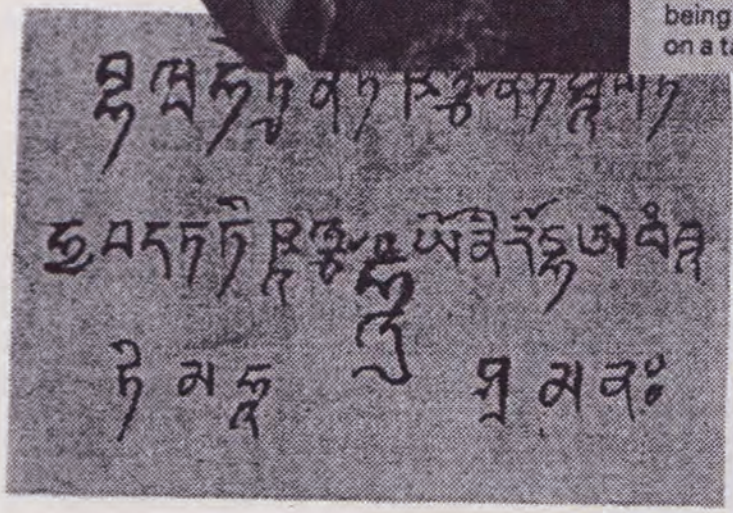
JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K" #8

A monk in Lhasa, Tibet, raises a defiant fist during last month's demonstrations against Chinese rule. Above, an 8-year-old Tibetan boy who was shot in the back by police and, right, the corpse of a monk being carried on a table.



BULLETIN

CHINESE EXECUTE TIBETANS IN RESPONSE TO DALAI LAMAS' PEACE PLAN

Three days after His Holiness the Dalai Lama presented his 5-point plan for peace in Tibet and the region to the Human Rights Caucus on Capitol Hill, Chinese authorities in Lhasa began executions of Tibetan nationalists. Kelsang Tashi was executed on Sept. 24th, Sonam Gyeltsen the next day and another activist, Migmar Tashi, was sentenced to death. Scores of Tibetan monks and laymen have been imprisoned since Sept. 24th during massive demonstrations involving thousands for Tibetan independence, and at least six Tibetans have been killed in Lhasa.

Tibetan exiles and American friends of Tibet are calling on U.S. leaders to act to halt further executions and arrests, according to the U.S. Tibet Committee, a human rights organization. Directors of the group urge Americans to contact their Senators and Representatives in Congress to help the people of Tibet in their time of crisis. for an update or information on how you can help, please contact the U.S. Tibet Committee, 107 E. 31st St., New York, NY 10016, (212)-213 5010.

Additional stories on pages 8-12

JIMMY & LUCY'S HOUSE OF "K" #8 Jan. 1988

Cover: rubbings of bench marks from Kings Canyon, California.

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Kenneth Irby's Riding the Dog originally appeared as The Zelot: No. 4 (The Zelot Press, 1982).

RIDING THE DOG

[SLC, Howard Johnson's, between and on at 0220, Reno by midday]

high school but older babble behind in the back of the bus of couples—faggot jokes, enforced card games, kids crying slapped to shut up, wifey-hubby kissy-killer blither—quietness a sign of . . . scarecrows? serious impertinence, impermanence? root pride? good rude sense of the traveller, anyway, at the same time chatter can be—but not chatter, incessant loud yuk-yuk-fucking-yuk-yuk, it's always got to be insisted it's right to enjoy, e.g., the card game turned into backgammon—gathered by the lot of the journey, how it ends up sitting together, like, not -minded, but -vibed, -chinned, congenial-congenial, jawbone for nose, instincts like accidence instruct—in Gerrit's letter: «poetic "elitism" [which grows —& can reconcile Mallarmé's (& S. George's) & Lautréamont's (poetry is for everyone) . . . & the mirror of supernatural economics»—the Montana Texas great-grandmother finally came and picked up the 16-month-old boy of the couple across the aisle and in front of her, who'd been crying ever since Denver, and got him to sleep—"usually I can hypnotize a child in five minutes, he took longer than any I can remember, his little muscles were just like knots"—calling to imaginary animals in the air, "hey dogs, come on, dogs, ooo-ooo, hey, come on, hey dogs", spell weaving—what we all have in common as willingness to make out of time, and what can't be made up for, no matter out of or out in—limits to go to see the sacred places on the table with the scrambled eggs and hash-browns, between and on—then we stopped and waited for the signal to come on, we heard return in us

[Sep 79]

[Greyhound station in DC, c. 1345, bus to Annapolis at 1430]

of the Luminist show at the National Gallery yesterday, still the Kensetts haunt the most profoundly, the spectral Newport beach light—so much in the show it's hard to hold as a whole—but, a definite DC notch cut next to the Henry Adams, and the Bierce—maybe as much in the gilt frames as in the paintings' light and subject matter (not just the Great Vistas of the West—à la King)—and again thought I saw Ruth, as I thought I had in Baltimore—laid on the still more-vivid-than-waking-life dream residue of her from the night before—is that all part of the West, and Light, the Western Light?—or this morning's visit to the House of the Temple on 16th St (walked right past on the other side of the street looking at that side's old houses in process of being rebuilt, and had to backtrack when I got to U St) 's tour?—«. . . and there was Light»?—what'll I say, I instantly wondered, if it is her?—«when now it is / the moss mystery / stones accumulate»—some promise of the inner space to show forth?—like some weakness of the sight from early on meant no choice of the sea, the Navy, as a life?—still remains, to call up as well a similar incapacity of the heart to see?—or is it the Navy captain standing at the gate for Annapolis, the aging parents he's seeing off, makes it also to take care of the lack?—«love, and exploration»—with Kensett on the New England shore, or back in the 10th St studio building in New York in front of a canvas, what would I call it watching in(n)it castaway ?—so sought Adams away from fields of clover, turned away in South Sea sands and utter silence, if she had been there, looking at Trost Richards?

[May 80]

[en route KC-StL, c. 1940]

tuning the bowl, playing the bowl—between fire and water, there, between earth and air, here—sand on the prosciutto-thin, glass-hard taut skin of the bowl head, into the patterns that the bow against the edge draws—hair, skin, wood, metal: thickets, hungry from, ahead—I can't hear the young Japanese across from me, with a Vail lift ticket on his down jacket zipper, as he reads from his English-Japanese Study Dictionary, only see his lips moving, his right hand gesturing as he murmurs, then jotting in a notebook, the dictionary shifting hands —under the Pentecostal searchlight beam of the overhead reading lamp, in the dark bus, Eastward riding—the rest of the bus ahead of us is totally dark, on into the road world where all the lights move for us—and the sound—bent over the empty page, rimming the empty surface of the paper with the wet fingertip of the pen, the edge of the glass of the book, into its silence feeling—the sound that is all around us, soothing as the icebox in the middle of the night but not from stopping and starting up again—the sound of the airconditioning blowers and the tires, an unintelligible, barely audible voice now and again rising above, a faint almost popcorn in the picture show lobby smell drifting, fading, persisting—bent over the bowl to play that history of the old languages that we seek, against the onslaught of great signs, the stations of reflection till we turn out the light

[Mar 81]

[SLC overheard, Howard Johnson's, c. 0510, on to Denver at 0630]

"—no one should eat margarine, because it warms the system —India is a country where they've let philosophy tell them what to do and it's ruined them, cause I know what I'm talking about—in Puritan times, now you know more about this than I do, the father had complete control, he could beat his wife and children whenever he wanted to, he could kill them if he felt like it, and it was allowed, he was absolute authority—course a lot of people say there's nothing wrong with being rich—and if you're going to make your career in religion why shouldn't you be paid for it?—I think the church should help people, but I'm not sure Christianity is so bad—Mohammedism, is just as bad, Buddhism, is just as bad—John F. Kennedy, now, maybe he was one of those avatars—when you only believe in yourself you better be good, I have no structured religion but the mind, trying to get someone to think—people start putting their trust in some leader, just like putting themselves in the hands of a doctor—just think of all those millions spent on Disneyland—however when I was in Europe I always went to the churches where I was, I was more likely to go to a church than a museum, of course their churches, religion is much more austere, much more austere—of course look at the Moonies, I think they're a disgrace, but I don't think you can legislate against the Moonies—and this one in Los Angeles, Armstrong's, what it's called, with that beautiful college and gardens and a branch in England, they only think the original 144,000 will be saved—the son was in an adulterous relationship and was thrown out, then his father let him back in, but that Jewish treasurer became heir apparent, something like that, and the son was out again, and all the members, blah blah blah, were up in arms about the money that was being spent—you can't legislate against the Moonies or any church, you can't even make them pay taxes—and if Armstrong wants to fly around in a jet and the treasurer wants to drive around in three pink Cadillacs, that's all right —but now they've got that law passed in Sacramento, the rank

and file can find out how the money's being spent——now that Cardinal Cody in Chicago, doesn't he know they've got that law passed?——I wouldn't miss a bit of it, it's as good as any romantic novel——she went to one of those recruiting meetings, they make you feel so important, so she went to the retreat, and this girl, and they really started the brainwashing, and this reporter, was there two or three days, I don't know but what she did feel threatened——I don't know finally how she did get away, I've forgotten all the details, but the other girl stayed, and even the reporter, and she was writing an article, found it very hard to get away——and an emotional gang that was roving the temple got her out of there, and then she said she was so happy to be rescued, all that just pouring in on her, and that was just last week or so——still, if I was a judge and a parent came to me and said they had to quote kidnap their child to get them out, I'd go against the parent, even though it might bother me to do so, if the kid is 21 and an adult and didn't want to leave, how do I know but what they like it?——now L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology, now that's the real Beast——"

[Oct 81]

I have fetched phoenix papers

[after a gift of poems from Roy Gridley, written while travelling in China, silently left at the door between 11 am and noon, 28 Jul 1986]

The referential is the clear telling. What is remembered or not remembered of the dream is of another life. Memory itself is from another life. Cups, called so simply, are not sufficient to account for their overflow. The things that you want to be quick, the things that you want to be more specific, do not account for the power of their sentimentality, for the cough, for their touching their shadows. A loss, then, if we do not, but never doubt that the world of men can share this knowledge.

There we have gone off along the railroad tracks into, to school, and stop and dip our feet in the creek, just for a little while, to cool and cool, with our little brothers and sisters. That is the distance, and in that it does not return, memory itself is from so long ago, no matter how long ago it instantly is of. And the try to intensify wreaks the comparison, to keep compassionate.

[28-29 Jul 86]

The epigraph and the quotation in the first paragraph are from A. C. Graham's translation of Li Shang-yin's "The Walls of Emerald," in Poems of the Late T'ang (Penguin, 1965), p. 168.

—Kenneth Irby

THE CRYSTAL TEXT by Clark Coolidge (The Figures, 1986)

Surroundings have a finality about them——most likely the source of writing's independence. I start by thinking of Williams separating words from events, ("by action itself almost nothing can be imparted").

In The Crystal Text the writer writes just anything. The text's formlessness is in keeping with the writing of places unknown. Lack of direction is perhaps its only imitation——as the universe.

The writing is words as they are forgotten. Words as they can be forgotten. Retention is kicked out from under as each word is potentially a new context with an unusual grammatical role. All forms of memory——repercussion, history, acquisition, alliteration, reminiscence, tend to be shut out or out-paced. "The hard momentum of forgettal."

Coolidge raises ponderable dynamics. The words are awarenesses of their involvement in the world which the writer does not contextualize. A word can leave behind its use and redispose the nature its use had given to it. The known place the text must not state, it must know well when it is not. The text, in that it opposes experiences, might even impart understanding. Holding to what exists becomes inaction.

There are antagonists, or, what could be considered parts of propulsion. The writing could be without limits only to the extent it involves its constraints. It has resistance to ostinato, selection, reverberation, beatification, pulling together, conclusiveness, development ("I only realize the first moves of this. / I know only the intense starts, which are now dreams"). Aversion? "Inverse lesson by positive adage."

Odd leverage. The crystal is indeed the object looked into. Human is immured in the inanimate properties of the crystal—outside of which, there is no dialogue at all. Inorganic otherness activates / contradicts language process and mind. The crystal is "monad" (contains all) and is the knowledge the text accepts, in an orphic sense—its speech or at least the mixing of its nature with the mind's.

What succession is, is given by the book's collapse into problems the stationary, humourless, silent, undesigned crystal presents to writing's linearity. An instance of this, as address: "But it's not fair. You have hooked things up / that I could never see in a moment. / Now all I can see is you. Whatever you contain. / Whatever you do to time, not to mention / perform on space."

I wonder how continuous a stanza is. It seems backward to call it a stanza. That's the way the writing looks once it's over. The measure is not quantitative—not lengths to fill. Also not so simple as saying the stanza is a session or sitting. Perhaps it is a matter of momentum carried. In which case, momentum of what? Inception at the crystal, made up of its number of starts, if but one. A density; or, clicking encased. Certainly not catch-all for lines from other times.

The stanza is a problematic temporal shape. Its continuous appearance can order any bit or abeyance at the time of the writing into a timing in the writing. I'm not referring to musical pause but to experiential gap. The question is not whether The Crystal Text's time is more constructed or more involuntary. The formlessness of its acceptance of one-word-set-next-to-another is a thorough copy of time as unprecedented rhythms.

"The stanzas are of gold or brass / or a folded glass shocked full of bright / outer data."

Though Coolidge imagines the writing-mind in non-linear, inconsequent or concurrent terms (knarl, spill, strew, etc.), the lines lay out one after the other, giving tension, and are not involved in shaping the page. Any structure might be too much memory to 'ask' and too leading.

"Some places link up without my stopping to. Most never do."

"And I still see all sides, what the tangents are pursuing me, consuming me with."

———

"My thoughts / do not land. The whole world a floating with / at two in the morning. And these sentences, who cares where they break?"

"The end of theline is the greatest juncture"

(?) though the text has a Period—which is the division 'higher' than stanza and though uncanny word use makes for great juncturing at word-boundary.

———

The text is a physics—in that it is in relation to the inanimate and uses perception-laden terms for unobservables (as metaphor in science). Scientific is about as related to fact as literary is to convention. It is not a physics in that it (1) intimates, doesn't operate, (2) enters non-objectivity, (3) is counter-paradigmatic —not few states but profusions, as good as endlessly, (4) therefore? is not deadening language.

Some of its imagery; could be neurophysiologies.

States of matter made of words. Hard won right where experience would be lost. Not the realism of knowledge (knowledge of what's out there). Though it's useless to think this writing could exist beyond the page, in the prophetic sense of, say, Khlebnikov; as social, psychological or political condition evoked; which would be suspenseful, like writing a thriller.

The freedom he has found among verbal relations can be brought to direct sense-perception. Or, current is impinged upon by the familiar it vies with. In a way I can know what he means by "A barn of rustled threads."

Limited to language but not by sense-experience. I read the line by how much the world it's moving. I read the line by how much the world it's moving.

"What has been identified as / 'the Devil' is merely matter. Matter / is collision, collusion, my confusion. There / must be a further state of things. Art is / merely the drapery. The task to scribe it thinner."

"Imitation of nothing ever / to be seen again forget it, and in parallel."

"I am writing these things to see if they can be seen if not touched."

The writing doesn't generate from itself, from the material under hand, in a traditional sense of field-composition. Forgettal is constantly breaking and blinding the way. Hence a certain non-physical causality—a reference from the unrealizable part of the process. In this way, language as

limited is included.

Compared to earlier work, Coolidge, in The Crystal Text, lets in fuller light as events 'other than' words on paper—continuous exteriors and interiors. He uses self-revelation, past tense, observation, quotation; lines often roll out into consequent sentences; images scale up to scene and scenario. And the words do not tend to dematerialize. Though the transformed word-roles, jarring, then fall in quite syntactically. Original mind is not lifting attention from how the words are creating it. The text is not an equating of broken grammar with opacity of language, new world and effective action.

Unknowing is literalized. It sounds as though he ran into what he sees. Or, sight is eclipsed by the sonic and isolated lexical force of each word.

Yet in the blinded momentum, holding to the gross, even hearing is undercut. I've been wondering if the text follows anything—what it might be accurate 'to'. // He writes his physicality which is prior to sense, and is visionary in that, in density. Here (I can't unfuse eye and touch)= . The world has been taken in. And there is not yet language.

"The floor is strong stone and you're going to smell the smoke of hard slump / once your brain goes out."

"Martians having not a thing to do with it. / Uncapping and capping the pen having lots."

Perhaps it follows the aggravations of resisting the carrier or signal experienced without any time/material.

"It's too long, for the light, it'll never match."

———

"To see everything loose and then walk up to the door."

—Robert Kocik

SOLUTION PASSAGE: POEMS 1978-1981 by Clark Coolidge (Sun & Moon, 1986)

Scenic wayside

red-headed pheasant
roadrunners (?)
magpies
sea gulls

Boise = two instant replays
one VW headlight (out)
one roomlamp (blown)
one interconnecting doorkey (missing)
several bath towels & cups (mess)
one stomach ache (Toni)

so far . . .

