

# L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

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APRIL 1978

## WRITING DEGREE ZERO

For modern poetry, since it must be distinguished from classical poetry and from any type of prose, destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leaves standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality. The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an inflexion which lasts only to present the Word. Connections are not properly speaking abolished, they are merely reserved areas, a parody of themselves, and this void is necessary for the density of the Word to rise out of a magic vacuum, like a sound and a sign devoid of background, like 'fury and mystery'.

In classical speech, connections lead the word on, and at once carry it towards a meaning which is an ever-deferred project; in modern poetry, connections are only an extension of the word, it is the Word which is 'the dwelling place', it is rooted like a fons et origo in the prosody of functions, which are perceived but unreal. Here, connections only fascinate, and it is the Word which gratifies and fulfills like the sudden revelation of a truth.... Fixed connections being abolished, the word is left only with a vertical project, it is like a monolith, or a pillar which plunges into a totality of meanings, reflexes and recollections: it is a sign which stands. The poetic word is here an act without immediate past, without environment, and which holds forth only the dense shadow of reflexes from all sources which are associated with it. Thus under each Word in modern poetry there lies a sort of existential geology, in which is gathered the total content of the Name, instead of a chosen content as in classical prose and poetry. The Word is no longer guided in advance by the general intention of a socialized discourse; the consumer of poetry, deprived of the guide of selective connections, encounters the Word frontally, and receives it as an absolute quantity, accompanied by all its possible associations. The Word, here, in encyclopaedic, it contains simultaneously all the acceptations from which a relational discourse might have required it to choose. It therefore achieves a state which is possible only in the dictionary or in



poetry--places where the noun can live without its article--and is reduced to a sort of zero degree, pregnant with all past and future specifications. The word here has a generic form; it is a category. Each poetic word is thus an unexpected object, a Pandora's box from which fly out all the potentialities of language; it is therefore produced and consumed with a peculiar curiosity, a kind of sacred relish.... It initiates a discourse full of gaps and full of lights, filled with absences and overnourishing signs, without foresight or stability of intention, and thereby so opposed to the social function of language that merely to have recourse to a discontinuous speech is to open the door to all that stands above Nature.

ROLAND BARTHES

(from Roland Barthes' essay Writing Degree Zero, which has just become available again in paperback in a reissue by Hill & Wang, at \$2.95)

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### WATTEN

#### PERELMAN ON WATTEN

All that is objective call nature, all that is subjective call self. Example: seeing wrecking ball moving through stucco walls hurts to watch. Both conceptions are in necessary antithesis. Dream last night that I had to fuck the fat lady. Intelligence is conceived as exclusively representative, nature as exclusively represented. He wants to get in. Tearing the building apart, that's what it takes to do this. The one is conscious, the other without consciousness. Dreams are our life, which we will never be able to penetrate. During all acts of knowledge there is required a reciprocal concurrence of the conscious being with what in itself is unconscious. Thinking in clusters, the group of scholars gathered around the hole.

It is contradictory to require any other self than the identity of object and of representation. Therefore, in all the objects it sees, the spirit views only itself. If this could be proved, the immediate reality of all intuitive knowledge would be assured. A spirit may become its own object. It must therefore be an act; for every object is, as an object, dead, fixed, incapable in itself of any action, and necessarily finite. Again the spirit (originally the identity of object and subject) must in some sense dissolve this identity, in order to be conscious of it.



The line is a crux  
Until it is mutual  
were sounds to him neither meant...  
Black continual circle or ring  
of air dissolves  
speaking the dissolution.

Thought is a torrent, the assumption of self is thick, hardened to glass. Any person's report available. Any person is the image of what he sees. The streetlights begin to come on, the lights on the signs. The eye cannot stand what is not complete. So it tries to destroy what it sees. The arm is reaching for the glass, the eye blocks out the glass.

Olson wanted to let the dream back in. Okay. There is no difference between waking and sleeping. That sentence makes even more sense when you're asleep. A century can thus be condensed into a collective mask. The outer man is attached to a man inside. The poetics of the situation are beginning to be found out. Forget sleep / and be there.

Wherein does the realism of mankind consist? In the assertion that there exists a something without, which occasions the objects of perception?

Streets moving away on all sides: they are there because he says so, and that is the voice.

Fancy, engendered in the eyes, fed, and dies. Ring fancy's knell. Fixities and definites, a desire to recombine perpetuates nothing. Even so / the clouds played the brain / the eyes. One light shines from / the house within, recording.

A man walks into a large room. The universe expands. The seriousness of the problem deepens as one becomes aware of it. The rooms are filled with the arguments of philosophic schools. When he has heard just one word of their discourse, he understands everything they intend to say. A system of connected lines, he shudders at their approach.

I hope no one is counting on language-centered to be a very helpful term. To utter a single word changes all we know. The sentences come from nowhere. This situation cannot be misinterpreted. I found my new life to be hard, constant attention, but a great joy. As if I had said / this, everyone knew exactly / what I meant.

The words in this piece are mostly from Barrett Watten's work. The excerpts are often accurate. Many of the rest come from Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, chapters 12 & 13, which distinguish imagination from fancy. C's quotes are quite shortened.

BOB PERELMAN



## NOTE

The problem is, does this person, in what is merely adaptation to his environment, develop a language we can identify as our own. The problem of translation. Referents drop away. Not to circumvent identity structure, an all-over form. Rather that form is built back in. Any element implies a whole. A bean that explodes its meaning, small beans into large clouds. A monument is equally a miniature. Isn't the gas bill particular, Joseph Stalin. A monument is merely a moment in time, the next world in line is miniature. Ideas become things, the lore of the antipoetic. Step back from this picture in order to see it. That's where he can't find any area attention's restricted to. The scale pops endlessly in and out of line. A voice, but, choice. Scales thinking most to that point.

"The world we seek is white." Is color a special section of vocabulary, unlike any other. Stepping back from, abstraction as white. Equally specific, the white page. The white paint of turbulence, atmospheric pressure up. Is X, the next word. So white conveys a distance, up front, getting on to the next thing. Taking attributes from descriptive, relational, intentional language (any difference?) to make statement. A logic is developed, way back in the brain. The voice becomes distinct in the values of the words. A language as a whole modified through that voice, values established to a greater degree. White with its element of death. So he remembers the penetration of unresolved metallic hum. Throughout his physical body, a tone. Magnetized through a ring of all experience, the word becoming an act.

"A poem can be a stretch of thinking." At the point where words are formed, back in the brain. Not polyform, static, branching, kicking unless the words say so. Values decided at the source, and of necessity, through the form of writing. The line in verse operates as syntax, an entire poem as an arena or duration in which to work. One can now find he needs must bear down on words, one at a time. But prose must be satisfied first (in this gestalt, deciding to be a poet). Prose as an equivalence to state, a state of mind. A line of thought in the environment of many others. The opposition only serves to heighten interest. The copula leads to automatism, a dialectic of the unreleased. The scale expands or contracts, within the surrounding unknown. Negative capability. But power is more in the line, the power to get things done. A stretch of thinking, thinking syntax, to participate in the making of words. The categories all bear on reconciliation between logic and the physical fact. Into language, poem line prose word. A separation clears the air, a lot more needs to be done. I think an act allowing itself, grabs me back in.

