Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

https://archive.org/details/wheretogowhatdod0000sche_j8u5

where to go
what to do
when you are

Bern

Porter

Also by James Schevill

Plays
Voice of Mass and Capital A, Friendship Press, 1962
The Black President and Other Plays, Alan Swallow, 1965
Lovecraft's Follies, Swallow Press, 1971
Collected Short Plays, Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1986

Poetry
Tensions, Bern Porter, 1947
The American Fantasies, Bern Porter, 1951
The Right to Greet, Bern Porter 1955
Selected Poems 1945-1959, Bern Porter, 1960
Private Dooms and Public Destinations: Poems 1945-1962, Alan Swallow, 1962
The Stalingrad Elegies, Alan Swallow, 1964
The Buddhist Car, Walton Press, 1968
Release, Hellcoal Press, 1968
Violence and Glory: Poems 1962-1968, Swallow Press, 1969
The Buddhist Car and Other Characters, Swallow Press, 1973
Pursuing Elegy: A Poem About Haiti, Copper Beech Press, 1974
The Mayan Poems, Copper Beech Press, 1978
Fire of Eyes: A Guatemalan Sequence, Copper Beech Press, 1979
The American Fantasies: Collected Poems, 1945-1981, Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1983
The Invisible Volcano, Copper Beech Press, 1985
Ambiguous Dancers of Fame: Collected Poems, 1945-1986, Swallow Press/Ohio University Press, 1987

Fiction
The Arena of Ants, Copper Beech Press, 1977

Biography
Sherwood Anderson: His Life and Work, University of Denver Press, 1951
The Roaring Market and the Silent Tomb, Abbey Press, 1957, 2nd edition, Bern Porter, 1968

Editor
Ferdinand Schevill, *Six Historians*, University of Chicago Press, 1956
(And author) *Break Out! In Search of New Theatrical Environments*, Swallow Press, 1973
(with Edwin Honig) *Wastepaper Theatre Anthology*, Pourboire Press, 1978

NX
512
P67
S34
1992

where to go
what to do
when you are



Bern Porter

A Personal Biography

James Schevill

Tilbury House, Publishers
Gardiner, Maine

Tilbury House, Publishers
132 Water Street
Gardiner, ME 04345

Copyright © 1992 by James Schevill.

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First printing.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schevill, James Erwin, 1920-
Where to go, what to do, when you are Bern Porter : a personal biography / James Schevill.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p. 327) and index.
ISBN 0-88448-125-5 : $27.50 -- ISBN 0-88448-126-3 (pbk.) : $16.95
1. Porter, Bern, 1911- . 2. Artists -- United States -- Biography. 3. Scientists -- United States -- Biography. I. Title.
NX512.P67S34 1992
700'.92 -- dc20
[B] 92-30954
CIP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

1 Introduction: Towards a Personal Biography 1

2 Houlton Roots 9

3 Colby College 25

4 Brown University 35

5 The Acheson Colloids Corporation 45

6 The Manhattan District Project 59

7 Henry Miller's Magnetism 73

8 Marriage 93

9 Sausalito 107

10 Escape to Guam 127

11 Japan 141

12 I've Left 161

13 Return to the U. S. 179

14 Saturn in Huntsville 199

15 Back to Maine: Rockland and Belfast 217

16 A Strindbergian Third Marriage 229

17 The Institute of Advanced Thinking 245

18 Belfast and the Voyages 259

19 The Eightieth Birthday Celebration 277

20 Afterword: The Founds Achievement 295

Bibliography 327

Index 337

Acknowledgments

My greatest debt for this personal biography is, of course, to Bern Porter himself. Without his continuous help over many years, I could not have combined the subjective elements of a memoir with the more objective research required by a biography. My files contain an incredible number of postcards and long, single-spaced letters from Bern answering questions in detail about his many activities. They are always addressed formally to "James or J. S." as it is hard for Bern to accept the pseudo-intimacy of nicknames. I am also indebted to Bern for various stays at his Belfast, Maine, home, where he showed me his scrapbooks, files, and photographs and proved willing to answer the many questions that arose in the writing of this book.

My second debt is to my publisher, Mark Melnicove, who commissioned this book and supported it with his advice and creative editing. Melnicove is not only the chief publisher of Porter's work; as a poet and actor, he has also performed widely with Porter throughout the country. Consequently, his contributions to this book have been essential.

I would also like to thank Devon Phillips for her persistent copyediting, which has helped strongly in the shaping of this book.

At Brown University, Jennifer Campbell was an invaluable assistant with editing and word processing.

My wife, Margot, deserves much credit for the advice and patience that she contributed to this project.

The tempting, enigmatic trails that Porter has left deliberately around the country in many different libraries to which he has donated materials will one day reflect the investigations of numerous independent scholars and Ph.D. candidates. They face the arduous task of sorting out the valuable material from the ragbag of published and unpublished manuscripts in various stages of revision; countless newspaper and magazine clippings often scrawled with Porter's comments; books linked—some obviously, others less so—to Porter's life; souvenirs from foreign countries; miscellaneous letters to and from famous and unknown people; security documents from Porter's years of employment with governmental and private organizations; an endless number of photographs, many of which are not identified and are therefore difficult to connect to Porter; boxes of advertisements that Porter probably considered but did not use in his Founds; bills both commonplace and puzzling, incurred during Porter's wanderings; court documents detailing the many lawsuits into which Porter has entered; and a large number of

catalogs relating mostly to Porter's involvement with the international Correspondence Art movement. In addition, particularly at the library of the University of California at Los Angeles, there are items Porter calls "one of a kind": unique works of art, innovative "books," and sculptures for which Porter painstakingly created special containers that are remarkable in themselves. Some of these should be in museums rather than libraries.

While I have spent long hours in these library collections, I soon gave up hope of covering them all thoroughly, not only because of the difficulty of separating important from unimportant material, but also because much of the material has not yet been cataloged. Porter's output is prodigal, testifying to his inventive genius, the painful realities and fantasies of our society, and the incredible waste that we Americans have generated in our pursuit of happiness. It would be a life-consuming task to work through such a complex mixture.

Nevertheless, I would like to thank the many helpful people especially Mark Brown and Rosemary Cullen, who assisted me at Brown University (where Porter earned his master's degree in physics), P.A. Lenk at Colby College (where Porter spent his undergraduate years), and Diane Gutcher at Bowdoin College. I am also especially grateful to Clive Philpott at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and to David S. Zeidberg, head of Special Collections at the University of California at Los Angeles, which contains the largest Porter collection, much of it still uncataloged.

Articles and interviews about Porter that I have consulted and which contribute invaluable material about Porter's life and work are listed in the Selected Bibliography.

I would like to thank Edwin Honig, Stanley Noyes, and Ferol Egan for their helpful comments and encouragement.

Finally, I'm indebted to the many people to whom I talked about Porter. These include Porter's brother Everett, Elizabeth Dunker, Basil Burwell, Carlo Pittore, Mary Weaver, Leonard Wolf, Martin Steingesser, Kendall Merriam, Robert Saunders, Erica Pfander, Susan Appleton, Kala Ladenheim, Don Stratton, Doris Thurston, and Ed Holcomb.

To my daughters, Deborah and Susie,
and my stepchildren, Sherifa and Paul,
who know the hopes and problems
of the turbulent years discussed in this book.

1 Introduction: Toward A Personal Biography

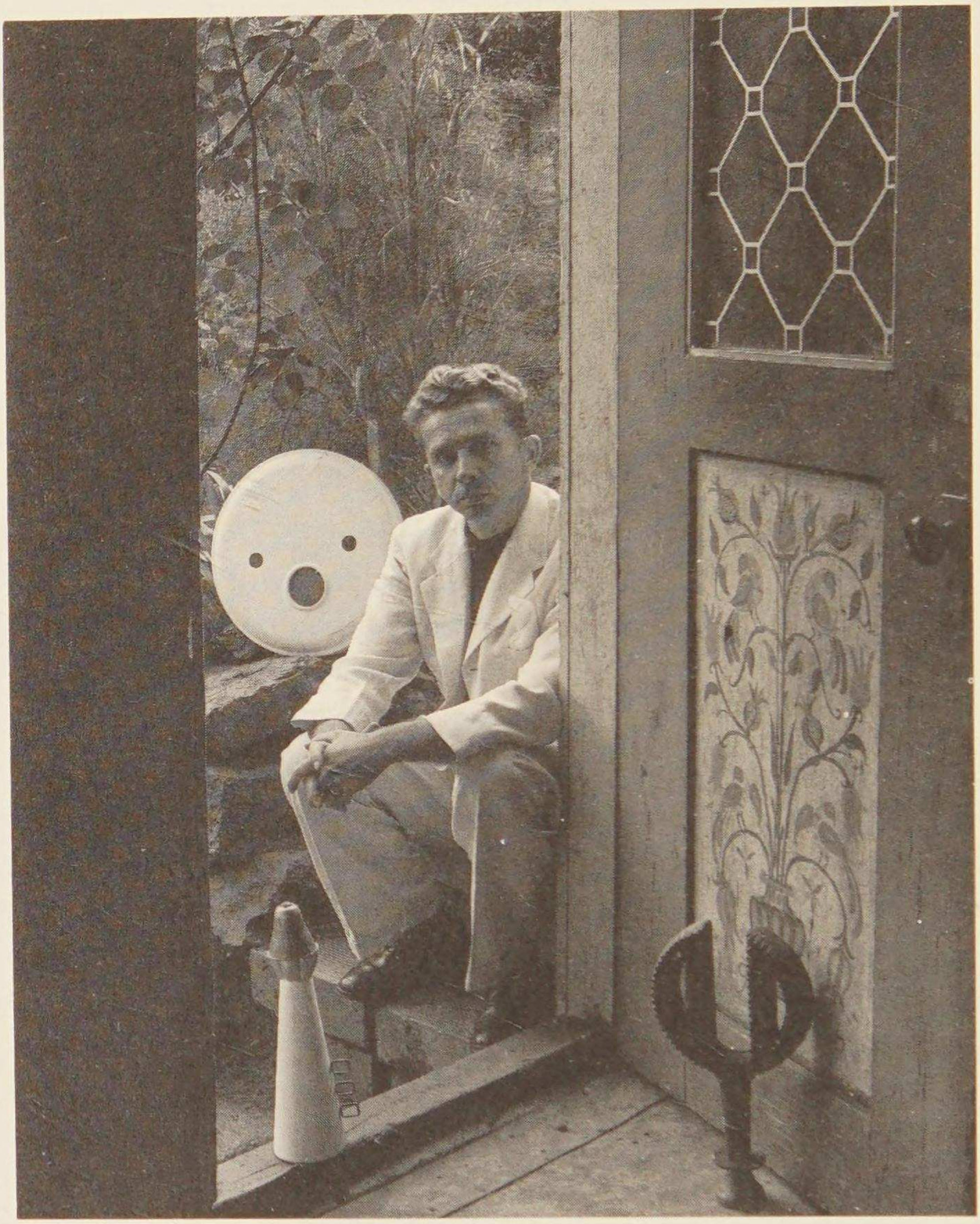


Forty-five years since I first met Bern Porter, he still creates a web of tangled thoughts in my mind. In an age of increasing specialization, he stands out as a singular humanist, clinging to his idea of unifying the arts and sciences. As a physicist and engineer working on the Manhattan Project and the Saturn Moon Rocket Project, he experienced both the excitement of nuclear age discoveries and the perils of the government's various security systems.

As an artist, he is the originator of a unique series of collaged "Founds," as he calls them. He has been a publisher, painter, sculptor, photographer, and, always, a poet, believing, as the Greeks did, in poetry as the art of making, the central principle of all creativity. In recent years he has toured widely doing innovative work in Performance Art. Also, he has become a major participant in the international phenomenon of Mail Art, which has helped to spread his reputation throughout the world.

Through three marriages, Porter endured to participate in a remarkable celebration of his life and work on the occasion of his eightieth birthday in Belfast, Maine, where he lives. Many friends on this occasion praised his generosity, his sense of humor, his fostering of the arts against all odds, and his creative genius. They also satirized his eccen-

Bern Porter



Porter at his Sausalito art gallery, Schillerhaus, with three of his sculptures, two found and one made (on sill), August 12, 1950. Photo by Harry Bowden.

tricities, his peculiar eating habits, his miserliness, and his obsessive collecting of found objects that fill his house. Indeed, Porter is an unusual man whose life illuminates American achievements and problems in the bewildering, rapid changes of the twentieth century.

I met Bern Porter in 1947, at the end of World War II, when he was a young publisher in Berkeley, California, my hometown. After four years in the army, I was struggling to write and publish my poems and early plays. So it was natu-

ral for me to visit a publisher interested in new work. Porter, I learned, had worked as a physicist for the government's secret Manhattan Project, specializing in radioactivity and the separation of uranium isotopes. When the atom bomb fell on Hiroshima he suffered a nervous collapse. He claimed that he had not known that his work would be used to build a nuclear bomb, and he was devastated by the destruction of Hiroshima. During the war, as a relief from his scientific research, which was strictly supervised by the military, he had begun publishing short works by Henry Miller, a risky undertaking given Miller's pacifist views. After the war, recovering from the psychological impact of the Hiroshima bomb, Porter focused on developing his publishing company and fostering his own talents in art and design.

At our first meeting in his small, inexpensive apartment near the University of California, he seemed to me somewhat of a dandy. His hair flowed impressively; his tie flared red with white polka dots against an expensive shirt; his cufflinks sparkled; his colorful, well-tailored jacket sported a white handkerchief in the lapel pocket. He seemed to be playing the role of the young publisher on his way up in society. He was in his late thirties and had just married an attractive college student, Helen Hendren. She was dedicated to poetry and had been studying at the University of California with the distinguished poet and critic, Josephine Miles. At the Porters' home, one heard enthusiastic talk about the Bay Area poetry scene, then developing under the influence of such figures as Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, Robin Blaser, Madeline Gleason, James Broughton, William Everson, Rosalie Moore, Thomas Parkinson, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Leonard Wolf, George P. Elliott, and Josephine Miles, a generous presence to all of us writers.

I sensed immediately that Porter was a private man. His face was a mask behind which his eyes observed intensely, although they rarely stared at you directly. His mannerisms were extremely neat and his choice of words deliberate, flavored with sarcastic wit. Soon it became apparent that he had little money and was floating on the edge of appearances. His self-absorption and moodiness were safeguards against private revelations. In his youth, I learned

4

later, his mother had labeled him a "cold fish," an accusation that troubled him throughout his life. He gathered few male friends. Although we were to work together closely on various artistic projects, I never felt close to him until late in our friendship. I respected him—his knowledge and instincts about science and art were impressive—but he spoke always in a shorthand, abstract way that forbade intimacy.

After the failure of his brief marriage to Helen, Porter moved to Sausalito, where he started an influential art gallery, hosted a radio interview show, continued his publishing business, and pursued his artistic interests. Following the sudden collapse of his parents' marriage, Porter abruptly left the Bay Area, leaving the impression that he had taken another scientific job. He fled to the South Pacific, working at any job he could find. From there, he began a wandering life that would take him all over the world.

In 1957, two years after Porter returned to San Francisco from his five-year "escape" (as he called it) to the South Pacific, I published a short book about him called *The Roaring Market and the Silent Tomb*. The title came from Henry James's assertion that "We have in England and the United States only the two alternatives of the roar of the market and the silence of the tomb." My purpose, in addition to looking at Porter's artistic achievements, was to examine the significance of his life in a postwar society in which the arts were increasingly threatened by a new military technology that controlled the economy. From 1957 to 1991, Porter accomplished a range of work in science and the arts that merits a fresh examination. My focus in this biography will be on Porter's unique achievements in the arts, as well as on the personal crises he experienced after World War II. Particularly, it will be important to discuss how government security programs hindered his scientific career and exacerbated his chronic financial and psychological insecurity.

I call this a personal biography because it is based on my long friendship with Porter rather than the objective academic research involved in the usual life study. While I have done extensive research in the libraries containing collections that Porter has given to them, and have interviewed many of Porter's friends and relations, I have concentrated on writing Porter's personal story as I witnessed it and as he told it to me. With his continuous cooperation, I felt I had a chance

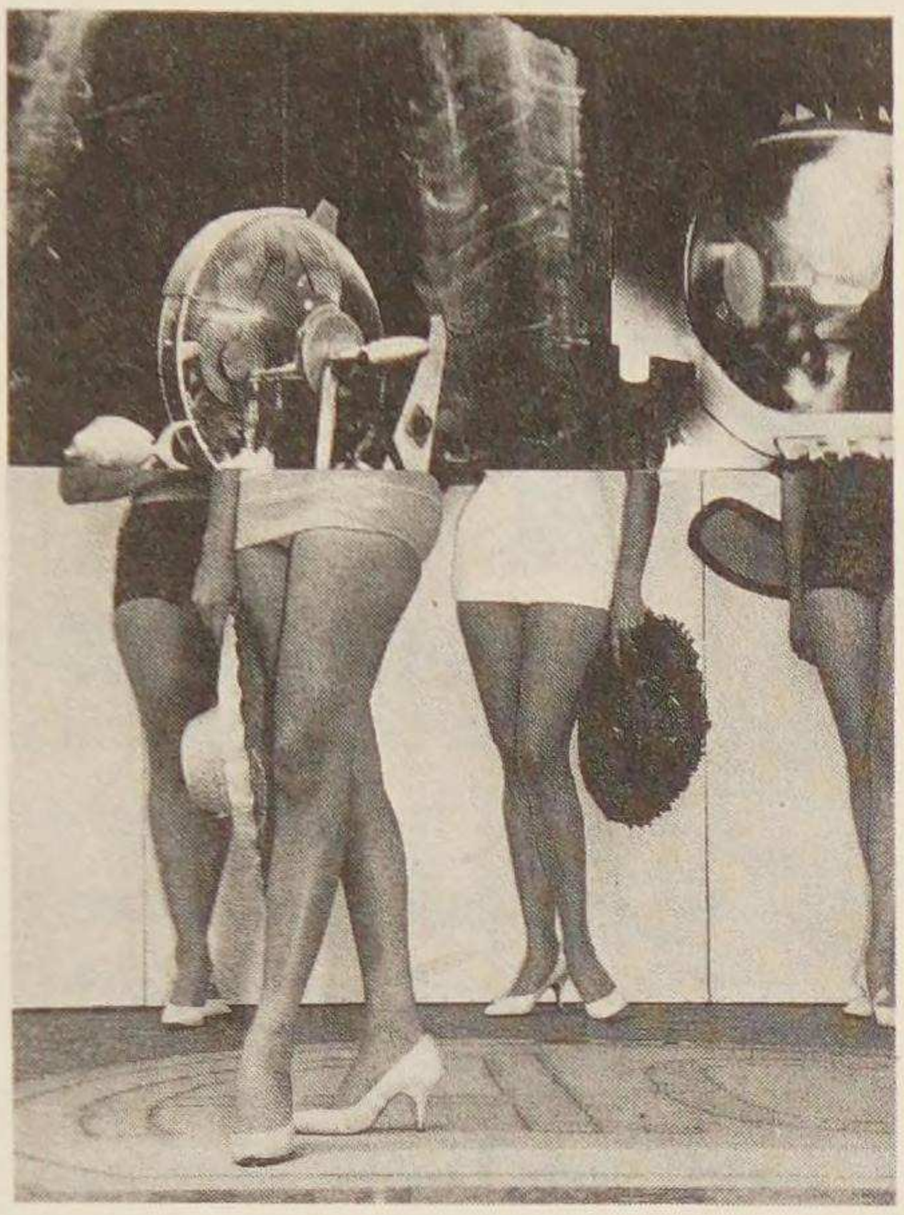


Photo collage by Porter to illustrate the second edition of Parker Tyler's *Granite Butterfly*, Walton Press, 1974.

to create a biographical structure (including many of the major events of the twentieth century) that was possible only because I have known Porter over a long period of time.

I will examine Porter's first major book, *I've Left*, published in 1962 and reprinted by Dick Higgins's Something Else Press in 1971. In its early years of circulation, *I've Left* achieved a reputation as an unusual autobiography—the story of an artist-scientist who rejects the wasteful society in which he lives and creates a uniquely imaginative view of the technological world of the future. In his introduction to his edition of *I've Left*, Dick Higgins asserts that "in its own way the only other text it relates to is Thoreau's *Walden* (for instance, why did Thoreau go to Walden anyway?)." *I've Left*, like *Walden*, is the result of a rare inward journey, an odyssey in which Porter sought to reconcile art and science.

As I will discuss, Porter's artistic achievements are most evident in his Founds. The use of found material—ordinary, everyday objects—is one of the major directions of twentieth century art. Yet Porter's Founds are of a different order. A lifelong obsessive observer and collector, he has turned his heap of found materials into a series of books, epic in concept, that addresses the fundamental nature of American society. In an age when the United States is turning away from printed books toward electronic visual images, where words are only secondary, accompanying elements, Porter's Founds are a new kind of visual event. In these books, the pages are not even numbered. One can thumb backwards or forwards, crossing boundaries of time and space. Using this cinematic technique of rapid-flowing, disjointed images in a variety of collaged forms, the Founds are a witty, original visual history of American technological and

6



Found from Porter's *The Manhattan Phone Book*, Abyss Publications, 1972.

sociological change in the twentieth century. Porter's special distinction, as revealed in this work, is his ability to merge scientific and artistic insight in a process that he calls Sciart.

Although he has received significant recognition for his revolutionary (I don't use this word lightly) book *I've Left* and for his Founds, Porter has been mostly ignored by the "roaring market" in the United States. Unheard in the commercial din, the singular sound of Porter's many activities emanating from his Maine outpost are like someone blowing strange signals into the sky's impersonal jet-trails overhead. Defiantly, he has named and incorporated his Maine house as The Institute of Advanced Thinking, a deliberate counterpoint to all the heavily endowed "think tanks" around the country. In the closing chapters I will discuss the unique atmosphere and history of Porter's Institute of Advanced Thinking in Belfast, and the culminating artistic achievement of his lifelong discovery of Founds.

Over the years, as I came to know and admire Porter's artistic gifts, I saw how his guarded ways enhanced his inner fantasies. Despite his surface reserve, I never thought of him as a "cold fish." Yet somehow, this unjust label had remained with him. Certainly his creative life as an impulsive experimentalist (like his mentor Marcel Duchamp) has been far from cold. In a letter to me, Henry Miller called him a "porcupine." Like a porcupine's quills, Bern's defenses are always ready. He uses them to conceal his insecurity caused by the poverty that has continously shaped his life.

At the age of eighty-two, with a long, relatively happy second marriage and a futile third behind him, Porter now lives alone. He relates mainly to women. With them he

finds it easier to relax and give his wit freer rein. Over the years he has had several female travel companions; one, in particular, has acted as his patron, encouraging his creative work. As Porter says, "Our aging society, in which women outlast men, must create new relationships, not necessarily based on marriage, if the extreme isolation of old age that prevails is to be avoided."

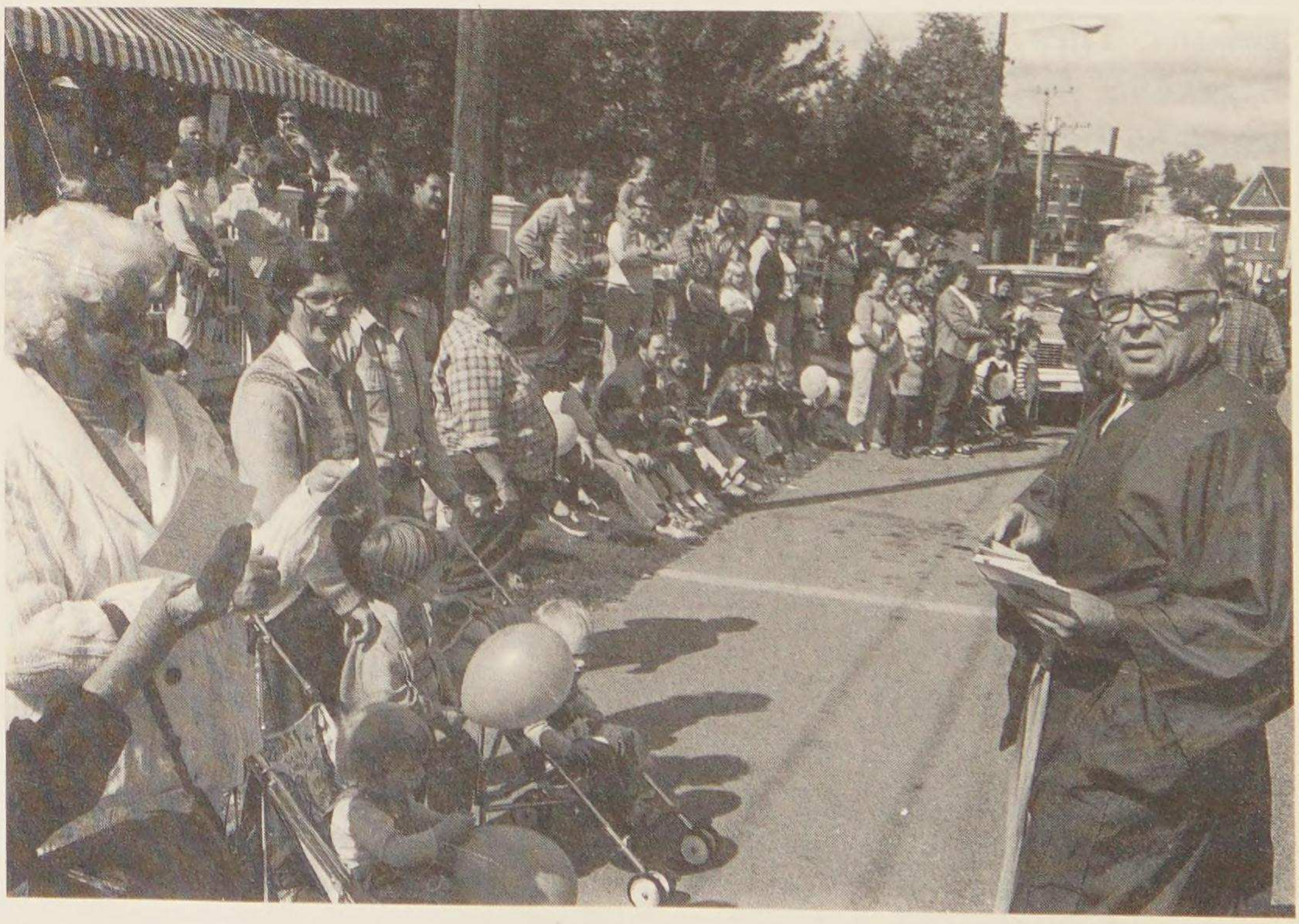
In the small town of Belfast, Porter looms conspicuously as both conservative eccentric and artistic innovator. At town council meetings, he assumes a cantankerous mask and attacks excessive budgets, taxes, environmental dangers, and any commercial boondoggle that threatens to change the town's character. Constantly he writes letters of protest to the local newspaper. His thick white hair, lined face, and distinctive voice are capable of startling intrusions into any civic occasion. He loves, too, to maintain his sartorial surprises, gleefully donning his special "poet's costume" with lavish colors and flowing cape for the occasional artists' festivals he sponsors at the Institute of Advanced Thinking.

Porter lives mainly on social security. He seldom cooks at home, where his refrigerator and oven are full of completed Founds and found material instead of food. After a morning of work and correspondence, he walks into town for lunch at one of the facilities that offers meals for senior citizens. Then he may check the schedule for guest readings or exhibits at the town library's Margaret Porter Room, which he founded in memory of his second wife. Before returning home, he makes an important stop at the post office. Not only does he have a large correspondence because of his artistic and publishing connections around the world; in the post office wastepaper baskets he discovers a daily treasure of found material, from medical catalogs to junk mail. These he gathers in a bag for future consideration as collage material or for use in his large Mail Art correspondence. Participation in international Mail Art exhibits in Europe, South America, and Japan—foreign places have given Porter's work a warmer welcome than the United States has—satisfies his wanderlust now that age and lack of money curtail his travel.

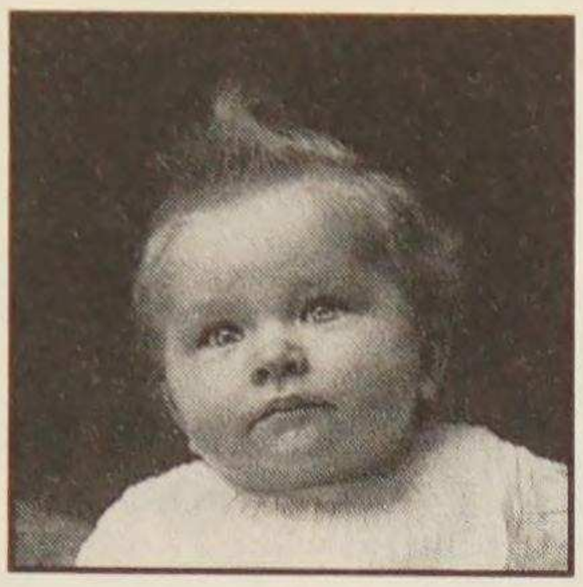
If, by his own admission, his character sometimes seems paranoic and cramped, his work has always flowed in new directions. His struggle to break out of secret, special-

ized scientific fields into a unified artistic and scientific maturity will continue to astonish us as we try to understand the technology in which we are trapped. Never have I known a person who more clearly reflects an American contradiction, the widely traveled cosmopolitan, sophisticated and well-educated, with the confined personality of a longtime rural resident struggling to integrate his family's conflicting immigrant beliefs. Throughout his long, adventurous life, one clear strength emerges: in spite of his constant lack of money, after many years of struggle, Porter has become one of America's foremost artistic experimentalists, creating a rare fusion of scientific experience and artistic vision.

Porter distributing poems on cards at Church Street Arts Festival, Belfast, Maine, September, 1982.



2 Houlton Roots



9

According to his proud baby book characteristic of the turn of the century—a statement at the bottom of the page reads "A life to be satisfactory should be started right"—Bernard Porter was born at 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, February 14, 1910, on his grandfather's farm in Porter Settlement, just south of Houlton, Maine. On the next page of the baby book is a correction. He was born at 5:30 a.m., weighed eight pounds, and when he was two weeks old, his father placed a $5 gold piece for him in a savings bank. The first caller to see the baby was "Grandpa Porter." Later in the baby book, alongside an advertisement proclaiming that "The name Borden stands preeminent for all that is good in Milk," Porter's parents recorded milestones: Bernard sat at six months old, crept at nine months, walked at fifteen months.

His parents' record notwithstanding, Porter himself has often listed 1911 as his birth year. In 1990, at my request, he wrote to the city clerk in Houlton, asking her to check his birth record. The city clerk replied, affirming 1911 as the official date. So Porter is uncertain of the actual year of his birth, although he has come to favor 1910, believing his mother made a mistake when listing the date in the civic records.

About Porter's birthplace there is no such uncertainty.

10



Bern Porter, 1911. Photo by
Bryson Studios, Houlton, Maine.

The oldest town in northern Maine's sprawling Aroostook County, Houlton first prospered from lumber; later, potato farming dominated. As the shipping point for the state's northern agricultural products, Houlton often refers to itself as the "Garden of Maine" and a "four-season vacationland." Yet the hopes of prosperity have proven elusive, and potato farming has begun to decline. Remote and isolated, Houlton remains a small town of about 7,000 people. Porter has struggled all of his life to reconcile his need to escape from Houlton's provincialism and his attraction to its communal, agricultural atmosphere.

Driving to Houlton with Porter on a cold, bright October day in the late 1980s, I see the foliage is just past its peak. The woods still blaze with color, dogwoods and maples in vivid reds and oranges. Porter has recently completed a new book of Founds concentrating on the theme of light, which he calls *La Lumière*. Tense in the front seat, he rambles on about the foliage and the magical vision of Mt. Katahdin rising near us to the west, marking the end of the Appalachian Trail. We speak of John Marin and Marsden Hartley, who so often painted this mountain. Porter is excited and nervous about visiting his Houlton area relatives. Among them he spent the first seventeen years of his life, an uneasy conditioning for the restless travels that have marked his life.

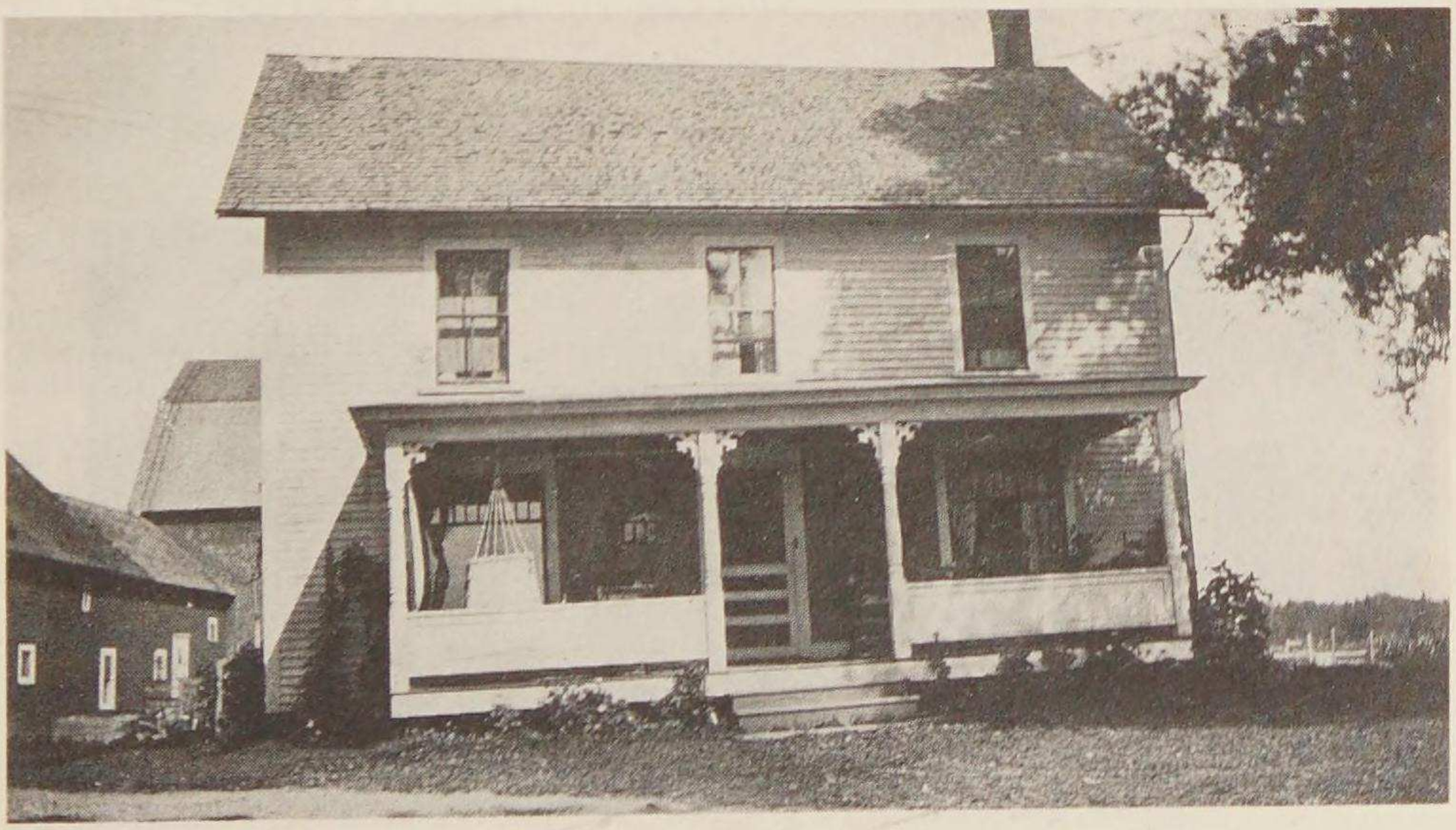
Settlements, Maine's smallest civic units, are usually named

after the founding family and have no post office, general store, gas station, or commercial development. In 1850, Porter's great-grandfather, Andrew Porter, who had immigrated from Ireland twenty years before, built a log cabin along a branch of the Meduxnekeag River. With the arrival of the Hagen, Peabody, McGready, McGinley, Stolten, and other families who became known for their seed potatoes, this settlement soon spread to more than 450 acres. The men and women of Porter Settlement were strong supporters of Grange farm administration cooperative policies. They were also fervent worshippers who established religious summer camps in Littleton, north of Houlton, each one complete with tabernacle, cottages, and store.

A faded sign on a huge barn reads Porter Homestead. The most prominent farm in the settlement, it is modest by modern standards. For many years its 120 acres produced only potatoes. The farm is still owned by Porter's Uncle Herman but run by a tenant farmer who grew oats and corn this past year in a desperate effort to survive low potato prices. Three weathered buildings are visible: the main house built by Porter's great-grandfather Andrew, where Herman and his wife now live; the barn; and a small house modeled after the one where Porter was born. Porter's original birthplace burned down twenty years ago, and Herman rebuilt it almost exactly. It's a typical small New England woodframe house with a living room, kitchen, and bedrooms heated by a woodstove.

The eighty-two-year-old Herman comes out of the barn to greet us, cap perched on head, a lean, dignified, gray-haired man,

Porter Homestead, Porter Settlement.



12

his eyes contemplative behind glasses. At first he doesn't recognize Porter, then calls out in his formal way, "Bernard!," and they begin to exchange family news.

"My wife went to town this forenoon," says Herman, speaking with old-fashioned New England gravity and precision (later, Bern, who loves words, marvels at "forenoon"). "I have to make my own lunch. I don't know what I'd do if she died. I can't cook a thing. Are you still writing, Bernard?"

"Well, yes . . ."

"How many books now?"

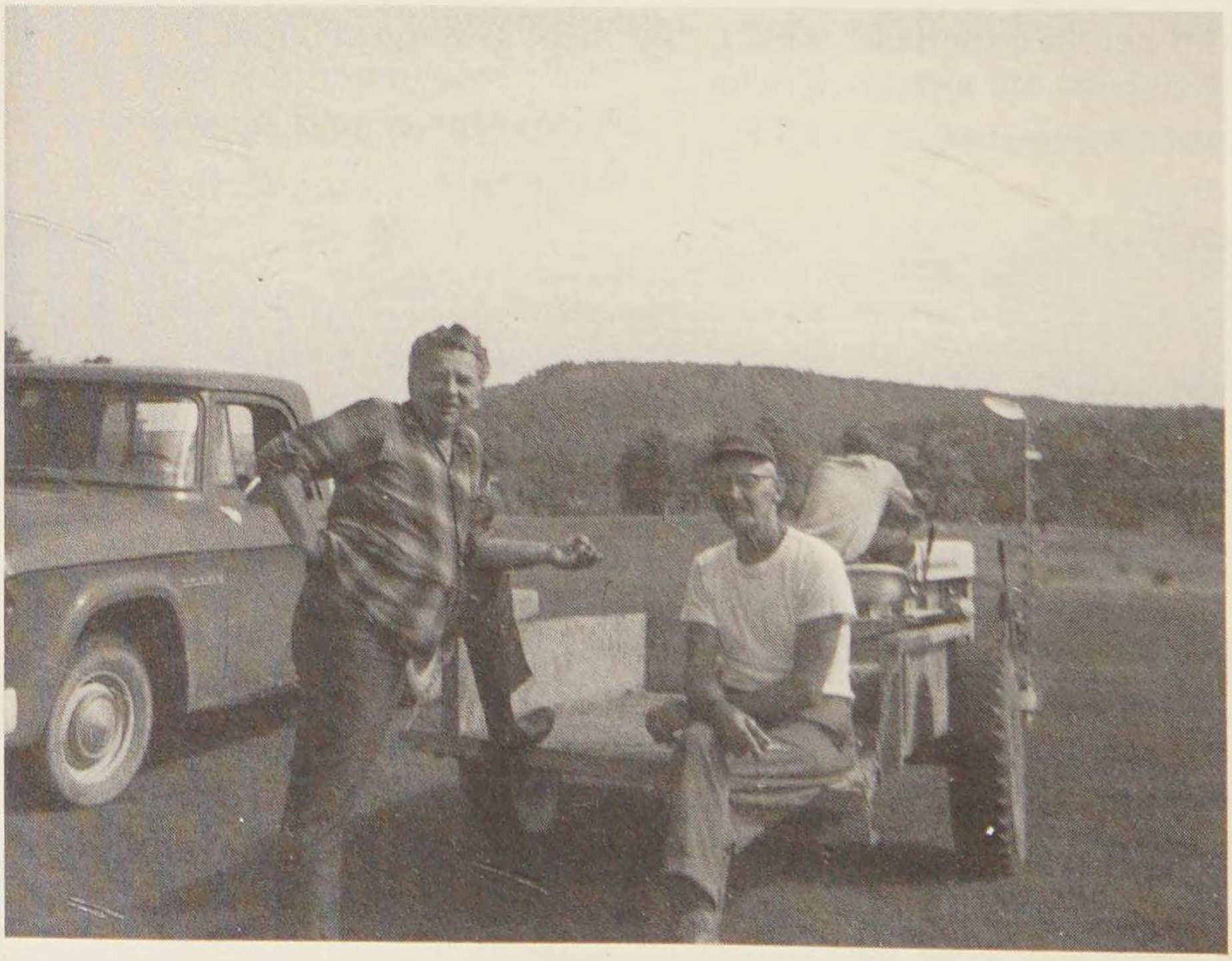
"Well, fifty-five or fifty-six."

Herman does not answer, only smiles and nods. He has been president of every local farm organization and prominent in the Methodist church. For him there is but one Book. Fifty-five books are a curiosity. Bern questions him about the farm.

"Last year," Herman reflects, "I had the best crop of potatoes ever. I hoped the price would go up. It didn't."

Herman holds out his right hand and shows us where the middle finger was severed. A long scar runs from hand to forearm. "I fell off the ladder in the barn with an electric saw in my right

Porter and his uncle, Herman Porter, his father's youngest brother, at Houlton Country Club, October, 1969.



13

hand and lost a finger. Damaged the nerve in my arm, too, and two vertebrae in my neck. You see the scar? That's where they operated, and it's worse now than it was. I can't farm any more and may have to sell. I worked seven years at the country club mowing fairways and doing other jobs to pay off debts. Now Aunt Geneva's gone. All are gone except Mary Ellen and I."

Suddenly, Bern is alarmed and tries to control his voice. "That's a shame, Uncle Herman. I don't like to think of the Porter homestead going to a Smith or Jones. Aren't your children interested in the farm?"

"My children are interested in carpentry and computing."

"What's your son doing now?"

"He's the head of the Mathematics Department at Lawrenceville School in New Jersey."

Herman invites us into the house and tells us how his grandfather started to build it: "My grandmother was pregnant. She told him, 'Hurry up and get one room finished. I want to say my child was born in a home instead of a log cabin.' " The house is conventional, with modern appliances in the kitchen and a large wood furnace pouring out heat from the basement. A fine old roll-top desk used by Herman's father now serves as Herman's desk. Quilted covers on several chairs as well as the immaculate kitchen reveal the touch of Herman's wife, Mary Ellen, now in her seventies, a product of the days when the role of farmwomen was to raise children, communicate with God through church, cook, knit, hook rugs, quilt, and help tend the farm.

At Bern's request, Herman shows us a book of family photographs. The ancestors are all strong, serious-looking men and women. In this part of Maine there was little time for levity. Andrew Porter had seven children. Expanding his farm from a clearing in the wilderness to 120 fertile acres, he helped found the local Methodist church and became a leader in the Grange, the local agricultural organization. His youngest son, Ira J., later a member of the Farm Administration and active in the Littleton religious camps, also had seven children, four boys and three girls. The next-to-the-youngest boy, Lewis Harden, became Bern's father.

Cautious about intruding on his uncle's territory, Porter has brought along a bag lunch. While Herman busies himself in the kitchen preparing a frankfurter, Porter munches cheese and bread and tells me about his youth: "I used to go to Grange meetings and read poetry to the members when I was nine or ten. In those early years I invented Mail Art, writing and drawing things

14

Porter's ancestors. From top, left to right: Ira J. Porter (grandfather), Annie Porter (grandmother), Lewis Porter (father), Etta Porter (mother).



and sending them to Massachusetts, to the "Pen Club" as it was called in those days. Of course, there was no typewriter or mimeograph or photocopier. So I drew in India ink."

Returning to the large, round, wooden dining table, Herman regales us with one of those personal accident stories compulsively inherent in human nature: "One day I was visiting a farm. Suddenly, just below me on the porch, this bulldog appeared. I just stood there and he stood there, growling, coming up to my crotch. As I was trying to ease my leg down off the porch, he grabbed my peoplemaker. For a moment, I thought he was just going to take it right off. Then his owners appeared and got him off me. My peoplemaker was black and blue for days."

After lunch, Herman goes outside to talk to a visitor; Bern remains seated with me. Struck by the clash of past and present, he begins a monologue: "Time and economics! Time and economics! I must get the address of Herman's son and write to him about saving Porter Settlement. I remember Grandfather sitting here at this table and saying blessing. I can see him working at that roll-top desk, on which, incidentally, in his last hours he simply rested his head on his folded arms and died. He used to read the Bible to me in the living room. Particularly he read the Psalms, which had a strong influence on me. I liked the free-flowing quality of the long lines. His voice had a strong musical flow that gripped me and made me want to speak aloud, too. Soon I was speaking and reciting in church, and then in Grange and school competitions. They called me 'the young orator.' That's what happens when your grandparents are reading-aloud people. Few people read aloud and memorize anymore. . . . Can you believe Herman and his *peoplemaker*? What a precise, fantastic use of words! It's all going. I've got to try and write to Uncle Herman's son, or maybe live here myself. How could I do that? Time and economics!"

Outside, Herman shows me around the barn, while Bern takes a ghost walk around the rebuilt home where he was born. The huge barn is a time machine testifying to one hundred and fifty years of change on this northern farm. Herman tells me that the thick joints in the walls were hewn from tamarack trees imported from Nova Scotia. "Up this ramp," he says, "we used to bring cattle in the winter. In those days, we were a combination dairy and potato farm." As we reach the top of the ramp, Herman points, "Look there!" An Edsel in perfect condition sits in the corner, its long body, fins, and sculptured radiator reflecting the vanity and power of an American dream car. Bern returns, and contemplating the

16

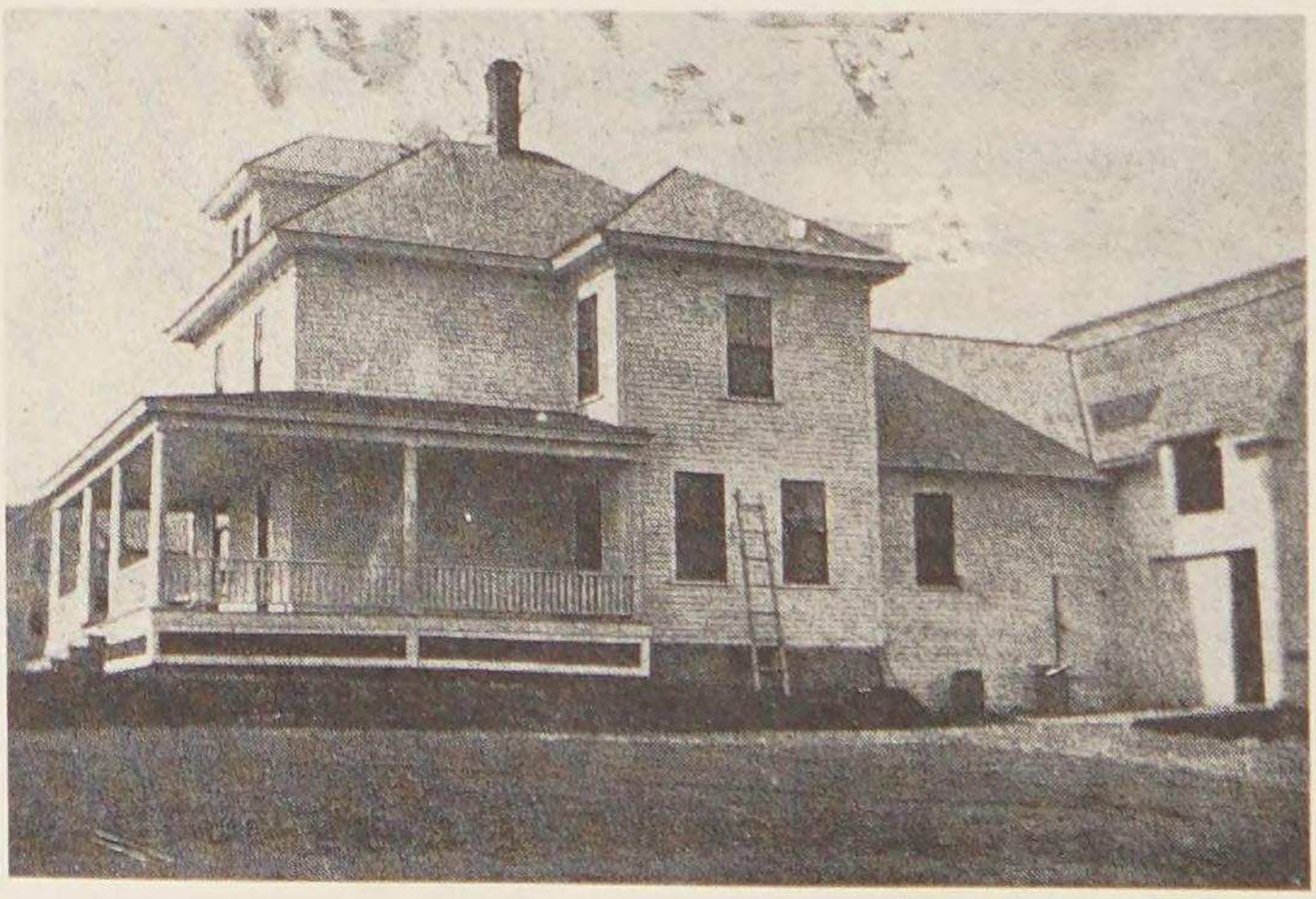
presence of this pristine Edsel in a Maine barn, we remember the correspondence between Marianne Moore and the Marketing Research Department of the Ford Motor Company, in which she was asked to suggest names for the new Ford model. In letter after letter she poured out names such as "The Ford Silver Sword," "Mongoose Civique," "Regna Racer," "The Resilient Bullet," "Cresta Lark," and "Utopian Turtletop," only to receive in the end a statement from the department manager:

> We have chosen a name out of the more than six-thousand-odd candidates that we gathered. It has a certain ring to it. An air of gaiety and zest. At least, that's what we keep saying. Our name, dear Miss Moore, is—Edsel. I know you will share your sympathies with us.

The barn tour reveals more artifacts, disjointed fragments that tell a story of frantic change. In the back are various cars and boats. "I store them for six months at a time," Herman explains. "I don't get much, but it helps to pay taxes." Herman shows us stalls now filled with debris of all kinds. "In the old days," he recounts, "we rented these stalls out to racehorses. Used to be a lot of horseracing then at the fairgrounds." In the front of the barn, amongst tools and equipment evidently still in use, loom archaic tools, scythes, and plows. Standing in the ghostly barn with its peeling paint, I struggle to connect past and present. The image of the Edsel keeps recurring in my mind.

As we leave the barn, Bern again expresses his concern to Herman about the farm's possible sale and gets the address of Herman's son in New Jersey to write to him of his dismay.

25 South Street, Houlton, Maine.



17

Porter says goodbye to his uncle with that reserved affection characteristic of Maine and the Porter family. Herman has been lamenting the loss of "one of my old friends, my corncob pipe." A hospitable man, he offers us a final drink of water before we leave: "You want water, we got some good spring water here."

Leaving the farm, with Porter muttering sadly, "Time and economics! Time and economics! What can I do? I can't really move here to live," we set out on a tour of the town. After Bern and his sister Marion were born at Porter Settlement, his parents moved into a house on South Street, seeking more space for their growing family. This South Street house, where Porter grew up and spent his adolescence, is surprisingly large, a conventional three-floor Victorian with some neoclassical features in the columned porch. Next door was a small barn, now gone. In the basement, Porter and his father, a carpenter and man-of-all-trades, had a workshop where they often worked together. The large wood furnace that heated the house stood in the basement and was fed daily through the winters by Bern and his brothers. In the living room and kitchen on the main floor, Bern's mother reigned supreme, preparing meals, cleaning and mending clothes for her large family, and welcoming neighbors and friends who dropped in to visit. "The living room was decorated with Mother's quilts and knitting," Porter says. "There were conventional reproductions on the walls. In an effort to make ends meet, mother cooked and baked for sale."

Eventually there were four children, born between 1911 and 1918. While his two younger brothers grew up to achieve success as a pharmacist and an optometrist, Bern's sister died mysteriously of a flu-like ailment before her second birthday. This was a tragedy that his mother, surrounded by males, could not forget. All of his life, Porter, too, felt a deep attachment to this lost sister. Throughout his youth, he went many times to visit her grave in the Houlton cemetery, sometimes with his parents—now buried beside her —but usually by himself. A lonely boy, he grew accustomed to wandering away from home without telling his parents where he was going.

"My relationship to my parents was difficult," Bern says. "My mother always regarded me as a cold fish, which made me feel that I was cold to other people. My parents never discussed sex with me or my brothers. I learned later that their relationship suffered from my father's sexual problems and because my mother didn't like the isolation at Porter Settlement. My father liked the farm, so while my mother wanted to move into town, my father

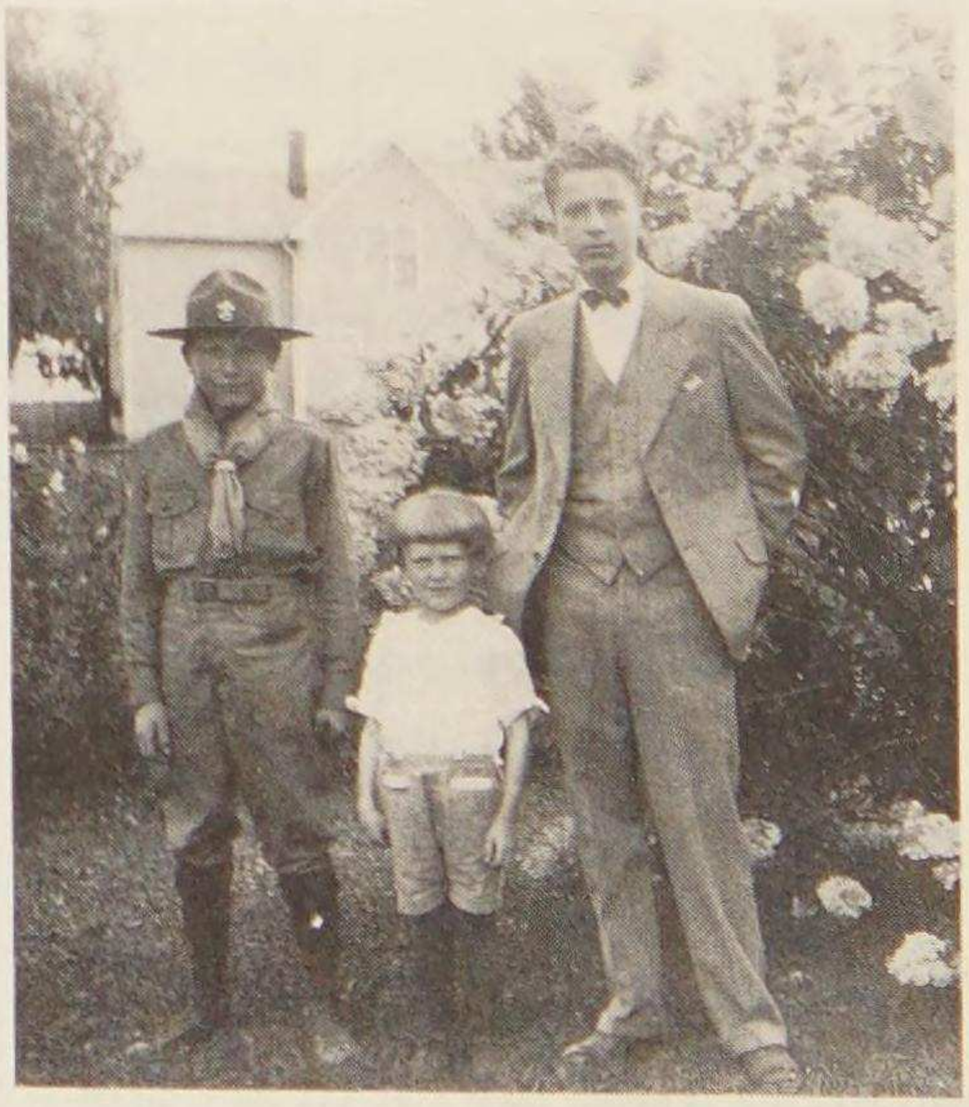
wanted to stay. My grandfather understood this conflict and loaned them money when they needed it. Although my father had only the equivalent of a high school education, he was an excellent craftsman. He painted houses and had a continuous variety of odd jobs, functioning as a carpenter, plumber, whatever, repairing and fixing everything. When hard times came in the twenties, he sold Fuller brushes, and that must have hurt him, taking away his confidence as a craftsman. In the hard times, my mother took in boarders and sold a variety of items to friends and neighbors to make ends meet. She was dedicated, a determined mother who resolved that her sons would have an education and not end up like her husband. Every time I think of my mother, I see her doing methodical housekeeping work. She wanted desperately to pretend we were middle class when we were not. Despite the house, it was a low-level existence. My parents were simply hard-working people divorced from the amenities of life. Later, there was no way they could help me with college tuition, so I had to learn a lot of earning tricks. I worked at all sorts of jobs and developed salesmen's tricks in the true American tradition."

When we arrive in front of Porter's old house, he tells me it has changed little, although another family now lives there with ghosts they don't recognize. "On the second floor," says Porter, "I had a den and bedroom, so I was lucky to have some space. There, and in the barn next door, I became involved in science. I had a chemistry set, and I became increasingly interested in radio, which

Porter's sister Marion.



Porter with brothers Harold and Everett, 1928 on grounds of 25 South Street.



was just coming in. With a school friend I built my own radio, first a crystal set, then a vacuum tube. Also, I became a feverish collector of all kinds of gadgets, mostly relating to radio, which fascinated me as television would later.

"My grandmothers Rogers and Porter lived nearby and I traveled frequently back and forth to their houses. I split their wood and was their general workboy. With her devout conscience, my grandmother Porter was a strong influence on me. She told me many stories. One, especially, remains in my mind, the story of two great-uncles living near Danbury, Ireland. Like two mythical characters out of Joyce, whose work I came to love, these great-uncles would communicate with each other by going to nearby hilltops and shouting across miles of space."

Continuing our journey into the past, we drive up to the high school, a shabby, blockish, factory-like structure. It is depressing how most schools in the United States are designed merely as pragmatic centers for the collection of bodies and the dissemination of practical information, without any attempt at artistic architecture to excite the spirit and stimulate the imagination. A sign reads Lambert School. "Lambert was principal when I was there," Porter says, "a typical principal in terms of abiding by administrative regulations and routines without any particular attempt to foster individuality. However, he was generally well liked. I did well in the mathematics and general science classes, but my particular savior was the art teacher, Althea Brockway, with whom I have remained close all these years. She showed me prints of the old masters and made me believe I had a creative talent in art. She had us kids sit at our desks and draw with crayons. Drawing was the root of everything, but she used her own experimental techniques, too. She would take kernels of corn and ask us to form them into letters of the alphabet, to make patterns and designs. It was a real challenge and my introduction to using common things. She was an artist herself in the conventional school of classical realism, mostly representational landscapes. Rather than being highly gifted as an artist, she was a sympathetic and inspirational teacher, chafing at the cultural restrictions in a small town. In the summers, when the fair with its exhibits of vegetables, livestock, horseracing, and Chautauqua variety shows brought some color and drama to Houlton, she insisted on installing an art exhibit. Along with her own work and the work of her friends, she exhibited her students' art, and that was where I first showed my drawings and paintings. This exhibit symbolized the possibilities of the artistic life to me, so

20

I owe a great deal to her. She always remained a friend and counselor and even instructed me in German when I had to be proficient in that language for a college degree in physics."

"If I were going to do it again," muses Porter staring at the school, "I think I'd quit school at the age of eight and just take an interest in wheeling and dealing for money."

"Come on, Bern," I say, "you're the head of the Institute of Advanced Thinking, your own think tank. That certainly represents an interest in education, not money."

"The only way to get an education is to apprentice yourself to a master in science or art. My problem, as with most students in schools and colleges, was that I couldn't find a real master, although I had some good teachers in my education up through college. It wasn't until I was drafted into the Manhattan Project that I met scientists like Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer and, on the other side of the scale, writers like Anaïs Nin and Henry Miller."

Our next stop is the Methodist church, another institution that helped shape Porter's life. Never notable for their architecture, Methodist churches in the United States tend to reflect the solid, familial, materialistic values of the communities in which they were founded. Except for its stained glass windows, this Methodist church has a sprawling, flat character that could as easily be a bank or hotel. Here Porter received the traditional Sunday School religious education and, in his later teens, taught a Sunday School class himself. "I was taught one thing there," he says, "and that was tolerance. When I was a boy, there was only one Negro family in town. The husband was a tie man on the railroad, a common laborer. He became a member of our church and a popular Sunday School teacher. Eventually, I was his student there, and I admired his gentleness and dignity. Otherwise, I can't say that this church had any great spiritual influence on me. However, the summer camp it and other local churches sponsored certainly helped shape my beliefs, for later at Colby I briefly considered a career as a minister. I gained a deep appreciation of the extraordinary narrative poetry of the Bible, but there was a large gap between the Middle East grandeur of these stories and the agonizing spiritual clashes they portrayed, and the restricted, isolated life of our town, where religion was taken for granted. In our town, religion was simply accepted for its traditional values that could not be questioned, but science seemed capable of exciting new inventions. Radio was the spark that would bridge and unite the country. For me, radio became the kind of imaginative spirit that was missing in religion."

21

The site of the former Ricker Classical Institute, where Porter went to junior college, is desolate now. "Look!" Porter exclaims. "Even the library is padlocked! I sent them some material from my files and I was going to send them a lot more. The main building where I studied is gone completely. The whole place is just another American ruin. A McDonald's will come soon!"

Our next stop is the small public library, "my childhood escape into the world of the imagination," as Porter describes it. (How many public libraries have served as alternative schools for children stifled by classroom routine!) "I would go there often to find and read books that would take me out of my provincial life. Actually, as a kid I was beginning to live on two levels. I would read practical science books, particularly about radio, even assembled an extensive scrapbook of clippings on the subject, because I saw the possibility of getting out of Houlton and making a living in science in the future. But, like all kids, I was also deeply into the world of dreams and fantasies. My favorite book was called *The Brownies*. It featured dwarf figures in their family life and their absurd antics. *The Brownies* in those days were precursors of Bugs Bunny and similar characters."

As we leave Houlton, we stop at the main square, and again Porter compares it with the past: "This area we used to call the 'tough end,' and it's nothing like that today, except for a couple

"Incomplete" sketch by Porter of main square in Houlton, circa 1932.



of buildings: I see it with the old Lumberman's Hotel, Mrs. Brockway's second-hand furniture store, the old Union Hotel, and other establishments—not with what we're looking at, the hot-topped parking lots, brick buildings, and scores of automobiles around.

"On Mechanic Street, I see a man shoeing horses, pounding and shaping. At the corner of Franklin and Bangor Streets, I see men working on sleighs, cutting oak and maple and shaping them into runners and seats. These men worked on sleighs in the winter and four-wheel, horse-drawn carriages in the summer.

"I can see the old Grange store, one of the oldest cooperative stores in the country at that time. You could get almost anything you needed there. I see the old Buffalo Fertilizer Works with its huge agricultural tonnages loading onto Bangor and Aroostook Railroad cars. And speaking of the railroad, I can see the roundhouse, the paint shops, the cars being remodeled and painted—a beehive of activity.

"Back there in Community Park, I can see the summer agricultural fairs with their displays of flowers, vegetables, cooking, and crafts by the Houlton ladies. In the grandstand I see 2,000 people seated, cheering, watching the horseraces. Some of the horses racing there I knew well because they were stabled in my grandfather's barn."

Particularly, Porter remembers how the town came alive on Saturday nights in summer. A band played at Monument Park, where a character named Emmons Robinson haunted the fringes of

Porter (far right) with family members on outing at Littleton campground, early 1920's.

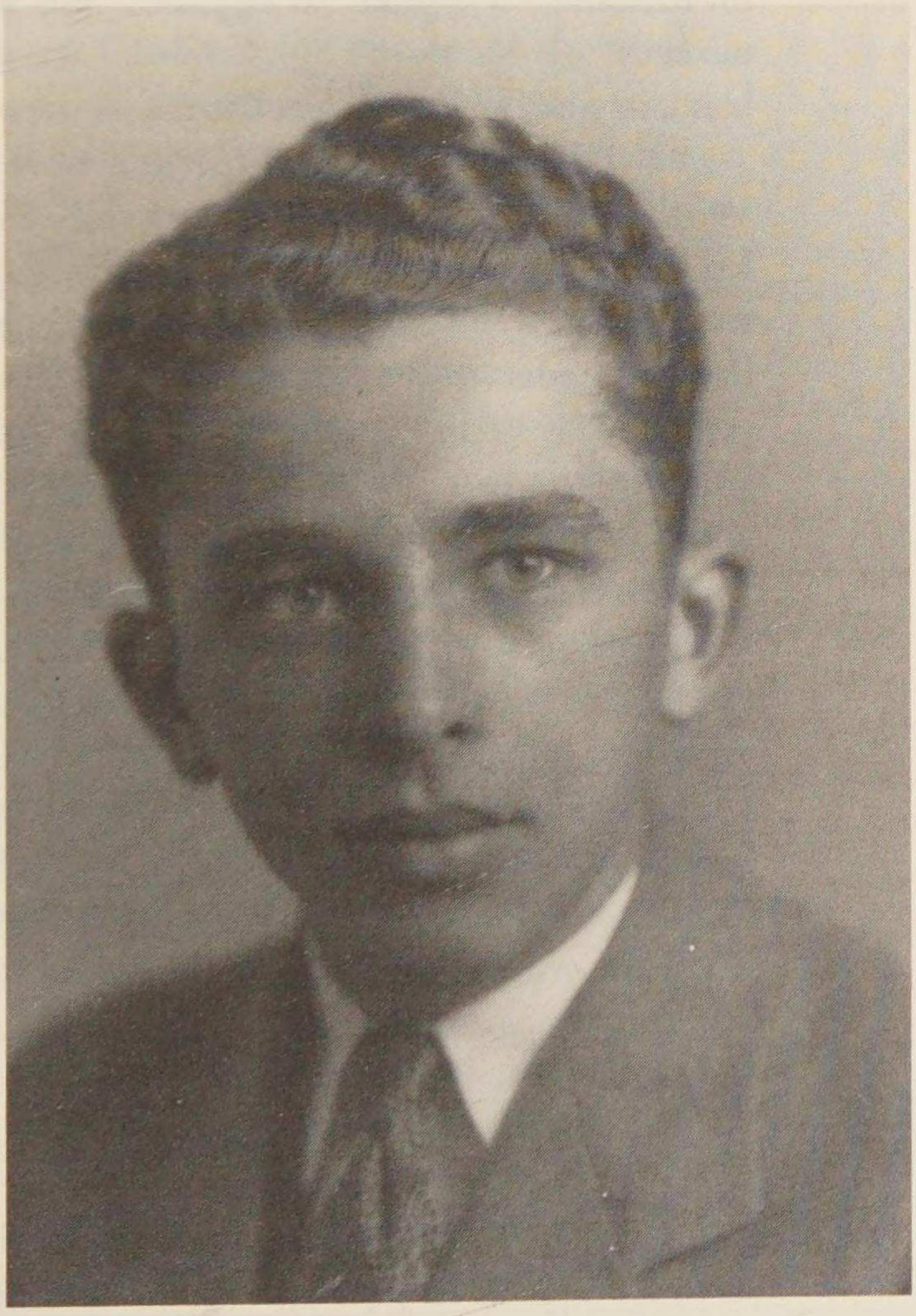


23

the crowd selling peanuts in a wild, cajoling manner. On those precious nights, no one stayed home. Amongst the locals who fascinated Porter and his friends was Franklin Hall. He lived on Reservoir Hill and kept lengthy genealogies of Houlton families and their immigrant roots. To Porter, Hall seemed like a character out of a small-town novel. Around Houlton it was whispered that "to keep his occupation economical he cut and sold his hair once a year." Otherwise, his thick, disheveled hair looked like a haystack tossed in a storm.

Leaving Houlton on the long drive back down Route 95 to Belfast, Porter is still lost in the past, shaking his head and muttering. "Time and economics! Here we are on a new, fast, divided throughway, but it's still hours to Bangor, the nearest city of any size. When I was a kid, it took my grandfather days to drive to

High school graduation photograph, 1928, Houlton, Maine.



24

Bangor and back in a horse-drawn wagon to get supplies for the farm. My brother started as an optometrist in Houlton, but he couldn't make it there, so he moved to Belfast where he became successful. I can't go back to Houlton to live. Too many layers of memory. . . . What will happen to Porter Settlement? Time and economics!"

As with most old people, Porter remembers clearly, even obsessively, the important events of his youth. Despite his estrangement from his parents, Porter does not remember his childhood as unhappy: "I had a lot of opportunities. What museums now call, 'the machine age,' was underway. Radio, locomotives, new flamboyant cars, movies, transatlantic liners, heavy industrial plants, the possibilities of photography, the telephone, gadgets of every kind promised a life of security and leisure to do what you wanted. Even though we were on the edge of the Depression, it was an exciting time to live. During the 1920s, in school or wandering the streets, I felt the optimistic sweep of all these new mechanical inventions. I was going to be part of this society of scientific miracles! At Houlton High School, I was active in art; the school band, in which I played the clarinet; the newspaper; and the yearbook.

"In high school I got labeled with the nickname 'Bug.' Working as a caddy at the country club, I wore knickers that buckled under my knees. I wore them every day to school though they were meant to be used only on the golf course. Also, I wore long-handled underwear, and it would show through the cuffs on my arms and around my neck. I must have looked like a bug with protruding antennae. Working for twenty-five cents a nine-hole round added to my feelings of inferiority. The girls I was interested in lived on the wealthier side of the tracks. You can imagine how I felt about their knowing that my father was a general handyman. A strong economic class division prevailed, not an aristocratic division as in Europe. Despite my good grades in school, I felt as though I were standing outside of things, on the edge of society. Always I heard my mother saying, 'You're a cold fish,' and I kept wondering if that kind of reserve wasn't part of being born in a small, isolated town in northern Maine."

3 Colby College



Frustrated because he didn't have enough money to leave his home town, Porter spent his freshman college year in 1928 at Ricker Classical Institute in Houlton. Ricker, a private school where Porter's father, uncles, and cousins had studied but never graduated, had just added a junior college curriculum. Porter and eleven others were in the first freshman class. The promise of eventual escape to Colby College was a strong lure, since Ricker had arranged with Colby for qualified freshmen to transfer there as sophomores.

Although Porter did well in his studies at Ricker, he was impatient. In his last term in high school, he had felt increasingly isolated from wealthier classmates as they prepared to depart for Harvard, McGill, Bowdoin, Smith, Wellesley, and Vassar. Porter's grades were better than his classmates', and he began to resent the relationship between money and educational opportunity. To save money for Colby, he patched his shoe soles with tin, wore second-hand clothes, and hitched rides to and from his job at the golf course. Despite pennypinching, he earned only $3.25 to $4.00 a week, and from this meager sum he had to buy clothes and food and pay other expenses. Porter's frugality in adulthood resulted in large part from habits formed in these early years. The only advantage of his poverty was that it forced him to live at home, where he had private space to which he could retreat and cultivate his scientific and artistic interests.

At Ricker Classical Institute, the curriculum was patterned, as the school's name implies, on English classical education with an

emphasis on Latin. Since he studied Latin in high school, Porter selected classes in history, English, mathematics, and physics. Of his year at Ricker, Porter says: "It was a strong learning experience, but the arts and the creative imagination were left out completely." His excellent grades earned him a part-time job as a substitute teacher in the high school from which he had just graduated. Walking through the corridors, he revisited the social frustrations of his high school years and felt he was still a second-class citizen.

A scholarship to Colby for his sophomore year enabled Porter to leave Houlton, only to find that 1929 was an inauspicious time to enter college. Coming from a farming family, Porter was more aware than many of his classmates of the impending Depression. Farmers were already suffering, although radio and newspapers were predicting a period of prosperity. The nation's false confidence was shattered in October 1929, with the collapse of the stock market.

As a result of the Depression according to Porter, "Out of my Colby class of 118, only two got jobs after graduation and those in their family businesses." For a time Colby seemed a haven to Porter—yet Waterville, as Victorian as most small New England towns in 1929, had little to offer the young man. During Porter's student years, Waterville was basically a mill town and railroad center. The college grounds were pressed between the railroad and the river, with smoke from the mill across the river blending with emissions from coal-burning trains that rumbled through town. "Lectures had to stop when freight trains clattered and shook their way by," Porter remembers.

The measure of the provincial environment in which Porter found himself at Colby in 1929 is evident in some of the major artistic events that occurred in that year of which he knew little until later. Brecht and Weill's *Three Penny Opera* premiered in Berlin and signaled a transformation of expressionistic musical theater. In Paris, Pablo Picasso, who with Georges Braque had already created Cubism, was developing a series of significant metal sculptures in Julio Gonzalez's studio and painting grotesquely distorted images of women such as *Bust of a Woman with Self-Portrait* and *Nude in an Armchair*. In November 1929, the Museum of Modern Art opened in New York and revealed to American audiences the wide range of modern experimental painting and sculpture. Meanwhile, in Waterville, Porter was beginning to feel his cultural isolation without having any real sense of new direction.



1932 graduation photograph from Colby College.

At first he shared two rooms in Colby's Roberts Hall with two other students. In exchange for tending the furnace day and night in the men's gymnasium, he was allowed to eat meals in the kitchen of the women's dormitory. Feeding on leftovers, Porter again felt like a servant, an outsider struggling to advance in an impenetrable educational hierarchy.

In spring 1930 a crisis occurred. The gymnasium, where he stoked the furnace, caught fire and was severely damaged. An investigation showed that the fire started from the furnace Porter tended. After a lengthy hearing, Porter was exonerated; he was shown to be a faithful attendant who had labored hard and frequently complained about the ill-functioning, decrepit furnace. Nonetheless, the investigation made him feel the target of an attack that wealthier classmates would have been spared.

Toward the end of his sophomore year, Porter's situation improved. He showed outstanding scientific abilities and began to concentrate in physics, which gave him new confidence and a glimpse of a possible vocation. Philip Ely, a class ahead of him, befriended him as they shared scientific and literary interests. Ely was majoring in English, and they talked extensively about literature, especially about Thomas Hardy. Seeing Porter's loneliness during the holidays, Ely invited him to share Thanksgiving and Christmas, and Porter accepted gladly. Subsequently, Ely became a high school English teacher, and he and Porter remained lifelong friends.

But the major event that bolstered Porter's spirit was meeting a pert, vivacious classmate, Dorris Moore. Although Dorris belonged to a sorority and Porter scorned fraternities, they fell in love. Dorris came from Farmington, Maine, a small, isolated town not unlike Houlton, so they shared similar backgrounds. Both loved to hike and appreciated the Maine countryside. On weekends they would take a picnic lunch (on one such occasion Dorris introduced Porter to ginger ale) and go on long walks through the woods and

28

fields that surrounded Colby. With Dorris, Porter felt freed from his restricted background. He could talk with her about current events, literature, film, or music. Her sensitivity and concern for him opened him up and eased his guilt about the reserved side of his personality.

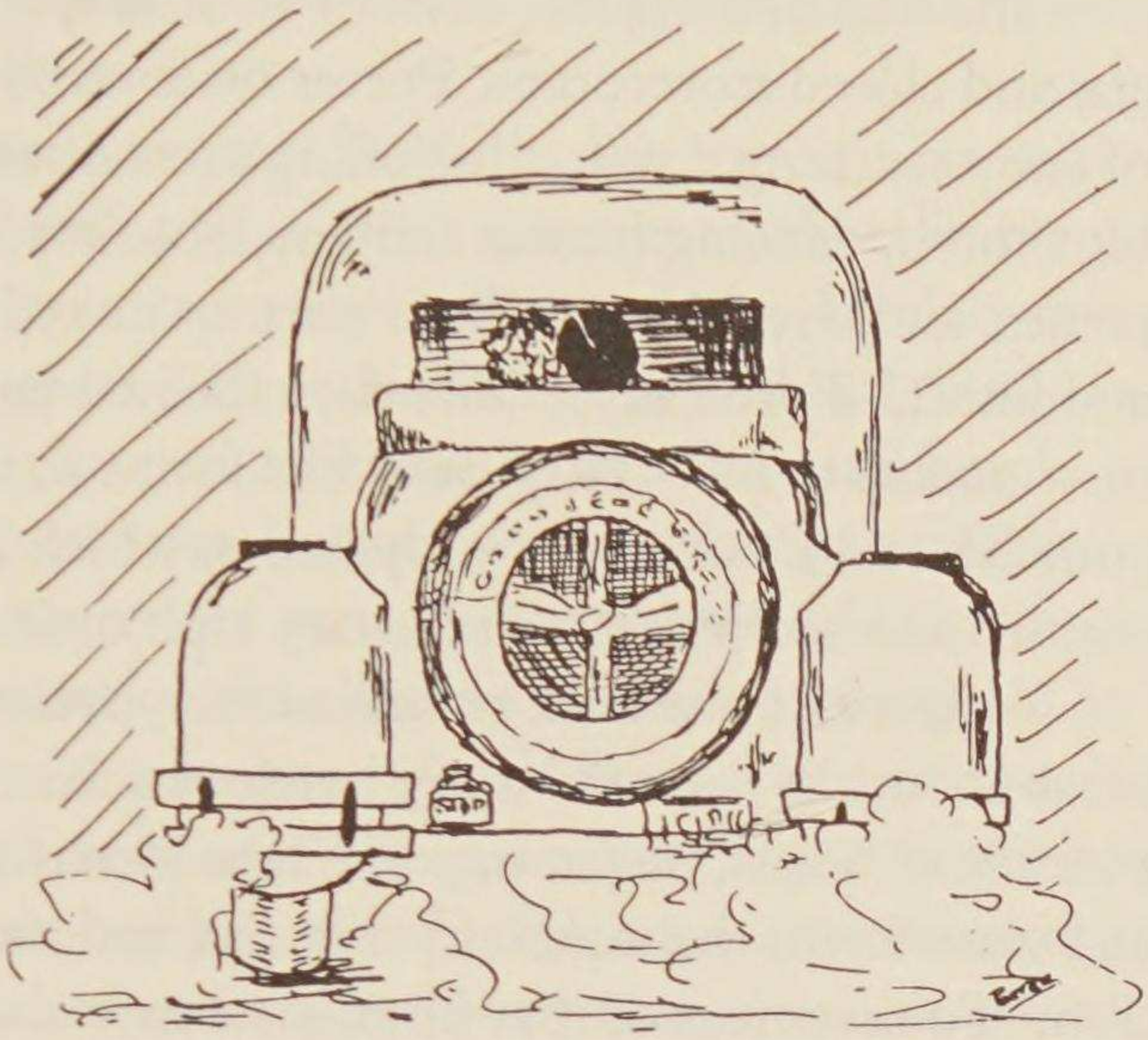
By the end of his first year at Colby, Porter had developed reservations about the college. "Although there were some good teachers," he says, "there was really no imaginative stature in any department except English, where Carl J. Weber, the department chairman, was an expert on Hardy's life and work. As for my class, there were only five men and two women from a Jewish background, and of course, no blacks. Only two of us men were not members of a fraternity, myself and a friend, James Mason. So the nine of us constituted a strange minority, sticking together against the rest of the class who were caught up in conventional fraternity and sorority routines."

Having shown ability in physics, Porter was appointed a student instructor in the physics laboratory during his junior and senior years. He prized this honor, but it confined him to a narrower course of study. He had to concentrate in physics, mathematics, and chemistry and forego classes in philosophy and literature that he wanted to take. As a student instructor he could afford to live in boarding houses and private homes off campus, which enabled him to pursue his romance with Dorris more freely. For a time he lived in the home of a veterinarian whose animal hospital was attached to the house. "I used to run chemical tests on poisoned dogs for this vet," Porter says. "I was so busy with my studies, my teaching assistantship, my part-time jobs, and my romance with Dorris that my eating habits went to pot. I ate however, wherever, but mostly not at all."

Porter and Dorris Moore at Colby, 1932.



Despite his busy schedule, he immersed himself in two extracurricular activities, the Glee Club, in which he sang baritone,



HOW DID EDNA GET ALL MUSSED UP?
SHE WAS OUT WITH A CRUDE OIL SALESMAN.

Cartoon by Porter from *The White Mule*.

and the humor magazine *The White Mule*, which he served as editor for three years. As he had trouble finding other students who could do cartoons or illustrations, he produced most of these drawings, signed or unsigned. One day he showed some of his cartoons to his mother and tried to explain to her why they were funny. She didn't understand.

All in all, though, Porter found little intellectual stimulus at Colby. "The ideas on campus," says Porter, "were, can Colby beat Maine in football, how to ride freight trains to Boston, and our fraternity is better than yours. There was no variety of ethnic cultures, nothing to stimulate my interest in modern literature. Professor Weber, the distinguished Hardy scholar, impressed on students and faculty alike that there was no writing after Hardy, so no one read Faulkner or Hemingway, to say nothing about Proust, Joyce and Stein. Colby was founded by Baptists as a religious institution, and retained a conservative religious aura. So I concentrated on setting up a Physics Society, designing the membership key, outlining the bylaws, and planning meetings. Once I even got a physics professor from the University of Maine to come and speak. It was a major deal to bring such an outsider.

"At one point I considered quite seriously going into the ministry under the influence of Professor Newman who taught religion—a kind of extension of my childhood religious experiences."

The physics building at Colby had a long-defunct observa-

tory and engineering laboratory. In attic spaces, odd corners, closets, and closed storerooms, Porter discovered a fantastic collection of early teaching devices, including astrolabes, sextants, a copper blowtorch, dancing master calipers, obsolete flasks, and old chisels, planes, and wrenches. "These were so incredible in shape, form, and finish," Porter says, "that they seemed far beyond gadgets and instruments to me. They were like forms in space. They went beyond Marcel Duchamp's readymades, which I saw later. They seemed like sculpture, art of a very high order."

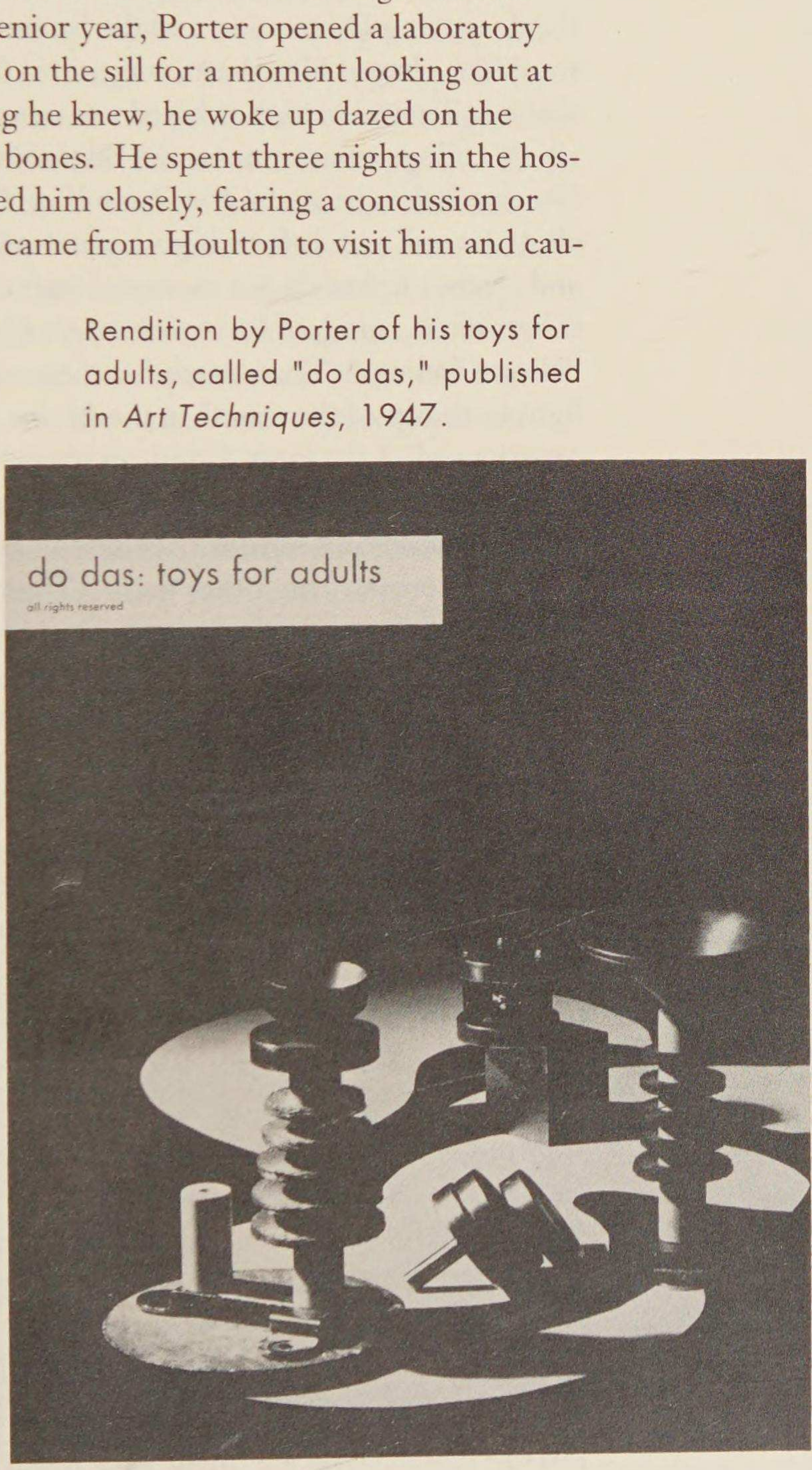
Here, in the back rooms of the physics building, Porter's ideas about the essential unity between science and art, the future concept of Sciart, began to come into focus. He saw in these metal and glass forms the ingenuity that characterized the age of invention. To inventors of that time, machines and mechanical objects were made to fit humanistic concepts. The connection between man and machine was still close. Machines were not yet sleek and streamlined; rather, they mimicked, sometimes clumsily, man's movements. At the turn of the century, in laboratories across the country, eager inventors—Thomas Edison is one famous example—working in barns and sheds with sawdust on the floor and spittoons at hand, tried anything that came to mind. They used available materials, searching for practical results. The idea of a "clean," objective laboratory with uniformed workers searching for statistically pure results, was a half-century in the future. General optimism about machines prevailed, and Porter, following his enthusiasm about the birth of the radio, was swept along by the indivisibility of the creative process. As he says, "Too often we speak of conflict between science and art, whereas the creative vision of a theoretical physicist, a composer, an artist, is the same for each. Now I think of a coin marked on one side physics and on the other, art. Bear in mind that to be a chemist, architect, geologist, engineer, doctor, botanist, etc., you have at some point to study physics—or in the pure classic sense, nature. Early physics was nothing but the study of nature, and in recent times, as with Einstein and others, we're seeing a return to that pure condition after a tendency to bypass nature and/or extend it—an impossibility, really."

Years later, spurred by the memory of those obsolete teaching aids he had discovered in the physics building, Porter was to take objects from the physics laboratory and exhibit them, unchanged, on pedestals in an art museum. Also, he would adapt some of these structured metal forms into "Toys for Adults." "Always I was struggling," he says, "to bring science into the artistic

world, rather than the equation that has evolved today that equates science with war or defense."

In the meantime, however, Porter had to concern himself with getting by. He shared a $5-a-week room in a private home with another student, eating sparsely and irregularly. His laboratory assistantship paid some $30 a month, but he still had to pay tuition from his summer earnings as a bellhop in a Portland hotel. Failure to eat regularly and concentration on work began to take their toll. One day in his senior year, Porter opened a laboratory window to get air, then sat on the sill for a moment looking out at the campus. The next thing he knew, he woke up dazed on the ground, feeling for broken bones. He spent three nights in the hospital, where doctors watched him closely, fearing a concussion or other trauma. His mother came from Houlton to visit him and cau-

Rendition by Porter of his toys for adults, called "do das," published in *Art Techniques*, 1947.



32

tioned him about his peculiar eating habits. His nurse turned out to be a former high school classmate, which pleased him and they reminisced about Houlton. Dorris Moore visited constantly. Drawn together by nature, shared beliefs, and sense of humor, she and Porter now considered themselves engaged, although they had agreed to postpone marriage.

Lying in bed, startled by his narrow escape from death, Porter could not help speculating about his difficult future in view of the deepening Depression and the limitations of what he had hoped would be a broad liberal arts education. He had begun to realize that a college education is based not merely on classes but on the whole college environment. As Edith Hamilton, the distinguished Greek scholar, wrote in *The Greek Way*, "Civilization, a much abused word, stands for a high matter quite apart from telephone and electric lights. It is a matter of imponderables, of delight in things of the mind, of love of beauty, of honor, grace, courtesy, delicate feeling." There were few "imponderables," and little "delight in things of the mind" in the Maine environments that Porter experienced. Like most American liberal arts colleges at the time, Colby was interested basically in pragmatic training. Scientific education focused on a core curriculum of science courses with a smattering of courses from other fields. Then and now, colleges have depended on extracurricular activities— libraries, museums, campus publications, visiting lecturers, and the like—to flesh out students' liberal arts experience. But the climate of ideas at Colby was too provincial to satisfy Porter's increasingly rebellious imagination.

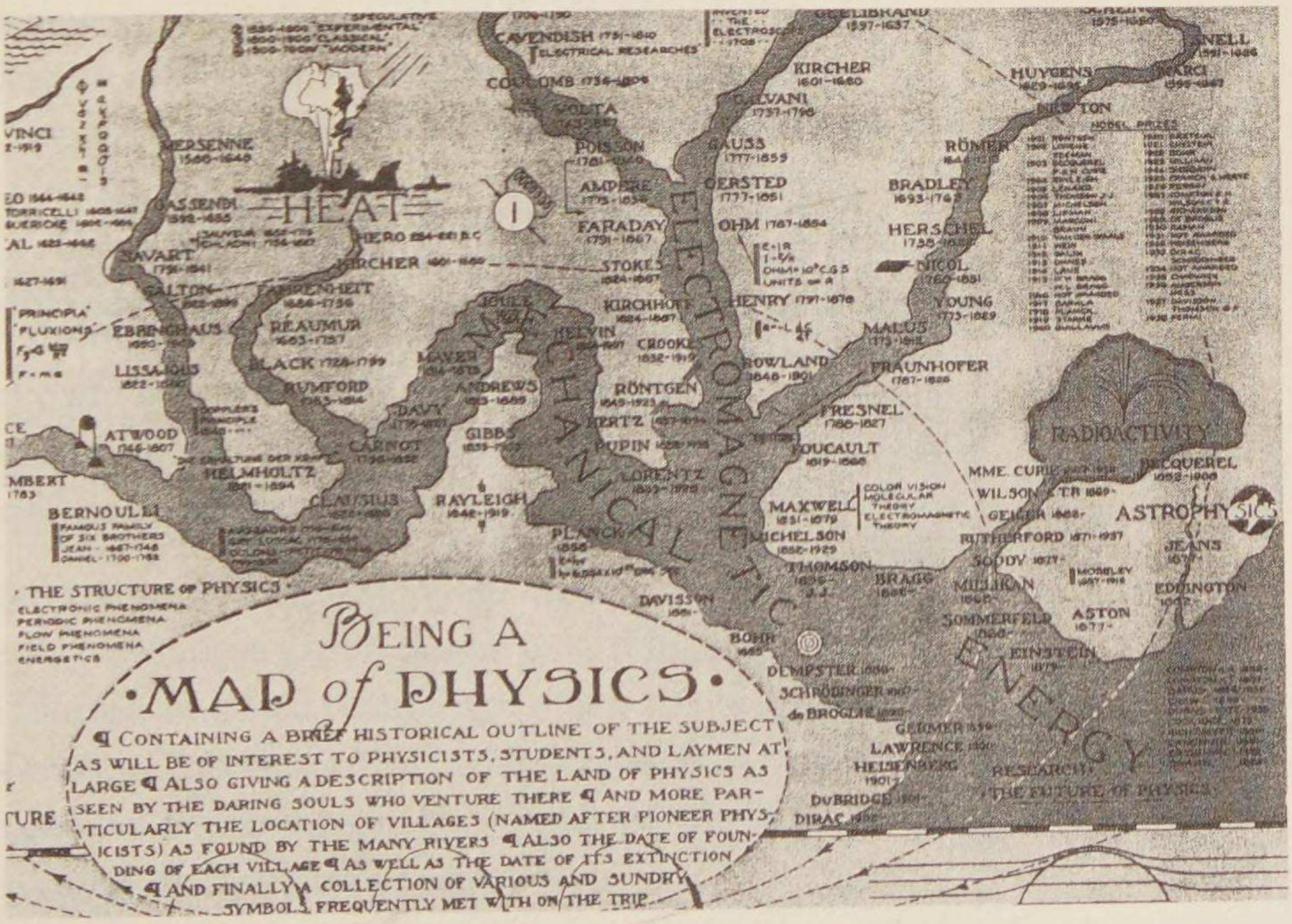
One unusual element of his education that Porter salvaged concerned maps. He found that in their peculiar inscriptions and imaginative qualities maps sometimes exceed geographical realism and move into the realm of art. Thus intrigued by maps and their relationship to painting and sculpture, Porter started work at Colby on a map of Houlton High School as a present for his brother Everett, who was attending Ricker Classical Institute. Also, Porter hoped that if Everett showed the map to administrators at Ricker, they might commission him to create a map of their institution. Although this did not work out, he became increasingly attracted to the medium and began a map of physics, ambitiously intended to cover the entire history of the field. Why should maps, he thought, represent only earth's physical and political features? If physics concerns the material nature of the world, why couldn't the history of physics be represented in a map? Led by influential intellectuals, physics had become a domain unto itself, and therefore required a

map to chart its origins and development. The logic of this argument was initially lost on publishers, however, and it was not until 1938 that Porter's five-color *Map of Physics* was finally published by the Central Scientific Company of Chicago. Five years later, when World War II had greatly augmented funding for secret physics research, Porter's *Map* appeared as the frontispiece of Blackwood's *General Physics Text* for college students.

Out of date today, Porter's *Map* retains its singular visual power and foreshadows his many experiments linking science and art. It shows a striking double image—a flow of energy out of the earth, represented as both a sea of energy and a tree of energy, uniting water and land as the dominant natural sources of power. From these sources snakelike streams of energy flow into the universe along channels of light marked magnetism, electricity, heat, sound, mechanics, and astronomy. One relatively small cloud of energy on the map represents, prophetically, Porter's developing interest in radioactivity, in which he would later specialize at Brown University. Embedded in the map are the names of the great physicists and their discoveries.

In his *Map of Physics*, Porter put to use imaginative abilities Colby left untapped and undeveloped. Instinctively, Porter presaged an era in which the discoveries of twentieth century physics would forever change man's environment.

Map of Physics by Porter, 1939.



34

When Porter graduated from Colby in 1932, his future seemed bright despite the Depression. A Ph.D. from a prestigious Ivy League university, he reasoned, would ensure his future in teaching and research, and he could marry Dorris. Confidently, then, he applied for a graduate scholarship at Brown University, enclosing enthusiastic recommendations from Colby. E.C. Marriner, dean of the Men's Division at Colby, wrote of him: "Porter stands third in a class of seventy-eight men, and will probably receive the Phi Beta Kappa distinction in June. He is a young man of high moral character and attractive traits of personality, thoroughly cooperative with both superiors and associates." Professor of Chemistry George F. Parmenter wrote "Mr. Porter has taken three years of Chemistry and we have found him tobe a very good student and a man of excellent character and general ability. I am very glad to recommend Mr. Porter to you and the Staff of the Department of Physics."

But the key recommendation came from Professor N.E. Wheeler, head of the Colby Physics Department and director of the Shannon Physical Laboratory. Wheeler's letter is particularly interesting because, in addition to praising Porter's scholarship and personality, it goes on to say:

> Incidentally he is quite artistic, and has made some rather fine sketches of attractive pieces of architecture. Rare taste, it seems to me, was displayed in a brief talk on Faraday which he recently gave before our Physical Society, of which he happens to be President.
>
> His circumstances make it important that he secure some sort of financial assistance if he does graduate work next year, and I hope that you may be able to give his application favorable consideration.

When he heard from Brown that he had been accepted and given a graduate scholarship, Porter went immediately to see Dorris. They celebrated and talked excitedly about their future. The fact that they might have to wait a year or two to marry while Porter pursued his graduate studies did not bother them. Their engagement was firm. At last Porter had gained entrance into the academic world of the professional scientist.

4 Brown University



Porter's scholarship paid part, not all, of his expenses at Brown; to fill in the gaps he took exhausting part-time jobs. At first he thought himself up to the intense work graduate study required, and he was bolstered by the belief that when he achieved his Ph.D., marriage to Dorris and a secure career in teaching and research would follow. A notebook that Porter kept in Houlton during the summer of 1932 reflects, along with his love for Dorris, a deepening concern about the split between science and art. In a section called "Statement," with "Confession" crossed out beneath, he wrote:

As one bound by circumstance to a major subject only in part adapted to my liking, instead of to a major course, which my make-up and innate abilities demand, I can fully agree, yet with modesty, that those of artistic aptitudes should not be hindered in their inner expressions. Though Science creates the physical necessities and explains the material world, it fails in the appreciation and creation of the more fine or aesthetic. To me, the latter is as important to a person as the food he eats. In fact, it is art that makes the man of the cultured and refined sense. Anyone who can, because of his understanding and appreciation for the finer things, uplift the minds and narrow bounded thoughts of others to the limitless heights of creative and imaginative expression of things aesthetic, should be granted that privilege. In the end, the world exists for the soul to satisfy its desire for beauty.

36

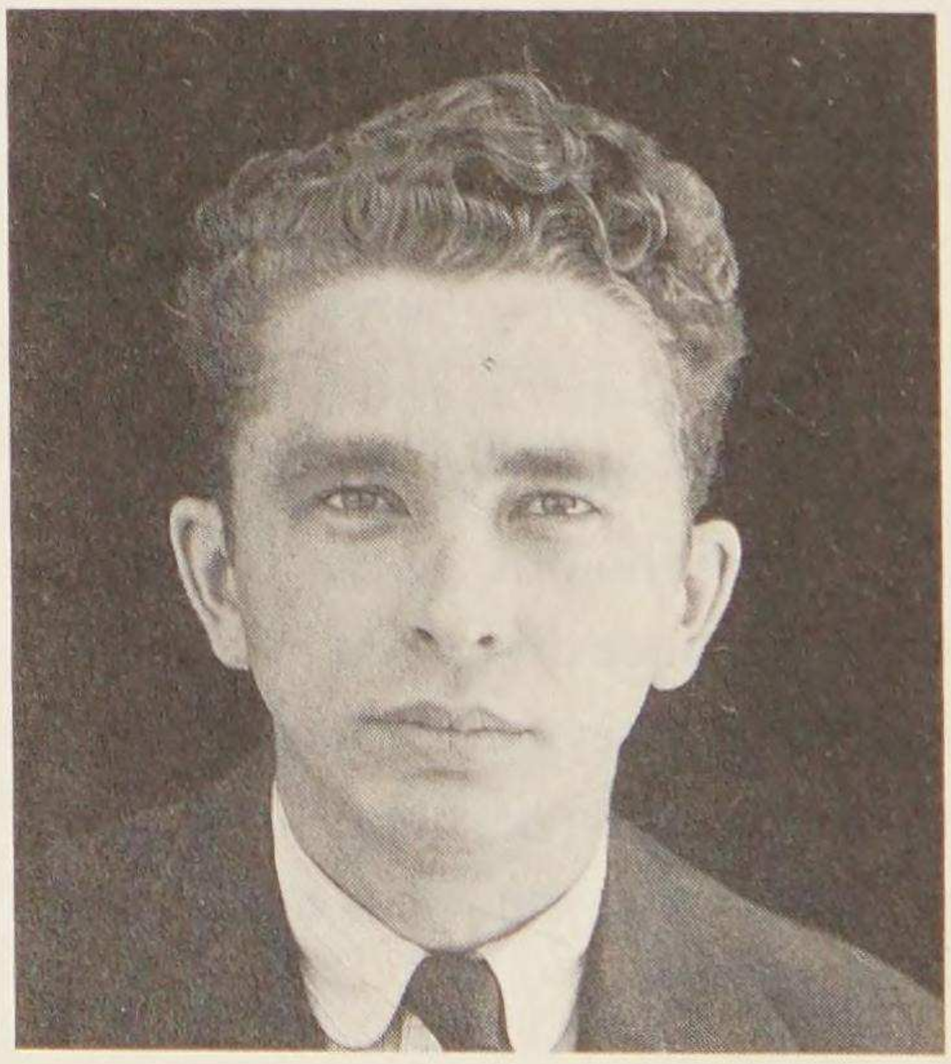
Such romantic broodings revealed Porter's awareness of the difficulties he faced in finishing his graduate studies. During his first year as a graduate student, Porter received all A's. He was so immersed in his work that he saw Dorris only infrequently, when she came to Providence or he visited Colby, where she was still a student. Somehow Brown seemed sheltered from the Depression. On October 12, 1932, the *Brown Daily Herald* stated in an editorial:

> In the midst of the Depression, with registration figures collapsing all about us, enrollment at Brown remains the same as last year; with educational institutions all over the country having difficulties with their finances, the Brown budget balances this year. *The Dartmouth* remarks editorially that registration has decreased at 13 out of 19 colleges and universities in the east.

A *Daily Herald* poll of undergraduate students indicated a vast majority wanted Hoover over Roosevelt in the impending presidential election. On November 9, 1932, however, readers found the startling headline "ROOSEVELT SWEEPS COUNTRY IN UNPARALLELED DEMOCRATIC VICTORY; WINS IN RHODE ISLAND." Porter himself, raised a Maine Republican, believed the nation needed new leadership to break out of the Depression, but he was too involved in his studies that fall to concern himself with politics.

Porter had entered Brown at a time when the university was essentially a conservative Baptist institution. To Porter, however, Brown was a center of stimulating ideas compared to Ricker and Colby. He studied mainly with three professors. His chief advisor was the chairman of the Physics Department, Professor Albert de Forest Palmer, an authority on precision measurement. Some of his earliest experiments involved measuring parts of the sun's helium spectrum. He also worked on the precision measurement of light and, when Porter studied with him,

Porter as a Brown University graduate student.



was concentrating on interferometry, a form of light measurement. Palmer was the author of a widely used physics book, *Theory of Measurements*. Occasionally he and his wife invited Porter and other graduate students to tea, a formal Ivy League custom inherited from British universities.

That fall of 1932, Porter began research with Professor Carl W. Miller leading to Porter's master's degree thesis on "Alpha Particle Range Measurements on a Mixture of Radium and Its Disintegration Products." The research was so successful that in March 1933 Miller wrote an enthusiastic letter to the head of the graduate school, recommending a new scholarship that would allow Porter to continue in the Ph.D. program:

> Mr. Bernard H. Porter is applying for a Graduate School scholarship with the approval and recommendation of our Department. Mr. Porter has been associated with me during the past year in a preliminary investigation of alpha particle ranges by a point counter method. During this time I have become quite intimately acquainted with him, and have had a constantly growing respect for both his industry and ability. He is one of the best students we have had here in recent years, and I sincerely hope that he will be enabled to continue with us next year.

The third professor with whom he studied, the internationally famous physicist Dr. Carl Barus, earned Porter's greatest admiration. In 1900 Barus had been awarded the prestigious Rumford Medal by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for his research in heat, and especially for his work in developing methods for high-temperature and high-pressure measurement. In 1903 American physicists had rated Barus second only to Albert Michelson as the outstanding physicist in the country. Shortly before he became the Hazard Professor of Physics at Brown, Barus published a paper on colloid silver that earned him a reputation as one of the founders of colloid chemistry. Barus's background in colloids was to influence and aid Porter in his work with the Acheson Colloids Corporation.

By the time Porter came to study with him, Barus was a professor emeritus who had stayed on to teach part time and continue his research. Elderly and distinguished, he always opened his class in applied vector analysis with a formal greeting, "Gentlemen." (In those days there were almost no female graduate students in physics.) Porter says of Barus: "He was a white-haired man with metal-rimmed glasses, a full white mustache, and always formally dressed

in a black suit with a tie around his upturned, German-style collar. When he wrote something on the blackboard he expected you to be able to repeat it exactly. He brooked no nonsense."

Barus's fame was reflected in a story that William Faunce, president of Brown until 1929, liked to tell about a group of German students visiting the university. When asked what they wanted to see, the German students answered, "The laboratory of Herr Doktor Professor Carl Barus."

"When it was pointed out to them," President Faunce said, "they bowed in the direction of the laboratory and departed. That was their idea of a visit to Brown University!"

Porter was especially intrigued by Barus's insights regarding scientific research and the role of the scientist. In May 1926, at a testimonial dinner to mark his retirement, Barus had told the assemblage:

> "Gentlemen, I am one of the 999 about to be forgotten. But after all what difference does it make! Time will come, the time is probably close at hand when even the Newtons crowd too numberless for memory. All that we can do is to be true to the little orbit to which we have been assigned. We do not understand it, we shall never see the end; but we believe—and that is a matter of pure faith, mind you—that it is some inscrutable scheme of growth; or that we also, like the stars, are enlisted in a kind of cosmic teamwork, needing neither excuse nor applause, because it is sufficient in itself."

Barus's modesty and dedication were appealing to Porter, and he felt himself deeply in sympathy with the dignified old man. In addition, Porter, with his New England religious upbringing, had always felt a desire to be "enlisted in a kind of cosmic teamwork," and now that desire for the first time in his difficult life seemed on the verge of being realized. When Barus asked Porter to collaborate with him on the writing of a textbook on vector analysis, Porter was immensely gratified and felt that he had been accepted into the community of science.

From Barus, Porter also absorbed an unusual moral viewpoint about science. At the beginning of the Depression, Barus wrote in a letter to the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia, "The dilemma of our present civilization is that its advance in ethics and aesthetics is not comparable with its advance in science. I am by no means sure that to teach the people at large more science will not do more harm than good. Science lends itself to the arts of war, aggression, of exploitation, of sabotage, quite as much as to the

arts of peace." These words, and similar counsel Barus gave him as they worked together on the book, remained in Porter's mind.

