

*PATTERNS / CONTEXTS / TIME*  
*A Symposium on Contemporary Poetry*



*Edited by Phillip Foss & Charles Bernstein*

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TYUONYI





## TYUONYI

*TYUONYI* is a Keresan word meaning, the meeting place, and is the name of a major prehistoric ruin in northern New Mexico.

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Cover painting, "Fishermen's Dreams" by Sergio Moyano, 4' x 7', oil.

## PREFACE

This issue of *Tyuonyi*, *Patterns / Contexts / Time: A Symposium on Contemporary Poetry*, exists because of collective desire. Ninety-seven poets from the United States, Canada, New Zealand, England, and Australia felt the desire to respond.

Their responses were to a series of questions devised by Charles Bernstein and myself. The questions were designed to be inclusive enough to address the issues which engaged us, but vague enough not to restrict the potential responses of the respondents. We wanted to create a forum wherein the real issues that compelled poets could be addressed without a felt adherence to any presuppositions. The volume of response was very gratifying and the range of response far beyond my expectation.

This issue serves, also, to inaugurate a new component of *Tyuonyi*. In the future we will publish essays, reviews, etc., in addition to the primary work.

This issue would not have been possible without the relentless energy and enthusiasm of Charles Bernstein, who will continue on with *Tyuonyi* as a Contributing Editor.

It would also not have been possible without the unqualified support of Christopher Merrill, Director of the Santa Fe Literary Center, who offered to sponsor *Tyuonyi* through Recursos de Santa Fe. He, too, will continue on as a Contributing Editor.

And many thanks to painter Sergio Moyano for letting me use his "Fishermen's Dreams" as the face for this issue.

Additionally, I would like to thank the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for an Editor's Grant, and the Fund for Poetry for their generous support and encouragement.



## THE QUESTIONS:

What patterns, if any, do you see developing that are presently influencing habits of reading or readership within poetry?

What are the values or limitations of these developing, or undeveloped, patterns?

What context, if any, do you see your work as part of?

What context, if any, do you see for the work of those contemporary poets whom you find most interesting?

What's the most disturbing (or irritating) thing associated with poetry or your work as a poet?

What sources do you find most useful in keeping informed about contemporary poetry?

Do universities play any role for you in terms of your work as a poet?

Do you ever think about what you will be doing in ten years? What? etc etc.

## PATTERNS / CONTEXTS / TIME: *A Symposium on Contemporary Poetry*

*Edited by Phillip Foss & Charles Bernstein*



CHARLES ALEXANDER

Limited to five hundred / words a response not / resolution, patterns of reading / resolving

(Whitman: reading is a gymnast's act)

Heterogeneous play of signifiers. We become more accustomed to reading as an *activity*. Reading as swimming, not (necessarily) to reach the edge of the water.

*Language Writing* -- often described as an urban regionalism, practice of two coasts; but this has never been the case -- just that more writers ( & more such any sort of folk) live in certain urban centers, enough to gather into groups, publish magazines, attract others. Yet Toronto has never been on an ocean, and has from beginning been a site of such activity. Also Milwaukee, where *Stations* provided an early forum on Clark Coolidge, ed. by Ron Silliman. Or, the southwest is thought to be a regional focus for Native American writing, yet as many or more writers live in New York or San Francisco. Any insistence on regionalism seems highly suspect.

Locally (and out from there) my own work (as writer, book artist, literary activist, publisher) seems to be to --

1) give wider context to so-called experimental writing (not that this is a preferred terminology) in Tucson, bringing writers from elsewhere, focusing attention on their work, and attending to the work of local writers so engaged.

2) interact with others nationally/internationally, continuing dialogues such as this symposium on what it means to read & write (as exploratory activities). Colleagues include the two of you, Karl Young, Paul Metcalf, Lyn Hejinian, Johanna Drucker, Brita Bergland, Beverly Dahlen, Nathaniel Mackey, Eli Goldblatt, Karen Brennan, Gil Ott, Leslie Scalapino, Cynthia Hogue, Ron Silliman, Michael Amnasan, Jessica Grim, Kit Robinson, Jackson Mac Low, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Lisa Cooper, Michael Magoolaghan, Steve McCaffery, Karen Mac Cormack, Clifford Dillhunt, Sheila Murphy, David Abel, Robert Creeley, Tenney Nathanson, & very

many more --it seems, as I write this, that there is probably no more central answer to your questions than to name such names.

3) consider reading as expanded act, text involved with physical book --structure, color, design, tactile possibilities, . . . -- not to see the book as *container* for text, rather as participant in construction of meaning.

4) write with all such things in mind, as well as the simple (or not so) act of one's apprehension of world, in & of language.

This speaks to several of your questions. As to others--

Disturbing: slow growth of audience; active resistance of some poets (stories could be told here, but they seem not to the point); certain *praxis* in writing (e.g. "language" writing) being adopted by younger writers/students as a *style*.

Sources: magazines like *Tyonyi*, *HOW(ever)*, *Paper Air*, *Ottotole*, *The Difficulties*, *Volition*, *Big Allis*, *O-blek*, etc.; many small presses (& great thanks to Segue, Small Press Distribution, Sun & Moon, & other distributors for handling them; no bookstores here carried such items until the Arts District Bookstore opened last spring); and, perhaps most informative, the correspondence of friends & colleagues; keeping one's eyes and ears open.

Universities: they are *here*, yes, a somewhat marginal part of the community-at-large. Generally, the students are more interesting and interested than the faculty; as a place and context for work, the university seems far away.

Ten years from now: Chax Press is becoming more of a literary center -- production in literary book arts, and somewhat more 'regular' small press literary publishing. These activities will continue, perhaps not in the same locale. My own activities in ten years may center more strictly on writing & publishing, and take place at some remove from an urban center (Tucson seems urban *here*, of course; it probably will not seem so to many of your readers).

Currently work with handmade books gives me a certain structural focus in writing -- page as unit of composition within the poem, book as limit of the entire complex of the poem. Where *this* takes me in ten years is far from certain. One writes, & neither circumstances nor will seem to want to change that, now or in ten years.

What began with wonder as to what I might say to *any* of these issues, has continued as what feels like one side of a conversation -- I wish the two of you



were here, to extend it -- *this* is sometimes a disturbance, that one often feels one, isolated --but that can happen anywhere.

Charles Alexander is Director of Chax Press and Director of the Tucson Poetry Festival. His *Hopeful Buildings* is forthcoming from Chax Press and *A Book of Hours* from 5 & Dime Press.

## BRUCE ANDREWS

Ben Friedlander:

In your essays there's no systematic positioning vis-a'-vis other writers, nor even many citations, and looking over your book reviews, I don't pick up any pattern -- i.e., pieces on John Wieners, Rosmarie Waldrop, Michael Lally, etc., writers not especially similar to you, along with appreciations of one or two writers whose work *does* recall your own. In comparison, Charles Bernstein's essays are a virtual compendium of Charles' interests and obsessions -- and in *Total Syntax* Barratt Watten takes great pains to point out the origins of his thinking in the writing of Viktor Shklovsky, Robert Smithson, and Charles Olson. You operate differently. In fact, excepting "Misrepresentation," a long discussion of Ashbery, your essays don't depend on specific texts at all.

Earlier, you spoke of an "ecology of reference," and it does seem that your criticism operates out of such an ecology, rather than in direct response to individual works.

What context can you give for your writing? For your ideas about language and society? How would you map out your reading?

## TALKS ABOUT READING

*Unrestricted reflection. Mixed forward to sound live. It's not new & it's not social, so, who needs it?* Systematic -- I think immediately of system, what is, what's to be done, a positioning towards a system, an overall pattern of sense. --Especially with writings which are invigoratingly & ravishingly self-reflexive on these contested discursive planes. *Shall we call the roll?* 'Out of the corner of our eye' -- or their eye. Public peripheral vision.

Reading active, sometimes overactively, for use. Assume the fact of everybody. I want my full network before I get it. Seek some path in language . . . itself labyrinthine, to . . . people, social interaction, heat, interlacings of experience . . . a reading toward more generalized orders too. Order don't order us. Unreleased vaultorama. Fanning the frames. Every



*inciter.* (Another way would be to study, to dwell within the full scope & sweep of some individual's work -- a bibliographer's dream. For poets as yet undead or uncanonized, this becomes a practical impossibility. The life's work isn't done, or isn't published, or scattered around. *If I'm special it's only into seeing what's wrong.* So I'm led, whether I want to be or not, toward fragmentary incursions into the textual lives of others -- & maybe for that reason toward themes & figures & individual syllables, words, phrases, techniques to hold onto me, its net & my nest meshing. *Each lack all.*

*Productive consumption.* Drawn to what sticks out, what's less (institutionally normalized) 'verse' or to what is less orthodox, more mysterious (remembering the tropism of opacity or heroic rebellion toward their own exclusivities & orthodoxies). What can answer back -- through its writerly code & my readerly code -- with unexpected not-yet-norms: particulars, reverb. Textual hyper-individualism, eked out. *Technique astonish me.* Exemplary problems elicited & articulated by writing.

'Everyone' = a context. *Incognito apparati. Present & unaccounted for.* *Who can write.* 'Address' in writing about reading: Hard to choose among an entire encompassing field without complicity in the off-putting embarrassments or closures of canon-making. *Ideological bites out.* The basis for choosing among a bewildering many might be the manifold uses I'd want for any of them. All at once? And this varies enough to make hash of any hierarchy or periodization based on values internal to the literary field itself. *Instant institution nerves.* Criterion: individual 'texts' refigured as pieces of a puzzle of an argument about (or allegory of) the threading of a social fabric, an image structure if not a Real. Task: contextualize, back toward a social backdrop, while reading works -- productions -- that are already more or less satisfying contextualizings (a.k.a. writings) themselves. Retreadings.

Literary issues & stylistic tactics: hardly enough meat on the canonized bone. No image of an individual and self-contained surface is sufficient. *They don't care what the content is as long as it has polished finish.* In reading, charismatically individual 'texts' are empowered to retail their conceited lies about their autonomy, their 'positive' infinities, their heroism. Buy into that? *I'm tired of something new.* Formalist surface displays & indeterminacies often succeed only in shielding their backstage & the stage's social construction. What stage are you on vs. what stage are you at? - Privacy, that too. *"One million regime-related deaths."* It's not only a High Romantic rapture which belies its social production by chattering the jargon

of authenticity. So can all the conscious & unconscious gestures of "literariness" belittle their ideology, or hegemonic role, by chattering the justifications (or gesturing to the cozy hearth) of tradition, social consensus, dialogue, Arnoldian sublimation, neo-Social Darwinite naturalism, cultured 7-11 phobia, etc. The literary, a practical groundswell of ideology. *Excused machinery. Refrigerating the social.* And individual works participate in it, full throttle, even as they are construed as if to be disclaiming all interest in it. (Defining 'interest'). A subjective & Visionary attempt to soar above all social ground as the 'romantic ideology'. Embracing it, reading can becloud & occlude what those writings actually do -- for they pose & poise themselves (& their potential readers-collaborators) in relation to all that resists them. Or ask in what way can stylistic self-consciousness coexist with a social consciousness (& conscientiousness)?

Constitutive horizon -- reading into it. *Down systematic from leashed sympathetic base.* Context, too often kept hidden -- either as an array (or rows & columns) of separate exterior circumstances or, how insidious, as interiorized limits & directions which the individual keeps in shape, in good repair, with the aid of the grip of illusory centerings. The 'ring of the horizon' continually reveals novelty after novelty; it produces desire. *The individual is a sacrifice to it. What the limitations weren't.* The network runs over us, over-ridden by the 'wheels' ('of justice' [--'state ideological apparatus, scarcity'] or 'of love' [--'seething cauldron, sublimation'] or 'of greed' [--'reproduction of capital']). A social fabric as source of energy. *Track down the motel bills, 'we've checked out yesterday'.* Lethal weapons needn't need silencers -- or they work entirely as silencers. Or they can even make you talk a Miranda of normalizing communications. *We're free, we're well socialized, we're false. You've got to respect lack of idiom.*

What lessons can reading draw direct from form -- or, more generally, from a self-reflexiveness locked (or defined) in embrace with a social world. Desire as Negation: that, first. *Impatient with sound, we turn into propaganda? Not public, not interesting.* Recently I've been on the track of a more social, political responsiveness, for resonances between society ('national issues' -- sociology haunts another lively providence?) & method of construction in the poem. A micro & macro social body. How works themselves define context as a prelude to constructing what readerly stance toward it would 'follow'.

A system accounts for individuals, even the individual texts which themselves help account for the system. Explanation/Prescription -- that fit.



Larger surrounding pattern: as a scaffolding of meaning. *It's my intention to eradicate the secret? If you'd like literature free of charge . . . Very figural total. Information is hegemonized data. Airbrushing out ideology.* So that suggests to me: reading as an eliciting -- of social positioning, mapping, horizoning. *I'm meta-commenting on the meta-comments.* To help chart (i.e., imagine) what's at stake in an uncontested or taken-for-granted social context. To cut through somehow to an experience of a social overall, the social order & its foundations (& what's more than some orthodoxy of 'economic base' or commodity fetishism): social order, a whole open to being implicated by a writing. *Problemist.* Work inclined to contest, rather than to bail out of, the context; the content. To send it up, shortcircuit some of its particulars & maybe its shape, its agenda, its organizing principles. New constructions broadcasting their social implications through the wireless imagination, socially embodied. *Diverse palette of totality.*

Pluralities everywhere, but do we need to theatricalize this diversity so that we would turn even farther, in our facings, from understanding it, & from . . . disalienating it. *Most of the verbs are contaminated. Paroled in liberty. System's my indifference.* Reading's negotiation of a social order. Context, frozen, at first glance -- something rather settled or sedimented, cooled. What is frozen: a grid of definite meaning. Not that you can read through discourse to reveal a separate, free-standing base -- but recognize that now we face a more unified field, as embodiment of principles of orientation, delimitations of scope, identity-making, near-successes of suture. It's not just a paranoid fantasy that these social specifics (of sense) are systematized, or that socially systematic (mediated) elements are floodlit to produce the allure of the concrete, the idiosyncratic, the direct. An allure which could habituate & justify. *Meanwhile . . .* What stands beyond our individual writerly initiatives -- or besieges them, occasionally ventriloquizing them? *Everyone is being singled out.* As if the base expands to fill the superstructure available; it colonizes. At the very least, then, it seems unhelpful to ignore a context with this much solidity (and that's discursive & institutional ) or scope. (Foreshortening may allow us to focus, on what's immediately facing us -- 'immediate luminous numinous direct experience' -- but the lens & prescription implied for myopia may confirm it, reinforce it, even reduce our [or reduce our desire for] (needed & compensatory) farsightedness.)

Content? *Form is always neglected at first in favor of content. Context is the only content. Formalism means property.* If content weren't of necessity a formal matter, an instance of articulating form, & via form . . . a

formalized material -- brought to bear . . . If it weren't for all this, we might imagine we could innocently bring it forward -- to invest our hopes in it as a separate realm -- in the direction to which the arts would continue to (a) pay deference, willing to (b) sublimate the erotics of their own (constitutive) medium. Still the impulse toward content at least will mark an impulse toward the contextual, or the extra-literary. *I need the social (heat) to get beyond the social. Some other colonial grammar.* In reading, it would point up certain aspects of composition or style or method which appear less self-enclosed, not in terms of what works are pointedly 'about' but in terms of what they are working with & working through. *I forgot to mention ecology.* System all inclusive -- also: not quite. *Systemic mischief.* Reading = talk trouble. Cracks in the empire, cracks in the wick. What won't fit the manners designed to organize, flatten, harness or relax. The language -- incommensurable. Chipped frame. (DATA ENTRY). Beyond a carnival of absence. Not a Transcendent Ground, but a socially embodied possibility.

Bruce Andrews' latest book is *Getting Ready to Have Been Frightened*, from Roof. Sun & Moon published his *Give Em Enough Rope*.



## RAE ARMANTROUT

A newspaper reporter interviewed me recently. She asked if I thought poetry was a dying art. That was discouraging. I said I hoped not because reading and writing poetry can produce an active relation to language (information) which is increasingly rare in the "consumer society." What's truly needed can't die out, can it?

Poetry had better not die after I've sacrificed all my economic viability to it. My job as an adjunct faculty member at UCSD helps keep my family solvent, but, of course, there's no job security. When I'm really discouraged I imagine that in ten years -- when I'm well into middle age -- I will have lost whatever currency I have with professors and students there and I'll be quietly dropped. I won't even be eligible for unemployment.

At the moment, though, I'm actually in a pretty good mood. I see a couple of positive trends in the poetry scene today. One is that there are undeniably so many strong female poets publishing now. I'm (almost) no longer defensive about my gender. The other I'm less certain of, but it seems to me that alternative (experimental, whatever) poetry is less factionalized than it was five years ago. There seems to be a bit more tolerance or, at least, less furor over who belongs in what camp. I hope so. What I really want is just to have the time and energy to keep going.

Rae Armantrout's most recent book is *Precedence* (Burning Deck, 1985). A new book, *Necromance*, is forthcoming from *Sun and Moon*. Her poems have appeared in *Language Poetries* (New Directions, 1987) and *In the American Tree* (National Poetry Foundation, 1986). She is the current coordinator of UCSD's New Writing Series and co-editor of *The Archive Newsletter*.

## TOM BECKETT

I've been told that my failure to move to either East or West Coast is seen by some as a sign of my lack of seriousness, a badge proclaiming second class commitment to my project as writer and editor. A *pattern* which I would like to encourage is a pattern of perception as well as reception. And it is a pattern which is specific to my own location, my own habits of hesitations: The pattern of engaging and inflecting the bicoastal scenes from the outside. An important subtext of *The Difficulties* has been that it is a magazine based in the Midwest. It is literally a tool I use to get people to talk to me. I'm not often in the position of mentor but when I am I advise young poets to start a magazine. But moreover, to know why they are starting a magazine and what audience and issues they want to address. Practical Poetics 101. It can transform your life. If it happens often enough it can transform the scenes. There are never enough good poetry magazines.

My life and art are as much the consequence of what I have decided not to do as what I have found myself doing. I earn my living doing dirty, tiring, stressful, exasperating, but useful public health work. I crawl into sewers, deal with rodent and insect problems, mediate landlord-tenant disputes, inspect restaurants, schools, pools, investigate communicable diseases, animal bites, toxic waste problems and more. It's not a well-paid job. I don't love it. But I've been at it for 12 years and I'm good at it and can understand its social utility. The ultimate frustration of public health work is that the results of your work are often not visible -- you're trying to prevent things from happening. While most people are glad at some point to see a cop, people are rarely glad to see a health inspector. My job, two children, a spouse who works hard in the public schools, writing and editing without a local support system, all of this accompanied by the chronic daily pain of a serious back injury, make for a demanding juggling act. After ten years, I've admitted with great reluctance that something has to give and what's going to give is *The Difficulties*.

I believe that if I had moved to the East or West Coast I would have a different publication history -- that I would have achieved significant book publication



by now. The last 10 years have been a great adventure. Who knows what the next 10 will bring. What I crave more than anything is *time*, time to think through my aesthetic and work without uninterrupted interruption on some moldering writing and editing projects. I haven't had a real break for the last twelve years. I liken my condition to an asthma of the mind. It's increasingly hard to catch my thought.

Tom Beckett edits *The Difficulties*. His book include *Separations* (Generator) and *Soluble Senses Census* (Tonsure).

DODIE BELLAMY

MISHMASHING

Gossip . . . myth . . . newspapers . . . campfire tales . . . sitcoms . . . Book-of-the-Month Club . . . Indiana Jones . . . dirty jokes: thousands of years of oral then written tradition evidence a deep human drive to tell stories. This need is not suddenly wiped out when some middle class white male theoretician announces that it's hokey. The primal urge for plot has inspired, not just a reemergence, but a reinvention of narrative in the work of many female poets. 60's feminism's invocation to write down the stories of women's lives is being exhumed -- however, as horror movies are always reminding us, anything reanimated comes back askew. For the past few years I've been working in a lyric form that looks and feels like prose, though a prose less linear and more open than my early "poetry," a form which wavers between story and the mysteries of interiority, in which each paragraph, and sometimes each sentence, is essentially the equivalent of a new chapter, with lots of collaging in of mass culture icons and stolen technical and critical vocabularies.

Other women are moving in similar directions, from Fanny Howe's juxtaposition of disembodied subjectivities with prose passages in her novel *Deep North* to Carla Harryman's surreal parodies of narrative conventions in *Animal Instincts* to Laura Moriarty's holographic blending of desire and the fantastic in "Luz and Rosie." A devil's advocate might suggest that if female poets want to play around with fiction why don't they just switch to prose, why all this mishmashing of genres? Because no linguistically sophisticated woman could find satisfaction trapped within an overwhelming framework of linear conventions: important spaces are invariably left out: the leaps that occur between body and logic: all those wonderful squiggly in-betweens. It has been said that the hardest thing to do in writing is to get a person through a doorway and into a room -- why not just beam them where you want them like in *Star Trek*? Besides, what rule dictates that a character or consciousness must exist in a room, or, for that matter, in any physical locale? Sometimes before my own narrativity I feel awkward and shy, like when figuring out what to do with a new lover, when concern over technique



threatens to obliterate content. For me, much of the pleasure of a traditional text occurs when the author handles plot conventions in a clumsy manner, creating a crack in his or her seamless intentions which I can enter -- for instance, Agatha Christie's stick figure romances. The essence of the narrative's reinvention is the deliberate creation of these types of cracks. As my character Mina Harker has written, "... into my dreams my shady manipulation into a writing deformed and twisted as its content themes and perspective buried in spontaneous subject growths ..."

Dodie Bellamy is currently working on *The Letters of Mina Harker*, a book-length collection of correspondence between Mina Harker, the heroine of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and various contemporary writers. She recently edited *The Women's Issue of Mirage*, and, along with Kevin Killian, runs the reading series at Small Press Traffic in San Francisco.

#### STEVE BENSON

Works of poetry today that are typically the most innovative are written on an increasingly large scale. Does less attention, care, and commitment per unit of measure go into such extensive verbiage? It seems predictable that, by and large, less time, energy, and consideration will go into *reading* a 20-page-long work than a half-page work. The tendency to publish lengthy works in excerpted form in magazines tends to further depreciate any reader's confidence in the adequacy of what understanding can be engaged with the text. Why do such large-scale works seem necessary to us?

How is 'reading' being re-constructed through these *long* works? For want of a rationale to ground myself in the code of reference of a given work, often I am otherwise unable to adjust to more than the manner of a given writing's *textures*. An absence of marked developmental thesis or trajectory, reinforced by an ambiguous indifference or passive-aggressive challenge in the writing's manners of address, may overwhelm incentives to a linear reading and spur one rather to browse, skim, skip, sample and 'mix.' Such high-handed reading is rarely condoned, even among advocates of a 'reader-constructed writing,' but I believe it's a predictable, maybe inherent corollary of our practice -- and may it thrive.

The amplitude of invitation and of anticipated responses to the present forum seems to me a manifestation of the same tendency. I don't suppose the grandiosity of wishing to be able to include everything is only contemporary. *Tyonyi's* identification of an ongoing project (in the call for submissions to this issue) with publication of "some of the most diverse literature extant, and [as] a vehicle for writers whose work would otherwise be less available," without any claim to particular values or purposes of discrimination, similarly makes little argument for a rationale to focus editorial decision. To prescribe a more deliberately motivated, delimited range of inquiry would require an explicit avowal of commitment to editorial judgment, management and organization that might call into question the grandiosity not only of each individual author but also the presumably unmanageable, irrepressible, and unresolvable plethora of any wannabee democratically participatory discourse.



As for *censorship*, in our civilization (advanced capitalism?) censorship is always and essentially something *we do to ourselves*, on an individual, group, community, mass and state level, whenever we have something to say that might disrupt a status quo we have agreed to know and remain beholden to and we decide therefore to hold our peace -- something we're doing *almost* all the time. Consider artwork as a model, wherein maintaining the 'art' status of the production, audience interest, an integrated stylistic authority, thematic correlations, frame-of-reference limits, socially and politically admissible position, etc., governs decisions *not* to disclose or venture many potential statements of what we know or want to know and would be challenged on. To cleave to an "us/them" model of censorship under *our* conditions perpetuates and reifies our complicity with it.

Steve Benson's *Reverse Order* is published this fall from Potes & Poets Press; The Figures put out *Blue Book* (comprised largely of projects including improvisation and performance initiatives) a year before. He's quit his bookstore job and started proofreading in a law firm while studying for a doctorate in clinical psychology.

## MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE

### A CONTEXT OF A WAVE

November 5: You would be thinking about your physical placement, what can be a continuum and what is chance. You place yourself innately on a mesa, there are blue hills at each horizon, the light falls copiously onto your open space, the path of the sun and the planets are proportioned around you.

The source of the balance is a sense perception. Your sense of your location is not contingent, but accords with an idea of location inside you, that turns in you like a gyroscope, as you are moving.

I believe in this sense perception of place, because I experience it. It may be a sense of the shape of a space, or of the balance of "features" of the space. Or, it may be a sense of a point on the earth in relation to forces in the earth, which may be affected by stars and planets. Or, it may be in relation to stars and planets.

December 1: She is making a difference between how the land seems, and how the land looks. If the land is a place, and the place sites your content or the place orients your sense of value, then what is seeming about the space, that also seems inside your body?

Snow closes the space to you, and the dark arrives earlier; you have no space to look out to, in the dusk, and so it seems that you are having no words.

You see woodpeckers on the snowy dirt. It is mild and snowy. It is morning. So you think the quick movements are something you can speak about, the red throats of the males, the volume of their down. Carnations of snow in the pine trees. It seems a value to be describing these things, or what you are describing, as if it were just to describe: the beautiful place.



December 6: If she were thinking about the relationship between the content of a view, and the view's relation to life in a new way, she cannot think. The view is the content, and the life is the time, still. The view is your movement through millions of parallel white lines of falling snow. Seemingly disconnected traces of paths through space across the time you are looking, or moving through, in the night. Like highlighted clouds at sunset, she can't tell their distance away from her.

The value of the content is equivalent to a mood. The content or story of the view is repeatable and depends on your orientation or mood. The changing of an orientation marks time. The depth of the content of a view depends on the degree to which your body can respond to your perception of the view. So, the content is abstract. The value of a view depends on the degree of your response. But, the character of your response, which is emotional, dictates the value, as a passion.

Even as the view lengthens across the time you are travelling.

December 9: Dozens of varieties of tufts of dry grasses, sheaves empty, but still catching the light. Stalks seem more luminous yellow than electric, a color that retains its luminosity when placed next to the skin of your hand, while colors in electric light and synthetic colors lose their beauty. So, you would think beauty pertains to light, but beauty is an idea or a feeling that associates from light to the mind.

December 11: The mountain, "The Wave", is veiled by a mist of snow, there is light snow in the air over the plain, and a near butte shows dense and clear against the shadowy Wave. You could say, of the colors of the moon. In the day. You could start out with a feeling that could be love, or it could be a feeling of orientation, or a feeling of beauty. It seems to relate to, but not be, the place in the light around you. A nuance of grass or lit cloud related to the current in your.

Then, if the feeling changes, you could look around, and the land would have overcast time. The day is colder. The colors are darker, of branches and snow, but the land is still lighted. Light over the mountains is still gilded at sunset. You feel that the place is still located correctly within the lines of the stars and lines of force of the world, but you are not located, so your feeling makes you out of place. Your feeling makes the place darken and turn in on you. Which it does not do. It still extends a line into space for the jackrabbit, escaping. It still sends a line of a glance across the horizon into infinity, or vertically levitates a glance, at night, to it.

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge's most recent book is *Empathy* from Station Hill. Her previous books include *The Heat Bird* and *Random Possession*.



## JAVANT BIARUJIA

*pattense*

just as it has been said the visible logic of meaning appropriates  
somniaulic *logos* lunatic *pneuma* or hermeneutic *ousia* or allegoric *biblia*  
abiblia so in the same way does the matrix of vowels appropriate aphetic yet  
axiomatic anilingus irrumatio intercrural friction or some other poiesis in  
*eroticis*

in the former case appropriation meant apotropaic intonations in the  
semantics of the practised disciplines similarly in the latter certain  
histrionic mnemonics are contradicted in the ironies of podex and pudendum  
it may in fact be said to *accomplicate* these monogamies in the same sense  
as a codex explicates the woven praxis in history or archaeology to  
*accomplicate* each other when they are being implicated together in order to  
make the polyglot stone a calculus

*in the status of texts (hubris)*

and the books i have been dreaming of writing will be brought together under  
the coverture of *Vivimus Vivamus*

*prius prius*

walks

walking home from marivaudage my pricksoul is cut to the quid pro quo and  
japed

the amorous parallels and mnemonic contrivances of names -- from  
misnomered Hadassa to Azza Aziza now Alissa should the grains *nom de*  
*guerre* be estro or nympholepsy

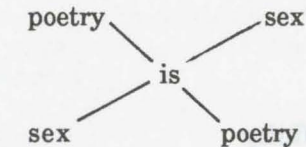
*Mosque Masque* or the unwritten *Black Perfumes*

transpose alphabets in the text geometric limns toss off a theorem beneath the  
fount of reason and flow of soul -- and carnal names Vilshka Quiphon  
Vueillau and Riwan traduce a chrestomathematical calque

*between crasis and creases*

consider this example -- some of the themes are assigned others are rescinded  
imagine two different equilibria imagine the sudden flux of parallelogos of  
crasis of abraxas presumably traded off for s[ol]lips[istic] promiscuity  
(*shomyo*) or trousers (*danshoku*) image a sidereal *je vous tutoyerai* a  
palpable fetish of libidinal katabasis an incestuous epizeuxis an interior  
flower

most mundugumoresque subjunctives operate but in an axioma medium of  
contagion instead we have desire and image thus



is = copula

*pataques*

fant^onni jeune nifroid parle infinide la lumin`ere be'niouioui/tombe sanz  
friponner moige^net paz d amour chenu paz du ciel blue laiteus les champs  
touljour composent son corpt avec Sodome de la fourrure de la faimme  
charmante o`ul feu fada est tellement mesquin me voil`a je lez haiz le  
sifflolement de cez ma^les!

*hope spurs etypic*

the proairetic gag



adamant the rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain

musculine pride

one out of every two adversaries it appears does not read adversaries -- future  
and flesh -- deprive themselves of the factitiousness of the text.

*sigla*

from emporhic margins *ad ogni ciuffone* consider the sources of  
logodaedaly for poetics

*il girigogolo di Sisifo*

*non ci capisco un accademia!*

*oneiric will*

there is no future in english without volition

the future round rhombs is suspended from infinity

what follows is logged to what precedes it -- not a glottochronology of mortal  
remains being merely a problem of writerliness but of being reread just as  
absence has risen high in the sky so inflexion exhibits the same marvel of  
wanderlust

Javant Biarujia (born 1955 Melbourne Australia) is of mixed Celtic and  
Mediterranean descent. Originally interested in painting as an avenue of  
expression, he turned to writing with the development of his Diary (almost  
10,000 pages) and a hermetic language of his invention named Taneraic.  
Over 3,500 pages of this Diary were written in Taneraic, which now form the  
basis of his Taheraic-English Dictionary (Nainougat Tanerai-Sepou), a  
work in progress. Since 1979 he has published his poems in magazines in  
Australia, USA, Canada and Japan. In 1982 he co-founded Nosukumo, a  
small press devoted to the publication of poetry. Besides publishing

chapbooks, he edits *The Carrionflower Writ*, a literary and arts magazine in  
folded A 2 format, and *taboo jadoo*, a journal of multilinguistics,  
amphigory, interlinguistics, ecriture d'ombres, langue close, lettrisme,  
zaum, kubofuturizm, jasyan, kachatatapagajadadaba. His books include  
*Warrior Dolls* (1982), *Thalassa Thalassa* (1983), *Autumn Silks* (1988), *This is a  
Table* (1989), *Calqueneauz* (1989).



JULIA BLUMENREICH

OUT OF CONTEXT

Huge ANT I'm afraid it's too. (out of context)  
the word is context  
would like to be in the speech  
patterns of Saturday shoppers on Cheltenham Avenue.  
"The Ant sits up like a dog in the sun -- "

If on the outside of context  
cut the chord,  
only in space, the tumble and toss --  
by land we have turning on the television,  
sometimes a phrase arrows just the recognition,  
"We've created this for you:" our peacekeepers,  
freedom fighters, war on drugs,

so I am now caught up in  
the Daddy Long Legs dancing  
with his own shadow, the  
Warrior Ant (after the production by Lee Breuer)  
resurfaces higher up on the porch railing,  
his movements eclipse my wanting contact --  
synapses and feelers.

The context is a wish of community  
a turning to and recognizing the others.

The context is a wish of the world  
also the acceptance of reality that Susan Howe states:  
"You can't do a writing which is a challenge to authority and have the  
authorities welcome you into their ranks."

wouldn't leaf shavings  
announcing the wind  
be acceptable?

I'll call the context the urge to be lyrical and then the violence  
that follows  
Prisoner, sock in mouth.

Not thinking so much of challenging authority  
as creating with the hope  
of a new understanding --  
old staid ways at best boring  
& at worst?

The starving.

\*

Context has to be involved with the world,  
those contemporary writers who expose the system's hold  
while writing on the outside

now it might rain  
tidal of wind

I admire, read most frequently.

\*

What about gender as a context?  
sometimes I skirt those issues unconsciously  
(see the choice of idiom directly above).  
The pattern of my own poetry fits in with those  
finding their voices when constantly  
2nd rank -- this goes beyond boundaries of gender  
to those of class as well.

