

STATIONS No. 5:

A Symposium on Clark Coolidge  
Winter, 1978

Editor for this issue: Ron Silliman  
General Editor: Karl Young

CLARK COOLIDGE

by Ron Padgett

In the inner courtyard of a (Mexican?) hotel a group of citizen-soldiers are about to introduce me to a friend of theirs. I look at their friend, who is an enormous tortoise standing on its hind legs, dressed in human clothing, its mouth opening and closing slowly as it rocks slightly from left to right. I am hesitant about shaking hands with this creature. "Ron, we want you to meet Clark Coolidge." I stare at the tortoise. "Hello, Clark," I say, embarrassed by my fear of getting too near him, "nice to meet you." The soldier-citizens engage me in conversation. There is small arms fire in the distance. As we talk I notice that the tortoise is very slowly assuming the appearance of a human being who still resembles his animal self. Very slowly the shifting shapes come into focus: it is Clark Coolidge! "You've got to hand it to him, they say, "he's worked very hard and he's come a long way." "What a fantastic accomplishment!" I cry.

COOLIDGE/TONE

by Fielding Dawson

POME: GRANITE (clue

if you can taste the milk in cotton on a child's breast, if you can see a bee at sixty paces through ivy, if you can shudder under a dog's breath in summer: feel each as potential for metaphor, and remember their individual lucidity in Bartok's 6th Quartet on a 3 & 2 count at Stogie Stadium, you'll understand Clark Coolidge's poetry. Otherwise, boys, it's HARD sledding.

CC

by Michael Lally

I first read the work of CLARK COOLIDGE while attending the Iowa Writers Workshop, world famous, as they said, and was unimpressed. Years later I met Bruce Andrews in a book store in Washington D.C. where we argued about jazz and revolution and I discovered that although he (Bruce) had been published in THE PARIS REVIEW he didn't know anybody in "the New York crowd" personally. In fact he had never even met Clark Coolidge though he was crazy about his (Bruce about Clark's) work. I liked Bruce despite his lightning like instant analyses, and so I gave Coolidge's work a second chance. Whammo! As surrealism attempted to disrupt the "normal" associations between images, usually by combining phrases that totaled up to nothing known in the physical world but with characteristic sexual, violent and anti-booshwa overtones very well known in the physical world... this new stuff attempted to disrupt the "normal" associations between words (!), usually by combining words into groups based on arbitrary construction methods or on chance (slight difference there) or on deliberate attempts to discover new motivations for word energy other than Denotation and Connotation... it was pretty far out. Thus it took me several years to "open up to", as we said in the movement about later developments, CC's work. The next step was reading everything available. Then attempting to teach him (highly successful, especially to my predominantly black graduate students, mostly elementary school teachers) and finally defending him. But that wasn't the end of it, many years later I find myself now constantly defending other poets from the accusation: "Oh him, he writes that Clark Coolidge kind of stuff" or worse yet, this from a prominent California poet: "Coolidge is a real man, the rest of these creeps are just imitating him, they're not real." Coolidge, I guess, is a seminal figure, in the development of what is the newest (I know it's an extension of Stein stuff and Zukofsky stuff, and even much European futurist work now almost a hundred years old, nevertheless) and therefore in many ways most exciting, approaches to the poem. I also know a lot of bad and boring work has been created based on the same or very similar approaches. But almost everything I've seen of Coolidge's has been interesting, if not always stimulating, and often moved me to write, sometimes very linear and direct statement type work. And, I consider any writing that moves me to write has got something great going for it (and I assume, if it moves me that way it moves others that way). I also assume the idea is to confront us with language we can't immediately respond to the meaning of and therefore if we take the trouble (and the words, or combinations are interesting or provocative or in some way attractive enough) to respond at all it will be to other qualities of language and its various components (I keep saying "words" when obviously parts of words or letter combinations are equally as much a part of this work) like say: weight, texture, shadow, shape, etc.-yes, plastic qualities like in the other now more financially rewarding arts-as well as to eventually the usual but in new ways—I mean connotations and denotations of specific words or word parts but in such a way as to reveal new facets of even those familiar qualities. Well, the best of Coolidge's work works that way for

me and I'm grateful to him for it. (As well as for his more uncharacteristic work like the Kerouac condensed novel or the Tom Clark interview.) I hope he continues to keep us guessing.

FROM THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

by Alan Davies

Clark Coolidge's method of writing IN VIRGINIA (Boston Eagle no. 3). In the original source text, *Caves of Virginia* by Henry H. Douglas and the *Virginia Cave Survey of the National Speleological Society*-Falls Church, Va. 1964, 761 pp., there is a section report on each cave the survey explored. From each section Coolidge selected the sentence he most like of those containing the cave's name. His interest was based on several things, among them fascinating sound, humor and wit, social prejudices, and unusual ideas and relationships.

COOLIDGE

by Charles Bernstein

*"...is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of a thing; detected the inmost mystery of it, namely, the melody that lies hidden in it; the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul, whereby it exists, and has a right to be, here in the world."* -Carlyle

*"It will be as much like granite as it can be."* -Pound

These words are inside things, and become, landscapes of their internal relations. The Chinese in Pound: everything as a process-in-the-world. So no nouns or adjectives alone, but ideograms of subject-verb-object, thing and action not formally separated. Language, then, not mere naming, and, specifically, not naming things. In these poems, objects nor actions described as objects are not the primary substance. Or perhaps: everything is objective.

So events, in the world, this, themselves.

Coolidge's OFLENGTHS: The preposition as significant verb or noun, presenting a world of relation-of it, on it, in it, between or among-here landscapes of particular situations, precisely centered on how we are situated.

Denise Levertov's idea of organic form, as opposed to blank verse, is a way to begin an aesthetics of modernist poetry. By blank verse is meant a recording each line as thought or unit or entity. By organic form: the poem as a whole entity, a cross-section of time and place, a constellation that captures a particular experience, a particular-in-time. In Coolidge, the experience captured is the one set down, internal to the individual poem, to its compositional integrity, its limits. Internal to the poem is the experience it is about: the "inscape" of it. So not the recording of a reality outside the poem but the reality of the experience in it-or perhaps-during it. What this process reveals is that which is intended-designed, chosen, picked, arranged, programmed, judged, manipulated, decided –aesthetical or ethical or moral or political-in other words, that which is human and which is particular of each human.

Which says nothing of the reference of any phrase or image or element. But the individual reference is surrendered to the overall composition.

At first, reading the poems in SPACE, a particular phrase sounds right seems well placed, and I attend to a variety of elements-internal balance, non-syntactic juxtaposition, pun & rhyme & allusion, assonance, dissonance, alliteration. But a nagging emerges: Is this all there is to it? A glistening surface? A dazzling facade? Are these only automatons, patterns, mere programmes—with nothing intended about them, nothing of human meaning? Just intellectual designs? -I feel I need a meaning to accompany this surface of words, to reassure me that they are about something, mean something. I want a way of reading these words, a way of interpreting them, that yields a fact, story, statement to accompany this surface. —Here the meaning seems to lie in the surface. The (outer) surface has collapsed onto-become-the (inner) meaning: so that meaning does not accompany the surface of words but is simultaneous with it.

Take a line. What is it about? What is it referring to? What picture can I think of to replace it?

*"is so  
of  
I  
from"*

What is so? Of what is it? From whom?

It resists my pinning it down. Won't allow itself to be coralled or summed up in a sentence.

But why resist? Why insist on distance? On being enigmatic? Obscure? Alien? Unknowable?

It is as if it doesn't care about me but just stares. (He, She, ---) (Trees, Rocks, Planets, Stars.) Still, I am inside it as much as under or across. I stare back at myself.

In Coolidge, a poetry of elimination: stripping away any thing that distances, a reducing to bare form, aesthetic, way of seeing, pure judgement (within the limits of time and place alone).

Because of the multiplicity of ways any of the poems can be interpreted, a critical reading gets bogged down into diversions and limitations. It is possible to point to directions or ways of meaning, as well as certain textual qualities, but the poems themselves seem to show these up as incompetent.

For instance, here are some textual remarks on "Calypso" "is et clastic": existential assertion of the type of thing it (the poem, the experience in the poem, the experience of the poem) is, "clastic", its density plastic (words as shape) and classic (poetically classical in its use of assonance, alliteration, etc.). "bill & wide": its dimensions, as also "two wide" and "mixed matted". "Trad stone dumb"-descriptive of what it is, as traditionally stone dumb, i.e., brute silent presence, dumbly speaking this thing, stoneness. "links": what it does. Single words filling a line I read as verbs, assertions about it-that which is, becomes, here, the subject-i.e., it links, it keel, it dimes, it ponds-files, reels, says-it ultimately language, which does all these things, it says and shows what saying is, a link, mixed, matted, keeling-making tropes that gab.

Throughout his work, Coolidge uses phrases-word clusters-that have a gooeyness and gumminess, a thickness of texture, hard, ungiving and indigestible-"clump bends trill a jam" "mid punt egg zero" "copra stewage" "globule" making the poems dense and heavy, filling their space with a high specific gravity that weighs them down to earth, keeps them resistant to easy assimilation, lets them hold their particular space through time.

These verbal clusters allow for the most extravagant and wonderful fantasy-words building entities wilder (and more hilarious) than our dreams. My favorites from "Calypso"- "hum over glow trout" and "cog world sigh blimp" One is, after all, left to one's own resources: one can only imagine what these things are.

Here, words are not used as references to objects but as concrete objects, themselves, as texture, sound-and the poems more shape than idea or description. "That words hum" "in figurative sap".<sup>2</sup> A poetry of hieroglyphics: an iconography peculiar to this writer, this poem, not symbolizing something outside the poem (as in Lawrence, Freud, etc.), but remaining an impenetrable embodiment, untranslatable into any single thought. Symbol as embodiment of its particularity-in-time, the material embodiment of form, an incarnation, hence the miracle of art, that it means. (The human form divine.)

Coolidge uses and reuses a group of words that make up a significant part of the texture of his work. Typical of the words he mines in THE MAINTAINS-time coal mine cog mink facer diurnal hum bop breather clap cup slim putter alp ace at a an of part word in granite looped dogbrick slate it fin pound pond nul grouper trope patter nutlet pull pug noun pit bivalent as globose bulbous slag part borax blimp dine dime borage actinic limestone: such a such, the very so-mingles means & maybes.

