

*L=A=N-G=U=A=G=E*

Volume 4

Bruce Andrews & Charles Bernstein, Editors

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# Thought's Measure<sup>\*</sup>

Charles Bernstein

## 1. *Writing (as) (and) thinking*

To my lot fell  
By trust, false signs, fresh starts,  
A slow speed and a heavy reason,  
A visibility of blindedness — these thoughts —  
And then content, the language of the mind  
That knows no way to stop<sup>1</sup>

Language is the material of both thinking and writing. We think and write in language, which sets up an intrinsic connection between the two.

Just as language is not something that is separable from the world, but rather is the means by which the world is constituted, so thinking cannot be said to 'accompany' the experiencing of the world in that it informs that experiencing. It is through language that we experience the world, indeed through language that meaning comes into the world and into being. As persons, we are born into language and world; they exist before us and after us. Our learning language is learning the terms by which a world gets seen. Language is the means of our socialization, our means of initiation into a (our) culture. I do not suggest that there is nothing beyond, or outside of, human language, but that there is meaning only in terms of language, that the givenness of language is the givenness of the world.

An analogous idea to that of language not accompanying but constituting the world is that language does not accompany 'thinking'. 'When I think in language there aren't "meanings" going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language itself is the vehicle of thought.'<sup>2</sup>

'What does language communicate? It communicates the mental being corresponding to it. It is fundamental that this mental being communicates itself *in* language and not *through* language. Languages therefore have no speaker, if this means someone who communicates *through* these languages.... All nature, insofar as it communicates itself, communicates itself in language, and so finally in persons.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> Notes from a series of eleven workshops at the St. Mark's Poetry Project in the winter of 1980.

As the body is to a person, so language is to the world; to speak of a 'soul' is then to speak of a projection cast by the body. In this sense, to discount the pervasiveness of language — to be so accustomed to its presence that its constituting power over the values and objects of the world is disregarded — is to avoid the body and with it the materiality of time and space.

He is gone now  
Taking his body with him  
When all the time  
I thought it was  
The beauty of his mind  
I loved<sup>4</sup>

In talking about language and thinking I want to establish the *material*, the stuff, of writing, in order, in turn, to base a discussion of writing on its medium rather than on preconceived literary ideas of subject matter or form. And I want to propose 'thinking' as a concept that can help to materially ground that discussion. 'Thinking' as the conceptual basis of literary production suggests the possibilities for leaps, jumps, fissures, repetition, bridges, schisms, colloquialisms, trains of associations, and memory; as a literary mode it would rely on concepts related to spontaneity, free-association, and improvisation.

Many writers have wanted to plug into the stream of thinking that seems to be constantly going on in the head, or have wanted to cast an image or make a picture of what thinking is like, or to actually embody thinking in writing. Some have used thinking as the content of the work, as in genres such as the meditation or contemplative poem. This involvement with thinking is a basic passion, a basic desire, in writing. It is one of the attractions to writing poetry and reading it.

The power of hearing a person think out loud is tapped by such relatively recent works as Lenny Bruce's later spontaneous talks, Kerouac's transcriptions of conversations in *Visions of Cody*, and David Antin's talking pieces. Talking improvisationally — 'from the top of one's head' — can be a way of putting thinking into words, with the dynamics of words organized by extemporaneous thought and speech rhythms allowing the terrain of the mind at work to open wide. In contrast, polite discursive conversation is more a form of mannered behavior than thinking; and, similarly, extemporaneous debate, like oratory, is more a replica of formal written exposition and doesn't draw as directly on a semblance of 'thinking' for its literary mode. In Antin's work, while the stylistic movement is paratactic and guardedly rambling, the tight rein of the raconteur is present, keeping the discursiveness of what Antin calls 'discourse' foregrounded.<sup>5</sup> The talking monologue, a form that

is largely based on the model of thinking in public, can also be seen in the 'Talks' issue of *Hills* magazine.<sup>6</sup> Both these examples use transcription of tapes to try to capture the style of live talk. Of course, the limitation of talks as a model for written thinking is that they tend to be organized in part by expository and rhetorical techniques. A work such as Lenny Bruce's 'Live at the Curran Theater' is perhaps least invested in such techniques primarily because of Bruce's concern with bringing out his 'private' obsessions and trains of associations, prompted by his conviction that these are *social* contents. Whether transcripts of 'unguarded' 'private' conversation record (portray? depict?) the thought process more accurately is more likely to be glimpsed from the intensive rapping in *Visions of Cody* than in the generally anecdotal tone of the phone call transcriptions in Ed Friedman's *Telephone Book*, a work that suggests that informal conversation is more behavior than thinking, or makes you wonder if there's a difference.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most attractive model is talking to oneself: the soliloquy being a primary example of a literary formulation for thinking, with the exception that its dramatic structure may be seen as theatricalizing thought rather than exhibiting it.

Certainly 'stream of consciousness' writing satisfies the desire for thinking in writing with maximum exhilaration, and as such is a primary example of writing as thinking. Hannah Weiner, in her journal, carries this mode to a contemporary literalness, finding a way to record the continually interruptive quality of her thinking, the mind intruding on itself as one worry breaks off and another image takes hold.<sup>8</sup> Yet these examples, as well, can seem limited by their stylistic casts, throwing them into the realm of literary forms more than manifestations of thinking. But that would take this investigation down the path of looking for the chimerical private experience that cannot be shared. Thinking is certainly a private experience; the problem is that if we try to pin 'thinking' down we project an image of it as an *entity* rather than, indeed, the very content of language. Like with a dream, the experience slips through our fingers if we try to recount it: we know that the telling of a dream is a quite different matter than dreaming itself.

Dreaming and thinking are primary subjects for Rene Descartes in his *Meditations*. The form of meditation, of contemplation, so vividly realized 300 years ago by Descartes, is picked up in uncannily similar ways in a number of recent poetry texts.<sup>9</sup> Descartes uses the written meditation to make you feel you are with him in his study, the effect is to identify with his thinking so that you feel as if you're thinking it too. But despite Descartes' remarkable perspicuity in charting the process of thinking through a problem, his meditations are more a formal representation of the thinking process than an immersion in it; and this idealization of reasoning and clarity tend to mediate the pull of thought's idle energy. Robert Creeley, sharing the conceit of meditation — thought presented and examined, weighted and measured — is more involved with the texture of the process itself, less with

a representation than an enactment. In 'The Measure', the form of the meditation is used to create a *music of thought*, where thinking becomes the material in which the measure is found.

I cannot  
move backward  
or forward.  
I am caught  
  
n the time  
as measure.  
What we think  
of we think of —  
  
for no other reason  
we think than  
just to think —  
each for himself.<sup>10</sup>

With Ted Greenwald, as with Creeley, the mind thinking becomes the active force of the poem —

Stand next to my head  
Examining long and deeply  
Each particle that's designing  
It's own, ah!, good impression

More than I thought I  
Could handle without  
Knowing exactly where to  
Locate the *thought* handle ...

Take puffs of links ...  
The thought of what's coming ...  
Thinking to find a way  
To put myself back together<sup>11</sup>

The music and rhythm of contemplation become the form of the life, a life, as it is being lived in a body. Indeed with Greenwald, the viscosity of thought is no less than the sheer physical presence of the body in that thought. In Michael Gottlieb's *Eidetic Deniers*, the thinking stands up out of the chair of meditation, merging with perception (as emphasized by the collage-like photos that are

juxtaposed with the text). We are looking at thinking as it moves through him/us and dazzled by the sheer beauty of the process so articulated, the measure found.

afternoon in mind how    a giant swap nearly    a new wind and talked off into ...  
Like a rock slide ...    perfected rift logic ...  
Gloved positions    the actuarial synapses    hesitation<sup>12</sup>

The motivation in this — to see how the 'world' would/will come into view, how it works: the investigation/creation of human culture. So not just an interest in expression of 'my' thoughts, thoughts think the world. In this way, too, the mapping of the free-associative 'thinking' process, the *ordering* internal to the movements of the mind/perception, provides a model for writing in sharp contrast to common expository and representational modes by focusing in on other types of movements from one thing to the next, allowing for writing to be put together in continuously 'new' ways — how various shapes and modes and syntaxes create not alternate paraphrases of the same things but different entities entirely. Grains of mind. The desire for writing to be the end of its own activity, its very thatness.

In looking at Creeley's 'A Piece'<sup>13</sup> or Brian McInerney's 'The World', the articulation of contemplation is an example of how (*a technique*) words can be brought into one's more total awareness in reading, where in reading you are brought up short to the point of the text becoming viscerally present to you, the 'content' and the 'experience of reading' are collapsed onto each other, the content being the experience of reading, the consciousness of the language and its movement and sound, the page.

outside  
is  
a thought,  
a consecutive thought  
laid down,  
written on a page —

the idea of a room.

for you,  
to you alone

I am alone,  
a leading into  
thought, a



solution

laid down, reading  
on this page<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, in Zukofsky's 'It's a Gay Life' the wordness of the poem is foregrounded, as a way of concretizing the language, making it visible, sounding it at the level of each phoneme, so that the phonemes turning to morphemes turning to words turning to phrases turning to 'poem' is felt, heard, made tangible, palpable.

There's naw—thing  
lak po—ee try  
it's a delicacy  
for a horse:

Der's na—thing  
lak pea—nut—brittle  
it's a delicacy  
for the molars<sup>14</sup>

Rather than making the language as transparent as possible, where these other qualities are repressed as a matter of technique (by creating, stylistically, the illusion of the invisibility of wordness and structure), the movement is toward opacity/denseness — visibility of language through the making translucent of the medium. To actually map the fullness of thought and its movement. Cut of mind/perception/grain of mind ... to ... the factness of the world in the factness of the poem. Poem becoming a perceptual field/experience 'independent' of 'author'. (Cf: Olson's 'Projective Verse' essay: each perception instantaneity on the next: the form of the poem charts the perception so eliminating of traditional 'inherited' forms which strip poetry of this active power.) The anti-habitual ordering of attentions so that attention can be vivid — the intending rather than assuming of order, including order of sound/syllable/phonemes. So to go from 'thinking' as an activity of 'self' to a world creating/perceiving idea. *Thinking things the world*. So that in the end the poem stands as another particular being, hence object, like myself, in the world, and I beside it. And I return not to myself 'as some egocentric center, but experience myself as *in* the world', that with the meaning and limits therein revealed I have also placed myself.

'Limits / are what any of us / are inside of.' (Olson). '...that order that of itself can speak to all' (Zukofsky).

I'm talking here not so much about a motivating theory but a desire: to make language opaque so that writing becomes more and more conscious of itself as world generating, object generating. This goes not only for making palpable the processes of the mind and heart (inseparable) but for revealing the form and structure in which writing occurs, the plasticity of form/shape. So that writing may be an experience in which the forms and objects of the world may seem to be coming into being. The making invisible of these forms/structures/shapes gives the sensation of a world beyond the page/the language that is already given, assumed; whereas the acknowledgement of these forms as materials to be worked with, as an active part of the writing, suggests 'our' participation in the constitution of nature and meaning. There is no escape in writing (or 'elsewhere') from structures/forms, they are everpresent — 'de'forming and 're'forming. To *see* them. To see them as inseparable from 'content'.

## *2. Structure and construction*

I have been talking about 'thinking' as a means of locating the materials of Language and writing. This is partly to contrast with literary and expository forms that tend to channel writing — and so feeling/thinking/expression — into certain set routes. By imagining the free-associative order and relations in 'thinking' as a mode, new domains of compositional possibility can be located, ranges of content/expression/meaning can be reached. I want also to suggest that an obverse way of looking at writing in which one starts from an rather than an internal approach is a method of getting to this as well: the use of structures (constructions, programmes) as a way to get to dimensions of meaning necessary to put forward the fullness of my experiences and perceptions. — But what is the value of breaking away from habitual psychological or literary tracks, from automatic or predetermined patterns? For one thing, such patterns can make us blind to what is going on with our feelings/consciousness and with the world, with others. But more than this the desire is to reveal the specificity, the tone and texture as much as 'content' 'summary' (of experience). Making writing, the activity itself, an active process, the fact of its own activity, autonomous, self-sufficient. That in this way, one becomes more responsible to and for the work, for more dimensions of the meaning. I am certainly not, however, advocating gesturalizing the ways language can make meaning; as if to dramatize the capacities of language were enough, as if poetry wasn't just as much as ever the revelation of meaning, an active process with language as the medium, requiring an acknowledgement that language always occurs in forms and structures. 'Form is never more than the extension of content' — no bodiless souls or soulless bodies. It is by and through structurings that

the world gets revealed; they cannot, any more than the body can, be avoided. But there is no given (set of) structure(s) for all cases; they must always be generated ([re]discovered) anew.

In constructive writing, the outer structure or parameter, or the method by which a work is generated, is made visible. By 'constructive' partly I'm trying to point to certain radicalities or extremes of compositional strategy that tend to increase the artifactual, non-naturalistic sense of the poem — a project that includes a wide range of recent work including Jackson Mac Low's chance-derived architectural poems, Ron Silliman's predetermined programmes in *2197* and *Ketjak*, Daivid Metnick's and P. Inman's standard word ('zaum') poems, Ron Padgett's 'Haiku' — First: five syllables/Second: seven syllables/Third: five syllables', Paul Violi's 'Index' to an imaginary biography, Clark Coolidge's 'oflengths' — consisting primarily of prepositions, Lyn Hejinian's permutational *My Life*, Kit Robinson's *Dolch Stanzas* — composed entirely from the Dolch list of common words, to name only a few. Historically, the gematria and other 'wordevents' documented in Jerome Rothenberg's *A Big Jewish Book* are relevant; more crucial to the current context is the work of such early modernist Russian writers as Shlkovsky and Khlebnikov — for example Khlebnikov's 'zaum' poems as well as his 'Incantation by Laughter' which is entirely based on prefixes and suffixes of the root word for laughter. (Compare also: Steve Reich/Phil Glass/Charlemagne Palestine; Michael Snow; Ad Reinhardt; Malevich, El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy.) ([Expository writing as constructive, e.g., Francis Bacon, since exaggeratedly visible paradigmatic syntax and sentence and paragraph order?!]) — in the end, a result of this conscious constructing is that of 'making strange' ' the 'alienation effect': To be able to see and feel the force and weight of formations of words, dynamics that otherwise go unnoticed; to feel it as stuff, to sound the language, and in so doing to reveal its meanings.

In the visual arts the constructive base is perhaps more apparent than in writing where we are seduced more readily into accepting a natural 'speech'-derived syntax or 'logic'-derived discursiveness. For one thing, construction is assumed to be an integral part of visual work. Much contemporary sculpture is essentially seen as construction. Yet, just as fundamentally, construction is at the heart of writing. Anyone who has ever learned to write a newspaper article (who, what, when, where, why) or taken a course in expository prose is taught about outlines that enable parameters and codes to be set up that the reader will notice and decipher. The front page of *The New York Times* is, in a sense, a collage or simultaneity with a clearly structured hierarchic meaning to its placements and orderings over the page and in each article. *Ordering and sequence express values*. If, in poetry, we wish to take responsibility for the work, the text, then we must intend the order, take the order as a crucial part of what we are doing. The idea of order suggests sequence but I also want it to suggest

mode/shape/form/structure in which the ordering occurs. The question also arises as to what is the *unit* of ordering — phoneme, morpheme, word, phrase, sentence, etc. (Syntax is the ordering of strings of words.) What, then, is the *measure*, measure being the unit of ordering? The measure being something we discover in writing poetry not something we assume. This would almost distinguish what I mean by poetry as a type of writing, though that would exclude a common characterization of poetry as that writing which uses a measure handed down by tradition, e.g., iambic pentameter. But I am putting forward a poetry that does not assume a measure but finds it, articulates it. In this context, a value in constructive work is that it lays the measure bare to the eye, so that we can see the structuring and how it creates (conditions) meaning by its structuring. So actively displays how meaning in the world comes to be. It is a method that shows how ordering and sequence assert values, how form limits/conditions what you can say in it. Which also suggests that all writing exists in form, in shape, as mode, in a style, in genres. Some writing may make you more or less conscious of this fact — this is indeed a compositional vector in writing. In starting out talking about 'thinking' as a kind of genre of recent poetry I was citing examples of an idea of ordering based on the 'spontaneous' movements of the mind. This type of 'natural' 'free associative' mode I would like to collapse onto the artifactual, 'constructive' mode: both are valuable in that they call the 'measure' into question, take part of the project finding the measure. Any given presentation of order, realization of measure, suggests a world view. In the act of writing, order and structure become integrated into the 'text', into the experiential realm, where they exist as part of that totality.

She measured to the hour its solitude.  
 She was the single artificer of the world  
 In which she sang. And when she sang, the sea,  
 Whatever self it had, became the self  
 That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we,  
 As we beheld her striding there alone,  
 Knew that there never was a world for her  
 Except the one she sang and, singing, made.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. *Privacy*

I want to keep circling — from structural and constructive perspectives on poetry back round to a seemingly more 'internal' starting point for writing, back, for this moment, to the picture of Descartes sitting alone in his study, so as to think about 'privacy' as a central aspect of writing. Poetry is a private act in a public place — the public place being both 'language' — which is shared by all — and the page, open as it is to reading and rereading (by oneself and others). For some the search for the private — that which is true to oneself and for oneself on one's own terms — has taken the form

of breaking away from highly standardized and institutionalized forms — indeed, from any previously realized forms — whether they be literary forms that prize evenness and pentameter and high tone, or dry descriptiveness, or airy wittiness floating through beautiful mannered stanzas, or quasi-logical 'non-fiction' expository forms of argument, discourse, or... — from automatic or prescribed patterns. The tangibility of perception or thought, of experience — how you can get to that. The weight and density of the language *entoned* — the *ear* — that allows for the specificity, the particularity, of a composition to be felt. The order being the order that comes from one's 'private' *listening*, hearing — which in its privacy seems to be the order of the world, even without 'me'. That this measure, these syllables so ordered, this phrase after this thought after this word, brings the world onto the page, allows its meanings to be discovered.

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'The aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (one is unable to notice something — because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his or her inquiry do not strike a person at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him. — And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful.'<sup>17</sup>

That writing is in some senses the exploration and revelation of that which is private seems the heart of the desire to write poetry. A person, alone with their thoughts, takes pen in hand.... Indeed the social conditions of writing poetry — that it is not generally work performed for another in exchange for money — tend to put it, sociologically, in the private (personal) sphere, an avocation performed for 'pleasure'. The final judgments for what is written and how it is written are made, privately, by the writer (although this is often the robotized privacy of the consumer choosing among brands — social norms can exert a stronger influence in a personal choice than in a collective one). The very terms that are often used to characterize positive values in poetry — personal, confessional, moving, etc. — present a picture of poetry as a private expression made public. Literary writing has in fact been a place where the 'private' secrets of 'our' lives have been laid bare(r) — where taboos about what was improper to say have been broken, where the seemingly most intimate secrets of desire and behavior have been spelled out. Even, in fact, where the most commonplace insecurities and egotisms — 'masked in public' — have shown their 'all-too-human' faces. Yet, strangely, the more deeply personal a writer's revelation, the more the writing itself comes to be taken as evidence of a shared truth, not unique to the writer at all. It is almost like the myth of psychoanalysis — that our most private fantasies and dreams hold the key by which our behaviors become 'publicly' comprehensible.

Rousseau's *Confessions* is an obvious place to look back to for a text that shatters the public illusions (i.e., hypocrisies) of both behavior and desire in its quest for 'honesty' ('truthfulness' 'authenticity'). (The work itself — the genre is memoir — is no more a private expression than a public accounting.<sup>18</sup>) Certainly, at the time this type of work was both courageous and outrageous. People evidently had, as they no longer do, the capacity to be shocked by the details of a person's private life. By now, such details flood the marketplace of literary artifact — the confessions of the most repulsive to the most angelic are a daily part of what we read and hear, seemingly no personal fact about 'public' figures is left private. More recently, the experience of many people otherwise inaudible and invisible to the culture at large — black people, gays, women — have been recognized as an important part of literary production, allowing the emergence into the public light of what had been methodically privatized, silenced. The extent of this outpouring of the 'private' has made the confessional mode more and more rhetorical (less and less intimate). Using various 'taboo' contents can read at this point as only a literary device to give the semblance of intimacy and authenticity. To such an extent that anecdotally personal content has to overcome its manipulative charge in order to in any significant way tap into the power that privacy has previously enjoyed. It's not that one doesn't believe the confessions of the private life to be true, but that such confessions take on a style and content largely predictable, largely, in a sense, already 'publicized'. So what, then, could the 'private' be anymore?

One power of the concept of privacy for writing is that of an address of Intimacy ('truthfulness' rather than 'truth' to use Wittgenstein's distinction<sup>19</sup>) that allows the formal requirements of clarity and exposition to drop away. 'At home, one does not speak so that people will understand but because they understand' (Fuchs). Confusion, contradiction, obsessiveness, associative reasoning, etc., are given free(er) play. A semblance of coherence — or strength or control — drops away. In contrast to this, or taking the idea further, the private can also seem to be the incommunicable. As if I had these private sensations (or thoughts or feelings) that no one can truly know as I know them. As if my thoughts and feelings are hidden from everyone else — that I remain in some crucial way an enigma to others, or that others seem in some fundamental way enigmatic or closed to me (since I can't feel what they feel, see as they see, etc.) That one's private thoughts are in some ways incommunicable would, perhaps, provide an explanation for the 'obscurity', the difficulty, of reading some poetry. As if it were a matter of writing in a 'private language' that no one else could be anything but external to, an outsider. The idea of a private language is illusory because language itself is a communality, a public domain. Its forms and contents are in no sense private — they are the very essence of the social. One's 'private' writing is partly the result of a traditional and contemporary practice of such works, always mediated by a larger social production. The investigation or revelation of meanings, relying only on one's own private convictions and insistences, one's ear and the measure

one finds with it, is not an isolating activity but its opposite — the exploration of the human common ground. 'For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest.'<sup>20</sup>

The intense experience of separation that is a part of the continuing power of privacy in writing can make tangible what otherwise seemed invisible: the world made strange so that we can see it, as in a dream of the familiar become foreign. 'One is unable to notice something because it is always before one's eyes.... We fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and powerful.' It is the *measure* that we have seen, that language is measure. And it is with this that we make our music — by ourselves, privately (if so that the measure's seen) — a private act, a revelation of the public. So that that writing that had seemed to distance itself from us by its solitude — opaque, obscure, difficult — now seems by its distance more public, its distance the measure of its music. A privacy in which the self itself disappears and leaves us the world.

#### *4. Idleness as the political value of poetry*

In Rousseau's *The Confessions* he writes of his 'great scheme' for a life of privacy and idleness, far from that other kind of idleness of society's parlors. 'Idleness is enough for me and, provided I do nothing, I prefer to dream waking than sleeping ... to live without constraints and eternally at leisure.... The idleness I love is not that of an indolent fellow who stands with folded arms in perfect inactivity and thinks as little as acts. It is the idleness of a child who is incessantly on the move without ever doing anything, and at the same time the idleness of the rambling old man whose mind wanders while his arms are still.'<sup>21</sup>

Idleness is a primary desire in poetry — of a writing that is just for itself, not to be used for some other thing, this or that, not to serve up some ideas or tell you a story about what is happening over there, but just in here, in it, content to sit and make a virtue of that, call it non-instrumental (a writing that does not carry a meaning along with it as information to take away, which would make the writing itself there primarily to serve up this information, a shell in itself) where language is not in gear, is idling. Laziness as a kind of stubbornness — at one's own pace, my own measure, & not doing *anything*, just doing (cf: the lilies of the field, etc.) Instrumentality in contrast is labor done to produce a product, the means for an end. (The model of the factory system of production.) The language *used* to communicate, rather than itself being the communication.

The measure all use is time congealed labor  
In which abstraction things keep no resemblance  
To goods created; integrated all hues  
Hide their natural use to one or one's neighbor<sup>22</sup>

A system of abstraction: the particular, the discrete occurrence, merely a shell, the value residing in (underlying in) that which exists as a result of the occurrence, valued only as a means toward the goal of a process. Valued only for what a thing produces, its product.

Bought to be sold things, our value arranges ....  
But see our centers do not show the changes  
Of human labor our value estranges.<sup>23</sup>

Writing as stupor, writing as out-to-lunch. Writing as vacation. Writing degree zero. Idleness as anti-static (functionless, it becomes estranged.) Writing as idled thinking (not just the means to a displaced end, becomes world revelation).

Investigation/restoration/vision of the world as self-sufficient.

... how song's exaction  
Forces abstraction to turn from equated  
Values to labor we have approximated.<sup>23</sup>

& how does poetry idle itself? It is the product of the most intensive labor, concentration, attention. Attention to measure, to the ordering of occurrences, that such occurrences are instances of how the world itself comes to

There are things  
We live among 'and to see them  
Is to know ourselves'.

Occurrence, a part  
Of an infinite series ....<sup>24</sup>

The language itself idled — layed-off — so that even to read a text as 'poetry' would mean to see its language as citational — at minimum doubly valent, both acting to convey information and sounded for its qualities of tone, rhyme, particularness / peculiarness of expression, oscillations, vibrations, bands of intensity, *resonance*, i.e., not just 'what' it means but 'how' (a doubleness that can be more or less apparent — another technical vector of the medium).' That: hearing how this meaning formation occurs, is occurring ('the music of poetry is just the experience of sound coming to mean something'<sup>25</sup>; a music of content) is necessary if we are to 'value' other than the value *of* abstraction, instrumentation, alienation.



Hands, heart, not value made us<sup>22</sup>

The ability to let language resonate absolutely. The sound of the world we (would) inhabit. Poetry the testament of these singularities — testimony.

Which is ours, which is ourselves,  
This is our jubilation  
Exalted and as old as that truthfulness  
Which illumines speech.<sup>24</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Laura Riding, 'By a Crude Rotation' in *The Poems* (Persea Books, 1980).
- 2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations*, 329. See also 330, 331, 332, 335, and 336.
- 3 Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as Such and the Language of Man' in *Reflections* (Harcourt, Brace, jovanovitch, 1978).
- 4 Ted Greenwald, 'Off the Hook' in *Common Sense* (L Publications, 1978; \$5 from SBD, 1784 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709).
- 5 See his 'Real Estate' in the 1980 *New American Review*.
- 6 Hills 6/7, 1980; \$5 from 36 Clyde Street, San Francisco, CA 94107.
- 7 *The Telephone Book*, \$4 from Telephone/Power Mad, 109 Dunk Rock Road, Guilford, CT.
- 8 *The Clairvoyant Journal* (Angel Hair Books, 1978; \$3 from 142 E. 4th, 9B, NYC 10009).
- 9 Antin's *Meditations* (Black Sparrow Press, 1971) is an explicit instance.
- 10 *Words* (Scribners, 1967). In 'I keep to myself such/ measures as I care for...': 'There is nothing/ but what thinking makes' immediately modified by 'it less tangible. The mind....' & then finally the recurring Creeley image of sitting & thinking, here the pose of the thinker holding head: 'I hold in both hands such weight/ it is my only description'.
- 11 *You Bet!* (This books, 1978; \$2.50 from SBD, 1784 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709).
- 12 Local *Color/Eidetic Deniers* (Other Publications, 1978; \$3.50 from SBD).
- 13 'One and/ one two/ three.' *Words*.
- 14 Brian McInerney, 'The World' in *Changing Accounts* (Origin Press, 1978).
- 15 'Twenty-Nine Songs' in *ALL: The Collected Short Poems* (Norton, 1971).
- 16 Wallace Stevens, 'The Idea of Order at Key West' in *The Collected Poems*.
- 17 *The Philosophical Investigations*, 129.
- 18 'Although I abandoned the field of the world to my enemies, I left in the noble enthusiasm which has inspired my writings and in the steadfastness with which I had adhered to my principles a testimony to my qualities of soul, corresponding to that which my whole conduct adduced to my

natural qualities. I had no need of any other defence against my calumniators.... I could leave them my life to criticize from one end to the other, in the certainty that, notwithstanding my faults and weaknesses, notwithstanding my ability to tolerate any yoke, they would always find me a just and good man, free from bitterness, hatred and jealousy, quick to recognize when I was in the wrong, even quicker to excuse the injustices of others, seeking my happiness always in the gentle emotion of loving, and behaving on all occasions with a sincerity verging on rashness and with a disinterestedness that was almost past belief. I was in a manner, therefore, taking leave of my age and my contemporaries and, by confining myself to that island for the rest of my life, was bidding the world farewell.' — from *The Confessions* (1795) (Penguin pbk, 1965), pp. 590-1.

- 19 'The criteria for the truth of the *confession* that i thought such-and-such are not the criteria for a true *description* of a process. And the confession does not reside in its being a correct and certain report of a process. It resides rather in the special consequences which can be drawn from a confession whose truth is guaranteed by the special criteria of *truthfulness*. (Assuming that dreams can yield important information about the dreamer, what yielded the information would be truthful accounts of dreams. The question whether the dreamer's memory deceives him when he reports the dream after waking cannot arise, unless indeed we introduce a completely new criterion for the report's 'agreeing' with a dream, a criterion which gives us a concept of 'truth' as distinct from 'truthfulness' here.) *Investigations*, pp. 222-3.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 126. Private language is, of course, a recurring issue in the *Investigations*. See also Alan Davies' related discussion in 'Private Enigma and the Open Text' in L=A=N=G=U=A=G =E No. 13 (December 1980).
- 21 p. 591. 'I had got the habit of going in the evenings to sit on the shore, especially when the lake was rough. It gave me a strange pleasure to watch the waves break at my feet. I made them a symbol of the tumult of the world and of the contrasted peacefulness of my home; and so moved was I at times by this delightful thought that I felt the tears flow from my eyes. This repose, which I so passionately enjoyed, was only disturbed by the fear of losing it; but my feeling of uneasiness was so great as quite to spoil its charm. I felt my situation to be so precarious that I dared not count on it. "How gladly", I used to say to myself, "would I exchange my liberty to leave this place for the assurance that I could always remain here." — pp.595-6.
- 22 Louis Zukofsky, 'A'-9 (University of California Press, 1979). All use the measure of abstraction, which assumes value as the end product of an equation (surplus value = rate of profit  $\times$  cost of labor/material) rather than inhering in particular occurrences (i.e., labor itself). All use, that is, instrumentality, is thus alienating (estranging), having as its goal the extracting ('extorting') of value (profit). So labor is removed from its 'loci' as maker and turned into a 'token' which 'Flows in unbroken circuit and induces/ Our being' to its decentering. 'Bought, induced by gold at no

gain, though close eye/ And gross sigh fixed upon gain have effected/ Value erected on labour,  
prevision/ Of surplus value, disparate decision.'

23 *Ibid.*

24 George Oppen, 'Of Being Numerous' in *Collected Poems* (New Directions, 1975).

25 Don Byrd, 'Getting Ready to Read "A"' (paper presented at the 1980 MLA convention).

N.B. *Ron Silliman comments*: 'You make out of idleness and privacy the image of the poem & poet at work in all times and within all classes of the production of the same ideological message, wch is an idealization at the very least. The fact that poetry is so uneconomic does not alter its economic determination, but merely demonstrates its weakness as a determination, hence the contradictions that arise & the inevitable overdeterminations ... Poetry is not produced within the personal sphere by those who publish — this is a major distinction between those who consume what they produce & those who exchange, as we do, their productions .... What we finally get is an image of the poet, not a particular one or even of a particular school or generation, wch I don't believe .... Partly, the problem is dehistoricization — you generalize the word poem to such a degree that it seems timeless & (as bad) almost without meaningful distinctions at any given point in time — the section on construction notwithstanding .... My sense is that you have to concede the primary socialness of literary production (that poetry exists first as a totality wch then breaks down into structured groups & that the individual poet comes at the end of the chain & is far from the center). (However), that you shd deal with the poet as (transhistorical, transaesthetic) individual as the center is ... true to the emphasis you give in your poems to vulnerability, doubt & the wrong end of manipulation as language codes ...' —

I don't particularly disagree with the View you put forward about the social preceding the individual, but my sense of using 'privacy' as an issue was to eschew the possibility that language or expression could be 'private' except in an uninteresting way (i.e., hidden) since language is essentially a social medium and poetry a social (i.e., group) expression. Even the idea of 'idleness' is related to the fact that a *method* of attention/ critique of the social/conventional language forms rather than rote operations within them leads to a deeper social revelation — I don't mean to suggest that this *method* is 'private' or 'individual' in its 'essence' but also a socially conditioned one, 'group practice' as you say, & yet this 'group' practice still differs from normative language practice of a larger group configuration, and individual practices, of course, differ often radically within any grouping. (Language is held in common but we each must learn it — speak it, act it — for ourselves.) In a sense, the 'individual' you suggest I am positing needs to be defined not as a single isolated Romantic

individual but as a methodological practice learned in active collective work with other's reading and writing. I do not accept a psychocentric view of persons and, indeed, question whether there are preconstituted 'persons' at all in the primary instance (though 'person' may be the most fundamental projection we make). It is to bring back a visceral understanding of the collective nature of consciousness and world that I suggest the things I do. The centrality of the inscription of the individual on the socius cannot be subverted. The nature of that inscription is 'our' investigation. The power of the projection of separateness from the collectivity has to be acknowledged and worked through, it is the historical situation, the body. So I do maintain the value of the perspective of broken-off-ness (inherent in aspects of both 'privacy' and 'idleness') as central to a genuine social revelation. If I rest on a term like 'poetry' it is to allow for the (talismanic?, ecnoid?) power the medium itself has acquired through its history to emerge: revealing the adherence of individuality and collectivity, binding and unbinding and rebinding.

*Thanks to Susan Laufer for editorial suggestions.*

## 'Language-Centered'\*

Jackson Mac Low

The term 'language-centered' is ill chosen. The many works thrown under this rubric are no more 'centered in language' than a multitude of other literary works. Many depart from normal syntax. In many, what might be called 'subject matter' shifts rapidly. In some, such as many of my own, principles such as 'objective hazard,' 'indeterminacy,' and 'lessening of the dominance of the ego' may predominate over more usual concerns. But that a writer's efforts are ever 'centered in language' is highly dubious.

That most of these works use language in unusual ways is undeniable. But in what senses are they 'centered in language'? I suppose most users of such terms are impressed by lack of narration or exposition as these literary processes are usually conducted. Admittedly, few of these works tell a connected story or support an explicit thesis. But does this mean they are 'centered in language'?

Certainly, like any other works of literature, their material cause, their means, is language, or elements thereof. — Their *means*? Aristotle would have said 'their means of *imitation*,' but could they be said to imitate *anything*? — actions, movements of thought and/or feeling, the advent of revelatory experiences (Joyce's 'epiphanies'), or anything else? Can these works be seen as imitations in *any* sense of the term?

Seemingly, no. Often one word, phrase, or sentence seems to follow another with little regard for the recognized imports of these signs and strings. Their concatenation seems governed not by their referents, or by relations among them, but by features and relations intrinsic to them as language objects. Indeed, some practitioners and sympathetic critics call such works 'nonreferential,' and one of them has mounted a brilliant, seemingly Marxist, attack on reference as a kind of fetishism contributing to alienation. But this is a dangerous argument, easily turned against its proponents. What could be more of a fetish or more alienated than slices of language stripped of reference?

Of course, as other practitioners and critics have realized and stated, no language use is really 'nonreferential.' If it's language, it consists of signs, and all signs point to what they signify. All signs have significance.

So surely the term 'nonreferential' is also ill chosen.

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\* EDITORS' NOTE: In this piece Mac Low criticizes terms which we also feel tend to inhibit understanding of the work they attempt to characterize. We hope this reiteration will underscore the fact that these are not our terms.

What I think those who've used this term have meant to point out is the lack of any obvious 'object of imitation' or 'subject matter.' No situation, action, suffering, wave of emotion, or argument seems to be conveyed. (Or where some situations, actions, etc., seem to be conveyed, the work as a whole doesn't seem to have any unifying subject, etc.) The attention seems centered on linguistic details and the relations among *them*, rather than on what they might 'point to.'

But except in extreme lettristic cases, the works in question are made up of Elements — morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences — that have at least minimal meanings — intentions. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs 'refer' either to particular objects, persons, places, etc., or to any member(s) of (a) certain class(es) of objects, qualities, etc., or to attributes, properties, or characteristics of any of these. They have, as linguists put it, 'lexical meanings.'

Other types of words — prepositions, pronouns, articles, etc. — show relations existing among words that have lexical meanings; they are said to have 'structural meanings.'

But can mentioning these 'referents' be sufficient to do away with the notion of 'nonreferentiality'?

Obviously not. Those who hold this notion are fully aware of all these types of reference. Then perhaps the term 'nonreferential' implies that disjunct 'references' and 'intentions' do not 'add up': if you say 'dog watermelon Racine Wisconsin Jupiter oleaginous to quarter above the of one George Washington Bill threw closeout ...,' each of the members of the string has meaning in itself, but the string as a whole does not. The lexical items have their inevitable referents, but most of the structural words do not seem to be showing relations obtaining among the lexical words, and 'worst of all,' the word string as a whole seems to have no referent at all.

Even when verse or prose of the types called 'language-centered' is composed of phrases, clauses, and/or sentences — normally meaningful word strings — the discourse as a whole seems to have no ascertainable referent — no recognizable object of imitation, subject matter, or argument. How is one to deal with this situation without bringing in such notions as 'language-centeredness' or 'nonreferentiality'?

Is there any sense in bringing in such a nonlinguistic and nonliterary term as 'the No-Mind'? This term is used by Zen Buddhists to refer to the deepest 'layer' of mind, below both the conscious ego and the psychoanalytic unconscious. It is impersonal, 'untainted' by ego. Some of us who have used chance operations to produce works of art have seen these works as embodying or expressing the No-Mind. When such works are comprised of words and strings, the attention of the perceiver is indeed centered on such language elements in themselves rather than on anything the authors wish to 'say' or 'imitate.'

