

# SELECTED CRITICISM

JEFFREY JULLICH

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Selected Criticism  
Jeffrey Jullich

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**Aaron Shurin: *The Paradise of Forms: Selected Poems***

In his introduction to the ground-breaking Language Poetry anthology *In the American Tree*, editor Ron Silliman names the names of the many *excluded* from the anthology ("A volume of absolutely comparable worth could be constructed"), a long list of those omitted which includes: Robert Glück, Bruce Boone, Gerrit Lansing, Douglas Messerli, Leland Hickman, Dennis Cooper, Tim Dlugos, and Aaron Shurin. All gay men.

In accordance with the "hermeneutic of suspicion", and in the spirit of gay paranoia (my own), it might be worth asking, these thirteen years after that defining "moment in writing", whether the exclusion of gay males was only seemingly systematic, or if there was some intrinsic feature to their writing, if not their life styles, that warranted exclusion. Characteristic features of the then new "Language Poetry" which Silliman identifies were: a preference for text over speech; non-referentiality, or an abjuration of normative syntax; and a non-ego/persona-based psychology. One might ask whether an innovative poetry that is also gay poetry *could* be written absent of ego psychology, since so-called identity politics, rooted in the ego of real self, is a necessary determinant of being gay; and, similarly, whether a (gay) community with only the rudiments of an indigenous literature (however prolific those titles may or may not have been by 1986) has an identifying corpus to call upon *besides* speech or the "oral tradition" of its street life, even by way of resistance.

Aaron Shurin, whose career since 1980 is revisited in a Selected Poems, *The Paradise of Forms*, has spent those two decades in part negotiating between the possibilities of a gay "experimental" poetry and the strictures of a sort of "Language Poetry", inasmuch as he, more than some of the other poets mentioned, maintained a stronger allegiance to the aesthetic of a non-normative or disjunctive syntax. That dialectic has both motivated his writing, and incidentally converted it into a critique of "Language poetries", *malgre lui*. The tension at times has taken his poetry into an outer fringe where the asyntactical meets convention (love poetry), and at other moments surrendered it to a now-you-see-it/now-you-don't erotica.

Leonard Schwarz's introduction to his own as it were "anti"-Language Poetry anthology, *Primary Trouble*, has identified *pleasure* as a theme omitted by the occasionally Spartan agitprop of that indispensably significant movement: "To call it a new eroticism would also be reductive, but surely this poetry has an ample category for pleasure, a category absent . . . in language poetry: this poetry sees sexuality as a crucial nexus between the body and the world" (p. 3). And Shurin rarely scrimps on an unashamed indulgence in pleasure — "submission, the rapture of falling", "the mouth makes me fainting from exultation and relief", "from the birth of deliciousness, plant of you", "I marveled about the ecstasy music could create in me" — a sense of excess that often runs overboard (saccharine?) onto the palate — "yet sweet and deep, figures of delight drawn after you", "the sweet smell of psyche", "many other ferocious sweet things". He is compelled by this sub-plot of his to keep the verse open to beauty, if only a fleeting glance of beauty

inter-cut with a montage of other elements. And sometimes, since modernism is too expressionistic and post-modernism too ironic to look on beauty bare, that means recourse to a hothouse language of florid sentimentality ("shower of petals", "they rain down their multi-foliolate petals"). He dares, for example, to re-admit into his mix of tropes that quintessentially poetical of symbols, the rose itself — "and for a rose a picture of the smell of a rose", "the itchy green that hugs the yellow rose petal", "the cattle are feeding off drowned roses", "her open mouth released her beside the malodorous roses" — but none of them are red.

The construction of a language suited to desire and eros forces a motion one step forward, three steps backward, in the age of Desiring Machines, since our contemporary scene runs short on any authentic *canzone d'amore*: with love poetry, there is a continual, necessary retrieval and rehabilitation of earlier poetries; and Shurin carries out that transhistorical pillage-work not by anachronism, but through occasional echoes, allusion or parody, and by mining the dominant genres that now legislate desire. As early as his second book, he calls up a Shakespeare whom he has more recently returned to in his *Involuntary Lyrics*, with innuendo. Shurin: "there the tantrum throws go I"; Shakespeare: "Where the bee sucks, there suck I". Elsewhere in the same book, *The Graces*, it is "The Jabberwocky": "the jaws that ache, the ache that claws, the claws that grab", as if struggling to retrieve from faulty memory how the poem actually goes ("the jaws that bite, the claws that catch"). And sometimes it is the simpler form of *pun*, as in his "rasp of medusa", from the title of Gericault's painting, "The Raft of the Medusa" (a painting, to be sure, with more than its share of bare male back muscle and frontal nudity, doubly meaningful in its masses condemned to shipwreck during our age of AIDS). This device, one that Shurin soon enough abandons with a healthy nonchalance, nonetheless underscores an earlier mode of gay literariness that engineers so much writing, a "closet" trope, as it were, where one text (the original) is partially concealed/partially revealed beneath the screen of another (the allusion), just as the reality of a gay identity must often be suspected, suggested, and glimpsed through layers.

Likewise, it is in this *Selected Poems*' earliest examples that Shurin resorts to a "symbolic" apparatus of phallicisms, snakes, and so on: "Taking the snake between your teeth and / biting through / into the fleshmeat of desire", "A snake bites his tail, the venom circuits" (note the static-y interference of other, more troubling sexualities which this repression of symbolism hatches: the sadistic twinge of biting), "a rocket rammed with a personal hand", "every usher is a heirophant with a big wand" (sic, with the tellingly Freudian slip-of-the-typewriter-key misspelling). Or, desire could be transferred onto a symbolic agency of other mammals and elements in the landscape: "dolphins kiss under the nipples wave", "The pink sun undressed over your eyes". (This eroticized herpetology can still recur, in spite of himself, four and five books into the volume: "' . . . never sleeps' awake to tempt the serpent", "tongue in the mud is a lover screaming for a serpent".) All the same, when the circuitry is working — this book is more psychologically *oral* than phallic — he can strike an almost Biblical poetry: "I gulped coal and raised the hall to ferment" (an angel laid a live coal on the mouth of the prophet Isaiah). This shift of energy off of the phallic and onto the oral or elsewhere may be a conscientiousness on his part to avoid the *patriarchal* implications of the phallus, as an

instance of unguardedly plain prosaicism makes clear: "What are your parents like?" "I don't know. My father has a prick." That hierarchy (or *heirarchy*) which would, in the hands of another writer, in the hands of most, give way to the undertow of the patriarchal, he makes a point of crowning the wrong head with: "an old woman with red cheeks drinking soup repeated the words 'I'm the king.'"

At the other end of the spectrum, where Aaron early on struggled to throw off a dissonant symbolism, likewise the total lack of repression (one might still call it a *de-sublimated* repression) which the explicitly graphic might seem to offer can run aground into the facile: "The tree is a dick". Still, even then, he has the artistry to salvage bluntness by fudging a slightly askew syntax or endearing clumsiness in the deployment of a preposition: "Come --- this'll serve as a bed --- fuck my ass into my mouth". That register, the timbre of the obviously four-lettered, Shurin has the good sense to confine mainly to a single parody of gay pornography which, in "The Third Floor", can be quite entertaining:

The instrument pulled, sipped it slow, he said "Are we a couple of guys?" He jammed a thick one into his whole face. // . . . "Take it." With a sidelong look thick sobs . . . He formed a wadded mass, flared, almost nodded . . . a husky voice got him at last. "Don't take it too big." // . . . Dave bent down and touched the sticky place shocked and stiff . . . "Yeah," he said softly, foamy against the corner. . . .

A poetry of desire must find its grounding in some matrix of *the body* (duh), and that body must be delineated in terms of organs, some organs and not others. If Talisman House, the publishers had not used an antiquarian etching of a wreathed architectural filigree as the cover illustration, it might have appropriately used *A L'Heure de l'Observatoire*, the well-known Man Ray painting of a cloudy sky filled with an enormous pair of surreal, red lips. The Shurin body is so much a nexus of mouth that at times there seems little else but: "Am I a moist lip", "with moist lips filling the screen / & that is all", "a moody business of thick lips and moans take place", "HIS SONG, FEED IT BACK TO HIS LIPS", "to make the taker have bliss, all the world are nothing like lips", --- until it seems as if every poem --- "put your lips back, new husband, . . . upon mine, lips, I permit your throbs", "I hung on his lips, I was the speaker", "His gaze softened his lips into flourishes", "white teeth over his lips, alone in the house", "He glued his lips to an air of resignation", "35 millimeter lips". But lips, after all, are not only the organ of the kiss and the gateway to fellatio; they are the instruments of speech, and the poem read aloud.

This reiterated imagery of the bodily serves a second purpose of *textuality* in addition to sexuality. Once a literature like Language Poetry has moved off into the realm of broken syntax, shards of sentences, discontinuous phrases, and shattered grammar, the fragmentary threatens to overtake the reading with a risk of the cubistically inhuman; where some skeptical readers put all the disjunction aside with a shrug as "boring," there is a deeper danger they escape: despite our Modernism, it is only natural to long after a feeling of *wholeness*. In the absence of a syntactical wholeness, it may be psychologically necessary for the author (and reader) to displace that superstitious wholeness somewhere:

some Language Poetry may relocate it to the peripheral, imagined *insurrectionist* consequences of the writing, in the spectre of its implied heroic revolutionary. And Shurin repositions that anxiety against its antipode, in the traditional site of that classical longing for wholeness: the body. The body, and its business of desire, here supply a stable touchstone as haven from the discomfiting stylistics of the fragment. These parameters, the body as both end-all and starting point which can lie outside the silent movie flicker of poetic discontinuity, are, I think, Shurin's discovery and contribution to the genre. He has found that the printed page has *two* inescapable margins, one in the white space around the edge of the text, and one in the pair of hands *that hold the book* and inevitably get in the way of a detached or intellectualizing reading, the body that he calls "opaque body."

There are indications that Shurin might have liked it better — "prematurely hiding under unrelated events", "Something has spoken to me that cannot be deciphered", "I thought of her dance without meaning" — if his poetry were more difficult to understand. Certainly, obscurity has become a substitute for beauty in most sophisticated poetry. But his keen intuition has outwitted his post-modernity, and the poet in him has found a way of outdistancing the "experimentalist." He has slipped through his own fingers, as it were, in a way that is more convincing than some dogmatic "The subject does not exist" ideology: "beneath your clothing I have escaped from me." In the end, even the homosexuality dissolves passionately away from self-expression or any trace of confessionalism, and it all, his great theme, his *idée fixe*, might as well have been myth or legend or parable: "I walk in the *fable* of a man" (my emphasis). Simply fabulous. He could have been using talking animals, not men, to bring off his Aesopian moral.

## Standard Schaefer: *Nova*

A stem cell from the fertilized embryo of a clone has replicated and spawned and given birth to a book of poetry: *Nova*, by Standard Schaefer.

Aristotle and the pre-scientific world used to believe in "spontaneous generation," that mosquitoes literally sprang up out of swamps, etc. Schaefer has tilled a Petri dish where meanings and images and story lines spring up *ex nihilo* out of the swirling concatenations of words he rubs together for flint sparks.

The book intertwines several epic-scale themes; one of them is the science of sub-atomic particles. Quarks and mesons, infamous for their paradoxical, seemingly impossible movement (they pass through each other, can be in two places at once), are the active metaphor for what avant-garde, experimental language does. And there are eggs, and ovals, and circles, and--

The science has a *Popular Science* feel to it sometimes, but that at least is not a remedial "Physics for Poets" credulity, and it is far from cold or dispassionate. Where another remarkable first book like Eleni Sikelianos's *First Worlds*, which also uses science as a main theme, can wax mythic in imagining a magnificent, primal Big Bang, or romanticized tectonic plate shifts--consequently a sort of naïve acquiescence to the P.R. the science industry is sending off about its heroic discoveries--Schaefer's scrambling of scientific vocabulary flattens its aggressive proselytizations in a way that leaves its packaging vulnerable to a healthy skepticism.

I read one main *Nova* story-line, carried across poems of different stylistic method. The poetry is butch, chock-a-block with boys' stuff, guy talk ("the fist extending to darken the page," "the sting of silver nitrate then swallowed up in cowboy boots", "I sleep in my boots", "Nothing covers the scent of jism on your fingers like armed conflict or sympathy for the working man"). There is a father figure who is dimly glimpsed in the book's more ostensibly autobiographical opening series, "Fort" ("a shadow in a doorway like his father's back / but it was only a guess in his pajamas", "he reached for the roll of fifties and hundreds / kept in the glove box with the golf balls and pajamas", "sirens on the CB-- and the old man's habit of high beams"), and as the realism recedes, that father becomes gradually "sublimated" or transformed into further and further distillations of male power figures: *el conquistador*, bosses ("My former employer") . . . What's left behind is the vacuum of a shadowy paternal silhouette other things try to fill ("laments he's merely an outline of a blunt mass," "In the male of the species, the memories of the man who was alive chiefly in his memory"). There is something elegiac at first about "Daddy go bye-bye."

In the book's second series, "Ovalness," a God father figure gets mixed up with tough male booziness ("God was not built in a bottle") and is put through *Finegans Wake*-like punning transformations ("Render under Asunder what is Asudder's. Unto Grog what is Grog's"). These are often aimed at The Lord's Prayer ("Our lather who is in curved and

thick space, hollow is the sequential advance echoing through your name"), an easy target that might seem *puerile* or pointlessly blasphemous as anti-religion polemic, but which assumes poignancy when read as struggle with Papa.

The fathers become more and more cartoon-like and comical ("another hilly-billy king whose / context has gone madly insufficient"). He can be as big as Daddy once appeared, a Gulliver from a Lilliputian's eye view ("The tub in the sky where the giants wash their testicles", "the giant has never been extensive, only promiscuous", "bees beat juicy shadows around the nose of the giant") or gnomish. Eventually, the father figure comic strips split and take on funny names, a Shem and Shaum-like, Vladimir and Estragon "general" and "groundskeeper" ("The groundskeeper was imposing, all shoulders and immaculate like a ceiling", "The general claimed to reach it, . . . the Grounds Keeper to whom the pear merely occurred"; they're caught playing their boys' games with balls: "says the General over the pings of the pinball machine", sometimes sparring in debate: "According to the crows, one crow could destroy all of heaven, and according to the General, heaven is immune . . . . The Grounds Keeper maintains both are correct") where winner/loser would only be the *end* of a game enjoyable mainly while it lasts.

In time, these *G*-men (groundskeeper/general/giant) emerge to be yang-and-yang like facets of male identity ("the impossibility of giants and generals in the same room, much less the same man"). And then they start saying things, things that interweave the book's other major themes of science or grammatological parts of speech: "'these black holes I call pronouns are but a blue thread . . . ,'--the Grounds Keeper"). The bigger they are, the harder they fall, and they must come to be undone by their man's work: "The grass eventually devastates the greenskeeper", as if the lawnmower and the thought of all that crabgrass finally did 'im in.

After their defeat, episodic reappearances that developed sequentially, they are replaced: "the Faculty of Theology contradicts the greenskeeper . . . In place of the greenskeeper, a philosopher was sent". The speculative thinker male emerges out of the chromosomal male. But they were never really flesh-and-blood; they were *parahuman* ("A point made by the giant: stress on those days was placed on the parahuman aspect of the orgies").

This search for the disappearing/disappeared father, one of the Great Themes of literature--the *Odyssey*, after all, is the boy Telemachus's search for his father Ulysses--gets Hamlet-like in its spooky apparitions: "fleas so whereas He was once fire-clad now seems surrounded if gradually by ghosts". Indeed, the book opens with a palpable, lugubrious "There's something rotten in Denmark" sickliness: "malaria: bad air / brown wave after brown wave," a sort of *Death in Venice* sirocco. This is poetry written for a sick country.

There is much of the feel of Language Poetry here; indeed, it *is* Language Poetry, *good* Language Poetry. Except maybe not quite Language Poetry. Maybe Lingo Poetry. Or Jargon Poetry. Or Speech Therapy Poetry.

Whereas, for example, many Language Poets announced their intention to make a poetry of *text* and its printedness, a "grammatology" of language as opposed to the spoken, by casting up right to the surface of the poem a flotsam of linguistic terms that normally only refer *to* a text (the word "word", "letter", so on), *Nova's* occasional use of the same material ("Others fear the boards are as thick as a comma", "was it dash marks and vibrating diamonds / caught in the clock", "a dash mark carved through the skull", "the hyphen dividing the autopsies" (sic), "a void between the letters and details of the window") treats these parts of speech and punctuation marks as surrealistically solid, and *emotional*. Jots and tittles turn into similar-shaped things: six-pointed asterisks into six-pointed snowflakes, "snow fell with no style / asterisks grew robust"; a typographic crescent shape into a quarter moon, "an aspirin in parenthesis / the aftermath of ellipsis / moon looming"; an etymology, "a tenth of an asteroid used for an asterisk"). The *textual* is on a plane side-by-side with things of the world.

The newness here is that this masculinity is not a phallic but perhaps rather a *testicular* maleness; not phallic, but "phatic" (another linguistic term, for the "uh-uh" and "yeah, yeah" fillers that keep a conversation going, here coupled with telling markers of maleness, such as measurements of *size* or *shaft*: "a million miles excrete a phatic inch", "shafts of a phatic if transitional species"). Almost lovingly, tenderly: "indentations in the grass / left by poised testicles".

The performance artist and sometimes film-maker Mathew Barney closes one of his *Cremaster* films with a strange shot: some weird, bumpy, infinity sign flesh protuberance fills the entire screen, squeezed through an opening. One realizes: balls. "The End" and closing credits will come down over or after a panoramic close-up of anonymous testicles. In his *Cremaster* opera film, a naked satyr has a Barbi's boyfriend Ken-smooth crotch but unmistakable, makeup-powdered scrotum, that tied to long ribbons at the ends of which are tied doves roosting on his shoulders. At his pantomime signal, the doves break into flight, pulling the ribbons in their wake.

Standard Schaefer is pioneering that same, disturbing, scrotal masculinity. In *Nova*, the ribbons the doves pull are the trails of meaning we're compelled to draw across the text. *Nova's* politicized manhood is to the male what feminism aimed to be to the female, a sort of liberatory explosion of imprisoning gender stereotypes.

There are some marvelous new slogans to put on our protest posters: "Taking off your clothes is not a revolution".

No wonder Nick Piombino was the judge who picked this book as the National Poetry Series winner: Piombino is a psychoanalyst by trade. It isn't often that Id writes a book. The book is strung together with a sort of fuzzy logic that's so fuzzy it's peach-fuzzy or stubbly like an unshaven chin.

I'm the boss here and this is an order. Buy *Nova* and read it . . . before it buys *you*.

[published in *Raintaxi*, Online Edition, Fall 2001]

**Leslie Scalapino: *New Time* (Wesleyan University Press, 1999)**

From darkness to first light, Leslie Scalapino's *New Time* traces a Dark Night of The Soul trajectory, moving from the books opening nocturne, "rim of night (having been in it) which is (in night)," through a final hint of morning in the closing line, "(as:) their dawn is thin blue of one—?" Between the chiaroscuros of those two points, an electrifying arc speeds by: occasional dreams (all troubled), a struggle of imagery, and a running commentary of scrambled, phenomenological speculation.

Fittingly, Scalapino labels one of the book's sections "for Dante" ("this illumines the ghouls. who are the people there only"), and *New Time*, like a loveless *Vita Nuova*, convulses with the claustrophobia of a divine comedy we recognize as our own paranoia, comedic only in its sardonic smirks ("one. making the small is joking./don't even foul up—the small person") and its mocking leers ("implying making fun of me as it is intricate social fabric?"). But *selva oscura* has been replaced with *self obscured* by indeterminacies of post-modernity. And if there is a sign over these gates of hell warning "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here," it is the book's cautionary word, early on page 2, to both critic and hypocritical reader: "interpretative—blue destroying—itself—their—structure in being after only/it's itself interpreting—reordering only." Which is to say, like the title of Bourdieu's book *Language as Symbolic Violence*, that our compulsive interpretive fallacy, the very "destroying" through commentary I am committing now, is here after-the-fact, a redundancy, an unnecessary duplication of labor ("reordering only"). We're given it all: facts, however incredulous they leave us, phantasmagoria, and a theoretical poetics of her own making, however addlepat. Our reflex is to distance ourselves from all this spectacle by interpreting it, but critical detachment amounts to only a self-defense mechanism, a hedge against its realism. A psychoanalyst would discharge "free association" like this as cured.

The simple question the poem raises, "is Dante-in structure?," answers so much. Yes! Yes! How brilliant. That's right! Dante's three-fold cosmology is in its structure, in that concentric, Ptolemaic spiral of his, doubtlessly a perfect objective correlative for the social constriction of his monarchical Italian Renaissance. And our anti-metaphysical "hell," as it were, the fear and turmoil in *New Time*, are co-present in our structures, psychological and literary: collage, disjunction, and non sequitur. Is Scalapino—in structure? But the supreme exception her many books have supplied us with is a structure beyond that commonplace disjunction now so de rigeur in poetry: by repeating words, images into gradual accretions, with unyielding, obsessive continuity, never letting go of a thread once it's started, she shows us the underside of discontinuity and, perhaps, why we so often resort to it, for fear of the iron grip trauma holds on us. Geoffrey Young once called Scalapino's work "shell-shock from reality."

The dedication in those two words, "for Dante", is later re-absorbed directly into the opus, grimly: "this is despair. for Dante. if action of events (my mind) were the same as resting." Similar dedications within the poem, "for Aaron Shurin," "for Alice Notley," may serve to remind us that whatever depth charge of alienation such despair plumbs, and plumb it does to the point of numbness ("what's the anxiety?": as not being in the state of constant change—in which there's no fear"), that contracting horizon of

solipsistic pain is offset by the exoskeletal, extra-textual presence of real others: “for Joanne de Phillips, playing Frank Martin’s *Irish Trio*.” A direct precedent for *New Time*’s ontology of violence (“what’s coming is people attacking as sustaining their being in existence”) can perhaps be found in *Being and Nothingness*, which maps out three vectors for “their being in existence”: Being-In-Itself, Being-For-Self, and Being-For-The-Other. The dedications here are life-savers, rescuing the book from an enervated plunge into autistic Being-In-Itself. They salvage some surrounding penumbra of humanity by holding out the prospect of a tentative engagement with Other, a real Other someplace. But the book’s fragile psychic imbalance implodes dramatically at the borderline between literary and metaphysical: a stylistic avoidance of the autobiographical self topples over into total omission of Being-For-Self. The closest it approaches For-Self is a “black dawn” scene: “black irises hanging in darkness where one sits—so was sewing them; up, at 3:00 a.m., in silence, sewing,—sew silk black irises that are that.” Yet any autonomy, self-sufficiency, or independence that moment might have held out is swallowed up in the hour’s insomniac restlessness (“sleep-deprived one”) and the tic of “sewing”—“sewing”—“sew” repetition.

She uses the word “people” as a pronoun. The human race, such as it is, is seen miniaturized and diminished, be it from overhead (“cubicles, of only city, from high up where people live—separated by a river”), or with little electric lights like embers about to be snuffed (“waking. town-specks in a blackness, that’s barely at the rim”). When things draw in closer and individuals become visible, they’re mutancies seen in overlays. Is that an insect? No, it is a “woman motorcyclist curled as black bumblebee in the blue.” If a door opens, there’s nothing hospitable about it, and those inside come out only to chase away the homeless scavengers (“man dawn in front of whose house recycled bottles are to be picked up by truck—comes out to say to destitute man not to take them”). As always in Scalapino, to the extent that people are human, that’s still mammal, and perilously close to the dumb beasts wandering around unleashed (“the bride’s white billowed dress in the red shooting trees—they’re putting a coat on a huge dog by the bride,” like the pig dressed in baby’s clothes in Alice). (Marjorie Perloff, referring to an earlier work where a woman on a bus has a snout, calls this half-bestial return of the repressed “the uncanny and terrifying substrate of ordinary life,” and conjectures about the low-grade menace lurking everywhere that “her suspicion is merely the emblem of the larger, depersonalized, tooth-and-claw survival of the fittest that characterizes the postmodern metropolis.”) And, as with any subterranean consciousness, there are monsters.

In short, the nays have it, in a realm of non-being. There is no inner life. Interiority is demolished, crushed under the oppression of the objective. The ubiquitous bickering of the populace has been totally interiorized. Everything is agon and combat, sometimes with a slight Keystone Cops edge to it. Even when we dream, Scalapino demonstrates, we are dreaming of an outside world, and usually one of regimented chaos. The inner is thinned down to something as flimsy as a lining.

The astonishing turn-about, though, is that these zigzags do lead to higher ground, or at least a simulacrum of hope. Where the ego is speechless, beleaguered and atrophied (“I—can’t—not—only—so having to give that up”), someone else is required to step in to speak the unbelievable, and the impossible vision appears: “then from another person—. . . I saw a white azalea—yesterday (morning too)—blooming in the

whole space (on rim?),” “I imagined yesterday—the next—the next—the next—is blooming.” Stranger still, flabbergasting, something weird is happening to the trees there: “magnolia buds opened in the blue—can’t pick up or resume the structure in.” But don’t miss the last pages! In that unexpected dawn she’s safeguarded us into, there are winged symbols, black creatures perching in the trees (see *The Norton Anthology’s* “Two Corbies”: “I heard two corbies making a mane”).

Leslie Scalapino has created a new brand of Futurism, where everything is velocity, but there is no tomorrow. We poets should imitate her slightest trope, to steal this golden egg: she could lead us into new spaciousness.

[published in *Rhizome* no. 4, 2000, South Pasadena, CA]

**Cole Swensen: *Try* (University of Iowa Press, 1999)**

Cole Swensen's book *Try* concludes with a prose poem on a documentary video by film-maker Chantal Akerman: "What if she had not put the cellist so separately . . . but had slowly over a ten-minute period brought the music up behind and faded the image . . ." Books of poetry all have half-audible music scores, too (Keats): the background music throughout *Try* wells up so gradually that we have to calm down or we'll miss something. ("You will hear a slight click.") Her elegant poetry re-educates me in how to take my time; the judicious pacing of her contemplative, simple language lowers my blood pressure. Simple language, not in any lack of intricacy, but in its superiority to the facilely decorative. Her vocabulary is close to the truth of Basic English, in that when words such as "prédelle" or "unphalanged" appear, it is a rare ornamentation: her books can be read, bewilderingly, without the prosthesis of a dictionary. She has removed from her textures any inessential obstacles (only essential obstacles here!), and, as such, approaches the mysterious and now rare quality of intimacy. I worry lately if the percussions and jaggedness of all the varied poetry I love haven't dulled my ear, deadened the palate, but in order to cross the panorama span of a Swensen book, I must submit to something restorative, classicist: she teaches me again the lost art of reading poetry. In a way, her poems have a French feeling to them, as though translated out of a measured, more substantial language where words still carry weight.

*Try*, 1998 winner of The Iowa Poetry Prize, is so sensitive that Barnes & Noble sells it sealed in cellophane. Lushly, spaciouly printed (only 49 out of the book's 79 pages contain poetry), *Try* takes a translucence of language and lays it down as if sheets of tracing paper or vellum over a series of Old Master paintings which partially show through, sometimes describing, often contradicting, but always concentrating on a personal gallery of masterpieces, where Swensen, never intruding, serves as precise, digressive, and accurate docent. By my count, a full 34 artworks are encompassed in this guided tour of an all but vestigial sixth sense, the sense of the aesthetic. They range from the familiar (Giotto, Bosch, Rembrandt) to the sophisticated (Bronzino, Joos van Cleve, Bellini) to the high snobbism appeal of erudition (Orcagna, Patet le Pere, Elsheimer); here and there, there is even a modernist (Rodin, a Gauguin fan painted after Cezanne, Albers). Where this leads to is the specialized acuity known as connoisseurship, and the poetry equally refines our capacity to respond. We have to learn to take in subtlety all over again.

Another list: poetry has certainly seen a virtual anthology of ekphrasis, of poems based on paintings, either imaginary and invented (Browning's old chestnut "My Last Duchess," Auden's "Musée"), or real museum pieces (Williams' "Brueghel," Ashbery's "Parmagianino," Clark Coolidge's "Melancholia" print of Durer's). Swensen's innovation may be paintings that are simultaneously both imaginary and real: there is just enough observation, a soupçon, to make us wish for a fully illustrated edition of *Try*, but much reverie and introversion. She grounds post-modernist abstraction in the beautiful.

Between Prologue and Epilogue, the book's nine sections are titled Triad, Trilogy, Triune, Trio, Triptych, Triarchy, Trinity, Trine, but then (slippage!) Triage, so that the book's title, *Try*, would seem to waver at the mutable frontier of sheer vocalic glissade, lest we become too enamored of semantics (like, presumably, the clipped cupids in

Francesco Albani's 1620 "Les Amours Disarmed on Earth": "They are cutting the wings off the angels"). Similarly, three sequential poems are entitled "Cove," "Dove," and "Woven," (note the homophonies) the first beginning, "Covey of night/do convey," poems written by, to be sure, Cole. In Giotto's 1310 (amblyopic?) "Madonna Ognissanti," "The right eye" is "traveling, planned, fled, and/the left fixing forward like a pin"; and that may be the best way to listen to such poetry, with one ear on target, with the other open to fleeting transformations, identities, shifts of discourse.

Several of these Renaissance paintings point back to the episode in the New Testament (used as well as the basis for Susan Howe's poem "Turning") where the Risen Christ cautions Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch," source of the since proverbial Latin tag, *Noli me tangere*, used famously by the Elizabethan poet Wyatt. These repeated mentions of touch, arranged the way the series of gesturing hands in Da Vinci's "Last Supper" hold the composition together, may lend this suite its most humanizing, delicate theme; I quote at length, to luxuriate: "Story One: If you touch/the sky will turn blue"; "She touched the painting/as soon as the guard/turned his back"; "put it/in your pocket; touch it/to return, once, twice"; "touches the way we'd been taught to touch"; "Touch me and you touch the world because color is simple to fall in love with"; "Give me your hands; they are cold to the touch and not one but all". And this subliminal evocation of the tactile, that most realistic of senses, succeeds as counterfoil to the sort of voyeuristic optics a poetry of painting has as its worst pitfalls, especially in light of our 20th century dogma that The Gaze Is Male.

Swensen has written an essay on Anne-Marie Albiach and Susan Howe, reading their books as a multiplication of fractals: she calls it "self-similarity of scale," how one page can contain all the themes of the entire, surrounding book, "in a way that does not advance them and does not depend on an accumulation of what has come before." *Try* is perfecting a literature of fractals, a literal metonymy where the part is fungible, yes, fungible with the whole; thus, Gauguin's fan, which reproduces its own shape in every panel. By focusing on painting after painting, she is reiterating, dozens of times with a steady, masterful power, the same, fractal action. Each phrase here ("one hand, heading toward heaven with a hole in it", "your moth-fingered hands, in your million-fingered hands", "already her hand is reaching and already the fire has reached her") deserves its own bookshelf.

[published *Rhizome* No. 4, 2000, South Pasadena, CA]

**Susan Howe / Susan Bee: *Bed Hangings* (Granary Books)**

Susan Howe's new book happens after dark. It's lit dimly: at best, a reading lamp on a night table. Misspelled nightingales and a rotund, capitalized hoot owl swoop through its elegant midnight:

Evening for the Owl  
spoke wisely and well  
willing to suffer them  
and coming flying night  
from the Carolingian  
mid owl falcon fable . . . .

But the Owl here may not be calling out "Hoo! Hoo!" I think I heard it say "Howe!"

Susan Bee's matching illustration takes the meaning deeper: a winged, female-faced sphinx soars above the stanza, and a bird-footed, feather-tailed human figure hobbles beneath the block of text, pen-and-ink-black images with white inner lines taken from Hellenic pottery drawings, ancient images next to post-modern poetry (in the vein of Nancy Spero's feminist archaeological artworks).

Alright. Let's up the ante on high praise: Susan Howe may be our greatest living American poet. Or, if not our greatest poet, then certainly *among* our greatest poets, but certainly the finest "ear" in contemporary poetry. Or one of the finest ears.

That term, "ear," has dropped out of current critical discourse, turning up only rarely, used loosely in blurbs on the back covers of books. Once, not long ago, the word meant something. It is especially out of fashion and perhaps ill-suited to use for a poet of Howe's allegiances: she came out of a phalanx grouped together as "Language Poets." Their innovation was, ostensibly, to perfect an anti-voice and more "grammatological"-typographical aesthetic based on the written sign, rather than the spoken. This emphasis on text broke with the earlier, "breath"-based doctrines of Charles Olson and the Black Mountain School.

And indeed, Howe is a forerunner instrumental in carrying forward that new approach. She has taken the "grammatological" approach to its limit. Each book of hers, for a page or two, is stamped with an autograph device of hers: flattening pages into a zero-gravity choreography where the lineation is printed akilter at all angles (usually toward the end of the book-length poem). The reader is then forced to tilt the book or hold it upside down to follow the topsy-turvy diagonals and upsydaisies, sometimes squashed word-under-word by narrowing the space between lines.

*Bed Hangings* doesn't tax typesetter or reader with those trademark acrobatics \_except for one, brief over-struck couplet on front and back of the first page, a facsimile of an old manual typewriter's Courier font where we strain to read

Lucifer has winged homeverpst  
To other lands Liberticide

with a sliver of broken letters in between. It's set first one way recto then upside-down verso on the opposite side of the page, like some form of mirror-writing or see-through paper. In fact, the artfulness of the typographical idiosyncrasies that do remain may better be detected by omission: the 41 page, illustrated long poem is left discretely unpaginated (presumably not to interfere with the graphic composition of the Susan Bee designs?).

The *typophiliac* urge is here sublimated to a similar strain in her work: the breakthrough of misspelled, oddly spelled, or neologistic, un-English-like word gnomes:

Nihtegale to the taunt  
Owl a preost be piping  
Overgo al spoke iseon  
sede warme inome nv  
...  
Go he started mid ivi

and, the final words of *Bed Hangings*,

Fleao westerness iseo  
Opertuo go andsware

We cannot tell if we're facing "nonsense" words that she's coining afresh or obsolete, Old English antiquarianisms from before the standardization of spelling. (In an earlier book, Mohegan place names are concatenated side by side with still undeciphered combinations of letters, Howe's 21st century Linear B). James Joyce was also compelled in that direction finally, also in a dream-book (*Finnegans Wake*) of the nocturnal on the same side of consciousness/sleep as Howe's somnambulant *Bed* book. So, she travels in good company. That tension between orthography and sound may be precisely what emphasizes her exquisite sense of tone, balance and pacing into such audibility, in short, "ear."

That strong graphic element of her books has perhaps been taken up by her words' co-habitation with Susan Bee's fine illustrations. Bee's decorative but simple pictures accompany, frame, augment and approximate the poetry. They often clarify subtexts by highlighting elusive themes with telling images.

A good measure of "ear" is the handling of vowels, especially long vowels, and a tendency toward playing monosyllables against less common or even sesquipedalian words. The book's opening words:

daylight does not reach  
Vast depth on the wall Neophyte . . .

Keats knew how to do that, no two vowels contiguously repeated, in an extemporaneously fluid diction. Or the tuning fork she strikes with the assonances of

there is nothing to justify a  
claim for linen except a late  
quotation knap warp is flax  
Fathom we without cannot . . .

(Embedded in an overall multisyllabic field ["nothing," "justify," "linen except," "quotation"], the initial grace notes of long A's ["claim," "late," "-ta-"] and stately diction suddenly flatten out to the blunted-sounding "knap warp is flax." And, again, except for the pre-set word "except," the vowels keep changing from one syllable to the next) on to entire page-length stanzas:

A small swatch bluish-green  
Woolen slight grain in the  
Weft watered and figured  
Right fustian should hold  
Altogether warp and woof  
Is the cloven rock misled  
Does morning lie what prize  
What pine tree wildeyed boy . . .

(Howe may be alone in her practice of a very un-modernist alliteration.)

A person with a very mellifluous speaking voice can often get away with waxing poetically difficult to understand, since we keep listening to the beautiful *sound*, its mystery no longer threatening because beautiful, and we don't entirely care as much when meaning slips away *lyrically*. Where Howe goes obscure\_and she *does* (often out of ellipsis and rock-candy-hard terseness, the way the philosopher Wittgenstein was criticized for the laconic axioms of his *Tractatus*)\_the silver thread of her sustained musicality keeps attention rapt. In her flourishes of bookworm scholarship\_I'll have to wait for some more thorough grad student to trace down her quotes and allusions ("Contest between two / singers *Conflictus ovis / et lini* if the heart of / eye were cause of sin", and all her lines about the "Sandemanian", evidently a denomination of preacher: "Sandemanian sentiments of / course he never preached . . .", etc.)\_she loses me the way fascinating university professors and lecturers used to lose me. It's a whetting of appetite and a kind of free-form cadenza flaunting their virtuosity in an oratory my understanding *gladly* weaves in and out of, as though I'd blinked too long or been lulled into cat nap: I often fall asleep at the opera during wonderful performances I like, too. That may be a litmus for great art like hers\_or Milton's!\_whether we find ourselves drifted out of focus, since it's great art that best carves out an interiorization that pulls away from mere bookmarking attentiveness.

Beds are her theme, old beds ("A source for this book is *Bed Hangings: A Treatise on Fabrics and Styles in the Curtaining of Beds, 1650-1850*"), the kind that had giant canopies over them. The nineteenth century engravings that Susan Bee collages into her illustrations make it clearer with many such tented beds: back then, they weren't content just to fall asleep on a flat rectangular plane as we do, but they wanted to be entirely enclosed and roofed-over within a soft four-sided cube of draperies. More pre-natal and womb-like in the pleasures of its slumber?

And there is a latent feminism to the theme of beds, too: male servants had other chores, and it was the women who made the bed, who sometimes made the same bed where the night before they were similarly uncovered.

In the closing pages where Howe breaks into semi-autobiographical prose (another signature device of Howe's books), the pearls are shucked from an 1839 *Elementary Dictionary for Common Schools* for unrecognizable definitions: "*Bed, n.* a couch to sleep on; a bank of earth . . ." and other lexicographer's bed paraphernalia, such as, "*Test'er, n.* a sixpence, the cover of a bed", not at all the way we would say it now. Her point is well-made and brilliant in its lovely evidences: not only are language and culture (hence, identity) transitory, time-dependent phenomena which are determined by the context of historical period—we already knew *that*—but so too the baseline that we take for granted as most fundamental, *sleep itself* is a product of its era, and the unconscious along with it.

I found the music that Bellini wrote for the sleepwalking scenes in his opera *La Sonnambula* ("The Sleepwalker") quaint and unbelievable when I first heard it: all pizzicatti—as if there were insufficient sonic resources in a pre-chromaticist music to represent sleep and night as weirdly as our conventions or theremins do. Maybe sleep was just a pricklier affair back then, and "The Princess and The Pea" problem a well-known, widespread irritant of poorly made mattresses.

There's an artist named Kara Walker who showed in the Whitney Biennial who works in large-scale silhouettes of nineteenth-century woodcut-style drawings of Blacks, images of slavery or Uncle Tom/Br'er Rabbit racism.

Bee uses silhouettes here, too.

It was a popular nineteenth-century minor art form: Nathaniel Hawthorne sat for a hand-scissored silhouette profile portrait (or *refused* to sit along with his graduating classmates for the silhouette portraitist, I never recall which).

Bee's silhouettes show bearded, bald-pated gentleman gesticulating in debate ("One of the perplexing questions / on which members of the Bed / Curtain Seminar were able to / shed very little light"), preachers in pulpits (a running theme in the book with the Sandemanians and Jonathan Edwards: "apostle represented as a plain / if practical preacher I come to / you with neither crook nor shoe / or scrip a Presbyterian cloak / though admittedly eyelet holes"), a coiffed lady in a gown with petticoats holding an artist's palette and brush, and a man in top hat running, hand extended pointing, carrying

a ladder, images less explicitly connected to their page's stanza ("you appear to me walking / across the text").

Bee's neat silhouettes are richer in meaning if we read them as a conscious counterpoint to Kara Walker's African-American silhouettes, politicizing the assumed here and underscoring that it's a nineteenth century, *Caucasian* sleep that we're witnessing euphemized in *Bed Hangings'* poetry.

Howe has been filling her books with lists for decades. *Bed Hangings* starts with a list:

Alapeen Paper Patch Muslin  
Calico Camlet Dimity Fustian  
Serge linsey-woolsey say  
A wainscot bedsted & Curtans . . .

But in *Bed Hangings* we learn more about the function of those lists; she tells us a little more about these compact, "objective" litanies that have virtuosically tempered the pacing of all her page-turning books, often elaborating by following or preceding a list with some broader grammatical phrase:

Ordered wigs cloaks  
breeches hoods gowns  
rings jewels necklaces  
*to be brought together*

(my emphasis). Its components are there *to be gathered into a list*, as pick-up-sticks are toys to be bundled together.

A list, too, is the last thing we might leave behind, when the text of last will and testament hammers home that "The letter kills":

John Legg  
of Boston left to his daughter  
1 Coach bed camblet curtanot  
vallens . . .

In the autobiographical prose segment that often stands before or after the poetry, Howe typically represents herself as moving through some public space, an air-conditioned rare books library in her previous book, *Pierce Arrow*, and here the gift shop of a library museum:

One Sunday afternoon in the gift shop at Hartford's Wadsworth Athenaeum,  
wandering among

\_and here she lets it rip\_

the postcards, notepaper, ties, scarves, necklaces, keychains, calendars, magic markers, pens, pencils, posters, children's games, paperweights, and arts books, . .

\_and then lets it all "be brought together" \_

my attention came to rest on a pedestrian gray paperback.

The book turns out to be, apparently, the original 1994 reprint of *Bed Hangings . . . 1650-1850* or so we are left to conjecture, as her sentences never make it that definite: a "gray paperback," almost to be visualized as a book with blank covers (as John Ashbery has said that his *Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror* traces back to coming across a book of Parmagianino reproductions in a resort town bookstore, a bookstore he portentously could never find again).

This Athenaeum gift shop list is of a very different timbre than Howe's uncounted lists, itself "pedestrian."

The list is modernday, banal, *consumerist*.

How the world has sunken since the golden age of legendary, poetic catalogs Howe gives us glimpses into with her cadastres (in *Pierce Arrow*: "Emerald jacinth sapphire / chalcedony lovely Isolt / Topaz sardonyx chrysolite / ruby sir Tristan").

Howe's lists are the *antidote* (or opposite/complementary, anti-matter replica) of the do-it-yourself, assemble-your-own, on-the-spot shopping list sprawled out across her description of a gift shop.

Language Poetry was notorious for its similarly disjunctive "word salads," which were sometimes characterized more approvingly by the term "asyntactical"; Howe's lists are echoes of a *pre*-syntactical, archaic world, heavy with nouns and no verbs to affect them with.

Sometimes a verse of hers that could be parsed otherwise *reads* as a list, feels like a list, all staccato accents, no connectives ("non-connection is itself distinct / connection"), and usually "hodgepodge" lists at that, miscellanies, sumptuous indulgence of gallimauferies:

summit granite cramp marble

or

to call an  
unconverted soul King James  
lyricism another C minor  
Coeval decades . . .

But where else have we read such lists?

Exhibit A:

A dog howling in the daytime. A wickerwork fish-net in spring A red plum-blossom dress . . .

Exhibit B:

Sparrows feeding their young. To pass a place where babies are playing. To sleep in a room where some fine incense has been burnt.

Exhibit C:

Dried hollyhock. The objects used during the Display of Dolls. To find a piece of deep violet or grape-colored material that has been preseed between the pages of a notebook.

These are from "Depressing Things," "Things That Make One's Heart Beat Faster," and "Things That Arouse a Fond Memory of the Past," in *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*. Written circa 1000 A.D., *The Pillow Book*, a unique work of Japanese literature, was called "Notes of the Pillow" because of its mode of composition:

a type of informal book of notes which men and women composed when they retired to their rooms in the evening and which they kept near their sleeping place, possibly in the drawers of their wooden pillows, so that they might record stray impressions (Donald Keane, Introduction, 1971 edition, Penguin Classics) . . . not in any way to impute to Howe so accidental a method of composition, \_she is rigorously precise down to the letter\_ but *Bed Hangings*, with its heavy-lidded, closing confessionalism ("I am an insomniac"), brings the stakes down to the axis of that same, final horizontal plateau, the bedside, awake reading \_alone?

A critique of the Japanese *Pillow Book* could apply equally well to this American *Bed Hangings* (if not to modernism in general):

The structural confusion . . . is generally regarded as its main stylistic weakness; yet surely part of its charm lies precisely in its rather bizarre, haphazard arrangement in which a list of 'awkward things' for example, is followed by an account of the Emperor's return . . . , after which comes a totally unrelated incident . . . and then a short, lyrical description of the dew on a clear autumn morning. (Keane)

[published in *Electronic Poetry Review* No. 2, 2001; re-printed

**Graham Foust: *As in Every Deafness* (Flood Editions)**

It may be that the most difficult poetic form isn't the sestina or the rondeau redoublé but a modernist, free-verse form commonly known as the "skinny" poem: three-, two-, and often one-word lines expose the poet's every gesture. With the 50 poems in his debut collection, Graham Foust swiftly takes a seat alongside a handful of others (including William Carlos Williams, the form's originator; Robert Creeley; and the late Larry Eigner) as a master of that most minimalist, no-place-to-hide form. Here, in its entirety, is Foust's "Night Train": "creased, the darkness seems / exactly // the same— // someone / in one of those houses // is you." Yet for all their economy, the largesse of these frequently rhyming, expertly paced poems accommodates the great themes of the human condition, from love ("One day love / is mere / manipulation. / . . . On another day love / is purely possession") to death ("Bury me / up to my kite"; "You look / as if I haven't seen a ghost") and the complexities of time ("Tomorrow is the newer / of two ruins"; "give this scream / time"). Allusions to addiction and addicts throughout lend the collection grit and gravitas, but their autobiographical relevance is somewhat beside the fact—what do any of our desperately craved, quick-fix commodities deliver in the end if not a kind of narcosis? ("Welcome, autumn / to my room / of empty things.") Foust's brutally elegant condensation distills a sore, sensitive intensity rather than a *Reader's Digest*-style abridgment. Our age of the sound bite has its own logic, its own snap judgments and damnations, and with *As in Every Deafness*, Foust emerges as the dangerous, tight-lipped Milton of that world-weary downfall: "Knives / from a child // are not as beautiful / to pull." He goes straight to the point.

[published in the *Boston Review*, December 2004/January 2005]

**Rae Armantrout: *Up to Speed* (Wesleyan University Press)**

“Very brief musical passages quoted out of context often seem banal,” wrote Theodor Adorno. “The most stringent test is to see whether . . . smallest components make sense, and whether they can be quoted.” In *Up to Speed*, her eighth book of poetry, Rae Armantrout snips “smallest components” from the music of ordinary lives not so much to determine whether the original, the world, makes sense, but to test how the foreign matter of everyday America reacts when placed in the context of poetry, a medium often thought to be autonomous (or at least resistant to intrusion). Reunited with an old friend “after months apart,” Armantrout tries to reconnect by quoting (or misquoting): “I agree by mangling quotes.” Quotes have a ready-made quality, a locked-down givenness like the past itself, and in this sense Armantrout’s quoting and sampling isn’t merely an act of archivism but of endearing nostalgia, the banality of which may be—in Armantrout’s dialectical fundamentalism—the measure of our fallenness. A familiar soundtrack rendered uncanny (“Marvin Gaye’s ‘What’s Going On’ / . . . batted back / and forth / between speakers”) intercuts the book, interrupted by surprises: unforgettably, a “woman dressed as ‘Frank N Furter’ / from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*” appears “alone on the sidewalk, 9:30 a.m., / August 24, 2002.” More somnambulist than surrealist, Armantrout’s poetry drifts half-awake (“When a dreamer sees she’s dreaming, / it causes figments to disperse”) through the automatic writing of a world dopey with the bad dream of history, where the only alternative to the oneiric is to be totally unconscious. Armantrout gives back to experience its innate incoherence. Anything but obscurity is pure wish fulfillment: “How often in dreams / I’m making my point / clear.” More than ever before, *Up to Speed* makes clear that Armantrout’s importance crosses over from the ghetto of poetry and into the arena of serious thinkers, serious comediennes.

[published in the *Boston Review*, April/May 2005]

From: Jeffrey Jullich  
Date: Sunday, June 8, 2003 10:36 PM  
To: Michael Scharf

Thank you for clarifying where to find *Verite* in the thrift shop rummage of ubuweb. I'll tell you my current responses:

I'm glad I got to spend time with *Verite*. Although it may not always meet the eye in the fascicles that I sent you, I am, in my own way, struggling through the transition I guess we're all going through, "post-9/11"/-Iraq, of testing out how and where poetry can speak to politics; ---so I'm interested in seeing it carried out as such a singlemost poetry, and how, as in *Verite*.

I read through *Verite* twice (actually, I recognize the business about your [the narrator's] buying his apartment with family money, so I apparently already read it once before, although remembering that only with vague *deja-vu*), ---once with the prose essays and once without. The presence of the prose does a great deal to tilt the rest of the reading (of the poetry) in a certain direction: perhaps more toward a sense of autobiographical-"authored" than actually exists in the poetry read by itself; a curve it puts on the curveball of the poems' politics that perhaps has a wilder spin without the essays . . . Basically, the essays threaten to overpower the poetry. The two genres don't feel dialectical; they feel in competition with each other: "Is the prose more 'interesting,' compelling, 'effectively' political than the poetry?" etc. (I notice, though, that until the final poem about Franco-Japanese relations, the political in fact does drain away from the poetry as subject matter as the manuscript proceeds.)

There's certainly an unrepentant intellectualism throughout. In some ways, the intellectual seems to figure in here as an *attainment*, as a *raison d'être*.

I bought the *Companion* to Pound's Cantos this weekend and have been reading through its decipherment

of the poetry,--- so that's on my mind in relation to political poetry--- And I found myself wondering what, in *Verite*, remains aside from and/or *opposed to* the political? Vestiges of memories of a certain prolonged teen years kind of youthfulness (the drugs, school days, etc.)? In Pound, regardless of how excessive, monomaniacal and dominating the political can become, there's still "if the suave air give way to scirocco", "till the shrine be again white with marble", etc., --- that is, The Sublime, the strong imagistic nature poetry lyricism that is, for me at least, the "true" Pound the poet. You seem to get involved in the ideational logopoeia with only occasional lip service to melopoeia (and that, sometimes, fast against the very bottom-most register of, say, "Stop eating so much, fuckball", "All roads may lead to Rome", the Dayanu of "that dead form that / lightly here had drained the dew that / lit my face that bent the spoon", "Tiddly tiddly ooo ooo ooo", or "the king / is in his counting house", a doggerelization that risks making a stronger impression than any begrudging melopoeia there per se to counterbalance it) and even less to the phanopoeia of imagery.

So, in a sense, I'm left wondering: *where's 'le Paradis'?* in *Verite*.

I was left with a sense that, where it isn't political, it's (simply?) post-Language Poetry, ---that I'm not given as much inroad toward any other aspect of existence besides the political and that where it isn't political, it's zero degree meaning asyntactical. It seems to go from uni-dimensional to *blur*.

Again, that's where it begins to seem to me that politics, in your poetry, is in fact *not* purgatorial or oppressive or inhuman(e) the way it (Blue Meanie "capital") is in most current political poetry, a kind of strident dissonance that threatens and often succeeds in obliterating the poetic as such. It began to seem as though the political, for you/*Verite*, may *be le Paradis*. There's a kind of delirium about it that verges on exhilaration, in the poems, as though rousing good leftie *Tischgespräch* is where

you truly beginning to feel passionate and stronger  
and in your Ego Ideal.

Annotations or some form of glossing might help. It's more powerful for me *knowing* that Jean-Bernard Ouvrieu was the Chargé d' Affaires in Iraq, rather than wondering where he fit in. (How did you wind up deciding/feeling tempted to ransack "*les deux pays qui pourraient débattre ensemble des grands défis*" straight out of the Ogoura interview, for example, except that "*qui intéressent la planète*" becomes a rather comical conclusion, to an Anglophone mentality ---and so on. ["I am interested in your language / as an instrument of liberty" is funny, too, ---like Berlitz Toward Freedom.]) I don't know how I or another reader would feel about the poem if I couldn't read French; I found myself somewhat resentful and bothered by the untranslated German, a language I'm weaker in. . . . It *checks* (stops, limits) runaway semiotic confusion for me to double-check and be reminded that *Defensive Rapture* is Barbara Guest and poetry, than for it simply to be a free radical (another movie title? cinema being something else I know nothing about) by escaping me as an allusion. . . . Although I suppose gestures like Michael Palmer and *Defensive Rapture* right in the body of a new poem may be a genuine post-modernity that I'm just not hep to yet . . .

The function of proper names throughout is a major feature. The politicality/contemporaneity is, to a large extent, cued or established *through* the invoking (the litanizing) of "Cisco, or CSX", "Breuer" and "Adler", "Giorgio Moroder in Munich", "Axl Rose" and "Reagan" . . . In that sense, *Verite* really is operating quite a bit through its own kind of *ideogrammatic* poetics.

[Where does politics go in a regime of anonymity (which may be, in fact, its real circuitry of domination)? Etc.]

J.J.

## Drew Gardner: *SUGAR PILL*

50-some pages into the 70 pages of Drew Gardner's *Sugar Pill*, I still kept putting it aside, interrupting my reading, not "getting it." Gardner has almost no sense of humor; when he jokes, the gag may be either slightly creepy in its microbiology ("interwoven with a kind of auto-cryptozoology" [p. 23]), harsh and insensitive ("aren't you supposed to be out . . . killing things?" [10, ellipsis his]) or entirely forced and kind of Smiley Face in its cartoon character-infantilized obviousness ("as opposed to the Easter Bunny" [23], "Winken and Blinken and a molecule of Nod" [60]).

The lines on the page are set triple- or quadruple-space apart, exaggerating the already disjunct separation from one truncated statement to the next. The lines all read as fragments excerpted out of something else, that is, an impression of *collage*, and, when two lines do interconnect,—a subject leading into a verb, a phrase followed by a prepositional clause,—it usually seems only accidental, serendipitous, and a lucky break that should be un-written back into the poetry's prevalent disjunctiveness. This is, of course, a style, *the* style of late 20<sup>th</sup> /early 21<sup>st</sup> century experimentalism: "parataxis" is the convenient misnomer often given to its montage, but montage<sup>1</sup> is a sensibility we're all very much used to, deeply ingrained in us by films and post-modernity, and disjunctiveness *per se* should no longer be an issue to anyone conversant with such poetry nor have been a stumbling block for me.

The language itself felt weighed down by a heavy *factuality*, a somewhat dulled and neutral perspective toward things. It kept jumping back and forth between snippets of concrete imagery, or at least *substantives*, and brief stretches of semi-philosophical abstraction. Substantives, such as—spider web, door, mandibles, goldfish, subway tunnel, forest: "for whom (spider web) / the totality of the door" [15], "the mandibles of the conductor / goldfish" [34], "a wild subway tunnel / an area of continuous forest" [45]; albeit substantives that "weren't adding up to anything" *per se*—although the book early on includes its own *caveat lector* against expecting anything to come together additively like that ("we calculate without hesitation that 3+3=20" [15]). The philosophical abstractions, some of them, tend toward a bland political jingoism \* or a kind of Poindexter science ("the value reduced in direct proportion to the amount of money applied to it" [12], "the speed and control over the finest and most intricate details / of intellectual apprehension" [16], "to use the information about heat / to save your life" [18]). And, with this fast back-and-forth and the relatively underdeveloped state of any piece of information, the book came across, upon first reading, as a monotone blur ("the scenes of everyday life toughen into confusion" [34]). It's as though there were too many frame per second in the shutter speed.

