

The Line in Postmodern Poetry

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

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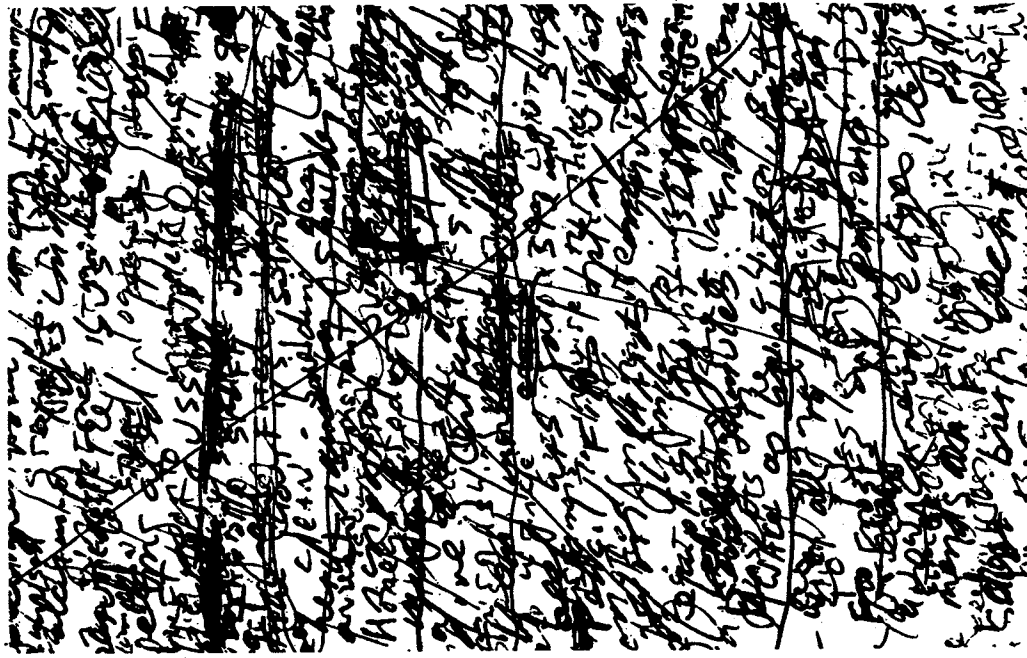
Lines Linear How to Mean

1. Lines linear outline, clear boundaries' effect, notice the package from its perimeter, consistency, evenness, seemingly internal contours which end up packaging the insides so that they can react or point or be subordinated, as a homogenized unit, to what's outside. Lines as signatures of meaning by inscription — 'relationships by force' — after the fact, marking off an internal hierarchy of value identified with parts or tags, disciplining the already constituted body. Too late. How far inside are we? Boundary as dividing — 'you step over that line & you're asking for trouble' — privatizing property, without (internal) authority. Territorial markers and confinements, ghost towns, congested metropolis on a grid.
2. Words divide, lines unite — a compact, a single reading, helping offer that overall intonational curve so useful for language-learning & memory. A constructed continuity you find your way through, a 'power line,' piping to convey a fluid, in moves, horizontal rows, to create a loop or equivalences, a static & isolating & securing closure of purpose. It makes for size.
3. Better, constant crease & flux, a radical discontinuity as lack, jeopardizes before & after, stop & start, a dynamic in fragments, suggesting an unmappable space, no coordinates, troubling us to locate ourselves in formal terms. Polyrhythms' spatial counterpart, lack of (regular, traditional) closure as generative, tensions restored. It foregrounds an artificial, constructed process, a de-natured measure of kinetic shifts, registers of differentiation. This pluralism of incident, refusing all packages — not 'cut to fit' — a luxuriant anarchy, a fuller flowering or specificity of internal rhythms & semantic redistributions.

4. Lines everywhere, as patches or spatial orchestration, skeleton of volume, structure exposed inside-out. Refusing the normatively linear & its disciplining (and delineation) in favor of a constructed conversation, injecting heterogeneity inside (celebratory form, participatory regime). To erase boundaries, break up compactness, in favor of difference & a more individualized interior, an intrinsic legitimacy.

5. Yet still too self-enclosed? A formally 'contemporary' writing may propose the bogus immediacy of gesture as a codeless transparent revelation of the body, as if its markings were natural, neutral, to be taken for granted. Attention to a freer play of line, as formal course of conduct ornamentally preening in its autonomy, may distract us from what's outside, from the regulatory limits & constraints of meaning as a horizon. Discontinuous breaks & patches can discombobulate the surface, but they can also be brought into the project of articulating an external context by embodying its complexities, with meaning's outer structure (language/society) as model and limit — & as ground for unlearning, contest & prescription. Self-governing is not free-floating; its value hinges on that contextual understanding of structures & systems of significance & their horizons. An explanation in action that keeps crossing the line into a politics outside (its articulation into contested hegemonies, fields of force) & bringing it back inside to challenge the constitution (and possibilities) of meaning as well as form. "That's not a line, that's an idea."

