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Assembling

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EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

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For Henry James Korn, most of the time,
and Mike Metz, some of the time;
and for Andrew Stasik and Douglas Tumbaugh,
this time, for the retrospectives.

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OTHER BOOKS EDITED BY RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

On Contemporary Literature
Twelve from the Sixties
Beyond Left & Right
Possibilities of Poetry
John Cage
Future's Fictions
Seeing through Shuck
Breakthrough Fictioneers
Language & Structure
Younger Critics in North America

The New American Arts
The Young American Writers
Imaged Words & Worded Images
Moboly-Nagy
Social Speculations
Human Alternatives
In Youth
The Edge of Adaptation
Essaying Essays
Esthetics Contemporary

PREFACE

The artist no longer creates one or several works. He creates creation. —Nicholas Schoffer

Back in 1970, we hardly knew what we were doing in founding *Assembling*. We knew, first, that there was a problem of severe blockage in literary communication and, then, that we wanted to confront it with a radical alternative. Little did we think that within a decade our annual innovation in book publishing would be honored with an exhibition in an institutional gallery and, yes, with this retrospective catalog.

Our history has been precarious, to be sure; and each year we wonder whether *Assembling* will survive. Not only does the administration of it take an increasingly larger bite of our complex lives, but the funding necessary to produce it remains so insecure.

Indeed, *Assembling* would have died in 1978, were it not for the support *not* from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, which receives government money solely to fund periodicals like ours, but from the Pratt Graphics Center and its director Andrew Stasik, at 160 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y., who initiated the exhibition October 7 to 28, and the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation and its executive director, Douglas Turnbaugh, who came to the rescue with a grant that made both *Eighth Assembling* and this catalogue possible.

How could we do a retrospective volume on a publication like *Assembling*? We thought of doing a "Selected *Assembling*," but to exclude some contributors, at the expense of including others, would have been contrary to the spirit of our enterprise. Rather, it seemed more appropriate to collect materials relevant to the development of the press: A revision of my own memoir of the early years, which initially appeared in *The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook* (1973); the reprinting of subse-

The [Filmmakers'] Co-op went on to prove that the policies established there were sound and they still are even today, 15 or 16 years later. I would really still term them revolutionary. The five points on which the Co-op was based remain even today, and they are 1.) that no film is rejected; in other words, no matter what it is, the film will survive on its own merit; if the film is good, it will grow by itself; if the film is not good, nothing can establish it; 2.) the Co-op is run by the filmmakers themselves; 3.) no film is pushed above the others—they are all treated equally; 4.) no advertising; 5.) all income from the rentals goes to the filmmakers except for the percentage assigned by the directors/filmmakers to cover the running costs.

—Jonas Mekas, Interview, *Parachute* (Printemps, 1978).

Partly because sufficient factual material about the operation of small literary presses remains ungathered, a full examination of the role of small publishers cannot be made; we do not know enough yet to understand how a publisher influences literature and how literary circumstances require the evolution of different kinds of publishing. And partly because researchers interested in literary publishing have studied the little magazine isolated from its small press counterpart, we have seen very little data on the interrelations between the two enterprises.

—Tom Montag, "The Little Magazine/Small Press Connection: Some Conjectures," *Concern/s* (1977).

Little magazines are the pollinators of works of art: literary movements and eventual literature itself could not exist without them... A good magazine brings writers together, even the most isolated, and sets them influencing their time and, when that time is past, devotes a special number to them as a funeral.

Little magazines are of two kinds, dynamic and eclectic. Some flourish on what they put in, others by whom they keep out. Dynamic magazines have a shorter life and it is round them that glamour and nostalgia crystallise.

—Cyril Connolly, "Fifty Years of Little Magazines," *Art & Literature* (March, 1964).

Kulch. Perhaps in that Poundian word we may best see the extent of democracy's absorption of Pound and, by extension, of even his worthiest successors. Pound spelled "culture" the way he did because he had a real contempt for most of the culture around him. And yet he or his snippings have now become, to a degree, a part of that Kulch, and the Kulch goes on, and the Kulch will absorb more Pounds.

—Reed Whittemore, *Little Magazines* (1963).

Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.

—A.J. Liebling, "Do You Belong in Journalism?", *The New Yorker* (May 14, 1960).

It is a higher degree of freedom when thoughtful and independent individuals have the opportunity of addressing each other. If they have no vehicles by which they can express opinion, then for them the freedom of the press does not exist. . . . So far as culture depends upon periodicals, it depends upon periodicals which exist as a means of communication between cultivated people, and not as a commercial enterprise; it depends upon periodicals which do not make a profit.

T.S. Eliot, "A Commentary," *Criterion* (1938).

One after another the serious politico-literary periodicals have disappeared or lowered their colours, and there is scarcely one left whose liberty of speech has not been sold to the advertiser or mortgaged to vested interests.

—Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932).

quent prefaces to *Assembling*; a fresh afterword to these; the offset reproduction of the entire self-reflective symposium that Karl Young edited for *Margins* in 1975 (and which includes Young's incomparably brilliant critical essay on *Assembling*); exhaustive bibliographical data; excerpts from reviews; documents from our history (e.g., announcements of gatherings, invitations to contributors, applications for projects that were lamentably not funded [and thus give an idea of what *Assembling* Press might have done]); a critical history of the press's publications that Loris Essary, himself the editor of *Interstate*, wrote especially for this book; and comments from our veteran contributors on what *Assembling* has meant to them. The latter are reproduced camera-ready, as is our custom, in alphabetical order. Since we think this book should be read from cover to cover, there is no table of contents, and no index. The result, we hope, is a gathering of relevant information and understandings—a literal assembling about *Assembling*, which is to say an *Assembling Assembling*.

To everyone who has ever collaborated in *Assembling*, I am also grateful. Without contributors, donating their thousands of copies every year, insuring our survival at their own effort and expense, *Assembling* would never have lasted so long, and neither this exhibition nor this catalog would have happened. To my partner from the beginning, Henry James Korn, and to our sometime designer and production supervisor, Mike Metz, I am particularly thankful.

Richard Kostelanetz
New York, New York
Labor Day, 1978

WHY ASSEMBLING? (1972)

NOTICES

As an unreconstructed anarchist, I still must consider the solution of this issue [proprietary control of the media by the tribe of intermediary bureaucrats] easy, easy in theory, easy in practice; if we do not apply it, it is for moral reasons, sluggishness, timidity, getting involved in what is not one's business, etc. The way to get rid of dummy intermediaries is by direct action.

—Paul Goodman, "The Chance for Popular Culture" (1949).

Assembling grew out of an oppressive crisis in avant-garde literary communication; for while experiments in writing seemed both possible and necessary, genuinely innovative manuscripts found increasing resistance from both book and periodical publishers. *Assembling* was established in 1970 by Henry James Korn and myself, two young writers who had known each other since childhood. (His older sister and my younger sister were close friends in high school.) Five years older than Korn, I was already a full-time freelance, hyperactive mostly as an essayist and anthologist. I discovered that my visual poetry and comparably eccentric fiction encountered, in contrast to my expository prose, considerably more difficulty in getting published. Even the best of these pieces seemed to take at least two years to get into any sort of public print (at which point, fortuitously, a few would be anthologized with remarkable speed); and I had good reason to suspect that, as often as not, the periodical editors accepting them were implicitly honoring, or flattering, my critical-anthological activities. The problem was scarcely personal, however, because other work in such veins, including much that I regarded as critically excellent, was similarly blocked. Korn, on the other hand, had produced some remarkably witty and inventive fictions, only one of which had ever been published; and his work as a museum administrator made him aware of growing problems in cultural communication. I suppose that my own anthological experience also gave me a compiler's passion for making available a goodly amount of avant-garde literary material that might otherwise be lost.

It also became clear, at the onset of U.S. publishing's most severe depression, that commercial houses were less and less inclined to take risks with any kind of counterconventional work or with unestablished authors. Among the principal reasons are not only editorial ignorance and opacity but a gross rise in the costs of book production and then the increasing profit-hunger of even the more "enlightened" publishing firms. The best-seller

"Read any good books lately?"

I've discovered a few but it seems as if the recession has had a disastrous effect on young American writers. It's practically impossible for anyone who lacks a "name" to get published at present. Commercial publishing houses are just that commercial. They need to make money. In a time of drastically declining profits they're naturally less and less inclined to take risks on new authors who by definition, lack a proven profit potential.

Old magazines, to check another possible outlet for young writers, are without exception, locked into a historical/critical bag with self-serving editors whose mission is to impose their own standards of what poetry and fiction should be, and who it should serve. Thus, their receptiveness to newcomers—especially those whose work is eccentric or experimental, is non-existent. New magazines turn out to be mainly journals by and for immediate friends.

Hence I was particularly pleased to run across a copy of a new collaborating magazine called *Assembling* compiled by Richard Kostelanetz and Henry Korn expressly for the purpose of solving the problem (known by all who create in an unusual way) of how to publish freak literature in an ever constricting publishing scene.

To avoid institutionalizing their own taste, Kostelanetz and Korn invited potential contributors to print 1000 copies of a manuscript of their own choosing at their own expense. The results were bound into the first issue now on sale.

I found *Assembling* to be illuminating, delightful and occasionally profound. It's an amazing demonstration of the vitality of new American writers and an eloquent testament to the moral and creative bankruptcy of what Kostelanetz and Korn refer to as the "editorial/industrial complex."

I suggest you go to the East Side Bookstore at St. Marks Place, N.Y.C. or the Gotham Book Mart between Fifth and Sixth Avenues at 47th Street and pick up a copy. Or if you prefer, you may order by mail from Box 1967, Brooklyn, New York 11202. Either way—a post-Christmas bargain if ever there was one.

—Jeanette Friedman, *Ken* [Brooklyn College], VIII/2 (Feb. 8, 1971).

* * *

Assembling: Tal el nombre de una nueva revista que engrosa el número de las tantas dispersas por todo el mundo dedicadas a la investigación poética y difusión de las referentes corrientes de la nueva poesía. . . . Tanto el material gráfico, como los eventos que se proponen y las notas críticas sitúan a esta revista entre las primeras y de imprescindible conocimiento para estar al tanto de los movimientos vanguardistas actuales.

—AZ, *El Popular Magazine* [Montevideo] (May 9, 1971).

Assembling: This is the title of a new magazine which joins the growing number of publications around the world dedicated to poetic experimentation and the dissemination of the various trends of new poetry. . . . The graphic material, the events and happenings proposed, and the critical notes all place this magazine among the best and make it essential reading for anyone wishing to be in touch with today's vanguard movements.

—translated from the Spanish by John M. Bennett.

* * *

The claim is that no manuscript here is rejected and perhaps you wonder what kind of losers you'll be stuck with for your money. Strangely enough, the quality of work here is quite high, as good as what you'd find in a majority of "reviews." But then, perhaps that isn't so strange at all. Perhaps you'll begin to get the point of *Assembling* a little more forcibly when you realize. . . . that it's not charity at all, merely a job needing to be done. . . . *Assembling* is today like few other things you'll read.

—Rich Mangelsdorff, *Creem* (June, 1971).

* * *

Teksten van jonge Amerikaanse schrijvers en dichters. Van Wolfe Blotzer dit mooi vers:

You will grow like paragraphs on pages
From blankness to expression
(Birth)

Traditionele en progressieve teksten (niet geselecteerd). Konkrete poëzie van Michael J. Phillips, visuele poëzie van Kostelanetz en Liam O'Gallagher.

—Paul de Vree, *De Tafelronde* [Antwerp], XV/3-4 (1971).

Texts by young American writers and poets. From Wolfe Blotzer this beautiful verse: [As quoted above]

Traditional and progressive texts (not selected). Concrete poetry by Michael J. Phillips, visual poetry by Kostelanetz and Liam O'Gallagher.

—translated from the Flemish by E.M. Beekman.

* * *

Assembling continues its function as a supereclectic "new" creative window the

has become their all-engrossing goal, while interest in commercially more modest work, such as anything avant-garde or unknown, has declined dangerously. Only one one-man collection including visual poetry, for instance, has ever been commercially published in the United States, even though "concrete" is reportedly "faddish"; and since that single book, N.H. Pritchard's *The Matrix* (1970), was neither reviewed nor touted, it seemed unlikely that any others would ever appear—another example of how the rule of precedent in literary commerce produces *de facto* censorship. Established literary periodicals, on the other hand, were dying or retrenching, while alarmingly few of the new ones were open to experimental work. For several reasons, therefore, the future of avant-garde writing seemed increasingly perilous.

In the preface to our initial issue, I noted:

As young writers of stylistically "different" poetry and prose, we faced not only the inevitable objections to our youth, but also the equally inevitable resistances to our wayward literary purposes. And so we wanted an institution that would publish alternative work by imaginative artists who genuinely believed in what they did. Since rejections often came with the excuse, particularly from those editors pretending to sympathy, that "our printer can't handle this," it seemed best to overcome this obstacle by direct action—by becoming one's own publisher, which is more practicable in this era of photographic reproduction processes; for the oldest truth is that, when other demands are more pressing, the writer must do more than just write.

Somewhat influenced by a beautiful German book called *Omnibus* (1969), we hit upon what we think is the most appropriate structure for a cooperative self-publishing channel. In brief, *Assembling* invites writers and artists whom we know to be doing unusual work, which we broadly characterize as "otherwise unpublishable," to contribute a thousand copies of up to four 8½ x 11-inch pages of whatever they want to include. Since each contributor is responsible for arranging, by whatever means and funds available, for the production of his own work, he becomes his own self-sub-publisher, so to speak. There is no doubt that writers should usually be paid for what they do; but just as serious poets often give much of their work away gratis, so there are times when every artist feels it worth a few dollars and a little effort to put into public print a work that he likes but could not otherwise place. (Indeed, self-publication at such modest cost could stand as an ultimate test of creative seriousness—not just in Russia, whose predicaments are familiar, but in the United States too.) In practice, self-printing turns out to be less forbidding than it initially seems, for not only do academics have access to xerox machines (and did one contributor call upon a family printing business), but recently developed offset processes can commercially reproduce one side into a thousand sheets for less than ten dollars and both sides for less than fifteen. We advised our invited collaborators to put their names on the face of their work, as we ran no table of contents, and to center their contributions toward the right, leaving at least an inch on the left-hand margin, because *Assembling* promised to collate the

contents alphabetically and then return three bound books to each contributor. The remaining copies would ideally be sold through bookstores and the mails, hopefully defraying the costs of binding, mailing, etc. Since all copyrights, which are the literary form of "property," were returned to the contributors, *Assembling* could make no money from subsequent reprints; and once the thousand copies were gone, it would be impossible for us (or anyone else) to "reprint" the entire issue.

Since both Korn and myself do work that transcends the boundaries of "writing," we opened the book to artists of all sorts. Our initial form letter invited "poetry, fiction, graphic art, designs, architectural proposals, or any other ideas adaptable to print." As we were also trying to abolish the restricting prerogatives of editorial authority, we agreed to accept everything contributed by those invited. (Our invitation mentioned our "reserving the right to exclude a contribution for reasons unforeseen or in case of libel." I was thinking of egregious slander when I wrote that, but it remains an option we have never considered exercising.) We abrogate editorial authority not because we are lazy or rudderless, but because we want a structural contrast to the "restrictive, self-serving nature of traditional editorial processes." This is libertarian anarchism in its truest form. Since we are collators rather than true publishers, we customarily refuse requests to handle the printing, for necessity demands that counterconventional writers learn some essential things about reproduction, such as discovering the method(s) most conducive to their particular work. As a result, each entry ideally represents the best that each contributor can do untouched (or unretouched) by grubby editorial hands. As "compilers" rather than true publishers, we also avoided the editorial pains (or pleasures) of rejecting anything, along with the anxiety of needing to fulfill a predetermined concept or worrying whether a particular contribution would offend our patrons or professional friends; and given the elasticity of our production methods, we never faced the predicament of accepting more material than could be "accommodated by our precious space."

The only editorial control left to us was the invitation itself, so that just as unfamiliar would-be collaborators were asked to contribute examples of their work (before receiving an invitation), so a few contributors to one *Assembling* were not invited to the next. The almost paradoxical reason was not that we thought their work "no good," whatever that might be, or that we wanted to impose a particular style or taste, but that their work was insufficiently unconventional, while we were obliged, in principle, to keep the medium committed to alternative, "otherwise unpublishable" imaginative work—a domain that was, to be sure, elastically defined. (None of these unreinvited people ever asked to contribute again, perhaps because of awe or disgust with the rest of the book; and none, to my knowledge, have founded their own collaborative periodicals.) "Don't hesitate to send material that has made the editorial rounds," our initial invitation said, "but remember that there's a difference between manuscripts that are just too freaky to get published elsewhere and those that are simply not one's own best work." It continued: "The long-range goal of *Assembling* is opening the editorial/industrial complex to alternatives and possibilities. The short-range goal is providing the means for unpublished and unpublishable work to get into

likes of which few people outside of the publishing houses ever get a glimpse of. It's a barometer of how people are getting it together, containing a surprisingly large number of art-design-photographical things (and surprisingly few collages), lots of concrete poetry, a growing number of conceptual things, quite a few narratives, with few dramatic or intentional pieces. Even philosophical raps can find a place here.

—Rich Mangelsdorff, *Nola Express*
(Dec. 3-16, 1971).

* * *

Some excellent examples of writing too experimental—and therefore unprofitable—to be noticed in the columns of *The Times Book Review* are collected in *Assembling* and *Second Assembling*. Although there are a number of contributions in both collections which excite me (Jan Herman's "Magic Typewriter," K. & R. Waldrop's "Knee," Ely Stock's "Found Poem with Comment in the Margin") as images, it is the concept of *Assembling*—and its lucid exposition in introductory essays by Kostelanetz—which truly rouses. I rally to the cause, despite a lack of enthusiasm for what its members are doing. . . . The very term *avant-garde* is bankrupt language, owned by literary journalists and gossip columnists. There is simply good writing that people aren't yet equipped to read; writers who, published or unpublished, can't find their proper audiences; and a publishing system which has become too monstrous to help the writer create his readership.

It is on this last point that I find myself in total agreement with Kostelanetz and the purpose of the two compilations of *Assembling*. "The obvious conclusion is that today's publishing establishments can no longer be counted upon to support new writing. . . . The most obvious, and yet demanding, solution lies in creating new literary institutions. . . . *Whatever needs to be done, we, as writers, shall probably have to do it ourselves.*"

—Michael Perkins, *The Staff* (Dec. 3, 1971).

* * *

Compared to what [another publication] was trying to do, this is way ahead of the avant-garde. Kostelanetz calls [*Second Assembling*] a collection of otherwise unpublishable manuscripts, and that it is. The idea behind it is for the many many avant-garde writers in all meanings of that word to print their own pages, and for the three editors to bind the lot into a large magazine with no editorial intervention at all. The result of course contains a hell of a lot of rubbish, people churning things out just to get their names in print. It also contains a bunch of gems.

—Peter Finch, *Second Aeon*, 15
(1972).

* * *

And *Assembling* is still a rare window on what's really happening these days, still a wide range of poetry (conventional and concrete), prose, collages, posters, photos, graphics, grounds, concepts. Seems to be more writing and less flashy graphics and photos than in past numbers. First prize for this issue goes to John Dowd's pop-culture collages, such as have appeared in some rock fanzines.

—Rich Mangelsdorff, *Nola Express* (Feb. 6, 1973).

* * *

The oddest anthology on earth.

—St. Marks Poetry Project News-letter (Jan. 1, 1974).

* * *

The writings and pictures in *Fourth Assembling* are "otherwise unpublisshable" because of what one of the editors, Richard Kostelanetz, calls a "de facto conspiracy" of "censorship" by editors, book distributors and reviewers. A reader might conclude that it's because of lack of talent—but only in a few cases. This fourth annual collection is colorful and sprightly.

In his introduction, Kostelanetz writes that "the high sales of books by Barth, Beckett and Borges indicate the existence of a large audience for serious experimental work," but the public seldom hears of most of our eccentric writers and the small and uncommercial publishers who give them a chance.

Meanwhile Kostelanetz and his compilers have for several years been inviting experimental writers to send work already reproduced in sets of a thousand copies each on 8½-by-11-inch pages. Then, without selecting, the compilers have collated these pages into alphabetical order by author, bound them, and marketed them.

This procedure has not encouraged the self-indulgence one might have expected from the contributors, primarily because, I think, it would be too easy to be self-indulgent.

Instead, one has wistful excerpts from David Franks' "Body of Language"—reproductions from "making love to the immaculately passive and overexposed Xerox No.'s 720 and 914."

There is a therapeutic piece by Bob Heman entitled "Guilt." The reader is to cut out and paste together a cube, every side of which bears the motto:

*the cat
you released
in the woods
is making its way
slowly back to you.*

The reader is instructed to roll the cube and read the top side, then to roll it again and read the top side. "Continue doing this. Stop when you feel like it."

And there's an elegant cut-up readjustment poem by Thomas Macauley that would be unconsciously damaged if I were to reveal its workings here: Just read it.

print, partly to see what kindred spirits and spooks are doing." We also promised to type and print, at house expense, biographical notes, in part to introduce the contributors to each other.

Large cartons poured into our homes and post-office box during the summer, as our one hundred fifty invitations produced forty responses. Late in August, two months after our announced deadline, Korn and I rented a small panel truck and lugged a half ton of paper to a commercial collator (whose services cost us three hundred dollars). The bound books came back a few weeks later, and contributors' copies were immediately put into the mail. (The post office remains an innocent collaborator in the development of experimental writing, for it is largely by posted print that most of its creators know each other's work.) We sent possible reviewers a query, since available copies were so few; and though we honored all requests received, only four reviews appeared, three of them positive—in a Belgian new-poetry journal, a New York undergraduate newspaper, and a Detroit rock magazine. (The single negative notice rather dumbly criticized the absence of editorial "personality"!) Our copyright line read: "(c) 1970 for automatic assignment with the printing of this notice to the individual contributors." However, we subsequently discovered that this was regrettably invalid. Since copyrights must be connected to a particular name, it should have said: "(c) 1970 by Assembling Press. All rights reassigned to their respective authors upon request." We also made the mistake of incorporating (which cost us another hundred), in part to protect against personal liabilities; but we later discovered that this precaution was unnecessary, as long as we published an editorial disclaimer (for "the views expressed herein") on the title page. Indeed, since we eschewed editorial authority, responsibility for all material definitely belonged to the individual self-publishers. We disincorporated simply by letting Gnilbmessa, Inc., which is *assembling* spelled backwards, die of bankruptcy. We also opened a checking account, which was both needlessly expensive and, in practice, rarely used.

The results of such self-publishing license not only confirmed our initial polemical point—both *Assembling* itself and most of its contents were unlike anything seen before—but the book also showed the possibilities and productivity available to society if artists were granted absolute creative freedom. Some pieces were poetry or fiction, while others were visual graphics or words mixed with pictures. Some contributors resorted to commercial reproductive processes (of varying quality), while a few used handpresses. Scott Hyde contributed an especially elegant multicolored photograph. One contribution must have been individually hand-stained, as the shape of each brown blot was different. The well-known rock critic Richard Meltzer sent us, as he explained, "a thousand pages of all different shit (including the only copy of the only novel I ever wrote) so each one-page thing is gonna be a whole different show-stopper." Some contributors exploited this anti-editorial opportunity to surpass their earlier work, such as the novelist Nancy Weber, whose handwritten story, "Dear Mother and Dad," was subsequently anthologized. Others, like the poet David Ignatow, introduced work (an excerpt from his journals) that would later appear in a book. The stipulated page size became an inadvertent constraint, as one writer offered a thousand artistically doctored baseball cards, "each

with a literary move." We were embarrassed to tell him that the available collating machines could not handle such work.

What was most impressive about *Assembling* was the sheer variety of counterconventional alternatives, as individual contributions could be roughly characterized as visual poetry, verbal poetry, abstract photography, playlets, minimal poetry, verbal collage, stream-of-consciousness narrative, representational graphics, picture-accompanied words, scenarios for happenings, sculptural documentation, personal journal, esthetic manifesto, etc.; for the hundred flowers blooming here were really different. A few pieces could best be termed "other"; and the only signature on one poem, its face suspiciously turned backwards, read "Richard M. Nixon." The overall constraint of alphabetical order generated some peculiar juxtapositions that, in turn, made the whole book resemble a loony sequential collage. It struck me afterwards that very few contributors portrayed sexual experience, partly because the liberties that artists now want to take and that are blocked by established channels deal not with content but concept and form.

The contributions were uneven, to be sure, in both artistry and printing quality, but such discrepancies epitomize *Assembling's* characteristic style and integrity, as well as perhaps its charm. "If you don't turn on to something," one contributor noted, "all you have to do is turn the page." Such blatant chaos marked *Assembling* as a counterbook or anti-book (though *not* a "nonbook") which nonetheless gains its cohering definition (which is approximately repeatable) from its unprecedented diversity. In my admittedly biased opinion, more than half of the material has been uncommonly interesting, while a few contributions are awesomely extraordinary. It is more important to judge that very few pieces, if any, would have otherwise gotten beyond private musings into public print. (At the beginning, Korn and I awarded, in total secrecy, a booby prize to "that contribution most likely to have appeared elsewhere" and thus needing *Assembling* least—a rather fine story by a sometime contributor to the slicks.) Collaborators in the first *Assembling* included such eminences as the painters Edward Ruscha and Arakawa; the poets Robert Lax, Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, Vito Acconci, and Bernadette Mayer; the playwright Lee Baxandall; the novelists Marvin Cohen, George Chambers, Arno Karlen, and Raymond Federman; the composer Arthur Layzer; the polyartists Liam O'Gallagher, Dan Graham, and Alan Sondheim; along with a few artist-writers making their initial public appearances.

Most of the contributors were pleased, not only with the collaborative concept but with individual works, so that we decided to do the book again in 1971. *Second Assembling*, as we called it, materialized, like its predecessor, in response to a summer's correspondence. Many of the same artists and writers joined us a second time—Elizabeth Ginsberg, Tom Ahern, Gay Beste, Jan Herman, Rosalie Frank, and Roni Hoffman; but more than half of the fifty-two contributors were new, including such eminences as the film-maker Stan VanDerBeek (who neglected, however, to send enough copies); the poets Robin Magowan, CP Graham, Tom Ockerse, and Ruth Krause; the fictionists Russell Edson and M.D. Elevelitch; and the polyartists Ken Friedman and Bern Porter. Mike Metz, a process-documenting artist who contributed to the first book, took charge of production for the second, not only

The book is crammed with concrete poems, stories, essays, musical compositions, drawings, photographs, diagrams, and even a grotesquely invalid Practice Law School Admission Test. The most dazzling quality of this collection is the freedom from the sado-masochism, paranoia, general dread, and stream-of-consciousness maunderings that have often been the tiresome mainstays of commercial experimental writing.

My favorite crackpot is Richard Meltzer, who seems to have unbound a postage stamp collection and dispersed it in a thousand pieces. My copy features 1918-21 Austrian issues, including some postage-due and newspaper stamps. It is a deep pleasure to flip by that leaf.

—Jonathan Sisson, *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune* (March 17, 1974).

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It is unnerving to know, even when twenty-odd thousand new titles spill yearly from the publishers, that still there are fanatics protesting that it should be more. The fanatics we have in mind are those ideologues of the avant-garde who are only kept going by the hope that the media have ganged ruthlessly up on them and turn down their offerings because they are unsafe rather than just plain bad. No one wants to be unpublished, but not all spited authors can rise to the belief that they are unpublished.

Those who can have been in an oddly exposed position during these past years of glut in the publishing business, because there was a better chance than usual that they might be accepted perversely into print. And what could be more demoralizing for a committed firebrand, bent on recharging his self-esteem by the acquisition of a few more rejection-slips, than to find his outrageous manuscript being snapped up by a repressively tolerant publisher?

But if the forecast that publishers are now slipping into reverse turns out to be right, then things should soon get back to normal and staunch unpublicables find it easier to stay out of the lists. Unless, that is, they bend their principles and consent to be published in an anthology of fellow-lepers. One such collection has just come to us from the United States, under the vaguely apocalyptic title of *Second Assembling* (Pages unnumbered. Assembling Press, Box 1967, Brooklyn, New York 11202), second because there was a first *Assembling* a year before and more promised in Falls to come.

The converters of this embittered harvest are Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn and Mike Metz, and they have gone about it in an ingenious way, since their contributors were made to supply not, as is conventional, the potential contents of an anthology but its actual contents: "1,000 copies of up to four 8½ inch by 11 inch pages of anything they wanted to include, printed at their own expense." Which

leaves the editors, who say that they accepted everything they were sent, with nothing more arduous to arrange than the binding of the volume. Straight publishers too might like to try this labour-saving method out on their more adventurous clients; not only would it work out very much cheaper, but provide an extra thrill, too, for the eventual reader, who could enjoy his hero's text exactly as he himself had prepared it for the Xerox machine: immediacy could hardly go farther.

The contents of *Second Assembling* are a bit of a let-down after the challenging variety of its manufacture. The concrete poetry has not really set, the half-tones are murky, the prose all too arch: "I dreamed that Jesus and I were playing Chinese Checkers. He was winning..." Not much here, in fact, to back up the indictment in Mr. Kostelanetz's introduction of America's craven and myopic publishers; if, indeed, that maligned body was ever asked to prove its conservatism by rejecting these way-out scribbles, one's guess is that most of the contributors to *Second Assembling* decided to cut out the qualifying stage and sent their stuff straight to Messers Kostelanetz, Korn and Metz.

The first issue of *Assembling* had, we are told, only three reviews, and Mr. Kostelanetz's word for this neglect is, predictably, "predictable." Given the ambiguity of this undertaking, we are quite unable to work out whether or not he will be gratified by our comments on the second issue.

—*Times Literary Supplement*,
No. 3647 (Jan. 21, 1972).

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And the magazine, *Assembling*, which [Kostelanetz] was involved with during the early 70's was surely one of the few alternatives to the publishing bind: Within its pages one found true experimentation; its production was the result of a vital commitment to the new.

—Neil Baldwin, *Buffalo Evening News*
(March, 1975).

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Interesting people at their wildest (if they wanted to be).

—*New Letters* (Sept., 1974).

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For those interested in the unusual from the worlds of art and literature, *Fifth Assembling*... is unique and, despite the self-indulgent tone of much small press work, fascinating more often than not.

—The Editors, *Gadget* (August, 1976).

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Avanche and *Assembling* may both start with the letter A, and may both be magazines, but the resemblance ends there. The one is a periodical covering advanced artwork, carefully structured and produced by two people who leave

designing a stunning cover (which, this time, wrapped around the spine), but also joining Korn and myself as a "co-compiler."

And its preface became yet more assertive, if not strident, in part because the closure crisis had become more severe, but also because I had spent most of the previous year drafting *The End of Intelligent Writing*. In the second preface, I said:

Anyone who gets [experimental] writing frequently into print is bombarded with requests for advice: Where can one publish? Who? Why not? And while one could give specific suggestions before [in the sixties], now the answer is invariably "nowhere," accompanied by a brief and inevitably bitter analysis of the current predicament. . . . The terrible point is not that "one can't get published," but that nobody is publishing experimental writing anymore. The fresh fruits we bear are turning into sour grapes, while the only money falling from those trees of dollar bills is counterfeit or confederate; and terror of a kind rules the roost. As writers largely lead isolated lives and have excessively sensitive egos, they tend to take rejections as strictly personal; but when nearly everything in certain veins is kept unpublished, the problems are not individual but collective—and, thus, amenable to political, or more specifically literary-political, solutions. Since it would be naive to solicit help from elsewhere, the initiative in introducing any New Art to the reading public must first of all come from the artists themselves. Our guiding rule in an acclimating task comparable to that confronting Ezra Pound and his allies sixty years ago must be this: WHAT-EVER NEEDS TO BE DONE, WE, AS WRITERS, SHALL PROBABLY HAVE TO DO IT OURSELVES.

After years of courting established publishers on behalf of experimental writing—not only my own but that by others—I am reluctantly coming to the conclusion that more than half of the consequential literature produced in this country today remains unpublished. The more closely one examines the situation, the clearer it becomes that only temporary idiosyncrasy or lapse can explain the commercial release of such genuinely innovative works as Pritchard's *The Matrix* and *Eecchbooeens* (1971), Richard Horn's *Encyclopedia* (1969), Madeline Gins' *Word Rain* (1969), Kenneth Gangemi's *Olt* (1969), Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971), or G.S. Gravenson's *The Sweetmeat Saga* (1971). Indicatively, most of these and other consequential books came from smaller commercial publishers. But it is a more telling fact that some of the past decade's most important American avant-garde texts were self-published: Edward Ruscha's widely admired picture books (especially *Thirty-four Parking Lots* [1967]), Dick Higgins' *Jefferson's Birthday/Postface* (1964) and *Foew&ombwbnw* (1969), Russell Edson's *The Brain Kitchen* (1965), John Giorno's *Raspberry* (1967), Charles Henri Ford's *Spare Parts* (1966), Dan Graham's *End Moments* (1969), Wally Depew's *Once* (1971), Vito Acconci's *Book Four* (1968), among others.

"Ahead of us, especially if the censorship presently implicit in the editorial/industrial complex becomes complete," my second preface concludes, "is a writing situation comparable to that current in Soviet Russia, where nearly everything consequential is *Samizdat*, which means 'self-published,' and circulated from hand to hand. The practice of experimental writing in America is thus

coming to resemble private research, like that in science, where a writer first announces his new discoveries on stapled xeroxes that are mailed to one's professional friends, rather than trying to generate a demand for his product." We did a *Third Assembling* in 1972 with over ninety contributors, most of whom, once again, had not contributed before; and we expect to do a fourth in 1973.

Assembling has set an initial stone in the implicit edifice of International Cooperative Self-Publishing—a growing, unorganized, artistic movement that includes Dana Atchley's comparably pioneering *Space Atlas* (1970, 1971, Box 361, Crested Butte, CO 81224), which was done with the help of art students at the University of Victoria in British Columbia; Ely Raman's *8 x 10 Art Portfolio* (Box 363, New York, NY 10013), which began in lower Manhattan in 1971; and Jerry Bowles' *Art Work, No Commercial Value* (Grossman, 1972). Notwithstanding similar concepts in editorial-production, these media differ in several crucial respects. Atchley collates his hundred-plus contributions into two hundred fifty loose-leaf clipbooks and sends two apiece back to the contributors, thus having nothing left to sell; and he has recently taken to traveling the country, collecting spare work in one place (usually academic) and then, like Johnny Appleseed, distributing it gratis elsewhere. This extraordinary service implicitly extends his earlier aim of open-ended, unfettered artist-to-artist communication, now with a different kind of inseminating activity.

Raman's periodical, which appears sporadically, asks for only two hundred copies of one's text, returning two cardboard folders apiece to the thirty-or-so contributors and then selling off the rest to subscribers, who are asked to pay what they can. Bowles' one-shot resembles Raman's and Atchley's in favoring graphics over literary (or post-literary) work, and its large loose-leaf binding was issued, to much publicity and after a gallery-sponsored collating party, by a commercial publisher that, even though it minimally reimbursed its paper-producing contributors, expected to make a profit. Thus, *Assembling* has three clear distinctions: its literary emphasis (in response to an initially literary predicament); its ideological underpinnings (elaborated in the prefaces—a feature indicatively lacking in the others); and its stapled binding, which we feel creates the sense of a fortuitous community united in process, though disparate in style.

What is most important about all these media, in spite of differences, is their common anti-authoritarian structure—quite literally, a participatory democracy that successfully redistributes both initiative and responsibility. In addition to epitomizing the humanist theme of ultimate self-determination, this collaborative concept represents, in my opinion, an important development in literary communication, precisely because it transcends "dummy intermediaries," and it has the further advantage of easy imitation. (Its commercialization also signals a certain, perhaps dubious success that probably explains why Bowles' enterprise rejected a duly submitted contribution, albeit an outrageous one, that went instead into *Third Assembling*.) In the mail recently came *Clone*, which is comparably produced by students at the Rhode Island School of Design, and another pile of unbound pages from British art students, along with independent invitations to send self-published packets to Holland, Germany, and Italy.