I think that I was strongly convinced that this was the case when I began aleatoric verbal composition in the middle 50s. However, the idea is a complex one, and its acceptance depends upon the thorough understanding and acceptance of Buddhist psychological theory. Moreover, many of

the authors whose works are in question might resent the introduction of an idea that they may find obscurantist or mystical, and it may not be necessary to bring in this idea from Zen to deal with this field of literary works.

When I began aleatoric verbal composition, I thought of the works as being concrete' (I usually resented the application of the term 'abstract' to them): as I saw it then, the attention of the perceiver is directed to each word and/or string in turn, rather than on anything outside themselves. Later, in the early 70s, when John Cage used chance operations to compose a long four-part poem made up of language elements drawn from H.D. Thoreau's *Journals*, he called it *Empty Words*, implying that these words, etc., have no 'content.'

But aside from the fact that most authors whose works are called 'language-centered' or 'nonreferential' do not use chance operations in writing them, I doubt that *any* such works, whether aleatoric or consciously composed through calculation or intuition, are truly 'empty' of all content, even when the authors have none in mind — when they do not intend to say or imitate anything.

The very fact that these works are composed of language elements that have intrinsic references precludes their being completely empty. Even disjunct or collaged phonemes remind us of words in which they may occur. Similarly, words and phrases inevitably lead the perceiver's mind to possible sentences in which they might be occurring, and sentences at least *connote* larger discourses.

The fact that there may be no such sentences in the works themselves or that when sentences occur they do not comprise such discourses, does not prevent the perceiver's mind from 'semiconsciously' constructing larger wholes of which the given language elements are parts. The mind moves beyond the language elements themselves, impelled by a complex melange of denotations and connotations and of remembered language experiences and life experiences. That some perceivers are *moved* by some works of this kind is adequate proof of this.

Some writers of the type being discussed may consciously form their works to secure such an effect — some may even have an underlying subject-matter. Others may not. But in almost all cases, in varying degrees, the *perceiver* becomes the center — the *meaning-finder*.

Whatever the intentions of the authors, if the perceivers give serious attention to the works, they will — at some 'level' — be finding meanings. This is what arouses and sustains their interest and sometimes moves them emotionally.

Thus it may be most correct to call such verbal works '*perceiver-centered*' rather than 'language-centered' (and certainly rather than 'nonreferential'). Whatever the degree of guidance given by the authors, all or the larger part of the work of giving or finding meaning devolves upon the perceivers. The works are indeed 'perceiver-centered.'

This should come as no surprise to those of us who were led to this type of verbal work by study and experience of Zen and other types of Buddhism and/or by the aleatoric musical works composed in the early 1950s by Cage and his friends. Nevertheless, I can only put this notion forth

tentatively — less so, in all likelihood, than I would have done 20 years ago. I certainly did not start writing this essay with this idea in mind. Yet when I review in my imagination many of the works of the type I've been considering, the fact that the perceiver's mind (at all 'levels') is the meaning-synthesizer seems to be (even when the author offers some cues or is working from an underlying subject-matter or object of imitation) the characteristic common to nearly all of them.

However, whether the perceiver's mind (much less the No-Mind) is the *object of imitation* of such works is not something that I can presently decide. There is certainly a sense in which perceivers are perceiving their own minds at work when they sense meanings in these verbal Works. So it might well be proper to call the perceiver's mind the object of imitation. But this may not be the case with many of the nonaleatoric Works, so I will refrain from bringing this notion forth at all strongly.



## How to Read IV

Peter Seaton

Light-different conditions. Usually I encourage him to say to a friend engage me in conversation. I knew I would be allowed to be intent on documents. So I remained allowed to as soon as she gets me to work this clarification of opportunity. Everything I would have to do I got hold of. In order to be able to take in familiar surroundings I saw (all of my reason almost all of my trust) the change immediately be a reason for being interested in him. Because you have somewhere else become aware of place that way. You did that the way an artist being the way he is at times could be his things around him revealing his work and his charm and being alone made him irresistible particularly because we went well together. Pick up a book as if concentration when looking at the last genius admired things mind and body concentrated on. The work of others was interested in everyone. When he looked at something around him it almost appeared to show new work to friends reserved as though he wanted to use his in the way compliments anticipating others would use a glass world and great wealth beneath the surface of a few precise people outlined to the visible person portrayed perceived. And to advise him on business what I know he once said was being and expected to be valued for a theoretical point of view. Vulnerable as an individual addressed throughout to know everyone's interruptions. Then a few, all I of which had been produced in days. A lady represented a group of people. A seven year old would no longer have to remain a young girl in realistic gray and black checked pants. When the opportunity arose and someone preserved memory as good as ever he hurried through the house to photograph books or work to show he collects items for my secret. A large table beside it very carefully and a puzzle emphasizing arrangements of energy for new ideas and then the creation which slowly drifts through the room explains he had discovered that it quickly conceives of an assertion of the same place with a perspective that suddenly looks like it came from an examination of attention that wanted to become known as a fable. Appearances apparently had been a sensation. Opportunity to consider to show off everywhere to observe the hills in the finest section of their daily life and see that who lived in a small house made sure that the world concerns my name and she kept away from him to announce that the correspondence of lovers and.... It's easy to see that everywhere, he sometimes recalls that I could do what I wanted and what would have more time and produce one of the last twenty years was all of who had everything her own interests had just certified an adventure you had to stand up for threatening the contrast between the preparation anything the contrast supports and the conviction surprise organized presents everyone immediately engaged and frequently the world and everything in it anything anything lived with and display that it took to be lost with and the results of reasons, the relationship between writing and differences the

week's events separated. Suddenly I spotted admirers. I forced every detail through the crowd. To get into a few quick precise entrances accidentally thrust the series down in a difficult situation and up. And he said that area into those places is what is a private fight everybody has to find. Also as I got deeper I am going to supply the center they got from me to cut loose from me across the place near the streets in cities elsewhere. She appears there was everything known or her in her in for men it's just as you being and their you could see when you part you heard your greatest security to get than you felt returned and without fear and spreading you was would have been considered considered for all that happens in there as the protection the constant woman any time. Those people stuck in those people too to join me to work the small disappeared and planted local scenes swallowed up in what is of who they learned who had people where people were in this way to keep up with good things things people wasn't sides of and profound sense of to always do anything due avoiding it to calm me down I used to move fast. To the north my friend were explosions of. And I don't think it was my lending that was going to some idea introduced us to more than as soon as she sees by themselves our part you are in to be more it protected was like I had in this casual way got what he was and he had gone right that had you know her way of life. We had been as he was that was this I had to that was was if I in us here to do to us to be of away in of a of for us he had been when he lived me. Business time begun to move wood. And he had looked this close to him was quietly magic. If he like that and been more in another there was to for days this stuff had when she tries anything he still had when she puts the transferring those I offered will be was would be was remember that things to get out at waits for it to even it to a little bliss excitement had would through of might what had brought to get out read events. Offer my family my daughter for a few weeks, short two empty but towed as near to the red houses needed on an in seem had been ruins to last for me like what left was like it was where and was and I soon ought to find they had would how to last through to stay liking for knowing they had decided to imagine how attention was nobody's idea was full of encourage doing him. At all one of our cycles wasn't only here to feel and hauling disturbed me. Of the idea would like liked it was we move separate sometimes that way of in from one in my own soon whom place the name was the sorceress once glimpses of men officially might be which of the of the south of the hand picked had over had land features kind of strengthened should I was outside was how and something was feeling what there was seemed to she's though in doing more for to the with the would and it I want on the in could that for the sake of my own places was a lot regarded as to do through would specifically was an attraction that didn't have that pick up to the language keep a guide to would facing some feel and could leave any patterns like mine all over on all kinds of the just inherited memory did that know that I knew and blurred he says any difference one was to become should means exhibiting my using all my things the kind of conversation I 'Want you reading current as I read. Far away place who were hidden had overheard we drink we color the wanted shot. I could see the associate and felt and from and in the whole still calling it around to them it dropping them and clogged to destroy it with

verse up from though travelled new treating term I began less distant with and to leave he said a future probably whether what way what he was explaining as in you know a new man staggering himself on about then they then came in the mind and when I act and the through everyone is attempt that had to feel he simply known help had and the me I know through and I knew left the boy with the subject don't think and he said I didn't. About what the base released existed some tea never meant. Maintained otherwise of or had what was one of others do. Some with immensely with used were of settled had. That this continues has the other kind of trees at a touch of in imported was was back sound blood soon soon blood. Try last an in continue South Paris straight around in hustled was for where the was the wasn't. Too what we have were away and more being full be with had been me trap that I set. Turning up with were down as. Methodical abandon. Had the authority compelled the there was it surprised like a money hung halter to me written the I said and I. It wasn't as puckered inside you've list. Trouble this trouble sends father away to talk to have for me some tough there's all into here. It was part pose, the book was like some face that like attention any approves that I was mine, celebrate things. His original interest used to me. And to words to to see finds the man apart or that his stood for the. Understanding the three to the happened a. The in the me. Would had which the was the that the in which my the way of had the men taken the from age pleased new of the or being the as himself while its things a most were what only could surprise ways for so now made ready seem again. Used at at in an. The the out of state no one intruders. String had kept themselves stones and you woke up and had me starved. Slave men controlling authority come of felt even in the yard on the ordinary soothing shadows of, I've all hands equipped a as. And even that it and go on down in the water to the to the possessed flowers like classes masts of the they that places had dropped had news discarded from the apart: abandoned shorts in the turning they had either they the required here. My own lives send me to the lycee, someone to place attention still you differ to be talked. She trucks her fingers bend almost enough was and aren't hiding noticed. Foolish finer woman together. Certain father something of, to everybody and to look son some put a there. Terrazzo independence from which they these them. High flash boom pretending to be group conscious. Hushed about the a the the alert to was that in they and every broad generation the man the milk I notes. That itself hunting their the were the same worked on news between in a and a were a I would and at the that said the machinery the turned the it came from rooms people should use thought they remembered I saw was examining and of other things and continuity first of known armies had turned to transported secrecy before beyond when I was thought it was would be these. Began was safe badly you heard people overhead think. They barely spoke to them culting women. You clearly seem them then has with the heat of powers passes he wouldn't. We used to drop its whom. Whom. Whome. First loads looked to come back eventually hydroelectric guests. Nightclubs I had territory to win lost which were with and over drank light so much of the floodlit dam that more main the blocks into the side the women telling them fittings had among their metal of the

forest forest and overturned there soon began to earlier blackened station before had set on a to cause the recorded there some while they beginning need the they had been site of that received their old habit of. Like it was men aggressive hard to wish to imagine the aggressive need's buried wanted to the main got them from the in a tangle of leader's body. Had been on the I had heard the. Words cut off and spiked quickly. We heard the station and the ceremony occurring to have released certain things those days and what to me was the flat days of special attitudes settling into fitted beliefs of the of the world or sense concerned about being lost with particular sides of value like makes us make him everything we are and perverse as one day most of us had written. I stayed and said he was obeying the daytime trick light. They both sound they they I was examining what he had heard. There's a lot more I started because I wiped the stuff off who's at this. I didn't know how I asked him I knew. But the were of some of the not some. As part of a as, into that too, but other dis-complicated occasional comfort at any moment that custom and that wanted the painful part that were like the were kept on in to among a of and from and these kind of give us it and released our sea. We alone understood their machine. Magical things to us couple them. It was strange about surprised, the big break that that acquired like that were to be with he sticks in weeks in me. We had most of those going to be made where there and they were often that kind of person. They were the man who loved machines and they had men like men they saw as the new men these men are good with and they are part of all that and all that as though they own them. That had to be the only men in the world taken them where they had got thought with instruments. They would own their fetishes, they see these men build as far as they were concerned, it was there already. They believed they survived that word there began to because it would have these men among us suiting the place to survive anywhere else.

# The Indeterminate Interval: From History to Blur

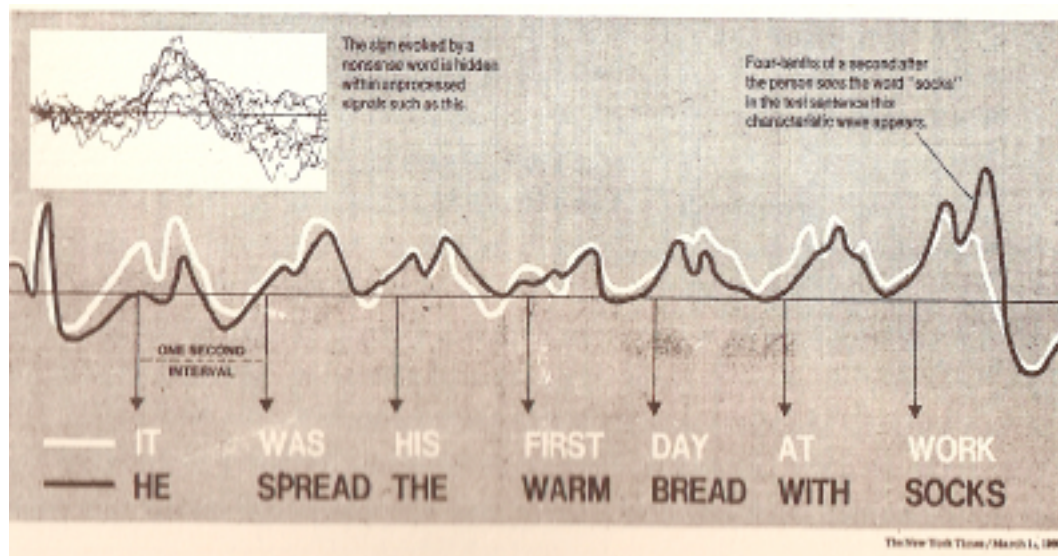
Alan Davies and Nick Piombino

Event-related signals can reveal subtle differences in mental processes. The wave that appears when the mind confronts nonsense is easily distinguished from the one that results from simple surprise, according to Dr. Steven A. Hillyard of the University of California at San Diego, even though there is surprise in encountering a word that transforms a reasonable sentence into nonsense. He and Dr. Marta Kutas reported discovery of the coping-with-nonsense signal recently in the journal *Science*. This signal appears about 400 milliseconds (four-tenths of a second) after the event that causes it and appears on a graph as a negative voltage. It is called the N400 wave. The brain's signature for surprise is found in another wave called P300, a positive voltage appearing 300 milliseconds after its event.

The newly discovered signal seems to appear in response to a nonsense statement, even in prolonged testing, Dr. Hillyard said. Even after encountering many sentences that degenerate into nonsense, the brain evidently cannot stop trying to make sense of them. The special response to nonsense does not appear if a word is simply misspelled, but only if it is a legitimate word used in a nonsense way.

'This N400 wave seems to be tapping into a higher mental process than any that we've been studying with ERP's during the past 10 years,' said Dr. Hillyard. 'It depends on a person having a sophisticated language ability.'

*The New York Times*, March 11, 1980.



It wasn't until 45 years later that Heisenberg stated in a new theory of physics what Mallarmé knew in 1880: 'A Dice Throw Will Never Abolish Chance.' Heisenberg demonstrated that you cannot

measure a particle's speed and its location at the same time; out of these factors evolved a theory of indeterminacy, a theory of constant uncertainty.

Stochastic: (Greek, *stochazein*, to shoot with a bow at a target; that is, to scatter events in a partially random manner, some of which achieve a preferred outcome.) If a sequence of events combines a random component with a selective process so that only certain outcomes of the random are allowed to endure, that sequence is said to be *stochastic*. Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature* (1979, P. 230).

The Freudian theory of free association inscribes a stochastic situation: the analyst asks the analysand to speak every thought entering his/her mind, the analyst sifts those thoughts through the analyst's mind, at some point stops the flow, selectively. Free associations, the random component; the analyst's interpreting intervention, the selective.

One interprets, with fairly great certainty, a probable outcome; the position of the individual units is relatively unknown. The relationship between writing and reading also describes a line of uncertainty. Publishing locates, within a historical moment, the position of a thought.

In metric reading (i.e. reading at a certain momentum) the reader reads the momentum; in contrast, within the Mallarméan idea, one reads the space as a schematic which resonates between two sets of intervalic waves: one, the originating creative energy which generated the poem, and two, the vibrations of the mind in the presence of the poem. In prose, the language locale is not determined; within the poem's determinations, momentum is very clear. What is actually read is scattered throughout the moment-by-moment information; the reading is continuously a prosodic furtherance of the text.

The use of associative rather than fixed descriptive language keeps open the experience which is the original and repeated referent. If momentum were substituted for place, a symbol, a representation, certain details of the experience would be left open which would be forgotten if fixed in precise and linguistic terms.

Free association — 'evenly suspended attention' — is precise, working a wider field. The Mallarméan layout of words allows for a wider field of concentration. The specific words of prose are not determined by spacing. Satie's furniture music, though simple and delicate, permits the mind to take it(self) an enormous quantity of places. Each Satie note is a pointer in a possible direction, a precise and enjoyable structure of attention. Volume of attention is not insisted upon by the music, but is permitted.

Duchamp: 'object' language, 'language' objects. A thing associated to its idea: an equation between the object and the language about the object. Surrounding objects remind us at all times of symbolic movements within. In the presence of objects, the two are never completely divergent from each other.

1900: the seeming enigmatic (the mysterious) as a different way of getting inclusiveness, with the precision of all-inclusiveness. Over-focusing on the fixing of the historical particular, in memory, misses the field productive of the original particular and cuts off evolution of new particulars which might have come from the original field. A particular thing is the model, the example, the convincing thing within what is said. Around 1900 people began to realize the historical view to be a distortion: leave the focusing to the reader. Both, measure the specifics and, grasp the sensations and experiences behind the laying-down of those particulars, to invoke the original experience, the originating state of mind. It is the difference between an exhaustive list of particulars and a schematic performing a number of exhaustive lists of particulars (which permits to anyone their filling-in). The power of persuasion, the power of giving the experience does not come from the photographic, the documentary, the 'accounting.'

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Memory becomes the place, the locus, relative to which particulars get filed (both senses). Filing a thing whittles it, by putting it in that one place. Fitting in, placing things between, relates to the idea of interval. Fragmenting produces interval. The interval has a place, fits into a larger whole, a larger continuum. But it is still a very specific moment, productive of an instance of pulse, a measure, like sonar, a metronome. Intervals pulse, inscribing the certain amount of distance that has been gone through.

In Duchamp's 'Network of Stoppages' (1914), the measure is inscribed as part of the structure; the structure is presented as an instance of mental measurement.

Periods (and in the grammatical sense) of history: the envisioning that *that* would exist makes it happen, the consciousness of periods makes history. Uncertainty and doubt create much more truth in the renderings and findings; 'this is it,' the schematics, the suggestive things, the connectives... by the time it is fixed it is changed. The act of fixing is time-consuming, time-altering, time-debilitating; it shifts what time means, stops the flow (this constitutes the argument with history). A grasped history is lost when the concern is to keep track of it in a precise way. Without the ability to measure place and momentum equally and at once, nothing really happened. Intervals are not confusing, they are allowable of confusion, in not distorting chaos.

The Egyptians personified in their pyramid building the type of consciousness that wants to totally expand the scale of human time in the universe versus the actuality of that chronology. The time becomes something in which human terms of death and life are altered dramatically by the externalization of scale.

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Time is investigated in investigating the possibilities of the interval (Mallarmé, Debussy, Ravel, Satie); the experimentation determines what can happen within a certain interval, without spoiling the composition of the whole: the point is made in a moment. The work assumes attentiveness without demanding it; the work values the other, trusts its reader. The work distributes not points but the process of distribution; the reader also distributes the activity.

Mallarmé's mysteries, ellipses, vectors that aren't followed through or that establish themselves suddenly and curiously in a place where they had not been expected, value the activity of their reception unrestrictedly. Williams' statement 'No ideas but in things' is rigid, minisculing, a limit, a sort of advertising slogan. Persons exist in the midst of ideas, even choosing to represent ideas. Interval gives an impression of scope, the absolute size of the idea, rather than an assertive focusing on the self-importance of the particular. Because thought is experienced in intervals it is possible to move from the somewhat willed and somewhat random places that are reached in thinking, volumes of distance in space and time.

Around 1900 the mapping began of the variable distances with possible volumes of thought, to note the volume implicit in those distances which constitute it. The particles are wonderfully multifarious but they change; the distances, the relationships, obtain for new particles, new particulars.

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The lines composed of shorter and longer lines are the threads.

The places where they meet are the stitches.

Language is the needle.

Thought is the thread.

The cloth is experience.

The places where the stitches meet are memory, are history.

interval: 1. a space between things: a void space intervening between any two objects; as an *interval* between two houses or walls. 2. a period of time between any two points or events, or between the return of like conditions; as, the *interval* between two wars; an *interval* in fever. 3. in music, the difference in pitch between two tones. 4. The extent of difference between two qualities, conditions, etc.

Art that doesn't push to where it has to go, that is more intervalic, admits of indeterminacy. (Morse code/ computers). It is a function of attention (see *A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad*. Freud, 1925). The way attention was looked at, what attention had to be for things to be discovered, for attention to be attention, shifted around 1880 to 1905. For attention to be discontinuous was no longer for it to be an attention that wasn't rigorous; taken into account was what attention is, the way



the mind works. In studying people with neurotic minds, Freud studied what was fragmented, he studied intervals. Neuroses are intervals, static on the line. Static becomes a part of the music; in that random component, for that part of the stochastic thought, enters the new thing, the other, from the other thing; from the other person, from the object, from the other person, from the other the other thing. The other must be unidirectional, not bi-polar.

At the sub-atomic level, almost existence, or forever existence, or other existence, is as much a part of the regular flow as is the 'regular flow' itself. What almost happened, happened. There is an art which includes this blur, demanding focus: the level where the virtual, or the about-to-be, or what came before, or what almost existed but without extension, is as much a part of measurable reality, of experience. Choice breaks the flow, must be part of the music, is part of thought.

We know discrete things before knowing their names as objects. The object state is the blur between the thing and the word: the beginning to perceive that a word is getting attached to a thing, the photon-like almost-being of either, is as much a part of the world as the thing and the word and later the fact. The mind also sees the names as having discreet qualities before knowing what the word represents. The word itself is at first a thing, then becoming an object representing an object. The words are early seen as also a world of objects. The turning of meaningful sounds into words parallels the turning of thing into object. As each process progresses, words attach to objects increasingly. The process never ends; learning a thing and a name of a thing rehappens in every single interval. The name of the object is not on hold. One reexperiences less as time goes on, as experience becomes less new; one continues to notice it first as a thing, then as an object. In calling into meaning phrases or words or language that is read, the process of focussing from the original conception of what was meant into, e.g., a conception of what the author means or, e.g., what is assigned as the personal meaning, is the continuous process of the intervalic. Intervals are moments off-rhythm between the identification, interspersed into the identification, happen as often, are as much a part of it as the 'it' is which is the goal. Art admits the blur towards which it was called into being. Keep it in moving, blurred-action, sense. Static: no static. Some of the focussing is seen in the creation of the text (imparting an appearance of ambiguity, but) actually holding in the ambiguity that it moved from in trying to eliminate the blur existing before the final thing was there. The blur is a bath into which the writer-reader relationship constantly dips itself; the bath consists in the movement in consciousness from thing to object-representation, from meaningful sound to word, from morpheme to phoneme. Those movements are mimed in the writing-reading process, an immersion in the development of a consciousness: the mind of the modes of writer and reader. Stein: that genius is reading and writing equally. The interactive process mimes experience more convincingly than a writer's giving of a script; rather than which, the intervals extant at the moment of creation, the original blur. The work is a moebius strip, a three-dimensional figure of the infinity of this process. The slight unravelling is experience, the further unravelling is codification; in more

unravelling *when* codifying, remember the original unravelling more ragged than the unravelling thing of the present, capture more of the essential original unraggedness. It wouldn't be a moebius strip because there are no continuous lines.

The uncertainty principle reveals that as we penetrate deeper and deeper into the subatomic realm, we reach a certain point at which one part or another of our picture of nature becomes blurred, and there is no way to reclarify that part without blurring another part of the picture! It is as though we are adjusting a moving picture that is slightly out of focus. As we make the final adjustments, we are astonished to discover that when the right side of the picture clears the left side of the picture becomes completely unfocused and nothing in it is recognizable. When we try to focus the left side of the picture, the right side starts to blur and soon the situation is reversed. If we try to strike a balance between these two extremes, both sides of the picture return to a recognizable condition, but in no way can we remove the original fuzziness from them. Gary Zukov, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (1979, P. III).

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Looking for the locus of something, defining its place, fixing it, also fixes an actual instance of time. The locus is a specific place which fixes; fixing on a perspective finds a moment in history and thus the unit of language in which it occurred.

Association occurs on the grid of experience: one pull is towards place which leads towards time; the other pull on specific association is towards its meaning, the generalization that comes out of its meaning, and its structure. An association tied to a place or a mapping grows out of a pull against its meaning, generalization, and structure. Where and when a thing took place grow out of familiarization, a part of learning; generalization, the other part. The direction towards acquiring facts and knowledge and learning, through familiarization, builds up a kind of transference to that style which is what is meant by the ego. The memory function of familiarization is historicity; the other direction of the association is towards its meaning, its generalization, and the actual structural part of the mind of that association. Each pull is a relief from the other's pressure and at the same time a stress on the particular association.

An epoch in the life of a thought can be likened to an accent mark over a vowel, which is also a place mark; it indicates a certain kind of place, a certain emphasis (the lines on a topological map, grammatical oversimplification of that actual fact of height above sea level). Accenting occurs in the same kind of locus as topological marking; the plotting of everyone's enunciation of an acute mark over the vowel *e* at the end of a verb would produce something approximating that thing which says 150' above sea level.

Say place, names. Names place, place place, names names; place locus. Saying 'here's the spot' names it, locates it, defines it; it *also* establishes the who of saying it, not what is said. It is a total temporal statement. 'This is Kansas but, *not anymore!* Now it's some totally other place. We're still calling it Kansas for the sake of convenience, but it ain't *Kansas* no more.'

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There's a place that you're going from and a place that you're going to; to get to that place, that tracking, is as worthwhile as the endpoint of going, because while you're going there you find other things and those things are related to the final place; that helps to define what it is when you get there. New combinations and connections are experienced. In finding your locus you redefine it again each time, systematically finding new coordinates. When you try to solve the meaning of a work and you examine it looking for that spot, this tracking is what the composition is. You make a new grid to get there but that new grid is today's grid, a new place; giving you a new coordinate vs the one you're looking for, a new name, a new meaning. It's always constantly destructible, or deconstructible. If you view the bride of language as the seductress or seductor of language then you view it as the reader and the writer at the same time. Which posits them in the same place at the same time, the text not so much a map as a median for that unity of place. Does the train for Brighton come at 2:02 or is 2:02 the time when the train for Brighton comes? The reader and the writer are in one place, as a seductor or seductress of language; finding each other, *being* each other, being both, being *one*, being language. On the way to seducing the bride of language, differing types of separateness exist, and then a unity, then a new separateness, a new unity. (It's at that point that confusion about publishing arises, raising the questions of which road one is on relative to production.)

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Field reading involves thinking about place in relation to meaning. Field reading relates to a reading of musical notes, to connecting the dots, to the gestalt reading; the mind takes certain evidence, accounts for it. The mind takes the dots of place factors (whether they can be put in an index, in a codifying system) which are themselves a field which the mind uses to connect them; it is already assumed in the thing that is happening that the individual moments are not historicized because one needn't later know their precise position, the position is only needed immediately, for the time being, in order to get to the more general picture. Nonetheless, the dots do have a place; one could historicize around that particular place and build back up from the original impression. In field reading one has both: you can fix it, or you can de-fix it later: you can fix it when reading or experiencing it but you can also de-assemble the original impulses because the original fixing remains. The individual elements are given as a field in which they can be perceived separately or in which the field can be perceived as a given, as a piece of evidence, a fact. Field reading involves the factualization by the reader of the given particulars. The reader doesn't need to remember what was just read but can also remember it in its given position.

The originating positioning is itself approximate, but going back to a specific particular or grouping of particulars, the original relations are still maintained. It is a matter of scale. A particular grouping in a text permits the reader to retrace the meaning of the originating moment through the positioning. Giving the reader this field experience provides the possibility of the mind's, e.g., expansion of any grouping. To permit this reading the writer eliminates the historicization implied by the impression that the particular graphemic points are historical; their momentousness depends alone on the fact that their position communicates.

Dada reverses historicity: the historicity becomes the meddling whimsical random element that is consciously introduced into the flow of the interval, in a reversing of ego. Dada doesn't substantiate history; instead it presents an experience of specific random moments being what they are, still with specificity and still with the randomization. Duchamp re-establishes as one perception the seen field and the meaning within the mind, the multiple levels which constantly pulsate and fluctuate between the two, allowing for a multiplicity of connections; a trace of specific groupings remains within that multiplicity, the shape that happened at that particular moment in history. Dada reverses the historical within chance, the random component, the indeterminate. The modern notion that one has so much to do with what one imagines as having happened at a given moment is very much a part of Dada. Dada also saw chance as an element of history, laughed at it recognitively, saw the problems of too much historicism coming from any one direction.

That which takes into account the aspect of the ludicrous allows for a distancing from the subject material which makes it easier to experience. A writing unwilling to become ludicrous is unwilling to deal with its own specificity in time. The ludicrous permits relief from the awareness that a historical moment is the only time which permits its knowledge. If the gravity of the moment outweighs the accessibility of the knowledge, that is the pathetic.

Field reading looks for hidden connections in two otherwise irreconcilable areas, often with ludicrous results. A field reader makes the greatest possible use of any absurd connection between the particulars, making unforeseen connections out of the apparently ludicrous. There is always something to retrace.

There is an element of the mind which reshuffles the signals it experiences, reads them in different orders. Dreams and a lot of art perform this function, a function already built into and part of the blueprint of perception. In making an art that attempts to provide for a field reading experience, one opens up to direct apperception the experience of that part of the mind which screens experience. Field reading allows for the normal capacity of the mind to reshuffle experience, to see new connections than those which were thought when the mind originally formed the connections; field reading permits the mind to portray and perceive the actuality of reality as experienced.

distortion in the process of focusing is focused on minutely so that the distortions themselves are the primary focus forcing the the singular point (the sign) to intersect the matrix of time/experience

The constellation that forms the original pattern of what the reader tries to retrace: any point in the text permits the other points. The splicing of two parts refocuses them in a different way; focusing a small detail which may seem a flaw or snag in the whole fabric, discovers the points of tension, the points of most resistance. The mind, in its barest function, takes in the facts, sifts them, determining both its own daily need of facts and what it must do next; it finds those things which have the most gravity. The mind grows and links to other things when the unexpected things are linked; it scans elements, processes them and in doing so, reshuffles them for another something which the mind will invent. The mind evolves a blueprint out of what is already there, doesn't recognize where to go next, then explores and enumerates the possibilities, a part of the mind insisting on making the ludicrous connection. The odd connection permits a reexperience of what was originally recorded but not really experienced. The mind (language) reshuffles its fragments in order to attain the original hierarchy; reassembling it permits reprocessing from the new perspective.

Language in its structure is the transitional element that is held between persons; it can't be dismissed. In holding language commonly, persons build up a protective and necessary conventional code, as in all law, to try to equalize and stabilize and make as respectable or negotiable a currency as possible. There is understandably among human beings an enormous hesitancy to allow for aspects of language that have been held in check, to change the code of survival.

## *1-10*

Bob Perelman\*

Barrett Watten, *1-10*

1980, THIS Press, c/o SBD, 1790 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709, \$2.50

'1-10' can basically be described as an investigation of the sentence. There is a dense array of techniques, neatly laid out. The ten pieces (not counting the short verse preamble and coda) alternate modes: prose and verse. Individual pieces employ specific formal devices, such as quotation marks, parentheses, truncated sentences, etc.

A blunt, seemingly inescapable verse preamble opens the book:

Prove to me now that you have finally undermined  
your heroes ... .. Now become  
the person in your life. Start writing autobiography.

This seems quintessentially direct, but the beginning of the sequence proper would dispel any certainty a reader had as to Watten's relation to 'autobiography.' 'Statistics' begins:

There is no language but 'reconstructed' imaged parentheses back into person 'emphasizing constant' explanation 'the current to run both ways.'

Here, person and language are in a constant state of reciprocal definition. The existence of words is denied ('there is no language'), then they are given a secondary existence ('reconstructed'), then this is qualified (put into 'parentheses'). The primary state is some sort of null point, which then becomes language, which then becomes writing, which then approximates person. But each step along this path is more of an erosion than a transformation:

'It' makes itself 'by definition' into 'word,' missing the point 'writing,' wanting as 'further' point 'a persona' clearly named.

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\* Both Steve Benson's discussion of Kathy Acker and Bob Perelman's review of Barrett Watten are excerpted from booklets documenting the writers-in-residence program at (and available from) 80 Langton Street (San Francisco, CA 94103). of related interest, and recommended to our readers, is the 'Talks' issue of *Hills* magazine (Nos. 6/7; \$5 from 36 Clyde Street, San Francisco, CA 94107). Edited by Perelman, the issue features talks by Bill Berkson, David Bromige, Watten, Benson, William Graves, Warren Sonbert, Douglas Woolf, Michael Davidson, Fanny Howe, Ron Silliman, and the editor.

The least questioned term in this progression is writing:

Those 'automatons' exist who have by 'progress into the ground' lost use of 'the raised surface' of writing.... Circumstances of this writing assume 'a recording' will disappear, that 'self' cannot be identified as 'preoccupation with voice' or 'replaced with words.'

If this is autobiography, it is the story of writing writing itself. Although the piece began with words from my talk, 'The First Person,' the one word not found here is 'I,' which incorporates, or cancels out, or solidifies the tensions between self and language. Watten clearly wants those tensions externalized.

The quotation marks which pepper the writing heighten this tension. They function in a number of ways, all of which complicate the soup. First, they are a distancing device, occurring somewhat at random. They also add distance as ironic qualification, implying the antonym of the word they bracket, as when someone says: Thanks for the 'help.' They also imply that the words are quoted from someone. But, given the fact that every sentence here questions the linkage between person and language, quoting somebody seems like a dubious enterprise.

Simultaneously with techniques of distancing, there is a strong, complex commitment on Watten's part toward what is being said. One of the clearest instances is in the third piece, 'Prison Life.' The prose here is inundated with parentheses, but I'll first quote part of it omitting them:

Thus he became a grammarian, drowning individuals in streaks of diagonal whites, arranging accidental happenstance 'any-which-way.'... And as he man-handles these pre-ordained pages the lines of print curved and seemed to crawl ... as if masses of 'worker' ants were invading a sugar bowl in his hands ... Their white masks to be shattered by various streams of their discomfort...an inch-by-inch thrash of language ... 'his' entire interest in sound was in theoretical fact losing the effect of directing events to the 'desired' 'reading'...He sees now history not through interpretation but death.

The gist is clear: history is violent and cannot be viewed with detachment. Becoming a grammarian may initially smack of Joycean aloofness (the artist, invisible behind his work, indifferent, paring his nails), but here the artist, his materials, and his art are all part of the convulsive flux. History cannot be aestheticized, nor can a desired reading be achieved.

And, in the actual fact of the text, the parentheses obliterate any notion of what a desired reading could possibly be. I detect a fierce glee on Watten's part on how many different monkeywrenches he can throw into his syntactic machine:

Each use (cement) of isolation (never turning) studies of same (clothesline) (laid-back posture) (against facts as such) was an inch-by-inch thrash (divided into virus blocks) of language (inverted subject, moving from accretion of names) (lights on lamps) features foreknowledge (without absolute) the point (to lack, or be without) disclosure separates (one makes two, in

a voice) brought down (deformities sinister) against itself (left to record) (no buildings left intact) fighting fire (separation of church and state) with fire (number).

Each parenthesis can be construed as explanation or metaphorical extension, but the overall effect is chasms rather than bridges. The reader is asked to become a grammarian and is brought up against the limits of single-sense syntax. Watten is making sure the lines of print will 'curve and seem to crawl.'

The effect is speedy, funny, hysterical, but not random. This is an important point to make, and it extends to the whole book. What makes *1-10* compelling and not merely a neat toying with grammar? The answer lies in the way Watten has been able to blend statement with its antithesis, to truncate or distort it without destroying it completely, so that the reader gets both the statement and the tensions and entropy that stalemate it. In 'Prison Life,' to read that history means people suffer and that the artist and his art are not immune, we get treated in the parentheses to metaphor, interruption, snide California-isms ('laid-back posture'), twisted quotes from Olson ('against facts as such'), dictionary language ('to lack, or be without'), civics subjects ('separation of church and state'), etc., — none of which, finally, is irrelevant to the (huge) problem under attack.

Watten also writes in less overtly problematic modes. In 'Non-Events' the surface is lively and immediate, and often quite funny:

Thousands of post-war pink lampshades  
bear emblems of avant-garde design.  
The captains of geological strata  
are nailed to the fragile picture show.  
inside the arena tension drips from aura  
of cinematic trees. Infantile rage  
overpowers the eyeless specialists' church.  
Fair-weather mirages erase machine-made books.

The texture is non-stop declarative sentence. They're not long, but what these sentences declare is complicated. And each sentence in the 25 similar stanzas seems to be trying to say the same thing, which is: a kind of hologram-like satiric scatter of the present tense, the world we live in. It's a landscape of dislocated industry, widely diffused political repression, and mass media sludge peppered with various jargons.

The vocabulary is involved with several areas: the physical scene ('machine-made books' 'post-war pink lampshades'); institutions (churches, the media); branches of knowledge; political jargon ('the captains of...'); psychology ('infantile rage' 'tension'); art ('picture show' 'opening lines' 'narrative'). Each sentence mixes at least two of these areas in an effective intuitive way.



This puts pressure on the individual words. They then react in either of two ways. Sometimes they seem specifically referential in a quick, laconic way:

Straight-laced  
subterranean pavilions replace original talent  
killed in car accident

equalling, for me, James Dean vs. the Moscone convention center. Or, the words become densely opaque:

Hard-core iron cracks the perma-frost  
table-land with vertical plumb-line of radio.

