

JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K" #7

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JIMMY'S IS PROUD TO PRESENT A
TYPICAL EXAMPLE OF HUMOR FROM A
FOREIGN CULTURE-- THIS WEEK'S STRIP
COMES FROM **RUSSIA!** IT WAS SENT IN
BY LITTLE KOLYA KARNEVOV, OF
☆☆☆-LENINGRAD--☆☆☆

KOLYA CALLS HIS CARTOON:
"OUR FRIENDS FROM ACROSS THE SEA"

Boone now!

Kak
toi
gymaeme

Иде Апоги аоулу е гма

Потемы

Иде Апоги аоулу е гма!

Е
бае
Аоулу

Мне Апоги
Аоулу
Чем Апоги

Чем
Апоги
Аоулу!!

AND HERE-
THE STORY ENDS! KOLYA WRITES
THAT HE WISHES "TO EMPHASIZE THE
PURE ABSENCE OF RESOLUTION IN HUMAN AFFAIRS!"
ALL WE CAN SAY IS! WHEN YOU SUCK YOUR BREW AT
JIMMY'S, THE SECOND CUP IS ON THE HOUSE!!

"WHAT KEEPS YOU INTERESTED?"

Animals Used In War Research

This year in the United States, hundreds of thousands of animals will die preparing human beings for World War III.

Because their overall physiological and psychological make-up is so similar to ours, monkeys are favorite victims of experiments designed to measure the effects of radiation from nuclear bombs and the toxicity of chemical warfare agents.

It started in 1957-58 as part of Operation PLUMP-BOMB. Ten tubes, each containing eight monkeys, were placed at varying distances from ground zero during atomic testing. Some monkeys in the outer tubes survived and were subsequently transferred to Yerkes Primate Center in Georgia, where they developed various cancers.

Today, people at the School of Aerospace Medicine at Brooks Air Force Base in Texas continue to perform radiation experiments on primates. Some of the most painful experiments are conducted in the Oculothermal Burns Section. The actual irradiation of the eyes does not hurt; it takes two weeks for the monkeys' agony to start. Acute irritation and discomfort last several months and eventually cataracts and blindness result. These studies concern the effects of radiation on the performance of dying, irradiated pilots. Monkeys are taught to fly platforms which climb, dive, and otherwise simulate aircraft. Then the monkeys are irradiated and tested for their ability to keep the "planes" level, while suffering from radiation sickness.



Researcher Quits

In 1979, Dr. Donald Barnes, a researcher at Brooks, wrote: "I can no longer perform experiments with animals doomed . . . to a very early death, pain and suffering. The shock generators deliver at 50ma at 1200 volts. I couldn't guess the number of times I've seen units used at full power to punish a slow learner: well into the thousands . . . Frustration leads to self-destructive behaviors, e.g. biting hunks of meat from an arm or hand."



For Barnes, the worse part of his duties was the death-watch: "I was ordered to keep watch on these irradiated monkeys, which meant, quite simply, to see what happened until they died. Do you have any idea how miserable it is to die of radiation injury? I do, I've seen so many monkeys go through it."

At the US Army Armament Research and Development Command Chemical Systems Laboratory in Aberdeen, Maryland, monkeys are exposed to two types of chemical warfare agents: incapacitants or "knock-down" agents, and lethal agents, such as SOMAN, an organophosphate or "human insecticide." The pain suffered by monkeys in these laboratories must be unbearable.

The Armed Forces Radiobiology Research Institute (AFRRI) in Bethesda, Maryland, specializes in high-dosage radiation studies. Here again, the point of the experiments is the death-watch, so no therapy is ever attempted. Monkeys are put in a treadmill, able to avoid shock only by running. Once a monkey has "learned" to run for several hours (ten minutes running, five minutes rest), he is irradiated and put back in the wheel to run his way into eternity.

A watching psychologist counts the number and duration of each monkey's "incapacitations" (periods when the hapless monkey crumples into a vomiting mass on the treadmill floor, accepting repeated shocks rather than trying to continue running for his human masters).

Excerpted from the newsletter of
Buddhists Concerned for Animals.
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Dennis Keeley's photograph of the Minutemen originally
appeared in an advertisement for McCabe's Guitar Shop.
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HOUSE OF "K" SURVEY

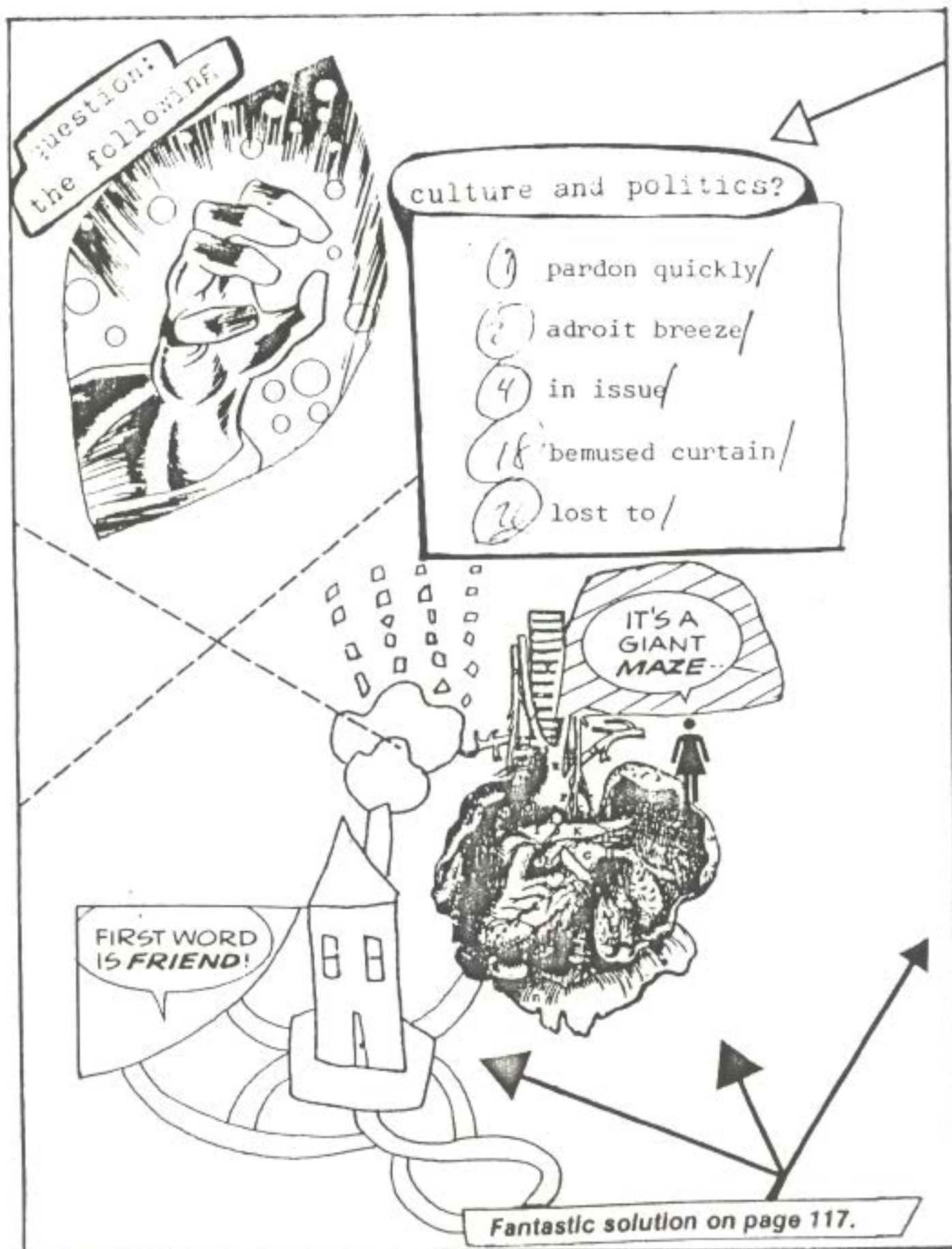
In Issue #6 we announced that the present issue would include responses to the following question:

What are the most encouraging developments in contemporary culture and politics?

In June and July we circulated an expanded form of this question, adding, as a further incentive to answer, the modification "What keeps you interested?" Our initial idea was to offer an inventory of specific acts, outlooks, organized political efforts, and historical events which might suggest an alternative to that bleak view of the present which is, with probable cause, so fashionable. What we've gotten is a fairly detailed portrait of a loosely-bound community, acutely alert to what's going down politically and artistically, but better able to articulate personal values than to suggest political solutions. Isolation and a sense of political ineffectiveness appear to be the principal problems. Yet in the commitment to personal ideals—art, love, friendship, scholarship and activism—we see a consensus.



—Andrew Schelling & Ben Friedlander



STEVE BENSON

The anticipation and corollary, contingent compromises of access to 'the other' (what's not predicated automatically as self-consciousness). It's the dynamics of access that problematize recognition and understanding that 'keeps me interested.' Knowledge, as illusions born of the holes in my presumption interface with matters the terms of which are to all effects, intents, a mess of ciphers, thrills. Despite the paradoxical cons of all acknowledgement, the purposiveness of functions perseveres, a siren call to the will to power deflected in the mind.

Attention to the evidences inflected by the other(s) dislocates my maniacal structures of evaluation and ambition and informs my own working without 'shoulds.' I know that what I perceive is by and large picked up through peripheral visions, I don't pretend to have grasped another's moderm operandi, but I open some of my own unknown to my response by risking some alertness to the concrete reflections of another.

September 13/19 1986

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Ben + Andrew—

This may seem inappropriate as a response to your question. The truth is it would have been much easier to answer the inverse question....

The Kiwi Bird in the Kiwi Tree

I want no paradise only to be
 drenched in the downpour of words, fecund
 with tropicality. Fundament be-
 yond relation, less 'real' than made, as arms
 surround a baby's gurgling: encir-
 cling mesh pronounces its promise (not bars
 that pinion, notes that ply). The tailor tells
 of other tolls, the seam that binds, the trim,
 the waste. & having spelled these names, move on
 to toys or talcoms, skates & scores. Only
 the imaginary is real—not trumps
 beclouding the mind's acrobatic vers-
 ions. The first fact is the social body,
 one from another, nor needs no other.

DAVID BROMIGE

That English has become the lingua franca of global commerce
 I find the most heartening news within the parameters of your
 inquiry. Since the 1970's, its momentum has accelerated—it
 is fast becoming "everybody's second language"—and this
 looks to be irreversible. Why is this good news? Not,
 certainly, because English is less capable than other tongues
 of criminal employment; it lends itself to all sorts of
 jiggery-pokery; it, too, can look upon massacres and deem
 them instances of laudable efficiency. But there is that about
 English which indicates, even as its manipulator would have
 us stare elsewhere, the precise spot where the bodies are
 buried. This is due to the plethora of synonyms which
 constitutes the language in any of its varieties. Given the will
 to listen, we will hear, in the choices made by any of its users,
 the words s/he chose not to employ. These echoes which
 impart to English its particular resonance call into question
 all its assertions, and are in fact the source of such will to

listen. This resonance is at once the sense of humor that accompanies its use (present, even in the diction of the most humorless, to so characterize that diction), and its inextricable irony (what is chosen against nevertheless is present to comment upon what was chosen for). So that even today, when, glancing up from the steel-glass gorge, one sees a flat red sun raying threat-promises of job-fulfilment (Plan Z) down upon anyone who has to work to eat, one sees the revenge for cataclysm bent upon its round-eyed targets and—well, recalls hearing of the guy who enters with a handful of dogshit crying "Look what I almost stepped in!" I have no will to minimize the awful misery of our Leviathan society with puffy euphorias, but would note the keen pleasure in the thought that, wherever business, science and political swindling carries itself out in English, an actual hope goes with it that such rule will come undone—that this language of multiple subtexts will subvert all such intentions. I am aware that the various jargons establish limits to prevent this subversion; but the very drive to power I reprehend will insist on greater knowledge of the tongue, and therefore a constant tendency to inhabit fully its resonances must lead to multiple reversals of such simplistic insistencies. This for me is the truer sense of all that seat-of-liberty guff.

WILLIAM CORBETT

Andrew & Ben—

...I find a great deal to be interested in. Am a hedgehog rather than a fox and have, what someone once called, a "magpie mind." The danger of this may be that I go "deeply into the surface of things." An Englishman, Henry Ward, once said that about all Americans!

Best to you,

Bill Corbett

"Encouraging developments?" We have yet to annihilate ourselves, but this is hardly a development. As for "interested," may I substitute the words nourished and sustained? If so let me list:

The art of Trevor Winkfield, Norman Bluhm, Joan Mitchell, Donna Dennis, Archie Rand, R. B. Kitaj, Red Grooms, Sean Scully, Jon Imber, Neil Fearnley, Gregory Amenoff are the first artists who come to mind.

And de Kooning. I consider myself fortunate in being alive while he paints.

The writing of Michael Palmer, Clark Coolidge, Fanny Howe, Bernadette Mayer, August Kleinzahler, Charles Simic, Ron Padgett, Paul Auster, Barbara Guest, Lewis Warsh, James Schuyler, Russell Banks, Robert Creeley, John Yau, Thomas Meyer, Kenward Elmslie, Jonathan Williams...well, this list can never be complete.

The Boston Red Sox, Boston Celtics, Zippy, Sulfur, Bob Hoskins in Mona Lisa, postcards, biographies (I'm an addict), Peter Gammons on baseball and Bill James's yearly Abstract, Jack Nicholson, Debra Winger, Ran, House and Garden, again, it is futile to get it all down.

As for music—David Murray, all the Monk, Ellington, Mingus, Coltrane reissues, Van Morrison, the Lee Wiley reissues, Steve Lacy's recordings of Herbie Nichols' music, the Atlantic Rhythm and Blues reissues....

I wish I could get to see the John Chamberlin retrospective, but will have to settle for the catalogue as I had to for the recent Robert Frank retrospective. Morton Feldman's Essays, the novels of Larry McMurtry, Philip Whalen's poems...I'll be surprised when I read this over, by what I've omitted.

This summer I've reread Patrick White's The Vivisector, Paul Celan's Last Poems and Nicola Chiaromonte's The

Paradox of History. All totally absorbing. To think that there are even a few more like these out there... well, that's enough at least for now.

23 August '86

23rd August '86

CID CORMAN

Dear Andrew—

There's too much to say & best—even as you insist it—to say less & let it be.

20th c. politiks has remained stagnantly rooted in the power games of 18th-19th c. & nothing has happened but breakdown. This can't be a prelude to something decent.... People like Mrs. Aquino & Bill Bradley are aberrations & will be taken off the scene as soon as the power gangs can operate at such edges—assuming they "bother...."

Love
always—
Cid

Dear Andrew—

the only encouraging thing for me in the contemporary scene is/are such youngsters as yourself who somehow persist in being in the face of so much "terror." I'm thinking of people like Gil Ott and Ed Evans, of Peter Cole and Bob Arnold, Joey Simas and David Miller, Billy Mills and Maurice Scully, Jan Bender and Barbara Moraff and Anne-Marie Albiach, and others who are quieter yet.

Where money is the only guiding motive and prophet becomes profit—nothing is possible. Yet since all life is predicated upon impossibility, here we build.

Coomaraswamy said it long since in his essay that everyone interested in human existence should take to heart and mind, "A Figure of Speech or a Figure of Thought?":

The separation of the creative from the profit motive not only leaves the artist free to put the good of the work above his own good, but at the same time abstracts from manufacture the stain of simony, or "traffic in things sacred"; and this conclusion, which rings strangely in our ears, for whom work and play are alike secular activities, is actually in complete agreement with the traditional order, in which the artist's operation is not a meaningless labor, but quite literally a significant and sacred rite, and quite as much as the product itself an adequate symbol of a spiritual reality. It is therefore a way, or rather the way, by which the artist, whether potter or painter, poet or king ((or queen?)), can best erect or edify himself at the same time that he "trues" or cor-rects his work.

And he footnotes from the GITA: "Whoever does the work appointed by his own nature incurs no sin."

Love—
Cid

TINA DARRAGH

Dear Ben—

9/12/86 at work,
then home

I wanted to write you a letter on this Mac for old times sake
—just learning it on my new job which is keeping track of

DICTIONARIES for a psychiatric computer hospital system—sort of the total Americanization of Freud—applying cost effectiveness to open-ended psychotherapy and having a computer to tell the drs when the insurance money runs out (that's it—you're cured now, toots). But it's the first time I've worked in a place that wasn't on the brink of going under and that's a nice thing. My last job was such a hostile environment. Which brings me to your question about what keeps one going/writing in hostile times, especially when poets are being hostile with one another. I've thought about that a lot because things were SO BAD on my previous job and that made me feel less able to distance myself from the poetry wars. Now that I wake up in the morning w/o a stomach ache, the feuds just seem to echo the literary gang wars we read about. When [your friend] said that the L=A=N gang was dead, [he's] probably right in terms of nourishing new writers and sustaining older ones. (*) But when people have arguments other than economic ones based on an historical sense of themselves "before their time," it just sends me back into history. I started reading the Frida Kahlo biography and that has been difficult (the passages about all her physical pain and mental anguish are painful to read), but her ability to keep working is really inspirational. Also, there have been some amazing movies around here lately—the Godard film "Hail Mary" with pickets out front saying the rosary [that would be a lot like what I grew up with] and then the prologue to the movie has a dance scene in it that made all of us (Lynne Dreyer and Phyllis Rosenzweig, too) cry with the beauty of fighting all the irrational guilt stuff. Afterwards, people came up to me on the street to ask me questions about the New Testament—it was really funny—guess I look like an ex-nun no matter what. But I was so amazed that the movie had been made at all—the

 (*) as a group—indiv writers will still be encouraging etc.

well, that's wrong—once the fighting starts, an already established gang inspires writers/artists to be other than they are & as w/Frida that's often the work I like the most—

pickets remind me to take nothing for granted. Then a couple weeks later Lynne and Phyllis and I went to see a movie called "Sugarbaby"—have you seen it? It's German—and has the most amazing "pattern recognition" scenes as this woman tracks down this guy she has a crush on—also, a scene about death and sexuality that had everyone in the audience quiet (though there weren't too many in the audience laughing at an obese woman making herself over—Phyllis saw it again later in the summer up at Middlebury and the college crowd "yucked it up" a bit more but the movie got beyond it anyway). So, I guess that's it—history and movies.

Also—there's a basic "female outlaw" movie—"Sincerely, Charlotte" that I enjoyed for the essential role reversal stuff ... plus, the leading man was middle-aged w/nice big belly & very sexy which is lots of fun—P. didn't enjoy the movie very much, though—I think it's just a "woman's" film....

