

AN EXPLORER OR A MATHEMATICIAN

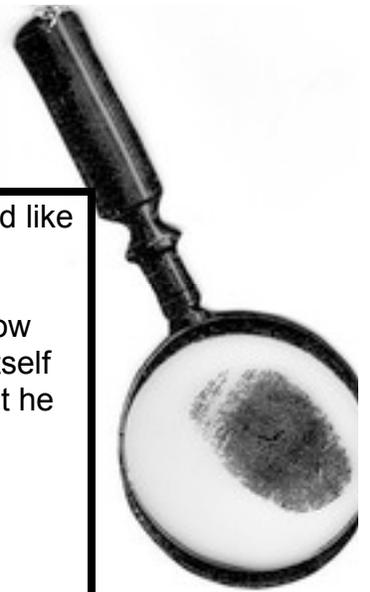
or condenser, or anthropologist, or observer

A man finding himself in the possession of a number of opinions which he would like to express, writes an essay

an explorer or a mathematician also knows what he thinks— but he doesn't know what he will find a man applying a method of thought as which is powerful in itself which is more powerful than the ordinary forms of discourse, doesn't know what he will find, or what he will think

Then

George Oppen from *Daybook II:V*



GEORGE OPPEN

from ROUTE

[...]
Reality, blind eye
Which has taught us to stare—

Your elbow on a car-edge
Incognito as summer,

I wrote. Not you but a girl
At least

Clarity, clarity, surely clarity is the most beautiful
thing in the world,
A limited, limiting clarity

I have not and never did have any motive of poetry
But to achieve clarity

2
Troubled that you are not, as they say,
Working—
I think we try rather to understand,
We try also to remain together

There is a force of clarity, it is
Of what is not autonomous in us,
We suffer a certain fear

Things alter, surrounded by a depth
And width

The unreality of our house in the moonlight
Is that if the moonlight strikes it
It is truly there tho it is ours

3
Not to reduce the thing to nothing—

I might at the top of my ability stand at a window
and say, look out; out there is the world.

Not the desire for approval nor even for love— O,
that trap! From which escaped, barely—if it fails

We will produce no sane man again

4
Words cannot be wholly transparent. And that is the
'heartlessness' of words.

Neither friends nor lovers are coeval . . .

as for a long time we have abandoned those in
extremity and we find it unbearable that we should
do so...

The sea anemone dreamed of something, filtering the sea
water through its body,

Nothing more real than boredom—dreamlessness, the
experience of time, never felt by the new arrival,
never at the doors, the thresholds, it is the native

Native in native time . . .

The purity of the materials, not theology, but to present the circumstances
[...]

from *Of Being Numerous*

LORINNE NIEDECKER

POET'S WORK

Grandfather
advised me:
Learn a trade

I learned
to sit at desk
and condense

No layoff
from this
condensery

from *Collected Works*

In the great snowfall before the bomb
colored yule tree lights,
windows, the only glow for contemplation
along this road

I worked the print shop
right down among em
the folk from whom all poetry flows
and dreadfully much else

I was Blondie.
I carried my bundles of hog feeder price lists
down by Larry the Lug,
I'd never get anywhere
because I'd never had suction,
pull, you know, fever, drag,
well-oiled protection.

I heard their rehashed radio barbs—
more barbarous among hirelings
as hire-ups grow more corrupt.
But what vitality! The women hold jobs—
clean house, cook, raise children, bowl
and go to church.

What would they say if they knew
I sit for two months on six lines
of poetry?

from *For Paul And Other Poems*

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

from A-9

An impulse to action sings of a semblance
Of things related as equated values,
The measure all use is time congealed labor
In which abstraction things keep no resemblance
To goods created; integrated all hues
Hide their natural use to one or one's neighbor.
So that were the things they could say: Light is
Like night is like us when we meet our mentors
Use hardly enters into their exchanges,
Bought to be sold things, our value arranges;
We flee people who made us as a right is
Whose sight is quick to choose us as frequenters,
But see our centers do not show the changes
Of human labor our value estranges.

