

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

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## THE POLITICS OF POETRY

*(This double issue began with the desire to focus attention on political dimensions of current writing. To make some of those aspects and concerns more explicit, and to encourage further discussion, we've asked a number of writers to give their view of what qualities writing has or could have that contribute to an understanding or critique of society, seen as a capitalist system. Below, in alphabetical order, the responses of Kathy Acker, Barbara Barg, Bruce Boone, David Bromige, Don Byrd, Chris Cheek & Kirby Malone & Marshall Reese, Mark Chincer, Michael Davidson, Alan Davies, Terry Eagleton, Larry Eigner, Brian Fawcett, P. Inman, Michael Lally, John Leo, Chris Mason, Steve McCaffery, Michael Palmer, Robert Rakoff, Jed Rasula, Peter Seaton, James Sherry, Ron Silliman, Alan Sondheim, Lorenzo Thomas, Barrett Watten, Hannah Weiner, as well as our own.)*

KATHY ACKER :

NOTES ON WRITING -- from THE LIFE OF BAUDELAIRE

In the beginning Baudelaire wrote his poems in order to discover his own image in them.

After a while self-absorption is boring because one sees thoughts are only thoughts and one wants freedom.

So one gets involved with the process of creating thoughts, with creation which is superfluous and gratuitous.

To avoid this superfluity and gratuity which every great artist knows, pain, Baudelaire asserts himself, for no reason at all, a natural rebel, against the world he knows. There's no other world. He needs a world he can fight or else he'll be back in uneasiness.

One has to exist in pain.

Because Baudelaire kept running from pain, he had no friends and few intimates among derelicts.

The difference between a writer and its world gives the reason for writing. All mental existence is an expression, a measure of distance.

There's another way of saying this. Consciousness just exists: no reason: it is useless. There is no meaning in the world. Consciousness creates meaning.

Let's start again. A human being's life starts when two humans called parents for no reason in the world stick that kid into the world. Then the parents turn against the kid and tell the kid it has to do such-and-such and become SOMEBODY or else they'll kick it out or else the parents just turn against the kid and say YOU STINK. The kid realizes it was once part of a warm perfect hole whole not apart and *now* it has an existence: It is separate. It is itself. It has no meaning. The great cry is against no meaning cause that's scary and boring and painful.

The kid can't go back. Rather than remaining in pain, the kid says I'm not nothing pain, because I am separate. Fuck you. My separate-ness is fuck you is total hatred is and will always be against you against everything that exists. I am a natural rebel.

The poet knows how ridiculous any action is cause it's actually nothing, so he makes sure his poetry and everything else he does is as stupid as possible.

About method of writing: There's no such thing as real action. What we mean by *action* is creation. Because there's no meaning. Creation is pure freedom: before it there's nothing; it begins by creating its own principles. First and foremost it invents its own goal and in that way it partakes of the gratuitousness of consciousness. This explains camp.

I don't want any ethic. I don't want to say anything is right. I have no desire to tell anyone what to do and I just take teaching gigs for the money. I don't say this is how you write. I keep saying I don't know anyway of writing. I WANT TO SAY NO TO WHAT IS I WANT TO GO OVER: I DON'T WANT ANY CONTENT I JUST WANT EXTREMISM.

Once a human's grasped this truth: that there's no other end in this life except the one it's chosen, it no longer feels any desire to look for one. But suppose we don't care what we choose?

What I feel is lousy, immense discouragement, a heaviness of unbearable isolation...absence of desires, impossibility of finding any sort of amusement. I call this my laziness.

So I do things suddenly, when I don't think! anything! I seem to other people active, impulsive, destructive, a person who acts and doesn't care VIOLENT. This is the only way I can act. This is the only way I can write. Bad. Obviously I don't believe in anything I'm doing the minute I'm doing long enough for self-consciousness to arise I stop what I'm doing.

A poet a person has no morality.

I need your boringness your self-righteousness your hatred of me my paranoia just cause of who I am this loneliness solitude pain inside

my head everything coming from the poverty I choose to keep flagellating myself to go over.

One needs laws, the laws of writing, so one can hate them.

BRUCE ANDREWS :

## WRITING SOCIAL WORK & POLITICAL PRACTICE

"Language is practical consciousness" (The German Ideology). Mainstream criticism still fails to raise or demand an answer to key questions about *the nature of the medium*-- which remains the modernist project for an art form. So, talking about writing, we have different ways to characterize its medium, different ways that medium's distinguishing qualities can be acted upon. Different political practices & epistemologies are implied.

### ONE

One mode of writing tips its hat to assumptions of reference, representation, transparency, clarity, description, reproduction, positivism. Words are mere windows, substitutes, proper names, haloed or subjugated by the things to which they seem to point. 'Communication' resembles an exchange of prepackaged commodities. Here, active signifying is subordinated, transitive. Its continuing *constitution* of the world is ignored. So are the materiality of words & the conventions by which they get generated. Words are mistaken for tools (if only they could disappear to make way for meanings that sit outside language). Our concepts or mental pictures are confused with referents & referents are attributed a secure identity that precedes their delivery into thought & words (the conventional nature of that relation is also ignored). An illusionism, the taken-for-granted, *the fetish*. An imagined 'oppositional' poetics stemming from this perspective would still be reductionist, naturalism (a breakdown theory, reformism, 'socialist' 'realism'). Or else poetry becomes complacent literature, ornamental reinforcement of the status quo.

### TWO

An alternative structuralist view. Here the medium of writing is *language*, understood as a system. *The structure of the sign* determines that medium's intrinsic & distinguishing characteristics: the division of the sign into a signifier (material form) & a signified (concept or mental representation), the former related arbitrarily/conventionally to the latter. Word matter is not dissolved by reference but exists relationally within an overall sign system. Signification occurs negatively, through *difference* & opposition-- terms signify by being differentiated from all other terms, not intrinsically or transparently.

Just as representational literature (dominant form) rests on an implicit definition of words as largely transparent tools of reference, other kinds of writing practice correspond to this second, relational

definition of the medium (sign/language). It could be a cataloging of the properties of the linguistic system, a didactic or playful yet still dependant practice. More radically, the poetics would be those of *subversion*: an anti-systemic detonation of settled relations, an anarchic liberation of energy flows. Such flows, like libidinal discharges, are thought to exist underneath & independent from the system of language. That system, an armoring, entraps them in codes & grammar. Normative grammar -- a machine for the accumulation of meaning seen as surplus value & for territorializing the surface relations among signifiers by converting them into an efficient pointing system

The coherence between signifier & signified is conventional, after all -- rather than skate past this fact, writing can rebel against it by breaking down that coherence, by negating the system itself. Result: an experimentalism of diminished or obliterated reference. This would deliberately violate the structure of the sign, make the signifieds recede even more from the foreground occupied by supposedly autonomous signifiers. Characterizing the medium this way, we can find a brief for actually instituting opacity, promoting a spillage or dissemination -- Not from caring about message or meaning, but caring about the eruptiveness of material being put into distinctive relationships. So: a spectrum stretching from 'stylistic display' work to a more disruptive political work -- within the mostly self-contained linguistic system, of the sign.

Writing can attack the structure of the sign after declaring that settled system of differences to be repressive. But there's an ironic twist here. The Blob-like social force of interchangeability & *equivalence* (unleashed by the capitalist machine, and so necessary to the commodification of language) precedes us: it has actually carried quite far the erosion of the system of differences on which signification depends. It's reached the point where a coercive organization of grammar, rhetoric, technical format & ideological symbols is normally imposed in everyday life to even get these eroded differences to do their job any more (an assembly line to deliver meaning, of certain kinds). So to call for a heightening of these deterritorializing tendencies may risk a more homogenized meaninglessness (& one requiring even more coercive props) -- an 'easy rider' on the flood tide of Capital.

A calculated drainage of the referential qualities of individual words, for example, may deviate from established rules in a revelatory way, yet still abdicate the central struggle over meaning. That remains to be fought over the fetish, over myth & ideology, the representations & consumptions of fixed meanings.

### THREE

Whether we bypass the referential fetish by writing non-signs or whether we tackle & problematize it depends, again, on how we define the medium. Writing is actually constitutive of these underlying libidi-

nal flows; it IS the desire for meaning, if not message. This is a third characterization of the medium, acknowledging the usefulness of the second one but acknowledging its limitations also.

Here, the distinguishing quality of writing is the incessant (& potential) production of meaning & value. Created through the articulation of writing, which is neither a representational positing of "the" world by imitation of signifieds nor simply a dizzy surface play of signifiers. Meaning isn't just a surplus value to be eliminated -- It comes out of a productive *practice*. Not passively, as a derivative of a system of differences (pre-defined) prior to composition. [Even obsessive attack & clever derangement may seem derivative] Instead, active -- back & forth: a relay constantly making contexts out of a fabric of markings: writing & reading.

Those ideologies & fixed meanings can be reinforced (1.); or blown apart by wild schizzed-out eruptions (2.); or they can also be opposed by (3.) a political writing practice that unveils demystifies the creation & sharing of meaning. That problematizes the ideological nature of any apparent coherence between signified & referent, between signified & signifier (for example, by composing words around axes other than grammar/pointing function -- ). [By contrasting example, see how familiar social ways of (verbs: to contextualize, naturalize, commodify, fetishize, make instrumental) language only shrink the theatre of meaning -- lay down a law, a lie, a line, a grammar, a code, illusion. *Writing as Critique*.] Not to make the words or signifiers provocatively opaque irrelevant, but to stress their use value & productivity in the face of mechanisms of social control.

Writing doesn't need to satisfy itself with pulverizing relations & discharging excess. It can *charge* material with possibilities of meaning -- not by demolishing relations but creating them, no holds barred, among units of language (even when these seem superficially like a pulverized normality). These relations are constitutive & germinative of meaning. A *practice*, based on this definition of the medium: to create conditions under which the productivity of words & syllables & linguistic form-making can be felt, & given aesthetic presence.

To make the word the basis of extensions. Instead of a derivative (sublimate) of previously established connections, the word as "the dwelling place," where meaning will insist on spinning out of the closed circuit of the sign, to reach or act on the world (not only as it is, as it could be). Amnesia or blindness about this *productivity of writing* stands alongside the prevalence of individualized self-preening consumption. Socialisms / necessary but not sufficient conditions. Yet only a dramatic change in the structure of capitalist society is likely to disorganize the fetish, the narrowness of readership (& therefore the capabilities of writing), the dominance of ideological restrictive notions of what poetry & language can be. To politicize -- not a closure but an opening.

BARBARA BARG :

1. Which of the following communicates its meaning most directly and exactly? a) a musical composition b) a traffic light c) a group of words d) weather
2. The written mood that will affect the masses most is one of a) hope b) despair c) cheerfulness d) rage e) regret
3. An amateur writer is one who a) is limited in talent b) distrusts other amateurs c) has great enthusiasms d) tires easily
4. Feelings that produce good writing a) thrive in urban centers b) are based on the prevailing standard of living c) are based on science d) are based on science which is based on the prevailing standard of living d) come mostly from Pakistan
5. Historically, writing a) has become a subject for formal study b) offends the wise c) is remembered only in part d) has commercial appeal
6. The most powerful writing deals with a) definition b) incidents c) grudges d) pure form e) sex f) emotional spasms g) attaining manhood
7. Which phrase best describes contemporary writing? a) working without pay b) The Age of the Experts c) contributions of gifted dabblers d) in praise of amateurs e) the experts' superiority over the amateurs
8. In his/her writing, a writer should mostly convey a) maladjustment b) condescension c) curiosity d) arrogance e) innocence f) professionalism
9. Great writing occurs when the writer is a) young b) recovering from a serious illness c) "in love" d) "spurned" e) exalted in mind f) dead
10. Writing gets written because writers a) desire recognition b) wish to avenge themselves on teachers c) need to give expression to their feelings d) hope to impress others with their wisdom e) feel they have a message for young, old, and the not-yet-born f) know someone has to do it
11. When writers converse in public they a) defend Melville against his critics b) show that Kerouac wrote well c) describe Rimbaud's growth as a literary artist d) should listen to themselves talk

12. Women writers
  - a) are only concerned with content
  - b) don't have happy marriages
  - c) should always have men edit their works
  - d) are naturally gullible
  - e) are always referred to as "women writers"
13. Writers who write about "love" present only
  - a) optimistic reports
  - b) pessimistic reports
  - c) limited information
  - d) government propaganda
  - e) distorted and biased viewpoints
14. In times of stress, writers
  - a) support radical movements
  - b) become more closemouthed
  - c) stop regular news services
  - d) distrust everyone
  - e) revert to primitive techniques
15. Which phrase best describes writing's "place" in your life?
  - a) a shelter of long duration
  - b) a haven from a sudden storm
  - c) an overnight stopping place
  - d) an Indian outpost
  - e) a vacation resort
16. Do you write most creatively
  - a) in summer only
  - b) on drugs
  - c) day (night)
  - d) before a reading
  - e) instead of eating
  - f) in violation of the law
17. Writing is mostly about
  - a) maintaining writing
  - b) selling one's self a likable image of one's self
  - c) selling others a likable image of one's self
  - d) control over one's own productions
  - e) aspiring to produce an imperishable monument
  - f) the inevitable

CHARLES BERNSTEIN :

#### THE DOLLAR VALUE OF POETRY

*Social force is bound to be accompanied by lies. That is why all that is highest in human life, every effort of thought, every effort of love, has a corrosive action on the established order. Thought can just as readily, and on good grounds, be stigmatized as revolutionary on the one side, as counter-revolutionary on the other. In so far as it is ceaselessly creating a scale of values 'that is not of this world', it is the enemy of forces which control society.*

(Simone Weil in Oppression and Liberty.)