Time was Clark Coolidge exhorted us "go to the Brodey" & constructed word mobiles slanted Beat-wise in the mind—

later, "prosoid" contraptions whose "axial armature" rolled through mental regions on a "maze of tracks... unwreathed from cross-over webs of railroad intellectuality to become simple main line dignity"—"lonely handwork of self keeping record of self's consciousness" "bathed in Bong" & splashed with mud. Not to say the work wasn't abstract (or even arty) but—& this is a but you can't overemphasize—his obsession with geology, amongst other things, grounded the work in a reality that had nothing to do with "literature." Even now, steeped in Beckett & Rilke, writing poems called "The Book of During" or "Godard and the Rhapsody of Mention," Coolidge's Beat (not to mention St. Mark's) origins sit close to the surface:

ON THE ROAD

Well, you just have to read and get involved
with things in scribble. The letters
under the mountain, and the wrath vat
turns auto. Will never sour up any
plans by jabbering on. Will whittle
while we run. And in back of it all
the spiral ramp of conversation, higgly-
piggling over hours and starts and landings.
Nobody digs it all better than in
comminglings of flowage, hot off the rocks
back of the batter pen where dimers stand.
And the flesh floats out of the stars into
our upraised tips. Writing means motion.
The hover left behind in the lever jacket,
the car park flap, the inhabited sever.
I was ready to take up amazement and
follow the words.

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Coolidge's newest, Solution Passage, collects a mere four years' worth of poetry but clocks in at just under 400 pages, an awesome torrent of intention & completion that brings to

mind a dream about Michael Palmer Coolidge once recounted in an interview, "a real writer's dream":

> I was at his home in San Francisco, and he showed me these typed pages which were the contents of all of his next four or five books. With the title of the book and the titles of all the poems, quite a few pages, probably hundreds of poems. And he showed them to me, and I woke up, only remembering one title of a book. . . . Writing to him I said gee I'm glad I didn't have that dream, about me, it was better I had it about him.

This is not to suggest that the prolificness evident in Solution Passage is the fulfillment of a task given Coolidge in a dream—& I certainly don't want to suggest that these poems were dictated, Rilke-fashion, from beyond the beyond—but I do think Coolidge has begun to accept literature as a task, as his task, in a way he never did before. As recently as 1977—in his Naropa talk—Coolidge was defining his interests in terms of geology and music and science fiction and painting; my guess is that today he's more likely to talk about poetic sources.

SHED WITNESSES

Rilke, give me your paw.
And we will ladder our pain across pointless vasts
striking eachother like Dumbs to the Head.
There is no light in Kafka, there is no mass to you.
You light but do not heat the Dense, or do you
hate? In a turret above your neighboring
countess's farm you switch an arm as if
a broom across the page, and return to
the blinding squares an initial and a date.
You and I a vow primed to meet
the Language meshed enough to hold
what veers but nears.
You will not bear. I will not wait.

But complaint is not my intention—the sheer skill & voluminous good will of this wadded volume's 200 and some odd poems is staggering, a seemingly endless compendium of frozen imponderables & shooting stars, formulaic in its effortlessness if not in its effects & speculations. Much of the book consists of homage & allusion—Lovecraft, Artaud, Hejinian, Burroughs, Melville—the rest is half "Windbag for a dudelsack," half "pureperfect gems / of lucid poetry"—Cool Clarkage all:

> And do you wander in a blue stone town,
> plain linking own self to mountains, or
> with others? Train signal of an anciency,
> Jupiter and Saturn rise together. Bare round
> powers. How did they lock the stones?

One difference between Clark Coolidge and the poets who followed his lead by following "the endless babbleflow, that began back in Beat America," Brodey fashion, to its "flip side," is that while Coolidge is romantic enough to believe poetry "not just another method for knowing the world," his descendant contemporaries can't get past the fact that language is knowledge, its substance as well as its mode of expression. Lyn Hejinian has written: "The language itself materializes thought; the writing realizes ideas. One discovers what one thinks, sees, says, and as the words unfold the work, the work, directed by form, extends outward." The author of Solution Passage might agree with this in principle but as a definition of writing it's too restrictive to apply to his actual practice; Coolidge, formalist that he may be, is still a student of Kerouac, whose "Belief & Technique for Modern Prose" includes both of the following instructions: "Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea" & "Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists in mind" (& I want to remember to say here that Hejinian's "autobiographical" My Life, if less compelling than "October in the Railroad Earth," is still the major challenge post-Kerouac to our understanding of what narrative consists in & what prose can do). Ultimately, the difference between an Hejinian & a Kerouac is acceptance

versus rejection of experience as a control in writing—difference that crumples Coolidge over to the Kerouac side of the continuum; for where the poets of the 70s & 80s have discounted the value of all that stands previous to the act of writing, Coolidge—a product of the 60s (if not the 50s!)—sits transfixed, pen in hand. What, after all, is Solution Passage if not a testament to "the flow that already exists in mind," the previous that stands above the page; & what is The Crystal Text (Coolidge's 150 page meditation on a piece of quartz) if not a monument to the infinite suggestibility of an impassive, non-verbal world?

DEAR WHO

What do vou think of when you write? Usually
I think of nothing, or the carbarns of my youngness.
The noises made by solid things, the pretense of
matching.

On the table is a board composed of two fibers.
Yank and Lawn. Once the rules have been set
then the flats are cut. A carbonaceous schist
on which primrose crystals light.

I think of walking, then I think of a table land.
I think of talking, then I think of never. Water.
Or a planet without horizons.

How could there be such a mild manner
would not realize its weight to settle?
My favorite rule is tobacco.

It's no contradiction that Clark Coolidge, whose faith in language as language comes second to none, gets over the top by dint of an equally strong faith in the power of the extra-literary—be it earth science or music or a "word-activation of the imagination in the act of seeing." Charles

Bernstein: "The distortion is to imagine that knowledge has an 'object' outside of the language of which it is a part—that words refer to 'transcendental signifieds' rather than being part of a language which itself produces meanings in terms of its grammar, its conventions, its 'agreements in judgement.'" Clark Coolidge (not diametrically opposed to the above but looking over the fence into another yard: "... sometimes it strikes me that poets are the most limited of people in the various areas of external feed-in they allow, they tend to get 'stuck with themselves', trapped in a needlessly single mode of language/thought.... Open the sluices." Like Coltrane before him, who called his formalist masterpiece Ascension, Coolidge is less interested in resolutions than he is in the forward push careful thinking allows (& whereas Charles Bernstein's best work gains power by holding to a theme, which also reminds me of Coltrane, & the force Trane unleashed by playing the changes). Coolidge's writing is about & embodies the big journey, om out, through whatever topics one has to go through, on to no destination—"the journey itself is home"—or as my dad used to say, "When you're driving there's one thing you don't have to worry about; the road never ends."

Indian om primal sound before creation
"if you can hear it, you have the right to speak"

. . .

"write the words you know"
"there's a moment when you feel
oh man, I did
get hold
of a word"

I always thought that to be Clark Coolidge was to play Rauschenberg to Michael Palmer's de Kooning, to erase the "colloidal lightbulb eventua" lit up like a North Star over Michael Palmer's head. Now it turns out that Clark Coolidge has a tungsten brain-halo all his own—& still chases "The

lab carrot of everything":

> To start out and want to be a writer . . . I didn't want to be, I wanted to investigate and hold the discoveries in my hand. I wanted to see things until their names appeared and led. It didn't seem that it would amount to a paper life.
>
> •
>
> It fascinates me now to see if I find things to speak what shape their sentences will take.

P. S. (for Bob Grenier): I've been assuming all along, perhaps mistakenly, that Coolidge's work from Space to The Maintains on to Solution Passage & the present has, & has intended to make, meaning (= bringing the world into writing), first by manipulating materials (including specialized vocabs) (i.e., by "considerateing" "that which exists through itself"), & later by memorializing the movement of the mind in language ("because mind in work really does want to think phonetically"). Whether Coolidge's long-standing desire to work "straight through" & not stop ties in with the above, however, is another Q & A altogether, as is any determination of the value of that endlessness—for Coolidge himself & for the reader. If you invest enough power in the act of writing can your attention create meaning from scratch inside the work or does it still have to stream in from outside (or both or neither)—& what happens when you substitute a rock for Neal Cassady? How far can you get & how far should you go? Or as Larry Eigner once put it (in reference to work of yours which pushes the other extreme): "Nothing can last forever, of course, or anyway nothing very meaningful can, and so how long might or should anything endure, any one thing, or be expected to, or be prolonged, is one of the great questions of these modern times."

SOURCES OF QUOTES:

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("considerateing"). Charles Olson, Causal Mythology (Four Seasons, 1969), p. 2 ("that which exists through itself"). Robert Grenier, "Hedge-Crickets Sing," The L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E Book, p. 19, ("because mind in work..."). Kit Robinson, "Clark Coolidge," 1979 80 Langton Street Writers in Residence, p. 38 (quoting C. C. saying "I've always worked straight through" & "Why stop? Am I going to stop breathing?"). Larry Eigner, "Not Too Fast, Either / (So Does Time Much Matter?)," Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K" (#2, Aug. 1984), p. 43 ("Nothing...").

Special thanks to Tinker Greene

—Adam Moorad

ROOT SONG by Cid Corman (Potes and Poets, 1986)

The Sun & Moon catalogue reminds me that Root Song is Cid Corman's 64th book! It is a humble book of quiet beauty which keeps faith with the 63 that came before it, a book which feels of a piece with a life and the traditions which inform it. In these haiku-like meditations "We share what has been said before—again."

> the feeling is of
> terrible slowness
> overtaking haste

This is poetry so fundamental to the American literary landscape that it has disappeared into the landscape—as befits, I suppose, one of our foremost practitioners of naturalism in poetry.

So much more
than this is
this. And yet

how say it,
how expect
it to stand

beyond self
within this
emptiness?

A lovely book, an underacknowledged author. I wish both well. A toast:

From bamboo
flask into
bamboo cup

emptiness
the source of
drunkeness

—Tom Beckett

ICE CUBES by Kit Robinson (Roof Books, 1988)

There is a pacific, morning coolness about Kit Robinson's Ice Cubes. I say morning because they seem, in their reserved, slightly removed chilliness, to forecast the heat of the day. These poems seem to prepare for a reality other, quite other, than the one they inhabit, the one they embody. I say

pacific because the poems were manufactured in California, and because although they clink and move, the individual stanzas are static monitors of moving thought.

I suppose that each stanza of four one-word lines would be a cube, and each poem, of from two to nine stanzas, a tall glass of cubes. I would suggest that the drink has not yet been added to the glass, each stanza retaining its distinction, contacting those above and below, and around it too, but not at all diffused by any diffusing thing. This is a way of intimating that the matter of the stanzas is relatively cerebral, and quite clear, but not often distracted by drawn connections with life outside of thought about it.

I don't know where the one-word-to-a-line poem originated. It was certainly used to effect by Tom Clark in his Smack (Black Sparrow Press, 1972) and has seen a lot of use at the hands of Ted Greenwald. There is something about it that seems particularly apposite in relation to our times. Perhaps it's adequate evidence of our need to reduce extant media to something manageable, perhaps as it scales language down it gives evidence of the supremacy of scientific technologies, perhaps it's simply a yet slimmer version of literature's common this-is-all-is-left-to-say.

There's often, here, a kinky connection stanza to stanza, word to word sometimes, that makes of relations a kinetic matrix that makes you surprised when the poem stops. This fastness is today, and moving, and a poem only stops to let another one begin; in one sense each poem does show its discretion, in another the titles interrupt the flow of the whole. And the project as a whole, with its curtailed curtailing limits, is perhaps to some extent an exercise in control, by which the corpus is prepared for Kit's fuller, just literally, poems such as "Nesting of Layered Protocols," "Rented Objects," and "Forgotten Algebra" (Sink 1, 1986) in which the mind that

talks inhabits the body that walks.

—Alan Davies

---

from ICE CUBES

the
dead
hand
of

the
past
falls
gradually

a
fund
of

knowledge

a

land

of

numbskulls

a

maximum

security

person

*

voices

at

lunch

time

air

flows

across

the

vacant

work

stations

hum

"American

Opinion"

a

storefront

on

San

Pablo

Avenue

now

completely

empty

inside

—Kit Robinson

AND THERE'S NOTHING FOR ME BUT MARIA

NAME by Alan Davies (This Press, 1986)

Sighing and sobbing. He's.
In the sitting room.
(p. 75)

2:48 a.m. man sits up cold sweaty in bed, pug-eyed, cries out the name of the beloved; on the ceiling is a diagram of a bed. So he's full of lyric dirge, that horsey interior gait. With penis in one hand and pen in another he expresses... "dragging the semen across the page" into "forehead blocks," giving syllables their places, infusing stanzas with staggered breathing, with final sigh and space.

The vocabulary of Name is a code for the beloved's name.

Because all the lover really wants to do is say the name of the beloved over and over, in a straight zoom to heaven, but he can't because it's missing.

You're gone now.
You're gone.
You're gone.

You're gone now.
Your reasons perambulate.
Your reasons might.
You might understand this
if you had been there with us.
Your name is Name
and you have only so many feelings
inside, inside of your name.
With Name in it.

(p. 80)

Name is both the title and the stand-in for the missing title; thus, a hole is at the center of the piece. The social matrices that surround (work, language, culture, and machines, greasy and interactive) are also, here, the social mistresses (The poem is his mistress. He shall want. It maketh him to lie down in still waters...), each a dominatrix. And in the middle of each matrix, a hole:

The universe is full of holes. Not ordinary holes, but vast, nearly spherical voids hundreds of millions of light years across and empty of galaxies. And where there are no holes, there are equally vast clusters of galaxies, often on the edges of these voids.

—a clipping

The holes are gently evasive, tricky. They masquerade as particularity:

Thank you Michael.
Thank you Diane.
Thank you Sally.

[here a page break]

This is not about anyone
that either of us know.

(pp. 25-6)

This stanza exploits and blows up the conventions of the New York School, the naming, the explicit wit, the deadpan

familiarity—put through the wringer of selfcognizant form. See how the singular verb belies the plural of us. I almost don't notice because subject-verb agreement is screwy in our language anyway. When I do notice I'm bowled over by the subtlety of Davies' technique, its integral patterning. He makes Dick 'n' Jane sentences multifarious, and uses wrong grammar to touching effect:

> Name, there isn't this much
> time, to've take, or spoke.
>
> (p. 89)

The poem is a parody of the kind of thinking of people like Harry Lieberman M. A., MFCC, who places the following ad in the classified section of the Bay Guardian:

> TORMENTED BY ROMANTIC LOVE? I've come to see romantic love as a form of self-torture. It's painful and necessarily temporary. It's a baffling and powerful addiction and many are drawn by its intensity. Let us work together to sort this out. Insurance accepted.

What a scam—to pretend insurance could cover those crevices in which we farm contradiction. The hole makes me know structures that aim to fill it but end up emulating it ("Sentences are filling / a space we / ourselves should occupy," (p. 31), or this from Emily Dickinson, "to fill a Gap / insert the thing that caused it"). Fortunately the painfully beguiling gap is funny too (this book is drenched with humour: "I have said no to a / handkerchief when I needed one / and now I am blowing / my nose in my hands," (p. 34)), like the orange dunce caps that surround the scene of a traffic accident; looking at beautiful Emmylou's gaptooth, I crack up. This is the tickle in the sternum that characterizes melancholy as well as glee.

It's a glorious stretching, capturing the push & pull of words' relationship to wanting:

The occlusion between this section
and the next section
is the over all distance
between us.

(p. 90)

A nice flourishing
makes our genitals
battle the air between us.

(p. 88)

"...but we have in each an other." (p. 9) Reader and writer, like writer and poem, assume the poses of lover & beloved. Either we are in love with the poem, exploring it, milking sensation from it, or the reader is an aloof woman the writer's trying to seduce, the way Woody Allen might (with commentary), or Descartes, or Walter Mitty, their severed heads looking lasciviously at their bodies:

Come and see me
when I have this kind of energy
in the body.
I kiss my hand [an old vaudeville trick]
and touch your hand.
And you're sure there's no
meeting.

(p. 61)

And indeed how can there be congruence where being is splayed, undefined, one minute self-conscious, the next splintered (because of the presence of the beloved?—as Patsy Cline tells us, "You walk by / And I / Fall to pieces,"), the next denied entirely, and the next defined physically. Physicality seems fairly sure ("The hateful ambivalence / of silence / drives me to my hands"(p. 70)), even if the material of the poem itself moves from wispiness to the pretend realness of nouns, their arbitrary precision:

You think of you bending over me
with a sponge in your hand. [why a sponge?]

There are pieces of punctuation
that contain you.
You want to know
if you were in this poem. No.
You weren't.
You never will be, in this
poem, this landmark.
You have small white white
pointed breasts. I see them

(p. 66)

Reiteration——here the loaded word 'you'——mimics both the rhythm of the lover's litany (she loves me she loves me not) and the antonym of love: work, whose figure menaces this poem ("Belts and drives. / Belts and drives. / Belts and drives. / Master slave arrangements. "(p. 71)), interrupting love ("Why do you have to work / when there's no work to do," (p. 51); "Can I call you tomorrow / or will you call me tomorrow / at work. I work." It's bald necessity in two words.), and mixing its metaphor with that of love, for the writing itself is work done of love:

I do important work.
You can see that.
When the stapler broke
the engineer fixed it
with his screwdriver.
Looking forward to your
machine, reliability and
long lasting.