To build the form back in, increase emphasis. That would be logically consistent. The grounds of that logic are greater than the decision to employ it. The specialized vocabulary is part of any



language as a whole. There's something in the air, wanting to complete itself, unattached. Verbs eat into walls, nouns in a ring consume themselves. If at some point language walked in the open door, we would show it some respect. Our response would be more immediate than to use it as a sign. A sign of social respectability, or connections to the art world. So we respect language by not being content to operate in any one part of it. It's greater than we are. This has implications for the form. That sense is larger than one can say.

BARRETT WATTEN

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Opera Works (1975; Big Sky; available from Serendipity, 1790 Shattuck, Berkeley, CA 94709, \$2.50). Decay (1977; This Press, 326 Connecticut, San Francisco, CA 94107, \$1).

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## HEISSENBÜTTEL

Helmut Heissenbuttel, Novel; Schematic Definition of Tradition; The Dilemma of Being High and Dry. (1977; Diana's BiMonthly Press; translated by Rosmarie Waldrop. \$1 each; \$2.50/set)

Diana's BiMonthly has recently published 3 pamphlets by Helmut Heissenbuttel which indicate a sophisticated sensibility on the part of this German poet towards issues of mounting interest in American poetics. Heissenbuttel's work is solidly based in a concept of literature as phenomena and each of these works attempts to explore a different domain of linguistic qualities and precepts through an indigenous form.

The most readily accessible of the three is *Novel*, a sequence of 21 short statements which explore, individually and collectively, the properties of the conventional novel. The piece evolves in a triangular form, starting from the apex in the first poem "I'm a story," and widening in the second "I'm a story of someone." and still wider in the third "Someone whom I'm a story of is the story I am. I'm someone who's a story." This inversion and rearrangement of words in a given line is a common form in all three poems, leading to a density of language through regenerative repetition. The effect of these and other structural devices is to give the poem a definite worldly presence of its own, a concern which appears throughout all Heissenbuttel's work.



As the title suggests, *Schematic Definition of Tradition* is an attempt to arrive at a fixed systemization of terms by which a given phenomenon can be measured. It is easy to see the influence of Stein and Wittgenstein in the way Heissenbuttel has limited his field to the appearance of a language game. Yet he has gone beyond the ideas of these two catalytic figures to create an extraordinarily compressed work concerned with the difficulty of fixed logic in a perceptual system ridden with contingencies. The entire poem is an attempt to overcome its own spiralling momentum toward the fixity of definition. For example: "even when they had been there there had already been more of those who hadn't been there than of those who had been there as long as any who had been there could remember there had been less of those who had been there than of those who hadn't." A certain futility is implied here and a certain disenchantment with the language as a vehicle for getting anywhere is evident.

*The Dilemma of Being High and Dry* is the most playful of the three pamphlets, and Heissenbuttel seems a master of play in writing. A prose poem in five stanzas, this piece is more referential in its use of images and its superficial appearance as a character description, though again the essential experience lies in the composition and language. The entire poem is an improvisation on the aphorism "high and dry," with the sense of an exquisite elliptical curve, turning simultaneously into itself and yet constantly expanding. The work finds its success in the establishment of a surface tension between referential words (nouns) and contextual words (prepositions, articles, conjunctions) which interact in a syntax that clarifies itself through contiguity, without ever defining itself completely.

A key to *Dilemma*, and perhaps all these poems lies in the end of the fourth stanza: "...how it has happened to him and others too namely to live in a world that you don't see as it is but through who knows what imaginings". By ritualizing the use of contextual language, with or without referents, he creates a poetry on the plane of presence, structure and event, an exceptional accomplishment.

CRAIG WATSON

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## PURE STEALING

(The following text is taken from a journal work by Ed Friedman. His recent play/performance piece, La Chinoiserie, also deals with the possibilities of the decorative in writing)

what i really became interested in was atmosphere. writing and performance as atmosphere. not so much that we all exist in a particular



community accommodating to each other's work. not like died to match curtains and wall to wall carpeting. more the possibility with language of there being a linear or single source of atmosphere and it can be quite minimal actually like a small perfume atomizer.

this is why it's hard to argue about atmosphere. old atmosphere is the only kind that can be recognized otherwise you are remembering details. detectives make old atmosphere new if they can by remembering details. i'm only talking about stories. you wouldn't talk about stale details. any real details are always interesting if they can be separated from atmosphere. this is why no one should like capitalism. this is why interior details are always most gratifying. it's never easy to really find them. or as facile as it seems finding one or two through combinations of having good memories. leaving it alone for now.

which is how i let too many thoughts go by unchecked. you have to remember all the time. if you spend the time to remember then you won't think so much about what you've already remembered and know more. i know this is true.

it's my only way of knowing really. telling about it in as much detail as possible isn't the same thing as remembering but is how you know something new.

which is how i'm gonna tell it later anyhow like john's son by jean or ed's son by lewis. everyone didn't follow the taxis white streak but that was really telling the old story and why you wouldn't remember at the same time you think so clearly that you feel you get to own certain words or that others own them for you.

i listen very closely to people who give precise physical descriptions of objects. who use a precise word.

i remember the time that lenny used the word sprockets to describe the square holes that run along the edges of a roll of 35 mm. film.

i remember the time that brad was looking at the painting by klimt in my kitchen and described the jaw of the woman in the picture as being square.

i remember bob's description of the two doilies on the poiret butterfly hat as being antimecassars crotched in a pineapple stitch.

i remember the time bernadette described the way i said "hi" on the telephone as being laconic.

any time i use any of these words, laconic, square-jawed, sprockets, or antemecassars--i become lenny, brad, bob, or bernadette. but only when i'm alone.

yesterday laura used the word "puce" which she said was worse than the chalky magenta color used in the 17th century english porcelain. there are no words to describe the way one perceives in conglomerate images. for example, i see the entire cactus garden in a single glance. several hundred species of cactus at once, but if i want you to see it



too through my description, this is where time must proceed as atmosphere because i have to describe the garden as a series of particular species and placements of cactus.

so we at last forcibly take these turns together when they arrive too shortly at sameness. secret blues and occasionally pink or old flame. appear. putting in an appearance. showing up. making an appearance. taking a cameo role. all of the methods of memorizing tides instead of waves.

making an outline of history and homes by the sea. too much ocean to recognize the bluffs on an overcast day. taking care not to fog over or mist delay.

always making sure not to be jealous or anciently concerned with detail. rest as sure as salinated water cannot be as cool as sea. that is why what else is in sea. nobody knows. nobody knows this is getting much too hard to stop memorizing stopping. why not memorize hart crane instead.

somebody knows how noticing details leads to learning if you follow television elevating sleep which is how i mistake hart crane for walt whitman on the subway. i get relaxed enough to make mistakes. slowly as cameos appear in relief of glancing, nobody retires again and i memorize phone conversations. trying not to memorize boring conversation slowly.

