THE NEW SENTENCE

From The New Sentence

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> To please a young man there should be
> sentences. What are sentences. Like what
> are sentences. In the part of sentences it
> for him is happily all. They will name
> sentences for him. Sentences are called
> sentences.
>
> Gertrude Stein

The sole precedent I can find for the new sentence is *Kora In Hell: Improvisations* and that one far-fetched.

I am going to make an argument, that there is such a thing as a new sentence and that it occurs thus far more or less exclusively in the prose of the Bay Area. Therefore this talk is aimed at the question of the prose poem. I say aimed because, in order to understand why so little is in fact understood about sentences and prose poems, a certain amount of background material is needed.

The proposition of a new sentence suggests a general understanding of sentences per se, against which an evolution or shift can be contrasted.

This poses a first problem. There is, in the domain of linguistics, philosophy and literary criticism, no adequate consensus as to the definition of a sentence. Odd as that seems, there are reasons for it.

Milka Ivić, in *Trends in Linguistics*, noted that linguists, by the 1930's, had proposed and were using more than 160 different definitions of "the sentence."

The word sentence is itself of relatively recent origin,

according to the OED, deriving from 12th Century French. As a noun, the OED proposes 9 definitions. Among them:

> 5) An *indefinite* portion of a discourse or writing.
> 6) A series of words in connected speech or writing, forming the grammatically complete expression of a single thought; in popular use often such a portion of a composition or utterance as extends *from one full stop to another.*

This definition dates from 1447.

Contained in the sixth definition is the notation that in grammar, a sentence is either a proposition, question, command or request, containing subject and predicate, though one of these may be absent by means of ellipsis; likewise the OED acknowledges 3 classes of sentences: simple, compound and complex, and notes that one word may be a sentence.

In the November, 1978, *Scientific American*, Breyne Arlene Moskowitz presents a summary discussion of recent developments in the theory of language acquisition in children:

> The first stage of child language is one in which the maximum sentence length is one word; it is followed by a stage in which the maximum sentence length is two words . . . By the time the child is uttering two-word sentences with some regularity, her lexicon may include hundreds of words . . . an important criterion is informativeness, that is, the child selects a word reflecting what is new in a particular situation.[1]

Here is an abbreviated conversation between a child at the one-word stage and an adult, which indicates the sentence-function of single words:

> C: Car. Car.
> A: What?
> C: Go. Go.
> A: What?
> C: Bus. Bus. Bus.
> A: Bicycle?
> C: No!²

Even before the one-word stage, the child is playing with the babbling prosody of sentence forms which are considerably longer,

until gradually the intonation contours of normal speech are acquired. This suggests that the child *hears* sentences before it can break them down into smaller units—that is, that the sentence is in some sense a primary unit of language.

The absence of a 3-word stage is also worth noting. From the 2-word stage, an infant enters the realm of sentences of variable length.

Finally, we should pay attention to the fact that Moskowitz is talking about speech, not writing, a distinction that will be getting more important.

Here is another example of speech, a telephone conversation:

> E. Hello?
> L. Hi Ed.
> E. Hi Lisa.
> L. I'm running around here trying to get my machines done [+] and I'd like to get it all done before I leave, [+] so I won't have to come back. [−] So that might push us up till near two. How is that?
> E. That's fine. My only thing is that I have to leave here like around 3:15 or so.
> L. 3:15. [−] OK. Let me see how I'm doing here, [+] then I'll give you a call right before I'm going to leave.
> E. OK. [−] Fine.
> L. Okey doke. Bye bye.
> E. Bye.³

Friedman has written this conversation up as 16 distinct sentences. There are at least 6 places in this short script that could have been transcribed differently (indicated by + or − signs inserted into the text), rendering the conversation into as few as 13 or as many as 19 sentences. There are, in fact, 64 separate ways to transcribe this conversation without radically altering the acceptibility of any of its sentences.

Which brings us to the question, not of sentences in speech, but in modern linguistics, as a discipline and tradition, normally considered as beginning with Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. Saussure mentions the sentence in this work on only three occasions. All take place in the second part of his course, concerning synchronic linguistics.

The first mention is in the area of locating practical delimiting units of language. Saussure is quoted as saying:

A rather widely held theory makes sentences the concrete units of language: we speak only in sentences and subsequently single out the words. But to what extent does the sentence belong to language [*langue*]? If it belongs to speaking [*parole*], the sentence cannot pass for the linguistic unit. But let us suppose this difficulty is set aside. If we picture to ourselves in their totality the sentences that could be uttered, their most striking characteristic is that in no way do they resemble each other . . . diversity is dominant, and when we look for the link that bridges their diversity, again we find, without having looked for it, the word . . . [4]

The distinction between language and speaking (*langue* and *parole*) is critical. Saussure is analyzing only one, *langue*, and by putting the sentence into the domain of the other, he removes it from the major area of his inquiry. More than any other reason, this is the origin of the failure of the modern human sciences to develop a consensus as to the definition of such a critical term.

Saussure's second mention completes the setting aside of the sentence into the realm of *parole*. It is in the section on syntagmatic relations, in the chapter which historically first divides paradigm from syntagm. The syntagmatic axis is that of connection between words, as in syntax:

. . . the notion of syntagm applies not only to words but to groups of words, to complex units of all lengths and types (compounds, derivatives, phrases, whole sentences).

It is not enough to consider the relation that ties together the different parts of syntagms, one must also bear in mind the relation that links the whole to its parts.

An objection must be raised at this point. The sentence is the ideal type of syntagm. But it belongs to speaking, not to language. [5]

The sentence has been shoved back into the domain of non-investigation, the realm of parole, but without a clear and decisive argument. These two quotations conspire without proof for the dismissal of the sentence as an object of critical investigation.

The only other area where Saussure even mentions the sentence is in the problem of one-word sentences and the question of whether or not they possess a syntagmatic dimension. The language used demonstrates the problem raised by the dismissal of

sentence theory from linguistics:

To be sure, language has independent units that have syntagmatic relations with neither their parts nor other units. Sentence equivalents like *yes, no, thanks*, etc. are good examples. But this exceptional fact does not compromise the general principle. [6]

Given this denegration at the origin of modern linguistics, it is not surprising that the sentence is neither defined nor even indexed in Louis Hjelmslev's 1943 *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*.

In America during this same period, the most influential practicing linguist was Leonard Bloomfield, who, in *Language* (1933), defined the sentence as:

An independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger form.

