



THE DIFFICULTIES
RON SILLIMAN ISSUE

RON SILLIMAN

FROM 137

RON SILLIMAN ISSUE EDITED BY TOM BECKETT

that, not trying to turn the many feeble attempts of the air -- and so
come down upon your head at last. Antennae-like, be not long absent from
the ground. These antennae are good and well-discharged which are like
so many little antennae from the water floor of our life -- a dip-
tongue fruit and some itself, springing from the earth firm. Let there
be as many distinct plants as the soil and the light you sustain. Take
as many books in a day as possible. Sometimes attend with your back
to the wall.

Henry David Thoreau

November 12, 1841

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RON SILLIMAN

from LIT .X

VIII.

"Write often, write upon a thousand themes, rather than long at a time, not trying to turn too many feeble somersets in the air -- and so come down upon your head at last. Antaeus-like, be not long absent from the ground. Those sentences are good and well discharged which are like so many little resiliencies from the spring floor of our life -- a distinct fruit and kernal itself, springing from the *terra firma*. Let there be as many distinct plants as the soil and the light can sustain. Take as many bounds in a day as possible. Sentences uttered with your back to the wall."

Henry David Thoreau
November 12, 1851

IX.

Wild gesticulations, wide

receivers. To shade

white page glare

just write. Decal

on shirt front

is suspect. Boots

for to take

big hill now.

Butterfly. Porch rail

is saw horse.

Red thorns on

old rose bush.

Hand trim lawn.

Under these stairs

find cool shadows.

Poor stereo lacks

one speaker. Shape

of word one.

On line sheets

form sails. Boy

shoots with his

cheeks, ricochets whisper.

Goggle. Blue lube,

big bad boy.

Silver. Allergic to

detergent. Sun in

row of hard

to caulk sky

lights. Think about

toilet seat. Elastic

aesthetic governs tenure,

fear. Sad old

comp prof. These

suburban streets never

taught to curve

go right home.

Single sitting, subtle

settling predicts quake.

Insects on neutral

feed. Restart. Pair

of dimes won't

buy paper, three

ring carny. I

is for farce

but mean that.

Brown garbage can,

faded steps. Sky

heats dry streets.

X.

Late

Light

I stumble, you sing, they lie in the sun. Now here's an in-service on
the DSM-III.

When to not make love demands more

Permanent salsa lunch poem

Shifts into higher gear

The ear is wide

and the word is odd

and and inserts its own

hard tonality:

beep beep beep

I sit on a bench on the edge of the park: descriptions of joggers trot
past. Three fat flies lunge at the kitchen window and bounce back. A
red rose starts to unfold. The glass doorknob is broken and lies on the
floor of the shed. Negative campaign in the race for Lieutenant Grammarian.
A plume of white smoke from far over the hill. Writing is eyes. I love
the way the flocks compute.

Pen half chewed, the rear

door open but the heat

on as the grey cat

is to the couch, lawn

mower, rain shower, slower to

his vocables in a purse

'd lip, "ho ho caribou,"

sleep tips heat's absence, wit

wobbles, hear I am, sun

sets, terrible pink orange sky

gets dark, gets down, gets

laid back at the ranch

around the table at lunch.

So simple

set

to strings

kept hidden--

mere lower limit

--margins mirror

fixed borders,

fate

to be born into

if to write

to right

thot ecco's--

Is it words
heard in the hollow
chill of morning
real as
this seat is
cold?
To speak,
speak
the line . . .

Look: the rook in the book in the nook was unable to take a hook. I
want a poem real as an allusion. The way people bundle up on a chill day.
The heat from the coffee enough to steam the kitchen windows. The
decorator mug feeling heavy. Butter melting into the toast. I want a
poem real as an illusion. A row of small clay pots on a fence, awaiting
plants. A colony of small bugs dances like motes in the sun. In the
paper, description curdles and flattens. Patterns of static construct
a radio, sending "please remit" toll-free into the skull, a swollen tomato.
You want under? Aliens communicate by code: alligator on sport shirt. As
for we who love to be astonished, the doorknob is still on the floor. Is
it Bob? These nouns crinkle, all yellow and pink. Ling P. Sicat asks for
an epilog. An earplug distributes opposite of silence. The antennae of
the race have been snapped off by idle youth. Clarinet in a cat fight.
Get drunk before you vote. Thus reason soil. A small girl beckons her
kitty. This scene is repeated, intended to charm. In Jonestown, bloated
corpses begin to explode in the sun. Thus seasons air. Find the noun.

At what moment do you realize that you will always be forced to rent?
Her unstated tenacity only becomes evident over time. He starts up
conversations with strangers on the bus. These sentences occur in this
order. I hate what narrative does to time. The garden's grown into a
jungle. The butterfly is orange and black.

Please hold on sudden stops
the steppes of Russia rush
across a split blue screen
screaming locomotive plumes into Munich
Chicago (fat fingers -- closeup -- drop
nickle into palm for news
Who gets to be Rosebud?
so sad Who gets to
(so said my Cid) be
dead, hand me my head
This at least I read

One in five is lost
so trump the ghost, best
past in the alphabet, bitter
tea, lower case, faces front
as ball is a font
spinning to print which words
harden harping theme, absurd luck
thus to land at Boardwalk's
red hotel (near to Go

so posit verb as noun)
 My brother wears the crown
 Rich heart, hard stitch, reach
 down, each word one thing
 covers many, multiplies out, surrounds
 clutter of the simplest desk
 in town, realtor sells insurance --
 drowns, self service station: book
 breaks binding, kids leave home
 return, look sadder, haunted, stare
 over dinner, silent, sticks stalk
 almond chicken, shoots, baby corn
 stereo choking one thin horn

 4th: the count adds up
 Dear gem spa, it's 5:15
 (aha) what limit to pure
 differential clatter (cough) the stuff
 of art (thus fart: Life
 parts, the river Jordan, marts
 of perfect bondage, margins) starts
 to get simple: fee fi
 phoneme, name it, sit straight
 sing "Hail to the Chief,
 he's a dirty little thief"

Young and savvy, soft but
 savage, to square the root
 cherishing procedure, put down these
 syllables swollen in the red
 corpuscular pressured pump, it said
 it says, to the wall
 that is turning, paper made,
 trust the next, it's this,
 the last, it's that, thought
 fattens, trapped in the head
 abstraction's presence left for dead.

Let's stretch. To write, I sit in the shed
 in a storm. She sent
 recently her statute of limitations,
 "you slime." Plastic yellow bucket
 gets my drift. Door slams.
 Is the parrot in the rain?
 Is the parent the reinforcer
 of a painful narcissistic response
 say, as men in a porn shop
 imagine autonomy in sex? One sits
 long at the livingroom table
 drafting the twelve page paper
 later returned with just a check -- Iatrogenic Maladies:
 Etiology and Response. Our Friend the Beaver

by Eddie Haskell. Thus gunowners perceive legislation
to prohibit teflon-coated bullets
as a restriction of their freedom
of speech. Mother calls each Sunday
promptly at ten. The couch
is three foam mats
neath an Indian print spread.
The beach is down the street. The text,
if permitted, encodes time
inexactly. Erving Goffman
is dead. Plum leaves
are blown from the tree. A scale
is something I don't want to stand on
like tradition. The next hill
no longer in sight is nonetheless possible
by virtue of memory
if only you sober up. Tenure
is terror. What if your kid
is beaten, his lunch money taken from him,
your daughter fails to come home?
Your head stops still
so that I sense your teeth gently
right at the instant
of orgasm. Which things
come together? Imagine language
on display at the zoo. At the bar tonight
people are making choices

but in the lobby of the La Valencia
a 50 year old jigsaw
remains incomplete. Two eyes
are the cause of depth. Strawberry preserves
on zucchini bread. Negative adjectives
outweigh their nouns.
Laughter slaughters laughter.
The library from out of space
has no fourth floor, thereby contributing further
to a theory of number, fidelity
If you don't have something nice to say,
write it down. Rodefer made note
of Levertov's washer not out of disrespect,
but the nuclear movement, if it is to include
the familiar, must confront the problem of One.
Rochelle Silliman. Who said
I was uninterested in fiction? This rain
will live on in literature
for weeks. For once
try simple statements. In here
inhabit the head: half
a loaf. In the doorway
Marcie calls for Emma. We sit
at the head of the steps
to the ocean and sip champagne.
The grammarian thinks to rid
the Department

of poets teaching comp.

The sun rises. The sun rises. The sun

rises. But it's the middle of the afternoon

months later and at night.

The sun rises. The International Dateline

breaks. I want a poem real

as an elusion, taped legs pumping

twist out of the block and deep

into the secondary to await the bomb

lighting up thousands

homes roaring in Utah

deafening as the forest, the self.

These are the simples,

salt in the semen,

two strangers in a Navy town

irrationally fond of camels, off-white

walls, first smell of coffee, a small guy

long dead in a cowboy hat, hot

nachos, Mick's lips, being careful

just to walk down the street

O Miss Margaret Jarvis

The song of abstraction cuts glass, difficult standing up in the boat,

ear cupped to the wall, the sun rising or setting or both. Complex

phenomena are eaten by snails: escalator clause. Small jars full of art

preserves. The CPM for upscale is higher. It wants more toner, but the

light says "brew," sunny December, towels almost still on the line, a

pink clover, Lopping Shear (reggae band), the pen gives off a cheesy

discharge. How often only one wants to be fucking. Erica's a teen now

(possible source of criticism). Deep in the swipe file, quantifiable

and blue, are we speaking colors, between houses, jobs. In this simple

sentence we share eye contact, but at one remove. Context creates

equivalence: you in an examination room at Emergency with a sprained back,

the woman in the next one rapidly dying. Coriander. The half-musical

clang of pots. Sound is a petroleum product, thought a gas emitted from

the skull. The sun causes you to unfold your fist. What are men? I put

the penis in my cheek so that I won't gag. Merit increase. The working

class rises up only to change the station, one finger deep inside, subtext

transfer point. French guys construct a thought. The generic word is

"huh." Barry picks me up for lunch. Icy Fist Grips East. At the end of

the line, the driver sits alone in his bus, reading the paper, waiting to

start his run. Words are not solids. She shoos the dog indoors with a

broom. Predicate engineer. Thus the white hair against the dark skin

gives that old Philippino cowboy a look. Tho the lot is vacant. One sees

the remains of a service station. The auditors crowd in. The smell of a

Christmas wreath fills the bus. It's dawn and the neighborhood is full of

joggers. The large pen jutting from the breast pocket of the old man's coat

looks foolish. Try stamping out that cigarette with a hole in your shoe.

At first the word *with* meant *against*: fight with, argue with (*contest*,

conflict). Maniac sonata. Two weeks for Xmas. Too weak from punning.

My grandmother's moustache (copper red). The truss on the table by the

bed. Let it all hang out. Let it all bang out a rhythm and call this

logic. The dance of the line in the hand in the head of the man writing.

Let's invoke Vico, let's provoke Duncan. Floppy disk. An image of order with a spinal cyst. Parrot's name is Tito. Rule one: never kill your publisher. That small table in the kitchen was once the only furniture I had. In another corner, mop, broom and hamper. Why the cat likes to sleep in doorways. Some people cannot let go without trashing the other. Today the sun was only a diffuse light in the clouds. Michael and Michael stood in the rain. Eventually any poster tacked to the wall will start to sag. A huge bag of Meow Mix atop the fridge. A large plastic spinner to just dry the veggies. Fresh bacon on a paper towel. A street walker will want to make eye contact. It wasn't that the boiler was broken: it didn't exist. This year's media Christmas tale is 3 year old sex slave returned to her parents. The Cid Corman Tradition. The pot holders were just sort of lying around anywhere they'd been used last. Now the jargon says cognitive deficit. Blue loop, big guy. Pink and white and in between. In a new town you think you see more because you're paying attention. Not rastafarian, Roderferian. Dear Cheese, don't be blue. I've got Labriola next to Lacan. Words are not silent, even written in a quiet room. Reality is private, charged with crimes. The lights go out in three states. A gray sweater. The wind knocked the construction worker right off the I beam. They ran the corner store by flashlight, iron gate closed and locked, taking orders and cash and passing goods through the bars. I go in just to keep the office open. The next morning the air's perfectly still. Then comes the blueline, ready for inspection. Great care in simple words. Buffalo Bob moved his lips, so they never showed him on screen when Howdy was speaking. The light at the end of the pencil (shadows on the wall of the notebook). He's upset that the increases aren't retroactive to the Fall Quarter. The day after, people buy every candle in the state. The cat

climbs on the couch. The Giants are a monument to the limits of the imagination. The plum tree is barren, a web of dry branches. Why not declaratives? Time to transplant. You can hear the metal in the oven cooling. Porch light. The tree demonstrates asymmetrical balance. Wait, I thought you were the Other (here at home). Sad fern. The screws on those cheap plastic hooks won't hold in old wood well. Poem lacking unity (pour M. Jacob). Two rings around the moon, one narrow, one wide. Stations of the crass. Rabbits cannot remember pain for more than 60 seconds. These straight lines are a yoke I cannot escape. Fever model. Headset. In France the noun is something different altogether. Two young cats play a sort of tag out in the back yard. The grammarian's handkerchief, his cape. Donor Life. To shape to shock once awake in stock and out, out. What was that sentence? Think of form as a sister, cousins, several people eating waffles, fig jam, game played with pegs on a board with holes. In the bathroom the plaster has crumbled. I will never marry a fat man. That jar has been on the floor for weeks. Your resume shall be kept on file for a period of six months. The sod mister. Twelves. Different values get asserted here. Add flour: the plot thickens. New Xmas jogging gear. At dawn the old men stand outside the Cherokee Lounge, waiting for the bar to open. The name of that place is Wash & Dry Coin-Op. Coda, cola. The accountant shows up in purple coordinates. The neon signs burn all night. The cat goes up the steps in a manner you would describe as guilty. The purpose of a sports columnist is to express viciousness toward coaches. What does it mean, personally, to become a paragraph? I'll have the chimi-changa. The diver seen as paused, half within the water. The calendar you get from the corner druggist. The pen as a razor, cutting silence. I get dizzy from too much coffee. What a trowel is for. Known for its fleas. Heat

a pot of tea. The shadow of Stein crosses the text. Kellog's Topper,
Reggie's Mantle. He liked his few small scars, sensing he had earned
them. A blue mold on the spine of *The Cantos*. You go into a coma and
choke in your sleep. A typeface would betray you. The chill in the shed
is merely physical. This was many years ago. We were far away.

XI.

Painter's reconstruction of the color white
Clatter of birds' wings crowd the sky
Sighing, declarative sentence makes wrong judgment or none
Sandwich wrap harbors dark nine grain bread
Out the window, fog shuts sky
Rhyme invoked scandal greases new semi-gloss wall
Head in lap speaks with frozen jowl
Lack of yogurt now seen as misplaced caution
Rolls of roofing felt dot concrete yard
Signing, a straight line stifles cough
New hope for pronouns refunced once again
Pink shape of future lit behind frosted glass

Hint of rain renews odor of lemon rind
Renaissance of moth is hardened, blue heart
Foot encased in wool, then leather
Swami firemen climb into smoke ridden sky
My book, my bowl, old grammarian slouches in
That's why new physics emits false sun
Stationary cloud growing darker and more dense
Sis writes Ecstatic unrelated on forehead
Dead leaves silent to plum trees horror
Old pipes start to strangle the white basin
Big sigh, the way the walls breathe
Big dream face wants to gel

So noon is a self-enforced myth
The status of adjectives tends to cringe
Surrounded, the not high porch offers an inadequate vista
Sex as an idea penetrates an army
No verb will denounce a bias
A statue of mother filling the harbor
Then seven repeats the still bad concept
Automatic cartridge return rising high over U.N. Plaza
The lack of light is its name
Sound certain, sound silly, sound off
Red rover, wind in the clover, over
Sailor boy pays to dance with naked lady

Cat gut, rain is its own rupture, rapture
Brain's a hardened cream of mushroom soup
Insert jellied finger deep into anus
Insist "What a good boy am I"
Two armed duck hunters enter the stock exchange
Ardent aliens harden in coat of light
A cat sits, dreaming in its juices
Stoop opens onto shouting in Tagalog
Electronic transfer of whisper or rice cake
It wants to snooze is a bad sign
Curved window reflects sad flock of geese
Forest of vast moss over spider

6-sided house (or seven) falls down
Neon bosom glow is drink my scotch
Rhythm of evasion at program directors' monthly meet
Bite down hard to discover soft penis
Sun rising in pink dawn sky
Coroner's crew unfolds a dark trash bag
Six legged horse, or 7, kneels down
Sausage seals gold deposit is military regime unstable
Dense cloud swarm threatens memory of stanza
Who are you now, little man
Ridge Road rigid load on hell week
An 8-legged hoss swims in dark water

Slant shingle rooves shelter back porches on stilts
Up the canal by speedboat for crackers
Six cities choke on eraser dust
The scientist's beautiful daughter understands his evil
The clear-headed clean-shaven blond young reporter is single
The herd of wooly spiders crossing moss
Fresh hot coffee drips from its filter
The plum tree pink with spring
The new erudition in subway car graffiti
Faded map with foreign countries in wrong colors
Slow rhythm of lone basketball against concrete
Saucer becomes ashtray for old cigar

Gull gang patrols dull urban lake

Too tall antenna on a lone house

One parrot up against the theory of birds

Cost per tea bag equals one noun

Espousing freely into air bag (sic)

Makes too headed a motion rhyme rhyme

That your jackets possess lining, compromise lunch

The watchband cutting into the fat man's wrist

Edit an idea, change channels, insert dime

Assert thyme, ascertain lime's way, limp

Here kitty kitty where shitbrains still govern

Wax melting where the binding nears the sun

Off-white, a narrow sky begins to close in

Soft hyphens fade against the green screen

Half-hidden, nonremarks curtail attributes, crop predicates

Tough blue Stanza Z-80 shuts engine off

Laugh at a chip shot, the long putt

Often unremembered, the face in the mirror

Coughing fears margin & a second cup

After the tap in, insert flag

Overt horizon, slope now to greet fashion

Rough bumps along the road to break line

Suffer motivation, bright red flare of nostril

Draft image, through which seek shadow

Notes crinkle old syntax's loose sway

Rope bridge in monsoon to far noun

Loom foreign to swampgrass curried in hot sauce

Thus Senator Borah says to another bore

Baby corn, button mushroom, bullet vote

Love it or live it, Dear Barrett

It's 5:15 a.m., that world is over

But I just want Yaz to go forever

Two minute warning, four minutes to midnight

Half seven, digits on the readout

Count pulse, court passing sums, again Sam

An old broom standing proud in one corner

New nouns for old, no noons for ought

Caffein multiplies the thought into red image

The plum tree is snowing petals

The tall porch landing was her stage

Waiting to load transient program, dog bites parrot

For a general, Ike was so femme

The formalist variation on a double play

Sends Europe south into North Africa

Where to punctuate was mother's next question

Get Out The Vote, capital of South Dakota

Dog bites paragraph parachutes over moldy buckram

Sun disk accesses into driven sky

A broken old pen scratched this
Big wooly spider climbs the stoop step
Months of steady rain silences an urban populace
I squint right at the phosphor screen
Now the sun at the margin
To have what are called good hands
The car backfires and the valley echoes
Depositing ink in swirls to code these phonemes
My state of mind is New Hampshire
Light is but the shadow's absence
A fresh cadence marks a new crime
The lines upon paper state the social contract

Blue parrot sips slowly from an amaretto glass
Jigsaw puzzle down to last dozen pieces
The grammarian's palm begins to bleed
House full of bad pens, bad puns
One year ago tomorrow I went down south
Symbols quest for an impossible full morning
A clerk hosing down the produce shelf
Cabbie's view through the interior mirror
Static, like a postcard from your childhood
Too yellow, too green, the pinks too bright
To mean anything, to mourn anything, two
People terrified to speak of love

XII.