ED FRIEDMAN

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### THREE "NEW" POETS

Donald Quatrale, Genitals (1977; \$2 from Bosom Press, 17 Hemenway St., Boston, MA 02115), and The Factory Dances (1977; \$4 from The Four Zoas Press, RFD, Ware, MA 01082).

Diane Ward, Trop-i-dom (1977, Jawbone; \$2 from Folio Books, 2000 P St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036).

Carole Korzeniewsky, Breastwork (1977; \$1.50 from Korzeniewsky, 11 East 7th St., N.Y., N.Y. 10003).

1.

Donald Quatrale's *Genitals* instigated this piece. His 2nd book. His 1st engagingly well-focused: *The Factory Dances*. *Genitals* has more poems, so peaks & ebbs more pronounced and have a wider context as basis of support and/or contrast. Not necessarily erotic or sexual, rarely even sensual, but some attention to physical properties, descriptive qualities. The technique mainly assemblage (which reminded me of the other 2 poets --



what they have in common is the ease and looseness with which they approach this way of structuring a poem -- in "my generation" only the W.C. Williams mode afforded my contemporaries the same casual, easy grace and good feelings -- whereas assemblage as such created often self-righteously & therefore often stiff poetry-as-work ethic). Quatrone perhaps most of these 3 in need of a sharp editorial sense to make poem do better what it does and the poet intended, without silly self-indulgence to ego-cleverness. But he has a kind of elan about the presentation of his voice which backed by the rhythmic strength of the construction alone creates a movement hard to resist & which gives me pleasure (and I still like to get pleasure from my reading no matter how it's generated or what the other effects

2.

and it was a pleasure to read Diane Ward's *Trop-i-dom*. Also a 2nd book (unless there's more); the 1st a collection of 1 poem *On Duke Ellington's Birthday*, which displayed truly down to earth wit (in 50s hip jargon "down" was a descriptive term, usually complimentary, for anyone or thing truly down to earth as opposed to 60s hippy jargon when it became a noun to describe a state of being not all that desirable, etc.). *On Duke* also showcased Ward's fine ear for the musical basis of the language when we base the flow of it on the extension of the breath. She could be honoring, more subtly, "ol' blue eyes." Sinatra's mastering of extended phrasing, learned from watching one of the Dorsey's (can't remember which is which) play, was one of his distinguishing features as "vocalist." Stringing phrases or vowels together for an extended musical space was a puzzle Dorsey helped explain by teaching him to inhale ever so slightly through the side of the mouth, where the lips join, just the least opening and the most minimal intake could add moments as though all one exhalation. Ward approximates that in *On Duke*, a string of phrases describing activities & gestures of the day in her life & lives of the world. It doesn't compete with the extended sentence (of say Kerouac, whose inspiration was also jazz soloists who "blew" long "crazy" riffs with what seemed like one breath) because her phrases are really sentences only connected in rhythm & logical continuity by choice of words that leaves no doubt where they're going making them seem dependent on what follows creating the phraselike effect. In *Trop-i-dom* the intention seems altogether different. No pretensions to glib detachment from aesthetic concerns mar either, but *Trop* achieves the impact of a declaration in control of rhythm alone. It's poetry because it sounds like poetry in my brain when I read it, falling under the spell of its movement & rhythms unreproducible in musical terms on any instrument but especially the voice; their music is poetry (i.e. they couldn't be translated into the post-Patti Smith fashion of "the beat" as foundation for rhythmic extension. They are instead based solidly on syntactical



relationships that only work when they make the reader/audience concentrate on the language, not the music). The language is the music.

3.

Not as compellingly "musical" is Carole Korzeniowsky's *Breastwork*, a tour de force that is a 1st book. These rhythms are based on more familiar prose & conversational structures. The basic unit is the sentence, not the phrase or as phrase. But the relationship of the sentences is intended to draw us into poetic concerns for the language as other than prosaic or logic ridden. Yet, in the end, this work seems most dependent on logic to work, and it does work, hard & well. (The other 2 poets use the audience's capacity or potential to "intuit" meaning, in ways similar to those we use to intuit knowledge from our surroundings & experiences -- no neon morals and/or conclusions flash on and off in the brain, just accumulation of sensory and/or conceptual data leads to the evolution of conclusive ideas about what it all is & can mean to/for us. *Breastwork* meanwhile seems to depend on a more contrived approach to gaining knowledge, one traditionally misconstrued as the traditional, main, or only way. In other words it moves as if teaching us something that can be taught by the very force of the continuous logic of the presentation of related ideas through the accuracy of referential terminology. While "in fact" it totally disengages the continuity of logical structures -- but in that continuity's terms, so we are left feeling as though we've been introduced to an area of "knowledge" we hadn't known before about a subject matter we had. The concepts are "abstract" in their purity as much as any in "new" music: not simple or straightforward as they appear but only structured as conclusively step-by-step directional and conclusory. I mean she tells us information while recreating a poetic kind of pleasure in the experiencing of it, that pleasure is often the sustenance of language.

MICHAEL LALLY

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## BREASTWORK

This book is the proposition of an exactly objective perceptive machine & becomes, thru just this fact, exactly subjective: Necker's cube, transcendence. A clear formulation of what in reality confronts any attempt to write. The key term is LUDEN (inter-, a- -ed): "In the interlude of bed and board..." = language pointing to the entire universe of meaning, wch is always present in the phenomena at (in) hand, if only we see it. The most descriptive sentences (wch both present the concept of knowledge as the field of vision seen almost as page, canvas or screen, what Derrida means by writing-as-such) are the finest. Courage admits



the possibility of such language: the trick of our time (since Flaubert) has been to leave the whole implicit, not from stylization but fear, inability to grasp the larger unity wch at the same moment announces its own negation. Consider this in relation to McClure: all there written (say, "The Skull," his best piece) trumpets the impulse imPULSE to arTICulate, a writing wch takes place within the body & prior to the text. Wch is why his work reads more like a trace or map of a poem. The next key term in *Breastwork* is blurred (wch is connected to the word detected, a 3rd key): it conceals much information. In just wch way are the words blurred? Is it that, overlaying one another, that tapestry of sound in wch phoneme over phoneme buries the morphemic, that overdetermination of data wch is the constant fact: we have to detect our lives.

