

# Writing and Politics

Capitalist ideology hopes to dilute or deny the existence of anything other than the everyday given. By doing so current ideology stagnates thought, replaces the possibility of change with the statistic, frozen black on paper, legitimized by its very inertia. In rendering present social structures “natural” ideology underwrites their “immutability”, whether in terms of some kind of metaphysic or positivist scientism. ( ... or in what is the sociological equivalent to scientism, it promotes all reality as relative, hoping to defuse all social idealism.)

If only as a language that is other, a language outside the pervasive ideolanguage of advanced capitalist society (which once having classified & defined, seeks to box in, contain) free language exists in a critical relation viz. capitalist superstructures. A language of the word instead of the worded, predigested, fabricated; accepted fact. It's perhaps as simple as saying anything to make one think & examine. The degree to which language is self-concerned is the degree to which it remains unimplicated (?).

Having said this, there are a few important qualifications to the above. For me any critical theory must of necessity exist within revolutionary praxis ... neither the primary component of that praxis, nor servant to “practice”. Whether the establishment of a revolutionary counter-hegemony (Gramsci) is a precondition for social transformation or not, once critical theory has become detached from practice (or at least the struggle toward a program for action) it becomes merely another academic discipline. Scholasticism drained of any real social content, ready to be taught at the state u.

Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual is helpful here. The organic intellectual was one who, unlike the traditional intellectual, was not a sub-class unto himself, separated from everyday life. “Theory” was not directing practice from above, but the self-expression of the proletariat's everyday struggle. (This shouldn't be taken as an argument for some sort of Gramscian orthodoxy. For starters, the whole concept of “working class” has become problematic forty years later.) ... Concretely, it would seem to me that all revolutionary critique must begin (attempt to) with an extensive analysis of class relations within present-day society. Who, what or where are/is the revolutionary class(es) in the USA today? Critiques for their own sake obviously don't make much sense. Criticism becomes revolutionary at the instant it somehow manages to come to grips with this question.

## **Doug Lang, *Magic Fire Chevrolet***

(1979: Titanic Books, Washington, D.C.)

A collection in roughly two parts. The first, larger section, of “prose poetry”. —Material: sentences sometimes developing into some overall structure (narrative, thematic, imaged), but more often not coalescing into any kind of resumable unit.—Lots of lists, itineraries, names. Facts in the red wheelbarrow; additive work. Lang’s work here seems particularly resistant to paragraphs (i.e. paragraphical history; the paragraph as teleological organization). There’s no chronology implicit in “the facts”. Things do accumulate (resonance), but don’t line up into any kind of argument.— ... tension is between the frequent naming (labeling) of particulars & the lack of a parcel to lug all the labels around in. (punch-line, summary.).—The strong emotional tone of much of MFC works toward one’s expectation of a summation which never in fact happens ... A second section of MFC takes a more concrete approach to the problem of organization. Press type & typewriter script are used to form words, phonetic units & sometimes purely visual formations. The press type is often broken or crumbled to underline its texture, print is obliterated by successive layers of print typed or placed directly over it. A kind of layered type-field results, through which the alphabet achieves a physical density—(presence), (materiality of the page)—physical to the point where its letters can be broken, crumbled; splattered like paint. In a piece like “Poem for Mary” e.g., though there is nothing (except for the “so” in the lower righthand corner) pronounceable, the large press type letters seem to demand vocalization—(childhood association with alphabet blocks?)—These later pieces point up the problem with a term like “abstraction”. For these pieces are on one level “abstract”: the way the letters of the alphabet are treated as categories; the lack of reference to everyday, “concrete” language; the move toward (& I don’t mean this in a pretentious way) metalanguage. But in another, & perhaps more dramatic, sense the physicality of these works argues against any abstraction “conceived apart from (the) concrete realities, specific objects, or actual instances” of the works themselves. (Random House Dictionary) ... in short, continually interesting, non-pigeonholable work. MFC is something only Lang could have written. In fact, he did.

## Stein's

My assumption would be, following Stein's lead, that the paragraph/stanza structure is more than just a see-through container ( $\neq$  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

# One To One

A personal name delineates one's space from that of the others'. My name marks my spot on the assembly line off from yours, though our jobs may well be interchangeable. "Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual. Avoid distribution in groups; break up collective dispositions ..." (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*).<sup>1</sup> To be delivered a subpoena the subpoena'd must have an address. To be drafted, or inundated with credit card bills, the billed must have a name. Linnean classification begets the mailing list.

Althusser: "Every human, that is to say social individual, cannot be the agent of a practice unless he takes the form of a subject. The subject form is in fact the form that the historical existence of every individual, every agent of social practices, takes; for the relations of production and reproduction necessarily involve, as the integrating element, what Lenin called 'ideological social relations,' which in order to function, imposes on every individual agent the form of a subject."<sup>2</sup>

Craving for faces. For facial imagery. Iconology. From your generalized Medieval Christ figure to the realistically depicted wart on the Dutch burgher's nose. My son bowled over by how realistic the graphics of a computer game are. His two buddies sitting next to him receding into a less & less vivid reality the more he gets into the game.

Defoe describing Crusoe's day-to-day routines. Accumulating minutiae & details. Building up the inventory of facts while Crusoe stock-piles goods. Narration as accounting.

Good old days. In precapitalist narrative forms the hero was generic. Or at least not very specific. Capitalist narrative made a science of individualizing; describing facial tics. The movement from *Romance of the Rose* to Fielding to Henry James. Greater & greater psychological resolution. Now all that's been assimilated. We don't have to work as hard at it. Psychology need just be hinted at before the plot proceeds.

Hierarchical pyramid. Sentence/paragraph/story. Emblematic of the same old top/down society we've been living in. It all flows up to the top, gets digested,

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, tr. Graham Lock (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Althusser, "Response to John Lewis" in *Essays in Self Criticism*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 95; as cited in Alex Callinicos, *Althusser's Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), p. 70.

then excreted back down. I like thinking of *Pere Goriot* (or “Miami Vice”) as plumbing.

Ideology constructs the subject. Singularizing, it suppresses all collectivity. The individual lives as if it were a subject not subjected.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault shows that alongside the maturation of the capitalist system of production the scientific location & elucidation of “the individual” (preeminently through the psy- and medical sciences) becomes an increasingly effective means of control & repression. Keeping tabs. The body is acted on by a barrage of knowledges & disciplines. Defined, analyzed &, most importantly, located and fixed. The individual as part of a taxonomy. The body as a map of the terrain. Formulate a category: female hysteria. Describe it, validate it “scientifically”. Use it as a means of abnormalizing women who are dissatisfied with their second-class social status. Anna O. & the woman’s suffrage movement.

Kids prefer watching TV videos of Guns & Roses to hearing G&R songs over the radio. They can see the haircuts & costumes behind the music. Are they dolts or merely the next wave of reality effect junkies?

Lit crit’s notion that behind the allusions & in-group imagery stands the genius of Wallace Stevens. The persona of the poet who, even if you don’t understand what the hell he’s saying, represents what’s best in our culture, our human spirit. The poem not so much a unit of meaning as an emblem of it. The real story that of the artist as super individual. The sensibility before you punch in on the time-clock. The promise that it’ll be there when you come home from another day at the office.

Marx had thought that the factory as gathering place would socialize the workforce. He hadn’t anticipated a late capitalism mobilized against such an effect. Home & school as decontamination chambers. Media opium replacing religion. The brain police & the other kind.

Medicine, psychology, criminology, sociology. Which treat bodies as machinery (passim Descartes, the “father” of our Western subject). Developing alongside the dirty sciences. Industrialization, Taylorization, automation.

Narrative & its strategic mode: realism.

Narrative implicates the subject through its insertion of s/he into the action. Stories must end up somewhere. They must be told to *someone*. What this presentation lacks is an audience. Subject as terminus. The story’s protagonist acts as a duplication of that someone, the reader. Why else all the effort realist

texts expend on rendering their characters true-to-life, believably like their readers, if not for the purposes of effecting an identification?

Narrative triumphs precisely through the consolidation of isolate detail, fragmented experience. It solidifies. Things all come together at the end of the episode, denying social atomization by the production of a kind of aesthetic afterlife where things will be made whole again. Its closure indicates not only that of the unitary subject's, but the possibility of closure itself. Case closed. I peeked at the end of the book before I got there.

No mere play on words to couple “viewing point” with “point of view”.

Once constituted as a name, once disposed toward its opinions, once “profiled”, it becomes clear in what ways the constructed subject is supposed to behave. As a free agent. There are precedents, so many years of them. The mock-up is assigned its own motives. It has no one to blame but itself—or other selves. “It doesn't surprise me that she turned out that way.” There is no societally stacked deck.

Perspective painting develops a visual representation in which the viewed is given to the eye as a unified, shrink-wrapped field, to be apprehended with the viewer as its hidden point of reference. Unlike preceding spaces, perspectival space acts as an information funnel whose only possible endpoint could be the merchant, or emergent banker's, eye.

Perspective produces the subject as viewing point. Omega eye. It reminds the viewer where s/he is. That this is not natural, as is sometimes suggested, becomes evident when other modes of art are examined. Chinese, cave, all-over. Surface line, sans illusionistic depth. No visual cue as to where I should position myself relative to the scene before me. Viewer is not incorporated, before the fact, into the picture.

Realism is still the heavy. Graphic violence as an index of “the public's” need for junk. Not a need to know, but a need to see: CBS news. Real blood, sex, in between bullet holes. Increase the dosage of verisimilitude.

