Craig
Dworkin

Klatsch [1]

8-17

The well-known cry of 'Joe! Joe!' […] which means […] one of the myrmidons of Charley Joe, as they familiarly style Mr. La Trobe. [2]

—William Howitt

As they descried us approaching on the rocks, a simultaneous cry of 'Joe! Joe!' was raised. This is a popular cry on the New Zealand diggings and is used to hail any 'new chums' who may appear. It had its origin at the Australian diggings, where licenses were granted to all who held claims […] When the police came upon the ground, to inspect licences, the cry of 'Joe!' was raised. [3]

—Edwin Hodder

In the 1970s, Robert Grenier wrote a series of series of minimalist texts that torque faux-naïf, seemingly uninflected observations into beguilingly disorienting conundra. What appear, at a glance, as spare, direct statements turn out, under scrutiny, to be elusive constructions ensnaring reference and referents together. Neither merely simple descriptions of Grenier's own quotidian experience nor abstractions of sheer linguistic play, these poems advance their documentary snapshots in tandem with their material surface. Exophora in Grenier's writing emerges not in place of, but *by way* of a concurrent self-reflexive formalism. Skimming the linked sequence of poems in *Oakland*, for instance, one finds:

IT'S ITS

handmade

vary [4]

With a haiku-like, tripartite lineation, the verse evokes Imagism's bare, appositional assertions. Compare Grenier's tercet, for example, with Ezra Pound's "Papyrus," which also seems to postulate a subject, modifier, and final oblique twist:

Spring…
Too long…
Gongula… [5]

In the post-Poundian tradition, Grenier's text might be taken as a telegraphic sketch recording the first, half-formed impressions that surface as the mind registers an "It's-It," the iconic regional confectionary of vanilla ice-cream sandwiched between jumbo oatmeal cookies and dipped in dark chocolate. Abrupt and discontinuous, Grenier's handful of words proffer themselves with the fleeting and sudden flash of the eye-catching It's-It billboard glimpsed while speeding along the Bayshore freeway just south of the San Francisco airport. [6] With the very handmade look of bespoke vernacular design, the sign sports a trademark typography—cramped, blocky, sanserif majuscules approximated by Grenier's all-caps title—below a lopsided, oversized ice-cream sandwich. Indeed, a historicized cultural context would lead to a topical

1   A dedicated thanks to Michael Golston, who first introduced me to Grenier.

2   William Howitt, *Land, Labor, and Gold; Or, Two Years in Victoria: with Visits to Sydney and Van Diemen's Land* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1855), 427.

3   Edwin Hodder, *Memories of New Zealand Life* (London: Longman, 1962), 188.

4   Robert Grenier, *Oakland* (Berkeley: Tuumba Press, 1980), unpaginated.

5   Ezra Pound, *Lustra* (New York: Knopf, 1917), 55.

6   On his "innumerable" day-trip drives between Oakland and the San Mateo County coastline that serves as the setting for *A Day at the Beach*, Grenier may well have passed the striking sign, just after picking up the 101 from California 92 en route to the Bay Bridge [Special Collections Staff: "Guide to the Robert Grenier Papers" (Stanford: Stanford University Manuscripts Divisions, 2001), 82].

interpretation of the poem. Just as Grenier was composing *Oakland*, the newly sold and resurrected It's-It company moved to Burlingame, and the ice-cream treats that had been handmade for half-a-century—first in an amusement-park storefront near Ocean Beach, and then in a small shop south of Market Street—began to be factory produced. [7] If handcrafted It's-Its had previously differed from one to the next, now two category types of It's-Its could be distinguished more broadly: hand-dipped and machine-made. Moreover, the meaning of "handmade" itself has varied over time, with its denotations vacillating diametrically between natural and artificial, plain and ornamented, "produced with care" and "unrefined." [8]

Having raised the subject of variance, the poem invites its reader to consider other variants. To begin with, "vary" is a homophone because it does not vary very much from *very*, and the ghost of that intensifier subtly directs attention back to "handmade," which is also obviously a homophone. Corroborating that permutation, "it," as "an abstract or immaterial thing considered as auxiliary to another in a subordinate capacity," can indeed be the grammatical handmaid to *it*. [9] For instance, when asked what *vary* means, one might reply: "it means to undergo a change." When asked about the word *it*, one could similarly begin: "it means the thing previously mentioned, implied, or easily identified." [10] Furthermore, because *it* is a deictic (or what Roman Jakobson would call a "shifter"), it can indicate multiple, varying referents, depending on the context. [11] Moreover, its grammatical use can also vary, since *it* serves as both the objective and also the subjective case of the third person singular neuter pronoun. While Grenier's text might be construed as a perfectly good grammatical sentence ("vary" can also be properly parsed as a noun: "a variation; a hesitation or vacillation"), the more common usage would understand the syntax of the poem to be abbreviated to the point of anacoluthon, inviting the reader to supply the elided terms: e.g., "[because it is] handmade[, its details can] vary." [12] Grenier thus explores not only the vocabulary, but also the subject of the remarkable concluding section of