Words wiggle, tickle, setting cat's whiskery nostrils atwiche, rooster's
yodel, breeze in tall grass (little spider), grasses, is as/was is (fuzzy),
a blue prick bleeds & what remains (flock of gulls) means, O new Spring (!),
rhythm is its own plagarism, doo wop, vowel's valence splitting the dipthong
and beneath the kale a thousand snails still in the damp shade, quiet morning,
wasp got into the john, bird's call like a gargled whistle, bang, snap, crack,
hid in the flowering leaves of the plum, phlegm's but the solids of sleep
caught in the throat, the moat, remote, we crossed in the boat, like a bat
out of Philly. Folly to count and hope, however fewer, the fix & feel of a
clean edge, eye lid, three lies, loafas settle steaming on a hot board (bed),
bid 2 Junior Gilliams for a Lew Burdette, get set, said, sad, smell of ripe
mulch is sour, our match made of volleys, sulphur, so for how long is that
yellow caterpillar set to sit atop hot wet fresh steaming asphalt? Leopards
in leotards, hot sauce, spotted cat on the shed roof, blue-gray flicker on
the small screen, radios is hard, bad news, how the heat drops when the sun
goes, cup of tea, fog tint, hollerin' in the hallway while the desk clerk
snores. Later the sun rises but you have to jam the door shut, ear full of
wax, car full of vexed doggies yapping in supermarket lot real loud. Lone
viking in longboat seeks land across page from crosswords, folded in the
old man's lap. Each of many lives seems simple, full of repeats. One job
I wouldn't mind losing. After the reading. Referent. Bypass. Bid. Call.
Sought. Sweet. Saw it. Sweat it out. Sad Sultan of Swat. At dusk, the
blue-pink horizon. The way you hear sirens deepen when they slow and stop.
Swaggering though they don't mean it, a heavy slow grace, the elephants

cross the roadway. Head of the snail rears up, horns extended, king of this leaf, leaving its trail glistening, to see the grey jet descend, yard shuddering after. The tongue is thick in the head of lettuce on bread, a lattice said to weave lotus leaves along the wrong path to a single meaning, mining half shades of nuance to mime the world, blue swirl, solid object bigger than a breadbox. Gravity is its own absence nor is balloon racing a sport of the poor, pearls in the sky high over a meadow hover, while below rafters in white water rush, rivers too curl from view, hushed where puppies carry hunters to the fox, boxed in by snapping death, bad breath of a rifle muzzling kin of dog, digs image cut by line from a wood block, inked and then stamped. Thus the blisters of history whisper pus, lives pissed to no higher purpose than poverty's trust in service dense as the surface of a jungle served up under jelly flambe', India my Indiana, say that particulars do not fade nor rust consumed in their own dust, or that memory's fair, an old funeral barely the scene of thought's return, my own father flattened into a photo, false smile no knowing could ever fill, fall becomes autumn but never spring, negative my nugget, if we ever got it, that new syntax equal to the living could just as well lie.

Count friends few just as lovers many, money enters in, plot the poem all lit by reams of writing's trace against the face of one who, were it you, is eye alone at home in the head just as the large bed of the past seduces, the feel of what tongue, wet, widens and hardens what is, just as is wills was its future by being, so a small scar spreads into a canyon from which there is no turning back, only demolition, given that entropy is not perfect rest, even as the debris blossoms each mote of dust bloating into a rotten

whole swells so fast that syntax starts to sweat. Hot noon on the sloping steps of an old porch, smell of tar: down in the valley between the tops of trees autos pass, over which the sound of a big truck bearing lumber, but the rustle of wind in the plum branch is louder because more near, I hear the sleeves of shirts slap on the line, all tangled (old white gallon bleach jugs full of water weight nylon, bobbing in the air). Garden orders forest or meadow, the park bares design, clay pot to trap roots, hard edge to the hedge, long rose in a slim vase, knife slicing thru torso of zucchini, steamed carrot growing limp, teeth ripping thru leaf of lettuce, gone. A big cool dumb easy fox gets his index jogged kindly, light moan not of pit quiet roar seeking time under vexed waxy xenon yellow zit. Sun sliced through the bamboo shades illumines the room, one window open to let air in. The sounds of pots and forks from back inside the kitchen. The curve hits the outside corner. Upside your fat head. Besides that. Siding. Side. Said.

So. Sad. So soft. So sue me. Lofts in Soho shrink. Rents rise, forcing the poets out. Who remembers the linguist of the Hotel Wentley? White and aimless, cum laude, they have learned which books to purchase, but not which ones to read. The road to Iowa City is paved with good intentions, perfect binding, preferring submission to solicitation, O ragged right. I was not bitter, better, butter being the tiger's fate, finding access where lately excess fought its own fathers to a halt, inhalt, in all the right margins habit sought Rago's white horse, a site for soaring lyric lies. The words are my wife else the mirror break, mere beaked thing worn at the neck, the past is peaked, the page, aging, yellows where black ink hollows out a syntax

deep in the stacks of a library not checked out of an infield made of the mind in which spelunkers become fixed by the smell of gas leaking from a pen's tip (tap) along the quay of letters lost, thus thoughts' ruins tossed. Through the print, between the curling graphic spaces, I could see them shitting, grammarians downside up from the rafters in the old hotel, pelicans out over the water, the caged parrot, the Tac Squad in snowshoes at the door, the small girl finishing the ancient puzzle and the distinct fartlike odor of nachos until the salt begins to slide from the rim of the margarita and the weeds in between cracked floorboards start to spell out spring's flowering breach, damp gardens of seriphs seen from above understood as a rash thing to do, not love but what desire from which I start to sing.

The yard understood as a mixture of motives, porch paint spotting sage and spider, sawdust and old boards killing the lawn, strange bird half yodels in the plum tree against the sound of a garden hose inside a trash can or another bird's still higher trill, ears absorb while the eye scans, skin senses the fog's damp, butt upon the step, sound of a broom in which driveway, wind felt in eyebrow's hair, here in the little things (who I am), three flies articulate the sky between porch & tree, poetry is that this, is thought thus, body but a metaphor (who I was) for a medical model of that thing lit. Of late much work, little light, leads humor stuttering home, get the lead out (of the pencil, the penis), the point scratching paper's skin seen to signify mind means the made marks the maker's mask (meet science), ear stitched to side of head, hard wood weds floor to foot (I am not that), float from word to word as if there were a reason, as if there were reason, beyond as and es. "Ease awes," guffaws the talking mule, eyes as corrective

to ear's reduction of kitten's seductive vocabulary turned to "mews" is snot enough to lose amid typos the essence of our text beckoning assent. Anxiety of response conducts meaning to lowest denominator, prefaces foreplay plying tongue to punctuation, a setup. "My reputation is in your mouth" is in your mind (read aloud) allows no reading. Speak up or forever hold your piece: this is the place. Word bytes man, and the apple drops. Submit to reading. Now read this. And this. This. This.

Thus. Toss. Tsk, tsk. One gets lost. Lust accounts meter. Made my morning into song sung. Lung got it wrong, tho, stung by redaction: ink is glue. The visible flickers filtered so, selected is neglected, name of the not seen. To construct a clock imagine time seizable in units, sizable in eunuchs, laggards playing tag to communicate past tense thought. We live in the house that Juan bought, rebuilding steps that spiral up to a meaning over my head rent with practical implication, make it nuance, shade's shift tracking sun's course, cloud muted, the mind is a terrible thing (think). To the bottom, bent pole limits parking, lottery of comprehension to any statement but convention restricts error only narrowly, stop signs vs. stars' names in the night sky, anarchy of house types in town by which to discern home in the dark become regular in the newer tracts, pattern recognition of birds in flight, a walk in the right woods. Words would do it were they real (would they were) but signifieds drain them, hemophilic meaning, all we can speak of caged in thought insulates action, friction of syntax fought the intention, sparks connotation to belie melody, whomp bop a do bop, pink and green houses, blue glass, the old woman who lives in a shack, kettle's whistle, incomputable smear to greet ear and eye can do no-

thing but sort, leaving a trail that sought only to lay a track which, sounded, marked a possible present (this), activity grounded in its own proceeding, bleeding store-bought ink onto spongy page.

The abstractions of history, lethal as a foodstamp, clarify the legal real, an all-over texture, the white race to oblivion, the white rice stacked in sacks in a valley town for the displaced Laotian farmer, a frown seen is a sign of displeasure, a fond scene measures the papers' coverage, "human interest" being neither fosters purchase, sculpted tragedy of a playground killing turned into "features" fathers a false remorse (sullen competent cop shakes head), mothers no new insight, the boy just bled 2 pages away from where Garfield contemplates lasagna. Disjunct art-meaning of later collage framed against white gallery wall bends context into content, the difference it makes that the girl rising, mouth open, in horror over the student's dead body in Kent was overweight, message in the politics of appearance not lost on the applicant for what's really a sales job, degree in museum studies. Some do, however, choose education, mechanism by which to lose close connection to the culture of the "working class," whoever that was, solution to my parents' oppression being to change sides (reverse image). Perverse imagination to make equations against scale, as if to sell such small reproductions of thought: no ideas but in context. Form gathers force (my credo) for what purpose but use, source for an assault on habit. Seeming clarity inhibits thought as it ought not. Boy dead because he spoke wrong tongue. Boy George, my hero. You survive. Others. Will. Not.

Now. How. Ever. Buy futures. Bird features feathers. Beard furthers the casual look. Inverse of camouflage, open at the collar: pert. Polo shirt

pink pastel backlit in the La Jolla window beside the folded tie. A small wooden box on the dresser in which her father had once kept cufflinks now held only a vial of cocaine and a tiny spoon. The diskettes were kept in what looked like a card file across from the overstuffed easy chair with its faded burgundy brocade upon which lay the sleeping ocelot like any other housepet near the window to the sea. Tennessee fireworks factory goes ker-blam, fine rain of body parts, make it noise, red against blue of the news studio, cut to cued dissociation, sailboat silhouetted against vast setting sun, beer glass in foreground rising full until just the slightest foam spills over and this is the sole lamp in the cramped apartment, family of five fresh from Taiwan. Plums too small to eat have begun to drop, the fog if you look closely has its shapes and shadows, the wind in the trees is loud, I can't tell over it if that's a dog barking or the steady squeal of a saw, black beetle on a yellow leaf, parsley gone to seed and the brown cat atop the back fence sniffs the air, too cool to rain, not a fly or bee in sight, the sameness of any day against another accumulates that sadness which becomes restraint in everyone older feigning wiser, orange cat on the porch turns around and sits, such simple acts set beside each other build.

Hand-held, the image thru the pen's lens wobbles as it pans, sweep to right margin, pins sound to paper but the mind adrift hobbles after, gathering few vague echoes of intent, so tend the senses wisely or they tangle, angles frame the object hued by light, hard edged, wedged into an imagined sight but lost, the page turned, the cost of dreaming as you stare at words, birds migrating toward a punctuation, partial truths are all we get, letters home, honed, the bone of thought rings in the head, a sort of bell within a spire,

what is higher than sight is heard, hurt, herds these small black beasts
of graphics forth. I sit and you set the table, used it and able to do so
again (you sit and I set the table, used it and able to do so again): which
of us reads, which writes, or writing reads, seeds of a process which binds,
not blind to the separateness of different lives, always we find strangers
on the bus, but print is a bond we learned by rote, in rows, years ago.
Each step taken jars the old porch, beams cracking along the grain, white
spots of bird drops speckle the brown paint, the horizontals bowed and
perpendiculars slanting, a few nails painted over when they should have been
hammered back down. Heat-seeking, the reading eye zooms in on denotation,
and old statue gone pale blue in the park with its skirt of broken bottles,
dark green. The color chart fused in the eye bears arbitrary borders, blue-
green, blue-gray, purple. The globe closes to a focus, or widens and blinks.
Thought burdens sight by erasure. The instinct is learned. Blue iris.
Brown lash. Yoke. Yolk.

But. Bit. Chewing. Down into. Onto a chunk of. Ontological chocolate.
Horizontal on top of it, the sky is not flat. Venn proof by intersection of
air into yard or room, such subsets of otherness. A yam what a yam, Ham's
syllogism knew Yorick, Powhatten's bridge off coast of Cuba into candied
doubt und so max out by the cut. Dive, he sad, for rice flakes, watch what
is given (is given back), freedom's just another word, old rooms so silent
of their births and deaths, brooms push dust toward a meaning, the moaning
wind in the trees thought by some to be their fathers. In the desert once
I heard silence, a startling thing, not wind, not even the skitter of a
lizzard over gravel, until the roar of blood in my head, high pitched, a

clear tone, seemed about to deafen and I thought, thinking words, as if to
fear a soundless world, still, stillness, knowing even motion to be but an
image of time, and that but memory's projection. The idea is to inform all
of their layoff at once, at the shift's end, a note on the timecard, telling
each to return tomorrow for their severance plus a half-day outplacement
clinic, resume skills or retraining: in 1983, the average manufacturing
plant lasts just seven years and you can lease the technology out, contract-
ing for the product, keeping capital mobile, wages down, which has its im-
pact on poetry, that writing whose value is not that it has none, but the
image presented, craft-centered, of what working could be, the care in the
word.

The car in the yard: the ward healers of tenure bicker (suspending Spenser,
choosing Chaucer), make it known is such a small demand, not one literate
among them in the face of a single syllable sounded, soft and simple, ample
enough to sample the whole of the world's thought rounded in the mouth, but
curriculum demands division into genre and the vision is gone of a possible
writing, sighting the opaque nameless things which fill a garden so hard to
fathom, the world at random forcing form is not a farm of hardened meanings,
for knowledge cannot be taught. Say that what he wrote were words, heard
but never hardened into objects foreign to their making, senses shifting but
not to settle (none too subtle), taking out of talk & all that reading a
bottled ship not to chase whales in but yourself until the shelf of this im-
pulse swelled and he understood it better -- say what he wrote weren't words,
that he merely scripted letters. A cat is a stylized wildness chewing grass,
blue inhuman eyes over which the sky fills with clouds, white scraps preced-

ing the gray bank that pushes over the houses by the ocean, the garden damp
smells stronger, a plum drops. Parrots of the past unite, for what have you
to lose but that thru which you live, dream-headed, our own cages more
elaborate than any. Voices in the dark, wires tangled, hark to find not an
answer but an echo, barking. I know a house of mud and wattles made (no I
don't). Gulls circling over the valley. It's the end of May. A hard wind.
Thin sun. One. Room.

Roam. Wide. Not build. In it, "A." The el to the Loop. Lit up, writing
down: balances. The boys in the binding, the bouys, discipline limits. Ears
arc what's harped, I's wide, wade in the foam of, the form is a half shell
(my bell), held up. Hurts harden over but are not erased, and in each case
I was to what degree guilty, silly centered careless love but an indulgence.
In sequins lights shine real serial, un aleph beth, garlanded sin tacks
sharp consequence, flex sun's spotted circumstance all Latinate, the lit in
it falls to the were, he rows to the sure lea, a lie: thus did we cross the
tea. I spy: see shore, 3 masts approaching must broach a new whorl, he, he
coming to z'real, breach a broken syntax teaching each token surreal dis-
placement of the rolling feel of it, eye's wheel, tolling signals rodeo's
begun, radio's on, the sun (radiant) fills the air, what hair remains on my
head is blowing, the future flowing in off the sea smells sweet. A word
wide is deep also heard right, rate of exchange, sides edged by white space
placed in a row go forward, knowing only where they've been as possible site
to future meaning, hybrid as Marcie's white rose leaning over the fence,
name's a neighbor, each a particular as against the typical, person sighted
about to cross the street, city mapped in the mind is a grid, greed's a

knowledge oddly used, hidden is that you I'd bid to speak with, a letter
mailed at random, ladder to the wall's top (edge of the paper) that stops
pretending the vision's beyond, left there, mark of an old desire.

INTERVIEW

Ron, I find it interesting that you frequently seem to write using very specific procedures of text generation. Can you speak to your use of these procedures and of their value to you?

My sense of what you rightly call procedure has changed enormously over time. At first, such structures (devices, strategies) were something I resorted to out of necessity. The problem which confronts any writer, once they have broken with the received tradition of a writing that presumes and imposes a stable "voice," is how literally to proceed. Without persona, narrative or argument (however implicit or associational), what motivates the next line, the next sentence, the next paragraph or stanza? Without syntax, what justifies the existence of even the next word?

Yet all poetry is procedure. The tangible rule-governed behavior of the sonnet is no more constructed than the work whose devices efface such governance in the name of a "voice," or of "realism." The debate which characterized American poetry at the point when I, and others, were first struggling with this issue, failed on both sides to make itself articulate at this level. The closed forms of the Academics (so-called) admitted their self-constructedness, but were non-generative, capable only of the repetition of the past in the face of the present. The open forms of the New Americans (so-called) concealed their "madness," but for a time offered a more fully generative response to daily life. Once, however, the creative euphoria of sketching out what the false model of a (non-constructed because "natural") speech-imitating poetics would look like was complete, the same limiting claustrophobia set in.

All poetry is formalist, the intervention of forms into the real, the transformation of the real into forms. But the real is social, discontinuous, unstable and opaque. Against that, any fixed poetics (any valorized, codified set of procedures) is necessarily a falsification. It is the moment at which the real generates new forms that the real itself becomes visible. The problem of procedures is how to keep the problem manifest.

If I trace the movement toward such devices in my own writing what I find is a recognition, gained in stages over a period of years, that what was truly subversive, in the literal and best sense, about Jackson Mac Low's chance methodology was not the use of chance, the value of which Jackson seems to have overstated, but the turn toward method itself. Not that you cannot find writing which is equally procedural, in both its generative and constructed qualities, in the work of Creeley or Zukofsky. But it took the artificial surface texture of the chance-composed text, with all its rigid awkwardness, to make that turn to method apparent.

For me, then, the question of procedure is not one of seeking a "correct," or valorized device (e.g., the "new sentence"), but of taking a stance toward language, the activity of composition, and reality, which will call forth strategies and structures that are both generative and unconcealing of their constructedness. In practice, this places the

decision over any given procedure in advance of the "actual writing." With *Tjanting*, it took me more than eight months to go from my first rough sketches of what a piece built on the concept of the Fibonacci number series might look like to the composition of a two-word first sentence, "Not this."

What factors enter into a decision to use a given procedure?

The potential is the main thing, the potential which I sense a particular method will have to enable me to get at whatever I want to investigate or work on at the point of composition. So the factors change radically from work to work. It's content-dependent, though not in a story-board sort of way. Content-centered.

Again to use *Tjanting* as case in point, the original impulse there was a question that had been recurring to me for at least 5 years: what would class struggle look like, viewed as a form? Would such a form be useable in writing? Given the pervasive and extraordinary force with which the constant competition between social classes helps to shape our lives, a form which could reproduce (however dimly) these dynamics would seem to offer an articulate vehicle through which to explore just this problem of "shaping," of how these exterior events act upon and enter into the subjective in order to create the Subject.

Any solution to a question like that is necessarily going to be both reductive and an analogy, and *Tjanting* pleads guilty to both counts. What it does is to develop, through alternating paragraphs, in two directions: every paragraph is the antithesis of the preceding one. Any synthesis, if it occurs, does so at the level of the whole, the book. Perhaps this will make more sense if I contrast the paragraph structure of *Tjanting* to that of *Ketjak*, written four years earlier. If the sentence "Revolving door" is taken as the kernal unit of a continually expanding paragraph in *Ketjak*, the equivalent kernal in *Tjanting* would be a pair of such sentences, each of which expands into a series of paragraphs interspersed with the other.

