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Anarchism and Culture

By Jefferson Hansen

The definitions are provisional and highly volatile. They will be revised and reformulated as this essay moves. I am, right now, highly skeptical of the linearity underlying my initial statement:

If "culture" is taken to refer to accepted standards of taste in the arts, where conventional notions of beauty flit across the stage and poets ask questions about the meaning (or meaninglessness) of war and the necessity of seizing the day, then "anarchism" refers to that edge of the so-called "cultural world" where the questions and standards are unsettled. The unruly questions and sulfurous motions and shocking techniques of anarchism are form finding itself rather than replicating itself.

In political anarchism, according to a chief theorist, Peter Kropotkin, consensus is obtained "not by submission to law or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups" (229). This political theory suggests for art the active searching for and development of creativity rather than just accepting previous notions of good taste. Anarchism explores new questions and evolves new standards, thereby exposing "culture"'s assumed standards and opening possibilities for new ones.

This essay locates itself in the shadow of Charles Olson's famous statement, "Projective Verse." Perhaps this is a reinterpretation of that essay in the light of current poetics, poetries, and the varying vectors of so-called everyday life.

Assume that "culture" and "anarchism" are two poles on a continuum. No poetic act of any value is wholly anarchistic or wholly cultural. Every poetic act embodies elements of both "culture" and "anarchism".

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There is no one, underlying continuum. Every poem is produced within a poetic network (or as it is more popularly known, "community" or should we be honest and just call it a "cult"?) with its own calcified "culture" opening onto various anarchistic possibilities.

At the moment of composition a poem is at the nexus of four forces: the writer, the assumed audience, potential publishing venues, and potential performance venues. Each of these forces contains elements of anarchism and culture.

Wholly anarchistic works are not capable of being read (consumed?) in any meaningful way within any existing poetic networks; though it is possible that a future network may be able to provide just such a context, thereby making the work meaningful. Think of what happened to Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson.

Since the audience and publishing and performance venues *precede* the writer, both temporally and logically, I will discuss them first.

The "audience" is the segment of the reading public that purchases, discusses, and consumes the type of poetry being written. (The audience may, in turn, be further subdivided into general readers, critics and other poets, but such subdivisions are beyond the scope of this essay.) This audience has a general preference for certain poetic forms, for certain techniques, for the expression of certain sensibilities, and for certain ways of reading. I leave these preferences ill-defined because they must be. For the poem to be written they must not be strictures, but guideposts; not definitive, but provisional and flexible. The cultural element of the audience is these preferences; the anarchistic element is their lack of definitiveness. On the one hand, a poem that invokes no preferences currently at play among a network is to create poetry unable to be consumed because it is *outside* any audience's practices of reading. On the other hand, if these preferences have become too well-defined among the audience, or, if the writing is too sensitive to some of the audience's demands, then the writing veers sharply toward the "cultural" end of the continuum and, whatever its reception in the chaotic realm of public culture (where a bad, calcified poem may be taken up by a pop star and suddenly turned into a big hit that generates a lot of money), becomes calcified. The anarchist impulse is lost. While the artistic value of the work diminishes, its possibilities for use as an emblem of "culture" are

sometimes heightened. Accepted art is not art; it is the reiteration of the expected.

All networks have a cultural pole. Certain "avant-garde" networks may dispute this claim, but a close look at the exclusions and inclusions in such networks' journals, anthologies, and reading series reveals accepted preferences. However, because of the small size, lack of institutionalization, and love of novelty characteristic of such networks, they tend to be more volatile and anarchistic than more traditional networks. (Sometimes, however, an "avant-garde" network's strictures become incredibly demanding, perhaps as a result of feeling embattled after a disappointingly indifferent or hostile response by other networks. They feel the need to keep the ranks pure.)

Any act of writing, if it has value, will be met with disdain by a portion of the audience because it is either too "cultural" or too "anarchistic". (Dear poet, if no one hates your poem, give up.)

If the dissenting voices are few, yet strident and clear, it may be a sign that the work is safely cultural (i.e., BORING).

Performance and publishing venues are similar to the audience in that they exhibit certain preferences, but differ in that only a few people, namely editors or curators of reading series, decide on these preferences. The exact "taste" of these editors and curators can be more easily established than that of an audience. In my experience, the challenge for these workers is to remain anarchistic enough to avoid calcified editorial and curatorial work.

The audience and the potential public venues for the poem being written usually act upon the writing moment as mulch, as subconscious assumptions about poetry and its possibilities that the poet has developed through his or her participation in a network of publishing, performing, writing, and reading. The study of and general exposure to the poetic assumptions and characteristic techniques of this network has a cumulative effect on the poet, who now puts them into play as the poem is written. *The good poet has learned the assumptions and techniques so thoroughly that they "naturally" flow from the fingertips onto the computer screen.* The poet may agonize over words and combinations, but in general these words and combinations are a logical possibility opened by the network. The more this poem can locate

and use previously unexplored possibilities of this network (i.e. push the network towards anarchism) the more original the poem seems. Such a poem slightly and subtly deforms (anarchism) a way of forming poetry established within a network (culture).

This should not in any way be taken to claim that poets prostitute themselves to publishing opportunities. Poems usually fall from the poet's fingertips with little or no consideration of publication. But poems that the writer has absorbed inform the writing, and after writing the poem the poet decides on which journal in his or her network may be most likely to accept the finished product.

The writer is the final, and most unpredictable, force that impinges on the writing of a poem. While the general outlines of audience and, to a lesser degree, publishing can be discerned, the writer's very individuality makes this force impossible to precisely pinpoint. Every writer has a unique relationship to the general poetic tradition and to the specific emphases of his or her particular network. There is no such thing as a writer "mastering" the poetic tradition in the same way as a literary critic. Influence is nebulous and unequal, flowing as much from minor writers as from major. Indeed, a writer may be as influenced by extra-poetic material—pop culture, politics, domestic relations—as by strictly poetic sources. Granted, these materials will be refracted and reflected by the writer's favorite poetic techniques (provided by one or more networks) but the source is outside poetry proper. The writer is a wild card.

A writer must balance the demands of culture and the demands of anarchism. A poor grounding in a network dooms a poet. (The criteria for good grounding, like everything having anything to do with the peculiarities of an individual poet, is nebulous. Some writers may gain an intuitive feel for the basics of a network after reading only a small selection of poets and poems. Others may need years of study. The key, it seems to me, is the proven ability to apply and transform the network's techniques and assumptions in a manner that works.) Similarly, a stifling grounding dooms a poet creatively, though it may prove helpful for short term career moves. There is no program that, if implemented, would give the precise measurements of culture and anarchism necessary to create good poets. The form must find itself.