Robert Creeley's poem "'Time' is some sort of hindsight,"
where the conceptual interest of the minimalist stanza
derives from the way in which the syntax visually pivots around
unspecified predicates:

<div align="right">—it
it— [13]</div>

If the first line of Grenier's poem constitutes a summary analysis of Creeley's lexicon —*id est*: it's (only) its—the following lines play against the same elliptical omissions that allow "it," in its two modes of subject and object, to work as a syntactic hinge. With an eye to the everyday world around him, Grenier recasts the existential truncations of *Pieces* as the quotidian advertisement of a Bay Area dairy treat. And *vice versa*.

In the Finding Aid to his collection at Stanford University, Grenier describes his 1978 book *Sentences* as a direct reaction to Creeley's *Pieces*. [14] Accordingly, one might see the influence of "—it / it—" in the grammar and layout of a poem that might not

7   See Helene Goupil and Josh Krist, *San Francisco: The Unknown City* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005), 106.

8   "Handmade," *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

9   *Ibidem*, at "Handmaid."

10 *Ibidem*, at "It."

11 See Roman Jakobson, "Shifters and Verbal Categories," *On Language*, eds. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 386-392.

12 *Oxford English Dictionary*, at "Vary."

13 Robert Creeley, *Pieces* (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1969), 17.

14 The extraordinary gloss reads: "an attempt to 'stop Time'/'destroy the Book' in reaction to method (apparently achieved/'over with') of Robert Creeley's beloved *Pieces*," qtd. in Paul Stephens, "'Alive in the Eyeblink': A Media-Archival History of Robert Grenier's *Sentences*," unpublished MS. Grenier repeats the association between *Sentences* and *Pieces* elsewhere; see, for instance, interview by Charles Bernstein, *Close Listening*, radio program, WPS1, 20 October 2006, accessed May 15, 2016, http://writing. upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Grenier.php.

otherwise so readily evoke Creeley. Like each of the five-
hundred poems in *Sentences*, this text is printed in a
landscape layout on the recto of a 5-x-8-inch, lightly bleached   JOE
Oxford index card:

                                                                         JOE [15]

For Bob Perelman, this poem exemplifies the aesthetic bewilderment that *Sentences*
can provoke. Perelman confesses that he was so "boggled" by the poem he felt com-
pelled to question Grenier directly: "Is this one *good enough*? What's so *'good'* about
this one?". [16] As I hope to suggest, this card epitomizes precisely what can be so good
about Grenier's poems. With an uncanny folding of the most commonplace language
into curiously defamiliarized arrangements, his gnomic poems are able to achieve
a maximum resonance (echo, as it happens, defines the very structure of this particular
poem) with a minimum of means—in this case, even a single word. Moreover, as
we have just seen, Grenier's most intriguing poems construct lexical systems that set
signifier and signified into a reciprocal dynamic, inextricably entwining a poetics of
place with the space of the page and actively enacting signification as much as refer-
entially describing any external state of affairs.

Grenier's response to Perelman's perplexed queries makes recourse to a dramatized
soliloquy, in which the repetition of the name emphasizes the lonely isolation of an
unanswered address. Joe is hailed, but he does not respond. A more insistently desper-
ate cry ensues. Silence again follows. [17] Grenier's performance, against the echoing
mise-en-scène of the alpine backdrop fantasized by Perelman, does not sound entirely
implausible. Indeed, many of the poems in *Sentences* would seem to require the very
sort of Wittgensteinian poetics that characterize the work of his contemporaries,
asking their readers to imagine the social circumstances under which estranged and
enigmatic statements could escape from the hermeticism of nonsensical or private
language in order to make sense as colloquial, everyday speech. [18] Nonetheless, any
particular contextualization—such as the sustained, more desperate, second "Jooooe!"
of Perelman's admittedly "personal and contingent" narrative—would be hard to pre-
fer, especially without privileged access to the author. [19]

Contributing to the mystery, "Joe"—unlike Amy or Emily (or even Boom and Paw, the
dogs which populate Grenier's poetic sequences)—does not return elsewhere in
Sentences, and so does not come to function as a literary character independent of any
actual referent from Grenier's personal life. What meaningful associations, then, can
the reader have? On the one hand, the name has come to operate as an abstraction: a
pseudonym for the ordinary, typical everyman—the "average Joe"—who, with classist
social condescension, can be addressed with a presumptive familiarity. On the other
hand, if taken as a specific reference to a particular individual, the name would delimit
an inner circle of those in the know. Already a casual abbreviation of the more formal
"Joseph," "Joe" emphasizes the conditions under which intimate address might position
a reader at once drawn in and excluded by coterie familiarity. Consider, for instance,

15   Robert Grenier, *Sentences* (Cambridge: Whale Cloth Press, 1978), unpaginated.

16   Bob Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52.

17   In his 8 April, 1981 reading of the poem at the St. Mark's Poetry Project, Grenier does not protract the second word; if anything, its attack is slightly deflated in comparison with the first. See https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Grenier/Grenier-Robert_St-Marks_NY_4-8-81.mp3, accessed 6 June, 2016.

