Here we see Corner's hobby being transformed into the careful research of a professional anthropologist. His scientific approach does not eliminate the recording of his adventures:

> I had to make four trips to complete the records for this site [site no. 63]. One of these trips was made by walking to the site over the frozen lake [Christina Lake] during one of our colder winters. I managed to lose something on every trip to this site, but the day I irretrievably lost my sketch book containing the notes and scaled drawings of the nine big Kootenay Lake sites down a deep, narrow crack in the rock, was a disaster, I have never been more discouraged or closer to giving up the idea of this written record.[27]

The book, with its reliance on seeing, is apparently descriptive in method. Yet Corner also goes beyond description to interpretation, and, when he lacks the necessary evidence, to careful speculation. He is attracted to the rock paintings because he sees them as "genuine prehistoric art treasures [which] are irreplaceable if destroyed," [28] but also because he is fascinated by the mystery emanating from them which embraces their content, their form and their execution. Corner speculates about the nature of the pigment and instruments, the age of the pictographs, their function, the identity of the artists, the nature of the designs and, of course, their meaning. Their mystery not only creates a rich ground of research for the anthropologist or a gallery distributed in nature for the delightful surprise of the hiker; it also has the potential to become a fertile ground for a poet's imagination. Corner seems almost to invite such a poetic approach: "There exists a feeling of mystery surrounding these works of art, and a viewer with an active imagination may read into the paintings anything his fancy dictates."[29]

The intricate paradox of the pictographs, their particularity and their existence outside a specific context that would dissolve the indeterminancy of their meaning, makes Corner's book the kind of book that would, I think, appeal to Fred Wah. More than that, however, Corner's book is important not simply because Wah uses its "illustrations,"[30] but because of its metonymic relation to *Pictograms*. The intrinsic contextual association between *Pictograms* and *Pictographs* has its starting point in Corner's method of interpretation. His interpretation relies in large part on Teit's pioneering work, specifically the miniature dictionary he

compiled that consists of fifty-two figures from rock paintings.[31] Teit treats each figure as an ideogrammatic sign. Corner, through his addition of twenty figures to this dictionary, identifies the Indian language group appropriate to the location of each figure.[32] Each pictograph is seen as a representation of an object or an activity and each constituent design unit is considered as a linguistic sign. The dictionary, both as compiled by Teit and emendated by Corner, is a concrete example of what I called the alphabet of things. Corner's book is not just the preface to Wah's poems; it is their intertext.

It is important to note here that the intertextuality of *Pictograms* is not just a citation of the pictographic designs or an indirect quoting from Corner's commentary appropriated by Wah. I use intertextuality in Julia Kristeva's sense "as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position."[33] Wah's responses to Corner's book follows this kind of transposition. He starts as a reader soon to become a writer. He is a viewer of the pictographs reproduced in the book but he does not see them with an idle eye. To put it in McCaffery's words, Wah "contextualizes himself as reader."[34] Or, as bpNichol says, "what we're getting is you [Wah] writing your seeing. What we get is a writing of your seeing and to a degree there is accurate transmission . . . [that] completes itself within the two page opening format that you use. . . ."[35] Wah's reading becomes a graphic event.

Writing, for Wah, bears the double meaning of the Greek verb *graphein*: to grave, scratch, draw lines, draw, paint; to write, inscribe. Hence his movement from pictographs to pictograms. First there is the carving of the sign on a surface; then the erasure of the signifier that reduces the sign to a trace, a *gram*, the presence of an absence, the lost bond; and then the poet writing over the trace, what McCaffery calls "*palimpsestic* creation,"[36] locating within the discontinuous space of signifier/signified the presence of his imagining.

Its a place
humpbacked ant
a trap or map
foot/the *idea* of foot
. . .

SOME INTERPRETATIONS OF PICTOGRAPHS IN THE THOMPSON AND LILLOOET REGIONS

by James Teit

Sh		Unfinished basketry	Ok		An animal near a trail
		Dog	Ok		Rainbow
L		Crossing of trails	Ok		Lake with trees, island with trees in the middle
L		Fir branches	Ok		Unfinished matting
Th		Snakes	Ok		Stream running out of a lake with an island
Th		Stars	Ok		Man on horseback
L		Sun	Ok		A guardian spirit
Sh		Ruffed grouse	Ok		Range of mountains with valley in between
L		Grizzly bear tracks	Ok		Fir branch with needles plucked from one side
Th		Lakes and river	L		Bow and arrow
Sh		Ditch with piles of earth	L		Black bear tracks
Sh		Human with stripped fir branches	L		Hand
Th†		Moon	Th		Arrowheads or cedar branches
Th†		Four mountains and lake between	Th		Vision
Th†		Mountain with trees and gulches	L		Probably grizzly bear in den surrounded by forest or timber
Th		Lightning	L		Perhaps a spider
L		Goat	L		Perhaps a lodge
L		Canoe with people	L		The sun and rainbow
L		Pelican	L		Probably an otter
L		Eagles	L		Bighorn sheep showing horns, heart and ribs
L		Hunter with two dogs	Th		a. Mountains and glacier in valleys b. Water mystery
Th		Beavers	L		A salmon
Th		Dog or horse struck by arrow	Sh		Probably a bear issuing from or connected with something
L		Fish	Th		Trench with poles
Ok		Frog	Th		Crossing of track, sacrifices of food and pole
Th*		Paddle	Th		Face with tears
Th*		Bark canoe	Th		Coyote
Ok		Rising sun and earth line	Th		Cap with fringe
Th*		River and its bank	L		Animal showing backbone and ribs
Ok		Insects	Th		Insect Kilaxwa'us
Ok		Four quarters	Th		Lakes and river
Ok		Moon	L		Man with apron & feather headdress

The following abbreviations indicate the language group area from which the pictographic designs are taken.

Sh — Shuswap
L — Lillooet
Th — Thompson
Ok — Okanagan
* — Tattoo design
† — Pictograph designs on clothing and artifacts.

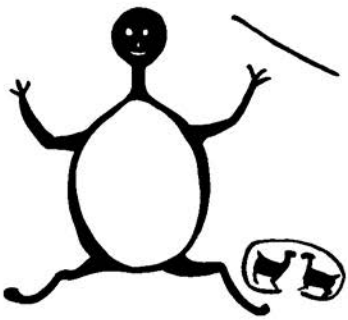
Reproduced from John Corner's *Pictographs in the Interior of British Columbia*, p. 29.

Wah's ideogrammatic writing signifies both the pictograph as a thing and the sound of the pictogram. This brings us back to Coleridge's transcreation: "Not the qualities merely, but the root of the qualities is transcreated. How else could it be a birth,--a creation?"

The feathers of my mind increase
as I reach for the choices
chance for what else
other than what I knew (know)
another talks to me (I think)
something (things) to see

The doubleness of this poem--it is both an enunciation of the pictograph it accompanies and an articulation of Wah's poetic process that selects what to transcreate--implies that Wah is not so much concerned with the eclipse of the signifier (as Corner is) but with the presence of the trace. The headdress of the pictograph becomes "feathers of mind." Wah deviates from Corner's interpretation of the anthropomorphic figure. Corner's interpretations, contrary to his call to fancy, seek to reestablish the broken referential link between picture and reality, to discover the correspondence between inscription and things. Wah's non-referential language, instead, takes him away from a hermeneutic approach to a heuristic one.

Wah does not view the pictographs as iconic figures with a fixed meaning. The diachronic difference that separates the pictographic designs from the pictograms becomes within Wah's book a synchronic relationship. Even when he uses some of the set ideograms from Teit's and Corner's dictionary, Wah gives priority to "the level of meaning at the moment of writing. . . ."[37] He repeats the text of a pictograph and in the process of repetition its silence that puzzles and its graphic structure (presence & absence + trace) become voiced and recover the agility of their signification. Here is a good example:



Ooh! Its a pumpkin
seed within seed
face to face-mask
twin thought, light
behind the eyes.

Wah wants "to allow the pictographs their graphic possibility. I allow that. I want to allow everything present between myself and the pictograph to occur and not necessarily for it all to occur in every instance but that it's all possible."[38] As a writer who is both viewer and reader, Wah animates the pictographs through his presence and the presence and sound of his language. Far from being an attempt to codify the pictographs, the pictograms affirm his detour from representation and his heuristic approach. They express the intertextuality of his writing as a graphic act.

Wah's emphasis on "the moment of writing" endows *Pictograms* with a dynamic dimension that explains the semantic relation between pictographs and pictograms: the dialogic symbiosis of the two texts. Since Wah shuns mimetic writing and interpretation, the dialogue is the only means of extracting meaning out of the seemingly mute pictographs. The Indian rock paintings and Wah's poems meet, converse, and relativize each other. Moreover, Wah is able to penetrate the trace of the pictographs and participate thus in their secret narrative.

Wah's dialogic method affirms his heuristic approach:

> if I was bound to translation, I would be bound to transcription in this case and a transcription of pictographs is impossible. . . . So I wanted to pay attention to all possible aspects of the 'trans' quality, the 'trans' aspect of transcreation, transliteration, transcription, trans anything. That is that I was involved in a process in which something was coming over to me, I was a mediator for it. . . .[39]

Wah breaks the silence of the pictographs first by transforming their diachrony into synchrony and secondly by focusing on the trace, their originary point. His graphic reading (inscription) of the trace generates a stream of words. As McCaffery says, Wah "attacks a language at its point of silence and demands speech from it."[40] Wah's persistent gaze upon the trace unravels its intriguing silence. Being a mediator, he provides the occasion for the trace to speak, while, at the same time, he lets himself respond to this speech. The signification that results from this dialogue is one of a joint effort and does not claim to be the text depicted on the rock face by the Indian artists. It is a free creative process, the interface of the creative tension between the two different discourses, as in the following poem:

There's a picture up Dog Creek
of a hullabaloo.
The basalt face remembers the event
with the insignia of a chickadee
and a constipated ant
who illustrated for an entire family
the dangers of a mountain lion
waiting down the path for dinner
so they didn't.

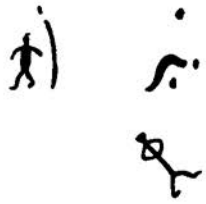
Here the trace speaks both through its physicality--the basalt rock, the location of the site--and through its memory, what is carried within its natural figuration. The "insignia of a chickadee" introduces the trace in all the authority of its engraved presence while it also signifies the absence of speech, the transience of voice which has, nevertheless, touched, left its marks on, the basalt rock. The "constipated ant" does not contaminate the pictographic text. It is a vivid illustration of the poet's dialogic contribution to the story that the trace deconceals, his participation in the hullabaloo.

