

THE BLESSED

~~WHAT WE MEASURE~~

WHAT WE MEASURE IS NOT POWER.

NO EFFORT
when not exerted
by our flesh.

The universes are one
blue-black swallow
skimming over the beaming
twilight pool
catching gnats
before
the setting sun
of our
rich bodies ~~rich bodies~~
-- poor rich bodies.

line

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As a journal published in co-operation with The Contemporary Literature Collection, *Line* will reflect in its content the range of the collection. The materials it plans to publish—archival items, interviews, essays, review/commentaries, and bibliographies—will be related to the line of post-1945 Canadian, American, and British writers whose work issues from, or extends, the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D., Gertrude Stein, and Charles Olson.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

This past spring Michael McClure came to Simon Fraser University, gave a lecture from *Scratching the Beat Surface*, and in the evening, in Vancouver, read poems to a packed house at the Western Front. The Contemporary Literature Collection has been amassing, over a number of years, an enormously impressive McClure archive, shelves of correspondence with writers and publishers, book and magazine publications, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera—the full contents of an insistent and astonishing writing life. It was, surprisingly, McClure's first visit to the University, and we talked about publishing materials from his archive in future issues of *Line*. He agreed, and the "Michael McClure Section" of this issue is our initial selection from the archive.

McClure's *Scratching the Beat Surface* is available from North Point Press and New Directions has published his latest book of poems *Fragments of Perseus*; readers may be interested in noting that the whole of McClure's *Specks* will be published by Talonbooks in the fall of 1985. Barry Maxwell, who selected the poems from the McClure notebooks and who recommended the overall contents of the "Michael McClure Section," is working on an annotated McClure bibliography. Smaro Kamboureli is writing her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Manitoba on the Long Poem in Canada. Steve McCaffery, who can spin more terms around the fine point of a pencil than a dozen post-structuralists, has just had his book *Panopticon* published by Blewointment Press. Andrew Payne is working on the editorial collective of *Borderlines: Canadas, Cultures, Contexts*, a new journal from Toronto. Norm Weinstein's latest book of poems *Albedo* has just been published by North Atlantic. Jenny Penberthy is editing the Louis Zukofsky—Lorine Niedecker correspondence for her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of British Columbia. bpNichol gave the first issue of *Line* a send-off with his commentary on Gertrude Stein's writing. George Bowering, a *Line* regular, has contributed the second installment of his "Recent Reading"; Coach House has recently reprinted *The Contemporary Canadian Poem Anthology*, edited by Bowering, in one volume.

RM

December 1, 1984

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* *

A

MICHAEL McCLURE

SECTION

* *
*

Michael McClure in Vancouver, March 1984



photo by Miki

POCKET NOTEBOOK POEMS

Selected by Barry Maxwell

Not unfortunately the Universe is
wild — game-flavored as a hawk's
wing. (Benjamin Paul Blood)

The selections that follow are drawn from pocket notebooks which McClure filled between 1969 and 1979. Amongst names and addresses, appointments and reminders, admonitions to self, bits of science (usually biological), and brief notes on vehicle maintenance and play rehearsals are the first—and sometimes only—takes of poems. The poems that reached published form are noted with captions. Otherwise, they remain unpublished.

I shook a screen under about 200 of the notebooks and picked from what nuggets remained. These are moments of the daily vision—McClure's title for a privately published sequence—and the concerns, health and liberation, are continuous with McClure's work since the late 1950's. Health and freedom are synonymous for McClure. The absolutely unforgettable physicality of *Dark Brown* and *The New Book/A Book of Torture* (both published in 1961) was a twisting to be free at once and forever of what an earlier visionary called "mind-forg'd manacles." These lyrics from a later time are moving in saying again that shreds of the old world, made of memories and animals and loves, hang from any being we have in the new. Shreds? Manacles? Banners.

*
**

All the flames of Hell
can't burn up my memories
for if they were smoke the nostrils
could distinguish among them!

(McClure, "Same War")

* *
*

"((HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION))" and "Masons of Light" are previously unpublished parts of a long work, *STATES*, in this characteristic form. McClure wrote "99 Theses" in Paris in 1969; it was the first of these "sequential prose statements." Two others, "Moire" and "Springs," were published in the 1974 volume *September Blackberries*, and another, "Essay on the Media," as a 1971 broadside.

The form, which, strangely enough, no one before McClure seems to have used, is particularly strong when the argument has an obsessive, ostinato quality, as does "Masons of Light." The insistence of sequence, and the use of such titles as *STATES* and *SPECKS*, makes me think of the soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy, with his "Raps" and "Scraps" and "Stamps," and his lovely momentary stretchings out from a tight rhythmic/ideational structure. It may be that McClure has grown out of the sequential form, so well-suited to the proclamative drive of the 70's, and now works more surely with a helical essay form (witness "Wolf Net" in *Scratching the Beat Surface*, and the forthcoming *SPECKS*). Hammering and twisting: two ways of getting it said.



THE
SELVES
PRINT
THEM
SELVES:

CAVE
MOUTH
WITH
A
HALO

WINGED
HANDS

#

DN, ROMANTICISM
for Stem ground

~~TAX TE CHING~~

COOS BAY

THE LIZARD SALESMEN SELL LIZARDS.

THE MANAGERS BUY EACH OTHER.

Caterpillars bulldoze over the homes
of larks
on mountains of woodchip & excrement.

THERE IS A GLORIOUS RAINBOW

My hand says hello to me.

IT

IS

ALL THAT I KNOW
in this change place
that my father lived

THE FORM OF THE WITHERED LILY

is true shape
of the history of hungers & swindles
and touches
and kisses.

The intense
orange
with
maroon
flicker
could be

an ancient Hopi turquoise beaded
or a chain of lakes in snowy mountains
in
this
lody lody
motel.

The more fool I
for drawing dreams around
~~the~~ ^{the} cupped darkness.