So writing might be exemplary--an instance broken off from and hence not in the service of this economic and cultural--social--force called capitalism. A chip of uninfected substance; or else, a 'glimpse', a crack into what otherwise might...; or still, "the fact of its own activity", autonomy, self-sufficiency, "in itself and for itself" such that.... In any case, an appeal to an 'other' world, as if access is

not blocked to an experience (experiencing) whose horizon is not totally a product of the coercive delimiting of the full range of language (the limits of language the limits of experience) by the predominating social forces. An experience (released in the reading) which is non-commoditized, that is where the value is not dollar value (and hence transferable and instrumental) but rather, what is from the point of view of the market, no value (a negativity, inaudible, invisible)--that non-generalizable residue that is specific to each particular experience. It is in this sense that we speak of poetry as being untranslatable and unparaphrasable, for what is untranslatable is the sum of all the specific conditions of the experience (place, time, order, light, mood, position, to infinity) made available by reading. That the political value of poems resides in the concreteness of the experiences they make available is the reason for the resistance to any form of normative standardization in the ordering of words in the unit or the sequencing of these units, since determining the exact nature of each of these is what makes for the singularity of the text. (It is, for example, a misunderstanding of the fact of untranslatability that would see certain "concretist" tendencies as its most radical manifestation since what is not translatable is the experience released in the reading while in so far as some "visual poems" move toward making the understanding independent of the language it is written in, ie no longer requiring translation, they are, indeed, no longer so much writing as works of visual art.)

Certainly, one method is the restoration of memory's remembering on its own terms, organizing along the lines of experience's trace, a reconstruction released from the pressures of uniform exposition--"the only true moments" the ones we have lost, which, in returning to them, come to life in a way that now reveals what they had previously concealed--the social forces that gave shape to them. So what were the unseen operators now are manifest as traces of the psychic blows struck by the social forces (re)pressing us into shape (ie: "a sigh is the sword of an angel king"). *"What we do is to bring our words back"* --to make our experiences visible, or again: to see the conditions of experience. So that, in this way, a work may also be constructed--an "other" world *made* from whatever materials are ready to hand (not just those of memory)--structuring, in this way, possibilities otherwise not allowed for.

Meanwhile, the social forces hold sway in all the rules for the "clear" and "orderly" functioning of language and Caesar himself is the patron of our grammar books. Experience dutifully translated into these "most accessible" codes loses its aura and is reduced to the digestible contents which these rules alone can generate. There is nothing difficult in the products of such activity because there is no distance to be travelled, no gap to be aware of and to bridge from reader to text: what purports to be an experience is transformed into

the blank stare of the commodity--there only to mirror our projections with an unseemly rapidity possible only because no experience of "other" is in it. --Any limits put on language proscribe the limits of what will be experienced, and, as Wittgenstein remarks, the world can easily be reduced to only the straight rows of the avenues of the industrial district, with no place for the crooked winding streets of the old city. "To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life"--think of that first 'imagine' as the active word here.

"Is there anybody here who thinks that following the orders takes away the blame?" Regardless of "what" is being said, use of standard patterns of syntax and exposition effectively rebroadcast, often at a subliminal level, the basic constitutive elements of the social structure --they perpetuate them so that by constant reinforcement we are no longer aware that decisions are being made, our base level is then an already preconditioned world view which this de-formed language "repeats to us inexorably" but not *necessarily*. Or else these formations (underscored constantly by all "the media" in the *form* they "communicate" "information" "facts") take over our form of life (see *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Dawn of the Dead* for two recent looks at this), as by posthypnotic suggestion we find ourselves in the grip of--living out --*feeling*--the attitudes programmed into us by the phrases, etc, and their sequencing, that are continually being repeated to us--language control = thought control = reality control; it must be "de-centered", "community controlled", taken out of the *service* of the capitalist project. For now, an image of the anti-virus: indigestible, intransigent.

BRUCE BOONE :

#### WRITING, POWER AND ACTIVITY

Modernism, particularly in its completed forms in recent trends in poetry, can only be understood and validated, partly or wholly or not at all, insofar as these same trends represent a specifically utopian moment in language. Charles Bernstein's essay just above in this issue on "The Dollar Value of Poetry" reminds us of this. "Social force," Bernstein says citing Simone Weil, "is bound to be accompanied by lies." Poetry then can refuse to be in the service of capitalism by being "untranslatable," "unparaphrasable." In a commodity society, we might say, poetry can refuse an exchange-value to make itself available as use-value, or to use another term, text (-uality). Recent trends in poetry can be described as the attempt to deny this commodity aspect of language.

How far should we go in this project? The question is not simple. It implies that the project is historically conditioned, and developmental,

and that at a certain point it will have to be thought through again when objective conditions change. In the last analysis the reciprocity between what writing *is* and what it *ought to be* becomes a question of what writing actually does, that is, politics. To judge from a plurality of practices like that of this magazine, the imperative to formulate writing questions politically is recognized more and more widely -- and what is more important, by poets themselves. To place ourselves in this discussion then in the last analysis seems to be to ask how writing can relate to revolution, that is, class and liberal struggles. But not in any simplistic way. What is at stake here is the ability to give full play to the two poles of instrumentality and self-referentiality. Until the present, though, it has been generally assumed that it is the second of these poles, the self-referential aspect of language, that ought to give writing its self-nature and legitimacy for others.

But it is hard to imagine how this question, phrased in just such a way, can avoid having an eternal, once-and-for-all aspect to it. Posing the question in this way one doesn't so easily arrive at history. If indeed a utopian content were the only criterion of what a useful and acceptable writing has been or continues to be, finding writing that didn't embody that criterion would become a difficulty interesting only to the most incurable of scholastics....

But perhaps we can sharpen this question by rephrasing it. Is it possible to imagine a modernism that doesn't assimilate itself into the project of symptomatic reading? That is to say, into a humanism. But what about struggle then? Taking sides? Being *parti pris*? Or are these concerns out of date in our formalist era? Of course one assumes they are not. But *if* they are not, it's hard to see how they wouldn't be instrumental concerns. If all literature expresses and embodies a yearning for a non-alienated future, it isn't clear in the balance how aspirations for participatory writerliness -- a readerly praxis -- do not end as subjective improvements that may become indispensable to reaction itself. This possibility poses a useful limit case. For it once more foregrounds the political.

Literary history is in a sense the enumeration of past consensuses of this problem that are no longer seen as viable. Romanticism and the cult of the artist. Symbolism and alienated utopia. Modernism and the fetishization of language as product. Described in this way, however, the trajectory is one that grows increasingly melancholy. In each of these stages literature has more and more radically narrowed its rights to the public participation in the ongoing construction of society by itself -- inseparable from power. A profound disjunction, that has proved favorable neither to power nor to literature. Yet both continue to influence each other, fascinate each other, and their uneasy attractiveness seems to register the uneven development of revolution itself. This specific inability to think writing and power at one and the same time then comes to have a name. It is false consciousness.

2. So perhaps we can start again and understand writing, poetry, as developed in our time as a *critique of power*. Such a critique -- a denigration or disavowal -- can now be usefully described and evaluated from a political-historical perspective. The refusal of the moment of power in the transition stage to socialism becomes objectively regressive or even reactionary as the refusal of contestation. Simultaneously, though, this refusal names the utopian content of a later period. But in the transition to this later time -- communism -- the critique of power takes on a positive meaning and no longer functions regressively. It becomes instead the means of expediting a passing over to the era of history proper, to the dismantling of the state and its apparatuses and to the first general realization of a human social life. The legitimacy of writing as a critique of power then stands or fails in relation to its historical timeliness in utopian struggles. In periods when legitimate demands are given utopian formulations, the anti-instrumental character of this kind of writing gives it a definite progressive function. In an era of class struggle, however, when political demands take on an instrumental complexion, such a writing may come to seem less useful. At this point writing may often become propaganda. Such at least has been the classical and binary model. Yet there are strong indications from our own time that the model has been broken down and that these either-or formulations have been simply bypassed.

This is the dilemma. Modernism's alliance with terrorism and disorder has become irrelevant precisely to the extent that communistic or utopian possibilities have begun to make their presence felt in collective, durable political formulations in objective association with the working class. And to the degree that these new utopian forces make themselves felt politically, writing is to that extent forced to rethink its abdication from power. By a consensual removal of itself to the margins of the public sphere of commodity production -- in order to privilege utopian demands for use-value -- writing historically founded its notion of self-legitimacy on a reintegration in the communist future. But what if in a variety of regions and in germinal form that future has *already* begun to make its appearance in the advanced capitalist countries in the West?

3. All this of course is to speak once more of the cultural revolution, and to ask again if any legacy remains 10 years after Maoism, May of '68 in Paris, the anti-war days of the '60s and Counterculture, and the Prague Spring....

What has happened? In 10 years objectively anarcho-communist forms of political organization have sprung up and proliferated wherever one looks. Feminism and the gay movement, ecology and anti-nuclear movements -- in Europe and in this country both -- power issues on a municipal level, consumers' and tenants' movements, the large-scale prison movement and so on -- a whole spectrum of liberation organizations has now arisen. Their impact has been to raise issues in mass political organizations, such that

their solution is not possible within a program advancing a demand for socialism alone, but only on the basis of one making radical demands *beyond* that -- to communism, in fact.

Within this perspective one might legitimately ask if the solution of writing and writers can still remain what it has been programmatically -- that is, a political absence validated by the notion of a critique of power in an autonomous writing area. Early in the 19th Century this was the concordat reached between writing and society, an agreement according to which society's writing practice was from then on to seem something other than self-expression. But if this agreement is now seen as renegotiable, we will need another conceptual model in order to do it. For writing's renunciation of instrumental values in regard to language will continue to imply the negation of an attempt at power as long as writing and power are seen in a relation of mutual exclusivity. If, in other words, writing must always be either on the side of utopia or on the side of instrumentality. And if -- more radically -- class and liberation struggles are to persist in regarding each other with stares of non-recognition. In this case surely writing would remain exterior to power, and power to writing. But what if the situation were to change? What if at a certain point in history, class struggle were to begin to have a doubly implicating relationship with human liberation struggle? And what if human history had begun to think socialism and communism *globally* and *at the same time*? -- and here the work of Rudolf Bahro might be seen as a dramatic indicator of these very possibilities. If one were to be able to think the situation in some such way as this, one could also conceive of the possibility of some collective intellectual work existing on its own behalf. Rather than instrumentality for another, writing's relation to power would then be self-expression. This new model would have profound implications for the norms and forms of writing as now practiced. For writing's 'eternal', or unreflected, premise has been that the notion of writing for another and that of writing as a commodity are in reality one and the same thing -- an understanding that has made modernism possible. But let us suppose for a moment that the situation has changed. Let us suppose that this binary description is no longer adequate to the course of events. Writing now grounds itself in an *interior* relation to power. It becomes a self-expression, and a group practice. With this supposition writing's past is simply the series of discrete moments, salvageable enclaves or testimonials to what is still to come. Its present on the other hand becomes the collective intellectual practice one is engaged in at any moment. Writing would not be separate from whatever one does as an intellectual -- in the body of those who both think and act, and who stand in a certain tendential, final relation to the Modern Prince. That is how this reality might be mapped in the present. And here one can already see certain points of possible focus. These are probably very ordinary or predictable areas like work in mass or sectarian organizations, critical and educational outputs, the construction of political narrations or what-have-you.

In all this play would be supposed. This writing would be instrumental in a new way, certainly, but never in a sense that didn't say 'we,' that wasn't freely willed. It probably wouldn't get along with commissars.

Naturally one supposes that this writing has begun and that it is only a question of locating it-- and that each can begin finding it in her life or his. It is impossible to assume that this writing has not already begun in places one visits each day. Writers, in this view, are simply people engaged in reaching, political organization, community work and liberation groups, and so on-- in fact in normal activities we are already engaged in. This is the opposite of modernism and écriture. Above all, a writing like the one I am supposing accepts its relation to power. It knows it has no other choice. But in this it feels tremendously exuberant, at the thought of the possibilities opening before it. And it knows too, it is embarked.

DAVID BROMIGE :

#### WRITING THE WRONG

Not to debunk the disjointed nature of existence, but at 11 I won an election as Labor candidate, & at 14 was leading goal-scorer for Cricklewood Rangers-- a soccer team. How much of writing knocks life out of the accidental, orders things to make them reasonable! Because my name had to appear in the reports of our games (625 words max.) I wrote for The Kilburn Times, these were signed "D. Mansfield, Club Sec'y."