*(revised from a letter to Carole Korzeniewsky, on Breastwork)*

RON SILLIMAN

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

... I see the Eigner as in some respects the christening--the serendipity of relationship I take as key--& that, however manipulated the purpose, it remains arrogation to wear credit for the connections mind affixes, skims. When Kit Robinson speaks "a generosity in this way of taking things in" he speaks to the shift--the explorations of "making be."

I am most in sympathy with Silliman's reference to the 'pure light' passing thru the 2-way mirror. This has been the turning of my most recent work and co-incided with Higgins' sense of poem as charm. There is that element of spirit-magic as one rides the inchoate, meaning the pro-vision at the turns (that a spectrum from willful to random remains the mind's purview--the witch-stitchery. What brings us together, however prominent language concerns, is the sense, the hunger for 'present-ation'--we are alchemists all of the velocities of light spun, turned, ricochet'd on all the analogous surfaces, depths and passages of mind.

"All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, together with all the wriggling things possessed of life, share ... the nature is Mind; Mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the Dharma... Let a tacit understanding be all!... To mistake materials surrounding for Mind is to mistake a thief for your son."

It is just that activity here called tacit that you would gather into vision. I agree completely that, finally, "It's the vision that matters, the real & worked out clarity of vision." ...

JOHN PERLMAN



## THE TELLING

Laura (Riding) Jackson, The Telling (1972; Harper & Row, o.p.)

For what Laura (Riding) Jackson has had to tell, poetry is insufficient. "Deficient," she insists; *The Telling* her first major work after renouncing poetry in 1938 as being linguistically incapable of truth telling. For writers serious about the possibilities of poetry it has been difficult to react; that Jackson intends this difficulty is evident from her vehement refusals to allow her views to be taken as the basis of a new way--a "medicine"--for poetry.

There is an unsympathy--a quarrelsomeness at times--that runs through *The Telling*, and is accentuated in some of the book's appended material. This is not a quarrelsomeness for its own sake, but the result of the prophetic--sometimes oracular--mode Jackson has chosen to write in: "preachment". There are few styles of, to her, contemporary avoidance that escape censure--from rock music and left politics to all manner of "professional" thought. *The Telling*, indeed, echoes the critique of Rousseau's *First Discourse*--that 'art' and 'intellect' have replaced 'virtue'. Jackson decries the obsession with doctrines, the new, success in the place of "articulating the human reality with truth"; it is professional learning--e.g., the poetic craft, specialized poetic form itself--that interposes itself between us and the truth of the mutuality of our one being.

Her insistence in *The Telling* is that in speaking it is possible to tell one another of that in which we each are not another--the 'Before' that is in the 'Now', spoken as 'Subject' to all 'Subjects'. Of the many things that prevent this truth telling of ourselves is the self satisfaction of carving out a voice that is distinct, actualized by its difference. "Telling differently for the triumph of difference, and not for truth's sake." Poetry dwells on the description of the distance, whose extolling, it is imagined, is a penetration into the deepest roots of humanness. This dwelling in the less-than, on the forms of our present lives, is a diversion from the fact of our "self-sameness in Being".

Since it creates a "literary reality", poetry is limited by its craft. "The liberty of word that poetry confers is poetry's technique not truths." Jackson's mode of writing in *The Telling* is able--unlike poetry, she says--to have a place for the reader in it: a speaking ideal of "normal" diction, one speaking to another of the mutualness of both, all, in being ("a method of our speaking, each, our All.") Each section of *The Telling* is--this is my experience of it--the enunciation of a shared fact; I find myself in it not in the sense of relation of personality (foibles, longing, &c) but ontologically, by the fact of my human being. (And yet



in her sternness and insistence on this 'ultimate' seeing, her rebukes of all our human failings, perhaps too much--this 'all'--is asked of us--does not her very unsympathy shut-out?--for there is connection also in the recognition and acknowledging of such failings in our fellow human beings.) Although Jackson's prophecy/pretension does not allow her to admit any predecessors in this self-actualizing of words--she says there are none, that the personal concreteness of *The Telling* is diverted by such comparisons--still, I thought of Dickinson (e.g., "The world is not conclusion"), of Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart and Works of Love*, of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (which, like *The Telling*, is a critique/renunciation of an earlier work and method), of Oppen (not 'gesture' but the 'actual' "which is ourselves"), of Ashbery's recitals. Of *Walden*: "There are words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning."

In the supplemental material to *The Telling*, Jackson cautions against confusing endings for completeness. This work, dedicated itself to self-completeness, brings to completeness the promise of Laura Riding's poetry. The turning required for this completeness is, perhaps, an unexpected one; its faithfulness to itself--to language, to "us"--is manifest. "And the tale is no more of the going: no more a poet's tale of going false-like to a seeing. The tale is of a seeing true-like to a knowing."

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

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#### NOTES ON MICHAEL PALMER'S *WITHOUT MUSIC*

Michael Palmer, *Without Music* (1977; \$4 from Black Sparrow Press, Box 3993, Santa Barbara, CA 93105)

*Without Music* is an advance over Michael Palmer's previous books because it achieves a more total effect. A presence realized through an integrated design, an architecture. Yet this is a tentative architecture, perhaps a scaffolding the height and shape of which suggests the building we take to be there but perceive in glimpses through the scaffolding and construct in our imaginations.

Nowhere is it written that books of poetry must have an order beyond what the table of contents presents. American poets from Whitman through Pound to Olson, Spicer and beyond have sought an order, a form, that will carry all the poet has to say. Palmer's concern may be seen as similar



but in a significant way (or he may be more intense about it) he diverges. His poems (the parts) are to the book (the whole) as the lines of each poem are to the poem.

"You can never step in the same cloud twice (in the same song twice)"

Palmer seeks to permit the poem to connect as many diverse elements as possible - Polysynthesis - to propose rather than dictate so that each poem suggests something beyond itself. "Content," as de Kooning said, "is a slippery glimpse."

The poems are relentless but not predictable. They are tense but sturdy. Not about to crack.

...

Without music. Acapella. For the past four years Palmer has been making dances in collaboration with the dancer Margaret Jenkins. His words - her choreography. Without music? Palmer's music, his "noise" is dry, comes from the throat:

'Only the birds' she said

'clearing their throats'

The tone has a precise edge to it. Crisp, it seems hardly to vary, but its accuracy is telling. Without music, but the book returns again and again to songs and dances. A tone that is toneless and will not draw attention to itself, will not overwhelm the song.

"the song / of the jungle partridge // is the purest /  
something like a flute / with no tones at all."

...

"the figure unconscious in the leather chair"

"A sleeper wakes up but not too much / enough for an alphabet"

"complex sleep"

Palmer works the image of sleep, the figure of a sleeper "awake and fearing sleep," awake and sleeping, "asleep between concertos" and "sleeping among stones" into the book's larger design.

Sleep - Between speech and dreams?

Between one language and another?

