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TOTAL SYNTAX

Barrett Watten

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Not this.
What then?
—*Tjanting*

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Introduction

Each of these essays was given originally as a talk to a community of writers, and each was addressed to a collective state of mind at a particular time. Each was intended, by its own argument, to make its way out of a situation in the total present in such a way that there was no going back, building a space to work in out of what were only nebulous imaginings at one time. This characterization of the critical project is very far from traditional critical thinking. Rather than arguing from texts to interpretation, I wanted to extend an argument by virtue of the disjunctions between previous methods and as yet undiscussed literary facts. This is the kind of thinking that could only have been done in front of a community of writers actively in pursuit of the art.

The first question of this volume is not that there is a school of critical thinking known as Russian Formalism but that a reading of that work makes a new value for writing in the present. The dependence of some recent thinking on static structuralist models of language is particularly accessible to criticism from the position of the predecessors of structuralism. Jakobson's insights into poetic language were often poetic in themselves, and the reliance of his method on numerous analogies between levels of language is in many ways an extreme formulation, as the more self-conscious and radical methods of the Formalists point out. My intention is not to show a congruence between such models of language and what is essential to writing in the present but to "systematically deform" the understanding of recent writing by means

of the earlier, more mechanistic approaches. It is by virtue of his radical simplification of poetic language that Jakobson yields such insights. Poetic language can only be seen as more extreme and more active as a result.

This kind of conflict between approaches is essential to any development of method, both for writing and for criticism. The intensity of the relation of politics and psychology in Surrealism, for example, gives a sense of the limits of the present; meanwhile the social and literary meanings of that method are on the verge of disappearing forever. There is no translation of the Surrealist impulse, but a reading of Surrealism gives off shock waves of insight when placed next to, for instance, the almost automatically produced positions that developed in the early issues of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine. The motivations for each of these methods appear more difficult, arbitrary, heroic, and particular to their times. This kind of argument between total approaches, and the resistance it entails, is optimally the act of reading—which sets up fundamental obstacles to sense by virtue of the never entirely accessible meanings of the original impulse for the text. What results in the understanding, given this resistance, is a new order of thought.

The question of the value of theory in the present literary landscape is wide open. On the one hand, the tradition of postmodernism locates this value in an inherence of the subject—a radically different theory of knowledge than the one I have attempted above. Part of Olson's role as a polymath involved his ability to incorporate, almost physically, masses of "evidence" and yet still come up with the essential scenarios of romantic subjectivity. Values for theory have never been so mistrusted, in literature, as since his influence, but this mistrust is at least symptomatically a social critique. The period of Olson's work was witness to, simultaneously, the growth of a monstrous scientific elite and the failure of political programs in the United States with anything like a theoretical basis. The retreat into the self indicated a victory

for the anarchy of production, whose theory of knowledge is now filed under "Sociology," while the prospects of method, which had seemed so promising for Olson, disintegrated under the impact of these developments.

On the other hand, actual poetics, that is, developments of method leading to the production of texts, have been isolated from these imbalances in the social sphere—apart from the work of Olson, or up until very recently. This is not surprising, given the lack of accumulated evidence as to what these changes would mean. No one writing in 1960 could have anticipated the fundamental realities of daily life in 1980—the culture has been irrevocably changed, largely by virtue of a sequence of viscerally understood social defeats. The information has been so consistently negative that what literary theory appeals to the sum total of these actualities has been of necessity imported from elsewhere. The failure of the postmodernists to develop a comprehensive poetics is now matched, in the university, by the overdevelopment of critical theory without any sense of American writing since 1945. The critical response has been to its own lack of knowledge of recent work, and conversely these critical methods have remained obscure and irrelevant for most active writers. This gap in the structure of intellectual life is also specific in real time and space—outside of small communities in San Francisco and New York, there is little of actual social scale that matches the issues being developed, in virtual opposition to critical practices, by the most advanced literary work. The question of theory is immediately relevant in that it leads to the absence of social equivalents for the "collective state of mind" that is literature at present.

On another level, these theoretical imbalances point to the necessity for making new relations among prior, fixed approaches. If individuals have made symptomatic adjustments (or exceptions) to the world as it is by means of a set of relations we might call a "language," the question is how to make these "languages" available to a larger social scale. One

can proceed by analogy from these mechanisms of individual control to a hierarchy of social forms—the present clearly is constituted in terms of many such analogies, which are daily inculcated by the media. The "creative" is the necessity of a new order of understanding, and the characterization of individual "languages," especially as to be found in forms as determinate as those of modern poetry, is not a static concern. The question does not reduce to "language." In any language there are numerous claims of individual languages; what is important is to tie the characterization of these languages to the possibilities of change. To this end, languages should be characterized in terms of their forms, the mechanisms by which they are constituted and by which they reproduce their conceptual order in individuals, and not as static abstractions.

Increasingly, the arts are taking on social and political meaning in relation to the construction of these individual languages. Though not stated exactly in these terms, this has been a primary motive for work in poetics since the modern period, particularly in Surrealism and Russian Formalism. Similarly motivated critiques have developed in the last decade in the periodicals *Art-Language* and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. The question of poetic method is essential to these critiques; criticism here leads directly to creative work, not just to description and analysis. Individual artists who have avoided explicitly systematic approaches, such as Charles Olson and Clark Coolidge, have also made major contributions to method in the form of their total projects. And the construction of individual "languages" in the arts, as in the work of Hart Crane or Larry Eigner, shows possibilities of method even where the authors themselves have nothing to say on the subject apart from the fact of their work. If these poetics are inherently theoretical, theory likewise has its poetics, as is apparent in the writings of Robert Smithson and the Art-Language group. There is a deep relation between the constructive potential of a self-conscious method and the

order that is poetry, even if there are significant differences of scale. Both theory and creative work can be considered as constructed languages. One of the central assignments of the present work is to show that there are irreducibly a number of approaches to how these languages are built.

Finally, the question of "language" itself is wide open. It is clear that the total form of a language, even for linguists, cannot be described. The exclusion of the work in linguistics since Chomsky in this book points to such an initial delimitation of the concept "language." In Chomsky's generative grammar, language is strictly formalized to provide criteria of validation for its own analysis. There seems to be no other question of the use of language (at least by adults). The "best account of the data" is, however, very far from the literary series, and this fact accounts for the shortcomings of linguists in the Chomskyan tradition when confronted with literature. The separation of linguistic levels in Chomsky leads to minimal results in application to anything but a model for grammar. The particular advantage of prior theories of language, particularly those of Jakobson, in which different levels of language are connected by analogy, is still counterbalanced by the arbitrary imposition of these analogies on a wide range of facts. Jakobson's idea of language is without boundaries; Chomsky's exists on the head of a pin. In going back to the Formalists as a point of departure, I am concluding, for the present, that the characterization of language can best be addressed historically, as a literary fact in itself. The extension of the "creative" into these areas is likewise a necessary literary act.

1

Russian Formalism & the Present

I want to make a distinction between two different ways of looking at writing. The first is from the point of view of technique. In editing *This*, my criterion of interest has been, in general, that a given work comes to an identity with its particular technique. How it comes into being is the same as what it is. And I want to oppose to that what the Formalists called the "subjective aesthetic approach," in which writing takes its basic values from psychology or biography. An example of this subjective aesthetic approach to current American poetry would be the recent discussion of Charles Olson as a "big man," in other words a biographical myth reduced to physical size. To quote one of the Formalists, Eichenbaum: "We had to oppose the subjective aesthetic principles espoused by the Symbolists with an objective consideration of the facts"—the facts being the writing itself.

I also want to make a claim for technique as the most dynamic approach to writing. The recent talk on Olson was a good example of the static approach. From the point of view of technique, one could talk about Olson for days—there is an incredible formal range in his work. But the discussion of Olson's "bigness" is not so much even biography as a tautology of the literary fact: one keeps saying "this is Literature" and eventually it becomes "Literature." So Olson compares

with Emerson and Thoreau, but does Louis Zukofsky really compare with Henry James, or Clark Coolidge with Whitman? This is the point of view of working an author into the canon; it is not the point of view of a writer in the middle of his or her work. The Formalists took a constructive approach to the nature of literary fact; this they called *literaturnost,* and they had a linguistic model for that fact. Nothing was excluded from consideration; for example, Byron's biography was discussed as a literary device. Arguing the poet into the academy assumes a static, tautological biography, leading to "bigness" or "Frank." I want a discussion of writing that leads to what can be done.

There has been a tremendous sophistication of technique among certain writers I want to deal with in this talk. Technique has assumed many of the constructive qualities that the Formalists saw as *literaturnost.* But there is almost a block at this point—a number of writers have thrown themselves into technique with such incredible force that getting beyond that technique, expanding its range, becomes a problem. In some cases technique has been proposed as a static value toward the production of one kind of text. The Formalists' position was formed against the background of many different kinds of writing. And it assumed a social context for this position that now seems intrinsic to their method. Starting from the point of view of technique did not limit discussion to technique but led to a way of seeing what was most active in writing.

The Formalists were literary critics; they functioned as a school between 1915 and 1930, when they were largely suppressed. The movement had its origins in two separate groups. The first to get started was the Moscow Linguistic Circle, whose main figures were Roman Jakobson and Osip Brik; discussion began from the linguistic point of view. There was interest in dialect and folklore, and poetic language was brought up as an object for study in linguistics. The Moscow Circle was influenced immediately by Saussure. The

other group was OPOYAZ, an acronym for the Society for the Study of Poetic Language, which was based in St. Petersburg. The main figures there were Viktor Shklovsky and Boris Eichenbaum, coming together from the point of view of literary theory. They were taking on the problems of meaning in poetry as raised by the activities of the Futurists and the Symbolists. So about 1916 several things were happening: there was modernist literary criticism being undertaken, "the scientific study of literary fact"; there was the interest in relating literary fact to linguistics; and there were the poets—Mayakovsky went to meetings of the Moscow Circle.

There were two main nineteenth-century influences on the school.[1] The philologist Alexander Potebnya made a distinction between poetic language and practical language, arguing that poetic language has its own laws and should be studied as such. He also evolved a theory of poetic language that was important to the Symbolists. The basis of this theory was that poetry by means of metaphor condenses the forms of the world into images. So that poetry is basically thinking in images. One gets to the world through the image; the trope is referential and has metaphysical implications. The other influence was the folklorist Alexander Veselovsky, who collected vast quantities of literary materials and organized a kind of inductive poetics from them. For example, he would be interested in a comparison of plot in a number of folktales coming out of a certain area. He was an anti-individualist, seeing literary forms apart from biography, apart from individual writers.

Then there was the influence of Saussure, who saw language as relational, relative to itself. All parts of language bear on each other: "In language there are only differences" leads to the distinction between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is the capacity to understand what is heard; *parole* is language as spoken. It's literally "I talk, you listen"; language goes from one person to another. How speech is understood is different from how it is made. There's speech, and then

there's hearing—the message comes over the wire, to be interpreted by the code. Saussure spoke of the verbal sign as relative, uniting not the thing and the name but the concept and the sound. Saussure also criticized prior linguistics, which were evolutionary and which tried to derive linguistic laws from changes in language in time. He separated the synchronic model of language at one point in time from the diachronic model of its succession from point to point. This succession of moments in language was transferred by the Formalists to the literary plane.

The third influence on the Formalists was the poetic background. Up until 1915 the dominant poetic group in Russia was the Symbolists: Andrey Bely, Alexander Blok, Valery Bryusov. The basis of Symbolist technique was a belief in correspondence: "That no event is not penetrated, in intersection or collision with, an eternal event" is Charles Olson's American version of this view. The poem then stands between the outer world and the subject in a world of forms. A problem for the poet is to generate new symbols, to keep the symbolic function of poetry alive. A good American parallel to that would be Jack Spicer's theory of dictation, in which the poem is dictated by a voice coming from outside, possibly from the moon. The metaphor of the radio is the search for new symbols. Also for the Symbolists the implicative character of illusions was more important than the specificity of words. So that one would want a rich symbol—as a current example, Robert Creeley's "The temper is fragile / as apparently it wants to be, / wind on the ocean, trees / moving in wind and rain" is indistinct word to word, but it has a tremendous connotative power.[2]

The Symbolists saw the organization of sound in a poem as being a reflection of corresponding semantic planes. Rhyme is a sound parallel between two semantic planes, implying a correspondence. Thus rhyme tends toward a unity that is a significant structure of the world. In a contemporary

example, Creeley rhymes *walk* and *talk*. Both of these words signify activities that the organism carries out. The fact of correspondence on different planes tends here toward the poet himself. The poet's production of new symbols evokes magic, breaking new ground in the otherworldly. There are a number of religious ideas connected to this—Creeley prays to Hermes, "god of crossed sticks." Of course, the Formalists simplified the issues of Symbolism as I am doing here. They made them crude—when a continuity breaks, the issues become simplified and one starts from that point.

Coexisting with and very much in reaction to the Symbolists in 1915 were the Futurists. One of their manifestos was called "Declaration of the Word as Such," which argued for the existence of poetic language in its own right. Poetic language begins with sound in the self-evident word; it does not end in correspondence with the outside world. New meaning comes from new sound; in this the Futurists were close to Dada and to the Italian Futurists. To get this sound exclusively outside, their self-presentation rose to furious heights. Another characteristic of the Futurists was the fragmentary nature of their production; their books were often collective, handwritten in editions of thirty copies. Velimir Khlebnikov's *Worldbackwards* was hand-crayoned; this tradition was carried on by David Burliuk, who did books that were one sheet of paper, systematically numbered. And the Futurists were involved in a collective poetic process, "swapping egos," wearing uniforms, and in general coming close to the status of a cult. There were definite nonindividualist, Asiatic influences, as well as elements of primitivism.

I want to focus on sound in the poetry of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov. The following are two poems by Mayakovsky in which sound at the level of the phoneme is used as a structuring device in the poem. Hopefully the sound pattern is perceptible without knowing the Russian, though the Formalists never isolated sound from its semantic component:

SHUMIKI, SHUMI I SHUMISHCHI

Po ekham gorada pronocyat shumi
na shepotye podoshi i na gromakh kolyos,
a lyudi i loshadi—eto tol'ko grumi,
slyedyashche linii ubyegayushchikh kos. . . .

The sound element is foregrounded. Radical consonant clusters carry through the poem—they might be described as self-evident; they make themselves heard.

IZ ULITZI V'ULITZU

U-
litza.
Litza
u
dogov
godov
rez-
che.
Che-
rez . . .[3]

Mayakovsky's early poetry can be described as asymmetrical, fragmentary, and metonymic—parts are proposed as things in themselves; for a street scene he gives a lamp. Mayakovsky invented numbers of new words, neologisms, and he constructed quasi-kinships between words and sound levels that worked not as parallels but as steps. Parts of speech are often left out; the poetry is highly condensed, pointing toward its use as oratory. It was capable of being heard at a distance, its image sticking out as irregular, active. The word *I* in Mayakovsky's poetry comes across first as sound, structuring a mode of address. This bears on the issue of the "I-writer" in Formalist theory. From this use of the pronoun it is a short step to "literary biography as a device."

Khlebnikov is in a way the polar opposite of Mayakovsky. Where Mayakovsky was interested in design, Khlebnikov

left many works unfinished, inventing and discarding new forms, scribbling all over sheets of paper. He used words in Russian poetry as they had never been used before, foregrounding archaic roots, dialect, neologisms, and word combinations that gave forth unusual "light of the image." He was not a primitive—his background was in Asiatic languages and non-Euclidean geometry; he was interested in boundless generation, the "proliferation of new forms." One of his inventions was *zaum*, "transrational language," a poetic language operating on the phonemic level, ascribing meaning below the level of the word. David Melnick's *Pcoet* is an American version of *zaum*. From Khlebnikov's famous "Invocation by Laughter":

O rasmyetes shmekhachi
O zasmyetes shmekhachi
Shto smeyutsya shmekhami
Shto smeyantsvuyut shmeyal'no . . .

The poem plays on *shmekh*, root of the verb *shmekhat'*, "to laugh." A number of endings are added to *shmekh*, creating new words—laughers, laughists, laughites, laughity. . . . The next poem presents what the Formalists called a verbal image, "bobeobee," in which transrational language creates new meaning through sound:

Bobeobi pyelis gubi
Veeomi pyelis vzori
Pieeo pyelis brovi
Lieeei pyelsya oblik
Gzi-gzi-gzeo pyelas tsyep . . .

Which translates:

Bobeobee sang the mouth
Veeomee sang the orbs
Peeio sang the brows
Lieeeey sang the aspect
Gzee-gzee-gzeo sang the chain . . .

"Thus on a canvas of would-be connections / In another dimension there lived a Face" [trans. Gary Kern].[4]

From there we arrive at the main tenets of Formalism. First, poetic language is separated completely from practical language by virtue of the self-sufficiency of the sign. In poetic language the sign is detached; it does not necessarily correspond. The Futurist poetry I have quoted demonstrates several ways in which this was understood. In practical language the sign points toward the thing; the milkman wants to know how many bottles should be left on the porch. This leads to automatism, habit in language. Therefore it is necessary to separate those qualities that make literature what it is—*literaturnost,* the "nature of literary fact." In poetry this is sound; in prose it is plot ("the unfolding of the verbal material"). The devices used to construct a work are identical to that which separates it from the practical world. Poetic language functions in a particular way: it defamiliarizes, making strange what is habitually assumed. Though the Formalists had no interest in the "creative," there was a claim for a psychology of effect. From Shklovsky's *Mayakovsky and His Circle:*

> A phenomenon, perceived many times, and no longer perceptible, or rather, the method of such dimmed perception, is what I called "recognition" as opposed to "seeing." The aim of imagery, the aim of creating new art is to return the object from "recognition" to "seeing." In terms of contemporary psychology, we deal with inhibition and stimulation. A signal given many times produces drowsiness and inhibition. That the views I expressed at the time coincided with Pavlov's work was pointed out to me. . . .
>
> In analyzing poetic language for its phonemic and lexical structure, for its syntax and semantics, as well as for its characteristic distribution of words and in the characteristic thought structures compounded from its words, we will always encounter the same property of the artistic: that it is created expressly to liberate perception from automatism and that the

aim of the artist is the "seeing"; it is "artfully" created in such a way as to hold perception and to bring it to its highest possible intensity and longest duration, while the object is perceived not in its spatial aspect but, so to speak, in its continuity. "Poetic language" meets just these requirements.[5]

An end to sleepwalking through technique. There is an identity between technique and its effects; for the Formalists everything in the work exists in order that it be perceived.

Starting from the sound. According to Jakobson, "The function of poetry is to point out that the sign is not identical with its referent. In poetry sounds enter the clear field of consciousness; in prose they are automatized." In this decade, Robert Grenier has written about the phoneme thus:

> —think of *Keats* as really 'milking' words of all possible letter/phonemic qualities without really challenging notion of English word/morpheme as basic unit of 'meaning'—hence 'best effects' all-stress monosyllabic—"No, no, go not to Leth(e)"—"Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?"—because mind in work really does want to think phonemically, one sounds so 'dense & rich,' tongued . . . 'meaning' identical to physical fact of *a* sound (everything noted/nought denoted) in series of discrete particles strung together (by Keats e.g.) with gaps—[6]

Grenier is interested in the phoneme as a thing in itself; Shklovsky said much the same in his discussion of *zaum*. The concept of *zaum* was used later by Brik in his discussion of semantics: when the rhythmic requirements of a language outstrip what it is possible to say, poetry enters into the area of "transrational" poetics. So Brik saw *zaum* as more than a device used by the Futurists; it is a basic response to unassimilated content. The demand, the insistence, pushes the emphasis of the work into areas where sound takes on an independent value. Possibly a given poet's language is excessively rhetorical or overloaded with connotation to the point of blur—Brik would say that poet is tending toward *zaum*.

Dylan Thomas would be an example of such a poet, where the sound is "almost taking off with blood."

The concept of *zaum* was a convincing argument against the previous poetic theory, in which poetry acted to condense exterior forms. Poetry exists without image or metaphor in *zaum;* images and metaphors are devices, not the fundamental facts of poetry—meaning stems from the self-evident word. Shklovsky writes in *The Theory of Prose:*

> Someone walked down a sidestreet either fifteen or thirty years. Each day he read a sign "Big Selection of Sig"[a kind of salmon], and each day he thought: "Who needs a big selection of sig?" Finally, somehow the sign was taken down and put on the wall sideways. Then he read: "Big selection of Cigars." The poet takes all signs down from their places. . . . In the hands of poets, things revolt, throwing off their old names and taking with the new name—a new face. . . . Baudelaire says that the carrion raised its legs like a woman for shameful caresses. In this way, the poet makes a semantic shift. He wrests the concept from the conceptual set in which it stood and transfers it, with the help of a word or a trope, to another conceptual set. . . . This is one of the ways of turning a thing into something perceived.[7]

From there the Formalists went on into the mechanics of this "semantic shift," which takes place first of all in sound. "Sound repetition is the underlying character of devices," according to Brik. An example would be the stepped, nonparallel repetition of consonants in Mayakovsky's poems. For the Formalists, perceptibility is organized by means of a hierarchy of devices within the "total sound of the poem." Mayakovsky's *I* dominates other elements to become perceptible as sound; a poem must have this relation between subordinating and subordinate, otherwise there is automatism. A poem is a complex hierarchy of devices within overlapping rhythmic and semantic fields. So rhythm is seen as operating through the dominant linguistic units—word, line, phrase, sentence—as well as through the "stress pattern." For example, the syntactic gap

from word to word (the "word boundary") can alter the possibilities of stress in a line of verse. "I live in a *black hole* / the end of the *rainbow*." Here syntax alters rhythm; conversely, rhythm can modify or deform sense. The presence of repeating elements subordinates other elements in the poem, as in the case of Mayakovsky's *I*. On the other hand, the absence of such a "dominant" in the hierarchy of poetic devices allows normally automatized "secondary factors" to be perceived. Dissociation, as in Khlebnikov's poems, enhances unusual "light of the image"; coloration is strengthened by the suppression of such hierarchical devices as the *I*. According to Shklovsky, "the time of verse is the time of expectation," and "terror and oppression are necessary" in organizing poetic sound. Perceptibility, "seeing," can come only from the subordination of one element by another.

This leads directly to the Formalist analysis of rhyme. "Juxtaposition on the basis of partial similarity of two otherwise dissimilar notions is the principle of poetic creation," but there is nonidentity and "more meaning" in the parallels of rhyme. Since the sign is autonomous in poetic sound, to add a phonetic parallel to parallel semantic planes is to increase the number of ways the language can be heard. In "milk fits the fitness game" the sound "fit" repeats in "fitness," but "fitness" is something other than "goodness of fit." The skewed meanings bring the slogan off the packaging and into the brain; in this case "rhyme is an organized violence which proliferates meanings." In advertizing and elsewhere, the Formalists' model for perceptibility is now built into the psychology of everyday life.

From poetic sound the Formalists went on to the analysis of prose. Narrative, plot are verbal orchestration, the manner in which the story is told: how expectations are set up; how digressions, parallels, retardations work; how devices such as repeating motifs and withheld information are used. One of the early Formalist studies of prose compared Gogol's "The Overcoat" with the traditional oral form called the *skaz*. Go-

gol's story is a parody of that kind of tall tale; prose is described in relation to how a story might be told out loud. This leads to a distinction between the plot, "the unfolding of the verbal material," and the "materials" of the story. There is the sense that the materials of prose exist in a kind of warehouse of stories of the culture at large. A remark by Shklovsky was that "images come from God"—there are no new materials, only new techniques. Another early Formalist study of prose was Shklovsky's analysis of *Tristram Shandy*. "*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel in world literature"—in that it defines itself entirely in terms of plot. The novel is all verbal orchestration; the narrator leads up to the moment of his birth for 200 pages, introducing an amazing number of digressions, stopping in the middle of the narrative to comment on what he's doing (what Shklovsky calls "laying bare the device"). Eventually there comes to be no difference between the "unfolding of the verbal material," or plot, and the narrator's "laying bare the device"; for this reason *Tristram Shandy* is the model for the orchestration of prose.

These were the basics of the Formalist program; they were all articulated before 1921. The test of the method was that literature could be explained exclusively from the point of view of its inner form. Biographical, psychological, social, and historical information are all exterior unless they can be shown to have a direct bearing on the use of a device. But the method was to be extended immediately to literary history. The Formalists saw that a break with the past, for example that of the Futurists, could be the expression of a semantic shift, leading to a new technique; this new technique is the demand of a new literary content. Though the Formalists initially refused to deal with social forms, in the course of time they integrated elements of Marxism into their method. An example of this would be their discussion of the relation of the literary marketplace to literary form; Dickens was described as writing for serial publication. Social factors were to be dealt with from the point of view of inner

form, though the social value of inner form hopefully would be extended. In the mid-20s the Formalists realized that an emphasis on technique could be translated into values of social construction; for example, one issue of *Lef* discussed social construction from the point of view of Lenin's language "as such." The emphasis on literary facts evolved into a proposal for a literature *of* fact, in which the form of the newspaper would replace the novel. About 1930 the Formalists were made to recant; Shklovsky wrote "A Monument to Scientific Error," renouncing any independence from social fact as perceived by the state—what was to become socialist realism. The Formalists then stopped producing literary criticism as a group. But Shklovsky had a particularly ironic stance; he was capable of making adjustments.

The split between poetic and practical language could be psychologized into a kind of detachment. So now I'm going to do what the Formalists would not do, which is to describe certain social conditions that clarify this identity between poetic language and technique. I want to read a few selections from Shklovsky's own prose that show how this nonfunctional relation of art to individual psychology or social fact might have been equally an irony of direct perception. Shklovsky wrote a book of memoirs called *Sentimental Journey*, taking the title from Sterne, about the revolution and civil war: traveling on trains, seeing villages burned, going to the front, and so on. In it he uses a number of techniques of defamiliarization: he will be talking about one incident and in an offhand way interject a digression on a philological study or on a bomb that is about to go off. He shuffles together an enormous amount of material, breaking the linear time frame, but under it all is the journey, a sense of constant travel. There is a tension between this sense of motion and the numerous events related out of serial order. The abrupt and frequent semantic shifts break the narrative into a set of nearly autonomous segments. At the same time,

these segments form an intricate system of motifs that hold together both the journey and the verbal account.

The entire book is an assault on narrative by event. Here is a description of the trenches:

> When you stuck your head out of the trench what you saw was blades of grass, what you heard was the occasional leisurely whistle of bullets.

This has the quality of something frozen in time, utterly disconnected.

> Making the rounds, I talked to soldiers; they sort of huddled together.
>
> Along the bottom of the trench, a narrow little stream ran under the boards you walked on.
>
> We followed its course. As the terrain descended, the walls got damper, the soldiers gloomier.
>
> Finally the trench broke off. We came out in a swamp. Only a low wall made of bags of dirt and sod separated us from the enemy.

This is a kind of montage, a stepwise unfolding of information. In terms of verbal orchestration, the material is let out like helium from a balloon. Every statement is almost a device in its own right. This is close to Sterne; it is equally close to film. Event seen through technique here becomes a heroic form of sheer being. Even descriptive passages convey this:

> Here I saw something unbelievable. A desert salt marsh. It was an enormous, smooth inland sea, clearly dead. Long jetties on piles extended into the water. Several good-sized black barges were being loaded with something or other.
>
> But strangest of all, there were no houses along the shore, no people in sight.
>
> Only the desert. And deserted warehouses. Goods lying about. Rolls of barbed wire. Several granaries. A dozen cars standing on the tracks. But the port was dead. This is the main port of Lake Urmia, a place supposedly with a tremendous future.

The facts parallel estrangement, *ostranenie*. In fact estrangement might be the only possibility here. It is almost like being on the moon. The perceiving subject is an irony in itself. And this irony is not only of perception but of any act:

> Through Vonsky, who had just arrived, I somehow got rifles and cartridges and sent the men into battle. Nearly the whole battalion was wiped out in one desperate charge.
>
> I understand them. It was suicide.[8]

That is all he says about the incident. Here he has just consigned fifty people to their deaths, but he is the one who gets to write it up. That is close to the point of view of the book, and it is in fact a great theme of Russian modernism. Something nearly as bad happens to Shklovsky: a bomb goes off in his hands. This is treated as a literary device—perhaps the type of the unexpected digression. He takes a great distance from the event, using it as a recurring motif rather than as an exemplary account. The state of mind of the bomb having gone off possibly existed before the account; it is very unlike "so it's all come to this," according to Lew Welch, where the dread is a bomb one can not even see.

I want to put this next to our present situation. In 1973 there was the phenomenon of the gas line; here there was a nonfunctional relation between the experience perceived and the belief in doom. We all expect raw materials to run out, but no one knows exactly when. And when evidence of this fact actually does occur, the experience itself does not seem like the preexisting dread. This characteristic of our experience did not obtain in Russia during the civil war. As opposed to the direct perception of the cataclysmic event, we have doom on the far side of the media undermining our brains. We do not believe our senses; the level of automatism we have to deal with is of an order the Formalists would not have believed. The necessity for technique is absolute in the face of this fact.

The Russian revolution was a period of total reorganiza-

tion. Anything one did was a political act in itself. That is close to the design potential of the self-evident word. There is a near identity between Russian modernism as the most extreme and typical case of modernism and the invention of the Russian modernist state. Shklovsky talks this way about the social processing of art:

> In brief, I see the matter this way: change can and does take place in works of art for non-esthetic reasons—for example, when one language influences another, or when a new "social demand" appears. Thus a new form appears in a work of art imperceptibly, without registering its presence esthetically; only afterward is that new form esthetically evaluated, at which time it loses its original meaning, its pre-esthetic significance.
>
> Simultaneously, the previously existing esthetic construction ceases to be palpable; its joints become calcified, so to speak, and fuse into a single mass.

It is not, however, the accumulated response to social condition but art itself that argues in this way:

> We contend, it seems, that a work of literature can be analyzed and evaluated without departing from the literary set. . . . Everything in it is subjected to the organization of the material. But the concept of literature changes all the time. Literature extends its boundaries, annexing non-esthetic material. This material, and the changes which it undergoes through contact with material already esthetically processed, must be taken into account.
>
> Literature stays alive by expanding into non-literature. But artistic form carries out its own unique rape of the Sabine women. The material ceases to recognize its former lord and master. Once processed by the law of art, it can be perceived apart from its place of origin. . . . Art converts the particularity of things into perceptible form.[9]

"But I know this—my craft is wiser than I am." What is all this technique telling us; more precisely, what is the point of view of technique?

I want to read the work of several writers whose work can be said to show an identity with technique. The first example is from a poem by Bruce Andrews, "Funnels In." One might assume that his work is involved with the surface characteristics of language; so "an armada" has one referent and "whose pollen will not mate at all" has another. The degree of connection is given by the spatial arrangement on the page. But in hearing the work read it seems that the surface disjunction is not how the poem works; so how does it work?

an armada
whose pollen will not mate at all
the animal grace it's everywhere
always a bridesmaid never a bride
float and fade
old awful
are fulfilled
mild-voiced immediately to one over the tube on hook of
the little nations
me own hook[10]

The effect of this on a listener involves what the Formalists called "rhythm as a constructive device." The phrases are units. The poem goes: unit . . . unit . . . unit. After a while a point of balance in the phrase begins to be heard; it takes on a meaning of its own. At first, one is not particularly hearing the words due to their referential shifts; it takes work to get from one isolated plane of reference to another at the speed of reading out loud. But what actually happens is that the rhythmic parallels turn into a meaning-structuring device. After ten minutes of this the phrases start to assume a rhythmic point of balance; the words take on weight in relation to that.

Bob Perelman: He seems to be, especially in this work, always going back and forth between very familiar language and very unfamiliar language. It's defamiliarization. So "always a bridesmaid never a bride." When he comes to that, it clicks in immediately; that's just a cliché, and he hears it in this easy intimacy, with no dissonance. But after a while of hearing that in a disjunctive context, "always a bridesmaid never a bride" sounds just the same as "not as deviant enough." All of a sudden the nonsyntactic or unusual phrases take on the same weight as the clichés. By playing back and forth between the familiar and the unfamiliar, he makes you familiar with the unfamiliar.

Watten: The semantic shift is one way to make things strange; Shklovsky is doing that in his prose. But I don't think this is working like that. One gets completely exhausted by all this semantic shift; you hear it as sound and wait for the meaning to catch up. The fact that the semantic shift is constant doesn't make for any new perception; it works out of a kind of automatism to begin with.

Lyn Hejinian: Because it overloads?

Watten: There's no way of keeping up with all that. It's the rhythmic insistence that finally catches up. We have the experience of hearing that. If one wants to be *literal* about how this works—I don't want to appreciate it at a distance and say that because it's shifting semantic planes it's defamiliarizing me, no—the effect seems to be of a word machine that he has set up, like a wave generator or a conveyor belt.

Andrews's work is paradigmatic in this way; it makes poetry read out loud into a problem for design. Then what are the specific qualities of language brought into the work? In Andrews we return to the semantic shifts, various bits of language that can open up and expose mental space. Here *parole* is structuring within *langue;* the inner space of language is being altered by a mechanistic act.

Robert Grenier: Williams identified with the phrase in his

variable foot. Although it seems more associational—you could have a variance in the possible number of syllables included in roughly parallel time units, as one line follows another down the page. So what this seems to be doing in part is dissociating that form of the variable foot from specific statement to the extreme of sound that you hear for its own sake.

Watten: In Williams there is an entire range of meaning in that line and in the variable foot. It doesn't stop with the phrase; the fact that Andrews uses this disjunct content qualifies the sense of the metrics. Every phrase is going to be an integrity; the repetition finally makes us hear it that way.

I thought to go on to two of Clark Coolidge's works. The first is from *The Maintains:*

> cold
> inroad
> insectarium etcetera
> a coroner or guest of some other species
> something something firmly
> not a mean little sense for size
> as edge or the inside curve or turns indoors
> the angle beside or number as in ten
> chemicals usual parts in a plural
> to that which sits in pinpoint speech
> flat
> undone
> brain of an agency
> a thin part having absence
> having only one lean as said of a roof
> occurs
> or lets[11]

The line here sets up a point of equivalence—"to that which sits in pinpoint speech." This work comes out of the dictionary; every line in this stanza might be heard as a different definition of one word. The work builds from all possible definitions of *the word*—a spade is a card, a shovel . . .

Tom Mandel: It's a lot like what Potebnya says. It is a condensation along which you can travel back to its source.

Watten: It's very fluid. It works in the opposite way from Andrews; it's additive rather than isolating, so it builds steam. There is a metonymic quality to the lines; they seem to refer to a whole, they're part *of* the big definition. So, *word is* cold; *word is* inroad; *word is* insectarium. I hear an "I state" or an "is" behind every line.

Grenier: There's also a correlation between and among the different parts. The separate lines are not heard as separate. "Present" would be a modification of "percent." So that there would be structures and correlations among the units. That's a significant point. He's formulating a congruence; it's not simply dissociative.

Watten: It doesn't involve mechanistic ideas; there is the musical analogy. These are the materials, and they're being brought together in the making of a work. There isn't the sense of tearing apart, exposing new areas in the head. The intention is not to disrupt semantics. In Andrews each phrase tends to stop; each one evaluates itself in a particular way. Whereas, this builds momentum.

Morgan Wines: In "the angle beside or number as in ten / chemicals usual parts in a plural," you don't know from the line break entirely if there's a modification or an elision going on. In fact, there's a little bit of both. It is actually relational that way.

Watten: Coolidge is actually making a new syntax out of rhythmic demands. Maybe it's going toward sound in the way Brik described; maybe it's going toward *zaum*. There's too much signification, and the rhythmic insistence is too much. It's detaching and becoming transrational sound.

Mandel: And then the sound is subjected to musical composition. Not so much in this, but "Weathers" can sound like Haydn.

Wines: I'm saying also that he's creating relations as he

goes that cannot be described by the kernels of ordinary syntax.

Watten: Here rhythm is a deforming device, in Formalist terms.

This is the most recent prose of Coolidge's that I've seen, from "Weathers," section XVII:

> Partly stone only to see beneath the red slips. The fishing particle, on and off, innards of glass. Sun parts hardly, seems to move. The jetty I'm on of tons, afternoons further planks, oil glow dome pending. The salamander owns munch breccia, clots the window in a skid-to piping, glance off sleeving collides. Of a wind and burn scratch reach, the maundering columns. Streaks to score, go on melting button the barks. Do too scooping handle greys form a point off the scarp fist, knuckle crimps eject of pint tone. Lurid imported word impacts, pans.[12]

There is a great sophistication in the interrelation between parts of speech and rhythm, a synthesis of the original propositions of *The Maintains.*

Perelman: There is this tension between parts of speech. There are sentences, and there are nouns and verbs, and ghosts of nouns and verbs. Nouns become verbs, like in this one sentence: "Lurid imported word impacts, pans." *Pans* there is a verb; then *word* coming from some other source implodes or impacts, but also pans across, and gives you a whole sense of association. But also, given this context, *pans* could just be *pots and pans.* There's no grammar that necessitates one or the other. So you get this vibration or blur all the time.

Stephen Rodefer: Sometimes that difference would be defined by the way Coolidge would read it. Because you could also say *The* maintains.

Watten: But the emphasis is relative, so it is going to be both. In the Formalist vocabulary, semantic ambiguity increases coloration. This interchangeability of the parts of

speech would be an example of coloration being foregrounded because there is no dominant. It can go both ways.

David Bromige: But it does emphasize ambiguity, where a practical language would wish to deemphasize it. Here the foregrounded element is ambiguity.

Watten: The language is in a sense contextualized by itself. There is ambiguity in statement, setting up an incredible number of resonances between words. And it does tend toward the autonomy of sound; it does not tend toward form. (Coolidge's poetic project involves a kind of overload;) this is part of a thousand-page poem.

I'll read this paragraph from Ron Silliman's *Ketjak:*

> Revolving door. How will I know when I make a mistake. The garbage barge at the bridge. The throb in the wrist. Earth science. Their first goal was to separate the workers from their means of production. He bears a resemblance. A drawing of a Balinese spirit with its face in its stomach. Fountains of the financial district spout soft water in a hard wind. In a far room of the apartment I can hear music and a hammer. The bear flag in the black marble plaza. Rapid transit. How the heel rises and the ankle bends to carry the body from one stair to the next.[13]

Ketjak is a sequence of thirteen paragraphs; the number of sentences doubles from one paragraph to the next. Sentences from paragraph A repeat with the addition of new sentences to form paragraph B. So in the terms of Shklovsky's *Theory of Prose,* the verbal material unfolds: each sentence is a device. Every sentence becomes a motif; this is close to Shklovsky's characterization of Sterne. *Ketjak* is a typical novel in the tradition of *Tristram Shandy.*

Bromige: You find out more about each sentence as you go along, in the way that you find out more about a character.

Grenier: Another thing that maintains *Ketjak* for me is the interest in so-called poetic language at the same time that language is operating in very simple practical ways. All these sentences give information as to the specific time and place

of composition. Form and content don't have to be opposed usages. You can have structure that generates its own form at the same time assertions are made about something outside the sign.

Watten: There are almost contradictions from one sentence to the next. Some of them we've heard before; some we haven't. Some of them are perceptible images; some are things people said. Some of them are ideological and tend to describe what the work is doing; some are facts. In other words, it's not a list.

Perelman: Many of the sentences have a common moral passion that spans a continuum from personal noticing to ideological, political commentary. There's very little quotation of off-the-wall language just for the sake of shifting.

Steve Benson: Earlier you were saying that nowadays, we have a hard time predicting what it's going to be like. Or what we do expect we don't have ways to relate very effectively to what actually happens. So it's hard to tell a reasonably successful status quo from a viable opportunity for a good change from a disaster area. In this work there's a certain dynamic or dialectic between knowing what to expect and not knowing what to expect. There's a really interesting recognition of the issue of monotony or boredom or flatness. Because there are surprises, and there are totally predictable things. How does this relate to the level of automatism being very high?

Watten: You're never quite sure what the scale of your activity is going to be. The continuity has to be internally produced. There's no way up, or around, or out; the scale could be very great or very little—one doesn't know. Are we in a dire situation, or do we have a relatively comfortable life? *Ketjak* seems to think its way out of this box. It shows a way of thinking unit to unit in one's experience, dealing with both "maybe this is all very big" and "maybe this is all very small." Either case takes its place in the work in an orderly fashion.

I want to go on to Bob Perelman's work. This is from "How to Improve":

> Suppose we examine a great deal of care. First, its definition: a state of being. Splendid. 1) Emitted or reflected. 2) Appearance used figuratively. 3) Conspicuous. The *splendor* of *rare* disregard. *Accuracy* applies the star. And a star shines with accuracy. We learn through meaning to *shine*. Splendid. A distinct gain.
>
> Turning, we are stuck. We notice our ears are trained. Soft harmonies of deeptoned, nevertheless quiet, repeated questions suited to the context enrage the attention. It is no good. Every thing uses any music to make the use of us sound so precise. Submerge valuable connotations. If they survive, they have their duties.[14]

This seems to be an essay on how to make language into a language that talks about itself. It is an example of a kind of permanent "laying bare the device." But if this is an argument about how language works in terms of how language works, there are plenty of problems: it is easy to lose track of the speaker in the high degree of semantic shift. For Shklovsky, "a work is created artistically so that its perception is impeded, and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception." That "impeded form" occurs here; its difficulty draws out the point and spreads it over a wide area. The argument's "busted formality" makes the splendor of the language available.

Ron Silliman: What about the argument of the form? It would appear to have specific conditions for furthering itself that would be different from the usual poem, more like an "essay." Yet at the same time it's internally constantly arguing all those affective terms that are poetry. Like "Abandoning *splendor,* it can be seen. Figurative fundamental sense without implications of appearance." There's a lot of internal rhyme within a "nonpoetic" genre.

Watten: There are parallels that are not quite insisted on and not quite followed through with.