But that's my meat
and I extend it
Tractor crushing in woodchips. T.V. bars

I CAN'T TELL IF THAT MAN'S
SPIRIT IS BROKEN

OR

if that man's spirit is sleeping.
He smiles softly
to me, gently, self-
consciously.

With great delicacy
and sureness his black
ringed fingers sep
arate

the ashtray top and
empty it into his wheeled
cart. We

are brothers, brother - cheetahs
on the plains, My plane~~s~~ is
waiting.

Sunday morning quotes

NO SELF-CASTIGATION!

LET EVERYTHING

sort itself out.

The mind is a sieve.

The free-flow of creation.

Myriad-mindedness ^{allowing} making
a creative implosion
creating a world.

The many flows are necessary.

The information is stupendous
and insignificant.

An opal ring
stops the eye.

can get high
on one atom
of Blake
!

Open the portals
again.

My bloodstream is a flame!
Look for solid flower flesh?

(1 We are
violets;

the fire
written

the stars;
and scars;

upon
long buried lips 11

Process of Reality
Jury on Individualism

WINGS FOR CHARLES

WE ALL FLY THROUGH
the fetid earth
on

OUR

WAY

to light
again!

((We are
violets, ...

The fire
within...))

~~the silver egg,
the dance~~

-- beyond your garments --

therein...

the stars
and scars

upon

~~our burning lips~~
our burned lips

BATTLE

THE HANDPRINTS ARE WHITE GREASE

on the glass pane
making a war of dots, beams
and slashes

where the bright
morning sun

strikes them.

In the corners

two whines

chat

over morning coffee
and orange sodas.

This tabletop
and the warm voices
are a universe.

THE WINDOW
is enough
I want no more
than the red flames
and the steeples
and the dark mountain
and the giant shapes
that whirl & twist
IN THE AIR

above the banks of
lights
ALL OF THE FLIGHTS
OF fantasy
MUST CEASE
& attend

me now.
Long yellow windows
blossom dreams
and castles.
Golden wires in the cold
water.

April 29th
Mt Tam

Tracks of Spring	Miner lettuce
Wild lilac	Baby Blue eyes
Yellow Iris	Holland's tongue
Douglas Iris	Minimus
Blue Dicks	Purple sancto
Blue Brodiaea	Larkspur
Popcorn flower	Larkspur
Lotus	Blue-eyed grass
Lupine	Mules ears
Heliotropes	Milk maids
Gold fields	
Buttercup	
Mallow	
Cow parsnip?	
Yarrow	
golden Yarrow	
Indian Paintbrush	
Scurside aster	
Plantago	
Morning glories	
Hay fennel	

①

Wolf

Remember

gulf

September

arm

Chain

Charm

Wane

Star

Stone

gar

Bone

#3

Alchemy

is where the lights flash
in spotlights from the cars & elbows

Tower-buildings lean

and breasts are trees.

Hear the elfin trumpets?

Now, remember!

~~HALF~~ ELF

MORTAL CREATURE AM I.

(Even) my cry
is a slight thing
a sound

moving around

limping
dropping or wing
of matter

but
shattered

parts

of
many

beings
drawn whole

in me again.

with skin & fur
& shell & fur & hearts.

all of the parts

are my feelings.

all are and my pride.

I

have an eye

and I have a dagger.

THE GLOW OF PRIDE IS REAL

SELF-ENJOYMENT

-the selves revel in the bare arm
moving ~~the~~ water

OR

the
situational

growing

that is heard as ~~of~~ speech and meaning.

But the elf (within)

and the gorilla

they know.

they know

they know

there is pleasure in social sin

and the love of self

and the secret grin.

and the slender fingers

stintily swirled

in the scented world.



Lullaby

Sleep, gentle carnivore
thy senses are
a blooming flower
of tiny tendrils,
deep black lines,
quicker than coxes
and

all
the lovely drops
~~that~~ the spring ^{travels} winds
above the crinkled stream.

This song for John and Toni Lilly
appeared as part of "The Claremont Suite" in *Jaguar Skies*.

Milarepa's Homage to Robert Browning

1. LIFE IS A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE.
2. THE ONLY ONE I'VE GOT.
3. NO MORE THANK YOU.
4. I TURNED INTO A SNOW LEOPARD.
5. I DANCED ON MY MAMMA'S BONES.
6. THESE ARE SPOTS.
7. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR ME.
8. I'M RIGHT HERE.
9. RIGHT BEHIND THAT WIMPY MAGICIAN.
10. THERE ARE LOVELY HALLUCINATIONS ABOUT MY DEATH.

Milarepa is the great Tibetan poet and yogi — Robert Browning is the 19th century poet who specialized in the dramatic monolog.

The Songs of David

1. COME ON GOD, AND TEAR MY ENEMIES TO PIECES.
2. RIP THEM APART WITH YOUR BARE FINGERS.
3. PLUCK OUT THEIR EYEBALLS AND SCREW THE SOCKETS.

MASONS OF LIGHT

1. MASONS OF LIGHT -- CARPENTERS OF MATTER.
2. DUALITIES MAY ARISE FROM UNCONSCIOUS AWARENESSES OF SOCIETY'S STRATA -- YOU ARE IN THE STRATA -- OR YOU ARE NOT IN THE STRATA -- SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS MAKES AWARENESS OF TWO.
3. DUALITY MIGHT BE BIOLOGICAL -- AWARENESS OF GOOD AND BAD -- IN THAT CASE STRATA EMPHASIZES BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS IN A HUMANISTIC WAY.
4. THE HUMAN IS INVENTED.
5. THE MAMMAL IS BORN.
6. A PHEASANT FEATHER -- A BOOK -- TEAR GAS.
7. DE-CONDITIONING IS A RESULT OF SELF-LOVE.
8. SELF-LOVE IS UNSELFISH AND SELFLESS.
9. SELF-LOVE AND DE-CONDITIONING ARE ANTISOCIAL.
10. BEING IS TEMPORARY AND DELICIOUS -- I HUG MYSELF WITH PLEASURE.
11. MAMMAL -- MAN -- SUPERMAN (THE FIRST AND THIRD ARE SIMILAR -- THE SECOND TWO ARE NEOPLATONISMS).
12. THE INTERVIEWER NEVER REPORTS CORRECTLY -- HIS ROLE IS TO DISTORT.
13. ATTORNEYS WORK FOR THEIR ROLE AND FOR EACH OTHER.
14. THE ATTORNEY IS THE MASON OF LIGHT.
15. THE CLIENT IS THE CARPENTER OF MATTER.
16. THEY DO NOT TRULY COMPLIMENT EACH OTHER.