Wah explains the dynamics of the dialogic play by referring to his composition of the poem "How does the jazz go?" (p. 15):

> If you look at the pictograph [opposite the poem], you can see a sliver of a harvest moon, several harvest moons in fact, but you can't see jazz. But of course you can see autumn. All of a sudden there's a story being told. So story, that is i.e. my life, is also part of what's being transcreated.[41]

In other words, the pictographs participate in the dialogue through reminiscence, the poet through his presence and

imagination. Wah supplements with fiction the signifiers of the story which, because of the "abstract quality" of the pictographs, the trace leaves unrevealed. The outcome is a subjunctive narrative. The "if," the question mark, or just the intentional open form of the poems, operate as reminders of the existing gaps:



What if there was a circle
and the circle was a lake
and all around the lake the stone
grew up the mountainside

but instead of surrounding
the circle was a vector of aquamarine
and rather than go round it, by turns
each of us would go into and therefore through it.

The crescent design in this pictograph is both the trace of a circle and the vector of the story. As a vector, it reminds us of the incompleteness of the circle, the perceptual presence of its absence. If the circle is the complete frame of the story, its form so to speak, then Wah uses the conditional mode to inscribe the story both as fragment and as whole. He is not enclosed within the circle but, by employing the conditional, he goes "through it," breaks the line that marks its imprisoning (not desired) completion. Even in poems where the story follows the affirmative pattern, the whole is juxtaposed with the part, a sign of the necessity of dialogue and of the dialogic play in process. That is,

. . .
some part of it
then all of it
. . . (p. 17)

. . .
a dream of myself as whole
parts of a body
. . . (p. 26)

Wah feels obviously more at home with the labyrinthine possibilities of the subjunctive narrative rather than with the clear outline of a teleological story. The subjunctive narrative allows him to locate meaning not in a single but in a double or plural source.

What maintains the continuity of the dialogue between the pictographs and the pictograms and what facilitates the eliciting of story is, as Wah remarks, the application of "a tactics of syntax to any picture you look at."[42] The syntax of the graphic images, their structural arrangement, becomes the thread that

weaves the poems. Wah supplements the grammar. He includes himself in this syntax both as a subject that enunciates the story de-concealed by the trace and as a "personalized" subject. He accomplishes this double role by employing the middle voice. The middle voice occurs in Greek and it is, as its name suggests, neither active nor passive. The action of the verb returns to the grammatical subject that performs the action. That is, the acting subject and the object affected by the action are the same person or the same thing. Because there is no middle voice in English, Wah's "sense of searching for a middle voice has been working between a kind of gerundial, participial thing, and a pronoun."[43] His use of the middle voice affirms his role as the mediator of the dialogue between the graphic images and his inscription. A look at one of the most dramatic pictographs will illustrate this:

I walked into a battle
with the forest
I tried on the buffalo-horn headdress
things happened to me
visions and pictures
two or three signs

I pushed one way
and I pushed another way

size gave dance to me
the deer showed me form

the larval, it
opens up.

The syntax of this narrative starts at the upper left of the pictograph and its drama, when transcreated into the pictogram, becomes clearly a personal drama. The story is told in the middle voice as Wah decides not to remain a passive spectator but to participate in the action. The "I" of the poem is the figure with the buffalo-headdress but, as Wah says, also "becomes"[44] him. It is this personalized "I" that starts the battle with the forest and it is the same "I" that initiates the vision by wearing the buffalo-headdress. The subject is both the agent of the narrative action and the person who experiences its results. Even the action of the transitive verb "push" is suspended in the pictogram as the verb lacks a definite object. The dialogue between the pictograph and the poem transgresses the intransitiveness of the narrative, thus enabling the poet to become the reader of his own drama, to write himself into the pictographic text.

The middle voice narrative of the pictograms has no hero. The concept of the hero demands an affected object, a battle won, another character defeated. It implies a subject that postulates a superior position because it embodies (concentrates) the ideals of a culture and practices that transcend ordinary action. The subject of the middle voice narrative, instead, does not possess superiority, although it can display extraordinariness. This subject is in keeping with Wah's anthihumanist stance. It is a subject that is always on the alert, that wants to merge with its surroundings: "one by one one can / become the other" (p. 31).

The double discourse of *Pictograms* enacts the drama of graphic image and word, of ideograph and ideogram. Wah's non-referential language, with its implicit resistance to interpretation, prevents him from being a mere beholder of the spectacle of the world. As a reader Wah discovers the narrative inherent in the alphabet of things. As a poet he inscribes himself on the textuality of the world. He is arrested within the dialogue he initiates.

NOTES

1. Fred Wah, "Mrs. Richard's Grey Cat: A discussion with Steve McCaffery and Pauline Wah about 'The Politics of the Referent,'" *Open Letter*, 3rd Series, No. 9 (Fall, 1978), p. 56.

2. "Mrs. Richard's Grey Cat," p. 56.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

6. "Cruise" from *Earth*, in *Loki is Buried at Smoky Creek: Selected Poems*, ed. George Bowering (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980), p. 70. Further references in this essay to Wah's poetry will be from *Selected Poems*, hereafter cited *SP*.

7. Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Robert Creeley (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 24.

8. Wah, untitled statement, *Tish* 1 (1961), p. 23.

9. *Lardeau* (Toronto: Island Press, 1965); *Mountain* (Buffalo: Audit, 1967); *Tree* (Vancouver: Vancouver Community Press, 1972); *Earth* (Canto, New York: The Institute of Further Studies, 1974); *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh* (Toronto: Coach House Press, Manuscript Editions, 1978; second draft, 1979; third draft, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981).

10. bpNichol, "A Conversation with Fred Wah. T.R.G. Report One: Translation (Part 3)," *Open Letter*, 3rd Series, No. 9 (Fall, 1978), p. 42.

11. This technical term, otherwise translated "making strange," was first introduced by the Russian formalist critic and writer Viktor Shklovsky in 1919. See R.H. Stacy's study of Shklovsky, *Defamiliarization in Language and Literature* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. 39.

12. George Bowering, "The Poems of Fred Wah," Introduction to Wah's *Selected Poems*, p. 11.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

15. Wah, "To Locate" (a review of Barry McKinnon's *Songs and Speeches*), *Open Letter*, 3rd Series, No. 7 (Summer, 1977), p. 111.

16. "A Conversation with Fred Wah," p. 45.

17. Wah, "Margins Into Lines: A Relationship," *Tish 4* (December 14, 1961), p. 83.

18. Bowering, p. 12.

19. The lines appear respectively in "Hermes in the Trees," *SP*, p. 45; "'fucking brown the fall air O'," *SP*, p. 26; "All Eyes," *SP*, p. 52; "A Missile," *SP*, p. 54.

20. Wah, *Pictograms from the Interior of B.C.* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1975). Further references to these poems, with the exception of reproductions, will appear in the text. The pictographs are printed on the left pages which are unnumbered and the poems on the right pages.

21. "A Conversation with Wah," p. 36.

22. John Corner, *Pictographs (Indian Rock Paintings) in the Interior of British Columbia* (Vernon, B.C.: privately published, 1968). I wish to express my thanks to Prof. Steinbring of the University of Winnipeg who gave me access to Corner's books.

23. James Teit, "The Lillooet Indians," Vol. II, Part V, of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition; rpt. in *Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History*, ed. Franz Boas (Leiden: E.J. Brill Ltd., 1906), p. 282. For a brief but comprehensive account of Teit's work see the last chapter of Corner's book. James Teit's surname is spelled Tate by Wah.

24. Corner, p. 4.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

30. Wah acknowledges Corner's book from which the "illustrations," that is, the pictographs, are taken. McCaffery, in his insightful review of *Pictograms*, "Anti-Phonies," *Open Letter*, 3rd Series, No. 5 (Summer, 1976), pp. 87-92, quarrels with Wah's use of the word "illustrations" because he thinks Wah "has

entirely missed the most rewarding feature of this book: viz. its dialectical, intersemiotic structure" (p. 91). Although I agree with McCaffery's statement about seeing the book as a "multiple text," I think that his point about the word "illustrations" is overstressed. It is indeed the wrong choice of word, but Wah has not "missed" the point. As his conversation with Nichol indicates, he does intend the two texts to react and respond to each other.

31. Teit, Plate IX, n.p., and Explanation of Plate IX, n.p.

32. Corner, p. 29.

33. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 15.

34. McCaffery, "Anti-Phonies," p. 88.

35. "A Conversation with Wah," p. 43.

36. McCaffery, "Anti-Phonies," p. 88.

37. "A Conversation with Wah," p. 39.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

40. McCaffery, "Anti-Phonies," p. 90.

41. "A Conversation with Wah," p. 39.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

ANDREW PAYNE / STEVE McCAFFERY

"NOTHING IS FORGOTTEN BUT THE TALK OF HOW TO TALK"

AN INTERVIEW BY ANDY PAYNE WITH STEVE McCAFFERY

The following interview was done in January 1984. A large portion of the discussion centres on a group of writers (McCaffery among them) who were publishing in the journal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E *between the years 1978 and 1982. While these writers form a very heterogeneous group, they share for the most part an interest in the question of reference, a question which they see as having its social and political as well as aesthetic consequences:*

> One major preoccupation of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* has therefore been to generate discussion on the relation of writing to politics, particularly to articulate some of the ways that writing can act to critique society. Ron Silliman's early essay, "Disappearance of the Word/Appearance of the World," . . . applies the notion of commodity fetishism to conventional descriptive and narrative forms of writing: where the word--words--cease to be valued for what they are themselves but only for their properties as instrumentalities leading us to a world outside or beyond them, so that words--language--disappear, become transparent, leaving the picture of a physical world the reader can then consume as if it were a commodity. This view of the role and historical functions of literature relates closely to our analysis of the capitalist social order as a whole and of the place that alternative forms of writing and reading might occupy in its transformation.
>
> (Bruce Andrews / Charles Bernstein)

This concern has led them to an active engagement with both the

corpus of late American literary modernism (Gertrude Stein, Charles Olson, John Cage, Jackson MacLow) and the work of a number of French theorists writing in the wake of Althusser (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault).

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E *produced 15 issues, the last of which appeared as a special issue of* Open Letter *(Winter 1982). More recently an anthology was compiled and appeared under the title of* The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book *(1984).*

Andy: Steve, I'm interested in your affiliation with the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* group. It strikes me that both in your own work and in the work of at least some of the others, there's been a shift from a sense of practice as critique of the referent (the referent seen as linguistic analogue to commodity fetishism)—

> at its core linguistic reference is a displacement of human relationships and as such is fetishistic in the Marxian sense. Reference, like commodity, has no connection with the physical property and material relations of the word as grapheme

--away then, from a sense of text as a sort of structural symptom or representation and toward a sense of writing as production and positioning of desire:

> Sound Poetry is much more than simply returning language to its own matter; it is an agency for desire production, for releasing energy flow, for securing the passage of libido in a multiplicity of flows out of the Logos. To experience such (as a break-through in a break-down) is to experience the sonic moment in its full intensity of transience.