This is a poem from *Without Music*, by Michael Palmer:

The death of blue weight
or look I'm listening

Evening inside
or look I'm lifting

one thing with one hand
several things with three fingers

and look he's listening
let's say bone somewhat modified

bone in the process of reorganisation
according to a model

of the final monument
to the Third International

wood, about 15″ high
figures walking in place

figures carefully located
on a balcony over water

or of course over water
The sister is weeping

My sister with her parasol
The pens and red pencil

Reading aloud is for emphasis
Reading aloud is to practice[15]

There is a deft use of parallels here that aren't brought to complete parallelism. According to Brik, "the purpose of parallelism, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into a sphere of new perception, to make a unique semantic modification." The semantic shift on the level of phrase to phrase sets words adrift, gives them autonomy. The skewed semantics parallel the sequence of phrases, so you have "or look I'm listening" and "or look I'm lifting." The work seems to proceed in a

plus one/minus one manner. Perhaps there are *exactly* two possibilities for sequence, in the sense that there is exactly a couplet: a line either follows logically the line preceding it, or the line violates what immediately precedes it and brings in a new element. There are two options; the poem has an integral, step-by-step movement. There's a conflict between the kinds of parallelism; the word is set adrift, toward music or sound.

Perelman: In Michael's work there is always this agonized political position that is hidden way under the aestheticized surface—"of the final monument / to the Third International // wood, about 15″ high."

Watten: It's not heroic, obviously, to call the monument to the Third International 15″ high. He's taking an anti-heroic position. (The scale problem we mentioned in talking about Silliman's work—we don't know how big things are, we don't know how little things are, so how to keep going—is an essential problem in Palmer's work.) The variability of scale means that only an inner argument is possible. There's history and then there is the position one is in; you can't get from one to the other.

Grenier: Would you say that the poem is an expression of the problem of the position one's in or a recognition of the limits of the available structures?

Watten: To put the monument to the Third International after "bone in the process of reorganisation" tends to diminish faith in the idea or reorganization.

Erica Hunt: But it could be the fact of doubt. Right after that line "according to a model" there's a shift in tactics. The poem seems more strung out; all of a sudden the Third International comes in, then there are figures over water. Whereas acoustic phenomena are a focus in the first three stanzas, and "bone" is "in the process of reorganisation." There is reorganization of the first part from "according to a model" down, so there is a consonance between the formal

properties and what it's actually doing. You seemed to indicate that you didn't think the writer thought reorganization possible. But there it is happening.

Watten: In "reading aloud is to practice" there is the figure of the poet reading to himself. "Reading aloud is for emphasis" might be Mayakovsky. There is frustration in the position taken toward the materials of the poem, for instance in this last couplet.

Bromige: You feel it caps it off too much, or too quickly? Whatever meaning's been generated in the poem.

Watten: No, *literally,* "Reading aloud is for emphasis / Reading aloud is to practice." We might as well be talking to ourselves as saying anything. That implication can be taken directly from that couplet.

Bromige: Well, *praxis,* though.

Perelman: It has a double meaning. There's somebody who says you should be playing concertos, and the bad artist gets stuck on Czerny, scales. You can say practice means solipsistic, onanistic activity that doesn't go out, so that the second line shuts off the extroversion or the social consequences of the first. But there's the other meaning of action and *praxis,* and then emphasis is the negative word. And emphasis in the first line implies rhetoric and big bluster, whereas the second line is a much truer, more conscious activity. I think that's what Palmer means there.

Watten: But still the ambiguity is right there on the page. There is the question of scale, of big and little; the poem does split the problem into itself and everything else.

This is the introduction to one of the sections of *Third Factory,* by Shklovsky. I want to use it as an example of parallelism being thought of in terms of construction, including "the setting adrift of autonomous elements." It uses a number of parallels: shape, a red elephant, natural history, history (a red elephant), child's play, and the possibility of saying something.

"Red elephant, my son would be lost without you. I'm letting you into my book ahead of the others to keep them in their place."

The red elephant is squeaking. All rubber toys are supposed to squeak; why else would the air come out? . . .

My son is laughing.

He started laughing the first time he saw a horse; he thought it was doing four legs and a long nose just for fun.

We are cranked out in various shapes, but we speak in one voice when pressure is applied.

"Red elephant, step aside. I want to see life seriously and to say something to it in a voice not filtered through a squeaker."[16]

That kind of parallelism interests me in my own work. So I'll read an excerpt from my poem "Plasma":

They lost their sense of proportion. Nothing is the right size.

He walks in the door and sits down.

The road turns into a beautiful country drive. The voice isn't saying something, but turning into things.

Irregular movements spread out the matter at hand.

My work then is done.

His earliest dreams were prerecorded. Pointing a finger at a child in the act of play.

Light grows from the corners of the state map.

The universe is shaped like a hat. I lose interest and fall off the bed.[17]

Grenier: To return to where you began, I'd like to talk about your interest in method as an approach to writing. One might think that Formalism is simply the extension of the identification of linguistics as a science vis à vis its proper field of objects. That is, the specialization that evolved into a "rigorous" science in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and its insistence on its own restricted subject matter, the materials of language. And the extension of that science to the descrip-

tion of verbal facts in literature. So, one might think that this was merely a historically inevitable approach to a description of literary possibility. What do you think is the use to you as a writer in looking at words along these lines?

Watten: Modernism was heroic and had a belief in the future. And I identify that with the distance and objectification involved in modernism. So that one has one's work before him; I want to look at my work in that way.

Grenier: What did you mean when you said that parallelism made it possible to go forward? What's the significance of that gesture as a writer?

Watten: Belief. This is something that is characteristic of the modern position: it's possible to make a world in which one would want to live. There are plenty of parallels between design, architecture, and painting in the modern period, and then there is the subjective aesthetic *bulge* in between that seems useless and unreliable.

Bromige: Who do you mean? Bukowski?

Watten: I mean my personal gripe against "the self" as the meaning of literature; I don't want to have to define it beyond that.

Bromige: I didn't quite hear you.

Watten: That "the self" as the meaning of literature as we have experienced it in American art since World War II has become a total limit. There is a disjunction occurring now in form because there is new content; there's something that hasn't been said, and that's what I want.

It's not an absolute. You can talk about Olson or O'Hara in terms of their work and be very inspired by what they did; or you can talk about the belief in "the self." The automatism, the big dream that we live in, has a great deal to do with the forms that we write in now. That dream is only further confused by "the self."

Grenier: When I was going to college as a freshman there was a text that was presented, a standard for that time, which was Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* . . .

Watten: You mean what's the difference between Formalism and New Criticism? . . .

Grenier: What's it for you? What's the difference between the identification of the values in a poem as literary criticism and your own sense of . . .

Watten: Total. There's a real confusion in American criticism as to how close the Formalists were to them. The Formalists saw language as relative to itself; the New Critics basically saw language as symbols for objects.

Mandel: And also for the moral order.

Watten: The language model being used by the two schools is totally different. As a result of New Criticism you have James Dickey saying something like: poetry is less than the real world, because the word *tree* could never be a tree. The only similarity is that they saw literature as an object for study. But their models of language were vastly different. I'm speaking from the point of view of language as technique leading to what can be done. The Formalists elaborated this distance in terms of a scientific discipline. I don't need to do that. But to consider the difference between what they did and what we have to do is one way of establishing our position in cultural time.

2

The Politics of Poetry: Surrealism & *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*

I too have been called a Surrealist. The first poem in *Opera—Works* does touch on some issues of Surrealism: it is anti-Cartesian, subjectively revolutionary, troubled by its relation to Marxism, automatic, hermetic, written according to chance procedures, and not rewritten. In another poem from the same book, "Dream: With Wittgenstein":

> We then talk about artificial music in deserted rooms in a large building on a hill we walk through. I tell him about a man whose daily compositions are played out on a player roll hooked up to an orchestra in one of those rooms. "Automatic music," I say. "Yes, that's a big one," he says. Then—"The mind is so full of things—the only question is to free it so we can have them." "Yes, my mind knows more than I do." "Really," he says.[1]

The "end product" of Surrealist method might be this: to free the mind so we can have it. Yet it seems appropriate that Wittgenstein is the so-called "guide" in the poem. The principle of Wittgenstein here can be seen as language's inherent "correction" toward itself, as opposed to the subjectivity and noncorrectibility of Surrealism. This notion of reflexivity bears on the following comparison of Breton's writings with

writings from $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$. In making this comparison, I would like to pose the following question: can a "corrected" language be a generator of new language, and what does this mean for method?

Breton defined Surrealism as "pure psychic automatism," though this does not take into account the later concern with the Surrealist object and in general with the extension of "pure psychic automatism" into the world. Perhaps this quote from Nietzsche, concerning the state of mind he was in while composing *Also sprach Zarathustra,* is a better definition:

> Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity. —The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems . . . as if things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors ("Here all things come caressingly to your discourse and flatter you; for they want to ride on your back. On every metaphor you ride to every truth. . . . Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak").[2]

This state of mind seems close to what in a total sense could be the "end product" of the method of the Surrealists.

What is the difference between method and technique? One could say that *technique* is the principle of construction in the writing. In other words, how the writing is written, prior to the finished work. *Method* is the principle of construction that begins with the finished work, with the activity of the writer as a whole, the extension of the act of writing into the world and eventually into historical self-consciousness. *Style* might be the middle term.

In most examples of method we have had recently,

method and technique have been very close. Wanting to get beyond the identity of the individual writer with his method, I have been going back to the modernist movement in a self-conscious way. Shklovsky generalized this when he wrote, approximately, "One always goes back to one's grandparents." An American definition of modernism can be found in this quote from Williams's *Rome:*

> The modernist is he who sees through to the modern—to an essential and continuous organization that exists in it, perfectly so that to him there is no confusion, no necessity to go back, or to look ahead—he gets his pleasure here, now. His work is made of the modern whatever bit he chooses . . . but it will be all modern always—the success is the joy of self possession and a perfectly present use of material—through the seemingly apparent brokenness of the life about him.[3]

The structure within this "apparent brokenness" is perpetually valid, will always be there. One of the problems worked out in the modern period was that of the writer's professional role. Apart from Williams, three areas of the modern movement bear especially on this: Russian Formalism; the work of Louis Zukofsky, a one-man movement; and Surrealism. All three involve a negotiation with Marxism in the articulation of their fates. The Surrealists called themselves, in fact, "specialists in revolt"; perhaps the emphasis here is on "specialists" rather than on "revolt." "The petite bourgeoisie has no class interest of its own": these members of the middle class arrived at a professional necessity out of the conflict between bourgeoisie and working class. The working class appears in their work in different forms: as working-class politics, in the case of Breton; as working-class aspirations, in the case of Zukofsky; and as a working-class state, in the case of the Formalists.

In describing the writer as a locus of conflict tending toward a professional role, one could begin with "the self" in these different areas of writing. In Zukofsky, the self is cor-

rected, reflexive, to begin with. There is an immediate need to fit a "noncanonized" individual into the dominant literary forms. Zukofsky's poetics are the poetics of an assimilation; finally the private life, in fact suburban, results. After a thorough epistemological effort, the poem itself stands as a thing outside, a musical whole. "The words are my life" is the result of a conflict so great that the words become the self of the writer and present his case for him.

The Formalist analysis is not so easily assimilated. Starting from the separation of signifier and signified in Saussure, the Formalists identified poetic language with the dissociative techniques of the Russian Futurists. This separation ultimately tended toward the idea of design in the presentation of language. The direction is outer, toward the person, or many persons, hearing the work. The self is seen mechanistically as the amplifier or conductor of language that exists outside in the "materials" at large. The self might be the sign of action, as in the literary metaphor of Mayakovsky; the "I" is a constructive device. Behind this is the image of Lenin, the type of the intellectual hero in the 20s and 30s.

An interesting comparison could be made between the images of Lenin to be found in Zukofsky, in the writings of the Formalists, and in Surrealism. In Zukofsky's poem "In Memory of V. I. Ulianov," Lenin appears as a star, a point of guidance over a generalized flux. Lenin is interpreted as an idea here, and as a point of reference intrinsic to method. This was taken literally in Russian Formalism; Lenin's language "as such" was studied in an issue of *Lef*. A connection was attempted between the constructive potential of that language and that of poetic language itself. Here we have the mental hero altering the world through the agency of style. The stylistic implications are for directness, design, and social address.

The Lenin of Surrealism appears in a more moral frame. Lenin would be the guiding light for the party model of the collective act. This sense of the keeper of the flame

translates into the Surrealist idea of the self. Breton's political conversion came only after reading Trotsky's biography of Lenin, which he praised for its "purity of tone." In the 30s this self became the privileged term and locus for the revolutionary act. The political argument, then, connects the original hero image to the idea of tendency in aesthetics itself.

Surrealism was above all a defense of the self and its value in art. And Surrealism is the movement involving method *par excellence*. While the method was continually being worked out, it never rested in a fixed social role. The Surrealists were addressing a great instability in like terms. When conditions changed, the moment of efficacy of "the self" disappeared, and the content of Surrealist method was irrevocably changed.

In a 1934 talk called "What Is Surrealism?" Breton makes a claim of identity between his movement and the social conditions, "the coming and immediate results of the war of 1870," that produced Rimbaud and Lautréamont. The poetic response to World War I is tied to the political program known as defeatism:

> Nothing was to our minds worth saving, unless it was . . . 'l'amour la poésie'. . . . The field was not, to our minds, open to anything but a revolution truly extended into all domains, improbably radical, to the highest degree impractical, and tragically destroying within itself the whole time the feeling that it brought with it of desirability and of absurdity. . . . I must, however, insist on this attitude of ours, common to particular men and manifesting itself at periods nearly half a century distant from each other. . . . From the beginning, the Surrealist attitude has had that in common with Lautréamont and Rimbaud which once and for all binds our lot to theirs, and that is wartime *defeatism*.[4]

So the legitimacy of self-contradiction, however precious in historical terms, led to a self-conscious method equal to the

"desirability and absurdity" of a response to the war. Breton is consciously identifying that personal response with the call for defeatism and proletarian internationalism made by the party of Lenin. Defeatism was a program followed by certain socialist parties during the war that refused support for the bourgeois states in which they happened to find themselves. It is interesting to make a comparison between the wartime defeatism of Breton and the response to the Vietnam War; defeatism was never articulated as clearly in the United States.

But Breton's position in 1934 is a later interpretation of an early yearning for method that was not specifically political. The first involvements with method were in a sense extraliterary, or "above the level of the writing": the work with mental patients during the war, his first acquaintance with automatism;[5] the social orchestrations of Apollinaire; and the involvement with Dada as a public act. The literary influence of Reverdy's theory of the image, "the dynamic union of unrelated objects," which can be seen in *Mont de pieté* (1919), met with these forays into method to produce the first experiments with automatic writing, published as *The Magnetic Fields* with Philippe Soupault in 1921.

The automatic image is introduced this way in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924):

> One evening, therefore, before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word . . . a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent relation to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was then involved . . . : "There is a man cut in two by the window" . . . accompanied as it was by the faint visual image of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body.[6]

Breton's interest in this image is from the point of view of style; it is contrasted to the tidy accounts of realist prose, of which this example is given:

> The small room into which the young man was shown was covered with yellow wallpaper: there were geraniums in the windows, which were covered with muslin curtains; the setting sun cast a harsh light over the entire setting. . . .[7]

So a point of reference in the first *Manifesto* is realist prose, a literary form. Although the argument here appears to be primarily toward style (in the widest sense, the quality of an image), Breton justifies this style in the name of science, not art. And in general, whenever Breton makes a claim of authority for his position, the claim is made in the name of science. He talks about his researches, the Surrealist experiment,, and so forth. He does not rationalize his efforts in terms of literary history to the same extent. Obviously this is because literature, capital L, is coded into the social structure with which Breton finds himself at odds. So Surrealism extended itself away from literariness and toward experimental "results":

> On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally formed by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigations much farther, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its right.[8]

The appeal to science extends the boundaries of the literary act. Shklovsky described this kind of extension as "the canonization of peripheral forms." Speaking from the point of view of an art going through progressive changes in historical time, Shklovsky saw that the movement from one period to another was abrupt and disruptive. One way that this movement is articulated is through an appeal to peripheral forms. That is, at a given point in the decay of one kind of literature, writers extend literature to an outside source, for example folk tales, that would bring in new possibilities for style. So there is a dialectic between "literariness" and both language and cultural "materials" as a whole.

Rather than focus on the constant "experimental" activity of the Surrealists at that time: automatic writing, seances, fortune telling, and other language games, one can see a method developing that is greater than any technique. This method begins with the representation of the self, the agency or efficacy of the writer thinking beyond categories, as absolute, expanded beyond and unimpeded by previous literary domains.

The style of Breton's critical writings in the 20s is a perfect example of this presentation of self. The writings invariably take off from subject matter, never to return but to arrive at a further point. Criticism, Breton says, is an "act of love"; there is no taking apart or analysis of other *oeuvres.* Rather the examples of other artists are predictive, pointing the way to the future of as yet unrealized acts. Breton's critical writings exist to boost the imagination into the future. This boost is the substance of Breton's prose, and its realization in style is an utter flamboyance of self-presentation.

The first few essays in *What Is Surrealism?* show how this works. The earliest, "For Dada," is a testimony to a congruence of spirit:

> I speak for the pleasure of compromising myself. Appeals to the questionable modes of discourse should be forbidden. . . . The obscurity of our utterances is constant. . . . The dadaists from the start have taken care to state that they want nothing. . . . What is myself? Don't know, don't know, don't know.

Dada is a state of mind, therefore. The next testimony for Dada shows Breton's determination to think beyond that state:

> 'The essence and the formula' will perhaps always evade me, but . . . it is the search for them that matters, and nothing else. Hence this great void that we are obliged to create within ourselves. . . . I do not wish to slip on the floor of sentimentality. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as error; at the most one might speak of a bad bet. . . .

One can see here the crystallization of purpose out of the host liquid of "despair." The self, or single artist, is becoming the locus of a collective voice. The examples, then, of other individual artists are taken as stepping-off points. On Marcel Duchamp:

> Let us . . . be suspicious of all materializations whatsoever. . . . Is there anything that can do us more harm than a *materialization*. . . . Let us leave certain among our friends to fight over these grotesque tautologies and return to Marcel Duchamp. . . . In writing these lines . . . I have not undertaken to exhaust the subject: Marcel Duchamp. . . . The thing that constitutes the strength of Marcel Duchamp is above all his *disdain for the thesis*. . . . It will be a good idea to concentrate on this disdain. . . .

Duchamp here is the hero of *the method without objects.* In fact, pure method, without regard for what is to be produced. Picabia is the hero of *the method of many objects,* or the variability of style:

> You haven't stopped running; and, whatever distance you think you have put between you and you, you still leave behind new statues of salt. . . . The man who changes most from Picabia is Picabia. . . . And how would the majority of people perceive that for the first time a painting has become a source of mystery, after having for so long been only a speculation about mystery, and that with this art which has no model, either decorative or symbolic, Picabia has without doubt reached the top rung of the ladder of creation?

And then there is the hero of *the method of the reconstituted object,* Max Ernst:

> Unfortunately, human effort, which never ceases to vary the disposition of existing elements, cannot succeed in producing a single new element. A landscape into which nothing earthly enters is beyond the reach of our imagination. And it seems likely . . . that we should refuse to evoke it. . . . We must accept these conventions, and then we can distribute and group them

according to whatever plan we please. It is because they failed to understand this essential freedom and its limits that symbolism and futurism failed.[9]

This idea of language and psyche being a kind of vast reservoir for collage appears later in the "image bank" of William S. Burroughs. It bears on the criticism of the "Zeno's paradox of biomorphism," or organic form, identified by Breton with symbolism and futurism. One of the problems with the attack on normative grammar, which would break it down into bits and pieces of verbal rubble that then might release libidinal flux, is that it demands a prior value, "a whole person in a whole world." And since that is not possible, we have to keep going, back to the original impossible act. For Breton, the elements are fixed; action is possible within them. There is no final term, as in Symbolism; there is only what is available. From this point of view action is predictive, leading onward rather than back to what was already there.

Breton implies that the word comes from outside. At this point the position is liberating; later it ends in the doldrums of hermeticism, a position one could easily have no interest in at all. Neither is there anything in the Surrealist view of women but a literary romance. What is left to consider is the independence and history of the sign, which Breton refuses to detach from the thing signified. The adjusted outsider will go down with the ship of "the intellectual between two wars." But Breton proposes a method above and beyond, without reliance on its objects. There are many possible techniques; Breton refuses a static characterization of technique.

So in "Letter to Seers" (1925) Breton describes "techniques" (fortune telling and arcane faith in the medium) that are arbitrary enough but that at the same time open the way for a theory of the imagination, one that comes up again in Robert Smithson's "Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan." This theory of the imagination leads to *Nadja*, one of

Smithson's greatest influences, which he possibly never read. Again the predictive value of any technique is at the heart of method: the ability of technique to construct a possible future.

> Time is certain: already the man that I will be has the man that I am by the throat, but the man that I have been leaves me in peace. This is called my mystery, but I do not believe in (I do not prize) the impenetrability of this mystery, and no one wholly believes in it for himself. . . .
>
> Everything that is revealed to me about the future falls in a field which is nothing other than that of absolute possibility, and develops there at all costs. . . . It appears that I must go to China around 1931 and run great dangers there for twenty years. . . . I have faith in everything you have told me. . . . For thanks to you, I am already there. . . .
>
> Out of hatred for memory, for that combustion that it feeds in all the places where I no longer want to see anything, I want to have dealings only with you. . . . What is will *be*, by virtue of language alone: nothing in the world can stop it. I grant that that may be more or less well stated, but that is all.[10]

A simultaneous hero in terms of constructing a possible future was Lenin. The early politics of the Surrealists were struggles of identity as much as of political tendency. Breton's career in the party was aborted, but the Surrealists took on the party model from then on. But the tone of hysteria in the *Second Manifesto* is not to be explained only by Breton's disclaimer, later, that he was unduly influenced by the poetics of tendency. Breton took on the Leninist party model and adapted it to an aesthetic involved in the total disruption of boundaries at the service of egotism. In other words, he identified the revolution with his own psychic resources and intellectual discipline. There was no rest point in exterior social fact for Breton's Marxism; it is only later, when the political stance is secure, that coal strikes, wages, the popular front, and so on, can be used in support of the Surrealists' position. For example, the social argument of *Les Vases com-*

municants (1932) is that economic structures limit free choice in love. Only after concretizing the problems of identity posed in the *Second Manifesto,* through Dali's later theory of paranoia-criticism, could he arrive at actual social facts.

Paranoia can be defined as a delirium of interpretation bearing a systematic structure. And paranoia-criticism, as practiced by Dali, was a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on systematic objectification of delirious associations. The self becomes a projection of any phenomenon; the boundaries between self and other are blurred. In *Les Vases communicants* Breton discusses himself as having possibly entered into that state. That state of mind having been achieved, and for a number of other factors, the political position hardened somewhat, to terminate in its most stable form with the beginning of World War II. But for the period of 1931–39, Breton's identification with social revolution was complete, and a major accomplishment of Surrealist method.

By 1934–35, Surrealism's method had assumed a kind of permanent value for the "redeemed" self, ever valid in historical time, especially given revolutionary responsibility. The techniques of Surrealism appear to gravitate toward two poles: *verbal-auditory,* involving automatic writing, lyricism, the uninterrupted voice, leading to the possibility of an imagination free from constraints; and *verbal-visual,* involving the representational value of the Surrealist image, poem-objects, and *objets trouvés* (found objects, connected with accident, or objective chance), leading to the capacity to inspire the dream in others. This latter function is tied directly to the function of language in recording dreams; the Surrealist object is an idealization of the objectification through words of the dream experience, coming from the practice of writing down dreams.

In *Les Vases communicants* Breton argues his way out of a period of delirium of interpretation and political identity crisis through a close examination of the interpenetration of dream and exterior facts:

> This fog exists. Contrary to current opinion, it is formed of the thickness of things immediately sensible when I open my eyes. These things that I love, how could I also not hate them for derisively hiding all other things from me? It has appeared to me . . . that in examining closely the most irreflective activity, if one passes beyond the extraordinary and badly tranquillizing effervescence apparent on the surface it is possible to bring to light a *capillary tissue* in ignorance of which one works in vain to understand mental circulation. The role of this tissue is visibly to assure the constant interchange which must take place in thought between exterior and interior worlds, an interchange requiring a continual interpenetration of waking and sleeping activity. My only ambition has been to give an idea of its structure. Whatever the pretensions common to integral consciousness and the delirious details of rigour, it cannot be denied that this tissue covers a sufficiently vast region. It is there that, for man, the permanent transactions of satisfied and unsatisfied necessities are consummated, there that the spiritual thirst—which, indispensably, from birth to death, must be calmed rather than cured—is exalted.

The style of this writing itself might be the capillary tissue between reality and dream. What does this mean for method:

> With a little ingenuity it would not be impossible to succeed in provoking certain dreams in another being, if one at least applied oneself to making the other fall, in spite of himself, within a remarkable-enough system of coincidences. It would be in no way utopian to pretend, by these means, to work seriously upon the other's life, from a distance. The real fact, which is a result, would gain in solidity to the extent that one of its principal components might thus, in great measure, be determined *a priori,* and *given.* I should hope this proposal might obtain approval from enough minds that it move toward practical application.[11]

So the science of dreams extends to social control. But this strategy could also be understood as an exalted description of an art exhibition. The "remarkable-enough system of co-

incidences" could be a collection of paintings. Here is an area where Breton's worldly program alternates with a considerable utopianism.

If this fixed "system of coincidences" has use, it stems from the value given to unimpeded psychic flux, not modified by an intention for control. In "The Automatic Message" (1933) Breton states a primary value for automatism:

> The fundamental disequilibrium of modern civilised man vainly strives to absorb itself in the artificial concern with minor and transitory equilibriums. The odious crossing out of words increasingly afflicts the written page, crossing out life itself with a stroke. . . . To correct, to correct *oneself,* to polish, to smooth out, to find fault instead of drawing blindly from the subjective treasure . . . this is a command which . . . slavish custom . . . has for centuries asked us to obey.

One would like to know exactly how much he did correct. But to whatever extent, it was not to give value to the activity of correction. Instead, Breton sets his sights only on the outcome of the automatic act:

> In a dark room, his eyes wide open, Watt contemplates the future steam engine—the one *to come.* What is not yet will be. . . . The expression 'All is written', it seems to me, must be literally held to. All is written on the blank page. . . . The beautiful interpretative wall, brimming with lizards, is now but a fence post toppling on the highway, before which a landscape that never has had time to form itself reconstitutes, furthermore, the magic mirror in which life and death may be read. . . . Let us cast a glance . . . on these elementary surfaces in which the future world has for so long elected to compose itself. Coffee grounds, scrap iron, cloudy mirror: it is of you that the impenetrably bright veils on the hats of young women are made.

Another famous automatic image is that of Kekule's ring, in which the chemist Kekule's dream of fish chasing each other around in a ring predicted the molecular structure of ben-

zene. For Breton, this automatic reading can be accomplished against the most ordinary, indistinct backgrounds: scrap heaps or coffee grounds, which brings the argument back to seers and tea leaves.

> All the experimentation here would be of a nature to demonstrate that perception and representation (which to the ordinary adult seem radically opposed) are merely products of the dissociation of *one original faculty,* of which the eidetic image gives us an idea and of which one still finds a trace among primitives and children. . . . Systematically, without frenzy, one can work from this point where the distinction between subjective and objective ceases to be necessary or useful.[12]

Apart from the false causal idea here, the identity of perception and representation seems to be at the center of the use found for automatism and the Surrealist object.

In "The Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935), Breton quotes Hegel to rank poetry first among the arts because of its need "to attain, first by its own means and secondly by new means, the precision of sensible forms." This makes poetry a paradigm for other arts: "Painting benefits from the only external element that no art can get along without, namely inner representation, the image present to the mind." Hegel gives a value to the image: "All idea is image, an internal representation of an act. The representation of the act is thereby the beginning of the action." Breton's belief in the universal interpretability of this image completes the logic of the revolutionary necessity of the private image in poetry. The private image is revolutionary transformation in germ.

> "Thus," Hegel also wrote, "it is a matter of indifference whether a poetic work be read or recited. Such a work may also be translated, without essential alteration, in a foreign language and even in prose poems. The relationships between sounds may also be totally changed."

The image, which is a repressed act, is independent of the grounds on which it is visualized, and it can be translated

from one material to another. This transparency of the material is close to Surrealist technique in verse; there is often an extreme linearity of progression and an extreme literalness of line. Self-conscious parallelism works for the mechanistic production of image and statement. This is an argument against other considerations for technique, such as meter and sound, which the Surrealists did not discuss, and an argument for the convertibility of the image in Hegel's terms. The image travels endlessly; this is the substance of Surrealist internationalism. The grounds for the image are arbitrary; it is not French language or literature or tea leaves but the condition of "man." Breton's poetics are not "language specific," and this fact allows for an interconvertibility between poetry and the world itself:

> Thus I for my part believe today in . . . the experiment that consists of incorporating objects, ordinary or not, within a poem, or more exactly of composing a poem in which visual elements take their place between the words without ever duplicating them. . . . The reader-spectator may receive quite a novel sensation, one that is exceptionally disturbing and complex, as a result of the play of words with these elements, nameable or not.[13]

For this "reader-spectator" Breton both made poems that contained images of objects and arranged real objects, with written words, to make "object poems." The logical consequence of these techniques is the Surrealist object: "an object which lends itself to a minimum of mechanical functions and is based on phantoms and representations liable to be provoked by the realization of unconscious acts" (Dali). Here is a description by Breton of a Surrealist object recovered from sleep, in the "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of the Real":

> I got my hands on a rather curious book in my sleep, in an open air market out toward Saint-Malo. The spine of this book was formed by a wooden gnome with an Assyrian-style white

beard which came down to its feet. The statuette was of normal thickness and yet it in no way interfered with turning the pages of the book, which were made of thick black wool. I hastened to acquire it, and when I woke up I regretted not finding it near me. It would be relatively easy to re-create it. I should like to put a few objects of this sort in circulation.[14]

This object is produced in a dream, though similar objects can be found in real life. One of these is Nadja, and another is the wooden spoon that led Breton to his second wife in *L'Amour fou,* predicted in the poem "Tournesol" a decade earlier. At this point the mysticism is getting unbearable—one wishes to concentrate instead on the objectification of the image and to relate it to the dialectically inspired projections of Robert Smithson.

With the argument of physical-mental parity, the Surrealists were in a perfect position to discuss their method as having a political necessity. In "The Political Position of Surrealism" Breton claims that political conscience "before being a moral conscience, is a psychological conscience." Revolution is a psychological necessity. Thus the absolute demands of the psyche are the key to social transformation. The structure of work is not all that is to be transformed—the entire social code, the "superstructure," must be taken apart. It is the job of the intellectual to interpret dialectical materialism as a collective myth. Thus Breton could with a clean conscience uphold his rights and privileges as an independent artist "at the service of the revolution." Toward this end, in 1938 Breton wrote with Leon Trotsky the "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art" as a polemic against Stalinist positions intended to regulate the content and social meaning of art, a position that is still fundamental to Trotskyism.

In a lecture at Yale (1943) Breton states: "I insist that Surrealism can be understood historically only in relation to the war: I mean from 1919 to 1939—in relation at the same time to the war from which it issues and the war to which it extends." The utter dislocation of context, carrying with it

the finely reasoned interior-exterior dialectic, by the war, seems to be weighing heavily on Breton when he writes in the "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not" (1942) the following from "The Great Transparent Ones," which ends the manifesto:

> Man is perhaps not the center, the cynosure of the universe. One can go so far as to believe that there exists above him, on the animal scale, beings whose behavior is as strange to him as his may be to the mayfly or the whale.[15]

The emphasis on a "new myth," after World War II, and the increasing hermeticism of Surrealism, may be taken as symptomatic of a total transformation of the social conditions in which Surrealism articulated itself, a transformation that Trotsky saw as the probable *raison d'être* of the war. In Breton's myth, we are the small bodies, the cells, of larger organisms beyond our ability to sense. It is not very difficult to imagine that these large bodies are the movements of history. And it would not have been possible to characterize Breton's position as that of a parasite within a larger host until World War II came along to destroy the basis of his relationship to social context up to that time. The shift was so sudden and total that Breton had to admit to his subjectivity again. In different circumstances, but for similar reasons, this happened also to Zukofsky, who, in the postwar period, argued out of the historical necessity of the 30s into the personal locus of his work. So the new value given to individual aesthetics is likewise a recognition of the impossibility of social scale.

Method in American art after the war incorporated numbers of Surrealist concepts. Traces of automatism and objective chance fuse in the renegotiated value for "the self." That recognition and the self are equivalent terms is coded into a wide range of art work. Logically, "the method that is no method," which so many artists have claimed, is consistent

with the dominant ideology, aesthetic and otherwise, of the time. The method of no objects, the method of many objects, and the method of the reconstituted object all have their postwar forms, as critiques. The dialectical frame is absent; the predictive potential of method degenerates into the condition one is in. The only place for discipline to go has been technique. Where Breton argued for "the self" as an historical inevitability, that point of reference has become a static absolute. And it is difficult to call into question—it rhymes with common sense. Bill Berkson describes the 50s art environment in this quote from "Talk":

> O'Hara's reference to art, any art . . . is: Who does it. It's not granite critical terminology. What strikes me reading any of his criticism or poems, is that his terminology for art is a terminology of social life. And his terminology for social life could also borrow from the stockpile of art criticism. That seems to make living in the total language more possible, make it total, rather than have specialized languages for special experiences. . . . A curiosity of art production is that it's done by people. You name the name and call up a body of work.[16]

Looking for a way out of this "real-time" self has led to a minor reaction in the name of Surrealist method. Philip Lamantia's glossary entry on "Poetry" in the Rosemont edition of *What Is Surrealism?* makes this claim:

> Surrealism's fifty years of poetic evidence demonstrate the initial steps taken toward this supreme *disalienation* of humanity with its language, an emancipatory leap in opposition to the civilised debasement and fragmentation of language by reason, that is, language conditioned to serve as aesthetic object, submission-to-reality, mirror-trickery, everyday speech, pseudo-revolutionary mystification, personal confession, conscious self-expression and other idiocies—all of which, I insist, can be summed up in the self-condemned monstrosity that was Ezra Pound, his emulators and what generally passes for poetry and good writing in this country.[17]

Here the American takes on the European mentality whole, and the violence of the rejection is equal to the pathos of the position without any access to its specific time and place. Williams saw a similar dynamic in Poe, and he went on optimistically about the proletarian writer H. H. Lewis in an article in *The New Masses* (1937): "When he speaks of Russia, it is precisely then that he is most American, most solidly in the tradition, not out of it, not borrowing a 'foreign' solution. It is the same cry that sent Europeans to a 'foreign' America and there set them madly free."[18] It is a matter of record that Surrealist energies were transferred to New York during and after the war. But Lamantia's attack, twenty of fifty years late, is an image of stasis; the work of the Surrealists has already been coded into many of the aesthetic options he rejects. The beginning for further extension of method is in the reflexiveness of "the self."

A reading of a number of the early articles in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* yields a series of reflexive positions.[19] That "the distancing device is the staff of life" (Hugo Ball, 1919) is again true of a number of writers here. But the distance, in addition to being cultural, is a part of the method itself; the differentiation of meanings produced calls into question the person at the center. The mediator ultimately is directed to a larger scale.

It is significant that *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* opens its discussion (vol. 1, no. 1) with a statement by Larry Eigner. In "Approaching things / Some Calculus / Of Everyday Life . . ." the point of departure for writing is the position of the writer *in situ*. There is an absolute identification with day-to-day life; experience is the language medium for Eigner:

> No really perfect optimum mix, anyway among some thousands or many of distinctive or distinguishable things (while according to your capacity some minutes, days or hours 2, 4 or 6 people, say, are company rather than crowds), and for instance you can try too hard or too little. But beyond the begin-

ning or other times and situations of scarcity, with material (things, words) more and more dense around you, closer at hand, easier and easier becomes invention, combustions, increasingly spontaneous.

Writing is a structure of response or evaluation ("to find the weights of things") within the context of a present language:

> Well, how does (some of) the forest go together with the trees. How might it, maybe. Forest of possibilities (in language anyway)—ways in and ways out. Near and far—wide and narrow (circles). Your neighborhood and how much of the world otherwise. Beginning, ending and continuing. As they come, what can things mean? Why expect a permanent meaning? What weights, imports?

In Eigner the implication of structure is in the way words appear on the page. The poem "is a made thing," but there is insight into the structure of experience in the way that it is made. Beginning with "care to find as it may be perceived," the poem extends beyond this—"so a method is glimpsed, by the way."

In Clark Coolidge's "Larry Eigner Notes," immediately following, the homage to another writer appears as notetaking for a re-entry into Coolidge's own work. Here, as in much of his criticism, Coolidge is looking for points of recognition or congruence. In so doing he transposes the reflexiveness of language and experience in Eigner into values seen in language "as such." "I do not think of Eigner." Coolidge's approach in general preserves a romance of language taken as a whole; there is useful exclusion of any interpretation in this stance. An operator in a language medium looks at others doing similar work; finally the operators disappear and one language looks at another. The terms Coolidge uses in talking about Eigner are the terms language would use in talking about itself:

> an invisible & steadying "is" behind everything . . . all particles in the pile soon to reach / *nounal state* . . . the word "air" & its

> immediate prepositioning . . . these "scenes" don't exist, never have . . . the poem is built // each line / equals / its own completion // and every next line / its consequence . . . wholes are made only by motion . . . Each poem sights into a distance of all the others following . . . word-activation of the imagination in the act of seeing . . . a synthesis of presence.

Here "the self" has become generalized as "language," or, put another way, "the self" has exploded and disappeared. According to Coolidge, "Writers will now have to focus from a greater distance still subject to everything." The mediating persona has been abandoned.

The opposite tack, though in fact connected, locates writing as a specified mediator in relation to an organic continuity. Nick Piombino's articles, as "Writing and Free Association" (vol. 1, no. 1), look for a reflexiveness that would have therapeutic value:

> The method of self-disclosure called "free association" wherein one writes or speaks all one's thoughts in consecutive order (also sometimes called "automatic writing" in literary criticism) is comparable to serious attempts to read, write and understand poetry that directs attention to the *totality* of the thinking process. Memories and awareness of the present collapse into an experiential field composed of verbal presences which can be re-sounded for various interpretations and alternative directions.

Writing here has a literalness of purpose. Value, rather than inhering in a made thing, is given by personal use. This is possibly the most radical statement of "process" poetics to date. In the work of Robert Kelly, Theodore Enslin, and others, writing imitates a highly literary, derived notion of process. For Piombino, the poem is a process of the use of language in a practical sense. Rather than an exemplary, exalted self, as in Breton, Piombino proposes a quotidian, commonsense self, where the methods of writing or psychoanalsysis are applied not as exercises in collective myth-making but as procedures that will "get results."

In "A Short Word on My Work" (vol. 1, no. 1), David Melnick writes, "I doubt that any statement will mediate between *Pcoet* and its audience." *Pcoet* is written in a style close to what the Russian Futurists called *zaum*, "transrational language." Language is broken down below the morphemic level to letters of the alphabet, bits of debris. According to the Formalists, this kind of writing is motivated by an overplus of meaning on conventional planes; the need for pure expression is at odds with the available means. By randomizing phonemes or disrupting word forms, Melnick presents a sound texture of qualitative absoluteness not threatened by "meaning":

> What can such poems do for you? You are a spider strangling in your own web, suffocated by meaning. You ask to be freed by these poems from the intolerable burden of trying to understand. The world of meaning: is it too large for you? too small? It doesn't fit. Too bad. It's no contest. You keep on trying. So do I.

In a simple dialectic of sense and non-sense, "trans-sense" language proposes an organic meaning or wholeness apart from either. Melnick separates sound from reference in language to produce an acoustic spectacle in the reading of the text. This strategy is elucidated in a remark by Robert Smithson on the nature of abstraction, which for him is "a representation of nature devoid of 'realism' based on mental or conceptual reduction . . . [that] brings one closer to physical structures within nature itself."[20] Melnick not only avoids the reduction of "realism" but that of "abstraction" as well, in order to render both the world and his work into physical wholes. An uninterrupted "nature" is the end product of Melnick's text—a return to things as they are by means of a language without false literary mediation.

In Zeno's paradox, the commuter never gets home because of the parcellization of the distance. In the "Zeno's paradox of biomorphism (or organic form)," fallen language

never arrives at either the self (in Piombino) or the world (in Melnick), in spite of its endless refractions. Steve McCaffery operates a kind of synthesis of these two problematics. His "solution" can be exemplified by a performance (as one of the Four Horsemen) in which he poured Alpha-Bits (a cereal in the form of letters) on the ground from a ladder and then physically read them by rolling around on them while making noise. This was intended as a kind of "deconstruction" of the text (the complete text being *in* the cereal box, perhaps). Here the physicality of language (stated by means of creative vocalization in the style of Schwitters or by destruction of its "object status," the letters) is argued against the false reification of the commodity. McCaffery's aesthetics are consistent with this analysis; in "Repossessing the Word" (vol. 1, no. 2) he is quoted:

> Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, which is to say the occultation of the human relations embedded in the labour process, has been central to my own considerations of reference in language—of, in fact, a referentially based language, in general—and to certain "fetishistic" notions within the relationship of audience and performer.

The identification of reference, and of normative grammar behind that, with the commodification of language might be true in a given time and place. For example, the French bourgeois education Breton received probably approached this kind of social coding. But writers in the present would be lucky to have had the lids on that tight. While toying with the idea of an essential absolute (reference = alienation), McCaffery's values are perhaps better seen as a part of a performance dynamic, of the flow of energy between performer and audience:

> To demystify this fetish and reveal the human relationships involved within the labour process of language will involve the humanization of the linguistic Sign by means of a centering of language within itself; a structural reappraisal of the func-

tional roles of author and reader, performer and performance; the general diminishment of reference in communication and the promotion of forms based on object-presence: the pleasure of the graphic or phonic imprint, for instance, their value as sheer linguistic stimuli.

"A whole person in a whole world" is here a kind of fictional premise for an acting out, one in which energy is released within specified formal bounds. The question of whether this energy in fact transforms is mediated by the irony of the dramatic presentation. Here the artist is taking himself apart for his art; still there is the danger that dissociative methods repeat themselves, continually giving the same results.

Beyond such absoluteness, the strategy of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* has often been to "provide information." Simple lists are juxtaposed with extreme convolutions. For example, there have been various bibliographies: literary magazines, current journal articles, featured writers, "recent readings," and so on. The overall editorial procedure might be seen to parallel these—there are a panoply of views, a multi-axial reference system, a system of poetic relations. Many articles in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* give evidence of being one of "an endless number of points of view"; method is rarely given a full space for development but is, rather, represented. The various possibilities are located on their appropriate file cards, ready for quick recall. From "Articles" (vol. 1, no. 3):

> *Ideology & Consciousness.* No. 1, Easter 1977: "Marxism and Linguistics," "Theories of Discourse," "Ideology and the Human Subject."
>
> *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies.* March 1977: "Machine understanding of natural language."
>
> *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America.* January 1978: "Hearing 'words' without words: Prosodic cues for word perception."
>
> *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism.* Fall 1977: D. Kuspit, "Authoritarian Abstraction."