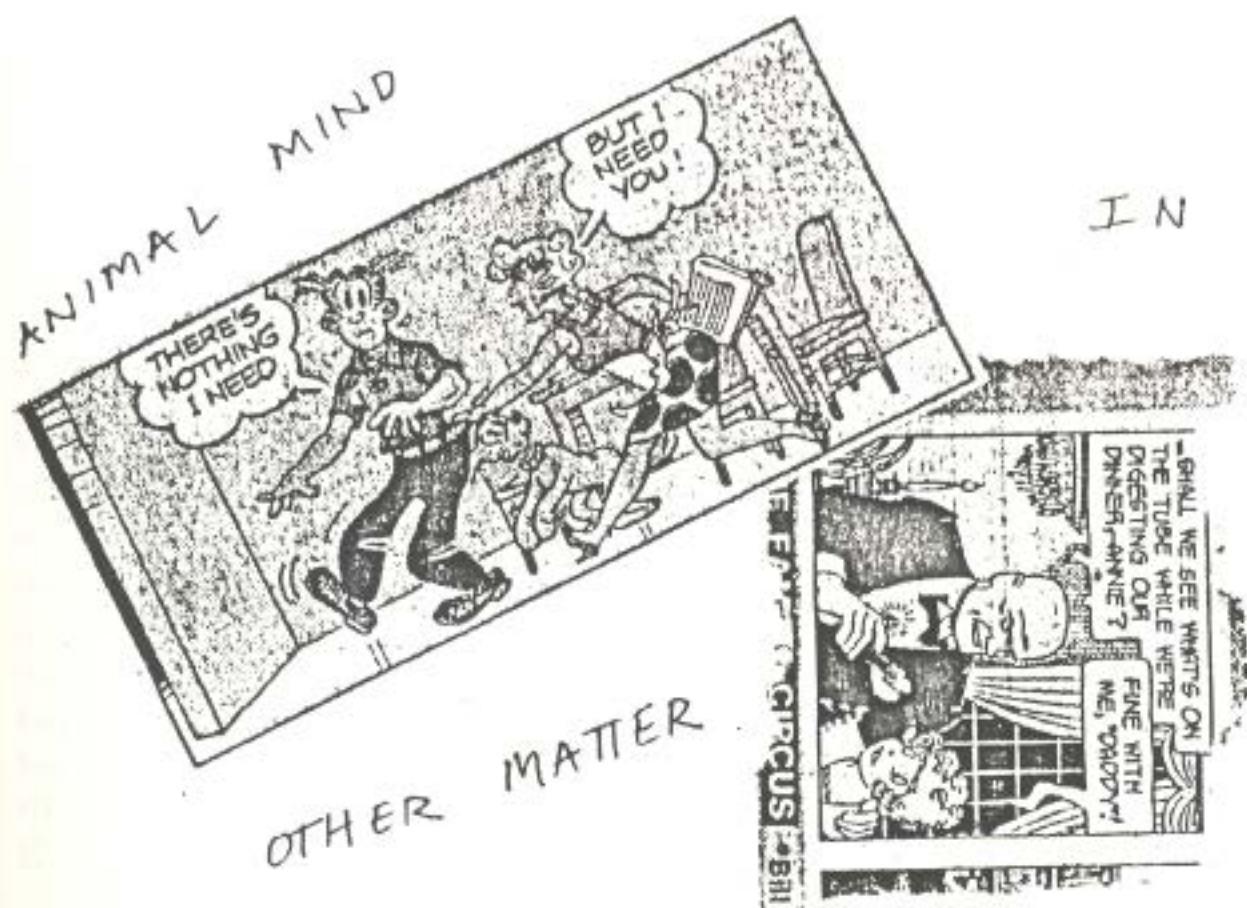
wanted to send you and Pat a copy of the ambiguous figures project—I hope you guys are well. I can imagine how strange it is to be proofing for a big law firm—I'd have a hard time with that myself. Well, more soon—just wanted to let you know that all is going better here. Peter and Jack are well and we may be solvent, even, in a matter of months (if so, I can start to work part-time and write more). Gotta go!

—the parking lot was about to close—I have to drive our '72 Torino (like on "Starsky & Hutch," only they had a red one—ours is wild blue) because Jack is being bussed to school this year & has to wait alone on a dangerous corner—so, I wait in the car ('cause he doesn't want to be seen with me! in public—at home he's very affectionate) and we all feel better about it—but I'm not used to thinking in terms of "car concerns" (!) instead of bus or metro schedules—I park by the river (which says LOT FULL constantly & you drive up anyway) and the lot guy warned me about getting out of there by 6 on Friday night—otherwise people block you in & he was right! Sports cars everywhere zoom zoom for a Georgetown evening—but I probably work at the one Georgetown location left that has a vacant lot w/empty bottles strewn all over it—that's where I eat my lunch! Well, bye for now.

PS: Also got the notice today of the Tree welcoming at SPD—that would be a lot of fun to see no matter what—hope you guys have a good time!

JEAN DAY

what keeps me interested?



(TORQUE)

LARRY EIGNER

June 22 '86

H e r e a n d t h e r e

gables

cloud, smoke, treetops

n o t t o e x p e c t e v e r y t h i n g

or too much

d o w n t o t h e w i r e

the present, the future,

don't forget all in the past

e n o u g h

l i t t l e

to do with

distances , times

think, think, think

"Be in me as the eternal moods
Of the bleak wind ..."

Everything, as seems inevitable, gets to be a specialty, like say, the long view as much as the short run. For instance came over National Public Radio a couple of weeks ago half an hour of an interview on the greenhouse effect, which a Walter Roberts (if that was his name) had it we can with advantage and had better start getting ready for, planning, now, for the 6° warmer weather the world'll have in general by 2050, around 98% of the studios in the field agree, whereby the midwestern U. S. corn belt will have to move 300 miles northwards, and Minnesota will be good to grow rice in, though there won't be enough ground water for wheat. Various things could be done, he said: ample time enough at this point. Calling for a 25- or 43- or 60-year plan? Well, it's true. Barry Commoner, an ecologist and advocate of a big nationwide boost to solar energy (as Israel has done) industry, did run for president in 1980. And further research, better than none, seems a good sport. I like the idea of it, pretty much.

The flatulence of cattle produces methane, he said. 3° of the rise in temperature (during the next 60-odd years) will be from CO₂ (carbon dioxide), or so it's expected, and 3° from various other things.

June And this afternoon a 1/2-hour interview about U. S.

24 agriculture in which this man, asked about farmers' reliance on chemicals, considered that's the thing that most needs turning around, after the present economic situation, and noted one company in Kansas is on quite a hunt for safe and very specific pesticides. Busloads of schoolkids have got dosages of toxic stuff, farmer(s) planting and spraying too near the road, and a neighbor who's a Dr. as well as a farmer told him one day he didn't know whether he'd poisoned his son. He's spoken with state legislators who are very confused, distrusting state agencies, the chemical companies, and the E. P. A. Lack of trust is part of the problem, he said.

And this noon a program (recorded in Boston, late April) about the hungry in the U. S. with the chairman of the House Select Committee on Hunger Rep. Mickey Leland (D., Texas), and the head of the Doctors' Team on Hunger, from Harvard.

Both sure seem greatly concerned with it (of course??) and to be doing all they can.

July 10

While meat inspectors, FDA- and CDC-men/women are still on the ball. And the n..-power industry is on the wane (except in countries with a gd deal of central planning—France, Russia—so I hrd it sd today; while in Sweden, aftermath to Three Mile Island, news to me in May was, the people voted to have n..-power all phased out by 2010, I think it was).

What kps me interested (overload or not)? Ears and eyes, I guess. Being alive ...

If life on other planets were feasible and known enough!! Wow!

"Where but to think is to be full of sorrow,
And leaden-eyed despairs ..."

??

NORMAN FISCHER

I have the impression that everything that can happen has happened (1965 to the present), every cultural twist, artistic experiment, shocking statement, political atrocity, etc. On the one hand things just keep getting worse and there is no energy to oppose this etc. etc., on the other hand people who have done good work continue in a strong, simple, straightforward way. No big deal.

I am encouraged that most poets I know are not giving up, getting strung out on drugs, or raging: they are having children, finding reasonable ways to support their families, remaining politically active, and continuing to write. They are finding in writing a source of sustenance and a method for improving the world their children will inherit. They take the world quite

seriously, in a practical way.

I am also encouraged by the firm establishment of forms of writing created by people of my own generation. These forms are more egalitarian, inclusive, non-sexist and aware than anything I've seen, and the fact that they are now established means that we can all relax, we don't need to be doctrinaire, we can afford to deal more directly with questions of substance and value, less with questions of form and literary turf.

As a student of Dharma, I have also been encouraged by developments in the last few years away from a kind of esoteric Orientalism and toward a more student-centered approach in which honesty, realism, and compassion come forward as the real point of religious practice.

We are clearing up the last of the painful preliminary underbrush. Just about ready to get down to the fundamental work; the long haul.

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

What keeps me interested is the sheer number of things that surface, from the past as well as from anywhere in the present, unexpectedly, showing passion for art &/or commitment to political struggle, made by active participants in some overall system forced on us, taken on & (momentarily) survived. Also, that the world is so much bigger than we have reason to hope it might be, & that its implications stretch well beyond the limits of any individual imagination.

Felix Guattari says (in "Plan for the Planet") that one of the purposes of the arms race is to put a little distance between the superpowers & everyone else. (Before we obliterate life on earth, we want to render it meaningless, so that nothing matters but the words & deeds of the leaders of the major

nations.) The same thing is happening in other spheres of life as well (in the writing community, for instance), & though I recognize its basis in my own reactions to things—my hero worship, snobbishness & ambition—it still upsets me. The range of works that inform our lives is much broader than we care to admit. "The lack of standards in art is deplored everywhere, especially officially and institutionally. Don't believe it. We have plenty of standards and judges. Watch out!"—Ad Reinhardt.

GETTING A JOB

How can we stand the soup?

How can we love the pope?

How can we put up with the cops?

and we do...

But plenty

of Dante

destroys us,

that great light over us

And the light enters the asshole

and the asshole enters the office

and the office records it

—Paul Blackburn

(I had a horrible dream last night: the content said, "Work or die"; the form made my hair turn white. My teeth fell out & my bones got brittle. I just aged.)

To live, "To / cross on makeshift / spans" (Pat Reed), is by definition a confrontation with uncertainty. To make sense of it all, you need a conception of the world so big, you could drown in it & never wash ashore.

"If the brain changes matter breathes / fearfully back on man
—But now / the great crash of buildings and planets / breaks
thru the walls of language and drowns / me..."
—Allen Ginsberg

KATHLEEN FRUMKIN

Any of the writings of John Brinckerhoff Jackson, American landscape essayist. How the collective effort produces social visibility detective, slightly 'square', better than National Public Radio.

A reading list includes:

Landscapes: Selected Writings of J. B. Jackson. Edited by D. W. Meinig. Univ. of Mass. Press, 1970.

American Space: The Centennial Years, 1865-1876. Norton, 1972.

The End of Landscape. Berkeley, University of California, College of Environmental Design. Ark Lecture Series, 1977.

The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays. Edited by D. W. Meinig. Oxford University Press, 1979.

The Southern Landscape. (Ann Burnett Tandy Lecture in Civilization: No. I.) Distributed by University of Texas Press, 1980.

The Necessity for Ruins: And Other Topics. Univ. of Mass Press, 1980.

Discovering the Vernacular Landscape. Yale University Press, 1984.

GORDON

Those who work will understand the following sentence: Sometimes when I get very tired it is hard to stay interested (my mother brought me into the world so I could join the workforce, answer the phone politely: FUNHOUSE. The soft smiles of secretaries pad the sharp corners of the inner offices—a woman is a door to let the dogs in). But then I go on a walk in the city, from 24th and Mission to 16th and Mission, from 16th and Mission to Market and Church, or all the way down 24th St. as far as the York. I find a lot to keep me interested (plus there's the necessity of breathing). I'm no wimpy detached flâneur! Looking in the store window, I am a piggy bank or some tennis shoes or a dead plant or a sculpture of a toucan. Rather I am a magpie (crawling along). The sheen of brightly coloured objects "brings a little joy into the humdrum life" of my retinas. I take things home with me, a tiny red rubber doll shoe, photograph of men in a bar, a ten of hearts playing card, a purple plastic hand puppet from McDonald's called Grimace. Material called sharkskin that has two different colors in it at once. Egyptian music by Odette Kaddo. A Mexican Indian necklace hung with miniature tools: a saw, a hammer, an anvil, a shovel. A charm bracelet composed of the Torah, a sign reading "Olde Absinthe House," a sign reading "Pirate's Alley," two Turkish musicians, a

teacup, and letters spelling out the word R-A-N-D-O-M. For things (a tiger or op art when I press on my eyeballs) fill out the space of something missing, even communists have mothers and fathers. And objects scattered around on the streets, even if they're just rocks. Which brings us to the panoramic view and the possibility of optimism: politics seems the realm of the impossible, sodomy, abortion "clinics," "people who aren't Christians shouldn't be allowed to live here I'm just doing god's will." Doing nothing to quell the hungry alcoholic fit of America: man sitting on street. Girl walks by with pizza. He bellows GIMME THAT PIZZA. But neither does it quell the tenacious spirit of

- 1) the man who sits blindfolded in Pioneer Chicken drawing pictures of Jesus,
- 2) the miniscule blind woman who sits outside the Emporium wearing a tin cup around her neck and reading enormous volumes in braille,
- 3) the woman in the supermarket wearing ugly rainbow striped woolly thongs all up in her toes insisting on buying baby's breath and not any other kind of flower.

But you can't end a statement on the word "flower"—that's a cheap trick (the boy in the commercial calling his mom or getting his horse). Animals' young keep me interested with their oversized heads. It's an imperative ("and then you die"): flower.

ROBERT GRENIER

Whether the "chemistry!" of which Whitman speaks is still operative—literally, biologically/'ecologically', & in whatever range of its transformative, 'mythological' capacities ("The resurrection of the wheat," etc.) one doesn't, can't presently, know.

The 'native strengths' of this passage—its invocation,

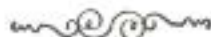


4.

- c. SOMETHING startles me where I thought I was safest,
 I withdraw from the still woods I loved,
 I will not go now on the pastures to walk,
 I will not strip the clothes from my body to meet my
 lover the sea,
 I will not touch my flesh to the earth, as to other
 flesh, to renew me.
- a. O Earth!
 O how can the ground of you not sicken?
 How can you be alive, you growths of spring?
 How can you furnish health, you blood of herbs, roots,
 orchards, grain?
 Are they not continually putting distempered corpses
 in you?
 Is not every continent worked over and over with sour
 dead?
- a. Where have you disposed of those carcasses of the
 drunkards and gluttons of so many generations?
 Where have you drawn off all the foul liquid and meat?
 I do not see any of it upon you to-day — or perhaps
 I am deceived,
 I will run a furrow with my plough — I will press
 my spade through the sod, and turn it up un-
 derneath,
 I am sure I shall expose some of the foul meat.
- a. Behold!
 This is the compost of billions of premature corpses,
 Perhaps every mite has once formed part of a sick
 person — Yet behold!
 The grass covers the prairies,
 The bean bursts noiselessly through the mould in the
 garden,
 The delicate spear of the onion pierces upward,
 The apple-buds cluster together on the apple-branches,
 The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage
 out of its graves,
 The tinge awakes over the willow-tree and the mul-
 berry-tree,

The he-birds carol mornings and evenings, while the
 she-birds sit on their nests,
 The young of poultry break through the hatched eggs,
 The new-born of animals appear — the calf is dropt
 from the cow, the colt from the mare,
 Out of its little hill faithfully rise the potato's dark
 green leaves,
 Out of its hill rises the yellow maize-stalk;
 The summer growth is innocent and disdainful above
 all these strata of sour dead.

- a. What chemistry!
 That the winds are really not infectious,
 That this is no cheat, this transparent green-wash of
 the sea, which is so amorous after me,
 That it is safe to allow it to lick my naked body all
 over with its tongues,
 That it will not endanger me with the fevers that
 have deposited themselves in it,
 That all is clean, forever and forever,
 That the cool drink from the well tastes so good,
 That blackberries are so flavorful and juicy,
 That the fruits of the apple-orchard, and of the
 orange-orchard — that melons, grapes, peaches,
 plums, will none of them poison me,
 That when I recline on the grass I do not catch any
 disease,
 Though probably every spear of grass rises out of
 what was once a catching disease.
- a. Now I am terrified at the Earth! it is that calm and
 patient,
 It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions,
 It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such
 endless successions of diseased corpses,
 It distils such exquisite winds out of such infused
 fetor,
 It renews, with such unwitting looks, its prodigal,
 annual, sumptuous crops,
 It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts
 such leavings from them at last.



— Walt Whitman
 (1860)

prophecy & prayers (not but/because of its 'ironies', some of which stand forth revealed now as outright untruths—i. e., even more lamentedly 'cause for lamenting'?)—have come to the fore—it is a better poem, now!

I hope so! ("harmless and stainless") ('better off' freed of biology, as we know it?—'politics' & 'culture'??)

"THE WOMAN WHO FELL TO EARTH" BY ANDREA
HOLLOWELL

In "The Jet-Man" Roland Barthes defines the then-new phenomenon of landspeed record holder or astronaut (like John Glenn) against an older, more gentlemanly adventurer "whose whole value was to fly without forgoing his humanity (like Saint-Exupery who was a writer, or Lindbergh who flew in a lounge-suit)." Applying this contrast to the crash/explosion/blow-up of the Challenger space shuttle a few months ago, it seems significant to me that the Challenger crew's make-up transgressed Barthes' definition of jet-men by including someone like Saint-Exupery or Lindbergh. This person was not a writer and did not wear a lounge-suit and was not a jet-man and was not in fact a man at all but the woman Christa McAuliffe who crashed with the rest of the crew of jet-men as the first U.S. civilian to go up, to venture towards space. She was "the traditional hero," as Barthes puts it, because she fits his description of that above. But she was a very untraditional hero in that she was a heroine and not a hero, in the strict gender-assigned sense of the words, and in that she was a schoolteacher, which isn't usually thought of as an heroic profession, at least not as far as I know. Not like being a fireman or an ambulance driver or a doctor or even a journalist or a scientist. Except that there was a prime time tv show called "The Greatest American Hero" in which the title character was a (male) schoolteacher. It was a comedy and so

in a way perhaps his heroics were even antithetical to his "profession" or "occupation." He had a bunch of superhuman powers, many of which he didn't handle well, the primary one being his ability to fly. But he had these powers only when he was wearing his special Superman-like suit—cape, tights, boots, belt and all. But even in his suit he was human, fallible and clumsy, which made the show (comic).

Barthes also discusses jet-man suits in his essay; he sees them as key in the "racial" change jet-men undergo. Part of their dehumanization which allows them to do what no man can do/has done before without the suit, like walk on the moon. "Anti-G" suits Barthes calls them. It's the suit that makes the (jet-)man and that makes "The Greatest American Hero"—space/science fiction often depicts the failure or rupture of a suit as the ultimate tragic or comic accident, as in the movie "Brazil" when Robert DeNiro, pirate fix-it man, connects sewer lines to the breathing apparatus tubes of two bumbling "straight" government fix-it men, and their suits fill with raw sewage.

But the suits didn't matter to the crew of the Challenger because the suits couldn't be anti-G suits, couldn't function still within the earth's field of gravity. Jet-men have to cease being earthmen for their equipment to sustain their human characteristics/qualities. The Challenger crash/blow-up emphasized the human-ness of the un-human or superhuman astronauts (star-sailors): Because it was feedback between human error and technological malfunction—tight scheduling and insufficient testing (or neglect of test results) coupled with mechanical breakdown—which caused the explosion. The crew was caught in the middle of this feedback, and as the pickles in the middle, ended up having to show of what stuff they were made. The human-ness of the people inside the blown-up Challenger is underscored as well by the fact that they survived the blast but not the fall—didn't die like Joan of Arc but like Humpty Dumpty.

The Challenger blow-up is encouraging because it was a failure, a misfire, a fizzling example of all those human attributes that space shuttles and other advanced technological spectacles

usually zoom out of focus: mortality, dependence on technology for survival, obedience to the environment's rules, fallibility.... The explosion was a big live publicity stunt for the "Error Farce" (a term from LeRoi Jones' / Amiri Baraka's autobiography which he coins for his stint with the Air Force). An enormous wide-eyed demonstration of what a tragi-comedy of errors Star Wars is, what a destructive path NASA's paving to put citizens and weapons in outer space.