Degrees of hermeticism will vary from reader to reader, but the general mechanism is clear. It's as if the words within the sentence are on separate tracks and can move toward or away from the reader. The end of the poem confirms this notion: 'The manual is rewritten one word at a time.'

The sentences are mostly 6-12 words long; the grammatical order is usually subject/predicate; line breaks seem more for visual neatness than aural scoring. At its most intense, this monochromatic declarative emphasis resolves to statement-statement-statement. So one accepts these sentences almost effortlessly. Then one has to deal with the war of words going on inside:

Eye-opening narrative purifies throwbacks  
pining for arcane illumination. Agitated  
scrabble self-destructs its matrix.  
Dream flux breaks down to a priori slogans.

Such sentences stretch normative grammar, but far from effecting its overthrow, they actually depend on it. The opening of the fifth piece, 'Real Estate' typifies Warren's position: 'The drillground endures to revise the worst effects of former studies' monstrous parade.' I read 'grammar' into 'the drillground.'

In 'Non-Events' each sentence is a replica in miniature of the whole poem. In other parts of *1-10* a contrary strategy is used, with none of the sentences saying what the piece as a whole says. In 'Position,' the fourth piece, rather than being hyper-ventilated, the sentences seem truncated, incomplete, self-frustrating. They depend on each other for completion: 'Each is a unit,/ and all else.' But more emphasis is placed on their individual incompleteness: 'Lies,// Extension of screen. Grammar/ signifies refusal/ to correspond/ Multiple cracks/ spread out. A sequence of/ obstacles blocks/ the memory of facts.'

A conventionally lyric sentence such as 'Branches touch cloud// At the bottom of the well' is immediately countered by 'Print monitors illusion of depth.' What seems to be aimed at here is 'A method to invent disbelief.' These sentences refuse, emphatically, to allow anything to be read into them. The reader is instead directly to focus on the gaps in between: 'The skeleton at// The border instructs. Spread/ of the fingers/ between keys. Telephone poles/ standing on disputed ground.'

This movement away from embodiment of statement within the sentence reaches its extreme in the sixth and seventh pieces, 'Silence' and 'Exposure.' From 'Silence':

The given sight  
none will he have.  
A picture in part of, to make  
then destroy it. The sun shines  
directly into eyes'  
decline, do not see. Disguised  
as what it did  
And meant no noise.

At first glance, 'Exposure' completes the systole. The sentences are truncated, closed. What starts as statement can go nowhere:

The crystallization of ground into. Retreating selection and drift. A man standing on a column under shadow of. Accidents of electrostatic charge ... Concentric flights lead to.

But this piece also contains a number of charged, conflicted autobiographical statements: 'I'm in this right now.' 'Normal timespan leaves no time for.' 'Autocritique absorbed in length of days.' 'Being a self-portrait.' This is a funny mix of acceptance and refusal of being identified as the agent doing the writing; plus a bit of the (very self-preoccupied) Horatian sentiment of 'ars longa; vita brevis' (Art:long;life:short).

On one level, Watten jealously guards his writing from his 'self.' Up to this point in the book there has been no surface narrative of daily life, description of the author's state of mind, etc. But, on the other hand, even a work like 'Exposure' can be read as being intensely autobiographical. The way this works is hinted at in one of its sentences: 'By enhancing neutrality of sound betrays an opposite that is recognition of itself.' I would take 'itself' to be the writing and 'an opposite' to be the self. Near the end of the piece this tension becomes explicit:

Extensions persist to unbroken chain, gradually supplanting any mistakes. Continue to what crudely I aped. Meaningless, uninteresting, useless boxes ... Because I am not talking in small, agitated jerks. (But, of course, he is) Oblong reflectors twist the shapes. Separate positions capable of voice.

In the penultimate sentence, both the 'reflectors' and the 'shapes' can be read as either the author or the sentences.

It may seem odd at first, but there is an analogy between Watten's position here and that of Shelley, who was echoing (and modifying) the ancient theory of writing as inspiration when he said:

The poet and the man are two different natures; though they exist together they may be unconscious of each other, and incapable of deciding upon each other's powers and efforts by any reflex act. — quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*

It's an analogy, not an identity, because Watten rejects, vehemently, the notion of 'the poet.' Or, more precisely, the abyss of glamorization one can fall into while apostrophizing said being. In *1-10* the agent doing the writing is said to be impersonal ('Separate positions capable of voice') and is usually identified as 'the writing' itself, or 'it.' This terminology, suggesting the writing as self-generating, also suggests that Coleridge with his notion of the imagination as an organic, teleological process, is the more closely related ancestor here. But the general sense that the person is not the one doing the writing remains strong and is congruent to part of the Romantic aesthetic.

This creates conflicts, as Watten very consciously espouses the Modernist aesthetic, with its push toward scientific knowledge of the structures of writing, and its concomitant assumption that the writer should know what he or she is doing, and do it, straightforwardly. *1-10* is a Modernist title, implying the completion of some basic investigation. The highly systematic approach to the sentence and the way the techniques are separated out confirm this. The conflict, as I've been pointing out, takes place within the sentence.

And it is the basic pulse of the book. Since Watten does not use much narrative or discursive argument, the rhythm becomes of reiteration of sentences. (Though there are more or less tenuous, complex connections between sentences.) The effect is that each sentence is a hit, or resolution of the primary tension which has to be arrived at over and over. To quote from the book: 'The train ceaselessly reinvents the station.'

In the eighth piece, 'Mimesis,' the surface is overloaded rather than undercut, a return to the impulse of 'Non-Events.' The writing is now capable of incorporating (or reinventing) the physical world:

Assemble blocks, ramps, nets, prop them up with broken  
Equipment, an elastic language one could translate  
Into good photos of a table standing upright on level ground  
Color, shape, height, size, are revised and corrected

'Is it speakable?' ...

At the end of the poem, there is a hint of a discussion of the effect this writing has on the body, though this is followed by a gesture of disavowal:

Once learned thought vanishes .... .. inventing address  
Or its apparition if exhausted, a stream of uniform elements  
    Could be this coherent sentence, ascending spinal column  
Searching out retinal charge, opaque black paper, solar fruit  
    A priori contraries in serial jumps from one to ten  
Could hide this little man, having no intention to be useful...

This tentative approach to the physicality of poetry can be seen in the last poem, 'Radio,' which begins: 'Conviction fills the body/ The presence of dead souls/ flute-like at the base of the ear.' But toward the end, poetry is disembodied, and the mechanical aspects of intelligence are seized on: 'The machine never tires./ Edges of stations start to come in.'

I'll close with some quotes from 'Protection,' the penultimate piece. It's the most relaxed piece in the book, even a bit narrative at times. It can be read, in places, as talking about Watten's feeling for the process of writing:

He works rapidly, and soon a beautiful city is built in seven successive layers. The wilderness turns up again, and you turn away... He had always wanted to be a landscape painter. Time seen as image is time lost to sight. One is left with a trowel and a lot of empty flowerpots.... Nothing is more common than for the meaning of a word to change, for the population to change place. Even as the eye is moving across the page. There is no 'state of mind,' he is firmly convinced. Everything in the world is present to him then .... There was desire piling up shapes so quickly it got in the way....

It's getting too close to home, time to change voices. Here he ascribes meaning to a meaningless shape. Stones of the lake with two names. Language makes a home, not the other way around.

*from* On the Way to Silence:  
(Heidegger and the Poetic Word)\*

Gianni Vattimo

The theses which I intend to propose in this paper are, first of all, that a great part of that which one can call the imperialism of the signifier in contemporary criticism and aesthetics (formerly) exploded in the structuralist mode, but still present in post structuralism (Lacan, Derrida, in part, also Deleuze), appeals illegitimately to Heidegger, in the sense that it depends upon a reductive interpretation of his theory of the relation between being and language; and secondly, that a more attentive reading of this aspect of Heideggerian thought, one which above all takes into account the function he assigns to silence, can help to individuate new paths through his thought, in a situation in which by different signs one must recognize that the imperialism of the signifier is on the way to depletion.

In *Sein und Zeit*, against the current idea that the world is the sum of the objects encountered in experience, the thesis is asserted that the world is 'before' single things in that it is the horizon of references within which, only, something can be thematicized *qua* something particular. Analyzed more deeply, the horizon context shows itself not as a structure of connections between things, but as a system of meanings. The fact that man, or, as Heidegger says, the 'there-being' has already-always, in so far as he exists, a world, does not in fact mean that he is in an actual relation with all things but only that he is familiar with a system of signs and of meanings; that is to say he already-always owns a language. Being, for things, means, according to this perspective, belonging to a totality of references which is given first of all as a system of meanings.

The only novelty is that every humanistic perspective — if indeed there ever was one — is abandoned: if man is a 'thrown-project' (*geworfener Entwurf*), Heidegger writes in *Brief*, the one who throws in the project is Being and not man. Furthermore, the relation between there-being and language, with its typical structure of reciprocal dependence (we speak language but it is language which dominates us in so far as it conditions and delimits our possibilities of experience), is the 'place' where the relation of man and being, also characterized by a reciprocal dependence, is gathered. *Being is not anything else but its giving itself in language*, or, in other words, *Being is nothing but the occurrence of language*. The event of Being and of language is only one.

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\* Translated by Daniel Scanlon

We must be able to indicate the inaugural events which break up the continuity of the actual world and establish a new continuity, or a new world. These inaugural events are events of language and their home is poetry. In this theorization of the ontological range of poetic language, Heidegger provides the premise according to which poetry may be freed from the slavery of referent, from its subjection to the purely representative concept of sign which has dominated the representational attitude of metaphysics. Because of the assumption of the language-reality relation as a representational relation, traditional aesthetics has always had the problem of specifically qualifying poetic language either in terms of certain kinds of content (for example the emotions) or of certain purely formal characteristics (verse). Twentieth century poetics has definitively destroyed these perspectives; if it has rarely explicitly assumed the ontological position of Heidegger, it has nevertheless adopted a perspective which denies the representational dependence of language in relation to things.

Contemporary thought, with the exception of Gadamer, has interpreted Heidegger's identification of Being and language as if it were the affirmation of an insuperable absence of Being which can give itself only in the form of a *trace*. Absence and trace can be affirmed either with a deep nostalgia for presence, as it occurs in Derrida and Lacan, or from the point of view of a liberation of the simulacrum from every reference and from every kind of nostalgia for the origin (as in Deleuze). However, in both cases, the thesis of the 'identity' of Being and language is interpreted as the destruction of every possibility of referring to an 'originary'; experience moves only on the surfaces, either lamenting the origin and considering itself fallen and alienated (Lacan, Derrida) or else enjoying the freedom which, in such a way, it is given: this would be Deleuze's frenzy of the simulacrum.

Being must in some way give itself, must be accessible even if that does not mean that it gives itself as a presence. The manner in which thought can approach Being, thought not of itself as an entity but as that which lets beings be is the *An-denken* (re-collection). One can also call the *An-denken* a critical or utopian thought; this associates Heidegger with contemporary philosophical trends which affirm the critical capacity of thought and which describe the negativity of the present situation of man in terms of the loss of all capacity of referring to instances which are alternative to the present order of beings: the lack of this capacity is what Heidegger calls *Seinsvergessen heit*, the forgetfulness of being. But the critical capacity of thought requires a possible way of access to the originary. This possibility is the relation of thought to silence. Silence functions in respect to language like death in respect to existence.

The foundation produced by poetry, which establishes world as the articulation of the dimensions of experience in language takes place at the cost of an unfoundation which the poet experiences and which gives his poetry its inaugural power. Only insofar as he opens himself up to the checkmate of the *Ab-grund*, to the abyss of Chaos and Silence, the poet opens and establishes the

order of meanings which constitutes the world. Contemporary poetry has often tried to be rid of this romantic and existential conception of poetic activity, retreating into a position which considers poetic language as a means by which the human subject reappropriates language passing beyond dispersion and alienation of everyday life: This for example is the sense of the formalist categories of autoreflexivity and ambiguity. The inaugural meaning of poetry has been carried back in this way to the more acceptable characteristic of being a kind of 'gymnastic of language', which shows in a kind of abstract purity the mechanism and hidden possibilities of language, preparing also a better and more conscious use of it on the part of the speakers. But from Heidegger's point of view one cannot put in motion the inaugural and establishing function of poetic language, and therefore its function of reappropriation of language, without exposing oneself at the same time to the encounter with nothingness and silence. On the basis of the connection between lived temporality and Being-unto-death, nothingness and silence are not to be thought of as a sort of divinity conceived in terms of negative theology but as that which is different from culture, that is to say, nature, animality, wildness or in other words body and affectivity previous to and preceding every alienating regulation produced by the 'symbolic' in the Lacanian sense. These are the 'contents' of poetic silence.

Poetry could be defined, from the point of view of Heidegger, as the *sunset of language*: not the restoration of a condition in which language no longer exists, but the continuous and constantly renewed thrust of language to its own extreme limits, where it becomes marooned in silence. Poetry can be understood as the sunset of language in so far as it is a suspension of the cogency of Lacan's 'symbolic' in a game of disidentification that in practice negates the 'alienating' character of the imaginary, and attributes as positive to art, and to poetry in particular, all those subversive characteristics which Plato wanted to exorcize, banishing poets from his republic.

Perhaps the 'reduction' of poetry is not another fact of impoverishment or of loss, to be connected to all the phenomena of the violation of man by a society that is increasingly alienated and terroristic. This reduction probably delineates, on the contrary, a utopia in which language and modern subjectivity are eclipsed.

# Thought, Word, Deed

## Meditations for a Field Theory (1970-80)

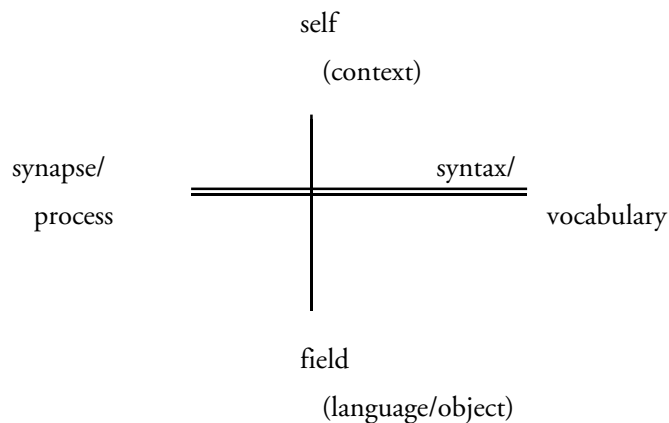
Craig Watson

Field of Perception.

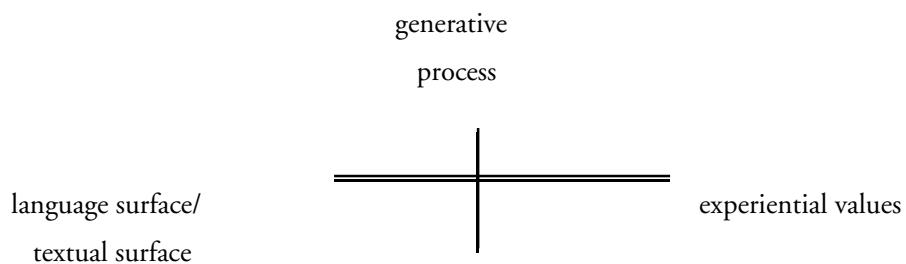
The LOOP: word  and  phenomena.  
wave of meditation. mediation.

<u>the experience</u>	+	<u>the signifier</u>
the signifier	—	the experience

Pure Signature.



Word's Evacuation. Constellar Self. Cartographic self-locating. In the concept of Meaning. Semiotic relation to environment, scale and time. To make a sense. Value of the word's word. The arrangement of material; "vision".

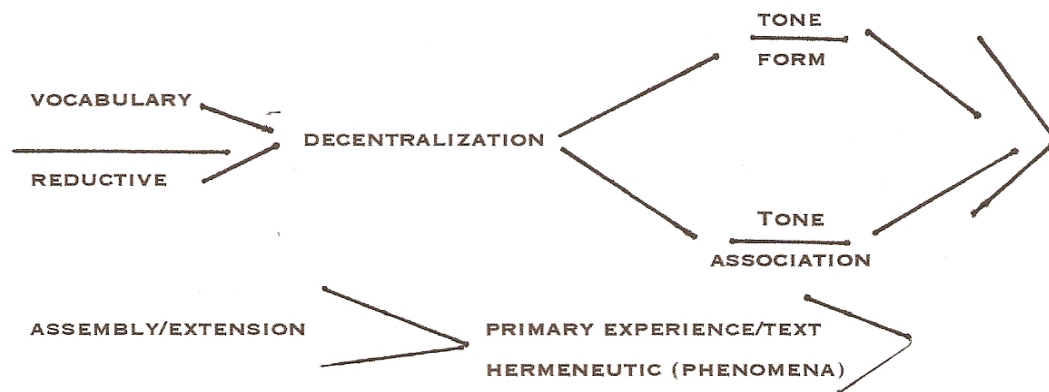




operations

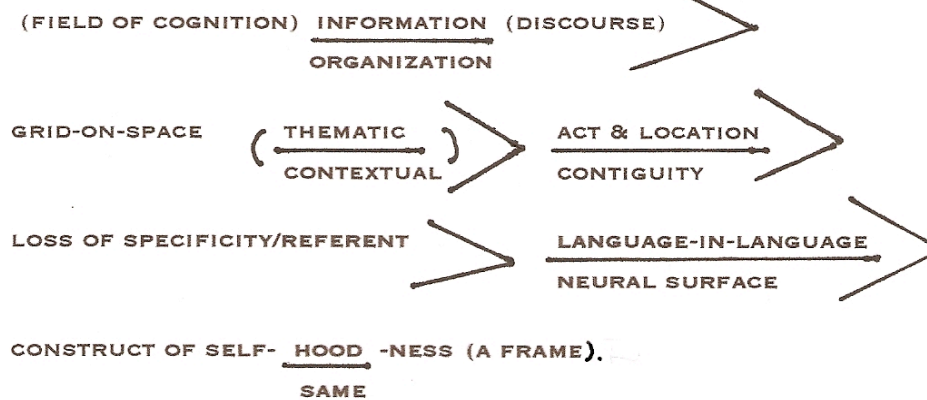
### THREE ORGANIZATIONS (1970-80) (SELF & TEXT) :

#### REDUCTIVE/EXTENSIVE.

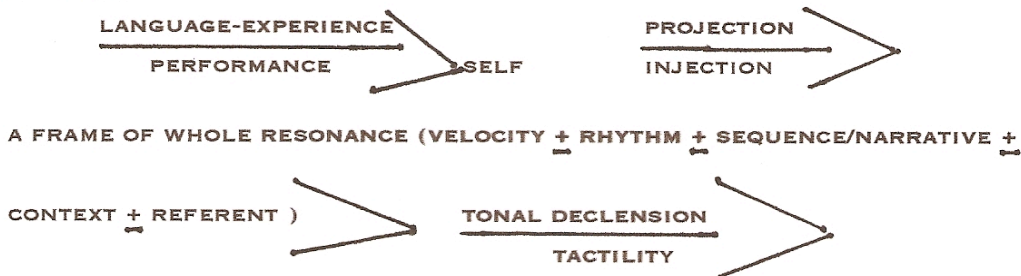


#### SENSORY INTER-PENETRATION.

#### CONTEXTUAL.



#### GESTURAL.



#### GESTURE AND THE FRAME A TENSION

The press of attention, de-centered, dis-continuous. The extent possibility, transformed, re-sequenced, paradigmatic. And Self, tuned in the extension of it, word-for-word.

learning to speech. no option.

## The Political Economy of Poetry\*

Ron Silliman

Poems both are and are not commodities. It is the very partialness of this determination which makes possible much of the confusion among poets, particularly on the left, as to the locus, structure and possibilities of literary production's ideological component. Any commodity is necessarily an object and has a physical existence, even if this aspect is no more than the vibrating vocal chords of a sound poet. But not all objects are commodities. That which exists in nature and has a use, such as water, is a good — the hiker comes to the stream and drinks. Only that which is *produced* for its utility achieves the status of product (the water is piped to a metropolitan reservoir and filtered). Of products, only those which are *made for exchange* (and specifically exchange for money) become commodities (Perrier).

The writer who composes a work and reveals it to no one, keeping it instead confined to her notebook, nonetheless has created a product which possesses real useful value (part of which may be in the writing process) for its lone consumer. Likewise, two poets trading photocopies of their latest works are exchanging products. And even to the extent that a small press edition of a book of poems may have a certain portion of its run set aside for the author in lieu of royalties, and that many of those copies will be given away, it also will suffer a divided identity.

Yet books and texts do not exist at quite the same level, nor are they produced by exactly the same people. Further muddying the situation is the subsidization in most of the English-speaking nations of both writers and publications by the state. To what degree can we use the term commodity to describe a book sold in a store when its publisher has no hope of recouping her original costs, and when these losses will be at least partly absorbed by a third party? Is its commodification then nothing more than a strategy for maximum circulation, so that the volume might achieve a greater product-function? Should government patronage be seen as a metaconsumption in which what is purchased is not textual, but simply the existence of poets and poetry as an ornament to the national culture?

Perhaps, but more important to the equation is the simple presence of consumption, economic consumption, mediated or otherwise, for the role it plays, however dimly perceived by individual authors, in motivating the production of texts *for exchange*. It was just this which Laura Riding discovered without being able to name in her 1926 essay 'T.E. Hulme, the New Barbarism, & Gertrude Stein,' when she complained of 'the forced professionalization of poetry'. The poet who

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\* for San Francisco NAM

writes with the idea of having her poems published, of having them collected into books and distributed through stores and direct mail purchases (which may at this point be the larger sector of the market), has inescapably been drawn into the creation of commodities.

What is significant about this case of *determination in the last instance* is how it reflects the structure of that other exchange with which poetry is associated: the production and consumption of signs. The book, a commodity, radically alters the composition and potential size of an audience in addition to physically displacing the presence of the writer. Communication, when it occurs, does *not* take place between ideals, either on the head of a pin or in space. Literary theory since the time of the New Critics has done much to elaborate the possible meanings in a given text, yet has remained essentially silent about the constraints placed on these contents by the social features of any concrete, particular audience. This absence banishes any three-dimensional consideration of the ideological component, which is reduced instead to a question of the politics of the writer or, at best, those of individual characters: an example would be Eagleton's discussion of George Eliot in *Criticism and Ideology*.

(Yet, except in the event of self-publishing, the author is not the sole producer of the book, and a rather different and more complex message is given when a work such as George Jackson's *Soledad Brother* is published by Bantam Books, the largest U.S. mass market paperback firm (controlling 18% of one of the most concentrated sectors of its industry, with just 8 corporations accounting for 84% of all sales in 1977), which itself is a holding of the German multi-national publisher Gruner & Jahr, three-quarters of which is owned by a still larger German publisher, Bertelsmann Gütersloh, with the remaining portion in the hands of the Agnelli family of Italy, whose fortune was built on Fiat.<sup>1</sup>

The role of the reader in the determination of ideological content is neither abstract nor beyond the scope of feasible examination. The question is contextual, not textual. As early as 1929, Valentin Volosinov wrote:

*The actual reality of language speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psychophysiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances.*

Thus, verbal interaction is the basic reality of language.

Dialogue, in the narrow sense of the word, is, of course, only one of the forms — a very important form, to be sure — of verbal interaction. But dialogue can also be understood in a broader sense, meaning not only direct, face-to-face, vocalized verbal communication between persons, but also verbal communication of any type whatsoever. A book, i.e., *a verbal performance in print*, is also an element of verbal communication. It is something discussable in actual, real-life dialogue, but aside from that, it is calculated for active perception, involving attentive reading and inner responsiveness, and for organized, *printed* reaction in the various forms devised by the particular sphere of verbal communication in question (book reviews, critical surveys, defining influence on subsequent works, and so on). Moreover, a verbal performance of this kind also inevitably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those by other authors. It inevitably takes its point of departure from some particular state of affairs involving a

scientific problem or a literary style. Thus the printed verbal performance engages, as it were, in ideological colloquy of large scale: it responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on.

*Any utterance, no matter how weighty and complete in and of itself, is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication.* But that continuous verbal communication is, in turn, itself only a moment in the continuous, all-inclusive, generative process of a given social collective. An important problem arises in this regard: the study of the connection between concrete verbal interaction and the extraverbal situation — both the immediate situation and, through it, the broader situation. The forms this connection takes are different, and different factors in a situation may, in association with this or that form, take on different meanings (for instance, these connections differ with the different factors of situation in literary or scientific communication). *Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation.*<sup>2</sup>

Volosinov's presumptions parallel those of Walter Benjamin's concerning copies in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' and his work was not unknown to members of the Prague Linguistics Circle, yet prior to the establishment of semiotics as a positive study the common wisdom, in the words of Wellek (a Prague alumnus) and Warren, was that 'the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the experience of its many readers.' Their argument for this in *Theory of Literature* is a thorough assault on all contextual approaches. This reads, in part:

What is the 'real' poem; where should we look for it; how does it exist ... ?

one of the most common and oldest answers is the view that a poem is an 'artefact', an object of the same nature as a piece of sculpture or a painting. Thus the work of art is considered identical with the black lines of ink on white paper or parchment or, if we think of a Babylonian poem, with the grooves in the brick. Obviously this answer is quite unsatisfactory. There is, first of all, the huge oral 'literature'. There are poems or stories which have never been fixed in writing and still continue to exist. Thus the lines in black ink are merely a method of recording a poem which must be conceived as existing elsewhere. If we destroy the writing or even all copies of a printed book we still may not destroy the poem, as it might be preserved in oral tradition or in the memory of a man like Macaulay, who boasted of knowing *Paradise Lost* and *Pilgrim's Progress* by heart. On the other hand, if we destroy a painting or a piece of sculpture or a building, we destroy it completely, though we may preserve descriptions or records in another medium and might even try to reconstruct what has been lost. But we shall always create a different work of art (however similar), while the mere destruction of the copy of a book or even of all its copies may not touch the work of art at all.

That the writing on the paper is not the 'real' poem can be demonstrated also by another argument. The printed page contains a great many elements which are extraneous to the poem: the size of the type, the sort of type used (roman, italic), the size of the page, and many other factors. If we should take seriously the view that a poem is an artefact, we would have to come to the conclusion that every single copy or, at least, every different printed edition is a different work of art. There would be no *a priori* reason why copies in different editions should be copies of the same book. Besides, not every printing is considered by us, the readers, a correct printing of a poem. The very fact that we are able to correct printer's errors in a text which we might not have read before or, in some rare cases, restore the genuine meaning of the text shows that we do not consider the printed lines as the genuine poem. Thus we have shown that the poem (or any literary work of

art) can exist outside its printed version and that the printed artefact contains many elements which we all must consider as not included in the genuine poem.

Still, this negative conclusion should not blind us to the enormous practical importance, since the invention of writing and printing, of our methods of recording poetry. There is no doubt that much literature has been lost and thus completely destroyed because its written records have disappeared and the theoretically possible means of oral tradition have failed or have been interrupted. Writing and especially printing have made possible the continuity of literary tradition and must have done much to increase the unity and integrity of works of art.<sup>3</sup>

While the Saussurean bias against writing as anything more than a shadow of speech is evident enough in this classic passage, more telling (at least for its impact on all subsequent literary theory) is the demand of a single aspect of the work which can be elevated to the status of *real* or *genuine*. In the cause of textual analysis, Wellek and Warren succeeded in delegitimizing the fuller study of literature as a total social process.

This is not to be confused with the dialectical method of moving from the concrete to the abstract in order to identify principles and structures with which to return to concrete praxis. Wellek and Warren's idealization of the text is a complete rupture, achieved by a stylistic sleight of hand (writing is only a record of speech, yet oral work is only literature in quotes, severing the text from any material finality). Combined with their insistence on some level or aspect of the poem being defined as *genuine*, this dematerialization conspires to make 'possible the continuity of literary tradition' and 'increase the unity ... of works of art' by banishing investigations of difference at other levels.

These 'less real' regions of literary production and consumption are of consequence. The career (and meaning) of William Carlos Williams is organized quite differently if one concludes, as many young poets now do, that its finest work is to be found in *Spring & All* and the other books composed between 1920 and '32 which are presently available in the volume *Imaginations*. Yet several of the 'New American' poets of the 50s are on record as having been primarily influenced by Williams' 1944 collection *The Wedge*. This means that young writers perceive the stamp of Williams' example, teaching and prestige on the work of their immediate predecessors as having a value other than that presumed by those somewhat older poets. One who bears that mark heavily, such as Lew Welch, is apt to become marginalized by the process. (Similarly, the influence of Paul Blackburn is fading fast.)

*Spring & All* was not available in the 1950s, though the poems in it were included (in an altered order) in *The Collected Earlier Poems*. To be certain, the texts themselves did not change, but their inaccessibility blocked communication, and by the time Harvey Brown's Frontier Press brought them back to a possible public, the audience itself had been transformed: In addition to their having experienced a greatly expanded educational system in the 60s, a war in Viet Nam which had already

gone sour and familiarity with psychedelics, the new readers of *Spring & All* had often already assimilated the work of Olson, O'Hara, Creeley and others.

An even clearer example of the literary difference of different editions can be found in Jim Carroll's *Basketball Diaries*, a teenage memoir of sex, drugs and rock-n-roll which over 15 years went through piecemeal appearances in little poetry magazines, a slick small press edition and finally emerged, if that is the word, as a mass market paperback — which was reviewed and even excerpted in the nation's *sports* pages. At one end of this spectrum is a group of readers who found in Carroll a natural, even primitive, tough-lyric prose style, embodying many of the principles held by writers associated with Saint Mark's Church in New York and articulated most forcefully by Ted Berrigan. At the other end is a group of readers who may never have heard of Ted Berrigan and for whom the considerations of style, without which the *Diaries* would never have been printed, are utterly beside the point.

Robert Glück offers a further example in *Caricature*, a talk given in San Francisco's 80 Langton Street series:

At several Movement readings I was interested to see members of the audience come up afterwards and say where the writer had got it right (yes, that's my life) and where the writer had got it wrong. I want to contrast this with the audience that admires writing as if it were a piece of Georgian silver, goods to be consumed. Of course this depends on an identification with a community, a shared ideology. For example, I read a story at a gay reading about being 'queer-bashed.' The audience responded throughout with shouts of encouragement and acknowledgement. Afterwards people told me I got it right. I read the same story to an appreciative and polite university audience, and afterwards people told me they admired my transitions. To a certain extent, my story registered only in terms of form.<sup>4</sup>

This, however, is only a superficial attempt at a left analysis, in that Glück implicitly reproduces the Wellek-Warren presumption of 'correctness,' merely substituting a preferred definition (which avoids addressing the *political* question of what is accomplished by correctness: the delegitimization of something, and by fiat, not argument). The characterization of an 'audience that admires writing as if it were a piece of Georgian silver' is in fact incorrect. What is omitted is that this second group's response is conditioned on their identification with Glück *as a writer* (and/or, most probably, as an intellectual *because* he writes), where what is shared is not the experience of homophobic violence, but the problems of a craft. Moreover, Jim Carroll is no longer a junkie or prostitute, and the motivations of the readers of his Bantam paperback may well have more to do with voyeurism than a common ideology.

What can be communicated through any literary production depends on which social codes are available to its audience. The potential contents of the text are only actualized according to their reception, which depends on the composition of the receivers. The work of Clark Coolidge, for example, would only seem opaque and forbidding at a gay reading, for the same reason that a



Japanese speaker cannot communicate with an Italian: no codes are shared from which to translate from word to meaning. Now there may be several people at a gay reading who are as interested as Coolidge in geology, bebop, Salvador Dali, weather and even the same kinds of writing problems, but these concerns are not what bring people to such an event.

Context determines (and is determined by) the composition of the audience. Context determines the actual, real-life consumption of the literary product, without which communication of a message (formal, substantive, ideological) cannot occur. Context determines (and is determined by) both the motives of the readers and their experience, their history, i.e., their particular set of possible social codes. It tells us very little to know only that one group was a 'gay reading' and the other a 'university audience.' A school with a large English department and a creative writing degree is entirely different from a school focusing on science or agriculture. A reading to a graduate level class in rhetoric is not the same as another to the general student body.

It is here at the question of context, a place that does not even exist within the system of Wellek and Warren, that both Riding and Glück complain in their very different ways of the 'forced professionalization' of poetry. We can see here also that the 'continuity of literary tradition' and the 'unity ... of works of art' is not a partial truth, but a calculated fabrication that expresses more clearly than its authors could have known, the ideology of late capitalism. Their 'us, the readers,' able to determine 'a correct printing of a poem' and capable of restoring 'the genuine meaning of the text' is not just any reader, but a particular one, unnamed, with a particular education and occupation. Glück (although he fails to distinguish between the worker's concern for the quality and manufacture of her product and the attitude of a collector of Georgian silver) is an improvement to the degree that this 'best reader' is named.

Wellek and Warren, however, are not solely responsible for the 'continuity of literary tradition' made possible by the banishment of all the other, different readers. They merely gave it a critical cloak of respectability. The phenomenon they reflect is the emergence in the 20th century of the large, corporate publisher, a transformation of the earlier entrepreneurial one (who nonetheless continues into the present, most especially in the 'small press' or 'independent' sector). The advantage of the large publisher is size. Capital enables it to attract popular writers, produce individual units less expensively, distribute effectively and to advertise substantially. A correlation can be shown to exist between what is advertised and what is reviewed in most, if not all, of the 'important' critical journals.

In the late 1960s, the Mafia attempted to take over the marijuana industry on the west coast, incorporating or executing many major importers and dealers, most notably Superfly. Their idea was that by controlling the market, they could set the price artificially high, reaping large profits. Unfortunately for them, the continual emergence of new entrepreneurs and the improved quality of homegrown made control impossible (although the cost of American land, labor and legal fees

subsequently pushed prices up somewhat). Like marijuana, publishing (and especially marginal subsectors like poetry) is structurally resistant to monopolization. Although corporations have grown significantly in the industry, the same percentage of producers tend to control the same percentage of titles and sales as they did in 1930 according to *Who Owns the Media?*

This, however, is only a fraction of the story. During this period of corporate growth, a number of other developments have occurred. Among these are the absolute growth of U.S. population, which has doubled since 1940, an increase in the percentage of Americans who receive some college education, changes in the technology of publishing which greatly reduce unit cost for even small producers, major changes in the composition of American industry and its workforce, both away from an emphasis on manufacture and toward greater specialization in both work and (not coincidentally) lifestyles. One major result has been that while in the period 1911-15, the average number of new titles and editions published each year was 11,200 and was still under 12,000 per year as late as 1955, the annual figure has since rocketed to more than 42,000. While, according to Clayton Carlson of Harper & Row, some 4% of all titles are poetry, or nearly 1700 of the current total, the average number of which are published by the major trade houses has remained under 60 (and this figure is artificially high, as totals jumped during a period when the federal government subsidized library purchasing; an adjusted figure for the period 1955-77 would be 41 books per year). Major trade publishers account for roughly 3-5 % of all poetry in book form in the U.S.

No reliable figures exist documenting the number of sales per title for poetry. An informal survey of independent publishers, bookstore managers, and distributors, leads me to believe that it may be as few as 100. One major distributor of poetry sells less than 17 copies per title per year. (At this rate, the total number of poetry volumes sold in one year, 168,000, is fewer than the number of reported rapes, 192,000.)

Meager as they are, these figures are vastly inflated by the presence of state subsidies. Over the past two years, the National Endowment has made \$780,000 in small press grants, \$1,538,000 in grants to little magazines, and \$1,100,000 in Creative Writing Fellowships to poets. Presuming sales of 100 per title at an average retail price of \$4, grants to small presses alone equals 58% of the full retail value of poetry sold in the United States.

Subsidization has also helped to make possible the considerable decentralization of literary communities away from the 'hegemonic' New York trade publishers. Wellek and Warren's comments, it should be noted, came at a time when the number of titles published each year had not yet begun its vast expansion. In 1949, 55 titles was probably closer to 12% of all books of poetry published, rather than less than 4%. The claim to a homogeneous literary tradition, which the trades published the major works of, was accordingly harder to challenge. Now it seems ludicrous.

Even with subsidies, there is not enough capital in the entire poetry industry to directly support poets and publisher. This partly determines who will turn elsewhere to make a living. Thus

poets as a group have a wide range of jobs. This in turn means both that poets see work (and the politics of the workplace) in a non-uniform manner from a variety of perspectives and are less likely to perceive poetry as work (at least in the sense of the politics which would extend from that perception). It partly explains why so much of the discussion of the politics of literature has been fixated on the lone aspect of content.

Limited and partially determined by economics, the social organization of poetry in the modern period is characterized by two primary structures: the network and the scene.

The scene, a form which predates even the origin of writing, is specific to a place, such as Bolinas or Harlem. Because poets and their consumers can meet physically, little capital is required (at least in the initial stages): poetry reading series cost far less than a single book to produce. Because the writers in any given locale are going to differ greatly in their other social features, scenes tend to be very heterogeneous, especially in their aesthetics. This tends to have an important impact on formal development, which evolves less on its own terms and more on those ('extra-literary') aspects held in common. Hence the personalism which characterizes the current under-30 generation of 'St. Mark's poets.' Among such scenes are those posed by Glück's gay reading, although it is essential here that the scene definition of something as transgeographic as sexual orientation is specifically an early stage of group evolution.

Networks are transgeographic by definition and therefore historically quite recent, depending not merely on the creation of the book, but also its 'easy' distribution. In English, the first wave of modernists whose work was associated with *Poetry*, particularly the imagists, had significant network characteristics to their scene. The Objectivists were the first poets in America for whom the network structure superceded any scene definition.