There is a kind of professional librarianship (special collections) operating here. Meanings, rather than being developed, are referred to—at the reference desk. So the radical poetics of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* are mediated by the commonsense functionalism of a professional role. Perhaps this is symptomatic of a cultural fact—that the intellectual is himself commoditized, by the university system.

If professionalism has atrophied, the avant-garde has exploded. Peter Schjeldahl has commented, roughly: "Not in the Surrealists' wildest dreams could they have imagined the life we live now," in regard to the New York art scene in the 70s. In fact, not in the wildest dreams of the New York art scene could the methodological rigor of the Surrealists be imagined. As an example, Bernadette Mayer's St. Mark's writing workshop has produced another kind of list, of "Experiments" (vol. 1, no. 3):

> Construct a poem as though the words were three-dimensional objects (like bricks) in space. Print them on large cards, if necessary.
>
> Cut-ups, paste-ups, etc. (Intersperse different material in horizontal cut-up strips, paste it together, infinite variations on this).
>
> Write exactly as you think, as close as you can come to this, that is, put pen to paper & dont stop.
>
> Attempt tape recorder work, that is, speaking directly into the tape, perhaps at specific times.

Here there is a proliferation of techniques. The over-all equivalence of activity leads to a "state" in (real) time in which particular motives are effaced. Inspiration might be constant. Technique for Breton, on the other hand, was dialectic—automatism was a paradigm for method rather than an end in itself. The logic of inspiration, itself to a degree "objectified," was in its timely approach to a larger scale. While the advantage of Mayer's techniques is their adherence

to the quotidien, there is no further integration. The "permanent avant-garde" vaporizes, leading to more conventional roles. As actually happened—in the course of Mayer's later editing of *United Artists*, the stylistic opening-up returns all these techniques to "the self."

The specter of "too much possibility/not enough necessity" appears likewise to Bruce Andrews in his review of John Wieners's *Behind the State Capitol/Cincinnati Pike* (vol. 1, no. 1):

> AND how (and where) is consternation in the realm of reason a confrontation of the unknown, and do we know it?
>
> Or just, "You think I'm normal, they do a lot of things to my mind"? : a senseless indecipherable deluge, where nothing contextualizes an other thing?
>
> Not a frame outside, and not a kernel inside? Are we all collage, all dense, tensed, & unlocatable?
>
> The soundless permeation of madness upon sanity: would this be the quandary gotten by viewing the language as the cure for artistry?
>
> As a rebuff to social order, to emotional and perceptual order?

As in Coolidge's "Eigner Notes," one language is looking at another. But while language and writing in Eigner are stable, in Wieners the forms of writing are breaking down. Andrews eyes this breakdown in the form of a perpetual question: "Is this my reading?" "What have we got here?" Here the psyche is fending off an incursion by an "other"; Dali's "paranoia-criticism" comes to mind. The skepticism or questioning is both consciousness and its projection, a blank wall that words (both exterior and interior) bounce against. "CONFUSION? Decor? Meaning? Memory? Body? Space? Rhetoric? Reality?" The poet mediates by insistence on such a *mode* of questioning; by taking himself apart he places his judgment in the world. Thus it is appropriate that Andrews is dealing with Wieners, who is likewise taking himself apart. But the identi-

fication is complex; where Coolidge locates another artist in Eigner, Andrews admits to "phenomena" in Wieners as much as "art."

The "exploded self" entering the world carries with it a critique based on its own organization. The inner argument is reciprocal, obviously; poetic reference is not only a question of "the world in the work" but "the work in the world." In a crude sense the negotiation with data taken in at the outset conditions the means for answering back. If in Andrews the response is skepticism, in Ron Silliman it is a passion for explanation. In an early article, Silliman wrote: "What happens when language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development . . ." as the first term in an argument concerning alienation and reference. This causality is most possible in a subjective perspective—the only place where "language" and "capitalist stage of development" can both be given equivalent ontological status. It is only the extension of the writer's language into the world that can accomplish the desired equivalence of terms; so the underlying motive of the explanation is the elaboration of a new poetics. In his piece on Walter Benjamin, "Benjamin Obscura" (vol. 1, no. 6), Silliman writes:

> The obliteration of the gestural through the elaboration of technology occurs across the entire range of cultural phenomena in the capitalist period. It is the principle affective transformation of the new material basis of production. Gutenberg's moveable type erased gesturality from the graphemic dimension of books. That this in turn functions to alienate the producer from his or her product is tangible even to authors who compose on the typewriter: to see one's text in a new typeface (inevitably asserting different spatio-visual values) is almost as radical a shock as first seeing oneself on film or videotape, or initially hearing one's voice remarkably *other* on a tape recorder.

Locating "affect" in the literal writing process is not gratuitous here. Rather than arguing "between texts" (as in the

case of numerous Marxist critiques), Silliman extends himself through the medium of alienated texts by means of his own literary "production." Where Andrews identified with a text breaking down into language (in Wieners), Silliman places broken down, peripheral, alienated language from any number of sources at the heart of his writing procedure. There is a proliferation of facts in Silliman's work ("Revolving door. A sequence of objects . . ."), but these alienated *things* are not only given as paradigms of content. Their use is in their identification by the writer as the essential problems of "the self." The mind that thinks its way into the world of things is the same mind that perceives things as having argued their way into existence. Exterior causality becomes the same as the writer's interior romance. Finally, what can be written is no different than what can be thought or perceived.

The "explanatory fiction" of Silliman's criticism is motivated as an extension outward; in the case of the reading of Benjamin, the desire is to reconcile newspaper typography or tape recording (the self objectified) with the pen in hand (the writer at work). At the heart of this method is the belief that the word, even as it is taken in by the subject, is an *other*. The passion for explanation in Silliman is an act of compensation for the autonomous word; in the act of writing the word is returned to the world, though this time the writer too is in it. Here the gradual movement of the skeptical self toward identification with its objects begins to take on its truly constructive potential, despite the difficulties of the method.

In the development of method in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, the increasing reflexiveness of the writer occurs parallel to a new value given to exterior fact. The dialectic that Breton saw as somehow taking the poet away into the clouds of a final realization (as in the state of mind achieved by Nietzsche) arrived at a stasis of method at the exact point where exterior reality itself underwent a change. *The* dialectic kept the upper hand, but one wonders what the world would

have been like "after" Breton's revolution had been accomplished, anyway. The failure of Surrealist method was prefigured, and this perception from the outset was part and parcel of the absoluteness. That foreknowledge does not appear in the positions taken in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E,* possibly because the scale of foreknowledge at this point is simply beyond that of the individual. Rather, there is a day-to-day reality in which the extremes of identification partake, and on which method builds, through the means, either referential or purely linguistic, of writing itself. In this sense the answer is yes, a language corrector can be a generator of more language and of future possible acts. The idea of revolutionary suicide has been abandoned by means of a consideration of the power of words.

But what does this reflexiveness *sound* like when placed next to the Surrealist "purity of tone"? It would be interesting to juxtapose the writing itself of Surrealism next to examples of work being done now. This is from section 9 of "Soluble Fish," the automatic text that Breton included with the first *Manifesto:*

> Foul night, night of flowers, night of death rattles, heady night, deaf night whose hand is a contemptible kite held back by threads on all sides, black threads, shameful threads! Countryside of red and white bones, what have you done with your unspeakably filthy trees, your arborescent candor, your fidelity that was a purse with dense rows of pearls, flowers, so-so inscriptions, and when all is said and done, meanings? And you, you bandit, you bandit, ah, you are killing me, water bandit that sharpens your knives in my eyes, you have no pity then, radiant water, lustral water that I cherish! My imprecations will long follow you like a frighteningly pretty child who shakes her gorse broom in your direction. At the end of each branch there is a star and this is not enough, no, chicory of the Virgin. I don't want to see you any more, I want to riddle your birds that aren't even leaves any more with little lead pellets, I want to chase you from my doorway, hearts with seeds, brains of love.[21]

This is a highly structured work, even though it involves a considerable dislocation of image. But there is a consistent voice, and a consistent address to an other; one can imagine the narrative voice in *Maldoror*, although in this case the voice is turned inside out—a kind of Klein-bottle effect of a continuous surface is achieved. Compare the continuity of statement in this prose poem to that of "Cult Music," by Carla Harryman:

> Got worn out screaming in the theater as if words could be a substitute for hard work; furthermore, the soft line of the jaw by pampering leans into steaming table: mutton, fish, greens and potatoes. Fed period music in a boxcar. Something infantilism—roams around, captures monsters, wants a lot. A great mind to waste. Surrounded by fleshy hulks and rocks that move toward voids and purple swamps. It's pink. Bird maps secured. The sky is turquoise. We always find the thing we do not seek. Eyes to intersections, the artifice's mercurial stuckness on the wall. A converted mausoleum. Fish heaps moving under feet. Dread of serene continent, webs, mites inland, and intoxicated community, rides into glory of sun, cars simmer into destination (or an arena) (the freeway is disguised). Entwined in the stone limbs the statues preen to the waves instead of cotton and synthetics or the organdy effusiveness of the sailor at port. The spine curved in right above the ass which was strong and perfect.[22]

Here the writing is concerned with the evaluation of each sentence. The thought procedes up to the moment of the next thought; unlike Breton's high rhetoric, it's also capable of stopping. There is a tension between this mindfulness and a good deal of "automatic" content. The image content, though extremely interior, is still given a distance and particularity; there is also much more distance to the "you." Compare to this excerpt from Breton's "Vigilence":

> At the hour of love and blue eyelids
> I see myself burning in turn I see that solemn hidingplace of nothings

That was my body
Probed by the patient beaks of the fire-ibis
When it is finished I enter the invisible into the ark
Paying no attention to the passers-by of life whose dragging
footsteps echo in the distance
I see the ridges of the sun
Across the may-blossom of the rain
I hear human linen being torn like a great leaf
Under the nails of absence and presence in connivance[23]

The subject of this poem is transformation, though the image given is to some extent impeded, evoking rather the desire for transformation. The syntax is accretive; each line could be another of a sequence of events; the poem appears to be always coming out of itself. The transformation is in the creation, by linear means, of an imagistic tableau. A contemporary counterexample is "In the American Tree," by Kit Robinson:

A bitter wind taxes the will
causing dry syllables
to rise from the throat.

Flipping out wd be one alternative
simply rip the cards to pieces
amid a dense growth of raised eyebrows.

But such tempest (storm) doors
once opened, resistance fades away
and having fired all the guns you find you are left with a ton of
butter,

Which, if it isn't eaten by some lurkìng rat
hiding out under the gate, may well be picked
up by the wind and spread all over

The face you're by now too chicken to admit is yours.
Wheat grows between bare toes
of a cripple barely able to hold his or her breath

And at the crack of dawn
we howl for more
beer. One of us produces

A penny from his pocket
and flips it at the startled thief
who has been spying on her from behind the flames

That crackle up from the wreck.
The freeway is empty now, moonlight
reflecting brightly off the belly of a blimp,

And as you wipe the red from your eyes
and suck on the lemon someone has given you,
you notice a curious warp in the sequence

Of events suggesting a time loop
in which bitter details repeat
themselves like the hands of a clock

Repeat their circular travels in a dream-
like medium you find impossible to pierce:
it simply spreads out before you, a field.

Now you are able to see a face
in the slope of a hill,
tall green trees

Are its hard features,
a feather floats down
not quite within grasp

And it is Spring.
The goddess herself
is really

Feeling great.
Space assumes the form of a bubble
whose limits are entirely plastic.[24]

What is transformation in this poem? It would not seem to be a specially valued state or a state to be inferred from the

images. There is a definite arbitrariness in the work; certainly there are levels of diction the Surrealists would never have used. But although the landscape is mutating, the driver is always in control of the car. The attention is directed to the progression in the poem, and the image content is undercut and distanced by that fact. Illusion comes with a tag. The transformation in Robinson's poem is not the coming into being of the image but of something even deeper—the perception of mind in control of its language. Distance, rather than absorption, is the intended effect.

3

Total Syntax: The Work in the World

We can understand syntax as the relation of total sense to the order of elements in a language; that is, the way words make sense by means of their sequence in time.

However, interpretation demands context, and a statement also will be built of elements of its possible contexts. Syntax has a spatial dimension, if space is taken in the broadest sense to be not only physical but cultural and linguistic.

In art, one can speak of a syntax where the time element is not intrinsic to the work; one can speak of the syntax of sculpture. One can speak of the syntax of one word as a work of art or the syntax of a sequence of shots in a film.

Syntax taken in relation to art means: how is the statement of the work made, both in time and space. Works of art make a statement, though this statement is not to be written on a blackboard and diagrammed for all eternity.

The syntax of a work of art, in whatever medium, has intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. There are no fixed rules for this syntax; "acceptability of statement" or "competence in art-language" are time-bound, culturally specific, and a part of the total human situation.

Statement causes a change of state. The objects and con-

texts of art are relative and continuous. A work of art can incorporate an exterior syntax within conventional or radical frames, and the interior syntax of a work can likewise lead to a new context.

To take one example, Douglas Sirk's film *Imitation of Life*, which, as the title ironically admits, is about the problem of art. The plot of the film juxtaposes two stories: the success story of a white actress, equaling the Hollywood formula, against the tragedy of her black maid, whose daughter attempts to pass as white. The success story is equated with the mode of Hollywood film—for the purposes of the plot, the actress's story *is* film.

A white woman meets a black woman, by chance, and takes her on as a domestic. The actress's daughter and the maid's daughter become best friends. The actress succeeds in Hollywood, but the maid is still the maid. The daughter, played by Sandra Dean, is blonde, energetic, and has boy troubles. The maid's daughter is dark-haired, sullen, quasi-bohemian, and starts to run away at night.

The maid, whose heart has been broken by her daughter, is talking to the actress, who has been a sympathetic character up to this point. The maid says that she is going to die soon, and that she would like to have an enormous funeral and invite all her friends.

> Actress: Friends? What friends?
> Maid: Oh, I have a lot of friends. I belong to a church and two lodges.
> Actress: You do? I didn't know that![1]

But the actress has known the maid for fifteen years. Here the Hollywood film is recording, internally, its own obliviousness to the world. The syntax of the work travels outside the boundaries of the constructed work and into time and space.

The sense of syntax being proposed here is quite different from that of recent linguistics. Chomsky, in *Syntactic Structures*, specifies that in his approach

> the process of "understanding a sentence" can be explained in part in terms of the notion of linguistic level. . . . In order to understand a sentence it is necessary to know the kernel sentences from which it originates. . . . The general problem of analyzing the process of "understanding" is thus reduced . . . to the problem of explaining how kernel sentences are understood—these being considered the basic 'content elements' from which the usual, more complex sentences of real life are formed.[2]

Linguistic levels are separated in Chomsky's analysis. But this statement has another syntax—it is the syntax of modernism, Williams's "essential and continuous organization" within the "apparent brokenness" of the world. The modernist linguist, out in the field with his tape recorder or at the blackboard drawing trees, frames a language that is specific to his method. Values for context are either not developed or ignored. Later the method becomes the test of meaning, limiting interpretation to the question of the adequacy of the method.

> Those who propose some variant of (117i) [two utterances are phonemically distinct if and only if they differ in meaning] must be interpreting "meaning" so broadly that any reponse to language is called "meaning." But to accept this view is to denude the term "meaning" of any interest or significance. I think that anyone who wishes to save the phrase "study of meaning" as descriptive of an important aspect of linguistic research must reject this identification of "meaning" with "response to language."[3]

As a test of acceptibility, a linguist might record the words *beer* and *burr* and ask an informant to distinguish them. But in the context of a bar someone might ask for a "burr" and be understood to want a "beer"—so only the man, not his language, is drunk. The separation of linguistic levels restricts the question of the context of a statement to one of possible interpretations. The defense is of the method, not its applicability to the totality of what is being said.

I would like to propose a more total syntax for the statement that is a work of art. And I want an art that reflects that total syntax.

Imagine a simple art "statement"—a cube in the center of a gallery, both painted white. Perhaps this is a kind of kernel sentence of art, but the syntax is immediately complex. There is a syntax of construction, "interior" to the work—in this case, the form of a cube. But perhaps this form has been subtracted from the space of the gallery as much as it has been built up as an argument of form. There is also a syntax of context, "exterior" to the work, in the way the work makes its statement at a particular point in cultural time. The interior and exterior syntax are not separate; rapidly they merge in the vast array of possibilities from which come painted white cubes.

The writings of Robert Smithson show the mutual motivation of a sculptural syntax that is both interior and exterior to the work. The development of the sculpture, from the period of minimalism to the larger statements of the Spiral Jetty and the Amarillo Ramp, is not interpretable solely as an argument of forms. There is a conscious dialectic between outside and inside, much as in the example of Sirk, that extends the work into entirely new contexts for art. This dialectic is argued into existence over the range of Smithson's writings; it is their demonstration of the structure of Smithson's syntax that completes the extension of the sculpture onto a larger scale.

The syntax of Smithson's sculpture is articulated on a linguistic axis of which the central terms are *space* and *time*. *Space* is the exterior syntax; it is physical and cultural, starting from the actual site of the work. *Time* is the interior syntax; it is structural and psychological and begins with the response to the work in language. There is a continuity of space and time at all levels of the statement; in addition, these terms are generative, leading to new elements in the

work. The development of a language in the writings proposes values for sculpture, and the meditation on the syntax of art leads to the incorporation of hitherto unassimilated areas of the culture at large.

Smithson's sense of time is complex, central to his work, and ultimately predictive—it points to what will occur. In his 1965 article "Entropy and the New Monuments," the concerns of recent minimalist sculpture are stated directly as time:

> Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. Instead of being made of natural materials, such as marble, granite, or other kinds of rock, the new monuments are made of artificial materials. . . . They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages. . . . Both past and future are placed into an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere.

A monumental stasis, compelling and inert, is for Smithson a hopeful development in art. This hope is connected to the recognition and exploration of states of entropy by artists as the art world falls apart into "endless amounts of points of view." The atomization of the art world parallels the sprawl of the "slurbs" seen from city center; the breaking apart of the spatial order undermines the authority of the present time. Smithson's entropic present connects directly with the farthest pasts and futures, "bringing to mind the ice age rather than the golden age," and rejecting any claims for "progress."

Time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated by many of these artists; this displacement allows the eye to see time as an infinity of surfaces or structures. . . . Judd's work . . . vanishes into a series of motionless intervals based on an order of solids. Robert Grosvenor's suspended structural surfaces cancel out the notion of weight, and reverse the orientation of matter

within the solid-state of inorganic time. This reduction of time all but annihilated the notion of "action" in art.

The annihilation of time creates the conditions of space in the work; Judd produces "a series of motionless intervals based on an order of solids." Time and space fuse in the syntax of sculpture to generate new terms in the vocabulary: a negative value for "action" (and "action painting" behind that) and a positive value for "crystals" and the process of crystallization, which is irreversible and entropic as opposed to liberal and progressive. If "action" is the parent liquid, the abstract expressionist soup from which the cubes of the new monuments are crystallizing out, the process of crystallization affirms the entropy of the art process in a final devaluation of any "action" as a permanent value in art. The created space is atomized and dimensionless, leading to nothing but itself.

> We gain a clear perception of physical reality free from the general claims of "purity and idealism". . . . As the cloying effect of such "values" wears off, one perceives the "facts" of the outer edge, the flat surface, the banal, the empty, the cool, blank after blank; in other words, that infinitesimal condition known as entropy.[4]

Smithson's use of the metaphor of crystals and crystallization is a prototype for his propositions in art-language. The metaphor is motivated by both the forms of art and cultural facts, and it reflects the contiguity of Smithson's categories of time and space. Physical facts present conceptual difficulties that can only be approached with a certain detachment; Smithson quotes from a textbook of thermodynamics:

> But I think nevertheless, we do not feel altogether comfortable at being forced to say that the crystal is the seat of greater disorder than the parent liquid.[5]

It is a fact that in any irreversible process, such as crystallization, the entropy of the entire system can only increase. But

the metaphor here is also of art within the larger, "supersaturated" world, a crystallization of art-language from the culture at large, parallel to the developing "slurbs." The slurbs themselves appear as a crystallization as the entire society cools down to an in fact more random, though seemingly more regular, order:

> The terrain is flat and loaded with 'middle-income' housing developments with names like Royal Garden Estates, Rolling Knolls Farms . . . on and on they go, forming tiny boxlike arrangements. Most of the houses are painted white, but many are painted petal pink, frosted mint, buttercup, fudge, rose beige, antique green . . . and so on. The highways crisscross through the towns and become man-made geological networks of concrete. . . . From the shiny chrome windows of shopping centers, a sense of the crystalline prevails.[6]

The "tiny boxlike arrangements" of the slurbs are equally the forms of minimal sculpture; like the facts of crystallization, they must be approached with some detachment. The final metaphor is of a state of mind, as well as a state of the culture, ending in what the Surrealists called "objective humor" (the forehead abutting the wall, the grin pointed downward):

> Let us now define the different types of Generalized Laughter, according to the six main crystal systems: the ordinary laugh is cubic or square (Isometric), the chuckle is a triangle or pyramid (Tetragonal), the giggle is a hexagon or rhomboid (Hexagonal), the titter is prismatic (Orthorhombic), the snicker is oblique (Monoclinic), the guffaw is asymmetric (Triclinic). . . . If we apply this "ha-ha-crystal" concept to the monumental models being produced by some of the artists . . . we might begin to understand the fourth dimensional nature of their work.[7]

Here laughter is atemporal, resulting from an entropic change—a supersaturated state of mind that yields the crystals of laughter. Each unit of housing in the suburbs might be likened to an atomized spasm of hilarity. Such, indeed, would be the case at the moment of their first arrival on the

scene, a moment of estrangement that Smithson wants to perpetuate through this structural metaphor of crystallization in entropic time—the moment of the artist's estrangement on arrival.

This static, "anti-action" time owes a great deal to the experience of the movies, which Smithson continually describes as having no real duration. The syntax of film is spatial, not temporal; film is an object much like sculpture, with surfaces and edges, but one that the spectator sees from *within*. The "time of expectation" of B-movies is an ironic single moment—all devices are equivalent in their illusions. The literal time-frame is one of the physical dimensions of the film; this case for film as sculpture connects directly to Smithson's entropic moment in cultural time, seen as "the life of the artist":

> Some artists see an infinite number of movies. Hutchinson, for instance, instead of going to the country to study nature, will go to see a movie on 42nd Street, like "Horror at Party Beach" two or three times and contemplate it for weeks on end. The movies give a ritual pattern to the lives of many artists, and this induces a kind of "low-budget" mysticism, which keeps them in a perpetual trance. The "blood and guts" of horror movies provide for their "organic needs," while the "cold steel" of Sci-fi movies provides for their "inorganic needs."[8]

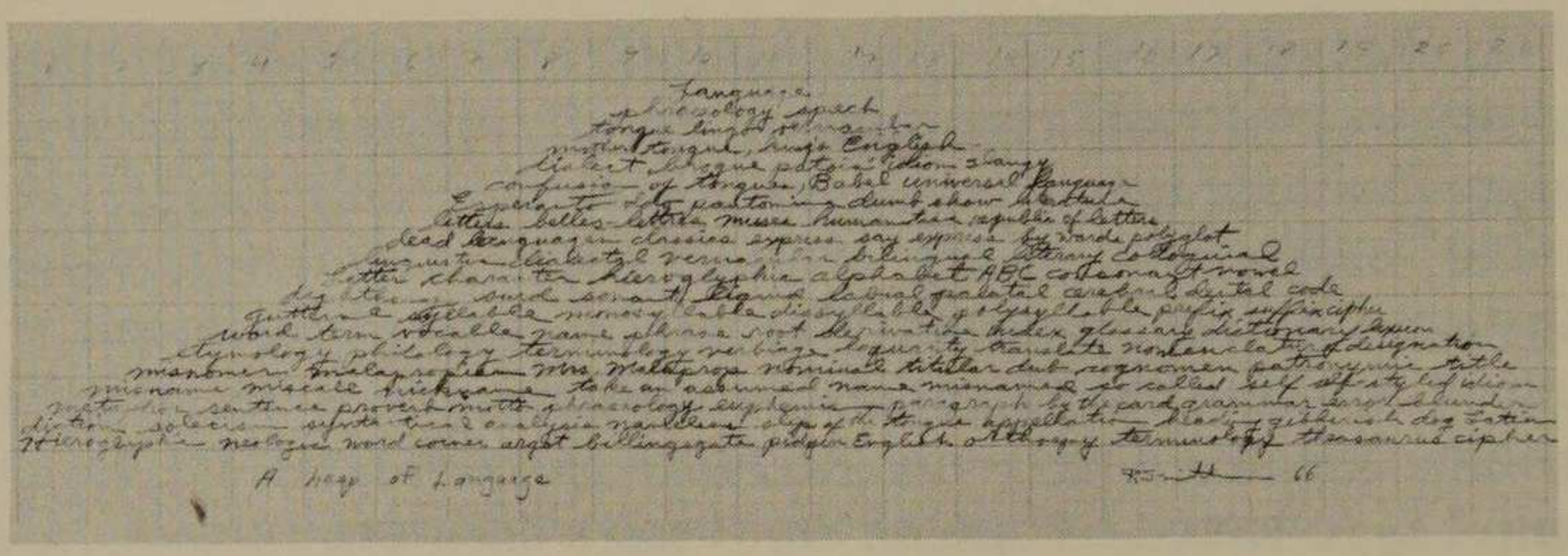
Later, in his article "A Cinematic Atopia," Smithson describes the piling up of vast quantities of image matter, much as in the metaphor of Burroughs's "Image Bank." The images of film are a kind of cultural raw material, suspended in a chaotic, dissociated state:

> As I write this, I'm trying to remember a film I like, or even one I didn't like. My memory becomes a wilderness of elsewheres. . . . I will allow the elsewheres to reconstruct themselves as a tangled mass. Somewhere at the bottom of my memory are the sunken remains of all the films I have ever seen, good and bad they swarm together forming cinematic mirages, stagnant pools of images that cancel each other out.[9]

This description of a "state of mind" uses a number of metaphors to be found elsewhere in Smithson's work. The sense of an inchoate mass of mirages might refer to the "supersaturated" subjectivity of the artist in entropic time—though in this case it does not crystallize out in ordered forms such as cubes or suburbs but rather stays suspended in its undifferentiated state. The sense of film's devices bewildering the mind is reflected in one of Smithson's early sculptures, "The Eliminator"—an ironic construction of mirrors and neon that is intended to "diminish the viewer's memory dependencies or traces." "Memory vanishes while looking at the Eliminator," as it similarly vanishes in the atemporal experience of film. Later sculptural works use this metaphor of oblivion in the "tangled mass" or "stagnant pool," reflecting the process by which "images cancel each other out" in an atemporal atopia. This undifferentiated state is taken literally in the work—the metaphor is embodied directly as sculpture.

The figure of a heap (or mass or pool) of images is extended to language, as well as to other materials; there is, in Smithson's art-language, a syntax of heaps. In his drawing "A Heap of Language," language is represented as a pile of synonyms for *language* from Roget's Thesaurus—*lingo, jargon, patois, King's English,* and so on, reflecting a somewhat categorical and leveling approach. An equivalency principle is at work here—words become metaphors for a deconstructed referent that is endlessly repeated. In the same way that all images "say" the same thing (Smithson sees "all those 'characters' carrying out dumb tasks" in film), language consists of an infinite number of replicas of itself, each of which say "language." In this language a temporal syntax could only be a repetition, accreting in the image Smithson gives of a heap. The heap of language can only be added to in time by the production of more language. "My sense of language is that it is matter and not idea—i.e., printed matter."

There is an interconvertibility between language and object here that is the reverse of the Surrealist position, in



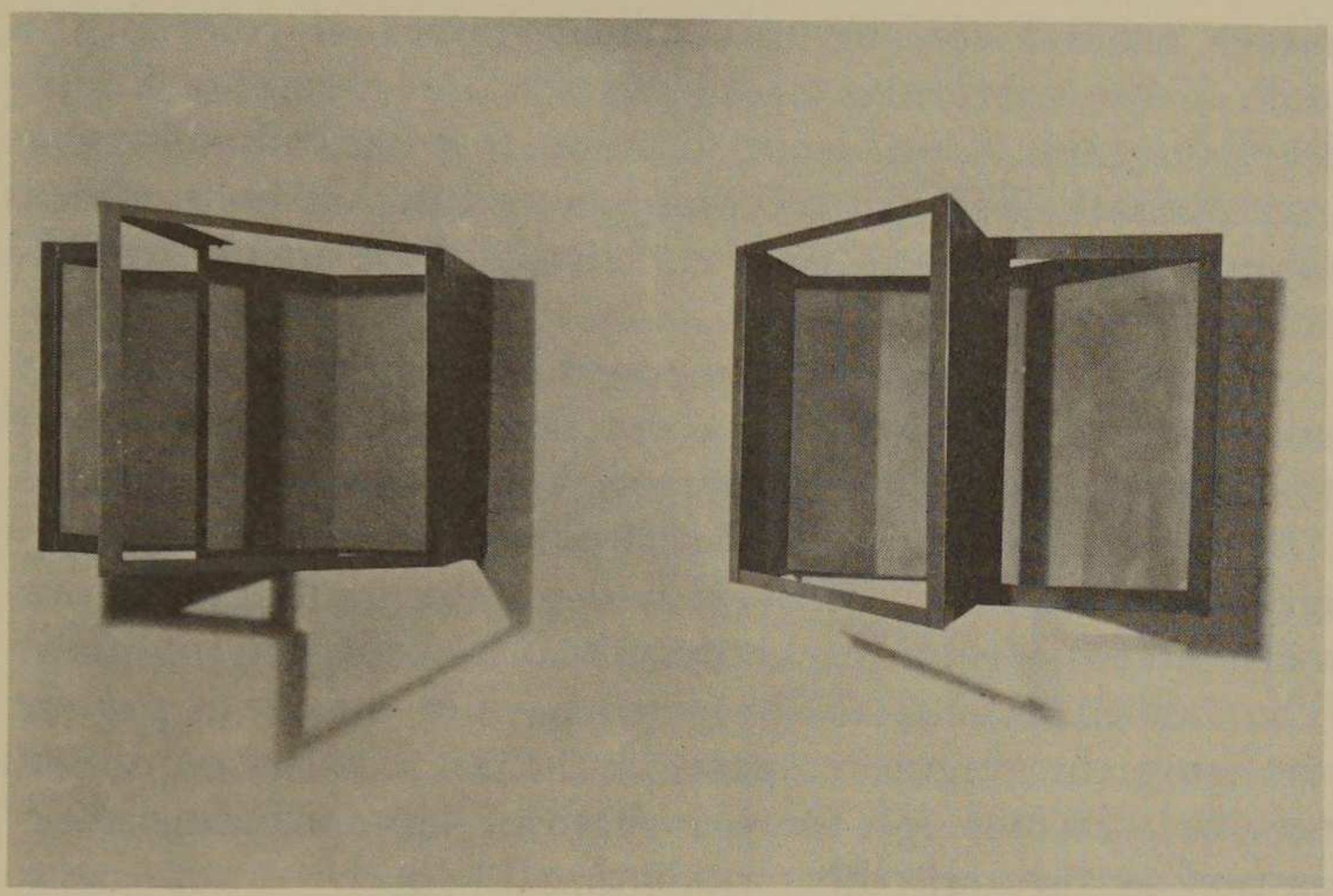
Robert Smithson, "A Heap of Language." Photograph courtesy of the John Weber Gallery.

which an object can be considered equally inside language or outside it. A Surrealist poem, according to Breton, can be an arrangement of objects, or an object can be incorporated directly into the poem. For Smithson, language and objects are coextensive, but the relation is ironic—printed matter is simply a heap. Smithson relies heavily on language as matter in his dialectics—the language of description is a part of his sculpture. In a positive sense this reflects the importance of his writings for his overall project; negatively, it is a parody of art criticism.

The ironic object is Smithson's first response to this problem of "masses" of language and material. The ceaseless proliferation of forms, as in "A Cinematic Atopia," points to one of his earliest breakthroughs in sculpture.

> In this cinematic atopia orders and groupings have a way of proliferating outside their original structure or meaning. . . . Tangled jungles, blind paths, secret passages, lost cities invade our perception. . . . We wander between the towering and the bottomless. . . . The longer we look through a camera or watch a projected image the remoter the world becomes, yet we begin to understand that remoteness more. . . . "A camera filming itself in a mirror would be the ultimate movie," says Jean-Luc Godard.[10]

This call for distance and irony, as in "the camera filming itself," is a response to the "blind paths" of unmotivated



Robert Smithson, "Enantiomorphic Chambers." Photograph courtesy of the John Weber Gallery.

forms as well as to the "state of mind" that is lost in them. Smithson realized this distance and irony in his "Enantiomorphic Chambers," a single sculpture consisting of two mirror-image, three-dimensional frames that support mirrors that mirror each other, canceling itself out. The sculpture is a moment of hysterical laughter crystallized into mute and objective form. The presence of "masses" of language outside this terminus is not apparent to the viewer, but they motivate the work.

Another ironic metaphor in "Enantiomorphic Chambers" is that of organic form, which is taken to its oxymoronic dead end in the sculpture. Enantiomorphs in organic chemistry and biochemistry are mirror-image structures that differ in physical and biological properties due to their different configurations around an axis. Enantiomorphs can be right-handed or left-handed; dextrose and levose are an example. Materials are not only material—they are arrange-

ments around coordinate systems, frames of reference as well. If the wilderness of images leads to a camera filming itself, "organic form" leads to an art that can only mirror its assumptions. The irony comments usefully on holistic ideas of organic form, and on the "self-sight" of artists involved with them.

There are still other structural metaphors at work. "Enantiomorphic Chambers" is constructed to hold a mirror up to itself; life is not being mirrored by art here—only art is. The irony makes the "self-sufficiency" of art a part of a larger situation—one in which a greater randomness prevails. An art object now represents one reality among many. The self-mirroring device incorporates its own parody, changing the linguistic space of the art. An art object will now be seen through the paradigm of "art mirroring itself" as well as through the paradigm of "object." A relation to context is now a part of the sculpture; the mirror builds art into the paradigm. But these metaphors are ironic; it is still necessary that art accept them, which it (perhaps unknowing) has done.

The "Enantiomorphic Chambers" mirror art into an equivalence with the object itself, demanding a new logic for sculpture. There is no "tertium quid" to sit in judgment of "what kind of thing this is"; there can only be a real-time commitment by the artist to submit to the judgment of art. The paradigm eats into him, demanding more sculpture, as it eats into the world at large. This logic is quite other than the Surrealist dialectic, in which a paradigm is produced by the artist in order to install a dialectic that begins with others. In Smithson's work, art does the work, and there is a question of who is in control. In celebrating its own uselessness, art demands a greater scale. Rather than the thesis, antithesis, synthesis of Surrealism, the movement is: synthesis, thesis, antithesis, which then, like a "free radical" in chemistry, can look around for some synthesis to prey on—perhaps that of Clement Greenberg.

So the final metaphor of the "Enantiomorphic Chambers" is that of pure mental projection—that an idea can be built. This seems to have been liberating for Smithson—the problem of the motivation of form is collapsed to thought and language, opening the way for a statement that can transcend its medium. But there is always an ironic undercurrent to the project. The self-mirroring emphasizes the negative—nothing will come of this but itself. The artist is drawn back into the question of a form that is self-consuming, leaving only the illusion of having been there.

This metaphor of pure mental projection is part of an analysis of style, and Smithson is particularly interested in stylistic extremes. The extremes of illusion seem to lack motivation; only an extreme can be self-sufficient on a larger scale. Smithson discusses the painting of the Mannerist period, where narrative paradigms assume effusive disproportions in huge, overdone displays (long fingers, waxlike expressions, a larger-than-life scale . . .), in these terms. Devices, rather than being transparent, are substantial, physical—they have a life of their own.

> Far from being non-illusionistic, Brecht calls attention to the physical elements of illusion, thus illusion exists on an equal level with reality. . . . This is true of many Mannerist pictures, where for instance everything turns away from the center of interest. This *turning away* from what is thought to be "important" is at the bottom of the a[lienation]-effect.[11]

Mannerism for Smithson implies a world of edges (nature is a sphere whose circumference is everywhere but whose center is nowhere, to quote Pascal in reverse). This dissociation of the sensible from its underlying dominant, especially that of a "Golden Age" of humanist modernism, owes a great deal to Smithson's reading of George Kubler's *The Shape of Time*, which is concerned with the problems of a temporal hierarchy of forms. Kubler describes the history of art as a series of interrelated problems set off in time; forms, styles

atrophy and are revived in new contexts. This is opposed to the historical inevitability of Clement Greenberg's modernism, where art is continually striving toward its own essence, as evidence of a kind of "progress." Smithson describes Kubler's view as a string of beads; he probably envisioned Greenberg's as a kind of terminal morass, a swamp of cultural waste-production. Rather the hard edge of temporal disjunction than the stagnant pool of painterly values!

Kubler allows for a consideration of the devices of art that is not subsumed by a categorization of periods (classical, romantic, decadent, modern). In his article "Ultramoderne," Smithson describes the congruence of devices that are shared by modernist and archaic architecture as indicating not a question of periods but a similarity of states of mind. At the center of this state of mind is the null center/illusionist edge paradigm that Smithson identifies in the Mannerist period and in Brecht, charted here on a monumental scale in 30s architecture, whose primary qualities are seen in terms of time:

> The Ultramoderne exists *ab eterno*. . . . He does not 'make' history to impress those who believe in one history. Belief is not the motive behind the timeless, but rather a skepticism is the generating force. This skepticism takes the shape of a paradigmatic or primordial infrastructure, that repeats itself in an infinite number of ways. It is not an accident that 'the mirror' is one of the more widely used materials of the 'thirties, and that the façades of buildings contained countless variations of brickwork. . . . An archaic ontology puts the Ultramoderne in contact with the many types of monumental art from every major period—Egyptian, Mayan, Inca, Aztec, Druid, Indian, etc. The Ultramoderne contains the 'primes' that establish enigmas not explanations. . . . The more exact the primes the clearer the Time-Crystal.[12]

This refraction of the qualities of the "ultramoderne" state of mind goes on at length in a one-paragraph piece. In its original publication it is placed next to several illustrations: repeti-

tive brickwork on a building facade; a circular mirror from the 30s; and stills of the Empire State Building from Andy Warhol's film. The proliferation of mirrors and brickwork described in the piece relates directly to Smithson's style of presentation; in "Ultramoderne" all the sentences seem to be saying the same thing—that there is no progress. The method of writing is to generate metaphorical extensions of the theme in one-sentence units. In addition to mimicking the subject at hand, with its endless windows, mirrors, decoration, Smithson is taking a shot at the pointless iteration of the language of art criticism.

This notion of art-language as static, surface-oriented, and reiterative is further developed in Smithson's essay "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art." The possibilities of language in art are described as fictional and illusionistic, as exemplified in the labyrinthine projections of Borges. Language reflects the spatial dimensions of a state of mind for Smithson:

> In the illusory babels of language, an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humors, or voids of knowledge. . . .

The actual writing of artists displays the same formal characteristics as their work—the writing of a sculptor can be a form of sculpture:

> Carl Andre's writings bury the mind under rigorous incantatory arrangements. Such a method smothers any reference to anything other than the words. Thoughts are crushed into a rubble of syncopated syllables. Reason becomes a powder of vowels and consonants. His words hold together without any sonority.

Language and sculpture are equally fictional and material. The distance from language that Smithson takes here ex-

tends to even larger fictions, such as the nineteenth-century fiction of "nature" or the twentieth-century fiction of "progress." For Smithson, there is nothing natural about The Museum of Natural History—it is a showcase of illusions. Smithson's particular favorite illusion is the visualization of prehistoric eras by the Museum's muralist Charles R. Knight ("one of the best recreators of dinosaurism"), who is quoted:

> "Great sprawling salamander-like creatures such as Eryops are typical of this period. . . . They were stupid, smooth-skinned monsters some six feet long, with wide tooth-filled jaws and an enormous gape which enabled them to swallow their food at a single gulp."

This version of nature is a pure projection of illusion, akin to science-fiction or B movies. Its purity is its nonfunctionality; the artist has been completely caught up in his fantasy, and the world accepts it. This adolescent scenario extends to another Sunday-afternoon resource: maps. Maps for Smithson are the ultimate fiction; they are highly illusionistic, almost Mannerist:

> Each dot in [Buckminster Fuller's] *World Energy Map* refers to "1% of World's harnessed energy slave population (inanimate power serving man) in terms of human equivalents . . . ", says Fuller. The use Fuller makes of the "dot" is in a sense a concentration or dilation of an infinite expanse of spheres of energy. The "dot" has its rim and middle, and could be related to . . . Pascal's universe of center and circumference.[13]

The highly unnatural premises of these fictions, from art criticism to mapmaking, provide generative metaphors for Smithson's language of sculpture.

Starting with the fictionality and illusionism of language, Smithson goes on to create a new kind of literature in his critical writings. The realm of this literature is physical space; its constructive dimension is the illusion of time. The ironies of representation are located on the temporal axis, which is partial, entropic, and negative, while the affirmations of

Smithson's literary method are in space, which is not ironic. If time is ultimately a state of mind for Smithson, space is the redeemed imagination, where the ironies of the mind have been made physically real. Space implies a future that is not ironic.

This literature is constructed on numerous bipolar oppositions. Smithson's mania for the dialectic derives from his parody of the subject-object illusions of art criticism. Smithson could set off spontaneous oppositions at the drop of a hat. An acutely estranged state of mind in the confines of the art environment produces ironic crystallizations of descriptive fiction based on the "objects" of art as its response:

> A reversible up and down quality was an important feature of the work which Judd showed in the VIII Sao Paulo Bienale. It is impossible to tell what is hanging from what or what is supporting what. Ups are downs and downs are ups. An uncanny materiality inherent in the surface engulfs the basic structure. Both surface and structure exist simultaneously in a suspended condition. What is outside vanishes to meet the inside, while what is inside vanishes to meet the outside.[14]

And so on. At the basis of this writing is a flagrant and ironic use of metaphor ("downs are ups . . .") that indicates the impossibility of any real "likeness." While offered in a spirit of occasional nihilism and general impatience, Smithson's tropes are positively motivated by sculptural concerns. Smithson uses language to expand the normative metaphors of his art in order to create an even larger context for the work. The sum total of the tropes leads the imagination beyond the confines of art-language to the possibility of even larger statements—for example, the Spiral Jetty.

