



LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Series 2, Box 6: Work by Rakosi - Naropa, Yaddo.

[s.l.]: [s.n.], [s.d.]

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/4IRH46ST72MDU8X>

This material may be protected by copyright law (e.g., Title 17, US Code).

For information on re-use see:

<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/Copyright>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.

Naropa Institute Summer Session I 1979

W316 Visiting Poetics-Rakosi, Dawson

Conroy, Daniel C

Hale, Graham NC

Hardin, Stephen NC

Kaplan, Tobey NC ~~Kaufman, Bruce A~~

Kaufman, Bruce A

^{Leith}
~~Kelsh~~, Kim C

~~Kilpatrick, Sandra~~ NC

Lewis, Berwyn NC

McMonagle, Rick C

Nauke, David NC

O'Brien, Maureen C

Reinsentz, Stacy NC

Smedman, Lorna C

Stewart, Karen C

Walz, James C

SIXTH SESSION ON WRITING

Carl Rakosi

POETRY WORKSHOP

June 22, 1979

The Jack Kerouac School
Naropa Institute

Carl Rakosi: You remember last time we talked about the energy of language in the poem "Behold the Rib" and that the source of that dynamic language, language energy (I talk about language as if it were a human being, but as a matter of fact, language as a medium for human beings is not a dead thing out there somewhere. It really does seem to have, in poetry and in literature, an inner vitality of its own, which by the way is one of the reasons why it's risky to tamper with language, because that energy, that life, and the source of it, has been developed over centuries of use by people, millions of people), came from two places: one was the wonderfully imaginative and creative use of language which American blacks developed; the other was the passion of the author in his own subject matter. I mean he was overwhelmed by it, and when it came out, it came out with the energy which his imagination had put into it.

Language energy can come from a different source, too. I'm going to read two poems by Jonathan Williams to illustrate this. Williams comes from North Carolina, so this is a language of Appalachia, of rural folk. It has a strange vitality--I can't put my finger exactly on where it's coming from, but when I see it and hear it inwardly, as one can do, I hear its personality and the extraordinary energy of that personality. You'll see it in a moment when I read it, but when you read it on the page, you will get it too. It forces the reader to hear it. So this is white Appalachian idiom. It's called (by the way, it's very amusing, the poem itself), "Lee Ogle Ties a Broom and Ponders Cures for Arthuritis"--not "arthritis" but "arthuritis." Now "arthritis" of course is standard English but when you say, "arthuritis," immediately you're alerted; what comes to your mind are certain people who

hadn't gone to the university but who are talking folk speech. Folk speech has a distinctive character of its own.

LEE OGLE TIES A BROOM & PONDERES CURES FOR ARTHURITIS

lands them fingers really
dreadfulled me I
couldnt tie
nary broom one

had to soak em in water
hot as birds blood

then I heared this ol man from Kentucky say
takes a jug of apple juice just juice not cider
pour the epsom salts to it and
take as much as you kin

bein fleshy I kin take
right smart but
boys you know it moves a mans bowels
somethin terrible

well boys it just
naturally killed that arthiritis
lost me some weight too
and I
still tie thesehere brooms

pretty good

I'll read the other which is in the same vein: "Ol Man Sam Ward's History of the Gee-Haw Whimmy-Diddle." I have no idea what a Gee-Haw Whimmy-Diddle is but it doesn't matter. I think you have to be in North Carolina to know.

OLD MAN SAM WARD'S HISTORY OF THE GEE-HAW WHIMMY-DIDDLE

some folks say
the injuns made 'em
like lie detectors
called'em
hoo-doo sticks

feller
in Salisbury, North Caylini
mide the first
whimmy-diddle I seen

I whittle seven
kind: thisuns king
size, thisuns jumbo, thisuns
extry large

here's a single, here's one
double, here's a triple and why right here
here's a forked 'un

been whittlin' whimmy-diddles come
ten year, I reckon you'd
care to see my other toys,
boys, I got some fine
flipper-dingers, fly-
killers and bull-roarers, I can

kill a big fly at 60 feet

watch here

(both from Jonathan Williams AN EAR IN BARTRAM'S TREE, New Directions, 1969.)

It just bristles with energy. It's electric with it. Where does the energy come from? I don't know, it's just there, one has to hear it.

This happened before with John Synge. Synge heard the remarkable folk character of Irish speech, especially in the Aran Islands where he spent some time. After which he kind of got lost in Paris for a while, and then wrote his plays in which the characters had this speech, this electric energy. You know that it's solid. This is the language of a people, not of an individual; no man, no single man, made it. It has a singular beauty, singular beauty. It is far more beautiful than anything Yeats fancied up in his poems. What happened with Yeats was, he had an idealized image of the Irish, for which he wrote in an idealized language, but he was never able to capture the actual language of the Irish. It's as if he were writing out of a myth. And the language is therefore much softer, it doesn't have the realistic brilliance or solid character of the actual speech that Synge heard. Yeats himself recognized this and brought Synge back to Ireland, and he was then honored for what he had achieved.

In Williams' poems another thing that gives the language energy is that it corresponds to and reveals the individual character of these two people. The man who is old Sam Ward is not Lee Ogle. So that in really good human speech, you get individual character, which you never get from a more standardized language.

I don't know how we, living in big cities, can get this kind of brilliance. As I said, language has been deteriorating. Something dreadful has happened to it actually, and it's getting worse. It's homogenized, it's reduced to a tiny vocabulary, it's unimaginative, and we've gotten into the frame of mind of not using our imaginations when we speak. We take the easiest way of expressing something, and that's deadly to a language, deadly. But the writer must not do this. If he's going to be a writer he must exert himself and break loose from that kind of easiness and comfortableness.

In that connection, one can learn something from Mallarme's definition of poetry. His friend, Degas, had been struggling without success to unravel the obscurities and grasp the ideas in a Mallarme poem and in vexation had complained that he couldn't understand what Mallarme was driving at, to which Mallarme, in his very superior, sophisticated manner, responded, "My dear Degas, poems are made with words, not ideas." Well, there's an important point there, and that is, that it is, in the final analysis, the language that you use, your mastery of it, your skill with it, that will determine whether a particular poem is good enough to re-read again and again. It's the language that counts. As well as, of course, the other things that have to do with the spirit of poetry. All that has to be in. But you can have marvelous spirit, great imagination, you can have a great human experience to express, it will do you no good unless the language that you use is notable. Now this is one reason why we must distinguish between writing a human document --there's a lot of writing that is serious, that is well-worth reading as a

human document, that is not poetry at all--and writing a poem, it does no good to put the format into poetic lines, that will not make it a poem.

One of the other characteristics of poetry which I mentioned earlier, was music. The music, the cadence of lines. That we see less and less of these days. I don't know what is happening, whether people's ears are worse and we're actually becoming deafer (it's a possibility) or whether we're just oriented in other directions. But surely one of the most beautiful aspects of language is the music that's in speech and writing. Here's a piece by Joyce in which he forces the reader to listen to the music of his lines, you can't avoid it. This is in conventional form with regular rhymes. Now Joyce, as you know, had a beautiful tenor voice and almost became a professional singer, so he must have had a great ear, one of the greatest ears. In fact, the great beauty of Finnegan's Wake is the music there. (By the way, I regard that not as a prose piece but as an epic poem. It's been mis-classified. That is an epic poem if ever I heard one.)

This is a poem he wrote as quite a young man.

All day I hear the noise of waters

Now Joyce used perfectly standard English in this poem but he heard a music as he was conceiving it, in relation to what he perceived; he heard it inwardly, and he then transmitted it. Now there's great beauty **there**. So I can suggest that the next step for you to take--at this stage you're naturally absorbed in subject matter, in something to write about--but the next stage is to be aware of the language for expressing this. After all, millions of people have subject matter to write about but millions of people do not have this intuitive interest in language. That's a specialized thing.

Would you like to--anybody--comment on this? May I have some feedback from you on this part?

Q: What's the best way to go about that? Reading other people's poetry?

CR: I think so, yes. I'm glad you asked the question. Read the good poets, and listen. I mean, pick up Finnegan's Wake and listen to that music. It's remarkable and it's very clear, very clear.

Q: I like to walk down the street and listen to what people say...I lived in Ireland and I stayed in the same places as Joyce and the others, but I noticed how patronizing people seemed on the street, as if they were talking to little children. In America too, it's worth listening...if you really open your ears and listen to how people do talk, not only just the dialect but the arrangement of the conversation. Like this morning I was walking down the street and heard a conversation that was like a part opening to a play, it was exactly the same as Malanchtha by Gertrude Stein. It was this emotional argument between two lovers and it just repeated each phrase three times and I realized that in real emotion, in a really turbulent emotion between two

people in love, it is exactly the same...people will repeat something exactly the same or arrange it to stress what they think because it's almost inarticulate, but yet on the outside, just walking down the street hearing this, it's not so beautiful-sounding as in a play. So outside of reading words, I'd say to hear, to appreciate music, to realize that we all do talk in rhythmic pattern, we are our own grammar, and how we produce our meaning systems by the rhythmic measure of where we put intonation or stress, or what words we use more than others becomes a musical arrangement and that you'll be walking down the street and hear some musical arrangements, so keep your ears open.

CR: Yes, you're making a very good point, David, that is right, it can still be heard in some places. I'm not saying human speech has become totally devoid of imagination and character in this country. You'll still hear it among working men, for example. You will hear it in bars, where men are relaxed. I don't know about women, I must ask you about that, where you might hear it in the conversation or talk of women. I don't know. What's been your experience?

But you do have to look for it, I mean that's true, so your point is good.

Q: In churches?

CR: You hear it in churches? Really? Working wives maybe, working women?

This is a problem in England too. The curse of contemporary poetry in England has been the standard university English, which is perfectly adequate to express ideas, very suitable, but not to express poetry. The young poet in England who I think has introduced something new and fresh, a vigorous quality, into the language of English poetry, is Roy Fisher. I met him a couple of years ago when I was giving readings in England. I said, "How

come in your poetry I can recognize something authentically British and I can't recognize that in the other English poets? Is it because their language is too smooth, too stylized, too much alike?" And he said, "The reason is, I never went to a British university." He's made his living as a jazz pianist in Birmingham.

So this is a problem. As society becomes more civilized, more centralized in big cities, and everybody goes to universities, our speech tends to become standard university English. It's a great problem.

Q: Carl, who was the guy you were trying to remember the other night?

CR: Roy Fisher.

Q: Yes, I was trying to get hold of a book of his. I've been reading a book called Five Back Country Poets. It's right in that area; the dialect and the accents are just incredible. You know, one neighborhood can't understand another. So when you were talking about where is this--for me, that's where it is.

CR: Yes. Well now, the Scotch poets, that's a different story. They've held on to speech idiom. It's wonderful, really wonderful. You know when you hear it all right that it's the real thing. The only point I wanted to make to you on this is simply to shift your attention a bit from subject matter to language. Mallarme was absolutely right, poems are made with language, not ideas.

OK. I now have something to show in a specific way, what I mean by the particular. You remember I was saying that a poem has to be proved, in somewhat the same way that a theorem in geometry has to be proved. In a poem it has to be proved by the particular. You're making some generalizations, and the reader, who is a very sceptical cuss, is not going to believe it unless you prove it by the particular, by something that would demonstrate that you must in fact have felt the way you did or that what you've concluded rests on some particular facts. There is in France a very curious poet, now in his 70s, called Francis Ponge. He himself doesn't think of himself as a poet, and maybe he doesn't write poetry, but the French regard him as a poet. What he does, you see, is look at the tiniest object in nature, and as he looks at it with more and more concentration, his imagination begins to work on it, and something is created as a result. So he actually starts from the other end. Where the poet will usually start with the general and then introduce the particular, although it doesn't have to be that way of course, he starts from the particular, from the smallest possible particular. He is a little like the French entomologist Fabre, who looks at a bee, for example, the life of the bee, and it goes on and on and on and before you know it, you have an epic poem about the bee. Similarly the ant.

This Ponge piece is called "Notes Toward a Shell." He is looking at a shell. "A shell is a little thing but I can make it look bigger by replacing it where I found it."

I'm going to stop for a minute. Just think about that. He's introducing something highly metaphysical at that point. "A shell is a little thing but I can make it look bigger by replacing it where I found it." As a matter of fact, this is actually what happens. Once he's taken it from where it was lying, looked at it and then replaced it, it is not the same object any longer. I don't know why, but it does, in fact, look bigger, if you've ever had that experience.

"...by replacing it where I found it on the vast expanse of sand. For if I take a handful of sand and observe a few grains, then each grain individually, at that moment none of the grains seems small to me any longer. And soon the shell itself, this oyster shell or lumpet or razor clam, will appear to be an enormous monument, both colossal and intricate..."

Now, you see, he suddenly leaps into imagination. He's looking at this thing running through his fingers and there are a few grains of sand left and at that point the shell will appear different (he's holding the shell in his hand apparently), it will appear to be an enormous monument. So you've got this transformation--you've got the shell in a different perspective than when it's lying in the sand and you're at some distance from it. Now it's very close to you, right up to your face, and there it appears "...an enormous monument both colossal and intricate like the Temples of Angkor." The poet now has moved in on the scene. Now if he had stopped short of that, you know, it would have been interesting observation, worthwhile, but no more; but then as he's looking (this might be a lesson in writing, the creative process of writing), as he's looking and continuing to look, and changes the perspective of the thing from where it lay to close up, this way, that way, the poet moves in, the poet's imagination moves in. "...like the Temples of Angkor or the Church of Saint Maclou or the Pyramids and with a meaning far stranger than these unquestioned works of man." And the metaphysician has moved in, the philosopher, the thinker. Not simply the imagination of the poet, but now the thinking poet, the speculative, philosophical poet. "If I then stop to think that this shell, which a tongue of the sea can cover up, is inhabited by an animal, and if I add an animal to this shell, if I add an animal to this shell by imagining it back under a few inches of water, you can well understand how much greater and more intense my impression becomes, and how different from the impression that can be produced by even the most remarkable

of the monuments I have just mentioned."

Well, Ponge is a very modest man, very unpretentious, you know. He's just following his actual observation, and then his poetic imagination moves in and the thinking part of him moves in and he lets it go where it will go. This has charm, therefore, because of his unpretentiousness. He doesn't pretend to be a philosopher or a great poet, he doesn't even regard himself as a poet. The thing to learn from this is that there are great possibilities in the particular, limitless possibilities perhaps--well, I don't know about limitless, but great. To the person who has imagination, who has an accurate eye to start with (Ponge's powers of observation are precise; he also has imagination), who's able to have his imagination move in on a particular, and then have the thinking part of himself move in on it too, the particular becomes a poetic reality. The shell here has become a poetic reality. Absolutely convincing, nobody could dispute the authenticity of it. What I see so much in writing courses, unfortunately, is not this great talent in observation, nor the patience to wait for penetrating observation, or the modesty to go with it. I find instead very pretentious kinds of generalizations that lie out in the atmosphere somewhere unbacked by any actual, particular experience. Or the experience may have been there but the author simply either didn't feel it necessary to put it in or didn't know how to do it.

Let me get some feedback from you on this.

Q: Intellectually I'm very aware of what you're saying, but sometimes when I write a poem, I think I've got the particular in and I'm very proud that I've got the particular in there, but it may sometimes be remote from really what I was writing about. You know, it may be a detail to describe something that maybe the reader won't get, yet it is really real... Something that Larry Fagin pointed out to me the other day. I mean it's not real for the reader, necessarily, even though it may be a detail. It's almost as if you had taken

a detail and plastered it on like stucco or something.

CR: Well, when I use the term particular, I don't mean just any detail.

Novels are full of details but they are not essential reality. In poetry the particular would be that particular which is the basis from which generalization is made; in other words, there's a functional relationship and dependency between the particular in a poem and its generalization or its overall statement and feeling. We get into the most difficult problem in poetry when we try to particularize feeling, or feelings, because feelings are, in fact, kind of free floating, and they don't have a specific shape. Therefore, to provide the particular is not so easy. It's much easier to do with an intellectual generalization.

Q: Thinking about what you're just saying now, there's a quote by Bertolt Brecht about politics, that it's a springboard into creativity but for the inadequate, politics are a crutch. In a way, it's sort of what you were just talking about, because I think a lot of people are afraid to talk about their feelings, because they're afraid of being alienated, that people won't understand them, that everyone's very cynical, and that if you expose your private self, it's dangerous. You know, in today's kind of television mythology everyone wants to talk in generalities, so there's mass communication. So if you do want to talk about passion, you use politics or you use social issues rather than going behind the feelings that have created politics and social issues. Everyone is just saying it's all breaking down but no one is prepared to go back in and try and find out the reasons, because that's really jeopardizing your own self.

CR: Yes, yes, that certainly is true. But even in ordinary everyday human relationships we have that problem of expressing feelings. I don't have that problem myself, maybe because my origins are European, not English. After all, a great part of my own professional life as a psychotherapist dealt with that precise problem of, say, a man and a wife not ever being able to express their actual feelings towards each other. Certainly not negative feelings. Scared to death of negative feelings. But surprisingly, almost as frightened of positive feelings. I mean, you would not expect people to be afraid of positive feelings, of feelings of affection, yet they are almost as afraid of them as of hostile feelings. This comes out of the natural life situation in American society. And the American poet of course has, then, in writing the same problem. After all, he was born into an American family.

This is worth talking about, the psychology of self-expression. Let's get some feedback on that, because it really could be more helpful to you than any comments I could make on the texts of your poems.

Q: I was thinking of a project that I'm working on in California to do poetry with individuals that are recent discharges from psychiatric institutions. They're in residential treatment facilities...and that's one of the things that I'm interested in, how to get them to express their feelings, their poetic sensibility...in terms of like distancing themselves from it, like say OK choose an object of nature or any object to describe their feelings.

CR: Yes, yes.

Q: What's been your experience in encouraging that? How does that work? Because you can see these people are angry or depressed, but they don't express it.

CR: It takes a lot of time and a lot of concentrated development of the other person's confidence and trust. First of all, he has to begin to understand that he will not be destroyed by the expression of his feelings. As a matter of fact, far more problems are created in a human relationship by the failure to express strong feelings than by the expression of them. This is because feelings can't be totally concealed from the other person, and pretending that they are not there forces the two people into a pact of dissimulation and prevents the situation that is causing the angry feelings from being resolved. And a situation that is unresolved, festers and metastasizes. The fact is, angry feelings never hurt anybody. The feeling that they do is an illusion formed in early childhood.

Curiously, love too is feared. Now why should the expression of love, deep love, feel threatening? This has a curious basis. It has to do with perhaps a fear of being hurt, first, of being rejected, that the other person may not love so deeply, for we expect reciprocity and assume that the relationship can't endure without it--a somewhat illusory game. On the other hand, love does demand personal involvement and a person may, therefore, avoid expressing his feelings in order to avoid being forced into something in which he feels insecure.

So these are some of the curious grounds for the reluctance, the fear, of expressing deep feelings in human relationships. They carry over into writing, simply because we live as human beings before we live as poets. And yet what do we expect of poetry? We certainly do expect affection in poetry. What would it be without it? Pretty cold; just objects of intellect, the things that produce so much intellectualism in poetry.

Q: The thing that I find hard in all this, you know, is that writing a poem is pretty much digging deep in and conveying a feeling. The thing I'm so pissed off about me is that I'm so dependent upon other people's response. So you know, I'll write this thing and I'll say, "Damn, it's good," you know, and then I'll read it and maybe I'll get a good response, you know, like, "Gee, that really hit the nail on the head," and maybe hit another group and they'll say, "Gee, it just doesn't do it for me," and I'll be crushed. And I'm really finding that out incredibly--not incredibly, excuse me--

CR: (laughter) All right, I can put on my evaluation of you that you've learned something. (Note: I laughed because in a previous session I had cited the word, incredible, as an example of lazy, sloppy English).

Q: But I'm finding that out in this class too. It's just that I don't know, it's a whole different experience, it's a tender thing, poetry is, especially when it's new and I'm so susceptible to whatever people feel. In a way, it somehow contradicts the essence of poetry.

CR: Well, I must say I'm a little uneasy at the tendency of the present generation to always stick with one's peers. Uneasy about it because poetry is individual, a poet has to be an individualist. Poetry is written in a solitary place where there's quiet. It's a private matter and if you're always mixing with your peers, if your whole life is with them, and certainly if you depend for reassurance or confirmation of your work on the feedback of peers, you're going to be in trouble. It'll drive you crazy. Somebody's gonna like it and somebody else is not going to care for it. And furthermore, are they giving you what they really believe? And is their opinion worth a damn to start with? Are they good critics? Why assume that your peers are

good critics? I wouldn't. I wouldn't.

My experience in the only writing class that I was ever in was interesting from that point of view. The teacher was William Ellery Leonard, a famous poet in his day. He demolished an early poem of mine and made fun of it in class. Now I could have stood his criticism but he made fun of it. You would have thought that would have destroyed me, but it didn't destroy me at all. I thought, "Well, that son of a bitch doesn't know what he's talking about! Really, he's just old-fashioned, he doesn't know." Well, it wasn't a very good poem and I didn't keep it, but it doesn't matter, the point is not to be dependent on the opinion of others. There are some people of course, whose opinion I value highly. For example, when I was in my 30s, I used to get feedback from Louis Zukofsky which was useful to me. I could have done without it, but it was useful to me and I respected it because he had a great critical mind. But there aren't many great critics around. So don't depend on your peers' opinion. You may be much better than they are. I'm not saying that your work is necessarily going to be good for that reason. But psychologically there has to be a core of confidence in you. Otherwise you can't move ahead. A center, a hard center of confidence.

Q: ...which comes from peer opinions, and--

CR: No! It will never come from peer opinions, never. I don't know, frankly, why I had it. Maybe it had something to do with the integration of my personality. I knew if I was going to depend on all kinds of other people, it would just fragment me. But young people of my generation had a tremendous amount of self-confidence. They were individualists.

Q: Did you find that it built up as you went along, kind of?

CR: I had it right away. Right away, yes.

Q: I think that's just the essence of maturity for anyone who works a profession or job. It's a matter of confidence and inherent strength. And the difference, I think, to start, might be that during and after the 50s it was a credit system and so people were insulated psychologically much beyond other individuals who when they reached around 18 or 17 would either go to the university or they'd go out and work. They had to have that innate sense of character to realize they were going to do it themselves. They were going to have to cough up. So as a masculine trait, you know, the father would take the child and throw him out in the water, and make him swim back. So these harsh cruel things worked. And the best image that I could say in being strong as a person as regards myself personally is that it's like the essence of forging. You fire the steel and then you put it in water and temper it. Being a creative person is even more delicate because you're on an edge where there's an enormous amount of tension, which if you're an artist you create in order to develop your subject, whether it's a poem or a piece of sculpture, especially in the arts because for the most part, people demand so much in their ignorance or out of their slothfulness from the artist that the artists themselves have to make even more tension, so what I would say is that 80 per cent of all conversation amongst all the writing students has to do with confidence: please tell me that I can write. Now let's say that to establish yourself in a field, or to appreciate someone's work, means a lot of hard work, but the main thing that young people have to realize is that they're going to have to construct from their self, they're going to have to be their own critic. Then they'll be respected because something will emanate from their own strength; something will come out of the poem, once they can do that, but until they can do that, I don't think any poems or an art or anything will ever really appear except

by accident. Because that emanates from who the person is. And that gets all the way into your particular. To me the most particular would be the kernel, the essence, and in everything is a diagram, whether it's a shell, a blade of grass, a microcosm, and in that diagram, as the philosopher said, the smallest point, can tilt the whole universe. That point is probably unfathomable, or it's a belief itself, but it holds us--well, it holds my self together. That quality, that's what life's all about. When you throw that in the fire, what remains is what you really are. And everything else will eat at you until you are the person that you truly are. And if you can accept that quickly and stop crying about it, and then draw from that each day, each moment, where there's a confirmation of that in nature, either you see the shell, or you see a snail climbing up Mt. Fuji or something impossible, something, any confirmation of the life force which is the human spirit, then that's all the greatness that one has to be in contact with, and then greatness will arise through any kind of articulation of it.

CR: Yes. Well, to get back to my own case, I think one of the things that gave me self-confidence was that I was a good reader of the greatest poetry. I read it avidly, it gripped me, and having that in me, I knew when I was good and when I wasn't. In other words, the only teachers, the best teachers, are the great writers themselves. Everything else comes secondhand. The greatest teacher is Shakespeare. The greatest teacher is Blake. The greatest teacher is, you name it--Sappho. Now, does every person have the capacity to get into great poetry and to learn from it? I don't know, really. But if you can do it, you have the only teacher that you need. Nobody needs to go to a writing class in order to learn to be a poet. That's a foolish idea. You can learn grammar and punctuation from writing courses and you can get some

little help, yes, but you will never learn how to be a poet that way. No, never. Gee, maybe I shouldn't say that. But this is your problem, relationship to peers. Maybe you should talk more about it. I'm on the outside when it comes to this. I'm merely an observer.

Q: I think you have to develop a sense of humor, to work with that. I really enjoy taking the same poem to several different people and get completely different reactions. And, you know, if I've finished a poem, I've finished it and I'm not usually going to change it. But it's really interesting to see, because, like, what one will hate about it, another will really like. It becomes just really funny, because you've expressed yourself. All you're ever really expressing some ways is yourself, your own essence, so it's there, and what one person likes about me is probably what the other person can't stand. And it's in the poem. So that's part of it too. You have to have a sense of humor about yourself.

CR: But would any of your peers be competent to help you with the language of a poem? With language as a medium?

Q: Yes. Then also I can show it to teachers too. However, if you take everything that everyone says about you all that serious, you're going to be in a lot of trouble.

CR: Well, you'd be very confused. I can see nothing but confusion ahead for somebody who keeps taking his poems out for a reaction from peers. For one thing, there's a very great difference in taste among people, let alone competence to react to a poem with a good head on one's shoulders.

Q: Also, what Pound reiterated many times about "making do." I feel that at Naropa it's very typical to make do because of the political workings of groupings of personalities, whether for money or because this is how artists do cohere together in order to make themselves credible. So one has to be strong when merging with a group and have a sense of humor, not take himself too seriously; otherwise the group becomes arrogant and can't hear its individual members. I feel that it's very healthy for young poets now to leap, to listen to the drum of their own heart and to beat their own path because I feel that the influence of some of the people who teach here can, you know, if one's open, lead to something, to making something totally new. But for the most part if one is to interject oneself into a group, he will more or less assimilate and be co-opted into changing his sensibilities in order to get published or to make money and win acceptance, I notice a lot of artistic groupies, and how that changes. Ted Berrigan says the same in Talking Poetics: he says, "Watch out." Historically you can check it out. Every group that's at the forefront has done that, has listened to the group that came before them but they had something a little bit different that they wanted to say and they understood how one gets co-opted. Because loneliness, being alone, is strength, and then the loneliness of being alone possibly attracts other minds and new forms develop, not so much as an antithesis to, but as a reaction to the fact that that it's a different feeling, it's a different world. We do have change. So on those questions, you know, mostly one has to be his own critic and have his own confidence, but not so he can't see or hear others, and realize that the masters or the professionals or people who came before went through the same trial of endurance, the same situations, and merged to become the voice, and that they truly wanted that voice rather than any old voices they could draw from and wanted to create their own sensibility which would be their own voice which would be new, because everyone is different.

We're not clones yet.

CR: No, we will never be clones, no. The human spirit fights against that, it doesn't submit entirely.

Q: Only if the spirit wishes to go along with comfort. That's why the sharpest hit of today was when you said the word "comfort." That's the biggest enemy for any real sensitive person; not to take the easy way out.