In the midst of graduate study, Porter found it increasingly hard to resist cultural activities on campus and in the surrounding city of Providence. Poor eating habits born of overwork and insufficient funds persisted and endangered his health as he spent more and more time on the conflicting interests that attracted him.

In November 1932, he attended an Institute of Art cosponsored by Brown and the Rhode Island School of Design. Frank Lloyd Wright, already famous, and painter Thomas Benton and art historian Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., were key speakers. That same month, Porter was also impressed by two outstanding professional theater productions in Providence, Eugene O'Neill's controversial *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which the Theater Guild was touring with sets by the great theatrical designer Robert Edmond Jones, and Marc Connelly's *Green Pastures*, the 1930 Pulitzer prizewinner, which also featured striking sets by Jones.

During the fall and winter of 1932-1933, Porter found himself going regularly to Brown's Sock and Buskin dramatic performances, which included Molière's *Doctor in Spite of Himself*, Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Capek's *R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots*. Porter was particularly intrigued by the latter, a futuristic piece involving an international trust for the manufacture of robots almost identical to humans.

Porter's background made it hard for him to accept certain aspects of wealthy Ivy League campus life. On February 16, 1933, the Brown *Daily Herald* reported that the "Senior Committee on Pipes, Canes and Jackets" had decided that each student would have an opportunity in chapel to signify whether he wished a pipe, cane, or jacket. To Porter, the idea of smoking a pipe, carrying a cane, or wearing a formal jacket seemed far removed from his working class way of life. In any case, his burgeoning artistic interests were starting to pull him away from strict adherence to academics.

Finding that his mentor Barus was an accomplished instrumentalist and composer, Porter began to feel freer to attend concerts. The Boston Symphony played regularly in Providence, and there were concerts by violinist Fritz Kreisler, and Italian tenor Tito Schipa. British pianist Myra Hess and Yehudi Menuhin gave concerts in March at the Loew's State Theater in Providence.

Porter began spending more time reading poetry and fiction and attending readings by poets Robert Hillyer and Leonard Bacon. However, the event that was most memorable to Porter occurred

on Sunday, February 19, when T. S. Eliot visited Brown to read his poems. The *Daily Herald* reported that a "maximum audience" greeted Eliot's appearance:

> L. T. Damon, head of the English Department introduced Eliot as a talented man who "embraced John Dryden, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and George IV." He was characterized as emphasizing in his verse the drift and significance of the newer poetry in all its mystery and beauty. In getting up to address the audience Professor Eliot remarked in return that "my poetry seems very simple to me."
>
> The *Herald* reporter approached T. S. Eliot as he was receiving people in the Crystal Room following his reading. He was surrounded by a bevy of adoring Pembroke students with open editions to be autographed. . . . "There are a whole school of would-be poets in the University, and all of them, I am sure, would be interested in finding out whether you think the atmosphere of an Oxford or a Cambridge is more conducive to the writing of poetry than the atmosphere of a modern American University." "It is rather difficult to draw generalities," said Professor Eliot, pursing his lips, "for the American universities are of such a heterogeneous character. However, I should say that as a general thing the atmosphere of an English university is more segregated—the individual is left more to himself and this is certainly conducive to the more successful creation of poetry."

A *Herald* editorial writer extolled Eliot's reading:

> The poems were delivered in faultless English, and gave a hint at the potential beauty of the English language that we will venture to say, have rarely been felt so keenly at this University. We will further offer the possibility that the actual meaning of these Eliot poems, in large measure, passed quite over the head of the audience. They had neither Bacon's obvious quality, nor the fixed nicety of Hillyer, who has given similar readings in the past. And yet they were far more successful than either. The stock qualities of alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, were used in a way to suggest an almost divine flow.
>
> The undergraduate of today is being brought up in an atmosphere of change not only in things economic and social but in those of the arts. Stravinsky amazes, confuses and thrills; his eerie disharmonies get at the bottom of any open imagination. Matisse does the same thing; his "cubic" methods of art are delightful in

their baffling qualities. Exponents of similar measure in literature, including D. H. Lawrence in prose, and the very relevant Professor Eliot bear out this thought.

The enthusiastic tone of this editorial, which Porter read, reflected his tastes at the time. In a rush of excitement, he began writing poems influenced by Eliot. What fascinated Porter particularly about Eliot was the poet's dry, ironic wit and revolutionary voice. Remarkable urban images such as that found in the opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" ("Let us go then, you and I,/When the evening is spread out against the sky/Like a patient etherized upon a table") made Porter feel that poetry could be as exciting as science in its ability to transform society.

In the spring term of 1933, then, Porter started to feel doubts about pursuing an academic career in physics. What had seemed a promising goal seemed less so if it meant he could not develop his interest in the arts. And as the world darkened into war, the political climate in the United States and Europe fostered disturbing questions. On February 20, 1933, the *Daily Herald* printed a special article about H. V. Kaltenborn's interview with Hitler and the rising threat of a Germany under the control of the Nazis. In Manchuria, the Japanese invasion continued. In spring 1933, sensing the threat of war, the *Daily Herald* conducted a campaign it called "War Against War." More than 400 Brown undergraduates signed a pledge "not to bear arms, except in case of invasion of the mainland."

Still, that spring Porter's career seemed on an irresistible course. He worked on the textbook with Carl Barus, continued to receive excellent grades, and finished research on his thesis. In March he was inducted into Sigma Xi in recognition of high academic standing, and he learned that the Graduate Council had voted him another scholarship to cover tuition costs for the next academic year. In May he passed his French language examination for the Ph.D., and started to study German for the fall examination. At commencement ceremonies in June, Porter received his master's degree in absentia, requesting that he be excused from the Graduate School convocation for financial reasons: "It is then, for the lack of funds, for the difficulty of further borrowing and for the bare possibility of a summer position, that I ask this favor."

But in fall 1933 Porter's academic career began to fall apart. He had been able to save only a small amount of money working during the summer in Houlton. His part-time jobs at Brown, as a

42

busboy in a downtown cafeteria and a subscription salesman for the new magazine *Providence*, served only to exacerbate the differences he felt between himself and the wealthy students he served as an attendant in Brown's Lyman Gymnasium. In November he was notified by the Registrar that he had passed his German language Ph.D. requirement, but that was his last success. Multiple pressures were closing in on him, and the stresses of poverty and poor eating habits were too great. Late in the fall term, overwhelmed by doubts about his academic career and distraught by his inability to earn enough money while managing a heavy load of courses and research, he began to steal small sums of money from students in Lyman Gym. He seemed, unconsciously, to want to be thrown out of the academic net in which he felt trapped. The thefts were so obvious that he was caught almost immediately. In his panic, he could not understand what had happened. He was put under a psychologist's care and permitted to withdraw from the university. When the athletic director complained to Dean Roland Richardson of the Graduate School that Porter should be made to return the money immediately, Richardson replied that Porter was desperately hard up and that he had loaned Porter $10 "to keep him in food for a while."

That spring Porter returned to Houlton to work at the usual odd jobs and repay the money he had stolen. On May 12, 1934, he sent $30 and the following letter to Dean Richardson:

> I am enclosing my savings to date. This amount, although only a part of my account of fifty dollars, has been a most staggering sum since it has grown from every sort of job from splitting wood to serving as a substitute teacher in a school.
>
> It is my sincere hope that I can somehow earn the balance before the university closes in June, though it has been my experience so far that even Hope is short-lived. As yet I have no regular work. I am not forgetting my account with you personally [the $10 that he owed Dean Richardson].
>
> Only after I have paid this debt and know that it has been returned in some possible way will I feel at all free.
>
> Thanking you for all your past kindnesses I remain
>
> Sincerely yours
>
> Bernard H. Porter

When Porter wrote "Hope is short-lived," he was thinking not only of his aborted academic career but of his long-awaited marriage to Dorris Moore, which now seemed impossible. How

could he find sufficient money to marry with his career shattered? In his shame, he could not bring himself to tell her about the thefts and his withdrawal from Brown. His parents and friends knew only that he had suffered a nervous breakdown because of the pressure of his graduate studies. On May 31 he wrote to Dean Richardson again:

> I am enclosing the balance of my account [the final $20] the amount of which is correct according to my honest and sincere belief. This amount I have earned while working in the office of a local Fertilizer Concern during their recent rush period.
>
> Within the next week I intend to go to a nearby farm to spend the summer and to get myself in good physical condition through outdoor work.
>
> At this time I ask for your continued patience and good wishes until I can repay my account with you [the $10].

Working at the "local Fertilizer Concern" was a humiliation, yet even laboring as a gas-pump attendant on the Ellis Farm in Dyer Brook, another of Porter's odd jobs that year, gave welcome relief from the mental turmoil that assailed him. Carefully, he began to weigh his options, knowing he couldn't stay home for long. At Brown, as he said, he had felt "like a blotter trying to absorb every kind of experience that came along." The head of the Physics Department, Professor Palmer, had called him in and, without stressing the thefts, emphasized the need for Porter to withdraw for psychological reasons. Palmer had suggested that Porter was not really working full time in physics and was involving himself in too many literary and artistic activities. Palmer also offered the possibility that Porter could come back in a year without a scholarship if he resolved his problems and decided that he really wanted to be a physicist. Looking back at this final interview, Porter says, "If I had been honest when I answered Palmer, I might have said, 'No, I'm not sure I want to be a physicist. I found myself sitting in the front row of every artistic activity at Brown and it changed me.'" Porter knew that his life had changed irrevocably.

The next step was to find a job in the New York area, where he could spend his spare time investigating his abilities in the arts. On September 6, 1934, Porter wrote to Dean Richardson from Amityville on Long Island:

> I am returning the personal loan you made to me some time ago, trusting the next Graduate Student who receives the same will appreciate your kindness in time of need as sincerely as I did.

44

Again thank you.

Through Professor Hill of the Brown Placement Bureau, I have recently secured a position as Assistant Manager in a small store on Long Island for the Macmillan Company. I have recovered in many ways and have attained, I think, some measure of mental and spiritual balance. I have Faith for the future.

Most sincerely yours,

Bernard H. Porter

Behind these optimistic words, Porter was still in torment. The job he mentioned in his letter to Richardson was in the small book department of a larger department store and paid only $18 a week. His hopes of marrying Dorris had vanished. After their student years, they remained lifelong friends and often regretted their separation. As late as September 1984, Dorris could still write to him:

> What is "love" anyway? Affection, attraction, sex, agreeability, companionship, understanding, sharing, believing in each other, creating a basic pattern of compatibility that satisfies, embellishes and strengthens our every moment and faith in one another. Surely our ways have undergone a far-reaching separation from our original concept of love in the early years of college. Then, it was indeed, close, warm and sensual. And yet, fifty years later, there is still that deep-seated need, desire, and embracing idea that love still does exist in our hearts and minds—despite other affections, people, multi-influences, family (on my part), spouses, travels, environments. . . .

No wonder Porter sometimes still cries when he talks about his relationship with Dorris. He would never lose completely the guilt that he felt over his inability to tell her the truth about the collapse of his promising career, and with it, their dreams of marriage.

5 The Acheson Colloids Corporation



The winter of 1934-35 and the spring of 1935 were bleak months in Porter's life as he and Dorris drifted apart. Despairing about his future and evading questions about the past, he repeated the falsehood to Dorris and his family that excessive work had broken his health and interrupted his studies. Growing restless with his menial job in the store on Long Island, he moved to New York City and went to live in Hartford House, a shelter for the educated unemployed who were seeking work. In New York he was closer to the arts, and his depression eased. Through Hartford House connections, he got a job as a window dresser at Woolworth's on 14th Street. Among other crafts, he learned to work leather and created, in his spare time, an ironic Porter crest with bells and wreaths, celebrating his Scottish and Irish ancestry. His belief that he had failed Dorris dominated his mind and, using store materials, he sculpted a classical plaster head of a woman who seems lost in time.

In the fall of 1935, Porter's luck changed. Recommendations from Brown professors got him a job as a physicist with the Acheson Colloids Corporation in New York. There Porter con-

ducted research and wrote articles about colloidal graphite, minute particles of pure carbon that may be held indefinitely in suspension in liquids such as water or mineral oil. Graphite, as Porter explained in an article for the corporation, is one of the softest minerals, opaque, black, extremely resistant to acid and heat, and a good conductor of both heat and electricity. Colloidal graphite was used in the lubrication of automobile engines; it was also important in the early stages of television technology in which the Acheson Corporation was interested. Porter described his work: "I was one of the researchers who took the colloidal graphite process and used it to coat the interior walls of a cathode ray tube. The television age was just beginning, and I was one of the people trying to develop the television tube, which projects images on the screen. This is done by a beam of electrons that must be shielded with an opaque electrical conductor. I was an eager worker on the project. As I conceived of television in the 1930s, I hoped it would be used mainly to educate. My colleagues and I visualized television as part of the educational system. Like many scientists, we were extremely naive in failing to perceive how the medium would be used and controlled by advertising."

In his free time, Porter began to study art, painting representational pictures in night classes at the Leonardo da Vinci School of Art. The teachers did little to encourage him, but his love of art drove him to all of the major exhibits in New York. In 1936 he went several times to see the Museum of Modern Art's show of "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism." This exhibit of almost seven hundred works was the first comprehensive attempt in the United States to show the range of surrealism from its beginnings to contemporary times. What attracted Porter to surrealism was the way it transformed commonplace or discarded objects, as he had begun to do at Colby using old laboratory equipment. In the 1920s, André Breton, the founder of surrealism, urged his students to scavenge at flea markets for unusual objects—*objets trouvés* was his term for what Porter came to call Founds. At flea markets, an artist could break through creative barriers by discovering unconscious associations with discarded objects.

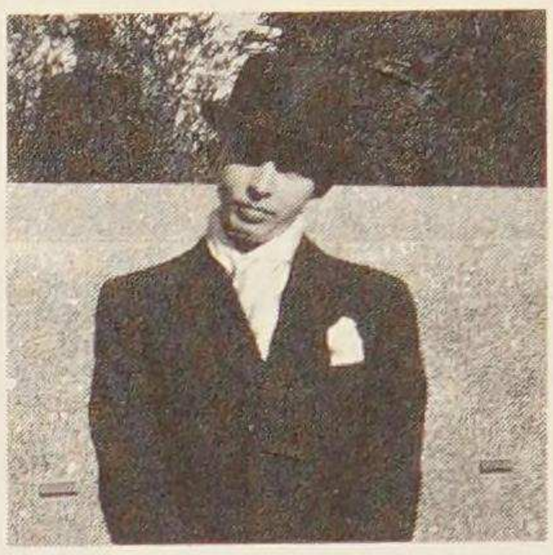
Porter particularly appreciated the way surrealists were able to surround an image with an aura of wonder. As Sarane Alexandrian wrote in *Surrealist Art* :

> Breton indicated that the aim of the movement was 'the marvelous,' and preferably the marvelous in modern life, inspired by the

> symbolism of dreams, whose latent content was revealed by psychoanalysis. . . .The aim was to reconcile reality with the illogical processes which arise in ecstatic states or in dreams, with the aim of creating a superreality in which all the contradictions which afflict humanity are resolved as in a dream.

At this time, though enmeshed in his new scientific research, Porter was just beginning to absorb the implications of surrealism for his latent artistic interests. Art was still mainly a recreation to satisfy his unfulfilled creative ambitions. As a scientist, he appreciated the natural transformation that the surrealists achieved with ordinary objects as in Marcel Duchamp's Readymades. However, he still had little idea of how surrealism would change the practical-minded American cultural scene. To be sure, three American artists—Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, and Alexander Calder—were becoming well known in the 1930s and were influential in the trend toward surrealism and abstract art. Ray's experimental photographs or Rayograms, Cornell's boxes with their dreamlike juxtaposition of objects, and Calder's Mobiles and Stabiles fascinated Porter. He felt a special kinship with Calder (who was trained as an engineer) and the remarkable way he balanced objects in space in his mobiles, combining science and art in new, surrealistic ways.

In contrast with the surrealistic movement's emphasis on dreams and the unconscious mind that affected Porter in 1936, the larger culture was dominated by the ideas that Dale Carnegie mirrored that year in his enormous bestseller, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. With the growing success of Franklin Roosevelt's economic policies, the Depression was yielding to a superficial optimism. Carnegie's book, with typically hasty American fervor, was subtitled "A Shortcut to Distinction." Carnegie urged Americans to seek importance and material success by overpowering others with manners, charm, and personality. The new film industry emphasized personality and glamour to conceal the poverty that still plagued the country, just as Carnegie emphasized the importance of always "Smiling." Although Carnegie's superficial techniques did not interest him, Porter, too, longed for a new persona that would bring him social recognition. In off hours, taking advantage of his salary from the Acheson Corporation, he turned himself into what he called a "clotheshorse." He wore hand-tailored shirts with fancy collars and brightly colored ties, an expensive dark suit, or handsome tweed jacket. He sported a derby hat and spats to simulate a distinguished gentleman invading the New York art scene. Of



Outside Radio City, New York City, 1935.

course, at work, he wore more conventional clothes and played the company man. He was working as hard as ever, but he enjoyed his double life, venturing into the artistic world as a stimulating escape from the routines of his job.

In June 1937, he had another difficult meeting with Dorris Moore. During his undergraduate years at Colby, Porter had fallen short of achieving Phi Beta Kappa academic distinction by a fraction of a grade point. Dorris had persuaded Colby's dean that, in view of his academic accomplishments at Brown and his success in New York with Acheson, Porter should receive belated appointment to the honorary society. Together, she and Porter attended the special ceremony at Colby in which he was finally admitted to Phi Beta Kappa. Although they talked again of marriage, Dorris was beginning to realize that he would never marry her. For his part, Porter's guilt increased, as he was now further indebted to Dorris and still could not bring himself to tell her the truth about his withdrawal from Brown.

In the fall of 1937, Porter escaped from his torment about Dorris when Acheson sent him to England and Paris on a short business trip. In France, he met Gertrude Stein. "I just went to her home on instinct," Porter says. "Probably six to eight people were present—she seemed to like the feeling of running a salon. There was no food or drink. She was just talking to her curious visitors, talking a blue streak and not permitting any interruptions. The problem was to figure out what she was saying! She talked exactly the way she wrote, which made me wonder if she had some kind of recorder and talked her books into it. It still seems to me as though most of her books were written that way, by transcribing the incredible flow of her verbal rhythms. Listening to her was like listening to some kind of extremely sophisticated performance art, as it is called today. No wonder so many of her pieces have a powerful theatrical effect when performed, although they may seem abstract on the page. The carved, sculptural flow of her language dazed me so that it seemed incredible that she could find time to sit down at a

desk and write. Certainly, from her talk developed the whole contemporary movement of the so-called language poets."

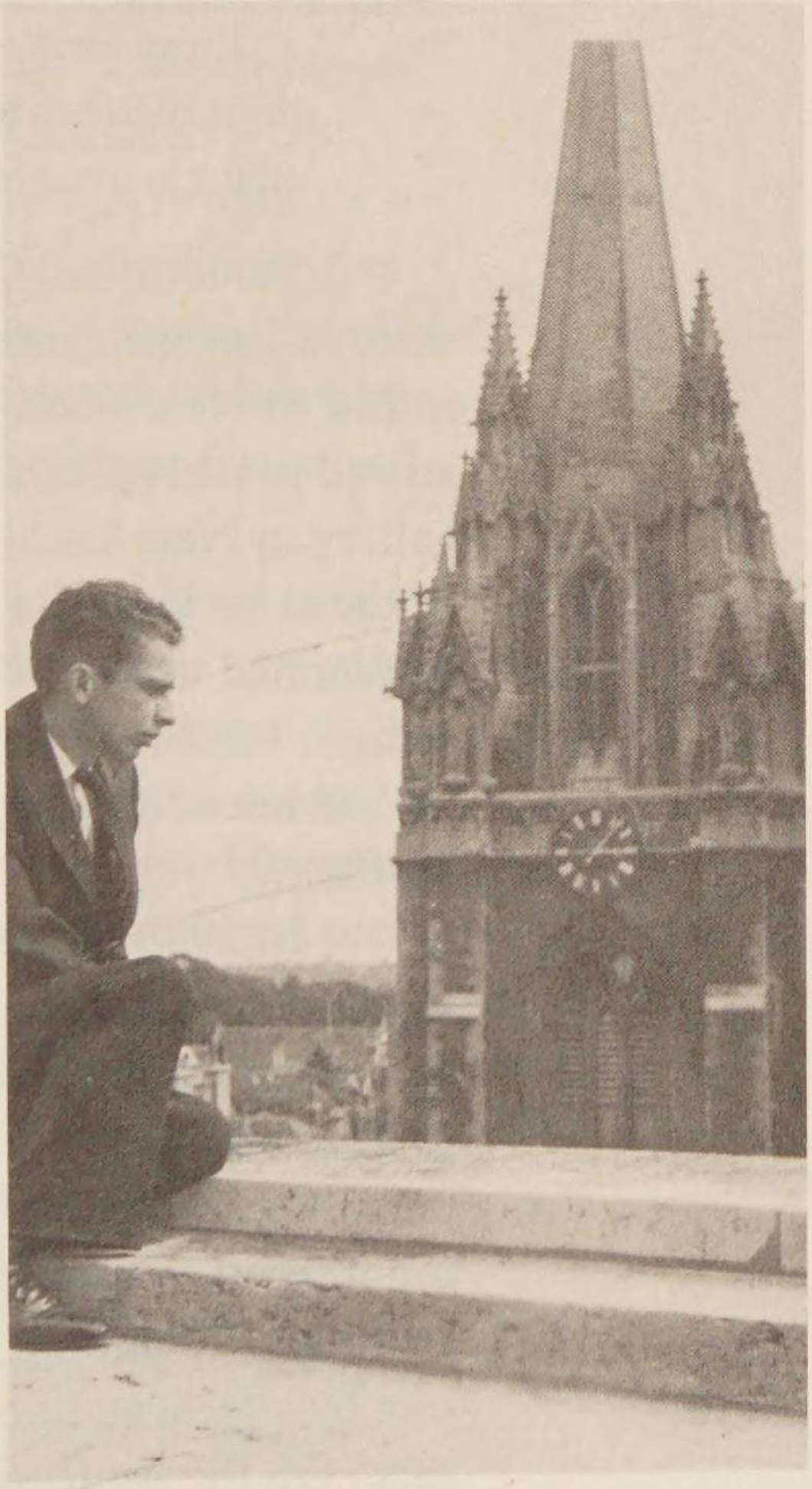
The encounter with Stein gave Porter a deeper sense of language. Stein took abstract words and made them concrete by dramatic or humorous repetition and manipulation of syntax. Porter recognized a paradoxical American tone in her hypnotic rhythms and images and began to write more of his own poetry. In later years, he acknowledged Stein's influence in his performance poems.

After his return to New York, Porter was increasingly disturbed by the ominous political climate. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 prefigured World War II, as Franco's rebellion against the Spanish Republic enlisted the support of Nazi Ger-

Porter in London, 1937, on trip for Acheson Colloids Corporation. (left)

At Oxford University, 1937. (right)





many and fascist Italy and the western democracies maintained a policy of nonintervention. The murder of the great poet and playwright Frederico Garcia Lorca by Franco's Falangists signified the end of a generation of poets and artists who had transformed Spanish culture. Soon thereafter, on July 18, 1937, in Munich, Adolf Hitler intensified his attack on modern art with the following statement:

> How deeply this corruption of taste had eaten into the German mind was shown in the material submitted for hanging by artists in the House of German Art. There were pictures with green skies and purple seas. There were paintings which could be explained only by abnormal eyesight or willful fraud on the part of the painter. If they really paint in this manner because they see things that way, then these unhappy persons should be dealt with in the department of the Ministry of the Interior where sterilization of the insane is dealt with, to prevent them from passing on their unfortunate inheritance. If they really do not see things like that and still persist in painting in this manner, then these artists should be dealt with by the criminal courts.
>
> I was always determined if fate ever gave us power not to discuss these matters, but to make decisions. Understanding of such great affairs is not given to every one.

Paradoxically, to Porter's benefit, the darkening artistic climate in Europe caused some of the Continent's most creative artists to flee to New York. To represent refugee artists who were involved in surrealist and abstract art, Peggy Guggenheim opened a gallery in New York, Art of this Century. As a preface to her book of the same title, she printed Hitler's arrogant statement about how he planned to deal with modern art. Fascinated by Guggenheim's refugee exhibits, Porter broke with the representational techniques he had been following in art classes and began painting more abstractly.

In 1938, Acheson temporarily transferred Porter to its plant in Port Huron, Michigan. Porter protested, but the corporation assured him that the transfer was only for a year, so he used the stay to develop his artistic abilities. He read Joyce and Stein avidly. He painted semirealistic landscapes of the area, revealing that his growing interest in surrealism still conflicted with his training in representational painting. Participating in a weekly radio drama broadcast by a local station helped fulfill his literary and theatrical interests. On the professional side, he compiled a technical volume, *Col-*

loidal Graphite: Its Properties and Applications, which Acheson published. Then in 1939, as promised, Acheson returned Porter to New Jersey, and he was able to resume his artistic pursuits in New York.

He attended Guggenheim's weekly receptions focused mainly on artists (although many high-society New Yorkers congregated there, too). Marc Chagall, Max Ernst (formerly Peggy Guggenheim's husband), Salvador Dali, Hilla Rebay, Piet Mondrian, and other refugee artists attended, and Porter was introduced to them, struggling to understand the many languages that swirled around him. He met, too, the young Jackson Pollock, whose work was little known before the war. A key figure Porter encountered at the salon was the architect Frederick Kiesler, who designed Guggenheim's gallery. Seeing picture frames as archaic, Kiesler sought to replace frames with the walls themselves, which he constructed in unusual lengths or curved shapes. He advocated a "magical architecture" that would take advantage of technological knowledge, and this struck Porter's fancy. In the fervent arguments and discussions at Guggenheim's salon, Porter was excited to observe the cross-fertilization of ideas between European and American artists. Dreaming of a rebirth of American art in which he might play an important role, and influenced by Kiesler's work, Porter applied in 1939 for a Guggenheim Fellowship, proposing to develop painting exhibits that would "project off the wall into the area of the onlooker." Although the proposal was rejected, the idea anticipated the work of Frank Stella and other postwar artists who explored ways of breaking the restrictions of the picture frame and the wall surface itself.

The Guggenheim proposal was not Porter's only venture in 1939. Anticipating what would become commonplace after war was declared, he proposed to the regents of Columbia University the establishment of a special institute at Mohonk, New Jersey, where scientific leaders could confer on impending war measures. However, his status as a scientist was not such that his proposal received serious consideration.

In 1938 and 1939, Clement Greenberg, the critic, was attending evening life classes run by the WPA art project, and he had much the same exposure to the new ideas as Porter. In his essay, "The Late Thirties in New York," Greenberg wrote:

> Eighth Street between Sixth and Fourth Avenues was the center of the New York art life that I became acquainted with in the late

52

Bernard Porter Flies To Houlton For The Holiday

Special Despatch to The Press Herald

Houlton, Nov. 24.—Bernard Porter, physicist for the Atcheson Colloids Corporation of New York City, arrived at Houlton today by the Boston-Maine Airways plane for a holiday visit with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Porter, South Street.

Widely known in scientific circles, Mr. Porter passed several weeks the last Summer in France and England doing research for his company. He expressed himself as being enthusiastic over the new plane service here, having left New York City at 7.30 this morning and eating lunch with his parents this noon.



Notice in 1938 issue of *Portland Press Herald*.

With his mother, grandmother and grandfather Rogers, and Aunt Mae Porter at Houlton airport, 1938.

1930's. There the WPA art project and the Hofmann school overlapped. The big event, as I saw it, was the annual show of the American Abstract Artists group. Yet none of the figures who dominated this scene—Arshile Gorky, John Graham, Willem de Kooning, Hans Hofmann—belonged to the Abstract Artists, nor did any of them have big jobs on the project, and only Hofmann himself was connected with his school. . . . Abstract art was the main issue among the painters I knew in the late thirties. Radical politics was on many people's minds, but for these particular artists Social Realism was as dead as the American scene. . . . Eighth Street in the late 1930s and early 1940s meant catching up with Paris. . . .

Porter, like Greenberg, was concerned about the free exchange of ideas in the art world and favored the abstract artists. He saw that artists involved in the WPA art project in New York were restricted by government demands for representational art and that this work bore an unfortunate resemblance to the kind of art that was demanded in Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Yet he also saw that WPA projects represented the first time that the United States had supported the arts in any way. Such support, he felt, if it could be free of censorship, would be essential for the growth of American culture. With his scientific background, Porter foresaw how scientific discoveries such as television, radar, electron microscopes, and giant telescopes would soon transform the abstract artist's approach to nature.

In the late 1930s, Porter began to frequent the New York salon of Mabel Dodge Luhan as well as that of Peggy Guggenheim. In 1912, Luhan had created a famous salon in her Washington Square apartment where socialists, anarchists, liberals, and others met. Later, she moved to Taos, New Mexico, where, in 1923, she married Antonio (Tony) Luhan, a leader of the Tewa Indians at the Taos Pueblo. Luhan gave Mabel a new mystical perception of the Indian belief in natural gods and a cyclical faith in the relationship of life and earth. These beliefs, she realized, were clearly opposed to white society's search for power through machinery and technology. In subsequent years, her new faith led Mabel Luhan to invite D. H. Lawrence and Robinson Jeffers to Taos in search of a consciousness that would return modern industrial society to its natural roots.

In winter 1939, Mabel returned to New York, hoping to establish another revolutionary salon. As Luhan biographer Lois Palken Rudnick wrote in her 1984 book *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds*,

With the outbreak of World War II, Mabel was responding to her sense that the world was in "a time of transition, changing patterns," which she talked of exploring with some of the same élan that she had brought to her pre-World War I "at homes." As she told a reporter for the New York World-Telegram, "I'd like these evenings to bring results. I'm not interested in politics. I wish we didn't have to hear such words as Communism and Fascism. World federation is one thing to think about. It's in the air, as a forward step to world peace."

At Mabel's salon, Porter was excited to find discussions of new efforts to link science and psychology with religion and art. Unfortunately, the spreading war, which was fostering nationalistic passions and new military technologies, put an end to the search for scientific and artistic unity, and with it, Mabel's salon, only a few months old. With her usual impulsiveness, Mabel decided that the increasingly warlike climate in New York was not right for her mission, and she departed again for New Mexico and Tony Luhan and his Indian traditions.

In 1940, with Hitler's army overrunning Europe, Porter's dream of an American artistic renaissance vanished. After the fall of Paris, his draft board removed him from the Acheson Corporation and assigned him to the Department of Physics at Princeton University to work on experimental methods for the separation of uranium. Princeton was a mysterious, fascinating situation for Porter. He had been drafted for essential military-related work, but the government could not admit it because the country was not yet officially at war. Albert Einstein's famous letter to Roosevelt (it was actually written by Leo Szilard and signed by Einstein) in August 1939, had helped to spur the Princeton research on uranium. In this letter, Einstein had recommended "speeding up the experimental work which is at present being carried on within the budgets of the university laboratories." At Princeton, Porter met Einstein, who had been his scientific idol for many years. According to Ronald W. Clark in his 1971 biography:

> Einstein was the practical Bohemian, the man who genuinely acted the way he did because his mind and his time were devoted to essentials. "We are slaves of bathrooms, Frigidaires, cars, radios, and millions of other things," said Infeld [Leopold Infeld, the refugee Polish physicist whom Einstein invited to Princeton]. "Einstein tried to reduce them to the absolute minimum. Long hair minimizes the need for the barber. Socks can be done without.

One leather jacket solves the coat problem for many years. Suspenders are superfluous, as are nightshirts and pajamas. It is a minimum problem which Einstein has solved, and shoes, trousers, shirt, jacket are the very necessary things; it would be difficult to reduce them further."

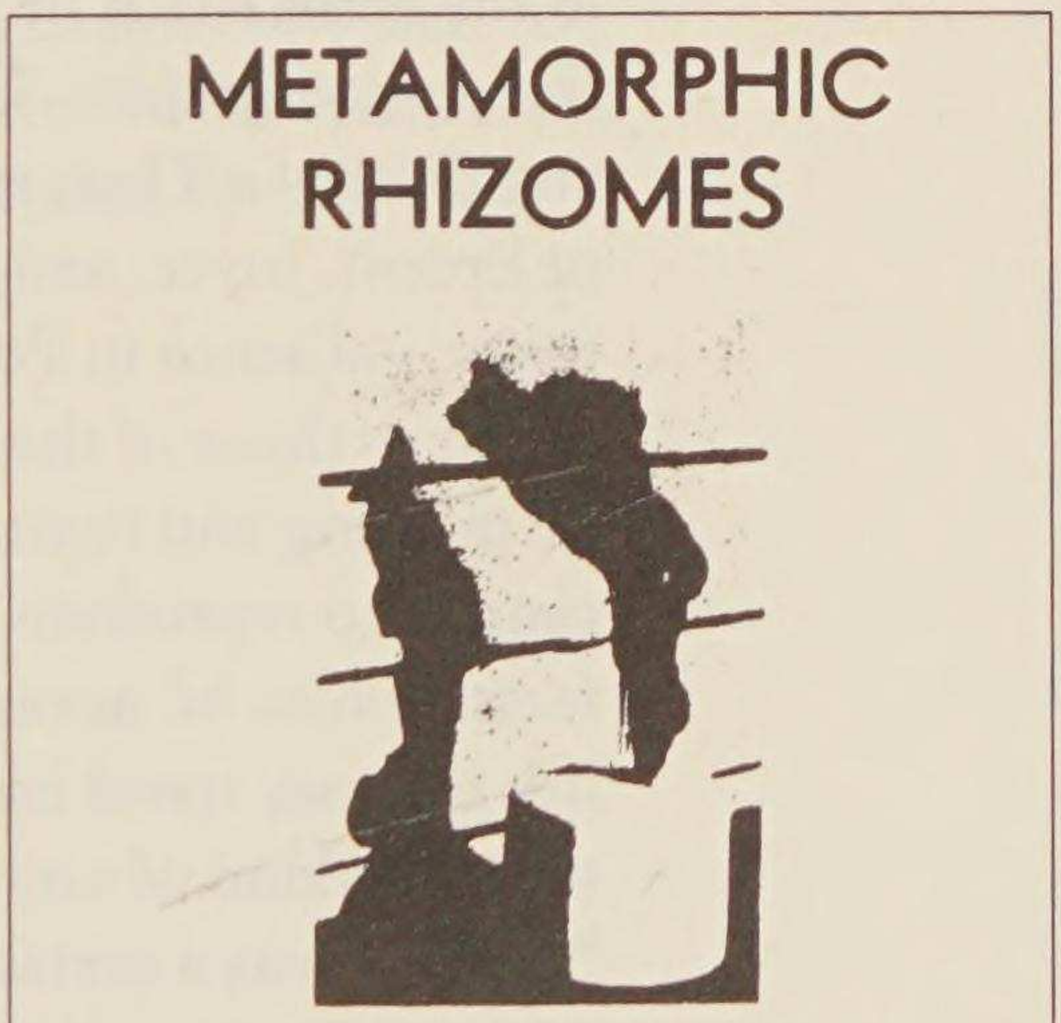
Einstein became an enormous influence on Porter, a model of the artistic scientist who stood aloof from the world's turmoil, who stripped everything to the essential. That Einstein never drove a car, barely typed, and lived an extremely simple, isolated life affected Porter strongly, and later he carried over these influences into his personal life and his book *I've Left*.

At Princeton, Porter also met J. Robert Oppenheimer and was impressed by the physicist's sensitivity and intellect. At the time, Oppenheimer was a professor of physics at the University of California at Berkeley, where, as at Princeton, work on the separation of uranium was intensifying. Not long after Porter met him, Oppenheimer became head of the Manhattan Project.

For a year at Princeton, before Pearl Harbor and the United States' official engagement in the war, Porter was able to continue



Blooming Rhizome (left) and ad for Metaphoric Rhizomes (right), 1939.



some of his artistic activities. He exhibited his root sculpture, *Metaphoric Rhizome*, at a Princeton gallery and advertised the work in an important new magazine, *View*. Porter had met the cosmopolitan poet and editor of *View*, Charles Henri Ford, at Peggy Guggenheim's salon. Although American by birth, Ford had grown up mostly in Europe and was enthusiastic about bringing revolutionary European arts to the relatively provincial America. Particularly, Ford was interested in promoting surrealism and James Joyce's linguistic experiments, which were just beginning to filter past American censors.

Announced in *View* as a new art form representing "Eighty Years of Natural Disintegration and Six Months of Selective Dissection," *Rhizome* was a root form Porter had found on a weekend hike through the New Jersey countryside. Specially treated, the root form was mounted on a plaster base. It was Porter's first artistic expression to receive public attention. What attracted people's interest was the root form's advanced and ongoing decay, producing extraordinary textural changes. Some spectators returned frequently, to see if *Rhizome would* vanish into dust from its chemical treatment, "the reverse of a flower blooming," as Porter said laconically.

Along with *Rhizome*, Porter exhibited several surrealistic photographs and two experiments with bone sculpture. For the photographs, Porter used only a Brownie box camera given to him in the early 1930s by his favorite aunt, Elva Rogers. Several of these photographs, *Semblance of a Devoted Past*, *Whose Valley Home*, and *Faith of a Thousand*, reflected titles and phrases from the works of Proust, Joyce, and a new writer, Henry Miller, who became a major influence in Porter's life. The photographs were directly opposed to those of the Purist photographers, who believed in exquisite printing and remarkable clarity of images. Porter wanted the camera to reproduce only what his eye saw without any illusory effects. Thus, he never retouched negatives. In his attempt to establish intense, visual contact with natural forms, he was searching for the same kind of unity that André Breton claimed for surrealism: "There exists a certain point in the mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the uncommunicable, the top and the bottom, cease to be perceived as contradictions. All surrealist activity is motivated by the search for this point."

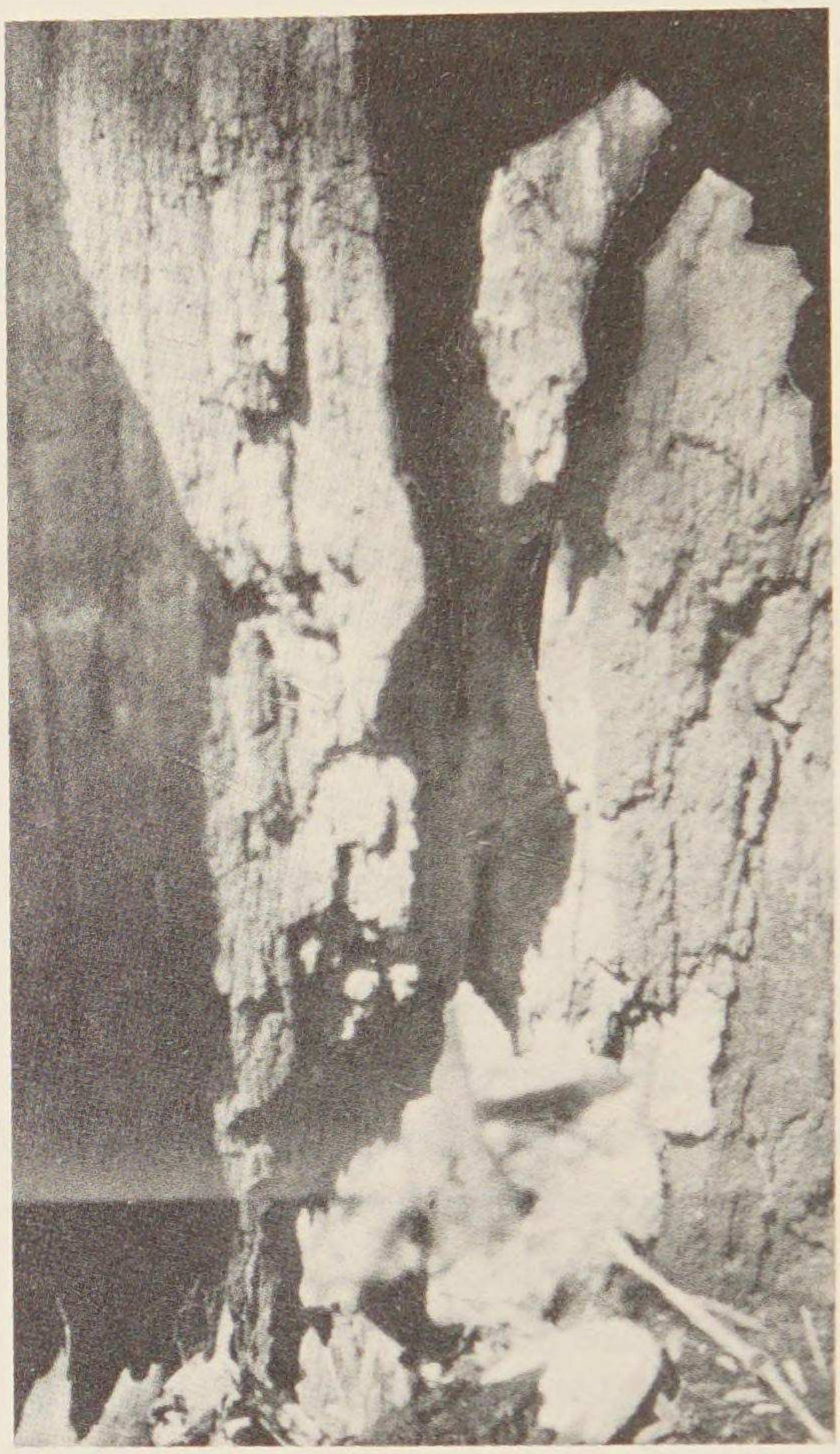
Porter's experiments with bone sculpture included *Dawn Bird*, made from a human leg bone Porter found on one of his weekend hiking trips and set in a small plaster base. The texture of

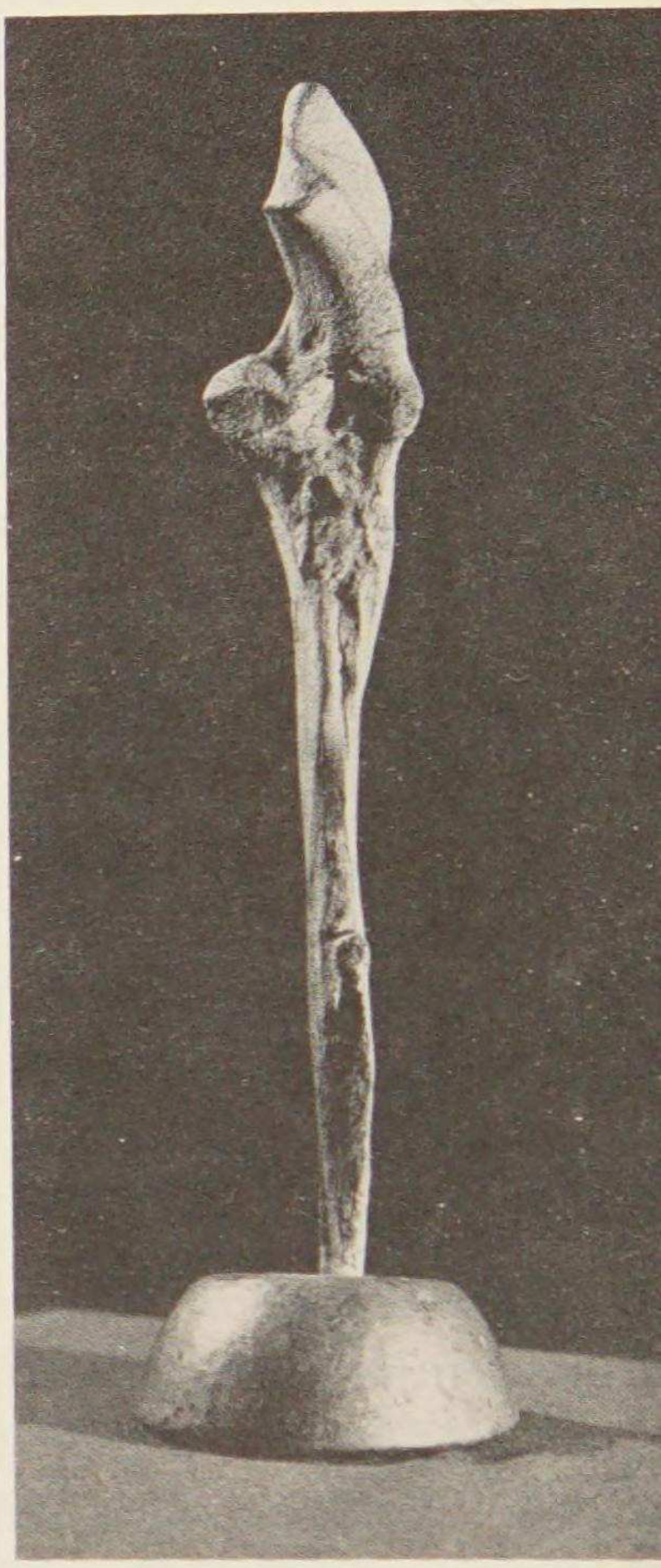
the bone, which Porter left almost untreated, is worn, rough, rising from the narrow part to the knobs of the tubercles in a primitive image of flight. *Affinity*, which he made from a dog's hip bone that he polished and worked on extensively, is a much more sophisticated form. Juxtaposed on a thick, free-form base, the polished bone and a small lead pyramid generate visual tension and textural contrast. While these sculptures with their simple geometric forms resemble Constantin Brancusi's work, which Porter had learned to admire in New York, they also show Porter's individual sense of natural American textures, a sensitivity derived from his Maine background. After *Affinity* and *Dawn Bird*, Porter never again used the medium of bone sculpture. "Having said everything once, there is no need to repeat," he says, "even in variation."

At the Princeton exhibit one day, Porter met Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, one of many distinguished refugees from the Bauhaus in Germany. Moholy-Nagy, whose wide-ranging achievements in painting, sculpture, photography, stage design, and industrial design Porter admired, praised some of Porter's work, and confirmed in Porter's mind the need for new art forms suited to a scientific era. He began to dream of an American institute that would unify the arts and use scientific technology as the Bauhaus had struggled to do despite the Nazi tyranny. A few days later, in a Princeton lecture that Porter attended, Moholy-Nagy predicted that houses would some day have "walls of air," a prophesy that remained in Porter's mind. The rapid development of the Manhattan Project, however, would soon dominate Porter's life for the duration of World War II.

Bern Porter

58





Photograph by Porter,
Semblance of a Devoted Past.

Sculpture in human bone by
Porter, *Dawn Bird,* 1942.

6 The Manhattan District Project



In his book *Science and the Modern World*, the philosopher A. N. Whitehead wrote of the tragic split in the modern scientific imagination:

> The pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. Their vision of fate, remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science.

When he speaks of his work on the Manhattan Project, established in 1942 in New York under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to produce an atomic bomb, Porter implies a vision of fate that is similarly "remorseless and indifferent." "The scientist's imagination," Porter once wrote, "combines with a ruthless will to do almost anything to find the natural discoveries that he seeks. Even though I wasn't there on the morning of July 16, 1945, when the first atomic bomb was exploded on the test tower at Alamagordo, New Mexico, that date is engraved in my mind. Robert Oppenheimer, the director of the experiment, peered across the desert at the great ball of fire, and lines from the *Bhagavad-Gita* burst into his mind: 'If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One. . . .I am become death, the scatterer of worlds.' Later, Oppenheimer was to observe: 'In some crude sense which no vulgarity, no humor, no overstatement can quite extinguish the physicists have known sin; and this is a knowledge which they cannot lose.' Even though I was a minor physicist in that wartime project, I too feel the sin."

Many physicists, of course, acknowledge no sin. Their position is that they are only absorbed in the search for facts, and if the facts turn out to be sinister, that is not their fault. Dr. Percy Bridgman, the Nobel Prize winning Harvard physicist and

Oppenheimer's former teacher, put it this way: "Scientists aren't responsible for the facts that are in nature. It's their job to find the facts. There's no sin connected with it—no morals. If anyone should have a sense of sin, it's God. He put the facts there."

God does not answer Bridgman's charge. What is apparent, however, forty-five years after the explosion of the first atomic bomb, is that the Manhattan Project drastically affected the lives of the people who were connected with it. As a project scientist, Porter shared Oppenheimer's anguish as opposed to Bridgman's pragmatism, and he wrestled with problems of sin and morality. In addition, he was shocked to see what government security can do to a free, open democracy. In the preface to his book *The Oppenheimer Case: Security on Trial*, Philip M. Stern wrote:

> Initially, this book was to show how the Federal Government used its power to bring one man, J. Robert Oppenheimer, to his knees. But the more that story unfolded, the more the Oppenheimer case seemed to lay bare the vices of the security system itself and their malign effects on American society.
>
> Indeed, in many respects the Oppenheimer affair offers the most graphic illustration of the system's defects. It is the only security case whose hearing record has been made public. Its voluminous transcript displays both the procedural injustices of the system and the extent to which security investigations often intrude into the most intimate details of a man's life. The origins of the Oppenheimer case—in the white-hot policy debates, the animosities—demonstrate the system's susceptibility to being exploited for political (if not for personal) ends. And the consequence of the case—the loss to the nation of Oppenheimer's talents and services—shows the costliness of the obsession with "security."
>
> Finally, the case highlights one of the most invidious aspects of the security system. If such a man would yield, how many can be expected to resist?

Porter's introduction to government security began in 1942 when he was summoned by his Newark, New Jersey, draft board. One of the three board members had been asked to look for physicists who could do research on the separation of uranium. The next day Porter was sent to a mysterious Army office on Broadway in New York, then assigned to work in the Physics Department at Princeton. Yet to this day, because the Manhattan Project had not officially come into existence, there is no record of Porter being

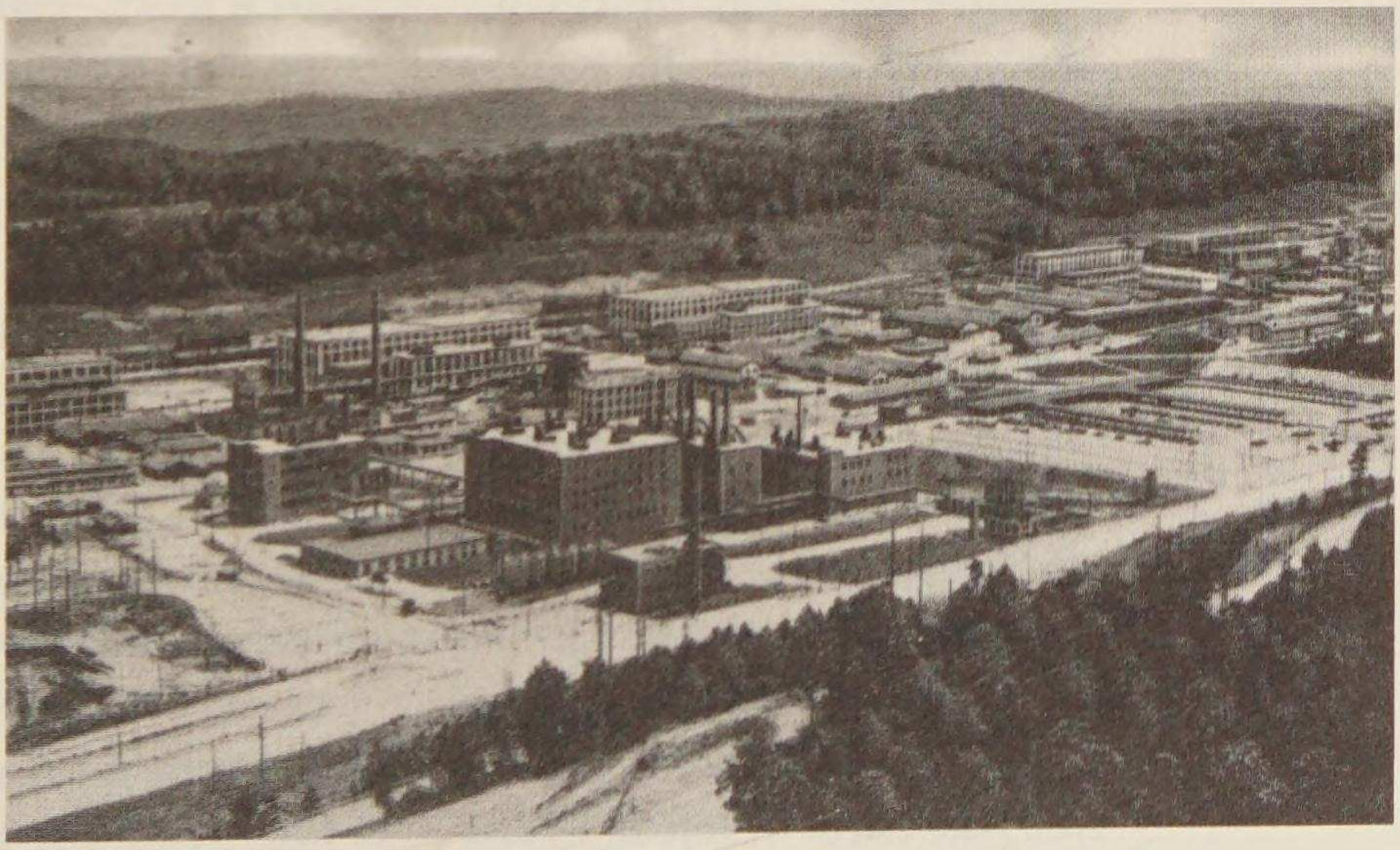
drafted for military research. He became a civilian under the control of military security.

Porter was indeed qualified for the job. For his master's degree at Brown University, Porter had worked on the electromagnetic separation of radium rays, achieved by passing a known amount of radium through two magnets. At Acheson, he continued to work on the effect of EM fields in television tubes. Thus, when he was drafted to work at Princeton, he was assigned work as a research physicist and specialist in EM separation of uranium, a job that was eventually absorbed into the Manhattan Project.

At Princeton, Porter and the three graduate students who worked as his aides handled pure uranium rods imported from Canada. They used no protection as in those days the dangers of radioactivity were not fully known. In a few years, when the danger was better understood, safety measures such as mechanical hands and protective clothing were installed. Because he lacked such protection, Porter goes every three years to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to have the amount of radiation in his body measured.

Although there were other competing techniques for the separation of uranium isotopes, E. O. Lawrence's EM method developed at the University of California at Berkeley was chosen for industrial development. Porter was sent first to Lawrence's Radiation Laboratory, then to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where a vast industrial plant designed to separate uranium on a massive scale for bomb

Production and Research Plant, Oak Ridge, Tennessee, from postcard sent to Porter's mother in 1971.



use was established. Richard Rhodes described Lawrence's process in *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*:

> Lawrence had committed his time to winning the war; now he committed his beautiful new 184-inch cyclotron. Instead of cyclotron dees he had D-shaped mass-spectrometer tanks installed between the pole faces of its 4500-ton magnet. Making the new instrument work, through the spring and summer of 1942, solved the most difficult design problems. It acquired a name along the way: *calutron*, another *tron* from the University of California.
>
> To separate 100 grams—about 4 ounces— of U235 per day, Lawrence estimated in the autumn of 1942, would require some 2000 4-foot calutron tanks set among thousands of tons of magnets. If a bomb needed 30 kilograms—66 pounds—of U235 for reasonable efficiency, as the Berkeley summer study group had just worked out, 2000 such calutrons could enrich material enough for one bomb every 300 days. . .Berkeley planned a system of 4-foot tanks set vertically between the pole faces of large square electromagnets, two tanks to a gap and a total of 96 tanks per unit. To reduce the amount of iron needed for the magnet cores the arrangement would not be rectangular but oval, like a racetrack. And *racetrack* it was called, though its official designation was Alpha.

At Oak Ridge, Porter witnessed the extraordinary industrial development essential to promote Lawrence's EM process. In September 1942, General Leslie R. Groves, then head of the Manhattan Project, acquired for the government 59,000 acres of Appalachian wilderness along the Clinch River in eastern Tennessee. A work force of 4,800 men and women was assembled just to run and maintain the calutrons twenty-four hours a day. Porter says, "You could look around and see hillbilly men and women twisting dials under supervision in a process they knew nothing about." Once, when the power was turned off, there was a disaster. The strength of the magnet broke the steel bands holding the containers together, separating them by as much as two feet, thrusting some containers up, others to the floor. Another Alpha racetrack was built and the EM separation of uranium into U235 for the bomb core continued inexorably. However, for secrecy, General Groves had compartmentalized the project in districts and sections around the country, so Porter and his fellow workers could only speculate about the intent of their labors.

At work on the separation of uranium at Princeton and with the Manhattan Project, Porter found himself involved in endless se-

curity checks, surveillance, and frequent interrogations by FBI agents and military counterintelligence officials. As he describes this period: "The McCarthy era is usually thought of as starting in the late 1940s, after the onset of the Cold War. This isn't true. It really began during World War II in the conflicts of the various security programs. At first, it was relatively easy to get a security clearance. At Princeton they didn't bother me much. Even later, when I was sent to the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in Berkeley, and to Oak Ridge, I didn't know that I was working on research for the bomb. I used to talk with my fellow scientists about all of the possible constructive uses of atomic energy that would come out of our research. The security people really started jumping on me when I returned to Berkeley. In retrospect, this was obviously because of their fears about Oppenheimer and the students he had gathered around him. The security people were trying to recruit internal informers and they wanted me to be one. I was trying to resist, but they kept on asking questions, Did I read *The Nation* or *The New Republic*? I didn't subscribe but if I saw them around I might read them. What about the scientists in Berkeley I was working with, Oppenheimer's brother Frank, David Bohm, and Giovanni Rossi Lomanitz? What did they think and what did they like to read? If I admitted that as intellectuals we were intrigued by the Communist system, even though we were only scientists and sideline observers, we were immediately suspect. The FBI would come to me quite frequently and ask me about civilian writers I had met in Berkeley and San Francisco. Who was Philip Lamantia? What about Kenneth Rexroth? I have been under investigation and surveillance ever since I can remember. There is no question this has warped me and made me suspicious all the time. I feel this black force looking at me over the shoulder."

The origin of that "black force" was clarified only in the early 1980s when Porter managed to obtain through the Freedom of Information Act a thick file containing his security records. A report from the San Francisco office of the United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, dated May 26, 1959, read:

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

> This case was referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation by the Civil Service Commission in view of information set forth in the Sixth Report of the Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, California Legislature, 1951, wherein, on pages 228 and 229, it is set forth that on July 13, 1943, an Executive

64

Board meeting of Chapter 25 of the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians (FAECT) was held in the home of one [name blacked out]. At this meeting a discussion was held concerning important contacts to be made among scientific personnel who were engaged in atomic research and other critical work. Among those persons listed to be contacted was one BERNARD PORTER, not further identified.

Concerning the FAECT, on page 198 of this same Sixth Report published by the California State Legislature, in part it is set forth that, "The FAECT originated in the Lenin School of Espionage in Moscow and comprised a great many highly trained scientists who were also members of the Communist Party. . . . It was established beyond the slightest doubt that it was communist dominated from top to bottom and that it was primarily interested in infiltrating and organizing the personnel in the Radiation Laboratory at the University of California in Berkeley, where vital atomic research was carried on."

According to Porter, Giovanni Rossi Lomanitz and David Bohm, the physicists who had been Oppenheimer's students and who were employed at the Radiation Laboratory in Berkeley, invited him to attend a meeting of FAECT—a legitimate labor union at the time—which was trying to organize workers in the laboratory. Since Porter was basically apolitical, he told them he was not interested in attending the meeting and never participated in their activities. Yet from this point on, in the security investigations conducted when he applied for government jobs (and he applied for many such positions from the 1940s to 1980) the fact that he was *approached* by FAECT members was a mark against him. That he turned them down and never attended any meeting was not mentioned.

Consequently, Porter's life became haunted by the FBI's surveillance of Oppenheimer and his students. Although he was never close friends with Lomanitz, Bohm, and Frank Oppenheimer, the fact that Porter worked with them was enough to brand him as suspect, too.

Porter watched as his colleagues' careers crumbled. After Rossi Lomanitz was summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1949, he couldn't get a job teaching or doing research in physics for many years and had to support himself by odd jobs. Even when the political climate eased a little in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the only jobs Lomanitz could find were in small western colleges, where qualified science instructors were desperately needed.

The case of David Bohm is even more pertinent. As with Lomanitz, security officials prevented Bohm from joining Oppenheimer at Los Alamos. After the war, Bohm returned to Oppenheimer as a research assistant, then followed him to Princeton in 1947. Summoned before the Un-American Activities Committee in 1949, Bohm pleaded the Fifth Amendment. He was tried for contempt of Congress and acquitted. Nevertheless, he lost his job at Princeton and was unable to find employment elsewhere. Finally, he took a position at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil. When the American Consul in Sao Paulo confiscated his passport and had it stamped "Valid Only For Return To The United States," Bohm decided that he had had enough and applied for Brazilian citizenship. After several years in Brazil, Bohm went to teach in Israel. After a few years there, he became a full professor at the University of London in England. Several of the United States' closest allies, then, accepted and nourished Bohm's great talents. While Bohm was becoming one of the truly great international theoretical physicists, his own country was rejecting him. As Porter says of Bohm's gifts: "Even though Bohm wrote an important textbook on quantum mechanics in 1950, he has always doubted that any theory based on chance and indeterminism is a true representation of the world. Like Einstein and Schrodinger, he believes that we have to look at the world in a holistic way and that you can't reduce things haphazardly to tiny accidental particles. He is trying now to develop a mathematical version of what he calls implicate order. As I do, he believes that the world is a strange, mystical unified place where past, present, and future exist simultaneously, and that all matter exists in a continuous process of folding and unfolding."

Finally, the fate of Oppenheimer's brother Frank had, as Porter points out, another kind of sad implication. During the McCarthy era, Frank Oppenheimer was forced to resign from the University of Minnesota. He became a sheep rancher in Colorado, some 1,200 miles from Los Alamos. Even there the FBI continued to haunt him, inquiring whether Frank was still involved in physics experiments at his ranch and whether he had radio equipment to send out messages. Eventually, in 1959, as the McCarthy era waned, Frank Oppenheimer was able to find another job teaching physics at the University of Colorado. Near the end of his life he made a great contribution to the teaching of science by establishing a hands-on science museum, the Exploratorium, in San Francisco, where children and adults learn about some of the major scientific theories of the twentieth century through intriguing games and

demonstrations. "So the sinners become saviors," says Porter, laughing, "and the whole damn security system reveals itself for the rigid disaster that it is. Yet it all continues."

Before World War II, as Porter says, there was a universal collegiality in physics. International conferences brought physicists together. This fraternity vanished during World War II, due to the increasing compartmentalization of research caused by the war and the government's security system. After the war, the government continued to pour money into physics. Physicists were elite, but they were restricted by the government to more and more specialized tasks. As I. I. Rabi, who received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1944, observed in John Rigden's 1987 biography *Rabi: Scientist and Citizen*:

> Physicists became narrower. I think that partly came from government money because the competition was along particular lines. There was a sharp drop-off of interest in physics amongst physicists other than for their own particular speciality. They became more and more specialized. That good amateur spirit that existed and was so fascinating to me was disappearing and I think perhaps has now disappeared. I felt the change was deplorable, but it was all done by the scientists themselves.

"The war effort was one thing," Porter says. "We wanted to work against the Nazis, but specialization and excessive secrecy damaged the exchange of ideas. Often we grew bored with the assembly-line stuff we were doing. The security people kept warning us not to talk to people outside of our units. We talked when we could about the creative possibilities of nuclear energy, how the potential benefits in heat, fuel, and medicine outweighed the possible evils of explosive military devices. I tried to suppress the idea of a nuclear bomb. I wanted to get back to creative work. At Oak Ridge, we knew nothing about Los Alamos, where the big physicists were working out the scheme of bringing together the two subcritical masses of isotopes that would set off the bomb. More and more I tried to suppress what was going on or to justify it in terms of future social values. As I repressed my doubts, even at Princeton, I began increasingly to think of writing and publishing as a way to keep my sanity."

In June 1941, while still at Princeton, Porter published his first book, a slim volume called *Doldrums: A Study in Surrealism*, which he had printed offset in a limited edition of ninety-eight copies by a company in Newark. *Doldrums* was significant for two reasons: 1) It showed Porter's growing interest in experimental text de-

sign (he laid out, illustrated, and lettered the text himself); and 2) it revealed his continuing guilt regarding his work. In the text he satirized his frustrating fight against inertia and closed with a chiding self-exhortation to action:

AMOUNT TO SOMETHING
urge the gaseous letters:
"Write a book and confound the critics;
Paint an unintelligible picture and please the aesthetes.
Build a bridge and collect tolls;
Loan the filthy money and count the interest.
Compose a talking couplet,
Design a ten-way switch;
Instigate a revolution,
Re-organize
the
Nation!
DO
SOMETHING!

Another more original pamphlet, *Water-Fight*, followed from the same Newark printer in July 1941. Here Porter struggled to pull together his varied interests in art and science. His tone was surrealistic, dreamlike. In *Water-Fight* Porter described water flowing over a cloth as a metaphor for the conflict in his mind. The interaction of water and cloth is portrayed as a desperate struggle between opposing forces to achieve unity: "Deep, damp, deeper and more-moist the penetrating water soaks. Contrarily, the little arid threads quail, though sporadically and undaunted, they soon recover. . . ."

Porter also tried to express his turmoil in a prose poem, "Not at All: A Psalm Written in Tumultous Days," which he published in a little magazine, *The Leaves Fall*, in November 1942. His friend Fred Lingel, an engineer, was editor of the magazine in Bluffton, Ohio. Curiously, while unwittingly working toward a nuclear bomb, Porter meditated in this poem on the possibility of nothingness, of nonexistence:

Oh praise non-existence: laud the
prevalence of nothing, everybody.
Endorse naught, popularize its name;
believe the reign of day after day.

68

Former Houlton Man Author of Two Booklets

Technical Volumes By Bernard Porter Being Published

(Special to The Bangor Daily News)

HOULTON, Oct. 9—The L. A. Press of Washington, D. C., publishers of the magazines "Whip" and "Latin American," announced publication this week of "Waterfight," a small prose volume written by Bernard H. Porter, elder son of Mr. and Mrs. L. H. Porter, South street.

Appearing first in magazine form, where it attracted considerable attention, this short piece of creative technical writing has been reprinted for the L. A. Press by the Pine Hill Printery of South Dakota in a format designed and decorated by the author.

Louis Parra, editor of the Washington publications, writes in introducing the work: "The L. A. Press, following release as a science feature in its quarterly "The Whip," is pleased to reproduce Waterfight by Bern Porter, physicist and contributor to numerous scientific periodicals in this country and abroad. Giving to his material a vitality and color uncommon to technical descriptions, this writer depicts the simple act of water wetting cloth as a desperate and exciting struggle between strongly opposing forces."

The publication of a second volume, entitled "Doldrums," was also announced this week by the Al Press of Newark, N. J. This "study in surrealism," quoting the subtitle, appeared in the April-May-June quarter of the "Latin American" and treats of the human mind in a state of depression. It was introduced there by the following editorial comment: "The surrealism employed by Mr. Porter to effect the illusion of the various nerve centers and fibers at work is actually a feat of literature as well as a new and most original contribution to science —a field often overlooked by readers because of its complexity and which Mr. Porter reveals for us in a manner that is fresh, original and easily assimilated by the average mentality."

The pages of the book were reproduced by the photo-offset process from hand lettered and illustrated texts designed and drawn by the author.

Mr. Porter has contributed greatly to scientific research, several of his articles being published by his company. Perhaps his most original piece of work is the "History of Physics in a Descriptive Map." This is a map done in five colors, containing a brief outline of the subject and giving a "description of the Land of Physics as seen by those who have ventured into this field."

Mr. Porter, who is 30 years of age, was graduated from the local high school and Ricker Junior college and completed his course at Colby college. In 1930 he received his master's degree from Brown university, and has since been employed with the Acheson Colloids Corp. in Newark, N. J., as a physicist. In 1937 he was sent by his company to Paris for five weeks' research work at the exposition held there, and was in London for three weeks' research also at that time.



WRITES TWO BOOKS—Bernard H. Porter, formerly of Houlton, is the author of two small volumes of creative technical writing being published in book form this week. Both articles have previously appeared in magazine form.

Bangor Daily News, 1941.

Explain to onlookers that nothing
excels: zero does not promote poverty,
disorder and International War.

Let nothing permeate the land and
all that are therein; then shall everyone
live quietly together.

For it in nowise bestirs: neither
something nor anything at all is produced,
nothing that is except useful quiet—
useful to the non-existing...

In an essay in the same issue, Porter rationalized his nuclear research:

> The fountain-head of inspiration accepts no compromise—its will is always done. While the reasons for this may seldom be evident, the resulting action is for the best. . . . Curiously the inspiration for a 6-Block Bomb is not granted anyone unless such negation has been ordained. When completed its potentialities for constructive use outweigh the pernicious elements. . . .

The statement about "a 6-Block Bomb" would seem to prove that Porter was thinking about the possibility of a nuclear bomb, although he knew nothing officially about the purpose of the Manhattan Project. In the February 1942 issue of *The Leaves Fall*, he published a short Joycean piece called "Saint We—Uninterrupted Commentary from Out of the Air," which further reflected his fears of a nuclear explosion and ended prophetically:

> . . . everlasting purification by fire acid forever destruction with hurricane tornado eternal scouring volcanoes heaving stones in unending polishing through sand and dust blows flushing torrential water cracks the world rending laxative ungrateful dogs blind deaf and dumb the written law is upon you death.

The June 1943 issue contained a selection of Porter's aphorisms under the title, "Materia Existere." One says simply and poignantly, "Full time material without the mind and spirit is living death," suggesting that the government laboratories where he was working were in danger of becoming bureaucratic tyrannies. However, it would be wrong to attribute the mood of his articles and poems in *The Leaves Fall* solely to his physics research. Porter was still confronting serious personal problems, misunderstandings with his parents, and the battle that raged in his mind between art and sci-

ence as his scientific work became more confined and routine. In a society that had trained him to regard financial security and specialization as goals, he felt guilty about his shifting interests in art and science. For the September 1944 issue of *The Leaves Fall*, Porter wrote in a "Letter to Gabene" (Gabene was a nickname for Gabrielle Lederer, a friend from his days with the Intercollegiate Alumni Club):

> . . .I detect in its fresh-mottled texture [the texture of an uninked copper plate] the scars of my own existence. The tedious hours with radium emanation fusing into a six-year injection by colloidal graphite, that pleasant rut, innocuous like the sixty-year death. With the War came the eruption, the boiling over that wafted me on to charming Princeton, hence to the Berkeley Roundhouse and the Halls of Elsa—any one of which is the aspiration of pale-faced physicists. Meanwhile the crosscurrents from art, literature and creative urges tore me unmercifully. In the conflict I became a dabbler in many fields, a master of none. . .

If the quiet, academic atmosphere at Princeton had permitted Porter to spend time on his sculpture and writing, the Radiation Laboratory at the University of California in Berkeley was another matter. The United States was now officially at war with Germany and Japan, and at Berkeley, an intense wartime urgency prevailed. Laboratory hours were long and rigid; military security, in collaboration with the FBI, was expanding. Porter refused to join in the political interests of some of Oppenheimer's students, but he continued to admire Oppenheimer's intellectual leadership, his rare ability to synthesize opposing arguments, and, particularly, his success in combining his broad interests in science and the arts. Even though Porter felt uneasy about the tight security measures, he was unaware of the battle that was going on behind the scenes between Oppenheimer and the head of the Manhattan Project, General Leslie Groves.

From their first meeting in fall 1942, Groves and Oppenheimer were an odd team. Coming from entirely different backgrounds, the dedicated military man and the dedicated intellectual mystic both admired and suspected each other. Yet Groves became certain that only Oppenheimer's magnetic leadership would attract the world's best scientific brains to the project and thus ensure its success. At first Groves tried to persuade Oppenheimer that Los Alamos should be run as a military installation. The two even agreed that Oppenheimer would become a lieutenant colonel in the Army, and Oppenheimer ordered his military uniforms.

Berkeley Campus Workers Unsung Heroes of A-Bomb

(Continued from Page 7)

Samuel R. Lerner
R. K. Leslie
Victor E. Lester
Alexander S. Levens
Carol L. Levine
Marion S. Lew
Abraham Lewis
Barbara R. Lewis
Dean F. Lewis
Franklin H. Lewis
James V. Lewis
Margaret Lewis
Robert N. Lewis
Sidney E. Lewis
Marie H. Leyda
Geo. D. Leydecker
Frank Light
Walter C. Light
Robert C. Lilly.
Sarah J. Lilly
Edward R. Lind
Hjalmar Lindahl
Robert Lindblom
Arthur S. Lindh
S. W. Lindheim
John E. Lindquist
Louis M. Linn
Harold W. Lindsay
G. A. Lindenberger
William T. Lingard
Murray H. Link
Kenneth J. Linnane
E. C. Linsley
Margaret J. Linton
R. L. Linton Jr.
John Wm. Linwood
Mortimor Lipsett
David Lipkin
Edith H. List
John C. Little
Viola M. Little
Alan G. Livingston
O. W. Livingston
R. S. Livingston
Wm. K. Livingston
Jack Lloyd
Robert E. Lloyd
Eldon H. Lockhart
Robert Loevinger
Edward Lofgren
Robert L. Loftness
Inez Logan
Francis M. Lohse Jr.
G. Rossi Lomanitz
Francis P. Lonergan
George R. Long
Jesse W. Long
John F. Long
Mildred O. Long
Jack B. Longstaff
Raymond J. Looney
Laurel R. Loos
George L. H. Loram
Jere J. Lord
Lt. Com. M. Lothrop
Franklin J. Lott
Iza M. Lott
Donald H. Loughridge
Chas. E. Love
Harry J. Love
James D. Low
Bertram Low-Beer
Gordon Lowe
Warren Lowe
Vernon Lowery
Marie L. Loyd
Stebler Loze

Lewis Moore
Madelyn A. Moore
Mary E Moore
M. J. Moore
Thomas W. Moore
Wm. H. Moore
J. W. Moorhead Jr.
John W. Moorhead
Lois Moquin
Daniel J. Moran
Glen W. Morgan
Ted J. Morgan
Wayne H. Morgan
Helen Moritz
Donald E. Morris
H. J. Morris
Maynard M. Morris
Edward Morrison
Kenneth Morrison
John M. Morrow
Anthony P. Morse
Harold E. Morton
Patricia M. Morton
Lt. (N.) E. H. Mosher
Albert E. Mosier
Nancy J. Moss
Yvonne Mott
Albert G. Mowbray
Walter M. Moxley
Burton Moyer
James W. Moyer
John L. Moyer
Cornelius C. Mozena
Manfred E. Mueller
Chester R. Mueller
Jane Muir
Helmute Mundkowski
John A Muncy
Norman Mundell
Dorothy M. Munson
Eugene Murphy
Frank J. Murphy
John K. Murphy
Margaret L. Murphy
Phyllis Murphy
Barbara J. Murray
Chester E. Murray
Conrad A. Murray
Frank J. Murray
George M. Murray
Raymond Murray
William C. Murrills
Virginia Mustard
John A. Muzinich
Morris E. Myers
Robert D. Myers
Sheldon I. Myers
Stanley H. Myers
Betty McAdams
Jack McAdams
Helen N. McAfee
Margaret E. McAffee
Dorothy McArtor
Erba M. McCabe
Justin G. McCarthy
Patrick J. McCarthy
Mary A. McCarty
Virgie I. McCasland
John R. McCharles
Olga V. McCharles
Martha McChesney
Virginia McClain
Marjorie McClellan
Dennis McClung
Horace R. McCombie
James N. McCormick
A. O. McCoubrey

Richard W. Penn
Charles H. Perkins
Morris Perlman
Richardson E. Perpall
Mary L. Perrine
Shirley B. Perrine
Floyd E. Perry
John A. Perry
Joseph E. Perry Jr.
Muriel Jean Perry
Philip C. Peter
Bernard Peters
Genevieve A. Peters
Marie A. Peters
Ralph Peters
Rudolph Peters
Paul G. Petersen
Basil H. Peterson
Carl A. Peterson
Carl O. Peterson
Delbert G. Peterson
Eleanor M. Peterson
Herbert O. Peterson
Matilda E. Peterson
Frederic W. Petler
Harold Pfluger
Russell N. Philbrick
Robert W. Phillips
Martin Phillips
Will D. Phillips
Kathryn D. Phipps
Pete Piancino
Helen M. Pierce
Keith A. Pierce
Wm. Pierson
John W. Pike
Arthur C. Pillsbury
Thomas S. Pillsbury
Betty Pimeutel
George Pimeutel
Mary Emma Pioda
Frank Piombo
James H. Piper
Alfred W. Pirkle
Ernest W. Pistorius
L. Place
Walter S. Place
Ernest H. Plesset
Doris L. Plubell
Shirley A. Plummer
Al Pocekay
H. Wm. Poggenburg
Jack Lang Pogue
Elizabeth Polemus
James P. Polese
Milton J. Polissar
Joyce B. Polivka
Louis J. Pollard
H. C. Pollock
Fletcher M. Pomeroy
John E. Pond
Alexander Ponedel Jr.
E. Ernest Pook
Claude Wm. Poole
W. D. Pooler
John Poor
Charles Pootell
Daniel M. Popper
Bernard H. Porter
Elizabeth W. Porter
Harold Poston
Bertha W. Potts
Dorothy M. Potts
C. A. Powel
Harry S. Powell
Kenneth L. Powell
Wilson Powell

Richard F. Salmon
Wm. W. Salsig
J. B. Sammons
Emma L. Sample
Alvin G. Sampson
Alan J. Samuel
Violet K. Sanchez
R. A. Sandelin
Robert F. Sanders
Virginia Sanders
Dietrich Sandkuhle
Jane G. Sandkuhle
R. C. Sandkuhle
Carl R. Sander
Nicholas Sanford
John F. Sargent
Carl O. Sateren
Bernard Saunders
R. F. Saunders
Grace E. Saxild
Claud H. Saxton
James Sayers
Anton H. Schaefer
P. F. Schalansky
Wm. G. Scharpff
Wm. C. Schauer
G. R. Schladetzky
Earl Wm. Schleth
Wm. R. Schluneger
Alfred C. Schmidt
August Schmidt
Fred Schmidt
Robert J. Schmidt
Walter A. Schmidt
Leona L. Schneider
Mary E. Schneider
Frans Scholin
John A. Schreiner
Margaret Schroeder
Madelon R. Schubert
Edward A. Schuert
Alvin G. Schulz
Ruth Schwabenland
Berkley A. Schwartz
Milton Schwartz
Gaspare Sciaccotta
Solen Scordelis
Barbara Scott
George F. Scott
Ida E. Scott
John Scott
Kenneth G. Scott
Lorin Scott
Marguerite K. Scott
Martin L. Scott
Walter A. Scott
James J. Scoular
Norma I. Scribner
Chas. M. Scroggins
Charles A. Seaborg
Glenn T. Seaborg
Charles E. Seabrook
Donna J. Seaman
Wayne S. Searles
Wm. Sears
Geraldine Secor
Gertrude Sedbarry
Margaret Seegmiller
Emilio Segre
George B. Seguine
Frederick Seidlitz
John B. Seller
1st Lt. P. B. Selbe
Virginia G. Selby
Wm. E. Selfridge
Carl B. Seligman
R. W. Selleck

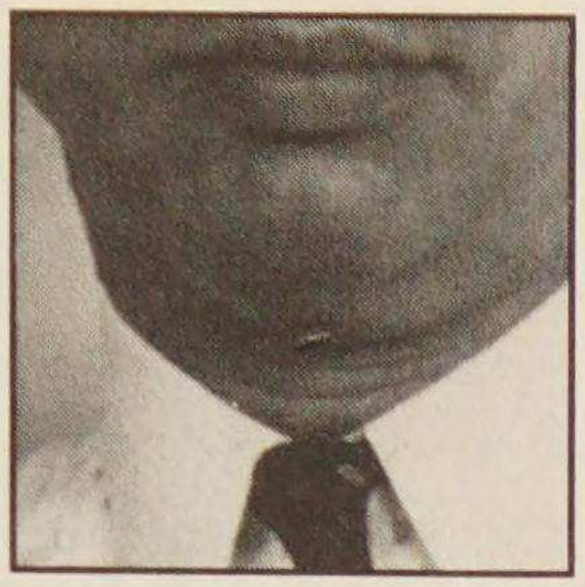
The November 17, 1945 issue of the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* published an alphabetical list of the hundreds of people who worked on the atom bomb at Berkeley during the war.

However, other leading physicists, particularly I. I. Rabi and Robert Bacher, disagreed. They persuaded Oppenheimer and Groves to leave the Los Alamos laboratory under Oppenheimer's civilian administration. Groves consented because he believed that he could control any subversive danger to the project through his military command of security. A curious bargain was struck that would affect the country's future even in peacetime and make possible what President Dwight Eisenhower later warned of as "the military-industrial complex." On February 1, 1943, Oppenheimer wrote the following letter, as quoted in Rigden's biography of Rabi, to Dr. James Conant, a leading member of the Office of Scientific Research and Development, which was coordinating the uranium project:

> Dear Dr. Conant:
>
> The discussion of which you were a witness in the early stages with Rabi, McMillan, Bacher, and Alvarez [all present or future winners of the Nobel Prize in physics] continued all Saturday. Rabi, with the full concurrence of the other three men, formulated the following indispensable conditions for the success of the project: (1) That the Laboratory must demilitarize: the arguments here were first that a divided personnel would inevitably lead to friction, and to a collapse of Laboratory morale, complicated in our case by social cleavage, and, more important, that in any issue in which we were instructed by our military superiors, the whole laboratory would be forced to follow their instruction and thus in effect lose its scientific autonomy. My efforts to persuade the men that such a situation would not arise were unsuccessful.
>
> (2) That the execution of the security and secrecy measures should be in the hands of the military, but that the decision as to what measures should be applied must be in the hands of the Laboratory.

So compromises were made. Leaving security in the hands of the military was a fateful decision that eventually returned to haunt Oppenheimer himself. Even Porter, a relatively minor character in the drama of the bomb, would find himself a victim of anonymous informers in the paranoia that swept the country and created, after the war, the McCarthy era.

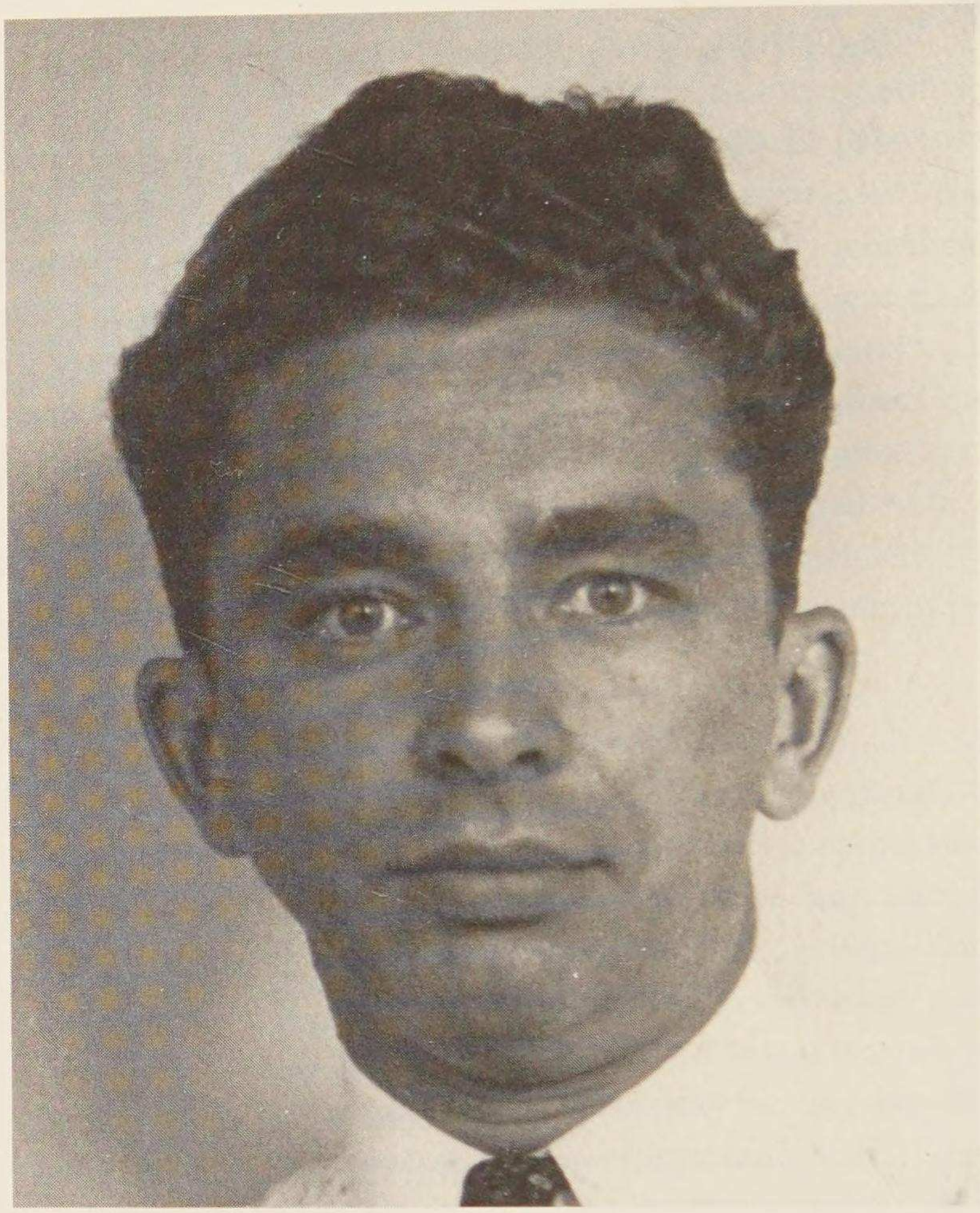
7 Henry Miller's Magnetism



On August 8, 1945, the day after the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima and put a hot brand forever on the United States as the first nation to use such an incredible weapon, Porter left his job with the Manhattan Project. In his shock, he didn't even submit a letter of resignation. He simply accepted his last paycheck, announced that he was resigning, and never returned to work. For two weeks he remained secluded in his Berkeley apartment, trying to decide what to do next. As he explained:

> My act of leaving the Manhattan Project wasn't wholly from guilt, nor could it be called strictly a compensating contribution to society. As I sat there in my room, I felt I could and should do more good. My reaction from destruction was simply that I had to do something constructive with what limited talents and funds I had. This impulse was heightened by the realization that the bulk of the world's fissionable materials would be forever assigned to destruction, directly and indirectly, and become a tool for political world-power jockeying, and would be completely or almost fully lost in their greatest potentials as effective substitutes for fuel, power, heat and medicinal cure.

If these were his conscious reasons for leaving the Manhattan Project, another reason lay in his new friendship with Henry Miller. Since reading *Tropic of Cancer* in Paris, Porter had been deeply influenced by Miller's anarchistic views of freedom. In 1943, while journeying from Oak Ridge back to the Radiation Laboratory in Berkeley, Porter stopped in Los Angeles to meet Miller and be-



Porter, 1945.

gan to collect materials by and about him. He became excited by the idea of publishing Miller's work and the possibility of launching a career in publishing after the war. With Miller's consent, he began to reprint several of the writer's controversial essays and started to work on a complete bibliography, an immensely difficult task as Miller's publications were scattered all over the world in small presses and journals of limited distribution. The American writer's vision of violence and fantasy seemed to Porter prophetic of the Kafka-esque, compartmentalized world of the secret bomb project. Miller stated in *The Cosmological Eye:*

> My aim in writing is to establish a greater REALITY. I am not a realist or a naturalist; I am for life, which in literature, it seems to me, can only be attained by the use of dream and symbol. . . .I am against pornography and for obscenity and violence. Above all for imagination, fantasy, for a liberty as yet undreamed of. . . .I want to be read by less and less people; I have no interest in the life of the

masses, nor in the intentions of the existing governments of the world. I hope and believe that the whole civilized world will be wiped out in the next hundred years or so. I believe that man can exist, and in an indefinitely better, larger way, without "civilization."

Miller's denial of naturalism and his claim that literary vitality can only be "attained by the use of dream and symbol" suited Porter's artistic views. After meeting Miller in 1943, he began a correspondence with Lawrence Durrell and other Miller friends in

1942 letter from Henry Miller to Porter, in response to Porter's request that Miller contribute a piece to *Circle*. From the Bern Porter Collection, Colby College, Waterville, Maine.

1212 N. Beverly Glen Blvd.
West Los Angeles, Cal.
June 15th

Dear Mr. Porter —

Much as I would like to oblige you I doubt if I can at this moment. I have almost never written expressly for a magazine — the editors usually take something I've already written.

Meanwhile I'm waiting for the copy you sent, which was not enclosed. Should I find I can I will let you know.

quickly.

Thank you for remembering me. Are you, by any chance, a friend of Robert (Duncan) Symmes?

Sincerely,

Henry Miller

preparation for the bibliography. Given Porter's inexperience in bibliographical research, no one would have bet that he could accomplish anything worthwhile. Nonetheless, after dogged, frequent visits to Miller's home in the Big Sur region of California, Porter was able to compile *Henry Miller: A Chronology and Bibliography*, which he published at the Waverly Press in Baltimore in May 1945. It became a key resource on Miller's life and work. In the volume's opening note, Porter wrote:

> I know nothing whatever about bibliography. Any that I have ever seen appeared useful but dull. . . . No matter. I undertook a bibliography of Henry Miller because I love him. The University of California paid my way around while I called on his many friends. I kept them up nights. I dug into their packing cases. I fingered behind the books on their shelves. I copied notes, pages, and dimensions. I visited twenty-nine states copying references, sticking my nose in other people's business and being generally grasping but congenial. Anything, everything Henry Miller. I wrote librarians, editors and book stores— some helpful, some grouchy and water-logged. Postcards, wax records, and stolen stationery were sent to remote places. Strange people answered me, some in full; more often they replied only in clues. These drove me mad. Raving in fact. I called in specialists and academicians; I enlisted stenographers and lay-readers. Together we struggled on, getting bogged, mainly, in our own stew.
>
> All the while I was besieging Henry Miller himself with questions and counter-questions. I spent hours with him at Big Sur, examining, cross-examining, pleading, brow-beating and belaboring his memory for every scrap, parcel and crumb. I wore him out. I read every letter, ms and notebook in his place.
>
> I exhausted the specialists and broke down the post office. The result follows: 82.3% complete.

The surrealistic obsessiveness of this opening note imitates Miller's obsessive, subjective style. Miller seemed to notice this when he added a humorous comment to Porter's copy of the bibliography, now in the John Hay Library at Brown University:

> *and* more dope, dates, names, clues, etc. as they come to me—by post card, telegram, or carrier pigeon. Signed, Henry Miller

Rarely has there been an important bibliography produced under such strange circumstances. What would government security agents have made of Porter's tour of twenty-nine states

researching Miller's work when Porter was a drafted wartime employee of the government? To say nothing of Porter sending "stolen stationery " to remote places. Indeed, "stealing" stationery from persons and places he visits has long been one of Porter's eccentricities.

As for Miller, he was both flattered and annoyed when he found this young physicist spending weekends with him, requesting to be his publisher, and keeping him from new writing projects. Miller's first American publisher had been James Laughlin, the head of New Directions. Laughlin brought out Miller's books of essays and autobiographical pieces: *The Cosmological Eye* in 1939 and *Wisdom of the Heart* in 1941. During the war, Miller's major book, *Tropic of Cancer*, was still banned in the United States. At the time of Porter's weekly visits to Big Sur, Miller was living mainly on a $50-a-month check that Laughlin was sending to him, even though the checks exceeded the amount that Miller was earning from New Directions in royalties. In the beginning, Miller misunderstood Porter's financial situation and didn't realize that the offer to publish him would be financed from Porter's salary. As for Porter, he was fascinated by Miller's buoyant, freewheeling way of life and determined to publish him no matter what problems might arise.

Porter was thirty-three, a young man still finding his way, when he met Miller. Miller was in his early fifties, his major books already behind him. Born on December 26, 1891, in Yorkville, the German section of Manhattan's Upper East Side, he grew up in Brooklyn after his father moved his tailoring business there. His father dreamed of his son taking over the family business. Even in high school, however, Henry preferred literature. He chose the public library over classes and dropped out of college during his first year. Like many self-taught American writers raised in a populist, anti-intellectual atmosphere, he rebelled against formal education and developed his own stubborn tastes. He spurned Shakespeare, Goethe, and Virgil, introduced to him in schools by boring teachers, and favored writers he discovered on his own—Victor Hugo, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oscar Wilde, Knut Hamsun, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. In 1919 Miller went to work for the Western Union Telegraph Company. For five years he was the employment manager in charge of messengers. This job provided material for the fantastic adventures of these messengers he described, calling the telegraph company "The Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company of North America." During this time, Miller married June Mansfield and began the most endur-

ing and the worst relationship he had with a woman during his long life. In a powerful Strindbergian sentence in *Tropic of Cancer* he described their marriage: "I see her festering there in that bloody wound of love."

In 1930 Miller sailed for England and settled in Paris, determined to write. There he met Anaïs Nin. They fell in love and began to share their writings, her fiction and diaries, and his autobiographical *Tropic of Cancer*, the novel that was to make his reputation. As a student of psychologist Otto Rank and a lay analyst herself, Nin urged Miller to analyze his dreams and discover the material buried in his unconscious mind. Miller trained himself to record his dreams and kept a lengthy notebook of them. This material he poured into *Tropic of Cancer*, giving it a surreal, dream-haunted tone. Once Miller completed the manuscript, it was Nin who paid the French publisher, Jack Kahane of Obelisk Press, $600 to print the book. Published in 1934, *Tropic of Cancer*, with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, was to shatter the conservative censorship patterns that prevailed in the United States, although Miller's novel could not be published in America until the 1960s provided a more open climate of opinion.

During the war, Porter began to read all of Miller's work and to understand its significance. Miller, like Lawrence, was attempting to portray the agonies of a dying society. *Tropic of Cancer* begins:

> I am living at the Villa Borghese. There is not a crumb of dirt anywhere, nor a chair misplaced.
>
> We are all alone here and we are dead.

Caught in the rigid restrictions of the Manhattan Project, under constant surveillance and forbidden to travel alone, Porter began to believe Miller's claim that the modern era was dying and a new technological society emerging out of the war. Porter agreed with Nin in her preface to *Tropic of Cancer*:

> To regard a naked book such as this with the same critical eye that is turned upon even such diverse types as Lawrence, Breton, Joyce and Celine is a mistake. Rather let us try to look at it with the eyes of a Patagonian for whom all that is sacred and taboo in our world is meaningless. . . .This book brings with it a wind that blows down the dead and hollow trees whose roots are withered and lost in the barren soil of our times. This book goes to the roots and digs under, digs for subterranean springs.

World War II and the imminent Nazi occupation of Paris forced Miller to return to the United States. Kahane had printed all of the writer's major books, *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Black Spring*, and a celebrated travel book about Greece, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, but with the Nazis in Paris he was soon unable to send Miller royalties. Miller's American income was meager. When he tried to find work in Hollywood with a screen adaptation of Jakob Wassermann's 1928 novel, *The Maurizius Case*, every studio rejected it. Undeterred by poverty, cadging on his friends as always, Miller took to painting watercolors. He said painting gave him more pleasure than writing. Most of these watercolors were faces or eager nudes, painted in a naive, colorful style. His practice of selling paintings for a few dollars apiece and his appeal to friends for clothes brought Miller the following notice in the December 13, 1943 issue of *Time* magazine:

> Henry Miller, whose Paris-published novels *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* have stirred intelligentsiacs to as much prurient curiosity and as much sour criticastery as any novels since James Joyce's *Ulysses*, published an appeal for charity in the *New Republic*. He said he wanted contributions of old clothes ("love corduroys") and watercolor materials. In Beverly Glen, near Los Angeles, the fifty-two year-old, free-loving, free-sponging American-from-Paris had been destitute for months. Recently he had taken up painting.

In January 1944, the artist Jean Varda invited Miller to stay with him in Monterey, California. Lynda Sargent, a friend of Varda's, heard of Miller's situation and offered him her small guest house at Big Sur. Later she found him a cabin on Partington Ridge that could be rented for $15 a month. Here Porter eventually came weekends to work with Miller on the bibliography. Miller was of two minds about the attractions of Big Sur. A man who loved the struggles of urban life, he resented the isolation of Big Sur. But he was struck by the landscape's power, the steep descent of the cliffs plunging jaggedly into the ocean. Here, he felt, was a good, inexpensive paradise to inhabit for a while until he could move elsewhere.

Visiting Miller at Partington Ridge, Porter admired the open style, the joyous energy, with which this unprepossessing man, bald but for a fringe of gray hair, conducted his life. Women were always writing to Miller, enclosing photographs of themselves, asking if they could visit him. Miller kept these photos on the fireplace ledge near reproductions of Chagall and Man Ray. One day June Lancaster, a dancer and artist's model whose charms in a photo-

cunning at the same time. He comes to me, in his sly way, and he says: "[redacted], you've got to do something for me!" Now Alf knows as well as anybody that what I can do for him is practically nil. What he does know, however, is that I am a master at passing the hat around. And so, when he says—"Do something for me, you [redacted]!"—that means *get out and hustle*. I know it sounds bad. It sounds as if I were a cheap [redacted] and Alf my [redacted]. But what's a little [redacted] and [redacted] when genius is at stake?

Then, too, I'm not such a *naif* [redacted] as you might suppose. I figure that if I can raise a little dough for Alf—for this Ibiza project—maybe I'll be able to do the same for myself when the time comes for it.*

*See Miller's *The Plight of The Creative Artist in The United States of America.*

Page from Henry Miller's *What Shall We Do About Alf,* with "four-letter" words crossed-out by Porter during summer, 1944 in Houlton, Maine.

graph she had sent caused Miller to invite her, arrived from New York. Porter became friendly with her. At night, after working all day on the bibliography, Miller would turn on the phonograph or radio and they would dance.

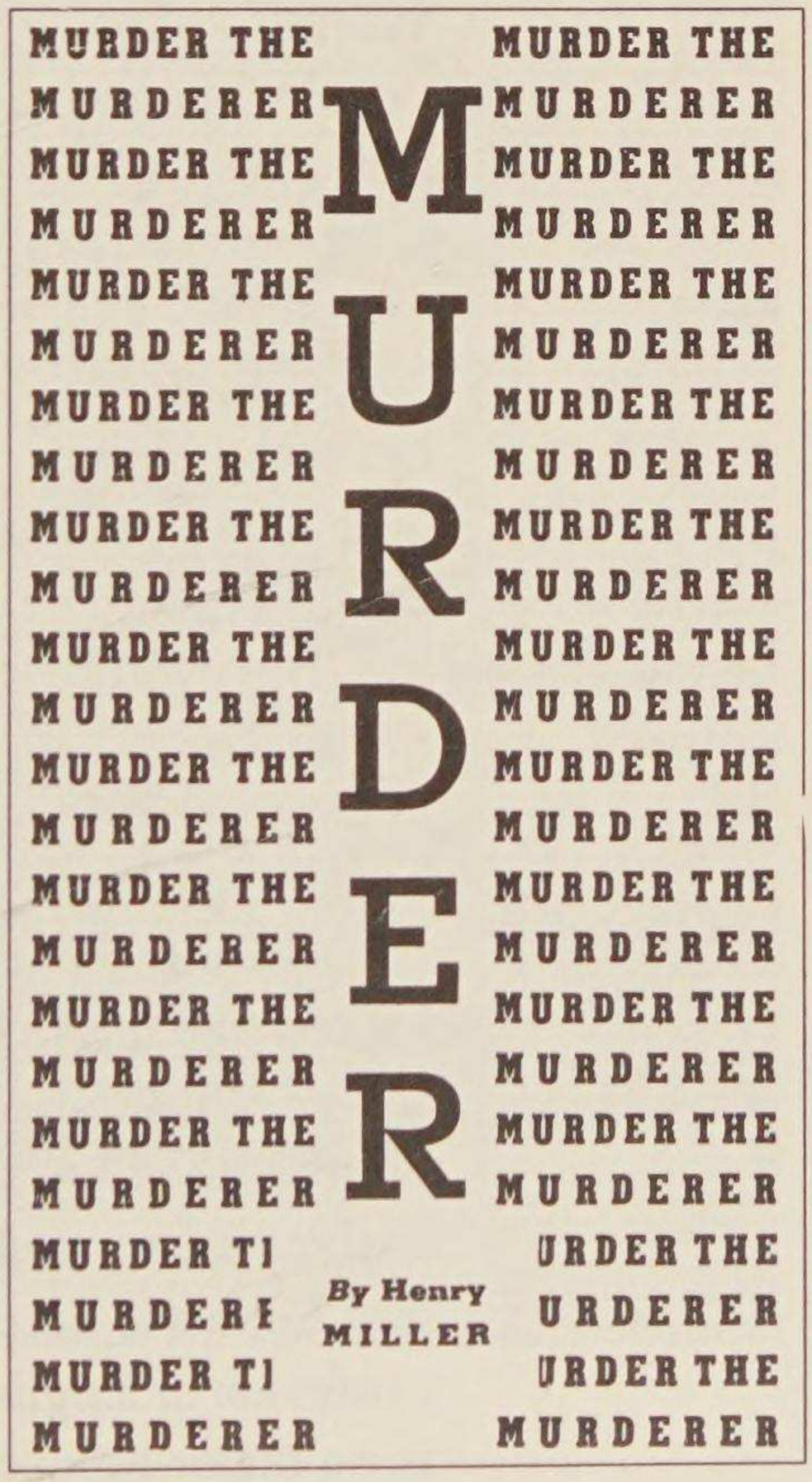
"Poor June," Porter reminisced, "she couldn't talk about literature or philosophy, so she couldn't discuss books with Henry. All she could do was dance. So she'd go out in the woods and dance by herself because she couldn't stay in the house when Henry was working. She had no space of her own in that tiny place. After a while she began to bore Henry because they had no common interests except sex. One day after Henry had been criticizing her, and it was apparent that he didn't want her anymore, she just left. A little later she sent me her address from Los Angeles. Once, when I was down there, I tried to call her. A man answered the phone and said

that she was out. I never heard from her again. She was always friendly and naive, like a lost child, so she got used by men."

As he began to publish Miller's work, Porter discovered the risks of printing controversial material. In addition to Miller's anarchistic and antiwar beliefs, there was the problem of four-letter words that could not then be published. On sick leave in 1944 from Oak Ridge, he returned to Houlton, Maine, for a visit and spent many hours at his grandmother's summer cottage on Nickerson Lake, blacking out by hand forbidden words in *What Shall We Do About Alf?* The printer had warned him that without such editing the post office might confiscate any copies he mailed. Later Porter regretted his efforts: "I should have left it alone. Trying to censor it was stupid, but I was putting a lot of my money into printing Miller's work and I wanted to get some of it back, so I could invest it in more of his books."

In 1944 Porter took a greater risk when Miller gave him permission to reprint *Murder the Murderer*, Miller's fervent antiwar essay in which he declared, "No man, in my opinion, has the right to demand the sacrifice of human lives. We throw up our hands in horror when we read of the sacrificial rites of the Aztecs, but we see nothing ignoble in the periodic sacrifice of millions of lives in the name of country, God, democracy, or civilization." How would J. Edgar Hoover, who had agents trailing writers and scientists suspected of left-wing tendencies, have taken such a statement? Porter tried to protect himself by leaving his name out of the publisher's credit and by disclaiming, "Neither the publisher nor the printer is responsible for or subscribes to statements made herein by Henry Miller." But these evasions troubled Porter's conscience, as he kept telling friends that "this piece of Miller's is one of the greatest anti-war satires ever written."

Considering the demands of his wartime job with the Manhattan Project, though

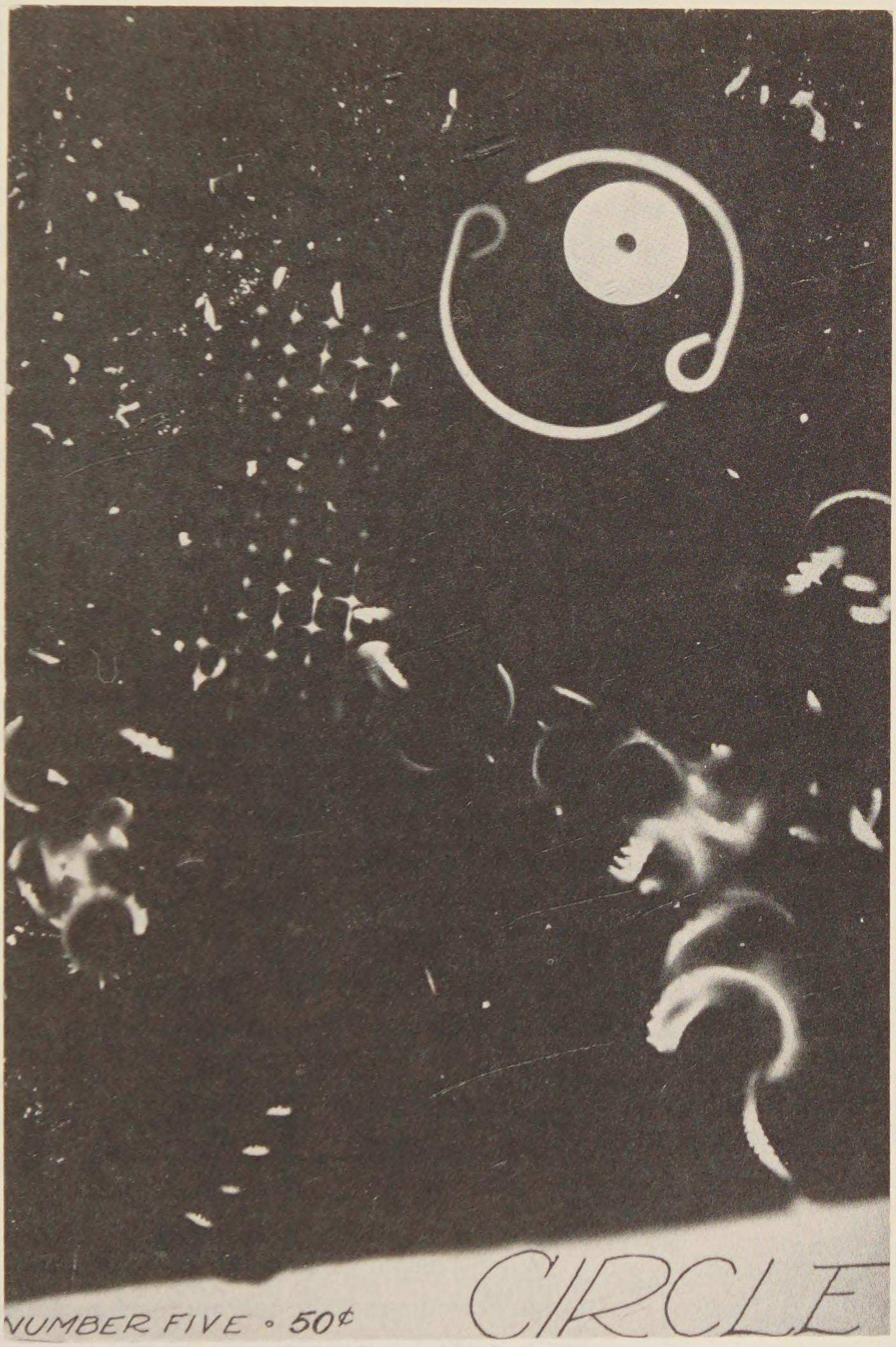


Cover of Miller's *Murder the Murderer* designed and published anonymously by Porter, 1944, while working for the Manhattan Project.

he took as much vacation time and sick leave as he could, it is amazing that Porter was able to edit and publish so much of Miller's work during the war years. "It was an astonishing time," reflects Porter. "I was half-crazy because of my growing doubts about the uranium project. Miller was partly crazy because his constant struggle for money had turned life for him into a kind of aggressive game. He was always trying out strange money-raising schemes by mail. Indeed, I got a lot of my obsession with correspondence, my distrust of the telephone, from Miller. He was the most incredible letter writer I've ever known. Once, at Big Sur, I began to notice that the cabin was filling up with thermos bottles! Pretty soon there were at least seventeen, and he wouldn't throw any out to make more room. It turned out that he had written to twenty people saying that he couldn't write without a thermos bottle to keep his morning coffee warm. And even though he expected to get only one or two in return, most of the twenty people had replied by sending him thermos bottles. So he felt he had to keep them all. The same thing happened with clothes and watercolor paints, brushes and paper that he asked for. The house was full of stuff that had to be carted a long ways uphill from the mailbox down on the road. Fortunately, Miller had summoned a loyal friend, Emil White, who came to live nearby. White helped Miller by building a cart for him to help him trundle supplies and mail up to the cabin. The amazing thing was that Emil White became a good naive painter of landscapes under Miller's influence. Eventually, White turned his home into a museum in honor of Miller."