18   See Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

19   Perelman, *Marginalization*, 52.

Frank O'Hara's casual mentions of his friend and long-time roommate Joe LeSueur: "I shall not dine another night like this with Robin and Don and Joe"; "I borrow Joe's seersucker jacket though he is still asleep"; "Joe is restless and so am I"; "Joe stumbles home"; "I reach the kitchen and Joe is making coffee in the dark"; and so on. [20]

In contrast, a common cultural reference would have been widely available at the time Grenier composed his poem in the middle of 1971. The Beatles' "Get Back" had been released as a single in the summer of 1969, spending over a month as the number one song on the Billboard charts, and in 1970 a remixed version served as the final cut on their final album *Let It Be*. The song's lyrics, of course, begin: "Jo Jo was a man who thought he was a loner, / but he knew it couldn't last." [21] Read against those verses, the card from Sentences presents the name with a layout that emphasizes and enacts the themes of isolation and return. And Grenier, we know, had written topically about The Beatles just months before; the poem "Sticky Fingers," which takes the form of the transcription of a relaxed conversation about the Rolling Stones, digresses to the rival band. With a witty syntax that revolves "around" around "revolver," several lines aver:

actually
it didn't
get really good until
around *Revolver*

around 1965 [22]

If we take "JOE [. . .] JOE" as an allusion to "Get Back," it would also be inflected by Aram Saroyan's book of proper names, *The Beatles*, which had been published in 1970. Each opening presents one of the four band-members' names, printed sanserif in the center of the recto page: "**John Lennon**"; "**Paul McCartney**"; "**George Harrison**"; "**Ringo Starr**." [23] The subdued tones and rounded corners of Saroyan's pamphlet make the pages appear more like gravestones than enthusiastic fan memorabilia (the official announcement of the band's breakup, one should recall, had been made the same year), and they rhyme with the funereal *My Mummy's Dead*, which Saroyan published as a chapbook the following year, reprinting the lyrics to the brief, eponymous John Lennon song, one-phrase per recto page. [24] Indeed, the blurred authorship of that publication seems to be the subject of one of Grenier's contemporaneous manuscript poems, written with exactly the same precise seven-line spacing of "JOE [. . .] JOE": "like John Lennon // or Aram Saroyan." [25] A more oblique response might be found in another poem from *Sentences*: "my mother is dead // and you are alive". [26] "JOE [. . .] JOE", moreover, was almost certainly composed in Saroyan's presence. In Grenier's composition notebook, a manuscript draft of the poem serves as an interlocutor between two texts in Saroyan's own handwriting. [27] If Grenier's JOE enters
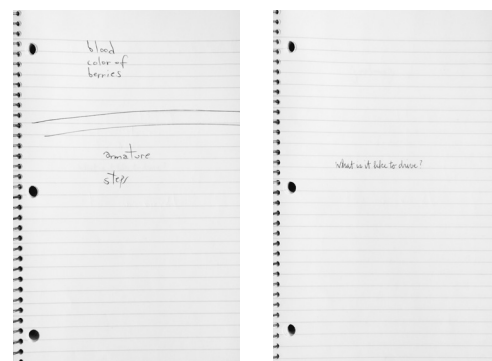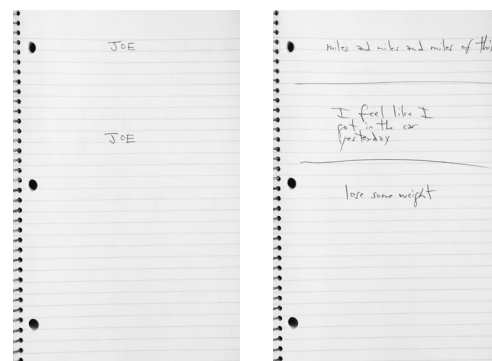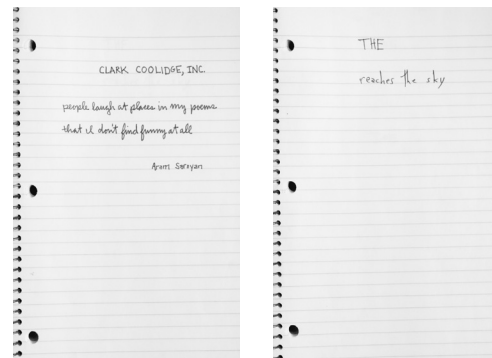
20   Frank O'Hara, *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 346; 330; 223; 405; 277; *et passim*.