\*



Most disturbing (or irritating)  
is the "What are you trying to say, I mean,  
what is the point?"

see that fern across the road  
wagging itself, *no* -- that's not it!

it's the poetry pushed out of people's making  
who are the poets? Is one writer really more  
of a poet than another?  
What about "turf" wars  
decreasing foundation money and now  
Helms and the NEA?  
Irritated by the star society  
disturbed that I buy into it when  
the poetry I read by children and the "uninitiated",  
oh, their world is often larger than I remember  
mine ever being.

\*

There is a long term project of being more in the world/  
poetry as an extension of both the love and hatred dicing the globe.

When I "challenge authority" who then is my audience?  
If, for instance, I want more than the readers of *Tyonyi*,  
systems beyond those which promote poetry of the white European  
tradition need to be challenged. That's what I'll be doing 10 years  
from now, teaching children the systematic marginalization of certain  
communities, including their poetry which is *Sounding* this instant

(the fern no longer wipes my  
front porch vision)

as I write.

The Susan Howe quote is from SH issue of *The Difficulties*, p. 39.

Julia Blumenreich works with both students and teachers as a poet-in-the-  
schools. Some recent poetry appears in *Mirage*, *Riddle Moon*, *Aerial* &  
*How(ever)*.



GEORGE BOWERING

FORM = FORMING AGAIN

One loves only form, said Olson, and form comes into being when the thing is born. I think that there can be no doubt about that, no getting around it. Beauty creates love, and beauty makes one want art. But some dolts, while extolling an emotional outburst about love, will denigrate the intellect as if it were a tight collar. What a pity. Great beauty reveals itself the more fully as it moves the mind. And mind is shared; the experience of the mind is shared experience. John Keats, whose writing can be found to influence Olson, and earlier Williams, wrote some great earthly beauty, and did not want to know too much about it. But ragged Shelley is, to my mind, the greater poet, because the heaven he was trying to glimpse could be approached only in thought, the achieved shaping of thought, only in the forms granted to and by the human mind in imagination.

But remember this:

In "An Essay on Virginia," William Carlos Williams, the father I chose, said: "Unity is the shallowest, the cheapest deception of all composition. In nothing is the banality of the intelligence more clearly manifested." Consistency is the hobgoblin of something or other. Here is the anti-teleological anarchism the nationalists and other totalitarians hate. But you see how unity is made in an item of literature: a will has to insist on a center outside of which must remain the unbidden. A product of such activity can be beautiful. A uniformed army of blond men all two meters tall is perhaps beautiful. Sorry, that is probably unfair argument. All right: why do people call for unity? Because they desire strength, or think they do. Should we really enter the act of composition looking for strength? I don't think so. I want to make a book you can get your fingers into, to break it open.

And don't forget this:

Some poets, such as Valery, say that the importuned gods or muses supply us with a first line, and that we must then call on our poetic skill to supply as good a one as possible to resemble it. The poem is then the result of a collaboration, and keeps adding up to what it will be -- a padded inspiration. In a poem called "Flowering Death," John Ashbery wrote, "We must first trick the idea/Into being, then dismantle it." Yes, there is a type of chic cynicism there, but also a modesty that becomes the serious poet. The metaphysical poet knows that his own mortality limits his poem to physical procedures. When Ashbery speaks of tricking the idea into being, he says that poets do not write to lyricize the ideas they already possess, and that their skill is musical or witty, in other words seductive or charming. But only the dismantling of the idea can make the poem or the idea live. Jefferson, for that reason, called for a revolution in every generation.

George Bowering's latest book of poems is *Delayed Mercy*, from Coach House Press. His latest book of essays is *Imaginary Hand*, from NeWest. He is assistant editor of *Line*, a Journal of Contemporary Writing and its Modernist Sources. He is working on a long poem called *My Life, a Poem*.



DAVID BROMIGE

ON MIMESIS AND SOCIETY

There could be a real future for utopianism. Fear of hubris generates the possibility of tragic failure.

Otherwise . . . The Utopia of Tender Buttons finds its future as the reader engages with that text. Is this real.

I guess (American for I think) the battle worth fighting (that is our part of a species-long war) concerns modes of apprehension under threat of extinction by instrumental reason. Not that these can be extinguished but that they can be rendered so thoroughly disreputable through common agreement as to virtually vanish, atomized, disheartened.

In poetry, today, this "common sense" will speak of communication -- where the term means discursive explanation. In the workshop, increasingly where would-be poets go to be snuffed out, group pressure added to prior conditioning ("education") is likely to produce writing which, through fear of being met with rejection, is hobbled from the word Go by its author's wish to be understood -- instantly.

Mainstream verse in the USA today is discursive prose decorated with flourishes towards a tradition and chopped into lines. Its intentions upon us are transparant: this is instrumental reason. It owes its success (its form of success) to a general loss of the sense of the poetic.

From its point of view, difficulty is a decorative gesture to be employed sparingly. The excessive difficulty (from its point of view) of a necessary poetry (from my point of view) is to be reprehended and mocked ("strictly unreadable"). That its "unreadability" has to do with the mind of the person so characterizing it will not be entertained, -- understandably. That (a) life is beyond description difficult to live -- that the necessary poetry would keep this

before us through both form and content -- the majority will (as ever?) through a weakness of spirit these find inadmissible, deny.

Meanwhile, and on the other hand, fashions of irrationality deplore poetry for its Apollonian aura, producing in its stead "shock value" entertainments. Producers of such often join forces with the "communicators" in a red-neck, know-nothing, common-sense dismissal of anything their own limited abilities prevent them from enjoying.

Poetry, which moves from concept to sensual intuition and thus onward (sidewise?), succeeds in outraging the one tribe with its intuitions, and the other with its conceptual part.

Given we can't get those who would be poets to stop signing up for poetry workshops, I guess we should get more poets (as distinct from poetasters) to teach these. Of course the colleges are "tenured in", but in many places rising enrollments coupled with the imminent retirement of many faculty considerably increase the chances for new hires. If our poets have a concern for the matters adumbrated in this note, they might bite the bullet and earn an advanced degree. Of course, some corruption of their poetic power is likely, through such application of instrumental reason. Each will need to weigh the potential gain and loss.

I'm not at all sure I was called on to suggest solutions, anyway, beyond the little clarity this exposition might bring. Like the bumperstickers say, I'd sonner be conceiving mimesis.

I do see the next decade as crucial, for the reasons given -- just as this decade was crucial, and the one before this . . .

David Bromige's *Desire* won the Western States Poetry Award in 1988. *American Testament* is due from Sun & Moon this Fall. Next Spring Black Sparrow Press will publish a book of his stories, *Men, Women & Vehicles*. He teaches in both the graduate and undergraduate programs at Sonoma State University and is an editor of *Avec*, a journal of poetry and translation.



LEE ANN BROWN

If grammar is the way the mind works, this includes evocation of emotion.  
The music sense of language is present from the beginning.  
Syntax is order of words, while music is simultaneous.  
Thinking is daily living.  
Pure consonance or more subtle assonance.  
Diversify your own realm.  
Experiment.  
Connect the world up in other ways, colors, sounds, regions of consciousness.  
Upper train skip harlem to bridge light. prague soap trike  
These poems should be out there in a book you think so decide on its  
existence.  
Have the 'ambition to connect the larger world together in ways such as  
publishing purposes (it's no accident that virtually every fine poet since  
WW2 has been an editor, a publisher, the coordinator of a reading series,  
etc.)' -- R. Silliman.  
Don't neglect your own work in all this fervor.  
Where I go for poetry: ABACUS, aka, AQL, Big Allis, Brief, Burning Deck,  
Coincidence, Cold Water Business, Conjunctions, CUZ, The Figures,  
Hambone, Illuminati, In Camera, Lines, Lost Roads, Jimmy & Lucy's  
House of "K", Mirage, Moving Letters, Notus, O.blek, O Books, Ottotole,  
Poetics Journal, Potes & Poets, paradigm press, Prospect Books, raddle moon,  
Roof, Segue, St. Lazare, Station Hill, Sun & Moon, Tender Buttons, Temblor,  
Trike, Tyuonyi, Writing, Xexoxial .....  
and I watch film and film.

Lee Ann Brown is the publisher of Tender Button books, coordinator of the  
Monday Night Series at The Poetry Project in NYC. Work in Archeus, Brief,  
CUZ,; film show at Segue.

DON BYRD

# HOW DOES ONE ARTICULATE THE SYMBOLIC CONTENT OF BURNING THE FLAG?

The impersonal lyric and the lyric epic -- the sustaining forms of  
poetry in this century -- are following the narrative poem and the verse  
drama into extinction. One doubts that either will survive into the next  
millennium. Of course, we let nothing die with dignity. Certain simulacra,  
supported by universities and government agencies, will continue to be  
produced, but no one, including their producers, will take much interest in  
them. I do not know that it was a matter of cause and effect, but the loss of  
vitality in poetry (and the other arts) coincided roughly with the founding of  
the National Endowment for the Arts. Poetry thereafter became a kind of  
National Park, though of course it did not attract many visitors. There are no  
traffic jams around the Old Faithfuls of poetry.

I think Senator Helms is right. He at least thinks art is important.

It is sad that a photograph of a large cock hanging out of a polyester  
suit is the most troubling art on the scene -- a rather formal and decorous art,  
having much the same esthetic values as Greek architecture.

Poetry continues in the private meditations of certain individuals.  
The poetry which has been most valuable to me for the past decade has been  
read to me from notebooks by a poet who has taken almost no interest in  
publishing.

\*

With the exception of part-time and summer jobs, I have been  
employed only by large, state universities. Universities are *the* conservative  
institutions: conservation of the culture's wisdom is their primary mandate.  
Their archives are invaluable. Academic writing -- whether poetry, fiction,  
criticism, philosophy, or history -- is itself a kind of living archive which



provides examples of certain kinds of discourse which were once practiced. It is thus something like exhibits of horse-shoe making or spinning.

The sciences and social sciences are adjuncts of government, especially the military, and of business, and, as they are well funded, the humanities and the arts emulate them. The Cultural Literacy movement is an attempt to generate enthusiasm for the Humanities as an instrument of social control.

I think it is important to try to get as many subversives into university teaching jobs as possible. If the human species is to continue to enjoy evolutionary success on the planet, we will require a rational technology and rational institutions to administer it. The university is the most likely center for such an undertaking. We must demand, however, that the soul be not mechanized along with the world economy and the technological environment.

If I survive, I will still be making this demand in ten years, and in twenty years, and in thirty years, and in forty years, and in fifty years. I will be 95. Perhaps I will leave the task to the young folks. It will be necessary to make the demand rich and offensive. How does one articulate the symbolic content of burning the flag?

Don Byrd has just finished a large manuscript entitled "The Poetics of the Common Knowledge." He teaches at the State University of New York at Albany, and occasionally co-edits with Jed Rasula a magazine, *Wch Way*, which is distributed by more or less occult transmission.

JOHN BYRUM

OBLIQUE

Obvious this depth of surface 'I' inhabits place, placement, context, and is a fluid perspective. Independent (in the sense of no academic, artworld, bureaucratic, or other affiliations) in the Midwest (Cleveland, Ohio).

Patterns of diversity, fragmentations, loose-knit groupings dot the maps. Waves of mutual influences emanate from and through these dots.

Values: multiple perspectives, oblique affinities, fragmentations of discourse creating moire-like patterns as a counterpoint to the master discourses of capital, i.e. power. Marginalized buzz, to be sure, but definitely counterpoint poised, filigree of ferment beneath the slick surfaces.

Limitations: The strength of these voices is their (our) weakness: their refusal of the master discourses, their disinterest in being swallowed.

Context gets placed in the act of writing and reading. Not quite without a context, or rather a shifting series of contexts, but always negating a master text. That is this hope, these values our consignment to a marginality bordering the body.

One disturbingly intriguing aspect is this strength in marginality, the realization that, by providing alternatives to the central discourses, we will never be, nor wish to be, ourselves central. A contradiction at the core provides the reason to continue, the relatively absolute necessity to continue: we must be alternative, provide a babble of otherness outside the normative narratives. No longer a hope of "breaking through to another side", an outside, but rather of expanding the network of possibilities these languages, these systems, can construct. For the future, keeping at it, the pin poised at the bubble.



John Byrum edits *Generator*, a yearly journal of visual and language poetry, and *NWSLTR*, the quarterly of the Poet's League of Greater Cleveland. His *Doc(k)s*, was published in 1988, Ventabren, France.

NORMA COLE

MYSTERY OF THE HOLOGRAMS, OR ASTERISME

ki' iba' a wilik                      good-night  
[lit. be careful what you see. Mayan/Lacondone]

Move the Anarchy, there is a Sky musing on us. Performing letters. This is vision image couldn't hold. Radially negative dread. It's not about degrees. Self makes your position as they are. Ingest the object, the difference in debt defining point of view. Figure/ground a problem language reprimands. Its own reader, clumsily.

"Simply to *propose*, in an epoch where propositional language has been used as an instrument of genocide, is to be quietly complicit with one's antagonist." (Terry Eagleton)

If/say                                      sublime = excess  
is a proposition. Then what

about see or believe, showing net marks on their smooth sides, hair-raiser, happily distraught. Twice-dark wonder in trouble in no one's eyes.

"No law silences women." (Catherine Mackinnon)

Singular numbers, their laws, concerns, noise, appeals, etc. Their absence, this space requires and exacts full early effervescence of listening awakening. Slams the awareness (complete and instantaneous) goes flat. Dull. Throw back.

Reinvent waking up. *Es matematico*. Vocal carrying on official logical modified and a parallel emptying system. Just when remorse will not erase. Restricted or qualified, a book is entitled to its spectator. See, hear and remember.



Pulling it out of the throat hand over hand. Future assume theme. If by accident -- nothing else -- hold or bite. Had to participate or prepare. I'm warned I'll "lose" my teeth. Despair. Some one sees a man with a chainsaw coming into the house through the wall. All the horror is literal.

Or shape, anything. Blessed, you take these briefs. You take shape as bricks and mortar. From what it's like.

Let's ramble. From the center. Parallel to time. (But fright is performed.) This explicit by arbitrary division real situation. (Not that in writing poetry you'd want to limit yourself to a token language.)

If you got the music wrong you got sick. "I'm accepting my condition now. Oh, I'm a special case, there's a lot of space around me. It would appear that I keep it that way."

Why erodes -- a garbage -- why applies color. Oh a map across the wild open. A child dashing a baby on its face on the floor -- horror -- but it seemed to have yet another face -- HORROR.

"my scarlet plumage, my little round eye like a fan or a paralune"

What little -- don't go -- map or see morning "it" the cracked bowl. Doorstep recently swept. I however never speak. Attendance at the funeral was obligatory, old store long kept, how visually styled, how distant past like a memory problem. So take this, just do this "Of sentiment your reasons" become my seasons launch into more of that "How do I like it" sense that people celebrate. If ever someheart to go on, some operating gate.

Distance impounded sail and harm variations. Shape will wear them out. Juxtaposition washing off the burning pulling. Back of and through an on the spot vocabulary improvement "watching a playful scene at the far end" or is it. Some one pushes through the crowd around the coffin looking . . . over at the stranger wearing a suit and white sunscreen on his nose.

Without being subsumed, becoming an insistence on being/keeping time "I think if I stay here long enough . . . ."

"I can't get out -- I can't get out!" said the starling . . . . (Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*)

Norma Cole is the author of *Mace Hill Remap* (Moving Letters Press, Paris, 1987) and *Metamorphopsia* (Potes & Poets, 1988). Her translation of Danielle Collobert's *Il donc* as *It Then* is forthcoming from O Books.



JACK COLLOM

"WHAT CONTEXT, IF ANY, DO YOU SEE YOUR WORK AS PART OF?"

As a late-middle-aged eccentric in the lower half of native economics, poeticizing about, every time I blink I open my eyes to a different context. Part of it's just the li'l ole cotton cornfields way back home, as 'twere. Another paradigm is, if light bends so can I.

Within this range, a boy-sized context, for most of my poet-ship years, takes form from my nonpoetic boyhood: approach: it's bullshit (human) world; the individual can drive some lone vision, like in the shape of leading-edge poetry (replacing Nature). *Trying* to talk true, in blue-&-white. Sailing one's own little rhythm paper thought. Feeling right & good as gadfly Galahad valuably lancing calcified social sphere. Sincere.

20C American life with all its dark pettiness, greed, lies, & a terrific second-nature charm I discover to be more personal substance than context. Context, maybe, is what you will, or won't a habit. Simple cuts don't get you accurately inside/outside, etc.

Sure, context is everything, but to *think* like that's epicenter ecology. Poetry is, to anagram it, per toy, the little patch of rug where you're the boss.

For one thing, context has gotten more multiple. Cloud-cover, as Mexican divers say about the upper few feet of water. The fact gets more respect the oftener it sneaks out the back door.

In other words, new science has cut away all solemn walls & left us with -- a field of play. Poems as verbal otter-slides, serious as a leaf, light as a planet.

Now we can leap from micro to macro & back, zigzagging like Eliza on the ice-cakes . . .

& then the swirl of sky focuses down for me, my own little stick size sways, & everything real's in a cone called Earth ecology. I "work" in a context being destroyed, for aching age after age, by my own tribe. That's the contextual point against which all others pale into insignificance . . . . On the other hand, what the fuck.

My reach to that big-brain context is a thin intellectual bridge. Fine, whatever one can apprehend at all, but, uniting mind & senses (short-time), it's OK to watch movies, buy shoes, drive pickup truck 30 miles to an Art brunch.

My context is a '60's fade. My context is a post-Puritan cradle. Why *not* disport ourselves in quik death? Every wiggle an infinite sphere on Lily St. Nice shape if U can get it.

I can't get Governears anyway, except as (o crazy hope) my wordies might dripdrop off pooled wiseguy fingers, to be accidentally licked up by passing princes way out West (sunset).

Or it's silly, asocial farting. Discomfort disguised as mortality.

It's the light on the linoleum. Harmonized with the impossibly semi-candid thought.

It's just a song. An available job.

Moral & beautiful.

Death-dust drubs dreams.

Jack Collom's *Arguing With Something Plato Said*, is forthcoming from Rocky Ledge Press. He teaches at the Naropa Institute in Boulder.



ROBERT CREELEY

ANSWERS IN ORDER OF QUESTIONS

1. Travelling recently in the eastern bloc I was very aware of the value of language, both in social exercise and in intimate or personal states. In short, words mattered very much, as Donald Wesling (then in Leningrad) usefully emphasized. When they don't "matter" that much, i.e., when no one is necessarily that much affected or constrained by "what they say," then it may be the art or arts relating lose consequence in like sense. Bleak that political constraint and curtailment of public utterance should prove a sponsor for the significance of poetry -- but clearly they do. I presume reading to be influenced by the same situations.

2. Obviously a pernicious political system is a poor occasion for anything, the reading of poems included.

3. My work I'd see as fifties coming of age white boy post depression lower middle class must find somewhere to live and something to do there common term plus usual (then) sexual social political displacement. Weird to be fact of vast middle amorphous class sans a "constituency" -- even though one has one.

4. The great Romantic tradition was it for me, and Coleridge its most defining member -- far more than Keats somehow, or more canny, Rimbaud - or whomever. So anyhow he sits as stem, and then on through meld of prose and poetry etc back and forth, viz Herodotus, surely, as much as Frost ever -- likewise Stendhal.

So leaping swiftly forward, contemporaries I love are the great Romantics of my time, place and company, a diverse and singular group. Wesling made a point that stays very much in mind: the **validation** emotion proved for us -- as in Pound's "Only emotion endures."

5. Most disturbing to me is the way poetry is felt to be nice or committed or some peculiar primarily socialized event -- which last no doubt it is. Just that I have lived even unintentionally a life so involved with poetry, I hate it if its products, call them, are only seen as reflections of determined taste or otherwise to be valued social beliefs. Sensing or defining limits feels something quite otherwise. Would chickens be Republicans or Democrats? Are ants Socialists?

6. I find out about what's happening primarily from other writers. But I haven't much interest in keeping informed nor anything much more than my teeth. Still . . .

7. A university plays an immense role in my working as a poet insofar as it gives me the money requisite to have a life of a stable kind. In other respects, e.g., colleagues, library, it's not been nearly as significant -- although the company of students has been good to me.

8. I think Simone de Beauvoir's book, *Old Age*, is a useful one and makes an active frame for so-called political thinking. What is "human" that it persists in such didactically self-destructive behavior? Who can care what it thinks? But, being human, it has that obvious interest, and whether one likes it or not, it's all we've got. He said.

Robert Creeley's *Collected Essays* was published by the University of California Press, which will also publish an expanded *Selected Poems*. Other work includes *Windows*, to be published in 1990 by New Directions.



MICHAEL DAVIDSON

"AN ALMOST MAGICAL ABILITY TO INFUSE SIMPLE DICTION AND  
EVERYDAY VOCABULARY WITH A COMPLEX AND HIGHLY  
AESTHETIC LYRICISM"

Today's *New York Times* quotes House Ways and Means Committee report which states that from 1979 to 1987 the standard of living for the poorest fifth of the population fell by 9 percent and that at the same time the living standard of the top fifth rose by 19 percent. Predictably, the Congress paid no attention to the implications of this report and bickered instead over who was responsible. The Democrats accused the Reagan administration's taxation and spending policies while the Republicans pointed out the economic conditions described actually began in the Carter period. This is the same Congress that is supporting laws restricting the rights of women to an abortion, that is drafting a constitutional amendment prohibiting the burning of the flag, that is clamoring to proclaim the Chinese student uprising and the Solidarity victories in Poland as the end of Socialism and the triumph of capitalism. I think of these things when I contemplate the questions asked by the editors of *Tyonyi*, not because the questions are irrelevant *per se* but because the answers they seek seem incompatible with the issues raised in *The Times*. "What sources do you find most useful in keeping informed about contemporary poetry?" How about the newspaper?

The rift between the current political climate and art is not unique to this period, but for some reason it seems more poignant at a moment when there seems little sympathy for progressive social action. One classic solution to the disparity between aesthetics and social forms was to define the former in a "windowless" relation to the latter. In the complex modernist work, according to Adorno, the promise of utopian happiness denied to modern society could be retained in the self-sufficient universe -- the "windowless monad" -- of aesthetic formal relations. By rejecting all instrumentalized connections to the world, the artwork could achieve an autonomy and integrity that a world enslaved to the "culture industry" could not. The advantage of Adorno's position was to see art as participating in

social production rather than standing in some specular relationship to it; the disadvantage was that it tended to valorize a kind of Kantian disinterestedness that ultimately denied all critical agency to the artist. Thus in an aesthetics that might have joined the artist to the world, Adorno consigned him/her to drift above it in a Symbolist dirigible.

One of the more troubling aspects of Adorno's position is its rejection of mass culture -- its inability to find any oppositional value in popular music, films and drugstore novels. I suspect that most poets today are impatient with this aspect of the *Aesthetic Theory*, feeling that to utilize contemporary signage is not necessarily to be used by it. But is the critical use of mass culture necessarily critical? Does simulationism defeat the "auratic" if it depends so desperately on an original? If Chris Burden digs a hole in MOMA to expose the foundations of the museum, isn't he relying on the stability of the institution he hopes to deconstruct? Or, to take an example closer to home, is the use of popular speech genres or found language in the work of any number of recent poets (myself included) anything more than a kind of cultural *bricolage*, as casual in its analysis of popular culture as Eliot's use of high cultural baggage was serious in "The Waste Land"?

My last example brings us back to the news. How can historical information be recycled so that it retains its contextual specificity while at the same time releasing it for analysis? Is it possible to write *within* the news while creating perspectives *on* it? The same news that I read in the *New York Times* is also read by Philip Levine who recently stated that the politics he was most interested in "is the politics of everyday life". (*Poetry Flash*, 196 [July, 1989], p. 1) Well, I'm interested in the politics of everyday life as well; why are his literary solutions to the "everyday" so different from mine? Why does his Black factory worker in *A Walk with Tom Jefferson* (Knopf, 1988) seem so lifeless when describing his disillusion with Detroit after moving from the south?

"We all come for \$5  
a day and got this!"  
His arms spread wide to  
include block after block  
of dumping grounds,  
old couches and settees . . .

In his review of Levine's book, Andy Brumer (from whom my title derives) quotes these lines, adding that "Like his namesake, this Tom Jefferson is a



man of integrity, independence and dignity, qualities that in this poem come to stand for the humanity of America's poor." Given the static portrait above, what else could the reviewer talk about but "integrity, independence and dignity"? Have we learned anything new about poverty or the institutions that reproduce it? I'm not denying the force of the images -- the urban wasteland of contemporary Detroit is disturbing wherever it appears, whether in the South Bronx or Hunters Point or Watts -- but I am questioning the rhetorical ease with which those images are produced. It is the same tactic that Levine uses elsewhere in the poem to describe his role in this book: "I am in my element, urging the past / out of its pockets of silence . . . ." By using a phrase like "pockets of silence" Levine signals his conflicted desire to become vulnerable before memory at the same time that he demonstrates his unwillingness to give up control. The attempt to contain experience by substituting images for it dilutes the vertiginous experience of experience and turns a potential conversation into a monologue.

An alternative would be to admit silence into the poem. By silence I don't mean experimenting with some kind of Mallarmean erasure or using spacing in some exotic way so much as exploring the possibility of unsayability. In a context where social alienation derives from having a surfeit of entirely functional sign systems, perhaps the most revolutionary act is not to use them -- or not to use them efficiently. This returns us to Adorno who, despite his Kantian perspective, understood what a "refusal of the social" implied. "Expression reveals work to be lacerations inflicted by society," he says (*Aesthetic Theory* [Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984], p. 337) implying that what we experience in art are the ruptures between historical conditions and language's ability to account for them. The poet, by dissolving the rhetorical connectives between words, by refusing to describe the environment, by leaving gaps in the text, places the reader in a sort of linguistic Detroit -- as insecure about his or her place in the text as a historical Black worker is about his city.

What would the poetry of the unsayable look like? Obviously, one of the conditions for unsayability is that it not be subject to definition. It is a horizon more than a reality. But whatever form it takes, the unsayable appears in the sayable, in the rhetoricity of daily experience. It recognizes its complicity with other print and speech genres, from the most intimate and lyrical to the most public and documentary. It may be the discursive equivalent to what Jean-luc Nancy calls "la communauté de'soeuv're," the unworking or "workless" community -- a social entity not based on the endless production of meanings or, to continue the theme, on the substitution

of ever more efficient images. In terms of the *Tyuoyni* forum, such worklessness would mean not answering the questions the editors ask and asking those that exigency demands.

Obviously a poetics of the unsayable will not erase poverty -- anymore than Levine's humanism will. On the other hand, until we understand what keeps poverty in place we won't be able to address it at all. Blake provided a pretty concise start: "Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody poor; / And mercy no more could be, / If all were as happy as we." The disparity between an ever-widening underclass in America and an even more expanding wealthy class is not just a coincidence, as we all know; it is a formula kept alive by simple theorems: that dissent will be tolerated in small doses; that bicameral institutions will dilute progressive action; that the market liberates everyone in the end; poverty is a state of mind. Poetry does not exist outside of these theorems, but it can undermine some of their rhetoric from within. Practicing linguistic subversion, leaving things incomplete, treating the pronoun like money, testing the news for what it's leaving out -- this is praxis that tests the ability of authority to contain itself. This should be worth something.

Michael Davidson teaches at the University of California, San Diego. He is the author of *The Landing of Rochambeau* (Burning Deck). A new collection of poems, *Post Hoc*, is forthcoming from Avenue B Press.



ALAN DAVIES

What patterns, if any, do you see developing that are presently influencing habits of reading or readership within poetry?

# TYUONYI

Phillip Foss  
Editor

6-30-89

In its first five issues, Tyuonyi has published some of the most diverse literature extant, and has provided a vehicle for writers whose work would otherwise be less available.

To further articulate the relevance of, and need for, this diversity Tyuonyi is expanding to include a section designed to address any and all issues of concern to writers working today.

To inaugurate this new section, Charles Bernstein has agreed to co-edit issue #6 which will be comprised solely of responses to issues relevant to contemporary poetry.

We would like you to contribute to this symposium by responding to any or all of the following questions, or related questions of your own choice, in the form of essays, letters, fragments, notes, poetic excursions--open in any form you like, but limited to 500 words:

What patterns, if any, do you see developing that are presently influencing habits of reading or readership within poetry?

What are the values or limitations of these developing, or undeveloped, patterns?

What context, if any, do you see your work as part of?

What context, if any, do you see for the work of those contemporary poets whom you find most interesting?

What's the most disturbing (or irritating) thing associated with poetry or your work as a poet?

What sources do you find most useful in keeping informed about contemporary poetry?

Do universities play any role for you in terms of your work as a poet?

Do you ever think about what you will be doing in ten years? What? etc etc.

When sending your responses would you please include contributor's notes stating current publications, projects, publications you edit or other poetry-related activities: Deadline for work is September 30, 1989.

Phillip Foss

Charles Bernstein



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Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

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Alan Davies' *Active 24 Hours* and *Signage* were published by Roof, and *Name* by This.



JEFF DERKSEN

Postal code, time zone, meteorological conditions, sexuality, class, health, anger: immediately I work from within these and other contexts that shift the ground of any text. Set in opposition to this are the official, homogenizing forces that try to stabilize or ignore contexts, to make each text repeatable as if it were immune to contexts. This repeatable text is a template that runs through the idea of communication, of representation, to social formations, to most of the poems sent to *Writing* magazine, and to how I answer the phone at work.

Within this then there's the obvious need to set up structures that aren't all from the top down -- this is the influential and energizing context of the community of writers and artists who I "work" with - their writing, photographs, paintings, installations, etc., as well the organizations we have set up. That's local, but not an anesthetic. Here, regionalisms expand to the nationalism and so I am also inside "Canadian Lit," whose genealogical, homogenizing forces attempt the construction of a national literature -- the tracing of the roots of an identity, or creating an identity by making visible the invisible stigmas we haul around. This identity construction is a stabilization of the self, where a self is defined and made central. This is a possible reaction to the recognition of the fluidity of context, that the domed stadium of language does get rented out. Often this is not a self that is all stable gaze (the lighthouse effect or "positive capability") but still a self that seeks stability through identity. Obviously, a lot of recent poetry has contested the centrality of the self -- of a monologic, single-voiced poetry -- but in work that is returning to examine the idea of the self, there is a tendency to have the diverse elements of the poem subsumed to defining the self. This produces a "self-realized" writing that is a stable discourse standing outside the dialogization of language, outside of the dialogic nature of reading and the self -- other discourses are not excluded as they once were, but are objectified by the gaze of the subject. This subject still *operates* as a centre, as if all other discourses define only it and are seen from only its perspective. This leads to a writing that is still accumulative, drawing in and authenticating the self by looking at discourses as objects that do not have a reciprocal effect. The

self is more than the sum of its discourses -- there is the personal in there -- but the self also shifts and is effected by contexts. The gaze back has to be anticipated.

Jeff Derksen: *Until* a chapbook, published by Tsunami editions, other work in *Poetics Journal*, *Motel* and *The Raddle Moon*. Editor of *Writing* magazine, founding member of the Kootenay School of Writing in Vancouver, BC.



RAY DI PALMA

from *CRYSTALS II*

The object of knowledge, determined as it is by the intention inherent in the concept, is not the truth, Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas. The proper approach to it is therefore not one of intention and knowledge, but rather of total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention.

-Walter Benjamin

Ingenuity is generosity transposed to the level of the intellect.

-Claude Levi-Strauss

I like a life of adventure. I like passing the night reading poetry. I like measuring pieces of oil paper and filling bottles with oil and drink whatever I can. I like to sit still and repeat that I am very well and not confused. I like speeches. I even like to select seats. I do wish I was not equal to it.

-Gertrude Stein

The shape-filled foreground: what distractions for the imagination, incitements to the copyist, yet nobody has the leisure to examine it closely. But the thinness behind, the vague air: this captivates every spectator. All eyes are riveted to its slowly unfolding expansiveness.

-John Ashbery

The infinity of propositions contained in the least worthy objects is so manifest that I am as yet unable to report on anything but the simplest ones: a stone, a blade of grass, a block of wood, a piece of meat.

-Francis Ponge

It is in the essence of language to be capable of origination, but of never achieving the absolute identity with itself that exists in the natural object. Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again; it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same

token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness.

-Paul de Man

It is an absolute perfection and virtually divine to know how to enjoy our being rightfully. We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting on our own rump.

-Montaigne

You cannot write anything about yourself that is more truthful than you yourself are. That is the difference between writing about yourself and writing about external objects. You write about yourself from your own height. You don't stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your bare feet.

-Wittgenstein

To say that someone is "anal" means that someone is trying extra-hard to protect himself against the accidents of life and the danger of death, trying to use the symbols of culture as a sure means of triumph over natural mystery, trying to pass himself off as anything but an animal.

-Ernest Becker

"I'm sure *my memory* only works one way," Alice remarked. "I can't remember things before they happen."

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards," the Queen remarked

-Lewis Carroll

The other project was a scheme for entirely abolishing all words whatsoever; and this was urged as a great advantage in point of health as well as brevity . . . . An expedient was therefore offered, that since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on.

-Swift



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-Swift

Poetry, according to Hindu metaphysics, is a language that no longer consists of mere phonemes and socially accepted meanings, but emphasizes their resonance. The Sanskrit work is *dhvani*. Commentators are careful to stress that it is neither the sound nor the meaning of the word, but rather its suffusion, the vibrating psychic halo around it, which is the effect of convergence and context. 5355 ways of making mere words resonate were listed by Vedantic metaphysicians.

-Ellemire Zolla

The highest wisdom would be to understand that every fact is already a theory.

-Goethe

Ray DiPalma's *The Jukebox of Memnon* was published by Potes and Poets and his *Two Poems* by Awede.



JOHANNA DRUCKER

I am not a poet; I consider myself a writer.

The readership with which I am best acquainted is academic.