I *wanted* to like the book. I fashion myself to be somewhere at the fringe of this experimentalism myself and a connoisseur of it. The book is published by the press Krupskaya, as good an imprimatur as this kind of work can get.

And then it started to open up for me.

(It may be becoming something of a formulaic meta-narrative here and there these days to testify, as Nick Piombino does in a [DATE] Buffalo Poetics List post, to how “difficult” poetry does not immediately yield itself to the reader, and how initial uncertainties about “good”/“bad” can only be persevered through with *hard work*. I am suspicious of how, in my own re-telling, a sort of minor saga becomes the sub-text: the heroic triumph and symphonic key change that the reader’s strenuous, persistent effort accomplishes, and the turn-about and reversal of an intractable text that, like the taming of the Nemean lion, is ultimately subdued by the labors of critical concentration. Nonetheless, it’s becoming a recurrent reading experience for me, and was the case with *Sugar Pill*, the pill that at first you can’t swallow.)

The switching back and forth, the toggling effect between concrete and abstract was not exactly a *defect* in the work. That’s how it *operates*; that’s its structure, skeletal to its anatomy; that’s where its poetry and music are taking place. Not at the level of the line, not entirely even against the frame of the total book itself, but in the ebb and flow of these rhythms, which *Sugar Pill* itself acknowledges: it calls them “astronomer rhythms / the dumb signatures”, but its aesthetic encourages us to see that very vacillation as beautiful, floribund, however megalomaniacally, “like any enormous gladiola” [69]. The point is made really quite simply: “different combinations of natural productions are rhythmic” [48].

So, marking the margins began to help, as usual. (If a book doesn’t want to surrender, write all over it.)

The tennis match alternations between those two modes, substantive-imagistic and abstract, are a type of *dialogue*, or dialectic, that’s set up. These two modes, like major and minor scales in music, virtually *stripe* the book. It wavers between conflicting sensibilities, varying back and forth between opposing extremes,—at times as almost the distracting pretext for the fugitive disappearance of conventional self from this poetry (“the kind of unerring escape through willing and cumulative alteration” [70, the antepenultimate line of the book]). It swings to and fro, and vacillates.

But, then, it wasn’t enough merely to leave that recognition at so general an assessment: “concrete vs. abstract” is pretty abstract. Gradually, becoming more habituated to these steady changes, the two types began breaking down into more subtle gradations: what *kind* of imagery, and what *kinds* of abstraction, in fact?

(Confronted with a similar oil-and-vinegar chemistry, the critic Lisa Samuels (?), in a *Qui Parle* essay on Leslie Scalapino’s poetry, proposes something called “*deformative reading*”, where she literally strains out all the intermittent imagery from her citations and leaves the pure abstraction unadulterated, so that the abstraction can be examined in its

own right as its own reflexive commentary. Allowed to speak more univocally, the abstraction has a good deal to say that seems to refer back to the effect of its own process, how it all might fall together “in specific patterns” [44] or break away again into “departure from the pattern” [52], “for those who seek for stylish juggling patterns” [24].)

The two sides and their bits and pieces “form and dissipate . . . / . . . / in different modalities” [31]. “[T]he next moment there is a shift in the kaleidoscope, and we are faced with a new grouping” [16]. They can be harmonized by the reader only through an equally abstracted business of particulars and how they interrelate (“new *relationships* between musical deformations” [18]; “equivalent divisions of *relationships*” [68]); “the interweaving of their reciprocal *relations*” [35], my emphases). . . . Sometimes held in balance—and, oh, how much we want to hold onto the temporary assurance of that equilibrium! (“symmetrical relations I don’t ever want to forget” [9])—and sometimes clumped together in an out-of-balance entropy (“asymmetrical relations gathering attrition” [64]).

The linear, serial nature of text forces the snippets of imagery to be taken in as sequential (“a series of embarrassing travesties, one after the other” [10]; “plants arousing series” [20]), but maybe they’re not really: the overlapping vignettes could be occurring at the same time, “your history / and someone else’s / happening simultaneously” [10] and polyphonically. The contents don’t really go together, each “invariably accompanied by its contradictory counterpart” [35], but the intermittent abstract voice-over makes a point of it that contradiction is unavoidable and even naturalized (“they accept the most violent contradictions” [14]) in a culture like ours that is built upon rationalizing its own internal contradictoriness into myths (“upward contradictions for typical answer” [20]). The wide quadruple-spacing of the typeset (which at first seemed slightly annoying to me and just contributory to the impression of confusion) feeds into the emerging sense of regularity by accumulating *spaces* as well as text (“the build up of intervals” [12]).

Indeed, poetry like this,—with the demands of how it strains at our capacity to hold its disparate parts in some type of meaningful congruence, imagining continuity out of what looks like collage, inferring the back-drop presence of author as an inescapable unifying principle, although much of it might just as well be scissored Tristan Tzara-style out of unassimilated source materials,—pushes at how far we will go in “creating imaginary propositional contexts for existence” [36], imaginary contexts for propositions themselves.

## EMOTION

Although much of the abstraction is flavored with a pop scientific Stephen Hawkins quality (see below), it also at times becomes inflected and infused with a sort of intermediate zone between the concrete and the abstract: it achieves the humanity of *emotions*, affect—the prime reference point of “poetry” in its traditional, lyrical vein, of course, but one highly distrusted and derided in the post-modern scene of this type of poetry. Gardner often *literally* calls emotions just that, “emotions” or “feelings”: as

though they were algebraic (“a set of emotions” [8]), bound together in aggregates rather than in the space of a breath (“this assemblage of feelings” [16]). They’re usually found at an alienated remove from what they involve (“the distance between the feelings and the plans” [9]); or quite cynically and Mister Spock-like,—despite how emotions still nonetheless motivate things to happen, like a miniature *primum mobile* we’re too skeptical to name as such (“a sort of ‘second-order’ experience called ‘feeling emotion’ / caused substantial changes in activity” [27]).

Sometimes, those emotions are specific, recurrent ones of empathy and connectedness (“the waves of compassion / cause ripples” [33]), however much that empathy might belong to a mere ghost of a person (“in the pursuit of a phantom / with its compassion, regardless” [54f]). —Or even *love*, albeit an unsentimental and cynical love (“half submerged exploitations passing themselves off as *love*” [50]), perhaps merely narrative love that instantly leads to betrayal and disappointment among de-personalized characters in a cliché story (“Mr. Y falls in love with a woman who then quickly marries Mr. X” [57]). Love *for what*, though, is somewhat opaqued in the general shuffle of the poetry, where one line leading into a next can rarely be taken at face value (“in that corridor where you change / doors opening I love / broken glass in black circle” [33]: a juxtaposition like that could be read as a figure for *broken-heartedness* or shatteredness. The image appears elsewhere, at points of entry: “the cracked glass of the door” [14]).

Sometimes, feelings in *Sugar Pill* are positive, an affirmation of “what it means to be alive”, although still held partially at bay or delayed by analysis (“renewed interpretations of fully realized pleasure”, “the sweet hesitation in this pleasure” [51]), —but rarely. To the contrary, the emotional chemistry that Gardner creates is such that emotions discolor the things they surround (“the blundering and tormented process” [7]). When feelings are not outright bad and perilous (“induced by panic” [26], “you would feel negative or dangerous” [47]), their latent negativity is barely tempered by romanticizing their incompleteness into a vain psychotherapeutic picaresque (“unresolved feelings of / guilt, anger, grief or betrayal / as our epic adventures” [45]). Despite the denail, there are *cris de coeur* of great desperation (“my heart felt like a black hole sucking in all light” [42]).

However, the emotional overtones in this poetry are never solely polarized and kept compartmentalized in a primitive, shut-down binary. They’re experienced, too, in moments of complex fusion that betray evidence of genuine emotional life, which is always paradoxical and ambivalent by nature (“the terrifying, beautiful applause” [37], “a kind of relief and climbing out of shivered confrontation / what they feel” [62]). But, still, there’s a hide-&-seek that goes on, as is normal for Americans: what may seem like emotions threatening at any moment to overwhelm with violence (“I kept beating my head against” [13]—although the line ends there and isn’t completed with the expected words, “the wall”) is, despite all that, still a figure of speech, an idiom. At his best, Gardner takes the next step of synthesizing emotional abstraction back into the substantial, and the outcome can be, if surrealist, a moment of good poetry:

this living black flower growing out of my side—painfully

should I cut it off?

can I?

[65]

One way or the other, though, in the book's final page, at the conclusion of its title poem, the over-all unemotionalism and even frigidity, which these examples are merely poignant exceptions to, win out and the end-result is confessed to be a slight numbness ("the mild narcosis induced by these fantasies" [70]). Speaking in the first person, a narrator-protagonist recoils from his own victorious defeat of the life of the heart ("I shrunk back in horror at the use I was making of my intelligence" [11]).

## VESTIGES

I do not want to give the wrong impression. There's little heart-throb about *Sugar Pill*, and this language of emotions is largely bottled-up and repudiated; Gardner's focus is elsewhere. These are *traces* of emotions. These modulations are simply inflections that rescue the abstractions from utter impersonality. Most of the poetry associated with this style has an ideological side-car that's a plain rejection of humanism, and Gardner often succeeds in bringing that anti-humanism to an almost Martian or extraterrestrialized, depersonalized irreality ("the firing of clusters of cells" [43]).

But traces, vestiges, and after-images are a significant vehicle for the book's *rapprochement* with reality or realism, in general ("subatomic realist" [8]), almost like the *infra-mince* or "ultra-thin" that Marcel Duchamp wrote about as occurring in phenomena such as the warmth left behind in a cushioned chair after someone has gotten up from it. In semiotics, it's called "indexical." And not only are the traces themselves immaterial and transitory when they show up in the book's imagery, but the very medium those traces are imprinted upon may also be evanescent and bound to fade ("the paw prints in snow" [65]), even where those traces accomplish some sort of ant-like marvel of supporting more than their own weight ("shadows on snow holding this up" [51]). What they are traces *of* can completely elude a simple reading, as in "footprints of darkening work" [69], which starts out *mysterioso* three-quarters of the way through ("footprints of darkening", like a *Fantomas* skull-and-dagger *noir*) but then aborts in an illogical end-stop. \* The reader should be on the *look-out* for traces, as they're not always explicitly stated but have to be inferred, even at their most famous or iconic: "walking across the moon in her space boots" [13], that is, leaving behind the well-known footprints in the lunar surface. In either event, though, Gardner leaves it clear that the indexical is of the very essence to his semiotics and poetics ("the footprints of conspicuous measuring" [64]), its metrics.

(The Zen-like quality of some of this vestige imagery leaves me wondering how much a role Buddhism or its like plays behind Gardner's poetics, as it does in those of Leslie Scalapino or Alan Davies or others of that school. There may be a few additional,

telegraphic clues: unelaborated, the word “reincarnation” [12], and “fuel for the engine of your next reincarnation” [53].)

If this preliminary examination is an inroad into how the abstractions in *Sugar Pill* may operate, it’s just as important to bring into definition what may be the contents of its other main mode, the imagistic-substantive (although the boundaries between imagistic and abstract can blur). There’s (1) an extreme, even *geek* taste for everything having to do with science, there’s (2) the political, . . .

## WATER

But, first, more elementally (“in all three states of matter—solid, liquid, and gaseous” [34], an important metaphor for the continual transformations in *Sugar Pill*), the book often dips or capsizes into becoming a kind of *Water World* (a sci-fi fantasy movie with Kevin Costner and Dennis Hooper, about a flooded world without any dry land).

There are many references to water. (As subject matter water might seem to trivial to be singled out as critical evidence, but I see it as reenforcing the over-all, oscillating basketweave structure of the book, and serving as emblematic for the book’s predilection for metamorphosis. The following concordance, however, is mainly the prelude or pretext for the more interesting and dramatic struggles that are acted out in those waters.) That near-ubiquitous water can be oceanic and ominous (“suggesting seas instead of water” [30]), as in the title of the second long poem, “Black Atlantic Sky” [10]. These oceans often function only as the platform or the plane of a denominator for a more arresting image (black sky) that appears *over* it; another instance—despite the slight surrealism of the unspecified analogy: “like an artichoke . . . / above the ocean” [13, ellipsis his]; “upper layers of the ocean” [19]. As is principally the case with the oceanic, ever since William James’ interpretation of “oceanic feelings” as symbolic of transcendent emotions of overpowering surrender, it comes as an inundating force: “the wheat fields slowly filling with ocean water” [42], which could be a picture of the extent of some future apocalypse’s global warming-induced rising sea level. It carries possessions off in its deluge force: “the camera lost in the waves” [51]. Sometimes it is caught up in the ambient toxicity that the book’s title, *Sugar Pill*, is or is not the medicine for (“when you move over the stagnant water” [66], “this poisoned water” [16], “CO<sub>2</sub> and water as the waste” [47]), and where it is a matter of ordinary, household drinking, captured and contained in one of the imagistic moments’ most doubly transparent substantives: “the glass filled with water” [38].

The ebb and flow can seem to be a surrogate for the book’s own rocky liquidity: “suggesting seas instead of water / that form and dissipate daily” [30]. It becomes directionless (“where is all that water going” [37]) and unstoppable (“you get a situation where the water won’t turn *off*” [53]), a final medium we may be free to dread or dive into (“you can jump into the water” [59], the final line of a poem).

“the underwater volcanoes” [61]

## AQUATIC ANIMALS

At the risk of critical over-kill, the above inventory at least certainly underlines, I hope, how one type of imagery, the recurrent element of water, becomes, in part, a metaphor for the poetry's instability and basic ungroundedness. The back-and-forth switching from abstraction to imagistic-substantive takes on a wave-like, rocking rhythm, in this regard. Indeed, part of why I initially rejected its appeal and couldn't find my moorings in its constant alternating may have been less a matter of kaleidoscopic vertigo than *sea-sickness*.

And this inventory sets the stage for what may be the book's most important and charming characters. Here's one: a kind of Seuss bumblebee/ant-eater "with a long nose for sucking pollen" [54]. Gardner has a frustrated Aesop in him.

While largely anti- or post-humanist with few if any examples to point to to show the role of *people* in its narrative, *Sugar Pill* becomes more user-friendly in its visit to *the aquarium*, fauna, and an abundance of lively sea mammals, aquatic beasts, and animiculae.

They are presented sometimes for the sheer aesthetics of their design, with all its regularity: "patterns of turtles" [10] (or, in another species and in a pattern not imprinted on a hard shell but traced from disappearances and re-appearances in motion, again, a seeming metaphor for the poetry's reconnecting discontinuities, "the patterns of fireflies" [55]). That is, they are tokens of *order* here.

Their importance is signalled, too, by the number of times they're in the significant inaugural position of the first line of a poem, as in my next paragraph. They start things off.

These little critters recall some of the wonderment of childhood's first encounters with such undomesticated housepets, in pathetic captivities ("the bucket of squirming frogs" [60, the opening line of the book's title poem]) or in an immature phase of their development ("you gotta find some kind of 'tadpole'" [53, first line of the poem "Dial Tone"]), protoplasmic and diminutive ("the bands of tiny jellyfish" [61]).

Sea mammals, *heard* and auditory rather than seen, may start off as solid, visualizable creatures, only instantly to pass into the shifting medium of the poetry into greater and greater obscurity or undecideability ("sea lions barking through the past / are trying to hear through termite origami" [49], where the strangeness and uncertainty of the image derives mainly from the concluding "termite origami")

These creatures are powerful enough, in this poetry, to evoke one of the rare appearances of the first person "I" into some sort of subject/object psychology, however pitiful and comically idiotic that "I" may be in his blundering tragedy: "it was up to me to take care of this baby shark / but it was dying / I remembered too late that sharks breathe water" [63]

If it is the animals who, in this case, are stand-ins for suffering, at one end of life, the awful terminus of mortality (the dying baby shark, where Gardner's concern appears to be eco-positive, a morality of concern for the endangered: "the disappearing species" [65]), they more frequently and strategically are witnessed at the other end of the life-spectrum: birth,—whether sea mammal or reptilian ("an alligator being born" [66], "to life as born animals" [48]), fish, fowl, or otherwise. . . . So much so that it is they who are the truly Born Again who go through it not only once but in the re-emergence of full-fledged mature insects out of their pupal-larval stage: "the giant caterpillars changing into moths" [38], the first line of the eponymous poem, "The Giant Caterpillars", not only sci-fi but another instance of how out-of-scale and disproportionately large critters appear here. For any television-watcher, it's by now a familiar sight, but still memorable in its miraculousness, however quickly Gardner undercuts any possibility of a *visionary* poetry by bluntly reminding us how it's Disney Channel photography that simultaneously brings such spectacle into our lives and that alienates us from it: "as I watched a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis on TV" [61]. The vision exercised in these descriptions shifts focus from close-up to *microscopic*: "tethered seven shrimp to a platform / inside an aquarium and recorded their closing claws / a process of cellular computation" [29] (*Do shrimp have claws?*)

We never fully escape our anthropomorphizing tendencies, and I do not think that the animiculae in *Sugar Pill* should be read as objectivist and utterly exempt from the poetic genres of the past with their allegorizing sub-texts. The four-footed or feathered kind ("the red-winged blackbird" [68]), in *Sugar Pill*, can play very much the moralizing role of a fable. They can talk. And what they might be saying ("a dog quotes a line of poetry" [15]) is both a challenge to the very existence of this book and the expressiveness of the poet ("maybe the crow has more to say than I do" [36]).

Ultimately, their fate, like the poor baby shark's, can be pitifully cruel, caught up and even manifesting the build-up of violence that the book's colliding particles seem to promise and rush toward: "horses eat each other in the street" [51], whether driven to that grotesque impossibility by fertile madness, surrealism, or an abject starvation inflicted upon them.

## SICKNESS

—But what does a *Sugar Pill* do? Familiar from blind drug trial experiments where half the subjects are given a placebo, a sugar pill is not a remedy at all, certainly. That's brave of Gardner, to know and announce that about his book and about poetry: that it isn't the cure; it's at best a palliative. However, the failure of a false remedy to heal what's wrong does not at all cancel out the book's testament to *sickness* of various kinds. And about that, that there's something "rotten in Denmark" and in America ("parasites it also becomes infested with" [48]), the book remains resolutely convinced. Malady is seen as somewhat endemic and generalized onto the objective surroundings, *largely in the absence of* self-portraiture and lyrical first person "I" self-representation, but not without some occasional, fleeting hints of self-awareness as a protagonist within that

plague environment, quite viscerally (“coughed up after a long illness” [41]), since, after all, as quoted earlier, it’s about “auto-cryptozoology”, not *autobiography*.

The air of cold intellectual emotional numbness or neutrality referred to earlier here (“a set of emotions”) in the affective component of some of the abstractions, for example, is translated into, or founded upon, a similarly abstracted and purely information theory sense of the ebb and flow of things (“a set of facts coming and going”) that is very much the structure of *Sugar Pill* itself;—but that conceptualization, that sheer idea, does not preserve the entire matrix of such parallelisms from its stigma as *pathology*: the lines in full read, “a set of emotions / based on a set of facts coming and going / as sickness does” [8]. And that sickness finds its most condensed symptomology, its ultimate casualty, in the vulnerable body of these animals themselves: “the sick eagles” [48], to be sure, are also the symbol of America.

**SELECTED BUFFALO POETICS LISTSERV POSTS**

Date: Tue, 13 Apr 1999  
Subject: **class and poetry**

I have been reading the discussion of class with interest, but some puzzlement. Once definitions were put aside, responses to the question of class have, as a rule, been a series of autobiographical testimonies as to one's own particular background. That's fine (although perhaps paradoxical, in that it's substituting a concern over the *individual*, whereas class would seem to call for an awareness of *group*). Unless this discussion is an instance of what LISTSERV welcomes as "messages relating to politics and political news or activism", what I'm missing from this lively symposium is how it relates or could relate back to *poetics*.

Without getting technical or pedantic, the consensus seems to be that class has *something* to do with money, something to do with culture, and something to do with work (working class). Out of these three, to single out one, *work* may be the most pivotal, the common denominator. What I ask myself, in regards to poetry, is: how can post-modern writing acknowledge and portray these class determinants without (and I emphasize) a return to *representationalism*? (I take it as a given that we're united in moving away from mimesis.)

Just as the discussion here has again confirmed that class in America maintains its domination by a sort of obliviousness where people cannot even conceive of themselves along clear class lines, the object that is the fulcrum of that crucial benightedness is, yes, The Commodity, a commodity foremost engineered to *conceal the labor that went into its making*. Insofar as the poem has yielded to commodification, I guess it would in theory best point back to the constraints of class by emphasizing its place in a food chain of *labor*. - But *how* to do that?

Some examples come to mind. I've seen poems by **Ange Mlinko** where I was impressed by the incorporation of rarely seen "lower class" material into the text as vocabulary. **Bruce Andrews'** *I Don't Have Any Paper* also made itself open, almost wantonly open to taboo subordinate class slang [yay, Bruce!].

Such examples, though, were incorporating class markers by way of *content* (vocabulary). How has a real -- or how could a hypothetical poetry demonstrate the same compass points of class by way of *form*?

Again, only one or two examples come to mind. The poems of **Jackson MacLow** are often appended with notes that describe their construction. That seems like one path. There's a sculpture called "Box That Contains

The Sound of Its Own Making" by - the name slips my tongue - where a wooden cube emits a continuous tape of banging and scraping noises that were recorded during its being assembled. The MacLow alternative seems somewhat like that. And, there's a way in which prose commentary is generally exempted from the rigors concerning referentiality. -- Also, poems of **Joan Retallack**, especially in *Errata* a series of poems entirely made up of quotes appropriated from various philosophers, coded line by line as, say, (D1), (D2), (D3), for (D1) **Deleuze**, (D2) **Derrida**, (D3) **Descartes**. I was very much taken by those poems, perhaps because they sometimes seamlessly follow a thread of thought through that patchwork. Their labor-intensiveness, too, is striking.

Authors, along with other free-lancers, live-in domestics, and "housewives," are exceptional in the realm of production, in that we're allowed to work out of our homes (or summer homes). Unlike the rest of the workforce, we are not corralled into offices or factories (except for day jobs) as the place where we manufacture the product of the poem. This may have something to do with why *collaboration* often strikes me as foregrounding the worker aspect.

I should say, too, that Language Poetry's over-all mission of accentuating the *materiality* of language may not be identical to the problem of revealing the presence of the *worker*. By analogy, a piece of furniture designed to make prominent its woodgrain (its materiality) reveals that as "naturalness," but does not necessarily display the hands-on strain of the *carpenter*. Perhaps I'm in error. Ironically, in some ways traditional forms with rhyme and meter may better have betrayed the shadow of the worker: the mere sight of twice ten rhymes for a *rondeau redouble* exasperates with its laboriousness. Although Language Poetry does indeed make me constantly conscious of the *language*, it is often by way of its strangeness, akin to some polymorphous autonomy, and I only afterwards in reading interviews or such get any inkling into how that artwork was actually crafted. (To read that **Susan Howe** wrote in *4x5 sketchpads* surprises me with workerliness and materiality in a new way that the stanzas' general brevity still left mysterious.)

At any rate, these are some preliminary surmises which others might like to join in on, in re-directing some slack of the (waning) class discussion to a potential *praxis*, class and poetry. Thanks.

Date: Mon, 19 Apr 1999  
Subject: **Hejinian: "deen" ?**

Although I've known other books by **Lyn Hejinian** for years, and have taught *My Life*, I have just lately read *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* for the first time.

One thread that particularly fascinates me are her "half-words," so to speak. That is, she punctuates the book with truncated words, or fragments, such as "ness," "scription," "porated," "brating," etc. The "rule" is that it is always the first syllable that is deleted. It's as though the fragment were the left-hand-justified tail-end of a word hyphenated at the other side of the page (obviously).

Here's the problem. There's one -- and only one -- such "nonce" word that for the life of me, I can't figure it. It is "*deen*", in section 36:

an ordinary person depending deen

I wracked my mind and finally gave up. I could not think of any word, as for "mena" or "nishment" or "sume", that would complete "deen". In a final gasp, I checked my rhyming dictionary, which lists words backwards from last letter to first. And there is, in fact, a single word which it gives that ends in "deen": "dudeen". A dudeen is a short tobacco pipe made out of clay.

The thing is, I feel that "dudeen" is out of character with the timbre of vocabulary Hejinian uses throughout. True, there is "cladding," and a few other rare words but, for some reason, I don't feel satisfied that "dudeen" is the answer that completes "deen".

Is there anyone steeped in *Writing Is* who can contribute some insight into this minutiae? Anybody out there who knows Hejinian (**Rae?**) and is privy to such a detail? An isolated case like this would alter my entire take on the book, . . . so I ask.

Date: Thu, 22 Apr 1999

Subject: **D=E=E=N**

NUMBER OF WORDS: 1557

Well, all the votes seem to be in (what syllable completes the **Hejinian** semi-word *deen* or what does it mean?), and the tally is: 3 for *Aberdeen*, 1 for *muhajideen*, 1 for *deem*, and 1 for its being the beginning of a word, such as *deenrolled* [sic]. Some speculate that it might be a typo (!), and others make a point of relating it back to the over-all instability that results in reading, where all sorts of innocent words like *fuse* or *sect* begin to look like *con-fuse*, *in-sect*, etc., and the very nature of what a word is goes ungrounded.

[**Sherry Brennan** writes: >>I feel compelled to say that I think there are a lot of "half" words with just the beginning of the word in her poem, but that (of course) they look like, and are, whole words, precisely because of the kind of word formation we have in English, where we make new words primarily by adding suffixes. In other words, I think that the particular ways the poem cuts words and lines makes you (or makes me, anyway) question whether any of the words are "whole." So any word to which you could conceivably add a suffix or adverbial ending becomes only a "half" word, as well, and then you start to hear the possibilities with prepositions, which is how we make other words, by adding prepositions in front of them .... and so on. The more you look at it that way, the fewer whole words there seem to be ... and the grammatical disjunctions within the lines help to reinforce that feeling, that you're just getting snippets that got cut and pasted together.<<

[And **Grant Jenkins** adds: >>Perhaps you have stubbed your toe on the "deen" because there is no single, logical explanation for it. As Sherry suggested that many of the words are not and cannot be made "whole," perhaps the opposite is true. That these words ARE whole and cannot be, to use **McCaffery's** terms, either enciphered (something added for completion) or deciphered (a key found to unlock meaning). Consider that perhaps these "words" could be: 1) fortunate "mistakes" or "errors" (spelling, typos) that, in their mutation, show how language changes 2) zaum-type syllables or sounds that have no meaning other than their sound, like music 3) indeterminate, potentially never to be figured out]

Here's something some Hejinian-lover might enjoy. I count 84 semi-words in *Writing Is an Aid to Memory* which cannot be explained as obscure entries in the dictionary (hence, excluding such false starts as *quire*, *gan*, *lection*, *bating*, which *are* words, though uncommon, and despite their semblance to *in-quire*, *be-gan*, *se-lection*, etc.). Those 84 are (bracketed numbers indicate the section where they appear, and any pair of words without a comma or other punctuation in between indicates two semi-words appearing in a single verse):

[1] ness; [2] scription, porated, brating, pand, covery, pensated; [4] gence ble; [5] plete, guage, straction, ception, tory, ysis, cerns; [8] mand, mands, mand, ting-mill, neral

quently, zontal, penters; [9] clusion, yond, crete, sopher, pel; [10] ceptible, ignated finement; [11] ness posites, victed, viction, lished; [13] dergo, cination, lic, cury, tice, velous; [16] ment, cribed, sented, thod, mit, fection semble; [17] pera; [18] spondent; [23] vived ternal, trious, ducer, persion; [24] ducer; [25] quence, civious, pelled; [26] jectures; [27] mendous prising, sume dom, duce, pery; [28] ficing; [29] vidual; [31] mand; [32] cate, tached; [34] nishment, ceived ket-weaving, tinuous, sert, tute; [36] deen, proach; [37] herent; [38] mena; [40] glish

Now, this evidence/influence is why I would exclude the chance of its being the beginning of a word: this pattern sets up a consistent perceptual expectation of discovering a missing *prefix*, or initial letters; but there are no such terminal examples as *conjec*, *perpetu*, or *suscept*, e.g. Moreso, I find in the absent *beginnings* a thematic correlative to the whole notion of *memory*. It is, of course, in the retrieval or re-creation of missing beginnings that memory consists! Thus, the gaps have a *larger* significance. Hejinian's decision to exclude visibly truncated endings comes from the same principle: that that choice would reflect back on anticipation or futurity, which is less her theme here. Yes?

Most of these cases can be "solved" with a handful of standard Latinate prefixes: *de-*, *ex-*, *dis-*, *com-/con-*, *ab-*, *sur-*, *in-*, etc. (perhaps why the poem attests to Latin twice: "Latin is a very genteel business" [23], and "points in Latin bridge a gap but unsaluted" [32]). Others require polysyllabic solutions: such as *cele-/cali- brated* or *hori- zontal*; for some, comical answers, such as *anal- ysis*, or witty self-references about the effect of the work itself, like *ran- dom*. Sometimes a missing syllable is immediately supplied within the next few lines or elsewhere in the poem (context): two lines after *straction* we read "drops of water to light off of abstraction in the other"; and *victed* and *viction* are shortly followed by "convicted of the inconsequences it touches are full / convictions". Sometimes *consonances* can echo out of the void: *mer- cury* and *mar- velous* (both within earshot range of each other, both part of the same section, [13]).

This latter similarity reflects, I think, on other choices that might be made. Should *strious* be completed with *indu-* or *illu-*? Well, two other semi-words are *vidual* and *dicate*: doesn't the likelihood of finishing both these latter with *indi- vidual* and *indi- cate* weight the earlier choice in favor of the similar-sounding *indu-*? That's where the sound-poetry can extend below the surface. Likewise, I find that the *-sc-* compound that emerges from *las- civious* should *bias* another maneuver like *cination* toward another *-sc-* choice, *fascination*. (And what about *ceptible*? Hence, more justifiably *sus- ceptible*?) The *las-* of *las- civious* in turns "rhymes" with the missing *bas-* of *bas- ket-weaving*.

In other words, the possibilities are combinatorial, and meaning increasingly becomes *probabilistic* here, and by generalization for *asyntactical* poetry in general, perhaps. (To complete *glish* as *Spanglish*, for example, would seem to be capricious, erroneous, in comparison with the more determined *English*.) Indeterminacy does not mean that any meaning goes: it means that meanings have to be filtered through a sort of *triage* and negotiated on the strength of internal evidence. (Technically speaking, in *The Poetics of*

*Indeterminacy*, **Marjorie Perloff** defines indeterminacy as the inability to distinguish between which associations are irrelevant and which are grounded in the text.)

So: *Dudeen* is too out of keeping with the overall rather normal vocabulary. And *Aberdeen*? Why *would* a proper name and a place name fit into a book which does not mention any other? (True, *Pacific* is a geographical name, but out of the capitalized nouns in the book ["Pacific," "Bach," "French," "Friday," "May," "Monday," "Thursday," "Latin," "Wednesday," "Man O' War," and "German," in that order] the stronger common bond would seem to be a certain *insubstantiality* or non-solidity shared among units of time, language, music,--- a jellyfish? a frigate bird?-- and the *oceanic*. ) *Aberdeen* would particularize in an unprecedented way.

The reader may be entrusted with the *production* of meaning, in Language Poetry, but there are productions that are fabrications, and there are productions that are deductions/inductions. I would say, for example, that *silicate* is an extraneous interpellation for *cate*. I am taking it that the book's vocabulary is governed by *homogeneity*, certainly in comparison to, say, **Kenward Elmslie's** diction, e.g. For a reader to produce *random* is more *likely* than *kingdom*, due to the congruence between the form and the impression of randomness the poetry risks giving (Is it plausible that someone might advance a feminist reading of *kingdom* as preferable, as a foil to patriarchy?).

Then, why am I reluctant to *produce* the meaning that it might be a *typo*? For one, because of the presence of *apple* and *nod* in the same section, reprising the book's first line. They lend an added importance to that section, so I can imagine a third, important gesture in the same space. (The William Tell Overture of the first line, "apple is shot nod", is glancingly signaled at "doubt shot bit sort done" [20], to reach full recapitulation in the final section [42]: "apple the proportion", "the test apple bank as material think is", until the closing {1812 Overture} jolt of "think is shot".) The belief-system, or ideology I seem to be carrying, in remaining lukewarm to the solution of typo, is a belief in the infallibility of the author that is stronger than my temptation to impute the fallibility of oversight to Sun & Moon, *especially* given that my copy is a *re-print*. The general field of meaning I want to produce holds out the hope that between 1978 and a 1996 re-print, *someone* would have caught a simple error, and that the care Hejinian devoted to indenting each line 1 to 26 spaces over depending on A to Z, which letter of the alphabet it begins with, would extend to *deen* and every other grapheme.

*Deen*, then, is a *genuine* case of not knowing which meaning to assign a word. I'll take it as The Exception To The Rule, *par excellence*. In all other cases, a denotation is determined, or variably weighted by likelihood. The range is narrower than "anything goes." There are many meanings that can only be assigned "whimsically." The opening "apple is shot nod" should *not* mean anything about oranges.

Date: Wed, 21 Apr 1999  
Subject: **A Barnard Report**

>>> "**Maria Damon** (Maria Damon)" [damon001@MAROON.TC.UMN.EDU](mailto:damon001@MAROON.TC.UMN.EDU)> 04/20/99  
07:56pm >>>

did you perchance see either of the papers on **Hannah Weiner** that were to be presented?  
if so, any remarks worth making about them? charles, or others, if you're out there, can  
you pitch in on this one?

---

I was at **Camille Martin's "Julia Kristeva and Hannah Weiner: A Poetics of the Multivocal Semiotic."** Martin introduced herself as "a graduate student" from Louisiana State. She was one of the few presenters to use an overhead projector.

She began with a sort of apologetics, about why theorists of Language Poetry, despite their penchant for French post-structuralism, have largely ignored the sort of psychoanalytic (or para-psychoanalytic) outlook of a Kristeva, herself a professional psychoanalyst. Martin's conjecture was that the triadic Oedipal matrix derives from too *narrative* a sense of self for the sort of "subject-less" ideologies of Language Poetry. Nonetheless, he advanced their viability.

She went on to give an overview of Kristeva's theories, mainly, to my memory, concerning the concept of the chora. (For my sake, I am left slightly perplexed, as the direction in which Martin took the idea of *chora* was different from my impression of what Kristeva's *chora* were: vestiges of the pre-Oedipal stage [and hence pre-verbal]). Then, to be plain about it, she started putting transparencies of Weiners' poems onto the machine, realized they were upside-down, had to turn the slide every which way to get it right . . . {non-verbal memory interference here} She went on to pick out some of the currents of voices that ran through the sample poems. She referred to Weiners' "clairvoyant" seeing of words everywhere, and on her forehead, as a "gift," almost enviously. The word "heteroglossia" seems to linger from what Martin said ( . . . which brings up other dissonances, since "heteroglossia" is more, to my knowledge, a term of **Bhaktin's**).

Basically speaking, it was a tidy presentation of Kristeva's themes, and then a matching or patching of those themes onto Weiner's poems. I do not remember the presentation to have diverged from that sort of one-to-one explication. Martin seemed, perhaps, somewhat new to Weiners' poetry. (The poem she used was, I thought, one I recognized as anthologized.) Some of my vagueness about the presentation may come

from a slight bewilderment at how little the talk acknowledged Weiners' sense of humor, which is a big part of my reading of her. I hope I'm not overlooking too much.

Just FYI: that presentation was preceded by **Mary Jo Bang** on "Elliptical Writing," and followed by **Ira Sadoff's** "Inside/Outside."

Mary Jo Bang took the invigorating (confrontational) tactic of facing the opponent head-on: She cited a poem by **Robert Pinsky**, "The Green Piano," as an example of what's wrong with "lyric tradition." Bang was rather wry in reducing the characters of the poem to the equivalent of a "television sitcom." -- "Elliptical" referred to -- who is the British writer? -- So-and-So's essay re-classifying American modernists/post-modernists as "elliptical," but tracing the origins of that post-modernism to a very limited primogeniture of only three or four Founding Fathers, including "*sometimes*" **Auden**. Bang critiqued that historiography for overlooking entirely the more important influences that exploded (ex nihilo?) from the '50's on.

The microphones weren't working at the table that had been set up on the auditorium stage, and each of the three speakers assumed positions elsewhere in the hall, for acoustical reasons, some standing on stage, some on ground level with the audience, Sadoff sitting on the edge of the stage. Bang apologized for her "tiny" voice.

Sadoff: "Inside/Outside" is a distinction he borrowed from Jazz. My memory of his presentation is rather eclipsed by an interruption that Sadoff was comical about. While the luncheon was being prepared, the other group having a banquet and filling up the conference rooms as soon as we evacuated them appeared to be -- in Sadoff's words -- a bar mitzvah! The noise from that group was becoming audible in our auditorium and slightly drowning out his presentation, which he joked, jumping to his feet, was some sort of "revenge," something come back to "haunt" him, as a Jew (the *unheimlich*).

I'm drawing from (my rather flawed) memory a week-and-a-half later, rather from than notes, so I apologize if this sounds like a *block-headed* synopsis.

Date: Wed, 28 Apr 1999

Subject: **Looking Around / spaced-out**

>>> **Alan Sondheim** <sondheim@PANIX.COM> 04/26/99 02:34pm >>>

> I laugh and laugh at indentations because they seem a weakness, arranging the lines just so! Why bother if the words are terrific? Maybe the words aren't so good and the "just so" part has to carry the weight of the day.<

Even though I too have abandoned special spacing and just left-hand justify my poetry for the most part, I think there may be answers for your question ("Why...?"). **Charles Olson** had this to say:

"It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspension even of syllables, the juxtaposition even of parts of phrases, which he intends. For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had" (quoted by RS in *Close Listening*, p. 370).

In other words, for anyone with a vestige of the spoken word in their poetry, spacing can be a way of measuring timing and pace [sic]. -- By not using spacings/indentation in my poems, I wind up resorting to a heavy use of commas (and semi-colons!).

There are other aspects, too. For poetry that is more text-centered than speech-centered, spacing may represent a defining dimension of the medium. After all, spacing (the *spatial*) is what differentiates text from voice: there is no way, in speech, that one word can be "above" another word,

like  
this

as they can in lines; there is only before and after, linear. For text-poetry, the spacing can be as intrinsic as *timbre* is to orchestration.

One other thought: The name "**Julia Kristeva**" has been circulating in the discussion list in the past few days. She talks about spacing, too (although in a different sense). To (mis)quote **Linda Kintz's** "Plato, Kristeva, and the Chora: Figuring the Unfigurable" (*Plato and Modernism*), she says:

"The important point in her revision of **Plato's** *chora* . . . is her definition of it as spacing, rather than as space---as the site of an aesthetic wobble . . . The aesthetic wobble is the ground of meaning . . . a moving dialectic or wavering between the body of the subject and the historical train of symbols and signs . . . The mobile ground of this spacing, [is] this wavering between perception and intellect which is fantasy . . . '(S)ocial organization . . . imprints its constraint . . . through an *ordering*,' or a series of . . . spacings."

And, now (to misrepresent Kristeva!): these spacings have to do with an archaic disorder, traces of which still show through the conventionalized, "patriarchal" order of learned language. The goal is to find a way to introduce an imprint of the speaker as unique, material individual, to offset the homogenizing, dematerialized, "weightless" language of The Information Age. (**Maria Damon?**) Typographical spacing is one such way.

Of course, I'm literalizing Julia. But it has that effect. Which may be why you "laugh and laugh," Alan. Laughter always erupts over the returned of the repressed. And the *chora*, with its irregular spacings, seems a funny joke: text is *supposed to* run along in one big prose block (Law of The Father), and poetry that is neatly trimmed into a sort of column of type more closely approaches that *safe* monolith.

Date: Tue, 11 May 1999

Subject: **Questions on a HOW-TO [value]**

**John Lowther's** past three posts, in response to **Standard Schaefer's** essay, raises many unanswered questions. (Many, many questions.) One vein in that inquiry I read as about *value*, criteria, and standards.

- > where are we to locate these 'formal criteria'
- \* > does experimental writing lack formal criteria ?
- > or can we say 'this IS a poem' about anything we wish?
- > in calling out for standards with which to judge are we not calling out for some authority?
- > art wherein there are no standards of this sort and no communal goals
- > aren't there folks who wd like to say that there are standards and ways to say what is or is not valid as literary or artistic practice?

The next question that comes out of all these (like hydra heads!), for me, is: why do we *need* to keep returning to a practice of "literary value," criteria and standards? Clearly, work has become widespread in the past quarter century, if not earlier, which puts into question ("problematizes") or renders useless earlier criteria of judgment: "good"/"better"/"best", "like"/"dislike", "masterpiece"/"genius". Post-modernism has set into play a body of works where not only is it tenuous how to value one over another, but how to distinguish within a poem itself what portions might "succeed" and which "fail" according to any casual standards of criticism. (Hence, the shift in editorial practices, which are now as a rule a flat acceptance/rejection-- since how else to arbitrate between one line and the next?) And yet, the question ("does experimental writing lack formal criteria ?") keeps coming up, as though there were too strong a nostalgic attachment to a criterion-view of art for even the initiated to part with such (Solomonic) judgments.

I find it helpful to contextualize the anxiety over value, by placing it against the very much *value-producing* society that wants to think that way, namely, for want of a better word, our "capitalist" world ("free market") where the assigning of value -- literalized into value-as-price -- is the very essence of exchange. Then, the value and "criteria" we fret over not having for art becomes a *metaphoric* sublimation for the more decisive matter of price. What is "really" being asked is: what *price* am I to assign to this art, this poem, that poem? Then, what happens to this all-important compulsion to judge and value, when the work no longer bears easy markers for such a judgment-game.

It may be a weakness of mine to draw in visual artworks as analogies, which (like the **Robert Morris**) people then don't know how to take, but

there sometimes seems something self-evident about the visual arts which, if it can be grasped, brings the same point, more elusive in literature, to the surface. This time I'd bring in **Warhol's** silkscreen and **Duchamp's** readymades as comparison. Once silkscreens entered into fine arts as a "means of production" (sorry), their labor-efficiency greatly jeopardized the earlier value-criteria of labor intensiveness and time ("Can you imagine how long it took to paint that **Wyeth!**?"). That the market actually did absorb Warhols side by side with traditional, brushstroke paintings is remarkable: the Trojan Horse had then gotten within the gates; the computer virus has entered the system. -- The same crisis of value erupts around a Duchamp readymade, where there is virtually *no* conventional criterion of workmanship or virtuosity. But for Warhols and Duchamps to be weighed in alongside, say, a **Monet** or a pre-modernist, an **Ingres**, on the same equalizing scales of price and value meant that the value-game itself had fallen open into a gaping, undetected contradiction.

Now, just such a contradiction has entered into the body of contemporary literature, with poetries such as *aleatory* works, "concrete" or found poetry, the a-syntactical, etc. It makes perfect sense that a book like *The Tennis Court Oath* continues to take such a drubbing from the forces of "conservatism," because *The Tennis Court Oath* has not merely done *badly* what other poetries have done "better"; it has sidestepped, or transcended the very basis of production, of writing that was taken for granted: that a poet "think up" on his own all the words and word-orders within a poem. (Why don't we just continue to use quill pens and inkwells, the way **Robert Graves** did?) It isn't just that if we give it the old college try once more we can *come up with* new criteria and standards, the ghosts of obsolete criteria, a rigor mortis of value, and relax again into our tranquilizing, habitual need to dispense value. Irreconcilabilities have, surreptitiously, entered into "The System" of literature and canon,--- that are as incongruent with the "traditional" as an attempt by a capitalist/free market economy to communicate with a monastic or vow-of-poverty economy (thus, a digression: the persistent, odd leverage a Vatican can exert against First and Second Worlds, consistently advocating in favor of Third or *Fourth* Worlds that share with it an immunity or exclusion from standard financial profit). Free verse alone represented a serious anomaly that a *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* scrambled preposterously to rationalize (invoking spurious precedents like the quasi-metered cadences of Hebrew psalmody, as justification).

For, without these *systematized* prestidigitations of criteria, the burden of a reader's experience falls back upon very different guideposts,-- such as the analysis of power relations ("What partisan interests benefit from this work?"), "taste," nepotisms of who-knows-who, etc., that

makes the lingering compulsion for value break down, unveiled, into a much more *gritty* host of determinisms. With "taste," do I even have a *choice* to like or dislike, or hasn't my allegiance of approval to an earlier work predetermined my obligation to "like" similar later works?

Along these lines, when **Marjorie Perloff** -- is it fair to mention her name? (hi, Marjorie) -- at the Barnard conference dropped the petite scandale of publicly asking what anybody sees in the poetry of **Jorie Graham** (invoking criteria such as "rhythm"! as though anyone in the room could still scan a Sapphic from an ithyphallic), I thought that a lost opportunity, . . . whereas had the question been re-framed as, say, "Given that, with a popular and reputable figure like Jorie Graham, I can't see anything in her work and I trust three-quarters of you can't either, *what are the mechanisms* of career-building, marketing, or the production of hype that could have so ignored the obvious?" that would have, in turn, provided a link back to the same mechanisms that advanced the reputations of the other seven readers, and the entire phenomenon of Language/lyric poetry. In other words, once the nebulousness of "taste" is put aside, what critique is forced to fall back upon are all the very *real* agencies of publicity, the prestige of select publishing venues, croneyism, whatever, but *real*.

It becomes not a question of "How was it?" but "*What* was it?"

That's where the equal sign in "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E" becomes emblematic. One way a spectre of this may have entered into earlier discussions was in the misunderstanding that Language Poetry could "mean anything" . . . as if people were correct in sensing that there might be some *equivalence* at play somewhere, but were off-the-mark in placing it at the semantic, instead of at the level of value. But the original, macrocosmic crisis of value is taking place around us all the time, in the fatuous equivalencies that capital, that the dollar can establish between complete incompatibles! I don't know if we *should* hope to be liberated, or exonerated, from a crisis of value in poetry/art at the microcosmic level. The discomfort that results from these aesthetic equivalencies or undecideabilities may be an aperture through which the art-consumer can reach a broader understanding of the criterion-lessness at play in the culture at large. We may just be becoming *un-deluded* in literary/poetic spheres, about what still passes for unquestionable around us.

Date: Wed, 14 Jul 1999

Subject: Re: **Submission Crucible** -Reply

>>>Mr. **Waber** proposes that rejection letters ought to be accompanied by a subscription form . . . "adding insult to injury," "rubbing salt in the wound," etc. What do y'all think about this? Would you feel insulted, salted, annoyed, demeaned or otherwise antagonized by such an enclosure? I'd really like to know. Because we'd really like to have more subscribers.

---

Why do you say only "rejection letters" should be accompanied by a form? What is it about your *acceptance* letters or, for that matter, even solicited contributors that makes you leave them out of the equation? If you'd have qualms sending unasked-for subscription forms to, say, a **Charles Bernstein**, or **Geoffrey O'Brien**, or **Fanny Howe**, when you notify them of publication, that hesitation should apply to those whom you decline to publish, as well.

Some things to consider:

It's perfectly legitimate for a magazine to run a subscription campaign, and even to assemble a mailing list from the addresses of "submitters." But, in scrupulous business terms, that effort should be treated as its own separate account; otherwise, you're piggybacking your development campaign onto the backs of somebody else's 33 cent stamp.

There may be genuine reasons for deciding not to subscribe to journals and to buy them in bookstores, instead. The covers of perfectbound journals are usually not designed to be folded over and squashed to fit into narrow city mailboxes. So immediately, subscription means reading a damaged copy.

The publication schedule of small press journals is, as a rule, undependable. You never know exactly when they're going to come out. To be truly subscription-oriented, journals would have to hold themselves to the same firm commitment of unbending dates as periodicals, guaranteeing when the books will be sent out, and those dates should be advertised as such. A subscription is a *contract*. We're conditioned to these nuisances of punctuality and efficiency, and paying for something that you're never sure when you'll see it may be a reason for its unpopularity.

Also, the climate of non-literary journal magazines (glossies) we're acculturated to, where subscriptions are standard, has learned to run

certain features to encourage an air of dialogue between the subscriber/reader and the magazine. Specifically, letters to the editor columns or "polls" as part of the aura that builds a subscription base. That's what you'd be buying into. Such lures foster (even if an illusion) an impression of things being *interactive*, so that subscription fees are dismissed as only part of a larger two-way communication. A subscription campaign requires *bait*, in addition to the product itself. In same Madison Avenue glossy culture, subscribers are offered substantial financial discounts off newsstand copies, which literary journals do not offer. Or t-shirts or mugs.

By sending out subscription forms like that, now you're the one entering into the "pretty please" realm of the unsolicited. And you risk having the reputation of your journal and its logo become part of the junk mail pile.

Personally, I've been spending about \$35.00 a month, currently, sending off for small press journals (\$3, maybe \$5, rarely \$7 a pop) who do not have national distributors. (That does not include the off-the-rack ones I buy, at about one a week; I have been known to buy \$80.00 worth of literary magazines at a single shot.) I find it presumptuous, this bias that "submitters" are somehow not pulling their share of the weight. How do you *know* that the recipient of the rejection letter hasn't bought every issue to date? But, I must say, I very much like the feel of *not* playing into conventional consumerism that comes of this practice. It feels very personal: whoever mailed that journal wrote "Thanks!" on the outside of the mailing envelope! Converting the audience ("submitters") into cash cow returns the literary journal to a whole ethos (sorry) of target demographics and such, which I thought the iconoclasm of the poetry was ostensibly subverting. And once literary journals have become mixed into the blizzard of "Bill me later" forms, why not just belly up and subscribe to *W*?

An alternative to treating the (frankly unpromising) "submitters" as golden goose might be to step up the drive for advertisers.

I hope this broadens the ramifications for "we'd really like to have".

Date: Fri, 23 Jul 1999 05:30:53 -0400

Subject: **\$3.50: Summer vacation in Scandinavia!**

I think I've discovered where poetry might be, had there never been a "Wasteland" to set us back 30 years! With the recent interest in international poetry demonstrated by such publications as *Boundary2*, readers should grab up the chance to check out the oddities transpiring in Scandinavia, in the latest issue of *Samizdat* (no. 3). With English translations of 10 little-seen poets from Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, it's an opportunity to glimpse a sturdier branch of our same family tree, effortlessly twentieth century, in a lineage spared the antagonistic influences of American confessionism with its counter-reactions. The surprise of it is a kind of unselfconscious modernism which escapes the sometimes deforming pressures of obligatory experimentation. Even Nordic Europe's "conservative" strains seem to derive from an unfamiliar lyric tradition (unfamiliar to American readers) which remains startlingly without recourse to our lyricism's "I"/"you" axis. What informed English or Romance poetry these poets do explicitly evoke (**Lawrence Durrell**, **Valery**, and **Char** in **Gungerd Wikholm**; "My Interview with **I.A. Richards**", **Perry Miller**, and an **Auden** epigraph in Anglophone **Goran Printz-Pahlson**) may sometimes seem quaint, but its spottiness and lacunae have spared them the weight of the Bloomsian patrilineage we suffer, all for the better. All the same, it's interesting to find **Eliot** that far north: "But think also of . . . the lonely typists in their immaculate rooms / with a small fridge and biscuits on the mantelpiece" ("My Interview"). (That quote may be unrepresentative, though, as even the same author could coin such fine peculiarities as "intestines of the heuristic house" [!].) Overall, they have no compunctions about blithely changing direction mid-stream in their poems, yet without that petrifying into an imprisoning literary trope like formal "disjunction." A flourish of Pop can turn up, as in Printz-Pahlson's "The Enormous Comics," which flaunts as much **Superman** and **Katzenjammer Kids** as a **Kenneth Koch** poem, except here Superman is a *transvestite*. Curiously, Scandinavian modernism also seems to have grown up without the facile vernacular imitators took from **Williams Carlos Williams**, and the pleasant formality that results meets the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E '90's halfway, insofar as they too, if pushed to it, may "hate speech." For instance, such linguistic materialities as: "And the language will arrive at last / We do not know what's first", "The vortex of our language / in the greater vortex; through its eye---" (**Goran Sonnevi**), "Stuck in his back pocket, a book with gleaming covers / . . . start at what page?" (**Jesper Svenbro**). There's a good share of nature imagery, --- a relief, in this July weather --- but there's a lot of wilderness up there, and, while perhaps a trace of Symbolisme adds a cool mystery to such "yellow leaves of the birches, the red leaves of the rowans", it's equally realist in its

occasional specificities: "drop by drop / down the whitewashed wall and the bulging gauze-wrapped sewer pipe / to come out first as rust" (**Soren Ulrik Thomsen**). Here's how far from transparency it can go: "gridiron reverberations / in the hills, sourmash / blandishments . . . As the *gavroche* innocence of a barnyard rape: // He offers a smile, mild / as pick-axe handles a / mile wide which kindles/ the hide of rutabegas" (Printz-Pahlson again, whose English language originals, translated into Swedish, have "on occasion" been translated back into English, according to the editor's introduction). I lived in Sweden when I was a teenager, so I can swear to you: those "sourmash / blandishments" keep coming and coming. (Followers of this EPC discussion list will also be glad to hear from our own **Masha Zavialova**, lone list-er throughout continental Russia, in her "Word from Russia": she reports on their first prize for independent writing, the coveted Andrei Belyi Prize for literature, where the award is a bottle of vodka and one ruble.)

The info is: *Samizdat* / 14 Campus Circle / Lake Forest, IL 60045. Single copies of current/back issues: \$3.50. Subscription: \$10 for three annual issues. Checks made out to editor **Robert Archambeau**.

What better time than now, while summer sunlight lasts well past midnight there?

Thu, 12 Aug 1999  
Subject: "alternative"

>>> "**Maria Damon** (Maria Damon)" <damon001@MAROON.TCMN.EDU>  
08/09/99 05:25pm >>> "alternative" does tend to mean a certain  
alternative, namely, an "experimental" style. like "avant garde."

---

With all of these various commentaries on the use of the phrase  
"alternative poetry"--- isn't this use of "alternative" derivative, though,  
borrowed from the marketing of contemporary music? It isn't as though  
poets themselves had hatched this usage, the way "Vorticist" or such  
may have been a genuine self-coined appellation. It's being patched in  
from the language at large, where it already has its politicized functions.

In the NY area at least, there are radio stations, more and more actually,  
which play what they call "alternative" rock; it's pretty much what used  
to be called "punk", with a dash of occasional "metal." I have the  
impression that with "alternative music" the marketers use the word to  
soften the scary edge they don't want to name: "punk." And I would  
suspect that, in its "pure" form, the same might be true of "alternative  
poetry."

Where "avant-garde" or even "experimental" may have suggested  
something contestatory, "defiant," or antagonistic to a status quo, the  
danger with a term like "alternative" is that it makes things sound as  
though these were arbitrary choices that one might wobble back and  
forth between casually: Coke/Pepsi ideology. It isn't dialectical anymore;  
it's styled as a mere matter of taste and whim, that you can switch the  
channel to "alternative" for a while if you get tired of mainstream, or  
whatever. Spice things up.