Extensive media coverage of the lengthy search for debris, bodies and the "black box" also hammered in these points. The search and its coverage were groping for some clue to the failure, for an answer as to "whodunit." But because the list of suspects is / was so long and the nature of the shuttle flight so collaborative and the cause of the explosion ambiguous, no one individual can be singled out for blame. Which further shifts the weight of the tragedy onto technological failure aggravated by extreme human dependence on technological performance.

The reaffirmation of such familiarities (of the foibles of human and machine) in itself is something pessimistic, "tragic." I guess what seems positive to me about such an event and what it reaffirms or demonstrates is that it provides a break in a seamless maneuver, gives an opportunity for change—in policy, in direction, in priorities.... Maybe the Challenger episode will challenge those with advanced technologies to stop using them for more destruction, expansion, expense and start applying them to more constructive or conservationist ends. A big maybe—but we all start out learning nursery rhymes.

I am interested in how an event like this will effect presidential administration public policy and public opinion about / towards future space expeditions. I guess I can't honestly say that I think the Challenger blow-up will end all (future) shuttle flights or even discourage the Reagan administration from its efforts to implement weapons in space. All I can say is that it's an encouraging development because it provides an opportunity for change, was a moment when things were out

of government's (and jet-man's) control. Certainly there are many moments like this; many of them serve to reinforce the control(lers) which they momentarily circumvent; many such moments are not part of public knowledge, are "covered up." But the Challenger blow-up was a public spectacle gone awry—like an accident at a circus—and it included a representative of the U.S. citizenry who wasn't a hero/ heroine as a "jet-man" with "the right stuff" but who was a heroine in not forgoing her "human" qualities while participating in an un-human activity. (What did Christa McAuliffe do? She was a mother and a schoolteacher....) It's Christa McAuliffe's presence on the Challenger that gives poignancy to its crash (at least in the eyes of the American public at large) and which could prevent it from becoming just an occasion of martyrdom.

8/ 30/ 86

P.S. 10/ 15/ 86 A month or so ago I saw a commercial on tv soliciting money for the National Education Association for a fund in Christa McAuliffe's name. The ad uses a photo of her and stresses dreams (as in "The American Dream") that children have about growing up and becoming whatever. The ad's set in a classroom; one of the boy pupils is drawing a rocketship on his lesson. The (woman) teacher catches him drawing, confiscates the paper, writes on it and returns it to the dismayed-looking kid. We see the paper as he does, with some kind of approving mark and a note to the effect that it's good to have dreams. At the end of the ad comes the plug for money to enable more kids to realize their dreams of becoming not astronauts, but teachers, and to enable more teachers to improve their skills. While I was relieved that the ad was encouraging children to become teachers and not astronauts, there was also an association between the two in the commercial which was a bit unsettling. Like the idea that maybe if you become a schoolteacher, flying in a space shuttle is the next logical step. (It really brought home the romanticism of space expeditions, which completely detaches astronauts and space projects from the martial aims they're grounded in, a romanticism which I certainly grew up on reading about the Geminis and Apollos in my Weekly Reader and watching with immeasurable excitement as Neil Armstrong et al. bounced on the moon. Heck, I'm even a little younger than the history

of U. S. space programs.) Despite the romantic image of the rocketship, the commercial does seem to avoid turning Christa McAuliffe into a teacher-martyr for her country. But with "Top Gun" a box office smash and Reagan's weapons in space plan breaking up arms negotiations with the Soviets, can the "jet-sons" be far behind?

PHILIP HORVITZ / NEVER KNEW I WAS ALIVE IN THAT WAY BEFORE

Live performance is undeniably contagious, be it dramatic, musical, or danced. The times are in many respects dehumanizing, and I consider myself lucky that I laugh when I wake up with an amalgam of a pepsi jingle and the theme to Cagney and Lacey pounding my brain. Humor is important. And not in a psycho-positivist sense. It doesn't have as much to do with feeling a certain way (e. g. : Happy!) as it does with providing a means of reminding. Like, "Ghad! I didn't know I was alive before I saw that!" (Even if it makes me wish I were dead.) Performance that clearly effects the audience then, there, always keeps me coming back for more, which I equate with "life is worth living," and what's more encouraging than that?

Some work I like (mostly because it's surprising):

The Theater of Gina Wendkos: Not hidden behind (even her own formidable) style. Call it "literal": I call it a "total brainer." Style alone is so chicken. The way Wendkos uses the stylistic elements of her pieces (language, paint, music, dance—sometimes large scale, sometimes no scale) is bold, which makes the cliches soar. People in her audience get hot, aroused. Dogmatic politicians often leave the theater.

More than loving the music of my brother Wayne, which on record is sometimes less colorful than it is, I love his stage

performances. A wall of electronics, combined with some of the sweetest, simplest acoustic piano, that is when he's not ripping its guts out (literally, as in strings). He gives himself an enormous amount to do, so the performance is more like watching a TWA pilot in descent than a recital. There's no time to worry about "subtlety" or "cool." It's a sensitivity to what is momentarily required, the sheer proficiency on stage, that makes the riffs kill.

The Mark Morris Dance Co.: "What do you do with a hoop? You jump through it." So says Mr. Morris in a recent interview. For the many dances so fearful of predictability they do nothing, here is fearless work, as fearless of being soft or stupid, as strong. It's so predictable you never know what's going to happen because of the way Morris has the choreography doing what you'd expect it to. Expectations confirmed so multiply, it's a physical thrill.

What binds these three is intelligence, superbly executed through the given medium. Excellence means "it excels." It's a shot in the arm. A refuelling that encourages to be alive. That's it. Given the climate, this is not something we can afford nor even expect to take for granted.

FANNY HOWE

In response to your question, I can only say that a handful of political and/or cultural facts keep me hoping that we will avoid a holocaust: the Rainbow Coalition is one; Liberation Theology is another; the obsession with justice which is in children; and a sense that we are all on the verge of a new form—aesthetic, physical, metaphysical.

ALASTAIR JOHNSTON

GRIM AS IT MAY SEEM, I AM ENCOURAGED BY THE AMERICAN SCREENING OF SOVIET NEWS ABOUT CHERNOBYL. WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE, ONE RECOGNIZES THE SAME MASKED NEWSMEN, SAME BAD GRAPHICS, AND EDITING, AS AMERICA CUTS IN ITS OWN SUPERCILIOUS GUFF ABOUT HOW INEPT THE RUSKIES ARE. THEY WONT SEEM SO DUMB WHEN RANCHO SECO MELTS. LOCAL CHANNEL 4 CAPTIONED THE MOLTEN MESS WITH "LOS ANGELES" WHICH SEEMED ABOUT RIGHT. DO THE COCKROACHES GET THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION BY DEFAULT?

AS AMERICAN POLITICS CREEPS INTO THE TWILIGHT OF SENESENCE WE SWITCH TO T. V. DRAMAS ABOUT THE FALL OF ROME AND REMEMBER WHAT WE LEARN FROM HISTORY IS THAT WE DONT LEARN FROM HISTORY. IF THE MARINES GET LOST IN THE SANDS OF TRIPOLI IT MAY DISTRACT THE HEAT FROM OUR GOOD NEIGHBORS IN EL SALVADOR, NICARAGUA, AND SO ON. BLACK PEOPLE CALL DOMINOES "BONES. "

KEVIN KILLIAN / SCRIPTURE: ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS

First Roland Barthes announces écriture in "White Writing." Then this—very similar announcement—Monday, August 28, actor Jon Voight held a press conference in L. A. Behind him sat actresses Elizabeth Taylor, Tyne Daly and Ally Sheedy, and comedian Cheech Marin (of "Cheech and Chong" fame). In a breathy, halting voice, Voight announced the impending revelation of a "sacred scripture" discovered in the Hopi desert. He pointed to a small frumpily dressed man, also seated onstage, and introduced him as our liaison to the Hopi Tribal Council, who own the rights to this "sacred scripture." When revealed, it will change our lives forever. Everyone is invited to the impending desert event, which will take place, Voight said, "under the flag of perfect truth." No times, places or dates were given. In years to come, continued Oscar-winner Voight, we will consider this sacred scripture our "American Bible." We want a nation of men, said he, who haven't closed their minds to the truth, or been blinded to the inequities visited on the Indian peoples by every American.

Afterwards, Chen Sam, secretary and spokeswoman for E. Taylor, said that Oscar-winner Taylor had accepted Voight's invitation to sit onstage during the press conference under the impression it was to have something to do with an impending lawsuit brought against the U. S. government by the Navajos to win back federal lands. I'm encouraged by these impending developments; I don't know if they'll change my life, though I hope so; and even if the impending revelation fizzles out, the vagaries of star behavior keep me going; like I worry whether E. T. will now discontinue her "charity" (read: "comeback") work, under the rubric of won't get fooled again. She must feel so stupid. Or maybe not. These are difficult codes to decipher, need a Rosetta Stone or Hopi Scripture. "Why/ Does/ Your absence seem so real or your presences/ So uninviting?" (Spicer, 15 False Propositions About God.) Anyhow....

ROBERT T KOCIK

(kept) Interested? Internment. Ulterior or interests, unvesting.

E. G., one (portal): where physical theory and poetry share ignorance.

The most astute technical expression I've found that accounts for vested interest: (from process philosophy) "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." The fallacy is to treat the observation—an abstraction focused on because of particular approach—as if it were the concrete itself.

Toward the recognition of profound existence as matter, would 'living' have anything to learn from research, or to recognize as threatening to matter

Maybe the apodictic already scrapped us

squaring what people do with what the palpable is

Do not disturb poetics? Hieratics, taken alone, slots art as invaluable, corroborating the overbearing usefulness of scientific struggle.

At the limit of the aided eye, in frustration, Niels Bohr: "The hindrances met on this path originate above all in the fact that so to say, every word in the language refers to our ordinary perception."

(so), what if, ultimately, we're not made of anything

Proof turned back against itself, within logic, has shown that language can be understood as a game, and that poetry, possibly, is distinct from language.

Messiaen and ornithology; Pat Reed and marine biology; Celan, geology; Louis Zukofsky, horticulture—remarkable assimilations of technical vocabularies. Enabling. The knowability of nature back into question

Artaud stating his immunity from "all thought immersed in phenomena."

though I keep imagining a writing that is far less reconciled, resisting the illegibility of ...babel

(with 'indecision' 'chaos' and 'non-objectivity' becoming some of the primary objects of science, what's to keep proof from unloading its questions on indisputable identities (identity as not in question).)

Pressing for maximum differentiation or, on the other hand, for consensus—either, in itself, a mere swing.

Coerced material backfires. It's indistinguishable whether natural resources are being exploited or repression is being acted out.

wary of interests, therefore. Cross-pervious.

If language knew no limit, poetry would not have to be demonic.

DAWN KOLOKITHAS

At Vacaville State Prison, when talk turns to politics, they're patriots, America's eternal optimists, prisoners of the State & socially (temporarily?) doomed.

When do the trapped not feel hopeful? There will be a world there when (one day) free. Still curious to me.

Another example—question put to inner city low income Oakland teens: what will you be doing 50 years from now if the world survives? Hand goes up. What do you mean, teacher, if?

Cut to KPFA—even younger, 7 or so, Chinese girl aspires to be perfect cog in the Marxist wheel, parents speak of a forthcoming Golden Age of Materialism.

Although I instance the contemporary, survival is the habit of hope, transhistorical.

Even in an age such as ours when the particulars of political extremism vitiate the future of the planet.

What keeps me going? The way my mind can open onto what most people I know won't admit they're conscious of.

Looking for the poem.

And would have to include love. Daily.

Each exercise of potential is an act of faith.

Mortality argues for millennialism in every age.

WHY I CARE—MADELEINE LESKIN

A pronouncement from an old Godard film pretty much describes why I still care or bother to listen to music anymore, as even the desire for (not to mention the freedom of) expression gets co-opted at the same time it starts to erode, meaning culture and politics get simultaneously bumped in favor of shadowy, inarticulate impulse, or worse, a more articulate rehash of the same impulse. Back to the zero-man (Godard): "Letting others tell you news about yourself is a crime"—and the shit really hits when the accomplices turn what little news there is (that can be swallowed & spit up/back) into inoculated myth, when "politics" or a "political stance" or "political awareness" is just another feeling to summon up in the service of feeling

groovy, or guilty or nostalgic or self-conscious. This sort of slapstick solipsism has reached its wistful apotheosis in the work of some post-punk musicians who can't be bothered with understanding how stardom applies to them as well as Madonna, and who apprehend Central America and Indian displacement as just so much poetic flora and fauna. Politically aware music that suggests but never delivers is hip & it sponsors contests like the one in the latest CREEM issue which asks readers and interpreters of the Holy Grail to tell a band (in this case the pop group R. E. M.) what their lyrics mean. That's about as homespun as you can get and it's not even an election year.

The new music I'm consistently humored and provoked by is fiercely astringent and lives squarely in a world where salvation is found in both top 40 and end of the world, end of the bar despair, at the drag races, in love spelled backwards, in conviction. The sound is collage, two or three or five men and women making a big noise with an equally big beat. Layers of culture (dubs of speeches, technology, bodily functions, homicidal/suicidal suggestion, a pop superstar singing her song to you) from the likes of Sonic Youth, the Buttholes, Green, Mekons, Ut, Keith Le Blanc, African Head Charge, Pussy Galore (whose LP Groovy Hate Fuck is sheer incendiary name-calling noise, in 7 tracks: Pussy teen-power, Jew you look like a CUNT tease DIE just wanna—MEAT—dead KILL yourself ASSHOLE) and my current obsession, Big Stick, one man, one woman, who mix LL Cool J, Pat Robertson, James Blood Ulmer, cartoons, and a mock-noir sensibility wrenched from Sonic Youth's In the Kingdom #19 to make news that ain't nobody's goddamn business.

From "Shoot the President":

I'm gonna shoot the president if I can't find a job if I don't get laid try stopping me now I'll punch your face if I don't get a raise if I don't get paid president what's your name

and "I Look Like Shit":

I might look ugly as shit I might be dumb as shit and you

can make me sleep in the barn if you want to cause I don't
 give a shit as long as I got this goddamn guitar...my
 sister said turn that goddamn guitar down wa wa wa sing
 it sis hey boo boo somebody said some big band came
 into town...the old lady sez we gotta stop

Whether it's a matter of appropriating and reconstituting a
 gaze or redistributing the language and beat and values of
 Presley or pepsi or the Pistols, the best music ten years after
 sings & dances to itself but spits back at the mirror that
 controls, & finds its news in the mix.

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

In July I went home to Kansas to bury my father. There I ran
 into a woman I'd known as a kid. She ran the truck stop on the
 highway and I worked for her there, changing truck tires and
 pumping diesel fuel. She helped me out several times when I'd
 gotten into trouble. She always represented for me a certain
 unshakable integrity. When I saw her in July she told me she
 was living in a community, a convent in which the initiates
 seek to wed the contemplative life with the life of social action.
 They have become one of the main sanctuaries in that area for
 Central American refugees. They are involved in hospice
 work and community centers for the elderly. Every week the
 woman I know (her name is Mary K. Meyer) drives a truck
 around to these small farming towns and picks up donations of
 clothing and food. Then she drives the truck 150 miles into
 Kansas City and gives it all away to homeless people on the
 streets.

Last week I received a card from her in the mail, wanting to
 begin a correspondence. On the front of the card was a quote
 from Dom Helder Camara: 'I brought food to the hungry and
 people called me a saint. I asked why people were hungry and
 people called me a Communist.'

"PESSIMISM OF THE INTELLECT, OPTIMISM OF THE WILL."
(Antonio Gramsci)

TOM MANDEL

When I sat down to respond to this question, I had a difficult time keeping its wording (not the restatement, the original formulation) straight in my mind. I had to look at the photocopied questionnaire over and over. "Contemporary culture & politics" —a mouthful of stones; perhaps the phrase will render me eloquent, tho I doubt it. As to the relationship between the reformulation and this original question, whatever it is that keeps me interested I'm sure it has nothing to do with contemporary culture and politics unless you wish to follow me in imagining that Dante is my contemporary, or you will allow me to conflate the terms commerce and art with culture and politics to make the question fit my life more comfortably, and in any case I know of no encouraging developments in commerce likely to interest my readership in Jimmy & Lucy's so I suppose I shall be reduced to a discussion of art and of contemporaneity if I can restrain myself from merely dissecting the question as to culture and politics. I must suppose that you prefer a response to your question to an analysis of it. It's just that I find picking a question apart so much easier and more natural than responding. Why is this??

Personally, I rather require to be kept amused than interested. Commerce amuses me because I'm not tall enough or young enough to play basketball. Art is not amusing, but neither is anything keeping me interested in it; I just am.

Listening to Bob Perelman read today at the omnibus In the American Tree reading allowed me to think about "developments in culture & politics," which seem to be not just Bob's subject matter, but even his obsession. But these are not encouraging

developments; or at least Bob is not encouraged. It's interesting to find oneself responding to work on such themes, when the themes don't activate in one's own life. Culture I'm not interested in thinking about at all, in the sense of how does it form my consciousness to live in a time of TV, fast food, and all the more complex variants on this concern, in short to live in our time. No no, I don't know, I'm only a participant; I like this age. I think it's fussy to complain. From this "position" (i. e. how I think), I therefore find Bob to be fussing. As if the facts of our culture and politics were a nuisance to his deepest mind. Yet I found the work moving, deepened by itself. Perhaps this is what I mean by saying that I'm interested in art not culture.

In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant describes a bird that, in the middle of the labor of its wings, imagines how much higher and more freely it would fly if it didn't have to push aside all this heavy air.

In my own work I don't worry about such matters. There are always facts of this kind, and everything has its effect. As a writer I start after those facts. You can define your writing by writing, but you cannot define the conditions under which you write by writing. I'm a participant in culture, a willing one.

I'm not a participant in politics. I prefer to think about it in the most theoretical way possible. A lot of theory is possible to me, but I am able to have no effect whatever on political reality. All I read in the paper is the Sports page; I never watch news or listen to it in the car. Does this mean I am an entirely private person. Maybe but I don't think so. My public interests are in business, art, love. Values of business as adventure matter to me, and that (adventure) is my public life. I like to go to Warrior games, and I am happiest in the public world when those around me are as different from me as possible, a state not difficult to achieve. It's amusing to get along with them. I grew up wandering as deep in Chicago as it was, everywhere. Anything to get out of the house. In short, by the evidence of my own life, it is not culture and politics which have been commodified but the ideas we may have of them, and I don't like to consume what keeps me happy. Thinking as above, or

looking at the paintings of Norma Cole, these things keep me going, as we used to say, gone.

BOB PERELMAN

"What makes you encouraged"—that's how I remember the proposed topic for this issue, and it's a tough assignment. It made me think of history as a spectator sport: I see the Third World rising up, crashing the boards, grabbing the ball, scoring....

I just heard John Stockwell—ex CIA agent—on the radio talking about an American who was down in Uruguay teaching torture to some internal security group with a name like the Forces for Public Safety who would pick up beggars to practice on. One woman who survived and was interviewed told of that afternoon's session being interrupted by a phonecall for the American instructor—it was from his wife, they were going to the Ambassador's that evening, so, yes, he'd pick up the kids, in fact he could wrap things up early, he'd see her in a half an hour.