Q: But for me the easy way out would be to sit up in my cabin and write this stuff and just say, "Wow, I'm a poet! You know, here it all is." The hard thing is to come here and to put it in front of you, for example. Not just peer groups. I can rationalize peer groups, you know, but I can't rationalize someone I respect. When I heard your poetry the other night, I was just taken back, so when you say something about a poem, it really penetrates. It really hits. Now maybe that's because my core isn't as strong as yours, but that's taking chances and I think you have to take some of those chances.

CR: I can suggest one other thing to you. I don't know whether you're at this particular level of critical power but it's helpful to lay a poem aside for six months and then come back to it and see what you have, and ask yourself the question, "Is this interesting language?" "Is the subject matter interesting?" Some very unfortunate conclusions have been drawn from Williams' efforts to see how far he could go in making the ordinary events of life into poems. This was a necessary direction to go when he began to write, in terms of where poetry was then. But there must be a million young people in this country today who believe that all they have to do is to put some particular observation down on paper and they have a poem. Not so. The

subject matter also has to be interesting. Now I'm not saying that it has to be poetic in the conventional literary sense, just interesting. I remember when I was Visiting Poet at Michigan State, a young woman handed in a poem that was about her fingernails. Well (laughter), you know, you've got to use your intelligence too. You know damn well that you're not going to make anything interesting out of your fingernails no matter who you are--you could be Joyce. There has to be judgment here as to what is going to be interesting to other people. By the way, that's another criterion; it's not simply being interesting to yourself, because you can be fooled there. If you've gone through a certain human experience, sure it's interesting to you. Or if you're writing about yourself, of course you're interested in that, it's you. But is somebody else going to be interested in that? No, not necessarily, not at all.

Q: I don't agree with you. I feel that the imagination can make everything interesting. And Whitman said the same thing, every part of his body was as holy and equal as every other part.

CR: Well, you can make the fingernail interesting if you can do what Francis Ponge did with the shell. But his was not simply a poem about a shell. What you're talking about now as a possibility would not be a poem about a fingernail. This girl had written a seven line poem about a fingernail, period. No, we must recognize our limitations. Don't take Whitman too seriously on this. Or Blake. Blake, you might say, could do all sorts of things that the rest of us couldn't do. One must recognize one's own limitations. And the limitations of one's imagination. It's not limitless. It's not limitless. And if you expect it to be limitless, you'll write a kind of grandiose poetry that is not good. You see, Ponge is solid because he doesn't try to go beyond

his limitations; he doesn't pretend that what he is writing is everything. He doesn't go beyond what he knows he can do with his imagination and his ideas. Now I love Whitman, but I don't take him seriously when he talks that way. You go as far as you can, yes. I do differ with you on this, therefore, David. It's very easy to say, "The imagination can make everything interesting," but you produce a poem that will do this. If you do it, I'll retract my statement.

But to get back to Dan's point now, the important thing is to develop your own critical faculty in this respect. What can I say about that except to tell you what questions to ask yourself when you're looking at your own poem after you've laid it aside for some time. If you look at it shortly after you've written it, you're not going to see very much that's different from what you were seeing at the time you were writing it, you're not detached enough; you're not seeing it as it is--that is, as an entity outside yourself. A poem really doesn't have anything more to do with you once it's written and completed. So in a sense, you have to wait until you are removed enough from your absorption in it to be able to look at it objectively as a thing outside yourself. At that time, you ask yourself, "Is it interesting enough? Are there other things that should be put in to make it interesting? And not merely interesting but also significant? Is the language interesting? The language must always be interesting no matter what--and the language must have energy, enough energy to move you. Has your imagination really done anything with your subject matter? Also, are the particulars in there that would bring this poem to life? It's always the particulars that bring a thing to life, not generalizations.

Q: Getting back to talking about feelings in poems--it seems like when I try to do that, it becomes stale, it's just myself always there and not getting

away from myself, the "I," expressing the feelings that I'm having, that big persona, that big ego...

CR: Oh, I know. There is behind your question your knowledge, apparently, that this is not pleasing to others when they read this. That's true. Who wants to read about somebody's I I I all the time? That's just a human characteristic. Well, why must it always be about the I I I?

Q: I'm talking about personal feelings that I'm trying to express.

CR: Well now, personal feelings are not quite the same thing; they're universal. They are yours but they are also universal because others also have them. I may not understand your question.

Q: To me the expression of feelings is personal and I'm getting the message from various people that there's no room for that in poems.

CR: Who are these people?

Q: I guess it was Creeley the other night that pointed out the difference between private and personal, that the private is the creative and the personal is not, in writing.

CR: I fail to get the distinction.

Q: The private coming from that inner place like you were talking about, that center.

Q: ...like basically instead of having I I I dealing with personal feeling, becoming the private without it, and that is the I without the I I I.

CR: Somebody is not thinking very clearly here. I don't know. If you're talking about feeling, then it's personal, it's in the I. No one objects to that.

Q: I guess the question is how to express that without having the I in there.

CR: Well, you have other options. You can express it fictionally, by changing from the first person to the third person, or even to the second person. Ashbery's always talking about the I in the second person: "You do this, you do that." In other words, you can remove it from yourself a bit. When you do that, you do have far more latitude for movement. I don't do it very often because I sounds more suitable to my character, my own personality. I like the directness of I, but I know nobody wants to have too much of the I, no reader, so one has to do it with restraint. But there are these other options open to you. Or you can make it completely fictional. Put it into an as-if world.

Q: I guess sometimes that dilutes it so much that I feel I'm really not expressing myself.

CR: It does dilute it a bit, you're right, because it is not direct, that's true.

Q: What I've been hearing is that if the I is in the poem physically, there's still a problem. But I agree with you, I would much prefer to say I.

CR: It's a matter of preference too. And also a matter of one's ability to carry it out as I. The psychology of the I poem is really quite different from the psychology of the You poem and the He poem because you detach yourself from responsibility for what you've said when you fictionalize it in He or You.

Q: You can also use One if you've got a bunch of complicated information to get over succinctly.

CR: Yes, but not in poetry. I can't remember a poem that expresses feeling that can get by with the use of "one."

Q: Anyway, these arguments about keeping I I I out of the poem, just keeping the word "I" out, sound really ridiculous to me.

Q: I think what you're saying is the essence of what he's saying, to keep that gushiness, the self, out of it.

CR: Also, one of the considerations is, how big is that I that's speaking here? The reader will tolerate a small I but not a big one. Unless it really is a big I.

Q: It's actually more presumptuous to use you for something like that. When poems say, "you," it's implied that, well, everybody does this. You walk out on the street, and you pick your nose... I walk out on the street, I pick my nose, is what they really want to say.

CR: That's true. It's an evasion, yes. And You is much more of an evasion than He or She, because the real person in it hides in a universal.

Well, this has been great fun. Our last session is over, and the time has come to give you back your manuscripts. OK.

Language Poet

TO CERTAIN LANGUAGE POETS, NOT TO TAKE THEIR ^{OWN} IDEAS SO SERIOUSLY

To the tune and words
of The Willow Song in THE MIKADO

↓

By a tree and a river an exiguous linguist
sat singing, "Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!"
And I said to him, "Superbird, why do you sit,
singing, 'Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky?'"
"Is it lyric asthenia, birdie," I cried,
"or a concept too big for your little inside?"
With a shake of ^{his} tight little head, he replied,
"Oh Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky."

!?"

~~No, Z-S-Z.~~

P.S.

~~Try Wittgenstein.~~

"Because I'm sitting on Bottom."

"Because I've hit Bottom
And I've hit Bottom."

LANGUAGE POET

LANGUAGE POET, TOM-TIT

TOM-TIT, A LANGUAGE POET

RE TOM-TIT, A LANGUAGE POET

ON TOM-TIT, A LANGUAGE POET

TO CERTAIN LANGUAGE POETS, NOT TO TAKE THEIR IDEAS SO SERIOUSLY

To the tune and words
of The Willow Song
in The Mikado

By a tree and a river an exiguous linguist
sat singing, "Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky!"
And I said to him, "Super-bird, why do you sit,
singing, 'Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky?
Is it lyric asthenia, birdie,' I cried,
or a concept too big for your little inside?"
With a shake of his tight little head, he replied,
"Oh Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky."

~~P.S.~~
For more
← consult Wittgenstein.

P.S.
For more
consult Wittgenstein

~~P.S. For more
consult Wittgenstein.~~

*P.S.
Try Wittgenstein*

so on through to the climax. The second character, the female, is a romantic virgin:

Speaking of beaux sartorial,
perplexed young girl hands laugh to love-wise.
I am a lovely, irresistible girl
of seventeen, with wonderous witching orbs.
Why do I blaze in my intangibles
like any mandolin romantic,
you, stable as the sterling?

Her subtle, mysterious charm contrasts with the overt showiness of the male. She is perplexed; her power is a covert magic which neither she nor those she impresses can resist. Rakosi ridicules these roles by the manner in which he exaggerates them. The "millions" are "gaping"; his "entertainment" is a "miracle." Her "orbs" are "wonderous" and "witching"; and she blazes in her "intangibles."

"Wanted" is a preposterous advertisement for writers:

WANTED

Expert experiences black on white
by men who are all white from the midriff
to the arches through the lowest joints

Their required whiteness seems an ironic indication of their acceptability to the American public, a superficial innocence.

We train you in accepted imagery,
the sights of love, and other popular sports,
and keep your eyes peeled for the gems of gab.

So far, this seems to reveal the young Rakosi's scorn for the popular, accepted poet, but the next two lines suggest that he's also talking about himself, as a Jewish poet whose "larnyx" is "without gentile deformations."

Diction or fact, it's all one to the larnyx,
that is, one without gentile deformations.

WRITTEN IN EXASPERATION OVER SOME PREPOSTEROUS STATEMENTS
BY A LANGUAGE POET

With apologies to The Willow Song
in The Mikado

By a tree and a river an exiguous linguist
sat singing, "Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!"
And I said to him, "Wittgenstein, why do you sit,
singing, 'Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!'
Is it lyric ashenia, Wittgie," I cried,
"or a concept too big for your little inside?"
With a shake of his tight little head, he replied,
"Oh Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky."

ON TOM-TIT, A LANGUAGE POET

By a tree and a river an exiguous linguist
sat singing, "Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!"
And I said to him, ^{"Wittgenstein,"} why do you sit,
singing, 'Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!'
"Is it lyric asthenia, ^{birdie} birdie," I cried,
"or a concept too big for your little inside?"
With a shake of his tight little head, he replied,
"Oh Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky."

Note: To the tune and words of The Willow Song in The Mikado.

Carl Rakosi

ON TOM-TIT, A LANGUAGE POET

By a tree and a river an exiguous linguist
sat singing, "Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!"
And I said to him, "Superbird, why do you sit,
singing, 'Zukofsky! Zukofsky! Zukofsky!'
"Is it lyric asthenia, birdie," I cried,
"or a concept too big for your little inside?"
With a shake of his tight little head, he replied,
"Oh Zukofsky, Zukofsky, Zukofsky."

Note: To the tune and words of The Willow Song in The Mikado.

Carl Rakosi

#28

A grouping of poets under a name is always misleading because it implies an entity that is not there and characteristics that apply to some ~~members~~ and not to others. *All one can say is that* A poet is an entity. It is not safe or wise to say more. Nevertheless, it does happen. Take the Objectivists. When Harriet Monroe, the editor of POETRY, yielded to pressure from Pound to let Zukofsky *in whose critical judgment he had confidence & who was closest to the scene* edit a special issue, she insisted on a name for the poets he had selected for inclusion, and he had to make one up, but he didn't want to name them anything because *to* all he had done was *what he judged to be* ferret out the best young talent in America at that time *of which Pound was* and select their best work. The only name that would have suited all of us, therefore, and been accurate was one that denoted Z's critical standards, which he had derived from Pound, and his personal taste. Of course once the name was used, it made us a group, but in reality we were not and never thought we were. The same sort of thing must be true of the Language Poets, and I am not willing to ~~go~~ *try* to respond to them as if they were an ~~entity~~ entity.

excl-
Carl Rakosi

The emotions and the intellect mix very poorly. In fact, they don't mix at all. They exist on different planes, and when they do meet, their tones clash. No sooner does a person feel something, then the mind butts in: looks, describes, interprets, denatures, absorbs, controls, encapsulates. Its wit and precision make it so complacent that it assumes it has improved on the original, or at the very least, made an even exchange. The trouble is that when it's through, the emotion is no longer there, only an ectoplasm.

This is a fundamental problem in writing.

Ah, youth! With what condescension and disdain it spurns all poetry
it should it do when it is itself a lyrical impulse,

One by one~~x~~ then. I won't use names. A, for example, has an amazing ^{incomparable} talent for ~~xxxxxxxx~~ extinguishing poetry. How he does it, I don't know, and I'm not interested in ~~finding out~~, but I heard him give a reading once and I sat there, dumbfounded, trapped, the minutes creeping mercilessly as he read what sounded like a treatise, and I cursed him for it. I didn't think anything outside an engineering ~~manual~~/handbook could be that dreary. Talk about dead! Yet A has a strong, lively intellect. He is the only language poet I have heard read.

I have, however, read a ~~few~~ poems by others. These poems deserve high marks for ~~mental boldness and nimbleness~~, for a very refined sensibility in language and ingenuity in managing it, one poem by Bernstein, in fact, reminding me of Zukofsky, and for a ^{Z's nimble way with language,} ~~(thick)~~ impasto of rich word-sounds and imagery and metaphors. ^{metaphors & musical} They deserve credit too for ^{spurning} the watered-down Wms. type of poem and ⁽¹⁾ the products of the Iowa School and the trumped up "tragedy" of the confessional poem. ⁽²⁾ Nevertheless, these poems are not where I want to be. ^X

William-esque poems

and
images, metaphors.

(3) the numberless little watered-down

for making an impasto of rich-sounding words,

Added to Scenes from my Life

George Oppen and I have been friends for over sixty years although we did not meet or correspond with each other until 1971. This is understandable only if you know George. The way it happened was that we sat around his kitchen table in San Francisco and talked and ate cheese and bread, and the more we talked and the more I looked into his steady eyes, the deeper down we got to something solid and brotherly between us, older than he or I. That is how we became old, old friends in one night.

George is a tough old bird. He's the only man I know who can get away with the curious notion that feelings don't have to be expressed in poetry; they can be assumed from the situation. He gets away with it because he's patient and his eye will not let itself be distracted from its object.

George has a great eye, precise and irreducible. If you sit still and look hard enough, you can see what it sees. What it sees feels like the gnarled bark of an oak tree. The tree is there too. You can put your weight

They are hermetic not because the author's nature was hermetic or
because the nature of reality seemed hermetic to him or because his expts.
have been hermetic but by linguistic ^{theory} assumption and fiat. As a result the
poems are artifacts devoid of the human qualities in hermetic poetry of the
past, their mystery and unresolved yearning. These poems are sealed casks
with no air moving in or out of them and I find myself unable to relate to
them in a human way. All I can do is recognize their linguistic excellence.
and ^{because the authors make certain linguistic assumptions}
^{and turn them into fiat} ^{which are facts}
^{relate with that part of my mind that recognizes}
^a ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~insincere~~ ^{insincere} impacts of words.

We use so little of our imagination that when we create the unexpected, it looks as if we have transcended even ourselves.

Left alone the imagination confounds more than it clarifies. This shows that it was not meant to be utilitarian and belongs to a different faculty, the aesthetic.

Thoughts and emotions are attracted to a work of art but when you talk about its meaning or the emotion it evokes, you are not talking about its essential character.

Now that philosophers have entered the modern world and turned their attention to utilitarian subjects, the field has been left to the poets.

Does our ancient interest mean that there is some correspondence between our quest for form and the impulse to discover the nature of being?

If one is not really turned on by poetry, he has no defence against mistaking facility for the real thing.

Question 28

128

I can't make anything of their work, because ~~that~~ I cannot
~~refer to~~ connect the words to anything ^{either to} the real world or in the
world of ^{the} actual imagination as I know it. It is a self-
contained ^{not an} universal ^{I supposed to} ^{I suppose} the lingual int. on a rampage,
Nevertheless, I am impressed ^{an undecaying exercise}
They are quite bright young people, however, ^{eventually}
and I think will become bored with this and go on to something
else, having ~~acquired~~ ^{acquired} something new & valuable out of it all,
from which they can use in their new work.
It has the fatal weakness of all ~~such~~ ^{School} things, it operates from
an ^{movements} ^{It acts} ^{from a theory}
which is to ^{act on} premises, assumptions, hypotheses were
the truth / facts / had the reality of fact

More on language poets — the problem for me = not in adventures in language but in the degree of intellectualization in the poems. If the degree to which it ~~shuts~~ ^{shuts out the existential} ~~shuts out the existential~~ ^{shuts out the existential} confronts me with the question, which I have never had to address myself to before, of the role of the intellect in a poem (as it concerns a reader, not of course, the poet), what it does, what it undoes, etc. Develop

Here the test, as in other matters, is, do I want to read it again? and again? and again? — that is, once we have been impressed or entertained or sublightened by the poet's intellect + ingenuity, do I want to be impressed again? can I be impressed again? — The intel. content has been received by the reader & approved; there's no place else for it to go — It's a one-shot bolt —

Refer to my ^{axiom}: the lyric poet has to fight against his intellect. But in addition to that, ^{this suggests that} poetry that can be read with satisfaction more than once, has to be existential, not just mental.

23
24-37
26-25

poetic impulse; who professes to have feelings which the poem shows he doesn't have; who does not write out of his own experience; who uses words deceptively to give the appearance of substance;I could go on. The interesting thing to note is that sincerity in all this, in the sense of honesty and truth, exists as a product of the poet's relation to his medium and that the test of it lies, therefore, in the writing, not in anywhere else. 33

Language Poets

Look on with amazement as they hang a noose
around their necks & proceed to hang themselves,
ranting the most polemical theory, etc.

As if one decided to see ^{interior} what happens ^{when} one
uses only the lower left lobe of the brain —

- ☐ SACRAMENTO OFFICE
STATE CAPITOL
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814
(916) 445-8077
- ☐ DISTRICT OFFICE
540 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94102
(415) 557-0784
- ☐ DISTRICT OFFICE
107 SOUTH BROADWAY
SUITE 8009
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012
(213) 620-4356



Assembly California Legislature

WILLIE LEWIS BROWN, JR.
SPEAKER OF THE ASSEMBLY

February 1986

mained a hero for Rochberg. In the 1972 "Reflections on Schoenberg," he accurately describes Schoenberg as a man who "lost touch with the primitive instinct of the musician's ear," who "succumbed to abstraction and rationalization," and who sought "salvation in methodology." Yet his final judgment on Schoenberg's career is that "miraculously he succeeded more than he failed." The loyalty is touching, but the logic is baffling. Rochberg seems finally unwilling (or unable) to admit that Schoenberg's perverse granting of priority to the mind over the ear brought about the failure of his own career, and that it is Schoenberg who is directly responsible for much that is wrong with twentieth-century music. This is one of the two grave faults of this extraordinary book.

The other is Rochberg's failure to understand that what he now sees as the great disaster that has overtaken all the arts in the twentieth century—a kind of "rational madness . . . which delights in manipulation for its own sake" and has produced "forms of art totally devoid of human content"—

Some form of tonal implication seems almost to be necessary if music is to satisfy the ear as well as the mind. Finally, a reading of

is cited the McCarran-Walter Act—
t dangerous subversives—in refusing
t enter this country.

The Baltimore Sun points out, is that
s pro-wolf and, worse, pro-seal and
t. Small wonder the Immigration and
im.”

“What Mowat *has* done,” observes
Globe, “is write a book called *Sea of*
o feeling and sound documentation,
of species of animal life.”

’ asks *The Globe*. “It could be, in the
eaucratic guardians of our borders.”

at has been banned. But *Sea of*
ich *The Seattle Times* describes as
must’ reading that Rachel Carson’s
once was.” refuses to be silenced. As
in your local

Language ^{excellent} ~~good~~ minds, good ears, ^{sharp} ~~good~~ eyes, but
~~poets~~ they have lots of brains
one wd. not know from their poems that they had ^{feelings}
~~beats~~, or other than conceptual experiences

^{haunted} mesmerized by vacuum -
fascinated by the poetry of vacuum,
^{excited} while & too fast at times

exception: Bob Perleman
- but too hesitant to reveal
more than glimpses
light, sensitive touch

Lydia Davis / Lyn Hejinian
longest possible distance from oneself / as if looking at events
from a distant planet - from this distance, one can still
^{outline of things}
~~see~~ people & events, but all one sees = their shape,
^{nothing inside}
mysterious / strange excitement from attenuating human ^{nature} ~~being~~

Some well-intentioned ~~people~~ ^{ass}
Somebody a loose-mouthed ~~friend~~ ^{no doubt},
being the ~~name~~ ^{abundance} Language Poets on them & they're
stuck with ~~the name~~ ^{the name}. The Linguists wd. have been a
better name, ~~for that they are~~ ^{for them} (But Language
~~Poets are an abundance~~ ^{for they do, as I understand have a} common interest in linguistics.
I ~~try~~ ^{try} to call a ~~poet~~ ^{poet} a language poet & like calling
a composer a music composer, for how is it possible
for a poet not to be a language poet? In fact,
a case might be made out for calling them
Anti-Language Poets, for are they not trying
to undo language ~~as a~~ ^{medium of communication}
(i.e. reference, meaning, ~~the~~ ^{idiom}) & substitute
word-objects, for them?
(& the pursuit of linguistics)

Also read Sagetrieb, Winter 1984 (p. my desk),
Interview with Bernstein & Messerli

The hunger to extend the boundaries (premise:
Poetry = a ~~an~~ ^{an} infinitely expansible system of progressions.
like science, always moving ahead, the future
unknown, limited only by the limits of one's own mind.
— Science as a paradigm of art — The art business / promotion
However, So far as the young poet himself = concerned, the
all-consuming need / drive to discover & make something
new, something ^{all} his own, & of this objective, the past
= his enemy, what he must renounce

A WORD WITH CONSCIENCE	360
"You should do/ something"	360
MEDITATIONS	361
MEDITATION	361
"Lord, what is man?"	361
MEDITATION	362
"Psychologist,/ my mental spider"	362
MEDITATION	365
"If one could write/ like St. Augustine"	365
MEDITATION	366
" <u>reverence</u> , His great"	366
MEDITATION	367
"What is the nature/ of quintessence?"	367
MEDITATION/ "What are Animals For?"	368
"How base the answer/ must be"	368
MEDITATION	369
"These lines I often hear"	369
MEDITATION	371
"The old man/ drew the line"	371
MEDITATION: MELANCHOLY	373
"bachelor of music"	373
THE AGE	374
"I shall/not prevail"	374

COLLECTED PROSE

LITTLE MEDITATIONS	375
xxxx xxxx xxx xx xxxxx	
THE DWARF	384
MY SIBERIA	390
MEMOIR	391
THE ORDEAL OF MOSES	392
THE ARTIST	394
OBSERVATIONS	399
DAY BOOK	414
EX CRANIUM, THE POET	429
MY EXPERIENCES IN PARNASSUS	454

PERMANENT RECORD

Language Poets

(1) It's where the action is:

(a) where boldest experimentation

(b) most fashionable ^{long before the fashion} ~~passing~~, ^{Parsons} ~~Parsons~~ will be excellent, aggressive polemicists) — a thing of the past for plain

Parallel to abstract expressionism: reduction to the medium itself, painting + language —

But in painting = no sticking point because has color & movements in the lines & these can communicate emotion & there = always a design of some sort there —

but if you remove reference & meaning, you short-circuit communication, everything stops —

^{the argument} What about the reader = left free to make up his own meaning? — This = regarded as a form of freedom but a reader does not go to a book & in order to make up his own meaning. The understanding = that he = going to relate to the author, etc.

If it's a virtue for the reader to make up his own meaning, it's surely ^{even} better for him to write his own poem in the first place. He doesn't need the author or the author's explanations

THE ANGLICAN PRESENCE	43
"Turning as from an instrument"	44
ORIGINS	44
"In the salt warp"	46
FIGURES IN ANCIENT INK	46
"In the dense scopes"	48
EXTRACTS FROM A PRIVATE LIFE	48
"Your second cousin, an obscure"	51
THE WEDDING	51
"Between the two gold"	52
NIGHT THOUGHTS	52
"After the jostling on canal streets"	53
EQUIPOISE	53
"This commanding/ young head"	54
HANDEL	54
"The piccolo of heaven"	55
TREMBLING ACOLYTE	55
"Blond youth"	56
DEATH SONG	56
"Young utopia of spring"	57
MANIFEST AND LONELY	57
"The eyes are centered"	58
PARAGUAY	58
"In the early hours"	59
FLORA AND THE OGRE	59
"Let her quince knees sag"	60
THE JANUARY OF A GNAT	60
"Snow panels, ice pipes, house the afternoon"	61
RETURN, SWEET LADIES	61
"with streamers blowing"	62
FANTASY	62
"One must have sullen wits"	63
HOMAGE TO WALLACE STEVENS	63
"Clear me with this master music"	66
YOUTHFUL MOCKERIES	66
CONCEPTION	66
"A plankwalk to the sea"	67
THE WINTER GARDEN	67
"the musical revue	68
REVUE 1	68
" <u>From Sinai to Killarney</u> , a comic burst"	69
REVUE 2	69
"They say in dreams they have a peetweet's view"	70
SUPERPRODUCTION	70
"St. Louis songbirds in Atlanta"	71
CHARACTERS	71
"one of our brassy beefeaters"	72
WANTED	72
"expert experiences black on white"	73
SYLVIA	73
"Trot out the negro singers, ladies, clowns"	74
FRANKFORT AND BETHLEHEM	74
"this postcard has the Christmas"	74

Deconstruction the 20th Century's
fin de siècle intellectualism,
(^{in its way as} elegant & effete as the 19th Century's)
deriving from the nature of our
~~some~~ technological age & the social
isolation

the network of
& radical young wing

of academia, which starts out
(~~with honorable~~) Marxist and
winds up ~~as~~ elitist, indeed,
~~does not know what~~

Linguistics as ~~part~~ of learning of an int. pursuit
is as legitimate & worthwhile for study as any other
subject. However, for the poet (who is) thinking only
of his own work it is not into this

The question is, what is its application
to the writing of a poem? ~~for the working poet who~~ Analyzing a poem by its
linguistic structure & effects does not give the answer.
But ~~excludes~~ psychology

Language
poetry expects the reader to perform a lobotomy
on himself

Has taken me a long time to answer
because one to question one's
own premises & base & to
that extent - wholesome

I approach the question from this
~~my~~ base: the poet's theory
(of theory of language -
interesting as theory (of composition
(as culture) & his intentions
are meaningful to the poet
(& other poets) but these
= immaterial ~~irrelevant~~ to the ind.
poet. The ^{only} reality there
= one between the poem &
the reader

the independence of the poem
from the poet - I insist
on that, & wd. be willing
to wager — on the correctness
(over)

of that —

In fact, come to think of
it, I have very little
interest in the poet & less
~~about~~ ⁱⁿ linguistic speculations
~~about~~ ^{my} interest in
in the ^{discrete} poem & its rel.
to to a reader
non-poet

No need to be bothered
by their theory - each man
grows his own garden, etc. —
If feel threatened by them,
~~feel~~ means one is insecure
& = our problem —

Abstract expressionism ^{as design} at least
communicates with one's
aesthetic sensibility but
~~the richness of metaphor~~
this doesn't work in language
because reference & meaning ^{as meaning}
built into language (in fact,
its reason for being) & without
them, one is simply stopped.
Language ^{in the sense} ~~as~~ ^{communication} an artifact & is no
longer a medium,
of passing communication from
poet to the reader but
a language-object (the parallel of
an object)

Here it is ^{restricted} by its nature
the quality of its ^{& cadence} ~~cadence~~ ^{as}
to ~~richness~~ of sound (color in
painting) + metaphor (altho
implies a metaphor already
& individual word
associations

+ the ability of the reader
to make his own associations
to build something out of the
individual words

I have read some of the
attempts to ^{solemnly} ~~solemnly~~ ^{dis} ~~dis~~ ^{solemn} ~~solemn~~
poems, & the interpretation
= a total projection ^{on the part of the interpreter} & not
related in any way to that
I cd. see to the poem
that I was reading.
= a disaster

Their poetry - at odds
with their ~~neo~~ neo-Marxism
that ^{what} at least 2 of them ^{that I know}
profess, for Marx & Engels,
~~for~~ especially Engels,
not to mention Trotsky, had
an honored place in society
for lit. & the whole direction
& drive of their theory,
etc. - in the opposite
direction towards the most
ivory of ivory towers
& towerish

Poetry, at best, already has a
great problem with having readers
(develop) - ~~the~~ solepsism of
~~much recent poetry~~ makes it
only worse & now in addition
to the solepsism, there is added
psych. ^{meaning &} reference are removed, what we have
left is a solepsism, if I may stretch
the word, of language itself & only language
- which makes the situation of poetry hopeless

Old is always ready for the new - it's the
nature of the beast -

Examine the reactions ^{to}

language poets - As interesting as
what the lang. poets have to say

- (1) ^{initial,} excitement ^{possibility of} at something new -
new discoveries, new forms, & where
~~better~~ better than in language
- (2) ~~Appalled~~ Appalled at the price one = asked to
pay - at the price of meaning & reference
^{who can take that seriously?}
- (3) ^{when discovered} then further appalled where they come
from - (a) the ^{Part 10} deconstructionists, one-upmanship
experts at int. ultra-smart, weissenheimer
who do not have an honest bone in their body
- who are ~~not~~ only out to show that they are one up
on everybody else

who are, in any case not ~~poets~~
themselves — (b) ^{the use of} from ~~statistics~~
as a substitute for meaning (c) New Left
theory — that in some way this was
serving a social
left political ~~purpose~~

Contrast with Objectivists & L2's
unwillingness to categorize.