"Following a deft assist from winger Cece Belle, Bromige drove a daisy-cutter through the legs of astonished Harlesden General Post Office goalie Al Soldofsky." "Minutes later, Bromige again rattled the back of the G.P.O. onion-bag." That moment when it's all pivoted & in the balance, in language as in sport! But chance favors the prepared mind. Cece & I spent hours perfecting these moves. Came the match, none worked; but I had lucky anatomy. No goalie could predict off which part of me the ball would next ricochet. That first goal against Harlesden: Cece put the fetish right to my feet. I shoulda hit it first time with my left. But nature favors my right foot; curiously, since I'm left-handed. Which is why I have trouble with knots. Killing the ball with my right foot, I stood looking down at the almost perfect sphere, admiring once more its handsome paneling. Oh dear! My shoe-strings were untied. My teammates were shouting, urging me to a decision. Soldofsky was creeping forward, obscuring my range. I let fly with my right foot (by what miracle of the will brought to action? by what bootstraps self-raised?), but my left foot was standing on the lace of my right boot. As I fell, my left foot knocked against the ball & the rest is history. I couldn't have done it alone. Well, you couldn't say all this in The Kilburn Times. Its editor had yet to hear Rae Armantrout's

"The smallest/distance/inexhaustible." His prose-model was ad-copy:  
"Fall on life's thorns? Bleed?" Can I blame him for the corners I cut --  
leading up to my last piece, concerning the game with the Neasden  
Flashers? Did I say, we didn't even have regular goalposts, sometimes?  
In the match with Neasden, two piles of coats marked the horizontal  
limits of the goal; it was up to the referee whether the shot was low  
enough to have passed under the imaginary crossbar. Two minutes from  
the end, we were losing 3-4. Is narrative bourgeois fantasy? A mirror,  
the only true Protestant relic? Ron Silliman, a confessional poet? *Did*  
Tristan's shot pass beneath the non-existent bar? We all thought so,  
but the mediator said "no." When I wrote this up, I told the Truth:  
"Tristan evened the score scant seconds from the final whistle with a  
well-gauged, twisting lob." We had practice, the same day my account  
appeared. All my teammates thought I had done wrong. "But you saw for  
yourselves!" Even Tristan was pissed-off at me. "But I got your name  
into print!" No dice. They admitted it had been a goal, but they  
maintained the ref's decision is final. I did not agree with this  
generality. "Humor is humor," I said, "whether in films or on the stage."  
"We have no time!" They answered, "do what you're told." The scene was  
in the center of the road; I left it & sat on the curb. This was, as it  
happened, off to the left, & when 11, in the mock-election held in sixth  
grade, I was up against a Liberal, a Conservative, & a Communist candi-  
date. Robin Crusoe was the Communist: he knew more political theory  
than the rest of the class put together, including Mr. King, our teacher.  
But I sensed the mood of the nation; later this year a Labor government  
*would* displace Winston in a landslide; I polled 25 votes, Crusoe, two.  
One of those two was mine.

DON BYRD :

STATEMENT FOR L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

1. Humans may finally become what Aristotle calls them, political  
animals. That means we might recognize that life is in a constant state  
of emergency. Emerge(ncy). Only in that knowledge is political life  
possible. Otherwise there is reversion to a constitution, the words of  
the king or the poet or to custom. Otherwise life is interpretation  
rather than action. Otherwise, "History is ritual and repetition," as  
Olson reads it out of Melville, rather than production of what? Call it  
fresh air.

Both The Prelude and the Bessemer converter have reference only to  
their own consistency; both are instances of the organic in ritual  
mimicry of the inorganic (and never doubt that Bessemer converters are  
less organic than the men who design and run them). Nietzsche's mad  
laughter was the last clamoring of the sense of ritual mastery (though

its forms haunt us). Madness keeps open the space where the assertion of recurrence is uncompromised. Nietzsche's willing of will is the mastery of life. It is mastery cleansed of all idealism, and, so, oblivious to the markings in the world by which idealism creates a shared theater.

I take it that now the tedium of repetition may overcome the satisfaction. One might now prefer the uncertainty of life to the monotony of death.

2. Orthodox Marxism has failed to produce interesting art and art theory because Marx could only envision the classless society as an inorganic becalm-ment. He studied the art of the western world thoughtfully, and the utopia it proclaims, from Gilgamesh on, is death.

In this late stage of dialectical stall, we begin to see again that the alienation of labor and the alienation of language are equivalent -- very nearly interchangeable -- terms, as, of course, Hegel was aware: "Language *and* labour are outer expressions in which the individual no longer retains possession of himself *per se*, but lets the inner get right outside him, and surrenders it to something else" (my emphasis). We now begin to see, especially given the Lacanian discourse, that Freud and Marx develop Hegel by halves. Their efforts to put us back into contexts which can be lived as well as thought in effect posit an element of alienation as the cost of overcoming another element (death dogs even our best efforts).

The obvious course -- a synthesis of Marx and Freud -- has not proven to be a solution. There are irreconcilable differences between Freud's conception of civilized discontent, for example, and Marxist utopianism, and, in practical terms, the demand for loosening the bonds of psychic repression -- a bourgeois demand -- does not necessarily coincide with loosening the bonds of economic repression. Freudo-Marxists, from the surrealists and Wilhelm Reich to Marcuse, current left-wing structuralists, and Deleuze and Guattari, have not managed to establish cogent theoretical grounds for revolutionary action. The synthesis seems inevitably to involve either an anti-Oedipal casualness or pessimism (Marcuse speaks of "the depth of the gap which separates even the possibilities of liberation from the established state of affairs").

I do not want to deny the survival value of casualness or the justifiable grounds for pessimism, nor do I want to argue against my fundamental sympathies. Marx's analysis, however, recognizes neither the antagonisms between human nature and inhuman nature (the basis for the technological utopia in which labor will be effectively eliminated), nor the intensified self-consciousness the dialectic requires. Freud, on the other hand, may be read as proposing a reconciliation of the individual to the sources of his antagonism (neo-Freudianism) or as a glorification of the individual and individual self-expression so thorough as to make communal action nearly impossible.

CRIS CHEEK, KIRBY MALONE, MARSHALL REESE :

TV TRIO present CAREER WRIST

[for the international *Festival of Disappearing(s) Art(s)*]  
[from the action-sound detention wing]

"Writing has never been capitalism's thing. Capitalism is profoundly illiterate. The death of writing is like the death of God or the death of the father: the thing was settled a long time ago, although the news of the event is slow to reach us, and there survives in us the memory of extinct signs with which we still write. The reason for this is simple: writing implies a use of language in general according to which graphism becomes aligned on the voice, but also overcodes it and induces a fictitious voice from on high that functions as a signifier. The arbitrary nature of the thing designated, the subordination of the signified, the transcendence of the despotic signifier, and finally, its consecutive decomposition into minimal elements within a field of immanence uncovered by the withdrawal of the despot -- all this is evidence that writing belongs to imperial despotic representation...Of course capitalism has made and continues to make use of writing; not only is writing adapted to money as the general equivalent, but the specific functions of money in capitalism went by way of writing and printing, and in some measure continue to do so..."

"Fourteen dollars and twenty eight cents is more attractive than fourteen dollars because of the 28."

#### *WHERE'S HABIT FORMING*

Writing can't be limited to dealing with capitalism. Capitalism is a setback. Writing as it relates to capitalism is the limitation the framework poses. The concerns should be against oppressive structures. Writing has become referential to itself -- to the making of objects. When writing informs writing & writers & writing writers the systems are securities.

#### *SHKLOVSKY'S KUGEL*

Literature, rather than visual or performance work, is the only useful residue left to us of Russian Futurism. True\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_

There are no differences between feudal states and capitalist states. True\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_

Where's the structural control. True\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_

Language (as understood in its use in a community) is comprised of approximately ten per cent verbal elements; the rest consists of gesture, atmosphere, billboards, environmental drift, etc.

True\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_

Publishing is imperialism.

True\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_

I embody all that I most must hate & fear. True\_\_\_\_ False\_\_\_\_

### *WRITING IS A CONSERVATIVE TENDENCY*

If writing is to defuse oppressive structures rather than re-fuse them its first task is not to be the mechanics of escapism. Lullabies are made of words. When words set themselves up they form double binds. Narrative constitutes a parallel life which absorbs the reader leaving her/his body depoliticized. Repressed sexualities objectify themselves through the use and design of machinery. The typewriter is not a lover. The investment of sexuality in mechanics leads writers to confuse eroticism with death, the erotic with the dead. What dies is not the author but the authenticating enunciation sustained by the immortality granted the subject. Properly speaking, "glyphs" are the signatures (cuts in the ear, brandmarks) of the owners of their cattle.

### *NOTES TO MYSELF*

Think of it as why we had to cook my poor dad's flesh. Think of it as open before using. Think of it as vanity and sink. Think of it as our own. Think of it as fresh daily. Think of it as I will behave in line. Think of it as 60 cycle hum. Think of it as proudly we hail these. Think of it as exclusive adhesive. Think of it as most folks use. Think of it as sheer bandages. Think of it as all purpose grind. Think of it as capitalism is a setback. Think of it as machines do it for you. Think of it as June 1979. Think of it as the people's pharmacy. Think of it as a small curd. Think of it as not less than. Think of it as our mail. Think of it as new easy re-close. Think of it as drink your drink. Think of it as amusement only. Think of it as a half a dozen of another. Think of it as a wet book. Think of it as a soggy cover. Think of it as money talks. Think of it as you can laugh all you want. Think of it as that means I can do what. Think of it as do you read me. Think of it as a lot to look forward to. Think of it as the author has no authority.

### *GROWN ASLEEP*

The ghosts of eroticism, so clear in the piston & cylinder, oblique into information storage & retrieval.

"...It was only after the remaining two had consumed what food they had-- some chocolate bars, a bag of potato chips, a granola bar and cough drops-- did they decide to eat Don Johnson. 'We talked to God and we prayed, and whatever else came we knew we had to eat him and we did. I want it known that we aren't ashamed. We knew it was right. God told us it was right. We knew it was what Don would have wanted,' he explained..."

The endorsement of hierarchies induces specialization. Mystification is manipulative. Its power misleads in appearing to be productive energy; it is not generative, it's mediocre. An objective life is undesirable. When sacrifice to the revolution begins revolution ends: here we mean subjectivity without individualism; micropolitics; simultaneous multiple corners. Hierarchies control through achievement by regulating & withholding information as to the means of achieving: honesty's broken spoon. It's hard to be totally positive. "Giordano Bruno comes to mind, whoever he is." "\$14.28 is more attractive than \$14, it's just that way." "Giordano Bruno, I think they burned him, he was too positive."

*SOME DO & SOME DO: SHAMANISM, CYBERNETICS, & REPRESENTATION*

"...Lo! The lid is raised, curiosity stands on tip-toe, eyes sparkle with anticipation, little hands are clapped in ecstasy, almost too great to find expression in words. The hour arrives -- the moment wished and feared..."

"...T.A. (Transactional Analysis), T.M. (Transcendental Meditation), E.S.T. (Erhard Seminars Training, not exactly electro-shock, E.C.T.), Creative Fidelity, Creative Aggression, Provocative Therapy, Gestalt Therapy, Primal Scream, Encounter Therapy, the conducting of three-day 'Marathons', a form of deep massage, Bio-energy, Japanese Hot Tubs (you take off your clothes and enter them *en groupe* as part of liberation). Then, 'Behaviour Mod' (the new generation Skinner) on how to toilet-train your child in twenty-four hours -- and then on the next shelf another book advertising a method of toilet-training your child in *less* than twenty-four hours! I've no doubt that after some of these experiences some people feel better, or begin to 'feel', or feel more 'real' -- or whatever the ideals of capitalism prescribe for them..."

*ONE LEG AT A TIME*

OK. OK OK. OK OK OK. OK OK OK OK. OK OK OK OK OK. OK OK OK OK OK  
OK. OK OK OK OK OK OK OK.