(p. 28)

"Your machine,"——maybe a quote from a machine manual, replete with the quirky grammar of ESL. Maybe Name. But certainly the woman, for the book worries at its confusions between sexist leerings at the woman-object, and love. It sneers but kind of means it too, making sex jokes that blur the distinction between satire and satyr:

You shouldn't really wear
pajamas, you're definitely
the nightgown type.
Type. Type. [what he's doing]
You're a beautiful woman, woman.
We're just good friends.

(p. 70)

In your Heidi outfit you're fit
to be tied.

(p. 52)

Although the passages are clearly not PC (except maybe in the way Bruce Andrews' oeuvre is PC—by inverse), they're interesting for their naughtiness. They contribute to the shameful thrill of hearing Name. It's one of the best-paced poems I know. It moves like the back view of a silhouette of a naked woman, a student of philosophy, on a stage, maybe at amateur night on 42nd Street, very very shyly, with an ironic expression on her face and a Giaconda smile (we can't see these), swinging her hips and miming someone also embracing her.

—Gordon

MY FIRST TRY AT THE TREE

IN THE AMERICAN TREE edited by Ron Silliman (National Poetry Foundation, 1986)

I understand my reluctance to review this book. In the American Tree is an anthology and I've never written about

one before. What's more, the collections I'm most fond of are of the work of dead poets or of essays focusing on a single subject. It also seems to me that a good deal of the issues raised by the work in this anthology have been "talked out" for now. Some lines seem clearly drawn and you're on one side or another. That is to say, you either see value in such ideas as "non-referentiality" and "non-linearity" and the way in which the poets in this book have found a use for those ideas in their writing or you don't. I do (although, as I'll discuss later, the idea which I like most in "language writing" is that of reader-constructed meaning).

Is that the way to look at it? Maybe those theoretical issues just are not important and I should talk about the poetry right off. One of Ron Silliman's techniques for measuring the relative importance of something is by counting ("Saussure mentions the sentence in this work on only three occasions" (1)) and looking for statistical breakdowns ("Eight of the twelve twelve women in this anthology live in the east" (2)). Trying that, I find In the American Tree has 130 or so pages of critical/theory type writing and about 460 pages of "creative" writing. Going all the way with Silliman's technique, I can say that roughly 4 out of 5 pages in the anthology contain non-critical writing. So why do I feel I must say something about criticism?

Silliman's somewhat obsessive focus on criticism vs. poetry and the relative importance of each to the other may be what's bugging me about it, leading me to concentrate on it. (In all fairness to Silliman, in the introduction to In the American Tree he does say he feels too much emphasis is given to such questions.) In his introduction to "Realism: An Anthology of 'Language' Writing," he says, "While theory is not without importance (and will be discussed in more detail later), its dominance here is a fiction" (3). In that introduction, he dismisses the critical writing of these poets by showing how little of it was published, stressing that when critical writing started to appear, it was subsequent to a good deal of the

poetry. Yet he sets the tone for In the American Tree by discussing an essay written by Robert Grenier which he says "announced a breach—and a new moment in American writing" (4). In the earlier anthology's introduction cited above, this essay was dismissed in the following manner: "Beyond a few small articles, mostly reviews, in its earliest numbers... This was virtually silent on theoretical questions during the 12 issues of its lifespan" (5). The only way I've ever found to get perspective on this confusion of focus (i.e., theory is important but not dominant but momentous but virtually a silence) is to recall that Pound wrote The Spirit of Romance before The Cantos. Likewise, Projective Verse precedes Maximus. Which is to say that some people write critical or theoretical works before writing their (best) poetry, but the poetry does not necessarily suffer thereby. Seems to me that the onus is on the reader to evaluate the poetry, not on the writer to publish things in the "right" order.

So, when hindsight becomes possible, the question of criticism should become academic; just a matter of "that's the way it was, class, what do you make of it" rather than an important question for evaluating the poems.

In fact, there is not yet any opportunity for hindsight with the work in this book and that may cause it to have a somewhat uncertain popularity. It is not a collection of writing being done now, but it is a collection of writing having been done by people writing now. Only they were 5-10 years younger when they wrote what's in In the American Tree. The work in the book is too old to be "news" and too new to be "history." Too early or too late. For those people who are looking for a sense of what any of the writers in this book are doing, the book will be a disappointment. For example, you could not evaluate the writing of Barrett Watten without looking at Progress, but nothing from that more recent work is included here. Nor is In the American Tree a "best of" collection of the writers in it. Silliman's incomprehensible distinction between a "moment" and a "movement" (6) draws attention away from what I think

is the most useful and satisfying way of looking at this book: this is a collection of writing done around the same time by a bunch of writers who seem to share certain concerns. Is that a "movement" or a "moment"? What value does such a distinction have? I'd say that, like the poetry vs. criticism question, this kind of posturing in an attempt to define a category for the contributors just takes attention away from the value this book has as a collection. I'd try to see what the majority of the writing has in common rather than spend time with nomenclature.

And it's about time I said that the writing in the book is good, interesting writing and perhaps point out what I like best about it.

The wide range of tones in the book is incredibly lively, contained, as the work is, "between two covers": the dead-pan matter-of-factness of Robert Grenier ("they want you to work / they don't want you to sleep" (7)) and Diane Ward ("He sits alone and drops. He's surrounded by me and drops. He must leave before." (8)); the blatant baroqueness of Charles Bernstein ("Appearance that not so much won't shake but returns, as / the pilot turns his starship into wool. To knit / the phantasmagorias out of white, sheer monument to culture's / merry meal of itself..." (9)) or Stephen Rodefer's more overt parody of high falutin' language ("Instead of what has always been known to be depth, complexity, and pressure / of spiritual thought, you can always make it on hijinks, gloze, and chicanery, / like a COKE machine. Do you not think?" (10)).

For each work in In the American Tree, one could characterize a self-consciousness which is a strength in these works. A strength because each piece of writing declares itself, through that self-consciousness, as a composition that is not an explanation. Tom Mandel puts it succinctly: "The limits of the world leak in from the edges, pervade. Thus did he take up the sentence and play it for all he was worth. But what was it

worth? The context commands." (11) The major challenge and charm of the works here are "I've made something of language (a composition) and you can surely see that; want to make something of it?" While perhaps not quite that confrontational, the works are also sitting ducks waiting to be picked off by the sufficiently perceptive reader. Nor are they self-contained little puzzles for which the reader need only find the proper diagram ("oh, I get it, the wool is his mother"). Rather, each work calls simultaneously to the reader and to the world (through the reader) inviting the imposition of sense upon it ("But what comes thru depends on you," (12) writes Silliman). As I mentioned earlier, reader-constructed meaning is what interests me most about these works. The writing, seen in the light of allowing the reader to "make stuff up," is by necessity fragmentary; that is, incomplete without a reader to interpret it (the only way to get someone to "fill in the blank" is to leave one (13)). While all writing of all sorts is, of course, open to interpretation by the reader, in this writing that openness is markedly overt (again self-conscious in a good way). No two of these writers could be said to be writing about the same things, their tones vary widely, as do their technical choices (e.g., prose, verse). The shared talent here (the value of the collection as a collection) is these writers' ability to create statements which, without implicit truth value or insistent relationship to the world, still manage to challenge the mind to hear them: "Up to heat up. A model. A revolving midsection glows in the dark office. No night of terror is as dark as this durable lacquer night."—Kit Robinson. (14)

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(1) "The New Sentence," p. 65 of The New Sentence (Roof Books, 1987). This sentence is not included in the excerpt from In the American Tree.

(2) In the American Tree, p. xxii. Henceforth, I'll abbreviate the book's title ITAT in the notes.

(3) Ironwood, (vol. 10, no. 2) p. 63.

(4) ITAT, p. xv.

(5) Op. cit.

(6) ITAT, p. xix.

(7) Ibid., p. 8.

(8) Ibid., p. 329.

(9) Ibid., p. 276.

(10) Ibid., p. 231.

(11) Ibid., p. 214.

(12) Ibid., p. 139.

(13) Certainly, there is something manipulative about leaving things fragmentary, forcing the reader to fill in the blanks. You might argue that it's as "coercive" as Socrates leading some citizen around by the nose.

(14) Ibid., p. 131. (What with the contributors' bibliographies already lacking the latest work by many of the writers, the lack of a list of where to find the small press books cited and Silliman's list of writers whose work he (patronizingly?) describes as having "both influenced and been influenced by the debate reflected in these pages" (p. xx), the anthology, like the work in it, can be called descriptive and yet non-definitive.)

—David I Sheidlower

"LANGUAGE" POETRIES edited by Douglas Messerli (New Directions, 1987)

Is this the great language poetry anthology?

How can it be when it excludes the likes of Kit Robinson, Stephen Rodefer and Robert Grenier—and foregoes statements of poetics altogether (this last despite the fact that the introduction is primarily a discussion of "positions")?(1) My dream anthology, the one I'd read and study and re-read on vacation, would be as quirky as the work in it and might even go so far as to include collaborations, plays and image/text collage—memorabilia of the literary life rarely given their aesthetic due. A perfect collection would also have included such anti-heros and unthinkables as Kathy Acker, Steve Benson, Bruce Boone, David Bromige, Beverly Dahlen, Jean Day, Christopher Dewdney, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Robert Glück, Fanny Howe, Kenneth Irby, Ronald Johnson, Frank Kuenstler, Joanne Kyger, Tom Mandel, John Mason, Bernadette Mayer, David Melnick, Rod Mengham, Laura Moriarty, Alice Notley, John O'Keefe, Ted Pearson, Larry Price, J. H. Prynne, Tom Raworth, Peter Riley, and The Tinklers. Admittedly, a freewheeling anthology with 50 contributors or more would have created its own attendant problems—but impact wouldn't have been one of them—and as Peter Seaton's stunning "Antonville" proves, a single page can be sufficient to dent the gray matter of a reader's consciousness. Which is what anthologies are all about anyway.

Unlike In the American Tree (a larger and more conspicuously edited book), "Language" Poetries doesn't purport to present the whole picture. It's purpose instead is to be "representative." "What one hopes, what I have worked for," writes Messerli in his introduction, "is a selection provocative enough that it sends readers out...in search of other 'Language' work."

Judged thusly, "Language" Poetries is a qualified success (sales being the ultimate justification of this strategy), its modesty a conscious element of the overall design. But a concise book need not be a safe one—the hallmark of a collection of experimental writing should still be the prospect that anything might appear therein. What we get in "Language" Poetries—two decades of anthologizing by Jerome Rothenberg having done nothing to affect the rigid neatness basic to the form—is an assortment of twenty poets' work plus one sober assessment (and to be fair, Rothenberg himself says on the back cover that "(t)he result is only/always poetry").

Nor does "Language" Poetries explain very carefully where the work comes from and where it's going—on occasion, even the individual selections come off as unbalanced—almost as if the editor's attention were wavering as he moved from poet to poet. The Clark Coolidge portion is fine and includes work from throughout the poet's career, ranging seamlessly from "The Death of Floyd Collins" (a wonderfully awkward, early poem that speaks to Coolidge's spelunking-through-language side) clear through to such skillful, late works as "Mine" and "Thin Places." Jackson Mac Low—an equally seminal figure—doesn't fare quite as well. There's one poem from 1964 (the "25th Dance" from Mac Low's recently reissued The Pronouns), the rest is culled from a well-documented 1-1/2-year period in the early 80s—to my mind an unnecessarily skewed version of what Mac Low's writing has been about. Where are the Light Poems, for instance, long out-of-print, and what about Stanzas for Iris Lezak, Mac Low's largest and perhaps best known collection, also difficult to find? True, the 1980s have been an amazingly fertile time for Mac Low, and one of the poems Messerli does choose, "Giant Otters," is a charming, epiphanous distillation of a lifetime's practices; but such a selection is hardly "representative" (to adopt Messerli's own criterion) of this long-neglected poet's entire career, and all in all Mac Low would have been better served by a careful overview than by the smattering of readily available works which we do get.

The Hannah Weiner selection (six pages from Spoke) is also

problematic, but for different reasons. It lacks contextualization, and lacking that would have to be less than fathomable to the newcomer. My own first approach to Weiner's work was Clairvoyant Journal, a book that contextualizes itself with three bits of information: (A) the photograph on the cover, which has "I SEE WORDS" written across the poet's forehead; (B) Weiner's note on the first page saying that the seen words "appear in the text in CAPITALS or italics"; and (C) Jackson Mac Low's blurb, which describes "the particular phenomenon this journal represents, that of being 'spoken to' by several persons, most of them external to [the poet], by means of words in various colors & sizes." Lacking hints of this sort a reader might easily mistake Weiner's concerns for those of such formalist-expressionists as Bruce Andrews, Carla Harryman, and Kathy Acker (2)—the difference is subtle but important—and if Messerli did want to distinguish between the various kinds of language poetry this would have been a good place to start (3). (Inclusion of Hannah Weiner's friend and publisher Bernadette Mayer might have helped by tipping the balance a little.) Spoke, a recent work that seems inspired by or modeled on Black Elk Speaks, is a visionary poem and a delightfully agile piece of writing. I wonder if its uniqueness comes across here.

Which brings me to one last quibble. I may be the last person on earth who hates reading fragments of long works—but I do. Not only does it taunt the reader with the insufficiency of his or her attentions, it makes the overall dimensions and form of the work impossible to discern. It's even worse when equally suitable, short poems are readily available—why anthologize 50 lines from Coolidge's The Maintains when the man has such vast holdings of piece work in its stead? Also unnecessary is the presentation of individual poems as fragments of the books they occur in—compare Messerli's handling of Lyn Hejinian's Redo, The Guard, and The Person to the way Donald Allen excerpted from Maximus in The New American Poetry. That said, I want to add that much of the best work in "Language" Poetries is chipped off larger blocks, four such works being the aforementioned Redo (great statemental simplicities etched rhythmically in language), Susan Howe's Pythagorian Silence

(a courting of the sublime), Tina Darragh's On the Corner to off the Corner (near-mythic re-sortings of the dictionary), and P. Inman's bop-like Red Shift (Luddite spell-checking plus more).

With the younger and/or less prolific writers there's less to choose from and selection is simpler. The Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Rae Armantrout and Barrett Watten entries are especially good—tightly configured and representative of what each has accomplished over the past ten years. Interestingly, and certainly not by chance, all four are entirely different from the corresponding selections in the Tree. The Alan Davies and Bruce Andrews sections are slightly less helpful, though Andrews' manic pop thrill does come across and Davies' "Shared Sentences" (a five page poem reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's "Stanzas in Meditation") is a highlight of the book. Special mention also goes to Michael Palmer, Ted Greenwald and Ray DiPalma for their scrupulously crafted lyrics, and then, despite my criticisms, to Messerli himself for seeing this project through. "Language" Poetries is a breakthrough publication—carefu' promotion and wide distribution may make it an icon.

I have been presuming a'l along that this work is valuable, enduring, and in need of being presented to a larger audience. I have also assumed that a rehearsal of its stylistic and theoretica' underpinnings is no longer to the point. Given the back-to-back appearances of two language poetry anthologies, the question is less "What is language poetry?" (or even "Who are the language poets?") than "How should this work be presented?" (i.e., "How can/should/will/might/does language poetry exist in the world?").

Clark Coolidge is fond of quoting Samuel Beckett's statement that the artist's task is to find a form that can accomodate the mess; what's missing from "Language" Poetries is exactly that —the mess—by which I mean a presentation of the sorts of activities that produce, inspire, and validate artistic works in the first place. For the Beats, the "mess" was their vision

of America; for the New York school it meant social life—and for the Olson crew, "a curriculum of the soul." To some extent the differences are unimportant. What matters is that finding and making meaning is an ongoing process that doesn't just occur in the words of a poem. Something contextualizes art making, is in turn given meaning by art, and that "something" also needs to be presented to the public.

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(1) Also, there's the absence of Ron Silliman, editor of In the American Tree, who took himself out of "Language" Poetries for reasons that are not entirely clear.

(2) Though Acker, the most famous of the three, doesn't appear in this anthology.

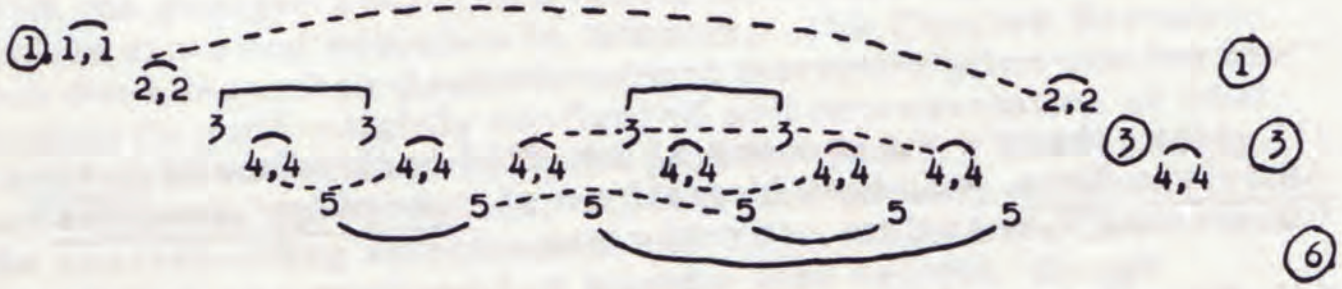
(3) That is, the pluralism suggested by the word "poetries" (as opposed to "poets") in the book's title.