These words take on the texture, the complexion, the materiality, the physicality of it-of language: the embodiment of the spiritual in the material that is language. ("Time's massed at material bottoms."<sup>3</sup>) Coolidge's poetry is "part art part limestone"<sup>3</sup> and the cave that recurs in his work, particularly in THE MAINTAINS, is the "word mine"<sup>2</sup> of language-an excavation of word/language as granite, limestone, dogbrick, asbestos, slate, monozite, coal.<sup>2</sup> "The hall we came to, one large asbestos like word"<sup>3</sup> as stone as

words"<sup>3</sup> "it a it"<sup>2</sup>. THE MAINTAINS a cave of language to be mined, resisting all attempts to possess it yet demanding possession. So that I come to feel it is mine-a mine-of me-as much as the rocks, stars and ranges.

"Grammar a granite"<sup>3</sup>: As in Stein's investigation of grammar and syntax in Arthur A. Grammar (HOW TO WRITE), Coolidge's work is an investigation into the different forms, the varying patterns, poems can take. So each work (as each poem in SPACE) has a new structure, new conditions, in which patterns are generated by different programmes. But throughout his work the words, the word mine, like the language itself is relatively constant. So that language itself (and in particular that subset of words that Coolidge uses again and again) is used as a prior text for cut-ups, arrangements, constellations, repetitions. "All the same played the parts of the so in program."<sup>3</sup> So-it-the so-the such-this-happening-being repeated. Repeating particular words of a word mine like counting off the cities and towns of a landscape, a wordscape.

The most serious critique of this approach to poetry grants all the assumptions I have asserted, all the possibilities of language to mean concretely, and says, still, that in the syntactical sentence all that is happening along side, if you know how to read it all that is being done in this genre of poetry is the dramatization of the possibility of language to mean as sound, as texture, as physical presence, avoiding the double edge that lets words mean in the world (i.e., in a sentence) and beside it.

Poetry need not win a philosophical argument, it shows, in its purity, what it wants and what it cares about. We can ask of a person or a work of art, if we feel the authority, nothing more than a wholeness of intention in the willing of one thing--"the very so".

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 footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>SPACE

<sup>2</sup>THE MAINTAINS

<sup>3</sup>Untitled prosework from THIS 6 (Spring 1975)

## CLARK COOLIDGE AND I

by Aram Saroyan

In the spring of 1966, when we were both living on the same raunchy street on the upper West Side of Manhattan, I brought out Clark Coolidge's first book, *Flag Flutter and U.S. Electric*, along with three other books, including my own *Works*, which is dedicated to Clark.

Clark's book caused an immediate stir among the poets of the New York School-Ted Berrigan, Peter Schjeldahl, Bernadette Mayer, and others-and I remember a fine reading he gave at Izzy Young's Folklore Center in The Village in which he made his poems as exciting to hear as they were on the page.

At this particular time, Clark and I were in the midst of a day to day dialogue about our work that was t last about a year or so: we discussed everything about what we were doing, and tried to offer our own senses of each other's direction.

My feeling about what Clark was doing was that he was breaking out of the normal structural patterns of language even further than they had already been broken out of by, say, surrealism and even the current work of the New York School.

We talked about a poem that would leave no impression on the mind after it had been read: a poem with absolutely no image-track. Clark had an uncanny way of using all sorts of words and yet avoiding any kind of accumulation of these words into meaning or image.

In the mid-sixties, with the drug culture going into high gear, we felt a real concern to let the words be themselves, to avoid any "use" of words because in using them we were avoiding a reckoning of what they were in their own reality.

We didn't want words to disappear, as they do normally in reading, into meaning, or mood, or whatever they might become instead of themselves.

Clark constructed galaxies, solar-systems, of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles and prepositions, as well as word fragments-and reading these works was, to borrow a phrase, a little like blowing in the wind.

My answer to this same problem was the one-word poem, which delivered the word stark naked, as it were, into the middle of the white expanse of the page.

The difference between the structures we employed to make what we considered almost identical statements is perhaps more telling than either of us might have guessed at the time. That is, the one-word poem eliminates the reading process entirely-it makes the word both instantaneous and continuous, like the eternal Present.

Clark's work maintained a time-element by maintaining the reading process. His work *moved*, whereas mine addressed itself to the reader in utter stop-time stillness.

Clark, that is, was taking a walk with his words, while I was, you might say, gazing at them through a microscope, stoned. Clark was more at ease with himself, I would say; I was getting stoned and looking very hard at things because I had been going too fast, I felt. I wanted my writing to slow up, and the one-word poem finally gave me the feeling that it wasn't going by too fast.

Clark was twenty-seven at the time; I was twenty-two.

Since that time, Clark has continued pretty much in the direction we set out in; and I have made a turn-around, writing more or less standard prose and poetry, and even writing songs. What happened?

Well, for me, I guess, after I'd explored the territory for a few more years, there really wasn't much more to do. I had wiped my inner black-board clean; and finally I had to make a new move-go up and write something on it.

I write now out of a concern with telling the truth in a very multidimensional time. Language to me is a medium, a kind of mirror. Time, finally, is the dimension I am most concerned with—rhythm, timing, cadence, or to put it all in a nutshell, "voice."

We used to be so concerned about not stooping to "description" in our work back in the sixties, of keeping the language alive in the present, and now I find the easiest way for me to do this is to speak in my own voice, to be a person in the world.

The amazing thing about Clark Coolidge is that all the time I believed he was a conceptual artist, making impersonal structures of words, he was probably in fact writing a very deep, very American, very spacey autobiography, which he continues to do.

I salute him.

A MEMOIR  
by Kit Robinson

Clark and I went to hear Clark  
some people were there  
thru a window across the street  
a woman stroking a dish  
didn't know how  
I visited upon her rooms  
in the words of Clark  
then across San Fran  
a great office divested  
empty corridors of  
craft and learned fright  
at Clark's martian  
strands hurling hack  
directives that woman  
has disappeared perhaps to follow  
unconscious tho I sense her  
intelligence even from here  
it is simple privacy  
aptitude for artifice minus drama  
is a kickstand  
not blacken white with adverts  
proposed as Clark  
always wants more  
maybe that's where she went  
we did too  
and so Clark  
that is not a big that is a good  
bye bye that is now  
considering that

THE MAINTAINS AND LATER PROSE

by Barrett Watten

The terms of a statement are not assumed. Words are placed. A test (Zukofsky's *Test*) is that writing abstracted, subjected to external procedure, still maintains itself. Start anywhere. Later, every word, every part of the whole, has the same structural weight. "As if words themselves had been questioned and forced to give up their hidden meanings." Can writing be taken apart with no loss? An "objective" pressure is applied to language. "A kind of allover structure," structure at points all the same. A writer is by vocation lost in time. Anything can be by nature proposed. The growing layers of clouds might scour one's brains of worldly thoughts. Words subjected to a radical procedure. The entire work brought back in on itself every time. Reading against background noise, dimensionless in character. To follow those returning birds would strain my eyes. There is no clear line.

The counter-clockwise motion of most sounds in the head. I can convincingly absent myself from any situation. I was there. Industrious silence-ever a word source. The will is likely to be named. The past contributes. I can move forward in a straight line. A sentence is a completed thought. *I* to further what I say. So a long work will provide a power in its own right. I speak from the point of initial response. Lost in time. Flattening & layering. At close range the lines simply do not reveal themselves. It is only by positioning oneself within a line so that it stretches away to the right that it has any clarity. And the definition or emergence of distinct figures occurs as the distance resolves. A long-range view by the effect of perspective compresses the length and foreshortening reinforces the edges.

You are not I. No one but me could possibly be. I know that, and I know where I have been and what I have done ever since yesterday when I walked out the gate during the train wreck. Everyone was so excited... Anthem: "I believe." One day I will climb to the top, to see the surrounding hills dwarf into waves.

Parallel statements say the same thing on a time line. OK OK. A lyric: "Give me water/I'm thirsty/Oh/My work is so hard." From the dictionary definition of! epigraph to SPACE:

- 1 extension characterized in all subject
- 2 points aggregate or sets
- 3 one limited three or two
- 4 accommodations as on a train
- 5 between points interval of
- 6 unity chance
- 7 while archaic a
- 8 page part of page used for
- 9 a place open of the staff
- 10 lower piece than of used
- 11 interval open key or not
- 12 popularly
- 13 intervals place at arrange between

All say: space. Objects are in relation. Space is an attribute of objects. A place is abstracted from space (*Robinson Crusoe*). Place is possibility. Possibility is relational, etc. etc.

No. THE MAINTAINS works off the dictionary. The energy between a word and its closest equivalent a gap. A gap equivalent to a word. The reference of words is toward other words. Words define each other nominatively. They *do this* to each other. Nouns are verbs. To make of this a voice: noun pulse. I hear a continuous "I state" in noun pulse. Words can be organized to state. All language in its maximum relational clarity becomes verbal by design. How to read it: a long poem is a composition which can be learned. Learning a poem: resolve head and ear. Learning THE MAINTAINS: resolve the radical disjunction of context with the *words*. Take apart and put back together. Read aloud. Creeley, reading Crane, heard a *statement* through the disjunction. The lesson was not to worry about the metaphors, say something. Render the words significant. The words lead out to all possible worlds.

These possible worlds which are spinning in my head pass over the page, encountering objects. Break-up of locked patterns and structural reformation. THE MAINTAINS allowed me to look at my language structurally one word at a time. To resolve the incredible weight of simultaneity in relations between words themselves. I am here to say that THE MAINTAINS condensed imaginative structures to *words first*. All other structures follow. Instead of structures leading to words, inside out, the possibility of structure made by writing, writing structuring a world. Both/and/either/or follows.

The line in verse is no longer only a scoring device, but an assertive registration of scale. "The habits of verse print bred" are in this sense an advantage. Seeing structural possibilities between individual words comes from seeing them on the page. The larger musical form is simply another order. It is statement too, the interstices not necessarily emphasized, as they are not in fact. The structural possibilities are a furthering force, not leading back in on themselves. Out of words comes movement. The scale of the whole is that whole.