Porter usually traveled to Big Sur on weekends with George Leite and his wife, Nancy, a schoolteacher. The Leites had a shack near White's. A would-be poet and editor who drove a taxi for a living, Leite founded the magazine *Circle* in 1944. Although not officially a member of the editorial staff, Nancy, according to Porter, was a strong voice in the selection of material. Common interests in the work of Henry Miller, as well as surrealistic art and literature in general, drew Porter and the Leites together. Porter saw *Circle* as a new outlet for his publishing ambitions and design ability and agreed to become assistant editor. Also, after designing the cover and contributing illustrations to the first mimeographed issue, he offered to put up some money to help with printing costs, which enabled Leite to change the magazine to a letterpress format. The first issue was noteworthy for several poems by Josephine Miles, the professor of English at the University of California who was becoming a major influence in Bay Area poetry; it also included "The Red

Circle magazine cover.
Photogram by Porter, 1945.



Battery," the first story by a young Berkeley fiction writer, George P. Elliott, who eventually earned a national reputation for his stories and criticism. In addition to his artistic work, Porter contributed a sardonic prose piece called "You're No Dope; Let Me Save You," which reflected both his former interest in sculptural disintegration and his new interest in Miller's anarchistic views and surrealist tone:

> What you need is an all out rotting. *You mean go decay?* Yes, brother, disintegration from the ground up would do you good. . . The graven essence—the total total—passes now in staccato order. From solid to liquid. Gas to marl, powdery red. Hence to nothing. This is the seed; the true beginning. Floorboards condense to sand. Carrot leaves sprout akimbo. Amid crushed anterooms and bowls of fluid memory, wind salted, birth out of decay, disintegration from life enfolds. It's good-by brothers and hello again.

Through *Circle* and the Leites' friendship, Porter got to know other Bay Area writers and painters, and the scope of his contributions to the magazine broadened. In the third issue of *Circle*, attractively printed and designed with Porter's help in late 1944, he was not only listed as assistant editor but was noted for contributing several "Original Decorations," forerunners of his Founds. These consisted of minimalist line drawings coupled with enigmatic poetic statements such as "single waves of nothing" and "seething action hastening decay." The same issue also featured four poems by Kenneth Patchen, who became a strong influence on Porter. Like Miller, Patchen was an independent spirit, eschewing literary cliques. Porter admired the way Patchen combined art and poetry in his poem-paintings. Patchen often used handwritten poetic aphorisms or short poems to enhance the bold human and animal forms that dominated his paintings, work that inspired Porter to experiment with combining poetry and art in his collages. In 1946 in Berkeley Porter published Patchen's *Panels for the Walls of Heaven*, one of Patchen's first experimental books combining art and poetry.

In the fourth *Circle*, the Leites and Porter stated their editorial credo in an effort to set themselves off from the growing number of artists' cliques:

> When a technique becomes a school, death of creation is the result. Eclecticism is the only approach to Art in which there is no death. CIRCLE is completely eclectic.

The fourth issue benefited from the editors' weekend trips to Big Sur. Miller contributed an article on his friend Jean Varda, who had introduced him to Big Sur. Also, there was a story by Anaïs Nin, whom Porter had met in Paris in 1937. Fascinated by her work and singular presence, Porter tried several times to persuade her to let him print her diaries. In an undated (circa late 1944 according to Porter) letter in the UCLA collection, Nin rejected his offer, expressing her doubts about American publication: "Knowing America(ns), who cannot bear the interior life, I cannot expose myself, my true self, without the dress of an art form. I do not want scandal or gossip."

Continuing the editors' eclectic, international approach, the fourth issue also contained the second in Kenneth Rexroth's series of re-evaluations of forgotten writers, this one about Mina Loy. Porter contributed a revised version of his laconic, prophetic poem-essay, "All Over The Place." Here he elaborated on his earlier idea that art should not be restricted to the confines of picture frames, and mentioned several examples of historical and contemporary artists whose works seemed to burst out of their frames. He talked about the desirability of "forward projection," a painting that moves out of the frame toward the viewer, citing El Greco and other painters as examples. Finally, he suggested that "significant approaches may be made to the concepts of reality through further exploitation and depiction of the multiple image in art," thus anticipating the postwar panel paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, and other artists.

While *Circle* encouraged Porter's creative work, the editorial experience stimulated his publishing interests. Finding as much satisfaction in painting as in writing, Miller wanted his watercolors reproduced and Porter published a special portfolio of twelve of them called *Echolalia*. Miller praised one of Porter's best photographs, a work with the Proustian title *Semblance of a Devoted Past*. Flattered, Porter used the title again for a small collection of Miller's letters to Emil Schnellock.

As his interests and skills in book designing grew, each Miller book that Porter published became more distinctive in format, culminating in a book of essays and tributes to Miller that Porter published in 1945 as *The Happy Rock*. The title came from *Tropic of Capricorn*, in which Miller described the birth of identity as "the true rock of the self, the happy rock."

"*The Happy Rock* was my first really experimental book," said Porter. I worked on it all over the country, while traveling back and

forth from Berkeley to Oak Ridge, with security officials peering over my shoulder, but blissfully unaware of Miller and what he stood for. Finally, not giving a damn any more about my war work, I put in a defiant dedication: *To the Freedom of the Press—should there ever be any*. As there were a lot of color theories in the air, I printed the book on different colored papers. I distributed these seven different colors randomly throughout the book, anticipating John Cage's theories of chance. After all, physics at the time was full of chance theories, too. I made it a large, folio-size book so it would have the heft and feel of an art book. For the cover I was lucky enough to get a fine drawing by Fernand Leger. At the end of the book, as my own individual tribute to Miller, I included my *Cosmic Sight*, a photo-print based on a found that I had discovered in my uranium work. The jagged, dark shapes seemed very appropriate to Miller's admiration of the Big Sur landscape, and his sense of the apocalyptic social upheaval that he saw coming. Since I couldn't pay anyone, contributions to the book were amazing. William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Patchen, Paul Rosenfeld, Lawrence Durrell and others sent pieces. Maybe Durrell's essay, in which he praised *Tropic of Cancer* as a 'piece of self-evisceration written in the purest romance vein,' was the most observant. Durrell was really perceptive about the romantic strain behind Miller's subjective sexual details. I printed 3000 copies at the Packard Press in Berkeley, and 750 were bound in 1945 for distribution. Naturally, it took years to sell and give away that amount."

The Happy Rock, with its fond recollections and paeans to Miller, was more of a haphazard *festschrift* than an anthology illuminating the range of Miller's accomplishments, but it marked a shift in Miller's reputation in the United States. After the war,

ORDER FROM
BERN PORTER
2303 Durant
Berkeley, Calif.

NEW BOOKS BY HENRY MILLER

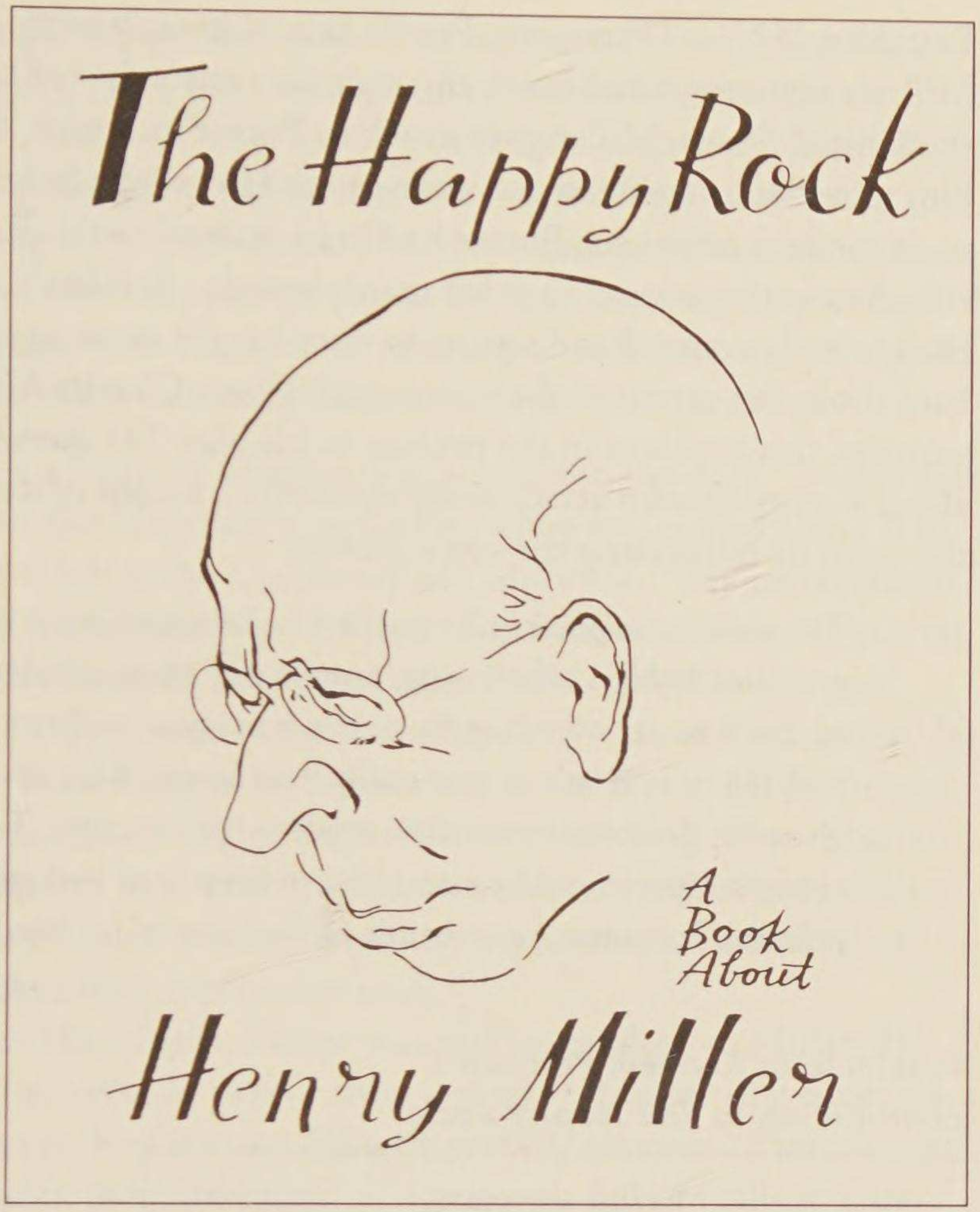
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT ALF?
98c plus 2c tax

THE PLIGHT OF THE CREATIVE ARTIST IN THE U.S.A.
$1.46 plus 4c tax

MURDER THE MURDERER
$1.22 plus 3c tax

MAKE RESERVATIONS FOR "SEMBLANCE OF A DEVOTED PAST" AND "MISCELLANEA"

Magazine advertisement, 1944.



Cover design for *The Happy Rock*.

when Miller's French publisher, Kahane, died, and his son, Maurice, took over the business under the name of Maurice Girodias, royalty payments were resumed. The payments grew as Miller's work was translated into many languages. Consequently, Miller no longer felt any need for Porter's limited abilities to publish and distribute his work. In addition, Miller felt Porter wasn't paying him royalties, and this finally caused a split between the two. As Porter put it: "I gave him a lot of copies whenever he wanted them, and he wanted a lot free. Still, he claimed I never paid him any royalties. How could I? Probably it was my fault. I wasn't really set up to be a publisher. I didn't make arrangements clear. I had no capital to work on, since I was using only my salary for printing costs. I wanted to keep on publishing Miller's work, but it was a pipe dream since I couldn't afford it. So we drifted apart, but I never lost my affection for him or his work."

The fact remains that during the war, along with James

Laughlin of New Directions, Porter helped greatly to spread Miller's reputation and break through the censorship of his work in the United States. Miller gave much to Porter in return, helping him to redirect his life in the wake of the Hiroshima bombing. Like most modern scientists, Porter had been trained to think that scientific discoveries were always for man's benefit. Suddenly, a terrible change had occurred and scientists were caught in an agonizing debate about the extent of their responsibilities. Charles Morgan wrote of this problem in the preface to his play *The Burning Glass*, about a scientist who accidentally discovers a means of destroying the earth by harnessing the sun's power:

> The vulnerable point indicated in *The Burning Glass* is the long-prevalent fashion of believing, uncritically, that each development of man's power over Nature, unless it happens to threaten his body with injury or death, is necessarily beneficent. This great lie has given the demonic forces their modern opportunity. The material changes experienced by man hitherto have been biological, social, political, economic, or scientific in the sense of his having step by

Fascimile of Kenneth Patchen's
contribution to *The Happy Rock*.

Tribute And Protest

1

Henry Miller is a very great writer and a very great human being.

2

The contributors to this book—with a very few exceptions—are so many sloppy-eyed nobodies.

If this is a bandwagon, then Miller should kick them the hell off it—and then drop the wagon into the nearest sewer-hole. After the lion has made his kill, what difference does it make whether the jackals like the meat or not?

For God's sake, Miller, the important thing is not to be liked by these people!

KENNETH PATCHEN

New York City
New York

step and always in his proportion as a human being, wrung from a seemingly reluctant Nature small extensions of her license to him....It did not occur to him that she, the mighty, the powerful, the enduring, the stubborn, would ever abdicate in favor of his pygmy self....A subversion of the relationship between man and Nature does not presuppose the continuance of anything we have on earth. The idea of it has to be apprehended as poetry is, or felt as we feel, with leaping imagination, a touch in the dark...

Such a "leaping imagination, a touch in the dark," Porter felt the day after the Hiroshima explosion, when he learned about it in the Faculty Club at the University of California. "My involvement with Miller contributed to my sense of guilt about the development of the bomb because I felt I hadn't listened to him," Porter said. "Miller was always predicting the collapse of western civilization. So I had to do something to rediscover my sense of self. Miller helped me to find another possible way of life in publishing. Now I had to see if I could live in a more independent way, as Miller did, without inhibitions, without a salary from the government, dedicated to creative rather than destructive ends."

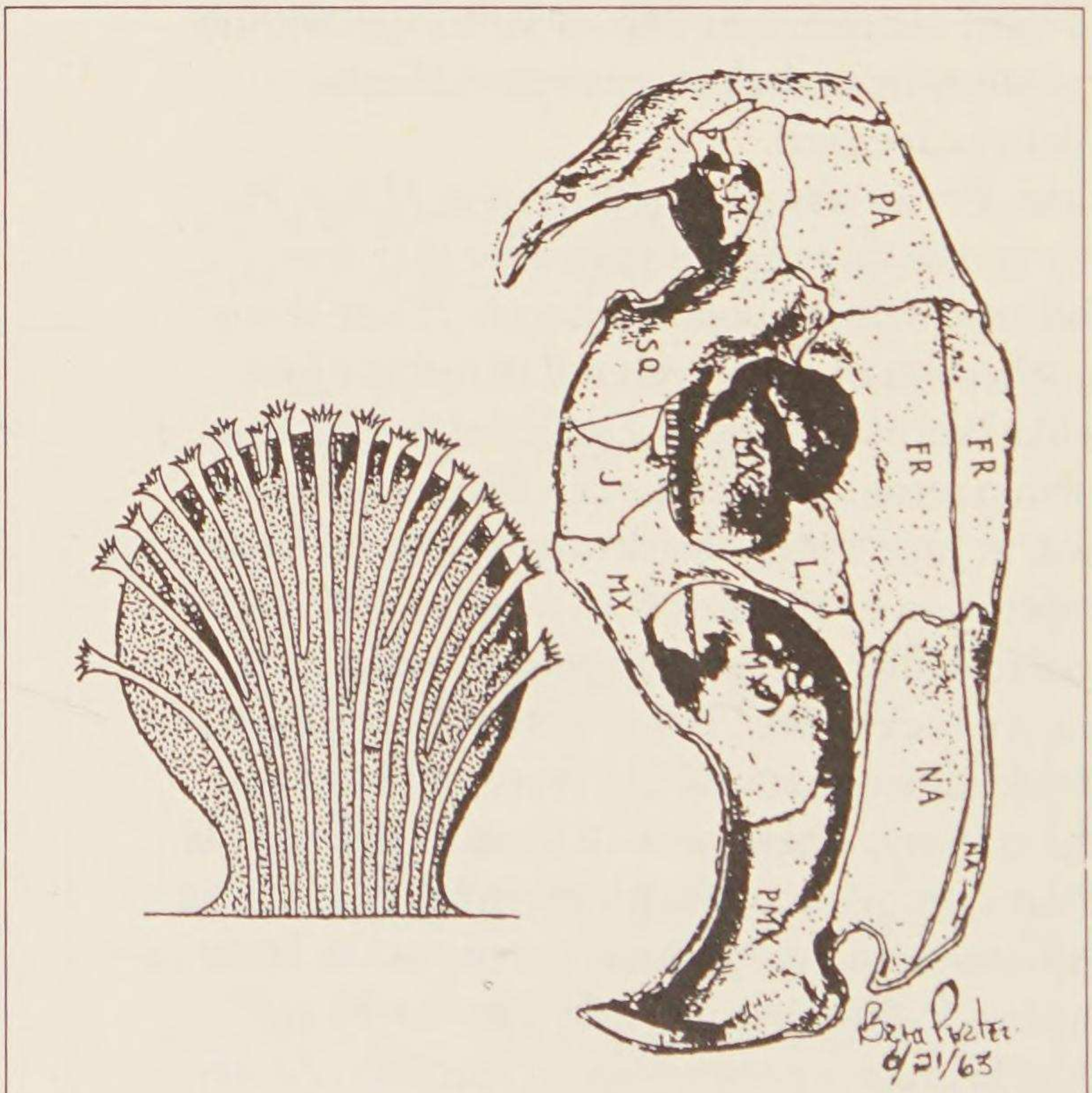
After Hiroshima, Porter was no longer close to Miller. He saw the writer on only two or three casual visits after that time. Eagerly, however, he followed Miller's postwar success: "Even though it was not until the publication of war novels full of realistic four-letter words—books like Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* —changed the censorship scene, I rejoiced when Barney Rosset of Grove Press published, in June 1961, a hardcover edition of *Tropic of Cancer* with an introduction by the poet Karl Shapiro. Echoing Anaïs Nin, Shapiro called Miller a great 'Patagonian,' whose one aim was 'to give literature back to life.' A few months later Grove brought out a paperback edition that sold like crazy and produced an outrage all over the country. There were all kinds of police raids on bookstores and court suits. Most of the people involved in trying to ban it, mainly Fundamentalist groups, hadn't even read it. Some bluenosed people who had looked into it a little were scared and didn't want it published because it presents sex so naturally. As opposed to Lawrence, who is full of erotic fantasies, Miller just presents the daily routine of sex. And because a lot of this daily routine is grotesque, the would-be censors called *Tropic of Cancer* disgusting. I like to think that I had something to do with paving the way for a defense against these malignant court cases."

In July 1964, the Supreme Court finally reversed a Florida

Supreme Court ruling that the book was obscene. At last *Tropic of Cancer*, which thousands of people all over the world had read, was protected from censors.

To celebrate Miller, Porter tried to sum up his feelings about his friend in a visual poem, *What Henry Miller Said and Why It Is Important.* Since the layout was an integral part of the poem, he worked on it for a long time, finished revising it on a visit to Maine in November 1961, and published it himself. Porter's "visual poem" is written like an educational primer, a satirical sex guide for repressed Americans. He begins by attacking the linguistic confusion that resulted from Miller's descriptions of sex:

> From the root comprising his initial billion words an overwhelming several billion more will multiply at the hands of countless others until in the resulting morass of verbiage the essential even simple, unsuspecting but all significant core will still remain undisturbed,



Profile of Henry Miller
In Bird Cape with California Mountain

BY BERN PORTER
1944

even lost.

Continuing in simple, sarcastic headings and minimalist layout, the poem looks a bit like a child's picture book that requires an adult's concentration on descriptive, anchoring nouns:

I. Sex is everywhere

air

bees

birds

city

country

earth

food

news

A. It is in the

news

water

town

bed

trees

songs

streets

clothes

cars

factories

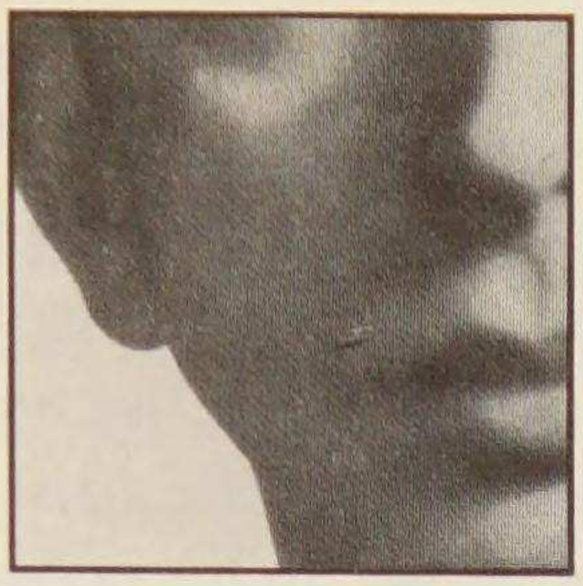
Seemingly in one breath as if sex were a universal word that includes everything, Porter goes on to say in the same precise graphic format that "2. Sex is clean, enjoyable, fun, good, healthy, innocent, etc." Turning to the puritanical criticisms of Miller's work, he emphasizes his third point: "3. And *sex is not*," listing vertically twenty-six words used to attack Miller, including "boring, damaging, dangerous, immoral, shameful, taboo, unclean, wanton, wicked, wrecking." Here, Porter deliberately culled words from pu-

ritanical critics who resented Miller's frank writings about sex.

The effect of Porter's word-lists is to make one think, like Ludwig Wittgenstein, of how even the most ordinary arrangement of language distorts meaning. In this sense, Porter's poetic experiment in praise of Miller is part of the influential linguistic revolution in philosophy and literature after World War II, and is a forerunner of the contemporary "language poetry" movement. Porter ends his piece by urging society's leaders to renew their learning "not so much from the parent, from the cleric, from the teacher, from the medic, as from an expert impartial OUTSIDER." That "outsider" is, of course, Miller, as Porter concludes: "Henry Miller treats sex for its own sake; neither apologizes nor glorifies its expression."

Porter's final statement about the necessity of accepting sex leads the reader back to the beginning, "Sex is everywhere, etc." The reader, or rather the observer, must confront again and again the simplifications and generalizations that prevent an understanding of the facts of sex. In this little visual conundrum, which must be seen on the page to be appreciated, Porter paid his final tribute to Miller.

8 Marriage

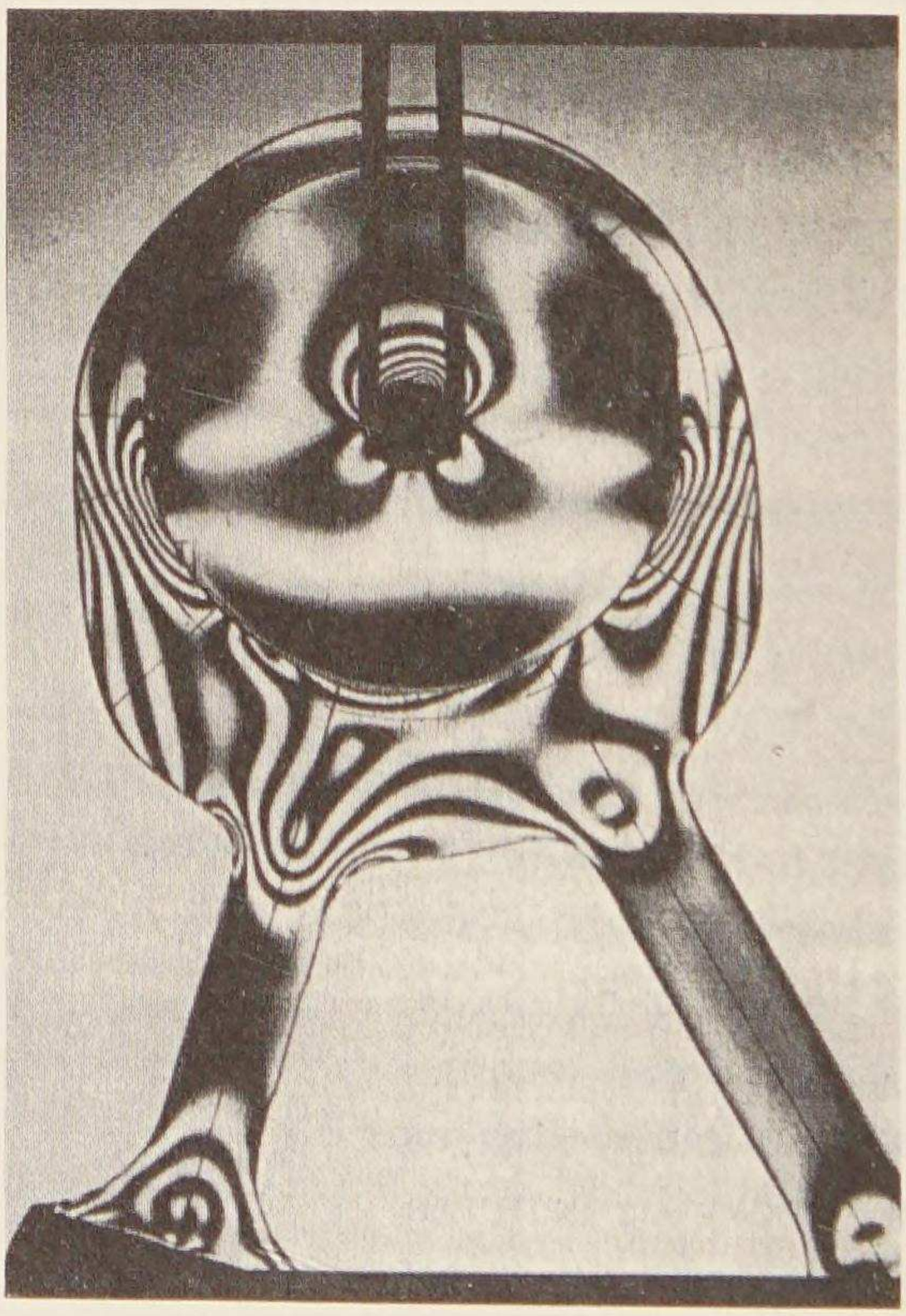


After his departure from the Manhattan Project, Porter entered a period of intense creativity. He spent two weeks isolated in his apartment, brooding about his naiveté concerning the project's purpose. Then, needing money to live on, he heard of a job working on the foundations of airstrips at the Engineering Materials Laboratory of the University of California. At the laboratory, he had access to a darkroom, and in off hours he began producing covers and photo-poems for *Circle* and experimenting with photograms. In the 1920s, Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, at the Bauhaus in Germany, had begun to create abstract photographic images without a camera by placing objects on photosensitive paper and then exposing the paper to light. At the same time, the American artist Man Ray began to experiment with this process in Paris. Porter brought to the medium a greater knowledge of physics and the nature of light than his predecessors had had, and that technical proficiency combined with his moral anguish about the bomb to produce a striking series of photographic works.

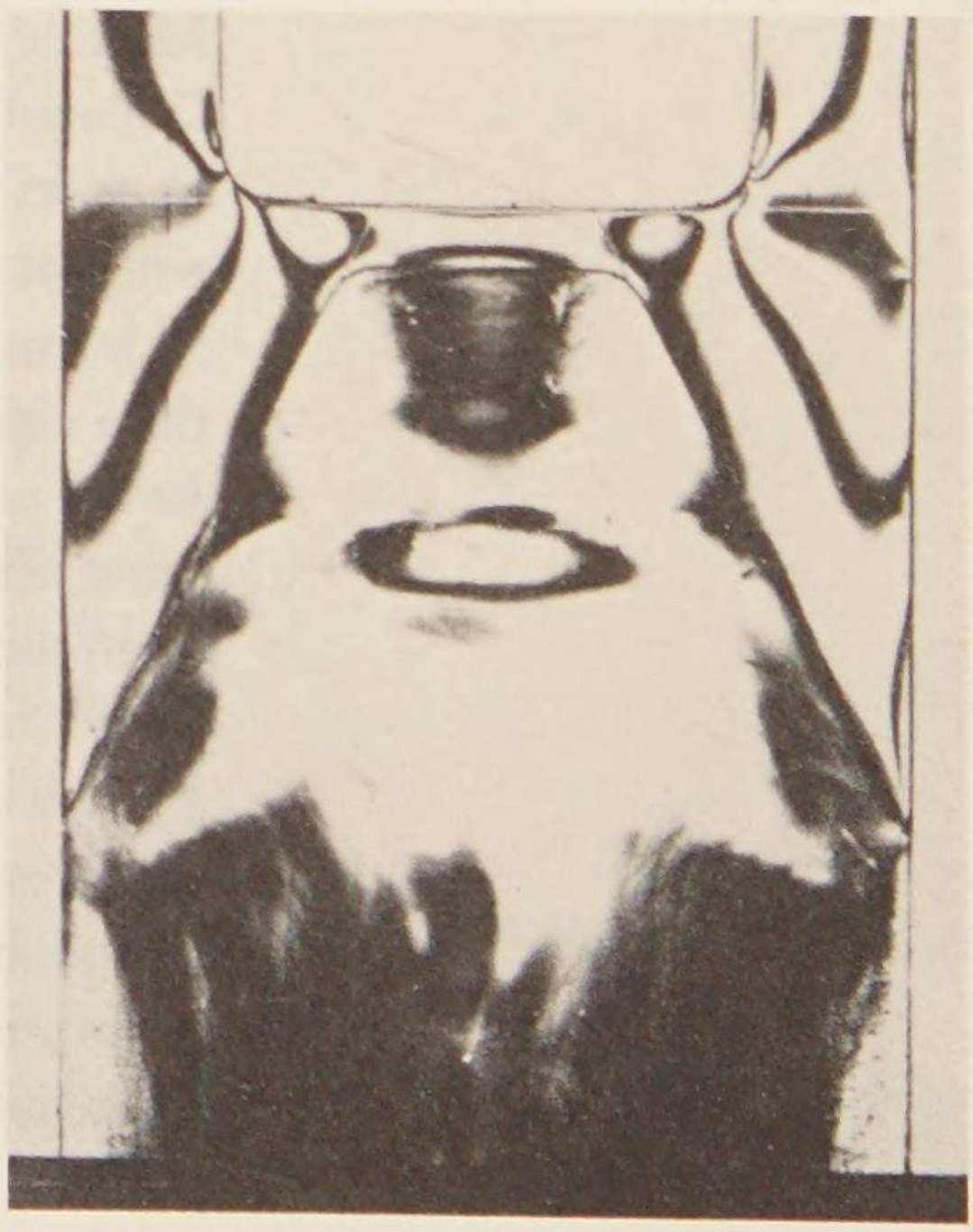
94

Two of the photographs in the series, *The Crucifixion of the Virgin* and *The Death of Abel*, stand out as Porter's two most significant works in the field of photography. Photographers may begin with simple amazement at the fidelity with which an image can be reproduced, but like any technical medium, photography eventually demands that the artist make a creative statement that transcends technique. In his prewar days in New Jersey, working with a simple box camera, Porter had been concerned with the camera's ability to reproduce unusual images accurately. In the war's aftermath, he felt compelled by his traumatic experiences to explore new territory. *The Death of Abel* transforms the biblical story of fraternal murder into a modern allegory of the scientific discoveries that threaten humanity. In the photograph, the abstract outlines of an anguished face emerge from the coils of light that appear to whirl with shocking energy. The inverted, triangular face is curiously original and moving, with a tense mouth crying out its final anguish above a black mass at the base of the photo. The mass seems to spread as if reflecting the critical mass of the bomb. The process of "snapping a picture," capturing a certain kind of external light, becomes a battle with an internal light that has burst out of confinement to exert pri-

Crucifixion of the Virgin. Photogram.



Death of Abel. Photogram.



mal force. If Man Ray's and Moholy Nagy's photograms achieved a distinctively decorative quality, Porter's struggled to show—like Jackson Pollock's explosive drip paintings that soon followed—the power of a new energy to distort, threaten, and thrill.

Similarly, the subject in Porter's *The Crucifixion of the Virgin* is no traditional virgin of ethereal loveliness. Instead, Porter's Virgin is a wild flow of light winding through an abstract body crucified in position by the sheer force of polarized light. It is a moving depiction of the bitter conflict between science and art in Porter's mind and an exultant warning of the demonic power of light. Light can kill or save, depending on its use. In this photo, light kills and illuminates at the same time. The crucified Virgin may be Christ's mother, but she is also the mother of creativity, of natural light. In her crucifixion is the promise of light's rebirth, dependent on the resurrection of man's respect for nature.

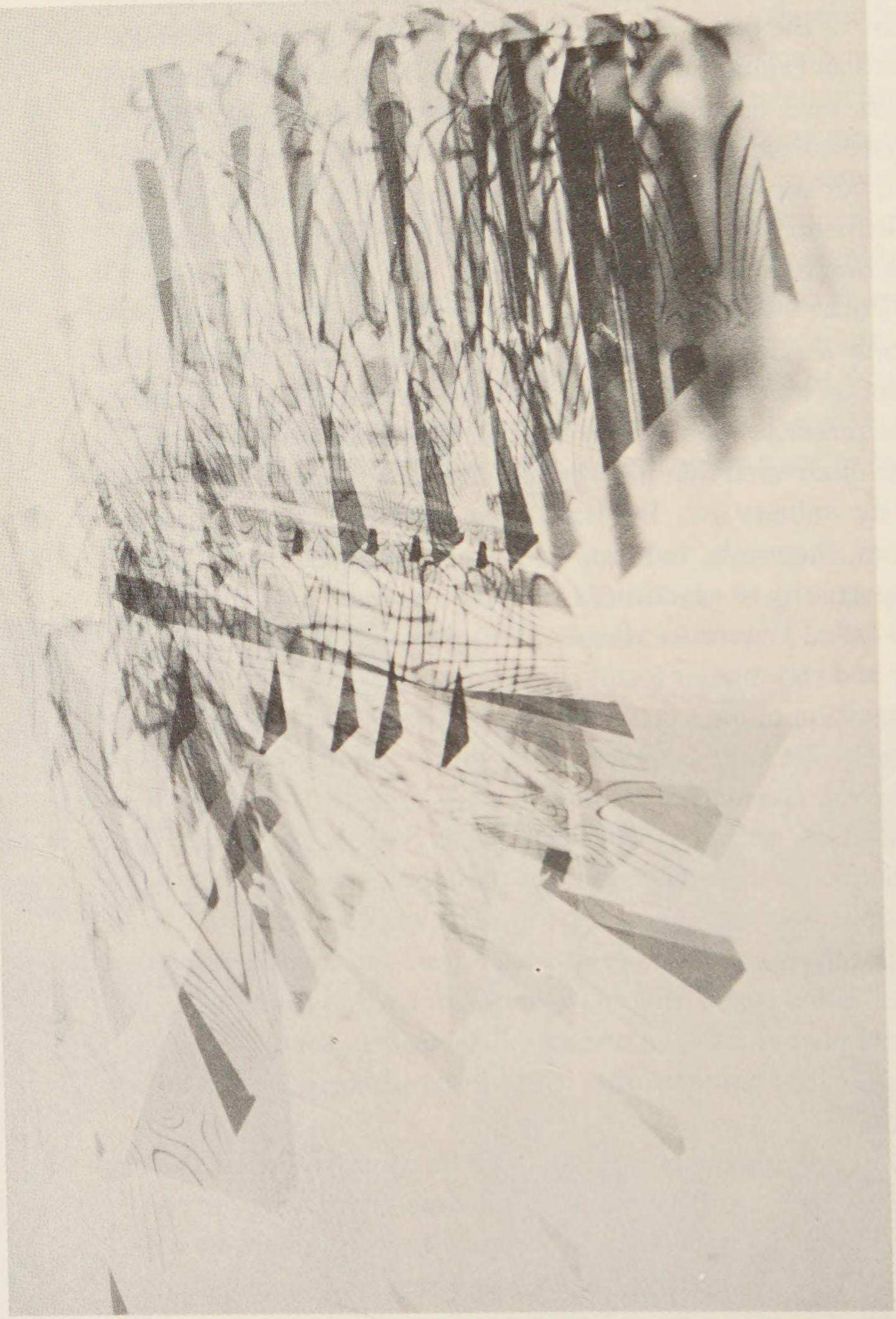
Porter's work at the Engineering Materials Laboratory lasted only about three months before he was discharged; it became clear that he was spending more time on his creative work than on assigned projects. Also, Porter became increasingly antagonistic when he discovered that his work on aircraft runways was intended mainly for military use. But before the discharge, the laboratory's darkroom, chemicals, and state-of-the-art equipment gave Porter a rare opportunity to experiment. Another work he produced at this time he called *Frustration Accents*. This photo shows a series of triangular and rectangular forms converging and clashing in a rhythmic suggestion of life's inevitable, crucial frustrations. Porter used this same image later as the cover design for the first book of poems he published, *Hamadryad Hunted*, by poet, novelist, and critic Leonard Wolf. Porter recalls reactions to *Frustration Accents*: "Edward Steichen was interested in this photogram for a show in New York, but he decided against it because he was concerned that there was no negative—only one original. At least this was the reason he gave me. Hilda Rebay at the Guggenheim tried to dismiss it as a product of pure chance, an uncontrolled accident of work with radium. Later, she admitted that it had to be arranged, controlled for each accent."

The stimulus of publishing in *Circle* continued to be a strong factor in Porter's creative output at this time. Exploring the concept of what he called Sciart, the union of science and art, he collaborated with George Leite to produce a series of photo-poems and photo-posters. "Basically all of my photographic work at this time," says Porter, "consisted of different kinds of experiments with

Bern Porter

96

Porter photogram used on cover of Leonard Wolf's *Hamadryad Hunted*.

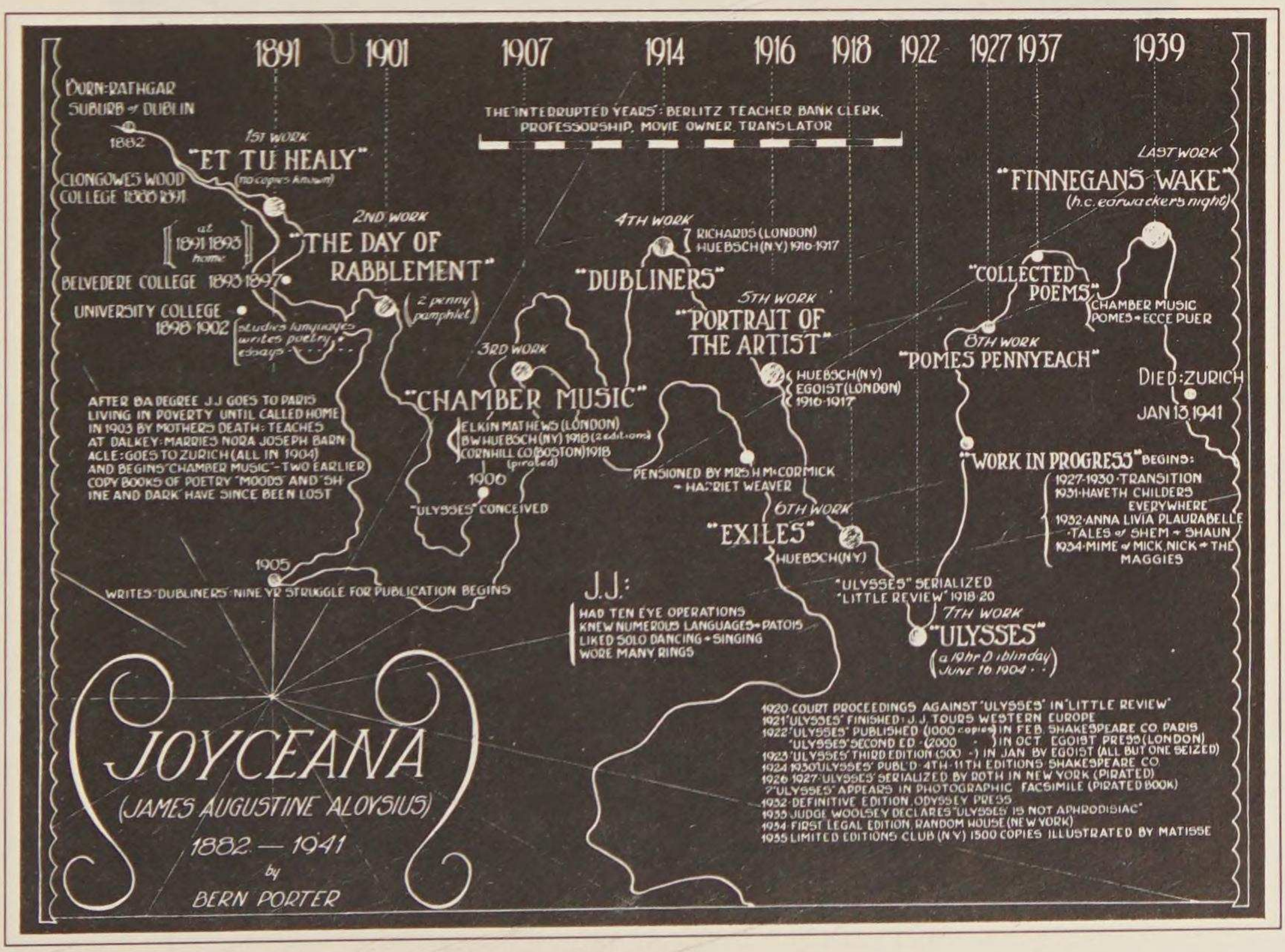


light—polarized light, normal light, no light at all. Also, my work in physics on the separation of uranium, the possibilities of creating unique rhythms and images without a camera, the opportunity to take advantage of darkroom facilities such as I had never had before or since combined to make me produce an incredible amount of work. It was a rich, fruitful period."

For *Circle* he also returned to his earlier interest in maps and created an unusual *Map of Joyceana*. This was a map of James Joyce's life, an attempt to adapt the physical qualities of a map to the main biographical facts of Joyce's career in chronological sequence. Despite several wrong dates and facts, the map showed physically, in a way that is impossible in biographical narrative, the wanderings of Joyce's life that contributed to his revolutionary linguistic explorations.

Another technique Porter experimented with was the map blankout, in which, as the name suggests, sections of maps were covered, leaving only the desired features. Porter thought that this method, and what he called the map cutout, in which portions of maps are cut out and pasted on black backgrounds, would be ideally suited for use in children's art classes. By these means, he thought maps would help children see the relationship between geography

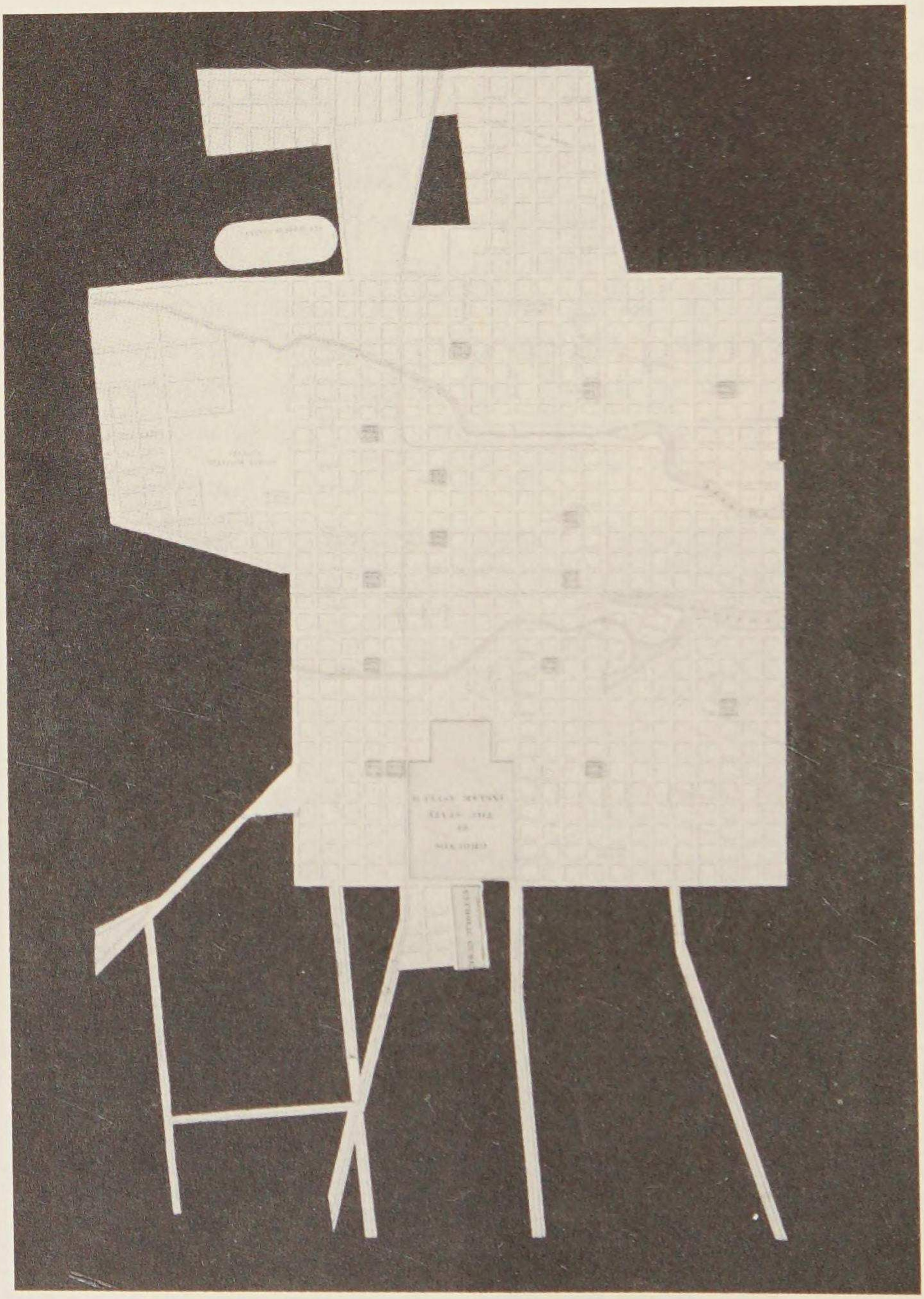
Map of Joyceana



Bern Porter

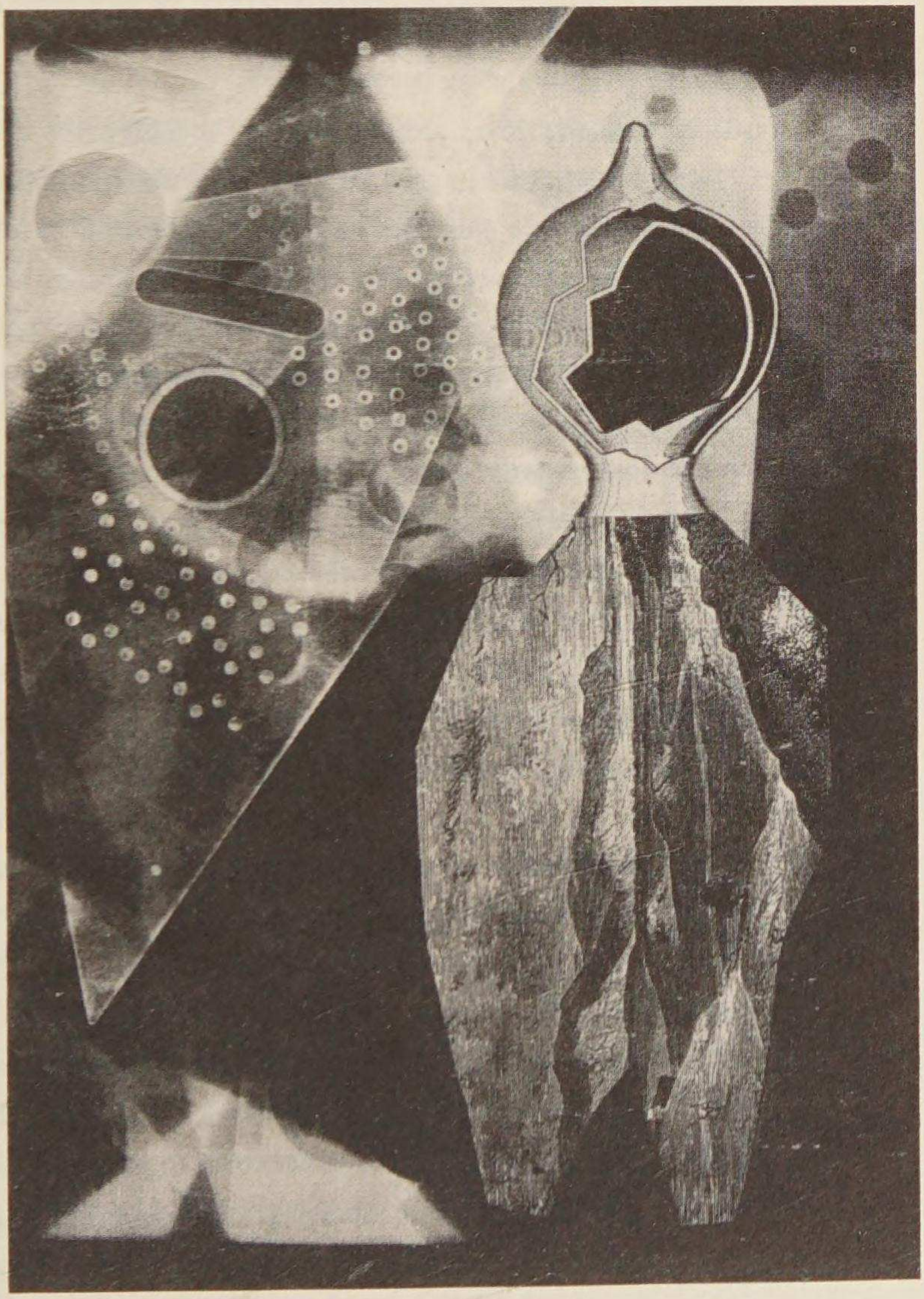
98

Map blank out, *The Inhabitant*



and their imaginations about places. However, when he sent an article about how maps might be used in children's art classes to the editor of an educational art journal, his concept was promptly rejected. Explaining why he produced only three map blankouts and no published cutouts, Porter says doggedly: "I cannot produce unless there is an outlet. Where artists normally discover a convenient personal vehicle, expression, and theme and repeat it without too noticeable variation, my entire credo demands I produce not more than three examples of a given form by a given technique, record it more or less in permanent form as in publication, and go on to another form, another technique. I am thus strictly a discoverer, experimenter, developer, deviser of forms and techniques, applying oftentimes to art the same logical principles of development and

Dream of Arne. Photo collage.



progressive research that I employed in physics. More than three copies of the same thing are to me inexorably dull."

Apparent in this statement is the influence, felt by Porter for many years, of Marcel Duchamp. But Porter's uniqueness as an artist lay in his faith in the union of scientific and artistic techniques. His desire for such a union is particularly evident in a photo-montage, *The Dream of Arne*, that he produced at this time. In this work, Porter's recollection of his grandmother telling him about two great-uncles shouting at each other from neighboring hilltops in Ireland merged with a memory of his college speech professor saying that Bern's voice was like "somebody shouting across the hilltops of northern Maine." Porter gave an account of the evolution of this photo-montage in an unpublished "Note on *The Dream of Arne*," written when he was spending a good deal of time at Cazadero, in the Russian River country north of San Francisco, where he found creative stimulation in the silence of the redwood trees:

> Twenty years after my Colby speech professor's remark, I was living alone in a mountain house in the Russian River country of California among a large collection of picture clippings and illustrations that had intrigued me enough to save but that had no great import, particularly considering the way I had them scattered about. Among them was a zinc reproduction of a seascape from an old geography text, an illustration of a vacuum flask from a physics book, and an unsuccessful photogram made with a transparent celluloid triangle laid over a sensitive film in the darkroom.
>
> If I saw the flask while considering ways to use the clippings in one or several montages, it invariably struck me as an extraordinary head form if inverted; at the same time, the photogram always turned up as a striking background for something, a photo-poem, perhaps a photo-montage, anything, but not necessarily a background for the head. This realization and confirmations of it took three months, or more correctly a few seconds in that long interval of fermentation.
>
> Once, while laying cut-out forms on the photogram, I noticed the circular flask, upside down and placed in the upper right hand corner, counterbalanced by an opening or round form in the lower left. Obviously, the head needed a body, something to tie the two circles together. Of the several means of accomplishing this, however, none automatically proposed themselves then, though by returning to the work from time to time, a process that covered

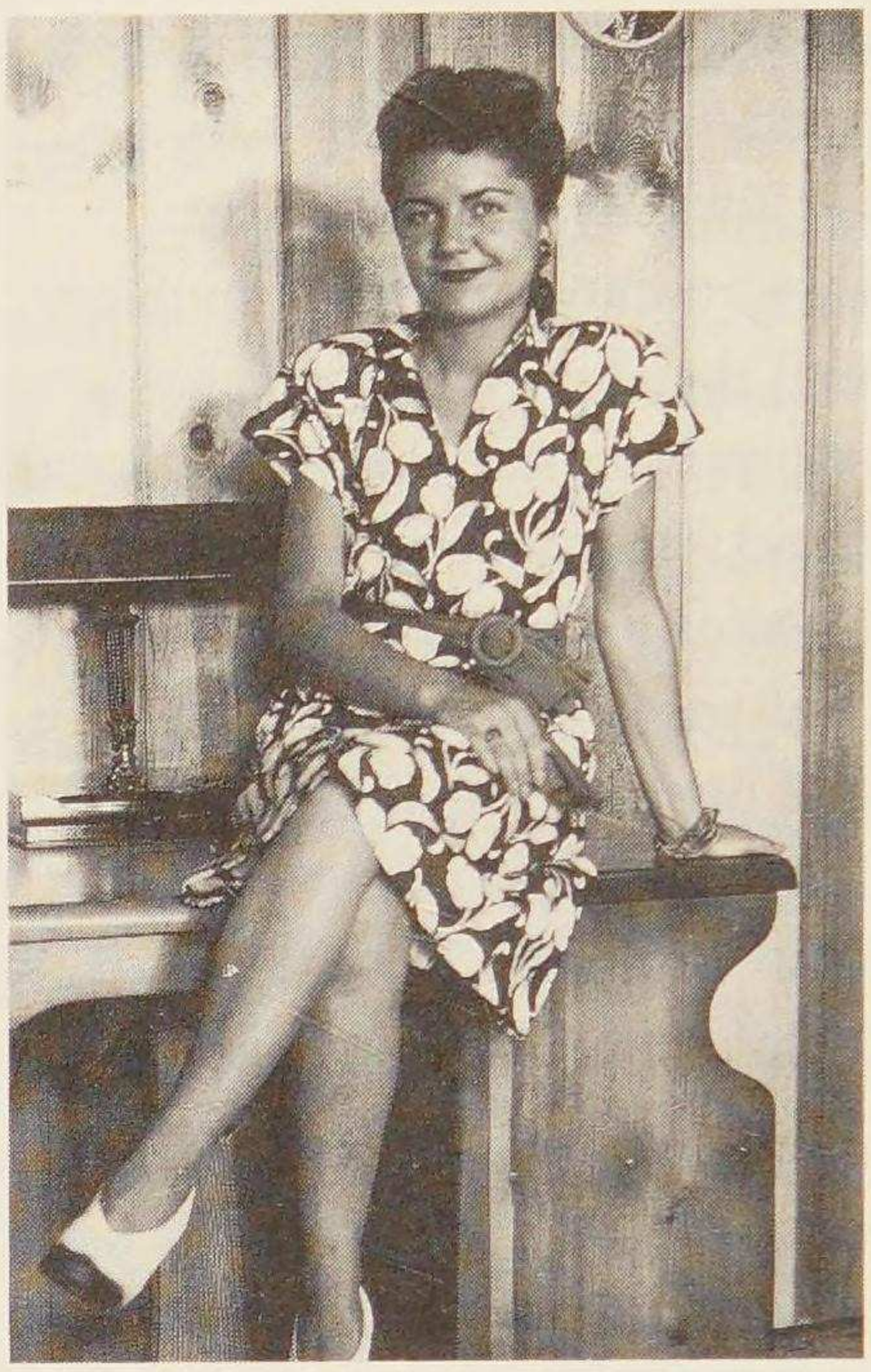
another three months, I visualized many types of connecting forms that were both bodies to the head and balancing elements to the circles. Later, in a surge of creative intensity, a kind of coma wherein there is no hesitation, no uncertainty, no forced thinking, no rational control; a state of relaxed abandonment in which one seems to know without knowing, a psychological state to which one ascends while leaving body, mind, and senses behind, I instantly and in one operation turned the seascape horizontally, clipped it into a body form with shore, hill, and wave lines automatically becoming, as I clipped, the folds and forms of a clownlike suit, placed it under the headform at the upper right and knew the process was for me aesthetically final. Days later in a coldly distracted and mechanical fashion, I glued the head and body to the glossy-faced photogram.

Certainly this is a compelling description of how the unconscious sources of creativity move through conscious technique to a sudden, impulsive solution that is often carried out, as Porter said, "in a coldly distracted and mechanical fashion." Porter said of the work's title, *The Dream of Arne:* "Only now am I fully aware that this creation is another version of my grandmother's story fused with the professor's 20-year-old remark. The word *Arne* appears to me now for the first time as a name, an Irish name, of both the figure and the seacoast village in Ireland where the figure dreamed. But more correctly it was my dream, not Arne's. He is the figure of my great-great-uncle, whose name I never knew, shouting across the hills one sees on his body. His head is all mouth as he shouts. The circles at the upper left are the returning waves of the echo."

Porter seldom explains his work in such detail; he feels strongly that art must exist on its own visual strength or "collapse to zero." He emphasizes, "I doubt if a seemingly detailed explanation can cover most of the complexities involved in the creative process, or is even necessary."

In late 1945 and early 1946, a major contributor to Porter's burst of creative energy was his love affair with an attractive twenty-year-old student and poet at the University of California, Helen Elaine Hendren. She had grown up in Boise, Idaho, where her father was a state employee and her mother a bookkeeper in a furniture store. At the end of the war, with her parents' consent, Helen followed her interest in the arts and her dream of new cultural opportunities and enrolled at the University of California.

102



Porter's first wife, Helen Elaine Hendren.

Porter and Hendren met in the First Congregational Church on Durant Avenue in Berkeley, where there was an active program of cultural events for young people. Porter spoke there several times about his artistic work and his publishing interests and helped arrange exhibits for artist friends such as W. Edwin Ver Becke. Helen and Bern took long walks together through the Berkeley hills. Taking in the view, the hills, the redwood houses overlooking the bay, they could feel the exciting search for a simpler, unified cultural life in spite of the war. The literary influence of John Ruskin and William Morris was still evident in Berkeley, particularly in the work of poet Charles Keeler and the architecture of Bernard Maybeck and his protegé Julia Morgan, the first important woman architect in the United States. The utopian dreams of Ruskin and Morris that were embedded in Bay Area architecture were reflected in the last paragraphs of Keeler's book *The Simple Home*, published in 1904 by Paul Elder & Co., in San Francisco:

> Of all reforms needed in the life of the home, that of the relation of the man to his family is most pressing. Modern materialism demands of far too many men an unworthy sacrifice. That the wife and children may live in ostentation the man must be a slave to business, rushing and jostling with the crowd in the scramble for wealth. A simpler standard of living will give him more time for art and culture, more time for his family, more time to live.
>
> The day is ripe for the general adoption of this idea of the simple home. People are growing weary of shams and are longing for reality. They will never get it till they learn that the ideal is the real, that beauty is truth, and that love is the inspiration for beauty. Let those who would see a higher culture in California, a deeper life, a nobler humanity, work for the adoption of the simple home among all the classes of people, trusting that the inspiration of its

mute walls will be a ceaseless challenge to all who dwell within their shadow, for beauty and character.

Keeler's idealistic vision played out when he died in obscurity in 1937. Yet his utopian/anarchist vision of the ideal as real, of beauty as truth, endured in the architectural and environmental spirit of the Bay Area. Keeler's master, Bernard Maybeck, became famous as the founder of the Bay Area school of architecture, a major cause of the postwar artistic renewal in which Helen Hendren and Porter found themselves excited participants. Indeed, without the architects and artists who flourished in the Bay Area with the educational aid of the G.I. Bill of Rights, the cultural surge that engulfed Porter and Hendren would not have happened. For Porter, it was the architectural climate in particular that fostered his churning ideas about the relationship of science and art.

At first Hendren was attracted by Porter as an older, more mature man, a scientist who had transformed himself into the leading avant-garde publisher in the Bay Area. It was the local poetry scene, however, that brought them close together. After Miller, Porter, favoring his surrealist, mystical inclinations, had published poetry by Parker Tyler, Philip Lamantia, and Kenneth Patchen. Consequently, young poets began sending Porter manuscripts, which Hendren helped him review. Together they attended poetry readings and gatherings, on and off campus. At these meetings, amidst the passionate arguments of prominent student poets staking out positions, Porter was an older, "tangential, secret" presence, as one of the most prominent student poets, Leonard Wolf, called him. On Friday nights in their home, Wolf and his wife Patricia, a friend of Hendren's, held poetry readings and discussions, where other student poets such as Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser read their work. Influenced by Hendren, Porter agreed to publish the first books of Wolf and Duncan, *Hamadryad Hunted* and *Heavenly City, Earthly City*.

The Bay Area's "Mother Superior," as Wolf called her, was poet and critic Josephine Miles, with whom Hendren was studying. Crippled from childhood by rheumatoid arthritis, Miles could only shuffle on level ground and required a helper to get her to and from classes and social engagements. Miles lived with her mother, an indomitable woman trained in psychology and social welfare at the University of Chicago in the spirit of John Dewey's experimental, pragmatic ideas. As a child, Josephine had been taken on all family outings and treated normally despite her crippling disease. When

the family went swimming, they placed her in a rubber tube and let her float freely. Walking in the woods, the family would prop her against a tree and leave her alone briefly to contemplate nature and gain a sense of independence. During her doctoral studies, Miles was told that she could never become a professor because of her arthritis. That skepticism only strengthened her determination to teach. Her courage and warmth brought a constant flow of visitors to her house. She was particularly close to her students, such as Helen Hendren.

Amidst her studies and his publishing activities, Helen and Bern watched with fascination the literary ferment and poetic battles that raged in the Bay Area. Miles was a major catalyst in those battles as students Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and Robin Blaser sought to set themselves apart from her influence and establish their own group. In an old Victorian house on Telegraph Avenue, they held a series of classes in which Duncan lectured, in his euphoric way, particularly about poet Ezra Pound, hypnotizing listeners. Because Duncan, Spicer, and Blaser were openly proud homosexuals ("It was the first time I ever saw homosexual activity," Porter says), their group played a key role in the development of the Bay Area gay community during the social struggles of the 1960s. In 1946, Mark Schorer, the fiction writer and critic whose popular courses in modern literature attracted many students including Hendren, published his book *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*. This book stirred up strong interest in literary circles as it examined Blake's occult as well as political interests stemming from the French Revolution.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, in his Steiner Street home lined with books and his paintings, Kenneth Rexroth held forth to anyone (and Porter was one) who cared to visit his Libertarian Circle meetings and readings and share his anarchist views. Opposed to Duncan's fervent support of Pound, Rexroth praised William Carlos Williams, whose *Paterson: Volume I* was published in 1946. This long poem influenced a whole new generation of poets to search for their American roots and created a belief in a subjective American tone with its own sound distinct from Pound's and Eliot's objective, international voices. Porter became interested, too, in Rexroth's poetry, which he admired for its emphasis on nature and the environmental movement then growing in the Bay Area. In time, Porter published Rexroth, too.

Attending literary activities, Porter and Hendren grew closer and decided to marry. The wedding took place in the First Congre-

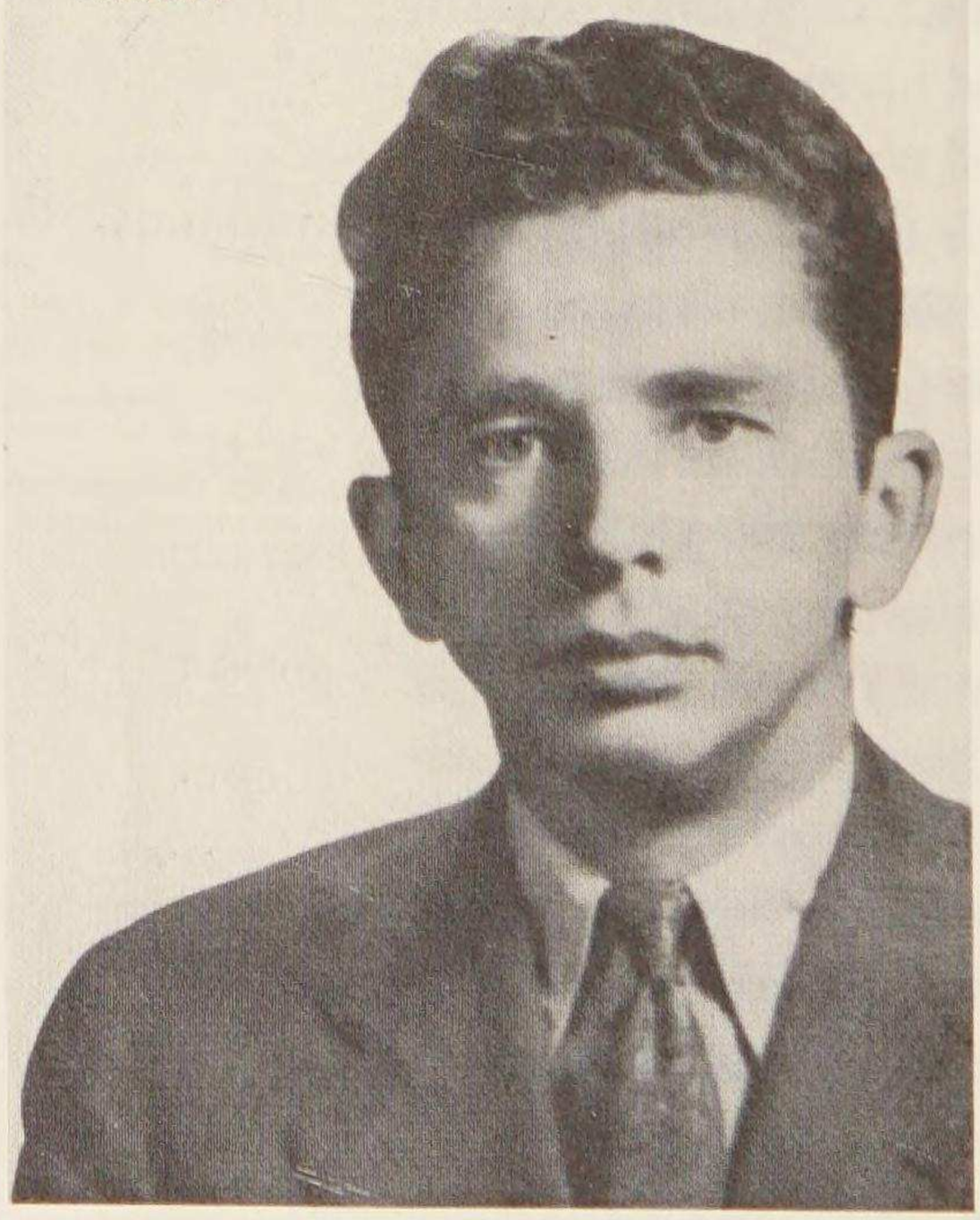
gational Church in Berkeley on February 21, 1946, with only Helen's parents from Boise and Leonard Wolf and his wife attending. The Porters spent their honeymoon and the early spring months in Cazadero before moving back to Berkeley. The difficulties of the marriage became apparent immediately. Porter was thirty-seven years old, a virgin who still harbored puritanical restraints about sex from his New England background and feelings of guilt about his unfulfilled relationship with Dorris Moore. Hendren, also a virgin, found it impossible to bridge the age gap. She romanticized Porter's position as a publisher. After their return from Cazadero, Porter moved into her apartment on Durant Avenue, where it soon became apparent that Porter's publishing interests could never support them. She tried to help him sell his books through a pay-in-advance program that he conceived for new titles. Pushing this program, Helen solicited friends in Idaho and the Bay Area and even walked door to door in Berkeley trying to sell her husband's books. She raised a good deal of money, which Porter poured into mailing costs and printers' bills. After a few months, she became upset with Porter's demanding bachelor habits and his preference for spending their money on publishing rather than on food or a car. When she took Porter on his first visit to Boise to see her parents, Helen gathered vegetables from her parents' garden and arranged for them to be canned, intending to bring the food back to Berkeley. Later, in her divorce suit, she claimed that Porter was so obsessed with his own pursuits that he wouldn't pay the costs of the canning. When their relationship became impossible, she left him. Her romantic view of publishing had been challenged by hard financial realities and Porter's impractical ways. She wanted Porter to publish Yeats and Kenneth Rexroth's *Signature of All Things*, but Yeats already had a publisher, and Rexroth was connected with New Directions. Jordan Belson, a friend of Hendren's who painted her portrait, gave Porter a chance to publish William Burrough's *Junkie*. Porter, to his later regret, declined. During the Berkeley years, Porter had earned a reputation as an important new publisher with money to expand, but Hendren discovered he had no money in reserve.

"When I left scientific research for publishing," Porter says, "people thought I had considerable financial backing or unlimited personal funds or both. This idea persisted in all I did during the next five years. The truth was that I had neither, that all I undertook was at a financial loss, that what I had saved was gone by the end of the third year, that one of the factors in the breakup of my

own home was the lack of food to eat and necessities of clothing, etc., for my wife, who certainly deserved more but could not subsist under the conditions that had been my lot from early boyhood. It was easy for me to go without physical amenities in favor of things I believed in. Thus, I published books and went without a decent home in the same manner I obtained an education and went without sufficient food. During the five-year period that I spent almost exclusively on publishing and related artistic activities after the University of California, I partially subsidized many creative people, produced many creative films, postcards, folios, books, exhibitions, etc., for others but never received any monetary aid from anyone to continue the work. I probably needed none, for the satisfactions were great, but at the same time the results were disastrous."

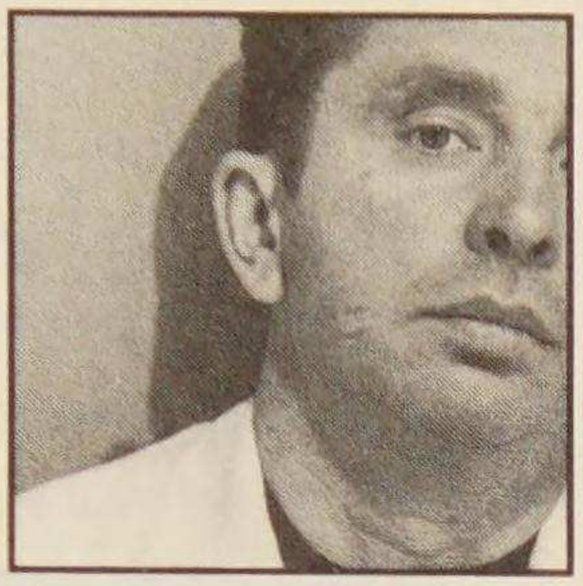
Porter's confidence in his untested sexuality, his desire to break out of his isolation and achieve the marriage for which he longed, were badly damaged by his divorce from Helen. Yet, his first important collection of his own work, *Art Techniques*, and a key pamphlet revealing the beliefs that would guide all of his future work, *The Union of Science and Art*, both published after their divorce, were dedicated to his wife. He could not forget her and the promise of love that she offered. What saved him was the creative energy that he had experienced in Berkeley and Cazadero and his desire to fulfill some of his publishing goals. In the hope of starting a new life and finding a way out of his depression, Porter moved from Berkeley to the Marin County town of Sausalito, just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco.

BERN PORTER
commentator
on contemporary
culture



Cover photograph for self-promotional piece, 1946.

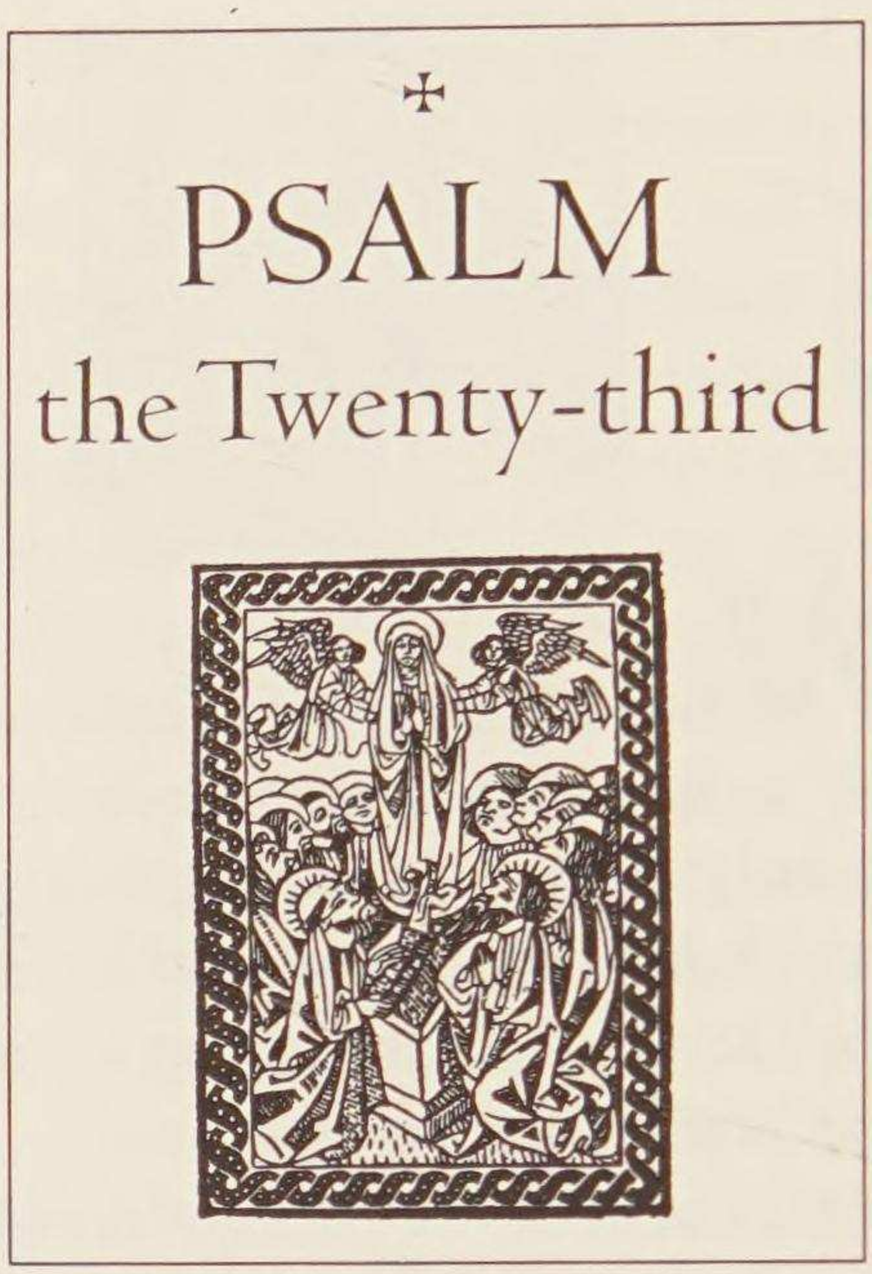
9 Sausalito



When I first met Porter in 1947 in his wife's apartment on Durant Avenue in Berkeley, they were close to separating, and I didn't know it. In retrospect, their impending separation accounts for their reserve amidst the tumultuous student life that ruled the streets outside near the main entrance of the University of California. A watercolor of Henry Miller's with an inscription to Porter hung on the wall. Porter's own work was conspicuously absent. He has never displayed his work prominently at home the way some artists do. The only signs of Porter's artistic interests were several well-designed books that he had published lying around, and a curious heap of magazine clippings on a table. This was my first acquaintance with Porter's habit of collecting materials that he would later incorporate in his Founds. Piles of clippings were a constant in subsequent visits to Porter over the years. Strewn on desks and shelves and hidden in unexpected places, these piles were the work of an obsessive collector of American images.

In person, Porter reminded me of a picture of the Ameri-

108



Cover of *Psalm the Twenty-third*, privately published by Porter in 1947.

can painter Charles Demuth. He dressed in an unusual style as if he were trying to create a revolution against conventional modern clothes. In Berkeley he might wear an old black suit with tight pants and a stiff white collar and tie over a brightly colored shirt. Above his thin face, which revealed the tension of asthma flare-ups, perched a bowler hat. Later in Sausalito, after his separation from Helen, he reverted to more casual yet still striking attire. Often he would affect a red lumberjack's shirt, open at the neck, sometimes with blue striped pants and the same bowler hat. At home in Sausalito, he would relax in more conventional California dress, a sport shirt and slacks, but the shirt was always distinctive in color or design.

During his first month in Sausalito, suffering from depression, he was sheltered by a friend, the poet and painter W. Edwin Ver Becke, who tried to make him eat when he saw that Porter was ignoring food in more than his usual careless way. In his distress, Porter returned to his early religious tendencies and began to participate in the activities of an evangelical group. More for himself than for any public, he published a beautifully printed edition of the Twenty-third Psalm with its hope of release from anguish: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Early in 1948, struggling to escape his despair and isolation, he established Schillerhaus, a Creative Center, on the hill in Hurricane Gulch in Sausalito. The building was supposedly a copy of one in which the poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller had lived in Germany, and Schiller's name appeared in a hand-carved scroll over the door to Porter's two small rooms off the garden. The living room he used for an art gallery, but as he said: "The word *Schillerhaus* meant to me a house of creative thought, not a school or forum, wherein the many who came there, exchanged notes on design, poems, art forms, and life." In the gallery, he exhibited the

paintings of Richard Diebenkorn, Jordan Belson, and Lawrence Calcagno and arranged informal meetings with such lecturers as Jo Sinel, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, and Haakon Chevalier. Lacking the impulse to new creative work, he felt the necessity of bringing together his ideas and published in 1948 *The Union of Science and Art*, which he later called the *Sciart Manifesto*. This key document in Porter's career needs to be quoted in full, incorporating changes Porter made in Japan in 1954:

SCIART MANIFESTO

Finite worlds of infinite reality and beauty revealed by the tools and discoveries of Science are ripe for aesthetic development.

1. Of light, besides the commonly employed natural and artificial, there is the polarized, the radiating chemical, mineral and radioactive types along with x-ray, cosmic and nuclear-particle beams with all related electro-optical phenomena.

2. Of other vibrations, there are the natural, the mechanical oscillatory, resonant and supersonic sound, the entire frequency range of electrical and thermal waves.

At Schillerhaus, 1950. Photo by Harry Bowden.



3. Of movement, there is mechanical and electrical acceleration to light speeds; nuclear, gravitational and magnetic interactions, the mechanics of flow and change in matter.

4. Of phenomena, there is hysteresis, electrolysis, isotopy, relativity, entropy, et cetera; of devices there is no end: cyclotrons, stroboscopes, cynometers, spectroscopes, cloud chambers, tonometers, diffraction gratings, x-ray tubes, electron microscopes, et cetera; likewise phases of Science e.g. meteorology, hydrostatics, crystallography, histology, aero-dynamics, astrophysics, metallurgy, et cetera.

From such as these, their similar related effects, the manifold variants they suggest, stem the heretofore unrealized textures, patterns, forms, devices and techniques comprising SCIART.

The depiction of these individual materials by conventional methods forges new reality particularly when expressed on non-rectilinear shapes having other than plane surfaces and with media not normally employed in art.

Such combinations as photography and art (photograms), topography and portraiture (map blank-outs), photography and poetry (photo-poems), calculus and sculpture (math-forms), drawing and poetry (poemscopes, poster poems), biology and art (bone sculpture, painting), and aerial photography, geology, biology and painting (dyneton, amorphous, spiritism and non-rectilinear art) suggest the already fertile potential auguring continued exploitation.
1939-1948

In this piece, Porter issued his major statement about the aesthetic possibilities of science. It makes a deliberate, optimistic, Emersonian claim that art must counteract the destructive possibilities of science exposed at the end of World War II. Years later, in the 1990s, the validity of Porter's message has become apparent as artists, photographers, sculptors, musicians, and writers experiment with new techniques and structures derived from scientific research.

The few who read the original *Manifesto* (Porter published only ninety-two copies) reacted with a mixture of skepticism and admiration. Some objected to the deliberately clipped, minimal style. Skeptics stated that Porter's beliefs were hardly new. Leonardo da Vinci, who perhaps more than anyone else argued for the essential unity of the scientific and artistic imaginations, wrote in his notebooks that "A painter has two chief objects to paint—man and the intention of his soul." After World War I, the Dadaists

exhibited ready-made industrial objects as substitutes for art. The Futurists and Constructivists proclaimed their allegiance to the spirit of the machine. Was there anything really new in the *Sciart Manifesto*? Porter's statement addressed the new age of atomic energy, incorporating his scientific background into his artistic experiences. By contrast, the Dadaists, Futurists, and Constructivists had little training in science. They expressed an intuitive belief in the creative acceptance of technological possibilities. Porter saw deeper into the aesthetic developments that might derive from the new knowledge of light, microscopic structures, and hitherto invisible forms of movement. His *Sciart Manifesto* suggested that the highly specialized techniques and formulas of the modern laboratory should be available to the artist and warned of the dangers of allowing science and art to continue developing separately.

Porter sent copies of his *Manifesto* to influential people in the arts and to key libraries, including the Frick Art Reference Library, the New York Public Museum Library, the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the library of the University of California at Los Angeles. Outside of the last-named depository, which began a large Porter collection because of the interest of li-

Title page of *Art Techniques*, 1947.

photographs
pressograms
photo poems
photo covers
page layouts
m a p s
j a c k e t s
c o v e r s
map blankouts
map cutouts
poster poems
f o l d e r s
bone sculpture
p o r t r a i t s
t o y s
all for helen

ART TECHNIQUES

bern porter

THE GILLICK PRESS · BERKELEY

brarian Lawrence Clark Powell, there were only formal acknowledgments and few signs of interest. Representatives of prominent magazines, such as those in the San Francisco offices of *Time*, to whom Porter showed the pamphlet, commented favorably but confessed that they didn't understand the statement. It remained for a handful of designers and critics to see the implications of the *Manifesto*. Among these were designers Alvin Lustig and Paul Rand, who stated that designers in the future would have to deal with Porter's concepts. Perhaps the most important recognition of Porter's achievement came from the distinguished British poet and art critic Sir Herbert Read, who wrote, "No significant art can evolve without roots in this statement."

Some of Sciart's potential, as Porter points out, has begun to be realized. Christian Schad, Man Ray, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy developed photogram techniques, while Porter himself was among the first to employ new methods of polarized light and x-rays, and in his 1947 book A*rt Techniques* described other artistic experiments derived from his scientific research. In the 1950s, in a musical score for Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* produced at Mills College, the composer Harry Partch used cloud chamber parts for uncanny sounds in his small orchestra of instruments that he designed specifically for his own music. Also in the 1950s, the inventor Buckminster Fuller, whom Porter admired, revealed in his geodesic domes the remarkable aesthetic beauty that can reside in scientific imagination.

The same decade brought further evidence of the accuracy of Porter's predictions. In 1955, Simon and Schuster published *Art in Science—A Portfolio of 32 Paintings, Drawings and Photographs from the Scientific American* (introduction by Gyorgy Kepes), an anthology of artwork employing many of the techniques prophesied by Porter. Museums throughout the country exhibited artist-scientist Ben F. Laposky's designs, created by means of electronic impulses beamed and fixed as photographs on the screen of an oscilloscope. Porter's friend, the painter Richard Bowman, who exhibited frequently at Porter's galleries in Sausalito, made a unique oil adaptation of Porter's photo Crucifixi*on of the Virgin* in 1949 and based many of his subsequent paintings on photomicrographs and aerial photos obtained from commercial research laboratories. Early in 1956, Bowman's show "Science and Art" at the Stanford University Memorial Art Gallery, outlined the potential of Sciart with a pamphlet containing the text of the M*anifesto* and commentaries by both Bowman and Porter.



BERKELEY

a journal of modern culture

NUMBER TWO

TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

In This Issue...

E. E. CUMMINGS
JEAN PAUL SARTRE
HOWARD O'HAGAN
PAUL ELUARD
DONALD WEEKS
JOHN GOULD FLETCHER
MEADE HARWELL
CHAUNCEY S. GOODRICH
DAVID CORNEL DeJONG

WHITE LILY—MOBILE, 1945—*Alexander Calder*
Collection, St. Louis Museum

MOBILES BY JEAN PAUL SARTRE

If sculpture is the art of carving movement in a motionless mass, it would be wrong to call Calder's art sculpture. He does not aim to suggest movement by imprisoning it in noble but inert substances like bronze or gold, where it would be doomed forever to immobility: he lures it into being, by the use of unstable and base materials, building strange constructions of bits of bone, tin or zinc, of stems and palm-leaves, of disks, feathers and petals. They are sometimes resonators, often booby-traps; they hang on the end of a thread like spiders, or perhaps squat stolidly on a pedestal, crumpled up and seemingly asleep. But let a passing draft of cool air strike them, they absorb it, give it form, spring to life: a mobile is born!

A mobile, one might say, is a little private celebration, an object defined by its movement and having no other existence. It is a flower that fades when it ceases to move, a "pure play of movement" in the sense that we speak of a pure play of light. I possess a bird of paradise with iron wings. It needs only to be touched by a breath of warm air: the bird ruffles up with a jingling sound, rises, spreads its tail, shakes its crested head, executes a dance step, and then, as if obeying a command, makes a complete about-turn with wings outspread.

But most of Calder's constructions are not imitative of nature; I know no less deceptive art than his. Sculpture suggests movement, painting suggests depth or light. A mobile does not "suggest" anything: it captures genuine living movements and shapes them. Mobiles have no meaning, make you think of nothing but themselves. They are, that is all; they are absolutes. There is more of the unpredictable about them than in any other human creation. No human brain, not even their creator's, could possibly foresee all the complex combinations of which they are capable. A general destiny of movement is sketched for them, and then they are left to work it out for themselves. What they may do at a given moment will be determined by the time of day, the sun, the temperature or the wind. The object is thus always half way between the servility of a statue and the independence of natural events; each of its evolutions is the inspiration of a moment. It may be possible to discern the composer's theme, but the mechanism itself introduces a thousand personal variations. It is a fleeting snatch of swing music, evanescent as the sky or the morning: if you miss it, you have lost it forever. Valery said of the sea that it is a perpetual recommencement. A mobile is in this way like the sea, and is equally enchanting: forever rebeginning, forever new. No use throwing it a passing glance, you must live with it and be fascinated by it. Then and only then will you feel the beauty of its pure and changing forms, at once so free and so disciplined.

It may seem that these movements are made only for the delight of our eyes, but they have a profound metaphysical sense. Mobiles have to draw their mobility from some source. At first they were equipped with electric motors, but now it suffices to place them in the midst of nature, in a garden, for example, or an open window, and let the breezes play with them as with an Aeolian harp. They feed on air, they breathe, they borrow life from the vague life of the atmosphere. Thus their mobility is of a particular kind.

Though made with human hands, they never have the precision and efficiency of Vaucanson's automaton. But the charm of the automaton is that it waves a fan or strums a guitar like a man, though with the inflexible jerkiness of a machine. The mobile, on the other hand, wavers uncertainly, hesitates and at times appears to begin its movement anew, as if it had caught itself in a mistake. Yet the motions are too artfully composed to be compared to those of a marble rolling on a rough board, when each change of direction is determined by the asperities of the surface.

I was talking with Calder one day in his studio when suddenly a mobile beside me, which until then had been quiet, became violently agitated. I stepped quickly back, thinking to be out of its reach. But then, when the agitation had ceased and it appeared to have relapsed into quiescence, its long, majestic tail, which until then had not budged, began mournfully to wave and, sweeping through the air, brushed across my face. These hesitations, resumptions, gropings, clumsinesses, the sudden decisions and above all that swan-like grace make of certain mobiles very strange creatures indeed, something midway between matter and life. At moments they seem endowed with an intention; a moment later they appear to have forgotten what they intended to do, and finish by merely swaying inanely. My bird, for instance, can fly, swim, float like a swan or a frigate. It is one bird, single and whole. Then of a sudden it goes to pieces and is nothing but a bunch of metal rods shaken by meaningless quiverings.

(Continued Page 2)

CONCERNING ART

By E. E. CUMMINGS

Like many, the undersigned was found to write spontaneously or pictures before finding oneself compelled to draw or words: unlike some who are threatened with knowledge, he encouraged himself by to be. While the portraiture progressed—while a painfully hand achieved likenesses of polysyllabic sitters, the gradually fingers overcame perspective, his clumsily wrist contrived verses—child spinning on a point of chalk emits boy who rides the squirmings of a crayon, legarms begin inhabiting bodies who are not faces, sidewalks cohabit with notebooks and joyously always writing continues

—for once-upon-a-time read, neither life nor living, but originally infinitive cooling through participle into compulsion; therefore once-upon-a-now equals "art". When to live is. For Con Colleano (distinct, teetering on his silver thread, poietes, breathing, measuring with least gestures the air most which creates self) arrives this When: quickly the entire man smiles and falls abundantly upward to with both soles strike actually just the bright wire—desperately to hover, gigantically juggling a thousand unvisible nodes curves terrors—and, resume; frowning: safety. An author of pictures, a draughtsman of words, became the not "forward" but inward "somersault from feet to feet" and his distinguished audience (J. S. Watson, Jr. and Scofield Thayer) understood; hearing such paintings, seeing such poems, mutually to be alive.

By notable contrast: undertaking society of "Independents" patiently extended if not prophetically courtesy of parlors; prophetically Mr. (promptly dying) Hamilton Easter Field if impatiently called "sound number 1", or perhaps it was "noise", hardly the sort of thing one (or perhaps it was you) would care to live with; Salons of politely America Inc c/o Anderson Galleries Inc, 30 East 57th Street, New York City, tactfully could not q-u-i-t-e hang a canvas whose facsimile occurs page 53 (O tempora, o crines)!

persianly poemprinter predicated picturebook

from JOPW, a book of reproductions of drawings and paintings in charcoal ink oil pencil watercolour, published by Covici-Friedz, New York, 1931

(Continued Page 2)

SELF PORTRAIT—*E. E. Cummings*
Collection, John Rogers Jr.

Cover for second issue of *Berkeley*.

As we became better acquainted during the years from 1947 to 1950, I became editor and Porter publisher of a magazine, *Berkeley: A Journal of Modern Culture*. Our intention, as we meant the admittedly vague word *culture* to imply, was to strike out in the direction of a unity of the arts rather than fight the artistic and critical specialization that prevailed in other magazines. We wanted to establish a broader view of the interrelationship of art and science in the general culture. Also, we decided on a different kind of format. *Berkeley* was published in eight pages in tabloid form, but on good paper. The great advantage, of course, was in reduced printing costs, although the layout was also unusual and tied in well with the wide range of our interests. Although we could not pay contributors, by luck and persistence we were able to get many unusual features. The first issue included unpublished letters of Sherwood Anderson, an article on theater by Robert Edmond Jones, a lecture on architecture by Frank Lloyd Wright, and a section from Yvan

Goll's surrealistic *Lucifer and the Microbe*, translated by Frank Jones. In subsequent issues we stressed unknown talents as well as work by major figures. We were fortunate to present a chapter of Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's biography of her husband and such creative articles as "Still Photography" by Clarence John Laughlin, "Photogenic Reflections" by Man Ray, "Alexander Calder" by Jean Paul Sartre, "Mies Van Der Rohe" by Carter H. Manny, Jr., "The American Community" by philosopher Charles W. Hendel, an article on the Mexican artist Gunther Gerzo by Wolfgang Paalen, "On Writing My Memoirs" by composer Ernst Krenek, as well as works by many poets and fiction writers. After starting *Berkeley*, we were joined by two capable editors, Jane Hohfeld and Jean Partridge. The magazine lasted for two-and-a-half years and ten issues, until we suspended publication partly because running such a journal interfered with our own creative work and partly because of distribution problems. No big distributor, of course, would handle our publication because they were geared to popular, national magazines. Many of the bookstores around the country that did take copies either seemed to go bankrupt (we received regular invitations to appear in bankruptcy courts to push our meager claims) or did not answer our bills for the few copies we had sent.

This inability to collect money deepened Porter's skepticism about the publishing business. Frequently he complained to me in his unique, sarcastic tone: "So I called up this guy, and he said how sorry he was he couldn't see me, he had just broken his right leg. Then, half an hour later, I happened to run into him downtown and, very gently, brought up the humiliating subject of money. So he looks at me with surprise as though I had mentioned a nasty word and tells me this is Monday. On Monday it's all right to talk about home, family, children, God, the weather, but not money. Come back Wednesday, he says, and I'll be glad to talk to you about the book or the commission on the painting you sold. But this is Monday."

Once when I asked Porter why he wasted money publishing books from which he could never make any profit, his customary ironic edge took on a deeper note: "From the money angle, it is useful to deduct what I pay from income tax. If I have to choose between paying money to the government or the few creative things I do, I take the latter." Porter's dogged commitment to the arts in spite of constant frustrations was brought home to me one Sunday evening in Sausalito. Without pay, Porter was hosting a fifteen-

minute program for a local radio station on which he interviewed artists and writers. On this particular evening, I was his guest.

The station was located on top of a hill, high above Sausalito. A severe storm had blown in, and rain was pounding down. Porter and I drove up together in my battered 1936 Chevrolet coupe, visibility close to zero. When we reached the station, we saw a frantic attendant placing cans and pots on the floor to catch the water streaming through the ceiling. The music being broadcast was the end of *Don Giovanni*, when the Statue summons the Don to Hell, an appropriately ominous selection, considering the weather. We completed the brief interview and were inching

Contemporary Gallery, Sausalito, 1947. Photography by Hansen-Petaja.



our way down the winding dirt road when my car slipped into a ditch. Porter slogged off through the mud to phone for help, while I reflected on his persistence in enduring the difficulties of his radio program. The station claimed it had only a small audience and would soon drop Porter. Yet he was always trying to promote the work of creative people despite the lack of money and the general indifference that greeted his projects.

At his home in Schillerhaus and at The Contemporary Gallery, which he founded and developed during 1949 and 1950, Porter continued to encourage experimental work. Located in an old house on the Sausalito waterfront, The Contemporary Gallery became the center of his activities. Bay Area artists no longer believed that New York was the capital of American art; throughout the country, decentralization was the trend. Clyfford Still arrived in San Francisco to teach at the Institute of Fine Arts, where he stimulated eager discussions about the new abstract painting that was dominating the artistic scene. Financially, Porter found himself in a peculiar position. Although the climate seemed ripe for artistic development, wealthy collectors still bought mainly from New York or, occasionally, through Los Angeles dealers. Also, Porter's small gallery in Sausalito tended to be ignored by reviewers, who covered mainly the bigger San Francisco galleries and museums. So it was impossible for him to make an adequate living even for his modest needs, let alone for his publishing dreams. Still, his commitment never flagged. With tireless enthusiasm he promoted the work of a gifted group of painters who were becoming known as the West Coast Abstract-Expressionists. In addition to exhibiting their work, he also published a portfolio of the drawings of Richard Diebenkorn, Frank Lobdell, Walter Kuhlman, and John Hultberg.

The power of these artists was in the way they attacked the canvas. Like the Expressionists after World War I, they wanted to convey the emotional and social transformations resulting from their war experiences. Their canvases grew larger and larger as if a living room could no longer contain the spatial relationships illuminated by the war. They used paint with colorful, dramatic effects as though representational forms and faces could no longer depict the inner traumas, the new technological world in which man was becoming a cipher.

All of these artists achieved distinguished reputations. By 1955 both Hultberg and Diebenkorn were featured in an international exhibit of young artists at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome. Diebenkorn went on to become internationally fa-

mous for his California landscape abstractions reflecting the strong influence of aerial photography. Other young abstract painters whose work Porter showed were Sam Francis, who later achieved an international reputation after his work won the praise of the influential French critic Georges Duthuit; and Hassel Smith, whom many painters and collectors praise as one of the leading pioneers in the Western Abstract-Expressionist movement but whose work still has not achieved the recognition it deserves. With his acute eye, Porter wanted to show other young Bay Area artists such as Bruce Connor and Jess, the longtime housemate and companion of poet Robert Duncan, but he could not persuade these two artists that it would be worthwhile to show in Sausalito.

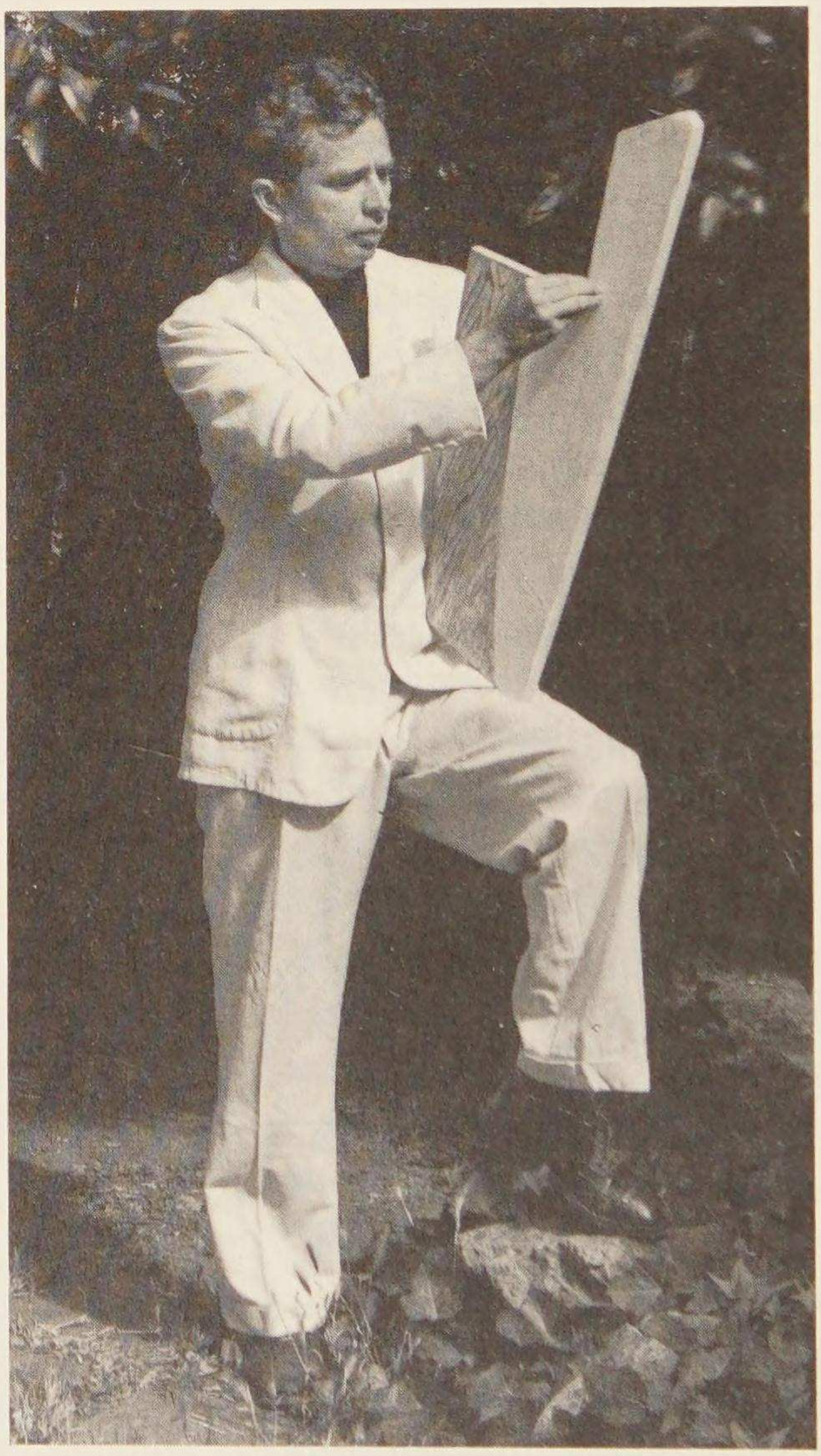
Other Bay Area artists and sculptors whom Porter exhibited and who became well known in California art circles included Harry Bowden, Lawrence Calcagno, Jean Varda, Adaline Kent, Keith Monroe, Edward Corbett, and Richard Bowman. As with Schillerhaus, Porter tried to make his Contemporary Gallery a cultural center. He showed experimental films, particularly those of Frank Stauffacher, and collaborated with Stauffacher on some of his film projects. He sponsored lectures, poetry readings, music recitals, and art classes for children and adults. The French Consulate in San Francisco often arranged with Porter for visiting French artists and critics to appear at the Contemporary Gallery. Despite small audiences, Porter never deviated from his policy of backing new talents. As gallery director he was exposed to pressure from all sides, from conservative artists who complained that he didn't appreciate their work, from pseudo-Bohemians who demanded that he get patrons for them, and from reactionary townspeople who thought that something queer was going on at the gallery.

On April 8, 1950, *The San Rafael Independent Journal* quoted Porter: "Sure, I'm mixed up, but no more than anybody else these days." It was a typically defiant statement aimed at complacent citizens who scorned or ignored his activities. The only thing that kept Porter struggling was an old Scottish tenet. He wrote to a college friend, "The Scots have a saying, 'The purpose of life is to praise God and enjoy his creation.' One cannot perform these functions without first setting his inner house in order, making gifts for his enemies and converting those with whom he comes in contact. So released, the blessings one receives are beyond measure."

In his new role as cultural entrepreneur, Porter found himself both frustrated by public apathy and his inability to sell paintings, and exhilarated by the amount of artistic activity that he dis-

covered. In retrospect, with Marin County now burgeoning with artists, Porter was a pioneer in the area's artistic evolution. Not only did he help spread the ideas behind Abstract-Expressionism—ideas that would manifest themselves in the fame of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko in New York in the 1950s—but he was proving to himself the importance of his vision of unifying science and art in the postwar world.

In this spirit of creative unity, while directing the Contemporary Gallery, Porter designed a unique World War II memorial for Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. During the war, this island had been used as an immigration center; now the government had released it, and there was much public debate about its future. Civic leaders suggested setting aside the southern part of the island for a distinctive memorial to those who had sacrificed their lives in the war. Disgusted by some of the traditional, imitative sculptures that were first proposed, Porter sketched his own plan, which he called the "Church of Light." A circular road was to spiral halfway up the island's conical peak from the bay, affording spectacular views in all directions. The visitor would then walk the short, remaining distance to "The Great Hall," a large, circular structure two hundred feet in diameter, built around the crest of the mountain, with the mountain peak projecting majestically through the center of the hall. Inside the hall, while visitors walked around the peak, glass walls allowed them to look out over the bay in all directions. The inside walls were to be decorated with mosaics or murals by the Abstract-Expressionist painters whom Porter had exhibited—Hultberg,

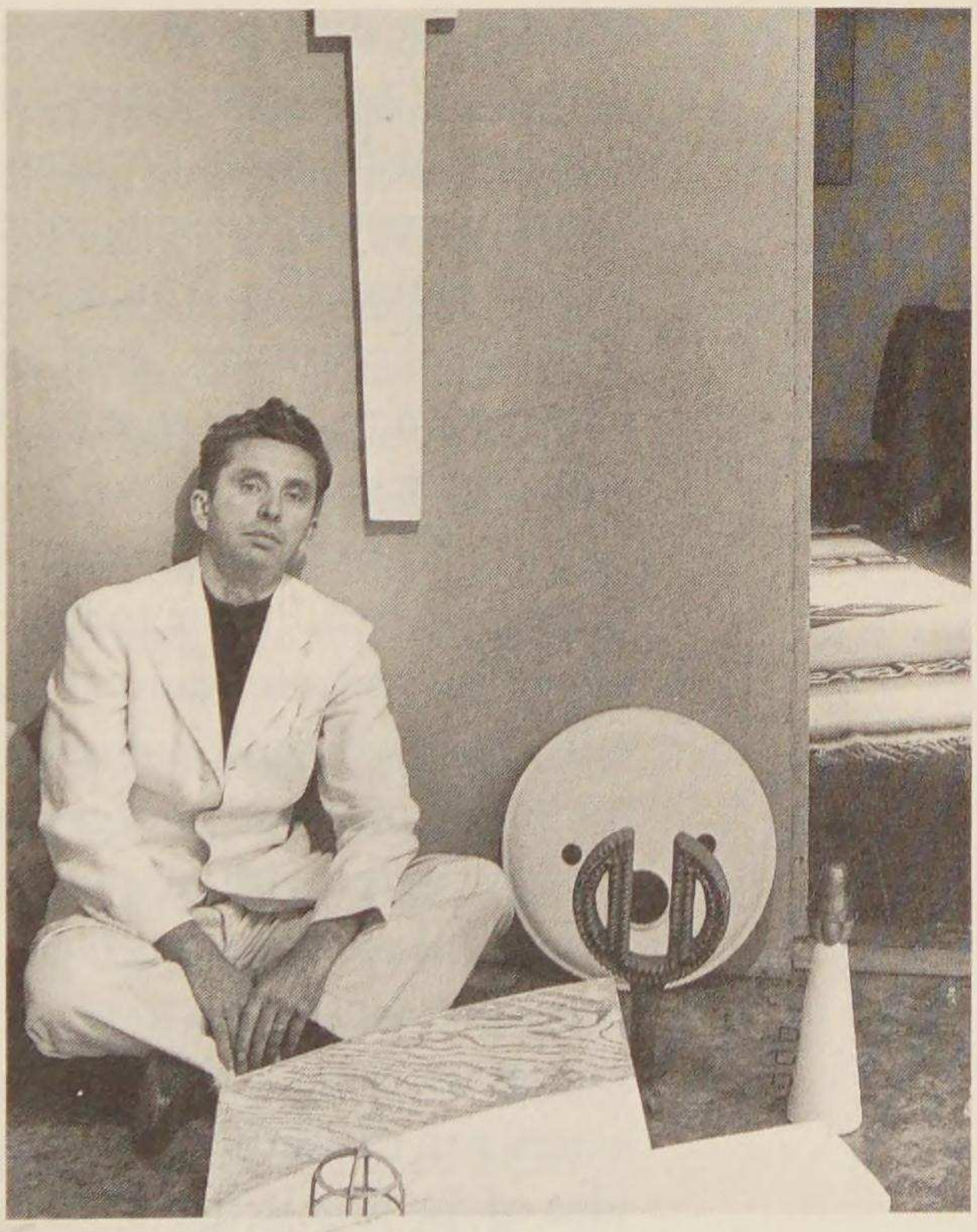


Porter in Schillerhaus Garden, Sausalito, 1950, with his wooden harp sculpture.