17. NATURAL SELECTION IS A FACT — INFORMATION REGARDING MUTUALISM DOES NOT NEGATE -- IT COMPLEMENTS THE FACT.
18. ENORMOUS SOCIAL PLEASURES ARE CLOSED OFF BY TRIBALISM AND SOCIALIZATION.
19. THE SECRET STRUCTURE IS AN OMNIPRESENT SECRET.
20. THE OBVIOUS SURROUNDS ME.
21. CRASH OF TRUCKS IN THE MORNING FOG.
22. POISONINGS OF HABITATS.
23. PAIRS OF SPARROWHAWKS.
24. PRATTFALL COMEDY IN THE ROBES OF NOBILITY.
25. DEIFICATION OF THE ROBES.
26. PROGRAMMED ASSASSINS OF INFANTS.
27. FACES OF ABSTRACTION AND ANGUISH ACTING OUT THE MENTAL MOVIE.
28. FOX SPARROWS — WET FOG -- HIGH GRASSES IN THE RAIN.
29. VISIONS OF SUNG DYNASTY PAINTERS — THE INVENTION OF NON-SOCIAL VISTAS — CHILDREN'S ART.
30. CLUSTERS OF ATTORNEYS — SOLITUDES OF CLIENTS.
31. THE JUDGE IS THE MASON OF LIGHT.
32. THE ATTORNEY IS THE CARPENTER OF MATTER.
33. JUDGES WORK FOR THEIR ROLE AND FOR EACH OTHER.
34. CARRY THIS NINE STEPS FURTHER.
35. RETURN TO MEAT MAMMALS.
36. CARNIVORE WHELKS AND WORMS DEVoured BY

SHOREBIRDS WITH PROBING BEAKS — A WHITE TAILED
KITE OVERHEAD.

37. THE MARBLE BUTCHERSHOP.
38. THE CONCRETE ABATTOIRE.
39. THE PRISONER.
40. THE PRISONER MAY LOVE HIMSELF -- HE HAS NOTHING
ELSE.
41. WE ARE POLITICAL PRISONERS.
42. PRISONERS OF POLITICS.
43. WE WOULD RATHER BE EATEN.
44. THERE ARE ALTERNATIVE COURSES.
45. THE PRISONER MAY NOT SEE WELL.
46. FREEDOM IS A REALITY -- IT IS UNDEFINABLE.
47. THE JUDGE DREAMS THAT HE IS A JUDGE.
48. THE PRISONER DREAMS THAT HE IS A PRISONER.
49. THE ATTORNEY DREAMS.
50. THE GENERAL AND THE MACHINE GRAPH THE
DEPOSITION OF NAPALM.
51. THEY ARE A HYBRID -- THE CONJUNCTION CREATES
NEW DESIRES.
52. THE DESIRES ARE NEITHER MAMMALIAN NOR
MACHINELY.
53. MASONS OF LIGHT -- CARPENTERS OF MATTER.
54. LAUDATION OF METAL GLINT.
55. FINAL SOLUTION FOR SYMPATHIZERS.
56. CLUSTERS OF SELF-LOVERS.

57. POOLS IN THE VISTA.
58. UTOPIAS OF ALUMINUM NUTRIMENT.
59. PATINA ON THE IMAGE TANKS.
60. FOG FORMING AT THE UPSWELL OF COLD WATER.
61. COLLUSIONARY HYPNOSIS OF METAPHYSICIANS.
62. EVERPRESENT LAUGHTER--EVERPRESENT LABOR.

SECTION THREE

* *
*

AH
YES,

how perfect
to be within a dream

inside
a body

in a
VISION!

How
REAL!

HOW SOLID!

I
am
the
body
!

The dream
is flesh!

APPEARANCE
is my breath!

I
AM
THE
HUMMINGBIRD

OF
CHANCE

!

* *

*

"Float like a butterfly
sting like a bee"

Muhammad Ali is not a dancer in the sense that one thinks of a dancer—moving about with legs working against gravity. Ali's style of movement is different. At first it is not easy to comprehend—his head floats and his body hangs suspended from his head. In turn, his legs and arms hang from the suspended body. When Ali moves, his torso falls the direction he wishes to go—his head continues to float—and his hanging legs, in subtle balance with all of his organism, step out to catch him and support him. His skeleton moves the muscles in equilibrium with gravity. Ali does not resist gravity but in part he's moved by it—backward and forward—or to the sides. It is the most powerful and refined style of movement. Man spent five million years evolving so that his head is free to float and his body able to hang from it and fall forward effortlessly. Ali, and Fred Astaire who also floats, are adored because they show what our mindbodies recognize in them as they box and dance—a high degree of perfection in movement.

Ali is almost fearless—there is no intrusion of an instinctual primate fear of falling. Ali is always falling and continuously and almost effortlessly recovering—and doing it in sync with the floating of his head. Ali's opponent Frazier is a physical genius in his own right but in a different manner. Frazier does not float and he has not mastered the fear of falling. He moves more mechanically than does Ali. Frazier requires enormous energy to move himself with the power for boxing Ali. Although Frazier is courageous there is a contraction—which is clearly fear—in his muscle use. His style is to utilize the fear. Alchemically, Frazier hunches—drawing into himself—using the contraction of his body—as opposed to the free-floating extension of Ali—to make a compression of his inner visceral systems. It is a transmutation. Frazier squeezes energy out of the center of himself, from his internal systems, and he pours it into the muscles. He does not use up the power inherent in the muscles but adds to it with the strength of his guts and organs. His power is almost superhuman—he resembles Society with its inputs of fossil fuel supplementing agriculture. Ali resembles a snow leopard or a butterfly.