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MARK CHINCER :

*(The following is an excerpt of a letter that appeared in Lobby 37, 4/79, 280 Cherryhinton Road, Cambridge, England.)*

#### SOME THOUGHTS TOWARDS A MATERIALIST POETICS

the precondition for the existence of a literature - in this century an écriture - is the existence of language. materialist poetics goes beyond this structuralist datum to assert that the precondition for the existence of language is the existence of social forms of production - sensuous human activity on nature. wherefore: the precondition for literature is the existence of social forms of production which govern (but not in the sense of opposing a one-to-one causality as vulgar marxism wld assert) the modes of literality.

with this materialist understanding we can place many of the idealist formulations of structuralism and its kindred poetics - in the last analysis bourgeois disciplines for all their progressiveness - in their real context - IN MATTER - and use previously gained insights to develop our own goal: materialist poetics....

poetry distinguishes itself from 'ordinary language' - the referential, comotive function employed in everyday discourse - in that it uses language and its signs in themselves, not as functional devices to refer to externality. in this way language is the OBJECT, the SIGNIFIED of poetic discourse, a discourse which carries no direct reference to reality but continually defines its own referent in accordance with the way in which it organizes its signs, its text.

the idealism underscoring structuralism causes the line to be drawn here by its adherents, thus the indispensable concepts of the autonomy of the text and the process of 'making strange' - ostranenie/verfremdung - are

ensnared in a bourgeois-liberalist ideology of freedom and liberation; the artist become able to do anything he wants, art raises one above everyday drudgery. this is the u-turn performed by structuralist critiques of literature: ...and this, I wld argue is occasioned by its idealist fundament placing consciousness before being, what determines literature it is argued, is the artist's attitude to language. this is not incorrect as far as it goes, but idealists do not attempt to investigate what has FORMED this attitude. so in their hands the concept becomes debased to one of the free association of the artist with his medium ie ANTI-MATERIALIST.

the concept of the text's autonomy undergoes similar ideological vulgarization. it is true that in a text 'anything is possible';... the text creates its 'own' reality, internally consistent with itself, yet it is clear that this process does not go on in a vacuum.... the social forms of production and the level of technology attained by them - CLASS FORMS, it should be noted - over-determine the modes of literary production; the book as we know it today cannot be fully understood without seeing it in terms of its materialist determination - the discovery of printing and its status as a commodity....

the variation in modes of literality is thus determined by the artist's attitude to the materiality that contains him/her; these attitudes have not fallen from the sky, they are determined by the artist's own relations in materiality: class origin, relation to the productive forces, those of écriture in particular....

we begin with a 'structuralist' analysis of the processes at work within the text. processes which are that text's own space and movement only to take them further by examining the relationship of text-author-society, the text's MATERIALITY.

poetry is artifice, a construct. it is capable of defining its own reality on its own terms. an investigation into poetics concentrates therefore not on what literature contains - which is generally to recuperate it into a normative ideology - but on HOW it contains its datum.... progressive art makes no attempt to hide its status as ARTIFICE, openly laying bare its techniques of construction....

materialist poetics seeks to rescue this valuable doctrine from its idealist distortion resulting from the structuralists' concept of literature as a self-contained, self-metamorphosing realm. an analysis of any literature shows that laying bare the methods of production is never necessarily in itself progressive if the process of revelation is confined to infratextuality - the poems of walther von der vogelweide, eg. it is only progressive on the plane of art, and this plane a materialist can never see as wholly isolated, although s/he accords it its own existence.

if our own poetic praxis is to be consciously materialist and progressive then we are concerned not simply with the laying bare of the artifice of all art - this is the death of any bourgeois concepts of 'finish' - but with the laying bare of the TEXT'S MODE OF PRODUCTION IN SOCIETY - its MATERIALITY. our poetry thus evolves from a critique of the bourgeois expectations of a work of art, namely that it should be 'finished' and 'accomplished', to being a critique of that whole society that is its matrix....

this is what i mean by a dialectic of autonomy and determination: we move between the two in order to pose the necessity of destroying determinants which are those of capitalism, so that the real autonomy of art is achieved in a higher mode of materiality, communist society.

MICHAEL DAVIDSON :

*For, as Aristotle saith, it is not gnosis but praxis must be the fruit. And how praxis cannot be, without being moved to practice, it is no hard matter to consider.* (Sir Phillip Sidney)

Since any text, regarded as a mode of production, must be capable of analysis, why not start with the question posed by the editors of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E. The fundamental problem with answering it lies in its blurring of distinctions between two rather different ideas: 1) that writing "has" qualities intrinsic to it and 2) that writing "could have" qualities leading to a social critique. The former implies a study of internal features. One might treat the linguistic structure of the declarative sentence as a microcosm of power relations in a capitalist society. The sentence's tidy organization of elements, its subordination of action to actor, its separation of subject from object could indicate attitudes toward human labor and the material world. Or, in terms of larger structures, one could discuss the "well made" essay and point to its implied valorization of idea to documentation, its positivist/deductivist bias, its emphasis on communication over the process of thought as extensions of bourgeois/technocratic thought.

On the other hand, what the editors seem to mean is "how can writing *be made* to critique capitalist society," whereupon the ancient dialogue between formalist and materialist surfaces again. The formalist contends that by radically altering the structure of conventional discourse, by decontextualizing, fragmenting, foregrounding the material element of language, he or she will illustrate the lesions and gaps within ruling class ideology. The materialist (and reflectionist) argues that all art is essentially ideological, and that analysis is carried out between base and superstructure in any literary work,

regardless of intention. In its vulgar form, this criticism looks for strictly economic, sociological "content" within the work. Obviously the answer to the question rests somewhere in between the formalist solution and the reflectionist theory.

Since I don't think writing has "qualities," per se, outside of a context of use, I would have to say that a critique of capitalist society begins with an art that investigates its own modes of production. I don't mean by this to emphasize self-reflexive art as practiced by current metafictionists -- an art which tends inwards toward a narcissistic literature of exhausted possibilities. I'm thinking here of an art which is conscious of its own vulnerability in a world of attractive, institutionalized solutions: an art which regards itself as a form of knowledge rather than a strategy in its pursuit; an art that in asserting its objectivity and integrity does so without forgetting the realm of human concern. (I am purposely avoiding naming what this art might be since to levy various critical criteria would only serve the interests of an already imperializing criticism; obviously, every new problem demands a new solution.) The lure of an objectified, ossified art, working in the service of "materiality" does little more than fetishize the realm of language and reinforce the dualism of subject and object all the more.

But this dualism can be useful, at least in one respect, in that it contains the boundary terms within which an interrogative (authentic) writing may occur -- a writing which works in the interstices between expressivist and objectivist modes. Such a writing would incorporate the moments in which language loses its purely instrumental character and becomes a mode of "humanizing practice." As Marx Wartofsky says, "... (the artwork) is a representation of a mode of action which is distinctively human...; in short, that art represents its own process of coming into being and insofar, exemplifies and objectifies the distinctively human capacity of creation." Art, considered thus broadly, should still be able to appeal to an actual (as opposed to a theoretical) reader and might even provide some of the *enargia* which Puttenham declared "...giveth a glorious lustre and light."

ALAN DAVIES :

$$\frac{\text{politics}}{\text{art}} = \text{politics}$$

$$\frac{\text{art}}{\text{politics}} = \text{art}$$

TERRY EAGLETON :

(The following is an excerpt from "Aesthetics and Politics", which originally appeared in New Left Review #107, 1978.)

Consider this curious paradox. A Marxism which had for too long relegated signifying practices to the ghostly realms of the superstructure is suddenly confronted by a semiotic theory which stubbornly insists upon the materiality of the signifier. A notion of the signifier as the mere peg of occasion for a signified, a transparent container brimfull with the plenitude of a determinate meaning, is dramatically overturned. On the contrary, the signifier must be grasped as the product of a material labor inscribed in a specific apparatus -- a moment in that ceaseless work and play of signification whose sheer heterogenous productivity is always liable to be repressed by the bland self-possession of sign systems. A centuries-old metaphysic of the signified is rudely subverted: the signified is no more than that always half-effaced, infinitely deferred effect of signifying practice which glides impudently out of our reach even as we try to close our fist upon it, scurrying back as it endlessly does into the privilege of becoming a signifier itself.

In trying thus to close our fist upon the signified, we are in fact attempting nothing less than the risible task of nailing down our very reality as human subjects. But what we will nail down, of course, will not be the subject, but the paranoid knowledge of the ego and its various identifications. In this ceaseless cat-and-mouse game, the subject, which is no more than the effect flashed cryptically from one signifier to another, the 'truth' which can be represented only in a discourse from which it is necessarily absented, will hunt frantically for its self-recognition through a whole fun-hall of mirrors, and will end up fondling some fetishized version of that primary self-miscognition which is, in Lacanian mythology, the mirror phase. Terrified of the very linguistic productivity of which it is the endlessly transmittable effect, the subject will attempt to arrest the signifying chain in order to pluck from it some securing signified -- a signified within which subject and object will blend infinitely into each other in an eternal carnival of mutual confirmation. The literary names for this are realism and representation -- those recurrent moments in which the *comedy* of writing -- the incongruous flailings by which, in heroically attempting to 'refer', it will finally do nothing but designate itself -- is gravely repressed for the ritual enthronement of some unblemished meaning which will fix the reading subject in its death-defying position.

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SUBMISSIONS OF RELEVANT MANUSCRIPTS WELCOME

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LARRY EIGNER :

Much more than enough boggles, drowns the mind and empties it - also, the more a man takes for granted, or over and above he needs to (forego, ignore, shut his eyes), the more he goes after to fill the head. ? Well, every day is new, at least in the morning. Take each. Here, whatever wakes you up says, have another. Some eternal present. It has to be a miscellany. No time for incoming shadows, sundown, or not too much, that is. Let's realize what there is. The variety. No regrets, or grievance.

Rapid transit? Somebody is/was lonely? Civilian? The life of a nude in one equatorial jungle or another? Bird? Elephant? Lion? Squirrel? Why do birds sing. There's interest.

Books, mag..s, eventually newspapers, as well as maps, legendary, make the best packages. World// Packed// All// Ways The more books the fewer of each, as wrote the author of Future Shock, the quicker their turnover they have. Is this adequate? Are there big enough islands? Too big? X is company and Y is a crowd. So maybe capitalism, constellation of miracles or not, let alone quantity (/quality) is mysterious.

O .. -mark something like sword overhead.

BRIAN FAWCETT :

AGENT OF LANGUAGE

*(The following is excerpted from an article and letter that appeared in Periodics, Number One, Box 69375 Sta. 'K', Vancouver, B.C. V5K 4W6, Can.)*

I don't want to write. I don't want to go to Eatons. I don't want to write here because I will provide in the activity of writing a rhetoric useful to the maintenance of the status quo. I don't like the words *status quo*, its neutrality, taken (stolen) from a dead conservative language. Rhetoric...is useful only to the ruling class. The *ruling class* upsets me. I don't want to use left rhetoric either. They (the ruling class) are byproducts of a universally employed process of exploiting phenomena for specific ends without having ultimate purposes, good or evil. In language the same process dilates complexity for its own sake, making it opaque, thus taking the power of coherent action out of the hands of any single social or political unit. We (human beings) are left with an arid corruption. To write about the *ruling class* without focusing on the source of power that organizes its activity & which allows it to ignore the ultimate questions of mass justice & truth while allowing individuals the air & illusion of those qualities...on the third floor buying a pair of shoes made in Europe, a black wool coat with real mink grown on a farm...they would know what it is to be poor if there were words but words aren't here, and it's a long way to the

basement where the poor buy synthetic wool checkered jackets with fake fur collars. I don't want to be in Eatons...

But I do want to buy something. No, sorry, that's an error. *I want to obtain something of value*, which is a struggle altho I have the money. I'm on the main floor between the basement & the third floor. I'm a bourgeois artist struggling to find value inside a language in which Beauty can't be spoken of in the same sentence as political or economic justice. Wrong floor. Go to the eighth floor, go to accounting. There are no words, they are, like the articles proffered from the store racks, inappropriate, they don't fit, they are not of the materials of reality. I can't invent a new language, a device like the escalator to elevate me to the next level of meaning because the parataxis is broken, busted, the magic of Psyche's house is gone, is immaterial, no stairs, entrances, windows or exits...and I don't want to write anything that is not the materials of reality. ...

Nothing else happens. I made no singular error in activity or thought that lead me there rather than anywhere else. Nothing is that personal. It isn't a question of the personalness of the personal opposed to vast forces moving like grand dinosaurs of 19th century historical necessity, it's the similarity of destination-- into the taxonomic reflecting pools where...I don't want to write this, I don't want to be alone, reflecting by pools of sorrow or by vast lakes above turbines grinding the energy for these useless appliances stacked row upon row beneath sterile lights & lady in black w/ plug in hand, beckoning to me *here sir, is a fantastic labor-saving device to help the little lady help you in the morning. In just 35 seconds your morning coffee...*

Says Trotsky: *In a society split into classes, the democratic institutions, far from abolishing the class struggle, only lend the class interests a highly imperfect form of expression. The possessing classes have always at their disposal thousands of means to pervert and adulterate the will of labouring masses.*

Yeah says Cliff. In Cuba it's not like you go to work for the government or stay on the outside, as if the government is an entity that's either beneficent or hostile. Those questions are answered. I mean, if you're an artist, you get a wage, you work to make the revolution clear & thorough. You stand outside, you're not an artist, you're just picking your teeth. There is no separate culture like we have. I mean, like off in the closet, where I can talk as loudly or clearly as I want because it's describable as protest, or some phatic corner or other into which eventually walks a joker wearing a tight blue suit & says, *Hey baby, you got a career!!*

I don't want to write. In the guts of the city there is neither air nor a heart, there is only ourselves, choking in the guts. Which hang over the streets, wired for electricity and totally invisible. Crammed with cheap goods & ideas. The agent of language is lost in these streets. In the springs of the heart. Sprung, like an old mat-

tress, or bulldozed to make way for some further developments. I'm in Eatons looking for the agent of language and the orders of the heart and the confirmation of justice, without words of my own.

... Our bloody technique mongering has led us down into the sump to the point where we've become convinced of the verity of language that is pure *within* so narrow a context of human existence its relatively harmless to the comings & goings of the real power in this life...parataxis, beloved parataxis, functions only inside the realm of personal emotion & the truth of our lives is that there is no *public* language that can be understood, I mean freely heard without the control of materials being withheld. (& this, I'd argue, is the real basis of contemporary marxism) So in the story I do something I've been taught not to do, which is to invade the rhetoric of the left to see if I can bring across what lies underneath its veneer. ...