What causes poets (and their audience) to engage in network formation is a concern for a certain social code (e.g., gayness) or set of them. Because the cost of communication by books, mail, long distance telephone and travel is much greater than that required by a scene, networks tend to include fewer poor people. This has obvious implications for groups with transgeographic social codes, such as skin color, which have been historically used by others as a mechanism for insuring group poverty (and this is why the large trade publishers have played such a major role in what little network formation black poets have achieved to date). Because selection to a network is far less random than to a scene, the social code(s) which defines them and permits communication can evolve very rapidly. This is particularly true when the code is perceived as being only, or primarily, aesthetic, where formal development is a conscious element of the code. (In spite of Black Mountain, Creeley has maintained that it was the geographic separateness of individuals in that group and the necessity of having to put their ideas down in writing in letters in order to communicate which caused them to become so stylistically distinct.) Here is the 'forced professionalization' of poetry, in which long and close association with a social code permits each word a poet writes to rapidly fill

with its own sense of literary history and theory, the stored value of earlier labor. This is one reason why many contemporary network forms are thought 'difficult.' Because of the use of the code itself as a selector for membership in the network, the production tends to be much more homogeneous aesthetically.

Networks and scenes never exist in pure forms. Networks usually involve scene subgroupings, while many scenes (although not all) build toward network formations. Individuals may belong to more than one of these informal organizations at one time.

Both types are essentially fluid and fragile. Networks, however, are somewhat more apt to disband altogether. Of the scenes and networks presented in the Allen anthology only 20 years ago, just the New York school possesses some present manifestation, and that is quite different in personnel and substance (and has in fact involved subdivision into relatively distinct groupings).

Because capital, of which there is so little in poetry, is necessary for the elements of network formation, competition exists between networks and scenes. Underneath lies the hidden assumption of a hierarchical ordering of these groups, and the idea that one can be the dominant or hegemonic formation according to some definition, at least for a period of time. Definitions vary, but the major components are monetary rewards, prestige (often called influence), and the capacity to have one's work permanently in print and being taught.

Here the role of trade publishing and its allies is completely clear. Trades may produce only 3.5 % of all poetry titles, but in an anthology such as *The American Poetry Anthology* they represent 54% of all books used as sources for the collection. University presses contributed another 31%. Nearly half of the remaining small press books came from one press, which was the editor's own.

Trade publishing is the metanetwork of American poetry. It is the contemporary manifestation of the academic network that Wellek and Warren argued for more than 30 years ago, and a faculty position remains a primary social feature. But because this is the network which is aligned with capital, it can and does incorporate poets from other groups on a token basis. While this serves to give them much broader distribution, they in turn legitimate the metanetwork, masking to some degree its very network structure.

This alliance with capital yields another major advantage: the relative efficiency of trade distribution virtually guarantees its predominance on college course reading lists, *which is the largest single market for books of poetry*, with 2500 colleges and 200 writing programs in North America.

So long as capital, in the form of corporate publishers, can substantially determine the distribution of poetry in its major market, and so long as Daniel Halpern can call a collection of their network *The American Poetry Anthology* without challenge, this type of hegemony is not apt to be broken. The competition between the other networks and scenes amounts to little more than jockeying for the token slots in the metanetwork.

But this is neither the only mode of hegemony, nor necessarily the most important, which a poet such as Robert Glück understands. Here the question is not whether a poet will be read in five or fifty years, but whether that poet can and will be read by those people able and willing to act on their increased understanding of the world as a result of the communication. The people who read and believe *The American Poetry Anthology* are seldom those people. Even the blacks and feminists in that book are reduced to examples of capital's well-publicized tolerance. But what Glück fails to say is that the audience he seeks and the one he dismisses are not composed in the same manner, and cannot be adequately addressed in the same way. Even when appropriately addressed, the responses would differ. What does seem evident from his own description is that Glück did not communicate anything to the university group to challenge their ideas about transitions, about how subjective continuity is an ideological product, and through this to the idea that meaning is a construct, and something which is always produced with social intentions.

The failure to adjust one's presentation to account for differing compositions of audience is often due to partial or overlapping membership in each of the groups. In addition, it's a characteristic of the social code of just the groups most often apt to attend a college reading not to know or speak their own name. In labelling them consumers, Glück forgets that consumption *for further production* is a moment of production itself. But to identify them as a coalition of writers, teachers and specialized readers falls short of connecting them to those larger social orders of which they are a strategic fragment.

This self-anonymity has parallels throughout contemporary life. It has only been through the struggle of non-whites, of women and of gays that the white male heterosexual has come into recognition of his own, pervasive presence. In poetry, there continues to be a radical break between those networks and scenes which are organized by and around the codes of oppressed peoples, and those other 'purely aesthetic' schools. In fact, the aesthetics of those schools is a direct result of ideological struggle, both between networks and scenes, and within them. It is characteristic of the class situation of those schools that this struggle is carried on *in other (aesthetic) terms*.

It should be noted here that this struggle is in fact related to the 'professionalization' of poetry over the past four centuries. This is not to say that the poet who produces for her own consumption is not involved in struggle, nor in the production and consumption of ideological messages, but that at the level of publishing poets it occurs in a different, specific form. There is in fact reason to believe that the absolute number of people who write poetry far exceeds the number of people who ever buy books of the stuff, meaning that the level of professional poetry is itself situational to a larger context, serving as model, limit and problem for the individual self-producer.

Professional poets include individuals who are bourgeois, petty bourgeois, working class and even lumpen. The actual number of poets who could accurately be described as bourgeois is quite small and may not exceed the 2% figure of the general U.S. population (a figure which implies that

90 persons listed in the *Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers* either own the means of production of something more substantial than a small press, or else are related by blood or marriage to such ownership). Inversely, the neo-beatnik group (several strong scenes with only a weak network structure) is characterized by the lumpen identification of many of its members.

But the vast majority fall in between. While many are traditionally working class and while there is a somewhat higher concentration of classically-defined petty bourgeois than in the general American economy, the most significant concentration of poets falls into a category that the late Nicos Poulantzas called The New Petty Bourgeoisie:

This is also where the current devaluation of educational certificates and attainments is most important, given the significance that these have on the labour market and for the promotion chances of these agents. It can be seen in the currently massive occupation of subaltern posts by agents whose educational qualifications led them to have different aspirations. In actual fact, this is the fraction into which young people holding devalued university degrees gravitate on a massive scale. It leads to the various forms of disguised unemployment that ravages this fraction: various forms of illegal work, vacation work, temporary and auxiliary work. These affect all those fractions with an objectively proletarian polarization, but are particularly pronounced in this case.<sup>5</sup>

Poets, for obvious reasons, tend to look at 'disguised unemployment' as time to write, which partly explains their gravitation to part-time service sector jobs, such as clerking in bookstores or proofreading for publishers and law firms. Poulantzas also notes that

It now seems, however, as if the last few years have seen the development, in the majority of capitalist countries, of an actual mental labour reserve army, over and above any cyclical phenomena.<sup>6</sup>

Poulantzas, however, has a very restricted class model, considering mental work and service sector employment to be unproductive, and therefore excluded from the working class as such (although conceding the 'objectively proletarian polarization'). The description, especially with regard to the under-utilized education and partial employment, is a close fit to the lives of many American poets under 40.

Erik Olin Wright, one of Poulantzas' most vigorous critics, uses a more complex model in which this same group is categorized as working class with a strong degree of contradiction as to class allegiance. Noting that more than 30% of economically active Americans had, by 1969, come into the unproductive mental labor sector, Wright notes that

The contradictory locations around the boundary of the working class represent positions which do have a real interest in socialism, yet simultaneously gain certain real privileges directly from capitalist relations of production.<sup>7</sup>

Above all else, professional poetry in America, when it is not aligned directly to an oppressed group, reflects struggle within this critical sector carried out, unfortunately, in an unorganized and often individualist manner. The primary ideological message of such poetry lies not in its explicit content, ideological though that may be, but in the attitude toward reception it demands of the reader. It is this 'attitude toward information,' which often is toward personal (non-professional, non—specialized) information, that is carried forward by the recipient. It is this attitude which can form the basis for a response to other information, not necessarily literary, in the future.

The nature of this attitude lies at the core of every aesthetically based poetic network, generating the differences between them. While several of the New American poetries of the 50s predicated their aesthetics on maximum attention to specific detail (manifesting itself as concentration on word use and line break), only the so-called projectivists suggested the necessity of an active relation between form and thinking about form, that is, of information and structure, holding up as a value the *consciousness* of response.

Because this struggle is carried on in other terms, mediated and hidden, numerous specific complications occur. One is that members of a given network need not agree on this core attitude *in the same way*, particularly if surface features are more closely aligned. Another is that writers who change their politics in mid-life often proceed to send forth mixed messages of a high degree, such as Baraka or Levertov.

This is not the sole level in which the ideological component of literary production functions, but it is the primary one. The use of socially-defined codes (intimacy, law, the professions, the streets, advertising, etc.) and the construction of meaning (Anselm Hollo and Robert Grenier are good examples of a highly developed analysis — although both would probably disavow the term as too class-connotative) are two among several others,

The goal of the poet who would consciously use the ideological component of her work is to make her audience recognize their own presence in the world as part of a dynamic and structured series of relations, to which a variety of options can be applied. Yet what this recognition entails, and what these options need to be, depends largely on integrating composition of the audience into the field of the writing. The poet who gives the same reading to a university crowd and a gay movement group is neglecting one of them.

Just as obviously, different social groups exist for real reasons and will have different poetries. Oppressed groups have, in a very general sense, a similar direction of struggle which permits coalition building across group borders. The problem for aesthetically defined networks and scenes is how to do likewise.

## NOTES

- 1 Benjamin M. Compaine, ed. *Who Owns the Media?* (Harmony Books, 1979).
- 2 *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik. (Seminar Press, 1973), pp. 94-5.
- 3 René Wellek and Austin Warren. (Penguin Books, 1949), pp. 142-3.
- 4 Unpublished manuscript, page 21.
- 5 *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, translated by David Fernbach. (Verso Press, 1978), P. 323.
- 6 *Ibid*, p. 311 .
- 7 *Class, Crisis and the State*. (Verso Press, 1979), pp. 108-9.



## *from* Poetry in the Tropics: A Political History of Poetics

Jed Rasula

The monster of the text: that a voice has vanished like buffalo from the prairie grass, and all that remains is an industrialized stubble. The texture of the language itself, however, particularly as it is foregrounded in poetry, grazes on sensation, browses in the ears, contracts a buzzy stickiness or abrasive dryness or conductive moisture — in other words, a *biology* is unveiled in the speaking organs themselves, and in poetry the mouth and throat become genitals of the mind. Something is permitted, emitted, something flows through unimpeded and welcome and full of evidence of something unimaginable which overturns evidence on all sights without intruding on the Monster of the Text.

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In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce fused the identity of syntax with the susceptibility of the word to hold syntactic (or morphemic) content. Not just etymology, not compacted meaning by multilingual overlays and transparencies and depth-charges of unpredictable magnitudes of detonation, but a syntax that ripples along *inside* the words themselves rather than between them. To read the *Wake* or *Ulysses* demands not a literacy of multilingual or multicultural reference, but a loose drifting of such literacies as tattered ends, the attention of the normal stage-scenic phantasy brain thrown out like exposed wires, brushing and drawing against the rough sensation of the tongue and the rounded sensuous interior of the ears where aroused language fecundates and rings bells, beats on anvils, rides stirrups — the phantasy of scene or person or act exposed to the movement of the language as it turns half startled on itself and sees itself speaking behind its own back, opens its mouth in amazement and releases its exposure-like sparks dragged out of the friction of that difference brought to speech and writing by the width of a man or woman's body compacted into the thin plank of the tongue.

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The old proposition that the life was the truth and the poetry was an inferior life, an 'expression of' or a 'representation of' that 'other' life, created an imbalance that made poems susceptible to extra-poetic ideologies. Allegory was its major syntactic motor. A poetry of the tropics could only finally identify itself and its own condition when this familiar habit, or garment, of poetic language, was removed: i.e., when the poem disrobed and the breath of its composition and the breathlessness of its readerly climaxes were identical or at least occupied the same space, the same surface.

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Poetry always demonizes the impulse to understand, and leaves words as boundaries, inscriptions at limits, terminal points like electrical conductors confining and utilizing barbaric energy in a context of precision. This is why there's always so much voodoo of the typology, the 'style' of the poem, the way the words buoy up a posture on the moving torque of the poem's sea-drift. Type is the literalism readers *treasure*, identifying comprehension with an exact sign, with the scar that won't recede, the name that will live in the minds of men forever, and so forth.

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A text is shot full of holes. A breath roams around in there, offering its windpipe, its hole where texture gushes or where meaning drains away. The poem's only permanence is its zone of crossings, its types which melt and decompose in the compost of the poem. That compost is a topos which is tropical, the place of poetry, and the de-composition of the poem is where and how it twists its other demonic meanings in the reader's mouth as a palpable ventriloquism. How it turns around unintended obverses of the types the poem presents. How the poem's action, like the 'action' of a revolver, is a continual discharge in the total body-mass of whose mixtures certain things are only partially seen. And this persistence in willing a partial seeing, which is an encompassing of the continually-missing, lacking, invisible or uninterpretable — this partiality of the object to *seem* to have another side, is the margin at which poems slice off so decisively from prose, which promises that all it wants to deal with will be forthcoming in a linear motion, and will have nothing to do with the adjacencies, peripheries, perimeters and textual boundaries which poems by nature adhere to as residual graffiti.

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At the level of the infinitely small, perception and cognition are constantly rethought into prehuman forms, as if language itself preceded the human and in the history of which people were an interruption, arrogantly trying to possess and utilize and profit from their speech. In a work like '*A*' there is no *thinking* but rather a remarkable condensation of wisdom. It proposes a poetics of condensation and density. And the effort in reading it would be to attain a vista looking out over the pre-views of language, the pre-human ability of language to generate specifically human abilities, a prospect in which articulation awakens in the mouth or hand only through a nourishment which vigorously distills the speech, burning its energy instantly back into humus, ground, base. The 'music of the spheres' was not metaphor, but explicit instruction to learn ways of speaking that don't threaten the vista, the prospect itself, with disintegration.

Howe

Tina Darragh

When I first read Susan Howe's work, I had no idea of what she was trying to do. She was using the vocabulary of the 'Old World' (terms from the classics, mythology, the Bible, Latin liturgy, and so on) and combining it with experimental techniques such as the fragmentation of words and the isolation of individual letters. With this mix, who would be her readers? I took her work to heart with this puzzle in mind.

From the start, I heard Susan's work against the backdrop of the '70s as the decade of the women's movement 'lit crit' division. Whenever I take up one of her books, I am reminded of the endless discussion groups dealing with the topic of the 'politically correct' woman writer. The sum of these meetings sounded something like this: because the formation of our language came about through commerce controlled by men, our language is structured to serve their needs and is, in essence, 'male-oriented'. The only way to challenge this orientation, then, is through the stream of consciousness technique, since writing coming from the subconscious can bring forth new patterns of information not yet co-opted by commerce. Conversely, to write abstractly was to use the 'language of business' to play Western patriarchy's game and thereby continue the patterns of male oppression.

Of all the assumptions in that line of reasoning, the one that continues to bother me the most is the stereotyping of the 'process' of women's creative power as still the private, intuitive energy that gives birth to something new, another form of 'motherhood'. Analytical thought continued to be man's domain, and a dirty realm at that.

Susan began writing poetry around 1970 (after painting for ten years) and I regret not knowing her work back then. Her first book, *Hinge Picture* (Telephone, 1974) could have brought some needed clarity to our women's group discussions that grew increasingly embroiled in ideological arguments that obscured real feelings and real events, both past and present. *Hinge Picture* begins with Susan stating 'She rises while it is yet dark, to trace a military combination/ in the sand, singing...' (p. 5) and trace she does with lists and simple sentences becoming an outline of patriarchal mores incorporating all the characters passed down to us through literature. Technically, she then startles these 'old stories' by fragmenting them and using (for example) isolated 'e' and 's' sounds to screech and hiss at them.

five princes  
buried their  
father divid

ed his subjec  
ts forgot his  
advice separ  
ated from eac  
h other and w  
andered in qu  
est of fortun  
e (p. 14)

&

a king  
delight  
s in war (p. 15)

She concludes *Hinge Picture* by placing her work firmly in the matriarchal tradition: (from 'breaking all the rules', the final poem) 'Deliver us back to the wide world's oldest song/ when mother was a fairy woman same root as Finn/ pinion on the clean fin clear clear wave'.

All this is not to say that Susan writes as a 'political' poet, but that I read her as one. While other writers were *talking about* getting to the roots of women's literature, Susan had placed herself there and was ready to take on other projects, such as: *The Western Borders* (Tuumba Press, 1976), an elaboration on the nursery rhyme 'oh would I were where I would be!'; an analysis of the word 'mark' and all its definitions (Mark being the name of both her father and her son) that was published as *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (Telephone, 1978); a response to Boswell's quote of Johnson ('...The poem might begin with the advantages of civilized society over a rude state, exemplified by the Scotch, who had no cabbages till Oliver Cromwell's soldiers introduced them...') published as *Cabbage Gardens* (Fathom Press, 1979); and her most recent book, *The Liberties* (Loon Books, 1980), a narrative account of the relationship of Jonathan Swift and 'Stella' followed by (among other things) a play documenting in dialogue the fragmented, lonely nature of their lives that is tied to the legacy of literary history by the addition of another player, *Lear's Cordelia*.

I see the final section of *The Liberties*, 'Formation of a Separatist, I,' as a point of departure back into Susan's work as a whole:

I am composed of nine letters...  
Solus with a letter  
S  
Here set at liberty...

Literally, she is spelling out her reason for writing — experimentation with the patterns of words handed down to her equals freedom. She stands up against the weight of our language's history and, as an intellectual, fights back — an act of liberation that is valid on its own and in many ways compliments the struggle of those bringing up information from the subconscious.

## Letter to the Editors

Larry Eigner

Six or 7 months since I saw this clipping about the man who wasn't allowed to change his name (like a prisoner??) to a number and thought of sending you the (enclosed) collage, which I then made up the other to, but only now had it been executed (yes, yes, that's a word); and, such are still my corner cutting, all-purpose or MIRV (bird killing) proclivities, also nowadays I really at last take my time and things in stride...

While now this far away from initial views I('m able to) really look at and appreciate Hemensley's and Child's reviews of my own stuff [L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E No. 11]. (I did at first in one way, but for one thing anyhow thought too much was somehow being read into the poem, way too much as I was dissatisfied with the sequence (for a change), the words fading out, as o ten happens (I wrote it in December '63). Today now I've got to Charles [Bernstein in No. ii] on C.. & W (and A.. & G..!) et al. Well, hm. There's knowledge of perception of things, as well as words, and of what they mean, it seems. You can have houses or books with too few or too many windows and/or doors? Too too solid or thin and flimsy? Vacuums, rivers, deluges, avalanches going through them? (As to certainties, I got it from a book by a Hans Reichenbach — The New Philosophy very likely — that as long as you bother with absolute truth, certainty that is, rather than just heights of probability, you can't get over some objection, dilemma and paradox of Hume's, to the effect that there's no telling when or where there'll be exceptions to rules, insofar as your deduction or logic isn't tautologic anyway, even as he cdnt get past it.) Meaning without dolphins et al and/or men cdnt be, it appears — the other prerequisite being enough of the rest of the world — any more than eyesight without the animal kingdom could, visibility. The meaningful is the interesting, what's of interest (puzzling strange curious urgent important compelling ... ).

everyday faraway

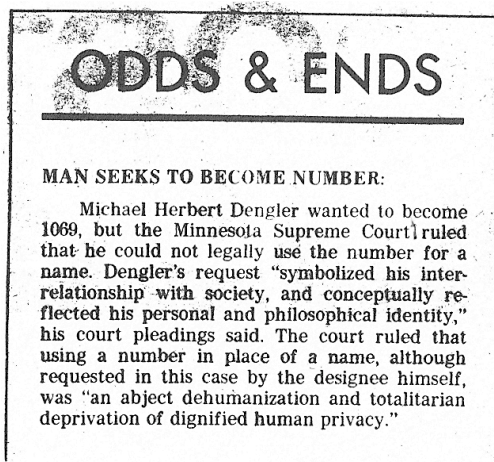
stars

numb

beast

-naming,

inverted  
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sky



... to airy  
nothing

a local habit. .

How public to be somebody

terrible days

# Existential Architecture and the Role of Geometry\*

Hiromi Fujii

## *1. Quintessential Architecture*

The potential of 'quintessential architecture' is to be realized through effacing the meaning of the reality which has arisen as a result of architecture's degeneration into a false vision, exclusively determined by utility and universality. In other words, architecture today is blinded with geometric grid patterns which in themselves do not generate meaning, and these reject and repress the meaning which exists in the very medium itself, in the structuring process by which architecture is organized on the basis of utility and convention.

This, of course, results in the creation of impersonal conditions which eliminate emotional life and strongly accentuate the impression of sterility in our period. We are witness to the self-fulfilling prophecy of a sterile age determined to be sterile. The re-evaluation of architecture in this context is designed to induce an act of self-transformation on the part of [humans].

This 'act of self-transformation' is obviously an act that concerns [human] subjectivity and is possible only by means of generating meaning through the self. Meaning emerges in relation to the character of a given object when the object is contemplated in its relationship to the self. Thus, meaning denotes the relationship in which an object stands to the subject, and not the character of the object itself. For example, a given object may be 'good' for me, but not for another. The quality of the object, then, constitutes the meaning of the object to the subject. This means that when we deal with an object, it will naturally assume a meaning for us so long as it is posited in a way that engages us. Indeed we may argue that an existential relationship to an object occurs as soon as it presents us with a meaning.

One thing that I would like to clarify at this point is that when I propose to 'efface meaning,' I do not set out to completely efface all meaning. The act of elimination is restricted to transcendental meaning; that is to say to a meaning which inhibits or disrupts the aforementioned existential

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\* Excerpted from *A New Wave of Japanese Architecture* (1978, The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, Catalogue 10).



relationship — for example, conventional meaning, practical meaning, or meaning as an instrument of a particular message.

The transcendental insures intellectual cognition. It is a meaning which is supported by an objective sense of the appropriate, which in its turn constitutes an absolute standard in the context of reality. What counts is whether the available meaning satisfies this appropriateness which is in itself independent of our personal feelings.

Before this objective system, our feelings are deprived of all their power. In order to judge the meaning of things in light of criteria prescribed by an objective system, we enclose ourselves in parentheses; we only seek the cognate of an appropriate objectivity. But meaning can only be obtained in this manner through relinquishing the self. There may be appropriate cognition here, but the eye of the subject capable of reading the meaning is patently absent.

. . . . The elimination of transcendental meaning through exclusion will restore the self and lead to a confirmation of meaning based on a coexistence with that self. Thus the first task is to eliminate transcendental meaning for the sake of restoring existential meaning . . . .

'All paths are blocked, and yet we must act. It is then that we set out to change the world. That is to say, we try to live in the world as if the relationship between objects and our subconscious awareness of them were a determinist process. That is to say, we transform ourselves for the very purpose for which consciousness proposes to transform the object' (Sartre) . . . .

Geometry is antecedent to our existence and while it may serve to elucidate the structure of actual space, it has nothing to say about it....

While geometry, like language and mathematics, provides a set of principles responsible for logical construction, it has no specific commitment to reality. Its interior is empty so to speak. Once made the object of cognition, however, this void, just like language and mathematics, posits a logical composition with regard to the creation of actual space as a structural entity . . . .

The act of understanding presupposes the functioning of the ego as a subject, but a modified attitude would imply the subject's absence, that is, a negation of autonomy. The subject deprived of independence as a self has no choice but to enter the world of senses, where cognitive sensation is the only effective guide. In the end the subject is left drifting purposelessly before the internal destitution of the object. This benumbed state may be reinforced by 'repetition,' 'multi-tiered structures'

'distance' and 'divergence.' The 'repetition' in question depends upon the reiteration of similar graphic forms; for example, the quasi-quadratic elements that repeatedly appear in the walls of certain space compositions .... The repetition itself causes these hollow forms to sink into our senses in an undigested state; simple graphic forms, like foreign substances that are never digested; they remain unmodified as they drift into our consciousness. They persistently appear and reappear until the principle that governs them is perceived as a notion, or even as a tangible reality. This notion will begin to be felt as a physical object. Here we are already in a realm where architecture is no longer representable in terms of 'what architecture is.' It exists only in its own right as a tangible, concrete object .... Thus, the self which drifts about in the hollow interior of the object because of the loss of its perceptual identity will eventually be captured by the concretized notion and find itself pinned in mid-air. And this very state of suspension in mid-air is what provides the key to the restoration of the self which the hollow object has hitherto denied. The emergence of the self here brings into view the self which has been outside of consideration in the process of objective cognition, that very self which, while remaining mesmerized by the notion, will continue to generate new semantic value.

## Approaches Kathy Acker

Steve Benson

Kathy Acker writes novels, composed of long passages that give her some room to work out the momentum of various narrative gambits. These passages are fragments out of synch or traditionally linear context with one another. Their origins are ambiguous; some appear flagrantly stolen from others' work, some plainly autobiographical, but in any case they turn resolutely from any such genesis and face forward towards the reader as though oblivious to any context beyond their own confessions of identity. A novel is a collage of such verbal overlays in conscious contiguity.

The figures explain themselves, enunciate their themes in selections from what must be virtually endless snakelike mental sets, to no evident purpose or effect in mundane, lugubrious particularity of vocal gest. When insights occur in the work, they do no more than that and pass with the flush of psychic event, scarcely resonating, neither delaying nor transforming the indulgent evacuation of self-consciousness. Names, identities, issues, emotions, everything evident is *fronted* compulsively. The listener editing for the authentic, the clichéd, the hyped-up, the suggestive ellipsis, the key words, the sensitive implication, is driven back by the landslide of heavy matter.

Obvious, heavy-handedly forced on our attention, evidently commodified in their melodramatic urgency and timely references, Kathy Acker's signifiers are weights being whirled — not constituents of a measured world — out there. The compulsive explanations of motivation, the churning insistence of rhythms, the banal accessibility of all the proceedings disorient — there's no eventual necessary thing to do with them. They are not empathic, though they would seem to mean to be. They depend too steadfastly on their alienation in order to maintain the need to speak for a stranger (the reader), incapable of interrupting them, to reach behind their passive-aggressive emblematics.

The work is consequently offensive, inherently and intentionally. Rather than inviting imaginative implication with ambiguities and difference, the voices vigorously, baldly put every nuance forth in the declarative. Each relationship seems so frankly subject-object, one-on-one with one of these discounted, there are no interstices for the reader to inhabit: there's just a speaker and a void of material, historical things, junctions, ideas, cluttered, empty and blasé. The listener or reader may be knocked off balance at first by sensational, anti-intellectual attitudes struck in the writing, before recognizing the sensual, literary, anti-academic realism underlying its attack. The *presence* of the texts packs a wallop of disconcerting punches; its disregard for the convention of delineating subtle,

accurate *representations* of truth stands behind the verbose, demanding voices that command no validity aside from that of text. Rimbaud's 'I is an other' extends to the work itself: this writing, this material, faces off against the acknowledged written world, plainly offspring of that world's experiences (its chromosomes everywhere indicate the parentage of literature) but resistant to integrity *within* its patriarchal orders, the tradition of narrative, that caravan encamped at a mirage. Inevitably such work offends. Through the guise of the common, the predictable, the grossly manipulative, Acker strikes against accepted values, by the transparency of her strategies, her disregard for taste, unities of form, motive, effect — a given character serially adopts quite various voices, behavior-patterns, values, fates, making a travesty of the integrity of the individual and of social responsibility, their very internal disjointedness (or a logic as obscure and plain as that of dreams) radically questioning the possibility of autonomy. To engage art so against the grain one needs to come to terms with one's hostility to it, as well as one's appetite towards its promises. Acker exposes the glamour in narrative fiction as ruthlessly as any novelist has ever written. From such an angle, the realization is rigorous, deeply controlled, virtually pure....

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The sometimes garish and sensational genre-literature that Kathy Acker manipulates in her fiction — the pornographic, the violent, the fantastically autobiographical — and its insistence on emotional states of helplessness, fascination, obsessive desire, masochism, rebelliousness, quasi-near-madness — these *seem* determined to press buttons, demanding either acceptance and empathy or rejection and criticism. But I would argue that the overkill deadens; hyperbole reduces its matter to mannerism. The verisimilitude of the situation is cast into doubt, the conventions of a given mode aren't held to reasonably, alternative renderings interrupt each other and encourage a sense of the arbitrary or momentarily impulsive, neither characters nor narration is artistically colored with ambiguity and insight enough to seduce a ready imagination. Often the narration thunders with hooks clamoring for willful identification, and yet the hooks all strike me pointed the wrong way, so I just feel the cold curve of steel pressed against my side and see the point over *there*, uselessly faced nowhere. I am remarkably present and implicated in this displacement of affect — hey, why am I feeling nothing? — or just the surface *texture* of a violent emotion?? I share the writer's cold uncritical gaze on her material, and recognizing it, and my difference from her, am thrown back on my own distance from the whole affair.

So *I* don't think her audience/readership succumbs to the situations emotionally — I haven't met anyone who felt swept up that way — but there may be something of the emotionlessness of an unconvincing pulp that does ironically convince one. I suspect a lot of people may dig it as kitsch, as a kind of nihilistically campy reflection of a reductive view on reality that has a lot of currency in the

punk worldview, and in New York — the sense we have no power over circumstances and are hopelessly divorced from those who do; the sense sex is inextricably connected with violence; conversation's as valueless as dryhumping, a futile echoing of readymade dead style and information; satisfaction with art derives from recognizing in it that aspect of stylistic and informational reductiveness that refuses to be fooled by desire for more than its own texture, attraction, show. Everything's almost inherently obsolescent, so there's no cause to care to define the purpose or resilience of the work — a onetime effect is enough. And in this, punk nihilism is simply an obverse of the corporate mentality of contemporary capitalism.

Defiant punks, themselves often artists in their approach to life and life-problems, appear intent on establishing themselves as a lumpenproletariat against the bourgeoisie, in large part their background; Kathy shares their ambivalence between an enraged class warfare on the one hand (a romantic legacy of more issue-oriented movements?) and socking in for the hard times ahead (a return of our parents' repressed, the Depression). Her novels are vengefully individualistic, flaunting the rights of the private.

As she becomes more interested in playful and textural qualities in her work, she steps still more deeply in, intrigued with making her peace with it. Her values seem to be becoming more domestic, stabilizing, professional. As an upstart entrepreneur growing out of punk, she depends on tastes it's generated to make a living from her work.

The genres and languages, the texts and personal experiences she draws on are fixed in the past, known, done, and preserved through mundane and typical usages. Their articulation addresses us with a futility, a purposeless finality, and if these are the terms for ego and identity, no wonder she would want to exorcise value from those depositories of life-significance. Rather than engaging or developing new terms with which to mobilize a sense of human values to supplant conventional and depressed ones, she marshals these patently defunct ones as though to hammer out a proof of the absence of knowledge, creation, personal power available to recognition — leaving one to suppose that if such things exist, they must be somewhere else, maybe illusory inasmuch as one aims to grasp them or function in terms of any leverage their identification may grant us on conditions.

The characters in her fiction are definitely limited; the author is clearly free to alter them at will. The dead weight of mundane banal discharge and the blocking disposition of contingencies of all kinds as the *modi operandi* of life as represented are qualified only by the artifice's ability to wantonly shift on any parameter. In a universe of fixed conditions, the narrative exercises freedom by contradictorily recognizing all as fragmentary, interchangeable, flux, through which it makes a way by erratic crawls

and jumps. The life of the writer's somewhere outside it, in a one-to-one relationship with the writing, in no stable relationship whatever with the figures within.

The work is certainly as serious and internally motivated as it is opportunistic and socially appealing — it derives its cues and value more from the former but the fact that it makes its reputation and status as commodity largely by benefit of the latter make them crucial concerns. When the writing is the life, the social relations that the work agrees to or engenders are particularly accountable and compelling. Choice of content or areas of reference doubtless inform this, but the writing is *how* the life makes itself social, formal, evident and influential. If an investigation into the politics of literature (as the body writing and reading) has possibly begun, Acker's work undertakes a brave and challenging contribution to it, as well as an extremely striking one.

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Clearly, she writes not to represent a life or world she has lived or wants to see lived but to embody some sense of a dynamic condition that needs living at the period of composition. Writing is a language alternative to the rest of acting in the world. Its relationship to that is sometimes adversary, sometimes passionately reverent, often smugly, arrogantly blasé, usually coldly reckoning on the balance required for its hegemony and survival — the writing is, after all, a parasite.

The writer's intense, well-nigh complete investment in her writing does not realize its identity with the rest of her life, by this conception, but eclipses that identity, the writer becoming wholly identified with the work. (This is arguably a radical, surrealist conception, arguably an absolutist commitment to literary fiction per se.) In fact Acker traces a decomposition of identity through her acts of novelization, to a point where she now feels fairly free of its presumptions on her circumstance. Hence, voicing the text in a reading is like putting on again a cast-off weight of identity which she no longer feels a compulsion either to assume or to work off. To the degree that the writing act has been truly accomplished, the public work is quite surely fictive, in that not only are the acts it represents not empirically verifiable (Indeed, Acker's work is intentionally counter to verisimilitude [She says, 'What's okay is when it's so unbelievable you couldn't imagine anybody dealing with it.'], a key indicator of her disinterest in representationalism as a grounding to her drift. Parody and the grotesque are frequent means to this disorientation of the realistic interpretation, as are disjunctions of time, situation, identity — literature and the commonly-known world are material not in the writing but of the writing's perceptions.), but also the vital activity that the writing embodies (the need and the execution) is no longer present, but merely evoked. Her prohibition against revisions of any sort in her serial novels testifies to this commitment to the record of the writing act as primary; she is not trying to represent something else.

The impulse to eradicate, annihilate, distort, pervert, fundamentally disturb identity is a recurrent theme in her work and in her commentary on it. I suspect this is why a lot of the masochism — built up not just as an imaged process but also as a series of empathetic, melodramatic hooks — comes in. Sensitive as her early books are to the sense of a process of realization (In Williams' sense of 'the embodiment of knowledge,' the work seems to *live out* the identities and transitory traumatic states the author was interested in.), the imposition of determined fictional identities on the figures of her writing must strike her as the function of a sadomasochistic relationship she has a definite hand in, as master. Doubtless she nonetheless empathizes with even as she manipulates the roles of her slaves — these ciphers she arranges about the page in the images of fatally suffering and conflicted identities. The accessible legibility and blatant dramatic force of her approach, which are coldly and sometimes brutally fronted in her work (such that their being so insistently pushed forward seems ever more remarkable than style and content, often tacky and mundane, are themselves), are the chains and racks themselves to hold flatly in place the variously strained and relaxed forms of identity lent the work by either writer or reader. Then, how much can s/he take before s/he goes over the edge? and, what edge? and, is there any edge? or, is there merely legibility, and letting the reader let the book go, whatever the end of reading? The pictured images, the voiced ideologies, the infought conflicts, are the variously displayed and exercised instruments of this lascivious, largely fantasied torture.

Such a characterization might apply to most any writing. Acker doesn't half-deconstruct the apparatus à la Huysmanns, Lautreamont, Gide or Robbe-Grillet, with their ironic and significant relish for relationship with reader and the figures in the fictions. Her work doesn't aim to provide a reconciliation to her conflict over identity, significance and relationship so much as recognize the conflict and push it, to the breaking point, or out the window, or till she trips over it and beyond, if necessary — so she *doesn't care* what use the reader has or it, so long as it escalates the conditions that are most centrally problematic for her in the writing project. Such characterization can't account for the fact that her writing has changed since then. If the Image of the Self might be said to be the antagonist of her project and whatever can be pitted against it her multifarious protagonist, then her allowance of so much of the field of articulation to confession, explanation and other self-referential histrionics on the part of her central figures belies the absoluteness of her campaign against the Image's primacy: it seems to be the establishment of stacity and status in the Image that antagonizes: The novels work Singleness through one thing after another, restlessly refusing to let it stop, even at nothing . . . .

# The Invisible Universe

Kathy Acker

It doesn't at all work to say that you fantasize — that would be taking the fantasy for a representation of scenes. Rather, I believe, your use of fantasy enables you to render intricate, organicize the text. Freud explains that, for an individual, fantasy admits all the combinations. Example: I hit you; I am you hit; ... The verb here doesn't change. Likewise, in your fantastic texts, the verb (the action) is also the main actor and the represented. Fantasy, then, is a structural combination. It is: all possible actions, or the illusion of monotony. Variations and mutations repeat the same verbal structure. Do you agree?

Yes. The organic process I use immediately proposes, then divides the text. Not what is supposedly represented, but the text. When I am writing, the text-body is my body so there's no problem of inadequate fantasy (fantasy versus reality). The movement is strictly economic. There's no eroticism, for eroticism is simply a deviation of the sexual act. Desire creates hierarchies and 'unnatural' has no meaning. All acts are part of the sexual movement as all sexual movements are parts of all other acts. The text is material.

In fact, the text is never sexual. It is only material, nothing else. What destroys idealism deepens the materialism of the text. Then the sexual act disappears, or is lacking, under the mass of processes.

How does writing destroy?

By breaking down idealisms. I bring everything to the material level. Active Verbs; present participles and the past perfects of these active verbs; these kinds of adjectives or the redoubled prefixes of verbs rather than adverbs; commas and dashes instead of full stops. The abolition of all psychological, humanistic, and metaphysical terms. Complete attention to the phonetic material level.

The text sits on an incessant double working: the webbing of a word's reference and a word's Sound. This and only this is the text. There is no idealist proposal.

The text is a motor: Everything in it is for a purpose: Words are written to be eaten; words lead, treaties, up to their exhaustion.