Subject-as-construct. Perception socially constructed (i.e., ideological). Or how we use the tools, the biological hard-wiring, channeled. A menu on the computer terminal.

Subject disruption #1: Hannah Weiner's *Clairvoyant Journal*, which through the development of several interpenetrating narrative lines, the push & pull of its alternative voices, frustrates an homogenized reading of the text. A viable identification of its author.

Subjecthood is not an essence preceding social existence. It's not what's left over once the dross has been drained away. It is the dross. It is a convergence of practices, a point of production. A product, not a producer.

Subject disruption #2: Charles Bernstein's stylistic indeterminacy. A constant defusion of the idea of "voice". Style becoming, not a matter of authorial signature, not even a style, but a tactic, a strategy to get into the text.

Subjectivity—once the sole privilege of the boss (who alone is important enough to merit a personal history, a bio note)—gradually democratized. Awarded to the anonymous masses at the bottom of the heap: lumpen, women, peasants, loonies. While this is supposedly a function of egalitarianism, in reality such democratization is used as a means of supervision. Building up a file.

Subject disruption #3: Tina Darragh's entangling of biographical revelation with procedural operations on the dictionary & other found texts. A graphic materialization of the anecdotal. The author made of definitions. The subject produced by geometric patterns mapped out on a page.

Suppose no viewing funnel. No hierarchy of picture planes, no visual pyramid pointing back to the viewer's eye. You don't have to stand in this spot if you don't want to. Suppose no buyer/patron generating the occasion for the picture in the first place. No patriarch pictures on the dollar bills.

Syntax represents a closure itself. A unifying structure. A grammatical identity with the closed boundaries of the reading subject. It guarantees order, mirroring psychic order. To use Greenberg's metaphor (viz. the painting canvas), syntax cuts out a space for the spectator. Through its regularity the narrative line's forward motion, its arrival on time at its destination, is assured.

The subject is a channeling device. It fixes one's view on her/his own life. On her family history, on his career, on their strategies for self-improvement (jogging, bigger bucks, EST). All the while obfuscating the social forces that have put them where they are. That have produced their personality makeup score.

Through the unified reading subject all the typical narrative shifts in time, location, points of view, are tied together. It is because the narrative's loose ends must be tied together that such a subject can be constructed. The text produces the reader as a non-contradictory subject, always there to receive the story's impulse. It positions him/her as the unified source of its message (Stephen Heath) while

circularly validating that source's existence with its own.<sup>3</sup> As such a subject becomes progressively entrenched the story line can give it more slack. The contemporary image can streamline, move faster, accommodate more. MTV montage as grapeshot.

Various individuals, via the social contract, voluntary association, or whatever, don't constitute society. The network of social formations & practices constitute them. "He" or "she" being the name of those social forces' intersection. Their pseudonym.

What are case histories if not narratives?

Writing is inescapably political. It doesn't illustrate the bleakness of late capitalism. It can't get outside itself. It is, rather, amidst itself, made out of the social world around it.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1981), pp. 43-54.



## Responses to Some Questions

*Is it possible to hurt the language?*

Well, what languages are we referring to? Male privilege language, literary journal speak? There is no abstraction “language,” as far as I’m concerned. There are a lot of different language practices, some of them part of the franchise, many more of them marginalized. Did Reagan hurt the language? He hurt a lot of people; that’s easily enough ascertainable. His oversimplifications of reality certainly signaled the degeneration of the language of power into a series of cartoon captions, very iconistic types of argumentation with everything done in garish colors & broad strokes. But hurting the language ... he’s not *apart* from language. He was hemmed in by the discourse of finance capital as much as the rest of us are, even if his was & is a more comfortable discourse of confinement. None of us can get outside of language, we’re made out of it. Raymond Williams demonstrated how the construction of the King/Queen’s English was used as a means of culture-based subjugation. An erasure of everything which lay outside of Webster’s. An adoption of one language position at the expense of all the others. You spoke good English & you were entitled to a piece of the pie. It was a class ID bracelet for the aristocracy &, by increments, the emergent bourgeoisie. If you didn’t speak proper English you were marginalized, put into “pidgin reality.” Or looking at it from Laura Mulvey’s perspective, male, phallic-centered language is used as a means of control & exclusion. One that relegates women to a position of less-than-maleness, to roles of passivity rather than activity. I *want* to hurt those languages. From what vantage point I could begin to do that is another matter.

*Have you had any typical procedures or order for producing a text?*

No one typical strategy. In the early ’80s I was shaping things, trying to make them look like minimalist structures, bordering them with lines & everything. I’ve used numerically based procedures, page specific mapping strategies ... whatever enables me to get the stuff down on paper. I have noticed that the more house repairs we get involved with the less ornate my plans of action become. What I’ve tried to do (along with a lot of my contemporaries) is avoid expressively bound macrostructures, shapes & forms; language organization with a lot of emotional, cultural, etc. baggage to them. Because I don’t care for all the political and economic garbage that goes along with things like sonnets, paragraphs, topic sentences, and the like. But I do think there’s a real contradiction emerging around the “change-the-paragraph” tactic. In trying to empty the work of dominant cultural effects, cues, I’m (we’re) possibly smuggling other ruling class

effects in through the back door. What could be more emblematic of high culture than, for instance, a long work based on the Fibonacci sequence? Using math instead of thematics as an ordering principle isn't something you have access to unless you're still operating within Modernist literary parameters, even if you're trying to subvert the assumptions behind those parameters. If nothing else, the jettisoning of received forms is much more evidence of an "artistic presence" than regurgitating the same old confessional poem conventions. The effort to get away from that kind of self-revelation that goes behind a work like Robert Grenier's *Sentences* seems to become gestural in spite of itself. Someone encounters *Ocker* & if they get any purchase on it at all it's that the work should be read as an index of the author's creativity. You take away all the other cultural reference points & that's the only one left. & it's a pernicious one. It's tied up with concepts of the bourgeois subject & artistic freedom that have to be seen as supportive of the structure about us, that nail us down into positions that give us no leeway but to act as we're expected to act. If one looks at the history of Abstract Expressionism this may be more dramatically evident. It's a process through which an extremely non-representational technique, Pollock's overall dripping, becomes signatory. Through which a radical formal approach to figuration is turned into a trademark, something to peddle the goods with. You had Pollock the cowboy, de Kooning as the William Powell of the group ... all of those artists (Rothko, Gottlieb, et al.) had their "look." When you can't "lose yourself" in non-representational painting, the idea of a neutral carrier becomes difficult to maintain. Whether such a process of personification is inevitable because everything is made to congeal into some sort of packaging, or whether there might be something more inherent in non-representationalism itself that produces such an effect, would seem a fairly crucial question. Certainly the fact that there was & is a lot of money floating around the art scene accelerated the whole mythification process as far as AE was concerned. But I don't think what went on can be reduced to marketing strategies alone. For one thing, that'd leave the poets out. It'd seem, equally, a problem of how the reader, in reading work that's been stripped of standard forms of representation & disclosure, can situate themselves? I think we all have to follow that through.

*In your description of the nonrepresentational artist ironically ending up imprisoned in an image, I can imagine the tragicomedy of all individualist artwork. The image may be created not only by an audience that can't situate itself in the work (like listeners to 19<sup>th</sup>-century program music who strain to hear pictures) but also by the artists themselves when they're slipping. Perhaps there's a "nonrepresentational" level to artwork (the too demanding level of participation) that limits the size of every work's community to a handful. Should one try for more?*

The slippage of images you refer to wouldn't be a function of artistic failure, nor of shortcomings in the viewer. But rather of the whole exchange system reader &

writer are captured in. Pollock wasn't popularized because at some point he let his guard down & became accessible. His work impacted the way it did because of the complex of ideological & social factors that surrounded it. I don't want to let us all off the hook & say we can pander or prostrate ourselves before graven images, but it seems to me that the flip side of getting away from ideas of individual genius is moving away from ideas of artistic culpability too.

To answer the second part of your question: I don't think making more sense to more people protects one from that kind of misuse. Readers will be ideologically situated whether they're reading Anne Sexton or Alice Notley. A series of direct political statements is just as likely to be read back into prevailing lit crit discourse as a series of abstract, non-figurative ones. Politics will change what's on the periphery & what's not, not our choice of sentences. The problem I have with trying to zero in on such & such an audience is that, for me, the whole thing devolves into packaging strategies. Which, first of all, I'm not very good at. But more importantly it seems inevitable that once you've moved from production models (how you write) to reception ones (how the written circulates) you get sucked into the same exchange system all the other "communication media" are trapped inside. & for me the move would always be in the opposite direction, toward a system of use values.

(In reading my previous answer I can see my use of the word "inherent" has probably confused matters. I certainly didn't wish to imply that there was something (anything) essential about non-representationalism. Any distinctions I might make a stab at between formal & marketing components are still socially determined distinctions. To say that a difficulty might be wired into the formal dimensions of, for instance, minimal art, would always mean "societally wired in." It's a Western European problem, not a metaphysical one. From our anterior vantage point it's probably impossible to locate a pre-commodified state where a Pollock painting's entrance into the exchange system hadn't already been "anticipated" by that system.)