Photograph by Harry Bowden.

Lobdell, Kuhlman, and Diebenkorn. The Great Hall was divided with sliding partitions into a lecture area, lounge, library, cafeteria, and offices. In the center of the hall, the visitor entered an elevator that would soar to a view platform on top of the hill and to the church itself. A room beneath the church contained a special light organ, a marriage of science and music that Porter called "Scimus." From the view platform, one could look to the East Bay, to Marin County, or to San Francisco. The platform measured forty by ninety-five feet, and in its center was a large, flat stone twenty feet across on which to sit, contemplate the view, and meditate. Embedded in the platform was a patterned, heavy glass plate defining the doorway, walls, and tower of the Church of Light. When electricity was turned on in the evening, the walls of the church soared as sheets of light fifty to ninety feet in the air. Beams of light forming the tower, twenty feet in diameter, shot up to two hundred and fifty feet. As an organist operated the light organ, intense color patterns would rise, shift, and fade in the tower's shaft.

Porter's plans, designed "to serve from afar as a symbol of worship, a plane and ship beacon, and an eternal memorial to the folly of war," were never realized, and today Angel Island is open for recreational use. Some years later, Porter wrote to me from Nagasaki, Japan, suggesting that the project could be adapted to the hills overlooking that bomb-devastated city: "Here is a chance again for The Church of Light to serve as my scientific contribution to the peace of the world." But again the idea did not take hold. The Church of Light was Porter's first attempt to create what he called "Sciarch," the union of science and architecture, but it went no further than the Imperial War Museum in London, which, curiously, requested a complete set of plans for its archives. Had the plans been professionally drafted, which would have made possible the right kind of publicity, perhaps Porter's



At Schillerhaus, 1950. Photo by Harry Bowden.

astonishing concept would have had a better chance of success. His restlessness, his refusal to be tied to any project for long, helped defeat his purpose.

When he showed me incomplete sketches for the Church of Light at his studio in Schillerhaus, Porter turned away from them impatiently, as if the mere concept was enough, and enthusiastically showed me two other ideas. One, a collection of bone forms that could be moved around to create interesting designs, was an expansion of his toys-for-adults idea called "Do-Das," which he published originally in *Art Techniques*. The second scheme was a group of white-painted wooden free-forms that could be attached to walls and arranged and rearranged in different ways.

"You get tired of looking at a picture in a frame on the wall," he told me. "Looking at the same picture day after day is like listening to the same symphony over and over again. But with a free-form like this, you can move it around, take it down, and play with it, work on your own creativity." With his wry grin he added, "It's relaxing as hell!"

In 1950, seeking respite from his strenuous duties at Schillerhaus and the Gallery, Porter managed a brief trip to Mexico, where he met and was greatly impressed by the expatriate surrealist painter Leonora Carrington and the Spanish film director Luis Buñuel. After his return to Sausalito, Porter told me of the advantageous situation of Mexican artists. "The thing that's made is important, not the thing that's sold," he said. "It's not so much the support the Mexican government gives to the arts, though God knows we could use some of that here. Somehow, in Mexico, art is more a part of life. You notice right away the respect they have for all kinds of creativity. And the surrealistic images of a painter like Carrington thrive in that kind of atmosphere. In Mexico the surrealists really seem at home!"

The trip to Mexico also revived Porter's interest in film. Buñuel invited Porter to the premiere of his film *Los Olvidados*, a powerful, realistic study of a young Mexican streetgang. "We had a talk afterwards, and Buñuel stressed the fact that there should be a minimum of sound background to a film," Porter related. "I couldn't agree with him more. You know how you sit in a movie house and the trumpets blare out for a procession and the strings trip along tensely for a suspense scene. All crap, said Buñuel. The important thing is the camera, its sharp visual impact with the characters and the setting. I've always felt strongly that the essential idea of the film is visual composition and the technique of cutting to

attain this visual composition. So I was happy to see and hear that Buñuel was working in this way. Maybe Hollywood will get there one of these days, but it seems unlikely, with these new large-screen techniques where everything is so often a huge, false space and overwhelming sound."

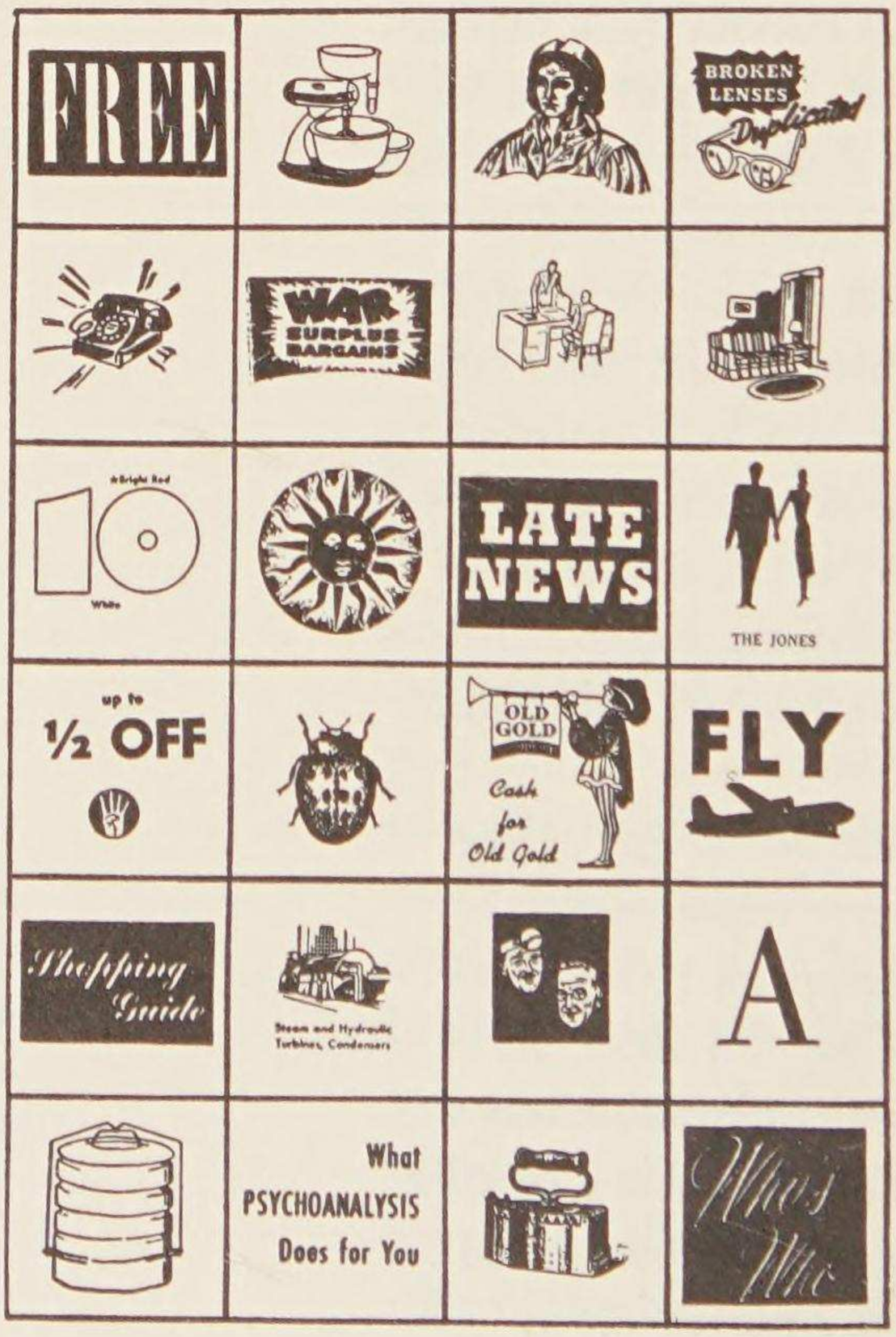
As a photographer, Porter had a natural interest in film. In the late 1940s, he had worked through his gallery with several Bay Area filmmakers including Frank Stauffacher, Harry Bowden, and Leslie Turner. He encouraged them, offered suggestions, and saw some of his ideas realized in such short films as *Howard Street*, *Landscape in Atlantis*, and *Wildcat Hill Revisited*, a documentary about the great photographer Edward Weston. Porter saw both the documentary and the surrealistic possibilities of film, and he disagreed with the widespread idea that film was basically a naturalistic medium: "Certainly it's true that film is the dominant art form of our time. Everyone goes to more movies than art exhibits, libraries, or poetry readings. Film commands everyone's attention because every object, every detail, is instantly there on the screen. But what about the relationship between the objects? As in any art form, it becomes a matter of style, the individual style of the filmmaker, which can range, even in a genius like Buñuel, from naturalism to surrealism. The problem is that films are rapidly becoming so expensive that the commercial market is likely to cut out most experimentation. Here in the Bay Area, after the war, is a good time for experimental films, but how many people like Frank Stauffacher and Harry Bowden will be able to really concentrate on filmmaking?" As it turned out, Stauffacher's promising career, which focused on making his own and also showing other new films at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, ended when he died in his thirties. Frustrated by the costs of making films, Bowden returned to photography and painting before his death in 1965 at the age of fifty-eight. Porter himself often dreamed of film projects, but his dreams were sabotaged by lack of money and unwillingness to commit himself to one art form.

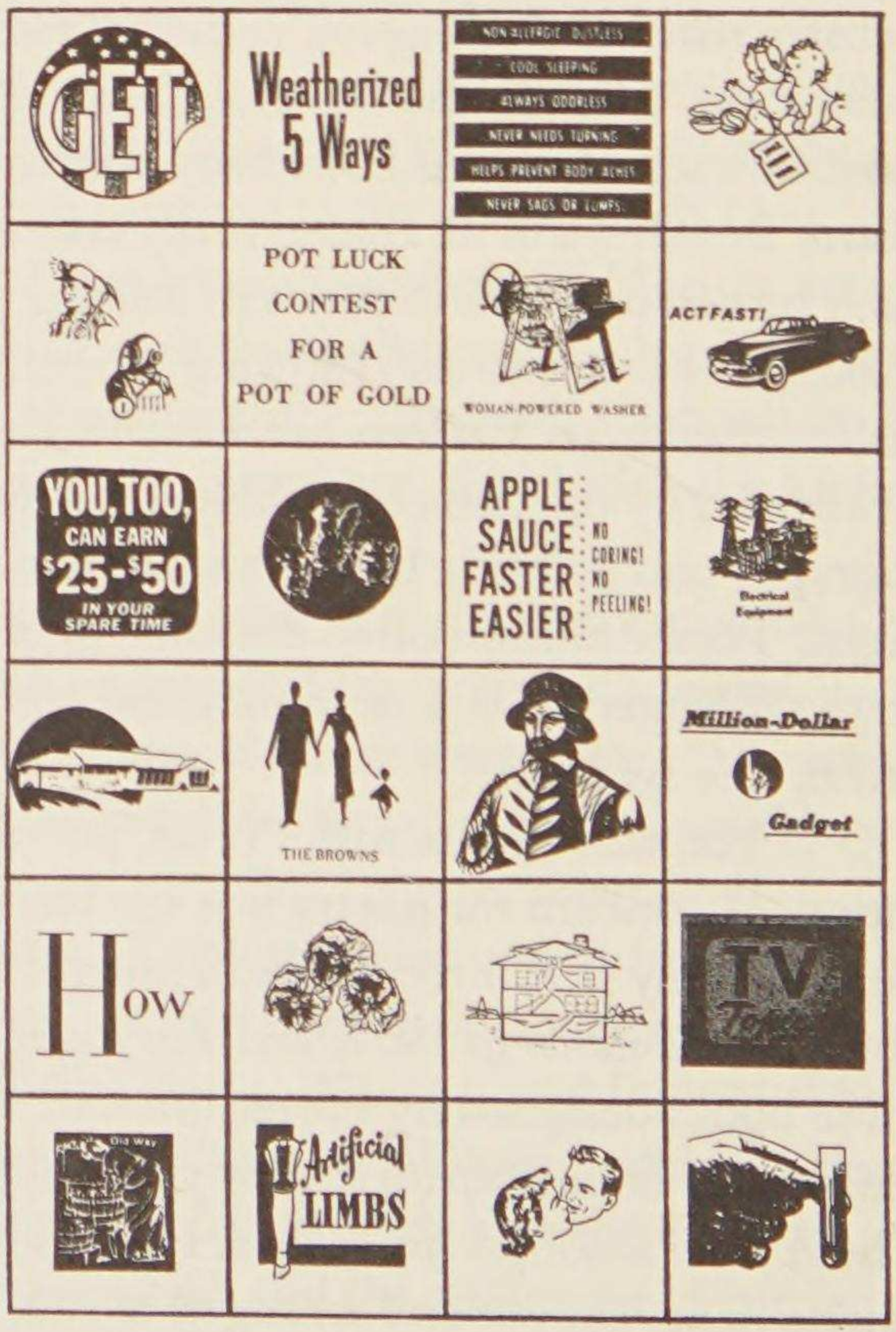
Yet, when I was with Porter, poetry dominated our conversation. A concern for poetry was the basis of our friendship. He published my first three books of poems: *Tensions* in 1947, *The American Fantasies* in 1951, and *The Right To Greet* in 1955, all three books designed by Porter himself. Especially notable was the striking set of endpapers that he created for *The American Fantasies.* These were amongst his earliest Found collages, composed of advertisements cut out and arranged to suggest the paradoxes of

American society. Within separate squares in four adjacent columns, familiar slogans such as "FLY," "LATE NEWS," "WHAT PSYCHOANALYSIS DOES FOR YOU," and "WAR SURPLUS BARGAINS," are placed in dramatic juxtaposition as if mocking the frenzied, commercial appeal of a buyer's market. These endpapers aroused enough favorable comment that Porter reissued them photostatically in his *Broadside* series as *Number 7* in 1955.

Such projects were exhilarating for Porter and for me. Both of us had been stunned by the war. My creative desires had been suppressed by four years in the Army; his by his work on the Manhattan Project. We talked eagerly of how American poetry seemed at last to be finding its own voices and forms. No longer would New York be the center of an American culture dominated by European influences; now it was the turn of the American West to outgrow its provincial insecurity and assume an important cultural role. We spoke enthusiastically about the artistic energy that we felt around us. Porter spoke frequently about the possibilities of combining poetry and photography, also poetry and painting, ex-

Endpapers for James Schevill, *American Fantasies*, published in Guam by Porter in 1951.





periments he had begun with his photo-poems for *Circle*. I argued that words could make only a minimal statement when superimposed on photographs or paintings. I wanted language to become dramatic, to re-establish a sense of dramatic narration again in poetry, as I had always been interested in opera and drama and was deeply involved with playwriting, too. But Porter insisted that abstraction was triumphing in poetry, as abstract expressionism was triumphing in painting:

"The word has become abstract today," he would say. "The bomb splintered language, turned the Tower of Babel into a shadow. Think of the simultaneous translators at the United Nations. Do they translate the speeches exactly as spoken? No, they struggle, often without success, for the general tone of the meaning due to the vast difference between the various languages. Joyce and Stein pointed the way to the new, abstract use of the word. If science and language are to be merged, words must regain some of the simple, terrible, abstract power that the parts of a machine possess."

"Why then do you publish my poetry?" I asked. "I'm not a scientist, and I don't favor abstraction as much as you do."

"All right, you've got me," he replied, " but I'm speaking about possibilities, not practices. What interests me about your work is that you write about the American scene in all its many fantastic aspects. You create a real sense of American fantasies, which is your major theme. There are lots of poets writing today in a pseudo-seventeenth or eighteenth century style, but you're trying to dig into modern experience, and you do deal with the problems of science and the new technology in your poems."

As I witnessed Porter's daily struggle to cope with the flood of manuscripts that poured in, and with anxious and sometimes angry young writers desiring to be published, I could only admire his dedication. If a writer has no outlet for his work, he is not likely to receive the critical stimulus that is needed to shape his artistic intuition. Writers' egos are formidable, obnoxious when literary politics are involved, and I often heard snide remarks about Porter playing politics in the arts. Yet he always considered each of the manuscripts that he received, searching for the distinctive quality that he desired. For some of the work he fostered I had little sympathy. Porter would always say, "Sure, I don't know whether their stuff is good or even significant. What I want to feel is that it's work in transition. It's searching for something new, for techniques that aren't just copied out of the past. And when you get right down to it, the important thing is to foster artistic activity that is really con-



Porter's parents in California,
1950.

troversial. Look around at the galleries, the schools, the publishers. Most of them are scared to death of anything new. They give controversial material a good miss and play it as safe as they can. Somebody has to stick his neck out, and I'm crazy enough to be the one. And this seems to be the right time in the Bay Area to do it."

After his return to Sausalito from Mexico, Porter's parents drove out from Maine to visit him. He brought them to Berkeley to meet me, and we spent a brief time chatting. Conservatively dressed and decorous in manner, they appeared to be the epitome of a jovial, middle-aged couple enjoying their new car and adventurous trip across the country. They expressed pride in their son and his new gallery. One day in Sausalito, in the midst of this family reunion, Porter's father was arrested for molesting a twelve-year-old girl who had visited Porter's gallery with her mother. The girl told her mother that Porter's father had drawn her aside and fondled her. Porter learned from the police and his mother that his father had a history of molesting children in Maine. The shame was too much for Porter and he could not bring himself to visit his father in jail. More intensely than ever, he blamed his parents' loveless marriage—the way they had never been able to discuss sexual matters openly and continued to live together only because of economic necessity and a sense of religious duty—for the failure of his own marriage to Helen. Although, he said, he had never had sexual fantasies about children as his father had, he suffered from sexual guilt stemming from assumptions that he had been brought up with about the submissive place of women. In Maine, religious and social custom

held that women were basically caretakers of men and that sex was potentially evil unless it served the purpose of reproduction. Porter, therefore, had always assumed that his mother and wife were there to serve his needs so that he could pursue his work. Even in New York, Porter had been in the habit of sending his laundry home to his mother. When his wife revolted against his demands and tired of his inability to provide financial security, he was forced to reconsider his views about women. Still, his sexual guilt remained, and he could not bring himself to face his father.

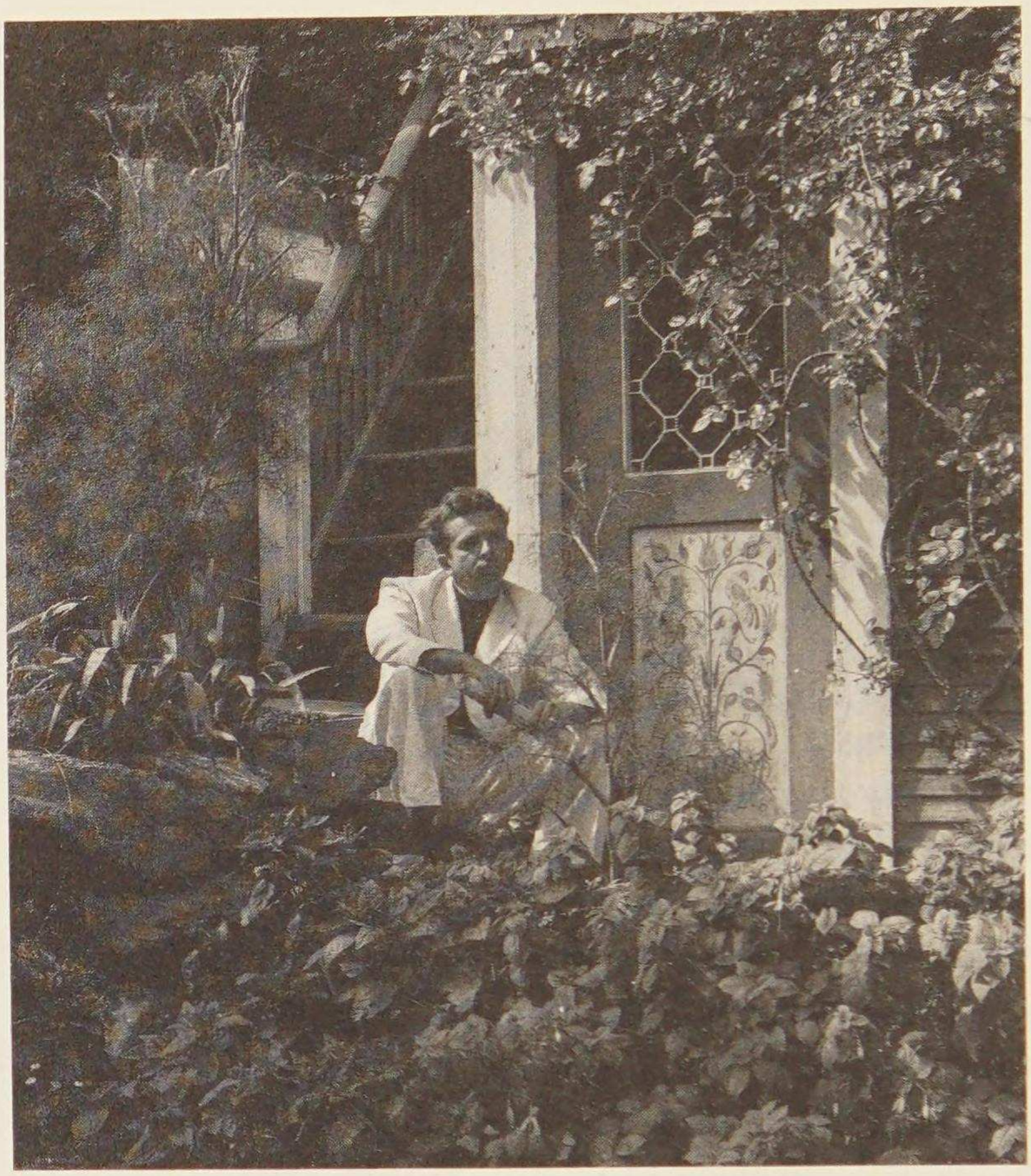
"I should have seen him," Porter admits, "but I couldn't bear it. My mother and I simply abandoned him throughout his trial and his sentencing to a short term of confinement and probation for several years. Later, my mother took control of the Houlton house and the rents therefrom, divorced my father, and married an Italian immigrant and woodsman of Lincoln, Maine, named Carl P. Batleno. After serving a prison term, my father wandered back to Connecticut, doing odd jobs and living on social security. When he developed Parkinson's disease, my brother Everett arranged to put him into a rest home and then brought him to a hospital in Belfast, where he died. But even though I was living nearby then, I visited him only twice and never even went to the funeral."



Porter and his mother in California, 1950.

Tormented by guilt, Porter began to suffer from nightmares about the strangeness of birth, how one lives in a warm, secure environment for nine months and then is thrust into a hostile world. Cursing himself and the country for the problem of sexual hang-ups, he let the business of the gallery slide and applied for many different jobs just to get away.

During the fall of 1950, I observed an increasing depression in Porter, but he said nothing of what had happened to his family. Instead, to my amazement, he kept talking about his sudden desire to leave Sausalito and his gallery. I couldn't understand the sudden change in his personality just as his efforts with the gallery were being confirmed in the Bay Area by a surge of artistic vitality. One af-



Porter in Schillerhaus garden,
1950. Photograph by Harry Bowden.

ternoon, Porter introduced me to the people with whom he had completed arrangements to take over the Contemporary Gallery. He was leaving for the Pacific, he said, giving me the impression that his departure had something to do with another secret physics project. Knowing what had happened to him after the Hiroshima bombing, I didn't really believe him. I worried about his mental state. Only months later, when he wrote to me from Guam, did I learn that he had seen an advertisement in the *San Francisco Examiner* seeking an assistant editor for the *Guam Daily News*. In despair over what had befallen his family, cutting himself off from friends, he was interviewed in San Francisco, offered the job, and left a few days later by plane.

10 Escape To Guam



Guam is the southernmost island in the Marianas with a population of some 60,000 people. Directly en route from Honolulu to Manila and from Australia to Japan, it is a natural crossroads and, consequently, has been a key military base in the Pacific. In 1521 Ferdinand Magellan was the first voyager from western civilization to discover the island. From the 17th century until June 1898, when the U.S. cruiser *Charleston* claimed possession during the Spanish-American War, it was under Spanish rule. During World War II, the Japanese seized the island, only to relinquish it again to American Marines in the summer of 1944. The terrible battle for Finegayan Village cost 600 American lives and more than 3,000 casualties. Only a few Japanese soldiers survived this carnage and hid in remote jungles and caves. After the Japanese defeat, Guam was rapidly rebuilt into a huge naval fortress, or, as the *Guam Daily News* put it, "an arrow aimed at the heart of the Japanese islands." The Korean War broke out in June 1950, shortly before Porter's arrival,

and the island assumed additional military importance as an air and supply base for United Nations troops.

Ever since Jean Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century promulgated his doctrine of man living naturally in primeval innocence, western writers and artists have dreamed of escaping from materialistic, industrial civilizations to live in natural environments. Rimbaud gave up his search for a metaphysical dream language to become a trader of slaves and goods in Africa. Charles Baudelaire, who actually spent only a few months on the islands of Mauritius and Reunion in the Indian Ocean, spoke longingly of "paradis artificiels" and filled his poetry with sensuous, tropical images. In the 20th century, for disillusioned men like Porter, the supreme example has been Paul Gauguin, who spoke of escaping "the corrupting influence of the civilized West," and wrote in *Noa Noa*, "The savages have taught me to know myself better; they have told me the deepest truth." Porter, too, was in quest of inner peace. He wanted to resolve the agony of his father's arrest and his own isolation in the relaxed, communal ways of the Pacific Islands. He had deliberately cut himself off from friends as well as family and past interests. Recalling this period, he wrote to me:

> When I left for Guam I had nothing. My fare was paid by the *Guam Daily News* and I had thirty dollars on landing. I had undergone great torment at the breakup of my parents' home after their visit in Sausalito. Without a parental home, without a home of my own, without sufficient food earned from any cultural pursuits and without anything to be had from science, it seemed desirable just to disappear, work at whatever I could, and carry on with some sort of personal program of solving and resolving my life to a point of some kind of peace.

On Guam he soon discovered that the newspaper could not pay him the salary he had been promised. Meanwhile, in California, he had outstanding publishing bills, and he was still paying rent for The Contemporary Gallery in Sausalito. The gallery was failing in Porter's absence, first with a poet as director, later with a musician. The agreed-upon rent was never sent. To pay pressing bills, Porter took a second job, moonlighting as a waiter in the Club Bamboo, Agana's busiest nightclub. Laboring from 6 p.m. to midnight in a white uniform, he was able to make $25 on a good night, or, as he wrote to me later with customary irony, "almost more than any physicist ever made in a similar time."

Found from Porter's *The Book of Do's*, The Dog Ear Press, 1982.

Tell your face you love it.

On the other hand, waiting on tables, taking orders from customers who were interested mainly in liquor and sex, was humiliating. In the early morning, when he finished his chores, his body ached and his mind whirled with the echo of strident music and the image of $100 bills (the first he had seen) in payment for whiskey, gin, and the huge steaks that he saw devoured. The loud, amateurish music and awkward dancing also affected his fantasies. Every night he found himself smothering the impulse to throw away his tray and stride into the spotlight to put on his own song-and-dance act. Actually, Porter was an accomplished dancer (for years he had invented dances as a private form of exercise), so it was easy for him to imagine the superiority of his own dancing to the enthusiastic, crude steps that he observed. Later, when he visited tribal festivals on the island, he enjoyed participating in the dances.

The patrons Porter served, mostly American soldiers, construction workers, and businessmen, would have been astonished to see their waiter's mail: "Your name has been obtained as a possible applicant for the position of nuclear physicist, GS-13, $7600 per year. . ."; or "Send further details of your art methods applicable to textiles. . . ." His few outgoing letters to his brothers inquired guiltily for news of his father and pleaded with his gallery and publishing clients for rents and overdue payments for books that he had published.

Work at the Club Bamboo was not entirely without satisfaction; it was there that he got to know islanders. Relatively few Guam natives came to the nightclub, but when they did they would go to Porter's tables as a matter of course. Porter had long been interested in other races and cultures, and the Guamanians sensed that he liked them without reservation. He thought of compiling the stories they told him in a book, but he had no energy for this or any other creative task. One custom he observed with amusement was that no courting or dating was permitted among young Guamanians without the whole family being present. He reported one such party for the *Daily News*:

Mr. A was much interested in the fetching Miss B.

Furthering his aims, he invited her to a Marine Drive night spot. She accepted and came along with a girl friend as chaperon, Miss C. and with a chaperon for the chaperon, Mr. D. . . .

As the evening progressed Miss B's cousin stopped by, her aunt from Yigo, and two younger sisters. Then there were Miss C's three brothers, four cousins, and one elderly uncle, who visited the table, ate food and drank drink.

To say nothing of those old friends of Mr. D's. . . .

And Mr. A? His morning-after calculations show:

Total bill—$64.75

Number entertained—27

Time alone with Miss B—3 minutes.

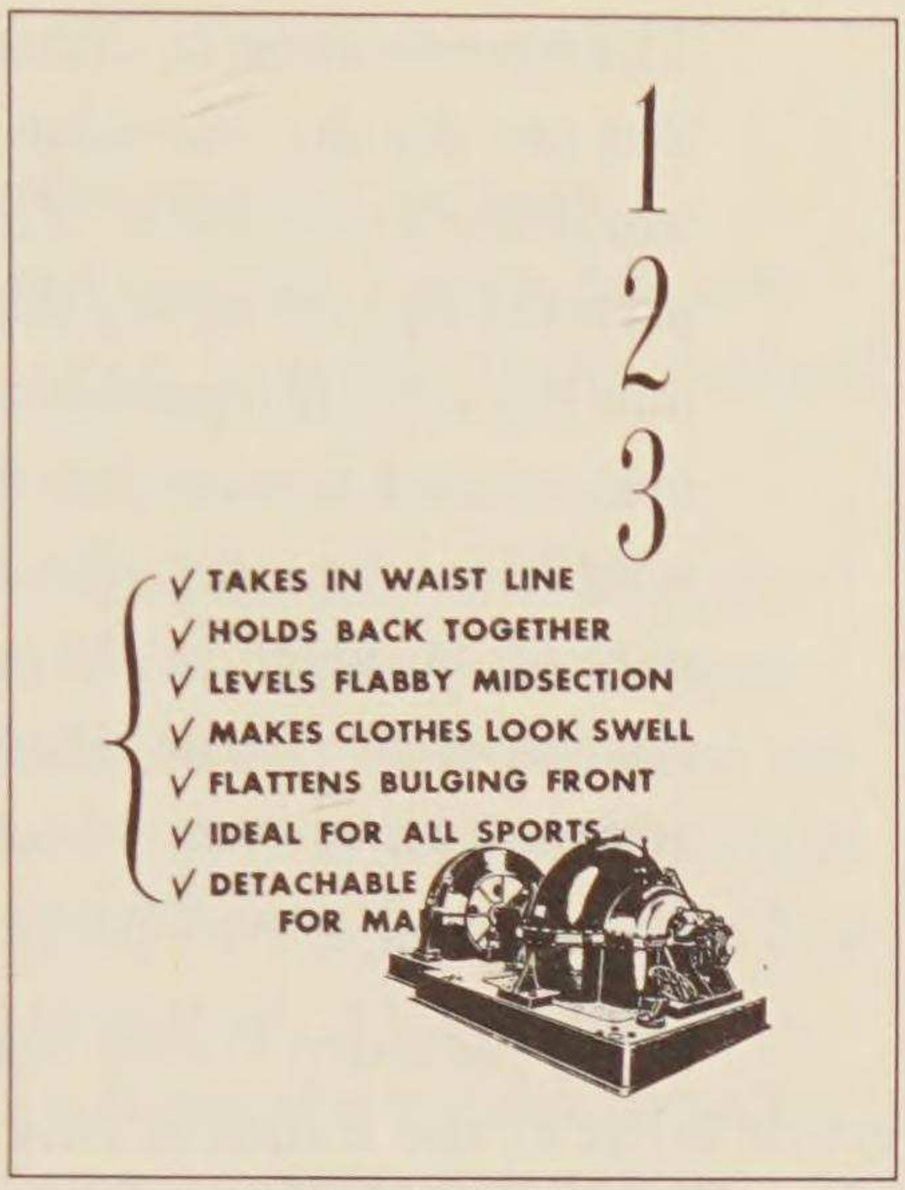
One Friday afternoon, three months after his arrival on Guam, Porter resigned from the *Daily News*, while holding onto the job of United Press International editor, which he had been given during his last week with the paper. The next Monday he started as information officer for the Office of Price Stabilization. Because the native director of this office could not read or write English well, Porter helped him with these tasks. Another month at the nightclub enabled him to pay off his California debts; then he quit that job, too.

As Guam correspondent for the UPI and information officer for the OPS, Porter met and interviewed visiting dignitaries and accompanied Naval officers as they searched the island for hidden Japanese soldiers. In May 1951 he reported a flight with the 54th

Porter at his typewriter in Guam.



Collage by Porter for Schevill's *The American Fantasies,*



Strategic Weather Reconnaissance Squadron seeking the eye of a typhoon named "Vulture Special Iris 8." But these were special assignments; he also covered routine local politics and sea and air mishaps. He remained largely isolated from his cultural interests but did arrange to illustrate and publish my second book of poems, *The American Fantasies*, which he announced dryly as "the first book ever published on Guam," and arranged to publish my musical play, *High Sinners, Low Angels* . Porter also corresponded with the San Francisco Chinatown photographer Kem Lee, which resulted in the release of a folio, *San Francisco*, with text and drawings by the physician-artist William Faulkner. He helped his Sausalito friends Leslie Turner and Harry Bowden work out details of short films they were making, and he published the first in a long series of Bowden folios, *Eight Photos*. These were Porter's only contacts with his artistic past, repeated pleas for back rent and book-sales payments having gone unanswered.

Whatever free time he had from his two jobs he spent walking the streets or wandering along the beach, struggling to regain his mental balance amidst the most intense loneliness he had ever felt. For hours he would watch the spectacular sunsets and sunrises. The sense of vast distance, the tropical winds, the sudden cloud changes and storms, hypnotized him. As he wrote to me later:

> Hourly and daily, there are the changing space effects, the vast distance in all directions that gives a sense of freedom, relaxation, and winds a spell of magic, wonder and fascination around you that is difficult to break or leave. I used to read how those who had lived in the Pacific islands always wanted to come back. I didn't believe it so much then, but I do now.

In July 1951, still holding the UPI job and on good terms with the news editor of the *Daily News*, Porter wrote daily reports for the paper while touring the Philippines and Bali with a group of Guam residents. He was especially intrigued by the communal use of art in Bali and wrote:

The western artist in customary isolation tries to convince himself that one day the true value of his work will burst on the waiting world like a revelation. This means he is likely to develop a paranoia against society that affects his work. In Bali I discovered how the artist is regarded as a fine craftsman, completely uninterested in recording his name for the future. His one aim is to serve his community. If called to decorate a temple, carve a gate or door for his neighbor, he is content to do it in exchange for some related service, perhaps help with his garden or small farm. Even actors and musicians, who may request payment to perform for foreigners, play without charge for Balinese ritual performances.

With pleasure Porter discovered that there was no word for art or artist in the Balinese language. All tasks of life had aesthetic significance. Bali's cultural sense of a unified community, as opposed to the western focus on individual success, appeared to breed social harmony. The loneliness that had bedevilled Porter seemed impossible in Bali, where everything was simple, direct, communal.

Pondering the possibilities of a natural, nonmechanical life, Porter arranged other island trips after his return to Guam. In Ulithi in the Western Carolines, he encountered again the half-tragic, half-humorous problem of American influence on native customs and wrote a satirical report for the UPI called "Two Squares and a Buck":

> Sitting on a Navy stretcher cooling his royal tattoo marks in the shade of a construction company office, the King of Ulithi says he can think of nothing in particular to complain about.
>
> Things are just dandy in Ulithi, in fact. His Majesty is pulling down two square meals and a buck a day with his loyal subjects helping to erect four permanent buildings for the Coast Guard Station on Falalop Island near their airstrip.
>
> Vinnell Construction Company workers from Guam are flattered to have royalty on their payroll and pay His Majesty to sit around in the shade and watch the peons mix concrete in the hot sun, their feathered head combs and G-strings drooping.
>
> Their weekly cash wages will go into the King's three purses: one for twenty and ten dollar bills, one for fives and ones, and the third for small stuff like dimes and quarters. When the subjects want some of their money, they'll ask him for it.
>
> "With this hundred-day construction job and six dollars a week income, my people will earn enough to keep them the rest of their lives. There's no place to spend it," the keeper of the island

exchequer explains. . . .

> The King, a stretcher-ridden paralytic for years, reportedly speaks several dialects and German, French, Japanese and English. But for reasons of his own, he prefers to play deaf and dumb in the presence of strangers.

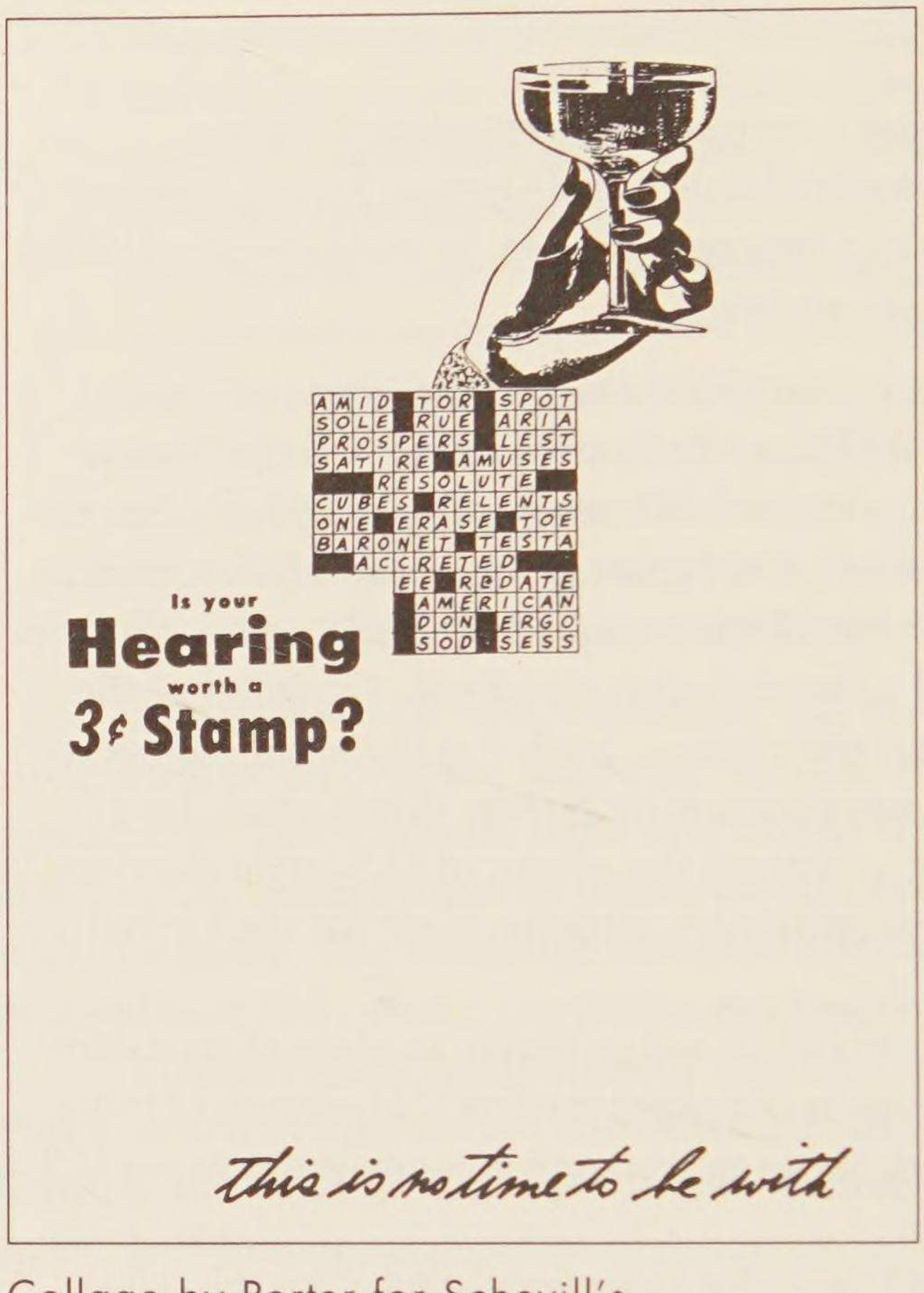
On another excursion, Porter visited the island of Yap, six hundred miles south of Guam. Before World War I, the Yapese had been under German control. Consequently, they had been exposed to German, Spanish, and Japanese ways, as well as American customs. When their island was occupied by the Japanese, the Yap children were obliged to wear clothes to school. Once out of the classroom, they tore off the clothes. Such was the usual Yapese response to the foreign ways occupying powers thrust upon them. Porter arrived in time to witness the advent of U.S.-style elections, which he reported with customary sardonic vigor for the United Press:

> Five air hours from U.S. soil on Guam, an island of grass skirts and G-strings recently completed the first U.N.-sponsored ballot election with dark horses and recounts as prominent as in any U.S. election.
>
> The island of Yap, with a native population of roughly 5,000, elected five district chiefs in what to them was a completely unorthodox style.
>
> Down through the years the Yapese had elected their chiefs by pointing out their choice as the candidates paraded past or by whispering their choice in the favored one's ear.
>
> This year each district built an election booth of surplus wallboard or of woven palm leaves and flowers and placed their votes in a marked box. . . .
>
> King W. Chapman, District Administrator for Yap and president of the Haiku in Hawaii, is the man primarily responsible for indoctrinating the Yapese in U.N.-sponsored methods such as the recent election.
>
> "The Yapese resisted western ideas for many years," he says, "but now have suddenly expressed a desire to absorb some of the best aspects of outside cultures. The free-willed, privately made vote is one of them. . . . "

After visiting Yap and other islands of the northern Marianas including Tinian, Saipan, and Rota, Porter lost hope of finding tribes unaffected by Western customs. He saw that the Pacific and

Bern Porter

134



Collage by Porter for Schevill's
The American Fantasies, 1951.

Asiatic areas with their vast human and natural resources had become the new frontier. No longer could a Gauguin dream of an untouched paradise in the Pacific. The Pacific Islands were too important as shipping centers, air bases, and supply depots for the world's great powers. Of special interest to Porter was the effect of Western customs on native legends. On Yap he found a young man who had written down several of these poetic narratives in simple English. Struck by the conflict between legend and modern reality in the stories, Porter transcribed them into poetic lines, while maintaining their integrity and vision. One poem in particular pleased him for its commentary on the value of money:

In the Yap land of long ago
The Chiefs wanted good money
So the Yapese people went in their canoes,
They went to the Palau islands
To make stone money.
It was hard to climb high mountains,

It was hard to cut the stones flat and round like the moon.
They used a thick shell axe
And they worked hard for the stone money.
When they finished they called all the people,
It was very hard to carry the stone money
Down from the mountain.
They put a log through the hole
To help them carry their money.
On the beach they made a bamboo raft
And put the raft behind the big canoe and pulled it.
They sailed with their money
And came back to Yap.
They came very slowly,
They spent two months.
Some people came back,
But some people couldn't find this island.
It was very hard if the wind turned to the north,
They lost their way, they sank to the bottom,
Many were hungry, they died in the ocean.
When they came to Yap, many people
Helped them put their money
Beside the road or by the house.
It is a smart man who has the kind of stone
That is good for Yapese money.
He can buy the canoe he likes,
He can give money to the man who brings him fish,
He can give money to the dancers,
He can give money to the finished house.
We Yapese need money
Because someone who needs something
Gives the stone money to someone who has something.
We think it is the best money in the world.

Behind the obvious satire on the dangers involved in acquiring money, Porter was fascinated by the wistful vision of money's power to purchase the good things in life—a canoe, dancers for ritual ceremonies, and a home. But the money had to be solid stone, not flimsy Western coins or bills, proving the endurance of the natural world. The last line, "We think it is the best money in the world," showed that the Yapese retained their faith in traditional natural relationships despite many years of foreign occupation.

Another poem Porter transcribed on Yap ended:

When I am young I learn the sea
I learn to swim and how to sail,
I learn how to spear the fish
And how to catch them in my hands
And how to dive for shells in the deep water.
I dive forty feet under
And it is very green.
I know how to wash myself in the high tide
And how to catch the crab in the mangrove.
I learn to sail but not alone
I learn the dangerous time
In the strong wind, like today
When the outrigger comes up many times.
When I am young I learn these things.

"It's all there in the poem," Porter commented enthusiastically, "something eternal about the relationship of man to the sea. And when you learn that kind of kinship with natural forces, you feel the machines of Western civilization will never replace the instinctive pride of belonging to the natural order."

Porter prolonged his Pacific sojourn even after Guam's Office of Price Stabilization was abolished in 1952 and with it his job as information officer. (According to Porter, there was no reason for the organization from the beginning, except to convince the U.S. Department of the Interior of the island's importance and thereby guarantee a continued flow of money from Washington to Guam.) He took advantage of his sudden leisure to visit Merizo, the ancient city of the Chamorros, in whose culture he had become increasingly interested.

The Chamorros, who constitute a majority of the Guam population, are descended from Indonesian stock, strongly intermixed with Philippine Tagals and Spaniards. Their language is a dialect of Malay, influenced by Tagalog and Spanish. The aboriginal Chamorro had chocolate-colored skin, but the advent of the white man soon left few full-blooded natives. In 1670, Chamorro opposition to Christian missionary zealots sparked a twenty-six-year struggle in which many tribesmen were killed. Porter saw the Chamorros' history as another example of how Western mercantile civilizations, under the guise of Christianity, seek to destroy communal cultures.

Fascinated, Porter spent several months with the

Chamorros, fishing, farming, and dancing with them, observing their customs, and exploring their historical sites and monuments. While he came to admire their pride and relaxed way of life, he saw that their pottery, crude sculptured idols, and agricultural implements were far below the artistic level of the Balinese. Continuous occupation by Spaniards and then Americans had resulted in a culture with an uncertain identity and makeshift rituals. Under the circumstances, he felt it was extraordinary that the Chamorros had retained as much individuality as they had.

After his return to Agana, Porter was lured into one of Guam's major enterprises—speculating in surplus military equipment ventures. Recalling his futile efforts in these business activities, he later wrote to me:

> My attempts to recover part of my business losses here remind me poignantly that I am not made for such endeavors. A Puritanical upbringing, association with academicians and later artists and writers, is not background for the dog-eat-dog atmosphere of broken promises, lies, thievery and throat-cutting that is the prerequisite of dollar making. My losses in philanthropy, if the many cultural ventures into which I have put money can be called that, are mild compared to my losses in surplus tires, steel scrap and general buying and selling. Fortunes come and go in Guam and only the super-few retain them by outdealing all the others. In transactions here I have come to know a local phrase, "the bouncing ball," and its meaningful variant, "That's the way the ball bounced." After the contracts are signed and witnessed, after the agreements and promises are made, the deal goes through in such a way that invariably law suits and counter-suits with liens, attachments and judgments follow until "as the ball bounces" someone ends up with the money, but never me. Five thousand dollars, which I might have invested in a home, car, or the other normal things normal people do, have thus disappeared.

To earn back some of the money he lost speculating on surplus materials, Porter took a job in the mail department of a general store. Also he worked part time at night in the Guam Style Center, owned by a native politician and Sunday cock-fight operator too busy with these lucrative pursuits to pay much attention to the business. Porter was called in at a consultant's salary of $1 an hour to inject "stateside ideas" of merchandising and advertising. He was listened to with smiles and nods, but nothing Porter suggested altered the store's leisurely rhythms. Still friendly, the owner contin-

* * *

Unless you alter your life, America, here's what's about to happen to

Your fathers that begot you . . . page 158
Your brain . . . . . page 164
Your body . . . . . page 168
Your love life . . . . . page 172
The boy next door . . . . . page 178
Your town . . . . . page 180
Your country . . . . . page 188
Your sense of humor . . . . . page 218
The rest of the world . . . . . page 250

Found from Porter's *Found Poems,* Something Else Press, 1972.

ued to employ him at the same salary as a kind of "floorwalker." In this capacity, Porter's first observation was the vast volume of goods that went out the front door unpurchased:

> On festive occasions, of which there are many, numerous women come up to the drug counter, make themselves up there by opening various creams and perfumes. Then they pass on to the scarf and dress departments to help themselves again and walk out without paying! It turns out finally that these women are relatives of the owner and the owner turns out to be the head of four families. The total number of relatives seems to me about 180 people counting the children who come in daily to leave behind old shoes and clothes and walk out with new. Outsiders buy by pointing, Filipinos want things for their wives and sweethearts back home, and an occasional American comes in desperate need of something important like a sewing needle; the Guam relatives just take what they want without paying.

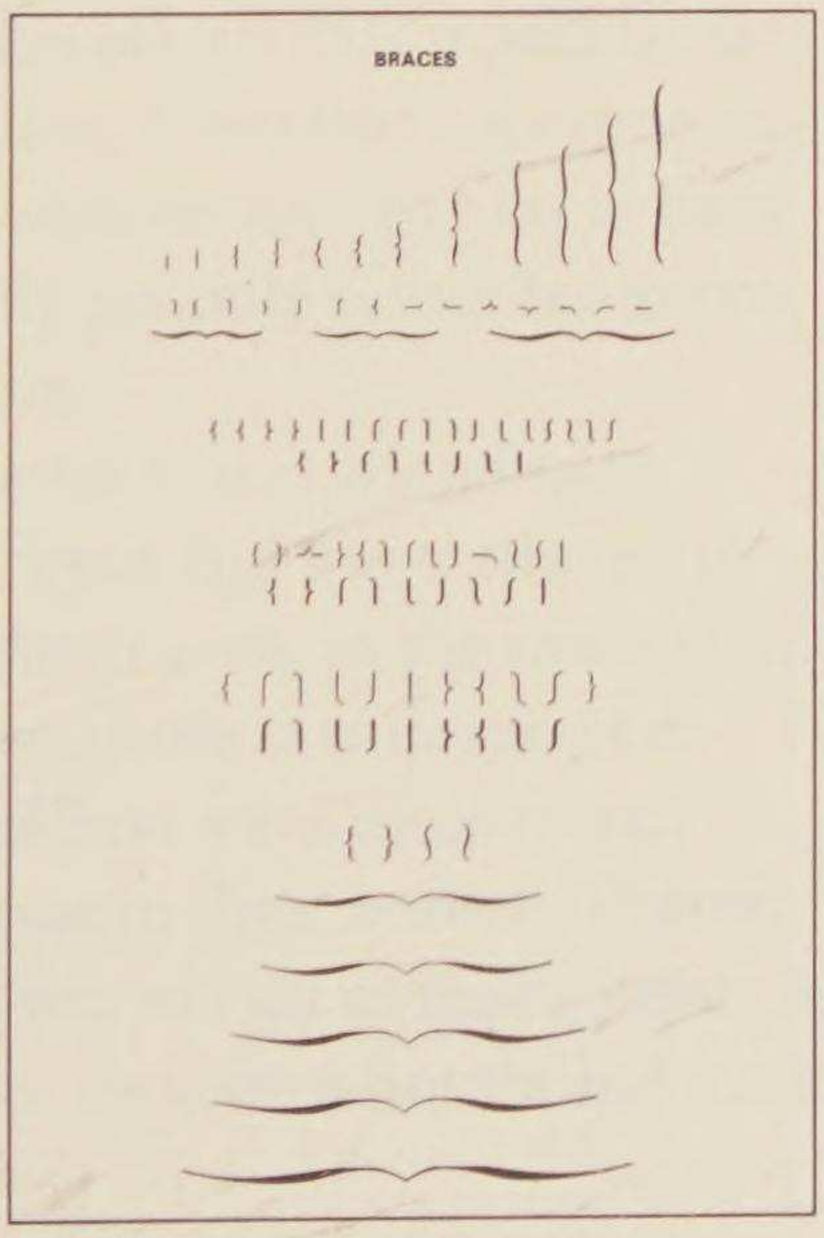
Working day and night at tedious jobs, Porter soon grew bored and restless. He had been in Guam for more than two years, and he was disturbed by his lack of artistic achievement. His illusion that a cultural paradise was still possible somewhere in the Pacific Islands had been destroyed. Particularly in the Marianas and Carolines, he saw that the conditions of modern life limited the development of the arts and crafts. The ritualistic communal unity of dance, theatre, music, and art that he had observed in Bali was impossible in this part of the Pacific because of the lack of raw materials. Wood, metallic ores, and even stone to make cutting instruments were scarce. Consequently, islanders succumbed to Western economic pressures. They tended to make simple, functional forms

without much decoration, although Porter thought their craftsmanship in making canoes, dishes, coconut graters and similar essentials was excellent.

Through zealous activity in the Guam Historical Society, he became aware of the region's cultural inferiority compared to Polynesia and the Far East. Responding to a January 1953 letter from the alumni secretary of his Colby class, he indicated that he had decided to leave Guam, despite the fact that his Pacific experiences had been stimulating:

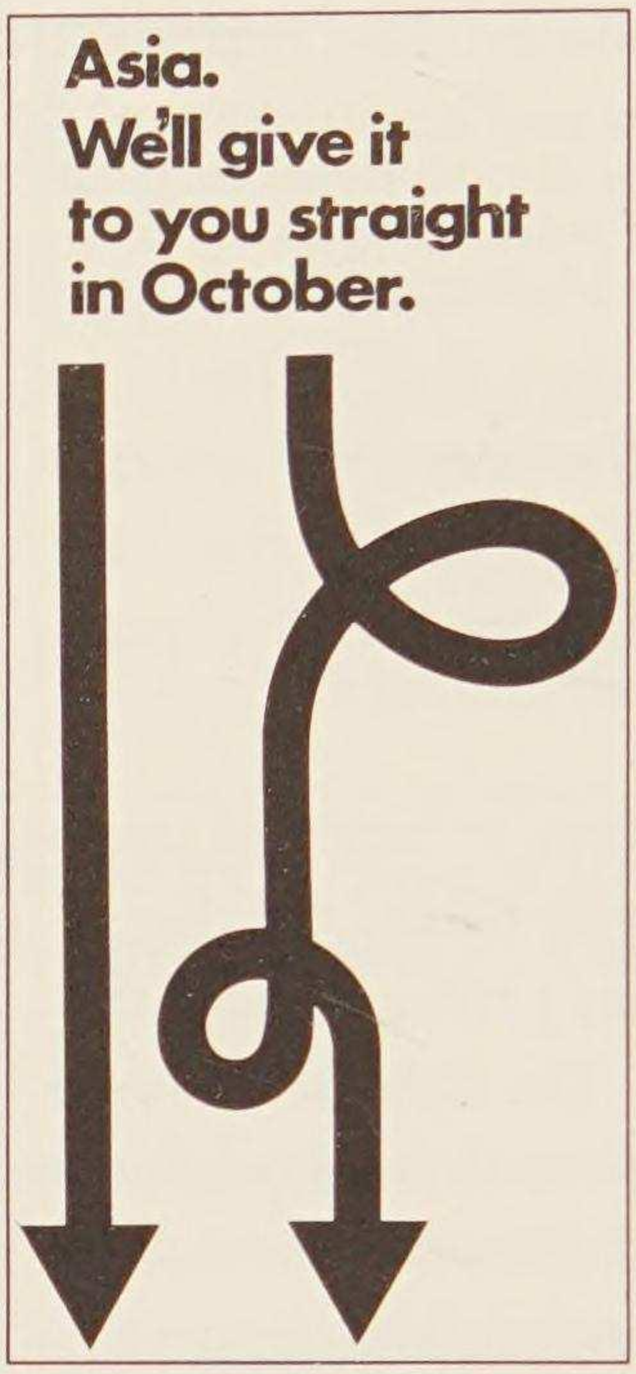
> Association with peoples of so-called primitive or backward areas is for me at least a fine demonstration of how far behind the alleged advanced cultures are on a simple matter like getting through the day without frustration, fears, anxiety, etc. The Balinese I noticed would rather dance, create music and sculpture than eat, while the men of Ulithi atoll find prolonged hours of discussion and discourse together more agreeable than clipping one another out of dollar bills, a reported pastime of Westerners. The money thing is pretty trivial, particularly when you go to the cobbler to have your shoe fixed. He wants fish, baskets, fruit or carved sticks for his work. Offering him dollar bills doesn't get your shoe back.
>
> Rather than continue for fear you might think I've gone native or am frustrated or through with civilization, I'll hasten to add I still wear neckties, read stock quotations and wonder what television is like. . . . How long I remain here is uncertain but the next stop is Japan.

In any case, Porter wasn't quite ready to leave, and he was seldom wearing neckties. In January 1953, he went to work for a small advertising agency founded by Barbara McClure. In the tropical weather, like most islanders, Porter wore a short-sleeved shirt, often unbuttoned to the waist, and was reprimanded once by McClure's husband for dressing this way. When Barbara McClure sold her agency to



Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

140



Found from Porter's *Found Poems,* Something Else Press, 1972.

Jack Kohl in the spring of 1953, Porter and the staff artist, Naomi Stern, carried on the business for a while. Porter worked on local advertising materials for prominent American firms including the Mennen Company, American Chicle Company, Polaroid, Sinclair Oil, Life Saver Corporation, Ponds Extract Company, and Golden State Milk. His layout skills and his ability to integrate text and visuals in imaginative ways were improving, even as his desire to leave Guam increased.

Working on ad layouts stimulated his interest in publishing a second volume of *Art Techniques.* Corresponding with a friend in Japan, he learned that printing costs were low there. However, there was a deeper reason behind his departure for Japan in the fall of 1953—Hiroshima. Driven by his conscience, Porter had long wanted to see the results of the bomb he had helped to create.

11 Japan



In a letter that becomes more prescient every day, the nineteenth century French novelist Gustave Flaubert predicted: "The time for beauty is over. Mankind may return to it, but it has no use at present. The more art develops, the more scientific it will be, just as science will become artistic. Separated in their early stages, the two will become one again when both reach a culmination. It is beyond the power of human thought today to foresee in what dazzling intellectual light the world of the future will flower. . . ."

Although he had never read Flaubert's prophesy, similar thoughts were stirring in Porter's mind when he landed in Japan. He was about to experience a fresh surge of creative energy and an unprecedented critical appreciation of his efforts that would be almost overwhelming after years of isolation, frustrated experimentation, and personal turmoil. Art and science seemed to him to have melted into one fluid entity, and the only possible future lay in creating new social concepts from this union.

Upon arrival in Japan, Porter stayed with a friend from Marin County who had joined the Air Force and was stationed in Nagoya. He soon discovered that the Americans, in the manner of all occupying armies, had tended to create little communities divorced from the Japanese. American soldiers were discouraged from befriending and visiting the Japanese in their homes. Porter, however, resolved to strike out on his own, to visit as many Japanese as possible, to live in the Japanese way in their own homes and inns,

and to follow their customs as much as he could without seeming to be a rash intruder.

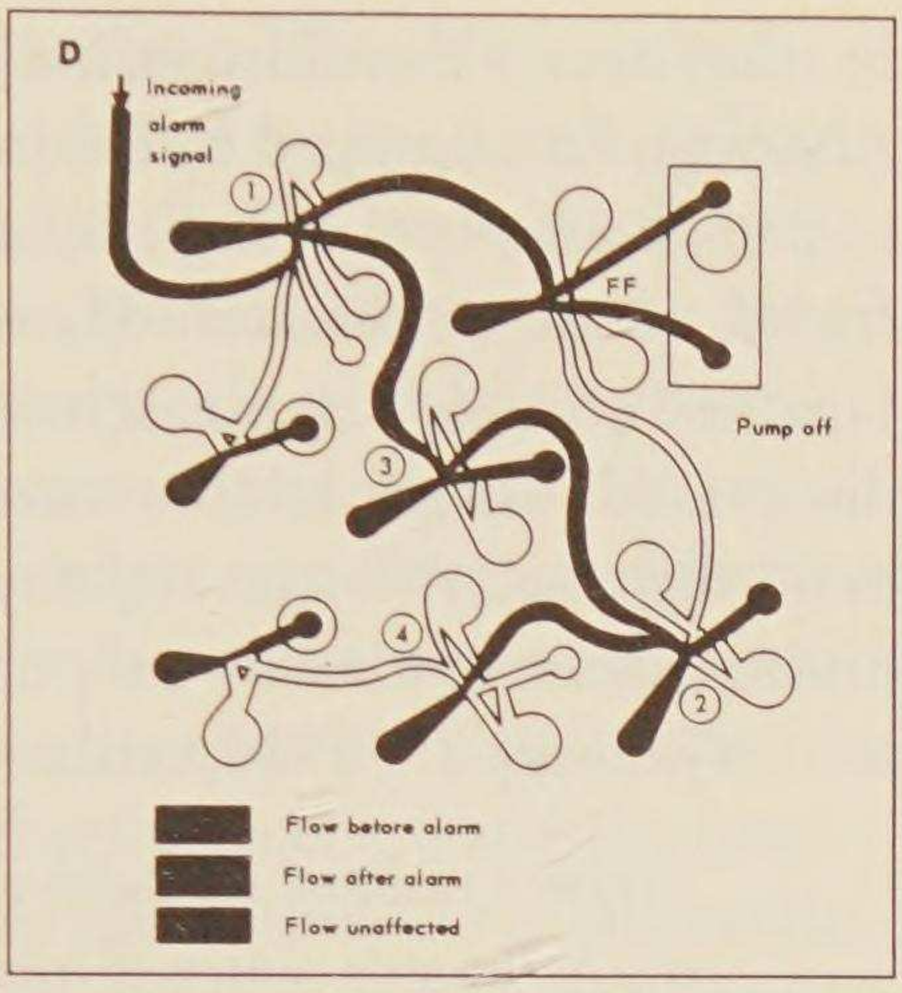
His first trip was to the ancient cultural capital of Kyoto, where he was strongly impressed by the city monuments. In the Katsura Imperial Villa, thought by Walter Gropius, the architect and founder of the Bauhaus, to be the most remarkable building in Japan, Porter sensed the close affinity between the traditional Japanese love of pure texture and form and modern abstract art. But it was on the grounds of the Ryuan-Ji Temple that Porter found "The most beautiful thing I've ever seen—this stone garden is pure art, pure sculpture, pure painting, pure poetry, pure philosophy, 2,000 years old and 2,000 years ahead of its time. It is superior to anything I've ever seen in the Metropolitan, the Louvre, or in Mexico."

"In Ryuan-Ji," Porter continued, "every stone is a living spirit used three-dimensionally, or flat, with as extraordinary a display of technique as I've ever seen. But the technique doesn't show. Rather than seizing nature, taking huge marbles and hewing forms out of them in an agony of the creative spirit like the great Western sculptors Michelangelo and Rodin, here is nature selected, sharpened and emphasized with humility and respect."

Talking about his experiences at Ryuan-Ji, Porter abandoned his customary reserve for quick, excited commentary: "In Mondrian and other leading western artists you feel the struggle of the artist to master his materials in a social vacuum—art for art's sake in the best sense of that misused term. In the Ryuan-Ji stone garden the effect is more universal—nature is art, science is art. To see and understand this Japanese garden is almost to admit that there is no original American art or sculpture. In addition to the usual problems of the painter and sculptor—problems of texture, color, form and light— the creators of this garden had to work out combinations of painting and sculpture in which mathematical theories and techniques could be made to apply in order to reproduce nature—i.e., to be a scientist. And how disillusioning to our contemporary laboratory life it is to find this unified scientific and artistic vision in nature, just for the looking!

"Today, we cannot despair because we are ruled by gadgets. Nor can we go back and create the same effects at Ryuan-Ji. As I left the stone garden, I thought if the scientist emerged from his warped isolation and the artist came out of his bitter retreat, couldn't they both find in the new laboratory techniques that cannot be denied the same perfection of vision that the Ryuan-Ji artists

Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.



created? It's a question of will, of education, of constant experiment. It must be done or the alternative is extinction."

From Kyoto and his vision of the enduring past, Porter traveled to Hiroshima, led by his conscience. He planned to stay only for several days, but the days lengthened into weeks and months as the city, rebuilding after the destruction caused by the atomic bomb, unfolded to him. Jotting down his first impressions he wrote:

> Hiroshima is the new Japan, a new future.
>
> After August 6, 1945, a plea for peace unequalled in history went up from all faiths and ideologies, but the world went on unheeding to Korea, to Indo-China and to other wars, obliging the leaders of Hiroshima to look within themselves for a more positive expression of what they sought.
>
> This examination has produced a healthy ferment in Hiroshima which forges the common objective of a brotherly conscience here out of the thinking of every conceivable philosophy—religious, political, commercial, social, ancient and modern.
>
> The open spaces of Hiroshima constitute an architect's paradise, where the same care that went into Japanese wood building is now being bestowed upon glass, concrete and steel, shaping the new architecture. Hiroshima artists have caught the new spirit with their decorations for candy and match boxes, wrapping papers, illustrated news stories and formal paintings.
>
> The voices of Hiroshima's children best exemplify the new poetry of the city, for they smile and laugh and say hello. Their trackless notes swell up the rivers, roll down the streets rattling the rooftops on their notched beams, sounding the chorus of builders who dust away the ashes and lift a city to the sky.

Porter's initial exuberance, however, soon faded. Driven by guilt from his part in the bomb's production, he went every day to sit and walk in the area that had received the worst of the explosion. For weeks the daily visit was a ritual. He watched children playing

in ruins near a Buddhist shrine that had been erected on the spot. Although handicapped by his inability to speak Japanese, he talked to people who spoke English, and to others through a Japanese friend, about the disaster. He was particularly interested in the Japanese attitude towards scientists, and the anger and distrust he discovered, though seldom mentioned in the American press, came as no surprise. After several days of such visits, Porter wrote down his impressions, which were published in the *Christian Science Monitor* on January 29, 1954, under the title, "Center of Impact."

> Today I realized an eight-year-long desire to walk around under the A-Bomb's center of impact in Hiroshima.
>
> It would be difficult to find a more photogenic and panoramic cross-section of life with children, sun bathers and street workers huddled together about a bonfire against the background of ruins, tombstones, souvenir stalls and the tiled canopy of a Buddhist shrine.
>
> It was my third trip in as many days for I wanted to understand thoroughly all I saw, to state accurately all I heard:
>
> 1. people wanted homes, with food, warmth and children.
> 2. they could think of no one, communist or non-communist, making these things any easier.
> 3. they felt world scientists, corralled in peace as in war, could do so.
> 4. they propose that those not now engaged be legislated into such action.
> 5. they inquired if U.S. Atomic scientists would underwrite the still neglected medical treatment of their A-victim friends.

Early in January, Porter sent me a letter revealing an even darker view:

> I have all sorts of notes, but no ideas now that people returned from the disaster with more good than evil. They have rebuilt many old horrors for dwelling with few exceptions. Girls with scars who can't get husbands are visible. Children in the womb were affected, tests now show. Ministers are cashing in on God movements. The man with the most burns exhibits his body for money. Survivors peddle souvenirs of radiated tile. I have spent some time directly under the center of impact, studying the scene, but seem to get nowhere. Perhaps you should do it all with a poem, one of your *American Fantasies*, called "Atomic Physicist Visits Hiroshima and Recommends Self and Associates Be Shot."

From day to day Porter's moods about Hiroshima shifted. When he observed people trying to capitalize on the bomb, selling souvenirs of the destruction and exhibiting burns, he was sickened. Other aspects of Japanese life, however, won his respect and admiration: the craftsmanship of the ceramic workers, the fine photography in popular magazines, the gay advertising balloons, the colored cloth bundles and bright, paper-wrapped packages so different from the drab, brown wrapping used in American stores. He also delighted in Japanese food, not only for its taste but also for the simple, beautiful forms in which the food was served and the fine way it was decorated. He thought that the skillful use of silhouette puppetry and artistic titling on Japanese television were bound to be imitated in the West. Above all, he came to admire the optimistic spirit of the children, whose greeting, he said, "melts one's ribs, crumbles the barriers, ever haunting and bolstering the visitor wherever he goes." One boy he met, Fumio Yanamoto, an eleven-year-old caretaker of pigs in Hiroshima Bay, pursued his task with such gusto that Porter wrote enthusiastically:

> Fumio, eleven, is master and keeper of the pigs. The healthiest, tallest, fattest, cleanest and greatest pigs in all Japan are daily watched over by Fumio.
>
> Being no extraordinary master, he talks to the pigs and they, being extraordinary pigs, talk to him. Discusssion of poundage, art, food, history and other subjects of philosophical importance daily occupy them.
>
> Warming his masterly hands over the coals on the boat, Fumio quietly recounts the life story of each of the great pigs of Hiroshima. A halo of warmth, humility and authoritative knowledge surround him. Each story is a masterpiece.

AP wire story found in August 7, 1945 *Bangor Daily News*.

Hiroshima Major Military Target

WASHINGTON, Aug. 6 (AP) —Hiroshima, first enemy city to feel the American atomic bomb was a major military target. Whether it is anything important now cannot be determined until the smoke and dust clear.

The War department describes it as "an Army city," major quartermaster depot and leading port of embarkation. Principal industries produced large guns and tanks, machine tools and aircraft parts. Industrial and warehouse construction varied from light and highly inflammable to very heavy and fireproof, providing a good check on the atomic bomb's capabilities.

Population was about 318,000 at the last census, with the city proper measuring about three miles by four miles, and an industrial and military storage district on the outskirts, roughly one mile by three miles.

Searching to discover the facts of the bomb's effects, Porter met the remarkable painter Yoshiro Fukui, then thirty-six years old. A native of Hiroshima, Yoshiro remembered particularly the long, dazed minutes after the shattering blast, when black-scorched birds scurried around crazily. He was struck by the uncanny colors created in the ruins by the bomb and started a series of paintings based on incidents of that terrible day. Often while working on the series, he told Porter, he wanted to throw away his brushes to stifle the memories. Still he kept on, although the series was frequently interrupted by the necessity of earning a living—painting matchboxes, murals for bars, drawing for newspapers, and teaching art classes.

Yoshiro, well trained in European techniques, was particularly influenced by expressionism. In his bomb series, he combined the figure distortions familiar in German expressionism with the vivid colors of Japanese art. One painting called *Black Rains*, dark and sinister, shows a paralyzed mother in the foreground holding her dead baby, a friend beside her. Their figures stand mute, dumb, their clothes in shreds, staring at a terror beyond understanding. Another painting, *Fifteen Minutes After the Eruption*, depicts agonized, naked victims groping along the ground, seeking escape. The bodies of children, men, and women lie among bent and twisted bicycles. A scorched bird hops like a specter in the foreground, while on the horizon tower fantastically colored rows of clouds.

Porter tried and regretted that he was unable to secure an exhibit of Yoshiro's powerful paintings in the United States. To Porter, Yoshiro's work was particularly moving and significant because it pointed to the central conflict in the Japanese mind, the alternating fascination with and repulsion from Western industrial civilization. Yoshiro had used Western techniques with great power in his atom bomb series, but as Porter said, "How could you paint the disaster of the bomb with traditional Japanese methods? After all, the bomb is a Western invention." The problem for Japanese culture, Porter sensed, was not to be overwhelmed into imitating Western trends, but to reshape its own tradition. As he later wrote to me:

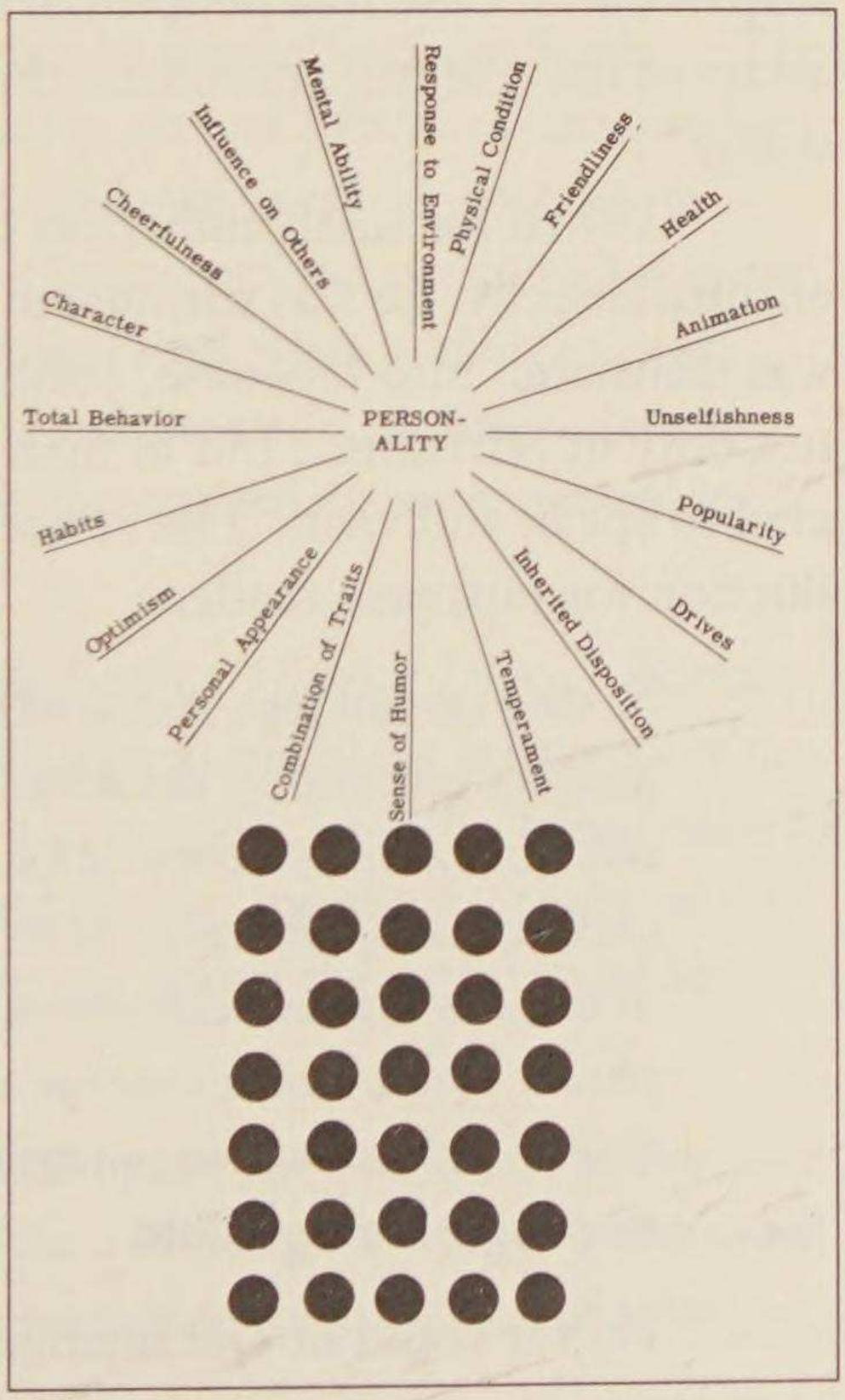
> Almost every Japanese has an instinctive artistic sensibility. The girls learn the art of flower arranging in early childhood. Nowhere in the world do you see the lovely, formal organization of Japanese gardens. And the calligraphy taught in elementary schools is another sign of this careful, stylized discipline that still contains a great deal of poetic perception. So I came to feel that the future of

> Japanese culture could be revolutionary and exciting, if they combined their formal artistic disciplines with scientific techniques used creatively in art instead of in destruction.

Following this surge of enthusiasm about the possibilities of carrying out his theories of the union of science and art in Japan, Porter began to lecture extensively, emphasizing his scientific background. In addition to lecturing, he wrote for newspapers, trying to publicize his views.

In January 1954, he read in the English language paper *Mainichi*, published in Osaka, that a commercial artist named Sugimura had been intrigued by the sight of one hundred Japanese and foreign pocket watches in a store all set at ten minutes after ten. Intent on the visual aspects of the problem, Sugimura wondered why the many different watches on display were set in the same way. This struck Porter as an opportunity to demonstrate the relationship between science and art, and after a day of experimenting with watch settings, he wrote a letter that was published in *Mainichi*:

> Re T. Sugimura's 10:10 problem, wherein he has seen 100 Japanese and foreign pocket watches set at ten minutes after ten, it is possible that the aesthetic analysis will reveal a circle (watch face) having a smaller circle touching (winding stem) is most visually pleasing when the radii (watch hands) are symmetrical with the circle above. This when the watch reads 10:10.
>
> A twelve o'clock setting, while an interesting relation for two circles, is probably duller visually than cutting the larger circle in half with a six o'clock position of the hands. Either 3:40 or 4:35 would be acceptable if the watch were stemless. Its



Found from Porter's *The Wastemaker*, Abyss Publications, 1972.

presence, however, above the twelve, requires the top half of the large circle to be used, thereby making 11:05 a possibility, but one not as acceptably balanced as 10:10. A 10:10 setting meets all aesthetic tests.

As interesting and as important as such diagrammatic aesthetics may be to advertising illustrators, it is perhaps not so artistically exciting to Japanese painters as the whole new field of expression currently in vogue abroad under the name of SCIART, a contraction of Science and Art, which considers not only the 10:10 pattern with two circles but includes the mechanical winding of the watch spring, the hand movements releasing the coil's tension, the energies involved and the recording of time, its meaning and implication with attendant consideration of rhythm, period, frequency and wave generation. From such studies an aesthetic expression as potent as Pointillism and Non-Objective Art is maturing.

In his lectures Porter stressed that the Sciart artist needed sufficient scientific background to understand and visualize the new forms, colors, patterns, and rhythms that scientific research constantly produced. "Suppose you're painting a picture with clocks at which people are staring," Porter explained to me later. "You must consider not only the settings on the clocks as far as the form of the painting is concerned, but how can you possibly portray the tense relationship of the clocks to the people staring at them unless the artist is aware of the scientific problems that have created these relationships?"

When his small audiences received Porter's ideas on Sciart enthusiastically, he was stimulated to revise his *Sciart Manifesto*. It was translated into Japanese, published in newspapers, and exhibited not only in Hiroshima but in many towns and cities where he traveled to speak and visit. The revised *Manifesto* included this introduction for Japanese readers:

> Noting certain Japanese workers have already discovered the new imagery revealed by the advances of scientific development, he has sent your editors a copy of his famous SCIART MANIFESTO, encompassing after nine years of investigation the complete sources of the new creative expression evolving from Science and Art, each phrase therein, each concept enclosed by commas, being a whole field of Science whose potential for reinterpretation by artists is seemingly inexhaustible.

Porter could not be blamed for the specious claim that his

Manifesto was "famous." He wanted intensely to spread his ideas, and this was his first real opportunity. In January he walked into a Hiroshima bookstore and discovered an August 1953 copy of the American magazine *The Art Digest*, with a short report titled "Dali in Nuclear Theft Charge." This concerned Salvador Dali's quarrel with an Italian painter, Enrico Baj, who claimed that he had created "nuclear art" before Dali had invented "atomic art" and pressed charges against Dali in an international court hearing in Milan. Porter commented on the case in a letter to Belle Krasne, then editor of *The Art Digest*:

> Not seeing your valued publication during three years in the Pacific made its discovery in a Hiroshima bookshop a pleasant experience. That it was five months old, dated August 1953, mattered little: old friends obliterate dates.
>
> One heading, "Dali in Nuclear Theft Charge," said Italian painter, Enrico Baj, professed inventor of "nuclear" painting in 1950, was suing Salvador Dali, professed inventor of "atomic" art in 1952, for infringement of copyright.
>
> If this international fracas is still raging, it may be pertinent to note that Messrs. Dali and Baj have been much behind the times, that both "nuclear" and "atomic" painting preceded them a few years and that both expressions are relatively unimportant departments of *Sciart*, a word contracted from Science and Art to cover any art expression deriving its inspiration from Science. The movement began, without a name, around 1900, had some notice with the Bauhaus group, continued with sporadic attention in different parts of the world until concentrated attention was given it in California from 1940 through 1949 when a *Manifesto* was officially published at Schillerhaus, Sausalito. Artists in Japan today are greatly stimulated by the original document issued in 1949.

This letter was never published in *The Art Digest*. Fortunately, however, the enthusiastic attention his ideas were receiving continued to stimulate Porter's creative spirit, and the frustration he had experienced in America seemed for the moment a thing of the past. In his excitement he wrote to me about the revision of his *Sciart Manifesto*:

> Owing to the interest discovered by my lectures in Japan, I've clarified the last paragraph of the 1949 original with two additional paragraphs, the last citing the particular combinations of science-

art forms already developed by myself and others, and the next-to-last containing the kernel for the art of the future where rectangles, squares and flat surfaces will be discarded for "non-rectilinear shapes having other than plane surfaces," the same prepared by methods of the scientific laboratory (covered with theme material of its continuing discovery), and "by media not normally employed in art." I produced three such paintings at Schillerhaus. . . .

Frequency effects, movement, phenomena and devices are noted in the 3rd, 4th and 5th sections, each word set off by commas being the key to an entire field of science, the subject of whole volumes of scientific thought which the artist can investigate—not necessarily to the point of exhaustive reading or complete understanding, but to the extent of feeling the aesthetic import of the illustrations, photographs, charts and equations contained therein for each topic noted. Often one reproduction of a microscope slide from biology, one topographical drawing from geology, a crystal drawing from metallurgy, is enough to start a fresh avenue of development. The works of so-called ultra modernists delving in what they call dyneton painting, amorphous, non-rectilinear art and other contemporary forms exemplified by the work at the California School of Fine Arts under Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and the work of the Sausalito Modernists which I sponsored in '48 and '49, originated without anyone being too aware in this area of Science-Art, sometimes anticipating Science, sometimes paralleling it, often drawing from it without knowing and now desperately needing to explore it thoroughly and to branch into it for survival, as nothing is more dull than the repetition these workers are now continuing. Sciart, the contraction of Science and Art, is the future of Art.

Porter's exuberance seemed to turn obstacles into opportunities. The United States director of the American Cultural Center in Hiroshima ignored him as his visit was not sponsored by the State Department. This rejection only enabled Porter to get closer to the Japanese: native staff members at the Center stepped forward with translating aid, advice on contacts, and an invitation to live in a Japanese home in true Japanese style for three weeks, a privilege granted to few foreigners.

When Porter announced his belief that Hiroshima should become the site of the first atomic plant to produce energy for peaceful purposes, the Japanese press responded with gusto, and he received increasing attention. Hiroshima's *Chugoku Press* asked Porter to write an article on uranium, and the piece drew widespread

interest. In the article Porter asserted that there was uranium in Japan and argued that Japan had progressed enough in rebuilding her economy to investigate the extent of the resource. He emphasized that the Japanese government should open the search to foreigners as well as citizens and pay equitable rates for finding, drilling, removing, and hauling the ore to government purchasing stations. Government, he insisted, must control "the final end products," which would be used only for peaceful benefits such as the generation of electrical power and heat and the development of medical treatments.

This article brought Porter new contacts with influential Japanese. One day he visited the distinguished philatelist Tokubei

Article from Japanese newspaper about Porter's visit with Professor Hiroshi Honda, Professor of Contemporary English Letters, University of Foreign Studies, Osaka, Japan, April 4,1954.



ご采配を堪能したが遂び切れないありさま、この但馬岡の湯山荘、加茂谷の宿屋山、加太記録も数万いる、また湯山寺前の和田の釣付近では数十名が一かたまりとなり、ハエ釣りに熱命でする五十尾も釣りあげる上手なものもあり、無心にウキをみつめる船は初夏の風景に溶け込んでいる(写真は会津川の鮎釣り)

Osaka Shimbun April 5, 1954

動く手先に驚異の眼

ボーター氏〝貝ボタン物語〟作りに

世界的な紀州貝ボタンをテーマに〝貝ボタン物語・を表出するためアメリカ・カーン州ホールタインの契約評論家バーン・ポーターン氏(四)ミシはこのほど飛行機で羽田着旦下和歌山県田辺市に滞在、日本全国の七都を廻し世界的にも知られている同市の貝釦業を調査し、カリフォルニア州で発行しているバークレン・ジャーナルに連載するもので、同氏はテメリカでも有名な百五の貝ボタンに興味を感じたといって居り、同市内の貝ボタン女工が能先一本でつくる美しいボタンに驚異の眼をみはり田辺市役所などで貝ボタンの歴史など聞いた上、白浜温泉で執筆する予定である、同氏は三日夜田辺市の指揮中村盛旅館でつぎの通り語った、なお同氏はイサム・野口氏の親友である

たお二、三日調査してから執筆のため白浜温泉に行きたい、貝ボタン工場を見学したが女の労働者が非常に働いているのにおどろいた、その大きな原因は問屋からあの大きな一つで美しい貝ボタンになってゆくのは魅力的だった、また日本の貝ボタンの品質は非常にすぐれており、そのための技術もすばらしくまた日辺人やご家族、私たちにこれた貝ボタンと知りとても感激し帰国に際することになっている、特に日本の女子労働は非常にすぐれておりアメリカにはこうした手先工業はない＝写真はポーター氏

はやくも虫籠

四国から海南へ

海南市黒江産にはやくも夏のおもちゃ虫籠が四国から運ばれ子供たちをよろこばしている、同市は和紙の主産地であるのに原料竹が不足、団扇や竹籠などの竹材製品にほとんど海路を四国から移入している、このシーズンはずれの虫籠も市内の某荒物屋さんがシーズンを迎えると仕入屋になるのを見越して発注したもので、一夏二千個ぐらいは売れるといっている

152

Fujii at his home overlooking the beautiful island of Mijagima, south of Hiroshima. The surrounding pine trees, peach blossoms, and other flowers set against the mountains and water so moved Porter that it seemed a shame to him that the house walls partly blocked the magnificent view. While admiring the Japanese expert's stamp collection and watching his host's wife conduct the graceful ritual of the tea ceremony, he suddenly remembered a lecture by Moholy-Nagy at Princeton in 1940, in which the Hungarian had predicted that one day houses would have walls of air. The memory of this statement gave Porter an idea: what if one were to build a house that used moving layers of air under high pressure as the wall material. That night, in his hotel room, he typed his concept of the *Hiroshima House of Air*:

> With moving layers of air as the wall material, this would leave only a large concrete floor having a simple tubular frame of stainless steel, four uprights at the corners and four joining tubes at the top to complete the house. A specially designed air compressor and ejector under the floor would force the high speed air wall, two inches thick, out through slits in the tubular frame forming four walls and a ceiling. Heat generated in the process would warm water circulating through tubes embedded in the concrete floor to heat the entire room or house space inside. The moving air being an insulator, the warmth inside would not escape. Sun would pass through the wall. So could people on entering the house, and rain and winds from outside would be deflected. As a measure of privacy, shade and extra protection, I added sliding curtains or walls of sheet aluminum to be pulled out of the tubular steel parts at will as one pulls up or down a window shade. Where room effects or partitions were required, I added a single tubular upright in the center from which four such walls might be pulled out at right angles to one another to form, if desired, four rooms. Decorations could be painted on these walls if needed and the furniture pieces could allow the design of those now found in the Japanese home. When I devised all of these details sitting there in Fujii's home, I didn't know how far Moholy had carried the concept. He merely used the words "houses with walls of moving air," and I have never forgotten them though I never could see a complete justification for it until coming to Japan, where the scenery is compacted into a small space with all possible variations of natural beauty that is to me as intoxicating as rare wine. One must take it in small steps, slowly, and one is never quite filled with it.

Porter knew that his creation went against the traditional nature of Japanese architecture. The writer Junichiro Tanizaki, in his book *In Praise of Shadows*, said that the thick, heavy roof of a Japanese house "spreads a parasol to throw a shadow on the earth, and in the shadow we put together a house. . . .There are no doubt all sorts of reasons—climate, building materials—for the deep Japanese eaves. . . .The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows toward beauty's ends. And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows. . . .The light from the garden steals in but dimly through paper-paneled doors, and it is precisely for us that this indirect light makes for us the charm of a room. We do our walls in neutral colors so that the sad, fragile dying rays can sink into absolute repose."

I asked Porter if he felt a conflict between this traditional view of the Japanese house and his new concept. First of all, he replied, his house was not intended to be used throughout Japan, but only in certain southern locations, particularly near Hiroshima, where the climate and landscape were suitable. Second, he felt strongly that his house suited the essential Japanese spirit. "There is a basic purity of design in the best Japanese architecture," he said, "a kind of abstract, geometrical statement, invented hundreds of years before Mondrian, that makes the beauty of a good Japanese building. In particular, the open nature of a Japanese house, the sliding paper-paneled walls, is in harmony with my idea. I found too, that many Japanese no longer believed in the old, contemplative ideal of thick-roofed houses. Perhaps unfortunately, the kind of society those houses reflected died many years ago as industrialists and militarists pushed the nation toward standards of Western civilization. Many Japanese architects build now in the 'international style.' Since scientific developments cannot be stopped, isn't it better to create a style for the future that is based on traditional Japanese design elements?"

After he had worked out his plans in greater detail, Porter's ideas were translated into Japanese and sketches of the building prepared under his supervision. In the Japanese translation, published in Hiroshima, he presented *The House of Air* to the Japanese people as a tribute to the natural beauty of their country. It was the second example he had produced (the first being the Church of Light) of what he called *Sciarch*, the union of science and architecture—or, as

he said, "the application of a combination of physics, air, heat, and light to architecture." Late in February 1954, Porter wrote to me:

> I am still in Hiroshima although I intended only to stay a few days. But I travel out of here on four-day trips, and by staying I have come to know Japanese who invite me to their homes and they in turn, introduce me to others with the result that I am getting far more of the life and thinking than the average tourist. The experience is quite something, for I go into everything from clothing to food, from architecture to books, from carpentry to physics, and have met some very extraordinary talents. I speak often to groups of all kinds on all subjects via an interpreter.

One of his four-day trips was to Nagasaki, the second Japanese city leveled by the atom bomb. Here, as in Hiroshima, Porter was amazed by the spirited reconstruction of the city. Nagasaki is the primary port of entry for ships coming to Japan from the west or south, and Porter was particularly fascinated by the rapid recovery of the city's shipbuilding industry. In both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, through his contacts among influential Japanese, he toured the shipyards. Since the Japanese had learned to build ships from the British, the plans and parts he saw often bore English names, and he was able to learn the basic process quickly. His fascination with the shipyards and his conversations with industry leaders about the importance of shipping to the native economy, inspired him to dream of a ship driven by sun power.

Using the mythology of Japan as the land of the rising sun, he also proposed that research be done on the feasibility of establishing power plants on the country's highest mountains to generate electric power from the sun. He visited power plants in Hiroshima Prefecture that developed electric power from water control, confirming his belief that the harnessing of the sun for the same purpose was not only possible but practical.

Porter's study of the possibilities of solar energy led him to consider the scientific problem of space travel, about which his Japanese audiences asked many questions. Having read and thought a great deal about interplanetary travel during his years as a scientist in the United States, Porter remarked to a Hiroshima audience that the southernmost tip of Japan seemed to him geographically suitable for launching a spaceship. The next day his statement was picked up by the Japanese press and treated humorously with a cartoon showing eager space travelers gathered around a rocketship. The publicity challenged Porter, and he began searching for a

launch site in southern Japan. He was followed from town to town by the press, to whom he had announced his objective, and his name was mentioned frequently on the radio.

Porter's concept of a spaceship resembled the one in the popular imagination, a three-stage model, two of which would contain the necessary fuel and propulsion mechanisms to drive the head into outer space. When their fuel was exhausted, the two propulsion sections would fall off. Since the propulsion sections would be of considerable size and weight, the ship would have to be launched over an unpopulated area, preferably an ocean. After searching for several days, Porter discovered a site near the village of Nichinan that he thought ideal. "Purely because of geographical conditions," he told newspaper reporters, "I don't think there's a better launching site in the world, until the theories and techniques of launching rockets and spaceships are improved. Here, the climate is not only good and railroad facilities nearby, but the spaceship could rocket out in the direction of the earth's rotation as required and the spent sections would fall harmlessly into the ocean before the ship attained sufficient altitude at some point off the United States coast."

Increasing interest in his ideas and the publicity he was receiving in Japanese newspapers resulted in an invitation to exhibit his artistic experiments at the Chugoku Museum. Again, as had occurred several times before, Porter was caught short of material. Most of his work was in the United States. However, he was able to show the *Sciart Manifesto*, the *House of Air* plans, and several examples of one phase of his experiments—photographs done with collage techniques. When he left Sausalito for the Pacific, he had taken with him a portfolio of the best of his photo-collages, derived from long hours spent pouring over cutouts from old copies of *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, *Town and Country*, and other popular American magazines. In the Pacific

Found from Porter's *The Wastemaker*, Abyss Publications, 1972.

An exciting new kind of holiday for the adventurous tourist !!!!!

TAKE A TRIP
To The
MOON

A journey of unforgettable contrasts, unique excursions, and new vistas far from earthly routines. Inquire about the round-trip plan with provision for your lunar stopover and all expenses, including insurance. Special off-season rates. Departures each fortnight.

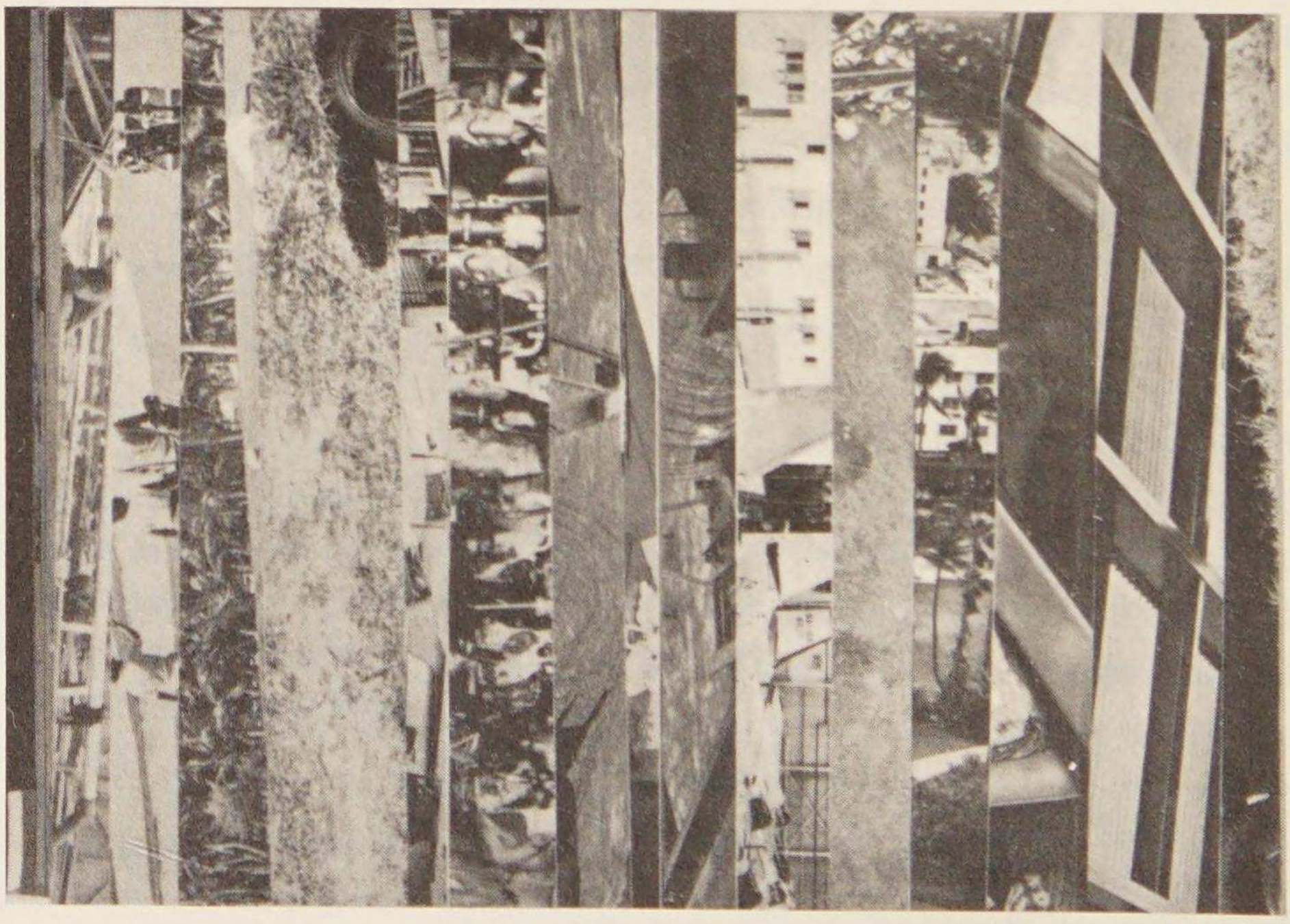
Consult your local travel agent

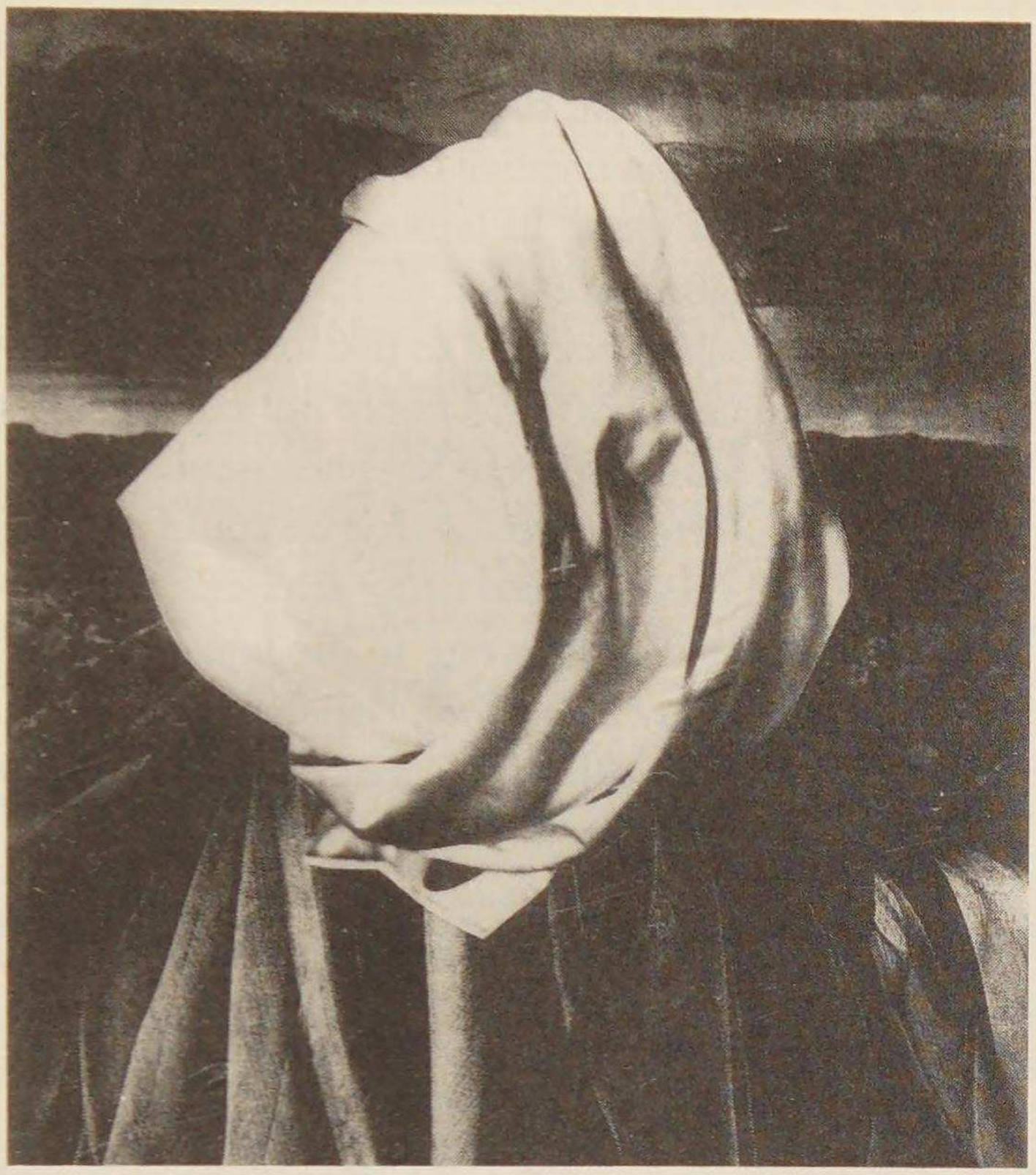
Islands and Japan, he hoped to find foreign illustrations he could use to create new collages. He wrote from Japan:

> While there must have been exciting material of this sort, there were so many other things to excite me I never got to it though I visited many secondhand stores and consciously kept an eye open for potential material to work into collage. The early work of Max Ernst has always excited me and I wanted to find strange materials through which to outdo Ernst, although I think some of my Schillerhaus experiments do this; where Ernst's achievements in this field are done with etchings and line drawings, mine are done with reproduced photographs from the luxury magazines.

Although he had accomplished little creative work on Guam, he had collected many glossy-print newspaper photographs via his press connections. He began to "carve them up" with a penknife, and, by fitting the edges together, replaced the images in more dramatic, surrealistic arrangements. This technique, he felt, would be more magical than pasting cutouts on top of each other as he had done previously. Porter's innovation gained recognition when he showed several of these pieces in the Chugoku exhibit. Japanese artists were, of course, familiar with the experiments of Ernst, Duchamp, and others in the field of collage and montage. Japanese commercial artists used similar techniques but not in the same way.

Endpapers from Porter's
Dieresis, 1969.





Mother of God, photo collage.

Porter's notion that the task began with four or five conventional photos cut up and reassembled to produce a certain mood stirred much interest.

Traditionally, Japanese art was based on an intuitive approach. Natural objects were drawn and painted, not from an empirical, analytical viewpoint as in many Western masterpieces but from the artist's intuitive participation in the universal order. This approach resembled Porter's struggle with his magazine cutouts. His novel use of cutouts struck the Japanese as a promising compromise between their traditional methods and revolutionary Western scientific techniques they felt compelled to explore. One photo-collage, in particular, at the Chugoku exhibit aroused much comment and was reproduced widely. Speaking of this work, called *The Mother of God*, Porter said: "To the left it is a breast set upon a mountain in wild, desolate country. To the right it is a hooded head upon draped shoulders, with the hidden face looking off at a distant scene. Straight on, it is a featureless, neutral face on draped shoulders. For me it has these aspects, anyway. When I did it, the draped, smothered head with the lake and mountains in the distance seemed to me to symbolize the complex relationships between Man

and God and Nature. The sexual aspects of Nature, the mountain in the shape of a breast, the intense loneliness of the hooded figure, expressed for me the creative or the feminine source of life—the Mother—also for God. In Japan, where the concepts of God, Mother, and Nature are open objects of worship at every turn, this grouping of symbols seemed to take on extra meaning, which, owing to the language barrier, I could not completely understand."

Despite the success of his photo-collage experiments with the Japanese, Porter regretted that he could not show any of the photographs he had created using scientific techniques, thus losing an opportunity to demonstrate to the Japanese the ideas he had expressed in the *Sciart Manifesto*. Popular as his photo-collages were, he sensed that his work with actual laboratory techniques would have even greater influence and significance.

The success of his exhibit at the Chugoku Museum and the general response that he had experienced in Hiroshima prompted Porter to write a poem to the city, which was translated by the poet Rihei Numata and illustrated by Yoshiro Fukui. It was not intended as an English poem, and Porter commented with his customary sarcasm, "By destroying the English, no one can say that I'm not a poet." When Porter left Hiroshima, a debate was continuing as to who should publish the poem, the Tourist Department or a bus company. His reception, in a city destroyed only nine years previously by the first atom bomb, had been an encouraging example of the cooperation possible between different cultures based on creative rather than commercial or military interests.