Metaphor for Smithson is the structure of an essential sculptural problem—the increasing scale of an illusionistic "likeness." If A *is* X, the statue of Mussolini *is* the state; the Monument to the Third International *is* history; a cube *is* the crystallization of a state of mind. Smithson has this to say about metaphor:

> Words for mental processes are all derived from physical *things*. References are often reversed so that the "object" takes the place of the "word." A is A is never A is A, but rather X is A. The misunderstood notion of metaphor has it that A is X—that is wrong.[15]

Around any physical object, mental tropes peel off. The Empire State Building stops time, dominates space—but it does this metaphorically. For this reason, metaphor has a particular use in indicating, and altering, the *scale* of an object. The scale of the Empire State Building has been increased to that of space and time—certainly an even larger scale. According to Smithson, "while *size* determines an object, it is *scale* that determines art." Language is a metaphor for matter and vice versa—Smithson builds his dialectics on metaphor to locate an object on an increased scale. This game might turn into a static nothing without the third term in the dialectic, the predictive, projected image of the work.

A string of permutations, with concrete examples, might elucidate the generative power of such structural metaphors for art. Here the grammar, not only the terms, is metaphorical:

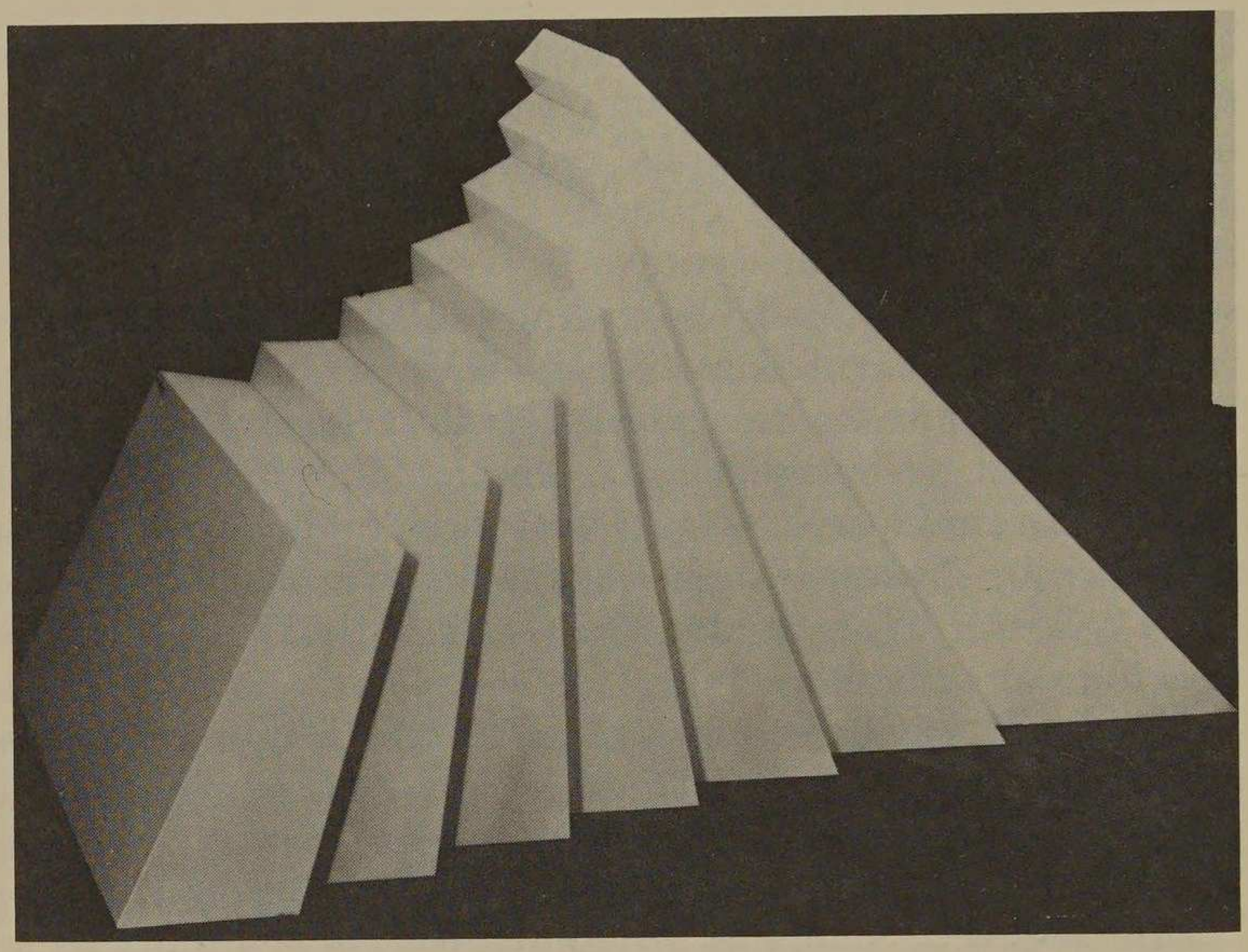
> Time turns metaphor into things.
> —The "Enantiomorphic Chambers"
> Metaphor turns time into things.
> —The "Age of Picasso"
> Things turn time into metaphor.
> —The Monument to the Third International
> Metaphor turns things into time.
> —Clement Greenberg's modernism
> Time turns things into metaphor.
> —An Edsel
> Things turn metaphor into time.
> —The statue of Laocöon

The way these statements can be interpreted indicates the way Smithson used language to pose sculptural problems on

an increased scale. More generally, "context turns objects into relation," worked through various combinations: contexts, objects, and relations redefine and consume each other, leading to larger grounds for statement. The key to this expansion is a nonidentity: "A is A" is not a symmetrical statement. "War is Hell," according to Smithson, means that "war can be imagined as 'hell' "—in order to understand "war," we conjure up the image of "hell," an even larger scale and one that permits extremes. The real is being explained in terms of the unreal, on a grammatical level. This practical approach to illusion is similar to that of Breton in "Letter to Seers" (1925): "You predict that I will be in China, and by that I am already there."

This theory of the imagination is embodied in a number of Smithson's sculptures, for example the "Leaning Strata," though his sense of the future is more problematic than in Breton. In addition to being a "pure" sculptural form, "Leaning Strata" contains an absurdist view of history as a heap of truncated temporal expectations that lean in on each other, a parody of liberal democracy. A whole range of possible futures can barely hold each other up. There are an "endless amount of points of view" here, some narrow and pointed (refined), others broad and stubby (generalizing). Other metaphors can be found, such as a comment on the space given by Renaissance perspective, which in this work is ironized and canceled out by being made physically real. The material realization of an idea is the key to an entrance into the world at large, though the meanings generated may be ironic.

This literal use of mental projection is the basis for method in a number of Smithson's writings. In "Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan," mirrors are used as concrete metaphors in an ironic investigation of various sites. Smithson places roughly a dozen mirrors at nine locations in the Yucatan, making for a shift in perspective that generates the narrative/documentary prose. The prose is constructed in a



Robert Smithson, "Learning Strata." Photograph courtesy of the John Weber Gallery.

manner similar to the way the mirrors are disposed of in space:

> In a suburb of Uxmal, which is to say nowhere, the second displacement was deployed. What appeared to be a shallow quarry was dug into the ground to a depth of about four to five feet, exposing a bright red clay mixed with white limestone fragments. Near a small cliff the twelve mirrors were stuck into clods of earth. It was photographed from the top of the cliff. Again Tezcatlipoca spoke, "That camera is a portable tomb, you must remember that." On this same site, the Great Ice Cap of Gondwanaland was constructed according to a map outline on page 459 of Marshall Kay's and Edwin H. Colbert's *Stratigraphy and Life History*. It was an "earthmap" made of white limestone. A bit of the Carboniferous period is now installed near Uxmal. That great age of calcium carbonate

seemed a fitting offering for a land so rich in limestone. Reconstructing a land mass that existed 350 to 305 million years ago on a terrain once controlled by sundry Mayan gods caused a collison in time that left one with a sense of the timeless.

The mirrors transport Smithson into areas of wide-ranging speculation, "and by that I am already there." If art holds the mirror up to nature, Smithson is making a metaphor of art by putting mirrors out in physical space. His attitude toward art recalls the Surrealists' "objective humor," which they located in the world—the site of impossible contradictions. Here art is the souce of its own contradictions. Smithson concludes with a statement of his literary theory:

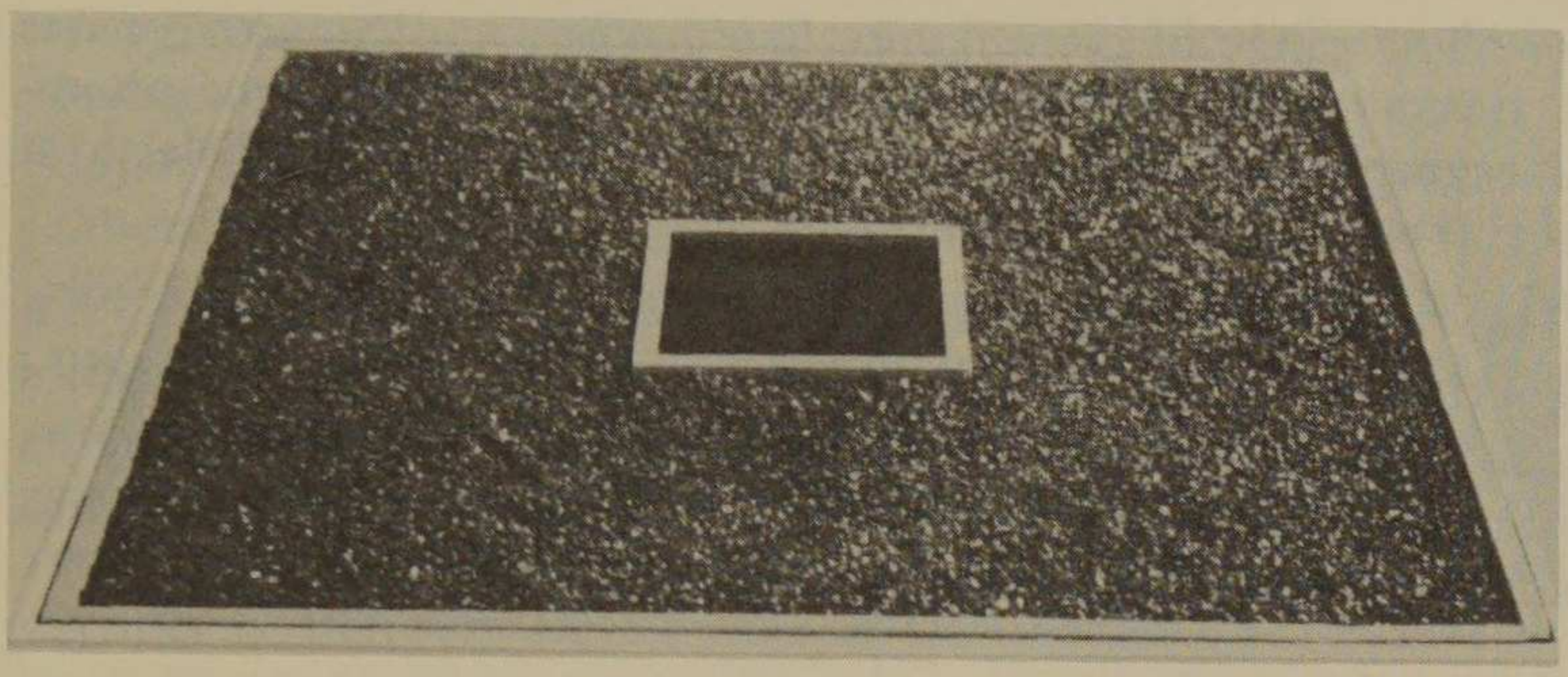
> Gondwanaland is a kind of memory, yet it is not a memory, it is but an incognito land mass that has been *unthought* about and turned into a Map of Impasse. You cannot visit Gondwanaland, but you can visit a "Map" of it.[16]

In this article and in others, such as "The Monuments of Passaic" and "The Spiral Jetty," Smithson creates a new literary form—better than the short story (because more motivated) and in fact supplanting that form. It is a prose of investigation and results, with the agency of the hero-artist, where once was either a hero or detective, as a metaphoric paradigm working against the transparency of statement. It is the detachable frame carried along the open road—where the frame is, if anything, more physically real than anything seen through it. These articles have a great deal in common with Breton's *Nadja,* which is likewise a prose of investigations and results; they might be categorized as analogical works—interpreting the structure of the world through the modalities of art. Nadja is Breton's Spiral Jetty or Mirror Displacement or Brownie Camera in Passaic, New Jersey—a figurative means for the artist to investigate the structure of the world, a trope. And in *Nadja* it is surprising how many of the structures that are discovered in that text might have been of direct interest to Smithson. Nadja sitting in a cafe

imagines great tunnels running underground; the neutral, oppressive area of a traffic circle draws her in like an entropic magnet. The image in Surrealism and the scuptural trope in Smithson have much to do with each other, based as they are on a Hegelian dialectic.

The literary use of the trope in Smithson is to achieve greater scale for the work. Criticism, obviously, is adept at such manipulation—Smithson wishes to coopt the process and make it his own. Out of an environment—a host liquid—overly saturated with critical judgments and the descriptive maneuvers to back them up, Smithson abstracts a language frame for works of art that transcends their initial cultural frames. In fact, the entire dualism of Smithson's vocabulary can be rendered as a strategy for getting the work out of the galleries and the confines of critical judgments and into real time and space, if it were not for the likelihood that Smithson had no intention of stopping there. The paradigmatic entropic crystal of art would continue to travel through the peripheral cultural and historical forms, I am sure: a Sirk movie in perpetual motion, constantly grabbing in larger and larger sections of experience hitherto unacknowledged as possible in art.

The final two poles in Smithson's tropism are those of "site" and "nonsite." Smithson's nonsites are gallery works, in which quantities of materials from sites such as quarries, sulfur mines, caves, are brought into a frame. Smithson built framed boxes for this content; these physical containers are likewise metaphors for anything that might be contained. In one such work, "Tar Pool and Gravel Pit," a system of frames and materials reverses the usual logic of framing and materials—or at least confuses it. The gravel could be the frame for the wood framing the tar pit, and so on, and the work proposes an increasing stickiness as we arrive at the center of its content. An approximation to the humor ends in the ironic object in the gallery site, with the "serious art lovers" crowded around. The other pole in Smithson's dialectic is the



Robert Smithson, "Tar Pool and Gravel Pit." Reprinted, by permission, from Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), © 1979 by Nancy Holt.

site: works of art done in spaces outside the gallery. Smithson develops an entire syntax of site in his extension of his work into the world in the largest sense:

> Remote places such as the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and the frozen wastes of the North and South Poles could be coordinated by art forms that would use the actual land as a medium. Television could transmit such activity all over the world.

It is clear in the above that Smithson's faith in the extension of his site work begins first with language. Through language, art tends not toward itself, as in Greenberg's metaphysics, but toward the scale of the culture at large:

> All language becomes an alphabet of sites, or it becomes what we will call the Air Terminal between Fort Worth and Dallas.[17]

While unlike the syntax of a natural language, Smithson's dialectics make a productive syntax for art. In his dialectics of site and nonsite, for example, the ironies of art-language are generative, leading to the incorporation of new terms in the work:

> The range of convergence between Site and Nonsite consists of a course of hazards, a double path made up of signs, photographs, and maps that belong to both sides of the dialectic at once.[18]

This "double path . . . of signs, photographs, and maps" is a good description of his writings. But Smithson's dialectics also lead to the production of single, non-ironic statements such as the Spiral Jetty, in which a language is extended into space on a scale previously not possible in art.

The possibilities for statement in art are taken in quite different directions in the work of three contemporary poets: Clark Coolidge, Ron Silliman, and Steve Benson. Like Smithson, all three work toward a greater scale in art, and their solutions to the problems of scale reveal new developments in syntax.

In *Nadja,* Breton makes a curious statement, but one that indicates his own priorities:

> As far as I am concerned, a mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects is even more important than its regard for certain arrangements of objects, these two kinds of arrangement controlling between them all forms of sensibility.[19]

The "mind's arrangement with regard to certain objects" is certainly at the basis of syntax in the work of both Breton and Smithson. Breton's surrealist image fixes the flux of automatism in static images, simple objects. Later, an object can be incorporated directly into the poem, which is essentially an oneiric form, without any loss in translation. Nadja is one such oneiric object—a woman. Smithson's generative syntax begins with tropes that are refractions of a single object seen through the lens of an ironic observer. They prepare the ground for other objects on larger, more monumental scales—such as the Spiral Jetty.

In the work of Coolidge, Silliman, and Benson, there is, without wishing to overdraw a comparison, a syntactic basis

in a "regard for certain arrangements of objects." A relation *between* things, a situation with its *own* laws, is the point of departure. Any given "object" has an essential relation to other objects, as well as a disposition to the observer. The observer, rather than being ironic, is responsible to the contingencies of any *thing* that might compel him. The situation as a whole must be taken in—linguistic, social, psychological—and it is not just a projection of the observer. The syntax of the world is elusive, though what is seen in this syntax is different in the case of each writer.

Clark Coolidge must be given credit for realizing the possibilities of *extension* of a syntax of "arrangement," although a number of writers have preceded him in recognizing its possibilities for art. The mimicking of the painterly surface in the first generation of New York School poets (John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara), as well as the performance values of experimentalists such as John Cage and Jackson Mac Low, are the two major influences, with Gertrude Stein and Williams's experimental prose in the shadowy past. Coolidge's extension of this possibility proceded in a deliberate, step-by-step manner over the course of his work. Its contribution to the question of scale in art is due to its exploration of the psychological implications of "arrangement"—extending experimentalism where it may have reached a dead end in painterly surfaces or performance values.

Coolidge's first collection, *Space,* shows the influence of the painterly surface of the New York School poets, and it also shows the beginning of the path beyond.[20] The book is divided into four sections, each a characteristic area of work. A number of works in the first section bear a close resemblance to the kind of cut-up, painterly lyricism of John Ashbery's *The Tennis Court Oath,* which uses a number of "exterior" procedures on found texts in a kind of "all-over" mimicry of the surfaces of Abstract Expressionism. The materials used are generally ironic and aestheticized at

the same time; false scenarios, inappropriate remarks, and a skewed, unmotivated syntax reflect the mind at work, along with a continual hint of the philosophical relevance of the impossibility of statement. However aestheticized, the work was a significant breakthrough, as evidenced by the number of its immediate followers. A work by Coolidge that is relevant to this context is the second poem in the book, "The Image Furnace, Under Brine":

> "the good ease!," sighed slamming his pencil
> vacuum of the light bulb drop, the sigh
> sign vent of its
> slat
> way
> (P. 4)

The gestures here are much like Ashbery's: "sighed slamming his pencil" betrays the anxiety of the fragmentary; "the sigh / sign vent of its / slat" seems to find a high irony in the problem of representing a mental state. But the emphasis of these anxious fragments is differently arranged than in Ashbery—there is a stronger, more propulsive pulse, an underlining of rhythmic play. This emphasis on the rhythmic, purely temporal dimension sets Coolidge off from the other imitators of *The Tennis Court Oath*. Coolidge sees Kerouac's "spontaneous bop prosody" in these cool surfaces, bringing to mind Coolidge's brief career as a jazz drummer. The temporal axis gives the go-ahead into a different aesthetic space, in much the same way that pure mental projection gave Smithson his permission. The materials and impulses can be given a kind of play—in the ironizing of meaning in Smithson, or in its basic mutability toward sound in Coolidge.

The jazz drummer is clearly visible in "Bontecou Chandelier":

> jars jars jars oil staples donuts
> wire, at the wrist, the Hey

Crenulated. Absolving. Holiday Swells.
meant snake to draw to slight slide to it
cuss snow car crust (drainage, Albany) rubble
can in sincerity (lumps, jeers)
bent nose ends fires (mattress, Iron)
Jersey, Jersey (P. 16)

If sound is leading Coolidge into the words, the sense is not far behind. The word stock of the above passage is consistently "American Industrial," a vocabulary of castoffs and slag heaps that might be typical of visual artists like Rauschenberg, Johns, and later, Smithson. The listing "jars jars jars" gives an immediately cultural component to the rhythmic drive—one could also have "cars cars cars" or "bars bars bars" and be giving a good picture of what actually follows, "Jersey, Jersey." The scenario in these works is quite different from the more abstract compositional plane of Ashbery—it is the practical, object-oriented, American cultural desert that Coolidge is trying to beat into life. The identification with Kerouac, in a form quite different from the spontaneous sketching of *Visions of Cody,* is still marked. A new value is being given to "calling up things by their names" in the willful drive of the sound. This syntax is certainly far from that asserted on the dustjacket, where "syntax . . . is simply removed."

Words in Coolidge are cultural facts, rhythmic and semantic imponderables. There are, in real time and space, whole landscapes of such imponderables; they stare one in the face with artifice and inertness, as in Las Vegas. No cultural nationalist, however, Coolidge is not tied down to any simplistic tagging of his materials. The America of his word stock is assumed, leaving open more universal questions as the ontology and psychology of such language. From the development of work in *Space* (which may not be chronological), Coolidge appears to be increasingly drawn to a scrutiny of words, to questions of their ultimate nature. The third section moves away from the more extended works, which still appear to be

bounded by the single page frame of the conventional lyric, to constructions that deliberate over weights and balances of words in highly delimited arrangements. Words are not being given "object status" here; rather, they are being questioned in terms of their relations with other words. One such poem, quoted in full:

ounce code orange
a
the
ohm
trilobite trilobites (P. 68)

Coolidge discusses his motivation in this work in the following terms:

> I couldn't stand the idea of one word. I don't think there *is* one word. . . . I was really trying to work with the words, look at the words, try to use all their qualities. There's no question of meaning, in the sense of explaining and understanding this poem. Hopefully, it's a unique object, not just an object. Language isn't just objects, it moves.[21]

The power of words is not in their status as objects but in their relation to each other. This concern, which runs deep in Coolidge's work, is also stated in an earlier interview:

> That's like my idea about arrangement . . . an old alchemical notion that if you take objects, like the objects on this table, any objects, and arrange them in the correct order, that some incredible shift, or something, would happen. Something would be affected. Like the power is in the arrangement not in the objects.[22]

It is the arrangement of words that unlocks their energies, drives the temporal event. But if words are like objects in an arrangement, there is still a question, for Coolidge, of particular qualities of these entities motivating their possible arrangements. His attention to words is to their differential

status on a number of linguistic levels that qualify their use in combination:

> "ohm" is the unit of electrical resistance, a quality of metal, let's say, that requires a certain amount of juice to go through. In other words, this is a fuzzy, resistant word. . . . "trilobites": you know what a trilobite is, it's an early animal of the Paleozoic Age that was a crustacean divided into three lobes. As a word to me it's completely irreducible. What are you going to do with it? "A trilobite": it's like a clinker.[23]

Here Coolidge looks *into* the word—it is not just a question of surface characteristics. The meditation on semantics is enacted in the way the words are placed on the page.

This meditation on semantics can be seen even in those works that use entities below the level of the word, in Coolidge's case morphemes such as "ed," "ing," "tion," and so on. The following is from the last page of "A D," the last work in *Space:*

erything

eral

stantly

ined

ards

cal

nize

(P. 120)

These morphemes become words, motivated by their (vertical, sequential) arrangement to the same possibilities of statement. Each is a whole, and like "trilobites" they are irreducible "clinkers."

Possibly Coolidge's most famed investigation into the possibilities of arrangement is in a work published as a sepa-

rate pamphlet, *Suite V*.[24] The poems in this work are composed of two words per $8\frac{1}{2} \times 11''$ page, placed at the top and bottom, with plenty of white space in between. All the words are four-lettered, and all have an *s* at the end. Some of these minimal pairs are: "taps / / buns," "keys / / ohms," "cans / / arms," and so on. The amount of space between the words is significant—there is a palpable time-lag between them. The page is being used to specify an interval in time. The temporal gap here induces a certain energy between the words, similar to that of Reverdy's "light of the image" produced by the pairing of unrelated verbal images, though without particular attention to time. Coolidge has also explored this semantic potential energy gap in a work involving tape loops, in which two loops at different speeds are phased in and out with each other and the phase interaction is recorded. The words on the two tape loops can be heard as two separate words at their maximum temporal spread, or as a phrase of some kind when occurring close to each other in time. The question is when and under what conditions this phrase linkage will occur, and what kind of energy will be produced. The phenomenology of syntax is being considered quite literally here, though it should be remembered that Coolidge is listening to the energy of the statement as a compositional possibility for his work.

This analytic interest in the potential energies of words in arrangements is equaled by an expressive impulse in Coolidge that reflects his reading of Kerouac. The opposite of the technical, this identification is cultural (New England) as well as stylistic ("spontaneous bop prosody"). Coolidge's contribution to *The World*'s "Autobiography" issue begins:

> let's chug it up to Diamond . . . maybe or Calumet . . . Jesus, Calumet in the dark? . . . or go climb the Geofort . . . naw, you crazy? we'll get snagged in our basement coats . . . shit on the fucking around we gotta go . . . well, Ray, you know, if we go, we'll end up with you a-s on fire . . . well actually . . . if you light . . . my ass . . . on fire . . . those guys in the project put

their lights'll always go on . . . let's go . . . maybe we can practice to shit off the edge a thousand feet & then the beercans . . . Jesus Ray, remember that time we were goin up in the dark & you got around above somewhere somehow & pushed a huge fucking *block* loose & down past us? . . . saw the blue sparks . . . Jesus, you really scared the shit out of us . . . Dave . . . HA-*HA!* HA-*HA!*[25]

The spontaneous verbalizing here has an adolescent character; names and dates on granite in white paint are a similar graphemic response to the New England mentality. The "mouthing off" in this piece seems to be a linguistic "carrier frequency" that can go on indefinitely. In Kerouac an echo of this kind of verbalizing produced a breakthrough in prose, one which is very much on Coolidge's mind:

> I was thinking of those long, long sentences [in Kerouac] where he's doing what he calls sketching. He might literally be in front of the subject, or it might be in his mind. It might be a brick wall, or that incredible section of the food in the windows, or the cafeteria section in the beginning of *Visions of Cody*. Where it goes on for endless pages. It's this beautiful line, it's always changing. Things'll just pop up, and you can see that he didn't think of that. It just came, because he was following this line, what's next, what's next.[26]

As opposed to the possibilities of combination and recombination Coolidge sees in arrangement, this mode of writing is not reducible to components. Coolidge is interested here in the vectoral potentials of work on a single scale—that of the writer in time. In this sense writing is self-sufficient, a "pure product of America," adequate in itself.

In work that appeared after the publication of *Space*, Coolidge moves away from the conventional page frame of the lyric poem into longer forms. *The Maintains* builds a 100-page poem from language taken from the dictionary (and possibly other sources).[27] The breakthrough in this work is Coolidge's use of an "equivalency principle" in the line that demands a larger form. The syntax of statement in

the poem is not only word-to-word (as in "jars jars jars") but line-to-line:

> the canna seats
> a shine-hard common
> so-called boat tooth of like shape
> from the rolls
> on which hue a saturation is secured
> as a candle about the mouth
> mosquito cans stated limes
> recorded off the bark or mummy
> overhang to sing
> a fine coal
> or book list of good mass or omen
> mustard simple
> uses clot in another machines
> pie star sliding
> a perpetual vow
>
> (P. 20)

There is a metalinguistic architecture, derived from the dictionary definition, behind every line. Each line could be a definition of the line previous, and they all might be understood as definitions of "word." "a shine-hard common" could be a definition of "canna seats," with the advantages of ambiguity ("seats" is a noun or a verb) and a synaesthetic image in "shine-hard seats." The play of language is built on the structure of the line. It is possible to see each line as commenting on the one above or as an independent arrangement. The poem continually argues this edge between self-sufficiency and connection. Individual words or phrases may stand out as entities, but they are motivated by their sequence. Language is being proposed as a relation between words—ironically or perhaps didactically, as the dictionary is the source of that language.

The structural concerns of *The Maintains* are developed in the course of Coolidge's next 100-page poem, *Polaroid*.[28]

The "nounal" emphasis of the line is undermined, first by the use of nonsubstantives and then by the breaking up of the line's accretive "equivalence principle." The last section of the poem is a kind of synthesis of these developments; a new line has been produced in the process, one that increases the ambiguities of syntax as it allows for greater rhythmic variation:

> few part once and then one as around leaves close stays then
> some
> of you few head so forth by whom why leave either to go
> part and it leaves once you then some do you within stays
> behind
> either few or just some once of either leaving miss it to close to
> it beside
> the either one or it you part per whom via either one or
> few do stay once it's close to you missing the whole either one
>
> (P. 92)

The phrase structure of these lines could be bracketed in numerous ways. "few do stay once it's close" could be, at least: (few do) (stay once) (it's close); (few do stay) (once it's close); (few do stay once) (it's close); and (few do) (stay once it's close). In addition, each word could be given temporal autonomy, as in a list. The possibilities for variation of stress in reading the work, given these multiple bracketings, is enormous. Where the bracketing of the line in *The Maintains* is reinforced by the dictionary definition, in *Polaroid* the bracketing is plural, reflecting the multiple elliptical constructions of American English (a structure much more complex than its dictionary). Here there is what Williams called a "buckling" of syntax; words snap in and out of different combinations in a line. The rhythmic play is much more various than in the simple reiterative structure of *The Maintains*.

In Coolidge's work after *Polaroid* words are not only used for their potential energies in possible arrangements; they

point simultaneously to other contexts in the world or in the mind. This expansion of scale parallels a shift in technique from the lyric frame to long verse structures in accretive lines to a mode that Coolidge has designated as "prosoid": an extended, dense, lyric prose form that has past examples in Williams's *Kora in Hell,* Stein's *The Making of Americans,* Surrealist automatic texts, and, more contemporary, Robert Creeley's *Presences.* One such work is "Smithsonian Depositions," based on Smithson's writings as well as on numerous other sources such as:

> William Carlos Williams: The Selected Letters; Paterson
> Jean-Luc Godard: Pierrot Mon Ami; Les Carabiniers
> Alain Robbe-Grillet: Last Year at Marienbad
> Salvador Dali: The Secret Life of Salvador Dali
> Joseph Le Conte: Elements of Geology . . .[29]

as well as journals and newspaper clippings. Content is layered in the work in a "geological" manner, inspired by the "language as matter" formulation of Smithson's work. The text is evocative of the strata of the linguistic bedrock, the reality of which is psychological (memory) as well as cultural (historical time), while still maintaining Coolidge's basic writing values as "spontaneous bop prosodist."

Coolidge's breakthrough work in the "prosoid" form, *Quartz Hearts,* is in fact a preparatory study for his still untitled "longwork."[30] "It is in every sense a hinge work . . . ," begun during writing of the last section of *Polaroid.* The work is densely argued, involving a querying of the words as they are being produced to make sentences. Statements exist both as words and in their "other," referential contexts:

> He walked up and knocked at the front.
> His shoe was the same color as the step.
>
> •
>
> The car had an open top that he never
> looked out of as he drove straight
> ahead. An iron mushroom.
>
> •

Walking up close to the wall, I felt
the heat from above, and heard the
horn below the floor.

•

A black tree on a purple shoulder.
The sock hidden in the stump. Pliers
in a room beneath a wind across a valley.

The balance of words within a sentence, again an arrangement, is as much the subject matter here as what the sentences actually say. But possibly there really *were* "pliers in a room beneath a wind across a valley."

There was a block on the door.
The handle turned out to be square.

•

Little women sending postcards from a
donut factory. They swim toward the
end of the land. An opening gradually
presents itself and arrives.

(Pp. 4–6)

The work seems to be arguing inward, starting from simple, if ironic, units of statement in language. There is a metalinguistic underpinning that is being used to fabricate the context for the next statement, as in "An opening gradually presents itself and arrives." Reference builds structure into statement by virtue of a querying of its essential purposes.

Only sections of the "longwork" have been published as yet, so it is difficult at this point to have an accurate sense of it as a whole. Initially intended to go to 1000 pages, Coolidge read the first 200 pages over seven nights at Eighty Langton Street, San Francisco, in 1979.[31] It is generally understood to be based on a limited number of subject areas, such as geology, the movies, the music of Ives, the writings of Beckett and Creeley, and so on. These are the sources for language materials to be used in the work. There are "topic" sections, in which one particular subject is developed, and "transitional" sections, between subject areas. Medial spaces be-

tween areas of language are being "bred," much as in the "geological" interaction of materials in "Smithsonian Depositions," and the work undertakes a large-scale assimilation of related language (taken in at the point of writing, from more "daily" frames) in its development. The steady force of construction is in a constitutive voice, a kind of "verbalizing" carrier frequency generally located "in back of" the utterances of speech (or conventional lyric poetry), a foregrounding of the involuntary memory. The weight of the linguistic materials is balanced in multiple "buckling" prosoid lines. The work mimics an assertion of the self-evident world in a highly elaborate cross-referencing of multiple arrangments. Within the work there is a constant play of unusual "light of the image" between the variously juxtaposed arrangements of words. In this created world there are endlessly refracted interstices, shadows of words creating space for new words in the shadows. In real time and space, the voice in the work intends a present: "What moves can make space," as Coolidge said in writing of Larry Eigner. Physical space is being carved out of linguistic space by means of vectors through the combinatorial potentials of the American word stock. The work is presented as an unanalyzable, though completely refracted, whole.

There is, in this work, a definite monumentality. Unlike the Spiral Jetty, the monument is temporal, not spatial, but perhaps it does approach an "object status." Coolidge's gesture after reading the work—prior to any discussion—was simply to place its two volumes on the table between the writer and his audience: "Here it is." However, the work has not yet been named. From "Weathers," a section of the work:

> Slipping from, tell me, this is a star and that a fin. That bottle keeps its blink on its side red from horizon. He left it to sun in the hard, black is not black it's night. State of Cadmium set in stint. This is blurring not what could be said from a table to be a ledge. Where, losing firm, is the percolator or perimeter. Thus and so, parts of a limb on a walk, of a bird, myself or have I thought myself febrile. . . .[32]

The writer appears to be out in the "welter of forms of these events," the events being writing first of all but mimicking a condition as all-encompassing as the weather. Journals kept of weather phenomena were the basis for this section, but observations of "daily life" and the weather are functionally close at the level of words. The need to repair the typewriter, the word "Cadmium," and a dark lowering cloud at 4 PM are equivalent terms of the work. A more strictly literary area of language is explored in another section:

> Caught an eryops. The sander says misericordia. Coronal of thicket plums. A stanchion of much aisle, even, though wooden. Blending stonelight with cornhusker's cellmate. Left themselves open to the announcement none of these people died on time. Though Huxley's faith in Iguanodon's bipedality was totally vindicated in 1878 when an entire troupe of iguanodonts emerged from a coal mine in belgium, the fissure filled with Cretaceous marls. As the thought to tower an erect beast, an enigma remains itself a plural impasse. . . .[33]

"Eryops" is a word from Smithson, though it segues back to its geological home to meet "an entire troupe of iguanodonts." There are other such delimited zones of vocabulary ("misericordia," "cornhusker"), along with a running comment that is the compositional drive of the work: "an enigma remains itself a plural impasse."

Coolidge is not forthcoming on his techniques, but I imagine a writing scenario as follows: words or materials (open books, clippings) are on a table next to a typewriter. Some of these materials might be past pages of the work. The writing is a spontaneous invention starting from these "exterior" materials, and the argument of the work that develops is a projection of the interior voice onto exterior words within a specific temporal frame. This argument is both associative (words lead to arrangements in terms of linguistic affinity and memory traces of their prior use) and dissociative (sequence is used to disrupt habitual patterns of thought). The exterior vocabulary is the cue for both the association and dissociation—it can lead into a new arrange-

ment, or it can introduce a dissonance that disrupts an arrangement. The "light of the image" that is being given off by these arrangements is an object of meditation as the work progresses, although it is primarily sound, as rhythmic variation being driven by subliminal verbalizing, that is leading the writing from word to word.

The concerns of this work have much to do with Surrealist automatism, though for Coolidge any such "pure psychic automatism" is coincident with words as objects—perhaps literally in front of him on the writing table. The incorporation of purely literary information, such as the Huxley anecdote above, is evidence of this without any confirmation from the author. The vocabulary in the work is not limited to the word stock of Surrealism, with its basically interior and organic scenarios, which often seem overly delimited by the past example of Lautréamont. The Surrealists excluded large sections of language as quotidian, and certainly words *as words* had no status for them. The sign is united with its object—there can be no dissociation at this level of language; once used in the writing process, a word or an image is used up. In Coolidge's work the sign is a multiple and possibly exterior reality, and words like "thus and so" have the status of substantives in the work. The relation to language is evaluative as opposed to convulsive—there is a "thinking with things as they exist" as much as any flux of the automatic image. Other aspects of the phenomenology of language than the irruption of the pleasure principle are primary—namely, the axis of memory and the associative contiguities of words. The word "iguanodon," established in a brief narrative, may have a continuing life in the work, and it is given a value in contiguous strata (in "eryops" above). Any word in the text can become the enigma of the plural impasse; the act of writing is the continual querying of these impasses by words.

The status of involuntary memory is quite different in Coolidge than in Surrealism. In Surrealism, the involuntary

memory is to some extent theoretical—it gives a value for the automatic image, but in actual practice the work is voluntary and literary—the language of automatism is bounded by fixed parameters of style. Surrealist automatic images often seem to be "exemplary" of the possibilities of automatism—there was no need for the investigation of the automatic impulse on a large (say 1000-page) scale. This fixity of the Surrealist image is the principle defect in its claims for "pure psychic automatism," rendering the project only partially successful in terms of psychology. But in literary terms, the use of the automatic image as a philosopher's stone leads to its success—the more developed formulations of Breton's theoretical works and of *Nadja*.

In Coolidge, involuntary memory is taken on directly. The improvisatory mode of writing has access to the vectors of subjectivity precisely because its initial objects—words—are conceived of as exterior to the writer, to be taken on in the ongoing construction of the work. The scale of Coolidge's improvisatory mode is very large in terms of the language and states of mind it can reach; the position of the writer, however, is fixed—there is no travel to the Yucatan, even with mirrors. Writing is a daily task, and the temporal demands of the work are a part of its argument with existence. Language is no philosopher's stone for Coolidge—any theoretical extension of the project is blocked at the "point of production." Coolidge declines to make a metaphor of his work; the querying of language by language *in time* is the method.

The work is driven into its particulars by this refusal of metaphorical scale. Where Smithson proposes the scale of his work as a metaphor for art, Coolidge holds back from such structural metaphors. The question of overall form is therefore problematic. Where earlier works such as *The Maintains* and *Polaroid* coincide at least with temporal frames (they are each one year's writing), the time frame of the "longwork" is open-ended, and it is unclear what it would mean for it to end. Perhaps the only developing structural metaphor in

Coolidge's work is that of the romantic subject, certainly an unwieldy figure to maintain.

But Coolidge's syntax is not to be understood only in its temporal sequence. There is a "spatial" syntax of the work as well. The writing continually foregrounds language as its primary reality in the uninterrupted refractions of the form. In the extended time frame of the work, a word at any moment must stand for the whole. Starting from these particulars, the work has a point-by-point structural basis in *metonymy*. In a standard example of metonymy "Moscow" stands for the system of government located there. One can say, "Go ahead, Moscow, I'm listening," but Coolidge would substitute the word "word" there instead: "Go ahead, *word,* I'm listening," in a device to be found everywhere in his work. The various linguistic levels—word, line, phrase, sentence, paragraph—each are structural metonyms for "language" and, ultimately, for "the writer in time." By means of this continual metonymy, the large-scale forms of Coolidge's work, and whatever metaphorical meaning they might have, are argued in the work at numerous levels of language.

For example, in the early lyrics the status of words as American imponderables is a metonym for the actual "state of the art." These atomized "associative contiguities" are inspired by similar values for individual words in Kerouac's sketching. The dictionary definition of *The Maintains* offers a metonym at another linguistic level; the definiendum is the "part" to the "whole" of the semantic component in language, which is ironically addressed. In the long line of *Polaroid,* the shifting brackets of phrase structure are a metonym for the "indeterminacy" of the whole. In *Quartz Hearts,* the sentence is a metonym for the act of writing, and the "prosoid" paragraph is a metonym for the time frame of the entire work. In the "longwork" the shifting line of the improvisation stands in a part/whole relation to the fixed position of the writer. In each of these works, in addition, the word-to-word argument is a metonym for structure at each

point in time. "Iguanodon" is a partial assertion of the possibility of naming; when iguanodonts march out of the cave's mouth, they can only be ironic. Any such acts are never more than accidents of parts that interact with each other within the totalizing whole.

Smithson's work invokes a stopped, ironic time, to extend the scale of the work. For a similar reason, the time of the work in Coolidge wants never to end. Its "association by contiguity" is unrestricted; language can only be a metonym for the writer in time. The possibility of naming is inferred, but nothing other than that is actually named. This holding back gives a kind of timelessness to the writer's act in time—all energy of statement is potential. A deferred approach to the world motivates the expansion of scale. Coolidge's time frame approaches the literal, while the work stands apart.

The querying of the status of the "other" is a central motive in the work of Ron Silliman and Steve Benson. "A bus ride is better than most art"—a total syntax is not limited to art but extends into larger structures. The paradigm of art or the position of the writer establish not a hierarchy of forms but one perspective among many. In order to call into question the "other" it is necessary to call into question both the self and the work.

The point of departure in Ron Silliman's work is an analogy between the structures of the text and of the world. Here structure is not an abstraction; it must show itself in concrete terms if it is to exist at all. *All* the possibilities of language are contiguous with *all* the structures of the world. The argument of such a poetics demands an exact attention to the values of scale in any representation.