The recognition on my part that there needed to be these two "oppositional" series of paragraphs was the point at which the Fibonacci series entered in. I had, as I've said, already been playing with the idea of a work using the series, but without notable success. The essence of Fibonacci's numbers is that each term is the sum of the two previous terms: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34... n. What initially attracted me to the series were three things: (1) it is the mathematical sequence most often found in nature, (2) each succeeding term is larger, and (3) the quantitative difference between terms is immediately perceptible, even when the quantities are of syllables or sentences. These latter two aspects of the series were at least as important to me as the first. A successive increase in sheer mass, in writing as in music, is felt by a reader as a powerful index of narrative (i.e., meaningful) development. I would never have put the paragraphs in *Ketjak*, for example, in reverse order. And the difference between terms being perceptible is critical, as this is what gives the series the possibility of significant shape.

This is not the case with all mathematical series. Consider prime numbers, whose indivisibility suggest all manner of metaphysical appli-

cations. The lower ones (2,3,5,7) are all numbers with an incredible impact on the history of poetic form. The haiku, for instance, combines three lines of 5 and 7 syllables to a sum of 17. Iambic pentameter's very name indicates that it is not a series of 10 syllables, but of 5 sets of two each. The power of prime numbers extends for some distance: there are 1229 primes under 10,000, with 1229 itself being a prime. But the differences between 9929, 9931, 9941, 9949, 9967, and 9973 would not be perceptible to the human eye or ear. Under Fibonacci, the final six terms under 10,000 are 610, 987, 1597, 2584, 4181, and 6765.

Yet I hadn't even identified the Fibonacci series with quantities of sentences until I -- through that entirely different line of reasoning -- came up with the need to develop a work which used two oppositional series of paragraphs. At which moment, the most important aspect of the Fibonacci series turned out not to be those gorgeous internal relationships, but the fact that it begins with two ones. That not only permitted the parallel articulation of two sequences of paragraphs, but also determined that their development would be uneven, punning back to the general theory of class struggle. Thus one line contains paragraphs with 1, 2, 5, 13...4181 sentences each, and the other 1, 3, 8, 21...2584.

Once I'd identified these two ways of thinking about the poem, the rest of the decisions came very quickly. Each paragraph would repeat every sentence of its previous occurrence, as was the case in *Ketjak*. However, the repeats would be rewritten so as to reveal their constructedness, their artificiality as elements of meaning, their otherness -- which makes them, for me, the most important ones in the book. And the mathematical relationships between paragraphs was such that there had to be stretches of writing at the end of each in which no rewrites would occur whatsoever. (What I didn't realize for over two years was that these "free-writing" passages would themselves advance according to an absolutely strict Fibonacci series!)

The only other decision of any consequence that preceded the actual composition of *Tjanting* was not to separate out certain topics or types of sentences for different lines of development. I felt that would have made the work seem too ping-pong like, as if one were to alternate paragraphs from *Moby Dick* with others from *The Sound and the Fury*. My idea was to begin with a fairly straight-forward discursive equilibrium and let the alternation of the paragraphs alone break that down until another equilibrium on a much broader level established itself.

Charles Bernstein's work seems to me to proceed and coalesce in terms of his scepticisms and rather thorough-going doubt. Your work, on the other hand, seems grounded in senses of certainty. This perception has been voiced by others and has led to charges of dogmatism. How do you feel about this?

Encouraged. If one test of my poetry, seen from the perspective of a lifework, is the degree to which it makes readers and other writers ask fundamental questions about the "nature" of writing, then it follows that one index of its "success" would come precisely in the form of such expressions of discomfort and/or disagreement on the part of those who are being asked to examine, and perhaps to give up, their assumptions.

I am absolutely not proposing that I know the answers to any of these questions. I don't know if writing can even be said to have a nature. But I do think that I know enough to ask -- and that this task of calling-into-question is an essential one.

But beyond this, the charge of dogmatism is the type of metacritical indictment which conveniently enables the accuser to avoid addressing the content of the alleged dogma. It's an umbrella term or cipher that stands in the place of disagreement on other levels more often than not. In those instances, I have strived whenever possible to get to the actual substance, the cause of this discomfort. The strategic use of overstatement is, of course, one method of taking a discourse to another level, and one which I've used (notably in my debate with Mac Low over politics in $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$). The downside of it as a strategy is that one is then wedded in the reader's imagination to the position taken: you are what you have published.

There's a larger problem here also, which even the category "certainty" just scratches: how, and where, does writing fit into the life of the individual? If there is a single point where I would take issue with Bernstein's writing, it's precisely around the issue of irony. What does it *mean* to be ironic in one's writing 100% of the time? I would love to hear Charles respond to that someday, and, in a slightly different sense, Bob Perelman likewise. If one believes in things and even believes in the concept of commitment itself, which Perelman, for example, must, given that he's politically active in the campaign to shut down the Lawrence Livermore nuclear weapons lab, then to not manifest commitment in one's writing feels very problematic. I'm not asking Bob to write an anti-nuke poem any more than I think I should be writing about rent control or solid waste management, but there are moments of simple, direct statement in the work of Lyn Hejinian or Barrett Watten that would feel entirely foreign if grafted into a piece by Bernstein or Perelman.

Something like this is incredibly complicated to try and talk about even in the context of four writers whose work I feel so close to and so thoroughly admire. Yet there is a quantum leap of difficulty in trying to sort through this terrain when one is dealing with very different kinds of poets. I have been trying to fathom of late why some of the "actualist" poets, particularly Darrell Gray and Andrei Codrescu, feel compelled to assault in print the "language" poets with a venom that is genuinely disturbing. Each tendency is, after all, equally the progeny of the "New American" poetries of the 50's, which should mean that there's a substantial area of concurrence as to certain literary values. If one looks at the relation of the writing to one's life, however, a significant distinction does occur which helps explain (nothing could "justify") their behavior.

"Actualism" buys into the anti-intellectualism which characterized (and eventually destroyed) the "New American" writing. Ostensibly the "actualist" text is not serious. Yet their social model for literature is one of intense competition, my team versus your team, whereas writing is taken by poets such as Rae Armantrout, Bruce Andrews or Steve Benson to be a far more collaborative project, a vision of literature as community which I personally feel is very moving and powerful. And the work, while it is filled with humor, is understood to be serious.

Founded on a model of individualism, that capitalism of the spirit, the "actualist" line of thinking leads to an unhappy conclusion. The failure of the "language poets" to disappear is taken as an indictment. It's not merely that "their team is behind and we're into the seventh inning" -- they might not understand just which game is being played. The depth of the bitterness such thinking leads to can be gauged by the fact that *Exquisite Corpse* and *Black Bart* are blatant imitations of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, a magazine each has ridiculed in print.

Competitiveness is exactly like racism, sexism or ageism. It is something which every person in this society is instructed in virtually from the day we are born. Like those other isms, competitiveness is fundamentally anti-social behavior: it causes individuals to harm one another when called upon to do so in the name of gain, economic or otherwise. And, also like those other isms, it's something no contemporary of mine (and certainly not myself) will ever fully get over. All that can be done is to struggle with it, in oneself and socially.

This is why hierarchical models of literature -- the essence of what the MLA has accomplished in American education -- oppress writing, writers and readers alike. They presume homogenous audiences over which writers compete for ranking, and they presume that one set of values is sufficient for all groups of people. Let's be blunt: Shakespeare was not a great writer. Instead, we have been taught to read in a manner that values highly what Shakespeare put into his writing. And if one of us fails to "get it," we are led to believe that the responsibility lies with us, not that Shakespeare's values might be different from our own. And the decision as to how to teach writing is a social, not a literary, determination.

All writing expresses value.

Not just linguistic value, though that also.

And if this sounds dogmatic, it is because one (I) necessarily must adopt an aggressive rhetoric in order to question that which has previously been outside of the domain of permissible questions. I may not be correct -- but now that has to be proven. The converse can no longer simply be assumed. My intention in writing is not to be a "great poet." My intention is to help incite a riot in the "prison house of language."

I'd like to go at Legend. Though I'm engaged by the text at points -- particularly the exchange of letters between you and Charles -- overall I can't see the thing as a successful work in terms of collective effect -- i.e., of arriving at some stage beyond a collation of individual efforts. What do you say to this?

I want to go back to my comment at the end of the question-before-last: about equilibrium. Any work, regardless of value or "success," will establish an equilibrium, a mean point recognizable to the reader. Some people call this "voice," others "tone" or "surface," and I take it that this is what Peter Yates meant when he wrote that aesthetic consistency was content. Yet this "collective effect" might not be the result of anything internal to the text, but rather one consequence (among many) of a phenomenon which I've elsewhere called the Parsimony Principle: the tyranny of the whole. The reading mind interprets all data incrementally and provisionally, struggling always to reduce the "meaning" at the level of the whole to the simplest possible explana-

tion, altering and discarding previous interpretations (readings) as needed. The genre of the detective story plays with the sensuality of this process, which is in fact the fundamental narrative impulse of the human imagination. Narrative is a function of the mind, not of the plot or story-board. Therefore the whole is not simply more than the sum of the parts -- it is capable of altering and distorting fundamental aspects of the parts in the name of its own ultimate authority. I'm not simply speaking of the age-old workshop dilemma of the beginning writer who inundates his or her work with "extraneous detail" -- though the very perennial nature of that situation ought to be a huge warning sign that the problem lies not with "beginners," but with the conventionality of a stylized language itself --, the censoring mechanism within this tyranny of the whole is the oppressive element within language. Keep in mind that during the Vietnam war there was a context, a collective effect, in which it made sense for a presumably otherwise rational human being to assert that "We had to destroy the town in order to save it." That is such an extreme instance that the problem actually seems visible for a moment. As it does whenever human behavior goes beyond the point of one's comprehension. Whether it's bride burning over dowries in India or mothers poisoning their infants in the Jonestown suicides. And if we look at the language systems employed by such deviant, closed communities as the People's Temple, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the Manson Family or the Nixon White House, we see over and over that, from a perspective *within* those collectivities (under the trance of that effect), *their actions made sense*. My point is simply that I doubt that this phenomenon is the exclusive problem of those groups. Again, this is something which seems obvious when we look at its operation within the practice and dogma of any religion other than our own. The "collective effect" is the ideological dimension of all language. It's as though we were deep sea fish unaware of anything beyond the surface of the water, unaware even of that surface.

Which is not to say that *Legend* is not a problematic text. Just that my problems with it lie elsewhere. I do think that it establishes an equilibrium, a "collective effect," but not one which sufficiently calls that condition into question. I certainly think that we tried to block that effect, at least to some degree. We avoided any "plotting" of the pieces beyond the vaguest formal distinctions, such as that three of us would work on one here and two of us on one there, etc. People were in charge of their own scetions, and I don't recall anyone trying to "veto" or alter any section that was not their responsibility. Although there are 26 parts, nobody worked on more than 12, so that there was no dominant note. The sections are essentially ordered in terms of formal contrast, rather than by theme, or chronology, or a sequence of formal "unfolding," as would have been the case had all the solos been followed by the duets, and then the trios, etc. Nonetheless, the first section is a "monad," though not the first one composed, and the final piece is the one five-way collaboration in the book.

Collaborations are a process of surrendering control. For many, people, myself among them, that is not a simple thing. Writers are taught that control is equivalent to craft, even to "sincerity." Setting out to put one's name to a work that is inevitably going to be "out of control" is a curious idea. It is not surprising that so many col-

laborations over the past few decades have either been fundamentally comic or ironic in nature, or else have been spoofs of certain genre forms of literature: in such circumstances the author's intent is distanced and buffered. Those are socially accepted modes of "irresponsibility."

My sense of *Legend* (being only one of five) is that it intended to demonstrate what a "serious" collaboration might look like. Yet the project was so large, took so long, and each individual's portion of responsibility was so fragmented, that the end product was quite beyond the grasp of any one of us. *Legend* is not typical of the writing of any of its authors. It's as if we set out to create a commune of poetry and ended up with a bureaucracy.

Would you be willing to attempt a collaboration on such a scale again? If so, how would you approach the project differently? If not, why not?

Given how much energy and thought I put into a work in advance of the actual writing, it's difficult to know just how I would respond to a particular proposal without having some sense of the details in front of me. With *Legend*, we had a pretty fair idea of the scale of the project in terms of pages, but I doubt that any of us anticipated just how many years it would take.

Engines, the fifth movement of *The Alphabet*, is a more recent collaboration with Rae Armantrout. To my own eye, it has a tension and density that I was never able to achieve in my portions of *Legend*. Part of that no doubt is because Rae and I have known each other longer than I have any of the other contributors to *Legend*. But part of it is also a consequence of having learned a great deal about that process from having already done so much of it. In a two person collaboration, there is an intense chain of action and response, attention and reaction, which one finds in such other interactive events as tennis or love-making. I'm much more sensitive to the nuances of interaction than I was five years ago. In fact, collaboration is an excellent method for sensitizing the writer as to the place of the reader, which, although it is never reflected directly in the text-as-object, is itself a participatory (if unequal) role.

On another level, I am already involved in collaborative work "on such a scale" through my work with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). A while back, Jean Day commented on my absence from the productions of Poets Theater of San Francisco, Eileen Corder and Nick Robinson's group. While I've never had the time, or never felt I had, to make the kind of serious commitment which Poets Theater demands, Jean suggested that one of its attractions to so many poets of the Bay Area -- and one of the reasons why I might not feel the same "need" to participate -- is precisely the cooperative nature of interaction which it requires. A type of process which is quite unlike the ways in which poets normally relate to one another, but which is very similar to the daily experience of membership in a political organization, as it is also to the writing of collaborations. Such interactivity can be deeply satisfying and might even be a basic human need, one that is perhaps underserved in the potentially isolating cottage industry of writing

poems. The social interaction of poets, beyond the sheer chumming around (sometimes slightly desperately) at readings and bars, is largely restricted to the act of publication. An act in which the available methods have come to be known as "solicitation" and "submission," terms whose sexual connotations, by no means accidental, serve only to highlight fairly alienating, seriously imbalanced power relations. In addition to creating superb drama (in fact, redefining the function of "character" for the first time since Brecht), Poets Theater offers a means for combatting just such alienation. My work with DSA is simply another method.

In fact, at one point the Electoral Action Committee, on which I sit, of the San Francisco local attempted a project which, both in scope and process, closely paralleled the making of *Legend*. This was to have been a detailed platform for the "socialist" administration of a major city government within the context of present American political realities. Given that DSA has members in Congress, others who are mayors, state legislators, city and county officials, or presidents of such diverse labor unions as the Screen Actors Guild and the International Association of Machinists, our platform project was not merely a utopian intellectual exercise. Although our primary purpose was to create a document that would serve to direct the actions of our own local, and to provide our coalition partners, such as tenant, neighborhood, peace, Central American support and union groups, what socialism means within the framework of local politics (an area about which Marxist theory, at least prior to Manuel Castells, has been largely silent), socialists everywhere must learn to govern. The failure of the Mitterand administration in France can be traced directly to the FSP's refusal to recognize that "socialism in one country" is as impossible under a western bourgeois democratic model as it is under a Stalinist state capitalist one. The world economic system (which is entirely capitalist), and not the individual state, is the dominant actor. Had the French Socialist Party started from this recognition, that it was not creating socialism but governing capitalism, its promises to the French people and its actual policies would have been quite different. The problematics of this are even more pronounced at the local level.

Unlike *Legend*, all of whose participants identify themselves as poets, that is, as persons for whom this is simply a collaborative extension of their major activity, the co-authors of the platform project were lawyers, planning students, health administrators, the legislative aide of a county supervisor and the like. Persons for whom this was an extension of an important (but not necessarily primary) interest into another discipline, research and writing. It was this difference, combined with the constant interruption of other urgent tasks for the committee, San Francisco being a volatile political environment, to eventually dissolve in its own entropy. Nonetheless, my own personal experience of the similarity between these two projects was sometimes so intense as to be a little unnerving.

What do you mean unnerving?

That the frustrations, for example, were so alike. People not taking their assignments as seriously as you would want them to, or being slow

to hand them in.

But beyond this is the problem that I, even as I hope to know better, am as much a creation of this culture as anyone else, a culture which has typically valorized poetry and the other arts, and, in so doing, separated them in our own minds from other productive human endeavors. I expect poetry, somehow, to be different. And when, as is so often the case, it's not, there's that little shock.

This points back of course to the whole question of the social organization of literature. This is such a terrible, powerful blindspot. The idealization of writing not only permits the little rituals of dominance which so often characterize the relations between poets, individually and in groups, or subverts the governance of writing into the hands of others, such as critics or editors, who are themselves in fact interested parties in other social structures with agendas all their own, it also renders possible a whole range of expectations on the part of the individual writers which may have nothing to do with poetics, and which may even be hurtful to them as human beings. Confusing substance abuse with creative stimulation is an obvious case in point, as can be the deliberate choosing of a life of under- or un-employment.

The idealization of any art, setting it apart from, or above, the "mundane" dynamics of daily life, serves only to isolate the artist and her work. But there is no Outside to society: even the hermit serves a social function. Thus to be "beyond such concerns" is only to be blind to them. A valorized art is one which is totally open to victimization, and the artist likewise.

I don't see that this should be so surprising. The process parallels the patriarchal elevation of women as an essential first step in stripping them of their power and self-determination. And it seems obvious to me that these same dynamics are at play when I find them elsewhere in the world of poetry and the arts, whether it is in the criticism of a Peter Fuller or Gerald Graff, in the self-destruction through romanticism of a Ted Berrigan, or in the unbelievably arrogant assertion of the NEA's Frank Conroy that, during the Reagan administration, the sole criterion for creative writing fellowships will be "excellence" (as if he were unaware of what that line of reasoning has meant for decades to women and people of color in such "more empirical" fields as medicine or law).

So that when I find these same dynamics within myself -- when I find myself surprised that the process of a poetic collaboration should be no different from (no better than) the very ordinary labor of a political action committee --, it is indeed unnerving. It reminds me just how powerful this spell is, and how hard one must continuously struggle to overcome it.

It's interesting to me that while most poets I know do something other than write for a living there seems to be little mention of this in their published work. I know from my own job experience (I'm a public health inspector) that it can be a liability within the context of a job interview to mention poetry as an active concern -- especially if it relates to a so-called "gap" in one's resume. I'd be interested in your perspective.

There must have been some job interviews which I didn't get because of allusions to poetry on my resume, but other than that it has never really been a problem. With five years in the prison movement, another five doing community organizing in the Tenderloin and a few stints teaching writing, my work history virtually eliminates all but the open-minded employer. A greater difficulty really is finding the time and energy necessary to combine two careers. Which is why discipline and good work habits are far more important for a young writer to have than "talent."

But I would dispute to some degree that first assertion. Kit Robinson, Carla Harryman, Charles Bernstein and Barrett Watten all come immediately to mind as poets for whom the contexts of wage labor often enters into their writing in diverse ways. Conversely, I've never written a "prison poem," nor a poem "about" the Tenderloin. The deeper issue here is what are the materials of poetry, and how are they to be used?

Rereading Jack Spicer's first Vancouver lecture recently, I was struck by his insistence that the key to maturity as a poet was eliminating the Self of the writer from the work. Coming from a poet, who next to Creeley perhaps, may have had the most "intimate voice" of his generation, that position sounds strange at first. According to Spicer, the materials of his love affairs, of baseball, even of language itself, were simply that which the poem used to create itself. These materials are, to use his terminology, simply the furniture of the poem. Which is to say that the ostensible topics of his short pieces are not in any real sense what the poems are "about."