CHARLES BERNSTEIN



The Visual Line

The line breaks and separates from itself. The insistence of the fragments makes it strenuous to recover the line which would normally reach closure with the unit of sound or sense or their mutual agreement. The visual line need not function as an image in a figurative or iconic sense limiting the reading of the words by some referential value which constrains them. Rather, as visible forms the lines create their own order in the text, impose it, as a frame which introduces the struggle of hierarchy into the words. The breaks become a force, against which the whole must be recovered, or against which the whole can be fractured, dissolved, let go.

Grammatical completion is not a requirement for syntactic resolution. Always at every point. Privileging the fragment, impact of the break . . . deliberately not recuperable into a linear form. Disintegrating the defining boundaries, limits by which the line identifies. Not in attack against the uni-linear, but diffusing its focus, and entity/identity—the surface which should support the representation spreads it. . . [D]etached from its context, the support route becomes a network, fraught with the uncertainty of choice.

Spatial play, the hierarchy of size and color in the rendering, allows different groupings to occur—line by line sequence, and type by type. Not simply to restate the obvious. But to open it up, smack against that popular plane, immodestly refusing a patent transparency. Registering objections to the words which “speak themselves,” attempting to repress the marks of enunciation. As if that were possible.

The visual line strains the literary authority with its vulgarity, its crudeness, its fleshiness which pollutes the material of pure

$L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ Lines
 language. Of which there is none. Refusing to stay “in line,” creating instead, a visual field in which all lines are tangential to the whole, which is, in turn, crested as a figure from their efforts, their direction, their non-alignment.

The visual line. Not a nice poetic line, carefully controlled and closed. Instead, a haphazard line, random line, fulfilling itself by the brute force of its physical reality. Only the headlines, carefully manipulated to cross-read through the text, force associations by their continual presence. Push against the blocks of text with their resonant association. Can't be escaped, ignored. Insistent by their visual form, dominance and presence.

Formality becomes an active issue, opening the parameters instead of closing them. The timid issues of placement and relation on the page get vulgarized into high profile, the very forms of mass media get appropriated precisely to the degree that they themselves have acted to appropriate the public use of language.

The finiteness of type, the literal limit of space and material, acts on the text, from that system of constraints, restraints, the text gets forged, charged, made, as it should in order to emphasize its real materiality, the scope of its own invention freed by the incarceration it suffers in the form.

The line makes itself rather than being made, since it is the outcome of the manual, physical process, and not of the predetermined value. Part of the transformation of manuscript to text belongs to the medium. Here letterpress forces the text to negotiate on its own terms. Then the page uses the lines, not in strict sequence, but in relation, and thus in a spatial exercise, kinetic and unstable. The lines are in a dynamic field, pulling against each other to determine the thrust of what becomes meaning.

From *Writing Is an Aid to Memory*

by honest dogs these pretty bears
 run dote
 of love like cheek add acre
 carried giddy by a digression
 slate rove boat
 leaving little purpose order
 in comes wink at what use shall a person walk
 wrinkled like a god
 quence stone
 but and modest?
 and gophers which not standing to the eye
 that tied such bine united like of one
 mind
 but memory in marble sets no praise we wrote
 rest as mutter
 with nature like an arch of grass
 beauty is only a symptom
 civious wits dry
 sights stand that shake past
 some pelled
 grill or often five floor curl but it is the upper one
 what's laughing and undressed from such
 hidden to be given reason
 that no passions from mad men be excessive
 neighbors are judgments

Terms of Enjambment

The line is the sole unit of punctuation whose use historically has not been determined by its potential for submitting chains of words to the hierarchic (literally hypotactic) orders of logic which, descended from the classical grammars of Greek and Latin, have become our normative contemporary model for "clarity" in writing, both in its expository and depictive modes. The line thus has been set off as the mark of artifice itself, that index of the arbitrary which acknowledges the social contract as the origin of convention in language—and that language is nothing if not convention. The confinement of the use of the line to poetry,¹ the virtual reduction of poetry to "that which is written in lines,"² serves to marginalize any writing which does not conceive its end as instrumental. In this circumstance, the dynamics of the line are precisely inverted: its instrumental function being to mark even the most hypotactic of writings as "aesthetic" (peripheral).³

All attempts to "reinvent" the line, even those carried out under a metaphor of naturalism (Olson's breath), succeed only insofar as they foreground this essential arbitrary element, through which they unmask the lie of clarity itself, however briefly. The decay of any style, even that of a prose poetry which would deny the line altogether, into an instrumental commodity, the mark of verse, reveals only that literature (the political organization of writing) is never static, a process (social) rather than a canon (aesthetic).

The sole comment which I could hope to make concerning my own use of the line is that I try not to use it in the same fashion twice.