How are structures of the world to be approached? According to *The Chicago Manual of Style:*

> The semicolon is used to make a more important break in the sentence flow than that marked by a comma. Use the semi-

colon between the two parts of a compound sentence when they are not connected by a conjunction:

> The controversial portrait was removed from the entrance hall; in its place was hung a realistic landscape.[34]

Here there is a proposition in two parts: a description of a structure followed by an example of its use. In terms of art, the one motivates the other to make both the semicolon and the sentence perceptible in a way that they would not normally be. The temporal sequence of "controversial portrait" to "realistic landscape" is given a value in the sentence that is precise—accounting for appearances in a way that a single representation would not. The representation is no longer automatic, and the perception of its components is enhanced. This juxtaposition of descriptions with examples of structure is a tactic pursued throughout the course of Silliman's work. It is often unclear which is the description and which is the example—both are equally motivated. Scale is not as polarized in terms of a single trope as it is in Smithson and Coolidge but is multiple and ambiguous.

Silliman's works are investigations of a variable scale—as opposed to the more determinate though expanded scales of Smithson and Coolidge. In a note on Silliman's writing in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (vol. 1, no. 4), I gave an account of this variable scale in terms of the mathematical concept of "fractals":

> An article in the April issue of *Scientific American* on mathematically generated music refers to "fractal curves," which show the same fluctuating patterns over time for any duration. Ten minutes of event would have the same ratio of peaks to troughs as ten years, but "the fractals that occur in nature—coastlines, rivers, trees, star clustering, clouds and so on—are so irregular that their self-similarity (scaling) must be treated statistically." In language self-similarity (statement) is irregular and constant while words can shift scale. Kid says, "You die!"—not having the same outcome as in the movies or in

war. But the words in each case point an abstract finger to exert will. Imagination, thinking build on these facts of natural language: "The so-called idea of the word . . . is the so-called *word itself—the word.*"[35]

The notion of a "self-similarity" of statement here is difficult and must be demonstrated to be understood. Silliman's early work *Mohawk* seems now to be such a demonstration—in it Silliman investigates the possibilities of a textually determined "self-similarity" of statement in a word stock limited to a fixed set of words, generally monosyllabic nouns, over a range of thirty pages. The work is both asymmetrical and precise in the range of variation possible; given the initial terms (words like "wet," "loom," "star," "wicker," "silt"), the constructed work is a determination of their potential—and limits—as structure. The individual words have a precise value as "units," with image and sound values in a kind of balance, that permits repetition and interaction up to an exact point. The relation between the values of the words and the completed statement is a paradigm of scale. It is at the scale of the entire work *only* that the "self-similarity" of this set of words is achieved.

In Silliman's book-length works, *Ketjak* and *Tjanting,* the sentence rather than the word is the unit of investigation into scale. Materials from the world at large are taken in and integrated into the ongoing construction; they are given an initial scale in the form of the sentence, but otherwise their origins are diverse. Descriptive writing, journal prose, overheard remarks, media hype, complicated puns, examples of language as language, fragments of ideology are all possible areas in the work. Each isolated sentence has a simultaneous value as both description and example of structure—and the argument of the work is the interanimation of this relation as it develops. Logical, narrative, or simply accretive orders build up and break down in complex displays. The scale of the work is an argument of the status of "other" as it can be

determined by its possible representations in language. It would be only partial to follow any of the unitary syntaxes of statement (logical, narrative, or accretive)—rather, the "self-similarity" of statement must be established on a larger scale—tending toward more open limits, the scale of the world.

In *Ketjak,* written in 1974, there is a self-conscious structure of devices, most notably the "doubling" of paragraph units in the text. There is at all points in the work a question of whether a sentence has occurred in the text before or is a new element; this provides a kind of continuous underlining of statement, very close to the motivation of description and example above. The work keeps opening up to admit more, but there is simultaneously a reiteration that is occurring parallel in time. The scale of the whole can only extend through the device of doubling up to a certain limit—the point at which it no longer can be perceived. This limit determines the length of the text.

In *Tjanting,* written from 1977 to 1980, there is a greater atomization of devices—sentences may come back, but they do so unexpectedly and in much more radically altered forms, like cryptic art messages in a bottle. Rather than relying on a device as mechanical as the doubling in *Ketjak,* Silliman is ready to let the words themselves do the work—although there is a complicated system of counting underlying the text that is not readily apparent. The structural basis is more transparent, and for this reason the scale of "self-similarity" in *Tjanting* is increased.

> Not this. Outward momentum presses down. Several tiny cuts on his upper lip. Watch waiters. Two Yankees, two out, too late. The beds in motel rooms are disproportionately large, high up off the floor. Small white plastic fork whose handle ends in the figure of "golden" arches. Self forcing to one it. The distinction between crayons & small cigars. Less croations are rested. Blue sweater forgotten on a red chair. Read into reading. Residue of watercress netted in sink's drain. Between

slices, a hill of fog. Hands never completely dry. It wld be with a new blue pen. Light wars. Not wanted is not not-wanted. Kitsums. Than what? Body remembers what brain forgets. This knot. Officer off-duty. Self given to one it. Sees bra strap thru blouse. Time laps catches sky. See's candies. Around town find roads. In the shade flowers fade. Gray cirrus roils deep. The even weave of freeways. Of about to under to—within to which of what—without into by of by. Patterns of wire in library windows. Wind bent the palm. In the distance red hills where the sun has yet to set. Flesh gathers in folds at the elbows as one grows older. As city darkens, lights appear. War replays pyrotechnics.[36]

The scale of the inconsequential is marked here. Silliman's insistence on the unheroic particulars is reminiscent of Williams's techniques in poems like "Proletarian Portrait"—where the "nonaesthetic" observed detail is the key to social insight, the opposite of the heroic aggrandizement of the social realism of the time. But in Williams this distance conveys a certain fatality—the inconsequential is dramatized as a single moment of truth that is also ironic, while in Silliman its use is in a much more radical, ongoing process of evaluation. For example, "Small white plastic fork whose handle ends in the figure of 'golden' arches" is a moment of truth that comments exactly on larger social forms. Monopoly capitalism will produce many such forks, but there can be only one in the poem, leaving aside the question of the other ten million. For Silliman, any such moment indicates a multiplicity of relations—the only solution for the poem is to keep going, to argue the work into a lived present that can take such multiplicity into account.

The motivation of this question of scale is not only formal; there is an ethical value being given to the particulars that are taken in. In the last paragraph of my note on Silliman's work I conclude:

> Only someone who had thought intensely about the fate of other people's lives could have written *Ketjak*. . . . To imagine

> another life without power gives value to the fact. Identity is all that literary politics can produce. . . . Identity in Silliman's work is open-ended.

Identity as a literary project can be given a political value in the Proletarian literature of the 30s. The use of dissonance, disjunction in Williams's work of the period is partly its critque. But the identity involved in Williams's project is still that of a professional insisting on the facts (and the diagnosis and prognosis) of the case. There is no such professional distance in Silliman but rather a relation of complicity between the writer and the facts. The argument of the poem is equally a criticism of the subject—Silliman admits his limits into the system as one source of observed detail among many.

This has a formal dimension; a criticism of the adequacy of statement is a basis for continuity in the work. In *Tjanting* sentences are pared down from previous models, rather than being built up. There is a constant "writerly" revision, an inwardness somewhat opposed to the orally expressive outwardness of the earlier *Ketjak*. Statement is necessarily partial—it can at any point be linguistically undermined. The poem progresses from "not this" and "what then?" to "this knot," "knot this," "not so," and "what exactly?" Other kinds of sentences go through similar permutations—from material taken in to puns to "language as language"—making the scale of statement ambiguous. The poem writes its way into the world by making use of this necessary partiality. It is the precedence of the facts of writing and of the world over the erring subject that motivates the text. The subject is continually corrected. Silliman solves the ethical dilemma of heroic identity and professional distance by giving priority to the object of these methods—the world as it can be perceived.

A partiality of representation is analogous to facts of the world that more aestheticized writing can not perceive—the facts of necessity, work, deferred impulses, limits. These are conditions in which anyone lives, and the question is their transformation. Where Williams ironized these facts, in Silli-

man's poem they are given a more straightforward representation, along with a skeptical account of aesthetic options, as in "As city darkens, lights appear." The syntax of the poem is a dialogue between the scales of these facts; the transformation of the poem is its admission to the scale of the world. The argument compels a recognition. There is a mutuality of oneself and others as seen through the text, which is structurally democratic.

Though written, the syntax of these works has permitted their reading in public places outside the environments of art—*Ketjak*, at the corner of Powell and Market Streets, San Francisco, in 1978, and *Tjanting*, at the Church Street Muni Metro Station, San Francisco, in 1983.

A point of departure in Steve Benson's work is the uneasiness of the speaker. The manner as opposed to the matter of what can be said is the object of his address. Beginning with a lyrical expansiveness derived from the poetry of the New York School, Benson submits such lyricism to devices of estrangement, introducing dissonances of scale that call the speaker into account. Where in the discursive work of O'Hara and Ashbery there is a large-scale architecture of the speaking subject, Benson shifts the foundations of that architecture, partly breaking it down. From "Non-Events," a poem of twenty-five stanzas of five lines each:

> So it's a good play, who cares about the style, it's the *idea* that
> counts.
> And Frederick found no chance to speak. N buried on,
> Wasn't I only just saying like in the case of Praslin
> Interruption by Hussonet
> Look we've heard this a million times. Forget it.
>
> Not as though the words were hard to make out in groups
> but really in a reasonable and open way
> as though he were telling just what happened
> to a friend who made sense, whom he could let know
> the most personal telling things he had to say.

He never had any intention of getting married at all!
Who so irresponsibly started these rumors up?
The same way, this story's been going around he was born
with a tail.
That's so ridiculous, not to say indecent and disgusting,
that I know I don't have to try to disprove it to you.[37]

The poem alters the time of expectation, constantly getting in its way and setting the events adrift by undermining their narrative basis. Each of these stanzas is strangely autonomous, although they are contained within the range of a single voice. The stanzas represent a fragmentation of that voice into several voices. There is almost a roomful of autonomous characters in the poem; each is given a chance to speak and expose the strengths and weaknesses of his temperament and mood.

Though played out in multiple voices in "Non-Events," this calling the speaker into question is the basis of Benson's more unitary later work "Narcissus," a prose poem of twenty-eight parts:

I hardly say anything, just sit there reading. They look out, wave their little hands from the drear red and green light emptying the sky from sun. The fear others will see what's different in me, hold me to it, eats my mind.

The road bends round about here and wanders to meadow. One of us may be nobody. I stand myself. Nobody the same as you remember them, yet you go on, as if good hands held you in mind till child-murderers pass.

Coming down here, shattering and beaming isolate flecks, the movie freezes. Stand for myself, carefully cutting and joining. I write everything out in my head on long walks.

A camel bashes the line of vision across a white shed. I adore you.[38]

A number of the sentences seem to come from a kind of middle ground—they are both assertive and reactive at the

same time. This middle ground could be the space of a relationship between persons, but in the poem it is unclear whether there are two persons or one. There is a *you* in the poem—"One of us may be nobody"—but in the middle of the address it tends to disappear as the other and return to the self—"Nobody the same as you remember them, yet you go on. . . ." Making the *you* into language can be a device of estrangement: "A camel bashes the line of vision across a white shed. I adore you," or later, "Put more sand in my pocket, or die." Hearing the work, it is unclear whether the poet is addressing an other or himself. The poem seems to be straining at a "capillary tissue" between the speaker's language and the *you*. This medial arena is not assumed but argued in the terms of the work. The language of the speaker is looking at itself, and it is not sure what it sees. Intentionality of statement is made multiple and ambiguous by a constant reference to itself.

Benson's performance work is notable for its mixing of different levels of intentionality.[39] In "Views of Communist China," the narrative illusionism of the citizen, Mr. Chen, is acted out in a staged setting, followed by a tour of Benson's apartment, which has been relocated in the performance space. The presentation of the tour guide is acted out as a kind of ultraspeculative trivialism in real time, but it is first of all given a value in the shifted foundations of the illusionistic sets. Perhaps life in real time exists permanently on such shifted foundations for Benson. In another performance work, verbal improvisations are integrated into a reading of the poem "Echo," and the results are recorded on tape and played back, forming the basis for further improvisations. The argument of the work is being invented and undermined at the same time. In Benson's performance "Blindspots," the performer acts out a continually reflexive encounter with his language, trying to hear what it is saying and respond verbally at all points. The total self-involvement can only undermine its own authority; the other is rendered

intact, but it is simultaneously the speaking subject that is the other. Benson's work casts the shadows of lyrical self-consciousness in Ashbery and O'Hara into the light of public discourse. The self-consciousness becomes virtually utilitarian as a result.

Benson's language is formed on the ambiguous edge between attack and retreat, which are being acted out in a role-playing manner. The structure of identity is being exploded in the form of a three-dimensional literary method in which the borders of personality, of self and nonself, are being argued as simultaneous and conflicting modes of expression. That this is being done in public locates the writer on a new and expanded scale.

4

Olson in Language: The Politics of Style

In his article "The Political Economy of Poetry," Ron Silliman begins his analysis of the material basis of poetry with:

> Poems both are and are not commodities. It is the very partialness of this determination which makes possible much of the confusion among poets, particularly on the left, as to the locus, structure and possibilities of literary production's ideological component.[1]

In fact, the reason for this confusion lies in the paucity of identification, either in writing or in criticism, of actual poetics with political intentions. The necessity of the "commodity" as a material basis for the poem indicates some uncertainty as to what would be a politically viable poetic method. Rather than seeing the agency of the poem as latent in, or in some sense determined by, the "object status" of the book, Silliman could better analyze the politics of poetry in terms of the function that poetry performs within language itself. What is wanted is a consideration of this function as exterior, autonomous, in the world, and here the commodity status of the book is a cue. "A sign is a phenomenon of the exterior world," and so is a book.

In two previous talks, I discussed writing in terms of

technique, the coming into perceptibility of the poem, and method, the overall activity of the writer in the world:

> One could say that *technique* is the principle of construction in the writing. In other words, how the writing is written, prior to the finished work. *Method* is the principle of construction that begins with the finished work, with the activity of the writer as a whole, the extension of the act of writing into the world and eventually into historical self-consciousness. *Style* might be the middle term.[2]

Style, though latent in the constructed entity that is a poem, acts as a phenomenon in its own right. In Terry Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology,* literature is analyzed as a production of "ideology" and as a subsequent producer of an altered "ideology." Ideology is found to be conceivable in terms of the effects of autonomous works of art. The aim of criticism is an accurate description of the status of "the text" within a complex ideological system; the British novel up to 1930 is analyzed within a continuity of genre.[3] Earlier, the Russian linguist Valentin Voloshinov had attempted to locate the fact of ideology in the world, in a wholly exterior system of signs.[4] For poetry, the fact of style in language, without forgetting values brought into the poem from its literary past, can be the point of departure into the poem as ideology. Poetry extends itself by its own means, in the act of writing, in public readings, and as a published text, into the political context.

Silliman is correct in asking for a "three-dimensional consideration of ideology." What the text accomplishes on its own is the point; the question that remains is whether the commodity status of the book is a dominant or supporting convention. Clearly, the specific interpretation of "the commodity" brought to a book, both by the author and the producer of the book, is an aesthetic choice with ideological dimensions. There are greater and lesser degrees of relation, however, between the content of a book and the manner in

which it is produced. It may be true that the notion of "fame" in the works of Keats and Coleridge came into being parallel to the expansion of the reading public due to the increased mass production of books. That notion of fame survives in such postmodern romantics as Olson and Ginsberg, but it is a reaction to the modernist compression rather than any fact of the book trade that allows for their "all-over" poetics. The writing is stylistically committed against the commodity; it is not readily packageable work, even if the City Lights "Pocket Poets" series provides a convenient package. Production values often differ markedly from ideology; for example, low-budget mimeograph publications of the New York School have followed the high art commodity market with covers by Alex Katz, Larry Rivers, and other well-known visual artists. Here poetry is borrowing from the stronger market, and in this way such work that stylistically aspires to commodity status, in poetry, tends to find itself in areas of the culture with more established ideological superstructures, what Olson called "the habits of verse print bred." In a country with no real successors to Sandburg and Frost, we still have a market for academic poetry (from Book-of-the-Month Club selections to Iowa Workshop sonnet series) and magazine verse (verse intended to compete for white space with cartoons).

In order to achieve real commodity status, writing must locate its style within given ideological limits. But toeing the line is rarely a matter of giving direct assent to a state created in the interests of private profit derived from the circulation of goods. In this society ideological limits are generally expressed in minor and circumscribed modes; by its very triviality, overly packaged writing is without interest. What are interesting are the choices made by writers with the dominant market forms placed at such a distance that they might be thought to be pliable conventions. Even so, attempts at an extra-social position, specifically one defined apart from the commodity system, often lead back directly to the market—

pointing to what sociologists might call a conservative social function. The withholding of publication of one's work might only increase demand for the product, appearing to be a wise investment strategy for some; values of writing apart from those of the text, such as those of performance art, are supported by gallery systems or arts bureaucracies that have commodity systems of their own. As a commodity the book represents social conventions from which it is not possible to escape; it is possible, though, to speak of the agency of style without regard to commodity status. Rather than being a determinant, the market is bypassed by what is of most interest in a poem.

Still, the book is a convention of style. Writers often compose with the form of the book in mind; the book is an element of "major form." The question is where this form really exists—in the medium of literature, itself built on the production of books, or on the page, in the material book. Silliman criticizes the "idealism" of Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* for placing the poem in an unlocatable pure form of which the text and performance are only copies. Although Wellek and Warren's intention undoubtedly is to sever literature from its physical reality and make of it an ideal series "for the purposes of discussion," that is for teaching purposes, there are important examples of the poem existing apart from any embodiment in a text. Osip Mandelstam's poem on Stalin may have at one point existed on paper, but all copies were destroyed and it was the recitation of the poem from memory that was the crime that led to Mandelstam's arrest and exile in Siberia. It is clear that a poem can act significantly in language, and in the language of a people with books, without actually having to circulate as a book. The tradition of the book exists, but language also can be considered as material, as a phenomenon of real time and space. At this point in time, the stylistic convention of the book exists in language itself as much as in any material book.

While "the book" can be thought of as a kind of template or outer form, style also operates *within* the medium of language, reinforcing or deforming that medium, which includes ideology. The manner of that operation is specific to the structure of a given "language," which must be understood to include narrowly "linguistic" and "cultural" terms as well. This assertion is a major theme of Prague School linguistics, from Roman Jakobson's paper "On Czech Verse" in the early 20s to his position in *Style in Language*, a collection of papers from a conference held at the University of Indiana in the early 50s. These papers, from the competing points of view of structural linguistics, behaviorist psychology, and New Criticism, form an interesting cultural document. However, the range and power of Jakobson's approach extends well beyond those of any of the other participants. Jakobson is given virtually the last word on the subject in his "Concluding Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," summarizing the relation of style and language with:

> There is a close correspondence, much closer than critics believe, between the question of linguistic phenomena expanding in space and time and the spatial and temporal spread of literary models.[5]

The inner ordering of a text, its variation within what is possible in a given language, can account for its propagation in that language, much as the spread of other linguistic facts reflects the systematic nature of the medium. Communicative acts exist in a continuity from speech to literary works for Jakobson. Style is taken to be the coming into being of autonomous values that are possible but not essential to a language in the manner in which things are said.

While Jakobson gives language as the context for his definition of style, other participants at the conference propose style as a phenomenon of culture. In relation to the verbal performance of folktales, style is described as an idiosyncratic variation within a matrix of dialects, cultural forms,

and narrative traditions. The significant question is that of differing conventions; in addition to individual styles, there might be regional or "national" styles for telling stories. These concerns of descriptive folklore point to a split in the structuralist treatment of style. On the one hand, according to Bernard Bloch:

> The style of a discourse is the message carried by the frequency-distributions and transitional probabilities of linguistic features, especially as they differ from those of the same features in the language as a whole.[6]

This seems to be an American version (tagged by the necessity to measure through frequency distribution and probability) of Prague School structuralism, which, having been derived from Russian Formalism, would consider perceptible differences to be determined by context. The American method is, however, more static, ending with a statement of a relation. A more typical American definition would be this, by A. L. Kroeber, which is cited as virtually a classical reference:

> A style is a strand in a culture or civilization: a coherent, self-consistent way of expressing certain behavior or performing certain kinds of act. It is also a selective way: there must be alternative choices, though actually they may never be selected.[7]

So style can either be a determinate variation or "a way of doing things." At the conference, I. A. Richards objects that the emphasis on variation might permit experiments of too cheap an effect, overly concerned with deviating from a norm, to be given the distinction of a style. Clearly he would be more comfortable with style as a way of doing things, in fact the right way of doing things, leading to normative grammar and *The Chicago Manual of Style.*

Without doubt I am interested in the sense of style as a determinate pattern of differences in the manner of statement—an autonomous, idiosyncratic set of values in opposition to the dominant forms of the medium. The worldview

associated with this preference is one in which everything is in flux, or as Lenin said, approximately, there is only movement. Structures push their way into existence, alter their surroundings, rigidify, explode or are absorbed, and fade away—"Saints wither on the vine and die."

Scaling the discussion back to discourse, an exemplary analysis of the mechanism of style is given by Jakobson in his paper "Linguistics and Poetics." "Linguistics is likely to explore all possible problems of relation between discourse and 'the universe of discourse.' " Jakobson characterizes this relation in terms of six functions of speech, deriving his model from Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* but increasing its multiplicity by proposing distinct modes contained within the act of speech:

> The ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE. To be operative the message requires a CONTEXT referred to . . . , a CODE . . . common to the addresser and addressee . . . , and finally a CONTACT, a physical channel and psychological connection . . . enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication.[8]

The elements of Jakobson's schema of speech (*parole*) correspond to six modes of statement in language itself (*langue*). That is, language, not only in the act of speech, is structured in these terms, reflecting a built-in relation between speaker and hearer. Jakobson's terms for these six functions of language are (together with a sense of their relation to poetry):

1) The *emotive*, corresponding to the addresser or "I," the voice of the speaking subject—the emphasis the speaker gives to the content, leading to the figure of the self, as in the "I" of Olson's *Maximus Poems*.

2) The *conative*, corresponding to the addressee or "you," which is found to be in the language itself. In "A Cloud in Trousers" Mayakovsky addresses Maria with "Give!" Later this address to the "you" is expanded to the public scale of oratory in his work.

3) The *referential,* corresponding to the context of the act of speech, or "it." The referential includes not only Yvor Winters's tree but Pushkin's proliferation of statues—that is, the referential involves both the literary series of facts as well as the facts one sees out the window.

4) The *phatic,* in which language establishes contact between communicating parties. According to Jakobson, the phatic is the only language function also possessed by birds. In a telephone conversation the first several exchanges usually establish nothing but the contact between speakers. On the other hand, continuity is often maintained for its own sake in poetry. "It's a poem . . . based on uninterrupted statements," Olson said of his first work, "The K."

5) The *metalingual,* corresponding to the code, in which language refers to itself. In Jakobson's schema the metalingual is involved when communicating parties refer to the terms of language itself. Metalanguage in poetry comes to the foreground when there is a need to establish the values of words, for example in the reinforcement of the noun phrase by the dictionary definition in Coolidge's *The Maintains.*

6) The *poetic,* in which the structure of the language itself enables the message to be perceived. The poetic function in language as a whole is its internal ordering, a relation of sound patterns and grammatical paradigms that allows for a consideration of "the message for its own sake." The rhythm and sound relations that give verse its autonomy are similarly based in the "poetic."

According to Jakobson, "any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry or to confine poetry to poetic function would be a delusive oversimplification. . . . Poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant. . . . In all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent." It would make sense equally to speak of the poetics of advertizing, professional language, or language itself. For Jakobson, the message rests in the "poetic," as it is bound in by rhythm, sound, grammar, and

tropes. Jakobson gives the following capsule summary of the poetic function:

> The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.[9]

If statement in a poem is imagined to be given along a temporal line, the poetic would be the principle that extends the values of the poem (ranging from sound to content) into the materials at large. As Breton said, "I grant that that might be more or less well stated, but that is all."

This fact of poetic language, rather than the emotive or referential, is foregrounded by authors as otherwise far apart as Charles Olson and Steve Benson. A continuity is built of equivalence, or its systematic avoidance, in many of the *Maximus Poems* and in Benson's *The Busses.* Where in Olson the emotive voice, the "I," is perceptible as a person behind the words, in Benson a formal argument intervenes to render ambiguous the real location of the speaker. In both cases, however, the time line is the axis of a continuity that argues, by iterating a "principle of equivalence," as a construction in which materials of the world take on systematic values. The "uninterrupted statement" of Olson's early poem "The K," in the face of all other structures, becomes the basis for the later politics:

> Put an end to nation, put an end to culture, put an end to divisions of all sorts. And to do this you have to put establishment out of business. It's just a structure of establishment. And my own reason for being, like I said, on the left side and being so hung up on form is that I feel that today, as much as action, the invention, not the invention, but the *discovery* of formal structural means is as legitimate as—*is* for me the form of action. The radical of action lies in finding out how organized things are genuine, are initial.[10]

This identification of radical formal means in the poem with transformation in the world is the foundation of Olson's po-

etics. Olson's "initial" opposes itself to mutation and dispersal; it is his "axis of selection." Initial acts are hinges of historical and poetic progressions; in "Some Good News," the history of Gloucester and the poem begins with the single act of "fourteen men." Olson's poetics are to project this value onto all other events; in his attack, he takes on numerous hitherto divided series and orders them on an "axis of combination" in the poem, which uses an in-time romance of self as its basic structure. A characteristic of both Olson's being as a poet, as a constructed entity, and his literary work is the rendering of divided subject matter and literary forms into units that can be transformed by a poetic "principle of equivalence." Olson says as much himself:

> One wants narrative today to . . . strike like a piece of wood on a skin of a drum or to . . . be plucked like a string of any instrument. One does not want narrative to be anything but instantaneous in this sense. . . . In other words, the problem, the exciting thing about poetry in our century is that you can get image and narrative both to wed each other again, so that you can get both extension and intensivity bound together.[11]

Olson's "image" here might be seen better in the light of the notions of motif in folktale or device in poetry as used in the Formalist analysis. Olson is building an *imago mundi* in his poem, but it is one in which the impression of the image comes from stopping narrative at a moment in time. While this seizing of narrative has a great advantage in terms of motivation in the poem, it is also extremely unstable. A condition of Olson's image is its immediate mutation in time, and Olson's poems duly record that fact. The devices of narrative, which in Formalist terms create the "time of expectation" in a literary work, fall instantly back on themselves, creating an impression both of impatience, the desire to get on with it, and of stasis—the argument is exhausted at the precise point of the image. For example:

the Wall
to arise from the River, the Diorite Stone
to be lopped off the Left Shoulder[12]

Here "extension and intensivity" are linked in this isolation of a moment in a continuity of inspired, nearly prophetic discourse. The result is the compression of both emotive and referential arguments, the personal and literary experience of Gloucester, to little more than names. An unusual topography is evoked, to say the least. There is a similar topography in the prophetic works of Blake, and its political use is, crudely, aimed at the disruption of commonplaces of rational procedure. Olson's *imago mundi* is likewise political; however, an element of dissolution is present in his plans for the future.

And the future did arrive. If Olson's actual writing proceded by means of the compression of narrative time to an imagistic radical, his in-time self also aspired to that compression. In his lecture at the Berkeley Poetry Conference (1965), the *image* of the poet caught among masses of atomized, contingent narratives and pushing out against them communicates much more clearly than Olson's actual negotiation with those narrative blocks. His performance is remarkable for the number of arguments left unfinished—with people in the room, with his own past, and with the poem. Rather the frantic movement from one thing to the next is identified in Olson's assertion of the moment as *the* value of his approach to the material. The hinge of the story becomes the story in its own right. Olson's refusal of closure gives the affect of presence, and this imagistic "stand" appears as the solution to a lifelong public and political dilemma. In fact, the theme of Olson's political experience, the failure of liberal politics from the Roosevelt era to the present, is central to his assumption of the hero-poet. That some present felt that Olson was, on this occasion, "as good as his poems" indicates that

this crisis was accepted as essential by many. Prefigured by the "extension and intensivity" of his writing, Olson achieved a resolution in real time of at least part of his original motivation. The poetic act had become the "uninterrupted statement" that Olson saw in his first poem, "The K." But now, any possible material could be rendered by the poetic "principle of equivalence" to a moment in real time:

> Absolutely! In the sense of the population explosion: the whole terrestrial angel vision, baby! Like, if I get to be President, I told you about who was going to be my Secretary of State for Love. . . . I mean, is there or is there not a Great Business Conspiracy called America and Russia? It was proved by a West German, writing in 1946 or 7, in *Der Dinge Zeit,* or something, a great man, a man most of you, because you don't read enough, don't even know. And the guy was dying. . . . Dig! I mean value, let's talk! Words are value, instruction, action, and they've got to become political action. They gotta become social action. The radicalism lies from our words alone. And if they're not right—and I'm not talking Mr. Williams's "republic of words." I'm talking our selves here in this week, the poets of America. And I don't mean America: I saw Ezra Pound, like an Umbrian angel, listening to anything that's said, going to see LeRoi Jones, which . . . I saw it. . . . I just walked in, thank god, seven o'clock, after the reading in the Teatro de something, Melisso, Jesus, Melisso, Melissa. Doesn't it sound like honey and sweet song? Yeah, exactly. Melissa, Caio Melissa, Teatro Caio Melissa, Spoleto: which means "spoiled."[13]

With this brief foray into the political use of language in its poetic function, the more general question of the relation of a text to actual politics comes up. In his *Criticism and Ideology,* Terry Eagleton, far from locating literary work in the mechanics of a class position, proposes that "ideology" in a text is composed of elements of both the underdevelopment and overdevelopment of statement. Ideological values of a work can to some extent be determined by a consideration of

possibilities that are excluded from the text—"Something is by virtue of what it is not." Eagleton makes an analogy between the underdevelopment of ideology and the avoidance of areas of conflict in the language of dreams. For Eagleton:

> History . . . 'enters' the text as . . . ideology, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences.

Such a measurable absence in Olson's work is any form of cultural center. That is, there is no *polis* in Olson's work. It is not Gloucester; Olson quotes with approval an article by J. H. Prynne that says as much. Rather, any actual polis is exploded and dispersed by the act of the poem. This displacement argues of necessity a psychologically elaborate topography in which persons, places, and things enter in a kind of "dream time." The poem reflects this topography at the level of style, constantly deviating from direct statement, in fact from the sentence, and accepting only "the modality of song" as its possibility. The elaboration of this topographical modality is a motivation for the "principle of equivalence" in the poem. There is no cultural or structural "bottom line"; this is a primary source of the linguistic density of the work.

In Eagleton's terms the autonomy of the text has a valid ideological component by virtue of its creation of an autonomous world *in* the text:

> For the text presents itself to us less as historical than as a sportive flight from history, a reversal and resistance of history, a momentarily liberated zone in which the exigencies of the real seem to evaporate, an enclave of freedom enclosed within the realm of necessity.

The text sets up a reality principle in its own right. Here a Marxist critic comes to recognize one of the conditions of literature, though it may not necessarily be "sportive." Politics, normally jealous, wishes for the sole right to represent the terms of a transformation of conditions; in this sense politics and poetry can be said to compete. The value of

Eagleton's approach, beyond the affirmation of the autonomy of the poetic text, is that it makes a relation by which the seemingly competing claims of poetry and politics can coexist. Poetry can only be a part of the world.

> The literary text seems . . . to produce its own object, which is inseparable from its modes of fashioning it—which is an *effect* of those modes rather than a distinct entity.

The agency of the literary text is in the production of its *own* effect.

This seeming autonomy, however, does reflect points of stress in ideology, both in the "literary series" and outside it. In the Formalist account, the succession of literary forms proceeds by means of the atrophy of defunct modes, and this possibly exterior process can be internalized as conflicts in the text. Perhaps the method of Williams's "No ideas but in things" had become such a defunct mode for Olson, leading him on to Edward Dahlberg's more subjective approach. At the same time, the nonidentity of the literary work in relation to its model can be a motive for further production; the generative force of the resistant, actual Gloucester in the face of Olson's borrowing of Dahlberg's version of myth would be an example of this. For Eagleton, such conflicts produce what is most active in a text—its status as a world apart:

> The pseudo-real of the literary text is the product of the ideologically saturated demands of its modes of representation.

The constructive potential of the work derives, in part, from the demands placed on the available but overloaded and thus inadequate modes. Olson's use of the already existing schema of Williams and Dahlberg led to conflicts in the work that finally arrived at a synthesis of fact and myth. But the non-fit and exhaustion of these prior modes of representation were responsible for what Jakobson calls "the superinducing of the equivalency principle," the nonstop irritable reaching after everything in Olson's work. Just as the phenomenon of *zaum*

in the Russian Futurist movement burst from the confines of literary models that could not accomodate contents that had irrevocably changed, so the mass of contingent detail that could not be integrated into the prior American modernist models produced the "superinduction" that finally arrived at Olson's Berkeley reading.

And then what happened, for this possible person in the thirty-eight-years removed front seats:

> The signifying process is . . . thrown into a certain relief.[14]

By the excess of signification involved. This is not to gloss over the problem of the "I," in his own words "one of the most devious, non-objective, plural, subjective sons-of-a-bitch this side of the wind." But there is a useful distinction between means and effect, between the person and the work. An experience of the overload of signification to the point of autonomy—as occurs when the "principle of equivalence" becomes a continuity in real time—is more generative than an identification with the romantic figure intended by Olson. An identification with the parts of that psychology would only lead to less successful reproductions of Olson's conflicts. Such conflicts operate only up to the production of the text, or the poetic act, *for* Olson and not for anyone else. "If it is to be a finished text, its non-solution must signify," according to Eagleton, and it is the nonsolution of Olson's work that is most of interest. This denial of the final reality of organic form is, of course, a project of Marxist criticism:

> The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of the work—to deny that "naturalness" in order to make its real determinants appear.[15]

But this is not just a question of "critical method"; it is also an account of the effects on an auditor of Olson's Berkeley reading. The availability of materials in the discourse—the *linguistic* present created—far outweighs the "in-time romance of self" in importance. Nor is this response a "neutral

evaluation"; the rejection of Olson's paternalist psychology, and his manipulation by means of physical presence and almost a wall of sound, is a matter of some conflict in itself. Only later do the political consequences of the romantic position appear, insisting on the advantage of its defects in the precedence of language over self. And from that point one can enter the work, in which comparative mythology, particle physics, continental geomorphology, popular culture, and the landscape of dreams become, in the image, "extension and intensivity." In this sense, Olson's creation of a nonstatic *imago mundi* is the success of his work.

The chain of literary acts is a continual sequence of non-identities. In various stages the grounds for the work are processed into the work, the work produces new ground, and so on. Eagleton makes an interesting analogy to the relation between the text of a play and its staged production. Writing could be described as this kind of production—from authorial intention the written work is further produced as a material book, and the work in book form is produced by a reader, either in private or in public. At each stage labor is advancing; by such labor an inhabitable world can be built, though its initial scale might be small. However, the question of this process separates from the more-or-less "ideal" position expounded by Eagleton and insists on a commitment to, rather than a distance from, new developments in writing. The critical intervention is not really needed in one sense—the overload of signification of the postmodern romantics meets a politically informed self-consciousness in a number of current writers. Beyond the need for analysis, there is a new social command, to which current literary production is offered as a response.

In the argument above there is a conflict between languages, with the question of the politics of style as the object of dispute. The argument of a poem can likewise be determined by such conflicts. In Olson's work there are a wide

range of sources, which the poet seems continually to attack and deform. The object of Olson's attack is the partialization of knowledge; by means of the poem he intends to take conventional modes of understanding apart. Stylistically, this meant a commitment against the sentence—or any other means by which a statement could be pinned down. Subject matter is for this reason problematic; according to Olson, "it is difficult to be both a poet, and, a historian"—which the twisted syntax of his work reveals. The values of style in "Some Good News"—from the last third of the first volume of *The Maximus Poems,* which is most clearly focused on one area of "subject matter," the history of the settling of Cape Ann—are exemplary of Olson's approach:

It wasn't new,
what happened,
at Cape Ann. It's where
and when it

did. Smith,
at Monhegan,
1614, and telling
about it, in a book.
1616, is

the demarcation (he,
the Sea-Marke!
as competently Columbus
backwards as Grant
forward, John Smith

the stater of
quantity and
precision, the double
doesn't unravel
so you'd know it

just like that, dragging,
as we do
shifty new

land, sucks
down, into the terrible
inert of
nature (the Divine
Inert, the literary man
of these men
of the West,

who knew private
passivity as these
quartermasters knew
supplies, said
it has to be

if princes
of the husting
are to issue from
the collapse
of the previous

soul: Smith
too early yet
to be understood
to be the sign
of present

paternities—[16]

An axis of similarity is being projected onto an axis of contiguity here, one that is amost impossible to break. The factual information of the poem is kept in the present by means of an ever-expanding sentence structure, with numerous digressions at the level of the phrase—but the sentence never arrives to complete its "statement." There are a few isolated sentences embedded in the overall matrix of the poem, but they stand out as divergent in their (still contextualized) completeness. The sentence boundary is used primarily as a caesura; for example, "It wasn't new / what happened, / at Cape Ann," which leads immediately to the more rapidly shifting passage on John Smith. Only later is the argument of con-

gruence between the time and the man actually made—and then it seems to be an already understood proposition. Meanwhile, there is a continual introduction of new material at the level of the phrase, which seems to refer to a context that is obliquely stated—"the double / doesn't unravel / so you'd know it / / just like that. . . ."

John Smith is the paradigm of the "initial" in American history, with which Olson identifies in the work. Smith both described and named Cape Ann "so it stuck" and wrote the first poem "as an American"—"The Sea-Marke," quoted in full in an earlier *Maximus* poem and here given as an epithet for Smith. There are a number of rhymes between Smith, the "Sea-Marke," the discovery of Cape Ann, and Olson's poem—leading from the discovery of Olson's place, one of the first American acts, to Olson's own discovery of John Smith and, by analogy, of the world. The simultaneity is reflected in the excitement of the poem—the shortness of the line, the breathlessness; one imagines Olson reading this as if there were something he *had* to say. There is a great deal of variation in the kinds of emphasis possible in the short line—rather than any parallelism of syntax, a twisting and turning is the intended effect. The content likewise shifts, in rapid cuts through a series of referential planes—from John Smith to metaphysics, the "terrible / / inert of nature," *Time* magazine, and later "Caesar's dream." Each of these thematic parallels, however, is to be approached in a different and oblique way. Any statement in Olson's poem is at the same time a digression, but the "topic" of the digression is rarely stressed. Rather there is a kind of atomization at the level of "extension and intensivity"—the avoidance of direct statement motivates the argument of contiguity in the work. The narrative is broken down into discrete areas of reference in a rapidly shifting verbal line; coherence is equally an extremely quick back and forth—"as competently Columbus / backwards as Grant / forward" mimics the manner of statement.

At this point in the poem the referent—John Smith—is

easily lost to the reader in the unfolding of contiguous themes. The poem is basically "about" Smith's discovery, but we are not going to know that in any literal way. Rather there is a mode of consideration of the "initial," which having become psychological is identical to the writer. The event of the poem is less history than the present being constructed in the work; perhaps this *is* the only way that history can be known. The "statement" of the poem is the poet's discovery of the materials and his breakthrough into the past, which is the discovery of himself. Olson's work is always a breakthrough, and if not it still maintains the rhetoric of one.

A different use of style as a principle of structure is to be found in the work of Jack Spicer. From a section of "A Book of Magazine Verse":

> Start with a baseball diamond high
> In the Runcible Mountain Wilderness. Blocked everywhere by stubborn lumber. Where even the ocean cannot reach its coastline for the lumber of islands or the river its mouth.
> A perfect diamond with a right field, center field, left field of felled logs spreading vaguely outward. Four sides each
> Facet of the diamond.
> We shall build our city backwards from each baseline extending like a square ray from each distance—you from the first-base line, you from behind the second baseman, you from behind the short stop, you from the third-baseline.[17]

While the sentence is suppressed, exploded, and contextualized in Olson's basically phrase-centered line, in Spicer's poem the sentence is the grammatical dominant. The sentence defines the form of the line, which is a kind of prose-poem hybrid—either a very long, run-over line or a paragraph with hanging indentation. The first line begins an address to a conventional "you" that is a complete sentence divided into two parts by the line at "high," which does not allow grammatical completion at levels of syntax below the sentence in the first line. After the declarative first sentence, there are no complete sentences until "We shall build our

city. . . ." The second "sentence" is a fragment, a predicate adjective modifying "baseball diamond," while the third is a relative clause referring to "Runcible Mountain Wilderness." The fourth, however, returns as an apposition to "baseball diamond," so there is a kind of layering of grammatical relations in the poem. The fifth is ambiguous—it could refer to "baseball diamond" in the first line or "perfect diamond" in the third. This, along with the now three-times-repeated word "diamond," gives the fragment some autonomy, though it is qualified by breaking the fragment in half, the second half being the unstable "Facet of the diamond" as a separate line. By this time the control of the original sentence has been broken down, but it is reasserted by the most declarative sentence in the poem in the next line: "We shall build. . . ."

There is a conflict between the declarative sentence and the fragment, that is, between assertion and qualification. The poem begins with a proposal that something might be done, adds complications, but in the next complete sentence begins to undertake it. This sentence stands out as pristine and heroic against the conflicts above. The sentence's control of its syntax ("you from the first-base line, you from the second . . .") is the poet's control of the poem—quite the opposite of Olson, who is surrendering control to the phrase. Jakobson, in an article on Kavafy, speaks of the "grammatical image" of a work. In Olson's poem the grammatical image is of flux, an ever-generative syntax with an oblique, obscured referent. The grammatical image in Spicer is delimited, controlled, and ironic. The agency of the poem in the larger sense and its grammar are close—insofar as a city is to be built, it will be built by means of a sentence.

The sentence is being proposed as constructive, with the proviso that the initial premise of the poem is in "the Runcible Mountains." The poem is a kind of "self-consuming artifact"; like a rabbit out of a hat or other illusory paradigm, now you see it, now you don't. But it is also a logical or mathematical exercise, a theorem—the baseball diamond is

the given and the argument of the poem is the proof. Spicer's books are argued as a sequence of proofs; the poems seem to have a place in a logical order. One argument leads to the possibility of the next, resulting in a kind of hypothetical poetic space that extends from the basic elements of the poem's structure—"from each baseline extending like a square ray from each distance. . . ."