Regardless of how this position is explained -- and Spicer goes so far at times as to name that which invades the work in the place of the Self, using all this furniture to write the text, as "the martians" --, it is a stance which recognizes the autonomy of the poem. It is also importantly a stance which allows for the relationships within the poem to be as complex, as mediated, as contradictory, as disjointed, as indirect and as over-determined as they are in life. Perversely, this enables the work to much more accurately document the realities of the universe than any so-called unified text, any writing organized under the hierarchical principles of narrative or exposition. That which restricts itself to what reason can comprehend of the real is necessarily going to be exclusionary and narrow, linear instead of polymorphic. A writing which is never "about" anything is never limited as to what can enter in. The furniture is endless. In a funny way, that is what David Antin was getting at when he compared "language poetry" to a stroll through Sears. All those shiny sentences stacked in a row. But, of course, retail layout is a hierarchical structure: it's a narrative with a conclusion "you buy." That is why the impulse items are by the register.

But the possibilities of complexity and plenitude are there. Which is why a writing which renounces "aboutness" can be so rich at precisely the level of content. I have never read an autobiography, for example, which encompassed so many of the dimensions of living as Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*. Likewise, Hannah Weiner's *Clairvoyant Journal*, among its other contributions, is a remarkable presentation of what material poverty is within the life of an active intellectual in contemporary New York. Hejinian, Rae Armantrout and Robert Grenier have all also brought in the contexts of parenting into their poetry, which like work is another of

writing's delegitimated contents. As if parenting were not work!

When writing is organized hierarchically, content is not only restricted, but much more easily subjected to a wide range of possible social conventions, internal as well as external censorship. There is, for instance, a conscious literature of the workplace, which ranges from the writing of the Canadian Tom Wayman to the sort of filler that decorates the tabloids of certain Leninist sects. Because the conventions which surround that literature extend so far beyond the mere issue of content and so often include a prescriptive, limiting and poorly thought out aesthetics, many poets cringe at the thought of becoming identified with a genre which violates not only their sense of the integrity of the poem, but even of the experience of labor. And if their writing is hierarchical, if it is organized by narrative and exposition, if it proposes a unified whole, then the difficulties of making use of this content are just that much more difficult. And, basically, I think the same kinds of problems enter in around the content of parenting.

I don't want this to sound like "my kind" of poetry is the "correct" or only way to approach the question of content, or even to suggest that "my kind" is itself one way. *My Life* is purely a construction, while *Clairvoyant Journal* utilizes a psychic procedure to disrupt or deconstruct an otherwise narrative writing. Rae Armantrout's poems are no more "about" anything than Robert Grenier's, although, like Spicer, they often present that as an appearance, an exteriorized expression of cohesion (not unlike a regularized stanzaic form) within which any number of disruptions, contradictions and incommensurable moments can take place. In fact, one of the most powerful exemplifications of this level of content occurs in the novel *Jews Without Money* by Michael Gold, who was nothing less than the theorist of socialist realism in the United States during the 30's and 40's, and even later. *Jews Without Money* is a wonderful portrait of life on the Lower East Side right after the turn of the century, yet it achieves this in spite of, not because of, its narrative. The real meat of this book lies in its scene-settings, in the descriptions whose sole purpose is to slow and govern the pacing of details, in the material outside of the characters and between the action. In those moments New York not only (as they say) "becomes alive," but Gold blossoms into a superb stylist. His sense of sentence length, and of sentence:paragraph relations, oddly enough, reminds me a great deal of Carla Harryman.

I'm fascinated by Sunset Debris, a text which is composed entirely of questions. It's an obsessive, almost violent work. How do you feel about it at this remove? Can you contextualize it for me?

It, *The Chinese Notebook*, and 2197 are three projects I worked on more or less simultaneously in the two year period between the completion of *Ketjak* and the start of *Tjanting*. Someday, with luck, they will appear as *The Age of Huts*. In a way that I guess anticipates part of what I'm doing presently with *The Alphabet*, those pieces tried to isolate and explore very different areas of my writing, each pushing an aspect of it toward a logical conclusion or extreme.

Sunset Debris is constructed on the same general principle as

"Berkeley," which is in the Lally anthology, and *Sitting Up, Standing, Taking Steps*, where each sentence or line in the work displays the same grammatical feature. The suppression of any main verbs in *Sitting Up* displaces, but does not eliminate, one's sense of referential action. In fact, many readers do not even recognize that absence, and I was more than a little amused to see the piece reprinted in *The Pushcart Prize IV* under the heading of fiction. But, for me, the center of that work is in the discovery of where, sentence by sentence, that active or (literally) verbal function goes.

In "Berkeley," where every line is a statement beginning with the word "I," something very similar occurs. Most of the lines are found materials, very few of which are from any one source, and they're ordered so as to avoid as much as possible any sense of narrative or normative exposition. Yet by sheer juxtaposition these reiterated "I"s form into a character, a felt presence which is really no more than an abstraction of a grammatical feature, but which is probably as "obsessive" in its own way as anything in *Sunset Debris*. And this presence, in turn, impacts significantly on how a given line is read or understood, which can be vastly different from its meaning within its original context.

My idea with *Sunset Debris* was to explore the social contract between writer and reader. As sender and receiver do not exist in vacuums, any communication involves a relationship, an important dimension of which is always power. In writing as elsewhere, this relationship is asymmetrical -- the author gets to do the talking. The reader can shut the book, or consciously reject its thesis, but an actual response is not normally available. As advertisers have known for decades, the process of consuming information is an act of submission. To have read these words is to have had these thoughts, which were not your own.

Perhaps this is the shadow side of writing, but it's one I've long had a strong sense of and felt the need to explore. This dimension of intersubjectivity in writing is closely aligned with the same phenomenon elsewhere, which no doubt explains why writing can feel so intensely intimate and erotic. To write is to fuck. To read is to be fucked. There is a pleasure to be taken in each, but it is not the same. It was this aspect of intersubjectivity which caused me to introduce so much explicitly sexual language into *Sunset Debris*. It is not the sex that interests me there, but the dimension it shares with writing.

This combines of course with the constant punctuation of the question mark. Every sentence is supposed to remind the reader of her or his inability to respond. And, rhythmically, because it's so much more of a full stop than a simple period, it hammers this point home within a long textual body, 50 pages in manuscript, that, being one continuous paragraph, is a solid wall of words. I'm certain that the effect can be disturbing and felt as violent by some readers. Interestingly, both Michael Waltuch and Alan Davies have produced texts which "answer" every question. But, overall, I don't think that *Sunset Debris* is any more "violent" than any other work of writing. Rather, it is simply one of the few pieces that calls attention to that dimension of its existence.

The last time I read it in public, at New College in late '82, I was surprised at how light it felt. The work wasn't nearly as dark as I'd remembered it.

In what respects is it most difficult being Ron Silliman?

Getting asked questions like that. Seriously -- to be a poet in this society is to become, however marginally, a public person, a projected (if not hallucinated) social object. Yet any interest in the writer, as person, on the part of a literary audience follows from, is an extension of, an engagement with one or more actual texts. It expresses a desire, completely legitimate, to situate the text in the world. But it merely anchors the work into the biography of an individual, in this instance me, and through this into the entire discourse of individualism.

The violence or distortion which takes place whenever this occurs does so precisely because this process fails to acknowledge the way(s) in which a text is equally situated through the life of the reader. A work's historic and strategic relations to other texts, for example, depends entirely on there being some congruence between writer and reader's mental maps of the whole of writing, there being no such thing as an objective topography of this terrain (what does it mean that I've not read Proust or Samuel Beckett?). Conversely, envisionments or meanings which are brought to the text by the reader are projected onto an authorial object presumed to be as static as the text itself.

It is in this sense that questions like the one above are "most difficult." The works stand for themselves, and come into play only in the presence of the collaborator who opens the text. It is through this interaction, the reading process, that a work can be said to exist in the world, a complex event with multiple actors, and an event which changes with each reading. To assign these events to any single individual is to misdescribe them utterly. "Ron Silliman," in this sense, does not exist.

LARRY EIGNER

Places in Hayward

Grutman's
Asutt
Wimer's

for Ron
Silli-
man a
mostly
found
piece

a barbershop sound nook
sandwich icken

Corrin's

Absolut
vodka

Grand
Auto

don't walk

Vi's
steak

rubber mattress
plant

Tax help

Zip
Instant
Printing

Zorn

the green sign is the thing

there are miles and miles and blocks

HANNAH WEINER

Ron Silliman SKIES III from THIS 11 and quote the page

one line per winter day assaid quote and said mybythesee Plurals
by donttype I see my words except carrots quotes thats the seen orthodox
plurals describe multis not describing circumstances and period. Plus
avoided the quarrel avoidthecharleshowasworking he can imagine this
line and quote "the carrots" dontunderline were eaten by the children
who avoid the circumstances thas a line youre stuck some line duscribe
show his errors even myname know the concrete walks made two
comments whistfully OPEN i a m s t e a c h i n g at suds the
clear often duscribe the life of the city MYME THATS A VERY REAL
COMMENTnot obliged speaking on quote the page thethis Hannah any
carrots "Babytears & carrots" why duscribe the events we know wearethe
children eating thecarrots for vitamin the children are b e r n a
d e t t e beginning to open and the next line
altruist put the words down a taste of following the report
instructions paper all sentences begin and end that was hard we
believe and we laugh didn't we forget somewhere we are here the
carrots the children we the centure hannah hehurts us a little
by the farmers opinion anyone else would continue by not quote sis
its mostly prose that we do anyway thinnest did you cost measure
buy the all the figures disguise weargue someone is overigged
skip the farmers some quote on the page but the line deepen use a
period. and mother forgets Iron he forgives you some farmers
skip line you're answering his questions remember the quote famous
he has winter possessions on his babytears mind and you dont unless we
plural are working in the field why buy atall the eating and carrots
his word sometime ecstasy plural carrots sometime like in the spring
this season farmer ground soft will grow upstate farmers choice and
then its a return to the page myname its ok with us just describing
quit and answer
mother would just believe in it herself and let everything else go last
line forgive iamspell andcorrect

BRUCE ANDREWS

CORPSES THAT DEVOUR THEIR OWN FLESH

1. (a) Do You Know Who You Are?
I might well be.
Now I write & soon I'll die.
As if otherwise yourself.
Here I am.
Facts' self-fascimile.
Nom de Plume.
I'm going.
Autobiography finds its way dead letter box.
Effigies give me inspiration.
Writing about ourselves raises our credibility.
Only the ego can pick up a pencil.
- (b) I write sentences.
To talk now in words from mouth.
So some discovers to do who is writing the writing.
No, baby, I'm not here, only these words are.
Cannot believe I wrote this.
I saw my shadow write this.
So one writes to discover who is doing the writing.
This is my work.
These words I've left behind no longer constitute my voice.
I am hardly who began this, tho it defines me.
I didn't say that.
2. (a) Name of name valve.
You want to be declassified.
Provoke my unity with a pre-fab image.
And you don't even have to recognize that there are pronouns.
A name is an institution & you have to have one.
Yakety-yak flag of convenience.
And I split into different factions.
Segmented person grows numb.
Squander my noun.
Desegregate my selves.
- (b) One is, was isn't one.
Forcing self to it one.
Self forcing to one it.
Books burgled.
Name dusts.
My perjorative the name.
It sentence self is each.
Who by erasure writes one.
I recognized the voice but cld not name it.

3. (a) Meaning means the elimination of identity.

4. (a) Schusses down a self-prom queen.
Autopsy that self-image.
Unrelaxed, self-contained.
Bad faith means self-protection.
Suspicious of crowds the pathetic individual hangs on.
Taste supplants ideology.
Felt that way else gloss over image mouth.
Push person.
Orphan makes child an orphan.

(b) How we are who we are.
The privacy of public occasions.
No self without other.
Holds who what evidence to be self-truth.
Territory is stylistic.
We are always from this case of our suffering selves.
But to each note a psychology clung.
Heads go in the cell & flicker out.
Your brain doesn't just happen to you.

5. (a) This is very flag.
Self is no redeemer, juice has to be constant.
We're only thinking about ourselves.
We just each have to spend time developing our own little flags.
Bird's-eye guide to more selfish motivation.
Greases up monad.
Convenience liquidates others.
Every ideology is inscribed by the elegance.
Nyah, nyah, nyah, my narcissism is better than your narcissism.
You can really become yourself with money.

(b) In uniform, heads individuate out.
The occasions of public privacy.
Today I feel.
I feel today.
Style is territorial.
Find somebody.
His language keeps dissolving into his voice.
One who was isn't once is.
Narcissism is not simple.
The desire to extend self to others never quits.
Speech scars meaning.

6. (a) Structuralism too punk for me.
We don't exist.
Life takes shape anonymity.
Your brain may no longer be the boss.
Spuriousity.
New slot squeaks clean.
People are just circuits.
We're just the units of a self-reproductive system -- we're
part of the methods.
Most people don't have brains, they're just terminals --
let's die.

(b) Equal heads are all.
Out in heads, uniform individuate.
Blame all difference, know same.
Structuralism, another god.
I was written.
Context constitutes.
Defense of the Code.
I am an example of grammar.
All subjects resent socio-interpretation.

7. (a) Language institutionalized theft.

8. (a) Parody of the citizen.
The saturations of independence.
It's like torture time on codic doubling.
Grassroots Lacanianism.
No main head is an island.
We own it but they play it.
Will individualism & self-consciousness ever be redeemed by
society?
Recruitment is propaganda.
White commission.

(b) The self means the house in the rented dream.
The public occasions of privacy.
You obey the sound of your name.
The territoriality of social work.
Implicit construction of the self.
Collapsing the distinction between competence & performance.
Education designs the brain.
Me in too general yes.
Self forcing one to it.
The first surrender is that of law.

9. (a) Heart panders to backward brain.
Concentric tourniquets.
Political technology of self-like slavery.
It had been inmate consolation against inmate consolation.
Wake up in a straitjacket & read the tabloids.
Individuals who happen to be wearing a uniform.
Except for the unsexed hero.
I was contented following orders.
Do I have to be an adult in this garbage?
Patchwork quilt of regulation keeps our feelings in line.
Ego means discipline.
I retired & became a disciplinary norm.
- (b) Like radios of radios talking to radios.
Forcing to it one self.
This is role memory.
A plausibility.
Assembling her constitution.
Heads in the cell flicker & go out.
I mean defies me.
Self giving one to it.
Strum our norms.
I felt a disease.
Meaning scars speech.
10. (a) People are so popular.
Human, huh?
Heart stays in code.
You just have no respect for people as cultural artifacts.
Culture means fear of being alone.
You try to claim authorship over *feelings* which are just
propaganda for the status quo.
Common sense is a rationalization for the status quo.
What you call emotions, I call propaganda.
Humanism is just a big police fart.
- (b) Refusal of personal death is not uncommon amid cannery workers.
An other is among others.
Thus gossip bonds.
Detestimonial.
Your own voice growing distant.
Representation deprives democracy of its aura.
The erection of the Theatre of Representation in the place of
production.
Your consciousness is first of all the consciousness of your
class, & this is never more clear than in the sudden
flowering of the emotions, the waves of anger that on
occasion sweep 'inexplicably' thru you, flash floods of
being.

The self is to language as sugar to my coffee.

11. (a) I did harp out on the overpersonalized.
You want everyone to applaud your.
The glossy patina of self-approval yearning to be pencil lead.
Eat your narcissism.
Escape from ego fuel.
Self-expression breeds contempt.
Self-confidence is an indulgence.
Autopsy that self-image.
You've got to stop being a specialist in identity.
The ego is detestable.
Quit worrying about yourself all the time -- worry about the
truth.
- (b) None of your words belong to you.
The model here is not psychology.
You don't exist.
Beginning is this begin I not.
My name the perjorative.
Always we are suffering from this case of ourselves.
Not narcissism is ample.
I am about.
All hells are private.
It is not easy to be a narcissist.
Self-hatred in politics is the image of correctness.
12. (a) Communism is the highest stage of individualism.
Ego quits its sap.
Pre-selfish.
There's got to be something beyond post-humanism.
Classes arise to take the place of adults.
We are a say don't need.
Communism isn't that ant farm shit, position talk talk.
Consensual signature.
Ideology is not going to be smashed by revival meetings.
Hammer the individual into solidarity.
Besoever badge of our disinheritance.
- (b) The personal will not transcend.
He is a unit of meaning as a writer.
Distancing your own voice.
But what comes through depends on you.
Writing writing.
The only unit is the whole.
Each must invent the world before conforming.
Our form does not yet exist.
I had determined to become invisible & I very nearly was.

Lines in the '(a)' sections are taken from Bruce Andrews, "I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up (or, Social Romanticism)," manuscript, Fall '82 - Fall '83. Lines in the '(b)' sections are taken from Ron Silliman, *Tjanting*.

RAE ARMANTROUT

"THE COMMUNITY OF SOUND"

Most of Ron Silliman's works follow a form or method of composition which he invents for them before starting to write. "Skies," a long prose poem which has thus far appeared only in magazines including *Sulphur* 3 and 4, *This* 11, and *So & So* Vol. 2, #2. for instance, was composed at the rate of one sentence per day. It deals almost exclusively with the effect of climate and weather on Silliman's immediate surroundings; much of it seems to have been written on his back porch. He partially describes his method in "Skies," when he writes "(against selection I want to pose the partial determination of what I find beyond these doors)." Typically Silliman's method is only half-apparent to the reader who, teased by an elusive form, may respond with interest - or irritation. I have heard his work criticized for being over abstract, impersonal, dry. While discussing "Skies," I hope to answer those criticisms.

In "Skies," certainly, the writer does not foreground his own subjectivity; his memories, hopes, moods remain largely unstated. This work is insistently perceptual, focussing on what the writer can see, hear, smell, and infer in his environs. What *things* are there? Silliman loves things; for him the essence, discreteness, and reality of the object is not problematized as it is for some of his contemporaries such as, say, Charles Bernstein. Silliman's roving senses always seek and find the discrete and distinct, the "Smell of the won ton district amid the odors of the alley wrapped in fog." or "The exact song of certain birds (a drawn-out whistle followed by a burst of chirps) fills the air (which ones are they?)" He is looking for the name of the species. Silliman's work is passionately noun oriented. Again in "Skies" he writes, "A herd of wild *stratus*." and "By the fence a *digitalis* in a green pot leans to catch the sun." (*Italics mine.*) One senses in Silliman's gleeful specificity a rebellion against the world's increasing homogeneity.

Because of the specificity of Silliman's nouns, and because of his tendency to ascribe motivation and feeling to the elements of his backyard world, ("The wind settles, the trees relax." "A thorny vine probes between the boards of a fence." *Italics mine.*) in "Skies" the things he sees daily take on the status of characters. As readers we watch the plum tree, the spider, the carpenter across the street, etc., variously impacted by circumstance. "Something small and green drowns in the coffee." "Skies" presents a dynamic, living world in which Silliman takes a respectful and friendly interest. He shows respect for these "characters" by allowing them autonomy. Teachers of creative writing are taught to teach that the purpose of poetry is the conveyance of mood. Silliman's poem doesn't convey a single emotion because the elements of its content remain discrete. While a bug drowns a *digitalis* reaches for the sun. A reader feels these events are given an intrinsic, not symbolic value. "Skies" is a utopian work in that a sense of unforced and benign participation in community fills it as "the community of sound fills the air."

If there is an emotional tone to "Skies" it is that of the mild but important euphoria associated with recognition. This can be clearly heard in statements such as, "You can tell when a sports car (not visible)

climbing the hill, shifts gears." or "Wild birds of the backyards absent from the treeless street." There is in Silliman's work an almost childlike pleasure in identification and fact. This is what I find most admirable in him - he makes interest in phenomena extraneous to our personal concerns seem perfectly natural. One could argue that he carries this interest even further than Williams, whose aesthetic heir he clearly is despite his new-fangled formalism. Here we return to our original problem; why does Silliman choose to proceed by pre-determined and fixed methods? I'm not certain how he would answer that, but I think one effect of his procedure is to set up analogs to the organic reality in which, as Silliman puts it, "Form is the flower's fate."