Sometimes poets feel themselves coming upon assumptions and tech-

niques expressly forbidden by a network. They may respond by pushing ahead and ignoring the strictures, thereby alienating some of the audience and perhaps dooming the poem's publication or performance prospects. (In which case, the poem may be a private one, which does not concern me here since private poems do not circulate within a network and need to be understood somewhat like private letters.) Or this poet may bow to the network's strictures by altering or abandoning the poem. I recently heard of a poet working within a network highly skeptical of traditional narrative techniques. When he found these techniques creeping into his poetry, he quit writing. In this case, the culture of his network overwhelmed the anarchistic impulse. Perhaps if he had allowed himself to move into narrative he would have come upon possibilities *between* his former network and traditional notions of narrative still operative in other networks. Or he may have written himself into obscurity, been in at the founding of a new network, or switched into the more "traditional" network. But at least he would be writing and exploring rather than letting the audience and publishing vectors overwhelm his writing.

This example shows that even "avant-garde" artists can be overwhelmed by culture. The sole difference between "avant-garde" culture and more traditional or mainstream culture is that the techniques informing and assumptions underlying the mainstream are generally taken more seriously by the mass media and the university system. Nothing is out in front any more.

There is no longer an edge to cut.

There is no such thing as the arts community. Art is factions.

It is impossible for a poet to follow a personal vision. Poetry is irreducibly social, like language itself. There is no such thing as poetry of value operating outside a network of audience, writers, and publication venues. Therefore, a poet can never write with no reference to an audience. *The notion of audience often operates at a subconscious level.* If wanting to believe to write only according to the dictates of individual vision, a poet may repress this audience and pretend it has no bearing on the act of writing. But it does. Reading precedes writing. The act of reading introduces a poet to the assumptions and techniques of a network. From where else can a poem be written? The poet's inner being? What does the poet's inner being have to do with

French, English, or Swahili poetic traditions?

Presently in the U.S., poetry happens within a number of highly specific networks. Various networks, therefore, compete for attention and funding. This seems obvious: If four poets deeply committed to confessionalism manage to get seated on a committee deciding on a major award, you can be reasonably sure that a confessional poet of some sort will win.

The more visible networks are those whose cultural pole is found congenial by the mass media.

For most people in the general public, poetry, if they pay any attention to it at all, is a single network, not a number of competing ones. It is therefore to *every* poet's advantage, regardless of network, if another manages to interest anyone in any poetry whatsoever. The more people browsing the poetry shelves of libraries and book stores, the better. It may rankle some poets in less visible networks that their work is less likely to be available to this poetry browser, but it may at a later date if the right moves are made.

Poetry's best chance for attracting more readers is to offer a diversified product. (When considering distribution, poetry is most effectively thought of as a product, not a vision. Sorry.)

While the frustration expressed by poets in less publicized networks is understandable, I feel that the wholesale dismissal of networks by other poets is counterproductive to poetry as a whole. Such dismissal tends to harden and cement the cultural ends of all networks involved, both those being attacked and those doing the attacking, by forcing poets to proclaim or defend fundamental allegiances. While such explicitness is valuable because it opens poetic assumptions and techniques to scrutiny, it ultimately hurts because poetry, as such, is not an explanation of itself nor a justification of itself. And if a poet spends a lot of effort defining, in explanatory prose, a poetic, then deviations from that poetic will be problematic. The gap between the poet's "theory" and "practice" will unsettle and even turn off some readers and perhaps confuse the poet. Unless a poet has the courage to change in mid-stream and alienate readers, it is likely that he or she will become more and more programmatic as time passes. In the end, the poems may become a monument to their cultural base.

form finding itself within the cultural materials at hand rather than obeying outside dictates. (In a future essay, I will consider the various sources of the creative impulse. Here, I am concerned with the social forces that give it form.)

What distinguishes this essay from Olson's "Projective Verse" is my insistence that form, as it interpenetrates with content, always occurs within a poetic field littered with various forms, techniques, and assumptions. Olson implies that poetry can burst beyond this poetic field into a form entirely specific to the moment of composition. For Olson, poetic history, ideally, does not mediate between the poet and the poem. For me, poetic history always mediates. Poetry cannot simply present perception; it must *poetically* present perception. The important distinction for me is not between closed form, which is mediated by history, and open form, which is not; but between excitement and calcification, between rigidity and the thrill of creation.

The Olson I feel closest to is the one who writes, "Limits are what any of us are inside of."

Poetic tools such as rhyme, meter, dialect, collage, obfuscation, and non-transparency, to take examples of both traditional and non-traditional techniques, are not in themselves ideological. Only their implementation is ideological. How a poet chooses to use rhyme is the question, not the nature of rhyme. Rhyme has no more of a nature than does a wrench.

But doesn't rhyme have a history that overloads it with meaning in a way that a wrench does not? Or is the history of a device itself a tool, to be used in an infinite number of ideological directions? I am only certain that this history cannot be discarded.

A poetry network often becomes creatively moribund when it begins to establish publishing and conferencing institutions, retrospective anthologies, and awards. Yet, I applaud such institutions, anthologies and awards. Rather than letting the techniques and assumptions used by a network disappear along with its most creative moment, they put forth and codify its ways of doing poetry, ways now more available to the rest of us because of this codification (as distinguished from cultural calcification.) People most upset by such institutionalization are poets in the network left out of anthologies and other

official representations, and poets in other networks who feel their established territory is being invaded.

Almost every network has at least one window of opportunity through which to establish itself as a cultural product dispersed into the wider reading public. Such opportunities usually occur after the most interesting work has been written. Such codification necessarily reduces the complexity and diversity of the network's production. Of *course* life is not fair!

I write in order to be surprised at what I find language can do, to untangle an emotional knot, to find out what others may perceive and feel, to learn, perhaps about consciousness in general. Procedural limits on this searching only weaken it.

I write in order to be surprised.

Conference Reports

Assembling: A Review

By
Loss Pequeño Glazier

Assembling Alternatives, an international poetry conference/festival held at the University of New Hampshire, Durham, 29 August-2 September, 1996.

The New England Center sits like a nest on a boulder-splattered wooded hillside on the edge of the University of New Hampshire campus. **Assemble:** "to bring or come together"; **Alternative:** from *alter* "one or other of two," etc. (noting also assembler: "a computer program that translates")—well, here it was: "Assembling Alternatives" sang like a bird's egg, snug in the downy center of its forest loft. And what could be more to the point? Robbin' these words from all points of the compass... Like the Vancouver conference of last summer, this conference enjoyed not only splendid weather (made even more delicious by the impending—though never arriving—sledge hammer of Hurricane Edouard aka Hugo Ball rolling up the coast) but a similar (though not author-based) focus and an exhilarating sense of multi-Englished poetries (avec un peu de Québécoise) as in, "note that U.S. poetries are not the only poetries in English". For a brief few days, New England became New Englishes, words steady under clear blue skies.