21   John Lennon and Paul McCartney, "Get Back," *Let It Be*, Apple Records AR34001, 1970, 33 1/3 rpm.

22   Robert Grenier, "Sticky Fingers," *Series: Poems 1967-1971* (San Francisco: This Press, 1978), 142. First published in *The Franconia Review* 2: 1 (1971), the poem was in manuscript in the Spring of 1971, and had been shared with Robert Creeley along with a selection of poems from *Sentences*. See Robert Creeley Ephemera, Hesburgh Library Special Collections, University of Notre Dame, Folder 29 [EPH 5009-29], and Robert Grenier Papers, Box 19.

23   Aram Saroyan, *The Beatles* ([Somerville]: Barn Dream Press, 1970).

24   Aram Saroyan, *My Mummy's Dead* (Pacific Palisades: Mini-Books, 1971). Cf. "My Mummy's Dead," *John Lennon / Plastic Ono Band*, Apple Records PCS7124, 1970, 33 1/3 rpm.

25   Grenier Papers, Box 1, Spring 1972 notebook MS.

26   Grenier, *Sentences*. Cf. the later elegiac reflection "WHY IS MY MOTHER DEAD // for timeless grieving" [Robert Grenier: *A Day at the Beach* (New York: Roof Books, 1984), unpaginated].

27   Grenier Papers, Box 1, August / September, 1971 notebook MS.

the archive by entering into manuscript dialogue with Saroyan, it implicitly picks up on other textual conversations between the two poets as well. In addition to the direct mention in the Lennon poem, a series of minimal poems later in Grenier's notebook are titled "after Aram Saroyan" (the pun obtains because of the specificity of the codexical format: not just pastiches, these poems are written on sheets subsequent to the ones that contain Saroyan's own entries earlier in the notebook).

Grenier was also well aware of Saroyan's doubling of proper names as poetic texts. The concluding poem in Saroyan's *Gertrude Stein*, a book composed entirely of language drawn from Stein's *As Fine as Melanctha*, looks ahead to *The Beatles*: "George or George."[28] Indeed, the insistent pairing of words, including proper names, is a hallmark of Stein's own style, especially in the short poems collected in *Bee Time Vine*, which Grenier was reading closely at the time.[29] For instance, Stein interrupts what otherwise appears to be the prose layout of "Miguel (Collusion)/Guimpe. Candle" with an indented line that might also have served Saroyan's Beatles project: "Paul Paul."[30] At one point, Stein abstracts her practice and prints the formula for her onomastic structuring device, offering the model that would also describe "JOE [. . .] JOE": "Name, his name."[31] Moreover, she frequently lineates repeated single words so that they are positioned vertically, one perfectly above the other, like Grenier's JOEs, as with:

Rose.
Rose.[32]

These lines in particular might have caught the attention of Saroyan, who completed his trilogy of small pamphlets in 1971 with *I Am Rose*. The booklet parses lines from Stein's *The World is Round* in the same way *My Mummy's Dead* had measured Lennon's lyrics.[33] In contrast to the subdued palate of Saroyan's other two chapbooks, however, *I Am Rose* sports cheerful rose-colored paper, so that the material support suggests a self-reflexive referent: the book seems to be speaking of itself. Even more apposite to Saroyan's writing from the period, however, is Stein's habit of doubling the name Lucy. "Lucy Lucy" appears in a central chorus from *Four Saints in Three Acts*, as well as in "To Do," from her *Book of Alphabets and Birthdays*, and not surprisingly it recurs throughout *Lucy Church, Amiably*.[34] In Saroyan's hands, the same name does double-duty. With a pun on the *photo-* of "photographs," the shutter stutter of the first words in Saroyan's *Words & Photographs* read: "Lucy. Lucy."[35] Paired with a picture of Saroyan's sister Lucy, the words seem to serve as an emphatic caption, but they also gesture intertextually to the poem that brought Saroyan his most notoriety. "Lucy Lucy," with its roots in the Latin *lucidus*, might be translated to the descendant of the Germanic *Licht* as 'Light Light'—and hence to a bifocal version of the blurred double-exposure of Saroyan's infamous 1965 poem "lighght."[36] As in many of Grenier's works, Saroyan's minimalist poem motivates a play of phoneme and grapheme so that, as Louis Zukofsky put it "one is brought back to the entirety of the *single* word

28   Anonymous [Aram Saroyan], *Gertrude Stein* (New York: Lines, 1967), unpaginated. Cf. Gertrude Stein, *As Fine as Melanctha* (1914-1930), The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein, Volume IV (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 344.