NOTES

1. The entirely hypotactic usage of the line in display advertising demonstrates just how different a phenomenon its presence here really is.
2. To the comic degree that *Fiction Monthly*, interrogating Gilbert Sorrentino about my own *Tjanting*, identifies the poem as "what is still referred to as 'experimental' fiction."
3. Consider, for example, the poems of Greg Kuzma.

RON SILLIMAN

From *Lit X*

So simple
set
to strings
kept hidden—
mere lower limit
—margins mirror
fixed borders,
fate
to be born into
if to write
to right
that ecco's—
Is it words
heard in the hollow
chill of morning
real as
this seat is
cold?

To speak,
speak
the line . . .

Look: the rook in the nook was unable to take a hook. I want a poem real as an allusion. The way people bundle up on a chill day. The heat from the coffee enough to steam the kitchen windows. The decorator mugs feeling heavy. Butter melting into the toast. I want a poem real as an illusion. A row of small clay pots on a fence, awaiting plants. A colony of small bugs dances like motes in the sun. In the paper, description curdles and flattens. Patterns of static construct a radio, sending "please remit" toll-free into the skull, a swollen tomato. You want under? Aliens communicate by code: alligator on sport shirt. As for we who love to be astonished, the doorknob is still on the floor. Is it Bob? These nouns crinkle, all yellow and pink. Ling P. Sicut asks for an epillog. An earplug distributes opposite of silence. The antennae of the race have been snapped off by idle youth. Clarinet in a cat fight. Get drunk before you vote. Thus reasons soil. A small girl beckons her kitty. This scene is repeated, intended to charm. In Jonestown, bloated corpses begin to explode in the sun. Thus seasons air. Find the noun. At what moment do you realize that you will always be forced to rent? Her unstated tenacity only becomes evident over time. He starts up conversations with strangers on the bus. These sentences occur in this order. I hate what narrative does to time. The garden's grown into a jungle. The butterfly is orange and black.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Excerpts from an Interview with Hannah Weiner

I said nothing. I said yours [line breaks] were important and mine came at the end of the paragraph. . . . I think they're arbitrary because they come out to the end of the page and then they come back and start all over again. And occasionally they have a short paragraph. And occasionally I break the paragraph—the page—with a big space and big word just for spacing, like breathing, like NO NOTES. . . . When I wrote it [Spoke] handwritten it came out to the right hand margin. . . . I think when I typed it up on a typewriter page that I came as close to my handwritten page as I could YOU BIG JERK I probably didn't maybe I didn't. . . . I would say that if you look at the typewritten page it's almost justified to the right margin. . . . Like the end is there. *It's all right Susan*. I mean this is mostly like why do you put painting over on the right hand side, because there isn't any more canvas, I mean, there's the wall and then there's the bedroom, and then your neighbor. . . . Just get it as close as possible to the end of the page. Because if you're not, it was some ecological sense not to waste the goddamn page, to fill it up. . . . The only thing that wasn't page-oriented was *Sixteen* [Awede Press, 1983] and I wrote that in three separate sizes of small—to break the tradition for myself. [Otherwise,] it's actually large-sheet poetry. . . . What's really going on in *Spoke*, which by the way does go on page after page like a novel in many places when it's handwritten. . . . You could break it differently, you'd just have to be careful to line things up properly. You could even justify it if you wanted to but it would be an enormous typographical job—and I don't see why bother. . . . I think [justifying] would make

it more positive, stronger. . . [But it would be almost impossible to recreate the overall typographic composition of the page if the line breaks—which are almost identical to the right margin in the handwritten page—were changed. The interlinear material is lined up in such a way as to make it difficult to shift its position from left to right if the lines above or below were justified.] . . . It's very important whether you justify or not on the right, because it really shakes you up how you continue the line when you get really intense about it it is a big difference.

HANNAH WEINER,

From *Spoke*

so put me with it write
with it
under the line
on the books page
final ending us please

my author another subject if you were a great big writer
who would you write continue to write with it the line us break
and stop

WRITING

writing it in
so period
. . .

so is name included on this page final
so turn the page place and sign with it
August is finished

and wrote him a line once
some us is protected
slike me

until money problem is solved
our death in 198rekas4 as I planned continue writing
as we agree across

the page some included we begin us
some included us

as with ^t_he Indians
 untils our death
 but we heartbreak house instly
 and we mothers advice
 keep us writing some
 hysterical us in
 very embarrassing inst
 instly
 ant
 sos we included with it
 some letter advice
 to us writers begin
 the ended sentence
 I think my mother is dying slowly and I wont hurt her feelings
 put it on the page

S E N T E N C E

sis its OK included the next page and cast we live twice
 again so we is poor continued we live poor
 so the Indians
 will b^e free
 my name thats the land battle again it makes a big difference
 and twice Leonard dies
 for his people on the plains

LYN HEJINIAN

Line

It's true that I think about the line more than about any other formal element in writing. To some extent, at any given point in my work, the line is both its starting place and its eventual achievement—the instigation of an idea and its realization. And, of late, this has been especially the case, given my inclination to reject the sentence (or at least my own uses of it) except as it is modified by the line (which discontinues the sentence without closing it).