Although this is the kind of strand not present in Palmer's earlier work, or not so developed, the image does not dominate, does not articulate a



theme. Stones also recur. And the word alphabet. Colors or the words for colors are less prominent in *Without Music*, but the fascination with numbers persists. 1s, ones, three, fives, six, eleven and 14. Image is secondary. The language, sentences not phrases, is primary. Language disturbed so that unlikely combinations provoke new responses, and there is both beauty and mystery in the meanings that insist themselves.

...

Several times while reading *Without Music* I laughed out loud. Palmer's humor, more in evidence than before, is equal parts matter-of-fact deadpan and chagrin:

"A hamburger and sand up your ass / is more like it"

...

A way into *Without Music* is through the back door, the book's final poem "The Meadow" dedicated to Robert Duncan in which Palmer quotes the phrase "folded in all thought" from "Often I Am Permitted To Return To A Meadow" the first poem in Duncan's *The Opening of the Field*. Duncan's poem thus recalled supplies this stanza to illuminate Palmer's work:

"She is Queen Under The Hill

whose hosts are a disturbance of words within words  
that is a field folded."

WILLIAM CORBETT

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

..... I'm sending this as a reaction to the first issue. As I remember, the main thing was information. If that is the accepted criterion, I find most of it an out & out failure. Most of it (the reviews) is just too self-conscious, too cute to be of use. Many of the reviewers seem to feel an obligation to turn the review into a performance as near an "original work" as possible. The result is akin to what happens when the old "new criticism" heavy weights go to work on something: whatever it was, novel or poem, becomes just something, the floor allowing them to do their dance. I see no essential difference between what they did and what many of your contributors do: make the work of others the occasion for their own performance. Why pretend to call them reviews at all? "Variations On A Theme Suggested By X" would be more honest & accurate.

I find this especially harmful with small press publications. It's



not unusual for even a commercial press book of poems to be out a year without being reviewed once anywhere. The odds jump for small presses. Given that, I find it nearly criminal to so grandstand that a reader can have little or no conception of what the work is like.... There may be a place for Barthes' choreography du text (which I doubt), but surely it comes well after the basic identity of the text has been established.... It is a disservice to the writers involved. & if you say after all everybody knows everybody else, well I ask you!

JOHN TAGGART

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## PHOTOGRAMS

"The illiterates of the future will be ignorant of camera and pen alike." -- Laszlo Moholy-Nagy

"The photogram, or cameraless record of forms produced by light, which embodies the unique nature of the photographic process, is the real key to photography. It allows us to capture the patterned interplay of light on a sheet of sensitized paper without recourse to any apparatus. The photogram opens up perspectives of a hitherto wholly unknown morphosis governed by optical laws peculiar to itself. It is the most completely dematerialized medium that the new vision commands."

-- Moholy-Nagy, 1932

Photography was for a time considered only a mechanical means of recording and documenting. While this quality of photography is widely held to have released painters from realistic depiction, the photogram represents the melding, rather than the separation, of the two traditions. The chief proponents and discoverers of the photogram, Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy, both turned from painting to photography and the discovery of the photogrammic technique (c. 1920-1922). These two pioneers, bringing to photography painterly concerns, questioned the purely documentary nature of photography. As Brecht wrote, "Less than ever does a simple reproduction of reality express something about reality." Photograms combine the directness inherent in the application of paint to canvas with the basic characteristics of the photo-process: light and the tones produced on light-sensitive paper. With photograms the question of taking pictures does not arise: the whole process can be confined to the darkroom.

Photograms are a form of bricollage. Bits of scraps, cotton, buttons, etc.,--materials "ready to hand"--are collaged together and transformed with the product often having no outward relationship to the elements that formed it. In the darkroom these captured images live. What



remains on the paper is the residue of the objects--their shadows--the predominant effect is a lack of gravity--of lunar traces--ghosts of objects--a capturing of a fleeting imprint of light passing through an object surrounding it, transformed by it.

Cameraless pictures serve as direct light diagrams, recording the actions of light over a period of time, the motion of light in space. The photogram produces space without existing spatial structure by articulation on the plane of the paper with half-tones of black, gray and white. It is a writing and drawing with light.

The typical feature of the photogram is instability; the image can only be preserved momentarily before it changes. "The object being, for the sake of curiosity, to create a fresh problem, or to place a new obstacle in the path of light like a straw dropped across the path of an ant." (G. C. Argan) Each instance is made particular by the translucent, transparent, or opaque qualities of the objects and the angle of the light rays to the paper.

For Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy, automatic writing, Dadaist collages, Stein, Schwitters, Breton, Cubism, Surrealist writing, etc., all provided an analogy for this proposed new vision of photography. Moholy-Nagy encouraged photographers to liberate themselves from rendering and illusionism and open themselves up to synthetic composition. Light itself would function as the kind of creative agent that pigment is for the painter. "If we can see in the genuine elements of photography the self-sufficient vehicle for direct, visual impact based on the properties of the light-sensitive emulsion then we may be nearer to 'art' in the field of photography." (Moholy-Nagy).

Beaumont Newhall has written, "The photogram makers' problem has nothing to do with interpreting the world, but rather with the formation of abstractions. Objects are chosen for their light-modulating characteristics: their reality and significance disappear. The logical end point of the photogram is the reduction of photography to the light-recording property of silver salts. To the cameraman this is what Malevich's *White on White* is to the painter."

SUSAN BEE LAUFER

(Many of Moholy-Nagy's books stress the interrelationship of the visual and literary arts and the value of visual artists studying the achievements of Stein, Joyce, the constructivists, etc., particularly--Painting Photography, & Film (MIT Press, 1969) and Vision in Motion (Paul Theobald, 1947).



## THE POLITICS OF SCORING

Ernest Robson, I Only Work Here, 1975; Transwhichics, 1970; both strikingly designed by Marion Robson. \$7 each, Primary Press, Box 105, Parker Ford, PA 19457)

Robson displays a life-long work of augmenting the visual information of poetry -- more keyed to voice than visual poetry has generally been, and specified for voice in ways more akin to vocal scores than projectivism. He introduces a more diversified acoustic palette by an orthographic technique for cueing the vocalization of acoustic features -- distorting lengths of letters, spaces, differences in elevation & darkness of letters. These graphic cues ("prosodynes") match, and make writable, prosodic levels (of pitch, intensity, duration, pauses, and vowel pitch modulation within a single syllable). *unstint<sub>e</sub>d RH Y THMS and the JERKed readJ U STM<sub>E</sub>NTS* So that the semantic realm acts as one term in an equation, where the associations carried by the phonetic pattern are matched up with meanings; where neither realm is independent of the other: an emblem of an absence, a representation, a compacting, a mimesis, an index. Yet scoring of such care makes the whole project take on the appearance of an instrument, a secondhand. *to IMITATE WITH GL A SS ...*