This definition is void of any internal criteria. The sentence is merely a limit, the point beyond which grammatical analysis cannot be further extended. In a sense this goes back to the OED definition of a sentence as being what comes between two full stops, regardless of what that might be.

One might expect a fuller treatment in Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), insofar as syntax and the syntagmatic is the one area where Saussure even permits the sentence as a question to surface, and since Chomsky is working with such concepts as acceptability, deviant sentences, and kernal sentences. But he raises the issue only in the prefatory "methodological preliminaries" chapter. "I shall use the term 'sentence' to refer to strings of formatives rather than strings of phones." *Formative* is defined in the first paragraph of the book as a "minimal syntactically functioning unit." The problem of one word or other short sentences is likewise slid over. Here is what he says about kernal sentences:

These are sentences of a particularly simple sort that involve a minimum of transformational apparatus in their generation. The notion "kernal sentence" has, I think, an important intuitive significance, but since kernal sentences play no distinctive role in generation or interpretation of sentences, I shall say nothing about them here. [7]

Chomsky gives us no idea as to what the important intuitive significance of kernal sentences might be.

Milka Ivić's figure of 160 active definitions of the sentence arises from the work of John Ries, who first published *Was Ist Ein Satz?* in 1894, more than a decade before Saussure, and who updated it in Prague in 1931. Ries analyzed 140 definitions in the latter edition, and the 20 further definitions Ivić located were critiques of Ries' analysis. Simeon Potter follows this debate in *Modern Linguistics*, which has an entire chapter devoted to sentence structure.

> The sentence is the chief unit of speech. It may be defined simply as a *minimum complete utterance*. . . . When we assert that the sentence is a minimum complete utterance, or a segment of speech-flow between pause and pause, or an inherited structure into which word-forms are fitted, we are not saying all that might be said about it. Nevertheless, these definitions are probably more workable than John Ries' final effort: "A sentence is a grammatically constructed minimum speech-unit which expresses its content in respect to that content's relation to reality." We may, in fact, find as much difficulty in defining a sentence as in pin-pointing a phoneme, and yet, after a little training, we all recognize phonemes and sentences when we see them.[8]

In short, the history and structure of linguistics as a profession inhibits, if it doesn't entirely prevent, an elaboration of a theory of the sentence which might then be applied to literature.

As early as the late 1920's, the Russian linguist Valentin Vološinov proposed this critique in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

> Traditional principles and methods in linguistics do not provide grounds for a productive approach to the problems of syntax. This is particularly true of Abstract Objectivism [his term for the Saussurian school], where the traditional methods and principles have found their most distinct and consistent expression. All the fundamental categories of modern linguistic thought . . . are thoroughly phonetic and morphological. . . . In consequence, the study of syntax is in a very bad state . . . .
>
> In point of fact, of all the forms of language, the syntactic forms are the ones closest to the concrete form of utterence . . . productive

study of syntactic forms is only possible on the grounds of a fully elaborated theory of utterance . . . .

> *Linguistic thinking has hoplessly lost any sense of the verbal whole.*[9]

Vološinov by-passes the sentence more or less entirely, citing that "the category of sentence is merely a definition of the utterance as a unit-element *within* an utterance, and not by any means as a whole entity."

The function of the sentence as a *unit within a larger structure* will, in fact, become important when we look at the role of the *new* sentence. But what is vital here is the failure, even within this critical analysis, for a possible theory of the sentence.

At this point, a number of things can be stated with regard to sentence and linguistics:

> The sentence is a term derived from writing, which in linguistics often brought over to the study of speech. Specifically, the sentence is a unit of writing.

> There exists in speech an open-ended form like, but not identical with, the sentence of writing. Following Vološinov, I am going to refer to it as the utterance.
>
> The critical difference between the utterance and the sentence is that the utterance is indeterminate, a chain that can be more or less indefinitely extended. There is no sentence but a determinate sentence and this is fixed by the period.

> The focus in linguistics on the development of a description of *langue* over *parole*, and the non-addressing of the question of writing has rendered the question of the sentence invisible.

If linguistics fails to deal with the sentence because it fails to separate writing from speech, philosophy deals with language neither as speech nor writing. Language is either:

> Thought itself
> as sometimes understood as constricted and formal, as in logic or a calculus, e.g., Quine's "austure canonical scheme," by which, if one only knew the complete set of proper eternal sentences, one could logically construct the whole of possible correct knowledge;

b) sometimes understood as unconstricted, as when language is taken to be identical with the sum of possible thought, a position Chomsky takes in his forays into philosophic discourse.

2) A manifestation or transformation of thought, also breaking down into a constricted or unconstricted models, Wittgenstein being an example of both, constricted in his early *Tractatus* and unconstricted in *Philosophical Investigations* both of which argue that language is a disguise for thought.

Wittgenstein's model, in both his early and late writings, closely parallels that of Saussure. The dramatic shift between these periods is one of object and goal—from the disentangling of an idealized discourse in the *Tractatus* to an exploration of the problems of meaning in the actual use of language in *Philosophical Investigations*. The break comes in the '30s and is documented in *Philosophical Grammar* and its appendices. The following sections from the *Investigations* show how close some of his later work comes toward a type of discussion that surrounds the new sentence:

498. When I say that the orders "Bring me sugar" and "Bring me milk" make sense, but not the combination "Milk me sugar," that does not mean that the utterance of this combination has no effect. And if its effect is that the other person stares at me and gapes, I don't on that account call it the order to stare and gape, even if that was precisely the effect I wanted to produce.
499. To say "This combination of words makes no sense" excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reasons. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may shew where the property of one man ends and that of another begins and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what it is for.[10]

One of the things that makes Wittgenstein (and, more recently, Jacques Derrida) so useful, suggestive and quotable to poets is the high degree of metaphor in his work. Not all philosophical discourse is like that—in fact, most shuns it. A.J. Ayer wrote in this latter style. In *Language, Truth and Logic* he tried to separate sentences from propositions from

statements, a classic attempt at the compartmentalization of connotation:

Thus I propose that any form of words that is grammatically significant shall be held to constitute a sentence, and that every indicative sentence, whether it is literally meaningful or not, shall be regarded as expressing a statement. Furthermore, any two sentences which are mutually translatable will be said to express the same statement. The word "proposition," on the other hand, will be reserved for what is expressed by sentences which are literally meaningful.[11]