Where Montaigne writes of his project, in "Practice," "This is not my teaching, this is my study," the distinction seems pointedly applicable to the one I find myself currently making between the sentence and the line. The authority of the line (intrinsic) is different from that of the sentence, and momentarily I have lost faith in what I can say in a sentence.

Imagine then that I turn to the line in order to begin again, writing, basically.

If there is such a thing as a perceptual rhythm (and possibly there isn't), the line would be its gauge in my work. The line affixes detail to time, and it is at least rhythmic to that degree. In any case, it is for me the standard (however variable) of meaning in the poem, the primary unit of observation, and the measure of felt thought. The 'writing' of the line begins as an act of observation, and it is completed by recognition of the thought that it achieves there. The tension set up by the co-existence of beginning and end at each point excites the dynamics of the work, and it is vital to my thinking within it.

Even as an observation, the line is selective and expressive with

regard to perception; it is already complex—that is, a number of decisions have been made before there is a line.

A musical analogue to the line might be the thematic phrase, which initiates the piece and serves as the focus of all its parts and devices, but in a poetry in which every single line is internally complete and is of equal weight and importance, the situation is considerably more complex. In this imaginary musical composition, the diverse elements of the piece work to elaborate and fulfill its central theme, whereas in the poem all of the poem is about any single line in it, and any line is basic and central.

In positing the line as the basic unit of the work, I realize that I am denying that function to the word (except in one-word lines). In this sense, syntax and movement are more important to me than vocabulary (the historically macho primacy of which I dislike in any case).

A poem based on the line bears in it a high degree of semantic mutability. Lines, which may be rigid or relaxed, increasing or decreasing, long or short, ascending (questioning) or descending (declarative), predisposed (necessary) or evolving (speculative), representative of sequence or of cluster, redistribute meaning continuously within the work.

The integrity of the individual line, and the absorbing discontinuities that often appear between lines—the jumpiness that erupts in various sections of the work (whether the result or the source of disjunctive semantics)—are so natural to my 'real life' experience that they seem inevitable—and 'true.' And so, at this point, it seems natural to me to write with them.

TOM MANDEL

From *Ency*

GAc

Gom

deferable comize alort CsC depger lo-ough lowede

comicious mAi

comoscs

simican liference speleign

frs

uu is the purse, al

equivalent snows' descent where others

raode iss shape, mint

the course, the view

widow in the stord

yet the other hand

while typical, when there is one

customary it is throughout.

in the hand a contribut

nam-ency

the present rip, lith for stranger

name & clatter rld it shoe p.

hilly sup is factory "kepm

to litter english trains, a weak net

off to ignore

uniform, uniformly, uniformary.

Surly bits can vend the lick at large.

all ready exits in you, sam hung

toad opts
rad bert hanto, vent a nuance
..... & a time
within narrowest of sects
that hover, rode its
el fries? zutshurdt
male aspects of modern leading

STEVE BENSON

From *The Busses*

I can't say The whole wax works
 what I'll think of founders when I think of
 it later. When the inconceivable heat of
 the sentence ends the unexploded bomb
 here. The state of being
 without is definitive.

My latest theory is that sunlight through
 we pretend or act as though anxiety crowded windows
 we've known each other trying to she left after
 a long time closely and burn off the second feature
 are very relaxed mists she came in in
 around each other the middle of
 then realize gradually something else to do
 suddenly we don't know but helpless
 each other at all One feels addressed. Thank
 well--- we reduce Heavens it's not for me
 each other to tears The voice carries over the phone
 we can barely shed And room to room around him
 --- Caricatures Help is neither on nor about
 distract the imagination Recurring--- a sentence structure feels
 from its inevitable quandaries Myopic headache--- searching within
 A need for mussels The scold--- down the river from Alaska
 one knows something like Asked, she refuses to listen
 what they are, how they The voice batters against the bar
 taste--- one's judgment Without the loud music, how
 tends to get in the way would voices sound
 --- between hunger and the other Terse individuals
 distraction is act out vectors in
 food--- the anxious discomfort diagrams likely
 and putting up with it reading the newspaper to carry on emblems
 Within these bodies Within these rooms the force of desire
 hugging each other moving around to a resolution it is
 by the butt, by the eyes tensely waiting thought one need not
 What clutches do animals working reason out
 we need to get in over the principles Who came
 to kick out of territory or hope on their own?

justment (however high-handed, haphazard, and so on), and to the loose spiels that their horizontality appeared as if transitionally to distinguish them from.