I'm deathly tired & ashamed of the absence of public language in poetic thought-- it isn't good enough to press the conviction that if everybody could practice parataxis the structures that make our lives so awful wld crumble...

I think we have to destroy our poetics & our poetic techniques & start to reintroduce all the *active* voices that make up *this* world's thought & force if we want to really practice parataxis. The parataxis we've learned is classical, applies to a world 2500 years gone. This isn't Homeric greece. We have to introduce the abstract & rhetorical & deterministic & the mathematical & the vernacular. Even the buzz. Without fear or hope. As if poetry were a dead issue we might reify with that risk.

Emotion is a dead issue-- we know so much about its dynamics that it has gone into the abstract (you can't have read Freud & treat human emotions as if they're mysterious). What hurts about this is that its made all the verity the writers who taught us sought not worth a pinch of coonshit. (If you want to test this have a look at any of Lawrence's more didactic & less careful novels [like Kangaroo, which I just finished reading]-- his ~~commotions~~ of emotion & their extensions into landscape is/are vaguely embarrassing & dilettantish. Or watch the same process on the media, where its all done from the outside, & much more effectively. Id say the emotional is the least reliable source of information we now have, because its the most thoroughly manipulated.

Which leads back to my statement about the exploiting of phenomena/ organization of synaptic activity (or 19th century capitalism/20th century) Both activities have taken from most people the power to act, & by that I mean to act *knowingly*. Most of contemporary capitalism (or just state control because it has more to do with industrial organization than anything) draws its power from destroying our abilities to understand our environment & the consequences of social/political activities, or at least to restrict it to those areas sympathetic to the retention of the present forms of control. I guess I share with Dewdney

the notion that it isn't the existence of a "ruling class" that matters, but a ruling structure that exceeds the power & understanding of those it benefits.

P. INMAN :

Capitalist ideology hopes to dilute or deny the existence of anything other than the everyday given. By doing so current ideology stagnates thought, replaces the possibility of change with the statistic, frozen black on paper, legitimized by its very inertia. In rendering present social structures "natural" ideology underwrites their "immutability", whether in terms of some kind of metaphysic or positivist scientism. (...or in what is the sociological equivalent to scientism, it promotes all reality as relative, hoping to defuse all social idealism.)

If only as a language that is other, a language outside the pervasive ideolanguage of advanced capitalist society (which once having classified & defined, seeks to box in, contain) free language exists in a critical relation viz. capitalist superstructures. A language of the word instead of the worded, predigested, -fabricated; accepted fact. It's perhaps as simple as saying anything to make one think & examine. The degree to which language is self-concerned is the degree to which it remains unimplicated (?).

Having said this, there are a few important qualifications to the above. For me any critical theory must of necessity exist within revolutionary praxis... neither the primary component of that praxis, nor servant to "practice". Whether the establishment of a revolutionary counter-hegemony (Gramsci) is a precondition for social transformation or not, once critical theory has become detached from practice (or at least the struggle toward a program for action) it becomes merely another academic discipline. Scholasticism drained of any real social content, ready to be taught at the state u.

Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual is helpful here. The organic intellectual was one who, unlike the traditional intellectual, was not a sub-class unto himself, separated from everyday life. "Theory" was not directing practice from above, but the self-expression of the proletariat's everyday struggle. (This shouldn't be taken as an argument for some sort of Gramscian orthodoxy. For starters, the whole concept of "working class" has become problematic forty years later.)... Concretely, it would seem to me that all revolutionary critique must begin (attempt to) with an extensive analysis of class relations within present-day society. Who, what or where are/is the revolutionary class(es) in the USA today? Critiques for their own sake obviously don't make much sense. Criticism becomes revolutionary at the instant it somehow manages to come to grips with this question.

MICHAEL LALLY :

One "quality" that "comes to mind" is -- to isolate and describe and record exact observations about "experience" and "objects" that otherwise are never shared beyond intimate relationships because they offer an alternative perspective to "reality" than the one the "capitalist" system (and maybe any "generally" applied "system") imposes through its control of the distribution of "goods," including "art" and "language" and other supposedly less "essential" "goods." *Honesty* is still, in my opinion, one of the most revolutionary "forces" or "weapons" we always have "at our disposal."

JOHN LEO :

/CAPITAL/ /WRITING/

The mere juxtaposition of the word signs creates doubts which unhinge and dismantle the familiar repressions, allowing for greater oscillations between signifiers and signifieds (whose fundamental misalignments it has been the business of Capital to conceal, wish away, or stabilize by mediating or diverting the interpretive process even in Capital's reterritorializing gestures). So: a countering that sets up bibliographies and an itinerary of possible projects and which assumes that a text's meaning production is always a collaboration/intersection/exchange between two *a priori*s privileged by two names: Freud and Marx: hence *autoproduction* (the drive(s), desire, libidinal economies, the Subject) and *the real* (all institutional discourses, constraints, encodings, economies of the commodity, the Other). And names familiar and unfamiliar: Lacan; Deleuze and Guattari; Kristeva; Fredric Jameson; Stanley Aronowitz and John Brenkman and their new journal Social Text; Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject; and from Australia the "'Working Papers' Collection," revising freudo-marxism in such anthologies as Language, Sexuality & Subversion, ed. Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris.

To see as preeminent in writing its intertextual *loci*, or oriented spaces marked by relations and modes of material language in its spectrum of specific performances from speech to written acts; a recognition disabusing us of the notions that space is "neutral" or that "extrin-

sis" or "intrinsic" are transcendental categories governing writing analyses. To further question writing in its aspect as an archival repository which in turn grounds the archive (hence a hierarchy of writings, "evidence," "history"); Foucault's project, but pushed deep into Capital's Writing by Michel de Certeau's L'Ecriture de l'histoire. To grasp that the most devastating confrontations between writing and Capital today are critiques of the (patriarchal, ascendant) signifier (all bets on /signifier/ taken), e.g. Kristeva (esp. Polylogue and current work; some translations in Tell-Tale Sign, ed. Sebeok and the journal October), Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray (Speculum de l'autre femme; Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un; see Language, Sex & Subversion), all connected by their work positing primordial biosociopolitical *differences* in female/male discourses (and thus *different* phenomenologies, semioanalyses, structurations . . .); and the continuing undoing of the hegemony of the signifier (and thus of capitalist representation) in Deleuze and Guattari, Jean-Francois Lyotard (e.g. Des Dispositifs pulsionnels; Discours, figure; some translations in Sub-Stance, Genre, Semiotext(e)), Pierre Klossowski (on Nietzsche and Sade), all of whom dance on the meeting-ground of intensities, redistributing flows, cathexes, the very possibilities of somatic (in)difference, "drive-devices," sophistry as the language of *affectation* and desire, bachelor machines, the resituating of the phenomeno-semiotic exchanging as the gradating libidinalization of Capital. With differing emphases, but still within the framework of the critique of representation offered by the deconstruction of (ideological) positionings of sign, signifier, signifieds and hence the position of the subject, a variety of revaluations are occurring of writing's figurations, typologies, and logical categories (e.g. implicit causalities) as these achieve the power effects of representation (a "window" we see an event *through*, or a "mirror" *on* which we passively regard a sort of duplication of the real). Here the work of Louis Marin (e.g. Etudes sémiologiques: écritures, peintures; Utopiques: Jeux d'Espaces; and La Critique du discours, études sur la Logique de Port-Royal . . ., with translations in Diacritics, Glyph, MLN) and Guy Debord (Society of the Spectacle) is unique.

These projects share an urgency, a sense of unease, coming out of that process we call writing which, in its tensions and reflexivity, generates its metacritical possibility with regard to what it embodies or authorizes: power, ideology. These projects are attempts to undo, in all domains of writing, the substantialist techniques of Capital's containment (policing) or rupture (generation) of meaning production and power of extension by reification. These counter-writings put forward at the level of writing, of representation, Capital's substitutions, its concealed attempts at neutralization, its dependency on phallogocentric (are these distinguishable *in* Capital?) *organ-izing* energies, which are the dismembering mutations of the scopic/writing/reading drive into living estrangement. The critique of the signifier from *within*

Capital but *against* it shows the meaning of such estrangements, which is, as Debord especially argues, the moving of direct life increasingly into representations, simulacra, and allegories -- into the totality of The Spectacle, whose end is always itself and whose means is the capture of the gaze.

CHRIS MASON :

# LEARNING READING AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

you read good but that one don't read good.

to learned to read i.e. impose the reading-trauma (screech when you...) in the middelst of jurisdictional speech and habit traumas,

- : the translation from print-scratcheme to syllable that rings a bell  
'oil' = /oy-ull/, but stuff for your car is /erl/
- : the translation from sounded-out notated sentence to phrase that rings a bell in your meaning-experience (many readers that can learn the notation and come out with the correct sound but not register meanings, not remember anything except making sounds)  
the book prints 'They are going to their house.'; a person says /they gonna go up the house/ or /them's gone home/ or, etc.
- : plus knowing left and right, plus discrepancies in vocabulary, plus being able to concentrate on those little dots, plus being motivated by a story about farmer duck
- : a learner who is not a normal speaker of middle class white english has a lot more translations to be able to learn to read to get jobs to fulfill survival needs and have basic controls over what happens in her life

writers teachers employers employees readers talkers learners friends might examine their roles in perpetuation of this linguistically based hierarchy. what can poetry, for instance, do to disturb it or remove as much of life from its grip?

stutterer doesn't just take extra time to say something, he's also a freak, tongue hanging out there, self-hate; ...sound-poet / crazy-talk, fingers in his mouth, by transgressing limits of what's art, limits of what's weird, can extend limits of what's normal (he takes long to say stuff but it gives me time to think and I like to watch his tongue)

dyslexia is not a disease but a description of how one reads. 'minimal brain dysfunction' should be dysfunctioned. we are all learning-disabled: I can't do directions, have no visual memory, etc. kids who have trouble learning to read should be given extra help learning to read (learning how to follow a line of tiny ink-scratches across the page, how to discriminate between 4 identical but swiveled ink-scratches (b,d,p,q) etc., etc.)

: Tommy Hart: 13, non-reader, speech impediment, p.s. 220 special class, funny gregarious, beats me at checkers, benevolently experimental in arranging interactions between animals & humans, humans & humans, animals & animals. Librarian to Tommy: "Can you say it this way?" ( /garter snake/ instead of /dar'er snate/ )  
Tommy: "I kalk hat way otay ewy day in peeche; liwary I kalk my way")

good writing: t.v. & academic & etc. america promotes a perfectionism (not the localized perfectionism of increased attention towards a particular task, but a standardized perfectionism) that is basically adherence to the linguistic stylistic logical models of the dominant group. & make every utterer who doesn't measure up real nervous.

::: mainstream literature / t.v. propaganda / hill-billy words / kiss-words / kiss-off J.C. and the finger / american sign language / signed english / slap on the back and the high sign / mumble-tsk / yawn or science lawyer / black english / gay lingo / baby talk / silence / classical beethoven whistling / and so on / folk song riffs / dance-dancing / bilingual raza mix / unassimilated pigeons / mistakes ; these-all

are communication information systems worlds with limitless semantic layers: art/performance/hanging-around/poetry could move between some of these in a fun/serious, open/critical/guerrilla way, not to construct (probably imperialistically) joycean universal language, but to interact with others' gesture-fields, to semantically high-life, to help break down the hierarchy and dictatorship of the presidents' / anchor-man's english

STEVE MC CAFFERY :

FROM THE NOTEBOOKS

The fight for language is a political fight. The fight for language is also a fight inside language.

Grammar is a huge conciliatory machine assimilating elements into a ready structure. This grammatical structure can be likened to profit in capitalism, which is reinvested to absorb more human labour for further profit. Classical narrative structure is a profit structure.

Grammar, as repressive mechanism, regulates the free circulation of meaning (the repression of polysemeity into monosemeity and guided towards a sense of meaning as accumulated, as surplus value of signification).

The importance of a language centered writing--all writing of diminished referentiality--is the writing and reading per se, as productional values (the writing as a production of production; the reading a production of the text). Both writing and reading of these texts are aspects of a language production. What publishing achieves is an extension of circulation on the basis of exchangeability. The act of publishing always runs the risk of producing an occultation of a use value by an exchange value.

Grammatically centered meaning is meaning realized through a specific mode of temporalization. It is understood as a postponed "reward" at the end (the culmination) of a series of syntagms. It is that fetish in which the sentence completes itself. Meaning is like capital in so far as it extends its law of value to new objects. Like surplus value, meaning is frequently "achieved" to be reinvested in the extending chain of significations. This is seen quite clearly in classical narrative, where meaning operates as accumulated and accumulative units in the furtherance of "plot" or "character development": those elements of representation which lead to a destination outside of the domain of the signifier.