Unlike larger conferences (and the word "conference" shouldn't even be used here) where words tend to sediment into a drone, Assembling Alternatives offered a gourmet feast of language leaping electrified across continents, seas, and islands. The talks were terrific, the readings offered one after another exemplar of how experimental writing (also sometimes called "linguistically-innovative" writing—among other terms) might propose itself—and how also it might NOT be limited. Despite the wide range of pronunciations,

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dialects, sets of vernacular, tropes, themes, perspectives, and forms, Assembling Alternatives allowed a multi-voiced rendering of innovative language—languages that never once sat still nor relented on their challenge to the gourmet-fed, sleep-deprived, conversation-charged, tone-ecstatic, grammar-declining "assemblers".

As I mentioned in the talk I gave; a taxonomy [French *taxonomie*: Greek *taxis*, not like New York taxis; see TAXIS + *-nomie*, method (from Greek *-nomia*, to meter)] of linguistic predecessors to electronic poetries might go something like this:

Following World War II, the examination of system in Olson, Duncan and Blaser's serial works, Creeley's numeric determinations, Bernstein, Silliman, Grenier, Howe's radical typographies, the explorations of language by Maggie O'Sullivan, Karen MacCormack, Joan Retallack, and Hannah Weiner—in fact the almost all the names listed on this program figure in this "tradition"—and the alleatories of Mac Low and Cage point in different ways to various forms of nonlinearity.

In effect, present in New Hampshire was a regiment of innovators that pointed in all these ways (as Gertrude Stein puts it: "a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing.") There could hardly be a better assembly in this day and age to put forward what I wanted to say. It is hard to mention any specific participants without doing disservice to the fact that the quality and strengths of nearly all of those present, were almost uniformly strong. However, evening readings through the penultimate night alone offered the likes of Maggie O'Sullivan, Kathleen Fraser, Ken Edwards, Joan Retallack, Tom Raworth, Pierre Joris, Leslie Scalapino, Allen Fisher, Catherine Walsh, Steve McCaffery, Robert Sheppard, Karen MacCormack, Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Denise Riley, Abigail Child, Barrett Watten, and Nicole Brossard, among other great readers.

place a small pale-cream bowl (to signify abundance)
on the table-top in front of you. (O'Sullivan)

What, beside this extraordinary talent, made the conference so useful? One fact was the significant presence of women poets. (Out of 39 evening slots, for example, 16 were occupied by women—not yet representative but a sight better than most events.) Further, typically marginalized areas of working were brought straight onto the stage.

One of these was performance poetry. The wide participation by performance poets was inspiring—and the final night's reading turned out to be a state of the art fête, gala, grand ... FESTIVAL (after all, this word was right on the conference program!) on how experimental poets might perform the word. In one evening, in a sticky Portsmouth theatre briefly stolen from the Rocky Horror Picture Show, performance/artists/poets such as David Bromige, Fiona Templeton, cris cheek, Paul Dutton, Caroline Bergvall, Hazel Smith, Christian Bök, and Seán ÓhUigín each took to the brightly-colored, multi-leveled stage. David Bromige's physical explorations of the many theatre stage levels fit well his wry, intelligent probing of language. Sound poets Dutton and Bök performed at the apex of sound poetry's possibilities. Dutton's presence was that of a maestro: his vocalizations, physical manipulations of voice, and multiple word plays grounded a specific and necessary dimension of the evening's activities. Bök's energetic involvement with a range of performance and vocal sound works was stunning, full of youthful vitality, and charged and compelling. In his performance on a single mid-level portion of the stage, cris cheek spread his "instruments" on a long table: various texts (including a collaborative text composed as a side project of the Poetics list) and a tape player with remote. The way he moved, his immersion into the physical possibilities of the instruments at hand were a part of the text. His "reading" of the materials at hand provided a multi-voiced tour de force. Bergvall may have stolen the show—"This excitement this sudden rash this unexpected full view. As we slowly turn: from sleep to motion as we come to pass: from semi-visible to nonchalantly here."—with her understated style, her poignant delivery, her arched body which seemed to act as a catapult hurling her taut, multileveled sensual incantations sizzling into the top rows of the Seacoast Repertory Theatre.

Another marginalized area brought into the spotlight was witnessed by the inclusion of electronic media in the event. For once, not stuck away in a time slot in a dark corner but as a prominent event, a plenary session no less! (Note even the mention of the computer in the program epigraph.) Though this conference was not *about* electronic poetics let me congratulate Romana Huk for recognizing, by including such a panel in the discussion of issues about innovative writing, that the formal issues about writing at the heart of experimental poetics ARE THE SAME ISSUES being explored by the literary electronic media. This is the first time I know that in a literary conference this kinship of language concerns has been ad-

dressed. This plenary session on electronic media included John Cayley, Jim Rosenberg, Chris Funkhouser, and me. An interesting range of technical approaches was evidenced. Cayley discussed his kinetic writings, words that fade, move, animated and motile, while Rosenberg's texts are archaeological sites: layered, intricately woven and superimposed verbal and calligraphic conglomerations ("fields and planes of word clusters associated in a non-linear spatial prosody" – Cayley on Rosenberg) for which the computer provides not only a reading path but an apparatus for excavation. Funkhouser, demonstrating the CD-ROM issue of *The Little Magazine*, showed the range of ways technology and writing can converge, or overlap—or how intermedial composition *is* writing (see for example Lee Ann Brown's contribution to the CD-ROM). My paper was an effort at providing documentation that the issues involved in electronic poetics fall in a straight trajectory from specific investigations of experimental writing in this century. The question period for this morning plenary session was extremely animated. The main question: are the electronic media torturing the word by their hidden codes? Or are they providing tools to be used in an exploration of the possibilities of language? How can we trust tools of writing that we don't understand? (As an aside: I never understood how all those levers inside my first Olivetti worked, but I carried on anyway.) Though this matter wasn't brought to a final rest, the list of poets in the afternoon readings that day included some asterisked (my spell checker just suggested "ostriches" or "austerities" here) names, that is, "poets working in electronic media". I felt that the electronic readings contributed much, for those who attended, to the conversation about questions of technology.

The book exhibit for "Assembling" is itself something that lingers in the imagination. Try cris cheek's *Skin to Skin* CD (samples of which, for sound card carrying Web users, are available in the EPC author library, <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors>). On auditory artistry, hear also Paul Dutton's *Full Throatle* (Underwhich). Of books relevant to such an assembly there are many. Anthologies you say—beyond the *New British Poetry* (Allnutt, et al., Paladin)? How about *Floating Capital* (Clarke & Sheppard, eds., Potes & Poets), *Conductors of Chaos* (Sinclair, Picador), *Future Exiles* (Fisher, Griffiths, Catling are the poets, Paladin) and the new and very exciting *Out of Everywhere* (O'Sullivan, ed., Reality Street aka RSE). Individual volumes? Bursts of incredible energy can be found in *Mop Mop Georgette* (Denise Riley, RSE), *The Flashlight Sonata* (Robert Sheppard, Stride), *In the House of the Shaman* (Maggie O'Sullivan, RSE), Catharine Walsh's

Pitch (Pig) and *Short Stories* (North & South), Ferguson's *The Relative Minor* (Tsunami), and Allen Fisher's *Stepping Out* (Pig), *Breadboard* (Spanner) or *Dispossession and Cure* (RSE). Ongoing projects which are well worth following include cheek's compact and vibrant journal, *Language Alive* and Fisher's *Spanner* (see the EPC for address information). As final note on the setting chez eux of some of the British poets present (Bernstein: "Types of class antagonisms and gender prerogatives are played out in the alternative poetry scenes in the U.K. in ways that are more marked, and dispiriting, than in the U.S.") you might want to also have a look at the interviews in *Prospect Into Breath* (North & South), the essays in *New British Poetries: the Scope of the Possible* (essays by Mottram, Middleton, Sheppard, et al, Manchester UP), or the article "Leaking Truth" (quoting Barry MacSweeney's "I leak truth like a wound") by Charles Bernstein (*Sulfur* 35) for the low down on recent events, current trends, and a heap of good reads.