*Is happiness linked to wavering, vagabondage, and shifting?*

Writing is linked to motion. Words moving across the page, the reading eye following them. Maybe that's the hidden (to me) connection between those titles. Where happiness would enter it is beyond me. Typically, a lot of my work centers itself around the problem of how to get things into motion on the page. I mean that literally. If you're not going to use standard literary organizational devices you do have to decide how you're going to organize things. Are you going to break up your lines on the basis of word counts, semantic units, visual properties? You can look at the works of Hannah Weiner or Susan Howe & see them as reexaminations of the straight-line narrative forms we've been (White Europeans,

that is) stuck with for centuries. Their works are really investigations into notational motion. There's a whole set of assumptions (increasingly less hidden) behind straight-line narration. Beginning, middle, end. Maybe some detours for ornamental effect, especially in the middle portion. But basically everything's designed along the lines of some traffic system. You want to end up at such & such a place; find out who did what; or what Wordsworth found out about life today. The links between narrative & teleological models have been sufficiently enough brought out by now. What's interested me lately is the connection between various "hard" production models & narrative line. The assembly line, Taylorist work-flow programs ... what Gramsci termed Fordism. I've been thinking of the assembly line as a physicalized plot line. Finished product equals denouement. Eschatologies of profit margins. You know, as British capital is beginning to consolidate itself Hobbes is talking about motion as the essence of all life. I've never thought of it, but it's quite possible the frequency of travelling titles in my work reflects a concern with all of the above. *Waver* is merely self-description. But maybe I was attracted to Varda's movie ("Vagabond") because it struck me as a kind of travelogue.

*You've mentioned many things writing can get away from and jettison. What, in addition to motion, does writing have to gain?*

The quick, unpretentious answer is more elbow room. Although there's a lot in his politics I don't agree with, when I think in terms of what a (my) writing might be, it's in Adornian terms. Writing as an attempt to create a negative, insubordinate space within the administered space we're all daily subjected to. A small language-writing ghetto. So most of the terminology I find myself falling back on is a terminology of distancing & differentiation. What writing has to get rid of, what it isn't, or hopes it isn't. On the other hand there is the sensual & material element of the writing process itself. That which insists on itself as a practice-for-itself, as not part of the agenda ... even if such insistence is, realistically, at the present time, largely gestural. It's that immediate level of activity that keeps me going.

*December 1989-March 1990*

*Questions prepared by Eric Wirth*

# Narrating (Moving) People

- ✿ Leviathan, a metaphor. Social harmony prefigured (maintained on the page) through the use of a literary device.
- ✿ Narrative is corporative. My paperback edition of *Leviathan* has a picture of the Hobbesian monarch on the cover. His body is made up of hundreds of small people, his loyal subjects. Social subjects as body parts, molecules of social fabric.
- ✿ His is a proxy, super-body. His body will be substituted in the stead of those of his subjects. They exercise their powers vicariously, through him.
- ✿ For Descartes the principal corporeal attribute is extension. Physical being as drawn lines on paper, through space. Galileo, Hobbes's scientific mentor, bases the physical world *in toto* on motion. Descartes's lines of height, depth, & width now have speed; they've become vectors. Traffic routes.
- ✿ Hobbes viewed social welfare as whatever was conducive to continued motion (life) of dues-paying citizens. What was paramount to such a scheme was a means of safeguarding & regulating the motion of bodies: acquisitive, appetitive ones. Bottom-line necessity for the functioning, flexible market economy. Otherwise, wasteful anarchy.
- ✿ As the schoolbooks (during the late fifties anyway) call it: "The Age of Discovery." Colonialism, system expansion. The optimum model for being would have to be a mobile one. Mercantilism as literal motion. Across seas & virgin territory.
- ✿ The lines through which a body navigates. Society as directed paths, as plots. What'd be detrimental to such a traffic system would be the interruption of flow. Nondirected, inefficient commerce. Spatial economics.
- ✿ Show the citizen how to move by example, by rote. When push comes to shove, demonstrate same through coercion. The self is constructed, built up to economically useful dimension; or, when necessary, broken down. It must learn how to behave under the new ground rules. The novel, with its meticulous cataloguing of daily movement, both visible and invisible (physical & mental), is issued as a maintenance manual. From Prevost to Defoe to Richardson; all write with the avowed purpose of moral instruction.

- ❁ Modern narrative at once an effect & support of the individual build-up from the Renaissance on.
- ❁ *Leviathan* demonstrates the need for a single, sovereign power to mediate, to keep things moving in the same direction. His government one big insurance policy; his system best suited to the maximization of commerce. A transit system. The sovereign has to be able to convince his subjects that he can maximize profits. He must win consent. Gramsci's hegemony armored with coercion. The individual transfers his rights, embodies them, in another, the sovereign, so that the roads might be kept clear.
- ❁ The narrative Hobbes devises is one of identification. The sovereign locates the rights of all citizens in himself. The tyrant living his life as the lives of everyone. Hobbes calls him an "artificial person." The subject governs vicariously, through a fiction. She is built into subjecthood at the same time she gives hers away, donates it to somebody else. The ruler rules via a process of substitution much as the classical narrative operates through a process of substitution of its own.
- ❁ A ballistics of social roles. Short-run losses, long-term gains, the balance averaged out. The capitalist, even before electronic funds transfer, needs the ability to distribute speedily. To reallocate, to deploy his resources where & when on time. Harvey discovers how blood is circulated, Hobbes does the same for power.
- ❁ Unlike his previous writing the writing in *Leviathan* is one of literary rhetoric, complete with metaphorical & fabular flourishes. Its language has become conscious of public opinion & a need for consensus. A shift in audiences: from that of a minority elite to that of an expanding middle class. Hobbes seeks to seduce. He becomes an ideologue as well as a philosopher.
- ❁ The line as narrative. "Plot line." The travelling subject & her need for a well-rehearsed itinerary. The role he plays, how he can safely acquire, mapped out & charted.
- ❁ The emergent novel form evolves with various models of motion of its own. Picaresques, travelogues, journals from the Americas, Hakluyt's *Voyages*. Travel is the omnipresent topic of the new narrative of the sixteenth & seventeenth centuries. Whether seen as a metaphor for the development of the individual or merely the occasion for colorful reportage and anecdotes, the picture of Europeans moving through the landscape becomes that culture's lowest common denominator.

- ❁ Stories will be, more than anything else, additive sequences. The accumulation of sensation & experience for bundling up into one big package. One's lifetime. People luggage.
- ❁ In his controversy with Boyle, Hobbes refused to admit, contrary to all apparent evidence, that such a thing as a real vacuum could exist. To him the idea was socially & ontologically impossible. Things, people, would be stillborn inside the vacuum. Nothing moved by itself. Anything needed other things to bounce off of. The appetitive capitalist needed matter to consume; empty space was useless. Emptiness would be at once impenetrable & noncommodifiable.
- ❁ As it describes characters' movements narrative itself moves. A macro-capitulation of the movement inside it. In the seventeenth century (e.g., Defoe) there is a lot of confusion between the ideas of "fiction" & "private history." Stories are fabricated, then boldly proclaimed to have "really" occurred, to be historical. Authentication via a ruse presumably understood to be a ruse. Imaginative work, at that stage, incapable of instruction.
- ❁ As Western-style storytelling ages it eliminates the distance between true & made-up. Narrative, unless otherwise labeled, is assumed to be fictive. Fiction, somewhere along the way, has received authorization to be instructive. One disguise substituted for another. Dickens or Eliot are no longer obliged to label their novels as true histories. What are, in fact, texts as real as any history are disguised as imagined entertainments. Discourse disguised as plot action.
- ❁ Hobbes takes the social subject to be self-possessed. The proprietor of his own person. Descartes' ego is seen in terms of property, rather than clear thinking. Individuality becomes an alienable good.
- ❁ Physics defines its picture of subatomic particles through their patterns of motion. Unable to see the bodies themselves but for the tracks they leave.
- ❁ A body with substantial integrity because it moves. No other existence but the path it makes.
- ❁ A world comprised of "artificial persons" would be artificial itself. It would be fabricated, a story.
- ❁ A story whose presence, as with Hobbes, is ballistic. The subjects constructed inside that story as moveable pawns.

- ✿ Taylor's time studies. Simple actions isolated & defined, then repackaged into an overall picture of productive motion. The subdivision of the workers' movement into its smallest possible parts. Cartesian analysis again. A refinement of descriptive skills put to business. So that all the working parts must be recombined, trimmed of fat; inserted into a streamlined sequence of manufacture.
- ✿ Closure of the story. End of business transaction. Finished product at the Nissan plant. Done deal of a student diploma or a criminal dossier. Narrative as sealant.
- ✿ A productive body can't be static. It has to be mobilized, put into the social flow. The assembly line destination. It has to get to work site on time. And the assembly line itself would be nothing more than another kind of travel narrative. (Godard's early seventies movie following an automobile assembly line.) Another trip to the Indies, the goods accumulating detail, gathering weight & finishing touches. The endpoint to be exchanged, dealt.
- ✿ To be an effective model of motion narrative itself had to be streamlined. Too much detail & its line bogged down. Buckled. A balance between its acquisitive penchant for accumulating details & effects & its need to embody a speed that had to be struck. The paring down of digressions & detours. The right balance of verisimilitudinous ornamentation & plot. The nailing down of reading & writing positions. Richardson whittled down to Elmore Leonard.
- ✿ The reader as Leviathan. Occupying the only possible position of unification within the text. I know things the Duchess doesn't. My POV is cumulative. The text unified (incorporated) through the reader's perception of it. Embodied in her as a society would be embodied in the sovereign ruler.
- ✿ At the far end of Western-style narrative: Beckett's bodies immobilized in rocking chairs, encased in trash cans & heaps of debris. "I can't go on, I'll go on."