What is being elided is that an authentic "avant-garde" might actually be  
meant as "*subversive*," the concept of "revolutionary" art, that it is  
seeking to change the whole rules of the game, and wasn't served up as  
a diversion. "Alternative," like "pluralistic," is a troublingly *umbrella*  
term, to my thinking: I thought **Jacques Debrot's** helpful postings correctly implied  
that there are poets who are writing essentially normative and  
conservative poetry, who are all too happy to slip under the tent skirts of  
a bohemia, out of embarrassment or plain obliviousness to their  
"complicity" in perpetuating/reproducing things as they are, or for other  
reasons.

In short, what I am trying to say is that "alternative" is a *vanilla*-izing of  
something perhaps much more bitter and tonic than that. Or, it is a  
repackaging of (*malgré lui*) mainstream castaways who otherwise

would have been lost against the mainstream's more exclusionary publishing odds. The "radical" that has lost its fight becomes "alternative."

Why *can't* a conference bill itself as "Subversive" or "Insurrectionist"? The fading of that sensibility may have a lot to do with the latter generational "directionlessness" that is also being discussed under this Boston theme.

Date: Thu, 12 Aug 1999  
Subject: **Farm Implements?** -Reply

>>> **John Tranter** <jtranter@JACKET.ZIP.COM.AU> 07/30/99 09:16am >>>  
JJULLICH@... mentioned in his survey of Scandanavian poetry the line

"He offers a smile, mild  
/ as pick-axe handles a / mile wide which kindles/ the hide of rutabegas"

As a long-time fan of **John Ashbery**, I'm a little concerned that the  
spelling of

rutabagas

is getting abraded here. We don't have them in Australia -- we have Swedes and turnips,  
but not rutabagas -- but that's no reason to become careless about our treasury of English  
spellings.

Anyone care to comment?  
best,  
JT

---

The *OED* lists 1799 as the earliest citation for "The new turnip, called  
roota бага". As "ruta-baga", it has appeared in poetry no less illustrious  
than **Shelley's** (*Oed. Tyr.* 1. 47):

Hog-wash or grains, or ruta-bagas, none  
Has yet been ours since your reign begun

later in poetry no less whimsical than **Ogden Nash's** 1951 "Family  
Reunion":

We gobbled like pigs  
On rutabagas and salted figs.

However, since *brassica napus* is also defined by the *OED* and the  
*Encyclopedia Britannica* as "the Swedish turnip" (see  
[http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?asmby\\_id=15299](http://www.eb.com:180/bol/topic?asmby_id=15299) for a lovely  
illustration of *brassica rapa*), the name is originally derived from a  
West Gotland dialect of Swedish, and perhaps we should be less  
protectionist about "our treasury of English spellings": often vestiges of  
an earlier etymology can resurrect in mispronunciations or deviant  
spellings.

I'm distressed, though, that I cannot find a journal article I read on "Farm Implements and Rutabagas", by **Reva Wolf**. It appeared in a literary journal that I chanced upon in our Periodicals Room, but now I can't remember which. If I remember correctly, she argues that there's a link to an **Andy Warhol** painting with, I think, the word "rutabagas" in it, or perhaps **Popeye** or some other element from the poem. John disavowed any connection or knowledge of the painting, but she prints a photograph of a Thanksgiving dinner party where he is seated in front of the suspect painting.

He was working at *Art News* at the time, and may have said that the title came from a Dutch or Flemish canvas in a catalogue he was editing at the time; but Reva Wolf again traces down the original to find that any such Old Master was in fact titled "Farm Implements and *Vegetables* in a Landscape", or such, so that his recounting of it was a double invention: he may have revised the title of the Dutch canvas itself in that catalogue.

I'm drawing on an imperfect memory of the article here, so if anyone can help out with the proper Wolf citation, we could learn more about those rutabagas. I'm sure they're delicious with drawn butter.

Date: Fri, 13 Aug 1999

Subject: **Village Voice POLYVERSE review**

Wednesday's *Village Voice* runs a lukewarm or even unfavorable review of **Lee Ann Brown's** *Polyverse*, filled with gratuitous innuendo about Language Poetry. The reviewer is named **Thad Ziolkowski**.

He doesn't wait any longer than *the first sentence* to mention **Charles (Bernstein)**, who selected *Polyverse* for the "prestigious" New American Poetry Series, and to begin casting veiled aspersions against him. We wouldn't have expected *Polyverse* as Charles' choice, Ziolkowski says: we would have expected "ironic, warily analytical work". Charles, here cast as papal, bishopric, or censorious by Ziolkowski, should have been more likely to give *that* his "imprimatur".

Ziolkowski criticizes Brown, basically, as too much a patchwork quilt of styles. (An assessment which Sun & Moon's own amazon.com Book Description is not, at a more positive slant, far afield from: "many forms and possibilities. Taking its cue from a wide range of modern and postmodern poetics, Brown's work . . .") *Polyverse*, he says, fails in echoing New York School, Beat, and Language, without synthesizing those influences. (Nor does Z. entertain the inkling that syncretism is not the only solution, that the *Poly-* in *Polyverse* may actually mean something, and that the segregated stylistics Brown leaves behind is *more* in tune with an aesthetic of polyvocalism.)

He finally treats this "thirtysomething" poet (his agism) as if, as I read it, this were a beginner's problem that she will hopefully work out in time ("But then maybe the orgy among all these poetic influences is just getting warmed up").

If it weren't for Brown eroticizing her Language-like "proliferation of grammatical terms", Language Poetry by itself is just "lifeless automatic pilot".

He accuses Brown of seeming "dated, frozen in a sunstruck New York--circa-1965 atmosphere". Oddly, it's her "references to **Whitman, Mayakovsky, Sappho and Stein**" that Ziolkowski particularly singles out as behind-the-times, but yet when he again cites her eroticism as "What saves the book from this terminally reverent tendency", he quotes her lines "She's a minor flirt,/a cloud in trousers" without so much as a blink of open recognition that "a cloud in trousers", too, is yet another homage and "reverent tendency" (**O'Hara**/Mayakovsky). Ziolkowski is left looking as if he doesn't know he was quoting an appropriation of Brown's, at

cross-purposes, and hence is in contradiction with himself by saying that what saves the book from a debility is the same debility.

His attitude may reach its pique when he writes: "You end up wondering . . . what's particularly new about this New American." Fair question. Personally, I am left wondering, if he was this global in treating Brown --- whom ("Brown is . . . goofy in a troubadour-hippie-Fugs way") he nonetheless seems to enjoy, despite his disparaging slant of praise --- what kind of harsher polemic *The Village Voice* would have printed if the book were indeed "ironic, warily analytical work".

See:

<http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/9932/ziolkowski.shtml>

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Date: Sat, 14 Aug 1999

Subject: Re: **Village Voice POLYVERSE review** -Reply

>>> Douglas <djmess@CINENET.NET> 08/13/99 08:05am >>>

>Jeffrey:

>Thank you for the good analysis of a very wrong-headed  
>review. I truly appreciate it.

>**Douglas Messerli**, Sun & Moon Press.

---

Thank **you!** . . . Sir.

I wanted to add, but decorum precludes:

The way he goes on and on about how the one "saving grace" of the book is all this supposed erotica he quotes ("As I pinch my nipples," "**Brown** puts an erotic twist on this", "Beat erotics", "*polymorphous* relation to gender" [my emphasis], "That and sex", "orgy . . . is just getting warmed up"), **Ziolkowski** seems to be giving a single-mindedly *horny* reading of an apparently very *literary* book . . . as if it were all some sort of *panty raid* which Brown ("goofy in a troubadour-hippie-Fugs way", like straight from *Dogpatch*) had lured him into. (Note the telltale "*Fugs*.") I'd say, on that vein, --- and this is when he was in a *good* mood and having his jollies, --- that Z. got stuck in a (heterosexualized) he-reader/she-author wish fulfillment as to what the book might be, and read it entirely through the fact that the cover has the name of a female

author on it. He seems to have misread the title as *Per-verse*, rather than *Polyverse* (as I think his *entendre* about "polymorphous" brings to the surface).

Date: Sat, 14 Aug 1999

Subject: **cut-ups / "homosexualization of the New York avant-garde"**

>>> **Mark Prejsnar** <no66am@MINDSPRING.COM> 08/10/99 07:13pm >>> wrote:

>**Jacques,**

>I would be interested to hear what you feel connects the  
>"homosexualization of the New York avant-garde" with cut-up  
>technique.... >(beyond the fact that some gay guys did it....)

---

Mark,

Although I don't know what Jacques **Debrot's** answer would be to that question, . . . I would like to agree with him about "the dangers of historical decontextualization", and that, to name as he did only **Burroughs, Cage, and Ashbery**, "homosexualization" is significant for the invention of cut-ups. Personally, I've already had a similar impression concerning the "homosexualization" of **Warhol's, Johns', and Rauschenberg's** appropriations, in relation to the genesis of Pop. (Not to forget: the theoretics of cut-ups' historical period were also hothouse to "Notes on Camp," whose own "homosexualization" treated sexuality and art style as self-evident equivalents.) Why I feel that way, though, may be thin ice to explain.

I take it from your (supportive) tone that you mean your question to be *in defense* of those "gay guys", . . . as though Jacques' telescoping of the period into one "-ization" were presumption, like talking "Velvet Mafia" or shortchanging heterosexualized contemporaries. But at the same time I'd like to submit that your "beyond the fact that some gay guys did it" may have a trivializing casualness about it, . . . as though there were always "gay guys" around, as it seems nowadays, and no less than three all at once independently but coincidentally being instrumental in the creation of a new art form were at best some statistical fluke. As though the branding iron of idiosyncratic desire did not leave its stamp on art. Back to "historical decontextualization": those three were still of a generation which couldn't yet even be *named* as "gay", so their consensus in all engineering this same new art form into being is to the contrary rather remarkable. If a new genre were to emerge from a similarly exclusionary group of, say, Jews, ---or *lesbians* rather than "guys"! it might be more striking and appear instantly sensible for someone to begin one of those typical explorations of Jewish Mysticist antecedents, or such.

That said, let me get myself into more hot water by attempting to explain the parallel I find between the Warhol-Johns-Rauschenberg "homosexualization" and Pop, and between the Burroughs-Cage-Ashbery "homosexualization" and cut-ups. Proviso: I may be confusing psychology for ontology, and I'm almost definitely erring into what Jacques warns against as "analogical . . . significance." (However, given the metaphoric nature of

"historical contextualization's" hidden similes themselves, some tropological thinking seems allowable.)

Here's the point:

The xerox-like image transfer methods (silk screening) of the Pop artists *reproduced* images without devising new ones; similarly, that graphic form has its literary equivalent in cut-ups, which also, if not per se reproducing, re-*arrange* a pre-existing text without introducing new matter.

The (perhaps heretically naive) link my mind draws is---to *biological* reproduction, or procreation. (There is some slippage of terms here, as we use the word "reproduction" for both productive biological parturition and the *non-productive* "mechanical reproduction" we know since Benjamin.) To blurt it out---the figure of the homosexual is, in biological terms, non-productive (non-reproducing), and the "homosexualization" artwork of those cut-up/Pop progenitors was also non-productive ("reproduction"). If we suspend disbelief and try to re-imagine from the perspective of those '50's art climate, "original" creation would have been seen as an indispensable criterion of *a man's* art.

The necessary absurdity that I'm figuring into this logic is the cliché that "an artwork is like a child to the artist"; and I am of course assuming for the sake of this stereotyped argumentation the fallacy of the *childless* homosexual, a fallacy which, however, in the case of these particular six artists named in the "homosexualization", happens to hold true (perhaps not accidentally).

Hence---I suppose another way of putting this (increasingly embarrassing) notion is that: the homosexual does not *add* to the world. (Although an unpalatable axiom, and patently objectionable on the level of the real, it seems fair to assert in the spirit of dogma such as "*Ce sexe qui n'est pas un*" or other post-modern metaphysics.) In these terms, the "gay guys" behind cut-ups and Pop reproduction, despite their incontestable contribution, did not *add* to the world or the bulk of existing imagery/text in the same way that a work of "original" production takes up space. ("Europe" had "really" not added anything to *Beryl of the Biplane*; it's commutative, not additive.)

As far as cut-ups' earlier larval stage of *collage*, I believe **Wayne Koestenbaum** has commented on the sublimated male-male "bonding" that **Picasso** and **Braque** acted out in its invention and manufacture (Koestenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration*, which should perhaps be required reading in relation to "beyond the fact": same-sex literary collaboration may *already* be an a priori "homosexualization," regardless of the participants' actual sexual preference, according to Koestenbaum's thesis).

I hope this doesn't seem like **Pound** on Social Credit. I mean it as Queer Theory,—which is always speculative.

Date: Wed, 18 Aug 1999

Subject: **oh my god: cut-ups / "homosexualization of the New York School"**

>>> **R M Daley** <R.M.Daley@M.CC.UTAH.EDU> 08/13/99 04:45pm >>>

>>>1. please see sedgwick's intro to *Novel Gazing*, published Duke Press 1997 for a primer on "queer theory" which departs ferociously from, says a thousand goodbyes to, freud and his cronies whose arrested sexual (theory) development foisted repression on any and everything not deemed 'natural' or 'biological'

Is that what **Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick** is saying? She uses the word "natural" only once, about the pleasure/reality principles, and for that, she places it in (ironic?) scare quotes: "This leaves pleasure-seeking as an always . . . underground wellspring of supposedly 'natural' motive" (p. 16).

As far as "his cronies", what about the **Melanie Klein** Sedgwick takes half her title from ("Reparative") and champions?

I don't know if I would call it a "primer"; to me, it seems a rather fine hermeneutical point she's sifting. And neither Sedgwick nor queer theory are that proscriptive: she repeatedly advocates a kind of scholarly libertinism ("turns these essays take away from existing accounts of how 'one' *should* read, and back toward a . . . fecund question of how one *does*", p. 2; "for someone to have an unmystified, angry view of . . . systemic oppressions does not . . . enjoin on that person any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences", p. 4).

Yet, the queer theory people I personally knew in 1997 took considerable umbrage at Sedgwick's dictating to the community, labelling them. There are good reasons to take exception with her "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading".

Sedgwick seems to be taking her psychoanalysis menu-style, picking and choosing which Freudianisms she'll keep and which throw out. Even if, as you say, she's expurgating repression (repressing repression), the whole essay is, of course, about nothing less Freudian than--- paranoia! That's like saying no USA, but keeping Washington, D.C.

Which still doesn't keep **Kathryn Bond Stockton** and **Anne Chandler**, to name only two of the essayists in *Novel Gazing*, from going right ahead and using their fill of **Freud** for their queer theory (50-51, 224n).

All the same, hasn't Sedgwick's new and improved model 1999 *Dialogue on Love* out-trumped her own 1997 "Paranoid Reading . . ."

into obsolescence, as far as repression goes? 1997: she may have had motives for rhetoric against queer theory's (other writers') reliance on psychoanalysis and repression,--- but when, 1999, it came to her memoirs and 'fessing up as to how she actually spent those years, she has no bones about publishing transcripts (cut-ups!) from psychotherapy sessions where she *paid* to unveil her own personal repressions. Doesn't that seem like double standards, prohibitive queer theory (no repression) versus indulgent private praxis (yes repression)?

Regardless, when I added "I mean this as queer theory, . . . which is always *speculative*" as the last sentence to my post (Sedgwick wrote: "there are important phenomenological and theoretical tasks that can be accomplished only through local theories and nonce taxonomies; the . . . mechanisms of their relation to stronger theories remains the matter of art and *speculative* thought", p. 23), maybe you're right and it's not queer theory; I shouldn't have blushed: I tossed that in as apologetics only because I was afraid someone might think what I wrote was "anti-gay." --- I wrote, "it's commutative, not *additive*", and Sedgwick wrote, "The desire of a reparative impulse . . . is *additive* and accretive" (p. 27): the two differentiations don't really seem that far apart to me.

But even if I am mistaken, she's already gotten there ahead of us: "'the importance of 'mistakes' in queer reading and writing . . . has a lot to do with loosening the traumatic, inevitable-seeming connection between mistakes and humiliation. . . . (A) lot of queer energy, later on, goes into . . . practices aimed at taking the terror out of error, at making the making of mistakes sexy, creative, even cognitively powerful" (p. 25).

**Maria Damon**, for one, seems to agree about **Earl Jackson** that a good connection between "the homosexualization of the New York avant-garde" and cut-ups can at least be argued. Are you saying there is no connection?

>>>3. not everyone has to have babies - some women don't have babies - some women who fuck with men don't have babies - some women who fuck with women don't have babies - some women who fuck men have babies and then give them away - . . .

**Gertrude Stein** couldn't have said it better. (I did identify "the childless homosexual" as a fallacy.) True, all exhaustively true. But that's empiricism. I was speaking hypothetically.

Date: Thu, 30 Sep 1999

Subject: **Jacket #8 / Perchik-Baratier interview** : ~reply

Ekphrasis. Yes, an *ekphrasis*.

I had wanted to mention the *Jacket / Perchik-Baratier* interview back when the list was discussing that topic "What should a standard cover letter include?" and all our resident editors were contributing how submitters should subscribe and scrutinize literary magazines and flatter the editors in the first paragraph. Perchik, some say the most widely published of all contemporary poets, says this on his strategy for publication:

"It's called carpet bombing. Three times a year, I used to do it four times a year, I write out all the envelopes from *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses* so there's no emotional involvement, I've got everything written out and all the return envelopes . . . When they come back all I do is the mechanical act of taking the submission from the rejected envelope into a new one with a stamp and out it goes. No emotion involvement. I just feel it's coming back and out it goes again."

Wouldn't it be interesting to know what other tactics our more widely published poets use. Are we to imagine that all these other writers put in the *hours* necessary to thoroughly familiarize oneself with the literary journal horizon?

Perchik comes across as a highly plain-spoken man,--- but I thought his "revelation" about using photography books as the basis for all his poetry had tempting theoretical implications. After all, the opacity of his elliptical poems reads as constructivist, doesn't it? One tries --- *I try* --- to read him, like anyone's poem, by interrelating the material I'm presented with, and seeing what congruences can be drawn. But, from what Perchik tells us, we now see that any attempts at interpretation we've made had been calculated on the basis of what economics calls "*incomplete information*." His entire output is an *ekphrasis*, and if we were to see those source pictures side-by-side with their respective poems, many things that previously had appeared non sequitur, unexplained, or gratuitous would now jump out of the picture's frame as justified, even mandatory. It turns the sacred cow of *referentiality/non-referentiality* around on its horns. --- With other similar poetry, this pitfall of "incomplete information" usually turns up in the form of unstated autobiographical associations. Perhaps naively, for example to name only one, I was surprised to hear **Ann Lauterbach's** spoken introductions to her poems at poetry readings, where "fragments," as she calls her new style, that were hitherto inaccessible to me and read as autonomous inventions, in fact related back on an almost point-by-point basis to personal

experiences she could identify, such as a trip around the coastline of Greece with--- **John Hollander!** To name two, there's an interview on the Net that I've lost track of, with **John Ashbery**, where Ashbery is asked to comment specifically on that poem of his that starts with the place-name "Nagoya", mention of "boy scouts", etc.; and he delineates that one obscurity about architecture goes back to his being stranded in the walled city of Chester, and that another came from him literally being at the Empire State Building (can you believe this?) and *seeing* a pack of boy scouts get off an elevator all with "Nagoya" on their baseball caps, and so on. (Cretan fallacy?) It's phenomenological, guys, but I can't help but think these distinctions *do* matter. (Personally, I have an aversion to a poetic principle that can be re-codified back into personal information.) Perchik's method just makes the role of concealed, supplementary information explicit--- hey! as though all these unannotated associations could be consumed back into one great *Family of Man Wittgensteinian picture theory* book!

Perchik also defies poet interview expectations by, aside from casual mentions of **Corman**, **Olson**, or **Blackburn** in a different context, having virtually nothing to say, being asked nothing, about literary *influences*, canon, or contemporaries.

Date: Thu, 5 Apr 2001

Subject: **Marilyn Monroe, the Emma Lazarus of her day**

**David Chirot** wrote:

> don't forget--Marilyn Monroe was prone so to speak to pen a poem--  
>  
> uncollected as yet--but scattered in various books one may find her gems--  
> --dbc

-----  
The visual artist **Barbara Bloom** included in an installation of hers vitrines of "found" printed matter. One showcase had a magazine photo pose of Marilyn, dressed to the collar, sitting outdoors on a log or out in the bucolics. She was holding a book. The cover of the thick book: *James Joyce, Ulysses*.

Any tips on in which of the various books her gems may be scattered, Dave?  
Sounds like the best undiscovered since **Candy Darling's** poems.

(Digression following Joyce and unlikely, American female celebrities:

There used to be a "**Ripley's** Believe It or Not" television series. Once they did a segment on James Joyce, especially his *Finegans Wake*. The moderator walking us through the footage and Joyceana was--- **MARGOT THOMAS!** (I swear. Watched it with my own eyes, on a small black and white TV, mid- to late-'80's.)

But now, the reason they were featuring Joyce on "Ripley's" was not because he was a titan of unbelievable proportions or because "Finegans Wake" is incredible in its neologistic coinages, but--- because James Joyce had VERY POOR VISION and managed to write such BIG BOOKS despite his handicap!

They showed closed-ups of the artifact of his eyeglasses, and how progressively large his handwriting became as his vision deteriorated.

Can you believe that a person with eyes that bad could heroically transcend his optical disability enough to scribble illegibly and unintelligibly like this all over notebooks and get it printed?

Date: Fri, 11 May 2001

Subject: meter/Anthology/"cola"!

Thanks for replies on meter and print-on-demand EPC Anthology.

Middle finger on left hand is still funky after injury (splint),--- so will only say:

More forthcoming on both topics.

A web 'zine-type site may be set up as preliminary *omnium gatherum* for Anthology work.

And about meter, just to say:

Some comments reflect a wrong impression of what classical meter was (and what it could offer to innovators), a wrong impression I think fostered by the New Formalists--- who generally employ structures as if static. In brief, the metrics of Greek chorus, odes, etc., consisted of lots and lots of alternative rhythms available for what we would "lines" ("*cola*"! in the Gk.); poets *of their own choosing* mixed and matched these "*cola*" into larger metrical inventions of their own (strophes) appropriate to the subject matter or poetry's purpose. ---The only difference between such classical meter and "free verse," broadly speaking, was that after running through what we might see as a "free verse" stanza or strophe, the poet-dramatist would then *repeat* that meter once (the anti-strophe),--- then go on to a new metrical deployment of "*cola*" and in turn that next stanza's meter repeated once. Etc.

It was, and I think might promise to be, if wrested from the misappropriation and misrepresentation of New Formalism, as various as the ingenuity of the poet-metrician.

Mainly of those recognized "*cola*" are audible in **Pound's** *Cantos* or sometimes **H.D.** They were the furthest that could be imagined from the iambic pentameters etc. that meter has again beeb re-damned into.

The goal of early Modernism's break into "free verse" was to turn away from or revivify the static decadence meter had fallen into. ---The tables have turned, though, and the New Formalists, regardless of their turn-back-the-clocks politics, are in fact a *minority* at this point. Ubiquitous is a "free verse" (lineated prose) which is as slackly loose as pre-Modernist bad meter was rigidly loose.

"Post-Modernism" (including "Language") was on-the-mark in perpetuating the (notorious term) "logopoeic" strain of the Modernist revolution, that is, an

enveloped vocabulary, and it has also continued the current of the "phanopoeic," imagery. It's the "melopoeic," the "musicality" (or meter), that I'm bringing up here--- wondering where it went. Of course, I'm as aware as any apologist that Language was recurrently criticized for being "un-musical," that it "does not sing,"--- and I hope I won't be punchily batched into the frequent flare-up derision that greets insensitive Language-attackers. (The sublation of meter/"melopoeia" was in fact a necessary consequence of the principally *textual* or grammatological focus of Language, I think.)

Given the new fluidity (Deleuzian flux) and commented-upon variousness that has re-energized the playing field of this undemarcated "post-Language" period,--- I just don't understand why this omission (of meter) goes on.

Parenthetically, "post-Language" as a term of course referred to "post-L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E," that is, *after* that movement named after a journal,--- like "post-*GQ*." Curiously, though, the EPC sees it progressing every day as *literal* with more and more "hypermedia"/e-poetry: heightened graphic design, web software, collage-pictorializations,--- and a diminished presence of "language" (small case "l"), be it textual or speech. It's entering a new sort of post-literacy.

Date: Mon, 28 May 2001

Subject: **NEW FORMALIST LANGUAGE POETRY**

Here's one that's handy, just because it's conveniently on disk, etc. (I generally would avoid posting unpublished poetry directly to the EPC,--- but in this case I'm not doing well at figuring out how to illustrate this point, otherwise. ...Totally buried in over-kill, having done scansions on **Susan Howe's** entire *Pierce Arrow*, sifting verse meters for rewarding commonalities. Pages upon pages of empirical data.)

How "Language"-ish/asyntactical this example is is of course a presumptuousness for hardcore Language victors to curl a lip at. (I now consider myself in general a would-be but FAILED experimentalist, an experimentalist *maudit*. Never quite had what it took, got it right.) (For the most part, I consider parallel lines to have converged and two roads to have met, if the texture of a reconditely *complex* thought, over-intricately phrased, is as equivalently impassable as a Language line constructed purely for non-representational opacity without such beneath-the-surface intracnectivity. I.e., **Wallace Stevens**: "A great order is a disorder."/"A great disorder is an order.") Sufficiently asyntac', though, for a very aghast reply from a classicist neighbor I know from church, who I hopefully sent this mania to, once--- Hope to dredge his sputtering bewilderment out of my papers soon, as postscript. ("...and these lines here: they don't even make sense!") Comical, too, that he sent it on blank greeting card paper with Blessed Virgin Mary sticker on the rose-colored envelope, assumed into heaven. (Spontaneous Post Office civil servant conversions.)

The writing is what it claims to be: excerpts from Greek drama "WRIT IN ITS ORIGINAL METER FOR THE FIRST TIME." I didn't quite understand how amphitheater acoustics work, at the time (since then, I've learned that there are "natural" amphitheaters and, from first-hand Middle East tourist's report, that the voice of one standing at the epicenter of amphitheater can be heard perfectly all around in "bleachers"), so I assumed that most of the Greek would be hard to hear, anyway. I figured that the *parsing* might be muffled, but that the *word order* would come through distinct,--- so I followed word order scrupulously as a main "rule."

-----

from **THE WELL-WISHERS (Aeschylus' THE EUMENIDES)**  
**WRIT IN ITS ORIGINAL METER FOR THE FIRST TIME**

## I. PYTHIA

divine, the goddess primal named within my prayer  
prognosticator, Mother Earth, and Justice next  
she who, where Earth once *ex cathedra* sat enthroned  
and prophesied, say stories. Then the third descent  
by destiny consented; no one had compelled--  
a Titan, chthonian child took her chair the throne

## II PARODOS

alas sisters how alas O we writhe  
so much to suffer all for nothing selfish me

## III APOLLO

I'll never leave you. Till the end, your bodyguard  
oath sworn to stay nearby and faraway, aloof

.....  
right now unwashed madwomen crowd all sides - you look -  
asleep. Aghast, what spat upon and drooling girls,  
one eye among them childish hags, untouched, unloved:  
no gods impregnate, men avoid, no beast will mount  
born *for* the hell of evil, deaf to wrong and right  
the shadows homey Tartarus below the ground  
miasmas foul both men and holy mountain. So,  
likewise, escape if possible. Faint-hearted, no.  
They'll stalk your lone footsteps, remote mainlands, beyond  
astride for all time over printmarks stamped in soil  
across the open sea and city walls of sea  
But do not weary, despite the neverending day's  
travail. Depart: **Athena's** city lies ahead  
Be seated there, embrace her ancient, carven form  
Another world: ours, jurymen, and sorcery,

.....  
to bring about your manumission, freed from flight . . .

## IV CHORAL ODE

high up, blue sky, other's opinions of us, grand,  
dissipate under the earth and diminish, no value,  
counter-attack in our blacknesses, widow's crêpe,  
we dance, green with envy, feet en *point*

Date: Fri, 1 Jun 2001

Subject: LANGUAGE PROSODY: ex. 2 (DOCHMIACS)

Okay. The collective cold shoulder routine is working, and I'm beginning to realize from the emphatic non-response that I'm barking into the Duino wind with this one-man agenda about post-modern classical meter--- However, since I have been nicely back-channeled by lurker, I'll continue in my unattended rant (I'm beginning to see how **Alan Sondheim** must feel).

Tinkered this brief (unimpressive and discardable) metrical exercise the other evening (below), on THE DOCHMIAC, a five-syllable Greek "foot":

\_// \_ \_/

What I hoped my earlier "Well-Wishers" posting would demonstrate --- by the relative inaudibility of its rhythm, as opposed to New Formalist buh-BUM-buh-BUM iambs --- is that "true" classical meter is subtly nuanced and varied in a way that keep it quite suited to progressives.

Dicta: New Formalism is misrepresenting the very models they point to. Metrics has been re-politicized by their misappropriation of Athenian democracy. Neo-classicism is entirely a Modernist legacy (**H.D., Pound, "Kora in Hell," Martha Graham, Eliot Carter's "The Minotaur" and "Syringa," Isadora Duncan...**). An ear trained to hear minute shifts of cadence is better prepared to catch the hesitations and falsities of politicized language. Go Greek.

The five verses below are "dochmiac dimeter," two dochmiacs per line. (Classical metrics is fun obfuscation for Langpo-lovin' obscurantists too, because it has so much burrograve terminology: cola, biceps...!)

(The dochmiac alone sub-divides into no less than --- get this! --- 32, yes, thirty-two recognized variations. The variations begin to proliferate after "resolution," that any long syllable can be replaced by two shorts. It's about the freedom of the dochmiac, in fact, that **Amy Dale** spoke of "Prometheus Bound" sections as "vers libre.")

I have tried, very **Tennyson-Swinburne**, to fuse English qualitative and Greek quantitative stress (or "quan./qual." vice-versa, never recall which) by using long vowels and diphthongs only on stressed syllables (three exceptions: "cor-", "-ty", and "bou-").

There's a superb post-modern neo-classical poem after **Davenport's Archilochus** in the latest *Fence*. ...Taking also as a new raised bar **Stacy Doris'** Ovid spoof in her new *Krupskaya Paramour*.

P.S. Thanks for all the "Get Well" cards and flowers about my left middle finger injury--- especially the bird-of-paradise from **J.D. McClatchey!**

---

METRICAL EXERCISE (dochmiac dimeter)

a fire hydrant leaks its spout trickling wet  
awash antidote the cure-all for burnt  
corsage beauty queen in first place performs  
the best talent act bouquet tossed to crowd  
enclosed fortress stormed from drawbridge and moat

Date: Wed, 6 Jun 2001

Subject: LANGUAGE PROSODY (ex. 3: hypodochmiacs in **Susan Howe's *Pierce Arrow***)

[Slight error in the previous "lesson": **Dale** found "*vers libre*" not in *Prometheus Bound* as misstated, but in **Euripides' *Hercules*** (sometimes titled *The Madness of Hercules* {*Hercules Furens*, not to be confused with *The Children of Hercules* or *Heracleidae*}).]

---

### PRELIMINARY INTERJECTION:

Graeco-Roman neo-classicism may have characterized ethnically monolithic European cultures, such as **Racine's** France, **Holderlin's** Germany, turn-of-the-20th-cent. America.

### OFF-SHOOT THOUGHT:

Unsubstantiated generalization: Most first generation Language Poets appear to have come from single-language (Eng.) "American stock" ethnicities, without the sort of dual language developmental home environment of 2nd/3rd generation American families of the Eastern-European or Italian immigration waves (where a "grandparents" language was spoken in the home. (With exceptions: Jewishness may have retained a trace Yiddischkeit.))

--- Hence, perhaps, a certain *monolingualism* in '80s/'90s Language Poetry, and the overall *English only* focus of its Language critique,--- versus, at least by comparison, the sort of **Joyce-Pound** polyglot poetry of Modernism.

---

Now, on to the topic: classical meter and Language/"post-Language" poetry.

**Susan Howe's** '99 book *Pierce Arrow* strikes me as her perhaps most audibly metrical book. This may be due to a gradual rhythmic shift in her practice, over a long career (away from an earlier, more strongly spondee-molossus meter [ \_ \_ and \_ \_ \_ ], or the heavy use of quoted material in *Pierce Arrow* that imbues the surrounding poetry of her own invention with "infectious," un-Howe cadences). By ignoring her line-breaks, the rhythms can be read as often breaking open in long stretches of quite standard iambic/dactylic/trochaic meter.

There are ample internal references in the book to nominate it as a proof text for an exploration into contemporary classical metrics: the book's strong Hellenism (from the opening "Phenomenology of war in the Iliad," through **Hecuba**, **Hector**, "fate metes out this and this dactyl", **Achilles**, Chorus of Thessalonian women, **Thetis**, **Apollo**, **Patroclus**, etc., etc., etc.).

One of the first, easiest observations is whether a line starts with a "rising" or "falling" rhythm, based mainly on whether the first syllable is stressed or unstressed.

As a starting point:

One of the first verse-length metrical units that "jumped out at me" on reading is a particular, irregular 5-syllable line: / \_ / \_ /. By potentially being alternately catalectic (no tail, missing a final short) or acephalous ("headless," missing an initial short), it is ambiguated and cannot in and of itself be read as either iambic or trochaic. (See below for further definitions of / \_ / \_ / as hypodochmiac.)

An inventory of such "hypodochmiacs" in *Pierce Arrow*:

thousandth silhouette	(p. 59)*
Something being true	(55)*
as in thought extreme	
where we want him flip	(49)
After all we want	
I will write to you	(82)
Certain things are mine	(83)*
paragraphs the Sixth	(87)
breathed and moved again	(88)
reading what will what	(89)*
scattered writing <b>Gosse</b>	(91)
Where "entagled" sic	(92)
record windworn sail	
fable now you are	
knowledge venom soft	(93)
strife in blindness not	
what is due from guest	(104)
<b>Tristrem Tristanz Drust</b>	(141)
Tristram must be caught	(135)
Minds trajected light	(136)*

\* begins/ ends stanza.

...Whoops! Gotta go. To be continued.

Date: Sat, 9 Jun 2001

Subject: LANGUAGE PROSODY (ex. 4: adonics in Howe's "Pierce...")

IS THERE A CLASSICIST IN THE HOUSE?  
IS THERE A CLASSICIST IN THE HOUSE?

". . . It would have  
been a mistake however  
to cast the sonnets in  
the same metrical mode  
as **Shakespeare's**  
Christmas 1898 -- **T.W.-D.**"

-- **Susan Howe**, *Pierce Arrow*

---

Sorry for the earlier interruption.

To continue this start along the same lines,--- I'll carry on with this initial presentation of the raw empirical observations first, and only then move back in on them to critique-theorize afterwards and incidentally.

After these readily audible "hypodochmiacs" (previous posting), another recurring classical meter line throughout the book (Susan Howe's *Pierce Arrow*):

the adonic (/ \_ \_ //).

The adonic may currently be the most popularly familiar classical meter, as it is the concluding, short verse of Sapphic stanzas (and Sapphics have been greatly popularized and appear among widespread schools of poetry, owing perhaps to their easy recognizability).

Howe:

Buckling his seat belt	(p.49)**
Where are my damn boots	(54)*
consciousness grows dim	(57)*
Often as black ice	(78)*

world in its first three (87)  
air but she did not (103)~  
gathered no blind threat (134)~

(\* ends stanza; \*\* begins stanza: Verses beginning or ending stanzas are given greater emphasis and, in the case of the adonic, end of stanza is its appropriate location viz.-a-viz. Sapphics.)

On p. 86, adonic and hypodochmiac appear back to back:

world in its first three  
paragraphs the Sixth

[NOTE: (1) I generally leave out of these analyses all the books' pages of prose, pp. 5 - 24 and 116f, and the stanzas on pp. 33f, 36, 38, 40-4, 48, 50f, 53f, 56, 60f, 66f, 71, 73, 75-8, 80f, 83f, 86, 84, 96-100, 105-9, 111f, 120-6, which I find to be closer to the prose pages in their style, discursivity, grammar/syntax, and diction. They do not sound characteristically "Howe," at least by the model of her earlier books. (AND I left out the seven-verse dedication that appears unpaginated prior to the table of contents--- *because I neglected to notice it until now!*) (2) The weight of certain syllables of course becomes ambiguous depending on the cadence of the surrounding absolute-value accents,--- principally some connective one-syllable words, pronouns, prepositions, such as "your," "who," "is," "of," etc. I tend to read secondary stresses as full stresses/long syllables.]

Aside from these two rhythms (the hypodochmiac and adonic), all the pentasyllables (five-syl. lines) in *Pierce Arrow* conform to similar regularity by proving classifiable into a small number of meters, for the time being left unnamed (catalog proceeds from stressed to unstressed, as a rule).

[IMPORTANT NEW CONCEPT: THE SYLLABA ANCEPS. Omitted or lost from "New Formalist"-style metrics is a pivotal feature of classical meter, the "syllaba anceps." Syllaba anceps was where designated syllables in certain fixed line-meters could legitimately be *written* as either long or short (examples to follow in future summer "lessons"). --- Applying that concept to this reading of post-modern/Modernist metrics, it allows near-identical rhythms to be read as alternative versions of the same meter, and greatly streamlines the scope of the taxonomic results. Syllaba anceps are marked "X," rather than "\_" or "/". --- Also, by applying the prerogative of syllaba anceps, it allows certain lines that

are similar to hypodochmiacs/adonics to be read as such, and it expands the evidence of their presence and use, from the list of seven (above) to seventeen: (below) the three lines under / \_ / / / and four lines under / \_ / \_ \_ as hypodochmiacs, and the three lines under / \_ \_ / \_ as adonics, where hypodochmiacs/adonics would be understood as / \_ / X X and / \_ \_ / X, respectively. (Such analytical practices are also a part of traditional, "New Formalist" readings: a spondee can substitute for an iamb, etc.)]

{ ~ = contains one or two ambiguous accents }

*Voilà:*

////

Slain life treads down tell (102)  
Grove bough dark wind cove (131)

////\_

psalms look out David (89)  
Gottfried shows Tristan (138)

\_////

a time Swinburne comes (49)  
is come crude change wave (129)

///\_/

P.S. Afterthought (59)  
how not-now perceived (85)  
Blind flight do we win (104)~

//\_//

Geist ("spirit") goes out (88)  
pierce dust and surf who (104)~  
pale anguish breathes free (134)  
red sound to sense sense (135)  
I use a white thread (136)~  
Day binds the wide Sound (144)

// \_ / \_

calls Tristan David's (89)  
Rest fathom over (92)

// \_ \_ /

Mark's speeches are sham (138)

/ \_ / / [quasi-hypodochmiac B]

Ramping brute force know (29)  
blown to bits one hand (30)~ [possible hypodochmiac]  
here is known change here (129)

/ \_ / / \_

sign for some one you (44)  
meter somehow but (82)  
Softly two kingdoms (93)

/ \_ / \_ \_ [quasi-hypodochmiac A]

violent rupture of (79) [hexasyllable, if pronounced "vi-o-lent"]  
out of touch with our (" )  
fable now you are (93)~  
strife in blindness not (104)~ [possible hypodochmiac]

/ \_ \_ / \_ [quasi-adonics]

something believed in (87)  
"Shelley the second" (91)  
turned to the light her (137)

\_ / / \_ /

Through mined copyhold (30)

\_ \_ / / \_

in reverse order" (55)  
as in dumb crambo (72)

-- / \_ /

are in thought extreme (49)  
to have written this (55)

\_ / \_ \_ /

would try to portray (72)  
the past is perceived (85)  
descendants his first (89)  
Who was and was not (101)~  
she wrapped up the bird (102)  
the matter to heart (103)  
their persons that they (138)~

\_ / \_ //

We took a thin thread (52)  
and by the sun's light (" )  
the hand and hand's field (88)  
and in the sun's light (136)~  
the sea reflects back (136)

\_ / \_ / \_

among these theses (82)  
Your "type" is better (82)~  
remembers always---" (100) \*  
and dies of it of (103) {~}  
of light from that of (136)

\_ // \_ /

We sing side by side (101)~

X X // \_

does not want Heaven (p.?)  
(too ambiguous to analyze first two syllables)

X X / \_ /

What we come to know (p.?)

HYPODOCHMIAC (left out of previous posting's list)

young he would have watched (140)

\* an important line, as the full passage is: "he had written **Mary Ellen's** / name and an inscription / in Greek "Earthly love is / soon forgetful/the heavenly / remembers always---". The English (and Howe's poetry), then, is a second- or third-level translation-transparency over some originally Greek meter.

Similarly, "ruin, lust, lechery *humanum est / errare* **Patroclus'** armor three times" (p. 28): as in **Pound's** verse or any such English poetry incorporating foreign languages, those insets confound any metrical scheme,--- here by mixing a language of quantitative meter (Latin) into qualitative English. The tendency is to read "*humanum est / errare*" as "*hu-MA-num EST / er-RA-re*", but "er-" is a long syllable in Latin by virtue of preceding double consonants, etc.

---

#### MORE ON HYPODOCHMIACS:

One of the elements in *Pierce Arrow* confirming the presence of hypodochmiacs, I found, was a single word in the line "Bottom's other monopolylogue" (p. 62). "(M)onopolylogue" is accented as a hypodochmiac. --- Elsewhere, the verse "Mirror-impulse ask **Fortinbras**" (p. 95),

/ \_ / \_ // \_ /

would be unanalyzable without the hypodochmiac as a "foot" (T2.S.I: trochaic dimeter, spondee, iamb? T2.\_cret: trochaic dim., \_ , cretic (/ \_ /)?? even assuming a "swallowed," sprung-rhythm beat after "ask" still leaves the verse as acatalectic or acephalous, neither clearly iambic or trochaic; etc.). It is analyzable as hypodochmiac-cretic. --- (Likewise {upcoming summer "lesson"}, that the book-length poem establishes its preliminary rhythms with the prominence and prevalence of four-syllable \_ / \_ \_ English words such as such "Mortality," "humanity," "interpretant," etc., and four-syl. \_ \_ / \_ words and names such as "Iliadic," "Polydorus," and so on, also promotes a 2nd/3rd epitrite analysis of the meter in a way that solves unanalyzables.)

**HYPOTHESIS:** Metrical analyses of XXth cent. poetry failed to explain or systematize so-called "free verse" because it relied upon a deceptive convention (the "New Formalist" tradition) of metrical analysis based on disyllable and trisyllables: iambs-trochees ( \_ / and / \_ ) and anapest-dactyl ( \_ \_ / and / \_ \_ ).

"Free verse" yields to discernible patternings when the standard of measure is expanded from di-/trisyllable to tetrasyllable.

(As was the case in classical meter: there never did exist and *could* not exist any such thing as "iambic pentameter" in classical poetry, as its uneven count was unallowable.)

A yardstick measuring by groupings that are a minimum of *four* syllables can explain the meter of free verse.

Date: Mon, 20 Aug 2001

Subject: **LANGUAGE PROSODY (H.D., "Helen in Egypt")**

[This reply is somewhat incomplete (defective), as a comprehensive survey of "Helen" goes further than this--- but as other matters are distracting me for greater thoroughness here, I thought of posting this as is, preliminary.]

**JJ** was back-channelled:

>>I'm finding these metrical lessons fascinating. You mentioned HD's poetry earlier. I've been looking at the metrics of *Helen in Egypt* for a while now and can see why I've made little progress. what is your source on the Greek metrics? I know of nothing like this published on *H in E*, nor on HD at all, really. Do you have any suggestions?

-----

Thank you for calling my attention to "Helen in Egypt," which I had passed over too lightly: I've been pursuing a genealogy for mainly double/multiple-stress feet, and "Helen" didn't seem pertinent.

I've now scrutinized the "Helen" meter extensively. Here's what I find:

### **1 I3/I3\*, A3/A3\*; variations (A.I, I2.A2, etc.)**

About three-quarters of the lines can be completely summed using conventional meters such as anapestic trimeter (A3:  $\_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ /$ ) or iambic trimeter (I3:  $\_ / \_ / \_ /$ ), with some trochaic lines (T:  $/ \_ . . .$ ) and dactyls (D:  $/ \_ \_ . . .$ ). There are novel but recognizable combinations of those four standard feet: A.I, I2.A2, DT, DT2, etc. And there are occasional, conventional (I5) iambic pentameter decasyllables ( $\_ / \_ / \_ / \_ / \_ /$ ). {Not necessarily a pentameter, but an amusing instance of a decasyllable: "the syllables H-E-L-E-N-A" [P.VII.2]}

### **FEMININE:**

Many of these meters end with an "extra," unstressed syllable which I mark ---f: I3 or even I3\* (below) become I3f ( $\_ / \_ / \_ / \_$ ) and I3\* ( $\_ / \_ \_ / \_ / \_$ ), A3 becomes A3f ( $\_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_$ ), etc. In standard contemporary Formalist scansion, familiar lines such as iambic pentameter or such are "allowed" to assume an additional, extra-metrical syllable: those lines are called "feminine," which, in the case of H.D. and the *feminism* surrounding her, seems like an apt reading.

That scansion, though, is vulnerable to a larger re-mapping of the entire book as possibly hinging on two important, other classical feet uncommon to American English readings: the cretic ( / \_ / ) and amphibrach ( \_ / \_ ). The case for terminal amphibrach is not, though, a particularly strong one, I believe: lines inexplicable by any other system are few. Regardless, I'm left inconclusive on this point: it regains relevant upon examining the amphibrach/cretic lines in "Helen": three-syllable lines consisting of only one cretic each ("gold from dross? / death from life?"), cretic dimeters

(cret2:

" <i>flame</i> , I prayed, <i>flame forget</i> "	[P.I.7];
"No--- I spoke evil words"	[P.IV.8];
"underneath vault and tomb"	[E.I.6];
"day before yesterday"	[P.IV.3] = D2?;
"being god-like and poor,"	[L.III.3] = A2?/Dod B?;
"so my throat knew that day"	[L.VII.3] = A.cret? A2?!),

cretic-choriambic (cret.chor: "**Amen-Zeus**, let me not ask" [P.II.8], appearing after the above-cited string of two full cretic lines, hence "weighting" its reading against an interpretation as lekythion), or cretic leading into exceptional "colarions" [figures] helpfully interpretable as containing cetics (cret, I.cret: "bring her here / to join hand with hand" [P.V.5] = cret, bacchiac.I?), or in combination (cret.T2: "Learn of me (this is **Paris**)---" [L.I.8]).

It also seems cursory to ignore final unstressed syllables as feminine since, when followed by lines beginning with iambs they set up a transversal! cross-line dactyl/anapest and, more significantly, when followed by anapests, they create three unstressed syllables (a pyrrhic, \_ \_ \_), a rhythm uncommon to pre-XXth cent. poetry that's difficult to explain by Formalist conventions and hence more interesting as a Modernist phenomenon.

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(The first two syllables of an English verse are typically the most vulnerable to ambiguity.)

Here's where it gets interesting:

Almost half of the above-mentioned trimeters come in a consistent alternative: they vary the *middle* foot, using the associated complement: two outer iambs begin and end a line with an anapest in the middle --- I3 becomes I3\* (or I.A.I: \_ / \_ \_ / \_ / ); vice-versa, a trimeter with beginning and ending outer anapests may take an iamb in the middle foot: A3

becomes A3\* (or A.I.A:  $\_ \_ / \_ / \_ \_ /$ ). In fewer cases, forms like T.D.T (trochee-dactyl-trochee:  $/ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ /$ ) appear.

In H.D.'s practice, the interchanging of these alternatives is very musical and constantly surprising in a way that makes it understandable why someone would have made no progress in detecting the pattern. It must seem constantly shifting and changing read aloud, although simultaneously continually familiar. Every time one of these line starts, it can go in one of two directions, and from there branch out into further-multiplying ramifications.

## 2. DODRANS A/B, HEMIEPES, PENTHEMIMER, etc.

There is a heavy use throughout the book of a line ( $/ \_ \_ / \_ /$ ) known in classical meter as DODRANS A, and its anti-type, DODRANS B ( $/ \_ / \_ \_ /$ ) (although Dodrans are not technically classified as part of the iambic-anapestic family, but aeolo-choriambic). These less familiar lines may be worth quoting, at the offset; many of them are questions, and book-sections often start with dodrans:

### DODRANS A

few were the words we said, [1.3]  
turning to view the stars, [1.6]  
How could I hide my eyes? [1.8]  
This is the spread of wings, [II.4]  
Will he forever weigh [II.7]  
Helen against the loss . . . "  
suddenly weighs me down"  
Love should be born of War? . . . [II. 8]  
written upon the Walls, . . . "  
whether he broke the law"  
What does he mean by that? . . . [III.2]  
many the problems solved"  
Why should I answer him? [III.4]  
why does she hold us here? [IV.1]  
listen and make an end . . . [IV.2]  
Helen will be your share . . . "  
this is the iron-ring, . . . "  
how did the story end?"

[In the arguable cases where the line ends not in a clearly accented monosyllable ("stars," "eyes," "wings") but in more ambiguous pronoun/particle-type words ("him"), others might read the lines as D2, dactylic dimeters,  $/ \_ \_ / \_ \_$ . The upswing inflection of the voice at the end of an interrogative sentence, that slight rise of pitch, though, I

think weights the meters more strongly toward Dodrans A. Also, I find few "pure" D2s in the book. D2 functions more as part of a larger (often "falling" rhythm") line, such as D2.T: "merciless strokes for the Flower" [Eidolon, VI.3], "over the smoldering embers" [Eid.IV.8], ---

Even where a pure D2 may be discernible (Eid. V.4: "numb with a memory"), the final ambiguous syllable is of a type conventionally mis-accentuated . . .]

## HEMIEPES

Anyone giving even cursory attention to the matter of classical/Gk. metrics becomes familiar with "hemiepes" (/ \_\_ / \_\_ /). Like an expanded version of our earlier "hypodochmiac" but with two unstressed syllables instead of one on each side symmetrically framing the middle stress:

whether he laughed as they fell; . . .	[P.II.8]
whether he cheated, he lied --- "	
why did I call him to me? . . .	[P.III.1]
"shall we seek Cyprus' rose . . . "	~ "
was he afraid of the dead?	[P.III.3]
~Helena, which was the dream?~	[P.III.5]
but for the wisdom of Thoth;	[P.V.2]
never the Star in the night.	[ " .8]
into the innermost shrine	[ " .VI.3]
Why did he pledge her to death?	[ " . VI.4]
Surely, I am not alone,	[ " .VI.7]'
Helena, reads the degree,	[ " . VII.2]
counting the fall of your feet,	[ " " .6]
kindles a spark from the past; . . .	[L.IV.2]
only the heroes remained, "	
ravaging eagle; his war	[E.I.6]
hostler who tended his steeds,	[E.III.5]
thunder and roar of the sea	[E.IV.1]

Date: Sat, 16 Jun 2001

Subject: Re: **Timothy McVeigh's face**

**Dodie/Kevin:**

Apologies for the lengthiness. A pamphlet-in-the-making.

Some quotes about **William Ernest Henley**, the poet behind **Timothy's** valedictory, "Invictus" (correct title: "**I. M. R. T. HAMILTON BRUCE** (1846 - 1899)," a requiem for a life-long friend of Henley's):

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Tantalizing excerpts, from below:

"LONG LISTS OF UNPRINTABLE SYNONYMS  
FOR THE HUMAN ORGANS OF GENERATION"

"THE SWIRL AND SCENT OF APRIL BLOSSOMS, THE BLUE SKY, AND  
THE TWO YOUNG MEN IN THE HIRED CAR"

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**Buckley, Jerome Hamilton**, *William Ernest Henley: A Study in the  
'Counter-Decadence' of the 'Nineties'* (Princeton: 1945):

After the end of their friendship, Henley called **Stevenson** the "Shorter  
Catechist of Vailima," an "artist in morals."

". . . despite its truculency as an aesthetic unit, 'Invictus' attains all  
the emotional and intellectual impact of true poetry . . .

. . . an inversion of Victorian defeatism in terms of a personal assent.  
It proclaimed the militant optimist . . . an Everlasting Yea . . ."

**Robert Louis Stevenson's** dedication to Henley's copy of "Virginibus  
Puerisque" (Stevenson was a close friend of Henley's [more below, on  
innuendos that theirs was a homosexual friendship]):

". . . this world appears a brave gymnasium, full of sun-bathing, and  
horse exercise, and bracing, manly virtues . . ."

**Connell, John**, *W.E. Henley* (London, Constable: 1949):

**Leslie Stephens'** 1875 visit to Henley's sickbed, while in Edinburgh to lecture on the Alps:

"I had an interesting visit to my poor contributor. He is a miserable cripple in the Infirmary, who has lost one foot and is likely to lose another . . . and he has a crippled hand besides. He has been 18 months laid up here and in that time has taught himself Spanish, Italian and German, and he writes poems of the **Swinburne** kind."

### **PLAYED DOMINOES ON THE COUNTERPANE WITH THEM**

Robert Louis Stevenson:

"in a little room with two beds, and a couple of sick children in the other bed; a girl came in to visit the children, and played dominoes on the counterpane with them . . . the poor fellow sat up in his bed, with his hair and beard all tangled, and talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a King's palace, or the great King's palace of the blue air. He has taught himself two languages since he has been lying there."

Connell, on the friendship between Henley and Stevenson:

### **PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMEN**

". . . quotation is it is usually followed by the observation that 'thus began one of the greatest literary friendships which history records' . . . It was a romantic friendship, in the strict sense of that term . . . its deep emotional facet . . . sides of it which were sordidly practical . . . its undertones and echoes, its major insistence and its minor plaintiveness, are a dominant factor in all that either of them, from this day onward, did or wrote or said or suffered. . . . For between them there was a strong, bitter, binding love, passing the love of women. . . ."

### **WHIBLEY TITTUPPED DELICATELY**

"**Charles Whibley** tittupped delicately round the truth about that friendship when he said that it brought both men something of the warmth and romance of youth. Boys at boarding schools pass ordinarily through this phase between fifteen and eighteen.

Neither Henley nor Stevenson had been to boarding school.

Henley's awakening affections . . . Stevenson's brief and transient . . .  
no development of romantic affection with boys of his own age . . ."

### **BOYS . . . HAD PLAYED TOGETHER --- UNDER CUMMY**

"Stevenson . . . thought of the men . . . who had been boys with him as brothers. There was nothing in the least exotic about them; they had played together --- under Cummy's supervision . . . He loved them dearly; but romanticize his relation with them he could not."

### **DELICIOUSLY UNEXPECTED . . . DELICIOUSLY RIGHT**

. . . the element of strangeness, of the deliciously unexpected which was so deliciously right. Each found in the other something of the long-dreamed of part of himself, . . ."

### **NARCISSUS**

". . . the dim Narcissus evocation . . . In the lives of some he never turns and steps into reality. Others, looking up from brooding over a book of poetry, or walking home in the dark after a school match, or listening to music, are suddenly troubled with recognition and longing.

If it happens at sixteen or seventeen, it passes without losing the tenuous, fragile quality of a dream. When it happens on the edge of or in manhood it is much more disturbing or scarring . . ."