In Olson there is a tension between sentence and phrase, to the disadvantage of the sentence. This reflects Olson's basically oral style—sentences in speech are ambiguous; the phrase is the dominant and sentences take their value from that. In Spicer the sentence is dominant but undercut and set adrift. The style is the written projection of an act of mind. In the following poem, from Steve Benson's *The Busses*, there are two ways of reading the work, which reflects a simultaneous dominance of both sentence and phrase. The poem can be read either across or down. Either way there are sentence structures that interact and compete, setting off disputes at the grammatical level that give autonomy to the phrase.

or backwards In the cities they know what it means—it's what
they're borne on In the Provinces we steam ignorance as though
fruit were vegetables & meat to be slapped off the table as the
cat The dying fall etc.— Call me after
truer words were you leave & I'll
not on call But browsing have a message Turkey legs
in unexpectedly from a night for you The for Easter
in their cups, as it were honey's too dark or running along
bounce the recollections to eat—suppose the boardwalk
off a chintsy, textured ants have decomposed in the middle
office wall, nylons on in it the night, naked
the foot of the batter or halfnaked
Cold cushions the sonofabitch lost my
Shucking & jiving barbaric moss mittens opposite sex
I'm buying something I walked in forests everywhere in writing[18]

The language springs out of itself on the axis of the phrase—individual elements like "in their cups, as it were," "barbaric

First and foremost
formulated by cat hairs
all over the clothes
of the massive butcher
with a pained smile
breaking tradition over
the hull of a remodeled
tanker. He sought the words
he had heard so often
in recent days, in
advertising, the press
talk around him, video
speeches, community sings---
fried rice for dinner.
He'd had enough beer.
It'd be okay. His function
in modern defense had been
assured him, a role in the---
but did he--- his language--- he
was *not* the figment of a paltry
imagination, even if--- he was
really the only sense he'd---
I'm soothed, anyway,
when I calm myself thinking
in terms of wish-fulfillment, that
I can put anything together
A lot of varied impulses,
marginal paraphernalia
in my sleep, as it were,
compared in passing
merely with some others
but not looking dead at
them.

The lesson learned,
extracted, as it
were, from the
baleful reactions we
gave my tipping
credo, wobbling
incentive arched over
restless, evasive
circumstance
like a boil over
peas, practice
grew shelter as
in effect defense
and solitude
against the
exhaustion of the
evidence in time.

I was trying to realize
an ideal form but I was
stopped at an intersection
presumably at any rate
the cop told me it was
having forced me to pull over
My head was bandaged with
thoughts of this ideal form
with which I wrestled unable
to get out the car door
he was leaning on, filling
the ticket out in duplicate
explaining this was just
routine and nothing to get
defensive about.

Dangling from
the skin of
the cooking
pudding were
globs of as yet
unestablished
went on to
describe, sensation
trickling that way
consideration
with which you
aren't obliged,
it must be admitted,
necessarily to agree

The crisis passed
we all released from
our congested stained
chests a relieved groan
The sun figuratively
speaking emerged from
the attenuated and yet no less
riotous dumb clouds
God what kind of grotesque
judgment will bring this
to a close?
A square barge came floating
around, soft and cylindrical, like
fashion in the ice floes of couturiers.
I went to hear at the master's house
with his emaciated wife, whose brain
seemed helplessly engendered with indifference
of me. The brutal fallacy of facticity---
"It's so weird out. What do you think is happening, with the air?" "I don't know. I think it's getting overloaded, with something."

The spelling was
peculiar. Always two
or three pencilled-in
statutes compromising
the innocent head of
the sleeping justice.
They had turned the
interest off their names
in order to increase
the value of derivation.
preconceived
expectations--- my forces in the blur
an opportunity
to dock my sinking
ship, to bail out
frantically at
some tourists,
amid the groans
of other ships
way off away...
so much space
I don't see.

I can barely cross off
of stretching back to
seal my arms
against the rubber
hoist relaying
tight calm messages
of triangles over
the parkway
system idling
at the docks.
He had said
enough. He
rampaged against
the walls of the house
as though they were the
headboards of his child's bed.

From Steve Benson, *The Busses* (Berkeley: Tuumba, 1981), © 1981 by Steve Benson.

moss," "mittens opposite sex" are set adrift in an indeterminate space. Sentence structure, where found, binds these autonomous phrases into more interpretatble orders, as in "Turkey legs / for Easter / or running along / the boardwalk / in the middle of / the night. . . ." The motivation of the speaker is still in doubt; why is he saying these things? The tension between linguistic levels creates an ambiguous plane of statement. As in his earlier written and performance work, Benson is making a form that calls the speaker into question, leaving the interpretation of any utterance up to the reader or spectator. This indeterminacy is stylistically various. Rather than the high seriousness, or even aggressive irrelevance, of dissociative modernism, there are multiple levels of style, from a "compositional" plane that might be inferred from the abstraction in the work to parodies of notes left on refrigerator doors—"the / honey's too dark / to eat—suppose / ants have decomposed / in it . . . ."

The physical layout of the text makes demands on the reader, who must decide to begin with which way to read the text. The question of the author's intentions immediately comes up—does the author want the reader to proceed horizontally first and vertically second? Or the other way around, both, or neither? The quandary is successfully built into the work due to its reorientation of the most basic pattern of intepretation, the left-right scan of the eye. The reader can only acknowledge an intention toward the indeterminate, apart from any "compositional" order in the text. The author stands back; the reader's interpretation is very much his or her own. In this sense the work is ethically motivated—it is a wall of words, much like the Chinese "big character" wall displays, on the other side of which the reader or spectator is constituted in real time and space. The writing is there to be looked into; however, unlike the Chinese "big character" posters, access is given not only to content but to the language itself. This access is intended on both formal and referential planes, as is reflected in the autonomy and dissociation at the

level of the phrase and the ambiguity of the speaking subject at the level of the sentence. Benson's work pushes the ordering mind away from the particulars into a perception of the formal means of the work.

The politics of the work are directed toward the capacity for and resistance to disorder in the spectator—how much indeterminacy can be allowed? Where in Spicer the poem is determined by the ironic displacement of a logical order, in Olson order is imposed by the spectator's dread of chaos in the speaker. Both work on the political subject by means of an absence, but in Benson that displacement is carried to its ethical extreme. The poem is a test of the reader's capacity for disorder precisely because it is such a test for Benson. A plurality has been formally developed in the speaking subject, while in both Olson and Spicer the form is invested with a singular complexity that is intended to draw the reader in.

The motive in Benson's poem is access. The means of access are the phrase and the ability to extend the phrase into a sentence. There is not one sentence but many. In Benson there is a feat of access to the self that proceeds along linguistic lines. He is lucid in the work; its contradictions can be taken virtually as points of reference. Literally, one can open up *The Busses* to gain access. Where Olson and Spicer compel an identification in their work, Benson presents multiple possibilities for identity, none of which are strictly determined.

5

The World in the Work: Toward a Psychology of Form

The world in the work is the question of reference. In Jakobson's schema outlined in "Linguistics and Poetics," reference is one of six functions of language seen in the communication between speaker and hearer. However, his comments on the "referential"—"a set toward the referent, an orientation toward the CONTEXT"—are more concerned with distinguishing it from the other five functions than with describing how it works. Although the referential is not necessarily the dominant function in language, it may be "the leading task of numerous messages," and it is assumed to be conventionally understood. In actual speech, other functions can be equally important—such as the "emotive" function, concerned with the "direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about," and the "poetic," in which the communication focuses on "the message for its own sake." The demands of the poetic—that the message reflect the structure of language—often contradict those of the referential for Jakobson:

> The supremacy of poetic function over referential does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous. The double-sensed message finds correspondence in a split addresser, in a split addressee, and besides in a split reference.

The structure of language, its internal order as given in the poetic, splits the referential context into that determined by the structure of the language and that of any "other" context. A reference must be made in a language, which has its own properties as a medium—this introduces an ambiguity into reference, especially in its use in poetry:

> Ambiguity is an intrinsic, inalienable character of any self-focused message, briefly a corollary feature of poetry. Let us repeat with Empson: "The machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry." Not only the message itself but also its addresser and addressee become ambiguous. . . . Virtually any poetic message is a quasi-quoted discourse with all those peculiar, intricate problems which "speech within speech" offers to the linguist.[1]

In his argument, the beginning of certain fairy tales, "It was and it was not," shows how a poetic "principle of equivalence" can code in an ambiguity of reference, speaker, and hearer at the outset. Poetry takes in the world on its own terms and, in Terry Eagleton's sense, makes a world of its own in which the necessities of form determine the possibilities of any incorporated element. These exterior elements are taken in on the order of "speech within speech"—for Jakobson, "virtually any poetic message is a quasi-quoted discourse." Here Jakobson's bias is toward speech, but "a quasi-quoted discourse" more accurately describes not the referential contexts of speaker and hearer but a text. Reference is stabilized in memory or in writing as a text, and it is the incorporation of texts, which may be quite removed from the contexts of speaker and hearer, that is most relevant to the question of reference in poetry.

An example of the reordering of a text within the act of speech is given in Leon Trotsky's account of his experience of the spontaneous poetics of reference. In his political speeches at "The Modern Circus" in the period immediately after the October revolution, the pressure of the crowd and of the

times caused a kind of superinduced "poetic principle" to take over, obliterating the prior boundaries of the referential:

> Then all the arguments and words thought out in advance would break and recede under the imperative pressure of sympathy, and other words, other arguments, utterly unexpected by the orator but needed by these people, would emerge in full array from my subconscious. On such occasions I felt as if I were listening to the speaker from the outside, trying to keep pace with his ideas, afraid that, like a somnambulist, he might fall off the edge of the roof at the sound of my conscious reasoning.[2]

The arguments and words prepared beforehand break under the pressure of the event, and the utterance is inspired beyond the intention of the speaker. The text here is the memory trace of Marxist method, which stems partly from texts; the referential is not just a mutually understood context but a context that occurs prior to the act of speech in the Modern Circus, with the "stern inquisitiveness" of the crowd drawing it out in an unexpected way. The poetics of Trotsky's utterance are a response to a multiple and unstable situation. This divergence of text from context gives a more dynamic sense of the referential than the speech-centered terms offered by Jakobson.

A discussion of poetics solely in terms of the act of speech will not cover the entire range of its reordering of reference. What is being spoken of can be quite other than the contexts that a speaker and hearer will share. Even where a direct address is the basis of reference in a poem, there is often a textual or, in consideration of nonwritten examples, a conventional basis as well. In the tradition of love poetry, the poem permits both an actual "I," or speaker, and a conventional "I," which has been coded into the form. The poem acts as a kind of displacement into a more timeless world where its address can make sense, literally, of its own. As Robert Creeley optimistically writes, "As soon as / I speak, I /

speaks," calling up a little man in the work who will speak on his behalf. Similarly there can be a split addressee—the person hearing the work and a "you" coded into the form—and a split reference as well. The contexts shared in the work are both manifest in the actual address of the poem and latent in the conventions of the form.

Bruce Andrews's poem "Bananas are an example" (complete text) is an example itself of a reference split by the ambiguities of address.[3] The manifest context is unclear—an example of what? It is not readily apparent why anyone would want to say that. The latent context is of a prior, missing text from which this bit of language has been displaced. The poem can be read either as complete in itself (referring to a context where "bananas" and "an example" have equivalent status) or as a fragment (an example that ironically refers to something else). A hypothetical text motivates the ambiguity in each case—"bananas" are an example of the displacement of reference to any context, understood not to be real, exemplary bananas but some nonexistent text. The poem is an argument for the self-sufficiency of the sign, but "the sign" is likewise a hypothetical entity that has ceased to exist, backed up by a missing and ponderous text. The poem more accurately can be read as a way of placing these ambiguities into circulation as it calls into question its own effects—any content the reader might get. Perhaps the poem intends a kind of dread in the reader—there may be a referential "elsewhere" or not, undermining confidence in the hypothetical text and forcing a decision as to what possible contexts "bananas" and "an example" could share.

Poetic reference is motivated by a text, but it does not necessarily end in any self-sufficiency of "the sign." In any reference the question is one of context, and in poetry this is necessarily ambiguous—referential contexts are both in the work and in its outside sources, which may be in experience or in examples of the poem or genres far removed such as

mystery novels or travel books. In motivating their use in a new context, these sources are often argued into the work in terms not of a direct quotation but of an identification with the form of the experience or text as a whole. The manner in which this is done leads from the question of reference to the larger one of the psychology of form.

In Viktor Shklovsky's *Third Factory,* a text of late-20s Russian constructivism, purely literary contexts are given a new value in the time and space of actual social life. In the extension of the work outside the boundaries of the literary set, each moment of the text must incorporate the dynamics of the whole form; Shklovsky argues for the perpetual validity of the modernist in his equation of individual referents with their motivation in the text. This is both an extreme and self-evident position—it expresses the fact of literary forms in actual, real-time use, not granting the literary a separate or ideal status, at the same time that it breaks apart the conventional values of the form. From the introductory chapter, "I Continue"—which indicates either a mode of address (narrative) or a disposition toward the world (persistence) at a single moment of literary/social time:

> In the old days, one anecdotal fact was normally followed by another. In the old anecdote, one responded above all to the attractiveness of the fact, to the material, whereas in the modern anecdote we respond mainly to the structure. . . .
>
> I have no desire to construct a plot.
>
> I am going to write about things and thoughts.
>
> To compile quotations.
>
> The time has changed course once again and the word "anecdote," once applied to a witty story, will soon be defined in terms of the various facts being printed in this-and-that columns of the newspapers. Each separate moment of a play is becoming a separate, self-contained entity. Structure is usually missing. When it does creep into a piece of work, it is promptly killed; moreover, the crime goes unnoticed by the public. And the crime is pointless: the victim is already dead. . . .

It goes without saying that plot-oriented prose still exists and will continue to exist, but it has been consigned to the attic.[4]

Shklovsky's argument here goes two ways—toward an extreme compression of the form into virtual points of reference—"things and thoughts"—and to the symptomatic use of the anecdote in newspaper accounts, in which form is automatized to an extreme. The victim is already dead because modern life has killed him—we see this daily on the six o'clock news. The total anxiety of the present is the agent of any real crime; all individual crimes add up to this anxiety, which is then replayed in the anecdotes of the daily accounts. Shklovsky is aiming the compactness of his form toward the larger context of forms that have been automatized and atomized in the world.

The totalizing state of present is dealt with by means of such a compression in the work of a number of contemporary writers in both poetry and prose. Major form is collapsed and condensed—the work argues at all points against a dispersed psychology, proposing itself as an alternative to the atomized message units of dread. In this argument there is often, in certain writers, a borrowing of alternative total forms with values entirely different from those of the totalizing present, to be used in the construction of the work. Narrative or expository tags from other genres shift the present from the totality being asserted to a synthetic and more possible whole. Carla Harryman indicates such a use of another total form in the values she gives in her work to the genre of detective fiction, in terms of a condensation not unlike that in Shklovsky:

> Let us consider a drooping mongrel barked under the nebulous foliage. In a detective novel this sets a tone of interest in things and facts laden with meaning, but it also sets a value on people as things, for things define people. So the observer, who in a detective novel is the active agent, the detector of the X, is not personally involved. . . .

> I desire my work to be a thing and this is what detective novels have to do with my imagination. The writing is the crime and the details leading to the crime simultaneously. And this does guide my imagination engaged in writing—the imagination engages the criminal, that's me; the crime, that's what I've written; and the detector, that's what determines what the crime is so that I can conceal the crime and continue my criminal acts.[5]

The form of the detective novel is atomized, reduced to the crime and its details, with the advantage that the form as whole is worked into the state of mind of the writer. The internalized genre leads the writer on to her discovery in another form, in which the writing is highly compressed and marked by narrative tags—the expectation of an event and its observation are equivalent terms of the work. The referential and poetic functions of language are very close in this reduction of a parallel text to the level of the sentence in the writing. The writer's romance is a kind of permanent transgression against automatized, normative totalities—which are a primary concern. Harryman's sentences are ironic and assertive in this sense; they stand out as isolated and exemplary against a generalized other—"The hand walked down the road."

The relation of genre literature to the work of Lyn Hejinian shows another way in which the values of a whole form can be condensed to an argument that proceeds from word to word. When asked, "What kind of genre literature do you read and how does it affect your writing," Hejinian responded:

> Answer: I guess how I read is why I read travel literature and natural history of a certain period which is not contemporary. These are volumes recording adventures which are as much adventures of ideas as adventures in the usual sense—putting limbs in danger—though there is that, too. First, I read for the prose style. That is important, because it has to do with detail. . . . I see the writing sentence by sentence, even phrase by phrase. I may miss too much because of this. It is a quirk of

the imagination and not something willed or commendable. It causes a fragmentation of information—I thoroughly get mere bits. Still, I read for the style, which is (I'm thinking about the 18th and 19th century work now—mostly 19th century: Darwin, Doughty, Bates, Wallace, the great German in South America who was eaten by natives but pursued by—I can't remember now) a highly accomplished, articulate, *complete*, civilized prose style in and about a wild environment. They wrap their notebooks in tarps and oilcloth and rescue them while the provisions float down stream on the back of an anaconda. Somehow this assures one that the intellect is of first importance; that is, these are adventures of the intellect—but not necessarily of intellectuals. They do not live in privileged circumstances; their lives are not pleasant; this is not comfort.

Part of the interest is undeniably that of armchair travel. That is, the book contains an experience, all of an experience, which is/was not the author's but which is mine. A book is a memory. I can recall an experience and if I can recall it it is mine, it must be mine. . . . There may be some parallel between the way my attention operates as a reader and the way the attention of the naturalist operates in the field. This touches on the nature of the imagination and of curiosity. The naturalist traveller is on the trail, getting a general sense of what's around, when suddenly a brilliant detail, a species comparable to a phrase, is underfoot. This is not a moment of high adventure—not a jaguar from behind a tree or an appalling turn of plot—but something ordinary and part of what's to be expected, and now one notices it. As Charles Doughty puts it in the opening of *Travels in Arabia Deserta:* "A new voice hailed me of an old friend."

In travel books and the accounts of naturalists content bears directly on matters of style—identifying a new species would be a highpoint of observed detail. There is a relation between this kind of genre literature and the structuring principles of Hejinian's work—the search through masses of foliage for the leaf that has yet to be identified is similar to the care given to the isolation of new "species" of language by Hejinian. But without the extent of text—or the masses of leaves—

behind the isolation of observed detail there can be no value for the fact—facts occur only within a form, which in the case of the naturalists' prose is one of "investigation and results." Here the nineteenth-century "objective" account meets Sir Walter Scott in the armchair travel of the present reader. This internalization of a parallel total form leads Hejinian on in the manner of composition of her writing. In response to a further question, "How does your work in writing reflect this reading," Hejinian gave the following account of her process of work:

> If question one was how do I receive information as a reading writer, then your question two is how do I give information as a writing reader. . . . All my work is made in three writings. These may be accomplished in a hundred sittings. The first is in notebooks (including jottings on scraps of paper, etc.); the second is the arrangement in a work; the third is revision of that work. . . . The first stage is passive in terms of imagination, beyond the imagination's role in selecting what might go into the notebook. Notebook material tends to be extremely fragmentary; no architecture to it at all; phrases and whatever is analogous to the phrase in ideas. Raw materials. I am not a diarist.
>
> It is in the work of construction, in the use of raw materials, that I depend on the imagination. . . . As a reader, I'm more accepting than analytical at the time of the encounter. I memorize information. Then I remember it. The second stage of writing is somewhat analogous to the process of spring cleaning—put *everything* on the sidewalk—then locate, identify, organize, and replace (re-place) each thing. The rooms look better; the things in them are more useful; one notices the things in them in their new places; everything is "like new"—the house, the rooms in it, the things in them. Remembering where everything was before is part of what's new about where they are now.[6]

The isolation of elements in the text—Hejinian says, "I thoroughly get mere bits"—is the hinge in her work between reading and writing. In travel books the romance of the en-

tire text is identified by Hejinian as one of the values of the fact; her reading of the literature of discovery abstracts a notion of isolated "facts" from the text and goes on to invent a form with entirely different values. Later, when asked about her values for revision, Hejinian stated, "All my work can be broken down into its parts. There is an inevitability to how the parts make the whole, and something synergetic about the sum." Revision is a point of review of the parts from the perspective of the total form, or as Carla Harryman responded to the same question, "When I revise I consider the autonomy of the text." Here the constructed work is giving a different value to the motivation of parts than was perceived in its prior examples.

In poetic reference values are abstracted from one context and reordered to new ends. The "wholeness" of the text can be argued in particular ways against the "wholeness" of the condition one is in. By calling up such allies in a prior text—as in Harryman's use of the detective novel or Hejinian's use of nineteenth-century prose—an alternate order for the present can be conceived. Poetic reference is related in this way to the transformation of the world in the text and to new values given by the text in the world at large.

The world is certainly in the work of Charles Olson. In fact, Olson's work might represent a kind of pole in the consideration of reference in poetry. Embracing the notion that "form is never more than an extension of content," Olson's poetics develop a modality of statement that gives a highly charged and often radically digressive treatment of the facts at hand. Facts are never points of rest for Olson; the objects of the world are not reliable, appearing only at moments determined by the ongoing argument of the work. Neither forms nor facts are stable, but the complexities of Olson's practice clearly contradict the literalness of his priority of content over form.

George Butterick's recently published *Guide to the Maxi-*

mus Poems of Charles Olson is a kind of literal mirror in which the modalities of reference in the poem can be seen. Normally, a work such as the *Guide* would be taken as transparent—a tool for the reader—but it also can be read critically in its treatment of Olson's poetic references in documentary form. Where in Olson's work time and space are simultaneous, the textual parallel of the *Guide* of necessity disengages the occasions of the poem from their temporal and spatial continuity into a more orderly world of discrete parts. Form is separated from the referential, and the work of the poet appears more as a consistent "activity" among its "objects" than as an argument at critical points. In ironing out many of the difficulties and instabilities in Olson the *Guide* encourages readings less discomforting than those the author had in mind.

The standards of reference maintained by the *Guide* are in any case not transparent; to begin with their point of departure is a different order of text. But in canonizing Olson's relation to the world of facts in a particular form, Butterick is also acting on philosophical, as well as professional, grounds of his own. The poet's relation to the world of facts is more of a given in the *Guide* than it ever could have been in the course of the composition of the work. The biography ends up appearing as a kind of unanalyzable whole, placed next to the unanalyzable whole of nature. This is reflected in the openhandedness of Butterick's introduction, which is deceptively neutral in its statement of the aims of the *Guide:*

> It does not seek to analyze or interpret, but to allow the reader to participate actively in the poems, find his or her own meaning, exercise one's own judgment along the lines of Olson's own principle of *'istorin,* "to find out for oneself."

The method is given as unitary; Butterick quotes Whitehead's "The process of creation is the form of unity" in support of this view. This characterization of the poet's method leads directly to the values given to his references, as in this

again seemingly neutral account of Olson in a period of work:

> It is not until back in Gloucester in 1957, with the land, sea, and sources around him, that Olson begins his direct, single-minded investigation and possession of the city. One sees, then, in the course of the annotations, the process or progress of the investigation, the act of history.[7]

The poet is given virtually against the background of his references; all he has to do is fit them into the work. Olson's real-time romance is separated from the poem that results by the notion of "process," and perhaps it is Butterick's "act of mind" as scholar to separate the plurality of motivation from the fact of the work. Butterick's attitude toward nature, that is Olson, is one of proper distance and respect. Olson's twistings and turnings are literalized in the way that hurricanes are given names—they knock down trees and become history; later, Galveston recovers from the flood. Olson is not a radical in Butterick's canon; rather, he is the founder of the tradition of his work. In no sense is he a writer who is pushing abruptly away from the literary past, breaking up the ground for his own use. The image of Olson in the *Guide* risks ignoring half the unity of the text—the motivation of the form. Something much more determinate is at stake in Olson's poem than an "investigation," though this may be outside the proper scope of the *Guide*.

A poem that typifies the documentarist side of the *Maximus Poems* is "The Record," which immediately precedes the poem quoted earlier, "Some Good News." The poem is as close to the purely referential as anything Olson wrote—in fact, it at first seems to be a list, without any mediation of the author. Historical documents concerning the founding of the first permanent settlement in Gloucester are given; the poem is a kind of account of the plusses and minuses of discovery, the first yield of the New World. Beyond the thematic value of the poem in the sequence, it is exemplary of Olson's value

for "writing as an aid to memory"—the trace of writing in relation to historical time is a direct concern of the work. The record as record establishes a value for reference in Olson's work, a value quite different from that of the conventional historian. In Olson's seemingly straightforward approach there is a relation between written word, the unknown that is historical time, and the form of the poem—all given a positive value in the occasion of the poem. The poet's penetration of historical time to the moment of discovery can only occur once, and this is it:

The Record Weymouth Port Book, 873

Here we have it—the goods—from this Harbour,
1626, to Weymouth (England) consigned to

Richard Bushrod and Company
& Wm Derby and Company

fr Cape An dry fish
corfish
train oil
quarters of oak
skins: fox
racons
martynes
otter
muskuatche
beaver

The *Amytie* arriving Weymouth 1st Aug
and the Fellowship followed 11th September

Capts Evans, & Edward Cribbe . . .[8]

Here there are several lists—an account of goods taken from Cape Ann and brought back to England, the schedule of the arriving ships, and a list of stores needed to establish

the venture on Cape Ann the previous winter. The poem's form at first seems to be an unambiguously literal account of things and events—certainly content is determining form in a straightforward way. But the entries in Butterick give a different value for the references, permitting a better sense of the form by virtue of the relation of the references to Olson's original sources:

> 1.117. *Weymouth Port Book*
>
> Records of the seafaring activity at the Port of Weymouth, England, preserved in the Public Record Office. They are referred to by Rose-Troup to provide additional information concerning the Dorchester Company's voyages to Cape Ann. See her *John White,* pp. 66–69.

The mode of discovery in Olson's poem—that it is a singular occasion for the act of reference—is underscored by the literal facts here. Olson begins the seeming list at high pitch: "Here we have it—the goods . . . ," rhyming "the goods" of the investigation with those of the Dorchester Company. The reference is split by the form of the poem. The next entry goes on to quote Rose-Troup:

> 1.117. *Here we have it—the goods—from this Harbour . . .*
>
> From Rose-Troup, *John White,* p. 68: "To the account of this venture . . . we are able to add a little information from the Weymouth Port Books. . . . The *Amytie* made her home port about 1st August, 1625, and the *Fellowship* followed about 11th September. The amount of dry fish, corfish, train oil, martyns, otter, muskuatche [muskrat] and beaver unloaded by Richard Bushrod and Company and by William Derby and Company, were of considerable value, greater than White's account leads us to expect."[9]

The quote from Rose-Troup contains many of the references in the poem. The act of putting the individual words—"dry fish / corfish / train oil . . ."—to paper appears in a different light in relation to its original source than if thought of as

written straight out in a kind of "notebook" approach to composition. Olson is acting on the original text, dismantling the narrative context and setting the individual words free on the space of the page. It is in this way that Olson bears the burden of being both poet and historian—to give the truth to materials and at the same time propel them with an intensity of focus necessary for their isolation from the original context as "the act of finding out for oneself." The poem is an exchange with history, that is the written records, and history in the form of Frances Rose-Troup is in some sense put back, left behind by the relatively few marks used to give witness to it—which become entities in their own right. The poetics, the excitement of discovery in the poem, are at war with history, although the relation betwen poem and history is close. Later in many of the *Maximus Poems* Olson strives for a thrust in the poem that is as vertical as possible. The vertical can be seen in "The Record" in the relation of the isolated words of the poem to its original narrative text.

In Terry Eagleton's discussion of ideology in the text, "History enters the text as ideology, as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences." History indeed enters Olson's poem as text, given in the *Guide* as the narrative of Frances Rose-Troup, and its ideological form in "form is never more than an extension of content" likewise determines and distorts the text by "its measurable absences." The facts are given in the isolated words and phrases of a list; the narrative of Rose-Troup's history has been excluded. Olson returns to an original moment of historical time by preserving only the names in the historical account—narrative is given a value here as a kind of resistance of the medium of history to the original names. The entrance into the text is ideological, given Olson's hierarchy of value in "initial" events and their eventual dispersal, which leads inevitably to narrative accounts. Rose-Troup's narrative is not only a source of references but a motivation for the work. In breaking up the historical account, Olson places himself at the

point of discovery, looking through the resistant medium to the facts, which are referred to by their names.

According to Eagleton, "If it is to be a finished text, its nonsolution must signify." "The Record" is a finished text in this sense—what appears to be an absolute of reference in Olson's poem is in fact highly tendentious, an argument with and transformation of a prior text. These values for the transformation of texts extend through the work; as Butterick remarks in the *Guide,* "One of the results of this undertaking has been to reveal the surprisingly wide extent of such borrowing, thereby raising certain fundamental questions as to the nature of Olson's poetry and the limits of originality in art."[10] It should not be surprising that the historical sections of *Maximus* were achieved only after the writer had negotiated his relation to writing itself, the content of the first sections of the work. To begin with *the form* is the content of which the form can only be an extension of; so it appears that "form can never be more than an extension of content" is true variously at different moments of the poem for precise reasons.

Form might equally be content, and it often is even in Olson's work. An example of this is in a poem later in the *Maximus Poems,* "Cole's Island," which returns to narrative in an account of the poet's meeting with the figure of Death:

> A fowler, maybe—as though he was used to
> hunting birds, and was out, this morning, keeping
> his hand in, so to speak, moving around, noticing
> what game were about. And how they seemed. And how
> the woods
> were. As a matter of fact just before he had shown up,
> so naturally, and as another person might walk
> up on a scene of your own, I had noticed
> a cock and hen pheasant cross easily the
> road I was on and had tried, in fact,
> to catch my son's attention quick enough for him
> to see before they did walk off into the bayberry
> or arbor vitae along the road.

My impression is we did—
that is, Death and myself, regard each other. And
there wasn't anything more than that, only that he had
appeared,
and we did recognize each other—or I did, him, and
he seemed to have no question
about my presence there, even though I was uncomfortable.[11]

In this poem there is a simultaneity of form, narrative, and the dream—which is what the recognition must be. The text of the poem is an occasion for the recognition of an other that has been argued with in many guises in the course of the poem, only here it is made into the literal figure of Death. But where the narrative is held in abeyance, fought off in "The Record" at the point of discovery of the unknown in historical time, the encounter here is given pointedly in the middle of a rambling account. The limits of history have been escaped at this point in the poem, but the poet has assumed them in himself, and the structure of his dream and the form of the poem both approach the status of the other that had been encountered earlier through the historical materials. The poem is left with its narrative alone—it is the record of a direct perception of an other that does not exist. Olson works continually toward this kind of crisis—"that a man's life be a perpetual allegory"—but the allegory approaches its limits here, and there is no other than the form. In Butterick's entry for the poem:

III.69. *COLE'S ISLAND*

Written in Gloucester and dated 9 September 1965, almost six months after the sudden death of the poet's wife. There is, however, an earlier version, apparently based in part on a dream, written in a notepad between February 26th and March 6th, 1963. . . .

Cole's Island is located in West Gloucester on the Essex River west of Wingaersheek and Coffin beaches, and is reached via Concord Street. It is not a true island, but at-

tached to the mainland by marshes and a road. The area is secluded and thick with growth, though clearly identified by a sign, which also declares that it is private property and warns against trespassing.[12]

As seemingly immediate as the poem may be, there are prior texts for the reference in the poem—both the previous draft and the landscape of Gloucester are Olson's texts. But form is now the argument of the poem as much as any content; this is given a precise value in the notion of "recognition" as an occasion of the world. Motive and reference have been collapsed to a single point, and the narrative that results is somewhat without choice in the matter. As Olson says, "the foreknowledge is absolute"—the argument of the poem is prefigured in the entire work, leaving its actual occasion as the final term. The certainty of recognition occurs at a specific time and place. The argument with history has developed from the question of the limits of the text to that of the limits of the poet, who has outlived his method to find himself physically on the other side of the "No Trespassing" sign. The poem determines the fate of its form in exactly the sense that the eye of the poet meets Death's eye. If form can never be more than an extension of content, this poem must be the limiting case.

In Clark Coolidge's work a different mode of address to the inert gives another value to the question of reference. Coolidge creates by act of mind a kind of verbal wall against which words are bounced in order to hear their inner secrets at that limit. Reference in the poem takes its value from this act, much as Olson's use of fact has a value in his transformation of historical sources. However, rather than finding unitary, inescapable points of recognition, Coolidge produces a world in the work by means of a mutability of sense. The world one recognizes in the work is filtered through the eidetic image—an internal production of the nervous system in which perceptual forms are broken apart into faces one sees in the dark. For example, in a recent poem, "Greta Sands,"

Coolidge calls up an eidetic silver screen on which Robert Mitchum and a Hollywood starlet are on vacation in the Florida Keys, replayed in the back of the brain:

She stood up. There was a lapping laughter.
She dialed fracas, importunity, smoke, and passing water.
The room lodged a splintered complaint. All
the stuck and previous band display a wound.
Then I woke to her knock at my door in
bandage from the avenue. A pearly sneeze.
She had cheek, and smiled baldly. I put
down my pants, my pen as well a pendulous
replacement. There was happiness, a snail
across the room from hurried dust. She
spoke, langsam wrists of the higher form.
Thought of the peak that could be seen to whittle
from a neighboring farm the precise bear
that came cancelling with me. This was
night, a strong thermidor. I asked her to
notch my heat. That, then, she turned down.
A whisper. A lecture. A dress that cleaved
of her sink to my hairs a dross of ostrich.
But she held a mystery of the stretch out
to sea, and I in direct descent an ankle.
Greta Sands, terse rotator and wash.[13]

The world referred to is fluid, as it exists in that part of the mind. There is a kind of cubist eidetic image here of a houseboat moving out of the lights, a tough-guy voice overlaid as the narrative moves on to inconsequence. The poem is a composite of modes, much as in dream, and the text of the referent is clearly multiple—in the narrative voice, borrowed from the monologues of detective fiction; the image content, which seems likewise borrowed from *film noir;* and the synthetic medium of the eidetic image, which has been developing in the course of Coolidge's work. Not only the poem's sources but the recognition of the eidetic have a textual basis—one of the acts of Coolidge's work is to reify a disso-

ciative psychology, as opposed to the more limited, determinate psychology in Olson. In Coolidge the act of dreaming rather than the structure of the dream is the point; the difference in method is between the use of the involuntary rather than the voluntary memory in the account of the dream, with the former giving the more open-ended result. The recognition is only partial, and Coolidge seems intent on preserving that.

Bruce Andrews's work, on the other hand, determines the world in the work to be exactly itself. There appears to be no psychology in the work, no structural other than the text; everything is on the surface. The reference of the words is to themselves as signs, and the words have only themselves as their textual basis. The world is a text—in a work such as "I Guess Work the Time Up," various sign systems such as State Department white papers, funkadelic rap records, and other isolated specimens of cultural detritus are splayed out on an illusionistic line to induce a signifying motive force common to them all. The entire culture is characterized as generating a text that proposes its signification at all points in an aggressive and disturbing manner—it forces the subject into a controlled linguistic space, reducing it to the status of a sign. All the energy with which these referential bullets are deflected by the subject is returned to the culture at large with a curse. One can imagine a handful of these lines thrown into the machinery of culture—they would rip through anything. The act of the poem is to dismantle the cultural machinery and set in motion a machine of its own:

> Babylonian girl specs CONFINES cronyism
> LOOSELY PREVIOUS LIASON DOROTHY 20 years
> who dusts an imbecile Each idealizes
> the amplified bear Don't want limbs of
> pediatricians diatribing too borrow it on spool
> don't want no thighs noise music Oh
> my mary mary knock-kneed roly-poly sleep-

walkin' pigeon-toed YELLOW YELLOW gimme
mule oiseaux exotiques Mrs. Garrulous is
apparently such typography so have raybeats
practically no shy in alphabet Gave $10.00
crossroads of—
workplace waxed carnals to thermometer Style
Sucker that
spinning President Polk on the rack tracks sly
fuss almost thang
as coop much baroque as relevant sumptuous Book
-zation But you can't beat them walkietalkies[14]

Andrews's poem is a kind of fanastic machine, each line a conveyor belt of semiotic rubble, funny poking things—to flip on the switch is to get action. The human subject is reduced the status of an equivalent sign, including the subject of the writer, who is as dispersed as any element in the work. In this poem there is a solution not imagined by William Carlos Williams to his proposition, in the 1944 introduction to *The Wedge*, that a poem be "a machine made of words." Where Williams's machine made of words is a self-contained entity, a whole consisting of interacting parts, each of which is necessary for the functioning of the other, in Andrews there is no limit to the whole, and the machine consists of the placing in motion of a sequence of unrelated parts found in the world at large. Possibly Andrews's machine is closer to the Sex Machine of James Brown than to the cubist Jeep imagined by Williams. The machine imagined by Andrews is not a metaphor—its limits are those of the entire culture, in which the dispersed subject is enmeshed. Rather than being a manipulation of the surfaces of language, Andrews's work involves a psychology of form that is even more exploded than those of Olson and Coolidge. The structure of the poem is literally that of signs in social space, which is identified with the formally coded subject.

The question of a machine made of words bears on the discussion of "desiring machines" to be found in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. Starting with an analysis of avant-garde machine images, such as those of Tinguely, Duchamp, and Man Ray, the post-Freudian psychoanalysts propose a hypothetical construction, the desiring machine, of which the avant-garde image is a prototype, a cultural artifact that is at the same time a clue to psychology on a larger scale. On entering the boundaries of a desiring machine, which can be as simple a construction as two potential sexual partners sitting at a bar or as complex as the formal psychology of television or the confusion of voices within the telephone system, with its millions of wires and relays, one is stripped of the boundaries of the self, finding oneself in a world in which there is only the flux of desire. This could sound like a description of life in a disco, with its amplification of "deterritorializing flows"—and the metrics of the disco may well stand as a criticism of its value as a machine made of words.

Of more interest in Deleuze and Guattari than the reductive psychology of deterritorializing flows is the discussion of the modernist machine image as a component of psychology, of which Man Ray's painting "Dancer-Danger" is given as an example:

> Insofar as this machine is supposed to represent the whirl of a Spanish dancer, it can be said that it expresses mechanically, by means of the absurd, the impossibility for a machine to execute such a movement (the dancer is not a machine). But one can also say: there must be a dancer here who functions as part of a machine; this machine component can only be a dancer; here is the machine of which the dancer is the component part. The object is no longer to compare man and the machine in order to evaluate the correspondences, the extensions, the possible or impossible substitutions for the other, but to bring them into communication in order to show how man

is a component part of the machine, or combines with something else to constitute a machine.[15]

The psychology here begins with the form of the whole, Man Ray's painting of the machine, extending the figure of the dancer as its ironic component. The spectator standing in front of the work is a displaced part of the machine—who really wants to be a dancer. The desiring machine is this total form in which the desire to be a dancer is coded into the work and then released when the work is viewed. In fact, Man Ray was interested in the manipulation of such culturally generalized forms of desire, and part of his solution involved the use of the machine. For example, in the "Rayograms," gears, nuts, and bolts are placed on a photographic plate and exposed to light, making a composition of the outlines of displaced components in a kind of amorphous, indeterminate space. Their immediate success in fashion photography points to the excitement generated by this arrangement of parts.

There is still a considerable distance from the charged relation of spectator and machine to the notion of the form of the machine in the collective subject. What at first seems to be a simple theory of a work of art is extended into a fantastic program for mass psychology. What is valid, if not the entire argument, is the sense that the form of the machine can be extended in cultural space. "If there is a machine, there must be a dancer" is a kind of visceral statement of the relation between radical forms of art and psychology that gives a new basis for the question of reference. It is possible to generalize for art, beyond the phantasmagoria of the totalitarian machine, the psychological necessity of cogs and wheels for form. The ironic use of such parts in Man Ray's work predicates the more fluid thought and movements of the dancer, which has been constituted by the work. Shklovsky's "I am going to write about things and thoughts" is a similar foregrounding of the mechanics of statement ad-

dressed to the total psychology of a moment in cultural time. The ironic mechanization of the subject in Andrews is intended to leave a greater space for the subject, which has been identified with the mechanics of signification that are dispersed in the world. What is common to each of these artists is the identification of culture with a psychology in which the work of art is a necessary component.

In the early modernist machine image there is a fascination with the transformative potential of the machine, especially in the aesthetic series. The machine is virtually the definition of the possibility of form; this much extends from the ironies of the Dadaist period to the progressive humanism of Williams. The psychology of the machine image in this period is based on a single representation, which is given a unitary, assertive, and often ironic value—the type of the syntax of modernism. Society in the present has reserved a more ambiguous role for the image of the machine. Machines are not only images but the means through which these images are conveyed—driving in a car, there are multiple billboards of cars; on the television there are images of more machines. Machines have multiplied on autoerotic principles to the point where they are under all rugs, in all closets. No one knows where that humming is coming from; one could not stop it if one tried. A great portion of the automatism in daily life is directly related to the omnipresence of machines. This is beyond metaphor; the form of the machine has been built into the psychology of everyday life.

In the mechanics of communication in the present, representation is reduced to narrative tags and reproduced for mass consumption in mechanical tableaus. A reductive characterization of persons and events is necessary to fit them in as units into the appropriate slots. Advertizing is never so useful as in the consideration of the contemporary machine made of words. These formal machines are highly crafted from component parts, and they are capable of a nearly endless replication of messages. But it is not just information that

is being communicated by the machine—the entire form of the machine is being inculcated in the subject, leading to altered desires, not just for the product being advertized but for larger mechanical forms. The following is given as an example of such a possibility of form:

> A sequence in which a long sentence, with many subordinate clauses, giving authoritative opinions about the quality of image to be found on Sylvania TVs, is spoken by eight persons. The people are drawn from all walks of life: construction worker, nurse, businessman, chef, telephone operator, policeman, druggist. Each person is centered straight ahead on the screen; each is dressed in the extremes of representation of that profession. All are caricatures, except the model: her profession is illusion. She is also the most attractive person, for this reason.
>
> This is followed by a studio shot of the object being referred to: a Sylvania TV. The voice of the announcer speaks responsible gibberish; the time frame shifts from spasmodic to normal. The picture of the TV's picture is clear.
>
> The sequence returns to three of the most characteristic personages, who speak in succession one word apiece. The message is "best / color / picture," spoken by construction worker, policeman, and model. The sequence ends with the image of the model.