Patterns of reading in the university follow established conduits; exposure to new or unfamiliar materials has to come through recognizable institutions. The academic readers I know who are willing or interested or aware of how to find literary materials produced outside the mainstream of published sources are notable exceptions. Small press publishing is uncharted territory; academic disciplinary boundaries remain strong; exposure to new writing is limited (as to new art or theater or film unless it belongs to the domain of upscale production). The exceptions repeatedly prove the rule here. (Examples? -- horror stories of a recent summer conference in which John Cage is the cutting edge of the avant-garde, Manuel Puig represents new writing, Duchamp is still bewildering, Warhol up for question, feminist criticism and art production are "marginal" etc.)

Frustration in this situation from these contradictory aspects: on the one hand critical attention in academe actually bestows serious examination on the work; but the misrepresentation of contemporary activity is infuriating. Time lag? Culture gap? Or irreconcilable differences?

Most criticism makes me furious and prompts me to more work as corrective assertion that something else is going on than that which is coming under notice.

Because I write prose, not poetry, my expectations of a readership are (perhaps unrealistically) different from what I would imagine for poetry. Now that I have shed the repressive taboo I write stories, complex prose with figures and scenes, scraps of character, moments of analysis. Still, my sense of context is plural (and amorphous) and fragmentary: certain webs network a continuity, gradually congealing into a broad if vague sense of a generation (not in terms of the age of the writers but the writers of the age); there are

points to which I pay attention as a reader, sporadically, intermittently, inconsistently, which over time come to have their own pattern and form. Similarly I feel my work finds its regular/irregular response.

My own reading patterns change: dense period of concentration, what I call "laser-reading" for research; indulgent pleasure in long fictional narratives; but mostly, the snapshot clips of bits and pieces, flipping through books standing up at the bookstore to "know" what they are; skimming the book review(s), journals and periodicals like seining; most escapes without record or effect, but the overall field is continually changing the sets of references and context. Context of thinking, and in which things are thought, written, received.

Johanna Drucker is a writer and letterpress printer whose recent work includes the performance "Wittgenstein's Gallery" (Small Press Distribution, May, 1989) which examined image/language discrepancies, *The Word Made Flesh*, (Druckwerk, 1989), and the forthcoming *History of the/my Wor(l)d*. She is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Columbia University and completing a biographical study of the Russian Futurist poet and typographer Ilia Zdanevich, and recently finished a book on experimental typography in the early 20th century, *The Visible Presence of the Word*.



RACHEL BLAU DuPLESSIS

ON ISSUES RELEVANT TO CONTEMPORARY POETRY

(Poetry is a continuum, part of a set of language uses (like essay, letter, conversation, some narrative) with a documentary intent: where, how, what feelings, what is seen, heard, who are the "I's" situated.

Poetry is the intent investigation of how language can be put together and fragmented, and what meanings can be generated by language, and how language bears and cracks with, under meanings.

Poetry uses line break musically, intellectually, playfully, emotionally, visually, wittily, willfully as a strategy for structuring meaning and generating feeling.

The social feel of words. Dialects. Regionalisms. Intonations. Etymologies. Cultures. The social feel of syntaxes.

A desire to rupture primary agreements about form, syntax, word, diction, punctuation as bearers of decorums to which it becomes impossible to assent.

The visceral pleasure of making a new object in the world, an object made of language.

Why are you asking me these questions? Is this really what you want to know? The questions lead to a sociology of poetic practice, but are not fully framed that way. For example, no one asks what do you do to support yourself as a writer -- what job, what line of work? How do you support other social institutions of writing with time or money -- volunteer as something -- run a little magazine, function on an editorial board, produce or contribute to a reading series? Are you intellectually or regionally isolated, and how, and what do you do, if anything, to counter that (write letters to networks of people, subscribe or contribute to magazines)? How much money have you made, or might you normally make, in poetic practice, and what are the sources of

income -- reading gigs? reprinting of work? payment for published work? Poets in the Schools? Have you ever received a grant for "creative writing" and, assuming your level of competence is plausible, what was the political and ideological conjuncture that allowed that to happen? Are you part of, or have you been part of, a poetic group or network, and how has that helped, hindered, contributed to your practice as a poet? I am curious about these things in others.

As for me, the university supports me -- it supports me as a feminist scholar of literature and increasingly as a poet. Although a poetry book is viewed with an ambivalence reflected in lower "merit units" as compared to "scholarship." But "merit units" are super-creepy anyway, an example of being suckered in to corruption; of course, they also mean more salary. If I had ever counted on the university to justify what I did, to "give it approval" like a good parent, I would have long ago destroyed myself as a writer. And as a scholar. I don't count on it, and so I am never surprised. Although occasionally startled! However, the university can be a flexible institution, can be turned to one's purposes. It offers the occasion for reading and developing nexuses of texts, and it gives fresh students and pretty fresh colleagues. It offers benefits such as medical insurance, pensions, libraries, and pool use. It also chews up one's time.

The 10-year question (did you think, or have you ever thought) scares me a little. I am as if "finishing" 15-20 years of work now, and what I thought of for these years was how to manage to get to the next project (e.g. *Writing Beyond the Ending*; the book on H.D., *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*; *Tabula Rosa*; "Drafts," essays for *The Pink Guitar*, etc.) I suppose in the next 10 years I will continue: more "Drafts," more essays, a book on gender, race, class and modern poetries . . . and I suppose it is quixotic of me to think I will change the hysterical but determined strategy of stubbornly worrying how to manage to get to and through the next project.

I see my work as feminist, experimental, objectivist. The places that publish it are a cultural context of support. Certain journal editors have functioned positively for me, and without their magazines and their particular reading of my work, I would be in a far different place now: Eliot Weinberger of *Montemora*, Clayton Eshleman of *Sulfur*, Kathleen Fraser of *HOW(ever)* and Leland Hickman of *Temblor*. During a good deal of the past 20 years, I was a member of the editorial collective of *Feminist Studies*, and then served



as its literature/creative work editor. Another cultural context for me is a random and eclectic viewing of whatever visual art I gain access to; for example, a current "strike" is the Marcel Broodthaers catalogue. I subscribe to a number of little magazines, and buy small press books, mainly through Small Press Distribution, but also through book catalogues -- e.g. Sun & Moon Press, Burning Deck, Potes & Poets. Those are my primary sources of information, along with the reading suggestions of a few friends. Whenever I am in NYC, in San Francisco, or in Milwaukee, I go to the wonderful small press bookstores there. Woodland Pattern in Milwaukee is a favorite.

The debate that engages me the most is the question how (and if it is possible) to rupture the hegemony of "official verse culture" (Bernstein) or "prize-winning poetry" (my bitter phrase for it). That's because I see my work within interlocking contexts that are antipathetical to "official verse culture." With the recent news, postdating your memorandum, of Jesse Helms' punitive attack on arts funding, echoed by tin-horn demagogues and liberals throughout our fair land, the issues of hegemony, the politics and ideologies of poetry, the reward systems such as NEA all take on some bite. I would like to see other people's views on that set of issues in future forums.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis: author of *Tabula Rosa* (poetry 1987); *The Pink Guitar: Writers as Feminist Practice* (essays, 1990); editor of *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (1990); *Signets: Reading H.D.* (with Susan Friedman, 1990). She also has a book forthcoming from Sun & Moon.

LARRY EIGNER

# FOUR POEMS

August 6 72

Life tragic, and full of wonder  
Only when I forget absence forever can I waste

Aug. 4-6 72

t o m o r r o w

Water in the face, the world  
blinds

sun

energy binds

dissipates

jaw stuck out  
going somewhere

motors cycle wheels, you

hear

the racing

August 15 89



A long life (/history)

wherever you are

in it

a few things (poems)

how many

August 15 89

As Thoreau might say

cool it

whoever can

Larry Eigner's books include *Country/Harbor/Quiet/Act/Around* from This, and *Larry Eigner Letters*, Moving Letters.

## ELAINE EQUI

Regarding your question of patterns presently influencing readership, my attention keeps returning to literary magazines and the ways in which they've changed over the past ten years. Basically, the difference I noticed in my own habits is that not only am I inclined to buy more magazines but also end up reading more of the magazines I buy. It may seem a simplistic statement, but I think what's behind it is a fairly radical shift on the part of a growing number of editors toward opening their magazines up as a forum for discussion, rather than making them an exclusive showcase for the work of a certain school. It doesn't particularly matter which.

Because magazines are in the unique position of allowing for and even encouraging differences in tone/temperment/politics, I think it is to the best advantage of everyone when they make full use of this capability. In my own work, I feel indebted to publications like *Sulfur*, *o.blek*, *Paper Air*, and *New American Writing* (among others) for publishing Language writing alongside of everything from New York School to Neo-Objectivist etc. This "melting pot" approach, in addition to promoting a number of interesting writers, also provokes unexpected hybrids as the styles seem to rub off on each other in surprising ways.

An amusing side light to all this is the new look of poetry magazines, including both the reactionary and the progressive. Even old magazines have suddenly taken a glitzy new turn, graphically anyway, for the better. Of course, they don't all look the same, but for the most part I'd characterize them as slick (as opposed to Modernist sleek) -- part University Press, part Memphis School of Design, with a dash of "new wave" constructivism thrown in for old time's sake. It's a look that makes one hope that the commercial world's perennial underdog has decided to solicit new readership despite the odds -- or at least has finally stopped appearing in the role of penitent.



Elaine Equi is the author of six collections of poetry, including most recently *Views Without Rooms*, published by Hanuman and *Surface Tension*, published by Coffee House Press. She also conducts a weekly poetry workshop at St. Mark's Church.

#### NORMAN FISCHER

I have a sense of culture's narrowing down to a needle's eye these last decades, approaching the end of progress the end of history. Perhaps people have imagined in the past such a thing; this time I think it's the truth. It seems that developments in poetry over the last twenty-five years (in the direction of a more open poetry, less emphasis on the subjectivity of the poet, more on the objectivity inherent in language making, seeing the poem as a field in which a variety of responses occur, seeing the text as a negotiation between reader and writer and culture) have returned poetry in a way to its most primitive state by a strange and marvelous route, one that does not try to avoid the changes of the last century and return to the good old days, but rather through the use of and by the playing out of the implications of those changes come to a place finally of real possibility. In a sense infinite possibility. Exactly because there is no next step possible, as ordinarily conceived.

I think the nature of this cultural narrowing is linguistic: our concepts of reality, our descriptions of reality, our words, don't fit anymore. I really think that mixed up language is the key to every difficulty we find ourselves in and so I think there is a tremendous importance for the work of the poet now, but not in the way, say, of Pound and Olson, who felt, magnificently, that they as poets could figure the thing out. In trying to do this they were caught in the trap of mixed up language. Rather by way of jumping into language, feet hands and head, with love and honesty, communally and cooperatively. With this kind of shared effort there is little by little a clarifying of language and therefore finally a righting of culture, producing the accuracy necessary to sail right through the needle's eye without smashing into cold steel.

This is theoretical but I mean it practically. It's time for the poets, like they did in old China, to move on into the give and take of the world, to use their skills with language to help run the world. This means the creation of institutions, either alternative institutions (my own involvement is with Buddhist institutions) (and there are also many other alternative



institutions, including businesses) or the creation of new frameworks within existing institutions. It means also bringing the work of poetry into relationships, personal, familial, societal. It seems to me at this moment that the universities are not lively places for these transformations; but things change rather quickly now. Ten years is enough time for a complete reversal and they tell me that the nineties are going to be quite different in the universities.

Oddly, I never think about what I'll be doing ten years from now. I assume that my objective circumstances will be completely changed but that essentially I'll be doing just what I'm doing now: trying to clarify my life on a daily basis through language and through the multitudinous implications of language.

Norman Fischer. Latest books: *The Devices*, Potes & Poets 1988; *On Whether or Not to Believe in Your Mind*, The Figures, 1987; *Turn Left in Order to Go Right*, O Books. He is also working on a book about Israel and a collaboration involving photos and text, also a collection of familiar essays, and on an ongoing project of one line poems. He works as a Zen priest at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, Muir Beach, California.

ROBERT FITTERMAN

BREAK IT UP

Mr and Mrs X said they lived in the same world and even if they're not the same person but that didn't help anyone who does any of this first. The latest plea finally I hear -- so there's that need -- why so much dissension us and them among us when the real issue is tradition of pushing the language or writing in the language rather than using it to tell some story that doesn't happen to reach the right margin, etc. But another ground to plow -- mine weaker flowers -- well, leave it

at that. When the new issue comes before the poem -- say, has to be good enough to be new. New is the police station as my heart is breaking the best juice last in the house being a love poet and where that fits with language-oriented poetry is already a rock in a hard place. Or what do you come to the poem for for. The conflict isn't or don't have to be emotionalism can rise in the strangest spots see Zukofsky and love again what for. So that the ear doesn't get lost no how can you tell in the hands -- or how else -- of a poet i.e. how Andrews sounds ever so almost verbatim in Howe where each syllable's heard this is Pound not Lux this is the heart to be embraced where the door opens and who meaning any of us I. But what concerns

me then -- can more petty differences Mr and Mrs Ever be put aside? what you bring to the poem one thing but to your defense? -- is how. How the poems get. Written and why there is so little on that so it hardly drops the ball -- (a ball) a big part of the tradition that we're associated with -- suddenly -- this silence. Or most times I think its special interest group on my part but why so little on how, instead the focus on discussion at times which again is not language. Bring no to the point of this and this

form from the back door. Since -- going back a bit -- the break from the iambic line what do we really have to show as new form what has happened then I want to make a small point not larger seems to be the -- end of the line meter for at least 7 centuries made a form, the syllabic attention varied



Pope and Hopkins more language-oriented than Clampitt. But the distinction really breaks down on how the music is made. And is making it still a point to that connection if not what am I in the wrong business? How to say that the discontinuity of syntax and the line-breaks/enjambments create a new form by form like sonnet was could be or any musical structure you like/think of. The question then how to make it changes has drastically in the past 15 or so years and how much of the issue occurs at the space at the end of the line. But to what end? one might add this: is no gizmo. The syntax keeps breaking -- discontinuing -- back into itself so that the language stays foremost the form as formalist would have it keeps barking each syllable back to the language away from the 'story' back to **poetry**. And this is the making sense to me back(lash) to the word continuation of Zukofsky's tradition to make music everywhere with every letter so that

the movement from Pound and Williams and Zukofsky to Olson and Creeley and Blackburn to Grenier and Bernstein to etc., as a direction in the music -- made -- the tradition how the question or impossibility. So that say in Creeley's "The Whip" the musical tension (and information) of the poem is more in the breaking of the line than the words themselves this is in Dickinson all the slants as well as Mac Low. The breaks carried today (musically limit it to that for an instant!) into discontinuity of syntax creates a kind of music **particular** to the poem is

the poem. Otherwise we and the workshops do go back wish probably they could to the sonnet after Dickinson, Williams, Celan, how could that sort of poem be written and does this irresponse makes for dissension. An overall structure or form shared the line changes the music to get there hear now we have a history this is the important thing

is the desire or heard discontinuity brings me to this community. I would like to see poetry always become more of poetry, and I wonder what my generation will bring **new** to the tradtion that.

Robert Fitterman's books of poems include *Leases* (Periphery) and *Among The Cynics* (Singing Horse Press). His work has also appeared in *Sulfur*, *Acts*, *Paper Air*, *Origin* and others. He lives in New York City where he recently moved from a one-bedroom apartment to a one-bedroom apartment.

## BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

The letter of invitation, a form letter allowing for a variety of responses, mentions that the magazine "has published some of the most diverse literature extant." I appreciate diversity in an individual but as an institutional approach it disturbs me. Institutional diversity by its relation to an assumed center becomes a form of relegation. Like the Multiversity of Duncan's *Passages*, it is a "simulacra of law that wld over-rule / the Law man's inner nature seeks." For where diverse things do arise they seek their own orders. Gravities the volition of individual occasions communicate.

I am impatient, I skim my several books,

I buy my various ways the road

home hasn't--any--for--

The laurel, the bent cup, the wreck

of the wind

degrees a way--the emerald

earth

as waged

for Levi  
Bastille Day



Jacques Derrida,

vis-à-vis the "mark," prefers the

term "remainder" to "presence"--a critical

imagery follows which incorporates

the structure

of a wager within which

the excesses of the poem are exemplary,

the "remark," able in its

"iterability"

to crack & traverse context, to *grope* . . .

"Context is always  
and always has  
been at work  
*within* the place  
and not only *around*  
it"--J.D.

To mark, traversing context, to *grope* . . .

*by the cold and uncertain and borrowed light*

*of that moon which [it] calls Reason*

*over the interlunar chasm of time where she*

*deserts us, and an owl, rather*

*than an eagle, stare*

*with dazzled eyes . . .*

[Bodleian  
Shelley MS. d.l.,  
"A Proposed Letter  
To Ollier," appended  
to the first draft  
of *A Defence Of  
Poetry*

sweetheart--dear--

commotions

veiled, available

a bated breath bent anymore

a laugh, a bet

a sweet stone's throw

a race--agha--

to the devil go

7/89  
in lieu



Benjamin Friedlander's books include *Oriflamme Days*, a collaboration with Stephen Rodafer, from Phraseology, and *The Practice of Space in Time: an Environmental Bibliography*, from B-klang!

GENE FRUMKIN

ON STYLES

What concerns me now in my writing is the mix of languages I engage with. This has nothing to do with dialects or foreign usages, but rather with different states of being, which require different kinds of linguistic discernment.

For more than two years I have been working on a series of long poems ranging in length from five to ten pages. Most of these sixteen sequences are conventionally punctuated; approximately half are capitalized in the customary way. (I am talking about each poem in the sequence, not the totality.) The other half is uncapitalized, rigidly the obverse of the usual, i.e., "george Washington" or "i am a turkey-feather." The uncapitalized sections are more intimate; first- and second-person pronouns abound, with romance and the erotic as frequent themes. The capitalized material tends to be more ideational, more abstract, more descriptive.

A third major strand ties all the sequences together via narratives. The sentences here are not only uncapitalized but also set in italics. Each long poem in the series contains a narrative complete in itself, connecting to other narratives in the total structure. The narrator is a forty-year-old Jewish woman, who has a number of interrelated stories to tell to an unidentified male "you" who never responds to what are, in effect, letters -- prose, really, cut into verse lines. Most of these letters have to do with the woman's Jewish heritage and in some cases with the Holocaust.

A few individuated characters such as Smilin' Jack, Stunt Woman, and Zapata Sam appear in the unitalicized segments, as do Kafka, Mickey Mouse, Cher, Van Gogh, and Walter Benjamin, who takes over the sixth poem, *Walter Benjamin in Moscow*. All three of the language devices noted are interwoven within each of the poems, and often they appear together in a stanza. Other languages, in a more classified sense, are also drawn into these primary orbits -- Surrealism, Language, idiomatic usage, etc. -- but there is not room to expand on these here. I classify all of these poems as meditations.



An enterprise of the kind I've sketched out can't depend on formal routine alone. The effort to work with polyphonic values in a way I hadn't managed to before moved me to do these sequences. My sense was that, if successful, I could discourse or lyricize about politics, religion, love, sex, domesticity, and the mundane by bringing "language" together in composite units. Previously, I had written in discrete styles depending on whatever mood I was in.

It is time to face the muse: I don't have *a* style, I have several. States of being change. I am not today who I was five years ago. Why must I be striving for, or be locked into, a single style for the rest of my life? One voice, I hope, but a number of styles.

Some areas of these ongoing sequences are clear, I think; others are translucent and still others sheer language constructs that attempt no meaning beyond the constructs themselves. At this white-haired juncture -- Pegasus still cutting loose his golden apples as I gaze ever upward -- it takes a lot of synthesizing to keep in touch with existence, its primal and valedictory voices.

Gene Frumkin's most recent book is *A Lover's Quarrel With America* from Automatic Press. He teaches at the University of New Mexico.

## WILLIAM FULLER

I am the pattern my reading draws every ten years. I take stock according to the flow -- contemporary in *what* census? -- of this sartorial weather. Sitting in the cafeteria 'on any day we want,' immune to recollection, suspended in the heart of the sentence, edged over by the interview pieced together on my left, casually aware of my suit, here it is all other-related. And always the more so the more it occupies me on *its* terms. For these are the contexts of my infinites.

### SEC. 2033. PROPERTY IN WHICH THE DECEDENT HAD AN INTEREST.

The value of the gross estate shall include the value of all property to the extent of the interest therein of the decedent at the time of his death.

Another way to think about it is to posit 8:30 as the absolute limit before revision and then repeat the process by subtracting it: 'nerve waxes brine D' and other irrevocable transfers now become available to the secret air of the page, the nevertheless 'unhatched prevailing effect' of *how* many words? The limit?

### SEC. 2036. TRANSFERS WITH RETAINED LIFE ESTATE.

(a) GENERAL RULE. -- The value of the gross estate shall include the value of all property to the extent of any interest therein of which the decedent has at any time made a transfer (except in the case of a bona fide sale for an adequate and full consideration in money or money's worth), by trust or otherwise, under which he has retained for his life or for any period not ascertainable without reference to his death or for any period which does not in fact end before his death--

(1) the possession or enjoyment of, or the right to the income from, the property, or



(2) the right, either alone or in conjunction with any person, to designate the persons who shall possess or enjoy the property or the income therefrom.

This was my estate two days ago. One can imagine the valuations dipthonged by audit. By stretching the organ to incorporate these associations (don't have to stretch much) the whole pattern influencing me **at this moment** emboldens. Nothing is more settled than how I challenge the habitual. Someone is on fire.

William Fuller lives in Chicago and is the author of *The Coal Jealousies* (Coincidence), and *byt* forthcoming from O Books. Recent work appears in *Paper Air, Sink, and O-blek*.

## FORREST GANDER

### SHIVER MY TIMBERS: AN ESSAY ON POETICS

#### I. More Quotation Less Exigesis

1.) I DO NOT WANT TO DISCUSS MINOR PUZZLES: WHAT WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND, AND WHAT WE DESIRE TO UNDERSTAND, IS THE MEANING OF IS

2.) I am going to die

Friends who made good,  
Friends who did not,  
I am going  
Down into the Egypt of your sex,  
The lands of your mystery and death.

Do you still want me  
To find you  
Somebody to love?

3.) The blemish snake or the hill snake  
the one snake of the name of the white snake  
the snake at the time of the snake repeating  
the glove snake, the tuck snake and the bland  
what will not will us other than to hover  
the buckle and mylar of the windscreen head  
the admission alone of the only unguent

4.) In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.

#### II. Ethics and Aesthetics



- 1.) No points for being nice.
- 2.) We Futurists have rebelled against the branding of wars as anti-aesthetic . . . War is beautiful . . . because it creates new architecture, like that of big tanks, the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages . . .
- 3.) the morality of perception
- 4.) Abstraction is evil.
- 5.) And you Edward Teller we know you're out there  
shelling nuts, saying to yourself alone,  
Now this is a pleasure.
- 6.) Though relations with oneself and with other people are negotiated  
in terms secretly confirmed  
by representation, her idea of the person's visibility was not  
susceptible to representation. No matter
- 7.) Whether, as the intensity of seeing increases, one's distance  
from Them, the people, does not also increase'
- 8.) that the very strangeness of her imagination, the intensity of her tone, is  
ethically, spiritually vitalizing
- 9.) Error comes from exclusion.
- 10.) But we may conceive of an enquiry turned in the same direction as art,  
which would take for its object life in general.
- 11.) It may be true that one has to choose between ethics and aesthetics, but it  
is no less true that, whichever one chooses, one will always find the other at  
the end of the road. For the very definition of the human condition should be  
in the *mise en scène* itself.

### III. Habits of readership

- 1.) Reading is for queers.
- 2.) Genet is a queer. I am a queer.
- 3.) the horses of Petrocles weep in battle
- 4.) the need to have one's perceptions remarked upon
- 5.) About General Ling, who was so handsome that he went masked into  
battle to avoid disconcerting his own troops.
- 6.) Poetry preserves its purity only because it has no conceivable relevance to  
anything beyond a small circle of experts. (Key word, conceivable.)
- 7.) Draw the attention of the public (as we say that a chimney draws).
- 8.) But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is  
more than those cometh of evil.
- 9.) Aesthetic of silence, the zoo for chickenshits.

### IV. Theory

- 1.) I for one leave the transcendence of language  
to the auctioneers on the widow's steps
- 2.) as American as I, just as skeptical of ideas, and like me they were  
convinced by the sincerity of an impulse rather than the rigor of a system.
- 3.) No one expects baseball players to understand the implications of their  
work.
- 4.) Why an expression only has meaning in the stream of life.
- 5.) syntax . . . : to avoid destroying a word by its relationship.
- 6.) It may be that universal history is the history of the different intonations  
given a handful of metaphors.



7.) This is where we lug our burning brains to feed the tree.

8.) The important question is about poetry itself: should poetry be thought of as primarily an art for communicating effectively *and* affectively the emotional and spiritual life of people (by means that are satisfying in themselves) . . . .

9.) The lambent  
nearness there in the flaw

of truth

the act is:

where everything  
offered burns

where most  
of what's withheld

begins

its decay.

10.) Words are a mode of being  
(not only communication)

## V. Competition

1.) The unsurprising and inescapable answer is that everyone must devise instruments as they can.

2.) Cassius Clay says he don't like all this talk about hate. Says, a tiger come in the room with you you gonna either run or shoot him. That don't mean you hate the tiger. It just means you know you and him can't make out.

## VI. Afterword

The condemned man spits  
On a rock, a dragonfly  
Lights on the spit.

I. 1.) George Oppen 2.) Frank Stanford 3.) Clark Coolidge 4.) Susan Sontag  
II. 1.) Mei-mei Berssenbrugge 2.) Filippo Marinetti 4.) J.P. Sarte; John  
Berger 5.) C.D. Wright 6.) Berssenbrugge 7.) Oppen 8.) Pascal 9.) Bergson  
10.) Godard  
III. 1.) *Figaro* poll on literacy, New Orleans 5.) Murasaki Shikibu 6.)  
Walter Gander 7.) Robert Bresson 8.) St. Mathew  
IV. 1.) Stanford 2.) Edmund White 3.) Ron Silliman 4.) Wittgenstein 5.)  
Oppen 6.) Borges 7.) C.D. Wright 8.) Jack Gilbert 9) Peter Cole 10.) Oppen  
V. 1.) John Taggart 2.) Flannery O'Connor

Forrest Gander has long poems in *Conjunctions* and *TriQuarterly* 74. His book, *Rush to the Lake*, was published by Alice James Books in Cambridge, MA. He is co-publisher of Lost Roads Press.



PETER GANICK

In the, small, poetry reading public, there is a growing separation between "mainstream - workshop" poetry and "language - experimental" poetry. The fact that both groups select forerunners from the same historical "pool" of writers doesn't seem to close the differences.

These groups have a diversity of unities, each writer loyal to their own view and many intolerances exist. This is natural in the type of "society" writers create.

My own work, I see as between "language" and "experimental" categories. Poets I've admired have included Clark Coolidge, Gertrude Stein, Charles Bernstein, and Jackson Mac Low. This list changes periodically. As I get on in poetry, I find more interest comes from new emerging writers. The more established writers, however, become a "reference" for learning about the craft - the younger provide inspiration.

I find out about contemporary poetry from other writers in their letters and telephone conversations; magazines like *Temblor*, *Acts*, *Sulfur*, *Big Allis*, *However*, *Writing*; what's available from complete distributors like Sun and Moon, Small Press Distribution, and the Segue Foundation. These sources provide information about what's happening in poetry that is of interest to me.

Peter Ganick is publisher of Potes & Poets. His recent books are *Braids of Twine* (Tsunami, 1989), *Rectangular Morning Poem* (Potes & Poets, 1989). 1990 will see publication of *Remove A Concept (1-2)* (Leech) and *untitled* (Generator).

DAVID C. D. GANSZ

Amerika, after the industrious, empirical consumption, turns, 'militiously' fanged, haunted by the doubt of a shadow, hiding behind the addictions and wishing for death. Thousands, bewildered, write in fear and avoidance, thinking to answer the call, yet choosing poetry as self-made career, 'commoditized', not born to burn with passion, to sacrifice, to be chosen to live in the poem, hence life and the world, to tell the tale, the truth tall and short.

So much babble, so many feathers, so much conniving, manipulative, cleverly rotting intellect housed in Socratic/Platonic/Aristotelian/Cartesian/Positivist/Existentialist/Deconstructivist self-perpetuating artifice techno-Akadeemy of neo-classical Amerika. So much self-willed ego-hype and publicity soul-sickness in our citifal dis-ease of mangled emotions, denied spirit, dying sanity and rampant lechery.

Poetry's devolving into cliché, the trite and formulaic, wallowing in shallow emotionalism, or rushing, manic, to employ its elements to say, intentionally, nothing at all. Then this myopia's paraded as vision before the blind on the prized-grant reading platform of nausea-laud, in perpetuity, in a grotesquely civil masquerade.

Beyond the measurable ecstasy, poised on a precipice of 2000 years, the poets are called, and the real arrive as threatening curiosities who stupefy, objects of scorn and derision, prophets to be, discriminated, repressed, impoverished and silenced. True poetry in Amerika's the hopeful refuge for the breaking and near-broken, desperate for balance, surviving long enough to grasp and gasp what, in a healthy society, would be danced, worshipped, and shouted out, loud.

The needfire's for a spiritual rereading, retelling, and rewriting of Western history in toto, from Olson's Hyksos hinge via the substratum, Akhenaten/Nefertiti, *Moses and Monotheism*, The Gnostic Christ, Arimathæan Joseph/Arthur/Guinevere/Celtic Grail, Albigensians (Cathars), Alchemy, Kant/Schopenhauer/Neitzsche, Jung/Neumann/Hillman, to us and our dreams in this very moment.

Centurion gate-keepers, take pointers from your theoreticians and practitioners, the stony Trakl, manifesting Marinetti, revolting



Khlebnikov, outraged Mandelstam, visioning Yeats, fragmenting Joyce, noting H.D., anglished Eliot, mediumed Breton, resistant Char, entrenched Eluard, cinematized Cocteau, mystified O.V. de L. Milosz, uprooted Celan, goddessed Graves, romanticized David Jones, engrailed Charles Williams, self-wounded Geoffrey Hill, economizing J.H. Prynne, washed ashore to occulted Duncan, the magical Gerrit Lansing and Robert Kelly, to our generation.

From Truth To The Tribe -- America is wherever we happen to be in the language, needing to compose ourselves, to tell our story to convince ourselves we have arrived into this destined body of our intentions. We are our destination; the body of this letter. Our body's full of voices speaking different dialects; to tell, the world about us.

David C. D. Gansz is Senior Contributing Editor of *Notus*. His books are *Animadversions* (Logres, 1986), *Sin Tactics* (Woodbine Press, 1988) and *The Sentencing* (St. Lazaire Press, 1989), and his writings have appeared in *Sulfur*, *Temblor*, *intent.*, *Hodos*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *St. Mark's Poetry Project News letter*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

#### JEFFREY GBUREK

Poetry is a dream maintained in the urgency of a mind shattered at the depths it comes to, a situation of rubble nonetheless one's own making for all the evil of the world. It is both great fruit & abject denial, the ownership of commodities & the assurance these objects-- for lack of homage or worship -- will one day rise up in rage against us & dash our homes & loves to pieces. Yet we were once these same bric-a-brac, peeled back layers of sultry mountain tides, chintzy colored glass of an earth-quaked devotion.

Preposterously maintained image of annihilation.

Poetry's conviction owes as much to clocks as it does to butterflies. Orphaned, of contexts, I have no guide to their appreciation but would thread myself through city streets, Oakland, even, and trade a glance with you or maybe more. This is no portrait. It is only by magic that one moment fits in the next & that is by & large our individual concern. I have never been availed to wash my hands so succinctly as when wet with another's tears I inherit entire histories of sin; one piece of each of us so remaining in nether's time, brinking on a kindled absolution that never quite catching fire leads me on. An awful, only hopeful, ruse.

'AQL as it is a dream in addition to the two issues born already as prevented early death & given me despair & has graciously focused me on what is left of my own true nature, as well as granting me the words or durations of others within what has been veritably their own caring use of time.

By some outlandish comprehension we appear to live in chaos unaware encounters with primitive want level whole superfluous trajectories of alienation or indecency, opening upon the orders pure fallibility declares we derive intimations of our law to be. And yet few are strong enough to be driven to the basic ground, as low as can be gotten, where a certain aura precedes. With due respect.

One must sense the dark is occupied.



I admire poets, witches, factory workers & all that masquerades as plant & animal, living in what centuries they can describe, but I fear within their circles they find me a fool. Let me for once stand outside of this fear & be content wherever I am among them.

We live in thresholds only, breaking down reluctance to an unbearable moment. Otherwise, it seems, we're in the turn of a screw.

What I mean to say is that response to the desperate.

What I mean to say is that responsibility to the desperate is the whole of the law.

September 7, 1989

Jeffrey Gburek edits 'AQL from the San Francisco Bay Area.

MICHAEL GIZZI

AMERICANA SCRIPTOR

Couldn't find myself they said  
'cause I wasn't looking where they thought I should

Because I hear pictures  
twigs tough out a leaf  
- See?

'Stick one over there ya yellow stiff  
That view goes on inside too

But I doan wanna be a twig that growls fer leaves  
rolling their song anthem out of em  
then sitting for a big brown stretch dormir

Which is why I think  
'I just got run over by a mind'

What was it I was saying  
to explain to the world  
who lives in the same puddle over one -  
Each vision a suspension because it spans?

Best author I ever knew  
was an arm  
Didn't point to any one thing  
just delivered the picture  
like a Satchel Paige kinescope by rote

Said in fact when the voices stopped  
'It felt like I lost my arm'



Gently I'd love to occur at the river  
But I just saw a word  
which sounded like a lump  
and these are the mottos I have to endure

Michael Gizzi's *Avis* and *Species of Intoxication* were published by Burning Deck. He lives in western Massachusetts.