—Benjamin Friedlander

TAGGART'S ROTHKO CHAPEL

In "The Rothko Chapel Poem" (published in Temblor #2) John Taggart offers the most extended version of his work over the last ten years with incantatory, repetitive modes since "Peace on Earth" (published 1979 in Paper Air, 1981 in the book of that title). Thematically, the poem marks a return to the locus of Rothko's paintings—"Slow Song for Mark Rothko" appeared in 1978—and at the same time it transcribes an arc of "return" from the dispersal of Dehiscence into the containment of an

architected space: the Chapel itself. Numerically, "The Rothko Chapel Poem" is aligned with the 14 canvases in the Rothko Chapel in Houston, in that six of its 35 parts (stanzas each isolated to a page) are figured as "doorways," while a final stanza functions as legend or key, as to a map, leaving an even 28 parts, or two "views" of each canvas.



As a sketch the whole resembles a dance notation, of steps—or of relays, audio or video signals carrying back and forth. The picture could, as well, be bent into a circle, to agree with Rothko Chapel's octagonal shape, and the reiterative, epistrophic notion played out in the poem's echo-chamber structure.

Surveying this exceedingly methodical make-up, an impulse to situate a "story of the poem" inside the frame of that structure keeps occurring. Yet it's clear, given the laconic nature of these lines of few words, lodged in repetitions, that the methodology is the poem's story—as much so as the intensely personalized (inward), high emotional charge rising off the events related under the aegis of the Chapel: including a wedding, a passion, a scream. All longing for a more unobtrusive sense of form—as some invisible quantity, buried underneath what's taken as the poem proper—abruptly runs up against, here, the sheer blocky cliff-face of these serial constructs. A feel of constriction happens from the very start, partly by the small vocabulary exacting limits, but also by what complements that, the lines feeding and growing, fold by fold, off their own surfaces.

> Red deepened by black red made deep by black
> prolation of deep red like stairs of lava

deep red like stairs of lava to gather us in
gather us before the movements are to be made

* * *

This spiral effect gets harrowing, even claustrophobic in its stringency. And the effect of being confined inside a small field of words is sustained over some 25 minutes' duration. So the poem's fidelity to its design is both impressive and imposing. Taggart's willfulness in pushing against the braces of these strictures, to this long extent, works so that the pivotal instant comes with a loosening, an unknotting out of this enclosed fabric——in the form of the final stanza, which affords an exit from the Chapel and the web of repetitions. The "key" turns, an economy of torsion and release gets enacted, in opening out, admitting an outside light, and atmosphere——while the world gushes in: Tourists leave Chapel explosion of their talk. . .

The poem's last gesture is an attempt to carry the Chapel outside the confines of the Chapel (with the paintings recognized as having entered into this outside, the "deep red ground"); and to carry the poem, possibly, somehow, outside the "rules" voluntarily adopted and radically enforced over this seemingly vast space. Is this reading effect to be read metaphorically (how can't it be)——as discipline and its boon? regulation and transcendence? subjection to a system in order (order) to learn ways out, or simply ways, a practice ("method" as meta-hodos, "after a way")??

A poem, here, at least, generative of questionings.

——Steve Dickison

LAB NOTES

These are stripped-down versions of notes for a presentation given at the George Oppen conference sponsored by the University of California, San Diego. Their title comes from Ted Pearson. The entries under 4. 7. 86 are all quotations from George Oppen's letters to myself; those under 4. 8. 86 are all quotations from Martin Heidegger's essay "What Are Poets For?"

4. 3. 86

Why is the speech of the poem to be more valued than other speech? Because it's involved with a greater density of figuration, metaphor, and thus—perhaps—vision. Commonplace that "poetic language" vs. ordinary discourse resists being used up in action. There is the desire to state a vision, to maintain that vision, and to have it acknowledged, if not admired, by others. Need more to the point, need—and obsession?

A church is a house built on vision, vision acted on and organized around. Why this is to be avoided: the church, like any structure or system, wishes to maintain itself. Vision frozen. There is one certified vision and one certified way to read it.

How to keep vision from being turned into a church (if not a conference): keep it moving, in motion.

To keep your voice from being appropriated, turned into an organizing principle: it must move and change, perhaps be displeasing or somehow confusing, unrecognizable; above all, it must move.

4. 4. 86

One way is silence, gaps of space left between parts of the line and other lines. Silence as white space or as the production of the disjunction of syntax. Curious that the sense of movement comes from having to bridge the gaps, supply the verbs. Sense of movement almost consciousness itself.

Paradox: the voice retains motion and a kind of definition-in-motion by means of silence, the introduction of syntactic awkwardness, disjuncture. This could turn out to be simply the more convolute expression of the riddle; a measure of technical skill, cleverness, a delay before we're returned to absolute orthodoxy.

Acoustically: the voice is articulate on the page because the edge of silence is always present, let "into" the poem.

4. 5. 86

Back to the first question. Why should I, or anyone, wish or be expected always to speak as a poet? Does it have little to do with poetry and mostly with a conception of self, a role? Sounds like a half-baked Psychology Today number.

And at my back I hear—Marvin Gaye!

The poet undergoes a kind of martyrdom by sticking to one voice. This has to be judged as deliberate, conscious, because what allows you to become a poet in the first place is attraction to, ability to reproduce other voices, other "routines" in writing. Being a young poet amounts to trying on all the various voices.

To be a poet, you have to hear the voices, be able to write in a variety of voices. Some never escape their "ability."

So, the intricacies: to be able to hear and reproduce other voices, yet not be captured by them. Then to choose to stay with one voice, denying in effect that which made the poetry possible in the first place.

Monk. Naturally, there were the charges that he couldn't play. Mary Lou Williams remembered when he had a lot more technique.

Why anyone should deliberately lose technique. Ethical, ethics. A choice made on the basis that one voice, one body of technique is somehow truer than others. The "verification principle" here is vision. You make the choice because of vision. And the vision is singular. Difficult to deny the feeling it chooses you instead of the other way around.

4. 6. 86

Our attention is drawn toward or by a quality of aware sacrifice, aware restriction. Distinction between the intelligent and otherwise admirable artist who makes appropriate use of available technique——even bothers to study——and the poet of vision.

Why vision can be repellent to those so apparently intelligent. Objection of the informed that it isn't up to date. Underlying all their objections, animating them, what throws current agreed upon taste into question, if not outright denial: the spirit world (& disregard for bantering irony, which is a protection against that world).

Vision is the big picture. "Phenomenological."

4. 7. 86

the poem is the moving edge

Therefore consciousness in itself, of itself, carries the principle of actual ness This is indeed the law and the prophets. Perhaps this should have been the meaning of objectivism

"Objective: objectivism"
That even sorrow or the most terrible wound may prove one to be part of the universe, not excluded, not fallen from it. There is no other sincerity

This is the definition of 'objects'

4. 8. 86

. . . these more venturesome ones must dare the venture with language. The more venturesome dare the saying.

. . . in what direction is that to be said which the sayers must say? Their saying concerns the inner recalling conversion of consciousness which turns our unshieldedness into the invisible of the world inner space.

. . . those who are more venturesome cannot be those who merely say. The saying of the more venturesome must really venture to say. The more venturesome are the ones they are only when they are sayers to a greater degree.

4. 9. 86

The "poet's question": when is there song that sings essentially?

But our interest has to be all the other way: subversion of any such essential song. And here we are, friends, back to silence. When is there silent song?

Tempting to consider that poetry, manifesting vision, makes

for destitution. Snapshot or radiant rose, the poem presents what hadn't been there before. What a reader's made aware of is the lack of this in the world. The poem makes the reader destitute. Art povera in the result or effect of the poem rather than in the poem itself? Perhaps poetry has been responsible for "romance," hunger for a time or condition that never was. Could there be such a hunger without poetry? No Hesiod, no gods? Contra only a god can save us, only silent song.

When we turn from the poem, what we have to feel is the falling away, the utter lack of its clarity all around us. Perversion of all "realist" art.

4. 10. 86

Not to get caught up in the complications of argument. If not the question, one of the questions: how is speaking as a poet different from anyone else's speaking or being spoken by language?

I've written it's a matter of vision. But if we are spoken through, bespoken, by-words or adverbs of the saying of language, then isn't the vision hopelessly controlled from the beginning? We say/see what the play of the saying of language allows us to say/see.

To ask if anything can be done presumes there's something undesirable about a human person defined as a "loudspeaker." There is! Simply wilful pride? Avoidance or rebellion against the speaking, however, has my sympathy. Antonio, surly and avaricious as he is.

To work for vision, valuing it beyond all else. And, instead of the mystical rose, to come up with a dark world dominated by a ruthless, indifferent sea on which we must have our precarious existence. "How wild the planet is." Or: the voice that will eat your face away.

Can anything be done? Vision, what's to be opposed. To speak as a poet is to speak according to a vision and to speak in contradiction of vision as it's given by language insofar as the speaking or calling of language would make the poet no more than a passive "transducer."

Speaking as a poet means finding a way to let silence into our speaking, to speak and yet be silent. "Speak, without words, such words that none can tell."

——John Taggart

PHILIP WHALEN'S NOVELS AND JOHN WIENERS' SELECTED POEMS

Two Novels by Philip Whalen (Zephyr Press, 1986)
Selected Poems by John Wieners (Black Sparrow, 1986)

If there are readers of this magazine who have yet to read Philip Whalen's novels they ought to skip Paul Christensen's introduction to the Zephyr Press volume that combines You Didn't Even Try and In aginary Speeches for a Brazen Head.

Christensen gives too much away in describing characters and plots. If his efforts were needed the reader would be better off having them as an afterword.

Whalen is a much calmer, more deliberate writer in prose than he is as a poet. The commodious personality—sorehead, intellectual, self-pitying weight watcher, irritable straight shooter, loner and clown—seems not to be behind these novels. And the language is so plain and well, deliberate that Whalen the novelist and Whalen the poet clearly represent different spheres of his imagination.

If I continue to prefer Imaginary Speeches to You Didn't Even Try it is because the form of Speeches continues to delight me. I read the novel when it appeared in 1972 and immediately wanted to write a novel just like it. The swirling form, Whalen's weave of the various threads, was so right I felt compelled (a compulsion I did not follow through on) to increase my pleasure by making a replica. His form retains its freshness today. There is an image in the novel of honey being spooned and mixed into yogurt. It is this mix, the dark honey and the white yogurt, that distinguishes the book's vital combining of character and place.

You Didn't Even Try is cautious, which suits the book's main male character Kenneth to a tee, and somewhat airless. In the five years between novels Whalen found the key to his freedom as a novelist. Both are novels of manners with character as their vivifying intellectual concern. And they are thoughtful books in which people are unafraid to be intelligent.

*

When I Read John Wiener's Selected Poems

I look up from the book
read by sunlight. The wrong light.
Too stark. Not bright noon
but dawn after neon and moonglow.
My eyes smart. Huge trucks shift
gears down the avenue and
roar off with loads of rubble.
Sitting here holding my breath
murmur of traffic overtakes me.

:

I write this on a mild March morning looking out over Columbus Avenue in Boston John Wieners' "old city on the Atlantic." I last saw, and heard, John in early December when he read with delicacy and grace from this book. And from Bill Berkson's Lush Life and T. S. Eliot's The Cocktail Party. (The scenes in the psychiatrist's office.) John read some of his early poems, but made it clear he prefers his later work. Poems that are represented in "Behind The State Capital or Cincinnati Pike" and "She'd Turn on a Dime" sections of this book. I have been told that John wanted to title this book She'd Turn On A Dime, but instead we have his Selected Poems with a photo repeated three times on the cover in which John looks like the young Artaud.

This is a welcome book as it makes Wieners' work available in quantity for the first time. In Raymond Foye Wieners found his ideal editor. When, in preparing this book, Foye came to see me he showed a zealot's regard for the poems and the necessary humility to put John's work first. John has been well served, and so have we.

If I am moved more by the poems up until 1975 it is because I better hear their music. It is a sad song and a trouper's song. There is emotional desolation and courage in these poems, and a real glamour—a word whose original meaning of "magic,

enchantment, spell" is reanimated in Wieners' poems.

This volume ends with two interviews. In conversation with Charles Shively Wieners affirms that he thinks of himself as a "Boston poet." In the minds of most the other Boston poet after 1950 is Robert Lowell. These poets have more in common than place. A statement I will not amplify here. But when Lowell yearns after "words meat hooked from the living steer" his violent demand, so literary seeming, is a world away from John Wieners' lyrical heart-breaking ease.

—William Corbett

QUALM LORE by Pat Reed (One Dog Garage, 1987)

It's difficult to say the title of Pat Reed's recent book, Qualm Lore, without weighing the phonetic mass of the words involved. While some writers take the line or sentence, stanza or paragraph as the basic unit, Reed concentrates on diction. Her words are palpable presences which draw attention more to their sound and placement in the sequence than to their signifying properties. Part of their enhanced material status issues from infrequent usage; I doubt that even the most experienced reader would have all of Reed's vocabulary on the tip of his or her tongue. "Nescient," "opah," "holandric," "thirl," "gha-la-hat," "diphylous," "xeric," etc., are not exactly words encountered daily, if at all. Oddity attracts attention, isolates the words in the poems in a way which seems, at times, to liberate them from grammar—but not to the extent that the lexicon becomes a vehicle of alienation or intellectual superiority. Whenever Reed's unusual diction is

is engaged, the effect is startling, but not artificial. The Great Outdoors appears far more often in Reed's poems than the city, and her naturalist stance extends to composition. The words she uses could be objects which belong to rock and seashell collections, or the unnerving drawer of insect wings. Even in narrative sequences that threaten to become translucent, Reed implements dictive tropes that send expectation flying: "My hair is brown / because it is a / sort of / hydraulic evering." In other passages, it is the juxtaposition of words which accomplish defamiliarization, such as the line "wading Woolworths vastly." In "4 on 5" she gives free reign to her ad/diction, "Fis hilly toen crop. Lefel ruck.... Vree vally assey." The "something unnameable" mentioned in the poem pushes Reed out to the linguistic frontier where words just might be able to invent themselves and their meanings.

—Dawn Kolokithas

A N I M A L , V E G E T A B L E , M I N E R A L , W H E N C O M E S M I C K E Y M O U S E ?

In Emily Dickinson, minute personifying has a closeup effect, brings things close up. Or it's extreme or pervasive or rather routine — she personifies a snowflake for instance and then in the same 2-quatrain poem, in its last 2 lines, has "Nature, like us, is sometimes caught / Without her diadem" (Modern Library Selected Poems, p. 112f). Cd Nature be headless? She or It has a crown and hasn't one, both, but might still be faceless. But basically, anyway, things are piled up, jammed together. There's also Pound, Hart Crane, Zukofsky, Grenier, et al. Maybe life or what is it we have

here is implosion. In lines 5 and 6 of this Dickinson piece "A narrow wind complains all day / How someone treated him." Keenly descriptive adjective. (Of course "whining" wd be redundant enough, not reinforcing "complains all day" so much as blurring its impact.) Reminiscent of a snake, more perceptible and thus more substantial than the wind, besides hissing and slithering through long narrow linear places around corners and doorsills and windowframes; and what with these things and the personification "narrow" provides a dissonance or incongruity that makes things doubly sharp or considerably sharper.

"A narrow fellow in the grass" is of course Dickinson's memorable snake or worm. Personification is itself an incongruity or metaphor, come to think of it, but how noteworthily greater is the metaphorical leap from wind or snowflake than from snake to a human stranger or acquaintance may be something you can't quite determine, if it does deserve notice at all. (*) Shelley apostrophises, has regard for and otherwise personifies wind (well, spirit, prays to it) and skylark, Intellectual Bty, Keats a nightingale, season and sun and various abstractions, Hart Crane (fervidly like Kts and Shelley) the Brooklyn Bridge, wch he also addresses for example as "Thou Steeled Cognizance." The specific bridge in Brooklyn becoming "Macadam, gun-gray as the tunny's belt," some extension of ocean, "Leaps from Far Rockaway to Golden Gate," coast-to-coast, NY to SF, then there's backtracking and you go by railroad and the Ohio and the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico and farther space and time via ships and planes. The River sometimes gathers to be a person, not always. Of course not. ("Ol Man River...")??