This formula for the sentence is no more well-defined than any from linguistics. It does not even propose the possibility of a distinction between a simple sentence, a compound or a fragment, since it doesn't address the question of a full-pause or maximum grammatical integration of meaning. But it does draw a sharp line between the categories proposed, or at least attempts to. Yet even this succinct formulation has resisted acceptance:

Ayer says (a) that his use "proposition" designates a class of sentences that all have *the same meaning* and (b) that "consequently" he speaks of propositions, not sentences, as being true or false. But of course what a sentence *means* does *not* enable us to say that *it is* true or false. . . .[12]

The problems posed by making sentences synonymous, or even approximate, with propositions can be viewed in an extreme form in Willard Van Orman Quine's *Word and Object*:

A sentence is not an event of utterance, but a universal. . . . In general, to specify a proposition without dependence on circumstances of utterance, we put . . . an *eternal* sentence: a sentence whose truth value stays fixed through time and from speaker to speaker.[13]

Literary criticism ought to serve as a corrective. Unlike philosophy, it is a discourse with a clearly understood material object. Like philosophy, it is centuries old as a discipline. In addition, it is fortuitously situated in western societies, where literature is treated in the schools as an extension of language learning.

As Jonathan Culler cautions in *Structuralist Poetics*, literary criticism is the study of reading, not writing. If a theory of the sentence is to be found in poetics, it won't necessarily be of great use to writers. However, it might function as the basis on which to create such a theory.

I want to consider first the New Critics, partly because they were so dominant that, until recently, all other critical tendencies were defined by the nature of their opposition. The New Critics were strongly influenced by the British philosophical tradition, with I.A. Richards, for example, playing a major role in both communities. In addition, René Wellek was a product of the Prague school of linguistics, and as such was thoroughly familiar with the work of Saussure on the one hand, and Shklovsky on the other, both of whom are cited with approval in Wellek's *Theory of Literature*, written with Austin Warren.

These influences already suggest that the *Theory of Literature* is not going to contain a coherent theory of the sentence. The Saussurian model of linguistics is implicit in this famous dictum:

Every work of art is, first of all, a series of *sounds* out of which arises the meaning.[14]

This does not, as it might have, lead them toward an examination of syntax—let alone sentences. But it does put them in the unenviable position of defending a point of view from which their own assertion could easily have been attacked.

Wellek and Warren are aware of this reduction, and defend themselves with a little sleight of hand, arguing that:

A . . . common assumption, that sound should be analysed in complete divorce from meaning, is also false.[15]

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Theory of Literature is not a theory of writing. In part, this is due to the accurate perception that not all literature is written. Nonetheless, Wellek and Warren fail to address the specific stages which occur once literature is submitted to the writing

process. They justify this by arguing that the written text is never the "real" work. This also enables them to put aside any consideration of the impact of printing on literature, beyond the most off-hand acknowledgment of its existence. Viktor Shklovsky notes the importance of this exclusion in an interview in the Winter 1978-79 issue of *The Soviet Review*:

At one time only poetry was recognized, and prose was regarded as something second class, for it seemed a counterfeit; for a long time it was not admitted into high art. It was let in only when they started printing books.[16]

If we argue—and I am arguing—that the sentence, as distinct from the utterance of speech, is a unit of prose, and if prose as literature and the rise of printing are inextricably interwoven, then the impact of printing on literature, not just on the presentation of literature, but on how writing itself is written, needs to be addressed. This would be the historical component of any theory of the sentence.

Wellek and Warren avoid any such discussion. Instead, they divide literature into a binary scheme, one side devoted to character and plot construction, the other devoted to wordplay. Generally speaking, these become the axes of fiction and poetry. This parallels Saussure's division of language into a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic axis. And it also parallels the strategies of Structuralism.

Wordplay, the paradigmatic axis of poetry, could itself lead toward an investigation of the sentence, but it doesn't. The realms Wellek and Warren carry it to are image, metaphor, symbol and myth: successively broader groups of referentiality.

Like New Criticism, Structuralism—and here I mean structuralist poetics—is founded on the model of linguistics first constructed by Saussure and later codified by Louis Hjemslev and Roman Jakobson. However, it has several practical advantages over New Criticism: it is not heavily influenced by the British school of philosophy; it has not identified itself with the conservative movement in literature; and it is at least conscious of the critique of Saussurian linguistics posed by Derrida.

Structuralism has come closer to a recognition of the need for a theory of the sentence than any of the tendencies thus far examined. But this doesn't mean one has been developed. Following a division

made by Wellek and Warren of discourse into three broad categories—everyday, scientific, and literary—Pierre Machery in *Theory of Literary Production* proposes that everyday discourse is ideological, scientific discourse is empirical, and literary discourse moves back and forth between these two poles. This model echoes the one made by Louis Zukofsky of his work having a lower limit of speech and an upper one of music. Machery's revision makes a real distinction and moves it well towards something that could be put into a contextualized theory of utterance such as that proposed by Vološinov. But Machery's divisions are inaccurate.

Everyday discourse is purely ideological, but so too is all specialized discourse. The constraints posed on all modes of professional jargon and technical language, whether scientific, legal, medical or whatever, communicate class *in addition to* any other object of their discourse. There is no such thing as a non-ideological or value-free discourse.

Tzvestan Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* actually addresses the function of the sentence, for about two paragraphs. Todorov defines meaning according to the formula of Emile Beneviste: "It is the capacity of a linguistic unit to integrate a higher-level unit." In a 1966 lecture at John Hopkins, Todorov demonstrates his understanding of the importance of the question of integration:

> While in speech the integration of units does not go beyond the sentence, in literature sentences are integrated again as part of larger articulations, and the latter in their turn into units of greater dimension, and so on until we have the entire work . . . On the other hand, the interpretations of each unit are innumerable, for their comprehension depends on the system in which it will be included.[17]

Consider, for example, how meaning is altered when the same words are integrated into successively longer strings:

Someone called Douglas.
Someone called Douglas over.
He was killed by someone called Douglas over in Oakland.

Of Structuralist critics, the late Roland Barthes was the most explicit in calling for a theory of the sentence. In the same symposium with Todorov, he went so far as to say:

> The structure of the sentence, the object of linguistics, is found again, homologically, in the structure of works. Discourse is not simply an adding together of sentences; it is, itself, one great sentence.[18]

This statement has the glaring flaw that the sentence has not been the object of linguistics, and Barthes was deliberately being audacious in his statement. But here is an important insight, which is that the modes of integration which carry words into phrases and phrases into sentences are not fundamentally different from those by which an individual sentence integrates itself into a larger work. This not only gives us a good reason for demanding a theory of sentences, but also suggests that such a theory would lead us toward a new mode of analysis of literary products themselves.