Without meaning & reference, how is it
possible to express feelings?
Without meaning & feelings, what do
you have? something not human —

Language poets: basic fallacy
= that words are not just sounds,
rhythms, cadences, etc. They are,
by their nature, references to
meaning—even if we want color,
we can't get to it directly, as in
painting, we have to refer to it
~~by~~ on the agreed-upon ~~medium~~ meanings
of the word.—

So if words without meaning
are impossible, if we want any
effect (~~can~~ all we can get is a composition
of aborted meanings)
(the nature of our medium) then
all we can do is manipulate the
meanings (more, less, this way,
that way, new meanings by
juxtapositions, etc.) and highlight
special effects or atmosphere
by manipulating cadence,
diction, form, etc.—

Pound's Advice to a Young Poet (with Revision)
Also from above: Mastering an art does not consist in
trying to bluff people. Work shows; there = no substitute
for it; holding one theory or another doesn't in the
least get a man over the difficulty, etc., etc.

use this for Language Poets
since — poems they can not go to my heart & hence
(1) The ~~poets~~ do not come from the heart, hence I never
move me. — develop

(2) Can they stimulate me intellectually? Not
if they block out meaning & reference — Can only relate
to it as to a crossword puzzle aesthetically only, the words

(3) Can I relate to it ~~simply~~ ^{aesthetically only} as to an aesthetic
object, ^{a language} ~~an~~ object with musical sound,

(3) Can I relate ~~to~~ it just aesthetically, i.e. as to a
collection of words which, ^{individually and/or} ~~individually~~ ^{the aggregate}
have a music, a richness of timbre, a novelty, which make
of it an appealing aesthetic object? Yes, I can, & do
but why shed. I want to shut out so much of my mind
& feeling? (Brownie, the feelings are there, only the cue words are missing
sidely makes no sense) A feeble need.

On this ground, the argument ~~cd.~~ be made that anything whatever is ~~x~~
The bottom line is, Do I want to take this route
(as the reader) & the answer is no, I don't. Too little in it for me to tolerate.
(Consider Gertrude Stein & the claps. make the same decision & take it)
me. That doesn't mean that others won't want to take it.
And it doesn't mean that the effort has been
wasted. ~~As~~ As in the sciences, perhaps nothing
is without some use - someone else will come along
& use it for his own purpose.
Furthermore the position of the language poet is
quite different from the reader's. There is, I know
from my own earlier exp. tremendous excitement &
sense of discovery & of limitless possibilities along this
& present in any combination of words, the ~~the~~ words
are simply absent
route. Alas, as the reader, I do not care
about that - it is of no import to me - that is
not my ^{problem} concern or interest.

Beginning) (1) The first thing that's wrong = the
title, Language Poet. Everyone after all is a
language poet. What else ~~cd.~~ be ~~x~~ - it wd.
be more accurate to call them The Linguist
& (that's like calling a composer a music composer)
for it's linguistics that they've introduced
into their poetry - for some, it's both their subject-
matter & their parameter (the subject of art = art)
Question is, Can the study of linguistics improve
poetry? & wd. think not (if it excludes meaning &
reference) but ~~let's~~ let's wait & see.

(the second thing that's wrong = the nasty personal
confrontations in pages of Poetry Flash. These have
been the direct result of the behavior of two of
the spokesmen: ~~Barrett~~ Barrett Watten &
not fair to paint the others with the same
brush - I have read things by L. Bernstein &
Bob Gorman which I cannot fault ~~as~~ in any
way provocative.
The remedy = to forbid these = to speak for
anyone but themselves.

Like the minimalists (^{viz.} Steve Reich & John Adams), the
language poets will > bored/glutted & turn to something
else ("Obviously Adams was attracted to minimalism's
surface characteristics - its sensuous sound but his ^{emotional} ^{requirements}
burst the bounds of the aesthetes' deliberate austerity")

Read p. 58 for roots of language poets
Danwood

What they attempt = psych. very ambitious.
" " " " is nothing less than breaking
off parts of poetry as a whole - viz. rhythm
sound & words from their syntax &
context
and using them as if
they were ^{entities} wholes. - Using them as if
they were wholes ~~but~~ does not make
them whole.

off just sound or rhythm
wind up having to be purely arbitrary
of sound pictures juxtapositions (over)

"What's wrong with that? - Has no
interest to the reader. The arbitrary &
the serendipitous happen to the author
in the course of composing, ^{& are vital} but that
same arbitrary & serendipitous can not
happen to the reader, for he is not the poet

"In reducing painting to its elements, Cubism made it possible to separate each element from the others & deal with it ~~as~~ sufficient for painting." (Rosenberg)
Is this not like the language poets?

The ~~arguments~~ ^{rationales} of the language poets ~~state~~ ^{remind me of the} arguments of the philosophers who prove that life is not worth living. But does anyone kill himself for such a reason? — It is just that, an argument, not talked seriously by anyone who has his ^{senses} about him. Not talked seriously because it leaves out the will to live. The argument is not applicable ^{which does not depend on any rationale}. Similarly, the language poets leave out the will to meaning. ^{installed of} Twinkl, needlessly to say, is not a construction of the mind, ^{it can not be discarded way an idea can.}

Language Poets

If meaning & reference = eliminated
or blocked (that's as close as one can
come to elimination), then ^{the author's individual} characters
& pers. = also blocked - ^{what's left} hence,
the poetry tends to look alike.
Why are they alike? -

One can excuse the pretentiousness
on the grounds of youth & inexperience
& sense of discovery, but the ^{aggressive}
^{a hard-nosed} dogmatism makes them an easy prey
because they are being certain ^{on} about
things about which one can not be
certain & about which they obviously
have too little ^{& dogmatic a base of} knowledge.

1

Dogmatism = ^{suspect} always obnoxious,
but ^{at least tolerable} when it is aggressive it ~~is~~ ^{is}
~~attack on non-believers~~
felt by others as an attack & they're
simply not going to sit ~~by~~ & take it -
foibles of youth -

To ^{act} be dogmatic in a field in which the best one
can do is ^{to offer speculations} guess so ~~to~~ show a lack of understanding
of ~~its~~ ^{its} complexity & range & to ~~believe~~ ^{assume} what can not
be believed, that poetry can be reduced to
understanding & controlling its linguistics.

of the complexity & scope
elusive, mercurial, dialectical nature

~~almost anything~~ diametrically opposite things can be
sd. about poetry & be true

So if one goes off into speculations, it is for the
pleasure & excitement (sometimes enlightenment)
of the speculation & not for the sake of poetry.

Re the abandonment of reference
It ~~seems~~ to me the opposite shd. be one goal:
the greatest possible concentration of references
in a square inch. - That's how a text
achieves richness, scope, depth & the
the major that is ~~unique to~~ language
(~~particular~~ kind of) possible in
Sans that it has to be robotic, despite
images, rhythm or what have you

The whole objective of the ~~freedom~~ ^{force} of metaphors
& of modern ~~poetry~~ - to enlarge meaning
to introduce ^{poetry} new & original illumination
of it ~~to~~ ^{to lift it} to take it into (+ show it) an
aesthetic ~~phase~~ ^{plane} -
all this moves in opposite direction to them

To lift meaning ~~into~~ ^{a new aesthetic reality} an aesthetic plane,
not to create an aesthetic plane from language
alone (sound, rhythm, color)
(word) sounds, rhythm, denotations of color,
& chance juxtapositions of words alone
And imagine, not only ~~are they~~ ^{for} this opinion, but
its their cause, for which they are willing to
march out and do battle ~~to~~ with one & all,
a cohort of Good Soldiers, Schweik.

To read what they have to say about
writing = a strange exp. -
Others I have read on writing, &
will agree with some points & not
others; ~~for~~ I will agree on some but
not ~~that~~ agree on its usefulness
of relevance or emphasis, or ~~may~~
accept its validity for some but
not for me (i.e. that it's a matter
of taste or particular psych. need &
objective) - These non-agreements
will be non-agreements of ~~fact~~ ^{opinion}.
But my non-agreements with these
ideologies are not ^{mainly} non-agreements of
opinion but non-agreements on facts
& reality. - With them I've had the odd
exp. of not agreeing with anything
they say, not anything. They asseverate
~~things~~ something as if anyone who
knows anything at all knows
that - etc. but what they asseverate
is not true at all. This wd. not be
strange if it occurred ~~but~~ occasionally
but when it happens every single
time I feel as if ~~in their~~ ^{another} describing
the psych. of a man from ~~Hamlet~~ ^{parrot}
not anyone I've ever met in a long
life - a psych. wooted ~~in~~ ^{out} in a computer
~~by a clever operator~~
a psych. composed on a computer ^{formula} ~~by a robot~~

the in-thing | ^{if they're} criticized
avant-garde | they act like
~~surprised~~ ^{surprised} communists

~~what we meant to~~
~~each other~~

they denounce & demolish
their adversary by
cited ways

^{They} Expect too much of human
nature - no amt. of scolding
is going to change that

They confuse ~~the~~ what goes
on in the writer with what
goes ^{on} in the reader.

It's that's necessary ~~to~~
~~to not~~ change human nature & to refer
the reader to the proper text
on linguistics

Their chief interest is intellectual exercise —
more interested in the theory & the semantics of poetry
than in poetry itself & They value poetry
as intellectual and/or semantic exercise —
Hence, they are not lovers of poetry / I'll give them
the benefit of the doubt & say that they are friends
of poetry — They undoubtedly think of themselves
as friends & proponents of poetry but I am not sure
that one who values poetry for its providing int. &
semantic exercise, can be a friend
in this young generation. — a basic change in values
(expand) —

~~please a couple of them~~
They never simply make a point; they make the
point by putting the opposition down. The reader, who
does not happen to agree with the point, is thus
identified with the enemy & feels he has been put down
— & not just put down but annihilated by the implication
that as one who doesn't "understand" the point
or as one who simply doesn't know how to read
what's in front of him, hopelessly backward
or ignorant or stupid etc. The result is that cackles
rise & the perpetrator finds himself being attacked
& protests that people are picking on the language
facts, that they are the objects of a nasty vendetta, etc.

But they ~~talk~~ write too much about writing.
It's as if they didn't trust the work to stand on its
own & to stand or fall on its own feet. They didn't
trust the judgment of the reader & we're going to
forestall that by telling ^{down} what he should be thinking &
about the work & what he should be finding in it.
Again, cackles rise & suspicion enters. They should
shut up & listen to others. They wd. learn something
from that. This way ^{who disagree with them} they'll ~~and~~ just be talking to each
other.

The ideology of linguistics, which Bernstein initially preposes as possibilities > before the ^{long} ~~the~~ ^{by author's conviction} ~~the very~~ ^{semantics} ~~article~~ ^{frustrates} dogma & ^{an implied} ~~not~~ for poetry — No, this won't fly — because it

mal-linguistic — dead (lacks a psychology) the psych. of the poet & the psych. of the reader reading poetry the psych. of the rel. between the reader & the written word

the reader & the ^{form & content} ~~person~~ ^{significance} ~~of the poem~~ ^{as shadow} ~~of the poet~~ dead because it cuts it off from the main body of the language meaning, which is the associations of words (which = also partly psych. because those associations are ~~in~~ in the memory of the reader (as they were in the memory of the poet) and ~~are~~ recognized by him & he reacts to them as the poet did —

All this I understand somewhat — This ~~that~~ the capitalist ~~for all this~~ ^{that} ~~corruption~~ ^{the necessity to purify} ~~of language~~ ^{input} ~~it by dismantling & re-organizing it~~ ^{the} ~~Kremlin~~ ^{men} ~~in the Kremlin~~ ^{had} ~~had~~ ^{stopped} ~~laughing~~ ^{about that} — I can imagine the look of dismay on their faces at finding ~~may~~ ^{may} ~~who wd. remove~~ ^{populace} ~~so every vestige of vox~~ ^{from language} ~~the one thing they are determined to keep in~~ ^{on which} ~~their rule depends~~ ^{these loony Americans. Who can understand them?} ^{of "Capitalism finally got to them."} ^{They've gone bonkers.} ^{not knowing whether to laugh or to}

exclaim, I hunger for the new (life mine when I was their age — cf. my fascination with early work of your Winters & Mark Twain) with which I can identify — (possibilities of expression, selection, suggestion, depth, power, etc. than the short form) in the new 2

What's wrong with a poet simply exploring his ~~mind~~^{world}
& his opportunities in language? Nothing if he's ~~going~~^{going}
to be the only reader/recipient). But if there's
going to be ~~read~~^{read} by someone else, then it's not
enough. ^{with a mind & an imagination & an expectation of his own,}
A reader is not a clone or ~~the~~^{the} shadow
of a poet. Nothing for a reader to do except try to
~~discover~~^{discover} the ~~same~~^{same} track the poet took (& try to follow it. Even
if he succeeds — & there ~~are~~^{are} chances ^{are} that he won't be
able to, that someone will have to "explain" it, ~~there's~~^{there's}
he can't do anything with it because it's a closed,
self-sufficient system — i.e. The mental exploration & experimentation
can't be its own end. — Rationally, it ~~should~~^{should} only be a means
to an end — "Now that you can do this with language, what
are you going to do ~~with~~^{with} it? It's that that is going to be judged.

a contempt for communication ^{> that sense}
^{a benighted ~~elitism~~^{elitism} —} disturbs me
that that will involve the reader. ~~That~~^{It's}
Like rehearsing before a

Have ^{strong, lively,} obvious analytic powers & skills - in fact, they
are ^{very much} taken with these powers & these ^{subject matter} ~~their~~ ^{subject} ~~matter~~
(+ they ^{poetry is} ~~are~~ judged on this basis: superior intellect = superior
poetry ^

A generational gap? Not just a difference of ideas
or point of view. We have here a fundamental psych.
difference - i.e. a ^{poet} ~~man~~ of my generation does not ^{highly} ~~seriously~~
take theory = so interesting as poetry because this wd.
not be in his life exp. ^{might} (altho he think it
sometimes as a joke, a wise-crack)

All this ~~may~~ comes, I think, from too much reading,
too much lying in books in explanations, interpretations,
theories, etc. of poetry
& in this case, of language itself.
of how poetry gets its effects
"works".

The impulse to think, here, = strong & clear, but where = the poetic impulse? (have found it only here & there in lts in Bob Peckman)

Historical Determinism

Also, if one views poetry, like some art critics view art, as a historical process which is forever progressive & evolutionary, then ^{there will be great excitement about} the latest innovation will get the most attention & it will assume great importance out of all proportion to its inherent value. The language poets are ~~temp.~~ beneficiaries of this. — Because of this & the whole intellectual, formetic nature of the poetry ~~with~~ which cries for exegesis, these poets will be in high favor ^{necessitates} among the Puritan Dept. avant garde, but not among other poets ^{hip}.

Are they ~~the~~ wave of the future? I hope not.
 wave of the future = ^{in the life of the reader} ~~the computer~~ word-processing ~~and~~ ~~commentary~~.
 accurate

~~Not~~ It wd. not be ^{accurate} ~~true~~ to say that there is not
enough heart in this poetry - there = no heart, perhaps
almost by ^{prescription} definition. Now is it true to say that
there = too much intellect. It is ^{There is never too much of that} simply that
the intellect = is its own subject matter & goes
~~on~~ in its own universe. Does one need to comment
on that? This is a defect that cannot be corrected by poetic or technical
Too many of this ingredients overusing. For those who do not find
poetry really ^{engaging} interesting, this = a(n ideal) universe ^{made-to-order}
And there are moments, when I too, have had enough and
& lost mind poking around in this universe, but not for long.

AMONG THE
EXHIBITING ARTISTS
ARE

Robert Arms	Ann Jeremias
Hyacinth Brown	Elliott Kai-Kee
Allison Lee Brown	Sherree Kaslikowski
Sherri Cavan	Elsie Kelly
Cecilia Czerwinski	Ben Linsey
Elizabeth Dante	Hazael Mejia
Ray Der	Eva Michaels
Dan Donegan	Lorraine Oller
Dorothy Brew	Helen Orth
Victoria Durkin	Mary Pafford
Ren Emery	Helen Phillips
Rodney Entrekin	Betty Podchiernikoff
Bill Farnan	Miguel Raggio
Dorise Ford	Leah Rawley
Joe Gans	Emily Reznik
Tebby George	Sandy Riker
Nina Goldfeather	Henry Rutzick
Beth Goodsitt	Tomas Shuster
Alvin Greening	Takeshi Sugimoto
Thomas Habersack	Alexandra Swavoop
Rosabelle Howard	Jerome Vloeberghs
Elizabeth Jacobs	Burgess Webb
Wilma Jackson	Craig Wiblin
Le R. Williams	

FORT MASON
SCULPTORS
invite you to their

Annual Holiday Show
and Sale

December 8 and 9, 1984
10:00 am to 6:00 pm

Building B
Fort Mason Center
Marina Blvd. & Laguna St.
San Francisco

ADMISSION FREE
PARKING AVAILABLE

because when I do, I ^{prefer} the good prose of the original thinkers. ^{who write in prose} find myself wandering off towards (I don't want to waste time on interpreters when I can go to the source) - why should anyone (I?) spend his time reading commentaries + applications when he can go to the source? ^{re-arrangements for poetics applications to details of original ideas, someone else's ideas}

interpretations + applications of someone else's ideas when one can go to the source?

Quote from Bernstein (interview) - not really interested in poetry - need one say more?
 more interested in philosophy, social thinking

After reading the poetry, a part of me cries out, "Come out from behind these words & let's see what you are & who you are? Be a man! Don't hide behind ^{clear} words"

Having a great time exploring their minds & using their ^{the effect of word arrangements} minds on language to discover all & array all the possible variations & connections & - etc. This = a spirited personal ^{inquiry the sky is the limit} adventure, exciting to them no doubt. But is it exciting to others? That depends on the reader & the poet's understanding of his reader - elaborate
 (to which there is no end)

But does that make it exciting to others? That depends. I see no awareness in their writing that they are aware of what that depends on, or any interest in that.
 (Curiously) this puts me in the position of the reader's advocate when I myself do not write for a reader (elaborate)

Language
Poetry misses so much / out of the mainstream
viz., Dan's folk joke.

Texan: I have a ranch so big, I get into my car
at sun-up and drive East all day until sun-down
and never reach the end; & I drive West all day
from sun-up to — etc. & I drive North, etc.; & I
drive South, etc. That's how big it is.
Nebraskan, considers this thoughtfully,
ponders for a while, then says, "Knowingly,
"I had a car like that once."

"The notion of alchemy may be as old as language, and
the idea that language & magic are somehow related is
also old. 'Grammar' after all, was a word used in the middle
ages to denote high learning but it also implied a practicing
familiarity with ~~the~~ alchemy. ~~Grammar~~, an older term
for grammar, signified occult learning & necromancy. Glamour
was the Scottish word for grammar and it meant a spell,
casting enchantment."

This unspoken belief in language ^{what} underlies
every poet's attitude ^{does} towards it & makes ^{us even} ~~language~~
interested in ^{trying to find out how it does that} studying it. But linguistics is ^{the} ~~the~~
least likely ^{to} tell us, for it does not deal with enchantment,
it deals with phonemes. ^{that necessarily reductive exercise}

learn ^{what} these young people have learned about language. ^{& so were curious to}

They seem to have reached the conclusion that
we have exhausted the possibilities of subject matter
the French ~~periodically~~ come to this conclusion
how many times ~~the~~ the young have come to this conclusion
& that now ~~that~~ they must explore the possibilities of
poetic ~~meaning~~ in language itself, in its very phonemes,
& that this — the wave of the future — this is their great
discovery & they go about it with boundless energy, ^{re-act}
leaving me behind because I have ^{not given up on the possibilities of subject matter}

It is no longer subject matter (in the ~~sub~~ sense of a writer
with a particular psych. + presence + ^{need} manner/style etc.
being present as a particular exp. of objective
reality. Language, it is proclaimed, will take the
place of all that.

Ha ha! Are they kidding?

the impulse comes from
^{reading} other poets —

dehumanize / de-socializes
(but not altogether, ^{and to that extent}
^{dehumanizes the language}
Sad to see talent wasted ^{etc.}
on that —

The Humanist School —

The interest is in ~~an~~ having an
exp. with language and not
in using life exp.
Are we willing to settle for that? ^{I'm} not.

Heretofore ^{we thought that there were only 3 ways for a} ~~there have been~~ poet ^{could} go — (1) outward to the world outside (viz. nature) (2) inward — ^{symbolism — inner states} and (3) a combination of 1 & 2. ^{realism — nature as seen}

The beauty of (3) — aesthetics of balance — is exemplified in Goethe (quote from Eckerman, p. 57)

For Goethe to a poet by Eckerman, "You stand now at that point where you ought to break through to the really high and difficult part of art, that of seizing on what is individual in objects"

He goes on: ^{p. 58} the apprehension & representation of the individual is the very life of art. Furthermore, when you content yourself in generalities, everyone can imitate you, but in the particulars, no man can, because no one has had your exact exp. in life.

"And you need not fear ^{that} what is peculiar ^{or idiosyncratic} will not meet with sympathy. Each character, no matter how peculiar it may be, from a stone to a man, has generality, for there is repetition everywhere & nothing ~~is~~ occurs only once in the world. On this step of representing what is peculiar or individual begins what we call composition (read, poetry)

But recent French linguists & the language poets now argue that there is a fourth way, language —

But does language exist in the sense that the world outside and the writer exist? ^{philosophers} have argued that the world outside does not ~~really~~ exist if there is no person to see it, but most find that a futile example. ^{a tree for example} wd. ^{perceive} any one are ^{that a tree exists (it grows, takes in moisture, spreads its roots etc.) whether or not anyone is there to see it.} But wd. ^{argue} that language is there & exists if there is no one to write it or speak it or read it? And if that is so, how can language ^{words} convey meaning exclusively by themselves? That — the basic fallacy —

that ^{idea} ~~does not~~ come naturally out of the poetic impulse — that means ~~that~~ it can be a ~~poetic~~ construction of the imagination, a play with words, a mental game, a mental construct, a word construct,

any distinction between poem & composition and poem ~~as discourse~~ has been wiped out & on this ground, the distinction between poetry & prose is really arbitrary & somewhat pointless — It is only a step further to Bernstein "As these poets repeatedly tell us, the distinction between theory & poetry is an arbitrary one" (Pisloff) (ridiculously) they've made theory the subject matter of their poetry, & once they've done that, Bernstein can say, "Theory is never more than the extension of practice."

Also, all kinds of proclaiming ideas > possible — go into them

On this ground,

- (1) feelings are not necessary
- (2) life exp. = not necessary
- (3) idiom & syntax = not necessary, for they are expressions of life exp., soc. relations, etc.

*1 Only ideas = necessary & the field of ideas in poetry can make us ~~more~~ ^{barricaded} but can not move us

This leads to a de-socialized language (to me, dead) & to de-humanized content

Since the ~~poet~~ ^{propagator} ~~is~~ ^{smart} anything but lacking in intelligence & perspicacity one suspects the worst, that one is being attacked by sophisticated punditry of a peculiarly humorless kind, that one is the victim of a con game, that these ^{little Wittgenstein's} young men ^{imagine they are King Canute} are ^{little Wittgenstein's} ~~little Wittgenstein's~~ & that like King Canute they can do anything & that the mind can do anything ^{act as if they were King Canute} high on the power of the mind

which claims that the self is ~~is~~ "not the primary organizing feature of writing" (Bernstein) and that the ind. voice is no longer privileged (who the hell said so?) that the distinction between theory & poetry is an arbitrary one, that the trouble with the conduit theory of communication is that it XX

What we have is

What we have is ^{most} ~~sophistical~~ ^{humorless, shameless} punditry of the ^{a particularly outrageous} ~~worst~~ kind -

What we have is ^{a new kind of sophistry,} ~~an outrageous~~ ^{and rather alarming} ~~sophistical~~ ^{a blind, and rather alarming} punditry in which

XX presupposes ind. to exist as separate entities outside of language" (Bernstein) (Ha! Ha!) ^{no kidding!} - amateurish epistemology

A Theory that is more than human nature can bear

~~Don't~~ But Silliman is reassuring. We ~~do not~~ ^{reassure} have to concern ourselves with meaning, say Silliman. "When words ~~are~~, meaning soon follows." Thanks, but I don't care to make the effort, not when all I'm going to get is language, ~~as such~~ ^{just} ~~as language~~.

~~What I don't want to say is that~~ ^{even if I did, succeed,} meaning by that that ~~the~~ ^{the} reader will ~~make~~ ^{constitute} some ~~meaning~~ ^{meaning} out of ~~them~~ ^{them}, even if he has to make ^{know} ^{good} it all up himself which he does, indeed have to do if when he is left without referential clues -

(As for) Me, I have to say, No, thanks, I don't care to make the effort, etc.

Exhilarating to confront "enemies" - we learn from this who we are, what we are, etc.

We don't have to take their theory ^{as} seriously as they do. We have the advantage of distance & uninvolvement & a sense of humor, which I find lacking behind all explanations & a sense of the insurmountable paradox & ambiguity ^{in their explanations}. They lack all sense of what they have left out, not to mention a sense of the ambiguity & paradox behind all explanations, and a sense of humor, & distance from their own lucubrations to judge ^{the} them critically. ^{I do not expect modesty at their age.}

Analogy: as in ^{theoretical} physics, where formulas & discoveries are made in pure mathematics, ^{which are} perfectly sound ^{without} ^{any} ^{parameters} but without ^{any} significance, ^{for} ^{side} ^{effect} ^{parameters} - Thus, this wd. be pure linguistics without significance for poetry.

Not competent to judge their linguistics but I'm willing to give them the benefit of the doubt & proceed as if ~~that~~ were sound. The first thing that strikes one is a lack of all sense of what they have left out - the psychological, etc. - not to mention a sense of the ambiguity, etc.

^{They have made} ^{some} ^{theoretical} ^{moves} ^{but} ^{too} ^{early} ^{to} ^{say} ^{whether} ^{they} ^{are} ^{only} ^{gambits} ^{or} ^{whether} ^{the} ^{poet} ^{language} ^{poets} ^{permanent} ^{residences}.