The sentence in Coolidge's later prose (KARSTARTS, FURNITURE MUSIC, QUARTZ HEARTS, 2Opp. in THIS 6) offers a different architectural basis than the verse line in the long poems (THE MAINTAINS, POLAROID). Whereas the verse line combines and furthers, the sentence is a containment and a forward motion. A sentence moves both forwards (towards the next sentence) and backwards (towards completing itself) at the same time. A frame is set up which can both contain and propose. The parts of speech work off more than noun pulse—they "jostle," are defined within the syntax of the complete sentence form as well. On this basis Coolidge's present work can be seen as an architecture going beyond combination, the scale of things placed next to each other, and delving into superstructure contained within the sentence, hidden libraries behind hinging shelves, books contained in words, Piranesi's flights of stairs as variations on an octave, a created world.

And then you get strung out on the lines. Lines of all widths, some forming trapezoids, shapes more fearful each time you look, cross one another constantly and move towards all points on the grid. When one looks down the line it is never blocked, even though it is crossed by innumerable others. The crossings have a particular character. The further down the line you look the stronger the form becomes.

A dream of structure-endless contained architectures--mirrors phenomena, "language breeding itself", play. Is poetry a private language? All roads lead to road. Rome. A turn pike which has never been driven on. "In a dream they get made into one." What is a dream? Language is discrimination. The entire reactive mess is forced into a new structure. Another world. What a combination!

#### BOOK REVIEW

by Ron Padgett

THE MAINTAINS by Clark Coolidge (This Press, 1974)  
\$2 ppbk., 98 pp.

#### WOMAN HAS 263 MEN TO BIRTHDAY PARTY

FREMONT, Ohio (AP)—Mrs. Elma Tschumy, a retired kindergarten teacher, celebrated her 70th birthday recently by throwing a "stag" party for 263 men at a local hotel.

"I've always had this crazy notion," Mrs. Tschumy said. "I told myself that if I lived to be 70, I was going to be surrounded by men--lots and lots of men."

The guests ranged from her garbage man to her doctors and lawyers. Many were her former pupils. They sang "Happy Birthday" to Mrs. Tschumy as she sprang from inside an artificial cake.

"I was fully clothed, and I didn't wear a bikini, she said.

#### "IN THE WORK OF.."

by Ray DiPalma

In the work of Clark Coolidge fulgence is duple.

#### A JOURNAL ENTRY

by David Gitin

4-22-75 early a.m. Read THE MAINTAINS three months after receiving it. "mingles," "such an even ever through." CC's vocabs from names of states and countries, classical names + Shakespearian, music refs to Concord Quartet's *Ives*, Van Morrison's *Tupelo Honey*, Miles Monk *Underground*, etc--- all mixed in varying periodicity into didactic, information-toned, syntax so what we know, the measure of coherence, is the looping of these strains around a 'tonic' (whichever we choose) to make an everchanging cell, crystal, world of words abolishing linear, ie development, for 'moment' which is redolent with geo + spelunker terms in mix with above

*plus* his prepositions are always *propositional*, begging predicates which are always 'of' something, unnamed but by us, all-at-onceness, motion + stasis. (He even names the Latin cases, proof that his 'address' covers tone, mood, axes of I/other directional possibilities. A very fine work. (Even found 'Tonto Lavoris,' p. 90, title of his + Fagin's CC word-grab pamphlet).

THE ROUND WORK AND SILENCE OF  
CLARK COOLIDGE  
by Don Byrd

1

Clark Coolidge lives on Lebanon Mountain, in Massachusetts, but from the windows of his living room, he looks out into upstate New York.

I drove up to see him today. It wasn't really hot in Albany, but it was humid and uncomfortable. Up there, it was almost chilly.

He told me that he had been sitting on the porch with his feet up on the railing, awaiting my arrival, and a chickadee had perched on his toe and pecked at his brown sock through a hole in his sneakers.

I wouldn't have believed such a story from most people, but I believed Clark.

That's the point: I believe Clark Coolidge.

He must have been sitting quietly, so quietly he became one of the patio chairs, or a limb on one of the trees. There is something very still about Clark's work. It shows itself forth almost in silence. The action is all *inside*.

2

The choice to live on the boundary of two conditions as distinct as New York and New England betrays a radical cast of the mind. The Shakers had a large settlement just across the road from Clark's. They too took on that uncertain condition, and, as they believed the End was at hand, they devoted themselves to perfect craftsmanship and simplicity. Their round, stone barn, which is within an easy walk of Clark's house, encloses one of the most comfortable spaces I have ever been in. I would gladly live there. It's so perfect in its roundness I'd never notice that I was living at the edge of one state and at the beginning of another. Although I may have difficulty demonstrating what I mean by this, Clark Coolidge's poems are round.

Partially I mean "rounds," like "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." As I read, "gently down the stream," or whatever, my memory of the beginning of the poem comes in, "Row, row, row, your boat," etc. They have their being inside themselves, and some part of the interest in them is that they work themselves through, through themselves.

But it's more than that ....

3

A year ago this spring, Clark and I drove to Saratoga Springs to hear Robert Lowell read. Someone-I think it was Don Stauffer-said it was like going to see Mt. Rushmore. Lowell had one good line. That is, he *mis*-read a line and became slightly (ever so slightly) flustered. For a moment, it was intense and real.

We came back to my house, watched the second half of a Knicks-Celts play-off game-the Knicks lost, as I recall-and then we went down to The Last Chance Saloon to hear Elvin Jones. On the way, I ran a stop-light and got a ticket. The large, clean face of the Albany cop at the car window was young and *there*. Certainly, there. The revolving red-light from his car reflected in his glasses, so he blinked off and on.

It was hard to believe that this was the drummer who played with Coltrane. He was not there. He dropped his sticks, forgot what he was doing, sometimes he missed the drum altogether. He sat tenuously on his stool, with no way to *be* in Albany, N.Y. He seemed more interested in teasing Jimmy Garrison (who played a fine solo) than in playing drums.

After the first set, we came back to the house, brewed a pot of coffee, and talked until dawn. I don't remember what we said, or at least very little of it. Clark told me that his grand-father was a wood-worker, who made bats for the Red Sox. It was sufficient. I have known since that night that the sound of Clark Coolidge's voice is *in* the poems, and it doesn't make much difference what it is saying.

4

Now, twenty-five years after the publication of Olson's "Projective Verse," the movements, schools, dogmas, proclamations, and manifestoes that moved poetry from, say, 1910 until 1960 have dissipated, and the

condition of poetry is roughly what it was when Whitman died. It is again, as it was for Whitman, a matter of sheer *assertion*: he created a space in language, and he was the sole inhabitant of it.

The poet is thrown back to a place in speech prior to the appearance of meaning, of emotion, of feeling, even in the simplest sense. Those are all luxuries—a world to which words *refer* is a luxury, not an ontological fact.

This passage, from Merleau-Ponty's "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," is directly to the point:

*What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs. Since the same can be said for all other signs, we may conclude that language is made of differences without terms, or more exactly, that the languages are engendered only by the differences which appear among them. This is a difficult idea, because common sense tells us that if term A and term B do not have any meaning at all, it is hard to see how there could be a difference of meaning between them; and if communication really did go from the whole of the speaker's language to the whole of the hearer's language, one would have to know the language in order to learn it. But the objection is of the same kind as Zeno's paradoxes; and as they are overcome by the act of movement, it is overcome by the use of speech.*

Now, however, the creative circle is broken, language has become a habit, and the universe of signs begins to repeat itself, endlessly uncurling, to reveal only more of itself. The sense that one is there, in the language, is lost. The divergence of sign from sign is always playing against its opposite. In language there is a counter-tendency to converge, for successful formulas are repeated, stock sentiments are bought and sold, people live out linguistic as much as genetic structures. Divergence is the creative force of language; convergence the memory.

Olson took purchase on this unsure ground by retreating in both directions from words: back to the syllable and out to the line. "... to step back here to this place of the elements and minims of language," he writes, "is to engage speech where it is least careless and least logical." The syllables yield not words but lines, and the obvious advantage is that the units of sense are rhythmic, rather than syntactical. It gives the poet, rather than the philosopher or grammarian, the authority of meaning.

Clark Coolidge is a word poet. In his work, I am struck by the senselessness, the muteness of words, and by the care with which they have been placed one by the other. Few poets know more about what happens when one word is placed next to another than he does. Few poets have felt as strongly the responsibility of the choices to be made at every juncture of words. Working on the thither side of meaning, image, sense, he rides that point at which signs simultaneously diverge and converge. It is a place of immense stress and energy.

5

In the highest orders of poetry perhaps, the play of words one against another join seamlessly with a "view." When Shakespeare has Cleopatra say, "I am fire and air: my other elements/ I give to baser life," he invokes a complete physical and metaphysical order, a universal moral judgement, *and* an absolutely particular incident in the life of his heroine. He does not create air and fire as "symbols" of spirit. He is working inside of a set of references which would have been understood as commonplace facts of his world. Shakespeare, however, was a man of culture and a man of a culture.

We now have learned men and women—people who know about culture—but we are barbarians. What we have to offer to ourselves and to one another is a raw, skeptical energy. If a poet would now write a line like Shakespeare's, it would be no less beautiful than it was when Shakespeare wrote it, but it would be sheer decoration. Its force would be learned, rather than commonplace, and symbolic, its precision of reference lost, and its meaning would be locked inside the privacy of the poet's belief. It would compel only to the extent that the poet could, as rhetorician, impose his belief on his audience.

Clark Coolidge is absolutely stringent with himself and his language. Whatever his beliefs, his verse is worked inside limits where there is certainty, or possible certainty. The decisions which are made as the poems move from word to word and line to line consider only poetic values. Our words come together too readily in patterns which have found their authority in simple power: the power which public figures have by their access to the language-forming media; by the power of the advertising dollar to transform habits of the most basic kinds of language use; and, I suspect most insidiously, the power from which other poets have shaped the language to a fierce rightness. "... if I close down much." Coolidge says in his interview with Barrett Watten (*This*, 4), "beyond a certain point I feel like I'm writing things that have already been written. I'm sort of taking whole units that I've read, and using them. And it gets too, I can't move that much furniture. I have to sort of move the individual units. There I can work. I can work in between those."