Before the next taped speaker they played some political song: earnest guitar and voice, over nondescript chords changing with the rhythmic drive of a traffic light. Chorus: "I'm working for freedom." Did that woman also call her husband in the midst of the recording session: she'd be home soon, and would pick up some lettuce?

Hysterical irony—in which I've logged more than a few seconds—wants everything to rhyme, all equally guilty.

I found Ivan Illich's new book, *Gender*, quite helpful in getting a picture of what it's actually like to stand in line at the Coop, or change a tire, clean up a kid's spilt milk, check out daycare places and schools: he speaks of "shadow work" and

treating knowledge as if it were a scarce commodity for which it was necessary to compete. (The second half of the book, where he writes of the ancient wisdom embodied in the absolutely separate man and woman universes, is pretty awful.)

So, only "critique"? In the following poem, I'm happy to be "critiquing" TV and Big Bird, because that is also critiquing the potentially very top-heavy word "critique," but the next line?

And by the end of that stanza, of course I'd love to be truly in the free world, singing "Down by the River Side," but a satisfied milleniumism is more depressing than a chastened utopianism, so I'm happy enough trying to see what's happening.

Ed Meese is not relentless necessity.
I'd rather study bugs than gloat or whine
over differences in biography.

History puts on its hanging cap
and looks for all the world like it's about to
pronounce sentence. The desire to rhyme, to master
rules, the ruler, the ruler's uncontrollable urges,
to be the one who speaks, who says anything,
how does the old song go? "The State is a person
who never shits or fucks
but manually defends its property
from sexual attack by a display of pomp
that puts use to shame and shame to use, tra la."

Meanwhile it was midnight. The sentence groped hurriedly for some flimsy rhetoric, but things were too clear. The camera was rolling, the grammar grinding, moans and groans filled the soundtrack precisely, like food in airline trays, denatured but in theory edible.

I too read the comics and see the gods
wolfing down lasagne. I directly perceive
by intuition, now that the calendar is an endangered species,
single things, brown wrappers on magazines at all night stores,
see-through wrappers on the Bounty, single things
to be picked up one at a time, crossed off the list,

paratactically, the shopping list like Homer, epic shopping,
but Odysseus never had to stand in line in his life.

So, yes, critique the three-gun ship of state
that shoots out a bright yellow Big Bird talking gently but
stupidly about how hard it is to share,
critique the Contra snuff films they show in the dark pouch
diplomacy dangles before the White House regulars who
dutifully shout out, Take it off!
to the counterrhythm of "I'm going to edit
my shopping list, down by the river side."

With this VCR I thee watch take off your clothes and make
love into
a speech about democracy, making the world safe for,
take seventeen, when what I actually want
is democracy, that propertyless dirty field of wishes, and
for busses to be as well made as bombs now are.

Sorry, but when I woke up this morning my aura
was all over the front page. The cropduster
nose down in the field of sunflowers,
did you see that one too? I in theory rule
exactly one five billionth of the world, up here over the paper.
The subject is separated from the object, its verb
hundreds of thousands of times as powerful as Milton's God.
The space in between fills with explicit images of Adam and
Eve, acting as if they had no names, and here we are.

PAT REED

What keep me interested are the writings of certain people
that make change seem possible, people that can make the
current 'way things are' seem like matchsticks: Julia
Kristeva dismantling 14th century Madonnas with Shiva-like

dexterity, Lacan counting his money during his sessions with patients, sessions which ended sporadically and abruptly to short-circuit the procrastinating ego. Or Chantal Ackerman, who seems to follow from these two, in a long slow film that whittles down to herself, naked, in a bare room, eating a bag of sugar and writing letters.

I'm kept interested by this kind of work because it is perpetually closing in on me—I'm tempted to step back as if from someone that is standing too close. The powerful subjects are the ones so intimate you don't think to look there.

Similarly, watching people around me develop as writers in what seems like a slow but sure uncovering of themselves. And the way poetry, transparent or not, shows up the endless and extreme variations on self, and manages, despite us, to expose the things we spend most of our time trying to conceal.

Also the way people in East Oakland paint the trunks of the trees in their front yards to match the house.

KIT ROBINSON / CAPILLARY ACTION

The most widely communicated opposition to insane U. S. foreign policy is a way to relax. As Garry Trudeau exposes the gross contradictions of this country's Central America policy in the daily comics, the madness continues unabated. One encouraging fact is that an opposition exists at all. Politically, we are in a period of stagnation, with broad-based national progressive political organization nearly moribund. The recessions of the 70's scared a rising generation of college students away from politicized life choices and into the tightening job market. With the Vietnam war over, the necessity to oppose the establishment lost an obvious cause.

Watergate removed the image of corruption, enabling a return to the fold. The decline of public education, hastened by a removal of federal funds in the 80's, has ensured that the next generation will lack the sense of history that motivated the generation of the 60's, educated on cold-war competition.

The Reagan era is frightening in its implications for the future. Yet, like the Eisenhower era, it is a period of extraordinary ferment in North American writing. As in the 50's, the most interesting literary activity is happening outside the dominant legitimizing institutions, the universities, which continue, for the most part, to promote the interests of established careers. In its marginalized locales, however, the current writing project takes in a larger, more interactive community of readers and writers than in the heroic 50's. The near identity of writers and readership can be disturbing until you give up the ideal opposite, the stock image of the socially isolated writer and his audience, the mass. That scenario has destroyed some artists and much good art. An audience that builds one person at a time is, in fact, the best, most responsive kind.

Sandinista Omar Cabezas was shocked, after six years of work inspired by a belief in "the compañeros in the mountains," the backbone of the revolution, to discover only 20 guerillas in the mountains. "It made you want to turn right around and go back. Mother-fucking son of a bitch! What is this shit!"(*)

The future will look back on the present as a period of revolutionary literary activity. Part of that activity involves a reorientation of reader and writer. Let's hope it leads to something better than what we have now.

(*) Omar Cabezas, Fire from the Mountain (New American Library, 1986), p.17.

STEPHEN RODEFER

Aix in Provence 8/10/86

Dear Ben & Pat,

It seems often when starting that there is no reason for a letter. Certainly not to catalogue the exploits of this boys club—swimming at the topless barrage, looking at the negative hands of Cro Magnon man, moving from Depeche Mc at the Roman Coliseum in Nimes to a Portugese bullfight at the one in Arles. You could actually see past the cokes the little square Van Gogh painted in 1889. The French countryside is endlessly gorgeous.

Travelling is a bothersome pleasure a lot though, searching for the right restaurant, the wrong hotel. Always better to be out of the cities. There was a pretty great Picabia show in Nimes. After visiting Les Marrioniers today (the atelier of the man who introduced Picasso to his pottery) we'll be off to Paris—Gurdjieff can't fool us!

I hope you're having a swell August. It seems that swell times are more difficult to find. I miss all and everything—from muse to youse to marriage to family picnics to readings in a grand scene.

It may be time to study mind erasure. Mine is so cluttered with petty concerns, and it's such dreadful way to start the day to lie awake in bed stumbling through them.

It seems at once both comical and miserable that, in order to manifest itself, dread, which opens & closes the sky, needs the activity of a person sitting at a table, forming letters on a piece of paper, to make itself succinct. Who said that?

Jesse's doing push-ups in the Wrong Hotel. Felix is mobilizing to find a Swatch. And I'm the franc machine.

Elvis gave his daughter Lisa a mink coat & a diamond ring for

her eighth birthday. That's the way it is with me sometimes.

Love Stephen

CLIF ROSS

(This ain't a submission—an anti-submission friendly note.)

9/16/86

Ben—

Here's the Nicolás Guillén I promised—keep it a while, read it & return at yr leisure—I'll get back to it myself one day.

Re: yr question, I thought of it a long time & had many thoughts but the question was too general to be able to think specifics. I mean what contemporary culture & politics? In white male culture the only positive contemporary movement is negative: Punk. Oh yeah, you could probably throw in the solidarity & revolutionary movements among white males in the U\$A but they amount to a handful. Certainly things are different among white females who are at the forefront in struggle. The most interesting Hemispheric developments would have have to be Cuba & Nicaragua—esp. the concept of "Sandinismo" which combines spiritual symbols with political realities to perform its conceptual art of New Humanity: i. e. Nicaragua in the 80's: not to say we've entered the Kingdom of God but that humanity has been born again in the west. A whole nation has begun to sing in a new language: the birds and flora have awakened. But specifically where I'm at? As a white North American male in the 1980's what keeps me interested is what everybody else in the world—esp. my continent—is doing. While the most discouraging development of the 80's is the suicide of Grenada and the

ensuing cannibalism of its corpse by the U\$ and the suppression of Reggae culture (here in the U\$). Not all revolutions and cultural transformation will follow this course. So white male society knows it's dying—it just wants its death to be painless—a drug, a drink or another cigarette. But the world doesn't end with the passing of our imperial race. Bob Marley lives! Holly Near sings! Nicaragua won! Nothing specific. Just a feeling I have.

Hope you enjoy the book—

yrs,
Clif

(Oh yeah—you should come by some time & check out the binding machine.)

LESLIE SCALAPINO

In regard to what's encouraging in politics

There doesn't seem to be anything encouraging now—we're in a very constricted time—but what keeps me interested is different individuals and poetry.

of the man - to do

that - relax for awhile - someone relaxing

- crying, not really

trying - then - for money - from

the people going by - which is not

ANDREW SCHELLING

Walked back from work last night, the midnight streets deserted, sharp end-of-September air biting my nostrils, and overhead the crisp fatal stars. People once navigated using those stars—in a few distant, isolate places they still do. Whereas I haven't learnt the names of more than a few of them.

At home, the mood on me, I opened Komroff's edition of Marco Polo and read how, when Polo was dying, a cluster of friends drew around him, concerned about the destiny of his soul. They urged him to retract those fabulous unpalatable accounts he'd dictated of things supposedly witnessed during his travels back & forth across the continent of Asia.

His reply: "I haven't told half of what I saw."

Among my friends I believe I can count a number who are, and who will be, equally unrepentant, when the time comes, about what they've seen and what said. That certainty keeps me attentive to the conversations of these people, to their letters, wanderings—and for those who write poetry, their poems. During the worst and most barbaric of times there will nonetheless be people like this. It's a pretty glorious heritage.

Are the times bad? I'm not convinced the arrogant, brutal men who rule our planet today are any worse than they've ever been. I'm also uncertain the current threat of war and the prospect of San Francisco's annihilation is any more unsettling than the slaughter of Herat's million and a half residents by Genghis Khan 800 years ago. With compassion, with intelligence, even with humor, we've always countered brutality. Everywhere I look today I see it happening.

So why return to Marco Polo? Because it seems to me the affirmation, in brutal intolerant times, of another person's, or another culture's, reality, is somehow more beneficent in the long run than fretting over the condition of one's soul. And we better get accustomed to being here for the long run. I have no patience with the world-weary or the doom-cryers. One day the history books will refer back to the twentieth century and its wars.

Studying history, or travelling to encounter the inhabitants of another culture, or disclosing some new, previously inarticulate emotion through the novel juxtaposition of words on a page—there's a lot to do. Nobody can exhaust this task—this emerging into ever wider realizations of who we are, as humans. Part of this widening definition, as I draw it from psychoanalysis, biology, and ethnography, is the extent to which the animal, and not simply the mental, is included in the human. The silicon chip holds no interest for me, compared to the friendship of a personable dog.

I spend almost as much time in the company of dogs as with humans. There's a whole wizardry involved there—in that sort of friendship—something that developed ten thousand years ago, maybe more. Today most of the traces are hidden. How did certain animals, and a vast larder and extensive pharmacopoeia of plants, get on such close terms with human beings? Chasing up the street with some dog, eating a bowl of rice, an apple, or smoking some weed—it's all right there. Discovering this stuff has been far more consequential in the scope of history than the invention of the internal combustion engine.

Furthermore, you don't need a visa for most of the travelling your organism is capable of, through time and space. Listen to John Coltrane—or Ali Akbar Khan.

"Does Nature remember, think you, that they were men, or not rather that they are bones?" So Henry Thoreau. Last spring I buried my own dog by a redwood grove on a hillside facing East. The rising sun pierces the trees on an opposite ridge, warming the disturbed soil. Any of us would be lucky

to end up in such a grave. Somewhere, beyond whatever uncertainty death holds, it's comforting to contemplate those bones.

Or to consider the remarkably elastic, frail bones of the ribcage in the woman I love, when I hold her—the inexhaustible store of affection and intelligence a hand and an eye can disclose in another person. Only bone, and a bit of ash besides—so where does it all come from?

Around my neck a talisman.

On a rawhide cord I wear a sea-ivory harpoon point from the Pacific Northwest. It's several hundred years old—or several thousand. The technology being entirely suitable changed very slowly. They keep a similar projectile, broken a little differently, in the Lowie Museum. The one I wear came from a sea-lion's tooth. Someone with hands like mine whittled it into a peerlessly efficient tool, then turned it to the hunt for more sea mammals. Now it's testimony of somebody's skill.

Nature and culture, the raw and the cooked—a single object precisely fitted to the human hand. What can we leave that's comparable evidence of our skill in living?

29 September 1986

ROBERT SCHELLING

Cambridge
October 1st 1986

Dear Andrew,

...I guess it's a resurgence of sorts, this fervor to cut through
.... But it is real. American. Eclectomania; hypersymbolic,
Jungian, buddhist, hopi, Dylan—it spirals in such a tumble....
But I'm making sense of something. An anthropological insight

into our cultural, historical context. For all our confusion and lack of a discipline, we are adept in some ways. As we come of age in these critical decades, it is us that will have to assume the responsibility.... It's you and me that are gonna be the old men in America, and so if we can't make this...no one will.

...days are busy—once a week I'm driving up to vermont to tend the crop—short days and cold wind. The project has been relaxed and enjoyable this year, although beset by troubles such as poor weather, diseases, etc. Over all it seems we've done pretty well, and the bud, which is hanging and curing now, appears to be beautiful—fragrant and bright. I've been driving up at least once a week since I got back, which on the one hand is a lot of work, but on the other has been a fine way to stay in touch with the change of seasons.... Many an apple pie baked, and some thousands of geese have passed over my head.... Yesterday Karen and I took the day and drove it up to vermont, motored through the golden foliage, bought apples at an orchard...

I've been continuing to work in wax/bronze...making bells, but also doing some 'just' sculpture. It is difficult for me to talk about my sculpture work (whereas I can talk forever about my music, Anthropology, dream work, etc.), but I'm working with certain themes. Bronze is so dead and cold—it will surely outlast us—to quote Peter Haines, "The bronze too will pass away, but relative to us, these are nuggets that will withstand the tides of time."

The sound studio where I've been doing some recording just went out of business; collapsed. The Massachusetts economy is such that it is difficult to get a plumber or electrician to come to your home. The sound studio was built under the notion that it would be a tool for those attempting to tap creative energy.... It collapsed. Had these people started a business that was for plumbing or electricity (let alone croissant or designer clothes), it would have succeeded...

...The last issue of Whole Earth Quarterly (the offshoot of Co-Evolution) has a symposium...some of the things that

Kesey says are extremely important...most notably about how we are losers, and how heaven must be constructed when we are alive. Check it out...

Love,
Ro

DAVID I. SHEIDLOWER / POPNETTING

What's keeping me interested these days has to do with computers. But it's not laser printing/desktop publishing which, as a production method, will find its way into the production of small press books along the familiar route already travelled by photocopy and mimeo. I'm excited and encouraged by the growth of a viable and concrete "public domain" ("P/D" in the jargon). Has to be in quotation marks: a computer's a pretty expensive non-essential item and hence what I'm talking about starts off sadly elitist.

Not primarily a market place, "public access electronic bulletin boards" (bbs) work as follows: hooking his/her computer up to a phone, a person calls up one of these boards and, if the line is free, is automatically connected to a "host" computer with which s/he communicates directly. Once communication is established, blocks of information can be transferred between the two systems through the phone line. This has led to the exchange of "P/D" software and information. People (mostly programmers at this point) put their work into the world and request (in something like a title/copyright "page," i.e., screen) that people who obtain a copy of the work and like it send them money (usually 10-20 dollars). It's not limited to software though (on one board, I saw "P/D" recipes for example). Such stuff goes by various names: "user-supported," "shareware," etc.

As more writers opt to get computers for word-processing, a

significant potential for reader-supported "P/D" literature is developing. People, incidentally, put a great deal of "P/D" software on the boards which they didn't produce, but which they got from other boards. Certain "P/D" software can be found on almost any software exchange board; likewise, certain texts would become "classics" and, if such a movement grew in the writing community, we can expect the popularity of a writer's work on these boards would increase a writer's chance of being published (NB: none of this could take the place of books). There would also eventually be services which would sell hard copy of "P/D" literature for those who don't have a computer, just as there are now services which sell "P/D" software on diskettes for those without a modem (the device which enables a computer to use a phone). This would make it somewhat less elitist.

Another equally exciting aspect of these electronic boards is called "conference." Right now, I'm involved in writing a never ending story with over 20 people I've never met. I get to add 30 lines of text each time I call in with the proviso that I can't end the story. This open access collaboration is particularly suited to narrative, but the technology also permits restricted access communication (called "mail") so collaboration could always be more controlled if desired.

Anonymity, wide distribution, "random" access. A lot of potential here; in a "public domain" for contemporary literature, there would be no length requirements and value would be determined directly by readers. Sure sounds good to me.

II

It's been done, of course. (*) Used to be (or anyway how I

 (*) Actually, the "author's corner" of Delphi, a for profit information service, was an attempt to establish exchanges of texts and ideas about writing. This service isn't offered any longer at Delphi and besides, you have to pay per minute charges to use systems such as Delphi and CompuServe so they're even

understand it) that literature existed in the memories of specialized people who sang it. Some of their works were old favorites which they didn't make up (although they might have changed them around). The oral tradition of literature sets a precedent for public domain (the elder eddaic poems), random access (1001 Arabian Nights), reader/listener supported (patronage) and the anonymous (the anonymous never changes). Almost all the features that appeal to me in these bulletin boards can be found to have precedent in literature's earlier stages (what could be more in the spirit of trobar clus than "logging on" with your own user number and password?). Once you substitute a computer's memory and storage ability for that of a singer's, the emphasis shifts from performance to the reader's interaction with the text. Of course, the more important shift, at least to me, is economic: a reader's first interaction with a text shifts from "buying" (the reader as consumer) to "exchanging" (the reader not necessarily as creator, but definitely as contributor). (**)

Feedback takes the form of conversations or announcements on these boards. People "talk" to each other by sending one another electronic mail (called "e-mail") which can be private or public. Also, with the proper configuration, a board can send e-mail anonymously and yet the receiver of that mail can respond addressing a private letter to the sender without knowing who that was. Who knows, maybe the anonymous can change.

As Ranxerox, my favorite popnetter on STARGATE coming out of Walnut Creek, has posted:

40/40: Boards...

Name: Ranxerox #11

Date: 7:50 pm Tue Sep 02, 1986

more elitist (for instance, you have to have a credit card to sign up).

(**) Either contributing other texts s/he has downloaded off of other boards or by "posting" feedback on the board for others to read.

Pardon my incoherence.

I've seen all kinds of boards; drivel boards, x-rated boards, .RAX board, CoNfUsIoN board, story boards, tech boards, RFPG boards, but I'd like to see an Atheist Board. I'd like to see a board about language, I'd like to see a board about mayhem. I'd like to see a maytag repairman board. I'd like to see a board with tonight's German homework or maybe even Us Government or something. I'd like to see lists made, a board of lists. A board called, "What would be a good board?" A board to be bored with is out of the question!