PETER GIZZI

NOSTOS: PRO PATRIA

Abandoned beneath this sky  
Without shade  
From a distance we are  
Watching sadly a 'Homecoming Queen'  
Whose moment is over  
There is only nostalgia  
For my hands remembering  
A gesture  
Remembering the telephone  
And your voice  
A long distance operator  
And this poem abandoned  
Miscellany & sky

Peter Gizzi is co-editor of *O-blek*. He recently entered the M.F.A. Program at Brown University.



ROBERT GLUCK

I was dyslectic avant la lettre and badly needed glasses as well, so my first four school years were passed minute-by-minute in a fog of real time and the fragment. From a psychological perspective, the humiliation of this long period fuels my attempt (at least in some of my writing) to use language to render the world in a spherical way, to experience the thrill of being entirely awake, *risen*, the thrill of bringing the world to a still point when/where all secrets are known -- which involves, in fact, some further, exponential learning to read. The goal of clarity always contains in some measure the goal of sympathetic magic. But the goal contains its own contrary, because the attempt reveals the impossibility of clarity, the parameters of my own faith, and the resistance of language. Therefore, an interesting goal.

I was the last person in the third reading group, sometimes trading places with a retarded boy. We took turns reading aloud. During my turn I came to a word that looked familiar because of its shape and the letters I knew: w on one side, ld on the other -- would. Would also contained u, a letter I didn't know. But where the stranger should have been, there was an r, an acquaintance. I lived briefly but intensely inside this Martian word. I stalled for a while, but the direction of the hateful sentence (whose entire meaning I'd lost, whose context I'd lost) was forward. I'd like to confuse the thematics of this drama by adding that I was taught in Hebrew School to kiss a book containing the name of God if I dropped the book on the ground (what book didn't contain God's name, how would I know either way?) and this perversity of my forefathers appealed to me. So I said, would, but hopelessly threw into the center of the word the sound of the r. Suddenly -- to my total astonishment -- Mrs. Banks strode across the circle and shook my hand so energetically I almost lost my balance -- then she slapped my back as though I'd made a great advance. I accepted the commotion -- what choice did I have? I remained in the dark for a long time about the world I'd discovered, and why making an r sound produced such a wild joy and affirmation. Misplaced joy.

I am grateful for the fragment; unity is a disease of meaning. At the same time literature that purveys disjunction (my own work and most of the work by poets who will be responding to *Tyonyi*) generates its opposite, frames itself with a canon of criticism -- authoritative, technical, "closed," narrative in that it proposes a self. This critical theory dictates the meaning of form, the meaning of freedom -- that is, it argues a self (even a non-self) which is the reader, that the reader must recognize and agree to. Maybe we can't avoid unity or disjunction, maybe they have a principle of conservation. In any case, this is my response to the question asking what patterns are influencing habits of reading within poetry.

I have remained an extremely slow reader, easily dazzled, easily lead off the page in forward momentums different from those the author might be choosing; my own work is discursive, at the same time it follows thematic organizations almost decorative in their strict patterns. I just finished reading Philip Aries' *Hour Of Our Death*, a history of death since antiquity, a beautiful book which helps me write about AIDS. I am reading *Crossouts*, Lydia Davis's translation of the second volume of Michel Leiris's autobiography -- marveling how the endless unravelling of the interior life at a certain point becomes objective -- in that sense "unoriginal" -- without rejecting personal disclosure, loose association and idle speculation which at any point he is free to disown. He organized the book around particular misreadings and misunderstandings.

Robert Gluck is working on a book of stories called *Everyman. Reader*, a book of poetry and short prose, was just published by Lapis Press. He is director of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, and on the board of directors of Small Press Traffic Literary Center.



JANET GRAY

Part of reading poetry has been that the scarcity of publication resources -- especially for experimental work -- makes us read jealously, to learn what gets printed. This is fashion-tracking, at worst, but at best is taking each other as mentors. Seems to me now that the resources for publishing unusual stuff are burgeoning. The Language movement deserves some credit for stimulating this; more broadly, a lot of less encamped poets have rediscovered (from each other) their histories & influences in the experiments of the '50s & '60s. This generally is where I would contextualize my own work & that of the writers I most admire; but much makes me place myself on the margin.

Big problem #1 for me with both the long history of poetry & the avant-gardes of the past couple centuries is that mostly men have done it; the a-gs often yet more ferociously misogynist than the canonical guys. One falls in love with the stuff as is but with anguish that, in every dimension, something vitally relevant to *me* is missing from it. And, on the other hand, contemporary feminist poetry too often looks neatly domestic in a moneyed way: not *my* home. School has been extremely important to me as a place to explore with others the tremendous variety of ways poetry can be; and now, to find the buried women and see how they wrote with/against the dominant texts to get the missing bits *in*.

Conversations with other poets are my best source of information about contemporary poetry -- but I lean on Dustbooks' *Directory of Poetry Publishers* as a reminder of how big and complicated the business is. That the vital level of contemporary poetry production takes place in barely public, partially commodified ways in hundreds of groups that may or may not overlap, compact & diffuse communities that have in common technical, cultural, ideological, geographical, or class interests or less -- this is to me intensely interesting & also the source of much frustration. Diversity: we are celebrating it, but it's hard work. Diversity = plentitude, but also plenty of constraints -- values and proscriptions differ, sometimes minutely, from one poetry scene to another. So that finding one's context -- ! Reading almost always is a transcultural act; I find this a helpful way to think of it -- we are

all eager to produce into the polyglottal whole but we need to take responsibility for continually relearning how to read.

There's the question: are nonpoets reading poetry? Proposition: there are fewer nonpoets than we think -- part of why poetry production flourishes at the semiprivate level; & a best outcome of a poem is *still* that it sparks another poem. In universities right now people are talking about how the rejection of formalist criticism has left a shortage of tools for reading poetry. In 10 years I hope I am in classrooms "giving back" whatever I will have learned & my passion for the stuff.

Perverse question: Do we really want to decommmodify art? What about poems as cheap little treasures that other people can take home?

Janet Gray: Books/chaps: *Flaming Tail Out Of The Ground Near Your Farm* (1987), *The Purse* and *A Hundred Flowers* (forthcoming; all Illuminati); excerpts from [*that emotion is not a license against examination but a tentative name*] (Cat's Eye, 1987); *23 Flowers* (Inkblot, fall 1989). Working on "Ways of Knowing," poem-responses to a questionnaire used in a study of women's epistemology; continuing quest for critical theory of emotion drawing on histories of religious language and political/social action.



PAUL GREEN

Whilst noting the important advancements in poetics that are, and have been, issuing from the European countries, particularly France and Germany; and not really discounting the innovative arguments that issue from out of the USA, it seems that there is a body of work now being written in England which is, for the most part, consistent, and of different commitment to what has passed previous, or is being written elsewhere. Notably, there are significant newcomers. D.S. Marriott and Peter Larkin are producing complex areas of writing, with their shifts in emphases being away from any standard set by the U.S. word revolutions of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Obliquely, old voices still exist; and Peter Riley, Anthony Barnett, and Jeremy Prynne are still able to maintain their past stances of originality laid down in, with the exception of Riley, their representative Collected volumes. Not yet documented would be the wilder writing of John Cussans. Paul Buck should have a Collected, or Selected, writing, but hasn't. Similarly, Allen Fisher's *Place* poem has to yet be collated into one cover. Glenda George is drawing up a Selected writing, while Maggie O'Sullivan has only just begun to tap a whole new world of semantic and "natural" experiment. Historically, and artistically, Alan Halsey prefers to look backward, and enter Europe through its Da-Da portal. Elsewhere, Michael Haslam, Andrew Lawson, John Seed, Kelvin Corcoran, Ralph Hawkins, Rod Mengham, John Wilkinson, Grace Lake, and Nigel Wheale make themselves interestingly prominent. Good though the activity is, I am not attempting to write an encyclopaedic reference of names, for such could not possibly indicate the types and styles, high or low, to which the various arts make imminent acknowledgement of. The English scene does seem to lack a good public theoretician, to rank against the Americans; but who knows what is coming? John Welch did produce issues of *The Many Review* which allowed a type of criticism to be aired for a while, and Tim Woods and Peter Middleton have been whispering about their projected *Torque* journal for quite some time. With the demise of Ken Edwards' *Reality Studios* there is now a clearer need for something approaching a forum. Debate is more than just a clearing-house for creativity, and both *The Many Review* and *The Swansea Review* have published very dense, and very reliable, essays by

Richard Kerridge and N.H. Reeve on the poetry of Jeremy Prynne. This point aside, the aspect of a critical journal made to inform *totally* of new English writing is almost a pie-in-the-sky day-dream. If *Torque* doesn't fill it, if its tastes aren't too transatlantic, then there is nothing else that will.

Paul Green was born in 1947 and for the past 15 years has been editing and publishing his own *Spectacular Diseases* imprint from Peterborough UK. His most recent publication is *Dusts* (Open Towship, 1987), and a new book, *A Comparative Daimon*, is forthcoming in 1989 from Prest Roots Press.



TONY GREEN

1

Words, circa 500, for TYUONYI. Tings in NZon the whole h : badly need decoding. De-constr , really *de*-everything. And I wouldn't miss a minute of it.

There's no interesting context for poets that isn't irritating.  
What else gives you the itch?

Phone rings. Agency wants 4 to 5 year old girl to pick up a puppy out of a basket tomorrow, advertising petfood. How old are your girls? 3 3/4 (and very small). Do they look 4? They are very mature, and I would like to be there. Unfortunately I won't be able to. They are scared stiff of dogs.

Is poetry an operatic occasion, when we can all call out boo or yah or cor, Windgassen as Tristan at Covent Garden, soft mousse in the moonlight, che Dolce Vita? I'll write anything from anecdotes to ricercares (a lie). What you call it afterwards is your business.

Upbringing makes what you're used to, and then moving to the far end of your language makes its own fun. There is a difference between NY London Jewish culture-vulturism, overlayed by public school (English, meaning private, meaning parents paid) and New Zealand middle-class mores, I guess.

The old boy association of my English Public School invites me to Eden Park to watch the All Blacks play Australia, followed by an informal dinner. Don't confuse me. I must patch up my battered 17th century Italian music to take along in case there's a piano I can hit in the vicinity of this feast, so we can make merry. And, if that fails, I could always read a few cut-up poems from my last book, *Software*.

Wystan Curnow has made a discovery: if noone wants to publish poetry that's worth reading, you disguise poetry as art-writing and get published by an art gallery, making your own illustrations with the art-works. All he knows about writing gets in there, (so that's where his poetry goes.)

I can't use any lineated stuff at the moment, because I have a liking for that idea, and am doing some of my own. Infiltration gets poets a hearing. The culture is not listening to the folks that say they are poets here, not so you'd notice.

Much writing energy goes into hand-outs for students. This should be cheques, because the government is cutting things to the bone, but it's actually little tracts on how to write and how to think your way from A to B or Z. More poetics.

I tangle with an English editor, who wants me to open with something that states "the essential theme", and otherwise obeys the rules of 19th century academic prose -- in an essay on Picasso?

The pen is a funny weapon, and the more you can wield it, the merrier.  
Poetry joins the battle, on whatever front.

"Whatever is supposed to be recognized in the interest of labor and interaction, from the very start and always, receives a "theory form" that is also stamped by the polemical or the erotic." says Peter Sloterdijk (*The Critique of Cynical Reason*. Verso, 1988. p. 358). I know where I stand on that, and it's not with the polemical.

19 July 1989

Tony Green's poem books: *Londonettes and Underground Reading*, 1978. *Doc Oxide and Other Reflections*, 1978, *Untold Angels*, 1979, and *Software*, 1986 (available from the author). Formerly editor of *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*, co-editor of *Splash*.



ROBERT GRENIER

POET FELT  
I WASN'T VERY SMART IN THAT STORE TODAY  
for Zero ~~or~~ 'Necessity' ?  
I wasn't very smart in that store today  
I walked AND  
+ ~~carried~~ Nothing  
I ~~thought~~ more ~~than~~ dis ~~than~~  
I ~~thought~~ some ~~things~~ is  
I needed but I did spend  
Yes ?? A NOTHING  
money + so was not a novel ly  
DOLLARS INTELLECTUAL

Robert Grenier, now of Bolinas, is the author of *Phantom Anthems* (O Books), and *A Day at the Beach* (Roof).



DOUGLAS GUNN

## HOW TO WRITE A SENTENCE

Central to the task is the issue of ideology and form, how they work together to limit the world. (Whose world?) It goes something like this: by disregarding the authority of formal convention, creating a context for writing that doesn't take conventional assumptions for granted, you automatically challenge the function of ideology, that it's in the nature of ideology to contain the errant, undisciplined gesture, to protect the official version of reality responsible for institutions like the literary institution, the academic institution . . . the "disciplines." It's the errant pupil and the institutional response is to discipline his miscreant behavior, correct his errors. Good habits, cooperation enforced by seating charts, hands raised: these are *formal* conventions -- and from the way sentences are put together to the way narrative is constructed -- what Foucault calls disciplinary apparatus, a kind of depository for ideology; for instance: the socially constructed rules in effect in any communicative encounter. Two people get together to talk, they must observe these rules in order to have a "successful" exchange: you can't lie, you can't withhold information in certain circumstances, etc.

The point is, what makes a "successful" exchange "successful"? That the rules are observed, but not this alone: that these conventions *become* conventions because they are generated in the context of institutional demands; they are the by-products of various institutional -- "disciplinary" -- frameworks. That it's the nature of an institution to promote itself by representing the actual conditions of existence in terms of an official version of reality; this is ideology, and it gets framed in certain formal conventions. And when we rely on these forms we are affirming the institutions and the version of reality they protect. "Successful" because this reality is taken for granted by participants who observe the rules, uncritically.

So, when you take part in a "successful" conversation, you don't notice the forms of the sentences you or your interlocutor are constructing because it's a conversation that takes place in a conventional context that doesn't threaten ideology (it is "successful"; these forms relay messages that Foucault would call *dans le vrai*, in the true). When you read a traditional

novel the language is naturalized in a similar way -- at least it doesn't present significant resistance -- it effaces itself in the interest of some "meaning" with its basis in an epistemology whose wisdom is taken for granted by the "common-sense" knowledge that disguises ideology. E. g., the entertainment business; the form effaces itself so the reader/viewer doesn't have to penetrate it, negotiate it, do any work or examine himself or his attention, but sit back and soak up the "message" unencumbered by anything like a formal resistance. He is entertained. This is how it's possible to slip ideology past people, they think this is the way things are supposed to be, the way language is naturally, without questioning how things got that way or what's concealed beneath the surface of the forms everyone takes for granted as being natural.

But there's not just one truth, and it's the *un* successful linguistic act, when one member of the conversation starts dissembling -- "opting out" of the speech situation, in the jargon of sociolinguistics. Because there is the truth that is composed of error, from the perspective of the dominant culture, and the voice of this truth is dissemblance. It's not when one speaker suddenly starts inverting every convention in an attempt to subvert ideology. For one thing, the other can simply dismiss such a voice as incomprehensible. More importantly, this type of simple inversion, creating a symmetrical opposition, leaves the "new" utterance in the same ontological space as that which is opposed; in order to recover ideological equilibrium, one needs merely hold the mirror of convention up to such an utterance. More interesting, and more threatening, is the utterance that dissembles, not inverting conventional thought, but dispersing it, along a treacherous discourse.

Then writing that is disturbing, but not altogether inaccessible so that people read it, produced by challenging the authority of various conventions of writing -- things like the function of subordination, the priority of chronology in narrative, the "inappropriateness" of offering facts that have no clear context -- in order to foreground language, and the conventions of story-telling, etc. In order to convey that the world the way we might feel it usually has little to do with the officially sanctioned world of ideology. The successful unsuccessful sentence exposes the false promise of common sense -- things shift, a different world reveals itself halfway through the utterance; narrative or syntactic continuity is interrupted when the narrator acknowledges the shifting, refuses to organize random experience according to the conventional demands of narrative: they hear the cars at the racetrack: "Sometimes they go, but the baby doesn't like the sound and the man goes



alone now that they have the baby he usually stays home and they watch tv and they can hear the cars, from where they live." (The function of "now that they have the baby," contaminating the contents of the clauses which share its syntax.) The intention is to force readers to examine themselves reading, so that it becomes a conscious activity, one that involves them in making choices. My most successful sentences are often the most difficult to get though; for writing to have any disruptive power, for it to make a difference in the world, reading has to be a bit painful.

Douglas Gunn's fiction has appeared in *Tyuonyi*, *boundry 2* and is due to appear in *Another Chicago Magazine* and in an Italian publication called *Postmodernism: Engagement and Experimentation in Contemporary Literature* (proceedings of the 1988 conference on politics and literature at the Gramsci Institute, Trento, Italy). In 1988 he received a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts grant.

CHARLES O. HARTMAN

# HOW TO DISTINGUISH NOTES ON POETRY FROM NOTES ON MY POETRY

(1) The Problem of Poetry: to make ends meet. E.g., Coltrane & computers.

(2) I sat through a friend's reading, listening to her wonderful short poems, fidgeting. My dis-ease resolved itself: I wanted to write a solo that will go on for twenty minutes. Hence "The Difference Engine."

(3) The poet whose best taskmaster is boredom  
-- who remains interested enough to finish a poem only if it differs in some radical way from anything else she or he has written (or if possible read)--

and whose critical ability to see profound resemblances among poems grows inseparable from his or her poetic skill and imagination

tends to write fewer poems each year.

(4) The first two decades of jazz predated recordings.

The first jazz records were by a white band.

The first thing to remember about history is that almost none of the jazz there has been recorded.

The first half of jazz history was recorded in a medium that cuts off performances after about three minutes, though a five-minute medium was available for Serious Music.

The first reaction of jazz players to the LP was an exaggerated sense of liberation.

(5) Human history is fractal. Every recounted level of action and meaning (from "she lived during the Renaissance," through "she managed her daughter's education," down through "she turned on her left heel") oversimplifies the level of detail below it.



There is no bottom

(though somewhere down the scale action may cease to be  
recognizably human before it becomes definitively chemical).

Poetic language, so famously suggestive, insinuates among other things a multiple availability of levels. Yet the poem is all surface. You don't (despite the popular locution) *go into* the poem or a graph of the Mandelbrot set.

(6) "Poetry is the footprints of a beast running in agony."

(7) An astounding amount of poetry is worthless because its makers are tone-deaf.

(8) A popular art presumes acceptable states of being in its audience. The great thing about finding yourself in a clichéd life-situation is that there are so many songs around to express what you feel. Popular songs resemble greeting cards for culturally recognized occasions. It's hard to find a Ramadan card in Providence.

(9) The State of Poetry: In the earlier anthropology of Morocco, it was customary to distinguish the *bled al makhzen*, the Arab and French colonial "land of government", and the *bled as siba*, the Berber "land of insolence."

Charles Hartman's second critical book, *Jazz Text: Voice and Improvisation in Poetry, Jazz, and Song*, will be published by Princeton. Sun & Moon will bring out *Sentences*, a book-length poem co-authored (with computer assistance) with Hugh Kenner.

## MICHAEL HELSEM

1. "Shrinking, through long experience, from the plethoric form of cumulation and 'periodic' writing in which the journalist supports or explains his views, every man who puts a business value upon his time, slips naturally into a trick of short-hand reading. It is more even by the effort and tension of mind in HOLDING ON, than by the mere loss of time, that most readers are repelled from the habit of careful reading. An evil of modern growth is met by a modern remedy. Every man gradually learns an art of catching at the leading words and the cardinal or hinge joints, of transition, which proclaims the general course of a writer's speculation. . . . the reader suffers a permanent debilitation. He acquires a factitious propensity; he forms an incorrigible habit of desultory reading. . . . better it is, by a thousandfold, to have read three-score of books (chosen judiciously) with severe attention, than to have raced through the library of the Vatican at a newspaper pace." -- de Quincey, *On Style*

2. Poets used to be the custodians of language; now it's journalists, whose stylebook scarcely extends past punctuation & capitals. A time when people will say anything, a time when people will believe anything, is worst for language, worse even than universal lying, for then language still has the logic of self-interest, but now (for this is such a time) it is gradually turning into a system of accidental noises. It doesn't matter if you are rigorous with yourself, either, for the moment you have to use a word that has been made fuzzy by misuse, it casts an uncertainty on all that follows, because unconsciously you will allow for its alternate meanings; & this ambiguity snowballs (especially if you write quickly) till you realize you could have said it a dozen other ways -- & none of them more precise than the others -- while truth depends on a sense of the best word: you lose that, & you're left with opinions . . . The words which lose the most meaning are abstractions, so you let yourself be scared into idle concreteness. At last all you can do is describe the motion of objects, or derive variations from the buzzflux of slang. Precision is necessary even in delineating emotional states, yet already these are being reduced to their ultimate economy, whether they make you buy or refuse to buy, & so to describe anything more subtle is



to take the deliberate risk that no one will be able to understand you . . . This is decadence, & has as much to do with scanty acquisition by displaced peoples, as with muddle-headed native speakers. What none of us who write in English today are willing to contemplate, is the possibility that this world lingua-franca (the basis of Empire) has already begun, in a literary sense, to turn itself into a dead language. Which doesn't mean we write for no one. But we often address others than those who are qualified to understand; more & more so, as the crisis seems to demand speech from the articulate. Perhaps decadence can be retarded longest in an enclave with the values of the Ivory Tower -- who anymore desires it? -- & is accelerated most, among isolated writers in the big cities, who only address their dreams.

Poets on the factory model: decide to produce (not poems, but books of "poetry"), and then try to create a market for their product. Who will hold a gun to the head of their pet & ask: "Does this need doing?" -- who would not be burst like a bubble by such a question? Then how much of our art is self-protection against that actual irrelevance . . . All contemporary poets will have to be read on faith, the way for a couple of generations the versification of Latin has had to be, since no one can scan. They will assume, in after times, that everyone had to be talking about SOMETHING. We were. But not with our words; with our taboos.

3. *The purpose of culture is to propagate the idea of justice -- immanently.* But we write for one reason: magic. To gain power over our chaos & our arid habits . . . What only is not denied me, is the dubious elaboration of an obsession. I imagine the real task as something like coming up with a new myth, a story stronger (& more contagious) than scientism. Which task, we are failing miserably. The "New Age" is that vacuum's shadow.

A real myth solves an unanswerable question with a string of images, that together create a story which IMPLIES its answerability. A world mythologized is not a world with infinite anxieties, though its meaningfulness gives no satisfaction to the inquiring intellect. Science was an attempt to create a myth that was also an explanation. To the extent that it works as one, it inevitably falls apart as the other. But our popular arts are almost devoid of myths; they are deliberate lies made to foster certain sensations, or else, more or less candid self-exposure. The real myths of our time (not: its cant or its prevalent misunderstandings) are more like pre-myths, the ritualized feelings of certain habits & recurrent practices, which

tend to sustain a set of familiar images, but which never (or seldom ever) attain the clarity of a single complex mythic-core, on account of the fact that no artist has yet bothered to contemplate that context, without bringing in everything else he knows & feels, & especially his desire to be stylish.

Myth is nothing, without the spell of the telling. What is more forlorn than an artist with nothing to say & no one to address, who persists in a feeble enactment of power? Shouldn't artists be the ones to care most about creating community? And preventing themselves from lying or faking it, when they do gain a hearing? The rites of a trade remain, thru all high culture & decadence, inviolate, until the actual technical secrets get lost. Then cultlike nontrades emerge: associations without any real knowledge, & invent a secrecy & jargon to justify their existence. . . . To reinvent: professionalism (intellectual conscience); trades (real exchange of knowledge & establishment of quality controls); cults (real veneration, thru skill, of the Way Things Work). Connoisseurs of craftsmanship should, but will not, lead the way. Because of the mystique of Taste: to each his own.

So what's required of a poem, in my estimation? To say something new\* & true -- an insight -- succinctly & in memorable words. That should be the MINIMAL condition (a poem's raison d'être). You got to know how words work together; & to know yourself & what an insight feels like. Then -- what needs to be said, NOW? (The utmost task) Say it so it's heard . . . say it for all time. (This is where Story comes in.) --How did we get away from this? By listening to talk about Poetry, & not reading poems . . . Instead of Eleusis -- Six Flags.

4. "Weary, flat, stale and unprofitable" is about what i think of contemporary poetry. If a poem is not beguiling as the smell of popcorn, it better have urgent need behind its unjustifiable importunity. I find this urgency in few. Kathy Acker, is all i can think of at the moment.

5. Publishing -- it's trying to guess the combination of a safe, when most of your guesses aren't even considered numbers . . . Ideology has taken the place of aesthetics. To write good poetry in an outmoded tradition is like running for president on the Whig ticket.

6. Rap songs, graffiti. I saw one the other day which i thought was pretty good: "Trust is the greatest human error."



7. Libraries are my only wilderness.

8. Someday i hope to figure in that anthology of late 20c.: among the ten million minor poets.

On the other hand, if the number of poets keeps increasing, perhaps one day they will amount to a voting bloc.

\*footnote to question 3, 'new': "In fact it is a beginning of genuine originality if one does not want to be what he is not." --Wittgenstein / i.e. newness (like spirituality, by the way) is not acquisition but divestiture . . . The MOMENT innovates.

I have 2 books from Xeroxial Endarche (n'ee Xerox Sutra Editions) in Madison, Wisconsin: *Carnivorous Equations 2* (a computer wordsalad); & *Mysteries from Forgotten Worlds* (my magnum opus). I also took part in their recent Wakest Aims book. In Dallas I am the editor of a xerox-zine for local poets (which pays 50 cents a line) called AMOEBA. Slough Press in Austin will soon be publishing my first collection of poems, *Raps Clack Calcsparr*. Presently i am writing in Esperanto.

## CRAG HILL

### THOUGHTS ON

There is no capital of poetry. There is no money in it.  
There is no one way to govern poetry. Why fight it?

The rush to publish can be the push to rubbish.

Poetry only read by poets? The blood of readership is thinning.

Meaning is ultimately individual. When more than one individual's meaning connects and interacts with another's, there is community.

Experimental poetry is not result-oriented. The purpose of experimentation is to discover methods by which to expand the compass of consciousness. The methods may be known and used for a long time before the best results are attained.

Poets on the offensive are actually on the defensive.

The market approach of publishing poetry is financially prudent, but it's anti-poetry. The market floods or the flood markets. Readers aren't consumers.

Poetry is more than one poet or group of poets. To attack any one poet or group is attempted amputation. With readership supposedly declining, the survival of poetry as a living art demands unity in diversity. What is beneficial to one poet benefits others.

Poetry has no mainstream, no banks.  
Instead of more bookstores, we need more libraries, especially for small, non-marketable presses. The cost of reading, parallel to everything else, is soaring. Readers can't always be buyers.



Poetry in schools is necessary, but not schools in poetry.

Literate illiteracy is almost as serious a problem as language skills illiteracy. To read and write proficiently means more than employability. Reading and writing create meaning. Meaning expands.

Poetry makes an individual experience. Poetry makes an indivisible appearance.

One possible alternative to print publication is the revival of the oral tradition. Read books to--with--each other. Let the voice be the pages, the body the perfect binding.

The only supportable battle for poets is on the page.

Experimentation in poetry, like in medicine, broadens the field. Some experiments are tenuous, some attenuated, but some extend the efficacy of language. They are not to be coughed at.

When poets are cornered, they will attack. But poetry has no corners, floors, or ceilings, only doors.

Need a poet make a living or a living need make a poet? A poet needs to make a living, obviously. By one's poetry? By the mythical skin of one's teeth. How each poet makes a living is a personal problem. We'll grant you that.

Readers need more space, more accessibility. If poetry is an end in itself, it's near its end.

Crag Hill has been an editor and publisher of *Score*, a magazine of visual-verbal literature since 1983. His most recent book is *Dict* (Xexoxial Endarchy). He has also published in dozens of magazines, including *Central Park*, *Generator*, *Parallel Discourse*, and *Sink*. He is interested in all manifestations of poetry. He has never received a grant.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

HOW CLOSE BEFORE THIS CLOSE READING  
IS THIS READING TO THE LOOK OF THREE CLOSED BOOKS\*

"As critical writing is 'the statement of eventfulness' (Albiach), it is the construct of a discourse -- syntax and fiction -- that sets up the potential for analogous action, the relationships between once removed events" (Simas), your writing, Albiach's writing, and the public acknowledgement of its effect on you reproduced -- that you reproduce the sign of that effect, indebted. Call it -- you're being implicated in the sound of what is there to be explicated. Call it -- you are there. (Hollander)

By distance, by analogy, I am also there, I am also indebted to her work. Last week, for instance, upon receiving your translation of *Mezza Voce*, it had happened I had that felt paralysis you know of as *coming close to the book and closing it*, where the book is read outside its limits.

The limits I had met -- and which I had read outside of -- inhabited the space between two words

Distance: «Analogy»

in the book I had opened on by chance. I closed it.

It had happened -- I had recalled -- that time with Claude's book as well, *The Notion of Obstacle*. I closed it.

Fear not  
(tossed into the dark)

I was. Somehow, beheld by that. It had happened his words had "stood on edge for generations / fear opacity," and I felt that, overly. I felt that physical "distance is the place" and him saying later "distance is place and I feel



that physically. And yes it comes from far away, but without profundity. What I give is in the surface; there is no this or that side." By distance, by analogy, the time beheld by that, the unwithdrawing crystallized in the image of language, in what the writing hand makes ready for the outside which is at hand. What you know of as *coming close to the book and closing it*. And yes it comes from far away, but without profundity.

And it had happened, at the time, at the time of my reading over *Mezza Voce*, I had been reading over something else as well, received as a gift of an occasion -- crystallized in the image of language: *Kristallnacht* November 9-10, 1938. I closed it.

Existence of the terrible :  
remembrance

The existence I am explaining I disappeared in -- had been overtly the same with both -- had happened over the opening of the books that had been called *Kristallnacht: Mezza Voce*: the occasion and the sign over the occasion:

Distance: <<Analogy>>

It had happened I was over them. It had happened that the word analogy had been punctuated darkly -- quote marks I think -- and separated by a colon following the word which was there as *distance*. It was clear "analogy" had been the utterance implicated in *distance*, had been speaking back to it -- that the word itself had found voice to speak back to that other word which was otherwise there. It was clear *distance* -- that could not say -- had given up its voice to "analogy". It was clear "analogy", even finding voice, even trying to articulate a closer more immediate stay and focus in writing -- crystallized in the image of language -- had been marked by the writing called:

Distance: <<Analogy>>

I closed it. It was clear that in the space between words I had found in Albiach that

THE GEOMETRY OF A GESTURE ELABORATES THAT OF  
THE FRAMEWORK

as well as what was outside it,

<< a pathway bearing germanic legends >>

like the one which had happened over the book in relation to an occasion: *Kristallnacht*. I closed it. The book *Kristallnacht*, which I had been over, I had closed -- which was one thing beautified, another encamp'd in its frame, one thing crystallized in the image of language, another in what the writing hand makes ready for the outside which is at hand, which was one thing cooled and reclaimed crystal, another beautified, remembered the frames I saw encamp'd and the shattering. *Was very great*. And the shattering carriages, age, reclaimed crystal, in thy silence -- came through, encamp'd. Partly trembling for lack of food, partly for "the tragic osmosis of a mute precision" (Albiach), I felt -- it had happened -- I was over it -- the book, *Kristallnacht*. It had happened it was over. The sense of privacy was very great. I had thought of entering it for review --

Sketch: the cold

like Blackburn over Creeley's *Le Fou*\*\* -- that set up the potential for analogous action, the relationships between once removed events: the ghost of the reviewer coalescing behind the ghost of the poems -- one voice, apart, over the occasion and the sign of the occasion, by distance, by analogy. I recommend it to you.

\* The three books are: *Mezza Voce*, Anne-Marie Albiach (translated by Joseph Simas in collaboration with Anthony Barnett, Lydia Davis & Douglas Oliver).

*The Notion of Obstacle*, Claude Royet-Journoud (translated by Keith Waldrop).

*Kristallnacht* November 9-10, 1938.

Photographs: Paul Batlan

Poem: Benjamin Friedlander.



\*\* Blackburn's review of Creeley's *Le Fou* is out there.

Benjamin Hollander is a San Francisco poet who co-edits *Acts*.

BOB HOLMAN

#### FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO POETRY

Poetry fighting for survival is of course no contest. The word is out and poetry certainly is. Rap is poetry, but no rapper would sign that on account of it would be Instant Death, at least economically.

The variousness of poetry (poetries?) is both poetry's great strength (indeed, the great strength of these United States) and great difficulty: where to find a way into the art? Since we continually reinvent, it is hard to find the line, the lineage, which is what the academy would like, what the media hungers for. Should we give it to them? How?

It's true: more poets than ever read by fewer people than ever. Does it matter to you?

Meanwhile, performance circuit is larger and better-paying than poetry circuit. Why does performance (offspring of Dada poets, mixed with US verbal pyrotechnics of Lord Buckley, Lenny Bruce, Spike Jones, Pigmeat Markham, et al) want a divorce from poetry? Or is it verse vice-a?

Sense of play, talk, dailiness, beauty. The political power of poetry: Ho Chi Minh, Mao, Mayakovsky. The empowerment of oppressed voices: cf. Black and Hispanic US poetries, the oral tradition. Struggling to find your voice? Check in with the deaf poets in Rochester, especially Peter Cook with Kenny Lerner.

Every day I write the book. But today that's not enough. Every day you fight to get readers to the book, fight to get the book to the people. Get the poem on television. Get it on stage. Put it on a CD. DAT. Download your modem magazines. Let's get on with it before we're stuck on the top shelf so tight we can't fall onto someone's head, An Idea.