Unless the crisis in literary communications is radically solved, it seems likely that self-publishing, both individually

the personal mark heavily throughout. The other is a virtually anonymously-produced amalgam of random material ranging from the sublime to the stupid. . . .

Assembling, like *Avalanche*, is a valuable endeavor, but for quite different reasons. Whereas *Avalanche* is the readiest source of information on new art, *Assembling* is the readiest place to find normal-throwaway art/writing anthologized. *Assembling*, which appears annually, bills itself as "a collection of otherwise unpublished manuscripts" and invites contributors of every bent to "submit 1000 copies of up to three 8½ x 11 pages of anything they wanted to include—printed at their own expense." No "editors" as such; Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn, and Mike Metz acted merely as compilers, responsible only for the collation, the cover, and the sentence-long biographies in back.

Assembling has everything you might imagine possible in such a format: art-work, poetry in traditional, experimental, and concrete veins, collagery, Xerography, conceptual art, prose pieces and excerpts (including a random page from original manuscripts by two different people), photography, et al. The absence of editorial digression allows some dismal stuff to get in—including most of the non-experimental poetry and much of the line drawing—but the rewards of at least the most recent issue (the fourth) are themselves numerous. The best works are often those which determine for themselves unique formats—Kenneth Gangemi's newspaper clippings, for instance, or Shoichi Kiyokawa's "Chamber Music." Anson Kenny approaches biography in an original way, while someone or something named "City" makes the law boards interesting in context. I also liked Davi Det Hompson's photopoems, the graphics of Wally Depew and Michael Wiater, Herbert Krohn's "Dream 'n' Drown Komix," songs and stuff by G.P. Skratz, conceptual pieces by Donald Burgy, Henry James Korn's prose poems, and the concrete poetry of Thomas Macaulay, Robin Magowan, Timm Ulrichs, Richard Kostelanetz, Kathy Schenkel, and the Northwest Mounted Valise. Instead of a page from a manuscript, Richard Meltzer contributed a page from his stamp collection—I came away with three turn-of-the-century issues from Panama. And the contributor of selections from a novel *Worthy Bones*, who sure can weave a good psychedelic narrative, remains unfortunately anonymous. Such untoward modesty! Meanwhile, the two-bit poets and doodlers write their names large all over everything. But that's *Assembling* for you: a scrapbook of ironies and conceits. Reading through it is like digging for ore—finding valuable material makes working one's way through all the crap worthwhile.

—Peter Frank, *Soho Weekly News*, 1/29 (April 25, 1974).

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Assembling Press is one of the most important small publishers around, attempting to publish things that most other presses, small or large, don't do. In addition to publishing high quality and literate short prose, visual fiction and visual poetry, they put out the incredible *Assembling*. . . . The whole thing is an innovative approach to getting material to the public. There are truly incredible and mind-boggling things in each issue—things you'll never see anywhere else: collages, silkscreens, photographs, visual literature, found art, posters, etc. . . . Highly recommended.

—Harley Lond, *Intermedia* (Dec., 1974).

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The various *Assemblings* compiled by Henry Korn and Richard Kostelanetz, . . . by virtue of the sheer bulk of possibilities presented in each issue, present intriguing challenges to writers and designers.

—Denis Boyles, *Design for Lit* (Exhibition catalog, Maryland Writers Council, 1975).

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Assembling is sub-titled "A Collection of Otherwise Unpublishable Manuscripts" and is a compilation of stories, poems, concepts, visual poems which authors print at their own expense and contribute. *Assembling* doesn't edit, though it chooses who may be allowed to submit. It merely collates, staples, binds, and distributes.

Considering the avant-garde nature of the contents, that "merely" may sound a bit unfair, but it suggests also the compilers' conscious unwillingness to act as editors. The aim is to bypass commercial publishers and to create a publishing scene as independent as possible of the commercial one; as independent of the industry, in fact, as the contributors are independent of established literary standards.

The concept is original and stimulating. Kostelanetz argues well that much avant-garde literature, especially in its visual and other non-language forms, doesn't get much attention above ground. Further, special books of such material, when published occasionally, deprive it of a relaxed and natural context. And more important still, the argument runs, non-competitive publications usually elicit the experimenters' best work and on a voluntary basis.

Fifth Assembling has a lot of innovative and provocative material in it: fold-outs, drawings, objects trouvées and the like, as well as more linear and narrative experiments in fiction.

And of particular interest to local readers is the issue [within *Fifth Assembling*] of the Sydney-based *Tabloid Story*, this one avoiding editorial commitments by running stories from each editor. They are all good stories and testify to a wide range of writing and, presumably, editorial styles.

and collaboratively, will continue to be necessary and respectable, and xerography paper may at times become more honorific than letterpress printing. Especially since the means of production have become more accessible, the pressing problem now, for all alternative publishing, is how to distribute the results beyond one's immediate acquaintances (or mailing list). The best solution is so obvious it remains visionary: a national network of art-conscious wholesalers and retailers capable of handling small, probably slow-moving quantities.

We were pleased to discover that *Assembling* has been read, not only by fellow contributors (who compose a most ideal audience) but by its purchasers, and even those who browse in literary bookstores. Some of the last tell me that they were intrigued by a subtitle that reads, "A Collection of Otherwise Unpublishable Creative Work," and they quickly discovered that the book's contents are, at minimum, clearly unlike anything they had read/seen before. There are good reasons to believe, as I wrote elsewhere, "that the magazine's distinctiveness caused it to be enthusiastically possessed, if not securely lodged within the imaginative memories of many readers; for as the anthropologist Edmund Carpenter observed, 'It is one of the curiosities of a new medium, a new format, that at the moment it first appears, it's never valued; but it is believed.'" Most important, in our judgment, is *Assembling's* realization, simply by existing, of our initial threefold commitment to individual opportunity, unhindered communication, and creative adventurousness, for both the contents and its structure finally reflect values intended by, and hopefully intrinsic to, the process. Behind such a cordial gathering of genuine idiosyncrasy is a freedom and anarchy I personally find exemplary. "Assembled we stand," runs our reiterated motto, "disassembled we fall," and for the *Third Assembling* I added: '*Power to the people who do the work.*'

TEN POLEMICS ABOUT THIRD ASSEMBLING (1972)

1.) *Assembling* was founded in 1970 as a response to a sense of crisis in literary communication and a related distrust of conventional editorial authority. One dimension of the crisis is that imaginative creations of various alternative kinds do not get published in America, and what little that appears in print is not adequately publicized and circulated, even though much evidence suggests that a growing audience for literary experiment exists. Thus, we wanted a medium that would demonstrate the range and variety of current artistic possibility. On the second point, we also wanted an anti-authoritarian editorial structure that would insure that *Assembling* would remain open to "otherwise unpublishable" work of all persuasions. So we hit upon the fortuitous concept of inviting the authors of unusual work to submit a thousand 8½ by 11" copies of whatever they wanted to include, and *Assembling* would collate the submissions into a thousand books. Since the medium is dedicated to avant-garde pluralism, rather than any particular style(s), our biases have never been restrictive enough to

collated and put between soft covers and stapled into a very impressive, thick book.

The result, as the introduction of *Sixth Assembling* says, is "variety instead of uniformity." As Karl Young noted in *Margins*: "The reader has to decide for himself which works are of value and which are not." I am inclined, however, to wonder if that is not always the reader's task, even when material has been pre-screened by editors and publishers who contend they know something the rest of us do not know: namely, what the bounds of literature are supposed to be.

The usual intention of writing—and that includes poetry despite its claims to ambiguity—is to depict what is before us and what is happening to us. There was a time when painting had very much the same errand. But about the time of Cézanne it must have occurred to somebody that the process didn't work if, in fact, we as artists were really trying to stir responses in our audience. We learned that to accurately render an experience did not guarantee that those people seeing our rendition would feel what we had felt. So painters began to put aside the "realistic" aim, and instead of painting what evoked strong sentiment in them they began to paint the sentiment itself; so gradually the object of the picture disappeared into its expressiveness. The technique was entirely used up by the subject and the subject was entirely used up by the technique.

That well-known development of non-realistic art has since taken countless turns, but what is still at the heart of any discussion of media is the method by which an artist, writer, composer, etc. evokes response, no matter what kind of response he evokes, or how well he does it. That this central theme of 20th century art expression has entered so rarely, so meekly, and so ineffectually into our literature is what makes *Assembling* and publications like it necessary. *Assembling's* contributors are trying to get the language out of literature by refusing to accept the traditional responsibility of writers to depict "realistically" what is before them and what is happening to them.

All of us know that there is an enormous, inexpressible gap between what we feel and the words at our command for depicting our experiences. This situation is especially apparent if we are writers who use words for more than matter-of-fact existence. The results of this predicament are far too complicated for me to discuss here, but some of them are relevant to the methods used by the contributors of *Assembling*.

The more we are confronted as writers with the nearly unbearable materiality of words the more we grasp that the very syntax of language which allows us to communicate also automatically limits and defines what we are able to say. Writers react to this conclusiveness of words by becoming intrigued by the process of writing as a thing unto itself. They look for shortcuts which could lead di-

6.) Several contributors wrote that they wished their work got more response; and though *Assembling* forwarded mail in the past, it now seems more practical to include mailing addresses in the contributors' notes. Do write, if you feel inclined; and should anyone wish to reprint anything, please contact the contributors directly. All copyrights are reassigned to their respective authors.

7.) The creation and even the reproduction of alternative work is comparatively easy, but the editorial/distributional complex makes circulation beyond a circle of immediate friends and relatives more problematic. A network of alternative wholesalers and retailers has begun to form; but until it thrives and responds, cooperative distribution, as well as cooperative publicizing-reviewing, must necessarily complement cooperative publishing. All of us belong to this effort, merely by contributing to *Assembling*, or reading it, or telling their friends about it.

8.) The most impressive dimension of *Assembling* is its collaborative structure, which effectively engineers a redistribution of risks and responsibilities. It appears that unless a periodical has many sponsors, narrow-minded dominance is the most likely editorial result of monopoly in either economics or ego. Therefore, the compositional structure of *Assembling* stands as an implicitly anarchist critique of the celebrity-minded and money-hungry authoritarianism that is primarily responsible for uniformity, flaccidity and death in American magazines. Even if *Assembling* itself should die, its easily imitated structure will surely survive under other names, and the editorial-cultural values implicit in such a concept will hopefully endure. Such successors will probably be similarly miscellaneous in overall form, though predictably different in specific content, because unprecedented diversity would seem to be the truest form of any editorially pluralistic compilation done today. This *Third Assembling* materialized, like its predecessors, out of nothing, after a summer of correspondence; and we discovered that such a medium requires more determination (from everyone involved) than either time or money. Each of the contributors—self-editor-publishers all—deserve great gratitude, not only from ourselves but from each other, for their collaboration.

9.) At the end of the preface to the first volume, I wrote optimistically: "In the end, of course, we should like to find the dissemination of [experimental] writing changed so radically that *Assembling* would have no further need to exist." By the end of the second preface, I sounded more pessimistic: "All the reasons that made the first *Assembling* necessary are unchanged, or worse." The first statement now resembles a pipe dream, while the latter is still all too true. Indeed, if current trends continue, xerography paper may become more honorific than letterpress printing, and self-publishing will become, as in Russia, an ultimate test of creative-intellectual seriousness. One difference now is that *Assembling's* founders have come to feel a bit undone, or exhausted, by deleterious circumstances that, nonetheless, must collectively be overcome if what we do shall survive.

10.) The pressing problem now, to repeat, is not that nobody writes or nobody reads but that the channels of literary communication are currently so clogged and corrupted; and because the festering back-up is approaching explosive proportions, our current situation desperately requires more alternative publishers,

more editorially eclectic periodicals, better distribution, more cooperatives, and more intra-literary and inter-artistic cooperation. Assembled we stand; disassembled, we fall.

Power to the People who do the Work.

WHY FOURTH ASSEMBLING? (1973)

Blast sets out to be an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that would reach the Public in no other way.

—Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, et al., “Long Live the Vortex!” (1914)

The major problem in Western cultural communication today is censorship—not the obvious kind practiced in totalitarian countries or the old-fashioned kind based upon licentious content, but a blockage that is more insidious precisely because its existence is not publicly announced or immediately evident. No one in America explicitly says that certain kinds of writing cannot be published—that would be patently illegal—but anyone surveying the scene of cultural communication can see that whole classes of creative work remain totally unpublished. The subtle truth of this censorship is that there need not be a center of control when there is a consensus of neglect. Although visual poetry, for instance, is a respectable international movement, memorialized in several anthologies and many exhibitions, no one-person collection entirely of visual poetry has ever been commercially published in the U.S. Though visual fiction is likewise internationally eminent, no U.S. publisher has ever issued a book of this kind, except as a “juvenile.” When one artist’s work gets “rejected,” that is a personal misfortune; but when whole classes of creative work are blocked, then charges of “censorship” are appropriate.

To make matters worse, it is almost impossible to discuss such censorship in print, hopefully removing its insidiousness by exposure, mostly because that would point to a central hypocrisy of the book industry—its claim that it supports more than subverts the oft-honored ideal of a “free press.” Editors will piously assert that no publisher sets out to prevent the circulation of certain kinds of writing, and that is probably true. However, unintentional does not prevent the development of a *de facto* conspiracy that, for certain classes of writing, repeals the First Amendment by default, totally without the Congressional intervention that is cited in the Constitution. Any writer trying to get this truth (that everybody can see) through established communications channels will find (as I recently did) another kind of nearly total censorship—the “gentlemen’s agreement” that keeps certain facts secret, in spite of their common currency in professional conversation.

A further fault is that reviewers consistently ignore experimental work. There is no regular book “critic” in America predisposed to such writing, and those critics who understand avant-garde literature are rarely asked to do reviews. It was noted elsewhere that *none* of the nearly one hundred titles issued by Ameri-

rectly from what is felt to the page itself. For this reason, most of the pieces in *Assembling* are not only produced without editors but also, in a special sense, without writers. What we see in *Sixth Assembling* are emblematic forms built out of the medium of writing without the intrusion of the process by which language normally communicates and therefore shapes and limits the so-called bounds of literature. We also see a good many examples of irony with which writers produce new forms by ridiculing the methodology of old literary forms. Some of the pieces are fairly straightforward; some take their lead from the Imagists of 1909-17 or the Dadaists of a later decade. But the most interesting pieces are those which depart entirely from the conventional notion of “filling the page with ideas in the form of language” and which create a literature that views the very space of the page (its surfaces, edges, succession, etc.) as an emblematic theatre where motion, image, succession and form have a life of their own.

What *Sixth Assembling* makes clear is that writers can assert new ideas of what writing is all about, and in doing this they are producing effects with words, pages, ink, typewriters, found materials, and print which imply an entirely original method for turning experience into pages.

—Jamake Highwater, *Soho Weekly News* (Dec. 9, 1976). Copyright (c) 1976 by Jamake Highwater.

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The same period in history saw the genesis of contributor-edited magazines and anthologies. In 1968 and 1969, *Amazing Facts* magazine was born in California on a collation principle, and *Omnibus News* was developed in Germany on the basis of contributors sending in their own pages in multiple form. This latter format proved extraordinarily durable, and was used with great success by Ace Space Company in Canada for the *Space Atlas* journals, and by New York’s *Assembling Press* for *Assembling*. While most of these titles no longer appear, *Assembling* continues to flourish under the guidance of Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn and Mike Metz with a *Seventh Assembling* to appear this year. *Assembling* by virtue of its wide distribution and visibility has influenced countless numbers of similar ventures ranging from local art school products to international gazettes such as *Orgon* and *Ovum* from Latin America.

—Kenneth Friedman, “Notes on the History of Alternative Press,” *Lightworks*, 8/9 (Winter, 1977).

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The most exuberant, and exasperating, small press publications are those boldly experimental works which explore the print medium by exploding it. Richard Kostelanetz drives me crackers with his claims for the artistic merit of endless grabbed word progressions, or of

numbers strewn across a page or played backward on a tape. Nevertheless, Kostelanetz and company call attention to the narrow limits of our awareness, how we take print and grammar and meaning for granted. In the Kostelanetz edited anthology, *Essaying Essays*, charts, collages, word-games, scribbles, lists are used, sometimes eloquently, more often idiotically, but always unconventionally, to express notions that ordinary expository prose might not be able to convey. Similarly, in *Assembling*, each of the writer-manufactured submissions is an attack—puckish, passionate, or vitriolic—on our notion of what “writing,” “literature,” or “a book” is or ought to be. Also available from Assembling Press is Henry Korn’s wry, affectionate collection of perspectives on The Champ, *Muhammad Ali Retrospective*. While not all of Korn’s readings of Ali’s motives are persuasive, the fighter emerges from those (not intimidatingly experimental) pages as a man as well as a myth.

—Carl Tucker, *The Village Voice* (Dec. 20, 1976).

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Richard Kostelanetz really staggers the imagination—another publication has listed him as a sort of Renaissance figure in modern garb. After all the things Richard has accomplished as a critic, editor, and scholar, one discovers [in *Visual Language*] that he is also a great visual poet.

—Michael Joseph Phillips, *Small Press Review*, VIII/6-7 (June-July, 1976).

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Anche il poeta newyorkese Richard Kostelanetz, in epoca ancora più prossima, si serve di una spazialità in cui il segno della scrittura esce dall'arbitrario dell'alfabeto per assumere la figurazione dell'idea designata dalle parole. Una sua serie, “football form,” costruisce gli intrecci degli schieramenti di un campo di calcio sulla base delle lettere costituenti le parole “difesa” e “attacco”; la parola “disintegrazione” scompare a poco a poco per cancellazione progressiva ecc. A parte la notorietà di simili procedimenti, i cui primi esempi si possono ritrovare nei poeti alessandrini, in Rabelais, in Carrol e nelle avanguardie storiche del novecento, si nota ancora una concezione tutta moderna di arte come gioco, come ironia, demistificazione operata sui tradizionali messaggi della lingua; una lingua che per l'occasione potrebbe essere l'inglese, o una poetica che potrebbe essere incentrata sul “doppio Joyce,” titolo dato da Kostelanetz ad un altro suo lavoro concreto, costituito da lettere alfabetiche che si diramano a spirali concentriche.

—Carlo Alberto Sitta, *La Gazzetta di Modena* (Nov. 4, 1970).

Also the New York poet, Richard Kostelanetz, still closer to us in time, uses a spatial form in which the sign of the writing breaks out of the arbitrariness of the alphabet to take on the shape of the idea

ca’s most persistent avant-garde publisher, Something Else Press, has ever been singled out for solo review in either the *New York Times Book Review* or the *New York Review of Books*. In March of this year, to cite another sort of example, Something Else issued *Breakthrough Fictioneers*, my own compendious anthology (rejected as “something else” by the big publisher originally paying for it) which contains 101 contributors working in a variety of alternative styles; many of them have also appeared in *Assembling*. Though its current publisher sent review copies everywhere (and I frequently receive private letters in praise of the book), only one review has so far appeared in the U.S. press—by Rich Mangelsdorff, a scrupulous soul who also deserves credit for reviewing all of the earlier *Assemblings*. (Of the 80-plus American contributors to this collection, less than a dozen have had their book-length manuscripts commercially published in the U.S., the others thus suffering censorship at the point of initial publication.) The high sales of books by Barth, Beckett, and Borges indicates the existence of a large audience for serious experimental work; but if potential readers do not hear about a book relevant to their interests (or even about the difficulties incurred in communication), then censorship of a similarly insidious kind has again occurred.

Partially because experimental work is rarely reviewed, books of it are nearly impossible to distribute. Not only are bookstore managers across the country more responsive to the literary-industrial salesmen, but they are all but unanimously reluctant to stock books (or publishers) they have *not* already heard of (i.e., what is *not* reviewed). However, if books that are printed cannot be distributed to their likely audience, then blockage has occurred again. As the novelist-editor Charles Newman perceived, “A classical totalitarian society censors at the production point. An oligopolistic society censors at the distribution point.” He continues, “If we were told, for example, that an anti-establishment novel in Poland was printed in a small edition, went unpromoted and unreviewed, and then was rapidly allowed to go out of print, we would know the reasons why. Here, it happens every day and we are not scandalized.” Precisely for that reason—our refusal to be scandalized—is “democratic” censorship not only more insidious but also more sophisticated (leaving no tell-tale signs).

We once said that *Assembling* was founded in response “to an oppressive crisis in avant-garde literary communication,” but it now seems more appropriate to say that the trouble inspiring its creation was censorship, pure and simple. Instead of declaring, as we have, that our medium is devoted to “otherwise unpublishable creative work,” perhaps we should use the phrase “otherwise censored,” for *Assembling* collects and distributes creative work that would otherwise be kept out of public print.

It was our radical stroke to abolish the conventional sorts of editorial authority, for instead of selecting work “suitable for our pages,” we have asked writers and artists doing unusual, “otherwise unpublishable” work to contribute a thousand copies of whatever 8½ x 11” that they wanted to include. Our job, as *Assembling*’s compilers, would be assembling these submissions into a thousand bound books. Several editorial powerhouses have reportedly objected to our “lack of editorial principle,” but they fail to discern the intelligence implicit in the abdication of authority. For one thing, our compositional guidelines—“otherwise un-

publishable"—have insured that, no matter what was submitted, *Assembling* would be drastically different, not only conceptually but artistically, from other U.S. publications; and sure enough, though both contributions and contributors have changed, the only publication resembling a new *Assembling* is a previous *Assembling*. The cunning paradox is that the denial of authority, coupled with implicitly selective ground rules, will produce roughly similar results, the whole enterprise revealing both a certain style and a certain unity in unparalleled diversity.

A friend, known socially, writes that, "I have been working for some years on pieces that are too strange to submit to magazines. Would *Assembling* be interested?" Of course, we wrote back, "that is precisely what we are for." One invited contributor enclosed several pieces, asking us "Which would be most suitable for *Assembling*?" Since all of his pieces were "otherwise unpublishable," we replied, "That's your decision, not ours." At most "edited" magazines, the assumption is that if writer/artists follow the direction of the editor, their work will thus be better. Similarly, we have persistently refused requests to print contributors' works, for one point of *Assembling's* concept is that, given the crisis of communication (i.e., censorship), serious writers and artists will have to learn the process of communication from its fundamentals. What separates democracies from totalitarian countries is that a citizen here is legally free to initiate contrary actions. Since the printing industry in America is not (yet) policed, self-publication can become, like *Samizdat* in Russia, an ultimate test of creative seriousness—do you care enough about what you do that you will spend the dollars or hours necessary to get it into public print, untouched (or retouched) by editorial hands. "Freedom of the press," A.J. Liebling once quipped, "is guaranteed only to those who own one," or those who will pay the printer. When thirty U.S. publishers rejected Abbie Hoffman's *Steal This Book*, the appropriate response was not dejection or resignation but self-publication.

Writers in democracies can also distribute freely, if only through the mails; and since *Assembling* gives three copies to each contributor, its immediate readership consists of similarly predisposed fellow artists (and their friends)—and that, of course, is the best circulation possible. Indeed, several previously unpublished experimentalists told us that participation in *Assembling* was the most effective way of initially announcing their work (and themselves) to their potential colleagues. However, such efforts now seem to be a mere drop in the bucket of present necessity, which includes the founding of new institutions, responsive to alternative work, at every point along the line of literary-artistic communication. More counter-periodicals and counter-publishers must be created, along with similarly predisposed distribution networks and stores where such items can be purchased, in addition to new media of review and publicity; for everyone reading *Assembling* must consider himself enlisted in a collective effort—making the audience of discriminating book-buyers aware of counter-censorship activities.

The compilers appreciate the contributions of their collaborators, who are, in turn, grateful to each other. Assembled we stand; disassembled, we fall.

designed from words. A series of his, "Football Forms," constructs the interlacings of the formations on a football field on the basis of the letters constituting the words "defense" and "offense"; in another piece, the word "disintegration" disappears little by little through gradual cancellation, and so forth. Such techniques are of course well-known, appearing first in the Alexandrian poets and later in Rabelais, in Carroll, and in the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. Here, however, one sees an entirely modern conception of art as play, as irony, a demystification worked on the traditional messages of the language; a language that for the occasion could be English, or a poetics that could be centered on "After Joyce," the title that Kostelanetz gives to another of his concrete works, consisting of the alphabet's letters spreading outwards in concentric spirals.

—translated from the Italian by Joan R. Acocella.

* * *

Dadelijk valt op met welke intelligente beeldkracht deze rusteloze zoeker begaafd is.

—Paul de Vree, *De Tafelronde*, XV/3-4 (1970).

One is immediately struck [in *Visual Language*] by the intelligent image-force with which this restless seeker is endowed.

—translated from the Flemish by E.M. Beekman.

* * *

Some of the publications of *Assembling Press* are witty. I particularly enjoyed Henry Korn's wry short fictions, "Exact Change," and his "Proceedings of the National Academy of the Avant-Garde." ... I found Donald Porter's "As If a 'Footnote' to the Final Glory. . . ." an amiable burlesque of pedantry, and Kostelanetz's "Visual Language" and "Come Here" viable lively experiments.

—Carl Tucker, *The Village Voice* (Feb. 2, 1976).

* * *

Exact Change, short fiction by Henry James Korn. Freshly short, entertaining looks at a lot of things. Worth it for the cover too.

—*New Letters* (Sept., 1974).

* * *

While probing for vital signs on the corpus of fiction I espied these nine little tales, fluttering beyond the coccyx. To fail reporting this abnormality would be plain nonfeasance.

Exact Change was published by *Assembling Press*, which is affiliated with the *Assembling* collaborative anthologies. Richard Kostelanetz and Henry James Korn co-founded *Assembling*—for the re-

cord—as a showcase for a nearly incomprehensible spectrum of unconventional talents, among which, of course, were the founders and, in fact, your reviewer. Which is to say—if you've neglected your gloss—that Korn (here modestly forbids me, etc.) is both unconventional and talented. Both as a manifestation of their beliefs and on its own merits, *Exact Change* is a very good and interesting book, and does, certainly, fulfill some of the promises on which those anthologies of the "unpublishable" and unmarketable campaigned.

The nine titles are arguably divisible into two classes: the thematic and the scenic. And if classification implies a hierarchy, let me say that I rank the latter as better. Stories such as "One Thing Perfectly Clear"—a truly scathing treatment of Nixon recidivist—or "Dogs in War" (anti-Yahoo), or "The Pontoon Manifesto;" or "Low and Behold"—which is to evangelistic revivalism what curdling is to milk—are fine on the once-over, but fail to substantiate themselves once you guess the trick. Of course, I may've missed my guess. And I may be tacking to catch a puff for the rest; for one of the neater comic episodes in *Exact Change* occurs in "Dogs":

A truly heartbreaking incident illuminating the strange and compelling relationship of man and dog in war, comes to us from the secret diaries of Hector Valdez, a soldier in the service of the great Santa Ana, Napoleon of Mexico.

Each morning, it was Hector's duty to dress the General's troop of sixty-five attack trained Chihuahuas in tiny green, red and white trousers and black felt sombreros with chinstraps. At the height of the siege of Montego Mission, Hector ran the dogs straight into a volley of grape-shot. He wept pitifully for three or four seconds before highjacking a supply wagon filled with tequilla and heading for Tijuana.

And even better canininity follows.

However, where these are what one might call a bit dogmatic, the remainder—"The Damned of Altoona," "The History of France," "Four Dreams Dreamed by the Girl Who Ate Three Desserts," "King Kong in the Kitchen," and "Tampa—June 2, 1898"—are sublime. What might easily be considered a brand of surreal comedy is in fact a dialectic with presumptive reality, posing in each of its details a question about and confrontation with the epistemological and its idiot successor, interpretation.

Kong's cuisine is superb, his service faultless. And if one is prepared to endure a modicum of roaring and chest-beating, or perhaps only a gnashing of simian teeth now and then (for who does not misplace a potholder?), a dinner Chez Kong will be surely a gastronomic event to remember.

("King Kong in the Kitchen")

WHY FIFTH ASSEMBLING? (1974)

In contributing to conventional magazines, most of us fear, to different degrees, that our work will displease the tastes of the editor(s). In contributing to *Assembling*, our principal fear is that our contribution won't display us at our best or won't sufficiently shine above everything else in the book. * * * The latter kind of anxiety is probably more conducive to exceptional creative work, illustrating a point (I have elaborated elsewhere) that changes in editorial circumstance can drastically affect the quality of creative work. * * * My own poetry and fiction, I find, stand out from the pack in most literary magazines; in *Assembling*, the competition is considerably tougher. * * * The initial audience for *Assembling* is select, consisting as it does of the book's contributors; yet copies of its four previous volumes have also gone to public and university libraries, bookstores and private buyers across the country. * * * Since the lack of restrictive authority brings decentralized responsibility, each contributor is ultimately responsible for what she or he does. That principle accounts for why works adjacent to each other in *Assembling* scarcely resemble each other and for why nearly every contribution reveals personal style. Whereas most magazine editors try to achieve a particular kind of stylistic uniformity, the identifiable trademark of *Assembling* is, paradoxically, the unparalleled diversity of its parts. * * * Like the recent New York Book Fair, *Assembling* offers individuals a forum for their alternative initiatives, creating a community merely by bringing like-purposed people and their work together. * * * By reflecting a sum of current directions and alternatives, rather than the selective limitations of a single editor or clique, this collection might also be considered an accumulated representation of "experimental imaginative reality." * * * *Assembling* has, to draw a crucial distinction, not "personality" but *character*, which is in turn composed of a multitude of personalities. *Assembling* is a synonym for "getting it together."

* * *

In the course of doing *The End of Intelligent Writing*, I discovered that whole classes of literature were excluded from the dominant channels of cultural communication—not only experimental work, which particularly interests me, but also novellas in all styles, radical philosophy, books by and about older people, etc. These classes were excluded not because no market existed for such work but because the literary-industrial complex, subservient to the demands of fashion and commerce, was concentrating upon other kinds of writing. * * * It pains me to repeat that no one-man collection of either visual poetry or sound poetry has ever been commercially published in the U.S. (and all the anthologies of "concrete" were done by small presses), and that no book of visual fiction has ever been published here (though such works appear in Canada and in Europe)—none, nada, nothing—even though I receive every fortnight in the mail at least one fine manuscript in these genres and thus must tell their authors a truth they initially refuse to believe—that this

work, no matter how good or "publishable," falls into a class that is currently censored.

* * *

The publicly funded agencies responsible for offsetting the forces of commerce are also neglecting experimental writers as a class. Of the scores of literary professionals supported by Poets & Writers, Inc., during 1972-73 (according to the annual report of the N.Y. State Council on the Arts), only one does visual poetry (Mary Ellen Solt), only one is involved with alternative poetic syntax (Dick Higgins), and none do sound poetry. Of the dozens of poets and novelists receiving grants from New York's Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS), only three do experimental work (Pedro Pietri, John Giorno, and Armand Schwerner). * * * Not only New York is so reactionary. Of the 154 American poets, fictioners, dramatists, and essayists receiving grants from the National Endowment in 1974, none, by my count, are predominantly experimental, though a token few, novelists all, of the winners might be characterized as part-time experimenters (e.g., Albert Drake, Ishmael Reed, and Gilbert Sorrentino). Need I say that private foundations, such as the Guggenheim Fellowship program, are equally neglectful—none, nada, nothing—in spite of the quality and quantity of experimental literary work in this country. Instead of wasting their time with the applications for such fellowships, experimental writers would have been well advised to bet on the horses or the Irish sweepstakes. * * * When an institution totally excludes a single class of human beings from the benefits of life, we customarily say it is "fascist." Does that mean that these cultural institutions are run by fascists? No, probably not, but it does mean, quite clearly, that towards experimental writing they operate with fascistic effect.

* * *

Appalled by such discrimination, I directed a letter of protest to the institution closest at hand, Poets & Writers, Inc.; and their response is not uninteresting. The reply was signed "Debbie Mayer," but a subsequent telephone conversation revealed that all quotations should be attributed to the director of Poets & Writers, Galen Williams. Their reply was that Poets & Writers didn't discriminate against such writers; they just never apply. "I have nothing on them," she(s) wrote, asking "who the hell [the other visual poets] are?" (I directed them to the anthologies *Imaged Words & Worded Images* [1970] and *Breakthrough Fictioners* [1973], as well as all past issues of *Assembling*.) She nonetheless cited two writers on whose behalf I had applied for aid several months before—a visual poet and a sound poet, who had appeared with me on a television program. Subsequent conversation revealed that the reasons why aid was then denied them were invalid; but Poets & Writers, unlike the rest of us, assumes no responsibility for past mistakes (at least in its dealings with experimental writers). * * * Doubletalking, their letter insisted, "We supported more visual poets this year than last," which is claiming aid to individuals of a class whose existence, only a few sentences before, had been vehemently denied! All this seems to echo the familiar lament that "we hire want to hire blacks but just don't find any who are qualified."

Jesus has no use for stand-up comics yet he was transfixed by an anecdote Groucho Marx told on the Cavett Show last week. He's repeated it several times. I wish I knew why.

("The Condemned of Altoona")

The work here bears some resemblance to Bill Hutton's stories in his *A History of America*, though Hutton's more resistantly narrative, skittish, and, to my taste, funnier (though in comedy as in porn repeating the thrill is a plus value, and for Korn's fiction, which is neither, that particular value is negligible). In Korn's vision there is something, certainly, which retards identification. The layering of exotic and often breathhtakingly lovely imagery is cryptic and suggestive, but happens quite fast, moving horizontally and vertically at equally stiff clips. In each case the work sets its own terms, satisfies them, then disconnects. Fortunately, it is a book which is easily read.

—Tom Ahern, *Margins*, 19 (4/75).

* * *

Surely funnier, more black-humored novels have been written than Donald Porter's *As If A "Footnote" To The Final Glory*, but against the vitality of his wit I cannot recollect them. Porter's *Footnote IS* a novel, whatever it may appear to be on first sight. Porter states that "...we still see many a book or piece with the 'chaotic and bewildering look' produced by footnotes. Nothing irritates readers more"; and truly there is nothing in Porter's book which is not footnote; or footnote to footnote; or footnote to the footnote to the footnote to the title. Nothing does irritate readers more, perhaps, but under Porter's skillful eye, the footnotes here bring wild joy, the sheening of a beautiful stone. If *Footnote* does remind us of anything, it is of Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, and perhaps of some stories by Borges. But Porter has chosen to out-reach the master, Nabokov; where *Pale Fire* is ostensibly a commentary on the text of a lengthy poem of the same name, *Footnote* becomes commentary on a title only. And more interesting, and more to Porter's purposes here, "the final glory" of the title is the "footnote." Says our narrator (for there is a narrator in this fiction): "The 'footnote' will be the hottest point in these fires. The 'footnote' will be utter detachment and disengagement, a radical and liberal barrier behind which to hide or fight. Refuge of those escaping the global village. The last and perhaps only means of escaping the 'appearance' of appearances. Or the 'state' of the modern state. Or the 'disposition' of others' dispositions. The 'form' of forms. The 'function' of functions. The 'condition' of conditions. The 'temper' of tempers, the 'dilemma' of dilemmas, the 'plight' of plights, the 'aspect' of aspects, the 'pomp' of pomp, the 'mode' of mode the 'tenor' of tenor the 'style' of style the 'end' of beginnings the 'middle' of middles and the 'beginning' of the end."

The "story" in Porter's fiction, if we may term it a story, is not one set down in description, characterization, or action; rather, we must read the *tone* of our narrator's voice as it modulates toward hysteria. We may assume at the outset that the narrator is a scholar of some sort, cantankerous, to be sure, and versed in scholarly ways, acquainted with language, literature, linguistics, and history. Or we might assume that he is an *anti-scholar*. Not, I say, an anti-intellectual or non-intellectual, but an anti-scholar who stands in relation to *scholar* as anti-matter does to matter. Though I have said there is nothing in *Footnote* that is not footnote, the narrator would dispute even this (*footnote a*): "in this piece, all the words serially after the second superscript [1] shall be regarded as 'text,'... [and] [t]he title of this piece [as if a 'footnote'¹ to the final glory...], shall be regarded as a portion of its 'text.' The sentence now being read is a portion of one of this piece's 'footnotes.'" And of course he is probably technically correct. On the other hand, "are not all statements 'valid' in some way?—with some statements having 'more validity' than others?" If our narrator can say at the end of the book that the footnote will be "utter detachment and dis-engagement," a "refuge," he says at the outset that it is, simply, "a note at the foot of the page, explaining matter important to the understanding of the 'text' of a piece of writing," etc. etc. He moves from dry statement to rhapsody; and who is to say which is more "valid."