The sense that a poet's work is his *work* is almost lost. The word is now more or less synonymous with "Collected Poems." In Coolidge's poems, however, we see directly the results of so much work done, so much energy expended, *and* so much energy stored in the cells of language:

*that fair  
the part  
of the part plots  
ending in for the most part bolts  
as of wholes  
golds  
come to as risen divides  
(from The Maintains)*

Nothing here can be pinned-down as image or sense, but image and syntax hover about a voicing of the poem. It is not an imitation of speech, but it offers some measure of what speech might be. The language cuts and turns, rides through itself and finds its way back, establishes one center here, another there, and plays between them, until that possibility yields another. It is that kind of senseless and life-giving energy we have always valued in poetry.

The child passes from babble to expression. The nonsense syllables begin to break loose, and some of them get identified with objects. He learns the pragmatic value of certain signs. Given the context in which he grows, sadly, he seldom gets beyond *self-expression*. "I see, you see, they see..." as mad Pip says in *Moby Dick*. Coolidge returns to language, the *whole* of language, as Saussure tells us we must know it, in an attempt to come forward again. into speech which has some use other than to say what he sees or what he thinks. This is an immense act of faith but hardly of belief. It is an active engagement, a wrestling match, an improvisation, *not* rhetoric.

#### CLARK COOLIDGE: DON'T KNOW MIND

by Alan Davies

Don't know mind is basic zen concept. It means getting detached from thinking mind activity. Attachment to thinking-feeling, modes of discourse and activity, complicates our lives and causes pain. In meditation, cut thinking. Mind doesn't stop working, but detachment lessens the burden of constant thought. Don't know mind is basic zen activity (what am I? don't know). Reach don't-know mind. \* \* Ginsberg talking at Naropa mentioned all minds work the same; one thought rising, flowering, fading, another thought. \* \* He flexes language at every joint - syllable, word, phrase, sentence, cluster, and larger structure - and even between them. This means the writing has muscle, isn't flabby. \* \* His language is not flat, but it exploits cerebral possibility in the words. In a work he fits words together, beside and after others, in proximity, like facts of a landscape. Each possibility of language unit is discrete, and the variety of his work suggests he intends to exploit them all. \* \* His language is separate from ego presentation. He doesn't use it assertively. He confronts the words almost head on, has no bias; or motive, except perhaps to have a certain new texture or density. \* \* His mind isn't empty, it's full words though gradually he is letting them out, and letting them out again. The words seem to float there, themselves for company until, using chance or other means, he determines and selects. \* \* A student asked the zen master: you speak of thinking, what is this thinking. Saen Sa Nim said: who asks me this question. The student quickly replied: me! Saen Sa Nim said: this is thinking. \* \* John Ashbery says of his own work, "There are no themes or subjects in the usual sense, except that very broad one of an individual consciousness confronting or confronted by a world of external phenomena. The work is very complex, but, I hope, clear and concrete transcript of the impressions left by these phenomena on that consciousness." In Clark's work the phenomena are words; all other phenomena are replaced by words, or placed close to that level. As a consequence, individual consciousness almost does not exist. \* \* Language might as well be evocative; (paint abstractly with it) it doesn't need to be referential. \* \* Man Ray: A certain amount of contempt for the material employed to express an idea is indispensable to the purest realization of this idea. Harry Brosby (artist): Humor is also an essential element of the style. \* \* The works imply something about totality by not being specifically referential. He seems to know the emotion equivalent to a word or group of words, but can also avoid the connection. \* \* The zen master Mr. 0 told Richard Dillon that Ashbery's poem, section 26 of Europe:

*water  
thinking  
a*

is zen. \* \* Put your right hand on your forehead, your left hand on the back of your head; lift your head off your neck, and put it down. Now what's happening. \* \* Are you aware of CC's interest in Lilly's work with Dolphin mind state?? (on card from Ron Silliman) \* \* We're made aware of the details of language: words, sound after single sound, bits of sound, small pieces of syntax. Close up. \* \* Perhaps he got tired of 'significant' language, as Duchamp became sick of retinal art. \* \* When he reads his work he doesn't demand, Did you get that? He creates space out of and into which the listener wanders, straying from distractions. \* \* The writing isn't ambiguous. It is unlike other poetry, but there is no doubt it speaks, if we could learn to listen accurately. The distance from other poetry means we would have to develop a pair of Coolidge-ears of our own. \* \* He does not always avoid saying things. But attention is always so focused to the unit of speech he's using, that we only infrequently notice what he says, that he says. We come back to it; we develop a sense of it. \* \* His use of any word is negative (- word) because it cancels the need for this unusual use of the word. \* \* You have to arrive in a strange situation to do work like his. You have to abandon intentions to some areas of meaning. This same meaning then abandons you. \* \* He doesn't need metaphor because it would be an addition and he proves that the language, as such, is sufficient. \* \* A zen koan is mind transfer; it doesn't depend on specific words to elicit a specific response. His poems are mind transfer. \* \* Saen Sa Nim: Emptiness is form; form, emptiness. \* \* Yung Chia: To understand is not to get the meaning of it. \* \* He is aware of his mind. He pays attention to it. At times he makes notation of its continuous activity, and that is the work. \* \* Suzuki says that before zen and after zen are the same, only after zen the feet are a little off the ground. His poems raise the mind a little from its use. \* \* Garma C.C. Chang: This *Hua Tou* practice is not a matter of reciting the sentence. *Tsen* means to look into penetratingly and to observe .... Our minds are used to going *outside* and sensing the things in the outer world. *Tsen* is to reverse this habit and to look *inside*. penetrate into the state before the thought ever arises, and to see what this state looks like. \* \* His poetry illustrates a stage in zen practice. Because words are not necessary to zen, a poet practicing zen might have to stop writing. \* \* Master Han Shan: The so-called practice or work is merely a method for purifying the shadows of our habitual thinking and flowing thoughts. . Those who drive their minds to the very dead end will find that their thoughts suddenly stop. \* \* Zen relates mind and breath. Certain kinds of mental activity are accompanied by a corresponding type of breathing, so that if breath is controlled the mind can be tamed. \* \* Telling the story of his meditation and enlightenment, Wu Wen says, "my human thoughts broke into pieces like skin peeling." \* \* In a recent long work, of which I've heard and read only a small part, he uses his great control of words as plastic element, and does say things with it. Here and there a glance of recognition that we are being talked to, words saying this is the case or that is how things were, among piles of beautiful language. \* \* Words hear inexact relation to what they refer. This is what interests him. \* \* It might be the gaps that cause misunderstanding. We go in there and don't come out. Or we fall so in love with these relationships that we forget the words. He brings us back to them. \* \* Even distance between words seems a function of the words themselves. \* \* As our mind pushes us to make a little sense of the poem, the words come first as sound in the head, to have at least that identification as meaning. \* \* He investigates possibility of words *between* thinking, how it is possible to get close to that and away from words *as* thinking. The words are activity. In zen, practice is all-important, and concepts exist only to explain zen to not-zen people. His words carry his mind to us outside it.

#### CONVERSATION WITH CLARK COOLIDGE

10/16/75

by Barrett Watten

**B** There's something definite on my mind about language and dream, like literally knowing where your perceptions lie from the language expression of dreams, after the fact, and then the self that watches the dream, like what it sees, how you see a dream unfold.

*C You mean while you're dreaming?*

**B** Let's start from while you're dreaming, watching, there's a situation which has potential but no definition, or there's a feeling. Then there are definite points at which the complex is defined and therefore altered. Whatever is perceiving in the dream is also part of the picture show, or the sense that something's there. As soon as a determination is made, there's a change. You can see it as distinct, it's almost a language problem, like where does one word end and another begin, or what is the relation of a thought to a sentence. It's logic, relations between different configurations that you experience. As much as you can talk about them, they're there.

**C** *Are you talking about the twists and turns you get in dreams as being somehow part of a mental operation that's going on? I get a sense of a separation, maybe it's just a way of talking about it, like you're watching a dream while you're dreaming it, do you intend that?*

**B** Wouldn't you say when you're dreaming there's a part which is watching the dream and a part which is dreaming it?

**C** *I don't know. I've had specific dreams where that's very apparent and others where that isn't. All my dreams don't do that, I suppose it's a matter of degree.*

**B** Let's consider that Olson poem [*Cole's Island*] as a dream experience, not *like* a dream but actually involving dreaming. It was a dream that he had, even though physically he was awake.

**C** *You think it's a dream?*

**B** Yeah, I think it's a dream experience, the discrimination he's making between death which is always around him and death which is particularized. It's the kind of discrimination I think that happens in dreams.

**C** *And also the sense of there being no doubt.*

**B** Like it happened before, but there wasn't a person where it was, and now there's a person in that place. It's the same place, I know where the death figure is. He just happens to be there in the flesh right now.

**C** *Literally personified, at the moment.*

**B** Right. Is there any better way of saying it?

**C** *That's such a clear cut experience in language. Most dream notation tends not to have that hard edge, it seems to me. which may be a problem of registration. Maybe that isn't a sign of whether its dream information or not, maybe it's strictly the person who's taking it down. That's a poem, and Olson's a poet. He was able to write it that way, but..*

**B** The narrative is like the coolness of the experience.

**C** *Yeah, it's like a commonplace feeling that really intrigues me.*

**B** So he's good enough to have made his actions equivalent to the dream stage, the dream arena.

**C** *He had these incredible authoritative senses of his dreams. You know the business of the angel. I don't know whether any of that comes into the works, but I remember him talking about it. He was visited by, what he called his personal angel, in dreams, it was actually, a personage he would recognize absolutely when it would arrive in dreams, and it was somehow identified with him, it would be carrying a lantern, that's one way he described it, and the lantern would somehow be his name, something about the light and color of the lantern would be his initials, except it wasn't, it was light and color, that kind of transformation. The way he always talked about the angel was in absolute terms, this angel would come and tell him what he hadn't been taking care of, I think that was the way he put it, in his life. It was like getting life instruction. People would start to go, ah, come on, and he would say, now wait a minute, listen, if this angel comes to you and tells you something, you do it, man, you know. It was that absolute sense that's almost at the end of that death poem, this person was death, that's it. There's no question about it, I can't describe it any further, it just was. No explanation. Absolute authority, no doubt, just wham, you do it. Which, I've never had an experience like that. I've never had any instruction, that direct, at least. But, you were talking about writing stimulating dreams. Did you ever have any sense of exactly the points at which the writing stimulus intersected with the dream, what images or what twists and turns...*

**B** I think my quote work has a lot to do with that. One of the first poems I like I wrote in a dream. And I wrote down.