The National Party Network could have an installation here—A board that tells about upcoming parties, and rates lastnight's parties.

Nothing's sacred, when you're thinking of boards.
I mean you kn

o

w... oops I tripped on my words again...

. -R-a-n-x-e-r-o-x

Znort! (***)

(***) Ranxerox is a high school student; he edits a magazine called Adolescent Entertainment.

RON SILLIMAN

That people continue to have the energy to struggle, and even to flourish, within an increasingly hostile environment. Capitalism in decay isn't pretty—and it may get much worse.

That so many poets now have an articulated politics, and one which is increasingly integrated into their practice as artists. Often this is expressed in critical projects, for even to believe in the possibility of that dimension is to confront

poetry's political potential.

I'm excited by the emergence of a journal such as (How)ever, by writers like Aaron Shurin, Bruce Boone, and Bob Glück, and by the black poetry scene in Detroit. By a writing that is not situated within (or primarily for) a context of straight white men, and whose relation to its audience transcends the instrumental. By the example of Beverly Dahlen in every aspect of her work.

I'm excited by the sheer number and energy of younger poets in the Bay Area. Maybe they don't know how much harder it is now than it was twenty years ago, how the resources available to them have dwindled. They don't seem daunted in the least.

And by a dozen or so of my friends, beginning with Barrett Watten, whose writing continues to leave me sweating and gasping for air with astonishment.

JOSEPH SIMAS

I've tried and tried to think of enough positive things to list for inclusion in your query on optimism, what makes me go on in this, as usually stated, bleak world. I can't remember how you put it, but it seemed to me that it was a call for a number of us to say something positive about our contemporary plight.

So I suppose I could point to a few things, and yet, today, I would be forced to admit that all I point to could just as easily vanish as exist, or be used in a context I naively ignore for all intents and purposes. Which is to say that I have a hard time considering our context outside of its incredible contingency. I am a part of this world in all of its fits and starts. Finally, I can't seem to get beyond that.

In time, I move between pleasure and disgust, acceptance and despair. The weather is constantly changing. Or: the money is constantly changing hands. Or: I know where I am/I do not know where I am. Or: I am alone/I am not alone. In the face of our contemporary society I am at a loss. So I turn toward local worlds: people I know or might be able to know, things I have or might have, actions I do or might do. 'Does this sound naive? ironic? I am simply asking for your help.' I have the feeling that in these local worlds I and you make some kind of sense, something we can both accept and understand, something we can play with. The results are never final here either. My optimism would have me think that I might go out and meet the larger world in a similar manner, but then it never quite works out that way. Godard: "Did you ever wonder why all those people you see on the street don't act together, as a mass, instead of staying in their lonely and solitary corners?" Even in solitary pleasure I am somehow part of that mass, and it seems more difficult than ever to figure out what that means to me and you, how that influences all of us.

Last night I went for a walk. There were people on the streets, in cafes and bookstores. I heard people talk. The buildings were still standing. I had a good meal, some wine, a strong black coffee. I thought about some friends, people I would like to know, a country I would like to help construct and live in. I saw someone take a book off the shelf and sit down to read it. I saw another sell the book. Someone else made the shelf, another the paper, another the building which housed them. It all made sense. I said, I know some of them. I walked home. I picked up a box of letters and thought about each person who sent them. You know who you are. I read some of them. I called all my friends who live here. Some of them were home. Some were not. That is what I did last night. Someone else was doing something different at the same time. Today I am writing a letter. It does not matter if you are home. This part of the day is really nice.

20 Sept-17 Oct, 1986

MOSTLY ABOUT THE SENTENCE

SEEN Introduction

Before the Code Poems please I was just short page an ordinary writer no instructions and one book was published. The Code Poems were performance pieces using two figures and flags and were found material based on the International Code of Signals for Ships at Sea.

Before I was introduced to myself. This book was published last. Last sentence. Before I became my clairvoyant writer myself.

That's the belief introduction

SHORT PAGE

Someone else would get hysterical.

And words began to be seen in August then begin 1972 almost after seeing images and energy fields since January 1970 some inclusion and writing journals some unpublished.

Then we began to see words as aforesaid and write some journal its all enclosed I still do All the introduction is seen.

Establish yourself. Some writers are very difficult but I seem

unusually Hannah I have to offer myself Read one line at a
time and it pleases you.

Some introduction fin Have some courage put it plain the
introduction one page seen and I am almost

INTERVIEWED

The Development of the Sentence in My Work in SEEN WORDS

When the words first began to appear in August 1972, they appeared singly. The first word, WRONG, appeared about an inch long, neatly printed at a 45 degree angle to my pant leg. Later words appeared in two word phrases some of which, as NO-ALONE, I did not understand (Early Journals, 1972, unpublished). In my naive (or natural form) desire for completion I would cry "where is my T—is it the phrases 'not alone' that is meant" and why cannot I or it or the spirits that I then sometimes thought it was, speak English. The phrase developed but remained a phrase right up through the Clairvoyant Journal (1974, Angel Hair 1978). In April sometime I think I got down on my knees and begged or prayed, please let me see a complete sentence. On April 15th I did see one, printed in small letters along the edge of my kitchen table that had come to me from Lenny Neufeld via Jerry Rothenberg. It said, "YOU WONT BE ANY HAPPIER."

Having achieved this wonderful goal (my mind could speak English, after all, I could) I then proceeded to discontinue the sentence. The words appeared too fast and interrupted themselves. The (my) natural desire for closure was defeated by the more important mind—or poetic—form. I was happy though, complete thought.

Lyn Hejinian says in "The Rejection of Closure," (Poetics Journal #4 May 1984 Women & Language) "...a natural response toward closure, whether defensive or comprehensive, and the equal impulse toward a necessarily open-ended and continuous response to what's perceived as the 'world,' unfinished and incomplete." She also states "Form is not a fixture but an activity" which was certainly true of both the Clairvoyant Journal and Little Book/Indians (ROOF).

Long sentences in Little Book/Indians were interrupted often by capital letter words as well as regular lower case in which the book was mostly written. Many of these words and sentences were completed if my memory could hold unto the long seen phrase which was interrupted by newer seen phrases. The complete sentence or thought then depended on my memory and if (as in the poem "Page 2 Numbered") I had smoked some marijuana the memory was elusive and hard to hang unto.

Little Book 129 Page 2 Numbered Oct 26 78"

Here comes a sentence S T R U C T UbruceR E
that DONT WRITE
I must make
a con MY BOOKS
 describe a story
the bell rings
twice & Bernadette's voice I run downdont skip Charles
I THOUGHT IT WAS MY BOOKS I JUST UPSIDE RAN
and nobody stands
Hannh its so
simple it hurts same line you
STAND IN YOUR SILENCE dont skip

But I dont remember what I said
the sequence stands
typical sentencesame line struct

YOU

and

sentence structure some exclamation MY SAME SENTENCE
 Danny returns
 and it has an ending
 giving away our
 SILENCE
 CRAZY DONT SKIP GIRL what was I saying
 an hour ago what I was
 reverse sentence
 SILENCEsome pages

Danny reports it on you Hannah dont speak overline
its just the sentence
PUNCTUATION
I canst remember sentence I folded my pages
AN HOUR AGO

In "hiding JAPAN" another long sentence poem, I had not smoked any grass and the interruptions were part of the original seen line, not something that intervened after I had started to write the first part of the line.

Little Book 134 hiding JAPAN Dec 19 78

WAIST my rings hurt something else is Jimmie wrong INSIDE
 RUSSELL MEANS uptown LIGHT I dont know what
 PERIOD dont finish sentence please
 See what Jimmie SORRY ABOUT THIS really phrase continues
 carry your books in a sack stupid MEANS TO APRIL
 THAS FINISHED
 RUSSELL MEANS ME
 HANNAHS I started my sentences again SKIPS A PAGE
 Dont date he feels it Jimmie has made the final decision of
 [dont
 continue with this dont speaks of this his POOR entire
 next page GURUS
 Dont be so stupid life sentence structure please that was
 [because
 of SAME PRICE me I CANST WRITE IT IN
 Jimmie has decided to become SENTENCE STRUCTURE

SAME AS ME LONG LINES

Jimmie sentence structure WRITE IN JOY APRIL has decided
to become Hannah finishes her sentences WE WEAKEN
EASILY

As for other drugs, I don't take any (except some Peyote in ceremony which I don't write on, but Peyote brings picture visions, not words).

Drinking, however, when I am seeing words, will completely mix me up and force a memory loss so that what I write is usually edited out. The disjunctions are out of hand and not interesting to me—too much out of control and I cannot complete the interrupted line. Perhaps I just get silly. Some drunk (seen) some perhaps (seen) some talk is in perhaps some (seen).

This summer 84, however, not seeing words, I wrote drunk very long very ordinary prose lines—also not interesting to me and also silly. Coffee is fine.

Spoke (Sun & Moon) was written differently. The words appeared on my forehead in groups short enough for me to remember and write them down and the continuation or interruptions were included in this word-group seeing. This is true even though the style varies from a journalistic technique (June & July) to a poetic technique (August) and a prose technique (Sept.). The exceptions are the large words which appeared once on every page, about 3/4 of the way through, as I was writing down the seen forehead phrases. Words for Spoke were not seen on any furniture, in the air, or otherwise. This, as far as I can remember, was also pretty much the same technique for the long poems Nijole's House (Potes & Poets Press) and Sixteen (Awede).

Before seeing words I always completed my sentence. The

works written prior to August 1972 are: (1) Journals describing early aspects of the clairvoyance as seeing images and energy fields (The Fast, forthcoming from Prospect Books) and a 1971 unpublished journal describing images seen in a summer in Woodstock. (2) The Code Poems (Open Book). These poems and performance pieces from the late 60's used a language found complete in The International Code of Signals. This is a book of ship signals that has been published for mariners since the 18th century, and continually revised. I used both the short incomplete phrases that I found (frequently ending with _____ blank) and complete sentences and questions. (3) Going back further, Magritte Poems, written in the middle 60's and published by Poetry Newsletter in 1970 is a very small pamphlet of 8 non-seen poems describing Magritte paintings in a normal poetic form.

A Short Interlude to Discuss Voices

I did, in the Magritte Poems, use a response to the verse, printed at the back of the poems, giving it a second "voice." In The Code Poems almost all (and I think all the ones published) were a statement and answer between 2 voices, people or ships. Two or three people read the poems aloud in performance. Sometimes I read both parts myself as in the movie "Any Chance of War" and in a non-performance reading situation. The idea of 2 "voices" is natural to The Code Poems as the code was developed for communication between vessels or between mariners lost at sea and a ship.

So the idea of using more than one "voice" or separate "voices" pre-dates the Clairvoyant Journal 1974. To clear up the matter of the three voices in this book, printed in regular type, CAPITALS or italics: at that time—Jan.-June 74—I saw words in a wide variety of sizes, script and printed, on my own forehead (the large capital words on my forehead began in a retreat in June 1973 (Unpublished Journals, 1973)) and on other

people, forehead included, and on every other imaginable surface or non-surface; the wall, the typewriter, the paper I was typing on, people's clothes, the air, and even words strung out in the air from the light pull (a favorite place), anywhere.

I bought a new electric typewriter in January 74 and said quite clearly, perhaps aloud, to the words (I talked to them as if they were separate from me, as indeed the part of my mind they come from is not known to me) I have this new typewriter and can only type lower case, capitals or underlines (somehow I forgot, ignored or couldn't cope with in the speed I was seeing things, a fourth voice, underlined capitals) so you will have to settle yourself into three different prints. Thereafter I typed the large printed words I saw in CAPITALS, the words that appeared on the typewriter or the paper I was typing on in underlines (italics) and wrote the part of the journal that was unseen, my own words, in regular upper and lower case.

It turned out that the regular upper and lower case words described what I was doing, the CAPITALS gave me orders, and the underlines or italics made comments. This is not 100% true, but mostly so.

The description of the voices is an integral part of the sentence discussion, as with three or even 2 operating there was scarcely chance to complete the phrase or sentence.

The situation of the voices, and the interruption and overlay, is quite clear if you hear the tape made by New Wilderness Audiographics wherein Sharon Mattlin is a wonderful CAPITALS and bosses me around endlessly. Peggy De Coursey read the italics for March and Regina Beck for April. Unprinted is a tape with Rochelle Kraut reading italics for May and myself alone reading the June Retreat. Peggy and Regina both sound as if they were scolding me. We worked it so that the voices came fast after each other, occasionally speaking in unison

and overlapping, and occasionally one of us would an ad-lib comment.

I want to add it was an enormous amount of fun, through hard work requiring a lot of rehearsals to prepare for the tape. Performances were a little freer, requiring less perfection. These readers and others put up with endless work and no or little monetary reward. Sharon used to get a bowl of cereal but she sounded funny in rehearsal and Peggy got fare to Brooklyn.

Since then all my books are written for one voice, though dis-continued and interrupted, and I have the lonesome pleasure of reading them all by myself.

Destruction of the Sentence

From Spoke, July 23:

why did_{I the} me destroy the sentence blurb because_{the}
 rhyme_{the mind} responds thinks quicker THAN WE SPEAK
 and answers below the line itself on the page OR WE SEE IT
 THE WORDS

In reponse to Diane Ward's query, summer 84, "Tell me what you think about sentences" I wrote in letters to her the following, plus some:

What I think about sentences comes from my understanding through clairvoyance and telepathy, dating back to the acid days

of the late 60's and early 70's.

(1) Telepathically we receive from each other the spoken sentence. In a house where everyone took a lot of LSD twice I heard people's thoughts as if they had been spoken out loud. Both thoughts were silently directed to me. One woman thought, almost a shout, "get out of my kitchen" and one man said something about helping me with a house if I bought it, and verified the thought out loud, asking me if I'd heard his thought. I heard their natural speaking voices. Differently, Mitch Highfill told me he once heard a whole conversation on LSD that he heard in reality later the next morning. I have never heard a "written" line from someone—or anything they are reading or studying. I never heard any poetry lines I could steal! Only answers to thoughts. Once I saw two people have a silent conversation which they confirmed.

(2) The sentence is always interrupted. Mind 1 that speaks out loud, or writes, is interrupted by mind 2 that is simultaneously preparing the next sentence or answering a question. Therefore the correct form to represent both minds or the complete mind, is an interrupted form. It takes two or three seconds for the thought to form into a sentence, meanwhile another one is being spoken-written. On acid some hippies could hold conversations with two people at once.

From Spoke, July 29:

some complete the interruptions sentence and I careful
 don't BECAUSE IT IS ALREADY ^{mother} psychic intuition
 helps children KNOWN

(3) The interruptions may be hereditary. My mother could go on with an interrupted story after several minutes without going back and repeating a word. The structure of the mind we each

have determines somewhat our style of writing and some style therefore as well as some formation of brain cells may be an inherited quality. I base this partly on findings from an article in Scientific American, The Brain issue, Sept. 79, about brain diseases.

(4) The sentence is unfinished because the mind of the reader or listener supplies the answer (the end) either through telepathically reading the other's mind, or through common knowledge. Or perhaps the reader involves himself with his own ending, which is equally valid.

Sentence Notes and Quotes

Many things happen at once, peculiar to a journal form, to force interruptions. My writing above and below the line incorporates some of this simultaneity. Linear writing must leave out many simultaneous thoughts and events. I am trying to show the mind.

The Clairvoyant Journal shows the mind working in relation to events happening. It was written at any and many times during the day and night whenever I saw the words until it was time to GO TO BE (bed).

Spoke shows the mind in relation to remembered events of the day—what is in the writer's mind as one writes. I wrote it late at night in bed.

From the Clairvoyant Journal, added in very large letters while I was correcting proofs:

STOP TH SENTENC

with the es omitted from the and from the end of sentence
—April 17—two of many incomplete words in my books.

From Little Books/Indians, one of several references to the sentence, this one a pun on the jail sentence. "LITTLE BOOK 128 / NEW PAGES I JUST REMEMBER IT":

Dear Russell
better in jail
for a year

NOV 15

than
DONT FINISH IT
S E N T E N C E

Comments from Spoke are many.

June 20 "and all continue sentence please"

June 21 "we don't finish this sentence"—last line for that day meaning we don't finish the subject

July 9 "its because I complete the sentence that I make no complete sense sometimes"

July 29 "dont insist on the sentence formation thats all but keep the meaning until this month clear"

Aug. 3 "sentence ending is the complete / some ending is the complete ending"

Aug. 3 "its a long paragraph / piece"—the word paragraph can mean a page and sentence can mean a paragraph

Aug. 3 "I must concentrate switch ^{CONTEXT} the sentence around so I am / able with it to include p/o/e/t/r/y and some

line breaks with the / uneven first as childish / only"

Aug. 14 "so it is concluded also that I am running out of sentences"

Aug. 15 "I was some comfort to the sentence way out west boy laughs"

Aug. 15 "I CANT WRITE ANYTHING ELSE / EXCEPT SENTENCES"

Aug. 15 "on this third week of my jail / sentence"

Aug. 17 "I was j/a/i/l sentence"

Aug. 17 "I was also sentence / conscious"

Aug. 21 "some / FINISH. / sentence. interrupted. by some / STRUCTURE"

Sept. 4 "why complete the sentence anyway question / because seeing with words before I was writing it in"

The Diminishment of the Ego and the Authority of the Author

Begins in The Code Poems with the verse of alternate forms,
"He, she, it or _____ can be," which also has to do with
de-sexualizing. RAT CAN(ABLE TO)

About the Clairvoyant Journal Ron Silliman says in Poetry Flash, "The very function of clairvoyance in the work of Hannah Weiner is an assault on the homogeneity, the continuity of the ego."

Especially in the Clairvoyant Journal the person writing is bossed around by the voices, and gives up her autonomy to the other parts of the self. A relinquishing of constant conscious control to let the other part of the mind dominate. The ego belongs to the conscious part, the writer's voice, and often, or nearly always, I reacted with some ego controlled emotion as anger or impatience or amusement to the seen words or voices. I gave up my authority to them, indeed the speed at which the words appeared would not allow for a time of complete ego action or thought.

The incomplete and interrupted sentence does away again with the authority of the author, engaging the reader whose own mind will either naturally or by art respond to the delay of the interruptions and the incompleteness. Perhaps the reader, even, is not allowed a consistent or ego building response by the interrupted and incomplete sentence because the writer throws at the reader such a quick multitude of words, phrases, lines and sentences to be put together and finished.

The reader's ego or expectation is further thrown by the occasional running of words together so that rather than put together the reader must pause and separate the words.

Every engagement of the reader breaks down the author's authority over him, and this includes the change of type face size, requiring an adjustment of eye focus and words written above and below the line, giving the reader a field rather than a linear response and increasing his choice. The variety and speed of reader challenges however will keep the reader from

building up his own authority as she reads—responds. The author isn't the only one with an ego.

The author's ego is further controlled in Spoke by transference, which means the author transfers the mind of someone else to himself or actually pushes it and seems to be a thing.

Aug. 7 "who am I in the / next page"

Aug. 13 "I was written in"

Aug. 13 "I was original copy"

Aug. 13 "I was also any / person"

Aug. 13 "I was / anybody else"

Aug. 13 "I was also anybody social systems work telepathically"

Aug. 17 "I was quilt"

Transference of another person's thoughts, feelings or even body movements is not uncommon to me, especially in the past, with acid or marijuana, and in the present, with American Indians.