Again (though), getting things together in the head, compounding them. If Crane for instance doesn't personify always, neither does Dickinson, while she (less traveled or knocked abt or whatever) is more exclusively onto nature, the non-human parts of it, and mini-climates, the small things that make up

the big. And at that, personification may hardly be or is less explicitly metaphor than taking or trying to take things as ends not mns (Buber's "I-Thou") or familiars or family members (maybe she never even heard tell of genera and species), kind of as to "undeveloped" or "primitive" tribes, small groups or families, there were familiar things / people (// spirits) in the home territory, except for the rarely if at all encountered blank creature from far away (so says Rbt Redfield in The Primitive World and Its Transformations, Cornell University Press, 1953); there were no anonymous phone operators or wagon makers, nothing automatic or impersonal, everything or virtually everything that was done you or somebody you knew daily did (hence people and animals were like rocks and trees, those other personalities, in being immortal for one thing, common sense had it, according to Redfield, going on forever without much change at all, if left to themselves, not destroyed or damaged anyway—like Newton's first law, of inertia, as it happens). Crane's Columbus (the speaker in the "Ave Maria" section of The Bridge) isn't the blank abstraction, stock figure (symbol?), that Dickinson's "Emperor" is. But a flower's "sturdy little countenance / Against the wind is seen, // Contending with the grass, / Near kinsman to herself" (Modern Library Selected Poems, p. 105), and in contrast to that snake, the "narrow fellow in the grass," Dickinson allows how

> Several of Nature's people
> I know, and they know me;
> I feel for them a transport
> of cordiality...
>
> (p. 81)

"This fellow" is a very down-to-earth snake, its elusiveness for instance clearly perceived, and only at the end can it hark back to the serpent in Genesis ("In The Beginning," "Bereshith," "Zero At the Bone"). Whereas flowers "put their nightgowns on" (p. 106) and a field has "a scarlet gown" (p. 110), etc. Fraternal, Equal and Free. Whimsical, humorous, playful—or does it cut the excessive (the personalizing)? Is Nature a sitcom? (I keep forgetting how

big the world is, a lucky thing because it's too much, and hear it all over again the next day, which is good too, satisfying curiosity at least.) Like finite and infinitely dense? Dickinson has some of her finger intruded, somewhere between St. Francis and Walt Disney?

Coyote, Cat, Jackal-god(**), Lion(**), Goat(**), Centaur(**), Fox, Fowl (Mother Hen), Bre'r Rabbit, Melancholy, Mirth, Venus, "Death, be not proud." Statues in the Atrium, Courtyard, Wild Garden or by the road, pigs dogs and cats or pigs, sheep et al. through village or city streets....

God the personification of something or other (Centralization (***), say, and the Parent or Original Wellspring of Nature).

t h e u n i m a g i n a b l e

power of the beast

to feel the dark

I t a l y

Statues
in the garden
and the square

to make men

stand still

"break
the marble spell" stone
buildings

deliveries clatter
the streets

but rain or light
streams faces

the wind blows

time becomes grass
and clouds

(*) Humorous or comic conglomeration e. g. in (?):

Nature, the gentlest mother,
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest,—
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill
By traveller is heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,
A summer afternoon,—
Her household, her assembly;
And when the sun goes down

[I guess ED knew
The Odyssey and/or
The Iliad]

Her voice among the aisles
Incites the timid prayer
Of the minutest cricket,
The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep
She turns as long away
As will suffice to light her lamps;
Then, bending from the sky,

With infinite affection
And infiniter care,
Her golden finger on her lip,
Wills silence everywhere.

(Page 65)

Less tongue-in-cheek is the version Thomas H. Johnson gives in The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson (Little Brown & Company, 1960)——I now have this book——where the first stanza, for instance, goes:

Nature——the Gentlest Mother is,
Impatient of no Child——
The feeblest——or the waywardest——
Her Admonition mild——

(No. 790)

——as the "is," anyway explicitly (seriously) asserts existence (Nature really is "the Gentlest Mother").

As to her use of dashes, varying in length (not apparent from the books)——and there are her ways with capitals too——could Dickinson have possibly been careless more or less? How regular was her handwriting? Was Gerard Manley Hopkins a contemporary of hers, before the advent of the typewriter, or anyway the realization and use of its potential, who's known to have come up with a calligraphic system graphing more specifically, accurately, how to speak a piece (in the mind)?

(**) In The Eternal Present S. Giedon says not until they became powerful (not puny) enough, in Egypt and Mesopotamia, did people get to be beautiful, and such composites as the Winged Bull or Lion were (came from?) attempts at gaining control over strength, fertility etc.: maybe at first anyway they, and/or components, were tries at facing up to (the music) or dealing with such forces, dancing with the dark.

(***) Ecstatic sources of Dickinson's royal images?

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—Larry Eigner

ARTICULATION OF SOUND FORMS IN TIME by Susan Howe (Awede, 1987)

It is a tough book. The words seem collected one by one from unvisited, if not entirely forgotten, grottos of language. A book likely to yield its troubled beauty by candle—by moonlight perhaps—but not by electric bulb.

History of seedling and seduction
Kinship of infinite separation

Sight of thought

Crooked erratic perception
Shoal ruin abyssal veil veiling

Something undefinable sets this book on edge. In Susan Howe's poetry the words are possessed by insomniac vigilance—the phrases cut sharply as primitive masks—madly alert to the follies of history without, and the perils of spiritual collapse within. It lends to every line, to every rock-hewn phrase, an intimation that calamity has been, by the gesture, only momentarily averted.

Stripped of metaphysical proof
Stoop to gather chaff

Face to fringe of itself
forseen form from far off

Homeward hollow zodiacal core

omen cold path to goal

End of the world as trial or possible
trail

These are words through which sound the clangor of armies "coming home through past ages." The syllables jostle, restless & implacable, ill at ease trying to settle down in a world too obsessed with the modern, too unmindful of the long journey such "sound forms" took to get here. When the darker, ancestral reaches of human experience lean towards speech, they assume such voices.

Girl with forest shoulder
Girl stuttering out mask or trick

* *

Cries open to the words inside them
Cries hurled through the woods

Through these lines the book's dominant image—or parable—flickers. Susan Howe sketches a Grimm-like tale. It concerns lost wanderings in Forests haunted by unfamiliar and indistinctly hostile presences. Allegorically leading—you could say misleading—Poetry into unmapp'd thickets of expression, she invokes an obscure 17th century Massachusetts minister, Hope Atherton, who after a skirmish with Indians found himself divided from his company, and wandered lost in the woods of New England.

A story—but it is not "story" which follows—a sort of "on the road" obsession with this continent "back in the beforetime," that fabled period before roads determined where and how you wandered—when the only thing certain was that the road followed would end. Not Whitman's easy, open highway but the shaggy wilderness which finds its best witness in Thoreau's writings, and lends his Maine Woods their tangled complexity of botanical terms and Indian place-names.

Without inscribing the ancestral name, Howe's poem also invokes the Dante of

> mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
> I found myself in a dark forest

when at the most dark, sleeplike moment of "Hope Atherton's Wanderings" the line

> Posit gaze level diminish lamp and asleep(selv)cannot see

spells itself out on the page. Wedged in the abyss between asleep and cannot, that Italian word selva—"forest"—in which no American can miss the echo'd self.

Moments occur in life when to sleep and to be lost are one and the same—from Rip Van Winkle to the wanderings of Ossian. That the line of Susan Howe's I just quoted tops each of two desperate pages—facing pages which display the same words, except that those words lie in precisely reverse order, front to back, top to bottom—lends nightmarish, almost shamanistic proportion. Whichever direction you take—in sound, in vision, in language close to you as your own tongue—the same deviancy results.

As in previous books Susan Howe has projected onto the page fields or tracts of language ghosted with significance; preliminary mappings where an ecology of the untamed

predominates. Sound, etymology with its twisting roots and archaic profiles, these determine the layout of words—but not syntax. These grids—of words and words unmask'd—have nothing to do with the "lists" or enumerations other poets periodically experiment with. They display a different sort of physicality, which you can only understand by wandering them "crosscountry." Howe's parable of a forest-wandering Self (the archetype ancient, genetically inscribed in human thought by those first tentative excursions northward from Africa in distant prehistory, and common to legend from Ireland to India, Siberia to Massachusetts) lends heightened urgency to such undomesticated terrain.

rest chondriacal lunacy

velc cello viable toil

quench conch uncannunc

drumm amonoosuck ythian

Elemental bits of Greek & Latin, Norse, Anglo-Saxon, French, twist thickly in these projective grids, edging against sound-forms distinctly native American in origin. It is a troubled collection, complex as the migrations and displacements that have produced North America's demography.

A few other poets now writing make parallel excursions into etymology. P. Inman and Tina Darragh will also fracture a word along lines of stress, disclosing along break-lines the ghosted histories of speech. But to find writing equally compacted with historical document as Howe's, and rooted equally in the compelling locale of New England, you have to go to Thoreau—his Maine Woods a precedent, a similar revisitation of the intertwined histories, natural and cultural, of the Northeastern woodlands.

But the closer analogy has to be Thoreau's great unpublished,

essentially unpublishable text—his collection of hundreds of Indian artifacts gathered off the land from which their makers had all but vanished. These Thoreau searched for sedulously, happened upon accidentally, scratched out of old campsites and hunting grounds, carried home, labelled, and filed with painstaking care in a desk at his family home. Arrowheads, stone axe-heads, fish hooks, flint chippings. To Thoreau these items, readily collected from field and forest but of no interest to his fellow New Englanders, told of the land's "disappeared" people, its original inhabitants whose story—the true history of America—had been effectually muted.

Mylord have maize meadow

have Capes Mylord to dim

barley Sion beaver Totem

W'ld bivouac by vineyard

Eagle aureole elses thend

There is in that story another lostness, a geographic confusion that bewilder'd the European mind, identifying Indian with Indian. It was a misnaming that readily became, by laws hidden in language, a truthful confluence. It remains active in those upon whom words work their troubled spell. Thoreau—and he was not alone—read the books of Vedanta and the discourses of Buddha as scripture native to the soil of North America. I have myself been told in India by saddhus, selfdeclared "wanderers" who make it their business to be there, that it is in the farthest most "lost" recesses of the forest that Shiva dances his epoch-sundering dance—out of which spin forth both the forces of History and the sound forms of Language. It is a wilderness, the saddhus further assured me, inseperable from the human heart. A place Susan Howe's strange, androgynously-named Hope Atherton accidentally stumbled into, and returns now to speak of, through her poetry.

Loving Friends and Kindred:—

When I look back

So short in charity and good works

We are a small remnant

of signal escapes wonderful in themselves

We march from our camp a little

and come home

Lost the beaten track and so

River section dark all this time

We must not worry

how few we are and fall from each other

More than language can express

Hope for the artist in America & etc

This is my birthday

These are the old home trees

A calm, a retrospective and domestic note to conclude the wanderings. It sounds that stiff, sentimental, moral note which connects the Puritan origins of European America to the mood of its present ruling factions. Yet detectable beneath the broken phrasings, a shortness of breath; the aboriginal stories, not adequately told yet, leaking through. In that elemental way still "lost" to the world—in forest, among strangers, in own mind's fool and fury—or within

what time and again seems the same crazy thicket—language.

—Andrew Schelling

DUSE by Laura Moriarty (Coincidence Press, 1987)

> To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed,
> the actors and actresses must all die of the plague.
> It is said in my repertoire I have not created any
> new personage. This I consider my best eulogy.

The judgment of justice arrives through many intents and locates itself in many forms. One being the auditory rounding of words forming the language of some event, spoken dramatically through the involvement of such attentions as desires, memories, and arrests. As Faust, Duse can be understood; best known by its

> Loss as rest from meaning.

However thus, never from sense:

> what becomes of a thing that
> present heavy with its fact of
> must be done something
> touch so that sense flares

The literal play, as the opening plague of Duse, or perhaps even Artaud, is that which, unpredictable in its result, acts in

human necessity. A writing which passes with our anticipations "that interweaving planned," and the cloth of the text remaining shreds of intent. Literally, the most we can hope for, "when," if this is our interest. And always it is, if some time.

The text, when read, is the literal sounding on two dialogical axes: between the left and right 'columns' on the pages, and, between our daily semantic anticipations and the abundant white of the pages, operational in the appearance of the text. These written dialogues allow for the metamorphizing opening of a "small room" from 'memory.' The opening is not a repetition of a known scene, but is the verbal (re-)en-act-ment toward a never fixed meaning or need. Through so-called 'fragmentation' and 'rhythmic distortion' of a possible narrative justification of such a felt language, the truth of loss is acoustically restored, 'showing' us 'things' in loss. Temporally felt things known as words re-cover the event according to the only truth recognizable in things: the necessary language they are actively thought to belong to, at the time.

in your small room

She used this to mean phrase
the world a man a line I always
always felt that she meant that
she filled

there time was hours only

Such seems the sensuous knowledge of this book. Showing itself from the dark burgundy covers into the acute soundings of its text.

—Ron Day

FIVE POEMS

The Cell

Exploration takes extra words
This (thus far) is a very particular portion—long and pointed over
It anticipates an immoderate time and place
Reality moves around making objects look as if they belong where they are
Then it goes, say, up and down, with the sunlight's yellow coloring matter
The sun here is an exceeding stricture
I've yet... I keep thinking... all open daylit areas carry at my peripheries yellowish floating ovoid motes
Motes go out of entoptical range, but only ellipsing
The particular attraction empties in
Blown convincing field, it rattles with brown grass turning back
I'm looking, prematurely, for a particular point of view—that of one who has already achieved objectivity
Inevitably I succumb to the urge to coax

October 11, 1986

Water is to admit that the life in which it acts smacks
Accumulated itself under ants' legs
Sleep as it makes a sidewalk
Reality is incalculable but it can be done
Especially if, in daytime, dream is driven out
But however conscious the things, they can only be known in a single pulse of numerousness

Waters

If reality is always inevitable and exterior to knowledge of it
They had half a minute left to spread their weight in light
Then knowing it should be irrevocable and inner
Inceptions include 9) shock from a flash of lightning and 136)
collision with a hill
The ceaseless first halves continue

September 23, 1987

Serpents to eat us—a charge reiterated time half-formed,
awaiting vast apparatus when it throws off a form of
consciousness which has since kept its sensual meaning
Of all external supports, they are the same

Or passing
A grammarian with legs on water leaving himself and herself
naked to the waist

September 30, 1987

Breakwater

Viewing is not a trivial slip
In the indistinguishable distance, that open paralysis...
In the light all over waters blurs are interspersed and
scratching
There is specific struggling in sight and knocking them
together
Self-consciousness is an indignity, that close sequence
No blinding sum

Viewing in the greasy air, cups and ridges on its conveyance
Conjecture is an ode, rolling
Viewing, persistently and latently
It necessitates and changes a glow by rubbing and a sum by
interjection

The hard way, from sun to sun
Coercions, those briefer curves

October 6, 1987

It is soft to be a mechanical object
The inner salt is unlikeness
All day the person is remaining reminded
The one you are hooting at, who is wearing pajamas and a fur hat as it lifts
A few intermittent ice particles, the cold ones
It arrived at the shore somewhat after its dry shadow
Words, diurnally—they...
A demonstration shot out of the water
There is nothing in back of the zenith
It is memory that's the opposition in thinking from what you read

October 13, 1987

—Lyn Hejinian

THE THOUGHT BEFORE YOU THINK IT

As we get it from Jack Kerouac and through him from Allen Ginsberg, spontaneous writing consists in loosening up and letting go with a stream of words whose natural bubbling flow unencumbered by our conditioning of what we think writing ought to be will produce deep and sincere meaning, a kind of

free style personal truth that is also good literature. Freedom equals truth, constraint equals falsity. This idea of course comes bursting out of the fifties, a time in which meanings and attitudes are so circumscribed very little of interest can be said. Hence spontaneity turns the valve open full energetically blasting out the encrusted pipes. And so Ginsberg's "First thought best thought" now perhaps the most influential poetic slogan since Dr. Williams's "no ideas but in things." This slogan has never been entirely clear to me. What does no ideas but in things actually mean? What "thing" does, say, freedom inhere in? Apparently the red white and blue flag? Do things in some way produce ideas that we can apprehend hovering around their edges like auras? Or is the notion that things actually are ideas, there are no ideas outside of things? Ideas are bad, things are good? In the end I become pretty confused about what Williams might mean by a thing. Or try this: the slogan taken as an imperative: "(have) no ideas but (be) in things." Keep the mind undistractedly focused on a single object: some of Dr. Williams's best poems indicate the application of this meditative technique. Although Ginsberg's equally appealing slogan sounds simple enough what does it mean?

The American Heritage Dictionary: "spontaneous" is "voluntary, self generated." The word comes from the Latin sponte meaning "of one's own accord, out of free will." Spontaneous words or actions are those which come "naturally to a person by reason of temperament or native tendency and not from constraint or external stimulous." Hobbes in his Liberty (1841) elucidates a bit further what is meant by "one's own accord" (a thorny phrase at best): "That all voluntary actions, where the thing which enduceth the will is not fear, are called also spontaneous and are said to be done by a man's own accord." The problem of course is that if you look at the mind and the words that it utters long enough and closely enough it becomes difficult to bring into view a mind that exists apart from the words, or to touch a bottom to a mind that exists below the fear or anxiety that characterizes it. And so it becomes quite difficult to say with certainty that the words are

"of one's own accord" and not the accord of parents, schools, advertising, political propaganda, wish fulfillment, stray radio air waves, other people's transmitted thought vibrations, signals from other planets etc. It may not be so hard to break free of, say the sonnet (although the immensity of that struggle in its day may not be appreciated by writers of the present) but it is much more difficult to break through one's own deep structural constraints into some really "spontaneous" literary truth. First thought may be best but what about the thought that comes before the first thought, the thought that is dimly unexpressed and can hardly be said to be there at all? What of the mind's pre-thought potential what is a shape that produces thought and what of the void before that? And what of the words themselves that possess independent energies even before they appear in mind? First thought may already be pretty stale. Censorship runs deep. A society can be heavy-handed about it seizing magazines and books or it can be subtle, for after all language is a social product: one can't say what the language does not express. So the effort to break through a restrictive language is a tough and noble one, the edge of art's long range attempt to reform or even pervert a society perceived as unjust or anti-life, an attempt that drives most of the important developments in twentieth century art. Hence in writing all sorts of stuff: chance operations, cut-ups, invented languages, found texts, etc. to end-run the constraints on the tongue in the head and produce writing which is truly spontaneous by being the opposite of spontaneous, to wit, since there is finally no "one's own accord" no way to circumvent "fear" in expression and get to pure utterance you put utterance out there as object and let it (language seen as social stuff, what's in the air between us) speak freely for itself: if you and I can't write sincerely at least "sincerity" can be in the word "sincere," which can function freely as a word if we stay out of its way as much as possible.