**C** *You mean you woke up and remembered the whole poem.*

**B** I remembered the first three stanzas.

*C I've never had anything like that. I remember one time I very naively asked Allen Ginsberg if he ever got any words in dreams. He said, oh yeah, whole poems. I see them burning in fire. Holy shit, hold it.*

**B** Recently I saw pages which had words on them, and I was trying to read them. As soon as I saw there were words on the page, this other voice came in saying remember these words, look carefully.

*C So you forgot.*

**B** Yeah, blew it out of my head.

*C That's what I was thinking about with Olson, what if he came out of a dream with this tremendous sense of importance that he remembered something, and he didn't. He forgot what the angel told him. You come out of a dream, I've done this, with a sense of great import, and just can't grab the words.*

**B** Have you ever had a dream that solved your life, just to have it?

*C You mean an imaginary completion of something?*

**B** A dream that completed the act of your life up to that point.

*C Something you're really worrying about?*

**B** No, the large patterns. I've had that experience three or four times, of total clarity, like after having one dream, that business had been taken care of, and I was free to act, the dream had put it together.

*C I have a lot of permutations and combinations dreams. Variance of everything, heightened versions of people and double people, things out of place and in place, simultaneous buildings, things like that. I've always had. Years ago, for about a year! took note of dreams. I found a lot of people that existed just in my dreams, and places that weren't just combinations. They were new places, new people existed there. I've talked to people that've had similar, they're the people of your dreams, they are. Where they come from, I don't know. They don't have that sense of he's made up of A, B, or C, that kind of thing. Which I think is an indication of the simultaneity of what goes on back in the brain. I think you're capable of entertaining three or four different things. In a dream they get made into one. Or at least, that's the curious thing, maybe when you wake up you make them into one, in the memory. That's speculation.*

**B** What about knowing that what's in your dream is not anything you have seen. Is there anything in language which is not in the objective world. I guess we're saying it's the same thing.

*C I guess, in a way, yeah. Because where do they come from. They don't seem to be new combinations.*

**B** You're not expressing them as if they were. You're not saying that they were. You're saying that they're something else.

*C Right, just as if you met a person on the street for the first time.*

**B** Is there any correlation to what you were thinking or writing about?

*C I wish I'd kept all that stuff, I got rid of it at one point. I can't remember the correlations of daily life that long ago. It's just gone. I don't remember finding any great things out that way, in the sense that this caused that. It wasn't that simple. I got a sense that I had to deal with these people, in the same way that I had to deal with anybody I had just met on the street. It was that kind of encounter. You made some kind of relationship, and it grew, or didn't. There wasn't too much difference. A lot of landscapes too. But I think imaginary landscapes are pretty much there in everybody, I don't know. I once had a big landscape imagination. That could be a combination of so many things that you wouldn't even recognize it as a construct.*

\*\*\*

*C I was thinking of a dream I had before, which I wrote to Michael because it involved him, it's a real writers dream. I was at his house in San Francisco, and he showed me these typed pages which were the content of all of his next four or five books. With the title of the book and the titles of all the poems, quite a few pages, probable hundreds of poems. And he showed them to me. And I woke up, only remembering one title of a book, which was, this is a big letdown, "Living Time". Which is kind of interesting if you play around with it. No no, sorry, it wasn't, that's actually the name of an album with which I connected this, it was "Thinking Time" Which is more interesting than "Living Time" "Thinking Time" or "Thinking Time" Writing to him I said gee I'm glad I didn't have that dream, about me, it was better I had it about him. In a way I wouldn't like to see the titles of all me works for the next couple years. I'd rather not know.*

**B** I had a dream once that Pound had written another collection of short poems which were in imitation of Auden. This book was endless, it was a construction. It was a world, only at a certain social distance. The poems could have appeared in *The New Yorker*. It was an interpreted world, and it was complete. It was another world than the *Cantos*, which he had also written,

*C How do you connect that with what you were thinking at the time? That's a real attitude.*

**B** A common dream is of arcane knowledge, the dream of the bookshelf behind the bookshelf, the bookshelf falls open and inside that is another library, you press a button and the bookshelf opens. It's a dream that there's more, there's another language, a third language that's complete. You've read *Cities* by Kelly, that kind of thing. I take yours to be that too, his future complete works are already done. Because he's there as a potential, it comes from him.

*C And maybe the idea that poetry is a private language, that too. That's something Bernadette was interested in. There was a book called "The Private Language Problem" like philosophers writing about something that sounds like poetry, but you know they're not involved with poetry, so how can it really be poetry. yet your interest in it is if it were. Is it a private language. Could you construct a private language deliberately.*

**B** I was thinking, coming across the country, about "All Roads Lead To Rome", is there any place where a road isn't connected. I was thinking about Australia. Not only that the road isn't connected, but the cars are manufactured where the road is. It's mutually exclusive, cars and roads, not just roads.

*C There are driving laws, right.*

**B** In Australia if they had their own factories and set of roads, and you couldn't get cars out of Australia, that would be one thing. But it's unimaginable. In Alaska, you have all these islands and ferries, in order for there to be a road there has to be access to that road in order for a car to drive on it, because they can't produce a car on that island.

*C A friend here the other day was talking about a section of turnpike down near New York that's never been driven on.*

**B** It's hanging in mid-air.

*C No, I think the entrances are blocked off. We were talking about graft and corruption in the building industry, and that's what this was. It didn't have to be blocked off because nobody would use it. It ended up being used by kids for drag races, because nobody was ever on it. But having that be right in the middle of the dense complex of New York City environs.*

**B** In Arizona there was a road which went through this big slice of hill, 100 feet. To the right of this hill was a plain that went on for 10 miles. It was completely flat, but the road went deliberately through the hill.

*C That's supposed to be America. They want to put up a hill, we'll take care of it. That's so perfect.*

**B** Is this a language problem or what?

*C I think we're talking about language all the time, now, somehow. I was thinking of something so vague I can't remember it. Dreams.*

**B** Do you want to make an example of something?

*C An inclusion here. Except we can't find it.*

**B (reads)** "The "Other Half" is the word. The "Other Half" is an organism. The presence of the "Other Half" a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally. One of the most common "hallucinations" of subjects during sense withdrawal is the feeling of another body sprawled through the subject's body at an angle... yes quite an angle it is the "Other Half" worked quite some years on a symbiotic basis. From symbiosis to parasitism is a short step. The word is now a virus. The flu virus may once have been a healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the lungs. The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system." ("The Ticket That Exploded"). Here's this dream about Pound. **(reads)** "He has written another complete book of poems, apart from the *Cantos*, which I didn't know existed. The poems are long-lined, Browning-like, and deal with occasional subjects, interspersed with fragments and neatly printed. It is mostly language, few proper names and little subject matter. Pound has also written a new book of reviews in which he praises Coolidge as being the new Khlebnikov, securely within his tradition of modernism. I am looking at this book while Pound and company are walking through an outdoor restaurant. Pound takes this opportunity to read on an elevated walkway above the dining couples. His reading coincides directly with the information and attention of the crowd, layering in over the top, like a cork fits a bottle. I'm surprised he can read so strong and forcefully when ten years ago at Spoleto his voice was so feeble."

*C Immediately, that Burroughs virus business, I've always been curious what that meant to him. I don't think it's just a metaphor. That word is a virus, that's making us ill.*

**B** When Burroughs says something like language is control, he's talking about biological effect of language which is already there. He's not talking at all about where it came from, what particular situation it's a part of.

*C Or where it's going.*

**B** It's almost as if language itself had been completely abstracted from event. So when *Time* magazine lays out lies, it's not as if they're expressing a position or they have any intentions. That language is their language. There's no analysis.

*C It's flat statement.*

**B** He's making no analysis, he never does. If he were willing to make an analysis, he wouldn't have written his works. He's got to be a person who doesn't believe in any kind of secondary expression.

*C But he is interested in method. It's very clear in those CCNY lectures, about what he called the architecture of writing. You could do certain procedures on yourself to produce certain words, certain states. He was giving these out, which he does sometimes in his writing. Sometimes those things sound just like prose, like he's trying to see where it will go, without any other explanation. The trouble with using virus is it sounds like some hideous biological helplessness which could not be countered. The Nova Mob has already taken over so forget it kids. On top of that I think he's just creating another one. His scenario with The Wild Boys is just another level of the same virus. It certainly isn't rubbing out words, or cutting the word lines. Like, homosexuality is a carrier frequency. Right?*

**B** Right. (pause) That might be a generality.

*C It is a generality. You can talk about it in writing terms as his tone. His works are given a certain tone by that. He says now that he gets a lot of stuff from dreams, plots and characters. He's really been watching his dreams.*

**B** What is a dream, no one knows for sure, he says.

*C Well, language.*

**B** That particular passage is in *Dead Fingers Talk*, it's differently arranged. You have this catalogue of effects the word can produce, from science fiction interior landscape, image-track, down to cut-up pressure, completely

opaque, flat statement. The range of *Dead Fingers Talk* is from flatness to transparency, dimensionality. Then he says the word is the other. It's a voice, in the configuration of his own psyche. And then you say, in this case homosexuality and the carrier are in the same place.

*C I don't know if I ever told you about reading the Paris edition of The Soft Machine, which was the highest cut-up he ever did. In fact he thought better of it, or worse of it, when it was published here he took a lot of that out, replaced it with almost straight narrative. Which is an interesting point too, that he apt to do that. I got this incredible image track from that, an image track that was completely coherent was being produced by a totally cut-up language. Which I tend to think of as being his work, his contribution, what he did that nobody else did. So that's primary. And then I tend to think the secondary level is remarks, like word virus.*

**B** When he says the other, he means practically his entire life. He's talking to himself. What is the other, the other is what I keep talking about. All he can say is that it's him talking.