In *S/Z*, Barthes demonstrates how a structuralist interpretation of a specific story ought to proceed. He takes Balzac's "Sarrasine" and analyzes it according to several different codes. In a sense, he goes word by word through the text, but he does *not* break his analysis into sentences. Instead, he uses what he calls *lexias*, anywhere from one word to several sentences long. Barthes himself describes the selection as being "arbitrary in the extreme," although he treats them as "units of reading."

His earliest work, *Writing Degree Zero*, does address the question of the sentence, but in a highly metaphoric style and with a certain primitiveness, really only a reflection of the other work which had been done in this area in the past 25 years. Compare this passage with Beneviste's theory of integration:

> The economy of classical language . . . is relational, which means that in it words are abstracted as much as possible in the interest of relationships. In it, no word has a density by itself, it is hardly the sign of a thing, but rather the means of conveying a connection. Far from plunging into an inner reality consubstantial to its outer configuration, it extends, as soon as it is uttered, towards other words. . . .
>
> Modern poetry, since it must be distinguished from classical poetry and from any type of prose, destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leaves standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality. The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an

inflexion which lasts only to present the Word.[19]

Barthes is here casting against the temporal plane of history a proposition originally formulated by Roman Jakobson for all poetry, that "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." Jakobson's dictum suggests the primacy of the *paradigmatic* to the extent that it imposes itself on the supposed value-free combinations of the *syntagmatic*.

Barthes suggests that Jakobson's projection of the paradigm is not a constant, but that history has seen the movement from a syntagmatic focus to a paradigmatic one, and that a break has occurred at a point when some critical mass—not specifically identified by Barthes—rendered it impossible for units to continue to integrate beyond grammatical levels, e.g., the sentence. It is just this breach—when the signifier, freed suddenly from its servitude to an integrating hierarchy of syntactic relations, finds itself drained of any signified—that Frederic Jameson identifies as the characteristic feature of postmodernism:

The crisis in historicity now dictates a return . . . to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic. If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold, and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. These are, however, very precisely some of the privileged terms in which postmodernist cultural production has been analysed (and even defended, by its own apologists).[20]

How do sentences integrate into higher units of meaning? The obvious first step here is toward the paragraph:

. . . in certain crucial respects paragraphs are analogues to exchanges in dialogue. The paragraph is something like a vitiated dialogue worked into the body of a monologic utterance. Behind the device of partitioning speech into units, which are termed paragraphs in their written form, lie orientation toward listener or reader and calculation of the latter's possible reactions.[21]

Vološinov's definition is not radically different from partitioning strategies in some current work, such as David Bromige's essay poems. David Antin, in his talk at 80 Langton Street, described his own work in just Vološinov's terms, as a vitiated dialogue.

Ferrucio Rossi-Landi, the Italian semiotician, focuses on this problem more closely when he argues that the *syllogism* is the classic paradigm for above-sentence integration. For example, the sentences "All women were once girls" and "Some women are lawyers" logically lead to a third sentence or conclusion, a higher level of meaning: "Some lawyers were once girls." Literature proceeds by suppression, most often, of this third term, positing instead chains of the order of the first two. Here is a paragraph by Barrett Watten:

He thought they were a family unit. There were seven men and four women, and thirteen children in the house. Which voice was he going to record?[22]

The first sentence provides a subject, "He," plus a complex object, "they," who may or may not be "a family unit." The second depicts a plurality ("they"), which might or might not be "a family unit." The third again presents a subject identified as "he" in the context of a question ("Which voice") which implies a plurality. Yet any integration of these sentences into a tidy little narrative is, in fact, a presumption on the part of the reader. Neither of the last two sentences has any clear term of anaphor, pointing back inescapably to a previous sentence. In the next paragraph, Watten explores the reader's recognition of this presumptiveness, this willingness to "complete the syllogism":

That's why we talk language. Back in Sofala I'm writing this down wallowing in a soft leather armchair. A dead dog lies in the gutter, his feet in the air.[23]

Here the first sentence proposes itself, by virtue of its grammar, as a conclusion, although it is by no means self-evident why this is "why

we talk language." The second starts with a phrase, "Back in Sofala," indicating a shift on the part of the subject in both time and place. But now the subject is "I." The third sentence, which shares with the previous two only its use of the present tense, is a comic editorial on the process itself: referentiality is not merely dead, it makes for a silly corpse. Yet just two paragraphs above, the logical distance between sentences had been so great as to suppress all but the most ambitious attempts at readerly integration:

> The burden of classes is the twentieth-century career. He can be incredibly cruel. Events are advancing at a terrifying rate.[24]

Rossi-Landi offers us another approach to the sentence. *Linguistics and Economics* argues that language-use arises from the need to divide labor in the community, and that the elaboration of language-systems and of labor production, up to and including all social production, follow parallel paths. In this view, the completed tool is a sentence.

A hammer, for example, consists of a face, a handle, and a peen. Without the presence of all three, the hammer will not function. Sentences relate to their subunits in just this way. Only the manufacturer of hammers would have any use for disconnected handles; thus without the whole there can be no exchange value. Likewise, it is at the level of the sentence that the use value and the exchange value of any statement unfold into view. The child's one-word sentence is communicative precisely because (and to the degree that) it represents a whole. Any further subdivision would leave one with an unuseable and incomprehensible fragment.

Yet longer sentences are themselves composed of words, many, if not all, of which, *in other contexts*, might form adequate one-word sentences. Thus the sentence is the hinge unit of any literary product.

Larger productions, such as poems, are like completed machines. Any individual sentence might be a piston. It will not get you down the road by itself, but you could not move the vehicle without it.