### **DOOMED AND BOUND . . . MEN, NOT BOYS**

. . . the presage of inevitability. From that first moment they were doomed and bound. They were men, not boys; and some part of their natures made them act and think and feel as boys. . . ."

### **ALL THE MORE DELECTABLE**

"all the more delectable . . . come to them in the time of marbles, moonshine and pimply necks. . . ."

### **THEIR LITTLE BOY WAS NOW FULLY A MAN**

"Stevenson, delicate mollicoddle . . . bewildered but loving parents that their little boy was now fully a man. Each, agonized by manhood's demands . . . could --- in their friendship --- become a boy again."

### **GLORIOUSLY . . . OUT OF SIGHT OF CUMMY**

"Spiritually knickered and jerseyed (and, gloriously enough, out of sight of **Cummy**), they would roam and romp and tease and giggle and play pranks . . . or, halted on the blissful, mist-wrapped summit . . . they could argue portentously and write each other poems. They could both be utterly irresponsible."

Henley was the editor who printed **Wilde's** rebuttals during the Wilde scandal. Wilde reviewed Henley's poetry, calling it

half-**Marsyas**, half-**Apollo**.

Connell:

". . . the tattle of twilit London . . .

That at exactly this time Henley and Whibley were engaged in the industrious correction of long lists of unprintable synonyms for the human organs of generation, in order to help **Farmer** in his *Dictionary of Slang*, was a fact of which Wilde was unaware . . .

. . . under the pseudonym '**H**,' which was mistaken for a disguise of Henley's . . ."

Henley was the source for the character **Long John Silver** in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

He worked on the research staff building the **Encyclopedia Britannica**.

### "**THE FIXED POLE**" & "**THE FLICKERING NEEDLE**"

"His was the fixed pole to which the flickering needle of Stevenson's personality was pulled back again and again.

Many years later, . . . after he and Stevenson had quarreled, he made a sentimental pilgrimage . . . Then it was not spring; and there was no spring in Henley's heart, but nostalgia. . . . Henley remembered the swirl and scent of April blossoms, the blue sky, and the two young men in the hired car."

Date: Thu, 5 Jul 2001  
Subject: Re: **Hannah's** visions

**Camille Martin** wrote:

- > I read that she was diagnosed with schizophrenia ... I'm less interested in
- > the label of an illness than I am with what was happening in her brain
- > during her visions. . . . I'd appreciate any comments
- > on this or sources to read.

Interest will go where'er it wilt, but---

You might find greater amplitude by not taking that label to be a "label of an *illness*" per se but a label of a *condition*, to start with,---

along the lines of (predictably) **Deleuze-Guattari** *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, etc., or the similarly neutral use of the term **Fredric Jameson** made in applying it to Language Poetry.

First off, to de-pejoritize your own notion of schizophrenia, which can be a useful descriptive signifier, and treat it with greater equanimity. Could widen your critical applicability.

Or even **Szasz**, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, and the whole **R.D. Laing** British anti-psychiatry approach.

Or the *Semiotexte* back issue on "Schizoculture": a broader approach that sees schizophrenia as endemic to America that's only emblemized in its recognizable cases.

Her Language friends whose **Weiner** eulogies I read seemed to treat the matter (evidently "discovered" late) with unbiassed candor.

Her ongoing political relevance may lie partially in *exactly* the fact of that label,--- much like the pellucid clarity after **James Schuyler's** reported episodes of psychosis: high-functioning, basically adaptive individuals who found a position in embracing communities, who lived pretty much happy lives, given baseline existential angst --- as opposed to the more malevolent "role models" **Sylvia Plath** or **Anne Sexton** became by yielding to self-murder in the end.

In light of Plath/Sexton's relation to Confessionalism versus Weiner's to Language Poetry (and with the unfortunate, after-the-fact revelation of **Ramez Qureshi's** similar condition viz-a-viz "post"-Language), I have, rather than waning interest, in fact wondered whether there isn't some way that Confessionalism's aesthetics of a concretized, reified self and ego-exposure

weren't intrinsically contributory to the high rate of suicides in that camp:  
**Roethke, Berryman . . .**

Language/"post-Language" Poetry's literary high tolerance for deviation, its virtual *enthusiasm* at aberration, apparently coincides with a much lower degree of pathologization of its poets, generally speaking. Rather the mystique of the "professionalized" poet generation: careerist, MFA.

Know what I mean?

Illnesses can be fatal, but they must be potentially curable, even where a cure has not been found. Schizophrenia, like narcissism, by being "incurable" falls onto a different diagnostic axis than, say, garden variety neurosis. Like AIDS, which is not an illness, but a "Syndrome."

Weiner's success could be very valuable in the empowerment or treatment of the similarly diagnosed, and the consciousness raising of the self-styled "normal." (There is *no* such DSM-IV category as "normal," Camille. Everybody's something.)

Despite the unique prominence and notoriety of (violent) schizophrenics in the press, in a sense you *cannot* be schizophrenic in America, . . . any more than there could've been such a person as, say, an obsessive compulsive *Medieval monk*, or an obsessive compulsive Kabbalist, . . . or a histrionic Bacchante .

Date: Sat, 14 Jul 2001

Subject: ~Re: **Hannah's visions**

I was in an unofficial "counselling" relationship with one particular schizophrenic (among others) for over two years. He phoned me every day (sometimes many times in one day or in succession, of course, just like a schiz'. For a long time he didn't have a phone in his apartment and had to use pay phones. Invariably, he let his nickel after nickel run out to its absolute last drop, triggering the automated [female!] robot operator voice to interrupt ["I'm sorry, but your time has run out" or whatever. "Please deposit another five cents for another X minutes"]. Speaking of "desiring machines," it was a curious mechanism by which he, innocently, forced the "hearing voices" experience on the listener.)

I'll relate a text-related moment that occurred with him, peripherally relevant to **Camille's** questions about hallucinated text, etc.

I used to leave tongue-in-cheek messages on my answering machine. At one point, I had a message that said "T-H-I-S I-S **J-E-F-F-R-E-Y**" (spelled out letter by letter like that, jokingly) "P-L-E-A-S-E L-E-A-V-E A M-E-S-S-A-G-E."

People who called would usually respond similarly ("H-I! T-H-I-S I-S . . ."), or laugh, or say something about spelling bees or the alphabet, or whatever. My schizophrenic caller, phoning daily, had left messages for several days without acknowledging whatsoever my outgoing message.

Finally, after about a week of messages, he said something about it (he was, like many schizophrenics, highly intelligent and well-educated): "That's a very interesting message you left. Mysterious. You'll have to tell me sometime if it means anything."

The surprise to me was that he was unable to amalgamate the obvious parts, letters of the alphabet, back into a meaningful whole, the way everyone else, people in fact much less clever than him had done in a flash.

He hallucinated voices sometimes, in his case voices of people he was really around at the time, usually when he or they stepped into the next room. (A schiz' friend of his hallucinated celebrities voices but, we found this hilariously funny, they were the voices of extremely *minor* celebrities. I wish I could remember whom, but I don't know a lot about television of popular culture.) He would go to the bathroom and hear the people he had just stepped away from saying ugly things about him through the door.

What was amazing about him was that he had the ability to *double-check* with the sources of his hallucinated voices whether they had just been talking about

him. He could reality text by going up to the person and saying, "Excuse me, but were you just whispering under the door that I should drop dead," etc.

By **Weiner** *transcribing* her reported text hallucinations, she may have had a unique reality-grounding technique like that, which brought what otherwise would be lonely "pathology" into a public and interpersonal realm that neutralized them. . . . not that most of the transcribed text hallucinations of hers that I've read were especially malevolent or remarkable in themselves. That, too, says something: the *depletion* in her "clairvoyant" messages . . . most that I've read of hers were as banal as street signs, perhaps even moreso . . .

---

I find much of what you've written here, Camille, to be very beautiful and eloquent, literary in and of itself, almost a new genre of mental epiphenomena reportage, a realism of privacy:

>> it's as if the words were rising to the surface from a place over which I have little conscious or intentional control. More commonly, I have the feeling of "losing myself" while writing, in which I seem to be allowing inner voices, mental movements and desires (and the voices & feelings that I have absorbed from others) to shape the work. Sometimes, in a hypnogogic state, I seem to be dipping into an ongoing chatter within my subconscious mind, as if this chatter might be happening almost all the time, but I'm only allowed access to it during certain twilight states. When I close my eyes at night, I often see a parade of images of faces that seem so particular as to be real individuals, but they are people I don't recognize. Where do they come from?<<

That last touch ("Where do they come from?") is reminiscent of the opening quote in **Chairman Mao's** Little Red Book ("Ideas . . . Where do they come from? Do they fall from overhead?" [I don't have it verbatim])

It's very **Proustian**, his bedside magic lantern, falling asleep in bed and all that (especially, for me, now after having recently concentrated on **Susan Howe's** *Bed Hangings* lullaby):

>>In addition to the "dictation" mentioned, there's the more quotidian inner stream, the seemingly incessant chatter or parade of images and symbols that we all experience, a kind of roiling conversation among memories, perceptions, and other mental / bodily events. The "conversational" feel, or the feeling of "otherness" of such voices might be due to the fact that the brain is interconnected in such complex ways that ongoing neural events of different types may appear like different voices to us -- perceiving, explicating, commanding, commenting, evaluating, emoting, symbolizing, visualizing ? not to mention the voices contending with each other to place

different values on things perceived and tugging at you to behave in different ways, the proverbial angel and devil on your shoulders.<<

I'd like to try to imitate it some time.

I used to (or can kind of at will re-activate it) "see" either the words that were being said to me (in reality) or the words of my thinking, going back very fast in a sort of teletype closed caption monitor way. They weren't exactly *in front of* my retina and in my visual field, the way Weiner reports hers, but sort of like a transparency and somehow coming from "behind" my eye, as there was no question but that they were thought and *my* experience, in no way externalized as Weiner imagined hers.

I worked for a few years, way back, as a dictaphone operator. My typing speed is high (over 110 w.p.m. when last test 15 years ago on an electric typewriter), and I often found it easier to transcribe by closing my eyes: I would work, literally, "with my eyes shut." Although I was already a sort of "hyper-literate" guy to start with, I think that that prolonged enforcement of having to bring to mind mentally the spelling of words, very rapidly, and then getting faster at it, somehow "helped" to accentuate or *embed* these "seen" spellings in this way.

Also, developmentally, I might mention:

My father worked as a sign painter. He would often have me help him out on Saturdays. Sometimes we'd go up and work on billboards, and so on. So, for one thing, I was raised in this household where down in his basement workshop there were letters, *big* plastic or wooden letters, boxes of them. I might either play with them when very young or, in helping him out, have to "go and get" a B or an H or whatever from these stacks. In proportion to my childhood physique, they must have been quite large, by ratio, maybe from shoulders to knees, some of them. --- And then with the billboards, we would be hanging mid-air on scaffolding with letters of the alphabet three times our size, painting them in.

I think by growing up around the alphabet on such a Brobdingnagian scale, it *embedded* the alphabet very palpably into my psyche. Hence, "seeing" or semi-seeing words while they're being heard comes "quite naturally," later deepened by other reenforcing. (I think they used to clock typing speed with five [six?] characters per word, so at over 100 w.p.m., typists are manifesting internal thresholds of transcription, of about 500 or 600 letters/units per minute, language micro-pulsations of around 8+ per second. [New Math?] . . . about the rate of musical sixteenth notes at MM = quarter-note = 60)

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I would prefer if psychodiagnostic terminology were phrased as *verbs* rather than *nouns*. Rather than "a schizophrenic," to say, "She was 'schizophrenicizing,'" the way we say "obsessing" in place of OCD. I think it makes it easier to understand, somewhat more relaxed to discuss.

Date: Sat, 14 Jul 2001

Subject: Re: **Hannah's** visions

The word I was searching for earlier ('not taking that label to be a "label of an *illness*" per se but a label of a *condition*,'), rather than "condition," is more correctly "DISABILITY." We are talking about **Weiner's** disability, about its relation to contemporary poetry, and its nature in general.

(1) First, for **Camille**: another relevant reference I crossed upon in my papers the other night, sorting:

**Mehlman, Jeffrey**, (sic) "**Portnoy** in Paris," in *DIACRITICS*, Winter 1972, pp. 21 etc.,

about the "self-professed" schizophrenic **Louis Wolfson**, of Brooklyn, who wrote *Le Schizo et les langues*, a sort of schizo-autobio, in grade school French, published in France by Gallimard, 1970, preface by (apologies) **Deleuze**.

**Sylvere Lotringer** recommended looking into Wolfson when I was doing my research/paper on **Artaud** (which later turned out to be a presentation at the Museum of Modern Art's Artaud centennial).

(2) As far as "the body without organs," "desiring machines," and other Deleuze terminology and whether such "dubious metapsychological concepts" form "an adequate basis for a theory of our collective postmodernity," etc., --- well,--- the idea of "postmodernity" itself is notorious for the same vagueness, and is a kindred and equally French (**Lyotard**) notion that came out of the same wave. To me, that seems like asking what escargot can brie can add to a croissant (metaphor).

"The body without organs" was a term borrowed from Artaud, so quite authentically schizo in its pedigree (Artaud's technical diagnosis was a phrenia slightly to the left of schizo, I forget which). The value of the concept, when paraphrased into the more *normative* discourse that's been asked for, had to do with aboriginal or infantile states of indefiniteness about the body. Linked to other psychoanalytical/metapsychological concepts: "*le corps morcelée*" or **Melanie Klein's** "the body torn to bits and pieces", i.e., the fused, undifferentiated, pre-self/other pre-baby/Mother, oral-anal-genital self-object of Klein's infantile anal sadism stage). The contribution of these concepts is that schizo consciousness would no longer be seen as *alien* to the self-styled "normal" mind (viz. the frequent references to famous violent schizophrenics as "monsters"), but *fundamental* to it.

"Desiring machines": ---well, where would you be now without the desiring machine whose keyboard your fingertips are touching? I hardly know what to say in response to a rejection of "desiring machines," I find their aptness so self-evident. "Desiring machine" then, cyborg now. Perhaps more palatably (normatively) re-stated under different schemata in **Lury, Celia**, *Prosthetic culture: photography, memory and identity* (Routledge, 1998). (The French sense of the biomechanic or automaton, as inherited from **Descartes**.)

Without this French revisionism of stereotypical schizophrenia,--- what are we left with?? American ego psychology? Strides were made with the **Sullivanian** approach toward the treatment of schizophrenics,--- but the obstacle here, **Barrett**, is that schizophrenia is otherwise disregarded as *unanalyzable*, hence not really meriting or benefitting from psychotherapy.

The schizophrenic is innately and irradicably subversive.

Was Weiners a "professional" schizophrenic? That is, was her diagnosis and state disability payments her means of livelihood?

The problem of "visions"/hallucinations/seeing words does not seem to me as disruptive a problem in her texts as the larger literary problem of where she stood (border-line) one foot in Language Poetry and one foot in second/third generation New York School East Village Personism (her frequent diary-style references to **Doug Messerli**, **Rosemary Waldrop**, **Charles Bernstein**, etc., whom she calls "the language boy": still more of a problem! is this little joke of hers a slow fuse time bomb critique of New York branch Language Poetry as male-dominated, a boys' club). The critical urge (especially the one, Camille, I've seen you use viz-a-viz **Bhaktin**, etc.) is to read Language Poetry as autonomous text. The loose ends, the ligatures that Weiner leaves explicit between her literature and her life *force* biographical inquiries that will seem antithetical to the Language aesthetic, as more and more biographies gradually emerge (there's a *David Lehman* waiting to undo all their efforts by story-telling a Life of the Poets).

Schizophrenia is never "pure" schizophrenia. There are schizophrenics who hoard (the iconic "street person" dragging around plastic bags full of rubbish) and hence are toward the hoarding-&-saving obsessive-compulsive axis; there are schizophrenics whose self-delusion comes out as the old "He thinks he's Napoleon" *New Yorker* cartoon (**Nietzsche** eventually declaring he was Christ, all the many other "crazies" who are **Jesus**, etc.): there, there's an inflamed narcissistic pole to the personality, with religious mania (Christ/the equally widespread popularity of the Apocalypse among schizophrenics); etc.,

etc. Those secondary aspects are where schizophrenia can downgrade into something in the direction of "normalcy": if the religious maniac can make it into church, they may be allowed to hang around, given soup kitchen support, in a way that re-contextualizes their religiosity into a like-minded community; the hoarding-&-saving compulsive has survivalist tendencies beneficial to making it through rough winters outdoors, versus the --- exhibitionist/nudist? schiz', who walks around without shoes or a shirt in freezing weather.

>From the one Weiner book I own, "Spoke," her above-mentioned friendships, and that she did manage to sustain relationships with fellow authors, is quite impressive. The LSD business would also change the diagnosis: drug-induced psychoses are treatable and more short-lived than idiopathic schizo-psychosis.

Do the stylistic parameters of Language Poetry allow the half-functioning schizotype to "blend in" or be concealed through the very genre, the way that homosexuality is undecideably blurred by the sentimental passion rhetoric in pre-XXth-century male-male correspondence?

But I'm not sure why her poetry requires explanation by recourse to her life. (!) The claim that capitalized word in the books were words she saw, often stated briefly in an introductory note, functions as a completely endogenous feature of the work. That claim ("clairvoyance"), once put aside, allows a re-examination of the capitalized words: often they seem to rise out of the preceding text and in no way to contradict or interfere with a theme she's unreeling; at other times, some of her "introjects"/"voices" make harsh accusations against her that threaten to undermine the text's forward progress.

This is similar to **James Merrill's** use of a ouija board in "The Changing Light at Sandover," which also provides transcribed "voices." I don't really need to know whether or not Merrill "actually" used a ouija board in his personal life, or what he believed about it. It is fully integrated into the literary machinery of the poem, as a symbol or a myth or a real-life quotation might be.

I hope I do not seem patronizing (recommending Deleuze to Camille Martin now seems as embarrassing as if I'd recommended *The Chicago Manual of Style*, it's so foundational). If I do, it's not directed at you(s). These sentences are partially my own attempt to work through some of these ideas/questions.

I find the weakness and frailty of her persona(e) to be one of the most appealing features of her writing. In contrast to (masculinist) grandiosity,

her protagonist is having a pretty laughable scrapple of a hard time managing even simple things. Like **Beckett** characters . . . or, more recently, **Heather Ramsdell's** *Lost Wax*, where the poor nit is constantly rummaging around through a closetful of socks, a **Philip Guston** kind of littered Parnassus.

Date: Sat, 14 Jul 2001  
Subject: Re: **Tove Janesson**

**peter culley** wrote:

> Tove Janesson, Finnish author and illustrator of the Moomin books, died today at 86.  
Kiitos, Tove.

---

Thanks very much for posting this, Peter.

I was a summer "exchange" student in Sweden when I was a teenager (no one was "exchanged" back into my family in exchange for me, though). I made fast progress with learning Swedish, although I wasn't comfortable enough to speak it until the summer later when I returned and went traveling with friends. They first started me out with a Swedish baby book, *Alla Vi Barn in Byllerbyn*. We'd also take cracks at newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*, etc.

Not long, though, before I'd "graduated" to be able to take on more teenage-sized literature. My friends were very fond of the **Mummintröll** books in Sw. translation. It may have been her illustrations especially that endeared them: sort of **Pillsbury Dough Boy** dumpling-shaped characters, fat-bottomed, who did funny things: pyrophobia, where "**Pappan**" was afraid there might be a tepid matchstick left underneath the dry leaves somewhere that would spontaneously ignite and cause a conflagration, etc., rowing in boats, their thumbcap-looking haberdasherie, *Trollkarlenshatt* [pronounced "-karlenshatt," not "karlen-shatt"].

The reminder tempts to me to take the books down off the shelf. Might be fun-nice to eulogize Janesson with some sort of Adobe Photoshop of her pictures.

There was a character called "**Lilla My**" [the Sw. "y" in "My" is a non-English vowel, more pursed lips, etc., somewhat closer to the Eng. word "mew," the word for a seagull's sound; even "Lilla" is un-Englished in Swedish, more of a "LEE-lah"].

My cat was not named **Mu** after that character (his name came from the Japanese koan) but, much of the baby-talk/kitty-talk I used to talk with them (**Shiki**, the other) was broken English broken Swedish Latin etc. The private language of pet-owners. And I'd call him "Lilla My," sometimes.

Date: Tue, 24 Jul 2001

Subject: Re: *ebr* piece on creative writing pedagogy...

(How will I ever get anything done and get back to the objects of *my* interest and commitment, this list is so distracting and engrossing!)

What I've already skimmed of the 57-pp. print-out of your fascinatingly argued, rousing oratorical paper looks like it's gonna be quite a read. Good shot!

Prior to tomorrow's (anon's) more specific replies, let me just say a couple of related thoughts recently on my mind, a convergence of illuminating accidents:

### ENGLISH LITERATURE AS ORPHAN OF HISTORY DEPARTMENT

I've been reading **Milton's** Latin poetry (huh?); recently, I read **Anthony Knerr's** impeccable, critical edition of **Shelley's** "Adonais" manuscript. What handicaps my appreciation of poetry, I'm learning --- with Milton, the importance of the **Guy Fawkes** Gunpowder Plot (so relevant and 2001, with "terrorists" driving explosives around like Good Humor trucks!) and later anti-monarchist **Cromwell-ism** for Milton; with Shelley, Tory party politics for Shelley (he accused Tory critics of causing **Keats'** death) --- is my utter lack of preparation in *History*. But I barely recall taking a single history class, although I must've (curriculum requirements)!

Imaginative, fantastical or mythological poetry seemingly devoid of political or historical reference begins to seem stridently agitprop: the whole of *Paradise Lost* could/should be read as Milton's autobiographical regicide remorse; even the *prevalence* of a mythological setting in Greek tragedy was a response to popular failures on record for when the dramatists attempted still contemporary historical subjects to an unreceptive or hostile response that forced a retreat back into anachronistic Iliad subject matter, . . . etc.

Simultaneously, I was very taken by an essay ("New Hope for The Disappeared") where **Ron Silliman** pinpoints the "birth" of the English Dept.: 1828, London University, **Thomas Dale**, the first professor of English literature. --- In a naive way, I doubt I'd ever *imagined* an antedeluvian academia without an English Department!

And, lastly, **Claudia Rankine's** (and **Carolyn Crumpacker's**) Poetry-for-Teachers-of-Teenagers reading last week, where Rankine unveiled (drum roll) their [www.newmediapoets.com](http://www.newmediapoets.com) Manifesto. Their critique: they notice that with everything they read in journals these days, there's no telling when it was written, given the poem's autonomous world; they want more name-naming ("**Bush**, Microsoft, Nike") and they're invoking (French pronunciation) "engagement" . . . ("Nike"? as in Victory of Samothrace? Note

to self: buy/find a newspaper) (I see holes in their critique --- newmediapoets as a literary *Grease* [the musical] or "Return to the '60's"/Pop; the non-recognition that formalist features alone [the asyntactical, "free verse," open field] absolutely date what's printed today with a definite *terminus post quem*; XXth cent. American heteroglossia/polyvocality as the microcosm of surrounding mass media journalism; the mere ~existence~ of certain authorial identities [Black, gay, ?feminist] as periodized; the abandonment of the political as "content" as a *conscious*, '80's, collective committee *fiat* of the Language Patriarchs, etc., etc. --- but still, I'm enthused by their direction.)

Which is to say, the daydream begins---

---poetry lost its "relevance" when the pedagogical needs to explain the ever-increasing allusions/elusiveness in poetry's synthetic language became greater than those poetic idiolects' vestigial resemblance to a normative discourse, ---note!--- a normative discourse that continues as the preferred vehicle of history and which would, in turn, have needed at least some common ground of articulation to crosspollinate with the poem's historical context or, vice-versa, the poem as explaining/augmenting historical particulars.

Next: "Autobiographia Literaria of a Total Failure" or "Avant-Gardist Manqué"

. . .

. . . "How Being Born at The Wrong Time Alone Spared Me The Worse Degradation of an MFA" . . . :

Late '60's/early '70's increased funding for high school Humanities in high school *made* me . . .

new sentence:

. . . The legitimate successor to the fallacious first-person "lyrical" I-subject is a description of individually experienced creative writing workshops, and their compote fruit . . .

Date: Fri, 27 Jul 2001

Subject: **Sylvia Plath SELBSTMORD** [German: "self-murderer"]

**Sylvia Plath** is to mental illness/disability (as objected by others earlier on this list, 7/10) as was **Faulkner** in regard to racism, or **Ezra Pound** in regards to anti-semitism or fascism.

Their ultimate wrong-doing potentially invalidates their entire oeuvre, . . . except as an empty aesthetic shell, appreciable for its style but "evil" in its influence.

Only worse. Perhaps more like **Paul De Man** and post-structuralism, or that convict protégé of **Norman Mailer's** whose snuff lit Mailer championed, who then went on to kill that East Village waiter.

Pound etc. are problematic in that, after all, they went no further than testing the limits of free speech. They never killed anyone.

Plath/Sexton used writing as a public announcement of the intention to murder. The work outlines a programmatic plan to kill. Poetic death threats in print.

This is exactly where a **Hannah Weiner** or **James Schuyler** or whoever become a heroic antithesis, in their strength of character to endure through substantial decay and the humiliation of survival until the anticlimax of a natural, slightly pathetic, elderly death.

In the mid-'70s/late '80s, its heyday, --- I can think of at least three separate locked ward people I knew --- *The Bell Jar* was studied like a how-to manual before suicide attempts, the way *The Turner Diaries* is more recently used by the Michigan Militia.

Plath's work thinly and only temporarily sublimated an eventually cold-blooded violence.

---in my opinion.

Date: Fri, 10 Aug 2001

Subject: **SYLVIA PLATH & 'EDIT, EDITORS, EDITING' POSTS FUSED INTO ONE, CENTAUR-LIKE (& ROCK BAND)**

Well, since the daug days of August have depleted The List to a two-topic dilemma ("Hmm. Shall I reply to 'Sylvia's Visions'--- OR to 'edit, editing, editamus, editant'? Hm. Sylvia Plath great/non-great? [now there's a tough one! **Regis** 'Wants to Be A Millionaire' offers 4-choice Sylvia questions!]? magazine editing great/Plath-ish?)--- I thought it might save time if we just fused the two:

If Sylvia Plath had lived (Counterfactuality Logic mode kicking in) and were editor of a journal today, what would she say, which glossy would she be editing, which of the four teenage band members would she recognize as hetero . . . ? which words would she see on her forehead? (and mightn't it have been Great SYLVIA [scorched eternal damnation fright wig] who left mischievous **Freud**-like "Father! Father! Wake up! I am burning in the next room while you sleep!" message on NEWLYWED **SONDHEIMS**' answering machine!? **Nikuko** jealous of recent Sylvia-reincarnation marriage?)

Similarly all-in-one labor-saving fused answer(s) to above Qs: {drum roll}

### **COLLEGE ENGLISH: THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH!**

{Sylvia is EXCUSED from greatness/un-greatness Miss World-style competition for the rest of her eternal damnation, since possessing A NOTE FROM HER DOCTOR

Date: Sat, 28 Jul 2001

Subject: Re: innovative language magazines

The on-line *Transcendental Friend* has a strong conscious editorial point-of-view, I believe (one so rigorous that some of their poets have been suspected to be forgeries drafted to espouse house style).

Although with a wider net to its inclusiveness (apparently feeling a regional mandate?), *Skanky Possum* might be worth singling out too--- because it may represent the (sometimes more discursive) camps of innovation *in opposition to* second generation Language.

(I blush to admit how behind-the-times I am, but---) As I recognize only **Osman** and [**Brian?**] **Kim Stefans** out of your list,--- I do not understand what the terminology distinction of "process/documentation" or "text oriented/radically performative" signifies as a theoretical dialectic.

Could you please paraphrase?

(Doesn't an Osman-vs-Stefans distinction outline the validity of the loose term "post-Language" vs. a continuity of pure Roof? Modelled on those two examples only, it might be reenacting a prior forking of the family tree, from New York School down a generation into Language vs. Poetry Project/East Village. The former are Oedipal break-aways; the latter, experimental traditionalists.)

("Performativity," since its original "How to Do Things with Words" coinage, is now circulated very loosely, and differently in different circles [**Judith Butler's** queer theory "performativity", the "performativity" now spoken of in theater and the *-qua*-performing arts] . . . in a way almost inviting a **William Saffire**-type etymology of its meaning-drain.)

Date: Sat, 18 Aug 2001

Subject: In~Re: **table of contents as mosh pit**

"Patrick F. Durgin" wrote:

> I suppose if I'm young (30, to be exact), and "post-Language" (which, in my  
> day to day living / working, makes little sense to me, as much as whatever  
> it is may bear on my circumstances or judgment), then so be it.  
> .....

> My only regret is that "young" and "post-Language" too easily become tags  
> which, once spotted, keep the more timid of Kenning's potential audience at  
> bay. And so, they spend their hard-earned six bucks on a copy of The germ,  
> instead of twelve for one of each.

> -----

Patrick,

I don't think it's the "young" part ("See half the world maintains young **Ganymedes!**" --- **Edward Thompson**, "The Court of Cupid," 1770). Maybe I'm timid.

I was one of those, in a sense, kept "at bay" with Kenning. In a sense, Durgin is "a necessary evil": an extremism that serves to define one pole of the spectrum. If you went away (counterfactual logic), someone else would have to become the hard-liner. I was glad to see your comic in the latest *CHAIN*, where you poke fun at your own masculinist heroism ("Would I be willing to die for the cause?" with brawny man hero cartoon in background).

After initial enthusiasm over Kenning, I sort of backed away. I originally felt very in tune with your uncompromising stance. More recently, someone (a Founding Father) mentioned you, quoting Durgin-esque "anybody who has anything to do with ANYTHING WHATSOEVER is a capitalist defector!" (paraphrase) with a sort of jejune world-weariness as though tsk tsk tsk they bite the hand that feeds them tooth-shaped bubble gum.

You seemed to call for an absolutism where not only was no middle-ground possible, but not even approaches *within reach* of the politburo ideal. Like the Talmudic idea of "a fence around the law": we cannot err even in the most trivial of ways, for fear that a relaxation of vigilance at the front lines endangers the Sanctum Sanctorum politick. Pretty damn close remains CAPITALIST ENEMY, Kenning-ethos, seemingly.

Meanwhile (over 30, to be exact: "Me only cruel immortality / Consumes" --- **Tennyson**, "Tithonus," 1907-8), that definiteness looks different elsewhere, dubious. As far as words that I can or cannot say (I cannot say inaudible words)--- "Capitalist" is a term UNDER

ERASURE, by virtue of The Fall of The Wall, the defeat of Soviet Marxism. It is *impossible*, from where I stand, to retain credibility and to invoke "Capitalist!" rhetoric. And the same critique is difficult to navigate, to re-circumscribe, using "free market."

It is becoming increasingly unclear to me (presbyopia?) what this awful evil is that we're fighting against, Patrick. Sure, every teenage boy grown up into a feminist punching bag wants to be subversive, but--- subversive of what? subversive to what extent? Subversive like **Samson**, pulling roof down yanking pillars? At some point, it became clear to me: I'm too timid. I'm not prepared for chaos in the streets, in the halls, on the door mat, "revolution". That's SURVIVALIST, thinking you'll manage okay with a canteen of rations and a sandbag waiting out the Internationale.

It was a remarkable paradigm shift, from aesthetic to political, and in so many other ways, but there was something *incomplete* in the Language critique, and I don't think we've managed a reevaluation that's determined where those moth hole soft spots are, and what continues to stand, to motivate. Lately, I suspect it has something to do with pluralism, Language's tendency to monolithize the dominant and hence to make resistance very untargeted and generic,--- whereas the political may have its real pressure points at an extremely LOCAL level, and globalism may serve dominance's end by diverting us to an abstracted political ether, now New Media instead of *neighborhood*. --- And I suspect, though unprepared to articulate, that there's something about IDENTITY that Language missed. In its ongoing, correct critique of the personal (as a screen that blocks the public-collective-political), it confused personal with identity.

See--- again, not that you care but--- I find myself in the embarrassing position of being an avant-gardist manqué, a *failed* experimentalist. I *thought* I was being "cutting edge" (AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA OF A COMPLETE FAILURE NOBODY'S EVER HEARD OF IN THE FIRST PLACE OR WOULD NOTICE IF HE DROPPED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH depressiveness). But the problem was: I *wanted to be published!* The desire to be published kept me fashioning my styles by *imitation*, thinking well if the radicals won't accept me I could always maybe sneak through the middle-range into some college-sponsored journal or something

. . . And I read too much, I think.

Second Generation Language Poetry tends toward utter *dilluteness* of meaning, rather than destruction of meaning.

The literary-political tactics of 1980 are rendered obsolete twenty years later, by the ever-changing nature of The Beast.

And--- the main means of de-fusing that "capitalism" has is--- to *absorb*, to *represent* its opponent, to *include* (thus, the heart-rending Fence/**Rebecca Wolff** "problem": it's very difficult to take exception with them or irritate by condemning, because *they're doing good work*, in spite of it all). Dominance re-proposes that its enemy is its Alternative.

There will be an *Alternative*  
festival of what used to be the unacceptable, the Barbarians at the gates.

"Resistance," that Kenning means to stand for, might only be able to be accomplished by being *un-reproducible* within the conduits of "the system." I'm far from anti-academic and I think the extended longevity academia is giving Language is a good thing,--- it's significant that the unacceptability of Language Poetry found a weak chink, the curiosity of the academic intellect after the difficult-to-understand, and the compulsion to explicate, and that through that pore --- subcutaneously? --- it's perpetuating itself and has found a break in the fire wall that's forcing incorporation into what *should* be rejecting as a foreign body, as its nemesis.

The International Center for Photography presented **Hans Bellmer's** "*puppe*" (Ger.) doll parts series under a new explication: Bellmer resolved that throughout the Reich he would do no artwork that could be of service to the regime. And so, found something *un-reproducible* within the surrounding culture. It could not even be shown so as to make a laughingstock or to point to it as what's wrong--- the way those anti-NEA ministers managed to publicize postage-stamp sized porn negatives out of context from a **David Wojnarowicz** (sp?) collage.

I'm not sure I could write avant-garde/experimental even if I *tried*, as I *did* try. Some of this may be constitutional.

ANOTHER UTOPIAN MANIFESTO PROPOSITION: Every poet, like in 1984, should adopt a deceased or "disappeared" poet, and carry that author around in her/his work as the missing Ego/Other surrogate. We do not need new poetry. A new danger is resulting from *overpopulation*. All this "great"/not-"great" talk has been rendered silly, outdated: "great" was possible only within a very small population, was patriarchal, leader-of-the-pack, competitive. The sheer numbers of poets at this point threatens to drown out perception of any one. Unforeseeable positions are called for, when a few dozen has increased to a few hundreds has increased to . . . thousands, I guess, there must be tens of thousands of poets at this point, right? Collective may be insufficient. WHY can't "radical" poets surrender their proper names?! Why is a poetry of the *signed* and autographed, authored, perpetuating itself in an age where advertising, journalism, etc., etc., etc., are all anonymous?

Anyway . . .

I don't think I "get it" anymore. Where's the How To manual, please? There is no conscious or articulated politic for this politicized writing to adhere to. It's all **Wittgensteinian** beetle-in-a-box. Your politic is Patrick, but is there any guarantee, any *chance* that the Top Ten list of political blue meanies on your hit list match **Jeffrey's**, or Rebecca Wolff's, or Rasputin's? Jeffrey's: 1. Cars are bad. Global warming. 2. Movies/video-in-any form is bad. 3. Caffeine is bad.

Now, *PETA* is succeeding at a genuine radicalism (!). The starting point seems to be--- I am complicit. I am unable to stop participating in and supporting the very things my "conscience"/ideals condemns. But--- most of us very possibly live in utterly idiosyncratic country-of-one auto-cultures, us X-poets. We don't *need* to resist. We're such a bunch of freaks, anyway. Like, the rebellious mutants. It's *enough* that to be a poet is already so fantastically weird. Even the most "conservative" *New Yorker* poet stands in a position of freedom that insults the larger culture at every step by ignoring it, disdaining. This attempt to be *doubly* a Cro-Magnon *and* subversive is--- odd.

Any how . . .

So, that's why I'll re-subscribe to Kenning and send you six bucks. They will each be six inches long, Patrick. I will press them flat with my hand as if ironing them, to smooth them of any wrinkles or creases before mailing them. And the postal office worker, momentarily diverted from yet another post office madman rampage, sniffing the scent of dollars ISSUED BY THE GOVERNMENT, may tear open the envelope, nibbling at it like a rodent, so all Kenning will receive will be a torn-open envelope with the SCENT of money in it.

HOW BIZARRE that you're talking "radical" and at the same time proposing prudent usage of "hard-earned six bucks"! like a *Farmer's Almanac*, *Consumer's Digest* of poetry. WASTE money. Nobody here works hard for six bucks. We do jiggle dance and they slip bills in our busts. In our g-strings.

Date: Fri, 24 Aug 2001 13:56:44 -0400

Subject: Re: **Why I was a bad poet (was: greatness; editors, editing, etc.)**

I was especially taken by **Jacques'** (pronounced "Zha-KEEZ", as in **Shakespeare's** "As You Like It, yes?) confession, "The way I've settled it for myself is to stop writing poetry". And I was somewhat miffed by **Behrle's** discriminatory *agism*, ---especially on the same day that the Social Security Administration for the first time officially admitted that reducing Soc. Sec. payments is under current serious discussion (but I've been shaking a good finger at Behrle, back-channeled/bare-backed, tsk tsk, the disrespectful ingrate).

Not enough is said by or about poetry's silent phases ("to stop writing poetry"). I am either in one or just coming out of one, and I don't know if I want to come back to poetry as poet, etc. *Laura Riding Jackson's* continued public articulation and writing from *the position of* a poet who is not writing is supremely interesting to me. ("I will never write poetry again, but that is not enough to change me and revoke my 'essence' as poet,--- and it is upon that authority that I'm going to keep blabbering and write kooky dictionaries here in a trailer park in Florida.")

(I have wanted to get in touch with (presumed) computer-programmer **Alan Jennifer Sondheim** about a language-generating program that could apply the rule base [morphologies] of Jackson's syntactical-grammatical sentence structure choices to the discrete vocabulary she was using in her last poems. I believe that the output of such manipulations would in essence be "by" Jackson, or by whomever else such operations could be performed upon, **Hart Crane**, say, or someone of a helpfully small output. New but posthumous. Ouija poetry. Our language and poetry on the page, absented of voice, is just that: vocabulary arranged according to discrete, idiosyncratic rules. You ARE the sum of those factors. --- But ongoing attempts to construct a "paper machine" version of that R.I.P. by hand, lists, formulae [N-V-N; N-V-Aj-N; . . . for Noun-Verb-Noun {Subject-Verb-Object, Noun-Verb-Adjective-Noun, etc.}] are difficult to draw to completion.)

To cite only the easy reference immortals: The legendary silence of **Rimbaud**, the interim silences of **Rilke** and **Valery**, and what they *did* with or during those silences fascinates me (Valery's immersion into mathematics during his poetry-less years, for example).

AUTOBIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA OF A TOTAL FAILURE NOBODY HAS EVER HEARD OF IN THE FIRST PLACE OR WOULD GIVE A HOOT IF YOU DROPPED OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH AND EVERY LAST POET INCLUDED WHO WOULD NOTICE

In my own case (WHO CARES!), now that my personal life has been callously ripped open on The List--- after the death of my 16-yr. old cat **Shiki** in January 2000, two years of nightly, hour-and-a-half sitting, eventually 28-line maximum poetry production came to an abrupt stop. When, after the fact, I realized that I had "stopped writing," I wasn't

sure I entirely minded or that I should force myself back into it. Instead, it being a new millenium, me being on my own [cat-less] for the first time in 18 yrs., I decided that secondary paths of "creativity" that I was playing hide-&-seek with all my life, such as music (composition) and photography, this being a technological age, might be worth finally taking up "seriously." I entered a "non-verbal" arts period that lasted a year and a half.

(Avant-garde cat requiescat photography of Shiki at

<http://photos.yahoo.com/bc/jeffreyjulich>

Click on thumbnails to enlarge.)

Then, --- strange how crises, Scylla and Charybdis, bat me back and forth between poetry and no-poetry, --- when I injured my left hand in May, within days (at first I assumed I had "regressed," defensively), I was picking up on the Greek translation stuff and poetry projects I'd put aside years ago. I don't entirely like the change. "Poetic consciousness" is in many ways a more personally uncomfortable, conflict-ridden state of mind (being the most long-lived axis of my personality, with archaic roots in ["Maxims from my Mother's Milk", **Messerli**] nursery rhymes etc.) than the empty-headedness music and imagery had given me. **Camille** described her bed-time "poetic"/"audio-hallucinatory" consciousness recently. "Poetic consciousness" is very bothersome for me now: my mind goes into a sort of Sort mode, where words begin coming out of nowhere, based on their *shape*, consonants mainly: consonant -- cnsnt --- Nissan --- canzone --- nascent --- *niente* --- can son not . . .

Currently, I'm sort of teeter-tottering as to whether poetry is going to "break loose" again, and whether I'll "let it." With musical composition, because my proficiency was so far below my language fluency, I found that I could work for hours and get up to have produced barely four chords or a couple of measures. The time/output ratio was absurd. -- - But that's accustomed me to, and changed my expectations about what constitutes artistic activity, so that I'm more open to a similarly glacial poetic "flow": lately, a day may produce, if at all, less than a half dozen unrelated words,--- because I *weigh and measure* every phoneme so infinitesimally now. (There has been maybe one full "poem", a few lines here and there, and a stalled attempt at a "longer" poem using a historical character persona, something I'd never done, besides the 2001 slowdown I mention. I can't evaluate them, though: aesthetics/taste, too, is likewise dematerializing for me and I tend to perceive only in terms of power-functions, social configurations, etc., where "quality" becomes, as MM was saying, obscurantist.)

Enough about me.

Isn't **Robert Grenier** the master of "impoverished idiom" that you were searching after? **Hannah Weiner** seemed to be constantly bungling her diction in a laughably frank way. **Heather Ramsdell's** *Lost Wax* has numerous, shockingly inarticulate phrasings.

I'm not an advocate of "Great Books", necessarily (despite appearances), but--- it's precisely this *agism* --- damaging not only in turning against the most unheard voice in America, that confined in nursing homes --- that prevents boy from seeing the adolescent *youthfulness* of these Great Male Authors! **Milton** is big great eternal post-pubescent wanting to kill king, sympathy for the devil . .  
. Milton: our first Satanist.

I've been re-reading **Dante's** *Paradiso*,--- and he's so f--kin' weird. Here you have this guy, right (I know little about Dante's actual autobiog)? who falls in love --- is it some under-age minor, like **Petrarch's**? --- and he does nothing that 2001 young can understand to consummate that passion. To the contrary he's possibly living in religious chastity (crossing knees),--- and he sets up this architecture where he SPEAKS ILL OF THE DEAD!, putting people he personally knew and political figures in dioramas.

Paradiso Canto III: he meets in heaven **Piccarda Donati**, deceased sister of a friend of his; he's already shown us that friend of his in Purgatory (thanks, Dant'. Nice pal); Piccarda was forced into some sort of "hateful" marriage that betrayed, I take it, her nun's vows; --- so, she's IN A LESSER HEAVEN, as far as Dante can tell, cause she's in the outermost ring. Like living in the suburbs: a fate too unthinkable, **Tantalus** paradise. VICTIMS GIVEN "LESSER PARADISE" FOR HAVING, what, BEEN WRONGED/RAPED? How come? Dante wantsa know. Telepathic untouchable Beatrice soul knows what he's wondering and goes into a philosophical critique of *will* --- but--- here your head'll spin, whee: in the process, Bea' holds out as moral models a PAGAN Roman who STUCK HIS HAND IN FIRE because he hadn't STABBED an enemy of the state, and a great Christian martyr who was roasted alive on a gridiron. Like, nice holy saint mentality, Bea'.

Young fogey, the truth now: can *you* get that weird?

My "attitude" (4:15 a.m.: fogies will "go to bed now" as soon as *you* crawl under the sheets first, **Endymion** stretched out under moonlight, hustler):

I wasn't really calling for a "moratorium" on poetry. What I meant was more that the "I am a poet and worth listening to in my self-centeredness" position is insufficient to advance the common cause of XXIInd century poetry in general. Overpopulation plus hyperproductivity equals--- our current Hong Kong/Calcutta/Times Square inundation.

Most poetry *has no Other*.

Confessionalists/autobiography has the Other of the maligned parent (Mr. **Olds**) who's being badmouthed *without recourse to defense* since there is no opportunity we know of to hear Mr. Olds' or the **Lowells'** side of the story. Poetry like **Susan Howe's**, or **Garret Lansing's** "**Stephen Phillips'** Marpessa" poem, or etc. or etc., the utopian poetic *care* that I was calling for that would CARRY FATHER across the river on back, **Aeneas**-wise, instead of just or at least prior to stereo-Oedip-ically murdering him --- work like Howe's,

presents the Influence of Anxiety antecedent literary figure as *an Other* who, uniquely, we can meet on their own terms: I have gone back and read AND I LOVE HER **Watts-Dunton** (Swinburne's boyfriend) whom Howe uses in *Pierce*.

Libraries are columbariums. Books are funerary urns you can rattle and hear an echo of the dead.

Print and literature are ultimately a necrophilia.

"Fame" and "greatness" wane in their drive, for me. "Love"/"lust" and "attraction" take on more force. EVERYTHING, if you have the dedication to persevere, THAT YOU HAVE WASTED YOUR ENTIRE LIFE ON will be SWEEP AWAY by a multitude of current global population nine billion multiplied by another generation to total WHITE NOISE people UNABLE even if they wanted to distinguish "good"/"bad" art when there are N-zillion logically valid aesthetic positions and a mountainous heaps of remaindered poetry books like toxic waste dumps of "sincerity" nobody'll be able to stomach for an instant in our increasing emotionlessness.

The smaller the audience the better, because a very small audience approaches the limit of *an audience of one*. And an audience of one, you and another person, is the real condition of *INTIMACY*.

("Audience", I detest the term--- like: clap, audience! Now performer will bow.)

Fame, outside Hollywood/Time Warner, can only begin by you dedicating yourself to making SOMEONE ELSE who isn't already famous famous. **Ashbery** was a fine model: this fogey harped and harped, whoever would talk to him, like Monsieur Idee Fixe: "Have you read **Raymond Roussel**?" "Have you read **de Chirico's Hebdomeros**?" (WHO?) "...Laura Riding Jackson?" and when finally he made it big the first thing he did was turn all of that authority he'd garnered to getting Roussel and "Hebdomeros" into print and attention.

Come to bed now. The mattress is still warm with your father's sweat.

Date: Thu, 23 Aug 2001

Subject: Re: **edit, editors, editing [MARCELLA DURAND/FENCE HOUSING WORKS LITERARY MAG. BENEFIT]**

Marcella:

1. To say that I admire and appreciate your stance on *everything*. You seem like one of the most consistent perspectives I hear of these days. I'm glad you can still use the word "capitalist" (as glad Yiddish survives).

2. I was likewise impressed by your "performance" on *Fence's* Housing Works Literary Magazine Benefit panel, several months ago. (Thanks, *Fence*.) Standing your ground against the likes of **George Plimpton** and that other *Tin House* (sp?) editor was a much-needed foil. I took notes at that session. The transcripts are below (defective, unable to read my own handwriting at points, and I think they may be in reverse chronological order).

P.S. Marcella Durand wrote:

>>> (i.e., Here kids, here's the oldest texts I found still in print!  
Assyrian-Babylonian stone tablets listing olive oil sales! Pop quiz at the end  
of class!) <<<

I spent a few years studying cuneiform and working on a paleoeconomics research project measuring the price fluctuations in six Assyrian commodities over a 600 year span (barley, cress, dates, . . .). It's very savvy of you to betray that you know clay tablets were indeed principally a record of sales--- but olive *oil* is an invoice I do not recall ever seeing.

>>|||<<<^^ {cuneiform emoticon for Happy Face}

**Armand Schwerner's** *THE TABLETS* are remarkably truthful in conveying what it's like to struggle with reading cuneiform. (And Sumerian tablets are older than Assyrian/Akkadian-Babylonian.)

-----  
Dramatis personae:

**IRA SILVERBERG** (CLMP --- Council of Literary Magazine P)

**GEORGE PLIMPTON** - 1953 - *Paris Review*

**Amber? Dorkerstopper?** *NIGHT RALLY* (founder of the first MENSA chapter of Tarot Readers!)

MOSAIC published (Af. Am.) & put on bookshelves but not marketed - *publicity* - now going for lesser known

PLIMPTON: --- A quarterly can't deal with issues as well as a weekly --- ["isms"] ---

SPILLMAN: {illegible} ?wet to higher first -- did test

MARCELLA DURAND

-----

Q.: How difficult is it to make a living --- [?work] rest of the time --- How often do you see something you can edit to use?

SPILLMAN: Giant gulf between GOOD and BAD ---- if there's a

MOSAIC: Don't have stuff---

PLIMPTO: we have an A slip and a B slip (rejections) --- to encourage with "borderline" cases {sic} --- You can tell awfully [fast?]

Q.: Flow from old school to new school --- on-line --- merger/conflict between trade & on-line---

PLIMPT: *Paris Review* has gone on-line to promote, not to distribute--- Interviews are on-line --- snippets of poetry to entice subscriptions --- Next week: Supreme Court rights

Q.: People who begin on-line? making trans.

PLIMP: assuming that the web is a lower form of printing

MOSAIC: if you decide you can't publish ??strengthening?? what Random House

MARCELLA: *ALL* political --- constantly subvert --- why you want to publish

SPILLMA: not overt --- Trojan Horse --- wld. love to be more like '60s: *Evergreen Review*

MOSAIC: final statement abt. ?absuing yr. employee(s?) --- used to have work #

CLMP: final Q. "The Market"? In Chicago panel on distribution --- ?Ingrams --- largest distributor --- 1 40,000 units of mag --- 60% Reader's Digest

*Granta, Poetry, Tinhouse* {something about a pie chart here}

If it's possible to get out there, do you want to? Is mass distrib. something to aspire to?

MENSA GENIUS TAROT READER: --- don't have the first idea how to make it happen --- wld.never stop anybody

PLIM: tried to increase circ. by having Random House do it --- worst decision they ever took ---

MARCELLA: --- she works for mag w/ circul. 150,000 --- cats magazine!

Specific community --- innovation poetry --- NY, Lang., Beat ?across from US --- a certain mode of writing not accepted by mass distributed in big outlets --- Staying small keeps you accessible --- You don't receive 500,000 ---

CLMP: name?

MARCELLA: (1) *ANGLE* --- was not accepted by SDP --- 8 1/2 x 11 --- **Stroffolino, Violi** --- ?ed. onto glossier?; (2) *COMBO*; (3) *INTERLOPE*? Asian-Am.; (4) *TINFISH*, each hand-made; (5) *CLAMOR*, queer women of color --- amazing people doing in their homes

SPILLMAN: --- mood to '86: disappointed by NY scene --- went to Cedar Tavern --- everybody gravitating to NY to write & publ. is out --- purposely picked eds. elsewhere --- cross-cultural --- like to feel writers are part of a community in mag. but it's tenuous at best

CLMP: is there an inherent politic?

PLI: you can't tell from content that Vietnam War was going on --- not politically oriented whatsoever

MENSA: ---no---

MOSAIC.: --- isn't overtly political --- almost by default you're making a statement abt. capitalism, & what's left by the ?roalfide

read *Paris Review* --- not just among the converted --- but ?Boise --- going to buy heavy metal mag.

PL: agrees w/ Rob you have to get it to people --- otherwise it's VANITY publishing --- ?pinned --- into hands of people --- if you don't do that, you're running in circles --- Rob was thinking of reader --- gave wrong impression before w/ one reader {story about having only once seen someone reading Paris Review: **Hemingway** in the Paris Ritz! :{ }

CLMP: reader vs. writer --- Rob ?yng you read --- me *Evergreen* --- community --- even if you have a small aud., you're part of a bigger world ---what community?

MOSAIC.: --- his community rather ?defined by race --- no longer trying to reach everyone in that group ---

MENSA (her journal: ?NIGHT RALLY): --- don't have an aud. that defined --- earlier decision/belief --- sent out flyer to opera companies --- wanted *non-writer* opera & museum docents

P: --- mag. often defined by poetry editors --- **Tom Clark** published NY School --- felt so bad for bad poetry --- published mysterious issue for bad --- **Donald Hall** disapproved of **Ginsberg** & now regrets it ---

?MOSAIC: ---- ?for as on writer as personality

CLMP: each of you has tried to fill a void --- if there are so many voids --- the reader? --- who's out there to get the message

PL: --- one of the dismaying things --- have only seen one man in his entire life --- Hotel Ritz ---Ernest Hemingway --- circ. of 4 fig. or even 2 figs. --- why all this time doing it? 20,000 MS a yr. --- every once in a while you get something that makes you jump out of your chair --- a void in your own perception of what --- on-line --- many more subscriptions---

MENSA: --- only 500 --- everone signs their letters "Love,"--- w/ more \$ wld. she pay more --- No --- she'd get prettier end-paper --- What Marcella sd. about saddle stapler so beautiful she'll think about it all the way home on the bus {!!!}

MARCELLA: --- don't worry abt. a reader - but the writer - it's imp. that if someone's written - not worry abt. pleasing this faceless aud. - this special art of stapling some things together - maybe put some art w/ it

SPILLMAN: --- diff. angle - first thing was to hire designer - strategy of getting a wide readership - distribution - by being well designed - picked up by Barnes & Noble and ?Binders w/ first issue - did not want itto be for poet-writers - for broader humanity - Baltimore {where he came from?} was end of the earth - **John Waters**

TIN HOUSE: - others are like mediocree that you had to swallow ugly but good for you - *TH* add humor

added at non-writer creative people (nuc. physicists) - half of staff is in Portland - a *great BS screen??* on-line - ?split

MARCELLA: - Tiny Press - tiny - no ISBN - 1-5 issues handmade - non-urban  
how-to-use saddle stapler - so that people who are isolated

double change? {charge?} internat.. Poetry is tightly ?confined - what's coming  
into the country

community vs. commodity

-----

{Please note: I have nothing against George Plimpton, personally. Many years ago, when I did an interview with **James Schuyler**, **Geoffrey Young** of The Figures Press told me that Plimpton and the *Paris Review* had been trying to get an interview with Schuyler for years,--- but unsuccessfully. So, I looked up Plimpton's telephone number in Manhattan White Pages and phoned him. He was home and picked up the phone. I also had an 11-page partial transcript of an interview with **Harry Mathews**. Plimpton said he would enjoy reading both. Sent him them. Later, proper etiquette of handwritten thank you follow-up on Paris Review stationery, I guess. --- It's just that he and Tin House becomes so dialectically opposed to Marcella and the MENSA genius, that their mercantile values appeared all the more caricaturish in contrast to Durand/MENSA Tarot Reader's altruistic authenticity.}

-----

Marcella Durand wrote

- > Hi **Aaron**,
- >
- > The question for me is not so much whether temporal durability is a
- > legitimate measure (or "principle" is the word you use--almost like using
- > the "test of time" as a definition of good art is a moral stance) of good
- > poetry, but why poets (and, therefore, supposedly, "active" readers) would
- > want to use it as such? It seems like the most extremely dull (as well as
- > unreliable) way to gauge good poetry, only to be used if you're stuck at the
- > very last moment for something to teach your students (i.e., Here kids,
- > here's the oldest texts I found still in print! Assyrian-Babylonian stone
- > tablets listing olive oil sales! Pop quiz at the end of class!).
- >
- > I mean, what is the "test of time" anyhow? Some sort of mathematical model
- > of greatest popularity (and do we mean popular with critics? The masses?)
- > plus durability of physical materials over longest length of time? X times Y
- > equals = Great Art that Has Meaning & Significance for Many (European?
- > American?) Generations?
- >

- > best,
- > M (Letting her assessment of a principle be overwhelmed with questions)

Date: Wed, 29 Aug 2001

Subject: **HOAX: DEBROT/ASHBERY INTERVIEW ON READ.ME**

Has this "deceit" been publicly acknowledged? Have you 'fessed up? (On the List, etc. I'm a little bit **Rip van Winkel**-ish in having missed about a year and a half while underground. The thing to be in doubt about now is: the existence of **Jacques Debrot**. "Jacques Debrot" is the name of the cultural minister of Antilles.) The poems are very masterfully done. I suspected that they were forgeries, too, mainly because they combine chronologically different styles of **John Ashbery**'s. The interview too does a very good job of reproducing certain speech patterns from other interviews of his,--- but, of course, there are then things there that John would never in a thousand years allow his name to be attached to.