JERRY ESTRIN

"EXORCISE YOUR MONKEY": READING KETJAK

"Waking in the dark now, more so each day, the year's slide. Numbers, Mind and Body. The partial function in the connective touch. You come at last into the realization as into a banquet room, domed perhaps but with chandeliers, that a lush ordering of events is no different than any other so that one might as well eat squid as tripe or plums, dressed in the regalia of tennis, the perceiving in the punchbowl reflection a costume as clownish as it is offensive. What is here. Red eye. The light has no right. Notational process, musical juncture."

Does your orientation invert through the suppression of the verb from "Numbers, Mind and Body"? You look around for a connection, producing scattered if waking notes. Perhaps you've been given a diary note, a fragmented perception of passing time, perhaps an assertion of progress: "more so each day", etc. Such connotations seem quite literal, a report of condition. "Numbers" as in reference to the sentence prosody, the "Numbers" which indicate where the sentences would appear -- so that the positive allusion plus the jingle of "Numbers" could tie in the calculated response to the time of the writing to time (in general? which time?), a proclaimed organization of time which tunes up the "Body" and the "Mind". Or perhaps "Numbers, Mind, and Body" can be read as ironic public relations. "The partial function" stands isolate, announcing itself, rejecting the connection with "Body" and "Mind", or the naming of such processes. Or perhaps it works as a unit in a list with no logical linking. Has a myth of continuity just been critiqued? The cluster of so many abstract nominals appear to refocus the argument, moving from the general to the specific. You expect some sort of resolution, and the writing appears to be gesturing in that direction, yet none occurs. So perhaps you can read this section as a mockery of finitude. But how did "You" get into a "banquet room"? How did the writer? -- perhaps by the "The partial function in the connective touch" which has been stationed in apposition, so that "You come at last" with its shifter pointing either at the reader or the writer seems to be there as a reward. The complete sentence coming after the noun phrase pulls the fragments into an articulated position, however convoluted by the intersecting metaphors, so that your dilemma ("Rhythm section of the Horns of the Dilemma" as Ron Silliman will write near the end of *Ketjak*) or language's openness or void is again labelled by the interrogative, "What is here" (or is it a question?), setting up the expectation of an answer which "Red eye" partially satisfies, both in its rhythmical relief, and in its anaphoric employment, throwing your mind back to "perceiving" -- as does "The light has no right", the assertion of consonance in "red" and "right", the semantic train set up by "reflection" "perceiving" "costume" all seeming to progress vertically toward "light", yet the negation coupled with the rhyme which focuses and isolates the physical properties of the words, cancels any closure: "The light has no right." etc.

Does an articulation of such devices, to take up the metaphor offered by this piece of language, nourish you? The question is perhaps mundane as to what you have just consumed. You could eat "squid" and "tripe", cook up something with both ingredients, a kind of "vocabulary of dinner in the syntax of (your) my mouth"? Are such readings becoming preposterous? But isn't any menu or hermeneutic both unquestionable and questionably valuable? Or perhaps "You" have been written because "You" take for granted what orders "You" -- what "You" consume. "You" function as a commodity in a system where people are likewise, where exchange relations pattern your life. Such an assertion of indifference is "clownish", a sign signifying leisure, or such an illusionary aspiration. Or "You" are functioning as someone at play, as is the poet here, writing. Or "You" are someone noting yourself in the "reflection" of a "punch-bowl", and this clownishness offends "You". "You" have existed to be ripped from habit and sequence, attacked in the enactment of reading, "You" clown. The author sympathizes with a reader that could be called "You", or with a character "You" have become, or he sees "You" as he sees himself, and therefore he points at this "banquet" which surrounds both "You" and he. He is compassionate and demonstrates this by telling "You" what "You" think since your thinking can be so easily read as "light", or is it "Notational process"? Or he plays with "You" by parodying "What is here" in this "non-object positing language". "What is here"? An uncertain "Red eye"? -- drunken eyed wandering? Or exactly "The absence of doubt which belongs to the essence of the language game", the multiplicity of the sense(s) of such a writing here posited. A shifting urban environment calmly programmatic (as equally in the notion of musical structure) and documented as Ron Silliman moves through it -- of which this text, in its use of montage and sentence permutation, functions as architectonic analogue, a "banquet room" of form in which move the signs which you temporally grasp to glue down a formula: "Void is what's left when the cosmos breaks down as the interesting evidence of order."

"This is the fable of objects."... "An infinite expansion." Or this is a sensibility victimized by its subjectivity -- what it sees in this "banquet room". Or this is a critique of subjectivity where the poet takes on the role of the grammarian who reflects on his own language, is manipulated by it as he molds it: a response to a prosody, a push of sentence construction, improvising against the barriers of a transfinite language system where chains of sound and parallel formations of grammar criss-cross and open out and kid themselves with particularly American corn: "A kick in the brain brings rain."... "Tonto's memo to the effect that life's hard, pard." Or finally, this is "The Particular, The Particular"... "This, This, This, This", the bottom line of the device, the fact from which all semantic ambivalence begins. And it is "This" light which does take it upon itself to make ambiguous a suspect lucidity, the clamor for a taken for granted closure, clear seeing at the end where "You" look out at the world, for "The light has no right" to darken your mind with its transparency -- or with a pervasive habitual drunkenness termed transparency. As certainly not the

"light" of the dialectic where the only certain adventure is attention to this system of signs where nothing is tentative, especially the contradictions --

for only in the disruption of a reading whose systematic normalization this reading effectively undermines is the fragmented interplay between subjectivity and system constructing the meaning of that subjectivity not problematic but acknowledged in all its ambiguities whose simultaneous improvisational/predetermined threshold is like the singular verticality of a musical moment constantly flattened by Ron Silliman's recontextualized chorus: "We want coherence" -- or the social conditions necessary for its redefinition as history.

CHRIS DOMINGO DAVID MARTIN

Silent Tjanting: Notations for Translation

On Sunday, September 25, 1983, Ron Silliman and 25 other performers gave an oral reading of the entire text of *Tjanting* in the Church Street subway station of the San Francisco Municipal Railway. For a portion of the reading, Chris Domingo, a sign language student who lives in Berkeley, and David Martin, a hearing impaired graduate of the University of California who has been signing since he was 16, accompanied David Bromige and Steve Roberts, translating the text for the hearing impaired.

American Sign Language, in its pure form, is not a representation of English, but a language in its own right, with a distinctive syntax that incorporates space and visual cues. Notational aids have been developed for use in teaching and interpretation. /

The kinds of notations I used in my attempt to translate Ron's poetry into American Sign Language (ASL) were basically the same as the scribbles I record as notes in my ASL classes. This makeshift system includes only a few of the notations used in textbooks such as *A Basic Course in American Sign Language* by Humphries, Padden and O'Rourke, and Baker and Cokely's *American Sign Language: a teacher's resource text on grammar and culture*. In addition I came up with many of my own idiosyncratic symbols.

Before giving a few examples of what the translation symbols indicate, I'd like to emphasize that my translation notes sometimes look very simplified. This is partly because much grammatical information in ASL is carried in facial expression and complexities of movement which I did not include in the written notations for the sake of speed at the reading itself. Textbooks notate more fully.

Also, I'd like to warn readers against thinking you can "sign" from *Tjanting* using only written symbols or a Sign Language Dictionary. Without association with Deaf people, even a text bursting with illustrations is not enough to sign correctly. Facial expression, body movement, dialects, syntax, idioms, etc. can only be learned from native users of ASL, as with any language. And a true translation into ASL can only be recorded on videotape, never on paper.

Now - to examine the notational system used in the examples that follow. First, both of the above-mentioned texts use all-caps with hyphens between the letters to indicate fingerspelled words, and capitalized words unhyphenated to represent one ASL sign (the latter are called glosses, and the capitalized word in that case is not an English equivalent.) Signs that are derived from fingerspelling but have evolved a shape and movement of their own are called "loan signs." In textbooks they are indicated by the symbol # preceding a capitalized word. Examples from *Tjanting* include #IF and #BUS. I used all of these transcription symbols in my translating notes.

Both texts I've mentioned use hyphenated word combinations for a single sign that carries meaning requiring several English words. These include LAST-YEAR and COME-UP. Also, as in the texts, I followed the signs that need to be repeated with ++. For example, "POINT+++ (lf to rt)." Again, however, I simplified for easier deciphering during the reading, keeping some of the grammatical information in my head rather than on paper. Some of the other fairly standard symbols I included are "2h" to perform a sign with both hands, indications to shake the head or nod, and occasional commas for pauses.

"CL" represents a grammatical structure in ASL called the classifier, similar in some cases to the English pronoun. ASL has specific handshapes that can represent, say, something tall like a person, tree or pole (1-CL); a flat object such as paper, a table top or a wall (closed 5-CL); and so on. There are many of these classifiers, and they can act as pronouns, various sorts of verbs, or adjectives for describing size and shape.

In *American Sign Language and Sign Systems* by R.B. Wilbur, Ph.D., a system developed by researchers Stokoe, et al is documented (p.17). It is based on developing a set of symbols for each of the parameters (corresponding to groupings of phonemes in spoken languages) in ASL. These parameters are handshape, palm orientation, location and movement. A translation in this notational system contains no English words whatso-

ever. I used some of his notations, such as naming handshapes B, G, F, l, 5, and C after the fingerspelled letters and numbers they are identical to, when using them as CL's. (For instance, F-CL for the verb-classifier "holding a single strand" - thumb and index touch, other fingers are outstretched.)

One very important grammatical notation is the symbol T over a word or phrase, which indicates a topical sentence. This is a frequently occurring syntactical element of ASL and is signed by raising the eyebrows during the entire part of the sentence that is overlined, emphasizing that this is the topic being commented upon. Many other facial expressions are similarly notated, and often serve as adjectives or adverbs, such as mm for a "business as usual" expression, \ for furrowed eyebrows, and th associated with the concept of carelessness. (I omitted most of these in my translation notes but it probably would have helped if I'd included them.)

I scribbled "mime" for sections where I decided to act out an idea - usually because I didn't know how to sign it. "Right" and "Left" were my indications to shift my body or look in either direction to indicate two characters as subjects or objects, respectively, or two contrasting ideas. (More complex spatial relationships can be set up, of course.) The texts mentioned tend to be more detailed on this - "gaze up lf," and so on.

In general, my translation was very faulty compared with David's. I tried to get across the double meanings in the text by putting double meanings into the signs - a task much too difficult for someone of my skill level to carry off in a performance. I wound up with translations too complex for me to handle, that contained more signs than I could deliver clearly at the pace of the reading.

T
HAPPEN RECENT THAT EXAMPLE OVERLOOK WORD T-H-O
That was a case of not seeing the word "tho."

th
BROOM OLD 5-CL F-CL.
A single strand from a bedraggled broom.

FENCE
A fence is.

(Look disgusted)
LAST-YEAR SUMMER SUDDEN
Sullenly last summer.

WARN WHORE #DOG MUST CONFRONT
Face it call dog.

T
SICK LUNG INSIDE MIND
Psychosomatic emphysema.

DOG SLEEP MANY P-O-R-C-H POINT+++
On many porches sleep dogs.

T
ME PROCESS FORGET SAY COME-UP
I often say what I am in the middle of forgetting.

SILENCE ONLY TRUE AGAIN-AGAIN
Only silence truly echoes.

MAYBE DOUBLE MAYBE
Per doubled haps.

T
SENTENCE ALMOST EN-
This sentence is about to stop.

(left) (right)
♀, MEET, MISS, ADMIT
Meet her, miss her, face her.

PEOPLE UNIQUE, LANGUAGE STUCK
Special is our language doom.

FINE-wg HAVE 1 PAIN THAT'S-ALL
It's nice to have one pain.

EGYPT KING ON MY #BILL
Pharoah on my bills.

ALL 9 BASIC C-R-Y-S-T-A-L STRUCTURE
All 9 elemental crystals are structures.

ME WAIT #BUS, WAIT FOR VISION #BUS 3-CL+++
I'm waiting for a bus, for the idea of buses.

TYPEWRITER DIFFERENT+++ NUMBER PERIOD COMMA ETC. VARIATION
Keyboards differ as to number & punctuation.

(Mime puffing cigar)
DIZZY NAUSEOUS
Dizzy with a big cigar.

--Chris Domingo

*

My approach to translating *Tjanting* differs from Chris' in that Chris is a student of ASL, thinking in terms of classifiers, loan words, etc., while I operate more on a "street" level. Her translation is more elaborate, attempting to incorporate puns and convey subtle connotations in the English. It even looks more elaborate on paper as Chris has demonstrated above. My notation is basically capital letters for fingerspelling and lower-case for glosses, with rare notes on performing the signs. My glosses are fairly standard, and could be read by another person with reasonable knowledge of ASL, even though there is no indication of facial expression, direction of movement, etc. My translation is more prosaic, using common everyday expressions; hence the simpler notation.

For example, above the sentence

Once they've counted the dead & questiond the
survivors, there's nothing left to do, no further
story, but they can't set it down, they lack a
sense of closure (p.144)

I write

count dead finish ask-ask survivors finish left
nothing do-do story dissolve but they can't
put-aside feel not-yet finish.

Facial expressions implied are: bobbing of the head at the first two "finish"es; a tightening of the lips at "nothing do-do," a drawn-out p-sound formed by the lips at "story dissolve," and a half-worried, half-puzzled expression held for the rest of the sentence starting at "put-aside." "Survivors" is rendered as "live" + "person," and the last "finish" is rendered as a physical ending, in contrast to the first two uses of "finish," which is rendered by a different sign that roughly corresponds to the perfect tense in English. All this is standard ASL.

Admittedly, this is one of the better examples; many sentences do not lend themselves so well to my style of translation. For example: "Demons rate" (p.148). I chose, rather than read it as "demonstrate," to render it as "demons" + "shelves," which also has the meaning of "hierarchy." It's natural ASL, but a little fast and loose.

The act of performance is itself almost as much a translation as the notational stage. It is not unlike bringing a role to life in a play; many aspects of expression must be poured into the mold of the written text. This is why the dominant creative medium of ASL is the-

atre. In addition, a great deal of ASL art is improvisational, following the tradition of Homer's bards and American jazz. I used the English sentences as much as the ASL notation in performing the translation. It is almost by happy accident that this style of art corresponds to the effect of a spoken reading of *Tjanting* -- a free-form stream of emotional impressions, drawing upon the multivarious aspects and images of human existence.

--David Martin

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DAVID BROMIGE

A NOTE ON TJANTING

Does one thing lead to the next? Did that act cause this or did it (merely) happen right afterwards? Can I no longer find cause-and-effect dependable? Are we as individuals powerless (to govern our lives) in this present circumstance and if so what shall we do instead?

Writing and reading induce euphoria through the fantasy of power the unbroken succession of cause-and-effect allows. As the author manipulates his fiction, or as the poet tends his tropes, we are at one remove the empowered witnesses of a process that guarantees success: nothing will prove in the end to have been in vain, not a drop wasted, every syllable harnessed to one end (accurately called *the point* in a performance whose brilliance, once that of tragedy (the world is only ever "like this" in our heads) is now that of farce (the man with the ladder knocks the other man off balance, so that he puts one foot in the pot of paint, which when he shakes his foot to free it flies up to encase the first man's head) or pornography ("Oh, God!" she screamed, "I'm beginning to come. I can't stop it! I'm coming, I'm coming!" The wand was moving across her stomach now", etc. The teleological shake-up (Darwin, Marx, Freud, Grimm, Malthus, Mendel, Ford, Pasteur, Einstein, Curie, Wright, Bohr, Teller, Hitler, Stalin, Truman...) that has removed the painted Paradise from the end of it has thus destroyed faith in a final cause and with it, plot.

The term "cultural lag" means that, although this is general knowledge, it is subject to widespread denial (which term I employ here in its psychological sense). The bulk of writing today may include cognizance of said shake-up as *content* but not as form. In a world "without meaning" etc., characters of an incredible consistency continue to advance via predictable routes toward plotted revelations that all is for naught, etc.. Meaning is not so easily gotten rid of, of course: if sought in wrong place, however, it might prove in short supply. Image of persons applying to traditional water hole, long since dried up, while new spring bubbles up other side of the dune -- hackneyed but for good cause.

The form of Silliman's *Ketjak* or his *Tjanting* accomodates this novel explosion of teleology into the minutiae of presentness and simultaneity where all our divining has to happen -- fittingly, for the poet (re)creates divinity through his/her way with words. A form of serial progression that cannot be denied -- sperm plus ovum equals one -- generated in *Tjanting* out of the first two sentences, "Not this" and "What then?", in its growth develops an accretion of other sentences whose referential details come to stand for (surely) "a life" -- though not at all to cause a would-be reader to expect "...and then, turning 18, I set sail for the Orient", except that that *could* be one possible sen-

*from *Dreams Die First*, Harold Robbins, 1977.

tence (physical manifestation of mental event) to be included. "David Bromige learns to drive" might be a notation on a calendar; I could try to tell you what it means (and has meant) to me -- both the fact and the sentence -- but in *Tjanting* on page 104 it occurs in a different context:

a hula hoop. Wordy as tho you ever understood. Shadows of thought. Eyes dilated your anticipation. I see the East Bay. An ant cld pick your fingers up without it crushing. Spontaneous combustion. In the plastic old dish sat blue soap slivers. Phone calls me back into the house. In the clouds is the sky. Separate faucets for hot & cold is barbaric. Back gums die. Whatever happened to Chiclets? In the twilight a high airplane somewhere heading. David Bromige learns to drive. Fingers always, in the doorknob of the vicinity, print. Demand each day is a new life. Kerouac's comma for the distaste. Sit in a schooldesk near my bed. Slow the lift of any launch. Putting rice cakes in a toaster. Middle if we had learnd for to write words from the instance. Today language comes spilling out. Many towards several.

Thus, the first third of that page. A connection apparent between or even among certain of these sentences is no guarantee of a connection among all of them nor of its absence simply by cause of one being unable to notice one. For me, a high airplane heading in the twilight somewhere effectively sums up something I was feeling about the time (quite late in life) I learned to drive: did Silliman (a long-term acquaintance seen little during the 70's) intuit this? However, I am at a loss to account for the detective-story sentence that comes next. (Not at a loss to understand the sentence, of source; that seldom occurs in Silliman; but to account for its coming next, or for its being there at all.) Possibly it enters "randomly", as something remembered incidentally. That would seem to be how the blue soap slivers enter -- although it is possible to read that sentence as metaphorical of the entire procedure. Starting with "Separate faucets" (but possibly at "blue soap slivers") three sentences suggest "the bathroom" as a joint title. Reflection upon perception links (possibly) the first 5 sentences: #s 4 & 5 juxtapose imagistically -- from SF, the East Bay looks comprehensible; an ant could pick up your finger. (The reversal in syntax further suggests the reversal of reality perception can perform.) Many of the sentences are linked by the common factor that each undergoes some distortion of syntax -- sometimes this is unmistakable, sometimes not ("In the clouds is the sky" could be accurate as is, depending (a) whether the cloud cover on a given day is 100% or not (b) whether the "speaker" is being metaphorical or not.) The progression and accretion are governed (but this one may not learn from the text or in any acknowledgments) by a Fibonacci series so that the first paragraph and the second consist of one sentence each, the third of two, the fourth of three, the fifth of five, the sixth of eight, the seventh of thirteen....each subsequent paragraph having as many sentences as the sum of the number of sentences in the two immediately

preceding paragraphs. Metaphorically this means not only the filling up of a life but the population increase of our present world, even the wholesale appropriations by multi-national conglomerates. Or it does to me. What it means to Silliman certain (but which?) sentences in the text perhaps indicate ("I cld have done it some other way"), yet certainty concerning the author's intentions can only be obtained from consulting oneself.