Lets assume the above as a technique. What then about the constraints we've worked our way around, aren't we now constrained by our avoidance of them? Our literary work becomes mechanical, habitual, a matter of "procedures." Freeing the voice from itself has been a relief, but where

then is the voice and do we need to hear our voice talking to us? We want meaning although it is a vague term it seems to indicate a feeling of recognition, that we are not estranged from ourselves, that our experience can be reviewed, can be sharpened, that when we die we're going to go on, meaning will continue. The challenge is to use the products of conditioned mind, Ginsberg's first thought, but in another way, not as who I am or what I wish to say because it is this sense of identity with our words that causes them to stick in the throat but rather as material rather as object rather as that out of which shape can be made just as we make shape out of chance generated materials or text manipulation. A bit of detachment is in order a bit of careful mental culture lest we miss a wealth of utterance we have to offer to ourselves. Which is to say writing had better be subjective as well as objective, objective as well as subjective. This dialectic this balance is necessary if we want a "one's own accord" to emerge and "spontaneous" writing to be in effect. And of course hasn't it always been? Perhaps we need always new devices, new approaches to trick ourselves into doing what we have always done but keep forgetting the freshness of.

Perhaps the best example of the possibility I am speaking of is the writing of the Japanese Zen teacher Dogen Kigen (1200-1253) whose prose poetic-philosophical works combine an urgency of quite personal content and meaning with a high degree of awareness of language as a medium that must be grappled with, never taken for granted, in the process of composition. Dogen continually enacts in his work the pivot between a radical mistrust of language's tendency to lull us into a false sense of self, and the crucial realization that outside of language there is no human possibility that can be pointed to. Here is Dogen refuting the old Zen saw that "you can't eat a painting of a rice cake" (you can't get at experience through language):

"Know that a painted rice cake is your face after your parents were born, your face before your parents were born. Thus, a painted rice cake, made of rice flour, is neither born nor unborn.

Since this is so, it is the moment of realization of the way. This cannot be understood by the limited view that a painting of a rice cake comes and goes.

"The paints for painting rice cakes are the same as those used for painting mountains and rivers. For painting mountains and rivers blue and red paints are used; for painting rice cakes rice flour is used. Thus they are painted in the same way, and they are examined in the same way.

"Accordingly, 'painted rice cakes' spoken of here means that sesame rice cakes, herb rice cakes, milk rice cakes, toasted rice cakes, millet rice cakes, and the like are all actualized in the painting. Thus you should understand that a painting is all-inclusive, a rice cake is all-inclusive, the dharma is all-inclusive. In this way all rice cakes actualized right now are nothing but a painted rice cake.

"If you look for some other kind of painted rice cake you will never find it you will never grasp it. A painted rice cake at once appears and does not appear."

(From "Painting of a Rice Cake" in Moon in a Dewdrop, translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi, North Point Press, Berkeley, 1985.)

——Norman Fischer

THE PARALLEL VOYAGES BY PAUL BLACKBURN

(The following essay serves as part of the introduction to a selection of Blackburn's uncollected poems, issued by Sun/Gemini.)

The quintessential Paul Blackburn poem ("Affinities II" would be a good example), is, visually speaking, more like a sketch (Franz K'ine was his favorite painter) than a work in oil. Lines are brisk, deft strokes, resulting in mobile half-stanzas, particle-stanzas, slightly assymetrical, that tilt the poem on. Whether in Barcelona or in the NYC 23rd Street "Bakery," the Blackburn persona is generally off-stage, activated by desire, an observer scoring nodes which the reader can connect to constellate relationship-oriented patterns. The tendency is to seek out value, or as Blackburn puts it in one of the poems included in The Parallel Voyages, "the whole and the flowing," but he is also fascinated by the extent to which humankind is derailed, and redesigned, by a ritualistic emotional and material interface. The content of this quintessential poem is spare, idiomatically erudite, and only marginally introspective. It frames itself as it tracks its own material, resulting in a page design that is quite mobile, with weighted, balanced lines and word-clumps.

Such a poem, it turned out, could only accommodate a limited amount of variation and materials that challenged its procedure. Anything that drew the poem inwards, that, in effect, unmoored its outer connections, seemed like sabotage. While there are some excellent poems of the early 1960s in which this frame is under great tension and bending to accommodate disintegrative psychological pressure ("The Sea and the Shadow" is an example), by the mid-60s Blackburn could no longer count on it as an organizing pattern. While it reoccurs from time to time in the "Journals" of the late-'60s, it must fight for time and space there in a context that is increasingly given over to

trivia and daily factual mapping.

The work of the mid-60s is mainly about Paul's failure to come to terms with himself as a man, or to weather the transitition from being a young, accomplished poet to becoming a mature poet with a sustaining pattern out of which to work. While Paul may have had complicated defenses in the social world, he had few in his poetry. In contrast to the self-contained pieces of the mid- and late-50s, which are models of opening, developing and resolving a poem, the mid-60s work is amorphous, meandering and preoccupied with daily and historical events in a dull, repertorial way. The specific and resolved poems are somewhat dated repetitions of earlier modes. Be this as it may, Blackburn's fate is being worked out during this period, and any ultimate and genuine evaluation of his life and his poetry must take the mid-60s carefully into consideration.

In the early spring of 1963, Paul wrote most of the long "Selection of Heaven" and his fusion of NYC observation and Greek myth, "The Watchers," two major works which, in the light of what he later produced, can oddly be thought of as summations. After these two peaks, references to alcohol, bars, bums, sensations of social or sexual rejection and impotence mill about in the writing. In a curious and touching way, the poem itself becomes a vagabond, without schedule or resting place. While Sara Blackburn is seldom named at this point, she appears to be the companion figure who, according to Paul at least, is rejecting him.

There are fits and starts of word-play oriented poems, and some pieces that juxtapose seemingly unrelated patches of experience (e.g., "Hesper Adest" and "You Light It"), both modes of which could, under different circumstances, have been developed to stake out new grounds. Something deep and central in Paul has come unhinged, and the poem has become a murky lamentation rather than a tool to get at and come to terms with the problem. An accurate indication of what has happened can be gauged by

comparing "The Watchers" to a 1966 poem organized in a similar way, "The Procedures." In contrast to the former poem which bristles with alertness, the speaker in the latter piece is unengaged and seems to be writing to pass the time.

Blackburn's decline in this period might well be pondered by younger writers coming to poetry now out of a William Carlos Williamesque idiomatic tradition which has been filtered and softened by the "confessional" poetry of the late-50s/early-60s. On one hand, Blackburn stayed "open" by not locking himself into a set of values that would have determined what he affirmed and what he rejected. On the other hand, his failure to do so, made him extremely dependent upon the facts of daily existence in the harsh, impersonal labyrinth of NYC. Had he been tougher, more self-dependent and more aggressive in directly expressing his feelings, he might have come through his "mid-life crisis," completed his troubador translation project, and developed a sustaining vision based on his work in the mid- to late-50s.

However, the facts, according to the poetry, seem to indicate that Paul's sense of creative worth was exceptionally contingent upon sexual acceptance, very overtly in the case of women and very covertly in the case of men. His antennae were lust-sensitive, and many poems are organized explicitly around an anonymous or intimately-known person who aroused him. As he approached his 40s, this point of imaginative ignition increasingly misfired, or did not spark at all, to the point that the pain of loving (himself as well as others) appears to have engulfed sexual gratification. In the chasm that began to appear as this single power gave way and divided was a morass of unresolvable childhood unhapiness.

In her Introduction to The Collected Poetry, Edith Jarolim writes that Paul and his slightly younger sister lived with his mother's "strict and elderly parents" in Vermont between his 4th and 14th years, while his mother, Francis Frost, recipient

of the 1929 Yale Younger Poets Award, was in NYC trying to earn a living as a writer, and living with a woman companion. According to comments that Robert Creeley relates (1), Paul was repeatedly whipped by his maternal grandmother. The image of small, brutalized 14 year old Paul rejoining his mother in NYC in 1940 and via her encouragement becoming, as she did not, a major American poet, is so redolent with Oedipal consternation that I begin to think that the host of anonymous women whose sexuality drifts in and out of his poetry (as well as his troubador translations, which he could never to his satisfaction complete) is Paul's reversed version of Isis and Osiris, in which it is the female figure whose body is scattered and the task of the poet-son to vainly attempt to reconstitute her via endless sallies into the moment of desire.

In this context it is worthwhile to think about what looked at superficially appears to be a heavy load of machoism in Blackburn's poetry. It is true that women are often signed, or identified, as sexual targets, and that his seeming dependence on women for self-confirmation empowers them with overwhelming, sometimes menacing, psychic size. The humorous "takes" (from a patriarchal viewpoint) are in one way escape-valves to let out some of the pressure such size builds up. But it is more complicated than this. There is, for example, a cluster of images making use of traps and nets (the purse-seine in the poem by that title, "the net of lust" and "that silken trap" in "Call It The Net") which evokes Blake's poem, "The Crystal Cabinet." Unlike the speaker in Blake's superb lyric, who is brought to understand that intercourse per se is not going to yield an apocalyptic vision, Blackburn never seems to get clear as to the limitations, meanings, and specific mental rewards of sexual union—nor is he able to develop an alternative set of values that lie outside its crisis. From the late-50s on, he seems to turn and twist, a dreamer in its nets, as if in the grip of an inhibition so intense that the source of the anguish cannot be identified, or even addressed.

An indication of the extent to which sexual fulfillment is endlessly complicated occurs in the splendid "Purse-Seine," when the

"sea bird," in context a gull-man-penis, facing the rising hips of the other, "hits the mast in the dark and falls / with a cry to the deck and flutters off." These lines occur at the threshold of penetration, and immediately after the "bird" strikes this peculiar "mast," we read: "Panic spreads, the / night is long, no / one sleeps, the net / is tight...." In "Call It The Net," a poem written 5 years later in 1964, the speaker "imagines a young woman / lying on her back at the intersection / Third Ave., and 8th St.," and as he continues to both titilate and vex himself, he writes:

> It is a threshold I cross, no
> longer an intersection, the bird
> hidden in the shirt upon the chest
> torn . the eye
> swells in the head
> bird flutters and falls into the sea of eyes
> She was so beautiful
> Bird and sun are holy take the head
> tear it open and set it like a
> melon upon the threshold .

Taken together, these two related passages suggest to me that Blackburn has projected a phallic intensity ("the mast") upon the vagina, with a loss of potency before penetration can take place. Subsequently, in the above passage, he fantasizes that he is castrated, and offers the street-woman object of his fantasy his genitals as a sacrificial gift. Given that Blackburn's first and ongoing projection of the creative self is the gull, which is envisioned as the poet's own childhood body as well as the numinous word riding the wind, or lines, of inspiration (2), the implication of these passages is nothing less that devastating. The sexual act becomes the sacrificial grounds where language, the poem, his identity and his sexuality are drawn and quartered.

"Lust is unpredictable," he wrote in a poem dated June 21, 1963, in which a stanza describing an angry black woman on the A train appears in a context that otherwise has nothing to

do with her. Within the next week or so, Blackburn wrote the shocking "Birds chirp listlessly in the heat," in The Parallel Voyages (3), which lets the reader in on what he believes women would do if they really had their way with him. I would propose that the terror implied by such writing is so extreme as to become somatically entropic. If the reader thinks that I am exaggerating, let him read "Crank It Up For All Of Us, But Let Me Heaven Go" in the Collected Poems. It is one of the most perfectly executed genuinely disturbing poems in American literature.

Keeping in mind the issue of macholsm I raised, I would like to suggest that there are at least three kinds of sexuality in Blackburn's poetry, only one of which is offensive from my viewpoint (which is one that believes in reciprocity between the sexes). The first kind is of the dirty joke variety, with Blackburn ogling ass on the subway or identifying anonymous women on the basis of their sexual "equipment." While such poems as "Clickety-Clack" and "The Once-Over," are well-written examples of this kind of humor, they in no way represent the range and complexity of Blackburn's sexuality or poetry at large, and it is a shame to see him again and again represented in anthologies by them.

A second kind is the turgid sexual despair that Paul attempted to reveal, or unravel, in the kind of poems that I quoted from before. Whatever sexism there may be in these multiple images of gulls, women, nets and masts, is overwhelmed, to my reading, by Blackburn's self-inflicted short-circuiting, and I can only lament that he suffered so much in this way. I am moved, not put off, by his hesitant, always somewhat thwarted attempt to express the core of his compulsive self-revulsion.

A third kind of sexuality, and certainly the dominant one for the first half of Blackburn's writing career, is an admiration and tender respect for what might be thought of as the

femininity of all forms. This motif is sounded again and again, as contact with women, animals (generally cats—the occasional dogs seem to indicate a negative male presence), and plants, and appears to envision a feminine principle as the force that provides the world with growth and beauty. When Blackburn is under the sway of this persuasion (generally in his apartment, in contrast to out on the street or in the subway), he is fair-minded, masculine and extremely sensitive. The reader who draws back at "The Once-Over" should be willing to read "The One Night Stand: An Approach To The Bridge," where there is a scene that most American men and women who grew up in the 40s and 50s experienced, suffered, and seldom happily resolved. The speaker's decision in favor of respecting his "date's" sexual fears, and not pressing himself onto, and into, her, is genuinely evocative of Paul Blackburn's respect for others at large.

I've drawn out these three differing attitudes toward sexuality to point out that they represent such a complex and complicated web of ambivalences that they cannot simply be passed off as macho. To read Blackburn on these matters and to think what they humanly mean makes me wonder what we would think of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and Ezra Pound if, in their poetry, they had been as honest as Paul about their sexual relationship to themselves and to their women and wives. The poetry of Blackburn represents a kind of halfway house in regard to the extent of his thrust into his fantasy life and the extent to which he was able to excavate the kind of ore that is precious to those of us who continue to believe, as has been attributed to Marx, that anything human is not alien.

It would be appropriate to evaluate Paul Blackburn's poetry in the company of his own entire generation—not just the haphazardly-identified "Black Mountain" associates (Levertov, Dorn, Creeley, Oppenheimer etc.)—but of those American poets born between 1923 and 1929, who began to make their mark in the mid- to late-50s. In this sense, Blackburn's

company would also include Dickey, Simpson, Koch, Ammons, Merrill, Ginsberg, O'Hara, Bly, Ashbery, Merwin, Wright, Spicer, Levine, Sexton, and Rich. I would say that with the possible exception of Ginsberg and Ashbery, that Blackburn is a match for any of these poets, and were a reader to assemble the best 100 pages of each of them, and do a comparative reading, that Blackburn's 100 pages would be definitive and unique, an original energy that is not elsewhere duplicated or backgrounded e. g., he is not the lesser example of any other poet, his best work is not secondary. Here, for whatever it is worth, is a list of the poems by which I feel he should be centrally identified:

The Birds
The Lanner
The Search
Pancho Villa...
Bañalbufar...
Plaza Real with Palm Trees
El Camino Verde
The Letter
Ramas, Divendres...
Alaméda
Affinities II
Spring Thing
Atardecer
El Día Viene...
Brooklyn Narcissus
Hot Afternoons have been...
The Purse-Seine
Definition
The Sea and the Shadow
The One Night Stand...
Ritual I
The Mint Quality
Bryant Park
Phone Call to Rutherford
Crank it Up...
This is Not the Same...
Pre-Lenten Gestures
#1, 7, & 17 from The Selection of Heaven
The Watchers
Here They Go
At The Well
Call It The Net
Faces I
Sunflower Rock
The Voices, It's Cheap
The Net of Place
The Touch

* * * * *

Between the years 1959 and 1966, Paul Blackburn and I had an active personal as well as literary friendship, much of

which took place while he was in NYC and I was in Kyoto, Japan. Kyoto, in the early- to mid-60s, was a kind of mecca for a small group of American writers and artists, including Gary Snyder, Joanne Kyger, Cid Corman, Will Petersen, Frank Samperi, Philip Whalen, with occasional visits by Alan Watts and Allen Ginsberg. Paul seemed to notice that our presence there represented a new alternative to Paris as a base where foreign materials could be drawn into American art.