For a while now I've been interested in the role narrative plays in constructing the individual, suturing her or him into its process through substitution. Producing the reading subject as the only possible source of its own continuity. As loyal, tax-paying consumer. Recently I've started paying a little more attention to narrative's shape. Its linearity & what that might imply. For examples: that its straight line-ness might serve as a model for efficient production, or as a model for territorial advancement, or for more generalized sorts of teleological scorekeeping. One of narrative's prime ideological functions might be choreographic. A rehearsal for its reader. Narrative wouldn't be solely constitutive of the person. It would be instrumental; a tool in the construction of a science of motion, among other things. A usage for both location & allocation. A means of entrenchment.

It should be obvious that I'm plagiarizing (perhaps oversimplifying) Althusser & Foucault here. Other sources used for the above were:

Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington, KY, 1983).  
Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London, 1980).  
Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington, Ind, 1981).  
David Johnston, *Rhetoric of Leviathan* (Princeton, NJ, 1986).  
C. B. Macpherson, *Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1964).  
Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (Princeton, NJ, 1985).  
Martin Shaw, *Marxism and Social Science* (London, 1975).  
Joan Williams, *The Idea of the Novel in Europe, 1600-1985* (London, 1978).

## Early/Later

### (2 Scenarios for/on Bruce Andrews)

The early work as paused. A constant push against momentum. The brake at the end of each unit. \*\*\* Lines as tableaux? The distance from one start-over to the next. \*\*\* “When Diderot speaks of the tableau, he presents it as a movement when narrative action comes to a halt.”<sup>4</sup> \*\*\* Measurements. The something that has to happen in the pauses & where is it, inside or out? The time that has to go somewhere to be used up. One between after another. \*\*\* Andrews writing of signs as containers, to be hollowed out & refilled by the reader. “All the productions we can fill it with.” Writing as “co-production” or “the first production.”<sup>5/6</sup> The space around each utterance. He’d want an essential interiority replaced with a participatory one. \*\*\* “Refusing to point, or to be arranged according to a pointing system ...”<sup>5</sup> \*\*\* I think the impetus might have been toward eradicating what’s outside the action itself. So that the reader had to be inside, implied into it. Midst’d. \*\*\* Could you break up gesturalism by stopping characters just before? Arresting the line at some pre-situative point? Sharper picture crops. \*\*\* You could thwart completion, snip out the links in “the chain.” That would be one way. \*\*\* The physical presence & tangibility of the lines in “Narragansett” or “Funnels In.” Their discreteness as gestalt. An impediment both to access & motility? A mimicking (despite) of the whole of proper subjects? \*\*\* At some point Andrews seems to want to re-think the line. He seems to want all the distances on the page diminished. All the distances between.<sup>7</sup> \*\*\*

Maybe there shouldn’t be a between. Andrews always wanted an immanence to the text. Maybe he saw all the spaces in the earlier work needed caulking. Too much psychologism leaking in. The way any silence (from one object to the next) could be appropriated for some kind of nuance. Two lines & what intervened, waiting to fill the work up. \*\*\* So less air, longer lines. The depth to the words proofed up, so that rather than fall in, we build over. \*\*\* “A multiplication of points of attention, authorless, into an unsituation.”<sup>6</sup> \*\*\* Had everything become too situated? Whereas the tableau freezes, arrests (the better to underline momentousness), Andrews would want to forestall fixity, to unglue, get the process moving. \*\*\* Everything at the page’s midst. Not enough time or space to distance the reader from the action. To get them facing it. Language lodged in the text. (On it?) No vantage point. \*\*\* “Beyond the anchoring of pointing, vertical

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<sup>4</sup> Jay Caplan, “Framed Narratives.”

<sup>5</sup> Andrews, “Text and Context.”

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, “Code Words” in Andrews & Bernstein ed., *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*.

<sup>7</sup> e.g. “Shut Up ...”

depth, is a horizontal richness that cannot be diffracted or identified with.”<sup>6</sup> \*\*\*  
Everything glanced. No echoes because no time-lag. Andrews wants the vertical  
axis of reference flattened out into surface (riff) ... “always motion, anti-stasis.”<sup>8</sup>  
\*\*\*

In that sense a visual writing, disavowing penetration. \*\*\* Pure scan. The  
anteriority somewhere else. Before or after. \*\*\* Another Northern art, five  
centuries later? Textual reference suppressed in favor of description [sic] and  
visual surface?<sup>9</sup> Or still-life stood on its head. A second issue then becoming  
speed: the overcoming of resistance, the refusal to relax into summation. The  
longer revved-up line a defense against psychology. A writing that can’t be  
bundled up into contemplativeness. \*\*\* Rather than hard currency, a more liquid  
exchange. “Sugar Money.” An anti-sclerosis: distributive, rather than  
representational. Vehicular writing. \*\*\* (The eye of the Renaissance observer)  
was, moreover, understood to be static, unblinking and fixated, rather than  
dynamic ...”<sup>10</sup> Cash flow, blood flow, electrical currency. The banks in Italy  
before Harvey’s blood circulation accounting. Distributional modes of making  
their move on the territorial ones. \*\*\* “Accumulationist focus. A static  
production is indemnified; no account is magnum enough.”<sup>11</sup>

Andrews wouldn’t be weighing terms in any more. He’d be weighing on them,  
trying to wear them down. Writing as erosion. Analysis moving into using the  
weaponry (praxis) at hand. \*\*\* Maybe the tactic behind his use of charged  
language (in “Shut Up” ... et al.) could be located here. The added mass you get  
with loaded terminology (the weight of their histories) a means of cranking up the  
speed, putting more behind the wheel. The amount of semantic resistance  
overcome re-invested into forward thrust. \*\*\* Pulsion. Debtedness against  
debtedness. \*\*\* Motion would be what makes later work harder for some to take.  
Not a change in terminology; only where “heinie” & “vagas” have been  
situated. Where once they were blocked off, a frontality; now they’re midstream.  
Now there’s no pull-back shot from which to be ironic. No off-stage. The trash  
talk is all in close-up. \*\*\* “Writing is actually constitutive of these underlying  
libidinal flows ...”<sup>12</sup> \*\*\* Maneuver succeeding positionality. (Thanks Gramsci.)  
The sculptural, edged quality you find throughout *Executive Summary & Getting  
Ready* replaced with a need for velocity. \*\*\* “pat self / fill with / size of / saw  
into \*\*\*”<sup>13</sup> Nineteen seventy what. The size of the line already filled, past tensed?

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<sup>8</sup> Andrews, “Be Careful Now” in *Temblor* 6.

<sup>9</sup> Svetlana Alpers, *Art of Describing*.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Jay, “Scopic Regimes of Modernity” in Foster ed., *Vision and Visuality*.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, “Under Erasure...”

<sup>12</sup> Andrews, “Writing Social Work” in Andrews & Bernstein.

<sup>13</sup> Andrews, “New York” in *Wobbling*.

Would Andrews at some point have seen the physicality of that line, its high definition, as an obstacle, a limit on what the text might absorb from without? As authoritarian. Did he want to get away from a line that was always already there? \*\*\* “A shift from the signifier to a linguistics of flow ...”<sup>14</sup> \*\*\* The need for another mode of line, one that’d forestall objecthood. \*\*\* Rather than attempt to place us (in front); an attempt to enable us. The older textual density thinned out to the shape of a signal. All the impulse such a signal could take spread over the page, rather than manipulatively positioned. \*\*\* The equivalence of a straight line anywhere you could stop. \*\*\* “You buy it, we fry it.”

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Crary, “Eclipse of the Spectacle” in Wallace ed., *Art After Modernism*.

## Notes on slow writing

1. Against it. The overwhelming noise of late capitalism. The omnipresent signal of capital (of “product” minus production) wearing away at everything else: at anything apart, anything aside from its own tautologism. “Noise [visual, auditory] as a weapon ...”<sup>15</sup> The communications [sic] network driving not only the superstructural, but the economic & political as well. “Electrification” given a perverse twist with the digitalization of banking, commerce, investment, production, text, weapons delivery &&&.
2. An ideology made up as a cosmetics. The glitter surfaces & the erasure of all intervening space between one surface, one frontal shot, & the next. Everything immediately before us: pre-packaged.
3. Any unitary word as a point of resistance, an interruption in the ongoing transmission. That which remains single & planted, which doesn’t move along the line, which isn’t swept along by the trajectory of information & bytes of sensation, of electronic current &/or currency. There’s no longer any lead time up to anywhere. No distance between one thing & the next; no space cleared out in which to reflect; no time in which to have an attention span. It’s always-already past tense. If I could just put my finger on it it’d already be gone.
4. “As coisas nao tem pez.” (“Things have no peace.”)<sup>16</sup>
5. “[History up to now] has been, as Marx comments, ‘pre-history’. History has not even started yet. All we have had so far is the realm of necessity—the ringing of changes on the drearily present motif of exploitation.”<sup>17</sup> ... Why not every word as a “first instance”, long before the last instance of the economic ever arrives (although, of course, it already has). Why not freezing that instance before it’s incorporated, drowned in the data.
6. “I, um, ah, ah, um; I, ah, um, um, ah; ah, I, um; ah ...”<sup>18</sup> Those single, separated utterances as interruptions: breaks in the unceasing wave of impulse. As transmission shut down.

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<sup>15</sup> Attali. *Noise*. Bracketed words mine.

<sup>16</sup> Antunes. “As coisas” on Caetano Veloso & Gilberto Gil’s CD *Tropicalia 2*.

<sup>17</sup> Eagleton. “Base & superstructure in Raymond Williams” in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives* (ed. Eagleton).

<sup>18</sup> Farrell. *Last Instance*.