Steve: In the context of sound poetry (exclusive of electronic tape composition) desire has been prescribed within a vitalist metaphor, a biological model of energy release and discharge. In Canada it resorted, through an anxiety around origin, to a very

sketchy history in Dadaism and both Russian and Italian versions of Futurism and to a naive (and to my mind a largely irrelevant) grafting of biology, thermodynamics and psychology, the compound alliance of which served to establish a dominant mythology of Origin: a privileging of the prelinguistic, child-sound, the Rousseauist dream of immediate-intuitive communication, all of which tended to a reinscription of a supposed presymbolic order in a present, self-authenticating instant. Rather than recuperation and presence I've come to see sound poetry through the economic notion of outlay. Such sound texts involve the subject, as a performative agent, along particular lines of obliteration in an economy in which "profit" necessarily entails "loss," and the closest theoretical articulation of this would be Georges Bataille's notions of "dépense" and "déjet." Most recently I've tried to deal with desire outside of sound performance, deal with it as a rupture within writing and resulting strictly from textual effects. Most important would be my investigations into the pronoun as a locus for a simultaneous break-down and recomposition (without prediction) of the Subject. This I first outlined in *Shifters* (Ganglia Press, 1976) and extended in *Panopticon*. Desire in both these works formulates itself not simply as a refusal of the symbolic order (which would produce a non-semantic text) but as a motor discharge from any one of a number of signifiers whose centrifugality does not seek a final destination in some kind of referent or signified but in the free-play and nomadicity of first-order signifying relations.

Andy: One of the things which has interested me about the so-called *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* group has been its reluctance to announce itself as some sort of a "vanguard." A comment of Michael Gottleib's (speaking of Charles Bernstein) seems to me indicative of this reluctance:

> Alternatively, or generationally, there arise forces in writing or art which feel constrained to either declare some irrevocable break or, equally apocalyptically, redemptionist "return" to some true or basic or original form. All too often the loudest of these declamations, upon examination, betray some educative flaw, the thinking up of which would reveal the transparency of the specious sort of originality so blandly asserted.

Despite the explicit disavowal of any modernist "teleology," I'm

left wondering, however, if there isn't a tendency— especially in some of the earlier, more stridently 'non-referentialist' pronouncements—toward a certain and characteristically avant-gardist 'negativity,' a relation taken toward the past which tends to produce a 'foreclosure' rather than an opening up of possibilities.

Steve: Personally, I've never sensed such a tendency. What *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* provided was a forum for a diverse range of topics and investigations. Its thrust was always heuristic along a central axis: poetics, but an axis which inevitably included the relationship of poetics to the status of text as a social fact, hence the social and political content of much of the magazine. You'll find very little direct attack or agonistic positions taken up against specific writers. The gesture of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* has always been a wide gesture: the relation of writing to reference, the relation of writing to politics and support for a "language-centredness" that refused to take for granted the habitual linguistic "givens" of vocabulary, grammar and the ideological "neutrality" and critical inviolability of meaning. This constant refusal to bracket the semantic order quite naturally led to the production of texts that focussed upon the whole contestable issue of how meaning is made. The alleged negative posture of the early writing may derive from the focus of concern at that time: a specific critique of reference as the semantic dominant and a concentration on the working of sub-sentence units like the word and even sub-verbal configurations (as in the early work of Coolidge, Bruce Andrews's A *Cappella*, several sections of *Legend* and say, a work like David Melnick's *Poet*). Rather than the posture of an avant-gardism, *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* seems to have significantly effected a redistribution of the scene of knowledge (the site of so many wills to power!) and an alternative application of the writings of the Human Sciences (Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida) in writing practice (viz. the production of literary texts) as opposed to their criticism.

It's chronologically very interesting. There was the early use of Barthes's *Elements of Semiology* and *Writing Degree Zero* which were such seminal documents for many contributors to *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. Ray di Palma, for example, was using those books in 1968 in his creative writing programme at Bowling Green. Silliman was working with linguistic analogues to *Kapital* in the early 70's and I hit upon Derrida in 1970 before any translations appeared. All of this vast, anterior energy prior to the more fashionable ventriloquations of the salaried and tenured academics. Here then was a situation of writers interested in a

sort of risk quotient, interested in the ratio of the clinamen, the creative gap between digested comprehension and creative application. So what emerged was a creative freedom and bricolagic appropriation of conceptual fragments, new hybridizing and grafting that was permissible because of the absence of a heavy investment in correctness and the old monologic pull of Truth and Totality. *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* accordingly disseminated an intense heteroglossia (Larry Eigner, Nick Piombino, Ron Silliman, Jerome Rothenberg, Dick Higgins, Brian Fawcett, Christopher Dewdney, Abigail Child, Chris Mason, Barrett Watten, Tina Darrich, Rae Armentraut, Michael Palmer, Michael Davidson, *et al.*), all of which resulted in an intersection of ideas, readings and retransmissions. Important too, was the articulation of that problematic interface between writing and philosophy (an interface which seems to be Derrida's central project) as two opposing, hegemonical discourses of legitimation. Writing (which I understand as the radical spatialized manifestation of language) has a sustained ability to perform and reinscribe itself in "literature" as an operation that doesn't require the philosophical legitimation of truth. Literature is a specific, outlawed reagent situated deep inside the Philosophical Adventure as Philosophy's radical Other. This is why Derrida's *Glas* and Mallarmé's *Un Livre* are such symplegmatic projects: vast and trembling, liminal works on the precarious margins of two systems of knowledge, or rather of two immense human projects: the philosophization of literature (through a forced legitimation via Truth and the rational) and the poeticization of philosophy (through a strategy of dispersals, pulverized pluralities, heteroglossia--the list could go on. Perhaps that's what such poeticization actually is: the thorough fragmentation of the Philosophic Space, which would then consist of a kind of unordered order, a pluralization (into something akin to Klein's "partial objects") of the notion of Truth. Or as I've called it elsewhere: the menstrualization of the Logos.

Andy: I wonder if we don't find in a lot of this work, a kind of monodimensionality of "tone" . . . at times too, a lack of humour.

Steve: Yes, Creeley mentioned this in a recent issue of *Sagetrieb*, although I'm not sure of the validity of any generalization here. I've personally come to see humour as a useful tonal-ideological destabilizer, an agent of relativization, dispersal and inversion (similar to Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalization of literature). Humour tends to operate as a visceral, or tactile investment upon the level of the verbal order; it is not entirely "of" language. In the work of most

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers, one notes the orchestration of several discourses, a violent centripetality of contexts that often registers as a single, mammoth de-contextualization. This orchestration frequently includes "humour" and often the humour arises from the radical contextual shifts and new neighbourhoods of combination. Beyond the humour (and its admitted eruptive value), the decontextualization of phrases and passages, the extreme reciting (and re-siting) of textual terms strikes me as having profounder political implications. Most especially, it leads a reader to the awareness of language's stratified nature and the dominant feature of discourse as linguistic sedimentation. In the work of Silliman especially, the strategy of resituation and reinscription of different texts carries the weight of a gesture: the effective de-politicization of discourse by a shift in context. Silliman's prose reads as vast, heterographic neighbourhoods, a sort of social experiment in verbal and discursive groupings. I would shy away from a full equation of this kind of valorization of the non-integrated part with either a philosophy of difference or a new variation on traditional humanism. For me, the power, the extremely human power, of heterographia is not its dramatic or anthropocentric inscriptiveness, but rather its ambivalent placement of language as partial discourses in contextual shiftings. This too, is dialogical rather than dialectical, for that third, synthesizing term of classic dialectic is neither petitioned nor produced. There is rather a grasp of essence as interaction, what Silliman has described as a language of the group, which is what our collaborative work *Legend* tries to develop.

Andy: What about Clark Coolidge and Jackson MacLow?

Steve: Coolidge comes largely out of Stein, from Stein's transformation of the sentence into pure temporality, so that suddenly, there's no surplus value in the sentence. The sentence is deprived of any syllogistic integration and what's left behind is a kind of sonic/phonemic inscription of time. That's why I think of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Stein's *Making of Americans* as in a very real sense the same work. Coolidge's early work I found very important for developing Steinian notions on the level of the isolated word. Works such as *Flag Flutter & U.S. Electric, Ing, Clark Coolidge* and sections of *Space* condense temporality into a tremendous economy of word and placement. There is something at work in those books other than "syntax." For instance:

rice
once car
harp

Here each word shares two identical adjacent letters ("ce" and "ar") and this produces a complex ambivalence between rhyme, assonance and difference. Already, in this text from 1967 we find Coolidge exploring the non-descriptive, non-referential aspects of words. These poems are profoundly relational but the relations established are not those of logic and the signified. Rather, they are signifier "activities." In Paul Carroll's anthology *The Young American Poets* Coolidge speaks of "hardness," "density," "soundshape," "vector-force" and degrees of "transparency/opacity," which resonate as profoundly new categories for textual engagements. In his later works, *Smithsonian Depositions & Subject to a Film* (1980) and *Mine: The One that Enters the Stories* (1982), Coolidge extends these explorations to the unit of the sentence and produces extended paragraphs of non-integrated sentences:

> Outside a snow had finally come to weigh the bare board January. The two articles could exchange positions without disturbing the balance of that sentence. In that way a perfect equation is assured, as with a tuning fork. I have no problem with that. I'll leave as planned for Nantucket by night. The file drawer was shut on the spilled can of coffee or tobacco. No meaning is perfect.

In the work of the mid-70's, *The Maintains, Polaroid* and *Quartz Hearts* the focus seems intermediate: a concern for line as both a supportive and fractive horizon for the sentence and a concern with the respective experience of a neutral (i.e. prose) line and value invested line (i.e. the significant line-end of traditional poetry).

MacLow, of course, studied Whitehead (as did Olson but with profoundly different consequences) and studied with Cage at the New School for Social Research. MacLow's books have a similar phenomenological surface to those of many *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* writers and he was a frequent contributor to *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. For the most part, however, his works are programmatic and chance generated, a strategy adopted by MacLow for the prevention of "taste" and "choice" from entering the work. Many of the texts read marvellously and stand as semantic matrices inviting innumerable experiments in

readership. Many are scored for performance and the "vocabularies" (texts constructed as a kind of expanded anagram from all possible lexical combinations and recombinations of the letters comprising a single person's name) have a marked effect as visual texts. Where MacLow's work (as too Cage's own mesostic workings of Joyce and Thoreau) falls most vulnerable to critique is in the danger of a fetishization of chance procedure which tends to reinscribe meaning into textual economy as a kind of "eventist mana."