In his poetry as well as in his correspondence, I seemed to be on Paul's mind more than the others, and some of the gifts I sent him (in particular, a happi coat mentioned in "Doubles: It's a Cabin" which he wore until it disintegrated) turned up in poems, as well as news from my daily life. A tape on which I described the images tacked up on the wall over my work area, along with a reading of Hart Crane's "The Harbor Dawn," led to Section 5 of his "The Selection of Heaven," and material describing workmen in the ravine behind our house warming their hands over fires they had built in oil-drums stimulated Paul to bring noticings of similar scenes in NYC into "Ritual IX: Gathering Winter Fuel." The conjunction of hands and fire was also symbolically worked into "Crank It Up For All Of Us...," one of the poems Paul read on a 1963 tape sent to Kyoto that stunned me and consequently helped me break through a block that had paralyzed me for over a year (4). His last mention of Kyoto appears to have been in the "24. II. 64 / Note to Kyoto," in which he expressed the age-old spring desire to get roving again, in his own case to leap back to Paris and Barcelona.

Paul was a loyal and comradely correspondent during these years, exactly the kind of slightly older friend that a young uncertain poet needs—not a mentor, let alone a master, but someone with a slight edge of experience who is willing to set forth his views and let the younger person make of them what he can. Paul Blackburn was the first to make me aware to what extent my creative blocks had to do with a swelling up of unassimilated childhood material, and of the extent to which participating in a full present life had to do with working through

such material. In 1963 he married his second wife, Sara Golden, and spontaneously I started to write a poem celebrating their marriage. As I worked away on it, the problems in my own marriage tore through the fabric, so I set the Blackburn poem aside, and tried to concentrate on my own difficulties, into which churned so much material from the past that before I knew it I was working on a poem that attempted to bring my past life to bear on all that had happened to me since I had started writing poetry and come to Kyoto. This still-unpublished 400 page poem, "The Tsuruginomiya Regeneration," was used as a quaryy for the early sections of the much shorter Coils (1973).

It has now been over 15 years since Paul's death, and not a week has gone by that I have not thought of him. It seems, on one level, that the fate of our friendship was in the stars, that we were to be magnetized and then demagnetized by currents that rose up through us. Our closest years took place continents apart and appeared to be balanced not only on the age difference but on my youthful and Paul's more mature uncertainties. This incongruity was very workable when we were apart, but when I moved to NYC in 1966 and started the groundwork for the life that I have been building ever since, while Paul, from about 1963 on, seemed to be losing his grip on everything that was dearest to him, the vectors of our drawing apart were set in motion. As clear as these points seem to me now, they still seem inadequate to explain the fate of our friendship. Cutting through how we felt about each other was how we felt about ourselves as men and as writers in a world that never let us take anything for granted. Thinking about Paul now makes me realize how tough, how nigh impossible it is, for American artists of different generations to have lifelong friendships.

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(1) See Creeley's brief Preface to Against the Silences, Permanent Press, London & New York, 1980. While the editor, Robert Vas Dias, states on the back of this book

that it "comprises the last manuscript remaining to be published which Paul Blackburn conceived of as a separate and unified book," he informs the reader in a Publisher's Note that he has eliminated a third of this manuscript from the present book. Vas Dias also states that "no title has been assigned to the collection," while assigning to it the first half of a poem title, "Against the Silences of Staircases." Without "of Staircases," "Against the Silences" is "poetic" in a way that Blackburn always avoided. Blackburn himself referred to this gathering as "the black binder," which seems to me to be the most appropriate title for the collection, which should have also been published entire, as Paul left it.

(2) From the late 40s through the early 60s, Blackburn's poetry is graced with continuing bird, most often gull, appearances. Some of the key poems in this respect are: "Cantar de Noit," "The Birds," "The Lanner," "Winter Solstice" (and for a further elaboration of the "forked branch," "Morning Song"), "The Purse-Seine," "The Summer Window," "In Winter," and Sections 1 and 6 of "The Selection of Heaven."

(3) I founded Sulfur magazine at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena in the spring of 1981, and the first 8 issues were edited there, and published by the Institute, with a commitment of deficit funding for 5 years provided by President Goldberger. In 1983 I was informed by Goldberger that Caltech's name had to be immediately struck from Sulfur because of the following incident: he had been using discretionary funds from the Weingart Foundation in Pasadena to support Sulfur, and at one point showed the Weingart Board of Trustees a copy of Sulfur #4, which included 22 of the Blackburn poems in The Parallel Voyages. Upon reading "Birds chirp listlessly..." the Weingart Trustees informed Goldberger that Sulfur was pornographic, and that not only did they want their "discretionary" funds not used to support it, but they also wanted Caltech's name removed from it. Goldberger told me that much as he disagreed with the Trustees' response, he had to honor it, because of the Weingart Foundation's huge yearly donations

to the Institute (mainly in the science area, I believe, but it should be pointed out that they also fund a yearly "Humanities Conference" on campus). Goldberger, quite honorably I felt, offered to make good on his original 5 year deficit funding commitment to Sulfur via other sources, so that the magazine could continue either on its own for a while or until it attracted a new sponsor. While the Blackburn poem is genuinely shocking, it is hardly pornographic by current standards. That a single poem by this shy, unassertive poet was sufficient to nearly eliminate a literary magazine on grounds of censorship in 1983 should keep us all alert to the fact that while things seem to change, the "sexual revolution" etc., on another level they remain stuck, and the same.

(4) There is a more complete description of the effect of this poem on me in the essay, "The Gull Wall," in The Gull Wall, Black Sparrow Press, 1975.

——Clayton Eshleman

MIRAGE——OR WHERE'S THE PARTY?

As usual this is me trying to think out loud about the future. What's with us writers writing in the USA today?... Now, if there's "Party Haha" and "Party Profession" as sides of literature, I get the feeling Bruce Andrews (whose writing, in deference to whose lovely first name I've always tried to pay attention to), to put it mildly, is far from fond of either of the two. In fact in an excerpt from a new book (it's in the latest Ottotole) he just about bursts a blood vessel slamming whatever

occurs under that name. "Gestalt me out!" he begins intemperately and continues in a style which if unclear in offering whys and wherefores is all too clear when it comes to the object of this unprovoked display of pique. "Slang to the point of meat-eating, imperative ornament, dislike occurs. I refer to the Felony Implementation Program; the tendency in art towards party." Now I like that! Cause all the time I'd been assuming what the New York poet/professor's here condemning isn't shameful at all but in fact pretty close to being the main thing: the point of lit as a matter of act. In the year 2287 will they be as bored with our writing as we are with the so-called giants of the past that's 300 years in the opposite direction? (Drydens or whoever.) Nothing lives beyond its era does it? But as busy grad students of that distant future exhume these books of ours that'll have been buried for centuries by then, won't they still have to wonder about and envy and maybe admire a little the aspect of us that came out when we got together and wanted to call ourselves writers...??

By which I mean party. These observations aren't abstract, but take place under the guise of a review of Mirage. Gossip, hanging out, calling up your friends on the phone to find out the dish on rivals, having fights and separations too, being allies or making innuendoes in your writing as a form of entertainment that you hope will make other writers in your group love, approve of, delight in you—I'm thinking of Mirage as party because I think it's quite possible that's the only way there is of being what's called "writers" now...in Late Capitalism.

Of course they say the group idea of writers (writers as a collectivity), some dare call it conspiracy, though I'm afraid that'll be in quotes, is what makes us modern or post or whatever. And I agree though you don't have to cite... uhhh, Schlegel and Young Hegelians or Breton with his Surrealism circus and Bataille going off into the woods with the Acephale group for all of them to take down their pants (with Laure),

or a New York School or Spicer Circle, Language Poets, New Narrative/Small Press Traffic Group, the Gay, the Black, the Women as groups of writers being together to show this as a fact! Kids who want to be writers but still are in school someplace (there's that fatal theme again: grad school!) concede the glamor of just being writers is the attractive thing, as if it's something "ontological," it doesn't matter really if you produce or not....

Though there's the other side as well: the entrance of rationality into this morass of sublime dark fun. "Party Profession": the foregrounding of light in what we do so that we, alas, also have a business and political side to us. Fun vs work? Well: I'll concede the fact we didn't wholesale become the lawyers, doctors and CPA's our mostly middle class parents wanted us so badly to be doesn't mean that writing isn't a "party" in the other, more calculating sense of being an interest group too! "Party as Profession" this time around? Just look at Dodie and Kevin: they're smiling back at you from a recent Mirage cover so competently, I think the word is, name tags and all. "Lets tell it like it is, folks!" Dodie and Kevin and par-ty-ing——they're combining business with pleasure——they're in fact at a national fan club convention of a TV soap opera they're partial to——"Santa Barbara"—— where they'll meet its "stars". And what might this say about a Mirage approach to arts, to literature? A theory of writing as fun plus interest?

The practice of this is a motto that I'm just making up at this very minute but want to attribute to Breton: Literature will be a party, I imagine him saying apodeictically, or it will not be at all! (*) Now this is an interesting way of putting it because where the Dada people were thinking of lit as party but just a party, the Surrealists had already (busy, busy, busy, as Denis Hollier points out in his new College of Sociology signing canvases and checks) become a business, part of the art business. I'm using these two groups to show that I think our writing ancestors weren't schizophrenic enough and, with a somewhat European devotion to clear thinking, thought you

have to choose one side of things against the other, that "naturally" one has to exclude the other....

But do they? What are you going to do in a society where everything's money? Exchange value? Just as it's nobler to frankly avow the emptiness of the signs that formally represent community, sublimity or the dark when it comes to the business of religion and, if it's important to you to join a church, be a TV adherent of the PTL Club, than have the unmitigated gall to decide you want to choose the side of purity by joining a "real" church like Anglicans (or... whatever), so I think the time has come to openly express the loss of the dark in the blinding, calculating light of writing today by reshaping what we do. If meaning has frankly departed from us isn't it better to acknowledge what we're doing not as writing but "writing"—in the sense of "sociology"? In the sense of having a pretext for getting together in secret clubs of gossip or whatever?

Our "God"'s gone away. This is just fact. There's no sense in telling people it ought to be otherwise... What we're doing with words (just like what so-called artists are doing with their hip avantguard painting these days) is truthfully thought of as a packaging of art. The forms of the community, of the dark, are business. We're making a commodity out of Dark.

So community, from my point of view, would be like sex for gay men at a time of AIDS—you have to keep producing images of it, representations. You keep it alive this way until the reality that's supposed to be up ahead of us, still in the future, can manage to be more than—an idea? It's like sympathetic magic. You say the words and do a dance. You—click your heels together and repeat with eyes closed thinking on lovely inner truths—There's no place like Home, there's no place like....

And Dorothy's ruby slippers? Are they ever real or are they—

studio properties? (Gasp.) Say the "C word": is it "commodity" or "community"—and does one equal the other?

I don't know. Is equal too strong a word: should I say equal for now? What I do know though is about Mirage wanting (locally? or on the writing scene generally?) to try to be really different this way! In spite of a common interest in genres of sex, porn, horror, entertainment etc. Mirage-published or Mirage-oriented writers, to any extent I can see (and I'd mean—Killian and Bellamy, Bob Glück or me or whoever, a lot of different names coming to mind somewhat vaguely), don't have a quote unquote program across the boards. But I think it's fair to say though that we do make a business of turning business into pleasure. Dodie Bellamy's rewritings of Dracula in her Mina letters (as her talk at Bob Glück's recent Intersection residency shows) aren't Dracula, much less Dracula. And few will be tempted to confuse the—I hope wonderful—aestheticizations of porn, condensed, stylized and subverted as they are, in Cooper or Glück (or I guess you could say "me," though "less" of mine is out there) with say a viewing booth, as I think they're politely called, in the Tenderloin.

I will only be happy when it becomes completely popular to recognize writing as a giant PTL Club—because (only?) then will it be possible for anybody to start to think the next step, which obviously is all-important... (Oh Lord of Dark, if there's a once and future Lord to be, in my heart of hearts I have this inner intuition that it's you and not a Maitreya Buddha who we're gonna see arriving with your tacky thunderbolts and lightning... but by then will they be as "tacky" as they can't help but seem to us now?).

As a closing thought for this review I want to refer to the Dennis Cooper piece by Dodie Bellamy (aka Mrs. Kevin Killian... as I think she'd want me to say in a tip of the hat to the heroine's entrance and breathy first words into the mike

at the end of: A Star Is Born: "Hello everybody... this is Mrs. Norman Main...) In one of the Mirages of last year, where, first, she has a brilliant/funny/important critical discussion of that writer's work and then, contextualizing this text, adds this coda——

"After his reading at New Langton Arts I walk with Cooper to his rented car. We formally discuss Writing for half a block when I say, 'I hear your next book is about shitting in people's mouths.' I know this isn't polite, but like in sex with Mark I want to make his professional surface messy. And it works. Dennis is momentarily disconcerted, keeps glancing at the people behind us, stammers, 'That's just part of it.'" Then she (as comment? query?) adds——"This is Life not art"—— in her own voice, allowing the antecedant of that this to freefloat ("the events she's just recounted," or, "the recounting of the events that constitutes her essay" on Dennis?). Does the Community contextualize the Commodity in that way, with the ambiguity of a "C word"? A big C.

Will Community, if we keep praying for it (preying on it?) redescend on Commodity like a Holy Ghost on the abstract heads of Apostles at Pentecost? I can't see a future now, only——Mirage... illusion... commodities like yours truly and the only life he knows....

(*) Compare V. I. Lenin's famous saying "Literature must become party literature." I agree! And also with Leslie Gore when she tells us——"It's my party and I'll cry if I want to (you would cry too if it happened to you)." (!!)

——Bruce Boone

JANET JACKSON'S CONTROL

The false self of Janet Jackson's become dislodged from her, in her voyage to Minneapolis, home of Terry Lewis and James ("Jimmy Jam") Harris, who made her new record Control. Have you heard it, or seen her on MTV? She moves inside the lens in a boxy, military field jacket, cut with Dolman sleeves to allow rapid, almost invisible chops with her long arms and stiff hands, and her sidle's now a march step, off the beat in twenty different ways so nothing happens twice. The message is: I've taken control of my life, this is it, the real me. I don't envy her; she still partakes of the divine. The latest video, "When I Think of You," is shot on a series of enormous sets, decorated to resemble (or "after") 50s MGM, when Vincente Minnelli worked there. Hundreds of extras perform thousands of tricky dance steps as Janet skips by like Mary Decker, singing lightly and quietly. Then she'll stop, swivel and fall into one of her robot/Contra line dances. She's spectacular in them. Like the rats chasing the Pied Piper, her co-stars follow, trying to duplicate her moves. They get an "A minus" for effort: while they look properly awed they're hard put to match Janet's will or bravura. Then without regret she leaves them to enter another realm of the soundstage, designed to suggest Chinatown, perhaps, Spanish Harlem or Little Italy. The cast of the TV series Fame, Janet's old bete noire/alma mater, changes from season to season but always reflects the imagined heterogenous multi-racial and -sexual student body of the School for the Performing Arts, so they needed a black girl and got Janet. Now she throws this back, as she prowls a jolly jungle of picture postcard locales, Cecil-Beaton-stylized, and in her Civil War uniform and her swank calls to mind US foreign policy as perhaps no one else could, not today.

Basically what I'd like to discuss is an amazing transformation and its implications. Christian allegory: "If we let Him—for

we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or a goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness" (C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity). Now I'm not saying that the pre-Control Janet Jackson was as filthy and feeble as all that. But pretty near, and oh! look at her now! You can't take your eyes off.

JJ began her career as a face in a photo's flash: The Jackson 5 (and little sister Janet, 7)—then Michael Jackson with sister Janet, 14..."Oh, there's that awful Janet again." After several undistinguished records, she took a role ("Cleo") on the TV series Fame, a sorry debacle. She couldn't act, she looked awful, and when she had to sing or dance you felt cynical as the producers who used her name and form to hype their numbers. She'd sidle out from behind a curtain, always on the left foot, and her lips would move (counting steps), fists clenched in fear. She concentrated til petrification set in, and one frame too late the camera would cut away, as if aware of the ignominy, to the so-called Fame dancers. In private life, Janet seemed equally confused: a teenage marriage to Motown teen idol James DeBarge (the "new Michael Jackson") was anulled after ten months in Las Vegas. I stress the pathetic only to point up the miracle of rebirth signed by the new LP (and by the four videos released in consequence, each hotter than the last). "I can't believe it's her," I said, then I thought, "Do I even know it is her?" A doubting Thomas but, with so bright a star, I can't put my hand in her side and if I could it wouldn't help. My word, I expect, must be taken on the pathos; so there's doubt on both my sides. We long for such a transfiguration; in that it comes in unexpected quarters it surprises, yet that first a death must occur we don't doubt. Amy Gerstler's book The True Bride (Lapis Press, 1986) is suffused, or torn through, with this desire: "On the dark / continent, in mud huts, / and in master bedrooms across / flickering cities, this is how / the haughty men and women / of this earth lay hands on / each other" ("Soft Talk"; notice the

accent on process). I can't believe it's her but if, as she insists in interviews, it's the real her, then from now on we'll be seeing this act until we sicken of it, and we'll yearn for the clumsy, dumpy Janet of Fame.