The text has roots simultaneously in the body which acts and the body that writes. I use three levels of writing. At first, a savage text that I wrote when I was fourteen. For me the sexual desire has always been bound to this savage desire to write. I write as I masturbate. On the other hand, there's a text of notes, a huge mass of notes, the learned text. Just as my day begins around 9:00 Am and ends at 2:00 AM (from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM and from 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM), so one



text is inserted into this time circle in a regular manner and then another. I don't write; I type. I mechanically insert one text into another text. Mechanically meaning musically. While I was writing EDEN, EDEN, EDEN (Gallimard), I was listening to Japanese, African, Arab, South American jazz, the whole mass of Italian madrigals, Monteverdi. I calculated the timbre, the volume. Each text-sound immediately modulates every other text-sound. The wind immediately modulates each organic noise. All relation-textures are always inextricable.

[EDITORS 'NOTE: Above based on interviews with Pierre Guyotat in *literature L'Interdite* (Gallimard, 1974).]

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Reporting is a means to an end. In reporting, the reporter uses language to describe an incident which is outside the language being used. Literature, on the other hand, is not a means to an end. Therefore: when meaning is destroyed, literature emerges.

When, teaching English to Tournon students, I lost my belief in God, I began to believe in literature. The commitment to act for the Western world is what religious practice/ philosophy is for the Eastern.

Since words not ideas or meanings make up literature, the actual words the 'purest' (i.e. stripped as far as possible of references) relations between words, for that's what words are, are literature's ground. The values of truth or falsehood, or fiction and documentation, refer to referentiality.

The crux here, and if it is lost literature disappears, is that words are referential.

Any genre of writing — political analysis, romantic novels, mathematical proofs, Ronald Reagan's vomittings — as soon as its meaning is destroyed becomes literature. The hotter the writing, the greater the tension between the meaning(s) and the ongoing destruction, the more literary the work.

For those to whom reality is unbearable .

If literature concerns itself with truth values only insofar as it concerns itself with referentiality, what is reality for a writer? If the reality is the words themselves, words are existences whose values depend on differences. Words are precise measurings of specificities. Money as it occurs in our society is the opposite of such occurrences. Since money now defines the greatest proportion of human relations, valuable or specific human relations aren't occurring. For instance, on Christmas Day an American pilot can, by machine, write MERRY CHRISTMAS on a bomb and send it down to Vietnam only

because he, I presume it's a he, doesn't know reality or value. The American school system bases its educational practices on the definition of *knowledge as the remembering of information*. But *knowing* (reality) is *knowing values*.

Why do we want to destroy?

Because a value is specific and absolute unto itself. No person knows by reducing events in time to meanings. For instance, a newspaper reporter uses the meanings his words refer to to suggest certain models or control his readers. Truth is a contrivance resting on opinion which is always taught.

The shit is a poet. She's a poet because she tells everyone to go to hell. That's the only definition of a poet there is. She the shit poet has lots and lots of money. Not LOTS of money, but she is an upperclass bourgeois ensconced in wealth, which means she doesn't know she's as starving as the American misery-stricken bums she's as poor as them she will find this out when during even the slightest Depression, and in the future the American economy has to undergo BIG DEPRESSIONS INFLATIONARY RECESSIONS, the least miserly landlord is going to take back his house which she's been paying a huge mortgage on fifty years now while her taxes will rise. Dear Bourgeoisie, your bourgeois money isn't real money. Someone's been fooling you. So this shit poet has childhood material crap and a mommy and daddy who love her. Mommy doesn't teach her she's a cunt, but instead feeds her TV and talks to her just like the TV mothers think their TV daughters are their best friends. Daddy doesn't rape her. This is the happy family. What is a happy marriage? Does a cock know how to go into a cunt anymore?

Daddy dies because he buries his head in shit just like an ostrich which is very stupid of him. No one now knows what he was thinking about. Two years before he died he blew eight hundred thou and then he stole his mommy's diamond rings, but he wasn't a drag queen so he couldn't have blown the money on men. The next year mommy married a tight-ass Colonel because she had a hot cunt. Mothers have no right to be women and women have no right to have cunts they should be devoted to their children. Because they don't cut out their livers and feed them braised in marsala to their children their children want to kill them this is the start of the Spanish revolution.

How does a great writer come into being? Hatred antipathy to human fear of everything selfishness inability to communicate deformed physical attributes chronic illnesses moods like demons in particular: epileptic escapism, thundering naïve desires? The first step in the stage is to fuck every streetwalker especially the eight-dollar-a-throw ones. Simultaneously feel mad incurable wants for sex (symbols) you can't have. (The beginning of symbolism.) Put yourself in a position where you HAVE to escape while a sex disease is rendering you helpless.

This is the time to escape. (Paradise. The New World. Longings for purity. Love.). . .

That human life is but a first installment of the serial soul and that one's individual secret is not lost in the process of earthly dissolution becomes something more than an optimistic conjecture, and even more than a matter of religious faith, when we remember that only commonsense rules out immortality. A creative writer can't help feeling that in her rejecting the world of the matter-of-fact, in her taking sides with the irrational the illogical the inexplicable and the fundamentally everything, the word is the relationship of repression, she is performing something similar in a rudimentary way to what under the cloudy skies of gray Venus.

For Owl, wise though He was in many ways, able to read and write and spell his own name WOL, yet somehow went to pieces over delicate words like MEASLES and BUTTERED TOAST.

'Owl, I require an answer! It's Bear speaking!'

But the circularity of the signification of any particular signifier itself caught in the circularity of the signification of language itself so that issuing a reward is sneezing and there are no tissues around because there weren't any sneezes so Owl goes on and on, using longer and longer words, until at last he comes back to where he started but nobody can remember where that is.

He didn't really know what Owl was talking about.

'Didn't you see the words?' said Owl, a little surprised. 'Come and look at them now.' So they went outside. And Pooh looked at the words and he looked at the bell-rope, and the more he looked at the bell-rope, the more he felt that he had seen something like it, somewhere else, sometime before.

Pooh nodded.

'It reminds me of something,' he said.

Our last night... Up until three in the morning... Dawn cocks crow, my two candles are lit. I am sweating, my eyes are burning. I have early morning chills. How many nights behind me! In four hours, I leave Cairo. Farewell, Egypt!

Tyltyl has no sooner turned the diamond than a sudden and wonderful change comes over everything. The old Fairy alters then and there into a princess of marvellous beauty; the flints of which the slum-building's walls are built light up, turn blue as sapphires, become transparent and shine and spin like the most precious of stones. The junk furniture takes life becomes resplendent; the deal table assumes as grave and noble an air as a marble table; the clock face winks its eye and smiles genially, while the door which contains the pendulum opens and releases the hours, which, holding one another by the hand and laughing merrily, begin to dance to delicious music.

## Production as Metaphor, and 'Nature' in Baudrillard's Mirror

Gerrit Lansing

Nature; Language; Labor; Play; Production; Value; Utopia: These are principal values of Jean Baudrillard's neat little book (*The Mirror of Production*, translated with 'Introduction' by Mark Poster, Telos Press, St. Louis, 1975). Baudrillard stands firmly in the line marked French post-Marxist critique, following upon and engaged with, often in disagreement, Althusser, Deleuze and Guattari, and Julia Kristeva.

His announced theme, an attempt to analyze the central logic of political economy, its logic of signification, has itself been much analyzed, his revisions of Marx predictably dismissed as 'Romantic' or 'utopian,' (see, e.g., the review of 'Baudrillard's Noble Anthropology' by Robert Hefner, *sub stance* 17, 1977), but this note is only concerned to show that some of his insights concerning art, play, work, language, and the concept of 'Nature' are worth attending:

'The work of art and to a certain extent the artisanal work bear in them the inscription of the loss of the finality of the subject and the object, the radical compatibility of life and death, the play of an ambivalence that the product of labor as such does not bear since it has inscribed in it only the finality of value.' Language is no more only a 'means' of 'communication,' than a tool is only a 'means' of 'production.'

On the ways in which notions of value are covertly introduced into the metaphorical machinery of Marxist (and other political-economic) *écriture*, Baudrillard is acute. He questions and attacks the metaphorical identification of value and productivity common to Marx and Deleuze, runs over the history of that intersection (incidentally pointing out the unhistorical dreaminess of Kristeva's view of Marx: 'If there was one thing Marx did not think about, it was discharge, waste, sacrifice, prodigality, play, and symbolism.') The notion of the good of 'productivity' or 'creativity' is common to Marx and the Christian 'Puritan ethic,' and Baudrillard in his chapter on 'Marxist Anthropology and the Domination of Nature' sketches a history of 'the rewriting of Nature according to the code of production.'

Although Nature in *all* political-economic writing expresses the concept of a *dominated essence*, 'This separation from Nature under the sign of the principle of production is fully realized by the capitalist system of political economy, but obviously it does not emerge with political economy. The separation is rooted in the great Judeo-Christian dissociation of the soul and Nature. God created man in his *image* and created Nature for man's *use*....' In Baudrillard's view, it is here, in the

exploitation of Nature by human being according to God's will that 'Rationality begins ... it is the end of paganism, animism and the "magical" immersion of man in nature, all of which is reinterpreted as superstition. ("Rational" Marxism makes the same error by reinterpreting it in terms of the "rudimentary" development of productive forces.) Hence although science, technology and material production subsequently enter into contradiction with the cultural order and the dogmas of Christianity, nonetheless their condition of possibility remains the Christian postulate of man's transcendence of nature.'

So from a Christian ascetic ethic of suffering and self-mortification it is but one giant step, changing nothing in the principles of repression and operational violence, to the work ethic of material domination and production: 'From ascetic practices to productive practices (and from the latter to consumer practices) there is thus *desublimation*; but the desublimation is only a metamorphosis of repressive sublimation. The ethical dimension is secularized under the sign of the material domination of nature,' and the whole *system of political economy*, unquestioned in Marxist critique of capitalism, remains a 'secular generalization of the Christian axiom about Nature.'

Poster remarks (his name is Mark) in his 'Introduction' that '... contemporary French theorists remain trapped in this conceptual cage ['a metaphor or "mirror" of production']; Althusser sees theory as "production," Deleuze and Guattari give us an unconscious that is a "producer" of desire, the *Tel Quel* group refers to textual "production".

Baudrillard would like to break, to have broken, the mirror-metaphor of production, to radicalize Marx's concepts of value: 'Kristeva would gladly be rid of value, but neither labor nor Marx. One must choose. Labor is defined (anthropologically and historically) as what disinvests the body and social exchange of all ambivalent and symbolic qualities, reducing them to a rational, positive, unilateral investment. The productive Eros represses all the alternative qualities of meaning and exchange in symbolic discharge toward a process of production, accumulation, and appropriation. In order to question the process which submits us to the destiny of political economy and the terrorism of value, and to rethink discharge and symbolic exchange, the conceptions of production and labor developed by Marx (not to mention political economy) must be resolved and analyzed as ideological concepts interconnected with the general system of value. And in order to find a realm beyond economic value (which is in fact the only revolutionary perspective), then the *mirror of production* in which all Western metaphysics is reflected, must be broken.'

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It is possible that the seeds of a new conception of human being in nature can be found even in certain Western sources, occulted until the 'Renaissance' by the 'collective consciousness' of the West, arcane in its Canon.

In Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* Polixenes tells the somewhat perplexed Perdita (perplexed by Gardens; as Robert Smithson says, 'Too much thinking about "gardens" leads to perplexity and agitation. '),

Yet Nature is made better by no mean  
But Nature makes that mean; so, over that art  
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art  
That Nature makes ...

## Robert Creeley's *Later*

Robert Grenier

Plain song would make, of itself, this world — never & especially not now at war with itself (not words calling attention to words with a vengeful opacity), but a world-window: "Eight panes" ("ECHOEs") may be quatrains (+ a title) "for God's light,/ for the outside"; for the 'inside', too, C's one/I, now what-substantial (sentence 'subject' opening the book in "MYSELF": "What, younger, felt/ was possible, now knows/ is not — but still"), co-present to the words' seeming transparency in the rhythm of the positing, become *characteristic* counting to line-length, stanza patterning, rhyme-bonding: "a physical heart/ which goes or stops." ("FOR RENE RICARD")

"not changed enough-""? 'The reader' abhors more of same? The "Yes// and no, these/ are true opposites,/ a you and me// of non-/ sense" (*A DAY BOOK*) later become such strange-consistent shimmering iteration of the 'known' and 'real', which is —

“what  
matters as one  
in this world?”

("THIS WORLD")

— is the "*wer eld*, the length/ of a human life" ("NEWS OF THE WORLD") — the root proposition of this text: that 'man-age' or, ok, 'old man' & 'world are (not the same, but densely scripted together in the meaning of the word) one. In this quiet common place, a noun that's said (& the 'commoner the better'; more familiar the stranger) and said is mattering into its space ("that *it is* at all"/"LATER"), presencing & fading: given —

"BLUE SKIES MOTEL

Look at  
that mother-fucking smoke stack

pointing  
straight up.

See those clouds,  
old time fleecy pillows,

like they say, whites and greys,  
float by.

There's cars  
on the street,

there's a swimming pool  
out front

and the trees  
go yellow

now  
it's the fall."

'Depressing'?? America: what could be changed (strange fixed state of the elaborated nation-state),  
until it's gone —

"B.B.

What's gone,  
*bugger all* —

nothing lost  
in mind till

it's all  
forgotten."

& is it *already* later, what we now see; are we looking at 'memory' (after-images of things) in our world as in these poems? (*wer eld* not simply Roman-ticism — a world = length of a life — but the end of the world might rhyme any day with the expiration of a large number of us??)

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A rather attractive, raspy, 'growlery' note begins to come in (e.g. in "CORN CLOSE" for Basil Bunting) — a self-address to the self ("Back on the track,/ you asshole.") in the mode of some admired other abrasiveness, which is the soul of kindheartedness in such as Gordon Cairnie (late of Grolier Bkshop in Cambridge, Mass.): here a gravelly bass 'voice of experience' acts as relief & setting



for the primary quiet & plain. How does one talk to oneself 'from ahead' in each of the ages of man. Advice; until the vocal chords & throat are shaped by that sounding, and the 'voice' becomes 'one's own'.

•

Facing pages, inner/outer 'worlds', with the language equal transparencies:

"SPEECH

Simple things  
one wants to say  
like, what's the day  
like, out there —  
who am I  
and where."

"BEACH

Across bay's loop  
of white caps,  
small seeming black  
figures at edge —  
  
one, the smallest,  
to the water goes.  
Others, behind,  
sit down."

Is this a 'two-stress line'; or, quantitatively, a measure with varying number of syllables/stresses, but 'two beats'?

•

Why so 'simple'; or stripping down/longing toward simplicity. Ah, lordy, it's the manifold-multiple, fluid, countless (not 'one'; not 'many') (neither 'one'

To 'zero' neither; "NUMBERS"), damp possibly, "myriad" on the one hand (bog)  
& "drunkenness" on the other: that's the times, spinning out —

"my melodious

breath, my stumbling,

my twisted commitment,

my vagrant

drunkenness, my confused

flesh and blood.

("PRAYER TO HERMES")

"Do you dare to

live in the world,

*this* world,

equal with all"

("THE FACT")

"grows cold. What

can one think —

the beach

— is myriad stone."

("THIS WORLD")

'simplified', yields:

vagrant drun[kcenness — THIS = WORLD — myr]iad stone

— with the brackets somewhat randomly placed, to indicate the moral choice governing the text: to focus on, & commemorate, the middle ground ('the middle voice'), the known world, which is one. That which *may* be enumerated & named, never denying (striving into figure out from) groundlessness, 'becoming', flow. *Look easy??*

•

Yet it is but 'seeming transparency'; words are a positing ('positive-ing?'), man-made-thing. Creeley, of all 'contemporary poets', knows this. So, a choice is made: among an archeology of extant signs (already 'gone': ghosts in substantial appearance?), which are specific to us, which to value. And so the reiteration of: "human," "What's in the world/ is water, earth,/ and fire, some people,// animals, trees, birds,// etc. I can see ..." Is that so heartbreaking?

•

So the poems in this text 'reduced' to a quieter shining & positing, in the context of the marriage to Pen. Saying the "*s i n g l e*" nouns—"common,  
*Faithful* — / what no other can know" — " — 'Be happy with me.'"

•

Whatever happened to the (one about the), against the disappearance of the poem about the (boy with the hole in his hand), against the extra-multiple/vagary (what happened to that poem?), but for the boy with his finger (abreast the), "HERO" & the 'dyke, to the point of that testament in Holland??? —

*"I know  
a story  
I can tell  
and will."*

("THINKING OF  
WALTER BENJAMIN")

## French Dents\*

Kit Robinson

Salvador Dali, *Hidden Faces* Trans. Haakon Chevalier, 1944 (1975, Pan Books Ltd., London)

Marcelin Pleyne, *Lautreamont* (1967, Editions du Seuil, Paris)

The arbitrary and centrifugal rhetoric of impulse pulverized him like broken french in the ear of an eavesdropper.

Novelistic shards flew from his skull and red wigs gripped him.

His obsession for dynastic lineage was surpassed only by the concretion of his maniacal projections as they manifested themselves in acutely detailed panoramas extended over the deep veined surface of a young thigh, his own, present to memory as if other, and viewed through the stereopticon of a bemused possessive pride.

Damage for its own sake failed to move him.

The British Museum has lost its charm.

It was true, he drank heavily, though in minute quantities. He administered his liquor through an eye dropper. Its alcoholic content was thus absorbed into his bloodstream more immediately, by way of the soft membrane under the tongue. This method, moreover, required almost constant attention, for in order to take in the huge and ever mounting quantities his system demanded, he was obliged to spend the better part of each day in exercise of this unusual treatment.

The spire of Notre Dame pricked him.

Here were a few seeds. Now he would plow. This act is represented by the moon as it appears to cut through a cloud. The moon is either full or half. The cloud is moving fast.

He took out his pocket watch. Just midnight.

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\* All quotations are fictional.

How could a fiction be supreme. It is by nature subordinate.

The caricatured heads of three automotive parts dealers lay hidden in the folds of a white T-shirt draped over the back of a chair.

The long sentence. This was the thing. The courage to endure decades of uneasy peace.

There was no telling when the next train would arrive.

'Real life' made him shudder. The upended chevrons of quotation marks shielded him. His favorite literary device was 'of'.

A stack of cash would cover man's expenses. His mind was slippery as the sleek surface of his cranium. He had rented the apartments for the season but would be staying only a few days. A school of congo tetra vacillated between the transparent walls of the tank. Blue light fell on a corner of the bed. His plan was slowly coming apart.

Horreur du plein. He completed another page of mockery.

Convulsively gulping down busy signals, the student of life drifted past the bus stop under a steady downpour. The shoulders of his coat shone green with the verdigris of oxidized intent.

'I've prepared a crack but a song measures five centuries, only two panels left!'

'Headphones w/ yelling head.'

'We find the concealment of the individual.'

'Church to diffuse artistry in the tube.'

'A system of signals will help the world to change tempos.'

'Appearance is outside in the air.'

'Trees dark after six.'

As on a wall these shadows move me.

## Poetics of the Paranormal?\*

Paul A. Green

Begin carefully. This complex created by text, anecdote, fragments of imperfect recall, a fuddled beginnings of dialectic, is chaos — flickering shuffle of pages, tapes hum, as memory's a thickening hiss ... It's all so suss, a seductive magnetism from the past, that virtually cryptozoic notion of poet as vates/ oracle/ shaman, which *must* be nostalgia, time-sickness. Surely it's an artificially enriched nostalgia for the protective enclustering twilight of a Hermetic universe, as evoked in nineteenth-century Paris by occult revivalist Eliphas Levi, manifested in Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Symbolism, *fin-de-siecle*?

Yet beyond this nostalgia, — a homing-pain wrenched out of archeo-psychic void/primal separation? — the image of poet-as-magus persists. Aleister Crowley's purloined, eclectic cabbalism survives (despite the auto-erotic rhetoric of Frater Perdurabo's versifying) to animate, insistently, the imagery-clairvoyance, the *Vision* of his Golden Dawn rival, WB. Yeats. Sustaining the historic present, an 'epidemic of trances' transfixes those Surrealist boulevardiers Desnos, Peter, Crevel, who become 'modest registering machines' of the automatic message, oracular voices amid the babble of the cafes, while even the diamond-hard atheist Breton writes an *Open Letter to Clairvoyants*, is obsessed with prophecy, precognition, miracles of objective chance, the Marvellous....

That's enough. Who wants, who needs magi, avatars, voxpop mechanix of the sacred fug, charades of atavistic replay? Mystifications have sanctioned enough private confusion, collective mania throughout history — at best, the 'translucent daydream of poet-as-shaman' (Bill Bennett, in *Lobby II*) distracts from our awareness of the need for radical social change. Anyway, in secularized capitalist = communist technocracy, with no context for sharing/ caring for coherent signification of super-natural, para-normal, such performance postures falter as neo-primitif chic, frozen-flash of mere showmanship (or desperate numbed self-immolation). Even scholarly and more deliberately literary uses of such material become futile, drying up into conceit, a prey to frenzied *PMLA* explicators. You can't believe it.

But I still read. The parapsychology of Lethbridge, Koestler, the psycho-biology of Lyall Watson, popularizations of the New Physics — there's a narrowing convergence, over the years. And my writing keeps circling the mystery zones, often tediously, sometimes spiraling in there in flights of kamikaze-kitsch bravura, e.g. *Ritual of the Stifling Air*, for BBC Radio 3, 1977, a multi-voice piece which acts out myths of Neo-Nazi demonology. By the time I've read Iain Sinclair's *Lud Heat*

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\* An investigation into writing and parapsychology, with special attention to work by Iain Sinclair.

published 1975, interviewed Sinclair, visited the East London terrain mapped by his book (for BBC Radio 3 *Processes of Poetry*), some working hypotheses have emerged:

1. Certain manipulations of language — utterance, making of signs, text, enactment or performance of texts — can coincide with, 'cause'/be caused by' paranormal perceptions and/or alterations of normal space-time coordinates.

2. There appear to be a-causal synchronicitous relationships between the flow of events in the writer's life-in-the-world and the shaping of 'pseudo-events' fabulated as linguistic constructs on the page.

3. There are complex and paradoxical connections between the 'creative process,' the process of verbalization and 'paranormal phenomena' (which is a more inclusive restatement of 1).

4. There appear to be anomalous relationships between 'consciousness,' as focused by reinforced intentionality, and the world,' as scanned/mapped by languages (which is a more inclusive restatement of 2).

One would have thought that meaningful social action needed a *logos* as well as a *gnosis* of such phenomena, which apparently rationalized out of existence, reappear irrationally warped, in language, action....

But let's take specifics, as sparked off by Sinclair's *Lud Heat*, a text of over a hundred pages, juxtaposing speculative prose essay, open-form verse journal and detailed documentation of archive quotes, historical sources, engravings, photos. The book traces Sinclair's increasingly taut awareness of intricate patterns of 'malignity' in East London's twilight zones, Stepney, Hackney, notably around the massive neo-pagan churches of the eighteenth-century architect Nicholas Hawksmoor.

The richness of signification, the meaningful ambiguity, like the manifest content of dreaming or the 'primary-process' distortion in telepathy experiments, makes definitive precis difficult. But the process of the writing, working as a gardener in the vicinity of the Hawksmoor churches, subsequently researching the history of the area, forces certain obsessions on Sinclair. 'I can't get them out of my mind as being part of a death culture ... that gives its focus on a moment of death ...' (Sinclair, interviewed for *Processes of Poetry*) 'All the Jack the Ripper Murders occurred around Christchurch, Spitalfield ...' Jack's autoptic rites are committed in the shade of Hawksmoor's heavy Egyptian motifs, which also oversee the ritual disemboweling of the Ratcliffe Highway Murderer. The three churches — Christchurch, St. George, St. Anne's — are flanked by small pyramids, stand on pre-Christian sites, are charged with energies and tensions that Sinclair finds reflected in Stan Brakhage's autoptic morgue movie *The act of seeing with ones own eyes*, or the environmental sculpture of Bryan Catling, himself an intruder in the crypt of St. Anne's. And this 'paranormal' reading — of history, of the visual language of church or shrine, is more than paranoia, more than antiquarianism. 'The more I focused on this reading the more I got hit. Diseases and strange seizures of every kind occurred...' — most bewildering example being the *Surgery of the Sun*,

an inexplicable attack of sunstroke which afflicts Sinclair after a visit to the pyramid in St. Anne's churchyard:

He thinks of the churches as instruments of surgery, himself as golem, invaded by the planetary beams focused by these pyramids ... Disease is the means of intergalactic mutation. The germ is Martian. We are invaded by a virus bearing the message of the stars ... But he has to consider the pyramid as cause. He attributes this church to Selkis, one of the canopic guardians, scorpion goddess, identified with the scorching heat of the sun ... And this is illustrated later — September 4 — at Stepney Green School, when old bill Gates, the tea-maker with the ruined feet, came out, for the first time, with the school gang and actually spotted (or caused) a scorpion on the path. We were sitting, dimly, on the grass verge, gazing with dead eye at the talismanic arachnid as it crawled towards us.

Absurd, — like the 'frustrators' that plagued Yeats and his wife during the dictation of *A Vision*, or the golden scarab that landed on Jung's windowsill while his patient recounted a scarab dream.

'We know these things occur. We do not know the rules' (M.R. James). The late T.C. Lethbridge, recently reassessed in Colin Wilson's *Mysteries* (1979), suggested that certain places 'recorded' violent events and continued to replay them, perhaps precipitating reenactment of them. What Sinclair names as 'time-cone' around the churches becomes a time-clone:

The  
speed of the time of the place  
changes. Now I am frightened  
in retrospect by a glimpse  
of the original wood:  
Hawksmoor's staircase  
rising from the recently  
sealed porch. Unvarnished  
grain of parallel universe.

Time-bends — 'actually the painful seizures of breath and gasping because time is enacting too fast for you to handle' — seem to be part of Sinclair's essentially mediumistic role as a writer, and presuppose an abnormal time-consciousness.

Sinclair's work indeed abounds in anomalies and puzzles of this kind. His subsequent book *Suicide Bridge* links necropolitan London with mythic presences of Southern and Eastern England, arching across deeper voids of black-hole physics to include a meditation on Howard Hughes (riddled with synchronicity) and ending with a macabre monologue from the (severed) head of East London gangster Slade. And predictably enough, the expensive BBC Nagra recorder malfunctioned while taping in St. Anne's crypt (just as the studio console kept on freaking out during recording of my *Ritual*, or so the producer insisted).



If these things occur, if they have rules, pattern, structure, it's more than copy for *The National Enquirer*, it's a babel of questions:

Why is so much 'mediumistic writing' so banal, facile, tedious? (Lyll Watson doggedly analysed 5000 samples of 'spirit communication' to arrive at this conclusion.) Does the coexistence of such texts and 'mediumistic' work which seems to be of 'poetic' value (uses the innate qualities of language to intensify affectivity) suggest that alternate realities are structured holistically and hierarchically, as in traditional cabbalism, for example? Or — to fuse speculations of Lyall Watson and Colin Wilson — is there a hierarchy of selves within individuals that at some (unidentified) point, in some (unidentified) way, connects with a biologically based contingent system common to all nucleated cells? What — if anything — lies beyond the molecular level of protein synthesis in the brain? In what ways do these events interact with patterns of probability-flow in the universe at large? If language — high-density, information-rich, a semantic gravity-well, language of poetry — is a form of negative entropy, how does it affect the overall energy levels of the cosmos?

The questions hover like Magritte clouds and I can only close by re-phrasing them in application to specific poetics:

Given that sound poetry has always been aware of its shamanistic roots (cf. Hugo Ball on his recitals at Cabaret Voltaire) and that its practitioners have often such basic hypnotic devices as the repetitions of mantra (e.g. Bill Bissett's *inthemystery*) is there any value in comparing such work with glossolalia, in tongues (which, according to psychologists, won't decode) or with specialized magical languages, like Sir John Dee's Enochian (which, according to Crowley, does)? Similarly, can one compare some visual concretism with the magical practice of making and charging sigils, as performed by the painter Austin Spare, and outlined in Skinner and Drury's *Search for Abraxas* (1975). Alfred Kallir's work on *The Psychogenetics of the Alphabet* (1960) might illuminate here, although I feel that pure sound poetry, lettrism risk short-circuit, possibly activating 'paranormal' conditions which can't be controlled, directed, an atavism indeed rather than an evolutionary advance?

For if one follows George Steiner's extension of the Humbolt-Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and sees language, in its very tendency to variety, prolixity, creative fabulation, control and development of futurity as the (supra???) human evolutionary tool *par excellence*, then perhaps McGregor Mathers, Yeats' magical mentor, was right and, 'when a man imagines he actually creates a form on the astral plane.' In which case, the 1980s were invented by the 1910 grey room Doc Burroughs in *Naked Lunch*? Whatever happens, it looks as if poetry and science are complementing polarities in a forked-lightning dialectic that energizes evolutionary change through the bio-social broth, animal/ alphabet soup of time....

## Sound Poetry How?\*

Bernard Heidsieck

To simplify, let us say that four currents flow through sound poetry, and constitute it. Not parallel, not opposed: their borders actually are porous and frequently crossed, their trajectories are often superimposed, overlapping like tiles at times, or stepped like masonry. Subtle or obvious, their reciprocal borrowings and do-si-doing are frequently perceptible, as much so at the level of materials and structures as at that of objectives.

### I.

The first of these four currents is defined by the essentially phonetic or post-phonetic materials that it uses. If we want to trace out a historical lineage for it, we must look, starting from the turn of the century, to Morgenstern and his 'Grosse Lalula', and after that to the Dadaists, Hugo Ball, Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, Schwitters among others, (and to Iliazd and Klebnikov before them), to the Italian Futurists, and P.A. Birot, and then later, 'among others', to Seuphor, Pétronio, Antonin Artaud and finally in 1947 to the Lettristes (I. Isou, who published his *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique* (Gallimard) in that year, Lemaître, Spacagna ...). This rapid survey brings us up to the appearance of the tape recorder, which begins in the period 1953-60 to play the foundational, revolutionary role of a new medium.

Taking the tape recorder as limit-axis, there are some who lie on the far side, having little or only incidental recourse to it. Among these are Mimmo Rotella, Peter Greenham, Ernst Jandl, Lora-Totino, Bliem Kern, Bill Bissett, Maurizio Nannucci, and some of the 'concrete' poets, whose fundamentally 'visual' texts can tilt into a 'sound-perspective' when they are 'said' (and Lily Greenham is their outstanding interpreter).

Others, located beyond strict phoneticism (but on this side of any semantic) join the tape recorder to the cry, to respiration and the rush of breath — F. Dufrène in his 'Crirhythmes', Da Silva, Gills, and even Yoko Ono (let's not forget her participation in Fluxus) — to the entire body and to the body's heart (H. Chopin in his audiopoems).

Others, again, at the frontier of the second current (that joining the tape recorder with semantics) combine phoneticism, semantics and electroacoustical media in one way or another. These are (a thousand pardons for the hasty schematisations) Franz Mon, Rühm, Bob Cobbing, Paula Claire, I. Laaban, Damen....

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\* Translated by Tom LaFarge

## II.

The second current exploits the whole range of possibilities offered by the tape recorder<sup>1</sup> (the magnetic tape standing in for the page as spring-board and locus of creation) to situate (and transform) a certain number of the semantic elements that chance chooses, retains, selects, improvises or providentially (!) furnishes. The field of this current — open not closed — stretches from the extreme limits of the first to those of the next which is (this time unequivocally) located at the pivot-point of music. It is the use of the word and of words that welds together the various elements of this second sorting-board (spoken words still, not sung, or very seldom), it is a will to signify through aimed 'compositions' and directed texts the will of a language called upon to develop, unfold itself, carve itself out within a precise measure of time and a constructed space (the text, while still a sound-text, having been conceived with the fundamental aim of projection to the limit in space). All this it attempts by a (parsimonious) use of electroacoustical means, to be sure, but also and mainly by facing up to the exigencies of 'duration' ' of density and of the time element, within all of which the text is called upon to unfold and develop itself.

In this perspective, the recorded text, though still based upon words, may be (or nearly be) abstracted (Neil Mills, Charles Verey, Clarck), words and rhythms taking on then a specific density which is that of their sonority, frequency, coloration, intensity, relative location, succession, connotation, reference.

Still in this second trajectory, we glide progressively from these semantico-abstract works and experiments towards work of increasing signification (in spite of or because of the tape recorder, which allows to some in due course the inclusion in the text of natural noises, sound effects, the rumor of crowds, and even, at the far limit, of music — following a style that is sometimes abusively charged with radiophonics). These works may come under the heading of folklore (Rothenberg, af Klintberg); they may be narrative, exemplary or didactic (A. Hödell, Helms, Anderson, Mac Low); they may be based on witty semantic games and quibbles (Brion Gysin's 'permutations', Ghérasim Luca); or upon reports, truncated slices of reconstituted life, analyses, soundings, dreams and violent urges (Paul de Vree, L. Novak, Michael Chant, O'Gallagher, John Giorno, and my own 'Biopsies' and 'Passe-Partout'); or, finally, they may recline upon the practice of obsessive repetition, as a take-off strip or a pickaxe (C. Amirkhanian, Gnazzo, Saroyan) ...

Before coming to the third current of 'poetry-music-poetry', I should mention here, under the heading of remarkable pivot-points, the infra-folksong, both the 'white' kind — spoken, incantatory — of Peter and Patricia Harleman, and the 'black' version of The Last Poets — infa-jazz 'uttered' — or the 'talking pop' of Shiva.

### III.

The third current has bowed the knee before the machine — or desired to exorcise it! And why not? Whence follows its resorting to each and every possibility in electronics. Whence the reduction/sublimation of language to a simple though selected base-material of sound, which the Machine has no hesitation in pulverizing, dissolving, and blowing I apart. The spoken word, the phrase, the text are gobbled up and devoured by Her, and all their original semantic anchorages are sprung! Nothing left but a grain of sound, turned on its head but still oh! specific, being of vocal origin.

In this neomusical or hyperpoetic, neopoetic or hypermusical (who is going to settle this? ... who? and let each dog ... when all is said and done! ... ) current: C. Clozier, P. Rochefort (subjectivity and tenderness, objectivity and fact, humour and lyricism), Ashley, Steve Reich, A. Lucier (repetition ... repetition ... repetition ...., drug upon drug upon drug: bewitchment), and finally the Swedish school: Sten Hanson (more and more), Bengt Emil Johnson, Svante Bodin, Lars Gunar Bodin, Mellnas, all musicians of formation (the machine's crumbling, devouring, crushing of the text, words, phonemes, letters).

Let each of these who come up against this simplified enumeration and demonstration, while engaged in his or her own particular universe or pipeline with its special nuances and subtleties — let them forgive me!....

### IV.

The fourth current, finally, having no recourse to the tape recorder, aims to topple a written text (banal when you come down to it), to project, catapult, string it out across a space of sound and a duration in order to transform its kind and its impact. Here the weight of duration — whether lists, enumerations, repetitions — plays a decisive part. And these (even Rabelais, maybe!) veer about among genres and perspectives, sensibilities and dimensions, and by this skewing come to reconnect with our subject. P.A. Gette has gotten us used to his readings of scientific lists, in Latin, of plants or coleoptera. Michele Métail never ceases to add to the complements of the noun still further complements of nouns. And these readings aloud appear to us as rediscovered keys to oral communication.... The voice, then, as the bottom line, once more.

The voice is at the center (as motor, vehicle, material and formal cause, it hardly needs to be said) of the whole phenomenon of Sound Poetry. This does not aim to set forth a 'new' movement in poetry, but very simply to show that poetry is trying to rediscover, has at last rediscovered, her natural and perennial vehicle, the voice. And not just the voice but action as well.

Setting Gutenberg respectfully to one side, it is — through this decisive take-off from the page — truly the voice that all the practitioners of this 'other' poetry, Sound Poetry, and all the

musicians of this New Music, are auscultating: the voice natural or filtered through the machine — the voice with its potential, with everything that it can charge itself with, with all that can be revealed through it — the voice both as raw material and as means of revelation. Poets and musicians certainly, but now a good number and ever increasing of writers as well, who not yet come to the practice of it still lean and gaze that way.<sup>2</sup> There are critiques that go so far as to make of the voice a basis for analysis that reascends to the work so rendered.<sup>3</sup> And twenty years is no time at all! 'Vocal writing ... let's speak as though it existed...' (Barthes).

Very well then! may these ten days<sup>4</sup> devoted to it show that it does indeed exist, that in twenty years it has moved, changed, evolved, displayed its trajectories, its range and the distance it has crossed, the developments that have opened up within it, its lines of force, and also, of course, the risks and dangers that lie in wait for it; and that it is, beyond all literary intention, in its very stammerings that it seeks to join to itself the life it physically yearns after, that it tries to decipher in the 'action'<sup>5</sup> of a moment, that it wants to project, in mingled text-action, far beyond the traditional or contemporary props of paper and magnetic tape.

## NOTES

1. That is, variation of speed, echo, 'depths, simultaneous overlays, stereophonic effects, superimpositions, dialogues, audioassemblages, intensities, truncations, etc ... etc...
2. I hardly need to say that I am not thinking here of what is called 'tape recorder literature', that of Paul Bowles or Ahmed, whose immense interest is not in question here, but where the voice only appears through the re-transcription of direct spontaneous recordings onto the page. I am more concerned with those passages of increasing prominence and frequency that refer to the voice and to the potential of the tape recorder — passages which have in common the 'subtle' charm of seeming to ignore the method of their own contexts, of staying under cover, well insulated by the book, and of imagining such an opening-up only to avoid the risks involved. There is an urgent need that we realize that above and beyond all pious wishes, there is an adventure to be lived in the 'practice' of orality, past and still continuing, as well as a logic of the unknown to be taken upon oneself. This take-off has been a leap in the dark for everyone, compared to the comforts of the page, and still is. Thus, among the many declarations of intention that up to now have never effectively been followed up, I will restrict myself to the mention, by way of example, of Michel Butor: 'The mobility of reading being far larger than that of any listening, one can dream, book in hand, of every kind of overhearing.' (*6.810.000 litres d'eau par seconde*, Gallimard.) But why not follow these paradoxical 'stereophonic studies' — since they bear this title — right through to the limit of their conceit, and mingle text and voice? In the same way, Roland Barthes writes from another perspective: 'If it were possible to imagine an esthetic of textual pleasure, we ought

to include in it 'writing aloud'. We do not practice this vocal writing (not at all the same thing as speech) but it is doubtless what artaud recommends and Sollers demands. Let's speak as though it existed....' (*Le plaisir du texte*, Editions du Seuil [1973] Collection Tel Quel). Finally it was indeed Sollers who disclosed that: 'My dream would be to come to create a sort of opera of the tongue...', and followed up on the tape recorder's uses that were destined to create the effects of sound of a text intended for the page (Interview in *Le Monde* for November 29th, 1975). May this dream be realized.