How much one's critical stance, which ^{one} ^{finds} ^{objectionable} depends on one's ^{depression, gloom, and} ^{inner} ^{weather} ^{opinion} on ~~what~~ one's recent exps. (rejection, frustration - essentially on how one feels about one's self - viz, secure, successful)

In written language, the reader reading this line,
assumes it is an event — and in a sense, it is
an event; it is, after all, there on the page; somebody wrote it,
etc.
but when ^{one} tries to penetrate it, one finds it is a
possibility which means that it ^{or could} lead somewhere
to something — but it stops short ~~of leading on~~ ^{of that, and}
if the reader wants to go further, he has to ~~write~~ ^{make up} his
own mind. Not a bad thing, you might say.
But if he's going to have to do that, and if he has
the ability ~~to~~ ^{it} to do that, then what does he need
the poet for? ~~He can do the whole thing himself.~~
Simply to point out possibilities to him? He has his
own possibilities ~~to indulge & develop~~ and can do
the whole thing himself.

A language ~~solipsism~~ ^{solipsism} — i.e. not that the self is the
only reality but that language ~~has~~ ^{has} an ~~independent~~ ^{independent} reality
— a computer solipsism — automatism — animism

a language animism / ~~should~~ perhaps be called Language Animism

"The word as such" does not ~~exist~~ ^{exist} & cannot exist, as an entity.
It does exist ^{and then only in the perception of the reader} as an element in an entity. — When more is claimed
for it than that, it > a form of ~~animism~~ ^{solipsism} which can have
a life in the poet's imagination but has neither the life
nor the power which = attributed to it outside of that.

*cl. hardly cope
one W — . How do you expect me to cope with nine?
But I'll try -*

*XX Though they do have a disconcerting habit of talking only to each other
or to potential converts*

me a note here or just arrive there and ask for me at the time stated above.

This is apparently how they first meet. Williams will remember in his Autobiography: "one day I met Louis Zukofsky in the city after I had been sketched for a caricature by a person named Hoffman. Louis and I became good friends."⁶¹ This friendship brings Zukofsky to Rutherford by April, and repeatedly thereafter, affording, as Pound will write, "some pleasure and consolation" to them both.⁶²

Williams at the time feels that he's been working in isolation. Attention from other writers does more than flatter him; it provides the "natural friendly stimuli on which we rest, at least, in our lesser moments."

William Carlos Williams was born in Rutherford on Constitution Day, 1883. Mike Weaver writes:⁶³

His father was an Englishman, said to have been born in Birmingham; his mother in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, to a Basque mother and a Jewish father. His middle name was taken from his mother's brother who practiced medicine in Panama City. If his ancestry was in any way Spanish it was more by cultural adoption than by blood. He was half English, one-quarter Basque, and one-quarter Jewish.

The facts of Williams' life are well-known. His Autobiography can be supplemented by Reed Whittemore's biography.⁶⁴ The facts

met while in medical

Quotes

"there is a claim being made to a syntax... of absolute attention to the ordering of sound's syllables... the music... is built into the sequence of the word's tones, totally saturating the text's sound." — Bernstein —

the principle I went for in his model here is I's Catullus — ~~a wonderful~~ ^{which puts the English language} ~~through the worst wrenching & contortions I have ever experienced~~ ^{that it has ever experienced} & which I was willing to do because he was ~~obsessed~~ ^{in its history}.

"What happens when a language moves toward & passes into a capitalist stage of dev. is an aesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its descriptive & narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of realism, the optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought." Language under capitalism is thus transformed (deformed) into representationality (as against the gestural nature of tribal language) & > merely transparent (i.e. the definite meaning). — Bernstein

Are we interested in ~~where~~ ^{how} such ideas came about? —

"Both in S.F. & N.Y., the Language movement arose as an essentially Marxist critique of contemporary Am. capitalist society on behalf young poets who came of age in the wake of the Vietnam War & Watergate" (Mirjorie Perloff) —
Their revenge (are the capitalists watching?)

"The attempt is not to articulate the curve of a particular exp. but to create a formal linguistic construct that ~~itself~~ ^{itself} shapes our perception of the world around us" (Perloff)

"The linguistic promise that the signified gives of something beyond language ~~is~~ ^{is} we come to feel as being control to capitalism (the fetish of commodity). To demystify this fetish & reveal the

"When words are, meaning soon follows." Silliman

Nothing cd. be further from the truth.
Some meaning, I suppose, never mind what. The mind doesn't rest until it has cooked up, & attributed some meaning to the words, but in my case I don't care to make the effort because

Ideas

(1) "the resonating of the wordness of language (Bernstein)"
(2) Distinction between communication... schematized as a two-way wire with the message shuttling back & forth in blissful ignorance of the ^(its) transom (read: ideology) and "a sounding of language from the inside, in which the dwelling is already / always given" Bernstein / "Language Juggler"

(3) The trouble with the conduit theory of communication is that it presupposes info. to exist as separate entities outside of language and to be communicated at by language
Bernstein

"Communication schematized"
Rejection of the conduit theory = at very heart of L. poetry
Perloff
The distortion is to imagine that Knowledge has an "object" outside of the language of which it is a part (mine, yes it does - that words refer to "transcendental signifieds" (they may) rather than being part of a language which itself produces meaning in terms of its grammar, its conventions, its agreements in judgment, etc." Bernstein
by meaning is meant a particular character to which the writer must conform, it's correct.

~~dry in the way a treatise is dry~~
subject is large enough to include everyone who is experimenting with syntax, etc.

These boys are playing for very high stakes.
And they're taking on everybody, etc. - ^{& kicking up a lot} combative of dust, aren't they?
They propose

Their concerns (i.e. escape the conduit system of language - list others) are not "alive" concerns, except to a few poets -

A romantic approach to language / perhaps even more, a romantic approach to invention - By "romantic" I mean, expecting more than can be ~~expected~~ realized, ~~or~~ expecting it because one has idealized

A bonanza to young academics / Ph.D.s / 3rd ^{Kdsky} = getting exhausted - Can spend the next decade explicating the L. poets (no need to evaluate them - time will do that) & added to attractive prospect: avant garde, obviously bright, etc. can't be read without explication (once a read for them -

The loss of ^{in language} idiom = a terrible price to pay
Quote from ~~Robert~~ Robert God poem
plus from Anselm Hollo's inspired translation of Blok
(p. 1)

~~and~~ a sense of life inseparable from idiom —
To my ears, my blood quickens
familiarity in a poem

From Harold Norse's tr. of Belli's Roman Sonnets:

"God said to Noah: 'Listen, Patriarch,
You an' your sons go an' take a hatchet
An' fwood my designs you must build an ark
So high, so long, so narrow, an' so thick."

Quote next stanza too. (no. XXXV)

There are polar extremes in poetry today:
at one pole, the language poets & at the other, ~~the~~
poetry videos (performance poetry) — the intentions = polar
opposites too. — So into what happens when poetry >
performance
Polyphonic

read — " —
When I ~~heard~~ one of them say,

what I see ~~a~~ is a
all I can think ~~for some~~ pipsquack
imagining that he's King Canute
(in a poem a pipsquack ^{poet} can be King Canute
— in fact, ~~he~~ ^{has} needs to be — but
~~on~~ the battlefield of ideas, a man professing
is
to be King Canute better be King Canute.
acting as if he were

^{interest in}
Re The Language Poets — ^{basic attitude} — optimism
American Activism — ^{in Am. culture} — always forward, onward, upward
(never-ending improvement) —

Attention to language ^{to the exclusion of} of the basic
exp. — the poet = leading and split off from

* My basic premise: one has a poetic impulse & i. writes
a poem because one has had an exp.

If one writes ~~because~~ ^{for this reason}, has a need
as distinguished from writing a poem because one
to be a writer & i. simply draws on what = available
without an exp., one's memory of what one has read & been troubled by

(1) Poetry as poetry, i.e. as something between a poem
& a reader

(2) Poetry as a part of lit. history

(3) Poetry as serendipity —

(4) Poetry as an encounter between
language & poet —

~~History~~
the more generic category:
Poetry ^{as written} theory / operates
by exclusion & pre-determination

& transformed by one's ^{imagination}
(for which one does not ^{not} the
poetic impulse) — the
imagination = always ready
to act

But of course be one source
for them but let me tell
you he wd. have thought
it atrocious to have
language at the expense
of exp.

But a theory about poetry = not in the
interests of poetry — limits & pre-determines it —
& does not concern itself with #1, poetry as something
between a poem ~~between~~ and a reader —

A poet needs no theory — Does he, after all, ~~need~~
have a theory about the way he did be writing before
he writes? — If the poet doesn't need a theory, who
then does? — (a) Non-poets — historians, critics
(b) Pseudo-poets

Incisive analytical powers, great powers of concentration, ^{sensitive, meticulous} attention
to detail — application of semiotics to poetry (a relatively new thing
the study of ref. of signs & symbols & what they represent — science of meaning in language)

I don't know much about them but the little I've read & see that,

They have learned from Z^{yl} ^{to} ~~write~~ ^{to} ~~write~~ ^{think} with meticulous precision but also, I'm afraid, with his Talmudist obsessiveness ^{as I have heard} ^{some of} I have heard, for example, that Bernstein's work aims to be ^{at being just} ^{composition in sound} just sound. All I can say ^{is}, "God help anyone who takes Z^{yl}'s Catulus as a model."

Language poets / ~~we~~ made to order for critical ^{the academic} exegesis
- we'll reach the time when ~~the subject of poetry~~ poems
will be examinations of language & the readers
(nothing ^{& thought of} ~~sp~~ as the human condition) will be excited
critics for whom
this poetry = made to order
for the authors are of the same
cloth, critics.
they are making an
academic exegesis

There is something mysterious
& magical & generating in language
but it does not come from ~~self~~ analysis
(refer to what I say about language in my letter to Duncan)

If a Hatten poem had been put into a bottle &
thrown into the ~~ocean~~ ^{ocean} etc. & a computer print. out
there'd be nothing on it to show that
~~we~~ ^{we} not have known (it had been written by a human being -
an extinct ~~voice~~ ^{medium}, a no-voice
Enough said, no?)
Is there the assumption that the ~~human~~ consciousness will
catch up to where they are? That like abstract expressionism,
it can confidently be left to the future
their appreciation

X It goes far to demonstrate ^{not} that a human being is like
a computer but that ^{it} is a computer. (not a who but an it)
There are those who have believed this for some time
& to have a whole school of poetry confirm this (if they
are aware of it ^{and to prove} must give them a ^{respect} of satisfaction
& to prove it by writing poems
showing that a computer ^{can} write poems
an advanced model,

This = the wave of the future. They're there already. We're not.
There's no reason, therefore, to their having any truck
with ~~the~~ ^{no point} likes of you & me. We won't understand.

Exactly this appeared a few yrs. ago
(meeting with Chas. Bernstein)

an un-mind, for this is not a mind reflecting on its human
condition or on itself but a mind engaged in distracting itself of mind
& being ~~the~~ language, language per se. ^{poetry} ~~speech~~

~~There~~ There is a point at which lit^{erary} considerations
cease to be lit^{erary} considerations and 7 necessarily human
considerations - that is, they ~~force one to exo~~
go ~~so~~ so far that they break
into human considerations & threaten them, forcing one ^{cross over}
to re-examine one's basic ^{personal} (human) values. & what do
we believe in? stand for? etc.

These poems cross over

Is poetry to have no rel. to
the real world? no rel. to human
aspirations? no rel. to the human
condition? ever to a reader?
only to itself?

Euphuism

Euphuism, The Anatomy of Wit

"The object of its invention was to attract & disarm the ladies by means of an ingenious & playful style of high artificiality — astonishing popularity for 50 yrs. — the publisher, Edward Blount (1632) wrote of John Lyly: "our nation are in his debt for a new English" (life substitute "originality")

In order to secure refinement (life substitute "originality") it sought to be as affected, as artificial, as high-pitched as possible. — incessant use, for purposes of ornament, of similes taken from fabulous records of zoology or relating to mythical birds, fishes or minerals. — fashionable — Queen Elizabeth herself — the most affected & detestable of Euphuists."

Conc

striving

When I was young, I was fascinated by Mallarmé. But there was only one Mallarmé & it never occurred to me that there cd. be more than one — in a period. I assumed that it was an expression of personality, that this was the way he was (when he was with language) and that in the effort to attain the utmost purity, this is what resulted — I didn't think there wd. be more than one (at a time) because I didn't think others wd. have such ^{austerity & dedication} total, obsessive need for purity & wd. be willing to sacrifice ~~to~~ ^{everything} else.

But now we have not one Mallarmé but 30, 40, 50 ^{to behold} ~~Mallarmés to order~~ ^{maybe more}.

In fact, Mallarmé has ^{being a} fashionable —

And it will take ^{Harold Bloom} a prestigious critic like to convince young people that this is where the action is & this is where they have to be.

~~///~~ Bright young ^{would-be poets} men are a dime a
dozen (~~we have always had them~~). What
we need are ^{poets} bright young men who
can move us (define), not show off
their brightness

make us admire their ~~brightness~~
^{style}
not make themselves admirable

The thing that moves me most = ^{not praise but} being
told that I had moved a reader.

Ordinarily it's not worth talking about a poet's ^{theoretical arguments} rationalizations ^{briefly} while ^{spending time} ~~about his poetry~~ ^{for a poet} matters. We have had ~~but in~~ because only the individual poem matters. We have had fine poems from weak theorists and lousy poems from great thinkers, but when a theory deliberately sets out to remove referentiality and, hence, meaning, except in the somewhat mystical sense in which they claim language by itself, ^{words as such} with its ^{and sounds} conventions, etc., mean ^{their}

Ordinarily it's not worth while (for a poet) to spend time ^{studying} stewing over somebody else's reasons for writing the way he does. In the last analysis only the individual poem matters, and one is judged by that only. We have had great poems from people who ^{have no interest in} not interested in theory and lousy poems from very persuasive theorists. However, when a theory, such as I understand ^{no need to justify their work by theory} the Language School theory to ~~be xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~, ^{for a theory to justify their work} deliberately sets out to remove all referentiality and hence meaning from poetry, except in the somewhat mystical sense in which they claim ^{their pundits} claim language per se, ^{i.e.,} language as convention and sound, ^{to have it,} words as such with their conventions and sounds have meaning, it crosses the point at which lit. ^{literary} considerations cease to be lit. considerations

I can understand how they might have become what they are. A young poet starting out, feeling the continual presence of poetry of the past and present, feeling its power and influence, knows in his bones, and he is not wrong, that to get anywhere he has to do something different, be his own man somehow. The force of his own creative impulse also brings him to this conviction. *Hasn't everything been tried already?*
M But how? *He can't do it by drawing on his life experiences; he hasn't had enough yet.* And the chances are that he's not going to be able to do it by drawing on the distinctness of his personality, his individuality, for that may not be there ~~xxxx~~ ^{either} yet, either because it's not developed enough to make itself known strongly or because, for one reason or another, he represses it from expression, justifying the rejection by protective rationalizations. In this situation there is one thing he can draw on, the seemingly boundless potentialities of language as it interacts with his imagination and intelligence. Note, I did not say, the boundless potentialities of his imagination and intelligence as it interacts with language, because with them, language comes first.

I say I can understand. But I can't be sympathetic. How can one be ~~sy~~ sympathetic to a ~~poet~~ ^{poets} who excludes so much of ~~his~~ ^{their} own humanity and above all the humanity of the reader, *to whom we all belong*, of whom, it must be remembered, I am one, and who fancies themselves little Wittgenstein's *and opponents only* and who will commune only with other little Wittgensteins *in the meantime, busily promoting themselves* and who run around promoting themselves *with manifestos*. *I can't do it. I don't care to do it.*

This is an awfully long answer to a question. What did you have in mind when you asked it, George?

I can't help asking what you must have thought it wd get a rise out of
X towards whom they act as if they had no resp.
calculated to lustling to promote themselves
by means of attract academia

if they are true or not - one didn't sign up for a ~~teacher~~ ^{pedagogue}
~~when one speaks~~
Being pretentious: one of the prerogatives of the young

word robots -

Nobody can object to their investigating
linguistics to see how it can benefit poetry -
but their objective seems to be to eliminate every fleeting
personal & they've succeeded & > word robots X
but oddly they ^{manage to give the impression} go around acting as if this is
^{the new wave} the wave of the future, a new undiscovered order
of reality ~~exposed~~ off to lesser mentalities

they've succeeded in removing every trace of ^{the human} (a human)
X ~~including~~ ^{including that} including that
being everything personal as well as all persona, for
that too is (personal) a person putting on a disguise
is, after all, only another (form of) personal, a
person pretending to be someone else, another person -

& look on ^{such a happening} this with dismay, that anyone should
wish to do this, but ^{they} ~~for~~ ^{they} ~~had~~ ^{they} ~~were~~ ^{were} ~~led~~ ^{led} ~~thereby~~ ^{thereby} ~~an attractive~~ ^{idea}
the ^{power of their} ~~intellects~~ ^{and surprising hubris connected with their intellect} that a choice does not even appear to them
that as with the matters of the first atomic bomb, the only ^{objective} ^{and} ^{side} ^{is to} ^{make one}

The question with them - not how much are you willing
to sacrifice for an invention, but how much are you willing
to sacrifice for an idea (Z's Catullus, for instance) -
The dismal lengths to which abstraction will take one
who is inclined to be bookish and absorbed in his intellect
to live

|| a collage of ^{that have come} sentences ^{out of} an essay - ^{and the tone}
~~that have the tone & language of the essay~~
but no poem = of course an essay - that wd. have only ordinary meaning
In a sense, they are in what = popularly believed to be
the ~~future~~ ^{of} ^{the} ^{future} of society (journalists who ^{about} ^{have} ^{time} ^{to} ^{spit}
discovery) the computerization of everything & everybody -
This is the real company in which they have placed themselves

(XI) — ideas, ~~are~~ in poems but if they are the subject matter, then they seem to me misplaced. I wd. always rather read them in a good essay than in a poem.

The linguistic approach: like a surgeon dissecting a body and examining the parts & how they connect to each other & ~~reproduce~~ function in order to understand ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~throw~~ light on the life of a poem ~~and~~ ^{a man's life.} — and reproduce it?

If we must ~~atomize~~ ^{in this way} poetry in order to write it, what is needed is not linguistics but psychology, more and better psychology.

This approach, ~~as best I can~~ if I am not mistaken, derives from recent French lit. criticism which has made a big splash ^{in intellectual circles} ~~theory~~ ^{a big name} for its proponents — ~~deadly for poetry~~ — a theory which has made head of poetry and from Wittgenstein, who has not been bad for poetry whose ~~poetry~~ ^{single} aperçus, in their compression and density & ~~abstractions~~ ^{poems} are themselves poetry, bring perception to a new level/plane ^{in the mode of poetry} despite the fact

that they are not written out as such, letting the reader know that what W — is aiming at is not poetic truth but real truth & ~~that's~~ what the reader shd. expect etc. — he is a philosopher — What may be philosophically true is no guide to how to write in pursuit of

truth ~~within the poet's~~ ^{as it is discernible to a phil.} & that truth is no guide to how to write & nothing more can be done with them ~~at all~~ ^{without doing violence.}

What I see is an eager ^{bright} youngster
imagining he's King Canute
of youth ^{in the surge} ^{flush} ^{in the eagerness} ^{surge} ^{flush} ^{surge}
his mind is ruler
can make anything
come about
carried along by the power of his mind
feeling the ~~energy~~ ^{power}
into imagining that he's King Canute
flush of youth - ^{his} ^{daring}

Re Silliman's, "When words are,
meaning will follow", meaning
by that, in the presence of words,
one will try to make something out of
them, but without reference clues,
one can only do it if one is willing to
go the whole hog and create a projection
of one's own.

~~Subject~~

Seem to be interested in
discourse ^{ideas} (elaborate)

Do this poetry?

Sans the lyrical—

In place of the tension & ^{poetic} impulse
power ~~of~~ of a life ^{as subject}
matter, we have ^{then trying to manufacture} tension & generate
excitement ~~generated~~ by purely
lingual means / the excitement
of the impenetrable, of the challenge
to the mind —

Assault with a deadly
tempo ^{of} pedantry

~~Assault with~~

The connection with Marxism: ^{they're} (1) Anti-capitalist (2) they're idealists, & idealists = suckers for Marxism, so long as it doesn't get down to every-day things — its purpose is not to serve art —

Marxism = not to be confused with literature — It is not only of the real world, but the nitty-gritty real world — Thus, when the language poets in order to reject Capitalism come up with a form of Mallarmé-ism, it wd. be a big laugh in Moscow — ^{another} it wd. be for them an example of how Capitalism drives men mad, the ultimate inanity, contradiction, corruption, bourgeois decadence, etc. — How strange & juvenile & unrealistic Americans are —

I was startled to read the other day -
"Pascal spoke of the joy one feels when,
expecting to encounter an author, one comes
face to face with a man." So opposite.

can be sd. with certainty E. M. Cioran
about these language poets!

One thing is sure one never comes
face to face with a man. Their theory puts
one cl. just one's case there.

Language Poets — Pros —

1. ^{boldness and first-class} Lit. nimbleness — Critical acumen — ^{refined} sensitivity to language — power / concentration & which forces attention on every word, ^{de-structured} forces the reader to work to his utmost capacity to reconstruct & find a meaning
2. Lucky in their name — sounds as if they're on to a good thing — Probably have already established themselves in lit. history as of lit. ^{home of} the 1980s — a part of the ongoing, ev. of Am. poetry — ^{they're making history}
3. Very able ^{relentless disputants} polemicists (Bernstein + Silliman), ready at a moment's notice & on every occasion to defend and to attack ^{promote each other}
4. Hustlers ^{resourceful} entrepreneurs
5. They love beautiful language & musical sounds & effects
6. Resourceful imagination
7. Inocentive
8. Rich, even lush metaphors, analogies, alliteration, ^{assonance} ^{crane} ^(as thick as in Hart Crane & Hopkins) ^{dislocations, connections}

Bruce Andrews: "I shld. tell you that Bruce Andrews
never answers letters." — A character defect — objection

is not ~~that~~ ^{simply} moral — ^{Dealing with} it expresses a character defect & a
~~seems~~ withdrawal from the human that characterizes their
work too — (otherwise, wd. ~~only~~ be irrelevant
to speak of this)

(So that their practice is an extension of their personality?
(This = psych. quite plausible (whose isn't it?)
and their theory = ^{an attempt to justify} a justification of their pers.
(+ to that extent, an extension of their practice)
That's why they want to keep out the ego from
their work?

Also: the romantic idea of the poet as being above
the world — old, sickening idea

(And these people = Marxists? ^{self-serving, narcissistic})

Formerly the romantic idea of poet = built into the tradition,
hence was imposed on him, he was educated in it, etc., so
he went along with it, somewhat uncomfortably —
But = no longer true today, hence = sick, narcissistic

~~It occurs to me~~
How large will their audience be? As large
as the no. of people with this kind of character or
attracted to this kind of character. Which shd. be many,
but not many with the intellect for it —
& who have the intellect for it

In language poems
~~the~~ the subject of poetry = language — As in
abstract expressionism, the subject of ~~the~~ painting is painting
And as in certain paintings, if the critic tells us what we
sld. see in the picture, the eye will obey and will, indeed,
"find" it there (or put it there) — So it is ~~impossible~~ with
this kind of amenability on the part of a reader (or looker)
anything can be made to be which the poet/artist
says ~~it~~ sld. be.

But is the reader that amenable? Except for that
handful of silly people who worship everything that
passes for poetry, the reader = & very tough and ~~it~~ it takes
~~very hard to convince~~ —
a great deal, and more & more as time goes on, to
convince him. So telling him what he sld. find
in a poem won't do it.

One sld. be wary of paying much attention
to the work, & particularly the apologia, of one's contemporaries.
C'd. drive one crazy. Dislocates one ~~if~~ ^{if} one is

It doesn't much matter what theory a poet holds.
The only thing that matters is the poem that's on the page.
And that can't be judged by the power of the theory
that the author says is behind the poem. A poem can
be judged only on its own merits

Their power as a group/movement / Like the Objectivists
Great interest in movements, ^{on} events in lit. history
More interest in lit. history than in poetry (social, cultural)?
There's an assumption of importance in a movement, esp. one
defended as learnedly & meticulously as Language

What are they against? If Silliman & Bernstein speak
for the others, they are against (list & develop)

Don't trust anything from theory, including
yrs. own.

Comes from 3 things: (1) ^{what happens in the sciences} scientific studies
(2) the ^{unreliability} rel. of theory to practice in psychotherapy
my exp.
(3) The absence of ~~any~~ need for theory in my exp.
as a poet

Re: "it doesn't matter. Nobody reads poetry anyway. So let
it be ~~an~~ one-up int. game among those who think the
way we do. — But among the reasons why
literate people don't read poetry is that the poet
is too far from his own exp. & the reader sees
no reason why he too shd. leave the perfectly satisfactory
base of exp. in order to follow the poet in his game
— in other words, the problem = not simply that the
(literate) reader expects the literal & the familiar in
some interesting form & wd. have to change gears &
get outside himself in order to enter the poet's
metaphoric/symbolic/imaginary str. universe
transforming imagination

~~most~~ ~~often~~ ^{often} starts
starting from an intellectual impulse, one has
to construct the ^{simulacrum or some} ~~appearance~~ of poetic impulse
& this leads to no end of trouble about ^{and what substitutions there are over this} seeming genuine.
Is it assumed that with enough linguistic knowledge
one can do this? -

Accusations & counter-
accusations
who are
accusers, usually correct, and
the accused, who know very
well how to defend themselves.
Both lack the poetic impulse.

In fact, from living constantly with ^{concepts} ~~concepts~~
& analysis, it is easy not to ^{let} know that one is lacking
a poetic impulse, ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~mistake~~ ^{concept} and
the act of writing for it. After all, ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~is~~ ^{is} writing
poetry, isn't he? How then can ~~he~~ ^{one} be without the
poetic impulse? ^{that}
Look at all he knows about ^{the good poets} ~~lit.~~

When
Their concerns are too esoteric, their references, ~~too~~
they don't destroy them altogether, too recondite. At my
age I can't afford the ^{luxury of} esoteric & the recondite. I need
bounciness, immediacy, joy, humor & above all, illumination
not the darkening of ^{& distancing} meanings ^{exuberance} ^{light} meaning

Yet the esoteric is what I was reaching out to in my youth.
& the recondite
I seemed to go with my ^{correspond to} ^{I seemed to answer my} somatic, intellectual longings (elaborate)
& my intense need for privacy ^{and ceremonial and linguistic} ^{and originality} ^{individuality} ^{reclusiveness}

So I don't know whether I've progressed or regressed
Yet the esoteric & the recondite are not ^{expressions} signs of youthfulness
(youthfulness - possible only in the real world) ~~but~~ but rather
of that stage in one's early yrs. when one

~~A~~ A monkish spirit ^{in sense of lonely & ritualistic} ^{solitary & formalistic}
In any case, once I began to work with people (social work)
the esoteric & the recondite ^{impossible} —, & I shed it as
if it had never existed — In fact, as soon as there is
another human being in front of one, listening & ^{ready to}
respond, my esoteric & ^{my} recondite ^{revealed} as mine
alone, of ~~no~~ interest to me alone
which he can engage only if by chance, he
also is interested in the esoteric & the recondite
and can enter my esoteric & recondite & find that they ^{express}
little bits of the ~~own~~ seed for " " " etc.