Date: Wed, 29 Aug 2001

Subject: README DECEIVES ON-LINE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Are you aware that <http://www.literaryhistory.com/20thC/Ashbery.htm> unwittingly gives the URL for your falsification, alongside authentic materials?

Have you contacted them to make them aware of their error, or was it your intention to raise your dishonesty to that next level?

Date: Thu, 30 Aug 2001

Subject: DeBrot virus spreading [answer to an old KNOCK KNOCK WHO'S THERE joke]

Given

(1) that **Gary Sullivan** circulated a falsified **John Ashbery** interview and forged Ashbery poems (identity of author, not "**Jacques Debrot**," still withheld by Sullivan),--- and

(2) that this unreliability has already entered into circulation and spurred further misinformation via literaryhistory.com,--- and

(3) Given that **Andrew Felsing** of *litvert.com* has published not only "DeBrot" (in a case already commanding its own separate international threats of lawsuit), but that *litvert.com* is also strongly associated with **Kent Johnson** (suspected "forger" behind the Yasusada deception) who espouses "heteronymity" and the widespread, strategic use of *noms-de-plume/noms-de-guerre* and false identities as a literary strategy,--- AND ---

(4) *NOTO BENE* --- that *litvert.com* published in its first issue a poem by one "John Ashbery,"---

there is strong reason to believe that the *litvert.com* "Ashbery" poem is also a forgery.

-----

It remains to be seen how the graduate English Dept. of Harvard University reacts to one of their Ph.D. candidates ("DeBrot") participating in a "ring" of falsification, and disseminating inauthentic documents within his own research field.

In the tiny field of **George Chapman** autograph studies (translator of **Homer**), there was a forger who compulsively altered any manuscripts that might pass through his hands. The verifiability of all Chapman sources must be triple-checked against whether the forger could have *potentially* come in contact with the documents, in which case they are rendered dubious. (If there *were* a Harvard doctoral candidate worth his snuff, he would be able to supply the missing name of the forger.)

Gary Sullivan's perpetration of the "DeBrot" "hoax" places into question all contiguous parties, and it corrupts the credibility of all publications therein. Note the similarity between the poem

attributed to "**Benjamin Friedlander**" ([below](#)) and an on-line poem credited to "Jacques DeBrot" (thereunder, <http://www.theeastvillage.com/tb/debrot/p2.htm>):

-----  
"FRIEDLANDER":

MOTHER

It hurts  
to chew on  
the nipple of your pain  
and feel the milk-  
lessness of time  
from the wrong end  
of a nursing grudge  
cowed by a pendulous Why?

-----  
"DeBrot"

gluhhnkKKK-K

Your tongue makes my breasts girls. Clench up  
and ball the nipple curving back, slapping against the mud.  
The nerves jump intrin-  
sically -- cow finger glistening  
like nibbling candy. Start slowly, wonder  
the bone of it while  
my mess grows a pencil. Why?.

-----  
The identities of all List members using @hotmail accounts (like Sullivan) or other such free addresses that do not verify sender identity are open to doubt. Kent Johnson's "heteronymity" proposes an entire *community* of fictionalized participants ("writing to and about each other and back to their creators and through time, re-valuing, dis-assembling, re-making the canon. What will the poetry world do with this?": [http://www.litvert.com/KJ\\_Interview.html](http://www.litvert.com/KJ_Interview.html)). Much of the List exchanges you have been reading may have been between different "heteronyms", personae, and sign-ons by the same writer or group of writers.

(Please note recent, sudden switching back and forth between e-mail addresses, changes of already fatuous sign-ons (from "][-n serf[" to

"[[mex](", say), or the affixing of comical names ("Jennifer", for a man) or "Jackson" as an previously unused second last name coincidentally with List mentions of **Laura Riding Jackson!** or when one "character" calls another by a wrong name ("Jim-- I'm humiliated to be called Pierre after we've spent nights drinking 1/2 a dozen times together & you've published me in \_canihaveyr\_") in ways that are unnecessarily but conspicuously reenforcing earlier suspect claims documenting their existence. Remain alert!)

**Jim Behrle** of [canyouhaveyourballsback.com](http://canyouhaveyourballsback.com) is practicing a form of "reverse" or quasi-heteronymity, mailing his publication "11" to people with the name "Zoe Johnson." "**Michael Magee**" (editor of Combo) and "**Jordan Davis**" (editor of The Hat) are published in 11.

"Jacques Debrot" is the name of the cultural minister of The Antilles ([http://www.litvert.com/KJ\\_Interview.html](http://www.litvert.com/KJ_Interview.html)).

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"Julu: This is a mess, just a blank, a brick, salvaged from the Amaya test browser. Just a moment, the phone is ringing.

Julu: As I was saying, this is a mess. There's nothing to it, nothing. The substitutions are weak; there's nothing to be done about it. It was saved from Amaya through lynx. Hold on, someone's at the door."

--- **Sondheim, Alan**, (Untitled) Thu, 5 Jun 1997

Date: Fri, 31 Aug 2001

Subject: Re: **Jacques and John**

**ammonides diodoros** wrote:

- > one should remember all those nasty things they said about the lovely boy
- > **Chatterton**, that saintly little **Theseus**... do you think he would bounce and
- > scowl like **Jeffrey Jullich**

-----  
Dear M. 'Aimonides ("M" for "M'sieur"!)

Jackie and I ("**Jacques DeBrot**," that is) transmit heartfelt thank you from here on floor for your sweetest-flavored epistolary novel installment yet, you one-man revival you. (Much appreciation for witty **Quintus Horatius Flaccus** allusion!) PLUS germ-free air kisses to those four, unseasonable "boys in the band" from You-Know-Who! (**J.A.** = **Jah**? Rastafarian deity incarnation?) His late-breaking band name contest entry: try "Ihr Glocken von Marling". Back to the topic (poetry) in a min'.

Guitar-strummin' jailbait sure know Fifth Avenue Botox injections have "Jullich" facial musculature too rigid, too unnatural, to "scowl" (Ho ho! "scowl" as concealed "scow" **Shoptaw** word, meaning vessel with square ends and--- flat bottom!? Insulting sagging posterior?!) during mid-life crisis vanity phase.

John took whole minutes out of writing truly epochal verse, not at all self-imitative, to clear up positively everything. He says HE (John) asked reapme "interview" questions under name-change "Jacque Debro" ( ) and --- guess who! - -- Jackie "DeBrot" giveth fatted kine answers unto The Master with misnomer "Joh Ashber", as zem discipline! So, all laughter. All comic relief. Exhaling thunderous sighs (whew!) as if bee-punctured bagpipe music. It was so VIRTUALITY-oriented in their mid-to-late-1900s cleverness, I'd say--- nay! So Virtuoso of 'cques 'brot. (**Marcella D.** protests over "vir-" root etymology and typical males. But you know "her".)

Found remaindered copy, not at all encrusted, of that **K.K. Ruthven** *Felsifying Literature* title thou inquirest after O these many days (July 25th, ingenious Oulipo one-letter-later-in-alphabet substitution: "K.K." indeed) --- and guess where! --- in the COLOMBARIUM! I can't put it down.. And, shop-talk, just wanted to recommend latest ish of **Andy Felsing**'s new "e-'zine" litBrot.com for truly thrilling **Kent Johnson** proposing --- here's the scream! --- adopting pseudonyms to fool everyone, to follow us around, as best my understanding, as at costume ball! guessing handsome masked man's identity. But only one peevish question: Say nicknames were one. F'r 'xample: Jacques could be "Jack" and John could be "Jack." Then---?

But also, K. Johnson speaks of "Flatland" (Remember that old chestnut? Geometry fantasia.) So appealing, flatness! Not distended, not convex. As flat belly is highly sought after by gymnasium-subscribers.

Off to Fifth Avenue for Botox 'jection now. Private jet revvin' up for jaunt to Antilles for holiday weekend full moon organ enlargement (just Cacques and I! {and pilot} the servant class on strike, so foraging for ourselves on knees digging at tree roots bare-handed).

And thanks, too, for not existing. For being the **Yasusada** you are (AND lovin' it)! Oh. And that **Jacquesline Kentedy Onansis** *Best Loved Poems* book. Can't find it anywhere. Hmph. Checked Rizzoli's, checked Shakespeare & Co. in Paris. Where else to look! You don't think September 26th publication date could be delaying things, do you?

Luv,

P.S. Here's a little haiku I hardly had time to dream up:

*ZZZ-ZZ-Z-ZZZZ-z*  
Snore? Power tool?

.....

Date: Sat, 7 Jun 1997

Subject: **NEXT: the identity of Yasusada to be revealed**

The identity of **Araki Yasusada** is now known by more parties than originally involved (although they are refraining from coming forward).

The undisclosed author of the fake **John Ashbery** poems in readme is one and the same as the author behind Yasusada.

The author of the fraudulent Ashbery poems/Yasusada whose name is about to be revealed will be self-evident by five distinct and unmistakable markers:

1. He/she will be a person with a post at a place of the highest academic standing and reputation (say, at the top of the Ivy League or that small calibre of schools). This accounts for the concealment of identity, up until now out of fear that it might negatively affect his/her professional reputation and credibility.
2. He/she will have recently lived in Japan and/or be distinguished by ties to Japanese professional societies (again, which he/she feared jeopardizing by self-disclosure).
3. He will be a master forger, already proven by the readme "Ashbery" counterfeits, or by other published literary constructions also under the name of another real poet/person; but that expertise may be demonstrated as well by specializing in linguistics or some technical aspect of the English language and/or a foreign or scientific language, or the manufacture of synthetic speech specimens. (Radio transmissions may be involved? The initials of his/her name may be very close to mine, or the same as mine!?)
4. He/she presents as a self-identified Buddhist or a quasi-Buddhist. Or, he may be of half-Buddhist or half-Asian parentage, a biographical fact shared with publisher(s) of Yasusada. Or maybe look like Buddha. (Fat?) (This half-nationalism may come out in other ways, such as publishing connections to other English-speaking countries.) This Buddhism will re-cast any temporary, futile reiteration of **Kent Johnson's** constant claim, "I am not Yasusada," with a whole new significance. (Johnson has effectively been shown in fact not to have been capable of authoring Yasusada, and to differ in telling "deep grammar" ways.)

The "am-not" will be heard then as validly expressible from a Radical Buddhist/Zem perspective, as one "is not" one's social security number, "is not" even one's own given legal name, "is not" one's job/body: the statement "I am not," from that grounding, will no longer be needed to be taken as denial of Yasusada authorship, which will be only too obvious! by The Five Markers; or will be understandable as parsing of semantic nuance at the finest shade of grammatical distinctions laid out elsewhere in his/her scientific/linguistic materials.

5. He/she will have publicly identified himself or some enterprise in his possession (a book title?) by a "clue" name meant to draw attention to the concealed falsity (whose prefix?) means secret, fictitious, inauthentic, bogus, such as "pseudo," "crypto," or such. (In a way that is not clear, it may be a four-letter word that sounds like the obscene word "f-k." The only word I can think like that is "fake.")

This full moon has brought it all to clarity.

(I thank **Michael Lutin**, Condé Nast horoscope columnist for Vanity Fair, for his help in leading me to this predictive description, and **Jan Pridmore** of literaryhistory.com whose intuition empirically lead to her to an answer. Her unique bibliographic experience with tracing literary web cross-references sniffed out the trail with remarkable speed and insight.)

Jennifer Julu

\*\*\*\*\*

"(Such are Clara Hielo Internet, Tiffany, Alan, Travis, Honey, Jennifer, and others. Jennifer-Julu, in particular, has been the subject/object of recent work, a blurring of epistemological/ontological distinction. Jennifer-Julu is me, not an alter-ego. Jennifer split into Julu; Julu is julu-of-the-scripts, and both reside as avatars in my linux machine.)"

--- **Sondheim, Alan**, "periodic (rewritten) notice - explanation of texts, etc."  
(Sun, 8 Jun 1997 18:07:51)

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Date: Mon, 10 Sep 2001

Subject: Re: **Translation, Chinese-English in particular**

**Joan Retallack's** book of poems *How to Do Things with Words* has a section/poem called "The Chinese Room" (or words to that effect). She's drawing upon a problem in the philosophy of mind, proposed in philosopher **John Searle's** essay, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (and subsequent discussion by **Fodor** in "After-thoughts: **Yin** and **Yang** in the Chinese Room", etc). Although somewhat racially insensitive in Searle's original shaping of it, the Chinese Room problem that Retallack refers to is, basically:

You have somebody in a room who doesn't know Chinese. You give them a set of Chinese flash cards, although they don't speak Chinese, and a set of grammatical rules for Chinese syntax. Somebody outside the room can see only the ideogram output that's constructed. When the person in the Chinese Room succeeds at forming entirely intelligible "communication," despite not knowing the language, *what is the nature of this language-thing that the reader outside the room is reading*, --- since it's uncomprehended by the sender/speaker but understood as normative by the receiver/reader.

That model is really the base for an investigation by analogy as to nature of mind--- It's a sort of **Turing** test. (To Turing-ize would be to dispense the person in the Chinese Room and have it just be a machine that's sending out the messages, and the reader's inability to tell whether talking to a man or woman, since talking to neitherk, etc.) It may seem tangential to your question, but --- In Retallack's use of it, it takes on a new, poetic resonance, and is, by itself, I think, an unforgettably bothersome sort of thought-experiment.

Date: Mon, 17 Sep 2001  
Subject: Re: just checking

--- "**K.Silem Mohammad**" <immerito@HOTMAIL.COM> wrote:  
>has anyone heard from **Rebecca Wolff, Tom Devaney,**  
**Brendan Lorber**? Kasey

-----  
Rebecca Wolff --- I hope this isn't a breach of confidentiality --- e-mailed me on Mon. the 10th that she was leaving on one of her selfless extended poetry-fundraising business trips outside the city (to a place with a name that could be in Massachusetts, Cornwall UK, Colchester Nova Scotia, or Australia, she didn't specify which).

And, yes, **J ffr y J ll ch** (who?) is still alive (un-dead), **Mrs. Jackson** (Thanks for the touching "my love and hope to all of you -- even, yes, those I've had tiffs with -- on this list" . . . like the media moment when **Rudolph Guiliani** and **Hillary Clinton** embraced) (though a name nowhere to be found on the 8/25/01 3:43 a.m. "100 NYC Poets" posting, oddly). Sorry epithalamium I was composing has been temporarily interrupted.

{Tinkling music box music coming from next dug-out, touching, . . . like film score in opening moments of Live Home Video *The Bell Jar* movie version, starring **Marilyn Hassett** as **Sylvia** surrogate, twirling in circles in cardigan in opening moments, not at all soil-bespattered, **Julie Harris** (formerly of *Belle of Amherst* **Emily Dickinson** fame, just to confound everything) as **Mama Plath**, and **Anne Bancroft**, a must-see (especially in solarium converted by night into in-patient "Entertainment Night," all pathos).}

We're hoping to be back from Antilles in time for the **Jackie O. Best Beloved Poem** unveiling, Sept. 24th. You know how beautifully they read "Ithaka" by **Cavafy** & "Memory of Cape Cod" by **Millay** at *her* funeral.

Tears, literacy, ahimsa,

that's

---\*MS.\* **Laura RJ** wannabe

to you, thank you

55596446229489549303819644288109756659334461  
55596446229489549303819644288109756659334461

Memory of Cape Cod

The wind in the ash-tree sounds like surf on the shore  
at Truro.

I will shut my eyes . . . hush, be still with your  
silly bleating,  
sheep on Shillingstone Hill . . .

They said: Come along! They said: Leave your  
pebbles on the sand and come along, it's long after  
sunset!

The mosquitoes will be thick in the pine-woods along  
by Long Nook, the wind's died down!

They said: Leave your pebbles on the sand, and your  
shells, too, and come along, we'll find you another  
beach like the beach at Truro.

Let me listen to wind in the ash . . . it sounds  
like surf on the shore.

Date: Mon, 24 Sep 2001

Subject: Re: **What is to be done**

--- "**Stefans, Brian**" <BStefans@GC.CUNY.EDU> wrote:

> According to **John Miller** (and I confess that I got this info from **David Letterman** last night -- remember, I only have one tv channel!), **bin Laden** himself (at least in 98) had three specific points of contention with the United States: support of Israel, the air-bases in Saudi Arabia and the sanctions/no fly zone against Iraq.

-----  
DEAR BRIAN,

The three points that John Miller reported are slightly mistranslated and re-ordered via Letterman etc.

What you quote as the second point ("the air-bases in Saudi Arabia") is the main point, but wasn't phrased solely against "air-bases".

The fundamentalist ultimatum is that there should be *no* non-Muslims, none, not one, including civilians, within the entire Arabian peninsula.

This has to do with their belief that that land itself is--- PLEASE NOTE: holy ground.

Hence, the point against Israel follows; it is not specifically discriminatory as anti-semitic; it is universally a taboo against all non-Muslims ("infidels").

As a formative influence in his life, years ago, bin Laden's construction enterprise was the one awarded the contract for the buttressing-up/restoration of the architecture that houses the Ka'aba (!) and, after a "wild youth" (Club Med of the Islamic world, etc.), he underwent a profound conversion.

A sense of sacred space or holy ground may be difficult for us Americanized to understand

(especially for those who understand their irreligion, such as "politics" or the secular, to be ontologically different from religion, who believe that Western empiricism, skepticism, and cynicism made some quantum leap break with tens of thousands of years of human religiosity, . . . instead of seeing rationalism-Americanism as another type of religion. [The god of money was Pluto]).

The closest the United States comes to remembering "holy ground" is, of course, in the Native American sense of such: you're familiar with recent negotiations that were waged over industrial development because Native holy ground had been infringed upon.

Those who followed the "story" around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem watched holy ground at play again. (Interestingly, Jews are forbidden to walk onto the Temple Mount, which is under Muslim jurisdiction, *not* [only] due to Muslim prohibition, but by *Jewish*, hallakhic law. Because it's believed that **Solomon's** Temple is inside the Mount but it's not known exactly where the Holy of Holies might be within that area, by Talmudic law Jews are not permitted to trespass because of our current state of impurity, for fear of crossing over the Sanctum Sanctorum that no one except the High Priest was allowed to enter.)

These Islam fundamentalists have expanded that sense of holy ground to the entire peninsula, an unusual, perhaps unprecedented scale (from the little I know of Islam. The "jihadists" are also markedly un-Islamic in their practice of suicide bombing [according to a Muslim academic whom John Miller interviewed]).

Westerners seem to re-acquire an approximation of a sense of holy ground only by death marking a spot. Viz., the struggle over the convent and crosses at Auschwitz.

As a New Yorker, you'll recall the African slave cemeteries that were discovered in lower Manhattan, and the problems around exhumation or the continued construction by the builders who had stumbled across the vast cemetery. **Jeffrey Dahmer's** house was burned to the ground, and the spot is thought to be

uninhabitable. There was a campaign along the New Jersey turnpikes of erecting small memorials at the spots of car collision deaths. Etc.

The link between ancient holy ground and this XXth/XXIst cent. return of the repressed may be blood stain: the Temple altars red with the slaughter of livestock . . .

The cries for "The World Trade Center will be re-built!" seem messianic and unrealistic to me. (Jewish "extremists" in Israel, of course, are dedicated to building The Third Temple, similarly.) My sense is that the site, if it can ever be decontaminated, hygiene-wise, will be too "holy".

I don't want to get too theoretical (I was initially dismayed by all the first person narratives appearing on the List, --- I don't know why it is that an "anti"-first-person literary movement reverts into "I" when there's the feeling of a *really* serious subject, viz. **Aaron Shurin's** AIDS essays, *True*, etc. --- but I sort of miss the memoirs, now that the breezier amateur politician bar stool opinions are flowing, a masculinist "coolant," I think, getting all prematurely theoretical and intellectual-hairy as a way of retreating from softer sadnesses, palpable groundedness) but---

an identification with holy ground cultures may have been especially lost to us because our civilization's sense of space went over to the concept of land as *private* property, land that could be owned. (Holy ground may be more rooted in nomadic hunter cultures, us a settled agrarian civilization.)

{I was disturbed to read in *Rain Taxi* last night --- I hadn't know --- that **Gilles Deleuze** died from jumping out a window a few years ago.}

I was out of the city for the first time this weekend for the twins' 40th birthday party (my brother and sister) and to visit **Mother** in the physical rehab (revision surgery of hip replacement),--- and it was

strange to find the world still going along elsewhere on quite different tracks, on the other side of the river (they're more at the phase of *anger*, I felt, New Yorkers more mournful)--- but helpful, reassuring in a way, that society moves along at different strata and some layers may persist unaffected, that the fissures might not reverberate into cracks throughout the entire system.

My sister was driving me back north from the shore where family live --- a one-for-the-road snack of six *bad* oysters on half-shell, shrimp in the basket with nothing *but* little breaded fried shrimp, no French fries (when they say "in a basket," they're being very literal: a basket; who said anything about anything besides a basket?), out at a *brise marine* table on the edge of the long Funland pier, dozens of chatterbox gulls re-staging *Suddenly Last Summer* climactic bird ravenous god scene to fellow patrons tossing French fries---

and my sister in the driver's seat pointed through top of windshield at sky:

"Look!"

However poets have described them, "chevrons," the trails of undulant giant capital Vs gliding across the sky:

near sundown, GEESE heading south overhead.

Silent through the windshield. That made me feel better, sort of, that the vast millenia-old migrations still go on, as scheduled.

One avenue I tried in the second week ("What is to be done?"), especially after late '60s punchiness at reemergence of The National Transitional Object (flag), was---

emulating models like **Gertrude Stein** who wrote a **Susan B. Anthony** opera during days of flag-waving, **Kenneth Koch** who wrote "**George Washington** Crossing The Delaware" during flag-waving days, **Larry Rivers'**

spin-off "...Crossing The Delaware" series of paintings, **Jasper Johns'** white flag, etc.,---

was

rather than let "them" just appropriate these symbols, to take my own closer look at the patriotic motherlode, bedrock, and see what it says to me, what I might make of it:

been reading **Francis Scott Key's** *Collected Poems* (author of the Star-Spangled Banner lyrics).

Some rewarding oddities:

He did a rhyming pentameter couplets translation of **Ajax's** speech, XIIIth Bk. of **Ovid**;

a very strange "On Visiting the Pennsylvania Hospital":

"Madness here,

. . .

On high-piled human skulls his throne is fixed,  
His bursting brows a burning iron crown  
Confines, and blends its fires with fiercer flames  
That from his ghastly eye-balls wildly glare;  
A robe of straw his giant form conceals;  
His hand a leaden sceptre wields, each point  
With terrors armed. Ice, never melting, gleams  
From the one; from the other, fire unquenchable;  
Each, as it points to his devoted prey,  
With cold, or heat, or freezes or inflames  
The chambers of the brain, and stupefies  
And chills to dullest idiocy"

a *very* odd, somewhat *buffo*, long (107-line) poem, "A Bear Story", *with* sequel! "Song" ("O, Bruin! O, Bruin! come back to thy chain / . . . / Thy lady-pressed paws will be luscious to lick"); a definite "dark streak" to Key, I think;

---but, to my point:

The biographical materials note that Key's first major political commission (which lead to the ship-side

imprisonment where he wrote the "Banner") was in the forced migration and encampment of the Creek Nation.

(More **JJ** research needed there. To follow.)

Thought of the Creek Nation also, paradoxically, lent me some hint of --- comfort? Before us, there were whole nations, civilizations, right here. They're gone. We ruined them. --- So, well, . . . I'll feel bad if it all caves in on us, yeah, but--- there may be civilizations/cultures that'll come later, as unimaginable to us as ours to the Creek.

I own one Arabic music cassette: **Om Khalsoum** (sp.?), the most popular singer in the world, more popular than **Elvis** was, than ABBA. I played it last weekend, windows always shut dust allergy air-conditioning (dust opened) opened wide. Hadn't heard it in years. Sounded beautiful. There's this curious *stoppage* that occurs in that Arabic music: the melodic line instantaneously seizes and lurches to a brief halt, then continues forward, at perhaps a modification of a half-step (?).

**Zuz'**, did you order that copy of Jackie's *Best Loved*? Today's the release date. I think it would be nice to read a few poems by **Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis**.

When The Towers were originally erected --- mid- to late-'70s, I guess --- all the earth that was displaced by digging the hole for the foundations was moved off toward the Hudson shoreline, and a small, man-made (temporary?) "beach" was created. There was an open air series run there for a while, called "Art on The Beach." The newspaper *The Village Voice* ran an article that I've never forgotten:

Australian aborigines were brought to the US. They were taken to the ex nihilo beach for an Art on The Beach to do a performance of their "dances."

It was very exciting to scholars and everyone that here were these pristinely untouched tribesmen. They

were living neolithics who had *literally* just stepped out of The Stone Age (outback, forest). The newspaper played it up big, the angle that here were these people brought directly out of 40,000 B.C. by silver jet to dance at the base of the world's new tallest building, in the shadow of The Towers. Museum curators removed Stone Age artefacts from vitrines to show the aborigines, ask them what they meant to them.

There was one particular petroglyph carved in rock. It showed a circle with concentric lines leading inward, like a wheel with spokes. Historians had conjectured that it might've been a solar disk, an ideogram for the sun. They asked the aborigines what it said to them.

It's a meeting of tribesmen, they said, all sitting in a circle with their staffs pointed toward the center, tips touching.

But, here's the point:

Being neolithic and nomadic, they had no sense *whatsoever* of personal possession. One couldn't *own* anything. (That's why graves provide evidence of Stone Age life, filled with **Venus**es of Willendorf, Cycladic mothers, stuff: rather than proof of belief in an afterlife--- once somebody died, nobody *wanted* anybody else's s--t, and they just dumped their hoardings like garbage into the hole where the body went.

There was one thing, though, which they could own:

a dance.

No one except the owner of a singular dance could do that dance. It could not be stolen, sold, or given away in life.

Upon the death of a father, the son who had seen it practiced could then do the dance.

And the dances were of such phenomenal simplicity that they were sometimes difficult for Westerners to recognize as having even *happened*, danced to

completion before their eyes. Such as, I remember,  
"The Bear":

The dancer stood very seriously, flat-footed, weight  
evenly distributed. He took one step forward,  
transferring his weight onto the sole of that foot.

Done.

The "dance," more than choreography per se, was like  
the "duende" that **Lorca** writes about in flamenco  
dancers, I guess, not only its motions but an  
attitude, or elan, about doing the dance, "The Bear,"  
the self-consciousness of possessing something.

The Australian aborigines danced at the base of The  
Twin Towers at its inauguration.

love read

Date: Mon, 8 Oct 2001

Subject: Re: **ON RECEIVING NEWS OF THE WAR [the architect of The Towers: Minoru Yamasaki]**

--- **Geoffrey Gatz** <ggatza@DAEMEN.EDU> wrote:  
> today considering the unusual weather in Buffalo.  
Today as **Peter Jennings** reports the sun shone as ice  
hailed down.

-----  
Dear Geoffrey, **Charles Bernstein**, spirit of **Isaac Rosenberg** (d.  
1918):

That frosty I Ching hexagram-like meterology report is  
a reminder that this godgiven List is, yes, it is a  
Buffalo List (space-time can become so cyber, so **Paul  
Virilio**) . . .

For you hinterland Buffalo-ans, blowing on your  
knuckles ("Tom's a-cold"):

Is it common knowledge among your good citizens there  
that the MANUFACTURERS & TRADERS CO. building (1967)  
in your fair city

was designed by the architect **Minoru Yamasaki**, the  
architect of the Twin Towers

(one of the forty-eight Danaïd-like sisters of our  
lost gemini)?

I wonder if the Manufacturers & Traders building looks  
nice. I haven't been able to find any photos of her.

While "taking a break" from architecture and  
convalescing from stomach ulcers in '54, Yamasaki, a  
Nesei (second-generation Japanese) went to Japan to  
study the concept of TOKONOMA,

"an alcove that is the spiritual and artistic focus of  
a Japanese home . . . often used to display hanging  
scrolls, flowers and objects d'art" (Baulch, Vivian  
M., *The Detroit News* [date?]). "On his return home  
Yamasaki built his own tokonoma in his living room  
devoted to small Japanese dolls and a small vase."

He was someone who had faced disappointment and the undoing of one of his artworks during his lifetime.  
"His Pruitt-Igoe Housing project, built in St. Louis in 1955, gained notoriety after officials dynamited it 20 years later as a failure" (Baulch).

I wish I were good at traveling, so I could go about as on a pilgrimage from Yamasaki to Yamasaki, keeping a **Basho**-like journal of the voyages, prose portions followed by haikus. And now would be The Perfect Time, with low, low airfare prices that would have been affordable--- even to Minoru during his youth! when he put himself through the University of Washington by working summers at salmon canneries in Alaska for 17 cents an hour.

It might be gratifying and comforting in some way, to see Minoru's other works of the imagination, to go inside them, . . . like being enwombed in the external manifestations of a man's mind.

Since so many of you dears live scattered geographically throughout these fifty glorious States, and throughout "the world" (Sweden),--- here's a partial list of Minoru's buildings, below. Perhaps you rugged types in your \$155.00 Timberland Classic Premium Waterproof 8" Boots would have no trouble traveling about

(unlike an old lady who wears her stockings rolled down about her shins, supporting herself in her plodding water-around-the-ankles pace by leaning on a wheelie pushcart to go out shopping for Pop Tarts at 2:43 in the morning, or a crumb bun)

and would enjoy visiting one of these habitable sculptures (in the spirit of **Gaston Bachelard**'s book, *The Poetics of Space*), maybe then lovingly back-channeling/bare-backing me/the List about standing face-to-face or going inside the remaining three-dimensionalities of Minoru's imagination.

Apologies for getting off-topic (poetry) by posting on another artistic medium (architecture), but those Muses, too, were sisters. Bon voyage!

Luv,

JJ

A partial list:

Urban Redevelopment Plan, St. Louis, 1952  
Gratiot Urban Redevelopment Project, Detroit, 1954  
University School, Grosse Pointe, 1954  
U.S. Consulate, Kobe, Japan, 1955  
Pruit-Igoe Public Housing, St. Louis, 1955  
Lambert-St.Louis Airport Terminal, 1956  
McGregor Memorial Conference Center, Wayne State  
University, Detroit, 1958  
Reynolds Metals Regional Sales Office, Southfield, 1959  
Michigan Consolidated Gas Co., Detroit, 1963  
U.S. Pavilion, World Agricultural Fair, New Delhi, India, 1959  
Dhahran Air Terminal, Dhahran Saudi Arabia, 1961  
Federal Science Pavilion, Seattle World's Fair, 1962  
Queen Emma Gardens, Honolulu, 1964  
North Shore Congregation Israel, Glenco, Ill., 1964  
Northwestern National Life Insurance Co., Minneapolis, 1964  
Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, 1965  
Century Plaza Hotel, Los Angeles, 1966  
IBM Office Building, Seattle, 1964  
Manufacturers and Traders Trust Co., Buffalo, 1967  
World Trade Center, New York, 1976  
Eastern Airlines Terminal, Logan International Airport, Boston, 1969  
Horace Mann Educators Insurance Co., Springfield, Ill., 1979  
Temple Beth El, Birmingham, 1974  
Century Plaza Towers, Los Angeles, 1975  
Colorado National Bank, Denver, 1974  
Bank of Oklahoma, Tulsa, 1977  
Performing Arts Center, Tulsa, 1976  
Rainer Bank Tower, Seattle, 1977  
Federal Reserve Bank, Richmond, Va., 1978  
Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency Head Office, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1981  
ounder's Hall, Shinji Shumeikai, Shiga Prefecture, Japan, 1982  
Eastern Province International Airport, Saudi Arabia, 1985

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"... 01100100011101010110110101100010 ..."

-- Pom2 (Brooklyn, NY, volume # 1 issue # 1), p. 70

Date: Tue, 16 Oct 2001

Subject: Re: **Truth Has Been Suspended. Indefinitely.**

TO: Ms. **Amber Dorko Stopper**

Founder, Tarot Special Interest Group of American Mensa

Editor, nightrally.org

Dear Amber,

I have urgent concerns about the suppression of truth in New York City.

On Sunday, September 16th, I was coming back from a visit to Jersey (for the twins' 40th birthday party), and, time on my hands, curious to be in Times Square (near Port Authority Bus Station, whence I was returning) with the crowds so thinned by the tourist exodus, I moseyed about.

There, at curbside, was a Tarot reader set up at one of those small, foldable metal tables suburbanites use for setting up small household parties in converted "rec room" basements,--- and her client. I stood to watch. The cards talready spread out on the table seemed odd: The World, the four of Wands (or whichever shows that chuppah wedding canopy), The Lovers, etc. . . . There was something about so many pastelle hues that seemed an unfamiliar chromatics, Rider deck.

#### **HER TECHNIQUE FOR TURNING OVER THE CARDS:**

She had a curious way of drawing her cards. The table (and now it begins, dream-like, to seem not a 'burbs party foldable at all) had two little compartments, and she kept half a deck in each, switching from one to the other. She would turn over a single card and hold it in her hand, and she and the client would lean over the card while the reader interpreted it. She sort of cupped her hand around the card, though, as if concealing it, and was either whispering or straining to be heard above the din of diminished traffic.

#### **DIALOGUE:**

And then she turned to me:

"I'm sorry," the psychic said. "But she" (the client)  
"would like us to be left alone."

By now I'd figured it out the omission.

"Where are the *Swords!*?" I asked, forcefully, in what the composer **Ralph Buxton** (publisher of Notre Dame Choir Editions, known for his reconstruction of an incomplete six-part **Robert Parsons** polyphony) has described as my "ominous tone."

"What have you done with the Swords?!" And I said to the client: "She's hidden a quarter of the deck!"

She should pay only 75% of the fee. (Or 75%, less the fraction for the ratio of Major Arcana.)

The signifiers for all sorrows, care, misfortune, friction, challenges, unpleasantness, had been taken out of that deck, Amb'! Certainly no Tower, either, nor Death, to be sure.

-----

I walked on. There was sightseeing to be enjoyed. The hustler in the classical disco ball tinsel proscenium male strip tease burlesque a few blocks uptown perplexed with his own curious politicality. An "**Osama** - Public Enemy # 1" shirt had already hit the Times Square street vendors' wares. This particular "boy" appeared, pro forma, for the opening, strip tease portion of his performance, still dressed in the trousseau of "straight-acting" street clothes they somehow select for themselves: Timberland boots, jeans, belt, gradually revealed **CKs**, whatever, . . . But, here's the shocker: he had on one of the "Osama - Public . . ." t-shirts! Anaphrodisiacal. The mainly silver-haired clientele all but gasped. They (we, salt-'n'-pepper myself) must have at least undergone a simultaneous, collective inhalation that could unanimously be sensed, heard at some low decibel frequency not drowned out by the piped-in dance music, each dancer choosing his own recorded accompaniment (Am I correct that I've heard a House Music-ized version of **Pachelbel's** Canon?). Perhaps, of course, some panache of his good looks caused coincidental

inhalation. --- Fortunately, the strictures of his terpsichore genre quickly shed the "# 1" shirt, and the second half of the expressionistic choreography, whew, is always reserved for the "boy's" reappearance, fully naked.

---

I thought this especially important to report about the missing Swords, Dork', because of something I'd recently read.

**Rick**, "Aries Marine Bull-Pussy," in Zeeland, Steven, *Military Trade* (NY: Harrington Park Press/The Haworth Press, Inc., 1999), p. 170, generously blurred by queer theorist (and writer on **Proust**, **Carravagio**) **Leo Bersani**:

"Soldiers prefer rough, dirty stuff like . . . canvas wrestling. Sailors like slick things such as body-hugging nylon/lycra clothes . . . Airmen want everything suburban middle-class clean and bland . . . Marines are drawn to stretchy, sweaty, tightly enfolding things like leather and rubber. . . . Another odd note: In the symbology of the tarot deck, Swords (Air) are Air Force, Wands (Fire) are Marine Corps, Cups (Water) are Navy, and Pentacles (Earth) are Army, and each of the major Arcana has a military form."

---

But, God in God's infinite plenitude, even while information (truth) may be withheld on one front, it springs up elsewhere, like wildflowers. Recently received a mailed, postcard-type announcement from Teachers & Writers about their Adventures in Poetry unveiling, just past (I can't find the announcement at the moment, a pretty electric green color, a scarab-like cockroach silhouette perhaps a logo from that mimeograph era, early New York School AIP's design, . . . so I can't quote it verbatim). But at the bottom, the card read: "*Epoisses* cheese will be served." Usually, gourmands, most poetry announcements do not specify their grade of cheeses. (*Epoisses*: 4 - 5 inches in diameter, reddish orange

skin, gooey, from an affinement in Marc de Bourgogne,  
invented by 16th century Cistercian monks.)

Luv,

**JJ**

P.S. While I was buying the twins their presents, I  
bought myself: **Allen, Robert** and **Josephine Fulton**,  
*Mensa Presents MIGHTY BRAIN TEASERS* (NY: Barnes &  
Noble Books, 1999), filled with "Brain Twisters,"  
"Headscratchers" ("Which is the odd one out?"), "Super  
Sleuth," "Matchpoints," "Quick Wit," etc. And ---  
here's the thing, Stop!: --- I'm not doin' all that  
great! Maybe you'd be available sometime to bus down  
not that The City's so enjoyable spacious and gimme  
Genius lessons sometimes, to bring me up to  
Headscratchers calibre.

Date: Thu, 18 Oct 2001

Subject: "4th GRADE / GREENDALE SCHOOL / FRANKLIN PARK, NJ 08852"  
(with poem)

Although I see that it has been reported (smh.com.au) that there is no Greendale School in Franklin Park, NJ, as written in the upper right hand corner return address on the envelope sent to **Senator Daschle** ---

"4th GRADE  
GREENDALE SCHOOL  
FRANKLIN PARK, NJ 08852"

--- there is very definitely a well-known (among a certain circle), "virtual" Greendale school.

Set in the invented town of Greendale, the school there, the "fourth" school in the town (as described on its on-line site, <http://www.eclipse.net/~rms/grndale.html>, coincidental with "4th GRADE")

is Greendale's most important feature: *all game players must enroll as students in that school.*

[First, also, the address contains a second "error" (or fiction, or "clue"): 08852 is not, strictly speaking, the zip code for Franklin Park (08853), but the zip code for a neighboring vicinity, Monmouth Junction.

[Out of the billion plus web sites that Google.com shows, there may be surprisingly few Greendale schools proper, world-wide; quickly within the first 70 Google listings, only the same names recur: there is a Greendale School District and Greendale Middle School in Greendale, WI, and Greendale Schools in Worcester, MA, Abingdon, VA, Lawrenceburg, IN; but thereafter, one would have to look internationally: Quebec, Niagara Falls, CA, Wellington, NZ, a Greendale High School in Witbank, Mpumalanga, South Africa, and a Greendale Community School in Dublin, Ireland.]

The virtual Greendale where the school is is described as "the site of the on-again, off-again Teenagers From Outer Space campaign" (!). Various web-based versions are given, and there is a book version. The first level of Google search shows it under the category "Games > Roleplaying".

"Greendale sits south of a chain of respectable mountains, which decline into gentle foothills before flattening completely into what was recently farmland." It's a highly developed virtuality with roads, restaurants, etc.

There is another interesting overlap with the events since the 11th:

"Route 101 north heads straight into the mountains and through them, arriving at the big City some two hours hence (if you travel at the speed limit). To the east, Route 972 soon takes you to the Atlantic Ocean, and deposits you in the shore town of Seaside . . ."

Seaside Heights, NJ (known as "Seaside," locally) is where the Thunderbird Motel is, one of the hideaways of the WTC terrorists (Although I am having trouble finding an on-line news report about that, it was reported within the first week after the 11th).

-----  
The creator of the virtual Greendale school posts a little poem on his home page:

Please to remember  
Eleven September --  
Hijack, destruction and plot.  
Our outraged reaction  
To terrorist action  
Should never be forgot.

-----  
-----  
"I made myself, and though no form have I, / Am fairer  
than the fairest you can spy" --- **Francis Scott Key**,  
"A Riddle"

Date: Wed, 5 Dec 2001

Subject: Re: **Harpo's Index** [\*\$@%]

Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your lovely, **Bourdieuian** numbers. (Your on-List silence had been noticeable. I heard you hurt your shin. Condolences. And I was worried that maybe your silence meant you were cooking up some sort of mischievous heteronym! :) I'm relieved to see you're putting your time to good use.) Something seems muddled with your statistics for advertisements, though: 7.5 doesn't seem to correspond to 65, numerically, and you might've done better to stick it out for an additional count of 62 (= 214 - 149), I think, especially with randomness, as comparison between samples of unequal size involve chi-factors or r or something . . . but otherwise, I find these numbers neo-Pythagorean in their sense of "beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all you know on earth and all you need to know," and charming.

I felt tempted to do the same myself --- but upping nutritional supplements of Vitamin Shoppe 1500 MG Amino Complex to 10 tabs a day seems to have moderated my counting mania --- and I was more interested in plotting *who* responds to *whose* posts and threads, for more of an analysis of power and follow-the-leader.

I also find the number of advertisements distressing. It's like being on one of those servers with pop-up ads that keep cluttering the screen. One waste of time there, for me, is that poetry-advertisers do not as a rule mark their subject header with their location,--- so I waste clicks opening ads for interesting poets' readings that are then disappointingly unreachable in far-away States I can't attend (given the impounding of my private jet), not that I ever leave the house anyway. So, (#1) I think it wld. at least be thoughtful of advertisers to mark location in subject header, . . . although I can understand that reputation accumulates through the redundancy of name, and why anyone wld. be motivated just to infiltrate **Gertrude Stein** Gertrude Stein Gertrude Stein at every loophole, "fame"-building.

I've wondered if **Christopher W. Alexander** or Prof. **Bernstein** couldn't somehow "cordon off" or segregate ads from poetics discussion. In print, ads are generally separated to the margins and not interspersed with "articles." --- Pedagogically, insofar as the List is State U. educational outreach, it's like mixing in Save Fifty Cents coupons with class notes. --- Electronically, segregation might be effort, though (develop a co-site/cache), . . . but maybe not all that much effort: even free servers like Yahoo provide instantaneous group resources that poetry-advertisers cld. be given a one-time "warning" to post to, for those interested to consult, and then otherwise summarily blocked/deleted (as exploitative, mercenary, whatever). I've even considered as public "penance" taking it upon myself to maintain an on-line Poetry Calendar such items could be re-directed to and plotted more helpfully, systematically, the way **Sharon Matling** (name?) single-handedly started the NYC Poetry Calendar as a 2-sided broadsheet that became a company.

I do strongly agree that it wld. improve reading for ads to be segregated somehow.

There's something terribly *American* in this anti-social Buy This/Go There panhandling that's done on-List, by poets (communicators!) who have total impunity abt. addressing a community only to try to change peers into audience. Very lively, daily discussion (although abt. work of a different "taste" than the Buff List's) goes on at PoetryEtc, for example, which is predominately UK and AU/NZ sign-ons, who don't seem as thoroughly *permeated by mercantilism* as Americans.

I'm very easily manipulated by advertisements (which is why I don't watch television or go to the movies, and have trouble with newspapers and magazines), --- psychology finds that some types are objectively more "hypnotizable" by ads/promos! --- and it's distressing to find my relation to poetry being bent into docile consumerism: I spend, easily, between a hundred and two hundred a month on poetry, average, much of it via SPD or checks to on-List book/journal advertisers. That's okay but, once upon a time, my naive attachment to poetry was because an endlessly re-readable enigma masterpiece and nothing but paper and pen/typewriter was a *refuge* from consumerism.

But it isn't only the alienation that poets are dousing colleagues with here that bothers me (I find it tacky if the automatic footer at the bottom of a poet's discussion post leads to a book of theirs and a price for where to send for it, too): it's the lack of *creativity*, or imagination, or even--- guile! in how matter-of-factly and mass media-like they style their "Satisfy Me" commands. Utopian, I think it's holding back a potential new *poetry* of inventive free market gamesmanship, a "litvertizing," as it were, where poetry would grow into being ironically/ambiguously conjoined with the zeitgeist of advertisement-seduction. What were all those names of friends doing in New York School poetry, if not a collective strategy of shared advertising and name-redundancy? (How *could* **Bill Berkson** be advertised on-List this week if, in the golden age of genuine inspired "litvertizing," **Frank O'Hara** hadn't paved a reputation for him by dint of including his name in O'Hara immortality?) Forgive me if it seems vain of me to use myself as an example, but it took much more than an hour to put together and post my shoddy little

<http://www.geocities.com/jeffreyjulich/EUNOIAN.LITTLE.LEXICON.htm>

with no self-interest in **Christian Bok's** reputation other than I genuinely find him to be among the two or three most remarkable. It was advertising, though, disinterested advertising, labor-intensive advertising. And I was lead to doing that, and to ordering Bok's book and to hearing him on the *Cabinet* CD as a result of **Brian Kim Stefans** posting a micro-review that brought out the nature of *Eunoia* in a way I'd previously missed, and as a result of Christopher W. Alexander bringing out points about glossolalia that mentioned *Cabinet*.

Already here, it shows, I'm more concerned about/focussed on the on-List *advertisements*, whereas you're more irked by the absence of discussion (the latest *Fence* takes uniquely unprecedented and *admirable* candor in presenting their distributors'

actual print-outs--- with sales figures! Congratulations, **Rebecca Woolf**/Rebecca-informants while Rebecca is on her doubtlessly tiring but invigorating *Manderley* road show. The charts should be framed, it's so good. --- Tragic, hopefully not, that their optimism was fueled by the "irrational exuberance" [**Greenspan**] of the now antediluvian lost "New Economy," and that recession nihilism may well show *Fence's* charts' upward curve to have been sub-sets of a larger upward slope mania that's been broken by three airplanes and thousands and thousands of deaths, "jinxed").

Maybe that's because I see advertising as an unstoppable semiotic that's really a major vehicle for graphic artists, designers, actors, models, epigrammatists, etc., and quite "avant-garde" in its ingenuities. And I'm mainly disappointed by how anemically we pursue marketing and how uncreative and ascii ads are, on-List.

[mar-/mar-]:

I don't think we're *marginalized*; I think we're bad at *marketing*.

But thanks for your own statistical avant-gardisme, --- the future is Neo-Pythagorean! --- which I read as a **Herron** poetic artefact in and of itself. Bar charts would've been nice (**Ron Silliman** did **Rae Armantrout** pie charts in *A Wild Salience*).

P.S. The "BICKERING" and fighting that you condone as the spice of discussion also greatly contributes, I suspect, to the drop-off in discussion: you have a thicker hide for and propensity toward it than many. Poets are sensitive plants, and people of substance aren't going to risk their vulnerability where at any moment their "lessers" are given full clearance to pounce and lash out over imaginary slights. (But I'm debilitatingly conflict-avoidant {meek!}.)

Professional academics tend to participate less seriously in on-List discussion, too. Perhaps they see it as "work," or their interlocutors as being unqualified; they're more "careful," though. On-List participation sometimes parallels how long a batch/klatsch enjoys *grad student* status together. They clam up once they've gotten tenure-track appointments.

P.P.S. I rented *Being John Malkovich* the other night to see the **Emily Dickinson** puppet, and the puppeteer's employer, Lester Inc., reminded me of your coincidentally named marionette Lester.

---

"One in the sun. Two in the sun. Three in the sun.  
One not in the sun. . . . Four benches used four  
benches separately."

--- Gertrude Stein, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, 1927

---

--- Patrick Herron <patrick@PROXIMATE.ORG> wrote:  
> Discussion Statistics, UBPoetics E-mail List  
> November 2001 vs. November 1998  
>  
>  
> November 1998  
> number of e-mails: 984  
> number of threads\*: 174  
> average length of thread, adjusted to remove  
> outliers: 3.6 e-mails  
> discussion, as % share of total list e-mail: 67  
> percent of list posts that were advertisements,  
> announcements, job postings,  
> or responses to such postings: 7.5 (based on random  
> sample of 211 e-mails),  
>  
>  
> November 2001  
> number of e-mails: 404  
> number of threads\*: 38  
> average length of thread, adjusted to remove  
> outliers: 2.5 e-mails  
> discussion, as % share of total list e-mail: 29  
> number of advertisements, announcements, job  
> postings, or responses to such  
> postings: 65 (based on a random sample of 149  
> e-mails)  
>  
> \*-threads with more than one e-mail

Date: Mon, 17 Dec 2001 16:04:15 -0800  
Subject: Re: Virus

<HEAD>

Example 1:

Of the pear  
the fish drives calmly  
the grass.

.....

Example 2:

>From the chestnut  
the pale steaming darkness  
and the long mushroom.

.....

I-Worm.Haiku, by Mister Sandman

Did you know  
The smallest box may hold  
The biggest treasure?

.....

## CONTENTS

bridge light sea fish butterfly foghorn day moon  
evening spring sunset boat petal blossom stone mist  
passage darkness dolphin ant shadow star frost cicada  
wind garden orchard chestnut forest leaf sun winter  
autumn summer morning tree branch smoke grape rainbow  
blackness shade edge snowflake raindrop starling stem  
charcoal silence flurry trunk gnat pear strawberry  
breeze grass silence worm solstice rain cauliflower  
dawn fire splinter cedar skyline mushroom foam roar  
child reflected calm distant small shiftin g long  
overlooking delicate tiny colorful silent noisy  
faint bruised plucked ripening swollen dark new old  
brittle steaming decaying single wet bare bright cold  
heavy purplish fleeting smooth pale imprisoned  
lightning frozen cupped dewy shriveled fiery hunkered

stirring chattering misshapen taut matted visible wild  
surprising sudden trembling twisting perfect flashing  
frosted solemn rising lost loved this that these those  
of to with from in on slowly calmly soon suddenly  
eagerly afterward slightly toward now the a and or  
share shared stop stopped recall recalled drive  
drove chase chased contain contained return  
returned rise rose ripple rippled move moved  
fall fell hang hung miss missed catch caught  
start started touse toused pass passed pluck  
plucked blind blinded crush crushed awake awoke  
rattle rattled pierce pierced

</HEAD>

<BODY>

The Haiku worm usually arrives as a HAIKU.EXE file attached to an e-mail message. The message looks like it was forwarded from the original recipient with the subject 'Fw: Compose your own haikus'. The message body advertises the attached file as a Haiku (oriental poetry style) generator which it actually is. But along with Haiku generation routine the file contains worm code. The message the worm spreads itself with looks like that:

:))

----- Original Message -----

>"Old pond...

> a frog leaps in

> water's sound."

>- Matsuo Basho.

>

>DO YOU WANT TO COMPOSE YOUR OWN HAIKUS?

>

>Haiku is a small poetry with oriental metric that appeared in the XVI century and is being very popular, mainly in Japan and the USA.

>

>It's done to transcend the limitation imposed by the usual language and the linear/scientific thinking that treat the nature and the human being as a machine.

>

>It usually has 3 lines and 17 syllables distributed in 5, 7 and 5. It must register or indicate a moment, sensation, impression or drama of a specific fact of nature. It's almost like a photo of some specific moment of nature.

>

>More than inspiration, what you need in order to compose a real haiku is meditation, effort and perception.

>

>DO YOU WANT TO COMPOSE YOUR OWN HAIKUS?

>

>Now you can! it is very easy to get started in this old poetry art. Attached to this e-mail you will find a copy of a simple haiku generator. It will help you in order to understand the basics of the metric, rhyme and subjects which should be used when composing a real haiku... just check it out! it's freeware and you can use and spread it as long as you want!

When the worm is run it first installs itself as HAIKUG.EXE into root Windows directory and modifies WIN.INI to be run during all further Windows sessions. After that the worm displays a messagebox with a randomly generated Haiku:

Example 1 [ABOVE;HEAD]

Example 2 [ABOVE;HEAD]

F-Secure Virus Descriptions

NAME: Haiku

ALIAS: I-Worm.Haiku,

W95.Haiku.16384.worm

After system restart the worm gets control, checks if Internet connection is available and starts to look for e-mail addresses by scanning DOC, EML, HTM, HTML, RTF and TXT files. After the suitable e-mail address is found, the worm decrypts its internal message text, connects to a remote SMTP server that allows sending anonymous e-mail and sends its body MIME-encoded with the decrypted message to a found e-mail address. Then the worm displays its copyright messagebox:

>From time to time the worm connects to a free web hosting provider Xoom and gets a WAV file from one of user accounts. The worm writes the downloaded file as C:\HAIKU.WAV, plays it and deletes it afterwards. The WAV file has a copyright string of Sandman:

```
0 00 00 (  
E 66 6D (c) Mister Sandm  
0 74 20 an, 2-2000 fnt  
E 0 00 > [HAPPY FACE] [HAPPY FACE]v C.  
0 04 01 [HAPPY FACE] etc.
```

The generator of Haiku poetry uses the internal table of words and endings and creates poetry strictly according to Haiku style rules. Here are the table's contents:

[CONTENTS IN HEAD]

[Analysis: Alexey Podrezov, F-Secure]  
<SRC="<http://www.datafellows.com/v-descs/haiku.shtml>">

<BODY>

Date: Tue, 18 Dec 2001  
Subject: Re: "**New**" Poet

Okay. (Poor **Patrick Herron**. Jumped ship just when the knitting circle really starts purling.)

The discussion seems to be thematicizing into like this:

1. **THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE TERRIBLE AND THE DREADFUL / CLASSISM**
2. **UNIFORM STANDARDS FOR ALL POETRY**
3. **THE IDEAL OPRAH**

-----

### 1. **THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE TERRIBLE AND THE DREADFUL / CLASSISM**

I do not know what people mean by "good", "bad," and the increasingly escalating "terrible" and "dreadful" here. (I never understand what it means to slippage over those terms from ethics to aesthetics.) Certainly, there's a usefulness in being able to speak among the like-minded in a short-hand like that--- but I don't know how to imagine what *criteria* those assessments are being framed against.

(The only poem of his that I have read is the one that was quoted on-List.)

Even in putting forward the criteria by which I found his poem promisingly improveable and him *educable* ("unmonitored abstractions"), I was moving onto thin ice: no to **Laura Riding Jackson's** philosophical abstractions, too?