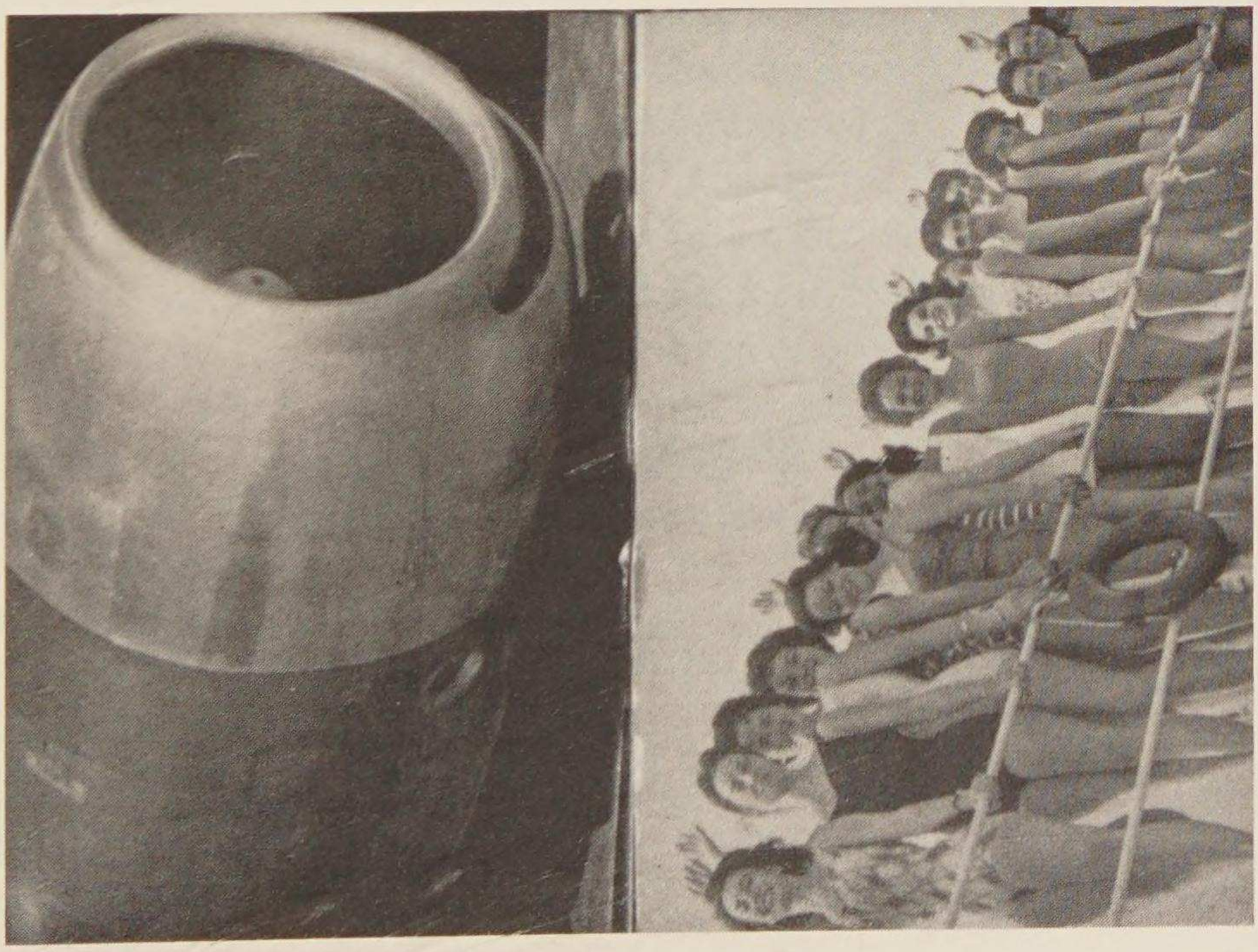
Porter left Hiroshima on March 5, 1954, continuing his travels by train through southern and central Japan. He kept to the small towns and discovered that the stationmaster in each town was the best contact. Through this official he could obtain hotel rooms at Japanese rates and other services usually available only to native travelers. Because his picture frequently appeared in the papers in connection with his lectures, it was not uncommon for train conductors to recognize him and telephone ahead to the stationmaster, who would then have a newspaper reporter and an English-language instructor from the local school (to serve as translator) waiting on the station platform. After the newspaper interview, Porter would bicycle to the school to speak to the classes.

In addition to his school talks, Porter also visited leading intellectuals as he had in Hiroshima. Among those he met were archaeologist Yotaro Osaka at Matsue; poetry authority Heihachiro Honda at Osaka; and literary critic Hiroshi Tajima at Kobe. On

such visits he was questioned on many subjects but primarily on the political attitude of the United States and the vast problems associated with American power in the Pacific. In cultural affairs, Porter often found himself on the defensive and tried his best to explain why the American government offers little help to the arts. Over and over again he sensed a general admiration of American industrial techniques together with a definite, if never openly expressed, belief in the cultural inferiority of the United States compared to Europe and Asia. To the extent that culture is the measure of any civilization, Porter saw why the Japanese regarded the United States as a technological tyrant. He pointed out many times that there were important American artists, but, with the exception of Frank Lloyd Wright and Henry Miller, the names he mentioned were little known in Japan. He found himself wishing that the American Information Office in Tokyo would do more on behalf of American artists.

In Kyushu, Porter paid a special visit to the statue of the Woman God of Yamaguchi. He wrote, "Because I often had occasion to pay tribute to Japanese women, I went so far as to say Christian prayers before the thirty-foot Goddess to the effect that it might be a good idea if women took over the world, for I have long

Double-page spread from Porter's *Dieresis*, 1969.



felt that men have made a mess of things."

This visit to the Goddess was the climax of his sojourn in Japan. His visa was expiring, and his restless travels, constant lecturing, and searching for people and places off the usual tourist tracks had caused him to lose weight and suffer again from asthmatic attacks. After a trip around Kii Peninsula and a stop at Ise Shrine, he returned to Nagoyaland and spent a few days with his Air Force friends from Marin County. From there he traveled via the Japan Alps through the silk-growing country and by the Fujii resort areas to Tokyo for a few days, a city he had avoided because of its size and the expense of living there. Western mechanization and overcrowding made that city a disappointment to him, although he dutifully visited museums and landmarks such as Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel. Still, the memories Porter took with him when he left Japan were good. The Japanese people, especially in Hiroshima, had given him new faith in his vision of the unity of science and art. Now he had to return to Guam, but knew he would not stay long there. He had been in the Pacific for four years, and a return to the United States was imperative for his health and further development of his creative ideas.

12 I've Left



The decade of the 1950s, despite American economic dominance throughout Europe and the Pacific, marked the beginning of an era of doubt and suspicion as the intensifying Cold War split the nations of the world. As early as 1947, W. H. Auden's long poem *The Age of Anxiety*, which Leonard Bernstein used as the title and dramatic theme of his second symphony, caught the tone of the period: "When the historical process breaks down and armies organize with their embossed debates the ensuing void which they can never consecrate, when necessity is associated with horror and freedom with boredom, then it looks good to the bar business." And the bar business in New York City boomed throughout the 1950s as fear, even in the midst of prosperity, tore at the fabric of American life. In *The Age of Anxiety*, Auden's character Malin muses:

But the new barbarian is no uncouth
Desert-dweller; he does not emerge
From fir forests: factories bred him;
Corporate companies, college towns
Mothered his mind, and many journals
Backed his beliefs. He was born here. The

Bravura of revolvers in vogue now
And the cult of death are quite at home
Inside the city. . . .

Far away on Guam, before embarking for the United States, Porter found himself caught in an uneasy national discussion about the aims of American power. Reports of the explosion of the first American thermonuclear weapon in the fall of 1952 on Eniwetok Atoll were beginning to seep out. Porter was particularly aware of growing uneasiness about the enormous power of this new bomb. Natives on Rongelap and Uterik had been burned by fallout from the blast. Stories circulating on Guam attested to the Pacific Islanders' bitterness toward American military experiments.

During June, after his return from Japan, Porter was able to find only a temporary job helping to edit and design the island's first picture magazine, *Guam Pictorial.*

Meanwhile, the Korean War was approaching a stalemate with China supporting North Korea, and tension over Korea, Indochina, and Formosa building, aided by H-bomb tests in the Marshalls. American officials continually passed through Guam on their way to conferences or to observe missions. Air Force jet bombers were moved from Japan to Guam to calm renewed Japanese fears of atomic devastation. The constant roar of planes overhead caused Porter to write bitterly, "I manage somehow to be in the middle all the time. The powder keg which I refused to go on constructing is always under me. Or just to the east, or the west."

Nights, unable to sleep, he walked the outlying streets of Agana or on the beach, mired in what he called "the wonder of loneliness that I know so well." He remembered that the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been launched from nearby Tinian. Obsessively, he found himself going over and over his experiences as a physicist during World War II: "Living in the Pacific," he wrote, "I had come to realize that life without all the mechanical gadgets was more pleasant and satisfying. The only pure scientific research man needed was in medicine, food, utilities, housing and clothing. But science had turned away from this basic kind of research and dedicated itself to things, rather than ideas and ideals. Science had become enslaved to the business society and the profession of scientist was merely another way to become successful. So I had come to my anti-scientist position."

For Porter, J. Robert Oppenheimer's hearing before a government Personnel Security Board in Washington from April 12 to

May 6, 1954, came to symbolize the degradation of a science that was controlled increasingly by dense, secret bureaucratic regulation. When the Board voted two to one to revoke Oppenheimer's security clearance, Porter despaired of the future of governmental scientific research. Later, when he read the transcript of the hearing, he felt that the haunting moral issues implicit in the Oppenheimer case were largely suppressed. However, one section of the transcript did seem to illustrate the problems. In a brief passage, the Board's chief counsel, Roger Robb, crossexamined Dr. Lee Alvin DuBridge, president of the California Institute of Technology:

Q. Doctor, do you think that loyalty to a friend justifies the giving of false information to a security office?

A. I would not wish to do that myself.

Q. You wouldn't do it, would you?

A. I don't think so.

Q. In fact, you can't conceive of any circumstances under which you would not?

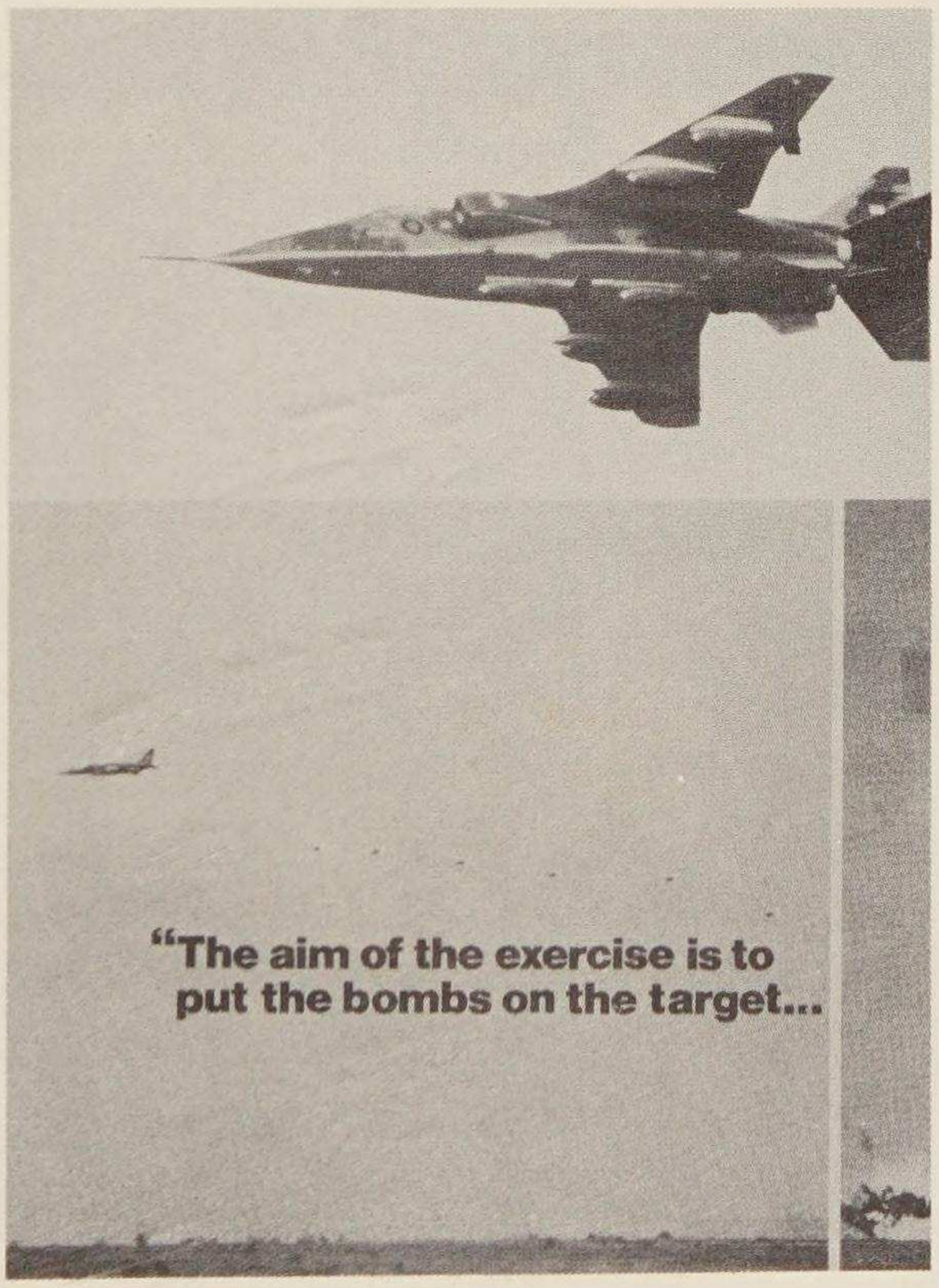
A. I wouldn't say that.

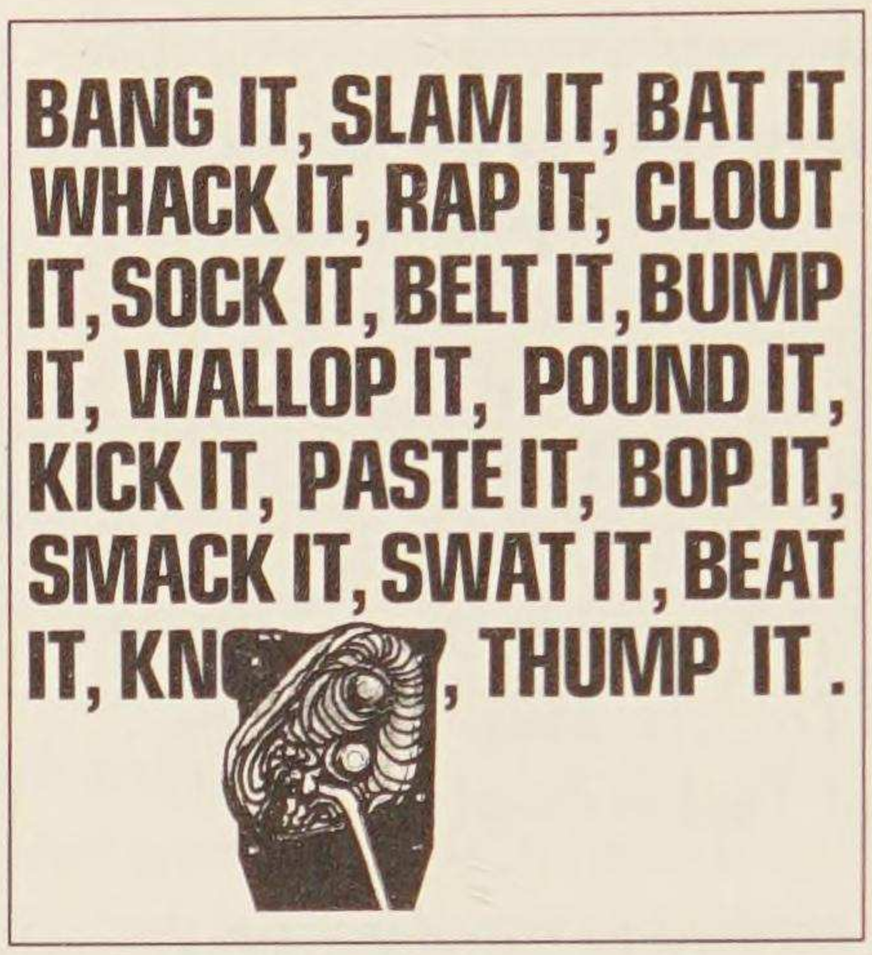
Q. Is it hard to think of any?

A. First, it is hard to project ourselves back 10 years as to what the situation was like then. None of us had any very keen appreciation of the problems of security and secrecy at that time or what was involved. I cannot say under no circumstances would I be reluctant to give away or give information about a friend if I were personally convinced that this information had nothing to do with the country's welfare. I would try to cooperate with security officers under all conditions, but I cannot say that under no conditions would I be reluctant to give such information.

Q. That was not quite my question. My question was whether or not you would feel that loyalty to your friend justified

Found from Porter's *Sweet End*, The Dog Ear Press, 1989.





Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

you in lying to a security officer.

A. No, I would not feel so.

Q. The standards of honesty were the same in 1943 as they are now, weren't they?

A. Presumably.

This kind of exchange, Porter noted, occurred frequently during the hearing. Then the questioning would switch suddenly to a different topic, as if the subjects of honesty, loyalty, and friendship in relationship to the authoritarian aspects of security had become too difficult to handle. When DuBridge answered with a cautious "presumably" to Robb's question about the standards of honesty, Porter thought that a sensitive truth had been touched. The truth was that the standards of honesty were not the same in 1954 as in 1943. Government security, operating in an antidemocratic manner that bred paranoic accusations, had altered the meanings of dignity and honesty.

The question raised by Robb and DuBridge and abruptly dropped was crucial, Porter felt. Had American society reached a point where a faceless security figure could be the final judge of the value of a friendship? In a free society, Porter thought, friendship must always remain personal. No anonymous security bureaucrat should have the power to override another individual's sense of personal honor. Each person must decide for himself or herself whether loyalty to the state or loyalty to a friend was paramount. Also, the fact remained that loyalty to the state would be meaningless without inviolable loyalty between friends. "The only alternative," Porter said, "is disaster, a continuation of the slow splintering of independent moral judgments, and an increasing trend in the United States toward a totalitarian government in the pattern of Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia." Musing about Oppenheimer's fate and the trend toward conformity, Porter wrote to me:

> Only rebirth and regeneration to simplicity, to truth, will save us. Simplicity, of course, is not easily found in a complex society. It has to begin with each individual. I have discovered that the rebirth of the individual must come from the full use and development of

his five senses. At present, we live in a largely visual world where our eyes are dominant. But even the use of those is stultified by a plethora of billboards, television sets, films, advertisements of all kinds. It seems to me the major defect of modern man is the loss of his unified sensibility, the fact that he does not use all of his senses to the fullest extent. All phases of education must re-examine their policies from the point of view of sensual training. And sensual training comes down in the end to art education. If we have no sense of the emotional and intellectual power of the arts, our ability to cope with real problems of life remains limited. Studying so-called primitive societies in the Pacific, I learned that sensual harmony is more conducive to the pursuit of happiness than any of the mechanical panaceas of western civilization.

Porter sought to bring together these ideas with his dream of uniting the arts and sciences in his first major book, *I've Left*, which he began in summer 1954 aboard a freighter en route to San Francisco. Steaming slowly into the fog of San Francisco Bay under the great arch of the Golden Gate Bridge, he felt both a surge of despair at seeing Angel Island without the Church of Light and a feeling of exhilaration because he had finished the first draft of his credo.

Cover of Porter's *I've Left*,
Something Else Press, 1972.



I've Left is an unusual autobiographical manifesto. A sense of jagged dislocation, as indicated in the title, determines the mood and structure, and a theme of alienation, the restlessness of modern man divorced from his natural environment, haunts the book. Once, at a San Francisco reading of his poetry, W. H. Auden said, "The only thing that differentiates man today from man in the past is that tomorrow he can be thousands of miles away!" This feeling of imminent change, in an age of faster and faster transportation, is also implied in Porter's title, *I've Left*.

The book begins with a quotation from the French poet and revolutionary critic Antonin Artaud: "I am proposing something to help get out of stagnation, instead of continuing to bewail it, and the boredom, inertia and stupidity of everything." In *The Theater of Cruelty: First Manifesto*, Artaud called for a rediscovery of "the notion of a kind of unique language halfway between gesture and thought." Such a language, he felt, would help "to create a metaphysics of speech, gesture and expression, in order to rescue it from its psychological and human stagnation." Porter begins *I've Left* with the same obsession to break through stale, conventional systems of communication. He wants to think freshly, "in a frequency universal," and speak "in a tongue world known and whomever wishes to hear, receive and understand does so."

The structure of *I've Left* reflects Porter's special interests. It is divided into eight sections: "Poetry," "Clothing," "Theater," "Architecture," "Art," "Food," "Hypertension," and "Automobiles and Transportation." At first the order of these subjects seems haphazard, but it is based on autobiographical concerns. Beginning with poetry, Porter describes how he printed poems on postcards and "exhorted the masses to post them to congressmen, labor leaders and commercial houses or even friends. . . ." If poetry, in its Grecian root meaning, is simply the art of making, what better way can there be to transform a pragmatic, commercial society than by distributing poetry widely through the most entertaining, available means? Yet, as Porter recalls through the autobiographical narrator's voice in *I've Left*, the attempt failed:

> I began unobtrusively to print quality poems on the back of common playing cards with a view to educating the ladies' every afternoon bridge playing society, gangsters at ease between jobs and fraternity lads in training for life and so pull the whole ghastly thing out of the mire of commercialism and put it on an aesthetic level.

> The ladies complained it was disturbing and distracting to read and think or even to have reading that might induce thinking.
>
> The gangsters complained it fouled their cheating system unless all cards bore the same poem.
>
> The college lads said it was out of their line.

Gradually, the narrator becomes obsessed with publishing and distributing poetry by any means, and he seeks to cover every available space with poems:

> I trebled the size of cigar wrappers for no other reason than to issue larger printing areas for contemporary poetry. For the same reason I enlarged theater tickets, laundry lists, matchbook covers, gum wrappers, toilet and facial tissues. No wasted spaces, I averred, no areas devoid of magic words was the motto.

Inevitably, the narrator is seized by delirium, and in his madness begins to spew poetry "without words, without sounds, without punctuation, without meaning." Poetry is dead. Then comes Porter's vision of what poetry might become in the new technological society, the traditional physical sources of poetry scrambled with the mad mastery of a scientist toying with new energy resources:

> In its place arose dots and dashes in full color, cinescope projected with mail-slot screens, intermittent spurts of chemically-dyed ether, alpha-radiated Geiger recordings emanated from my diaphragm with every third vowel crystallized. Textual poetry was at last off the typed ms, off the printed page and jet soaring. Spoken poetry was finally out of the arena of the society-reading cliques, off the grooved waves of the needled disc, out of the magnetic field of recording wires and tapes, and out of range of electronic treatments for audio and visual broadcast. In transit to the point from which it should never have departed I touched poetry with all of these means, including re-expression and accompaniment by musical scores, film footages and stage decors with choral, choreographic and instrumental interpretation of both normal and ultra-frequency octaves produced by both ancient and still preborn instruments. Coincident with this death and prolonged state of transfusional injections my own brand of flow continued like hanging gardens spouting and cliffs and skyscrapers, like geysers from the floors of banks. Fusillades of streaking arrows fused from the dots and dashes of the new expression. I spread them in waves, sheets and buckets full. I imparted density, opacity, heat, fear temperature, tenacity and anger. The lights, the dots, the dashes, the equivalents

of words became meanings, tones of meaning and the image of meaning. Poetry was at last intrinsically itself full born but umbilically tied to its source spring. Hence blood, groans, shouts, cries, stomach noises were also present. Likewise space, four dimensional. The result was space poetry, mental, audio and visual. Poetry was now in the realm of physics and I called it *scipoe*.

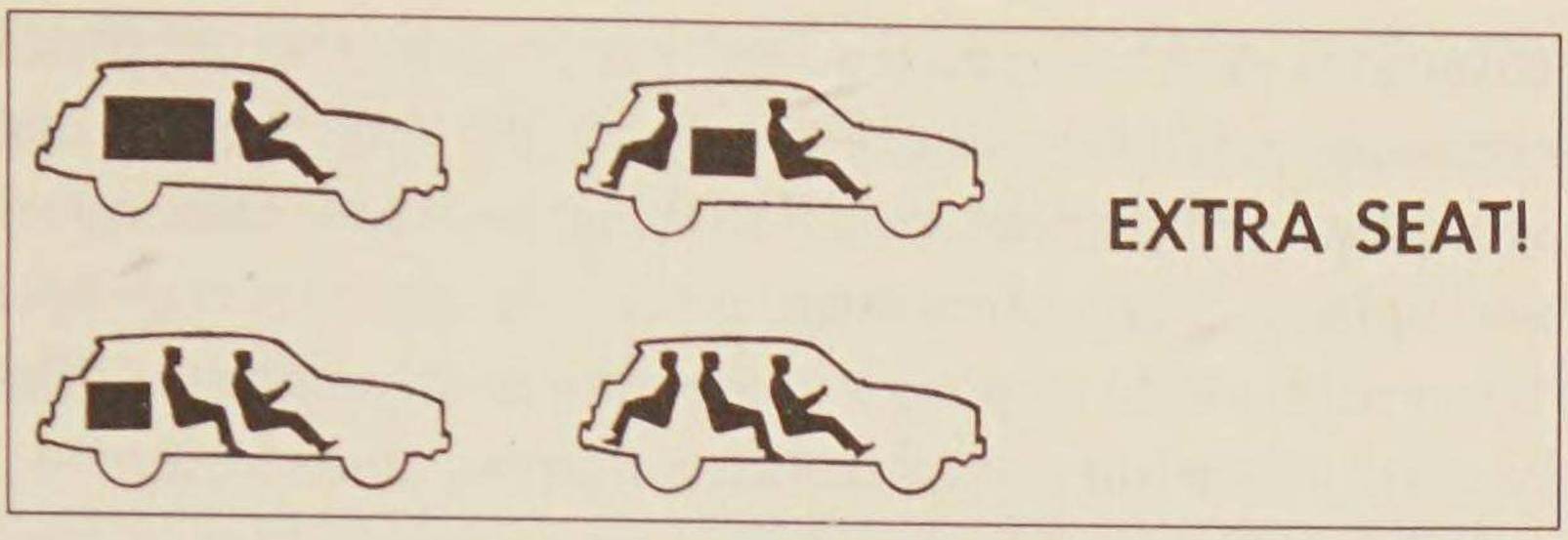
In the second section, on clothes, Porter's narrator gazes into a mirror and sees an absurd image of man in an unsettled world:

> Note that I am now ready for the wars of survival as we know them—in short I am dressed. Note that I have on eleven separate garments or items. Note that these items have twenty-eight appurtenances. Note that only my legs are now covered with a single layer of cloth, that is my legs five inches above and five inches below my kneecaps. Notice that fourteen buttons have been used, two shoelaces, two cuff links, two armbands, one belt, one tie clasp, two collar buttons and one necktie, plus one zipper, two garters and seven buttonholes which are not really buttonholes but only imitations of them. For some unaccountable reason six of these false buttonholes have buttons but the seventh does not.

As he continues, Porter introduces his experimental ideas: First, he considers eliminating the accessories—the cuffs, cufflinks, collars, excessive buttons and false buttonholes, and the unused pockets. Then there is the possibility of combining trousers and undershorts. "The direction of the trend, however," he says, "was clearly to a single piece with the necktie, the object of greatest affection and the most difficult to part with." With the decline of necktie-worship, he begins to speculate about "the ultimate suit," which could be coated or sprayed on the body and removed instantly by dissolving. Finally, this suit would become "an intermediate or somewhat popular model, having built-in soles or shoes." It would be dispensed "from slot machines and. . .disposable in toilets." Such developments, of course, would do away with old-fashioned procedures of sewing, knitting, and weaving.

Focusing again on the body, the narrator next undertakes thousands of stress and motion studies of the human body in an unrelenting American search for something new. In the end, he comes to the inevitable conclusion that it is impossible to improve upon the beauty and practicality of the human body:

> The sprayed-on coverings of my early design, the disposable one-piece suits, the shoes with high-heat-treated, spring-steel soles, the



Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

suits with the wear-out-proof seats and elbows, the master-special that had no pockets but carried all necessary extras pinned on, the moth-proof, fade-proof material whose weave and color design could be made to change by simple exposure to ultra-violet light—these and a staggering number of innovations for clothes which had come from my personal studio were already made obsolete by the efforts of those whom I daily directed to demonstrate for all time that the human body without embellishment was superior to anything that could be prepared. The contribution of this great truth to the poorer areas of the world's population—who already practiced it in part but needed further experimental confirmation—was, of course, tremendous. It only remained now to see that this body was properly fed, rested, exercised and made disease-proof.

In Section III, on theater, Porter's principal guide was clearly Artaud's vision of *The Theater of Cruelty*. Artaud stated that "theater, because of its physical aspect and because it requires *expression in space* (the only real expression, in fact), allows the magical means of art and speech to be practiced organically and as a whole, like renewed exorcisms." In *I've Left*, Porter proposes to abolish conventional American theater entirely, from auditorium and stage to texts, financial backers, and producers. His ideal theater would be "a circle of sufficient diameter to accommodate twelve-hundred swivel seats each capable of rotating a full 360 degrees and with sufficient space between each to allow occupants to rotate without touching one another, plus some additional footage to allow free and easy passage of all theatergoers and the performers or 'feeders,' as I now called them." Each seat would be "radiantly heated and lighted to temperatures and color ranges controlled from an unseen organ." As the audience enters, they wear their own masks and costumes chosen to represent a "particular mood and contribution to that particular evening." But this would be the audience's only con-

tribution. As the "spatial score" progresses, the organist would become the mad phantom of the opera, playing from "a composed score for each presentation," making each audience member "heat and light up like a glistening torch." As the spectacle intensifies, "the entire circle of people under the manipulation of the feeders became a stewing pot of emotional brew, sound-pierced, light-struck and heat-riddled with dialogue replaced by gesture and thought, with music replaced by feeling and spirit, with props replaced by the very theatergoers themselves."

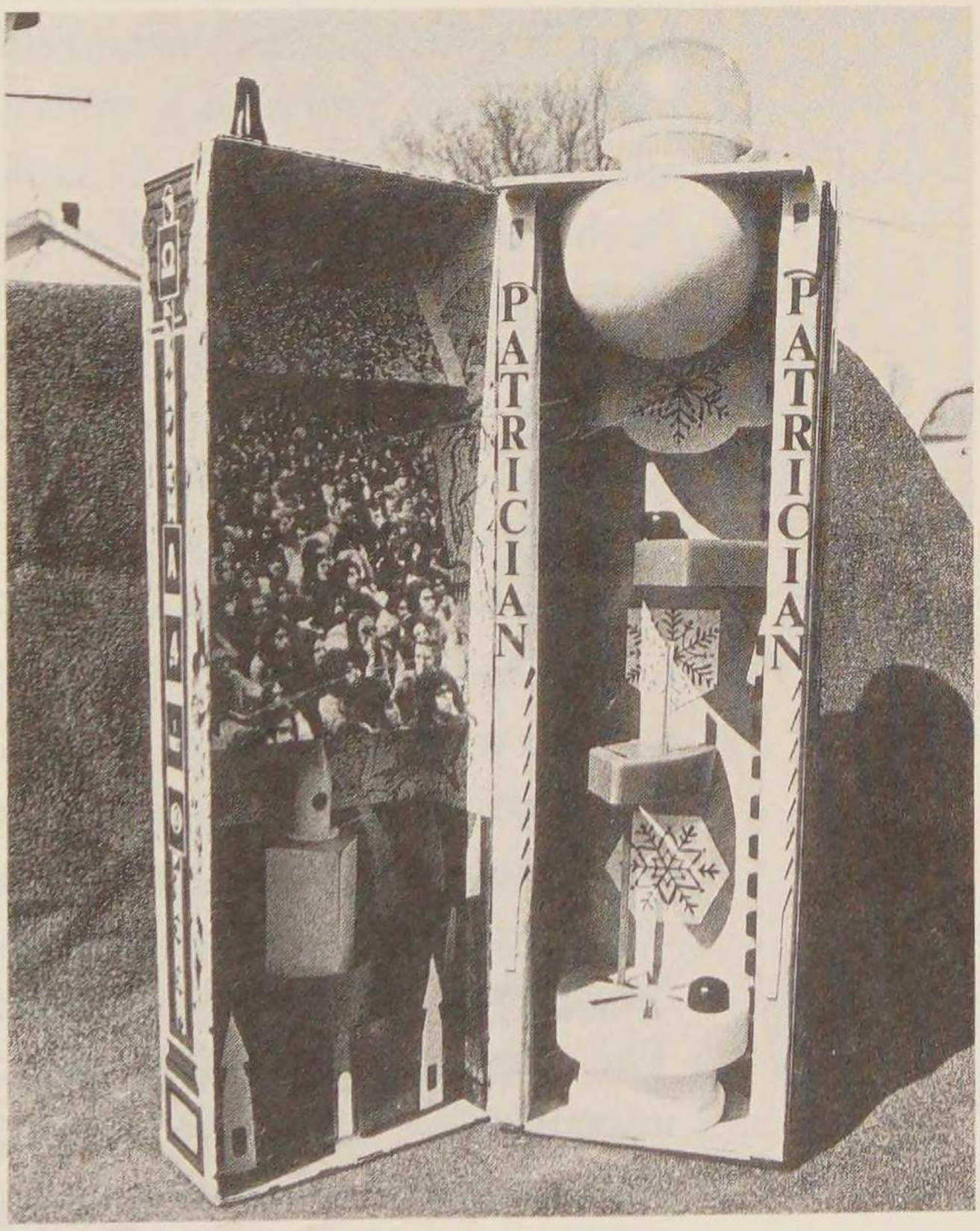
Finally, this new spatial language "transforms the mind's version of happenings into events to be perceived, this world of absolute gesture free of written scripts, scored music, dated choreography, theater noises and props which is the idea itself; this air of perspective in sound, color and movement undulating as a whole throughout the circle with meaning, content and validity." Perhaps it is no accident that, in the scientific theater that Porter envisions, the audience is manipulated throughout, as science manipulates our society today. Porter's satire displays the contradictions that arise when a new technology gains control and individuals are no longer permitted to relax before their television sets. Actors become mere "feeders," and the light organ of the Danish inventor Wilfrid, to which Porter pays tribute, becomes a colossal machine that creates a superhuman emotional spectacle.

Section IV, on architecture, begins, as does Section III, with a contemptuous dismissal of everything that has occurred in the field: " (1) burned all existing journals, texts and monographs on the subject, (2) shot all living architects, and (3) combined architecture with physics." With such authoritarian gestures, Porter follows André Breton's surrealist outcry against war and poverty: "The most simple surrealist act is going down into the street. . . and shooting at random into the crowd." What ensues, however, in Porter's vision of architecture is half-Rousseau, half-Frank Lloyd Wright—man returned to his natural habitat but living in a decentralized technological environment that physics has made possible: "That every house should be a self-contained, living organism free of all adjacent organisms and living directly off the environment of natural air, light, wind, rain and soil like any flower of the field was, of course, a principle I had long believed in and which life among most of the cultures had convinced me must inevitably follow." To achieve this natural simplicity, Porter advocates "ground houses" expanding logically into "plant houses" and then "leaf houses," "tree houses," "cacti houses," dwellings modeled on plant forms and, as in

the case of cacti, "equipped the structure with tentacles or feelers which receive heat, light, electricity, voice, radio, and television energies direct from the various rays and wave forms impinging upon them." In his final, ecstatic vision, Porter leaves behind the necessity of confining structural materials:

> With light I built a church. Its walls pierced the night in a film of brilliance. The tower vibrated throughout its height as a stringed instrument emitting tones of color. My church was a beacon, a memorial, a place engendering faith through worship: site of the largest color-light organ I had conceived in my science of *scimus*. With wind I built a house. Transparent, it restricted no views, passing sunlight freely in all directions. Insulated, it retained its own temperatures. It was snow and rain proof: repellent to insects and animals. A logical haven of human life in which black floors and aluminum curtains converted sun energy to electricity for heating, cooking and cooling. With darkness I made walls. Colors I used for partitions. Foils shaped the lattices. With sound I made controls, directors and communications. I was the first to utilize ether compressed, moulded or shaped as desired. I treated, cooked, poisoned; I repelled, restored, healed and cured with colored light. Water comprised my playing yard. Letting it drop in columns, sheets and walls, I enclosed areas for habitation, work and play. Forcing it upward in similar forms I made other constructions. Heat vibrations and gas streams were equally useful in building. Mountain tops, glass-covered, collected sun; the converted energy drove the turbines of my cities; I devised methods for commercial cooking, heating, cooling and locomotion from sunlight,

Theater of Mathematics, SCITHE installation by Porter, 1973.



> from wind, from rising and falling tides. When the world's supply of wood, coal, oil, and fissionable materials are exhausted, my techniques will save mankind.

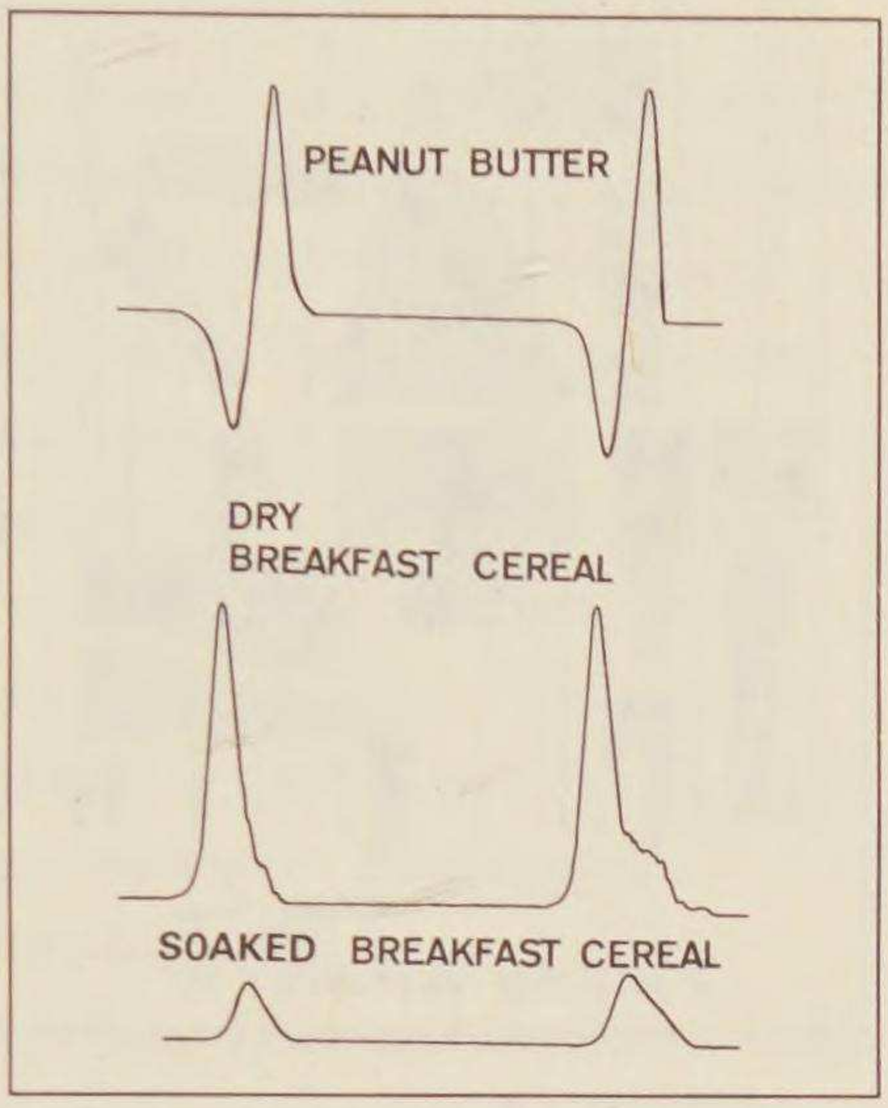
The subject of Section V is art, and here Porter strikes a prophetic note. He begins by complaining that "nothing has happened in the field for centuries." The reason for this, he claims, is that "art has been worked flat onto flat surfaces and hung flat against flat walls in flat rooms—painting is especially decadent." Consequently, he urges:

> "Get the subject off the canvas out into the air," I said.
> "Reverse perspective."
> "Discard frames."
> "Let the matter crawl around on the wall."
> "Kick in the wall and let the stuff stand alone."

In recent years, painters seeking new strategies to deal with the basic conflict between representational and abstract art have acted on all of these injunctions. For example, in late 1987 at New York's Museum of Modern Art, Frank Stella's l970-1987 retrospective exhibit was an attempt to break away from walls, indeed at times to abolish walls completely. Stella also fused painting and sculpture, as though specialization had become irrelevant. For his large, brightly painted metal reliefs, the artist used drafting templates, curves, and pantographs, a drafting tool that resembles a parallelogram. The use of mechanical drawing techniques instead of freehand drawing certainly implies the union of science and art that Porter advocates in *I've Left*. Elizabeth Murray is another artist who, in the 1970s and 1980s, shaped and sculpted her paintings in unusual, postmodern ways, breaking out of frames and off walls.

In Section V, Porter grants artists professional degrees such as CO (Creator in Oil) and guarantees them all well-paid employment: "Unionization was carried to such extremes with such force that there could be no gardens without sculpture, no walls without murals, no lawns without certified landscaping. For the first time in history, all artists were rolling in dough." Naturally, this affluence becomes so extreme that "creation per se stopped and artists walked out on me." At this point, Porter simply substitutes "creators for legislators, congressmen, politicians and statesmen. The artists now fed and clothed, saved the world." It is a wistful, unconvincing end to the section, but Porter clearly means that when the creative spirit, sated by greed ("Cadillacs, and hand-tai-

Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.



lored clothes plus rich food"), expires, artistic and scientific energy must be transformed into creative social action. How is this possible? The naive side of Porter's New England transcendentalism surfaces here, and he merely asserts the necessity of a transformation.

Although Bertolt Brecht, in his famous lines in *The Threepenny Opera*, stressed the primacy of food—"First, stuff your mouths, then think morality"—Porter consigns food to his sixth section, perhaps because food has never been among his strongest interests. After considering various innovations to replace food, such as pills, introducing food "into the body system via aroma and the nose," or dissolving food in liquids and reducing "all eating to a drinking process," he returns again to a natural solution:

> As master dietitian I determined what diet items gave the greatest longevity with the soundest body and alertest mind. All items not effecting such results were simply no longer produced or made available. All luxury items, fancy foods, food decoratives, preservatives, additives, taste and appearance features were eliminated. Pastes, sauces, gravies, condiments and the like were passe. Pasteurization, homogenization, vitamin supplements, packaging, freezing and treatment in any form were abandoned to allow natural food to exist and be consumed in a natural form. Simple, unadulterated and uncooked, basic food, available equally to all at near-cost was my motto. And on a day to day basis, with no storage, decay or waste.

It seems characteristically American that, in Section VII, Porter should focus on hypertension or stress as a major problem. None of the popular prescribed drugs help, of course, in Porter's view. Americans, he argued, could learn how to relax only by learning how to play. This belief recalls Schiller's famous statement, "Man is wholly himself only when he plays." Promoting play, Porter takes up again the idea of adult toys, which he had advocated as



Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

early as 1947 in *Art Techniques*. He called the toys Do-Das, and they were designed to encourage "tranquility through parts motivated by the palm or fingers." These small, attractive, malleable forms were "changeable at will and ever-changing with pressure, mood and feeling." Unlike worrybeads and similar contemplative devices designed to reduce tension, manipulation of "mallies," as Porter called them affectionately, promoted creative relaxation. Mallies, he felt, were superior to "feelies," another kind of adult toy with "a sculptured mass already formed and worked to give the utmost in delight." Mallies, "coupled with natural dietary and natural living procedures within the natural environments envisioned earlier," would yield proper relaxation and rest.

Section VII is the shortest section in the book, possibly because Porter believed that hypertension would be relatively easy to conquer once more complex problems were faced. Consequently, Porter saved for his last chapter the most complex and most controversial problem in American society, the question of automobiles and transportation. The car is an American icon, and no public figure dares to attack its role. Porter, however, starts boldly, asking, "Are automobiles necessary?" and goes on to call them "the greatest single destructive force in our enlightened culture":

> I hope to call attention to one of the most aesthetically hideous, technically unreasonable, the most scientifically inefficient, the most thoroughly ineffectual single device of our mechanistic civilization. In the fraction of a minute I have been speaking here four people have lost their lives, seven people have been maimed, twenty-two people have been injured seriously, sixty-one people have gotten off with minor bruises, aches and pains. Now the device that accomplished all this in a fraction of a minute weighed between one-and-a-half and four tons, was traveling between 55 and 105 miles per hour, was powered by the equivalent of 190 to 290 panting horses, and occupied as much as 120 cubic or 1220

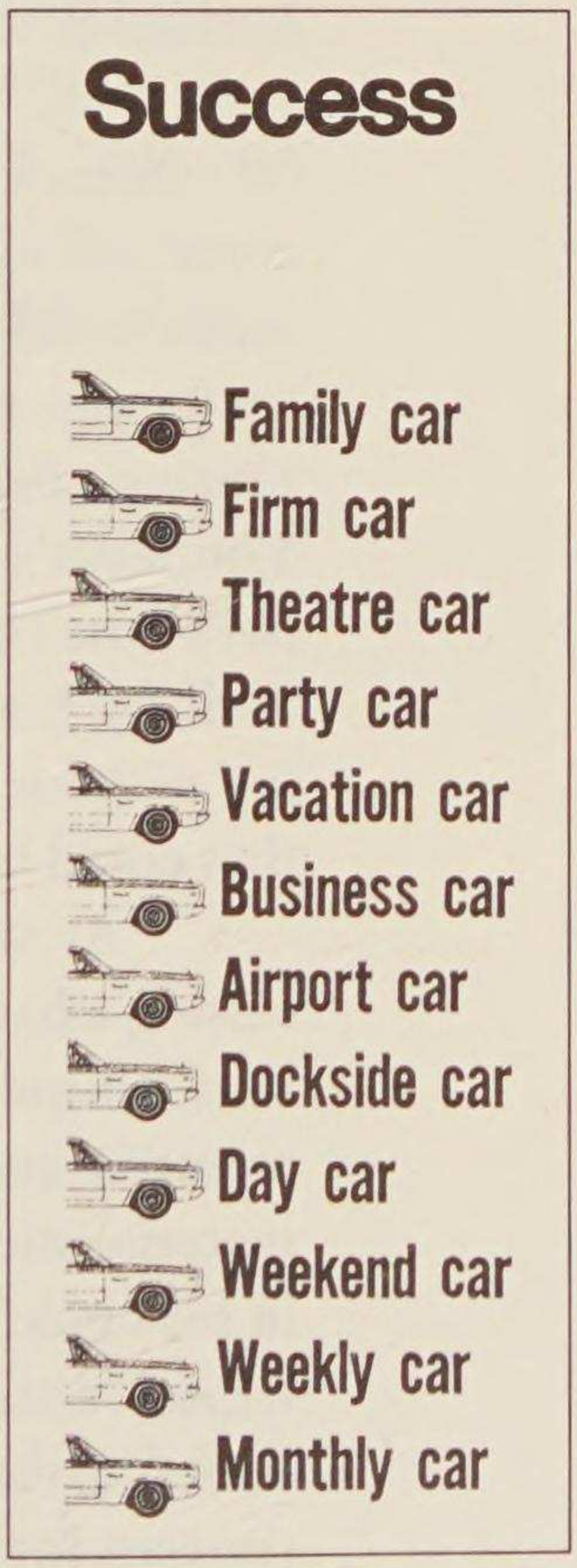
square feet. . . . Is it not obvious that as thousands of more cars are produced every minute the bulk of congestion, traffic and parking problems could be eased by cars of smaller, not larger dimensions? That fewer deaths and injuries from automobiles can come from lighter weights, slower speeds, less power? That engine governors would automatically prohibit any car but fire trucks and ambulances from going over thirty-five miles per hour? That it is silly to build cars to go 110 miles per hour when there are no stretches left to attain these speeds for more than a minute at a time. That engine powers over 80 horsepower are unnecessary for all but trucks. That weights over 750 pounds are also unnecessary. That engines should consume one gallon per every fifty miles instead of the present nine to eighteen miles per gallon. That fenders, sides, could be made practically bend-and-dent proof save under the severest conditions. That cars could be made collision-proof from any angle. That cars made now for actual attention-free life of four to nine months could be made to last a lifetime. That there is no reason why the inside of a car should be the exact replica of a living room.

Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

Certainly such issues are never raised by the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Automobile Association, or, for that matter, the automobile unions. While such organizations fund mechanical research and safety campaigns, they never question how automotive size and speed contribute to violence in our society. Moreover, Porter's comparison of a car's interior with a living room is a particularly penetrating insight. That we Americans carry our living rooms around with us in our constant restlessness is evidence of our inability, or at least unwillingness, to create distinctive permanent homes.

Porter ends with an anarchist's curse against a car-tormented society:

> I suppose it is acceptable to exhibit one's deranged neurosis, disordered mind and foul taste in the privacy of one's closet, but to do so on a public street at the risk of taking and losing life is really quite another matter. . . .Pity, then, only yourselves in your own stew. . . .As for me, I've left.



In the book's short appendix, Porter brings together his vision of the unity of science and the arts under the terms *sciarch* (for science and architecture), *sciart* (for science and art), *scilit* (for science and literature), *scimus* (science and music), and other experimental combinations. We must do as children do, he implies, blending essential subjects rather than splitting them apart. He adds a list of the possibilities that such combinations might produce. For scilit, for example, he predicts that literature will become "not a matter of type images, transmitted sounds or film projections but a series of (a) light signals, flashes and fusions to the eye, (b) sound signals like shorts as dots, longs as dashes, to the ear, (c) or combinations of both, the latter being conveniently instilled in periods of sleep or rest." And for sciscu (science and sculpture), he advocates "bringing sculpture up onto walls, out into and in contact with the environment of onlookers; making it also an object to be used: for easing hypertension, for sound and musical purposes, as screens, partitions and walls, a piece of furniture and combination thereof, a fireplace, the cooling and heating system; altering its concept to sociological conditions include the extended uses."

I've Left is a book in the tradition of utopian literature, from Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia* to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, but there is a significant difference in its tone. Even though Bellamy called *Looking Backward* "a fanciful romance," its view of a society in which greed has been overcome and intelligence and education have triumphed now seems sentimental. Today, after many wars and concentration camps, our preference is for anti-utopian or dystopian novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, or Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano*, works that warn of the destructive potential of the computer age. Porter's *I've Left* differs in that it reflects both the horror of an age destroyed by mechanistic science operating without morality and the transcendental idealism of the society that could be if science and art were imaginatively combined.

As with all utopian theorists, Porter appears moralistic in assessing what's wrong with society and decreeing a new age. However, his morality is concerned more with the potential beauty of scientific and artistic discovery than with the petty concerns of a materialistic society. Describing the discovery of the form of DNA in his book *The Double Helix*, the biochemist James D. Watson wrote, "a structure this pretty just had to exist." As Watson revealed, artistic form is inseparable from scientific accuracy. This concern for the relationship between artistic and scientific structure

dramatizes Porter's point about the essential unity of the creative imagination and the danger of losing this unity through the false traps of specialization we have created in a technological age.

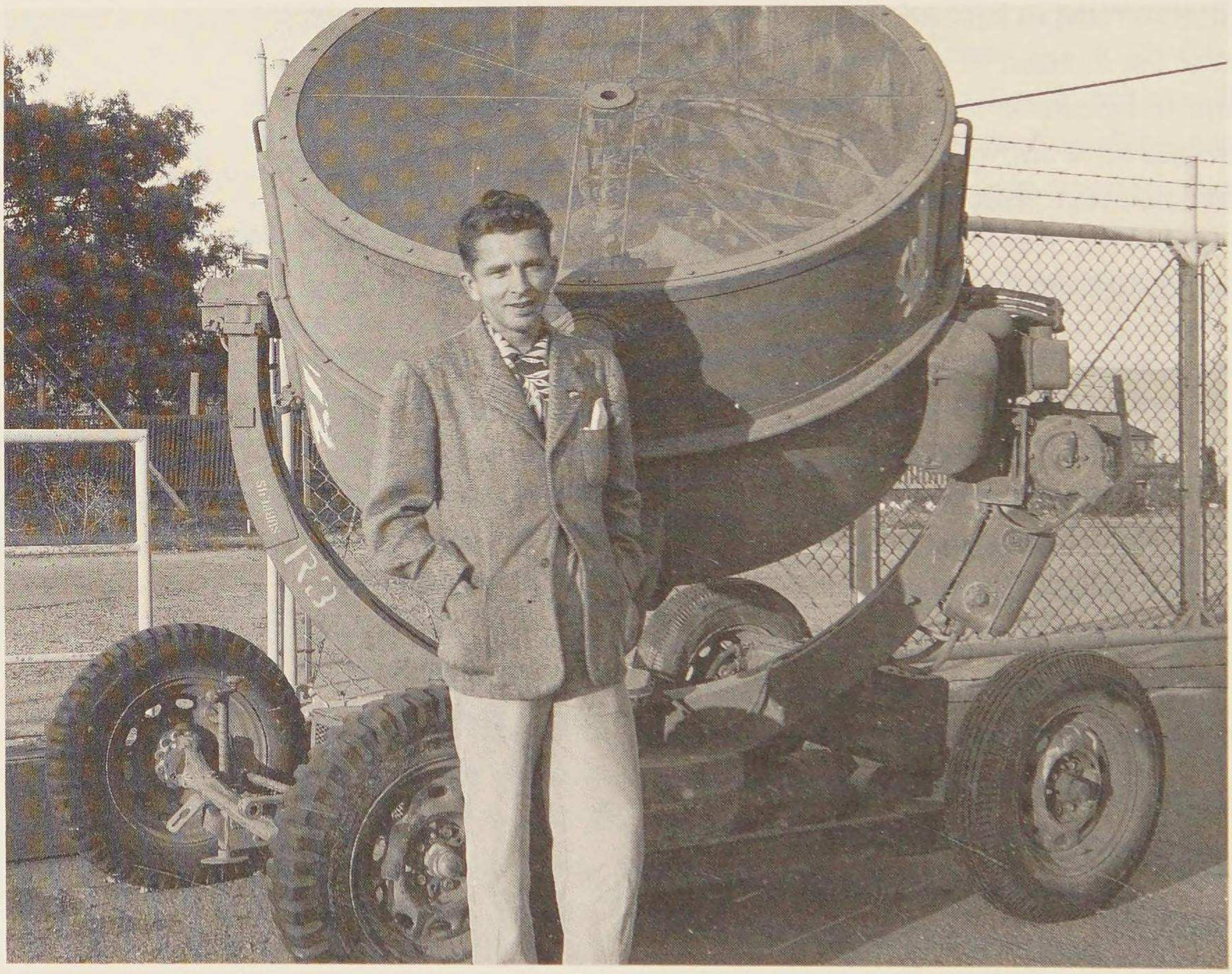
It is significant that many of Porter's ideas regarding science and art have become current artistic concerns: in poetry, for example, his use of found materials and his approach to visual forms of language; in theater, his interest in innovative uses of space and new relationships between the audience and the stage; in art, his repudiation of the frame and his call for new unities of environment and materials; in architecture, his belief in natural structures and desire for a union of physics and architecture to produce a freer, more imaginative way of living. Developments of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s have shown the practicality of many of Porter's seemingly fantastic ideas. But the greatest value of his book remains in its contribution to the tradition of distinctive autobiographies that express meaningful rebellion and the discovery of a new identity:

> It was the revolting, nauseous and wholly unbearable nature of obsolescence itself that drove me to more concerted concentration of the inherent possibilities within and finally to a point where I pressed the membrane separating man and God closer and closer to the Ultimate and indeed felt occasions when I had pierced the barrier sufficiently to more than look past. The first to raise himself by his own bootstraps I was thus able to see, hear, taste, feel and smell all things at all times. Through the combined use of these facilities I became all things at any time in any place. Thus endowed, being so, I became me.

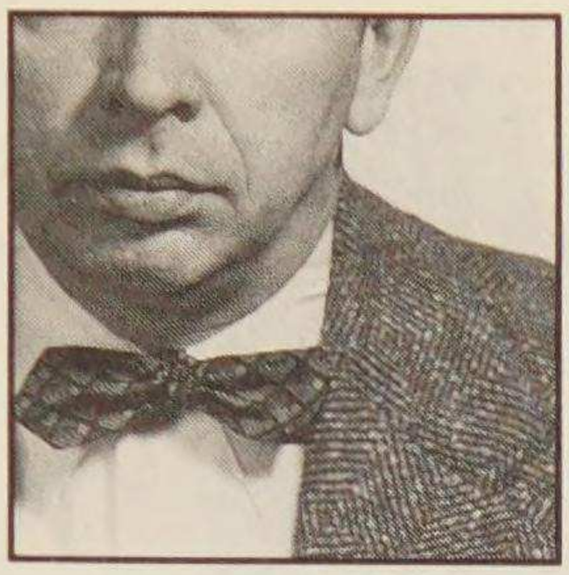
Bern Porter

178

At Marin Shipyard, Sausalito,
1954, upon return from Guam.
Photograph by Harry Bowden.



13 Return To The United States



Back in San Francisco, Porter found every job he applied for required a painful wait because of the network of governmental security organizations. He took an apartment in the Lincoln Park area and resumed his publishing activities after unsuccessful attempts to work on peacetime uses of nuclear energy for the Atomic Energy Commission and on medical research at the University of California Medical Center. Despite his unusual qualifications, he was turned down for such positions as crafts director for the Army; cultural affairs officer for the United States Information Service; and scientific advisor for the now-defunct Foreign Operations Department of the federal government. He suspected that his abrupt departure from the Manhattan Project and his warm reception in Japan, an adversary of the United States during the war, contributed to his failure to obtain work. Repeated calls on delinquent debtors, even aided by collection agencies, attorneys, and court actions, netted him only a small percentage of the several thousands of dollars due him from his earlier Bay Area

180



Number 12 from the Broadside series, by Porter and Gogo Nesbit.

publishing and art gallery endeavors. However, spurred on by a fresh desire to create, he continued to revise *I've Left* and began to publish folio series of photographs by Harry Bowden of prominent West Coast artists. Also, he began publication of *Broadside*, a series of large poem-posters. These he described as a "hand-bill, wallpiece, envelope stuffer, a world bulletin of essential content." With his usual irony, he announced that "*Broadside* will be suitable to drop from planes." Maybe he was thinking of Lauro de Bosis vanishing over Rome as he sought to drop fliers against Mussolini's dictatorship. In any case, the contents of this unusual publication varied widely, from social statements about the environment and the necessity for peace, to poetry and visual experiments with type. The second issue, which best fit Porter's "hand-bill, wallpiece, envelope stuffer" description, printed Bertrand Russell's *Plea for Survival*, a statement close to Porter's own views:

> I am writing on this occasion not as a Briton, not as a European, nor as a member of a western democracy, but as a human being—a member of a species of man whose continued existence is in doubt.
>
> The question we have to ask ourselves is: What steps can be

taken to prevent a military contest of which the issue must be disastrous to all sides?. . .The best authorities are quite unanimous in saying that a war with H-bombs is quite likely to put an end to the human race. . . .

Here, then, is the problem which I present to you, stark and dreadful and inescapable: Shall we put an end to the human race? Or shall man renounce war?. . .

The contents of Porter's sixty-three projected issues of *Broadside* (only fifty-three actually appeared—layouts for numbers fifty-four through sixty were prepared but no copies were ordered, and sixty-one through sixty-three existed only in sketches) constitute one of his unique series. As Harriet S. Blake, librarian and cataloger of rare books at Yale and Colby, wrote in the June 1970 issue of the *Colby Library Quarterly*, the series is essentially "Porter's scrapbook, distributed in large sheets printed on one side. Several numbers are devoted to the new authors who were then beginning to be active in the Bay Area. Others are large photographs, collages, advertisements, or anything else that appealed to Porter." If the series appears haphazard, it's because Porter was reacting daily to the authors whom he was publishing or to events in which he was involved. Nevertheless, the *Broadside* sequence is an exciting, beautifully designed, subjective commentary on cultural life in the Bay Area during the late 1950s. Since the series exists in its entirety only in the Rare Books Collection of the University of California at Los Angeles Library, it has never been exhibited as a whole. If exhibited in the space for which it was designed, a large museum or gallery or the corridors of a public building, it would show not only the unique design abilities that Porter developed through many years of publishing, but also the wide range of poets and artists with whom he was involved in these years (see selected bibliography). If the sequence had been published a few years later during the 1960s, when wallposters became popular and appeared on private and public walls throughout the country, it might have attained considerable popularity with its bright designs, wit, and social and environmental messages. But, because of Porter's isolation and his concentration on job applications, the posters were appreciated by only a few individuals.

In San Francisco, in addition to publishing, Porter continued to push his idea that Hiroshima should have the first atomic energy plant dedicated to peaceful uses. In late January 1955, he wrote to John D. Rockefeller III, president of the Japan Society in New

York:

182

Among the thousands of ideas that must come to the Society monthly for cementing Japanese-American relations or for improving the lot of men generally, there is some concern here for an atomic reactor, a gift to the city of Hiroshima.

When the matter was first suggested in Hiroshima last year, many Americans in Japan thought it more than fitting that the city to feel first the horror of the atom should be the first to use it for electric power. . . .

Douglas W. Overton, executive director of the Japan Society, replied on January 28, 1955:

Inasmuch as Mr. Rockefeller is not available at the moment, I am acknowledging herewith your letter of January 22.

The question which you raise about an atomic reactor for Hiroshima has been on my mind for some time, and I was interested in noting Senator Wiley's reference to the problem in his recent Japan Society speech.

Whether the Japan Society could do anything directly raises some question in my mind. It would seem to me that this is a matter which would have to be worked out on a governmental basis, for not only would it involve an important political decision, but also it would require a great deal of money, far beyond our capacity to provide or to raise. . . .

To which Porter answered on February 25:

At no time in these proposals has it been thought that the Japan Society alone or by itself could raise all the money which, incidentally, is not as high as you might at first think. It has been thought, however, that the Japan Society is the most logical of all groups to start, endorse and back the plan. Someone, some responsible agency, is needed to endorse the plan and to collect the money for this use both in the USA and in Japan. . . .

Your point that this is a government and political matter is well-taken but at the same time unfortunate. It is "the people" who wish to do something for Hiroshima; it is they who are conscience-stricken over such things as atomic and H-bombs, while the governments and politicians go on making them and indeed causing the drop in the first place. Once the people find they have to go through politicians and governments to correct the damage I am afraid there would be little support for this project.

Although Porter felt pessimistic about the outcome of this idea for a memorial nuclear energy plant in Hiroshima and later came to reject the idea when the safety of nuclear plants in general began to be questioned, he felt compelled to continue prodding the bureaucrats. "It's part of what Russell was pleading for," he insisted.

In June 1955, Porter lost out in a last-minute shuffle for substitute lecturers to speak at the prestigous Aspen Design Conference in Colorado. Frustrated, he hitchhiked there and wrote to me from Aspen:

> I left San Francisco via thumb, reliving an old life it seemed as snow, desert, sage and villages like Wells, Soldiers Monument and Grand Junction went by in three days and two nights of continuous hiking and hitching—the latter with farmers, truckers, miners, rangers, etc. This included one all-night stretch hiking alone down the middle of a strange road past strange forms and sounds until dawn. I was reminded again that America is at once both the most civilized and the most backward country, the most beautiful and the most ugly. And only on foot, with the people you meet on the roads during the day and alone by yourself at night, can one see all this.

At Aspen, although not on the regular program, he managed to talk to a small audience of young designers, architects, and painters about the possibilities of Sciart and his faith in the unity of science and art. When he introduced for the first time in the United States, full details of his House of Air, influenced by Moholy-Nagy, he felt again the unbridgeable distance between himself and influential designers and his inability to penetrate the "roar of the market place" in order to test his ideas.

Back in San Francisco, Porter was saved from his isolation and frantic search for a job by his reunion with the woman who became his second wife, Margaret Eudine Preston. She had met Porter in his Sausalito days, when she visited The Contemporary Gallery. Although Margaret was a plain woman (unlike Porter's first wife, Helen), he had been attracted to her courage, sense of humor, and maternal encouragement. Noticing his thinness and poor eating habits, she had often invited him out to meals at her expense or to her house in Sausalito, where she lived with her daughter Carole. Both she and Porter had considered marriage, but Porter was wary, still troubled by the failure of his first marriage. Then his father's sudden arrest in Sausalito drove thoughts of marriage out of his mind.

Margaret was born in Rio Vista, California, on June 1, 1905,

and was therefore six years older than Porter. She had had a difficult life. Her mother died when Margaret was still a child. Unable to cope with a small daughter, her father placed her in a Catholic school, where she was tutored by nuns until she was eighteen. She acquired a veneer of Catholic knowledge that belied her insecurity and fear of abandonment. While attending the University of California, she fell in love with a man, and they became engaged. Marriage seemed to promise a security she had never known. Suddenly, just before their wedding, her fiancé drowned in a swimming accident, leaving her pregnant and unmarried. In college she had become interested in anthropology and international affairs, as she wanted to travel. Forced to support herself and a new baby, she dropped out of the university and attended Munson Business College in San Francisco, a school that promised her a job.

After completing secretarial and business studies at Munson,

Porter and his wife Margaret.



and with World War II looming, she joined the Special Services of the Navy in Sausalito and worked there from 1938 to 1942. Then she obtained an administrative position in the mailroom of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company in San Francisco, a job she held for many years.

During Porter's years in the Pacific, he and Margaret corresponded frequently, maintaining their friendship. After landing in San Francisco, Porter went directly to her Sausalito address to stay with her. He found that Margaret was still commuting daily to work in San Francisco, but now she had the extra burden of supporting three additional people. Carole's marriage had failed, and she had brought her two children home to live with her mother. So Margaret and Porter were glad to be reunited as allies and companions in the midst of their family and economic problems. On August 27, 1955, they took a bus to the old mining town of Virginia City in Nevada and were married by a justice of the peace. "We were married for twenty years, so it was a close marriage," Porter told me. "She liked travel and was ready for it. She understood that I was a person who went into periods of silence and was never a

Porter on rooftop at 1480 Larkin Street, San Francisco, after return from Guam, 1954.

Photograph by Harry Bowden.



good communicator, so she let me alone to do the things I wanted to do. In some ways it was a marriage of friendship and convenience. But we shared an eagerness to travel, she content to travel with one suitcase and I with another. So I began to send out a lot of applications during the next few years for jobs in foreign countries."

From 1954 to 1956, while anxiously searching for a job, Porter continued his publishing activities. His first folio of Harry Bowden photographs, produced in 1954, was about the sculptor Beniamino Bufano, and included a portrait of Bufano in his studio and six photographs of Bufano's work. The following year, Porter published no fewer than six more folios of Bowden's work: *Around Richardson Bay* (six black-and-white photographs of scenes from that area); *The Grabhorn Press* (photographs of the Grabhorn family, the famous printers, and their shop); *Maybeck* (a portrait of pioneer Bay Area architect Bernard Maybeck and several photographs of his

Porter with sculptor Beniaminio Bufano at his Greenwich Street studio, San Francisco, 1954.
Photograph by Harry Bowden.



most distinctive buildings, including the San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts); *Otis Oldfield in His Studio* (a portrait of Oldfield and several of his paintings); *Robinson Jeffers* (photographs of the poet in his Carmel home and the surrounding landscape that helped to shape his dramatic poetry); and *Recent Work* (new photographs of San Francisco scenes by Bowden). In 1956 Porter published three more Bowden folios featuring black-and-white photographs of three prominent writers—Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Kenneth Rexroth. The distinguishing quality of these folios is not only the fine technique, but the way Bowden reveals the connections between character and place, the environment in which the writer lives. Today after several retrospective exhibits of Bowden's photographs and paintings in the Bay Area, it is clear that Porter was foresightful in his recognition of Bowden's unusual work.

Another project Porter was drawn into in San Francisco was a series of collaborations with Dr. William Faulkner, a physician and no relation to the famous writer whose name he stoically shared. Faulkner had achieved a certain reputation in artistic circles for his drawings and paintings of his patients, and Porter helped him publish some of these in folios. Faulkner was also strongly interested in literature and was involved in a curious and ambitious project of which Porter became the publisher. The idea was to create an international anthology of poems about a mythical man called "Henry," based on a portrait of Faulkner's. Through their embassies, a leading poet in every country in the world was invited to submit a poem about "Henry." Dr. Faulkner's idea was that "Henry" would symbolize a new kind of international man and help to eliminate ethnic and religious divisions. The fact that the name "Henry" had an American sound to it didn't seem to worry Faulkner or Porter in their international quest. In any case, many countries abstained from asking their leading poets to write a poem about "Henry," and some of the poets who did turned out to be diplomatic representatives of their countries rather than leading poets. Beautifully printed years later in a limited edition, the anthology stands as one of those stubborn follies that, because of their oddity, win a kind of minor fame in special collections.

While working on the Faulkner project and revising *I've Left*, Porter and Margaret lived in an inexpensive apartment on California Street in San Francisco, near the Sea Cliff district, while Carole and her children stayed in Margaret's Sausalito home. Porter continued to apply in vain for summer jobs and spent his spare time hiking daily along the coast of the Sea Cliff district. Local

newspaper editors frequently received his letters appealing for more recognition for the arts, fewer atomic test explosions, and other topics. Sometimes, using an old press card, he would smuggle his way into celebrity press conferences, curious about the current popular heroes. He poured his skepticism about these publicity events into his revisions of *I've Left*.

Finally, in the spring of 1956, having begun to emphasize his skills in scientific technical writing and publishing rather than his abilities as a research physicist, Porter found a job. Because of his financial situation, and with Margaret eager to travel, he was desperate for any work. Also, he was tired of his publishing responsibilities that brought little recognition and no financial reward. But his new job was a humiliating compromise, considering his aversion to military-related work. From May 1, 1956, to October 12, 1956, he worked as a technical writer for Convair Astronautics in San Diego. Convair was a key center for intercontinental ballistic missiles, particularly the Atlas. Porter rationalized that he was not building missiles, only writing instructions for field crews.

Porter's attitude toward the new military technology, which was becoming increasingly powerful and secretive, was changing. Indifferent about the profit-making functions of the corporations for which he found himself working during the next decade, he came to regard his work as a means of discovering new material for his Founds, or as a way to uncover some aspect of technology that could benefit the public and fit into his Sciart theories. For their part, company officials began to regard him with alarm. Could this outsider, this bohemian loner, develop the right kind of loyal corporate mentality? Porter's attitude, his iconoclastic behavior and abrupt, sarcastic remarks to his co-workers, made personnel officers suspicious. And the personnel officers were increasingly powerful. They made critical decisions about behavior and morale, and their decisions were based on cooperation and dedication to the job. Porter's individualism was too extreme for them.

At Convair, Porter discovered the color Xerox machine, which was just coming into use. He couldn't resist experimenting with it for his own artistic purposes. "Again I was caught," he says. "I was in a big defense corporation considering how I could use inside things for outside art, and, of course, they didn't understand. So I must have seemed doubly strange to them. " He was fired in October after he was overheard talking to a radio station about his scientific and artistic interests, a breech of security regulations.

However, while in San Diego he made an important contact

with physicist Ralph Markson. Markson had spent five years studying and trying to repeat Wilhelm Reich's unorthodox experiments in orgone energy. Porter knew only the official government version of Reich as a crackpot experimenter and proponent of suspect medical cures that caused him to end his life in prison. At first he was skeptical about Markson's faith in Reich's concepts. As Porter says, "Markson introduced me fully, excited me about Reich from the physics angle. No matter how skeptical I was, I became intrigued about the possible existence of orgone energy—the energy that Reich thought was given off by natural organisms in the act of growing. Since Tijuana was so close to San Diego, Markson and I used to go there sometimes on leisure trips to look around and continue our discussions. Once, returning from Tijuana with Markson, I saw for the first time what seemed to be orgone energy. Years later, on one of my voyages to Norway with Margaret, I saw it for the second time. Those are really the only two times that I've seen orgone energy. Later, at my Institute of Advanced Thinking, I continued my research into Reich's theory, at times with Markson's help when he came up from MIT. I don't want to claim the medical cures that Reich claimed in his research. That's what got him into trouble. But I do believe, and Markson was a strong influence on me, that Reich was onto something important with his theory of orgone energy."

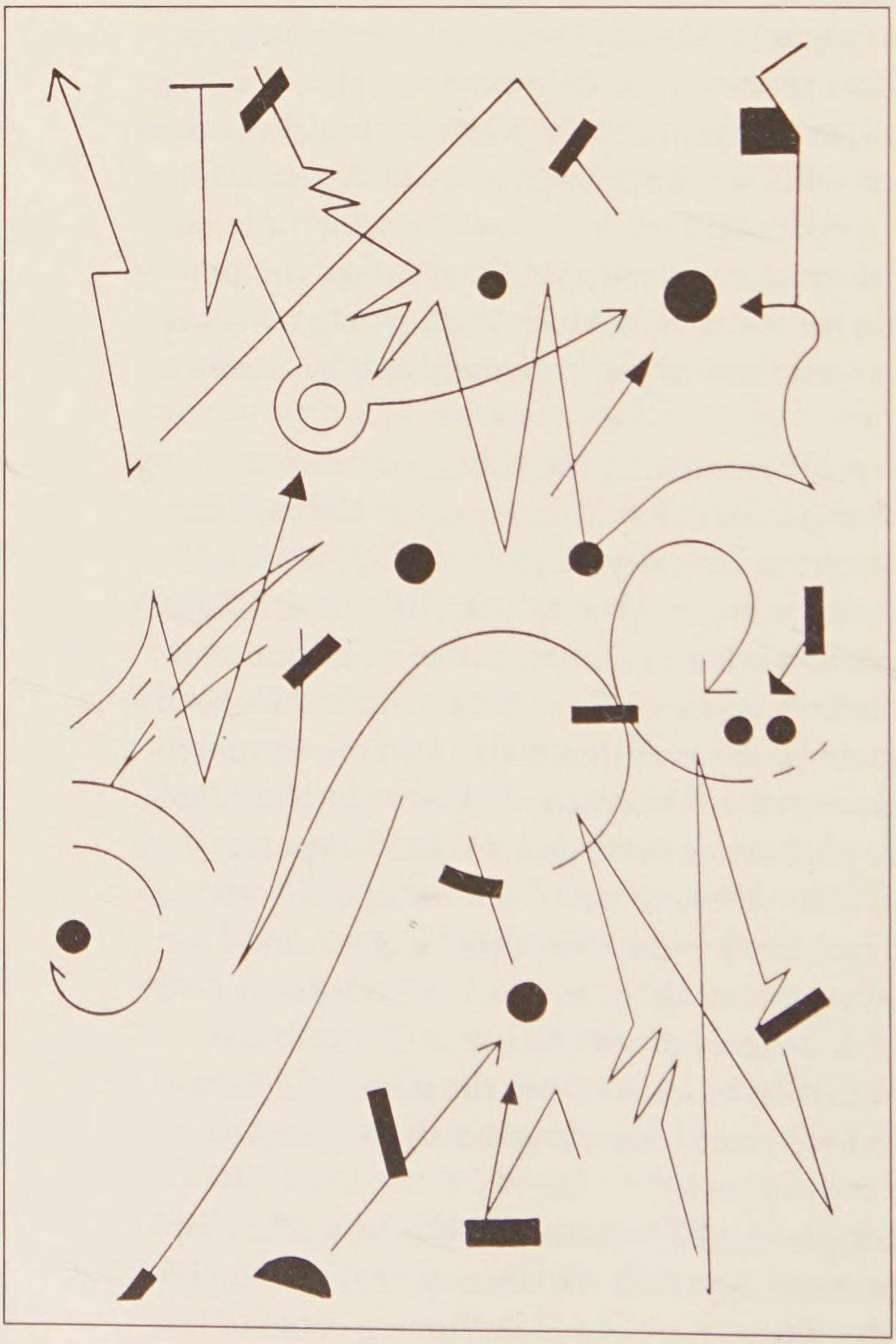
After San Diego, Porter managed to obtain another engineering position with the Collins Radio Company in Dallas, Texas. He worked for Collins from February 12 to August 12, 1957, adding another short-term position to his employment record. Collins sent him to Venezuela to work on a new system of electronic communications. The research involved developing a method for sending messages that would be particularly suitable for remote, mountainous areas, such as existed in Venezuela. "How it worked," Porter says, "was that we projected a beam up into the ionosphere. This sound wave was then reflected back down across the horizon, many miles away. Again, the problem was that Margaret and I were happier traveling and experiencing life in South America than I was in my work. When I discovered the possibility to do much the same kind of work in Alaska, I took it. Even the sound of Alaska was exciting, because I too came from a cold northern climate, where I felt close to native people."

In Alaska, from January to September 1958, he worked for the Civil Aeronautics Administration. "In these years it was odd," Porter comments, "that I was employed in facilitating communica-

tions over difficult landscapes because I've always had trouble communicating. I understand my problem, but I cannot express myself exhaustively." Margaret got a job as a secretary and bookkeeper. In their spare time, they traveled around the state, exploring the extraordinary range of sub-Arctic and Arctic culture. These trips inspired Porter to publish the second version of his *Drawings*, most of which were done in Alaska.

Existing unviewed in library collections, Porter's drawings are another part of his work that has been neglected. Moreover, they exist mainly in out-of-print, small editions of books for which he photocopied the drawings. If drawings are, in some sense,

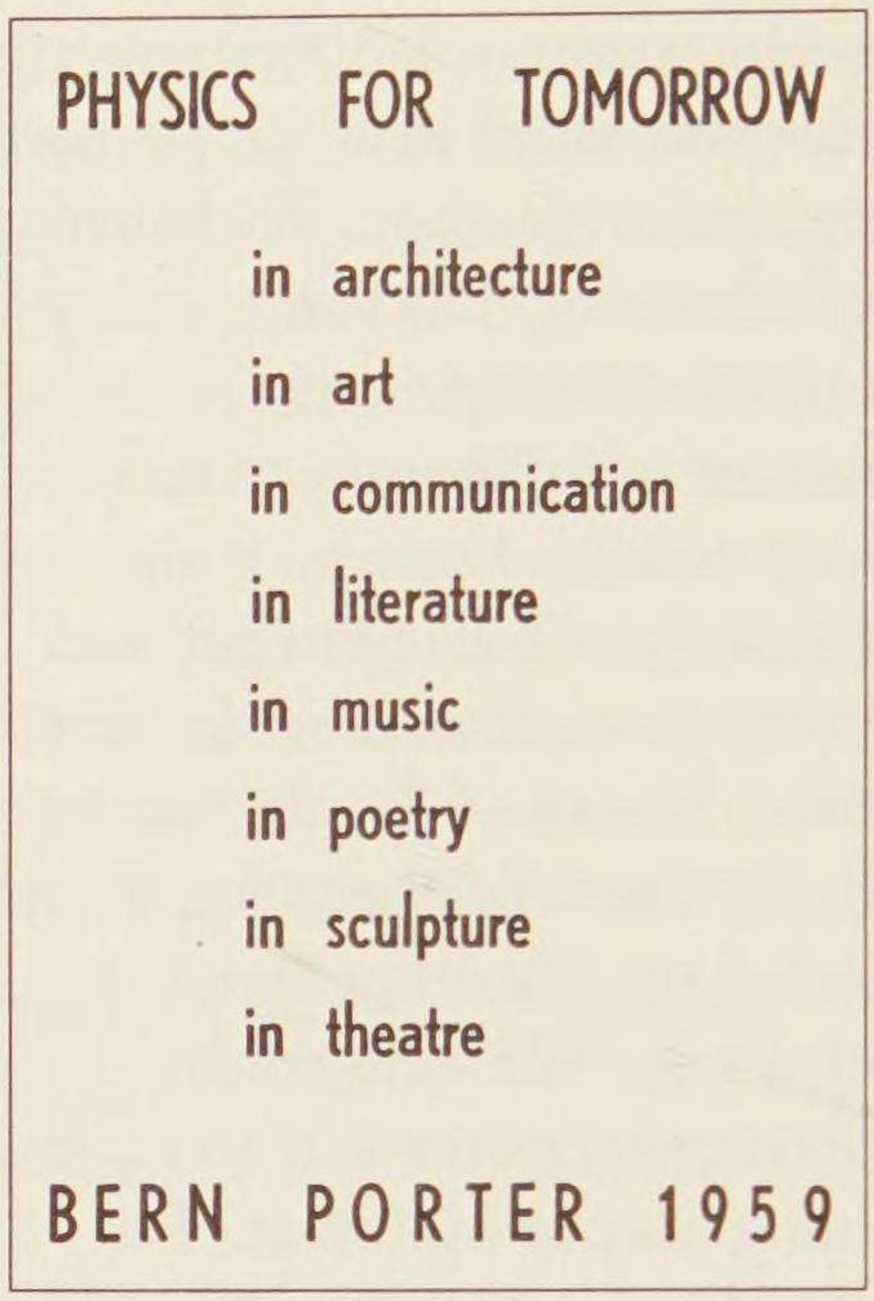
Drawing by Porter, *Lifetime*,
1947.



clearer, more technically elaborate developments of handwriting, Porter's are especially telling. A careful, restrained man, driven by his own fantasies, Porter's handwriting shows his scientific objectivity and his frequent, intuitive bursts of creativity. His handwriting is clear, distinctively cursive and symmetrical, revealing the influence of penmanship classes and his interest in calligraphy. His drawings have this same combination of structural control combined with impulsive, unconscious explosions. Created in pen and black ink, often on ordinary typing paper, they are abstract in form, but far more geometrically precise than the work of the abstract expressionists by whom he was influenced in New York and San Francisco. In some of the drawings, he shaded the ink off in blotches and carefully created ink-blot forms that resemble watercolors. The drawings are often mazelike, reflecting his own social struggles, hatched with lines, squares, and lightning-shaped squibbles. Far from decorative or representational, the drawings speak of scientific formula and geometrical intrigue, a demonstration of Sciart. It is not surprising that these drawings stem from the years when Porter was writing *I've Left*. Unfortunately, there has never been a complete exhibit of Porter's drawings. The artistic symbol of one of the last creative talents of an era based on handwriting as the major means of communication, Porter's drawings of the 1950s testify to the hand's ability to confront the new postwar technological age and graphically depict the traumas of that age.

In August 1958, trouble with his supervisor caused Porter to resign his job in Alaska. As records of that time show, an anonymous informant accused Porter of being "seriously ill mentally" and argued that "his continued employment is not in the best interests of the government." The supervisor did not dare to accuse Porter openly. As before, Porter was regarded as an eccentric, a corporate misfit. He responded to the unspoken criticism by withdrawing from supervisors and fellow workers with whom he had nothing in common. Consequently, his paranoia about his situation increased.

After he and Margaret left Alaska, they settled temporarily in Pasadena, California, while he applied for unemployment insurance and started the painful paperwork of new job applications. This time he ran into serious trouble. After a grueling interview for a position as a research physicist at Long Beach, he got a verbal turndown from a personnel officer. He contested this vehemently in writing because of his prior clearances on such secret programs as the first atom bomb and then on the Atlas intercontinental missile project. The personnel director's verbal statement about the diffi-



Title page, *Physics for Tomorrow*, Tasmania, 1959.

culties of his security record was not mentioned when he was notified that he had lost the job. Bitterly, he felt that classified records that he couldn't see, the invisible security reports, were against him permanently and irrevocably.

Determined not to go through the ordeal of applying for another federal job and convinced that he needed a drastic change for his own mental health, he arranged to immigrate to Australia. He planned what he called "a kind of second disappearance" from the United States, along the lines of his abrupt departure in 1950 for the South Pacific. As usual, Margaret followed him willingly, although she might not have if she had known where they were going. They were bound for Tasmania, where Porter had landed a position as an assistant instrument engineer for Burnie Board, Limited. En route by ship, delighting in the same kind of quiet seagoing routine that had enabled him to write much of *I've Left*, he finished his final statement on what he called "Sci Forms," naming it *Physics for Tomorrow*. In many ways, this was his final, wistful recollection of his frustrated career as a physicist in which he restated and defined the futuristic science that he had prophesied in *I've Left*.

Once in Tasmania, Porter and Margaret found that it was not to their liking. They felt that the country was "anti-culture, anti-literature, and anti-American." Porter had *Physics for Tomorrow* published privately in Tasmania in a small edition. The poor printing was unacceptable to him, and he had most of the copies destroyed. The one thing that intrigued Porter about Tasmania, despite its cultural backwardness, was his feeling that the people were struggling to grow economically, despite their lack of natural resources. He particularly admired the way they were buying up patents to cars that ran on steam. "Without gas and still desiring cars," he recalls, "they were trying to find a car that would run on two cups of water. That's something we Americans have neglected, put-

ting all our transportation resources into cars with all the pollution problems that have resulted. And the Tasmanians were also making paper out of hardwood, one of the few countries to accomplish this. But there was no real native culture as in other parts of Australia, and we soon discovered that we didn't want to stay there."

After only four months in Tasmania, Porter and his wife retreated to Maine. His brother in Belfast had always looked after his mail and affairs while he was away. Now, upset and paranoic about his series of job failures, Porter felt a need to return to his roots. The familiar Maine landscape offered him temporary security. As he says, "I feel a great kinship with the St. John among the world's rivers. It seems like home to me as my ancestors came up it in the early days, crossing over into Maine to form Porter Settlement, where I was born."

The next three years continued a now-familiar pattern, one inadequate, short-term job after another, followed by rest periods when he focused on creative work and publishing. Only now the rest periods were spent in Maine. Porter was always seizing the small chance and trying against all odds to turn it into the big chance. However, his mental health was suffering as his justifiable paranoia about government security investigations grew. Whenever he applied for a government job, he felt a gnawing uncertainty about the contents of his security file, and he yearned for travel—"the old escape route."

In the fall of 1960, Porter tried his hand at teaching English and French at Ashland High School in Ashland, Maine. After all, he reasoned, this was Maine, and he was on home ground. But familiarity proved no advantage: unable to conform to a conservative, provincial discipline, he was dismissed after three months for his unorthodox behavior and methods. "I didn't always wear the right clothes," he recalls, "and I wasn't a strict enough disciplinarian, so I seemed to antagonize the older natives. Stubbornly, I turned the classroom into a place where I could test ideas for my Institute of Advanced Thinking. I stressed writing heavily and tried to get students to participate in a national high school poetry-writing plan. In French class, I didn't permit my students to speak English. I stirred up class debates, trying to stimulate conflicting ideas. Again, I was the outsider, the isolated rebel. In the business world I could masquerade in the proper clothes. In the teaching world, I thought I could be different, but I was soon regarded as strange."

The same kind of disaster happened in 1961. Porter took a job teaching English and technical writing in Canaan, New Hamp-

shire, in a small institution with a large name, the College of Advanced Science. "I took the job," Porter says, "at an equivalent of a dollar-an-hour salary and great promises, my wife to be Dean of Women, but there were as yet no women students, etc." Again, this job lasted three months before he was fired. Confidential United States Civil Service Commission investigative reports of this dismissal, reports that Porter obtained many years later under the Freedom of Information Act, reveal decidedly surrealistic overtones. Here are a few excerpts from depositions by Porter's nameless (by government regulation) colleagues at the college:

> I only knew Bernard Porter for approximately two months, five or six years ago, when he was a teacher of English at the College of Advanced Science. . . . He apparently knew his job very well and, to my knowledge, has done a lot of writing himself, mostly for the newspapers. He, at one time, flew over a hurricane and took pictures of the eye of the hurricane, and has become very well known for that feat. He got into a violent fight with (name blacked out) who, in my estimation, is a psychopath, over an incident involving a cleaning woman and Mrs. Porter. I do not know the details of the incident between Mrs. Porter and the cleaning woman, but I do know that the cleaning woman was a particular friend of (name blacked out). Porter and (name blacked out) continued their argument during the dinner hour and, shortly after the dinner hour, Mr. (name blacked out) fired Porter on the spot and told him that he would have to move out of his quarters by midnight of that same night. At one time, Porter wrote a book, which actually was an autobiography, although it was written in the third person. It was written under a presideum [pseudonym?], and I cannot recall either the name of the book or the name which the author used. In my opinion, his writings were rather immoral, although I never saw anything particularly immoral about Porter himself, or his actions. He associated with persons whom I considered to be rather immoral. . . .He associated quite closely with Henry Miller, the author of *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, which I considered to be very immoral and degrading books. As I say, I do not think that he was immoral, it is just that some of the things he said were things that are not talked about in polite society. I do not consider that either Porter or his wife are immoral. . . .I do not know of anything really derogatory about him, but I do feel he is rather a different type person than the average. I do not feel that I knew him well enough, and my

impressions of him, as I do recall him, would permit me to recommend him for any position of trust and responsibility.

I knew Bernard Porter when I was formerly (position blacked out) of the College of Advanced Science in Canaan. . . . He was an English instructor, however, I cannot judge his ability, due to the short time he was there. I do know that the president (name blacked out) was frightened of him, but, actually, I think that (name blacked out) was afraid of almost everybody. I feel certain (name blacked out) is not entirely sane. At that time Mr. Porter was discharged from his employment at the college, and (name blacked out) demanded that they move out of their rooms in less than six hours, which they did. While the Porters were residing at the College of Advanced Science, they accused people of going into their rooms and stealing specific items. However, nothing was ever proved and I personally believe that nothing was actually stolen. . . . I do not recall anything immoral concerning Porter and his wife, however, I do not feel that either one of them is entirely in charge of their senses. I do not know of any other employments that he might have had. I always got the feeling that the entire faculty at the school was uneasy whenever he was around, however, I cannot put my finger on any specific reason for this. I do know that he had a very bad temper. From my impressions of Porter, I would definitely not recommend him for any position of trust and responsibility.

I consider Bernard Porter to be a very eccentric type of person. I feel that his biggest problem is his wife. I believe that he could adapt himself anywhere, anytime, and anyplace; to anything that he set his mind to. However, his wife is the type of person who does not get along with people and he is apparently completely subjected to her. . . . He was not what I would consider to be a very good instructor. He once got angry with a student and threw a book at the student. He dressed very casually in class, often showing up wearing a turtleneck sweater. He had no respect for the dignity of his position. He was a very smart and intelligent person, though. He seemed to have an endless knowledge of physics. Although I know that many people thought him to be mentally unbalanced, I don't really feel that this is so. I believe that all of his troubles can be traced right back to his wife. . . . His wife claimed that some moving picture film and a camera, as well as some dividend checks had been stolen from their rooms. However, we later found out



"He was caught in a trap labeled 'eccentric,' an odd-shaped peg in a square hole."

> that she had cashed the checks at a local store. . . . Based on this very short knowledge that I do have of him, I would not recommend him for any position of trust and responsibility, particularly if he is still married to the same girl, to whom he was married here.

The danger of such casual reports is evident. Porter's colleagues confessed that they hardly knew him, to say nothing of admitting that they hadn't read his books. Yet they were quite ready to judge his character. No doubt Porter's paranoic frustrations at the time contributed to his plight. His anger at the loss of his film and camera caused him to embark on a dogged letter-writing campaign to the local chief of police, the chief of the New Hampshire State Police, and finally to the governor, in which he claimed a loss of $1,300 for these materials and accused officials at the College of Advanced Science of misconduct in this regard. The director of the state police wrote back to Porter that his charges had been investigated and various persons at the college contacted, with negative results. Still, unevaluated reports of this and other incidents ended up in Porter's ever-thickening security file, which only caused him to write more and more bitter, accusing letters about his mishaps.

In these years, Porter learned the hard way about the provincialism of New England schools. He was caught in a trap labeled "eccentric," an odd-shaped peg in a square hole. Convinced that academic positions were even more puritanically restrictive than corporate scientific jobs, he began to apply for a new position in the business world. As he waited for something to happen, he and Margaret escaped to Puerto Rico. In San Juan, he got a temporary job teaching English at Castaner. There he enjoyed "the great peace of not being investigated, quizzed, examined, classified, trapped, gossiped about." Unfortunately, the tropical vegetation in the mountainous region where he lived caused a resurgence of his asthma, and the couple had to fly back to Miami. For six months, while he

tried to recover his health, he and Margaret lived in a "super cheap, bug-ridden dive hotel." From this depressing place he sallied out daily, "via my press pass," to observe "the fantasies of American culture, with food, speakers, programs, free on the cuff." The instant celebrities he observed at these press conferences also gave him additional material for his collection of Founds. He acquired many photographs, some of which he arranged into collages for his book, *The Wastemaker*.

In Miami, he was interviewed by the Federal Electric Corporation, a private firm despite the title, which needed a scientific technical writer. The interviewers were impressed by his scientific and literary abilities and decided that these talents were more important than the muddled data in his security file. They hired him to work in their Paramus, New Jersey, plant, where he was employed from 1962 to 1964. The Porters rented an apartment in nearby Waldick, from which Porter commuted to work. He accepted the job with relief as it enabled him to use his abilities as an editor and publisher. "It was the beginning of a rich creative period that lasted until June 1964," says Porter. Various long-term creative projects were coming to fruition, particularly the publication of *I've Left* and his earlier artwork for the magazine *Circle* under the title of *Circle: Reproductions of Art Work, 1944-47*, and his work on Founds. Also, he was having new luck as a publisher. His imprint, Bern Porter Books, gained wider distribution through his association with the publishing firm of Rutledge and Company. He contributed new materials to the master collection of his work at the University of California at Los Angeles and started a new collection in the Colby College library.

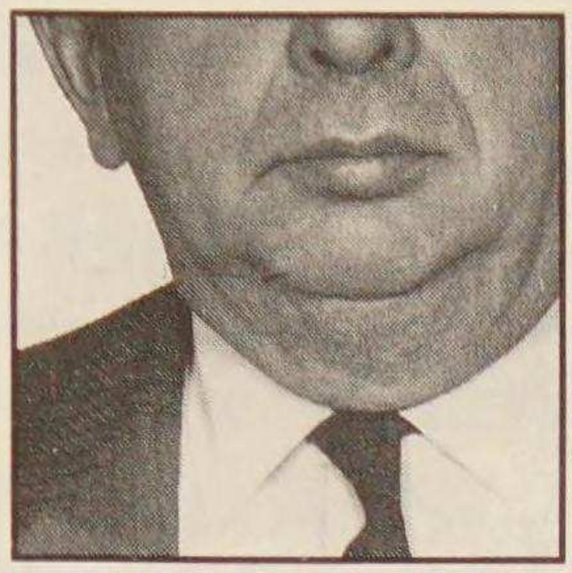
Though boring, his work for the Federal Electric Corporation provided Porter with his first substantial income in four years. For the job he received a secret clearance from 1st Army Headquarters in New York on November 21, 1962. His work consisted of teaching "Programed Training Techniques" for workers, installers, and operators of the Strategic Air Command of the United States Air Forces, which had built a network of underground bases throughout the country. Although upset that he was involved again with military work, Porter needed the money, and teaching and technical writing seemed far removed from actual air bases. In 1963, he was elected a member and New Jersey representative of the American Society of Programed Instruction. For use by corporation trainees, he produced several articles with convincingly bureaucratic and scientific titles: "465L Maintenance, A Programed

Text," "A List of Applicable Publications, 465L," and "Mathematics for Electronics." One article he wrote, "Programed Training Techniques in Action," begins with the proud claim, "Programed instruction techniques, long a controversial development in educational and psychological circles, were given valid acceptance as a useful industrial tool during a controlled test program undertaken by the Training Services and Methodology sections of the Training Branch, Federal Electric Corporation, Paramus."

But he could not hide in this comfortable position for long. In 1962, his father died, and Porter could not bring himself to attend the funeral or overcome the feelings of guilt that ensued. His brothers took charge of their father's limited estate and had him buried in the family plot in Houlton. Shortly afterward, in fall 1962, Porter received from his father's will a sad bequest that burned itself in his mind, "one dollar, shoes, coat, suit, some photos and a diary."

Then, suddenly, Margaret learned that she had breast cancer. After a string of medical tests and consultations, she underwent a mastectomy at Harkness Pavilion Hospital in New York City. Her recovery was slow, and her need for Porter's help kept them secluded at home for most of the next year. His contract with Federal Electric expired in June 1964. However, he was offered an engineering position working on the development of the Saturn Moon Rocket at the Marshall Space Center in Huntsville, Alabama. The prospect of working on this pioneer project fired his imagination. Because the Marshall Space Center was under the control of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, a civilian branch of the government, and because he had worked successfully for two years with Federal Electric, he thought that the security procedures would be more democratic. As he soon learned, however, the Army Air Forces controlled security for the Saturn project. Still, hopeful that he would be doing important scientific research again, he traveled into that secret world filled with strange mythological implications.

14 Saturn In Huntsville



After slipping into and out of so many jobs, and after years of wandering, Porter hoped that the Huntsville position would provide security and a home. Even though his official employer was the Boeing Aircraft Corporation, he was really working for the government on the Saturn Moon Rocket. Everyone seemed to take the name Saturn for granted. Americans, often compared to Romans for their materialism and economic strength, liked to borrow the heroic names of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses for their missiles and rockets—Jupiter, Apollo, and Venus—names suggesting transfigured space and power. Why was Saturn, god-king of the Roman Saturnalia, chosen?

"The German rocket scientists named it, " says Porter, "probably the two chief scientists who headed the project, Wernher von Braun and Arthur Rudolph. The story that I heard in Huntsville was that they were sitting in their beer garden, which the Army had built for them, talking about what name to use. Says one German: 'What about Saturn?' 'Oh no,' says the other, 'the Americans won't permit that.' 'Why not?' asks the first German. 'They won't know the mythological implications. To them it's just a planet.' And that's the way it happened. No one in the American government or press ever questioned the name Saturn, but the German scientists trained in classicism, Nietzsche, and Wagner, wanted to suggest the tragic destiny that was inherent in space flight. Even when the Chal-

200

breathing fire

Change, yes— upheaval, no

Found by Porter from *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

lenger exploded and devoured its own astronauts, Americans were not interested in remembering mythology. And now a new car has been named Saturn!"

Originally, Saturn was the god of agriculture. He was equated with the Greek god Cronus, father of Zeus. Like many gods, Cronus fancied an incestuous relationship with his sister, Rhea. His parents, Uranus and Ge (heaven and earth), warned him that his own child would overthrow him. As his children were born, Cronus-Saturn devoured them all, as is so terrifyingly depicted in Francisco de Goya's late, black painting, *Saturn Devouring His Children*. Only the infant Zeus survived, hidden in Crete by his mother. Zeus grew up, forced Cronus to disgorge the children, and imprisoned him in Tartarus. Later, Saturn was transformed into a beneficent king and was even brought to Rome as a founder who blessed the city with his knowledge of agriculture and navigation. From Saturn the Romans derived the Saturnalia, the festival they held celebrating him in December. As astrology developed, those born under the influence of Saturn were predicted to have cold, gloomy, melancholic temperaments.

The Army Air Forces, however, in charge of security at Huntsville, were not about to bother themselves with the mythological meanings of Saturn. The Air Forces wanted only production from their former enemies, and to that end the Air Forces were willing to build a special city for the German rocketeers in Huntsville, with their own beer garden, newspaper, and other amenities excluding freedom to travel. The scientists were restricted to an area within a few miles of Huntsville and had to get special permission to travel outside of it.

Was it just to employ Nazi rocket scientists in the American space program? Even Porter says that without the German scientists, the United States would probably not have been the first nation to reach the moon. After all, the Soviet Union took other German rocket scientists to work on that country's space program. Still, what about the morality of employing Nazi scientists in a time when the United States was pledged to "denazification"? Specifically, what about Wernher von Braun, who became director of the

Marshall Space Flight Center and founding father of the American rocket program, and Arthur Rudolph, von Braun's associate, who became general manager of the Saturn Moon Rocket project? Von Braun became a distinguished American citizen, awarded high honors by the government for his service. Rudolph's fate was different. After many years of distinguished work in the United States, Rudolph's World War II record was uncovered. He had headed the factory that made the V-2 "buzz bombs" that were launched by von Braun's group from Peenemunde against England. Toward the end of the war, when Hitler considered these rockets his possible salvation, the factory employed slave laborers from conquered countries, who were worked inhumanly long hours under horrifying concentration camp conditions. Many of these slave workers were beaten and starved to death in the factory, which was guarded by SS troops. In view of this, Rudolph was deported, a bitter man who felt he had been unjustly treated. Both von Braun and Rudolph had said little about their Nazi connections. They blamed what had happened on the Nazi tyranny, under which Germans had to obey.

Since the decision to use German scientists to start the American rocket program was kept secret for many years, American authorities (because of the program's classified nature it is still not clear who authorized the program) decided that von Braun, Rudolph, and the other scientists should be considered as geniuses first and that questions about the morality of their actions could be ignored, given the importance of their work on the Saturn project. Just the same, only a few people in the chain of command knew about these transplants. One scientist, Dieter Huzel, described their arrival in the United States in 1946 in a United Press International article by James D. Britnell dated November 3, 1965: Three days after the group had boarded an old liberty ship, Huzel said, "the lights of New York City came into sight and Americans on board with us pointed out landmarks I had so often heard about. Then someone came out on deck and told us we should all go out of sight below deck. We left the ship through a warehouse and finally emerged in midtown Manhattan. A Greyhound bus was waiting and it whisked us through New York City and on to Washington."

At Fort Hunt, outside of Washington, D.C., the scientists were screened for three weeks, then transferred to Fort Bliss in western Texas, far from civilian eyes. There they began to create an American rocket program, using the plans and equipment, including V-2 rockets, that they had brought from Germany. The first six months' contract, signed by a mere American captain in

202

							DOLLAR
1900	100¢						
1910	83¢	100¢					
1920	40¢	47¢	100¢				
1930	47¢	57¢	120¢	100¢			
1940	57¢	68¢	143¢	119¢	100¢		
1950	33¢	39¢	83¢	69¢	58¢	100¢	
1960	27¢	32¢	68¢	56¢	47¢	81¢	100¢
1970	20¢	24¢	52¢	43¢	36¢	62¢	76¢

Found by Porter from *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

Germany, stipulated that the Germans were to be paid in German currency. While in the United States, the scientists were paid a small portion of their salaries each month in American money (usually this included a crisp $100 bill) for expenses and entertainment. German prisoners of war cooked for the scientists, pouring their fraternal feelings into the cooking to the delight of the recipients. However, due to the rocketeers' unique status, their research was accepted only slowly by the American military supervisors, who had to be both bureaucratic jailors and enthusiastic employers. In the Britnell article, Walter Weisman, youngest of the German scientists, said of the project's development: "It wasn't easy. . . . We were up against monumental odds. The average citizen of the United States had little idea of the concepts of rocketry, and even the country's congressional leaders couldn't visualize the possibilities in the military field [it is still not clear how many members of Congress, if any, knew of the employment of German scientists in the early years]. It really took nerves and guts to overcome some of the obstacles this whole team faced. What should have been simple tasks turned into major hurdles. We had to make the most of the typical Army supply system. When vital parts for a test stand were unavailable we just made the part or substituted for it. In fact, some of these early test stands were really monuments to ingenuity. Most were built almost from scrap and weren't even authorized."

An inevitable conflict exists between bureaucracy and stubborn scientific originality that goes its own way when things aren't "authorized," as Weisman said. On the other hand, one wonders if these German scientists felt so free to do unauthorized things in Nazi Germany. Under the dark confines of "security," in a time of American power and tenuous peace before the Korean war, a singular problem developed that changed Porter's life and continues to haunt our society today. The word *security* conceals ambiguities that trouble our consciences. Applied to governments and large institutions, security almost always means increasing secrecy, and secret security creates its own phantoms. If democracy means openness and the free exchange of ideas, security means hidden surveil-

lance and the growth of invisible bureaucracies to gather and control confidential intelligence. Is such covert activity a legitimate endeavor for democratic governments? A secret Central Intelligence Agency operation, authorized by President Eisenhower in 1954 led to the overthrow of the elected left-wing government of President Arbenz in Guatemala and resulted in a series of brutal dictatorships in that key Central American country. President Kennedy authorized assassination attempts by underworld figures against Fidel Castro in Cuba. And the recent Iran-Contra scandal has emphasized again the danger that arises when the CIA operates almost unchecked.

As I often discussed with Porter, I first became aware of the dangers inherent in secret military programs during World War II, while I was in the Army. By 1944 some 350,000 German prisoners, many of them top combat troops, had been brought to the United States and scattered in prison camps across the country. Putting into effect a secret plan, the Nazis installed their own officials to run the camps. They even had political officers masquerading as enlisted men to control the compounds where soldiers were separated from officers. The result was that all over the United States, little Nazi camps came into being. Nazi kangaroo courts were held to discipline any protests, and anti-Nazi Germans were sentenced to death for any infraction. Nazi underground newspapers were published, and anti-Nazi books, radio programs and films were banned. American officers, who were supposed to be running the camps, would often find bodies of German soldiers or officers who had been hanged and whose deaths were passed off as suicides. Other bodies were discovered with swastikas carved in their backs. The situation became so troublesome that a secret organization was established in the Provost Marshal General's office for the re-education of German prisoners of war through various techniques such as films, books, music, and newspapers, and it was in that effort that I worked. In 1945, however, with the war coming to an end, the Nazis' hold on the camps naturally loosened. The chief aim of the re-education program shifted to finding the small minority of anti-Nazis among the German prisoners who might help in the postwar reconstruction of Germany. Many of these anti-Nazi prisoners had

Found by Porter from *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

HEADS

Hammerhead
Bulkhead
Warhead
Bighead
Leadhead
Redhead
Deadhead
Coolhead
Skinhead
Acidhead
Blockhead
Knothead
Warthead
Dumbhead
Pinhead
Fathead
Diamondhead
Knucklehead
Pothead
Goodhead
Juicehead
Lunkhead
Hardhead
Egghead
Squarehead
Flathead
Meathead
Bonehead
Stonehead
Maidenhead
Fountainhead
Featherhead
Worrywart
Copperhead
Steelhead
Woodhead
Sorehead
Drumhead
Wronghead
Godhead
Hothead
Barrelhead
Garbagehead
Woolhead
Jughead
Cylinderhead
Hogshead

served time in Dachau or other German concentration camps and had been sent off to Africa under strict military supervision to die in the front lines. But they organized themselves and surrendered to the Americans, whereupon the Americans refused to acknowledge their anti-Nazi claims and shipped them off with Nazi stalwarts to American prisoner-of-war camps.

After training these anti-Nazis in a special camp in Rhode Island, we American officers in the program intended to accompany them back to occupied Germany, where they would function in key military government positions. Instead, early in 1946, our program was suddenly disbanded. The highest ranking American officers received decorations and commendations for their service. Yet, when they returned to Germany, the anti-Nazis we had trained were bypassed for responsible government positions. The emerging Cold War and rigid fears of communism had increased security concerns. Right-wing American military authorities, who would not dare to make such accusations in public, privately accused our little re-education program of being too left-wing. In effect, the McCarthy era had begun. In western Germany, denazification procedures were ignored, and Nazis often returned to their jobs or were assigned to new positions. As we now know, even criminals like Klaus Barbie were protected and employed by American intelligence officers for the information they could provide about communist activities. American authorities even helped Barbie emigrate to South America, where he was discovered living affluently in hiding many years later.