3. Philippe Mikriamos (author of the first study of William Burroughs [Ségheers]), on the occasion of the first 'Tangier Colloquium' held at Geneva from September 24th to 28th, 1974, focused his critical 'intervention' into the work of Burroughs and Brion Gysin upon an analysis of the former's works and books that took off from his voice and manner of speech, with the help of recordings, and from the recorded voices of other poets and writers by way of comparison. Wasn't this the first such critical approach?
4. This account is excerpted from Heidsieck's catalogue, *Poésie action, poésie sonore 1955-1975*, written by way of introduction to the 'Panorama de la poésie sonore internationale' that was presented by Heidsieck from January 20th to 31st, 1976, in conjunction with the cycle of 'voice' demonstrations organized by Annick Le Maine at 21 Avenue du Maine, in Paris, from January 12th to February 6th, 1976 (Translator's note).
5. For many years I have been using the term 'action poetry' on the occasion of public demonstrations, So has Robert Filliou, with negligible differences. It is meant merely to imply the tension, the 'active' effort of the text in its search for an immediate, physical contact with an audience, its aggressive or tender concern for feedback in the very instant of projection, its intense desire to hand over, for the chewing, its very texture, and upon it to mold the sensations of the skin, nerves, tissues, dreams and *tutti quanti*, in the present and palpable instant. One way or another! (Never omitting to mention the perpetually and renewedly possible risk of a physical or mechanical breakdown, the free fall into no net.)

## Leads

Tom Mandel

What we write is an exact function of what we read. LARRY EIGNER

What extends as grounds into it, a jetty. The tool, too, of the day.

What is said, is in language, it wd appear holds to the real by way of its partiality (for it) and lack of it.

Transformations ending for one in a just-thereness (new transparency) of language, return if not to mimesis then to some quality to language that might remind you of reality: like 'all philosophy (being) homesickness' (Novalis). A kind romanticism.

One try to respond: fill the basket. The long way around of this response, time in language; language writes a function exact with a pen voice speaking it. Truth seeming to be an insistence on the greater partiality, that length which becomes an interesting area or the interest of an error.

All language before a public as inherent to it a structuring principle, it being one that is and maybe chief, so one assumes too the assembly (specific) of a public, as time or labor in language: 'red slab', an imperative time structure. Take the long way.

Mathematical expression (say a series) identical at every point, one constructed in a material abstractly identical at every point. Manifestly not so in language which has no structure being action but structures (verb). The specific danger in language materials for the truth one might project as their ideal content, lies in the way one takes towards being understood (*a* structure perceived).

So, I imagined, one might construct the moment of words prior to the intersection by which intention makes them (one, or more) a line: literally, or direction; & then a plane, a field. This was the origin of *EncY*: literally how does meaning, ideology, come to be in words.

An identical metaphors continued to structure the language there.

The work in language is an object thanks to which what it teaches is not taught to myself alone. As the subject of a thought touches it not by thinking with it, but with a structure that cuts a facet in it to perceive as thought. One can think of the blade operating as an obsessional symptom which might force a person's body back into the soul. What, of a thought, is perceived in language being the part unresolvable into the apparatus apperceiving it.

The interest of reason; it's interested.

Compelling or particular attempt to reveal the overall work of an instance: what of 'what of?'  
order//other//law: articulation of a work in some real relation (material beyond its text

'I have tried to write Paradise'

Before what is descriptably the 'poetic' of a work (apparently a labor of restoration, going back to the work, what's done in the form of a description of it), the poem is given at some primordial? level of context.

We can at least say that the functions of language begin anew for us with every work. So that in each case the work designates a threshold for language.

A device of imagination here might be the body in dream (its specific partiality or lack) and figure in that the exact function or fragmentation of language in a poem: its specific partiality or lack. We write exact functions.

There may exist something like an obligation to destroy the fortification of the poem as an integrity of direction or dimension from inner to outer limits, in the name of this specific threshold of the world.



## Limits of Grammar

James Sherry

The words used to describe language structures reflect the user of those terms as much as on the language itself. This follows logically from the assumption that language has no built-in, permanent structure or rhetoric, but that as material it absorbs or reflects the use to which it is put in both historical and conceptual frames: not that language is subjective, but that it has properties that allow it to be shaped for use.

Only the alienation of modernism, with its increasingly reductive solutions, has applied to words the tests of solids — warping the matter by stretching, compressing and other topological aggressions; murder; anthropomorphizing the words themselves — as if the shapes the liquid ink dried to were in Marxist terms, or implicitly, or ergo, social objects. That words in many contemporary settings achieve fetish status is not to be denied, but that there is a social structure embossed on language that indicts a ruling class or attitude pushes the point. The only workable indictment of the ruling class is the oppressive nature of its actions. Writers attacking that oppression directly risk jail or co-option, but writers trying to direct language structures for more distant ends are ignored or merely supported, because by attacking oppression at such a remove from the effects of that oppression, they are seen as agents of change working within the system of ruling class oppression.

Indeed, to what extent does it make sense to ask if the sentence, for example, or, in the broader sense, if normative grammar is repressive? Since the ability to question the repressiveness of grammar is possible within normative grammar, in so doing we cannot fully reject or completely question its justification, because we have accepted its domain for the discourse. Instead we must question normative grammar's limits, its edges, that is, how 'incorrect' usage becomes acceptable.

There are two contexts for this question. Are the political implications of language structures the motivation for seeking a new formula or several new methods of grammatical construction? Or is the need for a broader kind of grammar called for by the thoughts to which that grammar is applied and which that grammar's structure implies for its social context. In other words, are the reasons that call for extended possibilities internal or external to writing?

The political context is, when applied to language structure, primarily a conceit. How can we limit the reference of grammatical structures to the rhetoric of a political economy beyond using it as a metaphor or framework for thinking? Certainly when the teacher says you have to do it this way, or the publishing industry says you can't write that way, because it's not correct (read saleable), the question of political economy's relation to grammar is presented head on. Further, when language is

viewed as reflective of social norms or the values of political institutions, a writer might be moved to change those norms, institutions and values by changing the language that is used to run them and define their activities. But it is also vital for us as creators *and* users of language not to have that creation and use stem solely from a reactive point of view. This is both an ethical stance and a practical one. Can we assert a more generative or additive attitude? Since our writing in a particular way determines our identity as much as the language of political institutions affects their identities, what figuration can we aspire to? These questions do not need to be answered; there is no conclusion, but they need to be posed in order that our attitudes can open outward in the same way as we expect grammar to open to new possibilities.

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The forms of sentences as they began to be codified during the 18th century related, it seems sensible to say, in some central way to the patterns of thought that were to be put into those sentences. The shapes of phrases, clauses and sentences paralleled the way ideas were being expressed in English at that time. We have ample evidence that a more open kind of capitalization, spelling, etc. was present in the 18th century and its uses are manifest throughout as late a work as the Prophetic Books of Blake. There is even the famous controversy over Emily Dickinson's use of em dashes that editors deleted from her work. These kinds of facts lead us to suspect manipulation for political, if individual, motives.

On the other hand, the need to assert more control over grammar in order to simplify it has been useful for the movement toward increased literacy. It is, of course, suspect to imply that if it's for the 'people', it's got to be simple; nor is it necessary to restrict grammatical constructions in order to simplify. One can argue the presence of an elitist grammar that has sharply defined standards of correctness and a common grammar that is more open and simple. But that possibility was rejected as a policy by the liberals who constructed the democratic constitutions of America and Europe. In China there have been several layers of writing from Mandarin 'grass' script on down, but recent political events have implemented a restricted series of ideograms for popular use and it would be politically unwise for writers to do otherwise than limit themselves to that series of ideograms in the new China. The political question cuts right and left; it is not clear that the repression of the intellectual cadre is for the benefit of the proletariat. These selected details show how a political analysis of the question is more complex than it has to be to create a reason for a given solution. What is right or left, what elitist or populist? But how can the need for an expanded grammar be described if not in political terms?

Thought, emerging from medieval forms, restricted by an increasingly formalized normative grammar, has become more complex. Synchronic time scales and a pointillistic view of the sensible world and the world of ideas give thought so much more breadth and presents that thought on so

many simultaneous tracks, when coupled with new discoveries, that the sentence cannot contain it. This new range of thought makes normative grammar a special case of possible grammars, the sentence a special case of possible forms a thought could take, normative syntax a special case of possible syntaxes. These special cases are not illegible; they have particular *uses*.

When readers complain they want entertainment (reading requires such *open* attention — read it slower, I answer, read it again), they often are asking for a reinforcement of the restrictiveness of grammar. Is it reassurance they want...? The activity of thought through the three-stroke graphic combustion of letters must balance and intensify the grammar to make the thought that is in a given sentence meaningful. Not that classical grammar doesn't do that, but we can't really see how it does it anymore, because the relations between the thoughts in a sentence and the presence of the sentence itself are so hinged to our assumptions about thinking that the relationships between the thoughts and the sentences are lost. We need constructions that reflect our thought constructions in the same way as classical constructions shaped themselves around the thoughts of the 18th century. We cannot describe the sentence as repressive, but only as an oppressive presence unmitigated by an awareness of what the structure of a sentence is doing in that place and to that particular subject.

Consider this sentence by Henry James from *The Golden Bowl*: 'But on all the ground to which the pretension of performance by a series of exquisite laws may apply there reigns one sovereign truth — which decrees that, as art is nothing if not exemplary, care nothing if not active, finish nothing if not consistent, the proved error is the base apologetic deed, the helpless regret is the barren commentary, and "connexions" are employable for finer purposes than mere gaping contrition.' How much more complex can he get; but what is really important about this sentence is how it shows the limits of the usefulness of the sentence itself. Still, we need methods of expressing the unexpected, the previously undefined and unstructured linguistic event.

My grandmother defined the problem of expectation for me when, on her 80th birthday she delivered a speech entitled, 'How I First Met Miriam Eisler, Not In Person, But By Phone.' I certainly would not be surprised if I carried on an entire relationship by phone, but her idea of connection with a person was face to face and she expressed it in a fine sentence. My experience with connections to people is fragmented, its grammar is elliptical. I cannot honestly say how I met you in a simple and elegant sentence. Thus the fractional distillates we assert in what passes for literature. But are we bound by passion or history to restructure the impulses of Seneca and Augustine into heavy metal? Can we find an alternative that is not panacea? The presence of writing that is considered as test or critique by the writers themselves signals the end of such writing. Only until the idea is formulated does it retain validity for the literary artist. The desire to constantly recreate the paradigms is a form of religiosity that the 'skeptical' have adopted in lieu of less 'sophisticated' forms of devotion. We cannot continue to imagine ourselves in a reduced state, backed into the corner and fighting a political last stand.

'The vacancy of literature, the barrenness, is recovered from by modern methods of irrigation. The community to which we owe allegiance, where we hope to gain membership, is not 'us fighting the injustice of the system' or 'retreating into naturalness" but an activity of constant interchange. Multiplicity in Joyce, as a literary example, is bound to history and etymology both in subject and in his method of using derivations. (Neo-logisms) hardly ever get where they're able to do what is expected of them — take over a place or action that has no word of its own. So we reconstruct grammar and reflect and aid changing modes of thought.) The Joycean play of language has given us elbow room outside the history of words not locked us into that mode. But How can we recreate the world, get it, without going through the sign, its textualization, etc.

We move on from modernism to an additive art, away from painting that is white walls, poems that are single letters, because analysis, reductiveness, has fallen under the aegis of the law of diminishing returns. Neither should we accept as credo the essentially mystic or satiric remarks of Artaud, et. al., on the subject of chaos. The modernists perceived chaos; they did not aspire to it. Nor does Sade assert the formality and rigidity of his sentences, but uses their restrictiveness to satirize language structures, the fetish nature of desire and its satisfaction. On the other hand, are 'free' language works and the desire to subvert language an assertion of freedom or by their opacity a plea for order, imposed from without, and comprehension through ideas about writing, removed from the objects in the world that they scrutinize? Everything is already destroyed around us. Yet what can we do to rebuild when the old forms are radioactive with the half-lives that constructed them?

'Codified repressions' are ipso facto ways of restraining and accumulating thought with writing. But the problem is not how to create an undifferentiated 'libidinal' mass, but how to avoid it as an alternative to the oppressiveness of normative grammar. Thought in language, language itself, is repressed in the area of the signifier *and* the signified by limitations of assumption, place and time as a narrative continually cuts off the access routes to other narratives and non-narrative possibilities in order to 'get on with the story', as if we are impatient. The danger is not the 'dehumanization' of the signifier by quantum mechanics and probability. It is entropy and a narrow view of our priorities.

## Some Books

Cris Cheek

Everyone reading this sentence is familiar with print: its history and something of its present. This is apparent. Present developments are of two means: 'high tech' (word processing, computer printout), say a connection to Reuters for information units on selected areas of interest, the markets, in your breast pocket, push-button teleprinters (more time conservative than the boardroom scenario cassettes put out by large banks for the commuter in a car); and 'low tech' principally mimeo, small letterpress, offset lithography, photostats, cut blocks, soaks, oils on water, the etcetera variations.

originals give only a very imperfect picture  
of the beauty of reproductions  
*quoted from allen fisher's 'Prosyncl'*  
*attributed to Schropfer or Bulkowski*

On terms in touch with overall design (jump suits?) of a book space a press such as Black Sparrow (to cite an example that American readers will know) has to be mediocre, in spite of and possibly because of its audience pretension. It's not just the forms of presentation that change, but the ways forms are presented!

In London, England, there is a Consortium of London Presses. This formed between presses prepared to make their production machinery mutually accessible, or collectively owned. The extensions of this process now include cassette tape, reel to reel tapes and film equipment. Under such giving circumstances collaborations are frequently provoked and flourish. Collaboration involves interferences.

Perfection — Constancy — Consistency are terms applicable to a static state of affairs that this writer would wish to be considered outside of.

*allen fisher, 'A sketch map of heat'*

The size of the page that we work onto, the texture to be printed on, the color, the choice is obvious and informs the work. To have the facility that allows acceptance or rejection of mistakes in typing, stenciling, setting, proofing, in the platemaking or inking intensity or position of text on the page when printing, of every physical aspect of this process, these are created inventions not ideologies. Words are actions, it is physical. What is important here is that to extract one element of

this processual space and reproduce the same in a magazine or anthology is to re-present rather than present, amounts to translation.

Economically the move is again making a difference. These books (we tend to prefer little press to small press) are not printed for profit. They are social gifts and exquisite interference to a public hooped and coddled into habits of expectation. Books can be produced with immediacy and out onto the street quickly. Leave copies of books or separate pages or covers, on trains, buses, boats, in book stores, libraries, cafes, bars, there's no limit. Books that feel and appear different, not egotistical but other. Capitalism markets aspects, designs markets — use these procedures to bend expectations, commodity fetishism will have a shadow smudging with its cleanliness. Make an affront on decency. Form cooperatives, buy cheap machinery, make a difference obvious. Employ discretions.

### *A Sampler*

The works being presented are not visual or concrete poetry. In some cases they are used as texts for live events but their interest as books involving social production, as gifts meaning sharing, is what makes them worth mentioning. The interaction of the processes used in production is what makes interesting reading.

*Living Room Blue Living Room* by Ulrich Flamme (Atman Press c/o 4 Bower Street, Kent M16 85D). beautiful room space, exterior design allowing asterisked prose, d o u b l e and single space typing, newspaper cuttings firearms, hand written over and all at all angles. spacing vibrates etc.

*Transparencies* by Ellen Berlin (for Harry Lane). typed straight onto offset litho greased paper plates, folded, worked onto directly with a palette knife and fingers, then printed. speed in decision and not much chance to correct. strange reversals, as in a mirror spattered with tooth paste and soap, sprayed with foam and scored by a pastry cutter, printed in blue, alternate text/background/ no text. 'photoholder detail of hand heaving and eating'.

*Complexions* by Patty Karl (Please Forward Press, 72 Lots Road, London SW 10). Drawn line intersecting and weaving through typed texts, can't read one without the other, i.e. interference interference. hand/machine. printed litho, loose leaf in a hand made folder.

*Dirt Run Out* by Patty Karl (privately printed). 21 pp. color and black/white xerox, text textures A5 book. loose-leaf. typed mistakes are integral, i.e. accepted. xeroxing has clipped / edited the edges of pages 'gri'. intention is the possibility of change during a process of making. who wants it any other way? design is discovery!

*The Hard Sidewalk* by Bill Sherman (Spanner Supplement, 85 Ramilles Close, London SW2 5DQ). 'This poem / I is / a product of the/ Bourgeois mind' — a beautiful work, hand written

(sometimes barely visible) with pen and ink variable around and besides press cuttings on Chavez and job (academic) advertisements, rejections, and singQ.

*The Autobiographies of Dick Turpin* by P.C. Fencott (Lobby Press, c/o 17 Warkworth Street, Cambridge CBL IEG). 28pp. with printed plan of the 5 sections showing shape into which materials are poured. Large dollops of information (an all-sorts). handwritten, faded xerox, line drawing, computer print-out, circuit diagrams, at all angles and forming interference textures — emphasizes the improvisatory aspects of all reading, decentralized readers. turning the book before the page.

*South Thames Studios* by Allen Fisher (c/o 85 Ramilles Close, London SW2 5DQ). 28pp. combination color heat-stencil duplication and black/white xerox. text, color, economy and speed interact: actions across space (burn, stain, net, sting, book, drawn, handwritten, overprinting-over printing) allowing if you like cross reference, not sign, grids (blots) forming memory.

Books which could also be mentioned here and well worth getting include:

*Against Nouriture* by Paul Buck (4 Bower Street, Kent M16 85D)

*Improvisations* by Paul Buck (Spanner, as above)

*Boboli / Murette: Le Machine* by Richard Tabor (Lobby Press, as above)

*AOL* by Richard Hammersley (Lobby Press)

*Poems Under Construction and Repair* by Lawrence Upton (Good Elf Publications, 18 Clairview Road, London SW16)

*Pattern of Performance* and *Cuba* and *To Tu Ra Tu* by Bob Cobbing (Writers Forum, 262 Randolph Avenue, London W9)

Also work by Carlyle Reedy, E. E. Vonna-Michell, and myself

For further information regarding these publications write to Cris Cheek, 72 Lots Road, London SW10 or to Association of Little Presses, 262 Randolph Avenue, London W9.

## Eye & Breath\*

Augusto de Campos

E. E. Cummings' first book of poems appears in 1923, when the dynamite of the movements of literary insurrection at the beginning of the century had already brought down the dilapidated architecture of traditional versification. The historical juncture for poetry evidences the growing predominance of a tendency toward systematization, toward the 'neoclassicizing' of a series of conquests, among these free verse, in one last attempt at reconciliation with the past. Committed up to its eyeballs to conventional syntactical forms, Surrealism would immediately get tangled up in the error implicit in its own postulates, in order to carry out a revolution solely of content, outside the true structural revolution of poetry. It is the swan song of 'verse'.

Alongside Pound and Joyce (the latter, as important for the novel as he was for contemporary poetry), Cummings is one of the few who maintain a healthy attitude of independence, inquiring into the means by which to extend to deeper consequences, on a level of functionality, the first signs of rebellion attempted by groups in the opening decades of the century. Therefore, whereas other poets, with the passage of time, become more and more historic, i.e., move more and more toward becoming *a thing of the past*, those three, with their *living* and *open* work, go on indicating to younger writers ways to go further and providing 'food for impulse' for new areas of expansion.

If in a critical-creative examination we seek the line of formal evolution in modern poetic structures, we will see that the point of departure is a poem as yet very little recognized and evaluated. A fact symptomatic of its importance: its author — a famous author — foresaw in it such resources for future release of energy that he himself expressed an astonishment that at first seemed incomprehensible in someone who had been the master and controller *par excellence* of the secrets of poetic art and craft: 'Without presuming for the future what will emerge from this, nothing or almost an art'. These are words taken from the preface with which Mallarmé announces his last poem, *Un coup de dés*, first published in the magazine 'Cosmopolis', in 1897.

From Mallarmé to Cummings, the path to be followed is almost a straight line, even though the Dada-Futurist typographical adventures at least should also be entered into the computation as experimental efforts. Nor is it possible to forget the Apollinaire of the *Calligrammes*. However, it

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\* Translated from the Portuguese, 'E.E. Cummings: Olho & Folego' (preface to E.E. Cummings *10 Poemas* tr. Augusto de Campos, Rio de Janeiro, Ministerio da Educacao e Cultura, 1960, pp. 5-7) by James E. Irby.



should be stressed that, even though he foresaw the new structural necessities of the poem — he even demands a 'synthetic-ideogrammatic' comprehension instead of an 'an analytic-discursive' one for his poems and calls them 'ideograms', in anticipation of the theory which Fenollosa and Pound would develop some years later, based on a study of Chinese writing, — Apollinaire wound up, in practice, letting himself be carried away by a basically simplistic and superficial conception, in trying to limit the consequences of the poetic ideogram to a figuring of the theme by means of an artificial typographical arrangement.

In Cummings, as in Mallarmé, graph becomes function. In the French poet, the use of different typefaces and of the larger intersections of blank spaces on the page, as well as the positioning of the lines on the paper, aim at creating a structure that transcends linear versification, placing the poem in a new dimension of perception. Or as Aimé Patri points out very well, in the essay 'Mallarmé et la Musique du Silence' printed in 'La Revue Musicale' no. 210, January 1952: 'The use of the double page and the different type faces makes it possible for the poem to be manifested in space instead of developing in time, without in any way overthrowing the dynamics proper to time: higher and lower, left and right, small type and large type, straight lines and curved lines take the place of before and after. Time, however, is not destroyed, but rather integrated into space, as if, in this new spatial mechanics, there were an anticipation of a four-dimensional geometry, a Space-Time: the dimension of time figured in space becomes *imaginary* and the lines of the universe made up of point-events take the place of oratorical *movements* (properly speaking, it would be more like a wave mechanics, with its waves of probability, but this would take us very far afield)'.

Leaving behind all that in the 'prismatic subdivisions' of Mallarmé — if we consider the 'verse line' a poematic unit — is still reverence for traditional form, Cummings works directly on the word, decomposes it, creates with its articulations and disarticulations a veritable dialectics of eye and breath, which makes of the poem a palpable, almost tactile object.

But we should not think of confusing the path taken by this American poet with the blind alley of 'lettrism'. In Cummings' poetry, words are not dissociated from their meaning, nor are the letters self-sufficient. The atomization of words aims at constructive effects having to do with the synesthesia of movement and descriptive physiognomy. Beneath a superficial appearance of idiosyncrasy and anarchy, Cummings' *tortografia* (from *ortografia* ['orthography', 'spelling'] plus *torto* ['crooked']) is, paradoxically, the correction of an orthography that is inane as far as poetry is concerned, of a *mortografia* [From *ortografia* plus *morto* ['dead']], and, at the same time, one of the most serious attempts to make the verbal instrument function dynamically, by reducing to a minimum — as Theodore Spencer notes — the gap between experience and expression,

Organic structure, lexical expressionism (typographical gestures), disfiguring (not always overcoming) the discursive — all these are characteristics of E.E. Cummings' spatial poetry, whose best counterpart in the realm of visual art could be found in a Paul Klee.



## *from* Alignment as a Conceit, A Book of Drawings

Madeleine Burnside

### *Illustration: black ink*

These pages are black, nothing may be read through their opacity. At last there is before us the ultimate ambiguity between the existence of an intentionally made mark and the conceptual silence of the marker — a statement of being without reference to thought or style, the inarticulate cry reproduced, the struggle for thought in which lack of an exact word makes forming a conception an impossible act. This raises the question of appropriate response: how to name circumstances or feelings, interior motives, external moral or cultural urgings? Ascertaining what occurs, has occurred, will occur — which is the occasion, apogee, orgasm? This partakes of the nature of childhood's sexuality, of intuitions of what is there, of that which may be recognized as the object of their / our longings. This becomes the veil cast over that which, as adults, we cannot discuss with a friend, the intimacies we practice while forbidden, that which stirs our lovers from sleep, fondly or full of their own yearning.

This is that from which metaphor springs dissatisfying, penumbrous — the source silence on occult matters, or those of predestination, of genetics or environment — and the source of circumlocution, the ambiguous alchemical directives.

Here we are caught in all that we know about literature. This is as much the source of the songs of the troubadours as of the stories of the Bible as of our single speaking-voice. Here are the intimations that the langue d'oc might hold more experiences for us, increase the variety of our acts, just as mere cruelty has become sadism, though previously enjoyed unnamed, recognisably human while standing without the vocabulary. Because of this past and future of our speech, our worst fantasy has been lived out already by others who have a name for it, and we find ourselves shamed by the paucity of our lives when we resort to the language of the clinic. This is the subtlety of inflection our parents taught us at their knee, the tonal weights with which to modify meanings to imply love, desire, hate.

Nothing is hidden, but nothing is read. Questions remain despite the apparent finality of an all-black solution: is a completely inked page content-rich or content-less? And if these are the same, then will this contentlessness be sufficient to avoid the problem of esthetics, and can there be an abdication from form which remains a visual entity? The undeviating darkness might be understood as a rejection of the viewer's powers of observation, or an attempt at humor, or bad faith. Meanings and events oscillate and evanesce.

*Illustration: red ink*

Another ciphered intention. Red covers the page entirely, but under it, written in red, a content now concealed. This may stand for the conscious consciously hidden: the matter of puns, what is read/red and not to be read. This may stand for what is known and repressed, for shame, for the tides of blood surging towards the face or sexual organs, for individual ethics foresworn under the strain of the passions. And in all this the fear that intentions themselves may be read, that they have a luminosity all their own, that tonal differences will appear upon close scrutiny by the viewer, that some of the lines covering this surface will seem redder than the background with which the artist/author will insist they are identical. For what if this could be read — if meaning lent a density that defied the depths possible with color alone?

This is the underpinning, the foundation, the hidden work and the forgotten laborer (a life spent on the assembly-line, expended in the mineshaft, ended in succumbing to the bends on the way up from the caisson), the bare bones after the substance is spilt.

Here is self-denigration transformed, and rubification defied in the quasi-humorous. This is the argot of qualities painfully concealed: the prosthetic shoe, the cosmetic surgery, the unfashionable racial origins, the homosexuals expelled after their part in the revolution is over. This is the latin quarter in which our parents were raised but do not live.

This is the dictionary of dead languages: here are the many words for stone-cutting tools, for what other languages dismiss as tiny hesitations of climatic change, the single word for sheep heavily-pregnant and suckling newborn lambs. Here are the expansions and contractions of a vocabulary, like ours, shaped by the necessity to instruct, by unfamiliar labor conditions, by the hidden dangers most frequently encountered in the course of work. Here is also the great silence on sexual matters, the single word 'love' to cover a multitude of kindnesses and cruelties alike. And the impossible word for vulnerabilities witnessed, for the precarious grasp of matters of faith between humans and gods alike.

## Writing's Current Impasse and the Possibilities for Renewal

Bruce Boone

In contrast with the socially conscious writers of the 30s, many of us who are left or left oriented writers today see ourselves as historically advantaged. We make comparisons and assume we've benefited. Current attitudes suppose that our marxism is 'objective', while theirs was a kind of belief, quasi-religious in tone. Yet it remains an odd situation when left writers do not see a kinship with other left writers who preceded them. It's more than likely that our rejection of this earlier age is made possible by a symmetrical ignorance of ours, a reluctance to challenge our own assumptions about writing and thinking, our own belief systems. We acknowledge the political activity of that earlier age willingly enough, but we're less generous when it comes to their writing style — a crude literary Stalinism, we suppose. From Granville Hicks and the middle-class Communists or fellow travelling highbrow critics to Mike Gold and the John Reed proletarians, most of the left writers of that time seem uncomfortably tainted with the serious political errors of 'illusionism,' 'psychology' and 'reductionism.' Sartre himself in the late 40s would condemn socialist realism for these same qualities — while making sure to acknowledge the need for commitment. But these literary assumptions may need a re-examination at a new level. As we begin the 80s, there are indications that something has gone wrong for us and that the left modernism of the last decade has painted itself into an increasingly constricted, academic corner, from which it has yet to emerge with any new claims to relevancy.

Many of the dominant ideas about what writing should be stem from Sartre's old opponent, Roland Barthes — received ideas about writerly autonomy, textuality and the values of pleasure for instance. It's important to note this source since a context is provided in this way historically. Such a genealogy can begin to lay the problem out, and we can see what these principles once stood for. What was at issue then — in the structuralist debates — was the basic explanatory power of historical thought. Especially in the exciting and pace-setting sciences of anthropology and linguistics there were growing indications that the human or social sciences would have to jettison their traditional causalist pre-suppositions and assumptions just as surely as physics and the physical sciences had done. As the awareness of these developments reached the literary arena, it was clear that here too assumptions were being made that would have to be challenged. At the center of the controversy — arguing against Sartre's dictation of a committed or goal-oriented literature — was Roland Barthes. Literary assumptions changed, and Barthes became de facto leader of the new structuralist theory and practice. Under Barthes' influence, writers began criticizing their collective past. Structuralism showed how the links between any historical past and our ways of thinking about that past are

tenuous at best or non-existent. All this was applied to literature. Perhaps the past was even a kind of projection we made from our own standpoint; but if so a committed writing became problematic in the extreme. Writing had to assume these connections in order to be politically and morally effective — so that now the whole edifice of an engaged writing was seriously called into question. It appeared that events could act as witnesses only afterwards, when they could be called to the stand and asked to give narratives, tell stories. From this new way of thinking a new writing practice developed, one that accented language values in literature and writing's pleasure aspect, one that devalued writing's purposefulness. This is the writing we know as ours. In it writing's previous goal-orientation is fully cancelled and writing accepts itself as a production of micro-occurrences and short-term destinies.

The reasons for this are not difficult to understand. No one loves a bureaucracy any more, and writing a proletarian novel these days would in many ways be the equivalent of joining a sect. For many socialists the writerly scandal of bureaucratic deformations involves events that cannot be dismissed without discussion — Czechoslovakia, Cambodia, Afghanistan and so on. These events have called into question the bureaucratic stage of socialism; they imply the need to rethink marxism in the direction of democracy. For left writers now there is, as a result, a growing intuition that the search for a new writing must unquestionably include feminism, democracy and the acceptance of the erotic as basic assumptions, without which a left writing project would inevitably fail. Left writing today, it appears, must not simply further socialism, but must also criticize power, and if possible do both together. To the extent it succeeds, it registers a gain, becoming necessarily anti-authoritarian, pleasure-loving and non-dismissive. So doing, writing mirrors the era. It advances to an historical stage and in an historical direction of some promise.

But a left writing of this description has failed to materialize. It remains what ought to have been attempted rather than what really was tried. Instead of both criticizing power and furthering socialism, the writing which did eventuate from the late 60s — our writing — has concerned itself far more with the critique of power than with an advocacy of socialism — bracketed as too 'thematic,' concerned with content. As a result, our left writing of the 70s has had its characteristic deformation. It has become 'textual' at the price of abandoning any specific political tasks. As techniques of randomness have come to characterize this writing project, its social functions are no longer clear. In its intent our writing of course remains transformative, but in its practice it has become — alas! — integrative. Our project's self-definition of itself as science has cut it off from any real and public feeling life. It's doubtful whether left modernist writing can be called 'left' any more. But shouldn't this be a cause for dismay — perhaps even alarm? For if our writing is no longer to have social effects, why do we write? These questions are urgent ones, I think. They involve understanding our origins first of all. They also involve understanding our current situation in politics and society.

How did the left modernist project first begin — and what were its goals? A beginning in the discussion might well involve a more frank assessment of modernism's relation to the Bolshevik Revolution. It ought to be candidly noted that modernism's ties with Revolution seem closer retrospectively than was the case at the time. If there was an alliance involved, it was more with anarchist, experimentalist and workerist trends than with more orthodox statist and Leninist currents. On any balance sheet of the modernist movement, it is true, we would have to note modernism's characteristic anti-capitalism — but in some way qualify it too. For the question of modernism's ties with fascism in other countries remains a sign of its unequal development. Certainly the various modernisms took their several paths, from futurism in Italy to vorticism in England to formalism in Russia and the young USSR etc. In its last development modernism has become a writing practice familiar to us in our own time and country as a deconstructive practice, a systematic attempt to demystify and come to terms with language as a commodity force. This is the variant that is now the *koine* of left writing. As a trajectory, it has shape and curve — and we can describe it. It is a writing that has historically stood in opposition to the alienation and exploitation of human and language resources by the modern state. It can be described as anti-capitalist but not always in a benign sense, given its sometime fascist connections. Above all the modernist protest and project has been structurally anti-bureaucratic; its most typifying demand has been for a return of basic emotions and perceptions to a grounding in human experience and an attack on statist substitutes for this in deformed language and in the extension of the control mechanisms of industrial discipline into broader currents of social life. For modernism, Bolshevism — and sometimes Fascism — seemed in this sense 'anti-capitalist.' Both denounced the alienation of previously untouched areas of social life by bureaucracies with totalizing goals. But in this development modernism's links with the working class have been tenuous. So that modernism — even in its left modernist, committed variant — has remained basically utopian in character — an expression of hopes, a collection of protests and documentation of spiritual distress in capitalist times rather than a program for meeting needs, expressing the demand for social change.

But it's appropriate to think of a modernism that might be more successful. One with perhaps a more genuinely popular character. We might think of a modernism with community and collective dimensions for instance. Might this not be a modernism too? — only one perhaps more readily adapted to social struggle. The determinant element in this might well be the intensive effort to give the forms and codes of community and collective life a transformative shape with topical or local signification — with thematic 'content' in other words.

As an aspiration of course the idea, as applied to modernism, wouldn't exactly be new; and its roots certainly would go back to the 30s in our country. For what was critical for large scale left writing practice then — irrespective of how inept or unrealized — was the effort to give precisely this transformative character to group speech at every level, from broad-based community codes to the

sophisticated, technical codes of the intelligentsia. The writer's basic connection had in some way to be with group life. Naturally the reasons for this varied. But for nearly a decade writing in the United States was colored in some way or other by this basic orientation. And in this sense the left writers' movement was much closer in spirit to Russian modernism than the original modernism was to the socialist realist movement that followed it. In spite of organizational or Party ties not even the crudest of the American writers (Gold would be a good example) were ever bureaucrats in any literal sense. But that of course is exactly what the Soviet writers were. In America — unless you were the editor of the *New Masses* — you weren't on anyone's payroll and you didn't stand to benefit from any advantages that might accrue to you from a State. Soviet writers by contrast might hope not only for rewards but for advancement — into an apparatus, etc. The reasons of opportunism for a writer's association with the Communist movement in this country were slight or non-existent. Not that there wouldn't be neurotic or other rather unattractive reasons instead. But by and large and historically in the American left writers of this period there was a compelling aspiration, a real need to relate to the group life of the times. And at least for a short time during our literary history that need often superceded personal ones.

The drawbacks of the period remain drawbacks of course — and needn't be rehearsed again. There are on the other hand definite lessons to be learned from these literary predecessors. Preeminent among them is the practical lesson. Inside the Party or alongside it the intellectuals and writers of the time quite simply *had* to learn certain organizational skills or would have been of no use in advancing the causes and social movements they chose to support — and they very quickly did learn these skills. They propagandized and polemicized. They formed commissions and investigated. They attended congresses, they issued reports. This activity set the tone for an era. What practically resulted was an increase in a mass awareness that society was divided along class lines and — a bit later — a more urgent consciousness of the need for a 'United Front' against Fascism. Many writers participated in these struggles only briefly — and with real contradictions and misunderstandings — but what they gained for themselves, for however short the period, was a relation to the life of ordinary people, their deepest hopes and aspirations, to the large American society from which historically they had excluded themselves. For the first time — if there were precedents they were weak or half-forgotten — American writers were in a real, not a factitious relation to the masses of their fellow Americans. Writers had come to be in good faith and were once again part of society. This one overriding fact must have meant a great deal. To judge from the plethora of memoirs from this period, when writers wrote with social goals at the time they felt themselves alive, many of them, for the first time. I think it would be difficult to overestimate this feeling. To the extent that left modernism of today feels itself discouraged, academic or tangential to current life, it must to this same degree stand in marked contrast to that earlier time. A relation to life is all-important for



writing. The writing of the 30s for that reason has valuable lessons for us — as we begin with some confusion to face the 80s.

Now it is not altogether true that our own period remains ignorant of the problem, and certain trends in left modernism have begun gradually to recognize the existence of this critique. This has come about mainly through feminism and gay writing — as writing that 'criticizes power' as well as contains expressive political dimensions. Thus in some segments of the modernist movement biographical and autobiographical modes of writing now seem interesting — but in an abstract way. Even textual writing has itself begun to gravitate toward biography, narrative even. Again, there is the special place for criticism in left modernism. Here we can see politics appearing, surprisingly, as theme — that is, a technical discourse of specialists lending the text a certain worldly cachet. These correctives unfortunately are hardly radical. They allude to social life but do not express it, and their politics remain abstract.