29   Tim Shaner, Jonathan Skinner, and Isabelle Pelissier, *Farming the Words: Talking with Robert Grenier* (Bowdoinham, ME: Field Books, 2009), 28.

30   Gertrude Stein, *Bee Time Vine and Other Pieces (1913-1927)*, The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein, Volume III (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 40.

31   *Ibidem*, 239.

32   *Ibidem*, 130.

33   Aram Saroyan, *I Am Rose* (Pacific Palisades: Mini-Books, 1971). Cf. Gertrude Stein, *The World Is Round* (New York: Young Scott, 1967).

34   Gertrude Stein, "Four Saints in Three Acts," *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Random House, 1962), 605; Gertrude Stein, *To Do: Alphabets and Birthdays*, The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein Volume VII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 79; Gertrude Stein, *Lucy Church, Amiably* (Normal: Dalkey Archive, 2000), 88; 106-7; 122; 128; 183; 220; et passim.

35   Aram Saroyan, *Words & Photographs* (Chicago: Big Table, 1970), unpaginated.

36   Grenier himself associates these Saroyan poems with photography (letter to Clark Coolidge, July 11, 1972, Box 4, Robert Grenier Papers; qtd. Paul Stephens, unpublished MS).

which is in itself a relation, an implied metaphor, an argument, a harmony or a disso-
nance." [37] Given that the digraph *gh* can score a voiceless labiodental fricative (as
in the *ad absurdum* demonstration of erratic English orthography that would ostensibly
spell *fish* phonetically as 'ghoti'), the word in Saroyan's poem might be pronounced like
lift—precisely what would determine whether something is light—or like an ironically
prolonged *liffft*, as if dramatizing the effort required to raise something heavy. A
similar pun, significantly, also underwrites one of Grenier's other poems from the
period. With a microscopic attention to sound and the elision of the weakly aspirated
initial *h* across a transegmental articulation: "`THEFT OF CARS`//`stealing`" voices
a version of 'the heft of cars.' In the 1970s, furthermore, the heft of cars derived from
their steel—precisely what makes them difficult to lift (the slang sense of which means,
of course, to steal). [38]

A subtle ear for pronunciation and the asymmetrical relationships between letters and
the sounds they represent may also explain part of the play (in various senses of the
word) of "`JOE[...]JOE`." The letter *j* can signify a palatal approximate (as with words
borrowed from various Northern European languages, like the German *ja* [yes] for
example), and so one might read the poem as a phonetic "YO-YO," rising and falling on
the page in the manner of a concrete poem. Although a far cry from Perelman's imagined
soliloquy, such a reading would still retain his sense that the poem is concerned with
measure, distance, and return. Regardless, Grenier had elsewhere incorporated
foreign-language pronunciations and vocabulary in his poetry; the earlier poem "Wintry,"
with its mix of Norwegian and German dialect and vocabulary,
concludes: "oh, vell, I don't know /Ah yah /ah, yah / ja." [39]
Another poem from Grenier's *CAMBRIDGE M'ASS* more
subtly leverages the German interjection to motivate a recursive
dynamic between sound and sense:

`ACH`

`we are by the new gravel`[40]

One imagines, perhaps, the exclamation that would follow from an awkward slipping
on the shifting ground of ungraded gravel (to hear it as '*ach*-word' would make an
awkward pun indeed). Without recourse to any imagined narrative, however, the
denotative value of "gravel"—small pieces of rock—points back to the title, which
is indeed phonetically a small *[r]ock*, just as the more authentically German pronuncia-
tion of "ACH," with its terminal voiceless velar fricative, requires the granular guttural
enunciation of a 'gravelly' voice.

"JOE," as a play of sounded orthography, might move similarly away from any onomastic
reference to function more as a material word—even if only a neologism or nonce lex-
eme—than a personal name. *Yo-Yo*, however, is itself sometime construed as a proper
name. Following Boston concerts with the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra and a perfor-
mance at the United Nations in early 1971, Yo-Yo Ma had made his prodigy debut
at Carnegie Hall just months before Grenier composed his poem. And even as a toy,
Yo-Yo is often capitalized. [41] In either case, the etymology of the word is uncertain
("probably from one of the Philippines languages," the *Oxford English Dictionary* shrugs),
but in the 1970s the term gained prominence as a slang synonym for a fool or simple-
ton. [42] The *OED*, feeling more confident on that count, illustrates the valence with a
parenthetical: "He would leer, and categorize them in a loud, mocking voice. ('Weirdo'

37   Louis Zukofsky, "An Objective," *Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays of Louis Zukofsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 14.