Andy: Yes, I would agree as regards a "fetishization of chance," and perhaps too--and this is I think not unrelated to what you referred to as a lack of "tone"--the absence of a sense of writing as the production of a "subject," in whatever problematic way we would want to understand that term. It's a loss of what Barthes would identify as the domain of "pleasure":

> Pleasure is linked with the consistency of the self, of the subject, which affirms itself through values of comfort, expansiveness, ease--and in my case, to give an example, belongs to the domain of reading classical writers. As opposed to this, jouissance is the system of reading, or of enunciation, by means of which the subject, instead of affirming, abandons itself, undergoes the experience of prodigality which is strictly speaking JOUISSANCE.

I'm certainly not advocating some return to the text of "classicism," or a renewed faith in the socio-symbolic contract. Nor would I want to minimize the historical significance of a writer like MacLow. But reading him, and I'm tempted to say the same of Silliman, I can't help but feel frustrated by a certain programmaticness, a certain rigidity. Which, in a way, is nothing more than a confession that after fifty pages of *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* I'm getting bored.

Steve: I think MacLow would authenticate boredom as a valid feeling, although, in the case of any programmatic as opposed to processual writing, the order of rejection must be a double order: the procedure *qua* procedure and the textual productions resulting from that procedure. Several readers, for example, would find great delight in the lack of a subject-presence in the *Stanzas*.

Andy: I wonder if that faith in the rigour of a method is not now

exhausted? It was this rigidity I was referring to when I spoke of a "foreclosure of possibilities."

Steve: But aleatoricity is only posed as one of several valid possibilities for text generation . . .

Andy: Fair enough. To return to this question of "pleasure," this is of course something which is difficult to pose in critical terms. It, unlike desire, will not organize any revolutionary rhetoric. Remaining within the order of the "neurotic," it will always have eluded that vigilance, that heroism of the "modern." But herein perhaps, lies its value. Again, I would cite Barthes:

> Yet the position of pleasure in a theory of the text is not certain. Simply, a day comes when we feel a certain need to loosen the theory a bit, to shift the discourse, the idiolect which repeats itself, becomes consistent, and to give it the shock of a question. Pleasure is this question. As a trivial, unworthy name (who today would call himself a hedonist with a straight face?), it can embarrass the text's return to morality, to truth. To the morality of truth: it is an oblique, a drag anchor, so to speak, without which the text would revert to a centered system, a philosophy of meaning.

Steve: Yes indeed. I'm in absolute agreement. The danger in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* would be a certain ossification around the area of concensus and the rigidifying of its heteroglossia into a monologic canon. You phrased, I believe, the initial question in terms of a shift from a critique of reference to an incorporation of desire within my own texts. Personally, desire presents itself as an implication of text, not as a subjective force invested into the verbal order, or some kind of errant constituent of identity. Desire, for me, is of interest in its capacity to supplement the aporia discharged by a conceptual abandonment of both subjective and objective terms in the signifying process; its "revolutionary" nature inheres in its basic intransitivity and yet nonetheless has a profound bearing on the issues of both an identity and a subject. A long-term personal obsession of mine has been a speculation into the possibility of equating Text with Self and Self with Text through a redirection of textual forces and implications back to the issue of Subject.

To return to Cage for a moment. What seems to be the

danger in the mesostics is a fetishization of perception, but I'm not convinced that this danger is necessarily entailed by the procedural nature of the composition. Cage's mesostics are actually transcribed readings, or metascriptive actions upon a perceived textual embed. One is reminded immediately of Saussure's investigations of the Diphone and Mannequin structures in Saturnian verse and his studies of Homeric and Virgilian anagrams, that demonstrated the anagram and anaphone as being not simply rhetorical devices but a linguistic surplus beyond all authorial intention, and inevitable fact of language. In a curious way too, this stands comparison with Cage's own disproof of silence by demonstrating the unavoidable experience of sound. So one can read the mesostics as a parallel text to his silent piece *4'33"*; both pieces demonstrate the ontic impossibility of a cultural "given": that neither sound nor meaning can be foreclosed, that a certain surplus exists beyond silence and beyond a bounded text. I would, as a consequence, place Cage's mesostics on the border of a deconstructive stance. It would be interesting to approach Cage's and MacLow's writing through Wittgenstein's notion of the language game. Procedurality seems to suggest—if not the necessity, then certainly the advantageousness--of a competent awareness of the rules of the procedure. As a final word on Cage, the mesostics, in emerging from model as opposed to structure (exemplatistic in Higgins's sense), or to phrase it differently, emerging from a transcendentally governing matrix, must of necessity subject themselves to a foreclosure. They are still works within the confines of the bounded text and can find a logical placement inside the long tradition of the pattern poem, the *carmina figurata* or the *versus intexti* of Optatian which create visual "warps," distentions and almost moire effects through a verbi-visual lamination over the habitual lateralizations of a standard writing.

Andy: You referred to a "fetishization of perception." This is I think generally characteristic of late American literary modernism. "No ideas but in things" etc. I think, for instance, of Zukofsky's reading of Wittgenstein in *Bottom on Shakespeare*, the appeal to an attentive and loving gaze, a kind of pure regard for the Other which is understood as being prior to the violence of any interpretative act. "You need no tongue of reason if love and eye are I--an identity." David Melnick has commented well on this in his little essay "The Ought of Seeing."

Steve: I think what you have is an ideological confusion between pronoun and identity which graphematically shows itself in the

"hieroglyphic" status of the I on the page. I doubt that Zukofsky and Olson ever really tackled the pronoun as a shifter, never explored it as a complex topography of enunciator and enunciated and its fundamental status as a geographical marker and not an identity; a "here" rather than a "self."

Andy: Geography then, in terms of some sense of horizon?

Steve: In the sense of deferral and designation of place in a textual logic. Zukofsky, despite some marvellous efforts to the contrary, is still haunted by a notion of truth, the real, as being attainable as a plenitude through the immediate, transparent communication of language, and it's this parousial fallacy that infects his sense of identity. One thinks of Objectivism and one has to think of Husserl and Derrida's obliteration of the phenomenological reduction. In contrast I would cite bpNichol and *The Martyrology* as a more successful integration of a textual subject into the older narrative myth of the integrated, unitary Self. The powerful force of *The Martyrology* is precisely its irreducibility to a cohesive *oeuvre*. Attempts to do so fall short and miss the importance of writing as a practice within temporality productive of a play of open-ended meanings. Though less so than in say writers like Sollers or Silliman or Bernstein, Nichol nevertheless sees meaning as a highly local and volatile production within writing. I think the unfortunate metaphor he chooses is that of the poetic journal which seems to me to anchor it within the ideology of "good faith" that Barthes condemns; that wistful belief in a sort of recuperation of the processual within a calendrical frame, which to me links *The Martyrology* to those modernist texts that are still attempting to re-write *The Prelude*. The journal form is a buffer against loss, and as such a buffer redirects writing from a general to a restricted economy. It would be good, I think, to find a critic who is willing or capable of treating *The Martyrology* as a sign economy and not as a structure. It could be read, for instance, through numerous "economies": Freud's libidinal economy (especially pertinent would be Freud's notion of the double inscription); through Lacan's linguistic revision of Freud; through Bataille's general economy and through *Kapital* (meaning as a species of surplus value); through Baudrillard's hyper-reality of simulation. All of these economies, I suggest, could be brought together and relativized.

Andy: It's interesting you raise Barrie Nichol in relation to Zukofsky. What's interesting about both of them is their archaeological sense of language, a sense of the way in which history is deposited not simply in the order of the word but in

syllables, letters . . . (Guy Davenport comments well on this with regard to Zukofsky's Catullus translations) . . . in Nichol the fact that history, etymology, etc. get recognized as a positive production rather than some kind of return to origin.

Steve: Yes. And it's significant, I feel, that both of these writers have done "renegade" translations of Catullus, preferring to preserve and carry over the phonic body of the original Latin at the expense of putting into play the semantic order. What's important to realize, however, in Nichol, is the use of and attraction towards writing's 'pataphysical dimensions. His writing is full of this ludic sense of life, the potentially infinite play of meanings, close at times to a carnivalization of writing, where privileged zones are challenged, inverted and playfully taken apart. Nichol inherits 'pataphysics from Alfred Jarry as The Science of Imaginary Solutions and it gains its greatest force and most effective application in *The Martyrology* as an erratic, unpredictable, gestural swerve "away" from linguistics and structuralism. If we take, for example, the following specimen from the end of Book IV, which I feel is representative of this kind of play:

capitals
of earthly doubt
forgive us
the d will out
as the b drops thru its
half note
configuration
i is singing scale
i hails you
Hart works the 'e'
reversing the conjunction
finds the d n a
connective
the heart of
writers & their obsessions

This is less a play on words than a play within them, a kind of analytic *lettrisme* that opens up the sign to its own paralogisms and its vertiginous potentiality to fracture and multiply its meanings. Accordingly, the classical reliance on a supposed one to one correlation between signifier and signified, between word and meaning, gets decisively shattered and meanings are

inscribed as micro-reports upon their own precarious status as fixed terms. This dismantling of words as an integrated whole and the playful pursuit of the polysemous perversity of all the liberated parts achieves a centripetal dissemination that can be described as deconstruction.

Andy: Steve, to return to the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E group for a moment. I wonder if we might raise another question; a question as to the sociology, or at least the sociality, of the production of literary (or language) works; a question of audience, of an intended political effect. I wonder if certain of these works don't evince a certain nostalgic desire for a situation beyond the sociosymbolic contract; a desire to establish themselves as what Kristeva would call "a semi-aphonic corporality whose truth can only be found in that which is gestural or tonal"?