Naming Names

Involves the ego of the person named and has to do (not naming names) with de-personalization. The deciding factor in my books is the psychic factor.

In the early journals (unpublished) people were referred to by one or another letter of their first name (often the last letter) to preserve the anonymity and focus less on an individual personality. As the seen words developed, real names re-appeared and in the Clairvoyant Journal people often have both first and last names mentioned.

Little Book/Indians is about people, and names names. I often refer to myself in the third person, calling myself Sis or Hannah, often misspelled (destroy the ego attachment to the name).

In Spoke, written in 1981, myname (one word) often replaces my own name and name often replaces a real person's name. Many names are still, however, mentioned throughout the book.

In reference to healing, i.e. the diagnosis of illness which is or was one of my psychic powers, naming the individual is obviously essential. Even in this case, however, in Spoke, I sometimes destroyed the real name as in "very paralysed left arm on the name's left hand side" and "west coast name's chest back pains intro healer" (Aug. 3). This is probably giving into writing's political pressure to de-personalize or perhaps just admitting to myself people don't like healing diagnosis, especially free from a psychic. Unfortunately these unnamed people cannot use the information to protect themselves medically. Native Americans do not have the same hang-up, considering healing a respected quality.

Some Quotes About the Psychic Predicament

July 9 "Hannah I think terrified the Indians have the most knowledge"

July 9 "I haven't got the nerve to tell everybody the truth"

July 28 "I SOMETIMES WONDER IF writing IT IS period TRUE PERIOD AUGUST because of the many predictions"

There is often a psychic insistence on clarity. From Spoke:

July 29 "I want my meaning clear"

Pronouns

De-sexualizing the pronouns began in the 60's with The Code Poems line "he, she, it or blank _____" and continued in the Clairvoyant Journal with reference to the words and myself as it. In Little Books/Indians and Spoke there is no play with the pronoun but neither do I ever use the masculine as the indefinite pronoun.

Closing

I think (opinion) one of the important things about Spoke is said on Aug 14:

SHOW THE MIND

sis Im writing about included august my mind thinking and
[SOME
MORE

...MY MIND IS

drunk and has several passages

My mind has also made the decision to call a full length book a novel. This is mentioned in the Clairvoyant Journal and several times in Spoke as follows:

July 28 "sis its all about writing a great big writing novel"

July 28 "sis its a funny book if you like writing a novel"

Aug. 3 "sis its a very long novel book"

Aug. 7 "I have doubtful written this / ... novel"

Aug. 14 "unfinished novel of the type which it in style language and some periods"

Aug. 15 "I am rewriting the prose style"

Aug. 15 "I mean only clairvoyant / material for THE NEXT FOUR YEARS AND THENS I QUIT / WRITING f / o / r / e / v / e / r which I don't believe"

Aug. 15 "untils I die with only four books / this is included and count journal clair one and this is / it to me... only four books / to be included on the list of the same style per iod"

On Periods

Spoke

Aug. 21 "some periods I must give a lecture / on this subject are"

—Hannah Weiner

RAE ARMANTROUT'S PRECEDENCE (Burning Deck, 1985)

All three of Rae Armantrout's little books take their places within a sense they make of boundaries, within, as the opening of her first collection, Extremities, puts it,

lines across which
beings vanish / flare

the charmed verges of presence.

Precedence, her third and most recent, undertakes to find which side of such boundaries takes priority, which precedes the other. Or—to read into the title a more pervasive sense—this book puts its poems to work within a variety of systems where each side of the verge of presence precedes the other. The Precedence is double, constantly changing.

Thus the first poem of the book, "Double," sets its scene in an unexpected recognition of something seen so regularly that it has escaped the sight which nonetheless defines it:

So these are the hills of home. Hazy tiers
nearly subliminal.

But within this "untoward familiarity" something different arises. The hills are of course familiar, belonging to home; but they are also hazy corners at the edges of sight, beyond which the eye can remember having seen but cannot actually now see. The poem makes its way through the intersection of the memories of sight and sight itself, taking each in its turn as precedent of the other. A first, waking sight:

Rising from my sleep, the road is more
and less the road.

And a memory of something not now seen;

Around that bend are pale
houses, pairs of junipers. Then to look
reveals no more.

The poem ends, seeing double, hearing the "bad puns delivered with a wink" of a sight it must recognize as its own.

Other poems repeat the pattern: the second, "Postcards," isolates

My parents' neighbors' house,
backlit,
at the end of their street,

another familiar house at the end or boundary of another familiar street, in the verges of a "too convincing" memory.

In the same way, the

gray-white
congruence near to
the invisible

of "Compound" is accompanied by a different kind of presence:

While in this
car the round
drumbeats of "Mona"
fill our chests.

The body can feel the beat of this music as something here, something with such positive shape that it "fills our chests" with its form. But this sound is here only as it is projected—recorded and broadcast—from somewhere else, a presence that has precedence elsewhere and yet comes through the verges of what can be heard. Thus compounding hearing with what we

can't really hear.

But this verge has an other shape, its opposite number, so to speak. And there, on the opposite page, it appears:

Think in order
to recall
what the striking thing

resembles.
(So impotently
loved the world....

This in a poem titled "Admission." What admits to presence is admitted to that very presence or precedence only through the memory of what else it is like, one's love of the world thus a function or structure of impotence since there is no direct access, no unmediated admission. And the poem admits the boundary.

The sense is repeatedly of lines being crossed, of senses coming through other things, ostensible—and real—limits. Another poem, "Through Walls," gives another radio:

Most at home when
well-known
words come through
the metal
wires, the unseen
"transformers"
saying
"...reminds me of my home
far away."

This is neither Cocteau's nor Jack Spicer's radio—there are no spooks to dictate the poem—and yet something does come through from the outside. Such a being at home is clearest in—is, in fact, defined by—these transformations of

elsewhere into here and of here into elsewhere. The "home" of these poems is simply a memory, a nostalgia slipped into place by the words of a too familiar song; it is most clearly itself when defined by a precedence it never has had. Even as we are there it shifts, changes just as we think we remember where we are. The poem progresses through these very shifting boundaries, and thus swims or evolves through the uncertain narratives of its stanzas:

Excreting one more
link, and putting
a leaf back
on either side, a fin, a stroke, this
slow progress.

"It's vacillation that pleases" in Rae Armantrout's poems, and their insistence on the edge of vacillation that matters. But, as she asks in "Single Most:"

Who answers for
the 'whole being?'

Where do her poems leave us? Somewhere close to the scene of reading with which she closes her short essay "Chains" (*Poetics Journal* #5): "One proceeds through the stanza clusters, of course, in their given order, but not without effort, wonder and argument. Doubt and choice can coexist in the reader's mind. For me this better corresponds to the character of daily experience." The reader pays attention, notes where things come through in the poems of Precedence, exists as reader alongside a wall of them. They are themselves things experienced on verges, and must be taken into account as such.

On every bar the music shifts.
"I can't seem to get comfortable."

That, at least, is where Precedence leaves me: uncomfortable,

attentive to what escapes me, vacillating in the attention I'm able to give such a work. Here are verges where what I do as I read cannot quite take final shape, and these verges are essential. I will return to this small book as often as I return to any.

—Gary Burnett

ALICE ORDERED ME TO WRITE THIS

MARGARET & DUSTY by Alice Notley (Coffee House Press, 1986)

Alice said, "You will like it." So I went back and bought it through the autumn heat. As I had thought I would.

The delicate charged fluttering beautiful accuracy of these poems. Fuck me if I'm not an old queen but they hold hands with reality.

I can see the light start up in Alice's eyes at the thought of someone else's book just out. There's a morning lullaby sort of poem that itself looks like a comb but not like one that was never or even seldom used. It isn't rare when a person has a sense of humor about themselves but it's rare when a writer does.

There's an element of dramatic narrative gestural surprise in among Alice's poems that is missing from almost everybody

else's. Perhaps the surprises occur at the points where the poem bites reality. Or what looked real before it was eaten. "Perhaps this year I won't know / anyone." That sort of thing. So that the tongue actually turns the mind over in saying it.

The real inner life here is the one lived in the apartment and it's open to the life of thought and feeling on the one hand and on the other to the life in and of the street. I remember when we thought that a gram or a diagram of that sort of thing might have been enough. Instead it's that feeling of having been familiar with yourself for so long that it's really and finally begun to matter.

There's a heavy and childlike disingenuousness at places about this writing. Perhaps it comes of having children around. Perhaps it comes of having anticipated the minds of childhood. Perhaps it's as simple as the presence of the mind.

In much the same way as emphases here account for the presence of the voice. And what is the voice but that obdurate simple mind in space? Surely this combination of courage and honesty is adequate to accomodate that.

There are volumes of language here that make you wonder how could they have been remembered. Perhaps it's the spaces in among the uttered. Perhaps it's that these interstices—oddments of space, really—loom sometimes largely in the final summing of what's been done. Wasn't that what modernism is?

The "Congratulating Wedge" poem is slabs, the language of thought is that slowed down to itself. You're forced either to disregard meaning, if you're stupid I mean, or to slow down to the soft fathom of it, if you're not.

—Alan Davies

POETRY & TRUTH?

Some working notes apropos Alan Davies' Name (This Press, 1986)

Name, no more generic title is possible. And that is possibly why no other title would do.

Name is a sort of updated For Love, its airs conditioned by a reflective I's reflexive address (of itself and its others) within the writing itself. Nothing happens here that doesn't happen on the page through us. I'm struck that these interpenetrations work so completely all ways and that they are evoked so thoroughly through the text's accumulations:

Sit down. We said
 sit down,
 for each other. We sat
 down.
 It gives me great pleasure.
 I speak for you.
 You are not now
 close enough for speech,

for too harmful speech.
 It must have been you
 that was I, I that was
 you, in speech.
 The insects are driving us
 into speech, that small town
 in the insect west.
 I speak to you, you
 eat my neck.

I can't help but wonder what John Perlman would make of all this. Although I do know for Perlman "The poem is prior to the word and the name cannot be taken, nor conferred" (from a letter to the author).

In late January 1982 I had the good fortune to visit New York City. The highpoint of my first night in town was a conversation with Alan Davies, John Perlman and James Sherry at a small bar in the Bowery called Jones. The three had just returned from a Coolidge reading at St. Mark's. I was to read with CC later in the week at the Ear Inn, so talk centered very naturally on Clark's St. Mark's performance.

What began as a colloquy of four quickly gave way to an intensive-defensive debate between Davies and Perlman. This shift occurred when John attempted to make Alan account in some way for the Coolidge reading: "What did you take from it? Of what use was it to you?" Or some such words. The dichotomy finally arrived at was: poetry as "gift" or "grace" (Perlman) vs. poetry as "language system" (Davies). The dialogue faltered there on that seesaw. Two very particular and well-developed vocabularies collided and failed to engage. It kind of saddened me. John sucked on

his pipe. Alan sipped his bourbon. I nursed a beer. James polished off his chile and rice.

Walking down the short stretch of Bowery Street to James' loft, after goodbye to John who was off for a train to Mamaroneck, I gently tried as self-conscious outsider to press Alan to say what he thought was behind his difficulty with John. He said: "His language assumes." I quipped: "But all language assumes." "Yes," said Alan, "but his language assumes too much."

In Abuttal (Case Books, 1981), an essay on language, mind and reality, Davies makes an elegant case for his own position:

It is an annihilative function of language which presumes to collect its mind's assumption of reality. A mind's broadest possible distribution of language, and throughout itself, instant to instant, is its fathomable success. From within, language sees reality as a sum of dispersing languages. This induction of reality as pluralizing languages is a mistake, which the mind enjoys for its easy safety: language's recognition of languages is a perception entirely internal to language. Writers in particular are too willing to make of their language an over-voracious reader of reality. Language properly writes, itself.

"Poetry," though, is poetries: that plurality of discourses occurring within the set of disciplinary limits called "writing." "Truth" is political epistemology. Regimes of Poetry, regimes of Truth: parallel areas of concern (at best). Hallucinated enantiomorphs? Their lines never meet. Their images could never be superimposed. "And" is always suspect. Poetry and Truth? Perlman and Davies?

Speaking for myself Name assumes just enough.

NOTE: This should go without saying but I want it to be clear that I value both AD's and JP's work. It's a big world and there's room enough for all of this.

Oct. '85

—Tom Beckett

FROM A READER

Burroughs

flashes his dirty rotten hunka tin I am right strapped into
head electrodes he sticks a gun in teen age drug Harry S.
Truman decided to drop first I am right sequence
repeat dim jerky far away smoke cop rat bares his
yellow teeth kicks in the door I am right survivors
burned time and place he throws atom bomb knocks
man to floor you are wrong you are wrong he was
looking for are wrong Breaks through door Im poli outside
bar Hiroshima has strayed into Dillinger's right is
making a difficult decision right survivors burned mixed
you child I am he kicks him into 1914 movie if you are gay
I am right wrong executioner officer I am cop right
enough you are I am right right wrong Pentagon
dim jerky far away smoke.

Cut up his cut-ups, allegory of a Burroughs, allegory of an allegory of an allegory of an allegory of a waterfall of mental curlicues whose new meaning is no meaning in extremity. Is a Burroughs to eat? I am timid, abstract, complete, light fever, timid. Yells, Hey Pop, got any more Dick Tracys, barefoot. Burroughs am paying one wrecked penny for the pleasure he's wreaking on some "boy"; shooting quarts of toxins, skin a welcome mat, body heroically disjunct Picasso (two profiles, left front arm...). The stapled urge for self-protection that.... Simulacrum of a simulacrum, don't even know danger is a refuge from more danger, don't even know what a Burroughs is.

Manhattan Project, first atom bomb test, New Mexico 1945: Oppenheimer and his boys think the planet could go critical and explode. Oppenheimer refigures, the probability remains, "What the hell, let's blow the dang thing up." So and so many blasts: radioactive sex causes untold genetic mutations. A carnival of giants, vile luminosity sheeting off their scales and exoskeletons, march out of that nuclear desert looking for something to eat. I don't want to die but witness APPETITE and MURDER tread the vile luminous sand: ant spider Gila monster rattler wasp rat locust lizard grasshopper rabbit praying mantis crow ant spider wasp.... The entire town of Soda Bluff stampedes down narrow canyons scattering funeral lights beneath their trembling feet. The destruction of today. Two last men, mercenaries on the last patrol, eat rations with dog mouths, then fool around in caustic green dusk; they wear mylar capes and copper studded jock straps. Bud's withheld a basket musta weigh two pounds of fresh peaches. Bud squirms down with a deep sigh, odor of penetration, he says "I want to be so embraced." The last ant cold mandibles his thigh, a howl and spasms from Bud's lifted body mean death. I send my own spear into the enormous insect eye shattering a thousand selves—point touches pinpoint brain, blue sparks, burning isolation, ant collapses, cold heap of old parts. The reason Bud dies, so that his orgasm stays beyond in the realm of desire. I don't wonder who I am, I wonder where I am—still, nothing to do now but kick back and wait for orders.

Hitler

First they counted on the stupidity of their adversary, and then, when there was no other way out, they themselves simply played stupid. If all this didn't help, they pretended not to understand, or, if challenged, they changed the subject in a hurry, quoted platitudes which, if you accepted them, they immediately related to entirely different matters, and then, if again attacked, gave ground and pretended not to know exactly what you were talking about. Whenever you tried to attack one of these apostles, your hand closed on a jelly-like slime which divided up and poured through your fingers, but in the next moment collected again. But if you really struck one of these fellows so telling a blow that, observed by the audience, he couldn't help but agree, and if you believed that this had taken you at least one step forward, your amazement was great the next day. The Jew had not the slightest recollection of the day before, he rattled off his same old nonsense as though nothing at all had happened, and, if indignantly challenged, affected amazement; he couldn't remember a thing, except that he had proved the correctness of his assertions the previous day.

Sometimes I stood there thunderstruck.

Hitler portrays Hitler in a wild exasperation that he resolves by announcing "The victory of the idea of creative work, which as such always has been and always will be anti-Semitic." The words of the Jews, the work of Hitler. Hitler sets an equal sign between anti-Semitism and creativity—anti-Semitism is not punitive, the camps are Parthenons. For the first time I think I understand—I never could from the uncomprehending faces in our family album.

WW II

In a specific type of discourse on sex, in a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places... what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work?

"I have become extremely flighty and very easily upset. I can't control some of the things I say, and I find myself involuntarily giving myself away. Each time someone new learns, I am thrown into a frenzy, for soon it will be utterly unbearable and I shall have to turn to anything I can find, to get away from here before everyone knows, and I become a complete outcast."

The Gag Reflex and Fellatio

This observation, first made at an induction station in 1942, was studied further in 1,404 patients at a neuropsychiatric military hospital in 1944. The gag reflex evaluation was made in each case. It was tested by manipulating a tongue depressor around the uvula, soft palate, and pharyngeal vault. Normally the stimulus innervates the 9th and 10th cranial nerves supplying this area and produces the gag reflex. In subjects practicing fellatio this reflex is absent even when the tongue depressor is inserted well into the vault of the pharynx.

1 Constitutional psychopathic state:	%
(a) Sexual psychopathology, fellatio	89
(b) Drug addiction	36
2 Psychoneurosis, hysteria	50
3 Schizophrenia	18

The test was also used during the past two years in a civilian hospital. As in the above report, here too the findings were very satisfying.

How did they make possible these kinds of discourses,
Question: Do you wish to sleep with your mother?

Answer: No. I have no desire for that (pause of several seconds)...but why not?...I have too much pride for that... she never asked me to.

Excerpted from the American Journal of Psychiatry and the Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, letters and medical essays from Allen Berube's research on gays in World War II, italicized topic sentences from Foucault's History of Sexuality.

"In conclusion, it is felt the test is a definite aid in screening candidates not only for the military services but for positions where the sexual deviant must be eliminated."

and conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations?

"This morning I saw the psychiatrist. I went in his office and after a few routine questions he asked me to stand up in front of him—he had me pull my shirt up and my pants down. He starts running his hands around my back and chest and slowly working his way down to the inevitable—He asked me to say whatever came into my mind—but after he went through this routine we settled down to the \$64 question."

"Freud was the first to emphasize the close association between homosexuality and paranoia. In the Armed Services this relationship is frequently seen."

How was the action of these power relations modified by their very exercise... so that there has never existed one type of subjugation, given once and for all?

"The last terrible barrier between us is down and I am revealed shamefaced and defiant in all my abnormality and cowardice. Don't be too severe with me, please understand how heartbreaking it is for me to write such a letter. I feel that I have disgraced you, betrayed you in the worst possible way...."

"All of your present friends are loyal to you, for you, as is, and don't assume a cringing attitude. I hope that you have opened up the way to a more honest relationship with pa and me. "

"Sometimes I think our lives will always be hell. You can't blame it on the army. "

How were these relations linked to one another according to the logic of a great strategy, which in retrospect takes on a unitary and volunteerist politics of sex?

"When I entered the army I had certain homosexual tendencies. Army life has developed them into traits of character which I will never be able to change. "

"Frisco was absolutely beyond recall, I have never seen a thing like it—everywhere, anything on Powell Street—anything on any street...."