38   Robert Grenier, *CAMBRIDGE M'ASS* (Berkeley: Tuumba Press, 1979).

39   Robert Grenier: "Wintry," *Series*, 10.

40   Grenier, *CAMBRIDGE.*

41   The word is a proprietary name in the United Kingdom, although in the United States a court ruled in 1965 that it is a generic term, rejecting the Duncan Toys Company's claim to a trademark. See Donald F. Duncan, Inc., v. Royal Tops Manufacturing Company, Inc., U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, 343 F.2d 655 (3 March, 1965).

42   *Oxford English Dictionary*, at "Yo-yo."

was one of his favourite appellations; also 'Freak', 'Yo-Yo', and creep)."[43] One need not choose between the various possibilities for understanding Grenier's poem—"there are ('weirdo') *various lines of influence*, & authority," as he wrote in a poetics statement— but the subject of the foolish and the weird was one to which he returned.[44] For instance, one of the poems in *A Day at the Beach* (written in the early 1980s but continuing to explore the signature form of *Sentences*) boldly announces its topic:

```
FOOL

madman though ye beem[45]
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Perhaps suggesting the archetypal enlightened fool, through the association of *light* and *beam*, the poem also echoes the biblical passages at Matthew 7:1-3 and Luke 6:41, with the transformation of "thou" into "though" and "be" into "beem", via the "beam" that the foolishly judgmental sibling fails to recognize. The King James version translates:

> Iudge not, that ye be not iudged. For with what iudgment ye iudge, yee shall be iudged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you againe. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brothers eye, but considerest not the beame that is in thine owne eye?

The earlier Wycliffe translation of the related passage from Luke retains the spellings that might have informed Grenier's poem: "and what seest thou in thi brothers iȝe a moot, but thou biholdist not a beem, that is yn thin owne iȝe?" Grenier also knew Louis Zukofsky's "Poem 21," which similarly shades the denotations of "beam" from light to post; the short verse opens: "can a mote of sunlight defeat its purpose [?]."[46] Appropriate for parables that turn on a visual metaphor, the look of the variant spellings in Grenier's poem is striking for the modern reader, but the difference in sound is mute, and moot. Indeed, the deliberately archaic orthography in Grenier's poem, which asks the reader to reconcile the visual to the audible, recalls John Gower's lines from Shakespeare's *Pericles*: "Like moats and shadowes, see them / Moue a while, / Your eares vnto your eyes Ile reconcile."[47]

Another Grenier poem that also requires the reconciliation between written and spoken language can be found in *CAMBRIDGE M'ASS*, where a tercet of words in reverse alphabetical order sketches a narrative arc:

```
WIRED

weird

wearied[48]
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43   *Ibidem*. Cf. James Stevenson, "The Pianoforte Factory Revisited," *The New Yorker* 46: 6 (28 November, 1970), 40.

44   Robert Grenier: "Line," *The Line in Post-modern Poetry*, eds. Robert Frank and Henry Sayre (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 211.

45   Grenier, *A Day at the Beach*.

46   Grenier quotes from the poem in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* 4 (August 1978): unpaginated; cf. Louis Zukofsky, "Poem 21," *Anew: Complete Shorter Poetry* (New York: New Directions, 1991), 88. Compare a related poem from *Sentences*: "SUNLIGHT / snow in the air / dust in the room."

47   William Shakespeare, *Pericles: Prince of Tyre* IV. iv. 1740; cf. Louis Zukofsky, *Bottom: On Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 383.

48   Grenier, *CAMBRIDGE*.

49   Discussing his later poetry, with special attention to the Saroyan's writing, Grenier emphasizes "breaking up of words into *letters*" and the "the breaking-down of language into *letters*," until sounding and spelling, the voiced and the visual work together to produce "a 'thing-made-out-of-letters' (in-itself, as a 'verbal construct')." Grenier then poses one of the key questions of his poetics: "How *might* some developing sequence of sounds ('phonemes') forming themselves into words via scribed / 'typed' letters be *written*." See "Robert Grenier and Charles Bernstein: A Conversation," *Jacket* 35 http://jacketmagazine.com/35/ iv-grenier-ivb-bernstein.shtml. Accessed 4 June, 2016.