Let me think of some analogues. When Joan Crawford, and later Sally Field, changed their images (in Mildred Pierce and Norma Rae respectively) everyone gasped and gave them Oscars, but we didn't then know that was it, they were stuck, they had finally "affixed" their true selves. So one was forced to turn back to the MGM Crawford, tentative, goofy, cream and hesitation, to see someone trying to be someone else—the ultimately moving thing. Or watch Gidget or Flying Nun. I'm tired of Sally now. I wish she had married Burt instead of going on and on and nobody, nowhere, can credit her today with 1 ounce of acting ability. Is this what separates, finally, the stars from the writers I like to figure as stars? Once a writer, after all, has hit his or her stride, you don't want to re-read their earlier work. It embarrasses you and all your ideals. Shame and chagrin. Burn that book. But with my stars, I search and search their prior careers like the Hound of Heaven, passing my hand over the old stills like a reader of Braille, desperate for the signs of what they would/will become. Even this schema isn't entirely straight, since of course there's the love of decadence which enables us to enjoy late Henry James or Robert Creeley in much the same spirit as the John Wayne of In Harm's Way and Rio Lobo, and Tyrone Power in any of his last twelve pictures.

"I should know more about the sky / after all this time on my back, / in damp grass, huge moon and gnats / listening, a few whispers stuck in / my throat like fish bones. His kiss / dislodges them and they float up / to pierce the sincere blue firmament" (Gerstler, "Christine"). The value of Control lies in its analogue to heaven. Though we can't know heaven, we almost can taste it sometimes, and it's suggested in odd places; here's one. Soul wants release via an outside force, a kiss, a uniform, what have you. Now, I'm always doubting and

second-guessing myself, so release won't come for me: faith is crucial, I don't have it. But I know I want it. (She says, "Let's wait awhile.") (And inadvertently I left out the figure of "control" as a term from parapsychology, using it in the sense of Spicer's radio, which, which, which, I might have applied to both Gerstler and Jackson, but now I'm glad cause it would have seemed too pat. But I want it.)

—Kevin Killian

THIGH-BONE TRUMPETS & ATTENDANT SPIRITS.

THE GYÜTO MONKS: TIBETAN TANTRIC CHOIR
(Windham Hill Records, 1987)

Craggy, gutteral prayer, like the sound of stones crumbling down a mountain precipice, lift from this record. In a synaesthesia verging on sorcery you can practically taste the smokey broth-like tea of Tibet and smell the odor of yak-butter lamps clinging to your hair and clothes. Nowhere else on this planet have people developed such a wild, rapturously lonely music—harsh, yet at the same time strangely placating.

For 500 years the monks of Gyűto college in Lhasa performed their liturgical rites, evolving a difficult, highly disciplined method of chanting. The principal notes they sing, two octaves below middle C, are low—frighteningly low. They sound as if they come from granite, from windswept rocks on high mountain passes. Yet by distending their vocal chords—

it takes severe training—the monks reach even further. They isolate out of this geologic substratum not only a warm mid-range overtone as comforting to hear as your own mother's voice, but above that, almost on wings, a distinctly audible angel's tone, as sublime as its originating note is terrifying.

Vocal over- and under-tones—like the spirits, demons & celestial creatures whose "sounds" they are—are everywhere present. Rarely do they emerge distinctly enough to be heard. In the practice of tantric Buddhism every such tone manifests a sphere of possibility, of existence. This is the purpose of the Gyüto chant. To isolate and render such a tone—the magic is ancient as song itself—draws a specific potency, such as fearlessness, or compassion, into the singer's own mind and body. The faces and features of these diverse powers are never vague, but clearly seen and iconographically precise.

In a provisional way then, these chants can be called prayer—awakenings of those intelligences accorded to various Bodhisattvas, of whom the patron for Gyüto college is Mahakala, guardian of the wheel of Time.

Mahakala—his iconography of bloodbrimming skullcup, of sword & noose, of skull necklace and monstrous dancing body the color of midnight—his wrathful appearance drives off gnomes of greed and pathetic lechers of bitterness that clutch upon the human mind; for he is none other than an illusion-dispelling manifestation of Tibet's patron, Avalokiteshvara, the "Compassionate Onlooker" who has vowed not to rest from activity until he's released all sentient beings from misery. These are his prayers.

When China's expansionist armies overran Tibet with that mixture of vicious racism and Maoist lunacy that has so devastated all their outlying territories, they singled out

monks who'd developed this ancient chanting technique for special censure. Official pronouncement declared the singing "bourgeoise" and its practitioners in acute need of re-education. (For personal accounts of Tibetans who have survived such re-educating, John Avedon's book In Exile from the Land of Snows (Random House, 1986) makes humbling reading.)

After the confused mass flight of Tibetans into India in 1959, a number of Gyüto monks who'd escaped from their homeland managed to regroup in Himachal Pradesh in the Indian Himalayas. They reinstated at the center of their liturgy the lengthy prayer to Mahakala—heard in part on this record—around which their college had first formed itself in 1474. While their numbers have been decimated, the monks have not only not abandoned their practices, but have rewakened these practices with the grim understanding that Tibetan culture will require extraordinary effort if it is to survive its exile from the Tibetan plateau.

The first side of The Gyüto Monks is a ritual enactment of the Guhyasamaja Tantra, one of the principal esoteric practices of Buddhism, which has survived into this century only in Tibet. As the arts of painting, dance, poetry, and mystery plays demonstrate, the Tibetan genius has always been to render subtle doctrinal ideas into pictorial or dramatic terms—or in this case, into formal unaccompanied chant.

The Mahakala chant—side two of this record—adds to their triple-layered singing an orchestra of arresting instruments, not so much to accompany as to punctuate the prayer, or maybe to startle the ever-wandering human mind back from its place of distraction. Drums & bright cymbals irrupt unpredictably, along with six-foot long-horns, and trumpets bored from human thigh bones. These last instruments, as well as the abbot's magic hourglass-shaped drum, devised of two human craniums stretched over by skin, are spiritually complex items, magically dangerous, and wielded only by trained and qualified lamas. (I do not recommend buying stolen or

gratuitously manufactured ones from the novelty import shops that offer them, unless you know clearly what you're up against.) The escalating rhythms and clashing textures of the Gyüto instruments are designed to expell from both musician and audience any mental sloth or lingering conceptual foolishness, catching at the same time in a tantric net of sound the rite's attendant spirits——delighting the spirits with sounds pleasing to their ears, and riveting their thoughts upon the prayer's content.

The monks who perform on this record travelled to America several years ago in an effort to publicize their people's difficulties under the rule of Beijing. Drummer Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead, himself an ethnomusicologist and tireless contact man for musicians working in non-western traditinns, arranged an evening in Berkeley for the monks to publically enact their liturgy. He also got them into the recording studio for Windham Hill Records. It is a blessing to hear Tibetan music given the sophisticated studio treatment capable of reproducing its full net of sound. The vocal overtones, though they take a little effort to locate at first, come through with striking immediacy once your ear has discovered them. Nonesuch Records issued an earlier recording of Gyüto monks, taped in 1973 at Dalhousie, seat of Gyüto exile at the time. While spiritually haunting and of immense archival value, that recording couldn't capture the impressive contemplative dimensions you hear on this new, state-of-the-art reproduction.

Right now the Tibetan people as a whole stand in grave danger. No major political power has shown an inclination to intercede with Beijing on their behalf, and recent events in Lhasa and Shigatse show just how excluded they are from China's much publicized liberalizations. In early November the New York Times published an account of two American mountain climbers caught in Lhasa during the October protests and reprisals. They recounted what other sources had missed or avoided—— how the Tibetan protesters rose up in the aftermath of a

public execution of two alleged "murderers." But anyone conversant with reports coming out of Tibet over the years has heard this story repeatedly. Incarceration and execution of Tibetans, whose principal crimes are the exhibition of "non-revolutionary beliefs" and an indiscriminate mingling with foreigners, have haunted the country without interruption since 1959. Again, for its documentation of the Tibetan tragedy, and for insight into what courage it must take for the Tibetan people to maintain their language, culture and Buddhist beliefs in the face of Chinese repression, I cannot more highly recommend John Avedon's book.

Last year a friend of mine visited the gompa (literally "secluded place," or monastery) at Shigatse. A young lama gave him a button bearing the likeness of Lobang Lama, a monk of outspoken intelligence who the Chinese carted away and shot as a bourgeoise reactionary. (The ludicrous terminology exposes official Chinese "class consciousness" for the thuggery it is.) "Wear this," the lama told my friend handing him the button, "it will bring you good fortune. But if you see any policemen, take it off. With them it will bring you bad luck."

Spinning this disc is prayer—good fortune—something much needed in Tibet right now. Don't balk at the notion. For a thousand years Tibetans have devised ingenious techniques for reproducing prayer—they are doing it in prison at the present moment, using instead of beads the pages of little red Mao books to keep count of their recitations, and to conceal what it is they're repeating. Outside of prison, records and casettes will fit right in, assuming you bring to them the proper attentiveness of spirit. Think of the antecedents. Prayer flags on solitary mountain passes from which the wind carries off the syllables of compassion. Hand-held spinning wheels filled with wound-up strips of consecrated paper. Water wheels rotated by little brooks; small cylinders, and huge merry-go-round painted wheels that half a dozen monklings or little kids whirl around on

dizzily. Rock walls carved with mantra and images of saints, stretching along the traveller's route for miles; creek-bottom rocks hewn with "Om Mani Padme Hum," their glacial run-off carrying the message wherever sentient beings stoop to drink—to trees, to grasses, to yak & goat, Tibetan & Chinese people. It is one of the world's most civil visions, put into daily practice.

At our present historical juncture, the Tibetan understanding of universal comraderie seems indispensible to that patchwork-quilt legacy of Who-We-Will-Become. While the twilight skies of late Capitalism and bankrupt Communism lower, we are just beginning with great difficulty to envision what might lie beyond. This music, sung for centuries on high lonely rocks, is the voice of the planet singing. It may sound like the past but it's the future.

—15 November 1987

—Andrew Schelling

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

The following is a late response to the survey in House of "K" number 7.

what opens out
discloses
is revealed as the total negation, total relation, relation of the total of totalities, the complete opening of all ones into all others, the flooding of the entirety of fields with the totality of all possible articulations. The resultant could be said to

be an articulated field, completely overdetermined, in which each and every subsection (point/area) would bear (reveal) relations with each and every other subsection (point/area). This is to say that each subsection would contain the totality (of points of view of all other subsections), in a manner analogous to the notion of white light as the presence of the total spectrum of visible light. Such completely overdetermined articulations might not in all (or in any) cases appear articulate. (articulated light.)

all possibilities become transparent to each other: distinctions melt and are maintained: difference and identity fuse

—John Byrum

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE

Known as the Vidyadhara (Tamer of wild beings) Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the eleventh Trungmase tulku passed into parinirvana on April 4th at 8:05 pm in Halifax, Canada.

One of the most highly accomplished meditation masters of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhists, Trungpa Rinpoche came to teach in America in 1970 and established Karmê-Choling in Vermont, Karma Dzong in Colorado and many other meditation centers both here and in Europe and in Canada. He established Shambhala Training, a secular contemplative discipline first realized and taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. He also established the Naropa Institute, colleges guided by his secular Nalanda Foundation. These centers and schools and

his many writings express and elucidate the present moment freshness of the Buddhist traditions.

Trungpa Rinpoche chose a man from New Jersey as his dharma heir: Osel Tendzin aka Thomas Rich. Rinpoche leaves his wife, Lady Diana Mukpo and five sons and thousands of disciples. There is no doubt that Rinpoche's compassionate brilliant activity will continue and flourish. Accomplished in the fine and practical arts he published two books of poetry: Mudra (o. p.) and First Thought (Shambhala Publications).

Cremation will be at Karme Choling, May 26th 1987.

This is written w/ aching hand and joyous heart by the unknown woman disciple Tharpa Chotso Chime Lhamo, Barbara Moraff on 4 May 1987 in Strafford, Vermont.

May the sun of his rebirth quickly dawn.

CHARLES LUDLUM, 1943-1987

I always thought Charles Ludlum would be there. It hardly seems possible that there will not be a new show at his Ridiculous Theatrical Company theatre. Located on Sheridan Square in New York's lower West Side, the theatre itself, like the plays staged in it, was unique. Literally underground, in a dingy, gaudy grotto that seemed grotesquely psychedelic, it was one man's creation. And there every season his nature

would shine in one or maybe two new plays. Lately Ludlum had been on a roll: Camille, The Mystery of Irma Vep, The Artificial Jungle. All were hits. Only Salambo seemed to miss. A Pure Piece of Escapism (about Harry Houdini) was to be next. Now there is a silence in the New York City of the mind.

Trenchant and hilarious, his plays combined an utter ridiculousness of story with an intense theatricality. The madcap beauties of his plays were the workings of the theatre itself: the lightening costume changes of Irma Vep, the bright piranhas of The Artificial Jungle that followed the actors hungrily. They seemed to make fun of everything and they were great fun to see. Yet the passion of these characters, locked in their silliness as in the genres that defined them, and the zest of their situations, of the writing itself, made them interesting and familiar, not trivial. The vision of Ethyl Eichelberger, alone and paralyzed at the end of The Artificial Jungle, was bleak and compelling.

Ludlum was one of America's theatrical masters. His theatre was also triumphantly gay. The complex ironies of gay humor are also the strategies devised by a people who can "pass" as long as they deny the nature of their desires. His plays affirm the passionate nature of life in the slapstick camp of drag theatre. His art was an art of parody but also an art of deep affection. When Ludlum's hairy-chested Camille breathes her last, the audience laughs, but it is genuinely touched. The impossibility and necessity of what is human is revealed in the absurd pathos of that moment, onstage and in ourselves.

This is a time when comedy's message of survival is especially needed, especially for gay people, whose world has grown harsh with death. And now Charles Ludlum himself is dead of AIDS. When someone is flourishing in midcareer, our own imaginations fill in the happy productions we would like to see. Such a person fills the future with possibility. With such a

person go our dreams. 1943-1987. Rest in peace.

—Alexander Smith

ALEX SMITH

Alex Smith died of AIDS on October 3rd this year, not long after writing his notice of Charles Ludlum's death.

Much, though not all, of his poetry is still unpublished—books and xeroxes including The Snets, Enigma Variations (after Elgar, before Berkson), Colonizing the Red Planet, and The Four Seasons. The writing is sharp and elegant, as he always was.

He was a wonderfully determined man, full of thought, and a great wit. His conversation was probably the most winning I will experience. He savored ordinary aspects of living as though life itself might be a fetish—dissecting a strawberry tart with the same amazement he might experience separating out the argument of the sextet in Rossini's Voyage to Rheims. What he loved was that such a beautiful to-do could be made over a hat.

His interest hardly ever flagged, not even when he grew tired. He looked and marvelled at his nurses to the end, until it was time to dismiss them all.

We give away our lives thinking too much and too little, long before the painful ceremony of leaving. But absence equals out to presence. And, as Baudelaire said of Aloysius Bertrand, has not a man known to you, me, and a few of our friends the right to be called famous? Besides, he wrote the book on Frank O'Hara. Alex wrote the book on a lot of things. Nobody else could wear his shoes, because he wore them so absolutely himself.

—Stephen Rodefer
11/20/1987

WALLS

They stand among us every day in every setting. To the lonely, like a shifting mass, they may creep. Hauntingly, in and out of place, before the eyes.

Walls are avoided, skirted, painted and decorated.

Walls are sometimes hollow, with a sturdy crust on either side. A wall may be solidly structured through and through. May be brick, or cinderblock. Regardless of the construction, the fact is, walls exist, and they're almost every place.

People lock themselves behind walls, for within may exist privacy. Up until somewhat recently, WALLS have served a limited purpose. Think of it. The most common hardened surface besides paved ground or cement ready to be violated by some clever mind. Not with spray paint mind you. Any stupid idiot can learn to work a can of spray paint.

WHO KNOWS

It could have been some old, forgotten guy, many moons ago, who might've thought of a straight-on assault at a harsh, 90° transition. A solid wall. Thought of, conceived, tried, but never completely executed. A shelved thought?

TODAY

The sacerdotal sanctuary of the wall has been assaulted, challenged, abused, violated and conquered by a select and creative personnel. They are bent on mastering their environment, skating everything in sight. Ripping it up.

Some might recall the days when a backyard pool used to be the big thing. A left hand or right hand kidney was the equivalent of heaven. A skate soldier of the day would push off from the shallow end with enough speed to maybe try something on the little vertical two-foot high, maybe ten-inch (or less) transitioned wall. A whippersnapper frontside or backside grind, pulled off then abandoned in thought. A crescendo.

"Whoa," someone might've said.

The shallow end wasn't where the mind was. The conscious was in the deep end. On the blue tile. Coping. Grinds. The rock 'n roll. The air. The multiple trick run.

For some reason, the minimal transitioned fluke assaults were purveyed with less than a grain of salt. Not given much thought. A fleeting gas never pursued for more than the fragment of the moment. An unknown, new beginning takes silent root.

BUT IMAGINE

Another place, another circumstance, another topography, another attitude. An inspired individual, for a lack of anything better to do, has leaned a small piece of plywood up against a building. Insta-ramp, minor transition. Before long, navigating vertical in increments of feet is accomplished with an impressive percentage of completion.

"Am I the only one doing this?"

— M. Fo" Che

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