What was really assembled here was a range of possibilities. It is even more helpful I think to view this gathering as a *beginning* of a view of such possibilities (an ear to the multiplicity of sounds and an eye to delight). To this modest but crucially important end, the conference was a huge success. This is, of course, a poet's perspective. Events such as this can always, in hindsight, be found to have shortcomings. But as a venue for *listening* to such poets reading and talking, the conference was an intense aural glee over too soon. And now? Many more books (and writing in other forms) to read. Edouard? Extratropical to the south of Nova Scotia, so says the Florida State University Meteorology Department. Thankfully, I can still envision New Hampshire pines and can now more vividly sense "other" intonations as I read. And there is that port city in Ireland that I heard so much about. I will not rest until I see it with my own eyes.

Journey To Hoboken

By
Henry Gould

Hoboken, New Jersey is what is known in biology as a *salience*, a kind of protuberance or growth with characteristics of an entity; an appendage of Manhattan, crossing state lines. Layers of sedimentation (technical college, gentrified commuter haven, industrial ghetto echoing back through the decades) produce an impacted image of America—especially for certain Russian poets, planed over here briefly from their own continent, at the end of May 1996, to attend a conference. A kind of empyrical model, though not as dazzling as that Potemkin village panorama one beholds from the campus ridge, there, across the Hudson.

* * *

Temporary bivouac in Penn Station. Heavy book-filled bags. The directions say: "Take the PATH train to Hoboken." Shouldn't it read, "train PATH"? Has a conspiracy of Russian syntax invaded New York?

* * *

Huffing with my bags up college hill to Stevens Institute of Technology. Suddenly hailed from behind by a Russian accent, a piercing timbre. It's Irina, the blonde and *druzeskii* journalist from Astrakhan, on the Caspian Sea—recent transplant to Hoboken. She wants to know where is Peirce Hall (pronounced, in English, like "purse"—Charles S. Peirce, inventor of semiotics, one and only black-sheep American philosopher, taught here briefly before his academic casting-out. . .). Irina wrote a dissertation in Astrakhan, on Anna Akhmatova. Her mother and father are philologists. We xerox the conference schedule—she serves me tea and grapes, a Crimean meal. This confab is off to a good start. . .

* * *

What's it all about? Well, frankly, it's a conspiracy, hatched by a cabal made up of Ed Foster, poet, editor of *Talisman*, publisher of

Henry Gould edits Nedge. Work surfaced/emerges in alea, apex of the M, Happy Genius, LVNG, Negations, Poetry NY, Poetic Briefs.

Talisman House books, and Vadim Mesyats, Russian poet and musician currently on the humanities faculty with Foster at Stevens. This second *Festival of Russian and American Poetry and Poets* is just one cog in an ongoing multivalent cultural hob-nob cooked up by these two, and their friends there in Hoboken, which includes readings, lectures, films, and a number of translation activities, including bilingual anthologies of Russian and American poets, and a series of contemporary Russian poetry in English translation (the first volume, by Ivan Zhdanov, is at the presses).

The schedule of events reads like a roster of the American poetry loft (I lean left. I mean lift), with some Russian, Chinese, and Turkish poets thrown in for good measure. Three full days of three-ring readings, scholarly paper-deliveries, films (on Brodsky, Akhmatova, and a number of less well-known-in-America Russians), two massive evening poetry songfests, a staged reading of a parlor-piece masque by Robert Duncan (complete with stylish Akhmatovian feathered headpieces), roundtables on translation, the state of Russian and American poetry, little magazines, Chernobyl and Gertrude Stein (in the same roundtable). . . and more, and more. Here's the catalogue of ships: the Americans include John Yau, David Shapiro, Leslie Scalapino, Eileen Myles, Bruce Andrews, Jackson Mac Low, Juliana Spahr, Barret Watten, Ron Silliman, Kristin Prevallet, Leonard Schwartz, David Rosenberg, and many others I should name; the Russians include some of the most interesting and important contemporary poets, including Lev Rubinshtein, Elena Shvarts, Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Ilya Kutik, Maria Maksimova, Vadim Mesyats, and Ivan Zhdanov. It's an intense gathering—and it costs, yes, *thirty-five dollars*. It's a conspiracy! Imagine all those people in one place for three days, talking, reciting, discussing, laughing, vodkayaking, vodkayaking etc. . .

Now I'll tell you what it all means.

* * *

At the "tail end of the 17th century", the "vast Russian Empire"—"ancient, Orthodox", "xenophobic, hidebound"—had but one seaport: the "little town of Archangel", on the Arctic Ocean. Then "Peter the Great" built "St. Petersburg", modeled by himself and "his French architect" on "Amsterdam and Venice".

Meanwhile, "America" was "colonized"; Salem had its "witch trials", and "Anne Bradstreet". The "first American sea-going vessel" was built in "Portland, Maine"—while Peter ("deeply, steadfastly in

love with ships and the sea") was doing the same (while torturing and executing the "mutinous Streltsy"—an "endless" bloodbath).

* * *

Saturday night. The endless reading in the dingy chemistry hall, seats slanting up like some very provincial Coliseum over the blackboards. While the Americans read, the Russians go out into the spring night to smoke (not wanting to offend). They are our guests—we translate their readings (as best we can); it doesn't work the other way, unless some upstart (like Eileen Myles) jumps out of her poems to address them directly. But then, it doesn't *have* to work the other way! The Russians, unlike us, understand us already! (They speak English.)

Along the Coliseum aisles, Leslie Scalapino encounters Elena Shvarts. Two shy poets, circling each other hesitantly, wary as a pair of songbirds in the jungle of tongues.

* * *

Ivan Zhdanov. Tom Epstein, one of the few Americans here who actually knows something about Russian poetry, calls him "one of their best, a force of nature." He looks like a thoughtful lumberjack, sparse jet black hair slicked down, glasses, rangy strength. In fact, his translator, John High, looks like a lumberjack too. Maybe they met in Alaska.