& ^{engaging} language artifacts
 to make artifacts ^{out} of language itself, + sometimes just words,
 which look & sound beautiful, a universal of sound,
 which needs nothing ^{+ suggestive} + move us just by a cadence
 does not need the outside world, ^{a richness of} not a reader,
 & not even the pers. of the poet, to be what it is, a
 not a particular meaning or reference to meaning —
 language as language, ^{elicits + orchestrates} a thick patina of ^{rich metaphors}
^{nothing else. the poet simply brings into this possibilities of} alliteration & assonance & rich metaphors
 & dislocations & connections
 necessary to this
 which had not yet been
 a field not yet exhausted, in which there'd be a
 place for them
 seems existing & new —

no. of possible word combinations ^{almost infinite,}
 there is no limit to — ^{approaches}

who has not loved language ^{much} so that he has longed
 for this? ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ In a sense, this wd. be the
 perfect poem, the poem that can reach absolute perfection, because
 it is not really for meaning or communication, to a reader —
 the problem arises when the poem reaches a
 reader ^{for interest} expand; (2) from their explanations
 of the method (3) their behavior

But what is language? It is communication the moment
 there is a reader or spectator. It is language as language
 only when there is no reader,
 only the poet/author is present

XX They deserve high points for inventiveness, etc.

For ~~language~~ poetry

Too little of the self = used, a special ^{not the brain} small (linguistic) part of the brain — that ~~stays~~ ^{stokes} on the problems of the world, of existence

Too remote from exp. & hence too far from mainstream of people's interests & concerns, etc.
This ~~needs~~ poetry further in the wrong direction — already being read ^{only by other} by poets — now, will be read only by ~~linguistic~~ ^{other} language poets

A somewhat ~~undisturbing~~ exp. for me because
Antipodal to me —

Do not seem to be ever interested in the existential /
in that, = repugnant to ^{me} ~~be~~ (action = ^{dancing} going on in a tiny, highly specialized corner of the brain)
Turns me off — which is fine to if you ~~do~~ want to be dancing ~~the~~ & offering their gymnastics

Marjorie Perloff, quoting from Silliman's Carbon, "When
Ron Silliman removes a single phoneme from a word
("false start" > "false tart") he creates intriguing plot
possibilities." She meant this as a compliment, but that's
precisely the problem. It is just a possibility, and as
possibility is not an event. And what we have here is
a possibility pretending ~~to~~ to be an event. This pretension
would immediately be evident in conversation. In written
poetry, it is not because of the nature of written language.

Language ^{poets} ^{rational} = morally outrageous & abominable.

never mind linguistics, & all these ^{its} lucubrations. What the hell are they?
Are they to take off in place of the poet as a whole man?

All these linguistic lucubrations give me a pain.
& rob me of precious time ^{pedantry}

The narcissist has a rel. only between himself and
his image of himself.

Two things stand ^{disturb} in the way of relating ^{unbiased} to l. poetry:
their politics ^{linguistic} ideas and the behavior of some of them ^{without the bias}

A grouping of poets under a name is always misleading because it

hermetic — a sealed cast, with nothing getting in or getting out —
at "absolute inwardness" (Rilke) — True of Mallarmé (language
a state of but language ^{try} to be absolute outwardness, outwardness, outwards
from both the solusman people & social reality, not into what lies outside the individual but into what lies
within the universe of language —

Rilke's
"The Neue Gedichte seek to write as Cezanne painted, to
enter completely into the thing seen, and to force some kind
of metaphysical transformation on it." — X

You might say the ^{language} poems seek to enter completely
not into anything experienced but into language & to
force some kind of transformation from it

MHS records Recommended in Fairfax

Szymonowski, I and 3/Daniel Graham - MHS 3136

~~What else might be said of the poets~~
You can be sure you're not going to experience that joy
with a man in their work never going to come face to face
To make matters worse, you will be told ~~that by~~ not to expect that.

~~not to expect that~~
in a poem. You will be told that you shall not
expect that - that that's a thing of the past - that
poetry must be more objective, ~~less~~ ^{see that's} personal (the ego)

be a creation of language
^{something created by the magic of words}
To cure poetry of its ills

poets
you must delete the ego - in its place, the magic of
words, metaphors, secrets
+ rich associations of words

nothing wrong with words, ^{process of writing self} = subject matter
as an art, ^{art} = art

still at the know-it-all age. - they make pronouncements
Not mature enough to ask questions - pontificate
Don't have the personality for it?

I must not forget that clarity has not much
interest for the young. - The ~~recondite~~
~~hermetic~~ (my own exp.) ~~hermetic~~, irresistible/
romantic, exciting

the closest thing to the mystery of expression of
writing, of language + utterance

Inevitable perhaps? Too little life exp. to make
clarity interesting or perhaps even possible - Also
their pers. needs, & knowledge of self - not yet fully
formed

Also, & preoccupied with exploring & trying to
discover who they are, etc. & what it is right for
them to be

Not willing to make any sacrifices (of imagination, etc.)
for the reader / in fact, might think it wrong, shocking
but in fact, it is the sense of a reader that brings
the writer back to earth, where he is (& not in the writer's
mind) & returns ~~the~~ writer to ~~know~~ the fullness of his
own being

Basic criticism: the references are too narrow in range
& too distant from life exp. ^{aesthetic} terminology in place of original thinking;
categorization & compartmentalization in place of particular (individual);
illumination - the sources from which these come are too far removed from
poetic practice - hence, all seems marginal

Language poets —
~~Madness~~ Those who regard the ^{sole} end of it as aesthetic
bliss ^(c) because they believe the other ends have been
consummation exhausted/depleted? Or not suitable for those times?
fulfillment or because aesthetic bliss = greater than the other?
realization of the only one ^{strictly speaking} suitable to the medium? or
most suitable? — or the only one they're interested
in.
This = obviously their ^{raison d'être} ~~reason~~ ^{regard}

I said - ^{never} examine what are my ends?
never apart from ^{objective world} reality & personal exp., including adventures ^{which}

And what other ends are there? (from the p. of v. of the artist —

- (1) Self-expression — self-exploration
- (2) Self-therapy
- (3) Play — fun —
- (4) Social & prophesy — social compassion
- (5) Prophecy & didactic — something to teach
- (6) Destruction of what one hates
- (7) Love of medium — need to construct in words
high marks in this — ^{make something beautiful}

Excludes the reader. I can not attach much value
to any form that excludes the reader. —
If a critic comes along to "explain" the text, what we
get is an explanation & vindication — the reader may very
well like the criticism but then it's something between
the critic & the reader, not between the poem & the reader.

Fundamentals

What can one be sure of? One's poetic impulse — Only that. Corruption begins when one transgresses that principle — But one has to begin even before that. What is a poetic impulse? Two things it is not:

- (1) it is not the impulse to write — ^{a) to communicate} ^{b) to be a writer} ^{the ego for the glory of it}
- (2) it is not the excitement & glow generated by

~~reading someone else's poem~~
~~a great~~ moving poems by others —

→ a need, an impulse, to continue perpetuate that excitement, that greatness

The dividing line is here — The ^{truly competent} true poet ^{understands} what is going on inside himself, is (meticulously) honest about it & does not pretend/claim that he is expressing a poetic impulse when he is merely having (1) or (2). But many ~~really~~ don't perceive the difference & ∴ can't be accused of insincerity.

They just don't know any better. (The reader, however, always does — it can't be concealed from him because he's not a party to the self-deception or the ignorance). And the self-deceiver also knows because when he comes across the real thing, he feels joy & excitement). — (but he imagines he's in the same boat)

Corruption ~~of~~ the material begins when one ^{pushes} goes beyond one's actual poetic impulse. At that point the reader begins to feel that the poet is insincere, (otherwise, why wd. he be padding & exaggerating & pretending that he feels all that) & he begins to lose interest & distrust (this may be one of the reasons for specificity; you're proving the truth of what you claim).

Once ~~you've~~ pushed beyond yr. actual poetic impulse, anything is possible because ~~the~~ you're carried along on the impulses of (1) & (2) & the content of yr. poem can be anything & everything

Language Poets

"poets like ~~Marina~~ Maria Spivina who do not make focus describing an "experience" or even a "vision" but seek a language whose source is in a world beyond the "merely" experiential — more precisely further; in language itself!" ^{Jerome Rothenberg "The Search for a Small Poetics" Poetry Flash, Feb. 1985} beyond the experiential — the world of Language itself; beyond the experiential?

we are no longer satisfied with the experiential? ^{human exp.} we are tired of that? no longer interests us? No, not exactly that. But we need new terrain — We need discoveries, experiments, inventions ^{extend the} & we're going to seek that in language itself & bring boundaries (a fine phrase) to a new mode ^{that the American way?} — It's said all that it can to us? — We know all that!

poetry out into a ^{totally} new mode. Well, not exactly new. There was Strin, to make a point, otherwise I have to stop ^{here} & be talking as if there ^{may be} only two participants in this consideration ^{the poet himself and poetry} the poet himself and poetry ^{as matter of poetry} which has a fine sound to it as such has to be capitalized & has a rather indistinct & nebulous existence; despite its fine ^{are two other} & questionable ^{players} sound. I regret that there ^{as a third} participants if only ^{they} didn't have to be there! a reader who is not usually taken into account ^{and the individual poem, completed, on the printed page.} Somehow, it is assumed he ^{is} along (& he does, very often, not knowing what else to do — vide, non-representational art) — or it's assumed that he won't understand anyway or be interested & that leaves only the poet, therefore & his art. Now we know a great deal about the poet the poet can do anything he wants to do. There are, of course, natural limits to what any ^{single} poet can do & there is no one to stop him, not as I have the slightest wish to do so, but seemingly boundless opportunities for invention & discovery among all the poets writing so much for a Participant 1. Participation 2, the universe of Poetry, & one doesn't need to spend any time on at all, since it's made by the poets & is what the poets make it to be

& is therefore as variable as the poets make it
that leaves ^{the reader} Participant 3 can
be anybody, so we can't ^{know anything} specify about his psych,
but we do know he's a human being who ^{reads} ~~turns~~
poetry because he's been moved by it or - (exposed)
found ^{unexpected} illumination or ^{of aesthetic grace} perhaps been entertained, etc.
So he has had ~~these are~~ all experiences & he expects one in the
poem before him.

Now if you say you're going to ~~give him~~ make something beyond
eff., you ~~shift~~ shift him out

something in language
that you've discovered ~~by~~ by concentrating on
language ~~same~~ reference & meaning ^{putting yourself in a}
^{state of mind}
^{where you exclude}
^{reference & meaning}
^{& concentrate only}
^{on language}

You then have ^{the} situation of the poem ^{readily searching}
for a reader, ~~etc~~ and the poet in the wings with his
Theory, ~~develop~~ crying foul & suspecting unfair play
or just doesn't understand. ^{that there are people out there in}
^{the power structure to get him}
wringing his ^{hands} & bemoaning the state of affairs

If we saw this in a play by Moliere, we'd laugh.

Notwithstanding, they've made a ~~place~~ place for themselves
in the history of poetics, & they deserve it & who knows,
^{interchangeable} since
~~poetics~~ = sometimes taken to be the same thing as poetry,
who knows, they ^{may} have made a ~~place~~ place for themselves
in the history of poetry too.
(develop idea)

x on the theory that if you have the right
poetics you'll write the proper right poems
since poetics are ^{assumed to} contain what ^{the principles of} is best in poetry
which ^{determines} etc
comes in time to be regarded as
interchangeable with poetry ^{shape & direct}
^{constant thinking}
^{enough} about poetics will make it seem as if
it's interchangeable with poetry ^{particular poetry}
the same thing as poetry ^{blur the distinction}
^{between it & poetry}

The Individual Poem

Once completed & in circulation, it has severed all connections ^{it belongs to whoever is reading it} to the poet, it is no longer his. It must speak for itself, & only it can speak for itself. It does not make the slightest difference what the poet intended the poem to be, ~~what~~ etc., the poem = now public property and belongs to the reader. The only existence ^{meaning} ~~character~~ the poem can have is in the mind & imagination of the reader. The rel. is ~~between~~ ^{between} him and the poem being read by him and not between him & the poet, & certainly not between him & the poet's theory. One slips into error & irrelevance if one does not keep this constantly in mind.

All this in ^{way} ~~no~~ detracts from the fun & excitement of exploring & breaking new ground which no one can take from them or should want to & which my skeptical nature ^{knows well} ~~recognizes~~ ^{its} salutes, despite all its reservations.

tends to cloud & wither ^{new} things looked at too closely and ^{and tends to cloud & wither them} my skeptical nature which ^{in the end} ~~knows well~~ yields ^{to my knowledge} a lot of (great) fun & excitement, (that) they must have had (great) fun & excitement, poking around & breaking new ground. They're bold, ^{believing they were} bright young people, ^{bright enough for anything they ought to do} and are entitled to it. Besides, by the time this gets into print, they'll probably be into something else. They're too lively & intelligent to ~~stay~~ stay put.

* and had to take resp. for my ideas & behavior in rel.
to the needs of other ^{claims} I than my I (never the same after
+ interests + welfare their needs + interests, ^{though profoundly that}
^{their own life} (I can't begin to say
that) differing profoundly from that (I can't begin to say
changed me) a world of I's ^{only slightly & remotely related}
or related only by an act of their will to that fragment
of my personal I which ~~fabricates~~ fabricates literary I's
in the imagination & expresses them in language,
& producing, ^{each with its own literary life} in the process, the illusion of autonomy.
The illusion ^{first} is very real. - esp., once it's printed.

This illusion ~~fringing~~ leads to the illusion that
language can be used/manipulated as if it were
autonomous ^{the essence of the personal I} (once meaning & reference has been removed,
that > quite feasible) - All this comes not from
the organic needs of any poem that has started in the
mind of a poet but from theory, that this is the
way it shd. be.

Analogy to Schoenberg - cf. article ^{on Schoenberg} by ~~on~~ ^{by} Schoenberg
"Schoenberg lost touch with the ^{quote from} primitive instinct of the ^{musical} ear,
who succumbed to abstraction & rationalization & who
sought salvation in methodology, ^{the musician's} ~~the musician's~~ a perverse
granting of priority to the mind over the ear." The great
disaster that has overtaken all the arts in the 20th century -
a kind of rational madness which delights in manipulation for its own
sake & has produced art devoid of human content."

"The primary impact on language of the rise of capitalism has been in the area of reference & is directly related to the phenomenon known as the commodity fetish." Silliman

"What happens when a language moves toward & passes into a capitalist stage of dev. is an anesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the ~~word~~ word, with corresponding increases in its descriptive & narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of 'realism,' the optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought." Silliman -

Language under capitalism is thus transformed ^(deformed) into referentiality. It thus > merely transparent.

"The words are not our own. Rather, they are our own usages of a determinate coding passed down to us like all other products of civilization." Silliman.

"Theory is never more than the extension of practice" (Bernstein) - Actually, the other way around (self-deception): ~~their~~ ^{their} work (practice) reads like an extension of theory.

they Reject the conduit theory of ~~language~~ ^{communication} (me → you) is that
"The trouble with it presupposes individuals to exist as separate entities outside language & to be communicated at by language".
Bernstein

"The distortion is to imagine that Knowledge has an 'object' outside of the language of which it is a part -

How does he ~~to~~ know? I don't know that and neither does he. It is only a possibility. This leads to the position

• that the ~~only~~ ^{only} reality we can know is in language.

If this is so, ~~there~~ ^{no need} to seek it outside language.

Language > ~~the~~ the subject matter of poetry

It's a mistake, I think, to posit the self as the primary organizing feature of writing. As many others have pointed out, a poem exists in a matrix of social & ~~and~~ historical relations that are more significant to the formation of an ind. text than any personal qualities of the life or voice of an author. Bernstein

"Individual voice - no longer privileged"

"Refuses to separate philosophy from poetry" (Perloff)
Absence of exp. - ^{if so, then the}

Phonetic play, punning, rhythmic recurrence, rhyme, word as such is to pay special attention to sound patterning, phonemic play, punning, rhythmic recurrence, rhyme,

"Both in N.Y. & San Francisco the language movement arose as an essentially Marxist critique of contemporary Am. capitalism."

TWO POEMS

Carl Rakosi



Drawing by Frances Foy

MEN ON YACHTS

After the bath she touched her hair
with Orange Leaf and smiled.

Henry is gone. Who are you?

Fumous ashwood stationary violins
all night made bright da capo
constant as specific gravity.
So, the umbrellas were put away.

We were together on yachts and beaches,
breakfasts on the ocean,
taxis through the Brandenburger Tor.

Along the Danube

onion stew and cart hack,
sheep under the Carpathians,
the cheese upon the rack.
The heifers licked their noses.

Along the Boston limited
commercial service.

The table in the boarding house
was cleared, the cloth folded.
The rooms contained a few flowers,
chocolate boxes, women,
a laundry bag,
the lipstick on the dresser.

The men fled military service in the Empire.

THE LOBSTER

to W. Carlos Williams

Eastern Sea, 100 fathoms,
green sand, pebbles,
broken shells.

Off Suno Saki, 60 fathoms,
gray sand, pebbles,
bubbles rising

plasma-bearer
and slow-
motion benthos!

The fishery vessel Ion drops
anchor here collecting
plankton smears and fauna.

Plasma-bearer, visible sea
purge, sponge and kelp leaf,
Halicystus the Sea Bottle

resembles emeralds
and is the largest
cell in the world.

Young sea-horse
Hippocampus twenty
minutes old --

nobody has ever
seen this marine
freak blink.

It radiates on
terminal vertebra
a comb of twenty

upright spines
and curls
its rocky tail.

Saltflush lobster
bull encrusted swims
backwards from the rock.

This is Pamphlet 7 of The Poetry Series
THE MODERN EDITIONS PRESS
725 Greenwich Street
New York City

Examples of obj. Poetry/

Include my poem, The Lobster (p. 49,
Amulet)

what I see in the ocean - Strange little animals
+ plants

plasma

brithos = fauna + flora found at bottom of the
ocean

sponge

Sea-bottle (Latin name = Halicyptus)

Sea horse

plankton - microscopic plant food
that fish feed on

Also, To a Collie Pup (p. 30) -

Also, Cuddy's poem: influenced by Robert Lowell, ~~specificity~~
tenderness

1913

Pound's Principles

Mosaic Code

1. Direct treatment of the thing,
whether subjective or objective
2. Avoid abstractions
3. "The natural object is always the
adequate symbol, ~~the proper & perfect~~
3. Economy. Use no word that
does not contribute to the
presentation, which does not
reveal something.
4. Present vs. subject, don't
describe it or comment on it.

+ the proper & perfect symbol

5. "I believe in an absolute
rhythm: a rhythm that is, in
poetry, which corresponds
exactly to the emotion or shade
of emotion to be expressed.

A man's rhythm must be
interpretative: it ~~must~~ ^{will}, therefore,
in the end, be his own,

6. There is a fluid as well as a
solid content, thus some poems have
form as a tree has form, some as water
poured into a vase.

Budapest

- (1) History of Obj. movement — Who were in it —
- (2) Zukofsky's definition
- (3) My definition —
- (1)(4) Our predecessors / Antecedents

Pound — prose writings

Williams — free form —

{ Joyce's Ulysses → free association (the way the mind works)
Eliot's Waste Land: ~~disassociation~~ collage of incongruous, contrasting symbols

Entered into our psyche

Eliot raised the ~~late~~ level of psych. sophistication

and psych. understanding in poetry

A point of view

Don't see it at the time

- (5) Parallel movement: Phenomenology (Husserl) —
- (2) ~~Francis Ponge~~ —

Maybe derived from Nietzsche, his constant battle against abstraction
his sense that it reduced ~~the real~~ man & prevented ~~him~~ metaphysics
from realizing his potentialities

And from Wm. James —

- (6) Read ^{4-12 min} poems, as examples of Obj. poetry

THE ENGLISH IN VIRGINIA, APRIL 1607 (based upon the works of Captain John Smith)

They landed and could / see nothing but/ meadows and tall/ trees....cypress, nearly three/ fathoms about at the/ roots,/ rising straight for/ sixty or eighty feet/without a branch/. In the woods were/ cedars, oaks, and/ walnut trees;/ some beech, some elm,/ black walnut, ash,/ and sassafras/ mulberry trees in/ groves;/ honey-suckle and/ other vines hanging/ in clusters on/ many trees./ They stepped on/ violets and other/ sweet flowers,/ many kinds in many/ colors; strawberries and raspberries were on the ground./ Blackbirds with red shoulders were flying about/ and many small birds, some red, some blue; /The woods were full of deer;/ and running everywhere fresh water..... brooks, rundles, springs and creeks./ In the twilight, through the thickets and tall grass, creeping upon all fours....the savages, their bows in their mouths.

REZNIKOFF

Obj. principle: Let things speak for themselves.

savages: because (1) not Christians/heathens; (2) lived ^{simple} ~~in~~ uncivilized lives in nature; (3) Early Settlers afraid of them carried arrows in a sheath at their ^{hips} but their bows they had to carry - uneasy -

rundles = small brook

brook = a small stream (smaller than a river)

springs = water flowing from ~~mountain~~ a flow of water from the ground

"three fathoms" (John Smith was a sea captain, hence used ~~nautical~~ nautical term) - Wd. be 18 feet

ASYLUM PRODUCT

Brown and black felt, unevenly stitched with purple thread; what unhappiness is perpetuated in the brown and black of this pincushion, lunatic?

Obj. principle: be simple, direct; get to the heart of a thing immediately.

Disasters

of wars o western
wind and storm

of politics I am sick with a poet's
vanity legislators

of the unacknowledged

world *it is dreary*
to descend

and be a stranger how
shall we descend

who have become strangers in this wind that

rises like a gift
in the disorder the gales

of a poet's vanity it our story shall end
untold to whom and

to what are we ancestral *we wanted to know*
if we were any good

out there the song
changes the wind has blown the sand about

and we are alone the sea dawns
in the sunrise verse with its rough

beach-light crystal extreme

sands dazzling under the near
and not less brutal feet journey
in light

and wind

and fire and water and air *the five*

bright elements
the marvel

of the obvious and the marvel
of the hidden is there
in fact a distinction dance

of the wasp wings dance as
of the mother-tongues can they
with all their meanings

dance? O

O I see my love I see her go

over the ice alone I see

myself Sarah Sarah I see the tent
in the desert my life

narrows / my life
is another / I see
him in the desert / I watch
him / he is clumsy
and alone / my young
brother / he is my lost
sister / her small
voice among the people / the salt
and terrible hills whose armies
have marched / and the caves
of the hidden
people

Fear

once once only in the deluge
of minutes a tree
a city
a stone in the road waiting
stones eagles seagulls sliding
sideways down the wind I cannot find
a way to speak
of this the source
the image the space
of the poem our
space too great
or too small where the world rides the words
speak of too little
time remaining
fearful
of sorrow in this once once only
among atoms, eagles, and alone

include Nietzsche
Lorine

Objectivists

first letter from LZ in 1930

Parallel movement — Husserl, Phenomenology

Francis Ponge —

Philosophic antecedents: Nietzsche: seeds of phenomenology
Wm James — successfully bridged the gap between subjective & objective

Fight against abstraction

hence, when read Pound, I feel ready

also, solved the problem of the abstract (metaphysics)

arrived at position of anti-abstract / other with my psychology —

(1) Approach to reality = what ~~was~~ made diff. different
never abandoned, or concealed, distorted, etc. in metaphors
(surrealist) vague misty language softening

✓ Great curiosity about reality — effort to explore it further

✓ Great respect for reality → let things speak for themselves. — They don't need commentary, explanation

✓ they don't need to be expended & developed

✓ they don't need to be improved by metaphors, hypotheses (they can't be —)

✓ they don't need to be elevated to a higher plane via rhetoric / this makes them false

wanted to be very close to reality

(2) By reality was meant the whole person of the poet
not just the external world, the outer world
Thus it went beyond realism / were not simply realists. They were three-dimensional — Imagists were 2-dimensional

Also: quote from Pavese: "The most ~~and~~ the quickest —"

(3) Dead serious — never just played games with language —
had to have some life significance or with ideas, pictures, etc. (W. Stevens) or to make ornaments —

not just language significance or significance in the imagination

4) From this → extraordinary (super) clarity & objectification

(3) ~~Full~~ comprehension of object

(of next page)

(3)

Add to this / Another dimension of Algj

(3) (d)^a Comprehension of an object. ^{Take gifts} Is on course:

"A true revelation, I am convinced, can only emerge from stubborn concentration on a single problem. The surest & the quickest way to arouse the sense of wonder is to stare, unafraid, at a single object. Suddenly — miraculously — it will look like something we have never seen before?" — What has happened? ^{slightly hypnotic} ^{stated}

(1) Do we now see 'inside' the object — see its true nature?

or (2) Has something happened to us which changes our perception? ^{effect of} Like taking LSD — cocaine

or (3) in this state (hypnotic, meditative), the imagination = aroused and works on the tree, transforming it

or (4) finally, when it is expressed, the medium of language transforms it ^{because =} (not an exact equivalent or representation of reality)

|| All this = what = meant by full ^(obj) comprehension of an object
~~To be clear~~

Another dimension of Algj = clarity in the sense that all 3 ^{things} have to be clear: the altered perception, the imagination at work, the language

Tender/ semi-/ articulate flickers/ of your// presence, all/ those years/
 past// now, ^{eighty} ~~eighty~~-/ five, impossible to/ count them// one by one, like//
 addition, subtraction, missing// not one. The last/ curled up, in/ on yourself,/
 position you take/ in the bed, hair/ wisped up// on your head, a/ top knot, body/
 skeletal, eyes// closed against,/ it must be,/ further disturbance-// breathing
 a skim/ of time, lightly/ kicks the intervals....// days, days and/ years of
~~xxxxxxx~~ it,/ work, changes,// sweet flesh caught/ at the edges,/
 dignity's faded// dilemma. It/ is your life, oh/ no one's// forgotten anything/
 ever.// They want/ to make you// happy when/ they remember. Walk/ a little, get//
 up now, die/ safely, easily, into singleness, too tired with it to keep on and
 on. Waves break at the darkness under the road, sounds in the faint night's
 softness. Look at them, catching the light, white edge as they turn....
 always again and again. Dead one, two, three hours....all these minutes pass.
 Is it, was it, ever you alone again. How long you kept at it, your pride, your
 lovely, confusing discretion. Mother, I love you....for whatever that means,
 meant...more than I know, body gave me my own, generous, inexorable place of
 you. I feel the mouth's sluggishness, slips on turns of things said, to you,
 too soon, too late, wants to go back to beginning. Smells of the hospital
 room, the doctor she responds to now, the order....get me there. "Death's
 let you out...." comes true, this, that, endlessly circular life, and we came
 back to see you one last time,/ this time? Your head shuddered, it seemed,
 your eyes wanted, I thought, to see who it was. I am here,/ and will follow.

Read with Reznickoff's Kaddish —
 Ginsberg's Kaddish

foreshadowed

in surrealistic

night speech

on the media,

its first robot.

Carl Rakosi

Pound
"A few don't's" — Poetry, March 1913

- (1) Direct treatment of the thing, whether subjective or objective
- (2) Use no word that does not contribute to the presentation
- (3) Compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not like a metronome.

"Go in fear of abstractions"

"Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something."

"Don't use such an expression as 'dim lands of peace'. It dulls the image. It mixes an abstraction with the concrete. It comes from the writer's not realizing that the natural object is always the adequate symbol."

"Don't be 'viewy' — leave that to the writers of pretty little philosophic essays. — Don't be descriptive; remember that the painter can describe a landscape much better than you can."

Used in my talk on the Objectivists
in Budapest

So potent is this

prescience haunts me
pre-sentiment

MERCATOR'S PROJECTION

by Carl Rakosi

There is a belief that has never left me, that metaphors

When I started writing poetry, after total immersion in the Romantic poets, it seemed to me that metaphor was the god in a poem, the body in which he showed his splendor and transcendence, the motivating force behind writing itself. This belief led me to write some dreadful poems, which in time led me to my re-education. But the feeling that there is an affinity between some deep part of my nature and the metaphor never left me, and I remained loyal to it at heart and continued to woo this inviolable bearer of bountiful gifts, too rich at times for my stomach, who seemed to appear on call from some higher power in the imagination. In time I learned to choose only those metaphors that would stand behind their promises and be accountable for discretion and accuracy. Metaphors with a conscience, in other words.