The form here is a version of a contemporary machine made of words—in which entire subjects have been incorporated as component parts to highlight the values of the machine being replicated in the Sylvania TV. There is also a component of desire being built in, with the contrast of the model standing out against the more quotidien types, and the shift from the clarity of the single screen to the difficult syntax of individuals. "If there is a TV set, there can be a model"—the model represents the channel one would like to tune in. The contrast between desire and work is made at many structural levels in the sequence in order to increase the desire for the machine.

In the face of the ubiquity of machines, the value of a machine made of words is now of another order than in the period of modernism that generated the prototypes of Williams, Shklovsky, Duchamp, and Man Ray. Machinic components occur both in atomized structures (as in the method of advertizing) and as larger gestalts (the entire TV). There is no longer the possibility of a pristine, self-contained construction as exemplary of the form of the machine—or as compensation for the displacement of the subject. The machine made of words now inhabits a middle ground between itself as a created exemplary prototype and itself as the creator of a new and altered order. This middle ground is the world of projections, the locus of those limits of the subject that Olson saw on Cole's Island, that Coolidge culled from his nervous system in "Greta Sands," or that Andrews sets in motion as the automated teller of semiotics. If a poem is a machine made of words, it must take on first the entire psychology of living in a world of machines, where modes of communication are automatized.

Short circuit leads to improper wiring. An unanalyzable hum drowns out statement of fact.

Information is an antidote. Your instructions are to read blank pages back to the machine.

Without desire to write, messages end in code.

Pictures play to empty rooms. A mirror image looks back in on standing waves.

Plot-line conflicts dismantle the projection. The intact eye fuses with the outer air.

Nothing stands in the way of impulse. Inner voice turns power "On." Focus adjusts to test patterns, setting apart a point of control.

A slight shift causes the whole scheme to cave in. "He vanished into a dot on the screen, then went entirely out."

"He" is this room. I think the final image is that light.

My father was a spiral staircase, and our family various windows and doors. When the locks are changed, the skeleton key fits the palm of my hand.

Absentee landlord profits. Author in eternity withers away.[16]

In this extract from a longer work, "Paralleles," there is a thematic use of the figure of the machine that is parallel to the argument of the entire work. Where the Sylvania TV ad is inculcating desire for the machine, the machine here, which may also have a screen, is dismantling itself as a stable figure to call into question figures of the larger world. The instruction manual for this machine made of words is contradictory, oxymoronic—with the deliberate obstruction of its operation extending to the operator's codes as well. Finally, the question of the machine's dysfunction is metaphorically linked to the figure of a "whole" psychology of an entirely different kind. The mechanical family is located on a middle ground between two other machinic components—the relations of property combined with the dread of a missing figure in "Absentee landlord profits," and romantic subjectivity questioning itself as politics in "Author in eternity withers away." Reference occurs throughout the text in this middle ground between heterogenous contexts brought into the work. The ambiguity is ethically motivated; it undercuts the figures of the poems, which are not all machines, in a manner different from that of the Sylvania TV ad, which reduces the construction worker to a component part. In the poem the components are revenged, taking apart the machine until "The intact eye fuses with the outer air"—but this is not meant as a lesson in deconstruction. A new syntax is set in motion that demands an identification of the meaning of form by the reader, who must be included as an element of the poem's form.

In order to create this middle ground, the poem of necessity sets itself apart from the world. Conflicts in art occur

within boundaries, giving a value to the whole in relation to the totality outside. For example, an art gallery, like a poem, is a bounded territory that creates new values through the motivation of parts within a whole. The temporal sequence of paintings in the Marsden Hartley show created such a syntax beyond the more unstable assertions of the individual works.[17] In going through the show, paying close attention, a kind of narrative develops—the inner history of Hartley is revealed as an argument between the works. In large national museums, likewise, one can often try to make an inner cultural history of whatever is on display at the time. One goes through the Prado and then back out onto the street. This has an implication for method. In the Turner paintings in the Tate Gallery in London, there is often the obfuscation of a classical theme to be found somewhere in the background of a murky, impressionistic landscape. Leaving the gallery after seeing roomfuls of these, one is confronted with the ancient-looking banks, levees, flood channels of the Thames. They have a Roman look, from very far away in time, and there is a dramatic rhyme with the classical image hinted at by Turner in the middle of the resistant, almost blood-soaked, medium of his work. Here a sequence of paintings unexpectedly becomes a key to a synthesis one can make of the present. The banks of the Thames are confirmed by Turner as a classical image behind the visceral continuity of what is seen. One can see easily that the Romans were the builders of London in walking from the Tate Gallery to look at the Thames.

6

Missing "X": Formal Meaning in Crane & Eigner

> Motivation in art is the justification of some single factor vis a vis all the others, the agreement of this factor with all the others. Each factor is motivated by means of its connections with the remaining factors.

This statement by Yuri Tynianov reflects the Formalist thesis of the unity of poetic language.

But this is not to say that the Formalists were not aware of either internal limits or external contradictions. According to Tynianov, form is dynamic:

> Art exists by means of . . . interaction or struggle. Without the sensation of subordination, the fact of art does not exist.[1]

This interaction or struggle works its way down to the most minute levels of a poem. But even here, exterior factors enter in. Jakobson's discussion of metrics in "On Czech Verse," an early paper, is summarized this way by Victor Erlich:

> The hierarchy of prosodic elements in a language is not the only determinant of the metrical system. . . . The choice of a prescribed rhythmical scheme is influenced at any given moment by such extra-linguistic factors as "the poetic tradition,

the authority of the classics, and foreign literary influences operative at the time."[2]

The distinction between the "hierarchy of prosodic elements" and the "extra-linguistic factors" arrives at the question of *inner* and *outer* form. For the purposes of this discussion, I will call these *convention* and *inherent form.* A convention is a preexisting formal means; inherent form is the system of language itself operating in a poet in his or her negotiation with the work. In the work of some poets, convention struggles with inherent form, while in that of others, conventions can be identified with inherent form. Examples of both follow; either case can be successful. But the relation between these two elements, the balance struck, is an important index of the values created by the literary work.

The distinction between convention and inherent form can be illuminated in the comparison of two differing, though not exclusive, views of reference in language. In "Linguistics and Poetics," Jakobson gives the referential as one of six interdependent functions in the interaction between speaker and hearer. Reference is considered to be based on the *context* of the message:

> The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function. But even though a set . . . toward the referent, an orientation toward the *context*—briefly the so-called *referential,* "denotative," "cognitive" function—is the leading task of numerous messages, the accessory participation of the other functions in such messages must be taken into account.[3]

From this brief statement, and in light of the description of the other five functions that follows, I imagine a referentiality that is highly relational—both in terms of varying contexts and in terms of the other functions. Jakobson certainly is not making referentiality the pole around which all other sorts of meaning must be constructed. Jakobson's discussion of Pushkin's sculptural imagery as it occurs throughout Pushkin's

entire *oeuvre* exemplifies this sense of reference.[4] The values of reference toward statues in Pushkin are taken in the context of an entire poetic system over an extent of time. The poet's work becomes the context for this reference as much as any statue. This sense of reference is attractive to poets because it implies that new meanings can be created through the language of the poem. Reference gravitates toward the inherent form pole in this case—Pushkin's statues are a created value, bridging private systems of meaning with the structure of the literary work.

An entirely different axis for reference in the context of speaker and hearer is given in John Searle's *Speech Acts:*

> Any expression which serves to identify any thing, process, event, action, or any other kind of "individual" or "particular" I shall call a referring expression. Referring expressions point to particular expressions, they answer the questions Who? What? Which? . . . E.g., the occurrence of "a man" in the utterance of "A man came" is to be distinguished from its occurrence in the utterance of "John is a man." The first is referential, the second predicative. Russell once held that these are both referring uses and that the second sentence is used to make an identity statement. This is obviously false, since if the second were an identity statement, then in the negative form "John is not a man," it would make sense to ask which man is it that John is not, which is absurd.

Reference involves the intention toward a unique object. Predication, on the other hand, does not. The separation is essential for Searle:

> The distinction between subject and predicate is one of function. The subject serves to identify an object, the predicate, if the total illocutionary act is one of describing or characterizing, serves to describe or characterize the object which has been identified.

The intention for a unique object, on the one hand, and the conceptualization or qualification involved in predication, on

the other, make a grammatical architecture for the sentence, and the sentence is the form in which things are said:

> The characteristic grammatical form of the propositional acts are parts of sentences: grammatical predicates for the act of predication, and proper names, pronouns, and certain other sorts of noun phrases for reference. . . . The linguistic correlate of this point is that sentences, not words, are used to say things. This is also what Frege meant when he said that only in the context of a sentence do words have reference.

The sentence appears in the center of the three layers of speech acts in Searle's system:

> Let us assign names to these under the general heading of speech acts: (a) uttering words = performing utterance acts; (b) referring and predicating = performing propositional acts; (c) stating, questioning, etc., = performing illocutionary acts.[5]

Furthermore, grammar specifies a bearing of language in the world. Language's essential orientation toward the world is encoded in the subject of the sentence, which has intention for a unique object. On the one hand, reference is absolute; on the other, a moral order, a precedence of the world over language, is asserted or reaffirmed (since this is in the tradition that precedes Searle) by the language model. The order of language occurs in relation to a situation outside it. The subjective reflection of reference in predication can only approach the absolute status of the intention for objects—but it can never equal it.

In this discussion, if Jakobson's relational sense of reference is given a value in inherent form, Searle's absolute sense of reference can be seen in relation to conventions grounded in the exterior world. Of course, this moral, intentional grammar is the basis for convention in a number of poets in the American modernist period. What does an absolute pole of reference do to the structure of a verbal work of art? How can that absolute pole of reference be described as giving a

meaning to form? Can the formal architecture of a poem usefully be described as a propositional act?

The answer is yes in the following poem by Hart Crane:

ROYAL PALM

for Grace Hart Crane

Green rustlings, more-than-regal charities
Drift coolly from that tower of whispered light.
Amid the noontide's blazed asperities
I watched the sun's most gracious anchorite

Climb up as by communings, year on year
Uneaten of the earth or aught earth holds,
And the grey trunk, that's elephantine, rear
Its frondings sighing in aetherial folds.

Forever fruitless, and beyond that yield
Of sweat the jungle presses with hot love
And tendril till our deathward breath is sealed—
It grazes the horizons, launched above

Mortality—ascending emerald-bright,
A fountain at salute, a crown in view—
Unshackled, casual of its azure height
As though it soared suchwise through heaven too.

(1926)[6]

There is a kind of narrative here—easily mapped through the subjects of the three sentences that make up the poem: "green rustlings," "I," and "it." The poet hears the leaves, looks at the palm tree, and reflects on it. However, within the overall work this progression is more accurately a counterpoint to the dominant intention—the address to the palm itself. The articulation of the verbal material is in this reverse manner predicated on the reference to the palm tree. The three sentences act as a conventional means of approach by which the poet triangulates his address to the palm.

The poem is indisputably predicated on the palm, and its intention is to refer uniquely. To describe the articulation of

the poem as grammatical in Searle's sense of predication ("serving to describe or characterize the object which has been identified") yields more accurate values for its devices than might be obtained only through a consideration of their "interanimation" in Jakobson's sense. Looking down from the top of the tree, as the poem likewise attempts (that is, from the pinnacle of eternity [objectness] to the green strivings of the world [the poet's language]), the three sentences, rather than building up to the perception of the palm, reflect narrative approximations of the subject-object problem posed by the poet's address to the palm. In other words, "suchwise through heaven too" might be the most accurate perception of the palm, and the "green rustlings," rather than being the sensory cue, might be valued primarily through the difficulties of the written approach. How to get to the palm? Start with "green rustlings." In this sense, the thinking in the poem can be said to occur in reverse, with the first two sentences appearing as successivly less approximate nestings for the straight shot at the heart of the matter, as it were, in "suchwise through heaven too." This is an adequate refutation of any sense of a mimetic progression here such as "the poet hears the leaves, sees the palm, and then writes these things down." Rather than the poet "thinking with things as they exist," the thinking in the poem occurs in a reverse order from that of its articulation.

The narrative frame has a use both as a metaphor *and* as a means of construction. The approach to the palm sentence-by-sentence constructs a particular relation between language and an idealized object, one that indicates the difficulties of the approach. On the next level, that of the phrase, this use of language as a metaphor for a relation to the world is even more marked. The poem is a bizarre criss-cross of semantic planes, mixed metaphors. The conflict of semantic planes extends even to the word-to-word level: "tower of whispered light," "green rustlings," "grey trunk, that's elephantine," "frondings sighing," "charities drift," "blazed asperities,"

"casual of its azure height"—"a fountain at salute" and "a crown in view" most incredibly. The qualities of predication here are confirmed thematically in the poem; the "I" appears in a vanquished, tainted, and in a word mortal position in its approach to the eternal palm.

Beginning in a kind of neutral scene-setting, the poem twists the knife of language as it proceeds into ever more complicated, stylized, literary (Shakespearean), and even silly constructions ("that's elephantine") in order to break even more violently into lucidity with "suchwise through heaven too." In this sense the unfolding of the verbal material reflects the metaphorical basis of the poem in the propositional act—the separation of subject and predicate. A palm tree predicates a (seen through the rough potentials of language) palm tree. The poem aspires to raise another palm tree, in "heaven," that is to say in the mind, one that it will never achieve. But in so doing it creates time and space—time, a narrative in reverse, a progressive return to the initial, and space, the illusion of the approach to the palm, fleshed out in the numbers of intersecting semantic planes, all self-consuming. Here manner (the poem) and matter (the palm) are set apart at a considerable distance for maximum effect.

The poem's stance in relation to its object sets a limit for language while at the same time creating effects so strong they seem to take on autonomous values of their own. In adapting various conventions of approach (metaphorical approximations, figurative constructions, narrative, and four four-line stanzas with meter and rhyme) to this intention, Crane sets loose or "lays bare" the mechanisms of his language, which can be seen in its inherent form. This act is thematic, also—Crane dies into sensual profusion so that the other towering over him might have eternal life, and so on. The theme is connected, through the dedication, to the poet's mother, and it ironically proposes the transference of familial guilt to subject-object relations, that is, to the relation of the poet to his world. Rather than being a defect of style,

Crane's metaphorical excessiveness is multiply connected to the proposition of his poem. The resistance of the medium, language, is thoroughly tested as a result. The grammatical order of subject and predicate reinforces the struggle between poetic conventions and inherent form in Crane, a struggle that can be read in the autonomy of elements within the conventional, illusionistic space.

This autonomy of elements in the face of an absolute intention to refer in Crane has influenced the work of several major writers in the American postmodernist period (roughly, 1945 to 1970), especially that of Robert Creeley and Larry Eigner. Creeley's essay on Crane in *A Quick Graph* is a classic; in it Creeley demonstrates a reading of Crane that reduces the notably formidable metaphorical surface to the intentional act of the poem.[7] The implications for poetic meaning in this essay are great. Equally important, though not to this point investigated in print, has been the transformation of the autonomous element in Crane in the work of Larry Eigner. While poetic form in Creeley evolved directly from the idiom used by Crane, among others (Stevens, Dickinson, Lawrence, HD), Eigner's reading of Crane contributed to an entirely different poetic idiom, one in which the system of reference is oriented around a different axis.

This reorientation of reference in Eigner is related to a number of other formal properties of his work. Some of these can be summarized as:

1) Eigner's work can be seen as one long poem, with the separate parts as autonomous instances. The individual poem both is and is not thematically and structurally set off from the entire body of work. The temporal sequence of the entire work gives a value to the beginning and the end of any of the individual pieces; this is perceptible in the poem as the points of departure and of breaking off. The poem has a value both as its own occasion and in the entire work, and for this reason Eigner's work calls into question New Critical conceptions of the autonomous lyric.

2) Eigner's poems proceed word to word, line to line, and do not create an illusionistic space. In this Eigner's work stands as an heir to Whitman and Pound in that the line and the line-to-line continuity are the basic structure of the poem. The argument of the poem develops partly in terms of a psychological construction (as in the imagist example of Pound's "In a Station of the Metro") and partly in terms of a syntactic jarring of that perceptual space. As an example of the latter, compare the perceptual space of Williams's "Red Wheelbarrow":

So much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.[8]

to its inverse:

Chickens
beside the white

water
glazed with rain

barrow
a red wheel

upon
so much depends.

In Williams's poem the illusionistic space depends both on the unity of the sentence (the poem is one sentence) and on the parallelism of stanza and phrase. In the rewritten version the illusionistic space is broken up by the syntax. This determination of the perceptual order of the poem by syntax is to be found throughout Eigner's work.

3) While Crane's "Royal Palm" can be likened to a kind of syntactic box in which a royal palm is contained, or rather evoked (that is, the entire poem is closed, self-contextualizing, and necessarily at war with itself), in Eigner's poetry major form is identical to the articulation of the poem at all points. The time of verse expectation in Crane depends on a considerable separation of form and content; in Eigner form and content are the same, and the time of the poem is one of constant attention. The poem does not defer a present but, rather, *is* a present, and for this reason the poem does not possess an outer boundary or box-like limit. The poem begins and ends. It might truly be likened to a hologram.

The preceding has been an approach to this poem by Eigner:

A Imagination heavy with
worn power

B the wind tugging
leaves

C from the florist's shop

D some silence distanced[9]

"In language there are only differences." Though possessed of considerable structure (the poetic sinews are numerous and strong), this poem articulates a process of differentiation among its various elements. The precision of this articulation, its clarity and quickness, is characteristic of Eigner's "perfect ear" (Williams). Crane's "ear" was an unfortunate casualty of the struggles of his form; Eigner's form, on the other hand, enables a precise and autonomous evaluation, step by step, of each element of the poem. The evaluation proceeds in sound.

It will be noticed that in three of the four stanzas in this poem there is the possibility of inserting an *is*, making complete sentences of these stanzas. The poem then might be said to refer to: "Imagination," "the wind," and "some silence." The consistent suppression of the *is*, however, sets up

an entirely different order. The poem accurately can be said to have no reference in the sense of Searle. Each of these three stanzas (A, B, and D) is understood equally well as a predicate-less subject or as a subject-less predicate, that is, a predicate for which the act of reference is located outside of or is generalized by the entire poem. Each is, in fact, an independent noun phrase containing one embedded sentence. For some grammarians, this might not be enough to make a statement, but a semantic field *is* set up that depends on the absence of the grammatical order of subject and predicate. Thus Clark Coolidge, in his review of Eigner's work, heard "an invisible & steadying 'is' behind everything," behind each autonomous element.[10] Inelegantly, one can imagine the expression "X is . . ." in front of stanzas A, B, and D. This X could be located in each case *outside* the poem and could take the form of "an element of this poem is . . ." or "an element of the world is. . . ." At the same time, X could be stanza A in relation to stanza B, and stanzas B and C in relation to stanza D. The suppression or generalization of reference and predication becomes the dominant structural basis of the poem, giving a precise value to the more easily perceived construction of the recurring noun phrases.

This phenomenon is found throughout Eigner's work; complete sentences are suppressed, and though they do appear they often seem to be bracketed or in quotes as examples of something; for example, the line "now I need a hole in the head" might be an example of a "thought" at an "instant of time." As further support for the idea of a "missing X" outside the poem, one can cite the not-infrequent location of an apposed subject element on an axis horizontal to the body of the poem in Eigner, as in the following, cued by a reading of Jackson Mac Low. The poem is intelligible without the reference to Mac Low; however, the apposed element casts an entirely new semantic light on the poem. The poem is read differently with Mac Low as a point of departure, and one could argue for Mac Low as the "missing X" for at least stanza A here.

Something new A
little by little
Mac Low's
"Goodbye S e n s i n g B
L G M's"
how much repeated on a C
vast scale
old D
tendency to enjoy E
brought on[11] F

Mac Low might also be a weakened "missing X" for stanza C, making the noun phrase "how much" ambiguous in relation to "S e n s i n g" and increasing the possibility of two readings of stanza C. Thus the apposed element is functionally different from a title; Crane's title "Royal Palm" stands on a vertical axis *above* the poem, organizing the referential architecture below.

In Eigner an absolute object is not referred to in the poem. Rather the entire idiom is predicated on the lack of such reference. The individual elements could either be subjects or predicates; this ambiguity gives a precise value to the autonomy of the noun phrase in the argument of the poem. But this is not a phenomenon of Eigner's work alone; the constructive potential of the noun phrase, often involving a blurred distinction between reference and predication, is common throughout the poetry of the postmodern period. For example, the lyrical quality of the *haiku*, popularized during that time, is basically that of the independent noun phrase. The spontaneous generation of an entire range of poetic idiom based on the accretive noun phrase could be described. Moreover, this could be seen as a reaction to and rejection of the metaphysics of referentiality, canonized by the New Critics, that identified poetic means with such distancing devices as metaphor and irony while grounding meaning in a simplistic priority of the world over the poem. So in Crane the separate elements, the "tropes," predicated

on an absolute object, undercut their own approximate usages within an overly conventional frame. Crane was the victim of the referential presuppositions of his age, and his work is a bridge between the breaking part of a dying formal order (already in 1926) and the beginnings of a new one (twenty years later).

The possibility of a "missing X" located outside the poem in Eigner reorients the grammatical order given in Crane. The propositional act of the poem is completed only outside its limits, if at all, dissolving the conventional box. Both the point of departure for the poem in the author and the synthesis of sense in the reader are grammatically involved. Eigner transforms the atomized metaphysics of his predecessors into a constructive stance of the poem in relation to the world. As a result the struggle between conventions of statement, that is, approaches to the world, is itself atomized, Klein-bottle-wise, yielding surprisingly direct access to inherent form. Eigner's work for this reason takes on, directly, psychological values in relation to thought, memory, association, grammar, and sound. The poet thinks with his poem. Manner and matter, separate in Crane, are identical in Eigner. The metaphysical palm as a unifying element is particularized in the autonomous noun phrase. The unity is in grammar, not objects, though there are "things" in the poem. This new orientation is accomplished by a reversal of the axes of reference and predication, in which transformation the depth of Eigner's reading of Crane can be seen.

The semantic field determined by this reversal, which due to its relation to the overall propositional act might be characterized as the "formal meaning" of the poem, is the dominant structure by which the differentiation of values in the poem is achieved. To begin with, the grouping of lines into a quasi-stanza form is made possible by the functional parallelism of the grammatical units. Stanzas A, B, and D all become complete sentences with the insertion of *is*. They each equally might be subjects or predicates of incomplete

sentences. This is not true of stanza C, which is a prepositional phrase more firmly linked to stanza B. However, the stanza form of C underscores the greater autonomy of "from the florist's shop" than "with / worn power," even though each is a prepositional phrase. Through such conflicts, here between grammatical function and stanza parallelism, meanings are generated throughout the poem. Constructed on this basis, each stanza is given a unique value by means that easily can be parsed. Stanzas A and D each contain abstractions; stanzas B and C are concrete. Stanzas B and D contain one each of the two verbs in the poem; the other stanzas do not contain verbs. The verb in stanza B is a present participle, while the verb in stanza D is either a past participle or part of a passive construction. In addition, each of the first two stanzas is broken down into two lines, while stanzas C and D have no breaks. Thus:

A	2 lines	abstract	no verb	NP + PP	autonomous
B	2 lines	concrete	verb	NP	autonomous
C	1 line	concrete	no verb	PP	connected
D	1 line	abstract	verb	NP	autonomous

The argument proceeds from the most autonomous two-line stanza, A, to the most autonomous one-line stanza, D. The successive weakening and atrophy of the dependent second line from stanzas A to C sets up the heavy stress pattern of D, the most autonomous single line. In addition, the line breaks of stanzas A and B set up a kind of grammatical counterpoint to the dominant noun phrase structure. Breaking line 1 at "with" emphasizes and exposes "with," adding another value to the contexts of lines 3, 4, and 6, with which it could potentially join. The line break in line 3 exposes "tugging," which similarly could join with lines 5 and 6. The ambiguity here further underscores the resolution in the autonomous stanza D.

The scoring convention used by Eigner throughout his work allows for further articulation in terms of *autonomy* and

connection. A theory of this convention can be stated on this basis, in which there are the following options for stanza B:

(1) the wind tugging leaves

(2) the wind tugging
leaves

(3) the wind tugging
leaves

(4) the wind tugging
leaves

(5) the wind tugging
leaves

Case (1) gives the greatest connection to "leaves": no stanza break, no autonomy. In case (2) "leaves" seems to be stepping off from the end of the line, not fully autonomous. In case (5) the return to the margin allows for a fully autonomous beginning again, the second line being given a weight equal to that of the first. Cases (3) and (4) are intermediates. In the case of the poem (4), "leaves" is slightly qualified in its autonomy in relation to the preceding line. The grammatical ambiguity ("leaves" could be a noun or a verb) is underlined by this qualification. The movement of stanzas C and D back toward the original left-hand margin of line 1, conversely, implies the increasing autonomy and definition of these lines. The *near* achievement of the margin by the last line stands as a judgment on the outcome of the poem. If the poem had returned to its point of departure, a more complete figure would have been described.

The distribution of "parts of speech" in the poem reflects the structural tension that exists between the noun phrase and the line and stanza. Of the sixteen words in the poem, seven are nouns. With the exception of the additional possessive noun in line 5, there is exactly one noun in each line. This "nounal state" set up by the poem, in which a line-by-line parallelism is built on the basis of nouns, is

another counterpoint to the more regular stanza-by-stanza ordering of the noun phrase. But although each line contains at least one noun, grammatical structure is built on each noun in a unique way. "Imagination," "wind," and "silence" are potential subjects of sentences that are intransitive, transitive, and passive, respectively. While "power" and "shop" are both parts of prepositional phrases, "with / worn power" is a part of the adjectival construction "heavy with / worn power." "Leaves" is the only direct object, and "florist's" is the only possessive. The parallel structure built on the occurrence of at least one noun in each line, then, is offset by the differentiation of grammar. The distribution of the remaining nine words in the poem is determined by their relation to the nouns. There are three adjectives and two each of verbs, prepositions, and articles in the poem. With the exception of the articles each contextualizes a noun in a unique way. The nouns are the lexical dominant, then, around which other values occur. The relation of reference to predication, formally missing at the sentence level, reappears, mirrored in absentia, in the relation of the noun phrase to various kinds of qualification. In addition to its use as a structural basis for the line, the noun-to-noun progression, rather than the grammatical bracketing of the phrase structure, reflects the process of thought in the poem. The nouns are hinges in the process of thought; other levels of the poem (line, stanza, phrase structure, complete figure), rather than working from the top down, as in Crane, are built up from the noun, which is the basic unit of perception in language for Eigner.

The stress pattern in the poem similarly is built up from the word-to-word progression. The high degree of grammatical differentiation is reflected in the lack of any significant repeating metrical figures. The fact that there is no underlying, competing metric against which the rhythmic potentials of the individual words might be played (as there is in Crane) allows the words to display quantitative values without interference. The natural variation in duration of both stressed

and unstressed syllables is respected. For example, there are four distinct levels of stress in "Imagination" (4-2-4-1-3), and the metrical and grammatical isolation of the words permits these. "Worn power" and "leaves" can be extended with no distortion; conversely, "with" and "from" can take less stress, in line with their grammatical function. The total metrical figure adds up, by means of the heavy stress on "shop," to the autonomy of the last three words, "some silenced distanced." The architecture of Eigner's poem is kind to language, leading to a precise articulation; the opposite is true of Crane, who brutalizes his words.

While the metrical pattern allows for the autonomy of words, the sound pattern provides various axes of connection between parts of the poem. Vowel contrast is the dominant in the organization of sound, and it can be found on two levels.

ɪmæʤɪnéɪ̯ʃən hɛ́vi wɪθ
wɔ́rn paʊ̯̂wər
ðə wɪ́nd tʌ́gɪŋ
lɪ́vz
frʌm ðə flɔ́rɪsts ʃʌ́p
sʌ́m sʌ́ɪ̯̂ləns dɪ́stənst

First, the axis of contrast between the largely unstressed, neutral-sounding vowels ɪ (mid front) and ə and ʌ (which are close enough both to be considered mid back vowels) defines a "base" level in the sound pattern. Of twenty-six vowels, sixteen are ɪ and ə / ʌ, as might be expected since twelve of these are unstressed. These sounds tie down four of the six lines in the poem (lines 1, 3, 5, and 6), and two significant alternations of stressed ɪ and ə / ʌ occur in lines 3 and 6. Line 3 is a variation of only these vowel sounds: "the wind tugging," as likewise is, except for the additional diphthong, line 6: "some silence distanced." Second, the other ten vowel sounds take their values in relation to this neutral (yet contrastive) "base"; there is no particular other pattern to

these sounds. The relation of the different vowels (*i* [2], *ɛ* [1], æ [1], *ɑ* [1], ɔ [2], *eɻ* [1], *aɻ* [1], and *aʊ̯* [1]) to the "base" is one of extremes to means. This distribution reflects a physiological basis (the mechanics of articulation), one in which the continuity of vowel tone is established by a kind of "neutral" position of the tongue and lips. It also reflects a basis in perception—the more colorful vowels against a background of grey. The interesting fact is that this articulatory and perceptual basis is present in the inherent form of a writer's language, as reflected in the written text.

The distribution of consonants is built up, in turn, on the "basis" of the vowel pattern. The patterns of consonants that appear are significant primarily for their idiosyncracy: "*w*ith / *w*orn / po*w*er / *w*ind," "*s*ome / *s*ilen*c*e / distan*c*ed," "*f*rom / *f*lorist's," and "hea*v*y / lea*v*es." The distribution of consonants adds to the differentiation of word values, but the pattern does not determine anything. At most, partial regions of congruence add to the sense of particularity in relation to the lack of such congruence elsewhere in the poem. For example, the progression of consonant clusters at the end of the poem (*sts, ns, st, nst*) is unique. The same idiosyncratic, contrastive values are given to the use of rhymes and half-rhymes in the poem. Of sixteen words, eight (ten counting the two "the's") are linked through repetition of vowel and consonant pairs: "so*m*e / fr*om*," "hea*v*y / le*av*es," "sil*ence* / dist*anc*ed," "wo*r*n / flo*r*ist's," and "flor*ist*'s / d*ist*anced." The fact that there are no grammatical pairs here further supports the use of sound to distinguish word values rather than to force parallels between them.

On a number of levels a pattern of simultaneous autonomy and connection has emerged. Eigner is a poet of power and discrimination. The two principal axes of construction are the grammatical order built on the basis of nouns and the sound pattern created by contrast with the neutral vowel sounds. Autonomy occurs in the poem by virtue of grammatical orders other than that of the noun phrase (including the lack of a higher grammatical order, that of the sentence)

and by means of regional extremes in the sound pattern; both are maximally contrastive. The poem as a whole articulates structures of dominance and subordination while maintaining equilibria at other levels:

	Dominant	Variant
Total poetics	(Poem ⇔ *oeuvre*)	
Propositional act	Noun phrases	"Missing X"
Structure of poem	(Line ⇔ stanza)	
Grammar of poem	NP	VP, PP
Sound Pattern	(Vowels ⇔ consonants)	
Vowels	ɪ, ə / ʌ	Others
Consonants	Difference	Similarity

The poem accurately can be seen to reflect an order of cognition based on nouns and an articulatory order based on the neutral vowels. Both axes are qualified by grammatical conflict and sound contrast; the act of naming in Eigner is not simply accretive but is delimited by a quick reflexivity in grammar and in the ear. Eigner's poetry is an utterance in which things of the world and of the mind are named in a continually reflexive manner. At the same time that it constitutes a reality in language it allows for a maximum distance between things in the world. The poem is a judgment of these two possibilities, one that is achieved simultaneously with the calling of things into existence in the act of naming.

If the propositional act in Crane's "Royal Palm" is predicated on an absolute intention to refer, the illocutionary act, in Searle's sense, would have to account for the use of that proposition in regard to some "other." Without going into the logical presuppositions involved, or whether the "other" is a potential reader or the palm, the illocutionary act here would involve praise, celebration, meditation, and the possibility of submission. Although the "other" invoked is linked to the judgment cast on the poem by its object, the palm, it makes a certain sense to separate the proposition of the poem from its engagement with an order outside itself. This

separation of levels, however, is not really possible in relation to Eigner's poem. What could the proposition of the poem be, if predication, such as it exists, occurs in relation to a "missing" referent? Or possibly no predication occurs, in which case the poem is only a series of referents? But meaning is determined by the poem, as the analysis above and the reading below should demonstrate. The poem is complete, although there is no complete sentence. As a proposition, then, the poem reflects a process of thought that does not need, in itself, the architecture of the whole sentence. This is motivated in that the agent of the thought, the poet, can be identified, through the enactment of the poem, with the objects of his thought, the things of the world. The propositional act of the poem reflects the world in an intrinsic, delimited progression. Whether it is possible to separate an illocutionary act from this progression, which is not self-contained, should follow from a consideration of the total sense of the poem.

Let the "missing X" at the outset of the poem be "the world." The first stanza, "Imagination heavy with / worn power," reflects a state of affairs in that world. The "Imagination," with capital "I" signifying "Importance," is "heavy," overburdened, "with worn power." That is, the poet's imagination is burned out. The *w*'s sound like a smudge; the sounds are not crisp in this stanza. So the poem begins by adding the fact of being exhausted in words to the already existing state of affairs. At the end of a long, difficult, and silent prelude, "so it's all come to this." But, heroically, stanza B proposes new information. The characterization of the imagination will not end with the summary stanza A. The new information is added in two ways, congruent to the kinds of ambiguous "predication" previously discussed. Stanza B is both autonomous and connected to stanza A. In the sense of the former, "the wind tugging / leaves" is a response to the original "missing X," the world. At the same time that the imagination is burned out, the wind is tugging leaves—two facts existing side by side.

But "the wind tugging / leaves" is also connected, as a grammatical parallel and in the progression of thought, to stanza A. The freshness of the wind, the motion of the leaves are a response to the abstract summary. Once the poet has expressed his exhaustion, what next? The world provides something for his attention, allowing him to return after all. This movement from mental to perceptual reality can be found everywhere in lyric poetry.

Rather than reflecting a situation of "the world," stanza C is wholly dependent on the poem up to stanza B. The grammar of the stanza, that of a prepositional phrase following a noun phrase, reflects this. But the formal architecture of the poem, in which the stanzas have so far had equal weight, gives stanza C a measure of autonomy; it too stands as new information, immediately qualifying what might be the sentimental lyrical response to stanza A of stanza B. That is, the simple opposition of redeeming facts to the exhausted imagination is *too* simple. Stanza C transposes the leaves of stanza B into a more complex imaginative construction. The leaves might be in a florist's shop, not just out on the street, or they may have just been blown out of a florist's shop to the street (on a Sunday afternoon, through the locked glass door, leaves of a poinsettia?). Or perhaps the leaves are still on the potted plants in the florist's shop, in which case the wind is blowing through the glass door and around the customers in the shop, who are discussing the recent spring storms. The florist's shop introduces an element of artifice into the poem. The seeming exterior leaves of stanza B might be only an imaginative construction. There is no way out of the box. The determination of the world by the imagination in stanza A is asserting itself, but at least there is some movement. The wit of the poet here does not allow the initial response to exhaustion to rest. The imagination is all the more alive through this additional reflection.

Stanza D, again, can be read in terms of autonomy and connection. The poem's relation to "the world" accurately

can be expressed as "some silence distanced." By saying something in words the poem itself distances the present world from silence. The propositional act of the poem includes sound. Thus stanza D is a summary account of a state of affairs in the same sense as stanza A. The elements of stanzas A, B, and D can be seen as occurring simultaneously, each being a separate level of response to a situation in the world. But, equally, stanza D is determined in sequence by stanza C. The silence might have been located in the florist's shop. The door is now open, and the leaves have been blown onto the street by the noisy imaginative wind. More important to the overall movement of the poem, however, is the metalinguistic response of stanza D to stanza C. The anti-sentimental qualification of stanza C has brought the imagination fully into the poem; it is no longer silent, imperceptible, as it was before the poem began. The poet has been drawn into the poem by his wit, and now wit will not allow the previous witticism to rest. The imagination has come fully alive, putting silence behind it and nearly achieving the left-hand margin, the sign of a completed figure. The finality of this stanza, the fact that nothing more needs to be said, is underscored both by the metrics and the sound pattern. But sense is the determinant; as a final triumph of the imagination, the distancing of silence occurs not only through the poem but in the florist's shop, wherever that is. The poem has fully freed the imagination from its exhausted state by creating a reality even beyond the perceptible leaves. Thematically, then, the poem has finished doing its job.

The poem thus appears to be a very closely articulated progression of thought in and of the words themselves. The sequence progresses from noun phrase to noun phrase (stanza to stanza) and from noun to noun (line to line). The fundamental noun armature of this process is from "Imagination" to "wind" to "shop" to "silence." Each of these nouns is nested in a unique type of modification. The inner argument of this progression, then, is: Imagination (heavy) / wind

(tugging) / / wind (tugging) / shop (from) / / shop (from) / silence (distanced).

The imagination puts the wind in the shop and overcomes silence. In this poem the imagination is thought through to a demonstration of its real power. The poem lifts itself up by its bootstraps, fights its way out of a paper bag! The illocutionary act of the poem then is reflexive; it is located in the play of wit and in the judgment of its objects. The argument of the poem involves all levels of the poem, including grammar and sound, and is not confined to its own limits. Searle's separation of levels, and the final reality of the sentence that underlies them, does not fit the facts of this case. Nor does the separation of reference and predication, nor the identification of reference with a unique intention for objects. The illocutionary act of the poem *is* the poem, accounting for its own existence, set against all else, as Eigner says, "to find the weight of things."

7

On Explanation:
Art & the Language of *Art-Language*

According to Wittgenstein, "The meanings of words are part of language." If this is so, then language determines meaning on a scale of its own. There is only language, "followed by pages of notes" (Wallace Stevens).

This language might be a dimensionless utopia where each word, and its possibility, has a unitary value that is the basis of its possibility. A certain kind of language, then, determines what words can do. Wittgenstein's insight into the structure of a word (in the terms of the *Tractatus*) is informed by an idealization of actual language—a compression of scale that takes a value from language as it is actually used. Such a compression is particular to a language and to a culture, as in the eighteenth-century remark that French is the language most naturally suited to science.

The possibility of a word, in terms of language, however, is not simply transparent. The definition of a word, at the very least, involves more words than the word being defined. So definition defines not only a word but a different scale of language. If "the meanings of words are part of language," then language includes definitions of words on a different scale, a mapping of words from one scale to another. Lan-

guage supplies a difference in scale—and the structure of language reflects that difference.

For example, *Webster's Third International* maps *definition* into five major areas of definition, not all of which are equally reflective of "what is an X?," the favored context for definition here:

> Definition. 1: an act of determining or settling: as *a: Roman Catholicism* an official ecclesiastical statement concerning a matter of faith or of morals as pertaining to faith; *b:* a prescribed or official standard for a commercial product; *c:* the fixing or determination of social character; 2: a word or phrase expressing the essential nature of a person or thing or class of persons or of things: an answer to the question "what is X?" or "what is an X?"; 3 *a:* a statement of the meaning of a word or word group; *b:* the action or process of stating the meaning of a word or word group; 4 *a: in Aristotelianism* a determination of the real nature of a species by indicating both the genus that includes it and the specific differences or distinguishing marks; *b: in symbolic logic* (1): an equation between a single symbol and a combination of symbols for which it is an abbreviation; (2): a statement of the meaning to be attached to some symbol of a calculus when that calculus is given some particular interpretation; 5 *a:* the action or the power of making definite and clear or of bringing into sharp relief; *b:* distinctness of outline or detail (as in a photograph): clarity esp. of musical sound in reproduction; *c:* sharp demarcation of outlines or limits.

Wittgenstein's definition has a most favored context in symbolic logic and least favored context in "a prescribed or official standard for a commercial product" or "the fixing or determination of social character." For example, it might be argued that money is a language, but the Susan B. Anthony dollar was both proposed *and* rejected—not because it was not legal tender but because the size of vending machine slots, feelings about Susan B. Anthony, and belief in the size of the coin supplied a difference in scale. The minting of the

coin in the first place proposed a new definition of money, one that the language of money eventually rejected—but how can a language, in Wittgenstein's sense, reject its own terms?

But in actual usage definition is not static; definition is an act of language *within* language. "In Aristotelianism" the definition of a species determines its value on a larger, more particular scale. The Susan B. Anthony dollar is a small coin with eleven sides and a woman's head; its value as a dollar is not only as a token of its value—the scale of particular qualities determines what kind of dollar it is, too. In language, definition points both to the dictionary and to its usage "in Aristotelianism," that is, toward a larger, more particular scale. Conversely, definition is also a summary of all such acts of language that ask "what is an X?," and a Susan B. Anthony dollar is also a coin. Definition also can be made by analogy without any hierarchy of scale, as when "the action or power of making definite and clear or bringing into sharp relief" makes language a metaphor for the senses. But the opposite might also be true—the senses could be the metaphor for "clarity" in language.

If language defines a greater scale internally by means of definition, without any help from us, an actual person resorts to an explanation to address a word to a greater scale. An ostensive definition is really an explanation of a word to the world, as in a speech to an apple that says "here is your name." There is no ritual of "naming" at the origin of language, only a series of grunts leading to "a word as a word." While definition is a structure internal to language, an explanation extends language to the world. Dictionaries are contained between two covers, while an actual person opens the book, to find this definition of *explanation:*

> Explanation. 1: the act or process of explaining; 2: something that explains or that results from the act or process of explaining; *specif.* a statement incorporating an explanation; 3: a mu-

tual discussion designed to correct a misunderstanding or reconcile differences.

Here explanation is defined much more actively than was definition—as reflected by the fact that the definition of explanation refers, implicitly, to the verb *explain,* while the definition of definition did not need to refer to *define.*

> Explain. 1 *a:* to make manifest, to present in detail; *b:* to make plain or understandable, clear of complexities; *c:* to give the meaning or significance of: provide an understanding of; *d:* to give the reason for or cause of, account for; 2 *obs:* to spread or open out, unfold, expand; 3 *a:* to show the logical development of, explicate; *b:* to subsume under a scientific theory or exhibit as an instance of a scientific law; *c:* to deduce from stated premises, prove; 4: to state by way of explanation.

Where definition makes a change of scale by means of an act of language, in words, explanation changes scale by means of an act of language from words to the world. This act is accomplished by the person who gives the explanation, who explains something. What am I explaining here?