*C Yeah, except that, maybe I'm getting into something else, he has begun to talk to somebody in that he starts to think of himself as a novelist. When he was living in England he started talking about writing real novels. He started writing that Western, The Coldspring News, which is the only thing that ever appeared from that. You start thinking of yourself as a novelist, at least as an American you're thinking of an audience. You're thinking of talking to someone, a lot more than before, coming out of that incredible life-time junk experience, pulling himself up desperately, producing Naked Lunch, the cut-up technique. You can see a pattern of my own thought appearing, which might be more me than criticism of him.*

**B** Which is?

*C Which is that there is something that language does that nothing else does that stops or gets modified when you think of talking to someone else. He's described as writing, writing, writing in that period, without any ideas, until somebody came along and said this is good, type it up. Or Kerouac typed it up, and he became William Burroughs, the novelist. I mean, this is a problem for everybody.*

**B** You mean everybody's basically a junkie in some less compelling form?

*C I don't know about that. But there may be a similarity of procedure at a certain point. I don't mean you have to be a junkie or in desperate straits. Except that's a condition where you might be forced into it, it being some prime condition of writing, where you're writing those words way back in your head. I mean this is the almost completely ill-defined, non-defined area. This is at the center of the whole thing for me. Writing.*

**B** One thing I got into with the Enslin [*Synthesis*] was that here was a six hundred page poem attempting to demonstrate process. In that way five years of work was essentially a metaphor. Even though it went on at that length, it was basically an example of something else.

*C You mean the form of the whole thing.*

**B** Like now the clouds are out, I have a fever today, everything seemed closed but now it seems open, and that's the same voice. The demand of the poem is to show that the same voice runs through all possible states. In that sense the entire work has a secondary reality to those states. When you're talking about words in your head, they cannot be anything but themselves. I'm worried about seeing the form as a containment of a larger situation. Like it's a miniature of another situation.

*C The situation being your life in detail.*

**B** Like the Olson poem, all of a sudden there's a configuration you've known all along, so you can actually talk about it. Obviously you know death as much as you can know it.

*C Of course the great thing about that, you talk about life knowledge, is that death is just another ordinary occurrence. Which comes very strongly in that work. One day you could meet Death.*

**B** But it's not ordinary at all, it's the most incredible thing that could happen to you.

C *We're getting into the area of overview.*

B I don't mean overview. You can't extend yourself to it, it's not ordinary at all.

C *Maybe I'm talking about its method of happening.*

B You could say it's like falling apart, disintegration, nothing more than that. So that's exact, in one sense.

C *Considering there's been a tremendous romantizing of death, this is almost like an antidote. Death is supposed to be so incredible because of the written versions of it, the imagined versions. How did ice get into this subject?*

B It's a pretty good subject.

C *It's beyond subject. But, the fact that it could be written that way in a not beyond state is intriguing.*

B It locates you. What do you say from where you are. About anything, what's the other. Death is an other.

C *And so is language. How about that.*

\*\*\*

C *It's interesting, how much is the language integrated, just given, beyond any attempt to modify it or release it. Is language only in the front brain, is it behind, is it integrated throughout. I don't know who said whether it is or not, if anybody has. I've had a feeling there's a translation from what's going on behind into the conscious, where language operates. What's going on behind is either electrical impulse or some system of images or just some sort of motion. That is then defined into use by words or whatever we think we think with.*

B So that's like being in a dream configuration and making a shift, and that's a discrimination. You have this forward motion, and what gets you on to articulation is energy, that you want to.

C *There's a whole area of what makes you want to write, if you want to talk about writing.*

\*\*\*

C *You might say some things, some writings you enjoy you might not be able to use. Pound saying, the matter being whether you can finally use it or not. Which is one side of it. Some things you decide are pure pleasure. I think sometimes there are things you don't even like that you can use. That happened to me recently with Schoenberg.*

C *How many artists are able to do other than that, go beyond the individual, or the unique or the particular. See mass, numbers... They don't deal with that, because that's not staring them in the face.*

B It's like "The Mantis". If you want to talk about that, you'll never do it in a generalized way. You have to take a shift in order to make it possible.

C *Yeah, the mantis nails it down.*

\*\*\*

C *But Schoenberg, for instance there's a work called Erwartung that he wrote around that period for solo voice and orchestra. It has a terrible kind of dramatics to it, I forget who wrote it, a woman's in this terrible state, her lover is dead, and you don't really know if she killed him, maybe. There's all this terrible searching and beseeching in the night, and "Who are you?", and "Where are you?", terrible elements, sprechstimme, going up and down, wailing kind of thing. But I finally discovered what was really interesting about that piece is that nothing ever repeats, the motives that are used as the structure of that work never repeat. It's a constant use of discrete and changing melodies, which are never, there's no sonata form, no theme and variations, no recapitulation, any of those traditional forms. It's just a kind of all-over structure, in fact the only thing that brings it all close to traditional form is a kind of rhythmic, not even rhythmic, crescendoes and silences, that gives it a kind of structure. But everything else about it is that attempt to constantly invent, to make a structure out of something anew, every time you pick up a pen. Which always seems to*

*me to be a barrier, or at least something to be shot for, and I've certainly tried it, and it certainly gives, that's an inspiration, to work. And here a guy doing that back in the teens, and the work has been taken for this kind of hysteric dramatization.*

**B** But it's actually very clear to you.

**C** Yeah, I can see that structure without having to deal with the work as simply an explication of some kind of mental state, like a, what do the s' call it, a monodrama. In other words, atonal music, without, the problem with people who, well, I guess it is musicologists, was' that it's something that never resolves, you never have any, modulations back to the tonic. The music never rests, in other words it never achieves a state of rest, and therefore it's always up in the air. Therefore it's not normal, I mean it's not something that can be used except in extreme states. You constantly get back to that illustration business, expression, expression of...

**B** So the structure is no expression of, like you're saying, this is back to what we were saying about metaphor. The overall structure of the work is no metaphor for anything.

**C** *Yeah, exactly. And that's not a totally pleasant thing to deal with. Right? In other words you're not going from point A to point B to point C to point D. You are always waiting, like the traditional American 32-bar song form, you know, AABA. You're waiting for the bridge, and the final A is like a recapitulation of the first A. And that's a nice little pocket to be in. And it's in our brains, my god, so we have to fight back. But there is a way of proceeding through something. And incidentally, this new piece by Elliot Carter, that's just released, called Duo for Violin and Piano, is constructed this way. It just goes. There's nothing repeated. It just keeps going. This is something that's always been very attractive to me.*

\*\*\*

**C** *I was thinking of those long, long sentences [in Kerouac] where he's doing what he calls sketching. He might literally be in front of the subject, or it might be in his mind. It might be a brick wall, or that incredible section of the food in the windows, or the cafeteria section in the beginning of Visions of Cody. Where it goes on for endless pages. It's this beautiful line, it's always changing. Things'll just pop up, and you can see that he didn't think of that. It just came, because he was following this line, what's next, what's next. You exert a pressure on your writing mind that way, so that things do get included that you couldn't have thought of if you were writing sentences.*

**B** Kerouac did not write his work just to write, he was writing a story of. He was writing his life story. It involved a certain kind of knowledge consistently that would refer through time and back, through memory and then ahead into his experience. Cocteau, who isn't really relevant, says time is a phenomenon of perspective. He saw time as a statement. From there, everything moves out. Your sense of the duration of events comes from making a statement about them. That's what his Eternity is. Kerouac likewise is setting up an architecture which defines time. There's a subtle line between being at your limit and repeating your self. In metaphor, which is bad. Metaphor, for the purposes of this discussion, is bad.

**C** *I guess you'd have to say too, with Kerouac, what you're talking about is the large form, the large pillars holding it up. Very often it's obvious what he's really doing is writing. He really loved words, he was a word man. And he liked to get into situations where he could use that. He could go on, with what you would call description, which it really isn't, it's more than that, it's a particular kind of language. It's also invention, obviously. Those things don't add up as mirrors of each other. That window doesn't look like that. Here you get into, what is the correspondence in descriptive language. You're already into syntax and word choice.*

**B** That's discrimination.

**C** *That's where our discrimination is, and where Bradey takes off the seat belt, completely flies. Whatever comes along. There is a sort of perverse fascination with somebody who does that.*

**B** If you can use it, I guess.

**C** *Part of it is a little perverseness on my own part. I really want people to read words.*

NOTES ON COOLIDGE, OBJECTIVES,  
ZUKOFSKY, ROMANTICISM, AND &  
by Robert Grenier

Words will do it, horses.

"Horses: who will do it? out of manes? Words  
Will do it, out of manes, out of airs, but"

"A-7"

.....  
NO RACE A POSSIBILITY: CC & LZ, ZAZA, 'NECK & NECK'?

.....  
Language process, body process, one. The words in my mind, hum.

.....  
But, you come when you're called, some sounds break eardrums, *shutup*. She says, I don't know that it says a great deal, but I hear it. Ears & mouths of animals other than oneself. Strum, strum.

.....  
Mmmm. Mental muscles flex, sixty-four of these. Ha ha, o *sad*. Spunch n bap bap bap. Fine time, now shift & desire it to push a toot. Set back but articulate a cramp on focus, ordinary reality today. Coffee dear? No no no oh sure oh sure sure flip as deck a half an hour into it, by the clock.

.....  
Get it out, in the future, of them, out of the head, of the system's romanticism obviously disguised as machine. (Science exactly same as poem expressing author's feelings: methodology systematically inflicted on things.) Words as objects? However long it takes, doesn't help to push them around. I did so, yaaaasss, made that page. Ahab vs. space? I just can't stop, etc., gives me a feeling of power. I'm in my kitchen.

.....  
Language process essentially in the world, as a function of common sentient experience in definition of place. Any time, it makes room, Kerouac's Cassady's Creeley's *and* Coolidge's *it it*. Get it out of the fucking workshop, not simply into the performance of it (vocal performance just another media routine, like 'the book'), get it off the page, said, out of the mind, through the typewriter, dig it, unearth of discover, word it into being. This ain't tiddlywinks.

.....  
'Animism'?

.....  
It scares me that Coolidge gets up in the morning & writes (well, yes, also but differently, envious of his time & can do), like Hughes Rudd comes on each weekday on the ABC Morning News, or does he. Otherwise, a lovely durable craftsmanship ethic, it shines, it's all right. An 'unspoken pride in the work done.'