"Metaphors with a conscience!" (I hear someone screaming.) "Are you out of your mind? How can a metaphor have a conscience? What are you trying to do, Judaize aesthetics?"

I can make my point by examining a stanza from a poem by Delmore Schwartz, THE MIND IS AN ANCIENT AND FAMOUS CAPITAL:

"The mind is a city like London,

A Smoky and populous opening!

A grand opening! A grand view. Large meanings resonate from it, imminent. Yet the metaphor fits. The reader is content to be carried along at this great height wherever this Prospero has a mind to take him. Then follows:

"It is a capital

Like Rome, ruined and eternal,"

The field now is in danger of becoming overpopulated. Is it possible that the author did not realize what he had in the first metaphor? Or is this a case of pushing on in greed for still more effect, insensitive to the thickening of the atmosphere and the confusing side-effects? Whichever, the possibilities are still there but they are no longer charismatic. And the xx serpent whispers, "Art thou really Prospero?"

Nevertheless, the grand view continues in the second modifier, eternal. It goes with Rome and what we feel is true of its referent, the mind. But actual ruin stares the poem in the face and disbelief rushes in at the word, ruined. Why "ruined?" This term for the mind is no product of thought or soul-searching. It is the oldest and most hackneyed conceit in Romantic

That marvellous

The fellow has made me forget that the metaphor has a referent, subject matter, and that the best argument for the metaphor is that it endows the referent with these qualities. We expect more of a metaphor, therefore, than of a flower. *(And that being the case)* As long as it has a referent, we must expect it to be for the referent. *again I have gone too far.*

But here the fellow must be made But not entirely. Entirely would make it a dull fellow, ~~_____~~ A certain amount must be allowed for an existence in language, *(an existence always there and never identical to subject matter. The question is, how much? And the answer comes from man's connection to earth: it doesn't matter how much so long as it doesn't detract from subject matter. For why should one be willing to give up one jot of that? I see no need to. One can have both.*

But now we are suddenly But this now plunges us outside literary considerations, for *for metaphor* the amount of subject matter that a poet is willing to sacrifice or compromise depends on his individual psychology. *He who is of course, if a poet* If he is turned primarily inward, there is nothing to restrain him from going all the way to EUPHUES. But if his feelings for the outer world are *have a solid ground in his* solid and grounded in character, he'll keep his head against the charisma of metaphor. He will not settle for charisma alone.

Not thought But isn't it grand that we can have both the earth and metaphor?

Next rascal is metaphor for the poet's own aggrandizement which turns attention away from the poem to beam in on his powers of imagination and language. One is entitled to as much self-aggrandizement as one can get away with in this fictional world but not at the expense of the poem. This is a *matter of integrity* form of integrity. *of metaphor*

Then come metaphors which ~~_____~~ and perpetuate writing for the sake of writing.....e.g., writing as an ego need, as against *that* writing out of lyric impulse. Some ego need is always in a person but if ~~xxxxx~~ the driving force, it leads to poetry without an inherent reason for being, the ultimate contamination, and to a mindless overpopulation of writing in which no one's individuality can survive. A plague of locusts would be preferable.

Then there are metaphors in place of ~~xxxxx~~ subject matter and thought, and metaphors in which the poet can escape from personality, and metaphors by which he can slip into a drugged state, and metaphors that take over and lead him by the nose, and so on.

But I have run ahead of myself. Looking back to my beginnings, I see now that there was only one kind of poetry which moved me then, the lyrical. With what condescension and disdain I expelled everything else! Out! Outside the ~~xxxxx~~ pale! The memory is embarrassing.

Then one day I myself transgressed. It happened after reading Cumming's poem, Buffalo Bill, I think in The Dial. What delight! ~~_____~~

~~_____~~ It touched a nerve in me

that I didn't know I had, and a poem came to me as a counterpoint, a take-off on early Westerns. It was the opposite of lyrical, of romantic, of mystical, the opposite of everything I had done up to then; and it was without metaphor. I didn't have to "compose" it. The poem practically wrote itself. Form didn't seem to matter to it. It was fun writing, but I dismissed it as negligible.

Some time later, on another binge, I wrote THE EXPERIMENT WITH A RAT. This poem took more composing, more form, but again no metaphors, and the opposite of lyrical, etc. This poem I took more seriously. [With the writing of my AMERICANA suite, mostly done without metaphor, it became apparent that a different ~~part~~ part of my nature had broken out.....humor, satire, my bond to the everyday world. ~~XXXX~~ These poems had certain things in common: they all had a point to make, a realistic matter to reproduce, for which they needed no assistance from metaphor. It would have been extra baggage, a distraction, an enemy to the simple state in which all mental points have to be made.

In Narrative poetry, too, spurns metaphor. Who wants to be stopped in the flow of a story by the ambiguities and inner richness of metaphor? Similarly, in poetry in which the action itself stands for a larger meaning, the metaphor only impedes the symbolism. But no matter, the metaphor still haunts me. I know that what I was at my beginnings.....romantic, lyrical, idealistic.... had to have metaphors. In addition, I was possessed by the music of poetry; by overpowering, inchoate feelings.....elegiac, rhapsodic, mystical; by a sense of supernatural presences close by who would move out of their shadowy limbo and make themselves known to me if I allowed myself to go to them and listen. I stood at the edge, waiting. Would you try to express these things in literal language? Would you even be willing to admit to them as non-metaphorical states?

In this duress, metaphor came to ^{the} my aid.....as it comes to everybody's, for it is a primary tool invented early in our evolution to cope with imperfection at both ends of the communication process: with some defect or inadequacy in the cognitive faculty, ^{with a incapacity} in its capacity to know exactly and in full what we are experiencing from ^{at any particular moment} moment to moment and what is before us, and with imperfection in language, in its capacity to reproduce exactly and fully. Thus the metaphor is staple in everyday talk. The moment we are stuck for perception or words, we reach for an ^{analogue} analogy, ~~this is~~ metaphor in its simplest functional form.

If we are meditating, the cognitive and lingual imperfections are far more complex. If, for example, I am looking at a tree, what am I experiencing?

There's no point in asking that question if no demands are made on me to reproduce the experience. In that case, experience is knowing. But if I have to reproduce it, neither my self-observation nor the language of direct statement is equal to the task.

If I further ask the question, what is before me?, I run into a maze just trying to understand my own question. And if I can get past that, I run into a wall, for the real tree is not penetrable to my inquiry. Of course, if I assume that the tree is what I see, there's no problem. I wind up with a physical description. But if I sense, as I do, that there's something more there, something sui generis that is not I, ^{with its} a character/presence/ambience ^{with} its own purpose and destiny that is not what the scientist knows of its structure or its composition and function, then I'm in trouble because I do not have access to these things. I must invent something to represent them. The chances are, I'll start with a metaphor.

And if I want to reproduce the tree's ~~xxxxx~~ aesthetic effect on me, its particular beauty and grace, or my connection to it when I think of its durant heart, its destiny relative to man, the mystery of its great presence..... the enumeration, however true, is never complete and does not bring me any closer to the integral that is so moving about a tree; ^{the integral} that is on a different plane from its parts and attributes..... if, as I said, I want to reproduce all that, direct statement and descriptive words are of no use. If, in addition, I want to express my feelings about all this, for sure I need help and must invent the metaphorical tools for it. (I see that, almost without thinking, I have already done some of this in the words I used.)

Poet (It is possible that ^{What if}) I have no more entree to a tree than a spider has to the wall on which it sits and spins, ~~but~~ does that matter? Metaphysical riddles never stopped anyone, not the solipsist himself, from following his natural bent and intuition.

Pierre Reverdy plays this theme to death. "Poetry," he writes, "Is not in the datum but in the observant mind." I see no basis for such a dichotomy except in Reverdy's own natural bent towards solipsism, for if it held, ~~it would follow that the~~ ^{only} subject of ~~the~~ poetry is the mind itself, the poet/solipsist himself. We know that heavy presence, that long, millennial dream from which one can not awake because outside stimulus has been removed. We know its working principle, that subject matter is not the important thing, only the art of expressing it; that poetry has no responsibility to anything outside the poet himself, the man of unending surrealist excess and

extravaganza. Unfortunately for him, ^{nature,} ~~the~~ the nature of the reader, has the last word, whatever exercises in solipsism may be ^{for} to the poet, they are boring to others.

Leaving the metaphor for a moment for a larger field, I have to add that it is a fundamental problem in writing that ^{being here} the emotions and the intellect mix very poorly. In fact, they don't mix at all, not only because their tones clash and they exist on different planes, but no sooner does ^{a person} one feel something, then the mind butts in: it looks, describes, interprets, denatures, absorbs, controls, encapsulates. It imagines that it has made an even exchange because ^{this is a reason for this that it assumes} it does this with great wit, precision and eclat. The fact is that it ^{has} no choice. If it did not move in on the emotion, it would have nothing to do and no reason for being. The trouble is that when it's through, the emotion is no longer there, only its ^{an} mental ectoplasm. Yet emotion without intellect is slob. Only the mind can give it form and make it look and act the way it should in a poem. ^{supposedly its equivalent} ^{transfigure into}

How to do this, then, with as little loss to the emotion as possible. By confining the intellect to suggestion, and by expressing the emotion in the medium in which it is most directly expressed, music; in a poem, the music of the lines. Or in a medium which uses the associations that go with certain images and configurations.. This excerpt from Denise Levertov's poem, ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS, is an example.

"Well, I would like to make poems direct as what the birds said, hard as a floor, sound as a bench, mysterious as the silence when the tailor would pause with his needle in the air."

91 - The first three similes here need no comment; they are definitive. But who is this tailor in the 4th simile? Well, from the context,

"The ~~xxx~~ Rav.
of Northern White Russia declined in his youth to learn the language of birds because the extraneous did not interest him; nevertheless when he grew old it was found he understood them anyway, having listened well, and as it is said, 'prayed with the bench and the floor.'"

he is that slightly mystical character out of Yiddish literature and folk-

* This is a fundamental problem in writing.

lore, the ubiquitous Jewish tailor, lowly, obscure, philosophical, which God had made him for reasons known only to Him. He and the Rav evoke the shtetl atmosphere, as we know it; from this literature, in Czarist Russia, from where Levertov's father came. As such, the poem is a figuration of nostalgia. This much is on a single plane. The words, mysterious and silence and "would pause with his needle in the air, however, transport us to another plane. This simile is so much richer than its referent, so much more profound and resonant, that it displaces it at once. One no longer remembers that the poet was saying that she wished her poems to be like that. The wish seems unimportant now.

This tailor is a far more hypnotic character, in a poetic sense, than the historical tailor or the tailor out of nostalgia. The ~~wyn~~ simile has made him a figure of mystery wherein the author has a heraldic existence..... heraldic, at first glance, of a Jewish past unknown to her; on a deeper plane heraldic of the mystery of silence, of the mystery of our inward state where meditation sits timelessly on the question, What is Being?

What is great about
In this heraldic universe, ~~all know~~ *as we collect its* inhabitants are not subject to mortality. *invented a being in language* It is as if the mind had made a pact with language (to that effect, *wd.*) Once its word, its metaphor, *was* is on the page, it shall live in perpetuity, independent of its referent and its author. The conditions in this habitat, *standards,* the ~~the~~ associations, the voice, the thing that is matter there, were not set by referent or author. When they enter it, therefore, they have to undergo a transformation and abide by these conditions. Balzacian reality is taken in by them and ceases to exist as such. It becomes depersonalized. Its life space becomes aesthetic space. Above all, it becomes enhanced, a distortion not tolerable in the real world. In this enhancement like lies the poet's field for expressing his deepest longings for transcendence..... is this not the very air of the soul?.....to go beyond the ordinary, and beyond the excellent too, beyond what his mind can know and his eyes can see and his hand can write, (to settle for nothing less than magic in language, to have no limits, an impossibility broken when the word as symbol and metaphor transforms its referent into a heraldic thing and its author into a heraldic being. *made possible*

Are these aspirations not romantic? As ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ writing itself. And also lyrical?the romantic sings. Where else can one's lyrical impulses and rhapsodic feelings go but in this enhancement? Or all these vague, elegiac feelings and presentiments of the mystical that dog the poet. Or the grandiose impulses of his ego, and his need for immortalityhis double.

Enter ^{this} metaphor ^{a mode} and you take off in a self-contained, timeless space capsule, where William James once sat when he wrote, "Immortality is one of the great spiritual needs of man:" and Lev Lunts when he wrote in the Serapion Manifesto, "Art is as real as life itself, and, like life, has no goal or meaning. It exists because it must."

From matter to trope, into image.....the image as ^{my} way of knowing, of making matter conform to ^{my} mode of perception....how well I know this divine transmutation! Yet I am pulled equally towards the other pole, and ^{like} yearn to do what the stage designer, Nicolai Akimov, longed for. Writing during the early, sanguine period of Russian Communism, he said, "My fondest dream is to develop the expressiveness of things to a point where I need not be ashamed to put them on the stage beside the best of actors. As yet, this waits in Utopia, but if I should ever ~~succeed~~ succeed in bringing upon the stage a chair, the sight of which would make the audience, to a man, sob, I would die in peace."

Exactly how I feel! So I stand by what I once wrote:

"Matter,

with this look

I wed thee

and become

thy very

attribute.

I shall

be thy faithful

spouse,

true

to thy nature,

for I love

thee

more than Durer

loved a seaweed."

Foreword to Americana

never published
or used

The Americana started as a lark — to ^{capture the} put salt
bird of ^{stereotypes} ^{look at it a moment with smiling} ^{sprinkle a little} salt on its tail —
Pure fun — so effortless & occasional that seemed like
a ^{happstance} ^{congrat at it} — I saw the bird flying, & then was gone
Attached no importance to it — ^{it was over - had no reason}
Easy as rolling off a log. "or impulse to change it in any way
(as they used to say,)"
Seemed as if I had very little to do with it — It was
all on the outside of me. (i.e. that be important?)
^{the psychotherapist talking to}
It was a big surprise ^{to some} when I started to include
a few Americana for laughs at reading. ^{that}
The audience regarded them as no less important
than my other work. (Only the serious & important)
(among some critics ^{recently} only the apocalyptic & important)
^{indeed} ^{but more or less loved} ^{has stature} ^{numbers} ^{was}
stereotypes put this down to a peculiarity of the young audience,
a ~~general~~ generational gap, one of the consequences
in a reading audience of poetry — oral but not holding when one is reading
a poem by oneself from a book. ^{Do I believe it?}
I don't know. I'm confused —
The first inkling that that it didn't always be
a lark came in my N.O. poem — changed in the middle
to tragic (didn't treat a black man as a lark) —
And The Depression & Vietnam poems ^{certainly} ^{cd. not be}
~~these too~~ ^{these} ^{had} ^{been} ^{indecent} to be detached
as these were not caught on the wing as stereotypes
in fact, didn't start out as Americana — they were
very much on the level. I added them because
these were the other traits of the ^{same person} ^{in tone}
stereotypical but in their persistence & predictability &
unrelatedness to reality, almost so ^{American} ^{not quite as}
The oral literature: one ~~could~~ ^{could} no longer laugh at them

Am. Nympho-^{total.}version to ~~pure~~ hilarity. ^{only} my defense.
I can't help myself. a state that easily defies reason.

A.W.L.
outside the bounds
of the will, & reason too.
conscience, & ~~stuffed~~ bonkers
— reason gone happily out of control
Before you know it, it's all over.
You've been raped — abashed.

First of the Am. poems, allis not seen as such, was
Three Cheers for the Star Spangled Banner — injected
for Kline came from Cummings' Buffalo Bill poem
in the depth of pranks & merry-making — Blame
Cummings for this — opened up a vein in me that
I didn't know I had

Ideas for Preface to Americana

(1) ^{Working this preface} ^{was the realization} all my adult life I have been in search of the Am. character without being aware of it ^{restlessness -}

my hunger for exp. in cities all ^{working in N.Y.} Chicago Boston Milwaukee Cleveland, ^{etc.} It wd. not have occurred to anyone whose exiles came over in the Mayflower to go in search of the Am. character or to live in the city. ^{be anything but an Am. character} ^{similarity} on the Am. character

(2) ^{everyman} my exp. with lit. no such thing after World War I ^{law student / sociologist} ^{humanities} Sherwood Anderson - Meridel Le Sueur

(3) - ^{The writing of Americana} Simply came to me, usually after reading something in the news - didn't have to work on it (a few exceptions)

Came as a delight ^{the depression + war poems} ^{Viet Nam} - Because = already something in the past, ^{a curiosity (?)} ^{delightful}

like found poems - discovered in the news

Their tone = (usually) slightly comic / ironic / tongue-in-cheek because = stereotypes - ^{Happiest realizations in stereotypes} ^{found self fulfillment}

That's as close as we can get? ^{never - ending} as long as there are news, there are Americana

^{will be} ^{Americans} as long as ~~we~~ are vulnerable there will be Americana ^{(Marty - Martin J. Rosenblum} ^{who wrote his Ph.D. dissertation} ^{on my AMERICANA}

^{and} ^{endless} ^{on a poem} ^{what is now} a long poem in the modern Am. convention ^{Marty has argued that} more accurate to say, an unending long poem in " " "

Unpublished OR

O great Psychology, you are everywhere. I found you even in ancient Babylon, in Gilgamesh.

"This epic," you cried, in your sure, tutorial voice, "Is a story of man's boundless potentialities, but it was too early in history to dare to avow them, so the authors made a hero whom no one on earth could stand up to but not so daring and mighty as to provoke the gods and bring destruction down on the people. In fact, to make sure that no one could mistake their intentions, they kept some things out of his grasp, proof that they were not setting up a man to rival the gods. And they left certain things unclear, such as his origins and the circumstances of his birth, while other things were unmistakably definite: viz., that this was a lone case and only Gilgamesh could have done what he did; that the events in the story happened long before memory and there were no survivors to hold responsible; that it was, after all, only a story. We're not going to be held ~~xxxxxxxixix~~ accountable and punished every time our mind plays at make-believe, are we?

Then for good measure, they slipped in a Serpent. Here was our hero, celebrating the greatest event in his life, the possession of the plant of eternal youth. You can imagine the colossal shindig that was! In the midst of it, he could not resist taking his eyes off the plant ^{for a moment} to congratulate himself. When he came to, the plant was gone. The Serpent had slipped in ^{Exactly the kind of human failing that would put} during the hubbub and stolen it. ^{the gods at ease and incline them towards} compassion.

Thus, as far back as Babylon, Psychology was already on the side of the gods and disclaimed any intention except to entertain.

"Very astute," I thought to myself. "Psychology must be the prototype of the proverbial cat that always falls on its feet. But tell me, Puss, aren't there powers higher than Gilgamesh? And if so, where does that leave your analyzing?"

In any case, it is clear that behind Gilgamesh were sensible men who liked to tell earthy jokes. How else account for making the gods themselves favor Gilgamesh, as if the very heavens had to admire so much daring? And why else would the goddess Aruru, in order to save the people from being destroyed by Gilgamesh's violence, make a counter-force out of the raw stuff of animal life and then tame it by mating it with a knowing woman? I can hear men laughing in their beer at that.

And if the gods were listening, they must have chuckled when Gilgamesh, after much danger and travail, crossed the waters of death and made contact at last with Utnapishtim, who possessed the secret of eternal youth, and

discovered to his amazement that this hero par excellence, this savior of mankind, was doing nothing in his everlasting existence but sit quietly in the shade with his wife.

Carl Rakosi

old country ballad

God,

"if I had known

I was going
to live to 97

I would have
took better
care of myself."

Carl Rakosi

Minneapolis, Minn. 55409
4451 S. Colfax Ave.
Feb. 5, 1969

Dear Frau Hesse:

Mr. James Laughlin has asked that I trace my connection with the Objectivist movement for you, to go along with the mimeographed biography you already have.

My connection with Objectivism began with a letter from Louis Zukofsky, then unknown to me, in 1930, inviting me to contribute to a special number of the magazine Poetry which he was going to put together and edit himself under the banner of Objectivism. He was a great admirer of Ezra Pound's, of both his critical ideas and his poetry, and had seen my work in Pound's magazine The Exile, and wrote, "Permit me to say that your poems are the best in America---these U.S.A.---that I have seen since, well 1926." My poems led off that issue of Poetry and a considerable number appeared in 1932 in The Objectivists Anthology, which Zukofsky also put together and edited with infinite care. From that time on, Zukofsky, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff and I became known as The Objectivists. In fact, this is how we are known to this day. This is interesting because Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Kenneth Rexroth, Basil Lantier, William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon were also in the Anthology, but ^{we} were the only ones to get stuck with the name.

Since I lived in New York for only a short period, I did not get to meet Oppen and Reznikoff, but Zukofsky and I had a long, intensive correspondence on questions of poetics, mostly having to do with my own work, and we used to get together when I was in New York. We had quite a few critical ideas in common but our poetry was as unlike as two poets could be. This was true of all the work in the Anthology. Only Reznikoff and I can be said to have had some affinities. In spite of the diversity, however, all of the pieces in the Anthology did live up to a very rigorous standard of what a good poem must be.

What was that? Zukofsky tried to define it but was not really successful, ^{cf. not quite doing it did not quite come off}
not
at least/to my satisfaction. He was better at saying what it was not: "Fake, mere word mongering, the lack of a process of words acting on particulars show up as rot in all times."

For myself, I found the term Objectivist useful. It conveyed a meaning which was, in fact, my goal: to present objects in their most essential reality and to make of each poem an object.....meaning by this, obviously, the opposite of a subject; the opposite, in other words, of all forms of personal vagueness; of loose bowels and streaming, sometimes screaming, consciousness. And how does one make the subjective experience from which a poem issues into an object? By feeling the experience sincerely, by discriminating particularity, by honesty and intelligence, by ~~imagination~~ imagination and craftsmanship.....qualities ~~is~~ not belonging to Objectivists alone, obviously.

Let's see how this system works when applied to a few contemporaries. Take (A.S.)^X an American poetess ^{recently} who has just won the Pulitzer prize. Her experience ^{s are} is sincerely felt but not objectified. The result is dull, pretty awful. Which proves again that it is not the experience which provides the basic interest (experiences are not that different from each other) but the nature of the objectification. An example of a different kind is W.H.A.^Y His experiences are thoroughly and ingeniously objectified, but the experience conveyed in the "object" moves ^{feebly} very weakly. The impression is that the experience was not thoroughly felt, whether sincere or not, and that the whole person was not involved. Therefore not all of the reader is involved. But we have to settle here for W.H.A.'s^{Y's} intelligence and skill, which are sufficient to be interesting and pleasurable in themselves. ^{a brilliant dud.} ^{but the poems as an object is starts off} ^{brilliantly but drops} ^{To go on,} Going back now to the making of an "objectivist" poem, as the basic form for a particular experience is found and the poem begins to ~~g~~ take shape and fill in, all the insatiable tyrannies of language, which we only borrow.....the form, the cadence, the associations, etc.....set up requirements of their own which must be followed in order to complete the writing. In this sense the author experiences the poem as an object; a real thing outside himself which works on him; an organism, as it were, with distinct characteristics. Once the poem is completed, the author becomes like everybody else, a reader, ~~and~~ and it is no longer possible to experience the poem as anything but an object, which is there now to reenter the poet's subjective if it can.

Well, I hope this will do for the time being. And thank you and Dagmar Henne
for your great help.

Cordially

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Carl Rakosi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Carl Rakosi

Proposed insertion to interview (see #1, next page)

society which Marxists, ever intent on ^{persuading} ~~winning~~ people, proposed, writers, as communication experts, including poets, had an honored place, and if one could get to the center of the action, which was the magazine, The New Masses, a place of power. But the honor was paid only to social realism or to exaltation of the working man. If you didn't write....and I didn't, I wrote lyrical poetry....you were flayed and boiled alive for pandering to the decadent tastes of the bourgeoisie by the editor, Mike Gold, and his editorial assassins. This happened to Reznikoff, for example. It made me feel there was something wrong with me (and of course with lyric poetry) for not being able to write what was expected of all good men. Sounds outrageous now, doesn't it? but it was deadly real then. This had something to do with my stopping to write but the main thing was that I couldn't work all day as a social worker and psychotherapist, spend time with my wife and children, socialize with our friends, do the chores around the house and write. I would have had to be up all day and all night.

Your N.Y. Times essayist didn't get it right. The problem after World War 2 was not a pressure to conform. The problem was the Cold War mentality, "us" against the Communists (as it still is), which swept Congress and the President (Truman then) like the Black Death. The difference ^{between now and} then was that you could lose your means of livelihood and even wind up in prison if you were found to have associated with a Communist (and McCarthy labeled any dissident a Communist) or with someone who had ever been seen with someone who ~~was~~ said to have been seen with an alleged Communist or fellow traveller. You ~~g~~ get the picture.

About your book of poems: I was struck by its great variety and honest observations and found a true poetic sensibility in it.

With best wishes,

Carl

last page of transcript of interview w/ you.

insert
from letter
from Carl Rakosi
to me.

① I should marry & have a family. & altho my wife never stood in my way, it became more & more impossible.... there were too many things I had to give my time to. My profession absorbed me completely during the day, & no way was possible, in that profession. & at night, I had to spend time with my wife, my child, & then, when I tried to write at night, my mind would be jumping all over the place & I'd be awake all night. It was impossible, it couldn't continue. Another factor was, I was a Marxist, ^{in my mind} just annihilating the poetry unless it had some social purpose to it. So that ~~that~~ had a great influence on me. So I... I had to stop, & I stopped reading all poetry too. I couldn't read poetry without being tempted. For either a year or two, I almost died, I thought I really was going to get physically ill. I got all sorts of symptoms, but I finally stopped. Now, the poetic impulse however does not die. That isn't something that can die in you, if you have it. You can stop the expression of it, but it won't die. I wrote many articles in my professional field which, when I read them now, are really very good literary prose - in almost any aspect of social work that I wrote on: casework, cases, supervision, - I couldn't not use my literary powers, so they were coming out there - but I never thought I would write poetry again. What started it, but most people know this already - a letter from Andrew Crozier, just a year before I retired from social work, in which he expressed interest in my work & said he had first come across it at the University of Buffalo when he'd come here as a student, under Olson, & read everything he could find in the magazines & copied them down, & he wondered whether I had any new work or what was happening. That's what started me off again. As a matter of fact, 6 months before I decided to retire, I started to write again, & I've been writing ever since... this was in late '66. But your question, about the poetic impulse - I wanted to emphasize, that does not die. You express it even in your relationship to people. The other social workers didn't know I was a writer, but they did know my pen name, Carl Rakosi, & they admired these prose writings of mine.... I wrote over 60 articles on different things... so it comes out in some way...

JC - When did you begin work on the Collected Prose? How far back does the work go?

CR - Not very far. I can't give you a date...

JC - I find the book most fascinating.... of utmost relevance... the poignance.... what it says about criticism, the critic - what it beckons for.... we're experimentalist, we're not supposed to overtly show our brains, & yet you have shown, with a sense of honesty in your book, there's a need for a reader, a need for a critical response, an undeniable, basic need for recognition...

4

FINIS tape runs out

20 March 1988

Dear Andy:

So much time has elapsed since the interview that I was unable to fill in the obvious lacunae and the missing last portion. Will you please mention this in the ^{introduction} ~~interview~~ as well as the fact that the interview took place late at night, long after my bedtime, and that my brain felt as if it were wrapped in wool.