The visual poetics and audible play here are typical of Grenier's compositional techniques. On the one hand, the paragrammatic transformation of the first line into the second evinces his attention to individual letters. [49] On the other hand, the final line can be heard as the patient probing of acoustic boundaries that come from vowel bending and an exploratory attention to the slightest variance in idiosyncratic accent and regional pronunciation. In the process, the poem moves from overstimulation to altered consciousness to crashed exhaustion. Indeed, at precisely the time Grenier was composing *Sentences* and *CAMBRIDGE*, "wired" became a colloquial term for a chemically induced over-energetic high, as from too much caffeine; the *Oxford English Dictionary* illustrates the new slang, in a second entry from 1978, with a sentence from the style section of the *Washington Post*: "He […] turned down a cup of coffee after lunch, saying, 'I'm already pretty wired up.'" A similar sentiment concludes one of Aram Saroyan's poems, titled "For Bob" and holograph dated 27 April, 1973: "`I got nervous/after that last/cup of coffee.`" [50]

And here we can start to see the depth of the intertextual conversations between Grenier, Saroyan, and Stein. *Joe*, of course, is a synonym for "coffee," and by repeating the word, Grenier offers a couple of Joes (along the lines of the "`c o u p l a   a p p l e s`" colloquialized by one of his other poems), giving a subtle nod toward the idiom 'cup of joe.' [51] Accordingly, "`JOE[...]JOE`" might be read as a direct translation of Saroyan's poem:

> coffee
> coffee [52]

Given the typographic alignment of the vertical layout, Saroyan's poem in turn might be seen as a visual quotation from Ezra Pound's "Canto XLVIII," where the words are also printed one over the other:

> five score sacks of coffee (de Banchiis cambi tenendi)
> thus initiating the coffee-house facts of Vienna [53]

or, perhaps, from Louis Zukofsky's *"A"*-12:

> I forgot – the coffee *perking*.
> If I remember coffee
> Or *Phaedo*:
> The lover of wisdom [54]

The more likely rhyme, however, once again, comes from Stein. In "James Is Nervous" (no doubt, like Saroyan, after a last imprudent cup of coffee), the words are also vertically aligned. As if swearing off the over-stimulating drink, the poem concludes:

> Goodbye to coffee.
> Goodbye to coffee where. [55]

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50 Aram Saroyan, *Day by Day*, Fell Swoop #61 (New Orleans: Fell Swoop, 2002), unpaginated.

51 Grenier, *A Day at the Beach*.

52 Aram Saroyan, *Aram Saroyan* (New York: Random House, 1968), unpaginated.; cf. the poem's appearance on the cover of Saroyan's *coffee coffee* (New York: 0 To 9, 1967), a book in which the poem does not again appear. For a brilliant linking of these same two poems as parts of "an expanding series of textual sites," see Daniel Scott Snelson, "*Alcheringa*, 'The Dwelling Place' and Structuralist Tendencies," *Mimeo Mimeo* 3 (Autumn 2009): 28 et passim. Snelson perceptively notes that Grenier both extends Saroyan's poem, adding line-spaces between the words, and also condenses it, reducing the doubled letters in "coffee" and rotating the *f* around the baseline to form a *j*.

53 Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 240.

54 Louis Zukofsky, *"A"* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 162. Later in *"A"*-12, Zukofsky again relates coffee to philosophy: "Over coffee. // The lover of wisdom." (237).

55 Stein, *Bee Time Vine*, 208.

The repeated vertical layouts are so surprisingly congruent, one might be tempted to conjecture that the addictive repetitions encouraged by coffee—the habituating ritual and the impulse to a second cup—has effected its own pervasive poetics of repetition and typographic replication.

Even if one takes these coincident designs to be mere chance, however, Stein had earlier posited a relation between coffee and doubling in *Tender Buttons*, and we might read Saroyan's poem as a gloss on the opening of her poem "A PIECE OF COFFEE."[56] Stein includes this text in the "Objects" chapter of *Tender Buttons* rather than the "Food" section, perhaps because the unidiomatic "piece" suggest an obdurate, object-like substance more than a libation. The all-caps title—a form, as we've seen, taken up by Grenier—is followed by a single line which seems to stand in apposition: "More of double."[57] The phrasing of both lines, to be sure, is curious. As with the de-familiarized wording of the poems in *Sentences*, the title invites the reader to imagine the circumstances under which such language might occur (e.g., 'after the grinder spilled, I found a piece of coffee on the floor'), but the context of Stein's life in Paris may be more to the point. "A piece of coffee," in French, would be *un morceau de café*, and an English speaker might easily hear "more so" behind *morceau*. Furthermore, the volume in the *caffetière* after steeping, or the volume of beans before grinding, might be more than doubled, or *plus de double*, which could be easily mistranslated as "more of double." At the same time, if the syntax of Stein's title seems modeled on the *pièce de résistance*—the dish of beef (like the one that in fact opens the "Food" chapter of *Tender Buttons*) which would properly come well before the coffee service—it also reminds us that one can in fact have "a piece" of liquids, in French: *une pièce de vin* designates a wine cask or small barrel. Although the idiom also applies to oil or brandy, a cask of coffee would still, nonetheless, sound odd to the French speaker. Whatever macaronic negotiations Stein may be making, a more secure reading follows from the printed words themselves. The second line reminds the reader that the letters in "coffee" are doubly doubled, and furthermore that the line delivers more of "of," which reduplicates itself in the middle of the word "coffee." *Of* is indeed "a piece of [the word] *coffee*."