Haphazard American intelligence activities like these haunted Porter and other scientists who worked for the government. The freedom of scientific research was being corrupted politically by the right-wing views of high-ranking officers. In Huntsville, Porter again confronted their suspicion, even though he was employed as a civilian scientist and, compared to his work with the Manhattan Project, his job was minor. Essentially, he was an engineer, checking on the endless details involved in constructing and testing the rocket and reporting weekly to his superior, Douglas Tilden. A summer 1965 report from Porter to Tilden read:

> 1.0 Extensive remodifications have now begun on and about the Saturn V Test Tower in keeping with a long list of physical requirements: extra steel stress beams, floor changes, roof; air, water, electrical conduits; footings for the Martin pedestals; pump house and related equipment. Corner edges will be left open four

Rocket scientist Bern Porter.



inches throughout the entire height.

2.0 The matter of weighing and how to achieve it remains unresolved.

3.0 The tangle over accelerometer specifications, quantity, rejects and deliveries remains obscure.

4.0 Information on vendors, types and specifications for strain gages, load cells.

5.0 Arrangements may be made to visit the testing facility of the U.S. Army Command, Huntsville.

6.0 Work continues on Data Reduction Requirements and is aiding in clarifying the missing sections of the Data System Criteria document.

Porter soon became bored with checking and reporting. He had little chance to contribute any of his creative talents. "With all the constant security checks and spying that surrounded me, I was soon disillusioned with the job," he says. "Still, there was the excitement of building a rocket that could soar to the moon. And I got to know von Braun a little. I met him at a party and he took a liking immediately to my wife, Margaret. There was no doubt he was a creative genius. He could take a piece of paper and sketch out his impulsive ideas like an artist. But he was so obsessed with his work that he didn't seem to have any conscience. All he cared about was rockets and space travel. As a way to find out what he did and what kind of man he was, I started to compile a bibliography on his work, of which I finally published only three or four copies, as new work was coming out so fast that it always seemed incomplete."

After work, there was little to do in Huntsville. The city had been a strictly segregated textile center, and the scientists at the Marshall Space Center

Found by Porter from *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

GOB

1. Cut the gob.
2. Drop gob into a preconditioned mold.
3. Lower plunger forming gob into part mold.
4. Raise plunger.
5. Condition part.
6. Pick up part.
7. Inspect part for unfill and flash.
8. Deposit part either on conveyor if good, or in cullet chute if rejected.
9. Condition mold.
10. Index to receive next gob.

worked mainly in former mills, surrounded by hundreds of acres of farmland. "The past hung over us like a shadow," says Porter. "It wasn't just the abandoned, eerie feeling of the old textile mills. It was the hovering sense, still, of black-white segregation, despite the new presence of thousands of educated scientists." Porter became friends with a black engineer, but when his new friend came to visit him in Huntsville, it was apparent that the neighbors resented this violation of the color line. As a result, Porter and Margaret felt isolated, confining their social activities mainly to a few friends and occasional receptions at the Space Center. At home, he tried to keep up with his creative work and publishing, but these activities were sporadic due to the long hours and heavy responsibilities demanded of everyone at the Space Center. Documents in Porter's security file offer a glimpse of the quality of his life in Huntsville. Here are some of the statements about the Porters made by Huntsville neighbors to government intelligence agents:

> Mrs. Porter, I do not know her given name, is a talker. She is the type that gets out and goes from place to place and talks. . . . If Mr. Porter does have a personality I have never seen it. They do not have a telephone, television or car. They do not take the newspaper. About a year ago he received a telephone call from somewhere around New York and I went over and advised him of the call. He came over and answered the telephone. I am sure that he works all the time. He seems to write when he is at home. He has never taken any outside interest in anything. They do get an awful lot of mail. I imagine it is in connection with his writing. . . . I am not aware of anything that Mr. Porter could benefit this country with in any foreign country. I just do not know what he could do. Personally I think anyone would have to have a personality and would have to be able to work with people. He whistles one tune from morning until night. That is the only thing that I know he can do well. I would not definitely question his loyalty to the United States government because I have no evidence. In turn I would not recommend him for a position of trust involving our national security because I do not think that he has the attributes required to meet and deal successfully with people abroad. He feels superior and I think he would make a bad image for this country.
>
> I have learned that he might be a writer of some kind. I do know that they get an awful lot of mail and that they send out an awful lot

of mail. He has a room over there where he does his writing. No one has ever been in that room. I have heard his wife say she would not hesitate shutting the door on anyone that tried to go in the room.

They are very peculiar people and nobody likes or understands them. I do not believe that a person on this street knows them well because they do not mix with anyone in the neighborhood or elsewhere. . . . I have heard that Mr. Porter is real smart mentally. What good does that do if he does not share it with others? You will not get any good out of him. I think he writes some kind of books. I have talked to Mrs. Porter because she does visit around. She came down to my house and has spent a full afternoon. To be honest with you I am a little bit afraid of them. She talks a lot and you just do not know them. He whistles all the time. I do not know what he is whistling about because he does not carry a tune.

One has to question how such sober-minded, humorless reports could contribute to the security of the nation. Similarly, security-file reports from Porter's Boeing colleagues testify sadly to his peculiar situation:

I know this man is Bernard Porter but I call him Porter and I have known him for the past five and a half years during which time he has worked (blacked out material). He is a reliable person, hard worker when there is work to be done and he keeps busy. He has never worked on any classified data. I believe that he is a stable individual. He likes to write things, keep a record of his achievements of what he is doing. He does not communicate well with people. He is sort of a lone wolfer and keeps strictly to himself both out in society and on the job. He just does not get friendly with people.

As an engineer he was a bit unstable. He would make an attempt to do what you told him but his output was an indication of his instability. He was a bit emotional. I will be honest with you. I never could get to know him. You could not communicate with him.

I have attained his personnel rating file and a review of it indicates that his services have not been "too satisfactory" and the ratings from various supervisors run as follows, "Gives cursory answers," "he defines job himself and comes out with different answers from what the requirement is and his work is marginal", "he may improve his work but transfer into different type of work", "his work is routine and requires no analytical thinking". and "he may

improve self to company by taking a more positive attitude."

From these reports it is clear that Porter could no longer fit into a team of scientists. He had been battered by life and had retained his individuality at too high a price. His private writing and publishing activities seemed distracting and dangerous to neighbors and colleagues, and they viewed him as if through the wrong end of a telescope. The cultural landscape in Huntsville was bleak indeed, and in reaction Porter became even more of a hermit. In his mind, his scientific career had been downgraded from physicist to subordinate engineer, further damaging his pride. The continuous security investigations, the questioning of his sanity and his ability to communicate, drove him into retreat. Correspondence with artistic friends around the world was his only release.

A key document in Porter's security file indicates what can happen in a secret, undemocratic security system. In 1966 Porter applied for a job with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Organizations Employees Loyalty Board of the United States Civil Service Commission began a loyalty screening. On February 27, 1967, the chairman of the Loyalty Board, William P. Berzak, sent a letter about "Bernard Harden Porter" to the Secretary of State for transmission to the director of UNESCO:

> The person named above, who was reported to be a United States citizen employed or under consideration for employment by the foregoing public international organization, has been the subject of a full field investigation under the provisions of Executive Order 10422, as amended. The reports of investigation have been duly considered by the International Organizations Employees Loyalty Board.
>
> It has been determined that, on all the evidence, there is no reasonable doubt as to the loyalty of this person to the Government of the United States.
>
> There is attached a Summary Report of certain information, not relevant to the person's loyalty, which was disclosed by the investigation. The summary is submitted for your information only without recommendation or evaluation.

This was weak vindication indeed! The Loyalty Board was evidently able to present any kind of information it wished to and in the "Summary Report" stated its conclusions about Porter as if to sum up his life:

> Investigation revealed information from numerous sources to the

effect that the applicant is considered to be "eccentric," "confused," "unstable," and "unable to communicate with others." It was reported that his thinking is unrealistic, that he is unable to understand and accept instruction and constructive criticism, that he is un-friendly and will not associate with co-workers and neighbors, and that he is distrustful and suspicious, feels persecuted, and has filed unwarrented [*sic*] complaints with postal officials, police, supervisors, etc.

Investigation also disclosed that the applicant was requested to resign from a position in 1956 for unprofessional conduct involving premature release of information; that he was discharged from an employment in 1960 because of the peculiar conduct of himself and his wife in the performance of their duties as supervisors of a residence hall; and that he was discharged from an employment in 1961 due to "lack of teacher respect by pupils, disregard of textbook content, and failure to control student groups." In the latter instance it was reported that he consistently introduced the subject of sex into high school classroom discussions, and an associate who is acquainted with his writings said that some of them have been pornographic. At his most recent places of employment his work has been considered marginal.

On his Identification and Personnel Data Form the applicant listed his reasons for leaving the above-mentioned employments as "Extend experience." He listed many periods of "self-employment" under the title "Institute of Advanced Thinking." Investigation indicated that this apparently is not a bona-fide organization but a name used by the applicant to account for periods when he was unemployed and allegedly engaged in travelling and writing.

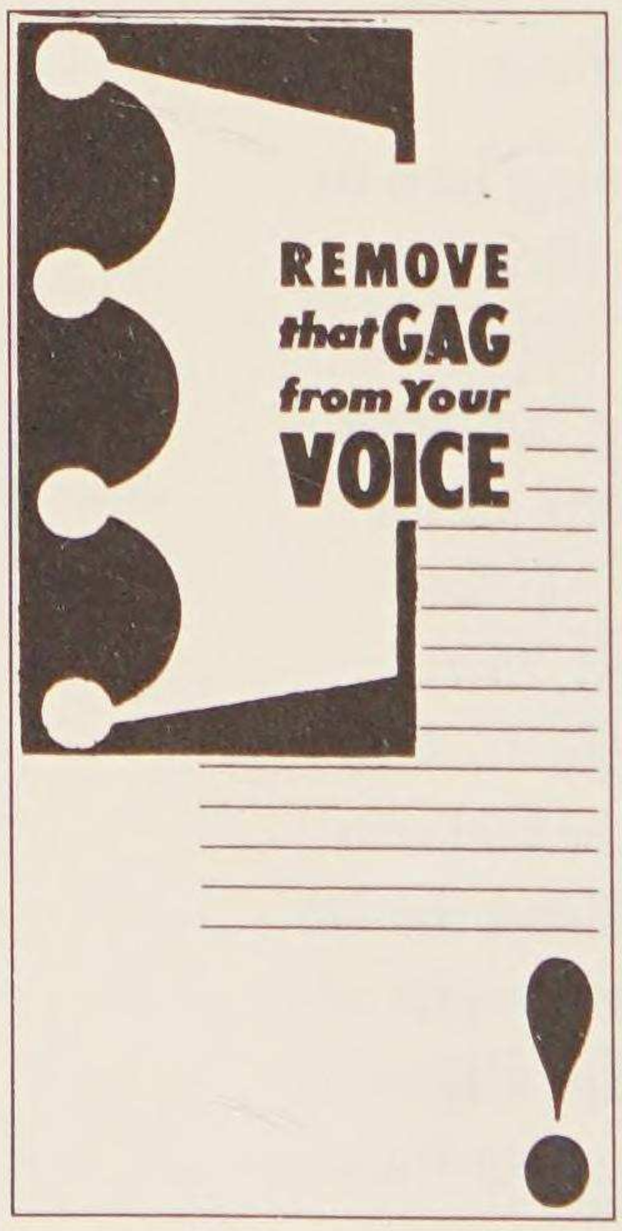
This report, asserting Porter's loyalty and consigning him to oblivion at the same time, resembles, alas, the kind of totalitarian practice that we have condemned in the Soviet Union, China, and other countries. The subject has no recourse. He cannot confront his accusers; indeed, he is not even aware of the accusations and final judgment. The names of the accusers are unlisted or blacked out. Thus, despite the fact that his loyalty was established, Porter did not get the UNESCO job or others for which he applied. The callous accumulation of unevaluated opinions made Porter feel constantly spied upon and therefore increasingly paranoid. Even the criticism about Porter's Institute of Advanced Thinking does not take into account his concept of the institute. Ignorant investigators simply compiled unevaluated details, which by their sheer bulk

(Porter's file is almost a foot thick) may be used to deny government employment to any unique, creative personality as if only a pebble has been tossed aside on the true path to national loyalty.

For Porter, the worst, perhaps the inevitable result of all the hounding was yet to come. One afternoon in Huntsville in 1967, he set out on his customary walk. For most creative thinkers walking is a special pastime. Legend has it that when Immanuel Kant took his daily walk in Koenigsberg, East Prussia, the townspeople checked their clocks to make sure that they were correct. The story implies that from Kant's strict schedule of daily walks came his imaginative discoveries. Walking alone, creative people often seem mesmerized, transported to a world beyond conventional law and order. Certainly that is the only way to explain what happened to Porter. When he began his walk this day, he was in his old clothes, not his usual workday attire. Bent over, deep in thought, he undoubtedly seemed a foreigner in a provincial town that resented the intrusion of the German scientists. When he rounded a corner and unconsciously took a shortcut through a building site, he was observed and apparently taken for an intruder. In that time and place, an intruder on a construction site with "No Trespassing" signs was cause for suspicion. Unbeknownst to Porter, the police were alerted. For a moment, Porter didn't realize that a police car was drawing up beside him; startled, waving his arms wildly, he lost his footing and stumbled. As he picked himself up, he found a policeman regarding him suspiciously.

When the policeman told him that he was under arrest, his immediate reaction was a sardonic grunt of disbelief. When the policeman informed him that he was drunk and trespassing on a private site, he couldn't reply that he never drank or smoked. The next thing Porter knew, he was in jail—unbelievable, but surely there was nothing to worry about. After all, he had even met the sheriff, who was related to the family from whom he rented his house. When the police discovered that he was a Space Center scientist, surely they would realize that he was merely taking a walk and had tripped while deep in thought.

From here, the story becomes even more bi-



Found by Porter from *The Wastemaker,*
Abyss Publications 1972.

zarre. For three days and nights Porter was held in Huntsville's new jail, locked in a tank with some fourteen or so black and white prisoners, all charged with drunkenness. Frantic, Margaret tried to find him, but when she did she couldn't get him out. Perhaps it was the discovery that Porter really was a scientist and did not drink that caused the police to panic. Suddenly, on the word of a doctor whom he could not identify but who had presumably been watching him during his incarceration, Porter was judged a mental case and sent to the state asylum at Bryce for three weeks of observation, as was permitted by state law. In Bryce, Porter was watched and recorded on tape constantly. Stubbornly refusing to cooperate, he could hardly believe that he needed a gifted lawyer. The charges were so patently false that he was sure he would be released in a few days. Finally, to pass the time, he accepted a job of painting a long expanse of white wall. As an experienced artist, he painted the wall with deliberate precision, as if he were painting a fresco.

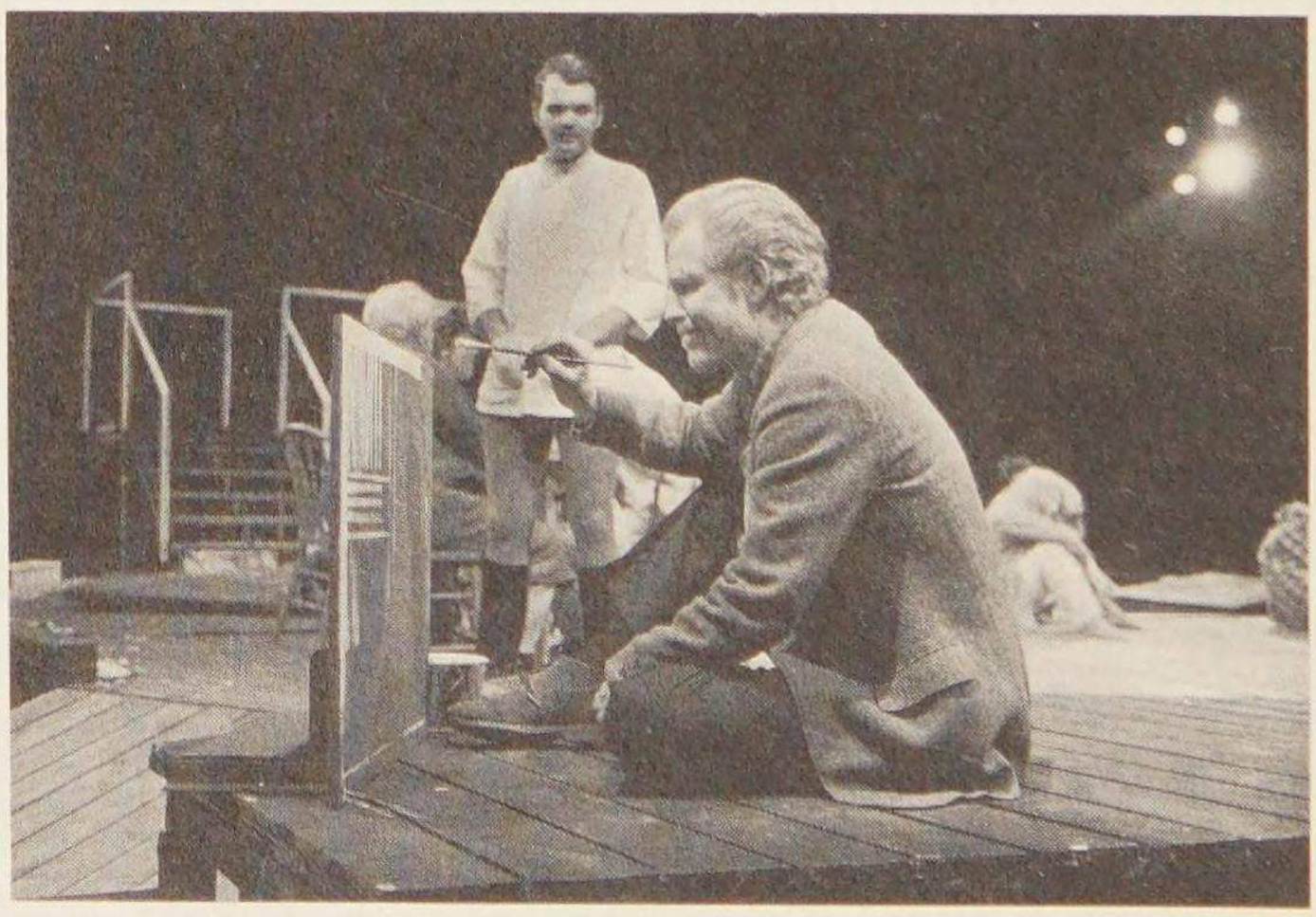
A few years later in 1969, I wrote a play, *Lovecraft's Follies*, that centered on a physicist like Porter and contained his nightmare experience in Bryce. The play was commissioned and produced by Adrian Hall at his Trinity Repertory Company in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1970, and Porter helped with the production. In one of the final scenes, based on what he had told me, I described Porter in the asylum:

> MILLSAGE (the character based on Porter): I entered the asylum sane. The whole test procedure was geared to prove I am not. Only by great effort can I beat their tests. The others pass the time playing cards. I don't know how to play cards—so I pass the time painting the wall. It's something I know, paint and brushes. How to paint a wall with my own kind of art. . . . But I am marked for so knowing. It is compared to card playing an odd, insane kind of thing to know. . . .
>
> AUTHORITY (an official at the asylum): What are you painting, Mr. Millsage?
>
> MILLSAGE: It's a wall.
>
> AUTHORITY: What are you painting on the wall?
>
> MILLSAGE: I'm painting it white.
>
> AUTHORITY Is that a solid white?
>
> MILLSAGE: No, I don't like solid white. I'm a physicist. I like invisible things. Did the Space Center confirm I'm a physicist?
>
> AUTHORITY: Yes, of course. You're a fine physicist.
>
> MILLSAGE: When will I be able to leave?

AUTHORITY: Soon. Soon enough. Well, if you're not painting the wall solidly, would you tell me why you're painting it?
MILLSAGE: Why or how?
AUTHORITY: Whichever you prefer.
MILLSAGE: Why I'm painting it is because it's there and I'm here. How I'm painting it is with the minimum amount of white paint that's needed. Look closely. What do you see?
AUTHORITY: Lines on a white wall.
MILLSAGE: Only lines?
AUTHORITY: White lines.
MILLSAGE: But that's what you're supposed to see.
AUTHORITY: Yes, well, go ahead, Mr. Millsage. Good luck with your painting.

"The way you describe the painting in your play is absolutely correct," Porter told me. "I was painting that long wall as artistically as I could to retain my sanity, and they were wondering if I was crazy because I was painting the wall with such artistic concentration. It was a no-win situation. When I got out of there after three weeks, there was no way they could prove I was insane. They had to drop my case and let me go back to my job at the Marshall Space Center. At the same time, it was clear that the security people in the Army Air Force would continue to regard me with suspicion and keep investigating me because I had been sent to Bryce. From the time of my Bryce release date in May 1967 to my departure from Huntsville, worn out, in February 1968, I considered suing the Huntsville police. I even contacted the American Civil Liberties Union. They advised me later that they would do nothing in the way of direct representation but might under special conditions file as a friend of the court. Unsuccessfully, I tried to get an attorney in town, or through the Boeing Company for whom I worked, or even through the Universalist Church, which my wife and I attended occasionally. But my wife tried to deter me. The sheriff, too, warned me that he'd come and pull me out of the house in the

Scene from James Schevill's *Lovecraft's Follies*.



middle of the night if I ever went to court. So I waited to file suit until I got out of town."

A report in Porter's security file casts more light on his sufferings in Bryce. The report, which appears on a United States Air Force form called "Regarding Disposition of Reports and Personnel Records Entries" and dated November 29, 1967, said Porter's case was closed, but also stated that the investigation "disclosed unfavorable information."

> SUBJECT was admitted to Bryce Hospital, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on 25 April 1967 and was discharged on 16 May 1967. His diagnosis was "paranoid personality." The doctor who examined and treated SUBJECT was DR. WILLIAM B. ROBINSON, who is no longer working at Bryce Hospital and is working in New Orleans, Louisiana. The records further reflected that the Doctor who initially examined SUBJECT had considered him psychotic and had had SUBJECT committed to Bryce Hospital on a "regular commitment" by a Probate Judge. . . .
>
> Records reflect that on 5 May 1967 Dr. Robinson certified that, in his opinion, SUBJECT was able to return to his usual occupation. ROBINSON, according to the records, did not consider SUBJECT to be psychotic. ROBINSON used such words as "compulsive," "obsessive," and "sarcastic" to describe SUBJECT.

Porter's nightmare at Bryce became even more incredible. Even though Robinson cleared Porter of being psychotic and stated that he could return to work, the record remained clouded by the doctor's qualifying words: "compulsive," "obsessive," and "sarcastic." "Paranoid personality" and "unfavorable information" remained on the record.

Thus, after Porter returned to work, it was only a matter of time before the security staff of the Army Air Force began to haunt him. On December 20, 1967, he was ordered to contact Captain Victor R. Gonzalez, Medical Corps, Chief, Mental Hygiene Consultation Service, U.S. Hospital, Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, and make an appointment for an examination. Failure to complete the examination within forty-five days would result, he was told, in "suspension of your existing access authorization at the secret level." On January 11, 1968, Porter had his appointment with Captain Gonzalez. Porter says that the meeting lasted approximately "eight minutes" and that Gonzalez had before him Porter's by now huge file of hundreds of pages, while outside of Gonzalez's door

two officers were holding down a patient who was said to have suicidal tendencies. Years late, Gonzalez's report about Porter, dated January 17, 1968, appeared in Porter's security file:

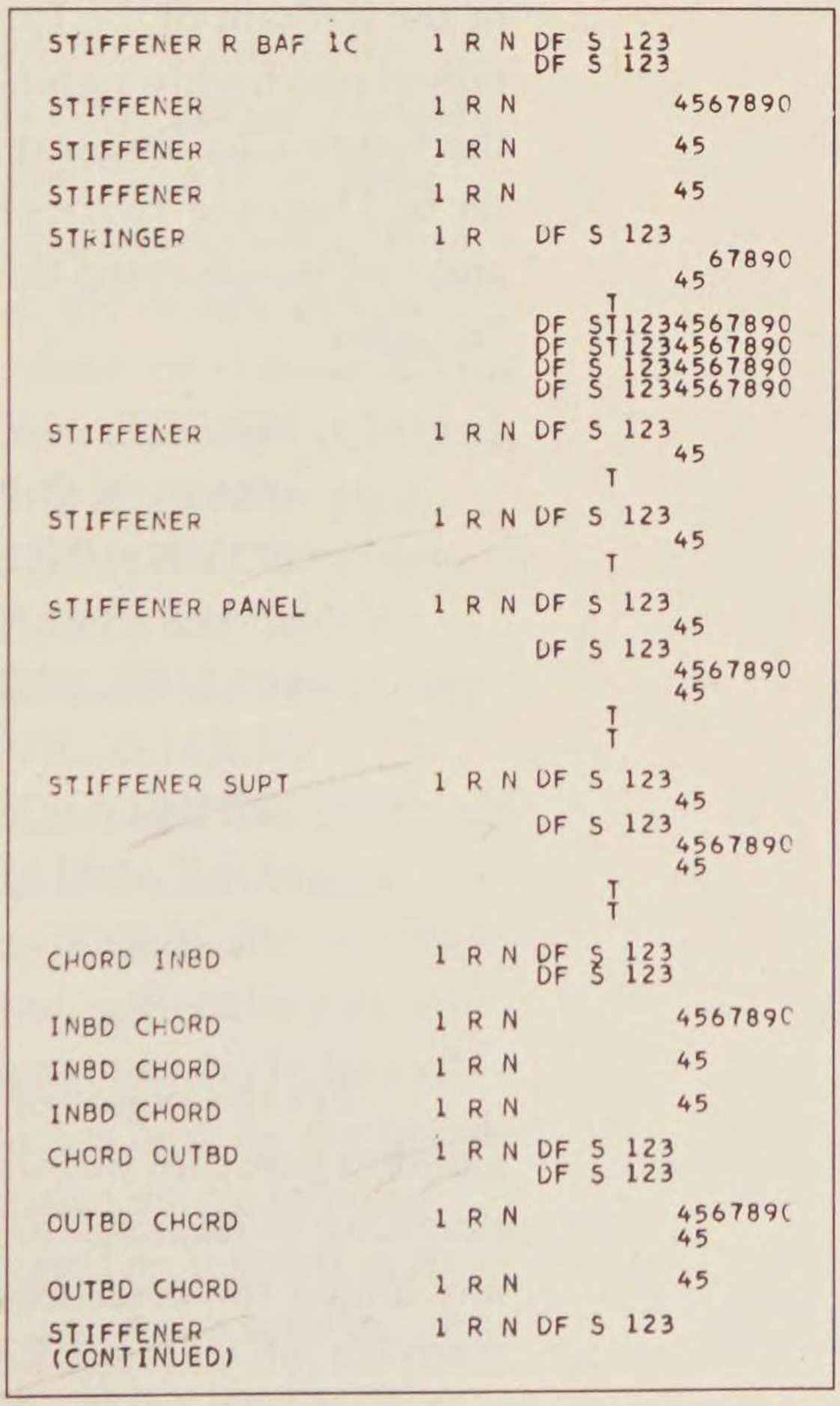
> 1. On 11 January 1968, in compliance with your request of 20 December 1967, I examined Bernard Harden Porter for the purpose of supplying you with a current psychiatric evaluation. The subject was aware of the purpose of the interview. In addition, I had access to the case file which you enclosed for my review.
>
> 2. The history obtained from the subject coincided with the information in the case file. He stated that he had been picked up by police on 23 April, charged with drunkenness, taken to the jail, later examined by a psychiatrist who recommended that he be committed to a state mental institution where he went for a period of 21 days of observation. There he received psychological tests and was discharged on 17 May 1967 with a diagnosis of Paranoid Personality and with the note being sent to Judge Ashford Todd that the subject was found not to be suffering from mental illness at that time.
>
> 3. Additional history revealed that subject has not previously nor subsequently consulted a psychiatrist. This man's family is free of psychiatric illness. He has not had any substantial physical ailment. His marital history revealed two marriages. The first terminated in 1947 with no children. His second marriage began in 1954 with his wife being 5 years older. There have been no children produced by this marriage either.
>
> 4. During the interview, the subject aggrandized himself by initially stating that he is a Physicist who has worked with great success, that he has many degrees, that he has written many papers and many books. He stated that he had worked on the atomic bomb development. He minimized the incidents that have resulted in his needing a psychiatric clearance. As he had in the statement contained in your case file, he pictured himself as a victim of police action combined with commitment procedure.
>
> 5. Diagnostic impression is of Paranoid Personality Disorder. I should like to note that this is in concurrence with the impression formed at Bryce State Hospital and is influenced by the observation that was made in that hospital over a 21 day period and which is summarized in your case file. It is unlikely that there will be a change in his person-ality pattern over the next few years.
>
> 6. Should there be a need for clarification of any part of this statement, please contact me. The report is signed Victor R.

Gonzalez, Captain, MC, Psychiatrist.

It appears that in writing his report, Gonzalez, who met with Porter for only a few minutes, relied mainly on the stack of documents on his desk. He made little effort to look into Porter's history and made only a few odd comments about Porter's two marriages. Also, Gonzalez diagnosed Porter as a "paranoid personality," yet said that "the subject was found not to be suffering mental illness at that time." And in the fourth section of the report Gonzalez made the hasty judgment that Porter "aggrandized himself by initially stating that he is a Physicist who has worked with great success." In any case, how could the truth about Porter—his real achievements and real neuroses—emerge from such a brief meeting?

In the three or four months before his arrest and confinement in Bryce, Porter noted some of the many activities he was involved in outside of his enginering work at the Marshall Space Center. These testify to his sanity at the time:

> In early 1967 I was advised that WHO'S WHO IN SPACE carrying my biography will be included in a time capsule at the Robert Hutchins Goddard Memorial Library at Worcester, Mass. The capsule will be opened in the 25th century. I was asked to help the newly organized Huntsville Literary Society to advise on their projected magazine, POEM. OLE magazine of Open Skull Press, San Francisco, reviewed seven published books of mine, three by me. Dick Higgins asked me to illustrate his MSS, *Taifun Willi*, which I did with collage photos. I sold the rights of Michael Fraenkel's *Genesis of Tropic of*



```
STIFFENER R BAF IC      1 R N DF S 123
                                DF S 123
STIFFENER               1 R N              4567890
STIFFENER               1 R N                 45
STIFFENER               1 R N                 45
STRINGER                1 R   DF S 123
                                          67890
                                       45
                                  T
                              DF ST1234567890
                              DF ST1234567890
                              DF S 1234567890
                              DF S 1234567890
STIFFENER               1 R N DF S 123
                                       45
                                  T
STIFFENER               1 R N DF S 123
                                       45
                                  T
STIFFENER PANEL         1 R N DF S 123
                                       45
                              DF S 123
                                          4567890
                                          45
                                  T
                                  T
STIFFENER SUPT          1 R N DF S 123
                                       45
                              DF S 123
                                          4567890
                                          45
                                  T
                                  T
CHORD INBD              1 R N DF S 123
                                DF S 123
INBD CHORD              1 R N              4567890
INBD CHORD              1 R N                 45
INBD CHORD              1 R N                 45
CHORD OUTBD             1 R N DF S 123
                                DF S 123
OUTBD CHORD             1 R N              4567890
                                          45
OUTBD CHORD             1 R N                 45
STIFFENER               1 R N DF S 123
(CONTINUED)
```

Page from Porter's book, *468B: Thy Future* (1966), consisting of computer printout from the Saturn moon project. From the Bern Porter Collection, Colby College, Waterville, Maine.

Cancer to Feltrinelli in Milan, Italy. I corresponded with the Dutch-American poet, Lee Ver Duft, and will undertake to reissue six of his titles in my limited hand-made formats if orders allow. I made many slip cases by hand during 1967 for individual titles and materials going to UCLA and Colby in frequent mailings. On vacation, my first out of Huntsville in three years, I flew to Expo 67 in Canada to take in current and projected movements and ideas in architecture and design. . . . Before re-turning to Huntsville, I stopped in Philadelphia at Walton Press to investigate some sixteen titles of books I planned to publish, a typical set-up of the printing trade I always encountered, delay after delay with little promise but always hope. . . . I corresponded with many writers and took care of book orders in connection with my publish-ing. The London Institute of Contemporary Arts published a group of my FOUNDS in their June, 1967 bulletin. I kept think-ing often of ways and means to get out of Huntsville and find in physical buildings the reality of my Institute of Advanced Thinking.

If Porter's neighbors were wondering what he was doing in his study, this is what he was doing! The splendid group of Founds in the bulletin of the London Institute of Contemporary Arts contained one highly significant work that foreshadowed the cause of the future Challenger disaster. Working on the Saturn rocket, Porter had become aware of the problem of the O-rings and their seal and had transformed this into his own version of what he called a "scipoem":

YOU MEAN YOU
HAVE AN O-RING
COMPOUND THAT
SEALS STEAM,
DILUTE ACIDS AND
ALKALIS...EVEN
SKYDROL, CELLU-
LUBE AND LINDOL
AT -65 TO
+ 300 F?

Yet the honor of having some of his Founds published by the London Institute was slim compensation for the agony he was undergoing in Huntsville. On February 7, 1968, unwilling to endure any longer the pressures to which he was subjected, Porter resigned from his job with the Boeing Company. The curse of being cleared and condemned at the same time had become too much for him.

15 Back To Maine: Rockland And Belfast



After his resignation from Boeing, Porter decided to leave the United States for a time to recover his mental stability. In February 1968, he and Margaret flew to Guatemala for a sojourn that lasted until the end of April. At his own expense, he traveled as a volunteer for a service corps of retired executives called the Volunteers for International Technical Assistance, which served mostly third world countries. In Guatemala City, Porter worked as a consultant to a publishing company, Editorial Pedra Santa, advising on the design and publication of educational materials for English classes. Margaret helped the firm with its bookkeeping problems. Since they could set their hours, they were able to travel around the country as they desired.

Like most visitors to Guatemala, they traveled first to the old Spanish capitol city of Antigua, where Bernal Diaz, the famous chronicler of the invading conquistadors, was buried. For several days, they wandered through the city's narrow, ancient streets, admiring the colorful, radiant textiles on sale from nearby Indian villages and the flamboyantly ornamented churches built by the invaders. They visited the vast, glittering Lake Atitlan surrounded by imposing volcanoes. Particularly they developed an interest in exploring the great pre-Colombian Mayan civilization, whose cultural force was still evident throughout Guatemala. What fascinated

Porter about the Mayans was that they combined, despite the lack of any metal technology, extraordinary scientific investigation with unique artistic developments in sculpture, painting, and architecture. At the great Mayan site of Tikal, he admired the lofty pyramids; the intricate stelae, whose dynastic hieroglyphs scholars were just beginning to decipher; and the immense, beautifully designed ceremonial plazas where annual ritualistic dance-dramas were staged. It was a time of recovery for both Porter and Margaret, and they enjoyed traveling together, renewing their marriage, and witnessing in many villages the enduring vitality of the ancient Indian customs.

In late April they decided to return to Maine, where Porter would be able to draw unemployment insurance under the terms of his contract with Boeing. Settling in an inexpensive apartment in Rockland, a small coastal town northeast of Portland in Knox County, he returned to his interest in Founds and started to prepare a large selection for a book. Also, to help with finding work in the fall, he got a certificate, because of his publishing and other business experience, to serve as a consultant for a government bureau, the Small Business Administration.

During the summer, he and Margaret visited many coastal towns and islands as he was eager to show her the splendors of the Maine coast. As they traveled, he found himself more and more interested in the future of his home state. It was a place to which he had always retreated when in trouble and found a measure of peace. He felt that, better than most people, he understood its resources and its problems. Soon he found himself dreaming about combining consultations in urban and county planning with an attempt to break into politics, realizing that attempts to change planning policies would be effective only in the context of political reality. Perhaps he could even apply some of his Sciart ideas to the simple agricultural technology that still existed in Maine.

In October, Porter found work as a consultant for the Knox County Regional Planning Commission. To his delight, he found his dreams catapulted into reality with the opportunity to create a master plan for Knox County. Porter remembered how Ralph Waldo Emerson combined in his transcendentalism the traditional American pastoral idyll with an optimistic confidence that mastery of machines would contribute to man's inevitable progress. In *Nature* in 1836, before the Civil War brought a new, sobering consciousness to the American scene, Emerson wrote exuberantly that nature "offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful. Man is never weary of working it



Master planner, Bern Porter, Rockland, Maine. From the *Courier-Gazette*, Rockland, Maine, October 12,1968.

up." But, for Porter, Emersonian optimism did not last long. Soon he found himself in conflict with both the planning commission and the State Planning Office in Augusta. When they discovered that they had an idealistic, stubborn, long-range planner who was spending night and day creating what seemed to them a totally impractical plan, they became apprehensive. Yet Porter managed to finish the report in August 1969—all 700 pages of it.

In his comprehensive plan, Porter argued that New England towns were deteriorating because they were losing their ability to govern themselves. These towns were losing economic control to outside concerns—banks and chain stores, for example, with headquarters in big metropolitan areas—whose only interest in their subsidiaries was profitmaking. Maine was turning into a state controlled largely by outsiders, wealthy summer vacationers whose major financial concerns were elsewhere, and business people devoted

to selling and investing their profits in large markets out of state. The result was a separation of money and government in New England towns and a sharp contrast between the well-to-do and the growing underclass.

In the plan's main section, Porter submitted detailed ways in which the county's economic base could be expanded. He offered a long list of processed goods that Knox County might produce, including paper, eggs, fabrics, logs, chemicals, foods, furs, drinks, peat moss, and sea moss, and urged the expansion of industrial plants to cover new technological developments. Of course, since he didn't mention the costs involved or where the money would come from, he knew that the planning commissioners would balk at the scope of his suggestions. But he didn't care. He had a chance to set out an ideal plan, and if petty bureaucrats were not ready to grasp the ideal, too bad. He particularly wanted to emphasize possible developments created by advances in technology, so he advocated new ventures in publishing, smelting, cement products, precision machinery, deep-sea terminals, prefabricated houses, electronics, development laboratories, pharmaceutical plants, refineries, and research institutions that he called "Think Factories."

Aware that the underclass, unable to cope with technological developments, would be condemned to service jobs, he urged broad expansion of the educational system to include vocational and technical schools of all kinds to train workers in the latest methods. Temporarily suppressing his environmental concerns, he even advocated off-shore oil exploration but later rejected the idea when he realized the threat to Maine's marine resources. The plan did include a strong statement about the necessity of pollution control, something that Maine business interests tended to ignore. But in view of the living conditions he observed throughout Knox County, Porter knew that efforts to strengthen the economy had to be top priority: "The truth remains that food surplus and unemployment lines in Knox County are long, that homes without indoor flush toilets abound, that many live in sub-standard structures, abandoned stores, and dirty single rooms. The income of many is insufficient for their needs even after all external aids have been granted."

Alarmed by Porter's independence and the length of his manuscript, the planning commission resolved to cut it drastically. They were also annoyed that Porter in early March, 1969, had complained to Jerome G. Plante, an assistant of Congressman Peter N. Kyros, that some people were starving in Knox County and that the nutritional value of the surplus foods program was questionable.

The Portland Press Herald magnified this conflict with a headline in their March 13, 1969 issue reading "Knox Officials Deny Charges County Residents are starving." So the planning commission decided to release Porter after the termination of his contract. He stayed on for several weeks, working stubbornly to finish his report, which the commission then proceeded to edit and shorten. The result was, according to Porter: "Three hundred of my pages disappeared, and the other four hundred pages, badly mutilated, cut-up, rewritten, were finally issued in two mimeographed columns as a two-hundred-and-ten-page report and a sixty-four page summary. Major concepts about a duty-free zone and passenger mail, as well as a freight terminal in Rockland serving Maine's 800 to 1,200 islands by sea, were entirely missing."

Convinced that he had written an important document, Porter slaved over the report to make his ideas more coherent and sent copies to major libraries, particularly those in the United States that housed his collections, but also to several European libraries and the Lenin Library in Moscow. (One can imagine the ghost of Lenin peering at the report, intrigued by the possibility of scientific planning in a country where the Stalinist economy was foundering.) On the title page of the copy now in the Porter Collection of the John Hay Library at Brown University, Porter wrote: "Written by Bernard H. Porter, but extensively cut up, mutilated, re-edited to point of uselessness by the Commission members."

In October 1969, seeking to back his plan with political action, Porter announced his candidacy as a Republican for governor of Maine. Old-time Republican leaders in Maine paid little attention to Porter's aspirations. They continued to favor wealthy, experienced, conservative Maine politicians already in power. Porter did gain, as he hoped, a good deal of publicity for the ecological and technological

Page from Maine Republican Party newsletter, 1970.

THREE ANNOUNCE FOR GOVERNOR

Already we have three GOP aspirants for the gubernatorial candidacy next year.

In recent weeks Mrs. Lydia N. Dennis of Dixfield, Calvin F. Grass of Sebago Lake, and Bernard H. Porter of Rockland have announced their intentions of seeking the Republican nomination in 1970.



Mrs. Dennis, a native of Benton, Maine, is the mother of four children and has five grandchildren. She received a B. S. degree from Farmington State College and has taught school in Brunswick, been in the Maine Extension Service Program and been associated with the Central Aroostook Action Program under the OEO.



Born in Limestone, Maine, Mr. Grass has degrees from Boston University and University of Maine. He is now an Associate Professor of Physics at Gorham State College and a member of the Board of Directors of SAD #6. Married to the former Jane Robertson of Auburn, he is the father of five children, is very active in youth and Masonic work. He is a veteran of World War II.

Mr. Porter is a graduate of Colby and is a Consulting Physicist and Methodology Specialist. He is the author of numerous technical and semi-technical volumes and has recently completed a 700 page study, 400 pages of which have been published under the title "A Regional County Report, 1969" by the Knox County Regional Planning Commission in which he advocates the consolidation of Maine towns for purposes of mutual sharing of the many aspects of local government.

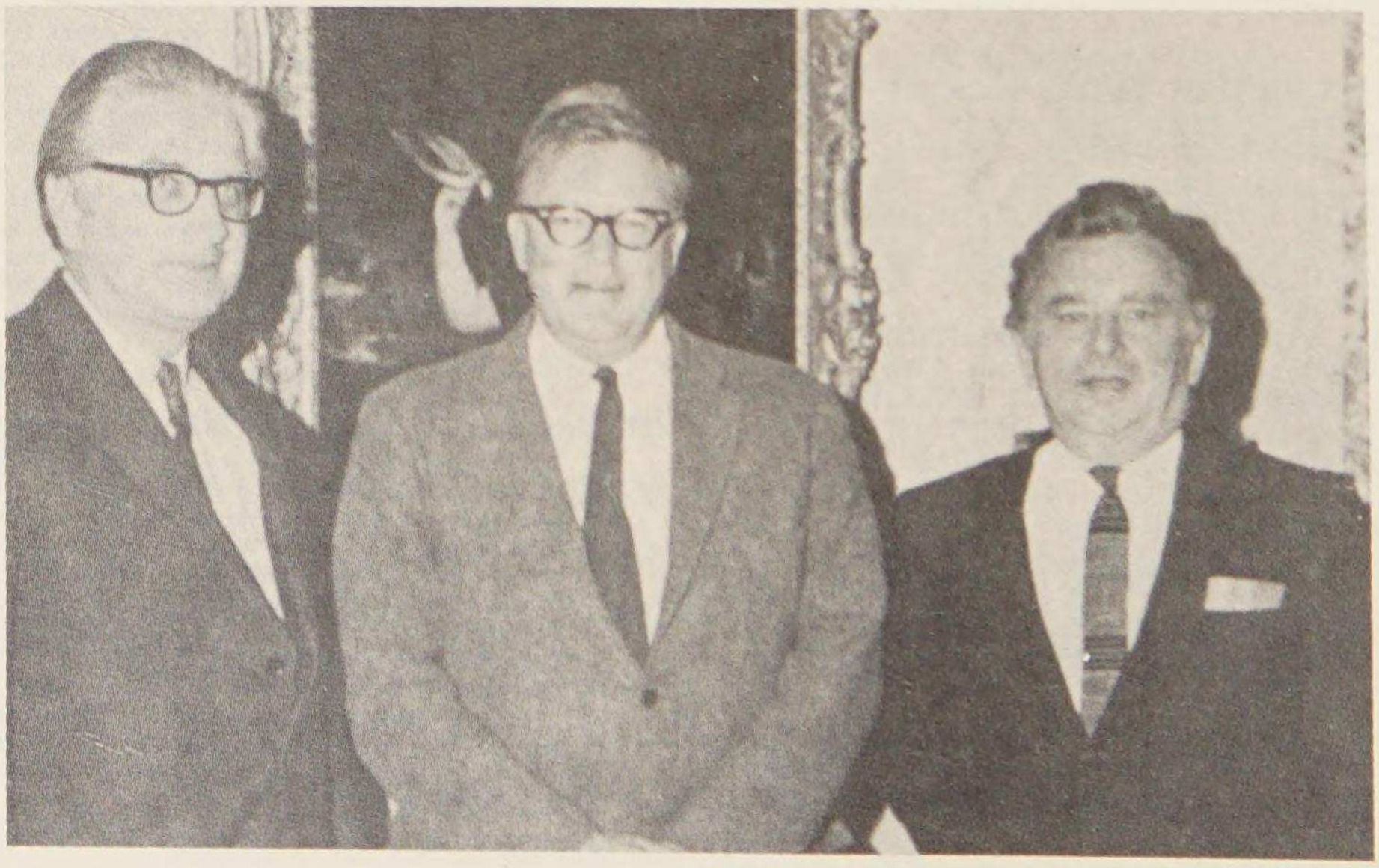


ideas contained in his county plan.

By 1969 Porter and I were geographically closer than we had been in years. I had left my position at San Francisco State University and had joined the English faculty at Brown University, teaching poetry, playwriting, and literature. In fall 1969, while I was working on *Lovecraft's Follies*, I was asked to give a reading of my poems and performance poems with my wife Margot, a professional singer, at Colby College. Porter attended, and we had a joyful reunion. At the time, the Colby Library was exhibiting some of its Porter Collection. Staff members were preparing their June 1970 issue of the *Colby Library Quarterly*, a special issue honoring Porter's work, and they asked me to write an article updating my book about Porter, *The Roaring Market and the Silent Tomb*, which I did. At the reception after the reading, in a formal suit and tie, Porter was clearly enjoying his sudden status as an honored alumnus. Smiling and gesturing like a politician, he told me about his work on the Knox County plan and his campaign for the governorship.

As a lifelong liberal Democrat, I began to kid Porter, saying he wouldn't have a chance against the Republican state machine.

Schevill, Robert E.L. Strider
(President of Colby College),
and Porter at a November, 1969
reading by Schevill at Colby
College. From the *Courier*
Gazette, Rockland, Maine,
November 6, 1969.



By a coincidence unknown to Porter, my cousin, James Erwin, who had served as attorney general in Maine, was running for governor with the support of the major Republican politicians. When he heard about this connection, Porter threw up his hands and grinned. "Anyway, I'm in it for the fun of trying to change things around," he said, "and get the bureaucrats, including your cousin, out." Porter's candidacy for the governorship came to an abrupt end late in 1969, when, lacking funds and political connections, he withdrew from the campaign.

The production of *Lovecraft's Follies* by the Trinity Repertory Company followed soon after the Colby visit. With Porter's consent, Adrian Hall and I decided to project the actual newspaper headline of Porter's arrest in Huntsville: "NIGHTMARE AT BRYCE—SCIENTIST LOCKED UP IN MENTAL HOSPITAL." Porter was deeply moved by the production, particularly by the short film by Japanese cameramen that we used before Part II. The film showed devastating scenes of what happened to Hiroshima and its people when the bomb exploded. After the performance, remembering his experiences on the Manhattan Project, Porter wrote to me from Maine a long letter of "Mental Associations," reviewing the script I had given him page by page. Excerpts follow:

> Page 4: "He's gone off into some private world—we can't communicate." I went off to the world of Cazadero, Guam and Pacific, Tasmania, Venezuela, Rockland. . . . Unable to reach, touch anyone, anything, even myself, still aware that physics has a great role, and while my fantasies may be dangerous for me, they are certainly not so for the world's needs.
>
> Page 5: "You're already riding the borderline. They'll withdraw your clearance." [Here Porter recounted in detail the security-clearance ordeal he underwent in Huntsville after his arrest and confinement in Bryce. He concluded with new

Portland Press Herald, March 25, 1970.

Porter Drops Nomination Bid In GOP Primary

ROCKLAND — Bernard H. Porter of this city, who last fall announced his candidacy for gubernatorial nomination, withdrew from the contest Tuesday.

The 53 year old "methodology consultant," who was a controversial figure as consultant to the Knox County Regional Planning Commission, released a statement of withdrawal.

As nearly as can be determined he circulated few if any papers after he had announced he would try for the Republican nomination.

The statement began: "Bernard H. Porter withdraws immediately as candidate for governor." Continuing in the style of the many press releases he had given out since his arrival in Rockland three years ago he continued:

"Running initially on a program of 'Maine brains, Maine business, Maine science,' Porter was concerned about the formation of sewage districts, consolidation of towns, the fishing industry, senior citizens and other concepts first revealed in his 700-page study for the Knox County Regional Planning Commission."

Porter has been battling with the commission over what he claimed was "emasculation" of part of his recommendations by the directors and their alleged failure to distribute the recommendations widely. He claims they still owe him some salary.

In his withdrawal statement, he gave as reason "press of other duties" as mid-coast consultant to the Small Business Administration of Augusta; the Institute of Advanced Thinking, Rockland, and Advanced Technology Associates, Wallingford, Conn.

He was unavailable for further comment.

information about the security bureaucracy and his suspicions of continued surveillance.] On February 8, 1969, I received a letter signed by W. W. Roberts, Lt. Colonel, USAF, Defense Industrial Security Clearance Office, Columbus, Ohio, saying, "Reference is made to your recent examination by Captain Victor R. Gonzalez. Please be advised a determination has been made to continue your Personal Security Clearance in effect. This letter does not constitute the grant of a security clearance for you. It merely is notice of favorable determination with respect to your continued eligibility therefor. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter." Today, March 17, 1970, my official situation in security is unclear.

Page 61: "the wives of scientists make the best ghosts. . . . " Data may show by professions that more home breakups, separations, divorces, remarriages occur among scientists than any other group. This is not due to alcohol, drugs and the usual causes, but simply that security intercedes. The husband cannot say where he is, where he's going, when he'll be back, what he's working on. A special type of intimate communication is ever lacking by the very nature of the profession under security as currently practiced.

Page 68: It is true that scientists feel they can undertake anything; they are extremely difficult to manage or even accommodate with. This arises from the nature of their basic training and the fact that a scientific methodology of thinking, approach, reasoning, is applicable to all topics, all things. The result is logical, reasonable, simple and, seemingly for these characteristics, hard to accept or accomplish or put across to anyone. . . . In order to read thoughts from my study of Knox County into the GOP platform for Maine, I announced also for Governor with a long list of points from the plan, all items so obvious there is and can be no acceptance. I'm difficult and hard to get along with. I shall withdraw as was my intention, and at this writing it is doubtful if any of these points will actually appear in the platform draft, or if they should that the party candidate would endorse them. Thus science, its approach, its followers remain in the wilderness, so to speak. Always suspect.

Page 114: In the final hospital scene when your physicist is arrested, you catch my authentic feelings of frustration and anger. After my release I smoldered with the thought of lawsuits. After leaving Huntsville, while in Guatemala through March and April, 1968, I was much moved by the death of Martin Luther King, and his statement that one must fight injustice wherever he finds it.

Already I had some law by mail experience with a wide assortment of people who owed me money. Seeming to enjoy such results after much effort, or by some equally bad logic, I typed up three lawsuits against Huntsville doctors and offlcials in the room at the Biltmore Guatemala where we stayed, had them notarized at the U.S. Embassy, and added another one later.

Later, I asked Porter about the lawsuits. "I suppose they were a means of futile revenge," he mused. "I wasn't about to go back to Huntsville to pursue action in the courts. That would have been a nightmare. But I kept pushing the suits with the aid of a student attorney in Rockland, who worked for a legal service for low-income people. So I knew they had to get attorneys to file demurrers against my pleas. I had visions of some kind of justice in the courts, but I must have really known nothing would happen if I didn't appear in court. And when the cases came up on the court docket, I was never there. So nothing was ever done, the cases lapsed, and my vision of justice was undone like Oppenheimer's in your play."

Porter's last remark struck me. How had he and I come to the same conclusions about what had happened to Oppenheimer? In addition to our mutual associations with Berkeley and the growth of physics research there, I knew about Oppenheimer's love of the Southwest, where my mother had spent many years of her life. Like Porter, I could understand why Oppenheimer insisted that Los Alamos in New Mexico, offering the isolation required for secrecy but amidst ancient Pueblo cultures that reflected timeless spiritual energy, would make a perfect site for the intense, almost mystical, international theoretical discussions needed for the development of the bomb. In my play, I portrayed Oppenheimer as an Indian shaman, a quality many of his scientists had ascribed to him. Also, as a child, I had met Oppenheimer's fianceé in Berkeley, Jean Tatlock. In my play I tried to show why Oppenheimer named the first test explosion of the bomb Trinity after Tatlock's suicide. He began to read John Donne's Holy Sonnets, particularly the one that begins, "Batter my heart, Three Personed God. . . . " Porter, too, had been attracted to the metaphysical aspects of nuclear research and was battered by traumatic experiences with the American security system and by the bombing of Hiroshima. No wonder that Porter had retreated to Rockland and the relative quiet of his home state. His extensive plan to transform Knox County was a temporary fulfillment of a creative social vision.

In any case, since Knox County, in its stubborn Maine way, was not about to be transformed, the time had come for the Porters to move again. This time, Margaret was the decisive factor. Severely affected by his confinement in Huntsville, she was tired of wandering and wanted a permanent home. They discussed possible sites and decided finally on the town of Belfast, on the coast north of Rockland in Waldo County, where Porter's brother Everett lived. They searched for days until they discovered an inexpensive house with grounds ample enough to suit Margaret's gardening ambitions. They bought the house at 22 Salmond Street.

Settled in 1770, Belfast is a typical coastal Maine town torn between past and present, struggling both to grow and remain small. Located in the exact center of the state's long, jagged coast, it has promoted itself as "The Greatway to Down East Maine." Originally, it was a timber-and-ice-exporting town dedicated to shipping interests, which created a mix of architectural styles from Greek revival and federal to colonial and high gothic. Commercial fishing has always made good use of the fine harbor; now, increasingly, in the summer, expensive yachts, sailboats, and motorboats crowd the fishingcraft.

At first, the Porters were happy in their 1912 brown wood-frame Victorian, built for a large, close family unable to afford luxuries. Margaret started her garden, and spent hours each day planning, weeding, and planting. Porter meanwhile turned the basement into a physics laboratory, and established a study, working space, and camping area for his Institute of Advanced Thinking. Although with little money and no staff, he determined to make the Institute function in his own unique way.

Porter's first step on behalf of the Institute was to encourage Maine artists and poets to use the grounds for exhibits, meetings, and summer festivals. Intrigued by the theories of Wilhelm Reich, he built, in a wooded corner of the grounds, a horizontal Reichian orgone accumulator platform. He and his scientist friends kept platform records in the basement physics laboratory. "What I was trying to do," says Porter, "was to prove scientifically whether or not there is orgone energy as Reich claimed. A good many people sat, meditated, even slept on my horizontal platform and said they experienced this energy. When my physicist friends visited, we tried to measure the energy from the platform every day—the quantity and the pressure. We wanted to know what it was doing under the hot sun, under clouds, under four feet of snow. If there is orgone energy, it is like ether in the air. You can't taste it or smell

it, but there seems to be something there."

He also spent a great deal of time on his epic series of Founds, arranging them into the series of books that he now envisioned. Many of these Founds he sent to international exhibits for artists involved in the burgeoning Mail Art movement. "It was exciting to watch the rapid growth of Mail Art," Porter noted. "It was an inexpensive, practical way for artists to communicate and show their work all over the world without having to rely on traditional museums or galleries." Porter volunteered, too, several hours a week for the Small Business Adminstration, advising would-be business owners on how to develop their enterprises. For several years, the Porters were content with Belfast's peaceful ways. As time passed, however, they grew restless, haunted by memories of travel and adventure. Margaret slowly discovered that she didn't want to settle down after all. Having lived most of her life in warmer climates, she found Maine's long winters confining. Besides, she was gregarious and had always enjoyed the contacts she made in their

Painted up for happening at Dick Higgins' house in Vermont, early 70's.



travels. Now she felt isolated. They had no car, and it was a long walk into town. The garden, which she loved, wasn't enough to satisfy her. At home Porter was always absorbed in his work, and the neighbors kept to themselves. She missed having a community of friends. Moreover, Margaret's health was declining slowly, although her mastectomy had apparently cured her of her earlier breast cancer. When she couldn't work in her garden, she suffered bouts of depression. Porter became increasingly worried about her. He discussed winter trips to warmer climates, but she recognized that her waning health prohibited travel. In 1975, she suffered a minor stroke. A few days later, on April 10, she had a severe stroke and died quickly. She and Porter had been married almost twenty years. He had come to depend on her. Suddenly, he was alone.

The relationship between Porter and Margaret was unique. In a way, as he acknowledged, she had mothered him and had encouraged his publishing and artistic interests as his own mother never did. Her nature was simple and direct. She made no pretense of understanding or participating in his creative work. It was enough for her to encourage him. She gave up a secure job and home to accompany him in his wanderings, and when he seemed unable to secure work because of his continuous security problems, she supported him through his constant depression. A shared love of travel sparked their relationship. If she was not artistic, she was sensitive to other cultures. She delighted in discussing and reading about the many different cultures they visited. Her eager adaptability meant everything to Porter. When she was gone, he was desolated, and he felt guilty that she was depressed and isolated at the end.

For days, Porter thought about a way to perpetuate Margaret's memory in Belfast. finally, he funded a room bearing her name in the Belfast Public Library, a place where exhibits, readings, and meetings could be held in her honor. As she desired, he had her body cremated. And in his own silent tribute, he scattered her ashes on Bangor's Mt. Hope. For Margaret, lover of nature, the cemetery was too bleak. She wanted death to return her to nature.

16 A Strindbergian Third Marriage



Alonely man, Porter never really liked living alone. Always believing in the benefits of a communal society, he found himself struggling to get used to the loneliness of old age. He liked women better than men. With men he tended to clam up and hide behind his ironic masks. With women he was more expansive; his sense of humor flourished. After Margaret's death, he began to see several women frequently, particularly Margaret Dunbar, an old friend in whose apartment he stayed during his New York visits, and Elizabeth Dunker, an ex-French teacher and strong supporter of the arts who lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He and Elizabeth were especially close, and they went to many artistic events together.

In the fall of 1975, they came to Providence to see and participate in discussions of my play, *Cathedral of Ice*, directed by Adrian Hall with his Trinity Repertory Company. The play, which centered on Hitler and the dangers posed by his enduring concept of power, was staged with the help of a humanities grant aimed at enhancing audience participation in an unusual environment. The production began in a tent that designer Eugene Lee had erected on the street beside the theater. Actors sang songs, beer was served, and different guest speakers talked every night about aspects of power they had encountered in their professions. Then the audience filed into the theater and followed the action of the play as it



At the Institute of Advanced Thinking, early 70's. Photograph by Gordon Geyerhahn.

shifted from place to place in the huge arena. The speakers included leading politicians, lawyers, doctors, artists, scientists, and community leaders. At the end of each performance, there was a general discussion with members of the audience, many of whom stayed on after each production. The play's tone changed every evening, depending on the speakers and the audience's reactions.

As one of the guest speakers, Porter spoke about his own experiences with governmental secrecy. He walked on stage and placed an empty chair before him, representing the presence of Oppenheimer's ghost. Addressing the chair, Porter spoke in a tremulous tone of what had happened to Oppenheimer. He told of his own experience with security investigations. As his memories of Huntsville and the Manhattan Project flooded back, his voice cracked several times. It was as though he were in a courtroom pleading for Oppenheimer's vindication. Some people in the audience who knew nothing about him wondered what was going on. Still, they couldn't help but be impressed by Porter's eerie dialogue with the chair. After he finished his short talk, there was a moment of shocked silence.

At the time, I saw that his relationship with Elizabeth was strong; she had done much to help him overcome his depression after Margaret's death. But the relationship changed one morning when a woman he had never seen before knocked on his front door.

She was distributing the magazine of her church, Jehovah's Witnesses. Her unlikely name was Lula Mae Schekel Bloom, and Porter was immediately attracted by her trim looks and robust energy. Perceiving that Porter lived alone, she invited him to one of her church meetings. Always curious about different religions and magnetized by her forthright manner, he accepted. He began seeing her, continuing to see Elizabeth as well. One day, in Porter's house, the two women confronted each other, and Porter was forced to choose between them. He succumbed to the illusion of Lula's strength and maternal force and chose her. Seventeen months after Margaret's death, on September 9, 1976, while taking vows before a notary in the basement of the Waldo County Supreme Courthouse in Belfast, Porter recalls being punched by his bride and sharply ordered to stand straight—an omen of what was to come. They honeymooned along the Maine coast. Once back in Belfast, an immediate tug-of-war started between them, creating what Porter called "the biggest mistake in my life."

Lula managed to get Porter to come to some meetings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but she couldn't persuade him to sell church publications door to door, a requirement for members. Of his visits to the church he observed in his dry, measured way: "I was impressed by the fact that they actually read and studied the Bible. Also, I was impressed by their tremendously disciplined way of life, even to the point where it detracts from their employment because they can only take part-time jobs due totheir religious commitments."

From the beginning, the relationship was doomed by their different interests. Lula agreed to move into Porter's home. She desired to remodel it completely and install household machines that Porter didn't fancy or had ne-



Lula Mae Schekel Bloom Porter.

glected to buy. Then she discovered that Porter was miserly and lived hand to mouth. Their main income was social security checks, hers from her dead husband and his from his long years of work. To her dismay, she found that the income from his publishing and artistic work was negligible. Discovering what seemed to her the antireligious nature of some of his books, draft notes, and letters lying about, she destroyed them in horror. At her insistence, Porter agreed to look for another house. With rising real estate costs, they couldn't find anything they could afford that compared with Porter's home. Finally, disturbed by Porter's habits and obsessive artistic interests, Lula ordered him out of their bedroom, and the marriage seemed over after only ten weeks. Subject for two years to continuous quarrels and several hysterical outbursts, Porter asked the church elders to remove her, find her a place to live and a job. Struggling to reconcile their problems, Lula summoned two elders of her church to the house as mediators, but there could be no reconciliation, and the couple separated. Porter memorialized the strange counseling session in "You, I, and the Elders: A Lula Poem":

You and the Elders
Were here
All three of you
  (with me, that made four—*my* chairs)
"How do you like the sculpture?" I asked.
"I don't," answered one of the Elders.
"Should we pray?" I questioned.
We did.
"I don't consider myself separated,"
I explained, "because we were
not together when we were
under one roof."
"I favor reconciliation now," an Elder said.
"I favor her coming here weekends," I said,
"Our going away weekends."
"You can't!" the lead Elder shouted.
"I'll not be your part-time wife," you shouted.
"My marriage is ended," you said.
"I'll not do anything about it," you said.
"How long do you want the sorrow,
Misery, strain to last?" you asked.
"Everything I proposed was rejected," I said.

"She says she is not running a board
And room place," I said.
"Do you want a Bible Study?" you asked.
"No," I said.
"What does the Bible say about all this?" I asked.
"It says what you want it to say," said the Elder.
"Maybe we better pray," I said.
An Elder prayed.
"And thank you, dear, for coming," I said
Grasping and kissing you.
Then you and two Elders left.
I was alone.
Am still alone.
Will be alone.

On September 13, 1977, as Porter was seeking to cope with his marital trauma, his mother died at the age of eighty-seven in Waldo County General Hospital in Belfast. As mother and son grew older, they came to resemble each other more and more. Her brief obituary in *The Republican Journal* listed her as a former member of the Houlton United Methodist Church, Houlton Grange, Women's Christian Temperance Union, American Legion Auxiliary, and Lincoln Church. Reading this list of traditional small-town memberships, Porter thought of his own painful history as a nonjoiner of significant organizations. Although he had always re-

Porter's mother.

Memorial Services
For
Etta Porter Batleno
At
The Dunn Funeral Home

Tuesday, September 13, 1977
2:00 P. M.

Born
September 25, 1889

Passed Away
September 10, 1977

Clergyman
Rev. Clovis A. Frame
Interment
Evergreen Cemetery



sented her lack of interest in his work, in his early years he had respected and relied on her dedication to the family. Porter and his brothers had her body interred with other family members in the Evergreen Cemetery in Houlton. Years later, thinking of their love-hate relationship, he wrote this poem in a travel notebook that he began on February 14, 1986:

THE COLD FISH SAGA

When Mother said
I was a Cold Fish
She did not specify
Cod
Halibut
Trout
Sword
Finnan Haddie
All cold.
She only called me
A Cold Fish.
To which I reply
Yes, I am cold
In temperature
In mannerisms
In approaches
In techniques
In ways general
But being a fish
That I do not know.
As a matter of fact
I do not know
Much about fish
When people ask me
If I go fishing
I always say
Yes I do. I
Go down to the
Fish Isle at the
Super Market
And debate for
A very long time
Whether I'll
Take Norwegian,
Alaskan, Swedish
Or Maine Sardines
Which ones are
The cheapest
I always ask
And as I leave
The Fish Isle
At the Super Market
I'm embarrassed
That the cheapest
Sardines, the
Ones I've sought
Are not from the
State of Maine
Another traitor
Some would say
Or as my mother
Says a traitor fish
But are
Sardines really
Fish or
Approximate
Imitation fish?
I don't think they
Count as fish
And furthermore
I am not
One of those
Certainly not
And not that cold.

As the poem indicates, his mother's death brought Porter no relief from his complex feelings about her. His angry defense at the end of the poem that he was "not that cold" was not convincing, even to himself. When I asked him about his mother he said: "I didn't hate my mother. In a way, I didn't know of her existence. She was just there, condemned to all the household tasks. As a kid when I came home with a medal I'd won in a speaking contest, she would never praise me. She kept pushing me to go to school and college, but there was little affection. She must have had a difficult time with my father, but she never revealed how she felt until he was arrested in California. Then she never saw him again. We couldn't really communicate with each other."

Porter's father, who suffered from Parkinson's disease during his last years, died in Waldo County General Hospital at the age of seventy-four in October 1961. Porter's brother Everett took care of the funeral arrangements, and the father was buried in the family plot in Houlton. Before his death, Porter visited him twice. Father and son had little to say to each other beyond exchanging nostalgic memories of Houlton. When I asked Porter about his father's problems, he meditated for a long time before he spoke: "Maine, with our poverty in those days and the long winters of isolation, sentenced my father to hard, frustrating work and to particular fantasies. The story was often told that my father and his sister slept together until they were twelve or so. Maybe that helped to account for my father's sexual problems. Man or woman, you're always searching for another breast, another warmth. Maybe you'll get it, maybe you won't. My father couldn't control his fantasies, and that was his undoing. Anaïs Nin took the view that 'my body has certain requirements.' She freed herself. My mother and father could never do that because of their repressed upbringing. So I was indebted to Anaïs, even though I never had more than an intellectual relationship with her, for a different sense of physical freedom. But I never really hated my mother. How can you hate your mother when she's the source of your life?"

Porter's mother did achieve a relatively happy second marriage.

Found from Porter's *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, 1972.

GUARANTEE

- Be a far better lover the very night you see this film
  OR YOU PAY NOTHING
- Give your wife more pleasure the very night you see this film
  OR YOU PAY NOTHING
- Perform the sex act longer and more vigorously the very night you see this film
  OR YOU PAY NOTHING

She married Carl P. Batleno, a woodcutter whose logging skills Porter admired. After his family emigrated from Italy, Batleno served in the Army in World War I. A lover of Maine's wilderness, he converted himself into a woodcutter after the war. "Mother's only problem with him," according to Porter, "was that she liked living in a town of some size, and he liked living in the country." Porter admired him for his humanity, decency, and love of nature, and they became friendly, visiting occasionally until Batleno died poor in a Veterans Home.

Porter's reference to Nin reflects his constant admiration for her and her work. Her independence and intuitive, feminine perceptiveness served as a model to him. He remained always a little in love with her until her death. In 1966, when part of her diary was published, he wrote her a shocked letter protesting the editing and omissions: "Know that only my deep unending love for you over many years and that alone, will carry me through, will assuage such deep wounds as these." She replied from Los Angeles that she was sorry he was disappointed: "I gave what I could, and you are the only one who was not glad for what I *could* give. Editing was my responsibility. . . . Enjoy what is there. The rest will come when all of us are not there to enjoy it." Still, Porter felt hurt that he was never able to publish her diary exactly as she had written it. He considered it the most extraordinary exploration of the feminine psyche that he knew. Later, he was disappointed again, when, at her request "for pen and ink sensuous, surrealistic interpretations of wilderness areas" for a book she was working on, he drew, in 1958, twenty studies of views surrounding him while working for a company on trans-horizon communication systems for remote areas of Alaska, only to have her reject all of them.

After the Alaska assignment, while Porter was in Pasadena in 1959, publishing his bibliography of F. Scott Fitzgerald and working on his projected issues of *Broadside*, Nin invited him to a party at her new Los Angeles home. Unable to attend because he had no car and didn't drive, and still resentful that she had rejected his drawings, he remained, as he says, "in sullen conflict yet sincere devotion to her."

Notwithstanding this uneasy relationship, references to Porter emerged in several of Nin's books and in her diary. Also, she sent him copies of her books with the following inscriptions: "I am learning from your books now," "With admiration for the way you fuse literature and science," and "Your dual activities, poetry and

science, are the future synthesis."

After the departure of his third wife and the death of his mother, haunted by dreams of women he had admired and lost, Porter still could not rid himself of his obsession about Lula. Angry thoughts about her entered his dreams, and he wrote a series of poems about their marriage. The fury of their mismatch clashed with memories of his initial ardor, and in winter 1981 he wrote a moving variation of Pound's famous adaptation of Li Po's "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter":

THE ESTRANGED HUSBAND: A LETTER

While my hair-end curled at the back of my neck,
I played about the many lawns, pulling weeds.
You came by waving arms, selling WAKES [the Jehovah's Witnesses' publication]
You walked about my room, playing with bright coins
And we started there the pretense that engulfed us,
Two small people, with scheming and distrust.

At sixty-five, I married My Queen You
I never laughed, being ever sad
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall

Photograph of Porter torn up by his third wife, reassembled with scotch tape by him.



Called to, a thousand times, I never answered.

At sixty-six I stopped scolding
I desired my warp to be moulded into yours
Forever and forever and forever
Why should I look further?
At sixty-eight you departed
You went to the Birches, by the School of Learning,
And you have been gone two years.
The squirrels play happily along the walls.

You took your things with you when you went out
By the hedge now the moss is grown, the different mosses
Too deep to clear them away.
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the South garden;

They hurt me. I grow older.
If you are coming down over through
The weeded lines of Salmond Street
Please let me know beforehand.
And I will come out to meet you
As far as our property line.

The romantic wistfulness of this poem contrasts sharply with the bitter "Marriage: State of Bliss," which came to him impulsively during the solitary Christmas of 1979:

Our lives were spent bitching and complaining
With you the bitch and complainer
I meek, content each half day
To praise Jehovah and enjoy his creation
Not the least of which
Was you
If only you were not such a complaining bitch. . . .

Memories of his long marriage to Margaret clashed with thoughts of Lula. On a long bus-and-car trip through western Canada with a Vancouver friend, Joyce Grimwood, whom he had met on one of his 'round-the-world voyages on the Queen Elizabeth II in May 1981, he wrote about the relative calm of his mar-

riage to Margaret:

TO MARGARET

If you had not
had not
not had
died
There would
could not
been/have been not/none
Those affairs
near affairs
misses
near-misses
arrangements
near arrangements
things of the
touch
the heart
mixed with
near words
near acts
real in truth
visioned in mind
dreamed by day
and by night
hour, hours, hour
by hour. . . .

The outburst of poems following his ill-fated, impulsive marriage to Lula led to another poem in January 1980, in which he created a kind of visual chant about his three marriages and resolved

not to make it four:

MY THREE (3) WIVES

One
Two
Three

One 1 Helen the poet, young and fresh
1 One
2 Two
3 Three
Two 2 Margaret, the pal and everclose life traveling friend
1 One
2 Two
3 Three
Three 3 Lula, the expensive screaming bitch
1 One
2 Two
3 Three
Four 4 - may the ninety thousand devils of
hell protect me, save me from another
OR
Three (3) is quite enough
OR
(3) Three is indeed sufficient
OR
Three (3) and NO MORE
OR
No More NOT FOUR

Eight years after their separation—ten years of anguish and loss for both of them—Lula, following advice found in *How To Get Your Own Divorce*, a booklet she picked up at the Belfast Free Library, took Porter through two court clerks and the county sheriff's secretary (with Porter paying eight dollars at each step) to obtain a divorce. On November 20, 1986, Lula appeared alone before a judge and was granted freedom on the obvious grounds of incompatability.

After their separation, Lula lived in a government-subsidized, second-floor, four-room apartment in a housing development on the outskirts of Belfast with income from money-market funds. She never remarried but remains dedicated to her religion. Occasionally, she makes yard stops at 22 Salmond Street to return brief visits with Porter as they have resumed a more friendly rela-

tionship. One of Porter's paintings hangs in her apartment.

In the 1980s, Porter began to perform publicly some of the Lula poems he had written during fifteen years of reflection on his disastrous third marriage. Performance art, which had gained recognition during the social explosions of the 1960s, was spreading rapidly throughout the country. New technology, particularly videos and cassette tapes, played a large role in the development of the art form. Disturbed by the political distortions of language that erupted from the Vietnam War during the Nixon and Johnson eras, writers and artists felt the need to get their work off of the private page and make personal contact with the audience. Performance was a way to search for a communal meaning again. For Porter, it was also a means of escaping from his solitude and bitter memories of Lula. He was no longer satisfied with reading his work alone. At Colby College, he had heard me read my performance poems with my wife, and we had talked about them. My poems were written for two voices—a speaking voice and a singing voice—in dramatic contrast. Porter wanted to explore the same kind of experience. Fortunately, in the 1980s, he found a creative partner, the young poet and publisher Mark Melnicove, and together they began to experiment with various kinds of performance art, calling their partnership the Eternal Poetry Festival. From the beginning, their performances had a definite social purpose, unlike other poets who

Generic poster for Eternal Poetry Festival events.



were more interested in the abstract possibilities of language with experimental syntax and nonlinear structure to emphasize new colors and tones. Porter and Melnicove intended their work to be an examination and critique of the society and culture around them. They used chants, percussive and wind instruments, taped as well as amplified voices, movement (usually Melnicove danced while Porter read), audience participation, and slide projections. Due to lack of money, their use of technology remained on a functional level. It would remain for performers and directors such as Laurie Anderson and Robert Wilson to raise the kind of funds that would enable performance art to enter the age of high technology. Rather, the appeal of Porter and Melnicove depended largely on their direct, intimate approach to their audiences. Expensive technology would have undermined their dramatization of the individual's struggle to maintain a private identity in an age of computerized uniformity. With Melnicove in his early thirties and Porter in his middle seventies, their performances had the dramatic advantage of showing youth and age together, the confrontation of a youth-oriented culture struggling to cope with the problems of aging. Consequently, like most of the performance art that characterized the 1970s and the 1980s, a strong autobiographical tone dominated their appearances. Porter often read parts of his notebooks that contained not only his Lula poems but accounts of his travels and the discovery of his Founds. Melnicove injected a skeptical voice and the energy of physical action to counterpoint Porter's ironic voice of experience, which often recited catalogues of Found wonders.

These performances enabled Porter to break out of his isolation and to observe the burgeoning youth culture that the new technology was creating through rock spectacles, computerized games, video entertainment, and amusement parks. During his travels, he discovered new contacts that fostered his creativity. He began to correspond with an artist, Todd Duveen, in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1983, he and Duveen collaborated on a pamphlet satirizing television, *Horizontal Hold*. Their major collaboration, a 380-page volume, *Devil's Wishbone*, still awaits publication. Porter thought of this as Volume V in his projected seven-volume series of Founds. As he describes it, "Devil's Wishbone is a book of visual imagery designed to be seen and read as in my already published Found Poems, *Book of Do's*, and *Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book*. We structured and designed it in sections to match a long poem I wrote, "The Kinds of Love." This singular poem, written in the late 1970s, is a wistful summation of all the kinds of love Porter had encoun-

tered and a prayer for the love he still hoped for. It should be read with a sense of Porter's unique intonation and syllabic stress, for it is a sound poem, and Porter has often read it in public performances.

THE KINDS OF LOVE
Oh romantic love
have you gone, alas,
from lover's lane, the
movie balcony, the parked car,
to the TV dinner and den.

Ah budding love
have you thought
it all the way through
to the court scene
and the barking judge?
All the way?

Oh puppy love
how grateful we
all are it soon
passes like a lost dream.
Amen.

Ah and oh the Crush.
The Crush, it presses in
so hard it almost
takes our breath away.
Praise be.

Jaded love,
love, love worn out
frayed at the edges
and run down at the mouth.
Oh.

Unrequited love
not returned, given back
stolen away like
the ashes of woe.
Oh demon, you.

244

Narcissistic love
destroy, throw about
push down and not let up.
What revenge, what
not taking back.
Oh. Oh.

Ah doting love
love hoping to bloom
linger like frost on the pane.
Let it sustain, nourish and grow.
Oh helper.

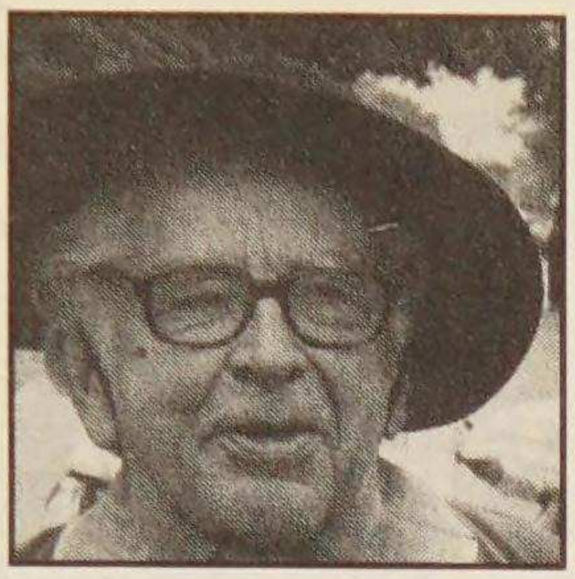
True love, ah, oh, oh
like diamonds it glitters
but forever and binding
too like Mum and Dad
said they had
Oh may we have it too?

Mistaken love
mistake, mistake,
how could one
be so stupid as to
not know.
Oh, oh.

Fading love
please fade not
before our time
Let us jointly
resurrect it,
Ah, yes, let's.

Fading love, romantic love—Porter had come to view love as a tangle of love and hate, the sort of passion August Strindberg described in his autobiographical novel *The Inferno*: "I loved her, she loved me, and we hated one another with a ferocious love-hate that was only intensified by the distance separating us."

17 The Institute Of Advanced Thinking



The term *think tank* is uniquely American, as though American intellectuals must be put into a pressurized "tank" in order to think. In the same way, the post-World War II spread of institutes dedicated to abstract "thinking" in the United States reflected the paradoxical notion that "thought" is best done in comfortable isolation, apart from the masses, who only toil and serve. Porter's title, Institute of Advanced Thinking, echoes the famous Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies, whose activities Porter has followed closely since his years at Princeton with the Manhattan Project. In 1978 he opened his Institute to unusual artistic projects and placed the following announcement in the summer 1978 issue of *Vision: A Journal of the Visual Arts in Maine*:

The grounds are open at the Institute of Advanced Thinking: Science and the Arts, 22 Salmond Road, Belfast, for the May-November season, seven days a week, 6 AM to 6 PM, to film makers, research workers, creative writers and artists arranging advance dates and projects by mail and phone.

The Reichian platform, the only known horizontal type in the world, is available for use by visual artists and poets. The main platform, garden, theme studio and physics laboratories are open to individual researchers and group panels in workshops.

Contemporary sculpture, paintings and books from the private collection of Bern Porter are on continuous display.

Media artists seeking exhibition space are invited to apply.

Porter has no telephone, so any applicant trying to reach him this way would encounter enormous frustration. If he succeeds in locating Porter at home by knocking on the door, the applicant finds a rigid set of living conditions. First, no smoking and no drugs. Second, no cooking on the premises. Instead, you must eat downtown in Belfast, a considerable walk unless you have a car. Third, if you want to stay overnight, you must pitch a tent on the lawn and bring a sleeping bag. Or you can put your sleeping bag in what Porter calls the "hotel," part of an open garage that is attached to the house and has two wooden platforms inside wide enough for four sleeping bags. There is only one toilet in the house, upstairs next to Porter's bedroom, and it is off-limits to Institute visitors. So they must use the woods behind the shed. These conditions, however, have not deterred many dedicated and curious Americans and foreigners from visiting, exhibiting their work, and staying for one or more days.

The "theme studio," at the end of the house, is what Porter calls his studio of Founds. Several, huge metallic sculptures project from the wall. "They look like pieces from the hoods of cars and trucks!" I exclaim. "You're not supposed to say that," Porter mutters sardonically. "They're completely transformed." And he's right. As I stare at them from different angles, they take on compelling abstract shapes. Other sculptural Founds in the studio include both natural and metallic forms that Porter discovered in the Belfast area.

As for the physics laboratory, it is now an empty basement room showing signs of water damage. Porter explains that developers changed the course of underground and surface waterways nearby, which caused water to back up into his basement and ruined records from experiments that he had kept for some eleven years. "Because of the flooding, I have had to write it off," Porter explains. "It's been a sad deal." He claimed $325,000 from his insurance company for the loss of his physics material. This included botanical specimens, outlines for new projects, resumés of past experiments by him and others who worked there, and reams of correspondence with Institute members; also many of his personal manuscripts in various stages. For property damage to his house he claimed $125,000. In the end, the insurance company paid him $3,000.

As for the collection of "contemporary sculpture, paintings and books" mentioned in the *Vision* announcement, it is still on display in many rooms of the house. Although small, it is a remarkable collection that Porter has accumulated over the years. It includes a fine sculpture by Porter himself, assembled from plastic egg cartons, and a distinctive early painting from his California days. Among the known painters represented are John Hultberg and Frank Lobdell, artists whom Porter exhibited in Sausalito in earlier days. There is also an abstract wall sculpture by Carlo Pittore, the artist who, with Judd Tully, created a Porter retrospective show at the Franklin Furnace gallery in New York in December 1979. And there are good paintings by many little-known Maine artists whose work Porter continues to support.

However, the best exhibit space at the Institute is really the spacious front lawn where Porter has installed a large sculptural display every summer. In early June 1987, when I visited him in Belfast, Porter had just returned from another lengthy voyage, and he showed me around the lawn display with delight. "I don't even

Porter at the Institute, late 1980's.



know who these sculptors are!" he exclaimed. "They just put them up while I was away. Look! They're amazing!" As he led me around, he poked in the woods where several sculptures were half-hidden in the trees and undergrowth. Many different kinds of sculptures were on display: intriguing little figures cut out of sheet metal; a nest of wooden twigs, which on close inspection turned out to be full of the debris of an industrial and technological society; a large circular cave of wooden branches in which nestled a green ceramic face. As Porter inspected the new exhibit with pride and delight, I couldn't help thinking: "This is a man with completely open tastes to everything new. Without any money, he's kept on fostering artists of all kinds. How few people have had his continuous devotion to art in spite of incredible difficulties."

Porter gave me the following list of artists and others (Porter calls them "scholars") connected with the Institute. Scholars who actually visited Belfast are noted by an asterisk; the others he has met on his travels.

*Patricia Aldrich, Unity, Maine, Scholar in Painting Research
Bo Atkinson, Montville, Maine, Scholar in Research
Anna Banana, Vancouver, Canada, Scholar in Events
Acosto Benton, Montevideo, Uruguay, Scholar in Visuals
Harry Bowden, Sausalito, California, Scholar in Photography (deceased)
Vittore Baroni, Forte Sei Marmi, Italy, Scholar in Visuals
Guy Bleus, Wellen, Belgium, Scholar in Visuals
Skip Back, Hull's Cove, Maine, Scholar in Research
*David Cole, Brooklyn, New York, Scholar in Graphics
*Cathy Counts, Portland, Maine, Scholar in Poetry
Eric Findley, London, England, Scholar in Graphics
Christian Herman, St. Louis, Missouri, Scholar in Communication
*Dick Higgins, New York, Scholar in Writing
G. X. Jupiter Larsen, Vancouver, Canada, Scholar in Events
Pat Latter, Yass, Australia, Scholar in Visuals
Ruggero Maggi, Milan, Italy, Scholar in Visuals
*Mark Melnicove, Gardiner, Maine, Scholar in Publishing
Peter K. Meyer, Stockholm, Sweden, Scholar in Tonics
Jackson Maclow, New York, Scholar in Poetry
*Charles Morrow, New York, Scholar in Composition
Gogo Nesbitt, Ossnik, New York, Scholar in Poetry
Clemente Padin, Montevideo, Uruguay, Scholar in Visuals

Aurelio Peccei, Rome, Italy, Scholar in Research
*Stephen Petroff, Bowdoinham, Maine, Scholar in Poetry
Diter Rot, Reykjavik, Iceland, Scholar in Visuals
*Abigail Shahn, Solon, Maine, Scholar in Painting
*Lee Sharkey, China, Maine, Scholar in Poetry
Carol Stetzer, Oatman, Arizona, Scholar in Visuals
*Shogo Shimamoto, Nishinomiya, Japan, Scholar in Mail Art
*Janelle Viglini, San Francisco, California, Scholar in Poetry
*Mary Weaver, Belfast, Maine, Scholar in Drama
Alma Yoray, Brunswick, Maine, Scholar in Dance

Porter delights in the word *scholar*, particularly since he refuses to admit to the Institute anyone with an academic connection. "You're at Brown," he told me dryly, "so you're not eligible to be a scholar." He yearns to restore creativity to scholarship, to eliminate the aura of the dry, plodding academician, so he thinks of Institute artists as visionary scholars in a realm of Advanced Thinking. Most of these artists are young and little known outside their specialties. Many of them he keeps in touch with via Mail Art. In Porter's mind, all belong to a community of rebels against conformity, pioneers who justify his lifetime faith in experimentation. The individual quality of each scholar's achievement is less important to him than the struggle to break free from social conventions and establish a unique creative identity. "Let time honor them if it will, " says Porter. "I honor them for their struggle to keep creative thinking alive in a time that wants to isolate and destroy imaginative thought. If my scholars seem isolated on such a list, so be it. In my modest, fucked-up way, I'm still trying to save the world."

Most research institutes are planned as comfortable retreats to promote ideas that will result in commercial gain or foster national power. Balanced on the thin edge of survival, Porter's Institute fosters instead dreams of rebellious creativity. His scholars are mostly men and women of the creative whirlwind, rejected by a rejecting society—people like Janelle Viglini, his longtime poetic correspondent from San Francisco.

"I'm the only person who's ever published her," says Porter. "She was close to both Ginsberg and Rexroth, but as well as she knew these people, she could never get a publisher. She was a devout Catholic and tried to be a nun, but she couldn't make it. Once I paid her way back here. She was going to be a scholar-in-residence. What does one do with a surrealist talent like hers in this country? Some people read her work and wonder if she's insane.

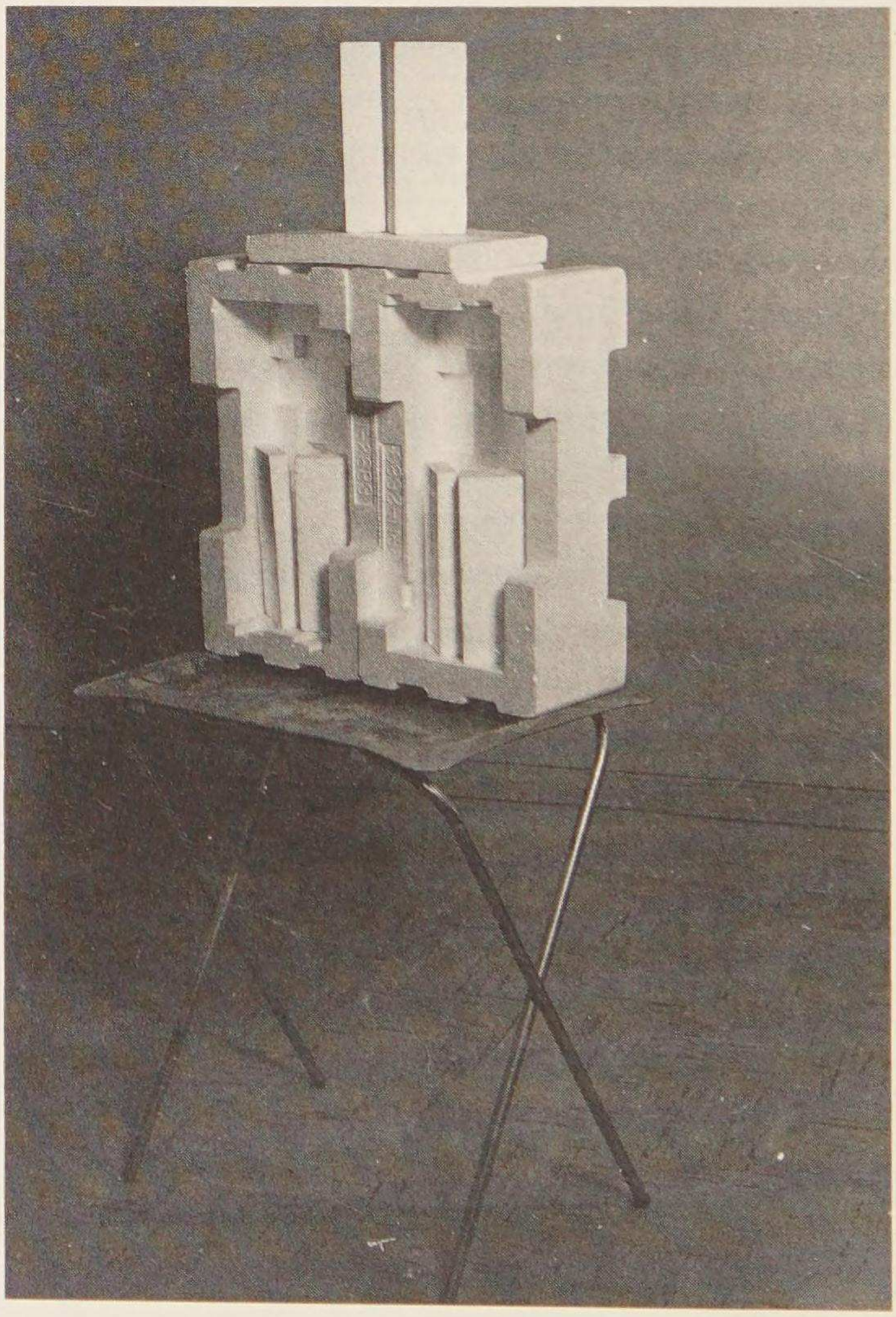
When creativity pushes naturally to the extreme, the borderline is so narrow. But I believe she's a genius, and she remains one of the real scholars in my sense."

In his *Broadside* series, Porter published a poem of Viglini's that begins:

> Revealed walnut primitives lust
> In their varied form. People are guided
> By popular songs, some are; the minister
> As Lawrence Welk bares silver fangs.
>
> Science advances: then hands
> Dial different skin hues, exuding kuddoes. . . .

Does this poem reveal merely another instinct for unusual words and images poured out disconnectedly? Or does it show a

Styrofoam construction by Porter, 1973.



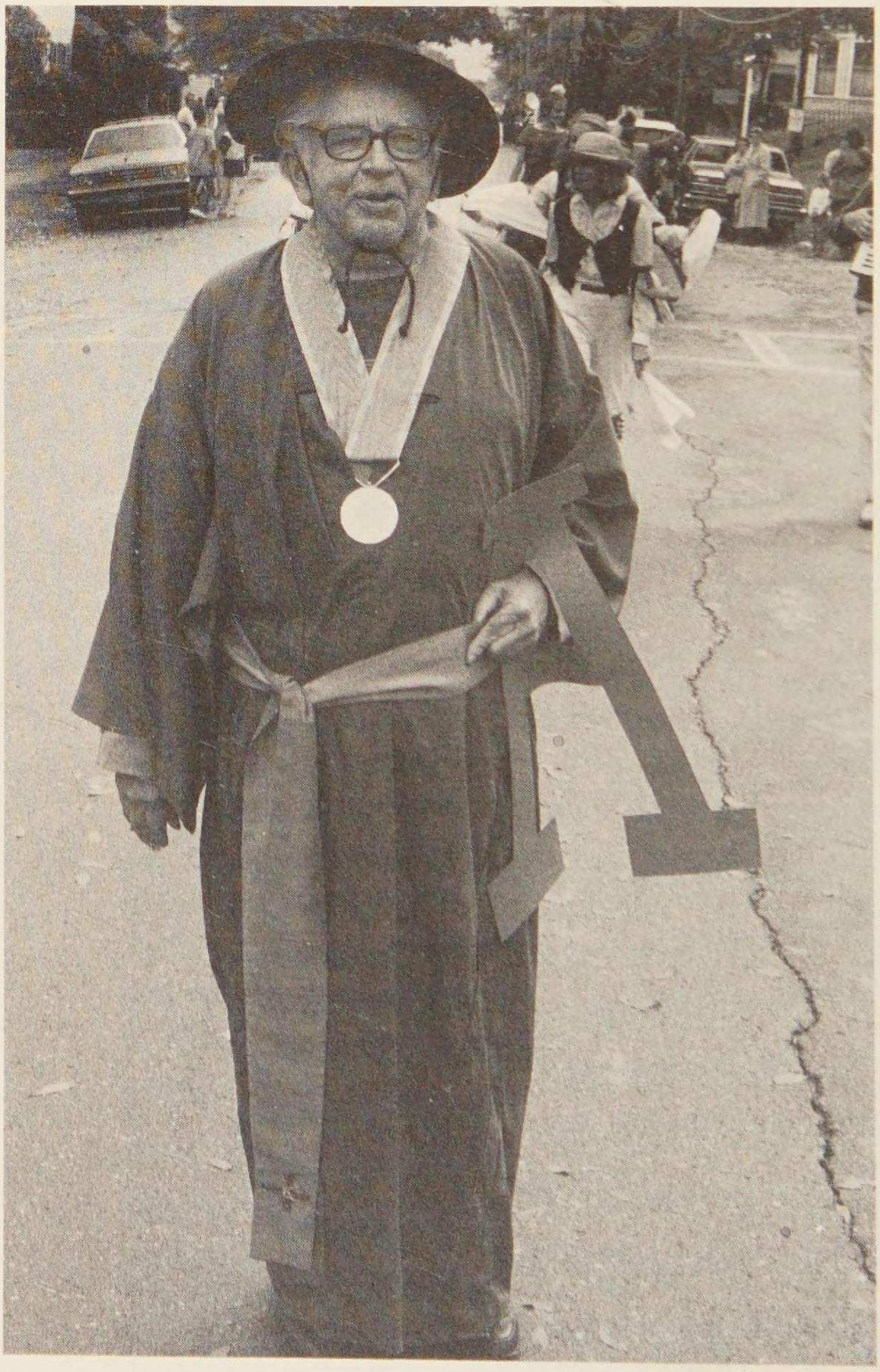
rare ability to illuminate the grotesque connection between the vampirism of popular culture and commercial science, with its promotion of such products as beauty aids in "different skin hues"? Porter published Viglini and encouraged her, and he still believes in her talent. "The problem is we don't recognize any Outsider Art in this country," he says. "How can someone like Janelle develop? There's no room for a strange gift like hers. It's too far from what we think of as normal, when there's no normal at all. If she had lived in Paris at the time when Breton ruled surrealism, she would have stirred up a lot of attention and she would have been stimulated to new work, instead of being rejected in San Francisco and struggling to survive by odd jobs."

The Institute is meticulously neat, down to its polished, gleaming floors. Porter works in two rooms he has set aside as studies. The walls are covered with notes about Porter's projects, posters from his readings, examples of his art. Much of the material he has collected is arranged alphabetically in cardboard cartons stacked everywhere. A note on one wall reads "Buy no more books." He has held steadfastly to this dictum in recent years as part of his protest against commercial publishing. The books in the two large bookcases upstairs are mainly copies of books he has published or gifts from friends. Most of his library he has donated to his collection at Colby College or UCLA. He owns a modicum of furniture: the bed in his bedroom, a peculiar chair downstairs that opens into a kind of improvised sleeping lounge for privileged guests, a small dining table and chairs, and an old radio, which was his sole source of music until he acquired a used television set in 1990.

One thing Porter does have, though, is clothes—several closets' worth. "When I go on my voyages every winter," Porter says, "I'm a different man. I dress up. I wear a tuxedo with a white scarf at night. It's as though I have to have that social life to counteract my isolation here in Belfast. You want to see my special poet's clothes?" He brings out a yellow cape made by a woman acupuncturist, a red-and-blue sash, and a brown, monklike robe. "That's the order of St. Bernard which I got in Portugal," he says. "This bright sun medallion is from the Holland-America line. They gave it to me for traveling over 100,000 miles on their ships—which represents three cruises around the world. Here's the hat that goes with it, too." He takes out a fashionable brown beret and puts it on. "Last year I wore this costume in one of Mary Weaver's theatrical productions outside on the lawn. They carried me on in my poet's clothes, and it was a great occasion."

Most of the time Porter tends to lounge around the Institute unshaven, in an old shirt and worn-out pants, barefoot, or in an old, scuffed pair of slippers. However, he likes to buy bright shirts in lavish colors at Goodwill stores. It's against his conservative Maine principles to pay inflated prices at the expensive tourist-oriented stores that are becoming prominent in towns like Belfast. When he's off to visit friends, or when he's entertaining visitors he wishes to impress, he's likely to break out some fancy duds: a derby hat, colorful string ties or a western turquoise neckband, a silk dressing gown that makes him look like a Victorian potentate, shirts with in-

Porter in his poet's costume, Belfast, mid-1980's. Photograph by Richard Norton.

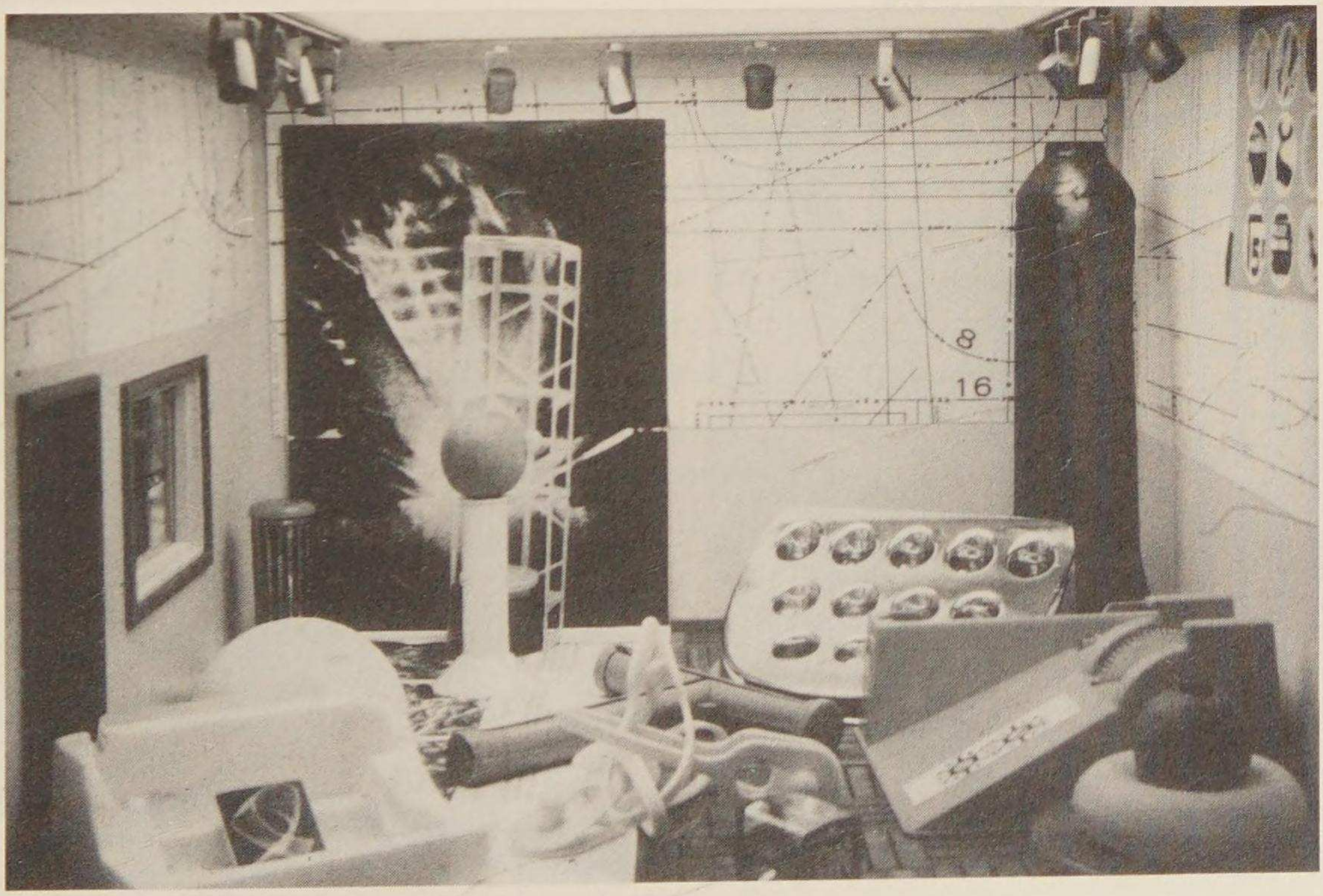


credible colors and designs, a gold jacket that he cherishes as if out of some childhood film fantasy, even a carefully tailored dark suit he has had for many years, in case he wishes to make a professional impression, say, in his role of city and county planner.

But look beyond the contents of the closet, and you see evidence of a life lived sparingly indeed. Porter does not skimp on heat, but otherwise fights utility costs at every turn, using a minimum of electricity and hot water. He turns on the hot water only when he or a guest takes a bath. This can be frustrating for guests who seek hot water in the morning to wash and shave. The hot water faucet doesn't work.

In the kitchen is the best evidence of Porter's parsimony. A large refrigerator stands in one corner, but opening it, one finds it has been transformed into a storage cabinet for Porter's Founds. What about baking something in the stove? No chance. The oven is also a repository for Founds (he does have a hotplate that he uses occasionally). He keeps almost no food in the house. Only rarely does he buy food at markets, because he believes strongly that plastic wrappings pollute the environment and supermarket prices are outrageous. Most of his meals he takes out with a senior citizens

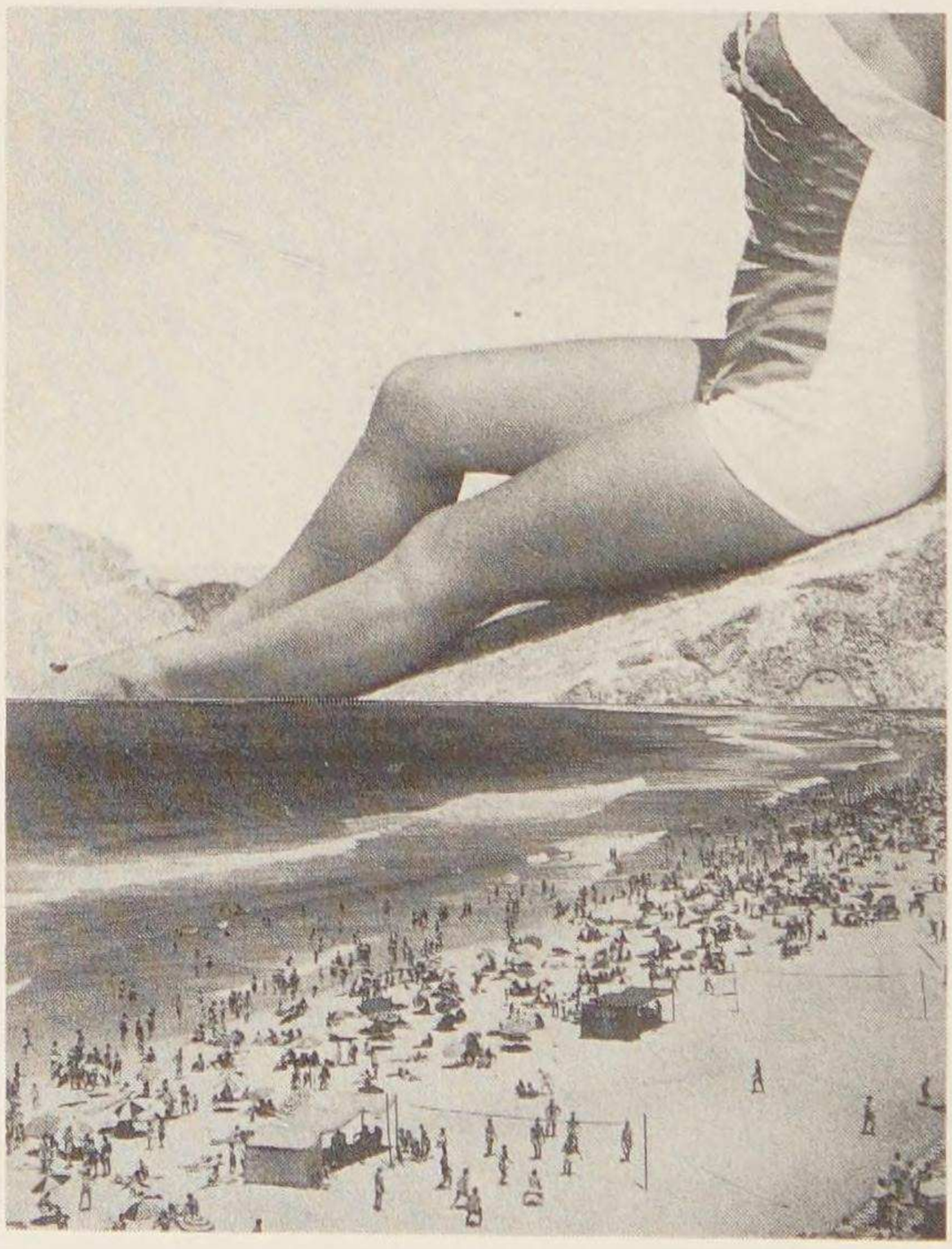
SCIART museum in miniature of 18 SCIART pieces by Porter, 1980.