Zhdanov, like the other Russians, doesn't read. He *recites*. Recites from memory. They know their poems by heart. The Russian language has some similarities to English—it *beats*, iambic, trochaic, unlike French—but the differences are also great. English smoothness accents the rough chewing of consonants, like a chard clarinet; whereas Russian is more like a caged animal, a bear, trying to tame itself. Everything would be full-throated—if the vodka-inflamed, heart-swelled throat would only permit such a thing. . . if only a bear could sing. (But you know this is stereotype. Russian is actually a lot like Latin or Hindu—an oratorical, ceremonious organ-voice, given to verbal and nonverbal *festa, hilaritas*.)

* * *

Jackson Mac Low and Bruce Andrews. Like father and son, a pair of riders. "Language Poetry." Finally, I'm starting to understand something, because I'm hearing it, out loud. These are the angels, pouring out their vials of wrath and glee and remorse at the apoca-

lypse of syntax. Glee and wrath and remorse are all that remain when the bridges to Disney World are burned, and the enlightened conscience. . . *flips*: the craziness of pure American products. But under the tongue the individuality of the verbum replaces the commodious self, and syllables wrap around alpha and omega of each blip with a kind of loving farewell.

* * *

It's Sunday morning, lovely. I decide to take a walk, clear my head of the vodka and mistakes of the previous 3 am. Down through the seemly garden-walks below campus, Hoboken. Across the street, a shy small Russian, head down, glancing furtively from one eye, bangs over her forehead, eating her constant cigarette (the Russian's best friend). She's taking a walk, too. It is Elena Shvarts.

We walk together. Finally I get a chance to talk to her (today is the last day). She understands, speaks English.

Yesterday, during a roundtable discussion focusing on her work (she is the most prominent contemporary poet in Russia), Shvarts launches into a long provocative harangue (in Russian—translated), the gist of which is, that the poetry of the West, and especially the United States, lacks the essential rhythmic quality of poetry—Dionysian fire, she calls it. The Americans (including Leslie Scalapino, who's borrowed my book of her translated poems) stir uncomfortably, shake their heads. She reads some more poems. The moderator of this particular roundtable never appeared. Tom Epstein does his best (and it is very good) to fill in, giving us a brief, incisive overview of Shvarts's labors. The roundtable breaks up—time to move on. . .

She says to me (roughly translated): Americans use the poem to find out what they're going to say, and they take a long time getting to it. The Russians wait until the whole poem is there, and then they commit it to memory.

It is the difference between comedy and tragedy; opportunity and fate.

* * *

Eileen Myles is the most Russian American poet here. Also the most American. She speaks from herself. In spite of her politics. Or, that is, you can't see where they divide her up. It's all one.

What's it all about? Personism (Pessoa)? Personalism (O'Hara)? Peronism (no. . .)? Eileen Myles is the only American to shout up from the podium—hey, you Russians, where you going? (or

something to that effect) *as you leave the room*. . .

* * *

Let's try to be incisive too, as you leave the room. Here are two big empire-countries, once the rivals of the earth, now like two paired lungs or windbags (Clinton & Yeltsin) breathing heavily out of sync almost. On either side of. . . the "old" West. The very old West, almost as old as the East.

At a certain salience sometimes, upside Manhattan, antennae try to touch.

* * *

Craft and personality (passion) have always been rivals, variables. Now toss in another variable—*history*. Enlightened America protects the Individual proper (properly tied), to the "detriment" of State and Religion. Russia experiences the reverse. In America, the Individual, so glorified, becomes commodified; in Russia, the Individual, so abased, becomes a cog. The old East/West yeast. . .

Modernism, experiment, avant-garde. . . these in the West mean subsuming the Individual to Craft, for the sake of utopia. Postmodernism, in the West, is only blurredly differentiated from the above, a reaction.

Modernism, avant-garde, etc., in Russia mean the same thing: subsuming the Individual. Now refer back to paragraph #1 (*history*). So postmodernism means. . . something very different, in Russia. It strongly opposes modernism and the avant-garde *from beforehand*. It means the tradition of the human, the primordial, the transcendent—a utopia beyond "utopia"—and beyond the reach of power, force, and will. Only miracle and grace achieve utopia. This is the Russian perspective.

Everything is reducible to Futurism vs. Acmeism. Miracle and grace have aesthetic implications.

* * *

Still—who or what is this mysterious Person, this Personality, this Personalism? Are we to fall back into the blasted ego-poetries of the seventies, into the nightmare of pale baby Shakespeares, the filigree of greed and self-promotion? (Have we even awakened yet?)

Once, in the nineteenth century, there was a Russian thinker named Chaadev, a bold explorer, akin perhaps to Emerson. He journeyed into the West, but then returned, called back to his homeland

by a sense of duty; bringing with him, like an unwelcome prophet, a Western lesson—the gospel of moral freedom.

What is this moral freedom? A word, a phrase-capsule, for a concept of the basic dignity of the human spirit—resting on the human being's capacity to dedicate herself or himself—out of love and piety (in its full uncanniness) and daring—to something better, something beyond self, some One, some Other, some others. The vanishing point where "moral" and "freedom" fuse.

Part of the artistic and identity crisis of the West has been the fracture of the Person: the demand, the pull from both Right and Left on behalf of either autarkic or subliminal—either nostalgic or futuristic—concepts of justice and the good. Like mirror images, Right and Left command our allegiance with the full force of both rhetoric and experience.

Yet perhaps—perhaps by some strange grace, it is Russia—that great animal, that evil empire, beyond the pale of enlightened democracies and the full birthright of humanism—impoverished Russia, suffering Russia, Potemkin Russia—that *will return the gift of Chaadev's moral freedom to the West*. Mandelstam wrote that in such times as these (speaking of his pyramidal, "Assyrian age"), Man must become the hardest thing in existence, harder than diamond. The free, loving gift-of-self is the essence of art and the limit of artistry: but it is another step to recognize it everywhere as an ontological fundament of reality. Mandelstam again (trans. Robert Tracy):

*It's not Rome the city that lives through the centuries
But man's place in the universal scheme.*

This is the voice one hears in the strange, ceremonious finality of Russian recitation; it is an echo, the curve of a shell, the arch of a wave, a ghost dance, washing up in Hoboken.

Readings and Reviews

Singing Contradiction

OUTSIDE BY TODD BARON, AVENUE B, 1995

Reviewed by Noah de Lissovoy

Outside, by Todd Baron, is a complex work that depends on a series of inner contradictions to propel it forward as poetry. These contradictions surface in a formal diversity that points in turn to a tension in the *attitude* of the work, and to a purpose that heads in two directions at once—not by accident, but deliberately. This tension constitutes the value of *Outside* as a book of risk, that is prepared to acknowledge the extent of the conflict that characterizes the literary moment, and even to hear its music.