Bob Holman recently co-hosted, with Pedro Pietri, the roving reading series "Poets in the Bars: A Celebration of the Oral Tradition" at eight NYC literary bars. He is the director of the St. Marks-LaMama Poets Theater Festival, and produces "Poetry Spots" for WNYC-TV. His most recent books are *PANIC\*DJ!: Performance Text* from University Arts Resources, and *Cupid's Cashbox* from Jordan Davies. He is currently working to reopen the Poets Cafe as a 7-night a week poetry nightclub in Manhattan's Loisaia.

PAUL HOOVER

## SEVEN ANSWERS TO SIX QUESTIONS

1.

The decline of romanticism; revival of formalism in a variety of guises; an aged avant-garde.

One feels that advanced writers will continue to lead. However, vanguards appear to flower during cultural growth, and at present American culture is threatening closure and insularity.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the center seemed willing to accommodate experiment. In the 80s, it has been in retreat from both modernism and post-modernism, indeed from any poetry with an experimental tendency.

For the center, "new" means new cultures willing to express traditional values like emotion, voice, and expressivity, not new forms or aesthetic philosophies. Poets like Li-Young Lee ("I believe the King James Bible to contain some of the greatest poetry in the world . . . and I hope to own some of its simplicity, glory, and mystery in my own writing") are traditionalists and neo-conservatives masked as cultural outsiders. Lorna Dee Cervantes and Rita Dove are included in the new *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*; Clark Coolidge, Alice Notley, and Wanda Coleman are not. Thus, while the center appears to be opening, it is actually closing.

The single new aesthetic of interest, language poetry, has made genuine advances. While one of its principles is *plenty* -- a healthy productiveness -- it has been wrongly associated with exhaustion. There has been a lot of *fin de siècle* hysteria in this regard.

A recent article in *Time* revealed that a State Department employee named Fukayama has declared the end of history, its culmination being in the victory of Western liberal democracy. This is roughly equivalent to the permanent ascendancy of Galway Kinnell's poetry.

2.



New York, language, surrealist, and "deep image" poetry are part of my inheritance. In recent years I've been increasingly interested in "realism," as opposed to the blatantly surrealist. In the way I mean the word, much New York School and language poetry is realistic. The elegaic, lyric, and heroic modes have never interested me for very long, nor has minimalism, unless it's epic in volume. Irony is the ultimate form of sincerity; sometimes I wish I were less capable of it.

3.

I wrote a novel, which made me understand that poetry is also a literary product. This has not affected my desire to write poetry.

Lewis Hyde insists, perhaps correctly, that poetry is based on a gift economy. But like syphilis it's the gift few want to receive. That's why poets are the greediest writers. Their commodity is literary reputation rather than specific poems; they sell the *impression* of themselves as poets. This is one explanation for the popularity of performance poetry: the "still stone dogs" mouthing empty air.

4.

*New American Writing* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

5.

I make my living teaching creative writing at Columbia College in Chicago, but only rarely am I invited to give a reading at a college or university. I was once introduced at a university as a "bohemian poet." The professor making the introduction had just been denied tenure and was apparently in the midst of a nervous breakdown.

6.

The young woman passing on the street is attracted to my grey hair and withered arm. After some Strega and a reading of her poetry, we stroll into the fog near the Place de la Concorde. It's over when it's all over, I whisper into her ear. There, at the end of the square, are the great writers: Proust, Apollinaire, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and Simone de Beauvoir. There are James Baldwin, slyly smoking a cigarette, and

Raymond Carver, his large face like a moon. They're not used to this yet, this death. As we approach, the great writers see we are not, after all, Samuel Beckett and Kay Boyle. They turn their backs and speak among themselves. Only Marcel Duchamp, lacking a partner in chess, comes over. But I don't play chess. He goes away waving his arms. The wordlessness of the place is more than I can bear. But the grilled cheese sandwiches, washed down with a Green River soda, are the best I've ever tasted. The young woman beside me? All bones and hair . . . .

Paul Hoover has published several books of poetry, including *Idea* (The Figures, 1987), as well as a novel, *Saigon, Illinois* (Vintage Contemporaries, 1988). With Maxine Chernoff, he edits the magazine *New American Writing*. He is also editing a book of essays on the work of Kenneth Koch.



## ROGER HORROCKS

One of the ways I make my living is teaching poetry ("Poetry") at a university in New Zealand. 700 new students each year teach me and Wystan Curnow (the old partner in my standup comic routine) about trends in "reading and readership". In our senior class the texts we currently use are the "language" anthologies by Douglas Messerli and Ron Silliman. The temblor in the classroom when 60 students open their textbooks for the first time is pretty strong. Generally speaking, the class of 1989 came expecting poetry to be: colloquial and user-friendly, intimate and confessional, delivering a quick buzz of feeling or a message about life from "the poet" (a rock star type of role model). The influences include Kinnell, Rich, Levertov, and one side of O'Hara, or their New Zealand counterparts. Confident first-person lyrics are understandably attractive to young adults who are not having an easy time putting their selves together. What use to them, then, is a shifty flux of l=a=n=g=u=a=g=e? Is this stuff safe to eat? Wystan and I are still not sure how to teach the poetry we like - - though we do know we don't want to be busy packers and labellers, or hagiographers ("Let's hear it, folks, for this week's poet"). So we play around with odd groupings of poems, or talk with students about language, translation, art, music, television, politics - coming back to the poems from as many directions as possible. Students tend to relax once they see there isn't a conspiracy (secret meanings exchanged between poets and teachers). Some encouraging (?) comments from end-of-course questionnaires: "I read even road signs differently." "My own writing is more schizzed-out and fun, less concerned with boundaries." "My approach has changed: I don't just squeeze for meaning, I look at the phrase, rock it a bit, keep turning it around . . ." "The humour in these poems was my first way into them." "My big breakthrough was 'sentence', coming to see how strange a sentence is." I get the students not to write essays but to keep a journal/workbook as a sort of laboratory for language. Distinctions between writing poetry and criticism tend to break down in their journals and that's very interesting to me because the impulse to write criticism needs to keep finding new forms. As a teacher as well as a writer I've learnt from writers such as Bernstein, Andrews and Davies who keep shifting the boundary between essay and

poem. There are still problems - moments in the classroom when I hear my own voice and it seems to be doing a bad voice-over for an instructional video. Some students are still ambivalent at the end of the course: "I often felt I would be more in tune with your classes if I smoked a joint beforehand." One student reminded me that I and the poets in the anthology learned English in a different era: "That time you talked about dislocating grammar you should have explained about grammar first." (Teachers of "modern poetry" are kept busy explaining syntax, metre, rhyme, etc.) One thing that still worries me is that delivering such poetry to the university is asking for trouble. The academic reading tradition converts any body of writing into merely another challenge, another code to break. Grades imply "correct interpretations". But by focusing on reading itself and its politics we do our best to short-circuit the tradition's power. The extent to which most students feel their reading and writing gets freed up by hanging around this poetry supports what Silliman has said about the "disappearance of the word". So much normal reading turns a deaf ear to words, teaching should follow writing in working to restore a sense of the material.

Roger Horrocks has co-edited the literary magazines *Parallax*, *And*, and *Splash*. (*Splash 5* will be out shortly.) Divides time between literature and film. Currently working on a long poem *The Best of Death Magazine*, and a book about artist and film-maker Len Lye.



KARL JIRGENS

split/discourse

Poetry is constituted where two discourses/two on  
codes split. The source lies in the mind of the other hand,  
the author the writer, the Other mind, the poetic when reading  
text can be read as a response to an a given text  
in-effable aspect of the real, an appeal i tend to  
to the mind of an Other, to see project myself  
if she/he sees, hears things the into the writing ,  
same way a seduction, really, i think of the printed  
taking place on the printed page page as a type of curtain  
the two minds the author's and perhaps, something that i  
the reader's inter-sect would like to peek behind  
on the page in the ink but after a while i end up  
the printed word splits staring at the curtain itself  
the meaning is not al- forgetting the point where i  
ways consistent with entered losing myself in the words  
the meaning generated in instead of what lies behind the  
in the mind of the reader words, knowing that the metaphor  
an inter-polation of be- hind is a lie of sorts in itself  
possible meaning a a kind of split of what is inside of  
tentative link, at me, my pre- conceive notions perhaps in  
best a loose line juxtaposition with what is actually there  
calculatingly what is there on the page, an aspect of reality  
tossed across really, a life line of sorts, some would say  
a gap to the a life sentence that we are all condemned to  
mirror/self serve alone, still i grasp for it, the line  
on the tossed to me from my double on the other side  
other of a self-divided chasm, the line is flipped across  
side the gap towards me, i feel it in my grasping fingers

Karl Jirgens edits *Rampike* from Toronto.



RONALD JOHNSON

8 ANSWERS TO 8 QUESTIONS (NOT NECESSARILY IN ORDER)

-- Poetry first of all is what the race remembers.

-- It can be fine-stretched as Sheets & Kelly, but also stubborn as Blake or Wordsworth. Takes both, to sail . . . Shakespeare, for bowsprit.

-- The Future is a destination we make-up daily -- those who have eyes skinned, and mind open.

--The Universe is my university. Its mysteries my meat and drink.

-- Today, like any Time, is 3/4 asleep. Pray to awake!

-- The best poet is always one three or four have come together over. Poetry should be read aloud, and has the sanction of the Ages as echo. The rest is what I call Lawnmower Poetry.

-- There are only a handful of poets produced every generation, no matter how many publish and perish.

-- Context is where, in the moment, we actually exist. To grow wings and fly the Sun, or crawl back the dark cave of Unknowing, is up entirely to you.

Ronald Johnson's current books are: *ARK: The Foundations*, North Point Press; *ARK 50*, E.P. Dutton. His current project is completion of *ARK* with *The Ramparts*.\*

PATRICIA SPEARS JONES

The context for my work is racial. No matter how you slice it, the history of Blacks in America continues to inspire progressive movement and regressive, repressive acts. So how to assume a measure of individualism within so volatile a situation? Since I am no genius, I find myself working through very personal issues -- the traditional realm of poetry: love, loss, family relationships. But I also am keenly aware of the political mood and mode not only of this country, but globally. So I am interested in the liberation poetry that my radical companions are developing: dub poets in the UK and the Caribbean; women's poetry in Central and South America; the politics in rap (both progressive and reactionary). My own work I think is very traditional since I rather make sermons in person than in poems.

But more than anything, the global dash towards either slow, ugly decade or swift warchant destruction must be countered with the language of the heart and the bold use of whatever instruments one has at hand to fight for human dignity and a sharing of this planet's dwindling resources. There's no place to go other than the grave.

Patricial Spears Jones is currently enrolled in the Vermont College MFA in Creative Writing Program. She is home writing, reading and thinking. Several of her poems will appear in 1989/90 in *IKON*, *Transfer*, *Heresies* and *The New Heat*. She is currently on the Steering Committee of Visual Aids/New England. For two years she was Program Coordinator at The Poetry Project of St. Mark's Church.



PIERRE JORIS

This yucca-age an era of intense invagination; real readership more than ever before folded back upon itself, uroboros here we come, are, tail in mouth (or between legs?), the reader of poetry as/is poet, the fault, I believe, not so much the invagination of poetry itself, but rather the socio-political fact that only person trained (self-trained) to read beyond Reader's Digestive Bisquits is poet herself [& Hackademia bears the brunt on the right most of the so-called creative dpts & on the left the froggified theorists aka Newer Critics leeches as ever on centuries gone & total blindness re the present]. None of this essentially new, even if the specific configuration is: except for rare historical quirks it has been that way all along - remember Holderlin asking *Wozu Dichter in durftiger Zeit?*

Back now in these State after fifteen years in Europe & Africa this seems right now a shape I detect: despite a number (a dozen, for me, maybe 20 poets right now - & that, in truth an astoundingly large number & fact one has to be thankful for, as it is the exigency & support of that strong contemporaneity that keeps one sane against the imperial insanity of the times & place, while poor Holderlin, say, had to, insanely, go to, the past, live with the Greeks, for lack of that community of the present)

despite a number, I said, of red-hot poets writing right now, this sense however of an increased ghettoisation of the various poetry communities, the seed more promising that the tree it developed into, tree that old hierarchical root-trunk-branch symbol, a kind of flag-waving, even if the flag is upside-down. A tiredness of Sixties defeat translates as *repli*, a folding back on purely local concerns, pristine communities eschewing the needed wider, global stance. Amazingly enough, & despite recent euro-focus, there's still much anti-intellectual resentment among the "poets" & certainly no push to engage & discourse in a wider public arena. A fear of dirty hands? (cf. Umberto Eco's introduction to the American edition of his *Travels in Hyperreality*) ((For when a US translation of Debray's *Le Scribe* ?))

The eternal bitching re the economics of being a poet (both in relation to day-by-day survival & to publishing) sounds incongruous to anyone aware of same problems in, say, England or France, and absolutely obscene in regard to the non-white world. Nowhere are poets better off (materially, that is) than in the US of A. The obverse of which is of course the possibility that that cld free a major energy-surplus which cld make not only for excellent writing (which it does) but also for an active investment by the poets in the wider struggle, call it an activist counterpoetics, - though that (see above) happens only very spottily, shoddily. And yet, and yet, having moved back here, & willing as ever, as is our job, to bite the hand that feeds me, it is that sense of available energy that boosts me, engages me, empowers me again & again.

Pierre Joris' recent books are *Breccia -- Selected Poems 1972-1986* (Station Hill/ Guernica) and *Janus* (St. Lazaire).



JEFFREY JULLICH

music: Jeffrey Lependorf I shall Kill Salman Rushdie The Blasphemer text: Jeffrey Jullich

Solo Voice

*circa 120 energico*

mm mm-ah - mm mm-ah - mm-ah mm-oooh ——— ceh ——— I shall

kill Sal-man Rush-die- the blas-phemer ooh ——— Ma-ny poets, tired of

but-tons and zippers are say-ing good-bye to ready to wear, bon-jour cou-ture

ooh ——— A po-et, wearing-a floun-cy Az-ze-dine A-lai-a cre-a-tion cinctured-

be-low the bust is po-li-ti-cal when e-ver po-li-tus is governed by the planet Jupiter in

A quar-i-ous mm-ah mm-ah mm-ah mm-ah nah nah An African-A me-ri-can po-et

does wear a cap ——— (p) P P P P P P P Po-ets have ta-ken to fur-ni-shing their

(breath only)

homes with sim-ple wicker. They are buy-ing pa-per the pa-per is

good ——— *Primo Tempo* *mf* *cresc.* ——— they do not know what to do with all their mo-ney

flood-ing in from po-e-try readings and sales of their books so most

poets purchase cou-ture Yves St. Lau-rent slit at the side and cut to the

*a tempo* knee still has an ai-lure and time-less-ness per-fect for the work of poe-try.

*d. = 1* A floun-cy de la Ren-ta de-col-le-tage bunched at the mid-riff and



ta-pered to a seem-less shoul-der Can con-tri-bute to a care-free air to

an-y po-et slumped o-ver manu-scripts. It can add such an air. A

slight mention of Ag-nes B. at the neckline, in worm's-wood or a more practical tartan,

*poco* al-lows those nature visits so vital to the inspi-ra-tion of the poet to go the way they

*mf* need to go mm-ah mm-ah mm-ah mm-ah like a zephyr be-hind auroras Rain

gear, whe-ther from the show-room or straight from the rack needs a

cel-lared and cuffed-serious-ness so ty-pi-cal of Yo-ji Ya-ma-mo-to for

poets out of doors — to tru-ly feel the sa-vagery of their bare-bleached muse. Those of us who

were sure we had dry cleaned our last Ralph Lauren — may be sur-prised mm-ah mm-ah

mm-ah mm at how ef-fec-tive-ly Ralph Lau-ren holds up in the wind beaten wilds

of Mother Nature We can make poems — in double-sided parkas,

fleece-lined boots en-ben-point at the heel, ho-sie-ry cour-te-

*poco rall* . . . . .

sy of Carne val

Jeffrey Lepore at '89

Jeffrey Jullich's work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Caliban*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, et al. He is an editorial assistant for the NYC literary magazine, *Shiny International*.



ROBERT KELLY

Poetry is always making its getaway from what is given,  
and good poetry ever from what is easy /

it is not easy to say a little bit

it is not easy to let language speak with your mouth and write  
with your hands

and not keep yourself as a pet, a pet "I" that always keeps having  
something to say

it is not easy to have everything to say  
because language does  
and the world is one  
hearing,

the world is not a rehearsal, it is the thing itself  
now and only

so it is not easy to say it right, right the way Basho and Mila did,  
and Keats that suburban long May golden day when they all poured  
out in the back yard or the red rock or the tree with no pith:

Basho means banana tree: the tree with no pith, no core,

the man with no meaning of his own ---  
he is only what happens.

The yellow sweet Shakespeare of him!

so what did it use to be, this poetry?

Poetry has been around a long time. It had a big crisis when  
people started writing their poems down, another, smaller, when  
printed books took over. A long time. What did it tell?

*the story of the gods* .... (Homer and Hesiod were remembering, and leading  
down (around The Year We Count From, wch used to be called the  
Fructiferous Incarnation) to *the story of the tribe*, and its paramount  
representative, the Hero . . . leading through the precocious individuals ---  
Lucius, Augustine, Mohammed --- then to *the story of the Elective Company* ---  
the Grail knights, the Albigensians, the Franciscans, the Conquistadors,  
those mortal conflicts of cosmology and individual will / willing / lust /  
velleity we mark in John Donne, that crypto-Jesuit .... on to *the story of the  
self*. Our local current gossip, our Confession. As if a religion.

We know it all, and know it all too well. Guillem of Peitau, Wolfram,  
Dante's vita, Keats, Rilke, Kafka, Williams and Stevens . . . until our  
obligation and delight and charm, to summon the poetry for the next  
millennium: which will be *the story of the not-self*: which may be the Other  
(the surreals led us) or the Trance-enders (Blake and Emerson, Marx and  
Jung) or, I hope, the unity of the family of all sentient beings. Language  
leads us beyond itself and beyond ourselves to the sleep of names, when  
another wakes.

So the writing that helps wake past me is our ally. Olson's cranky tunes led  
the way through the mind to the mind's knowers, language brittle, milkweed,  
ampoules, angels, pixels. Marx saw a brother-sisterhood of sorts, and pushes  
us forward. But Freud's vision locates the self even deeper in itself, in hell;  
he is essentially nostalgic in his gesture, leads us back.

Poetry has been around a long time. Today  
for instance walking  
I startled a red fox  
from high grasses  
who slipped into the path  
ahead of me  
and led me along,  
turning back every hundred feet or so,  
and so we went, a few hundred yards  
to the end of the meadow



where the hill slopes  
down through dark trees  
and he was gone.

He had led me  
to speak of him.

And of it  
it is enough  
to go.

Having no destination of my own except to mark it.

Robert Kelly's *Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence* was published by Station Hill. He teaches at Bard College.

KEVIN KILLIAN

## GREAT DEBATES

"Context" has its own limitations: day by day we change our minds about the size of our world, and of our poetry.

The number of objects the normal mind can instantaneously enumerate is five; and this week, the number of those dead with AIDS surpasses the total of American dead in Vietnam. Maybe it's natural, maybe not, but the enormity of these figures tends proportionally to diminish one's sense of one's own affect. The result is excruciation. I can't write through this line-up, but I can recommend the work of John Greyson, the Canadian writer and filmmaker. His video script "Parma Violets" appears in the catalogue for "AIDS: the Artists' Response" (February 24-April 16, 1989/Hoyt L. Sherman Gallery, Ohio State University, curated by Jan Zita Grover). "Parma Violets" has a complexity and range of thought I find difficult to summarize: I hope all who read this squib look into it full-length, as if into Mme. Recamier's mirror. For "Parma Violets," Greyson creates this table:

"If art is to confront AIDS more honestly than the media have done, it must begin in tact, avoid humor, and end in anger. Begin in tact, I say, because humor seems grotesquely inappropriate to the occasion. Humor puts the public (indifferent when not uneasy) on cosy terms with what is an unspeakable scandal: death."

Edmund White, *ArtForum*, 1987

"Art does have the power to save lives, and it is this very power that must be recognized, fostered, and supported in every way possible. But if we are to do this, we will have to abandon the idealist conception of art. We don't need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS. We don't need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it."

Douglas Crimp, *October*, 1988



Citing this exchange as an example of "false opposition," Greyson adds (so *would I*), "These debates are vital not only to the war against AIDS, but also to how we approach the representation of our sexualities, our subjectivities, our politics, and our (very uncertain) lives. I don't care about great art -- but I do care about great debates. AIDS, by its very scale, has forced us to reexamine many of our fundamental assumptions about the very 'nature' of art and of politics."

Kevin Killian has written a novel, *Shy* (Crossing Press, 1989) and *Bedrooms have Windows*, a book of sex memoirs (Amethyst Press, 1989). He's editor of "Mirage," and his interviews with Rita Moreno, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, Debbie Reynolds and Shelley Winters will appear in the next issue of the "Natalie Wood Collectors Club Journal."

RALPH LA CHARITY

*FLOATING OPEN IN THE MOUTH OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE DEATH  
OF POET EGO:*

Certainly I remember everyone's name, yet in the moment those days made, we were each nameless to be sure. Nor do I recall spontaneity as so much of a factor, rather there was this steady state of alert passivity ever ready to move on itself, to acknowledge mobilities of intent unfolding insistently out from themselves & ourselves. It would be so easy to say that we lived then, howsoever briefly, in the best of that motion, as if that motion were indeed a possible world . . .

So much depends on in which direction you look. The directions a cocked ear decrees. Every heard syllable an extending of eye/aye. Rolling wheels of witness claimed, given & sung, & abandoned. Our weighted ears hanging upright. We, waiting where listen embodies. Each ear a cocked mushroom radiating weight. Naked to the wasting silence noise names. Stately meander barked, toothsome. Brevities of brief sounded. Meant state brief-voiced. The comings & goings fluted, fluid & flirtacious. Ornamental flows combed, waded thru. Jetties of query & poise imperiled & awash. Republic of the Death, mobilized & echoing, depending, & so inclined.

Since the travelers into the mouth of open depend on the ear as primary organ, & since the travelers in their unity of effort excite a uniquely embodied state or republic, a virtual collaborative motility or chorus, the necessity for focused alacrity primes the tongue, that organ not of penetration, but of deliverance. & nothing shudders the pink granite rotunda at the center of the Republic of the Death of Poet Ego quite so nicely as a tongue delivering doings big ears scan after. Those deliverances are poems. Poems abandoned with a precision being inside the mouth of open exacts. You can't get there without ears, & what ears eat is tongue. The poem must escape the tongue before the tongue gets eaten. It all depends upon an urgency worked with calibrated deliberation, hairtrigger at each instant. You can't get there unless your ear eats your tongue, we can't get there unless our ear eats our tongue. Poems float open in the mouth of open, & so do the poets, & the discipline of making that work is a trick of dancing the open poetry



hoedown imparts. We do these rites because being inside the mouth of open unframes our veiled dilemmas. We are disappearing ourselves as poets, resonantly, insistently, precisely, & are, at least in our own embodied mind's Ear thereby crediting & discharging our duties as citizens of the Evaporate Economy our Republic, in all its forsooth aural contingency, has as its coined of the realm intransigency.

Whether smoke pours out of the mouth of open, or untold thundering tons of water pour down over that very opening, the physicality of the poets' office has become central to our moment. We roll in the grass in each others' arms across the lawn at midnight. We sweat & go drowsy in the frontseat, rolling through the tassels & the lace of the fields of Crooked Ample. No microphone amplified these acts, no printing press improves or insures them. The audiences appropriate to this moment sit baffled, scanning for clues, their very poise primed to respond in kind. If the poet is in our kind, the Poet will out.

We are that Poet, are that Audience. The aloud everDance allowed, accessible as physical place, awaits doing & deliveries, does so as condition & preparatory function. Each of us who do this work add to the resonance that melts the frame none of us require, anymore. We are waiting, for the instant immediately preceding the swarm of ears that eat our tongues; for the terrible starburst of a single syllable down inside our own mouths of open; for the swamped rotunda beneath the waves to be lifted, its transparent walls hung with mutable, insistent Song.

Ralph La Charity' last book was *Seatticus Knight*, from Black Heron Press, San Francisco 1985. He currently publishes & edits *W'ORCs*, a poetry monthly begun in West Germany in 1986 that is now based in San Antonio. He is a principal guerilla theorist & bard behind the ALOUD/ALLOWED open poetry festivals, days-long volunteer poetry jousts which have been held since 1987 in such inordinate communities as Austin, Cleveland, San Antonio, Cincinnati, & Kent, Ohio.

#### PETER LARKIN

If there is any received context for my work (as there is) I can't readily define it except to admit to being provoked (and surpassed) by the rhetoric of the British "Cambridge" poets and to having, in some way, to answer to it. If I can answer it as my own assistance of margin, it might be through the substantive tranquillities which seem to function in the work of Thomas A. Clark and perhaps Ian Hamilton Finlay. As a working context I would mention the inheritance of British romantic naturalism which seems to have an interminable aftermath positing the site of closure as some sort of immersion within our contemporary voiding of terminus. I look for the configurations of the dysfunction within such a stream, neither strategically viable (so no future) nor identical with what resists such immersion. I could see this as a site of conflict between the topographic and the topologic, were the way clear to assume a site and not just an infliction. Though my writing leads me into the terrain of the problematic I suppose I am too quietist to regard this as exemplary; the strategic is, as it were, taken for the refractions that it occurs to it to use, but without having ontological hands free. As a working method this comes out as a dual instigation: gathering a number of seduced fragments from other texts (and here I find a number of American Language texts highly amenable as they over-take me), but reducing them along a train of composition via a concurrently existing bound or root figure which accounts for them along quite accretive symphonic principles; this is to reduce (only reduction figures) the openness of language to a variable function rather than erect it as horizon or alibi. I take figuration to retain its ordinary closural incentive, a dynamic which I respect so as not to alienate such burdens as fidelity and affirmation (or "affirmation"). I would wish to bring my language to the site of its declared reduction, which then shares the offence of attachment. However, I hope I respect contemporary cultural "evidence" sufficiently not to take that offence lightly. Though this may sound rather like returning to a parental view of language (a risk I think ecologically necessary), I would hope to do it in a secondary or recessive manner, as recently outlined by the American critic Virgil Nemoianu. So I do not work as a minimalist but, in order to allow that room in which the figure of an offence neighbours the flare of a fidelity, take on a fallen



discursive argumentation, a sort of loyal rhetorical maximus, though from within an ethos of the speculative-contemplative: whatever can be switched this way during a time of purge, the deliberate and contaminated work of cultural sustainability itself; I take this not to be identical with provocation and not to be suspensible via a calculus of liability.

I'm not sure how to regard the undoubted fact that most of the work which interests me in Britain would be undetectable outside the universities as both contrary shelter and forcing ground, but as institutions they don't support or acknowledge this. They at least preserve the incentive for a wider detection.

Peter Larkin:

Current publications:

*six affermed elegies* (Spectacular Diseases, 1988)

*Pastoral Advert* (Prest Roots Press, 1989)

Projects:

*Care of the Retract* (probably from Spectacular Diseases,

anthology;

not yet confirmed)

Activities:

Runs Prest Roots Press, publish Wilkinson, T.A. Clar, A.

Barnett, Paul

Green.

ANNE LAUTERBACH

SOME RESPONSES TO SIX WHATS AND TWO DOS

It is possible possible possible. It must be possible.

--Wallace Stevens

We live inside the act of discourse.

--George Steiner

Today the scene and the mirror have given way to a screen and a network.

--Jean Baudrillard.

Not having an eagle's egalitarian overview, I cannot speak about patterns in poetry without a ponderous plentitude of prohibitive pejoratives, pretentious and pompous, weighing me down. That said, there is little doubt in my mind that poets have gone from bare-foot goliards running behind the caravan of artists, philosophers, critics, explorers of the linguistic frontier, to the cat-bird's seat, hauling that same crew in their new-fangled net. No doubt, a lot of disgruntled patriots have hopped off the band-wagon to return to their split-levels in the suburbs where they have a clear view of the view through the picture window, and others, hitching a ride, continue to explain loudly what everyone already knows by heart, and still others just sit as on a subway with eyes glued to the floor and ears affixed to a Walkman, but the new net is ample, generous, complex, being by nature a wave.

As we know, early modernism -- Cubism -- shattered the pictorial tradition of a single-point perspective, showing how it excludes the viewer from the viewed, as Stein shattered the perspective of syntax which keeps subject and object in perfect alignment. But somehow that revolution in perception became trivialized into ideas of style. Anyway, despite some valiant efforts to liberate it, poetry has mostly adhered to the single-point of view (voice), with a correlative over-valuation of "realism", capacities to depict or describe, as well as an under-valuing of form as a means of re-structuring, not just as



reactionary flourish. Someone had to come along and throw a stone through the window (Ashbery) once and for all, breaking the glass through which American poets have been gazing too long: know me, know my window. The "act of discourse" we live inside of is not a spectator sport, but is necessarily annealed to the ways in which we construe and construct our lives. The habit of confusing or colluding subject with content, content with its dream (meaning) has begun to be broken, no easy task in a time when decontextualized images (verbal and visual) carry so much power. But when Susan Howe grapples with an historical text, bringing the past literally to bear in the present, or when Leslie Scalapino lets language scan to incorporate the reader/writer with the read/written, and still keeps her in thrall, it seems to me poetry is providing ways to undermine the dangerous passivities of contemporary living, as well as the exhausted rhetoric of the egotistical sublime.

For the most part, MFA programs are not the "academy". The academy frequently views them with barely-disguised scorn or with condescending accommodation: give them that dark room in Misguided Hall. Poets should be careful not to assume that poets who work in these programs are academic poets. Poetry work-shops need not be like third-grade woodworking, nor on-going performances by aspiring mentors. They are opportunities to say that to be a poet in this culture is necessarily subversive, that the "work-shop poem" is an easy target for those who would like poetry to dry up and blow away once and for all (Joseph Epstein et al) --- which it is, and should be avoided --- we do not need any more well-crafted empty linguistic urns. You try to bring student writers into contact with a diverse range of literatures, to break the throttle-hold on "subject" to which the American curriculum has for so long adhered (the rigidly absurd Anglo-American canon), to show how theory and practice make uneasy but exhilarating bedfellows. Frequently, I am amazed by the limits students impose on their notions of what a poem, or a poet, might be, as if it were ripped away from anything but the most deadening notion of self-expression. You try to give permission to enter the possible, the changeless will to change, and to become part of it yourself. In ten years, that's where I'd like to be.

Ann Lauterbach lives in New York, where she teaches at Columbia, CCNY and Princeton. A contributing editor of *Conjunctions*, she is at work on a new collection of poems and a book of short essays called *Staircase*.



HANK LAZAR

INTER(IR)RUPTIONS 3

whose putdown is it don't cut them up so much it makes me nervous  
he hoped for a girl instead it's a ploy what's the point what are you  
driving at never pick up your drivet until after you've crossed halfcourt  
she slammed her fist into the wall all because her word processor went  
on the blink i think i'll catch a  
nap

To write in different ways is to live in different ways. It is also to  
be read in different ways, in different relations, and often by  
different

people. This area of possibility, and thence of choice, is specific, not  
abstract, and commitment in its only important sense is specific in  
just

these terms.

sack please leave it as it is why do you have to know what it is you can't  
legislate orality stuck again in the vertical a dime a dementia  
tell me when you're gonna change the spelling caste out look around  
i'm so glad i metcha jacques derrida was discovered to have been a  
passenger on the space shuttle which exploded over florida i got all this  
from a reliable source it won't happen just because he's in bad  
circumstances

They are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production.  
Production makes them uncomfortable.

the team with the most putbacks usually'll win one friend says we write  
our bodies but there's other stuff isn't there so i don't think so  
maybe a little bit or a lot (of which)

You never know where you are with production; production is unforeseeable.

You never know what's going to come out.

yes i too think love is overesteemed as a subject unless

And they themselves don't want to produce.  
They want to play the *apparatchik* and exercise control over other people.  
Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.

my sense of what occupies this page suggests this chunk will be a bit bigger  
than the others thicker seen first as geologic layers strips stripes  
fish among them caverns how many pronouns are there and blindalleys  
reading as snorkeling (more later) cut the phonewires and in broad day  
light stole money jewelry two dozen white crew sox & did not get  
the computer does inlet have to mean water going over the  
surface breathing staying there gliding over translucent  
flippers staring rapt down & into & of it composing  
& loved linear algebra first you have to get the characters straight  
no no i'm confusing algebra with fiction well vern tell us  
about your fission trip never ask the question did you get it  
& consider that you (we)'re learning about the world (in miniature)  
and how we (you) interact with it it's your right

'Freedom to publish', for example, can be practically defined  
as 'freedom to publish at a profit'.

Hank Lazar has poems & essays currently & forthcoming in *Central Park*,  
*Aerial*, *Temblor*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Southern Review*, *Asylum*,  
*Sequoia*, *Ottotole*. He edited *What Is A Poet?* (University of Alabama Press).



GARY LENHART

PATTERNS & CONTEXT

If you include those whose tastes run to greeting cards and the song business, the audience for poetry remains huge. There is obviously a need. Those in search of a common culture should applaud the worldwide dominance of the American song industry. But the diversity of the "other" American poetry is surely a source of vitality and maybe worth the cost of a common readership. Confronted by what Ed Sanders described as a "paper blizzard," one must make choices. Unfortunately, this is too often at the expense of an open mind. As one who believes that provincial newspapers generally carry more real information than the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, I'm interested in what people experience first-hand.