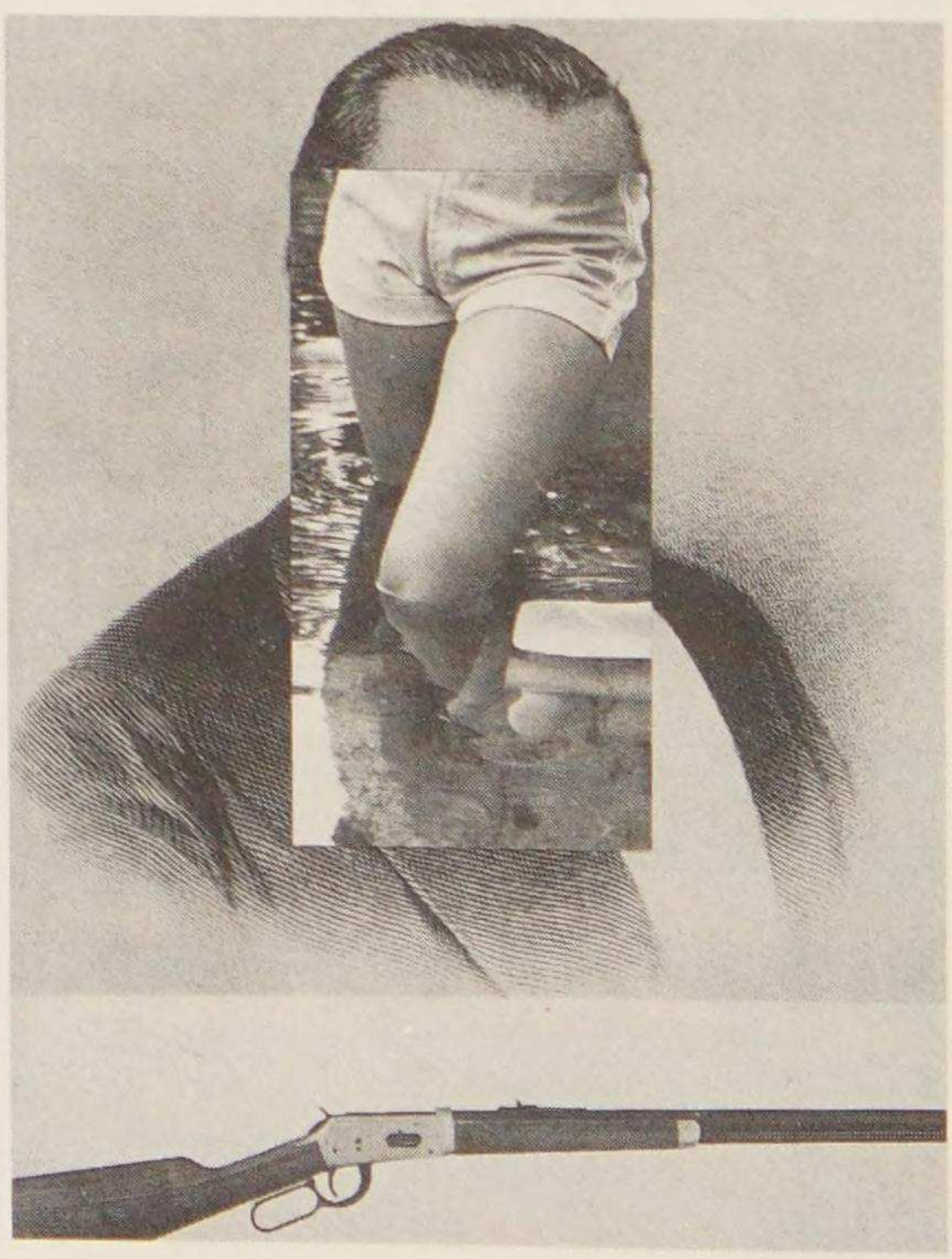


group in Belfast, which offers a federally funded hot lunch program in the Baptist Church. Walking into town, rain or shine, he combines lunch with a visit to the post office, where he discovers many of his Founds in the wastepaper baskets. "You'd be surprised," he muses, "how many medical brochures and advertisements get thrown away. They make wonderful material. In a throwaway society, all it takes is a perceptive eye to find things." In all of Belfast, perhaps in all of the United States, there is no more perceptive scrounger and student of throwaway habits than Porter. And he is not only fascinated by post office debris. Walking the streets, he keeps an eye open for discards, the countless, mostly plastic objects that litter roadsides. Some of these he arranges in bowls in the Institute. Daily, he contemplates these Founds, the way writers contemplate notes in their notebooks.

Porter's eating habits are similarly unusual. After eating out, he collects anything left over, such as biscuits or cookies, and takes them home wrapped in a napkin. One of his peculiar habits is to consume free sugar packets by pouring them on bread, a practice that has affected his teeth. He knows that the amounts of salt and

Photo collages by Porter to illustrate Parker Tyler's second edition of *Granite Butterfly*, Walton Press, 1974.





sugar he consumes aren't healthy, but that doesn't bother him. His poverty has accustomed him to hoarding everything that is free.

When he gets home from his walks, he usually takes a nap. In his room he falls asleep quickly under a loosely crocheted afghan that Margaret knitted for him. He never uses sheets at home, only on voyages and visits to friends' houses.

In his dedication to the Institute and his Founds, Porter suggests striking parallels to Alfred Jarry, the French playwright and forerunner of surrealism, their differences in culture and personality notwithstanding. If Jarry's Ubu, the central character in his plays, prefigures such tyrants as Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, Porter's Founds also dramatize our contemporary age of chaos, when opposites dance apart and suddenly come together, and chaos becomes a valid scientific subject. Like Jarry, Porter has always been trying, through his Institute and his Founds, to turn his life into art and vice versa.

Both men were influenced strongly by physics and physicists. Jarry's Ubu is taken from his encounter with his physics teacher in his provincial school. This poor man, Professor Hebert, was, as Roger Shattuck described him in *The Banquet Years:* "a well-meaning, obese, helplessly incompetent teacher such as boys immediately recognize as their prey. His demonstrations in 'my science of physics' always met with disaster." So "pere Heb" became "Pa Ubu" in Jarry's work, and Jarry's "Science of Pataphysics" emerged as his hallucinatory vision of the union of science and art.

Jarry's "deadpan" writing, as Roger Shattuck calls it, also resembles Porter's satirical wit. Behind each man's savage humor, in their very different genres, lies an intense seriousness about life, eros, death, and the search for God. Each seeks desperately to present the grotesque, splintered elements of contemporary life and unify them in an imaginary blend of science and art. Jarry called this blend Pataphysics, while Porter, more of an American pragmatist, calls it Sciart.

Porter and Jarry both use the grotesque to illuminate truth. In a letter to the Italian futurist F. T. Marinetti, Jarry spoke of "the beauty of the horrible." Porter seeks in society's lavish waste "the unity of the lost." Porter, like Jarry in his concept of a school for pataphysicians, has willed his Institute into being as a vehicle for the pursuit of meaning through what he calls "advanced thought":

> Thinking is necessary for evolutionary, revolutionary processes. We don't need the learning by rote, the mechanical school thinking

that we have. We need the Advanced Thinking by which great scientists and artists have always been motivated. It's nothing new. Advanced Thinking is the only way people can find their own creative identities and escape from becoming ciphers in anonymous bureaucracies, All over the country people are becoming wallets full of identity and credit card numbers supposedly entitling them to the good life. Is that any kind of real fulfillment?

Porter demonstrates the art of advanced thinking at his Institute in various half-serious, half-satirical ways. "After all," he says, "satire is also a form of advanced thinking. All Americans must learn how to practice it. For example, you ask what the Institute thinks about on Tuesdays. The Institute used to call Tuesdays 'World Problem Days.' Now we simply call them 'daze' for they do indeed consider an array of problems. These problems really have

Photo collage by Porter to
illustrate Parker Tyler's second
edition of *Granite Butterfly*,
Walton Press, 1974.



the characteristics of 'haze,' so complex and different are they—'Haze Daze', you might say of the universal problems that governments create: political and religious differences, disease, war, moral crisis, population explosion, uncontrolled technology, pollution, and so on."

Ask Porter about education, and he launches into futuristic fantasy: "We think about education in three phases," he might answer, "learning in the womb, learning at home, and study-apprenticeship."

"And how could an infant learn in the womb, Dr. Porter?"

"The body of the pregnant mother is filled with stomach electrode circuits," Bern might reply, "through which are introduced for eight months by electronic means to the developing mind of the fetus the basics of three languages, mathematics, reading, history, philosophy, drama, and poetics to the extent that at birth the child is already the equivalent of a Ph.D."

"Your Institute could breed super-children! What about learning at home?"

"The Institute could eliminate all campuses, saving billions of dollars. Elaborate administration buildings, dining halls, playgrounds, busing, and extracurricular activities such as sports and dramatics could all be eliminated by having students stay at home in study cubicles connected by television to a learning clinic in the center of each state. For three hours a day, seven days a week, each student is instructed via television in three languages, essential mathematics, reading, philosophy, religion, literature, history, and science. Periodic reviews are sent to students by mail along with examinations that would be returned to the clinic for grading and credit. The system would put an end to the hierarchy of education, which has been a failure."

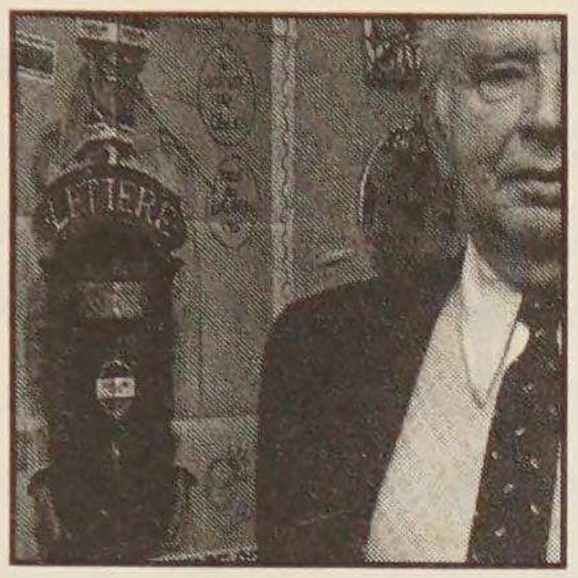
Now turn the topic to unemployment, and Porter will continue his demonstration of advanced thinking: "The Institute perceives how the unemployment problem is the opposite of the leisure problem. The two are linked, and we must create a balanced livelihood for all. In essence, this means the forty-hour week, the five-day work week, the holidays, the weekends, in short our entire present system, are eliminated. The twenty-four hours of each day in the seven-day week are divided into three shifts of eight hours each. No one works for more than thirty-two hours a week, that is four eight-hour periods in a shift of his or her choice while production proceeds continuously, 168 hours a week. Suppose a seventy-two-story skyscraper is being built across the street. Under the present system, the site literally crawls with workers for forty hours

each week, but is virtually deserted for 128 hours. Under the Institute plan, work would proceed 168 hours a week, more workers would find employment, and the building would be finished in one-fourth the time. Unemployed workers would be absorbed, apprentices would be in training to fill future labor needs, and every able-bodied person would have a paying job for thirty-two hours each week, no overtime. The additional leisure time would open a whole new range of possibilities. Alcoholism, drugs, auto accidents, crime would decrease. Suddenly, people would find time to do what they always wanted to do but never did because they 'had to go to work.' Hobbies would thrive for the healthy betterment of everyone."

This kind of advanced thinking may be real, but how real is the Institute in the literal terms that Americans like to apply? The lack of money is apparent, although Porter says that he has personally given several scholarships. Each July for six summers the Institute has hosted the Maine Poets Festival. From May 1 to October 1, for five summers, the outdoor sculpture show of the Union of Maine Visual Artists has been displayed on the Institute's grounds. In addition, there is abundant correspondence between Porter and artists in various countries relating to the Institute's activities, particularly in regard to correspondence art, and the Institute is visited constantly by people from all over the United States and abroad.

In Maine, Porter has helped foster artistic activity by his support of cultural events and talented creative artists. Perhaps most impressive of all is the way that Porter has turned the Institute into a hospitality center, permitting homeless people and drop-outs ("down-and-outers in general," Porter describes them) as well as touring bicyclists traveling through Maine, to use his grounds as long as they abide by his rules and respect his privacy. In his old age, Porter makes no pretense of being a fundraiser or successful grantsman. Rather his success lies in his lifelong efforts as a private, dedicated artist and scientist, and as a public advocate who has sought to enlarge the audience for cultural events. If this has led him into isolation, to advocate, like Jarry, "the science of imaginary solutions," few can match the variety of Porter's creative interests and achievements.

18 Belfast And The Voyages



During the 1980s in Belfast, Porter tried in vain to dispose of his publishing business. He had always run it on a shoestring, turning out unusual items from pamphlets and broadsides to beautifully designed books. His sense of the business aspects of publishing was indeed eccentric; he never printed invoices or stationery, nor did he hire a bookkeeper or tax accountant. Authors received no royalties. He thought it was understood that the expenses of publishing his way precluded profits. Some of his authors resented this practice and spread the word that he was irresponsible. But his simple, restricted way of life made it clear that he was indifferent about money. He hoarded what little he had, keeping his expenses to a minimum that few would be willing to live on. After sixty years of publishing, he said, "It was always a one-man, shoestring, hobbylike affair, and I can't do it anymore."

His difficulties notwithstanding, in his late seventies Porter was becoming something of a historical monument in the publishing world. The biographers of Miller, Rexroth, Nin, Patchen, Weston, and Stettheimer laid siege to him, soliciting his memories of these writers and artists. Despite this, Porter continued to be remarkably productive. In several experiments covering a period of

eight years of collecting and assembling beginning in 1979, he created in Belfast what he considered a significant work in performance art: a sixty-minute color videocassette called *Why My Left Leg is Hot*, consisting of more than two hundred collages. The video contains what Porter calls "discrete body sounds by Ms. Liz Was, filming and soundtrack by Aquatics Ever Tarnish, and it was issued in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1987 by Xeroxial Endarchy as a 'delirium of legs in the hot of the night—audio-visual wallpaper for the literate future.'" Porter conceived of this work as a "bookvideo" and believed it represented the way books might be made in the future. As its title indicates, the video is a satirical exploration of male fantasies centered on women's legs. It starts with a mysterious, androgynous leg—is it a woman's or a man's?—and continues to explore a variety of left legs, legs in high heel shoes, legs in different sheer and colored stockings, a ballet dancer's leg, a child's leg, a gartered leg, and many others. The legs are shown in a sequence of photos lifted formally from a pile of photographs by a gloved hand, as if by some mysterious mistress of rituals. The camera moves slowly, often awkwardly, changing and distorting angles of vision as if to suggest that we never see clearly the fantasies that we wish to see. As the camera moves with a slow, repetitive rhythm, a technique similar to one Andy Warhol used in his experimental films, the soundtrack emits orgasmic utterances, murmuring, growling, chanting, sucking, chirping, gasping, crying, chortling, an emotional gamut both disturbing and funny. The effect is surrealistic—legs displayed not merely as legs, but as rare objects of adoration. The robotic mistress of ceremonies, her gloved hand and forearm slowly lifting and changing the photos, serves as an anonymous, androgynous narrator, a neutral, Mephistophelean hand that mocks the viewer. Frequently, the photos become abstract. The left legs only hint at the limitlessness of the subjective, erotic world.

Aside from its appeal to leg fetishists, what is the value of this video? Certainly, never before has the leg been celebrated as an appendage of constantly changing appearance with an existence of its own. In this sense, the female leg as shown in the video becomes a postmodern symbol of disconnectedness, separation, and alienation from the body, a satirical warning that we are descending into a world of grunts, groans, and sighs. But Porter's deeper theme is manipulation—how people become disconnected objects of manipulation through the medium of advertising and films. The art of manipulation as developed by advertising techniques, Porter implies, forces us to read in a new way. Language is fading into tech-

nological, abstract forms that deny our real sexuality; these abstract dream-forms confront us with sensuous images that lure us to choose even though we have little chance of possessing the chosen. It is, after all, only a left leg.

In May 1988, Porter continued his performance experiments by recording an audiotape for Xeroxial Endarchy entitled *Williamson Street Blues*. The tape contains a performance version of a long poem that Porter also published as a book, *The Last Acts of Saint Fuck You*. Saint Fuck You is a comic American tyrant like Jarry's dictator, Ubu. Saint Fuck You, wrote Porter, was "a common man, so common that the Pope discovered him and annointed him a saint. . . Fuck you. . . I will get even." How will Saint Fuck You get even? "I will extoll crime. . . I will exude stenches. . . I will override objections. . . I will take care of everything. . . ." Isolated and manic, Saint Fuck You rants on with his list of things that "he will take care of." His closing "Fuck you, guys, fuck you" is a synonym for "Get yours—or watch out if you don't."

Earlier, in 1978 and 1981, Porter had experimented with what he called "Found Sound" in an audiocassette made with his colleagues and friends Dick Higgins and Charlie Morrow and produced by the New Wilderness Foundation. The cassette's liner notes describe well the communal environment of experimentation that prevailed in performance art during those years:

> 1. Many have heard words; few have heard their meaning, sense, and music. Many words are now so bruised in our culture that only their music remains. . . .
> 4. Cameraderie, three to six, together, simultaneous, unrehearsed, foot to jowl, manufactures the intuitive output, magical, beautifully rough, uneven but clean, always pure.
> 5. Into its own, never concealed, comes the fullness. Our senses drilled beyond repair in this hub-a-dub world. How pleasant to feel them rehealing!
> 6. Uncluttered, detached, separated from the others, then mixed into a whole only to be broken again, speeded up, slowed down, now high then low—never mind the mind—let the soul feel it.

A characteristic American expression of the times in its search for community and its appeal to soul rather than mind, the tape reveals one distinct difference between Porter's performance art and other experiments in this field. With Sciart in mind, Porter liked to investigate the contradictions as well as the possibilities of

new technology. For example, on various tapes he reads a phone book—the one in the city where he is performing—and improvises comments on it. First, he might read and discuss the terrifying possibilities of emergency numbers. Then he turns to the white pages and, in Whitmanian fashion, recites a catalogue of the melting pot names and their numbers. Also, he satirizes phone-company billing and how complex it has become "when it's supposed to be simplified." On the Porter-Higgins-Morrow tape, noises and babbling voices slowly overwhelm Porter's reading of the phone book. Then, Porter's voice re-emerges to comment on long-distance calling, with the caution that the technological unification of the world depends on our ability to find or recall the numbers for remote places such as Alaska, Germany, or the Soviet Union.

Certainly in these tapes and videos of the 1970s and 1980s, Porter emerges as one of the most provocative and entertaining performance artists, despite, or perhaps because of, the limited funds and equipment available and the often improvised, uneven performances. Indeed, one of the discoveries resulting from the universal experiments in this field was the perception that the work of a professional artist in performance was often more revealing than that of an actor in conventional theater.

Porter at reading with Allen Ginsberg, New York City, 1979.

Photograph by Sarah Wells.



In Providence, Rhode Island, during these years, I founded with several other poets and playwrights—Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop and Edwin Honig—an experimental group called Waste-paper Theater, dedicated to free performance of short pieces in unusual environments. Like Porter, we were in search of new, communal methods to explore the restoration of language and visual techniques that could be rough, crude, and often improvisational in the face of the new technology. What was promising to Porter and to us—as I discussed the project often with him—was the attempt to search for a new audience, an audience that would not be confined to commercial houses of entertainment, an audience that might awaken to the mythological possibilities of performance and help to restore to language its basic physical powers. As Porter said, "Discovery is what we're after, the discovery of ourselves and how we react to the incredible surge of technology in which we find our lives involved inextricably."

In addition to his involvement with performance art in the 1980s, Porter became one of the chief practitioners of mail art, or correspondence art, as it is called. For Porter, mail art was simply a way to break out of his isolation and use his already international correspondence for artistic purposes. His Founds materials could always be arranged or reduced in size to fit postal regulations. Mail art provided a new way to break out of the museum and communicate internationally. Anyone could do it. You didn't need expensive equipment. You didn't even have to know how to draw. All you had to do was paste or write something on a piece of paper and photocopy it. Then, send it off, maybe even in hundreds of copies. As artist-critic Dick Higgins wrote in an introduction to *Correspondence Art: Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity*, edited by Michael Crane and Mary Stofflet and published in 1984 by the Contemporary Arts Press in San Francisco: "Love by mail, sex by mail, comfort by mail. Life ain't easy, but the day brings new letters and new friends. Kind of sweetens the tea." From its beginning, mail art has represented free anarchistic international communication. Of course, it permitted a lot of throw-away art, but no matter—after the ruins of World War II and the concentration camps, nothing was sacred. A new means of communication was necessary. As mail art advocate Ken Friedman put it in his introduction to *Correspondence Art*:

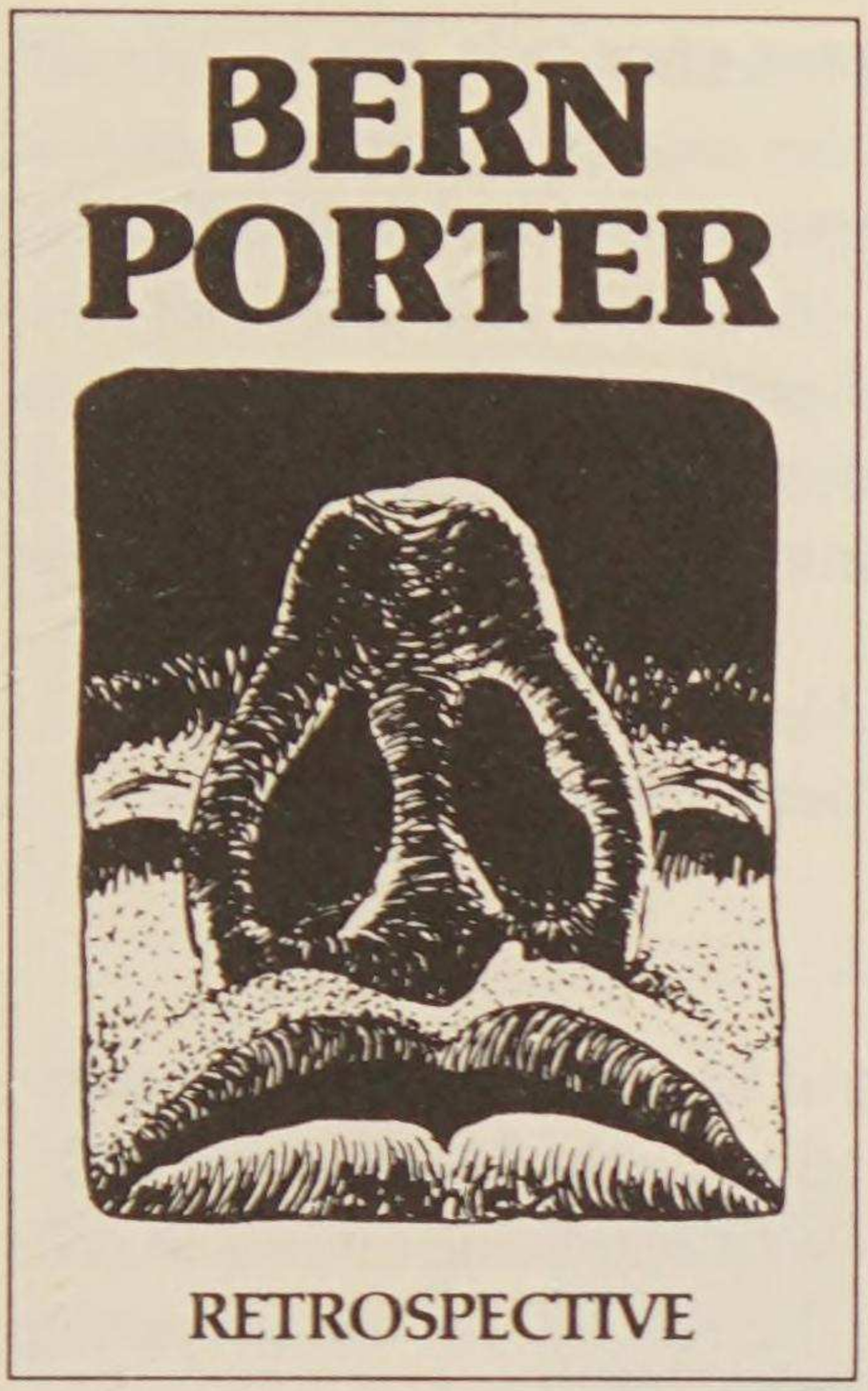
> The great genius of correspondence art has been its freedom and its use of "correspondence" in the phenomenological sense: the

Bern Porter

264

Sheet from Post Me stamp series
by Carlo Pittore of Bern Porter.





Cover drawing by Carlo Pittore of Porter for Bern Porter retrospective catalogue, 1979. Show toured to Franklin Furnace, New York; San Jose State University Art Dept./Galley, San Jose; Artworks, Venice, California; Miller Library, Colby College, Waterville, Maine.

binding together and bridging of ideas, media, objects, and persons who correspond or relate to one another in various ways. It is an art of delight and of revelation, an art of process and of persons. The work done in the medium ranges from serious to frivolous, from lush to austere, from banal to beautiful, from experimental to redundant, from highly traditional forms and ideas to the most unheard of.

Mail art seemed to promise equal opportunity for all, without committees, judges, or awards to confer respectability and status. At mail art shows, everything was hung; nothing was juried. In a time of growing domination by the computer, the idea of correspondence was interesting, too. It was no longer fashionable to write letters. So the mail could be used for a new purpose—to exchange visual images. Take stamps, for example. Why should conventional stamps prevail? Many mail artists began to create their own stamps. Carlo Pittore, working with Porter on a retrospective exhibit of Porter's work at the Franklin Furnace gallery in New York in 1979, put out a series of Bern Porter commemorative stamps. One showed Porter with a black shade over his eyes like some modern version of the blind prophet Tiresias with a label underneath reading "Post Me." Porter himself formulated his own aesthetics for mail art, which Michael Crane reprinted in *Correspondence Art : Source Book for the Network of International Postal Art Activity:*

No color outstrips black for elegance, grace, style, ease
of execution and understanding
White-heat production, spontaneous, random and unstudied
imparts the message
Allow the beholder to fondle, feel, embrace, get into
Say multiple things in variation leaving the core a bang
Jar, upset and kick the teeth of the mail people who
touch it
Calm the nerves of the final beholder
Have no thought for tomorrow (that it may never come back,
that there may be no catalogue)
Send out daily on the postal waves.

By mid 1990, Porter was obliged to admit that modern technology was overtaking slower distribution methods associated with the "now ancient mail pouch." Even as he was being invited to contribute to international symposia, and John Held, Jr., was preparing a 500-page *Annotated Bibliography of Mail Art* citing Porter as a pioneer in the field, Porter was turning to the new fax technology as the future of mail art. He entered by invitation the first international Fax Arts Biennial.

The Biennial began when Die Tangente, an arts society in the Principality of Liechtenstein, invited Porter and some 3,000 other mail artists from all over the world to fax their artistic or literary messages to the organization's office in Eschen. Die Tangente promised that all faxes coming in between June 12 and June 16 would be exhibited. Porter and his friends celebrated in Belfast when his simple, symbolic Sciart design with his handwritten name and address was faxed to Liechtenstein without a flaw. However, a week later, as Porter relates, "Ever anxious to maintain my position as the possible first contributor to the future second Biennial, I tried to fax another, more complicated design on the stated advance theme of "Grenzenlos" (without boundaries/boundless). Alas, like most American machinations, the system broke down with no repairman in sight, so this design, with its additional language problems, will probably come to rest in one of my archives."

One of Porter's chief colleagues in mail art is the European artist Dieter Rot. Rot's design abilities, like Porter's, derive from a knowledge of commercial art—how to design company or institutional logos, for example, that can be turned into stamp forms. First celebrated as a visual, concrete poet in Europe, Rot then moved into mail art with an extraordinary series of postcards called

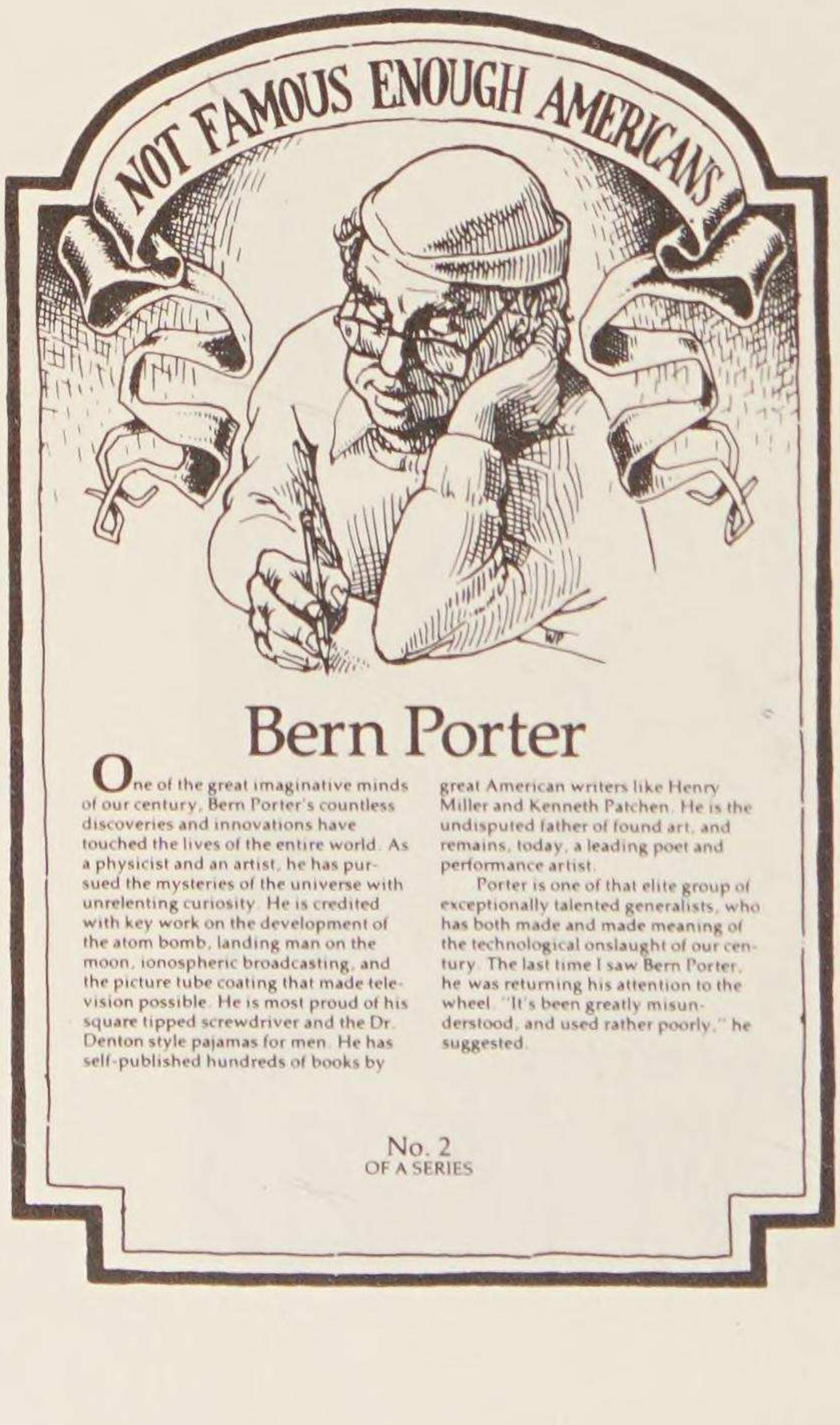
"blanks" because he blanked out or altered the images by drawing, painting, or applying found materials. Since Porter often used similar methods, his work was compared to Rot by Dick Higgins. However, there is a clear difference in tone between Porter's American images in his collage postcards and Rot's European images. In a typically confident tribute, Porter notes: "As for Rot, I out-rotted him years before I first encountered his work at Contemporary Arts

Display of Mail Art Show about Porter at Carlo Pittore's La Galleria dell' Occhio, New York City, 1980. Pittore's was the first gallery to open in the east village in the early 1980's.



in Stockholm, Sweden, in the summer of 1961. . . . We were simply two independents in different parts of the world, working unknown to each other on the same thing."

An influential postmodern artist whose work resembles Porter's in many ways is the German artist and teacher Joseph Beuys. Like Porter, Beuys aims to abolish the concept of art as an aesthetic discipline and show how its materials, images, and rhythms, are simply the materials of everyday life. Also like Porter, Beuys had a crucial experience in World War II. A pilot in the Luftwaffe who was almost killed in a crash at the end of the war, Beuys wanted to challenge the complacency of the postwar "economic miracle" by using art as a "healing process." However, Beuys knew that the healing could not be a matter of therapy, using the methods of art therapy that were being introduced into the United States. The only way art could heal was through the re-examination and restoration of universal images of history and myth, making art truly international again. Thus, Beuys, like Porter, would try anything once, using performance art, mail art, and any other approach that presented itself. As he came to know the work of Rot and Beuys, Porter admired them greatly. But he knew that his work was different, too, because of his background as a scientist and his continuing exploration of Founds.



Porter's active participation and leadership (he always felt that his work was better known in Europe than in the United States) in postmodern art led him to establish an annual escape from Belfast's long winter. Money to pay for these excursions came partly from Porter's own savings, partly from a wealthy Chicago patron, Marion C. Gettleman, whom he met during a 'round-the-world voyage on the S.S. *Rotterdam* in 1980. Marion believed in his work and wanted a companion for the cruises she enjoyed taking around the world. They often discussed marriage, with

In 1984, Tom Bryan. of Erieville, NY, honored Porter as a "Not Famous Enough American" on the labels of maple syrup cans produced on his farm.

her coming to live in Belfast or his moving to Chicago, to the point where she had her attorney draw up, in August 1984, a fourteen-page antenuptial agreement. Although this agreement was never legally signed and witnessed, Marion and Porter lived by it in every detail during their shipboard winter travels. Thus, throughout the 1980s, Porter found himself on luxurious voyages around the world on the British liner *Queen Elizabeth II*, the Dutch liner *Rotterdam*, and Cunard's S.S. *Sagafford*. He presented himself as Dr. Bernard Porter, head of the Institute of Advanced Thinking, and wore formal clothes to dinner with the rest of the expensively clad passengers.

"There are a lot of lonely women on the cruise ships today," Porter muses. "I came to know and appreciate several of them well. They helped me and I helped them. Many of these women have inherited money but end up alone on ships looking for companions.

Porter and Marion C. Gettleman aboard the QE2, 1988.



They are alone, alone, alone, tired of going to senior citizen centers and playing cards, or struggling to make a meal at home for one person. Do you know how hard it is for one person to cook a meal for one person? So they travel and go on cruises. What I tried to do for myself was to transform the shallow elements of a typical cruise into opportunities for discovery."

Still, he often became fed up with tourist snobbism, as when he wrote in Singapore in February 1984 of a typical shipboard encounter:

. . . how many sons do you have?
(and with the understanding, of course, that
if you have six, he has seven)
Like if you say you've been
On the ship less than eleven times
Or been around the world less than fourteen times
You are a no class, creditless slob.
So on the son thing
You say nothing
You have had no love affairs
Have no wife
No chance at love affairs
No wife
No sons
Daughters either for that matter
And hence are not a man.
No sons.

Despite such masquerades, his journeys enabled Porter to keep in touch with his mail art contacts as well as artists and writers whom he admired and considered "fellows" of his Institute. Also, he pursued his publishing business in dealing with foreign distributors and libraries. Sometimes his mail art contacts resulted in unexpected receptions, as when his ship arrived in Kobe, Japan, and a throng of enthusiasts welcomed him at the dock, one smiling woman holding a huge banner that read, "WELCOME, BERN PORTER!"

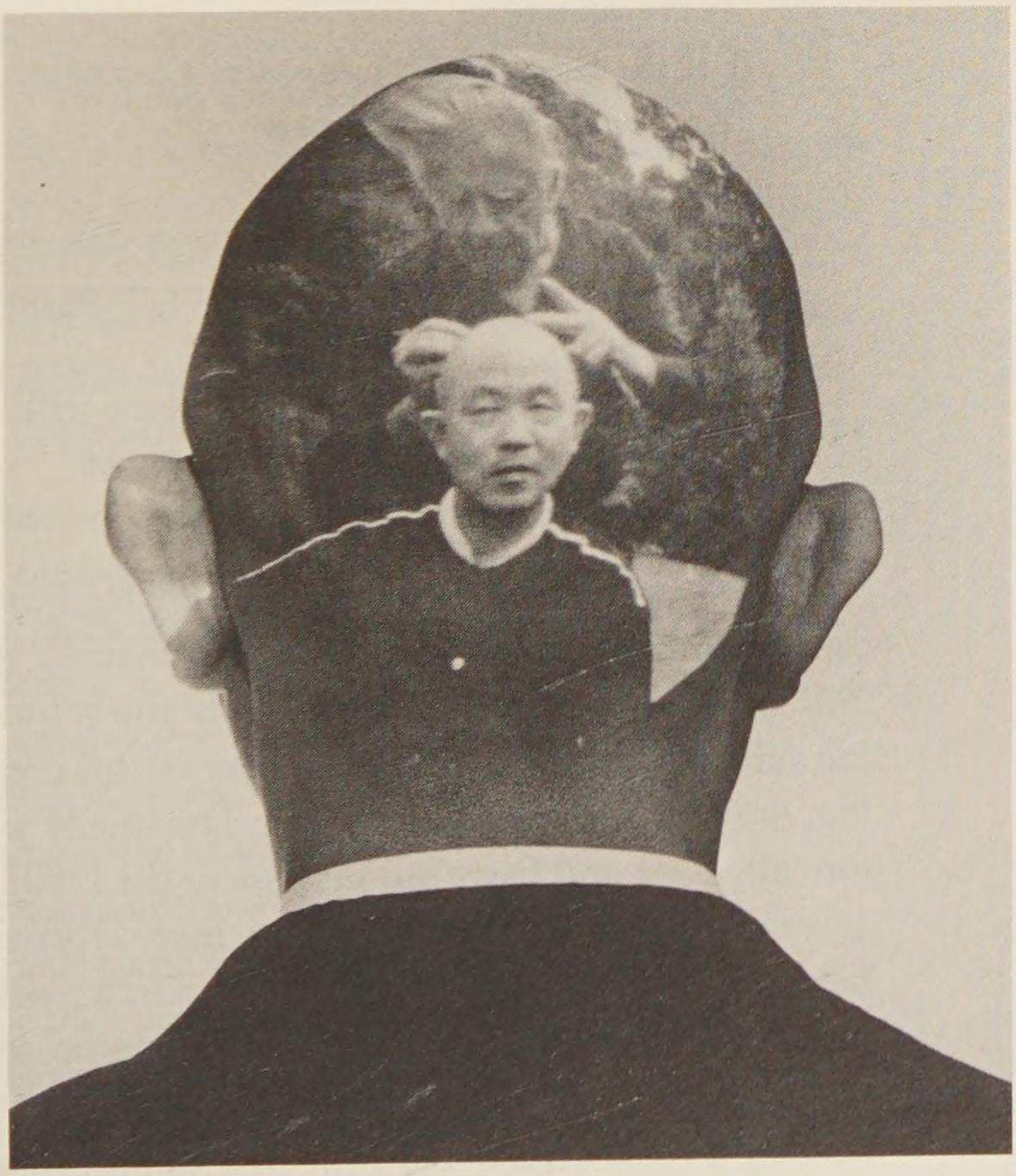
In the early 1980s, Porter began to keep scrapbooks about his journeys. The books are full of strange juxtapositions: Roman fountains flow into the Rhine River. The Spanish Steps in Rome lead to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Luxurious flowers on the Italian coast dissolve into the frenzied neon lights of nighttime Tokyo. A letterhead of the Grand Hotel Bolivar in Lima, Peru, is pasted under a hotel in Sydney, Nova Scotia. One page shows his old post

office address in Rockland, Maine, over the stationery of the *Queen Elizabeth II—1981 World Cruise—The 6 Continent Odyssey*."

Was Porter some sort of surrealist modern Ulysses? Certainly he transformed himself into a mythical wanderer, crossing countries and seas that Ulysses could never have imagined. He drifted half in reality and half in fantasy (shipboard life is, after all, a game played by the new elderly society) from King Ludwig's grotesque Wagnerian castle in Bavaria to the Parthenon in Athens. Photos of these two celebrated monuments appear side by side in Porter's scrapbook as if irrational constructions of the heart must always confront rational structures of the mind. In the same manner, a two-page fold-out of the Great Wall of China faces a two-page fold-out of the Taj Mahal. The political fantasy of China confronts the love fantasy of India.

In the end, Porter himself becomes a Found. In one shipboard photo, he sits impeccably attired in white jacket, purple string

Japanese mail artist Shozo Shimamoto and Porter in Belfast, 1987.



tie, and silk shirt, a blue flower in his buttonhole. Shaved and scented, he sits at a table set with wine glasses on a white linen cloth, formally dressed waiters hovering in the background. He smiles his secret smile, enjoying his double life. He is Dr. Bernard Porter, successful scientist, head of the Institute of Advanced Thinking, pretending to be as financially successful as the retired executives and professional men on board. He journeys north and earns a certificate from Canada's Northwest Territories for crossing the 60th Parallel North. He journeys south and acquires a certificate as an Explorer of the Straits of Magellan. Living among the rich, he surveys them with wonder. After all, Porter is also a bibliographer of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and he, like Fitzgerald, considered it a miracle that he could be an occasional companion and observer of the wealthy. In January 1984, he wrote a poem for Dorothy Engerman, one of his cruise-ship acquaintances:

DOROTHY AND THE KISSES OFF CUBA

Killer the ship's hotel manager knew full well
Dorothy would come
Sit in the same chair
At the same table
Use the same crockery, the same silverware,
The same half-spoon of sugar
In the same tepid red tea.
Has she not been doing it for twenty-five years?
Would she not be doing it for the next twenty-five?
And why?
Because as Dorothy explained it all too well:
"You get kisses the like of which are not
Given in the normal walks of life."

No wonder the journeys became for Porter a romantic escape from his "normal walk of life" in Belfast. And fortunately for him, he did not suffer the boredom of the retired wealthy. Cruising life suited him, for he was free to pursue his creative interests, writing, drawing, and corresponding. The lonely women he met gave him affection and friendship. Also, in the 1980s, he again took up a correspondence with his old Colby love, Dorris Moore. Dorris had been sharing expenses with a rich man in a plush trailer community in Florida and had become a golfer. On a postcard she exclaimed with delight to Porter about shooting a hole in one. At the age of seventy-two, Dorris could still write to him passionately: "Some-

times I need you so desperately that I could cry for days. Why? Guess there were times when you might have needed me too. Fifty odd years of love from afar—kept cherished in many countries. . . . Bern, what do you expect of life from now on? What do I expect? A few days ago I was seventy-two years old. I'm still slim, active, 120 pounds, no grey hair. I could be a very good one if you ever need me. Love, Doné."

Indeed, in the midst of his shipboard life, Porter often felt a longing for Doné, his pet name for Dorris. But it was too late. Their lives had changed too much. His marriage to Lula had been the worst experience of his life, and he sensed that he was too old and settled in his bachelor ways to marry again. Friendships were better, and he continued to cultivate his traveling companions. Still, when he heard from Dorris about her travels, he realized that in their wandering, he and Dorris had become mirror images of each other. Dorris's words echoed in his fantasies: "Who else," she wrote, "has traveled nearly a million miles to seventy countries in less than five years and been to every state in the USA, every province in Canada, Iceland, Europe, etc. etc. etc. Me! A civilian little old kid from Sebring, Florida." Porter might have answered, "Me, too."

Now past eighty, Porter continues his active life in Belfast, but the ocean voyages are only memories. Marion Gettleman, the friend and patron who made his cruises possible, died in her Chicago apartment in 1990. He keeps the grounds of his Institute open from May 1 to November 1 every year for exhibits, annual festivals, the homeless, and even tourists if they wish to stay overnight and sleep outside. He continues to bombard Belfast's city council and a local newspaper, *The Waldo Independent*, with letters of protest. In many letters he plays the crusty conservative, demanding budget cuts:

Dear Independent:

Regrettably I and taxpayers I know are obliged to advise the city council publicly on the proposed 1988-1989 budget that we have no money whatever for:

a. twelve 9 mm semi-automatic weapons;
b. $3000 for the librarian;
c. $25,000 for a salt/sand shed;
d. $3000 for the Maine Municipal Association
e. $1000 for new police headquarter extensions;
f. $40,230 for zoning/planning;
g. $91,480 for the library;
h. $1000 for the police chief.

Further we feel:

i. The obvious cycle of increasing salaries that increases taxes, which requires more salary increases to pay more taxes must be positively and finally stopped this year. . . .

Porter enjoys the role of the rockribbed conservative independent and Methodist, and he sees no inconsistency between that and his role as an advocate for economic projects such as breakwaters, duty-free zones, houses for the homeless, and reforms in technological education for the town and state. He is both town curmudgeon and town savior, and he embraces the contrast just as he enjoyed the contrast between his poverty and the luxury of his cruise-ship travels. The extremes of his personality are well described in an article about him by Elizabeth Dunker that is in the Colby College collection:

> Bern is full of paradoxes. Although he's curious and interested in all sorts of people and ideas, he's surprisingly intolerant and ignorant of ideas and actions that differ from his. "According to me," can preface a statement implying severe criticism. He's worldly but naive, trusting and extremely suspicious, deeply pessimistic and always hopeful. He is frugal, almost to the point of meanness, and he can be quixotically generous. He denies himself all sorts of luxuries and even a few necessities, and he's voraciously

Porter with painting by Carlo Pittore, Brunswick, Maine, 1987. Photograph by Mark Melnicove.



Radioactivity Center
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 02139

[redacted]

Measurement of Ra and $MsTh_1$ in Body

Name Bernard H. Porter Date May 24, 1974 C.C. No. 01-269
Date measured May 21, 1974 Sampling location MIT Room 2-038
Type of exposure physicist*
Exposure period * Checked by AMB
Reference: Rn Bk. 5 RnS, p. 14 Tn Bk. 51A, pp. 28, 29 γ Bk. 16R, pp. 78, 81

Summary

1.	Amount of Ra in body at time of measurement (μCi)	-0.001 ± 0.001
2.	Amount of MsTh in body at time of measurement (μCi)	-0.0001 ± 0.0002
3.	Calculated MsTh (μCi)/Ra(μCi) at time of mid-exposure	Indeterminate
4.	PRE (μCi Ra). . . . . (using factor =1)	-0.001 ± 0.001

Data on Ra

5.	Breathing rate (l/min)	12.2 ± 0.2
6.	Concentration of Rn in breath (μμCi/l)	0.008 ± 0.003
7.	Rn exhalation rate (μμCi/min)	0.095 ± 0.036
8.	Apparent amount of Rn external to body (μCi)	0.0008 ± 0.0003
9.	Apparent amount of Rn external to body of control subject (μCi)	0.001 ± 0.001
10.	Net amount of Rn external to body (μCi)	-0.0002 ± 0.0010
11.	Estimated amount of Ra in body from Rn measurement (assuming 60 percent Rn exhalation) (μCi)	-0.000 ± 0.002
12.	Method of RaC γ measurement	50 cm arc chair
13.	Amount of RaC in body by γ measurement (μCi)	-0.0006 ± 0.0006
14.	Amount of Ra in body (μCi) = net Rn external to body (μCi) + RaC in body (μCi)	-0.0008 ± 0.0012

Data on MsTh

15.	Apparent amount of Tn external to body (μμCi)	-0.39 ± 0.41
16.	Apparent amount of Tn external to body of control subject (μμCi)	0.00 ± 0.22
17.	Net amount of Tn external to body (μμCi)	-0.39 ± 0.46
18.	Estimated amount of MsTh in body at time of measurement, based on Tn measurement (μCi)	-0.0002 ± 0.0003
19.	Method of Th series γ measurement	50 cm arc chair
20.	Amount of MsTh in body, based on γ measurement (μCi)	-0.0001 ± 0.0002

*1932-1934, Brown University; 1941-1942, Princeton University;
1943, Berkeley; 1944, Oak Ridge

Porter's body has been measured for radiation as part of a scientific investigation at MIT since 1972.

hungry, can't throw anything away and buys things he doesn't need if he thinks them a bargain. He despises society and loves parties. He's very considerate, almost courtly, but nearly oblivious to another's needs. He's a real misanthrope and strongly loyal to his friends (but he doesn't have very many). He's skillful and knowledgable in many areas but very insecure and fearful in a new situation. He's both modest and boastful. He tells lies when he thinks it's useful or funny, and he's fundamentally honest and frank. He's a gentle man, and a very angry one, implacable towards someone who's hurt him. He loves laughter and boisterous jokes, and he's often moody and gloomy. He thinks of himself as free of the constrictions of conventions, yet he's bedevilled by anxieties and requirements.

Retrospectives of his work at Franklin Furnace in New York

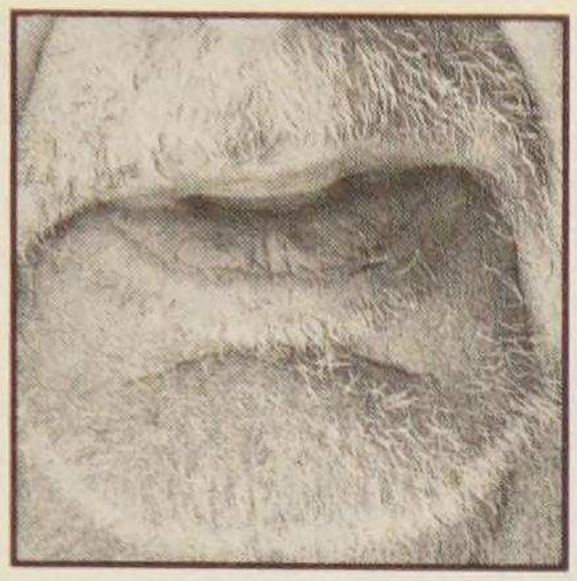
in 1978 and at Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee in 1990 have contributed a great deal to Porter's peace of mind in his late years. He feels that his creative achievements and claims for Sciart have begun to be recognized. Yet the contradictions of his life remain. The death of Marion Gettleman ended the imaginative stimulus of his winter voyages. His savings are gone, and he has little prospect of recovering the bad loans he made. Acting as his own attorney, he is still trying to recover money from his chief debtor in Belfast. In 1992 Porter survives mainly on the welfare system. Social Security and Medicare provide his basic support. He depends on food stamps and free meals from The New Life Mission and Bridge House in Belfast. Prepared for death, he carries in his wallet the following signed and witnessed note:

> In the event of my death the body may be used for scientific research; parts transplanted to others lacking same, provided ashes of other sections are sent to my brother noted herein. If such conditions of afteruse do not obtain, the body is to be cremated with one-half of the ashes thrown to the winds, and the remainder airmailed to my brother for burial beside my sister at Houlton, Maine.

Also contained in his will is his belief in Sciart and the hope that his vision will be carried on by others. His Belfast home and "everything in it, including my toothbrush" goes to Colby College. If Colby cannot raise the money to maintain it and has to sell it, the money from the sale is to be used for the Bern Porter Collection of Contemporary Letters in the Miller Library. His body goes for autopsy and the gift of any usable organs to the Center for Human Radiobiology, Radiological Research Division, Argonne, Illinois. Significantly, if such afteruse is not possible, some of the ashes are to receive family burial in Houlton, and the rest are to be thrown to the winds. In the great winds of time, Porter hopes that a new society may arise, a healing society rejuvenated by the creative union of science and art.

Meanwhile, however, in March 1991, Porter was the center of an unusual communal festival celebrating his eightieth birthday.

19 The Eightieth Birthday Celebration



On March 9, 1991, in Belfast, Porter's publisher and performance art partner, Mark Melnicove, cosponsored with the Union of Maine Visual Artists and the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance an eightieth birthday celebration for Porter. I drove to Belfast from my home in Providence, Rhode Island, the day before the celebration to stay with Porter, taking along a sleeping bag for his downstairs couch. When I arrived at Porter's house in the early afternoon, Melnicove and an independent video producer were making a documentary film about Porter's life and work. They were taping an interview with Porter's younger brother Everett.

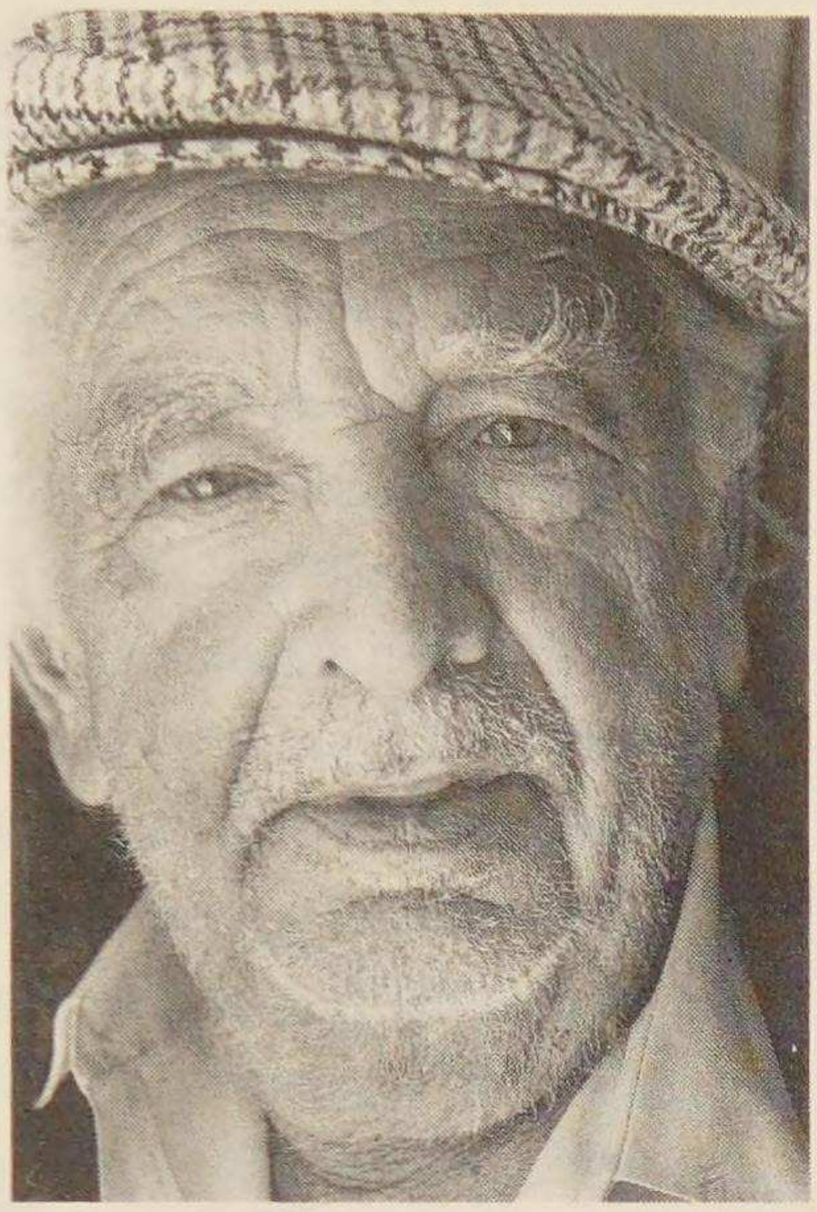
Although the brothers resemble each other physically, Everett, ten years younger and the epitome of the successful, respected citizen, is clearly more at ease with his life. Commenting on his brother's success as an optometrist, Porter says, "Everett lives in one world and I'm in an entirely separate and different world." On the other hand, they share scientific and theatrical interests and memories of an isolated childhood in northern Maine. Everett and Bern marvel at how their great-grandfather Andrew took thirty days to travel the 118 miles from Houlton to Bangor with a wagon and oxen team—a journey that now, on a divided throughway, takes only two hours. The brothers see this as an important example of the rapidly changing sense of time and space, the steadily increasing urgency with which we regard time, and the

changes that Americans constantly confront. As they talk, their strong fraternal ties show readily through their personality differences.

Everett says he and Bern were particularly close after Bern graduated from Colby and returned home. Everett was ten years old then, in 1934, and remembers his older brother reading James Thurber's *My Life and Hard Times* to him. "Even then Bern was a great book collector with the hard-earned money he saved," Everett recalls. "Deluxe editions from the Limited Editions Club arrived every month, and I used to marvel at the fine printing. Of course, they didn't cost so much in those days, and Bern saved every penny diligently to pay for them. Also, he read everything he could about Einstein, who was his hero. He talked to me constantly about Einstein, which stimulated my own interest in science."

Everett remembers a happier family life than Bern does, although both recall fondly weekend family picnics at Nickerson Lake, where their grandmother had a cottage. They remember their parents struggling hard at whatever jobs they could find; Everett recalls their father working for twenty-five cents an hour shoveling snow off railroad tracks. Both men emphasize that rigid schedules and long hours of work afforded little time for relaxation. I talk with Everett about theater as he tells me he is playing the role of the Alcalde, the Mayor, in the current adaptation from Sophocles, *Antigone of the Andes* by Basil Burwell, the director of the Belfast Maskers, a community theater. Bern and I promise to attend the evening performance at the Belfast Community Center.

That evening we drive first in my car to Tallpines, a home for the elderly, which is staging its "4th Annual Cabin Fever Reliever Variety Show." I don't ask Bern why we are going there. I think I understand. At his age, this is his potential future community. As we arrive and enter the lobby, a group of men and women in their eighties and nineties, many in wheelchairs, are sitting in the performance area (a hall and corridor have been turned into an improvised theater since there is no auditorium or stage), watching the audience file in. The performers are dressed in identical, comic plastic hats and red, white and blue vests, so it is hard to distinguish the men from the women. Instruments are handed out to them—whistles, washboards, tambourines, triangles, and drums. The usual microphone problems erupt. The Tallpines Rhythm Band begins the program with "You're A Grand Old Flag," the performers banging and whistling away. The program consists mainly of old popular songs in spirited, if quavering tones. An ancient performer



Porter in 1990.

Photograph by Peggy McKenna.

solos on a set of spoons to the piano's accompaniment. The evening's highlight is a couple, married for seventy-three years, waltzing while the pianist plays "The Merry Widow's Waltz."

These courageous old people are struggling to create a new community, and the rules are not yet evident. In the past, large families—children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—afforded a sense of community to the old; nowadays, we have "nursing homes" and "rest homes," communities in which nurses and doctors have the controlling power. As we view the musical program, Porter and I wonder about the old people's struggle for pleasure and their reversion to childhood. Is it a celebration or a condemnation of old age? Both, we agree. Old age in the United States is increasingly paradoxical. Our youth-oriented culture isolates the elderly, secluding them in nursing homes and retirement communities away from children. By contrast, Porter says, traditional societies celebrate the connections between children and grandparents. Grandparents are there to instruct the children, and the children provide a sense of the future. Separating old and young, Porter argues, is dangerous. As we walk out, I note a sign that reads:

> Tall Pines Health Care Facility
> Date is March 8, 1991
> Today is Friday
> The weather is cold
> The season is winter
> Next holiday is Easter

"Yeah," comments Porter. "That's a Found poem."

Our next stop is the Belfast Maskers play, and it is a pleasant surprise. Most community theaters exist mainly for recreation, but here under the direction of veteran actor and director Basil Burwell, who has directed more than two hundred plays around the country, the production has an original artistic impact. Burwell's adaptation of Sophocles's *Antigone* into *Antigone of the Andes* uses authentic

Andean Indian music of haunting pan-pipes and drums to emphasize the play's powerful subject: the clash between Spanish conquerors and the native Incas. Everett, a member of the theater's Board of Directors, proves to be an experienced character actor, relishing his role as the Inca town's mayor, and during the intermission we congratulate him and the director. Despite the varying levels of skill in the cast, there is a spirited unity in the ensemble that Porter and I and the large audience enjoy. As we leave the theater, Bern comments enthusiastically, "Burwell knows everybody in town. He brings out the best in the actors and the audience, too. Now you see the town's progress that I wanted you to see. Belfast was once the chicken capital of the world. The chickens left, and now culture is moving in."

Next morning, emerging from the depths of my sleeping bag, I see the sun glaring brilliantly off snow and ice. The wind has slackened, but it remains bitter cold. On the Institute grounds, trees stand bare behind the few sculptures left to brave the winter. One, composed of orange cloth-strips, flutters brightly in the breeze. Next to the annex, beside a huge white birch tree, a large silver metal sculpture looms like an Alexander Calder stabile. Through the naked trees, the neighbors' houses to the north and south are visible.

After breakfast we visit the library, where Porter's books are on display in celebration of his birthday. On the way Porter gesticulates out of the window of my car: "You see all these churches? Even here in Belfast we have thirteen religions. I'm disturbed by this because most of these churches are open only a few hours a week. It's religion in absentia. When I travel I make it a rule to go to the nearest holy place, wherever it may be. You have to look at the faith of the people before you know what's going on. But what would such a traveler do arriving here in Belfast? In this country the churches just show the subdivisions of the town."

"Do you still think of yourself as a Methodist?" I ask.

"I'm a church of my own," Porter replies. "Maybe a 'seeker,' as Roger Williams, the man who founded your Rhode Island in pursuit of religious freedom, called himself. Official religion has ruined the world. Between official religions and politics, we're lost. My community is the sun out there, nature out there. When the words give out in physics, we have symbols."

"Doesn't that make you feel isolated?"

"No, I'm in touch with the world through mail art and my Founds. Also, Maine has four distinct seasons that are very impor-

tant to me. We know when summer ends, when winter ends. The changing seasons will never reveal all of their secrets, no matter how closely we physicists study nature and try to disclose them. The membrane comes in and we push it. All we can to is endeavor to understand the process."

In any case, in the library I see that Porter is not isolated. This is his day, as the arrangement of his many books on a table in the reading room indicates. The woman at the desk calls, "Happy Birthday, Bern!" Porter confers with her about one of his books that is missing from the display. She grins and rushes into the stacks to search for it. Meanwhile, I look at some magazines featuring Porter's work and at *The Wastemaker*, one of Porter's best book of Founds. Seeing me turn the pages, Porter admonishes: "Don't read chronologically. Jump in and swim!" In one of the magazines, I find a quote from the poet and critic Jerome Rothenberg: "Some of the found poetry of Bern Porter is like this—you can open a book and see things there that look like poems, but they're laundry lists, or they're cut-up bits of ads, or pages of mail-order catalogues. Whatever. But in some way they become poems too, particularly, say, the way a really good found-poet like Bern Porter utilizes them."

Porter shows me material about a videoscript he worked on recently using Abraham Lincoln Gillespie's unusual coined words and phrases. "Who is Gillespie?" I ask. "He's another one of those isolated geniuses spread out across the country. He's a crazy, innovative linguist who continues with experimental language where Stein and Joyce left off. He invents marvelous words such as 'pulsthing' and 'bycits' and long, melodic phrases such as 'fugueflight-silkstream.' I admire his work very much."

Concluding our library visit, we go downstairs to visit the room dedicated to Porter's wife Margaret. Sadly, on this day of Porter's celebration, it is bleak and deserted, no exhibit of any kind. "The library should use this room more," Porter mutters, "but I suppose they're short of money in this recession."

On the way to lunch, townspeople call "Happy birthday!" Bern stops to talk to a man he identifies as an "entrepreneur." The man laughs, telling Bern, "I don't know what you're talking about." Bern shrugs and tells me, "He knows what I'm talking about. He owes me money." At lunch, a woman in the café gives him a flower. Suddenly, still thinking about the linguistic inventions we looked at in the library, he remembers, "Transients in Maine were called 'ne'er-do-wells.' Isn't that unusual?"

"How come you love humorous twists of language, Bern, but

you never tell jokes?" I ask. "Do you remember any jokes?"

Porter answers, "Two nuns took a tramp in the woods and he died. It's the only one-liner I know." No matter, I think to myself. Porter may not joke easily, but he has learned to survive constant frustrations by wearing a mask of sardonic laughter.

The birthday bash begins at 2:30 p.m. on the waterfront. A cold wind blows, and spectators are bundled up in caps and coats. Porter has changed into his poet costume: three layers of robes, brown, white, and gold from inside to outside over a red jumpsuit. A broad-brimmed red cap, like a cardinal's, rests on his thick white hair, and a gold medallion glitters on a chain around his neck. Looking closely, I see the medallion reads, "100,000 sea miles on the *Queen Elizabeth II*." A television crew films Porter as he leads the way down the slope to the water. Following are some fifty friends and admirers of Porter, many of whom have traveled considerable distance to observe what has been billed as a baptism. Suddenly, we confront a spectacle.

High on the wharf to our left, the Veterans of Foreign Wars are sponsoring a Gulf War victory parade. A forest of miniature American flags flutters in the wind. Yellow ribbons flicker on cars. A band strikes up. From our right, above the harbor, the sound of conflicting drumming is heard. A corps of "peace drummers" is performing in defiant counterpoint to the Gulf War victory din. Delighted with the cacaphony, the television crew struggles to capture all angles. But Porter, ignoring the other demonstrations, advances toward the bay, his robes billowing in the wind, holding a small vase. Scooping up some icy water, he begins to baptize himself, intoning: "In the name of the Institute of Advanced Thinking, I baptize myself, Alpha, Alpha, Alpha (on one cheek), Beta, Beta, Beta (on the other cheek), and Gamma, Gamma, Gamma (on the forehead). "Will others advance to be baptized?" he calls solemnly. As each of us approaches, he repeats his incantation and blessing. Porter's friend, Carlo Pittore, formerly Charles Stanley, who has hung an exhibit of his paintings, artist stamps, and photographs of Bern in the church where the celebration will continue later, gets baptized twice to celebrate both names.

By the time the baptism ends, the victory parade has disappeared and the peace drummers have dispersed. Porter changes into a black hat and brown robe, and we follow him to the post office for a demonstration of Founds. He assumes a position of authority by a large trash container in the lobby, as several citizens, opening their postal boxes, turn to stare. Reaching into the trash

can, he pulls out some discarded papers and regards them with anticipation. "The first rule," he says, "is always to turn it upside down." He does so, as people laugh. "Next," he continues, "you must learn to see which part is most important scientifically, anthropologically, and aesthetically. Then you can cut out the most important parts. You must cut in such a way as to create a new independent piece." He pulls out of his robes a small blunt scissors and starts to cut deftly. "If you're going to create a new piece, you must demonstrate that you can see. You have to forget your brains or the fact that you think you can read." He hands the piece he has cut out to Mark Melnicove. "Why is this piece impossible, Mark?" Like the straight man in a comedy routine, Mark answers, "I can still see some words on it." Throwing it away with a contemptuous gesture, Bern says, "Right, that disqualifies it immediately."

Sorting through some discarded catalog pages he has discovered in the trash, Porter meditates, "The process is like going to the beach and discovering the brightest pebble. See the verticals here? They're like a found gem in the natural cut. As I transform this with my scissors, you see the process leaves a mysterious design at the bottom. This is a real discovery. This should go to the Smithsonian in Washington." Cheers of applause.

Two extravagantly costumed ladies appear in the lobby to join the tribute. They wear old-fashioned, ruffled pink-and-white skirts and bright blouses, fluffy hats, and veils over their heavily made-up faces. To honor their presence, Porter increases the fervor of his demonstration. From a supermarket advertisement, he snips the letters "OOD VA" from "FOOD VALUES," leaving the enigmatic capital letters "LUES" emblazoned on a white background. Impulsively, some of the spectators begin a background chorus of sound poetry, chanting enthusiastically the strange new syllables, LU-ES. With magisterial authority, Porter continues to cut out magical letter arrangements. He passes them around. When hecklers' voices rise through the spectators' chorus, he admonishes them gravely, "I may have to ask your group to leave the room. Any questions about this process?"

"Maestro, I need help with the junk mail that wants money."

"Send it back. We should return to an age of barter. Send back your junk mail and ask them to send you something of use."

Tiring of scissors work, Porter attacks the floor as if he were Martha Graham asserting direct contact with the earth. He leans down to place a cutout directly on the black-and-white floor tiles. "Look what an intriguing design this makes! You can walk around

it, see it from different perspectives! Picasso said, 'I show what I've found, not what I'm looking for.' I'm looking for something that will kick the viewer in the teeth. But such a work, if looked at properly, might also bring peace and tranquility. We can play with this a long time. The trouble is, the more you play with it, the more worthless it becomes. The spontaneity, the impulse that creates art, is lost. Then you have to throw it away." With a gesture of disdain, he tosses the cutout into the trash can.

Poking again into the trash, Porter pulls out a plastic bag with a San Francisco label and a plastic lid for a food container. Carefully he turns the bag upside down and cuts out a section. Depositing the lid on the floor, creating a circular form against the square tiles, he then places the cutout on the lid and whirls it around, surveying it from all angles.

"From here it's very exciting," he muses. "But the moment I step over here it's gone. Have I made it clear that the angle from which you observe is very important? So be careful, you can overwork all this Found stuff until it becomes nothing." Disdainfully,

Celebrants at Porter's 80th birthday party including Erika Pfander, Pam Slaughter, Carlo Pittore and Martin Steingesser.

Photograph by Peggy McKenna.



he throws pieces of his found construction into the trash.

"Since you're doing this in the post office, wouldn't this be classified as federal art?" comes a challenging question.

"Maybe. We might send it down to George Bush and Jesse Helms."

"It's not erotic enough for Jesse."

"What do you mean? Just wait. . . .We're having a three-and-four-dimensional experience. We're going to do a last erotic one. . . ." From the trash he selects a catalog page with a figure on it and cuts it into a sensuous, abstract shape. Peering at it, he exclaims, "Look, it fails because you can guess where it came from. It's not transformed. You can see the fact that it was a figure. So it's still just an imitation." He throws it away and announces the end of the demonstration by passing out the plastic lid and some coat hangers he has lifted out of the trash can. "Take these home and transform them into Founds," he says. "Now you've seen how it's done."

The next stop for the celebration is the Fertile Mind Book Shop on Main Street. Porter is now wearing his red cap, red jumpsuit, brown suede shoes with rubbers, and the gold medallion. A collector of Henry Miller's work is waiting in the bookstore for

Celebrants at Porter's 80th.

Photograph by Peggy McKenna.



Porter to sign some of the Miller books that he published. As he signs the copies, Porter reminisces about Miller's obsession with the number seven, a fixation that "I've carried over to some extent." Also, he recalls with regret how he felt compelled to black out the four-letter words in the first American edition of *What Are You Going To Do About Alf?*, which he published in 1944. Porter reiterates his belief that Miller's *Murder the Murderer* is "the best antiwar book I've read. It holds up."

When he comes to Miller's *Semblance of a Devoted Past*, Porter recalls, "People think the title is Miller's after Proust, but actually it's my title for a photo that I took. I crawled under an old stump in New Jersey and took the shot with my small Kodak camera. Dear Henry thought I had put something over on him by using my photo and my title, but he came to like it."

Joking with friends, Porter says "None of you guys has any money, I see, to buy any of my books." This seems true, unfortunately, as only a few copies of Porter's books are sold in the bookstore on this occasion. Nonetheless, his spirits remain high, and he addresses a friend who asks if he has a nickname, "I used to be called Benjy after a physicist, but lately they just yell at me, 'Hey, you!'" Tapping the cover of his newly published book of Founds, *Sweet End* , which examines the way Americans view death, his face sobers as he turns the pages: "Here we have the new technological instruments of war and torture in the Gulf."

Shifting into the role of raconteur, Porter launches into a bit of fiction about Barbara Bush. "Barbara told me George has war fever. I said, 'Barbara, the time has come to kick him in the ass, to use his own term. You come on up here to Belfast. We'll be sympathetic to you. What kind of temperature do you have, Barbara, when you have war fever?'

"'The thermometer broke in the middle.'

"'So George has got it, a pretty high case of war fever.'

"'Yes, Camp David is not very pleasant with all those security guards around.'

"'Well, you come up here, dear. We'll go down to Rockport and have a time.'"

A friend interrupts, "I already heard Margaret Thatcher is on her way. Can you handle her as well as Barbara?"

"Well," Porter ponders, "Texas is where the wealthy live. So I don't think we need to worry about Margaret. Thatcher's son goes to Texas and Margaret follows him there. And Barbara's coming up here to us. I want to give her astronaut food, one pill for

breakfast, one for lunch, one for dinner. We'll revolutionize the whole food industry, cut out this wasteful gourmet food boom. George Mitchell, our Maine senator, told me we can't do it. He said, 'You crumbs in Belfast are running around on pills, and we down here in Washington have to make do with food.'"

Between the scheduled sessions of the celebration, I speak to Mary Weaver, a quiet, demure lady who seems to erupt in performance. She is the founder of the Mythweavers Theatre, a group devoted to fantasy and improvisation as she describes it, which has often performed in the summer on the grounds of the Institute. After admiring Porter and Melnicove's act, she and Porter started to perform together. "He's been an inspiration to me as a community organizer," she says, "as well as a spiritual person. He has an agenda and never stops. We've eaten many meals together and laughed a lot. We've even written a play together about feeling free. Also, he's my favorite dancing partner. One time we were dancing away fervently and I fell down and sprained my ankle and couldn't walk for six weeks. If I've been influenced by him, I'm only one of a hundred."

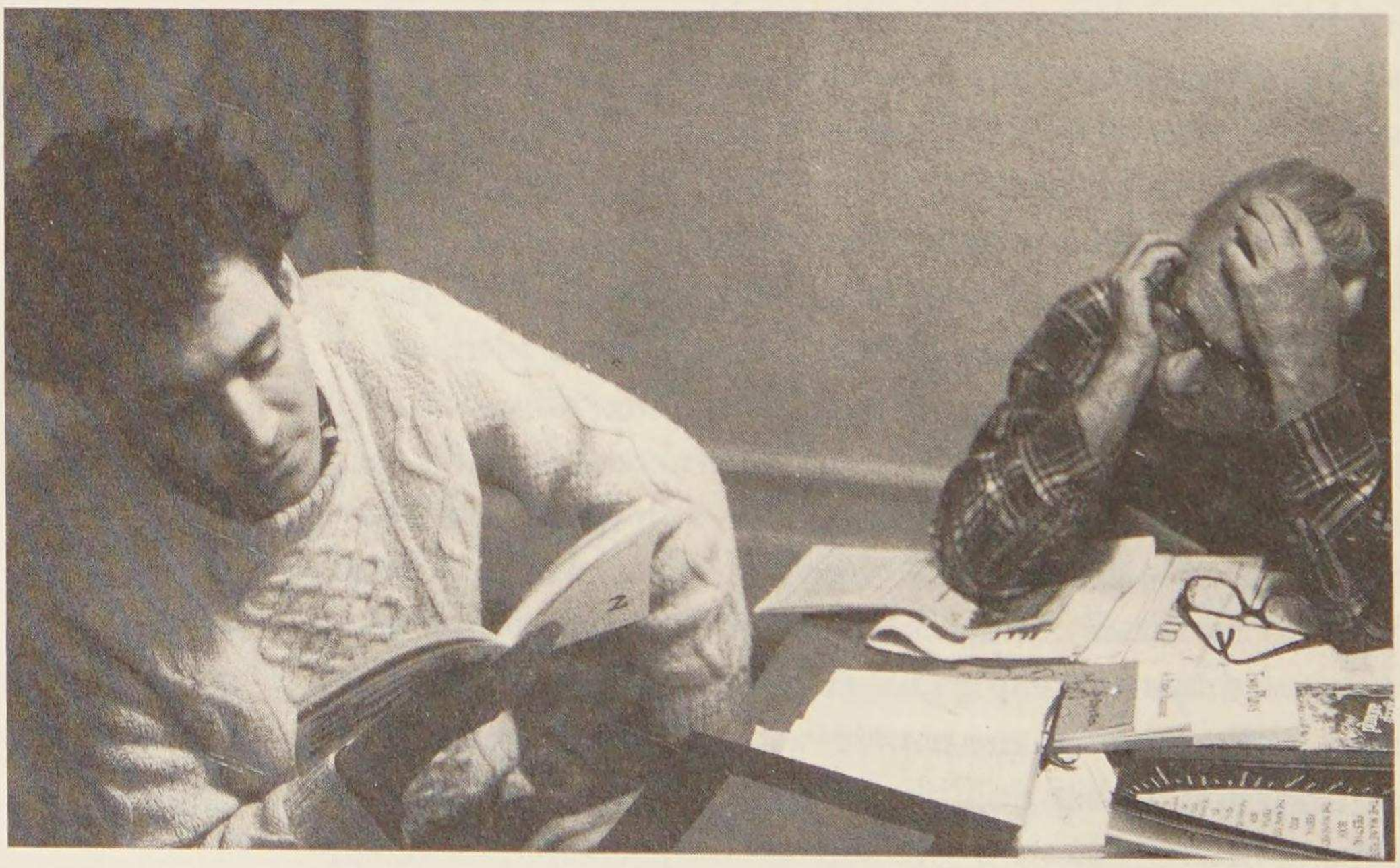
By five o'clock, when the pageant and parade honoring Porter starts off through downtown Belfast, the wind has subsided, although the temperature is still in the low thirties. A group of some fifty to seventy-five people has gathered, many clearly representing environmental and feminist interests that Porter has supported. The participants carry noisemakers and drums. Cardboard standards with green broccoli leaves stenciled on them wave in the sharp air (the broccoli leaves are a salute to Maine's green environment and a denunciation of the policies of George Bush, who has announced his dislike of broccoli). One woman is dramatically attired in a colorful headdress of stripes and bars and wears across her chest a papier-maché set of huge, naked breasts.

Leading the parade with his broccoli standard held high, Porter walks off briskly in the opposite direction of the planned route. "This way, Bern!" shout the parade organizers in vain, "You're going in the wrong direction!" Porter doesn't answer, but leads his laughing, protesting disciples on his own spontaneously improvised route. He guides us through alleys, backyards, and back streets down to the waterfront. Children and parents stare from windows, puzzled by the passing cluster of broccoli standards. Back up Main Street Porter leads the parade, with cars honking and children cheering, though they don't know what's going on. Parade members bang drums, blow whistles and kazoos, and sing. Finally,

the parade stops at First Church on Court Street, where the rest of the celebration will take place. Ascending the church steps, Porter addresses the crowd: "I'm going to count down from ten!" He does so like a physicist warning of the atomic clock timed for apocalypse. As he counts down to zero, cheers ring out led by Carlo Pittore: "Bern! Bern! Bern!" Then Porter recites the alphabet, accompanied by a chorus of gutteral consonants and poetic vowels from the audience. Finally, he announces triumphantly a long count up to eighty, ignoring the groans of comic protest from those stamping their feet in the cold who wish to gain sanctuary inside the church. However, everyone has been exhilarated by the parade, and the count is pushed along rapidly in an accelerating, syncopated pace and ends with wild applause.

Upstairs, in the meeting hall of the church's parish house, Carlo Pittore and Mark Melnicove have decorated the walls with the broccoli standards and Porter memorabilia. Pittore tells me of his long friendship with Porter, how Porter would stay with him during New York visits when Pittore was running the first art gallery in the East Village. These visits led to Pittore and Judd Tully putting on the 1978 retrospective of Porter's work at the Franklin Furnace gallery. Later, when Pittore left New York for Maine to

Porter and Mark Melnicove in 1980 (left),
photograph by *Republican Journal*, Belfast
and in 1991 at the 80th (right),
photograph by Peggy McKenna).



live and work as an artist, he stayed for five months at Porter's Institute in the spartan annex accommodations. With a grin, Pittore says, "During those months, I had only four meals with him. Two of the meals, I invited him and I cooked. Another occasion, he invited me out for oatmeal, and I paid for both of us. The last time, I walked in while he was eating a boiled onion, and he gave me half! As predictable as Bern is, he's always unpredictable; only his food habits are predictable. He's a great artist and a lousy cook!"

While waiting for Porter and Melnicove's program of performance poems, I talk to the poet Martin Steingesser, who is also a performer and storyteller. He tells me, "You can't avoid Bern's good spirit. His playfulness gets to the center of how play is essential for all creative work. This kind of playfulness is to creativity what lolling—the kind of sounds that babies make—is to speech. I feel that Bern's experiments are related to poetry just as the curious sounds of lolling are related to speech."

Kendall Merriam, the poet and short story writer, adds that he met Bern in Rockland, where Merriam's father worked in the post office. Bern, ever the active correspondent and scavenger, haunted the post office, and Merriam began to notice his omnipresence. "Then I heard him read and met him at the first Maine Poetry Festival," recounts Kendall. "Bern and Mark were doing their performance poems. As Bern chanted his magical repetitions, Mark was brushing him off carefully and decorously like a valet. Once Mark stripped and the little old ladies loved it. Bern has been a great influence in Belfast because he's stirred things up a lot."



Performance art, as I know from my own experiments in the field and from talks with Porter, has a special problem. While everyone enjoys poetry that entertains, what happens if the entertainment comes off merely as an effort to seduce the audience and reduce it to a simplistic common denominator, which is the effect of so many television shows? To their credit, Porter and Melnicove have developed techniques that, at their best, entertain, probe, and expose social problems. On this night of celebration, they start their performance with a blessing from Porter, "May it be well, may my father's place be well, may all be well." Melnicove claps his hands and echoes the chant as the rhythms gather momentum. Then Mark addresses the audience, "Tonight I brought all poems by Bern Porter" (often they perform Melnicove's work, too). They perform Porter's comic yet agonizing poem based on his three marriages, "Kinds of Love," with both men chanting and echoing the words. An experienced actor, Melnicove is particularly effective in his satirical miming, twisting and distorting his body to underscore the key terms, *crushing love* and *narcissistic love*. At the end, Porter's abrupt "So much for love" has a poignant, unresolved tone that indicates the impossibility of dismissing love.

Often Porter chants repetitively, as if from some magisterial catalog of American obsessions, while Melnicove adds his own contrapuntal comments or illustrates images with dramatic miming. In one poem, Porter asks the familiar psychological riddle, "How can I open up?" As Porter's persistent questioning proceeds, Melnicove looks frantically inside his sweater, admonishing himself, "Open up, man," then searches desperately around the room and into the audience. Gradually, the repetitive questioning and probing transform into an eerie examination of the word *packaging* and the hidden metaphor it suggests: technological specialization packages our lives with layers of concealment. We search frantically through the layers for our lost identities. At the end, Porter chants, "I am packaged, pray tell how can I open myself?," and Melnicove mimes the Kafkaesque problem of searching for an individual identity in a tyrannical bureaucracy by tearing at his clothes and exploring mocking facial masks.

Another strong performance poem "It's Coming Out of the Sky," based on Porter's experience with the Manhattan Project, reflects the constant danger of a nuclear apocalypse. Without being overly literal or didactic, the two performers show how people feel helpless because they have no control over the nuclear threat. The nuclear menace eliminates words and the possibility of communica-

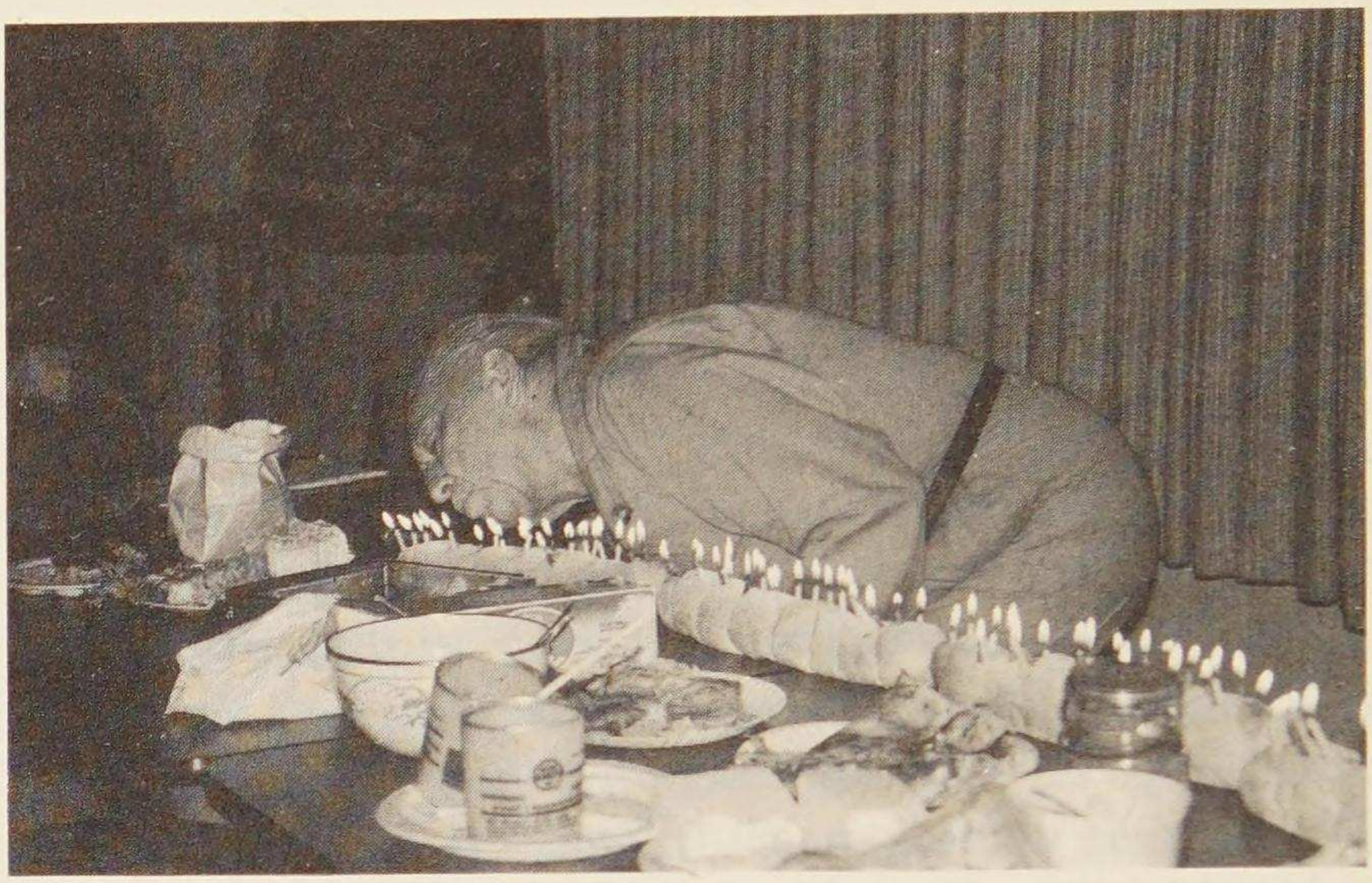
tion because it forces us to live in a new kind of threatening isolation. In effect, we are all "Waiting for Godot." "I'm in the corner of denial, the pit of denial," Porter cries, and Melnicove acts out the sense of being trapped. When the piece ends with Porter shrieking "I want to run!," Melnicove takes off running around the room and the audience, knowing that we live in the tragicomic time of Beckett and Dr. Strangelove, laughs uneasily.

Another well-received comic piece is "The Erotikon of Bern Porter," a vocabulary of sounds beginning with the letter *a* "that arouses Bern Porter." This pursuit of aural sensualism enables Porter and Melnicove to explore the possibilities of sound poetry and improvise a diapason of syllabic music. Frequently, the audience joins in, delighting in the linguistic fireworks. Here again, it is revealing how Melnicove's youth and physical virility compliment Porter's white-haired, defiant age and high-pitched, satirical voice. However, their teamwork does far more than contrast youth with age; it also illustrates the deeper truth that, in a splintered society where youth culture dominates, age is the missing part of youth. You cannot separate youth from age, Porter and Melnicove show; always the ghost of experience haunts and counsels youth. The voices of age and youth cannot be separated because they are part of the chain of being, and we isolate them at our peril.

Porter and Melnicove end with a poem called "Run." This time Mark runs faster and faster around the room, almost to the point of exhaustion, while Bern speaks of the pressures in contemporary life that force people into violent escape—the machines and bureaucratic mechanisms we have invented accelerate our existence until we lose touch with inner sources of tranquility. At the end of the program, amidst generous applause, Porter is crowned with a silver crown, and he and Melnicove repeat the blessing as an encore.

Then, summing up the communal tribute to Porter, a feast disguised as a potluck dinner appears from all corners, brought by participants. There are baked dishes, salads, cakes, cookies, and pies. Long loaves of French bread are lined up and decorated with eighty candles. Porter stands looking at them for a long time with an appreciative grin, then says, "They look so good, why don't we let them burn?"

"Let 'em Bern! Let 'em Bern!" Shouted by enthusiastic onlookers, the pun echoes through the hall. Slowly, gravely, Porter begins blowing out the candles one by one, and a small girl in a costume steps forward eagerly to help. Ceremoniously, Porter accepts her aid, and they alternate candles until the final birthday light goes



Dancing and blowing out candles on cake of bread at the 80th. Photographs by Diana Davies.

out amidst cheers.

Somehow communal food always brings out the best in people. It is a celebration of common interest and the joy that lies in creating shared rituals. Even though many of the people who celebrate with Bern live on the edge of poverty, they enjoy paying tribute to the man whose rebellious spirit unites them. They know that the best tribute to Porter, as in ancient tribal societies, is the gift of food that everyone shares and that sanctifies the words *feast* and *festival*. I look across the room and see Porter, momentarily alone, eating contentedly from a huge plate of food. For once, he is not fiddling with bags of sugar from restaurant sugar bowls. He is eating peacefully, happily, acknowledging the goodness of food.

After dinner comes a time of gifts and testimonials to Porter from his assembled artist and writer friends. Robert Saunders presents what he calls "A Bern Stick," a walking stick sharp and jagged on one end, honoring Porter's interest in the Abenaki Indians' closeness to nature. Saunders says, "Bern has given me a hell of a lot," and the enigmatic praise glows from the stick that he holds up and gives to Porter.

Erica Pfander questions the need for testimonials. "Serving as evidence, are they conducive to proof? He is here, he does shed light, is that not testimony? From my own knowledge, Bern Porter is poet, seeker, friend extraordinaire. I told him my despair and injustice. He replied: 'Well, my dear, the field is wide open.'"



As the testimonials continue, it is clear that Porter has been a central force in the feminist revolt against the mercenary and militaristic spirit of the 1970s and 1980s. Susan Appleton speaks simply her belief that "basically Bern Porter is a good man." Kala Ladenheim praises Porter's courtliness: "Bern Porter loves many ladies and most of these ladies love him because Bern Porter is a man of boundless sham. Every time I see Bern in a restaurant he is emptying the sugar bowl. My first major interaction with Bern was over a view of French pastries when he told me to get him one, too." A voice from the audience interrupts, "Did he pay?" After the laughter, she continues, "Bern is a man of very simple tastes and his handling of the sugar and catsup in restaurants testifies to that. Bern is someone who nourishes the austere. A lot of his art consists in his getting the sugar out of the sugar bowl. It's a really joyous thing to say I love Bern, too."

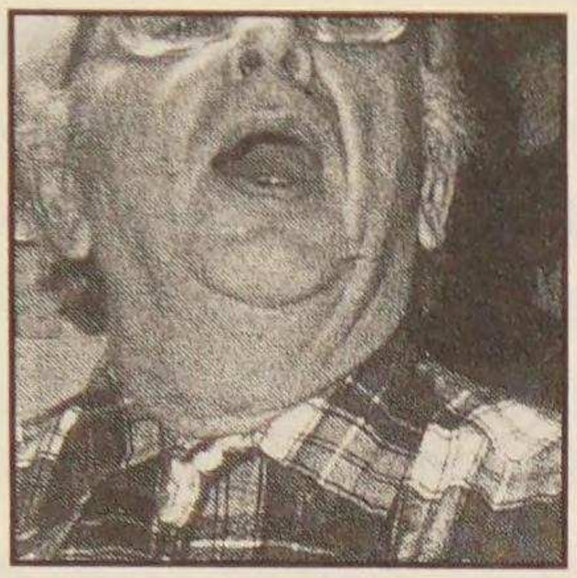
Taking out a trumpet, Don Stratton steps up to the podium: "I owe Bern a lot, so I'm going to play 'Happy Birthday' to you." He plays it beautifully off-key and throws Porter a rubber chicken. Wearing a green mask on his forehead, Carlo Pittore delivers his tribute: "I do believe that we are representative of hundreds and thousands who couldn't get up here to Belfast for this ceremony. More than ten years ago, Bern Porter told me that he was a fraud, and I've always assumed ever since then that Bern Porter and his art ephemera corporation is wholly fraudulent. As I look around I see this great family of imaginators, every one of us committed to causes and ideas so grand that we will assume even artificiality, if necessary, in the pursuit of probity."

Doris Thurston speaks of how she lived at Bern's Institute one summer under his strict rules: "There was no toilet. I couldn't use the lights." Then, using her training as an actress, she improvises a sound poem in tribute to Porter and kisses him. Reading a piece he has written about Porter's impatience when standing in line, Kendall Merriam states, "Bern's governing rule is simple, 'Do what you will.' Bern once told me that his mother could do potatoes ninety-two different ways—potatoes Wellington, potato liqueur, potatoes in biscuit, potatoes Kiev. . . ." He continues in a rising crescendo, amidst chuckles, to list the ninety-two potato recipes, by means of which he imagines Porter's mother endured her household confinement.

Among these moving tributes, I feel a need to speak about what Porter has achieved with his Founds. So I speak of my long acquaintance with Porter on both coasts and read about the Founds from the afterword of this book. The testimonials conclude with photographer Ed Holcomb, who shows his fine photographs of Porter and Henry Miller. Holcomb relates how he encountered Porter walking in downtown Belfast and asked him, "Are you Bern Porter? Immediately, he started talking about the war in the Gulf, and I knew he was a man interested and involved in everything, so I asked if I could photograph him." In addition to the photos of Miller and Porter, Holcomb projects photos of philosopher Alan Watts, artist Jean Varda, and poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti. "What these artists have in common," Holcomb continues, "is intensity of purpose, and Bern is not lacking in this special kind of intensity." *Intensity*—it is a fitting word with which to conclude the testimonials to Porter.

Appropriately, the evening ends with dancing, the way rituals often move into physical communion. We want to dance out of our bodies into eternal communion. Only then do we know that we are together and not isolated. Porter swings his women friends onto the floor and whirls them around gracefully to the taped music. Watching, I think of Yeats's famous lines, "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,/ How can we know the dancer from the dance?" I remember, too, at the end of Brecht's play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, a dance merges and unifies the leading characters as they fade into time and eternity. Porter is helping us to overcome our isolation as he dances with these laughing women. The end of a ceremony is not the end. Age does not die but merges into youth. A true ceremony ends as this one does, with dancing beginnings.

20 Afterword: The Founds Achievement



In the aftermath of the European wasteland created by World War II, it was inevitable that artists would choose materials out of the ruins to create new styles and artistic identities. "Confronting the bombed buildings, the concentration camps and the gulags," Porter says, "artists had the choice of saying nothing or transforming anything that came to hand into something new." Even during the war, artists had begun to notice the dramatic effect of found objects. In the early 1940s, during the Nazi occupation of Poland, when artistic activities were prohibited under penalty of death, the underground theater of Polish artist, director, and playwright Tadeusz Kantor presented in Krakow a classic symbolic drama, *The Return of Odysseus*. As the idea of a traditional set seemed impossible, Kantor staged the play in a room that had been partly destroyed in the bombing. Kantor asked his cast to fill the room with found objects, so they brought in grotesque fragments of war—including an old, decayed wooden board, a cartwheel smeared with mud, dust-covered

parcels, and pieces of a soldier's uniform. Kantor explained: "When the room was filled with objects, the text of the play lost its importance. What was important was constructing that environment, and the action of finding, choosing, and bringing those objects in. At the time we did not label those activities anti-art, nor did we use the term 'Readymade' to describe the objects."

Kantor and his actors were not yet familiar with the works of Marcel Duchamp, who had always been a strong influence on Porter. Duchamp began his Readymades in 1913 in his Paris studio, when he mounted a bicycle wheel on a kitchen stool simply as a pleasant object to contemplate. Octavio Paz wrote in his book about Duchamp:

> The readymade does not postulate a new value: it is a jibe at what we call valuable. It is criticism in action: a kick at the work of art ensconced on its pedestal of adjectives. The act of criticism unfolds in two stages. The first belongs to the realm of hygiene, intellectual cleanliness—the Readymade is a criticism of taste; the second is an attack on the work of art.

In this sense, Porter's Founds are also a cleansing of the United States's smoggy commercial atmosphere, a deep view of the anti-intellectual forces that move and shake the country. With regard to Found art, the strongest influences on Porter, besides Duchamp, were Kurt Schwitters's collages and Picasso's transformation of found objects into shocking, humorous expressions. In Vallauris in 1950, Picasso used old cake pans, a discarded stove plate, and a baby stroller to fashion a new statement of a traditional theme, "Woman with Baby Carriage." In 1951 he used a battered toy car to represent the head of a baboon with her child. Clearly, in the postwar world, identities were no longer fixed; they were susceptible to sudden change. Thus, *change*, *transformation*, and *chance* became distinctive words in the arts.

In Kurt Schwitters's "Merzbilder," as he called them—small, lyrical collages of discarded scraps such as train tickets, receipts, leaflets, matchbooks, pieces of clothing, whatever came to hand—Porter saw a way to transform throwaways into an epic, visual commentary on American life. As Arthur C. Danto wrote in *The State of the Art*, "Schwitters's first use of merz' was cut out of the printed word 'commerz,' an anglicized German expression that means 'commercial,' as in 'commercial bank.'" In the same way, Porter saw that the commercial elements of American society could be used aesthetically to show the vast transformations brought about

by the new technological age. He was seized by the familiar, dangerous ambition to create nothing less than an epic revealing all phases of American life from birth to death, a Whitmanesque consciousness asserting itself across the country in a new poetic, visual medium, Found art. He saw clearly that his contribution would be the use of Founds in book format. The key change after World War II, he felt, was not what was happening in art, but the trend toward books as an increasingly visual medium under the influence of international mass media. A book of Founds, he discovered, could include a special combination of visual and scientific techniques often combined with appropriate, brief poetic texts. These texts could sometimes be taken from found materials without alteration, or they could be altered as Schwitters had done.

The most important of Porter's early Founds books is *Wastemaker: 1926-1961*, published by Gerard Dombrowski at Abyss Publications in Somerville, Massachusetts, in 1972. This book had a curious history. The original manuscript of collaged Founds rested for eleven years in Porter's collection in the UCLA library before Dombrowski retrieved it for publication. By September 1990, the book was out of print.

Porter says he meant the title of the book to imply not only the careless person who makes waste, but one who "remakes waste, who finds waste that is both significant and beautiful." If Porter's intent, then, was to reveal and examine the mountains of waste in our affluent society, he was also one of the first artists trained in science to take a close look at a new kind of recycling, a process with aesthetic as well as practical functions. In his idiomatic shorthand, he speaks of finding "gems in waste or don't throw away until you have examined your throwaways." Pressed on this, he declares that a major problem in the United States is the ruthlessness of the waste-disposal industry. Each week we clean out our garbage in massive pickups and haul it off to dumps. Recycling efforts, although improving, are still meager. And while picking through garbage piles is for some a profitable hobby, most trash is trucked off and burned.

Porter's *Wastemaker*, then, stems from his idea that "nuggets of value in the waste are everywhere for the looking, if only the viewer can develop his or her wisdom of the questioning eye." In the questioning eye begins the thread of narrative that makes Porter's books of Founds distinctive. Narrative has always been a central element in painting, often deliberately spectacular in dramatic focus as in Michaelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes, Leonardo

da Vinci's *Last Supper*, or Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. In centralized Christian societies, the Bible, of course, provided narrative strategies for artists. In the twentieth century, the narrative was sublimated to subjective, increasingly abstract subject matter. Yet the tendency toward abstract subjectivity that peaked in the abstract expressionist movement in the 1950s did not eliminate narration completely. Rather, narration resurfaced in the private stories that each viewer imagined in the powerful, mysterious forms and bursts or drips of color. Porter, like Joseph Cornell, restores the narrative element of art in a new way.

The collages of Cornell and Porter, contemporaries who have been witness to the major wars and other changes of the twentieth century, reveal similarities of scale and interest. Cornell's sense of narration is largely a nostalgia for the romantic French past. His boxes are like theatrical frames in which to view his surrealistic presentation of the French symbolism that he fancied. In the symbolist manner, Cornell suggests to the viewer disparate images or events relating to the ballet dancers, writers, singers, theatrical stars, or exotic places that are often the subject of his boxes. While viewers can enjoy the boxes for their mastery of design and color, deeper appreciation rests on imagining Cornell's implied dramatic narrative.

Porter's narrative in *Wastemaker*is both more American in its technological content and more universal than Cornell's, if Cornell's has sometimes the more aesthetic appeal of beautifully arranged, romantic fragments. Porter's narrative is blunt, straightforward. Playing with banalities, it tells the story of a wasteful society in all of its odd variations. Cutout words wander in a labryinth of symbolic forms or geometrical shapes. His waste stories derive from a multitude of discards: mileage tables, house rules, indexes, tables of contents, boogie-woogie sheet music, used-car ads, a page about figures of speech from an old manual, a blank school seating chart on which Porter has superimposed a picture of an ornate easy chair. Frequently, the narrative element in *Wastemaker* forces the viewer to look at conventional meanings and imagine them transformed by a wasteful society demanding constant change to satisfy its economic greed. For example, in one Found the word *sale* is featured vertically, like a neon sign, with large letters in white on a solid black background:



Looking at the promising white letters against a background that might be a signboard, carton, or coffin makes one think of all of the impossible yet hopeful situations one experiences at cut-rate sales.

Another Found asks simply in prominent letters:

ARE YOU
A BORE?

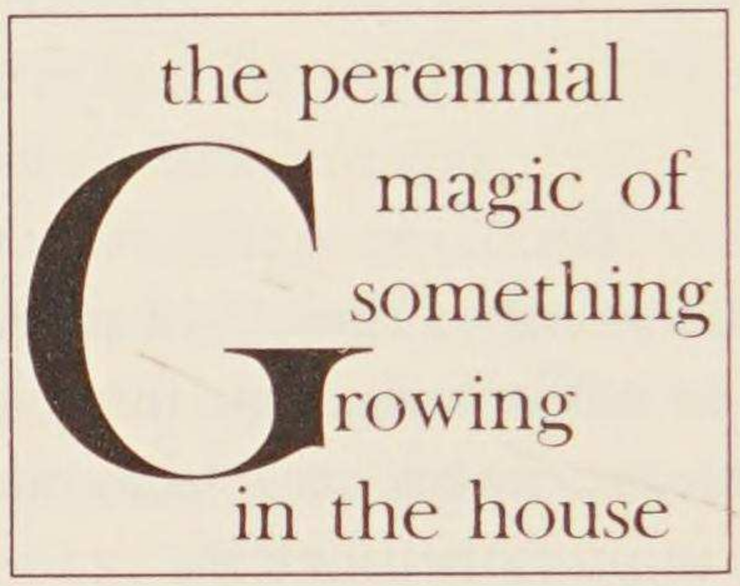
Displayed in a large, half-enclosed space that offers the possibility of escape, the challenge floats the question of boredom as both a private and public issue. Instinctively, the viewer creates a personal narrative of his or her own boring experiences.

In his introduction to *Wastemaker*, the critic Richard Kostelanetz writes of Porter:

> Bern Porter is a 20th century Walt Whitman, a sometime printer and publisher, a long-time servant of both U.S. letters and his own very American muse. *Wastemaker* represents an assiduous discovery of America writ large in the smallest "found" details, as Porter collects native waste into artlessly designed pages, not only reflecting his own love and bitterness, but exposing cultural insights and perspectives that are indigenously true. As haste makes waste, so patient composition, by contrast, makes art, or even insight, in garbage. *Wastemaker* ranks with Michel Butor's *Mobile* (1962) as print's encompassing pastiche of modern America, but Porter's is rougher in texture and kinkier in composition, more trivial in detail and more relentless in theme, as well as more intimate and unfinished in typically American ways.

While Kostelanetz's estimate of Porter's achievement is per-

ceptive, he seems to underestimate Porter's aesthetic abilities when he speaks of "artlessly designed pages." Anyone who knows Porter's artistic eye and his careful, critical approach to designing a Found understands that his work is far from casual. His knowledge of design and publishing often lends a typographical beauty to his collages that must be seen to be appreciated. One page in *Wastemaker* reads:



Again, the latent narrative element is strong, as in a Kenneth Patchen picture-poem (the book is dedicated to Patchen and Bob Brown, the expatriate poet and writer who coined the word *readies* for his "telegraphic" prose-poems). The large, swirling G becomes symbolic of the house in which the magical growing takes place; one wants to live in such a house. The typography and arrangement of the words creates a formal structure that suggests a growing sense of wonder.

The deliberate crudeness that characterizes some of the other *Wastemaker* Founds ("When you're dealing with waste," Porter says, "how do you avoid using crude material, so you have to find the artistic value in crude") is balanced by Porter's technical skill and his arrangement of a narrative sequence that covers many different events and moods. If, like Joseph Cornell, Porter is sometimes accused of dealing with trivial materials and commonplace forms, no one can deny the individuality of his work. His vision may seem eccentric, doggedly limited at first, but after all, this kind of eccentricity has always been at the center of American art.

(2)

In Porter's second major book of Founds, *The Manhattan Telephone Book 1972*, published by Abyss Publications in 1975, one collage depicts the ghostly outline of Porter's figure at ease in a chair, legs crossed. In the upper left-hand corner, PORTER is inscribed in large capital letters. Balancing the name in small, handwritten letters in the lower right hand corner, is his lifelong credo: "no phone." Here is another interesting difference between Porter

and Cornell. Cornell talked often and at length on the phone to friends. Porter has never owned one. Despite the length of our friendship, I have never talked to him by phone. He does not believe in the telephone as an instrument of communication or economic convenience. Is this book of Founds merely, then, another satirical attack against one of the dominating technologies of our time? No, because the book is full of the wonder of numbers. Reflecting his physicist's training in mathematics, Porter admires and laughs at—even if he refuses to be seduced by—the lavish, intricate display of numbers that is the essence of the telephone system. He

Porter performing at New York's Ear Inn, 1979. Photograph by Sarah Wells.



delights in the system's complex connections. Particularly, he has fun with long distance and emergency numbers. Yet he always dramatizes the spiritual vacancy that is inherent in the phone system. In collage after collage, as in one that contains only the shorthand letter "u" (for you and me?) in a bare corner crowded by a web of grids and lines, he reveals the lonely anonymity and increasing defensiveness of a system that advertises open, friendly communication. One Found shows only a huge fingerprint with the handwritten word, *unlisted.* While the phone today promises even the intimacy of sexual communication, all it can really convey is separate, isolated voices. Thus, Porter's telephone explorations comprise both a rare celebration of the power of numbers to merge in dazzling designs and an awareness of the technological danger to a society that organizes numbers purely for profit in the name of a communications system that is primarily abstract and inhuman. *The Manhattan Phone Book* portrays a city strangling with urban growth symbolized by a tragicomic beehive of phone images, a technology invisibly expanding without limits, creating its own rules and regulations. When the book was published, the district attorney of Manhattan, on behalf of the Manhattan Telephone Company, filed for infringement of name and use of materials without permission. An attorney for Abyss Publications replied that the volume was part of a limited edition from a small, nonprofit press. The case was dropped.