7. If one talks in terms of “depth”, they’re not necessarily psychologizing things. The inside of the object might be social, rather than personal. Interiority doesn’t (have to) equal subjecthood. Resonance doesn’t (have to) emanate from an ego. What’d be in there then? The grist of past & present usage (Dickensian ring notwithstanding). The accretion of the social. Layers of linguistic act.
8. If there was such a thing as uncanniness in language it’d originate from the history of terms: from the dissipation of their social substantivity. The glow from an energy leak. Some negative aura.
9. Isn’t it a case of putting words into relief? Of sculpting them? The move of edging off one thing from the next, rather than having language be a series of spillages. The form of words rather than their formlessness. Their concreteness re-established from moment to moment.
10. Language under quarantine. A wall between it & “the ever-changing production of what is always the same ...”<sup>19</sup> Language which is too difficult to be seamlessly incorporated. Too uneven. If writing does nothing else it should always verge on the non-assimilable.
11. One word does not equal another. Language is not a medium of equivalence. Words are not denominations. Or shouldn’t be. Language is not (shouldn’t be) immediately “convertible”.<sup>20</sup> Every unit of the written or spoken needs to be recuperated via its own particularity. The signal’s valence rethickened. Obstinance & discreteness as defense mechanisms.
12. Overpunctuation’s as one available strategy. Its dual effect to at once contract & expand the reader/writer’s focus upon the text. 1) to contract: to slow down the text, to counteract the socially constructed tendency to move through the present word to the next as quickly as possible (read “Taylorism”)<sup>21</sup>: to skim over, to scan: to reach the end; 2) to expand: to cut the reader/writer adrift in the text; to neutralize punctuation’s directive function & thus leave the length of each phrasal unit undefined: so that at any one point on the page one would always be in its midst.

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<sup>19</sup> Adorno. “Cultural Criticism & Society” in *Prisms*.

<sup>20</sup> Marx. *Capital* via Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*.

<sup>21</sup> I’m assuming that the family resemblance between Taylor’s time & motion studies, which sought to rid the assembly line workers jobs of excess movement & the gradual pruning of digression & ornamentation from narrative (the difference between Balzac & Grisham, for instance) is not coincidental.

13. Picasso reportedly said that painting's role was to arrest motion: the better to isolate form's possibility. The painter had to make a stab at recapturing the terrain of objects. To keep the surrounding social flux ... that which corroded the object, destroyed its integrity ... outside of the painting.<sup>22</sup>
14. "Speed distance obliterates the notion of physical dimension. Speed suddenly becomes a primal dimension that defines all temporal and physical measurements."<sup>23</sup> Speed is its own law: everything else bypassed. Capital's message now flattened into a carrier wave headed toward the next social widget, the next reception point. Efficiency would be based on velocity, on ballistic thinness: the social dimension to things, their differences, stepped on, squeezed out.<sup>24</sup>
15. Stillness as antidote. To write using only nouns? Grenier or early Saroyan.<sup>25</sup> Each word put down as part of a work action, a communication slow-down.
16. "Town hall meetings" on TV or on the Web: instead of at a meeting hall. Re: Marx's prediction that the concentration of workers at one locale, in the factory, would lead to a heightening of class consciousness, ie. to a class for itself. Re: telecommuting as a form of union-busting ...
17. [word] [period] [word] [period] ... The need to slow down the text. To anchor the single word in its own insistence & indigestibility. With apologies to Benjamin, writing might be that which shuts duration (a duration controlled by capital) down, if only for its own instant instance, the better to recapture duration. To regain history.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Helene Parmelin on Picasso, as cited in Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*.

<sup>23</sup> Virilio, *Lost Dimension*.

<sup>24</sup> Just as space has been mutated into some uniform, homogenized dimension to be passed through "en route" to delivering the goods, so too has time become homogenized. The length of an hour used to be pegged to how much time there was between sunrise & sunset, ie. to agricultural time. "The shift to hours of uniform duration near the end of the Middle Ages" was synchronous with the growth of industry & wage labour. Cf. Biernacki, "Time Cents" in *Space, Time, and Modernity* (Friedland & Boden, eds.).

<sup>25</sup> Robert Grenier's recent handwritten works seem to me to represent a limit case of such a possibility. *rhythms*, in particular, seems to approach a nominalism in which each word names only itself & the labor invested in its having been written down.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history" in *Illuminations*: "A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still & has come to a stop."





– Much I marveled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
Though its answer little meaning – little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blest with seeing bird above his chamber door-  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”

-- Poe, “The Raven”

Dan Farrell

Dear P.

- Where as I have used flitting signifiers as punctuation, you, Inman, at least in *at least*. Use punctuation as ... whatever the Raven is doing quothing ‘nevermore’. Those interruptions resist interpretation, are continuously present, and do little to reconcile the disappointments of what isn’t future. Inman’s grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous periods, stopping traffic, contributes to what I would characterize as a participatory materialism, a fatalism discouraged.

- What’s the difference between what Inman writes as stopped attention, on a social scale and stabilization of meaning, on a social scale, necessary for social cohesion? An answer I came up with seems like a contradiction; that stabilization may only be an effect of being passed over, ignored, incorporated in a sentence i.e. [democracy] vs. [Democracy was finally brought to East Timor.] The single word falls prey to concept dictionary, etymology, diffusion, etc., a kind of attention not I think what Peter is you’re thinking of. But as a part of a sentence or line it is prey to the passing over he you talks about. Incorporated: frozen, not in time, but, dare I say, ideology. A succession of slowings = sense.<sup>a</sup> Yes we have no grammars.

- I worry that Will just focusing on what is immediate and present will not distract from a notion of transition or an experience of history.<sup>?</sup> But although I think Peter would acknowledge that to expand focus (see note 12) risks may also be to dissipating dissipate focus his frame is such that there is little incongruity. Since history is to be read in terms of political change, the attention is clearly on the future.

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<sup>a</sup> “the anticipations of grammar are always and only retroactively installed.” Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p 124.

- My initial reaction is a reluctance to ~~I don't think I can~~ agree with countering a monolithic data stream with individual contemplation. Isn't this already a traditional role of poetry? Usage and social accretion (of #7), seems a better framework than the creation of attention spans (of #3). "Social substantivity" definitely comes through in the work. What then does one achieve or ~~recover~~ produce from the extra time taken? The overwhelming presence of the punctuation poses the question of its ~~origin and~~ use -- not what *I* can do with my leisure time.

- ~~I've~~ I had been thinking of ~~your Peter's~~ his strategy differently. In *at least*, the literal focusing of attention at so many points, the hesitation, is checking up on the mechanism: making sure it is OK to continue. It seems to invite or implicate the users of language, maybe with no grammar it brings one to other basics to rely on. But to form anything like a sentence or utterance, or unit beyond the word/syllable, means ignoring or consciously forgetting the ongoing 'handshake' (a term used to describe the electronic disturbance modems recognize themselves in). In between communication. For me the continuous starting and stopping, rather than creating a contemplative space, brings one (back?, forward?) to the conditions under which language/communication is possible – a contingent agreement that it is, or an unrepresentable iteration of the whole:

, "what it utters is its only stock and store,  
Caught from some unhappy master"

- It's an experience of not being *dependent* on the feed, that is -- surrendering life to the technology, to the agency which seems to exist there. De-alienation effect. Dear Dan, What's it like being me? Dis-articulation has them rolling in the aisles.

Somehow, in spite of language's fluidity, (or spillage as ~~you~~ Peter says) the full stop, culmination, seems like a request to give it a rest. But we know the world exists beyond truncation. We are surrounded by invisible syllables. That obviousness isn't the point, but maybe where production and reproduction start and stop is.

- Where is the site of production? Just in the writing? The movement in *Avail*, you're dying to know, isn't just within the text, to the extent that it is gives one the sense that somehow history can be confused with movement. This is not my intent, I'd rather start with a sense of how history might move through the material ~~#~~ than find a homology for it within its qualities. *Avail* is composed of actual (we can get back to this) diagnostic choices for feelings of anger and descriptions of one's state of health. Two separate questions and lists of responses. Their function is value-creating information gathering and their copyrights reflect this. To me bringing these two subjectively and technically differentiated realms together must bring their socio-economic ~~materially~~

~~historical~~ relationship together at this moment. For instance the conjunction of (a) not eating but (b) feeling good about one's self signals a specific nexus (a+b) of body image, eating disorder etc. Same goes for feelings of anger and the state of managed health care in this country, the most obvious of the connections.

- This is the one piece in *Last Instance* which carries forward a method I've used in most of my previous work: narrowing in on a specific source and using just that vocabulary, but using it in a way which is specific to its nominal usage, hopefully opening up that nominal to what it excludes: its ideology and practice. I hope to make it interact with what it as a form of communication ignores or assumes: a larger social field which it affects and is affected by. I like to think of material as not just medium, a lot of lang-po gets reduced to this, hence 'material' is weakened as a tool to think of conditions of social existence. So when writers talk of materiality we tend to see ~~do you see that as~~ the words, letters etc.: recuperation of the stuff of language from its alienation, fetishization, present in the practices of a great many writers (including ourselves). ~~Or is there an historical reason or shift for this emphasis in poetry I'm just missing?~~ What I'm trying to think through though is an expanding notion of what 'material' is. Doesn't it include ~~practices,~~ uses, acts, relations? What ~~you~~ Peter refers to as the "historical and socialized nature of such a [language's] materiality."