* *
*

The demonic aspect of Agriculture.

Honey and peaches and plums.

Some days there are no festivals.

* *
*

I
AM

THE
PELICAN

OF
REASON

D
I
V
I
N
G
in the surf
!

* *
*

The systemless system absorbs all systems.

Keats and Whitehead speak of truth and beauty.

Absorb the beautiful systems.

Blueberries in darkness and the light of stars.

I am given a painting of mastodons and I dream of smiling
rats.

How beautiful the pet rat is with his brain, his nervous

system, his tiny muscles and the fascia within them. The fascia join at the ends of muscles to become tendons that are inserted upon the bone-sheathes of connective tissue. How lovely are the nerves that report the tension of the rat's tendons to the brain. How perfect are the dark eyes, capable of performing actions, reflecting the conception of actions. They are jewels of living jet. How beautiful is the mastodon on the tundra. How perfect is my daughter. How exquisite is the nasturtium blossom, the odor of fennel, and the fog pouring over the peaks.

* *
*

Invent two observations or principles:

1. Cause and effect are one single explosion in the rain of Chance.
2. Reason can overlap the edges of Chance--and vice versa.

§

The white table.

The black table.

The rainbow table.

* *
*

The last rose of summer is the first rose of autumn.

October roses.

The personality. The rose.

Myriad-mindedness.

"BLASTULA. Stage of embryonic development of animals, at or near the end of the period of cleavage, and immediately preceding gastrulation movement. Usually (in those animals with complete cleavage) consists of a hollow ball of cells."

--From *A Dictionary of Biology*, Penguin Reference Books

* *

*

Nature is lawless. Nature drifts and surges.

We are in a flaming explosion—the cinders of it are concrete buildings, freeways, and plastic toys. Their formation continues. The explosion continues.

Let the badger loose! Praise the mustang!

The position of boulders is information.

The senses are hungers.

* *

*

The buckeye butterfly is as beautiful as the California condor. The art nouveau patterns of planets and auras on its wings in dazzling russet, brown, ochre, yellow, red, tan, and buff make me want to capture it. I want to possess and fondle it with my eye. But it is too beautiful to kill.

The California condor evolved to be the vulture—the scavenger—of the giant Pleistocene mammals of North America. But eleven thousand years ago the giant ground sloth, the American elephants, and the saber-tooth were extincted.

What will the condor do?

§

The raccoon is incredibly graceful as he picks up bread with his tiny hands in the beam of the flashlight. He slips from a sitting position on his hindquarters forward to all fours and drifts effortlessly in any direction he chooses. He steps backward, away from our stare, without turning around—or he moves forward drawn to the lovely white bread. He is able to stop—perfectly in balance and floating—in the midst of any movement and reverse himself and go the opposite direction. When he reverses there is no interruption of the smoothness of his movement. There is no stop made in a change of direction or gesture—there is no cessation. He never seems to be still and yet there is no unnecessary movement. He is vibrant with the delicate wildness in all life.

* *

*

The outlaw. The wild rose.

Assuming the postures of fear creates fear—just as fear creates the postures. Either can be seen as a penetration of a very real curtain of flesh.

The essential mystery is lost and recovered—lost and recovered.

The mystery of personality and the mystery of physics.

Addiction to personality.

Personality is an addiction.

I am afraid. I am not afraid. I am brave. I am not brave. I am something else. I am many things. I am a system. I am not a system. I am beautiful.

The addiction to solutions is dualism.

Addiction to facts is short-sightedness.

Myriad-mindedness. (System within system within system surrounded by dimensions of Nothingness comprised of the interpenetration of realms.)

We are almost liberated.

Liberation is physical.

Everything I touch is spread through me and reverberates.

* *
*

The taste of wild ginger remains long after the hike is over. The rain is forgotten, the exhaustion in the thighs can barely be remembered, but the acrid, sweet, and perfumey taste of the wild ginger stem remains. With it there is an image of purplish-red light on the leaves.

§

Walking through the herd of wild zebras, in front of the

hotel at the top of the crater, I am aware of the Pleistocene. Their striped haunches ripple and twitch with consciousness of me though only a few look.

§

The odor spreading from the tiny island is a physical aura. It is the smell of blood, of mummifying meat, of rotting flesh, of placenta lying in the sun, of the excrement of giant mammals and of their sexuality and pheromones. It is the odor of the Pleistocene—of the age of great mammals. There is also a physical aura of mammal-energy radiating from the island. I recognize it. My sub-beings know what it is.

These auras have the beauty of sudden recognition, of terror, of cousinhood, and of the special, thoughtless ogre-hood of these near-brethren.

The sea elephants—the size and weight of small trucks—raise their heads and threaten us as we walk among them.

They are very dumb and sweet and cruel. They are mindless and comic and terrible. These giant seals have the faces of feeble-minded babies grown gray and stubbly whiskered with noses changed into trunks. They are uninvolved with morality and amorality, and are caught within the processes of their evolving instincts. They are more than human.

* *
*

The movie stars appear to glow with wholeness. (John Wayne, Lauren Bacall.) We respond to the three dimensionality caused by their lighting for we wish to be whole, unified persons and sure—and free.

We hope to have cruel and beautiful and true relationships—and superhuman devotions marred only by our humane weaknesses.

We dream of being without proportion—sizeless as an image on a screen—permanent but also changing for each occasion.

§

We are stars. We are proportionless. We are myriad-minded. We are bodyminds. We are bulks of experience. We are cuckoos shaking the orange-blossoms from the boughs. We are boughs of orange-blossoms. We are the water moving by

capillary action through the dark earth around the roots.

* *
*

The orange reflection of embers on the polished floor.