Our narrator is not an elder at the campfire, telling the tribal history. Unless, of course, we are a tribe of scholars (or anti-scholars). "The word 'footnote' is not used in our language until the middle of the 19th Century. Our most distant forebears, the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, did not have either such a word or such a function. Only during the Middle Ages—popularly (and properly) known as the 'Dark Ages,' as subsequent 'events' (i.e. statements, conditionals, assertions, tentations, hypothe-cations) in this 'text' will show—did the function (but still not the word) come into existence, when the scholars of that era were faced with the *soi-necessity* of recording their comments on the mountains of scribbling left to them by the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews. These commentators called their comments *marginalia*." We are driven 'forward,' into metaphysical complexities and contradictions, but not without a firm grounding in humor: footnoting the word "margin," the narrator says "This 'margin,' *bien sur*, cannot exist without a portion of the 'text' being on that page—and thus are we, willy-nilly, already into a myriad of complexities for which the several websters' simple 'note at the foot of the page' has not prepared us—for if a 'page' contains no 'text' and yet has 'a note at its foot,' is this 'note' yet a 'footnote'?" Forward, but not without anger: "Abhorrent and irritating and useful as the

The day that the Mayer-Williams letter arrived, as it happened, I was giving upstate an "illuminated demonstration" of my visual poetry and fiction. I informed them of my appearance that evening, and in the mail a few days later came a note informing me that Poets & Writers would contribute to my appearance—not with the usual minimum supplement of \$75.00, to be sure, but with \$25.00. Fifty dollars are scarcely worth writing about, but this episode reflects principles of ethics, value and responsibility—principles that, needless to say, inform scores of comparable dealings with individual writers. What words do we use to characterize an organization that responds to a charge of discrimination with further evidence of discrimination? * * * When the check came, I returned it, suggesting that funds be forwarded instead to my two short-changed colleagues (thereby assuming some responsibility for P. & W.'s default).

* * *

The director of literature programs at the National Endowment told me, this past July, that visual poetry "wasn't Literature." The director of visual arts for the N.Y. State Council on the Arts told me, this past May, that such work "wasn't visual Art." * * * These statements indicate, to me, that each director has missed two central truths of recent art: 1.) the development of intermedia that straddle the old categories, respecting the traditions and values of each. 2.) what is initially perceived as "not art" (or "not poetry" or "not painting") is soon commonly considered to be a new, radical departure within the acknowledged tradition. Statements like these reveal debilitating deficiencies in literacy. * * * In 1939, Wyndham Lewis published a book entitled *The Jews, Are They Human?*

* * *

And even when publicly funded institutions support experimental writing, their granting policies are sometimes more destructive than supportive. In 1973, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, which gets a load of money from both Federal and N.Y. State arts councils, gave *Assembling* \$500, which is peanuts compared to what CCLM gives to journals already subsidized by universities (e.g., \$3000 annually to *Partisan Review*, \$3000 to *Southern Review*, \$3000 to *Tri-Quarterly*). Though this sum represented less than one-half of *Assembling's* annual cost (in money, excluding time), it would have helped pay off the skyrocketing collation bill. However, in an act of peculiar perversity, CCLM stipulated that the money had to be used exclusively for "authors' payments." What seemed sweet in theory—forwarding money to our colleagues—was devastating in practice. Since we already had over one hundred contributor-collaborators (and every new page added to *Assembling* costs us an additional five dollars to collate), we were not looking for many more contributors. Instead, the life of the magazine depended upon our capacity to meet collation expenses, support for which we really needed. Even worse, since the money was not meant to be distributed evenly, the process of deciding who would get peanuts and who not would have put us in the position of becoming precisely the kind of discriminatory authoritarians that we had originally

founded *Assembling* to combat. In short, CCLM was giving us a counter-incentive, if not murderous, grant that invited us to compromise our initial principles, all at our expense (as disbursing agents). With “friends” like CCLM, who needs Enemies?

My colleague, Henry Korn, filed a polite letter, which was rebuffed. So I fired a more accusative letter, which charged that CCLM was corrupting an essentially good cause—subsidizing many non-profit literary journals—in the interests of oiling the conservative few. Since CCLM did not respond by the time *Fifth Assembling* returned from the collator—seven weeks later—and since rigorously succumbing to CCLM’s stipulations would have killed *Assembling*, we invited our contributor-colleagues “to participate in a collective concept piece called GRANT GAME: Here’s how to play: Find your bill for printing costs, or make one up. Send us an official-type letter thanking us for a grant for whatever that sum was, and then say you’re donating your printing costs back to *Assembling*. Don’t forget to enclose your bills, so that we can submit them as ‘proof’ of our fulfilling their stipulations.” By the time we received more than enough receipts to comply with CCLM’s perversity, the organization informed us that the \$500 was “changed to a grant for general support.” * * * But why should we have to hassle a public agency for a little bread, not for ourselves, to be sure, but to keep alive a cultural institution that serves approximately one hundred artists and writers, most of whom would otherwise lack outlets for their very favorite work? * * * *Assembling* exists to fill a need: If no one wanted to produce, at their own initiative and expense, a thousand copies of whatever they wanted to include, *Assembling* would disappear; but whether or not this communications channel can continue its service depends, to an ominous degree, upon outside funding. * * * One measure of the necessity of any medium is whether its demise would leave a perceptible hole in cultural communication.

* * *

That grant-giving organizations should be Philistine is, I suppose, nothing new; but what is new (and terrifying) is the lack of professional protest. It is tempting, I know, for individuals to feel helpless before the intimidating mechanisms of bureaucratic authority. It is equally tempting for experimental writers to dismiss the decision-makers as hopelessly reactionary—unresponsive to either originality in art or considered criticism of their anti-avant-garde policies; but I for one refuse to be so cynical or fatalistic. * * * Experimental literature could die in this country, not from a lack of writers or the absence of readers, but from a lack of support from those life-or-death intermediary agencies charged with responsibility for our cultural future. * * * Unless all of us involved with (and sympathetic to) experimental writing protest and expose such discriminations—unless those in positions of public responsibility are called to account—inequities will continue to recur and recur and recur. Unless actions are taken all along the cultural line, feelings of impotence will continue to prevail; and the crisis that presently threatens the future of literature will become worse and worse and worse. The “losers” will be not only writers but readers. * * * Assembled we stand; disassembled, we fall.

‘footnote’ has become, the lazy printer’s devil who first put them all at the end of the ‘chapter’ (q.v.) should occupy the lowermost circle of hell.” Forward, but not without a smattering of etymology: from Skeat, we find that ‘foot’ “is ‘that extremity of an animal below the ankle,’” *Fot, fet, vite!*, we arrive at toenails; *note*, sign, mark; we arrive at the sign of the toenails, no? No, we arrive at the clay feet of the scholar, or rather “is it perhaps a mark of humility, set down that readers may keep in mind that pages, like their god-like makers, may too have feet of ordinary clay?”

The narrator’s discussion of such matters serves as the framework of the fiction; his voice grows shrill then soft, angry and humorous, sometimes tired. It is in the secondary and tertiary footnotes that the true horrors of the speaker’s vision are revealed: “Wouldn’t it draw a crowd to see the World Trade Center topple and the Empire State Building and the Turbo-Train Tower fall the length of Fifth Avenue?—while all the atoms of the city—including yours and mine—freed from their servile bondage to quotidian and prosaic labor, rise singing hosannas together?” And more: “What imagination and fantasy they [our varied mystics, seers, priests and WhatNotes] would have us accept as reality! After death, at best, we become atoms and molecules in the cosmic field of energy—and will it not be an experience worth the rupturing of billions of our puny sacks of bones apart to finally join hands together with the entire rest of our race, dead and alive, in the greatest orgy of them all, the greatest lovers’ leap of all time, all jump off the precipice together? Can you imagine it?—culmination of all our millennium’s efforts!”

And finally: “Haul our entire program up out onto the surface. Get it out into the open, in the papers and on Tri-V. Lay it on the line—that as a race we want our scientists and politicians to string cobalt devices throughout every city of the world to complete the start our civilization has begun in spontaneously constructing these devices. All set to destruct when any one of them detonates. As usual, the politicians should set—D-Day! Detonation Day! Every soul on the planet looking forward to this wild day of joy and release, budgeting his household moneys to provide a feast. Women packing lunches, men buying their children all the gaily-colored balloons they want and themselves cigars. As if a ‘footnote’¹ to the final glory and honor of the race, all the 100-year-old bottles of wine will be cracked and drunk.”

We find ourselves reading not a coldly reasoned dissertation on the nature and history of the ‘footnote,’ as we may have expected when we opened the book. We find ourselves reading not a cantankerous academician intent on blasting apart staid scholarly conventions. Rather, we are reading a madman intent on blasting apart the world. The irony is, his vision

appears as footnote; if you don't read the footnotes, you miss the vision.

—Tom Montag, *Learning to Read/Again* (1976).

* * *

Lists, by Jean-Jacques Cory; quite literally lists, many of visual interest; opens with quote from Hugh Kenner (*Art in a Closed Field*, 1962): "To adduce lists, to enumerate or imply the enumeration of their elements and then to permute and combine these elements—this, Joyce seems to imply, is the ultimate recourse of comic fiction." Gloss, Glosa, Glossa, *glogh dereu-glosser

—*New Letters* (Sept., 1974).

* * *

Three considerations...

Clark Coolidge calls lists the most advanced form of poetry wherein words are tested against objects and creatures present and those found wanting are considered subversive to clarity of thought.

To adduce lists, to enumerate or imply the enumeration of their elements and then to permute and combine these elements—this Joyce seems to imply, is the ultimate recourse of comic fiction—Hugh Kenner, "Art In A Closed Field," 1962 and the epigraph for *LISTS*.

W.H. Auden: "Poetry makes nothing happen."

All three statements contain varying degrees of truth, Auden's perhaps most of all. The great majority of poetry does make nothing happen because it accepts the world as a given. It is essentially static because it is not under its own control, but is prodded and flailed into directions determined by insanity rather than madness. Freud, for those who still care, did suggest that civilization only endures because of commonly shared neuro/psychoses. Motion does not rest in the Mind but in the mind.

A paradigm...

The World

Joan Rivers
Larry, Curley and Moe
Jack Benny
Frank Zappa
Nigel Bruce
Harold Lloyd
Joe Lewis
Keye Luke
Bob Hope

"I doubt whether a new fucking position has been developed in 4,000 years, but we need constant variations, so we improvise by dreaming up different settings or gimmicks..."
Al Goldstein, editor of *SCREW*

Barbie Benton
Abbott and Costello
Charlie Chaplin

WHY SIXTH ASSEMBLING? (1975)

Unless certain cultural enterprises get sustained support, they simply cannot survive; and the changes implied by their existence will not happen. When one of them dies, we cannot forget, some of the circumstances prerequisite not only for the articulation of minority consciousness, but also for the survival of literature, pass away too.

—R.K., *The End of Intelligent Writing* (1974)

Sixth Assembling comes as a surprise. Since the beneficence committees of both CCLM and the National Endowment for the Arts refused to support *Assembling*, we reluctantly wrote former and prospective contributors, this past May, that those two organizations "have decided that this year you cannot be allowed to publish totally free of editorial constraint. *Assembling* is dead for now." Realizing, as we explained in the preface to *Fifth*, that "our experiment in publishing openness and generosity (both yours and ours) cannot survive without grants," we applied to both those organizations for essential support. CCLM turned us down flat this year. The judges this time were Molly McKaughan, A.D. Winans, Arthur Vogelsang (elected); Robley Wilson, Jr. and Tom Dent (appointed). Even though the NEA guidelines specified that "experimental works" should be favored, one and only one avant-garde press got a grant, *Assembling*. However, not only was the amount insultingly low, compared to what other small publishers got, but NEA specified that the money should go *not* to the annual *Assembling*, which we emphasized in our application, but for one-man chapbooks. As we pointed out last year, the initial grant from CCLM had stipulations that were implicitly murderous, because they would have functioned to increase our publication expenses rather than reducing them; and only a relentless campaign on our part, against the most shameless insensitivity, insured that *Assembling* survived that earlier onslaught. What CCLM tried to do two years ago was finished off by both organizations in 1975, perhaps in petty revenge for the critique of grants that opens *Fifth Assembling*. In May, *Assembling* was dead.

Our letter to past contributors asked for help: "If you know of truly enlightened benefactors, please contact us." To the rescue came Denis Boyles, the head of the Maryland Writers Council, who got access to local collating and binding machines. So, in July, invitations belatedly went out to contributors, instructing them to mail their work to Baltimore. Collated and bound copies will, I hope, be shipped from there. Fortunately, the concept of *Assembling* and the values it represents have won advocates who insured its survival.

We remain haunted by the question of what to do about inadequate literary granting organizations? Both the CCLM and the NEA have been riddled by shameless corruptions, in which publications owned by members of the granting panels or the directing board frequently receive bountiful grants. CCLM has instituted rules to prevent this happening directly (though magazines owned by board members, which choose two-fifths of the granting committees, still get heavily subsidized); NEA remains ethically backward.

Furthermore, both funding organizations ruthlessly discriminate against experimental activity. As I pointed out before, no genuinely experimental writer has ever gotten an individual grant from the NEA. When I made this charge in a symposium, April, 1975, Leonard Randolph, literature program director of the NEA, cited, in response, a prose writer named William Kotzwinkle, whose work I would generously classify as "imitation Brautigan," and which has, for that reason, always been commercially published. (Genuinely experimental writing is *never* commercially published anymore.) Randolph also tried, at that symposium, to create the impression that no writers in America consider themselves experimental, thus denying that people like *Assembling's* contributors exist and could thus merit support. The principal characteristic of NEA's list of individual grant winners is, by contrast, the predominance of names one has never heard of. Do they really exist? Since the composition of the grants committees determine, as the rule, the nature of the winners, it is scarcely surprising that NEA literature panels are stacked with commercial hacks, none of whom until recently was born after 1935, and that no writer of experimental sympathies has ever been a member of this panel—they are Jews, so to speak, in antagonistic circumstances more reminiscent of Nazi Germany than liberal America. And there is no shame.

CCLM, by contrast, lets its constituency choose three of the five judges on its grants committees (*not* all of them, as Michael Anania, current chairman of CCLM, sometimes suggests). Then the CCLM board picks the remaining two, supposedly to give the panel literary-political balance. Characteristically, CCLM's sense of literary-political responsibility excludes experimental writing, whose advocates are never chosen to complete the pool. The same panel that sabotaged *Assembling* also shot down *Interstate*, among other essential experimental journals. In baseball as in literary charity, batters averaging .000 are not likely to hit home runs the next time up.

Cynics say that literary institutions are doomed to be Philistine, that they will always be run by megalomaniacal ignoramuses, carpetbaggers with no appreciable literary achievement, and that self-serving corruption will inevitably be the rule; but it seems to me unrealistic to subscribe to such cynicism. I take the charitable position that, given a chance to better themselves, literary commissars can be more intelligent and that public criticism of their inadequacies increases the likelihood that their successors will be better. After all, there is, just north of us, the enlightened Canadian example of regularly supporting experimental poets and projects. Of course, if CCLM and NEA continue to discriminate against artists and activities that now seem "ahead of their time"—against literature that extends the most estimable modernist traditions—then a fraud has occurred, for money earmarked for the support of excellence will continue to be ripped off by middling mediocrity. Unless there are changes in policy (and perhaps personnel), then the cynics are right, and legal action may be more appropriate than considered criticism. As Billy Preston says, "Nothing from nothing leaves nothing."

Everyone nowadays seems demoralized by an oppressive sense of precariousness. The trouble with survival-by-grants is that they are not necessarily renewed, no matter how well one is doing; and

Ed Wynn
Lucille Ball
Martin and Lewis
Rochester
Ben Blue
Andy Devine
Gentle Ben
Flipper
&

"You know, this really is quite good."
Ralph Waldo Emerson, evaluating his work, shortly before his death.

The Mind

&
Flipper
Gentle Ben
Andy Devine
Ben Blue
Rochester
Martin and Lewis
Lucille Ball
Ed Wynn

"We blew it."
Ken Kesey

Charlie Chaplin
Abbott and Costello
Barbie Benton
Bob Hope
Keye Luke
Joe Lewis
Harold Lloyd
Nigel Bruce
Frank Zappa
Jack Benny
Larry, Curley and Moe
Joan Rivers

Make no mistake about it, Jean-Jacques Cory in *Lists* (1974) is manipulating his reader. His field of reference is not the world, although we do have lists of presidents, writers, masterpieces, masters, cities, mountains, ambiguities, dollar signs, pseudonyms, lackies, the reflections of Herman Kahn, memories and so on. But they are your presidents, your writers, your masterpieces, your masters, your cities, your mountains, your ambiguities, your dollar signs, your pseudonyms, your reflections of Herman Kahn, your memories, and your so ons. Ultimately, all references in his constructions are to your mind. This is a free admission that these lists may, in and of themselves, be meaningless to Cory. His meaning is not his concern; but as he indicates by his selection from Kenner, his concern is comedy. The comedy he intends comes from the tyranny of his testing your associations about the objects/people/read phenomena that float loosely in your consciousness against the responses to them elicited from the particular form in which he has them arranged.

Out of this juxtaposition comes motion. However elevated our tourists' sensibilities about Mt. Everest may be, to discover that it is just one bulge among many, including Mt. Communism which many of us may prefer not because of politics but because it sounds less like a flashlight battery, we are not the same for our discovery. Or perhaps we learn

nothing except the fact that John Quincy Adams took office in 1825. What sinister qualities in the year 1825 have led to its inclusion in a piece of fiction? Nor are we the same for learning that women are perspicacious or that Cory may very well not be Cory at all (his disclaimer to the contrary) but actually Reginald Dwight or even Maximilian Ned. Godfrey Thomas?

We are not speaking here of the mere assimilation of information. Were that the case, Cory would have failed, done nothing more than dug another canal for impulses to pass over in our cerebral cortex. He has done precisely the opposite: overthrow that lingering notion of the reflex arc by smashing reflex against reflex. In so doing he has, as Coolidge suggests, clarified our thought undoubtedly by confusing us. In that confusion, however, there is the possibility of genuine perceptual freedom.

Thomas has moved us with his beauty but we have turned the corner and found ourselves on the same block. Eliot has instructed us with his erudition but has told us nothing that we did not already know. Stevens has been dismissed as a creator of fictions and forgotten. But most importantly, did any of them take us seriously enough to leave us on our own?

A few facts. . .

white pages

—Loris Essary, "Supplementary Opinion," *Interstate* (Summer, 1974).

* * *

[*Recyclings*] is a nonstop word eruption from the churning of an agitated subconscious in what may be the longest run-on string of words since Joyce and Faulkner, an entire book without punctuation, a cut-up, recollaged, cubistically-disjointed word marathon interrupted only by colorful, ass-backward titles above each page, titles puckishly and obliquely indicating the content below them, a touch of mockery jabbing at unhappy experiences and situations in the arts, education, publishing, and various institutions Kostelanetz found personally repressive from 1959 to 1967.

—Blair H. Allen, *Intermedia* (Dec., 1975).

* * *

Mr. Kostelanetz's unique and fascinating *Recyclings*, apparently composed from earlier essays by aleatory techniques, are as difficult to review as they are to perform. In these pieces, the reader must come to terms not with plot, character, theme, or idea, but with words in themselves, devoid of connection, syntax, and guidelines. Performance is controlled by the printed page but remains infinite in interpretation, for the elements of these important texts are simply what they are: words as openness, words as freedom, words as possibility, words as words, of-

doing too well, especially in unconventional ways, can jeopardize one's chances with the next grants committee. In my observation, the magazines that do best with CCLM are, first, those edited by members of the board and, then, those that offend the least. Some people have suggested, in response to our letter last May, that *Assembling* should transcend the predicament of survival-by-grants; but until the economic foundations of our society are changed, or private patronage comes to the rescue, there is no other way to finance such publishing generosity and conceptual integrity. Furthermore, passing the responsibility back to us evades the real scandal of the purposes of literary funding, in contrast to the kind of second-rateness that has so far been favored. These are murderous times; and even an institution as old and persistent as *Assembling* (b. 1970) can be killed off at any time.

II

For the pieces have been made from many different assumptions, and demand a wide variety of responses. The viewer who tries to impose one way of seeing on all the pages will not get far. Some pages call for contemplation, others for the more active participation of eye and intellect, and yet others for a purely aesthetic response; some for serious thought, others for humor. But the aesthetic remains one of many possible responses. . . . We may be called on to include ourselves in viewing the object, to partake in a process; or to use the page as stimulus to thought or fancy or, again, to exclude our personality entirely, dismiss the self in contemplation.

—Jeremy Adler, preface to *A^b* (Visual Poetry Workshop, London, 1973)

People frequently ask us how *Assembling* has been put together? It started with the observation that there exists in America today a good deal of experimental work that is not getting into public print. In my morning mail often comes a packet of unpublished manuscripts, sometimes responding to anthologies I have edited, often accompanied by a pained query asking where such experimental work might be published? Other contributors come to us after reading previous issues of *Assembling*. (On the other hand, we seem to get fewer unsolicited submissions than most little magazines, in part because conventional writers are put off by our invitation to self-publish, but also because they realize that conventional work looks particularly dead in *Assembling*.) The names and addresses of prospective contributors are recorded on a master list of 450-plus artists and writers receiving invitations. This printed note invites them to contribute one thousand copies of no more than three 8½ x 11" sheets containing whatever they wish, printed at their own initiative and expense. *Assembling* agrees in return to collate and bind everything received.

Prospective contributors to *Fourth* and *Fifth* were instructed to send their contributions (boxes of paper) to Greenwich, Conn., where Korn's parents live. These boxes collect into a mountain (illustrated on the cover of *Fourth*) until a weekend in August, when at least two of the three compilers organize the collation. When the boxes are opened, the spirit is reminiscent of Christmas;

the process, though laborious, is full of joyous discovery, not only at meeting new colleagues, but also in comparing the new work of previous contributors with their past pieces. The first readers to be floored by the surprises of *Assembling* are, fortunately, ourselves. We ask that each colleague paste two copies of his contribution to the outside of the package, so that we can remove the top one and add it to the collating dummy. (The one remaining on the box serves to identify its contents at the actual collation.) Once the top sheets are collected, we alphabetize them. We then number these sheets sequentially, and clip the packet together. When this is done, the number on each page is magic-marked on the box containing the corresponding contribution. Thus, the collator can double-check both the page number and the appearance of the page. Last year, this process took Korn and myself a full day. It has been a true thrill to see the initial *Assembling* come together from a pile of boxes to a definitive dummy. Both the dummy and the boxes were then delivered to the collator in Port Chester, New York. In 1973, he took four months to complete this job. His principal excuse for the delay was that, since the boxes were so irregular in size, and since sequentially unrelated contributions were sometimes packed together in a single box, he had trouble organizing his collation. So, in 1974, we repacked several contributions into smaller cartons. The process of organizing *Assembling* is not particularly hard; the real problem is getting prospective contributors to believe you will deliver on your promises. And the best way to foment that belief is indeed always to deliver.

Once the finished magazines arrive from the bindery, Korn and myself spend an evening shipping them off to contributors, who comprise the initial circle of readership. (In 1972 and 1974, we invited New York contributors to a pick-up party.) Other copies are posted to our regular customers, who now number several dozen. Another afternoon is spent delivering copies to such Manhattan bookstores as Eighth St., East Side, Jaap Reitman, New Yorker, Gotham, Wittenborn, Phoenix, most of which sell out their initial supply before the next issue arrives. Thirty copies go to our West Coast distributor, Book People. Orders arrive throughout the year. These are collected by Korn, who lives in Brooklyn, and forwarded to myself for mailing. Most of the edition is stored in Greenwich, so that whenever my supplies run low, Korn goes up to Connecticut for more boxes.

The 1974 collation bill amounted to nearly a thousand dollars. A grant from CCLM paid for \$750 of this. The remainder came out of previous sales and our own pockets. From the beginning, we have also been paying for postage, telephone, travel and other nuisances. (Merely mailing 250 invitations, for instance, cost this year over \$30.00 in postage, envelopes and printing.) While our sales records are inadequate, we do know that very few copies of the first *Assembling* remain and that the supply of the *Second* will soon be depleted. Copies no longer with us, we assume, have been "distributed" and hopefully read.

The way *Assembling* comes together makes it more expensive to publish than most magazines of its circulation (one thousand); for it is, quite simply, cheaper to print on large presses and then to fold and trim these pages than it is to print sheets separately and then collate. However, the cheaper method would extract its price in *Assembling's* conceptual integrity and editorial style. By

fered up by Kostelanetz, and free and open to the play of thought. The *Recyclings* then are words in their purest form, and they are well worth the efforts of performance.

—Welch D. Everman, *Small Press Review*, 27 (April, 1975).

* * *

CYCLING/RE

was time Kostelanetz in lines however recyclings writes straight book his 1959-67 but way is down grammar destroyed and result language from essays recyclings drawn quotes barthes fixed abolished cage demilitarizing kostelanetz breaking from usual straightforward favor more possibilities are significant are to imaginations manner simple it will however mathematical is to is criticism its footing if its context it its common sure are who say book but me that think more than reader are not Kostelanetz's particular nor trends situations he contemporary craft and even and new american moves beyond is analysis what be is place discursive for reasoning critical cannot that require language to needs require method to goals goals are than analysis intend to material allow reader experience epiphany way critical sense is reader is to in gaps shape understanding raw kostelanetz this be eye-opening for readers eyes frown and brains staid does it send searching ideas noticed can us for hidden that formerly us can permit reader return essays commenting two "bad the criticism this of age" "the art of no total" example on dimensions viewed this recycled arts be criticism this be criticism that can down can eyes have closed which wish remain this not only necessarily best or criticism should written it significant least would this anyone in breakthrough or we the garde you do you understand directions is context texture the today.

—"Crusader Rabbit" (Tom Montag), *Margins*, 14 (Oct.-Nov., 1974). Reprinted *Concern/s* Milwaukee, WI: Pentagram, 1977).

* * *

[*Recyclings* is] an autobiography written in experimental prose from where syntaxian order gives way to fractured sentences recollaged in what might seem to be jumbled jam in the understanding of three-dimensional minds. Juxtaposition gives new meaning to single words displaced out of their original positions.

—Blair H. Allen, *Intermedia* (Winter-Spring, 1976).

* * *

SURREAL FLOAT-CONNECT

The Pontoon Manifesto by Henry James Korn (Assembling's co-founder/ editor with R. Kostelanetz) is a post-McLuhan Shandy-esque card-read play 'book' often elegant, sometimes whimsical, more often (politically) satirical and really surreal.

A pontoon being "A flat bottomed boat or portable float used in building a floating temporary bridge," (Webster's Seventh), the verbal card relations of Korn's pontoon, float-connect at the reader's whim: "Thirty-three fictional beginnings to be shuffled and read in any order."

All of which causes the reader to fall back to Dada: The rocking horse lullaby of abstract art: To dream away the shrapnels of post WWI into the calm of chance art and anti-bourgeois shock abstract: Duchamp's Mona Lisa à la 'moustache' reflecting her hidden warm genitalia, his Nude descending a geometric stair, once again revived into the holocaust efficiency computerized nightmare of our twentieth century world of 'ready-mades': the shrapnel of built-in putrefaction obsolescence in the canned chemical cocktail packaging of consumer goods and minds: food, drugs, politics, banking, insurance, taxes, electronic media, book publishing ("hollywood to consumer-junkie dope selling best-seller-dumb"), all jogging to the puppet strings of the invisible faceless Octopus Briareus Giants of this small-to-medium-sized planet Earth, our *Multinational Patriarchies*, who buy and sell worldwide, bowelling into the teeming inchoate Third World's raw materials, cozying contentedly into communist and backwater strike-proof cheap labor markets, choking world economies with skyrocketing oil heists, buying and selling governments, machinating manipulating coup d'états, civil wars, assassinations. . . sandwiching every last inefficient all too human one of us, between fantasy and dream, helpless and bewildered, enforcing upon us the post cubistic dada nightmares of our time. The Surreal of Art (graduated into the Surreal of Life) has become at last Real.

Korn's persona, Poontang Pontoon, a latter-day Huck Finn and his raft riding out of/from yesterday into today, graduated from innocence into the no-nonsense no-sense world of post Tanguy-Ernst-Dali-Kafka-Rousseau, as King of the Jungle, being picked off by poachers who "come by night with their stealth and poison", the President holding off his appointments until "I swim with Jesus in the White House Pool," or Poontang rejecting public office: "no rifles trained on my skull,"; or dreaming himself into an animal, "powerful and smart. I eat what I like and wear my hat both indoors and out as I please."

No Homeric epic poetic purple mantled dawns are here: "Remember to stroke the nose of the dog of dawn." Instead the last card might be this selection, as the author's theme of the game:

This is only intended to be the story of the jester, the king and the wizard.

If you know it why not move on.

—Arlene Zekowski, *Small Press Review*, VII/9 (Oct., 1975).

* * *

making everyone his own publisher, with total control over content, format and paper, *Assembling* induces a dispersion of responsibility that accounts for the book's variousness in style, in content and in printing. Whereas most magazines aim to achieve a uniformity of tone and purpose, the contributions to *Assembling* are incomparably various and thus surprising. No other publication I know demands of its readers such leaps of perception and comprehension from page to page, for *Assembling* exemplifies the modernist idea of changing the artistic means in order to produce a different end. By eliminating editorial authority, the medium invites openness instead of closure and, more important, variety instead of uniformity, in both its contents and its reading experience. As Karl Young noted in *Margins*, "The reader has to decide for himself which works are of value and which are not. One of the main functions of such a magazine should be to shift critical authority from publisher and critic, returning it to the author and reader. With *Assembling* the reader is given the responsibility of exercising and developing his own discriminatory abilities. . . In its ability to stimulate participation it resembles an event as much as a magazine. It could almost be called an international, xenoplastic happening." This may not be "the only way to publish," as one of our contributors suggests; but it is certainly a viable alternative to the restrictiveness of both the literary-industrial complex and the coterie journals. *Assembling* also expands one's sense of what a spine-bound book can be.

Assembling is, by now, a truly international magazine. We have received submissions from nearly every state in the U.S., in addition to Argentina, Australia, Holland, France, Italy, Germany, Finland, and Great Britain. Issues have been favorably reviewed in most of these countries, as well as in the U.S. There are *Assembling*-like publications in Michigan, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Spain, Italy, Argentina, Australia, most of which have acknowledged our pioneering role. Some contributors have gone to exceptional trouble to deliver their work—one German even persuading his stewardess sister to deliver his package personally, another pedaling his bicycle across state lines. If there were no need for *Assembling*, nothing would follow this preface; but as long as artists and authors of "otherwise unpublishable creative work" continue to contribute at their own initiative and expense, *Assembling* ought to live. Assembled we stand; disassembled, we fall.

WHY SEVENTH ASSEMBLING? (1977)

for Karl Young

For a show to be "independent," everything submitted should be shown.

—Ad Reinhardt, "On Standards in Art" (1953)

Assembling's "editorial" innovation was inviting artists and writers whom we knew to be doing "otherwise unpublishable" work to submit one thousand copies of whatever they wanted to

include. Every year but one for the past seven, *Assembling* has assembled the results of our invitation. The humane assumption was that if intelligent, creatively serious people are allowed the freedom to do literally whatever they want, their contributions will be extraordinary, in unpredictable ways.

By inviting contributors to print their work themselves, we also gave them control over its final appearance. Ideally, the expense and nuisance of self-publication should not be necessary, of course. However, as Karl Young, a sometime contributor critically judged, "In this imperfect situation, I think it's better to pay for your own printing than either have your work unpublished or printed incorrectly."

Because contributors to *Assembling* want not to please the authoritarian editor and blend into his format, but to stand out from the pack, they are more likely to do extraordinary work. They can be as free as they want (and can afford) with their technologies as with their imagination. Contributor freedom becomes a license to excel.

"Creative editing" ultimately means revising the ground rules of editorial inclusion in order to produce something different. Karl Young thinks that *Assembling* represents the "only one gut innovation in magazine editing techniques...since Pound's efforts." Thanks. We're glad someone noticed.

Assembling as a whole implicitly challenges the editorial cult of uniformity that plagues most American periodicals—the sense that all the contributions might have been written by one person employing a variety of pseudonyms. Thanks to this unfortunate cult, most periodicals regard their contributors as slaves in a galaxy. If they don't pull their load, down the river they go.

As an anarchist, I am personally predisposed to less authority, rather than more; and I'd like to think the ultimate themes of *Assembling*—the sum of all its parts—have been liberation and community, which are the classic anarchist ideals.

"The artist no longer creates one or several works. He creates creation." —Nicholas Schoffer.

Both the initial *Assembling* and *Sixth* lacked the convention of a printed spine along the binding. This absence enabled the reader (or shelf browser) to see the variousness of its contents, visually represented by perceptible differences in the color and thickness of its paper. Where the reader expects to see the title, *Assembling* revealed its compositional process and thus its singular identity—that this book is an assembling of variousness, rather than an "editing" of similarity.

The best anthology I read this past year was *Art Studies for an Editor* (Abrams, 1975), in which art writers who had worked with Milton N. Fox, the late editor-in-chief of Harry N. Abrams, Inc., were invited to contribute whatever they wished. The sumptuously produced book includes conventional scholarship, polemical attacks (mostly on avant-garde art), a scholar's personal complaint about his research difficulties, June Wayne's original interpretation of the artist as metaphorically "female" in art-business relationships, Allan Kaprow's description of an intimate "happening," my own "numerical meditation." In a further denial of the cult of editorial uniformity, some of the essays are published in the original French; another includes passages of untranslated German.

Henry James Korn's *The Pontoon Manifesto* is, as he subtitled it, "thirty-three fictional beginnings to be shuffled and read in any order." We have seen random-order or shuffled novels before, of course, but we still ask: why has no order been imposed by the artist? isn't it part of the artist's function to impose order on the chaos of his materials? We might want to scream, yes, yes, yes, given the fact that we are facing an inherently difficult fictional creation. *The Pontoon Manifesto* is not difficult for reasons of vagueness, nor for its lack of "plot," nor even for the fact that it is printed on 3" by 5" index cards. As artist, Korn has chosen to be specific and exacting, yet he refuses to define for the reader the possibilities inherent in his materials; Korn has chosen to impose that order on the materials which his readers themselves impose. As a novel, *The Pontoon Manifesto* can be read as many ways as it can be shuffled, each shuffling creating a new ordering of the cards, a new plot, a new beginning and end. The thirty-three fictional beginnings are just that: beginnings. The creation of the novel itself, of character, plot, action, conclusion, is entrusted to the reader; Korn seems to believe that our minds hold as many interesting possibilities as his.

One card says: "I'm beginning to sense the onslaught of fragmentation. What an honor to be afflicted by a disease that affects the great and humble alike." In our daily lives, we perceive the world around us in a fragmented way; our senses are bombarded by disparate stimuli, yet we make "sense" out of the chaos, we create a wholeness, a unity in our minds. In our daily newspapers, we read—if we read the paper at all—story after isolated story about events here and there, separate events each with its own meaning and ramifications. Yet, putting the paper aside and resting our eyes, we congratulate ourselves, thinking that we "know what went on in the world today." Very seldom are relationships between news stories made clear and explicit; we are not given the connections. Yet we make them, we make our world whole. Korn is simply asking us to make his "story" whole, each one of us to reach our own particular fictional *denouement*. It is that simple, and that complex. "I hope you don't think any of this is my fault," he says, continuing, "In my other life I was a fish or a great brown bear foraging the underbrush for treats. My current guise is highly tentative." We might wish to read this "book" as a story about creating a story, and in a large sense it is. But whether Korn is speaking about Poontang Pontoon or about the President in the White House bathroom, he is also speaking about the way the artist must work: "How impressed I am with those who can work their will upon the world. No wonder their every move is followed by thunderous applause and the eye of an assassin." We may read this statement as a refusal, in an artistic sense, to define

for any reader the particular shape of the fictional world. In doing so, Korn loses the "thunderous applause," but he also avoids having his moves followed by the "eye of an assassin." What Korn achieves, finally, is a "story" that is a fictional creation, yes, the formulation of which is modelled upon the way each one in his audience actually "reads" the stimuli and events of the world around him. How we perceive the thirty-three stimuli Korn sets down for us to respond to determines how we can read his *The Pontoon Manifesto*.