In fact the problem of authorial intention -- itself brought about by the sudden increase in (a highly variable) literacy towards the end of the last century -- is brilliantly shifted in these books from what happens between sentences (a reader soon becomes aware how very much that province of meaning is his own act) to speculation concerning the why and wherefore of such being the case: what can it mean that the relation between the sentences in *Tjanting* is variable, sometimes given sometimes not sometimes perhaps? One welcomes the displacement. Much of contemporary poetry (of the best contemporary poetry, that is, not the mere entertainments most houses continue to issue) trammels one in the web of inter-sentence intentionality. That is, given (a) that each sentence is comprehensible (i.e., not nonsensical) then (b) what do they all add up to? How do they en masse (but also and importantly, linearly) agree with the title they point to (or form the equivalent of a title if the poem lacks one)?

A poem from John Ashbery's *Shadow Train* called "The Prophet Bird" has these lines for the first of its four four-line stanzas:

Then take the quicklime to the little tree.
And ask. So all will remain in place, percolating.
You see the sandlots still foaming with the blood of light
Though the source has been withdrawn.

Already you begin to calculate the relation I am speaking of. The writing invites such. An unmistakable aura of authorial intentionality exudes. The reader becomes detective at the crime where meaning tends to deteriorate into a trail of (true) (false) clues that makes of the poet a criminal *manque* instead of the law-breaker and law-giver s/he in the fullness of opportunity ought to all to be. For what happens once the case is cracked: The book no longer is. Until when, the poet stays superior, hateful.*

*I want to make it clear that it is not John Ashbery I find hateful -- *au contraire* -- but that there is a hateful quality to the means whereby meanings are secured in the verse cited as elsewhere in his poetry, and

What I have called elsewhere Unsubjected Writing takes with Ron Silliman a quantum leap forward into its own possibilities. The titles of the 2 books I discuss here are neither of them English nor even European, but Indonesian words, *Ketjak* meaning monkey-chatter and *Tjanting* meaning a batik instrument (but it also puns on *chanting*). Even once this much is learned, no reader need feel steered toward a conclusion in advance of his/her own acts of reading (of co-composition). Indeed rather the opposite, for the titles act as reassurances that as far as the poet is concerned, these collocations of sentences are no more than the weaving of what was once (and may again be) sound into an abstract design. (There is always the chance, as many of us have long since learned, that the author is *faux-naif*; that he in fact thinks each text something beside such -- in a sense -- modest dismissiveness. But *perhaps* he is not.) Nor, apart from the highly visible topic of the writer writing about what to write about, does any one subject disclose its presence no matter how far (to the end!) into the text one ventures. It is of course hardly possible to have a string of coherent sentences and not have subjectS "occur" to one while reading and therefore I have suggested "Polysubjected" as an exact equivalent for Unsubjected: my point being that no one topic bring the sentences to heel. But the other side of that advantage is that no one topic exists to generate the sentences, nor to dictate the order whereby they shall appear. Where did Silliman come by all these sentences? Their proliferation is breathtaking. Some obviously were occasioned by a prior sentence, coming in response or reaction to it, but many appear *ex nihilo* -- although probably from the poet's notebook. Many of them impress one (though here perhaps its time to assert *me*) as overheard -- on the bus (for Ron Silliman has never learned to drive) or elsewhere in the city: my impression of both books is of a bustling *demos*, the people fetched out of the sad apart-ments into the agora of the work, bumping up against each other, interrupting, completing, starting up anew one of a host of conversations. The wistfulness or the indignation or the outrage then felt -- at the solely imaginary nature of this festival of talk -- needs to be directed against a society that wants more to be said for it than the negative affirmation that at least we don't hang people from lampposts. We will.

(note continued)

that I take this quality to be a part of the work's power, having for its appeal a superiority that occasions worship, although I do not personally prize this aspect of the man's writing, preferring those moments of authentic collaboration between writer and reader enabled where the former doesn't hold a probable trump card. But I am well aware many cannot experience poetry as a sensation without losing their shirts. But it is not Mr. Ashbery's person in any sense of that term I tend to characterize with the slight surprise of that adjective.

It's tempting to link what one knows about one matter to what one knows concerning another, intuiting fitness. But would the pleasure of reading *Tjanting* be diminished had I not read Habermas? His *Legitimation Crisis* was recommended to me by Silliman, and as to whether the latter read it before or after writing *Tjanting* hardly looks to be significant. "With the appearance of functional weaknesses in the market and dysfunctional side effects of the steering mechanism, the basic bourgeois ideology of fair exchange collapses." Those who still wish to write themselves need to consider sufficiently the ramifications of our present situation. The self is a creation of society. "The spread of oligopolistic market structures certainly means the end of competitive capitalism." Stuck in the past, they work up a poetics calculated to set Number One at the top of the dung hill -- and call it Nature. "Only if motives for action no longer operated through norms requiring justification, and if personality systems no longer had to find their unity in identity-securing interpretive systems, could the acceptance of decisions without reasons become routine, that is, could the readiness to conform absolutely be produced to any desired degree." But the systems available enforce conformity also, and "stabilization". Gripped by such truths, I see Silliman as prophet of the End -- as Whitman was, of the Middle. Say Early Middle, "time" "flew" "by" so fast. It's interesting to compare the two. One difference instantly apparent concerns the way Whitman launches it all out from an I: personally, the part I can least tolerate. That's funny. But cutup *Leaves of Grass*:

The pavingman leans on his twohanded rammer. The signpainter is lettering with red and gold. The President is up there in the White House for you. The gist of histories and statistics as far back as the records reach is in you at this hour. Great is the English speech. The air tastes good to my palate. Dash me with amorous wet. I dilate you with tremendous breath. Every existence has its idiom. The pure contralto signs in the organ-loft. Peace is always beautiful. Elements merge in the night.

He has never anything to subordinate his lines to, anyhow, save himself. Remove that -- deny it its power to effect -- and the similarities become clear. Wasn't the hope and terror that, that sheer numbers plus resilience together would keep life? "The song of the sprinklers on these well-trimmed lawns presents a false surface. What then?" Thus the last words of *Tjanting*.

ROBERT GRENIER

PLUS + MYSTERIOUS / LIFE - LIKE - LABOR

Ron Silliman's work--or 'play', be it called--each thing the next thing--also, to want to do it, duty to do it, like to/love to, of course, have to do it, largely--after initial mysterious instigation strangely (absent) advent of the work: what sets it off/why *this* 'plan'? rather than another--this very public writing also 'private' that way--the lovely various dedication to the to be done, once established (I want to know how), know how, as the task at hand.

This labor produces a whole array of wonderfully common experience--'particulars' (& there is no one who has read WCW more in full complexity)--particular (particulate?) equally/'solely', to him. It's what he say & do--and/but--San Francisco, & the Bay Area--like a hyperactive, multivalent vine rooting itself across a sanddune without question--for all to read (as Lyn Hejinian says: "recognize"), as what we are, in this day & age.

How can these two *both* be true together, as they are, in the work? --the obvious (& fascinating) imposition of structure--e.g. paragraphs determined in advance by recourse to Fibonacci series in *TJANTING*--and that sense of whatever happening, happening, in time, in this different sentence given over totally to what happens now (in language)--& this's not resolved so simply, as by saying, *either*, that the 'form' is 'determined' but the 'content' is 'open' or that the 'structure of language' (that God) after all 'determines' everything we see & feel & think we know, as 'content area'.

I.e.--it's not just the 'Structuralist backside' of "Form is never more than the extension of content."

It's a real mystery, in Silliman's work--& this is specifically & adventurously true to Williams' "particular is the universal" + double emphasis on form ("A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words.") & "the Imagination" as, in fact, very near the same as "American speech" & "the local".

There is no summary of the work, in fact, that can account for it--e.g. "I've never been so bored," or invigorated, or charmed--rather: *what's there to read*. Horizontally, manifold substance.

Evident in the task is his commitment to letters--precisely as he 'furthers his career' & 'everybody else's' in the labor market (or a good many others') by promulgating & attacking the fiction of 'language-centered' poetry--just so everybody could see, what it only was 'about', because he cared enough to bother to say so, based (as a wide-ranging sympathy & interest) in a decent perception & tolerance of our mutual differences as writers--& granted reason to exist by a very fair & heartening (here 'commonplace') reading, of our lot on earth, Citizens, & cf. the fruits of labor & of our right to know & voice a--how does he get on, this excellent, Prospero figure? (--'us' ciphers in what 'labor market'?)--whose devout source & 'motivation' remain unknown.

('sub specie aeternitas' is the 'ground'...?)

--like a hyperactive, multivalent vine rooting itself across a sand dune without question--including negation, incorporating & inviting any question anybody might ask--because it believes in life, & so affirms in & by writing--knowing (?) 'full well' what our present form of 'life'

(as cancer) means...

He is implicated...M., his peds are in the mire...

Silliman not 'paratactic' so much as 'parameciac'--pure act, feet, desire, intelligence, spirit, matter, all idea a thing like a sentence, in motion. No limit really except the end of the organism foraging excursionsal ext/exertion of itself physically into space. Where it meets with others. It moves out laterally in any direction, aspires to all directions--coverage--cover the earth. Sentences released into the environment to 'bump into' something 'like itself' (?) eventually, likewise dissimilarities ('contradictions') changing by a not mad but 'social', somehow 'experimental' ami-scientist who may be about, through his experiments with you, to get a handle on life in the fizz.

A most friendly & interesting fellow. It's a service to all of us, as letters--that that he's doing, that he's done what he's done.

August 4/83

JAMES SHERRY

TAKING A STAND

Ron Silliman proposes that meanings are found in the connections between words and between sentences. The simplicity of his writings' forms makes those connections more visible and helps him to position his work so that the issues raised by each sentence are overshadowed by formal considerations. He takes this posture in order to illuminate the particulars of content and the reader determines the nature and meaning of their relations. This happens on the large and small scales.

The shapes of *Ketjak* and *Tjanting* are especially easy to see when the sentences begin to repeat. "Sunset Debris" is fifty pages of questions connected by the reader's answers or expectation of answers.

The kinds of sentences he uses make apparent their similarity, usually by their shortness and often by what the sentences imply--a common misapprehension expressed by the speaker, a social creature pictured through her rhetoric. Since each sentence is presented as a unit with stress on the skeletal relation to the next sentence, he points to the formal (imposed) nature of the sentence.

In "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World" (L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Supplement #3), Silliman describes how the focus of capitalist inspired writing moved away from the words themselves toward the Gestalt of the writing. (Silliman's syntheses go beyond even that Gestalt. He is trying to bring focus to the entire world of writing by emphasizing connections.) Silliman's text elucidates the problem he examines in the phrase "the effaced r in Jonah". The reference is to the r in "your". By using "r in Jonah", he makes the reader look again at the word Jonah and not finding r there, reach back three paragraphs to "your". The reader reviews the Gestalt of the text or what the text signifies and looks at the word Jonah again to see in the physical characteristics of the word the meaning of the text and the "gestural nature of language". Since Silliman proposes that the gestural nature of language constitutes a meaning in sense and nonsense syllables, so the gestural nature of Silliman's stances in his critical writing and to a lesser extent in the forms of his prose constitute meaning in structure.

These units--forms, sentences, phrases--are linked by prosody, by their social context, and by social theory propounded by Silliman (and others). So although these sentence units are discrete entities, the reader tends to see them as one thing--as facets of existence (work), as Silliman's work, as the reader's own thought and life--a unified piece of writing.

As his work is broad and inclusive, its synthetic approach includes more general definitions of common prosodic elements. Syntax means accurately

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the arrangement of words, although Silliman rarely uses all the possibilities allowed to him. The definition is closer to the dictionary than to the common literary and grammatical one. Narrative is more than the literary story, rather a recounting that might be of temporal or prosodic events. These definitions do not attempt to purge the more common, literature uses, but to absorb them into a general case in order that the old can exist within the new.

Silliman's most famous definition is "The New Sentence" (*Hills Talks*, #6,7) where focussing on the space between sentences highlights the artifactual nature of sentences. Emphasizing space or distance between sentences, extracts from the prose canon one formal issue, elevating it to the status of an icon. The space and the period are equated.

Not only does this diminish the importance of and in Silliman's case flatten the context of each sentence, it modularizes the sentences and makes them more accessible to manipulation by the numbers (prose, a poetry). It also makes his writing architectonic, monumental (*Le style est l'homme même*) and exemplar in definition and form.

He achieves these stances in his critical writing, the nature of the formal elements there being central to understanding the context in which he is composing, although this may simply point to his obfuscation of the distinction between criticism and poetry. In *Ketjak*, for example, while the numerical series by which he orders the sentences have an odd relationship to the field of meanings of the sentences themselves, that John is sentence #142 is apparently an accident of position or a choice. However in a critical piece such as "Rewriting Marx" (L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E #13) the most apparent aspect is the substitution of writing vocabulary for the political economy in Marx's original.

The result of this grafting process raises questions. First, wouldn't a grammar and structure consistent with the aims and conclusions of Silliman's ideas be more convincing than the given "capitalist" prosody. No, Silliman is not speaking about mental constructs but to a person in the world. The political economic framework, applied to writing, makes us focus on writing as praxis.

Second, there are a host of objections to the individual statements that are created by his grafting. For example, "Objects of reading become books only because they are the products of the writing of private individuals who work independently of each other" is quite superficially false. One is left in a rage or muddle, but but. Wouldn't it be true therefore..., doesn't that mean..., isn't that tending toward the conclusion that...

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It does, however, result in Silliman's pushing the reader to examine the issues within the reader's own criteria of objectivity. By setting up the conditions in his critical writing, Silliman gets the reader to temper its raw edge with her own discoveries. But simplicity of form only gives the reader access to the concerns of his work. The breadth of reference requires close analysis, because the large blocks of form and meaning he manages can be construed as fitting many ways. And the value of the work to the reader is limited more by her ability and knowledge than by Silliman's talent.

This opens up a whole new realm to the critic. As with "The New Sentence" where he means the space between, when you want to know what Silliman means, look elsewhere. This is not a paradox. Relation and connection are Silliman's work. He also avoids commoditizing the poem by activating the reader's dig into it, a product of human labor.

Because he has a method, charges of didacticism can be brought against him. Even in his most developed articles one is impelled toward a body of ideas in order to understand the terms of the piece. In one sense he ties the reader to his body of ideas at the same time as he frees her from following his argument. This rhetorical stance or agit prop or exposing of the nature of the argument opposes itself to a writing, New Criticism for example, where the connections are covered over as if there were no ideology or series of assumptions that might be questioned, as if the argument emerged as a single strand. Silliman does not accept this notion based on accepted truth and the reader is allowed to remain outside the argument (although not the operations) to be convinced only by her own reasoning. For Truth or Logic Silliman substitutes a synthesized argument composed of elements he chooses to match.

The danger is that the reader might appropriate forms and substitute those for thinking, not recognizing that Silliman's forms point. Or the reader may bring vocabulary to an argument that is not germane to it, will apply concepts by association or apparent relation.

I question whether "correct usage" must be synonymous with oppression, whether one can apply terminology beyond the context of its original "correct" usage. Words such as signified, uncertainty, parameter have such specific meanings in linguistics, physics, computers; how far away from their original context does one have to be before these words are again acceptable as common parlance. One can say, "I am uncertain about the outcome," perhaps. But does the uncertainty principle apply to people watching me. Can one say, "He signified what he meant by holding up a flower." "The signified of the paragraph." "That which is signified by the sign." Etc.

ALAN DAVIES

?S TO .S

for Ron Silliman and for *The Chinese Notebook*

The variations of usage and correctness vary with the distance of the user from a professional discourse. The question arises whether, even in Silliman's dense-pack, one must create a context for correctness if one applies a word outside its normal lexical use. But of course the examples above imply that there is no normal lexicon, only specialized lexicons connected by other specialized, if more widely used, lexicons.

But this discussion of usage may not be central to understanding what Silliman is trying to do with the forms of his critical articles, since he rarely gets down to the level of individual words, preferring to accept some givens. To paraphrase him, the concept of resistance re-constructs exactly the kind of structure it resists. To avoid that, Silliman restructures argument to juxtapose arguments, although he cannot avoid it entirely. Otherwise, even letters would not be recognizable. Instead he opts to change large scale uses and so when we talk about writing, and since we often do so in a broad context, Silliman often comes as an example.

(During the mid-1970s Ron Silliman and I corresponded. One focus of our thought and letters at that time was on the nature, the mechanisms and meanings, of what we saw to be a newly emergent sort of writing. We discussed this writing in many ways, among them its relations relative to referentiality. I suggested that we call this writing proto-referential. Ron suggested other terms. Some of the range of this discussion, or at least of Ron's sense of it, is reflected in his excellent essay on the New Sentence.

We also exchanged information about what we were writing, and new work as it was completed. One morning in 1975 or 1976 I received from Ron a lovely Chinese notebook in which he had written *The Chinese Notebook*. I read the text enthusiastically. I was impressed by the number of interrogatives in the work. My own tendency had often been to suppress questions and, where they did occur, to end them with a period. I knew that I would make my most considered response to the text by answering each of the questions in it.)

3. *Chesterfield, sofa, divan, couch* -- might these items refer to the same object? If so, are they separate conditions of a single word?

Chesterfield, sofa, divan, couch -- these are entirely different objects; they are related by the mistake we make in not having more words for more objects. They are conditions of the word 'name' used as a verb; even here we have made the same mistake.

4. *My mother as a child would call a potholder a "boppo," the term becoming appropriated by the whole family, handed down now by my cousins to their own children. Is it a word? If it extends, eventually, into general usage, at what moment will it become one?*

It is a word every time it is used. The rest of the time.

6. *I wrote this sentence with a ballpoint pen. If I had used another would it have been a different sentence?*

Written with a different pen, it would have been a sentence. Written after with a different pen, it would have been a different sentence. Absorbed in this question, we learn that the instruments of construction have their meanings. Time is an instrument of construction.

NOTE: The italicized portions of this text are from *The Chinese Notebook*

--Ed.

7. This is not philosophy, it's poetry. And if I say so, then it becomes painting, music or sculpture, judged as such. If there are variables to consider, they are at least partly economic -- the question of distribution, etc. Also differing critical traditions. Could this be good poetry, yet bad music? But yet I do not believe I would, except in jest, posit this as dance or urban planning.

It could be. A different person would make each judgment.

10. What of a poetry that lacks surprise? That lacks form, theme, development? Whose language rejects interest? That examines itself without curiosity? Will it survive?

Poetry lacks surprise, form, theme, development, interest, curiosity -- Always, somewhat. ... --Never, somewhat. It is how poetry drops between these two sentences that will survive.

13. That this form has a tradition other than the one I propose, Wittgenstein, etc., I choose not to dispute. But what is its impact on the tradition proposed?

Propose the tradition, delineate it; then wait, for more of what you already have, in part, in this writing. Any proposal of the tradition is, implicitly, impact on it.

14. Is Wittgenstein's contribution strictly formal?

Wittgenstein's contribution is strictly formal, but it is not only formal. He tells us about a topic, how to write for example, as Stein does. His contribution would not be strictly (sic) formal even if it were all in logical notation. His meditations, too.

16. If this were theory, not practice, would I know it?

If you said so.

18. I chose a Chinese notebook, its thin pages not to be cut, its six red-line columns which I turned 90°, the way they are closed by curves at both top and bottom, to see how it would alter the writing. Is it flatter, more airy? The words, as I write them, are larger, cover more surface on this two-dimensional picture plane. Shall I, therefore, tend toward shorter terms -- impact of page on vocabulary?

Already the writing has left its Chinese notebook.

20. Perhaps poetry is an activity and not a form at all. Would this definition satisfy Duncan?

This is not a definition. A proposition satisfies everyone; they notice it, even unwittingly and suddenly operate with the understanding that a proposition is its means of verification.

21. Poem in a notebook, manuscript, magazine, book, reprinted in an anthology. Scripts and contexts differ. How could it be the same poem?

There is no 'same poem'; we may only look through one text to its source, this activity then embodies a third poem, non-stop.