A flock of crows in the Douglas firs. Seen from below they make a black constellation in the daylight. They caw loudly. Each crow is a star.

Beauty is everywhere. Evil is rare. Honesty is deep as snow drifts. There is little joy.

The brains of certain invertebrates are in a ring around the mouth-opening of their gullets.

* *
*

It is frightening to walk through a herd of zebras but I do not show the fear.

* *
*

Our sensoriums pass over an event and various particles of the event stimulate our sub-beings. Our life which is an aggregate--in fact, a sensory model--is then brought into brighter being.

Or: we move through an event--which is a purely arbitrary segment of what we can perceive.

And/or: we and the event cybernetically bring each other into being and shape the totality of what is perceived.

Or: all of these possibilities, or none of them, or some of them, or some of them plus something else.

The nervous system makes models of the universe that are constellations produced by the information from our twenty-seven senses, and syntheses of the senses, and synesthetic restatements of the senses. These reverberate in the body-mind which is a solid piece of information derived from the success of innumerable earlier models of the universe. Perhaps these act with fields, auras, movements that we do not understand.

The senses are extrusions of the substrate manifested

through us. We test the background—the substrate—the messiah—with them.

The background—the substrate—may be comprised of inter-crumplings of fields and dimensions and realms. It is no doubt as complex as the microscopic surfaces of a cell from the cytoplasm on down to the molecular level.

Reticular formation.

DNA / RNA.

Mitochondria.

Cytoplasmic streamings.

Swirling dimensions taking the shape of our senses.

Or something else.

Other things.

No things.

Outlaws. Hummingbirds. A sphinx moth.

§

It is certain that we do not understand how we move or in what directions—or dimensions.

* *

*

I BELIEVED THAT EVERYTHING
IS DIVINE

and now

I

know

it.

It is all perfect.

This is really it!

-- AND IT IS ALL PERFECT. THIS IS REALLY IT!

-- AND IT IS ALL PERFECT. THIS IS REALLY IT!

You and I

will
find

our home
our cave

on this

substrate

among the wind-blown
orange poppies

among the wind-blown
orange poppies

on this

substrate

WHERE
WE
ARE
MAMMALS

and gods
and goddesses

and
KINGS

and
QUEENS.

* *
*

Spanish longhorns escaped from the southwestern missions and thrived on the native American grasses. They multiplied into scores of thousands and created a new resource—meat. The snowy winters made these survivors hardier and they discovered wild cattle behavior and learned to protect themselves from wolves. The plains grass lay untouched as a virgin because the large herbivores of Texas had been extinct for eleven thousand years. The longhorns created a rapport with the grassy plains—and the grasslands flourished with the cattle. There was a mammal renaissance—a mini-revival of the Pleistocene—clusters of large herbivores dotted the land as in the past.

Easterners could eat inexpensive beef regularly and often—if it could be brought to them. They could dine like lords did in earlier times. Some men became adventurous for the wealth and excitement of beef. The mounted cattle herder—the cowboy—came into being and gave birth to the myth of himself. He flourished with the herds of mammals.

SEE, THERE IS THE BOOTED MAN
IN THE SADDLE!

The dream was meat
and
he rode
tall in the stirrups --
flushed, electric, alive
with the thunder and stink
of longhorns.
The East was hungry
but tired
of the flesh
of pigs and sheep.

NOW,
MY
DEAR,
we wear
our boots

like dreams,

dreams.
-- And

SEE

that

reverberation:

the motorcyclist

in
his
black
leathers.

* *
*

I asked for a statue of Kwannon, the goddess of mercy, and I was shown a tiny black deer carved in jet.

The dust specks turning in the sunbeam flash like mirrors.

In the empty room I listen to the roar of the truck.

* *
*

"BASAL METABOLISM. The rate of energy expenditure of an animal at rest, usually expressed per unit weight. In man, basal metabolic rate (BMR) is expressed as the output of Calories per square metre of body surface per hour. Measured directly or indirectly by calculation from the amount of oxygen consumed or carbon dioxide given off."

--From *A Dictionary of Biology*, Penguin Reference Books.

* *
*

The fragmented consciousness is intense. The possessor burns brightly.

When man is alone he is on fire. When man is Love he is on fire.

When man sleeps he is a constellation.

Alert in the forest at night.

* *
*

A model to remind us what we are when outside of our selves.

* *
*

The surge of life drifts in every direction. In a teaspoon of water from the ocean or a vernal pool, or in a square inch of air, are many orders of plants, animals, molds, and microbes. Life in many tribes and phyla is around always. Each one is a sensorium. Each is a jewel.

* *
*

Billboards line the freeways and make a dimension of the

flattened and brutalized faces of advertising that stare in at drivers in their cars. The figures are represented as mindless robots of pleasure. The pleasures they show are simplified ones: macho triumph, narcissism, and sensual over-completion. The eyes and mouth express a life wherein the body is rigid and armored rather than flexible and supple. The representations are on backgrounds with little modelling of light and shadow. They show the everpresent, omnidirectional light of the supermarket. The figures are decorated with blatant sensory symbols—black velvet, pearls, peacock feathers. Plump lips are made into sculpture by lipstick, painted toenails emerge from sandals, blond hair flows in two-dimensional sculpture. It is the poetry of morons.

No diversity of intelligence holds it together. Merchandise is the subject—and the goal is to persuade the passing driver. There is no subtlety—it is less than human and less than anthropoid. Our primate cousins—baboons, monkeys, apes—have exquisite and detailed feelings of touch and appreciations of the softness of kisses and of the loving stroke and of the fires of rage and brutality. Their perceptions have a million opalescent caves in them. They have starlight on their brows. Some of them—as we do—watch the sunrise with pleasure.

* *
*

The subtle and tender auras and extensions of ordinary objects and beings. The baby rabbit might be a child.