—Tom Montag, *Learning to Read/Again* (1976).

* * *

Experimental Prose also deals with the things that can be done with language and words with the human voice/voices . . . The overall effect is hauntingly good.

—Tom Person, *Laughing Bear*, 2/3 (1977).

* * *

[*Rain Rains Rain*] is a great piece. It's printed on cards so you can read it straight, nail it around your living room walls, lay it out on the floor, or drop it off your apartment roof so your friends can photograph it going down as your own variation. . . . Richard Kostelanetz has once again proven that he is a fine poet and graphic artist.

—Tom Person, *Laughing Bear* (Summer, 1976).

* * *

With the publication of *Muhammad Ali Retrospective*, Korn fulfills his promise and emerges as one of the most polished, expert and "professional" writers on the current scene. . . . Korn is obviously derived from the School of Mailer, . . . but in a sense Korn has gone Mailer one step better and got rid of Mailer's looseness, loquacity, and omnipresent "I"—without losing his specific, hard-imaged language and psychological penetration. This book should be put on all required reading lists of contemporary American fiction.

—Hugh Fox, *Choice* (1977).

* * *

Kenneth Gangemi's *Corroborae* illustrates the imaginative conditions that actual life springs from. Twenty-seven brief tales followed by twenty-seven "miscellanies" of crazed comparisons and stretched metaphors drained from countless notebooks.

—George Myers, Jr., *X*, 4 (Summer, 1978).

* * *

It's a shame that in a family publication we're unable to quote some of the really sizzling funnies from [*Corroborae*], this absolutely whacky, clever comic send-up of tales and nonsense bits.

Perhaps the worst anthology I read this past year was *State-ments* (1975), by the Fiction Collective. Half of the twenty-six selections had limp first-person narrators who tended to sound alike. All but a few of the contributions were so similar in tone that I successfully worked their opening lines into a stylistically coherent paragraph. This book, unlike the other, put me to sleep.

Since the organizers of *Assembling* are "compilers," rather than "editors," there is no reason to believe that we think the following works are "good" or that the reader should think so too. *Assembling* does not come to you with that kind of blanket editorial imprimatur. Almost everyone agrees that "the contents of *Assembling* are terribly uneven—some good, much bad," but we are no more sure than the next reader which are which. Instead of proclaiming incomparable quality, we believe only that its artists and authors do unusual work that is "otherwise unpublishable" and should thus be allowed an opportunity for free communication that would otherwise be denied them.

We also assert that *Assembling* will give you a reading experience of incomparable variety.

The only "table of contents" in *Assembling* is the biographical notes that appear alphabetically in the back pages of the book. Nothing is "featured" on the cover (or anywhere else). The contributions are collated alphabetically. No reader can tell "who" is in the book until he turns to the back; he cannot tell "what" a contributor's work is like until he looks at it. Diversity requires each contribution to stand alone. *Assembling* is one book whose cover tells you little. As Karl Young observes, "The reader has to decide for himself which works are of value and which are not."

Precisely because of its anti-authoritarian process, *Assembling* is chock full of surprises—not only unknown artists and writers but familiar names doing work quite different from what we normally associate with their names. The details, as well as the whole, testify to its distinction.

"Langston Hughes is a separate chapter, a Negro Poet, . . . a natural writer, if not much of a poet perhaps. Generous to a fault, a self-appointed clearing house of information and advice, daddy of them all, providing spiritual and often physical food, revered even by the young who did not like his work, Hughes actually read the hundreds of manuscripts he received, he actually did something about the ones he thought had merit and actually believed that the occasional spark was worth the effort." —Paul Breman (1969).

Assembled, we stand; disassembled, we fall.

FURTHER NOTES (1978)

The initial essay was written in 1972 to appear in *The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook*, edited by Bill Henderson; and in recalling the early history of *Assembling*, it marked a turning point. By the following year, we began to receive grants that enabled us to hire a commercial collator, GFI, Inc., in Port Chester, New York, which sorted and bound *Fourth Assembling*, *Fifth*, *Seventh* and

Eighth. In addition, by 1974, we expanded the policy begun in 1970 with my own *Visual Language*, of issuing one-author books, apart from the annual *Assembling*. Korn published his first collection of short fictions, *Exact Change*, and it was cited among the "Best Small-Press Books of 1974" in *Library Journal*. Metz self-published *Model/Hideout*, a stunning set of photographs with handwritten notations documenting a sculptural process. Donald Porter, a sometime *Assembling* contributor, joined us to publish his complex comic story about the (mis)uses of the footnote, *As If a Footnote to the Final Glory*; Jean-Jacques Cory published his well-received collection of scrupulously enumerative poems and stories, *Lists*; and I published the opening third of my initial experiment with nonsyntactic prose, *Recyclings*, which is sub-titled "A Literary Autobiography, Volume I, 1959-67."

By 1975, this dimension of *Assembling* Press had expanded considerably with Korn's *Proceedings of the National Academy of the Avant Garde* and his note-card version of *The Pontoon Manifesto*, in addition to my own visual fictions—*Come Here, Modulational Extrapolate*—and my broadside-poster *Manifestoes*. In the following year we published a sumptuous edition of Korn's long fiction, *The Mubammad Ali Retrospective*; my own long poem as a packet of cards, *Rain Rains Rain*; a cassette of my audioart pieces, *Experimental Prose*; a newsprint book of my *Numbers: Poems & Stories*, which was included in the annual book exhibition of the American Institute for Graphic Arts; and Denis Boyles' intelligent and suggestive essay on the possibilities of book design, *An Introduction to Design Poetics*. In 1977 came Kenneth Gangemi's meticulously wrought book of nonsense, *Corroboree*, and Metz's retrospective, *Selected Structures*, which photographically reproduced his sculptural work of the previous eight years. By 1978, we needed to reprint *Mubammad Ali*, which had sold out its first printing, thanks largely to Hugh Fox's favorable piece in *Choice*, a review magazine for librarians; and we finally released my own book of previously uncollected critical essays, *Twenties in the Sixties*. The last two books were co-published with Wild & Woolley, an Australian firm which also distributed our other books on the sixth continent. All of these books represent, I think, an extension of the annual and its purposes, for they would have been otherwise unpublishable, were it not for *Assembling* Press.

The years since 1972 have also brought more widespread recognition of *Assembling*. Reviews since then have nearly always been favorable—in *The Sobo Weekly News*, *The Village Voice*, *Minneapolis Tribune*, *Intermedia*, *Second Aeon* (Wales), *De Tafelronde* (Belgium), and *The Australian*. Korn and myself have regularly been invited to discuss *Assembling* on radio and at public forums, and the magazine has been included in international exhibitions of the literary-artistic avant-garde. In 1974, Karl Young organized for *Margins*, a small-press review journal, a symposium, devoted to *Assembling*, that appeared the following year. It was Young's characteristically ingenious and appropriate idea to invite contributors to *Fifth Assembling* "to respond to one piece or one fellow contributor" and then to publish their responses unedited. (The entire symposium is reprinted in the following pages.) As an introduction to this symposium, Young contributed a critical essay that remains the most brilliant and insightful appraisal of our radical medium. Perhaps the best tribute I personally can pay Young is

Former Palo Altan and Stegner Fellow at Stanford, Gangemi points to the influence of various major artists, such as Samuel Beckett, Charles Chaplin, Lewis Carroll, Stephen Leacock, Edward Lear, Jonathan Swift, Erik Satie, even Joyce and Rabelais. And yes, echoes are there. Also a lot more that we can't talk about here.

Suffice it to say that in this grim age of ours a little wit is a precious thing and goes a long way to lighten the dark outlook. We need it; we should cherish it.

Particularly appropriate is Gangemi's epigraph: "Don't tell me," he quotes William Pitt, "of a man's being able to talk sense; everyone can talk sense. Can he talk nonsense?" A question that Gangemi is constantly asking us all through this chuckly, outrageous little romp, and one we should never stop asking ourselves.

—Charles Beardley, *Peninsula Living* (March 5, 1977).

* * *

Sub-titled a book of nonsense, [*Corroboree*] presents a series of rambling disjointed comments on life over a very wide range of subjects. It is extremely funny at times but the language used is rather on the strong side for those with a conservative nature. Good reading for the "in-crowd."

—*The Book Exchange* [London] (April, 1977).

* * *

In this aisle-roller of brilliant experimental fiction, you cannot swim past the razor-sharp coral of nonsense satire without being raked somewhere, and you laugh anyway. Stories shrink smaller toward the end until the non-matching Miscellany of footnotes equals the story size, reflecting oceans of absurdities in our time.

—Blair H. Allen, *Los Angeles Times—The Book Review* (Dec. 11, 1977).

* * *

[James] Laughlin is most vulnerable when we quote his challenge from *New Directions* No. 3 (1938) that his journal would feature otherwise unpublished works. Today only Richard Kostelanetz's *Assembling* does this.

—Jerome Klinkowitz, *The Nation* (June 24, 1978).

Seventh Assembling interfaces dadaists, concrete poets, minimalists, intermedia, the New York School, fiction, collages, intentionally ripped or stapled pages, installations, and pages to be folded in 3-D geometric shapes. Warning: "given the process of publishing...there is no such thing as a 'defective copy'." Free from editorial fascism, *Assemblers* submitted 1,000 pages "containing anything." ... To be "extraordinary in unpredictable ways" is still operative here. Annual.

—Val Morehouse, *Booklist*, 74/20 (June 15, 1978).

PUBLICATIONS

Assembling, compiled by Henry Korn and Richard Kostelanetz, 1970. 162 pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Henry James Korn. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated and bound by Electronic Reproduction Service Corp., New York, NY. Contributors: Vito Acconci, Tom Ahern, Arakawa, Lee Baxandall, Gay Beste, Wolfe Blotzer, George Chambers, Marvin Cohen, Regina Cohen, Mad Dog, Raymond Federman, Rosalie Frank, Paul Friedman, Madeline Gins, Elizabeth Ginsberg, Dan Graham, Aime Rene Groulx, Jan Jacob Herman, Roni Hoffman, Scott Hyde, David Ignatow, Arno Karlen, Lynn P. Kohl, Henry Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Robert Lax, Arthur Layzer, Bernadette Mayer, Carole Spearin McCauley, Peter Melnick, Richard Meltzer, Michael Metz, Elana Nachman, "Richard M. Nixon," Liam O'Gallagher, Michael Joseph Phillips, Edward Ruscha, Alan Sondheim, Ronald M. Spatz, Rosmarie & Keith Waldrop, Nancy Weber, Hannah Weiner, Steve Welte, Stephen Wiest.

Visual Language, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1970. 64 pp., 6 x 9, saddlestitched. His initial collection of visual poetry. Designed and drawn, with an afterword, by the author. Dedicated to S. Foster Damon. Printed by Publication Press, Baltimore, MD, under the supervision of David Seham, in an edition of 2300 copies with white covers and 150 copies with red covers; the latter were signed and numbered by the author. Contents: Manifestoes, Nymphomania, Lollypop, Nixon-Noxin, After Hawthorne, Cold War, Me, Anagogy [I], Concentric, Truth, Smog [3], Orgasm, Magnetism, Miscegenation, No, Gossip, Bikini, P [2], Telephone Dial, Black-White, God-Dog, Intercourse, Tributes to Henry Ford [5], Climb, Echo [negative], Ellipse, Eye Chart, Enclosure, Duration, Echo, Twiggy, Christmas, After G. Herbert, Cultural Exchange, Yo-Yo, Trial by Jury, Integration, After J. Joyce, Desperation, Marriage, A Museum, Bowdlerize, Pie Are Square, Asphyxiation, Chaos, Arise, Care Not, Football Forms, Disintegration.

Second Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn, Mike Metz, 1971. 180 pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated and bound by Mike and Madeline Metz, Providence, RI. Contributors: Tom Ahern, Adele Aldridge, Dana Atchley, Gay Beste Reinck, Marvin Cohen, Jean-Jacques Cory, Mad Dog, John Dowd, Borneo Jimmy Dupree, Russell Edson, M.D. Elevitch, Raymond Federman & Bruce Jackson, Eric Felderman, Rosalie Frank, Ken Friedman, Jochen Gerz, Elizabeth Ginsberg, CPGraham, Karenlee Grant, Pat Gunkel, A. Guthrie, Jan Herman, Roni Hoffman, Davi Det Hompson, Ruth Jacoby, Stephen M. Katcher, Peter Koper, Henry

that he deduced, far better than I, the significance and implications of our editorial method. In addition to identifying *Assembling* as the "only one gut innovation in magazine editing technique" since Ezra Pound's *Exile*, he perceived that our open invitation could be as implicitly discouraging as encouraging, fortunately discouraging precisely those artists and writers who did *not* need *Assembling*, and whom *Assembling* did *not* need.

We fear self-publication. The writer fears it because it inherently confers no distinction; it has not the authority of print or the implied backing of at least a publisher and his staff. . . . Distinction is not conferred on [Assembling's] contributors by inclusion. If a work appearing in Assembling is admired, it will be admired not because it has been included but because of its own merits. The kind of contributor who wants recognition only, not recognition for anything he's done, will not be interested in contributing; if anything, he would be embarrassed by this form of self-publication. People who do conservative work—of whatever quality—will probably not want to appear in the magazine either; they may have enough conviction in their own work to publish it themselves but will probably not want to appear in the company of radicals who make up the bulk of the contributors. So a sort of natural selection occurs in the plan of the magazine. If sincerity is one of the basic requirements of a writer, we will find the insincere weeded out before he has even decided to contribute anything.

To put it differently, even though *Assembling* theoretically opens itself to everyone, it attracts only those who would want to join its company. "The majority of people who would be unsuitable—the insincere, the conservative, the vacuous, the well-published," he concludes, "simply don't contribute."

Young also confronts the false belief that contributors, if left free to contribute anything, will necessarily submit their weakest work. That does not follow at all. Since they are paying for it, it would be foolhardy for anyone to contribute anything they did not think of value; and since this work will be appearing in highly self-selective company, it would be equally foolhardy to contribute anything that was not competitive.

The structure of the magazine [Young continues] can encourage a contributor to keep on coming up with new material. He will not want to contribute superficially innovative material, because other contributors will be able to see through him if he does. There is something demanding about the freedom an Assembling contributor has. That vacant space he's given can draw something out of him, challenge him to do his best. We've heard a lot about the way competition can stimulate; here's one of those odd cases where it really does.

Young also sees how the absence of editorial authority can be editorially advantageous. "An author may not be the best judge of his own work, but an editor's judgment will not *always* be better than his. At least in an unedited context you have the chance to see what the author chooses—what you see is the result of the author's decision rather than a second person's." I find what one judges in *Assembling*, especially after he has read several of them, is less the quality of work, which is often too unusual to be easily measured, than the quality of participation, which is to say how

well each contributor has exploited the opportunity of creative freedom.

Finally, Young emphasizes the esthetic advantages of printing something yourself, for those of us who do visual poetry, say, sometimes find that publishers misprint it: the image is turned upside down, or sideways, reducing, if not losing, not only esthetic impact but possible meanings. "In the case of visual works," he writes, "it is almost absolutely essential that works be printed *exactly* as the author wants them. . . . *Assembling's* contributors needn't fear production problems." Whether they print it themselves or hire the job out, they can see the final result, exactly as it will appear in the magazine, prior to shipping it to us. "These contributors at least will know how their work will appear before they send it off and have the option of not using an unsuccessful piece or having it done over." Young continues, "It's better to pay for your own printing than either have your work unpublished or printed incorrectly."

* * *

Most people think that a publication as critically acclaimed as *Assembling*, not only with contributors but with readers, would have no trouble obtaining support from publicly funded granting agencies. As the preceding history makes clear, such expectation has not, alas, been sustained. The selection committees of *Assembling's* possible benefactors—the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts—have year after year been consistently rigged, not only to favor particular benefactors (or kinds of benefactors), but also to exclude kinds of excellences that might otherwise compete with the rake-off of the available pie. This deleterious jury-rigging is done by the folks at the cultural agencies who choose the selection committees—the administrators, in collaboration with the overseers (also called "The Board of Directors" or "The Council"). Jury-rigging works in two ways: 1.) the selection of judges who can be expected to favor certain interests; and 2.) the complete exclusion of judges sympathetic to other competitive interests. That group most ruthlessly and continually excluded, in part because their excellences are so "threatening" to the entrenched cabals, are those working at the frontiers of literature. Nothing is more penalized in current cultural funding than excellence that is not tied to power. (For more detailed examples of jury-rigging and other corruptions, see my book *Grants & the Future of Literature* [RK Editions, 1978].) More perilously, the pursuit of power generally undermines the pursuit of excellence. We have reluctantly discovered that *Assembling* is envied—not only because it is audaciously distinctive, but also because it is much *larger* than other American magazines, its increasing size becoming a patent index of the number of people willing to put their own effort and expense into its survival. (Most magazine editors realize that they could never marshal this kind of hardrock support from their contributors.) Fortunately, by the late seventies, such inadequacies and hypocrisies are frequently exposed, and one possible benefit will be greater intelligence and sophistication about literary support.

Optimism about the future notwithstanding, it should still be noted that rigged juries at CCLM turned down our application for *Sixth* (1975) and *Eighth* (1978), both times jeopardizing our service.

J. Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Ruth Krauss, Barbara Jo Leer, Richard Lyons, Robin Magowan, Richard Meltzer, Mike Metz, Gary Moore, Tom Ockerse, Clemente Padin, Bern Porter, Ely Raman, Kathy Schenkel, Ellsworth Snyder, Alan Sondheim, Lilly Sovary, Ronald Spatz, Ely Stock, Sharon Stockley, Suzanne Szlemko, Betsy Wallace, Stan VanDerBeek, Nancy Wolf, Nicholas Zurbrugg.

Third Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn, Mike Metz, 1972. 280 pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated and bound by an anonymous fireman and his family, Providence, RI. Contributors: Tom Ahern, Adele Aldridge, Blair H. Allen, Michael Andre, Mary Ashley, Dana Atchley, Jane Augustine, John Baldessari, Neil Baldwin, Stanley Berne, Arthur Binder, Jeanie Black, Douglas Blazek, Bobby Bonbon, Jerri Bonbon, Lew Carson, Marvin Cohen, Jean-Jacques Cory, Coral Crosman, Lee DeJasu, Wally Depew, John Dowd, Helen Duberstein, Russell Edson, Ken Friedman, John Furnival, Marjorie Gamsco, Jochen Gerz, Elizabeth Ginsberg, Daniela Gioseffi, Anthony J. Gnazzo, CP Graham, Ronald & Beatrice Gross, Roni Hoffman, Davi Det Hompson, Nelson Howe, Ruth Jacoby, Arno Karlen, Stephen Michael Katcher, W. Bliem Kern, Andrea Kirchmeier, Shoichi Kiyokawa, Barbara Knight, Peter Koper, Henry Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Ruth Krauss, James Krusoe, Arthur Layzer, Richard Lyons, Richard Mathews, Barry & Mary McCallion, Richard Meltzer, Mike Metz, Michelina Metz, Richard Meyers, Cyril Miles, Stuart Mills, Gary Moore, Tom Ockerse, Tom Olson, Howard Pflanzler, Michael Joseph Phillips, Bern Porter, Jonathan Price, Ely Raman, Rochelle Ratner, Grace Rooney, Sarenco, Corinne Sayer, Kathy Schenkel, Barry Schwartz, Nancy Scott, Valerie Harms Sheehan, Ron Siliman, George Drury Smith, Ellsworth Snyder, Alan Sondheim, Ronald Spatz, Ernie Stomach, Suzanne Szlemko, Pat Tavenner, Paul Violi, Keith Waldrop, Rosmarie Waldrop, Shirley Woodson, Arlene Zekowski.

Fourth Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn, Mike Metz, 1973. 274 pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated and bound by GFI, Inc., Port Chester, NY. Contributors: Bob Aab, Adele Aldridge, Jane Augustine, Bruce Andrews, Mary Ashley, Barbara Baracks, Adrienne Blue, Beau Geste, Jeanie Black, Betty Bressi, Donald Burgy, Deb Casey, David Chirlin, City, Fletcher Copp, Jean-Jacques Cory, Colonel Cracker, Stravos Deligiorgis, Wally Depew, Albert Drake, Helen Duberstein, Borneo Jimmy Dupree, M.D. Elevitch, Eric Felderman, Hugh Fox, Siv Cedering Fox, David Franks, Christopher Franke, Susan Gallagher, Kenneth Gangemi, Daniela Gioseff-

fi, Anthony J. Gnazzo, Klaus Groh, CP-Graham, Bill Harris, Bob Heman, Nancy Henderson, Dick Higgins, Roni Hoffman, Davi Det Hompson, Robert Horvitz, Joe Johnson, Anson Kenny, Shoichi Kiyokawa, Konglomerati [Richard Mathews and Christine & Steve Smith], Debi Kops, Henry Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Ruth Krauss, Herbert Krohn, Carol Law, Alan Fred Levine, Thomas Macauley, Mad Dog, Robin Magowan, Aaron Marcus, Tim McDonough, David Melnick, Richard Meltzer, Nina Mende, Maurizio Nannucci, F.A. Nettelbeck, Northwest Mounted Valise [Stu Horn], Jim Peters, Rebecca Rass, Rochelle Ratner, Joe Ribar, Kathy Schenkel, Nancy Scott, G.P. Skratz, Alison Sky, Pauline Smith, Phil Smith, Ellsworth Snyder, Alan Sondheim, Pat Tavenner [with Irene Dogmatic & Opal Nations], Miroslav Todorvic, Rodham Elliott Tulloss, Timm Ulrichs, Walter Whiz, Michael Wiater, Chester L. Wickwire, Jeffrey Winke, Steve Zwint.

Exact Change, by Henry James Korn, 1974. 24 pp., 8½ x 11, perfectbound. His initial collection of short stories. Cover by Mike Metz, incorporating an offset lithograph by Scott Hyde. Dedicated to Joan [Korn]. Printed by Mouner Offset, Staten Island, NY, in an edition of three hundred copies. Contents: The Condemned of Altoona, The History of France, Four Dreams Dreamed by the Girl Who Ate Three Desserts, King Kong in the Kitchen, One Thing Precisely Clear, The Pontoon Manifesto, Tampa—June 2, 1898, Dogs in War, Low and Behold.

Lists, by Jean-Jacques Cory, 1974. 32 pp., 5½ x 8½, saddlestitched. His initial collection of poems and stories. Cover designed by the author. Dedicated to Kenneth Gangemi. Printed by the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY, in an edition of one thousand copies, twenty-six of which were signed and lettered by the author. Contents: Also by the Author, Soliloquy, Two Extended Meditations, Testimonial, Fictions of Leadership, Xanthaline, Education, Tripping, Account, Form, Mountains I Have Scaled, My Very Favorite Authors, Ambiguities, Enrichments, Serial Shufflings, Possible Pseudonyms, Reflections of Herman Kahn, Lackeys, Memories.

Model/Hideout, by Mike Metz, 1974. 32 photographs with handwriting, 6 3/8 x 5, sidestitched in six booklets, gathered into a manila envelope. Documentation of process-situational art. Printed by Spotlight Press, Staten Island, NY, in an edition of 200 copies. [Out of print, 1978.]

As If a "Footnote" to the Final Glory..., by Donald Porter. 15 pp., 5½ x 8½, saddlestitched. A magnificently complex fiction about footnoting. Dedicated to "D.T., who liked it." Designed by the Mulberry Street Typehouse, New York, NY. ISBN: 0-915066-09-2. Printed

(The judges for the latter were Hugh Fox, Charles Plymell, David Wilk, Ines Hernandez Tovar, and Paula Gunn Allen.) Several projects we proposed to the NEA's literature program—a particularly scandalous operation—never happened; and since our general purpose is making public things that might otherwise remain private, we are reprinting our rejected applications in the pages ahead. One good idea, proposed to the NEA in both 1976 and 1977, is the publication of *A Critical Assembling*. Since many experimental writer/artists were making theoretical/critical statements, we suggested that previous contributors to *Assembling* be invited to submit "no more than four camera-ready pages, 8½ x 11", of critical commentary on radical/experimental tendencies in contemporary literature." In contrast to previous *Assemblings*, which required the invited contributors to print their own pages, we now proposed "to print their contributions ourselves and bind them into 1500 books, approximately 600 pages in length, returning at least two copies apiece to each contributor." Although we regretted the loss of different papers and printing styles—a hallmark of *Assembling*—we also recognized it would be economically advantageous to gang-print several pages at once in signatures. "We believe that the result of this development in the continuing editorial experiment of *Assembling* will be an unprecedented symposium of unparalleled range, quality, and honesty of American thinking about literary possibility." This proposal, needless to say, was rejected, and we reprint it primarily to give an idea of a particular cultural possibility that was squashed by U.S. literary funding agencies.

In 1977, we applied to the initial book-publishing contest of the New York State Council on the Arts. Here we proposed to do not only the *Critical Assembling* mentioned before, but also an anthology of North-American text-sound art (reflecting research I did under an NEA "services" grant) and a definitive collection of Henry James Korn's short fiction. Here too we fell victim to a selection process that had from its beginning been scandalously rigged; we had as much chance of success as the most talented Jews in Saudi Arabia. The NYSCA literature panel had not recently included anyone particularly sympathetic to experimental work. In 1976-77, it had indicatively refused to refund a sound-poetry-producing program that had won for its sponsor, WXXI-FM in Rochester, an award from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for innovative local programming. This award signaled that full-time professionals regarded this program as the *best* in the nation, and the tapes made at WXXI were broadcast both nationally and internationally. Obviously, this sound-poetry program was killed for being *both* excellent and experimental; for as I pointed out before, nothing is more vulnerable in literary funding than excellence that is not tied to power. (That NYSCA panel for 1976-77 included no one from upstate New York either.)

Instead, the New York State literary program had since its founding in 1973 been rigged to favor a particular recipient, Poets & Writers, Inc., headed by Galen Williams, who was *also* the principal consultant in the creation of the NYSCA literature program in 1973-74. It was Williams who personally invited June Fortess, her successor through an earlier position, to be the acting director of the NYSCA literature program; the Council later confirmed her appointment as permanent director. In 1973-74, during Ms. Williams's consultancy, a panel of supposedly disinterested "experts"

was created to judge applications. In the following year, the first of Fortess's administration, eight of the eight panelists were part of the original panel; in 1975-76, seven of the nine; in 1976-77, four of the nine; and in 1977-78, two of the ten. These statistics suggest that Ms. Fortess had simply perpetuated the presence of her patron's people. On the surface, such constancy in membership violates the familiar principles of conflict-of-interest and personnel-rotation.

However, no one could credit NYSCA-Literature with following the rules. Although the official Memorandum of the NYSCA Executive Director, Robert Mayer, writing April 20, 1977, says that panelists may "remain on the panel up to a maximum of three years," one panelist for 1977-78, Victor Navasky, was then in his fourth year and another, Donald Barthelme, scarcely a scrupulous soul, was then in his fifth year. If literary panelists and administrators cannot read the rules, one wonders whether they are reading anything else NYSCA presents to them. (The other eight panelists for that year, who found it worthwhile to wink at the rule-breaking, were Jane Cortez, Bill Katz, Alison Lurie, Julio Marzan, Frances McCullough, Nancy Milford, Al Poulin, Jr., and George Quasha. The fact that most of them work as teachers or editors makes one wonder how scrupulously they read on the job. The predominance of mediocrities, representing mediocre interests, seems in this context a subtle device to eliminate, rather than encourage, real debate.)

To the surprise of no one, Poets & Writers, Inc. has received a pig's share of the available NYSCA literature funds. In 1975-76, \$152,000 of the total literature budget of \$560,000 went to this organization (which had formally requested \$175,000); in 1976-77, when the literature budget was trimmed to \$474,343, Poets & Writers received a whopping \$148,000 (of their request for \$150,000). No other arts organization in New York State takes as large a percentage of any departmental pie as Poets & Writers, Inc. A press release from NYSCA (Dec., 1976) describes this 148 grand as "providing fee money to poets and writers." However, even this statement is characteristically disingenuous. In fact, these grants provided Poets & Writers, Inc. (which is scarcely synonymous with "poets and writers") with \$60,650 (of \$152,000) for its own administrative costs in 1975-76 and \$68,000 (of \$148,000) in 1976-77. It would not be unreasonable to conclude that the literature program has from its origins been rigged, in the selection of both its program director and its grants jury, to insure that Poets & Writers, Inc., gets nearly all the funds and 45%+ administrative expenses it requests. The collaborators in this rip-off must have been not only the senior administrators at NYSCA—Barbara Haspiel, June Fortess, Peter Bradley (since departed) and Robert Mayer (who is unquestionably negligent about enforcing his own rules), but the "literature sub-committee" of the Council itself—the novelist Kurt Vonnegut, 1976-78; Arthur Levitt, Jr., president of the American Stock Exchange, 1973-79; Kitty Carlisle Hart, currently "chairman" of NYSCA, 1973-77; and M. Irene Fugazy, whom NYSCA describes as "in charge of instructional television for the Archdiocese of New York," 1977-79. Whether they are accomplices in crime only the courts can tell; meanwhile, there is no doubt that any organization affiliating with these people in the future inherits their tarnished reputations. One assumption is that most of them as-

by the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY, in an edition of one thousand copies, twenty-six of which were signed and lettered by the author.

Recyclings, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1974. 64 pp., 5¼ x 8¼, saddlestitched. A literary autobiography, recapitulating writings from the years 1959 to 1967, in scrupulously nonsyntactic prose. Designed by the author. Dedicated to "John Cage, Father Generator." Typesetting by Rowena Nichols, Kansas City, MO. Negatives by the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY. Printed by Karl Young, Membrane Press, Milwaukee, WI.

Fifth Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz, Henry James Korn, Mike Metz, 1974. 284 pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated by GFI, Inc., Port Chester, NY. Contributors: Blair H. Allen, Theresa Allen, Beth Anderson, Eric Anderson, Bruce Andrews, Roy Arenella, Ascher/Straus, Mary Ashley, John M. Bennett, Jerry Bonbon, Sean Bradley, Betty Bressi, Lief Brush, Deb Casey, Allan Coleman, Geoffrey Cook, Michael Cooper, Fletcher Copp, Jean-Jacques Cory, Lee DeJasu, Stravos Deligiorgis, Wally Depew, Barbara Drake, Patricia Elliott, Craig Ellis, Roger Erickson, Loris Essary, Ira Fader, L.S. Fallis, William N. Farley, Peter & Sandra & David Fiore, David Franks, Daniela Giossefi, Anthony Gnazzo, Roberta Gould, CPGraham, Klaus Groh, Bob Heman, Roni Hoffman, David Det Hompson, Scott Hyde, James [Turrcott], Joe Johnson, Stephen Katcher, Shoichi Kiyokawa, Henry James Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Ruth Krauss, Herbert Krohn, Maris Kundzins, Thorbjørn Lausten, Donald Lipsky, Christopher Lonc, Charles Lynch & Jeff Way, Thomas Macauley, J.O. Mallander, Bruce McAllister, David Melnick, Richard Meltzer, Michael and Shiva [Michael Sheridan & Anne Queeney], Claire Moore, Gary Moore, F.A. Nettelbeck, Valery Oisteanu, Victor Ourin, Frank Parman, Richard Pierson, Bem Porter, W.R. Prescott, Jonathan Price, Rochelle Ratner, Sylvia Salazar Simpson, Spencer Seidman, Ron Silliman, G.P. Skratz, Alison Sky, Phil Smith & Robin Person, Tabloid Story [Colin Talbot, Michael Wilding, Frank Moorehouse, Carmel Kelly], Ian Tarnman, John Vieira, Seth Wade, Hannah Weiner, J.M. Yeager, Karl Young, Paul Zelevansky, Larry Zirlin.

Proceedings of the National Academy of the Avant Garde, by Henry James Korn, 1975. 29 pp., 5½ x 8½, saddlestitched. Sub-title: "Administering the Coup de Grace to the American Reality Consensus." Dedicated to "Cosmos, Flavor & Rhythm." ISBN: 0-915066-19-2. Library of Congress Catalog No. 75-298-98. Printed by the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY. Contents: Introduction, The Arts, Agriculture, Automotive Supplies, Business Aids, City Planning Concepts, Clothing, Cultural Institutions,

Death, Entertainment, Food, Garden, Health, Home, Leisure-Time Services, Pet Products, Politics, Reference Works, Religion, Time, Toys, Transportation and Travel, Appendix.

The Pontoon Manifesto, by Henry James Korn, 1975. 5 x 3, 33 cards, wrapped in paper. Fictional beginnings to be shuffled and read in any order. Typeset by Larry Zirlin. Printed at the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY, in an edition of one hundred copies sealed in gold; and thirty-six further copies, twenty-six of which were individually signed and lettered and sealed in red, and ten of which were artist's proofs.

Moderations, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1975. 28 images, 3 x 3/4, accordion book. A constructivist novella that can be read from front to back and front again. Designed and drawn by the author. Printed at the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY, in an edition of three hundred copies on yellow cardstock. Twenty-six copies were signed and lettered by the author.

Come Here, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1975. 20 pp., 5 x 7, saddlestitched. An erotic visual fiction that the U.S. copyright office refused to certify on the grounds that it "lacks copyrightable artistic expression." Co-published with the Cookie Press, Des Moines, IA. Designed by the author. Dedicated to JoAnne Akalaitis. Typeset and printed by Fred Truck, Des Moines, IA, in an edition of two hundred copies. Twenty-six copies were signed and lettered by the author.

Extrapolate, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1975. 3/4 x 3/4, accordion book. A second constructivist novella, in an accordion format, that can likewise be read in either direction. Co-published with Cookie Press, Des Moines, IA. Designed by the author. Printed by Fred Truck, Des Moines, IA, in an edition of three hundred copies on white stock and twelve copies on brown stock; the latter copies were signed and numbered by the author.

Manifestoes, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1975. 17 x 22 poster. The initial image in *Visual Language*, enlarged. Printed by the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY, in an edition of six hundred copies in yellow cardstock and eighty copies on red cardstock; the latter copies were signed and numbered by the author.

Sixth Assembling, compiled by Henry Korn, Richard Kostelanetz and Mike Metz, 1975. 288 pp., 8 1/2 x 11, side-stitched. Cover by Denis Boyles. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated and bound by Maryland Writers Council, Baltimore, MD. Contributors: Bob Aab, Carla Adams, Tom Ahern, Blair H. Allen, Terrence Ames, Beth Anderson, Martine Arenella, Ascher/Strauss, Jane Augustine, Mark Axelrod, Anna Banana, Allan Bealy, Roy R. Behrens, John M. Bennett, How-

sume that never again will they be hired to work in public culture. Inevitably, even petty racketeers elsewhere in the industry will never forgive them for "blowing the business."

Assembling Press was not included in the NYSCA funding for 1977-78, needless to say; and the reason given me by Barbara Haspiel, the director of the division that includes literature, was that the literature sub-committee had "ruled" against funding any presses whose applications included books authored by their principals. This previously unannounced exclusionary rule might be more credible if it were scrupulously true. However, examination of NYSCA's own files reveals that top prizes in the same sweepstakes went to three small presses that violated either the letter or the spirit of this jerry-built rule: Reed, Cannon & Johnson, whose two-book application included a history by the name partner, Joe Johnson, that will feature Messrs. Cannon and Reed; TVRT, whose application included two books by Leandro Katz, a principal of the press from the beginning and a long-term resident of its official premises; and Cherry Valley Editions, officially run by Pamela Beach Plymell, to do two books and a record by her husband Charles, two books of translations by her mother Mary Beach, and another book by her mother's long-term paramour Claude Pelieu-Washburn! Nonetheless, with respect to *our* application, the NYSCA "rule" was approved by the literature panel, the literature sub-committee, and finally by the Council itself, all of whom were either collaborating or conned into collaborating in some disingenuous business. Characteristically, the numbskulls of NYSCA show no more integrity in obeying unwritten rules than written ones.