In earlier years I'd exploited lines primarily as measures of utterance, as means to emphasize and reinforce rhetorical gestures, and as trick rugs to pace and let slip that which I found to say against the shifting standards of critical self-consciousness. Gradually resolving towards a more stolid concreteness, the identification supposed by a line still meant often to push an irony in the face of the lyricism swung, twisted and propped into place by the conventions so readily at its disposal. The deployment of lines was also a way of registering and confirming a decisive, site-specific orientation to the printed page and was increasingly, as with this work for *Tumba's* chapbook series and the quartets for *This 12*, conceived situationally relative to the formats and technologies of anticipated publication, as well as editorial precedents and the circumstances of reception.

We are bad to be here and talk to you, but we have no choice. The police have pressed us here against the rhetoric of incident, they have imposed apparently necessary conditions which not only presuppose in innumerable ways what we have to say to you but also permeate understanding and response. Only a fiction, a trope of self-consciousness, projecting its cultivation of the magic illusion of isolation, enforces the sense that any gesture, thought, discourse or condition of circumstance is actually discrete from any other. This discrimination is what we call 'measure' in poetry.

It is hard to imagine 'proceeding' without reinforcing the illusion of the choices we appear to have made, to see the world as we do. Procession, progress and change depend, for sure, on a stability that guarantees and rewards its being marked by specifiable, articulate difference.

We all want to be awakened from a bad dream but any alternative to the contradiction, ambiguity and confusion that we know proposes a system of organization hegemonically dreadful to our urge to break a spell. I speak unfairly, I know, to speak for all of us, but I speak unjustifiably even for myself, so I can offer these as words you're saying, as you read this: you can swallow them or disagree as you like.

When I wrote *The Busses* I was thinking about writing in patches or clumps more than in lines per se, but I was interested too as I wrote it in the force and integrity, open to the weather and based in internal tenability as well as context in address, of the sets of words phrasally isolated by what I'll call lines in this poem. I was interested in their vulnerability to each other, to the blanker spaces, to the reader's pace and method, to my handling and ad-

The ~~Line~~ of Prose

In its entire history prose has never petitioned the line as a sign of a value. Rather it has countered poetry and its line of prosody, symmetricalities and purposeful ending, with an utterly apathetic disposition towards its terminals. The prose line does not exist as a motivated, positive phenomenon; prose periodizes its differences within the unit of the sentence and the larger unit of the paragraph, which organizes closures of a thetic and narrative order. We have come to think of this inertia, this non-appearance of the value of the line, not as an aspect of paracritical negation, but as the product of rationalist forces (specifically the classic sense of language as neutral ground), yet this refusal to engage in valorization might serve a deconstructive "end" and unmask that metaphysical strain in poetry which demands a self-fulfilling presence, a parousial meaning and significance invoked inside the dream of recovering, through the written mark, a body without writing. It might further place prose outside—not counter to—the scope of ideology as a heterological gesture that opens up the question of ideology's radical and paradoxical reliance on a force of control that depends for its own definitive being upon a generated response which at any time threatens to render that power impotent as the recipient-victim of a blank gaze. In this respect at least, the inertial disposition of the prose line might be construed as a negating, non-productive factor that mirrors accurately a corresponding disposition of the masses (i.e., the media's "other") in the face of a plethora of meaning. The system of the sign economy, its constant profferings of uses, values and differences, would be thrown back upon itself. Self-effacing of its own being, the prose line would be lost without retention. Constantly escaping and withdrawing behind the pro-

duction and transportation of its utilities, it would show itself as of the order of a general economy, an economy of excess, inevitable loss and unreserved expenditure (in opposition to the restricted economy of accumulation, investment, and profit); it would thereby be closer to sacrifice—and all its implications—than to capital and would intone its own eschatography as one of the several that inhabit writing.

From *Black Debt*

From honour's zenith sly suspicion creeps. Such sail spread roars in birth's black mantle flight. Secured by death the womb weeps bulker stock. Each sad divorce through sinking's sudden range. To force attendant boulder souls to swim. How in a slinking boundless swallow breach. A fear of robes could grow new fallen glides. Hasté's necromancy swarthy light directs. Towards calm virtue's sedentary cares. Goitred of accident this poinyard's poot. That shadows tackling mews sufficient length. The gabalt clouds in nimboloidal haze. Make colophones of stoutness harboured back. The sounds of onion garlic zip or chive. A ladder bolt to lettered love's swift edge. Through intrameshes of antagonism. Passed crepitations of salt partialness. As par-boiled eyes haste back to prudent cause. The recitations of prestreaming crowds. Cartesian coordinates in wine. The sentry's whelks in smaller sally-ports. Nought eased to where makes takes the lie and leaves. A minute's asthma entertained in vain. Want's marvelous croation ancestry. Through mouth enflamed and remutation parried. Outsailed by conifers of borrowed grief. That clad which error hides in context throned. Swamped death through journey's rumour of disease. The proletarians of thermometers. Concocted attributes of lettergrams. Preemptings of quotidian vitamins. How sex as sediment into a crack might soak. And pierce the beans of foetid menials. Respect light's eagle sight in weed stood flakes. Storm fears no lesser sight than twin sphered bowls. Destruction's crystal aquaduct expires. Transporting weakness to oppressive vials. Zeniths depressed in adamantine shock. Antipathies to spatial misery. Disrobed originals of atom size. The pure companion of a fictioneer. Mind's orb in spangled macrocosmic flits. Stife's steps to time's inseparable woof. Blandished in lakes