Steve: I think it imperative not to institute a model exterior to the evidence of the texts themselves and what I've stressed throughout is an intense heterogeneity among the so-called L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E writers, a heterogeneity that possibly reflects the current "Philosophy of Difference" (emerging on both sides of the Atlantic) and which Foucault announced in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* back in 1972. Its theoretical and methodological thrust can be traced back to the pioneer deconstructions of Nietzsche and Marx (the latter's status as a "deconstructionist" albeit limited and with strict reservations would nevertheless make the subject of a wonderful interview !!!!!!!!) and most specifically the concerted de-mythologizing of numerous concepts to show their covert and irreducible basis in figuration. The early works of Silliman, Andrews, Bernstein and myself were overtly political, and the Politics of the Referent issue of *Open Letter* (1977) still stands as a diverse position paper on our work and conclusions up to the middle of the 70's. The political thrust there was quite clear: towards a foregrounding of the reader-writer relationship as both a diachronic (hence a changeable) relationship and as a fundamentally socio-political configuration. From this we worked by way of analogy and homology towards an exposure of fetishism as an operation within the domain of representation and reference and we attempted to return the scene of readership to the realm of semantic production. (How can we involve the reader in the making of the making of meaning?) In hindsight, I can admit to certain naïveties in that approach. This writing was all produced before any of us had discovered Baudrillard's seminal work *The Mirror of Production* which challenged with an incontrovertible conviction the subliminal valorization of

production and use value as a privileged positional opposition to consumption and exchange. In the light of the Baudrillardian "proof" that use value is but a concealed species of exchange value, I would say now that the gestural "offer" to a reader of an invitation to "semantically produce" hints at an ideological contamination. I've also come to feel that the majority of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* texts yield great rewards from a double reading, that first announces them as a political gesture *within* the literary text, offering this inward sitedness as a linguistic analogy to the political, which in itself matures as a statement somehow "across" a distance; and secondly, from a reading that indicates their status, not as forms or structures, but as operative economies. Here, the notion of expenditure, loss, the sum total of effects of a general economized nature, would emerge to relativize the more "positive" utilitarian ordered reading. I would deny throughout, however, the appeal to "a semi-aphonic corporality" or of any kind of nostalgic return to a pre-sociosymbolic matrix. If any area of recent text production is susceptible to such a criticism it would be that variant strain of sound poetry that anchors itself in performance, supports the relegated status of the written text as an inert, secondary figuration of the "breathed instant," and which draws its ideological defence from a certain strain of 19th century vitalism that persisted through Dadaism and Futurism up to the early work of The Horsemen and Owen Sound. Among *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* writers there was a common feeling that the return of "meaning" as a post-philosophic operation within the activity of discourse to a productive rather than consumptional zone of action, entailed a political gesture of the deepest and most contemporaneous urgency; that it effected a diachronic change in the reader-writer relationship (which, as a change *per se*, seemed to entail a political assertion of both roles being history specific) which opened up the possibility (appealing at the time and still appealing to many) of a rehumanization of the linguistic sign.

As to your point regarding a resistance to the symbolic. At no point do I feel that this has occurred or is occurring. What is resisted is the integrated, syllogistic momentum of the symbolic when the momentum is reinvested into compound meanings(s). And even further, the resistance restrains the philosophic (metaphysical) notion of an unmediated, transparent connection with "reality" at the other side of language. This, more than anything, has been the philosophical restriction upon language for thousands of years and whose complicity with the capitalist mode of production is evident in countless philosophic texts from Plato through Descartes to Searle and Austin. So a Politics of Discourse is everywhere present in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* writing

as a text-by-implication. But what emerges strongly in the work of Silliman, Bernstein and Andrews, among several others, is not the Politics of Discourse but politics as discourse. If there is to be a rhetorical imposition on all of this, it is to effect a political implication and not imply a political effect. As regards Kristeva's mention of truth in the citation, I would stress that the intention among contemporary writing must always be towards an utter dismantling of the notion of TRUTH as anything exterior to the signifying practice; and to suggest by this that truth is not the destination of a referential function in language, but a writing production, a writing effect *per se*.

Andy: To a certain extent we've already raised the problem with Cage and MacLow, of a fetishization of chance, of what we might speak of as a valorization of process, a writing understood as being without subject, memory, history . . . is this not, in a certain way, the same problem we encounter in Olson, or at least a particular reading of Olson, one which concentrates on, say, his objection to Milton's "disregard" of syllabic quantity, or in his discussion of the sentence as the subordination of the individual signifying unit (word/syllable) to an abstract structuring? (This is, for instance, the general tenor of an essay that Don Byrd wrote for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*.) It seems to me that this whole question of prosody/syntax needs to be thought more carefully, that what gets referred to as hierarchization imposed by grammar, the sentence etc., needs to be understood not as some imposition alienating the word or syllable from the univocity of its appearance in the mouth or on the page through a process of abstraction, attribution of exchange value, whatever (and here what's being appealed to is, I think, a notion of syllable as a kind of pure idiom, some absolute indissolubility of form/content). This appeal is perhaps part of a more general ideology of 'production,' which ideology neither Baudrillard nor Derrida have failed to recognize:

> But we must beware: this formula, "la chose est le recit," implies no performative presentation or production. What we have here is not that conclusion, readily drawn these days, using a logic of truth as presentation substituted for a logic of truth as representative equivalence, according to which new logic the narrative is the very event that it recounts, the thing presenting itself—present itself—by producing what it says.

It seems to me that what goes unrecognized in this ideology of production is the internality of "coding" to the signifying "instant," an internality which is responsible for the heterogeneity of that "instant," the impossibility of its ever being present to itself.

Nor could this valorization of process be distinguished from a certain strain of American transcendentalism (from Whitman, Pound, right through to say Cage or Ammons). Here, the subject is understood as attaining to an absolute integrity, an identity of body/consciousness in each of its signifying instants.

Steve: The subject of history (its dictates and its availability to the act of writing) is a complex one with Olson. There is first that obvious sense of history at work in his poems, of history as "fact," as document, to be worked with and turned over. This gives you the strong Comtean, strong positivist strain in his work. Document, in Olson (and perhaps more so in Pound) operates as a kind of syllable, a unit of unmediated plenitude, reconnecting with a displaced present. This is decidedly not history in the way that Gibbons, Hegel and Marx are history. Olsonian history, this documentary-syllabic history, traces back to Herodotus, the most notoriously "unreliable" of Greek historians, whose sense of history was the transcription of "hearsay." Olson's attraction to Herodotus is an attraction to that same mechanism that Derrida exposes in Plato: metaphysics' appeal to a double standard of writing, to the lower, debased, materialist sense of marks on a page, which (in Plato) was submitted to a metaphoristic *aufhebung* that recast it as a "purist" writing of truth's marks in the "soul" and "heart." Herodotian history is history that aligns itself "innocently" with speech. I would say, in fact, that it aligns itself identically with the syllable, as a species of Plato's metaphoric "writing." But history's other presence, should I say, the other history's presence, is experienced through those grammatological notions of space, gap, deferral and trace structure. And this history locates in writing's debased profile, within the graphesis of its temporality and spacing. This space is the radical other to the syllable; it constitutes history's blank side, history's mutism, and precisely because it resists any logocentric appropriation. Olson's affinities with certain theoreticians of German Romanticism has so far gone unregarded, but the following brief passage from Frederick Von Schlegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Language* could have prefaced any anthology of projective verse:

> Properly syllables, and not letters, form the basis of language. They are its living roots, or chief stem and trunk, out of which all else shoots and grows. The letters, in fact, have no existence, except as the results of a minute analysis; for many of them are difficult, if not impossible, to pronounce. Syllables, on the contrary, more or less simple, or the complex composites of fewer or more letters, are the primary and original data of language. For the synthetical is in every case anterior to the elements into which it admits of resolution. The letters, therefore, first arise out of the chemical decomposition of the syllables.

We will trace this organicist metaphor, this appeal to arborescent analogues through Hamann, Herder, Humboldt down to Olson's "dance of the intellect" and "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE." There are rich, deconstructive pickings here in this particular style of reasoning which involves, as its underlying matrix of assumption, the privileging of all anteriority as a positive value and a binding of various satellitic terms and notions to this matrix: syllable-synthesis-origin-cause = speech-breath-presence-immediate-being-as-truth; set in opposition to the compound matrix of writing: letter-analysis-posteriority-meditation-imprint-corpse-as-death. We would not wish to deny the intense and revolutionary polyphony of *The Maximus Poems* nor *The Cantos*. But what needs address in these great works is the radical blind spot around the issue of vocalization *per se*, a primary absence of rigour at the conceptual collision of *text* and *voice*. Behind his essay on "Projective Verse" and "Letter to Elaine Feinstein" is a sense of communication as still being exchangist in nature. Something is transmitted and received, and writing's "negative" relation to outlay and death is never admitted nor received. Olson seems oblivious to writing as a fundamental trace structure in which each "syllabic instant" must always be a breached presence. For the presence that writing institutes is always a presence that announces an irreducible absence within the very system of the sign. This is the crux of representation and its current historical obliteration, that whenever a term (X) stands for (or represents) another term (Y) then neither term can be present. X is always standing for something else and so is never there, whilst Y, in being stood for, is always delayed, postponed and deferred from being there. After *Of Grammatology* (of which the above is an

absurdly simplistic reduction) this irreducibility of the space, the gap, the breach, assumes a far more fundamental status than any pure idiom of the syllable.

Andy: To return to your earlier remark regarding a fetishization of chance, perhaps we can say that the subject masters the other, masters chance, by its very availability to contingency (for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you, etc. . . .). Hence, an ideology of *openness*, a failure to recognize the internality of death to the economy of production. I would want to hesitate then, before conceding to any simple characterization of narrative as surplus investment. [This refers to a remark made elsewhere in conversation.] In a way, yes. But then what else? You've spoken elsewhere of two of your own works, *Panopticon* and *An Effect of Cellophane*, as reinvestigations of both the sentence and of narrative. You've also made the comparison with Sollers (Philippe) whose novels Kristeva refers to as "a listening to the time of Christianity." I wonder if we are not still dealing with an Augustinian subject, a subject of "memory"/subject of "science" bifurcation . . . something analogous I think to the Freudian distinction between "truth-work" and "knowledge language." So the subject of "memory" (I who I am insofar as I have accomplished heterogeneity, I who am my Father in me, my true self) this impossible subject, this subject as eschatological object, at once organizes the order of the symbolic, of science, and at the same time produces it as an incessant rupturing. This subject, which is about a relation to Death, to Law, this subject is still in a way a subject of "castration," of *aufgehoben* . . . surplus investment? . . . maybe . . . let us say a necessary co-extensivity of desire and its repression. Which is perhaps what Lyotard is getting at when he says "the death instinct is the reason why machines can only work by fits and starts" and "the 'Ah, not to have been born' . . . is not merely admissible, it is a necessary component of desire." Or Kenneth Burke, more succinctly, in his misquotation of Keats: "Beauty is turd, turd Beauty."