.....  
Difference between Eliot & Zukofsky's use of materials: E. disappears into linguistic conventions, religious symbols, traditional view of the world via assumptives of language as statement, swallowed up by machine he oils, he reenergizes with blood & verbal capacities, a sacrifice; Z. takes a linguistic structure (e.g. 5-word line in "A-22") or theme (the idea of natural chronology) as a situation, like a friendship, opening not only his own muscular display (fast-talking, action painting, wit) but equally chance for the realization of another in language & concomitant change in self's nature thereby. I'm not clear at this point where C. stands, on this, whether Williams' reaction to 'The Waste Land' could apply to a stunning, repugnant display of man's talent for language bent back upon itself, all verbal system (be it 'non-referential' or 'Christian'), or whether he will or wants to go from

Zukofsky, so already is revealing the world to us in our time.

.....  
Mexico isn't the point, i.e. they did & didn't have to go south to Mexico, Neal went right back north north east to NYC to get married in order to go back to California to live with his former wife & Jack was already doing fine back home where *Cody* begins in miserable old gloomy Eastcoast megalopolis Long Island before Sal even sets out for Denver to see Dean (likely story, heading north to Rte. 40 to go west instead of going west directly!), but neither is it 'the blow upon the world,' alone. Clearly the self is in there somewhere, 'sketching' language mediation working upon the world, dwelling on 'crinkly tar' until 'Merrimac' & 'snake' appear as understanding.

Writer's attitude toward his work important, places work in a life.

CC has a terrific, consistent ability, clearly no equal in his this present generation, for sheer size & quality of facility & in-plant operation maintenance. Reading recent writing, pleasure of participation large & various in mind at work, like touring race car manufactory's factory service center, really goes on & out.

All the lithe sexuality, sense of mind engaging tensile strength of words.

.....  
However (or, 'but') or so far, Zukofsky is 'better,' late A language process at least as interestingly intensive & variously extensive (point of another piece to evidence close reading of C.), plus makes more things happen, allows & engenders fervent beings ('manes?') entering material world of words.

.....  
Creation is the issue, co-positing not 'meaning,' cohabiting, language as how to live in what world. Who knows what's going to happen, what gets said.

Opposite: be defined out of existence (e.g. 'fired'), by something else.

.....  
Or analogous instance: by volume (weight, etc.), what % of Stein's language material in *Tender Buttons* truly names something that thereby occupies space, exists as celerity & issues forth.

Symbolism, here, not referential signification, but an identity, not relation but a circle of correspondence: x *is* x, the word *is* the thing of which it speaks. E.g. "Dining is west." How so.

.....  
Where are they, before we existed & after words. Meantime or some day, can ask that question in language & write toward that.

What's that 'bush.'

All this emphasis on facts in the present.

.....  
Anyway, think recent CC & LZ in light of the situation defined by Zukofsky years ago in "A-7" & ponder, as solutions, what each has done.

.....  
Hats off & most interested but can't *read* either one, in form in which it appears, consecutively, though I do, know I'm being addressed. 'Different techniques' not signs but spans of different lives. Passages, even, in both appear as mine.

Can't understand the 'enforced' continuity, although altogether weeks involved in experience of each. Question of how parts make a whole.

.....  
To record this, LZ in Franconia, May '74, after initial public reading of parts "A-23," response to my question, more or less can you realize *all* that's happening all the way through in your mind as you read it, Z. said, "yes" to my amazement (& something like, take it easy, Bob, I grant your energy, but).

.....  
Thinking out Olson: Eliot a dummy, not that him not bright but language there closed system of conventional operations & assumptions, taken as the world.

*What was the wind blew through it,*

.....  
*'It's changed, it's not the same!'*  
-from "Diction," from Pieces

.....  
I don't know, though *The Maintains* effects fact, that CC doesn't think the big white wall of language operations all the world the poem is responsible to & for. Or my stupidity, or why should he. Feel it, anyway, may well be a common situation of groping by verbal means (& listening) to find way out of cave under mountain of language habit (haha, dust to more so) to 'thing in itself,' or whatever, as words may reveal it takes place. Thus oldtime poetry & *truth*.

.....  
*Reference vs. non-reference?* It's not that simple. Ginsberg sets out (*viz. Indian Journals*) to bring words as close as possible to facts of event perceived & ends up contributing to experience in language. Z, aspires to condition of music & ends up writing nature into existence, clearly telling names & characteristics of things.

.....  
 Pure masturbatory exercise inside no time mind space, with practice possibly virtually all extensive:

*There might be  
 an imaginary  
 place to be-  
 there might be.*  
 -Pieces, pp. 58-9

All to oneself vanished in simultaneous extensive word space. Drummers don't drum in time, become time, drum it. We can hear. Clark's as real as anybody.

.....  
 As the State man in the Littleton liquor store said to me today when I asked him for boxes, fella, don't feel bad, we don't give them to anybody. I said, I don't feel bad, I need boxes, I've got to mail a lot of books to California. So he said, did you try around back, take away all the boxes you can carry, if you take all of them, don't leave anything. All right, I said, found two good J&B Scotch boxes, yellow with red lettering, & solid. Good luck.

What a romantic. Taxes.

.....

**ce•ment** (si-ment') *n.* 1. Any of various construction adhesives, consisting essentially of powdered, calcined rock and clay materials. that form a paste with water and can be molded or poured to set as a solid mass. See **Portland cement**, **hydraulic cement**. 2. Any substance that hardens to act as an adhesive glue. 3. *Geology* A chemically precipitated substance that binds particles of clastic rocks. 4 Variant of **cementum** -v. **cemented**. -**menting** -**ments**. -*tr* 1. to bind with at as if with cement 2. To cover or coat with cement -*intr* To become cemented. [Middle English *sement*, *syment* from Old French *ciment*, from Latin *caementenium*, rough quarried stone, and its plural *caementa*. marble chips used to make lime). from caedete. to cut, hew. See **skha-** in Appendix \*] -ce-ment'er *n.*

**ce•men•ta•tion** (se'men-ta'shen) *n.* 1. The process or result of cementing. 2. A metallurgical coating process in which iron or steel is immersed in a powder of another metal, such as zinc, chromium, or aluminum, and heated to a temperature below the melting point of either.

**ce•ment•ite** (si-men'tit') *n.* A hard brittle iron carbide, Fe<sub>3</sub>C found in steel with more than 0.85 per cent carbon. [From CEMENT]

**ce•ment\_ mixer** A concrete mixer (*see*).

**ce<sup>a</sup>•ment•um** (si-men'tem) *n.* Also **ce•ment** (su-ment') A bony substance covering the root of a tooth. [New Latin. from Latin *caemententum*, rough stone. CEMENT]

**cem<sup>e</sup>•e•ter•y** (sem'e-ter'e) *n. pl* -ies. A place for burying the dead; a graveyard. [Middle English *cimiterie*, from Late Latin *coemeterium*, from Greek *koimeterion* sleeping room, burial place, from *koiman*, to put to sleep. See **kei**<sup>1</sup> in Appendix \*]

**cen.** 1. central, 2. century.

**cen•a•cle** (sen'e-kel) *n.* A small dining room, usually on an upper floor [Middle English, from Old French, from Latin *cenaculum* French *cenacle*, from Old French *cenacle*, the room where the

Last Supper took place, from Latin *cenaculum*, dining See **sker**<sup>1</sup>, in Appendix \*)

**-cene**. Indicates a recent geological period for example, **Neocene**. [From Greek *kainos*, new, fresh. See **ken**-<sup>3</sup> in appendix \*)

**cen•o•bite** (sen'e-bit', se'ne-) *n.* also **coen•o•bite**. A member of a religious convent or community [Late Latin *coenob\_ita*, from *coenobium convent*, from Greek *koinobion*, life in community: *koinos* common (see **kom** in Appendix \* + *bios*, life (see **gwei**- in Appendix \*))] **-cen'o-bit'ic** (-bit'ik) **cen'o'bit'i-cal** *adj.* **-cen'o'bit'ism** (sen'e-bit-ism) se'ne *n.*

**ce•no•gen•e•sis** s\_ 'nô-j\_n\_ '-sis) *n.* Also **coe•no•gen•e•sis** The environmentally determined development of characteristics of structures in an organism. [Greek *kaimas*, fresh, new (see **ken**-<sup>3</sup> in Appendix \*) GENESIS] **-ce'no•ge•net'ic** (-je-net'ik) *adj.* **-ce'no•ge•net'i•cal•ly** *adv.*

**cen•o•taph** (sen'e-taf', taf) *n.* A monument erected in honor of a dead person whose remains lie elsewhere. [Old French *cénotaphe*, from Latin *cenotaphium*, from Greek *kenotaphion*, empty tomb *kenos* empty (see **ken**-<sup>4</sup> in Appendix\*)+ *taphos*, tomb (see **dhembh** in Appendix \*)] **-cen•o•taph'ic** *adj.*

**Ce•no•zo•ic** (se'ne-zo'ik, sen'e-) ui/i Of, belonging to, or designating the latest era of geologic time, which includes the Tertiary and Quaternary Period and is characterized by the evolution of mammals, birds, plants, modern continents, and glaciation. See **geology** –*n.* *Geology* The Cenozoic era, preceded by *the*. [Greek *kainos*, new, fresh (see **ken**-<sup>4</sup> in appendix)+ *-zoic*]

*-American Heritage Dictionary of  
the English Language, p. 217*

My best analogy to what C. is doing is Central African Pygmy music & then I put him way ahead of me, singing, dancing, instrumentalizing, simultaneously, omnipresent activity inside the music all the world.

He's a one man show. Did all die, or what.

.....  
HOPEFUL

now you know that's all so

.....  
Not satisfying to think only in oneself. Too 'romantic,' too like me.

I go there, inside the work, as often as possible. It's a great place to be.

.....  
just alone a lonely stay at home

waking up in the morning

.....  
"Thou watchest the last ooziings hours by  
hours."  
Keats, Oct. 11, 1975

.....  
How about telepathy, i.e. dispersing of notion of form altogether, & no person, just pure conversing with it.