Meaning is the unconscious political element in lineal grammaticization. Words (with their restricted and precisely determined profit margin) are invested into the sentence, which in turn is invested in further sentences. Hence, the paragraph emerges as a stage in capital accumulation within the political economy of the linguistic sign. The paragraph is the product of investment, its surplus value (meaning) being carried into some larger unit: the chapter, the book, the collected works.

Grammar is invested precisely because of the expected profit rate viz. a clarity through sequence carried into meaning.

A grammatical critique can be mobilized by presenting language as opaque and resistant to reinvestment. A language centered writing, for instance, and zero-semantic sound poetry, diminishes the profit rate and lowers investment drives just as a productive need is increased. Meaning in these cases is no longer a surplus value, but that which is to be produced without reinvestment. This need to produce (brought on by instituting an opacity in language) becomes the need to activate a relation of human energies.

Reference, like Capitalism, is "metamorphosis without an intrinsic code" (Lyotard). There is no code beyond referent reality, for referents are the destination points of codes. Reference, its placement both in and outside the triangularity of the sign, territorializes the flows of code as a constant movement into absence in destinations outside of itself. Writing can be modeled on energumen (on a semiotics of circulation and flow) and so work towards the redistribution of flow and a complication within the vectors of reference.

A language-centered writing not only codes its own flow but also encodes its own codicities. It is not, however, a code of representation but a regulatory code of the intrinsic, differential and opposite flows of words. The Capitalist rationale is : you can produce and consume everything and everywhere providing it flows and providing it's exchangeable. Reference marks a point of extreme liquidity in the Sign. It is, in fact, the line along which the Signifier liquidates itself, exchanges itself for the Other by means of the flow occurring along the surface of a grammatical meaning. Reference is indifferent to either Sign or Referent. Reference is the flow, the liquid progression of a liquidity itself already marked to be undifferentiated absence. Reference needs no code because it is the end of codicity. It is the destination of code per se and its sole teleology is the institution of flow (alterity) territorialized into a vector out of a presence (the graphic forms on the page) into an absence (= that which can never be inside of language.)

Meaning finds its place in bourgeois epistemological economy as a consumed surplus value; the extract from textual signification, found wholly as a surplus value at the end of a reading (whether sentence, paragraph or entire text.) Meaning in classical discourse is NOT a productive/productional use value: that which a reader herself produces from a human engagement with text.

The consumption of text occurs historically at that point where the reader herself is consumed and dehumanized by the text. Signs are consumed when readers are alienated from signification. Text, as a human issue, as the conjoint concern of reader and writer, with a destination in recycling a process rather than in a reified semantic object might eliminate meaning as that which meets one's gaze, fixed, in isolated distance.

Capitalism-- a decoded equality where all is equalized into exchangeability commodity promotion, loss of self, human serialization. And the reproductive organ of Capitalism is metamorphosis.

One thing a language centered writing desires is a presentness that language primarily focussed on reference can't provide. This is not so much a presentness of language per se (whose signifying functions as representation is predicated on a certain absence (of the term stood for)) as the reader's presentness to language itself. A presentness promoted by diminished consumption. In language centered writing referential reality recedes in order that the quality of the Sign as signifier, as imprint or mark, might be experienced as a "presentness before". As language centered readers we do not consume signs so much as confront them as opacities or produce them from ciphers. A language centered writing dispossesses us of language in order that we may repossess it again. A productive attitude to text takes the form of a writerly stance on the reader's part and is the first step towards a humanization of the Sign.

MICHAEL PALMER :

THE FLOWER OF CAPITAL

(sermon faux - vraie histoire)

*"...and the old dogmatism will no longer be able to end it."*

Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez

The flower of capital is small and white large and grey-green in a storm its petals sing. (This refers to capital with the capital L.) Yesterday I borrowed Picabia's Lagonda for a drive through the Bois. A heavy mist enveloped the park so that we could barely discern the outline of a few silent figures making their way among the sycamores and elms. Emerging at Porte de Neuilly the air grew suddenly clear and ahead to my right I noticed M pushing a perambulator before her with a distracted mien. Her hair fell disheveled about her face, her clothes were threadbare, and every few steps she would pause briefly and look about as if uncertain where she was. I tried many times to draw her attention with the horn, even slowing down at one point and crying her name out the car window, all to no apparent effect. Passing I saw once more (and as it developed, for the last time) the lenticular mark on her forehead and explained its curious origin to my companion, the Princess von K, who in return favored me with her wan smile. We drove on directly to the Château de Verre where the Princess lived with her younger sister and a few aged servants. The chateau itself was encircled by the vestiges of a moat now indicated only by a slight depression in the grass at the base of the walls. Or: we drove for hours through the small towns surrounding Paris, unable to decide among various possible courses of action. Or: they have unearthed another child's body bringing the current total to twenty-eight. Or: nine days from now will occur the vernal equinox. Yesterday in the artificial light of a large hall Ron spoke to me of character hovering unacceptably at several removes above the page. The image of the Princess and of M who were of course one and the same returned to mind as I congratulated him on the accuracy of his observation. L knitted this shirt I told him, and carved the sign on my brow, and only yesterday they removed the tree that for so long had interfered with the ordered flow of language down our street. Capital is a fever at play and in the world (silent l) each thing is real or must pretend to be. Her tongue swells until it fills my mouth. I have lived here for a day or part of a day, eyes closed, arms hanging casually at my sides. Can such a book be read by you or me? Now he lowers the bamboo shade to alter the angle of the light, and now she breaks a fingernail against the railing of the bridge. Can such a text invent its own beginning, as for example one -- two -- three? And can it curve into closure from there to here?

\* \* \*

#### A FOLLOWING NOTE

The problem is that poetry, at least my poetry and much that interests me, tends to concentrate on primary functions and qualities of language such as naming and the arbitrary structuring of a code -- its fragility -- the ease with which it empties (nullifies?) itself or contradicts what might simplistically qualify as intention. (And I might add conversely, its tyranny -- how it resists amendment.)

Poetry seems to inform politically (this being a poetry that does transmit material of some immediate as well as enduring freshness) beyond its aspect as opinion or stance. Thus a Baudelaire, Pound, Eliot et al may render a societal picture of transcendent accuracy. Note of course the political "intelligence" of Shakespeare's Tudor apologies, of Racine's hierarchical poetics, of Dante's vision. It is clear that political "rectitude" is not necessarily equivalent to political "use" in a larger sense, though we can also find instances where there is a coinciding of poetic and immediate historical impulse, where in fact a poetry transmits its energy from a specifically political moment. Paradoxically I am thinking of a politics that *inheres*, such as Vallejo's, in contrast let's say with the more practical motives of much of Neruda's work.

Politics seems a realm of power and persuasion that would like to subsume poetry (and science, and fashion, and...) under its mantle, for whatever noble or base motives. Yet if poetry is to function -- politically -- with integrity, it must resist such appeals as certainly as it resists others.

The call to language in a poem does not begin or end with its discursive flow and does not give way to qualified priorities. Not to make of poetry a "purer" occasion, simply to give credit to its terms and the range of possibilities it attends. Poetry seems a *making* within discrete temporal conditions, and I would happily dispense with the word "creative". Poetry is profoundly mediational and relative and exists as a form of address singularly difficult to describe or define.

A poet's political responsibility is human, like that of a cabinet-maker or machinist, and his or her activity is subject to similar examination. Synchronically the results are predictably various. We treasure and perhaps survive by those moments when the poetic and political intelligence derive from an identical urgency and insight. Recently I came across Terry Eagleton's quotation from an article by Marx in the *Rheinische Zeitung*, "form is of no value unless it is the form of its content." "Simple," as Zukofsky used to say. And is it if it is?

ROBERT RAKOFF :

Culture and Practical Reason by Marshall Sahlins, University of Chicago Press, 1976, \$4.95.

From the perspective of a symbolic notion of culture that is irreducible to other forces, natural or social, and is, thus, primary in the reality and the understanding of human societies, Sahlins takes on a variety of social theories which subordinate the symbolic to some version of material causation, pragmatic necessity, or utilitarian praxis. He demonstrates tellingly the inability of these several theories of material praxis to account adequately for the cultural order, to account, that is, for the cultural or symbolic construction of the utility or practical reason upon which their explanations are based. The arbitrary, human, cultural determination of the symbolic categories or code which underly judgments of utility or means-ends pragmatics is reduced, in these theories either to an uncritical naturalism or to an individualistic utilitarianism that merely reproduces the mystified world view of bourgeois society. Accordingly, Sahlins' goal, in the end, is not merely to assert the primacy of the symbolic but to render a cultural account of bourgeois society itself.

En route to this analysis of the "symbolic structure in the material utility" of bourgeois society, Sahlins critically examines the "practical reason" implicit in several schools of anthropological thought. While acknowledging--indeed taking his cue from--Marx's own early theoretical realization that human beings produce a "mode of life" through their transformation of nature, and do not produce merely out of some biological necessity, Sahlins finds that Marx's actual analyses of capitalist production in the Grundrisse and Capital reduce this "cultural" moment to a predicate of production rather than seeing the cultural or symbolic coordinates of the mode of production itself. For example, while Marx lays bare the symbolic core ("fetishism") of the exchange-value of commodities, he seemingly is blind to the cultural construction of use-values and the needs or utilities they supposedly satisfy, rendering this aspect of production a self-evident, pragmatic, and transparent response to "natural" human needs...

That Marx attributes human needs and the motivation to produce use-values to satisfy those needs to a naturalistic and pragmatic rationality leads Sahlins to find in Marx's "pre-symbolic" anthropology an essential continuity with the "bourgeois economizing" found in other theories of practical reason: "...the species to which Marx's 'species-being' belongs is *Homo economicus*...Marx's concept of human nature is a metaphor of capitalist rationality." And just as Baudrillard, in The Mirror of Production, sees Marx's theory as the culmination of political economy and calls for a move to the analytical level of symbolic exchange, so Sahlins concludes that "...production is the realization of a symbolic scheme," and points the way toward a cultural analysis which might give

us a "...theoretical account ...for production as a *mode of life*...":

By the systematic arrangement of meaningful differences assigned the concrete, the cultural order is realized also as an order of goods. The goods stand as an object code for the signification and valuation of persons and occasions, functions and situations. Operating on a specific logic of correspondence between material and social contrasts, production is thus the reproduction of culture in a system of objects.

At least two related modes of symbolic praxis, as it were, follow from this cultural problematic. There is, first, the analytical task of uncovering the symbolic base of capitalist production, the coding of people and objects that underlies and is reproduced in production. Sahlins himself begins this structuralist task in the book's final chapters by outlining symbolic accounts of the production of food (focusing on the cultural categorization of edible vs. inedible animals that precedes the actual production of food) and of clothing (focusing on the fact that both whole costumes as well as constituent elements like line, cut, color, etc., are coded by class, sex, occupation, time-of-day, and spatial differentiations that themselves precede and determine *what* clothes are produced). In addition, though, a less academic mode of symbolic praxis is implied in this cultural perspective on capitalist production. For if there is a relative autonomy to the cultural logic ordering the mode and relations of production, then deliberate action aimed at transforming that logic -- or at least aimed at uncovering it and its contingency and biases and, so, delegitimizing its "natural" authority -- may make good political sense. In other words, when seen as symbolic transformation that will alter the very context of production, the process of changing consciousness appears as anything but quietistic, and the workplace becomes only one potential locus for political action.

JED RASULA :

THE MONEY OF THE MIND

(The Economy of Literature by Marc Shell, Johns Hopkins University Press, \$10.00)

"... why did coinage, tyranny, and philosophy develop in the same time and place? What is the sociology of the distinction between the invisible, private realm and the visible, public one? What is the semiology of coins as material media of exchange and as symbols or works of literature? What is literary disposition and dispensation? What are the relationships among verbal, monetary, and political representation?"

(p. 152)

These fetching questions come at the end of Shell's Economy of Literature -- an honest placement because the book could hardly answer them in 150 pages; and in fact it functions as a kind of preparatory course for bringing such questions within range of intellectual audibility. The book is loosely organized, consisting of largely independent chapters on: (1) the Gyges ring motif in Herodotus and Plato; Plato, Heraklitus and the metaphor of money; (2) a history of the origins of monetary inscriptions (as a poetic language); (3) Aristotle on economy and aesthetics; Sophocles' Oedipus as an intensive scrutiny of the Greek homonyms *technē* (skill), *tychē* (luck), *teknon* (son) and *tokos* (human offspring); (4) Rousseau's fable of the fox and the grapes; (5) Ruskin's fascination with the notion of an economy of literature. The last two chapters seem to be thrown into the book simply to signal the fact that occasional latecomers have given thought to the relationship between poetic and economic production which so vexed the Ancients. The distance between each of the chapters works, however, because Shell is not presenting a thesis but elaborating a sequence of analyses (generally philological), demonstrating a way of thinking, and injecting into an imaginal realm the potential for a continued alert consideration of the issues he raises. No thesis, but rather a phrase which declares nothing as it stands, diffused throughout the book: "the money of the mind" (Marx's tag for logic). This mental currency has as its project the production of a supplementary human "nature" (or, an alien order of things). As he says, "Philosophy and money both order the 'other' arts and are about 'worth' (although in different senses)." (p. 25) They are not quite so innocuously "about", they're also *of*. Philosophy and money are productive of human natures and systems even while they attempt to retain their status as neutral regulators. Shell has made what may be the only supplement to Derrida on the relationship between thinking (the money of the mind) and image (the impress on the mind's coins). He literally examines coins as *texts* (the book photographically reproduces 32 of them), and he mounts his study on the myth of Gyges the slave whose king requires him to watch the queen undress so he can confirm her beauty. The queen gets wind of this, enlists Gyges' aid in killing her husband, and he becomes king himself. It's in his paranoid occupancy of his former master's throne that he invents coinage, bureaucracy, and subsequently tyrannizes the kingdom. "This invisible being (an ancient Wizard of Oz) introduces written communications to protect his position." (p. 18) "Written communications" = coins, tests, philosophy (or convertible mental currency). "The development of a bureaucracy supposes two fundamental social conditions: the development of forms of symbolization, such as money and writing, and the relative invisibility of the ruler."