- Looking for congruence without sameness in writing and politics is definitely where I would locate some of my work; that starting and stopping may be both a movement forward and the sloth of material which drives one's nail into the present state of things. So no I don't have a *reluctance* to relinquish motion as much as a relation with materiality: that which pushes and pulls at the same time. This I think is pointing to a definition, or a part of one, of materiality; it is active, not an ensemble of facts, not just matter. ~~Maybe it is not 'material' that I'm thinking of. I just read an essay on what I might call informationalized affectivity. The shift in the economy in the industrialized nations away from industry towards what has been called immaterial production: production of a service, knowledge or communication. The immaterial is now seen to be productive of more value than material goods. The category of the immaterial within materialism? Yes I can see how a redefinition of what the (non-producing) working class is may be a better account of this.~~

- If one can't get outside ideology, what is the practice -- not outside -- but opposed? In this way the method of *Avail* is the opposite of distancing: thinking/speaking from the ideologically saturated places, or where ideologies/discourses are at cross purposes; ~~m~~ Maybe they can cancel out each other, or form new pathways, short-circuits are what I hope to achieve. For instance this piece of

writing has become a pastiche of address rather than a progression of thesis. But maybe I just should have cut more.

- Is the material of ideology such that it can be set apart, or something to be dis-articulated? It's not that I think dis-articulation is possible outside of political movement but that it is necessary for, or a part of it. ~~You're fairly explicit in wanting to create a space separated from ideology. I'm willing to go along with "attention" or "analysis" to describe a non-romantic conception of this space. The question(s) then becomes whether it is possible to use language non-ideologically [one would hope so] or cleansed of ideology [doesn't seem possible]; the same question with two conflicting answers. It's that relation between answers I see us trying to focus on.~~

"The effects of the imaginary can only appear through and by means of the real, and the effects of the real through and by means of the imaginary." "To act is to play a game with many players, sometimes tricking or finessing, with and against the risks of ideology and economy"<sup>b</sup>

- As a writer I'm not satisfied with the material of my practice being restricted to the medium of my practice. So the notion of materiality I work with includes practices. Ideology is instituted through practices. [Althusser – No ideas but in apparatuses.] It is the relation between the ideational and material which informs ~~my our~~ writing. That interplay between idea and material is a life not ~~reducible~~ reducible to determination. Conventions misfire, rituals change, talk happens but action stops. We talk of practice but how does one practice relate with another?

One practice may block or interfere with the realization of another. What material gives material can take away.

- ~~But Therefore a~~ A Last instance is not anywhere or anytime I'm ever going to get to. I, as a subject, necessarily have to be distant or not co-terminus with whatever determines me. (But that set or sequence of determinations is what subjecthood is.) And when it is not I won't care because I'll be a citizen, i.e. living without contradiction. Same goes for society; its not about to be transparent to itself.

~~Yours, Dan~~

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<sup>b</sup> Etienne Balibar, "The Infinite Contradiction" p 163.

## *Red Shift* by P. Inman

Benjamin Friedlander

A pin dropped in the mind can be heard here and there throughout this book. A sound made and then remade as quoted. But where a pin – man, *if* a pin falls in language where no one can pronounce it, it simply reverberates. P. Inman’s writing is poetry precisely and moreover because reverberal. Not that the poetic is a silence. No – but to hear a sound that one sees as a word, that isn’t a word, that doesn’t appear in the dictionary – to see a sound that doesn’t pronounce a particular meaning and to feel out from that invention into the mystery of comprehension: such is the haphazard path language walks in us, which it is poetry’s chosen task to illuminate. P. Inman’s light, prismatic, measures the spectrum, shifting from the mind’s violating blackness to the furthest reaches of what can be read. The word, a hole pricked in consciousness, registered, like the light of a distant star.

There are three pieces in *Red Shift*. “ ‘decker’,” a fifteen page book quoted (so to speak) in fifteen sections labeled “pg. 1,” “pg. 2,” etc., divided by double lines. A stately work with delicate contours. Then “ ‘red shift’,” part of which appeared in the anthology “*Language*” *Poetries* : twenty-five five-line modules (one of P.’s favored terms), each a composition of sentence-esque fragments divided by slashes – again as if quoted, verse realigned as prose. The notion that *book* and *poem* are forms to celebrate and play with as, say, the human form in painting, very much operative in these two works.

The last piece, “ ‘waver’,” something else again. A sequence of stanzas with undulating left margin (hence the title), its poetry lies in the music, the vocalization. Music like the roar of a language sea (as Kerouac said): meaning awash in the mind, in tidal pulls of hurrying attention.

David Melnick once described *Pcoet* as regenerations of a kind of poem whose look and feel he associated with projective verse, particularly Denise Levertov’s work. P. Inman in like manner comes out of surrealism. Surreal compression as in a dream or fairy tale, nightmare decompression of city life and modern warfare. Blood, as red as Lorca’s blood and blood the slipper wore, splattered:

mute, think,      off, bleed

---

daughter  
chicory

hem off  
keag

✱

Inman's language: a template traced, afterthoughtless, in imagination. Real but not of our world.

The poetry lies in how this language becomes known – in the contemplative strategies it proposes – and in what it becomes known *as*.

Inman's poetry as *emblem* of poetry, of how the poem sits on a page, the page in a book, how a book opens, before one's eyes and in the mind – and of how the mind in relation to its knowns becomes material.

Physics says the universe is flying apart. I, book in hand, try to hold it together. Inman helps the universe along – widening the interstices of the word.

✱

What an emblem *is* and what it be emblematic *of* remain separable: the emblem, before us, materializing the emblematic, within us. I. – in traversal 'tween the two:

    speak in from black knock

    g l a y s husk

Peter, it is a “g l a y s” that has and isn't simply, *is* – the husk spoken into the poem and into the human head from a black knock. Reading “g l a y s” I think *glaze* and think of ceramics and that the kabalistic aspect here, i.e., “the breaking of the vessels,” wouldn't appeal to you – you of the backtracked machinalia wordscape. I think of glazed eyes and knock-at-the-door metonymies totalitary, I think of the Black Shirts and that “y” and “z” are transposed on a German typewriter (though “g l a y s” and *glaze* are not a simple transposition). The incursion of the personal, perhaps the commonest habit of reading disallowed in the conventions of criticism, here seems unavoidable. I see “mem,oir” and

“mengs” and *also* “quogue” bunched up near one another and I think of the war and of Mengele, of quagmires synagogal and Zukofsky’s “to whose salt marsh – it happens I like / cattails – Jewish I am mortgaged.” The drama of reading, which is a drama of knowing and being, *my* drama.

Poem, do you read me?  
I am the emblematic, you the emblem.  
The husk of the personal.  
Ben – you are a fucking idiot.

★

To get down to the business of reading P.’s work means conceiving of a strategy for thinking about the workings of his language. Figuring out *how he did that* – concocting a taxonomy for the vocabulary and rules for the grammar.

A science of combinatory graphemics.

A doctrine of intersyllabic metaphoria.

Allegorhythms of spelling and logo-schismatic pronunciation.

Intrawordal anaphora – or, more generally, word association as a form of rhetoric. Employment of the syntactic gnostrum.

Inman’s words – singly, together, altogether. Adding and/or subtracting letter(s) to beginning, middle, end of word, as might occur by accident (*eaction*) – or by prearrangement in the language (*scription*).

Punctuation as an exponential determinant of meaning (*s’paint. rye’m*).

Redefinition by insertion/desertion of majuscule (*Jack* vs. *jack*).

Kind of word – as classified by conventional lexicography and as reclassified by mental glossaries phonetical (*tintern* as a color word).

Kinds of pairings, phrase making, assignment/reassignment of grammatical roles.

Alphabetical materiology and dialectical etymologism. The “skew out of name” poetry begins in. Intuitional declension.

Sound and spelling as causal monitors of meaning – each a dematerializing representation of the other.

Perspectival architecture of the homonym, in which sound, haunting, rattles the chains of the alphabet.

Paltry guesswork scaring meaning out of creaks and groans.

How the gaps between words register. Detachable first and final letters (*its spay* becoming *its pay*) and meta-parsing (*deepener traction* as *deep inert traction* or even *deep in hurt r(e)action*).

Poetics of phraseology, as with “...’what sound is’ dissolved along a curve / d o o r l i k e n ‘ t / bent on a sea of turpentine.”

Grazing out on allocations of the heard.

Neological vs. archeolexical nomination – apostrophe, address, reference.

Statementality.

Peter – a thou in every thought.

★

I hope I live to see what a concordance to P.’s *Collected Works* looks like. As an anticipatory exercise I made a list of all the words with “l” in them in “ ‘decker’ “:

bleed	lean	medley
calumet	relaxant	line
still	eulogy	blood
leit	blown	slog
legs	glaces	pline
chalk	hazeltine	peopled
plinh(er)	black	clae
black	di/m	clungs
g l a y s	clasp	ply
clough	clungs	nil
clarity	loom	spliint
onlook	pale	slungs
nihil	blowns	lean



<i>elongation</i>	<i>loom</i>	<i>flatness</i>
<i>blackberry</i>	<i>lents</i>	<i>llwyd</i>
<i>allowance</i>	<i>Williams</i>	<i>llud</i>
<i>flection</i>	<i>lacks</i>	<i>loyow</i>
<i>climb</i>	<i>blown</i>	<i>stell</i>

Admitting that this list only begins to get at the influence of one letter – one would also want to look at the *absence* of “l” – *pane* for instance considered as *plane* and *panel*, not to mention *palne* – it’s still a useful tally, raising and allowing for the methodical answering of one or two important questions, questions that I, at any rate, have always wanted to ask this work.