The sentence is a unit of writing. Yet the utterance exists as a unit of speech prior to the acquisition of writing, for both individuals and societies. The utterances of *Gilgamesh* or the Homeric epics would appear to have been translated without great difficulty into written sentence form long before the advent of creative or aesthetic prose. Nonetheless, it is the hypotactic logic of the prose sentence, prose paragraph and expository essay which is most completely the model through which the sentence is communicated in western societies by means of the organized process of education. "Correct grammar," which has never existed in spoken daily life save as a template, is itself thus predicated upon a model of "high" discourse. (As Shklovsky noted, prose entered the literary arena with the rise of printing only a little more than 500 years ago; its cultural role became progressively more important as literacy spread to the lower classes.) "Educated" speech imitates writing: the more "refined" the individual, the more likely their utterances will possess the characteristics of expository prose. The sentence, hypotactic and complete, was and still is an index of class in society. Accordingly, the function of this unit within creative prose proves essential to our understanding of how a sentence might become "new."

Prose fiction to a significant extent derives from the narrative epics of poetry, but moves toward a very different sense of form and organization. Exterior formal devices, such as rhyme and linebreak, diminish, and the structural units become the sentence and paragraph. In the place of external devices, which function to keep the reader's or listener's experience at least partly in the present, consuming the text, most fiction foregrounds the syllogistic leap, or integration above the level of the sentence, to create a fully referential tale.

This does not mean that the fictive paragraph is without signficant form, even in the most compelling narrative. Consider this paragraph from Conrad's *The Secret Agent*:

> In front of the great doorway a dismal row of newspaper sellers standing clear of the pavement dealt out their wares from the gutter. It was a raw, gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of the dirty men harmonized excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers' ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like tapestry the sweep of the curbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet, in comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of disregarded distribution. Ossipon looked hurriedly both ways before stepping out into the cross-currents, but the Professor was already out of sight.[25]

Only the last of these five sentences actually furthers the narrative. The rest serve to set the scene, but do so in the most formal manner imaginable. Every sentence is constructed around some kind of opposition. The first takes us from the "great doorway" to a "dismal row" in the "gutter." The second contrasts "spring" with "raw and gloomy," and then has the "grimy sky," "the mud," "the rags of the dirty men" "harmonize excellently" with the "damp rubbishy sheets soiled with ink." And so forth, even to the presence of Ossipon and the absence of the Professor.

This kind of structure might well be foregrounded in a poem, by placing key terms in critical places along the line, by putting certain oppositions in literal rhyme, and by writing the whole perhaps in the present tense. Fiction has a much greater tendency toward the past tense in general. More importantly, the lack of these foregrounding devices permits the syllogistic capacity of the language to become dominant.

It is this condition of prose that we find also in the work of R... ... ... known English language writer of the prose ... This is ... the Sardine ... Dormitory":

A man opens a sardine can and finds a row of tiny cots full of tiny dead people; it is a dormitory flooded with oil.

He lifts out the tiny bodies with a fork and lays them on a slice of bread; puts a leaf of lettuce over them, and closes the sandwich with another slice of bread.

He wonders what he should do with the tiny cots; wondering if they are not eatable, too?

He looks into the can and sees a tiny cat floating in the oil. The bottom of the can, under the oil, is full of little shoes and stockings.[26]

Other than the hallucinated quality of the tale, derived from surrealism and the short stories of Kafka, there is really nothing here of great difference from the conditions of prose as one finds it in fiction. If anything, it uses fewer formal devices than the Conrad passage above.

In good part, what makes Edson a prose poet is where he publishes. The poems in *Edson's Mentality* were first published in *Poetry Now, Oink!*, and *The Iowa Review*. By publishing among poets, Edson has taken on the public role of a poet, but a poet whose work participates entirely in the tactics and units of fiction.

Edson is a good example of why the prose poem—even that name is awkward—has come to be thought of as a bastard form.

Even today in America the prose poem barely has any legitimacy. There are no prose poems at all in Hayden Carruth's anthology, *The Voice That Is Great Within Us.*

Nor in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry.*

Nor in the Robert Kelly/Paris Leary anthology, *A Controversy of Poets.*

The prose poem came into existence in France. From 1699, the rules of versification set down by the French Academy proved so rigid that some writers simply chose to sidestep them, composing instead in a "poetic" prose style, writing epics and pastorals in this mode in the 18th Century. At the same time, poetry from other languages was being translated into French prose. It was Aloysius Bertrand who, in 1827, first began to compose poems in prose. He published these works in a book called *Gaspard de la Nuit.* By the end of the 19th Century, the genre had been incorporated fully into French literature by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud.

The French found the prose poem to be an ideal device for the dematerialization of writing. Gone were the external devices of form that naggingly held the reader in the present, aware of the physical presence of the text itself. Sentences could be lengthened, stretched even further than the already extensive elocutions which characterized Mallarmé's verse, without befuddling the reader or disengaging her from the poem. And longer sentences also suspended for greater periods of time the pulse of closure which enters into prose as the mark of rhythm. It was perfect for hallucinated, fantastic and dreamlike contents, for pieces with multiple locales and times squeezed into a few words. Here is a six sentence poem by Mallarmé, translated by Keith Bosley as "The Pipe":

Yesterday I found my pipe as I was dreaming about a long evening's work, fine winter work. Throwing away cigarettes with all the childish joys of summer into the past lit by sun-blue leaves, the muslin dresses and taking up again my earnest pipe as a serious man who wants a long undisturbed smoke, in order to work better: but I was not expecting the surprise this abandoned creature was preparing, hardly had I taken the first puff when I forgot my great books to be done, amazed, affected, I breathed last winter coming back. I had not touched the faithful friend since my return to France,

and all London, London as I lived the whole of it by myself, a year ago appeared; first the dear fogs which snugly wrap our brains and have there, a smell of their own, when they get in under the casement. My tobacco smelt of a dark room with leather furniture seasoned by coaldust on which the lean black cat luxuriated; the big fires! and the maid with red arms tipping out the coals, and the noise of these coals falling from the steel scuttle into the iron grate in the morning—the time of the postman's solemn double knock, which brought me to life! I saw again through the windows those sick trees in the deserted square—I saw the open sea, so often crossed that winter, shivering on the bridge of the steamer wet with drizzle and blackened by smoke—with my poor wandering loved one, in travelling clothes with a long dull dress the color of road dust, a cloak sticking damp to her cold shoulders, one of those straw hats without a feather and almost without ribbons, which rich ladies throw away on arrival, so tattered are they by the sea air and which poor loved ones retrim for a few good seasons more. Round her neck was wound the terrible handkerchief we wave when we say goodbye for ever.[27]

. . . . the
. . . . devices, b . . not their interior . . . in
the sentence as in Conrad. Mallarmé has extended their absence by reducing the text to the minimum number of sentences. The de-emphasis on the materiality of the text in this manner is an example of prose shaping poetic form and beginning to alter sentence structure. But note that there is no attempt whatsoever to prevent the integration of linguistic units into higher levels. These sentences take us not toward the recognition of language, but away from it.