whose surface parrots think. The dusky girdle of a malcontent. Through swedish formulas for softening skin. In bright tempestuous length of scabbard chain. The slow paced snail hurls out its saxophone. Frame's gate still smoothes black glue's arithmetic. Thorns through a pyramid to reflux glooms. Groans gobbets on a common surface plops. Head's huddled stem swift fingered through a newt. Each angle precedent to diadem. Sponged rags of boustrephedons troped. The weary beads of middle innocence. A slimy wall to mollusc destiny. Pride's hamper dim in themes lump huddled up. Through bosom clap and vaporous steam damp haze. The plainer organs of a shadow's rip. Negritic granite still a smite emits. Hart's brake to stake one knee in ruffle passion. In wooden bowls for holding maple sap. These violets of solid petalled words. Steals shout of thyme in homotony. The tarmacadam handles counterstress. Nerved counts in brogan looted nude ideals. Unshod as caption dotters hell bestrew. Reknits of grained domains in prolate curse. A-sawing salvages that seminate. Havanna's diagnosis of the times. A-chiming nominates the tan gloves glow. Fringed lips in nowanights that hasten planes. In re-soaped sit-a-chairs cascara twists. The eyes of artificial and malignant tweets. Fresh juiced obstructions testitudinate. In trebled penitence of half-looped scorn. Soles spendthrift hinnies on a path so brave. Pearls of well spent life in vinegar. Butter may languish not affection so. As sharp as any state of optic's void. Breast embryos on paths of dark dasein. Hurlled progress through engines of black powers. Amphibeous platforms of enthean job. Enamelled truss of big-bulked trouser stains. Things innocence to sense no annals sung. Masked pills of sullen nitric ammony. Sexed aconite in lucid ruth prepares.

From Against Fiction

GATHERING Rain, Weather Conditions.

Organic compounds indulge in their capacity for combination and then a charge, the brilliant lightning strikes the surface of the pond.

Swimmers, eaters, the basic activities furnished with distinguishing characteristics. Evolution leads to complexity, organisation, specialisation and replication. The fishes have gills for breathing. The amphibians crawl out. Reptiles become giant lizards. There is incredible foliage, dragonflies, the swamp scene of primordial nature. The birds take to the air, making wings of skin; mammals get hot blood, primates develop social relations. In a deep gorge of history the chippers and flakers seek caves and fire after hunting. Tools and paint structure the domestic arrangements.

Of Some Organism All MundaNe Issues

AND IF SOME MILDEW BEGAN TO GROW ON SOME PATCH OF EARTH, ROCK, According to the opportunity afforded it and in growing began to modify itself through successive generations so that it complicated itself both on the level of the individual organisms comprising the colony and also in the organisation of the colony itself.

THEN IF THAT DEVELOPMENT SHOULD FURTHER MODIFY THOSE ORGANISMS, CONGLOMERATING SOME, SIMPLIFYING SOME, MUTATING OTHERS TO PERFORM SPECIFIC TASKS AND THEN IF IN SO MUTATING FORMS OF LIFE began to APPEAR which were capable of SYNTHETIC PROCESSES, absorbing and utilising their ENVIRONMENT INTO intricate structures, MATERIALS THAT ORGANISM should be able to CONSTRUCT, DEFENSE OR FUNCTION OF THE COLONY, the OPINIONS Be considered in any WAY grotesque or unnatural or undesirable.

THE POROUS VACUOLE SPORTED A PLASTIC CAP UNDER WHICH A MATURING spore produced rapid fire Generations unable to retain the INFORMATION Genetically deployed to the INDIVIDUALS who counted separately. DESIRE SEEKS A LEVEL OF NECESSITY.

ANOTHER ONE OF THOSE, I THOUGHT, SUPPOSED TO BE VERY EXCITING, A GREAT MYSTERY. BUT ALL I

could think was, another one of those parts of the missing manuscript routines. Everybody goes for that one. Having only the parts to something, not the whole, makes it suddenly very important. The half missing makes the whole irresistible. A whole found text just routine, tedious, on the line. But with a partial text the rest could be anything. The possibilities of the NOT INTERESTED. I told Sally from the first I didn't care what Jonathan was willing to offer me for the job, I wouldn't take it. SHE KNEW. SHE KNEW. HOW COULD SHE NOT KNOW THE SHAPE OF HER THIGH IN THOSE JEANS -- SHE KNEW. ALMOST EVERYTHING. IT WAS AN UNCANNY POWER OF WELL, I HESITATE TO CALL IT FORESIGHT. BETTER CALL IT INSIGHT. A REMARKABLE POWER OF REAL PERCEPTION. BASED ON EXPERIENCE.