* *
*

Federico Garcia Lorca in *The Duende: Theory and Divertissement* speaks of one of the inspiring forces of music and poetry. The *duende* is a black, demonic force of "salt and marble." It is an energy that passes historically through the Greek mystery cults and comes to the modern world by way of the gypsy Flamenco artists.

Lorca says:

"The *duende* is a power and not a construct, it is a struggle and not a concept. I have heard an old guitarist, a true virtuoso, remark, "The *duende* is not in the throat, the *duende* comes up from inside, up from the very soles of the feet." That is to say, it is not a question of aptitude, but of a true and viable style—of blood, in other words; of what is oldest in culture: of creation made act."

Lorca speaks of "how style triumphs over inferior matter, and the unenlightened" and he tells of a gypsy lady of eighty who took the dance prize—competing with the loveliest beauties—by the way she raised her arms, threw back her head and stamped her foot. She acted with *duende*.

The *duende* is not afraid of death—if the *duende* is to be present there must, in fact, be the possibility of death.

Lorca takes pride that Spain and Mexico are countries that use death—the bullfight—as a celebration.

§

The initiate in certain mystery cults was dressed in white robes and laid out upon a ritual bier. Above in the darkness a bull was sacrificed in the rite of the *taurobolium*. The bull screamed in death and the initiate was drenched with blood. The initiate was taken from the chamber reborn and given a new name and honey mixed with milk to drink. He, or she, was purified and ready to become at one—in bliss—with the godhead after death.

§

Emerson speaks of the transcendental Oversoul.

§

The mystical rebirth by blood sacrifice in the mysteries is not simply purification through the death of a substitute. The bloody act—the style of it—states that at deepest root we believe that the transcendental oversoul is connected to all by veins and arteries and capillaries of blood. Oversouls and godheads may float mystically on high, or in created dimensions and aeons of bliss, but the connection to them is through a common elixir—blood. Blood is, Mephistopheles says in *Faust*, "a very special kind of juice."

The sacrifices are like the veins of the placenta attached to a fetus that is about to be born.

§

Wine is the blood of the grape that is transmuted. Wine is the symbol of blood that may be exalted into spirit-blood in the body of the future.

The bee colony was seen as a body—a being—a single complex creature like a man or a deer. The honey was the blood

of the being.

§

When mysteries become metaphysical and abandon the sacrifice of an animal, the real drenching with blood, the wine, milk, honey, ecstatic songs and torchlight in the grottoes—they no longer are about the bodymind. They can no longer liberate. Liberation is of the body. It is the bodymind that is spirit as well as matter.

§

The substrate of the mysteries was the Asian Mediterranean and Mediterranean Europe. There were no lions in Greece by the time of Pericles. In the Roman world wild living creatures were rare and they were imported from Africa for destruction in circuses. Except for the sacred groves the large forests of the Greco-Roman countryside were extirpated. The trees had been changed into warships, fuel for cooking and smelting, and objects of commerce.

§

The mysteries were the last taste of animal blood (man's own animal blood) in a pastoralized, cultivated, and urbanized world. The mysteries renewed the physical longing found in dreams. They renewed the hopes, fears, and desires for the long-lost phylogenetic worlds of our evolution. The still-aware sub-beings and smoldering reverberations of the body—the mind/body—needed satisfaction.

The mysteries were acts of despair, attempts to find liberation. They went directly to the body—to cut open the flesh—so that blood might pour out. So that man might see his own blood and dream of it upon a landscape other than the devastated one on which he was born.

§

A Pueblo Indian friend speaks of Shewanna—a power that seems to be antipodal to *duende*. Shewanna is nature in an embodiment that shows both its grandeur and its consciousness. Nature allows her incredible beauty to be seen in a shape that is enormous and yet has physical boundaries. Shewanna is beyond good and evil but yet has majesty. As a boy, my friend was wandering through steep-walled canyons on a hot afternoon. A

storm started directly above him. There were crashing bolts of lightning and booming thunder and the colors and explosions and scents of a desert storm. As he ran home through the ravines with only a strip of the sky above his head, the storm followed him always staying above him no matter which way he ran—backward or forward or down a side canyon. When he darted through the door and fell over with exhaustion, wide-eyed and awestruck, his mother knew that he had witnessed Shewanna.

He says there is sometimes Shewanna in a herd of buffalo, in a sunset, or in a special place on the earth. You know it when you see it. It is very, very special—it is not a herd of buffalo or a place or a beautiful sunset or a thunderstorm. It is Shewanna.

Shewanna is of nature or the spirit of nature that is part of the interaction of vast undomesticated environmental systems. For Shewanna to appear nature must still be open-ended—the processes at both ends of a system must be vital. *Duende* appears as nature is closed-down by man. Perhaps it is a special manifestation of deep nature—a "loop" with our connections with uncultivated nature and with blood. Shewanna is primal and free.

I
KNOW
IT IS TIME
for
ENORMOUS
BEAUTY
as
well

as
the
special
manifestation.
Come,
Shewanna.

Come to brothers and sisters
and sons and daughters
of otter, and coyote,
and wolf.

Let us be done with diluted mysteries that are rhetoric—that are removed from the body. They are a froth of bubbles created by the social system.

Come,

Shewanna,

come to the brothers and sisters
and sons and daughters
of otter, and coyote,
and wolf.

* *
*

When some British children were asked, "What are the twelve loveliest things you know?" one boy answered:

"The cold of ice cream.
The scunch of leaves.
The feel of clean cloze.
Water running into a bath.
Cold wind on a hot day.
Climbing up a hill looking down.
Hot water bottle in bed.
Honey in your mouth.
Smell in a drugstore.
Babies smiling.
The feeling inside when you sing.
Baby kittens."

A little girl's list went:

"Our dog's eyes.
Street lights on the river.
Wet stones.
The smell of rain.
An organ playing.
Red roofs in trees.
Smoke rising.
Rain on your cheeks.
The smell of cut grass.
Red velvet.
The smell of picnic teas.
The moon in clouds."