His poem is *not* personist or autobiographical of the type Buffalo satellites might be expected to object to. He's quite transcended "subjectivity" and The Subject *per se* (although not with the greatest eloquence),--- so it isn't objectionable on those grounds.

It's remarkable --- and may come as quite a head-spinner to Oprah's America --- that it does not rhyme or have detectable buh-BUM buh-BUM buh-BUM buh-BUM meter. I had to be educated out of that naivite, personally.

The tailoring of one complete sentence then PERIOD per-line is noteworthy: no enjambment.

Despite my previous criticism of the "unmonitored abstractions", his use of them is in fact so blissfully indulgent in its excess ("Freedom", "Tragedy", "terror", "Structure", "faith", "outrage", "support" . . . ) that it creeps over into an almost **Blakean** Songs of

Innocence and Experience active abstractness: "mutual fear brings peace, Misery's increase / Are mercy, pity, and peace".

I *also* had to be educated out of thinking that "good"/ "bad", "taste", was some sort of absolute, universalized standard recognizable to everyone and true everywhere. It's not.

Currently, hierarchies from exemplary to lesser are really only understandable by dint of -- here we go again --- *whom they serve* and what groups they advance: power.

Is the poem "dreadful" and "terrible" because it's not displaying enough awareness of poetry at large (and post-modernist opaque poetry, specifically)?

## 2. UNIFORM STANDARDS FOR ALL POETRY REGARDLESS OF AGE OR DISABILITY (OR GENDER? OR EDUCATIONAL LEVEL? OR CLASS? ETC.?)

Coming from **Millie**, that gives me pause. But, again, I have to re-translate it:

If the sick wish to advance the social assimilation of their fellow disabled, they should conform to socially accepted norms.

Am I misrepresenting the thought?

It's better for the disadvantaged or special caste to *impersonate* the privileged majorities, in order better to promote inclusion of their group?

## 3. THE IDEAL OPRAH

The list of titles that Oprah's Book Club promotes does not match or even overlap with *The New York Review of Book's* table of contents. She is not known to be a purveyor of fine arts/high culture reading.

She does do some type of *good*, though. She's found a way of re-directing her celebrity away from gossip-raking over to the cause of high school level literacy.

Relatives very close to me buy the books Oprah mentions. And they weren't particularly reading before that. Intelligent but uneducated high school drop-outs now quite contently going through stacks of "bad" novels, experiencing at least *some* level of why ever we read. And the comparative *pandering* of Oprah's selections is not a dead-end to further expansion: it seems to be an inroad. My relative will still return to the series of novels about the detective whose cats help solve crimes,--- but when my **Hawthorne-Melville** opera piqued curiosity, there wasn't the old obstacle anymore and she picked up *The Scarlet Letter* and on her own went on to *The Blithedale Romance*. **William Burroughs'** *Naked Lunch*, which she had the librarians reserve for her, was a little more impassable,--

- but she tends to understand that she is not the infinite audience and is bound by her own indoctrinations.

But---

Oprah is not isolated. **Elaine Paschen**, the upper crust former head of Poetry Society of America, who shoved copies of her poetry books into **Bill Clinton's** hands at the White House, or the likes of Paschen have certainly crossed paths with Oprah at cocktail parties. **Billy Collins**, etc.

Do you think Oprah has never been asked, "Why don't you ever feature poetry books?"

So, my Ideal Oprah:

Recognizing that that's been an oversight and deficit in her recommendations, but understanding the prejudices of her viewers and working through her own limitations,---

**Stepanek** is a *beginning* in Oprah's Grand Scheme of introducing poetry to TV watchers.

First, get 'em on a sob story type they can't resist. Later, on the precedent and foundation of that preliminary introduction, you/she can move a level, go from Stepanek to some poet a little more multi-dimensional (although Oprah, from my scant knowledge of her, seems chauvinistically impervious to "high fallutin'" required reading).

It's a *beginning*. She and we are coming from *below zero* as far as television promotion of poetry.

I did read Book of the Month club Rod McKuen's *Listen to the Warm*, age 13, before I knew how to look elsewhere to find more English Department-accredited poetry.

There is absolutely no way a responsible talk show super-star --- or educator --- would jump start TV watchers directly to--- **Tina Darragh** or somebody like that. It would totally back-fire.

Is it that we believe poetries other than "ours" *should not exist*?! Is everything supposed to homogenize into healthy college-educated Caucasian salaried *Manderley*? (which I have not read yet. New School reading is on my calendar for tomorrow tonight. Luv ya, **Rebecca!** [Air kisses.] Welcome home)

Date: Wed, 26 Dec 2001

Subject: **Re: "New" Poet / "values" [Niss]**

**Millie,**

About your response viz. "quality" (points excerpted below)/"can't judge ... brilliantly/worst poet imaginable"---

and to conflate that with your other thread abt. **John Ashbery/James Merrill**---

John Ashbery had the reputation for being the most *generous* poet anyone would ever meet.

(**Harry Mathews** brought out that obvious characteristic of John Ashbery's, in an interview I did with Mathews in 1988.)

You couldn't show John Ashbery a poem he wouldn't like, wouldn't find some good in.

And if he *a priori* found anything likeable/attractive about the person, the poem was a shoe-in.

Any student of his, anyone who encountered him must've discovered this, I think: there would be a single line he'd pull out, a single *word* ...

("It made me think how many times I read the word 'the' and yet never tire of seeing it!")

John Ashbery has even said, in interviews, that given a student who writes in a style he personally doesn't follow or espouse, such as Confessionalism, he supported the stud. in trying to write "better" Confessionalist poems.

There are people, Millie, about whom it's proverbially cooed, "He never said an unkind word about anyone." It's not a bad thing to be approving, encouraging, and nurturing, --- especially where the students are novices.

Consider: the closer to an "ideal" any writer approaches embodying (the case with John Ashbery, who is living paragon to whole generations of imitators and admirers), the further that writer *falls short of* a Still-Unattainable that's envisioned.

(Another John Ashbery interview where he said **Wallace Stevens** used to scare him, because he realizes he'd never be able to write like that, at that calibre.)

If you're a **James Joyce** scholar, *what's the point* in even discussing or commenting upon anyone else's writing, since, on some level, you know that the entire XXth century (*pace Pynchon*, et al.) never did/will never reach that level of "command," architecture, diction.

Everybody's a shrimp, when there are giants in the earth.

Whatever mental list you can count off on your fingers --- don't give yourself too long or cheat --- of English language poets you can name from the *pre-1900s* millenium is probably about as many poets who are worth reading that the language produces, and *at that frequency*.

But we know so many more contemporary poets than we remember past ones.

The odds of any poem or poet being "supremely" worth your investment, on some sort of cosmic scale, are quite slim.

(And we know only Modernists. What were the libraries full of early XXth cent. poetry that are never re-printed...? Should these people *have never been born*?)

So, the rest is just *your temperament* speaking, how *you* form judgments, whether you form judgments *at all*.

As far as your Emerson teacher from Atlantic, pedagogically there is no evidence that "Spare the rod and spoil the child" works better in creative writing classes or MFAs programs.

My education has *closed me off* to more poetry than it has opened me up to. Indoctrinated taste *seals off* our capacity to take in.

How will red-pencilling a MS and writing "cliche", "redundant", "trite", and all the other *cliché* comments that creative writing teachers are indoctrinated to make,

faster advance students toward some next stage,

than encouraging them to believe there's some kernel of possibility that continued *work* (which takes place *on their own*, to the degree a writer can tolerate solitude) and guided reading will advance them toward?

(In *A Wild Salience*, a student of **Rae Armantrout**'s collated the marginal remarks that Armantrout made on poems of hers in a writing class that Armantrout taught.)

I think it's long since overdue to place "good," "bad," "worst," "terrible," etc., permanently **under erasure**, banned, as terms--- not to enter into the sort of Flower Children relativism you're talking about but

*in order to see* whether you/we can continue to make the same judgments with more illuminating terms.

"good"/"bad" are *universalized*, the way you're using them, when, in fact, in separate cases different criteria are being exercised in the judgment.

("This poem isn't very good" = "This poem is using a limited, 4th grade reading level vocabulary of one- and two-syllable words, few more than five letters long"? = "This poem is using a florid, Ph.D. level vocabulary that forces me to check the dictionary every other word, if I am to follow any meaning, and *I don't like* being reminded of what I don't know"? = "This poem is embarrassing frank about private matters and I'm uncomfortable having such hair-raising intimacies revealed to me"? = "This poem is **Mister Spock** Vulcan in its emotionless, impersonal neutrality and I believe it needs to be humanized on some level to have some appeal to any earthling" = "This poem is...")

The "bad" poet you describe who wrote in Gigi and Kristen fonts on lavender and pink paper *had a graphic impulse* more like a painter or visual artist,

and they might be more helpfully taught by being directed toward poetry, like --- whatever --- **Apollinaire's** calligrammes, **Robert Grenier's** caligraphic ink writing, **Spencer Selby's** collages, **WILLIAM BLAKE!**, etc., where that secondary impulse could be cultivated into fuller parity with the text.

Someone --- I forget whom (Blake?) --- said:

"There are no great poets in heaven."

---which I had to have explained to me by the commentator who quoted it: hierarchies of taste or importance are not ultimately leveling, a "superior" poem does not cancel out the appreciability of a "minor" poem --- and poems appreciated at different times for different reasons, in one case a sorrowful **Celan** miniature because your woundedness is seeking out its spokesperson, on another night **Milton** or **Pound** because you're more in touch with your multi-leveled complexity and a sense of history/mythology and need to be addressed from equally many planes, the next night a "saccharine" **Elizabeth Barrett Browning** love sonnet because *you* are lost in sentimentality and puppy love and at that hour can only understand the simplistic,...

The pleasures of poetry are not homogeneous.

I think there really needs to be more openness toward the determinants of transitory *power* that are influencing one's sense of "good"/"bad".

Study of women's poetry written in America before the XXth century will be reduced to -- whom? --- a teacupful of two or three poets, at best, unless the reader can transcend prejudices and unreceptiveness around rhyme, meter, and sentimentality.

**Annie Finch**, whose project in other respects I sometimes diverge from, was quite pioneering and recuperative in linking the resurgence of "formalism" to pre-Modernist women's poetry,--- so that by again reacquiring the lost *capacity* to read buh-BUM buh-BUM buh-BUM buh-BUM "June"/"moon" poetry "breathes life into" half the population of past poetry.

Your pink and lavender paper poet is much closer and ready for web publication, where graphics matter more, than a pure 12 pt. Times Roman font poet.

P.S. James Merrill's influence is as strong or even more widespread than John Ashbery's: you're not considering the counter-reformation of New Formalism, to which Merrill represents a formalist torchbearer.

Date: Fri, 28 Dec 2001

Subject: Re: **Merbery / Ashrill**

--- "**K.Silem Mohammad**" <immerito@HOTMAIL.COM> wrote:

> For example, many of his poems have lots of water imagery, or sky imagery, or writing-poems imagery, etc.

-----  
That's how I read post-**John Ashbery**/Language poetry: from the entire *oeuvre* downward to the individual word.

When somebody's worth it, I read and re-read their books, back to back, in succession. And I'm a marginalia FIEND. I have a good memory for what words I've heard --- I can usually remember, with uncommon words, the last time a person spoke them in a conversation or where I'd heard it --- so there's a sort of reflex or ding! that goes off for me when a word reappears a second time in a book or across a series of book. And a total Jacob's Ladder when it appears three or more times!

I mark those words off in the margin, often with symbols: my **Susan Howe** books use the Greek *theta* for the theme of thinking or thought; Greek *mu* (not my sainted cat's name, which was Chinese) for memory, remember, forgetting, etc. (For a long time, I've used Gk. *pi* for "poetry.") Then, by a sort of concordance method, I can re-examine the meaning of any cell by how it's transacted over the full scale. Meaning can also be re-diagrammed into a sort of symbolic equation, semio-algebraically.

**David Buuck** at *Tripwire* has the MS of the presentation I gave at the Barnard College Lyric Tradition vs. Language Poetry Women's Innovative Poetry conference, on Howe and this reading method, which I called "vertical reading." (I'm pretty sure *Tripwire* will thumbs down on it.) Theoretically, it's very sensible: with "asyntactical" poetry, the *dérèglement* (**Rimbaud**) has only been traced along the syntax, the horizontal level; the paradigmatic axis, or the chain of substitutions and iterations for any word/synonyms, remains untouched. Any poet's unconscious idiolectical drives to re-use the same words is quite personal and revealing. (There's a book on **Wallace Stevens** called *Obsessive Images*, I believe.) The associations are extremely subjective or private, and usually hermetic to anyone who doesn't intimately know the person: mere letters can become hieroglyphs for people or associations (the letters in the author's name, obviously), the way that **Schumann** tucked away his mistress' and **Clara's** names in the ASCH motifs.

The only catch is that, by vertical reading, words and word clusters do wind up meaning something, definitely, from macrocosm to microcosm, but it's often something *completely different* from the dictionary or standard meaning of the word. ...so that in contemporary poetry recurrent words are often place-holders or "wild cards" that stand in for private meanings.

An interesting exception, in **John Ashbery**, is his use of hapax legumenon (words that turn up only once), such as "jacaranda," e.g.

- > Furthermore, as I've been suggesting, they
- > frequently meet with a great deal
- > of success

A critic's job is to impose a coherent template over any poetry, or object of study. (The opposite of that was Deconstruction, which took apparently cohesive texts and exposed their inconsistencies and contradictions, ... but ultimately Deconstruction received a great deal of negative backlash in America.)

I once went in during her office hours, with the art critic (diva!) **Rosalind Kraus**. (That I merely dared to go into her office left Ph.D. candidates pale.) I had found (**David Hockney** may have pointed it out, actually) a visit that **Picasso** made to the **Gaudi** cathedral in Barcelona, and I wanted to say (or Hockney had said) there was a link between Gaudi's broken crockery facade surfaces and Picasso's cubism; I wanted to say that the elongated figures in Picasso's Blue Period was **El Greco** (I am an ectomorph) . . . And Kraus became famously impatient with me, and said:

"It doesn't matter if it's true or not! It's about which \*INTERPRETIVE GRID\* you superimpose over anything."

The "trick", as you say, isn't John Ashbery's. It's the critic's. One is taught to "write through" a secondary critical work: I took classes where some post-structuralist was assigned almost randomly, and you had to find a way of writing about the artist via those ("unrelated") texts.

- > So
- > for example, "Self
- > Portrait in a Convex Mirror" is on one level a poem
- > of meditation about art,
- > identity, etc.,

Sorry for the autobiographical reductivism,--- but he had also just lost his job (or was on the brink of losing it) as art critic for *Art in America*, whose ownership had changed hands.

(...what irritates me is what people *won't* say about "Self-Portrait", which should be so obvious: that it's about *narcissism*.)

- > Ashbery's, however, are like reversible jackets you
- > can wear to either Iowa
- > City or Buffalo.

That's absolutely brilliant. He'd love it! I hope some List reader who's in contact with him mentions that.

Date: Tue, 22 Jan 2002

Subject: **Craig Dworkin** talk

>Did any New York listserv folk attend Craig Dworkin's talk "against meaning" last night? If you did, please report. He's a smart cookie and I'd like to get a gist of what he's "for."

**Tom Thompson**

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To: T.T. From: **J.J.**  
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I found Craig Dworkin's "Against Meaning" lecture at the White Box gallery very upsetting.

(I was extremely eager to go: I rarely leave the house at night anymore, but I vividly remember his Barnard conference lecture on **Lyn Hejinian** and paranoia. He shared a panel with **Charles Altieri** back then at Barnard. Dworkin's talk included references to the asylum-institutionalized "madman" who composed much of the Oxford English Dictionary. Dworkin's scheme had to do with the paranoid underpinnings of language and the paranoid processes of seeking out and finding meaning.)

At White Box, he wasn't using the word "paranoid" anymore.

The audience of perhaps less than three dozen, crammed together in tightly squeezed chair in the midst of any otherwise expansive gallery, included much of the Manhattan illuminati: **Charles Bernstein, Bruce Andrews, Ulla Dydo, Claudia Rankine, Kenny Goldsmith** .

..

Dworkin passed out xeroxed hand-outs. His hair was moussed into standing.

Partially from my notes:

He began with **George Oppen's** *Discrete Series*, from which he drew a model for his "applied paragrammatics," a reading strategy which he defined as "willing to sacrifice its reference", "a grammar of reading".

A "discrete series" is a mathematical term for a series where every term is empirically justified, rather than being derived from preceding propositions. That is, as opposed to an arithmetic progression (the **Fibonacci**: 1,2,3,5,8,13...), he gave the subway stops on an East Side train. He said, à la Oppen, that it is the very fact of a poem's acceptability as a *mechanism* that is the proof of meaning.

He proceeded through trailing verbatim dictionary definitions which Oppen had followed in the structuring of his poem: the OED as an organizing structure. (His research included that a new printing of the OED had been a New Year's Day front page story.)

The multiple definitions for a single word as they appear in a dictionary are a discrete series, vs. an inductive "paragogic chain"--- by following a logic from signifier to signifier: glass > grass > crass > class, a "bitter romance" of associations.

He spent a good deal of time discussing the word "rim" in Oppen (with "a straight face").

He next moved on to **Saussure's** notorious hypogrammes: "multiple, uncontrollable and unhierarchical meanings"; **DeMan** spoke of the "terror" of the letter.

**Riffaterre's** book, *The Semiotics of Poetry*: When a gap opens up between a word and a text, the motivating anxiety is a single unwritten word. Texts have an unwritten core, a "matrix". Grammatical disruptions become a clue to the presence of a matrix.

He gave examples.

From **Apollinaire's** poem, "Monday in Christine Street":

"Trois becs de gaz allumés  
La patronne est poitrinaire"

("Three gas burners lit / The proprietress is consumptive"). Dworkin found Apollinaire's name in the line-endings,

"a-" "-pa-" "-lu-" "naire", or such.

(Saussure's hypogrammes, --- or "la folie de Saussure" [the madness of Saussure]--- was his similar, decades-long notebooks, where he traced the names of Greek gods in Latin literature --- repeat: *Greek* gods in *Latin* poetry, **Aphrodite**, etc.)

Not wanting it to seem that the Dworkin method of reading was applicable only to the avant-garde, he turned to **Robert Frost's** old chestnut, "Mending Wall".

(In excerpt:

"the frozen ground-swell . . .  
. . . The gaps I mean,  
. . .  
. . . 'Good fences make good neighbors.'  
. . . I was like to give offense.  
. . . I could say 'Elves' to him,  
But it's not elves exactly").

Dworkin found the same *Semiotics of Poetry* dynamic ("it warps itself around a missing core"). (Saussure's term "hypogramme" was taken from the Greek for signature.)

"(F)rozen ground-swell" is a synonym for rime frost; "rime" is a homonym for "rhyme"; "frost" was a term for "literary failure" that Frost would have been fighting against. "The gaps" mean the gaps of Riffaterre lacunae; for "elves", read "selves". "fences"/"offence" was a Russian "zdvig" or "shift".

Dworkin's third example, p. 258 from an edition of **Malcolm Lowry's** *Under the Volcano*: "Yvonne's father made his way . . . earnest candid eyes . . . synthetic hemp".

This prose hid a Dworkin matrix for the name--- **Ernest Hemingway**, Lowry's literary father (known as "Papa Hemingway", with "Papa" appearing on a preceding page):

earnest hemp way.

These repeated examples were his self-admitted defense against accusations of a "readerly hat trick" or "hermeneutical prestidigitation".

He said he found "recourse to soft psychology not satisfying either" (Lowry, writing around a bullfight, thinks of Hemingway), but acknowledged "the degree to which readers are more comfortable with corroborative" evidence.

He said he found these hypograms "factually, incontrovertibly there"; that it was not chance and permutations.

In **Elizabeth Bishop's** "The Moose", which is about an animal (C.D. cited critical commentary as to grandiose literary themes), he said the poem is about--- *orthodonture*.

He lined up words: "PINK glancing", "beat-up ENAMEL", "BLEACHED, ridged as clamshells", "BRUSHING the dented flank", "waits, PATIENT", and BRACES" to refer to unmentioned teeth.

Bishop at the time was going to the dentist twice a week. (---Bathos?)

(My notes do not record Dworkin commenting on the French word for tooth, "dent", and Bishop's "dented".)

In passing, he also cited **Zukofsky**, where three or four mentions of "law" are closely accompanied by "tessera", he said, but without Z. ever using the word "mosaic" (Mosaic law = the Law of **Moses**)!

The Q-&-A was not quite sympathetic: the first questioner accused him of not "opening

onto paths that might lead us away from meaning" ("Against Meaning") but rather back to classic modernist grids, an aligning, congruences. Another questioner seemed argumentative in talking about an "architectonic self".

I was quite bothered. My question accused his project of reenacting what **Geoffrey Hartman's** 1981 *Saving the Text* had already done with the Romanticists (**Wordsworth's** word's worth; etc.), which Hartman called "the spectral name."

Dworkin (with the exception of Bishop's teeth) was in all cases "re-discovering" embedded in the text what was already conspicuously written at the top of the text: the author's name.

This differed greatly from Saussure's hypogramme matrices, which found the names of gods like "Apollo" (Saussure's Apollo had been Dworkin's springboard into Apollinaire) or "Aphrodite", --- which, importantly, were not individual author's lemon ink autographs but *suprapersonal*. Saussure, in search for an explanation for these disturbing archaic forces inscribed across so many writers' texts, even conjectured whether there might have been some cultic or religious explanation.

Dworkin, instead,

at exactly our contemporary turning-pint where reading and criticism have moved beyond the fantasy of (writing packaged one-for-one to) the discrete unit of a self-sufficient author, broader territories (wilderness) of language as common possession, and a-subjective propulsions that are the agency for writing,

was re-bundling or "re-authoring" these texts back under the *souscription* of the individual author, neat bundles.

Bishop's teeth: biographical reductivism.

What would be *interesting* would be finding Louis Zukofsky's name in Lowry, or Hemingway's in Frost, I suggested.

Dworkin demonstrated no corrective familiarity with statistics and randomness, or their anomalies. He had fallen into a statistical rabbit-hole. (You'd be amazed how many time the same doubles will come up in a row.)

Definitely, the name is a narcissistic imago, and we develop fetishistic attachments to its letters. But Dworkin was going from general principles to a sort of "Find-a-Word" puzzle, where the solution --- surprise! --- in x out of y cases was a game of nominal, diagonal acrostics.

He responded by saying that he thought it might have something to do with the numinous or nebulous status of personal names as words, which he does not understand.

---I can't see how it moves "our" mission forward to go retrograde (moving from a self of societal construction to a metaphysics of "confidential, to the point of secrecy," as he said about Oppen). He's re-instating the self-enclosed, autonomous figure of the writer as the prime deciphering key to the text, where the "punch line" solution will be finding at the end what you started off with at the beginning.

His insistence on the "objectivity" of his findings and truth was jettisoning the whole rich ground of indeterminacy, and ambiguity, and The Absurd (that which can be neither true nor false).

---To say nothing of the spuriousness of his methodology.

The Lowry Hemingway was a single confabulation ("objective" or not) on p. 258 of a 400 pp. novel.

A "proof" strung out of four, maybe five tenuous examples, one of them (the Zukofsky) undocumented yields a whole paragrammatics. Between one example and the next, however, there was considerable *slippage*, with name only putatively unifying tellingly different cases:

Frost's name was hidden in synonyms, but was his own name in his own text;

Apollinaire's name was his own name in his own text, but appeared as splintered syllables, unlike Frost's rebus;

Lowry's Hemingway was made up of splintered syllables, but was somebody else's name, not the author's;

"Moses" in Zukofsky involved neither the author's name nor that of a living or real person nor syllables: it depended on a Latin-to-English translation.

Bishop's had nothing to do with names or any "unwritten word" at all, per se (a body part, instead); etc.

Dworkin's schizo-analysis was conducted without even passing reference to the possibility of a rhetorical trope of paronomasia. Writers writing without any sense of pun.

In resuscitating, after *The Death of the Author*, these authors this way, and stressing

"objectivity", Dworkin absolved himself of the uncomfortable position of being a *reader* with responsibility for his own idiosyncratic dyslexias: instead, the return of the invisible, Archmidean critic.

I think he lost ground by backing away from his previous "paranoia" model (which was anti-subjective). By moving on instead to a hunt for neutral alphabetic solutions, punch-lines, he has, in a sense, deepened his previous project further by joining into the affectlessness of paranoia's clues.

Paranoia is, literally (etymologically), *beside* feelings, that is, always a little to the left or right of emotions. Paranoia is more concerned with cracking the FBI's cryptography than with what *it feels like* to be so consumed and monomaniacal.

He said that the very fact that Frost and Bishop scholars become upset with him makes him think he's on to something. Others' emotive frustration is not an academically recognized barometer for confirming a hypothesis.

We were left with handfuls of alphabet blocks, Scrabble solitaire played with books. Even were they delivered less objectionably, those details could have been bridges into empathic deepening with the source texts, instead of "A-ha!" eureka at yet another ghost writer's signature: Bishop's toothache becomes a sort of joke, in its mundanity, rather than an opportunity to connect with the force of personal, physical pain (toothache, after all, being even **Wittgenstein's** preferred metaphor for investigations into the language of pain and private sensations); Zukofsky's unwritten (oral?) "Mosaic law" was not a segue into glimpsing the proud, idealized self-identification that he, as a Jew, self-aggrandized with the sainted law-giver; ...

Dworkin must be right: I'm as bothered as the Frost scholars.

(And from *Princeton*, no less!)

Date: Mon, 18 Feb 2002

Subject: Discount offer - Rachel Back's new Susan Howe book

Oh, drat. And I so eagerly had my credit card poised to order.

*More* biographical reductivism? (!)

Is there no end to this *People Magazine* school of criticism recidivist trend of reading de-subject-ified text through insiders' information about the private life of the (theoretically extinct [**Barthes**]) author?

I've presented on Howe only once at an academic conference, a fluke, (--- to paradoxically reverse my protest against personist criticism with an ostensibly personist retort ---) and published criticism/reviews of her books only twice (aside from that, my scansion Howe postings here this past spring serve as the only remaining public tip-of-the-iceberg evidence of in-depth involvement),--- but everything I've been able to amateurishly contrive about her, the "vertical reading," the interpretation of *Bed Hangings*, etc., was done without this wizard's stone of the conveniently neurotic Oedipal facticity of biography; and an entire factory of critics could have gone on writing from now until the deforestation of all paper sources similarly explicating her books along suprapersonal lines.

What a disappointment, what a crushing disappointment, --- and how perplexing! --- that the first full-length book on our greatest living poet is reported to resort to the universally infallible decoder key of Reading Through The Life.

...As though as indomitable a suprapersonalizer as **Mary Magdalene's** *noli me tangere* from Howe's depicted Risen **Christ** Himself didn't insist on transcendentalisms larger than one-woman (auto)biography.

Language poetry = covert Confessionalism?

>> This study debunks the myth of Howe's impenetrability

One might've chosen a less frustratedly phallic, more invagination-friendly predicate for her unfathomability.

Date: Thu, 21 Feb 2002  
Subject: **Susan Howe book**

>> I mean "there is a speaking subject of these poems which are emotionally realistic to me and have immediate relevance to my--and her--emotional life" autobiographical. <<

That's mistaking expressivity or Expressionism for autobiography. A feeling of empathic connectedness and emotive verisimilitude is not memoir; it's timbre.

>>How do you read something like "Europe of Trusts" otherwise?

Well, here's a very partial synopsis of my marginalia from just the first hundred pages of *EOT*, to give the outlines of how I've read it otherwise ---a sort of concordance method (paragrammatics) I've called "vertical reading":

---

**NEGATIVITY/NON-BEING:**

"because they *are* not." (21)  
"for they are not but as they seem" (38)  
"what are are / and what we are not" (61)  
"Do nothing / wrong / but Wrong" (30)  
"Save for air nothing here" (47)  
"of nothingness Estray" (60)  
"Not the true story that comes to / nothing" (88)

**BIBLICAL:**

"In Rama / Rachel weeping for her children" (p. 21)  
"not a sparrow / shall fall" (26)  
"Who is my shepherd" (29)  
"word made flesh" (92)

**PN abbreviated into single letter/initial "*fonction de la lettre*":**

"R / (her cry" (22)

**MEMORY:**

"soon forgotten" (24)  
"In memory / Errant turns to" (26)  
"Purpose / depends on memory Memory" (47)  
"another waking up Memory / harmony . . . Knowledge is a simple recollection / . . .

forgotten" (59)  
"long as remember" (79)  
"mute memory vagrant memory" (89)  
"remembered name in Quiet / rembered precepts" (104)  
"Distant forget" (105)  
"Ten adventures here forgotten" (107)  
"Transgression links remembering . . . illusory sanctuary of memory" (109)

### **THINKING:**

"Thoughts are born" (38)  
"into clear reason" (48)  
"arrows for thought" (67)  
"earth as thought of the sea" (100)  
"monadical and anti-intellectual" (108)

### **TIME:**

"and clock / a foil for future" (25)  
"lasting to everlasting" (28)  
"set nimble clocks at every station" (29)  
"Forever and for / ever" (30)  
"Slipping / forever / between rupture and rapture" (31)  
"Clock / and shadow of a Clock" (32)  
"Wheel of mutable time" (38)  
"And with time / I could do it . . . Time's theme" (40)  
"no more a long future the present" (41)  
"and Difference remote in time" (50)  
"time inattention / Finite velocity" ( 59)  
"Doomsday overturns and milleniums" (67)  
"Time to set our face homeward" (68)  
"woodcut of space time logic" (92)  
"late edge / Understanding of time endlessly" (105)  
"no clock running / no clock in the forest" (108)

### **Lyrical/sentimental ("poetical"):**

mirrors, memory, farewell, pearl, shadows - snow, trees (27)

### **SHADOW:**

"Spires cast long shadows" (26)  
"Snow coming and beauty of long shadows tumbling" (27)  
"Shadows are seated at the kitchen table" (32)  
"and strange shadows" (43)  
"Shadows only shadows" (44)

"Shapes shadow-hunting / Supremacy" (56)  
"Moving in solitary symbols through shadowy" (74)  
"no secrets spoken together" (79)  
"Set work on wheels (shadow / on shadow)" (81)  
"Lean as her shadow" (111)

### **STARS:**

"constellations of duration" (29)  
"morning star evening star will / rise" (31)  
"the unsphered stars" (38)  
"farewell to star and star" (44)  
"regions untenanted by stars" (65)  
"of late starlight undreamt of" (75)  
"a dry and icy star" (90)  
"The leashed stars kindle thin" (103)  
"(spangs like stars)" (109)

### **SECRET:**

"skip pebbles in secret also" (25)  
"in still / shared secrets of the sea" (30)  
"Dark as theology's secret book" (38)  
"Through secret parables thorough / books of dark necessity" (48)  
"(Socrates was a midwife / but that is secret)" (46)  
"volumes of secrets to teach / Socrates" (101)  
"Helios flies secretly across a lost / country" (52)  
"(sacred and secret tree systems)" (57)  
"the secret Secret" (65)  
"Iseult seaward gazing / (pale secret fair)" (100)  
"sees in severt houses in sand" (102)

### **Z:**

"Zodiacal sign / Sun / --- this is a circle and serpent" (52)  
"(Zodiac window)" (90)  
"mathematical starlight, zodiacal signs" (*FRAME STRUCTURES*, 105)

The book, and Howe's entire oeuvre, goes on and on that way.

Not in any limiting way, but--- her books can be read as the unfolding of about a dozen or less highly stressed themes or verbatim reiterated words ("theme" being one of them) and maybe a dozen more secondary themes, --- re-combined and varied in musical structures very much like the **Schoenberg** or other composers she discusses elsewhere. Howe is a kind of literary Serialist composer.

The zodiacal wheel that I partially brought out at the end, above, might almost be a figure for the cyclical/cyclonic structures she circles through. (The zodiac is an example of an ordinal but non-hierarchical/non-causative chain.)

>> How much more autobiographical can you get than the books in "Frame Structures"--even without the new introduction... <<<<

. . . But the "auto" behind "autobiographical" has to be a particular, concrete, narrativized "auto," --- autobiography is a sub-genre of realism or naturalism --- and if you look at the "I" that appears throughout *Frame Structures*, she's of an entirely different sort altogether:

"I kiss the wall's hole" (114, for **Shakespeare**),  
"I dined with the destroyers" (108)  
"I cut out my tongue in the forest" (102)  
"I sang for the besieged forces / sang to the ear of remote wheels" (101)  
"when next I looked he was gone" (90)  
"starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads!" (81)  
"I bit off and burned my fingers to keep from freezing" (71),  
"I looked at our precise vanishing point on the horizon",  
"I squeezed my baby flat as a pancake" (70)  
"I stopped my children's eyes with wool / as the angel did with Jacob" (66)  
"far off in the dread / blindness I heard light / eagerly I struck my foot / against a stone" (56)  
"I count the clouds others count the seasons" (53)  
"I the Fly" (80).

It's either luridly imaginative in a way that shifts the trace of person into an environment of fable or legend that is not autobiographical, or---

the subject has been reoriented toward an immaterial object (vanishing point, enumerating clouds, the synaesthesia of hearing light) that no longer provides the leverage of reality needed for a biographical subject, so that the "I," as if the eternity of these strange objects traveled back along the relation like an electric charge, becomes as nebulous, if not more so, than the clouds.

>> It also makes me think of that remark of **Rosmarie Waldrop's** (where did I read that?)--she's talking about how all her poems were about her mother, so she (as a cure for this ailment) began constructing poems out of lines chosen at random from books on her bookshelf but (as she says) "they were still all about my mother." <<

But if you look at The Mother (or father figures, and kings) in Howe, what you'll find are archetypal entities --- like a magnetic north --- that also don't function along an autobiographical axis:

"I am looking for lucky Luck / I am his mother" (*EOT*, 178)  
"Inward memory / Mystery passing myth sanctuary / Secret isle and mortal father" (146)  
"Dim artificer enchantment proud / Father / Countless secrets hissing together" (140)  
"Pursuer and pursuer / cloth sky-color / Follow my mother" (131)  
"Anathema / who was my father / Empty dominions beyond structure" (114)  
"seeds to be sorted Where / have I have I been I say to myself Mother" (52)  
"to Sleep (where / are you crying) / crying for a mother's help" (44)  
"Father's house forever falling" (41)  
"Midday or morrow / move motherless" (40)  
"Mother and father / turn downward your face" (31).

>> always thought Susan Howe's heart was pretty much on her sleeve.

The *tour de force* that Howe accomplishes, of viscerally awakening infantile longings for parent and filial attachment (or any of her other passionate communications), while still maintaining a thoroughly "Language poetry" abstracted picture plane throughout, that she, that *anyone* must've at some juncture in the career experienced loss of a parent, say, --- those elegiac and needy places within us and within language do not require specific autobiography as explanation.

The impact of "*Mein Fader! Mein Fader!*" sung out in **Schubert's** "Erlking" is only peripherally illuminated by whatever we might learn about Schubert's real life father and family. (Some might say it even detracts.)

It may be easier to grasp in a medium which has less representational capacity: music. And especially Serial music (twelve-tone), whose idioms remain especially foreign to us, despite re-listenings.

**George Perle** painstakingly demonstrated that **Alban Berg's** *Lyric Suite* contains encrypted in it, along the onomastics of the well-known **BACH** B-A-C-H, or **Schumann's** better-known A-S-C-H (initials for his wife, himself, and a city important to their romance), cryptographic records of his mistress, in great detail and at points in every measure. Schoenberg also wrote, I believe it was, a string quartet which, although we hear it as "pure" twelve-tone Expressionism, followed the autobiographical narrative of his heart attack and hospitalization to the letter: there's a *male nurse* theme, and a chord for *the injection!*

But, as fascinating as it may be to learn about this sort of side-car of significance that rides beside the piece itself, the representational angle of the language, of the linguistic system, does not accommodate the realistic pictography and narrative that is necessary for what we mean by autobiography. You can't hold the two in your head at the same

time. You cannot extrapolate out of the original the supplementary "insider's information."

Any relation between the poetry of Howe, or Language Poetry, --- or even **John Ashbery**, similarly misappropriated by **Shoptaw's** and **Lehman's** biographical misdirections, --- and the facts of their lives is equally tangential, oblique in a way that deserves to *remain* oblique. Legible autobiography was *purposely* excluded. To try to restore it is like autobiographizing personal content into a mathematician's algebraic formulae.

There was the High/Low show at The Museum of Modern Art. They took **Picasso's** and **Braque's** newspaper collages --- **Molly Nesbit** does the same for **Duchamp** and school children's *cahiers* --- and traced the collaged pages back to their original sources. The same feat was performed for **Max Ernst's** collage novels, *Une Semaine de Beauté*, etc. But to reveal the sources and original contexts of those inserts does not conclude in some sort of end-point of now knowing, meaningfully, the autobiography that Picasso *subscribed to Le Figaro!*, --- voila --- or that Max Ernst haunted flea markets and bought old books of lithographs. The *significance* of any such contemporaneous addenda takes place, at least in the intentions of MOMA, rather in the discovery and contrast between the rarified museum connotations of those artworks and their earlier incarnation as low culture detritus,--- like finding out that a frog was once a tadpole. The -graphy is one of the political, of the class resonances of different literatures and media; and how those different strata "collide" ("the collisions and collusions of history"--- Howe); it's not a **Dickensian** "I was born in such-and-such a place on such-and-such a date" *bildungsroman*.

Where I feel such an antipathy toward biographical reductivism of experimental writing, too, is in the totem we've made of *facts*. Once you have reached a fact (the author experienced a divorce, came from such-and-such a Brahmin background, outlived a loved one), it's seen as having arrived at a dividing-line that's "true," where you do not need to go any further.

The fact, in our minds, in this misinterpretation, is regarded as so real and so important and so unsurpassable, with no **Platonic** idea standing in behind it, that the search stops there, a kind of detective story that has traced the "clues" to their smoking pistol, to their "The End" reconstruction.

**Freud** dispensed with the question of whether it mattered if paranormal (psychic) phenomena were real or not. What their variable true/false toggle only lead to was *what do they represent* in the psyche, what more *mythic* formula are they only the variable evidence of, how to they signify, what would that matter.

What's wrong with the equation of biography with "Language poetry" is *epistemological*.

(It also badly encourages the naïve next generation to write their lives into cubism.) It's always going to be believable and provide another plane of plausible reference to find out

the facts of a writer's biography,--- but it lacks validity, because the translation or conversion of information moves in only one direction: the biographical satisfyingly supplies a scenario or *mise en scene* that grounds the "impenetrable" poetry in a dimension we then explore no further because it's our ideological dogma that a domestic, familial narrative-personal dimension is the beginning and end of everything. But it *counts*, epistemologically, that the paraphrase *cannot* be reversed, and that you cannot deduce from the conclusion what's been induced into it.

A last example: the epic abstractionist **Ellsworth Kelly**, whose work, to the eye, is surfboard-like curves, arcs, pure but sensual geometries. *All* of his abstractions originate in completely specific visual encounters, things he's seen and often photographed in his day-to-day.

The art is a black-&-white of zigzags. The source: shadows of a railing on a staircase.

The origination of one from the other does not maintain *content* in a way that constitutes autobiography.

P.S. John Ashbery's kind of poetry was called "New York School."

Thu, 21 Feb 2002

Subject: **Digital Poetics**

What I "had trouble with" in *Digital Poetics* [by **Loss Pequeno Glazier**] was not the New Media treatment, which seems fair, as much as a more fundamental sort of ontological or metaphysical distinction he makes about "multiple 'I's'": that becomes the basis for not just the following New Media assumptions, but for poetics both on-line and on-page. He calls it the "key feature." I'll present his position and then my disagreement. I quote at length (with commentary) for those who haven't bought the book:

'The position of the "I" is a crucial distinction between non-innovative and innovative literature. How the "I" is constituted in a text says much about that text's writing practice. Does the "I" assert forms of authority? Is it unquestionably a nonpermeable (or semipermeable) filter between the ego and the world?'

----But how does Loss hair-split between ego and "I" above? They're synonyms.

He passingly cites **William Carlos Williams** ('Whenever I say, 'I' I mean also, 'you)'), **Arthur Rimbaud's** "*Je, c'est l'autre,*" **Jack Spicer's** Martian radio, **Hannah Weiner's** audiohallucination-dictations, **Robert Creeley** ("As soon as / I speak, I / speaks"), and **Jackson Mac Low's** eventual post-chance defeatism "that there is no such thing as nonegoiac art".

Against the "I," Glazier poses the collective, . . . but perhaps oddly: 'The notion of our nation as multicultural . . . insists that a "nation" can be made of a plurality of identities rather than a sole stereotypical one.'

(Further slippage of terms: from "I" to ego and then on to "identities." --- Although identity is also true of the non-"I" subconscious.) '

'Such a perspective can be socially beneficial in a heterogeneous society as it obviates, for one thing, the need for one "I" to be more valid than others,'--- although he then flipflops the collective into a proven evil: 'holocausts, acts of genocide, and interpersonal violence'.

No dispute with his points about the fallaciousness of the autonomous "I" (or subject). It's just that the "I" can be de-coupled from its false autonomy and remain a contingent "I"

(rather than throwing baby out, bathwater, etc). Then the subsequent Web talk is predicated upon these 'multiple "I's"':

'Such examples of the possibility of multiple or "distributed" identity lead us to consider the text as not singular and isolated but more like the "I" of the Internet. The web can be seen as such a multiple text, being composed of endless varying pages or "I's.'" (...From "I" to ego to identity to--- *pages*, although pages are no more the "I" than, conversely, ID cards are.) 'Its pages are like the cells that fall off the "I" of the human body' (...not to

belabor the ongoing slippage with **Descartes'** accomplishment of retaining "I" *without* body,--- or the haywire syllogism: pages are "I's" are like cells of the body but the body is "I," where the whole becomes a part and then re-emerges out of that part as a different part that is the whole, etc).

Comically, he then dashes the whole "distribution" with the normal colloquialism: "In this vein, *I* published a volume of poetry . . ."

So, that's Glazier.

I sketched out some of my botherment in a letter to **Geoffrey Gatz** on January 27th, so I'll just quote that, for now:

-----

I used to say the same thing as Glazier, that the "I's" have it, and that that's the distinguishing feature between innovation and non-innovative, the heart of the battle. I might still have agreed and let it slip by, except that I'm at the moment very much under the influence of also reading **Deleuze's** *Logic of Sense* (in English; I've read it in French before, and didn't catch what I'm getting this round).

Deleuze introduces the "I"-dimension in a very special and technical semiotic way.

First, there's the level of denotation, where there's a pure statement, and that statement is either true/false, or absurd: "It is snowing outside"/"It is raining cats and dogs, literally".

(There is a veterinarian's kennel on the second story of a building where there's a fire, and orderlies toss the animals out the windows into the arms of firemen and people below: "It is raining cats and dogs, literally.")

But in order for it be uttered, there has to be a second level, which he calls manifestation: "I heard on the radio that it is snowing outside"/"Whenever I fall asleep during the day, I dream that it is raining cats and dogs, literally."

Even where that manifestation-"I" isn't present, it's implicit. Your mother looks out the window and says, "It is raining outside," which is to say, she is implicitly stating: I just saw that it is raining outside.

The manifestation-"I" (or "I's", if Glazier and Buffalo are right) is an absolutely necessary precondition for the statement's denotation. If the "I" who makes the statement about it snowing is a known liar (Cretan paradox) or practical joker, the denotation is recast in light of that, and the T/F value is suspended until further confirmation due to the unreliability of the narrator. Etc.

What Glazier is calling multiple "I's" is really School of Buffalo. Most of that writing (asyntactical) doesn't have multiple "I's" and it doesn't have a single "I": it has *no* "I".

So,--- that's the base out of which my "contention" precedes: the divisions of personality and identity that we harbor as individuals, mainly due to the work/leisure office/home split, do not radically alter our manifestation of propositions. ("When I said, 'It is snowing outside,' and I was mistaken, you have to understand, I was just speaking informally, not in my capacity as a professional weather man.")

Of course, Glazier shuffles the bean game a little by slipping between Mac Low's Buddhist pursuit of "non-egoic" writing, to single-authored "multiple I" writing, to communities and society in general where of course there are multiple I's because each I is a surrogate for an individual person or person's name: "Geoffrey in Buffalo says it is snowing", "**mez** in Australia says it is snowing" (where it cannot be snowing, since it is summer).

In the case of community, though, he's muddying his terminology, because he really means *perspectives*.

...Which is similar to my next gripe with him:

I think he's using "multiple Is" to refer to what otherwise could be called "voices" or "characters". **Lon Cheney Sr.** "The Man with a Thousand Faces" was not a case of "multiple Is": those were characters; it was still clear when **T.S. Eliot** first titled "The Waste Land" as "He Do The Police in Many Voices".

Multiple Is is actually a pathological condition: Multiple Personality, or its lesser version Disassociation Syndrome. And while I'd agree that the incidence of Disassociation Syndrome has become tremendously on the rise in America, that's not what Glazier is talking about.

My third disagreement is that he's talking about "I" as a *starting point* of communication (despite the scientist whom he quotes about our receptivity and passivity to perceptual stimuli): "I'm the one talking now and this is what I have to say---".

The "I" remains intact, though, as a *reception point*. Glazier, as "receptor" or reader of different poetries, will consistently class some as innovative and some as non-innovative. That's because he is single-I'ed, as a reception point.

The singularity of "I" is absolutely necessary as the target or end point of a communication, even if the "I" of the sender were debateable.

And my last and fourth disagreement is about the internal/external function of "I" or ego. (Now I'll switch to calling "I" ego.) Ego is a mediation between id and super-ego, that is, between sprawling polymorphous perverse desire and the controlling authorities (including fate and necessity) that interfere with the gratification of that id. Without an "I", the personality just rocks back and forth between impulsive craving and fantasy, and neutralizing agencies of authority that deny those impulses. "I" is a mechanism that learns

to compromise between fantasy and authority (reality), that learns to delay and to work in order to fulfill desires.

I don't see where there's room for Glazierian multiplicity in ego function. Competing egos within the same person do not help maintain any distance between id and super-ego, ... although, to a certain extent, I could understand and acknowledge that we possess *auxiliary* "I"s which, when the disappointment to one ego-zone becomes too crushingly disappointing and the id is either threatened with starvation or at risk of rebellion, can be called into play: "He couldn't marry his mother, so he became a priest devoted to the Virgin Mary." But there any "I" is serving as *the* "I" at the moment it's in operation. It doesn't matter *who* the batter is for there to be a baseball game, but there *must* be a batter. Likewise, "I".

I guess I do have a fifth (and maybe "multiple," down the road!) objection.

Despite the loose use of the word "ego", conversationally, when we mean pride, greed, or ambition, the risk of our times is not from the "I" or egomania (the Me Generation is over). The danger of our times is the transformation of individuals, of people, into statistics, into enumeration. There are no longer faces in an audience; there's the number of "hits" for a site. The stock market graph line, of course, epitomizes that tendency: the labor of hundreds of thousands, the symbolic exchange that motivates and accrues out of that labor, and the lives of tens of thousands of finance industry service sector workers who contribute to building the symbolism that culminates in the Dow Jones average, are all atomized, smaller than a hundredth of a pixel, and the non-"I" graph line prevails. (I'm not aiming for simple "anti-capitalism" by putting it this way. The same is true of any graph representation of people,--- or even of an individual, when the abstractions are DNA and chromosomes.) It's not a good time for The Left to abandon the "I". The "I" has more effectively been jettisoned by the cultures associated with The Right: the "I"-subordination to an imaginary Christ in fundamentalism, Super Bowl Sunday, . . .

The age of the *masses* needs to hold onto the "I", even where that "I" has many voices and is versatile and changeable.

.....

Date: Thu, 14 Mar 2002

Subject: **working class poetry and The Myth of Revolution**

**Ron Silliman** wrote:

> To confuse those people with \$150K networking consultants or junior accountants at Andersen who plan to make partner (or planned to, anyway, before Andersen blew up in its own corruptness) and who think of W as being too far to the left is to yield a pretty incoherent picture.<

(It may be a sign of my own creeping conservatism, but I personally feel uncomfortable with gratuitous vilification of financial industry professionals. As if there were no **James Sherry**. And now especially, after the wholesale slaughter of them in the tens of hundreds and the leveling force of the Grim Reaper's scythe has painfully revealed them to be/to have been little more than workers in their own right. But that's not my point here . . .)

Isn't all this discussion of class and class obligations within poetry missing its propelling factor, without any corollary sense of *revolution* and the poet-revolutionary? Any attempted analysis of class, even from a rightist consumer-exploitative stance, has its basis and origin in, of course, **Marx's** class theories. And that Marxist, post-Marxist or quasi-Marxist always took its motivating force against class from variously manifested versions of "revolution."

I have recently been reinvestigating Surrealism, . . . which partly lost its saliency because the "engagement" [pronounced "on-gozh-mon-t'"] of Existentialist commitment segued better into the concrete '68 revolutions, . . . and its genuine, troubled political dimension: **Andre Breton** co-authored a paper with **Trotsky**, many Surrealists "defected" from the Surrealist Revolution into Communist Party membership, etc.; so, it's much on mine my mind how, where, and when both real collaboration with "revolutionary" political movements and social forces or a *myth* of revolution fuelled the XXth century avant-garde we're the inheritors of.

The line forward from Surrealism and the October Revolution is fairly easy to draw: Surrealism out of the more short-lived, nihilistic and less articulated Dada forward into Lettrism, Situationism, and perhaps Lacan and post-structuralism. But I find myself faltering --- I need more research or education into the pre-history of Modernism --- in trying to trail the line backward chronologically. The Modernist precursors, the Impressionists in painting and Les Symbolistes in poetry, although formally often continuous with the Cubisms and -isms that flowed out of or were spawned in reaction against them, on the face of things do not exactly appear to be *revolutionary* in the same sense: rather, the Manet depictions of men in waist coats and top hats as the *celebration of haute bourgeoisie*, the **Monet** leisure, etc., and, in poetry, end-of-an-era decadence rather than a generative "revolution,"--- a decadence, albeit, whose obscurantism remains

larger the prototype and starting point of Modernist and post-modern obscurantisms, including the current "asyntactical."

However, despite the occasional formal resemblances, --- and I know that here and there there must indeed have been counter examples of sympathies for the emergent splinter group pre-October Socialists and utopians that I just am uneducated about, such as (?) the younger American **Whitman** or **Hawthorne's** and the Transcendentalists' **Fourier** communes --- these precursors, again, rather than being anti-"capitalist" seem to typify an *epitome* of capital, and their aesthetic revolution to be on the plane of, say, innovation in the fashion design of *haute couture* clothes, glass stemware (Lalique, Tiffany), and such.

The *ultra-moderne* rather than Modernist "revolution."

For want of a better word, I'm thinking of that high capitalist *semblable* of later anti-capitalist avant-garde as "High Style." (Maybe it's a Mannerism.) Regardless, it represents a legitimate moment where formalist relatedness conceals political antithesis, and demonstrates a Modernism that was fully dedicated to capital, rather than class revolution.

(And there was pre-Modernist or even anti-Modernist, non avant-garde revolutionary art: the realist classicism of Jean-Louis David's *Tennis Court Oath*, etc., which commemorated political upheavals and *coups d'etat*.)

And, --- pessimistically? --- I wonder if we haven't come full cycle and, *fin-de-siècle* again, at the turning point of both centuries, whether our particular historical branch --- "hippy" revolutionary Beat > Black Mountain > Language --- hasn't had the revolutionary myth effectively drain out of it, --- so that our current uneasy condition is a *vestigial* lip service to "revolution" but a reversion to High Style "bourgeois"/middle class conservatism. The discrepancy between the lived careerism and MFA-ing of poetry, the (first generation) New York School buttoning up back into shocking neckties and blazers versus the Beat dishevelment, (the journal *Fence*?) --- aren't we in a position like the earliest Modernists, living "the good life," fully trafficking in the pleasures of capital, and *only* observing a superficial (hypocritical?) *trace* pseudo-revolutionariness in formal aesthetic experimentalism (an experimentalism that has, meanwhile, obviously become its own paradoxical conservatism of an "alternative tradition," perhaps in fact the *sole* keepers of tradition)?

The point being that, without revolution, including a revolutionary ideology for poetry (*Revolution dans la Langue Poétique?*), class is merely class,--- and discussion about its frictions is just moot, neither here nor there: it's all missing its necessary leverage ("revolution").

.....

Incidentally,---

(Any "revolutionary" agenda, of course, is currently badly compromised or stifled, like the tepid street protests against the recent World Economic Forum, by revolution's indistinguishability from terrorism, or, for that matter, berserk schizophrenic violence [the newspaper-certified "schizophrenic" shooting up a post office, and Bader Meinhof-ish shooting up a post office], and the reasonable-seeming total clamp-down of new social controls and revoked civil liberties.)

(. . . And something should later be said about "Drug Culture," the most covert co-factor of revolutionary avant-gardism.) :)

Date: Sun, 14 Apr 2002

Subject: "**a volume of absolutely comparable worth**"

I find your list of acceptable revolutionaries, "**Rimbaud, Blake, Vallejo, Rukeyser, Cesaire, Artaud**", to be less than helpful, in various ways, if I may. For one, it does not differ greatly (Rimbaud, Artaud) from the early canon that "materialist" poetics has been putting forward. So, going back to what is virtually the same starting point will only, in the long run, come full circle and eventually grow into a "materialist" poetics rediviva. Second, with the exception of **Muriel Rukeyser** (a "Which One of These Does Not Belong" peculiar and seemingly personal choice) or the British **Blake**, it is decidedly foreign language, Europhile, and, in lacking even the beginnings of an American genealogy, it displaces revolutionary contexts that were very likely specific to their points of generation onto an American scene that needs a somewhat more indigenous topography to take root. (It is also anachronistic in its arbitrary leap-frogging back and forth across centuries.) Thirdly, upon closer inspection, I'm not sure that brief list holds up to your second criterion, of a prelapsarian unity of feeling and thought: Artaud, who simply admitted he couldn't *think* anymore, and that his problem was harrowing inner nullity, was, to my mind, much more wiped out and disabled as far as anything like intellect went, and his degenerative illness was what we loosely refer to as "*emotional illness*," so he kind of misses feeling/thought on both counts, since all his feelings were phantasmagoria and his paranoia or whatever the specific -phrenia of his diagnosis no better equipped to write feelings than, say, a schizoid.

I can understand your hunger to *start all over*

and the more-or-less "anti-Language"/anti-"materialist" poetics your various jeremiads have been dreaming of, from the standpoint of its having become too easy, too widespread, too "dumbed down," "pseudo-confessionalist" in its choosing its materiality from the same sources as Confessionalism: the accidentals of one's life, etc.

I think, though, that a call for something new has to base itself at some point on something that *is* new, and what your essays are missing is an even provisional indicator of where within American poetry something resembling your manifesto can already be seen, if only embryonically.

There's an interesting list that's been passed over for a long time, as an alternative starting point: the list of the *refusés* from the *In The American Tree* anthology. (I regard *In The American Tree* as the turning point where "materialist" poetics became organized as such as a sort of full-scale phalanx, and went from pockets of scattered idiosyncrasy to the national, self-proclaimed party system it has become.)