The Economy of Literature, as the title suggests, is about poetics. Traditionally, poetics has been obsessed with the mechanical apparition of the visible, the 'art-object', the artifact. But as Shell reminds,

"Poetics is about production (*poiesis*). There can be no analysis of the form or content of production without a theory of labor." (p. 9) In literary theory, labor has been repressed or made invisible, and in fact it now comes forward to tyrannize the product, making the product (the poem) not the consequence of labor but the inexplicable result of a magical expedition into the world of appearances (Merwin and Strand, for instance, seem to fuel this mesmerized fascination). Current American poetry too comfortably mimics the dominant cultural ideology to *produce! produce!* Questions of market and audience are generally only diversions from the more fundamental analysis of labor. Logic, money and tyranny were united in ancient poetic theory to become a poetics of invisibility, whose end (to cite Aristotle) is the production of that which does not exist in nature rather than the just distribution of that which does. In a society straining at the bit to use nuclear energy where solar would do as well, such a perspective is marvellously appropriate. But for Aristotle, says Shell, "Poetry is a counterfeit human production as vexing as incest." (p. 101) To be counterfeit is not necessarily bad if the prevailing currency supports a tyrant. In fact this would appear to have been the fulcrum of successive avant-gardes. A traditional motivation of poetry has indeed been a kind of linguistic incest, the desire to occupy another person's words. Whenever poetry, like Gyges, observes another man's wife undressing, a reactionary diplomacy sets in like a virus: mind mints money, minces words, and poetry refuses to acknowledge the nature of the labor that produced it and the community of laborers within which it has to exist. Criticism stops being a poetics (i.e. "about production") and becomes instead an alternative currency (which tries to work out an exchange value with poetry on a strictly commodity level). Shell's book is a useful challenge to language-thought-full poets, because in practice as well as theory an overdeveloped attention to language can make it, too, a commodity subject to the tyranny of -- "X" (which, like the sphynx's riddle, has two arms, two legs, and forges signatures).

PETER SEATON :

AN AMERICAN PRIMER

Some and some somebody have sometimes learned what went said in refers to as you know you you I'm any what what what. I were dancing in and the instances leave watch and and the the I features the times what somebody especially what's exactly it's still just good, an and people

know more time timing or you you timing's the is that's being I every I  
everybody makes exciting. My disturbing what when you'll time the  
magazine up in in what's it's fast and of and the the the on a point a  
somebody of and time times with people someone cut books, I and I  
consisted, watching movies, things, you, anything something some I was  
in I the I are understand business who or who and a that the distribu-  
tion ourselves expect the things jump over on so everything I'm over  
over or you want things easier ourselves, I areas, I food, I in and I  
order one. And I and the them the two them the talking, hadn't a  
definitive gaining thinking told taking someone sitting, I work, I and  
a some some and seems any me liked, I like and the of to like are your  
your and they do is your like segments a boss something doing things  
through you you're the sex time news, or money that's own, the and you,  
sex, if the wonder watching things problems people everybody everybody  
was thought, some in I a a from who trying to working that that problems,  
I, something, want and they're with you. And or make a or and run in  
and away and I've the the the what's the clean clean isolate. And you  
just equal a thing I, and was, also works and the I'm any any I'm after  
than example I I I'm body face people or page or a considered maid a and  
that when some to some and I work I just I in a I the get and pick more  
rich. I I I, when and what I I extend I I they than that the besides  
they're they're they and the field I like I slice. Are like and think  
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thing makes make what you're I I said do. Me. Think mistake. You I I  
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something for morning. Space it, an art port. I space my I space. You're space space and and your you your everything everything it's with everything you thinking that's you and myself I verse to I I I'm as I'm to of like this it'll and I I I thought that letters you thought I space that's is in I get the something I and I or or and and and some some and it's I I the I I'm the a the I I I the I I'm some favorite interesting somebody of power you I the a my a I the I and or like, the a and you spit smoke. Like the are is are is is who's the idea and than an to and the and and and of the I you're everything, the the and women you you and you and you're the the or or more more and you and the the or the you're of is I schedule I the and and the you. At the refers to lying out, my mines to feel one woman. And and the read and with some uses something ideas wanted, what writing reading refers to in a the were a was the the and that's the a reading writing everyday someday and like sort of alcne, I'd, idea, crotch, groin, mind, idea, hunch. I my and my the the and where perspective floor floors floor and a evolves days, were was mirrors, coming still mirrors, since some rehearsing practicing one one the for the and say a the Kerouac the Creeley continued a was was like her her and she she in in the the the performs a a, I'm anyone everybody everybody and I I the than or performing were you or me. Think think, you is to me, looking and you. Listening and you. And than it's and learn were learn that's sex pages of initial letting something read they're they've, doing, between women, of they they'd and there the that or part sex to it's is I love and shock you, and too you is you a shock inside cause the kind was, the and an chemicals something do do and and people people, idea, and I is the whole every are was whole you learned some actual example love and find me doing funny jokes. Sometimes the mouth world leg don't nothing can make Italy people close. Some didn't do somebody always, or to to to in some dream, used of else's sex of to it now. An the an being who were with you to slips and the a the the a and a of sex times sex some see dreams or dream and look was which numb love rock. Like, are that's degrees sex something sex people wonder people among the name impersonators. They still want, alternative inspection to place me like what thoughts people's you'd people everything you love. Just get getting.

JAMES SHERRY :

A,B,\$.

The Ground: Looking closely at words increases their materiality-- Curves of letters, repetitions of shapes and phrases and sounds. That and the materiality of discourse, definitions that turn back on themselves ("contagious hospital" is the famous example) begin to generate new meanings. Yet since the 18th century, the tendency toward standard-

ization of spelling, capitalization and punctuation as well as revolutionary content (Romanticism), more and more, has forced language into the service of the subject and the idea. Common usage usually allows one to see through the words to the meaning, intention or subject: "Pass the butter, please.", but why should literature, writing that is in the first instance writing, be instrumental, in the service of...? Value is not inherent in language any more than it is in commodities. All value is attached as exchange value or use value. Why should language have only exchange value? Yes, exchange language for butter, if that is the goal, but if writing is the goal, a more specialized use value must be at least a possibility. Is language always a commodity? Clearly not in the case when blank paper costs money and a poem put on it cannot be given away. So, consider the possibility of meaning that is not seen *through* language, but meaning that is embedded, as it is put on the page, *in* language. But the main concern is not instrumentality, but to question what use we expect from writing. Whatever we develop is going to be misused.

Language Models -- Industrial Conglomerates and Fetishism of Structure: Suppliers take control over demand and manufacturers, with the aid of transparent language (A lot to live, Ajax cleans), control demand merely by producing and selling. But traditional divisions of industrial production by product disappear, and, although we still say razor blades please, the company that makes the blades is a tobacco company, and what controls that company is not a person who is expert in either tobacco or razor blades, but rather a manager who creates groupings of industries and contrives to disrupt the flow of other companys' profits or supply so he can step in at the last moment and append a real estate firm to his empire. What is the underlying organization that makes the company more resilient to the vagaries of the economy, nature and other's predatory instincts? Japan might be a model and a warning to those who do not need to be convinced. Although conglomerates are not organized around the commodities they produce, they still exist for two purposes -- for profit and to maintain those in power in power. The literature often referred to on these pages does not exist for the purpose of critique, but because it elucidates our concerns: it has to be written because there is no other literature that can be so-called now.

Change Models -- Humanism?: So language, the chief and continuous communal endeavor of the species, must be an agent of its change. If I am dissatisfied, I look to language to soothe my wounds and change my attitudes. I tell myself... Not only language, but language used fittedly. (Polemics are another transparency. Sometimes more is needed.) *Fittedness* used: Attitudes are revealed in the *way* one says change takes place. To say "the order must be changed" has a different implicit attitude than "the order is changing" or fatalistically that "order will change." Attitudes are revealed in the tense as much as in generalized

language "views". A new idea is an agent of change, but only incidentally revolutionary. Language glorifies, gratifies, indulges, elucidates. The choices we make on that level reveal attitudes *and* expose the structures of the system. Shall we take a polemical stance or try to uncover more? Because "Commodities...are functions of the human organism," even materialized language use or structured language use or sincere language use will be commoditized. Even non-instrumentality is an unreachable goal if writing is to be comprehensible. (Non-instrumentality is an asymptote.)

Avant-garde as Commodity: Standard patterns of syntax refer to the way things used to be. New patterns reveal the present. Any other perception of the relationship between style and change is alienated. Old ideas show that not everything is changing at the same rate. The most avant-garde barely keeps up with everyday life. "In the future we will be freer, because the most advanced writing is more free of the referent than past writing" or "We are freer, not than we were, but because how our newest work indicates what freedom is." The former is a commoditized and alienated view of "language" writing. The contrary of it is equally alienated, but the second statement might be some help. (While we do it, we get...) The point is not only *how* the elements of the social structure are revealed in language, but the attitude we ourselves take toward that social-economic structure as writers. We do not need to strike poses or attitudinize. Our *works* are our *attitudes* and *expectations*. What are those three.

Another Example: Wittgenstein says, "When we speak of a thing, but there is no object that we can point to, there we may say is the spirit." If I reply that "language" writing is more spiritual and instrumental ("subjective") writing is mechanistic and technical, I missed the point of this article. The philosopher's words reveal a way to speak to the spiritual. This goes for poets and their critics.

RON SILLIMAN :

IF BY "WRITING" WE MEAN LITERATURE (if by "literature" we mean poetry (*if...*))....

Any writing, regardless of genre, referentiality, whatever, has the capacity to make such a contribution. However, very little does. Why?

Language is simultaneously a product of human activity & a critical mediator between the individual & all else. Any privilege it may possess as a sign system rests with its social role as the code thru wch most, if not all, meaning becomes *manifest, explicit, conscious*.

Language is one strategic part of the total social fact. So is art

(including lit). Beyond, if not before, art's long-recognized function of the transmission of ideology is its role as the tuning mechanism through which the individual is trained, often unconsciously, to organize her responses to the medium at hand. Thus painting (partially) organizes the code of sight.

Most art forms encode media that are not, otherwise, the subject of formal learning processes, consciously reproduced at the institutional level (save as instruction in the arts per se). Not so language. The position of writing, both as sign system & art, within the structure of the total social fact is therefore exceptionally complex. Its code is that of *manifest* perception, comprehension: you know that I know what you mean, because I can tell you in "my own" words.

But the words are never our own. Rather, they are our own usages of a determinate coding passed down to us like all other products of civilization, organized into a single, capitalist, world economy. Questions of national language & those of genre parallel one another in that they primarily reflect *positionality* within the total, historical, social fact. It is important here to keep in mind that new forms occur only at the site of already digested contents, just as, conversely, new contents occur only at the site of already digested forms.

Thus black American poetry, in general, is not language writing because of what so-called language writing is -- the grouping together of several, not always compatible, tendencies within "high bourgeois" literature. The characteristic features of this position within literature have been known for decades: the educational level of its audience, their sense of the historicity of writing itself, the class origin of its practitioners (how many, reading this, will be the children of lawyers, doctors, ministers, professors?), & significantly, the functional declassing of most persons who choose such writing as a life-work.

Any class struggle for consciousness must occur at different levels in the different sectors of the social whole, precisely according to the question of positionality. Bourgeois literature can either reinforce or undermine the historic confidence of the bourgeoisie, that its role, if not "inevitable," is at least "for the best." Or not.

Characteristic of this position in society (& writing) is a high degree of sensitivity to the constituent elements which enter into the overall struggle. That the formalism of modernism (including language writing) both examines such elements in a quasi-scientific fashion, while often appearing to cleave them from their material base is no accident, as all movements in art (however small or explicitly "anti-establishment") tend to present both progressive & regressive sides: symbolism brought polysemic overdetermination into consciousness within an individualized, romantic ideology.

*All meaning is a construct*, built from the determinate code of

language. New meanings exist only to the extent that they have been previously repressed, not permitted to reach consciousness. But it is necessary to seek the social base of any meaning not in the self-reflexivity of the text, as such, but in its relation to *the social positionality of its audience & author*.

Unlike most programs, wch are self-limiting, that of writing in the framework of capitalism carries within itself the admonition, typical of an economy predicated on technical innovation & the concentration of capital, to "make it new." The function of a truly political writing is to, first, comprehend its position (most explicitly, that of its audience) & to bring forth these "new" meanings according to a deliberately political program. Let us undermine the bourgeoisie.