FRED WAH: A POETRY OF DIALOGUE

I

The Alphabet of Things

"Mrs. Richard's Grey Cat," a discussion between Fred Wah and Stephen McCaffery about "The Politics of the Referent," starts with Wah eliciting from McCaffery a theory of non-referential language in which "you replace reference by relation" because "you're seeing a signifier in terms of another signifier."¹ McCaffery's grammatological stance is "based on a proposition that word and thing do not correspond, that in fact we have no representation."² Thus the word *cat*, he argues, when it is isolated, has infinite possibilities "of creating something else," but when *cat* is embedded in a phrase like *Mrs. Richard's grey cat*, "it is contextualized and its possibilities of producing anything . . . are minimal."³

Although McCaffery's theory is "well-made," as Wah keeps saying, Wah himself makes an important addition to their discussion by pointing out the narrative line of the phrase *Mrs. Richard's grey cat*. In other words, he shows a concern for the particular context of the signifier *cat* and the way in which this context limits the creative possibilities to be found in the relation between word and thing. *Mrs. Richard's grey cat* becomes for Wah

a problem in image, an idea, in graph, in picture, for me, specifically because it is, as you say, bound, contextualized, bound into that line, that narrative. When we decontextualize the word "cat" that opens up an ideogrammatic kind of possibility that I'd have to work with "cat" in a totally new way . . . it still carries with it image-making possibilities.⁴

In the case of the decontextualized sign, Wah sees the signifier as being effaced. Wah's decontextualized *cat* is a kind of ideogram that is neither an image of voice, a written word that stores speech, nor a component of a narrative line or of a given context. It is an image that does not evoke a thing in a particular position or relation—that would make it referential. Instead, as Wah says, "it operates in my mind as image because I see what's going on in my response to it."⁵ Wah's image-response erases the reliance of signification on a signifier so that the presence of things can compose a language of image-making possibilities.

In the contextualized sign, on the other hand, it is the signifier that carries the "ideo," the "graph," the "picture" of the thing. Wah's image-response, far from referring beyond the given context, provides him with a discourse that acknowledges no separation between word and thing. The signifier-as-image has nothing to do with rhetorical imagery or with the images of descriptive poetry; nor does it relate to imagism in which image, being "an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time," inflates the linguistic sign with qualities lying outside its linguistic order. Instead, the signifier-as-image becomes an ideograph. The ideograph (graphic image) presents the thing (makes it present) without simulating it and without taking it outside the territory that any given context delimits.

Wah is able to present the thing as it is because he *finds himself* in its context. This is a characteristic of most of his poetry. In "Cruise," for instance, he writes: ". . . so I told myself I would go out wandering not over the world but in the world / . . . I would be out there in it with everything else collecting measurements / with my senses in a timeless meandering through the wonder."⁶ Not a flight, but almost a will to descend. The poet is held within the labyrinth of the world by its wonder, a force that reveals the possibilities of signification. Not a prisoner, but a *homo viator* walking down a forest path and the path walking along with him. His presence is not felt there because of the "lyrical interference of the individual's ego";⁷ he is there as the presence of one of the things of the world. Wah, like Charles Olson with whom he studied, does not believe in an anthropocentric world. Anthropocentrism is a "stance" that defines the world with man's immanent presence as the parameter. Man's ego-position makes humanism into a solipsism on a grand scale. Wah does not view the phenomenal world only as a reality of objects. As he says, "There is that percussive and reverberating energy released from a cathexis of the poet on contemporary reality—a merging of himself with his natural

surroundings, aiming at establishing a connection between language and reality.⁸ Wah's statement "I would be out there in it with everything else" reveals, then, the subject objectified, not interfering; the poet seeing and being seen. Wah's anthihumanism locates him within the world, among its things, and this stance enables him to locate the intersection between language and reality where he discovers the alphabet of things.

It does not take long to notice that the central aspect of Wah's work is the textuality of the world in which human consciousness and the ontology of things are interwoven. Even the titles of his books point to this: *Lardeau, Mountain, Among, Tree, Earth, Breathin' My Name with a Sigh*.⁹ Nature predominates in all of them not as a setting awaiting description but as the natural surrounding in which Wah's presence is embedded in the presence of things. In the title poem of *Mountain* he writes: "float a hillside up with fluff rise / eyes of the world whirling through me" (SP, p. 24). The phrase "through me" does not make the poet a vehicle of an utterance prescribed to him by nature's laws but one of the points that *transmits* the act of perceiving the world. "Trans," Wah says, "is something that goes on. A trans to me has become a poetic process."¹⁰ Trans, then, means to walk attentively across the field of perception, to take in what is out:

The delight of making inner
an outer world for me
is when I tree myself
and my slight voice screams glee to him
now preparing his craft for the Bifrost
Kerykeion he said, the shore
now a cold March mist moves
down through the cow pasture
out of the trees
among, among

("Among" from *Among*, SP, p. 43)

"Treeing" oneself is neither a magical metamorphosis nor an escape up a tree. Wah has not insinuated himself into a paradox, a relationship that does violence to the structure of the sign "tree." "Making inner" does not erase the difference between the tree and Wah. He is not assuming the *physis* of the tree. The transference of the signifier becomes possible partly through Wah's involvement in a process of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) that "includes all techniques whereby the artist portrays or

describes—and thereby causes us to see—something familiar in a fresh, defamiliarized way,"¹¹ and partly through his partaking in the structuring of nature, the textuality of the world. Wah, by consciously denouncing the being-outside-of-things, contextualizes himself in nature, gaining thus an unmediated understanding of the signification of "tree." He is situated on the interface of signifier and signified, relating to objects by contiguity. He is inter-ested.

George Bowering talks about Wah's relationship to nature: "In no other writer's work are we able to find such an integration of consciousness & surroundings as we will find in Wah's writing."¹² Wah reads nature without using consciousness as the sole agent determining interpretation. In fact, he replaces interpretation with perception. In spite of the abundance of nature imagery, nature is not the matrix of his poetry but one of the tropes that relates reality to language.