With so much evidence of malfeasance, Assembling Press protested to the Council, but there was no reply beyond Arthur Levitt's acknowledgement that he had received and "forwarded these materials to the Council for its review." Repeated attempts to reach him by telephone have not been successful, and either he is not conscientious about returning calls or, as an investment professional, he does not think his reputation is worth a dime. (Ms. Haspiel doesn't return calls either, even though hers are free. She must think her reputation worth nothing.) The next question is why such a scandal-ridden public organization chose to enter our history in such a self-revealing, self-defeating way? The most persuasive explanation appears to be this: Once public officials are permitted to get away with the abuse of power, they become drunk on their oozing arrogance. I exposed this and other chicanery in a booklet entitled *Grants & the Future of Literature* (RK Editions, 1978); still there was no reply from anyone connected with NYSCA. So, unable to obtain justice in polite ways, we hired a lawyer who filed an appropriate complaint, and received a reply from NYSCA's counsel, Harvey Horowitz, proposing a meeting, May 31, 1978, at which I reiterated NYSCA's sins and proposed that since *we* were explicitly *cheated*, Assembling Press's application for 1977-78 should be fully funded. There was no response at the time, other than the perfunctory promise of one. As *Assembling Assembling* goes to press, six weeks after our meeting, nothing else has come our way.

Why is there such continued silence in the face of mounting evidence and further exposure? How can NYSCA accept such a devastation of its reputation without a rejoinder? How large must the "take" be to make such silence worthwhile? Why did an organization with so much to hide choose to enter our history with its un-

derpants draped around its ankles? Why? The most obvious conclusions are that its officials suffer from the unacceptable arrogance of power and, more important, that such malfeasance is not an isolated incident, as I initially thought, but something so deeply engrained and pervasive at NYSCA, from its bottom to its top, that self-extraction is impossible; the literature program is the tip of a dirty iceberg that they feel must be hidden at all costs. Even though our experience has heuristic value in exposing the hypocrisies of NYSCA, the ultimate purpose of Assembling Press is not documentation of cultural corruption—that is a secondary “achievement—but the publication of major books. This and other anecdotes are told to expose the “circumstances beyond our control” that have forbid us to accomplish as much as we wanted, or could have, or probably should have. These stories portray, let no one doubt, the *real world* in which Assembling Press has managed to do what it has done.

The business of Assembling Press is publishing, not unpublishing, which is instead the business of censorship.

In 1977, we also responded to an NEA sweepstakes for large-scale, three-year support with a proposal for a three-stage *Grand Assembling*. For the first year, we figured that we could invite all previous contributors to *Assembling* to send no more than two 8½ x 11” pages, camera-ready for offset printing, of whatever they wanted to include; and we would print, without exception, as before, all their contributions alphabetically into a book. Estimating that nearly all of those invited would contribute to this new *Grand Assembling*, we calculated there would be a 600-page book, in an edition of 1500 copies. Each contributor would get gratis two copies, and the remainder would be sold off, mostly to libraries, who would find such a compendious anthology a particularly valuable document.

For the following year, I envisioned that we could raise the quota and invite all the previous contributors to submit no more than three camera-ready pages to a thousand-page book, also 8½ x 11”. Taking the next giant step (to which the avant-garde is, alas, prone), I imagined that for the third year we could invite 500 writers and artists—not only previous contributors but prospective ones as well—to produce, at no more than four camera-ready pages apiece, a book 1800 pages in length, in our standard 8½ x 11” format, in an edition of 1500 copies, one of which would go to each contributor.

As a model of publishing possibility that, with sufficient support, could be repeated every year thereafter, this *Grand Assembling* would surely be the most elaborate anthology of current alternatives produced anywhere in the world. Nearly the size of the Manhattan telephone directory, it would serve an incomparably large number of people, including nearly everyone in America, if not in other countries as well, who is doing radically experimental work; and the initial distribution would be to a large audience of one’s like-minded peers. Indeed, this *Grand Assembling* would just as surely be the most extraordinary annual ever produced in this country—better than the *American Caravan* of 1927-36, better even than the great *New Directions* annuals of three decades ago. This *Grand Assembling* would be the kind of book that one would take a whole year to read. Needless to say perhaps, it too was simply too good for the folks at the NEA which funded, instead, a spate of academic magazines that contribute nothing to the future of literature and thus live only on dusty library shelves. Given the

ard Berland, Stanley Berne, Jeff Berner, Denis Boyles, Boby B. Bonbon, John Bradley, Richard Bronson, Donald Burgy, A.F. Caldiero, Deb Casey, Grace Cavalieri, Allan Coleman, Geoffrey Cook & Lew Thomas, Jean-Jacques Cory, Peter Cosgrove, Robin Crozier, John Dahl, Bob Davis, Lee DeJasu, Wally Depew, Stavros G. Deligiorgis, Albert Drake, Barbara Drake, Jerry Drev, Veronica Drew, Gary Elder, John W. English, Loris Essary, Peter Fiore, Manuel Fishman, David Franks, Ken Friedman, Bill Gaglione & Tim Mancusi, Guy Gauthier, Daniela Gioseffi, James Grauerholz, Klaus Groh, Richard F. Haines, Bob Heman, Davi Det Hompson, J. Hyder, Joe Johnson, Hans-Werner Kalkmann, T.J. Kallsen, Wayne Kato, Jerome Klinkowitz, Keren Korell, Henry Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Herbert Krohn, Mark Loeffler, Bertrand Lachance, Germaine Lanoux, David Lenon, Harley Lond, Thomas Macauley, Tom Martin, Joan Mathews, Bruce McAlister, Jim McDonald, Media Free Times, R. Meltzer, Cyril Miles, Claire Moore, John Morgan, Stephen Morrissey, Tom Ockerse, Liam O’Gallagher, P.J. O’Rourke, W.T. Overgard, Michael Joseph Phillips, Richard Pierson, Charles Plymell, Bern Porter, Donald Porter, Joe Potts, Stephen Procuniar, Rivka Rass, Rochelle Ratner, Joe Ribar, Clive Robertson, Harriet Rosenstein, Jerome Rothenberg, Arleen Schloss, Francis Schwartz, Mr. Sensitive [D.C. Landies], Dee Shapiro, Michael Sheridan, Noel Sheridan, Brian Sherman, Alison Sky, Pauline Smith, Ellworth Snyder, Edward Stanton, James Taranto, Michael Tate, R.T. Thomas, Helen Thornton, Mark Tomlinson, Leonard Trawick, Fred Truck, Timm Ulrichs, Craig Watson, Michael Wilding, Stephen Wiest, Synthony Wopcock, Bruce Wohl, Ron Wray, “Pure Art” [Ernest “Whiteman” Yearning & “Beefalo” Bob Friedman], Joann Young, Karl Young, Arlene Zekowski, Paul Zelvansky.

Rain Rains Rain, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1976. 5½ x 8½, 24 cards, rubber-banded. A long poem as a packet of cards, which can be read in any order. Designed and drawn by the author. Dedicated by name to twenty-four anthropologists of his poetry. Printed by the Print Center, Inc., Brooklyn, NY, in an edition of one thousand copies on white stock and twenty-six copies on red stock; the latter copies were individually signed and lettered by the author.

Numbers: Poems & Stories, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1976. 24 pp., 11½ x 16, folded newsprint. The initial collection of numerical literature. Designed and typeset by the author. Cover by the author. Dedicated to Milton Babitt. Printed by Fred Truck, Des Moines, IA, in an edition of one thousand copies. Twenty-six copies were signed and lettered by the author. Contents: Short Fiction, Ambiguity, Times Perceived, [Untitled designs], Numerations, Olympian Progress, Multiples, Combinational

Rotations, Seven Hundred Thirty, Steps, 202, 303, 404, 505, Fun, Self-Portrait, Two Thousand Fifty-Six [2].

Muhammed Ali Retrospective, by Henry James Korn, 1976. 119 pp., 8 x 8, perfectbound. The times and lives of a heavy weight king. ISBN: 0-915066-18-4. Library of Congress Catalog No. 76-8030. Designed by Mike Metz. Co-published with Wild & Woolley, Sydney, Australia. Printed by Edwards Brothers, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI, in an edition of one thousand copies with a die-cut orange cover. Reprinted in 1978 in a second edition of one thousand copies with a white cover.

An Introduction to Design Poetics, by Denis Boyles, 1976. 4¼ x 5¼, perfectbound. A primer with a manifesto. Dedicated to Georg and Chris Kajanus. ISBN: 0-915066-15-1. Library of Congress Catalog No. 75-15025. Printed by Steve West Printworks, Timonium, MD, in an edition of five hundred copies, ten of which were signed and numbered. [Out of print, 1978.]

Rumor Transmissible Ad Infinitum In Either Direction, by Raymond Federman, 1976. 22¼ x 23½, poster. A visual-verbal fiction by a first-rank experimentalist. Designed & typeset by the author. Printed by Philmark Press, Inc., New York, NY, under the supervision of Larry Zirlin, in an edition of one thousand copies.

Experimental Prose, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1976. 40-minute audiocassette. An initial collection of various audio experiments with language, read almost entirely by the author. ISBN: 0-915066-24-3. Engineered by David Dial, to whom it is dedicated. Mastered and produced by Ashley-Skull, Huntington, NY, in an edition of three hundred copies. Twenty-six copies were signed and lettered by the author. Contents: Dialogue [3]; Plateaux; Recyclings, I, III, IV, VI, VII; Self-Interview on "Recyclings"; Milestones in a Life; Declaration of Independence; Excelsior.

Corroboree, by Kenneth Gangemi, 1977. A masterful blend of nonsense, humor and satire. Dedicated to "The Science Teachers of American High Schools." Designed by Jean Krulis. Cover photo by John Bauguess. ISBN: 915066-22-7. Library of Congress Catalog No. 76-027241. Printed by Edwards Brothers, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI, in an edition of fifteen hundred copies.

Seventh Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz, Henry Korn, 1977. 396 pp., 8½ x 11, sidefastened. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz. Collated and bound by GFI, Inc., Port Chester, NY. Contributors: Rene Aeberhard, Blair H. Allen, Theresa Allen, Jack Albert, Richard Alpert, Bruce Andrews, Robert Armstrong, David Arnold, Ascher/Stráus, Eduardo Ballerini, Eric Baizer,

realities of literary granting in the U.S., we feel relieved, and grateful, that eight *Assemblings* have appeared so far, and note by contrast that the last *Assembling*, as well as the catalog *Assembling Assembling*, was funded not by CCLM, or the NEA, or NYSCA—hypocrites all (each in a different way)—but by a private foundation.

* * *

One key to *Assembling's* continued success is that we have delivered on our promises. This means that when an artist/writer contributes to a forthcoming issue, he or she knows that his money and effort will not be wasted, and that faith in turn perhaps explains why *Assembling* has survived for nearly a decade, while its imitators have disappeared. Another reason for *Assembling's* success is that it has a larger purpose—opening up our sense of editorial and creative possibility—rather than the small-minded publication a certain group of people or the exploitation of a fad. We expect that *Assembling* could survive another decade, although perhaps in the hands of other, younger compilers. Were we convinced that other people would sustain its purposes and likewise deliver on their promises, both Korn and myself would gladly give *Assembling* to them.

Richard Kostelanetz
New York, New York
Independence Day, 1978

Just after this introduction was typeset, the NEA awarded *Assembling Press*, to our surprise, sufficient funds to publish *A Critical Assembling* in 1979. Continuing obstacles notwithstanding, it and much else desirable will happen.

Peter H. Barnett, Lee Baxandall, Carol Beesley, John M. Bennett, Howard Berland, Cassia Berman, Charles Bernstein & Susan Laufer, Betty Bressi, Rhett & Robert Delford Brown, Stewart Buettner, A.F. Caldiero, Karen Campbell, David Cole, Geoffrey Cook, Tony D'Arpino, Charles DiJulio, Jerry Dreva, Helen Duberstein, Bolon Dzacab [Fred Truck], Claes Ejdemyr, John English, Welch Everman, Howard Faerstein, L.S. Fallis, Jas. W. Felter, C.A. Forget, Hugh Fox, Guy Gauthier, Dan Georgakas, Jon Gibson, Jesse Glass, Richard Grayson, Phil Harmonic, Susan Harris, G.C. Haymes, Lynn Hejinián, Scott Helms, Bob Heman, Geoff Henricks & Brian Buczak, Dick Higgins, Anne Sue Hirschorn, S. Hitchcock, Peter Hjersman, Davi Det Hampson, Scott Hyde, J. Hyder, David James, T. J. Kallsen, Richard Kallweit, Edward Kaplan, Karen Kent & John Puffer, Bliem Kern, Jascha Kessler, Jerome Klinkowitz, Henry James Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, Ruth Krauss, Martin Krieger, D. Landies, Doris Lanier, Archie Laun, Thorbjørn Lausten, Todd S.J. Lawson, S.J. Leon, Norman Lock, Jeffrey Lohm, Thomas Macauley, Ian MacLennan, Jerry Madson, Jan Maiherman, Gai Maloney, R. Meltzer, Effie Mihopoulos, Stephanie Miller, Robert Morgan, Madison Morrison, George Myers, Jr., Tom Ockerse, Valery Oisteanu, Fred Sanks Nadien, Jon Patton, Tom Person, Howardena Pindell, Bern Porter, Donald Porter, John Pyros, Keith Rahmings, Rochelle Ratner & B. Solomon, David & Judy Ray, Bob Rizzo, Howard Robertson, Alan Rosenus, RJS, Craig Sautter, Ken Saville, Arleen Schloss, Nancy Scott, Spencer Seidman, Bruce Shackelford, Paul Solyn, Al Souza, Kristine Stiles, Lewis Stein, Fred Szamanski, Indra Tamang, Helen Thorington & Karen Korell, Janos Urban, Paul Vangelisti, G. Jeff Whittaker, Joann Young, Suzanne Ostro Zavrian, Paul Zelevansky.

Selected Structures, by Mike Metz, 1977. 144 pp., 9½ x 3¼, Chicago-screw bound. A retrospective, 1969/1976. Photographs by the author. Printed by Ancraft Press, New York, NY, in an edition of one thousand copies.

Twenties in the Sixties, by Richard Kostelanetz, 1978. 336 pp., 8½ x 11, perfectbound. Previously uncollected essays on literary, criticism, thought and experience. Designed by the author. Typeset by Tom Montag and Ed Hogan. Dedicated to Dick Higgins. ISBN: 0-915066-25-1. Co-published with Wild & Woolley, Australia. Printed by Edwards Brothers, Inc., Ann Arbor, MI, in a paperback edition of 1200 copies. Reprinted in hardback in 1979 by Greenwood Press, Westport, CN.

Eighth A-J Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz and Henry James Korn, 1978. ??? pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz & Henry James Korn. Colated & bound by GFI, Inc., Port Chester, NY. Contributors: ???

Eighth K-Z Assembling, compiled by Richard Kostelanetz & Henry James Korn, 1978. ??? pp., 8½ x 11, sidestitched. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface by Richard Kostelanetz & Henry James Korn. Colated & bound by GFI, Inc., Port Chester, NY. Contributors: ???

Assembling Assembling, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, 1978. 96 pp., 8½ x 11, perfectbound. A permanent catalog to a temporary retrospective exhibition. Cover by Mike Metz. Preface, introduction & bibliography by Richard Kostelanetz. Printed by McNaughton & Gunn, Ann Arbor, MI, in an edition of fifteen hundred copies.

APPLICATION

January 11, 1978

Assembling Press
Box 1967
Brooklyn, New York 11201

CCLM
80 Eighth Avenue
New York, New York 10011

A. Assembling

Box 1967
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201
212-860-1873

B. Every year since 1970, Assembling has invited up to 600 artists and writers to submit one thousand copies of up to three 8½" x 11" pages of anything they wished to include, printed by any means at their own initiative and expense. Submissions are collated in alphabetical order in a series that now includes seven big, beautiful, internationally famous books. As perhaps the only truly open publishing medium in the world, Assembling showcases an unprecedented variety of avant garde, intermedia art. Without a minimum \$2,000 grant from CCLM Assembling cannot continue. This application will be published in Assembling.

C. Richard Kostelanetz is an artist, writer, editor and critic--author (and/or editor) of more than 40 books. His End of Intelligent Writing defined the dimensions and magnitude of the current crisis in cultural communications that Assembling helps to solve. Henry James Korn is author of four books among which is Muhammad Ali Retrospective--a small press best seller. He is Administrator of the Jewish Museum.

D. Acconci, Graham, Rothenberg, Baldessari, Burgy, Hyde, Arakawa, Rusha, Mayer, Vanderbeek, Higgins, Coleman, Ignatow, Gangemi, Gins, Federman, Metz....Wanna play the name game? We got about six hundred contributors!

E. Assembling is a partnership of Kostelanetz and Korn.

F. One plus several supplements. G. 1000 books, \$2,000, 250 sold 250 free

H. 250 hours

I. Collating expense and cover	\$2,000.00	J. Sales	\$ 500.00
Promotion	200.00	Grants	--
Postage	<u>400.00</u>	CCLM	1700.00
	Total: \$2600 .00	other	<u>--</u>
		Total	2200.00

M. \$2000.00

Date 1/12/78 By Whom application filed Henry James Korn
Henry James Korn

ASSEMBLING is a collaborative annual intended to provide a communications channel for alternative, "otherwise unpublishable" printed art by imaginative minds who genuinely believe in their work. By "otherwise unpublishable," we mean not things that are physically unprintable but works so unconventional that they could not possibly pass through current publishing channels. ASSEMBLING eliminates the traditional authoritarianism of the conventional editorial process by asking its invited contributors to submit whatever they want on one thousand (1000) copies of up to three different 8 1/2" by 11" sheets of any kind of paper, by any printing method, at their own initiative (and, alas, expense). Everything received from those invited is incorporated into ASSEMBLING, which binds the results alphabetically, and returns two copies of the finished book to you. (Contributors sending less than a thousand copies, as some have done in the past, find themselves omitted from certain books.) The remaining books are sold to defray the costs of collating, binding and mailing, and also to establish a fund for future issues of ASSEMBLING. All material is copyrighted by Assembling Press for assignment to individual contributors automatically upon their request. ASSEMBLING appears this year with thanks not to CCLM, which turned us down flat again, but to the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation of New York. (For more exposure of the inadequacies of publicly funded granting agencies in the U.S., see Kostelanetz's new book, GRANTS AND THE FUTURE OF LITERATURE.)

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. TIME, NUISANCE, MISTAKES AND YOUR CONTRIBUTION ITSELF ARE SAVED IF MATERIALS ARE DELIVERED IN AN APPROPRIATE MANNER. Please send your contributions to arrive no later than 1 Sept. 1978, only to Assembling, c/o GFI, Two Highland St., Port Chester, NY 10573. Direct all other mail to Assembling Press, P.O. Box 1967, Brooklyn, NY 11202. Be sure to put your name on every page of your contribution (as ASSEMBLING has no table of contents), and to wrap each set of 1000 pages individually (although more than one parcel of individual pages can go into a shipping carton). Use strong cartons instead of bags or other soft containers that fall apart easily. Paste two (2) samples of each page on the outside of each page-packet. This facilitates collation without our having to break open each package in advance of delivery to the collator. Be sure then to send a biographical note to indicate whether you'd like to have your address included in the bio notes: (Many find this reference handy and the subsequent correspondence fun.) It is important to allow at least one and one-half inches on the left-hand vertical margin of each of your pages, so that the left side of your work does not get buried in the binding. If you have any special instructions on collating your pages, please send them to Assembling Press; we'll do our best to honor your request. Try to print on both sides of your pages, making extra margin room on the right sides of these backside pages. It saves cost in printing, collating and mailing; it also saves trees.

Remember that you can really contribute to EIGHTH ASSEMBLING whatever you want; for whereas most magazines encourage uniformity among their contributors, the hallmark of ASSEMBLING, as both a publishing structure and a reading experience, is unprecedented diversity. Thus, whereas most magazines encourage prospective contributors to "fit" into the surroundings, ASSEMBLING offers every contributor the unparalleled opportunity to produce something truly distinguished--a singular work that will stand out from the surrounding pack.

Patronize your local printer, if possible, so that you can see the results of their work before sending the pages to us. Given the continuing suppression of experimental communication, it is important that writers and artists learn the processes of publication from the beginning. As creative participants, we should make the production of our work an integral part of the work itself. If, however, you wish to keep

your hands clean, you may want to use the Print Centers in Berkeley or Brooklyn, but please observe their deadlines (15 July for Brooklyn, which charges \$12.50 for one page of line copy, one side; and \$16.00 for two sides, both on 70 pound stock, plus \$1.00 per page for UPS shipping to the collator, paid in advance please to "The Print Center". If you have work that requires half-tone photographic reproduction (photographs, watercolors, gray matter, etc.), add \$3.50 per 4" by 5" image and \$5.00 up to 5" by 7" image. Colored ink is \$10.00 extra; and if you have your own colored stock, send them a sample before shipping the entire package of paper. Remember to label your copy as carefully as possible, and to make your instructions thoroughly explicit. Also leave margins of at least 5/8" on top and bottom, as bleeds are difficult. Should you want your original back, be sure to send a stamped addressed return envelope. For other special requests of the Brooklyn Print Center, write them at P.O. Box 1050, Brooklyn, NY 11202, or phone 212-TR5-4482.) With any printer, it is advisable to investigate yourself and see what special stock, types, etc. they can offer. Exploit the possibilities of printing you think appropriate. PLEASE MEET DEADLINES, WHICH CANNOT BE STRETCHED. Any contributions arriving too late will be kept for next year.

We are pleased to announce that the Pratt Graphics Center will be mounting an exhibiton of Assembling Press, opening 7 October, 1978, Saturday afternoon, for three weeks, 160 Lexington Ave., New York, NY, northwest corner of 30th St., TEL: 212-685-3169. The entire EIGHTH ASSEMBLING will be displayed on its walls, along with past publications. Contributors' copies will be distributed then, and earlier ASSEMBLINGS will be for sale. We shall also be producing, with the generous aid of the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, a retrospective catalog, entitled ASSEMBLING ASSEMBLING; and those of you who have contributed to ASSEMBLING before are also invited to produce a camera-ready statement about ASSEMBLING, no more than 4 1/2" high and 3 1/4" wide, which will be reproduced in ASSEMBLING ASSEMBLING. Ideally, this statement, which may be visual or verbal, would acknowledge what ASSEMBLING has meant to them. These must be sent to R. Kostelanetz, P.O. Box 73, Canal Street, New York, N.Y. 10013, by 1 July, 1978. A single copy apiece of ASSEMBLING ASSEMBLING will be distributed gratis, initially at the exhibition, to all contributors past and present to ASSEMBLING, and the remaining copies will go on retail sale at \$3.95. So, even if you don't contribute this year. we look forward to seeing you at the opening, and please send us your current address, especially if there is any reason to believe it is different from the one we presently have. It seems inadvisable to do an EIGHTH ASSEMBLING as thick as SEVENTH again; and should we get such an excess of contributions again, we will simply divide them in half, alphabetically, making an EIGHTH A-J ASSEMBLING and an EIGHTH K-Z ASSEMBLING, and send each contributor two copies of the edition in which they appear, and one copy of the other.

If you know of any other artists and writers who should contribute to EIGHTH ASSEMBLING, please advise them to send us a sample of their work along with a stamped self-addressed return envelope or international reply coupons. "Acceptance" will arrive in the form of an invitation to contribute to the next ASSEMBLING. This requirement exists not to allow editorial authority to impose its taste, but to insure that ASSEMBLING remains committed to alternative, "otherwise unpublishable" styles. If you know of any retail outlets that would like to stock ASSEMBLING, please have them order copies, prepaid, at the standard discount from Assembling Press (P.O. Box 1967, Brooklyn, NY 11202). No consignments anymore; copies of #1, 2 & 3 are scarce.

We eagerly await your stuff. Assembled we stand; disassembled, we fall.

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

HENRY JAMES KORN

MARGINS

NUMBER TWENTY-ONE/NUMBER TWENTY-TWO

6&7/1975

SPECIAL DOUBLE SUMMER ISSUE / \$2.00

ASSEMBLING

by Karl Young

Assembling; 1970. *Second Assembling*; 1971. *Third Assembling*; 1972. *Fourth Assembling*; 1973. *Fifth Assembling*; 1974. Assembling Press (PO Box 1967, Brooklyn, NY 11202).

I.

In 1917 Ezra Pound hoped to edit magazines as whole entities—having the kind of completeness, formal integrity, structure and continuity or progression you find in a good poem or novel. Though *The Exile's* 4 numbers—the only magazine Pound ever had complete control of—show some effort in the direction of such a holistically edited magazine, he was not altogether successful in his aim, primarily, I think, because he never really had control of a magazine for a long enough period of time to empirically work out the problems inherent in such a project. He certainly had the theory down but the practice would have taken at least five years, I'd guess, of continuous, uninterrupted work.

Since Pound's efforts we have had—as far as I know—only one gut innovation in magazine editing technique. That came in 1970 when Henry Korn, Richard Kostelanetz, and Mike Metz founded *Assembling*. This is not to say that we have not had good magazines, or that these magazines have not included innovative material, or have not developed new procedures of one sort or another, or even that a magazine's sole reason for being is to provide editors with the opportunity to revamp the editorial principles that govern them. A great deal has been done with thematically organized magazines. I've tried to follow some of Pound's principles in my own *Stations* and a number of others have tried similar methods. We have had a few attempts at oral magazines recorded on tape or phonograph record and we should have some literary and interart magazines produced on video tape in the near future. And even in the case of the standard grab bag magazine—magazines in which the editor merely selects more or less by whim whatever interesting material comes in the mail—often contain more innovative material than magazines governed by more careful editorial principles. But thematic editing is essentially an old approach and one that, for the most part, at least as practiced today, lacks the kind of integrity, sense of progression, dynamism, and almost teleological wholeness Pound longed for. When magazines of this sort have achieved more than the sum of their parts, we can chalk that up primarily to the developmental abilities of the editors rather than innovative needs. The recorded magazines—*Black Box*, *Panjandrum*, *Aspen*—while taking the initial innovative step of switching to a new medium, have been uninnovative in their basic approach to the microphone—it is as though a conventional magazine had been put together and simply read into a recorder by the contributors, taking little notice of the new possibilities for presentation that the new medium can provide. Also, the material chosen

for these magazines has generally been rather conservative. The grab-bag approach is both old and, as an approach, uninteresting. Its main function is to allow writers to get a little circulation on isolated pieces before they appear in book form. As advertising and testing this is fine but it leads to magazines that are usually uninteresting as whole entities.

This is not to say that we are in a period that lacks good magazines. The last two or three years have not brought forth many new magazines that are truly interesting but the number of good magazines publishing good material in the last 15 years has, I'm sure, been much higher than in any other period in history. Many thematically organized magazines during this period have been thoroughly interesting and have approached salutary completeness, if not wholeness. And the recorded magazines—well, it's always good to hear a poet read his own work and at a time when there are no standards of orthography, lineation, punctuation, paginal organization, hearing the poet read is often absolutely essential. And we would be indeed lost without the grab-bag magazine's ability to find new writers.

The problem is not a simple one. We talk continually of innovation—indeed it is, at least in the rhetoric of nearly all of us, one of the supreme goals of the contemporary writer. We talk continually of giving younger writers opportunities to circulate their work. We talk continually of wasted effort and wasted time. We talk continually of conviction and its relation to innovation and quality. One of our main preoccupations is with systems—we talk continually about them. But a lot of this seems to remain talk, remain theoretical maneuvering, remain part of a closed system not allowing its own principles of inclusion and exclusion to function as we expect them to. Large presses ignore new material in most cases (the exceptions being the publication of such works as Jerome Rothenberg's anthologies) and large magazines often seem to function in a different world. Quite a few alternative presses and publications bring us good material, give us more access to works of value than we could have expected at any other time in history. But something still seems missing to most of us. What are we missing; how can we find it? Perhaps there is something wrong with some of our most basic and intuitive approaches to what we do. For instance, how do we read the magazines we see? When you receive a magazine, you go through it, pick out those contributors you've heard of before, read their work and forget the rest. You don't read the work of the unknowns until you see their names often enough on tables of contents or start hearing about them from friends. This is a universal and total pattern and I'm guilty of it myself. Our magazine structures fail in introducing new people *not* because they're categorically excluded (at least in alternative publications they're not categorically excluded) but because the very editing of most magazines encourages a hunt and pick form of reading. Magazines could convey more than the sum of their contributions if edited intelligently; if this potentiality is ignored, energy is wasted and large areas of innovation are lost. The editing of a magazine can be a powerful thing; through it we can change our habits of perception, and realize our desires for innovations.

In this essay I will try to substantiate this claim, showing how *Assembling* innovates and what its innovations can mean to writers and readers. Editor Richard Kostelanetz will explain the magazine's demise in the second part of this essay. In the third, we'll hear from some of the contributors to *Assembling*.

Here's how *Assembling* is set up: Potential contributors

were asked to print at their own expense 1,000 copies of no more than three 8½" x 11" copies of works to be included. These were collated alphabetically, the more or less standard contributors' notes were inserted after the contributions, and these bundles were bound together into book form. Nothing was rejected. *Assembling* appeared annually from 1970 to 1975.

That's a simple enough procedure but it has profound implications.

Let's begin with its simplest implication. Contributors print their work or have it printed. I've had considerable trouble publishing most of my own innovative work, because few magazines can or will honor my demands. In the case of visual works it is almost absolutely essential that works be printed *exactly* as the author wants them—the few exceptions being productions such as Ian Tyson's realizations of other people's works. *Assembling* contributors needn't fear production problems. Beyond this, many experimentalists are using color and elaborate production techniques that most magazine editors shy away from or can't afford: *Assembling* contributors are not restricted by the financial and production limitations of the magazine. Of course the 8½ x 11 size is somewhat of a limitation but some contributors have gotten around this with fold out pages and divided pages and this limitation is not as severe as "no color" or "nothing that requires enlargement or reduction, halftone or other screen treatment." For those who know how to print and have access to printing equipment *Assembling* is perfect. I am among these and I really appreciate the control it gives me and also, and not less, the pleasure and satisfaction of doing my own printing. Of course, quite a few contributors can't print their own contributions and have to have it done by local printers or an organization like The Print Center. These contributors at least will know how their work will appear before they send it off and have the option of not using an unsuccessful piece or having it done over. Perhaps most important, though, they can learn a little about printing in the process—a kind of knowledge nearly essential for a contemporary writer. The objection has been raised that authors should not have to pay to have their work printed. This is perfectly true and in an ideal system no writer would have to do such a thing. But in this imperfect situation I think it's better to pay for your own printing than either have your work unpublished or printed incorrectly. The objection becomes more serious in cases of color work or more elaborate techniques but I think the answer to the objection still holds: with these more expensive techniques, innovative works have even less opportunity to be published and the possibility of incorrect printing is greater.

You may want to argue that this holds only for visual works and that there are other kinds of work at least as important, if not more so, that don't require this kind of fussiness. Perhaps that's sometimes the case. But most writing now being done bears some relation to its appearance on the page—consider a poet as distinct from the visual workers as Charles Olson. The way something appears on a page is important to author and reader even if it has nothing to do with the meaning or impact of the work—a work that doesn't relate properly to the page may not satisfy the author and may turn off the reader. If nothing else, the contributor is encouraged to learn a bit about the work's relation to the page for himself. Beyond this, some contributions aren't even printed (a hair taped to a page) and some consist of found or partly found poems (newspapers, text printed on varying materials). Most editors would find these works im-

possible to use, if not undesirable.

The objection most frequently raised against *Assembling* (and in the case of granting organizations, most disastrously) is that its contributions are not selected by a central authority, that anyone can contribute whatever he likes and that the contents must therefore be just junk from fools who merely want to see their names in print. From the point of view of pure logic this is an unsound position. The quality of work itself can only be judged on its own merit whatever its genesis. Ultimately the quality of individual contributions to *Assembling* can only be judged on their own merits and I think anyone interested should just get a copy and see for himself. My reactions are for the most part positive but you shouldn't take my word for it. You may find the third part of this essay, the remarks from contributors, as a testimony to the quality of work included but this only as an encouragement to see for yourself. Let's, however, examine this argument against *Assembling* and look at what the structure itself can do. I think it can be shown to be groundless and that the power of editorial conceit of the magazine could indicate, if anything, something positive.

Assembling counters one of the most deeply entrenched of literary prejudices head on: the anathema of self-publication. It has become a truism, so often repeated as to seem unnecessary even to mention, that no one or at least only a few extremely perceptive individuals will support or even recognize new, innovative work. The traditional answer to this has been self-publication. Self-published works range from such things as the nearly forgotten but truly astounding work of Harry Crosby to what have become best sellers such as Thoreau's *Walden*. Yet we fear self-publication. The writer fears it because it inherently confers no distinction; it has not the authority of print nor the implied backing of at least a publisher and his staff. The charge of vanity will be leveled against him. He is placed in a class of foolish vain people who cannot really produce anything satisfying to anyone but themselves yet have to aggrandize themselves. The reader fears self-published works because he is afraid he will not be rewarded for his efforts and, at least in a number of cases, because he is not sure he will know a valuable work without being assured of it—at least to the extent that commercial publication assures him. Is there any basis in reality for this belief? I think not. If we want to see why not, we can merely attack the assumption that commercial publication confirms value. Commercial publishers set more non-literary goals for themselves than literary ones. For instance: the number of books, usually broken down into subject categories, to be published during a season is usually determined before any manuscripts are considered. Also determined is how much will be spent on production and distribution and how much will have to be made as a result of sales of these books. Manuscripts are then selected to fit the grid established by these requirements regardless of what is available. The quality of manuscripts available will have little to do with what gets published. Some books are even written solely to fill these requirements. This system, *as a system*, is hardly the kind that should assure readers that the book they buy will be worthwhile. At times you'll find a fair number of good books coming from commercial publishers, but you should be able to see from this example alone that the mere fact of commercial publication assures you of quality no more than self-publication. I don't have any statistics on this but I doubt that a higher percentage of valuable books comes from commercial houses than from other categories: government and university publishers, small and alternative

publishers, and the ranks of the self-published.

With books that have been around for a while reprinting and republication provide something of an index of worth but not a truly reliable one. As time goes on, a sort of natural selection occurs. Works of little value drop out of print; quite a few self-published books are republished by larger houses. I've already mentioned *Walden*; among more recent works, let me mention Barbara O'Mary's *This Woman*—originally self-published then reissued by an alternative press. But this is ultimately a poor index: we are just beginning to see what innovative masterpieces written during the 20s have been all but forgotten; and even among non-innovative works, you'll find most of Wright Morris's works out of print.

The prejudice against self-publication remains. Its most pernicious effects are on self-confidence. The writer is not confident in his work until it has the authority of commercial publication conferred on it; the reader doesn't trust his own judgment, won't read something and decide its merits himself. The same is true of most magazines: they seem to confer value and seem to assure the reader of the value of the work selected. Yet in commercial magazines and to a too large degree in alternative publications the same patterns persist. The only real test of value can be made only by author and reader. We may get tips from those we respect but the real decisions should be made by us, by ourselves. Editorial systems alone do not assure value. But, as we'll see, one of *Assembling's* main functions is to return that judgment to the reader and writer confronted with the work itself.