Silliman's 1st edition introduction reads:

"A volume of absolutely comparable worth could be constructed from the writing of **Tom Ahern, Robert Gluck, Bruce Boone, Beverly Dahlen, Rosemarie Waldrop, Karl Young, Alice Notely**, (sic) **Dick Higgins, Curtis Faville, Laura Moriarty, Barbara**

**Einzig, Jim Rosenberg, Laura Chester, Lydia Davis, Johanna Drucker, Kathleen Fraser, Gloria Frym, Peter Ganick, Merrill Gilfillan, Ed Friedman, Gerald Burns, Gerritt Lansing, Chris Mason, Doug Messerli, John Godfrey, Michael Amnanan, Loris Essary, Keith Waldrop, Geoff Young, Marshall Reese, Craig Watson, Marina LaPalma, Steve Roberts, Bernard Welt, Gil Ott, Ted Pearson, Jerry Estrin, Mark Lecard, Kirby Malong, Norman Fischer, John Yau, John Taggart, Gail Sher, Joseph Simas, Cris Cheek, Joan Rettalack, Rafael Lorenzo, David Gitlin, Jed Rasula, Keith Shein, Charles Stein, Leslie Scalapino, Michael Lally, Dennis Cooper, Dvid Benedetti, Bill Mohr, Lelan Hickman, Charles Amirkhanian, Steve Katz, Doug Lang, Bill Corbett, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Maureen Owen, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Aaron Shurin, David Levi-Strauss, Sandra Meyer, DeLys Mullis, Carole Korzeniowsky, Frances Jaffer, Donald Byrd, Charles North, Jim Brodey, Madeleine Burnside, Barbara Barg, Lorenzo Thomas, Tim Dlugos, Steven Hamilton, Gary Lenhart, and others."**

(It also defines further criteria for exclusion, "For reasons of ... clarity," as "poets working in other nations", "those whose primary medium is something other than poetry", or "whose mature style and public identity was largely formed prior to this moment in writing". I find the second as especially promising, especially now that digital frontiers do allow a re-consideration and fresh attention to be given to "multi-media" poets.)

I've tried before to call attention to this list of refuse'es and to second-guess what it may conceal:

<http://home.jps.net/~nada/shurin.htm> .

In most cases, I think, those poets would not have advanced as well the cause of "paratactic"/asyntactical poetry, as many of them continued to write might closer to "normative discourse."

Some of the *refusés* were later folded under the aegis of "materialist"/Language poetry in subsequent round-ups, or have drifted there over time, perhaps precisely for want of the lost alternative that that "volume of absolutely comparable worth" took down with it.

Even a cursory glance at its names, though, brings up examples that, in fact, do seem to synthesize feeling and thought in the way you might envision, such as, out of the names I recognize, **Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge**, all of whose books are perfect masterpieces

(the opening of *Sphericity*: "I did not know beforehand what would count for me as a new color. Its beauty is an analysis / of things I believe in or experience, but seems to alter events very little. The significance of a bird / flying out of grapes in a store reates to the beauty of the color of the translucency of grapes"),

**Gerritt Lansing**, where alchemical hermeticism met gay male poetry in a seemingly impossible fusion or combustion, **Dennis Cooper's** unique hybrid of political poetry and

idealized self in his J.F.K.-as-a-boy poems, **Michael Amnasan's** chilling frankness about being *the* working class poet, the unsung epic unruliness of **Blau DuPlessis'** indefatigable hodgepodge, etc.

A great deal could be gained, I believe, ---all my card-catalog-scavenging to find those I could has been rewarding--- by returning to that fork in the road and seeing where the history "of winners" that was written over so many names I've simply never seen elsewhere diverged from a forgotten possible world.

As far as "materiality,"--- there's been continuous slippage in that term, and just plain ignorance as to meaning. A quasi-Marxist critique such as the polemics that accompanied "materialist" poetics *had to* have meant, at root, not eclipsing focus on the *material* itself, i.e. language, but upon the material *conditions* that surround its production. At some point, paratactical writing seemed like a believable hook on which to hang this hat of materiality. It did, after all, jolt with a startled re-encounter with the similar *materiality* of *the book*, in, the first few dozen times or some, opening an innocuous-looking front cover to find a total contradiction of all expectations within, hence forcing a re-examination of such expectations.

The difficulty, today, for a reasonably well-read poet is that, by dint of sheer number, it has been *normalized*. --- Difficulty in the sense that the original claims about materiality weather poorly, as the decades since have significantly altered the material conditions of the poet-producers but rarely effected a similiary telling acknowledgement of that whole new horizon of materialist realities within the imitation-of-an-imitation poetry: MFAs, a decline in the cost of publishing, criticism about said materiality, etc (to say nothing of the Internet and the yet unexplored ways in which distribution of print poetry through Web changes its "materiality" ---immaterializing it?). There are advantages, too, in its normalization: the work itself is less difficult. It is easier, critically, to see where a thread of a story or themes do show through. It's possible to discuss whole books of paratactic writing entirely for their "content" (semantics) now, without re-hashing the arguments in favor of and their apologetics. In time, one becomes re-trained or re-conditioned to read, when it's there, entirely lucid continuities. And, likewise, not to waste too much time getting caught up in "secondary" or tertiary writing, ... although the political climate of a very small poetry world continue to make it impossible to hold up specific cases as "poor" versions of "materialist" poetics.

At any rate, I do think that distinction important to put out at the get-go: materiality as, originally, the materiality of the poet-worker's situation, the historical materialism of publication, the materiality of the medium (language) as subject to its contemporary, time-bound jargons and slangs, etc. What materiality *should have* been meaning all along is: who wrote it, what (political) groups benefit from the power relations that it sets in motion, ...

The poetics or theory has gotten progressively muddled as its lost that key element of its own argument. Re-embracing the dogma in its more complete form also allows its expansion across poetries that chance and power struggles shut out. You mention **John**

**Ashbery**,--- but I'm continually intrigued by how much of materialist poetics fits **Frank O'Hara** perfectly: the historical materialist acuteness of the present moment notated in its chronometric exactitude, poetry as the product not of the lone individualist (which your **Blake** and **Rimbaud** somewhat harken back to) but the project of an entire community of interrelated manufacturers, etc.

(I never realized until just now when the radio announcer said it, that **Olivier Messiaen's** *Quartet for the End of Time* was written during and given its first premier in a German prisoner of war camp.)

It's important to keep in mind that the poetry is separable from the poetics, and that the same body of "materialist" work can be re-narrativized/theorized under different rubrics, ... and, vice-versa, that criteria of materialist dicta are met by work not typically identified with that banner.

Date: Tue, 30 Apr 2002

Subject: **What is "pure zero drive"? {Zombie avant-garde}**

**Jon Minton** wrote:

Jeffrey, I do appreciate your theory; and I can even see some evidence of what you're saying . . . What is "pure zero drive," as you use the phrase here?" I don't get it. And is replication + variation, which is what the poem explores, at least in part, always this "pure zero drive?" . . . in terms of theory-death (which is otherwise interesting and useful)

.....  
FROM PAUL MANN'S *MASOCRITICISM*:

In some of **Freud's** later works, the impossible notion of the death drive occupied a special place. Far from immortality or the endless satisfaction of pleasures (or rather, at their deepest level), Freud came to believe that the organism desired most of all to die, "in its own way." The death drive is a primordial force, indeed the only "primordial force," deeper than life, life's "final purpose."

Repetition compulsions, which we have already encountered, are the simplest expressions of this absurd drive. For Freud, according to **Jean Laplanche**, "the most varied manifestations of repetition . . . are attributed to the essence of drives" (Laplanche 1985, 107). The psychic economy is driven by a desire to preclude change through repetition, that is to say, through a principle of constancy. But this principle of constancy is itself the expression of a deeper principle: a zero principle. For Freud there is an absolute "primacy of zero in relation to constancy" (108). The constancy that the organism seeks must finally be identified as death.

Furthermore, this zero principle is ineluctably connected to aggression. **Sadean** aggression toward the other is in fact a displacement of a more fundamental autoaggression. According to Laplanche,

'a part of the primal destructiveness is deflected toward the external world, giving rise to the

manifestation we identify as aggressiveness. Thus . .  
. what is affirmed here is the primacy of  
self-aggression over heteroaggression, that  
self-aggression being, in turn, only the consequence  
of the absolute primacy within the individual of the  
tendency toward zero, conceived as the most radical  
form of the pleasure principle.'

Date: Fri, 17 May 2002  
Subject: **Who is Sil-Vara?**

It's interesting to me (or ironic) that, in the heightening rhetoric against criticism --- that is, against poetics? ---

the warnings against criticism's evils are taking on metaphoric form as:

(1) death ("You turn him to dust and then you go off to sparsely attended conferences where dozens of other academic-morticians gather") which, needless to say, seems some type of mirror image confirmation of Theory-Death somewhere, regardless of whether in no longer hiding under the rug it's now, like crimes of passion, justifiable incitement to riot; and

(2) waste ("be very careful not to waste your waste. That is the key thing: not to waste your waste. Too much time gets spent re-inventing the wheel, or feeling sh--ty"), which, as if by intuited by sixth sense, is the second leg of **Paul Mann's** Theory-Death exposition in *Masocriticism*: waste.

About dust

[ <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/dustfree.htm> ]

and **Rilke** first, though,--- doesn't Rilke seem to be a particularly inauspicious or telltale choice for a poet to cite against the **Dead Kennedies** of criticism? inasmuch as he, almost (like **Rimbaud** or **Valery**) more famous for *not* having written than for having written, after all, more than anyone else, is the author of --- get it? --- The Duino \*Elegies,\* and the poetic mausoleum on the death of the nineteen year old **Ruth Ouckama Knoop** that the *Sonnets to Orpheus* are ("Friend of death, for in easy transformation / it grew through death a hundred times"). That is, even if the teacher of German literature had subjected Rilke to his **Midas** Touch of a dusty death, who more the beautiful mortician than Rilke?

[On Rilke's military duty, in lieu of active service, of *drawing ruled lines on paper*:

"Industriously he drew vertical and horizontal lines for hours on end. Sometimes the spaces between the lines were only two millimeters wide, but he worked with perfect accuracy and a genuine humility . . . the severe geometrical network of pencil lines . . . almost made a work of out of it" ---The Austrian writer "**Sil-Vara**," quoted in **Stephen Garmey's** 1972 Harper Colophon introduction, p. 19]

But, waste, too:

After repetition as (theory-)death, Mann turns to waste, and **Georges Bataille's** doctrines about waste. In brief, in Bataille, economies do not function on scarcity, as we generally believe in a "free market"/capitalist system, and even the niggardly surplus that economics does allow is insufficient to reveal anything at the level of *drive*, or principle; he evangelizes instead toward: yes, waste. Waste, as one of Bataille's main platforms (the others being: sacrifice, heterology, and transgression), is cited as the very expression or eruptive consummation of theory-death, in that the loss and attrition of meaning decline in tandem with the degradation into profligate, generous waste. The potlatch of the avant-garde. (Mann, not insignificantly for the hypo-critical camp ["hy.po- or hyp- *pref.* . . . Less than normal; deficient" --- *American Heritage*, 1997], in passing speaks of academic criticism as *restricted economy*, the very opposite of heterology and euphoric waste, since its forces of containment and regularization forestall transgression.)

For the time being, I'll let these quotes (below) serve as further explanation of waste as a signal of the presence of theory-death.

What I am suggesting is that it is not necessary or healthy for anti-criticism to explode into destructive mutilation fantasy ("I wanted to maim"), since their vengence is a case of mistaken identity. The mortician has not *killed* the cadaver you find him near. It simply died, and keeps on dying. **Geoff Dyer** (sic) was

mistaking the mourner for the murderer.

Indeed, maybe criticism, in attempting to reveal that the avant-garde's relatively recent death still leaves it half-warm, to locate some posthumous growth of ideology's good yeast upon it (!!), enrages by thereby calling attention to what denial had screened out. (I wouldn't have noticed if you hadn't covered him with a sheet, damn you.)

It's not a bad thing to get all Type A about, though. We don't have to stop writing poetry because of it. Hardly, . . . even if sometimes the spaces between the lines were only two millimeters wide. It doesn't stop poetry from multiplying, or the fine collectibles convention from going on. The avant-garde as Sequel. We can still wear berets.

Theory-death, is like death at Graceland: every day there are still **Elvis** sitings

("Last year, I met a group from a Church of Elvis in Sweden. They claim that when they pray to him, he listens and understands.")

---

<http://www.student.virginia.edu/~decweb/issue/1998/09/10/word/elvis.html> )

Quotes on WASTE from *Masocriticism*:

'One's failings in respect to **Shakespeare** or **Hegel** or **Bataille** are therefore not merely intellectual errors, rectifiable through closer reading: failure becomes, in a sense, the very mode of our reading: our perpetual failure to cross the line that separates the reading from the work, no matter how far we advance in its direction, is at least as fundamental to us as any insight into the work that we might have.

. . .

'a principle of absolute expenditure as value, a "general economy" based on surplus, waste, loss, sacrifice, ejaculation, excretion, and death. . . or the glorious waste . . . ', the potlatch, 'a breach of every restricted economy. . . an exemplary expenditure, in excess of any possible compensation: a gift-combat in which one warrior tries to defeat

another by squandering his riches, by giving away so many exorbitant gifts that the other can never repay them, even if it means he loses everything in the process. . . . At bottom, at the economic base of the basest materialism, all value is waste value,' **Van Gogh's** ear as the ultimate avant-garde gift, 'the extravagant, sacrificial, excretory movement of the solar anus of art. . . . the abyss of Language Itself opening onto a curriculum vitae and grounded in an ideal footnote, a footnote bearing one's own name. . . . Whatever transgression occurs in writing on Bataille does so only through the STUPID recuperation' (my emphasis) 'and hence evacuation of the whole rhetoric and dream of transgression, only insofar as the false profundity of philosophy or theory evacuates the false profundities it apes. . . . [T]he interest of Bataillean discourse lies chiefly in the compulsive and symptomatic way it plays with its feces. The spectacle of critics making fools of themselves does not reveal the sovereign truth of death: it is only masocritical humiliation, a pathological attempt to disavow the specter of death. . . . Nothing is gained by this communication except profit-taking from lies. . . . to witness the slow freezing to death of every satellite text. . . . Theory comes finally to reflect this circular loss or lack as the interminable and productive self-consumption, the endless theory-death, of theory itself. In this movement, theory manages to transgress every project of transgression by forever failing to launch it.'

<http://www.deadelvis.com/sighting/seedead.html>

Date: Thu, 9 May 2002

Subject: **Why poets should read only cereal boxtops**

I find this to be a bad attitude: anti-intellectual, divisive . . .

It works from a notion that poetry's input/output with its other related disciplines is a conveyor belt that goes something like

AUTONOMOUS POET >

EDITOR >

PUBLISHER >

a. READER

b.1 CRITIC

b.2 REVIEWER

where the poet writes, the editor selects, the publisher puts into print/on-line, the unauthorized reader operates in a position of silence as unresponsive consumer, and the critic ---perish forbid--- responds. There is also a secondary/tertiary type of reader/critic position thought of as the "book review," which, unlike criticism, is welcome, as it's seen as a form of book promotion or advertising.

Anything that violates that flow chart, that chain of effects where the poetry is handed along with potatoes in a potato sack race, such as critics overstepping their putatively derivative position and actually daring to become the inspiration or source of poetry, is regarded as a disturbance in poetry's ripple effects and should be avoided, condemned.

Even when not outright ignored and boycotted, it is in an antagonistic relation to the poet (J. Gallagher: "It's all something to work against.").

First of all, I think this is wrong in that the different types of literature workers are not different *species* that lack the genes to mate. They are *roles*.

Of the examples of the "stereotypical" academic critic position that **Chris Stroffolino** lists, ---**Sianne Ngai, Lytle Shaw, Steve Evans, Juliana Spahr**--- Lytle and Juliana are both poets as well, there is published and a novel poetry by Ngai (I have simply ever seen any poetry by Steve Evans and don't know if he writes poems), *and*, Juliana, multivalent, is poet, critic, *and* editor (Chain). At different times, one may fulfill one or the other function within the literary economy; they are not mutually exclusive.

(In fact, the *academic* (as graduate student) is a very short-lived position, in general: viz., the Poetics archives where .edus come and go and *disappear*. There are years where the names of the main participants, just as eagerly involved then as today's subscribers in the current debate, have totally vanished from public record, in many cases presumably phased out of academics and maybe even poetry.)

This conveyor belt model is based upon the fallacy of poetry as, yes, definitely a stripe of language ("materialist") but poetry as an isolated discourse or form of text that does not engage in dialogue or draw upon and feed into the general element of language as fluidly as, for example, list posts do.

A better-educated poet is a better poet (a better-educated *person* is in a better position to write). One of the artificial boundaries that **Andrew Rathmann's** anti-criticism rant sets up is a wall between poetry and thinking. To the contrary, as ideas are, in the final wash, very much a part of poetry (and inescapably a part of language, in its ideological dimension), why shouldn't poetry be in an open give-and-take with any and every area of thinking? Academic criticism is simply the commentary (critique, analysis) of literateurs whose somewhat more comfortable, non-"working class" positions afford them a greater leisure and impetus to direct themselves at thinking. They're *experienced*, hopefully, at honing their reading into a sort of hypostasis with thinking.

Without the critic and feedback, ---how else does poetry advance itself? It's ~then~ that the raw power mechanisms of coterie, personal influence, private capital (publishing), etc., take on monopolistic dominance, and poets are promoted without studied justification beyond their proximity to major metropolitan centers, what good socialites they are, and so on.

This false division between poetry and criticism, between poetry and other modes of language, instead of a relaxed switching back and forth between modes, as a sort of "broken English," may in fact be much of why the Poetics List has, in general, abandoned poetics. If Steve Evans' writing is discussed at the cocktail party, it's to agree how terribly rude of him it was to be such a brute over **Rebecca Wolff**,--- since poets choose not to engage with his **Hegelian** ideas or the possibility that any friendly fire was just the regrettable casualty of his otherwise coherent thinking. That function is split off. If a subscriber's sign-on doesn't have a conspicuous .edu suffix at the tail end (really just a form of wearing a fraternity pin, as subscriber accounts can just as easily be set up to more anonymous or democratic alternative e-mail servers), there's no way of speaking *ex cathedra*. Poets become completely submerged in poetry as solely *practice*, without being interested in ---our capacity to do so increasingly atrophies--- articulating anything about the poem in non-poem language: that would only expose how unreflexive and blind-to-itself the process has become for most.

Oddly, too, the Language Poets that the List ostensibly dates back to were expressly engaged in producing their own, intellectualist poets' criticism, a genre that has largely disappeared.

Poets now presume that their poems *should* go out deafly into the world, like the penny dropped into the wishing well without making any sound. If it *does* encounter dialogue, questions, analysis, criticism, the reaction ---because the poet has maintained herself/himself in such an interaction-starved vacuum--- is that there's something *wrong* with that, and it would be better to leave the work self-contained, hermetically sealed. We *resent* people responding.

Personally, I think of the ultimate model of this New Man critic has having been the late **Ramez Qureshi**, someone who is at home and as hungry for the life of the mind as he was for the call of poetry. With no academic credentials beyond an on-line *correspondence course* B.A. that he was eternally completing, his criticism was quite serious, definitely respectable and sometimes exemplary in the insights it achieved,--- and he, at least, without any credentializing pay-off to be gained from it, was an absolute *fanatic* (fan) of **Adorno**'s. (There should be a Ramez Qureshi Prize for Criticism established.)

Date: Sun, 12 May 2002

Subject: Re: **Why poets should read only cereal boxtops**

At the risk of fuelling this further---

**Aaron Belz** aaron@BELZ.NET wrote:

> I often remember **Ashbery's** line, "In school all the thought got combed out." <

You don't support your case by arguing it through a line of poetry written by a Harvard-educated poet.

At the most elementary level, merely to know how to write requires the basic education of alphabet, etc. To write with a less limited vocabulary and to know how to employ what correct spelling or grammar are, a little more education. The very ideal that such a thing as poetry exists, versus only transcribed speech or prose, takes the education of being introduced to a poem (increasingly rare, in the over-all poetry-less American culture): schools themselves are usually the only place where that happens. That poetry can be more than one particular stamp of style (metered, rhyme) grows out of exposure to more and more varieties of authors, historical periods: education (or self-education). And, for right or wrong, right now, whether it's an insiders' network recognizing the cues of their own compatriots, in terms of book prizes, writers' colonies and other institutionalized measures of a poet's advancement or status, there is a statistically disproportionate number of MFAs, that is, education beyond even the B.A. college level. With academic critics, similarly.

A better-educated poet is a better poet (a better-educated *person* is in a better position to write).

The topic that I was responding to, **Andrew Rathmann's** anti-literacy "rant" that poets should not read academic criticism, was focussing on one particular

stripe of thinking, that of academic criticism:  
critique, critical/analytical thinking, theory  
(intertextuality, interrelation of parts to whole,  
testing poetry against the filter of canonical  
thinkers/philosophers [the condemned **Adorno**]...).

Broadening (blurring) the topic to include  
contemplation ("How about thinking with the body, with  
the soul; through meditation") or late phases of  
*character* ("through experience. Wherefore wisdom?"),  
or other types of thought, such as daydreaming,  
fantasy, visionary hallucination, dyslexia, etc., is  
catholic of you, a sort of fundamentalism, but that  
departs from the original question of whether poets  
should insulate ourselves unread and blindered.  
I was addressing only that, and not every periphery of  
the mind and human condition.

> Your logic reduces thought to what can be had  
through education, and that, for me, is borderline  
crazytalk. <

The List will function more civilly if we keep what we  
say to each other a little more Christian.

---

"We must not think of the matter in a human way" --  
**St. Augustine**

Date: Tue, 14 May 2002

Subject: Re: **The High Road of Art**

The Way of The Cavalier is to pull our revealing pantaloons up about our hips and cincture them, so that our weighty Pendulums do not chafe upon the flagstones, to be unmanned in a doily shoppe.

Time is as a small cake whose every crumb must be gummed or pinched.

I play the music of **Lully**, 1632 - 1687, not of **Racine**, 1639- 1699, in the background on my useful headphones, so as to be A Constructive Fellow, not a niggler, making utility of every scrumptuous moment (by exercising!) and to have a well-paced marching rhythm that guides my mincing Nancy steps toward elevated ground.

Criticism, that old she-hag of gender who waits to syphon out sweet plump young poetry's fair lustrous bloom. Ha! It is for those whose time is a nasty wastefulness, as a waste of corruption in their pants whereon they sit. She shows up too late at the christening and drinks the water from the font to taste the infant.

Poetry must fuel herself with a good mastication of hardy foods.

You are in a "romantic relationship" with a "significant other." You go to poetry-inspiring movies. You watch the sickle of television. How could that employment leave time for the grey shadows of impolite thinkers whose impositions are a waste that no clean cloth can cleanse? Then scrub the waste away! You have no time nor space! (Time, the stern master.) Latin epigrams are bearing down upon you, though not wastefully!

I am responsive only to aphorisms. Aphorisms win.

What is an "argument"? Ha! It starts with an "are gew" and it ends with "meant"! It is as a snare or a fowler's trap to tangle our shins around a pot of waste.

Stuff your great poetry stomach with nutritious boiled reading material that can have Utilitarian Value, my waster! not with the she-hag's indolence and uselessness.

For example: **Charles Bernstein**. He wears glasses. So then why *drink* from glass when he, an example, places glass before his eyes as a better entrance into the high life! The top shelf! High, yes, that interests everyone too short to reach easily. Ascend! Rise, as something tumesced! Who has ever met a Bernstein and said, That man is my lookalike! His imposter? His physiognomy, his phrenology, his aftertaste, they leave no bitter wastefulness upon the palate. It is as a fresh lemony Bernstein that has no unpleasant waste matter, ah. No one has ever followed him into heinous unlawfulness of anarchy or said, There's a fine reason to save my every pretty precious minute in a pail, a party favor! Without waste! A fob watch, there's a treasury to stuff in your pocket, not to squander hours in bug-eyed bookishness. Look to the Kings of Poetry! What, gossip?

Every baby must give its waste to a nursemaid or it is as a thing to be placed in the corner and desiccated. Or else, let them be as do-nothings and dummies, who have no special senses.

Some befoul their swollen pectorals. They take a wreath and they make it as poop. Who would ever work? A slave! More Bernstein: "**Maria!** Maria! I just met a girl named Maria"!

Everyone should go Upstairs and avoid basements. And let no waste dog your heel, as a discoloration.

I give you this from how **Pound** and **Eliot** used four minutes, as a pie.

Date: Wed, 29 May 2002

Subject: **The huysmansization of prose**

At first I thought you were saying "huysmansization of prose" and meant, à la *A Rebours*, a compartmentalization of it into separate rooms, each painted a different color, or a sort of museum of perfumes of prose--- but, dyslexia blinked away, I see you must mean **Napoleon III's Baron Hausmann**, architect of the re-design of Paris . . . in which case I understand even less what you mean by that (or find it less interesting when corrected, too real).

lcabri@DEPT.ENGLISH.UPENN.EDU wrote:

> So I guess no one else other than Chris S. and I have read S. Howe's *Pierce-Arrow*.

Some of my *Pierce-Arrow* marginalia (metrical notations subject to error in transcription/typing: some 60 out of 144 pages in my copy are fully scanned this way. Too laborious to re-type more [although I will take page number "requests"!], below.

Abbreviations indicate feet. I.e., I = iamb, S = spondee, T = trochee, etc.; P = paeon; E = epitrite. Numbers prior to metrical summary = syllabics. A period before a macron/breve (.\_ or ./) indicates that syllable can vary in accent/stress. | = some pattern or natural pause. {p. 3}

.\_ / \_ / \_ . \_ | \_ / \_ \_ / \_ \_ 13 iamb  
.\_ / \_ / | \_ \_ / \_ \_ ) 9 I2.3rd P  
// | \_ \_ / \_ | \_ / 8 S.A2=S.3rdP.I  
/ \_ / \_ / \_ / \_ . \_ ) 9 T4  
.\_ / \_ \_ | / \_ . \_ \_ / 9 I.2ndE.A  
.\_ / \_ \_ | \_ \_ / \_ \_ / \_ . \_ \_ ) 13  
/ \_ \_ | / \_ \_ | \_ / \_ / 10 D2.I2  
/ \_ | / \_ | / \_ | / \_ | / \_ 10 T5  
/ \_ | / | / \_ / / 7

{p. 25}

2nd paeon 2nd paeon + trisyllable  
undercurrent OR iamb,  
primes for Gk names --**Andromache**, **Prometheus**

.\_ / \_ \_ / \_ . 7 I.A  
/ \_ | \_ . // \_ 7  
.\_ / \_ \_ | / \_ . \_ ) 8  
.\_ / \_ \_ | // \_ 7  
// | / \_ \_ \_ / 7 mol/spon \*  
// | \_ . / \_ / \_ 8

/ \_ / x / 5  
/ \_ / \_ / \_ 9 dac.trim  
\_ / \_ / \_ // 8  
\_ / \_ / ^ / 7 Tel{essilean}

\* late field hour toward the green {dedication}

four ep2's  
one ep3/t2

{from p. 30}

clutching bandages next

.. . . . .

{periods indicate phonemes [ch & g <j> = t-sh & d-zh, etc.]}

{from p. 39}

links grisly

. . . . .

{from p. 42; \_ = long vowel}

--other archaic Greek messages

. . . \_ . . . . .  
indiscoverable lands all law

. . . . . \_ .  
torn up nothing praiseworthy-

. \_ . . . . \_ . . . .

{from p. 52}

sprung rhythm limerick

David-

-son cracked the whip  
of A ris to tle

we al ways wound  
up with a quar rel

humor

{from p. 58}

Occamists freq

.....

scis- -sor

Mis- -ter Brooks

occ(amists)><comm(it)

{from p. 62}

lakes fields springs Limniads

..\_ . \_ .. . . . . . \_ ..

{from p. 72}

preference for 2nd paeon (\_/\_\_): "hypocrisy ...  
obscurity ... analysis ... incognita (68) Piscataqua?  
inveterate (65)

{from p. 91}

ALL troch.-dac. w/ one "double spond"

{from p. 92}

"metra" when verses  
fall below hexasyllables

quoted misspellings  
substitute for Howe's  
trademark neologisms

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{Some Howe syllabics (since they're relatively easy to re-type), for the sake of interest (and in light of the book's illustration on p. 115). Numbers indicate line syllable-counts, as above except horizontalized.}

15 12 7 10 10 8 9 8 10 p. 26

6 9 8 8 10 10 8 8 9 p. 27

7 9 8 8 7 9 8 7 6 9 10 9 8 p. 28

8 8 7 7 5 7 9 6 6 8 p. 29

8 5 6 6 5 8 8 6 p. 30

7 7 7 7 6 6 8 6 6 p. 35

10 8 10 9 12 8 9 11 8 p. 39

9 8 9 9 8 9 9 9 10 9 p. 47

5 6 5 8 7 6 5 6 5 6 7 6 6 p. 49

6 8 6 6 5 6 6 5 6 6 6 p. 52

etc.

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{My review of *Pierce-Arrow*, from *America Letters & Commentary* 12, 2000, p. 178f (a necessarily simplified reading, given the genre [review])}

When I asked, like a starstruck autograph hound, to be introduced to Susan Howe after her poetry reading, her instructions to me were direct: since I work at a university, the library there probably owns the microfilm of the complete papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, hero of her new book, *Pierce-Arrow*, and---almost beside herself with happiness for me---I could *see the manuscripts for myself!* This poetry points outside itself, like Cupid's arrow, with an evangelism foreign to post-modernism. Out of a doctrinally non-referential Language Poetry background, Howe is vigorously *referring* and signifying back to an extrinsic world. That world, though, is not a monolith we can return to unlettered. Howe has a didactic streak (poetry should delight and instruct) and her lesson is our almost primal ignorance before a protean world. The past, historical or personal, was never something the rote memorization of schoolrooms could teach. She writes: "Occamists frequently commit / mistakes Hume falls into / error it may be simple / error on my part." Linguists and poets keep asking: what is the smallest unit of meaning---the word? The syllable? The phoneme? Regardless, Howe proves insistently that the *sound bite* our age speaks is smaller than whatever that atom may be. To explain the known in

the terms of the unknown (Occam's razor) is to ask the sub-set to contain everything that lies outside it.

I do not agree with the self-evident reading of Howe as a "poet of history," despite the dates she endlessly, cabalistically ticks off ("In 1900 Swinburne who died / in 1909 just a month before / Meredith", "Sunday Feb 15 / Deep snow / Blood was in a / little while", "In 1928 after Husserl's / last pen touched the MS / it was set aside", "Exhausted certainty / after 1900 ink dis- / persed randomly", etc., etc.), as if metrics were measured in years. Howe simply holds us responsible for our naïve numerologies---the historical is interchangeable with the *imaginary* in her poetry, and phenomenologically (the book begins: "Phenomenology of war in the *Iliad* / how men appear to each other when / gods change the appearance of things") what those two modes share in common is *absence*. Her great theme is what is not here. It is covered over with ink, and has serif or no serif.

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{And a propos "Susan Howe, who is a genuinely exciting poet", my review/criticism of Howe's *Bed Hangings* :

[http://www.granarybooks.com/reviews/bed\\_hangings/electronic\\_poetry\\_review.html](http://www.granarybooks.com/reviews/bed_hangings/electronic_poetry_review.html)

This is my gift, as apples beneath a gingham coverlet in a basket, for **Louis Cabri** in Pennsylvania. As Emily Dickinson says: "It is the gift of screws" (poem 675, **Johnson**).

Date: Fri, 5 Jul 2002

Subject: **Close reading close readings**

It's nice that **Andrew Rathmann** is serializing these close readings (I like the project and its recurrence): it provides a recurrent, intermittent feature to the List, one of a different type than the vaguer but necessary opinionation and merchandise/reading promotion, --- sort of like television commercials or public service announcements interrupting regular programming. **Brian Kim Stefans** used to post "micro-reviews" of books on-List, similarly. One risk is that it can seem like "practice" for grown-up review-writing elsewhere, as Stefans indeed "graduated" to stop posting such here and publishing reviews in the likes of *The Boston Review*. Consistent with Andrews' stated endorsement of on-line poetry, he helpfully is relying on URL-trailable examples. But it's good, too, that **Lawrence Upton** takes Andrew to task for the somewhat gratuitous, casual assertions. (Then some Punch and Judy head-bopping!) Especially as one of the main features of these close readings, proceeding out of their over-all departure from the general rule of dialogue/symposium that governs the List, is to ignore any subsequent dialogue they spur (most of the close readings have been trailed by responses that Andrew does not answer ["when the girls came out to play **Georgie Porgie** ran away"-ism]), some of which replies, like the one about drag and blackface, are more "potent," memorable and volatile than the close readings themselves.

But given the ambivalence toward criticism that keeps variously expressing itself on the List, criticism itself should not be allowed to escape with its own transparencies and subterfuges, better in turn that it too should be subjected to close reading, to determine how its stylistic prerogatives succeed in maintaining a power position over the text in question (the real outcome of **Roland Barthes'** "Death of the Author" criticism, despite the earlier misinterpretations and objectionable gay-bashing that passed, like the attack on drag, unchallenged here ["Barthes, a frustrated gay writer, had to force himself into the critic-closet & his revenge was . . .", "while **Foucault** went to SF for the actual jouissance of MS, with unhappily lethal results]: the post-authorial critic is revealed and self-confessed to be a repertoire of rhetorical tropes, too. The "good" critic, like Barthes, should deconstruct himself, simultaneously).

Tomorrow, I'll go on a diet and eat only macrobiotic snacks, make parfaits using Rice Dream recipes.

It interests me, as someone who has published a handful of criticism/reviews that I vainfully pride myself upon, how the close readings (narrowly?) imitate a particular stripe of review-writing, readings that may be "close" but that are unadventurous in their style, reproducing a mode of extant criticism rather than wrenching after an innovative approach to the very role of critic itself. Reviews are a genre and the genre characteristics assert themselves with unconscious force, I'm all too aware: thus, glib cleverness like "have her persimmons and eat them too". ["Eat"? Did someone say "eat"?] Some others (like **Lisa Samuels'** "deformative criticism" or **Benjamin Friedlander's** tracings over previous criticism in *Qui Parle*, or the sort of neo-criticism that *Telling It Slant* advertises itself on, etc. . . . or even **Tom Beckett's** fleeting use of Tracing Paper criticism) take the

interesting gauntlet of criticism to be that the critic now needs to depart from pre-designated and adopted modes as much as the poets under study. In a book like *A Wild Salience*, essays about **Rae Armantrout**, it even seems that "poets' criticism" equals the poems under discussion themselves in obscurity.

My chest is covered with a Hansel and Gretel trail of snack food, such as Cracker Jacks and Wheat Thins, handfuls of General Mills cereals, that I stuff my mouth with, gluttonously chomping, chomping as I type with my "free" hand, rolling along the floor to the scale to weigh myself again: yep, over 600 lb.

This familiar shadow of established critical tactics in the close readings, or sense of *deja-vu* (*deja-lire*), is there but somewhat difficult to pinpoint in the close readings --- a tendency toward, as Lawrence objected, unsubstantiated generalization; a structure that begins with an *in media res* assertion of either a question ("Why has the pun become so ubiquitous a device . . .?"; "Who said the lyric speaker was dead?"), the proverbs of a canonical hero ("**Heidegger** says something to the effect . . ."), an imaginary controversy ("Language writing's censorship of the individual voice", "The works of a number of younger poets, especially post-MFA poets, reflect a desire to get out of the workshop mode") that concerns itself with surveying, in fact, *not* the close reading of a single poem but continually treating poets as a sort of flock, multitude, concerned with what ~many~ poets are doing and then deducing down from that bird's-eye view, ---or such, which introduction becomes the pretext for a loosely drawn "issue" or ersatz critical thought which the close reading is then played off of (so that the tension of the close reading is displaced onto how the text addresses that straw dog issue, defusing the protagonist-antagonist relation between poet and critic, . . . a checkmate that still, as in provoking Lawrence's objection, filters through [pyoo?]).

But the general *flavor* that is left, and that is so familiar from prior criticism, is the disappearance act of the close reader into a semi-objectivized stance, an impersonalization, ironically, at the same time as taking exception with the de-personalized poetic mode. Compare, instead, other critical (earlier) modes, such as **Melville's** "Hawthorne and His Mosses" [title??], for example, where the critical posture was effusive, rapturous, even eroticized enthusiasm and self-depiction (Melville portraying himself as chancing upon the book and reading it lying down in hay in a barn or open field), or **Pound's** schizo-critical correspondences, which critiqued by frothing at the mouth. The movement toward feminist "personal criticism" called that impersonal façade "Archimidean" (in the sense of: give me a point outside the world and I will be able to move the world with a lever), and regarded it as untrustworthy because it erases its basis in gender, class, and such.

Later, I can eat a Beef Jerky Yum. Salty meat snacks.

[\(http://www.unclechucksbestbeefjerky.com/](http://www.unclechucksbestbeefjerky.com/)  
<http://www.primecountry.com.au/>  
<http://www.texasbestjerky.com/>  
<http://www.wildwestjerky.co.uk/>

<http://www.acmebrand.com/>  
<http://www.somethingsmokin.com/>  
<http://www.vermonter.com/beefjerky/>  
<http://www.azjacks.com/>  
<http://www.jerkyusa.com/>).

Curiously, the close readings are able to keep the pressure of re-personalization stifled for only so long, and they habitually end with striking frequency (unconscious self-imitation) on a valedictory sentence where the strain it takes to keep "I" out of the picture falters and the first person (singular or plural) re-enters only to depart, much like the similar, well-known habit of pronouns at the closing line of a **John Ashbery** poem ["I promise the sun was a switch, or tickler", "if we should ever get to know them", "We may live more patently . . .", "I think / the theme created itself . . .", etc., etc., etc., from *Can You Hear, Little Birdie* or elsewhere].

Rathmann close reading closing sentences, after an otherwise "I"-hygenicized critical screen: "I myself think her refusals of solemnity pay off in many cases", "At least we can see . . .", "I think poetry is better served by Option #2", "I wonder if [**Rebecca**] **Wolff** will become more song-like".

Date: Sat, 12 Oct 2002

Subject: Re: "**Review a small press book this year, and hang around**"

In an essay or letter, I forget which--- **Virginia Woolf** wrote asking what the purpose of (negative) reviews were, and how things could be different.

She re-imagined reviews into a utopian, new situation. Rather than having the review put out in the public sphere, where it might be an embarrassment to the author (out of modesty? for unfairly biasing/seducing readers?), she imagined that

an appointment could be scheduled between the author and the critic, where the two would sit down face-to-face for an hour or two, *for the purpose of the author taking in the criticism/review that is \*needed\* for the work*. I forget if she imagined there might be some payment by the author for the reviewer's services this way. (If there were, surely it would be transacted simply: an envelope pushed across a tabletop.)

So, the essence of her idea was that reviews are a *one-to-one* communication between the critic and the author, that the audience is more or less inappropriately eavesdropping upon.

In re-imagining a world for reviews, note, she was *not* open or prone to imagine a world *without* reviews.

They were necessary to the writing, maybe even so necessary that they shouldn't be diluted by the voyeurism of the audience.

Were Woolf right, then, reviews, at base, rather than being some piece of oratory similar to barkers at circuses luring spectators into a sideshow tent to see **The Seal Boy**,

would be

*one-to-one* akin to the one-to-one of, say, love poetry.

The motor force that drives the "good" review may be very similar to the love sonnet, to ask a question that will match an answer already given: who are you, you enchanted me, you puzzled me.

["he kissed me, he but only kissed / The fingers of this hand wherewith I write":

**Elizabeth Barrett Browning**, Sonnet XXXVIII]

The review was not always written as a bait to attract consumers into purchasing books or seeing works. Reviews (see French journalism from the eighteenth century clear through at least around the 1930's, viz. **Francois Caradec's** biography of **Raymond Roussel**) were written in a spirit where it was *taken for granted* that

anyone of taste, any member of the bourgeois community *would have been there*,

or, if some obligation prevented them from attending, such as *another* artwork (---how else, after all, might people have occupied their evening, unless at a dinner party?---), the review became a way of their sorting through all the *hearsay* that they would have encountered about it.

That is to say, the review as a way of giving shape to jumbled impressions that needed sorting out, as a spoon for cold tapioca, especially when it came to controversial modernism. The review standing in relation to the artwork as a definition beside a word in the dictionary, not contesting it or threatening it bullyish, even where it exposes the original to conceal some fault-line (slang), but simulating the other half of the helix that artworks set up, since, if one were not *reading* a review, one would be arguing out a less clear-headed version of the same with friends and neighbors ("What did you think of it?": is it a basis for community or a new community, or will it be divisive for us), but over too many cupfuls or confections.

I would add:

Reviews have their own autonomy or independence from the work they critique. At its best, the review derives from *its own creativity*.

. . . Which is why, in general, the etiquette is that

- (1) the artist puts out the artwork, then
- (2) the reviewer hers,--- and *there is no third step*
- (3) where the artist responds and contests the review.

(In fact, it does happen from time to time, usually to the merriment of knockdown/drag-out results: Los Angeles Times, August 24, 1997 [four days before his seventieth birthday], page 10: **John Ashbery**: "To the Editor: . . . I'm also pleased that when **Alexander Theroux** doesn't like my poetry he lumps me with 'the likes of . . . yam-in-the-mouth **Charles Olson**, a total fraud' . . . I for one would have been interested to learn why a writer of Theroux's stature has it in for . . ."; Alexander Theroux replies: "incomprehensible doodles of his which he has the whim, even if I do not, to call [poetry]. . . although how the writer of the following lines from "Idaho"

"Carol!" he said. Can this be the one time  
??

Biff: The last Rhode island reds are  
"diet of hamburgers and orange juice"

I see into the fields of timothy  
one  
the others time  
change

, , , , , , and they walked back,  
small hand-assemblies"

can presume to call upon anyone to clarify or outline the nature of anything is beyond me. . . . How can a poet of such byzantine contrivances . . . ? Who should know better than he the moral and aesthetic bankruptcy of calling gibberish "poetry" or nonsense "modernist"? . . . My ambition is not that hacks stop writing or that they stop publishing, but for anyone to try to fob off twaddle as poetry, without criticism, is another matter entirely. May I request that Ashbery do me a favor in return? Only explain for me why there are, respectively, precisely 40 question marks and seven commas in a row in "Idaho" and whether using, respectively, 39 and six would have ruined the meaning of that, um, poem." Ashbery Ashbery Ashbery)

One editor continually grills me on whether I'm friends with the poet I want to review. (But who would befriend *me*?! ) I'm not sure if reviews that expressly entered into print with an agenda such as promoting one rank of publishing houses against another wouldn't be similarly partisan.

Although incomplete, this is my language of pleasure.  
<http://phreeque.tripod.com/sealo.html>

Date: Mon, 4 Nov 2002  
Subject: Re: **Of late on the Blog**

**Thomas Bell** <trbell@COMCAST.NET> wrote: > The reason I'm addressing this to the poetics list as well is in the hope that there still some life there. <

**parrishka** <parrishka@SYMPATICO.CA> wrote: > begs the question, "why the blog?" . . . questions about how much feedback the author really wants . . . univocality <

At first, when some List members began advertising their "blogs" (---I think that very few have actually announced them on this List: basically, **Brian Kim Stefans**, **Lewis LaCook**, and, with a vengeance, **Ron Silliman**, to my memory---),

it reminded me of **Foucault's** *Technologies of Self*,

as if that book had predicted this. In short, what *Technologies* says is that the two main forms by which the West built up (the illusion of) Self and the subject, how the West invented subjectivity, was through letter-writing and diary-keeping. Having been through a letter-writing phase (for a short seven years ---since March 1994? The new List interface no longer sub-divides into Archives and Early Archives), for mysterious reasons the List atrophies and "bloggers" begin to spawn off of it. Is it that the preliminary exercise of having practiced Self through a communal letter-writing mode has nurtured a sufficient basis of Self for them to individuate off (as though "blogging" paralleled the maturational phase away from family)? Is it simple technophilia, and that yesteryear's list craze has faddishly given way to the new "blog" tech, so that the nomads will follow the next technology thereafter, in turn? Is it a "sinking boat" phenomenon, whereby the weak-of-stomach simply cannot tolerate the List decay any further and go off on their life rafts? Eulogies might be in order. Have List-productive periods tended to depend on crops of graduate students who cluster amongst themselves in their responses, so that such academics "outgrow" their pupal List phase as the encroaching responsibilities of their new job placements narrow or channel their freedom of expression, no longer at liberty to ad-lib spontaneously,--- and that any yet-to-be-seen periods of communal poetics must await the gradual and accidental reconfiguration of a new crop? (How much of the now rarely seen List Stats records the vestiges of defunct e-mail accounts in its tally?)

Oddly, the years when posts were screened by a monitor (**Christopher W. Alexander**, etc.), delayed in queue, and occasionally "censored" were more productive to discussion than the recent stage of effectively unmonitored twice-a-day posting.

Is it 9/11 Syndrome?

The List and other List members have been a means-to-an-end for many, and, having attained those ends, they jettison the means that helped them there? Has the Buffalo List

*exhausted its potential member pool*, so that there *are* no more poetry experimentalists out there who have not passed through its machinations, and these are the sum total boundaries of the experimentalist population that we are watching reach its collective limits?

Is it true that "bad money drives the good money out"? Is it merely coincidental that the increase of blog announcements happens at the same time as the unprecedented increase of daily poem-posting?

---But, today, the buzz-word "alienation" is more on my mind, and I'm more inclined to see alienation written all over the face of the neo-"blog"-ism. (...as if on **Hannah Weiner's** forehead: ALEINATION.)

Very simply, a shift from mediated one-to-one e-communication to the sort of "sound-proof booth" modality of blog is sort of self-evidently alienation, a shift from dialogue and discussion to monologue and soliloquy.

Even so, the blog announcements themselves take on interesting hallmarks of "spammers," too: Ron's latest, for example, was not confined to the Poetics List, but has cc's to [new-poetry@wiz.cath.vt.edu](mailto:new-poetry@wiz.cath.vt.edu), [WOM-PO@LISTSERV.MUOHIO.EDU](mailto:WOM-PO@LISTSERV.MUOHIO.EDU), and [BRITISH-POETS@JISMAIL.AC.UK](mailto:BRITISH-POETS@JISMAIL.AC.UK). ---Which introduces questions of the imagined/desired audience and, basically, that Society of the Spectacle wins out, yet again: anything that increases a disequilibrium toward a state of spectators and "star" has the greater magnetism, over time.

There were times when fevered disagreement set in on-List about whether "poem-spamming" and "advertisements" should be channeled off into a separate sub-list and the List kept exclusively for discussion. Ironically, that argument has concluded itself *post facto*, where the advertisements remain and the medium for discussion may have extinguished itself.

As said in the **Geert Lovink** quote that **Lewis LaCook** posted, 10/31/02:

"With the current corporate take-over of the Net, one can expect that the publishing activities will change. . . . The Net itself will be a publication tool, to announce new products, fashions, ideas, in short, a new medium to manipulate people. The interactive, democratic part will very soon become a mere marginal aspect of the whole business. It will lose its innovative and subversive part and will become deadly boring. . . . The question is: do you have enough power to go for the second round, to start all over again, each time, after the net orgy will be over, to start again . . ."

[http://www.lyricscafe.com/m/midler\\_bette/bettemidler\\_8.html](http://www.lyricscafe.com/m/midler_bette/bettemidler_8.html)

[and turn on your speakers for sound clips of "Surabaya Johnny" at---]

[Bette Midler](#)

[Marianne Faithful](#)

[Patti Lupone](#)

[Lotte Lenya](#)

Date: Wed, 6 Nov 2002

Subject: Re: **post-election day blues**

Ah, yes. Apocalypses! With their spectacle of red-rouged Whore of Babylon (anti-feminist, the e-poet **Mez** has pointed out to me) and Seal of The Beast (bad P.E.T.A.), all very **Fellini**. Read backwards, it's

ESP-y La Copa !

I, too, have been overly fond of apocalypse, in my day.

The poet **Jane Miller** wrote that, in apocalypse, everyone goes through the misery together, *everyone*. So it's antithetical to individual suffering.

Maybe some "consoling thoughts, words, bromides, slogans, lines, epithets" are to be found in the serendipity of today also being the day that--- actress **Winona Ryder** was found guilt of shop-lifting, in Beverly Hills!

Twice now, I've been out on the street and seen suspiciously effeminate men wearing T-shirts that read "FREE WINONA", with a stencilled caricature of her behind bars.

<http://www.bobfromaccounting.com/bfastore/freewinonadetails.html>

People have stencilled pumpkins "FREE WINONA":

<http://www.yque.com/frewinmiscle.html> .

If the Republican Party is the vehicle that most fully serves and manifests the historical-economic force that we naively used to call "capitalism,"--- then where's the surprise that it's increasingly propelled into full execution of those prerogatives, and that everything is swept up into its momentum,

as if unbelievably driven by the winds from the flapping of the Angel of History's wings? :)

**Rick Lyman** reports in The New York Times, 11/07/02:

'Today, after the verdicts, Ms. Rundle [deputy district attorney] was asked if prosecutors knew why the actress had committed the crimes.

"I cannot get inside her head," she said. "She may have been stealing for the thrill of it or to see if she could get away with it."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/07/national/07WINO.html>

Meanwhile, over in Adam Nagourney's article in the same issue, other people are also asking an Unanswered Question:

'The loss forced a day of soul-searching and hand-wringing among Democrat officials intent on figuring out what had gone wrong, and what it meant ...'

Perhaps, in a sense, the "what had gone wrong" that Democrat officials search after and "why the actress committed the crimes" and what it meant come down to the same **Charles Dodgson** answer: an unstoppable, hypnotic, compulsive drive against conscience, reason, or moderation, toward glitz, lucre, inanity, doggerel, hyperreality; the two coasts flanked by their respective grands dames: the 105 year-old **Madame Chiang Kai-shek** living out her last months on the Upper East Side in Manhattan with her three dogs, Winona in Beverly Hills.

How could they have voted the way they did? Why had the actress committed the crimes?

It can be very instructive and revealing, what sort of tactics and aesthetics people choose when they're finally, irreconcilably overwhelmed into an apparently interminable defeat and powerless against an invincible imperial force. How do you resist the

unbeatable? There's an introduction to an English translation of The Mishnah that suggests that that's what the Talmudists were doing. While the Rome that had overpowered them was devoted to nothing so much as the monumental, the colossal, **Hadrian's** immense marbles, grandeur,--- the pharisaic Jews, having lost everything and with no hope beyond faith, converged upon a project of the picayune, the fussy, the small, the lost, encyclopedic minutiae, in the assembling of The Talmud.

"The Talmud specifies how we can accurately distinguish between kosher and non-kosher eggs. Any egg that has both ends that are either rounded or sharp is definitely the sign of a non-kosher egg. The rounded edge represents suffering and the sorrow of mourning. For the Talmud tells us that mourning is like a sphere which revolves around the world, eventually reaching everyone. The egg's sharp edge represents the exact opposite of the round edge, denoting laughter and rejoicing. People who exclusively live for the pleasures of this world, who are frequently found celebrating at empty and meaningless parties and indulging in many other empty pleasures, pay little or no attention to the inevitable final, solo, one way trip we must all make to the cemetery."

[http://www.breslov.com/world/parsha/vaeschanan\\_5754.html](http://www.breslov.com/world/parsha/vaeschanan_5754.html)

The Times reports that Winona stole \$5,500 worth of designer goods from a Beverly Hills department store:

"including a cashmere **Marc Jacobs** sweater worth \$760, various **Frederic Fekkai** hair adornments worth about \$600 and several pairs of socks, including a cashmere pair from **Donna Karan** worth \$80, inside two shopping bags and a garment bag."

But--- \$760 + \$600 + 80 does not equal \$5,500 worth of designer goods!

$\$760 + \$600 + 80 = *\$1,440!*$

Isn't this artfully concealed discrepancy just more proof of the unabashed trammeling of justice that goes on in this country!?

WHAT were the remaining \$4,060 worth of designer goods that Winona supposedly took!?

And WHY isn't that hateful New York Times TELLING US!!?

Date: Sun, 8 Dec 2002

Subject: **Why Daniel Davidson's Culture is not political poetry**

Perhaps a reply of this length would be better off submitted to somewhere like *Jacket*, but (hey, there's always potlatch)---

**Gary Sullivan's** dare, "neither reader had really read what he was writing terribly closely", was a fair challenge and pretty much the case,--- so I read through the first 45 pp. of the on-line Davidson .pdf and went back to re-read *Culture* from cover to cover, this time paying attention (!), underlining, cross-questioning. And finding it a much more agreeable experience, by finally managing to *by-pass its misrepresentative marketing*.

My initially perhaps cursory reading of *Culture* may have come down to a reaction to its packaging or "false advertising," as it were.

Initially, with the boojum of political poetry very much on my mind, I responded to the SPD catalog's slanting of the book as political, and went in search of it for that reason. Very quickly, I could not ---beyond the broad Language Poetry apologetics of asyntacticalism as revolution (a dogma to which I am sympathetic)--- identify its political resonances; and this omission went on page after page. Becoming impatient with the book for not satisfying the promise its supporters had delivered, I gave up quickly. They sold me political poetry but when I unwrapped it, it was pure poetry.

I was also distrustful, reading the Afterword first, of how large a role the "Breakdown" software that Davidson sometimes used played, described as "an automatic cut & paste generator, taking text and spewing it out, in reordered syntax, endlessly". Where I may be sympathetic to such mechanical prostheses with someone like an Alan Sondheim or their non-automated versions as used by a Mac Low, because the works foreground that very robotics,--- I'm uncomfortable about "wasting" my critical receptivity (reading) on something that plays now-you-see-it/now-you-don't with its own methodologies (and, for example, found my opinion of his book revised downward by reading **Brian Kim Stefans'** readme interview, where he admitted to extensive use of mechanisms in a book I'd previously, gullibly read as authorial): my **Turing** Test scores just aren't high enough. I can read my gas meter if I want to read machinery.

The on-line .pdf (whose contents are completely different from the Krupskaya book) was quickly prompting an antipathy in me similar to my first mishap with *Culture*. The .pdf, unlike the book, however, definitely contains poetry with an explicit/content-based politics, ---although a politics that I find to be pallid, strident, clichéd, and underdeveloped. But let me put that to the side; the book, or at least significant sections of it, became newly rewarding, so it's better to look at how good Davidson can be (and how wrong, although well-intentioned, I think **Ben Friedlander** and Krupskaya [and to a lesser degree Gary Sullivan, who also offers other inroads: the Iraqi buttons are immensely distracting, though] were about what's worthwhile about it.) (I confess to having, currently, skipped over the opening poem, "Product.")

My reaction, frustrated at the struggle it takes to salvage Davidson's very exquisite passages and sensitivities from a sort of contamination by imported influences (and a certain kind of numb blandness he occasionally made no effort to resist, in the .pdf) could be summarized as: How A Good Poet Can Be Ruined By Late 20th Century Poetry Trends.

Davidson writes only long poems: "Product," 20 pages "Bureaucrat, my love," 40; "Anomie," 26; and, in the .pdf, poems 14, 21, and 20 pages. (...which partially stoked my impatience reading the .pdf. Within its long poems, Davidson favored certain serial or modular forms, --prose alternating with verse, the use of text-box side-bars, numbered sections of italicized one-word verses followed by regular stanzas--- so that if I didn't particularly care for a device the first few times around, I felt burdened confronting an even lengthier "ad nauseam" of them. With the .pdf material, I felt a disinterest akin to *boredom*, as each *non sequitur* was promising only the next hairpin turn. Overstimulation leads to anomie.)