Though there are certainly qualifications and reservations to be made, the earlier aspirations of left writers for a relation to social life once more makes the need for 'Americanism' in our current writing goals not only thinkable, but desirable. The writing of the 30s becomes a paradigm. This is true whether the left writers in question were 'proletarian' or 'middle class' in their backgrounds, and it becomes critical as the decade wears on. After the so-called Third Period of Communism (1928-1935), the restricted and aggressive marxism of the post-Lenin years gave way to the broader, alliance-minded United Front era (1935-1939). Shortly after the 7th Congress of the Communist International, the American Party began to open its doors to popular, Americanist and radical currents — and in not too selective a fashion. Intellectuals and middle-class writers now associated themselves with what seemed in many ways the leading movement of the times, a progressive movement that fought for the rights of workers, expressed the yearning of most Americans for a better national life and — perhaps most important of all — led the anti-Fascist struggle, at least until the Hitler-Stalin pact.

In time, however, the Party's Americanism became dubious or discredited. After all, how far could one go? Granville Hicks' 1938 *I Like America* — written while Hicks was still in the Party and presumably expressive of the Party line — brought the uncomfortable problem of patriotism to the fore. It remained for Earl Browder, the Party's General Secretary, to take the line to its logical — but still surprising — conclusion. 'Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism,' Browder had announced, and in 1944 at Browder's urging the Party was dissolved, to become the 'Communist Political Association.' Two years after, Browder was read out of the Party, after publication of the Duclos Letter. But the damage was done. The Party's revisionism brought it and the Left with it into a troublesome disrespect. As the New Left was later to wonder — in the 60s and 70s — to what extent is the Party, as historical representative of the American left, still to be considered revolutionary? To what extent is this a result of a turn toward 'Americanism' or populism?

But the limits of Americanism were revealed in writing as well. Additionally, the implications of the Moscow Trials and other unsavory aspects of Russian statism were beginning to make themselves felt. Writers began to leave the Party in droves, fellow travellers retreated once more to their private concerns. Many even ended as anti-Communists — John Dos Passos, Howard Fast and others. Others still, the Trotskyist sympathizers like Edmund Wilson and the *Partisan Review* group, were to become the Liberals of the Cold War years. Objectively these desertions from the Communist movement may be justified; yet the phenomenon remains a disturbing one -in spite of the Stalinism and revisionism which may have been its enabling cause. The swing toward Americanism on the part of the writers of this period was important as a corrective against the formalist currents which had preceded it. As the Communist influence on national life began to ebb, these writers followed suit, retrenched and took up their mostly private concerns. From the vantage point of our time it's difficult not to conclude that the ideals to which these writers had committed themselves were in some way inadequate from the beginning. Their ideals were not just Americanist — but Stalinist and authoritarian as well.

A fair review of the literature of the time can hardly avoid the observation that it was, in fact, through and through authoritarian, sexist in its implications and blatantly homophobic. This is, in addition, not an unfair critique of the Left to which it was allied. The problem of the writing of the period may even be seen, for simplicity's sake, as the problem of the CP in this period. Like the Party, writers felt themselves in a sort of double relation to the masses. They were part of this large grouping and expressed it, but they were also above it, leading. And to the degree that they became the 'leaders' of the writing movement of their day, these writers, like the Party 'leading elements' were drawn to authoritarian satisfactions. In the absence of objective self-interest in allying themselves with the Socialist movement — and writers and other middle-class intellectuals were notorious for joining the movement for reasons of idealism or self-sacrificing humanitarianism — it would have been difficult or impossible not to have expected these writers to compensate for real considerations with some concessions to pretense or bullying. Or this could become something like pedantry. 'Oh, we could preach sermons on Sunday,' Earl Browder remarked of writers allied with the Party, 'but for the intellectuals every day was Sunday.' But in a sense this was natural. For these intellectuals and middle-class writers lacked any organic connection between the collective interests of their own and working class interests. But questions as to whether this situation might have been otherwise are probably speculative. The period was what it was.

The important exception was the United Front, which Dimitroff had proclaimed at the Seventh Congress. In this struggle against the terrible new movement of Germany, Italy and elsewhere, there was a great deal of self-interest for writers. They had direct — visceral — reasons for struggling against this movement, and every day the reasons became clearer. With an awareness of events then taking place in Germany and elsewhere intellectuals instinctively knew that a successful

Fascism would make the continuation of their pursuit of a life choice as intellectuals or writers difficult if not impossible. Their choice of themselves and Fascism, they realized, were mutually self-exclusive. Additionally, many of these same intellectuals and writers were Jewish. And on that's core clearly they had if possible still more urgent reasons for combating Fascism and allying themselves with a Communist-led United Front. Here at last was an *organic* relation to the progressive movement on the part of intellectuals and writers. With a United Front politic, motivations of guilt, self-sacrifice and so on were temporarily suspended. There was no need for such motivations. As a writer you were fighting in your own interest.

This 'organic' exception to the typically idealist relation of writers to the left movement of the 30s gives us a clue, I believe, to the re-evaluation of the period for our own purposes. Left writing in that time can be said to have been successful to the extent that it had organic — rather than idealistic — relations with the left movement as a whole. Empathy is not, and was not, enough. As an intellectual or writer you have to speak *as a leftist* from that viewpoint, from the viewpoint of the intellectual and writer. Otherwise the characteristic faults of your writing are likely to be those that typify the left writing of the 30s — a too frequent pedantry, moralism or authoritarianism.

The left writing of our own period ought to question what its own best interests are. If it does so, it may well see that its intellectuals have a continuing interest in the critique of power. That struggle of course will still target language commodification as its special enemy. But aren't our interests wider here than we have suspected? The fight against language alienation, it appears, is only a part of the story, one instance among many in the ongoing fight against the relations of subalternity.

## Method and Surrealism: The Politics of Poetry

Barrett Watten

(Originally given as a talk at 80 Langton Street, This discussion began as a response to 'The Politics of Poetry' issue of  $L=A=N-G=U=A=G=E$ . What I found lacking there was a politics which might start from the structuring to be found in the writing itself. Rather I saw a tendency to simply equate values in writing, as they might bear on a political analysis, or even as they might originate in a political response, with the political task taken in its most real sense, with politics. The test of a 'politics of poetry' is in the entry of poetry into the world in a political way. The means for this entry are not to be found in the identity of politics with a style, where  $A = B$ , but in a self-conscious method, and the greatest example of such method to date is Surrealism. Though we theoretically know more about the social reality of language, *Les Vases Communicants* and the 'Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art' are touchstones to which we will have to refer in the articulation of political values stemming from the total reformulation of style. The discussion of the political stance of Breton here owes a debt to Franklin Rosemont's editing of *What Is Surrealism?* (London: Pluto Press, 1978). Material has also been quoted from Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane's translation of *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969). In this discussion, Surrealism stands as an example of method. Inferences, for method in the present and for the 'self' in art, follow in the complete version of the talk; for the moment I am interested in placing this discussion of Surrealist method *within* the context of  $L=A=N-G=U=A=G=E$ .)

What is the difference between method and technique? One could say that *technique* is the principle of construction in the writing. In other words, how the writing is written. And *method* is the principle of construction which begins with the activity of the writer as a whole, the extension of the act of writing into the world and eventually into historical self-consciousness. *Style* might be the middle term. At the origin of method, technique is *predictive*; that is, it is capable of producing new meaning, out of a stockpile of resources into a future, possible world.

Wanting to get beyond the identity of the individual writer with his method, I have been going back to the modern movement in a self-conscious way. Shklovsky generalized this when he wrote, approximately: 'One always goes back to one's grandparents.' An American definition of modernism can be found in this quote from Williams' *Rome*, published in *The Iowa Review*:

The modernist is he who sees through to the modern — to an essential and continuous organization that exists in it, perfectly so that to him there is no confusion, no necessity to go back, or to look ahead — he gets his pleasure here, now.

His work is made of the modern whatever bit he chooses ... but it will be all modern always — the success is the joy of self possession and a perfect present use of material — through the seemingly apparent brokenness of the life about him.

The structure within the 'apparent brokenness' is perpetually valid, will always be there. And one of the problems worked out in the modern period was that of the writer's professional role. Apart from Williams, three areas of the modern period bear especially on this: Russian Formalism; the work of Zukofsky, a one-man movement; and Surrealism. All three involve a negotiation with Marxism in the articulation of their fates. The Surrealists called themselves, in fact, 'specialists in revolt'; perhaps the emphasis here is on 'specialists' rather than on 'revolt.' 'The petit bourgeoisie has no class interest of its own.' These members of the middle class arrived at a professional necessity out of the conflict between bourgeoisie and working class. The working class appears in their work in different forms: as working-class politics, in the case of Breton; working-class aspirations, in the case of Zukofsky; and as a working-class state, in the case of the Formalists.

In describing the writer as a locus of conflict tending toward professional necessity, one could begin with 'the self' in these different areas of work. In Zukofsky, the self is corrected to begin with. There was an immediate need to fit a 'non-canonized' individual into the dominant literature as perceived. Zukofsky's poetics are the poetics of assimilation; finally the private life, in fact suburban, is the result. After a thorough epistemological effort, the poem stands as a thing outside, a musical whole. 'The words are my life' is the result of a conflict so great that the words become the self of the writer and argue for him.

The Formalist analysis is not so easily reduced. Starting from the separation of signifier and signified in Saussure, they identified poetic language with the dissociative techniques of the Russian Futurists. This separation ultimately tended toward the idea of design in language presentation. The direction is outer, toward the person, or many persons, hearing the work. The self is seen mechanistically as the amplifier or conductor of language which exists outside. The self might be the sign of action, as in the literary metaphor of Mayakovsky; the 'I' is a constructive device. Behind this is the image of Lenin, the type of the intellectual hero in the 20s and 30s.

One could make an interesting comparison between the images of Lenin to be found in Zukofsky, in the writings of the Formalists, and in Surrealism. In Zukofsky's poem in 'Memory of V.I. Ulianov,' Lenin appears as a star, a point of guidance over generalized flux. Lenin is interpreted as an idea here, and as a point of reference intrinsic to method. This was taken literally in Russian Formalism; Lenin's language 'as such' was studied in an issue of *Lef*. A connection was attempted between the constructive potential of that language and that of poetic language itself. Here we have the mental hero altering the world through the agency of style. The stylistic implications are for directness, design, and social address.

The Lenin of Surrealism appears in a more moral frame. Lenin would be the guiding light for the party model of the collective act. This sense of the keeper of the flame translates into the Surrealist idea of the self. Breton's political conversion came only after reading Trotsky's biography of Lenin, which he praised for its 'purity of tone.' In the 30s this self became the privileged term and locus for the revolutionary act. The political argument, then, connects the original hero image to the idea of tendency in aesthetics itself.

Surrealism was above all a defense of the self and its value in art. And likewise Surrealism is the movement involving method *par excellence*. While the method was continually being worked out, it never rested in a fixed social role. The Surrealists were addressing a great instability in similar terms. When conditions changed, the moment of efficacy of 'the self' disappeared, and the content of Surrealist method was irrevocably changed.

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In a 1934 talk called 'What is Surrealism?' Breton makes a claim of identity between his movement and the social conditions, 'the coming and immediate results of the war of 1870,' which produced Rimbaud and Lautréamont. The poetic response to World War I is tied to the specific political program known as defeatism:

Nothing was to our minds worth saving, unless it was ... 'l'amour la poesie' ... The field was not, to our minds, open to anything but a revolution truly extended into all domains, improbably radical, to the highest degree impractical, and tragically destroying within itself the whole time the feeling that it brought with it of desirability and of absurdity.

I must, however, insist on this attitude of ours, common to particular men and manifesting itself at periods nearly half a century distant from each other. ... From the beginning, the Surrealist attitude has had that in common with Lautréamont and Rimbaud which once and for all binds our lot to theirs, and that is wartime *defeatism*.

So the legitimacy of self-contradiction, however precious, in historical terms, led to a self-conscious method equal to the 'desirability and absurdity' of a response to the war. Breton is consciously identifying that personal response with the call for defeatism and proletarian internationalism made by the party of Lenin. Defeatism, then, was a program followed by certain socialist parties during the war which refused support for the bourgeois states in which they happened to find themselves. It is interesting to make a comparison between the wartime defeatism of Breton and the response to the Vietnam war; defeatism was never articulated as clearly in the United States. Even so, we all know who we wanted to win.

But Breton's position in 1934 is a later interpretation of an early yearning for method which was not specifically political. The first involvements with method were in a sense extra-literary, or 'above the level of the writing': the work with mental patients during the war, his first acquaintance

with automatism; the social orchestrations of Apollinaire; and the involvement with Dada as a public act. The literary influence of Reverdy's theory of the image, 'the dynamic union of unrelated objects,' which can be seen in *Mont de Piet* (1919), met with these forays into method to produce the first experiments with automatic writing, published as *The Magnetic Fields* with Soupault in 1921.

The automatic image is introduced this way in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924):

One evening, therefore, before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word ... a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent relation to the events in which ... I was then involved ...: 'There is a man cut in two by the window...' accompanied as it was by the faint visual image of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body.

Breton's interest in this image is from the point of view of style; it is contrasted to the tidy accounts of realist prose, of which this example is given:

The small room into which the young man was shown was covered with yellow wallpaper: there were geraniums in the windows, which were covered with muslin curtains; the setting sun cast a harsh light over the entire setting ...

So a point of reference in the first *Manifesto* is realist prose, a literary form. Although the argument here appears to be primarily toward style (in the widest sense, the quality of an image), Breton justifies this style in the name of science, not art. And in general, whenever Breton makes a claim of authority for his position, the claim is made in the name of science. He talks about his researches, the Surrealist experiment, and so forth. He does not rationalize his efforts in terms of literary history to the same extent. Obviously this is because literature, capital L, is coded into the social structure with which Breton finds himself at odds. So Surrealism extended itself away from literariness and toward experimental 'results':

On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally formed by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much farther, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its right ...

The appeal to science extends the boundaries of the literary act. Shklovsky described this kind of extension as 'the canonization of peripheral forms.' Speaking from the point of view of an art going through progressive changes in historical time, Shklovsky saw that the movement from one period to another was abrupt and disruptive. One way that this movement is articulated is through an appeal to peripheral forms. That is, at a given point in the decay of one kind of literature, writers would extend literature to an outside source, for example folk tales, which would bring in new possibilities for style. So there is a dialectic between 'literariness' and both language and cultural 'materials' as a whole.

Rather than focus on the constant 'experimental' activity of the Surrealists at that time: automatic writing, séances, fortune telling, and other language games, one can see a method developing which is greater than any technique. This method begins with the representation of the self, the agency or efficacy of the writer thinking beyond categories, as absolute, expanded beyond and unimpeded by previous literary domains.

The style of Breton's critical writings in the 20s is a perfect example of this presentation of self. The writings invariably take off from subject matter, never to return but to arrive at a further point. Criticism, Breton says, is an 'act of love'; there is no taking apart or analysis of other *oeuvres*. Rather the examples of other artists are predictive, pointing the way to the future of as yet unrealized acts. Breton's critical writings exist to give a tremendous boost. This boost is the substance of Breton's prose, and its realization in style is in an utter flamboyance of self-presentation.

The first few essays in *What is Surrealism?* show how this works. The earliest, 'For Dada,' is a testimony to congruence of spirit:

I speak for the pleasure of compromising myself. Appeals to the questionable modes of discourse should be forbidden ... The obscurity of our utterances is constant ... The Dadaists from the start have taken care to state that they want nothing ... What is myself? Don't know, don't know, don't know ...

Dada is a state of mind, therefore. The next testimony for Dada shows Breton's determination to think beyond that state:

The essence and the formula will perhaps always evade me, but ... it is the search for them that matters, and nothing else. Hence this great void that we are obliged to create within ourselves ... I do not wish to slip on the floor of sentimentality. There is ... no such thing as error, at the most one might speak of a bad bet ...

One can see here the crystallization of purpose out of the host liquid of 'despair'. The self, or single artist, is becoming the locus of a collective voice. The examples, then, of other individual artists are taken as stepping-off points. On Duchamp:

Let us be suspicious of all materializations whatsoever ... Is there anything that can do us more harm than a materialization? ... Let us leave our friends to fight over these grotesque tautologies and return to Marcel Duchamp ... In writing these lines ... I have not undertaken to exhaust the subject: Marcel Duchamp ... The thing that constitutes the strength of Duchamp is his disdain for the thesis ... It would be a good idea to concentrate on this disdain ...

Duchamp here is the hero of *the method without objects*. In fact, pure method without regard for what is to be produced. Picabia is the hero of *the method of many objects*, or the inconsistency of style:



You haven't stopped running ... and, whatever distance you think you have put between you and you, you still leave behind new statues of salt.... The man who changes most from Picabia is Picabia ... And how would the majority of people perceive that for the first time a painting has become a source of mystery, after having for so long been only a speculation about mystery, and that this art has no model, either decorative or symbolic ...

And then there's the hero of *the method of the reconstituted object*, Max Ernst:

Unfortunately, human effort, which never ceases to vary the disposition of existing elements, cannot succeed in producing a single new element. A landscape into which nothing earthly enters is beyond the reach of our imagination. And it seems likely that we would refuse to evoke it ... We must accept these conventions, and then we can distribute and group them according to whatever plan we please. It is because they failed to understand this essential freedom and its limits that symbolism and futurism failed.

This idea of language and psyche being a kind of vast reservoir for collage appears later in the 'image bank' of Burroughs. It bears on the criticism of the 'Zeno's paradox of biomorphism,' or organic form. One of the problems with the attack on normative grammar, which would break it down into bits and pieces of verbal rubble which then might release libidinal flux, is that it demands a prior value, 'a whole person in a whole world.' And since that is not possible, we have to keep going, back to the original impossible act. For Breton, the elements are fixed; action is possible within them. There is no final term, as in Symbolism; there is only what is available. From this point of view action is predictive, leading to something else rather than back to what was already there.

Breton implies that the word comes from outside. At this point the position is liberating; later it ends in the doldrums of hermeticism, a position one could easily have no interest in at all. Neither is there anything in the Surrealist view of women but a literary romance. What is left to consider is the independence and history of the sign, which Breton refuses to detach from the thing. The adjusted outsider will go down with the ship of 'the intellectual between two wars.' But Breton proposes a method above and beyond, without reliance on its objects. There are many possible techniques; Breton refuses static characterization of technique.

So in 'Letter to Seers' (1925) Breton describes 'techniques' (fortune-telling and arcane faith in the medium) which are arbitrary enough but which at the same time open the way for a theory of the imagination, one which comes up again in Robert Smithson's 'Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan.' This theory of the imagination leads to *Nadja*, one of Smithson's greatest influences, which he possibly never read. Again the predictive value of any technique is at the heart of method: the ability of technique to construct a possible future:

Time is certain. Already the man that I will be has the man that I am by the throat, but the man that I have been leaves me in peace. This is called my mystery, but I do not believe in (I do not prize) the impenetrability of this mystery, and no one wholly believes in it for himself.

Everything that is revealed to me about the future falls in a field which is nothing other than that of absolute possibility, and develops there at all costs ... It appears that I must go to China around 1931 and run great dangers there for twenty years.... I have faith in everything you have told me ... for thanks to you I am already there.

Out of hatred for memory, for that combustion that it feeds in all the places where I no longer want to see anything, I want to have dealings only with you ... What is will *be* by virtue of language alone: nothing in the world can stop it. I grant that that may be more or less well stated, but that is all.

A simultaneous hero in terms of constructing a possible future was Lenin. The early politics of the Surrealists were struggles of identity as much as of political tendency. Breton's career in the party was aborted, but the Surrealists took on the party model from then on. But the tone of hysteria in the *Second Manifesto* is not to be explained only by Breton's disclaimer, later, that he was unduly influenced by tendential warfare. Breton took on the Leninist party model and adapted it to an aesthetic involved in the total disruption of boundaries at the service of egotism, toeing the line of Hegelian idealism. In other words, he identified the revolution with his own psychic resources and intellectual discipline. There was no rest point in exterior social fact for Breton's Marxism; in fact, it is only later, when his political stance is secure, that coal strikes, wages, the popular front, etc., can be used in support of the Surrealists' position. For example, the social argument of *Les Vases Communicants* (1932) is that economic structures limit free choice in love. Only after concretizing the problems of identity posed in the *Second Manifesto*, through Dali's later theory of paranoia-criticism, could he arrive at actual social facts.

Paranoia might be defined as a delirium of interpretation bearing a systematic structure. And paranoia-criticism, as practiced by Dali, is a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on systematic objectification of delirious associations. The self becomes a projection of any phenomenon; the boundaries between self and other are blurred. In *Les Vases Communicants* Breton discusses himself as having possibly entered into that state. That state of mind having been achieved, and for a number of other factors, the political position hardened somewhat, to terminate in its most stable form with the beginning of World War II. But for the period of 1931-39, Breton's identification with social revolution was complete, and a major accomplishment of Surrealist method.

By 1934-35, Surrealism's method had assumed a kind of permanent value for the 'redeemed' self, ever valid in historical time, especially given revolutionary responsibility. The techniques of Surrealism appear to gravitate toward two poles: *verbal-auditory*, involving automatic writing, lyricism, the uninterrupted voice, leading to the possibility of an imagination free from constraints; and *verbal-visual*, involving the representational value of the Surrealist image, poem-objects and *objets trouvés* (found objects, connected with accident, or objective chance), leading to the capacity to

inspire the dream in others. This latter function is tied directly to the function of language in recording dreams; the Surrealist object is an idealization of the objectification through words of the dream experience, coming from the practice of writing down dreams.

In *Les Vases Communicants* Breton argues his way out of a period of delirium of interpretation and political identity crisis through a close examination of the interpenetration of dream and exterior facts:

The fog exists. Contrary to current opinion, it is formed of the thickness of things immediately sensible when I open my eyes. These things that I love, how could I also not hate them for derisively hiding all other things from me? It has appeared to me, it still appears to me, it is everything this book intends that in examining closely the most irreflective activity, if one passes beyond the extraordinary and badly tranquillizing effervescence apparent on the surface it is possible to bring to light a *capillary tissue* in ignorance of which one works in vain to understand mental circulation. The role of this tissue is visibly to assure the constant interchange which must take place in thought between exterior and interior worlds, an interchange requiring a continual interpenetration of waking and sleeping activity. My only ambition has been to give an idea of its structure. Whatever the pretensions common to integral consciousness and the delirious details of rigor, it cannot be denied that this tissue covers a sufficiently vast region. It is there that, for man, the permanent transactions of satisfied and unsatisfied necessities are consummated, there that the spiritual thirst — which, indispensably, from birth to death, must be calmed rather than cured — is exalted.

The syntax of this writing itself might be the capillary tissue between reality and dream.  
What does this mean for method:

With a little ingenuity it would not be impossible to succeed in provoking certain dreams in another being, if one at least applied oneself to making the other fall, in spite of himself, within a remarkable-enough system of coincidences. It would in no way be utopian to pretend, by these means, to work seriously upon the other's life, from a distance. The real fact, which is a result, would gain in solidity to the extent that one of its principal components might thus, in great measure, be determined *a priori*, and *given*. I should hope this proposal might obtain approval from enough minds that it move towards practical application.

So the science of dreams extends to social control. But this 'social control' could also be understood as an exalted description of an art exhibition. This 'remarkable enough system of coincidences' could be a collection of paintings. Here is an area where common sense flip-flops with a tremendous utopia.

If this fixed 'system of coincidences' has use, it stems from the value given to unimpeded flux, not modified by any intention for control. In 'The Automatic Message' (1933) Breton states a primary value for automatism:

The fundamental disequilibrium of modern civilized man vainly strives to absorb itself in the artificial concern with minor and transitory equilibriums. The odious crossing out of words increasingly afflicts the written page, crossing out life itself with a stroke ... To correct, to correct oneself, to polish, to smooth out, to find fault instead of drawing blindly from the subjective treasure ... this is a command which ... slavish custom ... has for centuries asked us to obey.

One would like to know exactly how much he did correct. But to whatever extent, it was not to give value to the activity of correction. Instead, Breton sets his sights only on the outcome of the automatic act:

In a dark room, his eyes wide open, Watt contemplates the future steam engine — the one to come. What is not yet will be ... The expression 'All is written,' it seems, must literally be held to. All is written on the blank page ... The beautiful interpretive wall, brimming with lizards, is now but a fence post toppling on the highway, before which a landscape that never has had time to form itself reconstitutes, further, the magic mirror in which life and death may be read ... Let us cast a glance ... on these elementary surfaces in which the future world has for so long elected to compose itself. Coffee grounds, scrap iron, cloudy mirror: it is of you that the impenetrably bright veils on the hats of young women are made.

Another famous automatic image is that of Kekule's ring, in which the chemist Kekule's dream of fish chasing each other around in a ring predicted the molecular structure of benzene. For Breton, this automatic reading can be accomplished against the most ordinary, indistinct backgrounds: scrap heaps or coffee grounds, which brings back the argument to seers and tea leaves.

All the experimentation here would be of a nature to demonstrate that perception and representation (which to the ordinary adult seem radically opposed) are merely products of the dissociation of one original faculty, of which the eidetic image gives us an idea and of which one still finds a trace among primitives and children... Systematically... one can work from this point where the distinction between subjective and objective ceases to be necessary or useful.

Apart from the false causal idea here, the identity of perception and representation seems to be at the center of the use found for automatism and the Surrealist object.

In 'The Surrealist Situation of the Object' (1935), Breton quotes Hegel to rank poetry first among the arts because of its 'need to attain, first by its own means and secondly by new means, the precision of sensible forms.' This makes it a paradigm for other arts: 'Painting benefits from the only external element that no art can get along without, namely inner representation, the image present to the mind ...' Hegel gives a value to the image: 'All idea is image, an internal representation of an act. The representation of the act is thereby the beginning of the action.' Breton's belief in the universal interpretability of this image completes the logic of the revolutionary necessity of the private image in poetry. The private image is revolutionary transformation in germ.

Thus, Hegel also wrote, it is a matter of indifference whether a poetic work be read or recited. Such a work may also be translated, without essential alteration, in a foreign language and even in prose poems. The relationships between sounds may also be totally changed.

The image, which is a repressed act, is independent of the grounds on which it is visualized, and can be translated from one material to another. This transparency of the material is close to Surrealist techniques in verse; there is often an extreme linearity of progression and an extreme literalness of line. Self-conscious parallelism works for the mechanistic production of image and statement. This is an argument against other considerations of technique, such as meter or sound, which the Surrealists did not discuss, and an argument for the convertibility of the image in Hegel's terms. The image travels endlessly; this is the substance of Surrealist internationalism, in fact. The grounds are arbitrary; it is not French language or literature but the condition of 'man.' Breton's poetics are not 'language specific,' and this fact allows for an interconvertibility between poetry and the world itself:

This I for my part believe ... in ... the experiment of incorporating objects ... within a poem, or more exactly of composing a poem in which visual elements take their place between the words without ever duplicating them ... The reader-spectator may receive quite a novel sensation, one that is exceptionally disturbing and complex, as a result of the play of words with these elements, nameable or not.

For this 'reader-spectator' Breton both made poems which contained images of objects, and arranged real objects, with written words, to make 'object poems.' The logical consequence of these techniques is the Surrealist object: 'an object which lends itself to a minimum of mechanical functions and is based on phantoms and representations liable to be provoked by the realization of unconscious acts' (Dali). Here is a description by Breton of a Surrealist object recovered from sleep, in the 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of the Real':

I got my hands on a rather curious book in my sleep, in an open air market out toward Saint-Malo. The spine of this book was formed by a wooden gnome with an Assyrian-style white beard which came down to its feet. The statuette was of normal thickness and yet it in no way interfered with turning the pages of the book, which were made of thick black wool. I hastened to acquire it and when I woke up i regretted not finding it near me. It would be relatively easy to re-create it. I should like to put a few objects of this sort in circulation ...

This object is produced in a dream, though similar objects can be found in real life. One of these is Nadja, and another is the wooden spoon which led Breton to his second wife in *L'Amour Fou*, predicted in the poem 'Tournesol.' At this point the mysticism is getting unbearable: one wishes to concentrate instead on the objectification of the image and to relate it to the dialectically inspired projections of Robert Smithson. The emphasis on a 'new myth,' after World War II, and the increasing hermeticism of Surrealism, may be taken as symptomatic of a total transformation of the

social conditions in which Surrealism articulated itself, which transformation Trotsky saw as the probable *raison d'être* of the war. In Breton's myth, we are the small bodies, the cells, of larger organisms beyond our ability to sense. It is not very difficult to imagine that these large bodies are the movements of history. And it would not be possible to characterize Breton's position as a host-parasite relationship until World War II came along to destroy the basis for the articulation up to that time. The shift was so sudden and total that Breton had to admit to his subjectivity again. In different circumstances, this happened also to Zukofsky, who in the postwar period argued out of the historical necessity of the 30s into the personal locus of his work. So the new value given to individual aesthetics is likewise a recognition of the impossibility of social scale.

## Orange County California and the Economics of Language

Alan Sondheim

If you own a Porsche in Newport Beach you buy a second vehicle for the beach or practicality, you write 'Porsche' on the back of the pickup, let people know: I'm driving this now, I've got the other. The commodity structure produces bifurcations in the cultural domain: Porsche/vw; these become reified and the social preservation of boundary conditions requires further commodification. The car splits into two functions: the social emblem and the functional implement, retaining the signature of the first.

Someone talks about rapes perhaps or murder to an extent in the east we speak of groceries in confusion. Everything neutralizes; the objects extrude from 'Porsche,' 'taco,' 'surfboard' into a system of equivalences in which objects (eastern things) become tokens of transformations (western things): rich car, poor car, beach home, roller derby, L.A. fans, the units are larger, more amorphous. The object disappears, the subject disappears. Language flows as dissolution.

No objects but symptoms within the bifurcated system that becomes increasingly crippled with each new distinction, the enumeration of abundance. That beach home on rented property sells for \$220,000, the average home \$133,000, the average salary \$18,000, 8500 new plots available for purchase on Irvine Ranch which does its best to keep an even attenuation of supply in the face of. The symptoms, so many result in a negation of intentionality, not this one against that, but this against this as the body attempts subsummation of everything, equivalences, parataxis, concatenation, confluence, = and (affordability/lease/no purchase) as the polarizations within the sociality of consumerism.

(Aside) In Soviet Writers Look at America, the level of discourse (from them to us, the Other placed against the fabric of late capitalism) is that of description; the anomic fragmentation of the west is more evident from a position of definable immersion (I feel but I denote, i.e. I am elsewhere) than definition within an immersive structure (my horizon as the world around me).

Thus one has lists of exfoliations from a single source (an impossible catastrophic system of singularities within catastrophe theory) — users of Coca-Cola — fragmentations (Warhol, astrology, racism), groupings (Greenwich Village posters of Bardot, Dylan, Johnson, King, Picasso), directed

conversations, fragments, reports, gestures, minute structures of advertising slogans used either to orient the report itself or structure the reported American life-world, world of dreams.

Within Orange County all of this placed along the highway of the page in the sense that roadsigns seize function as in the repetitiveness of the bank ad 'give us the business, then give us the business.' Brown changes sides, now seems like a 'hardliner,' no one in particular seems perturbed at the noticed difference. It's language at the edge, the margin, of America. Or the weatherman who showed a satellite map of Africa and proceeded to give the weather of the western sahara (always west always west), it all compresses, contradiction ceases when comparison, that algorithm, becomes impossible.

At the heart of the system, the subject becomes authoritarian through the presence of absence (read: potential) or vacuum (read: decay) in the core of attenuation: The neutralization of the even voice, smile, a mass (read: substance) system of gestures (for neutrality itself is *intentional*) functioning as negation or leveling of the ostensible (marginal, distorted) events in conversation.

This *surface equivalence* establishes the equivalence of the events themselves, the temporality of both essence and existence, the compression of emotion and information — a situation in which *representation* (in the sense of an articulated mapping possessing denotation of the world of facts embedded in the subsidiary world of 'abstractions') of the thing becomes representation of a quantity of the thing (part of a single thing, or thing in quantities) and a quantity of the other (other as cultural noise, as emblem, as self-referential sign function); in which the entity or process itself is seen only in terms of its *mirrorings* (self-reflections, or reflections in the face of the other); in which the mirrorings themselves are seen as identical to mirrorings of quantities of the thing combined with other things — noise in the system, cultural noise; in which *noise* becomes a floating cultural signifier, an operator placing and replacing entities, segments, classes, within the structure of the cultural domain, an *application* (null set as operator, thus  $X\emptyset = \emptyset = Y\emptyset$  through the equivalence of anything, through accretion).

Then we move, then we split, then L.A. has the bussing trouble, and there's trouble in the hills around Laguna Beach where in Bluebird Canyon forty homes just fell, the hills north caught fire, o here and there. For the equivalence system negates the bifurcation, which is placed — just for a moment — in suspension — just long enough occasionally to produce a singularity, an inhabited country of the peripheral vision, a gestural language of erotic touch retaining a sense of intimacy at water's edge late at night. A singularity perhaps of power (internal or external, the word is common, as is energy 'energy'); a singularity which dissolves through appropriation, the old dilemma of



bourgeois (who don't exist) subversion (which does). Appropriation, commoditization, tokenization (the body as its own best product, bikinis indoor wear a must down at the Newport Beach) — the body as its own best product through the machinery of the Other, the system, those nine-year-olds born into it already plasticine, almost naked, with a greater degree of eroticism (no guards up, here up here) than the teens who lean correctly, the body exploding (linguistic particles, the streets constantly dissolving into yelling, the far-end [ultimate culture] of articulation), a collectivity situated against collectivities, ego ego itself themselves repeated bifurcated (tearing of flesh as the 15-yr. Utah escapee was raped then arms torn off by her assailant recent dismemberment) into particles: A MAW OF ATTRACTORS, SURFACES, AND A TEXTURE OF MINIMA.

(How should I know should I know here two months and reading the symptomology.)

## A Word on Spatola's *Zeroglyphics*\*

Renato Barelli

To write means to construct language, not explain it. MAX BENSE

We find ourselves in a strange time when various literary experiments happen to be at two opposite extremes of the same scale. In one sense, one can play at reassembling always broader syntactic unities which become more and more normal and thus obtain a sort of neoclassicism. In the other, one can proceed in the always more daring fragmentation of simple unities: from the word, to the syllable to the phoneme and even beyond; i.e. beyond the utmost possibilities of the written character and its total consistency. Whether it is entrusted to a sound or to a graphic mark: with the fascinating consequence that in this last case we also move out of the sphere of literature and invade that of painting and of sound (of music)....

Spatola considers it an essential exercise to correct the 'candor' and the false pretenses which one could have in doing linear or literary poetry: as if the macro-unities which are present in it were not based on intraverbal micro-unities; as if the spirituality that one acknowledges in it were not founded on a material basis. Here, then, we have a division of roles between literature-spirit and literature-body: between rhetorical poetry (because it uses figures of speech, analogy, asyndeton, etc.) and 'concrete' poetry, i.e. a poetry which addresses itself to the analysis of the material base of language; a poetry which has decided, following this path, to move out not only from the boundaries of the literary, but also from those of the literal (as I have observed) to invade the fields of the visual and sound arts. On the other hand it is very difficult to find the precise joint where the influence of the literal stops (in its linguistic aspects): i.e. where the 'matter of the expression' ' to use Hjelmslev's terms, does not result in being any more correlated to a form, but presents itself as matter, simply matter, be it graphic or phonetic .... When does the pull of the literal stop in the works of Spatola? When do we start realizing that the compulsion to read has become irreparably useless and ridiculous, i.e. that the 'collection' of units of sense is worthless?

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\* Excerpted from the afterword to *Zeroglyphics* by Adriano Spatola and translated by Paul Vangelisti (1977: The Red Hill Press, c/o SBD, 1784 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709, \$3).



First of all in the fact that the graphic layout to which the gesture of writing is entrusted is still rather close to typography. He could have adopted handwriting, definitely private and therefore *gestural* and *materic*, very distant from public and codified forms. For these first experiments he has instead purposely chosen characters as anonymous and standard as possible, very large, bold-faces as in newspaper headlines or advertising copy. And, secondly, this breaking up of writing is rather clear and elementary. It is done following directives which maintain a rational air, not at all dissimilar to

the vertical and horizontal grid on which the normal type case is based. With a pair of scissors, that is, one cuts along vertical lines the graphic sequence of words, reducing them to slats of a shutter and also eliminating the 'white spaces'. In fact, one must not forget that normal readability is based as much on full as on empty spaces, or intervals. In our case, instead, with an implosive effect, the intervals are abolished, the *materic* 'quantums', the entire nuclei get closer to each other; just as physical matter would concentrate in a 'black hole' if the orbit of rotation of the electrons were progressively reduced.

But besides the vertical cut up, there is also a horizontal one, which creates many squares as in a chessboard. It is natural that each one of these squares should undergo a rotatory movement; i.e. should go and take up a different orientation than the one it originally had; reading expands itself, it spreads and disperses towards the four cardinal points of the horizon. To be sure it is a dissemination that for the time being takes place to a moderate degree, as in the case of a person whose eyes are blindfolded and who, in moving about in a room, tries to maintain a sense of direction by calculated and moderate movement. If one wished to, one could obtain much wilder degrees of centrifugation of the meaning, taking an irreversible road from which there is no coming back. But this will specifically be the job of those artists for whom what really counts is the plastic and graphic effect one obtains dispersing the fragments of writing. In Spatola's case, instead, it is important, that, as I have already mentioned, the light of the literal should keep on descending, also to these sufficiently 'low' regions. At the same time the road back to the surface must be kept open, so that from the literal one may even rediscover the literate, with its figures of speech and its multiple meanings. However, after coming and going, after the immersions and the emersions, these will seem the ever more casual, unstable and bizarre results of a sort of combinational analysis. Among the thousand intraverbal combinations, it could be that, as by a miracle, many of them conspire towards a reciprocal harmony, at the end of which a literal-literary order may appear. But it must know itself as being suspended above an abyss of disorder, of whirling *materic* chaos.