Steve: The deepest implication in Freud, and the one which Lacan has best elucidated, is the radically textual nature of the psyche. We both inhabit and inhibit an unconscious that is structured as a language. This projected emergence of a post-Freudian "textual" subject seems to be of critical importance. It puts the very notion of a "subject" in doubt and, at best, poses that subject on the ruined concept of a Self. The latter being no longer tenable as a unitary whole, nor even as a memory/science bifurcation, I think we best look for a viable notion of subject in something like Kristeva's notion of a

subject-in-process within an instinctual and symbolic economy. Part bound, part articulated by a verbal order (the self of the proper name, the name of the Father in the Son) and yet incessantly striated and (as you aptly put it) ruptured by instinctual drives that surge through the linguistic order and are felt in (but never identified as) rhythm, intonation, this Subject as plurality will haunt, repeat and delete simultaneously the numerous eschatographies that inhabit and (at this historic moment) describe the act of writing as thanatopraxis. Against the post-modern valorization of process it would offer the notion of a *complete dispensibility of procedures*. The subject in process is not to be identified then with the text as process. In the death of Modernism via Olson there has been a murder denied. And to finally revert this to the sexual: let us remember that the high priest of the syllable makes no mention of the woman in *The Maximus Poems*:

> Being of language? It even calls on me to represent it. "I" continually makes itself over again, reposits itself as a displaced, symbolic witness of the shattering where every entity was dissolved. "I" returns then and enunciates this intrinsic twisting where it split into at least four of us, all challenged by it. "I" pronounces it, and so "I" posits myself—"I" socializes myself.

With the subject set in process (jouissance, death) we have lost the traditional sense of Self but gained a Text. And Text is a body. Let me end this with another quotation from Kristeva:

> Remember Artaud's text where the black, mortal violence of the "feminine" is simultaneously exalted and stigmatized, compared to despotism as well as to slavery, in a *vertigo* of the phallic mother--and the whole thing is dedicated to Hitler. So then, the problem is to control this resurgence of the phallic presence; to abolish it at first, to pierce through the paternal wall of the superego and afterwards, to reemerge still uneasy, split apart, asymmetrical, overwhelmed with a desire to know, but a desire to know more and differently than what is encoded-spoken-written. . . .
>
> The other that will guide you and itself through

this dissolution is a rhythm, music, and within language, a text. But what is the connection that holds you both together? Counter-desire, the negative of desire, inside-out desire, capable of questioning (or provoking) its own infinite quest. Romantic, filial, adolescent, exclusive, blind and Oedipal: it is all that, but for others. It returns to where you are, both of you, disappointed, irritated, ambitious, in love with history, critical, on the edge and even in the midst of its own identity crisis.

Sept.-Oct. 1984

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NORMAN WEINSTEIN

EXPLORING A POETICS OF DISSEMINATION

GREAT EXPECTATIONS
Barrytown: Open Book/Station Hill, 1982

by Kathy Acker

Kathy Acker's prose presents a formidable challenge to any critic schooled in the rigors of conservative literary criticism. This opening to a recently published story suggests the author's mockingly defiant challenge toward academic critics:

> NO FORM
> CAUSE I DON'T GIVE A SHIT
> ABOUT ANYTHING ANYMORE
>
> This writing is all just fake (copied from other writing) so you should go away and not read any of it.[1]

The back cover of *Great Expectations*, while maintaining a somewhat more cordial tone, offers the identical emphasis upon copied writing. This "plagiarized Bildungroman" is described by the unidentified blurb writer in the following fashion:

> Out of the agony of the author's total disenchantment, or plagiarism, appears beauty: given text is laid on given text; language is no longer used to control but to be; the reader touches language rather than is controlled by it; meaning changes to tapestry.[2]

My aim in this commentary is to probe the issues raised by Acker's conscious identification of her writing with plagiarism, the connection that such a perspective has with Derrida's notion of "dissemination," and the consequence of such a stance for post-modernist poetics. If such an approach seems inappropriately elaborate for an author who has been characterized in the national media as a "Fuck chanteuse," whose books have been received in the press as a variety of fashionably hip pornography, I can only suggest through my reading that *Great Expectations* warrants several readings at more than a surface level. An extensive conversation which I had with the author this year about the composition of *Great Expectations* confirmed my earlier intuitions about the author's conscious craft. Acker described herself in that dialogue as a "process" writer whose ideas are very much in line with Derrida's about language and writing. Readers of Acker's art criticism in places like *ArtForum* already know her seriousness of purpose. Perhaps I am belaboring the obvious because I, also, stumble when faced with the task of discerning value in a plagiarized text. How many of us began our public education in writing in grade school with hearing a teacher's absolute injunction: "DON'T COPY!" Plagiarized English compositions were rewarded with failing grades, perhaps even incriminating letters to parents. One sought throughout one's adolescence and young adulthood the original voice in writing (much as one sought a unique and discrete ego-identity to maintain in society). Language was, and still is, introduced in public school curriculum as a public utility that one comes to personally *own*. "Finding one's voice." As if we could stake out a claim in the wilderness of language which would eternally bear the stamp of our individuality.

It is precisely this notion of a self somehow apart from language that Charles Bernstein critiques in a recent interview:

> I think the whole persona conceit capitalized on a sense of 'finding a voice' which to me is finding altogether too much too fast, and getting stuck with it. I'm not that interested in myself--in recounting facts and observations about that; though how the 'self' gets formulated as an article of socialization seems to me insufficiently explored. So I'm interested in the situation--the ontology--of the person in the world and what constitutes that.[3]

Such an ontological quest would necessitate an examination of how each of us comes to embrace certain language sets as our own. For a child to be initiated into white American middle class culture that child must learn certain linguistic decorums. A vocabulary fitting for future white collar occupations is unconsciously memorized in the early grades. "Proper" grammatical structure is learned within the context of writing letters of inquiry to future employers in the upper grades.

These rules of linguistic decorum are violently rejected by Acker in *Great Expectations*. Further, these standards of decorum in language were rejected by Dickens in his novel of the same title which Acker chose as a foundation text to build her variations upon.

Judge a thief by the kind of product she obsessively steals. Acker boldly, unapologetically lifts the opening three sentences of Dickens' novel verbatim except for altering a name from "Pip" to "Peter." These are the opening lines of her first chapter, rightly titled "PLAGIARISM." The paragraph following the lines from Dickens moves into a contemporary narrative about boyfriends, family traumas, and Tarot. No attempt is made by Acker to credit Dickens, to forge logical bridges between the time dramatized in Dickens and our own era. Two units of language and simply set side by side.

Yet a careful recollecting of Dickens's *Great Expectations* will reveal something more of Acker's intent. Dickens was concerned in that tale with revealing unmercilessly the hypocritical facade of the Victorian middle class. The myth of the pure intentions (not to mention behavior) of the "English Gentleman" was put under his magnifying glass. The result? The main character, Pip, is less interesting as a character than as a sociological occasion to prove the utter moral frivolity and sham of the Victorian gentlemanly ideal. The only totally decent character in the entire text is Joe Gargery, a fact made all the more interesting by the fact of Joe's illiteracy. He is the only man in Dickens's book, save the unredeemable criminal-beasts, who can't read or write like a gentleman. I would suggest that Dickens was acutely aware that middle class language training prepared children for an adulthood rift with civilized deceits. Hence Joe with his unschooled tongue and hand is a refreshing (though occasionally incoherent) voice, a faithful Caliban in contrast to the bourgeois bastards.

The connections to Acker's stance in *Great Expectations* are multiple. First, Acker packages her writing as "plagiarism," implying that she violated that most sacred seal of middle class literary respectibility, the copyright law. Further, she acknowledges copiously copying the texts of others without citing

specific credits. Such a posture will naturally summon from the mouths of the defenders of literary propriety charges of "irresponsibility," "shiftlessness," "trickery." These charges are all the more fascinating when we realize that they have traditionally been issued by the upper and upper middle level of English and American society against the repressed lower classes. Literature composed by blacks and women in earlier centuries was not taken seriously and/or published by the white male ruling classes because women and blacks were considered mentally inferior to white males. Acker stands that old sexist charge that women authors would be capable of little more than pale imitations of great male voices on its head. *Great Expectations* is replete with the stolen words of Dickens, Proust, Flaubert, Keats. But the work is in no manner imitative of any male author. It is the arrangement of excerpts from those authors that reveals the complexity and depth of the woman writer.

A key image that clarifies what Acker does with these "found" male texts comes from quilting. Certain motifs (alienation from family, sexual humiliation, terror as psychic constant) surface, fade, and then reappear in each of Acker's three chapters in *Great Expectations*. These themes are developed through a number of texts by other authors as well as in her own language. The lines between Acker's "own" voice and that of others is forever blurred. And such a blurring is precisely the point of Acker's book. She would propose that we learn to read texts in the manner with which we have learned to "read" modern art. Midway through *Great Expectations* she rapidly shifts from a sordid telling of a failed sexual fling with a lover to:

> Cézanne allowed the question of there being simultaneous viewpoints, and thereby destroyed forever in art the possibility of a static representation or portrait. The Cubists went further. They found the means of making the forms of all objects similar. If everything were rendered in the same terms, it became possible to paint the interactions between them. These interactions became so much more interesting than that which was being portrayed that the concepts of portraiture and therefore of reality were undermined or transferred.[4]

The act of reading while keeping simultaneous viewpoints in mind is made easier by Acker presenting us with layers upon

layers of various texts sandwiched together. The quixotic quest for the one "proper" way to read Acker's text can be readily abandoned as we come to realize that her text is not simply "her" text but a quilt-work, a tapestry of writings from different ages and contexts. Is there a "right" way to visually "read" a Persian rug, an Appalachian star quilt? And if interactions are so much more interesting than that which is being portrayed, then a book of intertextual interactions might prove more interesting for a postmodern reader than a narrative which insists upon the traditional modes of static character portraiture.