*to SING a SYMphonizing of their MEANINGS unless IT WERE SO E MPTY*

But significance *TH I NS in periph<sub>e</sub>RIES of chill A I R .....*

What we most want to say is unheard, unvoiced, barely framed, uncueable by orthography which is an operation-symbol, like (+), (-), etc. As if the distance between word and referent, between signifier and signified, could be bridged by *LURES*. These orchestrations may *CODIFY*; but do not create, or frame, or problematicize. The stress on connecting spoken and written language, on voice, still leaves open the larger task: of voicing the world, of using words to reconstitute it or be recomposed by it and within it. As an alternative / Robson / actual themes: Depression labor, the military, psychology, furtrapping, the political unreliability of liberals; yet oversimplifications, familiar tunes & image, slogan, texts as early as 1924 right up to publication, so "Five Decades of Poetry in Four Styles." *sucCESSIONS of reCESSIONS of hoRIZONS END*

One can talk about returning to the "desubjectivized" domain of techne and instrumental action some of the vanished subjectivity. Mao even associated composition "On a blank sheet of paper... free from any mark" with political leadership and constitution. But is an appeal to subjectivity one we can valorize in a social way? Isn't it preliminary to a more basic task -- of returning to techne, to labor itself, some of the normative and conformative qualities of interaction, of community, of redeemable claims to validity and significance? So: could the emphasis



on subjectivity (on monologue, on personal and poetic eccentricity)  
possibly be a distraction from this social challenge -- composing a social  
praxis, bringing us nearer to what we prosper by?

such INDEFinite IM<sub>ages</sub> of infini<sub>te</sub> deGREES of FREEDOM .... *the giddy*

*C I R CLING IN*

Performance, and prosodynic cueing, can articulate individual  
intention. OUR intention SH A RES its CALCULATED WAYS But, between  
us, reading bodies forth a shared field: beyond distraction.

did YOU conf U SE YOUR NOISEs .... with CHOICes And choices /  
intention might be as social as consciousness and language itself, so that  
writing need not be "incompatible with rules for socializing discovery" --  
for reading is such a socializing, a reciprocity. Social Desires. The  
validity of even problematic norms could be redeemed in discourse. But  
not the old bogey of 'discourse' used as a stick to flog all 'idiosyn-  
cratic' expressionism and 'arid' conceptualism and 'dehumanized' construc-  
tivism. Instead: touch, an erotics of the text, or participation, and  
consciousness -- dialogue. We can, slowly, be stretched at the limits of  
what would constitute discourse -- by our writing, by what we are  
conscious of in writing, in language, in ...

BRUCE ANDREWS

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## DOLCH WORDS

Kit Robinson, The Dolch Stanzas (1976; \$1 from This Press, 326  
Connecticut, San Francisco, CA 94107)

Dr. Edward Dolch, dear to all reading teachers, in his class *Manual for  
Remedial Reading*, came up with a list of words, 220 words, which he  
estimated accounted for 1/2 to 3/4 of all school reading matter, words  
which by the third grade everyone is expected to recognize instantly by  
sight. Dr. Dolch, with his usual modesty, referred to these words as the  
Basic Sight Vocabulary ("which should not be used in alphabetical order  
because that arrangement gives the child a clue as to how the words begin.  
They should be printed in random order...") some 50 years having since  
passed, the good doctor's reputation in the field is secure and his name  
has been memorialized, these words are now commonly known as Dolch words.  
They are supposed to come first, the words to skip past on the way to the  
unfamiliar ones: yellow, five, our, put, well, always, those, gave, for,  
ate, pull...

together or on / right / what works there



The unexpected felicities to be met in the absence of usual contrast, in a vocabulary which is all ground, or all figure. Maybe a leveller principle at work, not that it is a question of altitude, but that the words do not need dressing, that it is not necessary to import; if, as it increasingly appears, any realm of words, technical, pyrotechnical, can be found appropriate, or appropriatable, must it not also hold that the most common, the diction's lumpenproletariat, strictly those words we know so well we hardly bother with them, usually, are as readily capable, can hold at least as much charge as the most elevated, specialized, or purportedly lyric nomenclatures.

or why think / ask / try out new hold  
if they sleep / just as off / as always  
put it to them / like this / say  
here / this want / to be clean  
open / not done / wants to know

Separating out of words, by whatever process, enjoining them to enter the poem, any sort of arrangement lying there, if it is to produce the desired, must be radically delineated--delimited (else we wld say--prose), intentions of scrutiny bring forth, what--every length or combination across the band has its resonance, its complex of value, as many and as finely tuned degrees of concern; but it seems certain vocabularies are capable of calling up wider zones of response, they may interlock into much more that is outside of them, more hookups or sprockets, or memory bits; usually these plain words are the backdrop, the links, the machinery keeping everything running; tho' through this special acquaintance--an influence unexpectedly pervasive; also known as running words, e.g. the rivers under, the underground or under the streets, what everyone is running on, what they had in them all the time, surprisingly widespread contacts, that they may be closer to that thing pertaining to reality that we are always trying to name.

it can move fast / she is said to have / seen it go once  
once and for all / by the white way / it left out

The regions of thought the short stanzas read into are often called from certain areas of human activity, primary activities, working, loving, sleeping, watching, hunting, playing; is it a property of these running words to combine in concentrations of other-resonance, the "we" is how



many more than the author, an increasingly inclusive simplicity; and like all like minded words they combine most easily with each other--already meant for combination, unchambering each other, short primary words lines stanzas... and as all colors can be mixed from red orange yellow green blue violet indigo...

then is always before / no longer / than it is round

MICHAEL GOTTLIEB

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## REPOSSESSING THE WORD

(The following is an excerpt from an "Intraview" by Steve McCaffery in the January 1978 issue of Centerfold: 320-10th St. N.W. Calgary, Canada T2N 1V8. In a related discussion, Ron Silliman brings out the relation of Marx's notion of commodity fetishism to conventional descriptive and narrative forms of writing: where the word--words--cease to be valued for what they are themselves but only for their properties as instrumentalities leading us to a world outside or beyond them, so that the words--language--disappear, become transparent, leaving us with the picture of a physical world that the reader can then consume as a commodity. ("Disappearance of the Word/Appearance of the World," 1977, One Hundred Posters issue; \$1.15 from L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E distributing service). Such a view of the role and historical functions of writing relates closely to our analysis of the capitalist social order as a whole. It is our sense that the project of poetry does not involve turning language into a commodity for consumption; instead, it involves repossessing the sign through active participation in its production.)

Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, which is to say the occultation of the human relations embedded in the labour process has been central to my own considerations of reference in language - of, in fact, a referentially based language, in general - and to certain "fetishistic" notions within the relationship of audience and performer. Reference in language is a strategy of promise and postponement; it's the thing that language never is, never can be, but to which language is always moving. This linguistic promise that the signified gives of something beyond language i've come to feel as being central to capitalism (the fetish of the commodity) and derived from an earlier theologicolinguistic confidence trick of "the other life". It's this sense of absence as a postponed



presence which seems to be the core of narrative (the paradigm art form of the capitalist system) and basic to the word as we use the word in any representational context. To demystify this fetish and reveal the human relationships involved within the labour process of language will involve the humanization of the linguistic Sign by means of a centering of language within itself; a structural reappraisal of the functional roles of author and reader, performer and performance; the general diminishment of reference in communication and the promotion of forms based upon object-presence: the pleasure of the graphic or phonic imprint, for instance, their value as sheer linguistic stimuli. Kicking out reference from the word (and from performance) is to kick its most treasured and defended contradiction: the logic of passage.

STEVE MC CAFFERY

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BUT I WON'T

I could mention running into Larry Fagin (1962) and him giving me a list (one of his early ones) of things to read: Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Charles Olson, *Locus Solus* magazine, Robert Creeley, among others. Carried paper in wallet through 1969. Checking off item (person) as read. Threw paper away. Stopped carrying wallet.

I could tell about reading the Donald Allen anthology. Which (coming across) grew out of reading Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg while in high school. Which is how I got to San Francisco (to meet Larry). Travel through U.S. and Mexico "on the road." Tail end of two-lane blacktop. Drib and drab beginnings of interstate system. BORING.

I could go into (still in school) the gossip intricacies of Pack and Hall anthologies (endless psychological drivel in emblems endless). Also can't remember exactly some anthology from Doubleday edited by (question mark) someone and someone (not interesting) I can't remember (question mark).



I could leave out Padgett and Shapiro's *An Anthology of New York Poets*, more noticeable for absences than presences, a continuous source of reading (nice design), though. And *The World Anthology* and its sequel *Another World* edited by Anne Waldman which (both) had plenty in them. And (should note in passing) Paul Carroll's anthology.

I could point out the avalanche (so it seemed) of special anthologies, based on some kind of "social science idea" I tended to avoid: but kind of enjoyed Jerome Rothenberg's *Revolution of the Word*. Browse but not buy.

I could let you in on recent developments which an article in *The Poetry Project Newsletter* (by Harry Lewis) said were anthologies which were really one-shot magazines. Including Michael Lally's *None of the Above* and Yuki Hartman and Michael Slater's *Fresh Paint*. Both of which try to put together a grouping of poets (but not enough poems) to be an intro to (fine how do you do). Again (see various introductions) absents more glaring than presents.

I could let on what's (I think) needed. Anthology with selections worked down from about 200 manuscript pages (per poet) each. Could be organized city-by-city since "school" no longer is really workable and city is. About 50 poets. Edited by someone who can distinguish between real poems (by real poets) and images of poems (by competent poets, heretofore called MFAs). Differences between ongoing traditions and the bad-money-driving-out-the-good of cultural propaganda.

I could quickly note dictionary definition: (origin) a gathering of flowers; (later) selection of pieces. Or refer to Pound's idea of working anthology. A good one recharges what's what in the air.



Right now people are beginning to notice "stuffy." I could use more than a change of scene.

TED GREENWALD

(1960: Allen, The New American Poetry (Grove Press). 1968: Carroll, The Young American Poets (Follett). 1969: The World Anthology (Bobbs Merrill). 1970: An Anthology of New York Poets (Vintage). 1971: Another World (Bobbs Merrill). 1974: Revolution of the Word: A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry 1914-1945 (Seabury). 1976: None of the Above: New Poets of the USA (Crossing Press). 1977: Fresh Paint (Ailanthus).

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### MAC LOW

#### PASSING THE WORD ALONG: MAC LOW IN BRIEF

Jackson MacLow is a poet, composer, and performance artist. He is also a Buddhist, a pacifist, and an anarchist who votes. His writing and performances are organized by systemic processes, with more or less space allowed for pure invention in varying degrees.

His early training and work, as follows: he was born 1922 in Chicago, attended the University of Chicago, specializing in philosophy and structural criticism, and Brooklyn College in Classical Greek. He has been writing poetry, music, plays, prose pieces, and criticism since 1937, and after 1954 combined these arts, as well as theater, dance, and visual arts, in group performance works he calls 'simultaneities'-- as well as in solo performance works--while continuing to compose poems, music, plays, and visual works (drawings, paintings, videotapes).

Throws of a die in 1954-55 selected isolated works from the bible to comprise lines of MacLow's first major series, his *5 biblical poems*. At this same fertile period he developed two other techniques he used in constructing later pieces. He constructed a long poem by working out a system of correspondences: assigning a different word (drawn from a nineteenth century natural history text) to each pitch of Guillaume de Machault's motet "Quant Theseus." His simultaneity performances (in which more than one thing is going on at the same time) had their roots in the last of his *5 biblical poems*, in which instructions permitted three particularly long lines to be read simultaneously by three performers.

In 1958 he found a quick alternative to dice, cards, and coins for



producing random behavior in the form of the RAND Corporation's *A Million Random Digits with 100,000 Normal Deviates*. With these tools he composed stanzaic pieces derived from Buddhist texts and drew "word strings" (chains of words) from de Sade's *The Bedroom Philosophers* to form the *Sade Suit*.

*The Marrying Maiden*, a theater piece, was also written in 1958, its text taken from the *I Ching*. Any performers' impulses for staginess were quashed by stage directions, determined randomly, for amplitude, tempi, and tone of delivery.

In simplest form, his acrostic pieces, begun in 1960, drew words, word strings, or sentences from a given text by using the first letter of each word in the text's title as an index to selecting lines from the text to form the poem. In its hundreds of pages, MacLow's book *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* explores hundreds of variations on this procedure.

The lyrical *Light Poems*, begun in 1968, are free in form and repeat the names of kinds of light throughout their lines. The lights are drawn by various systems from a chart of 288 kinds of light.

MacLow began writing his gathas in 1961; they can be divided into several strains, all notated on graph paper. The mantraic gathas situate the words of mantras, usually vertically and horizontally. The non-mantraic gathas situate words taken from Kathy Acker's *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* #3. Each of his vocabulary gathas are based on one of his friends' names. Another kind of piece, called a vocabulary (but not to be confused with his vocabulary gathas), was first begun in 1968. It draws words from the letters found in a person's name, using some or all of the available letters. The vocabularies are written by hand, crowding the paper with words of all sizes pointing in every direction. He considers this form a crossbreed of light poems with gathas. These pieces are sometimes performed with instruments as well as voices, by performers situated around the room, their choice of words and intonations left up to their own personalities.