Are Inman’s words better thought of as static entities, or as mutables – and if the latter, what sort of rules govern the permutations? How many of the “non-words,” for instance, would be “real” but for a single letter (as with di/m)? What would the real words, absent a single letter, change into? Does the possibility of such change affect meaning?

Imagining other methods of tabulation – by syllable, vowel pattern, word size – means thinking about this poetry as “specific” and “effected” and thus as more than simply “disruptive.” An R&D of new interpretive strategies is what we need.

★

An anthology of the broken word would also help, would show how varied aims and procedures can be. Susan Howe, David Melnick, Hannah Weiner, Tina Darragh, Michael Anderson, Bruce Andrews, Jackson Mac Low, John Cage – and many another poet whose work, less familiar to me, would also seem to belong in such company, Frank Kuenstler, say, or Michael McClure – undiluted.

★

When I began work on this review it was Saturday night, Jimi Hendrix on walkman and I stuck on the twenty-fifth floor in San Francisco, scribbling notes while proofreading legal memoranda. I get paid to notice inaccuracies – which I love as much as accuracy – and *wherefore*, as the lawyers say, the mess of my reading didn’t seem particularly out of place. Lights low and coffee drunk, tired, with office memorabilia spread all round – a co-worker’s portrait of herself

gagging and Aram Saroyan's "light" translated obversely into German by Bob Grenier (who works the other night shift), handwritten blue ink

Nacht

left thusly on yellow post-it, gummed to cabinet door.

Dogs playing poker behind me. Voodoo dolls (we call them "packets") hidden behind the clock and calendar and in various other places. Mushroom cloud and big capital letters spelling BOOM! (coincidentally the name of Grenier's dog) drawn by someone on the day shift, long left in the big yellow dictionary as a "thought marker," now also stuck to cabinet door. Familiarities – the daily incoherence, which helps make *us* cohere, here in the echosystem our job as repairers of language established.

★

The abyssal sign. As in "a hole had been cut into the canvas for the \$": the dollar sign a hole cut in language, yet as much an object as a dollar bill, which *too* is a "sign" – for labor – and yet which hasn't the *thing*, labor (which *isn't* a "thing"), backing it up, the word hasn't. In comprehension of which we become holes, soul-less solace of possession. The cynicism of art world sign-manipulation for profit. The hole money cuts in us. The soul's.

Yet the sign, insofar as it *is* a reified, does offer support at the precipice of thought. I think of the Pascal of Shestov's "Gethsemane Night," who kept a chair by his side to reassure himself that an abyss hadn't swallowed him:

It is certain that Pascal never passed a day without suffering, and hardly knew what sleep was (Nietzsche's case was the same): it is also certain that Pascal, instead of feeling the solid earth beneath his feet as other men do, felt himself hanging unsupported over a precipice, and that had he given way to the "natural" law of gravity he would have fallen into a bottomless abyss. ... His reality in no way resembles other people's reality. Men in general usually feel well; ... they always feel the solid earth beneath their feet, they only know by hearsay of falls into the abyss. ... But does reality cease to be real when it ceases to be ordinary? And have we the

right to refuse recognition to those conditions of existence which occur but rarely?

– Lev Shestov, *In Job's Balances*

Language, real and unreal, object and objectless, in whose doubts and certainties we find ourselves, is of a consonance with the world no more verifying than – the soul's.

✱

“Worn words and tattered feathers. Only names remain. Letters. Can they be saved and how? Forward in a backward direction, a world of torn words turns to grasp.” Susan Howe, writing about Inman.

The pigeonholistic sentence ascatter at his approach, called back by a handful of crumbs.

## from *Culture Above the Nation: Globalism, “Multiculturalism,” and Articulated Locals*

Jeff Derksen

This is an excerpt from a section within a chapter of a work I am in the process of rewriting (the transition from dissertation to book). It begins, obviously, in the middle of things. If you want more context & text, email me at [jd@sil.at](mailto:jd@sil.at).

*Extra-National Language: G=L=O=B=A=L=I=Z=A=T=I=O=N*

Not this.

What then?

Ron Silliman, *Tjanting*

But do we at least agree  
that the human body is paradise  
and that the United States  
of America is not?

Bob Perelman, *Captive Audience*

To this point, I have outlined language writing’s containment within concepts of national culture and an historical avant garde and its engagement with the logic and ideology of globalization at a methodological level. The next step is to define a poetics that has the ability to move from the material condition of poetry’s production on a localized level to a geopolitical and geocultural level and to read the address toward globalization at the levels of semantic content and form. Here my inside/outside methodology alters; for the language writers have been read by their discursive exterior as an exclusively aesthetic or national phenomenon, or engaging with a siteless capitalism. Rather I turn to some internal tensions that create a fold within the reception and self-fashioning of language writing in order to move to globalization as a referent and determinant for their project. In this direction, a more recent internal definition on the part of some language writers establishes a relationship between their poetics and the crisis in public meaning caused in America by the Vietnam war. This is a movement in the internal definition of the language writers from the materiality of language – “from writing as meta-sign to writing as writing,” as Steve McCaffery designates it – to the production of meaning via the productive reader, to an exteriorization of a politicized aesthetics in a dialectical relationship with social conditions. In the introduction to the “Language Sampler” in the Paris Review (no. 86 1982), Charles Bernstein notes the tone of “anger” in the Perelman poem included, as well as the “quieter distress” in Susan Howes’ work, “[. . .] is not, of course a formal dimension but a reaction, in part, to the events of the current period,

including a barbaric U.S. military and social policy” (Contents Dream 242). This invocation of larger social relations is made more specific in Marjorie Perloff’s initial sighting of the language writers: “Both in San Francisco and New York, the Language movement arose as an essentially Marxist critique of contemporary American capitalist society on behalf of young poets who came to age in the wake of the Vietnam War and Watergate” (Dance 233). More recently, in an essay on Bruce Andrews’ work, Peter Quartermain draws the line from poetic production to the domestic and foreign politics of the U.S.:

Like most of the first generation Language Writers [. . .] Andrews was a teenager and then at college during the Viet Nam War, a circumstance which points to the political element in his writing. The ten turbulent years before the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975 saw an increasing manipulation of language by politicians and by the military: the doublespeak in which the “pacification” of an area meant the slaughter of all its inhabitants. (Aerial 9 162)

Posing the domestic effects of the international politics, Quartermain gives a broad context for the politicization of Andrews’ work, but how such determinants are materialized into cultural practice is not explicated. Presumably, the misuse of language by the state leads Andrews and others to question the representational role of language and to apply critique to the ideological function of language. The “Vietnam War” then stands as a backdrop for the production of language writing.

In the collaboratively written *Leningrad* (Michael Davidson, Hejinian, Silliman and Watten) the authors specify that, with a crisis in the national culture, a parallel crisis of public meaning arose as the galvanizing aspect of this community and that “[t]he impact of the Vietnam war on one generation of American intellectuals cannot, and should not be discounted” (10). In response to an interview question from Andrew Ross, Watten responds more directly on the influence of the Vietnam war, expanding on what Quartermain raised:

The central problem of reference in this writing may be seen in a context as directly related to the administration of information about the War on the part of the government and media that elicited, from intellectuals-in-the-making, a radical denial of consent for the conduct of the War [. . .] There was a denial of “national” culture in all aspects [. . .]. The formation of radical tendencies in the arts discussed above occurred directly as a refusal of the larger context, but at the same time it was a response to the crisis of meaning at that level. (197-98)

Watten links the “national crisis of Vietnam” to an investigation of the language of subject formation and social identities, a distrust of historical representation, and the crisis of meaning.

This framing of the aesthetics of the language writers as a determined response to an internal crisis caused by American foreign policy (and the function of the U.S. within the world system) foregrounds the role of the nation in cultural production – even if the response is entirely negative, as Watten’s quotation marks around nation indicate. Do these gestures of resistance to a national culture by the language writers then get read as a more critical form of cultural nationalism to counter the retrograde nationalism of imperialism? Is there a sense of national address, such as Olson’s Miltonic project of “the initiation / of another kind of nation” or can the poetics of the language writers be read outside of the frame of national narration as a non-narrative site of resistance within the teleology of a nation? What Watten and others are identifying here is the relationship between nation and culture, but also how the interpellation of a national subject occurs through the cultural and how this then extends beyond the boundaries of the nation and into the world system. Laura Kipnis is precise in this set of articulations:

So the aesthetic discourse becomes first a strategic political instrument and a site on which foreign policy – and the discourse of the nation and the constitution of “nationals” – becomes assimilated to subjectivity: foreign policy becomes a lived relation of perception and knowledge that is exercised in the practice of the aesthetic judgment. (210)

Kipnis, in an Althusserian manner, covers the constitution of a national subject through the interiorization of an ideological aesthetic and national discourses. But beyond a powerful interpellation or determination, Kipnis locates this internalized “foreign policy” as part of culture – recall Williams’ definition of culture as a “way of life” – by making it a lived relation. Foreign policies are lived through relations by national subjects in the cultural. This adept definition locates the cultural as a prime site of antisystemic rearticulation. It is this formulation, this set of articulations which allows the language writers to be simultaneously national (as a critique) and extra-national and able to extend their critique to the world system and globalization.