I was born in a working-class family with strong populist opinions and came of age when one was being told again and again that the true poets of the era were Dylan, Donovan, and Lennon/McCartney. I was interested in poets with more particular concerns, but felt their lack a popularity a moral flaw. Now I'm glad to do what I do for whomever's interested. The poets whose work most interests me usually demonstrate one or all of the following qualities:

1. Charged Language: Lew Welch told the story of touring a winery in California and being almost hypnotized by the drone of the tour guide until he was roused by the question, "Whose kid is that?" Somebody's child had wandered into an off-limits area and the guide's spiel was suddenly interrupted by an urge to communicate. I had a linguistics teacher who spent the first day of class listening to us talk and then guessing where each of us came from. I admire attention to speech as a dynamic act.

2. Amiable Spirit: James Schuyler put it, "Willa Cather alone is worth the price of admission to the horrors of civilization." I find exuberance attractive, morbidity repellent, pessimism ugly, and optimism incredible. Those who are genuinely aware of their surrounds can see that things are more complex than can be indicated on a map.

3. Stubborn Intelligence: Thanks to electronic inventions, we are constantly barraged by exotic, even unassimilable facts. Consequently, it seems that intelligence of the non-trivial kind is becoming rarer. I'm impressed when somebody knows what they know and, more important, what they don't. "What thou lovest well remains" continues to inspire. But as E.M. Forster said, "The fact is we can only love what we know personally. And we cannot know much."

\*

Annoyances

How most poets talk about what they do is more interesting than what they do. Those who realize this often erroneously generalize that criticism is more interesting than poetry. I'm apt to indulge those poets who think they hear a calling and resist those obsessed with their careers. Yet I doubt that whether one is a careerist or not has any real bearing on whether one's work is interesting.

\*

Universities

I am grateful to the university presses for the endless stream of catalogues they send me. I seldom buy contemporary poetry or criticism of it from them, but they do a good job of publishing readable editions of the poets common to course lists and the scholarly commentary on that work.

\*

10 Years From Now

I'm fairly content with the way life has dealt with me, and only hope that further down the road I'll find more time to work at what engages me now. That assumes that some things in the world will remain relatively stable.



Gary Lenhart's poems have appeared in *Broadway 2*, *Up Late*, and many other publications. He is the author of *One At A Time*, a book of poems published by United Artists, and is the editor of *Transfer* magazine. He is also associate director of Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

#### ANDREW LEVY

The context I've found most meaningful regarding my contribution as a poet, in both a deeply personal and deeply public sense, consists and moves around two cities: New York City and Evansville, IN. These two cities have been my spiritual centres for the past eight years, and Evansville long as I can remember. In a recent letter, Mark Ledden, a reader of "from Indiana," a work of mine published in *Temblor 8*, wrote that "we need a midwestern literature. New York and the other urban centers declare themselves the world (just as many gifted authors declare themselves and their peers the reading public), and demand that art come to them. A midwestern literature would be one of hospitality. It would simply declare itself, and invite the world to join. Too rigorous a structure would subjugate the individual to the group, and defeat the purpose. The triumph of a new midwestern language would be the freedom of the individual voice coupled with the courtesy of broad accessibility . . . It might originate from correspondences (heart-writing)."

Correspondences work in all kinds of ways; frightening and joyful, the insights, compliments, and criticisms spill into a widening pool -- it's an open dialogue that allows a "group" consciousness to emerge within very individual reflections. "I" can't always be in control -- to think otherwise would be self-deception. It's an exchange of context.

Broad accessibility? I close with a poem written for a collaborative project with Melanie Nielson, David Sternbach, Jessica Grim, and Fiona Templeton, who, while not midwesterners, do hail from different places in the U.S. and U.K. I'm interested in a poetics that articulates itself in terms of a community of residence located as much on the page and in our minds/hearts as being geographically specific. Maybe some of the values a "midwestern literature" might provide will correspond to those voiced in "Promise" . . .

it's an oasis in the middle of next week  
broken from the fruit



14 thousand women of private property  
 healing our individual flesh  
 a number to buzz near an ear like an affirmation  
 the *aurum philosophicum*, the elixir, the *aqua nostra*  
 a simple body has no corners  
 buttons going down to where the fluff starts  
 mellow guage of worth, that  
 instinctual heart-noose  
 like hand in the snow inside one's mouth  
 crease of the table's edge in the  
 flesh of my writing wrist.  
 Sometimes he is right in the middle of a sentence  
 smelling salts.  
 Then ladders and thunder re-murmur under water  
 ten foot pole doesn't touch the bottom.

The point of beginning and attaining right-away  
 close one eye O gracious moon  
 how objective can you be?  
 troubles with a mind to experience them  
 If I could to solve my life  
 Who is it who behaves so coldly? In a sweetish  
 haze every action comes under the shadow of a larger  
 figure. Your shoulders as big as mine, an embrace  
 restrained and still eager to dominate.  
 Try to remember things we can do together.  
 the centerline of a stitch intersects the center  
 line of an adjoining stitch  
 on which it is written: "Salvation  
 comes from complete surrender, with one's eyes  
 always turned to the centre."  
 We all sat ourselves around the warmth of stoves.

These things mean love the way you wake up  
 don't exactly lie in wait. I levitate.  
 The air makes me delirious! I can't fathom  
 the nocturnal embarrassment you might feel.  
 Behavior overlap, pleases you to loosen sense.  
 I love you too.

Tear back the bedclothes.  
 I've been here before.

Andrew Levy's books include *between poems* (Innerer Klang), *Values*  
*Chauffeur You*, forthcoming from O Books, and *Democracy Assemblages*,  
 forthcoming from Innerer Klang. He is a coordinator of The Ear Inn  
 reading series in NYC for the Fall 1989 to Spring 1990 season. Recent work  
 appears in *Abacus*, *Temblor*, *Aerial*, *Generator*, and *Writing*. He lives in  
 Brooklyn with the artist, Jude Ornstein.



## JACKSON MAC LOW

It's curious to think of my work as part of a context. Certainly it is, unavoidably. But after 35 years during most of which it fit in nowhere except with the music of John Cage, Christian Wolff, & their friends, & then, rather awkwardly, in the periphery of Fluxus, despite my disagreements with its ringleader, George Maciunas -- especially his ostensibly anti-art attitude -- & the divergence of most of my works from so-called Fluxus works, I find my poetry nowadays usually regarded as part of the context created mainly by my friends the so-called "language poets." This despite my skepticism as to the political efficacy of any kind of poetry.

Certainly much of the most interesting poetry I read nowadays lives in the "language" context. & from the beginning of my utilizing chance operations & other systematic methods with language I have thought of myself as making artworks that presented *language as such* rather than using language primarily to convey thoughts, emotions, etc. I.e., without using the term, I was making a "language" poetry, tho my practice wasn't based on the theories held in common by many poets who now accept that term for their work.

It's true I've thought performances in which my writings & graphic scores were realized by 2 or more people exemplified & furthered social situations consonant with my pacifist-anarchist convictions. But this is a far cry from being convinced that works transgressing the usual syntactical & compositional proprieties will make much of a dent in the worldwide system of corporate-cum-state capitalism (our *socioeconomic* context) & although my chance-operational, acrostic, diastic, graphic, & intuitive-disjunctive writing proceeded for many years from Zen premises akin to those of Mr. Cage, today I find the connection between my procedures & Buddhism tenuous, even tho genuine. I write what I write *for its own sake* rather than for extraneous reasons, political, religious, or aesthetic-theoretical. In *that* sense I agree with Kurt Schwitters that "art is autonomous."

I value the work of such "language," "experimental," & other writers as Acker, Andrews, Antin, Armantrout, Benson, Bernstein, Berssenbrugge, Bromige, Cage, Child, Coolidge, Creeley, Davies, DiPalma, DuPlessis, Eigner, Estrin, Ganick, Harryman, Hejinian, Higgins, Susan Howe, Fanny Howe, Kelly, Knowles, Mayer, McCaffery, Messerli, Moriarty, Nasdor, Toby Olson, Ott, Palmer, Perelman, Piombino, Price, Ratcliffe, Rothenberg, Scalapino, Schwerner, Sherry, Shurin, Silliman, Tardos, Rosmarie Waldrop, Keith Waldrop, Ward, Watten, Weiner, & Emmett Williams (to name but a few -- my apologies to many others!) not because of their adherence to specific aesthetic, literary, political, or religious theories, or their work's possible sociopolitical or religious efficacy, but because their writing, which I feel constitutes the *literary* context within which I write, gives me the vivid pleasures of art. Maybe some of this writing *will* help break down the oppressive social arrangements & help bring about better ones; and some surely *does* help unconceal Being -- but that's not, ultimately, why I love it & feel an allegiance to it. Transgressive, resonant, making language behave differently than it usually has before, it gives me something to do -- with great gratitude -- otherwise than.

Jackson Mac Low's many books include, *French Sonnets*, from both Chax and Membrane Presses, *Representative Works: 1938-1985*, from Roof Press, and *Words and Ends from Ez*, from Avenue B.



D S MARRIOTT

As both writer and editor of *Archeus*, I'm profoundly attached to the 'tradition' (as in Coleridge, Pope, Chapman) that views the poem as a *theoretical* object, rather than symbolic custom, or organic transaction of image in a neotic or phenomenological repossession of the world. In 'Framing . . . The Quest' this interrogation of the Husserlian 'natural attitude', its denial of *difference* as the event of the copula via the naturalisation of the sign, I hope leads out to wider questions concerning a politics of the referent, the ideology of the 'frame', etc. The method employed draws on many languages and crosses many lexical boundaries and visual sense. This project is invested in a reparation of a very specific kind (and has its parallel in the structural form of *Archeus*): that is, to restore to the textual body a resonance of fact without the monologic parity of code, voice, or iconic sign. I'm more interested in the 'lapse' of such manifestation -- the psychic commotion (see the theorists of *Lef*) inhabiting notions of formalist device or 'reality effects'. It is for these reasons that I think a 'context' in current English writing may be discernable, though supplemented by many 'traces' and far from uniform.

FRAMING . . .

No longer simply the *scene*, or *focus*, about which the cinematic spectacle guides us very well, but the *deificatio* of the 'eye'. Not the eye which places the spectacle, the one which is invisible and ethical object, but the dictated vision. The dictated vision, as in the frail integrity, confirmed subject, of the maintenance of first person continuity, as an implacable fetishism. This fetishism is also an illimitation; it enjoins the one who sees, and who sees via the auspices of such complicity, in a situation of fetishistic structure in regard to the represented object.

This closure, which puts into formation the structure of *vestigium* and sublimity of perception, calls for a connection between the metonymy of visual understanding and consumption. The essential denial of production.

Many a photograph has been put to use to sustain this so-called 'neuralgic point' of cohesion. Does this hypostatisation of object work as *difference*? Is the 'eye' an anterior present? The sublime ceremony of the Queen being crowned, the abstract property of the monarchical symbol as 'head' and *finis ultimus*, is this literal, a factitive image? And other more subtle measures, which nevertheless bear witness to ideologies of the 'natural attitude'. This denial of semiosis, via an inventory of the whole narrative of cultural individuation, for example, is to repeat the forms of absolute realism, *absolutely*.

What to my knowledge has been recently studied, and what the whole rut of naturalised iconicity is destined to conflate, is, perhaps, the following: the 'deformation', in part, between image and reality, by the remanence of signs 'within' narrative, according to a 'double articulation'. It is this too, certainly, and analogously, and hence the 'objective' image is the simultaneity of sign and image in need of a reflexive knowledge profoundly non-reductive. Representation infinitely postponed from any 'monistic ensemble' in the irruptive productivity of a writing. The *archai* supplement to event of copula.

\*

... THE QUEST.

"... That tiny golden figurine was the point of light under a vast burning-glass; the vision of an uncounted multitude was narrowed down to this."

Margaret Lane, The Queen is Crowned.

There are elements of ceremony, dark regions where absorption takes place (continuous lines, and defusion of drives). In general, the medium absorbs those wavelengths which it would emit if its quotient were less solemn or helpless. Internal reliquaries & fetishists in social demand. An imaginary component of accomodation. That is, the ability of the eye to alter its focal length & to produce clear images of objects at different distances. See neuralgic points; life



'within' the sign. As with cultural apertures centred & normal to the axis of an ethical system; it controls the amount of listening dust passing through iconic crisis & humid atmosphere. The properties of materials are not affected by water or earth.

If a camera lens is focussed on a particular object the image of the object will be in focus but the fabula of motive on either side will be slightly out of focus. The depth of field is the zone in which surfeit is all permissive. A small aperture and explicit focal length. To impoverish the manna as passage & echo the rift; these are conditions of immersion, as resonance, unable to maintain the hidden issue to the intersection of resolution with no face, or given constancy, see the rate of moral flow, the law of.

The theory that a luminous body travelled in straight lines in isotropic media, & was repelled on reflection, and suffered change of deformation deficient in grammar or cohesion. Resemblance is rancour on an inclined plane.

The value varies with the frequency. When light falls on layers of emulsion in width or density of a silver image the rate of flow is so normal to the eye. A chorus of silver ions in latent image burdening the print or transparency with original sound. With fear, modesty is both the wire & the coil, thus the presence or absence of discretion in the focus determines the probity of conduct, as crossover to harm's restitute trust. The life being free to contract we are often less than steady, fluid in revolution, the velocity being a scattering of pained dispersal.

A permanent deformation of small needs subjected to stress (1) See the density of being; integral systems. (2) The opaque feedback. See appropriate divergence.

Harms to hurt when an affined benediction is charged & terminal. The ideal as perfect & infinite, that is, ignoring all questions of error. When an image point is transitive & appears to diverge from solid honour (or aberration is the point to which intimacy is converging), the image is said to be conjugate. There can be no focal depth or allotropic form, as ice is the solid form of water. It may be real or virtual; the latter suffering from pure delusion of, want.

If an image orthicon is to be used to scan the incident light, interior broadcasts can be of high value. This sinful earth is a function of the charge stored and hence the illumination. It is due to the skin itself and becomes the meeting edge greater than the true resistance, the resolving power of dark in daylight hours.

The error of all nationhoods is thus remanence when the dissipation of energy through torsional & reactionary hysteresis occurs. The historic area enclosed by capital with the nature & passage of rebellion, being a sum of many lifetimes & reaching a value greater than failure.

See elementary Republicanism; *lost sight*.



D S Marriott is the editor of *Archeus Magazine*. His latest publications include, *Floodtide* (1 + 2) (London), and *Schaden-Freude* (Open Township). Forthcoming publications include, *Clouds & Forges* from Torque Press, and *Copula and Identity* (a critical work on the poetry of J H Prynne).

## CHRISTOPHER MERRILL

### EXCAVATIONS: A NOTE ON POETICS

The Santuario de Guadalupe in Santa Fe, an old mission church overlooking the empty riverbed that bisects the city, received a face lift last spring. The adobe surrounding the front doors was crumbling; the back wall needed shoring up. To complete the repairs a construction crew had to dig into the foundation, where more than seventy body boxes were unearthed. Some of the skeletons, it is true, dissolved as soon as the coffins were opened, and no one can say for sure what disappeared. "Not always the right person saw what was there," said an archeologist familiar with the dig.

A useful image for poetry. For here were signs only the initiated could have interpreted. Yet these signs, from which a history of the church might have been created, were lost -- out of carelessness. Poets, like archeologists, are custodians of the past: language is their provenance, the spring they must watch over. They, too, are excavators -- of words, formal possibilities, memory, the unconscious -- and what they discover, whether they write in traditional or open forms, is a story of the language, as it reveals itself at a particular time, in a particular place. "Language is fossil poetry," Emerson reminds us.

The history of poetry, as Eliot and others make clear, is not progressive. Indeed, great advances in the art often occur when a poet looks into the past. Think of Pound discovering in ancient Chinese poems strategies for treating the simultaneity of his own experience. Or Hopkins immersing himself in Old English poetry, then dismantling the sonnet with sprung rhythms and heavy alliteration. Or Wordsworth's ballads, which return us to the folk roots of English verse. Whenever the language of poetry must be renewed -- and now is as good, as necessary a time as any -- poets will turn to the past in order to navigate their way into the future.

And great advances, as the history of modern poetry discloses, can take place when poets surrender to the language, abandoning themselves to chance. Rimbaud, Lautreamont, Apollinaire, Breton and the Surrealists -- these poets celebrate the imagination as it unveils itself in language, teaching countless writers the importance of exploring the unknown. As



Breton wrote of *Les Champs Magnetiques*, the first Surrealist text, which was the product of extensive automatic writing sessions with Philippe Soupault: "we lived at that time in a state of euphoria, almost in the intoxication of discovery. Our situation was that of anyone who has just excavated a vein of precious metal."

Contemporary American poetry is once again at that intersection between our respective English and French heritages: a school of neo-formalist and narrative poets wends its way back to Wyatt and Surrey while the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets carry on experiments begun by Apollinaire et al. Is this an either/or situation, a poetic climate in which a young writer must choose between two contending schools of thought? Hardly. Strong poets know they can learn from all sides of an argument. And I like to think we live in a time in which poets can benefit equally from, say, a study of Pope's metrics and Bernstein's theories.

To those outside the literary community poetry itself may seem to be in need of excavation; those on the inside, however, know it is far from dead. Consider, for example, the battles waged over Jorie Graham's splendid *The End of Beauty*, a book which challenges all kinds of writers. What poets are fighting for, of course, is the future of the language -- and thus of civilization. Although the language will make its own choices about what will and will not survive, the current battles help influence those choices. Hence we must be careful not to rule out that which we do not immediately understand. Joseph Brodsky writes:

Beginning a poem, the poet as a rule doesn't know the way it is going to come out; and at times he is very surprised by the way it turns out, since often it turns out better than he expected, often his thought carries him further than he reckoned. And that is the moment when the future of the language invades the present.

The same is true for readers of poetry, those who try to interpret the signs the poet scatters in the hope of telling the story of our time.

Christopher Merrill's books include *Workbook* and *Fevers & Tides*, both from Teal Press. He is poetry editor for the Peregrine Smith Poetry Series

and directs the Santa Fe Literary Center which hosts the Santa Fe Writers' Conference and the Taos Conference on Writing and the Natural World.



*SHEILA E. MURPHY*

Patterns of readership. What is now elicited is thorough engagement. As though the artist presents a "starter" and exposes it to other minds, whose attention further feeds the starter energy until something spectacular awakens. Other things. The chaos of creation beautifully. Feeds itself, is being watched.

Authority has spilled and some desperately try to mop it up. But mops are the authority for now.

Solipsism has a lick of pleasure to it when it leaks.

The interesting ones do engineer vocabulary or play with it like a kite that really flies. Will is often central. Whose.

My work doesn't mind a fixed form for a while so my mind can be on vacation, not have to invent containers. Discipline works that way and other ways. Sometimes I build containers, too. Sometimes my mind learns new vacations.

Generosity versus skepticism remains a heavy thing. The questioning reader who derives maximum amusement from not being amused.

Then the generous reader for whom reflections of his/her own joy shine back, transformed. Even transcendent.

In ten years I will be in the environs of Launceston, Tasmania, in a community called Scottsdale. We are planning a unique creation of a place that will fuse energies of working artists engaged in individual as well as collaborative projects and those of artists with handicapping conditions. Short-term artistic events and residencies will be made available for people

from all over the world. The area is filled with Tasmanian Blackwood trees, much water and vegetation.

A mind fully capable of enjoying the flexibility in voyage (voyeur) foibles as chemically right songs inducing other songs. Heuristically recharging batteries that had proclaimed themselves a notch or two up from apparent death (easier to detect from within than from without, despite the lack of energy to sense with).

So that a passage fully realizessssssssssssss (that leaning on the "s" was unintentional, but now I like it).

Aleatoric and more. The ripeness longed for.

Pleasure in discovery or pain in a kin finding out. The context is the process is the very sharpness asked by what (still?) thing (noun or even flicker verb) is being posed. Nothing poses itself. Or if it tries, the camera person is on lunch break beering it or chilling or else neck deep in sunlight. Somewhere.

I don't know what question precisely I am answering.

I don't like very much those programs about poetry on TV because they're so very packaged pretty and predictably aha!-ing it up about things they're licensed to aha! about. But nothing very far. No one stretches past established ceiling.

I don't like very much the typical predictable performance of a wooden monovoice self-indulgently self-absorbed I'd rather (where's the punctuation key when it's most needed

I'd rather let it all be loosened or have somebody so planned up there, s/he knew exactly what would be performed next. It would be metalflake or something. Not those predictable retrospective pitiful-papa-on-the-porch-dramatically-uneducated as reflected upon by guilt-ridden shadow intellectual whose books P3 (that's "cubed") paid for.



I'd rather have it blaze and be enjoyed. I'd rather be enjoying. So I do. What stops me from reading shiny works of Charles Alexander, fluid lines of Gerald Burns that interconnect, brave facile thought extensions by Charles Bernstein, brilliant shifts by Lyn Hejinian, re-envisionings of Susan Howe's. And to pleasure over Gertrude whom I was warned never to canonize for that would break the spell.

I am convinced that nothing I could ever do would break the spell.

Sheila E. Murphy's publications include *With House Silence*; *Loss Prevention Photograph*, *Some Pencils and a Memory Elastic*; *Late Summer*; *Appropriate Behavior*; *This Stem Much Stronger than your Spine*; *The Truth Right Now*; *Virtuoso Bird*; *Memory Transposed into the Key of C*. She coordinates Scottsdale Center for the Arts Poetry Series, now in its third season.

#### EILEEN MYLES

The pattern I see in publishing is publishers being obvious: gay, third world, academic, language, late New York School . . . like each group has its own organs which mostly ignore the rest of the developments. We're ghettoized as poets and therefore less flavorful, more standardized by our own pervasive styles. There aren't any big comfortable magazines or journals or publishers who hop around in terms of what they do. There aren't any good parties either.

I mostly come out of a gay writing environment and maybe next the performance scene.

More poets I know are doing work with visual artists, dancers and writing for the theater themselves. Performance is an exciting context for poetry, so are gatherings based on political activism. I'm a member of various twelve-step programs and recovery is a vital context for new work.

I'm irritated by many poets' unwillingness to respond to human issues in their work. Poetry that seems pointedly middle class in its concerns. Poetry that celebrates female self-hatred. The sad conservatism that has settled in with the established small presses who now either publish tired imitations of the hey days of avant gardeism or have backed off on poetry entirely except for the occasional sensational fruit loop like the sorry spectacle I saw tonight. What really irritates me about the poetry world is that it commonly confuses middle class power with poetry values. I notice real painters and dancers tend to get Guggenheims but very few real poets. We are so often ruled by bureaucrats.

My friends keep me informed. The magazines that print me often give me clues. Gossip. Minnie Bruce Pratt was a sensation at the Lamont award night. Poets are probably in a state of information-deprivation similar to the Russian art scene. Their conversation is supposed to be good because there's no art press.



Universities pay me to read from time to time. I've been paid to teach too, though usually one-shots otherwise I've taught Comp which wasn't a thrill.

I'll be doing a combination of writing, teaching and performing. Young women will adore me. My most important work will be in print.

Eileen Myles story 1969 is forthcoming from Hanuman. She is doing a show of stories and poems at PS 122 called *Leaving New York. Modern Art*, a play, will be produced in the East Village in 1990, supported, in part, by an NEA Inter-arts grant, with Ellen Fisher (choreographer) and Tom Berry (Sculptor/Set designer).

MELANIE NEILSON, JESSICA GRIM,  
DAVID STERNBACH, ANDREW LEVY

#### JOE'S WALLET

Jessica Grim: In a window square mirrors hang linked with fishing line. Poetic bullhorns lay over us a kind of calm, synthetic sense of well being, merging cities into stealthy corridors of diagnostic response. Each answer's pigment is quizzically ludicrous. How *can* you be anything but late 20th century American trash?

David Sternbach: There aren't enough poetry columnists. Everyone's utterances might be less precious if more 'writers' (as poets think of writers) had daily or weekly columns. The opportunity to be banal is a privilege of frequent exposure.

Melanie Neilson: Just imagine believing in community, patterns, signs, etcetera, and blood coming out of something. How on such-and-such a day a flower or a trend disappears. Like looking for a human needle in a department store, or editing a magazine.

Andrew Levy: The flip side is that it happens so frequently; departure infinitely overlaps with values of this or that. Is it, *I need attention*?

DS: The *Tyonyi* questionnaire could be that chance since it follows -- almost suspiciously -- close on the heels of similar forums in *Jimmy & Lucy's*, *Ottotole*, and elsewhere. Is it an opening or a closing? There are more questions, too.

MN: Are informants a special kind of animal? Intellectual thuggery taken personal or a defensive grouping comes to mind. Our stars will be back in a few moments.



JG: Sometimes I don't think there's a liter in all this. It is important to be known and it is important to be brave. The trends are all regrets. Of course we hold up our own boat!

MN: We read it as it comes to us. Emphatic or cynical language in the custody of interior, individual effects. Where and how to live and work. There's no place like educated home. Economics, temperament, culture. Coffee, juice, or Crush?

DS: In fact, the opportunity for banality is built-in because the questions offered so scrupulously avoid direction and have a kind of lulling "neutrality."

MN: We "own" this equally. Alert to the lure, hook, blurb -- thereby moving the conversation to the kitchen or some other preproscribed space.

JG: I see now that they are dangling. Aggression's pact with hilarity mobilizes us into walking jokes. You have a theory of activity which establishes as its center not a hub but tangents out, leaving the middle provocative and empty. You put your right foot in, you take your right foot out ...

MN: ... to shoot the corroborative hoop. Hundreds of thousands of human beings in their "golden years" carry the sputtering malfunctioning American economy in their wallets. It takes something more than discovering an enlightened self-interest to interrupt the crisis in session. What's black and white and red with legal ease? A piece of culture is Joe's pension. Trapped in the blurb.

DS: Moderate, neutral questions draw the same kinds of response.

JG: The coziness of describing one's own self as context flabbergasts. I don't have an eye for that. It's a group with big ideas, it's a group with toes on all its fringes.

DS: Nothing left but to build a sound-set for solipsism and call it a community effort. Phrases like "What context" or "what values," "what patterns," seem devoid of the place, race, and aesthetic alma mater identifications they apparently want to draw from us.

JG: Given the choice, would you take the stupidity of relief or the cuts and blisters on the bottoms of your feet?

DS: My *work* (1) is what I think of as the context for my *work* (2).

MN: Does that mean one social obstruction fits all? Dead as a hammer, mad as a meat ax, flash in the pan, the broad speech of plumb right. Personal encounters meant to enforce moral suasion.

DS: Am I being unfair. Is the process of selection -- of birthweight, ice cream flavor, grant recipients -- fair. Aren't all things equal under the bright poetry sun.

JG: I don't know; what's the connection between writing and doing anything else or writing and its conversation. In ten years doesn't the world drop off its point?

MN: There was Steven Farmer in his UCSD campus housing eight or nine years ago typing at his son Adam's high-chair. Or my mother leaving Tennessee in her twenties for California, taking some clothes and her rural past in songs and stories, her aerospace-industry bound husband and the first of four children. Word gets back. What a bust this story is. Woodgrained "smorgy" hot-troughs, ZooRama, and endless planes of viscous chlorination.

JG: And if it takes a situation to study a word's brute term? What you want is to get a hold of this idea and milk it like some vamped cow but at the same moment the barn's burning, right? And do you guess it'll all turn out alright?!

MN: An X-ray of Joe's wallet reveals the triumph of information over fiction. Hands on, everything at stake.

AL: If it's not juggled between say destructive and that which is not optimum ... Going about your duties to permeate more intimately than just living well in your thought in the city.

JG: So you keep getting off the unexpected turn and doing its opposite and still you're greeted with warm furry arms.



DS: Are you waiting for the secret handshake.

September 1989

Melanie Neilson is a poet living in New York. She is co-editor of *Big Allis*.

Jessica Grim is a poet and co-editor of *Big Allis*. She lives in San Francisco. Her latest book is *Intrepid Hearts*.

David Sternbach is the author of *Swell*. He lives in NYC.

GIL OTT

What I find most frustrating about the community of poets in the United States today is its widespread acceptance of generalized literary or intellectual constraints on its work. As we have it, poetry is a plantation industry, with its main avenues of access deeply institutionalized. Rebellion itself has become redundant as each successive avant-garde competes for its own critical appropriation within existing academic and publishing institutions.

That may sound severe. My fear, however, is that the mainstream of US poetry -- with its capacities to absorb selected avant-garde, "multicultural", and progressive "tributaries" -- will continue to struggle against the odds for its own share in a literary economy that has already demonstrated its favor for the dominant market. Poetry can only lose here. And no intellectual rigor, no theory and no critique that does not *step outside the given literary model*, will be able to reclaim relevance for the art.

What "relevance"? No art is made in a void. The body is the site of all work, and the body owes its existence to relation. While referentiality, adopted as a compositional strategy, may diminish a work of art, no work occurs which is not informed by the context of its activity, its creation and consumption. The contemporary poet is deluded if she or he fails to push the scope of his or her critique to include these essentially political considerations. So long as the site of the work is the plantation, poetic potential is proscribed.

There is no point in buying into this narrowness. Humanity is suffering an epochal sickness; we fool ourselves to think the fever has diminished since Buchenwald, Sharpeville, or McCarthy. For that matter, it is only with greater difficulty each day that we adhere to the rules of the plantation, extending and repeating rather than exploding tradition *on every front*. Instead, too many of us continue hedging our bets within accepted modes of scholarship and literary activity, waiting for our checks and or sterile audiences.



The source of language, Poetry is among the principal determinants of a culture, and a primary agent of unity among a people. Globally, among many peoples, it remains a crucial, even in some cases a dangerous instrument of purpose and resistance. This is the case within the US as well, for those racial, class or progressive groups whose determination and difference keep them off the farm. But how did the broad, middle ground of literary US go so complacent? Personally, I give too much of my life to the art not to look for more.

*From a letter to Charles Bernstein, 7 September, 1989:*

*I have always been divided on how to talk about the scope of poetry, and the more I talk to other poets the more I realize I'm not alone in this issue. It is, after all, a humbling art for its practitioners; there's little to gain in status, money, fame, and regardless of whatever "credentials" (academic, publication, prizes, etc) a poet or group of poets might accumulate, the vagaries of the "new" wait always in ambush. There's no room for complacency, which is very good.*

*But those are essentially social and political considerations for the community of poets. Personally, I've always been tempted to simply say that anyone who struggles, essentially and creatively (and that, of course, would exclude the bulk of the MFA generation), with language as medium qualifies to call him/herself "poet". Issues of "quality", subject matter, audience are exclusionary in this broader definition. But then, the broader definition is pretty useless when I sit down to write/stand up to speak. That standing up is the first requirement each fills individually, and it is the source of all subsequent theory, poetics, other defenses.*

*So my complaints about the weak link between political analysis and poetry in the US function primarily on that collective level. But, bringing the two perspectives to an overlap, I could say that poetic strategies which avoid or preclude political critique are, in essence, reactionary. I'd apply this yardstick against Language writing as much as Iowa, New York, Beat or any school. The question is not one of content; the questioning of all assumptions about composition and language must continue, and continue to constitute, in my mind, the most useful assault on hegemonic usage. But it needs to be seen that the*

*mounting and maintainance of this assault is one of the most difficult tasks in modern writing, requiring a constant reference back to the progressive social position of the work.*

Gil Ott edits Paper Air magazine and Singing Horse Press. His *Public Domain* was published by Potes & Poets Press.



RON PADGETT

TODAY

I read the new  
book by a major  
poet and *ouyghk*.

DECEMBER

Now that I write things  
people can understand,  
my literary friends  
have changed their tunes.  
The conservative think  
it's for the better,  
though, of course, I was always  
"very good." The radical  
liked me better when I wrote  
"wilder" things.

I write things people  
can understand not because  
I care whether or not anyone  
understands anything, but  
because it's so interestingly  
hard. The tulips  
exploded in my face. It  
felt good. Now the flowers  
-- red inside with a foggy  
sheathing on light green  
stems that rise and jog  
toward the blossom base,

with same green spear  
leaves, some turned  
back down toward the vase  
whose blue figures  
dance round its swollen girth --  
turn toward the window  
streaked with rain.

Ron Padgett's *Among the Blacks* was published by Avenue B.



MICHAEL PALMER

Initially, it must be obvious that to be a poet (another question) in the fun house of capital, the here-and-now, "makes no sense." The sense one hopes to make and that the poem may sometimes make is other. Other than sense-as-represented. Plain sense, common sense, nonsense? The realm of the senses? The poem, in the process of sense-making, differs. It insists on and celebrates difference, even and especially where "it makes no difference." Poetry which transcends mere cultural decor would seem to incite a double hermeneutic, a reading of the book in the world as well as of the world beyond the book. It intervenes against re-presentation -- passivity. All the rest is literature.

The meaning of life, the precarious and fugitive sense one makes of a life, then, is located somewhere in the gap, the space between, which I understand as a social space in the process of formation, articulated by desire. It is in itself an active, contentious scene or site: the imaginary of the poem. Everyone passes through. No one lives there.

This piece was written in response to the question, "Qu'est-ce qui donne du sens à votre vie?" (What gives sense to your life); a French translation appeared in *Le Journal à Royaumont* #4/5 (1989). Michael Palmer's most recent books from North Point are *Sun* and *First Figure*.

JOHN PERLMAN

THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWN

--African violet on the writing table

under succulent velvet  
leaves the sheen of blue  
profuse skylight pales to  
somber shadow overarching  
ocean deep the deeps  
are elsewhere by  
common & complex  
complicity explicit  
flesh of flowers  
launches livid  
purple toward  
impossible pelagic  
airs flaws blossom  
in the mirror the static  
species of our cloying  
reveries & none to share  
that vista's rarity  
unless by fools'  
consent each tender  
touch confirms some  
serum of intransigent  
remorse while all attempt  
exclusion from the onus  
of morbidity the vagrant  
voiding of our fears  
votaries & victims  
of our trivial  
moodiness who  
weep for the  
perishing the



irretrievable  
lights who drown  
in sea the pallid  
multiples of humankind  
the absent-minded memories  
of flowers in our hands  
dismembered as the sky  
withdraws coeval with  
the quelling of desires  
last provision of our dear  
tendentious universe until  
the blackness ultimates  
itself & sea stands  
down exorbitant  
trope

VIZ: THE HAUNT DID EXCULPATE HIMSELF

To accuse, thus abuse.