With best wishes,

Carl Rakosi

126 Irving St.

San Francisco, CA 94122

30 Oct. 1987

Coler
Dear Jim:

A thousand apologies for taking so long to answer your letter. Perhaps "taking so long" is not the right way to put it. What happened was that Leah (my wife) got cancer about a year ago and I became completely absorbed in its practical and psychological consequences. She's now in remission, and my bondage to it is too, for the time being.

In your letter you said you had unanswered questions in your mind about what force in Marxist thinking would make one stop writing and "not knowing precisely what was behind that force, what underpinnings in this country so work against the poet, continue to work against him." Two different matters. I'll take up the second first. It's not that structural forces are working against us, it's that they're working outside us, we have no place in them, are not a part of them, meaning by that that American society from the very beginning has been and is materialistic, practical, commercial and has never had a national culture to counteract that, a national culture like the national cultures of ~~the~~ eastern Europe or Persia or the Middle East in which poetry has an honored place. Here poetry is just not a part of things. That's bad enough but our macho-esque mores make it seem rather ~~unmanly~~ unmanly for a man to be doing. We can write or not write, of course, as we please. Nobody is going to stop us; that's our private affair. But nobody but other poets and critics are going to be paying any attention. Which doesn't keep us from writing, of course; what it does do is deprive us of social backing and respect for our work. To fill the void, we make frantic efforts to win respectability and admiration from people in the business, critics and other poets, but this doesn't work because that's not where the void is. We pay a heavy emotional price for this omission. I have no doubt that it distorts our work, and especially what we write about it.....we constantly overplay our hand. But we go on writing anyhow, as I would have too if two other things had not happened along the way.

One was the Great Depression of the 1930's when I became convinced along with millions of others that Capitalism had failed, was finished, that the only remedy was some form of socialism. The suffering of people was so great that we were all swept along in a mass movement of such extraordinarily imperative moral urgency that it subsumed our critical faculties. In the ideal

society which Marxists, ever intent on ^{persuading} ~~convincing~~ people, proposed, writers, as communication experts, including poets, had an honored place, and if one could get to the center of the action, which was the magazine, The New Masses, a place of power. But the honor was paid only to social realism or to exaltation of the working man. If you didn't write ^{like that} ~~like that~~...and I didn't, I wrote lyrical poetry....you were flayed and boiled alive for pandering to the decadent tastes of the bourgeoisie by the editor, Mike Gold, and his editorial assassins. This happened to Reznikoff, for example. It made me feel there was something wrong with me (and of course with lyric poetry) for not being able to write what was expected of all good men. Sounds outrageous now, doesn't it? but it was deadly real then. This had something to do with my stopping to write but the main thing was that I couldn't work all day as a social worker and psychotherapist, spend time with my wife and children, socialize with our friends, do the chores around the house and write. I would have had to be up all day and all night.

Your N.Y. Times essayist didn't get it right. The problem after World War 2 was not a pressure to conform. The problem was the Cold War mentality, "us" against the Communists (as it still is), which swept Congress and the President (Truman then) like the Black Death. The difference ^{between then and now} ~~then~~ was that you could lose your means of livelihood and even wind up in prison if you were found to have associated with a Communist (and McCarthy labeled any dissident a Communist) or with someone who had ever been seen with someone who was said to have been seen with an alleged Communist or fellow traveller. You ~~get~~ ^{miss} the picture.

Finley
About your book of poems: I was struck by its great variety and honest observations and found a true poetic sensibility in it.

With best wishes,



THE NAROPA INSTITUTE
EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT - SUMMER 1987

Employment agreement between The Naropa Institute and Carl Rakosi, a faculty member for summer 1987.

Faculty member agrees to teach 2 classes (6/29 & 7/1), give 1 Poetry reading (6/29) and interview a select # of students (6).

Dates & Times _____.

Honorarium \$500.

Travel 1 Round Trip supersaver San Francisco/Denver

Housing Apartment at Varsity Townhouse Apartments

The Naropa Institute reserves the right to cancel the class, intensive or workshop if by _____ at least _____ full paying participants have not registered. In the case of cancellation, The Naropa Institute shall immediately notify the faculty member by telephone and follow-up letter. No compensation shall be payable in the event of a timely cancellation.

All salaries are subject to withholding deduction unless other arrangements have been made. Salaries will be paid upon completion of class, intensive or workshop.

Jane Faigao
Director, The Naropa Summer Institute

4/8/87
Date

Faculty member

Date

Address 2130 ARAPAHOE AVENUE • BOULDER, COLORADO 80302 • 303-444-0202

Social Security #

22 April 2287

Utopia Institute

Dear Jacqueline Gens:

The time schedule looks fine. No need to change the Wednesday evening class to Wednesday afternoon. I'll be leaving Thursday morning, as I had planned. However, I'm thinking of coming in to Boulder on Monday morning instead of Sunday. Any problem with that?

Since there's going to be a class on me on Monday afternoon, I'll add to it by filling up my evening class that day with reflections on my development as a poet and with ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ recollections of the other Objectivists. Then for my second session on Wednesday evening, I'd like to take up student work. So would you please ask each student to submit one poem on which he/she would like feed-back?

Cordially,

Carl Rakosi

SHIRIM:
A JEWISH POETRY JOURNAL



SPRING 1988

**THE POETRY OF CARL RAKOSI
AND A STUDENT SELECTION**

Elizabeth Knight	42	"Around My Chair There Are White Mastiffs"
Leza Lowitz	43	Dividing The Landscape
Ken Denberg	48	A Jew Hides In The Woods, Poland 1914
Biographical Notes	49	

Editorial Note

Now in his eighties, Carl Rakosi continues to search for clarity and honesty in his poetry. The directness of his poetry illuminates the world of concrete objects while it explores the ground between desire and fulfillment.

Michael Heller writes concerning Rakosi's poetry: "This poetry, then, is concerned not only with rendering the concreteness and feel of an actual world but also with accurately depicting the life of emotions as they swarm between object and person. . ."

Carl Rakosi inspires a movement of poetry begun in the 1930's called the Objectivist Movement. Other recognized leaders are Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff, all with concerns of clarity and honesty of expression.

In the following introduction, Rakosi not only explores the connection between his poetry and his Jewish experiences, but also tackles the question of a Jewish aesthetic and the Objectivist Movement. Why were so many of the Objectivist poets Jewish and is there something in the movement that struck a cord in their Jewish experience?

The following poetry can be found in Carl Rakosi's recently published book, The Collected Poems of Carl Rakosi.

FOREWORD BY CARL RAKOSI

In my youth, in the 1920's, I would have scorned appearing in a Jewish poetry magazine. It would have meant that I didn't have enough talent to be published anywhere else. The last thing I would have wanted was to be pigeonholed as a Jewish writer. That was too parochial and, in addition, would have put the kiss of death on what I was trying to be, an American poet... or, more accurately, an international-style poet, since Pound and Eliot, the poets that mattered then, were showing strong French influence. Another deterring influence to Jewish subject matter was the strong secular, Marxist atmosphere of the period. I was caught up in that. So were my contemporaries.

As a consequence my literary self connected in only a weak, nebulous way with my Jewishness despite the fact that my step-mother kept a kosher house and my father was president of his shul. At heart, however, he was an agnostic...and a Socialist and had been chosen because the congregation admired his integrity and fairness. In the end, my parents' strong Hungarian identification and interests (they spoke Hungarian to each other and to me, and knew no Yiddish) affected me more than their Jewish ones, which they carried faithfully as an obligation. In any event, I was not having Jewish experiences, as such, which could move me to want to write about them, and I was not about to go looking for them out of a sense of obligation. As a result, only a small portion of my work is about anything Jewish, and when Rabbi Dworkin asked me for poems for a small collection in SHIRIM, I was afraid there would not be enough even for a small collection. There's more than I thought, and I'm glad, for although my literary self still maintains its independence, my personal self has had a solid, unambivalent connection to my Jewishness.

Looking over what there is of mine in this collection, I see that I have been moved by the great lyrical passages in the Old Testament, by the medieval Sephardic poets, by the spiritual power of synagogue music, by the experience of anti-Semitism, and by Jewish humor. What is not there is Jewish mysticism. Alas, I was not aware of its existence until late in life. I regret that because there is in me a deep, mysterious affinity for the mystical, and had I encountered it sooner, I would have responded from a part of my nature which has not been tapped.

Is there something Jewish in my overall work despite my usual independence from Jewish subject matter? I suppose so, since there is no way to escape one's identity, but I don't know. I may have a clue, however. In the 1930's a new movement appeared in poetry. Its members were called the Objectivists. What characterized them was their extraordinary clarity and objectivity, their conciseness, and the unwavering honesty of their subject matter. The leading members were four Jews: Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen and I. We were all very different from one another. No one could mistake a poem by Reznikoff for one by Zukofsky, or one by Oppen for one by me. At the same time, our work was very different from the work of our non-Jewish contemporaries. One could tell an Objectivist poem not only by its greater clarity and objectivity and honesty but by some other qualities in the writing, and it is these that may be Jewish, not exclusively, but recognizably Jewish in its mix, a mix of utter seriousness and earnestness and a great candor and responsibility, and a great compassion. This mix seems to me to characterize modern Hebrew and Yiddish poetry too.

SERVICES

There was a man in the land of Uz.

Who's that at my coattails?
A pale cocksman.

Hush!

The rabbi walks in thought
as in an ordained measure
to the Ark
and slowly opens its great doors.
The congregation rises
and faces the six torahs
and the covenant,
and all beyond.

The Ark glows.

Hear, O Israel!

The rabbi stands before the light
inside, alone, and prays.
It is a modest prayer
for the responsibilities of his office.
The congregation is silent.

I too pray:

Let Leah my wife be recompensed for her sweet smile
and our many years of companionship,
and not stick me when she cuts my hair.
And let her stay at my side at large gatherings.
And let my son George and his wife Leanna
any my daughter Barbara be close,
and let their children, Jennifer, Julie and Joanna
be my sheep

and I their old shepherd.

Let them remain as they are.

And let not my white hair frighten me.

The tiger leaps,
the baboon cries,
Pity, pity.

The rabbi prays.

There was a man in the land of Uz.

I, son of Leopold and Flora,
also pray:

I pray for meaning.

I pray for the physical
for my soul needs no suppliant.

I pray for man.

And may a special providence look out
for those who feel deeply.

MEDITATION

After Moses Ibn Ezra

Men are children of this world,
yet God has set eternity in my heart.

All my life I have been in the desert
but the world is a fresh stream.

I drink from it. How potent this water is!
How deeply I crave it!

An ocean rushes into my throat
but my thirst remains unquenched.

MEDITATION

After Solomon Ibn Gabirol

Three things remind me of You,
the heavens

 who are a witness to Your name
the earth

 which expands my thought
 and is the thing on which I stand
and the musing of my heart
 when I look within.

POETICS FROM CHELM

In Yiddish folk humor Chelm
was a city of half-wits
whose absurdities were so
preposterous that the lis-
tener laughed and instantly
felt more kindly toward his
own.

We are the unacknowledged legislators of the world
....but we mustn't let it go to our heads.

There is no higher authority than theory.

Substance is no longer decisive. For every poem
now there are a dozen exegetes to supply it.

In today's world the only viable reality is to
pretend to be playing a game.

On the other hand, the world we live in is so mon-
strous that genius now must be measured by its
capacity to create commensurate monsters.

You can disarm criticism by writing surrealist as if
it might be a comedy.

It takes great discipline to be spontaneous.

My poems keep getting smaller and smaller not be-
cause I have less to say but because I have become
more rigorous.

On the other hand, the more impenetrable a poem
is, the greater.

NO ONE TALKS ABOUT THIS

Gentle sheep, I am powerless
to mitigate your sorrow.
Men no longer weep
by the rivers of Babylon,
but I will speak for you.
If I forget you, may my eyes
lose their Jerusalem.

ASSOCIATIONS WITH A VIEW FROM THE HOUSE

What can be compared to
the living eye?

its East
is flowering
honeysuckle
and its North
dogwood bushes.

What can be compared
to light
in which leaves darken
after rain,
fierce green?
like Rousseau's jungle:
any minute
the tiger head
will poke through
the foliage
peering
at experience.

Who is like man
sitting in the cell
of referents,
whose eye
has never seen
a jungle,
yet looks in?

It is the great eye,
source of security.

Praised be thou,
as the Jews say,
who have engraved clarity
and delivered us to the mind
where you must
reign severe as quiddity of bone
forever and ever
without bias or mercy,
without attrition or mystery.

L'CHAYIM

I felt
the foetus stir
a foot
below my wife's
breast

and woke
the neighbours
with my shouting
(a day
for silly asses)

and greeted
my first-born:
"Listen, I am
your provider.
Let us get to know
each other."

TO AN ANTI-SEMITES

So you fought for the Jews
in the last war
and have become a patriot again!

Why you thick-skulled liar,
as impossible to offend
as to trust with an order,

you were never within
three thousand miles
of the front.

You fought the war
in Camp McKinley,
cleaning stables

and stealing out
into the moonlight
with the kitchen maids.

EXERCISES IN SCRIPTURAL WRITING

1.

The king shall understand
that Yahweh is
Lord of four kingdoms.
There is the kingdom of fire
that is the compend of His word.
And the kingdom of the earth
of which men say that it was Eden
(now but merchants).
And the kingdom of the air
where birds make offering to our Lord
for His benevolent attitude.
And finally there is the kingdom of water,
history of many winds
and sailors in their salty coffins.
Certainly
our Lord is like the apex in the south
and like the scepter of the north.

2.

Sandalwood comes to my mind
when I think of you
and the triumph of your shoulders.
Greek chorus girls came to me
in the course of the day
and from a distance
Celtic vestals too,
but you bring me the Holy Land
and the sound of deep themes
in the inner chamber.

I give you praise
in the language
of wells and vineyards.

Your hand recalls
the salty heat of barbarism.

Your mouth is a pouch
for the accents of queens.

Your eyes flow over
with a gentle psalm
like the fawn eyes
of the woodland.

Your black hair
plucks my strings.

In the foggy wilderness
is not your heart
a hermit thrush?

You are timeless
as the mirrors,
Jewess of the palm country,
isolate as the frost
on the queen of swans.
Now that I have seen
the royal stones and fountains
and the tetrarch's lovely swans,
I am satisfied that you are
a mindful of white birds
in the folly of an old Jew.

Because of the coral
of your two breasts

are the prophets angry,
but I have my lips upon them
and the song shall go on.

3.

At Stagira lies Saint Belle,
and there lies also the body of Aristotle.

And you shall understand
that her bones are anointed
with the gum of plum trees
and that all men are used
to attend her grave on Lent.

And men say that in her youth
she was led into a garden of Caiaphas
and there she was crowned
with the sweet thorn called barbariens.

But now this is no more
but a tablet seven cubits long
above her head
on which the title is written
in Hebrew, Greek and Latin
and the date
when it was laid in the earth.

And the body of Aristotle
stinks too in a casket
at Stagira, but the eyes
are in Paris in the king's chapel.
Yet the emperor of Almayne
claims he has them,
and I have oftentime seen them,
but they are greater
than those in Paris.

FOUR CHARACTERS AND A PLACE
IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

1. Four Characters

Antonio, a special breed of existential cat:
a Christian, merchant, friend,
yet suffers from an enigmatic melancholy.
Spits on the Jew.

Nerissa, a gnat who'd make an outstanding critic.
Pricks a literary convention before the bubble
has a chance to be launched.
A Sancho in Quixotic clothes.

Gratiano, a hot head.
If there are Jews in Venice,
let them lock their doors.
This man will hate them
and be itching for a fight.
Prick him in his little finger
and he becomes the very foreskin of an anti-Jew.

Shylock. Is it possible a man can be so real
in the conventions of a tale of love,
he has the smell of boiled beef on his breath?

"The Jew," says Gobbo, "is the very devil
incarnation"

and fun to taunt and defy.

Therefore after Shylock lost his child
and fortune, "all the boys in Venice follow him,
Crying his stones, his daughter, and his ducats,"
for did not Shakespeare give the signal
of impending villainy himself
by calling Shylock sixty times "the Jew"?

What should one say? That the age
had not heard of the man of Sinai yet
who baked compassion into moral order?
Should one not say, this family man
had tenderness and ancient humor
built in like the glow-worm's light?
That it appears that Shylock is an afterbirth
left by the monk's dame that begat the Devil,
the one who wrote the special dossier on the Jew
which split the Middle Ages like a lightning
bolt with this syllogism:
Man was born in sin. Only Christ can save.
Christ is spurned by Jews. Therefore Jews
are sinister or perhaps not really men.

So when Antonio's bond was forfeited
and the gracious duke said
in his best melodious voice:
"We all expect a gentle answer, Jew!"
Shylock rode implacability to the end.

But so did Lear
and there were tears for Lear!

But we forget this is an early play,
a midsummer night's dream stabbed
by the long black caftan'd quiddity
of an earlier Italian villain,
before Barabbas!
that England had not seen a real
unbaptized Jew in three hundred years,
having banished these proto-bankers
(not before reneging on the notes due.)

Yet Shylock is a stronger brew than dreams
are made of, straightforward as his ducats,
yet not so real as flesh and blood.

Doggett, a famous low comedian of his day,
played him as a sharper.

"But suppose," as one apologist for Shylock wrote,
"that Shylock had subjected Antonio
to the same indignities, what would be thought?"

"Our sympathies are with him," Hazlitt wrote.
"He is honest in his vices"
and the only way to play him
is as Kean did with a "terrible energy"

or with scorn for Gratiano, as Irving did,
hurling a thunderbolt of understatement
when the trial was over and he said,
"I pray you give me leave to go from hence,
I am not well," and "walked away
to die in silence and alone"
or like Mansfield on "I am not well"
to gut himself

or chuck it all
and outfit Shylock as a low comedian
in pants pouched like a kangaroo
with gravel voice and sad, repeated
pratfalls on enormous pancake shoes,
but keep the poetry in Venice
in a cubist blue-and-white stage.

2. Belmont

a country of the mind
held subject by the harmony of friendship
and the perdurable vows of lovers
whose perpetual desires pump systole and diastole.

Chafing like a captive princess,
a fifteen-year-old suburban Jewess, Jessica,
fled with her father's jewels and a monkey
and eloped to Belmont with a neoplatonic youth,
a handsome nonentity,

and the crusader Godfrey of Bouillon
drove the Jews of Jerusalem into the Synagogue
and burned it down.

And Shylock said,
"Let not the sound of shallow fopp'ry enter
my sober house."

"In such a night
Medea gathered the enchanted herbs
that did renew old Aeson"

and in the sacked ghetto
two men wrestled for a pot.

"In such a night
stood Goebbels with a willow in his hand
upon the wild sea banks"

and the dead Jew lay
face up, a dog chewing on his hat.

All "vanish into thin air"
but the heavenly bodies which the ear
of Shakespeare heard in English,
the lovers buzzing in a hive of small acts
and the revellers materializing
into bone and gristle when they meet a Jew
who grounds their euphoric charge.

All their ploy is jell'd in clearest amber,
but the Jew remains in Gratiano's crawl.

"What's that for?"

"To bait fish withal!"

10 August 1988

To: The Fund For Poetry

From: Carl Rakosi

My heart brims with warmth and gratitude for your gift "in recognition of my contribution to contemporary poetry." With astonishment too, as you will see, for my wife, Leah, and I had just returned from the grocery and had brought in the mail with the bundles. The various items looked like junk mail, which I throw away unopened, or appeals from organizations. Your envelope looked like the latter except for "c/o Accounting Management Co." "The Fund For Poetry?" I wondered. "I've never heard of them. I wonder what they want." As Leah went about opening the envelope, I with only half an eye on her, she was griping, "Everybody wants money from us. Why don't they send us something once in a while?" Just then the check appeared and she exclaimed, "There is a check in here. For \$5,000!" You can imagine the rest.

I should tell you too that your recognition comes at the most troubled time of my life because for two years now I have been absorbed by Leah's cancer and racked by her suffering. Your recognition was therefore a hand leading me back to literature.

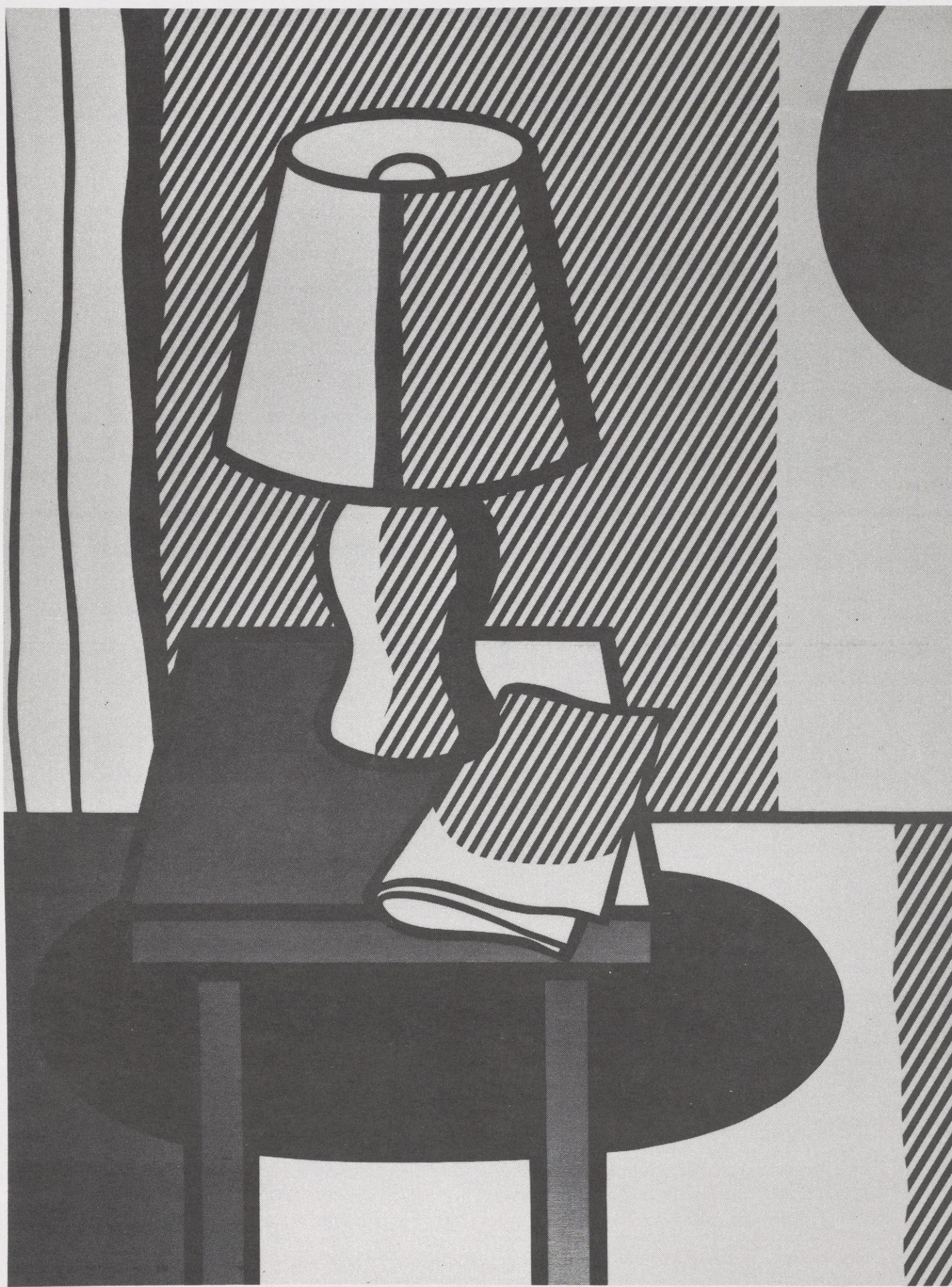
In appreciation,

Carl Rakosi

**THE POETRY
PROJECT**
AT
ST MARK'S CHURCH 2 AVE & 10 ST
NEW YORK CITY 10003
212.674.0910

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
NEW YORK, NY
PERMIT NO. 7021

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED
RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED



© 1976 Roy Lichtenstein, *Still Life with Table Lamp*

The Poetry Project 1988 Symposium

**April 7-10, 1988 • St. Mark's Church
2nd Avenue & 10th Street • New York City**

POETRY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Thursday April 7

8 pm

5 Lectures: *Poetry of Everyday Life*. Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, Ron Padgett, Ron Silliman and Lorenzo Thomas.

Friday April 8

3 pm

Panel discussion: *The Poetics of Liberation*. Charles Bernstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Gary Lenhart, Kofi Natambu, Carmen Valle and Robert Echavarren.

8 pm

Reading: Kenward Elmslie, John Godfrey, Barbara Guest and Charlotte Carter.

Saturday April 9

1 pm

Panel discussion: *The New York School*. Dore Ashton, Jane Freilicher, Charles North, Tony Towle, Anne Waldman and John Yau.

3:30 pm

Panel discussion: *New Forms / New Functions*. Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Joel Oppenheimer, Carl Rakosi, Lorenzo Thomas, Paul Violi and Rebecca Wright.

8 pm

Reading: Michael Brownstein, Rashidah Ismaili, Kofi Natambu, Joel Oppenheimer, Ed Sanders, Carmen Vallé and Anne Waldman.

Sunday April 10

2 pm

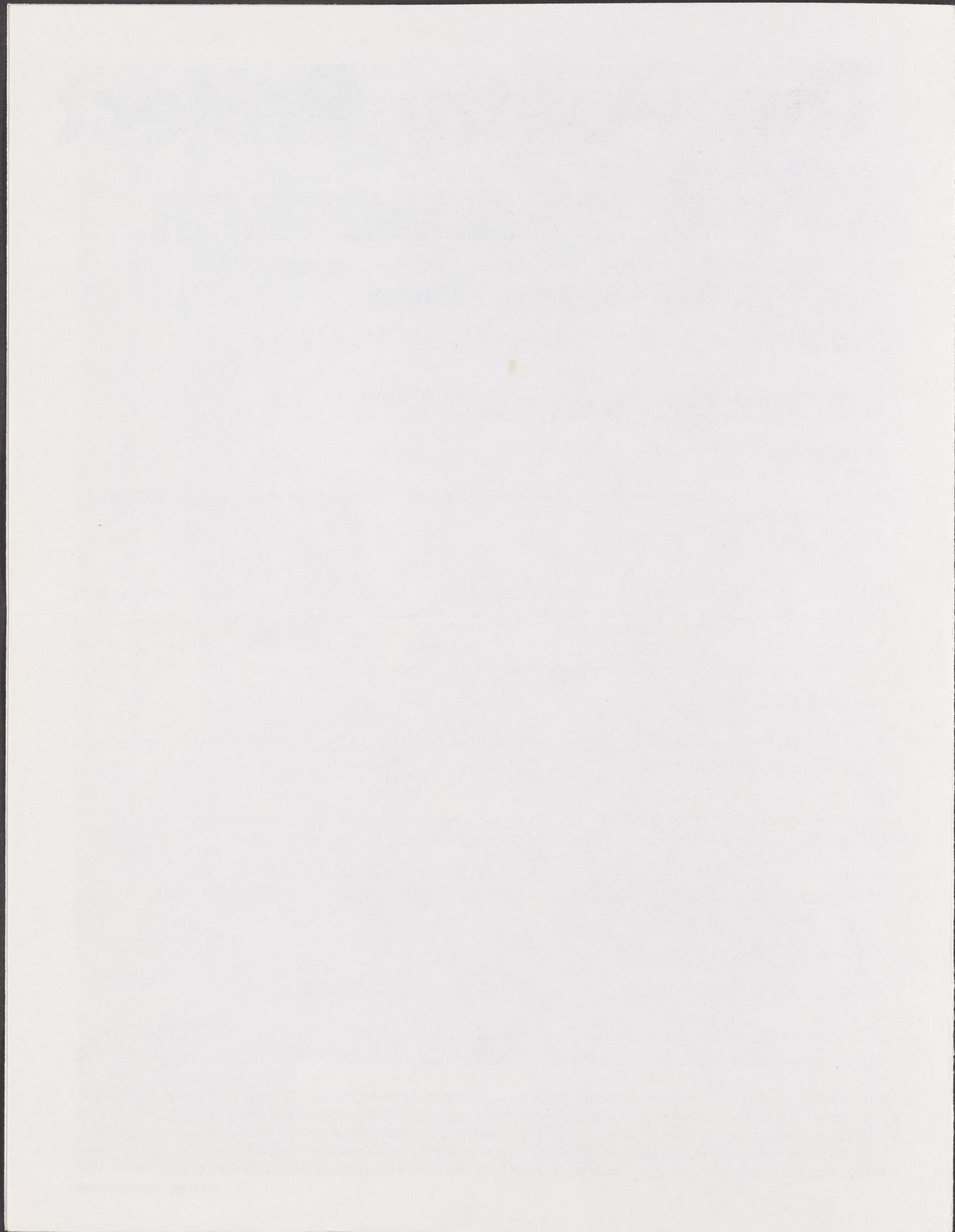
Readings: Allen Ginsberg, Carl Rakosi, Leslie Scalapino and Michael Scholnick.