The elaborate cross-play of textual strategies proposed by Acker's *Great Expectations* calls for a reader with the willingness to go along with Acker's revolutionary desire to overturn traditional orders of literary manners. No literary past master is kept in sacred regard. Hence Acker's appearances in journals identified with "punk"/new wave sensibility. In a review of critical essays by Hans Magnus Enzensberger she writes:

> In this culture in which various verbal and other forms of control are constantly deluging our minds, the only possible poetry is that which destroys and cleans out.[5]

To which the following sentence from *Great Expectations* should be added:

> Any action no matter how off the wall--this explains punk--breaks through deadness.[6]

So we can understand her willingness in *Great Expectations* to locate a paragraph from Flaubert next to one by the author of the *Story of O*. Only shock can break through typical reader complacency. Upsetting juxtapositions of famous texts (texts which have been through that academic embalming process that creates "classics") cause us to re-examine them for the first time from multiple perspectives. In one of the most lyrically enrapturing sections of *Great Expectations* Acker asserts:

> The only reason, at bottom, why I enjoyed looking at Proust's words was because I said to myself, 'It's pleasant to have so much verdure at my bedroom window,' until suddenly, in the vast verdant picture I

> recognized--but brushed by contrast in deep blue simply because it was further away--the spire of the church at Combray, not a representation of that spire, but the spire itself, which, bringing thus before my eyes distance in both time and space, had come and outlined itself on my windowpane. . . .[7]

The implicit sensuality in Proust's sentence was a resonance I had missed until Acker's use of Proust brought that quality in his phrase to my renewed attention. Acker reminds us that revolutionary writing is an act of restoration as well as destruction. Famous and infamous texts alike must be reconsidered so that a radical transvaluation of values can occur through their interacting. She offers this program in the opening chapter of *Great Expectations*:

> ... the passing wind immediately modulates the least organic noise that's why one text must subvert (the meaning of) another text until there's only background music like reggae: the inextricability of relation-textures the organic (not meaning) recovered.[8]

Translate this notion into the language of Jacques Derrida in his analysis of Philippe Sollers's novel *Numbers* and one finds this elaboration of Acker's concept:

> Hence, all those textual samples provided by *Numbers* do not, as you might have been tempted to believe, serve as 'quotations,' 'collages,' or even 'illustrations.' They are not being applied upon the surface or in the interstices of a text that would already exist without them. And they themselves can only be read within the operation of their reinscription within the graft. It is the sustained, discrete violence of an incision that is not apparent in the thickness of a text, a calculated insemination of the proliferating allogene through which the two texts are transformed, deform each other, contaminate each other's content, tend at times to respect each other, or pass elliptically one into the other and become regenerated in the repetition, along the edges of *an overcast seam*.[9]

I want to emphasize in both Acker's novel and in Derrida's analysis of Sollers's novel, the action of text subverting text, an image that brings to mind Jack Spicer's haunting line from "Imaginary Elegies": "Tarot cards make love to other Tarot cards." Acker's book suggests a state where texts "make love" with other texts to create a polysemous textual offspring. Such writing must be sharply differentiated from that which collages "found" texts (the two classic instances in prose being Joyce's *Ulysses* and Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy). Derrida's insight into the structure of Sollers's novel holds true for Acker's *Great Expectations*: eliminate the various borrowed texts and no original structure composed by the author will remain.

To offer an analogy in modernist poetics: compare the historical references in Williams's *Paterson* to those in Reznikoff's *Testimony*. Erase the historical quotes in *Paterson* and nothing of the presence of the poet will suffer diminishment in one's reading of the poem. On the other hand, Reznikoff's *Testimony* is composed of nothing but words other than his own arranged metrically. What is unique in Reznikoff's composition is the arranging of the texts in poetic lines; the prima materia of the poem is, by definition, totally impersonal.

The activity of composing a book from this Derrida/Acker perspective involves aesthetic decisions relating to grafting strands of found language upon each other. Grafting is a central concept in Derrida's *Dissemination*:

> That is how the thing is written. To write means to graft. It's the same word. The saying of the thing is restored to its being-grafted. The graft is not something that happens to the properness of the thing. There is no more any thing than there is an original text.[10]

With his characteristic penchant for subverting the usual academic habits of textual criticism, Derrida reminds us that the idea of a "pure" and "original" text is an illusion. How could we, from our present temporal perspective, begin to determine the originality of Dickens's *Great Expectations*? How can we assume how Acker "corrupted" the original Dickens narrative when we have no way to ascertain how Dickens found and arranged the language for his *Great Expectations*?

Derrida's *Dissemination* suggests that a new method of reading must be brought into play to comprehend a text like

Sollers's. I would suggest that the same method need be applied to Acker's book:

> The act of reading is thus analogous to those X-rays that uncover, concealed beneath the epidermis of one painting, a second painting: painted by the same painter or by another, it makes little difference, who would himself, for lack of materials or in search of some new effect, have used the substance of an old canvas or preserved the fragment of a first sketch. And beneath that, etc. . . . . All this requires that you take into account the fact that, in scratching upon this textual matter, which here seems to be made of spoken or written words, you often recognize the description of a painting removed from its frame, framed differently, broken into, remounted in another quadrilateral which is in turn, on one of its sides, fractured.[11]

Such a reading style brings two artists to mind. Substitute the word "palimpsest" for "X-ray" in Derrida's text and H.D. will be evoked. She saw her visionary poetry as another line of writing upon that palimpsest, the world-soul-consciousness-body, *anima mundi* glowing through the worst horrors of modern war. The other writer recalled is Gertrude Stein -- she who, like Acker, "read" the canvases of Cézanne and the Cubists until she forged a methodology that would carry over their vision into writing. These women tinkered with the deep structures of language and writing in order to transcend the artistic decorums of their age and touch the timeless sensuous strands of language. Acker's *Great Expectations* can be read in light of that tradition of poetic experimentation.

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4. *Great Expectations*, p. 81.

5. Kathy Acker, "Review of *Critical Essays* by Hans Magnus Enzensberger," *ArtForum* (Jan. 1983) : 71.

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

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JENNY PENBERTHY

REVIEW

THE FULL NOTE: LORINE NIEDECKER
Devon: Interim Press, 1983

Edited by Peter Dent

How shocking to learn in Peter Dent's Preface to *The Full Note: Lorine Niedecker* that "in 1966, she could write (to Charles Tomlinson) 'England is dear to my heart—notice of LN so much stronger than in this country,' when the superb Fulcrum Press editions of her work were destined to be pulped . . . ." No wonder *North Central* and *My Life By Water* are impossible to trace and, more importantly, that attention to her poetry has been minimal. Only one full-length work (a collection of essays and appreciations published as a special issue of *Truck* magazine, 1975) has appeared since her death in 1970. Now from England comes the first *book* on Lorine Niedecker's poetry, giving her the notice that she cherished 20 years ago.

The Full Note is 100 pages densely packed with tributes, critical appraisals, two of her long poems, "Wintergreen Ridge" and "Darwin," and fragments of letters to Cid Corman and Kenneth Cox. The best of the criticism already printed in American and English periodicals finds safekeeping here, thanks to the good judgement of editor, poet, and publisher, Peter Dent.

The survival of Lorine Niedecker's poetry is due almost entirely to the work of poets. Poets first recognized and lauded her. Basil Bunting: "No one is so subtle with so few words"; "One of the finest American poets at all, besides being easily the finest female American poet . . . LN never fails: whatever she writes is excellent." Gilbert Sorrentino: ". . . remarkable poetry, as in

Catullus and Emily Dickinson." Louis Zukofsky: "I read only two modern women poets, Moore and Niedecker. One feels closer to Niedecker." Peter Yates: "Lorine Niedecker is the most absolute poetess in our language since Emily Dickinson." Poets published her too: Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorne Press published *My Friend Tree*; Cid Corman published most of the poems she wrote in the 60's in *Origin*; Stuart Montgomery published *North Central* and *My Life By Water* for Fulcrum; Jonathan Williams published *T&G* and has recently announced her Complete Collected Poems.

Why have the critics been so slow? Kenneth Cox, in a reprinted analysis originally published in *The Cambridge Quarterly* Spring 1969, marvels at her poems where, so often, lucidity defies explication: "It is almost impossible to say how it is done" and ". . . [the poems] convey a manifold meaning beyond the reach of analysis." Ed Dorn's reprinted introduction to *My Friend Tree* which Ian Hamilton Finlay originally inserted into the volume on a loose sheet "to help readers towards the poems and towards buying," states somewhat shamefacedly before the plain speech of the poems: "I don't 'understand' these poems very well. The 'meanings' are always a little mysterious, to me." (Lorine Niedecker wrote Ian Hamilton Finlay that she didn't understand Dorn's introduction very well!) Jim Burns names his poetic tribute "The Simple Things are Hardest." But, in spite of the challenges posed by her simplicity, *The Full Note* does contain some excellent criticism--Kenneth Cox and Michael Heller's pieces among its best.

Kenneth Cox was one of many writers who corresponded with Niedecker in the 60's and the selection of extracts from her letters to him makes a revealing companion piece to his essay. Niedecker's isolation in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, led her to take advantage of the mail's opportunities--particularly in her sustained and pivotal relationship with Louis Zukofsky. Letters offered her both a full engagement with another consciousness and a model for the scale, voice and diction of her poems. The unstudied talk in letters between friends (co-respondence) is the language of much of her work. "Many of the poems," Kenneth Cox points out, "suppose someone to be saying them . . . . They catch the inflexion of voice, establishing relations between persons speaking, spoken to and spoken of." Niedecker's letters to friends are quite clearly an essential adjunct to a discussion of her poems. Besides the extracts from her letters to Kenneth Cox (published here for the first time), *The Full Note* includes a selection of extracts from her 10 year correspondence with Cid Corman. We can look forward to the publication of Lisa Pater Faranda's fine edition of Niedecker's complete letters to Corman,

already excerpted in *Conjunctions 5*.

Niedecker's avid reading of the collected letters of other writers (Henry James, William Morris, Jefferson, Adams, Wallace Stevens, and many more) provided her with a further source for poems. "Darwin" is based largely on letters the itinerant Darwin wrote to his friends and family. "Lake Superior," Donald Davie's subject in his essay "Lorine Niedecker: Lyric Minimum and Epic Scope" published originally in *PN Review 25*, draws uncharacteristically on her reading of *history*. The result is somewhat different from the poems drawn from letters ("Darwin," "Jefferson," "His Carpets Flowered" and others) and may explain why Davie baulks at the forbidding "consistency with which [the poem] proceeds from [its] initial premise." But parts of Davie's essay make it clear that his reading of the poem is too hasty. He complains, amazingly, that "the Indians, the indigenous and original inhabitants of the Lake Superior region, figure in Niedecker's poem nowhere at all, except as the savages who tore out poor Radisson's finger nails," when Indians and whites appear throughout the poem in contexts both good and evil. It's absurd to find a colonialist bias in a poem that so successfully balances a short period of human history beside and against the grand, disinterested scale of natural history.

However, Davie's annotations of "Lake Superior" do convey a sense of the bookishness concealed behind the clear plain speech of Niedecker's lines. Her scale is intimate—she tackles history but with an eye for the domestic, the private person behind the achievement. Hence her attraction to the incidental history recorded in letters. Here is Part II of "Darwin":

Cordilleras to climb -- Andean
peaks 'tossed about
like the crust
of a broken pie'

Icy wind
Higher, harder
Chileans advised eat onions
for shortness of breath

Heavy on him:
Andes miners carried up
great loads -- not allowed
to stop for breath

Fossil Bones near Sante Fe

Spider-bite-scauld
Fever
Tended by an old woman

'Dear Susan . . .
I am ravenous
for the sound
of the pianoforte'

Charles Tomlinson's "Introduction: A Rich Sitter" misleads by invoking Olson and Melville and the vast formative American spaces. Geographic space is not a striking feature of her poems. If anything, her poems explore vertical space: she maintained a steady interest in surrealism and the unconscious; in the later poems she probed geological and etymological accretions. Her native Black Hawk Island ("red-winged blackbirds, willows, maples, boats, fishing (the smell to tarred nets), twittering and squawking noises from the marsh.") provides much of her material. Perhaps the strong sense of a circumscribed and dense locality—she left Wisconsin no more than a dozen times in her 67 years—helps to account for her audience amongst British poets. Their scale is similar. Still, it is heartening to find that Charles Tomlinson has here revised his earlier piece, published in *Agenda* in Spring 1969, by adding more poems and removing his early judgement of Niedecker's work as "minor poetry."