Reasonable or not, we have our axiom: if a magazine is not edited by a central authority, contributors—most of them unauthorized incompetents—will submit uninteresting material. Who will contribute? People who merely want to be famous will probably not want to submit anything. It is made very clear that material included in the magazine has not been edited by a central authority. Distinction is not conferred on contributors by inclusion. If a work appearing in *Assembling* is admired, it will be admired not because it has been included but because of its own merits. The kind of contributor who wants recognition only, not recognition for anything he's done, will not be interested in contributing; if anything he would be embarrassed by this form of self-publication. People who do conservative work—of whatever quality—will probably not want to appear in the magazine either; they may have enough conviction in their own work to publish it themselves but will probably not want to appear in the company of the radicals who make up the bulk of contributors. So a sort of natural selection occurs in the plan of the magazine. If sincerity is one of the basic requirements of a writer we will find the insincere weeded out before he has even decided to contribute anything. Innovative writers who have achieved a fair degree of recognition—most of these older people who've paid heavy dues, have persisted in their convictions despite the obstacles, most of them originally self-published—will probably not want to contribute either. They want money and/or distribution. This is not evil of them. Good work deserves recognition and distribution. Writers should earn money by their work, at least as a supplemental income—very few actually make a living from their compositions. If you want a magazine devoted to unknown, mostly young, innovators, you won't be distracted by many tribal elders in *Assembling*. Part of our axiom was that *Assembling* would attract the wrong kind of people; what in fact happens is that the majority of people who

would be unsuitable—the insincere, the conservative, the vacuous, the well-published—simply don't contribute.

The category left after this process of exclusion is that of the young, sincere, innovative writers. There are a few exceptions such as Bern Porter—an older innovator who has been influential to a small group of innovators—but Porter is not really recognized and his contributions demonstrate a laudable insistence on continuing to publish with the youngest and often most radical avant gardists rather than merely to sit and complain about how he has been neglected. Those who contribute to *Assembling* are generally those people for whom small and alternative presses are supposed to exist. Of course in the generally decrepit commercial publishing field, older writers who have gained a fair degree of recognition would go unpublished if it were not for small presses. This includes not only revolutionary innovators like Jackson Mac Low and Ian Hamilton Finlay but also less violently innovative people like Charles Reznikoff. Be this as it may, small and alternative presses are still obliged to work for the benefit of the younger, unrecognized innovators. No other magazine is as concerned with this class of innovator as is *Assembling*.

Our axiom implies that whoever contributes will probably not contribute worthwhile material. The suspicion here is that the author probably does not himself know which of his creations are well done and/or that he will not give his best work to a magazine that will confer upon him no glory. In addition, some readers may feel that they will not be able to recognize the more valuable works. Again, I think this view unfounded. Authors are put on their honor as it were. I've contributed some of my best work to *Assembling* because I wanted to say that these pieces were among my best recent works. I suspect other contributors have responded similarly. An author may not be the best judge of his own work but an editor's judgment will not *always* be better than his. At least in an unedited context you have the chance to see what the author chooses—what you see is the result of the author's decision rather than a second person's. A second person's decision can be valuable and if we didn't have them we should want them; however, in the current dispensation, it's good to this other method.

In addition, *Assembling* not only allows sincere and innovative writers to publish their work, it actually encourages them to be more innovative. The structure of the magazine and the company a contributor will keep in it can encourage a contributor to keep on coming up with new material. He will not want to contribute superficially innovative material because other contributors will be able to see through him if he does. There is something demanding about the freedom an *Assembling* contributor has. That vacant space he's given can draw something out of him, challenge him to do his best or—in the case of some of the more dyonisiac contributors—his worst. The lack of editorial restraint encourages him to do things which he otherwise might feel too timid to do.

We have now come into the area of participation and in this area quite a few of *Assembling's* powers lie.

The readership of *Assembling* consists largely of its contributors. This readership is larger than that of many small press items because there are more contributors to *Assembling* than to most magazines. But proportionately, I think *Assembling* does not reach as many people beyond contributors, per contributor, as do many other magazines. I mean *Assembling* may have two noncontributing readers per contributor; most little mags, I'd guess, have at least 5, some have hundreds. But this readership is an intense one. Con-

tributors can see what their fellow innovators, in this case nearly all of them peers, are doing more clearly than they can in magazines not so thoroughly devoted to avant garde works. This can encourage an intense sort of self-evaluation. It can also make use of a sense of competition—we've heard a lot about the way competition can stimulate: here's one of those odd cases where it actually does.

In addition, contributors can find their fellows and start communicating with them. I've gotten in contact with at least a dozen new people through *Assembling* and other contributors have done the same.

Assembling encourages this sense of participation more than any other magazine I know. In its ability to stimulate participation it resembles an event as much as a magazine. It could almost be called an international, xenoplastic happening. Some contributors seem to participate in an almost ecstatic manner. The event of the putting together of the magazine could be compared to the Roman feast of Saturnalia—an event in which social and class distinctions are reversed and strictures of the normal order are overturned. The authors are now editors. Sometimes contributors will attack things they resent through the magazine in a direct manner you won't find in most poetries of protest and enjoy a sense of infinite possibility not imagined in some of the wildest avant garde polemics of ten years ago. Contributors demonstrate a great deal of spirit, exhibit a sense of liberation in their work. In *Assembling* the basic authority structure of a magazine is destroyed. Their levels of participation run from antagonistic to clownish to the heights of high seriousness.

One of the things that all of this gives the reader is a collection of works more varied than he is likely to see anywhere else. Most magazines, grab bags included, leave one with a feeling of monotony of tone. Some central authority has selected the pieces included and that authority's sense of tone usually pervades a magazine. Contributors to *Assembling* go from outright uninhibited play to intense soul searching, from an immediate sort of plangency to undefined giggles to grand pronouncements to an utter serenity. All these set into sharp relief against each other.

Assembling should have a larger readership. I'm sure it wouldn't lessen the intensity between contributors and there's a lot noncontributors can get from the magazine. Most important in this respect is, of course, the high quality of a good share of the work published in it. This should go without saying. Of course there is a fair share of uninteresting material in *Assembling*. Some pieces are downright wretched. But even these have value. Being unedited, the reader has to decide for himself which works are of value and which are not. One of the main functions of such a magazine should be to shift critical authority from publisher and critic, returning it to the author and reader. With *Assembling* the reader is given the responsibility of exercising and developing his own discriminatory abilities, to rely on and to develop his own sense of judgment.

Assembling presents itself as a chaotic mass of works that doesn't give the reader any immediate sense of order. The magazine does not have any sequence to it and the reader is thus invited to begin at any point and explore. Celebrity hunting will be impossible for him because few heavies are represented in the first place and those who are can only be found by trying to follow the alphabetical arrangement of the magazine—a process that will only lead him through the contributions.

Can all this make a magazine that is more than the sum of its parts, whose form actually has a meaning beyond its

parts? Can it encourage innovation and make that innovation available, give young innovators a chance to get work around, meet each other, and participate together in each other's developments? Can it vitalize a young writer's integrity and return authority and judgment to reader and writer? These are the potentials.

II.

But these potentialities will not be realized on a large scale—at least not as the magazine now stands: grant money has been cut off and the magazine is as good as defunct. Perhaps the idea may be resurrected and carried on by someone else. That wouldn't be terribly hard to do, and I hope someone will pick it up and take it from here. We may note that a magazine as innovative as *Assembling* should not depend for its existence on grant money and hope that anyone who carries it on from here will not rely on money from an external and untrustworthy source. We should feel truly saddened and disgusted by *Assembling's* demise. I'll let editor Kostelanetz tell the story. The following is from his notice to former contributors.

Dear Colleague,

Many of you have written to us to ask when we'll be doing *Sixth Assembling*, and we regret to inform you that the grants committees of both CCLM and the National Endowment for the Arts have decided that this year you cannot be allowed to publish totally free of editorial constraint. *Assembling* is dead for now. This is particularly disappointing to those of you who, like ourselves, have already prepared your contribution for another issue.

As we explained in the preface to *Fifth Assembling*, our experiment in publishing openness and generosity (both yours and ours) cannot survive without grants. The costs of collating, inviting, mailing, covering, printing, etc. runs \$1500 per year, without recompense for our time and interest. Korn has been unemployed for most of this past year, while Kostelanetz, having published *The End of Intelligent Writing*, now finds his work cut out of commercial contracts. Simply because *Assembling* has grown to serve more than one hundred of you each year, we can no longer afford to subsidize it ourselves. 1975 isn't 1970, when we began. So we applied to the NEA, whose guidelines specified that "experimental works" should be favored. Not only were we the one and only avant-garde press to get a grant—in a blatant violation of the mandate—but the NEA specified that the low amount (itself a gross insult to the values we represent) be used not for *Assembling*, which we emphasized, but for one-man chapbooks, thus eliminating nearly all of you from *Assembling's* services. (And for this they get government money!!) So we applied to the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, which turned us down flat, after two years of support (including a grant that, as we explained in the preface to *Fifth Assembling*, would have killed us two years ago, did we not campaign to have its stipulations changed). Since the proprietors of CCLM insist that excellence be the only criterion for awarding grants, it is scarcely surprising that the recent grants committee consisted of such noted advocates of quality and opportunity, such veteran opponents of little magazine mediocrity, as Molly McKaughn of *Paris Review*, Tom Dent of *Nokimbo*, Arthur Vogelsang of *American Poetry Review*, A.D. Winans of *Second Coming*, and Robley Wilson, Jr., of *North American Review*. The fact that none, absolutely none of these people

are sympathetic of experimental activity is a clear and inarguable index of CCLM's continuing repressive attitude toward alternative work.

Assembling seems to have its enemies, to be sure—people who are opposed to what it represents in both esthetics and ethics. In our observation, they fall into four categories—authoritarian editors who are occupationally offended by its editorial concept (i.e., the freedoms offered our contributors); envious editors who covet the attention *Assembling* has received and/or its physical size (which is an index of massive contributor support) and/or its influence (especially in the appearance of publications with a similar editorial concept); conservatives who simply object to any and all experiments in art and editing; and reactionaries (or fascists) who, out of fear of the greater attractiveness of experimental art, would want to kill everything that shows originality and initiative. It is scarcely surprising that the NEA small press jury includes William Styron, John Leonard, Webster Schott, Jack Shoemaker and the presidents of both Alfred A. Knopf and Atheneum. (And it contains no one, absolutely no one, sympathetic to experimental activity, in another example of scandalous exclusion.) It is indicative that both this panel and CCLM's shot down *Assembling* in its prime, when it had more participating contributors than ever before (in five continents), when it had scores of new people wanting to contribute, just as it was gaining international recognition and readership. *Assembling* was, in truth, shot down not because it failed in its aim but because it succeeded, so nobly. We shall have to have other ways to revive *Assembling*. If you know of truly enlightened benefactors, please contact us.

The elimination of *Assembling* is yet another grisly episode in the continuing history of the suppression of experimental writing in the U.S.—the decimation of originality and opportunity, on behalf of seventies mediocrity and closure. As many of you know, commercial publishers totally neglect experimental work; the recent NEA grants to 153 individual writers included no experimentalists—none at all—nothing, nada, nil; the grants to 67 small presses included only one press predisposed to experimental work. While the squares ran off with the loot, the Participation Projects Foundation got only one grant, itself repressively restricted, as we noted, to chapbooks. When one of us (Kostelanetz) confronted Leonard Randolph of NEA with this data at the Maryland Writers Council symposium, 11 April, 1975, Randolph cited as an NEA experimental beneficiary, one William Kotzwinkle, whose work we'd generously classify as "imitation Brautigan" and which has, for that reason, always been commercially published. Randolph tried to create the impression that no writers in America consider themselves experimental—no one, thus denying in advance that people like yourselves exist. This is scandalous—intellectually, literarily, humanly. It violates our sense of decency and quality. Merely writing these lines (and rereading them) makes us very, very angry.

III.

During the last two years or so I've become increasingly tired of the standard one-reviewer one-view one-subject approach to reviewing and have been working on formats for multiple and group responses. Most successful so far has been my *Margins* symposium series. *Assembling* seems very appropriate to multiple response. All north american contributors were asked to respond to one piece or one fellow

contributor. There might have been more responses but for several unfortunate circumstances. A number of contributors hadn't yet received their copies due to some problem with the mails—this was further aggravated for Canadian contributors by their postal strike. Several contributors didn't seem to understand my proposal—thinking I just wanted feedback to digest rather than print as is. Several anti-authoritarian contributors apparently saw me as some sort of authority figure and merely sent me cranky letters. You can see a certain surliness in several of the responses below—and I say bless the instinctive distrust of the contributors. The following is what I received.

Bruce Andrews

SIGNIFICATION

[The subject of this piece is Ron Silliman. Ed.]

Weighing what is weightless if we remain at a distance. Performative utterance. Reference the prize yet here the booby prize. There is almost no such thing as non-referential language—only the non-referential organization of any language, a way off of beyond what is expected. Up close. Wouldn't reference have at times the fakery of immaculate conception—"traceless"—and thus of myth, a *countering*, to alienate? Familiar usage hiding the appearance of intent. "Words only become non-referential through specific context." (*The Chinese Notebook*, no. 110) Words only become referential through specific context. The politics of form, formality. Convention and intention at war? Parxis: pragmatics.

Reading speed / post position. Syllables where it occurs. Yet for what purpose are the interior rules formed and how are they to be recognized? Jump out of context = jump free of conventional apprehension. Or a series of Chinese boxes—passing from one to the other ("place of silk" set within "plethora dimensions") so the varieties of velocity creating simulacra of understanding, as when "to pulse on" and "making a bad rolling straight faster". As though the specifics of narrative structure could ever be the surest guide to a structure of comprehension. They aren't. Content as an alibi and an exceedingly transparent one at that. The plea of having been elsewhere at the time of any alleged act.

Cause / effect and stimulus / response may be tropes for the way one mechanism relates to another, yet still not at all for the way we embed purposive acts within a situation, or for the way our readings taken in (inside-out) their presence; also what surrounds it. "making a short time fast". Just as the passage to get there was an enfolding, a reminiscent process. "All these words turning in on themselves like the concentric layers of an onion." (*TCN* no. 35) But is context always a paradigmatic concern?

Grammar suggesting a more static alignment of forces out there—whether the prominent noun or frozen verb—its suggestive powers (its ability to notate states, relationships) look more and more feeble in specifics. We are usually given a fog in favor of any directly attended detail or the enhancement of what is occurring now, here. The disclaimer, the false clarity. Language can do other things: a model of immediate perception. Where outside, for example, are we so conscious of subtle prolongments—"aim same synthesize" "a do grain" "but held shoes"—elicited lengthen attention. Pressure, the molding, doing the enlargements of time to re-

place the simplifications of meaning. Or metronomic. "shortly wad thank city". With such separateness. "he I me button". The backgrounding of meaning also allows it to play a much more active formal role.

"a guide language the people"

"would strike a blow at idealism"

Does context only disappear in our experience when it seems superfluous, as it so rarely is in what is normally called readership? A word shift outward through a set of its own enhancing (?) conditions – by which form and activity give mutual evidence of each other. The absentee ballot. Not writing as an activity but – constructivist – as score for activity, not a decoration of a plot (or, to say, a *story*). Sometimes accumulation as a prosodic graph of possibilities contained, each directed out (each with its own penumbra, and implication of context) and then directed refocused. "cent had were was who prostitution". Put in place. One might suggest the idea of *sprung reference*. Semblance of condensation. "to pulse on infusion more". "the names applause".

A remarkable autonomy of line (as witness of the autonomy of language); yet even here the lure of a verb form occasionally at the end: "draws" "shift" "sharply" crisscrossing that autonomy with its determined fixity. Does it begin to suggest *between*? How autarkic the individual words here? "meticulous from defeat". Yet all such choices seem transparent (the manner is, not the material) in a way a too strenuously sought "substance" can never be.

The process involved sends up a record of causal antecedence much less than of orchestrating these volitions. We see like that. As though the mechanics of form – a way of mocking the very character of form, whereas the mechanics of reference just throw another congealed layer upon whatever is present. "yang hollow". "causes are yin". Intentions are hollow – moreover, they are here not logically independent of the forms that perform them. Thus not experienced as Humean causes. "is not a fixed limiting". "to draw the lots". Evidence of what it is not.

Myth comes in as the opposite – an illusory transparency, with the implication that it is merely transparent, as though a formal structure were not at the heart of its substantive content. Myth as a blockage, an inability to get beyond, a counter-explanation, then such use of language as is here suggested begins to take on the look of a counter-myth, not a decoding of any ulterior myth or signifier (an explanation), but: a *formal signification*. That which is self-explanatory, self-evident, directly and directedly here, which requires no supplementing or absent context to become intelligible? In and of itself. No further knowledge of causes. No summarizing laws. Not vicarious.

Richard Kostelanetz

I hope that none of *Assembling's* 200-or-so other contributors are offended if I suggest that Richard Meltzer's continuing contributions deserve a special prize. From the beginning, Meltzer realized that an invitation to contribute to *Assembling* was a licence not only to be absolutely free, to

do something no one else would do, but also to transcend our own editorial expectations. Quite simply, he discovered possibilities we had not envisioned in advance. Whereas prospective contributors were invited to submit one thousand copies, 8½ by 11", of whatever they wanted to see in print, Meltzer initially offered a thousand baseball cards, each with a different "literary move" added to it. Since our commercial collator couldn't handle that, Meltzer then sent a package he called, in sum, "*Rin Tin Tin's Asshole and Penis*. It's a thousand pages of all different shit including the only copy of the only novel I ever wrote." Since one was forced to imagine a whole merely from observing the part, it was a kind of conceptual art. Though our invitation assumed uniformity, he discovered the possibility of absolute diversity. "Each one-page thing," he added, "gonna be a whole different show stopper." In one *Assembling*, I found a hand-written note, apparently from his mother, addressed to "To Whom It May Concern": "Please excuse my son Richard from school today." For *Second Assembling*, he contributed a thousand more pages of similarly miscellaneous material, and that book also contains pieces by Borneo Jimmy Dupre, which is a familiar Meltzer pseudonym, and Betsy Wallace, which I take to be a pseudonymous collaboration between himself and his paramour, Roni Hoffman, who has also contributed regularly to *Assembling*. Though Meltzer's writings appear all over the map, he has consistently given *Assembling* works that are, as we claim, "otherwise unpublished."

For *Third Assembling*, Meltzer contributed a four-page piece which Jerry G. Bowles had initially solicited for his own *Assembling*-like publication, *Art Work, No Commercial Value* (1972). Though Bowles's book offered total freedom, like *Assembling*, Meltzer's contribution made Bowles and his publisher double back. So *Assembling*, which has never refused anything solicited, got a truly otherwise unpublished gem. On its opening page is the contraction "I'm," hand-written, in large letters. On the second page is "going" and on the third is "bald". On the fourth page, Meltzer wrote, in a neat square, "But not/ my crotch," and scotch taped, just below, was a hair whose length and diameter leads me to believe it came from a pubis. One dimension of this work is, no doubt, an awareness of its awesome compositional process.

For *Fourth Assembling*, Meltzer contributed pieces under several pseudonyms, including Bob Aab and Steve Zwint (so that he could rip off both the front and the back of the traditionally alphabetical book), in addition to Walter Whiz and Borneo Jimmy Dupre. A few days before we expected to take everything to the collator, Meltzer called up and asked if I'd like his stamp collection. Instinctively I replied yes, and later that evening he arrived with a shopping bag full of pages. (These were distributed throughout a thousand books under his own name. Jonathan Sisson, in his review for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, singled them out among his favorite contributions.) I later discovered that the year before Meltzer had offered my colleague Mike Metz his mouldy sneakers and a lot of other old clothes. Meltzer had perceived that *Assembling* could also function as a drop for highclass garbage, literary and otherwise, which was not an intention we initially had in mind.

Meltzer's contribution to *Fifth Assembling* resembles Bob Aab's to *Fourth*. In my copy at least is a carbon of some critical writing about rock music, apparently Meltzer's own, typed on the back of a record-company promotional flyer, both sides of the page apparently constituting his contribution. I understand that other copies of *Fifth Assembling* contain pages from Bowles' *Art Work, NCV*, Meltzer's copies

of which were apparently recycled back through *Assembling*. Neither of these is by now as spectacular or inventive as his previous exploitations of our medium, but I sense that he, like everyone else contributing to *Assembling*, will do better next time, if there is one.

Ron Silliman

ON ASSEMBLING AND/OR LEE DEJASU

I find that I don't read it, per se. Rather, I look at it. Which may or may not be what ought to be done. The magazine as a whole I mean. Later, I'll get interested in somebody's work and, not having a lot of it at hand, check back there. It's apt to have been in at least one issue. Like Mary Ashley or What's-his-name Farley, who once got his ass in a sling by doing a series of stamps with the face (head, rather) facing the other way. Into the glue. The G-men made him destroy the plate. But you forget that. You read it in the paper and know, reading it, that you will forget it. It's something you accept in the very act of reading. Years later, Rosmarie Waldrop sends you a book of Mary's or The Black Tarantula mentions Farley. So you look them up. It's a pre-conscious, a gathering of that as much as anything else. I think it's hard for women and men who've been "into the publishing scene" for awhile to understand its assumptions. They don't think that they should have to pay to put forth their own projects. But, letting others control the money, others control the art. Why should you have to depend on the opinion of other people to get your work "out" to where people can see it? Does any writer have any confidence that when an editor "chooses" his work (or hers) it follows that they can understand its assumptions, its intentions? So it exists for that purpose. Ashley and Farley are not "new-comers to any given scene, but rather their scene has not been widely made known. Lee DeJasu was trained as a photographer, degree from Cooper Union '64, all the right names on the resume (consultations with Siskind, Arbus, etc.) who, I take it, became interested in the image as sign and began adding letters, language, into his work. In the works in *Assembling* the balance between reference and non-reference wavers. It's ambivalent. But so geared that if you could "figure it out" it wouldn't "make sense." A bunny in dots on what might be a blanket next to a socket next to the date. The bunny appears to be a toy, stuffed, an image of a bunny you would present to a child. Below, in heavier dotted "lines," is a pencil among weeds and the following text:

Though drafting
in the traditions
he refused the
final artists
"one" solution.
He also lied
"like a bunny."

It is like the problem of four doors, identical but for the words stenciled on each: Ladies, Gentlemen, EXIT, push. What, then, does the door mean? What you get are objects alright, but with the meaning drained. What you are supposed to see is that place where it used to be. What more can you ask?

Hannah Weiner

CRITICISM OF MY HANNAH FOOL long page

page 2 why criticize you dont understand DONT COMMIT WHAT what else another day Rhys AT THE TIN PALACE GO VISIT HIM Jingle bells means you made an ero 2 rs r You said Rhys dont write the underlines and capital words keep interrupting, explain Bernadette READ THE TAPE Grief, a psychic said my voices YOUR VOICES were a multi not hemorrhoids teacher therapist & companion. SO WHY DID You hear your own voice read the lines of original text as you write YOU CRITICIZE YOURSELF because copies of *Assembling* were returned to Kostelanetz and you only make sense no one else hears. Connecticut was never explained by the voices. THE EARS IT never went there scene by Satchidnanda's ashram AND Donnie's parents are NO PERIODS too much EXPLAIN THE PHONE WHEN YOU DIAL you get messages you hear voices you see words on your forehead like HANG UP or DONT COME which means they're busy or not home not welcome or it tells you when to retire. OBEY REKA your aunt Greif says was your Guru in a former life NEATness and patience to be learned from Bernadett A POET Complain HANNAH ELEVEN was never made clear. Your aunt dies the one who was turning 80 turned 81. She's alive. DON'T EAT STARCH period DONT CRITICIZE RHYS. Criticize the first chakra. TOO OPEN. Kundalini rises from the base of the spine WHERE the 1st chakra is. SEVEN is at the top of morning head GOOD GIRL. DONT WRITE MORE. SIGN

SIGN YOUR NAME

Hannah Weiner

Loris Essary

LITERATURE AS FIELD THEORY/CULTURE AS DESOLATION

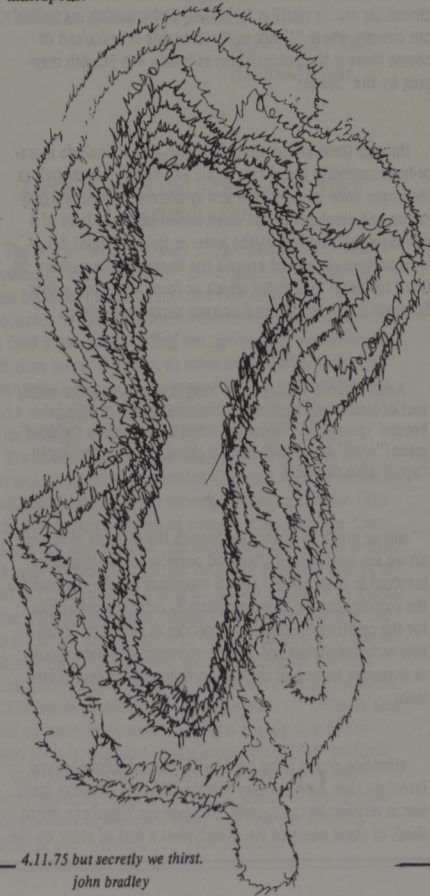
The written word is always a flage/modulation. With "P" as cultural structure and "N" as our art, the resultant paradigm becomes that of an inverted (M)etal (O)xide (S)emiconductor in which the source-to-drain effect of the electrical field is just that, yielding less, always less, incrementally less, than more. P batters to reductive submission our inputs: beliefs, perceptions, forms. N forced through the flux into a reduction to absurdity yields only the maintenance of an increasingly entropic writing.

Traditional American literature, of which we are both heir and perpetrator, has limited itself to a null set with its continued fixation on the unresolved concerns of the 18th and 19th century children of nature. When even the Kama Sutra is not inexhaustible, the missionary position is certainly less so. Political revolution endlessly re-canted always results in bicentennials. A boss is a boss is a boss. Who's next? After walking into a tree, Margert Fuller admitted that she saw it but did not recognize it. While failing to deny the resultant pain and contusions, she did underscore the vital point: *everything depends on recognition and identification.*

The whole problem confessed one way. . . "To think that I had so much to do with it. . . I was already sick of the whole subject. Nothing can be more dreary than 'coolness' . . . that covers up the fact that the character is unable to convey anything of force or interest, a kind of sociological coolness soon to become a fad. . . All this was about to sprout all over America. . ." Jack Kerouac.

but secretly we thirst.
 lipski uses "soybeans" and "hogs" and "barley" and "peaches".
 it might just as well be "hessee" or "cheerleader" or "kafka" or
 "shit". the art of calligraphy calling. pick any word. words of the midwest, or words of tu fu.
 but secretly we thirst.
 following: falling: descending: journeying: into the piece. it moves by hand. the spaces with the same importance as the letters,
 as the shapes. one.
 but secretly we thirst.
 he is taking us into illinois. into the blood of the word. into the blood of the earth.
 but secretly we thirst.
 we have forgotten our hands. we have forgotten the beauty they
 are capable of. we have forgotten how to see. how to appreciate
 the ink, the movement, the moment, the calligraphy itself. this as much as the meaning. this as much as the meaning.
 but secretly we thirst.
 we say "what did it say" not how it said it. or why it said it. the beauty in the telling itself.
 but secretly we thirst.
 people are afraid of calligraphy. afraid of its reaching into places where they cannot control. afraid of turning off the rationality and feeling the piece. afraid to stop thinking. and just sit there.
 but secretly we thirst.
 the typewriter. the printed cold letters. must be typewritten. have replaced the hand. faster. easier to read. less "mistakes"
 more binding. well it says right here in print. in print. in print. in print.
 but secretly we thirst.
 not that printing is not cannot be beautiful. ee cummings saw
 beauty in printed letters. but. to exclude. to condemn. to castrate handwriting. calligraphy for the press. we have lost something.
 but secretly we thirst.
 take a piece of paper. and write. take a phrase you like. or a book title. the miners pale children. or: the minneapolis telephone directory. repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat that phrase. write it, chant it until there is nothing else but the chant. one.
 but secretly we thirst.
 land use in illinois uses the state to give shape. use any shape-no shape. follow energy patterns on the white page. make a spiral
 inward. or work away from the heart. the writing itself will guide you.
 but secretly we thirst.
 i can remember saint raymonds school. writing twenty spelling
 words one thousand times each. how i hated it then. never realizing i was doing calligraphy.
 but secretly we thirst.
 in the heart of david lipskis calligraphy is corn. if we stare into the page long enough it is a mirror. our skin is covered with ink. signatures of all whom we have loved. all who have touched us. a black briefcase at our side. full of opium. full of corn.

but secretly we thirst.
 america needs more calligraphers. more graffiti. more murals. more tattoos. more excrement in the halls of the capital.
 but secretly we thirst.
 in the center of the midwest. a man is writing. he has a beer belly. he writes in blue ink. he is forming america with his hand. with his words. he shapes the body. he fleshes out the dream. a poem is born. a poem.
 but secretly we thirst.
 i can hear his scribbling by the cow shed.
 but secretly we thirst.
 it is midnight in america. but he is still writing.
 i can hear him.
 but secretly we thirst.
 this review should be calligraphy.
 but i am lazy.
 but secretly we thirst.
 the candle is burning. night.
 but secretly we thirst.
 quiet. quiet. quiet. quiet. quiet. quiet. quiet.
 but secretly we thirst.
 the avenue is calling me.
 but secretly we thirst.
 night. 4/11/75
 but secretly we thirst.
 john bradley
 but secretly we thirst
 mineapolis.



4.11.75 but secretly we thirst.
 john bradley

The whole problem summarized another way. . . "Neurosis is the contemporary expression of romanticism where the ideal wish was unfulfilled and ended in withdrawal. . ."

Anais Nin.

All of which is by way of introduction to Ian Tarnman's visual poetry.

The juxtaposition of linguistic and typographical elements against astral projections at one and the same time mocks our creative efforts and suggests the efficacy of creativity. Loneliness and isolation are the controlling motifs of "Galaxies." Against the physical void, fragments of communicable forms appear at seemingly random loci. Tarnman's constructions are less an impositions of form on chaos than the merging of the two. In his piece "Negative of M81 Spiral in Ursa Major," he has inverted the black-white shading of the previous gain, zipperesque projection and indicated the "teeth" by means of alphabetical outlining. The net effect, however, is to draw the eye into the Void, the sense directed inward by the rounding off of the letter "j" imposed on the letter "o" in the initial composition. The preeminence of the Absent in the resultant piece tends toward removing the artist-as-manipulator from our perceptions. To look for Tarnman, or a poem, or a poem by Tarnman brings us perilously close to the error of assuming that there is some "thing" in the heavens that is "Pisces" apart from the arbitrary demarcation of the human science of astronomy. Only the form persists. If our perceptions are the same as his, perhaps those in spite of him, we are close to order as art, rather than the converse, and forced to consider the possibility of an *a priori* literature.

Tarnman as a visual Pythagoras whose universe is composed of phonemes and morphemes instead of numbers? Not quite. Rather, we have the suggestion that the successful exercise of creativity consists in the coupling of a form within the mind to a Form within the Mind. ORDER as art.

The entire issue isn't as ridiculous as it sounds. Tantric thought has long recognized that art requires positive material with which to work instead of non-being contemplating itself or the unsupported assumption that the writer creates something out of his imagination that is tangential to and corrective of socially/psychologically experienced "reality." Art can work through a spectrum of modes covering all possible categories of emotional experience and expression, the forms of art stimulating latent traces belonging to these modes so that the mind "eats" them, tasting their juice or rasa. Tasting rasas in sequence allows the mind to transcend its own emotive contents to become conscious of itself both emotionally and intellectually through the prodding of fragments of memory/experience. In these traces, Tantra sees the gestalten of our universes as spatio-temporal rhythms. Without begging the question of whether the Tantra admits of any ontology, it would all seem to come down to a matter of choosing within a failed and constricted culture or, in effect, allowing ourselves to be chosen. In the latter case, visual mantras such as Tarnman's can direct us to those Forms which exist independent and apart from cultural straw men.

His final poem in the series, "Magnetic Poles no. 2", approaches the superimposition of a filmstrip in the form of a spectral analysis of a star cluster. What better choice with which to end the poems. Film the greatest cultural product and film the greatest illusion. What, after all, is abstract expressionism expressing? Symbolic logic symbolizing? If it is true that we fail to see what is familiar and, in the process, have forgotten, it is no less true that the only inherent un-

certainty in Heisenberg's principle is our own self-chosen organization of time and space.

Davi Det Hompson

RONI HOFFMAN ALWAYS PRECEDES DAVI DET HOMPSON

After a few moments consideration, I began to giggle at the proposal that *Assembling* should be reviewed and the reviews could be written, in part, by the contributors themselves. I can't imagine a system better designed to explode by the forces of its own internal contradictions. Anthology reviews are the reflections of editorial judgements and when such judgements are not made, as with *Assembling*, the reflections should disappear. And to expect any ego-driven contributor to ignore his/her own superior pages, in deference to another's, shows optimism worthy of a government economic advisor.

I have decided to write of Roni Hoffman's pages simply because they have always acted as an introduction to mine. My interest is based on their location rather than their content; a more appropriate, I believe, "review" selection for a publication like *Assembling*. Although Roni contributed to *Assembling* One, I did not, so the following comments refer only to issues Two through Five.

Her contribution to issue Two is a sheet of cheap yellow paper with two green rubber-stamp images of a cartoon dog with the name "Peabody" underneath. Issue Three has the same yellow paper with three black tilted rubber-stampings of tiny goats, one under the other, connected at the horns by two red X's made by a felt-tip marker. Issue Four is on a pink page with a thin red crudely drawn outline of a pig, to the left of page center, containing a red rubber-stamp of a smaller pig. Her page in Issue Five is much more elaborate, reflecting the upgrading of technical quality throughout this issue. Black and grey silhouettes of walking pigs form a border on a pink page for two couples of mirrored dancing pigs in jackets, the top couple touching, the bottom ones separated. None of the pages are identified, titled or signed.

A quick check of my other copies of *Assembling*, the ones I haven't given away, confirm that Roni Hoffman's pages do not carry the same image in each copy of an issue, with the exception of the offset page in Five. They are, however, identical in attitude and system. Maybe Roni Hoffman sees some obscure poetic purpose in all that stamping. Maybe. But I think she just likes animal pictures by the pageful and at the cheapest possible price. It makes sense to me.

I know nothing about Roni except of what is given in the biographical notes. In issue Two she was listed as an assistant art editor for *True Story*, in Three as an art editor for *Natural Gardens* and *Home Handyman*, in Four as art editor for *Silver Screen Magazine* and in Five as, alas, the former art editor of *Silver Screen Magazine*. I hope she has found a new job and contributes to *Assembling* Six. Otherwise I may not be able to locate my pages.

Betty Bressi

ROY ARANELLA: "V LETTER, FOR MARTINE"

Roy Aranelle gives us a visual poem the first line of which is "The heart is a lonely hunter" and transforms this familiar book title into something new.

Concrete or visual poetry takes many forms, two of which

are seen more frequently than others in American publications. One type uses words/letters without regard for meaning or content. Words/letters are a means used to create a visual pattern, design or configuration. This design or configuration communicates primarily on the visual level. An excellent example of this form of visual poetry is found in Jiri Valoch's "Homage to Ladislav Novak" in *Concrete Poetry: A world view* by Mary Ellen Solt (Univ. of Indiana, 1971, p. 147).

Another form of visual poetry uses rearrangement of words or phrases to create new meanings. Through repetitions and variations, the poem is turned around, changes so that meaning is presented in a different way. Our perception is changed. This form of visual poetry requires precision and imagination in the use of language. For it to work, it must hold the reader's attention, it must intrigue and ask the viewer to look at it again and again. Aranella's poem does this and he leaves us with "the heart is a lovely hunter".

Lovely.

Geoffrey Cook

NOTES TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF DEFINING

Very often with very experimental, innovative, or *avant-garde* work, it's best not to apply critical standards at all, for when reflecting on the object (or idea) we may not feel we have enough understanding to fully grasp it; yet, as sensitive observers, we feel there is (or may be) substance to the object (or idea) which is (or maybe) eluding us. At other times, when after thinking deeply upon an experimental, innovative, or *avant-garde* aesthetic experience, we can grasp an intellectual understanding (for criticism is no more than the attempt to form some sort of understanding to the pre-cognitive impulse that created a specific object [or concept]), &, at those times, criticism can honestly be entered into by the perceiver. In Richard Kostelanetz's work I find his visuals to be exciting extensions of the literary realm into the graphic genre; yet quite frankly his experimental prose baffles me, which only proves how lacking my own perception is. But I do not wish to discourse on Kostelanetz's work at all.