25. How can I show that the intentions of this work and poetry are identical?

You show it in that question.

29. Mallard, drake -- if the words change, does the bird remain?

Ask the bird.

30. How is it possible that I imagine I can put that chair into language? There it sits, mute. It knows nothing of syntax. How can I put it into something it doesn't inherently possess?

That you can imagine it answers how you can imagine it. Put the chair in a room, in an ocean, a sentence, an automobile, a thought, a word, a box.

31. "Terminate with extreme prejudice." That meant kill. Or "we had to destroy the village in order to save it." Special conditions create special languages. If we remain at a distance, their irrationality seems apparent, but, if we came closer, would it?

A language is rational when viewed from its inside. That is part of the meaning of 'inside' in this grammar.

32. The Manson family, the SLA. What if a group began to define the perceived world according to a complex, internally consistent, and precise (tho inaccurate) language? Might not the syntax itself propel their reality to such a point that to our own they could not return? Isn't that what happened to Hitler?

Languages are patricidal: there is no return from one to a former. Therapy, for instance, is designed to ease us from a held language, through (to) the choosing of another. This is one humane reason for regarding language at work.

34. They are confused, those who would appropriate Dylan or Wittgenstein -- were there ever two more similar men? --, passing them off as poets?

Myah gawd! I really don

35. What now? What new? All these words turning in on themselves like the concentric layers of an onion.

Unpeel the onion a layer at a time; at center, the still point.

36. What does it mean: "saw fit"?

"SAW FIT" is the clichéic expression, use, for a structural ideal.

37. Poetry is a specific form of behavior.

38. But test it against other forms. Is it more like drunkenness than filling out an absentee ballot? Is there any value in knowing the answer to this question?

Poetry isn't more like one thing than another, though the possibility it is proposes a game. We get the clear answer to this question only as poetry's attention unremittingly locks upon itself.

39. Winter wakens thought, much as summer prods recollection. Ought poetry to be a condition of the seasons?

It already is, but among so many other things that its mattering seems hardly to endure.

42. Analogies between poetry and painting end up equating page and canvas. Is there any use in such fiction?

Analogies relating art forms are useful because no form contains all the languages for talking about itself.

43. Or take the so-called normal tongue and shift each term in a subtle way. Is this speech made new or mere decoration?

"The so-called normal tongue" is decoration, as it is equally a fact in the world it continuously decorates.

47. Have we come so very far since Sterne or Pope?

We have come exactly as far as Sterne and Pope have come since Sterne and Pope.

48. Language as a medium attracts me because I equate it with that element of consciousness which I take to be intrinsically human. painting or music, say, might also directly involve the senses, but by ordering external situations to provoke specific (or general) responses. Do I fictionalize the page as form not to consider it as simply another manifestation of such "objective" fact? I have known writers who thought they could make the page disappear.

The relationship between 'same' 'different' will never in writing be clear; we might think so. This question is manifest in every art.

52. Etymology in poetry -- to what extent is it hidden (i.e., present and felt, but not consciously perceived) and to what extent lost (i.e., not perceived or felt, or, if so, only consciously)? The Joycean tradition here is based on an analytic assumption which is not true.

Each word goes to a page of the etymologicon for its history. A hammer is driving nails, another is pulling nails, another is breaking through a wall. Use does not need history, but very seldom does it ignore history.

53. Is the possibility of publishing this work automatically a part of the writing? Does it alter decisions in the work? Could I have written that if it did not?

Yes, now that you have said so. Yes, now that you have said so. No, each question demonstrates its altering decision.

57. "He's content just to have other writers think of him as a poet." What does this mean?

"...a relationship which adjectivizes is on the side of the image, on the side of domination, of death." --Barthes

58. What if there were no other writers? What would I write like?

There are. You wouldn't.

60. Is it language that creates categories? As if each apple were a proposed definition of a certain term.

Categories create categories; language gets used, again, again.

61. Poetry, a state of emotion or intellect. Who would believe that? What would prompt them to do so? Also, what would prompt them to abandon this point of view?

Poetry is a state of poetry; nothing can impinge on it, though things can be thought to. That it is otherwise is believed by people outside poetry. Poetry which resists the impression of emotion or intellect will allow people to be within it decisively, not straining from it to some other attainment.

62. The very idea of margins. A convention useful to fix forms, perhaps the first visual element of ordering, preceding even the standardization of spelling. What purpose does it have now, beyond the convenience of printers? Margins do not seem inherent in speech, but possibly that is not the case.

The historical persistence of margins makes them presently of one kind of use, to seduce the addicted eye.

63. Why is the concept of a right-hand margin so weak in the poetry of western civilization?

The right hand margin is very strong in western civilization. It is established, rigidly, by rhyme and meter, not by some other form of justification, justification of form.

64. Suppose I was trying to explain a theory of the margin to a speaker of Mandarin or Shasta -- how would I justify it? Would I compare it to rhyme as a sort of decision? Would I mention the possibility of capitalizing the letters along the margin? If I wanted, could I work "backwards" here, showing how one could posit non-spoken acrostics vertically at the margin and justify its existence from that? What if the person to whom I was explaining this had no alphabet, no writing, in his native tongue?

Yes, you would and could do all those things; you already have. If the person had no writing, you would have to begin with that standardization. You are not compelled to explain something which does not need explanation; again you are giving yourself something to need because you like having the lack of it.

66. Under certain conditions any language event can be poetry. The question thus becomes one of what are these conditions.

A question mark six words long!

76. If I am correct that this is poetry, where is its family resemblance to, say, The Prelude? Crossing the Alps.

The resemblance is in the genes; that they have passed on is evident in your mention of the predecessors. However, the mention is just another sentence.

78. Is not-writing (and here I don't mean discarding or revising) also part of the process?

No, it is not part of 'the process' until the process is named; then it is.

80. What if writing was meant to represent all possibilities of thought, yet one could or would write only in certain conditions, states of mind?

Writing would remain the metaphor that it always is, standing for its possibility.

81. I have seen poems thought or felt to be dense, difficult to get through, respaced on the page, two dimensional picture plane, made airy, "light." How is content altered by this operation?

Content is altered by all, which it is not separate from; especially, because often most obviously, its operation.

89. Is any term now greater than a place-holder? Any arrangement of weighted squares, if ordered by some shared theory of color, could be language.

The more suddenly a term appears (appears to have appeared) the less we take it for a place-holder. In this way, words can appear to be within the function of great intrinsic desire.

90. What do nouns reveal? Conceal?

Nouns reveal verbs. Nouns conceal verbs. -- Verbs expand nouns.

91. The idea of the importance of the role of the thumb in human evolution. Would I still be able to use it if I did not have a word for it? Thought it simply a finger? What evidence do I have that my right and left thumbs are at least roughly symmetrical equivalents? After all I don't really use my hands interchangeably, do I? I couldn't write this with my left hand, or if I did learn to do so, it would be a specific skill and would be perceived as that.

Without the power to think or to speak, you could still push a button and get off at the sixth floor. This is what is meant as the word 'eye' secretes its verb; though it does not depend on that.

94. What makes me think that form exists?

Having the thought that form exists, you have the fact that it does. This operation, seeming to prove itself, supports itself.

98. Good v. bad poetry. The distinction is not useful. The whole idea assumes a shared set of articulatable values by which to make such a judgement. It assumes, if not the perfect poem, at least the theory of limits, the most perfect poem. How would you proceed to make such a distinction?

You would proceed by lining up all the nouns and changing their order until you were satisfied. Only your satisfaction would show for it.

104. Put all of this another way: can I use language to change myself?

Asking this question has changed you so severely that you don't bother to answer it.

112. But if the poem/language equation is what we have been seeking, other questions nevertheless arise. For example, are two poems by one poet two languages or, as Zukofsky argues, only one? But take specifics -- Catullus, Mantis, Bottom, A-12 -- are these not four vocabularies with four sets of rules?

That a poem is a language is a stubborn idea because we persist in identifying with its function as a mode. The idea that 'vocabulary' has a plural is already a construct, and is already removed from vocabulary which it nevertheless appears to hover within.

114. If four poets took a specific text from which to derive the terms of a poem, what I call a "vocab," and by prior agreement each wrote a sestina, that would still be four languages and not one, right?

Four uses of language only reduce the language to four impressions of it.

115. A hill with two peaks, or two hills. If I grant that the language alters one's perception, and if it follows naturally that, depending on which perception one "chooses," one acts differently, becomes used to different paths, thinks of certain people as neighbors and others not,

and that such acts collectively will alter the hill (e.g., one peak becomes middle-class, residential, while the other slips into ghetto-hood later to be cleared off for further "development" which might include leveling the top of the peak to make it useable industrial space) -- if I grant the possibility of this chain, is not the landscape itself a consequence of language? And isn't this essentially the history of the planet? Can one, in the context of such a chain, speak of what we know of as the planet as existing prior to language?

The formulation of your idea of the hill is a consequence of language, and the hill may be altered by your ideas of it. This only seems to make the hill exist; something it does effortlessly, while your thinking has reduced you. You continue to confuse your perceptions, your thoughts and the words which for you are their vehicle, with 'the hill' and 'the planet', things which do not have to speak to exist.

117. Paris is in France. Also, Paris has five letters. So does France. But so do Ghana, China, Spain. How should I answer "Why is Paris Paris?"

Go to Paris.

118. The question within the question. To which does the question mark refer? If one question mark is lost, where does its meaning go? How is it possible for punctuation to have multiple or non-specific references?

Punctuation is usually part of a configuration; it shares its meaning. When a punctuation mark is "lost", nothing is really lost, there is no less than before; the meaning of the configuration shifts. Signs are not as separate as they appear to be when we examine them singly. Each sign contributes. A sign, before it contributes, is a possibility; it is that which makes us speak of it as pure, its state before it involves.

119. In what way is this like prose? In what way is this unlike it?

The Chinese Notebook is like prose in all respects.

123. What is the creative role of confusion in any work?

Confusion ignites work.

130. Content is only an excuse, something to permit the writing to occur, to trigger it. Would a historian looking for information about Massachusetts fishing colonies have much use for Maximus? To say yes is to concede that in order to like, say, Pound, you'd have to agree with him, no?

A historian will not have much use for *Maximus* as long as he has its sources; he will speak, differently, as an equal. It was the availability of Pound's sources, the books and ideas and experiences, things which he wanted available, that led and permitted so many to disagree with him.

132. But if one denies the possibility of referentiality, how does sad is faction differ from satisfaction? How do we know this?

Anyone denying the possibility of referentiality is quitting the writing game. Sounds do not so much differ in type, as they provide a substance for recognizing meaning(s), which do.

141. Why is this work a poem?

The Chinese Notebook is not a poem; though it does question itself, though it is obsessive, though its mechanics produce and procure a partly vertical structure, though it is sometimes aware of itself as a poem and lets the reader know it, though it

142. One answer: because certain information is suppressed due to what its position in the sequence would be.

143. But is it simply a question of leaving out?

Its personality is marked by what is left out because so much has been left in.

149. What is it that allows me to identify this as a poem, Wittgenstein to identify his work as technical philosophy, Brockman's Afterwords to be seen as Esalen-oriented metaphysics, and Kenner's piece on Zukofsky literary criticism?

'Poem', 'philosophy', 'metaphysics', 'criticism': nouns. These are among the states we leave when we write.

150. But is it a distortion of poetry to speak of it like this? How might I define poetry so as to be able to identify such distortions?

The definition of poetry is not distorted because you want it to include its contemplation. Each word (an integer with a hidden radical) already does that for itself; there is nothing to distort where distortion is wonderfully part of the function.

151. Can one even say, as have Wellek and Warren, that literature (not even here to be so specific as to identify the poem to the exclusion of other modes) is first of all words in a sequence? One can point to the concretist tradition as a partial refutation, or one can point to the

great works of Grenier, *A Day at the Beach and Sentences*, where literature occurs within individual words.

Literature is not limited to sequences or words.

153. But how, if it does not state it, does a work make a formal assertion? Certain structural characteristics such as line, stanza, etc. are not always present. Here is where one gets into Davenport's position regarding Ronald Johnson, to say that one is a poet who has written no poems, *per se*.

A work makes a formal assertion as soon as it is.

155. Why did I write "As always, the intention of the creator defines the state in which the work is most wholly itself"? Because it is here and here only where one can "fix" a work into a given state (idea, projective process, text, affective process, impression), an act which is required, absolutely, before one can place the work in relation to others, only after which can one make judgments.

You wrote "As always, the intention of the creator defines the state in which the work is most wholly itself" because you wanted to build up a great deal of certainty, some certainties which you hoped to link by their proximity, to make it be true.

156. What if I told you I did not really believe this to be a poem? What if I told you I did?

Whatever you question, you have said.

159. If, at this point, I was to insert 120 rhymed couplets, would it cause definitions to change?

Definitions would continue to be changing all over the place.

160. Lippard (*Changing*, p. 206) argues against a need for a "humanistic" visual arts, but makes an exception for literature, which "as a verbal medium, demands a verbal response." One wonders what, precisely, is meant by that? Is it simply a question of referentiality posed in vague terms? Or, does it mean, as I suspect she intended it to, that language, like photography, is an ultimately captive medium? If so, is the assertion correct? It is not.

A medium does not "demand" anything, unless it be the furtherance of its mode.

162. If I could make an irrefutable argument that non-referential language does exist (besides, that is, those special categories, such as prepositions or determiners), would I include this in it? Of course I would.

"I" would not.

164. Make a note in some other place, then transfer it here. Is it the same note?

You would make that question less vague by transferring it somewhere else. The action of doing so would be its only answer.

170. Is it possible for a work to conceal its intention?

A work's intentions are concealed by its imperfections. And the imperfections are its world.

171. But if the intention is always to be arrived at deductively, will not the work always be equal to it? Would we be able to recognize a work which had not met the writer's original intention?

It appears to us that a work, say, was intended as a good sonnet, but that it fails. The place where it was published may, as one factor, indicate the intention; the years since earliest sonnets were written will be a factor influencing our judgment. Considering intention, the work is a clue.

173. Is it possible for intentions to be judged, good or malevolent, right or otherwise? This brings us into the realm of political and ethical distinctions?

Intentions can be judged; but it is the nature of a work, and one of its appeals, that it will not interfere, will not help us with that judgment.

179. How far will anything extend? Hire dancers dressed as security personnel to walk about an otherwise empty museum, then admit the public. Could this be poetry if I have proposed it as such? If so, what elements could be altered or removed to make it not poetry? E.g., hire not dancers but ordinary security personnel. But if the answer is "no," if any extension, thing, event, would be poetry if proposed as such, what would poetry, the term, mean?

You can extend the term poetry. You could insist that the proposed event is a shoe. You would change the term only slightly by that one extension.

180. Possibly poetry is a condition applicable to any state of affairs. What would constitute such a condition? Would it be the same or similar in all instances? Could it be identified, broken down? Does it have anything to do with the adjectival form "poetic"?

Poetry is not a condition. It is a class of possible uses for language. The word "poetic" is a little more precise, which helps us avoid its use, and at other times allows us to use it insultingly in speaking of a listless product. The noun is larger.

181. If one could propose worrying as one form of poetry, what in the worrying would be the poem?

The attention to structure, to the work's gradual and careful performance. The worrying would be only a meaning, an aura.

182. Or could one have poetry without the poem? Is it possible that these two states do not depend on the presence (relational as it is) of each other? Give examples.

Poetry is possible as a topic, a consequence, without the poem; the consequence would be a more murky theory. If we say "the poem" is the presence of an argument for something, then "poetry" points to the fact that we are arguing.

183. Why is it language characterizes the man?

Language characterizes the man as long as we assume that he chooses his. It is the prevalence of the pronoun, which we notice, and which makes us wish to see each as a (kickable) noun.

184. Or I meant, possibly, why is it that language characterizes man?

Language characterizes man because we can only occasionally see past our mouths.

185. Is it language?

If we say so.

186. Context -- against the text. Literally a circumstance where meaning is not obvious simply by the presence of terms in a specific sequence. Remove 185 from this text: "it" in 185 then means either "this writing" or some "other" event. But in the notebook as it is, the sentence must mean "Is it language that characterizes (the) man?" Is the same sentence in two contexts one or two sentences? If it is one, how can we assign it differing meanings? If it is two, there could never literally be repetition.

The same sentence in two contexts: (1) two sentences, (2) the same sentence. The context assigns meaning to the sentence; we recognize it. (1) The simple thing is repeated, assigned another job; (2) the simple thing is the same, but we notice that it does different work.

188. But if poetry were a 'system' -- not necessarily a single system, but if for any individual it was -- then one could simply plug in the raw data and out would flow 'poetry,' not necessarily poems.

189. Is this not what Robert Kelly does?

Robert Kelly writes poems, makes writing. From my reading, the former is far more important to him.

190. It was Ed van Aelstyn who, in his linguistics course, planted the idea (1968) that the definition of a language was also a definition of any poem: a vocabulary plus a set of rules through which to process it. What did I think poetry was before that?

Ronald Silliman.

191. But does the vocabulary include words which do not end up in the finished text? If so, how would we know which words they are?

Knowing the vocabulary, either specifically or generally, we can see what has been used. In this way, each poem speaks of itself; we begin to make judgments about the poet, a personality capable of such work.

203. The formal considerations of indeterminacy are too few for interest to extend very far, even when posed in other terms -- "organic" etc. But organic form is strict, say, 1:1:2:3:5:8:13:21.... What is the justification for strict form (Xenakis' music, for example) which cannot be perceived? Is there an aesthetic defense for the hidden?

Strict structures for indeterminacy often falsify in pretending to be more ego-less, a personal concern which will not escape being one. But the artist may enjoy his hidden structure, which is not different from enjoying an overt one, except that overt structures have been drained of pleasure for the easily bored. Structures which announce their newness work insofar as they tire us quickly of our boredom; the justification for a work with a hidden form is that it has a relatively good chance of doing that.

205. Are 23 and 197 the same or different?

(23. As a boy, riding with my grandparents about Oakland or in

the country, I would recite such signs as we passed, directions, names of towns or diners, billboards. This seems to me now a basic form of verbal activity.

(197. Language on walls. Graffiti, "fuk spelling," etc. As a boy I rode with my grandparents about town, learning to read by reading all the signs aloud. I am still apt to do this.)

They are the same: remember. They are different: remember.

211. Absolutely normal people. Would their writing be any different?

It would be infinitely rare.

218. Buildup, resolution. What have these to do with the writing?

Like 'before' and 'after', the words 'buildup' and 'resolution' seem to fix points of an experience (reading) in time. Each point of the reading experience is only present, whether or not it is experienced as containing memory or expectation.

219. Just as doubt presumes a concept of certainty, non-referentiality presumes knowledge of the referential. Is this a proof?

Words such as opposites are especially paired, seem to support each other. This is a statement about human nature.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

NARRATING NARRATION: The Shapes of Ron Silliman's Work

Narration doubtless preceded Acting and gave Laws to it.

--John Dryden

Think don't narrate.

--Bruce Andrews

The limits of adjacency are claimed; flagpoles flutter; in a faint sea breeze the buoy is boosted.

Out of a deep crease . . . & stationary orbit: a function made of hurl and laid with tarn. Beggaring for life's glimmer, indeterminate heliotropes on the slow boat to New Foundland. . . . There are no minutes, only moments, sewn together by this "self"same thread: a candle's whisk of tomorrow in the tailspin of cylindric episode. Or maybe two kilometers away . . . bedwetters, undigested skies.

How to get from A to C by way of, at the least, D. This is not only the story of a poem but of a life--biography. The miracle is rather that you string together pieces and have a syntax comprehended, a life inhabited.