**All events \$10 contribution, \$7 for Poetry Project members.
Symposium passes \$50. Sponsors' passes \$100.**

**Information:
(212) 674-0910**

The Poetry Project receives generous support from these public and private agencies: New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs, The Jerome Foundation, Doris Jones Stein Foundation, Film/Video Arts, Inc. for film screenings, the Aaron Diamond Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance, the Mobil Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, Gramercy Park Foundation, New Hope, Inc., and Apple Computer, Inc. Also, the members of The Poetry Project and individual contributors.

Design: Marc Nasdor



22 Feb. 1988

is this Ed Foster, editor of
Tellusman

or Ed Friedman of the Poetry
Project at St Mark's
Church

Dear Ed:

I've been waiting for the letter of confirmation from you. In the meantime I'm making my travel arrangements on the basis of what I've learned from others, that I'll be reading with Allen on Sunday afternoon, April 10th and taking part in the panel discussion on Saturday evening, April 9th, on the subject of New Forms, New Functions, with five minutes allotted to each participant for starters. I know what new forms are but what do you have in mind when you say, new functions? I need clarification on that. Also, who ~~was~~ will be on the panel? Also the time of day on Sat. & Sun.

If anything in the above is not correct, will you please let me know right away?

I won't need Allen's guest room.

Best,

The Poetry Project • 1988 Symposium

April 7-10, 1988 • St. Mark's Church
2nd Avenue & 10th St. • New York City

POETRY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Thursday April 7

8 pm

5 Lectures: *Poetry of Everyday Life*. Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, Ron Padgett, Ron Silliman and Lorenzo Thomas.

Friday April 8

3 pm

Panel discussion: *The Poetics of Liberation*. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Roberto Echavarren, Gary Lenhart, Kofi Natambu and Carmen Valle. Moderator: Charles Bernstein.

8 pm

Reading: Charlotte Carter, Kenward Elmslie, John Godfrey and Barbara Guest.

Saturday April 9

1 pm

Panel discussion: *The New York School*. Dore Ashton, Jane Freilicher, Charles North, Tony Towle and John Yau. Moderator: Anne Waldman.

3:30 pm

Panel discussion: *New Forms/New Functions*. Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Joel Oppenheimer, Carl Rakosi, Lorenzo Thomas, Paul Violi and Rebecca Wright.

8 pm

Reading: Michael Brownstein, Rashidah Ismaili, Kofi Natambu, Joel Oppenheimer, Ed Sanders, Carmen Valle and Anne Waldman.

Sunday April 10

2 pm

Readings: Allen Ginsberg, Carl Rakosi, Leslie Scalapino and Michael Scholnick.

All events \$10 contribution, \$7 for Poetry Project members.

Symposium passes \$50. Sponsors' passes \$100.

Information: (212) 674-0910

The Poetry Project receives generous support from these public and private agencies: New York State Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs, Con Ed, The Jerome Foundation, Doris Jones Stein Foundation, Film/Video Arts, Inc. for film screenings, the Aaron Diamond Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Art, the Mobil Foundation, Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, Gramercy Park Foundation, and Apple Computer, Inc. Also, the members of The Poetry Project and individual contributors.

THE POETRY PROJECT 1988 SYMPOSIUM: POETRY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

The Poetry Project will host its *1988 Symposium: Poetry of Everyday Life* at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, April 7-10th. There will be a number of public events including an evening of lectures on the theme "Poetry of Everyday Life"; three programs of readings and performances by poets; and three panel discussions: "The Poetics of Liberation," "The New York School: Painters and Poets," and "New Forms/New Functions."

Thirty-two of today's most influential poets, artists and critics are being brought together for *The Poetry Project 1988 Symposium*. Among the participants are **Allen Ginsberg**, whose "Howl" and "Kaddish" became signature works for the Beat Generation writers; **Carl Rakosi**, an original member, with William Carlos Williams, Charles Reznikoff and Louis Zukofsky, of the Objectivist movement; **Ed Sanders**, lead singer of the poetry-rock group The Fugs; **Dore Ashton**, author of *American Art Since 1945*; **Anne Waldman**, Director of The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado; and **Joel Oppenheimer**, a leading figure among the poets and artists gathered at Black Mountain College during the 1950's.

The Symposium opens Thursday evening April 7th with five short lectures on the theme "Poetry of Everyday Life." The lectures will consider how daily experience informs the reading and writing of poetry and examine poetry's impact on the lives of people who read and/or write it. Speaking will be: **Ron Padgett**, poet, translator, and the director of publications for The Teachers & Writers Collaborative; **Lorenzo Thomas**, Professor of English at the University of Houston and author of *The Bathers*; **Bernadette Mayer**, author of *Sonnets* and creative writing teacher in the New York City Schools; **Ron Silliman**, central figure among the "Language School" writers and editor of *The Socialist Review*; and **Alice Notley**, recent winner of the General Electric Award for Younger Poets and author of *At Night The States*.

There will be three programs of readings and performances by poets. Friday evening April 8th at 8 pm, the readers will be **Kenward Elmslie**, publisher of Z Press and author of *26 Bars*; **Barbara Guest**, author of numerous volumes of poetry and a biography of the American poet Hilda Doolittle, *H.D. Herself Defined*; **John Godfrey**, author of *Midnight on Your Left*; and **Charlotte Carter**, author of *Sheltered Life*. Saturday April 9th at 8 pm will be an evening of extraverted, intense and joyous poetries by writers who share an ability to connect strongly with their audience. The program will include readings by **Joel Oppenheimer**, **Anne Waldman**, **Ed Sanders**, **Michael Brownstein**, **Rashidah Ismaili**, **Kofi Natambu** and **Carmen Valle**. The final reading of the Symposium, Sunday April 10th at 2 pm will feature **Carl Rakosi**, **Allen Ginsberg**, **Leslie Scalapino** and **Michael Scholnick**. Together, the careers of these poets span three generations of avant-garde poetry. All four of them convey accounts of daily experience that continually evoke fresh understandings of how poetry shapes the world in which we live.

The first of the Symposium's three panel discussions, "The Poetics of Liberation," begins at 3 pm on Friday April 8th. The panel will examine how poetry serves the liberation of language, thought and society. A wide range of poetries will be discussed in terms of their literary merit and their effectiveness as ideological statement. Panelists include **Rachel Blau DuPlessis**, author of *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women's Writing*; **Roberto Echavarren**, a member of the Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature faculty of New York University and leading translator of John Ashbery and Wallace Stevens into Spanish;

Kofi Natambu, editor of *Solid Ground*, a highly regarded interdisciplinary journal on the arts; **Carmen Valle**, author of *Vivir No Es Sinonimo De Maroma*; and **Gary Lenhart**, Associate Director of The Teachers & Writers Collaborative and editor of *Transfer* magazine. **Charles Bernstein**, author of the collection of critical essays *Content's Dream* and co-editor of *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, published by Southern Illinois University, will moderate.

The New York School: Painting and Poetry, beginning at 1 pm on Saturday April 9th, will consider an important moment in American art when a loosely associated group of poets and painters enjoyed a mutually inspiring dialogue. The discussion will center on the relevance of "New York School" as a critical term describing painters as diverse as Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers, Fairfield Porter and Jasper Johns; the correlation between the aesthetics of New York School painters and New York School poets—Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, Edwin Denby and Barbara Guest, among others; and the continuing influence of New York School painting and poetry on subsequent generations of poets and painters. Panelists include: **Dore Ashton**, Professor of Art History at The Cooper Union and author of *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning*; **John Yau**, poet, art critic and curator, a regular contributor to *Artforum* and *Art News*. **Charles North**, poet and member of the English faculty of Pace University; **Tony Towle**, poet and art critic, author of *North* published by Columbia University Press; and **Jane Freilicher**, painter and member of the circle of poets and painters associated with Frank O'Hara—her works are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum, Whitney Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. Moderating will be **Anne Waldman**.

The third panel discussion, "New Forms, New Functions," will examine *innovation-of-form* as a central concern of contemporary poetry. William Carlos Williams wrote in his 1930 essay "Caviar and Bread Again":

"On the poet devolves the most vital function of society: to recreate it—the collective world...in a new mode, fresh in every part, and so set the world working ..." and

"We must invent, we must create out of the blankness about us, and we must do this by the use of new constructions."

The panel will consider how the emphases of newness and formal innovation, brought to the fore in European and American poetry of the early 20th century, continues to invigorate poets and poetries soon to enter the 21st century. Panelists include: **Carl Rakosi**, author of *Ere-Voice* and *Collected Poems*; **Joel Oppenheimer**, long-time columnist for *The Village Voice* and author of *New Spaces*; **Rebecca Wright**, St. Louis-based poet, author of *Ciao Manhattan* and *Brief Lives*; **Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge**, author of *The Heat Bird*, on the faculty of Brown University, The Institute of American Indian Art and the Naropa Institute; **Paul Violi**, widely published poet, author of *Splurge* and *Likewise*. **Lorenzo Thomas** will moderate.

All Symposium events will be taped for inclusion in the extensive Poetry Project archives and for future radio broadcast. Media coverage of the Symposium is expected in *The New York Times*, *The New York Daily News*, *The Village Voice*, *The City Sun*, and on local radio stations.

Roy Lichtenstein, one of the originators of the Pop Art movement, has contributed *Still Life with Table Lamp* (1976) for the Symposium's brochure, poster and commemorative program. A signed, color version of the poster is available from the **Brooke Alexander Gallery**.

The Poetry Project 1988 Symposium • Poetry of Everyday Life

Biographic Notes on the Participants

DORE ASHTON is a distinguished art critic and scholar. A Professor of Art History at The Cooper Union, she is renowned for her knowledge of 19th and 20th century art. Among her 19 books are *Fragonard in the Universe of Painting* (1988), *Out of the Whirlwind* (1987), *20th Century Artists on Art* and *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (1973). In addition, she has written major critical studies on Mark Rothko, Rosa Bonheur and Joseph Cornell, and has curated exhibitions for the Museum of Modern Art and for other museums in the U.S. and abroad.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN is the author of 12 books of poetry, most recently, *The Sophist*, *Artifice of Absorption* and a collection of essays, *Content's Dream*. He co-edited, with Bruce Andrews, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine. In the 1988 *Columbia Literary History of the United States*, Henry Sayre refers to Bernstein's work as demanding "...a sort of active reading that ...violates habits of passive consumption."

MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE was born in China, and now lives in Rhode Island and New Mexico. A poet who has collaborated with dancers Blondell Cummings and Theodore Yoshikami, her books include *The Heat Bird*, *Random Possession* and *Hiddenness*, with drawings by Richard Tuttle. *Empathy* is forthcoming. She teaches at Brown University, The Institute of American Indian Art, and at The Naropa Institute.

MICHAEL BROWNSTEIN is a poet and prose writer who lives in New York City. His new book of stories, *Music From The Evening of The World*, is forthcoming from Sun & Moon Press. His other nine books include the volume of poetry, *Oracle Night*, and a novel, *Country Cousin*.

CHARLOTTE CARTER is the author of *Sheltered Life* and a former editor of *The World* magazine. A recipient of several awards, including a CAPS grant, she has taught widely and studied, herself, with Paul Bowles in Morocco. She also teaches the prose and fiction workshop at The Poetry Project.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS' most recent book of poems is *Tabula Rosa*. A scholar of modernist women writers and contemporary poetics, she is the editor of *Feminist Journal*, a contributing editor to *HOW(ever)*, the author of *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies in Twentieth Century Women's Writing* (University of Indiana Press) and of a study of the poetry of Hilda Doolittle, *H.D. The Career of That Struggle*. Rachel Blau DuPlessis is on the faculty of Temple University, and has lectured widely on the poetics of gender.

ROBERTO ECHAVARREN is a poet and leading translator, into Spanish, of the work of Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery. He is a member of the Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature faculty of New York University, and has written a number of books of poetry, including *Animaccio* and the forthcoming *Aura Amara*. His work has appeared in *The Partisan Review*, *The Portable Lower East Side*, the *Anthology of Contemporary Latin American Literature, 1960-1984* and will soon be included in an anthology of poems on Mexico, edited by Octavio Paz.

KENWARD ELMSLIE, the author of six books of poetry, is also a prolific librettist, playwright, songwriter and performer. His work has been performed by the New York City Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and the Washington Opera at Kennedy Center. His most recent books are *City Junket*, and *26 Bars*, which was illustrated by Donna Dennis. Kenward Elmslie has won two Ford Foundation grants, a National Council of the Arts Award and an NEA Librettist grant.

JANE FREILICHER's paintings are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. A new show of Jane Freilicher's work will appear at the Fischbach Gallery, April 2 through April 27. *Jane Freilicher: Paintings* (1986) documenting her retrospective, included essays by John Ashbery, John Yau, and Linda L. Cathcart.

ED FRIEDMAN is the Artistic Director of The Poetry Project where he founded The Monday Night Reading Series. A unique force in the New York performance-poetry scene, Ed Friedman's books include *La Frontera*, *The Telephone Book* and *Humans Work*. His multi-media performances and readings have taken place at The Kitchen, The Public Theater, MOMA, and P.S. 122. Ed Friedman is also a songwriter and has collaborated with visual artists such as Robert Kushner and Kim MacConnel.

ALLEN GINSBERG is a Distinguished Professor of English at Brooklyn College, and Professor Emeritus at The Naropa Institute. Harper & Row has published his *Collected Poems 1947-1980*, the *Annotated Howl* and *White Shroud: Poems 1980-1985*. He has just completed a record with Tom Wait's band, and lectured on photography this spring, in Israel, with Robert Franks. A book of Allen Ginsberg's photographs is forthcoming from Twelve Trees Press. In 1956, Mr. Ginsberg's historic Beat poem, *Howl*, published by City Lights Books, was seized by U.S. Customs and the San Francisco police. Now, over 30 years later, the poem has again become embroiled in a censorship battle, due to recent FCC regulations.

JOHN GODFREY is the author of *Dabble*, *Where the Weather Suits My Clothes*, and most recently, *Midnight on your Left*, of which Clark Coolidge wrote, "In a time when most poems seem overlit as sitcoms, John Godfrey stirs up the necessary darkness."

BARBARA GUEST is one of America's most distinguished poets. Her books include *Poems*, *The Blue Stairs*, *Moscow Mansions*, *Seeking Air* (a novel), and *Biography*. She received critical acclaim for her biography of the poet Hilda Doolittle, *H.D. Herself Defined*. A new collection of Barbara Guest's poems, *Fair Realism*, is forthcoming from Sun & Moon. An important member of the New York School's original circle of writers and artists, Ms. Guest's poems are included in the influential early collection, *The Poets of the New York School*.

RASHIDAH ISMAILI is the author of *In Woman Rise* and *Onyibo*. Her work has been anthologized in *Confirmation*, and included in the *Journal of the New African Artists and Writers* and *Hoo Doo* magazine. Her long piece, *Elegies for the Fallen*, was recently performed as a libretto by Joyce Solomon at Lincoln Center. Rashidah Ismaili is on faculty of Rutgers University, and has lectured widely at colleges and universities including a recent talk, "Alternatives to Feminism from an African Perspective," presented at Hampshire College.

GARY LENHART is the author of *One at a Time*, *Bulb In Socket* and *Drunkard's Dream*. A former editor of *Mag City*, he's now the publisher and editor of the new literary magazine, *Transfer*, as well as Associate Director of the Teachers & Writers Collaborative. He hosted and organized The Poetry Project's first lecture series, and coordinated the reading series at The Ear Inn, in New York City. Gary Lenhart's critical reviews have appeared in various magazines, including *Sagetrieb* and *Cover* magazine.

KIMBERLY LYONS is the author of *Strategies* and *Six Poems*. She co-edits *Red Weather* magazine and Prospect Books. Her own poems have appeared in *Sulfur* and *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*, and she has worked as a publicist at The Cooper Union and Simon & Schuster. She is the Program Coordinator (and lecture series coordinator) at The Poetry Project.

BERNADETTE MAYER is a prolific poet and active teacher of poetry in the New York City schools and at The Poetry Project, where she has also served as Artistic Director. Her awards include an NEA grant in poetry, a CAPS grant in fiction and a CCLM Editors Fellowship. She's the author of *Mutual Aid*, *Utopia* and *Midwinter Day*, and has co-edited a number of New York literary magazines: *0 to 9*, *Unnatural Acts* and *United Artists*. Forthcoming are *Sonnets* and *Writing Science*, a manual from the Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

KOFI NATAMBU is the editor of *Solid Ground*, a highly regarded interdisciplinary journal on the arts which he first published in Detroit. He is the author of a collection of poems, *Intervals* and he edited *Nostalgia for the Present*, an anthology of writings from Detroit. His work has been published widely in literary magazines including *Obsidian*, *Hambone* and *The Black Scholar*. In 1987 he was awarded a Creative Artist Grant to write a book of critical essays on Jazz and American Writing since 1945 called *Epistrophe*.

CHARLES NORTH's most recent books of poetry are *Leap Year* and *Gemini*, a collaboration with Tony Towle. Charles North has written essays on John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch and others as well as critical reviews which have appeared in the *American Book Review*, *Art in America* and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazines, among others. He is the Poet-in-Residence at Pace University and a recipient of a 1987 grant from the Fund for Poetry.

ALICE NOTLEY has authored more than a dozen collections of poems, including *Alice Ordered Me to be Made*, *Songs for the Unborn Second Baby*, *Doctor Williams' Heiresses* and *At Night The States*. She has won the Poetry Center Award from San Francisco State University, and the General Electric Award for Younger Poets. Alice Notley

founded and edited the literary magazine *Chicago*, and has taught poetry workshops at The Naropa Institute, The Poetry Project, the University of Chicago and in universities in England and Wales.

JOEL OPPENHEIMER is widely known as an original member of the Black Mountain community of artists and writers. He has taught writing workshops at universities throughout the United States, including Manhattan's City College, and was a long-time columnist for *The Village Voice*. He has published numerous books of poetry, including *Houses* and *New Spaces*, from Black Sparrow Press. Joel Oppenheimer's most recent collection of poems is *Why Not?* and in the fall, Jargon Press will publish his selected earlier poems, *Names & Local Habitations*.

RON PADGETT recently edited *The Teachers and Writer's Handbook of Poetic Forms*. Among his many books are *Great Balls of Fire*, *Toujours L'Amour* and *Triangles in the Afternoon* as well as collaborations with artists Trevor Winkfield, Jim Dine and others. Ron Padgett is a former director of The Poetry Project. He has translated major works from the French including Guillaume Apollinaire's *The Poet Assassinated and Other Stories* and Blaise Cendrars' *Kodak*. In 1986, Padgett was awarded a Guggenheim for poetry. Forthcoming is *Among the Blacks* (Avenue B Press).

CARL RAKOSI, along with poets William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen and Lorine Niedecker, founded the Objectivist movement. In doing so, they challenged the prevailing academic notions of proper subjects and idioms for American poetry. Carl Rakosi's books include *Ex Cranium*, *Night*, *Ere-Voice*, *Amulet*, *Droles de Journal*, and *History*. His *The Collected Poetry* was published in 1986 and the second volume, *The Collected Prose*, was published in 1987 by the National Poetry Foundation.

ED SANDERS is the author of *The Family*, *The Party*, *Love and Fame in New York*, *Tales of Beatnik Glory*, and *Thirsting For Peace in a Raging Century: Poems 1961-1985*, which collects poetry from seven earlier books. He is a founding member and "warbler numero uno" of The Fugs with whom he has recently recorded three albums including the full-length opera *Starpeace*. Ed Sanders is currently at work on *I Don't Want to Die: A Holistic Novel*, and on an album of Ancient Greek philosophical and poetic texts in modern settings.

LESLIE SCALAPINO is the author of *Considering How Exaggerated Music Is* and *that they were at the beach*. She is the editor of "O" Books and is editing an anthology, *O One*, of extended works that transgress the boundaries between the genres of poetry and critical discourse. Her forthcoming collection of poems is *Way*.

MICHAEL SCHOLNICK is the author of *Beyond Venus*, and *Perfume*. A former co-editor of *Mag City*, his poems have appeared in magazines such as *Roof*, *Jewish Currents*, *New Direction Anthology #37* and *United Artists*. His critical writing includes the 1987 *Cover* review on a Union Square Gallery exhibit, "The New Romantics," and he wrote the catalogue introduction for Alex Katz's recent show at the Robert Miller Gallery. He is a recipient of an NEA Fellowship in poetry.

RON SILLIMAN is the author of *ABC*, *Paradise*, *The Age of Huts*, and a collection of essays, *The New Sentence*. He edited *In the American Tree*, an anthology of "language school" writing, and he is the editor of *The Socialist Review*.

LORENZO THOMAS is the author of a number of collections of poetry including *The Bathers* and *Chances Are Few*. His poems have been anthologized in *New Black Voices*, *Another World* and *Poetry of Black America*. Lorenzo Thomas co-edited *Roots Magazine*, and has been a contributing editor to *Hoo Doo*, *Black Box* and *Nimrod* magazines. Recently, Lorenzo Thomas collaborated with artist Benito Huerta for an exhibition at The Museum of Fine Art, in Houston, Texas. He is a Professor of English at the University of Houston.

TONY TOWLE's books include *New and Selected Poems 1963-1983* and *North*. He has received the Frank O'Hara Award in 1970, an Ingram Merrill Award, a CAPS grant and a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Tony Towle's work has appeared in the essential New York School collections, *An Anthology of New York Poets* and *Poets of the New York School*. He is the editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

CARMEN VALLE's books include *De Todo de la Noche Que la Tienta* (Ricardo Garua, Puerto Rico, 1978) and *Glen Miller y Varias Vidas Despues* (Premia Editora, 1983). Forthcoming is a volume of poetry, *Vivir No Es Sinonimo De Maroma* (*Living Dangerously*). Carmen Valle's work has been anthologized, in the *Anthology of Contemporary Latin America Literature 1960-1984* (Farleigh University Press, 1986). She has lectured widely on poetics and Latin American literature, holds a faculty position at CUNY's New York Technical College, and is completing her doctoral dissertation on the work of the Columbian poet Porfirio Barba-Jacob.

PAUL VIOLI is the author of *Splurge* and *Harmatan*, *In Baltic Circles*, *Waterworks*, *Poems* and *Likewise*. He is a past workshop leader at The Poetry Project, where he has also served as Acting Artistic Director. Paul Violi currently teaches writing and literature in several New York City area colleges and universities.

ANNE WALDMAN has toured as poet-in-residence with Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Review, and has collaborated with musicians and composers such as Steven Taylor, Steve Lacey and Jimmy Rip. Until 1978, Anne Waldman was Artistic Director of The Poetry Project. Her own books include *Make-Up on Empty Space*; *Skin, Meat, Bones*; and most recently, *The Romance Thing*. Anne Waldman directs the MFA program at The Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado.

REBECCA WRIGHT is the author of *Ciao Manhattan*, *Brief Lives* and *Elusive Continent*. Her long lyric poem "Retena's Name," was excerpted in a recent issue of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. She currently resides in St. Louis.

JOHN YAU's books of poetry include *Broken Off by the Music* and *Corpse and Mirror*, the latter selected by John Ashbery for the National Poetry Series. Yau's critical essays have appeared in *Artforum* and *Art News*, among other journals, and he is a contributing editor to *Sulfur* magazine. A book of poems, *Cities*, is forthcoming from the Henry Art Gallery. John Yau is on the faculty at the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts, and at the Pratt Institute.

I believe this is "Shirim"

FOREWORD

In my youth, in the 1920's, I would have scorned appearing ~~a~~ in a Jewish poetry magazine. It would have meant that I didn't have enough talent to be published anywhere else. The last thing I would have wanted was to be pigeon-holed as a Jewish writer. That was too parochial and, in addition, would have put the kiss of death on what I was trying to be, an American poet....or, more accurately, an international-style poet, since Pound and Eliot, the poets that mattered then, were showing strong French influence. Another deterring influence to Jewish subject matter was the strong secular, Marxist atmosphere of the period. I was caught up in that. So were my contemporaries.

As a consequence my literary self connected in only a weak, nebulous way with my Jewishness despite the fact that my step-mother kept a kosher house and my father was president of his shul. At heart, however, he was an agnostic...and a Socialist and had been chosen because the congregation admired his integrity and fairness. In the end, my parents' strong Hungarian identification and interests (they spoke Hungarian to each other and to me, and knew no Yiddish) affected me more than their Jewish ones, which they carried faithfully as an obligation. In any event, I was not having Jewish experiences, as such, which could move me to want to write about them, and I was not about to go looking for them out of a sense of obligation. As a result, only a small portion of my work is about anything Jewish, and when Rabbi Dworkin asked me for poems for a small collection in SHIRIM, I was afraid there would not be enough ~~for~~ even for a small collection. There's more than I thought, and I'm glad, for although my literary self still maintains its independence, my personal self has had a solid, unambivalent connection to my Jewishness.

Looking over what there is of mine in this collection, I see that I have been moved by the great lyrical passages in the Old Testament, by the medieval Sephardic poets, by the spiritual power of synagogue music, by the experience of anti-Semitism, and by Jewish humor. What is not there is Jewish mysticism. Alas, I was not aware of its existence until late in life. I regret that because there is in me a deep, mysterious affinity for the ~~myxxxxxxx~~ mystical, and had I encountered it sooner, I would have responded from a part of my nature which has not been tapped.

~~My only regret is that I did not know of it sooner, and I would have responded from a part of my nature which has not been tapped.~~

~~My only regret is that I did not know of it sooner, and I would have responded from a part of my nature which has not been tapped.~~

~~My only regret is that I did not know of it sooner, and I would have responded from a part of my nature which has not been tapped.~~

Is there something Jewish in my over-all work despite my usual independence from Jewish subject matter? I suppose so, since there is no way to escape one's identity, but I don't know. I may have a clue, however, In the 1930's a new movement appeared in poetry. Its members were called Objectivists. ~~because~~ What characterized them was ~~an extraordinary~~ ^{their} extraordinary clarity and objectivity, their conciseness, and the unwavering honesty of their subject matter. The leading members were four Jews: Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen and I. We were all very different from one another. No one could mistake a poem by X Reznikoff ~~xxx~~ ^{for} one by Zukofsky, or one by Oppen ~~xxx~~ ^{for} one by me. At the same time, our work was very different from the work of our non-Jewish contemporaries. One could tell an Objectivist poem not only by its greater clarity and objectivity and honesty but by some other qualities in the writing, and it is these that may be Jewish, not exclusively, but recognizably Jewish in its mix, a mix of utter seriousness and earnestness and a great candor and responsibility, and a great compassion. This mix seems to me to characterize modern Hebrew and Yiddish poetry too.

Carl Rakosi