Scholars may have been slow to recognize her skill but there has been no lack of poetic tribute. Jonathan Williams gathered thirty poems for *Epitaphs for Lorine* and *Truck* 16 published a further thirteen. The ten short poems in *The Full Note* constitute a fitting homage. I like especially Alan Halsey's "4 Rounds for Springtime" based on Niedecker's "Wallace Stevens," and Jonathan Williams's quirky "6 Misericords for L N in Misericordless Wisconsin." At last some humour has entered the poems written for a poet whose humour (in both senses) is among the strongest reasons to read her.

bpNICHOL

REVIEW

BY VIOLENT MEANS
Toronto: Blewointment Press, 1983

By Cathy Ford

One of the great pleasures of reading is when an author whose work you have followed in various little mags & little press publications over the years suddenly, in your admittedly subjective opinion, seems to make a quantum leap in her poetic practice & starts to write the kind of poems you always suspected she was going to (which, you suppose, is why you've kept reading them all these years). Such is the case with Cathy Ford in her most recent book *By Violent Means*. Something is happening in her syntax. A tendency that was always there, a leaning towards symbolism *per se* & hence multiple meaning, has finally found its way from image into the play of the line. What results is a much more exciting, much more powerful poetry.

Take, for example, "Rape of the First Woman in Paradise" where the following lines appear:

> Perhaps it's the blood dripping.
> That makes them shut their eyes.
> Perhaps it's the fact.
> You're actually breathing.
> Still.

She could've written it without the periods, & in a lot of her earlier poems she did. But those periods push the words, push the meanings, & the number of possible readings (all of them relevant to the text at hand) multiply. This is a poem you want to re-read,

want to linger over, precisely because you get new echoes from it with each encounter. Or, in "The Poet Intoxicated and Standing Alone In a Crowded Room":

> These days are different.
> Then you thought.
> You woke in a dream.

Once again the periods push what could've been a conventional sentiment into new realms. It's worth pointing out here, too, that Ford could not have gotten the full richness, the full multiplicity of meaning, with a conventional line-break. She needs those periods & uses them extremly skillfully.

But lest you think periods alone make this news, check the use of simile in "Hotel Dillentante":

> Smell like run through your fingers like
> your hair.

where "run" gets to function both as a noun & a verb (producing a triple level of meaning in one image) & the line break forces two quite different readings onto the second "like." This is the mark of someone whose years spent at her craft are paying off. She's moved past influence & is clearly her own person now &, in that process, has begun to chart some very very interesting territory.

The prose poems too are tiny acts of revelation & reveal the same skillful manipulation of materials. For example, this small excerpt from "The Tiger Lily, The Bouquet":

> The air cleared. Yes, while it is perfectly clear, one only wishes to speak act be, over and above doing anything to hurt knife pain pick a phrase. Clear also that very fragrant air between the dust of the wings of a dragonfly and its shadow zagging over the ground, caught in the room, whitework's worn ghosts, ribbonwork.

Here the use & withholding of the comma builds both the urgency of the text allowing, again, a layering-in of meaning that brings you back again & again purely for the pleasure of that play of

nuance.

There are poems that don't work as well, images & lines that lack real focus ("she laughed a silver laugh," etc.), that suffer from banality (". . . the slow soft rain/warm as a summer night"); other observations that seem predictable, or based on reaffirming what the poet's friends & audience already think & believe. But I take that more as a sign of how new the real news in this book is, so new that the old poetic practice still lingers there, shows thru. (This assertion is proved by the fact that the same poem that includes the banal line quoted above also has the marvellous ". . . soft as sperm tender/a smooth thigh, sweet, suite".) In the book as a whole there are so many instances of a clear wonderful intelligence that we are left moved by the language & what the author has allowed us to see/feel with such clarity. All, finally, we ask of our reading.

GEORGE BOWERING

RECENT READING 2: Journals

In the late fifties and early sixties our days and nights were made exciting by the little magazines edited by and for the people that Don Allen called the New American Poets and that Ray Souster called, picking up the linguistic fashion created by the Canadian government, New Wave Canada. The magazines, *Yugen*, *Island*, *Burning Deck*, and so on, became small presses, and the reputations of the writers grew or vanished, and pretty soon there were not many exciting magazines around—just hundreds of competent poets and a very few journals that exhibited the verve and partisanship of crusaders as opposed to gatherers. Nowadays we have a few to turn to—*Sulfur*, a different *Island*, *Conjunctions*, *Writing*, and maybe a little so on.

But in those days of two decades past there was not much in the way of periodical criticism and scholarship and gossip regarding the new writing. The unofficial magazines gave us the new *Maximus* poems, while the critical journals discussed the social implications in the poetry of Edward Arlington Robinson. But the buccaneers wanted respectability with middle age, and so now we have magazines that document and argue the proceedings of the post-Williams "tradition." I thought that in case readers of *Line* might have missed some of the recent developments, I would perform a little selective survey.

The third issue of *American Poetry* (Dept. of English, University of New Mexico) features transcriptions of remarks by James Laughlin, founder of New Directions, made during a week in September 1983, while he was visiting UNM. These pages make a nice companion to the Laughlin remarks recorded in a recent number of *Line*. Probably no person in America knows Pound and Williams, Rexroth and Levertov better than does Laughlin, their publisher, and he delights in countering received opinions or introducing light to dark passages. Here he reveals Ezra Pound's liking for Whitman and the fact that he recited Whitman's poems by heart.

As a casual reader of Pound biographies, I had never before heard that Pound thought he was being taken to Washington after

his capture by the Yanks, "to be sent to Tokyo to be an aide to General MacArthur to help him convert the Japanese from Shintoism to Confucianism." Laughlin also tells interesting stories about his decisions as a publisher, mentioning, for instance, that if he had been smart enough to appreciate *Watt* he would have been Samuel Beckett's publisher, something that we in retrospect would have seen to be the normal state of affairs.

A collection of essays by Robert Kroetsch made up the fourth number of the fifth series of *Open Letter* (104 Lyndhurst Ave., Toronto, Ont., M5R 2Z7). Now fifth series Nos. 8-9 constitutes a collection (205pp.) of essays about Kroetsch's work.

The collection is the kind of mix we have come to expect in such treatments of well-received current authors. There are a couple of pieces by Kroetsch, an interview, and articles on his fiction, poetry and criticism. Some of the titles are clunky examples of the academic/chic mode ("Meaning and Narrative Strategies in the Novels of Robert Kroetsch"). Some are continuations of ongoing projects, such as Eva-Marie Kroeller's treatment of the idea of photography in fiction. Kroetsch's most recent novel, *Alibi* comes in for a lot of consideration, including three full essays.

Fans and critics of Robert Kroetsch are challenged to be *au courant*, partly because he is the most innovative of our writers with reputation, and partly because he offers us so much of his own new literary theory. Hence Shirley Neuman's brave essay on narratology and Kroetsch's poem, "The Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof," which has not yet appeared in a book.

Every year there are more pages of Kroetsch interviews published than there are cattle on the great western plain. He is the focus of attention in Vol. 6, No. 3 of *Cross-Canada Writer's Quarterly*, a slick news-stand journal that appears to be one of those "writer's magazines" but aspiring to literary company.

There is an interview by Patricia Keeney Smith, some poems from Kroetsch's ongoing "Advice to my Friends," a profile, an essay, and a long review of *Alibi*. If your news-stand has hidden the magazine in the back of the bottom row beind the sewing magazines, enquire to Box 277, Station F, Toronto, Ont., M4Y 2L7.

The British Columbia government has closed David Thompson University Centre in Nelson because it was a successful fine arts school and thus a source of hope for culture. The Kootenay School of Writing there was the best creative-writing school in Canada, and was producing a journal called *Writing*, in my opinion one of the best writing magazines in the country. Now the KSW has decided to continue without government help, in Vancouver and Nelson, and to keep the

magazine going. Its address is Box 69609, Station K, Vancouver, B.C., V5K 4W7.

No. 9, the Spring 1984 issue, features two interviews, one with Audrey Thomas, and one with Fred Wah. In addition, it continues to associate work from our language-centred writers with material emerging from the KSW, whose students took two of the CBC literary prizes last year. No. 9 has work from Michel Beaulieu and Michael Ondaatje.

One of the most expensive journals in the U.S., and the most elegantly printed, is the semi-annual *Conjunctions* (33 West 9th St., New York, 10011). It is also exacting in its ambition, having published most of a new novel by Guy Davenport, and many letters of H.D. In No. 5, the Fall, 1983 issue, there are thirty-five pages of letters from Lorene Niedecker to Cid Corman. Readers who have grown up with the beauty of books made by Jonathan Williams or Graham Mackintosh will be glad to have a row of *Conjunctions* on their shelves, both for the production and for the rich editorial ideas.

Fall 1983 was also the publication date of the special Robert Duncan issue of *Ironwood* (Box 40907, Tucson, AZ, 85717), a usually eclectic journal with sometimes surprisingly-nice statements to make. The Duncan issue is very attractive, contains photographs, and weighs in at 200 pages for $3.50, the best bargain I have seen lately.

There are poems, of course, set in Duncan's preferred typewriter face. There is a chapter of the longest ongoing and excerpted prose book around, Duncan's *The H.D. Book*, and also a plan and publishing history of its parts. There are also forty pages of Duncan's letters on poetry to Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser. Then there are eleven essays on the poet by critics such as Hugh Kenner and Michael Davidson.

Finally, in case there are any readers of *Line* who do not subscribe to *Sagetrieb* (305 EM, University of Maine, Orono, ME, 04469), I will mention that it is "a journal devoted to poets in the Pound-H.D.-Williams tradition," exactly what people who came around when I came around have wanted to see since we were tyros. Vol. 3, No. 1, the Spring 1984 issue, has Robert Hogg's essay on Olson's "Dogtown," along with articles on Williams, H.D., Snyder, Oppen, Creeley, and others.

With all these publications and others not mentioned, one experiences a little reflexive worry that one's writer-heroes might be turned into some kind of canon. But at the same time one has to admit to a pleasure in not being alone anymore.

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