\* \* \*

PARTICULARS: in re MacLow

I find no great evidence that Jackson MacLow "admire(s)" my work "for all the wrong reasons." I myself endeavor to read sensitively, intelligently & *critically*, his own writing, wch continues to be much underrated in this country. Its general unavailability is part of the political problem of poetry, a problem wch I do intend to address at each moment in my own activity as a poet.

But his letter in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E #8 combats my own comments in #7's symposium with more ire than logic. Consider: MacLow argues vehemently against my recommendation of Henri Lefebvre's Dialectical Materialism without One Single Statement as to WHY it represents "Western ideological diseases"; he goes on to suggest that I am little more than a radio, transmitting the messages of "the know-it-alls who entrap generous spirits such as Ron Silliman into their exploitive ideological mazes."

I regret to report that I am wholly responsible for my own opinions. Worse, I happily stand behind them.

That writing & politics are not discrete activities is nowhere more clear than in the fact that Jackson's complaint is centered around the problem of definition. The phrase "anarcho-social-democrat," wch seems to have pushed his button, is no mystery, nor is it wedded primarily to the Social Democrat Federation, any more than the term communism can be taken to be synonymous with the Stalinized CPs with wch we are all too familiar.

MacLow's letter robs all such terms of their specific (i.e., functional & contextualized) content, in order to set up an obfuscatory fog. This screen enables Jackson to associate me with any & all self-announced socialist tendencies (in the 2nd item of his indictment alone it is intimated that I might be a 3rd World nationalist, a Stalinist or

a Trotskyist!); it also permits him to send forth these volleys from a variety of positions, never having to commit himself to any one of them, nor addressing their sometimes glaring internal contradictions (citing, for example, Djilas, a socialist & repentant Yugoslavian Stalinist, in support of his anti-socialist stance).

Given MacLow's refusal to ground his terms, to the extent that I am unable to tell whether I'm supposed to represent bureaucratic oligarchies or 19th century utopianism, it's difficult to know just what are "the goals...Silliman & I *both* consider desirable" (my italics). Jackson's own position, however, hovers behind the very next sentence: "Only dogged & persistent & detailed work *within the present* concrete oppressive social systems may achieve some advance" (emphasis mine again). MAC LOW'S COMMITMENT PERCEIVES NO OTHER CONTEXTUALIZING LONG-TERM GOAL THAN THE MAINTENANCE OF A SYSTEM HE HIMSELF CALLS OPPRESSIVE! Here is the footprint of a social-democrat.

Understood as such, the incoherence of his general argument is no accident. The positions taken are in each instance partial & in no instance correlated to a larger program of political action. No wonder the contribution of cultural work seems to him "problematical."

But my argument is not with Jackson MacLow, who has at least bravely volunteered himself as a willing target. The idea that progressive political (& literary) work can be carried out within a context that does not fundamentally challenge the existing "concrete oppressive" economic relations of the world is typical not merely of members of social-democratic parties, but of *most of the poets* in the United States, specifically including those who associate themselves with L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E.

All behavior, including poetry, possesses a political dimension. Unfortunately for us all, this domain is set within an overlapping multiplicity of social codes wch reciprocally mediate one another, so that no one aspect may be identified as the arena for "correct" work to the exclusion of others. Nevertheless, two relations seem to me critical, insofar as no further sorting out of other realms is possible without them. One is the relation to audience, wch is specific for each writer & *each work*. The second is the relation *to a program*, wch means an articulatable set of goals, both long & short term.

If I write a newspaper story about landlord-tenant relations in San Francisco's Tenderloin one day, an essay for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E the next & work on my poem Tjanting the third, these relations shld be calld into play in ways that can be examind. The audience for the story will differ from those for either the essay or the poem, & I imagine the audience for the essay to be more restricted (focusd, if you will) than for Tjanting. Each, however, shld lead the reader toward a general program (making tangible, for example, the ways in wch capitalism harms & deforms every individual it touches *within the relations* that define

each of these distinct relationships). In each instance, it shld be clear that solutions are not to be sought "within the present concrete oppressive social systems." At best, one can achieve new staging areas for further, more effective, struggle within these systems.

By now it shld be evident that I do believe I cld carry on my poetic production within a dictatorship of the working class (a concept I specifically endorse), because all forms of literature are class-specific & these classes will not cease to exist on the day on wch state power is transferrd from one to another. My poetry recognizes an audience that possesses a bourgeois origin, is educated (to the point of being conscious of literary history), predominantly white & even male. The body of individuals wch make up this class has a specific history, specific internal relations (viz. Bernstein's note on group formation in #8), & a specific future. Unlike Baraka -- with whom I profoundly disagree --, becoming political does not mean abandoning this audience, but making it instead look at itself. The need for such understanding is not only not about to "wither away," it will be heightened if & when the events of history, for wch we are responsible, transform our lives.

ALAN SONDHEIM :

Letter to the editor - - reply to Dick Higgins

In L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E #5, Dick Higgins takes me to task for my criticism of Cage & Duchamp re. the notion of privilege. I would like to point out the following:

1) I am not criticizing Cage, Duchamp, and I suppose by implication other members of the "avant-garde" from an "automated" viewpoint. I know damn well I don't know "who the PEOPLE are" -- I couldn't begin to guess. I don't claim anyone as "statistical majority." The problem is simply this: That this civilization is in the midst of a crisis of enormous proportions, a crisis that extends internally through the "invasion of the image" and externally through the activity of appropriation. That the majority of artists in this country continue to ignore this crisis (or, fairly enough, argue against its existence). (It seems to me for example entirely reasonable to draw a parallel between Cage's Thoreau work and fragmentation/privatization in society, a state of friction resulting in an unbelievably desperate situation.) (One can also imagine the buildings in the South Bronx -- so near the origin of this magazine -- theoretically considered in a state of DECONSTRUCTION ----- )

2) Along with all of this, I cannot quibble with Dick Higgins about whether or not "privilege is inherently unfair." Obviously his knowledge of German (read privilege) is not "unfair" -- on the other hand, the U.S. consumption of world energy (around 30%) seems unfair as does a great deal in contemporary life. Is poverty (cultural or otherwise) "unfair"? This isn't irrelevant; it touches on both the context and foundation of culture. (I don't believe, by the way, that avant-garde art is "native to some" -- I happen to teach it and can witness daily the authoritarianism that accompanies such teaching (this is not a value judgement). I find that in the "REAL WORLD" (which always seems distant from the university or "artworld") there is a surprisingly small audience for avant-garde work. I don't believe for a moment that this is solely (or even largely) the problem of ACCESS -- it seems to be equally the problem of self-referentiality or closure that accompanies such work.)

3) Higgins asks for "positive models" -- I can recommend the work of (England) Steve Willats, Tony Rickaby, Conrad Atkinson; (United States) Rita Myers, Laurie Anderson, Martha Rosler, Dan Graham, Kathy Acker; (France) Didier Bay, Annette Messager; (Canada) some of the work around the CEAC group.

4) I agree with Higgins' third point to an extent -- the need for the exploration of a social hermeneutic. I think of some of Don Bahr's Pima/Papago texts in this light. I might point out that Adorno and Schutz have tackled the phenomenology of group performances. I personally (within this society) would tend to an analysis of "massification" (hate that word) in terms (externally) of "ratings" and (internally) the globalization and tokenization of the self.

5) Finally, I did not mean the attack to be directed contra Cage, Duchamp, etc. -- but only their work, especially the assumptions which seem to underly it. None of this would be relevant, but too often these assumptions (writerliness, autonomy, randomness, freedom, etc.) are taken for granted, i.e. not understood as the embodiment of a type of bourgeois ideology.

LORENZO THOMAS :

IS IT XEROX OR MEMOREX?

Neon, though not the opiate of the people (and though it provided a title for an interesting poetry journal edited by Gil Sorrentino in the late 1950s), is harsh and instantly nostalgic. It will also, all you

dear dear "Retro" fans, become even more funky when the "energy crisis" gets a fool head of steam. The advertising/propoganda/mass "communication" industry is about to be revolutionized by calculated want . . . then it'll be back to banners hanging over Main Street and travelling medicine shows.

The weather person is talking about winds and rain. "There are," she says, "46,000 people in the San Antonio area without power tonight." She explains that this is due to natural causes reported and predicted (all but the tragedy of the powerlessness) by the National Weather Service according to her maps and radar graphics.

Johnny Carson is talking about the disaster at Three Mile Island (the US government/utility industrial complex's sequel to Jonestown) and looks properly grave. "I have good news and bad news," he mumbles. "The bad news is that radiation is still escaping from the plant; the good news, it'll be twenty years before we know who got sick."

No one applauds.

Moving right along, lets get to the rest of the best news that's come along in a long time . . . . Soon, both nuclear energy and ecology will join the nostalgic annals that now boast phrenology and other half-assed campaigns. All failed scenarios.

We have been fooling ourselves. Our science says that hypothesis is meant to fail or there is no production of progress. We all believe that; worse, such principles also believe in us and act accordingly.

The Christians say that "faith" is all . . . that this is a dying world. They sing about that on their television shows.

I'm at a literary meeting. One writer says, "I just don't feel qualified to judge these foreign language writers." He's talking about people like poet Ricardo Sanchez, Alurista, Rolando Hinojosa. I look at this idiot in all amazement and wonder, Since when is *español* a foreign language on this continent?

Most of the people in prison in this country are functional illiterates. It's possible to function without being able to read or write . . . but it is not possible to live like a human being up to snuff. Expectations that the media breeds are beyond the reach of them what cannot reads. Teach them to read and they can work. Perhaps they will not mug you.

With millions of Americans who steal and take the falls because they cannot read the instructions, who has time to contemplate the morals of our grammar? Magnetism is undeveloped still . . . even as neon is going out. All all all all over this land.

"Capitalism" is a snobbish term for poverty and exploitation. A fiction. If there were a "capitalist system," would there be more subordination of clauses than in some language born and borne by another form of political economy? Would "socialism" eliminate the personal possessive pronoun from any language?

Do you know anyone who can read? This? The *semiotistes* have nothing to say to those of us who function as illiterates. That? Anything?

Don't ask.

BARRETT WATTEN :

WRITING AND CAPITALISM

What is that question doing? Do I get credit?<sup>1</sup>

I have many ideas about my work and capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

When first I opened my eyes, I saw. Before that I had structure.<sup>3</sup>

Yes, writing is social. I am immortal because middle class.<sup>4</sup>

I don't want to perpetrate bad ideas.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Form is identical to content.

<sup>2</sup> So does everyone.

<sup>3</sup> Words work.

<sup>4</sup> The petit-bourgeois has no class interest of his own.

<sup>5</sup> Editing is act.

HANNAH WEINER :

CAPITALISTIC USELESS PHRASES AFTER ENDLESS

TITLES ARE USELESS

THAS A HINT

what about the houses

this is a house and it is next to ours & ETC period I DONST CAPITALS

I just dont like quaint phrases anymore anyway adds s THAS SQUINT

I just dont like Pilgrims anymore ampersand their heads off

I just dont like signs ampersand money that this is the way

our quaint phrases

I just dont like I dont speak it language I JUST COME IN

SPEAK LIKE OUR INDIANS

CHARLES CHEATS next line offends

cheating is OK if yo TOUGH GIRL ure in the boring way of it  
HANNAH THAS A HINT  
CUT ITS SHORT  
THAT MEANS MEANS  
I meant our houses are stolen from us OF COURSE IT IS  
that means I have no home and I live with somebody else always  
thats not clearly understood  
MEANS IS OUR LEADER  
AND HE DOESNT CHEAT ON IT  
and they knows it in his jail  
WHAS A JAIL  
SENTENCE ENDED  
USELESS PHRASES ARE STUPID THROW IT OUT  
WHAS A PHRASE  
too many words waste paper separate line  
Hannahs you cant worry about capitalistic phrases you cheated long  
sentence on them Bernadette anyway add s  
nos code poems published wasted energy someone helps  
just add up the money  
BANKS  
WHO OWNS IT  
SOME ADJECTIVES LIKE DESCRIBE  
long adjectives hurt and you know it  
MENTION THE HOUSES AGAIN  
WHO IS COMMITTED  
END OF PHRASE STOP THIS SENTENCE  
STOP WRITING THIS OMIT NAMES AND CHEATS ends sentence  
mention Charles names stupid sentence omitted  
its our society stupid upside down and the flag waves again that hurts  
us we are indians and we live in trucks  
SOME PEOPLE THAS ENOUGH  
we just dont like quaint phrases  
save Charles  
I JUST QUIT  
helps other people stupid and stop next line  
complaining  
BRUCE I SAID NO NAMES LIKES IT ENDS LIKE THIS BORING STUPID  
ENDS SENTENCE thas a structure  
I JUST GIVE HINTS THAT I GIVE UP HINTING  
thas a capitalistic phrase  
I DONT SIGN MY PAPERS EITHER NO SIGN AFTER WHO SIGNS IT ADDS HAHHAH

NO SIGNS IT

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

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