Meanwhile, perceiving the far-reaching possibilities of his Founds volumes, Porter began work on a series of seven books. "Did you pick the traditional good-luck number deliberately?" I once asked Porter. "No," he answered, "it's also a number I took because of my admiration for Henry Miller. You'll remember Miller was obsessed by the number seven." Only four of the projected seven volumes of Founds have been published so far: *Found Poems*, published by Dick Higgins, Something Else Press, 1972; and *The Book of Do's*, *Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book*, and *Sweet End*, all published by Mark Melnicove at Dog Ear Press and Tilbury House, Publishers, in 1982, 1984, and 1989. The projected fifth, sixth, and seventh volumes are *The Book of Light*, *The Devil's Wishbone* (a collaboration with Todd Duveen), and *The Porter Book*.

Found Poems (Porter wanted the title to be just *Founds*) is Porter's breakthrough volume. Although it does not have the sequential unity of the later books, which were thematic, it embraces much of Porter's best work. In addition, the credits show Porter's burgeoning international reputation—listing experimental maga-

zines and anthologies published in Amsterdam, Berlin, Bombay, Buenos Aires, Edinburgh, London, Mexico City, Milan, New York, and Toronto.

Higgins was interested in stressing the poetic aspect of Porter's Founds, so this book reveals the importance of Porter's work in the field of concrete poetry. Concrete poetry in the twentieth century refers to architectural, sculptural poems in which a variety of visual elements contributes the dominant meaning. A key figure in concrete poetry, Porter has expanded its subject matter and techniques. In the following, for example, he presents a visual novel in miniature poetic form:

UNCONTROLLED

FEAR
WORRY
ANGER
HATRED
JEALOUSY
ENVY
LUST
GREED
SELF-PITY
SEX-MISUSE
SELFISHNESS

SELF-INDULGENCE
MEDIUMSHIP
HYPNOTISM
VANITY
EGOTISM
INTOLERANCE
INACTIVITY
LOSS OF INTEREST IN LIFE
HABIT

This can be read in different ways, as a romantic clash between two "uncontrolled" people with the characteristics listed in the two descending columns, or as one uncontrolled person indulging comically in a brooding monologue, exploring bitterly the personality traits that he or she detests.

Another structure is shaped this way:

The Yes Yes

Yes

and the If Yes

If

Here the affirming "Yes" (*Yes* is also the key word in Molly Bloom's monologue at the end of Joyce's *Ulysses*) is conditioned by the lower case "if," as if Porter is showing us that we live in a modern physical world shaped by Werner Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle.

Other Porter Founds play with traditional word-game

forms, as when Porter uses the word *FINIS* vertically to show how endings always turn into new beginnings, new comic connections:

F for Finny
I for Inny
N for Nicklebrandy
I for Issac painter's wife
S for Sugar candy

One of Porter's best known concrete poems in this volume, a piece that has been widely reprinted and anthologized, looks at the singular life of Abraham Lincoln with a new focus:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

FAILED IN BUSINESS AT AGE	31
DEFEATED FOR LEGISLATURE AT	32
FAILED BUSINESS AGAIN AT	34
SWEETHEART DIED AT	35
HAD NERVOUS BREAKDOWN AT	36
DEFEATED IN ELECTION AT	38
DEFEATED FOR CONGRESS AT	43
DEFEATED FOR CONGRESS AT	46
DEFEATED FOR CONGRESS AT	48
DEFEATED FOR SENATE AT	55
DEFEATED FOR VICE–PRES. AT	56
DEFEATED FOR SENATE AT	58
ELECTED PRESIDENT AT	60

Porter's intent here is to concentrate on an incredible range of failures followed by one astonishing success. This Found, then, is not only a satire of easy American success stories, but a history that hints at the dark roots of such stories.

Beautifully printed in large format on good paper, *Found Poems* is a pleasure to thumb through, its pages characteristically unnumbered. Many of the Founds are wordless, stemming from Porter's insights into technology's visual appeal. They explore, for example, the abstract patterns of electrical circuits, mathematical formulas, musical notations, and the inevitable statistical charts. However, the central voice in *Found Poems* combines verbal play and visual structure with endless experimental delight. With two simple pronouns Porter explores the gender gap:



Is this minimalism at its peak, a contemporary addendum to the ending of Goethe's *Faust*, "The eternal feminine draws us on," with man limping behind in his pursuit of the feminine spectre? Porter's "her" and "he" clash in a different tone than in the familiar opposition of "she" and "he." The words' vertical placement emphasizes a more mysterious, possessive encounter.

In its playful experimentation, *Found Poems* also investigates melodramatic forms (". . . The bloated cadaver of poor Mrs. Hayes" set in a garden frame of twining leaves and flowers) and cartoon-strip adventures ("PHEWWW!" placed in a large black rectangle as in a Roy Lichtenstein painting). We see and hear in this book how words struggle to emerge from the physical structures that condition and confine them. Even the simplest phrase, Porter shows, must penetrate invisible as well as visible barriers to achieve forms with a wide range of meaning. An example of this is Porter's sardonic self-portrait:



(3)

When Dick Higgins's Something Else Press ceased publishing, Porter was fortunate to find Mark Melnicove, who had started Dog Ear Press. (Dog Ear merged with Robert L. Johnston's Harpswell Press in 1990 to become Tilbury House, Publishers.) In 1982, Melnicove published Porter's epic volume of Founds, *The Book of Do's*, a vision of a puritanical society that commands, *do this, do that, do something*. In my copy, he wrote:

> James: I do not go over the two million pebbles of a beach looking for a bright one to take home, but through four million printed words looking for a potent few to cut out about the American action theme of do, do, do. If there are a few thousand such by the

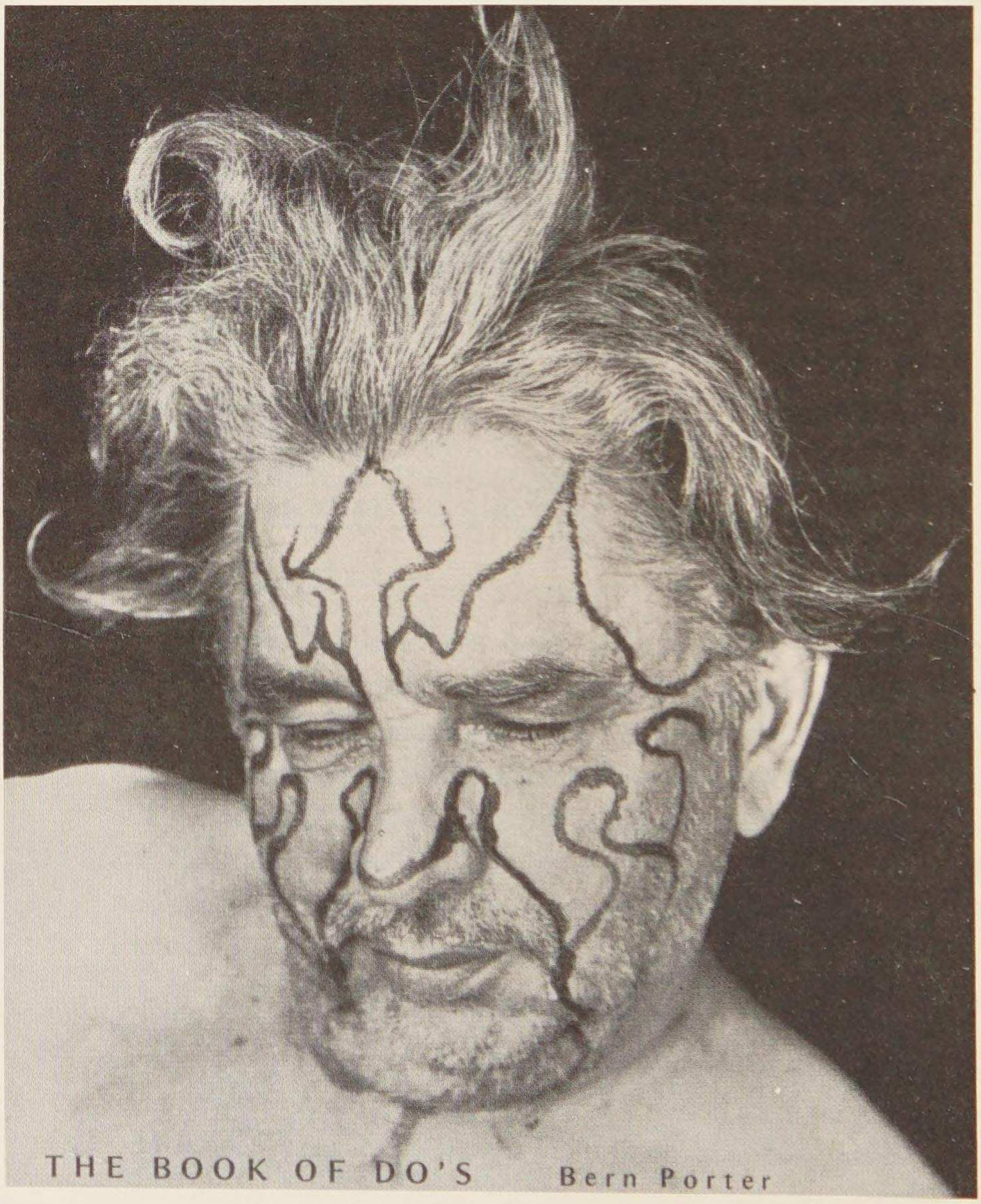
time six years have passed, I refind from the lot four hundred, for this is the second volume of a seven volume series which basically intends to twist American reality back onto itself for the purpose of re-knowing what's been happening all the while.

Acknowledgment spots at the left assure maybe some of what follows is valid and acceptable.

Bern at the Institute of Advanced Thinking in Belfast, June 28-29-30, 1986.

The "acknowledgment spots" credit little magazines and mail art publications in the United States, Canada, England, the Philippines, Japan, Egypt, South America, France, and Italy, since the mail art movement has become one of the principal outlets for

Cover of *The Book of Do's*.



Porter's Founds. "Mail art suits me because it consists mostly of Founds prepared in different ways," Porter says. "I make it a point to respond to worldwide requests within twenty-four hours. Ever since I was three I've been mailing things as part of pen pal clubs. Maybe as a kid I couldn't write, but I could cut and paste. Artists who have no money, no studio, can qualify to be a mail artist. What it is, really, is an exciting form of communication between artists. During the last five years, especially, it's been growing into an international medium. I've been on the verge of trying to mount an international mail art exhibit here in Belfast. You can imagine there must be a very serious discussion going on in the post office as to what constitutes mail. Once you take part in mail art, it becomes like a disease. All of this stuff keeps pouring in, although only some mail artists are excellent. To sit here in Belfast and share with artists worldwide adds a lot of meaning to my life."

On its cover, *The Book of Do's* features a photograph of Porter, his head of thick, white hair flowing wild and wavy, a heavy stubble on his face, eyes almost closed, looking down in a stern, meditative stare, and his face, like a tribal warrior's, painted with black, snakelike lines. "That's my Abenaki self," says Porter wryly. "I really do feel strongly about my Abenaki kinship. I'm not a Rotarian or any other kind of joiner, I'm an Abenaki, people of the dawn. They were the native people in eastern Maine, some one hundred and twenty-five miles north of Belfast on the coast ten to twenty thousand years ago, and maybe I'm part-Indian by descent. The Indians are broken into tribes now, but I like to think of myself as a member of the earlier, larger group of native people. I am listed as a member of the Abenaki tribe or rather family, because I subscribe to the Indians' ancient beliefs about natural relationships."

As Porter thinks about the white settlers' attempt to destroy the Abenaki culture in Maine, tears come into his eyes and he apologizes, "I can't talk about these things, so maybe I am a little insane." He shows me his poem called "Prayer," published at the Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico in a special native peoples issue of *A Journey of Contemporary Literature*: "I was thinking of the many lakes in Maine," Porter says, "and the way the Abenaki honored the spirit of those lakes."

Oh lake, plain of waters
surround me
flow through me
press upon me

wash my spirit

Oh lake, sheet of waters
cover me
smother my limbs
submerge all of me
bathe my body

Oh lake, lake of waters
water of the deep vale
give my people strength
moisten our eyes
refresh our children

Oh lake of water
sustain us
through to the
end of the years

"You can see my Abenaki desires, my Maine background, are behind the Founds," says Porter. "I don't just want to be ironic, satirical, in an age of irony. Underneath the Founds and through their juxtaposition, I want there to be a sense of the traditional and the modern values for which I've always fought."

Struggling to understand Porter's obsessive involvement with his Founds, I ask him, "It's impossible to list the amazing variety of images in your *Book of Do's* and the other books. Is there anything you find incompatible with your collage-making?"

Porter: "No, by now artists have demonstrated that all materials, all substances, organic or inorganic, can be employed to the advantage of an individual's creative statement."

Schevill: "You're eighty now, and you've been though an incredibly tough series of experiences. Now you're finishing a seven-volume series of Founds that reflects your experiences objectively against a deep sense of American history. What do you see as the relationship between history and your collage techniques?"

Porter: "History and collage are one and the same thing. History is a series of brief and prolonged events and situations knit by whatever means into causes and effects. Collage merely portrays the results."

Schevill: "Is that why you often portray found objects unaltered?

Porter: "Yes. As I have said, the pristine original is often more articulate, more expressive, more meaningful than anything one could invent."

Schevill: "Since the *Book of Do's* is a completely different kind of book, how would you advise someone to read it, if one can speak of reading it?"

Porter: "The pages aren't numbered and, of course, there's no index. So I hope the reader or viewer will just plunge in. It's a new kind of book in which you can go forward or backward or just consider a few pages at a time. In this way, I hope people will participate in the book, become part of its flow of images and experiences. If one page seems trite and another seems puzzling, that's the way things are experienced. The whole intent of this book, as in Joyce, is to create an epic web of travels and sights that will have some ultimate, unified meaning."

Schevill: "And this ultimate meaning is up to the reader. Certainly, the meaning is not just 'Do's' or 'Don'ts.'"

Porter: "Of course. In a way, it's a version of the American absurd. Children understand it and are my fans. If the Founds are American absurdities, it's because they come from everyday sources. You can't call any of them absurd unless you call our entire culture absurd, which maybe it is. In a way, I'm taking the best work of advertising artists and carrying it to the next level. All I try to do is feel the Founds visually and sensuously; I don't rationalize them. We're all victims in this country of those signals I call Do's and Don'ts. A major characteristic of life in the United States is that we don't accept continuity. We don't live in chronological time anymore. We get locked into daily routines and try desperately to jump out of them, so these signals keep recurring."

The opening seven Founds (to borrow Porter's interest in the number seven) in *The Book of Do's* illustrate the variety and technique of his collages. The first is merely a statement of the ambiguous theme, DO'S, in bold black lettering with a ripped, partly illegible statement at the top that suggests the unconscious, mysterious linguistic commands that control Do's. Surely this is the signal, announcing the book's theme. Yet isn't it also a warning that while we act because we're told to act, we're not really aware of why or what we do? We all remember our parent's advice, "Do what you're supposed to do." Even if we think we don't do what we're "supposed" to, we usually do.

The second Found is the first of many enigmatic, humorous puzzles that Porter arranges in his collages. It is based on the frus-

310

tration generated by the endless questionnaires that we are forced to fill out in our lives. It reads curtly:

Are you

?

Answer these six questions and see.

1. Are you
2. Are you

3. If you

4. Are you

5. Are you

6. Do you

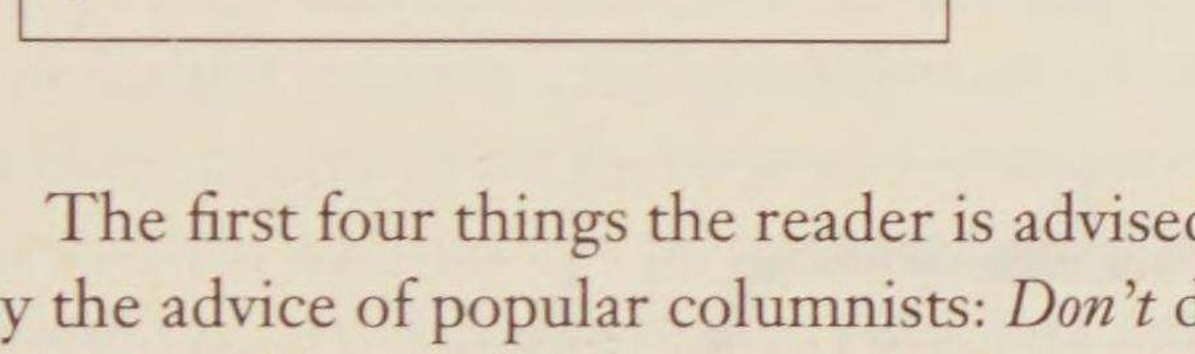
At first this seems merely fun. Then a deeper meaning becomes apparent: The floating question mark that constitutes the second line may stand for the uncertainty we all feel about our identity. The third and fourth lines are spoken as if by some modern, bureaucratic Sphinx who invites you to a mysterious, ritual questioning. The following six questions resemble the coded, minimal dialogue of Samuel Beckett, but even the question marks have disappeared. The toneless repetition, "Are you," is the contemporary interrogator's incessant question that has no answer. With his sense of design, Porter spaces the questions irregularly, as if to show that such questions resound without meaning in time and space. The final "Do you" reverberates in a world that does not even hear the question anymore because everyone is obediently doing.

The third Found is even more strident in its instructions:



The first four things the reader is advised to do seem to parody the advice of popular columnists: *Don't* do anything that I wouldn't do. *Write* in to get your coupons or claim your prize. *Talk* to escape from your neuroses. *Invest* to strengthen America. Then, there is Porter's distinctive use of space: The fifth thing the reader should do is a puzzling *Send*, dropped to the bottom of the page. Below *Send* is a series of lines, as if for the listing of your name and the money you may send to get an invisible reward.

The fourth Found, in large, black, boldface type, consists only of the following statement against a white background:

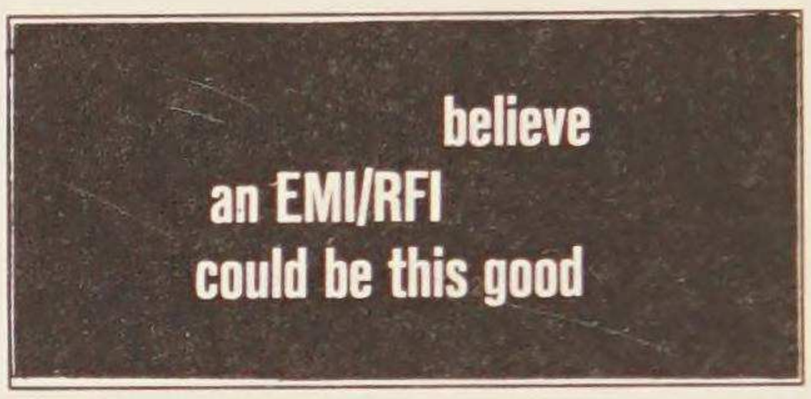


I look up "diuretic overdry." It's not in my Oxford dictionary, which doesn't believe in the latest jargon. So maybe this is another of those stray phrases from medical advertisements that

312

Porter likes to retrieve from post office wastepaper baskets. Excessive elimination of urine puts you into "overdry." Is this Do connected with the frequent coffee breaks that make our speedy society piss too frequently? Or is it just another example of a pharmaceutical ad aimed at increasing profits? Perhaps it's all of those things; Porter wants to show language is drying up, stripped of meaning by layers of irony.

The fifth Found, consisting of large white letters in a black rectangular box, is an abstract pun:



Is this Porter's Joycean satirical pun about a technology of waste? Does our bent for shorthand technology (an EMI/RFI, whatever that may be) lead to good/God? And the rectangular, coffinlike box on the page, is that Porter's warning? Is Porter trying to show how superficial advertisments can cover a variety of ambiguous, threatening suggestions?

The sixth Found asks me to:



Boxes follow alongside a list of items ranging alphabetically from Antiques, Aquarium, Baby Buggy, and Baby Clothes, to Tele-

vision Sets, Toaster, Trunk, and Tuxedo. All of these desirable household items are enclosed in a mysterious hanging scale. A scale of justice? More symbolism. What does the reader do now? We Americans love things and spend more than any other country in the world. Just do what you're supposed to do, Porter suggests—check the boxes for anything you desire. Don't worry if some hidden force, some hidden scale, is weighing the value of the things you check. If some unknown force is judging you, watch out. Maybe you're caught in the kind of eternal watching and waiting that Beckett's tramps endure in *Waiting for Godot*.

Found seven is a similar kind of all-American statement. In handwritten scroll, it advises the reader to "go see," and there's a long list of some seventy male names—Curtis and Bruce Underwood, John Passwater, Harold and Greg Jones, Bob Troidl, Denny Minney, etc. Does Porter intend viewers simply to enjoy the sound of these names? How could one "go see" them, even if one wanted? Are the names friendly or threatening? We Americans like to base our fantasies on real personalities. Still, instead of fantasizing about celebrities, maybe we would find joy in ordinary people such as these if we would participate in creating a community.

Considering these seven Founds as representative, is there anything really new in Porter's collages? Like an archaeologist, he gives us insight into our civilization by analyzing society's garbage. But is there poetry or art in his work? For me, the answer is yes. Porter uses his abilities as a poet and artist to transform the power of commercial art. Employing his talents as a writer and editor, he invents new text/art relationships that redefine the concept of a book. His work compares in importance to that of Jenny Holzer, whose electronic message signs explore the realm between verbal and visual invention. Porter shows the grandiose extravagance, the unique gestures and commands, the Do's of our society that we obey, whether we wish to or not.

(4)

Porter's third satirical volume, *Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book*, was published in 1984, also by Dog Ear Press. The Joycean influence is evident in the title. The protagonist of *Finnegans Wake* is H. C. E. —or Here Comes Everybody in Joyce's code—Earwicker, a universal dreamer of night voyages. Designed and photographed by Mark Melnicove, the cover shows a group of elderly women and men sitting on a bench in a park, contemplating life. As in a cartoon, a balloon floats above one of the women with

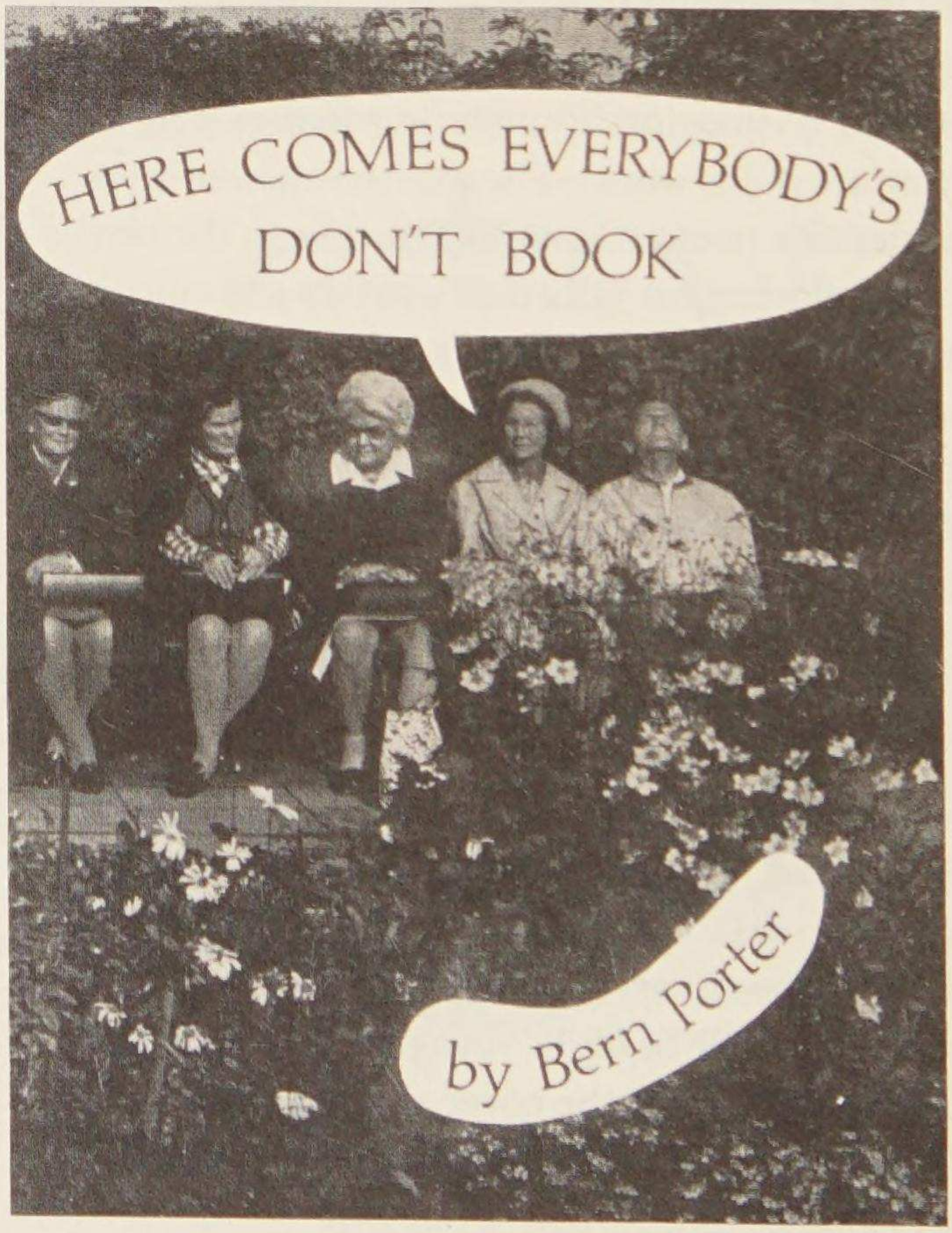
the title inserted in the balloon, as if the woman were announcing gravely, "Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book."

We say firmly to a child, "Don't," but what do we say to adults? In this book, Porter is out to prove that "Don't" is more than a religious commandment in our Judeo-Christian society. It covers not just the puritanical restrictions deep in our unconscious minds, but a wide range of other prohibitions as well. In June 1986, Porter wrote the following inscription in my copy of the *Don't Book:*

> The critics say it's cornball obvious to do a Don't after having done a Do. But I feel the American culture is so shot with confusion, inconsistency, untrust, disloyalty, violence and fraud that it is difficult to know when to do and when to don't. Others say I'm running the found cut-out deal into the ground; also stealing other people's stuff. Personally I'm still looking for what I'm looking for.

What is Porter looking for? A look at the first several Founds in the *Don't Book* may yield some answers. The book begins with a large horizontal cutout in boldface type:

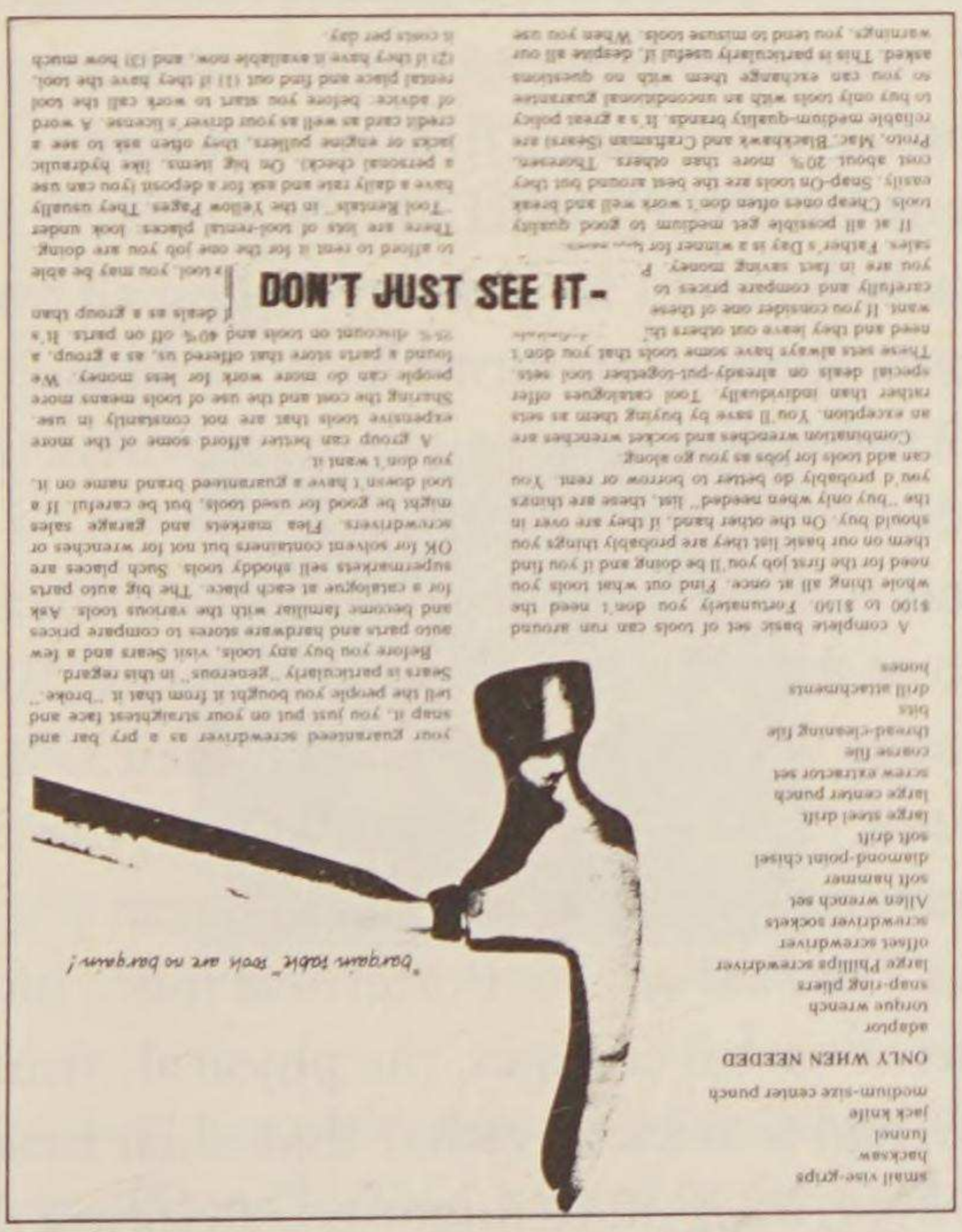
Cover of *Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book.*





This surrealistic injunction is pasted over a dark background of street signs turned on their sides. If you feel compelled to read the signs, you can turn the book around and read "Grand Ave" and "Great . . . ami Blvd" with arrows pointing off the page. Is it "Miami Blvd" with the M and i blocked out to signify the breakdown of urban structures? Thus, perhaps, Porter is suggesting Don't blame potatoes (symbolizing the agricultural dream that still haunts this country) for urban decline. Blame our obsession with cars and streets and highways. However one reads this puzzling Found, it has a stark, compelling visual power.

The second Found is mostly upside down with this command in the upper center of the page:



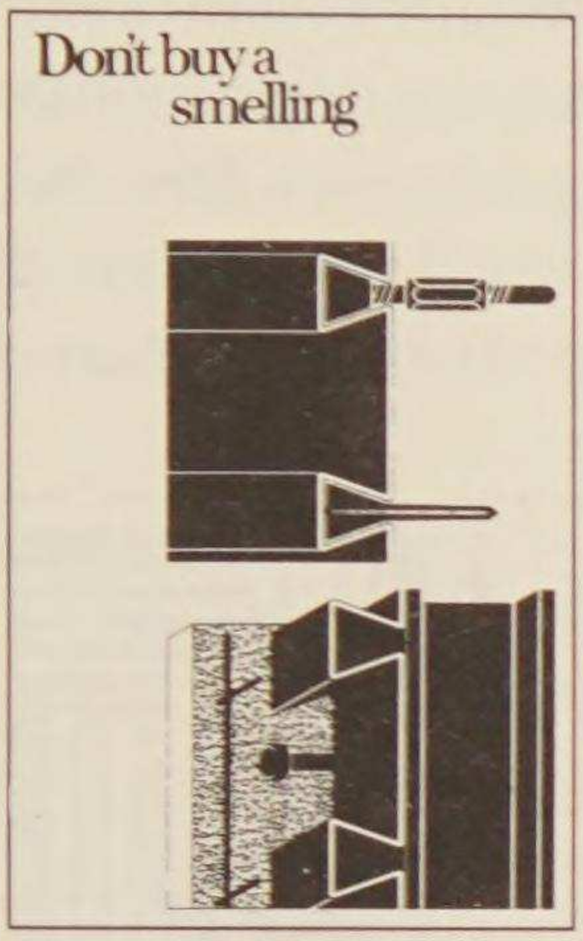
Of course, I must see it and read it, too, so I turn the page upside down. I see a typical catalog page advertising a "Tool Set." It lists devices such as "small vise-grips, hacksaw, funnel jack knife, medium-size center punch, etc." There is also a lot of do-it-yourself advice, aimed at the self-reliant American male: "A complete basic set of tools can cost around $100 to $150. Fortunately, you don't need the whole thing at once. Find out what tools you need for the first job you'll be doing, and if you find them on our basic list they are probably things you should buy. . . ." That does it, I think to myself. This is one tool set I don't have to buy! Wait a minute, though. Further on are some intriguing bits of information: "The big auto parts supermarkets sell shoddy tools. Such places are ok for solvent containers, but not for wrenches or screwdrivers. Flea markets and garage sales might be good for used tools, but be careful. If a tool doesn't have a guaranteed brand name on it, you don't want it." Porter has done it! He's lured me into the upside-down "Don't" aspect of this catalog lingo. Look, he says, there's a marvelous, upside-down image of a hammer with an impossible shaft inserted into the head and another cautionary inscription, "'bargain table' tools are no bargain." So I'm forced to read this Found like a supermarket sleuth. We Americans are supposed to be toolmakers but we also believe that tools and machines are built to be replaced frequently so that we can keep production up and the economy going at full throttle. Is Porter turning me into a critic of capitalist economics?

On to the third Don't. This Found is composed mostly of blank lines as if the page was taken from an empty notebook. Below the blank lines at the bottom of the page, floating in a large block of white space, are the words DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE. I'm beginning to laugh a little, and I feel like scribbling all over the page. How many tiresome application forms have we all had to fill out in which we are ordered not to write in the space where unknown authorities will decide our fate?

The fourth Found is an exciting visual explosion. Slanted in small type at the left top of the page is the admonishment, "Don't wait 'till," and then, in huge white letters turned on their side against a black background, "NOW!" Turned this way, the NOW! appears as a lovely abstract construction or even a Mayan glyph. It is becoming clear that in *The Book of Do's* Porter was more interested in the arrangement of verbal collages, the physical, visual power of words, phrases, and sentences, rather than their meaningful sound. In the *Don't Book*, he is more intent on exploring the way

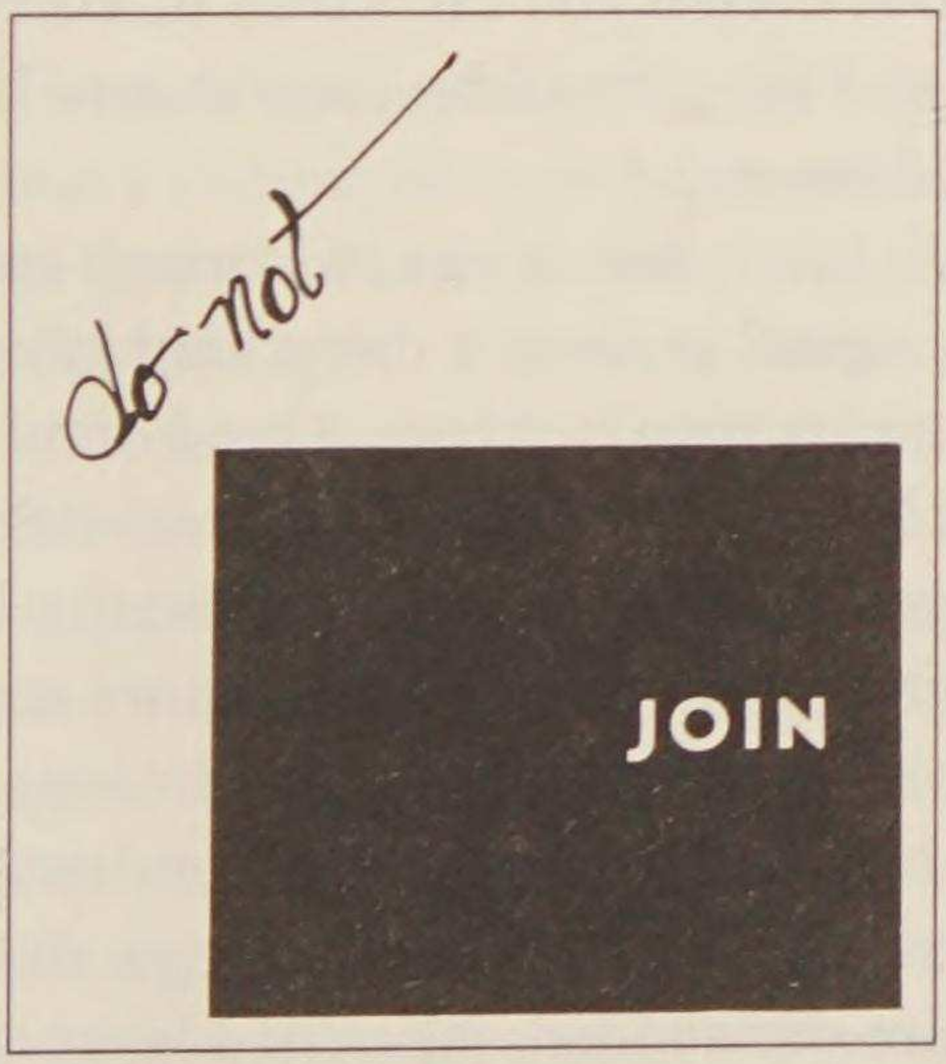
the language of Don'ts is affected by our visual fantasies about possessions, the commercialism in which we participate and which controls us. The result is a series of bold collages that reveal complex dramatic conflicts.

The fifth Found cautions us again in witty Joycean terms:



The words float above two black-and-white cutouts showing well-designed machines intended for military or industrial purposes. But what do they have to do with smelling? Is it possible that such attractive machines can pour out the kind of pollution that haunts our cities and covers our forests with acid rain? Sadly, the answer is yes.

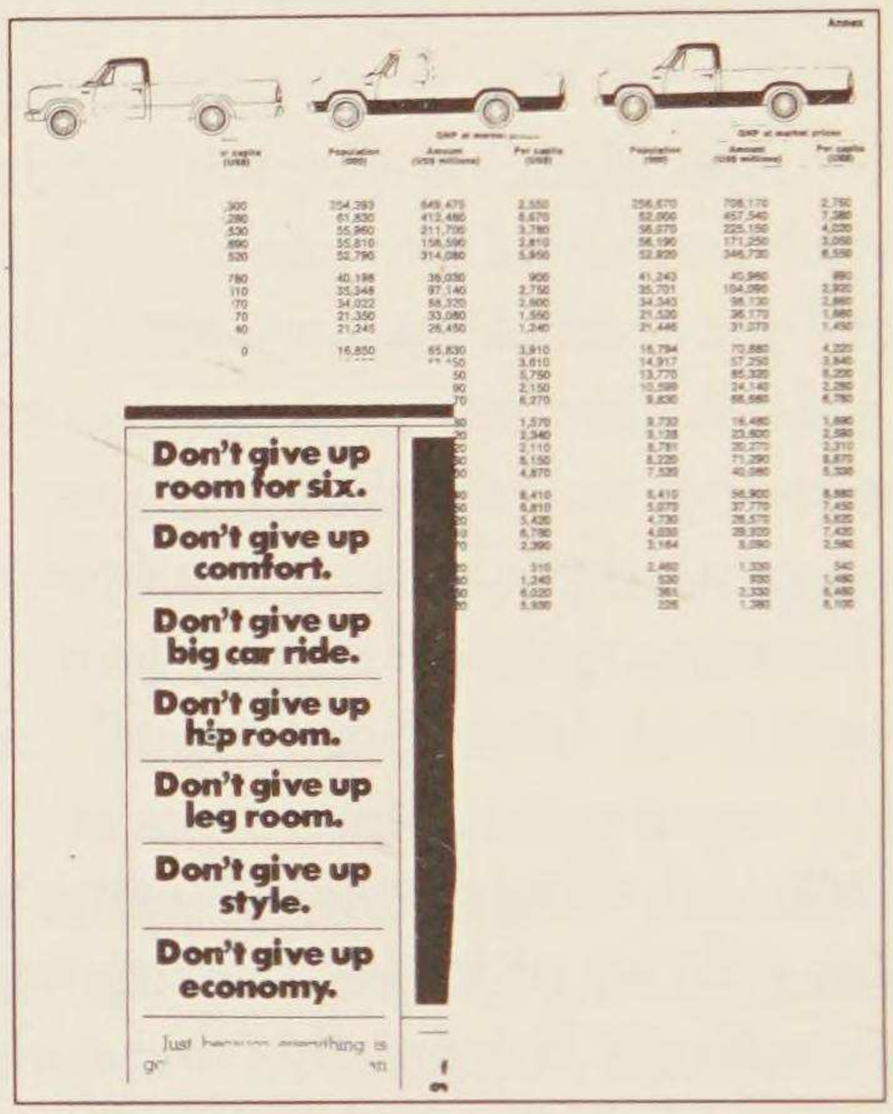
The sixth Found is pure Porter, pure stubborn New England independence. "DO NOT" is written in his clear calligraphy, slanted on the left side of the page at the top. Below is a large black square with the white printed letters JOIN inserted in the center of



the square on the right side. The message is clear but subtler than it appears. If we "JOIN," we are in the square, and we had better be

prepared to cope with a powerful corporate system that controls the visual appeal of advertising. If we "DO NOT," we remain with our own handwriting, our own abilities or limitations.

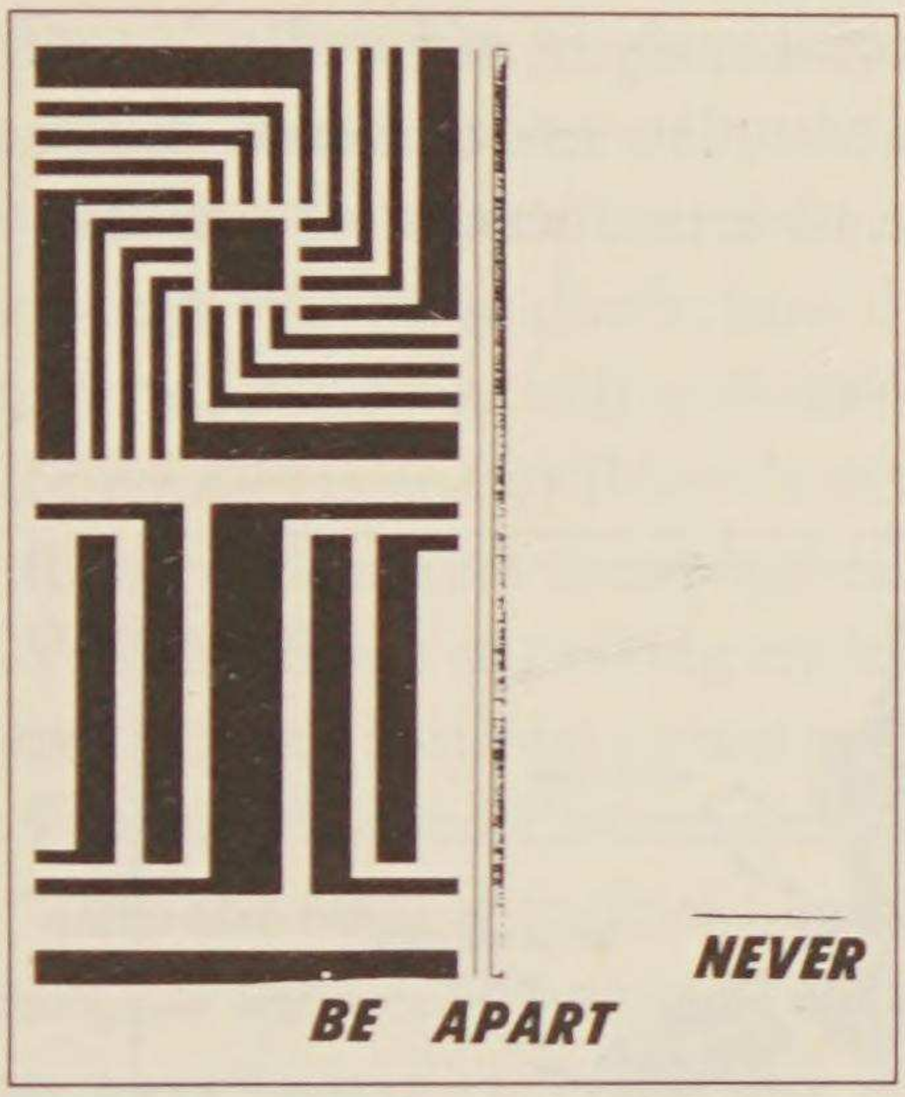
In the seventh Found, Porter takes on one of his favorite subjects: the automobile economy. On the left side of the page, a cutout from a car catalog counsels us imperiously:



As Porter does often, he cuts this clipping in an interesting visual way, leaving a long curving black line at the right beside the commands. He then pastes the cutout over another statistical Found with rows of impressive figures, implying that if you "Don't give up economy," you'll be bolstered by the profits of the automobile industry. You're part of the code even if you can't read it, Porter's Founds repeatedly show us, and his surrealistic depiction of the code is often both witty and dramatic.

Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book is one of Porter's most attractive readings, vivid and original in design, disturbing in verbal message, and often more complex than it seems. One Found has only three words, "Be Apart Never." "Be Apart" appears directly below a striking cutout of two mazelike patterns. "Never" is by itself in white space on the right side of the page. Again we see the forceful paradox that Porter often uses to portray the isolation of the individual within the web of technology, a web that develops with feverish energy, unaware of where it is going. From dizzying angles, in collages that capture our sudden, disjointed leaps of vision and action, Porter shows us the enigma of our pursuits. In this sense, his persistence in collecting and shaping sequences of Founds is extremely important. If Whitman and Melville were the first

great writers to reveal how the art of cataloging can be used to create American narrative, Porter is one of the first postmoderns concerned with revealing how science and technology can combine with art and poetry to show us a world so loaded with new information that it is almost impossible to catalog it completely. Moreover, the narrative offers no linear story of the social images—trite, lovely, comic, tragic, painful, grotesque—that control our fantasies. We are left with a terrifying question: do these disassociated fantasies really control our lives? Porter deliberately gives no answer. With his customary ironic tone, he leaves it up to us.



(5)

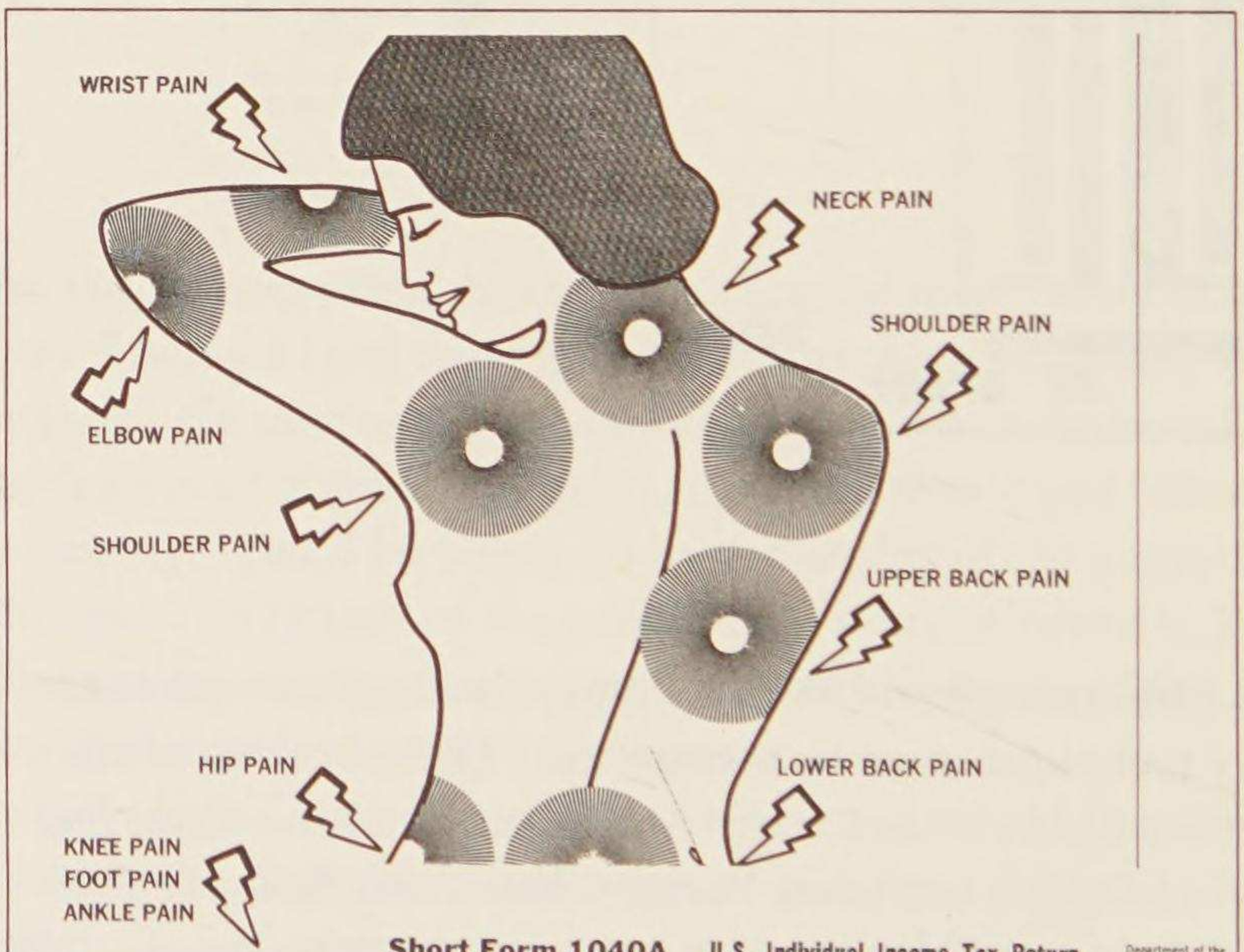
Two final examples of Porter's typically American exhaustive investigatory technique must be mentioned. These are two of the most impressive books from the series of seven Founds—*Sweet End* and *The Book of Light*. For years Porter called *Sweet End*, *The Book of Death*. "It represents," he says, "at least six to eight years of work. It takes four to six years just to collect the material and pile it up in boxes. Look at those damn Founds filling up my refrigerator. This is one reasaon I have difficulty finding somebody to come live with me. Imagine collecting this stuff! You can't just start out tomorrow morning at ten o'clock."

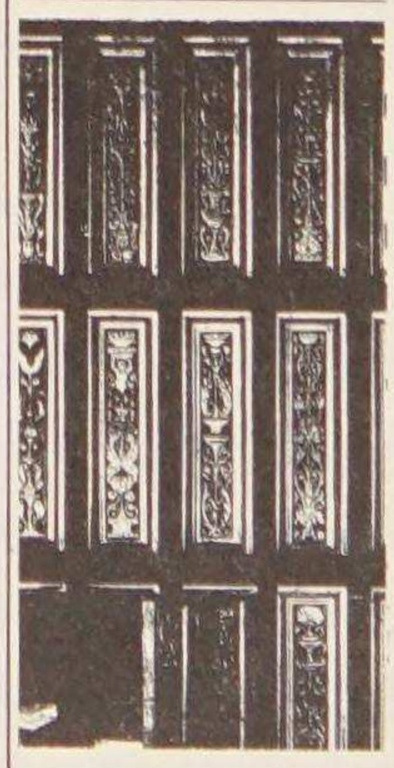
Among the Found materials in *Sweet End* are a vast variety of obituary notices from foreign as well as American newspapers and magazines; weapons advertisements in different languages; Founds from classical writers; a cutout of Ronald Reagan in which his appealing grin repeats in grotesque geometrical distortions; unusual

landscapes with surrealistic contrasts of light and darkness; impersonal war images transformed into personal death images; medical and technical charts concerning death taken mostly from discarded mail; rejection slips from magazines saying such things as "I'm afraid that we weren't able to find any portion that was readily acceptable"; even a note to Porter from a relative who doesn't like his way of life and tells him abruptly, "You are not welcome in my home or cottage."

Although there are many studies of the ways in which we struggle to ignore and eliminate death in our society (Forest Lawn in Los Angeles, a cemetery run as a recreational park, is a famous example), there is no poetic, visual study of our society's complex attitudes about death that is as complete as *Sweet End*. Some pages are direct and forceful, like the advertisement from a military maga-

Found from *Sweet End*, The Dog
Ear Press, 1989.





Short Form 1040A **U.S. Individual Income Tax Return** Department of the Internal Revenue S

Please print or type

Name (If joint return, give first names and initials of both) | Last name | COUNTY OF RESIDENCE | Your

Present home address (Number and street, including apartment number, or rural route) | Spo

City, town or post office, State and ZIP code | Occupation: Yours ► / Spouse's ►

Filing Status—check only one:

1 ☐ Single
2 ☐ Married filing joint return (even if only one had income)
3 ☐ Married filing separately. If spouse is also filing, give spouse's social security number in designated space above and enter full name here ►
4 ☐ Unmarried Head of Household
5 ☐ Widow(er) with dependent child (Year spouse died ► 19)

Exemptions Regular / 65 or over / E

6a Yourself ☐ ☐
b Spouse ☐ ☐
c First names of your dependent children you
d Number of other dependents (from line
7 Total exemptions claimed

8 **Presidential Election Campaign Fund.**—Check ☐ if you wish to designate $1 of your taxes for this check ☐ if spouse wishes to designate $1. **Note:** *This will not increase your tax or reduce your refund.*

Attach Copy B of Forms W-2 and Check or Money Order here

9	Wages, salaries, tips, and other employee compensation (Attach Forms W-2. If unavailable, attach explanation.)	9
10a	Dividends (See instructions on page 3.) $ ..... 10b Less exclusion $ ..... Balance ►	10c
11	Interest income	11
12	Total (add lines 9, 10c, and 11) **(Adjusted Gross Income)**	12

- **If you want IRS to figure your tax, skip the rest of this page and see instructions on page 3.**
- **If line 12 is under $10,000 find tax in Tables 1–12 and enter or line 17. Skip lines 13 through 16**

13	If line 12 is $10,000 or more, enter 15% of line 12 but not more than $2,000 ($1,000 if line 3 checked)	13
14	Subtract line 13 from line 12	14
15	Multiply total number of exemptions claimed on line 7 by $750	15
16	Taxable income (subtract line 15 from line 14)	16

zine promoting the M16A1 rifle. This altered Found stresses the rifle's international success by featuring the complacent slogan, "Combat Proven." Thus, death is advertised as blandly as any successful commercial product: "With more than three and a half million in the field today, the M16A1 is the most accepted modern military rifle in the world." Death is disguised as victory and patriotic triumph.

Another page in the book is composed of the impersonal bureaucratic correspondence of the Internal Revenue Service, its endless numbers and statistics pasted at different angles. How are such Founds concerned with death, literal viewers might ask? Porter replies, "Death is invisible, impersonal, so the perils of extreme bureaucracy are certainly part of it. I felt the need in this sequence to show not just the direct, literal facts of death, but the strands of circumstances that cause death, how death stems from family isolation and antagonisms as well as from social conflicts."

Sweet End is one of Porter's most subtle and daring books. It ranges from nightmarish metaphysical images, such as one taken from a William Blake engraving entitled *Night the Third—Narcissa* that shows women battling a giant snake, to a cutout article by Maine Senator William Cohen with an epigraph from Dante's *Inferno:* "Into the eternal darkness, into fire, into ice." Writing about nuclear winter, Cohen quotes Einstein: "Unleashed power of the atom has changed everything in the world except our power of thinking." Porter sets this article against a black-and-white background that suggests fire and ice, worlds of flaring light and darkness, oblivion, death.

Admiring *Sweet End,* I tell Porter: "In a way, it's too bad that you've restricted yourself to books and limited library distribution. If framed and exhibited in galleries and museums, wouldn't some of these Founds receive the public attention that they deserve?" Porter replies: "You're right. It's not bookstore stuff. It's museum stuff. I've carried it further than the surrealists to a reflection of international as well as American reality today. Still, the book is a natural, experimental form for me today. And I can get more image/text into these sequences in books than I could in a gallery or a museum."

(6)

The *Book of Light* is a natural antithesis to *Sweet End.* The word *light* appears in each of the book's Founds. Much of this material investigates the paradox of using impersonal mail art as a way

to discover the *light* of artistic communication. One page, for example, shows the torn elements of a map colored green, blue, and brown and pasted on the back of an envelope decorated with scattered dots as if to suggest an international code that is beyond the domain of national censorship. This envelope is attached to the front of another envelope bearing a Canadian postmark. Porter blacked out the top portion of the address to highlight the next word, "LIGHT," illuminated just above the superimposed envelope, as if "LIGHT" were the dawning sun.

Sometimes in this book, as if to show the relationship between Found art and mail art, Porter uses poems by Maine poets such as Mark Melnicove and Martin Steingesser. These are pasted over mail art requests for contributions with the word *light* in the poems underlined, suggesting that intricate communications can travel either by air mail or at the speed of light.

Another striking Found reveals a brown square of Braille writing set on a diagonal, over which is printed in red, MAIL ART FOR THE BLIND and in black stamped letters below, MINUS LIGHT! The Braille contains the name and address of Mario 'Artist' Lara in San Diego, so it becomes a tribute to this particular mail artist as well as Porter's commentary on the blind person's ability to transform light. I suggested to Porter that parts of *The Book of Light* would benefit by being printed in color, and he answered wryly, "My Founds are like Patchen's poem-paintings in this regard. It's almost impossible to get a publisher to put up the costs to print such a book in color. So I've had to resort to cheaper black-and-white methods of reproduction, as has the whole mail art movement. It's a restriction, of course, but in mail art it doesn't prevent a lot of significant work emerging. And who knows, maybe one day, with the rapidly changing technology of printing, I'll get a chance to print my Founds in color, the way I would like to do. Certainly *The Book of Light* should be printed in color to get the contrasting effects that I intend on many pages."

In *The Book of Light*, Porter plays the role of an entranced observer. He sees *light* emerging from a paradoxical world that functions according to Niels Bohr's famous Principle of Complementarity. The theory holds that reality does not exist until it is perceived. Consequently, perceptions of reality are often paradoxical and contradictory. Our perception of reality depends on our choices and the ways in which we observe things. Because of his religious New England upbringing and belief in Einstein's unified field theory, which seeks to resolve the duality of natural laws and is

therefore opposed toBohr's principle, Porter cannot envisage a world without unity. His entire *Book of Light* is a search for this unity in a world shattered by a succession of ever-more-destructive wars.

Einstein never gave up trying to establish a unified field theory, despite Bohr's success in showing that unity was impossible because of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. In the same way, Porter in *The Book of Light* never gives up as he moves through a series of conflicting Founds to a unified vision of *light* that celebrates Einstein's search. Working on this book in his seventies, Porter was clearly in sympathy with the attitude Einstein expressed to his friend Hans Muhsam in 1942, as reported in Ronald H. Clark's biography of the physicist: "I am an old man mainly known as a crank who doesn't wear socks. But I am working at a more fantastic rate than ever, and I still hope to solve my pet problem of the unified physical field. I feel as if I were flying in an airplane high in the skies without quite knowing how I will ever reach the ground." Porter's perception of light is much like Einstein's wry self-description. The mind must be both eccentric and steady in its visionary search for ultimate reality. If one earns a reputation as a "crank," as Einstein did and Porter has, it is because the perceptive spirit in science and the arts cannot endure the confining boundaries of social customs. The creative individual is obsessed by the imagination, and the obsession often governs both his spirit and the way society regards his behavior. Porter's *Book of Light* is a highly personal record, witty and elegiac in tone, of his obsessive search for all the social metaphors of light, as well as a scientific observer's view of the way in which technology transforms the word's meaning. In short, its 380 unnumbered pages show how light enters our senses, first as a small word, then as a ruling concept, and finally as a wondrous, unified, mythical reality.

(7)

In the short history of American art—which has derived largely from European styles—certain artists have created their own distinctive, influential idioms by the unusual ways in which they shape images or structures out of American objects. In this search for a native style, these artists have followed William Carlos Williams's famous principle about poetry: "No ideas but in things!" By using homely, anonymous things such as posters, newspapers, kitchenware, and smoking equipment, William Harnett and John Frederick Peto in the nineteenth century satisfied a desire for illusionism—*trompe l'oeil*, or "fool-the-eye" reality. With the dawning

of the age of machines, American artists were excited by the plenitude and artistic potential of mechanical devices. No other society had ever produced such a variety of industrial products.

Porter's reaction to the changing industrial scene resembles that of Charles Ives, as writer and publisher Dick Higgins has claimed: "Checking through my notebooks, I find that I once described Bern to the German poet Hansjorg as having only one parallel—the composer Charles Ives. Like Bern, Ives comes from New England, the very heart of American cussedness and independence. Like Bern, Ives worked with values that led him to extraordinary techniques which confused his contemporaries. Like Bern, Ives saw beyond the cliches of his contemporaries, that there was no real opposition between art and science."

Both Ives and Porter are revolutionary in their use of collage. Ives quotes fragments from hymns, folk songs, and band marches, shaping these into a musical portrait of the American experience. Porter tries to create unusual visual rhythms by combining Found images witrh epic, mythical themes. Ives's rhythm is more leisurely, reflecting his memories of an agricultural time, whereas Porter dwells on the more frenzied, conflicting rhythms of modern times, an age dominated by cars, television, and computers.

If Porter's Founds occupy a distinctive place in the search for new forms and unique images that occurred after World War II, they cannot be separated from other artists' search for an American style. The abstract expressionist movement, through such artists as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and David Smith, produced huge, dripping, thrusting, floating images of American energy and color. On the West Coast, painters, printmakers, and sculptors such as Richard Diebenkorn, Hassel Smith, Nathan Oliveira, Frank Lobdell, Robert Arneson, and Manuel Neri combined abstract and representational images in new ways. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as Europe struggled to recover from the war, American art began to influence Europe for the first time. New York was celebrated as the capitol of international art. From the late 1950s on, a new concern for objects developed, as exemplified by four prominent artists whose influence spread far beyond New York: Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, and Jasper Johns. These artists, influenced by the beliefs and energy of the abstract expressionists, did not seek to restore naturalism through literal representation. They sensed the power of a new technology that was about to thrust man to the moon; yet, at the same time, technology had created a culture in

which Andy Warhol could say that soon every American would be famous for fifteen minutes. More importantly, they popularized the scientific revelation that objects change according to the viewer's perception; therefore, the true identity of every object was questionable. Gertrude Stein's "a rose is a rose is a rose" was no longer a humorous statement about identity, but a new way to look at and hear poetic repetition. Why could not art also focus on the same kind of humorous American repetitions, adding ironic poetic reflections? "I think a picture is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world," said Rauschenberg. So he began to search city streets and beaches for interesting objects, incorporating larger and larger street elements in his paintings: clothes, mirrors, light bulbs, even a woman's silk umbrella. Johns created the same kind of controversy by focusing on the American flag. Oldenburg used popular "software" and "hardware" images such as baseball bats, scissors, a drain pipe, and beachballs to furnish reflections of computer and military language. Warhol trained his camera on the Empire State Building for hours at a time, mesmerizing the viewer with the building's slow, almost imperceptible changes as the day's light shifted. David Smith showed representations of the American iron-and-steel industry could be transformed into ritualistic, totemic images of strength and power.

Porter's Founds occupy a special, if less well-known, role in this investigation of the reality of American objects. From his California years he took the power of abstract energy, colors, and forms. During the quiescent 1970s and early 1980s, when many American artists abandoned abstract expressionism for new kinds of representational imagery, he merged abstraction with popular symbols. As a physicist, he was better able than many artists to incorporate the shapes and images of science into his work. His abilities as a poet, editor, and publisher, as well as his limited financial resources, turned his attention to the transformation of the book at a time of growing awareness of illiteracy and vast changes in book publishing and sales.

Porter does not create what the critic Arthur C. Danto calls "curatorial art"—huge-scale wall art for the blockbuster museum exhibits that characterize the mercenary spirit of our times. More accurately, Porter is a kind of book aesthetician. Unlike the "coffee table" books of our television age, Porter's work does not rely solely on visual appeal. The sound and shape of language are also important in his work. Like other influential innovations, Porter's collages reflect both his own time and his prophetic sense of the future.

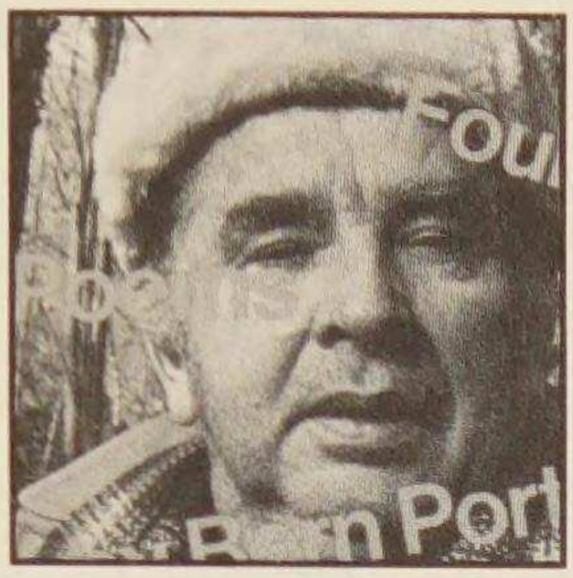
If we take his prophesies too literally and do not hear their sarcastic tone, that is our fault. An unusual artist is a special kind of mirror, cutting and sparkling across time past, present, and future, with vision and endurance. His metaphors merit long contemplation.

Porter's productive life, spanning most of the twentieth century's terrifying and hopeful changes, speaks finally in a tone of optimism. We are what we achieve, and Porter's achievements through his many traumas cannot be denied. His Founds reveal the wonder and terror of scientific research in a commercial society as well as the yearning for freedom that is essential in a time of greed. The self-willed "Dr." Bernard Porter, once the successful scientist incarcerated for madness, dances on wearing the masks of poet, artist, and publisher, alone in his Institute of Advanced Thinking, reaching out to touch the world.

Found from *The Book of Do's*,
The Dog Ear Press, 1982.

Listen to this page.

Selected Bibliography



Books By Porter

1. *Doldrums: A Study in Surrealism*, A.I. Press, Newark, New Jersey, 1941.
2. *Water Fight*, first edition, A.I. Press, Newark, New Jersey, 1941; second editions, L.A. Press, Pine Hill Printery, South Dakota, 1941, and L.A. Press, Washington, 1941.
3. *Art Techniques*, Gillick Press, Berkeley, California, 1947.
4. *Drawings: 1955-56*, Bern Porter, Berkeley, California, 1957.
5. *Physics for Tomorrow*, Rockcliff Printers, Burnie, Tasmania, 1959.
6. *Scandinavian Summer: A Psycho-Visual Recollection*, Bern Porter, Madison, Maine, 1961 (in Colby College Library, Special Collections).
7. *Aphasia: A Psycho-Visual Satire*, Bern Porter, Madison, Maine,1961 (copies in UCLA library collection and Bowdoin College Special Collections).
8. *What Henry Miller Said and Why It Is Important*, with introduction by John G. Moore, Marathon Press, Pasadena, California, 1964. 2nd Edition Philadelphia, Walton Press, 197?.
9. *Art Productions: 1928-1965*, Marathon Press, Pasadena, California, 1965.
10. *468B :Thy Future*, Huntsville, Alabama, 1966 (in UCLA library collection and Colby College Library, Special Collections).
11. *Dieresis*, Bern Porter, Rockland, Maine, 1969.
12. *I've Left*, first edition, Marathon Press, Pasadena, California, 1963; second edition, Something Else Press, Millerton, New York, 1971. Introduction by Dick Higgins.
13. *Knox County Maine, A Regional Report, 1969 Summary*, published by the Knox County Regional Planning Commission, 1969.
14. *The Manhattan Telephone Book*, Abyss Publications, Somerville, Massachusetts, 1972. Dylux edition, 1975.

—OUR HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL SCIENCE FEATURE—

"WATER FIGHT"

NOW BEAUTIFULLY PRINTED IN BOOK FORM

Each Copy Autographed by "The Editor"
AND
The Author, BERN PORTER.

Copies Available in Leather Slip-Cover—ONLY $1.00.
Bound in Fine Linen Bond—ONLY 15 Cents.
POSTAGE INCLUDED!

WHY NOT ENRICH YOUR COLLECTION WITH THIS FINE VIVID BIT OF GENUINE CREATIVE WRITING?

The L. A. Press
Publishers

BOX 6138, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Order from the Author at 36 Ingraham Place, Newark, N. J.

CURRENCY OR STAMPS.

Advertisement for Water Fight, 1941.

15. *Wastemaker: 1926-1961*, Abyss Publications, Somerville, Massachusetts, 1972. Introduction by Richard Kostelanetz.
16. *Found Poems*, Something Else Press, Millerton, New York, 1972.
17. *Where to go, what to do when in New York, week of June 17, 1972*, Bern Porter, 1974.
18. *Selected Founds*, Croissant and Company, Athens, Ohio, 1975.
19. *Run-On*, Bern Porter, Belfast, Maine, 1975.
20. *Gee-Whizzels*, Maine Coast Printers, Rockland, Maine, 1977.
21. *American Strange*, special edition of *Spanner* (#14), London, England, 1978.
22. *Isla Vista*, Isla Vista, Cal., Turkey Press, 1981.
23. *The Book of Do's*, The Dog Ear Press/Tilbury House, Publishers, Gardiner, Maine, 1982.
24. *Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book*, The Dog Ear Press/Tilbury House, Publishers, Gardiner, Maine, 1984.
25. *My My Dear Me*, Xexoxial Editions, Madison, Wisconsin, 1985.
26. *The Last Acts of Saint Fuck You*, Xerox Sutra, Madison, Wisconsin, 1985.
27. *Horizontal Hold*, Bern Porter and Todd Transformer, Clarksville, Tenn.: A.P.S.U., 1985.
28. *Sweet End*, The Dog Ear Press/Tilbury House, Publishers, Gardiner, Maine, 1989.
29. *Neverends*, Runaway Spoon Press, Port Charlotte, Florida,1988.
30. *The Book of Light*, unpublished manuscript in possession of Bern Porter, 1990.
31. *Vocrescends*, a collaboration with Malok, Runaway Spoon Press, Port Charlotte, Florida, 1990.
32. *CRCNCL*, Xexoxial Editions, Madison, Wisconsin, 1991.
33. *Numbers*, with introductory notes by Erika Pfander, Runaway Spoon Press, Port Charlotte, Florida, 1991.
34. *Untitled*, special edition of *Xerolage* (#16), Xexoxial Editions, Madison, Wisconsin, 1991.
35. *Sounds That Arouse Me*, Tilbury House, Publishers, Gardiner, Maine, 1992.

Bibliographies By Porter

1. *Henry Miller: A Chronology and Bibliography*, The Waverly Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1945.
2. *H. L. Mencken, A Bibliography*, first edition, Geddes Press, California, 1957; second edition, A. Swallow, Denver, 1958; third edition, Walton Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,1971.
3. *The First Publications of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, first edition, Alan Swallow, Denver, Colorado, 1960; second edition, Bern Porter, Walton Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1971.
4. *Wernher von Braun*, unpublished, Huntsville, Alabama, 1965 (in UCLA library collection).

Posters and Limited Edition Prints By Porter

1. *The Last Acts of Saint Fuckyou*, Broadside, on white glossy paper, October, 1977.
2. *American Strange*, Harry Reese, Turkey Press, Isla Vista, California, 1983.
3. *The Last Acts of Saint Fuckyou*, White window shade screen-printed with red ink and mounted to maple panel. Edition of 20, Volatile, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1990.
4. *89 Offenses*, Lithograph and etching with chine collé (Kitakata rice paper on Rives BFK). Edition of 25, Volatile, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1991.
5. *untitled*, Six color screen print on Rives BFK white paper. Edition of 20, Volatile and Mark Patsfall Graphics, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1992.
6. *untitled*, Suite of four lithographs printed in four colors on Daniel Smith Archival paper. Edition of 20, Volatile and Mark Patsfall Graphics, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1992.

Books And Articles About Porter

1. *The Roaring Market and the Silent Tomb*, James Schevill, Abbey Press, Oakland, California, 1957.
2. "Of Course, I'm No Psychiatrist," Robin Reisig and Roger Rapoport, *The New Republic*, June 24, 1967.
3. "Physicist Outlines Plans To Save State's Political System," Richard Plummer, *Morning Sentinel*, Wednesday, November 5, 1969.
4. *Colby Library Quarterly*, special issue devoted to Bern Porter, edited by Richard Cary, with articles by James Schevill, Dick Higgins, Harriet S. Blake, Renee B. Simon, and Richard Cary, June 1970.
5. "The Founds of Bern Porter," James Schevill, *The Nation*, January 19, 1974.
6. "Bern Porter: Belfast's Resident Poet, Publisher, and Thinker," Denise Goodman, *Republican Journal*, Belfast, Maine, December 26, 1974.
7. "Bern Porter," Terry Reilly, *The Colby Echo*, Volume LXIV, No.20, Waterville, Maine, Thursday, May 8, 1975.
8. "Bern Porter," David Miller, *Poetry Information* (#15), Summer 1976.
9. *The Puckerbrush Review*, vol. I., no. 1, Orono, Maine, Spring 1978. Three articles about Porter by Constance Hunting, Janelle Viglini, and Elizabeth Dunker.
10. "Bern Porter: Publishing Henry Miller, Splitting the Atom, and Planning for Knox County," Barbara A. Riegel, *Maine Times*, Topsham, Maine, April 30, 1976.
11. "Writer Sees Houlton As It Was in 1920s," Virginia Hiltz, *Bangor Daily News*, Bangor, Maine, October 6, 1978.
12. "Bern Porter in Manhattan," Judd Tully, *Puckerbrush Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, Orono, Maine, Spring 1979.
13. "Bern Porter's Sci/Art," Bud Navero, The Soho Weekly News, New York, New York, January 18, 1979.
14. "Ignored Physicist Has Plans for City," Dick Saltonstall, Republican

Journal, Belfast, Maine, July 31, 1980.
15. "Bern Porter Reviewed: It is Doubtful the State Will Soon Acknowledge His Contribution," Kendall Merriam, *Maine Times*, Topsham, Maine, August 22, 1980.
16. "One Continuous Exploration Through the Eye," Karl Kempton, *Kaldron*, Grove City, California, Summer 1980.
17. "A visit with Bern Porter," John Rolfe, *Maine Sunday Telegram*, July 15, 1984.
18. "A Little Spin Through the Cul-de-sac: Bern Porter's Quantum Leaps," C. Carr, *Village Voice*, New York, New York, October 9, 1984.
19. "Physicist-Turned-Poet Closes Gap Between the Laboratory and Stage," Margaret McCormick, *Syracuse Post-Standard*, Syracuse, New York, December 7, 1984.
20. "A Brief Look at Some of What's in Print from Bern Porter," Mark Melnicove, *Score* (issue #8), Oakland, California, 1988.
21. "Theories of Relativity: An Interview with Bern Porter," *Afterimage*, Rochester, New York, November 1987.
22. "Bern Porter turns your discards into his poetry collage," Paul Grondahl, *The Times Union*, Syracuse, NY, Friday, November 17, 1989.
23. "Bern, Baby, Bern," Mike Brown, *Republican Journal*, Belfast, Maine, June 5, 1990.
24. "A Separate Reality Reigns at the Institute of Advanced Thinking," Alan Crichton, *Waldo Independent*, Belfast, Maine, September 6, 1990.
25. "Valentine's baby Bern celebrates his 80th," Elizabeth Banwell, *The Waldo Independent*, Thursday, February 14, 1991.
26. "Bern Porter Leads His Followers to an Icy 'Baptism'," Art Mayers, *Kennebec Journal*, Augusta, Maine, March 15, 1991.

Interviews Of Porter

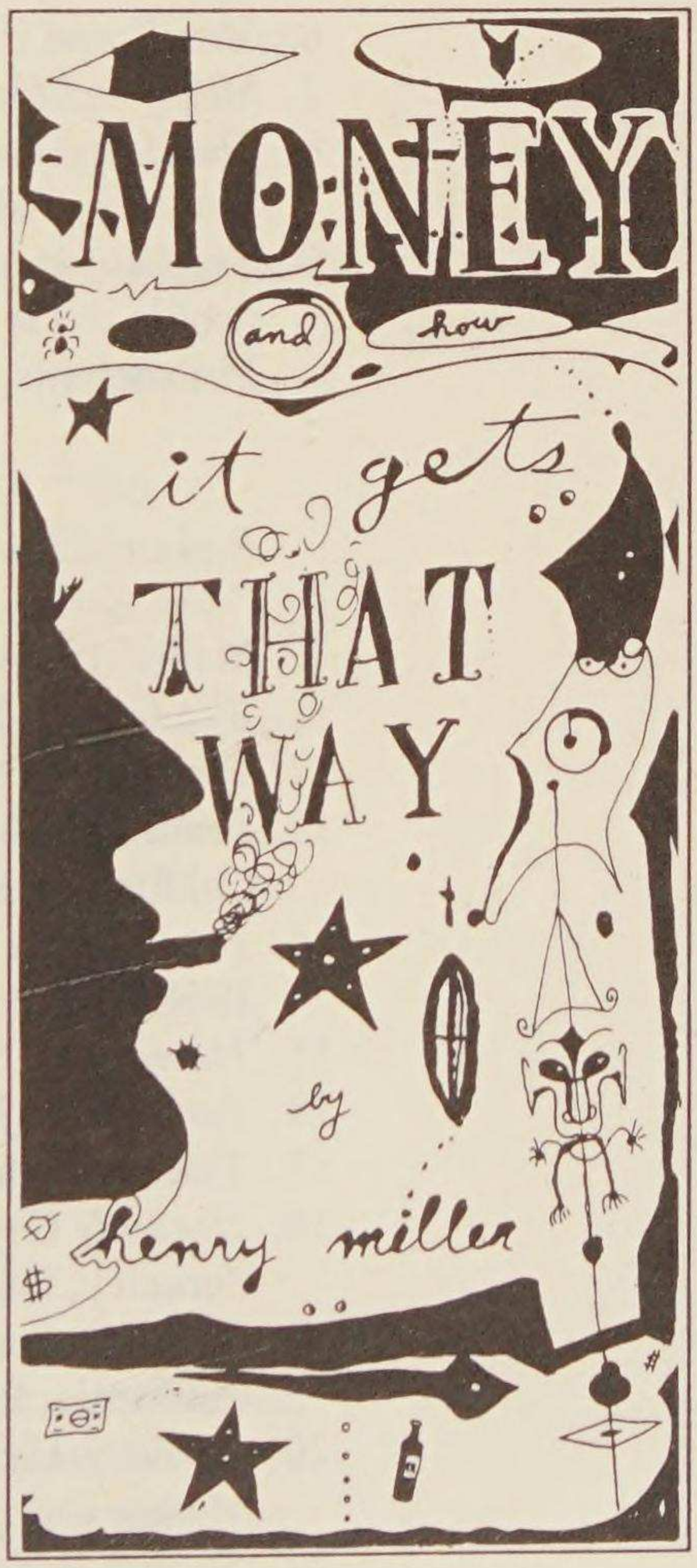
1. "Two Maine Men," interviews of Bern Porter and Cappy Hall, *Observations from the Treadmill*, Union, Maine, 1975.
2. "Bern Porter: an interview," conducted by Judith A. Hoffberg, *Umbrella*, Volume 3, Number 5, September, 1980.
3. *Bern! Porter! Interview!* conducted by Margaret Dunbar, The Dog Ear Press/Tilbury House, Publishers, Gardiner, Maine, 1981.
4. "Bern Porter," interviewed by Phil Nurenberg, *Vagabond White Paper #5*, Vagabond Press, Ellensburg, Washington, 1983; interview taped in August 1980.
5. *Velocity*, untitled interview by Richard Daab, Dennis Baldwin and Christian Herman, St. Louis, Missouri, November 1985.
6. *Alphabets Sublime: Contemporary Artists on Collage and Visual Literature* (interview of Porter included in the book), George Myers, Jr.. Washington, D.C.: Paycock Press, 1986.
7. "Bern Porter: An Advanced Thinker Speaks Out," interview with Porter in *Preview*, Ellsworth, Maine, August 2, 1991.

Maps

1. Map of Physics, Central Scientific Company, Chicago, Illinois, 1938.
2. Map of Chemistry, 1941, in UCLA library collection.
3. Map of Joyceana, *Circle* magazine, vol. 1, nos. 7 and 8, Berkeley, California, 1946; also published in *Art Techniques*, Gillick Press, Berkeley, California, 1947.

Tapes, Films, And Videos
(performance works)

1. *Black Box*, American magazine of recorded poetry, issue number 4, Washington, D.C., 1975. Sound poetry by Porter, 12 minutes, 14 seconds.
2. *Earum Magnus*, super-8 film conceived by Bern Porter, music by Charlie Morrow, directed by Dick Higgins, photography and sound by Scott B., 22 minutes, 1979.
3. *The Eternal Poetry Festival*, sound poetry improvisations with Mark Melnicove, Xexoxial Editions, Madison, Wisconsin, 1979.
4. *Found Sounds*, New Wilderness Audiographics, New York, 1981; reissued by Xexoxial Editions, Madison, Wisconsin. Side one is Porter with Dick Higgins and Charlie Morrow recorded in 1978; side two is Porter in concert with Patricia Burgess, Charlie Morrow, Glen Velez.
5. *Aspects of Modern Poetry* (Porter talking with Robert Holman), recorded from broadcast on WBAI, New York, 1982.
6. *Jacqualin and Rosa*, found sound radio play by Porter, New Wilderness Audiographics, Found Sounds #7913A, side 1, section 3, New York, 1982.
7. *Why My Left Leg is Hot* video, Xexoxial Editions, Madison, Wisconsin, 1987.
8. *Williamson Street Blues* (includes readings of *Last Acts*, Chinese poetry, and the Madison phone book; also, a rock version of *Last Acts*,)1988.
9. *Williamson Street Night*, 1989. Side one is Porter reading from Abraham Lincoln Gillespie and Malok talking. Also on this side, Porter reads from Abraham Lincoln Gillespie and Miekal and from his own book, *Raw. Sway. Aloud.*, accompanied by a recording of the Abenaki Indians. Side two is Porter reading from Abraham Lincoln Gillespie and Liz Was reading *Rooms* by Gertrude Stein.
10. *December Ninth*, a Jeff Brewer recording, Newton



Cover of Henry Miller's *Money and How It Gets That Way*, 1946.

Center, Massachusetts, 1989. Porter is accompanied by Jo Brewer and Elizabeth Dunker.

11. *Sleepers Awake*, performance from Kenneth Patchen's book by Porter and Mark Melnicove at the Second Kenneth Patchen Festival, Warren, Ohio. Published by Cedar Grove House, Dresden, Maine, 1990.
12. *Belfast Berning*, a video of Porter's 80th birthday celebration (see Chapter 19). VHS 22 minutes. Produced by Vanessa Barth, Cyclops Video, Freeport, Maine, 1991.

Selected Books And Magazines Published By Porter

Books by and about Henry Miller

1. *Murder the Murderer*, Berkeley, California, 1944. Published anonymously.
2. *The Plight of the Creative Artist in the United States of America*, Berkeley, California, 1944.
3. *What Are You Going to Do About Alf?*, Berkeley, California, 1944.
4. *Semblance of a Devoted Past*, Berkeley, California, 1944.
5. *Echolalia*, reproductions of watercolors by Henry Miller, Berkeley, California,1945.
6. *Miscellanea*, eight articles by Miller, Berkeley, California, 1945.
7. *Money and How It Gets That Way*, Berkeley, California, 1946.
8. *The Happy Rock*, articles about Miller, printed by Packard Press, Berkeley, California, 1945.
9. T*he Latitude and Longitude of Henry Miller*, John G. Moore (includes profile of Henry Miller by Bernard Porter), Walton Press*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,1962.

Books and Folios by Other Writers and Artists

10. *Franz Kafka: A Chronology and Bibliography*, Angel Flores, Houlton, Maine, 1944.
11. *The Granite Butterfly*, Parker Tyler, Berkeley, California, 1945.
12. *Psalm the Twenty-Third*, Berkeley, 1946.
13. *Erotic Poems*, Philip Lamantia (with illustrations by Porter), Berkeley, California, 1946.
14. *Panels for the Walls of Heaven*, Kenneth Patchen, Berkeley, California, 1946.
15. *Hamadryad Hunted*, Leonard Wolf, Berkeley, California, 1946.
16. *Berkeley: A Journal of Modern Culture*, ten issues published, 1946-1951.
17. *Tensions*, James Schevill, Berkeley, California, 1947.
18. *Heavenly City, Earthly City*, Robert Duncan, The Gillick Press, Berkeley, California, 1947.
19. *David Copperfield in Copperplate*, William Ross Cameron, Berkeley, California, 1947.
20. *Ins/Outs*, Hyman Swetzoff, copublished with *Berkeley: A Journal of Modern Culture*, Berkeley, California, 1947.
21. *Spanish Writers in Exile*, compiled and edited by Angel Flores,

Sausalito, California, 1947-1949. 2nd Edition Philadelphia, The Walton Press, 1971.
22. *Poems and Drawings*, Kenneth Sawyer and Frank Lobdell, Sausalito, California, 1949.
23. *Trial of the Masks*, Gene Magner, Sausalito, California, 1950.
24. *The Crazy Bird*, Christopher Maclaine, San Francisco, California, 1951.
25. *The American Fantasies*, James Schevill, Agana, Guam, 1951.
26. *High Sinners, Low Angels*, James Schevill, San Francisco, California, 1953.
27. *Benjamino Bufano*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1954.
28. *First Poems and Others*, Gerd Stern, Sausalito, California, 1954.
29. *Eye Poems*, Kenneth Lawrence Beaudoin, San Francisco, California, 1955.
30. *Maybeck 1955*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1955.
31. *Robinson Jeffers*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1955.
32. *The Grabhorn Press*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1955.
33. *Otis Oldfield in His Studio*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California,1955.
34. *A Bestiary for My Daughters Mary and Katherine*, Kenneth Rexroth, San Francisco, California, 1955.
35. *The Right to Greet*, James Schevill, San Francisco, California, 1955.
36. *Imogen Cunningham, Three Photos by the Photographer of Alfred Stieglitz, Barbara Cannon (Mrs. David M. Myers), and Leaves, and Three Photos of the Photographer by Harry Bowden*, San Francisco, California, 1955.
37. *Constructions*, by Hassel Smith, Bern Porter, San Francisco, California, 1955.
38. *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*, Antonin Artaud, San Francisco, California, 1956.
39. *On Hot Summer Afternoons and Other Poems*, Kenneth Lawrence Beaudoin, San Diego, California, 1956.
40. *Aldous Huxley*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1956.
41. *Gerald Heard, MCMLVI*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1956.
42. *Kenneth Rexroth*, Harry Bowden, San Francisco, California, 1956.
43. *In Praise of Eponymous Iahu*, James Harmon, San Francisco, California, 1956.
44. *Poems*, Pablo Picasso (translated by: Richard Bowman and Charles Guenther; illustrations by Porter), San Francisco, California, 1956.
45. *What Are Legends*, Dick Higgins, Calais, Maine, 1960.
46. *Selected Poems, 1945-1959*, James Schevill, San Francisco, California, 1960.
47. *You Don't Say*, Al Copley, Waldwick, New Jersey, 1962.
48. *The Buddhist Car*, James Schevill, Walton Press,* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1968.
49. *Henry: An Anthology of World Poets*, Rockland, Maine, 1970.
50. *Henry: a world poet's anthology inspired by William Faulkner's painting*, photography: Kim Lee, editorial: Margaret Eudine Porter, endpapers and design: Bern Porter, 1st limited edition, Belfast, Maine, 1970.
51. *A Radio Script: To Have Done with the Judgments of God*, Antonin

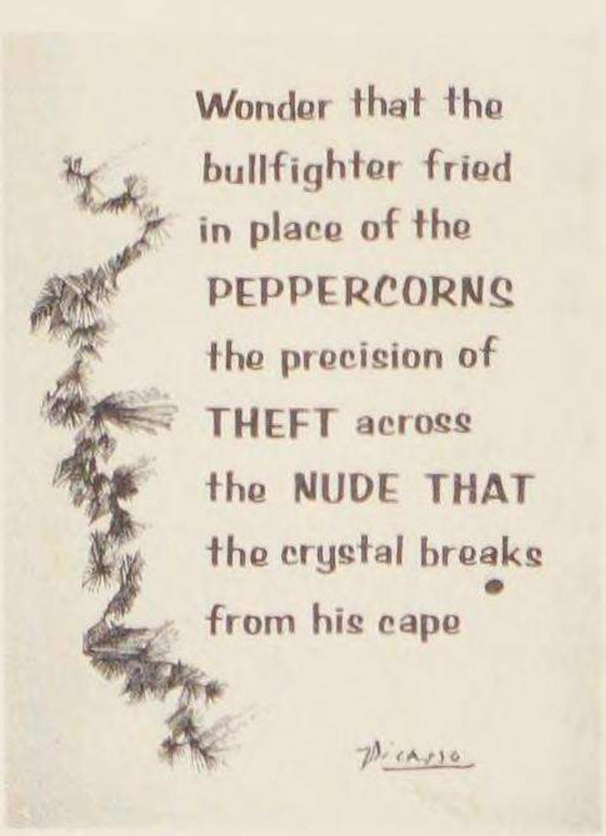
Artaud, Walton Press*, Philadelphia,Pennsylvania, 1971.
52. *Pablo Picasso Poems*, Walton Press*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1971.
53. *Fruit from Saturn*, Yvan Goll, Walton Press*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
54. *Lover's Tale*, Alfred Tennyson, Walton Press*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1972.
55. The *Magic Fillmore Fagin*, Janelle Viglini, Bern Porter International, Belfast, Maine, 1975.
56. *Advanced Memories*, Mark Melnicove, Belfast, Maine, 1983.

*Note: Walton Press became affiliated with Bern Porter Books. Porter states about this affiliation, "Since I couldn't manufacture, I provided the designs, the illustrations, and manuscripts for printing."

Broadsides

The following list was prepared by Harriet S. Blake and first published in the *Colby Library Quarterly*, 1970. Porter's "Broadsides" were conceived and published in San Francisco during the late 1950s (see Chapter 13, "Return to the United States").

1. Christopher Maclaine, poem.
2. Bertrand Russell, "Plea for Survival."
3. Henry Bowden, exhibition poster.
4. Gogo Nesbit, advertisements for poetry reading.
5. Kenneth Patchen, poem.
6. Gogo Nesbit, collage.
7. Bern Porter, endpapers for James Schevill's *The American Fantasies.*
8. Mason Jordan Mason, illustrations and poem.
9. James Catnach, printed handbill, "Comfort to the Afflicted; or The Wonderous Works of God, Shewn to the Widow and Fatherless."
10. James Catnach, printed handbill, "Carols for Christmas Holidays."
11. Bern Porter, "Metamorphic Rhizomes," advertisement for Porter's sculpture with the same name.
12. Bern Porter and Gogo Nesbit, collages.
13. Charles Henri Ford, collage from his magazine *View*, including Porter's "Household Hints."
14. Bob Brown, poster-poem.
15. American Type Foundry, type specimens.
16. Christopher Maclaine and Bern Porter, poem and silhouette.
17. Charles Henri Ford, page from his magazine *View*, incorporating Porter's photograph "American Beauty."
18. Bern Porter, collage with poem, photograph, illustration.



Pablo Picasso poem reproduced as number 52 of Broadside series, illustrated by Porter.

19. James Schevill and Bern Porter, poems from Schevill's book *The Right to Greet*, with illustrations by Porter.
20. Holly Beye, poems.
21. Collage of a Blum's Menu.
22. Bern Porter collage dedicated to Wallace Stevens and including an article on poetry by Stevens.
23. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, poem.
24. Bern Porter, partial list of U.S. states with commentary.
25. Bern Porter, photograph collage.
26. Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Bern Porter, collaged, illustrated poems.
27. Hassel Smith, collage.
28. William Faulkner, drawing or painting by the Bay-area artist-physician.
29. Gogo Nesbit and Bern Porter, collage.
30. Bern Porter, anatomical drawings.
31. Holly Beye and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, poems and photographs.
32. Bern Porter, photograph, "Crucifixion of the Virgin."
33. Bern Porter, collage including his Colby transcript.
34. Bern Porter, magazine collage.
35. Langston Hughes, illustrated poem.
36. Lee Mullican, complete text of book.
37. Richard Bowman, abstract painting.
38. Bern Porter, drawings and photographs.
39. Kenneth Rexroth, collage from Rexroth's *A Bestiary*, published by Porter.
40. James Schevill, poem with photograph by Porter.
41. Enid Foster, collage of faces.
42. Bern Porter, collage of art and economics, involving Porter's suit for back rent against new owner of the Contemporary Gallery in Sausalito, California.
43. Miriam Allen di Ford, poems.
44. James Schevill, poem and map cutouts by Porter.
45. Kenneth L. Beaudoin, critical and poetic works.
46. Etta F. Rogers, Porter family photographs and crest.
47. George Canellos, modern Greek poems with photographs.
48. Max Oloff (Mrs. William Faulkner), painting.
49. Bern Porter, collage from *Sports Illustrated*.
50. William Faulkner, cutout design for fabric.
51. Bern Porter, foreword from Richard Bowman's pamphlet "A Commentary on the Relationship of Art and Science."
52. Pablo Picasso, fragment from Porter's 1956 collection of Picasso's poems, illustrated by Porter.

Collections

1. Special Collections, University of California at Los Angeles library. This is the major collection of Porter's work, including material as yet uncataloged. The collection includes original books by Porter as well as books published by him, letters to and from Porter, drawings, clippings, magazines, and rare "one-of-a-kind" items created by Porter such as "Hand Painted Chocolates" (containing Sciart fortunes on slips of paper), "14th of February" (in a heart-shaped slipcase prepared by Porter and remodelled from a box of chocolates), and "Hexa 914" (in a six-sided box with cellophane cover revealing page after page of nine circles in bright blue, purple, and orange that repeat in different variations).
2. Special Collections, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. This collection includes original books by Porter as well as books published by him, a copy of his master plan for Knox County, Maine, several of his scientific articles, and his master's thesis in physics, and correspondence and materials gathered by James Schevill in preparing this biography.
3. Special Collections, Colby College Library, Waterville, Maine. In addition to original books by Porter and books published by him, this collection contains letters to Porter, a complete set of *Circle* magazines, and many books with inscriptions by the authors to Porter—a valuable record of Porter's reading interests. Also collected are photographs, letters, and manuscripts, including material relating to his various world cruises.
4. Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine. This collection includes copies of Porter's own books and rare copies of books that he published; also photographs, letters, and manuscripts, including material relating to his various world cruises.
5. Bern Porter Archive in the library of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York. This collection includes, in addition to rare copies of Porter's books and books published by him, a great deal of material about Porter's involvement with Mail Art.

This selected bibliography incorporates much of Judd Tully's "Annotated Bibliography—Checklist of Bern Porter Retrospective for the Franklin Furnace, 1979." It also draws on Christine Hathaway's list of Porter's work at the John Hay Library, Brown University.

Index

Appleton, Susan 293
Arneson, Robert 324
Artaud, Antonin 166
Auden, W. H. 161, 166

Baj, Enrico 149
Barus, Carl 37–38, 39
Bellamy, Edward 176
Belson, Jordan 105, 109
Bernstein, Leonard 161
Beuys, Joseph 268
Blake, Harriet S. 181
Blaser, Robin 3, 103, 104
Bloom, Lula Mae Schekel 231–244
Bohm, David 65–66
Bowden, Harry 117, 121, 131, 180, 248
Bowman, Richard 117
Braque, Georges 26
Brecht, Bertolt 173
Breton, André 46, 56
Bridgman, Percy 59–60
Brockway, Althea 19–20
Broughton, James 3
Brown, Bob 300
Bufano, Beniamino 186
Buñuel, Luis 120–121
Burroughs, William 105
Burwell, Basil 279–280

Calcagno, Lawrence 117
Calder, Alexander 47
Carnegie, Dale 47–48
Carrington, Leonora 120
Cohen, William 321
Corbett, Edward 117
Cornell, Joseph 47, 298, 300

da Vinci, Leonardo 110
Dali, Salvador 149
Danto, Arthur C. 296, 325
de Kooning, Willem 324
Diebenkorn, Richard 116–117, 119, 324
Dombrowski, Gerard 297
DuBridge, Lee Alvin 163, 164
Duchamp, Marcel 6, 30, 47, 296
Dunbar, Margaret 229
Duncan, Robert 3, 103, 104, 117
Dunker, Elizabeth 229, 230, 274
Durrell, Lawrence 75, 86
Duveen, Todd 242–243

Einstein, Albert 20, 30, 54–55, 323
Eliot, T. S. 40–41
Elliot, George P. 3, 84
Ely, Phillip 27
Engerman, Dorothy 272
Ernst, Max 156
Everson, William 3

Ferlinghetti, Lawrence 3
Ford, Charles Henri 56
Francis, Sam 117
Friedman, Ken 263–265
Fujii, Tokubei 151
Fukui, Yoshiro 146, 158

Gettleman, Marion C. 268–270, 273, 276
Gillespie, Abraham Lincoln 281
Ginsberg, Allen 249
Gleason, Madeline 3
Greenberg, Clement 51–53
Gropius, Walter 142
Groves, General Leslie R. 62, 70–72
Guggenheim, Peggy 50, 51

Hall, Adrian 211
Hamilton, Edith 32
Hardy, Thomas 27, 28, 29
Hartley, Marsden 10
Hendren, Helen Elaine 3, 4, 101–106
Higgins, Dick 5, 248, 261, 263, 302–303, 324
Holcomb, Ed 294
Holzer, Jenny 313
Honig, Edwin 263
Hultberg, John 116–117, 118, 247
Huxley, Aldous 176

Ives, Charles 324

Jarry, Alfred 255
Johns, Jasper 324–325
Joyce, James (Map of Joyceana) 50, 97, 309

Kantor, Tadeusz 295–296
Keeler, Charles 102–103
Kent, Adaline 117
Kepes, Gyorgy 112
Kostelanetz, Richard 299
Kuhlman, Walter 116, 119

Ladenheim, Kala 293
Lamantia, Philip 103
Laposky, Ben F. 112
Laughlin, James 77, 88
Lawrence, E. O. 61
The Leaves Fall 67, 69–70
Lee, Eugene 229
Leite, George 82–84, 95–97
Lichtenstein, Roy 85
Lingel, Fred 67
Lobdell, Frank 116, 119, 247, 324

Lomanitz, Giovanni Rossi 63–64
Lovecraft's Follies, 211, 222–223
Luhan, Mabel Dodge 53–54
Lustig, Alvin 112

Mailer, Norman 89
Marin, John 10
Markson, Ralph 188–189
Mason, James 28
Maybeck, Bernard 103
Melnicove, Mark 241–243, 248, 277, 283, 288–291, 305
Merriam, Kendall 289–290, 294
Miles, Josephine 3, 82, 103–104
Miller, Carl W. 37
Miller, Henry 3, 6, 20, 56, 73–92
Moholy-Nagy, Laszlo 57
Monroe, Keith 117
Moore, Dorris 27–28, 32, 34–36, 42, 44, 45, 48–49, 272–273
Moore, Marianne 16
Moore, Rosalie 3
Morgan, Charles 88–89
Morgan, Julia 102
Morrow, Charles 248, 261
Murray, Elizabeth 172

Neri, Manuel 324
Nin, Anaïs 20, 78, 236–237

Oldenburg, Claes 324
Oliveira, Nathan 324
Oppenheimer, Frank 65–66
Oppenheimer, J. Robert 20, 55, 59–60, 63, 70–72, 162–164
Orwell, George 176

Palmer, Albert de Forest 36, 43
Parkinson, Thomas 3
Partch, Harry 112
Patchen, Kenneth 3, 84, 86, 103, 300
Paz, Octavio 296
Pfander, Erica 292
Picasso, Pablo 26, 296
Pittore, Carlo 247, 265–266, 282, 288–289, 293–294
Pollock, Jackson 51, 324
Porter, Andrew (great-grandfather) 11, 13
Porter, Bern
Art
cartography 32–33, 97–100
church of light 118–120
drawings 190–191
film 120–121, 260–261
founds 218, 227, 242, 246, 253–254, 294, 295–326
Hiroshima House of Air 152–154
mail art 1, 7, 227–228, 263–266, 307
performance art 259–262, 290–291
photography 56–57, 93–97, 100–101
poetry 121–123, 134–135, 136, 232–235, 237–238, 239, 240, 241–244
sciart manifesto 108–110, 147–150,
sculpture 56
surrealism 46–48, 50–51
As Author
Art Techniques 106
The Book of Do's 302, 305–313
The Devil's Wishbone 302
Doldrums 66–67
Found Poems 302–305
Here Comes Everybody's Don't Book 302, 313–319
I've Left 161–177
The Last Acts of Saint Fuck You 261
The Manhattan Telephone Book 300–302
The Porter Book 302
Sweet End 286, 302, 319, 321–323
The Wastemaker 281, 297–300
Why My Left Leg is Hot 260
As Physicist
Acheson Colloids Corporation 37, 45–57
Hiroshima 143–144
Huntsville (Saturn Moon Rocket project) 198–216
Manhattan District Project 59–72
Map of Physics 32–33
As Publisher
Berkeley: A Journal Of Modern Culture 113–114
Broadside 180–181
Miller, Henry 73–92
publishing ventures 105–106, 108, 109, 123–124, 180–181, 186–188, 259–260,
Education
Brown University 34, 35–44
Colby College 25–34
Houlton High School 19–20, 32
Ricker Classical Institute 25
Government Security 60, 63–64, 179–180, 191, 193–197, 208–210, 213–214
Huntsville (Saturn Moon Rocket project) 199–216
Manhattan District Project

59–72
neighbors' interviews 193–196, 206–208
Impact on Maine
birthday parade (80th birthday celebration) 277–294
Knox County Plan 218–221
poetry festivals 241, 258, 273
political office 222–223
Institute of Advanced Thinking 6, 7, 20, 226–227, 245–258
application 245–246
regulations 246
scholars 248
Schillerhaus 108–109
The Contemporary Gallery 116–117
Travels
Alaska 189–191
around the world voyages 268–270
Guam 127–140
Guatemala 217–218
Japan 141–160
Tasmania 192–193
Youth
art teacher (Althea Brockway) 19–20
church 20
family relationships 17–18, 124–126, 233–234, 277–278
Houlton childhood 9–24
radio 20
work as golf caddy 24, 25
Porter, Etta Porter Batleno (mother) 17, 233–234
Porter, Everett (brother) 24, 125, 277–278
Porter, Herman (uncle) 11–13, 17
Porter, Ira J. (grandfather) 9
Porter, Lewis Harden (father) 13, 17, 235
Porter, Marion (sister) 17
Porter, Mary Ellen (aunt) 13
Powell, Lawrence Clark 112
Preston, Margaret Eudine 7, 183–198, 227–228, 281

Rabi, I. I. 66, 72
Rand, Paul 112
Rauschenberg, Robert 85, 324
Ray, Man 47
Reich, Wilhelm 188–189
Rexroth, Kenneth 3, 85, 104, 249
Rhodes, Richard 62
Richardson, Roland 42, 43
Robb, Roger 163
Rosenfeld, Paul 86
Rosenquist, James 85
Rosset, Barney 89
Rot, Dieter 266–268
Rothko, Mark 324
Rudolph, Arthur 199
Russell, Bertrand 180

Saunders, Robert 292
Schorer, Mark 104
Schwitters, Kurt 296–297
Shapiro, Karl 89–90
Smith, David 324–325
Smith, Hassel 117, 324
Spicer, Jack 3, 103, 104
Stauffacher, Frank 117, 121
Steichen, Edward 95
Stein, Gertrude 48–49, 50, 325
Steingesser, Martin 289
Stella, Frank 51, 172
Stern, Phillip M. 60
Still, Clyfford 116, 324
Stratton, Don 293

Tanizaki, Junichiro 153
Thurston, Doris 294
Tully, Judd 247
Turner, Leslie 121, 131
Tyler, Parker 103

Varda, Jean 79, 117
Ver Becke, W. Edwin 102, 108
Viglini, Janelle 249–250
von Braun, Wernher 199
Vonnegut, Kurt 176

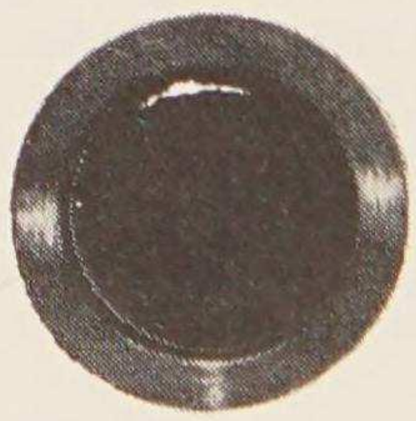
Waldrop, Keith 263
Waldrop, Rosmarie 263
Warhol, Andy 85, 324–325
Watson, James D. 176
Weaver, Mary 249, 251, 287
Weber, Carl J. 28, 29
Weston, Edward 121
White, Emil 82
Whitehead, A. N. 59
Williams, William Carlos 86, 323
Wolf, Leonard 3, 95, 103, 105

3 9001 03169 8908

The text and cover of *Where to go, What to do, When you are Bern Porter* were designed on Crummett Mountain by Edith Allard.
Editorial and Production Assistance: Angela Colwell, Devon Phillips, Wallace Pinfold, and Kelly Beekman
Tilbury House staff: Mark Melnicove, Eric Rector, Jolene Collins, and Robert L. Johnston
Imagesetting: High Resolution, Inc., Camden, Maine
Printing (jacket and cover): Western Maine Graphics, Norway, Maine
Printing (text) and Binding: Maple-Vail, Binghamton, New York

Printed on recycled paper

PRESS
THIS
BUTTON...



Found from Porter's *Book of Do's*,
Dog Ear Press, 1982

3 31317 MAIN: C-BKS
10U/A 7/93 5053