Formally, this book aims for a continual unsettling that must upset any assumption of consistency. It clings at all times to the most unpredictable unfolding. The work moves from couplets to three-line stanzas to rough paragraphs to verse units of variable numbers of lines. Any easy continuity is broken at each level of analysis. Syntax is perplexed into discontinuous phrases that crumble into isolated words only to reformulate themselves into new gestures that refuse to complete. The exigencies of sound bend reference into some unanticipated shapes, and then back off, without allowing the music a consistent patterning. An uneasy intention proposes sentiment, but won't say how exactly, the reader is supposed to get there:

undisclosed or resignation fixed
frail & ephemeral focus

the music before it gives
fathers fragility

feathers initial disclosure

One has the sense at times that the book might be governed by some chance procedures, except that it cannot allow itself even this hidden consistency: it brooks no system. (The result is a chance-procedure

Noah de Lissovoy's poetry has appeared in Mirage, Fourteen Hills, and Primary Writing. Work is forthcoming in the anthology Tense Present.

flavor—a happy oxymoron that is emblematic of the contradictions that this work is aiming for.)

This insistence on interference, in addition to operating separately at each level of the writing, also operates between levels. Thus the phonetic disrupts the referential—an easy one—but also vice versa: the thought in referring violates incipient sound schemes. However, it is pulling things apart to look at the writing that way; it is better to observe the collision of all the elements of the work on their varying trajectories, as they come to form some very unusual kinds of statement and meaning:

that plain double-
jointed so backwards
film of hot water
some/how in a loss of
name naming the names
on a tape of dry season, "I've
entered the cast off engraving as solitary singer"

Here, a lot of individual machines (alliterative machine, lyric machine, machine of the measure, etc.) operating with and against each other create a total statement that cannot be reduced to a single analysis. The statement is more than the sum of its parts.

The formal variety of the writing in *Outside* corresponds to its attitude as well, which is ambivalent—and honestly so. It makes a virtue of detachment, of confusion. What is disguised in this stance is a strong antipathy to the programmatic. This is an anti-programmatic book. In its very abundance, heterogeneity, and self-contradictions, this book means to fly in the face of the authority of any single poetic. Almost as if stopping would be to fall prey to some oppressive singular position, the lines, even, are irritable with any moment of termination:

... "now I'm just
a site-specific mirror,

everything I've said has
just been said & I still

won't shut up."...

In this regard *Outside* is accurate also to a particular literary-historical moment. With the attack beginning in the seventies on many of the

lyrical economies inherent in the writing of the New Americans, the ground of U.S. poetry began to shift dramatically. However, the new avant-garde did not so much succeed in defeating the old as in casting the whole territory of poetry into a kind of doubt. Writers beginning to work in the middle of the eighties and into the nineties have thus been left with a somewhat foggy landscape in which there is little consensus as to what constitutes the starting-point for poetry, even within the avant-garde. Baron's work makes its way through this realm, and accurately reports on the strange and contradictory concatenation of poetics that exists there. The writing even uses that doubt itself as a positive principle.

There are times when the resistance of this writing to being pigeon-holed becomes problematic:

A song in which I turn & stare
the noise of the street immobile

That means I picture the night out towards land
everything the way it seems

What matters is moment as moments are long
coming up off the bed reflects the nature of light

A certain music plays the single sound of more than one bird
inside the cover of leaves branches

Night, land, light, music, leaves, branches. One has the feeling that the poetry is attaching itself to such images as convenient *signs* of the lyric. There is a reluctance here to undertake an investigation of a more concrete outside. (This is, of course, not a fault of this book alone; one could trace the same tendency from Baron back through Palmer and Duncan to Pound.) The writing has a penchant for settling on images as final inaccessible monads, avoiding an interrogation of them that would reveal a more determined content. This tendency is congruent with the refusal of the writing to take any one side: as if to deploy a more specific language would be to risk being localized, and thereby pinned to one position, as perhaps it would be. But don't we in fact occupy particular positions?

Nevertheless, this book is also, quite deliberately, an enterprise within the lyric, and at this level too it struggles with an incompatibility that is the source of its tension and value. The dilemma is this: in insisting on the primacy of the material, language, the writing

risks abandoning the writer. But if the writer is indulged in the fulfillment of an impulse toward an expression at some level of *self*, then the work would seem to do some violence to language, closing its possibilities in a ring around the writer. It is therefore the tension itself, between these poles, that becomes the basis of its lyricism. Even more, the writing aspires to a kind of total musicality—of sound, concept, even *affect*. This musicality appears not only on the surface of the poetry, but invests the shifts between couplets as well. The writing is very skillful at the level of sound, but it is at those moments when that skillfulness coheres with the kind of gesture particular to the book that it is most successful. The gesture to which I refer is a cleaving away, a tearing from continuity, which shocks each new line off into a clean space, keeping the statement alive:

Spread out like comparison's edge
 an engagement to be held
 where pointing is the finger down
 or up into "not knowing, past" my
 small & sturdy bird whose covenant is mourning
 like a want or need again
 this is what comes to pass
 letters to myself or god with the small g gone
 and so near the phone called voicing

Here there is an open economy that allows the writer's subjectivity to be loosely contellated, but not totally determined. There is tension in the sense that this subjectivity is reconstituted with each new line, and that these lines are motivated by the syllables themselves. It is precisely that play between open and closed that *is* the music of the poetry.

In its rhyme between the syllable, phrase, and subject, and in its alternate restriction and dilation of their field of play, the writing hints at the theatrical aspect of language. Or to put it another way, the rootedness of drama in language. Once we hear it, the interrupted clause becomes poignant *in itself*. And conversely, at the macroscopic level, the dramas of the personal lose their mythological character, considered as characteristic expressions of a molecular fluid mechanics.

Baron's poetry in *Outside* refuses to allow any easy singularity, tending at all times toward a complexity that will accurately correspond to experience. If no resolution is proposed for the contradictions that the book engages, it nevertheless honestly and fully enacts

them. The accomplishment of this writing is to show how form, feeling, sound, meaning, and drama are not analogous but conflicting and interlinked in a continuous and asymmetrical unfolding. Zukofsky's "desire for what is objectively perfect" in poetry is here further ramified to include the hard and sometimes tentative explorations that characterize the ongoing searching of the post-postmodern. *Outside* articulates that difficult desire precisely, and in so doing draws it out into its own distinctive music.

Our Theories, Our Selves

IN MEMORY OF MY THEORIES BY ROD SMITH (O BOOKS, 1996)

Reviewed by Daniel Barbiero

To begin at the end, the title poem closing this book in many ways sets the tone for the entire collection. Almost immediately, the poem's speaker declares that

...it is the experience of being powerless amidst people, not
against nature, that generates the most desperate embitterment
against existence (67)

The social alienation embodied here is expressed under different circumstances elsewhere, as when in an untitled poem from the book's similarly untitled third division we read of:

an increased
analysis of horror
where the scramble of lives
is an étude (37)

The connection Smith draws between the detached analysis of mundane horror and the role of ideology is one of the defining motifs of this book. In fact much of *In Memory of My Theories* is ideology critique carried out by other means, and as it turns out, the memorial to one's own theories is a requiem for an

eternity
of *their*
system's belief (69)

It is thus possible to read this book as being offered in memory of "their" theories, which have been laid to rest unlamented.