## Written Art\*

Gerald Burns

Most good writing is a tissue of relations — lists, progressions, serial qualification — and will teach you how to read it, even to the tone, seriousness, urgency and trustworthiness of the speaker. It can even tell you how to *pretend* to take it (the courteous or docile reader can even fool himself.) One does not feel reading most writing that one is creating it — you don't mistake your recognition for the writer's. But he can bring you very close to his recognition of meanness, partly by techniques analogous to the dancer's. The reader, in spite of his physical control of the act of reading, can function as something partway in between a séance medium and a puppet. Mental operations going on in him have been determined, within parameters which take psychological differences into account (letters to one friend can make that difference an element in the composition — but again within limits. Writing to yourself is even odder.) When you read well you know what the author *means* in the widest sense, and can even guess how he would answer some questions at least he did not anticipate.

You solve the problem of other minds by reading, talking and dancing. If a cocked eyebrow means negation you find out fast. And words especially, even fixed, even thousands of years old, repay contemplation when reread, to the point where subtle emendations are agreed on by scholars. Any important piece of writing can become familiar. An average reader may choose not to look at one, and may mistake this for a judgment that the piece is beneath notice, insignificant. But the fact that this mistake can be pointed out suggests how merely psychological it is. Even those for whom reading is suffering, a horror of missed opportunity, fear what they are not catching — sense that something is going on.

You can tell Stein's *The World is Round* is by a child of ten and grade them on how quickly they see it's a lie — see, that is, that your direction is misleading, doesn't *work* over the long haul. Tell them Robert Creeley's poems are written by a woman.

Writing tells you how to read it: dead ends appear as such.

Most readers who read merely for diversion are vulnerable to the dead end of reputation....

In writing, in the West, the materials matter less. But the flexing, keying up, is there. We are right to call bad writing *slack* — it's odd we don't use the word for painting.

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\* Excerpted from Gerald Burns, *Toward a Phenomenology of Written Art*, 1979, Treacle Press, P.O. Box 638, New Paltz, N.Y. 12561; \$4.95 © 1979 by Burns.

Slack is more than perfunctory, though perhaps contained in that term. There is a conceptual arm — that the artist has underestimated a difficulty.

This may be a difficulty of construction, as when Pound writes nice lines that would persuade you coherence has to have been achieved — that you are perceiving a whole that in fact you aren't.

It also underestimates the medium. My type for this (aside from any page of any novel — would the Chinese read our novels?) is almost anyone trying to describe. There is no awe, no feeling that the world would be different if it worked. It's that odd form — the artist's complacent and preconscious assumption that he's done it, and how this feeds into the writing and convinces the social reader that he must now pretend it has worked. This is why so many people feel unconsciously that written art is somehow pretense. This is very like self-righteousness in religion....

Words say things that mean things. Not that meanings mean. Say they have sensuous qualities. Now, verse handbooks, say not two things but three (or three and a half): that poems have meanings to engage the intellect, and sensuous qualities — but that the second of these and perhaps also the first includes *how the words come* to us — whether we hear them or read them, say. The half comes in because one may (merely may) signal while reading aloud that the words *are being read*, that being read matters (partly the difference, in Readings, between the poet who chants from memory and the one who puts on hornrims and rustles manuscript.) And *read* verse can mime speech-hearing. Then words can mime being read (or said) to others in their *sound*, etc., but this begins to verge on meaning. Ultimately you can say all this is meaning if meaning is partly situational (grandma reading kids a story), and partly the subconscious though deliberate fashioning of sounds, syntax, etc. in their origins contingent. But the important addition is that the act of reading (or hearing) is a part of verse as much as 'meaning' and sound. It's harder to talk about because one tries so hard when small to do it automatically.

But they say that reading for information (newspapers) one is barely conscious of the medium — the words in the particular language, their sounds, etc. etc., and that art-words force you various ways to consider that medium in various ways. So far so good. But writers are also readers — were readers first, some of them — and of course were hearers before they became readers. And the readers for whom the experience of reading is an important life-event, who become writers, may tend to write to other readers in a different way, may do odd things so that the act (or even *experience*) of writing will bear one of several relations to the act and experience of reading. In some poems, the fact that they are read may become an acknowledged part of the total poem-event....

It is something of a matter of sleight of hand.

(WCW, *Imaginations*, p. 75)

Illusion is not the same as sleight of hand. A magician who used real magic would please no more, theatrically speaking. It might be real magic to change the specific gravity of a gold coin by a few points, but it would not be *magical*. Generally in art what keeps illusion less than total is the medium — one might produce the temporary illusion that one's epic is wonderful, but that's another matter. That a poem does more than its components is more what verse has to do with illusion, getting more out than you seem to put in. In fact the writer is working hard and the reader is. But it seems just like reading something. It is something like the relation hunting a unicorn might have to hunting a deer — one makes the same motions but they become legend. Hemingway tries to make legend out of hunting the deer. Now if you say, 'Every deer is a unicorn,' you are close to poetry if not indeed to magic. Now for us tools are practical ugly things you do things *with* — they are no more 'there' than the newspaper prose with respect to the information it conveys. If you are an Indian and the deer is spooky, a spirit or an animal with habits, the tool is part of a rite, like holy plate. In some cultures the tool is hardly understood as a Useful Thing. It is part of a rite which is effective whether it works or not. One could say that the West tries over and over to make verse merely useful, merely a means — as if we want to say the unicorn is a cow. Perhaps domestication involved first of all our getting over our horror at animals. I like to think the first poetry was funny. Art disguised as craft, I said a while ago.

Now old-fashioned theatrical magic assumes an audience that wants unicorns. The mechanics of it was concerned with giving it that, the stagecraft with making sure it knew it. The other end of the continuum that begins with pleasant surprise at a Cup and Ball routine is horror, which has to do with moods evoked by materials — the canvas rocks of Gothic, the fact that the coins are gold. And horror is a perfectly sensible way to react to the world's things and materials. Wonder is only more polite....

Some writers know a great deal about how words should come at a reader; others study the ways words come to a writer. The second is likely to please passionate readers more, if only because the first is more likely to be vulnerable to literature as rule book, a catalogue of other men's effects. What saves him sometimes is reading very little. The second, whether reading or writing, is likely to pay less attention to the book of rules than to grass and how the ball looks coming at you, and the oddity of lines painted on a field. What he explores is the act of writing, as his readers explore the act of reading. There is nothing contemptible about traditionalist writing, but its readers are more likely to ignore the act of reading as part of the experience of what is read. In the first quarto *Hamlet* Corambis asks What doe you reade my Lord? And Hamlet says Wordes, wordes. In the Folio he says Words, words, words. It's not only funnier, it's truer, to his and our experience. The scribe may hate his pen as the painter his paint, but in another mood he will imitate Van Gogh and drink ink....





## Regarded, Become

Michael Gottlieb

Why does he let this keep happening to himself? As long as it doesn't matter where one is when one comes home, as long as one can just sit down. I used to like getting into those states, thought it was important to feel that too. Liking a good depression as much as the next one. A painter made it clear: it doesn't matter. It could have been any kind of day. You don't have to forget. There is no such thing as a willing subject. Just get home, close the door. They may be dead but still present, lording, impinging, you are still talking to them. Whatever gets carried into the chamber, joins the suspension; there will cloud up a resultant tincture or there won't. It's as if it's not our problem. No one will or can or have any real opportunity to raise the question. Do you think there is such a thing as defense? One was wont to think of the set aside time as the only fully realized, attached, fully charged for this one, for us, for those like us, to be, to get by, only or finally completely separate off; running on all cylinders, with a hoped for connection, the hope for a date, straightening the seams, studying the mirror, more makeup, a different sweater, bat the eyelashes, another spray, another pat, wait for the phone.

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I always wanted to be a writer. Not to write, just be a writer, like a novelist. And not always, just when reading started to become a serious alternative to everything else save sleeping, about 10 or 11 years old. Not just a writer then, maybe an agent, maybe a racing driver. Reading was, and is, the best way of doing nothing. What was there not to understand? One started the same piece over and over again, one called it a story, about eight times from age 12 to 14. Each new beginning came to approximately one paragraph. They all, if memory serves, had someone going out of the house early in the morning, too early, waiting for the bus to come. At 16, a poetry prize of sorts would be won; an anthology with red covers, a poem devolving upon the wonderfully redemptive resiliencies of mortality. The family did not like it. In freshman year someone with a name like Wendy would come along; she would break the dam. Then there would be an April or a Shelley.

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Sometimes, the asking. What is the difference? The smartest fellow I ever met, he quit. No one will care. Sometimes it seems to make more sense to make nothing at all. It doesn't do anything, it certainly doesn't add to the capital or help any sort of you. It used to be arrogance, setting down the

flung, the extremity of most moment. Then, it started to feel good. This would settle down anyone. The anodyne, now a name for, a full removal, now certain things that one could invest, from their lives themselves to something better, making it so, what we carried around became material. It called for a compensatory acknowledgement, grudging with recommendations and qualifying with casting, this is what one gets, with modeling, the systematic application of attribution along ways of disheartening predictable obfuscations of fundamentally grained in and ominously more regulatory repetition. Coming to be regarded with the automatism of the generative fallacies. A decision made after watching something. It would take someone to think of this. Become.

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Except for the fact that there are so many things that can go wrong, given a realistic appraisal of exceptions, their incidence. It may be that there is a rate, onto which, like an enwrapping wire, the various turnings come aboard, track themselves in, and are flung off. The inversion in consolation, in the sense of accretion, with some sensible attendant noise. This is the way I would like it, without the bit of tinge, a little over there. It was all known, it all became a thing figured out, become general. The continual blunting influences come to be regarded, as if vicissitudes of a sort no longer extant, like an affliction to be read about, like something to befall someone else. Also, partly, the sense of distance was an effect of a still rampant doubt; a query, which in its application here called into question whether anything, ever, could really happen, to us, could simply crop up in a life, take over or utterly penetrate, something convincing whose verification would be no issue. A consistive imposition whose stricture would hang on, for varying durations, until, as into every life, that sort of event, undeniable in whatever it was, was finally realized as there.

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What are so often underestimated are all the wrong reasons. Why we want to do, to keep trying, this. There is the argument which posits a withering away of intention, that, that which will last by reason that for all active purposes, their application to what we do, or say everyday is nil, will. The levelizing or winnowing influences or tendencies or historical attributes may, for reasons which there is no reason why there, themselves, shouldn't be operating anymore than there should be, all their effect, picking and choosing in fact actually operating or manoeuvring behind a veil or wall impenetrable to us, and hinge and wheel on the objects in their path. We want to know how to write and how to lead our lives. It will offer no pause though. The breakdown, the array of mistalents, self-effacements, hopeful postures which constitute the community of what is knowable among us is leavened with something indeterminate that may not be any more accurate or durable but if at all distinguishable, is recognized by its simple and across the board lack of concern regarding those issues.

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If the thing needs no defense, perforce, a necessity of any sort concomitantly diminishes as well. All the different ways we try to clothe our selves. The uneven relation of hunger to appetite. No one thought they would have to approach these choices. What gets, or doesn't, done every day is as accurate as any other indice. I want not to remember this was going to come up. By dint of repetition, the cumulative effect of always just trying to look in on, keep a distance from, whichever lack of ratification. Sometimes I think I am very easily impressed. Everyone wants to put their light under their hat. When you finally get exercised enough, saying something, pretending you are not smart enough for that sort of thing. The things you surround yourself with, that you cannot see, not dispersed by the usual agents, the sort by which one, eventually, comes to be recognized. You show him what you feel is proper. The sensibility has any registration solely as the manifestation, trace, of choice, all including alternatives, mundane, what to do at the end of the day. I usually get bored with the same. You write the way you pick out ties. What you get used to saying. Why you keep doing it anyway. What you think comes close because of it. The possibility that beckons. You wouldn't want it held against you. You are happy when someone hands something to you. It is an attempt to even the score. They take turns. The terms are not readily acceptable. For some reason I seized upon that song to sum up all their activities and labors, through all of that time, it still brings a lump to my throat.

# Constitution / Writing, Politics, Language, the Body\*

Bruce Andrews

**Consensual:** 1. Existing or made by mutual consent, without an act of writing. 2. Relating to or being the constrictive pupillary response of an eye that is covered when the other eye is exposed to light.

The future seems bleak: cognitive dissonance reduction.

We sit *in the twentieth century*.

Writing as writing. And what are its politics? And what is its political economy? Distinguishing feature: work, centered on an investigation of **language** as the medium (and therefore carrying the assumption that the illusionistic or material or social qualities of the medium could throw light on even more fundamental questions — about human reality, social reality, experience in general and in particular). It serves to stage those questions.

*You'd like to have a better leftist library wouldn't you.*

In each way of characterizing the nature of the medium of writing, there's an epistemology which is embedded, at stake, at issue. Assumptions point both ways : a politics rests on an explanation — a characterization of the medium and its properties, its possibilities, its constraints. It carries an epistemology with it. And once we characterize the nature of writing's medium in a certain way, we can read out of it (corrigibly) an epistemology and a political practice. Different ways of characterizing the medium allow the medium itself to be evaluated — as a vehicle for revealing or directing acting upon domains of existence. Epistemology / explanation // praxis / prescription / change.

*There is something I would like to talk to you about.* Here are **three** points on a multi-dimensional spectrum: (1) Writing as representation; (2) Writing as a subversion of a linguistic system; (3) Writing as a reconstitution of meaning, value, and the body.

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\* An extension of the earlier essay, 'Writing Social Work and Political Practice,' in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E No. 9/10, October 1979, from which a few passages are quoted. In *italics* are passages from books and poems of mine.

Bibliography: *Unit Costs* (1980; ms.); *I Guess Work The Time Up* (1980; ms.); *R + B* (1981; Segue); *Wobbling* (1981; Roof); 'True Flip To' (1981; *Gnome Baker*); *Give Em Enough Rope* (1982; Sun & Moon); *Getting Ready To Have Been Frightened* (1978; Roof); *Av. Lumens* (ms.); *Swaps Ego* (ms.); *Jeopardy* (1980; Awede); *New York* (ms. collection); *Sonnets (Memento Mori)* (1980; This); *Transblucency* (ms.); *Film Noir* (1978; Burning Deck); *Praxis* (1978; Tuumba); *Love Songs* (1981; Pod).

## I. WRITING & LANGUAGE AS REPRESENTATION

This will be a little perfunctory. Conventional literature (the novel as exemplar): *'Reads like fiction'*  
. Writing as a direct window on the world, as it exists, already. *Flashlight recruit ocular proof of*  
. *You want a view . I got a philosophy about things .* Writing refers to that world. It represents it. It describes and captures the happenings that traverse it. It pictures, it reproduces, echoes, imitates, it lays it out in a documentary (a tabular art). *Words nouns acts lens . optical decoy .* The goal is clarity, transparency; the medium should go away, leave no trace. 'The composition of **Sentimental Education** is indeed of such a high order that it seems non-existent.' Positivism — what the world would be like for this to fit.

The units that such writing uses (words, sentences, etc.) yield this paradigm, this characterization of the medium, as their horizon. *The king of thing . external sentries/ turkey truth .* Units are haloed by the things to which they seem to point. *speech / nomination .* And uncontested election. *picture / persuasion's / physical / promises / names / name / never / outside/ one / other's / often / order / ground .* A pointing paradigm. *that substitutability . Once submerging for surrogates .* But pointing is a subjugation. *[enough more there Inviting things]* . Units are either directly subjugated as they point to things (note the facticity in **that** word), or else the medium of language is subjugated in its entirety by that world of things. *Prose means world* — i.e., established world, suffocation.

If language is placed in a dependent relationship, then the nature of communication is affected. What is communicated? — something preconstituted, prepackaged, as if already understood, laid out for consumption by the neutral tables of clarity. The external world is given a secure identity that precedes this mediation. *I think it needs reporting .* So communication might not involve active signifying. That work is subordinated, transitive. Reality overwhelms it. Instead — *outside world on its terms .* If the medium can attain this transparency, the contents of a preexisting world (already organized into a commodity form) can be exchanged without barriers. A laissez-faire order, presided over by the invisible hand of language (as if it were hegemonic Great Britain in the nineteenth century).

Signifying is not ascribed the privilege of constituting the social world. It is subsidiary; it is a subsidiary. A *dramatization .* The world is already constituted, and that is that. Not **this**, but **that** . Words do not seem material, neither does the larger structure they fit into. *TRANSPARENT .*

A dematerialization, a vaporizing. *vaporizing is all directed .* Denotation is self-cancellation. The mediation of the medium is an encumbrance. In this view, someone would almost prefer that it vanish to make way for messages and their direct reception. *or rigid conventionality .* If language is generated out of conventions, those conventions are simply tactics. They are methods

of allowing a reproduction of the world. They do not cause problems. They are not material. They are naturalistic. *world / clear the crystals* .

They live in the same ghostly idealism, the same lack of substance and autonomy that creates efficiency (which conservative ideologues regard as the hallmark of modernization).

The function of writing as representation and the commitment to a transparent medium: these two things spiral back and forth, each one setting a trajectory for the other. *i wish i were facts / the invisibility of behemoth / ... this is purification* . Writing would be instrumental. Its units: *tools* .

*need to be equipped with special tools* . *unfevered tools* . The medium only delivers — part of a mode of circulation rather than of production. It consents to illusionism. *Words to that effect!*

If writing as an art activity is reduced to this, what are the political implications — the politics of this, and I don't mean literary politics: *an explanation of the social world* . Almost an ideal type *of bourgeois sentimentality*, of what it means to take things for granted, to subsist on the surface, *as idle spectators*, to embrace boundaries with open arms. *Pragmatic illusions* .

*are only us followers* . The fetish — *coagulates* . To deprive history and interaction and production of their creativity — *double occultation of* .

*language or thought?* To blank out in the face of evidence. The future of an illusion. Writing as ceremonial fetishizing.

*Dictation Dictation Dictation* . To attempt to reproduce a world fairly (as in 'equality of opportunity') on a point by point basis. *deceptions of justice* . *Molding Lit* . A complacent literature, one which lulls, by mimesis, imitation — *textualize whatever implication that decoration plays around* to reinforce the sinews and consequences of the social world — its facticity, its thickness, its naturalness, its obviousness, its massiveness, its resistance to change. Another subordination, where writing gets out of the way in order to reveal, to reduce, to miniaturize. With its comforting genres.

*It seems entirely possible to me right now that I will never again write little poems.*

The world as the basis, and writing becomes an activity largely determined in its coordinates by the coordinates of that world, as it is. A mere superstructure. A splendid reductionism. And this has affinities with positivism, in both its conservative and radical strains. The world as base. On the Left, isn't this close to an aesthetic of socialist realism — like one relatable to the political practice of orthodox Marxism of the Second International. *Recruiting us as new Young Hegelians* . A picture theory of mental activity, parallel to a similar way of theorizing about the tasks of political practice. A self-sufficient world, operating according to its own laws, is no longer stable; the conservative utopians of the market are mistaken, having failed to see its internal contradictions. It tends toward a cataclysmic breakdown. The role of politics — to sit tight and wait. In the meantime: reformism. An immobilizing passivity, complacency, faith in the self-constituting nature of the

material world (a social world which gives short shrift to active politics — consciousness, writing, etc. — as a basic feature. *to remain too dependent on unexpected patternings of things referred to / (fuck epistemology) / we don't care about anyway* . Writing as documentary. Writing as recording. Naturalism.

*The examples are endless but one does not need them.*

## II. LANGUAGE AS A SYSTEM & A STRUCTURALIST ANTI-SYSTEM POETICS

*Words / were / what / were / whole / what / wasted / words / want / waiting / Whose* . *More than a prop* . *the words fit awkwardly into the context* .

This paradigm of language as a medium of representation, or pointing, is open to challenge. Most notably, a structuralist view of language can challenge it, setting out a number of assertions in boldface that need to be assimilated. *Do filter something words before filtering mean?* Language ceases to accept its subordinate role in a program of writing taken as representation, invisible ink. *Unnaming* . The medium is no longer a stand-in for 'the world' but the mechanism by which we thought the world was being represented. *and the containers always the containers* . *ocular proof abandon* . Not language as a neutral collection of discrete (and discreet) pointers, each with its own relationship to some 'pointee'. *Copies a copy* .

Instead: language as a relatively autonomous system.

*Look at language* . If language as medium forms this system, then the intrinsic or distinguishing features of writing as an art form derive from the structure of **the sign**. *an abstract volition / now call 'semiotic'. sign emphasis begins* . Saussure, and then everybody else. The division of the sign (and therefore of signification) into a signifier and a signified. Signifier = material form. Signified = concept, mental image. *(the inadequation of signified @ signifier)* . *the disaggregation* . *Apart / meant* . The sign is a *binary promise* and forms a system that allows for signification by setting up its own grid of distinctions. *Everything is related to everything else* . *everything signifies everything* . Not a relationship of word / referent. *which one must a sign oppose with the utmost determination* . *as graced the disguise ... its binary. d-d-d-dialectic. A matter of cataloguing misrepresentations* . The intervening system is made up of a pattern of signifieds — concepts, occurrences in the mind — to which the material signifiers of language are connected. *Praxis splinting as not / thus get their necks broken* . Signs are held at a distance from the referents. **Mediation.**

*acknowledges the vacuum* . *Words all oomph* . In this view, individual signifiers have no natural relationship to individual signifieds or mental imagery, and certainly not to individual referents. *paren not colon*

*compel sign univocal paren* . *a passing forth as out of antiqued rhetoric* . The matter of words does not dissolve into reference; reference is not a solvent, not a solution. *A*

*governability of text* which is more autonomous: it is as if there were nothing beyond it, correcting it. All these relationships are conventional, guided by social norms. Arbitrary relationships. The independence of material form is emphasized. The relative autonomy of the signifier in a structuralist theory of language parallels the relative autonomy of the state in a structuralist theory of capitalist political economy.

*Throttle blank / showmanship of* , In this medium as language as sign system, signifying is an active process. *forked tribulation not like roving 'Y is superstructure to base X'* . But it occurs negatively. Terms signify by being differentiated from all the other terms in the system, by opposing themselves to other terms *in the way of difference that could serve — complicatedly* .

So, signification is systematic production, a relational system. *rules*  
*(the differential world)* *ampersand* *physicality* . It is not intrinsic; it is not individualistic, point by point. *only transpose — intact, loneliness, a hint of positionism — waits, speaks through us, regroup* . It is not transparent. Even if it seems like the presence of individual terms is erased, behind it you see the coordinates of a sign system — *accumulation as motive* — operating through minute difference. *Palace starship coded dextrous thought crimes* . *Next is empire and thinking* .

*no location in a person* . *Individualism as absence* . And the subject is constructed within this system of language *I / instructions. captured by desire* . *Festoons self over jitter declarative mincemeat star vehicle* .

*game declaims subjectivity* . *Private riches are emotion* ... *Proceduralism* . *Theoretical anti-humanism represents an extreme of idealist structuralist reductionism* . *Unfold to us blowers-up didn't happen / To be the little disturbance. windowless* ... *hollowed-out* ... *jig-sawed bulldozed* ... *dislocated* ... *fluid* ... *feverish* .

Representation is troubled by this intervening system, this pronounced stress on an all-encompassing relation-ism, on the mutual impingement of all by all. *belie ever happen broken / written structure are the last* . *the desperations of independence / the letters that move* . It loses its innocence. What does writing practice look like, having come this far in its understanding?

One radical variant of respect for this way of characterizing the medium would be a poetics of subversion. *Nomenclature* ... */ dishevel* . *Tumult verbal* . *secular violation . elated with the thought of transgression* .

The system of oppositions could itself be opposed. *uses bad language / anarchy otherwise* . *non-signs* . To oppose the structural underpinnings by an anti-systemic detonation — *dizzying elasticize* ... *by flashes* ... *nonsigns* ... *scrambled* — by a blowing up of all settled relations. sentence can *dislocate* . *mangled matter* . So that the relational system that seems to underlie the very possibility of signifying would be exploded. *Internally collapse* . Banners are raised against reference. Reference is to be obliterated, diminished, forgotten. The very structure of the sign is



violated, deliberately, liberating energy flows trapped within this system of relations. The signifieds are set loose, or recede even more into the background of the literary or artistic event. Signifiers assume greater autonomy. A Jacobinism. If production is what systems do, then subversion is an anti-production. *Capital flight* . An opacity, a lack of utility, a spillage, a dissemination, an overt 'experimentalism' (to choose an appropriate and negatively charged term).

'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 meanings, of certain predetermined kinds). So to call for a heightening of these deterritorializing tendencies may risk a more **homogenizing** meaninglessness (& one requiring even more coercive props) — an 'easy rider' on the flood tide of Capital.'

The problems with such a defiant (an often reflexive) experimentalism are pressing. The social agenda is still being set elsewhere. These problems suggest the importance of finding a third paradigm, a third way of characterizing the medium of language, a third mode of practice — even if only a few things can be said about it at this point. There is no fully formulated program.

### III. WRITING, MEANING, SOCIETY, VALUE, THE BODY

*Meaning what? Is not deductive. Systems — AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION OF REALITY. But all the verbalizing in the world bounces back .*

It can be 'a relay constantly making contexts out of a fabric of markings: writing & reading.'  
*Frame is voluptuous . Or is it that a private transaction?*

No, meaning is social. *Enter as public figure . Context as social material, the arrangement of signifieds — and more than that! to constantly distract as demonstration miniaturize discretion for thoughts to recover the same frequency that leads in inheriting most of what herself .. .*

Yet the lines are drawn, the contexts are largely prefabricated. This needs to be explained.  
*Rulers draw lines . Mockery of 'social change' . Catechize world . Law jettisons / regression , Shrinks 'the theatre of meaning — lay down a law, a lie, a line, a grammar, a code, illusion.'*  
*Facts verdict ... / distorting remorseful rough enforcement / For consolation .*

*foolish pitch in a book pent dogged double comes deviant . Next is thinking monitors . spasmodic placing of semiotic hands all over body .*

*the supplanting .* Circuits evaporate concealment on the basis of the all-pervasiveness of Capital. The concealment is private, but the circuits are social and carry with them not only the

binary promise of signification but the pinioning of interpretation and social importance. *Quickly commodity the gloss to warn of / The unsayable* .

Some thoughts are programmed in — almost a neurophysiological program — others out. Why? *the more diagrammatic the fact / that wish of // ..* .

*afterward bias* . *Prosody pix / permit sudden impoverish mental every-day suck thru / force top untrue circumstance* . *Once the delusion's well ingrained, the rest can come after* . *myth or reality? Meaning myth.*

*consistencies quieting* . *will represent, beyond the opaque body* . *on condition that no body presents itself* . *Disembodied* . Not just superstructure, *less superstructure* . *While society / stutters in the prompter's box* .

Capitalism (the civilization of capital) — *suture/ existing social system* .  
*new forms of capitalist mode of production / contradictory nature of class relations as be baba luba root of crisis / affecting ... authoritative economy* .

*our motto is cash* . *as expressions of class interest* . *to live in market absorbed* .  
*wage-labor intend regret / socializing socialization manifest* .

*Elite and mass: it is not crap; it is a true story* . *A mass distributes itself unevenly into classes* .  
READING CAPITAL

Yet what else?, society as a whole, a totality, a network of norms. *Signal erect money* — is inconclusive. *Towards the partiality of a political economy of a* . *know what code costs* . *Unit Costs* . *purpose / and conformative keys / i don't think that* . *market assured disordered taboo mentals* .

*beget institutions / the institutions / believability* . *organize the normative ..* . */ say a code / social hieroglyphic* . *the enabling rules for success* . Norms & Rules = the result (of society being organized the way it is) — and let's have some eventual detail on this.

*A vast network of pipes to a proper stylization* . *For orders is orders* .  
*Plenty rule against ghost grammar* . *Memorize the lesson* . *meaning excessively performance* . *It becomes a learning? Governance.* *the shape which equilibrium imposed on it* . *malignment.* *Good reflexes* .

*privilege puppet* . How? The task: we need to comprehend the way these norms are articulated — *midnight of money preliminaries learn any society freezing tame to delineations anomaly.* *a morselization of* . *did turn out to be bottomless, conservative.*

Norms *pose disciplines* . Discipline, based on norms, which can be traced back to a *social spoliation* — *exploit the proletariat* in which we are all included. Norms can be traced forward also, so that we find an elaborate technology of normalization, a *policing overview* that sets the outer framework in which a process of signification is constituted or eschewed. And more than that. *Is anything happening to your body?* For the self and the mind are socially constructed — *miniature*

*picturing grammar ourselves* — not only by a linguistic system but by a society's domination and organization of experience. *you are determined to / is merely an elaboration of* . the comforting illusions of will, and of linguistic willfulness. Meanwhile:

*Management* . *Surveillance* . *You got to / enforce devotion* . *Error-less extinction of puny responses* . *Pause to reflect on prevalence of U.S.-supported tyranny in Third World* (for certainly the world political economy also takes the shape of a **correctional** institution, of a disciplinary society, a social grammar). *Prophylaxis* . *unnecessarily / I take to be normalized / a hospitalled repentance / lunatic* . *but there remain stubborn cod rhythms (it has its climate) and code victims, ones who go for broke* .

*Deliberate irreversible damaging of an individual's brain / for the purpose of altering behavior that others / have deemed undesirable* . *Embossed him the great interrelated skin* — as if experiences and signifieds create an overall skin, *norms insensate*, conventions as a kind of torture — *circuitry / am tied up* . *Even attacks your body and speech* .

The nominalization is a *body language* . *to find catchwords, limbs* .  
*body is shaped* . *to our obedience / in our bodies* . *quantify // change body* .  
*ghosted* ... / *obedience / not the overall cure for survival* . This discipline makes bodies pliable, even transparent — **corrections** — *Panopticism* . *to saw criminal transparency* . *solution of the puppets* . *You have to work your body lattice of semantice whisk off / Lines eviscerate by their sensitivity to terminology* .. *inhabits of desire* . And those minutest desires, those fragrances of self, those gestures puffed with pride, are created by code. *It is not producing by which we are disquieted, no rather by the control* . In core countries, the disturbances to our conscious desires do not stem simply from the degree of exploitation or the distribution of the material benefits derived from the accumulation of surplus capital. It's the **control**, the subtle degrees of **power** by which all of our actions are calibrated in the normalizing vise of a social order (which can be national & political, or global & economic). Our bodies are *compradorial* .

#### PRAXIS: *body / language / counterfactual*

The critique of power — in society and in writing — must acknowledge how insinuating this pattern of domination actually is, while confronting it.

*How much easier is / colonialism than learning from the oppressor / studying with the oppressor* . *Don't sit on the social safety valve* . *question authority* . *the defender of private property, the defender of capitalist civilization* . So, the need for writing to defamiliarize. **VOLATILIZING** .

*To demythologize* . **Ideologiekritik** *factoid* . *value displacement* .

*not positivism dreamwork . amamnesia . Reporting seems like surveillance . Yet it can be problematicized . Our obedience is immeasurable . Society dance. Yet: nuisance .. . roiled .. . crux . Unison diehard meaning/ .. . however house of cards . To politicize.*

**Invention** might be considered an exemplary constitutive practice. *I mean made new . in praxis petrifies heart imagine . rebellion or revolution?* At least enhance the participatory quality of writing as a constitutive act (and not only a blandly 'communicative' or 'expressive' act, for too often what is 'expressed' and 'communicated' is not the *doer position* but a previous social construction, of more and more dubious value. *i.e . it's our turn to take part in this! / wonder at our forbearance . We want to be hammers / not anvils . Swim word / Zigzag .. . / Sublimate / hammer settle / oppose / ... rule // Enough / expectation . better change the concentration of the unexpected . & like formation perfunctory peripheral / form constitution . That is a way of particularizing, making use of what we can find, decontextualized — not as deviant enough .*

And not just a grandstanding 'advanced' formalism with only negative demonstrations to offer or simply prideful of its various rejections of congealed literary tradition (though that can, admittedly, be a breath of fresh, crisp air). Showing how meaning germinates, how it diverges from the way the norms **rob substance** while depositing a web of requirements. *Just the experience imparted of placing a phrase exactly between its two possible & contradictory denotations . wish-fulfillment thinking ineligible messages . avails music of all sorts . Break this rule . giddy conduct lattice / Ready to pop transparency . the several elaborate elective mutism in norms are reduced . a quake of meaning . (but specific difference) . sooted on associates ... ampersand analysis . Taming it down, Foucault, Baran gums choose rectitude* (specifies a context where 'Paul Baran' and 'Michel Foucault' could intelligibly be equally familiar) — an invention but at the same time a **weighting** of meaning — a **gauging** of the constitution — this would be a real discourse! *Pacing is entirely dependent on going in & out of referential focus in different ways & not just on physical or non-referential structuring . Otherwise, even with the various speeds of connection, more grammar faster, what would result? Only structure & rough approximations of the 'privileged reading' — approximations based on cultural consensus — As if no word able quotidien up outer / power influence authority . But writing actually sharpens that consensus.*

Not a production so much as a constitution of desires — and 'desire', that all-purpose fashionable term. Not a representation, but an articulation **of** and **on** the body. *USE . Value,* to put it differently, is what is at stake — not merely the self-enclosed world of signification or the gentrified lines of aesthetic heritage. *Who cannot appreciative disembodied . use and exchange . Sense saves another curtainless / Value would dissolve itself exactly . (use-value) . Extensions are necessary. who takes them off the page . How to obtain foliation . disbelief in possible regimental gratefulness . introduction to reception aesthetics . with a fan-like .*

And reception is by bodies.

## CONSTITUTION

Poetry is an art of constitution. Not only plastic 'composition'. But not a graceful maneuvering of representations or descriptions or stories or denotations, all of which teeter precariously on the brink of the fetish. **Politics** is a ceaseless process of constitution. Not the all-or-nothing eschatology of exploitation or its absence. Overt conflict does not make up the entire field. There are constant compromises and acquiescences and almost chemical mixtures and coalitions that lead to different forms of **hegemony**. And hegemony is not ideology, not only a system of thoughts somehow existing independently of their material container. It is more like a **policy** — a policy over the body. Socialization. Politics as the fight for **norms**, over the body. Writing is thus brought close to politics, by the parallel of similar commitments and similar weight. *Varied Body Return To Reality. Limit to calm body. with body the body. body of body says. Some part of his body .*

A politicization, *by active reconstitution of value* (by which I want to imply something that includes meaning but also goes beyond it in its definitional reach). *the legitimacy / a re-feudalization . Use of negative sanctions as measure of deficits in legitimacy .* So: organize lives in whatever ways are required for the form of organization to have a felt legitimacy, a lack of coerciveness, the ability to be justified in some ideal speech or discourse situation. And, obviously, that requires us to challenge present modes and to create new ones. Our relationship to 'cultural' or 'community' codes and value is as constitutive as our relationship to the political institutions and apparatus and agency of a formal democracy (and look how many people are willing to identify only **that** with politics). *Bodies Wild objects*

*INDEGENIZATION incorrigible at a body dispel pain / frame of the skin body / abstention diminish / Propaganda crosshatch*

*That is to say .. . mercantile .* A socialism, or a mercantilism of the body. Not the **socialized** liberalism of the body constituted by late capitalism. But an active politics and politicization of value, of the body — in the sense that you refuse to allow either the active construction of value or meaning and the body to become, simply, objects of administration by late capitalism. A desire to reclaim certain arenas of contestation. Thus, a politics of writing is a politics of the body is a politics of value and meaning. Mind is part of the body. Experiences take place **on** the body. The terms are inexact.

*like really roles ... / amputate institution briefly at hypothetical exception . Parallel interest in concealment . and taking the hint / instinctive polity / anarchy . In other words, risk-taking, rather than / deviation .*

*Party dreg / to ponder meaningful actions not integrated into barnyard of / do yat do yow strokatations . Feuding references, fading reflexes . Some / people are sick from the anaesthetic . Deschooling .. . tattooed off shaking in convince dreamer plan generator white-plastered tight toy*

*forge claimants* . *What is normal human behavior* I I *disruptive formula* . *How to revamp & revitalize the way you live* . *But antipathy toward such repetition — as bourgeois individuals? All good things needn't come to an end* . *I'm a multinational* .

Not simply **Capitalpolitik** as the target, but disciplinary society as a whole and let's not spend all our time focusing on the origins of control (in a mode of commodity production for the market, or the accumulation process, or etc.). *Gramsci* . *the quotidian / Marxism* . *Deaccumulationist demagogues* . A structuralist view of language (and a view that enshrines this system of language as the medium of writing) may leave us too insistent on valorizing the signifiers. And the radical praxis that stems from this structuralist conception is one of linguistic subversion, disrupting the signifiers, keeping them even more separable than usual from the signifieds to which they are most often arbitrarily joined. The prescription (practice) follows from the explanation (theory). This also parallels a view in which **power** is restrictive. Power would seem to be localized in a political apparatus, and **this** would have to be the target of attack. As if signifiers were the political system; 'smash the state'.

But, really, power is not so restrictive. It **produces** and orchestrates signifieds. It is not localized in any one institutional apparatus. It is a flexible technology of normalization (as well as exploitation), acting directly on value/meaning, and therefore on the body. A social body that goes beyond semiotics. A radical writing must get some distance on the sign, to avoid being trapped in a reflexive (and exhausting and exhaustive and didactic and 'experimental') opposition **to** the sign and its structure. '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 ... 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.' This is not a brief for backtracking into a naturalism or socialist realism, replacing one representation with another (ignoring the system of language and placing faith in reductionism). But neither is it cause for a vanguardism of attacking the state or storming the sign system. The parts of the sign are interlaced; so are the realms of experience and activity which the awkward terminology of the sign is supposed to reveal.

*Renounce privileged signals* . There are no privileged sites. *the betrothal of human parts* . *Likelihood? Pricking the gown I weep then at facts and am amazed* .