Such attention to the suggestive force of individual letters within words characterizes Stein's poetics throughout *Tender Buttons*. For just one example, consider:

PEELED PENCIL, CHOKE

Rub her coke.[58]

Beyond simply suggesting the rubber ("rub her") of a pencil eraser, the language here performs its deletive function, erasing the *h* in "choke" to transform it into "coke," a carbonate metonym for the sharpened pencil's graphite. Erasure, the poem's cyclical reciprocal dynamic argues, is also a kind of writing. This is precisely the kind of typographic, lettristic attention on display in one of the poems facing "IT'S ITS" across the page in an opening from *Oakland*:

THREE

legged dog

The trio of words distill into the thrice-repeated *g* of "legged dog," with each descender scampering below the baseline like the limbs of the canine they describe. Those limbs, in turn, echo the schematic, anthropomorphic forms of the majuscule letter "A" in an earlier poem in the book, where

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56 Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 12.

57 Grenier writes about *Tender Buttons* in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* 6 (December 1978), unpaginated.

58 Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 29. This reading far from exhausts the poem's semantic work, and if it also sounds sexual, one might recall that the inventor of the eraser plug, patented in 1858, was named Hymen Lipman.

the angled lines of the letterform look as if they are recording
the stride of the ambulating subject that follows:

WHAAT

someone walking

In a conversation with Charles Bernstein, Grenier acknowledges this interest in the images and sounds scored by individual graphemes: "writing is made of letters, letters make words, words make poems […] the real mystery of how language happens […] seemed to be the letter values of things shaping themselves in space."[59] The melopœic textures and visual patterns of alphabetic language are also what Gilbert Sorrentino, however facetiously, singles out in Saroyan's writing. Sorrentino opens his review of *coffee coffee* with an in-joke reference to one of the fictional authors catalogued in his own novel *Mulligan Stew*, comparing *ARAM SAROYAN* to "Heather Strange's recently published *LOON WHOOP*, a sensuous and deliberately crabbed handling of the varied sound textures and patterns developed in bewildering combinations of the letter 'o' with other letters—'r' for example."[60] For Saroyan, the letters might be *c* and *f* and *e*; for Grenier they might be *o* and *j*. Sorrentino concludes his review with a gloss that abjures from glossing over "some of the failures" of Saroyan's collection; "coffee/coffee," he proclaims, "seems to suffer from a too-heavy reliance on the famous line of Gertz's, 'Coffee, coffee, by God, I'll have my coffee or daylight come!'"[61] Pushing the joke further, he explicates: "although the line is neatly and forcefully condensed, the materials are not sufficiently transmuted in order that the reader may forget the strength of the Gertz."[62] As it turns out, Sorrentino did not need to fabricate a precedent for the condensed literary doublet. James Henry, the Victorian physician and poet who wrote a dialogue between a stethoscopist and an unborn child, also penned an encomium to coffee, touting not only its medicinal benefits but also linking it directly to poetic inspiration. Having made his diagnosis, Henry summarizes his argument with a prescription:

If thy heart and spirits sink
Coffee coffee be thy drink.[63]

I take the point of Sorrentino's sarcasm, but—as we have seen—a more serious consideration of Saroyan's poem might have revealed the witty relay of enactments and translations between the actual precedents and intertexts that link Grenier to Stein via "coffee/coffee." Indeed, despite Grenier's purported performance, which emphasizes the monologic pathos of the absence of any response from Joe, and despite what at first glance appears to be a poem so restively reticent that it merely repeats one common, monosyllabic name, it turns out that "JOE [. . .] JOE" is taking loquacious part in a number of conversations with its cultural moment and poetic peers. A century after Henry's rhymes, and half a century after Stein's provocation, "the coffee drinkers," as Lyn Hejinian wrote, "answered ecstatically."[64]

59   Bernstein, *Close Listening*.

60   Gilbert Sorrentino, *Mulligan Stew*
     (Normal: Dalkey Archive, 1996), 45; Gilbert
     Sorrentino: "Review of Aram Saroyan,"
     Grosseteste Review 1: 2 (Autumn 1968), 46.

61   *Ibidem*, 49.

62   *Ibidem*.

63   James Henry, *A Half Year's Poems* (Dresden:
     Meinhold and Sons, 1854), 66.

64   Lyn Hejinian, *My Life* (Los Angeles: Sun
     & Moon, 1987), 54 *et passim*.