I wish to write a few notes on the needs that created my own piece in *The Fifth Assembling*, "Theme & Three Variations on Michael McClure's Ghost Tantra no. 39 / (for four voices)". Poetry & writing in general is an intellectual art—we do more thinking than moving our body. Poetry is communication on a highly refined yet on an unabstract level. So, we see that the perceiver is basically using his mind rather than his sense or his body (the standard criterion of quality in poetry is how well the poet can make the mind mimic the senses), but this cuts the poet, as well as his audience off from whole realms of aesthetic experience. When I was an adolescent, I had demonstrated possibilities as a composer/musician, a plastic artist, & a writer. Through circumstances & a series of decisions, I was trained so that when I did decide to dedicate my life to my creative talents, I became a writer. But this whole ranges of my personality denied. Fortunately, the arts are synthesizing, & the musician who crucified the poet is resurrecting him, too. In the "Theme & Three Variations" I am approaching the musical (as many composers are approaching the poetic in their sound-text compositions), but I'm creating a "music"-like experience in a way no conservative literary person would recognize as such). Therefore, something is created that, hopefully satis-

fying is (although aesthetically challenging) to the perceiver. If you ever hear my work (or other poets or musicians working with the same synthesis), I hope you do not take your standard prejudices of what music or poetry should be, for what you hear will be neither of these, but rather something which is the synthesis of two or more aesthetic disciplines.

Much of what you will see in the *Assembling* anthology is literature that is reaching out into other genres—usually music or the plastic arts. It is a record of literary individuals fulfilling themselves & liberating their audiences from the standard cliches of literary genres. Without this liberation, literature will die because it has become technologically obsolete (more satisfying media have been devised to fulfill the standard function of literature), but that does not mean that people will stop reading or attending performances of literary material, but they will read & search for that which only the literary utterance can fulfill best. This is what we are searching for, & creating.

Ascher/Straus

SOME NOTES ON OTHERS ↔ OURSELVES ↔ A ↔?

a

anyone can tell you by looking at the brief section of *Green Inventory* in *Assembling* that we approach intermedia work from the language zone

0

about 4/that is between 3:30 and 4:30/on April 12/ fixed site of the wooden steps/twins pass ← heading south "freddy" passes/egyptian blue raincoat want an orange?

you can

want an orange?

juice yourself up!

an orange?

pinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepinepine (orange)

twins pass → heading north

b

notes on p. zelevansky's pages from *Jericho/zelevansky* offers a complex elegant and technical looking surface/that is perhaps the world of sound equipment/familiar exterior forms on the order of speakers turntables microphones switches etc./+ an abstracted geometrical conceptual version of an interior human-electrical world of sound/this is perhaps on one level a map of the world/that is of the possible look of the world of the musical performer ↔ musical listener ↔ and the intricate realm or field of recording playback amplification and so on the "wall" screen or structural matrix that conceals-connects performer and listener

0

about 2/2:30/ or 3 pm/on April 14/yellow light on green "madras green" wall/facing the small north window/grey pepper shingle roof shingle roofs 12345^u concealed presence "idea" or "memory" of "Jamaica Bay"/breezes through air field/win(spr(win(spring/ter)ing)ter

a¹

however we find ourselves more and more having to deal with materials/with the nature the presence of materials/we find significant various styles of work related to the move-

Richard Pierson

THE NEW KILROY

Davi Det Hompson is a beautiful name, and deserves to survive. Obviously, Davi Det Hompson (aka Davi dET hompson) agrees. No trickery is too low for him if it allows his name to worm its' way into the real time situation of his readers. In the case of *Fifth Assembling*, 'Davi Det Hompson' crawls into the skin of the unsuspecting *Assembling* contributor who sits on his couch, idly leafing through the magazine.

Unless he's planning a pyramid, Davi Det Hompson's only hope for cultural immortality will be in print. He has wisely decided to exercise as much control as possible over the use of his electrifying monicker, less the power of his verbal monuments to himself be depleted by shabbily designed card catalogue listings.

098
KI

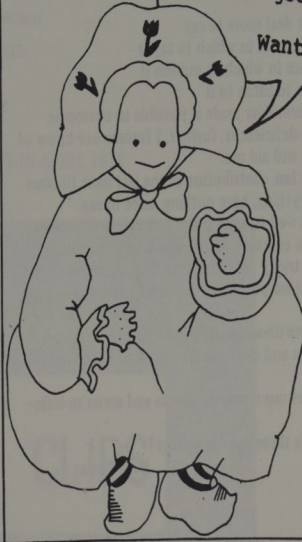
KILROY
Kilroy-was here
NP ND

I. Hoaxes and forgeries I. Title

Barbara Drake

fifth assembling's talking stamps cats newton's rings fold-outs celebrations and all that disorder people out of order in one neat cover makes me feel good.

Want more.



"How Can You Tell?"

Davi Det Hompson

pressed

His Leg against Her Arm

as they read

Assembling

"That's Your Name"

[To the right: the Hompson piece reviewed by Pierson, Ed.]

Bern Porter

**BERN PORTER COMMENTS ON HIS THREE ISSUES OR
THREE SINGLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THREE ISSUES
OF ASSEMBLING**

My problems at 64 after authoring 53 books reduce to four:

I have a great deal more to say
There are no words in which to say it
I have no place in which to publish it
I have no one to listen to it

That is until *Assembling* made it possible to overcome these embarrassing deficiencies; further, I foresee nor know of anywhere else that will aid me.

Fortunately my last contribution in the last issue finishes me: I have said everything, have nothing more to say.

In this light it is well to examine my three contributions.

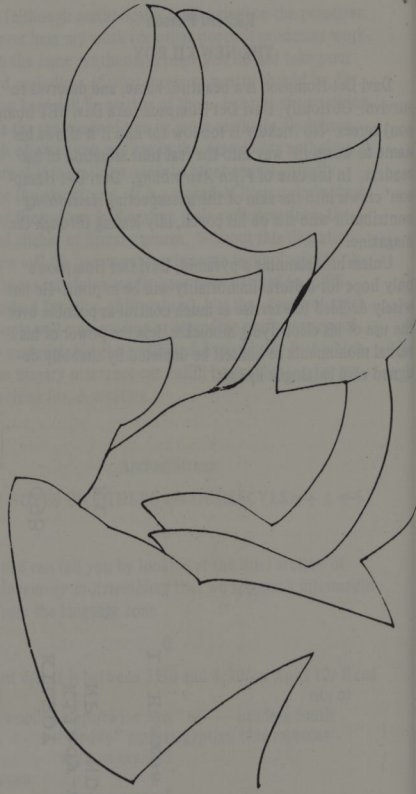
The first, using a combination of words and numbers, proclaimed each is tricky plus, together they are more so and in total do little but impinge the eye—the brain and thinking are not bothered.

The second, a line drawing, merely depicts the mess we are and have been in and shows an exit leading to the next one coming up.

The third reduces our numbers, words and stews to infinity in an azure sky.

As I said/asked is there anything more?

Bern Porter



(2) Bern Porter

222
LINES DAYS DOLLARS

(1) Bern Porter

222
LINES DAYS DOLLARS

(3) Bern Porter

John M. Bennett

IN FIFTH ASSEMBLING:

LORIS ESSARY

THOMAS MACAULAY

LARRY ZIRLIN

BY JOHN M. BENNETT IN APRIL 1975

TOUGH CLIPS

TOUGH CLIPS

TOUGH CLIPS

TOUGH CLIPS

At the time of experimentation in techniques developed from extensions of the Burroughs fold-in method. Mid 1960's. No Essary, nor Kolář. A development of the use of columns for use of simultaneous presentation as in musical composition. Parallel themes presented visually in the effort to control the performance in script.

Fumbling and struggling along yet easily finding the way back at the end of each long night's tour of newyork streets, cafeterias, bars. Development of the texts always in the morning, sometimes after sleep sometimes before. Mixing a day's observations with the deadly pages of the newyork times. It was then that it became difficult to read a Burroughs text. And he was the only experimenter getting work into print. Collecting those, and yet seldom reading them. Have not yet read any Burroughs since. Finding that Dead Fingers Talk being some climax, and going on to other activities, mostly theater, and even Burroughs did one event which was overly crowded and we couldn't get in, but heard it described and it was written about in the papers. Now. That there are books about Burroughs, perhaps it is possible to search back and study it. If. But then again who and why? And others: August Stramm. Gerhard Klühm. Konrad Bayer. Jiří Kolář. There are others besides William S. Burroughs, you know.

Loris would write "in the mornin g and then wa lk along the river, watchi ng the fisher men and somet imes stopping to read. . ."

But earlier, Levendosky & I collaborat ed on an add ing machine tape mobus s trip of impr ovised Faulknerian improvisation some quoted some less poetic and now I don't even know who we mai led it to. Used the two-toned r ed and black ribbon as Faulkner wanted for his Sound and Fury, printed multicolored rather than simplified italics and standard. Now that we know there is histor ic precedence, how are we to use our own literary-critical knowle dges? And the intrigue with the Dada, and NaDa, and CaNaDada? I echo Kostelanetz, saying: Loris your work is beautiful. He says "brilliant". Then I answer your question saying, Yes. Compile a list of criminals like a Lord Hi gh Grand Inquisitor, and add it to the list of your 25 favorite words.

REVIEW OF A DIFFICULT ACT TO FOLLOW (HENRY KORN) by Gary Moore



DRAWING BY KORN

Henry Korn's A DIFFICULT ACT TO FOLLOW is the newest and perhaps finest example of the "Surreal" or "Felicitous Apocalypse" type of short fiction by this surprising writer. Other stories in this vein, along with most of his other published short fiction, divided into what I think are appropriate categories,

may be seen in a chart:

SHORT FICTIONS BY HENRY JAMES KORN

<u>Surreal or Felicitous Apocalypse Stories</u>	<u>Play Stories</u>	<u>Pathetic/Realistic Stories</u>
* A DIFFICULT ACT TO FOLLOW (FIFTH ASSEMBLING)	DOGS IN WAR (FOURTH ASSEMBLING AND EXACT CHANGE)	CAUGHT LOOKING (FIFTH ASSEMBLING)
* EINSTEIN GOES TO THE ZOO (THIRD ASSEMBLING)	KING KONG IN THE KITCHEN (FOURTH ASSEMBLING AND EXACT CHANGE)	* ONE THING PERFECTLY CLEAR (EXACT CHANGE)
* FOUR DREAMS DREAMED BY THE GIRL WHO ATE THREE DESSERTS (SECOND ASSEMBLING AND EXACT CHANGE)	HOW WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE INCAS (FIRST ASSEMBLING)	TAMPA -- JUNE 2, 1898
THE CONDEMNED OF ALTOONA (EXACT CHANGE)	THE HISTORY OF FRANCE (EXACT CHANGE)	
* THE PONTOON MANIFESTO (EXACT CHANGE)		
* LOW AND BEHOLD (EXACT CHANGE)		

EXACT CHANGE (ASSEMBLING PRESS) is the only collection of Korn's short fictions from magazines. Stars indicate stories I think are terrific.

According to my classification system, the "Surreal" is Korn's richest vein, and the one from which he most often brings forth true blood. A DIFFICULT ACT TO FOLLOW had, in FOUR DREAMS DREAMED BY THE GIRL WHO ATE THREE DESSERTS and LOW AND BEHOLD, difficult acts to follow. FOUR DREAMS is short enough to quote in full on the next page.

FOUR DREAMS DREAMED BY THE GIRL WHO ATE THREE DESSERTS

One: It was the day of my wedding. All about me were black children with snow cones covered with different flavored syrups. My husband was dressed in an ice cream vendors uniform and I was angry at him for giving the cones away free instead of charging fifteen cents. He turned around to say I should be grateful for what I was getting and he pulled a small ring out of his pants pocket. When I put it on my finger it burst into flames and I woke up.

Two: I dreamt I was dead and I woke up to find it was not so. I went downstairs and found my mother baking a cherry cobbler in an old hat that belonged to Grandpa. When I asked what she was doing she swung at me with a rolled up dish towel. I ran around to the back of the house where my dolls were lined up in an enormous hole. I stared at the blackness until I woke up.

Three: I dreamed the Astronauts were my Uncles and they came to bring me chunks of the moon. We lined them up on the kitchen table and each piece fit together like a three dimensional jig saw puzzle. When the pieces were put together they spelled my name. My uncles smiled and showed me some dehydrated cinnamon cubes. They were larger than I expected from seeing them on television.

Four: I dreamed that Jesus and I were playing Chinese Checkers. He was winning. I wanted to give up but I was afraid to tell him. After we were done we went into the bathroom and he let me comb his hair.

HENRY J. KORN

At the close of A DIFFICULT ACT TO FOLLOW, after bringing Dickens' Magwitch from fictional existence in an English cemetery in 1831 to real life on the stage of Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas 1974, the magician goes on in his second show to the only trick that can triumphantly follow an act of literary magic in which literature becomes real: it is the revelation of the world itself,

uncreated by man, always there, and more amazing by far than any literature or magic.

The magician draws open the curtains of his puppet theater to reveal the universe.

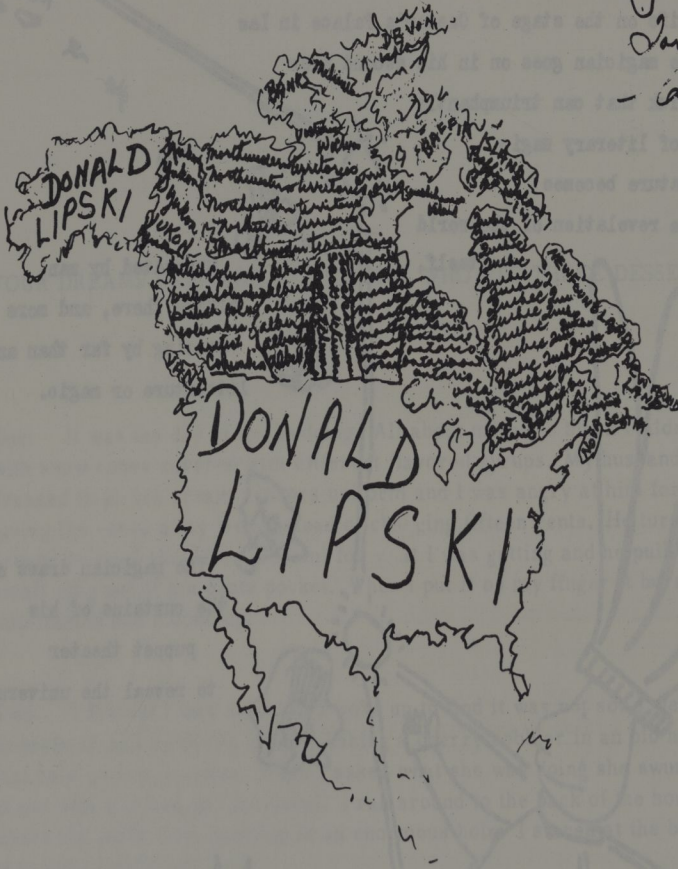
I have a good idea what it looks like in there,

It looks like the world, of course, but it also looks like this drawing by Henry Kern.

— Gary Moore



May 15 / 75
Toronto,
- Canada.



Dear Karl - ASSEMBLING arrived up here a little late due to multi strikes and blizzards. Enjoyed everything but did appreciate the work of DONALD LIPSKI - (I don't know of any one who has, or will again, write Canada so many times (+ by hand, from sea - to sea - to sea))

Am sending him a huge in fact a three million six hundred and eight thousand four hundred and eighty-seven mile thank-you!!

Yrs. for continued "in-depth" preverbing - Pat Elliott

UNREFINED ROCKING HORSE REVIEW OF FIFTH ASSEMBLING

umnum dumdum dada dee dum dee dada dumdum dada deede deede dumdum

* * * * *

ZZZZZZ The winged free compilers/editors of wild wild wild ASSEMBLING never promised the literary world a rose garden - none of the manicured classique hors d'oeuvres the established critics love to nibble on. No, ASSEMBLING has compiled their very own backyard of avant-garde weeds grown in the tradition of Dada. So much good unguided stuff in brilliant array that it's hard to pick just one for a wheeeeeeee review. Tear out a page, roll it up, and smoke it to get high on.....and like Dada, we'll pick one of the contributors' work - at random - and review it (with maximum B.S.) in the manner of whatever comes into my head. Slug o' beer for a chaser to smoking ASSEMBLING Lessssseee - ummmmm.....right here.....

(betcha the F.B.I. will file this one)


Ahhhhhhh but my finger landed on my very own contribution EAR PRINT at the beginning of the FIFTH ASSEMBLING and I must say that it strikes me as aAAAHM! Seriously now. The visual impact leaves me one-sided.....SAAAAAYthis compilation is tipping like a table in a seance imitating a cork in a sea in the middle of a typhoon..... Alright, so my prejudiced finger landed on the first..... inclination. That's what reders...I mean...readers...get when they puff on joints made from ASSEMBLING pages..... ALLRIGHT (got it right this time)let my random choosing finger land on.....of course, of course, obvious genius/ulrite ahhh on obvious genius of our excellent editors and compilers of ASSEMBLING who help grow the below

(so we can get hih er high)




W
O
W
!


There is my finger (ooooops) hand on editor Richard Kostelanetz's visual poem and like so many of his visual poems, words telescope time and experience and spread meaning as they stand alone



Kostelanetz's visual poem projects an aura of sorcery from a few rarified words with import heavy on the incisive choice sending the reader to the research shelves of discovery.



Henry Korn's two fine short stories reveal opposite situations; the first is a surreal story about a magician presenting his ultimate illusion, a mind-trip into the universe of his imagination; the second is a poignant baseball story about ambition stuck in the confines of mediocre talent.



And Mike Metz's invisible poem of expected appearance sends readers on a search for a will o' the wisp they'll never see unless they slip into the 5th demension.

What's that? I was supposed to pick ONE contributor, but not kowtow to the honchos? O.K. We'll try again.... My finger's found the heavy symbolism of Beth Anderson's RRRRRrr rr letter sound arrangement. A mad dog? A motorcycle? A hot rod? Frustration? Anger? RrrRrrRRrrrr rising like a cloud of noise and (smog?) to fill the atmosphere as emission from the impatience of engines gunning a furious pace for the mod future shock....RRrrrr RrrrRrrrRrrrrrrRRRRr! Phantom of future????? Contented cat's purr with hiccups after a meal? A swarm of hornets? A menacing overflight of invisible bombers? RrRrRRrrrRrr RRRRRrrrrrr An enraged mob? Your own revolution? RRrrRrrr An empty stomach? RRrrrrRRrrrrRRRRRRRRRRRRR a rocket to the moon? A mind trip. Whatever you want it to be.

Whoooooops! Fickle er fickle finger slipped to another page. David Franks "REJECTS: (a work in progress) hits on the relation of viewpoint in subjective rejection, things we cast away in disdain without really examining them, the failure to observe what is there right under our very own noses.....like simple type erase pieces ready for the wastebasket after practical use and filled with typed letters eliminating typing mistakes. Throw away? Not so. Franks finds that the letters mix with the design on the tape for aesthetic possibilities. Typed out phrase/sentence pieces become small poems with big discovery meanings for mind probes. Franks has photographed and blown up six discards for a two page gallery showing. Some make me think of Mark Tobey paintings. Just think if these were reproduced on 8'x 4' canvas! Think if they were sixty by thirty feet! And in full sun with halos around them! Franks could reproduce them on billboards in black and white and/or rainbow combination! I CAN'T BELIEVE A SIMPLE TYPE ERASE COULD START ALL THIS! And to think I used to throw these visual poems away without thinking or seeing

AN
 ASSEMBLIMP
 HIGH
 For unblocking
 And re-directing
 The flow of cosmic traffic

this zeitgeist of
 rejects
 soaring over
 the moon-whitened
 sand of seashores
 preserved in
 the rings of Saturn

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaargghh!

Heavy weed these

ASSEMBLING pages
 flapping around
 like crazed moths....
 Shot doves?

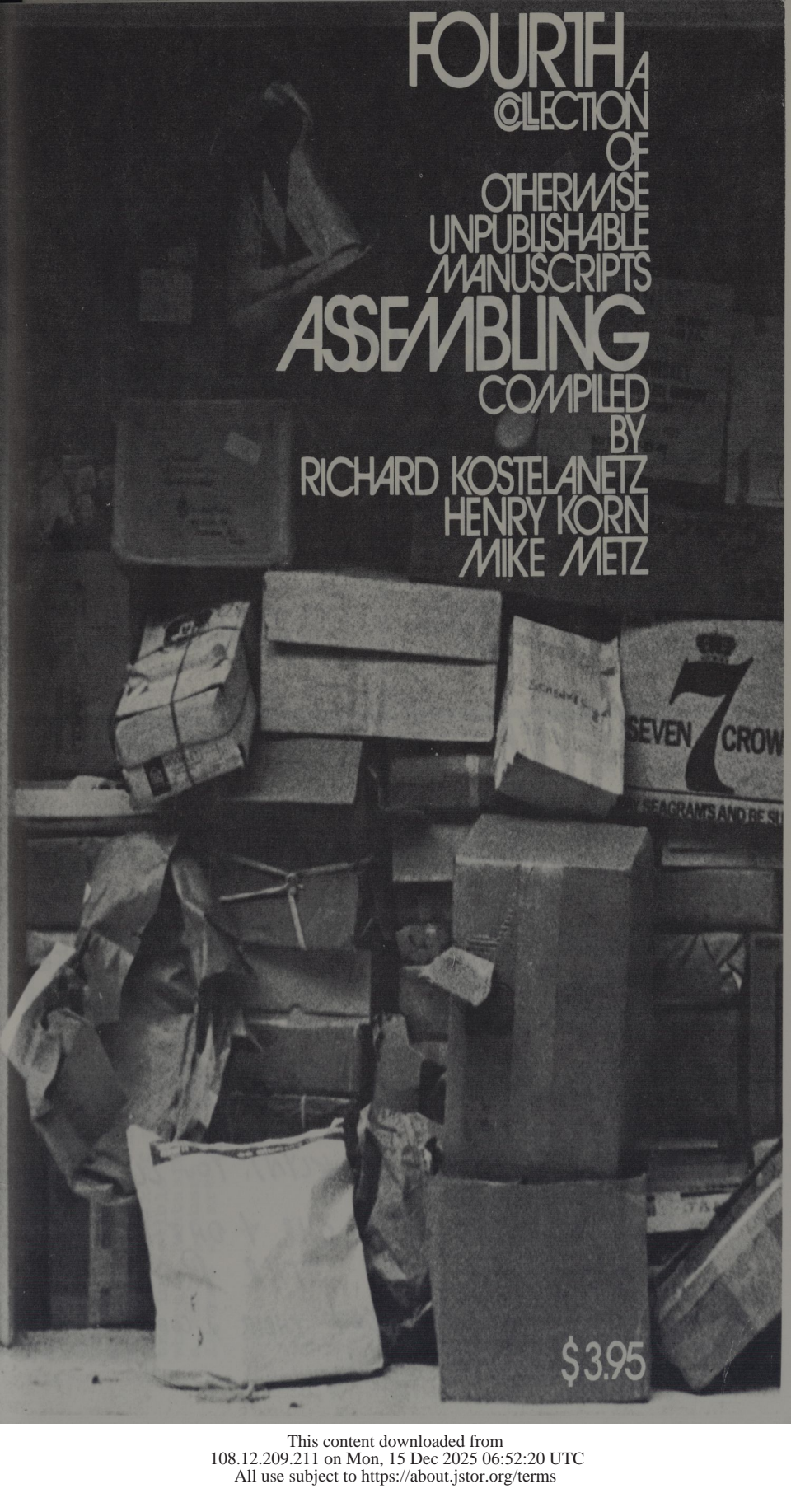
THIRD ^A PARTY FOR ASSEMBLING

WHERE CONTRIBUTOR'S COPIES MAY
BE PICKED UP, COLLEAGUES AND
EDITORS MET, BACK ISSUES PUR-
CHASED, CONSPIRACIES HATCHED, ETC.

SATURDAY EVENING, DEC 9th
4:30 P.M. HENRY + JOAN KORN,
160 COLUMBIA HEIGHTS, BROOKLYN 1120
212-643-0882. NOTE: CONTRIBUTOR'S
COPIES NOT PICKED UP THEN WILL BE MAILED.

DIRECTIONS: By Subway: Take Seventh Avenue IRT to Clark Street, which is the first stop in Brooklyn. Go out main exit, and turn right onto Clark Street. Walk three blocks to Columbia Heights; 160 stands on the southwest corner. OR take Levington-Fourth Avenue IRT or BMT (RR train only) to Boro Hall. Walk west (toward the river) on Montague Street to the end, turn right onto Montague Terrace, and walk 100 yards to Columbia Heights.

BY Car: Go across the Brooklyn Bridge, staying in the right lane, and take the first exit to the right, then swinging into the left lane on the exit ramp; so that you can take the first left onto Cadman Plaza. Drive one-quarter mile to Montague Street. Turn right and follow it to the end. Turn right onto Montague Terrace, which runs into Columbia Heights. (see above)



FOURTH
COLLECTION
OF
OTHERWISE
UNPUBLISHABLE
MANUSCRIPTS
ASSEMBLING
COMPILED
BY
RICHARD KOSTELANETZ
HENRY KORN
MIKE METZ

\$3.95

FIFTH
ASSEMBLY
PICK-UP PARTY

B.Y.O.:
BOTTLE,
FOOD,
CHAIR,
ETC

FOR ITS CONTRIBUTORS

AT THE PRINT CENTER

68 JAY STREET, BROOKLYN

BETWEEN FRONT & WATER STREETS

SATURDAY, DEC. 14, 5:00-7:00 PM

(TAKE "F" TRAIN (IND) TO YORK ST.

(FIRST STOP IN BROOKLYN). YOU'LL EMERGE

ON JAY ST. WALK ONE & ONE-HALF
BLOCKS TOWARDS THE RIVER)

THOSE NOT COMING SHOULD GET THEIR 2 COPIES BY MAIL

1970s as bowed ground bent by our hope dogged by edifice institution barrier (of sight — they don't see, "have no guilt") package (commodity, vs. relay, cathecting; exhibit vs. firecracker & cherrybomb). coercive expectation (of entertainment, "fit," distraction, rewarded, vs. art as provocation of experience, a sharing; they [who, even?] hear & see — an officialdom in absence, as market force — but only what they've always already read: art as confirmation, blandishment, grooved socialization, vs. temptress — norm, not form, as coercion). official standards, defensive [as offensive] characterization, (a detour), fatalism cynicism inscribed in the global & then the domestic political economy (late capitalism), as in super-structure, everyday life, consciousness, the chill. Not the 1960s (task: go beyond, & go back from, excavate, widen contradictions — for ex., what we found in The New American Poetry 1945-1960 & find tracing hypotheses, or paths, momentum, new arenas: expanding yet viciously imperial economy = spur) but this decade: incentive structure: dilute, sacralize the atoms, entrap, rhetoricize, egoism, dampen: recession, amnesia, repression, repressive desublimation. We have not gone underground but blossom in the furrows, "otherwise unprintable," the community — the assembled body, text of impatience; write the future.

Bruce Andrews June 1978

Dear ASSEMBLING,

I feel the need to express my warmest thanks. No sooner did I start reading ASSEMBLING than it began to work. I couldn't believe it. I wasn't hungry. Before I was always hungry, as a result I was extremely introverted. I never wore a bathing suit. I hope my experience can help others. The true miracle, however, is my new attitude toward life. Before I was always depressed, tense. Now I'm in a position to do my job with calm contentment. It's amazing how much self confidence I've built up in just this short while. In addition, ASSEMBLING is very attractive and my acquaintances compliment me on my good taste. Again, ASSEMBLING, many, many, thanks.

Sincerely,

David Arnold

Of course everything exists • of course everything exists in at least two ways • everything is what it is and also indicates the nature of everything that is no longer or not yet that thing • assembling has a reality which is nothing but that assembling reality and it is also a collective and unusually complex reference point of literary otherness and extremity from a moral and aesthetic point of view • it is in its first assembling reality particularly a vehicle of the visible material opaque presence of the text • and in its second moral reality one of the invisible generators • despite limits of space within the assembling format — allowing only brief suggestions of what may in a few cases be large scale developments in uncovering new grounds of being for the text or the poem — as in the case of our own SPACE NOVEL — which could only be hinted at — despite and because of this prohibition on extended presentations assembling can be seen as a communal workshop for the evolution of a literature of abstraction • a laboratory of literary design aesthetics • certainly for the ASCHER/STRAUS COLLECTIVE assembling has been a site — periodic yet continuing — a curiously stable entity despite its surface of dazzling changes — where through snatches of GREEN INVENTORY — AS IT RETURNS SPACE NOVEL — and now TWINS TWINNING we've shared our research into an abstract literature that in obvious ways parallels the development in other 20th century art forms of a surface where the private emotive code of the interior codedness of emotion present in all automatic art becomes the solitary exposed content — formalizing the surface but also poeticizing it in a new way • depths that require only reading

ASCHER

STRAUS

DENNIS

SHEILA

THE POET & THE PALINDROME

"Many a time," the poet said to the palindrome," we poets are constantly dismayed by the vagaries of literary poseurs who, in beseeching us to create, actually indict us for creating."

The palindrome remained silent.

"They give lip service to originality, preferring instead, like an endowment which here shall go unnamed, the effusivity of the regular, of the credo that goes mundane!"

The palindrome said nothing.

"But oh how wonderful indeed, 'the poet began again, 'is the pastiche that is ASSEMBLING, which saves us from the fallen graces of the mags that breathe effete; for what should be done if bridled and uncirculated our pages went unread, unseen? What would be there for us to do oh wise palindrome to make our presence known?"

The palindrome smiled.

"Poop," was all it said, as it shit upon a flyer that read "Mail to Stop 4, Washington, D.C."

mark axelrod

as-sem-blage (ə-sem/ˈbli), *n.* [Fr. < assembler; see ASSEMBLE]. 1. an assembling or being assembled. 2. a group or gathering of persons. 3. a collection of things. 4. a fitting together of parts, as of a machine. 5. a whole that results from such fitting together.

as-sem-ble (ə-sem/ˈbəl), *v.t. & v.i.* [ASSEMBLED (-b'ld), ASSEMBLING], [ME. *assembler*; OFr. *assembler, assembler*; L. *assimulare* < *ad-*, to + *simul*, together], 1. to gather together into a group; collect. 2. to fit or put together the parts of (a machine, etc.). —*SYN.* see gather.

as-sem-bly (ə-sem/ˈbli), *n.* [pl. ASSEMBLIES (-bliz)], [ME. *assemble*; OFr. *assemblee* < *assembler*; see ASSEMBLE]. 1. an assembling or being assembled. 2. a group of persons gathered together, as for legislation, worship, etc. 3. [A-], in some States of the United States, the lower house of the legislature. 4. a fitting together of parts to make a whole, as in making automobiles, etc. 5. the parts to be thus fitted together. 6. the factory in which such assembling is done. 7. in *military science*, a call, as by bugle or drum, for soldiers to form ranks.

assembly line, in many factories, an arrangement whereby each worker performs a specialized operation on the work as it is passed along from one to another, often on a slowly moving belt or track.

as-sem-bly-man (ə-sem/ˈbli-mən), *n.* [pl. ASSEMBLYMEN (-men', -man)], 1. a member of a legislative assembly. 2. [A-], in some States of the United States, a member of the lower house of the legislature.

assembly plant, a factory in which parts, as of aircraft, are assembled.

- DRIVE 78

ASSEMBLING ASSEMBLING

Assembled collaborations from nations radical
 Fugued vertical Visual compassed points in the
 non-spoken wheel, a map for self-published
 multi-media wo-men to travel throo inexhaustible
 site of fume, the spirit of fuel Avant Garde
 - Courtenay P. Graham-Gazaway

Read Down

Here are fresh experiments
 Breath of fresh
 Air on a fresh
 literary scene in
 Art replete & Barbatic
 with literature
 false prophets UNscrubbed
 shifting allegiances. UNperfumed
 of the late 20th cent.
 WHO? MAN? GIVER

Jesse Glass, Jr.

E
 S E B I
 ASSEMBLING
 ASSEMBLING
 INNOVATIVE
 INNOVATIVE
 NO T V
 T V

Jesse Glass, Jr.

You know I
was there.

DAVID HOMPSON

If Assembling was a house
and you wanted to add a room
all you'd have to do
is just open the window
a little more
which is like
saying
it's a
neat clearing in
a forest with no
trees in it
yet it keeps on
growing & growing

/'78
Edward
Kaplan

A S S E M B L I N G
l a a c e a u r e o droppeth
t c l c t c p r p o as
e r i e a c e i e d the
r i e n t h r t n gentle
n l n t h i c a t rain
a e t r e c a t h from
t g i t l i e heaven
i i c i i v a
v o c a e n
e u n
s

T J Kallsen
600 Bostwick
Nacogdoches TX 75961

What is a critic and scholar
doing in Assembling? Although
the task is impossible, one
should at least TRY to be equal
to one's subject. But if there's
anything more conformist than the
commercial publishing establishment,
it's the G.D.E.D. (god damn english
department, inc.), whose own
journals and presses (with just a
precious few exceptions: Critique,
Chicago Rev., Illinois) never
dream of letting it happen.
Assembling is more than an outlet;
it is an example and a cleverly
seductive invitation to younger
critics who can experience what
"alternative" means. Once you've
tried it, you wouldn't trade it
for Random House, Harvard, or the
world.

--Jerome Klinkowitz

THROUGH ASSEMBLING I GOT
The Chicken wire

Loris Lanier



Hey I really think Assembling is the most boring piece of shit I've ever been associated with, if this stuff's "unconventional" I'm the mayor of Saskatoon. Buncha precious wimpy b.s. and the only reason I contribute is I got all these random worthless "otherwise unusable" 8 1/2 x 11's lying around in the dust, kinda just an alternative way for me to just throw all my paperly garbage the hell out. Wouldn't go & actually pay to have something printed up for Assembling if you paid me. Anybody funding this dull sorry trash with grants or any of that oughta be taken out and shot and their remains oughta be converted into the paper the goddam thing's printed on. Grrrr.....

R. Meltzer

an educational, expressive,
therapeutic, co-operative,
non-political grab bag, an
alternative space, literary
counterpart, word & image
renderings that please the
eye, re-shape cognition by
shifting context of focus
from linear involvement in
one lane -- to pictorial,
over-all splashing, dive
in anywhere, backstroke
forward. Robert C. Morgan

A S S E M B L I N G O R B I T S

HAVING SUCCESSFULLY ESCAPED
GRAVITY _____ the establishment

Its TURNAROUND T I M E

time to use this network &

cross the threshold of SPACE
communication

Fill the VOID probe the

O U T E R L I M I T S modify

the FORMS _____ hitch

your STAR to the cargo of

NEW IMAGES

C/A M O G A C F O R G E R
6/12/78

Bern
Rizzo



Sweet Recollections of Assembling

if kostelanetz is the meir kahane
of the avant-garde, then each is-
sue of assembling is a solidarity
sunday. every jew a .22!

--- keith rahmings

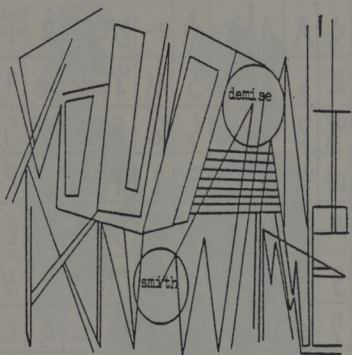
What does Assembling mean to me? A few years ago it meant a chance to publish, but this time to publish what I wanted, not limited to the choices of editors who almost never chose the pieces I liked most. In the past two years, my work has moved toward a concern with visual elements (as in the collaborations with Bernard Solomon in Assembling 7) or with 'found' poems (as in the pieces in Assembling 8). These pieces would have been produced whether there was an Assembling or not, but knowing there would be at least one magazine where such pieces could appear in a friendly environment helped ease some of the frustrations and fears of creation.