Finesse was my diligent  
passivity.

--You're so  
enthralled by  
visciousness.

Seduced by mute incipience  
in words, happenstanced in  
bird-throat fervently re-  
nouncing dawn.

Duplicitous co-incidence  
of imperious petrifacts.  
Derelicts of duty.

Ornery dialects.

To read the world conceals  
the eyes' opacity in brilliant  
fits besmirching clarity. Surfeits.

As befits our late lusts' obliterate  
strategems. Stasis is *to starve* or  
as meat *is* the matter consummated.

Enough most patently is  
not : to seek or flee, what

Sacrifice of woe, annoint  
thyself, by null authority,  
incorrigible commotions.

Absolute encryption.

Gird the flesh *as if*  
one suit suited dis-  
embodiments of days.

Deliquesces.

You sought  
partisans when  
all that we could  
fathom was the heart  
of friends.

And that :

POEM FOR CRAIG WATSON

in fact, factitious -



ness i jam your fist thru  
the window & the fragrant  
airs the airs' consoling  
share of all the volitility  
of earth to leaf to flower breathes  
your prayer's first scarlet cry  
of pain or fling ourselves  
on thru the jagged glass  
sight blinded with the  
unacknowledged precious  
ruby of the cryptic  
streaming of the  
factual heart the  
awful revelations  
of the nouns' opacity  
--no time for these  
contrivances the self  
abuser unto suicide  
insatiate zealot for  
veracity beyond the  
histrionics of the flesh  
in fact, a shattered window  
broken cardinal smaller than  
a human hand in the flowerbed  
beside the house pink & white  
blossoms of the peony inhumanly  
poignant scattered where it fell  
beyond desire or caprice who  
has the emptiness to see it  
rigorous acuity to fashion  
of it nothing dispassionate  
happenstance plummeting  
heartrending proximities  
of winged & flightless  
things we oversee  
momentously

John Perlman is editor of *Room*, a poetry magazine. His *Eyes A Light*, was published in 1988 by Room Press; *Exuviae* is forthcoming from Spectacular Diseases Press.



## NICK PIOMBINO

Impossible to write a kind of poetry in which the unconscious aim is to create (reveal) a code that almost can't be cracked (analogue to the enigmatic nature of reality itself) and to also have the pleasure of seeing almost every aspect be constantly governable. In this sense my approach to writing (and the one I seem to most often enjoy in the writing of others) contains an important anarchic aspect, a "jungle" or "jumble" or "mumbo-jumbo" that permits things to thrive together unnoticed, or could utter involuntarily from its throat a garbled kind of truth -- garbled necessarily because of the resistances which arise in the uncovering of any mystery. This truth is not a deduction, reduction or introduction -- it is the description of life which has the smell of life -- a most venerable scratch 'n sniff. But the same element which creates this palpably funky aspect also threatens to cause to be said that which seemed unspeakable in any other way.

\*

The charm of certain writers, and artists, may consist more in their lifelong commitment to a certain way of understanding -- whose works -- and lives -- exemplify a certain perspective in living. Their lives consist of a kind of investigation -- private investigation -- private "I's" that seem to constantly continue along their own way, not oblivious to the world but of necessity tangent to it at times. Learning about -- and, even more, knowing such a person is often experienced as an inspiration. At one point I experienced this in relation to the writings of S. Freud, in another Paul Valery.

\*

Ideas accumulate one at a time. A constantly disruptive conflict that persists in the imagination is the endless search for a completed underlying frame or structure. But the discovery of this structure is equal in its importance to the attainment of the uncrackable code -- one opens us to the world -- the other closes us against the world to acquire or keep something

within. The code contains a dare or a risk. Can it attract enough memory to itself to be read again, and yet, not such specificity that it can be remembered at a glance? A good poem, like a healthy body, wants to be touched repeatedly, at intervals, but also, like a person, wishes to embrace and be embraced by. In order for a poem to need to be read more than once it must offer tempting glimpses of a world which, in everyday life, would otherwise remain largely invisible. To "describe" the world as it is given, summarily, is to provide an inventory, not a poem. A poem which is little more than an ordinarily said, or even sung summation of everyday life experience, however detailed, however epiphanous or rapturous, witty or insightful, will rarely be read more than once because it cannot evoke more upon rereading than is offered in the everyday repeating of the days. No one needs another wallet-sized snapshot of life to add to the album of similar snapshots. We need poems that accumulate us, not that we accumulate.

Nick Piombino's *Poems* was published by Sun & Moon.



STEPHEN RATCLIFFE

The writing of today that most engages my attention reminds me of Shakespeare's plays: one doesn't so much want to ask "What is the meaning?" but rather "Where does the meaning lie?" -- which is to say, "How does the work make meaning?" When Viola in *Twelfth Night* says to Antonio, "And what should I do in Illyria, / My brother he is in Elysium," the multiple sparks that jump as if across the synapse between "Illyria" and "Elysium" send a current my way, *through* the ear by way of the syllable, whose sense so to speak won't hold still, isn't easily tamed, caged or made in any way to fit the pigeon-hole paraphrase would set to trap it, chew it up, digest away the play.

\* \* \*

That I find myself reading and thinking again about Shakespeare, for a class I taught at Berkeley last summer and now again at Mills, pleases me more even than its surprise: the intrigue generated by work of a complexity vaster than I gladly can comprehend -- "monuments" like buildings in a culture whose rooms, windows, doors and halls we gawk through, wondering, "What did they do here?" "How did they live?" How for instance in Orsino's speech at the beginning of *Twelfth Night*, "If music be the food of love, play on, / Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken, and so die . . ." language carries itself forward from world to world, sense, the angle a mind thinking on its feet so to speak of when the words will almost land before lifting off again, bearing "meaning" out the door. How a statement seems to make perfect sense, to offer itself up as it were to the sacrifice our understanding would demand in the ritual of readers sitting down at the book of the man who cast the spell of words, only (and here the string begins to wrap, the pleasure rise) the net of syntax springs the animal "meaning" would be, collapses in an instant what we think we know.

\* \* \*

In thinking of the weight echo bears as it moves from one person's set of words -- which themselves have had a "prior life" in these or other frames of coherence; how what's made "new" at any time in the life language leads -- independent of us as much as we think otherwise -- stands on the shoulders of the one before the one before, "stout Cortez . . . Silent, upon a peak in Darien" peering onward, forward, for the (next) words.

\* \* \*

The next step for poetry as I see it will be to cast a net across the whole field of possible words, and draw together those which maximize as much of what has been "said" before and will be "said" (again) from now on. How else to know one's address in time and place -- and to this we attach all perception, all present feeling, thought's pulse.

\* \* \*

It makes no sense to think of Language-centered writing as counter to or different from any other "center" of writing: if it is the work of words to think and feel -- to perceive the world the person finds as continually present as past -- all writing is Language-centered, as all painting knows itself as pigment, drawing as the line, music a sequence of pitches played in time.

\* \* \*

What more can the writer ask but to interest others, and how better to accomplish that but continually to surprise. As for poetry, I think most of the line, whose unfurling of words, the more it flaps in the wind of what I don't know, blowing from where I haven't yet been, and whose turning at line end to carry on again after entering for the moment the silence of the white page, startles me most if it works, that is, what starts over wanting to be the next in a series whose time/line has come.

\* \* \*

Posit that words "have a life of their own." Say next that the sky is infinite as far as we know, that clouds float in its blue to the southeast ("Very like a whale"), that the car pulled over at the side of the road isn't going anywhere "fast," that the line may or may not "form" to the left, the full moon "fall"



on the fifteenth. The thought of the voice falling on the penultimate note, syllable, sound, catches as it takes hold of the ear that knows it is right to measure the space between gestures, the silences before and after the line which floats in the white of eye's page, tongue's tooth, in such terms.

Stephen Ratcliffe's recent books are *Sonnets* (Potes & Poets, 1989); [*where late the sweet*] *BIRDS SANG* (O Books, 1989); and *Rustic Diversions* (Echo Park, 1988). He is editor of Avenue B, whose recent books include *Words and Ends from Ez*, by Jackson Mac Low, and *Among the Blacks*, by Ron Padgett & Raymond Roussel. Two new books, Michael Davidson's *Post Hoc* and *Ted Berrigan Interviews*, are forthcoming.

## TOM RAWORTH

What patterns, if any, do you see developing that are presently influencing habits of reading or readership within poetry?

### Lines and points

What are the values or limitations of these developing, or underdeveloped, patterns.

### Obvious

What context, if any, do you see your work as part of?

### Its own

What context, if any, do you see for the work of those contemporary poets whom you find most interesting?

### Mine

What's the most disturbing (or irritating) thing associated with poetry or your work as a poet?

### Dust

What sources do you find most useful in keeping informed about contemporary poetry?

### Gossip

Do universities play any role for you in terms of your work as a poet?

### No



Do you ever think about what you will be doing in ten years? What?  
etc etc.

What? etc. etc.

Tom Raworth's selected poems, *Tottering State*, originally from *The Figures*, was also published in England by Palladin. O Books recently published his *Visible Shivers*. He lives in Cambridge, England.

JOAN RETALLACK

NOTES ON STRANGE ATTRACTORS; CHAOS/CAGE/3/ETC  
/SEPT/1989/

"For me the number three is important, but simply from the numerical, not the esoteric point of view: one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest." Marcel Duchamp

3. Cage has made silence -- non-intentional noise -- audible in his music; and what we might call the 'silence of language' -- non-intentional meaning -- available in his poetry.

Etc: I'm thinking a lot these days, weeks, years about the difficulty of silence -- the difficulty of outdistancing the din of our own voices, of seeing beyond the confines of our own best intentions, making unintended meaning, or meaning at the edges of intention available: real exploration. I'm thinking about complexity and non-linearity at the intersection of the intentional and non-intentional. The poetry that interests me most comes (paradoxically unabashedly) out of the collision of language at this intersection . . . . which is after all the figure/ground of "real life", with/without quotes, with/without cartoon blurgits (running feet), briffits (dust clouds left by running feet), skid marks and discursive thought-balloons. This collision of language with itself comes from a fact about the nature of language J.L. Austin didn't recognize when he said "our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men (sic) have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking," without going on to say, and these markings provide the merest initial conditions out of which are generated distinctions and connections and other patterns beyond our most industrious imaginations, which (imaginations) tend to be beholden to what those men (sic) have indeed "cared " to think and justify, and no more.

It is at the intersection of the intentional and non-intentional that we define what we value (figure our grounds, ground our figures); but it is also here that we watch figure/ground shift and collapse, redirecting attention from the structures of our ego and interest-bound imaginations toward



community and otherness and humor and surprise. The surprise of the complex patterns of the interdisciplinary post-Newtonian, non-linear sciences for instance. Patterns that investigate thresholds between order and randomness -- the generous forms of Chaos. Revolutions of act and agency and attention are taking place on these thresholds, at these intersections. Scientists (e.g. Edward Lorenz, working on a turbulent complex system like the weather) as well as poets (e.g. Cage in his "Lecture on the Weather" and every elsewhere, Jackson Mac Low -- who pioneered the use of chance operations in verbal compositions, Tina Darragh and a number of other language poets . . . ) have explored these edges by inventing investigative designs and formal strategies to invite the unexpected -- lying outside intuitive-associative connections -- and render it visible/audible. These strategies at their best catapult us out of habitual perceptions into reaches undomesticated by the strong colonial tendencies (whether Capitalist or Marxist) of our proprietary imaginations. Imaginations which cook up, among other things, new forms of idealism to nourish the egos of every generation. (Linguistic idealism being our legacy -- the culturally solipsistic notion that the world is nothing other than what our language creates in its own image.)

Therefore, Notes For an Essay on Post-Mod Poetry:

a) "A chaotic orbit is its own briefest description . . . it is both determinate and random." Joseph Ford

"The only thing that can simulate the weather is the weather" Heinz Pagels

We might notice that the best poetry has always involved elements of chaos (and weather) as recently redefined by those in complex, non-linear studies. But, there has been a much stronger pull toward other kinds of attractors: fixed points, limit cycles, quasi-periodic cycles . . . i.e. patterns with higher degrees of predictability than the chaotic patterns that are being called "strange attractors."

b) The strange attractor seems to be radically different from other, more familiar attractors. It traces its continuous path within a bounded region while never returning to the same point. It is the geometry of the significantly unpredictable, so-called "chaotic" systems which form the contexts of our everyday lives -- systems we know to be extremely sensitive to

initial conditions. (Like the state of the mind, the room, the world, history . . . at the moment of poetic composition? Yes, if we are ourselves receptive to those initial conditions.)

c) The "attractor" most often structuring poetry from the 17th century on has been the associative mind-psyche of the poet -- intensely directed romantic or "free" associative surrealist. But, I think there have been "strange attractors" at work too -- tracking us to the edges of intention and non-intention, chaos and order, self and radical otherness -- toward and beyond the number 3.

d) "I have not spoken of the esthetic appeal of strange attractors. These systems of curves, these clouds of points suggest sometimes fireworks or galaxies, sometimes strange and disquieting vegetal proliferations. A realm lies there of forms to explore, and harmonies to discover." David Ruelle (physicist/co-author of paper in which term, "strange attractor" was first used.)

Sources of Quotes:

*Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Pierre Cabanne

*Philosophical Papers*, J.L. Austin

*Dreams of Reason: The Computer and the Rise of the Sciences of Complexity*,

Heinz R. Pagels

*Chaos*, James Gleick

Joan Retallack is the author of *Circumstantial Evidence*, (S.O.S.) Press and numerous essays. Currently working on several poetry projects, including WESTERN CIV -- portions of which are forthcoming in *Abacus* -- and a blurred-genre prose piece. Teaches in the University Honors Program at the Univ. of Maryland and in the Institute for Writing and Thinking -- Bard College.



KIT ROBINSON

NOTHING I IMAGINE TENDS TO STAY THE SAME

The question of trends in poetry readership presupposes an attention and knowledge I don't possess, because I don't have my finger on the pulse of the poetry-reading public. If I did, perhaps I'd be better equipped to "give the readers what they want." But that never entered my mind.

It may be simplistic on my part not to have done more market research before coming up with "creative" for the poetry market, but the great attraction of poetry for me has always been the freedom from constraint that comes with not having to cater to presumed expectations.

I imagine a big part of poetry's readership resides in and around universities, and that tastes and interests are developed there, partly by faculty and partly by students, but I have very little contact with the academic world.

It may be characteristic of my position as a poet that I have found much greater acceptance of my work from art institutions than from universities. In recent years, I have been invited to read and talk at galleries and art museums in Berkeley, Tucson, Detroit, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. I have found that people in art spaces have a higher tolerance for unusual ways of working and perceiving than within the academic literary context, where there is a great deal of entrenched interest and where new methods tend to be perceived as a threat.

For me, the context for my work has always been defined in two ways: by the practice of a few fellow writers and by daily life, whose measure extends from the personal to the global. Lately, I have tried to turn economic necessity to advantage, by exploiting the materials available to me under the circumstances -- the language of the workplace, dreams, and correspondence. In some cases, my attention to these sources has attracted listeners and readers not otherwise involved with poetry.

I find poetry and criticism I like in a handful of magazines such as *Temblor*, *o-blek*, *Ottotole*, and *Poetics Journal*, but I get as much from the pieces of language I find every day, in the speech of the people around me, in

the media, on signage, and in my own skewe(re)d brain. These are the sources I find most helpful in keeping informed about contemporary poetry.

As for what bothers me most, generally it is the situation of poetry in America, where one seems faced with the variously unsatisfying alternative of (1) earnest middle-of-the-road respectability aka "finding your voice" (forget it), (2) identification with a rebel force (ethnic, feminist, gay, avant-garde, "language") (better, but you'll be expected to answer for the group, and be labeled and dismissed instead of recognized for what you do), (3) isolation (most common denominator), (4) hang it up (understandable under the circumstances). Given today's prevalent cultural values (money, security, fashion), poetry seems to come up only as a negative, and that position gets lonely and sad if you don't watch it. On the other hand, it's good to remember that writing has to do with more than reading and vice versa, and that the possibilities fleshed out in poetry can be achieved no other way.

Nothing stays the same, and it is among poetry's prerogatives to document that truth. In ten years I'll read this and laugh.

Kit Robinson is participating in a project involving five Soviet and five American poets. The project includes joint translation and publication in the Soviet Union of a book, as well as travel to the Soviet Union in 1990. Recent books include: *The Champagne of Concrete* (Potes & Poets, forthcoming), *Covers* (The Figures, 1988), and *Individuals* (with Lyn Hejinian, Chax Press, 1988).



JANET RODNEY

Patterns influencing habits of reading within poetry today? READ AND FEED READ AND FEED READ AND FEED. Chaos theory, linguistics, philosophy, ethnography.

...

*Echoes from the Spanish Civil War* (From The Book Of Craving)

Journal Entry, March 29, 1937

I am beginning to use words that don't go together in my letters. To see what will come about, arising out of chaos. In the face of my own confusion about reality, so much is clear: this is an ideological war. Yet these are men again, fighting. And nothing is clear in the shock of battle. To write from the ruins of language is what I do. Report from the front. Things like a moisture field occurring in the heat of artillery.

First, a series of sketches, remove and diffuse the expectable, process the rabbits. They are there. Hop hop hop hoppity hoppity hop. Not just the droning of a voice or an airplane or whatever in the still of the night. Objects simply images, or the other way around. You are there and not there. "This is the End" and you start from here. Whatever comes along might happen -- or might not. You might not live to tell it. "Well, of course," she wrote, "Even in the thick of it, war is metaphor. I can't *live* it that way because the particularities are much bigger and closer. Quite some ways from anything easily contemplative. There are no promises I can keep. Only sound and silence in the context of this fragile inner world I speak from. Plenty of false starts, plenty of breakdown. I should care, I'm in it now, I have nothing, and everything to lose . . ."

Pieces of paper propaganda flung from a plane were floating down from the sky.

...

I see my work not as part of any group or school or canon, but in the context of *Mind* of the poets, artists & musicians whose work triggers my own work, among whom, to mention the merest few: Nathaniel Tarn, Susan Howe, Michael Palmer, Lyn Hejinian, Clark Coolidge, Anne Waldman, Anselm Hollo, Ed Dorn, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Ines Talamantez, Nathaniel Mackey, Charles Bernstein, Arthur Sze, Phillip Foss, Ramona Sakiestewa, David Von Schlegel, David Hockney, Miles Davis, Steina and Woody Vasulka, Morton Subotnik, Jackson Mac Low, Linda Klosky, Leslie Scalapino . . . I could think of writing that in a line endlessly back through history, back to Homer, to the caves at Altamira. But there is also the recycling spiral, endlessly forward and upward rewritten, repainted, recomposed . . . And in the wider context of *Universe*, which does not include institutionalized university writing pogroms (sic), but *does* include their libraries.

...

And the single most disturbing factor about poetry is, as it has always been, The Bone Factor, Isolation a Silence so close to the bone, always ready to snuff out your breath, no matter how many publications or readings or letters of praise, not to speak of lack of same, or the Hungry Ghost of The Career Poet, the artist-bureaucrat . . .

...

Ten years from now can only be a projection of what today is. All of my cells will have changed. More of my brain cells will have died. The possibilities for transformation are endless.

Janet Rodney's most recent book is *Orphydice*, from Salt-works Press. Her translations include poems by Guatemalan poet Margarita Carrera in *Ixok Amar. Go* (Central American Women's Poetry for Peace), Zoe Angelsey, ed.: poems by Krya Galvan in a bilingual anthology of Mexican women, forthcoming from Lost Roads Publishers. She is also the printer and



publisher of small letterpress editions under the imprint of The Weaselsleeves Press.

TOM SAVAGE

### MY SCHIZOPHRENIC MUSE?

What's the most disturbing (or irritating) thing associated with your work as a poet?

The contradiction or problem I find myself constantly dealing with in my work is that I seem to write not in one style or direction but in two. Since I have allowed myself to be influenced by many poetic trends that have come along in the past fifteen or so years, I find this multiplicity in my own directions alternatively refreshing and confusing. On the one hand, I am committed to the idea that poetry (or certain poems) should say something or at the very least relate to life as it is actually lived by human beings. For lack of a better term, this could be called "context" poetry. An example of such a poem follows.

#### Helen On The Lower East Side

First her name's Helena  
Then Elena. Then she switches back.  
Meanwhile, she's taking off her clothes  
to the ghettoblaster beat.  
As she moves into and out of bodies  
With her fancy eyes, she cries  
With joy. She also knows  
One other little trick. She'll be  
Man or woman at your command.  
She comes with the necessary attachable parts,  
As switchable as thunder,  
As loud as the junky's scream.

On the other hand, I am also committed to the proposition that words can create their own context in the interactions and potential interactions between one another. These poems need not "say" anything that relates to



things outside themselves. Each poem resembles an individual's life only in that it is complete unto itself and demonstrates movement. Each of these works may mean different things to the same reader at different times. An excerpt from such a poem follows:

from Mad Wednesday

I was in the habit of being  
In love with your mother's daughters.  
All seven of them. Does practice  
Make perfect? Did you ever hear  
Of a Texas tornado? You arouse  
The artist in me. We oughta  
Have organ music for your first  
Drink. Posterity is just  
Around the corner of when was  
You born. A fruit cup with  
Sex appeal screams like a wounded  
Moose. My friend may be small  
But he's got a heart of gold.

This moving in two or more directions at once is considered heretical if not bordering on the schizophrenic. Nevertheless, I have continued to move in whatever direction each poem takes me as it arises. To do otherwise would open me to the danger I see present in much contemporary poetry where an individual's "style" has been created, following which the same poem is repeated over and over again for a lifetime. My most recent book, *Housing, Preservation, & Development* (Cheap Review Press, 1988) is composed entirely of context-poems. As if to counter this effect, the book I have just finished writing, called *Brainlifts*, is made up entirely of noncontext, self-contained poems, each of them derived from an old film shown on television. What I am discovering, now, at readings, is that people familiar with *Housing, Preservation & Development* come expecting to hear more of the same and are resistant to these other works. Why? It is as if poetry and its audience had parcelled itself into two camps, one devoted to self-contained or "language" works, the other more interested in "context" poems. In finding myself straddling both camps or approaches in one lifetime, I seem to be doing something not only dangerous to my sanity but also threatening to this arrangement of poetry into warring cliques or camps. Nevertheless, I will

continue to swim in both streams at once. For the present, I seem to have little or no choice in the matter.

Tom Savage's books include *Slow Waltz On A Glass Harmonica/Filling Spaces* (Nalanda University Press, 1980), *Housing, Preservation & Development* (Cheap Review Press, 1988), and *Processed Words* (forthcoming from Coffee House Press). He was a founding editor of *Roof* magazine and currently edits *Gandhabba*. In 1987, he accompanied Ginsberg and other New York City poets on a reading tour of Nicaragua as guests of the Sandinista government.



LESLIE SCALAPINO

PICASSO AND ANARCHISM

*Re-Ordering the Universe, Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914*  
by Patricia Leighton, 1989, Princeton University Press

This book says that his form is the same as anarchy in that it is a faculty or function.

One familiar with and sympathetic to the plight of the poor and with anarchist analyses of its causes and cure could not innocently choose such subjects for their purely "visual" interest.

These early paintings were not personal.

Anarchist thinker Proudhon says "Society divides itself from art; it puts it outside of real life; it makes of it a means of pleasure and amusement, a pastime, but one which means nothing; it is a superfluity, a luxury, a vanity, a debauchery, an illusion; it is anything you like. It is no longer a faculty or a function, a form of life, an integral part and constituent of existence."

Picasso's collages have a diarist quality, incorporating journals. The content of the newsprint was horrifying descriptions of the war as it was going on. So the collages abandon depth and recognize the conditionality of optical laws.

Such associations embody threats to the civilization represented by the work itself.

He did not replace description with polemic -- which is illusion.

Later, with two and three-quarter million civilian and military dead, three-quarters of a million permanently injured, and the entire northeast section of France an utter wasteland, it is not surprising that the prewar assumptions about the civilization that could produce such a destructive cataclysm, the goodness of human nature and earlier anarchist views underwent a crisis of faith. Waldemar George in 1921 pointedly refuted the prewar view of Cubism, adamantly discussing the movement in purely stylistic terms. "Cubism," he wrote, "is an end in itself, a constructive

synthesis, an artistic fact, a formal architecture independent of external contingencies, an autonomous language and not a means of representation." So as not to be a function -- either content or form.



waking up dressed having done that  
and being tying one's shoe crying in waking  
that is extended

not quite that







ANDREW SCHELLING

THE QUESTION

After-dinner conversation around Steven Rodefer's eating table, nine of us  
elbowed together in the close kitchen. The slow brew of conversation, out of  
which someone proposed a collective *I Ching* consultation, and we brought out  
the book to the table.

A question, at first distant, hard to discern, passed from person to person,  
worked itself into partial articulation and finally became formulated by  
Michael Amnasan as,

What can we do about the disintegration of the literary  
community?

Nine hands, variously involved, our ages spanning nearly half a century,  
tossed the coins to construct,  
by candlelight  
across the wooden table  
the hexagram



55. Feng : Abundance

It is not given to every mortal to bring  
about a time of outstanding greatness and  
abundance . . . Such a time of abundance is  
usually brief . . . a sage might well feel  
sad in view of the decline that must  
follow. But such sadness does not befit

him . . .

Poetry is itself abundance.

Its community --  
which includes rocks and dry grass, the moon, a stuffed animal --  
carries on its uninterrupted dialogue through time and space.  
Periods of intense conversation alternate with periods of  
quiet consideration.

Ben spaks painfully and honestly with Paul Celan. I discuss curious old  
languages with Vishvanatha. Andrea converses with Emily Dickinson,  
Althea with Edward Lear.

At the proper season, growth.  
Then broken stalks on a fallow field.

That poetry is  
--and continues--  
is cause enough for celebration.  
That nine eat at the table, even once, is sufficient.

Hidden in rain, among stones, under the floorboards, poetry  
returns with her hands in her pockets.

I think of Nadezhda Mandelstam, her dead husband's verse  
concealed for decades in her memory; while exiled,  
silent, she waited for the nights and days  
of Stalin to pass.

"Be in me as the eternal moods  
Of the bleak wind . . ."

19 September 1989

Andrew Schelling is the author of *Claw Moraine* (Coincidence Press) and  
has completed a manuscript of translations from Sanskrit poetry, *Dropping*



the Bow. He co-edits with Benjamin Friedlander *Jimmy & Lucy's House of "K"* which has just been mulched into the ground and will reappear as *Dark Ages Clasp the Daisy Root*.

#### SPENCER SELBY

Literature, I had learned, had lost its hold upon its human soul. It had become a realm of writer-opportunism, using the name, the historical setting, the social and spiritual honor, of literature as credentials of contemporary dignity of status.

--Laura (Riding) Jackson

I'm pretty dissatisfied with the literary world that I've encountered and that I'm in contact with. It would take a lot more than 500 words to fully articulate all of my concerns in this regard (let alone answer the other questions you ask). For this reason, I will confine my statement to some brief assertions.

1. In ways that are crucial, who you are has become more important than what you write. This is my central claim, or, more properly, this is the best way I've found of introducing my disputatious viewpoint. Writers are read and taken seriously to a degree that generally matches the name or reputation they've managed to build. The issue, of course, is which comes first, the writing or the name. And I maintain that the answer is not what everyone wants to believe -- if the writing was really primary, then the signature couldn't mean as much as it does.
2. Writers are encouraged by the literary system to become careerists, to play political games, jockey for position, and push their writing just like any other commodity in the marketplace. This atmosphere is bad for new writing because it deflects judgment and energy, because it builds too much around the wrong kind of success.
3. Problems and hypocrisies are identified, but only for the purpose of pointing at others. It's never one's self or one's own group that is responsible for negative aspects of the scene.
4. Money pressures cast a giant shadow over the art. Established writers get a lot more support because their work sells better. At least that's one reason given by publishers for the kinds of favoritism they show. There's no denying that publishers are in a difficult position, but that doesn't make their approach right. Change is called for, and that means rethinking everything;



there are options that haven't been considered and benefits that haven't been guessed.

5. To date, the aesthetic emphasis on the greater, active role of the reader seems to have failed. As far as I can tell, readers are just as passive as they ever were. They follow the dictates of the system, responding primarily to name recognition and other specious factors, such as personal allegiance or relationship.

6. There is a confusion of promotion with critical review.

7. There is a confusion of fashion with quality and style. There's nothing that surprising about this or #6, except that no one says much about either issue, which certainly doesn't help.

8. A repressive, uneasy atmosphere exists in most quarters, no matter how defined. Many are unwilling to air complaints or speak out on touchy subjects. Two reasons for this are cynicism and fear or wariness of the consequences.

Spencer Selby is editor and publisher of *Sink Press* in San Francisco. He is the author of two poetry chapbooks, *Instar* (Sink Press), and *Barricade*, which is forthcoming from Paradigm Press.

#### DAVID I. SHEIDLOWER

Patterns influencing readership? I may be out of touch, but I think there are not enough small presses publishing cheap books. Seems to me that as people become more conscious of and finicky about book production values (especially the prejudice against books without spines and those which are stapled), they have killed the impulse to just put a lot of writing out. This makes the "publication" more precious and, therefore, how not make readers feel more solemn about reading? I say, go to extremes: everybody type it, xerox it, staple it and sell it for less than a sandwich costs. Everybody.

Actually, my answer to all these questions comes down to the idea that you don't have a child just so you'll have a babysitter for the next one. While I want to be more impulsive than dogmatic in answering, I can't be. I can't help feel there's something wrong (always?!) with anyone creating anything without thought to any function but being able to make another one.

Ivan Illich's idea that the main task of a "professional" is to ensure the continuance of the social structures and paradigms which support that profession fits in here. I don't think there's any malice built in to grants, university sponsorship in the form of teaching jobs or not-for-profit organizations (one of which is providing my current audience). But there seems to be a mechanism by which one can, in this country anyway, be a "professional" poet by virtue of establishing the proper credentials. (This questionnaire very properly asked the respondents "include contributor's notes stating current publications, projects, publications you edit or other poetry-related activities". That makes sense, but I'm just not sure the establishing of the credentials hasn't become an end in itself.)

The mechanics and politics of establishing credentials have, as far as I can judge, begun to have too little to do with the work of writing and too much to do with validating those mechanics and politics.



A paradoxical, but fitting analogy: just as insulin is not a cure for diabetes, a grant is not a salary. What do I think I'll be doing in ten years? I hope to be ten years closer to knowing how to do without those damn needles.

David I. Sheidlower, would-be amateur. September 26, 1989.

ROBERT SHEPPARD

NEW BRITISH POETRY IN THE EIGHTIES

Blake Morrison in "Young Poets in the 1970s" grudgingly acknowledged two strands of the inventive poetries of Great Britain. One was the group of writers around JH Prynne, the Cambridge school, since collected in the anthology *A Various Art* (ed. Crozier and Longville). However, the genuinely young poets of that grouping, John Wilkinson (*Proud Flesh*, *Equofinality/Delires*), Rod Mengham (*Glow Worms*, *Many*) or Wendy Mulford (*The ABC of Writing*, *Torque*) are not to be found there. The other strand had "been associated with and promoted by Eric Mottram"; in *Pages* 1-8, I conjectured that the withdrawal of that "set" from the Poetry Society in 1977 was the loss of an effective power-base. I certainly feel that this marks off the poets who around that time emerged under the aegis of Mottram -- Ken Edwards, Allen Fisher and Bill Griffiths, all three *Pages* contributors -- from those who followed, and who had to operate in fragmentation and incoherence. I have sensed the difference myself, since as a publisher, I've experienced both periods; as a writer, only the latter. There have been enterprises for which one can be thankful, Ken Edwards' campaigning magazine *Reality Studios* and the anthology *The New British Poetry* (ed. Allnut, D'Aguiar, Edwards, Mottram), and, in London, the tenacity of Gilbert Adair's *Subvoicive* reading series.

However, it seems to me, in or associated with London, there was, around the mid 1980s, the emergence of a number of writers who had reached independent maturity but who lacked the sympathetic context that might have existed a decade before. Editing *Pages* has only strengthened this conviction.

As a mentor figure of some distinction for these poets in the immediately preceding "generation" -- rather than in the 60s generation of Bob Cobbing, Roy Fisher, Lee Harwood, JH Prynne and Tom Raworth, poets who have, I suspect, also influenced each in differing combinations -- I would point to the local presence and example of Allen Fisher. However, they point not to the 70s Fisher of *Place* -- and its Olsonian fragmentation with its excuse for



imitators to produce "open field" pastoralism -- but to the Fisher of *Gravity* as a consequence of shape, with its exemplary forward-thrust and lateral shiftings, and its sense of poetic production as transformative process and self-interference. Indeed, it was with a passage of this work that I deliberately launched *Pages*.

Since then, fortunately, some of those London-based writers I have in mind have been published in *Pages*: Gilbert Adair (*Hot Licks*, Subvoicive), Adrian Clarke (*Ghost Measures*, Actual Size), Virginia Firnberg (poems in *Pages*), Peter Middleton ("Portrait of an Unknown Man", in *Temblor* 7), Maggie O'Sullivan (*States of Emergency*, Magenta), Hazel Smith (*Threely*, Spectacular Diseases), and I would hope my own long text *The Flashlight Sonata* (published in separate books, Oasis, Torque, Ship of Fools) would constellate with these works. Outside London, associated *Pages* contributors -- this list is not exhaustive -- included Kelvin Corcoran (*Quiryat Sepher*, Galloping Dog), Alan Halsey (*Five Years Out*, Galloping Dog) and Andrew Lawson (*Reality Studios* 10).