The book's poem "Bureaucrat, My Love" strikes me as its "the best," despite its deceptive title. (My reading, from here on, elides the boundaries between separate poems and reads *Culture* all of one piece.) Yes, there were, occasionally but *only* occasionally, traces of an identifiable politque

("spirits of deregulation", in the sense that Reagan made "deregulation" a buzz-word, or the fire arms of "the handed revolver" [p. 33]; the monetarism that so plagues the .pdf: "shifting values and wealth"; "armies of mere ideological coincidence" and "stamps of crime" [34]; "each citizen's perfect cure" [36]; etc.)

but I found those blips rapidly receding in significance as the meat of Davidson's "real" poetic concerns took over entirely. And he could be quite weak at politics: "the owners assume ownership" [118]. Just as fragmentary as my quotations of them, those fleeting glimpses of erstwhile politics are embedded splinter-like in a larger whole that has other, more compelling concerns. Politics may have remained somehow undigested or "split-off" in Davidson.

The poetry in *Culture* is not, per se, political by any means. Its strengths are that it is

(1) *philosophical*, philosophical to the point of ontological;

(2) it surrenders to rhapsodies of lyricism so unabashed that they verge upon sentimentality;

(3) it's preoccupied by matters of *belief* that bespeak a near-religious transcendence; and there's a good return to "non-political" themes such as

(4) dreams,

(5) our physical embodiment and desire in "the body", "skin", etc (although "The Body", the body-as-narrative and so on, was very much a consciously politicized art object in the '90s, after its representation became the focus of the battle against the NEA), and

(Addenda) a sense of separation or blockade (alienation?) epitomized in his concept of "distance" (glimpsed in the figure of "walls" and the doors that lead through them).

Each of these Davidsons has to be looked at, to see how claims about Davidson's political poetry recede out of proportion.

## (1) THE PHILOSOPHICAL DAVIDSON

He re-visits big, macrocosmic concepts, almost **Wallace Stevens**-style, such as "world", often very beautifully

(conjoining one abstraction, "world," with another, infinity: "Cast an eye into the infinite world" [38]; sometimes making the idea tangible by apprehending or juxtaposing it to the sense of touch, as in: "The world opens onto a shell and awaits its skin" [57], "the shape hammers away / and now we are at the center of the world link palms and predict" [58], or "the world wraps completely, / my body" [110]; "to withdraw from the world would not beg in or begin" [57]; "conditions favor another world sounding this rhyme of semitones" [60]),

--- but it has to be kept clear that that sense of "world" is not on the same experiential plane as, say, a *world power* as a political horizon, or the politics of New World Order: it's not experienced at all; it's either theorized or rhapsodized. Even where not named verbatim, this cosmological intellection of his is there, but never mundane: "plastic multiple universes" [39]. This abstract idea of "world" perhaps reaches its best, most nuanced and autobiographical summarization in the line on the second-to-last page:

Make the words of many into a world of one thing.

The *genre* of that *idée fixe*, again, is not political but has more to do with, say, **Schopenhauer's** philosophical tome, *The World as Will and Representation* ("the world is insufficient but has its place or I close my eyes" [53]). Rather than historical materialism, what he pauses over is "the real in the imaginary" [30].

What a remarkable, meaningful line, and how true: the public, collective entity of language ("the words of many") narrows down to claustrophobic monomania ("a world of one thing"); signification, he implies, is always a case of obsession. Indeed, the philosophical for him is a virtual *habitation*, and it operates as a surrogate locale or location, someplace you can live: "In slang terms, let's face the town of another philosophy" [77]; "a reminder of the distant home of thought" [115].

## (2) THE LYRICAL DAVIDSON

Well, beauty's another thing altogether, and you almost have to sit back and drop jaw and all critical pretenses and just let it wash over you, he gets so positively romanticist:

and then the complexity shakes itself  
loose  
and I am repeated and the fallen air is reaped of  
its clay

[54]

(This peculiar notion of a person being "repeated," ---a very different, mysterious and metaphysical reiteration than the political repetition seen in Marxist ideology about the social order "reproducing itself"--- recurs, as though lives came in triplicate: "Applying a scale of desire, the woman is repeated" [86].)

More lyrical euphoria:

lights dim and glow  
this standing where the shadow of falls has always  
been a distant gleam  
an endless myth

[60]

Blood bores me and all the stones holding still  
close to the water's edge.

[61]

Why, the very air derives from short gasps.

[95]

Late yesterday a scarcity of evening light, as  
flowers roam in dust

[96]

His lyricism does what lyricism is good for: meaning, implication and content are compressed into a condensation so intact that paraphrase or interpretation can barely extract its sub-text.

Lyricism tends toward crystalization. It must be sung, not understood.

the resulting bed turned down, remote, warmed and  
set upon a  
further star

[97]

...the courage it takes to revert to such unapologetic poeticisms ("a further star")! The gamble, though, is always that quasi-archaic poeticisms bring with them a thoroughly resolved and conventionalized emotional connotation, that is, sentimentality:

As touch out-paces the dim outline, hands grow  
lucid and charmed. ...  
The grey-green dusk of morning presents an offering

[103]

But he's not in the least ashamed of such indulgence. The book ends on a tremolo violin crescendo of lines whose melodrama rivals the line "Here and there, in cold pockets / Of remembrance, whispers out of time" (the conclusion of *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*) in their endearing raptures of weepiness (which I like very much):

the related, silvered pastures of moonlight  
the instant passing of a face in the distance  
if tomorrow, or yesterday, or barely out of sight.  
This is what we brought to take with us  
then couldn't find. Even then  
the wasted, watered landscape grows  
faint, constellations seen to glow  
when looked at from beneath another side.

This lyricism throughout *Culture* functions as a departure into The Sublime, with all its many definitions, principally a zone of feeling in equilibrium that is immune or oppositional to the think-think-think passions of his philosophical side. (See Addendum on "absorption", below.)

### (3) DAVIDSON THE TRUE BELIEVER

He doesn't in the least blink away from (avoid) a very *counter-political* vocabulary of religion, and a Judaeo-Christianized one at that ---"grace," "litany," "sacrifice," the "offering" that "morning presents" (above), "impenitence," prayer, "sanctuary," sacred music, etc.:

"faces emerge in a state of grace" [53]; "absorbing moments / before a deepening litany anonymous / as though we haven't looked anymore / as the sacrifice begins" [54]; "impenitence", with all its attendant redemptions [55]; "gentleness that cold sand prays to

and releases" [58]; "Between named distance and the sanctuary of fable" [73]; "rock-hymns" [78].

These vestiges of *faith* that are operative throughout *Culture* may take as their object desiderata other than theology's, but the underlying mental (or spiritual) action remains the same, one of belief; the direct object changes, but the verb is the same: "Belief in nouns walk free" [96]; "unassigned disengaged / unbelieving running fingers over its surface" [59]; "pearl of belief" [99] (*vide* the Christological figure of "the pearl of great worth" as a metaphor for faith).

The residue of creed shows so much through the surface, that *Culture* has motifs of hymnology that it revises, the way **Charles Ives'** Third Symphony is filled with old hymn tunes: "Mine eyes have seen the glory or what submits" [70] (original verse: "Mine eyes have seen the glory / *Of the coming of The Lord.*") (Inasmuch as the same hymn may in fact be an anthem, The Battle Hymn of The Republic, the example would be ambiguous in favor of whether the material were religious/fideistic or political,--- except that similar latent content reappears elsewhere in *Culture* as unambiguously part of the *belief*-paradigm: "belief / handles its sword". *Vide* "His terrible swift sword", from the same hymn).

#### (4) DAVIDSON THE DREAMER

It's essential to the rationalism of political consciousness that it be, first and foremost, *conscious*, that is, at the very least *awake*. But *Culture* is a groggy sort of book that continually keeps nodding off on itself. It falls asleeps and revives and slumbers back into a deeper dream. And one does not speak of political dreaming:

even where those dreams are embraced with an ironic twinge of sloganeering, as in: "Everyday living through dreams" [40]; "I woke myself from a dream and sleep memories" [57]; "In a fond moment of memory do we all dream the same dreams" [47]; "the impenitence fashioning itself into its own / dream a future of color and shape" [55]; "In the morning dreams awaken with you" [60]; "Again and again in the red light no dream left in pieces" [62]; "I walked last night to another city, into an other room / ...a dream... / an endless patterning" [ellipses his, 106]; "sustenance, as an unsustainable waking" [118]; "I am awakened without sleeping" [34]; as part of a psychology: "radiant wisdom, grief, sleep" [98]; "the smallest particle at sleep" [111].

(Am I misinterpreting his use of dreams and sleep, and is it the inverse of what I'm saying? Are the dreams in *Culture* a *bad* somnolence that stands in contrast to some healthy rigor of realpolitik thought? I can't see how. Regardless, they function very importantly, as sleep does, as nocturne, as the lapses between consciousness, but not, I think, as an existential nothingness, since sleep in *Culture* is consistently punctuated by the alterity of dream life which Davidson remembers "fond"-ly (above).)

Sleep is so central an action that the long poem "Bureacrat, My Love" ends with the line:

doubtless circles around as if waking

[64].

## (5) THE BODY AND DESIRE

In opposition to Davidson's stratospheric philosophical thought, he remains mindful of its irreducible opposite, the body and the body's sense of touch ("running fingers over its surface" [59]). It is often represented by metonymy through the agency of individual body parts (hands, etc.), but its weight establishes its imponderability through the full, undifferentiated presence of "body" *qua* "body" throughout the poetry.

Sometimes the answer that might lie within that body is interrogated out, to test if it is truly an element of The Ideal and not of the real ("if my hand touches the plaster dress / has it already touched its perfect body?" [57]), and sometimes that body is carefully, almost supernaturally attended to, apprehended and even *heard* through a kind of synaesthesia ("Listen to the film in your hands" [61]). It does not remain a barrier to the imagination nor does it succumb to barriers, in a kind of super-human walk-through-walls/eye-of-the-needle motion ("Outside of my body I can move through almost any opening" [52]). If, in instances, the body appears lost in a neutered bureaucratise ("my body, compensations, procedures" [119]), it's invoked just as well in hypostasized, beatific illumination ("hand-held as lights without bodies" [115]) or it disappears and is not seen at all ("where the body goes into hiding" [49]).

To the arguably slight, slight degree, however, that *Culture* still may also retain a minor theme of politics, as seen in agents of politics such as a police force ("the guard drops from gravity" [118], despite that this example happens to find any such power politics represented as a weak, overpowered force), that dream-like police force meets the body not through violence but in semi-eroticized confrontation with the body's ultimate nakedness: "Officer strips the body, then the shore" [87] ("body" retains the secondary meaning of "corpse", which could lead to an alternative interpretation about mortality rather than eros); when that body is not completely stripped, political force still impacts upon it by seeking to disturb and enter into its *clothes* ("All passengers are noted and searched" [43]). This theme of "body" is, then, the antithesis to politics, since it would be what politics tries to subdue or denude.

Almost like a more quiescent distant relative of Artaud's "body without organs", it is so much the kinaesthetic sense organ in its entirety that it exists as one vast cutaneous surface of skin ("Then is the enemy that skin does and does not" [70]; "How beautiful the skin works" [74]; "I complete my skin" [82]) or a magicalized inner network of capillaries and arteries ("light enters into the veins" [113]; "Imagine resting, stately veins / brushed against the surface" [116]). However multiplicitous its purposes in *Culture*, the body, in the end, may be serving foremost as a *measure of all things* ("zero through one / about the size of a hand" [58]), a yardstick that gives the proportions of everything else ("devise and repeat / the length of scale, each skin" [102]).

{I do not find the alternative, morbid possible reading of the word "body" to be operative in *Culture*, because it seems everywhere counterbalanced by the vital, appetitive drive of *desire*. Indeed, the two are sometimes unequivocally conjoined, if in a slightly counterintuitive order ("the substance of desire / follows hazards of skin" [35]), or the two words function almost synonymously ("the length of scale, each skin", and "Applying a scale of desire" [86]). It can be a sort of currency or fiduciary system of exchange in itself ("moves desire between them" [91]); this interstitial in-betweenness of desire is a terrain of intermediation, a dividing-line ("this map expects to cross desire" [96]). Unlike the stasis that inheres in the alternative reading of the word, Davidson's "desire" flickers by very quickly and kinetic ("Each version / displays its organ. Its blank light, / the rapid desire" [88]).

## THEATER, NOT POLITICS

The central point I'm belaboring here has been that anything that might have appeared lacking in my previous assessment of *Culture* as "hermetic politics" is, for one, all too amply demonstrable by in fact going ahead and reading the book "terribly closely", since much more elaborated and mutually cohesive dimensions emerge out of the poetry. Were I in fact in error, ---a counter-argument that would basically have to ignore the evidence of the book itself (how more terribly closely has anyone else read it?),--- or how I arrived at that preliminary, more cursory conclusion was the result, I daresay, of how the para-literary (blurbs, marketing) can be at cross-purposes with the literary, and proceed out of assumptions or information about the *person* to the neglect of the poet.

In defense of that para-literary apparatus, even in its misdirection, though, there may have been other hints in the blurb on the back of the book and the SPD/Kruspskaya that someone else would have found spoke louder to them than the reiterated promotion of the book on the basis of its putative but difficult-to-back-up politics. Gary Sullivan also wrote: "He approached the book almost like a method actor". And Davidson himself wrote: "An excited theatre fondles transition" [75]; and he wrote: "act falling into artifact theater / invisible" [29]; and, transposing and omitting **Ingmar Bergman's** "Cries", he wrote: "whispers and theaters" [63]. It was all play-acting. It's just that somebody else was more taken in by a face-to-face persona, whereas this reading is based on his writing.

If politics drains out of *Culture* upon closer inspection, as I think it does here as the stronger, more introverted, poetic dimensions of the book come forward, ---these interpretations are consistent in their all being variations on the *contemplative*--- that is not to say that the book came utterly without any valid interpretive key or that his loyal executors had somehow betrayed the work, necessarily, by re-casting it in an unbalanced, ungrounded projection based more on autobiography than on the literature of the book's actual contents: that may just be the inevitable distortion that results from all *ad hominem* criticism that concentrates more closely on the author and the biographical than upon the text itself. Equally upon re-examination, it was only *one note* of Friedlander's blurb that Kruspskaya seems to have seized upon in portraying *Culture* as political poetry: "Politics for Dan Davidson was . . .", "action undreamt by the revolutionaries he admired".

Friedlander also picks up on the same "method actor" theme of Sullivans's: "Not street theater, but the street theatricalized . . . a role".

Books don't sell any more if you promote them as *drama*?

I do not think that I am minimalizing the vestigial evidence of political consciousness that can be found in *Culture*, and hardly in favor of some covert agenda about the political. To the contrary, let me be over-scrupulous at the faintest hint: The fragments may be there

(a couple of times, a theme of history, or factories; "armies of mere ideological coincidence" [34]; "yellow bureaucratese" [39]; "statistical evidence", "another satisfied customer" [43]; politics as summed up in law, ----although a law, oddly, associated with the sartorial: "Everyone violates the law in plain clothes" [46], and "each fossil or play of law or cloth to wear" [61]; "I live to the fullest extent of the law" [77]; and his poverty and his aversion to money re-cast as economics: "I pay rent to a man of impeccable etiquette" [39]; "Each of my friends has amassed a supply of wealth" [45]; "foreign debt" [100])

but those bits and pieces are all too often only a vacated verbal *residue* of the political, "bureacratese" without any actual bureaucrat ---and without any true activist,--- that appears at the most asyntactical junctures and, consequently, at those points where '90s poetic trends leave meaning and intention at its most unverifiable. Sure, I see, here and there, the trace of a sort of *scum* of politics that floats on the surface of *Culture*. But it isn't, to my ear, *integrated* into the composition as a sufficient structural device for it to be read as any mainstay or dominant axis of its architecture that can be interrelated to the other building blocks that are brought into relief here. It's a loose shingle in the building, not a cross-beam.

{If my reading also seems to be overlooking the portrait of the "suffering" Davidson as a dead-end that the work is supposed to have prefigured, it's not because he was some sort of one-dimensional poet too untalented to have thoroughly included explorations of pain into his magnum opus, at times quite plaintively and pianissimo ("a breaking that can't hurt / a barely discernible scar" [37]), nor one so untalented as to allow private angst to *overpower and eclipse* all other directions, nor to consign that pain to mere post-modern stylistic repression ("The codified systems of silence, hidden by definition" [86]). The book's numerous modalities include Existential insights ("the fresh air-stinging void" [100]), at times with unbridled, Dionysiac vengeance ("what can only be ripped apart / in tender, supple cuts and pieces" [117]). I understate that teleology of reading a death in reverse backward onto the life it coincides with (or I do not in fact at all find it as a sub-text in *Culture*) because the book that I've detailed here is so versatile, philharmonic, and well-articulated that it's too healthy for that; it's larger than any single, fatal symptomatology (just as it's larger than political poetry) and I can't imagine any sound-minded, poetry-literate psychologist having read it in advance and found some sort of terminal case warning signal imbedded in it.

{But Davidson appears to have been shrewd enough, too, to foresee that "The offending self slips into rumor" [30], that anything art strategically leaves out will have to be filled back in by some future *Lives of The Poets*. He teases, in a meta- moment, at how his very method somewhat precludes summarization into the reductively personal:

So all this talk adds to the idea of the  
encyclopedia  
seems to be a refraining index never having  
localized any subject or what personal?

[40]

but the joke he makes of that lacuna reveals a wry attitude that's quite different from post-modernity's righteous, anti-Humanistic conviction about its self-censorship. Maybe because his method was realistic enough to anticipate (a simulacrum of) the personal as an unavoidable accident that, willy-nilly, always comes with language:

To speak is to appear as a continuum  
linking resemblances in an apparent world.

[81}}

Certainly, there is a fragile, tinkling "Handle With Care" breakability that can be heard in the background of *Culture*, intermittently, the way crystal will ring out if a singer's voice hits too high a note ("boundary of glass" [29]; "Ingenué, is this your heart of glass?" [77]; "Occasional death, trait, hint of glass" [95]; "Her house is made of glass and steel" [109]), but that's what's *good* and artistic about *Culture*. It's not grounds for commitment.

All these parameters of his poetry evade the political, because they aim to descend to meditate upon a rumbling, unlegislatably level *below* the *terra firma* of the body politic:

Beneath the city, fire, and the cool tunnels  
it looked like some weird horror film

[114]

---

[ADDENDA]

## DISTANCE

Space, while sometimes concretely inventoried in *Culture* as domestic space ("the bed floor curtain window door room / what is the language of this place?" [116]), also carries

abstracted resonances of the poetical-metaphysical Faraway, a Beyond expressed as "distance". It re-appears variously, a nowhere out of Bachelard. That distance can still be subordinated under the domination of language ("Between *named* distance and the sanctuary of fable" [73], my italics) rather than apprehended geographically, hence, a sign.

He can be glib about it, again recapturing distance in language, this time the language of a pun ("What a distance a day makes" [73], playing on the Esther Phillips disco hit lyric), while still tweaking undertones of left-over meaning such as (grammatological?) *difference*. Davidson's distance can carry something of the exile of "stranger in a strange land" ("Foreign, distant, the long version spring of neutrality" [101]), and there is a loneliness about it, a solitude agitated by the accelerated loss of the other and the gaze ("the instant passing of a face in the distance" [119], although faces are not legible from a distance; "Rated in the distance below a coming measure, a look" [79]).

Indeed, this powerful motif of distance is intricately linked with other core preoccupations of his, that of a pensive, philosophical-contemplative life ("the distant home of thought" [115]) and themes of his such as his elusive, doubling sense of repetition ("Repeated in the far distance" [96]).

The political is understood to be an arena of action, and where it is not, inaction becomes a passivity resulting from oppression or apathy; but this ever-present distance in Davidson's imagination lessens or eliminates the instances and salience of action, not necessarily out of some lumpen impotence, though, but out of speculative states of rest and repose ("At distance, / more than shape or act, . . . / . . . offering hands in reflection and ease" [98]).

Where, rarely, architecture interposes itself to block and interrupt the tides of that distance, it is symbolic of impasse, estoppages ("Each of us blurs before our own walls" [45]) that are so strong in their definiteness that they render *us* indistinct, the object betraying the subject. It is unclear whether those blockades have any route of passage built into them, and even if so, if those passageways would only anticipate their shutting ("the doors would close there / are no doors" [57]), stated as a paradox. Which may be why, earlier, he has to jettison his body to get through such openings: they're very narrow ("a small crack in the door" [113]). These doors leading through distances don't behave as entrances or exits. They're more a form of hide-&-seek ("He disappears behind a door that he enters into view" [50]).

Date: Sun, 8 Dec 2002

Subject: **ADDENDUM: Absorption**

## **FURTHER OBSCURE PHILOSOPHIZING: ABSORPTION**

(Did **Charles Bernstein's** essay "Artifice of Absorption" mean anything to **Daniel Davidson**?)

That strange concept of *repetition* of self or others ("I am repeated") is only one of several inscrutable, private concepts that fuel *Culture*. I do not mean to portray his philosophical side as the popular caricature of philosophizing as a cold intellectual pursuit; **Laura Riding Jackson** said about herself that, if **W.H. Auden** was a poet of history, she would be one of philosophy, and Davidson, when his poetry is strong, also meets ideas from the standpoint of the philosopher-*poet*, picturesquely, leaving them in their mystery (there is a weak streak to some of his writing, though, where the poetry drains out of his attempt at art totally, as in the **Jenny Holzer**-isms in the .pdf file). Its meaning eludes me, but another arcane principle that his personal universe operates on is *absorption*.

Absorption is not an aspect of the possible or real, though: when the thing undergoing absorption is not itself another abstraction, such as measurement or time ("questions imagine its opposite absorbing the lengths of encounter" [53]; "stray of a quiet stare absorbing moments" [54]), then it simply defies reality and involves an other-than-human surrealism ("Buildings that animals absorb / penetrate anyone" [29]). A world of absorption would be a literally fluid one. In both cases, then, it is a property of the central philosophical imagination that drives him: absorption is a Davidsonian fantasy that is carried out by *thought*, and that is carried out upon various mannequin-like figures missing people left behind ("she approximates a statue that thinking absorbs and / disgorges" [58]; "Those brilliant figures track to the left, absorbed" [98]).

Enigmatic usages of his like those may not be able to be resolved. He may have been a person (poet) capable of pivoting on unknowns.

Date: Tue, 10 Dec 2002

Subject: **my dog ate the first 17 pages in my copy of Daniel Davidson's *Culture***

Well, then, I guess what you're saying is [turn on your speakers for sound clip]--- "[If you don't eat your meat, you can't have any pudding / How can you have any pudding if you don't eat your meat?](#)" (Pink Floyd's "The Wall")

gpsullivan@HOTMAIL.COM wrote:

> Like having a discussion about a punchline without taking into account the rest of the joke. <

Funny you should say that: I just sent a manuscript off to an open call for submissions, and the opening poem in the book, "Sound Effects," begins:

A man goes into a bar. There's a dog  
standing on its hind legs behind the bar,  
polishing shotglasses on an apron it wears.

Elected officials should stop leaking news items  
to the press if they're unwilling to face  
spuming branding irons poised to set fire  
to their front gates, stamping searing ensignias  
into bleached acacia wood. . . .

The opening lines (tercet) are borrowed from the beginning of numerous commonly told jokes (leading into a sort of illustrated cocktail napkin cartoon, and then veering off elsewhere [into--- the political?!]) without bothering ever to return to or even consider the ~possibility~ of a punch line.

So, on some level, yeah, I *am* all too willing to discuss punchlines without taking into account the rest of the joke. And vice-versa. (...Although I think your metaphor is sort of flipflopped, proportionately.) I read a book about **Aesop's** fables which assessed which ones might actually have been the "original" fables and which were the imitative genre that came after it, and the book totally excluded any consideration of the *morals* that are tagged on at the end. --- Famously, in Biblical studies, there's the "shorter version" of The Gospel According to **St. Mark**, too: it leaves out the final chapter about the Resurrection.

The problem you're attaching to my reading (which, granted, may indeed be a serious, preposterous problem) is that, by leaving out the first 25 out of 119 pages ("Product" is actually only 17 pages), the 83% of the book that I did read somehow doesn't count or cannot stand on its own footing, without that remaining 1/5th of the book. But then, what you're proposing is an aesthetic of the unitary, of the artwork as an indivisible totality, --- no?--- where *Culture* can only be approached in its wholeness and intact completeness

(really, that "Product" is the filter that the remaining poetry cannot be approached without, the skeleton key),

--- but that only puts Davidson completely out of step with the mentality of the '90s and why he would have used "Breakdown" software in the first place (to deregulate the primacy or necessity of order [whereas order is the very thing you're defending! You're reinstating an unimpeachable global syntax to over-arch the book, whereas he took pains to disempower syntax at every turn]). Is that *really* the compositional principle of Davidson's that you want to fault me for having failed to respect: his *linearity*??

Before a deck of cards is dealt, it's shuffled, and then it can be "cut," dividing it in half and moving the second stack in front of the first. That's about how much of "a reason Dan put it at the beginning" survives, after "Breakdown," I'd say.

There is an important underlying difference, though, between my hermeneutic and your reply's (despite that yours superficially resembles or copies mine: list-like "evidence", etc). I did organize my "findings" according to their general types and tried to extract a portraiture that accounts for and harmonizes what emerged,--- but the sort of thematic-motivic analysis that I followed proceeded *inductively*, by delineating first *what's there*, without preconceptions, and letting the diction that Davidson himself chose to operate as motifs be shown as such.

These words, "world," "dream," etc., are what *he* reasserted, over and over. I only come in as an observer trying to interpret the *objective* content that results from his refrains. In some cases ("absorption", "repeat"), I don't even know how to *name* what he's doing or saying, it's so abstruse; but I am at least having the honesty to argue that it's a disservice to his artistry to leave all that out of the picture. If the first 1/5th of the book or any part of it is political, that political side has to be *reconciled* to these other dimensions, without just brushing them into oblivion or missing them entirely.

But your reply moves from the a priori conclusion, that he is in fact political, and then searches out documentation that would substantiate that prejudice.

And the kind of politics that you want to pin on him is a prefabricated doctrinaire position that's as cliché as "productivised social relations". If that's true, then it was politically very unimaginative of him. (As if card-carrying Party member artists were to crib their poetry off of the small print and instructions on the back of the card.) "Productivised social relations" sounds like exactly the sort of empty jargon he was attacking (?) and problematizing in his long series of **Jenny Holzer** Truism-isms, in the .pdf's poem "An Account". ---There: "Anything not used in the creation of profit is automatically suspected of being subversive" [.pdf p. 14]; and the transgression in my omission of "Product" is that I've left something "*not used*"!

The dilemma here may be: was Davidson as politically simplistic and exaggerated as the occasional political passages in his poetry would make him seem ("Product Control, Inc."???) and therefore writing political poetry (and maybe just bad at it),

or,

is there a poet there who is good enough, ---a genuine "masterpiece," as **Ben Friedlander** blurbed,--- that he should be defended from his own ambiguity by insisting that it ~was~ ambiguous and not the agitprop that it resembles?

You're taking his "politicaese" (like the "bureaucratese" he mentions) very literally.

Meanwhile, take a closer look at the Iraqi buttons. (Afterword by **Gary Sullivan**: "During the Gulf War Dan made up a batch of pins that read 'Iraqi.' The idea was that you'd wear them in public --- which I don't think he convinced many of his friends to do, although he certainly wore one himself. . . . Benjamin Friedlander recalls telling Dan he'd wear one if it read 'Arab' or 'Arabic'---Ben felt that if Dan's point was to humanize the 'enemy' it would be more accurate to refer to them as people (Arabs) as opposed to a government (Iraq).") They can stand in as a model here.

What the Iraqi buttons were doing was taking the immediately and topically political, today's headline, and then *swapping and mismatching* its signifiers so that the political is exposed as a way of *mislabeled* and misidentifying everything. Davidson was, essentially, treating politics as though it were a giant form of "Breakdown", scrambling the signification and syntax of *people's place* within the political order (Americans wearing "Iraqi" buttons were *not* Iraqis, so the political signifier is as arbitrary and spurious as any).

Your Afterword brings out how he made poetry out of specifically assembled collections of books and "source material", by genre, that included hordes of art and culture theory discourse, mass media, and women's beauty magazines. I don't know why, with his treating discourses as virtually interchangeable anthropological fodder, you then make an exception and see *Culture* as having retained *one* sole precious discourse that he would not sully with irony or alienation, a political discourse that must be the "*real*" *herz-sprach* of Daniel Davidson.

In which case, the second half of the dilemma, what I would prefer: the critique in Davidson would be a critique of *politics*,

rather than critique *as* politics or if its effects.

And I'm not convinced that all the quotes that you collect as counter-weight would in fact hold up as substantively "political" under further review.

In your first example, I can certainly recognize "packaging" and even "exchange" as being more of his cynicism (critique) about relations, alright. But the abstractness of the surrounding thought ("Reception is a particular . . . , an object. This establishes, if attended, a paradigm . . . , walking across the room to find it") seems entirely the language of the "philosophical" Davidson that I was arguing. (The currency of the term "paradigm" originates in *science*, with **Thomas Kuhn's** *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and in linguistics, with **Roman Jakobson's** paradigmatic axis, ---to name only one.)

This effect of his writing, ---a tendency, where political vocabulary does occur, for it to occur as flotsam within a field of other-than-political discourse,--- is what I tried to describe as a fragmentary, residual vocabulary being embedded in an unintegrated way. There has been no *absorption* of those elements. They're garnished on. If the first 17 pages are very, very politically charged but you're more or less leaving it undisputed that a (terribly) close reading shows the remaining 83 to be only marginally political,--- that's why I was saying that the political in him is "*split-off*"! Amassing it mainly in the book's prelude or overture *compartmentalizes* any politicism.

And so on, throughout your examples (another difference in our two methods is that I tried to offer paraphrased explanations alongside each individual quote. You're treating your quotes ---voila!--- as self-evident. They're not): The politics of "Entering is participation, identity, multiply unique, restricted to what replays, recalls, aligns, within the silence that tells about feeding it" seems hermetic, at best, to me (What do you imagine that all those abstractions *mean*, that it could be an illustration of "critique of productivised social relations"? There seems to be a great deal of *reading into* on your part. Is it that you equate abstraction with politics? We seem to be reading English with two incompatible dictionaries. What I considered to be an absolute *depth sounding* of the book, you're calling "face value." [At what level, then, *should* his "dream" poetry be taken, given the first 17 pages? What does "dream" mean in light of all this political re-tuning? You seem to be saying that getting through "Product" would've allowed me to coast down-hill from there on and only *half*-read the rest of the book, to unburden everything I found there of its meaning.] To me, that language is psychological ["identity"] or technological ["replays"], etc. Please: What part of the word "silence" am I not understanding?). Etc., etc. I absolutely cannot see what political resonance you find in "See the differences . . . at all locations". . . . Etc.: "Blend in, stand out, in the fragrant melding of trust, warmth and comfort, a fabrication learning to collect"--- politics?? I can see the politics in "armed camp" (who could miss it?) but, in the same sentence that you're arguing against my claims, "ritual" only takes us back to the belief-religiosity question, and "never far from" right back to the "distance" motif.

Yes, to an extent, of course, we're playing Ten Blind Indian Swamis Meet Their First Elephant. The blind swami who touches the elephant's trunk says it's a serpent, and the blind swami who touches its leg says it's a tree trunk . . .

My omission of "Product" was not "selectively ignoring" (in the sense of purposefully "conveniently" or some sort of unfriendly intentionality). It was done arbitrarily. I *said* "I

confess to having, currently, skipped over the opening poem, 'Product.'" "Product" is shaped differently on the page; more of it is prose. Sometimes I skip over prose parts in poetry books: I find that I can't switch my meter-meter quickly. (I once burned a CD of all the connective recitative interludes in Handel's opera, *Radamisto*, and left out all the arias.) I never saw *Deer Hunter*. I'm sorry the dog ate the first 17 pages of my copy!

So, I'll read "Product."

{"Return and there's another bag. Return and there's another bag. Return and there's another bag" sounds like just the kind of Koyanisqaatsi politics I can't get enough of.}

-----

The octopus says, 'Play it? Hell if I can work out how to get it's pajamas off, I'm gonna screw it!!'

<http://www.jokes2go.com/jokes/7626.html>

...and she whispers "Hey big boy....want to go shopping?"

<http://www.jokes2go.com/jokes/19673.html>

The man throws back his last shot and says, "Fifty cents."

[http://www.maximonline.com/jokes/joke\\_47.html](http://www.maximonline.com/jokes/joke_47.html)

Date: Sun, 15 Dec 2002

Subject: "good"/"bad" poetry

Although I used to vehemently reject simplistic "good"/"bad" poetry distinctions and interrupt conversation if they were used, I've somewhat mellowed, and I find situations in which the terms make sense, ---especially since, no matter how thoroughly one seems to have hygenicized one's thinking, the occasion sure enough always arises where one slips into those all-too-basic terms.

I think they're validly operative (1) where they're spoken on an assumption of a shared understanding, so that the terms serve as a form of short-hand for something that both parties have a common basis for or where further elaboration was undertaken in nearby texts that can be taken for granted as "Recommended Reading", where "good"/"bad" are simultaneously translated back into more extended ideas, (2) where they're used for reasons of verbal efficiency, and a more accurate and detailed explanation would prove too lengthy or unwieldy, or a "good"/"bad" question is not the central point under consideration, so that casualness of word-choice can be disregarded as peripherally trivial, or (3), their most frequent use, where you're lacking the critical apparatus to make more nuanced distinctions.

There are, to follow **Nick Piombino's** metaphor, in fact numerous circumstances where standards about "good"/"bad" meditation, free association and prayer prevail. --- Some Orthodox Jews, for instance, hold that any form of prayer that does not exclusively praise G-d but that *asks for something*, a petition, is bad prayer or not prayer at all, that it is a form of *magic* in its attempt to influence or compel the deity. Similarly, the same and related prayer-communities reject *idolatrous* prayer as bad. Prayer that is performed as a ceremonious, rote recitation without affective involvement is rejected as "bad" in many denominations. Or prayer that's done out of superstition. Etc. --- Meditation: Korean Zen talks about "chich" (a word meaning the sound of crickets), the chatter of the mind that meditation aims to quiet; so that if meditation remained completely an ongoing opportunity for the meditators to, in fact, be making grocery lists in their heads or planning the weekend, their meditation would be regarded as "bad." Or meditation, say, with the ulterior motive of gaining prestigious social standing as a result of Enlightenment, rather than ending suffering by it. Otherwise there would be no ~schools~ of meditation with teacher and disciple. The teacher is there to help the disciple move away from directionless, wasteful, "bad" meditation. --- And, along with free association, psychoanalysis brings the concept of "resistance," the analysand's persistent attempts to refuse, hide, circumvent and avoid the repressed material that would be a liberatory discovery whose truth would alleviate symptoms. If an analysand's version of free association stayed perpetually in a state of resistance, the analyst might eventually be forced to terminate therapy since it wasn't "getting anywhere" (= "bad").

(Each of these "good"/"bad" distinctions largely operate out of their own local cultural communities,--- which is where the notorious *relativity* of such criteria enters in.)

"Good"/"bad" poetry isn't necessarily *intrinsically* good/bad; but there is a constant assumption about *relative* good/bad that underlies poetry's institutions, even where "bad" would only be the least superlative in a string of "good," "not as good," "very good," etc. The fact that magazines *reject* some submissions comes out of a tacit agreement about "good"/"bad". And book contests and awards are judged with implicit standards of "good"/"bad" (*The \*Best\* American Poetry*).

The "good"/"bad" issue is somewhat deflected by poetry communities' clannish tendency to see "bad" poetry as principally the style of poetry being written by opposing poetry communities. (Judgments against "bad" poetry tend to be global and sweeping: **Ron Silliman** recently wrote, "It is not that bad poetry cannot be written in the post-avant mode - sign on to the Poetics List for awhile".)

I do find myself having a feeling of "bad poetry" about certain writing that's closer to my own sympathies, lately, though, in reading much "post-Language Poetry" or second generation Language. It feels like: my impatience, an unwillingness to read the poetry from beginning to end, a feeling of *deja-vu*, "been there/done that"... My reaction is probably a case of (3), above, a failure of my critical preparedness: critical sensibilities that I'd learned or developed for reading *1980s* Language Poetry are somehow not able to re-articulate what's happening when confronted by a *simulacrum* of 1980s Language Poetry; what applies in one case somehow does not carry over to a near look-alike that shares much the same features, ...although I can't yet say how I know it's *Memorex*. In another area of fashion, its attempt at charm would be called "retro".

I suspect that this sense of "bad" ---using Language Poetry's own aesthetics (of a poetry weighted toward the reader as the ultimate arbiter of meaning whose ~active~ involvement must complete the business of meaning)--- comes out of the impression that the investment or meaning-making that I would have to rise to the occasion to make would be *greater* (more time- and energy-consuming) than the compositional investment that the writer is displaying. (There's a problem with poetry-as-materiality-of-the-medium, too, where the imminence of the materiality conceals or leaves out of the picture the process that lead up to it, so that it becomes more difficult to tell the difference between accidental and planned.) There can be signals in the poetry that strike me as evidence of the hasty, the underdeveloped, not thought through... so that it becomes completely disproportionate and kind of absurd for a reader to go sweating out on a limb over something that includes insufficient cues as to its own intra-relatedness. I think of this as poetry that's "refusing to meet me half-way". It's up-ended the desired ~active~ awareness of the reader by turning the text into an overly *passive* magma.

Less generally, I also react negatively ("bad") to the trend's frequent, gratuitous use of abstract vocabulary (literally abstract, such as "irresistible force", "restoration", "Statement and persuasion / An analysis of the physical aspects", or "actual improvement", --- taken for convenience's sake from a book recently mentioned on the List, **Laura Moriarty's** *Symmetry*, a book with other strengths and appeal which --- please don't pounce!--- I am otherwise not condemning or dismissing wholesale) that I find doesn't alert me it's aware of its own abstraction. Perhaps it moves from an under-

examined surface to depth too capriciously.

Foreground/background and field-&-ground become too blurred or dizzying. Although it may still be achieving the "Language Poetry effect" of jolting me into self-consciousness about my own participation, the work itself doesn't seem to be demonstrating any conscious grasp of the differences among jargons and dialects that it's employing.

Etc.

Date: Fri, 20 Dec 2002

Subject: Re: **To blog or not to blog**

I'm glad **Nick Piombino** weighed in about the blogicization, and it's helpful that he used that self/affect slant that he's good at and that's an ideological/poetics position of his, as I'm not as good at it--- Last night, when I looked at **Nada Gordon's** one-entry blog, strangely, I felt similar emotional regret, nostalgia, disconsolate, etc.,--- not because she was writing poorly or anything like that--- but, a little bit of a feeling of "Another one bites the dust", another Stepford blogger. Pod people become blog people. It's also striking to me that it's, so far, mainly East Coast and New York City poets who are blogging themselves away. Is this *not* a post-9/11 effect? The saddened feeling that I felt was that it somehow increases our solitude.

I lean toward **M. Palmer's** (first name?) response: he said "reactionary" and, last night, I thought "counter-revolutionary"; it seemed to me like people were sneaking back in through the "back door" what they'd just thrown out the front; etc. Nick gets to the point: "Why write frequently on the poetics list when you can have your own blog?" My version of that was: why would people ever *want* to blog? what could possibly motivate this wave? **Jonathan Mayhew's** blog is candid: he unsubscribed in reaction to **Richard Tylor's** anti-Americanism (Mayhew calls him "some poet in New Zealand"). A blog

(1) takes conflict-aversion to the next level of removing oneself from the possibly risky environment that many have objected to in the List's social unpredictability (there's a photograph in my family's album of my sister as a child, in a party dress, sitting on the carpeted floor in her bedroom by herself, caught by surprise, playing with all the toys and birthday things she was just given at a birthday party *in progress* at that same moment with friends all outside the bedroom whom she'd left behind: blogs remind me of that protective self-insulation)--- you can hold forth without interruption, rebuttal, or disagreement;

(2) a blog allows you to be found by a Google search, whereas the Poetics List does not: moreso, by writing about poets and keywords that others would be searching for, people can be lead to discovering you by Googling after those other names;

(3) importantly, a blog, with its representational self-depiction, by returning to all the Foucauldian "Techniques of Self" mechanisms, allows *self-invention* --- one is not merely a practicing poet but someone consummately preoccupied with poetry in every waking moment and every thought, the poet who is more than a poet (read: bad faith) (I'm often taken aback at how bloggers *stick to the subject* so. Like, *don't these people ever go to the opera* [Ron's blog has already stated his antipathy and condemnation of that] or anything?? Isn't there another *channel* that they switch over into? Why is their self-portrayal so lacking in normal multifariousness, O'Hara's "grace to live as variously as possible"? It seems like it would be healthier, given this day-by-day/hour-by-hour reality TV look into their solitude, for them to just *forget about* being a poet some of the time and change the tune every now and then. I'm amazed at how obsessively they stay on target); . . .

These blogs, so far, are by no means the *Goncourt brothers'* journals. Regardless of how the bloggers might actually live, these self-portrayals are typically catching them at their most a-social, connecting only through the mediation of what literature they have opinions about.

I find that this "self redux" or "pre-self" that's emerging in their self-portraits is curiously lacking in *sympathy* to themselves, too. It's lacking in ideology and it's somehow short on compassion for the very pathos that they're revealing about themselves. --- Granted, there was remission from psychosis involved, but if you think of the self-writing in *Morning of the Poem*, when James Schuyler returned to mimetic self-depiction after years of writing in less-/other-signifying modes, the *weakness* and frailty of self that he had the courage to show: I'll never forget that puffy plastic WonderBread bag he went out to buy for his sandwiches. But how it would tarnish their authority, to make a sandwich (white bread). To return to diary as a literary form is one thing, but to then behave as those these "discourses" and rhetoric were completely natural, in no way to *wink*, and to conduct reconstruction of self with the same, unconscious prerogatives as the New Formalists . . . !

Of course, there always had to remain a dialectic between Language writing (with its various *semblables*) and the ongoing momentum of institutionalized normative autobiography, ---if the latter were to disappear, a world overrun with nothing but Language would be bedlam,--- but the blogs, like some of the print essays and interviews that were creeping up to this, seem blithely oblivious to that original agonistic struggle that these poets' poetry is based on,--- so that *they themselves* are simultaneously re-enforcing the very dominances that their poetry is challenging, as if undoing with one hand what you'd just done with the other, language a row of buttons (clothes buttons) that you take off only in order to put it back on again, language the zipper.

The positive side is that the pendulum must have swung too far, that it's a free market after all and not capitalism, and that those weren't *crashes*, they were "market corrections." I'm trying to see it along the lines that **Pierre Joris** suggested, a helpful reminder that it's all (maybe) rhizomatic, and not *defection from a utopian collectivity and the hope of symposium*.

--- I admit to generally skipping over Richard's posts. But I read one the other day (considering what slim pickin's there are, these days), his uncontrollable enthusiasm and curiosity thinking that **dcmb** had actually spent an evening with the grand **J. Ashbery** himself, just as Richard's earlier post had fantasized to do. But when Richard, parenthetically, wound up including this little, peripheral detail about having *lived at home with his mother all his life* until she died when he was 53, and how he wouldn't listen to "*dissonant*" music as much as he might've liked to because the sound of it might've bothered her in the next room--- ---*that's excruciating!* The sympathy just ripped through me. *This* is what brought down the project of a poetics community and drove professors of literature into hermetically sealed sound-proof booths?! This is getting like **Sullivan** in the computerized cartoon *Monsters, Inc.* where the monsters try to be so scary but they're terrified of a little child. Meanwhile, the bloggers' armor. . . . Will they ever get there? Could they? Or: the self imago in **Heather Ramsdell's** *Lost Wax* who is

always rummaging through closets and drawers for a pair of missing socks. But the bloggers don't seem to know where **Samuel Beckett** took things. The narcissistic incapacity of the individual to admit to any vulnerability or weakness completely parallels the current national defense. (Whatever his prose's other flaws, it should be said in favor of Richard's posts that he's never erected a reified concrete self as totem in his writings.) --- But maybe it's positive: maybe these blogged missteps are *paving the way*, a gradual loosening of poetry's puritanical rejection of some badly needed ballast of self. I guess I had expected it to be more conjectural and avant-garde, though. Who *told* them they are these characters? The use of "personal criticism" by feminists or queer theorists, which Maria rightly mentions,--- wasn't it always an attempt, though, to maintain at all points the *partial*, perspectival, therefore qualified and limited nature of all writing, to localize each thought, in refutation of the depersonalized and therefore more effectively dominant (male) voice of criticism (that I often slip into)? It's the difference between fetish and, say, surveyor's tripod, the latter being all about a measurement of *distance* between objects. My myopia, my color blindness. The "personal criticism" that sticks in my mind, for example, was queer theorist **D.A. Miller** putting himself completely on the line in *The Novel and The Police* by describing an appointment with a psychiatrist who diagnosed him as Borderline,--- (then, *what's the rest of the book!?* Auto-symptomatology?) or his ambiguous, seemingly gratuitous self-portraiture in the **Roland Barthes** book as on his back doing bench press in the gym (man of steel, or vain conformist? half-naked and at risk of the barbell he was holding falling down to crush him if his partner slipped). (I don't recall if it was word of mouth or in his writing, but I also remember his "personal criticism" including his fear of becoming the man with the poodle and beret, that somehow stereotypes are true.)

Yes, Richard, yes. He had a small rose watercolor by [Pierre-Joseph Redouté](#) on his wall.

Date: Tue, 28 Jan 2003

Subject: **poetry and reading levels**

Perhaps somewhat in the spirit of **Juliana Spahr's** post about Cybergraphia, the on-line symposium on the pedagogy of teaching contemporary poetry (more colloquially put in her announcement): a thought that's been pre-occupying me lately, ---although I still don't have it in any well-articulated form. Would be curious about others' impressions.

I haven't yet had the pleasure of reading **Jordan Davis'** much talked-about *Million Poems Journal*, which I look forward to,--- but it was upon recently re-reading the Davis poems in the 1998 Talisman *Anthology of New (American) Poets* that this thought dawned on me and has been sticking since, as a sort of odd, new template I keep reading poetry though.

Reading Davis' poems there, I was struck by *the simplicity* of the vocabulary. It seemed, upon first impression, that, except for gerunds ("-ing" words) or plurals or "-ed" words, it was almost all one- or two-syllable words.

That's not entirely true, on further inspection. There are in fact a little more than a hundred polysyllables in the six pages of poetry. (I've learned afterwards that in [on-line] reading level material, it's only three-syllable words or longer that are to be called "polysyllables", in the context that follows.) What may have lent to that impression was the somewhat childhood-oriented, nursery rhyme themes of the poems ("foxes steal gold mice", "shining bar of soap", "The ice cream barking all night the piano running past", "A Little Gold Book", etc). At any rate, ---and I do not mean this as a condemnation or condescension toward Davis' poetry--- I was left with the feeling that this was an entirely different reading experience than reading, say, **Drew Gardner's** *Sugar Pill*, with its penchant for science textbook terminology, to name only one strain, or, certainly, **Kevin Davies' Comp.** ("The entire panoply of minimalist histrionics"). I had the sense that, aside from the "difficulties" (new reading dissonances) that the disjunctiveness and other Modernist/post-modernist techniques introduce, a child would have no trouble reading most of it ("My old love ripped off of me like an apple / I am dying to see you / To carry you like an age into wood / . . . / Rain off the bridge / Searching with a bell"). (There is, of course, some more "adult" vocabulary that requires a different level of education/information, such as "milltowns" [which I interpret to be the Valley of the Dolls tranquilizer], "tagalog", "magnums", etc.)

I was left wondering if (1) we assume about the cognitive-interpretive dissonances which disjunction, parataxis, etc., instill that they are basically equal in their effect and the same whether you're 25 or 45, or, in this case, 25 or 15, then (2), aside from that "difficulty," the differences between any two poets may additionally come down to *what reading level* of challenge they present.

(I in fact do not believe in assumption (1), and feel that, the more acculturated one becomes to such poetry, the different effects of different tropes is essential to the pleasure of the reading. For a good while, though, or in poetry of overload, these more subtle distinctions can blur together and assumption (1) may be accurate in some basic way.)

In comparison, think of the vocabulary in, say, **John Ashbery's** "Daffy Duck in Hollywood" (yes, unfortunately, one must keep circling back to Ashbery, . . . the way '50s painters couldn't get away from **Picasso**), where "La Celestina", "**Amadigi di Gaula**", "Escritoire", "déconfit", "**the Princesse de Cleves**", "borborygmia", "**Aglavaine**" and "**Sélysette**">, etc., involve a binge of nose-bleed stratosphere ultra-sophistication that would keep the best Norton annotator or graduate student flipping reference works and dictionary pages. The notorious Ashbery "difficulty", then, becomes a sort of double difficulty, of not only adjusting to his poetic ellipticism but to the high-brow *New York Review of Books* mentality that not so coyly peeps through that primary dissonance. An uninitiated reader has to acclimatize her-/himself not only to the new "challenge" of how contemporary experimental poetry functions, but to the level of education the text speaks to, even if it could be rearranged and ironed out into a normalized, *conjunct* rather than *disjunct* discursivity.

The different audiences that poets attract might be in line with these inequalities, too. Ashbery's reputation was, to some extent, pushed forward toward such unparalleled proportions by how that secondary level of post-doctoral sensibility in his writing excited critics who aspire toward that very breed of cosmopolitan erudition. Davis, meanwhile, at least from the Buffalo Poetics List reports, is enjoying a rather rapid and lively appreciation that, the educational level of the List notwithstanding, sounds like a sort of "populism" responding. (I do not know how *Million Journal Poems* continues this streak or supplants it, and his poems were largely just the catalyst for these thoughts rather than their prime example. At a skim, it's moot how much his [millionpoems.blogspot](http://millionpoems.blogspot) writing deviates from this. On the face of things, "Then pop! / There's nothing wrong with your rain / Hat on lifted ass. / The subject looks around the car. Rock and roll" doesn't especially upgrade the secondary level of challenge.)

In some sense, to their credit, then, perhaps work like these poems of Davis' allow a more "pure", interference-free experience of disjunctive dissonance. There is no special degree of unfamiliarity with the content, otherwise, so there's the potential of a more "clean" effect, as far as the reverberations that come off of "parataxis."

I find it interesting, though, the possibility that there might be contemporary work like this very immediately suited to a readership of high school or grade school students, since we tend to think of ourselves as all so beyond that.

Without having checked, I would think that the popularity of, say, a **W.S. Merwin** (or a **Michael Palmer**) has much to do with this fundamental reading level of vocabulary.

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The remainder of this post gets number-fussy and may be ignored off as a sort of crankier footnote.

An interesting rabbit hole I fell down in pursuing this idea was the whole question of what constitutes "reading level" altogether. I used the Idiot's Guide approach and checked the Internet.

There's something called the "SMOG reading level" or Readability Test. It's all about those three-syllable or more- words. (I do not know what "SMOG" stands for.)

The formula is to take 30 sentences from the beginning of a text, 30 from the end, and count up the number of polysyllables. The formula itself then goes off into rather arcane calculations involving square root,--- but there's a simpler version, which treats the sheer count as indicative in and of itself. The simplified SMOG conversion table appears at the bottom of <http://www.sph.emory.edu/WELLNESS/reading.html>.

It's surprising and sort of disappointing that SMOG recognizes polysyllables only in and of themselves and does not distinguish between the reading level differences between household, substantive polysyllables like <"(air) conditioner", "marigolds", "underground", "magazines", "rubber-stamped", "Jack-o-lanterns" (sic)> (all Davis', *AAoN(A)P*, p. 30) versus ones like <"credulity", "excommunication", "perdition", "internal", "derangement">. (all Gardner's, p. 50f), the way it levels the playing field of educational differences that result from information (cultural capital). Obviously, a more "advanced" lesson plan or cultural-intellectual attainment would be required for the latter.

It's somewhat free rein how to apply the SMOG to poetry, which, unpunctuated and run-on, may not even be comprised of "sentences". Should you count up 30 lines, instead? Should it just be applied to the total text?--- But, regardless, the three shorter of Davis' poems there each contain 8, 5, and 5 polysyllables. That places them on a 6th or 5th grade reading level, basically. The long poem, "A Little Golden Book" (my counting mania set in) contains about 52 polysyllables, which, over all, might be a 10th grade reading level (although that's something of a misapplication of the SMOG rule. The 12 and 9 polysyllables in the poem's first and last 30 lines would be an 8th grade reading level (still high)). The poem of Davis' that **David Shapiro** chose for the *Boston Review* (see [on-line version](#)), which was basically a broader audience's first introduction to his poetry, is about the same numbers, 46 total for a 10th grade reading level, or a beginning/ending 6 and 4 for a 6th grade reading level.

There may be a metrical-musical side to this. Polysyllables seem to come in waves, in this limited sample of Davis poems: whereas there may be a roughly even distribution across "A Little Gold Book" (almost never two in one line, but sometimes clumped up in a peak distribution, like the 10 polysyllables in the last six lines on *AAoN(A)P*, p. 32), he's also prone to sizeable stretches withholding any at all, such as the range of fifteen lines that straddle from p. 30 into p. 31, the ten lines at the top of p. 33, etc. The *Boston Review* poems can be read similarly with whole sequences of stanzas going polysyllable-free.

This may also not be atypical. Or, it may be typical of the age demographic that *AAoN(A)P* chose. The seven Gardner poems in the same anthology (3, 20, 5, 12, 6, 14, and 5 polysyllables each) SMOG-clock in with four poems at a 5th grade reading level, one at a 6th, and two at a 7th. Clearly (at the risk of betraying bias here), some subsequent differentiation would have to be made between the supplementary educational-conceptual levels of vocabulary like <"bewilderment", "salamander",

"opposition", "coinciding", "subjectivity", "unconsciously", "perceptible", "individual", "absolute", "disaffected", "intentions"> (Gardner), versus vocabulary like <"photography", "employers", "pyramid", "meteors", "museum", "surgery", "zinnias", "helicopters", "basketballs", "propellor", "lullabies", "mosquito"> (Davis).

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This doesn't have to do  
With truth value or even  
Meaningful probability

Whether true or false

--- Jordan Davis, "When I Was The Subject"

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<sup>i</sup> We are encouraged to think of the poetry's montage effects as cinematographic, as the opening poem's title, "Marie Menken", refers to a film-maker, one whose short films lasted only a few minutes each (whose work I have never seen). Perhaps Gardner fancies his poems to be similar to her films, not only in their effects but in the book's ultimate brevity. The wide line-spacing used is deceptive, and it lends itself strongly to the "spaced-out" feeling of the reading experience: the opening poem, which covers three pages is, despite the lay-out, only 32 lines long, about the length of a one-pager in an average, single-spaced book; others: 92 lines; 79; 29; 29; 55; 56; 39; 71; 38; 32; 141 [= 693]. Single-spaced, the book's 70 pages would in fact come out to roughly 24 or 25 pages, that is, about the size of a small chapbook. (. . . Which would account for how I found myself able to read through it cover to cover, repeatedly, in building up my analysis and notes, in—I never checked the clock—what felt like about a half hour to forty-five minutes flat, without speed-reading.)