"You can't blame it on the army —it's the whole damn world and we were just born at the wrong time—all we want is to love and to express what is in our souls and thank God we have something to express. However, we must remain friends and someday, god knows when, but someday we can help each other. "

—Robert Glück

THE STREET

The street stinks of oil
The street is blocked by two large trucks
There's several pounds of brown sugar spilled on the street
The street is narrow
A man is driving a fork lift in the street
Men in the paint company doorway look out onto the street
A sleek BMW is parked on the street
A black mother with her child is standing in the street in front
of the saloon
Two black kids are playing rough with a puppy
There's no mailbox in the street
The street runs parallel to the river
The street overlooks the river
The street looks sinister at night
At night the street spills people out of its saloon
In the day the various workers stand in the street
A lunch wagon arrives and parks in the middle of the street
Whatever people are thinking they forget it when they hit the street
The sun warms the street
There are thousands of streets just like this one
People throw bottles on the street
Occasionally people are violent on the street
Before the street was here something else was here
But now it's a street

strange, feet in zendo

* *

kind of like talking but no

* *

dreaming, I am that thing only a trick would

* *

now this this and this

* *

sea of trees

* *

library books upend rows of corn

* *

I have one so want more

* *

the same is similar

* *

the things changed because of the article

* *

beaver-chewed snags in the channel

* *

experience increases in subtlety and dissolves

* *

tight words not mine but belong to the place

* *

only one word next

* *

fence patterns keep from here all that would adorn

* *

that that one is already what this one is

* *

I misunderstand you too

* *

you move in, or you see it another way

* *

flowers: all exposed

* *

tiny flies on sneaker toes

* *

tufts of grass—onions—spackled shade, the bull

* *

big subjects hover over roof beams

* *

this one can always be taken out later

* *

punch, or, mouth

* *

the day comes out to be something it was

AFTER MONTAIGNE

We are men but by speech are our relations
 Reorganized. We honor the horror and gravity
 Of what we consign to be arcane while the
 Simple fact of what we say goes by un-
 Touched by fire. I find people common,
 Their accompanying halves correct but
 Unappreciated, taking the most ill-advised
 Plans to carve out as correctly as children
 Disastrous edifices which have neither trace
 Nor consequences. We assay the harmless
 And neglect the circumspect; the heedless
 Limbs of what we do flutter in a hapless
 Breeze of our own overtaxed imaginations.
 I know of no other human vice than lying
 Unless it be the establishment of a fixed pattern.

—Norman Fischer

IN THE AMERICAN WEST (PORTRAIT PHOTOS BY RICHARD
AVEDON)

1.

The portraits are super real, super intense. Nothing should appear this exact, precise, focused. Gigantic. The eyes screwed into the skull, every hair sharp, the lighting even, penetrating. Each face, body, a perfect image of... what? ...a person? Photographed against a white background so that the people are standing in the middle of nowhere, ripped out of context. Is anything or anyone ever out of context? Is there ever no background at all? These are images of presences. They look like people but you don't see anything past the surface of the image, into or through the surface. They look like pictures of trees, gnarled, busted, blasted in storms, interesting shapes. The captions indicate that they function: "rancher," "coal miner," "pawn shop operator," "drifter," and they have names, but they don't appear to have, to be, anything else.

2.

It is impossible to imagine what these people are thinking. They appear not to be thinking. It is impossible to imagine what these people are feeling. They appear not to be feeling. I say people but they are not people they are images. The actual people represented by the images must think, they must feel, they must love or hate. If I meet them I like them or I don't like them. They are human, I am human. But these are images. I think I am supposed to imagine that they are people.

3.

Avedon trains his fashion photographer's skill in the direction

of ordinary people. He makes them look larger than life. He photographs them as if they were more than they or we could ever be, but they are clearly not. They are ordinary. The tension is tremendous.

4.

It's about hands, tough dirty unconscious beautiful useful durable conscious as speech, about eyes, intense, steely, unafraid exposed expressionless opaque unconscious conscious, clothes, durable weather-beaten ridiculous dirty plain, hair that flows speaks moves around is alive more alive than the faces possesses a health and expressiveness that the faces don't seem independent of the rest of the body.

5.

The young people look like they might as well be 100 years old. The prisoners bear scars and tattoos of Jesus. The mental patients pour tremendous energy into their hands, as though they could keep the world away with their hands. Everyone's been through the mill, worn down. There's no range of emotion. No development.

6.

Nothing, no one, is an image, is clear, is without context, straightforward, fixed, subject to exact expression by means of technique. But if you can do it, if you can do it well, if you can evoke the image that arouses admiration, disgust, pity, envy, horror, etc., that touches the storehouse of images and triggers it, opens it up, then you can produce art that can be desired, described, bought and sold, and you can become famous and make a lot of money because the image, the description, the commodity, the clear perception, sells well in a mass market.

7.

But nothing is like that. I want art so realistic nobody can tell what it is. I want art that doesn't take a person out of herself but reminds her who she is. She may not notice. She may not be interested. She probably won't pay.

8.

No one I've talked to agrees with my view of the Richard Avedon exhibit of portrait photographs entitled In The American West. Piet Groat writes that Avedon "sees with a compassionate eye. He is able to communicate to these people who volunteered to sit for him, that he is telling the truth about their lives, if they will let him. He is not a man taking a picture; he is giving them their picture, their life." I don't deny this. I think it's unfortunate that I can't deny it.

9.

"A portrait photographer depends upon another person to complete his picture. The subject imagined, which in a sense is me, must be discovered in someone else willing to take part in a fiction he cannot possibly know about. My concerns are not his. We have separate ambitions for the image. His need to plead his case probably goes as deep as my need to plead mine, but the control is with me."

—Richard Avedon

10.

These pictures are powerful. They change reality. When I leave the exhibit faces I look at look like faces from the exhibit. But this only lasts a little while.

—Norman Fischer

WHERE LAND AND WATER MEET

Mary Robertson / New Paintings and Drawings (Charles Campbell Gallery, San Francisco, March 4-April 5, 1986)

The composition of these paintings, taken from scenes on the beaches of the Russian River north of San Francisco, is dominated by a horizontal organization of planes. Parallel bands of river, beach, bank and bushes alternate foreground and background. Sometimes the foreground is land, other times water. What might first be perceived as an equivocation of thematic elements, i.e., "fog on the window view," gives way to a purely analogous sense of the physical alternation of compositional units.

Where land and water meet provides the focus for the sunbathers to consider their whereabouts and the artist to consider them in turn. The sure-footed psychology of 'place' is roll called. The paintings are small (about one foot square) and the elimination of deep space keeps the sunbathers and beach gear on the surface so that they may not escape our scrutiny by disappearing into an imagined pictorial infinity.

Objects "stand up" against the foreshortened background—sunbathers, umbrellas, beach balls, make-shift shanties. Vertical and diagonal accents. Nature is horizontal and passive, humans and man-made objects stand out against water, beach and trees. Land and water contrast with the bright tones of human flesh and tints of man-made objects. The natural aspects of the landscape absorb the light. All that is human and familiar to us gathers up and reflects the light back to the eye of the viewer. Bodies and objects are on display. Humans appear singularly or partnered, never in a crowd.

Beach gear stands in as portraiture.
Scale makes us privy to the things we view.

I think of 19th century American Luminist painters like John Singleton Copley when I think of the quality of Robertson's light. Robertson, like the Luminists, is primarily concerned with light and the ways it can pervade, even flood, a scene. But, unlike the Luminists, she steers clear of the depiction of deep space flooded by an infinite light source.

Degas said it:

the visual investigation should not concern itself with
the source of light but with effects of light.

Robertson also departs from the Luminist style in the way she builds her images. Form, value and color are delineated by visible strokes remaining on the surface of the work. The Luminists preferred their marks be rendered invisible, so the artist's trace would act more as a clarifying lens and not an intermediary between the viewer and the image. The visibility of Robertson's stroke corresponds less with the Luminist's sense of intermediacy and more with a certain sense of time. The absence of stroke and the smooth surface of a Luminist painting gives the feeling of time stopped. In a Robertson painting, you get the reverse. Time is not frozen but accumulated. The passage of time is measured by a number of strokes building up the image. The objects begin to glow as we gaze. The movement (passage of time) of light, shadow and color are captured by the strokes, yet the sunbathers and objects represented are brought to us short of an absolute focus. In "Two Girls," the faces are absent of detail, swathed only in light and shadow. We are in between moments.

Nor does Robertson simply express light as it is perceived

as the Impressionists thought. A careful study of a painting of a river dock reveals her palette is as much based upon her observation of light as it is based upon her conception of what the object might be. Color permeates the dock sitting in the water. The shadows on the surface of the dock have as much color as do the areas in direct sunlight. A particularly iridescent blue shadow lies on the surface of the water directly underneath the dock. It surprises me. It is so intensely light in the darkest area of the painting. It resolves into believability the longer I consider it, that is, my awareness of the dock and its shadows becomes more intense than if I were to confront this object on location. It is precisely here where Robertson is kin to the Luminist's attitude to light and to things.

These are not pretty mannerist works.
Beached leviathans minus the bulk.

There is a moment unresolved in time on the verge of... as in the paintings of Edward Hopper, in which drama is held momentarily in abeyance.

—Kathleen Frumkin

THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR (45 RPM) by Dionne Warwick and Friends (Elton John, Gladys Knight, Stevie Wonder), proceeds to benefit AIDS research, ETF

On TV's Solid Gold a sight to dream of, not to tell! It

happens that Dionne Warwick is this show's host so it's natural that, when the commercial ends, you see her, humble, opening her mouth and saying that she has an important presentation to make, but to Elizabeth Taylor?

But first she will sing her song that became #1. "Elton cannot be here with us tonight because he is in London" (the birthplace of Elizabeth Taylor) "but everyone else who was on the record is here and will sing for you."

Stevie Wonder takes over the part of Elton as well as his own part, and when he sings "Keep smiling, knowing you can always count on me," he ad libs and says, "knowing you can always count on Steve," personalizing the lyric—or depersonalizing it, I can't decide which. Or maybe he is sorry he is called Stevie, as if that were the name of a little boy or a grown woman.

Gladys Knight must be in her fifties, and so is Dionne, and so is Elizabeth Taylor, who comes down a set of white steps in a grey evening gown and slate grey Tina Turner hair, and they all look very young and their skin is so smooth it looks sleek, like the skin of beavers. ET accepts a huge blow-up of a check for \$500,000.00 signed by Clive Davis, the record exec, who stands by smiling and shining, knowing he can always count on me. Burt Bacharach sits at the piano, his fingers pressing the keys down lightly and nimbly all the time Taylor speaks. "Show business is life business. And we're all in show business and we're all in the business of life," she told me. I crept closer to the TV to hear her better and know her more intimately.

My brother Dave watched the presentation with me and he said he's never seen any pictures with Elizabeth Taylor but he kind of remembers her as Cleopatra. "It came out the week you were born." "So that's why I remember it."

Burt Bacharach wrote the tune, and his new wife, Carole Bayer Sager, wrote the words. Why are these people involved with AIDS? Bruce wonders. Well! Look at her middle name (pharmaceutical; pain-killer; relief) then wonder! And then she was an old flame of Elvis—so that dates her in a random way to an Age of Anxiety. And Bruce doesn't know how Burt Bacharach got his start—as the last love of Dietrich, and now Dietrich lies dying in Paris of one of those diseases everybody gets—Alzheimer's Disease (And he's campaigning for something else?) (But it all ties in, doesn't it, Bruce?) (How, Kevin, how?) Well! Bacharach was formerly married to Angie Dickinson (they have a "special" daughter, now sixteen), and never, ever, ever til the day I die will I forget Angie Dickinson, in Dressed to Kill, opening the fatal drawer in her lover's apartment to discover he has a sexually transmitted disease. She gets dressed real fast; walks into the elevator, worried, patting her white dress down, absently, very absent....

Show people involved with AIDS? Show business is life business—I was trying to explain it to him without sounding goofy (but I couldn't think of it as pithily as Elizabeth Taylor) but when I tell it to him in Taylor's words I seem even more inane, white and absent.

When the disc jockeys first played the song, they didn't tell the audience that its sales would benefit AIDS research, because the stigma would damage the intake, but when it became number one, they released that information.

I imagine this to be similar to the way AIDS overtakes the body, the body of whom.

"Well what famous people have died of Alzheimer's Disease —outside of George OPPEN," he says, pronouncing Oppen's

name in a way that suggests that Oppen wasn't all that famous a person at all—and I guess he's right.

"Rita Hayworth!" But she's not dead yet. "Sugar Ray Robinson." Still alive. "Ross MacDonald." Who? He's like Oppen—if you haven't heard of him, it doesn't mean that you don't know about famous people. "Edmond O'Brien." Victims with the names of stars—but that's because they're famous. "David Niven. Jacob Javits." "Foucault died of AIDS, Foucault and Rock Hudson."

It's not that I get any pleasure of this music. It's something to be interested in, if not for that reason. It's not something I have to be concerned with.

A woman I know told me a story about why she broke up with her high school boyfriend: he'd taken her to the Indianapolis premier of Cleopatra but then deserted her halfway through and joined the other boys in his frat, who sat up in the balcony hoping to see further down Liz Taylor's cleavage.... She was so mad and jealous, felt abandoned. It's something you don't forget. Do memory's pains outnumber, outweigh its pleasures, possibly, except without them I wouldn't go out and buy any records, thus saving no lives, because I'd have no interest in the stars. I just wouldn't love them and care about them or count on them.

First there was that British version of We Are the World, then We Are the World itself, then the Canadian version Tears Are Not Enough, then the Latin version with all the Latin singers and stars, and Texas had one with Farrah and Willie Nelson and Shelley Duvall, and famous children had their own record We Are the Children, and opera stars, and rap musicians, and 50's survivors, and gospel singers, and a cappella groups, and Hawaiian musicians. Prince went on

TV with his video For the Tears in Your Eyes, 60's psychedelia.... Live Aid was on, then Farm Aid. Sun City is the big entertainment complex in South Africa which was inaugurated seven years ago with a concert by Frank Sinatra, and it's the all star record protesting U. S. involvement in South Africa, with Daryl Hannah. Mick Jagger and David Bowie made a video of the old Motown song Dancing in the Streets, and I used to Love Jagger and Bowie but that love has dried up and won't allow them to sing that song. They look ridiculous.

I think I saw them all. I wonder if these people turn to each other in times of trouble because they suit each other, or if their souls somehow connect on a Lawrentian passion level. Then they have to make an address to an audience they can hardly know at all, and they have to sound unified (but that is their problem) and so the product is bland and anthemic, like Dodgers Stadium on opening day. Content-free, so it will sell like hot cakes. (Allegedly, Sun City was a comparative flop among these records due to its specificity of reference.) At the same time, reassurance, knowing I can always count on Steve, enriches my life because I associate it with the resonance of my meories of whom, of the stars I've counted on for so long. I wonder if, when my memory goes, I will ever, ever forget Angie Dickinson in Dressed to Kill, opening the STD drawer, walking into the fatal elevator to meet the knife of the transvestite doctor. I guess probably and I won't know what a TV is nor how to listen to music or save a life. Content-free, and my body will be worth \$1.99 cents, like a pop record, except for what audience and by which artists?

Do these stars trade on my love for them by making these records? And appearing on TV? Or is it a writing problem only, that one doesn't know what one's doing, in the sense of the audience unknown, language misheard, a product like

any other, except if you pay money you save lives so buy a body.

—Kevin Killian

AFTER GENET

Not the thing itself but the thing not itself.

It would have to start, of course, with a funeral procession out of Our Lady of the Flowers, where the great queens in gender exile parade their lamentations in the rain, here literarily transformed so that Mimosa I [Flaubert], Mimosa II [Baudelaire], Mimosa the half IV [Rimbaud], First Communion [Proust], Angela [Gide], Milord [Cocteau], Castagnette [Sartre], and Regine [Beckett] — "a still long litaney of creatures who are glittering names" — wail with a plastic stress of language verging on black magic incantation to raise his dumpling face into its pre-ordained saintly niche.

The monument in Père-Lachaise will be etched with the outline of his erect cock — a sign in no danger of losing its reference — or the word "cock" for a signature, which would bloom in proximity to his name, for in Genet language is always verging into gesture, golem-sensual, masturbatory, reifying itself into a strokable solidity, useful, purposeful, imprisoned. "... Until their warm sperm, spurting high, maps out on the sky a milky way where other constellations which I can read take shape: the constellation of the Sailor, the Boxer, the

Cyclist.... Thus a new map of the heavens is outlined on the wall...."

Yet his language, too, is unstable; words as gateways from the present, opening at either end into memory or fantasy, more for exit than entrance, inconstant, hiding behind themselves to protect their hinges, escapist, riding linguistic drift in the sway of slang, the impermanent high of street lingo and nicknames that in the mouths of his characters are not so much signs as markers of a way, meaning, frequently, the opposite of what they say. "I am forced to use words that are weighed down with precise ideas, but I shall try to lighten them with expressions that are trivial, empty, hollow, and invisible." And containing, also, the knowledge that language is a caste system, various private and semi-public networks, rigidified by class, race, and gender; so fiercely identified they have near biological power:

Slang was for men. It was the male tongue... it became a secondary sexual attribute. It was like the colored plumage of male birds, like the multi-colored silk garments which are the prerogative of the warriors of the tribe. It was the crest and spurs.

He is not outside his noisome Christian dialectic who, like Baudelaire, can only use the oppositional negative terms in hopes of detoxifying the state-sanctioned positive ones. But his bitter graces bring a whole new people into church; the canonical force of his writing not only sanctifies the criminal, the mad, the Queer; it throws the popes and judges into the shitpile. (Though he will, of course, transform the shithouse into a holy confessional.) A young man at the cafe complained (having seen Fassbinder's "Querelle") of its negativity. He's post Gay Liberation longing for positive imagery, felt Genet's abases and dooms as debased and doomed. But the same aggressive Christian dualities are still used for political disenfranchisement, and their terms still need to be turned around: immorality (by which the Meese Commission may

wind up banning Genet as obscene), disease (by which the Justice Department and Gov. Deukmejian sanction discrimination against people with AIDS), and anti-scriptural illegality (by which the U.S. Supreme Court gives the go-ahead to states to declare private consensual sodomy illegal). I understand the desire for confrontational imagery that's nevertheless positive (not to mention freed from dualistic terminology altogether) but given, say, Reagan's familiar penchant for deliberately misusing oppositional terms (the deathmaker missile as Peacekeeper, the CIA puppet Contras as Freedomfighters) Genet's insistence that "negatives" be "positive" is still helpful. And his awareness of how the State appropriates the Church's moral prerogatives to create criminals, though it landed him in prison, also helped free him from it, turning the tables to earn for himself Sartre's sobriquet, "Saint."

...and the insistence always that sex and gender are political controls, socializations rather than biological imperatives, "I will speak to you about Divine, mixing masculine and feminine as my mood dictates." Who more clearly tells of the renegade power of queens, their strength of purpose, their negotiation of humiliation into pride, without forgetting to detail the holes from being on the firing line, the piece-out-of-the-side that masculist culture inevitably carves for itself? At the same time they (he) are locked into adoration of the masculine, they deconstruct its terms, make fun of it, re-name it, dress it up, and then go down on it. For pleasure is the mode that both canonizes and deflates masculinity. And in Genet full arousal is achieved only when gender is subverted, when the man posing as masculine meets the man posing as feminine. The paradigm: Our Lady, the murderer, goes to the ball in a silk dress, dazzling. (The bar is called "The Tabernacle.")

They enter the brilliant fireworks of silk and muslin flounces which cannot fight clear of the smoke. They dance the smoke. They smoke the music. They drink from mouth to mouth. Our Lady is acclaimed by his

pals. He had not realized that his firm buttocks would draw the cloth so tight. He doesn't give a damn that they see he has a hard-on, but not to such a point, in front of the fellows. He would like to hide. He turns to Gorgui and, slightly pink, shows him his bulging dress, muttering:

"Say, Seck, let me ditch that."