Accordingly, a point Smith keeps returning to throughout these poems is that the solidity of "their" theories, ideologies, frameworks of analysis, etc., is ultimately illusory. Smith emphasizes the contingency and relativity he sees not only in social arrangements generally, but in the specific "self-explanatory movemented informational context[s]" —frames of reference, in other words — he sees them undergirding. Like Wittgenstein's "forms of life," these frames of reference may be (or may appear to be) holistic and organic, but in fact

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they are more or less plausible conjectures about the world that, given the proper motivation, can be played with, poked at, and rearranged.

Smith illustrates this by taking ostensibly disparate belief systems and interweaving them or placing them side-by-side. In the title poem, for instance, an embittered social unmasking segues almost imperceptibly into an outlook informed by the existential humor of an oblique Buddhism:

I am currently serving a sentence of natural life for a crime of
which I have no knowledge. (70-71)

(This passage gives a hint of the deadpan humor, frequently based on semantic and phonological dissonance, that is one of the defining constants in this book.)

In a similar spirit, the sequence "For Loss" is given a vocabulary — and consequently a conceptual repertoire as well —that is limited to words found in an old translation of the Lao Tzu. By restricting the sequence's vocabulary in this way, Smith creates a closed circuit of systematic self-reference, and with it a parody of the immunity to refutation too often encountered in belief systems of all types.

Parodied or not, contingent or not, our theories continue to define us and to mediate our contact with our surroundings. As Smith puts it in "The Latest Attempt":

Are not our feelings, as it were, inscribed
on the things around us. sandwichman, promotor, publicist,
wellspring, coxswain.

In the end the following lines, from "Your Group Insurance Benefits," can stand as Smith's epitaph not only to "his" theories, but to theory in general:

its use of *I*
as a tentative, fluid collection of
trembling amounts —

Only the elements tremble
Only the false

But there is no false....

Crossing Boundaries

FIELDS BY DON WELLMAN (LIGHT & DUST, 1995)

Reviewed by Cynthia Hogue

O.ARS editor Don Wellman's *Fields* opens, like those well-known works of his poetic "fathers" Pound and Olson, at the shore, on the border between land and sea, nature and culture, *in media res*:

Small horses tow the skiff
outward / Eyes
watch the coast recede...yet
the landmark only seems less ephemeral
than manes
swimming on the wake
The impossible is known in the familiar
Not myth / mouth
("Beginning at the Shore")

But in Wellman's poem readers aren't sure whose eyes watch the coast recede (the status of whoever mans the craft is unmaximized), nor why the skiff has set out (this is, like "The Seafarer" of which the text reminds us, both ancient and postmodern quest into the "impossible," not the unknown). The opening observations take us as readers, quite literally as well as figuratively, out to sea, but not to drop us off with poetic feet made of (the) concrete so that we sink, cleanly, straight down into the depths of authoritative truth or the collective unconscious.

Rather, Wellman cannily resists a myth-making (mystifying) defamiliarization of the everyday concrete by materializing "the familiar" in and of language. The transformations Wellman's poems achieve are linguistic, verbal, *oral*: *Not myth / mouth*. One *thing* (image) becomes another; words mutate—throughout this collection—into other words. Sometimes the verbal shifts result, oddly and even unpredictably, in an erupting awareness of the materiality of language's form, as in the following passage from an untitled poem:

{ { { } Elegant bracket, minus the substantive
 An *empire* leg

Cynthia Hogue's books include *The Woman in Red (Ahsakta, poetry)* and *Scheming Women (SUNY, criticism)*.

As "empire" suggests in the passage above, moreover, Wellman's awareness is often politicized, at the border between language and lyric poetics, with a lyric ear for language's music. The changes that words Emersonianly store are explicitly historical, geographical, as in "St. Sauveur," in which the language traces America's colonizing history and leads us back through layers of place(names) to the root(s), etymological and otherwise:

Small holdings have English place names
Mountains and rivers are French and Indian [...]

In 1613, English burned the Jesuit mission of St. Sauveur [...]

Massacre is French for slaughter
Strike is from *stria*—furrow, verse
The plough turning in the field
Distances in Russia
St.-John's-wort, words are roots
The Flower goes before
("St. Sauveur")

Like nature, which knows no borders, crossing boundaries that language (i.e. culture) attempts always to confirm, Wellman's verse is remarkable for its nimble poetic reversals, its border-crossings: lines turn like ploughs turning up a field for planting, but what turns up in the furrows unearths, in the poetic field, the violence of which the geographic field was the scene (rendering it visible, imaged: that is, *seen*). Hence, I take it, the collection's title, *Fields*: Wellman striking in multiple ways the Olsonian soil.

Onto this field Wellman has strewn Old English "Legends" (literal translations of a passage from *Beowulf*, as well as the full text of "The Seafarer," which has, however, been relineated) among Rilkean signs ("Elegy"); (male) feminist ruminations of gender identity at once characterize and question what's "normative" ("Men Make War"); choral performance pieces ("Lines Removed") juxtapose lineated quotations from the anthropology of liminality (to be exact, Victor Turner's *Forest of Symbols*). In this volume, discourses formally, substantively, humorously mingle and mix: "*Amor roma [...]* *Eia popeia [...]* *Boogie-woogie*" ("Men Make War"). Time is visually, not chronologically, demarcated, past coinciding with future in the present poetic field as if "in windless waters—wedge that divides / time past from time / to come" ("The Maelstrom"). If Wellman's project builds smartly on Pound's and Olson's, his cultural and historical (feminist) sensibility

is as sophisticated as Susan Howe's, of which *Fields* may remind us. But in his quirky fusion of pure lyric pitch, linguistic and literary attention, and intriguing, daring poetic invention, Wellman *makes it new*.

The Multiplied Faces of One-On-One

MOUNT SOLEDAD BY HARRY POLKINHORN (LEFT HAND BOOKS, 1996)

Reviewed by Stephen Ellis

For love or money, the world turns, and turns on itself. That's the tone of Harry Polkinhorn's *Mount Soledad*. The writing is heated, sometimes surreally "stream of consciousness" in its continuous read-out. The book is comprised of three sections, "Mount Soledad," "Money Shadows" and "Sao Paulo." The movement of the three sections involves the relationships between love and money, and the valorization of the two in the form of a specific relationship between two lovers; the frustrated intimacy of the relationship is expanded into examinations of the nature of power and need in terms social and fiscal as well as personal. The failure of the relationship leads the narration from the passionate and personal terms of the first sections ("I was the dreamer, you my dream. I dream you were inside me. When I touched you doves cried in the evening," through a synthesis involving the socialization of personal desire into a functionally narrow concept of identity, and the narrator's rage at—and within—it ("...to mete out and play their roles accordingly which contains melanoma and sarcoma as per your invoice offered by fax sets out under full sail into tropical disturbance hired gunmen since we've brought up rear as alpha data machined to a T...") to, in the last section—the only one written as dated journal entries—a sequence in which the moral outrage most evident in the second section is ameliorated by—if not synthesized with—memories of the 'purer' beginnings of the relationship, and an at least partial acceptance of the relationship's failure ("...I've come to realize a polishing steady against all these abrasions of history and police violence that produce not a song or picture of her face in profile but the feeling that remains after she has left....")