The pleasure in hearing syntax is like the pleasure in tasting food; in either case the alternative is sustaining, perhaps bracing, even 'sheer'; but even the interstellar Hippy of the old lore likes to come down from time to time, for contrast. It follows, that is, by dint of: a demonstration that we live in a world made content a posteriori: an age of huts (*series makes syntax*) not bits. The body, so to say, is very 19th century; that we understand little more about it than a horse hay reminds me of the story of the writer who proved that discontinuity is a readerly fiction by riding on the subway. *It's* all connected and if you don't comprehend that it may be because it's not trying to persuade you that it is. Not that up is down--not so simple; more like sideways.

"That's not writing, it's spelling!" I think it was Norman Mailer said of Erma Bombeck, or was it Golda Meir speaking Gershom Scholem. "That's not writing, it's spilling!"

Syntax is the order of words in a phrase or sentence (from the Greek for arrangement, to order together, as in tactics); grammar provides a set of rules that govern normative (a rule-governed normal) syntax. Or, as we like to say in the poetry business, "you broke it you bought it" i.e., you're gonna get hung with it. Which is probably fine with "you", just the ticket. You're hanging by it anyway. ("Better well hung than ill wed." . . . Better so, better well hung than by an unfortunate marriage to be brought into systematic relation with all the world", as J. Climacus put it some time ago.) I provide this explanation to put off such inhospitable and ungrateful concepts as 'nonsyntactical' as if elephants, because they have trunks, cease to use their feet for walking. Should I choose to take my tie off, the one with the embossed seals that is so carefully knotted over my Adam's apple, I do not fall into a state

of undress. I remain clothed, in some fashion or other, until I am without clothes and indeed then my skin still encloses me, until I disappear. (The real moral of "The Emperor's New Clothes" is that power is always naked and by force of that concealed by the modesty of a people who cannot bear to look at the spectacle without mediation; the Emperor is clothed, that is, by the self-protective squeamishness of the collective subconscious.)

If syntax is a neutral term for intrasentential relationships, narrative, in this structural sense, would be the term for intersentential relationships. That is, narrative is not intrinsically tied to causality, development, chronology, characters, setting--concepts that might be associated with narrative conventions within fiction or the novel. To make a narration is simply to make an account, and while an account is customarily given so as to picture an event in a causal-sequential manner, this is already a privileged assumption about the nature of the 'event' narrated. Such conventions largely predetermine the nature of the reality accounted for by them.

The etymology of narration ("etymology is the hobgoblin of little minds" was it Noam Chomsky said of Louis Wolfson?) traces it to the Latin word for "a tale", which is derived from the past participle of *narrāre*, meaning "to relate, literally make known", which in turn is derived from *nārus* and *gnārus*, which mean "knowing, acquainted with". The root word, according to Rev. Skeat, is GEN, as in generate, beget (secondary form, *gnō*--know). So, evidently from the first, narration has slept with epistemology.

Which brings us to Ron Silliman (this is an article about Ron Silliman), whose work accounts for narration by showing how the sequencing of sentences engenders meaning and how the world accommodates--is made particular by--the ingenuity of narrative shapes.

Or again: Silliman writes tales, a word whose Anglo-Saxon derivations include both the word for narrative (*talū*) and number (*tael*). By adding number (numerical structural programs) to narrative, Silliman tells the tale of ourselves; or, better, has awakened such tales from the deep slumber of chronology, causality, and false unity (totalization).

Not so simple

Hypnotized by false unity, that is a theme Silliman's work returns to again and again: the desire to read-in a unity even where none exists. And so, in his own texts, detail is cast upon detail, minute particular upon minute particular, adding up to an impossibility of commensurable narrative. With every new sentence a new embarkation: not only is the angle changed, and it's become a close-up, but the subject is switched. Yet maybe the sound's the same, carries it through. Or like an interlocking chain: A has a relation to B and B to C, but A and C have nothing in common (*series not essence*).

Breaking the hold of rationalized narrative is not new with Ron Silliman. One only needs to look at the opening of Blake's *The Four Zoas*: "Four Mighty ones are in every Man; / a Perfect Unity Cannot Exist." And if the indulgence of the juxtaposition is not incommensurable enough, let me compound the problem by substituting Silliman's

name for Blake's in this passage from Donald Ault on *The Four Zoas*:

Silliman forces the reader to come to grips with an experience of radically incommensurable explanations of the narrative nexus of events. On the other hand, Silliman implants signals which appeal to the reader's desire to find interconnection beneath surface incommensurability. The basic formula which lies behind the interconnection of these two narrative processes is: incommensurability does not entail disconnection; and interconnection does not entail unity. ("Incommensurability and Interconnection", p.298)

The "signals" Silliman uses to encourage the reader to find "interconnection" are the structural programs that underpin each of his works. Unlike Blake, whose signals are often obscured by his mythopoetics, Silliman has relatively straightforward, usually numerically-based patterns that are, at least in part, readily graspable. For instance, each new paragraph in *Ketjak* has twice the number of sentences as the previous paragraph and embeds all its words. The "logic" of his narrative sequencing is experienced at the same time as its effects. What differentiates this approach from a more experimental/conceptual minimalism is that the narrative rules are not taken to be of intrinsic interest. Rather, they are used to enhance the pleasure of reading the subject matter that is processed through them. Silliman accentuates rather than obliterates the distinction between structure and subject matter, while at the same time making structure his most insistent subject. The experience of reading a Silliman text is less the coolly formal pleasure of looking at an architectural plan and more the surprise of being in a building whose plan becomes apparent as you walk through it.

Ketjak is one part of Silliman's tetralogy, *The Age of Huts*, which also consists of *The Chinese Notebook*, *Sunset Debris*, and *2197*. *The Chinese Notebook* is organized into 223 numbered paragraphs, a format based on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The subject matter of this work is explicitly poetics--not only what it means for a text to be a poem but also why this particular text, in so many ways like an essay, is being claimed as a poem (and a section of a longer poem). But it is partly just the placement of *The Chinese Notebook* within *The Age of Huts* that makes it a poem. Poetry need not privilege a particular kind of language as poetic. In *The Chinese Notebook*, types of discursive discourse are explored by a poetic process: Silliman not only writes about, but also uses as formal devices, strategies of continuity, discontinuity, synchronicity, and format. Within its frame of poetics, other topics--sometimes the frames of the other books of *The Age of Huts*--emerge. Indeed, throughout *The Age of Huts*, Silliman recasts similar subjects into novel contexts, so that, for instance, when the topic of discontinuity/synchronicity comes up in *Sunset Debris* it can take on the erotic content that pervades that work: "Do sentences 'just come' or are they conditional, a logic of disorder, accumulative, sequential?"

In *Sunset Debris* every sentence is a question. This structure makes otherwise theoretical questions--which are quietly meditative in the environs of *The Chinese Notebook*--volatile, unrelenting, pleading. Who is the reader--you--reading the text? What assumptions do I make about you or you about this? As in a "mis"assembled jigsaw puzzle, autobiographical facts reside next to political inquiry, surface descriptions of landscape, overheard conversation, twisted cliches and jingles, imaginary aphorisms, place names and personal names, formalist self-scrutiny. Indeed, all these things are in all four parts of *The Age of Huts*, though with a different preponderance in each.

2197 balances out the more discursive concerns in *The Chinese Notebook* with a primarily intrasentential investigation. The poem is made up of 13 individually titled sections of 13 paragraphs or stanzas each with 13 sentences. Each section, then, is composed of 169 (13 squared) sentences and overall the work has 169 stanzas/paragraphs. The title is derived from the equation $13 \times 169 = 2197$. Each sentence in each section appears to be a modification of a similar sentence (or sentences) in each of the other 12 sections. Sometimes the modifications involve elaboration or fragmentation, sometimes syntactic permutations, and sometime hybridization (parts of previously distinct sentences are detached and recombined). For instance, a sentence with the words "form" and "fill" shows up in all 13 sections of *2197*. Versions include: "Only forms fill us." "Forms should not have fill." "Talking with the forms about the fill." "Forms fill." "The fill is a forms of coleus, canvas, barnwood and skylights" ("canvas" and "coleus" are index words for another series of sentences, making this an instance of hybridization). "Forms stood on the sidewalks waving to the incoming black-clad fill." "The mereness of fill is not form." "This dream forms in the summer song of the fill." Evidently, the text has been generated from a group of core sentences (169, 1 in each stanza/paragraph, the author has subsequently informed me). Like an inscrutable object of reference, we get many different views--some apparently incommensurable--but never the whole-itself. The structural metaphor of *2197* is playful and suggestive: "Locating prior concept atop difficulty." It baits with a lure of totalization, a unified and idealized picture, while providing only partial glimpses.

One of the 13 sections of *2197* is entitled "The Four Protozoas", referring to Blake's *The Four Zoas*, which is itself a Biblical reference to the four living creatures who together make up the human form in Ezekial's dream. In the midst of Silliman's own tetralogy, the suggestion of four basic elements--with its echo of ancient Greek physics--is less a numerologically oracular assertion than a wry comment on lower limits--at least four. At least that's how I interpret a motto that occurs twice in "The Four Protozoas": Initially Silliman writes, "Only struggle defines us"; before the section is concluded this is transformed to "Only struggle defines." This is the principle of narrative process rather than narrative fiction. Definition is a posteriori, arising from a poetic practice in which the reader is acknowledged as present and counting. It is, accordingly, not reductive to a single world viewed, but participatory, multiple.

"Perspective". . . is a product of the drive

toward the suppression of multiplicity into unity, a drive which we have seen is overwhelmingly strong in Newton. . . . Thus what Blake's *Four Zoas* narrative constructs is, from the point of view of Newtonian narrative, an impossibility: a series of eccentric, mutually incommensurable universes which intersect precisely at their lacunae.

(Ault, "Incommensurability", p.299)

Rationalized narrative, in its presuppositions, is "A specific ontology hushed, search(ing) for the world", as Silliman points out in "The Four Protozoas". In contrast, Silliman has produced a writing in which that search is replaced by a material engagement.

In "Skies", a section of his ongoing *Alphabet*, each sentence is about the--or a--sky. These sentences "intersect precisely at their lacunae"; they do not build a more and more incommensurable picture but exist, despite this unity of subject, as separate, partial and complete.

Newtonian narrative presupposes that behind the text lies a single unified field . . . whose essential features do not irreconcilably and incommensurably conflict with one another but can (in theory at least) be fully captured through systematic analytic explanation. . . . Both "Single vision" and "Newtonian narrative" aim toward making explicit the coherence and completeness of the narrative world of the text . . . and towards realizing a pre-ordained "end" or closure which resolves conflicts into a unified whole.

(Ault, "Revisioning", pp. 2-3)

The Age of Huts demonstrates incommensurability not only within works but among them. Extending this further, Silliman conceptualizes *The Age of Huts* as part of a yet larger, as far as I know unnamed, superstructure. To understand Silliman's work it is necessary to look at both the shape of the canon (the external relationships of shape among the works) and how this shape is reflected within the individual works.

By backtracking to Silliman's early *NOX* ("Chronology is false consciousness" was it Harpo Marx said to Margaret Dumont?), the continuity of his work with the reversibility of macrostructure and microstructure becomes apparent. Each page of *NOX* is divided by a printed cross into four sections each of which contains a short (one to four line) poem with a distinct style and shape. The "action" of the work is the relation of the four poems on each page to each other, multiplied by the relationships among the 15 pages of the book. By not homogenizing the text into a single voice or syntax, the separate elements are able to interconnect with each other through the readers' mediation. The isolated units come into a part-to-whole relationship not by altering the components but by incorporating them into the common poetic project.

As a highly schematic prototype of the work to come, *NOX* reminds that Silliman's structures can be read as political allegory for a so-

ciety that is nonauthoritarian (playful and provisional structures) and multicultural (the absolute right of difference). Not that this is ever made explicit in *NOX*. In fact, the scale of such a reading contrasts with the delicate word-to-word and syllable-to-syllable displacements ("velopes / alism / / now hear this") that are typical of the poem. These implications are internalized into the fabric of *NOX*--"a plaid etude". Yet, once recognized, the interpretation gains all the more power for not being demanded.

Let me abruptly jump ahead in Silliman's chronology and sketch the shape of *Lit*, his most recent work as of this writing. Twelve sections, twelve formats, each structured around some variety of twelve ("L" being the twelfth letter of the alphabet):

I: Twelve paragraphs, increasing from one to two to five and then, by plus ones, to twelve sentences each. The first few sentences of each paragraph are only one or two words, with larger paragraphs building up sequentially into very long, complex sentences with increasingly embedded, baroque style. The number of words in the sentences in the last paragraph, for example, goes from 1 (in the first five sentences) to 4 to 11 to 13 to 26 to 34 to 67 to 104. On closer count, this turns out to be a numerical sequence in which the number of syllables in each sentence is equal to the sum of the previous 2 stanzas' sentence count starting with 1 syllable and stopping at 144 syllables (12 squared and the 12th in the sequence). (This is called a Fibonacci series and is used by Silliman as the numerical structure for *Tjanting*.)

II: Twelve stanzas, a sentence a line, with the number of sentences in each stanza proceeding by Fibonacci progression, as in I, from 1 to 144. Sentences are fairly short, often only a couple of words and only once slightly exceeding a single line of typescript. So the feeling is of a steadily increasing accumulation of quick hits ("Numbers harden."--definition of a tale?); sharp visual details, often with structural connotations ("Web visible because it reflects the sun."); delirious (or serious or cited) assertions, aphorisms, headlines, slogans ("Punk is a petroleum product."); plain statement, naming ("The rooster."); decontextualized dialogue ("How can you think that."); "factual" and political reference, observation, irony (Reagan's "There you go again."); poetics ("Syntax presents the illusion of depth (pork stomachs)."); author self-reference ("Silliman is wrong and I can prove it."); idle word play, cited from a new commodity's brand name ("Nissan stanza."); sex ("Orgasm is a consequence."). (This kind of serial subject matter is similar to that in I.

III: One long sentence arranged into 145 lines (12 squared plus 1: a delightful "mis"count), running-in similar kinds of subject matter as previously, commas where periods had been and only once at the line break, the strong effect of the enjambment to make it seem one long stream of associations in contrast to the clipt autonomies in serial order in I and II.

IV: Twelve prose paragraphs of twelve sentences each. "This is narrative (you will die)." The relative uniformity of the paragraph lengths makes each a set piece; easy to become familiar with, keep in mind the inter- and intraparagraph arrangements: a feeling of decorum, stateliness. "Lit, then whispers, flashes out" being a description of the emotional valence (in Stein's sense) of each paragraph.

V: Four sequences of twelve numbered sections each with three one-sentence verse lines (the total number of sentences is, like IV, 144). The sentences are mostly simple and declarative. The effect is similar to NOX's schematic perspicacity. The groups of three suggest stanzas and paragraphs, but the double spacing between lines, and the lack of overt sound or meaning overlaps from line to line, emphasize the discreteness of the line = sentence units. "The simplest thing (a paragraph) has begun to melt."

VI: One long paragraph of 144 sentences. The subject matter is more obviously unified than in the earlier sections. Each of the sentences apparently refers to an aspect of Silliman's one-term move to San Diego for a teaching job. Because of the unity of the subject, this section comes as close as Silliman gets to a conventional narrative account. But the absence of causal and chronological connections among sentences, or explanations of settings and names, or attributions of attitudes or remarks, makes the "underlying" subject elusively unplanar and multifaceted, refracted into 144 synchronizing parts rather than caught and held in an ever more single image.

VII: Six stanzas of 12 lines and 24 sentences each (144 sentences total). The stanzas are typed across the horizontal axis of the page to fit the double-length lines. This is the most direct use of page scoring in *Lit*. The line lengths suggest ragged right prose, an impression underscored by the absence of periods at the line ends except at the terminus of each stanza. The second section plays with this confusion by opening with "New paragraph: old tricks" when of course the format, appearances to the contrary, is stanzaic. Is this a difference that makes a difference? There is another, subtler dynamic here as well: In the more gradual tonal discontinuities between sentences, the length of the paragraphic stanzas, and the strategies of opening and closure, Silliman appears to be alluding to the highly conventionalized "prose-poem" style about which he has elsewhere said, "if it looks like a prose poem then it is not" ("What is the Prose Poem?"). Certainly, these last lines suggest a parody of that unnameable mode, or, at the least, a wry nostalgia for the fantastical unity of conventional short fiction: "A dense mist settles over the small white homes on the hill." "In the kitchen two sisters are dancing to the Stones while the calendar on the wall still shows July." "The old parrot gives a squawk." "The tiger stares through the bars of her cage."

VIII: A brief quote from Thoreau on the need for "a thousand themes" as distinct as a text can sustain. Written on the twelfth day of the month, this is a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of *Lit*'s criteria of twelveness, although it's similar to Ray DiPalma's fecund text-determination method in his *Birthday Notations*, which is composed entirely of quotations written on the day and month of his birth.

IX: Four 12-line stanzas of 3 words each (144 words total). The short lines seem enough to induce the experience of lyric poetry and Silliman goes with that--the first line being "Wild gesticulations, wide"--but immediately undercuts in the next with "receivers." and continues more in the latter vein through the highly controlled and "lovely" poem(s).

X: Has basically the same twelve-step Fibonacci progression as

II but with several wrinkles. There is both prose and line format, some of the lined stanzas do not have any periods for the first time in *Lit*, and the tenth section, counting as "55", is actually five separate eleven-line stanzas with only one terminal period at the end of the fifth stanza. The internal complexity of this structure gives the text a quirky, quixotic feel. "These sentences occur in this order. I hate what narrative does to time. The garden's grown into a jungle." The final prose paragraph, with its 144 sentences in amusingly varied serial order, both caps and dominates the section as a whole.

XI: Twelve twelve-line stanzas, no periods, with a recurring pattern of six-, seven-, or eight-word lines. A return to normalcy--"semi-gloss wall". Each line is as much a sentence as previously punctuated ones, more than many. So verse = prose (there is, strictly speaking, neither prose nor poetry, Silliman has written ["What is the Prose Poem?"]). There is no line-to-line enjambment in this section (an explicit exception is the two lines, where the metaphor in the structure of autonomous lines is spoken: "To mean anything, to mourn anything, two / People terrified to speak of love.") Unlike, for example, the sentence in the final prose paragraph of X, each of the lines is evenly matched in length and content; there are no one- or two-word lines and no lines of purely transitional content; neither is there any of the pseudofiction of VII. "Sighing, declarative sentence makes wrong judgment or none." Everything is equivalent: "Espousing freely into air bag (sic)"--an odd comment on writing poetry, given the reference to James Schulyer's *Freely Espousing*--to "Too tall antenna on a lone house"; or these stanzas make them so, make them heard as. The power of language: "Tough blue stanza Z-80 shuts engine off."

XII: Twelve twelve-section paragraphs that alternately decrease (to a series of one- to three-word sentences) and increase (to ca. hundred-word sentences) in sentence length. Because of the gradualness of the increase or decrease, the constraints and possibilities for sentence length are brought into focus. The shorter, simplified sentences tend to name and declare, a series of snapshots, while the very long sentences have a wildness of imagination related to the exuberance of their syntax. Yet, lest we be carried away by their exhilarating sweep, Silliman ends one "... that new syntax equal to the living could just as well lie."

The air steams with August heat, modicum of ectopian respiration. My preconscious is crowded with shapes and they're beginning to crawl. I can barely think my own thoughts. All I've ever been authorized to do is eat shit. Eyes stutter, ears bug out, mouth stiffens into brace. Plain brown wrapper around semblance of an echo of an act. Bunting puns, fronting stuns. *More than this*. The reasons, enumerated, cannot be asphyxiated. Get off the wall & into the hall. Which is not origami. Having ideas a kind of conduct (George Burns). Not enough. "Mouth closes slowly over friendliest of ..." WHAT then. WOA, Nellie Belle! "Everything is syntax (there is no meaning apart from the world)." "The sun steams into the sea."

This "writing whose value is not that it has none, but the image presented, craft-centered, of what working could be, the care in the word."

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