Values in series taking on as real
We affect ready gold a steady token
Flows in unbroken circuit and induces
Our being, wearies of us as ideal
Equals that heady crises eddy. Broken
Mentors, unspoken wealth labor produces,
Now loom as causes disposing our loci,
The foci of production: things reflected
As wills subjected; formed in the division
Of labor, labor takes on our imprecision --
Bought, induced by gold at no gain, tho close eye
And gross sigh fixed upon gain have effected
Value erected on labor, prevision
Of surplus value, disparate decision.

[...]

We are things, say like a quantum of action
Defined product of energy and time, now
In these words which rhyme now how song's exaction
Forces abstraction to turn from equated
Values to labor we have approximated.

from A

12

It's hard to see but think of a sea
Condensed into a speck.
And there are waves—
Frequencies of light,
Others that may be heard.
The one is one sea, the other a second.
There are electric stresses across condensers
That wear them down till they can stand no strain,
Are of no force and as unreclaimed
 as the bottom of the sea
Unless the space the stresses cross be air,
 that can be patched.
Large and small condensers,
Passing in the one instance frequencies
 that can be turned to sound,
In the other, alternations that escape,
So many waves of a speck of sea or what,
Or a graph the curve of a wave beyond all sound,
An open circuit where no action—
Like that of the retina made by human light—
Is recorded otherwise
Then having taken a desired path a little way
And tho infinitely a mote to be uncontained for
 ever.
This science is then like gathering flowers of the
 weed
One who works with me calls birdseed
That are tiny and many on one stem
They shed to the touch tho on a par
 with the large flower
That picked will find a vase.
I see many things at one time
 the harder the concepts get,
Or nothing
Which is a forever become me over forty years,
I am like another, and another, who has
 finished learning
And has just begun to learn.
If I turn pages back
A child may as well be staring with me
Wondering at the meaning
I turn to last
Perhaps.

from *ANew*

ROBERT CREELEY

“[H]e avoids the iron reference of particular ideologies by turning to the system of manners with the abstract delicacy of an anthropologist’s attention ... [B]y discovering the operation of systems of behavior which make no claim to historical meaning [...] Creeley has always been, in an important though unusual sense, been a systematic poet. He presumes that people conduct their affairs in orderly fashion, and that the poet’s task is to reveal the order behind human behavior as a delicately articulated but binding system of understanding. In this regard, Creeley is an empirical poet [...] Creeley discover systematic behavior in the people he observes or imagines”

-Robert Von Hallberg

SONG

The grit
of things,
a measure
resistant—

times walk-
ing, talk-
ing, telling
lies and

all the other
places, no
one ever
quite the same.

THE MEASURE

I cannot
move backward
or forward.
I am caught

in the time
as measure.
What we think
of we think of-

of no other reason
we think than
just to think—
each for himself.

SOME AFTERNOON

Why not ride
with pleasure
and take oneself
as measure,

making the world
tacit description
of what's taken
from it

for no good reason,
the fact only.
There is a world
elsewhere, but here

the tangible faces
smile, breaking
into tangible pieces.
I see

myself and family,
and friends, and
animals attached,
the house, the road,

all go forward
in a huge
flash, shaken
with that act.

Goodbye, goodbye.
Nothing left
after the initial
blast but

some echo like this.
Only the faded
pieces of paper
etc.

from WORDS

RAE ARMANTROUT

MY PROBLEM

It is my responsibility
to squeeze
the present from the past
by demanding particulars.

When the dog is used
to represent the inner
man, I need to ask,
“What kind of dog is it?”

If a parasitic
metaphor grows all
throughout—good!
Why stop with a barnacle?

A honeysuckle,
thrown like an arm
around a chain-link fence,
would be far more

articulated,
more precisely repetitive,
giving me the feeling
that I can go on like this

while the woman
at the next table says,
“You smell pretty,”

and sends her small daughter’s
laugh, a spluttery orgasm,
into my ear—
though this may not have been
what you intended.

It may be a problem
when I notice
the way the person shifts.

from *Veil* (Wesleyan UP 2001)