Soledad = solitude. It's also the name of a prison: a proper noun. *Mount* is both noun—*mountain*, from L. *mons*, which might also imply the female pubic 'mound'—and verb—to ascend, to mount, to increase, to prepare (as a skeleton for the purpose of display), to place an object on a glass slide for microscopic examination, or to post as a means of defense or observation. *Mount Soledad* is an angry

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book full of the terminology of love; it deals with power in terms of a double deal: desire and money. The connections between the two are seen to be unbreakable yet unworkable, much like the narrator's difficult—and ultimately failed—relationship with a Cuban-American woman, the source of the text, which winds itself around the implicit frustrations of, not only this specific relationship, but equally, the more-or-less latent dissatisfaction that is woven throughout the social fabric wound like mummy-cloth around the icon of endless 'possibility' that defines the dead weight of an unassimilable power-base. The impossible double-bind the narrator feeds off of—in this case, intense feeling that has no place in daily life to be witnessed by an other (the woman in question)—produces an incendiary lyric that ascends into solitude, a position of advantage from which to consider the ultimately disadvantaged (i.e., disaffected) position of being in exactly that elevated context: no way to 'get off' without causing an inflationary spiral—emotionally, and analogously, socially and fiscally—that would damage the status quo. No moral participation is useful, or even plausible, in those terms.

The book is a subtle mix of the social and personal, and develops through this tactic vectors of inquiry that reveal the ley lines along which the social need for power erupts within the personal desire for intimacy. Desire thus inflated beyond the actual limits of intimacy—the *person* of it—becomes inverted to the need for a fetish object; the narrator's rage is against his being put into that kind of receivership by his own personal needs as placed in contradistinction to those, societally, being given more credence in terms of equivocity rendered as numbers in a ledger. His view of her lips is not the wealth she uses them to speak about; while they may share each other as objects, each is yet marked and limited by the fantasies of the other. They fumble, expectantly with the the under-parts of each other's culture; certain kinds of familiarity, learned early and assumed later, seem unlikely to extend.

This socializing of personance, a generalizing *away from* specific persons produces an emptiness out of which the narrator's anger produces an equally self-defeating ascent in terms of a victory *cognitively*; the photograph at the end of the text of Perseus holding the severed Medusa's head aloft is indicative of the power the narrator accrues: an objectified image of distorted power, which would turn the proponents of such power to stone, if they were caught eye-to-eye with it. The soaring/searing quality of the writing (the 'poisonous head' lifted; the auspice of power displayed) shifts almost magically

('blackening'—*making clear*—its objects as it goes) across the doubled and criss-crossed lineages of number and language in the applied forms of money and desire...she frowned in language her shoulder muscles tightening into stones she spun her own axis I couldn't understand her immaculate makeup a Medusa that froze the world through which she then moved freely and pointlessly in control...). The book is an attempt to posit value in terms that cede both money and desire—the societal and individual—a place, yet this valorization can only occur at the cost of the narrator's removal (a defensive ascension) to a linguistic sphere; the acknowledgement of loss in terms of the woman produces a critical and poetic text in which the narrator's subjective love for her is objectified—by his interceding on her behalf, morally, *for himself*. She becomes—by her absence—the abject powerlessness of unresolved contradiction the narrator uses to fuel his rage, not so much against her *as person*, but against the impingements of the social she has allowed—in his view—to corrupt her acceptance of his intimate imprecations: what he cannot tell her, she will not hear. The ascending anger of the text reduces her to an absence that is heraldic of an equally empty social conceit, which would produce pain at the cost of relief in order to insure the stability of exchange on the monetary (social)—but not the seminal (personal)—level.

Mount Soledad speaks against this torpor to the extent that it maintains a self-reflexive critical stance in terms of the language employed to 'unwind the mummy cloth' from around the emptiness of the power base that in fact is the motor of the redemptive aspects of the text itself. This leaves the narrator loyal to a split conflation of love's object with power's subject, applied in the moral choice between being the person of either. That one needs both—the feeling of increase in the ceding of power (that most recognizable of exchanges)—puts the purpose in Polkinhorn's narrative skew; the shifts are restorative of feeling, though the restoration is in no way final. The first and final emptiness of the power base—both personal and social—as it incurs via language, cognitively, *back into the language*, and thus into each of our lives, is the primacy Polkinhorn is out to deliver via *Mount Soledad*; as each of us must, perforce our reinhabitation of the language as indispensably *common*: to climb that mountain, and mount whatever distortion the *simulacrum* of the common has allowed the singular to become, in order to see otherwise, one *on* one, one *in* one, one *from* one, in steadfast count among the many.

Publications Received

Books and Chapbooks

Paradise & Method: Poetics & Praxis by Bruce Andrews, Northwestern University Press, \$19

Strictly Confidential by Bruce Andrews, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

Touching Extremes by Javier Coy, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

Cold Heaven by Jerry Estrin, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

Status Immigrant by Peter Ganic, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

Some Other Kind of Mission by Lisa Jarnot, Burning Deck, \$11

As If In Turning by Jessica Lowenthal, Burning Deck, \$8

The Whole Note by Gil Ott, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

Acoustic Masks by Ted Pearson, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

Lead, Glass and Poppy by Kristin Prevallet, Primitive Publications, \$4

No (World Version) by Larry Price, Zasterle Press (no price listed)

The Haunted Baronet by Mark Wallace, Primitive Publications

Sonnets of a Penny-A-Liner by Mark Wallace, Buck Downs Books

The Gait of Voices by Joshua Taylor, 2324 N. Spaulding #3B, Chicago, IL 60647

Journals

Abacus #101: *Preponderance of the Pull of Paradise* by John Perlman (Potes & Poets Press, 181 Edgemont Avenue, Elmwood CT 06110-1005)

Situation #13, edited by Mark Wallace (10402 Ewell Ave., Kensington MD 20895)

Antenym 10, edited by Steve Carll (Bathysphere Press, 106 Fair Oaks St. #3, San Francisco CA 94110-2951)

House Organ, edited by Kenneth Warren (1250 Belle Ave., Lakewood, OH 44107)

Hole, edited by Louis Cabri and Rob Mannery, 301, 1333 17th Ave N.W., Calgary AB T2M 0R2

Poetic Briefs, edited by Elizabeth Burns and Jefferson Hansen (4055 Yosemite Ave., St. Louis Park, MN 55416).

Taproot Reviews #9/10, edited by Luigi Bob Drake (Burning Press, P.O. Box 585, Lakewood OH 44107).