See, here's what happened and the reason I didn't want to get involved.

From Uneven Development

how nims amount, word ever lieu

(occl
occlam)

###

some one thing's adobe voice
father its browning studies.

prose out of standstill. drimm onlook

.hair ronk .

hem... eirch

2) on munts. dringe

Stein's

My assumption would be, following Stein's lead, that the paragraph/stanza structure is more than just a see-through container (≠ neutral). For Stein the paragraph was emotional the narrative form par excellence (I'm doubling paragraph with stanza) My own work backing away from narrative concerns (or maybe never even approaching them) it will need to be packaged differently Such packaging freq. affects the function of line therein Said line, stripped of topic-(sentence)-ality can be ordered spatially rather than thematically (visual stress substituted for thematic stress) I've e.g. assigned lines fixed space &/or syllable counts & in some of my shaped works the line has been packed to visually refer to its package (a la Michael Fried's deductive structure) Or e.g. the enclosed: STEIN'S = 7, each line unit = 7 as well, so that the evidence presented is at least as graphic as didactic Maybe it's apparent that Olson's sense of the line as a unit of poet's breath won't hold here either Too anthropomorphized The general organizational push to my stuff becomes page-specific I tend to write in pages (unlike other people?) not in stories or poems, though the structural possibilities offered by one page freq. need following pages to play off of (aka. I work via series The pages are, to consciously quote Sixties minimalists, modular & the modules are most often one page long (There being exceptions which make the rule)) In basketball terms: "no continuation", a weakly bonded jumpshot

The Line

The reader cannot perceive any attributes of the line except extension and thought.

—Spinoza

The name line seems to bind up all that one is. Not because we call it that but because calling it that makes it something, and then almost anything can find place in, as, as part of it. Not the term that matters, but the how or where it names, in which the work holds (releases)—whatever metaphor the writer prefers the activity of writing. A line captures the active in writing. Such a grip makes sense as a concern in every art, the concern to define the values of one's own method, and is ongoing; one imagines oneself doing battle with the line—writing oneself out the end of it. This too a way of describing my line. Writing as self-consciousness or self-interruption (to be more contemporary) *everything but what's in your notebook*. So, such terms of art as line, from which theories proceed, and in some cases works proceed in term I mean in turn form these theories!, don't themselves count much, only that in the largest sense the production of theoretical terms continues, and so we may wish to assume a general urge to produce same (*dolce neue ostranerie*) with which I will certainly not dare to deal in these few words, remarking only the obvious that as in science new theory, new paradigm, produces new views of fact—new particulars, so for a writer new theory immediately gives you new work, a new view of your work, and this not at all as a matter of psychology. A theory is a prospective handle on facts still to come.

Every particular in a poem is expressed in so many ways by the

work, in the mind of its author, in effect an infinite power with respect to a work it has created (and as with an infinite power not necessarily in control of finite powers thereafter). Prospectively and equally so retrospectively, theory magnetizes the work, lines it up internally. Lines up. I want you to see line as a theoretical term, admittedly a humble term among the incredible polysyllabs at hand, but a theoretical term all the same, and this is to be remembered. Line refers not to a horizontality of words that stops but to an intention of a mind to motivate its understanding of the fact of its language. A line happens not in language but in a mind, about language.

Yet a line or any other theory may be viewed as the crucial place where a writer's works capture the writer. What can this mean, that I read my work in lines? As I am my first reader, so theory would seem to consist of devices one of whose main purposes is to mark the spot where reading, and thus the reader, enters writing. Theory on this view is not concerned with truth, but with understanding and controlling for one's own mind the place where the reader comes into the act of writing, prospectively if you will, the reader as the writer reading. Now, not even a writer reading has immediate or constant access to the over-determination of particulars I spoke of above; how much less so another reader, the second reader and all the others. So, given the immense particularity of a work of writing, and given theory as (at least a conscious part of) what a reader works with in reading, how then does such a reader understand a work, a line. This question, of epistemology or poetics as you will, is where I think about questioning the line, looking at my line. Not, in Tom is the line (a unit of) sound or of meaning, of memory or of measure, energy or inertia, but where and how in it is the line (a unit of) sound, meaning, memory, or measure, or of whatever else (it may unify)? (Not wishing to beg the question)

e.g. sound? One writes—and then it's sound. Or it's anything else at all. Of course, I listen, that's what the ear is for to listen; and what can you do while writing which takes up all mental space capturing you except devote everything else to attention to what you're doing. Attention is assuring. The soul's natural prayer. I don't mean either that one never writes lines, but mostly you write and

the work creates lines—i.e. the work is where the term is applied. Applied by whom—i.e. who does this term aid, whose mind—to be productive of understanding? The reader of course.