Or, nature is the poet's locus, his personal map, i.e. the interior of B.C., that collects in its territory the poet as well as what he encircles with his eyes and what encircles him. To quote again from Bowering, Wah "responds to the particulars of his ground with an eye to the singularity of each, without any semiological distancing that would be signalled by a 'definite' article."¹³

or lookout eyes look lookout of
even the eyes a lake is or creek fills
and the map the eye is a circle makes
the Mountain isn't
(from *Mountain, SP*, p. 27)

A lake is activated as a thing aware of its context because it is reflected on its face within its eyes. The eye as a map is a metonymy that affirms the graphic signification of the images that Wah's locus consists of. Indeed, eyes are present throughout his work. Seeing is the first gesture of the movement toward inscription, the graphic exposure of signs that tells the story of the identity of things and of the poet. As Bowering observes, ". . . Wah, with his refusal to subject his home to description, comes closer than anyone I know . . . to enacting an holistic image of the world."¹⁴

Wah's relationship to the world is summed up in "From in Here . . .": "In the particularity of a place the writer finds revealed the correspondences of a whole world" (*SP*, p. 126). This revelation provides him with the content of his poetry, for, as he

says, "home is where the story is."¹⁵ But it also provides him with language. "I'm interior," he says, "I'm really very much here. But that's too easy. I'm very much where you are too. . . . The language seems very much at home. I don't need a referential language going on."¹⁶ His view of the world, then, is both paradigmatic and syntagmatic: paradigmatic in the sense that a local place is replaceable with another place in the world; syntagmatic in the sense that the things of a place are interrelated since they are parts of the same system, letters of the same alphabet. Wah's poetics is grounded in place because he sees narrative as being inherent in the textuality of the world.

Yet the emphasis on the eye that Wah's "holistic image of the world" demands does not shield the world from sound. His "delight in making inner" is not accomplished solely through the eye. He moves from the labyrinth of the world to the labyrinth of the ear.

Wherever you are wherever
you can believe in pictures of the earth's contours
and just because its dark out have words enough
...
black pitvoid voice the mouth hole
the words all are places and distant the snowbird
a bowl to the white moon's brightening
(from *Mountain*, SP, 25)

World word alive
in the heart circle of the moon
...
("Hermes in the Trees," from *Among*, SP, 45)

In both examples, the word is present in the world not only as a *scriptum* but also as sound and speech. As Wah says, "The collisions of sound implicate a rhythm, the actual sound of coin when counting."¹⁷ Sound is directly related to the thing, and speech is equally related to the process of perception and its articulation. As narrative is imbued with place so is speech active there as well. In Wah's writing there is no conflict between the eye and the image/scriptive response it generates and the ear that records the sounding of the world. As Bowering remarks,

There is nothing more exterior than writing.

The moment it is done it is forever outside. There is also nothing more interior than speech, than the body's saying. It has no meaning save when it accompanies movements inside the mouth & the ear. Speech & writing are therefore eternally separate. Yet the poet survives upon the ambition to entwine them. Thus Wah will not be caught *describing* nature, the act that would render the latter forever passive, without ears.¹⁸

Perhaps the best example, an example of economy too, of the marriage between the eye and the ear is to be found in the frequent exclamations that announce Wah's perception: "o word of the world"; "O so Co-old"; "her eyes o eyes"; "O Jack."¹⁹ "O" as an exclamation articulates both the body's awakening and the mind's initial step toward a realization. It occurs at the threshold of signification, on the interface of speech and writing. "O" is pure voice, yet it is also a letter, a word. For the tongue, at that moment's surprise, gives to the voice the shape of a letter, drawing within the cave of the mouth a form that reminds us that both the eye and the ear work together.

II

The Rebus Text



Wah's fascination with inscription and image finds its fullest expression in his *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.*²⁰ Here the words of Wah's poems and the images of the Indian pictographs assert their different linguistic and iconic identities while at the same time becoming inseparable components of one text, the text of *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* To account for the relationship of his poems to the pictographs, Wah borrows,

very aptly, Coleridge's term "transcreation" which appears in an epigraph to *Pictograms*: "Not the qualities merely, but the root of the qualities is transcreated. How else could it be a birth,—a creation?" But before I examine how Wah transcreates the pictographs, that is, how he draws poems out of these images, it is necessary to consider Wah's statement regarding the genesis of the book: ". . . it's important to realize I'm not responding to rock paintings, I'm responding to John Corner's drawings from rock paintings, which were these rust-red things."²¹ He points to Corner's *Pictographs (Indian Rock Paintings) in the Interior of British Columbia*²² not as a source of reference or as an *hors-texte*, but as an inextricable part of the intertextuality of *Pictograms*.

The pictographs Corner studied date roughly from 1818 to 1858. The predominant belief about their origin, initially advanced by James Teit, is that they were made "on rocks and trees by adolescent boys and girls as a record of their observances, but also by men as a record of their dreams. There are several rocks on which every person passing by for the first time had to paint a picture."²³ Corner does not openly refute Teit's thesis—"this must be accepted as a fact, since it was noted and recorded by Teit"²⁴—yet, although he does acknowledge their ritualistic origin and crudity of their form, the overall feeling in his book is that the rock paintings were executed by conscious artists. "The complete story of these paintings will never be known, but we may assume that not every member of the tribe was capable of painting even the crudest pictures."²⁵

Corner's book is an interesting blend of a thorough study of the rock paintings and fascination with the mystery of their "origin and meaning." I will let Corner himself explain his work:

Once a site has been found, it may require several visits to compile a complete record. A careful study is made of the site and the surrounding area to determine if other paintings are present. Each painting is carefully cleaned, using a special preparation that does not damage the paint. Several hours of painstaking work with fine brushes are required to prepare the paintings for photographing and sketching. The size of the panel is recorded together with details of locations, type of rock, evidence of prehistoric camp fires, artifacts, and direction of the rock face exposure. Each figure is then measured and sketched in its relative position on the rock.²⁶