The prose poem did not soon take root in England or America. Nonetheless, Oscar Wilde and Amy Lowell made stabs at it, and the presence of poems from other languages being translated into English *prose*, such as Tagore's rendering of Indian songs, *Gitanjali*, was quite visible.

Alfred Kreymbourg's 1930 anthology, *Lyric America*, has four prose poems. One is a long and tedious one by Arturo Giovanni, called "The Walker." The other three are by the black poet Fenton Johnson. Johnson uses a device which points in the direction of the new sentence. Each sentence is a complete paragraph; run-on sentences are treated as one paragraph each, but two paragraphs begin with conjunctions. Structured thus, Johnson's is the first

American prose poem with a clear, if simple, sentence:paragraph relation.

THE MINISTER

I mastered pastoral theology, the Greek of the Apostles, and all the difficult subjects in a minister's curriculum.

I was learned as any in this country when the Bishop ordained me.

And I went to preside over Mount Moriah, largest flock in the Conference.

I preached the Word as I felt it, I visited the sick and dying and comforted the afflicted in spirit.

I loved my work because I loved God.

But I lost my charge to Sam Jenkins, who has not been to school four years in his life.

I lost my charge because I could not make my congregation shout.

And my dollar money was small, very small.

Sam Jenkins, who never . . . Bible to tatters and his congregation . . . . the pews with their shouting and stamping.

Sam Jenkins leads in the gift of raising dollar money.

Such is religion.[28]

Johnson is clearly influenced by Edgar Lee Masters, but his sentence:paragraph device brings the reader's attention back time and again to the voice of the narrator in this poem. It is the first instance in English of a prose poem which calls attention to a discursive or poetic effect. Even though the referential content is always evident, the use of the paragraph here limits the reader's ability to get away from the language itself.

Yet Fenton Johnson may not be the first American prose poet of consequence. Here, from *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* is the third entry in the twentieth grouping, accompanied by its commentary:

One need not be hopelessly cast down because he cannot cut onyx into a ring to fit a lady's finger. You hang your head. There is neither onyx nor porphyry on these roads—only brown dirt. For all that, one may see his face in a flower along it—even in this light. Eyes only and for a flash only. Oh, keep the neck bent, plod with the back to the split dark! Walk in the curled mudcrusts to one side, hand hanging.

Ah well . . . Thoughts are trees! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Leaves load the branches and upon them white night sits kicking her heels against the shore.

A poem can be made of anything. This is a portrait of a disreputable farm hand made out of the stuff of his environment.[29]

Certainly we have strategies here which echo the French prose poem, such as the constantly shifting point of view. More important: the sentences allow only the most minimal syllogistic shift to the level of reference, and some, such as the laughter, permit no such shift whatsoever.

But note the word "portrait" in Williams' commentary. His model here is not the French prose poem so much as the so-called cubist prose of Gertrude Stein, who as early as 1911 wrote *Tender Buttons*:

CUSTARD

Custard is this. It has aches, aches when. Not to be. Not to be narrowly. This makes a whole little hill.

It is better than a little thing that has mellow real mellow. It is better than lakes whole lakes, it is better than seeding.

ROAST POTATOES

Roast potatoes for.[30]

Stein says in "Poetry and Grammar" that she did not intend to make *Tender Buttons* poetry, but it just happened that way. It is sufficiently unlike much that she later called poetry to suggest that it is something other than that. The portraits *are* portraits. The syllogistic move above the sentence level to an exterior reference is possible, but the nature of the book reverses the direction of this movement. Rather than making the shift in an automatic and gestalt sort of way, the reader is forced to deduce it from the partial views and associations posited in each sentence. The portrait of custard is marvelously accurate.

The sentences deserve some examination. They are fragmented in a way that is without precedent in English. Who but Stein would

have written a sentence in 1911 that ends in the middle of a prepositional phrase? Her use of elliptical sentences—"Not to be. Not to be narrowly."—deliberately leaves the subject out of sight. Custard does not want to be a hard fact. And the anaphoric pronoun of "this makes a whole little hill" refers not to custard, but the negated verb phrases of the two previous sentences. Likewise in "Roast Potatoes," Stein uses the preposition "for" to convert "roast" from an adjective into a verb.

Stein has written at great length about sentences and paragraphs. Her essays on them are works in themselves, and in them, she reveals herself to have thought more seriously about the differences here than any other poet in English.

Because of the consciously non-expository method of her arguments, I'm going to simply quote, in order, some passages which shed light on the issue in the terms through which we have been approaching it. From "Sentences and Paragraphs," a section of *How To Write* (1931):

1) Within itself. A part of a sentence may be sentence without their meaning.
2) Every sentence has a beginning. Will he begin.
Every sentence which has a beginning makes it be left more to them.
3) A sentence should be arbitrary it should not please be better.
4) The difference between a short story and a paragraph. There is none.
5) There are three kinds of sentences are there. Do sentences follow the three. There are three kinds of sentences. Are there three kinds of sentences that follow the three.[31]

This of course refers to the simple, compound, complex division of traditional grammars.

From the essay "Sentences" in the same book:

6) A sentence is an interval in which there is finally forward and back. A sentence is an interval during which if there is a difficulty they will do away with it. A sentence is a part of the way when they wish to be secure. A sentence is their politeness in asking for a cessation. And when it happens they look up.
7) There are two kinds of sentences. When they go. They are given to me. There are these two kinds of sentences. Whenever they go

they are given to me. There are there these two kinds of sentences there. One kind is when they like and the other kind is as often as they please. The two kinds of sentences relate when they manage to be for less with once whenever they are retaken. Two kinds of sentences make it do neither of them dividing in a noun.[32]

Stein is here equating clauses, which divide as indicated into dependent and independent, with sentences. Anything as high up the chain of language as a clause is already partially a kind of sentence. It can move syllogistically as a sentence in itself to a higher order of meaning. That's an important and original perception.

8) Remember a sentence should not have a name. A name is familiar. A sentence should not be familiar. All names are familiar there for there should not be a name in a sentence. If there is a name in a sentence a name which is familiar makes a data and therefor there is no equilibrium.[33]

This explains Stein's distaste for nouns quite adequately. The concern for equilibrium is an example of grammar as meter, which points us clearly toward the new sentence.