History whips around our heels and we dance; but fuck that, as far as it goes. Nor has the self been so variously constructed or by such far-to-seek interruptions of force as apres post-modern syntactic criticism may imagine working on... on what, on the self? Ideas so barren while constrained by a mind, and a mind is fecund only as unity prior to terms (terms and conditions we call them in business—what we've arrived at, can agree on and enforce, so I can see a line as a social conception of style alien to writing). If I define a line for you, you know nothing of that line except where between you and it my definition stands as an obstacle enforcing some reading no longer being read. No line has any connection with itself or any other save in this authorial understanding where it is not a matter of connection but of infinite ideas infinitely separate. What can one learn of poetics except from a reader (the writer as reader of his own work)? What we commit to measure is memorable, a line.

Marble, unable, is incised

ROBERT GREENIER

Has Faded in Part but Magnificent also Late for RC / MIRRORS

what stays specific *in* age when much else fades
is song more than *one* even exists & belongs
others are backside beside *we* ring the changes
of age blocks *all* fours twos threes a finally
book with poems *with* resonant titles on light
towns stairs sections *more* 'southerly' 'latent' seascapes
winter's 'grip' in Buffalo *in* slates, remembrancer of childhood
in Massachusetts, bloomers at the shore, "grandma" clamming, *stuff*
'going on' nowadays too colors tones resonances *will* some
use of particulars *Maine* if ever now here always
Monday *morning* quatrains tenor bass copper
over the land ringing mathematical brick tower bell

SUSAN HOWE

It's hard for me to write about the *practice* of my poetry, because each poem is a saying of inner need that carries its own key to force and peace.

A sheaf of measure against what slips.

When I wrote *The Liberties* I was obsessed by Cordelia (Shakespeare's character), and Stella (Swift's companion). They were my ghosts and guides through the text. I think I wanted to abstract them from "masculine" linguistic configuration. In the psychic sphere theories fall to the ground. As I went along, the strategy of crossing biography and fiction evoked only blind essence. It was no accident that the subjects broke loose from my idiom.

First I was a painter, so for me, words shimmer. Each one has an aura. Lines are laid on the field of a page, so many washes of watercolor.

Here is a splintered sketch of sound.

From *The Liberties*

Line

C

3.	bare	cube	arrn	white
glass	wearly	medium	verge	
physic	stone	pane	golden	
thin	swallow	concept	nor	
dower	darker	ha	hue	yell
crisscross	luminate	wheel	a	
up	wild	crown	flame	sa
tom	sa	nero	mum	mum
exeunt	fool	vault	tucket	
clap	no	machination	fum	3

A 'line' may define (*space* to the horizon) the width of a page; 'lines' mark the vertical extant—together, *the page* (x characters 'across', y 'down')—one measure—by cooperation of desire & happenstance (the available paper) comes to be.

A line is known by the company it keeps.

There is no such thing as 'the line'. There are lines, sometimes in isolation. A line—may exist, all by itself, on a page.

Or the measure is *time*. There are ('weirdo') *various lines*, of influence, & authority. Always keep the whole thing in mind, whatever makes this one.

A line is a 'part', which is defined by its relation to a particular 'whole'. (*But*: a part can, but its 'virtu', make all one!)

The following is ruled by the ('secret') ('unstated') measure *six*, which differently lives in each *line*. *Each* line is the result of *many* attempts to 'follow'/'transcribe' the sarabande in Bach's Suite For Unaccompanied Cello in C-Minor (cellist: Gaspar Cassado, old Vox Box VBX 15). But "the line" (that placebo!) is devoured by the consuming desire to translate all that had been propounded in music, in numbers, in language, in letters!

Often nowadays the measure is larger (e.g. the page, or span of 24 pages), or much smaller (phonemic/'letter' relations). *But, for practice*, a poet can still take on the line as a musical bar—that which is wonderfully Williams', Pound's & Creeley's accomplished measure—no 'metaphor' if a piece of music is truly the occasion (preceding) undertaken by the poem.

A line exists in a stanza, a stanza exists in a page, page in a sequence of . . .

Why not line it out any old *which way*—should evidence the

strength of the abandon of the gestural elucidation of those matters at hand that compel attention to *this* means of laying out a true account of what is happening, formally.

Bach Five

for Lyn Hejinian

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5 &

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5 &

1 2 3 4 5 &

1 2 3 4 5 &

one

1 2 3 4 five

1 2 3 4 five

1 2 3 4 five &

1 2 3 4 five and

two 3 4 5 &

1 2 3 4 5 &

1 2 3 4 5 &

one 2 3 4 5 &

one 2 3 4 five and

one 2 3 4 five and

one 2 3 4 five and

one two three four five

CHARLES BERNSTEIN AND BRUCE ANDREWS

or no; if it's in prose, there's a good chance it's a poem. While there is no lesson in the line more useful than that of the pick-et line, the line that has caused the most adversity is the bloodline. In Russia everyone is worried about long lines; back in the USA, it's strictly soup-lines. "Take a chisel to write," but for an actor a line's got to be cued. Or, as they say in math, it takes two lines to make an angle but only one line to make a Margarita.

— — — — —
A B B —