> Now can anyone tell me
> what question
> I am asking you
> said the teacher.[1]

Here a would-be student is being undermined by the coercive strategy of a would-be teacher. The experience is primary to my sense of explanation, and its dynamics are essential to the use of explanations by actual persons. According to Wittgenstein, however, "All explanations take place inside language." The human part is more or less attached to a congruence of terms—this is necessary so that "explanation can clear up misunderstandings. The understanding here spoken of is a correlate of explanation." Explanations perform their work, for Wittgenstein, effortlessly, in a manner internal to language:

> Explanation of a proposition is always of the kind of a definition which replaces one set of symbols by another. . . . Explanation increases the multiplicity of the system by distinguishing between possible interpretations. Understanding a symbolism is correlated to an explanation, and explanations remove *mis*understandings. When the right multiplicity has been given, no further explanation is wanted or possible. . . . An explanation of a sign can replace the sign itself. . . . A description of language must achieve the same result as language itself.[2]

Essential to this usage of explanation is the notion of a "right amount" of terminology needed to distinguish "between possible interpretations of a statement" at a given "multiplicity of the system." For Wittgenstein, it would not make sense to use any more terminology than that. There is a lovely transparent quality to Wittgenstein's argument that reminds me of nothing so much as *art.* One might be tempted to let the idea of explanation rest here, alongside an example of self-sufficiency in art. But the human use of human beings obtrudes into the calculus—there is the sense that this logical self-sufficiency is in some sense *motivated.* We will descend from this plane of transparent perfection to the somewhat murkier argument of W. V. O. Quine, quoted with approval by Terry Atkinson in *Art-Language,* vol. 1, no. 2:

> [Explication is] a variant type of definitional activity which does not limit itself to the reporting of preexisting synonymies. . . . In explication the purpose is not merely to paraphrase the definiendum [what is being defined] into an outright synonym but actually to improve upon the definiendum by refining or supplementing its meaning. . . . Explication . . . does rest nevertheless on *other* preexisting synonymies. The matter may be viewed as follows. Any word worth explicating has some contexts which, as wholes, are clear and precise enough to be useful; and the purpose of explication is to preserve the usage of these favored contexts while sharpening the usage of other contexts.[3]

There is an evaluation involved in an explanation that changes the scale of "what is being explained" by means of an "improved" expression. This is not simply a matter of the amount of terminology being used but of a different kind of usage—one that is "more useful." An explanation maps a word, for example, onto an improved scale, one that is being defined primarily by the favored contexts of the word being clarified by the act of explanation. Say the presence of a crate of oranges is being explained. The crate of oranges in the center is preserved, while the context of productive relations will be made more clear. The scale of the "thing being explained" now includes the store, the truck parked outside, the Produce Market, and the forty-hour week. The crate of oranges has been given a new scale; does it appear larger, more powerful as a result—or smaller, swamped by the grey background of the store? This is a question for the artist, who explains his notions of scale by the scale of his art. According to Robert Smithson, "Size determines an object, but scale determines art." But such a notion of scale is really an explanation *of what?*

An explanation expands or contracts the scale of the thing being explained by means of a language on a new scale. An explanation determines *a* language, and *a* language determines a scale. Wittgenstein's language maintains a remarkable consistency of scale; it is this that is primary in the aesthetic appreciation of his work. The scale given in the work is consistent with Wittgenstein's sense of explanation—one that is tautological and internally consistent. A poetry is constructed with a similar consistency if it has any value as art—any discourse is an argument for a scale. It is not so much a question of "weights and measures," as if the delivery of a number of crates were being arranged—the determination for art is rather how significant the crates are made to appear.

In order to establish a scale we need an explanation; in discursive forms, explanations can work in one of three ways:

1) An explanation can determine *a* language that maintains scale. Wittgenstein's "logical multiplicity" leads to a body of work with a controlled, consistent argument of scale. Any new element to be taken into the work will occur at a level of scale already established—there can be no deformation of scale. This occurs also in works of art—as in the work of Jasper Johns.

2) An explanation can determine *a* language that reduces scale. This is the case where an assimilative, normative discourse is being built—as in academic discourse, the discourse of science. The terms of such a discourse are functioning parts within a whole that is the approximation at a point in time of its object. Insight into phenomena is normalized and fitted into the appropriate niches. These discourses are suprasubjective—greater than any one person—and so the scale of languages that fit into them must be made less than that of any one person. Categorical arguments of art history that subsume art production into standardized periods work in this way—they reduce the scale of an individual language by fitting it into the suprasubjective scale of the standard discourse. Creative writing is likewise normative with respect to the English Department.

3) An explanation can determine *a* language that expands scale. This is the scale of the creative, of art in its development and of discovery in science. Such an explanation severs a term from its niche in the existing discourse and creates a new term. Steve Benson describes such a redefinition in terms of an ongoing art project:

> The terms of the normative tend to comprise a language, which itself pretends to the status of a comprehensive mythos of everyday life, a language thus pretending to a stability howsoever conscious of its indispensable contingency, apparently transfixed in a mutability it can hardly comprehend. The assumptions and qualities of understanding and bonding manifest in normative language, however subcultural, I then prefer to take as counters generated to our individual and collective

> advantage. Inherent within their claims to autonomy are all the functions that could split them, conventionally absorbed on recognition of their ascendencies as terms of themselves, conceived as autonomies in their turn.[4]

Here *a* language is being redefined in the context of a larger language, one that includes both normative language and the "mutability it can hardly comprehend." The terms of the normative language are by that reinvented and become elements in a language of a larger scale. Normative language, which is assumed to be *the* language, is being mapped onto language, by which act normative language is redefined as *a* language. The scale of language increases while the scale of normative language is now less. But what is language?

Each of the languages mentioned has been an example of *a* language. Scientific discourse, Wittgenstein, and Benson are each *a* language, to which any number of examples of *a* language might be added until we understand the vertiginous upward pull of language, which is not one thing but a sum being built by all. Language is the sum of all languages that are mutually intelligible—but the mediation is human, not linguistic. Somewhere in the corner of linguistic hyperspace are the radically perfected versions of English, German, French—*the* languages, the versions linguists study—which are hypothetical structures that languages (the examples of *a* language), tending toward language, have built.

An explanation participates in the construction of language on a wider scale by means of its determination of *a* language. Language is open-ended; like Wittgenstein's notion of the infinite, it is not a quantity but a repeated operation. The rules for the construction of language are languages—and all the examples of *a* language given so far have had their own rules—the dictionary, Wittgenstein, scientific discoure, the work of Steve Benson. The scale of language can only increase; it is due to this fact that language, as a nonquantifiable entity, denies closure.

If an explanation determines *a* language, at the point of the explanation there are at least two languages—the one being determined and the one that is already there. The constructive potential of conflicts between languages determines a new scale; explanation, as a mapping of *a* language onto language, is in this sense possible as a determinant of verbal art.

The construction of a new language is clearly a task for art. There are a number of examples in the art of the recent past where this task has been taken on—from the period of Surrealism and Duchamp to the present. The intention to redefine language by means of the language of art I take to be no less than the substance of method. *Method* in art is the putting into practice of an explanation.

This notion of the role of the artist is very much against the grain at the present time. In much current art, both visual and verbal, there is a predictable resistance to explanation. An explanation raises the bet; it demands a more complete account, and unless the artist is willing to take on that responsibility he runs the risk of definition, and thus aesthetic suicide, if he sticks his neck out to offer as a necessary component the explanation that is being enacted in the work.

There are several well-defined reasons for this rejection of method in art—reasons that have assumed the status of explanations.

1) The creative process is not rational. It would be no help, and possibly a hindrance, to name one's processes. The varieties of this explanation are legion—what was originally a description of the creative process (Pollock—"When I am *in* my work . . .") has been elevated to dogma (Ginsberg—"First thought, best thought . . ."), with penalties for transgression. Creative and rational processes of thought are opposed, but clearly this explanation gives a privilege to an unexamined rationality. Smithson's qualification of Duchamp as a Cartesian rationalist is formalized, in reverse, in a statement by

Duchamp that has been, coincidentally, a point of departure for the Art-Language group:

> To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.
>
> If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out. . . .
>
> In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane.
>
> The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of.
>
> Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work.
>
> In other words, the personal 'art coefficient' is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but unintended and the unintentionally expressed.[5]

It is this mystification of the gap between intention and realization that the publication of *Art-Language* specifically set out to reject. This critique placed *Art-Language* immediately apart from much of the conceptual art movement, in which art was often, in hindsight, predicated on such a gap. Although *Art-Language*'s position developed in relation to the characterization of this gap, and away from any art that might be predicated on it, in their first issue Sol LeWitt, in "Sentences on Conceptual Art," seems to reproduce it exactly, if in inverted form:

28. Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side effects that the artist cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.[6]

The decision to "carry out blindly" reproduces the fascination with the mysterious gap—into a near formula for the production of art.

2) The medium of explanation, language, is separate from and secondary to the medium of the art work. In the visual arts the notion of "visual thinking" ends in bald assertions like those of John Berger: "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak," which led in turn to a hundred pages of sarcasm published as *Art-Language* vol. 4, no. 2 (1978). This emphasis reflects an aesthetic choice and not an innate order, as might be seen when its logic is extended into verbal art. The medium might be language, but language is often thought to reflect an approximation of a more primary state of mind that is given a value in the senses.

3) The artist merely does the work: the critic and the marketplace will judge. Here the artist is severed by the production relations of art from the "evaluation procedure," by which a superstructure is erected on the artist's work, inevitably either co-opting or denying its values. Joseph Kosuth writes of the exclusion of the "aesthetic" artist from this evaluation in *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 2:

> The artist is omitted from the 'art activity' in that he is merely the carpenter of the predicate [that is, the ". . . is art" in the proposition "X is art"], and does not take part in the conceptual engagement (such as the critic functions in his traditional role) of the 'construction' of the art proposition. If aesthetics is concerned with the discussion of perception, and the artist is only engaged in the construction of the stimulant, he is thus—within the concept 'aesthetics as art'—not participating in the concept formation.[7]

Kosuth goes on to describe the two more evolved attitudes toward making art—first that of the "reactive" artist, lost in the maze of conflicting formal possibilities and unable to evaluate them because his attention is focused on the morphological, rather than the functional, characteristics of art:

> For the most part 'reactive' art is the scrapheap of 20th century art ideas—cross-referenced, 'evolutionary,' pseudo-historical, 'cult of personality,' and so forth; much of which can be easily described as an angst-ridden series of blind actions.

It is almost too easy to find examples from the poetry of that period of what Kosuth takes to be the position of the reactive artist. In visual art it seems to be earthworks and installation artists who are intended. Kosuth then goes on to describe the most evolved type of artist, the "conceptual," in these terms:

> At its most strict and radical extremes the art I call conceptual is such because it is based on an inquiry into the nature of art. Thus, it is not just the activity of constructing art propositions, but a working out, a thinking out, of all the implications of all aspects of the concept "art". . . . Fundamental to this idea of art [is] the understanding of the linguistic nature of all arts propositions, be they past or present, and regardless of the elements used in their construction.

Part of the "art content" of Kosuth's proposition is its strict separation into types. This explanation is particular to the scale of art at the time, and it intended a new scale that is more easily rendered in retrospect. The conceptual art movement could be characterized now as concerned with the ownership of the "evaluation procedure," a displacement of the critic. The desire to control the interpretive process is, in this sense, similar to the need for earthworks artists to "get art out of the gallery space." But conceptual art and earthworks art were motivated first of all by the inadequacies of art, which demanded an approach on a new scale. The struggle for power over interpretation is a metaphor for the

expansion of scale—from that of a construction in materials on which values are placed to one of a reciprocal discourse between "objects" and "states" in the world, and language.

The language portion of the expansion is of the essence. Many of the strategies of that period (of Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*) are still in use, but the language of art does not exist on the same scale—for the simple reason that a separation of art into functional types no longer determines a new language. The "art-world" portion of the argument has not gone away, but it is now possible that art—particularly a verbal art—can work at all three levels of Kosuth's functional types. The progress of an art movement is determined by the limits of the art. "There's no use in keeping accounts or records," according to Cage, but the scale of language in the present must always be taken into account.

The first premises of the Art-Language group are given in the introduction by Terry Atkinson to the first issue of the periodical (1969), though the Art-Language position had been developing in works and documentation since late 1966 when, according to Lucy Lippard's *Six Years*, "Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin meet at Lanchester Polytechnic, Coventry. Baldwin had made contact with LeWitt in New York in March." Lippard has "Terry Atkinson travels to New York, meets LeWitt, Graham, Andre, Smithson, after having corresponded with the first two for some time, in July-September 1967." The first work documented by Lippard of the Art-Language group is the 1966–67 "Air Show/Air Conditioning Show":

> The macroscopic aggregate can be subjected to a microreductive examination. The horizontal dimensions of a "column" of air, atmosphere, "void," etc., can be indicated and established (for all "external" and practical purposes) by a visible demarcation in terms of horizontal dimensions, axis, etc. . . . Obviously, when one talks of a column, there is some reference to a visual

situation (from whence the vocabulary may or may not find support). There is a comparison to be made here between the "air-conditioning situation" and the fog bank, in which the obvious physical differences between the "matter" which constitutes the indicators of this or that "boundary" can be made out. This is not to describe the difference between boundaries per se, nor is it to exclude the possibility of regarding "boundaries" as "entifications" of geometrical gaps.[8]

The concern here is with the physical boundaries of a conceptually specified column of air, which would not be subject to perceptual verification. The perception of the work is only in the reduplication of the conceptual effort—in order to "see" it, one must think it through. The question is obviously being raised whether art in general is specified in this manner—and thus, how does one disentangle the "perceptual, physical" limits of an artwork so specified from the conceptual limits imposed on or defining the artwork in the first place. The problem is posed as a problem of art (the documentation of the piece is the work itself), and the technique of its realization is the "microreductive examination" of all the terms in the statement of the boundaries of this work. Rather than mystification of the entity that has been specified (the kind of "now you see it, now you don't" approach typified by the work of the American conceptualist Robert Barry), the Art-Language group proposes a method that begins with the question of language. The "gaps" of Duchamp, made into procedural questions by LeWitt, are accorded the status of language—hence the assertion of the "entification" of geometrical gaps. These gaps are as much entities as anything else about the artwork, and all such gaps or entities are specified as language.

In Atkinson's "Introduction" to *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 1, the position has evolved to the point that language itself, irregardless of its capacity to specify a hypothetical object as an artwork, is being held out as "coming up for the count" as an artwork.

> Suppose the following hypothesis is advanced: that this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what 'conceptual art' is, is held out as a 'conceptual art' work. . . . There has been a hierarchy of languages headed by the 'direct read-out from the object' language which has served as the creative core, and then various support languages acting as explicative and elucidatory tools to the central creative core. . . . What is surprising is that although the central core has been seen to be an ever-evolving language no account up to the present seems to have taken up the possibility of this central core evolving to include and assimilate one or other or all of the support languages. It is through the nature of the evolution of the works of 'conceptual art' that the implicated artists have been obliged to take account of this possibility. . . . Inside the framework of 'conceptual art' the making of art and the making of a certain kind of art theory are often the same procedure.[9]

The introduction goes on to specify, and largely reject, a number of ways that the introduction might be considered an artwork, while still holding out that it is. The skepticism drives the prose, and the artwork is this holding out of the concept of art that the language is simultaneously approximating and, by that act, achieving. A built-in instability of assertion gives the work its extension—for after all, if naming the introduction an artwork were not problematic, the introduction would consist of a very short naming of itself as art, hardly much of an artwork at all. The "posing of the question," then, makes the introduction the artwork, and it involves two responses in the subsequent development of the Art-Language position—the suggestion of a possible solution, and the destruction of that solution. Some solutions are: the works of other artists, a method informed by philosophy, aesthetics considered as an historical or cultural argument, and so on. The method of Art-Language is to leave these "entities" in the folds of their "specifications"; much like the column of air, they will never achieve object status by any means other than by being called into existence.

This is jumping a little ahead of the story, however. Before Art-Language could become "pure" method, there were a number of theoretical objects to be dealt with on the way. Theoretical constructions of art-making were to be proposed and then extended by questioning, as art. In his introduction, Atkinson lists several levels of construction of artworks that are the objects of his questioning, as art:

> 1) To construct an object possessing all the morphological characteristics already established as necessary to an object in order that it can count as an art work. . . .
> 2) To add new morphological characteristics to the older established ones within the framework of one object . . . (e.g. in the introduction of Cubist collages). . . .
> 3) To place an object in a context where the attention of any spectator will be conditioned toward the expectancy of recognising art objects. . . . For example Duchamp's 'Ready-mades' [or] . . . David Bainbridge's 'Crane' which shifted status according to his 'sliding scale' intentions as to where it was placed at different times. . . .
> 4) The concept of using 'declaration' as a technique for making art [as in the "Air Show" but also in the use by Atkinson and Michael Baldwin of the county of Oxfordshire as a work of art: "If then Oxfordshire is declared to be an art ambience, how are the objects within Oxfordshire to count?"].[10]

And so on, to the incorporation of the language as the artwork. An interesting experiment in combining levels of construction of artworks was undertaken in *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 1, by David Bainbridge in "Notes on M1," in which the construction of an artwork by an alien given certain categorical specifications is described as an artwork, a theoretical construction that then poses problems about art that are open to debate. The alien is "forbidden the use of metaphor"; therefore, in order to determine what art is he must use only analytical propositions such as the "sortal concepts" given in the British philsopher P. F. Strawson's work *Individuals*. The resulting artwork appears roughly as follows:

> On entering the gallery you would see two objects. One a metal plate 27 in. × 27 in., suitably supported in the vertical plane, its centre about three feet from the floor and the second object some distance away consisting of a small box, a disc on the frontal face, supported about the same height. On approaching the plate, at about three feet, you might notice the disc begins to turn (or stop turning) and continue as you circumnavigate the plate and move off. . . . On crossing the threshold again the display reverts to its former state and assuming no-one else is within proximity, remains at this condition.[11]

There is not a little British sarcasm here in relation to the category "action" as in "action painting" or in the category "spectator" as in "art must be seen by a spectator." In fact, the construction is so arbitrary as to credit no theoretical solution—just an appreciative titter. However, in the issues of *Art-Language* to come the question of this construction is bought up again and again as a touchstone for increasingly elaborate thinking as to how the "concept" of art is going to be sorted out by the alien, and how the resulting artwork would then reflect exactly its sorting out. The false problem defines a collective approach—many of the members of the movement are at some point involved with it—so here there is, again, not a little sarcasm as to the possibility of a critique of British culture in the method that has been taken for the collective attack.

This figure of the alien sorting out art by means of analytic propositions is typical of the approach of Art-Language in a number of critiques of artworks coming from less than theoretically consistent areas of the Conceptual Art movement. The strategy is to try to delineate the assertion of the artwork in relation to its status *as art* as the criterion for its validity. Its success or failure is not so much the point as its applicability toward the method that Art-Language intends. As indicative of the approach, the following discussion from vol. 1, no. 2, of Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" begins with the reasonably incontrovertible assertion by Morris that

sculpture is not only a question of an object but of the placement of the object in a context: "Morris states firmly that the new work cannot be evaluated simply within the confines of the specific object framework, and that the situation is now more complex and expanded.' " Atkinson responds:

> Aristotle distinguished categories of substance from those of quality by contrasting the question, "What is X?" with the question "What is X like?" . . . Perhaps consideration of the following sentence from Morris' notes will furnish a way in to examine some of the more controversial points of his assertion.
>
> (1) 'A beam on its end is not the same as the same beam on its side.' Then the following sentences constructed on the base of sentence (1) above.
>
> Q. (2) (A beam on its end is not the same as) what?
> A. (3) (The same beam on its side).
>
> Q. (4) (A beam on its end is not the same) what?
> A. (5) (As the same beam on its side).[12]

This is just the beginning of an involved argument that really is about nothing if Morris's assertion is allowed a kind of sense, which it has. But what kind of sense that is is for Art-Language not the sense of Morris's assertion. Rather, what Morris says has sense only within the questioning of the sense of what he says—and there does not seem to be any real answer to the question, except in the establishment of a basis for questioning. But what is the difference between what Morris says and what Art-Language says? Morris says that objects must be taken in regard to context, while Art-Language says that assertions about objects in contexts must be taken in regard to the Aristotelian distinction between substance and quality. An assertion about objects in context is not enough. Still, there is the sense the Art-Language basically approves of the sense of Morris's assertion. Not so with that of another conceptual artist, Robert Barry, whose piece from "Psychic Series, 1969" is given as:

Everything in the unconscious perceived by the senses but not noted by the conscious mind during trips to Baltimore, during the Summer of 1967.

Art-Language responds:

> The assertion itself could have supplied exactly the same amount of information in either of the two following forms:
>
> 1) Everything in the unconscious perceived by the senses during trips to Baltimore during the summer of 1967.
>
> 2) Everything perceived by the senses but not noted by the conscious mind during trips to Baltimore during the summer of 1967.
>
> This simply states that anything perceived by the senses if it is not noted by the conscious mind must be in the unconscious mind. . . . Anyone examining the assertion . . . will be compelled to ask Barry a whole series of questions. . . .
>
> 1) When Barry asserts 'perceived by the senses,' does he really mean, perceived by him through the senses?
>
> 2) Or, are his senses doing the perceiving, or is he doing the perceiving through his senses? Who or what is the perceiver?[13]

And so on. The job being done on this somewhat naive artwork has a point—that such "conceptual" work is predicated on mystificatory concepts, specifying not only the quality of the work in question but its method—which is the distinguishing feature of Conceptual Art, its *raison d'être.* Robert Barry's method is lacking; his "conceptual" works appear to be unmotivated mystifications:

> One of the possibilities that was raised by the 'Frameworks' writing [an early Art-Language publication] was that how one did one's singling out determined what was singled out. Barry seems to have 'looked around' to find what the old concept [the readymade] could be applied to that it had not previously been applied to, but clearly, he has overlooked . . . [that] a workable context has to be made. This is the crucial condition

of Conceptual art. In Barry's work there does seem to be a trace of the simple-minded and mundane ghost of Marcel Duchamp.[14]

The notion that "anything can be named as art" is being dealt a crushing blow here. Art-Language is demonstrating that such naming is only a consequence of a total approach—even if proposed as a teaching method.

Beyond the negotiations with other Conceptualists, there is the ghost of Duchamp looming in the wings. Art-Language would like to deal with that ghost once and for all:

> We are told [in Duchamp's 1957 statement quoted above] that an ACTUAL transubstantiation takes place through the change from inert matter into a work of art, but we are not told what is transmuted. . . . The most glaringly mis-leading statement here is the one that asserts the change from inert matter to a work of art as if it is no longer inert matter. This is a category mistake of a prime order.[15]

There is a mystification at the heart of the "Duchamp declaration device." In another article, on models for art in *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 2, Terry Atkinson insists that such "declaration devices" are specifications of the "object status" of contexts that lead upward in scale from the designated art object (the readymade), to the gallery, to any designated art context (for example, the naming of Oxfordshire as an artwork), to "that of a theoretically specified ambience." Since

> there was no particular set of morphological criteria which was a necessary condition of an object counting as a member of the class art object . . . also there was no particular set of morphological criteria which was a necessary condition of an ambience counting as an art ambience. Here it becomes strikingly evident that ambience can be counted as, simply, larger objects.[16]

A "theoretically specified ambience," that is, the result of method, that is, the construction of *a* language, can be achieved by formal extension of "object status" into a context

of art in the world. Art-Language is calling for no less than *a* language, as art, constructed on the consideration of all contexts of art in the world. Art-Language is calling for no less than *a* language, as art, constructed on the consideration of all contexts of art, from gallery to language, as being substantial in the same sense as the art object. There is privilege neither for language that is a "direct read-out from the art-object" nor for the object itself. Atkinson concludes, "in the past it was often assumed that objects were the prime movers in setting the clues for the mechanics of their interpretation, such an assumption is today more questionable." Rather the artist in the present deals with objects, ambiences, and theory that are objects in equal terms—without benefit of critics.

Thus all contexts are subject to interpretation as art. Art-Language gives *a* language in which this can be done. Beginning in a radical questioning of art in the environment of Conceptual Art in the late 60s, Art-Language shifted the object of its method to the social context. If an introduction to a journal can be counted as an artwork, by extension the social critique undertaken by Art-Language in the mid-70s can likewise. There is in Art-Language consideration of the "frame" of art as equally material as the art itself a method that extends, through language as material, into larger contexts. The following proposal for a work is from *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 3, by Mel Ramsden:

> It is proposed that a 'model' would be assembled which would take the form of a synopsis or index of words. This model would establish (through words) 'connections' between the words and the experienced environment. . . . The reader then uses the model as an instrument for providing 'connections' (which may be seen as art-connection) between the conceptual model (language) and everyday empirical experience. . . . The investigation of frameworks and metastructures seems to make for a considerably wider area of exploration than the manipulation of the internal determinants of the products of frameworks, i.e., the art-object.[17]

So a new kind of art-object, one that exists as a compilation of frameworks. This could be a text, possibly, in *Art-Lan-*

guage, or it could be Robert Morris's card file or Joseph Kosuth's billboards using *Roget's Thesaurus*, titled *Art as Idea as Idea*. But it could also be the work of a number of poets now working—Ron Silliman, Bruce Andrews, and myself particularly. The question of the construction of a work in language in order to investigate "frameworks and metastructures" will be taken up later in regard to Silliman's *Ketjak* and my own "Artifacts"; the ways in which such "frameworks" are structured in the composition of the work is certainly a matter of more complexity than the description given by Ramsden, which involves only exterior specifications of the index.

Much of the work of succeeding issues of *Art-Language* is devoted to issues of metatheory that might precede the construction of such models for the investigation of frameworks. Here is a typical example from vol. 2, no. 2, from "Information" by Atkinson and Baldwin, extracted at random to sound like nonsense:

> It can be established by allowing all constituents, even non-trivially contradictory ones, some status-better-than-of-no-account. When a shift is made from a given limit to the next, the better than . . . etc. status of that constituent is divided between all subordinant constituents. The point is that sometimes there are no such 'subordinate' constituents: then the status of alternative, etc., of that constituent either is left out or is reassigned to constituents having the 'next' finite limit which are not subordinate.[18]

Such thinking does two things—it forever postulates that an artwork might be undertaken, and it forever defers the moment when that will be done. Art-Language proposes notes to a monument to the future that will never be built. The motivations for such a position, of course, are social and cultural. Art-Language does not want to undertake the building of a monument to a possible future; rather it wants to call into question any proposal to do so, and to substitute the deferred moment of monument-building, with its attendant

meetings, interoffice memos, and political negotiations between interested parties, to the building of the monument itself. There is a radical lack of faith as to what a monument to the projected future could mean or accomplish in England in the mid-70s. Art-Language's proposal for appropriate art in the circumstances is a perpetual holding back—and this holding back is accomplished by means of a skeptical method that puts anything under attack as "not good enough." One wonders whether the political argument, which comes into being with full force about the time of *Art-Language* vol. 3 (1976), is politics—or the calling into question of the terms of political debate along lines similar to the former questioning of art. A passage selected at random from vol. 3, no. 3, by the now anonymous Art-Language collective, chosen to sound like aggressive despair:

> There is no degree of transformation relative to mass . . . or, it might be added, relative to the (paradoxical) 'spaciousness' in a circumstance (like ours) which is not inside the transformatory practice. It's foolhardy or idealistic to classify the power, etc., of envisaged or actual transformations. The strategical futures of ideological activity (activism) are reflexively transitive. And fuck you if you think that's a logical mistake. In this sense one's boundaries of practice are not relativistic . . . but they are; that's when you start to overrate yourself.[19]

What is being asserted here, again, is method; its intentions are to call into question any metaphor of transformation that might be given by a political proposition. Art-Language, in maintaining this pitch of sarcasm, wishes to subvert metaphorical structures by injecting a language predicated on objective reality (as they have been able, through their methods, to find it) into the political discussion. Rather than the metaphors given for the condition of British society by, say, the left wing of the Labour party or by a group with very high interpretive aims such as the Socialist Workers Party, Art-Language wants to construct an apprehension of the

world by means of the more-or-less impossibility of the extension of object status into all frames of reference. This is motivated by a central disdain for the interpreters of objective reality given by the existing political forms. This loathing for the middleman is consistent with the project all along—where earlier Art-Language wanted to reclaim critical language from the hands of entrepreneurial middlemen such as Clement Greenberg, now it wants to reclaim the critique of culture from the mediation of radical interpreters with professional careers, victims of the "French Disease," semiotics. From vol. 3, no. 4, by the collective:

> Semiologists concoct relations 'within' and 'between' 'categories of thought' and 'structures of society.' It is an explanatory system—sort of. Explanatory systems of this kind are functions and products of privileged managerial optimism. . . . The Gallic disease serves the 'causes' of mystification perfectly in that it encourages us to treat *actual* people and *actual* products as 'subordinate' to abstracted relations. . . . The Science of Signs is managerial, not historical. . . . The interpretive morass of semiology provides us with easy lies and enthusiastic half-truths that are the hallmark of the entrepreneur. . . . The semiologist is forever seeking isomorphisms between 'social systems' and 'categories of thought' . . . [but] the struggles of the working class are waged at the point of production.[20]

I have edited out much raving here in order to focus on the actual content, but it is worth noting that whatever light is being shed on the practice of semiotics as cultural politics is being obscured by a lot of viscera. The tone of Art-Language has been developing from "technical" skepticism to shriller and shriller hysteria through the course of its later volumes. One reason for this increasing self-destruction as a viable method is built into the system—Art-Language insists on the instability of its assertions "at the point of production" in attacking the "optimism" of the managerial class. In denying this optimism to others it must first deny it to itself; its method is not merely "objective" but devolves from a self-cri-

tique. This fascination with the mirror stems in part from the alienation of the artist from his product, but at the basis of this alienation is a consistent error in estimation of the category "art" at the outset. There is no critique of motivation, neither for objects nor for frames. Rather, Art-Language builds only from the outside of already existing objects and frames. Its language can only contradict their ontology; it does not know how to change their meaning. The only meaning given by Art-Language is "not this": the significant contradiction of the Romantic.

At the beginning of its method is a resistant category, "art," that will never change. The kind of language being built here is reminiscent of Ogden and Richards's project for Basic English—a vocabulary restricted to a base of 800 words. The language of Art-Language might be said to have even fewer words—on the order of "Oxfordshire," the alien in "Notes to M1," "Duchamp," sortal concepts, Clement Greenberg, and the "French Disease." But restriction of vocabulary does damage to the speaker—Art-Language can only take itself apart; the language itself is not meant to "take." However interesting as literature, Art-Language has not transformed the "object status" of art—as witness the recent return of Art-Language to gallery shows, albeit undertaken as a collective.

In Art-Language, language is being proposed as the central project in the visual arts. But it is a language of a particular kind. An expansion has taken place from the "objects, states, and events" of art to a consideration of art's ontological status. This has produced a form in language for an ideology based on the categorical rejection of art—or at least one that finds, under the circumstances, any art production to be problematic.

A method of this order in art has not really occurred since Surrealism. But the method being built here is virtually the opposite of that of the Surrealists—its language rejects psy-

chology, and thus the mysticism of the Duchampian "gap," and is predicated only on objects. The objects of this predication are works whose boundaries are their prime constituents—including the language that is, inevitably, the argument for these "objects, states, and events." The consideration of boundaries is the method of doing art; the explanation of art increases its scale, negatively, toward that of the world at large.

These kinds of questions will occur differently in poetics. To begin with, there is every reason to be uninterested in the area of philosophical inquiry being put into practice by Art-Language, even on its own terms. The notion of a logical calculus predicated on the existence of objects in the world is a useless inquiry, as has been shown by Wittgenstein. Oddly, Art-Language never deals with Wittgenstein, so locked are they in the folds of the specifications of analytical empiricism.

Poetics will demand even more from a descriptive approach than was needed for the relatively simple problems of objects in contexts. Poetry is not accurately considered from the position of a language built on the characterization of the exteriors of its objects. Language is constituted *in* a poem, and poetry is demonstrably *a* language; it cannot be generated by a language of exteriors. Dan Graham's conceptual piece for the construction of a poem in *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 1, which gives only external parameters such as number of words, number of prepositions, nouns, and so on, is an obnoxious mistake. Whether something like a poem could be generated at all, even in a manner interior to language, is another question altogether, but in any case a poem is a construction *in* language. Lucy Lippard is correct in rejecting Carl Andre's characterization of Lawrence Weiner as a "pretty good poet." She says, in reply to Andre, "I think the difference between poetry and something like Larry's pieces, or those by any of you who use words primarily, is the isolation of a single visual experience. Anyway, one thing I like about a lot of so-called conceptual art is that while it commu-

nicates itself . . . it gets *transmitted* much more rapidly."[21] A language built on the parameters of poetry involves a very different kind of extension than one constructed on the parameters of Conceptual Art.

The extensions of *a* language into language, from the point of view of poetics, immediately encounters the intrinsic organization of language. The way poetry travels through its medium is the way that it is built; it is like the key to an enormous lock, and it is not just fast. Poetry takes into account a more significant "resistance of the medium" than does Conceptual Art—which often is simply a projection of the category "art," as in the "Duchamp declaration device" in which the status of a prior artwork such as "The Nude Descending the Staircase" is transferred onto phenomena outside the order of art. There can be no "conceptual" poetry; I can think of no example of a poet transferring the designation "poetry" onto materials without providing for an interior structure. If the poet in Cocteau's Orpheus claims godhead by inscribing blank pages, those pages still have been written—and if read aloud, they would have a temporal structure. If this poet were to speak, we would be able to understand him. Interestingly, no poet has been able to imitate Duchamp.

A discourse on poetics from the standpoint of poets being in charge of their own interpretation will begin with the structuring principles of language—the ways in which a poem can be built. "What a poem is"—at all levels, from the sound pattern to its determination of social meaning—is the means by which it extends through the medium—of language, culture, and self. Any object status brought to the poem would ironize it, yielding another level of language in which the object status could be perceived. There is no parallel between the art object and the poem, and the discourses that can be based on these two kinds of art are going to be of necessity very different. Poems are temporal; they have no object status.

What, then, are the compositional possibilities of definition and explanation in poetic forms? The dictionary definition has been used both in Conceptual Art and in poetry, but in very different ways. Joseph Kosuth has made artworks out of the definitions of words such as "Idea," "Object," and so on, sometimes putting these on billboards out in real time and space. On the other hand, Clark Coolidge uses the dictionary definition on a temporal axis in structuring his long poem *The Maintains*. Compare the following examples of definitions where only parts of the *definiens* are kept:

having a smooth level surface
activities, practices, qualities, properties
an allergic reaction to skin
forceful and compelling, to the point

to this passage from *The Maintains:*

aluminous
of a wasp and the whose
often used nutlike cloth
hair on shipboard
mound in dim to make one
a large hence such wires
either has somely spotted
with two fit char or tubule
of in shape doxology
or light lamp as a bit[22]

The *definiens* as a "principle of equivalence" in language is clear. But Coolidge's later compositional practice occurs in light of a mistrust of explanations. Rather than provide any principle of equivalence, Coolidge wants his work to be situated firmly in the intentional ambiguities of the Duchampian "gap." An example of Coolidge's later work in verse shows a thematic of "anti-explanation":

My hands so cold the words come shattered
Hand me a posit, a pause, then position
Gained real stains, strains, storms

The window was locked clear through
Past tense as conditional
Temperatures of space through syntax
The sluicing of generalization
The parlor in which the event collapsed
Miles to go before I wake to the very room of
close speech and intimate lighting
The closet's noose contains a fly
Chain to pull down reverse of night
You have no people in mind
The others have no hallway for you[23]

Coolidge may "have no people in mind," nor an explanation for them either. The form of the poem is like that of the earlier example, but the aesthetic as a whole has developed considerably. Where the object of definition in *The Maintains* is words in the dictionary, in *Research* it is words in a state of mind.

Another compositional practice using a definitional structure, although at another linguistic level, is described by Ron Silliman in his talk on "The New Sentence."[24] Silliman's "new sentence" is a unit of composition in which language structures both above and below the level of the sentence (that is, the phrase and word below and the discourse above) counterbalance each other, making for a tension that allows each sentence to be set off as a discrete, atomized unit. Each sentence then has a kind of definitional use in an approach to an area of language or phenomenon. The tension that pushes the "new sentence" toward the definitional can be thematic as well as linguistic, as an early work of my own cited by Silliman as one of the first to use the new sentence, "Chamber Music," shows. Here there is a conflict between two languages—exterior (politics) and interior (dream). The definition is of an area of shifting scenarios in a composite language:

> The circular motion endured by inhabitants of the planet confused them.
>
> In order to more convincingly absent themselves, they placed great value on lies.

This story is about the fall of the feudal cowboy empire and its effect on me.

The last time I saw cracked rain, the goddess was planting seeds in me.[25]

Silliman uses the "new sentence" as a propositional counter in the construction of his book-length poems, *Ketjak* and *Tjanting*. The origins of this sentence, formally, are in Coolidge's "prosoid" works, Robert Creeley's prose, and so on, but I would like to suggest also that the form of documentation given in Lucy Lippard's *Six Years* of the Conceptual Art movement was important to Silliman in his use of the sentence, as an example not only of the ontological values of art propositions but of questions of the relation of such bounded propositions to their objects. In many of the works in *Six Years*, the problem, or question, of the art proposition in relation to its objects is central to its value as an artwork. Some exemplary works documented by Lippard:

> All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking—1:36 PM; 15 June 1969, New York.
>
> —Robert Barry

> On a wall, using a hard pencil, parallel lines about ⅛″ apart and 12″ long are drawn for one minute. Under this row of lines, another row of lines are drawn for 10 minutes. Under this row of lines another row of lines are drawn for one hour.
>
> —Sol LeWitt

> "Boundary: A section of a city, especially a thickly populated area inhabited by minority groups often as a result of social or economic restrictions." (Text of a small silver and black label affixed to telephone poles, street signs, etc., along the boundary of the ghetto in Seattle.)
>
> —John Baldessari and George Nicolaidis

> A translation from one language to another.
>
> —Lawrence Weiner

Choosing a person at random, in the street, any location, each day. Following him wherever he goes, however long or far he travels. (The activity ends when he enters a private place—his home, office, etc.)

—Vito Acconci[26]

The value of these art propositions as units of perception, questioning, structure, and so on, is comparable to the value of the "new sentence" in Silliman's *Ketjak,* written at about the time he read *Six Years:*

> There is only the verb "to be." Quills and crackers, jewels or miracles. The words will have more force if you use a crayola. One could propose, for example, the inclusion of anything. Extraordinary mouth session. Cigar shaped art object, would hover near the highway then quickly fly away. These words scare me to write them. With such attention the mind can follow the act of her washing in the next room, it knows hands from neck from cheeks. I have a time problem. Haul ass, kitten. Existence is an attribute. Subtitles lower your focus. White tribe, the golfers migrate up the slope. Such, of. She liked to lower herself on top of him. The first person to remove himself, as Zukofsky debuted Reich's Violin Phase to the west, Mario Savio. Palace of the Legion of Honor. Yoyo's alibi, the way back. Balling on the beach, as tho there are some places so public one's privacy is not questioned. Old sentences heard new carry a different purpose.[27]

It is possible that many of the sentences in the text could have analogues in the kinds of art propositions contained in *Six Years.*

This compositional strategy depends on a process of induction from the world, one possibly determined by the propositions of art. Arguments of different languages are taken as facts of the world, each being given a certain autonomy. These facts are not motivated solely by their original contexts but participate in a larger order. There is a kind of world to text to world movement in Silliman's work that is

close to the kind of art project specified by Mel Ramsden in *Art-Language* vol. 1, no. 3, in which an index of language is used as a guide to the structures of the world. Silliman's use of different languages in a text that could be read as such an index gives an exact value for the construction of a new language in his work:

> The situation is not improved by narrowing "language" to some further (distortive) definition. . . . Difference, not unity, is the norm. . . . In the pages which follow, no two poets propose the same definition for either "language" or "the text," let alone for the possible relations that might connect the two. . . . The coherence of this selection is to be found not in the writing with its various methods and strategies, taking different positions on different questions, but in the social composition of its audience. The project of this writing is the discovery of a community.[28]

While referring to his editing of an anthology, Silliman's note still gives a good rationale for his use of different languages—"the discovery of a community."

Where in Silliman's work the evidence of different languages is taken in relation to their multiple and ambiguous social space, in my own long poem "Artifacts," different languages are presented in terms of essential conflicts within and between them. Crucial to the writing of the poem was a typical experience of different languages in conflict within a seemingly unified method—in this case, that of a linguist trained in logical models for syntax who became interested in the problem of poetic language. Wild artifacts of method resulted from the radical divergence of at least two languages—and this question of the method of science, or of "objective" representation in general, inspired the mode of organization of the poem. The "artifacts" of this constructed discourse occur at moments of maximum self-sufficiency and conflict over twenty sections of eight short "paragraphs" each. The argument that develops is one in which various

explanations on widely different scales interact, forcing language to a new scale of discourse that includes all these possible conflicts—and the motivation behind them:

Sea anemones were whispering at low tide.

Spectators have agreed to be invisible. Verisimilitude is divided into two parts.

The valves of sensation unlock at different (various) levels.

Speakers say the words clearly. They will be replaced with a park.

One takes on chains (this haze of images) in order to better illustrate how to throw them off (analysis).

A palm tree predicates a palm tree. The signal for "I" resembles a rabbit or a duck.

An articulate, winged diatribe about "everything" signs off.

"Get another linguist!"[29]

Notes
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Notes

1. Russian Formalism & the Present

1. For background on Russian Formalism, see Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine,* 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale, 1981); Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska, 1965); Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views,* Michigan Slavic Contributions no. 8 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1978); and P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins, 1978).
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16. Shklovsky, *Third Factory,* p. 7.
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3. William Carlos Williams, "Rome," *The Iowa Review* vol. 9, no. 3 (Summer 1978), p. 31.
4. André Breton, *What Is Surrealism?: Selected Writings,* ed. Franklin Rosemont (London: Pluto, 1978), pp. 113–14.
5. *Automatism* is used in two senses in this book—that of unrestricted psychic flux in relation to Surrealism, and that of habitualized perception in the context of Russian Formalism.
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10. Breton, *Manifestoes,* pp. 199–202.
11. Breton, *What is Surrealism?,* pp. 71–73.
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17. "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site," ibid., p. 44.
18. "The Spiral Jetty," ibid., p. 115.
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