In her 1934 American lecture, "Poetry and Grammar," Stein makes a few additional comments which cast light on the relation of sentences to prose, and hence prose poems. The first is, I believe, the best single statement on the problem as it is faced by a writer:

9) What had periods to do with it. Inevitably no matter how completely I had to have writing go on, physically one had to again and again stop sometime and if one had to again and again stop some time then periods had to exist. Besides I had always liked the look of periods and I liked what they did. Stopping sometime did not really keep one from going on, it was nothing that interfered, it was only something that happened, and as it happened as a perfectly natural happening, I did believe in periods and I used them. I never really stopped using them.
10) Sentences and paragraphs. Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are. I can say that as often as I like and it always remains as it is, something that is.
    I said I found this out in listening to Basket my dog drinking. And anybody listening to any dog's drinking will see what I mean.[34]

Stein later gives some examples of sentences she has written, also from *How To Write* which exist as one sentence paragraphs and capture the balance between the unemotional sentence and the emotional paragraph. My favorite is "A dog which you have never had before has sighed."

11) We do know a little now what prose is. Prose is the balance the emotional balance that makes the reality of paragraphs and the unemotional balance that makes the reality of sentences and having realized completely realized that sentences are not emotional while paragraphs are, prose can be the essential balance that is made inside something that combines the sentence and the paragraph . . . .[35]

What Stein means about paragraphs being emotional and sentences not is precisely the point made by Emile Beneviste: that linguistic units integrate only up to the level of the sentence, but higher orders of meaning—such as emotion—integrate at higher levels than the sentence and occur only in the presence of either many sentences or, at least Stein's example suggests this, in the presence of certain complex sentences in which dependent clauses integrate with independent ones. *The sentence is the horizon*, the border between these two fundamentally distinct types of integration.

So what is the *new* sentence? It has to do with prose poetry, but not necessarily prose poems, at least not in the restricted and narrow sense of that category. It does not have to do with the prose poems of the Surrealists, which manipulate meaning only at the "higher" or "outer" layers, well beyond the horizon of the sentence. Nor with the non-surrealist prose poems of the Middle-American variety, such as the dramatic monologs of James Wright or David Ignatow, which do likewise.

Bob Grenier's *Sentences* directly anticipates the new sentence. By removal of context, Grenier prevents most leaps beyond the level of grammatic integration. This is the extreme case for the new sentence. However, most of Grenier's "sentences" are more properly utterances, and in that sense follow Olson, Pound and a significant portion of Creeley's work. Periodically, some sentences and paragraphs in Creeley's *A Day Book* and *Presences* carry the pressurized quality of the new sentence, in that the convolutions of syntax often suggest the internal presence of once-exteriorized poetic forms, although here identified much with the features of speech.

Another author whose works anticipate this mode is Hannah Weiner, particularly in her diaristic prose pieces where the flow of sentences (their syntactic completion, let alone integration into larger units) is radically disrupted by "alien" discourses which she ascribes to "clairvoyance." While, in general, the new sentence has not been nearly as visible on the East Coast as it has in the west, something much like or tending towards it can be found in the writings of several poets, including Peter Seaton, Bruce Andrews, Diane Ward, Bernadette Mayer (especially in her early books), James Sherry, Lynne Dreyer, Alan Davies, Charles Bernstein and Clark Coolidge.

A paragraph from section XVIII of Coolidge's "Weathers":

> At most a book the porch. Flames that are at all rails of snow. Flower down winter to vanish. Mite hand stroking flint to a card. Names that it blue. Wheel locked to pyramid through stocking the metal realms. Hit leaves. Participle.[36]

In other contexts, any of these could become a new sentence, in the sense that any sentence properly posed and staged could. Each focuses attention at the level of the language in front of the reader. But seldom at the level of the sentence. Mostly at the levels of phrase and clause. "Flower down winter to vanish" can be a grammatical sentence in the traditional sense if flower is taken as a verb and the sentence as a command. But "Names that it blue" resists even that much integrating energy. Coolidge refuses to carve connotative domains from words. They are still largely decontextualized—save for the physical-acoustic elements—readymades.

This is not an example of the new sentence because it works primarily below the level of the sentence. However, there is another important element here as a result: the length of sentences and the use of the period are now wholly rhythmic. Grammar has become, to recall Barthes' words, prosody. As we shall see, this is an element whenever the new sentence is present.

Here, from Bob Perelman's *a.k.a.*, are two paragraphs of new sentences:

> An inspected geography leans in with the landscapes's repetitions. He lived here, under the assumptions. The hill suddenly vanished, proving him right. I was left holding the bag. I peered into it.
> The ground was approaching fast. It was a side of himself he

rarely showed. The car's tracks disappeared in the middle of the road. The dialog with objects is becoming more strained. Both sides gather their forces. Clouds enlarge. The wind picks up. He held onto the side of the barn by his fingertips.[37]

Here we note these qualities: (1) The paragraph organizes the sentences in fundamentally the same way a stanza does lines of verse. There are roughly the same number of sentences in each paragraph and the number is low enough to establish a clear sentence:paragraph ratio. Why is this not simply a matter of the way sentences are normally organized into paragraphs? Because there is no specific referential focus. The paragraph here is a unit of measure—as it was also in "Weathers." (2) The sentences are all sentences: the syntax of each resolves *up to* the level of the sentence. Not that these sentences "make sense" in the ordinary way. For example, "He lived here, under the assumptions." This could be rewritten, or have been derived, from a sentence such as "He lived here, under the elm trees," or, "He lived here, under the assumption *that* etc." (3) This continual torquing of sentences is a traditional quality of poetry, but in poetry it is most often accomplished by linebreaks, or by devices such as rhyme. Here poetic form has moved into the interiors of prose.

Consider, by way of contrast, the first stanza of Alan Bernheimer's "Carapace":

> The face of a stranger
> is a privilege to see
> each breath a signature
> and the same sunset fifty years later
> though familiarity is an education[38]

There are shifts and torquings here also, but these occur hinged by *external* poetic form: linebreaks. In "Carapace," the individual line is so-called ordinary language and is without this torque or pressurization of syntax. Torquing, the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into that of combination, yields, in this instance, sly and carefully-honed incommensurabilities, and occurs in "Carapace" through the *addition* of the lines, one to another.

a.k.a. however, has redeployed the linebreak to two levels. As noted, the length of the sentence is a matter now of quantity, of

measure. But the torquing which is normally triggered by linebreaks, the function of which is to enhance ambiguity and polysemy, has moved directly into the grammar of the sentence. At one level, the completed sentence (i.e., not the completed thought, but the maximum level of grammatic/ linguistic integration) has become equivalent to a line, a condition not previously imposed on sentences.