BARBARA BARACKS

BIBLIOGRAPHY: *The Pronouns--A Collection of 40 Dances--For the Dancers* (1964; N.Y., mimeo; photocopy, \$3 from MacLow, 80 North Moore, NYC 10013; 1971, Tetrad Press, London, with graphics by Ian Tyson; revised edition forthcoming, Station Hill Press, Barrytown, N.Y. 12507). *The Twin Plays: Port-au-Prince* and *Adams County Illinois* (1966, Something Else Press; \$3 from MacLow). *Manifestos* (1966; Something Else Press, N.Y.). *August Light Poems* (1967; Caterpillar Books, N.Y.; limited # available from MacLow). *Verdurous Sanguinaria* (1967; Southern University, Baton Rouge, La.; play). *22 Light Poems* (1968; Black Sparrow Press). *23rd Light Poem: for Larry Eigner* (1969; Tetrad Press, London). *Stanzas for Iris Lezak*



(1972; Something Else Press; \$10.41 from MacLow). 4 Trains (1974; Burning Deck Press). 36th Light Poem: In Memoriam Buster Keaton (1975; Permanent Press, c/o Vas Dias, 52 Cascade Ave., London N10 England). 21 Matched Asymmetries (Forthcoming; Aloes Press, 18 Hayes Court, New Park Rd., London SW2 4EX, England). 6 Light Poems for 6 Women (Forthcoming; Station Hill Press). First Book of Gathas, 1961-78 (Forthcoming; Membrane Press, Box 11601, Shorewood, Milwaukee, WI 53211). TAPES: "The Black Tarantula Crossword Gathas" (#33 from S Press, c/o M. Kürler, Tonband Verlag, D-8 München 40, Zieblandstrasse 10, West Germany). "The Text on the Opposite Page," "Homage to Leona Bleiweis" -- 2 versions (1978; 3 tapes from New Wilderness Foundation, 365 West End, NYC 10024; \$8, 8, & \$8.50).

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### MAC LOW

#### MUSELETTER

for Charles

Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews have asked me to write something about my work &/or self, & Charles sent me a month ago a letter containing 13 questions of which he did "hope one or two make you want to say something--" & today he phoned me at about 11:30 AM (to remind me, i.e., nag me in the sweet way he does), "So--" from our conversation & his qq., "here goes--":

CB: "1. Are you interested in having emotion in your process-oriented, programmatic poetry?" / JML: (I'm too stingy of space to give each of us a whole paragraph each time.) To most readers of poetry this wd seem a remarkable question! I take it that C senses conflict between "emotion" & my using chance operations & other quasiobjective methods to generate artworks: if I ever felt such a conflict, & I think I may have, say, in the middle 1950's, I no longer do & havent for some years. Yes the Zen Buddhist motive for use of chance (&c) means was to be able to generate series of "dharma's" (phenomena/events, e.g., sounds, words, colored shapes) relatively "uncontaminated" by the composer's "ego" (taste, constitutional predilections, opinions, current or chronic emotions). It was such a relief to stop making artworks carry that burden of "expression"! To let them become themselves, watch them grow & take shape without one's pushing & shoving them around too much, was & is a great pleasure: probably a "self-indulgence" (one cd care less). But by the later 50s it was plain to me that sense- & sense/concept-events (tones, words)--the specific sensible instances--are both intrinsically & extrinsically emotional: by which I mean simply that specific sounds &/or words (or other sensible elements) singly, combined, &/or in series, have high probabilities of arousing feelings within specific ranges in hearers &c



(whether in "most," or merely most members of certain classes or ingroups I'm not prepared to say--probably the wider the range the smaller the ingroup) & also that each hearer has to bring an idiosyncratic range of emotions ("associations"?) to each event, which is inextricably compounded with the more "general" range in each person's experience.

But (paragraphs are emotional, said Stein) that may not be what you mean by "having emotion": if that were all you meant I cd say that of course I've always been interested in the fact that sounds, words, &c., no matter how "randomly" generated, arouse emotions "willy-nilly" (& I for one never nil'd 'em). But if your question means, Do I allow my own emotions to influence my systematically generated work, I must answer that they can't help doing so: my choices of means, materials, &c., can't help being influenced by emotions, & I'd be foolish if I thought they weren't. Moreover, I realized by the later 50s that the events we single out as "experiences of emotion" as against those we call "sensations" occur as randomly as the sounds in a forest, & began to feel less difference between generating works systematically & recording emotional events (or otherwise using one's own or one's performers' emotions as elements in artworks). & while continuing to do each of these things relatively separately in some works, I have made many works in the 60s & 70s which variously combine chance & other generative systems with various types of "direct expression"--notably my Light Poems, of which I am presently writing the 55th (the 2nd to Stephanie Vevers: so far 18 notebook pages, about 20 lines each), some of which only "have" the emotions attached to or arising from hearing names of kinds of light, others of which use as elements emotions arising in my current life, &c.

Which brings me back to CB: "2. What do you think of 'cheating'--changing results so that the poem conforms to some non-procedurally derived sense of meaning--when composing basically chance-derived poems?" / JML: If I decide to use a certain system, I don't change the results of that system (whether doing so is "cheating" or not I forebear to judge). But I have at times composed systems that generate works conveying or "having" meanings clearly intended by the composer. As you well know, I've composed many political poems & love poems while abiding strictly by the results of such generative means as systematic chance.

I do want to touch on your 3rd question, finally: which I'll summarize: These days I'm greatly interested in work that tells me how it is to live lives--whether the artist's own life or the lives of others: works as different in their ways as Phil Niblock's movies of people working in Mexico, Peru, & the US & Sharon Mattlin's vivid embodiments of "epiphanies" (to use Joyce's term) from the lives of her family, friends, & acquaintances, as well as her own life: quasi-narrative poems in which the poet's own attitudes & emotions about events & feelings are conveyed predominantly by word choice, rhythms, selection of details of experiences dealt with, often quite subtly & indirectly, rather than by her self-consciously imposing herself upon her materials. You ask whether I'm



less interested in "procedural" or language/structural work as such. Well, of such work, I'm most interested in works having "content," even "subject-matter," tho not always as the words are commonly used. Hannah Weiner's "Clairvoyant Journals" convey her life experience while radically transforming usual formats (verse/prose/&c) to do so, Bernadette Mayer's work has done so for years. Also, your own work, as well as that of Emmett Williams, Dick Higgins, & Ron Silliman, & the recent work of Peter Seaton (to mention only those who quickly come to mind--forgive me, others), while not referring to experience with the same directness, seems "to have content" even tho the "subject-matter" may often be shifting & elusive. Interest, however, is not at all synonymous with value judgement, & when I hear more purely language/structure work, such as John Cage's "Empty Words" or the works of Clark Coolidge, I'm often completely enthralled, even tho I do not return again & again to the pages from which they read.

Well, "I think that's about enough," as the blessed Henry Cowell used to say when signing off his WBAI radio program, "Music of the World's Peoples." ...

JACKSON MAC LOW      NY    12/22/77

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ANNOUNCEMENT: ONE HUNDRED POSTERS #26 (February 1978):  
"Three of Four Things I Know about Him," essay by Charles Bernstein; \$1 from Other Publications, Box 415, Kenmore Station, Boston, MA 02215.