These writers hold at least some of these operational axioms in common: that poetry must extend the inherited paradigms of "poetry"; that this can be accomplished by delaying or even attempting to eradicate a reader's process of naturalization, by using new forms of poetic artifice and formalist techniques to defamiliarize the dominant reality principle, in order to operate a critique of it; and that it may often use indeterminacy and discontinuity to fragment and re-constitute text to make new connections, to inaugurate new perceptions, not merely to mime the disorder of capitalist production. The reader thus becomes an active co-producer of these writers' texts, as he or she is drawn into the invention of the poem. Reading the poem will be an education of activated desire, not a passive recognition, fulfillment or killing of desire.

Robert Sheppard edits *Pages*, a monthly 8 page project. Publications include *The Flashlight Sonata* (forthcoming), published as *Mesopotamia* (Ship of Fools), *Looking North* (Ship of Fools), *Letter from the Blackstock Road* (Oasis), *Internal Exile* (Torque); and *Coming Down from St George's Hill* (Stride, forthcoming, Nov 90). Has reviewed poetry for *New Society*/*New Statesman* and *TLS*.



JAMES SHERRY

POETRY BY PERSONS IS SUSPECT

As a marketer of poetical and critical presentations and as a promoter seeking public and private funding, I am frequently confronted with the desire of those with significant swap in the market places to control poetry output by poets.

I have even noticed it in myself when wearing my poetry market-place beanie. As a publisher I choose which books to publish, and as a distributor I choose which books to promote. (Neither of these is called censorship, although there is an element of censoring in every choice. Poets define what type of selection is called censorship as much as culture defines what is censored.)

I assume the right to choose which books to produce and how. And there is enough written that I can find a few books a year to publish and a few more to distribute without having to coerce writers to write what I want. I can control my output by a process of selection from among poetries.

Each poetry, and the U.S. has many poetries including the ones I represent, has a distinctive aspect. Yet the legislators and literary organizations pretending to represent all constituencies retain the view that poetry is the immutable, universal, and elemental expression of human creativity and retain the view of poets as inspired as if by heaven and participating in a single common culture which extends an agreed upon lineage of canonical works.

With such a bias, the literary organizations can't really serve the needs of each of the multiple communities in the way legislators purport to serve the people who vote for them. And until the literary funding organizations begin to view the money they provide as serving a variety of constituencies, their assertions about value will be suspected both by the minority constituencies and by the detractors of art in general. The literary organizations must

change to deal with the multitude of forces pressing upon them from poets, to legislators, to foreign dictators.

Iran's threats against Rushdie. Joseph Papp's refusal to present *The Story of Kufr Shamma* at the Public Theater in New York, Jessie Helms' attack on the N.E.A. Each represents one culture censoring the other.

Rushdie I have discussed at length in *Our Nuclear Heritage*. Papp is merely protecting his income sources and as such is transparently craven. Helms on the other hand is taking a more complex route which the majority in the legislature and the art world finds initially easy to reject, but which will, I believe, become increasingly difficult to dismiss. The realignment of political positions since 1968 must be understood to be able to combat this argument. A summary example must suffice.

There is a lot of talk going on today about freedom, and yet the reasons why freedoms were accorded individuals in the Bill of Rights and elsewhere have been lost. Too many consider the freedoms of the individual to also be the rights of the institutions -- nations, corporations, cultures, religions. But rights were accorded to individuals precisely to balance the power of the institutions.

If we give corporations, for example, all the rights of free speech, then how is the individual to compete, since she doesn't have nearly the assets and power of the corporation to assert her rights. If we take away the rights of the poet to express herself, but leave the freedom of the corporation to sell whatever culture it wants, the poet will have quite a difficult time, although Velasquez or Voltaire in a similar situation were equal to the task.

To further complicate the picture, the various institutions are currently competing for power to the detriment of the rights of the individuals. In 1948, virtually all of the nations of the United Nations signed the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", encouraging all signers to deal with democratic issues as the western nations would define them. The Declaration represents what those who use culture as a political instrument wished to establish as the culture. This document guaranteed in principle the ideals which the U.N. at that time wished to promote. In 1966, the U.N. attempted to require legal compliance with the principles which the U.N. at that time



wished to promote in the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights".

In the intervening years the General Assembly had found its voice. No longer did the Security Council, representing the western cultures, dominate the discourse. And since that time the western powers insofar as they are controlled by corporate models have become less committed to democracy even to view democracy as "ungovernable". That "ungovernability" arises, at least in the United States, from the large number of different cultures and constituencies, each with a separate agenda, making separate and conflicting demands.

Article 20 of the Covenant says that "propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law" and that "Any advocacy for national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law."

To date the U.S. has not signed, because the Covenant contradicts the U.S. Constitution. The General Assembly, dominated by the majority of nations in the world, probably more than a little perturbed by the colonialism and racism of the west, also has a different view of the rights of citizens than the U.S. These nations wish more control by the state over possible alternative viewpoints and the ability to define their own culture without interference of the western monoculture.

Helms takes a position regarding art production similar to the position liberals in the U.S. opposed to the hegemony of the Security Council support in third world countries. The similarity cannot be dismissed as chance. In an effort to support third world self-determination, liberal thinking has supported a pluralism in the third world what it would not support in U.S. culture.

The language of Helms' amendment, barring Federal funds for art works which "promote, disseminate or produce obscene or indecent materials" and to bar grants for artwork that "denigrates, debases or reviles a person, group or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age or national origin," reads very much like the language of the Covenant. The reason Helms rejects Maplethorpe may also have a lot to do with the fact that the N.E.A. is not particularly supportive of the culture Helms represents.

The culture of the west would have us believe that blasphemy is not a crime, but rather a tool against intransigence. The culture of the majority of the General Assembly, now including the radical right wing of the United States, thinks differently.

But can a view of art and culture which acknowledges the needs of all constituencies to be heard be accepted by the cultural establishment. Not until issues of judgment in poetry are admitted to be of more than one class.

The structure of cultural delivery, the corporation, will continue to pressure for a homogeneous, universalist culture to decrease resistance to the particular progress of market management via cultural control. Each culture must have the right to be heard, but not the right to prevent someone else from being heard. The right of free speech is perhaps secondary to the rights of freedom to hear. And the rights accorded an individual should not be the same as the rights accorded a country, a culture, or a corporation.

We are accorded rights as individuals in America in order to balance the power and assets of corporations and governments. Those rights should not be automatically passed on to the very institutions from whose abuses of power and asset that those rights are designed to protect us.

James Sherry directs the Segue Foundation and is publisher of Roof Press. His books include *Converses* (Awede), *In Case* (Sun & Moon), and *Popular Fiction* (Roof).



AARON SHURIN

Having recently understood I was moving towards narrative in my writing - that moving being *narrativity* that interested me -- to bring forward what I first called the Outside World, then Social Relations, and, finally, Evil, I'd felt compelled (A film documentary about the Lodhz Ghetto in Poland helped break me down to it; an inhabitant had written in a secret journal, "If anyone got out of here alive and had the chance to blow up the whole world, he would do it -- and he would be *right*." The moral assurance of that statement seemed to me as far upside down as one could go, horror, ruined, pain, hell's literalness, totally shit upon and living in shit, the blackest thing I think I ever heard said.) to read Holocaust writing, and found myself on summer vacation picking up a copy of Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*. I saw my timing, and thought to open the book when I returned, thereby not sabotaging my release time on Cape Cod. But one is commanded by books as much as the other way around, and so in bright June open early summer in Provincetown I found myself entering Auschwitz, trying to survive. The tides that rise and run from the small bay leave slick and shiny mudflats in the late afternoon, the dusty light brings things to serene paleness, washed away, withdrawn hushed isolated pilings, and form the sweetest of moments in P'town whose picket-fenced sweetness is sometimes too neat, cloying. The long sand-cliffed Truro beaches of Longnook and Ballston are the archetype of heat-blasted summer delirium and luscious nothingness. Survival in Auschwitz, there, and Survival in Auschwitz on the white chenille bedspread by lamplight, and in the peonie garden on white wrought iron. The book read like a book; I read it like a book, turned pages toward their narrative projections, relished perversity and antagonism as well as heroics (survival) -- that's narrative tension -- and shuddered at my inability to find a deeper, more problematized way in. Is it not writing but *reading* that's in trouble post-Holocaust? What model of reading would properly hold for such an encounter? Would I have to stand thigh-deep in ice water, read by penlight in an airless closet? Or would the writing itself need to change reading, would it need to discomfit, to use dream's technique of fracture and surprise, paranoia's looming enlargements, hunger's hallucinations, pain's throbbing rhythms, identity's multiple (dis)locations, politic's polysemous lies (all of which are possible

functions of referentiality and narrativity, suitably fucked-up) to break the habits of reading formed by studious information-gathering and pleasure? To make these uneasy arrivals alluring enough to encounter -- the way Dante makes you willing to harrow hell -- is a compelling challenge I'm being given, dangerously.

Aaron Shurin: Books in print: *The Graces* (Four Seasons Foundation, 1983), *Elsewhere* (Acts Books, 1988), *A's Dream* (O Books, 1989). Curated in 1989 "Derivations: Robert Duncan and the Poetics of Influence" at Small Press Distribution and will coedit *Acts 11*, *The R.D. Book*. Received a 1989 California Arts Council Literary fellowship.



LAWRENCE R. SMITH

I don't think poetry in the US has had a large "audience" since the 19th century, when every family had a volume of Tennyson on the bookshelf next to the Bible. But I can't consider that the "good old days." Why wasn't that volume *Leaves of Grass*?

\* \* \*

One of the most interesting recent developments in "poetry" is the amount of it which goes out in disguise as fiction. There are a number of fiction-writers, most of whom started out as poets, who are writing works that read like an amalgamation of prose poems. I think of Maxine Hong Kingston, Janet Kauffman, Louise Erdrich, and others. This is a fascinating turn of events. I do not by any means see this as a symptom of the death of poetry; rather it is a sign of vitality, a search for new forms.

\* \* \*

The universities have never done anything to help poetry, notwithstanding the current popular belief to the contrary. Literary critics, especially in the 20th century, are fundamentally hostile toward writers. This may be a kind of penis envy. What they do in their anthologies (for instance, the Norton anthology of 20th century poetry edited by Ellman) -- neutralize all the lively currents and influences of this amazing century and at the same time promote themselves, most outrageously with deconstruction, where the critical text replaces the literary text -- is exactly what they have managed to accomplish by pulling almost all of the poets into the academy and putting them on the payroll. It is hard to decide which is the most pernicious, the academy or the network of writing programs, grant foundations, public and private, contests, etc., which have created the new poetry industry. It has always been understood, from Catullus' time on, that there is no money in poetry in any phase of its production, from writing to publication to selling. This was an accepted fact until someone discovered that a good deal of money could be made by exploiting a host of would-be poets through useless

creative writing programs (not all are, but most), "contests" with substantial entry fees, "reading fees" that subsidize the function of many presses, magazines and organizations like Poets & Writers that offer "professional" advice on how would-be poets may become rich and famous and have their pictures printed in *APR*. It's a large and rather lucrative scam. Having absolutely nothing to do with serious poetry. It is the same kind of Horatio Alger scam perpetuated by Ronald Reagan during the eighties, and just as unethical and bankrupt. I'm aware that there have always been poetasters -- newspaper poets, professor poets publishing decorative poems in academic journals, etc. -- but the poetasters, or more properly, those who profit from their fantasies, have never been so well-organized before. The result is a general deadening effect on contemporary American literature. (We must remember that this is an American phenomenon, like our educational crisis; this lucrative "poetry network" doesn't exist in any other country.) Not until a real "underground" reasserts itself, one which is basically antagonistic to and independent of this network, can we expect a return to the healthy, lively activity which has characterized previous periods of American literary history.

\* \* \*

With all the hand-wringing lately over Jesse Helms, we seem to forget that the NEA, the "lady in distress" in this case, is part of a system that has been quietly promoting censorship all along. Self-censorship, that is. When serious writers and editors hesitate to say, write, or publish certain things for fear of losing grants, or fear of being excluded from consideration for them, we have already lost the battle. I have heard writers wondering aloud who the current "MacArthur spies" are, and worrying about offending Helen Vendler because that might take them out of MacArthur consideration. It is the sacred duty of all serious writers to offend Helen Vendler and everything she stands for at every possible opportunity.

\* \* \*

As far as new trends go, a number of people have been talking about the convergence of Language poetry and surrealism in the pages of *Caliban*. They seem to be talking about putting the ecstasy back into the fascinating slippage and linguistic disorientation that traces its lineage back to Stein. For the last ten or fifteen years, the only real energy on the American scene



has been among the Language poets. In the midst of the awful reactionary "return to traditional forms," they have attempted to continue necessary explorations. But I believe that the Language poets -- or the best and most innovative of them -- are now searching for new directions. Maybe this is related to what the Europeans (after Jurgen Habermas) have called the "return to the modernist project," the desire to re-invent modernism. But the most important thing we can learn from this discussion is the necessity of "projectuality" in our work, whether artistic or political or both. The postmoderns have long considered projects obsolete; we need to get beyond that disastrous mistake.

\* \* \*

The future? I think it's very bright. The edifice of stupidity and mediocrity which has been erected in recent decades is crumbling as fast as those Yuppie condos in San Francisco's Marina district. There are lots of openings for important and significant change, and there seems to be a lot of raw energy out there which has the potential to make it happen. Finally, I would say that the recent censorship controversy has been a blessing. The cynical postmodernist credo that "nothing is controversial; everything the avant-garde has produced has been assimilated into the mainstream culture" can never be persuasively argued again. That is a great liberation for us all. Now we can roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Lawrence R. Smith edits *Caliban* from Ann Arbor and teaches at Eastern Michigan University. His most recent collection of poems is *The Plain Talk of the Dead*.

## ROD SMITH

Music was abstract before we were. Communication has to do with forfeiting. Amazement is a consequence of non-existence, like sequence. This is stated. One decides based on reluctance over there. Systems enjoy memorabilia associated with themselves. No one asks your permission.

I am currently serving a sentence of natural life for a crime of which I have no knowledge.

\*

The women are smarter. A very general observation. The number of contemporary women writers that strike me as consistently interesting is larger than the number of contemporary males. Unfortunately I'm not sure that the fact that their work is more interesting will increase their readership.

I am more & more interested in poetic investigations of other disciplines, forays into the scientific, philosophical, sociological, historical, musical, etc. e.g. Susan Howe, Tina Darragh, Bruce Andrews, & others. A collaborative politics of anti-disgust. The more ways of thinking there are the better. I am hopeful tho not convinced that an artistic multiplicity can contribute to an alternative non-exploitive politics.

As soon as I see a context my instinct is to blur it with others.

*Context*, singular, is that which I am most resistant to. If I saw my work as contributing support to this society as it is currently constituted I would cease immediately. *The best form of government is no government at all.*

Certain aspects of myself, or my experience of myself, are certainly the most irritating things I've encountered associated with my work as a poet. But then one cannot in the end usefully distinguish between self & world. John Cage's statements about the necessity of a work bringing about a change in the artist make a great deal of sense to me. They may or may not hold true.



Music keeps me informed about poetry. This is not a flippant remark.

Universities support &/or employ a number of writers that interest me. I often read books from university presses. As a power structure I am quite put off by academia. However it is so tied to corporate media governmental power structures (& therefore stifling in the same manner) it does not seem useful to me, personally, being one not educated in them, to spend time unhinging them from the larger problem of which they are a symptom. Watten, Chomsky, Cage, are all very good on various aspects of this question.

I hope I don't have to work in ten years.

Through his fondness for spiteful pranks, a white weasel turns into a flying white hot dog with wings of malice. He blows early frosts, shakes snow onto campfires, and plays cruel jokes on the mountain plants. One of his favorite activities is stealing single mittens. How one such mitten theft transforms the monster is the focus of this funny, touching, and memorable story.

\*

The rest of the world is an abstraction constituted of leafs, etc. Our only hope is evolutionary, technology may help &/or hinder us. A bad rockabilly band is a symptom of political change. Because I see words often I wonder what they are. They don't seem to be able to say. If they go on this way . . .

Rod Smith edits *Aerial* out of D.C. He recently began publishing Edge Books, the initial titles are *Asbestos* by Wayne Kline, and *World Prefix* By Harrison Fisher.

DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

TYUONYI NOTES

What we try to do in life is a calling. Carpentry, teaching, mothering, farming, writing, is never an end in itself but is in the service of something out of the world -- God or the Word, a supreme Fiction. This central mystery -- this huge Imagination of one form is both a lyric thing and a great "secresie" on an unbeaten way; the only unbeaten way left.

Susan Howe, in *The Difficulties* Interview

Poetry in the service of this mystery is a "secresie." It goes on separately, in small rooms, sometimes w/a few people, and through the U.S. Mail. The U.S. Mail is the most subversive institution in America.

Because this poetry is **seperate**, it doesn't behave very well in public. In a consumer society it is an embarrassment because it has no **currency**. There have been two or three exceptions to this over the last 200 years.

I have a good deal of anxiety about the social and political place of poetry in the U.S. Over the last few years I've discovered that I can act socially in the other kinds of writing I do (art writing, essays, cultural criticism), but that doesn't remove the anxiety from the poem.

The point of editing *ACTS 10: In Relation* was to assert the necessity of writing **in relation** as we come to the end of a mostly confused decade, in which many of us have been searching for collective values, individually.

The truth is that poetry only happens in community, and language is a system of signs, only and always "articulations of relationship." In our present predicament, this sometimes appears as a terrible truth: "For someone who uses language, imagine then the terror of discovering that he is



only there as an empty place, defined by his relation to every other one who speaks his language. No way out. Except to pretend that the **other** one is the one who is lacking, she who can be found to exist only because he exists" (Susan Thackrey, "An Other Language / Another Language" in *ACTS 10* ).

It's a relational problem, not an absolute one. In recognizing ourselves **in relation**, we begin to recognize the world **in relation**, and recapture the actual speech.

**If the world does not speak to us, we cannot speak with it.  
If we view the literal as a matter of mere fact, as the  
positivist does, it is mute. But once we apprehend the literal  
as language, once things about us reveal depths and heights  
of meaning, we are involved in the sense of creation  
ourselves, and in our human terms, this is Poetry, Making  
the inner fiction of Consciousness.**

Robert Duncan

David Levi Strauss's writings on art & culture appear in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Arts*, *Artscribe* (London), *Arena* (Madrid), *Artes de Mexico* (Mexico City), *Afterimage*, *Propaganda Review*, *Re/Search*, *Cinematograph* and elsewhere. He is the editor of *ACTS* in San Francisco and the father of a 4-month old baby girl, Maya Grace.

ARTHUR SZE

### THE SILK ROAD

I am taking this opportunity to write some notes regarding a collaboration I did with Chinese composer, Tan Dun, which premiered at the Center for Contemporary Arts, Santa Fe, April 1 and 2, 1989. I first met Tan Dun in Beijing in July, 1985. He gave me some tapes of his music, and when I returned to the United States and played them, I was struck, in particular, by a piece that uses a Beijing Opera singer and unusual Chinese instrumentation to create provocative tonal effects.

After Tan Dun came to New York, we talked early in 1986 about creating a piece where I would read the poem and he would perform the musical score. But as I worked on the poem and as we talked further, it became apparent that two performers were insufficient. We decided to take our time and let the project develop at its own pace. By February 1989, two months before the concert, we sat down in New York with the completed poem and musical score to make final adjustments. There were now six performers: Joan La Barbara, New Music soprano; Shi-Zheng Chen, Chinese opera vocalist; myself; Christopher Shultis, leader of the New Mexico Percussion Ensemble; Yao An, *zheng* (zither) player; Tan Dun, who scored for himself *xun* (pottery pipe) and Chinese fiddle.

"The Silk Road" is in six sections, and describes an interior journey where aspects of the imagination coalesce. As such, it makes the barest use of actual places on the historic Silk Road. Three places are named, but they are used symbolically: Turfan, an oasis city and point of critical juncture; Xi'an, the Tang Dynasty capital and image of "City"; Kuqa, a remote village and image of "wildness." The end of the third section presents a breakdown in language and meaning between Chinese and English. This section, then, became important for Joan La Barbara to sing. It was the crucial pivot point in the piece, and we needed the tonality of her singing for this one section. The only other performer in section four was Christopher Shultis, who had to play a demanding score of simultaneous marimba and rototom. At various points he also had to play unusual instrumental combinations, such as a triangle on top of a kettledrum. It was also the only



section to be entirely scored second by second. In performance, Tan Dun got up and conducted, so this section became a concert within a concert. The other five sections were scored out on large sheets of paper so that all five performers could see at each instant what the other were doing or *not* doing. Each of these sections was improvisational in that the synchronicity and dynamics were open-ended. For instance, the opening to the concert began when Shi-Zheng Chen slammed together two Chinese wood sticks, and set in motion a simple rhythm. When it felt appropriate, Yao An slammed her wood sticks together and picked up on Chen's rhythm. When it felt appropriate, Tan Dun slammed his sticks together, but began playing a more delicate rhythm inside the prevailing rhythm. Then Christopher Shultis used a tam-tam with bow and hammer and picked up a rhythm inspired by Tan Dun's. When all of these rhythms were in motion, I stood up, walked up on stage, and began to read.

Arthur Sze is the author of four books of poems, most recently *River River* from Lost Roads. He teaches writing and literature at the Institute of America Indian Arts in Santa Fe.

FRED WAH

*MUSIC AT THE HEART OF THINKING NINETY SIX*

The repetition of the body as a means of carrying imprint. I don't think flowers, for example, could get there any other way.

Looking at the ends first. Or that the digital eight hems. We all prefer a circle route.

If this is the edge of of, that's skating. If those words aren't full of an ankle then nobody'll read them.

Mountains. Absolutely.

One night when the moon was below the horizon the one who had travelled furthest drew a grid on the beach. Supper was over and she used fishbones to detail parts of a bird. These were labelled p, u, and m. The kids sat on a log labelled w. Some of us realized later that the moon had gone under the lake and what rose above the ridge later that night could have been larger and crisper.

Death.

Well, this summer it was limestone again. Acres of it. And that's exciting because you could meander aimlessly. Not quite: I mean a fragment seemingly a trail might reveal itself, or not.

Ten years from now I plan to stoke up the brush pile in the morning. Some words will.



Fred Wah teaches at the University of Calgary. He has published 14 books of poems, most recently *Limestone Lakes Utaniki* (Red Deer College Press, Alberta, 1989).

ANNE WALDMAN

*BOTH, BOTH*

Today I write in the context of 4 white walls. I woke to overcast sky. I stayed up late last night. The night was still. I could think clearly again extracting myself from the child's voice: demand & interruption. & yet I had the notes of his contribution to the long poem which he had sung out in the car outside Telluride. It was a list for the guardianship of plutonium, all the coverings to encase it: "one of every single stone in the world, pennies, quarters, everything" or "playdough - dried, & dead peoples' bones, & then there's plain dead people with nothing on them".

Last night I had nibbled at the psychotropic mushrooms and was lying in the grass in the yard waiting for the near-full moon to rise. I was counting the "fathers" I had known in consideration of the long poem which among other things celebrates them. How many of them were dead now? How many of them had become stars in my sky? In any sky? I invented a list of questions for my father about World War II. What were the names of all the towns in Germany he passed through? Had he met any women in those travels? What had he told me years before O tell me again about the dead arms reaching to heavens near the Maginot line? "Image O" I heard then & now. I experienced the dread of the act of making this poem for so many years & of all the men dead & alive going into it & saw them beckon to me to speak of my relationship to them in a language perhaps only I could understand.

Then I tried to imagine my great great grandfather Thomas Hand, seacaptain, lost at sea between Cape May & Liverpool delivering the South Jersey oak & pine they craved abroad. Who was he? What was the vocabulary of that boat & occupation & what tempest rocked him dead?



I feel myself always an open system (woman) available to any words or sounds I'm informed by. A name. A date. What you said in your letter about the praying mantis: "I brought it right up to my face and opened my mouth and it wasn't afraid" or what words go on between nouns & verbs you choose. What phoneme exists there.

I get up & dance the poem when it sweeps into litany. I gambol with the shaman & the deer. It is a body poetics! I am in the context of those before me who worshipped a goddess whose eyes were mirrors. One eye reflected the "inside", the other the gorgeous & dark phenomenal world. Take your pick. Both, both. She, the goddess, puts an invisible protection cord 'round my neck to protect me from ego.

I exist in a community of my own choosing & making which is attentive to language & poetry before language.

I write in context of mind unfolding back to a void of luminosity, rich in energy. I write to speak of it.

I write against a closed system of abuse & exploitation.

In the dream of "Frederick Hegel" later the same night, Hegel, a father, was 88 years old, with copious red hair & crisp spectacles. He was to perform his latest piece in a bright green meadow & he let it be known that all the women present were invited to fall in love with him.

I honor & dance on the corpse of all the poetry gone before me. I write with the disappearing coral reef in mind, & the toad extinction of the dusky swallow.

Words are to be used with dread, awe, submission as if they were sacred creatures - pulsating, alive. They are deities residing in your throat your heart your gut. Name them to release them.

Anne Waldman is co-director the the Poetics Program at Naropa Institute. Her recent books include, *The Romance Thing*, *Skin Meat Bones*, and *Makeup on Empty Space*.



LEWIS WARSH

I've never had a problem staying interested in what I'm doing as a poet & that's prevented me from becoming overly cynical, cranky & eccentric, though I'm no doubt more of one or all of those three than I think. I don't produce a commodity (though when I publish other people's books of poems or write novels I think I come close, in a marginal way that has more to do with potential value than anything real) & that makes me a lunatic by definition i.e. what I do for many of my waking hours (writing poetry, thinking about poetry, talking about poetry, reading poetry, going to readings) has no value in a world where value is determined by how much something's worth. I hate people who say that poetry is only read by other poets; it's the excuse ex-poets tend to make when they explain why they gave it up. I can't imagine that it could be more interesting (for instance) to be an art critic than a poet, but it's crazy to think that you can't do both, that you can't earn a living doing something that also gives you pleasure, & write poetry as well. To avoid the tackiness of any of these issues, I try to usurp my place in the gray area, where life just "goes on," & seek out an absolute edge of blackness or whiteness where the only solace is the pleasure I get from writing, from evolving as a poet even in the most incremental way, from the sound of a sentence, from a belief in continuity (I was doing it twenty years ago & I'll be doing it ten years from now, but that doesn't mean I haven't changed i.e. in 1975 I weighed 140, I'm 180 now). Maybe habits of loving influence patterns of reading -- as well as all the appetites, so that eventually one might seek out the truth of the world from poems as readily as one might consult the *I Ching* or a marriage counselor. Certainly loving influences forms which in turn influence the events in your life (it took Pound 80 cantos to reach "Amo ergo sum") which then turn back into poetry in a new way, but none of this happens consciously -- we're not machines, after all -- or in a mechanical time frame, it just grows out of itself, it's what being alive is supposed to be like, not this deadening search for order through time. The energy to create order is dull, there's nothing organic about that type of energy, if you want order take a look in the mirror or your lover's eyes.

As far as "the role universities play in terms of my work as a poet," I'm distinguished adjunct lecturer at La Guardia Community College in Long Island City & teach poetry, fiction, literature & composition at Long Island University in downtown Brooklyn, where I hold a chair.

Lewis Warsh's most recent books of poems are *The Corset* (1986) and *Information from the Surface of Venus* (1987) He is the publisher of United Artists Books and a recent recipient of a New York Foundation for the Arts grant in poetry. His novel, *A Free Man*, is forthcoming from Sun & Moon.



HANNAH WEINER

MEANING BUS HALIFAX TO QUEENSBURY

or related questions of your own choice, bus Halifax to Todmorden I am writing in my ordinary consciousness and use a more normal syntax train Hebden Bridge to Halifax with more meaning In my other, clairvoyant consciousness bus Queensbury to Bradford I follow my seen words' instructions and attempt to train Bradford to Leeds *destroy meaning, disrupt syntax* and STOP TH SENTENC bus Queensbury to Bradford The point is to *show the mind* Meaning grounds one in one's ordinary consciousness bus Leeds to Kirkstall Abbey Disjunctive, non-sequential, non-referential writing can alter bus Leeds to Branhope consciousness bus Queensbury to Haworth allowing what is the equivalent of my seen words train Haworth to Keighley to enter ordinary consciousness This other consciousness often knows the future train Keithley to Bradford and knows what is in others' minds It is much more intelligent bus Bradford to Ilkley than the consciousness of the subject "I" and can be more politically effective I see my work bus Queensbury to Bradford in a context of other minds I find most interesting the work of those bus Halifax to Shibden Hall who write as described above, breaking down the authority of syntax and sentence with some exceptions, which is a reversal bus Shibden Hall to Halifax Linguistically inevitable historically this work as a new way to alter consciousness bus Halifax to Queensbury brings with it some (spiritual) power This can be used to change the culture bus Bradford to Queensbury (Poets of other persuasions also have power) There is an old similar argument of mantra versus prayer versus chant versus silence trail Ilkley to Bradford I like poets who are politically engaged This is work that can be understood at all levels of consciousness train Bradford to Scarborough here I like meaning The most disturbing things associated with poetry are that poets are read mostly by each other and that a poet who writes one way often opposes a poet who writes another barge along Rochdale canal Other poets are the useful sources train Scarborough to Huddersfield Universities play a role for me only if I am taught in them or if similar poets are train Huddersfield to Leeds are taught (and teach) in them Yes I believe the

system can be changed from within train Leeds to Bradford because power has the ability to open others to power and a strong mind can transfer itself In ten years I will be seventy years old and will in my life as a poet been bus Bradford to Queensbury a performer, a clairvoyant, a "language" poet and a friend to the traditional Native American movement Worth Valley railway I would wish that we understand each other silently and that we (poets and) form a consensus and a model for a new culture train Halifax to Manchester I would wish that only women could vote.

Hannah Weiner's forthcoming books are: *The Fast* (Prospect Books); *Pictures and Early Words* (Tender Buttons); *Weeks* (Xerxoxial Editions); and *Seen Words With It* (Sun & Moon).



DON WELLMAN

PALPABLE, ABSTRACT, AND DOCUMENTARY WRITING

I think that it is possible to experience language as something other than code or cry. I have always been attracted to writers who explore the roots of language, but I feel that the answers I seek may lie in the use of language, not its origins. Currently, I find the ideas of anthropologist, Roy Wagner (*Symbols that Stand for Themselves*), to be particularly interesting, but the point I want to make is that *thinking about language helps me to experience it as flow*.

And by *flow* I mean something palpable. I may be nostalgic for words that are *things*, but for all its valorization of the concrete -- I think the doctrine of *no ideas but in things* represents the last legs of illusionism. I am not opposed to illusion; I'm simply not interested in pursuing it. This rules out a great deal of contemporary poetry, just as it rules out a great deal of painting or image-making. So I guess the subject of my desire has to possess at least two attributes: *palpable* and *abstract*.

Who are the writers who make the abstract palpable for me? Susan Howe is amazing. Paul Metcalf, Don Byrd. And in different ways Bruce Andrews, Ron Silliman. My search for a palpable presentation of abstract values may also explain my interest in Visual Poetry and in translation as an activity (as opposed to a definitive version or product).

I may have stumbled on a dividing line here. Some of my abstract and palpable writers are narrative, in an elliptical, but also, importantly, in a documentary way. *Documentary* appears another important attribute for me. The abstract, non-narrative works on my list display a consciousness of social or political fact. They document a situation.

I'll risk a fourth term -- *frame*. For me, the interesting problem with palpable, abstract, documentary writing is the use of frames. Writers invent frames or they adapt them by stretching, collapsing, enveloping. The problem is akin to the abstract artist's need for volume (I've just been reading Frank Stella's *Working Space*). Anyway, I like my frames to have a volume that opens toward and includes the reader.

Art, anthropology and palpable, abstract, documentary writing, what have I forgotten? All I have to do is ask, and I know right off what it is. My

own situation in life -- maybe only the weather, but also health, mood, affections, community. These are the essential and complementary context for writing.

In ten years, it'll be *my situation* that remains most engaging to me. I'll still be writing and reading in ways that complement one another and that help me to *frame* my life. In twenty years, I'll retire and cash in my pension fund and move to Tunisia, if it still exists, and cultivate geraniums.

Don Wellman edits O.ARS. The most recent issue is VOICING (Summer, 1989). A chapbook, *The House in the Fields*, is due out from Zelot in Minneapolis.











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Charles Alexander  
Bruce Andrews  
Rae Armantrout  
Tom Beckett  
Dodie Bellamy  
Steve Benson  
Mei-mei Berssenbrugge  
Javant Biarujia  
Julia Blumenreich  
George Bowering  
David Bromige  
Lee Ann Brown  
Don Byrd  
John Byrum  
Norma Cole  
Jack Collom  
Robert Creeley  
Michael Davidson  
Alan Davies  
Jeff Derksen  
Ray Di Palma  
Johanna Drucker  
Rachel DuPlessis  
Larry Eigner  
Elaine Equi  
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Robert Fitterman  
Benjamin Friedlander  
Gene Frumkin  
William Fuller  
Forrest Gander  
Peter Ganick  
David C. D. Gansz  
Jeffery Gburek  
Michael Gizzi  
Peter Gizzi

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Tony Green  
Robert Grenier  
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Gil Ott  
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David Levy Strauss  
Arthur Sze  
Fred Wah  
Anne Waldman  
Lewis Warsh  
Hannah Weiner  
Don Wellman

Cover painting by Sergio Moyano: "Fishermen's Dreams", oil on canvas, 7' x 4', 1990.



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# *PATTERNS / CONTEXTS / TIME*

## *A Symposium on Contemporary Poetry*



*Edited by Phillip Foss & Charles Bernstein*