Imagine what the major poems of literary history would look like if each sentence was identical to a line.

That is why an ordinary sentence, such as "I peered into it," can become a new sentence, that is, a sentence with an interior poetic structure in addition to interior ordinary grammatical structure. That is also why and how lines quoted from a Sonoma newspaper in David Bromige's "One Spring" can become new sentences.

In fact, increased sensitivity to syllogistic movement endows works of the new sentence with a much greater capacity to incorporate ordinary sentences of the material world, because here form moves from the whole downward and the disjunction of a quoted sentence from a newspaper puts its referential content (a) into play with its own diction, as in the sentence "Danny always loved Ireland," (b) into play with the preceding and succeeding sentences, as quantity, syntax, and measure; and (c) into play with the paragraph as a whole, now understood as a unit not of logic or argument, but as quantity, a stanza.

Let's look at this play of syllogistic movement:

I was left holding the bag. I peered into it.
    The ground was approaching fast. It was a side of himself he rarely showed.

This is not the systematic distortion of the maximum or highest order of meaning, as in surrealism. Rather, each sentence plays with the preceding and following sentence. The first sounds figurative, because of the deliberate use of the cliche. The second, by using both a repetition of the word "I" and the anaphor "it," twists that, making it sound (a) literal and (b) narrative, in that the two sentences appear to refer to an identical content. But the third sentence, which begins the next paragraph, works instead from the direction one might take in looking into a bag and associating from there the sense of gravity one feels looking down, as though falling.

The fourth sentence moves outside the voice of the narrative "I" and presents the sequence of previous sentences as leading to this humorous conclusion. This double-relation of syllogistic movement, which nonetheless does not build up so far as to move the reader away from the level of language itself, is highly typical of the new sentence.

Further, the interior structure of sentences here reflects also how such issues as balance, normally issues of line organization, recast themselves inside sentences. A sentence like "Clouds enlarge" is no less concerned with such balance than those of Grenier's *Sentences*: the word "enlarged" is an ordinary word *en*larged.

Let's list these qualities of the new sentence, then read a poem watching for their presence:

1) The paragraph organizes the sentences;
2) The paragraph is a unity of quantity, not logic or argument;
3) Sentence length is a unit of measure;
4) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ambiguity;
5) Syllogistic movement is: (a) limited; (b) controlled;
6) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following sentences;
7) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work;
8) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader's attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below.

My example is the poem "For She," by Carla Harryman. It is one paragraph:

The back of the hand resting on the pillow was not wasted. We couldn't hear each other speak. The puddle in the bathroom, the sassy one. There were many years between us. I stared the stranger into facing up to Maxine, who had come out of the forest wet from bad nights. I came from an odd bed, a vermillion riot attracted to loud dogs. Nonetheless I could pay my rent and provide for him. On this occasion she apologized. An arrangement that did not provoke inspection. Outside on the stagnant water was a motto. He was more than I perhaps though younger. I sweat at amphibians, managed to get home. The sunlight from the window played up his golden curls

and a fist screwed over one eye. Right to left and left to right until the sides of her body were circuits. While dazed and hidden in the room, he sang to himself, severe songs, from a history he knew nothing of. Or should I say malicious? Some rustic gravure, soppy but delicate at pause. I wavered, held her up. I tremble, jack him up. Matted wallowings, I couldn't organize the memory. Where does he find his friends? Maxine said to me "but it was just you again." In spite of the cars and the smoke and the many languages, the radio and the appliances, the flat broad buzz of the tracks, the anxiety with which the eyes move to meet the phone and all the arbitrary colors. I am just the same. Unplug the glass, face the docks. I might have been in a more simple schoolyard.[39]

Compare this with the following characterization of the postmodern cultural text by Frederic Jameson:

> The isolated Signifier is no longer an enigmatic state of the world or an incomprehensible yet mesmerizing fragment of language, but rather something closer to a sentence in free-standing isolation.[40]

Yet what endows Harryman's piece with precisely the intensity or power that makes it worthy of our consideration are the many ways in which individual sentences are *not* "in free-standing isolation." The charged use of pronouns, the recurrence of the name Maxine, the utilization of parallel structures ("I wavered, held her up. I tremble, jack him up.") or of terms extending from the same bank of images, notably water, are all methods for enabling *secondary* syllogistic movement to create or convey an overall impression of unity, without which the systematic blocking of the integration of sentences one to another through *primary* syllogistic movement (not how those parallel sentences operate in different tenses, or how the second one turns on that remarkably ambiguous, possibly sexual, verb "jack") would be trivial, without tension, a "heap of fragments." Nonetheless, any attempt to explicate the work as a whole according to some "higher order" of meaning, such as narrative or character, is doomed to sophistry, if not overt incoherence. The new sentence is a decidedly contextual object. Its effects occur as much between, as within, sentences. Thus it reveals that the blank space, between words or sentences, is much more than the 27th letter of the alphabet. It is beginning to explore and articulate just what those hidden capacities might be.

The new sentence first became visible, at least to my eyes, in the poem "Chamber Music" in Barrett Watten's *Decay*. There are, of course, as I have noted, numerous anticipations of this device, such as Watten's use of the line in his early poem, "Factors Influencing the Weather," or in the last books of the late Jack Spicer. More telling, perhaps even a test of its status as a device, has been its evolution, in something less than a decade, throughout an entire poetic community. Unlike, for example, the short enjambed lines of Robert Creeley, which were so widely imitated in the late 60's, the new sentence has successfully resisted any proprietary appropriation. It is in this sense something different, and more, than a style. The new sentence is the first prose technique to identify the signifier (even that of the blank space) as the locus of literary meaning. As such, it reverses the dynamics which have so long been associated with the tyranny of the signified, and is the first method capable of incorporating all the levels of language, both below the horizon of the sentence *and* above:

> Everywhere there are spontaneous literary discussions. Something structurally new is always being referred to. These topics may be my very own dreams, which everyone takes a friendly interest in. The library extends for miles, under the ground.[41]