How then, at the level of method and address, do the language writers engage with globalization? A work like P. Inman’s *Uneven Development* (1982) is unrecoupable into such a thematic, even if the term uneven development describes the form globalization takes. However, the fragmentation and the resistance to normative modes of meaning production make *Uneven Development* unrecoupable, into the culture-ideology of globalization. It is illustrative, or

demonstrative, of the resistance to commodification, keeping in mind that, as Silliman wrote, “Poems both are and are not commodities” (1987 20). It is odd to excerpt an example from a book of this type as it is the effect of reading over a duration of time that the materiality of language becomes clear, when the words are not “misrecognized” as signifiers to be completed into signs. However, here is an indication:

cleek oddity.

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broken blackener.    spod clouds.

Now imagine it on full page, sideways. Now imagine twenty-four pages of it. I use *Uneven Development* to show three things: its semantic uselessness (its resistance to meaning) even though its title frames it within my description of globalization; its rejection of representation; its sheer materiality. Let me bring back the discursive frames of language writing to at least give it contextual meaning. The materiality of the words (words?) returns (rescues) them from their fate as blank commodities awaiting consumption; thus there is an implicit rejection of capitalist modes of meaning production. This work also resists recuperation into a “national” culture at any level, so in the framework of the breakdown of meaning due to the “national” crisis of the War, *Uneven Development* is a withdrawal from the cultural at a national level. Extended to Kipnis’ theory, this is also a rejection of the aesthetic logics that U.S. foreign policy is built on. As well, through the materiality of the language, the reader becomes aware of the ideology of consumption at the level of language; thus a defamiliarization to make ideology visible is possible.

Similar to McCaffery’s speculations concerning the resistance to capitalist modes of production at the level of language, the type of reading I give of this text has been critiqued, or even updated. Perloff in her “After Language Poetry,” describes McCaffery’s essay which outlines his imagining of a productive reader generated by a fragmentary text: “As the Utopian manifesto of a twenty-eight year old poet, ‘The Death of the Subject’ [McCaffery North 13-29] inevitably overstated its case.” (not paginated). McCaffery, in the reprint of the original text in his collected essays, *North of Intention*, periodizes the aesthetics. In a note he writes: “A decade later I can safely speak of this concern as an historical phase with attention having shifted [. . .] to a larger aspect especially to the critical status of the sentence as the minimal unit of social utterance, and hence, the foundation of discourse” (North 13). McCaffery sees a historical move within language writing from the morphological relations and sub-lexical units to the more social unit of the sentence. However, within the cultural logic of globalization, I want to foreground the speculative aspect of such sub-lexical texts, texts that turn from commodity and toward materiality. I want to emphasize this not as a text that can

produce a particular type of reader – for subjects and the process of meaning production are too erratic for that – but a text that foregrounds the noncommodity status of a level of language at a moment when culture is expected to materialize and is judged on its performance as a commodity. Culture that matters, in Judith Butler’s sense, is a commodity. Our critical methodologies do not provide a great deal of support for this speculative emphasis; it is impossible to track a sociological reception of such a text; reading it as a gesture within a positions war within a culture field is reductive; nor do I want to argue for it on a purely aesthetic level. However it is illustrative of the micro-aesthetic and macro-ideological conjuncture that a cultural poetics should emphasize. It is antisystemic in that it insists on a function for the cultural which is not outside of the logics of globalization, but which globalization rejects.



## Blurbs

... a highly fragile and precarious paratextual element, an endangered masterpiece, a baby seal of publishing, for which no amount of solicitude will be superfluous. (Gerard Genette)

### Think of One

Susan Howe: Inman's space is fractured, the action is interrupted, the situation tense. Construct of equivalencies, ZIP Brouillons of painters, writers, and musicians, crisscrossed with erasures and corrections.

Doug Lang: The work [is] a kind of conceptually and procedurally based form of painting; and it can also be read as music; but it remains what it is: writing.

### Red Shift

Joan Retallack: Inman reacquaints us with a full-blown sensual apprehension of language—a luxury we can't or don't permit ourselves when semantics predominates. ... It is Inman's pleasure to explore the warp and woof of the fabric of our linguistic intentions with all the meticulous humor words such as *warp* and *woof* evoke. Here the substantiating quality of the talisman, if nothing else, transforms our perceptions.

Douglas Messerli: Peter Inman has been one of a few American poets who has helped to bring the "transrational" poetics of the Russian Futurists into American poetry. In its fractures, stuttering starts and stops, collisions of meaning and sound, and glossalia, Inman's poetry is at once intensely private and extensively public. The poems of P. Inman contain a language that is spoken by no one, yet everyday, in our repetitions and confusions, and in our daily usage of the private languages of home, love, and office, we all speak "as one."

Gail Sher: I find this work very satisfying.

### criss cross

Diane Ward: *Criss cross* is a tour of the process of navigating the realms of experimentation, witness, and critique, an invitation to participatory poetic locution. You, as reader, are given the gift of transience.

Charles Bernstein: By fully semanticizing the so-called nonsemantic features of language, Inman creates a dialectic of the recuperable & the unreclaimable, where what cannot be claimed is nonetheless *most* manifest.

Joan Retallack: Inman's work is as unsettling and resistant to habitual comprehension as the ambiguous figure and similarly raises questions about the nature of perception. Like Beckett, Inman challenges his reader/audience ... to consider what is fundamental, presence or absence.

Estban Pujals Gesali: The type of experimentation characterizing his work ... situates him within the tradition of zaum, the "transrational" poetry of the Russian futurists Khlebnikov and Kruchenyk, and constitutes one of the most radical examples of the utopianization of language today.

Ben Friedlander: [Inman's] poetry lies in how this language becomes known—in the contemplative strategies it proposes—and in what it becomes known *as*. Inman's poetry an *emblem* of poetry, of how it sets on a page, the page in a book, how a book opens, before one's eyes and in the mind—and how the mind in relation to its knowns becomes material.

### VEL

Diane Ward: P. Inman's mind is a thoroughly attached organ. There are no places to escape to or from in relation to its consideration, its inclusion. His work is liberating: images crystallize then overflow their frames, the ends of lines complete phrases whose content is picked up—goes off—on the next line in sudden tangential angles. P. Inman's writing exists simultaneously in the realms of formal experimentation ... social and cultural witness ... and political/economic/institutional critique.

Joan Retallack: *VEL* makes it clear once again that without Peter Inman's work a whole register of our language would not exist. It comes to us via his uniquely musical intelligence, his compound mind's ear, opening a range from "suth. pitted. light. stream." to "forks of ponders" to "Their / every brink of mouth." This work is as uncompromised and incompressible in its lush detail as all linguistic weather beyond dichotomies of sense/nonsense. What Tractarian Wittgensteins might say must be passed over in silence Inman's work realizes as the possibility of a third term, *n e wsense*. When I read "teak of near eskimo" and "he couldn't hide the mind blanch / ed past." I marvel.

Rod Smith: Inman's attention is unique. He's a maker with *respect* for materials. There's no excess & no lack. We need to learn to live like these writings.

*at.least*

Bruce Andrews: Hardly anything seems strange enough anymore—"reality. as. a. normative. effect,"—at least P. Inman still works the front lines. With evidence shimmer, no things but in letters & space & punctuation, political paying off perforation. This arranges tantalizing raw (& V-effected) materials for us to construct (& live in) a life, a milieu. With zero bluster—"language. larger"—contra code everywhere, a clip-o-matic audacity & atomic redlining to thrill. Syllables leave their lipstick as synonyms for individual letters. Cuts the each, so let's go watch cells divide—"of. someone. / else's. dictionary."—as decompression "leaked. agency." for "language. without. a. channel." Not to complacently cooperate with a fetish or impress with imagery & optic sugaring, not to wield massageish 'content' to represent something already built, an institutionalized titanic humanizing the pin-ups or invoice behavior as contentment as containment. The already is uninhabitable. Let's de boss!

Hung Q. Tu: Peter Inman has written in *at. least.* a painstakingly meticulous book that is both clinically cold and unerringly humane. It is a bizarre, almost classic, experiment which surprises and provokes (disturbingly) a sequence of sensations that shakes us to our cognitive core, at least as to what words are and how do we read them. That is to say, the poems run at different speed, and there is no indication of the limits, just that one finds oneself either reading dot to dot or stumbling over the pages like a sheet of laser. *at. least.* is a hard core verbal preamble with such dialectic velocity it leaves us dazed if not choking on the fumes. Corners are not beveled; they are cut razor fine and held so tightly to one another as to gauge the thin membranes of signs and cause them to leak meaning. If by the end of the collection of poems Lenin, who makes several appearances as an embodiment of thought and action, doesn't exactly "understand" the work, he certainly would have commissioned P. Inman for a post in an Arts Committee.

*Amounts. To.*

David Buuck, *Traffic*: that. this. would. be. practice. into. woken. spurred. agency. beat. tuned. in. on. call. mediate. static. the. ticker. update. tense. present. spoked. jittery. capital. word. flow. fractions. viable. sensory. upwakes.

*Publisher's Weekly*: P. Inman's *at. least.* continues his investigations into the lexical nexus, replete with streams of meditations that are the literary equivalents of serialist sound-clusters: "properties, into,/ expressions,/ ness, tatter, of/ one, unbroken// smallness, polks." For his attention to the resonances of the single letter, the syllable in isolation and Mallarmean "white space," Inman is an important, but under-recognized, writer of the Language group, bringing a unique, human-scaled tone to the entire project.

Hung Q. Tu, *Tripwire*: Peter Inman has written in *at. least.* a painstakingly meticulous book that is both clinically and unerringly humane. It is a bizarre, almost classic, experiment which surprises and provokes (disturbingly) a sequence of sensations that shakes us to our cognitive core, at least as to what words are, how do we read them, etc.