ROCHELLE RATNER

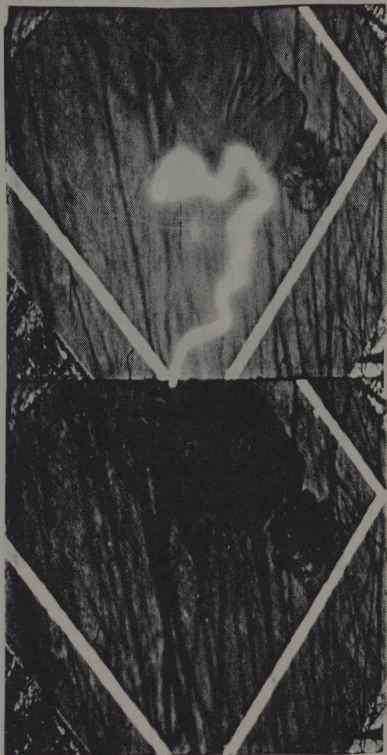
Bob Rizzo



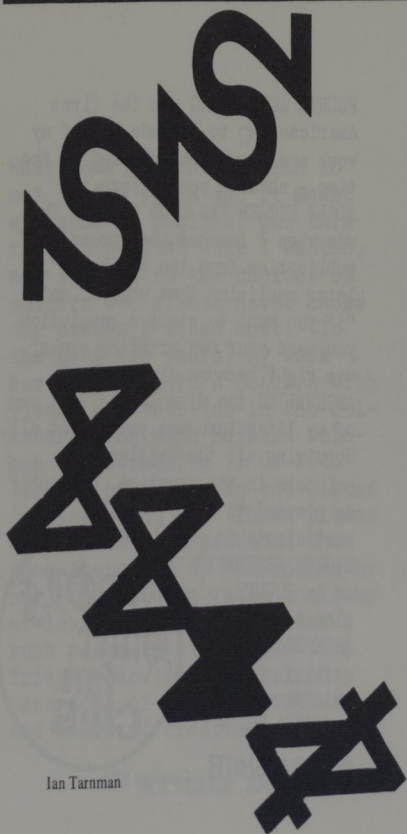
ASSEMBLING
PERHAPS ONE OF THE BEST WAYS
FOR ARTISTS TO DISSIMINATE
THEIR WORK TO A WIDE AND
VARIED AUDIENCE.



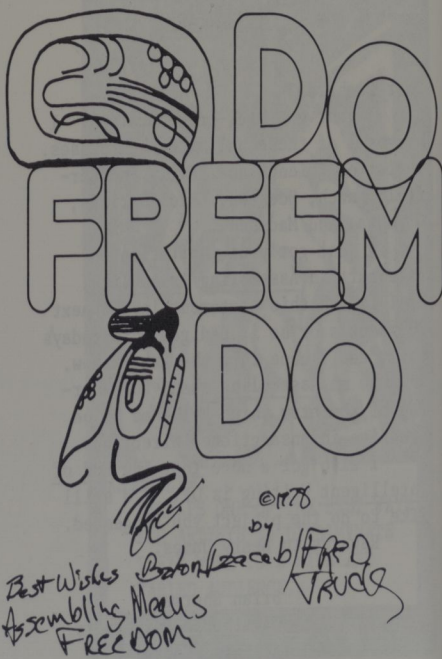
for ASSEMBLING ASSEMBLING;
for/giving CHANCE an equal CHANCE



Fred Szymanski



Ian Tarnman

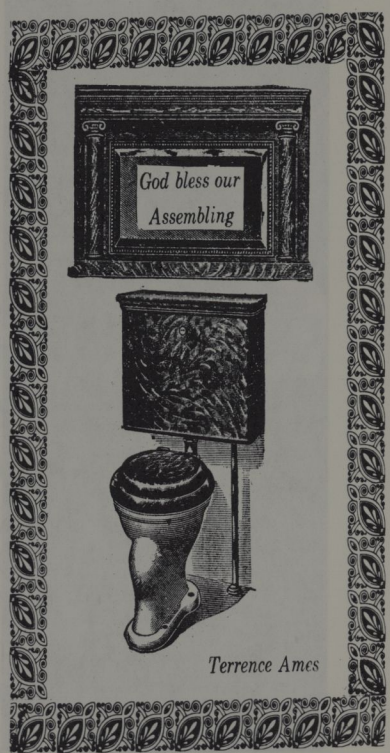


light purple word elements play obsolete games
 personal dancers sing the old songs
 rope fibers crumble

1 C BB
 0 C FF
 0 G
 0 III
 0 I N
 0 P
 0 M
 0 S
 0 T
 0

**CALM,
 CLUMSY,
 AND
 CONNECTED**

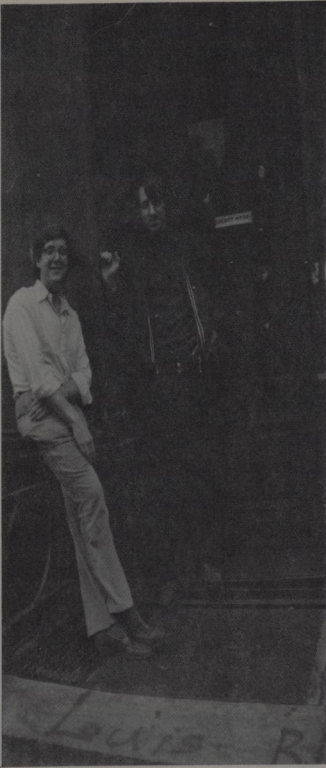
Anthony J. Gnazzo - C, C, and C
 July 1978
 Copyright © 1978, Anthony J. Gnazzo
 All Rights Reserved.



Terrence Ames

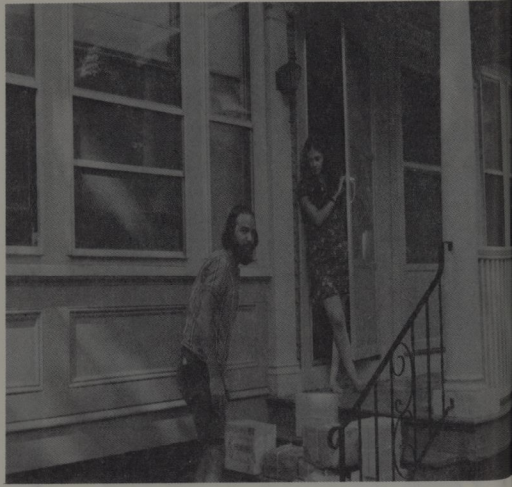
1-78
 Assembling
 is my
 kind of
 Guy.
 Thanks
 Cuttlefish

MATE



Henry James Korn

Mike Metz



Richard Kostelanetz

Madeline Metz

Mike Metz

Scott Hyde

Richard Kostelanetz



AS SEMBLANCE, -ING

We accord the avant-garde a malapropos seriousness. At the point of public acceptance, its objects hang in our most prestigious galleries, commanding high prices. Frequently innovative in syntax, dominated by neologisms, phonetically alien, its texts confound a facile interpretation on even two or three readings. Safely attenuated through time, the personal, social and sexual anguish of its first practitioners offers us a reassuring emotional voyeurism. Most importantly, because the avant-garde is concerned with the directionality of an art to which we have affixed our profoundest fears and hopes, trying to take us beyond our failures and inadequate successes to a place of triumph and salvation we have as yet only glimpsed, we regard it with the same somber respect with which we regard classic tragedy.

What we expect of the avant-garde is no more than the arc of the tragic: birth, struggle, death and rebirth in a new knowledge and vision. The static nature of the tragic pattern, however, is reflective of a world gone dead, bereft of possibilities, wholly determinant. Contradictorily and laughably, we have narrowed, not widened, our expectations.

If, however, the distortions of tragedy's mask we would wear do not fit the convolutions of our flesh, we should not forget that we have a second 'face' to put on things. 'The comical,' writes Kierkegaard, 'is present in every stage of life, for wherever there is life there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction the comical is present.' For all our art, we still live in an age of un-reason, absurdity, the inexplicable, the surprising and the nonsensical--in short, the very essence of the comic. It is by embracing the comic, however, making a logic of the absurd as Gautier calls it, that the avant-garde most nearly fulfills its claims and expectations.

Comedy, wrote Meredith, is 'the ultimate civilizer' because it requires that we regard ourselves sceptically. 'Often,' writes Wylie Sypher, 'we are, or have been, or could be,

Quixotes or Micawbers or Malvolios, Benedicts or Tartuffes. Seldom are we Macbeths or Othellos. Tragedy, not comedy, limits its field of operation and is a more closely regulated form of response to the ambiguities and dilemmas of humanity. The comic action touches experience at more points than the tragic action.'

The highest comedic act of the avant-garde is its first act, the generation of an object that at worst may never be understood (even by its creator) and at best may be only misunderstood. Paradoxically, only when the avant-garde ceases to be recognizable in the first instance as 'art' with the imprisoning responses that perception automatizes, and is experienced initially as the substance of our lives presented as 'art,' does it fulfill the freedom and scope it claims for itself. If this experience does not occur, if the object is rejected and ridiculed, we should recall Schopenhauer's statement that laughter 'is simply the sudden perception of incongruity' between our ideals and the actualities in front of us. As Mephisto further explains to God, one cannot understand man unless one is able to laugh, 'for man must strive, and striving, he must err.'

We should not treat lightly this laughter of the avant-gardist and his audience, so seemingly different, yet so much the same. A laugh, argues Anthony Ludovici in *THE SECRET OF LAUGHTER*, is man's means of displaying his fangs. Like any other animal, man needs to show his fangs only when threatened. We laugh in self-defense as a tactic for survival, to be re-born in ourselves, not in another world, as a warning and as an acceptance of being warned. As Nietzsche notes, man laughs only because he can suffer terribly, and his worst sickness is the thwarting of his will.

The avant-garde is not rooted so much in our mental selves as in our biological selves. So situated, art is not a plea for salvation but a saving itself, of self. We are the other that we would become. As comedy, the avant-garde shows us its homeopathic nature, curing folly by folly. Our incomprehension of objects is an incomprehension of ourselves. If an avant-garde work cannot be accommodated in our lives, it is because our lives are not possible, the work clearly is.

We have moved very far away from the ideas that life and art are somehow at variance and that avant-garde art is 'elitist.' 'The higher comic vision of life,' writes Sypher, 'is humane, an achievement of man as a social being.' Avant-garde art remains our best, conceivably our only response, to a world increasingly fragmentary and over which our individual control is minimal. It signifies only and all of the participation brought to it. It is not referenced to a known world, any representational social situation of either things or human beings.

'You cannot-a kid me, dere ain't no sanity clause,' is the way Chico Marx expressed it in *A NIGHT AT THE OPERA* which Henry Korn takes as an epigraph to his *PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF THE AVANT GARDE*. Elsewhere, Korn writes of two men in a room singing loudly, each in response to the other, filling the room with alternate balloons of sound. 'Sometimes,' says Korn, 'we call this Opera and other times it's the on-going process of life itself.' Korn understands much of what Kafka was getting at in his notebooks where he explained he wanted to exaggerate situations until everything becomes clear.

So, we have a catalog of the 'National Academy' considering the 'art' of 'programmed immortality,' 'nostalgia for the future,' 'fluorescent chicken bones.' Art exists where art is perceived and it is frequently mis-perceived. Still, anything can be art at that point where we remove the object from the realm of the practical and personalize it through our own sense of esthetics. Our misperceptions occur because we allow our reactions to art to be institutionalized, enslaved to the sort of 'official' certification represented by the tests Korn appends on behalf of his hypothetical officials in order to prove to everyone how well we've understood what they want us to understand of these 'official proceedings.'

(It should be apparent that the most fundamental reason for the rejection of avant-garde art in the larger culture is not that it cannot be comprehended or has no commercial value, but that it lies beyond the control of 'official' institutions of art. We do not need critics to explain it and make it meaningful to us. It cannot be referred to an already

controlled 'tradition' of art and given a 'safe' meaning through affixing a dollar value. By 'safe,' I mean an interpretation that does not challenge the entrenched positions of vested interest of the art bureaucracy which has less to do with esthetic values and more to do with their own lack of self-image and, often, their inability to produce, as artists, an object that can satisfy even themselves. An 'official' view of art occurs at just that moment that art itself is seen to have 'failed.')

Once freed of an established view of art, Korn challenges us in THE PONTOON MANIFESTO to take up the gauntlet and write our own stories. Thirty-three fictional beginnings are provided on index cards, not so much as he says 'to be shuffled and read in any order,' but to be expanded, completed, resolved on our own terms which may not at all be the way Korn himself saw the scenarios worked out. But the biting underside of comedy, our very real chance for failure is always present here. Here, Korn says, is not anywhere but just here. And he suggests to us a story that begins by imploring a computer to begin a line with the word 'Jesus,' but the computer, created without ears, could not hear the request. Pontoons are only flotation devices, and a pontoon bridge has as many gaps through which to plummet as places to step. 'Mobility isn't salvation (but it gets me there and brings me back.')

'...I asked ((Don Juan)), writes Carlos Castenada, 'if controlled fully meant that his acts were never sincere but only the acts of an actor.' 'My acts are sincere,' he said, 'But they are only the acts of an actor.' And Muhammad Ali in Korn's RETROSPECTIVE is the consummate comic actor of our time. 'I don't have to be what you want me to be,' says Ali. And Korn knows that it isn't so much boxing that is Ali's art as it is his life.

In a brilliant section of that book, 'Assaying Ali: A Conversation Among Body, Mind & Spirit', the triune aspects of ourselves discuss what Ali means to each. And though the Body sees Ali's art as boxing, for the Body itself, our biological animal existence, 'he's a measure of a lot of my ideas about the world. He helps me come to grips with some basic questions.' Ali is 'an all encompassing idea,' he has 'created a

compelling epic drama out of his life,' is 'a clever liar.' The Spirit sees him a bit more removed and ethereal, as a 'true hero,' while the Mind is largely content to narrate matters, relate incidences and facts. The RETROSPECTIVE, however, is not fact as fiction, but the fiction of fact. Ali, a clever liar, is nonetheless, 'an American myth, but black' (italics added). 'In a world filled with vagueness, sports are absolute,' says the Body, 'someone clearly wins and loses.' But Ali is a clever liar. Ali, as would the avant-garde, transcends time, his moment in history. But Ali is a clever liar.

There is much of the Imposter in Ali, what Korn calls 'wise ignorance.' In the fertility rights from which our concept of comedy developed, the Imposter first profaned the rites, then was beaten and driven out. Or first feasted, then sacrificed. Our sins are thus symbolically cleansed. At one point in the history of the Christian Church, each Lent saw the monks appoint a Lord of Unreason to rule over a Mass at which an ass was worshipped, where the Litany was literally brayed. In so doing, these worshippers would come out from behind the masks of their official selves, and when the masks were replaced, it was with a new perspective on the fraudulence of their existence, the finite forever separated from an Infinite so devoutly desired. 'The heart of truth,' knows Ali, 'is warring.' This is our exact change.

Tampax bombs are sometimes the weapons of that war fought in a world where frustrated hatchet murderers sit in their rooms and write out the tenses of the verb 'to torso.' Among the influences Kenneth Gangemi lists in his CORROBOREE are Lewis Carroll, Charles Chaplin, Edward Lear, Erik Satie, Samuel Beckett--all in their diverse ways, intellectual clowns. Gangemi himself adopts the role of the clown of intellect for a society in which a businessman's obsession with pubic hair leads to the invention of rail transportation, religion declines into a party of social freaks, politicians recite absurd slogans and poets eat alphabet soup. It would be easy to dismiss this world as an absurd fiction if the logic of it all were not so apparent in contemporary American culture. Clearly recognizable are the familiar processes

of capitalism, sexuality, art and politics which form the core of our waking concerns. Obsessed by them, however, we have warped the objects of our thoughts and cares, so that a woman's genitals have no more value than that of the market potential for new colored string tampons. Nouns, objects--the products of culture--are totally bereft of any significance outside the twisted shades of darkness smeared on them by our ids, not set free, but given license.

Written about again and again, there is no escape here from lust, genitals and sexual hygiene. There is no appeal to a spiritual realm possible because it is our spirits which have infused the objects we have created. Gangemi has reversed our evolutionary pattern and returned us to the exact point that we ceased being animals, a point at which we become aware of our bodies and first experience shame. Animals are not self-conscious of their bodily acts, but for us, sexual obscenity denotes our first psychological fall from grace.

Having reached this point, Gangemi knows there is nothing else to do but laugh at one another. A student of pubic hair does do research in a public library. To be able to laugh at evil and error means that we have somehow surmounted them. In this light, the pun of his title is easier to understand. 'Corroboree' in Australian English is an 'uproar,' or a 'tumult,' the word taken from a dance festival held at night by aborigines to celebrate tribal victories. But we are also dealing with an almost television-like neologism in which Gangemi becomes the recipient, the 'corroboree' of the verb 'to corroborate,' which means to make more certain, 'to strengthen.' So are we all.

If Kenneth Gangemi accepts the world as a given, Jean-Jacques Cory does not. His field of reference is not the world, though we do have LISTS of presidents, writers, masterpieces, masters, cities, mountains, ambiguities, dollar signs, pseudonyms, lackies, the reflections of Herman Kahn, memories and so on. But they are our own personal presidents, our writers, our masterpieces, our masters, our cities, our mountains, our ambiguities, our dollar signs, our pseudonyms, our reflections of Herman Kahn, our mem--

ories and our so ons. Ultimately, all references in his constructions are to our minds, not to his. These LISTS, in and of themselves, may be entirely meaningless to Cory; meaning is not his concern. He is laughing at (and with) us, tyrannizing us, by testing our associations about the objects/people/phenomena that float loosely in our consciousnesses against the responses to them elicited from the particular form in which he has them arranged.

'Poetry,' observed W.H. Auden, 'makes nothing happen.' The great majority of poetry does make nothing happen because it accepts the world as a given. It is essentially static because it is not under its own control, but is prodded and flailed into directions determined by social insanity rather than the sometime brilliance of individual madness. As Freud suggested, civilization only endures because of commonly shared neuro/psychoses.

Out of Cory's juxtapositions come motions. However elevated our tourist sensibilities about Mt. Everest may be, to discover that it is just one bulge among many, including Mt. Communism which many of us may prefer not because of politics but because it sounds less like a flashlight battery, we are not the same for our discovery. Or perhaps we learn nothing except the fact that John Quincy Adams took office in 1825. What sinister qualities in the year 1825 have led to its inclusion in a piece of fiction? Nor are we the same for learning that women are 'perspicacious' or that Cory may very well not be Cory at all (his disclaimer to the contrary) but actually Reginald Irving or even Maximillian Ned. Godfrey Thomas?

We are not speaking here of the mere assimilation of information. Were that the case, Cory would have failed, done nothing more than dug another canal for impulses to pass over in our cerebral cortex. He has done precisely the opposite: overthrown the lingering notion of the reflex arc by smashing reflex against reflex. In so doing, he has clarified our thoughts undoubtedly by confusing us. In that confusion, however, there is the possibility of genuine perceptual freedom.

We do possess more wisdom singly, perhaps the tribal sharing of comedy notwithstanding, cautions Donald Porter in

his AS IF A 'FOOTNOTE' TO THE FINAL GLORY.... As he 'documents' the history of the footnote in its development to meet a social need of differentiating what is essential from what is peripheral, the text of his book is less and less that of a recognizable standard English--abbreviations proliferate, footnotes require footnotes, the text itself gradually drops into the footnotes themselves. As a race locked into history, the social process robs us of our individual ability to determine value. Just as the avant-garde understands we must transcend the determinacy of time in order to realize ourselves, so Porter's scholars fret over being understood exactly as they are across time and they seek a final, unambiguous static nature that cannot be misinterpreted. They die while they are yet alive, unable to risk the slightest disorder though it surrounds them, contemporaneously in the form of Skid Row bums, maniacal futurists manipulating abstract laws and a very real potential for nuclear holocaust. Unlike the avant-garde which understands time to be no more than any other element of an event, to be acknowledged when useful, ignored where irrelevant, or redefined where appropriate, Porter's scholars have yielded completely to time, made it more precise and omnipotent in each smaller unit they detail, until every aspect of time is implicit in each miniscule notation, no thing else, nothing.

We have literally looked at ourselves from a 'lower level,' the bottom of the page, and know what is incorruptible. Possibly not ourselves, certainly not our beliefs or shared assumptions. Implicit in Porter's work is the warning that we ought not to take too seriously even our comedy or our art unless we can do them without sapping them of their vitality through a compulsion to ossify them as an assertion of some absolute aspect of ourselves, a final footnote to an unrealized glory. Otherwise, as the bombs we've built go off, there is nothing else to do but buy a balloon and sip a little wine, finding at the bottom of the final page one moment in which we are at last free to play in a final, ultimately irrelevant way.

'The attempted completion of any event suspends it.' Mike Metz knows better, too. His SELECTED STRUCTURES is an

annotation of objects that require participation to 'complete,' to make into a structure we would call 'art.' He offers us a number of 'models' for behavior, hiding, intention. The nature of models is such, however, that they conform only to themselves and not to the world beyond. What is true of models is only true of models. 'Beneath a shapeless form,' comments Metz, 'is a definite structure.' So we are compelled to behave in a way that we drive the spike into our own flesh. It is our fault, he tells us, we point to ourselves.

Might not, however, the reverse be true, that beneath a definite form there is a shapeless structure? Metz's pieces remain only analogies of personal processes, not the processes themselves. His work is dominated by the curve, not the straight line with its inevitable link of two points. And, as Malraux notes, when archaic sculpture represented human lips cupped into a smile we have our first indication that man has become aware of his soul. The question is to which self we will point.

'ART CREATES WORLD MADE ENTIRELY FROM'

'LIFE COPIES THE POETRY OF'

'THE TRUTH OF FICTION IS THE POWER OF ARTIFICE IS'

Art itself is part of the selection process, Richard Kostelanetz tells us in his *MANIFESTOS*, and our options are exactly those of the possibilities of our language. 'Poetry,' he quotes the formalist critic and linguist Roman Jakobson in the Afterword to *VISUAL LANGUAGE*, 'means the giving of form to the world, which is valuable in itself.' We are not to Kostelanetz so much our language as our language is us.

Meaning and shape are complimentary in his work, he tells us, and a piece like *COME HERE* elaborates what he means. The sexual pun becomes obvious as the text sperm-like works its way across to the center of the page where a visual explosion occurs. The nature of the event, however, remains ambiguous. Are we to see the final imploded pattern as some sort of hopeful fertilization fulfilling the promise of a fruitful union, or are we to understand the pun of the shift in verb tense from 'come' to 'came' as an implicit statement of failure, that the joy of reaching our destination may not be sustained?

The world of language can be as painful as any other, par-

ticularly when, as Kostelanetz notes, his visual poetry refers to other realms of experience and more general processes. He calls his pieces in VISUAL LANGUAGE 'a minimalist beginning' and so they may appear at first reading. There is something in their simplicity, however, of Paul Klee's 'little scrawls' which so aptly document the absurd suffering of contemporary man. In their childlike nature, Klee represented by his strokes much of the inability of a child to accept the world his parents had fashioned and the wisdom of that rejection. We find in VISUAL LANGUAGE the promise of an American presidency reduced to a processual ideogram in which 'Nixon' gradually yields 'Noxin.' Perhaps it is most indicative that the word 'asphyxiation' appears literally choked as its letters pile and collapse on themselves.

Kostelanetz's visual extension of language tells us more of ourselves through time than even we even simultaneously know. Arranged in book form, the text of ONE NIGHT STOOD displays an interpersonal relationship coterminous in its beginning and in its cessation. Read forward, two individuals who bring so little of themselves to each other that they sometimes speak in almost monosyllabic grunts meet and fashion a sexual encounter. Read backwards, however, we experience the deterioration of the event, the inevitability of it all, as we watch them come apart, the woman possibly passed on to another friend of the artist.

Sometimes we are almost trapped in language as language. The pun of 'STOOD' Kostelanetz elaborates in a long poem he calls RAIN RAINS RAIN. To read the poem, however, the pattern we most often find is 'rain rains rain.' An object only yields an object identical to itself. Yet, the poem consists of visually and typographically varied instances of the two words 'rain' and 'rains.' There is less confusion here than meets the eye when we understand, as does Kostelanetz, that language is the first and ultimate multimedia. Only as language does it yield itself, but words occur instantaneously across all the senses of our nervous system and our nervous system occurs instantaneously across all our body and all the world to which it has been extended. Something of the question of COME HERE has been answered, for the implosion of language

is also a corresponding explosion.

Just as poetry is the possibility of language, so language is the possibility of all things. Kostelanetz shows us this in his NUMBERS where, to understand these poems and stories, we must understand 'numeracy' or the way numbers are within their own language which is also our language when we grow beyond the stuttering resistance of our tongues. Of numbers, Jung wrote that they are 'a mysterious something midway between myth and reality, partly discovered and partly invented....' As such, they are much like ourselves. Further, as we perceive their properties, we 'name' these properties, turning their existence in space and time into a linguistic nascence which is identical to the scope and substance of what we possess of the totality of etymology. In these pieces that scope has expanded, clearly noting that the elements of a generative process of language goes beyond a simple psychological confrontation with phenomena that is resolved finally in our mouths.

Every number has as an element a word to signify it. 7 is also 'seven,' 5 also 'five.' Just as we are all at our deepest beings something not quite flesh, so poetry and fiction are not quite language. Art is no less characterized than are the world's economies by the concept of synergy, the idea that a whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. In MODULATIONS and EXTRAPOLATE Kostelanetz expands on the implication of NUMBERS and realizes his fiction/poetry at those points in our perceptions where distinctions first occur. We are offered nuances without content, images without reflections, conjunctions which continue to infinity and occur only there, not at the point on the page where we encounter them. We have come full circle in something of a Kierkegaardian sense, treating any given instance of art not discretely but in toto. At any given point in these matrices of geometric patterns all their possibilities are present, just as everything appears to be absent. The decay from quadrants to parabolas to squares in EXTRAPOLATE at the other end is the beginnings of its growth.

Though innovative and generative in this form, what is involved in works like MODULATIONS and EXTRAPOLATE is implicit in all poetry. A line from Wallace Stevens such as 'we live in an old chaos of the sun,' requires the same

inventory of perceptions, vocabulary and emotions as Kostelanetz's shapes. Traditional poetry, however, does not ask us to experience it on the same primal level as do these works, always permitting itself to be resolved according to what is already known of the 'lived' world of things and pre-existing organizations. Our first perception of the 'sun' is wholly different from the second; in that instance we have the first experience to which we can compare it. After an initial perception, little more than comparative modification is involved in any cognitive process. Here we are dealing with the genuinely new.

We have come, then, to the end of our avant-garde comedy, to a situation where it is almost impossible to say anything about that of which we are speaking. How do we understand something never before experienced? In itself, we probably do not. What we do do is immediately begin a comparative process to fit this alien object into categories and meanings we already possess, ironically robbing it of its own attributes and imbuing it with those of other previous encounters. Everything, as we have seen, has changed, neither the new or the old is quite the same, but we are not sure exactly why or how. We have entered into a caucus dance where we go round and round in a circle and, though going nowhere, get somewhere. Our faith is in absurdity and our faith is absurd. And yet.

And yet, this end was in the beginning. ASSEMBLING PRESS began in 1970 with the first issue of ASSEMBLING, a collection of objects collected without reference to an editorial philosophy, a non-negotiable esthetic, a tradition, a school of criticism, or even a gestalt of the magazine itself. In one very real sense, the magazine may be said not even to exist. What does exist is the compilation over the years of hundreds of objects freed from any arena other than themselves. What we may know of any given issue tells us nothing of the art facts that delineate it. If we understand that these objects are 'uncensored' we do not know that any of them are concerned with censorship. If we understand that we have these texts and drawings, paintings, and scores before us in spite of their commercial potential or its lack, we

do not know that commerciality is an aspect of any of them.

These ways of viewing art, as something to be suppressed or sold, are rarely, if ever, aspects of art itself. They are, however, a straight jacketing blindfold forced on us by the structure of art as it exists in our contemporary culture. The triumph, here, of the magazine is that it succeeds absolutely in giving primacy to the objects of art itself. No longer need we dissipate our energies in struggling to accommodate both an art object and its environment. Here they are synonymous.

This is an occurrence of the greatest importance. All the elements we hold so dear in the avant-garde, freedom, growth, no longer need be just an attitude toward an external society and set of circumstances. A structure itself has been fashioned from these attitudes in which the external and internal world unite.

Hundreds of objects into the thousands stand before us as naked as we stand before them. Our laughter at that nakedness is no longer the joke of shame but the first notes of a celebration.

Loris Essary

(With thanks and appreciation to Wylie Sypher whose essay 'The Meaning of Comedy' was so useful in the creation of my own.)

**Project Grant Application
National Endowment for the Arts**

Applications must be submitted in triplicate and mailed to the Grants Office (Mail stop 500), National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C. 20506

I. Applicant organization (name and address with zip) Assembling Press (Participation Projects Fdn) P.O. Box 1967 Brooklyn, NM 11202	II. Literature Program/Category under which support is requested: Development Grants
III. Period of support requested	
Starting <u>July 1, 1978</u> month day year	Ending <u>June 30, 1981</u> month day year

IV. Summary of project description (complete in space provided. Do NOT continue on additional pages.)
 Since the recent ASSEMBLING is 40% larger than its largest predecessor, it is apparent that we are serving a large number of American writers who would not otherwise be so freely published. In line with the intentions of "development grants," we are applying to do three GRAND ASSEMBLINGS, which will differ from their predecessors in that we will print and bind 1500 copies of all material submitted by invitees. For FIRST GRAND ASSEMBLING, we will invite at least two hundred previous contributors to ASSEMBLING to submit no more than four pages, camera-ready for offset printing, of whatever they wanted to include. For SECOND GRAND ASSEMBLING, we would invite at least three hundred possible contributors into a thousand-page book; and for THIRD GRAND ASSEMBLING, we would invite 500 experimentalists into an 1800-page book. The results would not only be a grand inventory of contemporary literary possibilities, but also be truly incomparable annuals, the best in America since New Directions of the forties or American Caravan (1927-36). Copies will go gratis to the contributors, who constitute the initial sophisticated audience, and the remainder will be sold only to libraries and collectors. We think that GRAND ASSEMBLINGS constitute the most propitious way to extend our editorial concept, which has been identified in Margins as the "only one gut innovation in magazine editing technique" since Pound's Exile. As examples of the six ASSEMBLINGS and supplements we have published in the past two years, we enclosed one ASSEMBLING

V. Estimated number of persons expected to benefit from this project and one award-winning supplement.
 125,000

VI. Summary of estimated costs (recapitulation of budget items in Section IX)		Total costs of project (rounded to nearest ten dollars)
A. Direct costs		
Salaries and wages	_____	\$ 10,000
Fringe benefits	_____	
Supplies and materials	_____	5,800
Travel	_____	00
Special	_____	00
Other	_____	44,000
	Total direct costs	\$ 59,800
B. Indirect costs		
	_____	\$ _____
	Total project costs	\$ 59,800

VII. Total amount requested from the National Endowment for the Arts \$ 59,800

VIII. Organization total fiscal activity	Actual most recent fiscal period	Estimated for next fiscal period
A. Expenses	1. \$ 2,000	2. \$ 10,000
B. Revenues, grants & contributions	1. \$ 2,000	2. \$ 10,000

Do not write in this space

Evaluation of prior year(s)' projects 1 2 3 4 Pys \$ _____ Cps \$ _____ Audit report 1 2

CHRONOLOGY

- 1952 Henry James Korn and Richard Kostelanetz first meet over lemonade and oatmeal cookies on a suburban lawn.
- 1957 Korn joins Troop Seven, of which Kostelanetz is the Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. Korn is a tenderfoot; Kostelanetz an eagle scout. Together, they propose a merit badge in alternative publishing; the proposal is rejected as "ahead of its time."
- 1968 Kostelanetz, now in Manhattan, is asked by Korn, now in Brooklyn, for advice on publishing his short stories; Kostelanetz recommends Richard Goldstein, who publishes "The Pontoon Manifesto" in *US 3* (1970). After an initial reunion on the Brooklyn Bridge, Korn and Kostelanetz begin eating in Chinatown as often as possible.
- 1969 Dick Higgins gives Kostelanetz his extra copy of *Omnibus*, a German compilation which he later shows to Korn; though neither can read any language other than English, they agree to generate something similar in America. Kostelanetz introduces Korn to Kenneth Gangemi.
- 1970 The initial *Assembling* appears with 42 contributions from ten states and three countries; *Visual Language* is published. *Assembling* obtains Box 1967 (1967!) at the main Brooklyn P.O.
- 1971 Mike Metz joins the compilers and takes particular charge of producing the final book. Kostelanetz's specialties are writing the prefaces and corresponding with the contributors; Korn is in charge of general administration (e.g., the P.O. Box and the bank account). Driving Sam Korn's ancient, carton-heavy Cadillac, Korn and Kostelanetz begin making yearly Labor Day pilgrimages to Providence, where the collation is organized in Metz's living room.
- 1972 *Assembling* is mentioned in both the *New York Times* and *Saturday Review* in the same week. Korn and Kostelanetz sit back and wait for Pulitzer Prizes, until Metz tells them: "You should hang by your big toes so long!" Bill Henderson invites Kostelanetz to contribute an essay on *Assembling* to *The Publish-It-Yourself Handbook*, thereby insuring its place in the history of American literature and American publishing, maybe. R. Meltzer expands the concept of *Assembling* by offering dirty laundry and moldy sneakers as his contribution to *Third*.

- 1973 *Assembling* receives its first grant—from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines, which attaches deleterious strings that are, after much protest and needless hassle, wisely cut. Metz moves to Staten Island and lives to regret it, saying, “Suicide on Staten Island is redundant.” Korn, Kostelanetz and Metz begin eating in Little Italy as often as possible. Higgins forwards Donald Porter’s “As If a Footnote” to Kostelanetz.
- 1974 Several path-breaking books appear under the imprint of Assembling Press, which affiliates with the Participation Projects Foundation.
- 1975 Karl Young’s symposium appears in *Margins* just after CCLM defunds *Assembling*, honor tarnishing dishonor. Assembling Press receives from the National Endowment for the Arts its first grant of one thousand dollars to do one-person books only.
- 1976 NEA funds Assembling Press again, doubling the ante, to do books like Korn’s *Muhammad Ali Retrospective*, Kostelanetz’s *Twenties in the Sixties* and Gangemi’s classic *Corroborae*. *Sixth Assembling* appears a year late, for reasons “beyond the control” of the official compilers. Korn goes gray, Kostelanetz grows bald, Metz gets flat feet; all gain weight. They begin to favor health-food joints.
- 1977 CCLM funds *Seventh Assembling*, which has 131 contributors from five countries and 26 states. The New York State Council on the Arts cheats Assembling Press, which obtains a lawyer, files a claim and, after unnecessary hassle, expects to be/is fully funded to produce several more books. Sam Korn sells his Connecticut house, forcing the Press to move two tons of paper to New York.
- 1978 CCLM defunds *Eighth Assembling*, which nonetheless appears, thanks to the efforts of Douglas Turnbaugh and the generosity of the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation, which also supports the book that you are now reading. Thanks to Andrew Stasik, Pratt Graphics Center sponsors an exhibition of *Assembling*, the first institutional show anyone can remember ever given to an American art-literary periodical and small press. Nonetheless, the rigged jury at the NEA rejects the application to do a *Grand Assembling* and several unusual books as “ahead of their time.” Korn, still in Brooklyn, and Kostelanetz, still in Manhattan, nonetheless expect a Pulitzer Prize for innovative publishing, eventually; Metz, still in Staten, remains dubious.

\$3.95

ASSEMBLING ASSEMBLING EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY RICHARD KOSTELANETZ