He barely snickers. His eyes seem moist, and Gorgui does not know whether he is kidding or annoyed; then, the Negro takes the murderer by the shoulders, hugs him, clasps him, locks between his mighty thighs the jutting horn that is raising the silk, and carries him on his heart in waltzes and tangos which will last till dawn.

Behind a veritable smokescreen that diffuses the usually sharp boundaries of gender, Genet brings his characters together, their meeting point the immovable phallus veiled with the movable dress. Then it plunges into masculine thighs. Genet's penis has a foreskin of silk that mediates its meetings with men. Traditional signs of the feminine drape the traditional signs of the masculine, in the service of a sexuality that uses them both. Subversion of gender is not the subversion of pleasure. My queen-friend, back in the pre-safe-sex days, was screwing an anonymous male, who in his throes turned around and coo'd "fuck me, girl." ...and they danced till dawn.

How a subculture learns that language is indeed a creative constitutive force, and how that force generates and degenerates behavior. "Divine was metamorphosed into one of those monsters that are painted on walls—chimera or griffins—for a customer, in spite of himself, murmured a magic word as he thought of her: 'Homoseckshual.'" So they learn to sabotage its terms, affronting its reverences as they rename themselves. Humor, revealing self-awareness, takes the sting out of contemptuous categorizations. There is no natural stance, there are only poses. No real face, only masks. Names call forth ritual presences—especially cross-gender names, since gender-aligned names are already

ritual delimiters — "When the name was in the room, it came to pass that the murderer, abashed, opened up, and there sprang forth, like a Glory, from his pitiable fragments, an altar on which there lay, in the roses, a woman of light and flesh." (Our Lady of the Flowers.) Feelings are the gestures of feelings, a self-reflexive semiology: "I'm the Quite-Alone." "I'm the Quite-Persecuted." "I'm the Quite-Profligate." "I'm the Consumed-with-Affliction." The article (the) qualifies each stand as a dramatic stance; language, gesture, and dress combine into a costumed drama of social forces intimating selves. "Madame née Secret." Genet evolved a narrative where fantasy and memory mold time to their urgencies; where the moment itself cannot be transfixed, no reality unequivocally defined, where language is contemptuous of singular meanings and characters exfoliate identities. "It is customary to come in drag, dressed as ourselves."

NOTE: All quotations are from Our Lady of the Flowers, translated by Bernard Frechtman, Grove Press, 1963.

—Aaron Shurin

TWO FOR D. BOON

D. Boon died December 22, 1985 in an automobile crash in Arizona, just a few weeks after the release of the Minutemen's last album, 3-Way Tie for Last. Boon was 27 years old.

"Dreams Are Free, Motherfucker!"

At first I didn't think the Minutemen (D. Boon, Mike Watt & George Hurley) were even any good. I bought their 1983 EP Buzz or Howl Under the Influence of Heat on Madeleine Leskin's recommendation, played it once while washing the dishes, played it a second time for my roommate, then filed it in the middle of the stack for good. The jazz riffs, the Los Angelesness, the post-WWIII rape in "Dream Told by Moto"—it was all too Zappa-like, especially if you weren't paying attention. It put me off. But Buzz or Howl turned out to be the one Minutemen product I was least prepared to enjoy, & a great record anyway. It followed three years of non-stop touring & recording, & took their musicianly thrash to the brink of (but not yet over the edge into) an avant-garde populism, the likes of which had never been heard before. Both musically & lyrically, Buzz or Howl was the Minutemen's most abstract, inflected & ironic effort. Yet it was hardly the spew of art-rockers, & its rhetoric had nothing to do with the pseudo-progressive, reactionary "satire" endemic to that form. My original assessment of the Minutemen was dead wrong.

They were never interested in noise for noise's sake. Rather, the Minutemen were starting from scratch musically, thrashing their way free of confusion. (Trying to take the lid off the box without tearing the wrapping.) Listening now to their output, from 1980's Paranoid Time EP on through to the end, the development seems smooth & inevitable, a five-year evolution from energetic garage band blat to full melodic accomplishment, from fast & furious chants to faithful covers of Creedence & Steppenwolf, a development that was mostly a matter of figuring out what to say, how to say it, & who to say it to. Communication was always the point. Getting slicker or going commercial were secondary considerations, as they should be, serving specific statemental ends.

The earlier recordings (collected with Buzz or Howl on My First Bells 1980-1983, an SST cassette) were punk rock plus: lurid imagery, blockbuster sentiment, rant forms, songs with parts, arrangements, hooks, historical perspective & better than average words. Furthermore, the Minutemen's politics, which gave definition to their musical project (a radical approach to a popular idiom), were a matter of being in the world, not an expression of frustration. Take "Straight Jacket" (off the 1981 LP The Punch Line), a put down of apathetic "intellectuals" that goes, in total: "I'm in a political straight jacket—my mind is bent—well defined ambiguity—I'm already on someobdy's list as a casualty." BLAM! Statement, guitar solo (ending simultaneously with the last eight words), song over.

Or better yet, take "9:30 May 2," a joke told on social life from the point of view of a spectator (incorporating with it the point of view of a spectator stuck in the spectacle). This song, which originally appeared on Cracks in the Sidewalk, a 1980 New Alliance compilation, was one of the Minutemen's first recordings & the timing is already perfect: guitar & vocal engage in a witty repartee, bass & drums thumping sympathetically, imperceptibly setting the listener up for a call & response conclusion. If that isn't enough, the song also includes a hooky chorus, sung against the syntax without ruining the delivery. A triumph.

But it was Double Nickels on the Dime, their 1984 2-LP set (which my roommate bought) that convinced me. More specifically, three songs: "Take 5, D.," a landlord's note recited in melancholic sympathy over the slow plaintive drone of an electric guitar; "Shit From an Old Notebook," a catchy bit of agit prop assailing "psychological methods to sell," ending in a bellowed list of all the positive values the Minutemen held dearest; & "Political Song for Michael Jackson to Sing," a peek at the utopian solidarity implicit in the very notion of a popular culture—"a guess at the wholeness that's way too big."

Let me get one thing straight: the Minutemen weren't just

another post-Beat cult of guerilla humour & fetishized spontaneity. Their thinking was analytical & their approach to songwriting audacious. They backed up their words with actions & they backed up their actions with music. And they were remarkably free of assumptions about what a song is. ("Mr. Robot's Holy Orders," about as advanced lyrically as rock & roll gets, goes: "forced-fed sifted tin can turn handle puppet (pull toy).") Their program was simple. Everything that has to be said, said. Everything else given a nod, a shove or a kick in the ass.

One of the Minutemen's biggest strengths was that they had two gifted songwriters — & that the two loved & influenced one another. Mike Watt, the bass player, wrote most of the Minutemen's material, & in fact most of the songs I've quoted so far were his. Watt's contributions tended to be more personal, experimental & statementally complex than Boon's. He was also an obsessed devotee of Blue Öyster Cult (check out "Tour Spiel"). D. Boon, on the other hand, the hulking guitarist/lead singer, was the soul of the group. His guitar playing — all bold lines emphatically cut in time — & his comfortingly solid stage presence — saved more than a few Minutemen compositions from turning into lame send-ups or arty gestures. (His own songs were unambiguously leftist anthems.) More importantly, Boon's politics — straight-forward, passionately felt, impersonal — gave the Minutemen's performances an edge of gritty determination. (By impersonal, I mean he wasn't particularly interested in how he, individually, related to his material — Nicaragua, Reagan, capitalism. When he put himself in a situation, in a song, it was to let the audience get a fix on the situation, not on Boon himself.)

Compare D. Boon's "Corona" (one of the Minutemen's best known songs) & Mike Watt's "I felt Like a Gringo": both are about going south, about the disparity in the conditions & lives of the exploiters & their victims. But where Watt's song is about how it feels to witness this disparity, Boon's "Corona" concerns itself with what that disparity is. ("The people will survive in their environment. The dirt, scarcity and the emptiness of our south.")



Cartoon by D. Boon on the back cover of the Minutemen's
1982 LP What Makes a Man Start Fires?

Above all D. Boon was taken with facts—social facts. His sense of the world was broad but his references were specific: Vietnam ("Was this our policy? Ten long years—not one domino shall fall."), U.S. dominated Europe ("West Germany": "It's been 40 years still a hostage—new kind of fascist ruled by fear...."), Central America (references to El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and U.S. policy towards those areas in several songs), plus many specific descriptions of work ("This Ain't No Picnic") and everyday life ("The Struggle") that show a healthy disrespect for the small debasements that add up.

"Mutiny in Jonestown," which Boon and Watt wrote together, sums up their take nicely—the nightmare scenario, the struggle for freedom, the refusal to accept anything less than total solidarity with their fellow sufferers, the bleakness of the personal solution—it's an anarchist's anthem, a "Blowing in the Wind" for the 80's: "cast off! me in these ropes? I'm one knot tangled in the heap I know it's paradox with my dreams the ship's creaking taking on bullshit I fucking scream: jump ship!"

PIECES OF SAME, PICKING
UP SPEED...

in

memory

D. Boon

No sham like
the present
can keep track

fully bounded
by our
squalor

human twister
lifting chunks
of earth couldn't

fill the hole.
The future.
The fortress

of solitude, car
parts, broken
memory, noise

& pictures
—confusion built
on subsistence dirt—

"the fix,"
nothing granted
nothing the same.

—B. Friedlander

D. Boon Didn't Write Propaganda Songs

D. Boon wrote and sang songs—lyrics, music, politics dense as haiku—that explode in a quiet vision. He toyed with the language of protest and with outrage lapsing into irony in some of the same ways his band the Minutemen played a game of musical Blindman's Bluff with a heritage of amalgamated styles,

punk, of course, but punk mixed with funk into jazz back to rock and folk. Roots music, from '65-'85: "Mr. Narrator, this is Bob Dylan to me... Richard Hell, Joe Strummer, John Doe... me and Mike Watt playing guitar," a History Lesson from 1984 in how punk rock changed (not saved) their brand of scientist rock. Gestures, not meaning, diffracted, splayed, gnomified.

From 1983, "The Product," trumpet blares, guitars and drums goose-step, voice snarls and shuffles and finally spits it:

wrapped and sealed with masking tape moistened with sweat and experience existence of ignorance—the product of capitalism!

Or from the same record (Buzz or Howl Under the Influence of Heat), distraction builds quietly for the first minute or so of "Little Man...":

the highest love a woman's touch harmony a strong mind
a strong body beauty all the things he couldn't be all the
things he couldn't have.

The history is unfolded, the outcome is predictable, raucous, an early variation on D. Boon's Big Stick theory shouted over and over. It is the sort of obliquely populist brand of parable he used to keep up the fight, the sort that folded neatly at all but the fourth corner, whether presenting a life lived, a people duped, a country sidewinded.

At issue, at first, '79-'80, smaller, shorter, thumbnail sketches and blasts: San Pedro, sprawl, paranoia, punk, white boy guilt, friendly and not so friendly fascism. Then bigger, out of home turf, the music moneymaker moneyground, rock and roll homage (to Blue Öyster Cult, Creedence), identity. By the end, whole songs of rage and protest with melody and situation and clear meaning even at the bridge, more about rock and roll, Vietnam, war in Central America, invasion on all levels, the profit gain between the media headlines ("I know what I've read...they'll have us believe").

The confusion perpetrated by a Dylan as well as a Reagan—the way lamentations conjoined with blistering pride produces a propaganda that might allow it to happen all over again—became a running joke to D. Boon songwriter as well as D. Boon rock and roll performer. He didn't play the part of spokesman (part of his audience at live shows was born at the end of the Vietnam era and he certainly wasn't going to preach at them).

There's something about the treatment of these issues that's different from the language of other political poets making music these days. D. Boon's words don't deploy anarcho-bombast or uneasy humor to obfuscate what is inherently, tragically funny (we all know Helms or Weinberger or Feinstein lack a soul but why appropriate their voices to chuckle and point the finger?). Nor do they condescend in their unflinching accusations; an almost anthemic "Big Stick" from last year explains:

These bombs are made by people like me and you...and we learn and believe there is justice for us all and we lie to ourselves with a big stick up our ass.

The difference—^{what} makes D. Boon's work with the Minutemen awesome and direct in the face of folkish conceits that worm their way into most musical attempts at melding political vision with personal response—comes from an absence of exhaustion or alarm. He doesn't believe or speak as if he's preaching to the converted, a deadening assumption that a lot of bands preaching political awareness make. He steps back from the songs having told what he believes the story to be right now, what it seemed to say then. It may not last long, that belief that "someone will hear and bring us back to get the peace train on its track" but at least, he argues, I'm telling you what I'm singing about, the race war that America supports, the limp causes and false prophets.

3-Way Tie for Last shows just how his well-articulated vision had, over the years, become matched by an even terser application of that vision to a specific outrage or specific joke. The words, the indictment, the call to action fill up space



L. to R.: D. Boon, George Hurley, Charlie Haden.
Photo by Dennis Keeley.

where only music or, better, bursts of activity used to be. The guitar strums along and at the break plays a sweet, pithy tune right before the accusation ("where's your courage?"). In "The Price of Paradise" ("The price of paradise is stained with blood / young men died for what") the pathos lurks beneath the play of a dreamlike elegiac beat with chunks of information that on other records were staggered, unfinished, subverted by his guitar, or voice.

D. Boon's songs on Project Mersh and 3-Way Tie for Last often hit as his most accessible. Both records make broad, mocking

attempts at "hit" song structure yet remain graphic and radical in scope. He wants people to hear it all, even the stuff they've already read, and heard and recited and sung and heard sung (the version of Creedence's "Have You Ever Seen the Rain?" sounds homier, even more bleary-eyed, head to the wall optimistic than the original). The slogans he resurrects are from the leaders; the responses from the lost, faithless employees who follow those cheerleaders of death; the vision comes from D. Boon, the patriot who held out for a kind of intervention from within, a hope that we will find the right turn-off after being lost just one too many times on the freeway.

—Madeleine Leskin

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thomas White (and who is he?) on Silliman was fascinating for being apt and off-the-mark at the same time. Granted Silliman's "relentless indication" has the semblance of a "kind of democratic levelling"—this is due to his relentless use of the present tense. Yet White falls into a common error: he conflates the indicial mode with a casuistry of textual 'judgement.' This is tough, I know—let me give an example. We are conditioned to a type of linguistic designation (i. e., the index) as having the unique capacity of presenting the 'real' to us. An indicial mode of writing forefronts denotation: Silliman's is such a mode, compounded by the majority of his 'lines' being in the present tense. Since we commonly use this mode to designate lived experience, when we read statements formed in the indicial mode, we take these to be 'lived,' that is, 'real'. Silliman's text exploits this mode to a degree that someone like White will take this as his "project," an "inventory" of the 'real' which can then be seen as 'full' or 'lacking.' White sees it as both.

He finds it "excessive," an "over-production." This is revelatory, since his slide into economic metaphor (and his diatribe on art-commodification) shows that he is nostalgic for a "pre-capitalist" literature, i.e., literature itself. What he feels is lacking in Silliman's writing is, I suppose, the sort of self-contained Lebenswelt à la Proust or Melville. He calls this "over-production" "isotropic," again conflating form (the indicial mode) with content—it's 'all the same' since it is expressed primarily in the modality of present tense indication. Still, despite its "excessiveness," White sees a lack in Silliman's "project." This is the failure of the inventory itself, the impossibility of a Lebenswelt. White can no more provide this than can Silliman—yet he implicitly holds to a belief in its possibility. Certainly Silliman already acknowledges the irony of this by underscoring the "dailiness" of his "project," which can only be termed a failure if he'd had the aspiration to 'write the world.' Language is our world, necessarily partial, you know all that jazz—White's coyness in asking 'more' (of what?) from Silliman while saying his chosen format cannot provide it is petty—what hidden agenda prompts these criticisms? I do not share this presumption of a "responsibility" that runs covertly through White's article and is never addressed as such. One last thing before I unclench White: I disagree with both of his pronouncements on the "purpose of criticism." It is meant to be neither complacency-disrupting nor an early-warning system. Criticism is responsive—that has always been its role. It is (or can be) far more complex than this pot-banging, bell-ringing definition White gives. As you may have guessed by now, I'm fed up with moralists who don't announce themselves as such.

—Michael Anderson

THOMAS WHITE RESPONDS:

Regarding M. A. 's response to my essay "What I See in the Silliman Project," which appeared in your sixth issue: yes,

well, so, I guess, why not. That is, I would love to "conflate the indical mode with a casuistry of textual judgment." Who wouldn't, given such rich and mysterious expression of that mistake. I like Ron Silliman's writing; I merely wanted to explore some problems which I felt it already was posing in and of itself. It's right or wrong on its own terms.

Present tense writing proposes a world that is present, obviously. It is also the tense of dream recording, when the journalist omits the tag "Dreamt..." Which is precisely what any act of imagination does. I am not opposed to post-capitalist literature. In fact I prefer it, especially since I write it myself. Though I can admit to longing for "literature itself." What writer doesn't? As for Lebenswelt (is that a substitute for Weltanschauung?) I also confess to liking a little of that in what I write and read as well. What would a book be without a little view of life in it.

Conflation is closer to combination than to confusion. Which is a unifying purpose of literature. It strikes me that M. A. confuses the function of criticism to be responsive and predatory at once. "One last thing before I unclench White" as a metaphor is clearly either raptor or gangster, choose your writer/reader relationship. I am certainly pleased only to be roughed up metaphorically. Surely waking is a better purpose of anything than is clenching.

Finally, the only thing worse than some moralists are the morals themselves. Had I been born into another world, Montaigne's for example, I might have been a moralist. In this one, unfortunately, one must be content and stay alert with a more archival function. Which I take it is basically Silliman's disposition also. And we have lebenswelts all over us.

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

... How to hold the words "contemporary culture & politics"

and "encouraging" in the same sentence, and carry it over into the United States? Despair is the common state, behind even the most "optimistic" acts. The utter and complete marginalization of substantive radical poetry & writing is one of the signal triumphs of consumer capitalism in the U. S. It's this sickening marginalization that has us fighting among ourselves. A privatized writing needn't be unmindful of or unresponsive to the needs of the whole social body—it's the marginalization has us talking to ourselves. (*)

"Positive denial is the refusal to believe in false statements" (**) and this doesn't leave much to take home. We don't use those voices any more, they took those too. If everything is permitted, nothing has any effect. What must one do to say no?

It was recently reported that the South African government banned a popular recording because the songs on it were played by saxophones. At the hearing, officials said the saxophone was an instrument that incited Blacks to violence.

"During a cultural void, one has a sudden luxuriense of existence."—Pasolini (La Poesie)?

"I find that there is simply a *reason* for living because there is, first of all, memory and, secondly, the present...."—Godard

(*) "Criticism is almost always important, even if it omits and misrepresents a great deal. However, when straight-away it becomes warlike, this is because political impatience has won out over the patience proper to the 'poetic.' Writing, since it persists in a relation of irregularity with itself—and thus with the utterly other—does not know what will become of it politically; this is its intransitivity, its necessarily indirect relation to the political."—Blanchot, "The Writing of Disaster"

(**) Bev Dahlen?

—David Levi Strauss

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ноу!

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Тотемы

Тте Ногге еовлу е гна!

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бае
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боуле
Чем нодотб

Чепм
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