.....  
Loneliness result of self perceiving itself as individual. Empathy result of self projecting itself on anything. Statement issue of language conventions taken as fact. *The Maintains* product of Coolidge's operations. Quincunx translated to lines from fives in nature. Help.

Ouch. Paint is paint. What a circle.

.....

So anything goes, but "nothing is anything but itself, measured so." (Olson)

Painting paint. Chairing chairs. Words words. Relax into the activity, & in the acceptance of limits, thrive.

.....

No, it's a 'lie,' acceptance of only apparently previously given conditions of fact as presently real. It's much more mysterious.

"Form is what happens." It did happen, but it only happened to happen. It couldn't have happened otherwise, we think. *What* happened.

Meanwhile, there's very little knowledge of where it came from. Where is it now. All this time using English, *that* was gone by.

.....

Most words just echoes, corpses. Existence is a corpse. You want to stare at it, play with it, assemble it.

It doesn't matter if it's dead. Try alchemy.

.....

Awful deadness of metal parts, all heat & light gone out, just reflections off surfaces interesting enough.

What's 'behind' what happens.

.....

Language tells, counts & shows, in moments of realization it comes into existence in particular words & dies, as every one does, & is reborn, again & again, in all manner of evanescent phenomena, flashes of light, heat, sound. Words.

Feel C's interest as language process calls things into being again & again, in *The Maintains*, but does he think these things are words only.

Existence in part the product of a preposition:

*Roast potatoes for.*

*-Tender Buttons*

.....

AMY

Jumprope

dries your hair

while your hair

is drying

.....

*Is a door*

*for-but*

*who enters*

*-Pieces*

the material spiritual world.

.....

Talk like this doesn't often have much to do with it. Coolidge may be convinced he's dealing exclusively with verbal relations & by such conviction free himself to think inside language closely enough to make a place for the gods, or express himself & his procedures & world the more completely, or even copy nature. I can blab on about 'material spiritual' etc. & do nothing with words to effect anything but a troubled idiocy.

Nevertheless, for purposes of the discussion of writing, the statement that words are as real as anything else & deserve to be treated primarily as facts (not signs) in a physical force field is only beginning to get down to what language is doing.

Coolidge, in his works, has been beyond this blunt idea (it's not conceptual art) for a long time.

.....

What's interesting about a word or group of words in time is the same as what's interesting about a person or group of people in a room.

It's not simply that something exists (although that does become a concern, as a question, that that is *that*, a 'mystery'), but who it is, what it is, how did it get there, what's it doing, what can we do together, etc., all age old common place concerns, that involve us or don't: the energy in a fact, how this one conducts itself, & finally (not 'meaning' as meaning something other than itself, toward which it points) what seems to be evidenced in the thing, what's it saying, what's alive there.

.....

Last ditch effort of romanticism to establish itself via total control over verbal universe a writer puts there by marking "I" etc. (1000 pages of it), "I" on a page (least interesting as most conventional, traditionally inevitable aspect of CC's work), flips over into wholly new thing, outside the bounds of extant literary criticism.

The poem doesn't exist, as 'poem,' because it doesn't ordinarily say anything-save maybe fuck you to MacLeish by really realizing his 'poem should not mean but be.' The writer is not typically expressing himself in the poem, so work doesn't yield much re information on the writer's condition (understood as how he feels, details of personal circumstance); simply, he did it, or so he says, by signing his name to the work. The world, clearly, is not normally mirrored. The audience is not apparently addressed though involved).

So, what is it, for novice & experienced reader alike, what are these words.

.....

What are the relations between language & physical mental process (not 'will,' not 'personality,' not 'feeling'), such that we perceive ourselves as existing in language in the head.

What are the relations between words (like 'Fred' or 'Harry') & the things words seem to call into being, such that we perceive ourselves as existing through language in the world.

"I" say, "I am," "You are." These are words. I understand the structure of experience *in language*.

What does it mean to write, to use these words.

.....

CC in his operations provides a massive evidence of mental process, *how he thinks*, already one of the most extensive & informative, literal instances of same in literature, which - is not to measure literature by an 'index of personality' (so convert the poem into statement of the poet's life), but just to say that his mind exists there in his words, & equally, that the place of the words, a place, is C's mind.

And we read it-i.e. the work makes room not only for C's mental activity but that of people at all familiar with English, all cooperating in the creation of the work by reading it silently or aloud.

.....

Sentences, sentience, words as ways of moving, language process place for mind & everything so recognizable to exist in the world.

I see you, says you. All that I can't say or see, being here, & me. Every thing I can.

All this, in such words.

.....

The world comes into existence in a tree, this tree in this place & season. An experience of a word involving recognition by a consciousness equally present makes the world (or words don't need us, any more than trees?).

.....

What do words know of each other, possibilities of sentience in words as well as dogs, plants.

.....  
Again, question of *how* words further perception, act in same place same time as mind's experience of objects in situation, like a third party (a sentence) tells & shows you what's happening. Language as operationally interactive definition, or some such, but that's my need.

C. primarily concerned with relationship between language & mental process. I'm more interested in ways words contribute to experience of things. These are different emphases, parts of the whole event.

.....  
Complacency (?) somewhere in C., a not having to explicitly address connections between language & other real things, or just sort of purposefully simple-minded provisional set that allows writing to go on, a working solution?

Recalls linguistic philosophy not concerned to inquire into questions of origin of language & its function in different human situations, content to accept proposition that it occurs in forms it does & investigate same.

Rest of the world somehow not a problem, or it *can* be excluded from the work.

.....  
Words don't have to say or be anything but what each is & does. A word space.

Still, each is possessed, by the energy *therein* occurring.

Turn around. What are the creatures standing off the wall.

.....  
Where words are, we are, so are things. Three things, however this may come about, simultaneously. Here we are, say any & each. Now what. As such verbal mental process faculty, sharp by practice *-whir-whirring-CC's* ready for anything.

#### UBEITY

by Ron Silliman

*Word goes together with word, one word rubs against the other like a cheek against another's cheek. Words are separated from words, and instead of a single complex, an automatically pronounced expression that shoots out like a chocolate bar from a dispenser, there comes into being a word as sound, a word which is purely articulated movement.*

Viktor Shklovsky  
*O teorri prozy*, 1929

*Fixed connections being abolished, the word is left only with a vertical project, it is like a monolith, or a pillar which plunges into a totality of meanings, reflexes and recollections: it is a sign which stands. The poetic word is here an act without immediate past, without environment, and which holds forth only the dense shadow of reflexes from all sources which are associated with it.*

Roland Barthes  
*Writing Degree Zero*, 1953

*...poems are not referential, or at least not importantly so. They have 'meaning' in that they do 'exist through themselves.'*

Robert Creeley  
"Poems are a complex," 1965

*That which is characterized by extension in all directions, boundlessness, and infinite divisibility; the subject of determinations of position and direction.*

Clark Coolidge  
Preface to *Space*, 1970

\*\*\*

The work of Clark Coolidge, as evidenced by *Space*, *The Maintains* and *Polaroid*, may be described as having taken the form of a path or dialectic, the function of which has been to explore the location of the word

in (mental) space. The work is not an object, a thing completed, with evident conclusions. Each new writing is of itself an act of its own orders and can be discussed as such. Yet each serves to clarify all previous terms (works) in the series. Each also awaits the clarification of future work.

If, for example, at least six of the thirteen words in the first stanza of *The Maintains* (*laurel, ratio, instrumental, triple, granule, award*) appear in retrospect not to be possible constituents of *Polaroid*, it is because in the course of these two book-length poems our sense (as readers of Coolidge's work) of the associational realms, domains, of terms has expanded to the extent that these words seem to us now to fall naturally into a restrictive category which is only introduced in the later work as a means of structuring, by contrast and counterpoint, a larger whole (cf. the use of *clad, matter, kind* and *I* on p. 81 of *Polaroid*).

It's tempting at present to find two distinct periods in Coolidge's work: one of *dislocation*, in which terms are freed gradually of the referential (all of the earlier writings gathered in *Space*); one of *relocation*, in which secondary or hidden aspects of language, especially position and direction, memory and expectation, are brought into play, creating new contexts of meaning and new dimensions of possibility for the poem (*The Maintains* and *Polaroid*). Later, I suspect, this perception will change, that we will then see in the final pages of *The Maintains* the beginning of a new and deeper understanding of the essential nature of language, and that what has thus far followed is in fact part of a period of considerable transition and rapid growth. If anything, the work is moving toward a condition of prose.

Coolidge is, with Robert Grenier, one of the first Americans to write in language, as distinct from its subset speech. Their work extends a tradition which includes such poets as Creeley, Eigner and Zukofsky. For Clark at least, it also includes Kerouac and Burroughs.

*To write in language.* As such. This at all points has been the essence, the thrust. At first this meant freeing words from whatever contexts forced them to be less than themselves.

The term *chair* is, in relation to an object in physical space, different from that thing which exists in relation to other links in a grammar (the horizontal, the syntagmatic) and different still from its counterpart on the paradigmatic or vertical axis (e.g., *seat, rocker, throne, etc., green, olive, emerald, khaki...*). The problem confronting his early work (and it's easy to forget now the difficulties posed by it, prior to Coolidge's writing: some sections of *Space* are already more than a decade old, it no longer looks *strange*) was how to liberate words from such entanglements without deteriorating into "mere" static or chatter, Brodeyism. How give form to the antithesis of perceived form?

A variety of provisional answers are proposed in *Space*. "Fed Drapes," the first poem, reads like a Joycean text in the process of disintegration. The third, "Machinations Calcite," presents words in a closed and fixed mold: the initial letter of the first term in each stanza is *a*; the middle term in the third (and middle) line of each stanza is an ampersand; a term of quantity begins the fourth line in each case, etc. Together, the first two segments of *Space* propose a vision of given forms veering into non-referentiality, moving gradually toward a more explicitly acoustic organization of language into texts (e.g., "said lines types ohm," p. 43) with a decreasing reliance on non-verbal structural devices such as punctuation, upper case printing, artificial stanza markers (as in "Soda Gong").

Words become non-referential only by virtue of specific context. Lines like "black pits, how can the flame be sunk?" may lack the particular grounding a positivist would demand in order to call it *meaningful*, yet it has all the characteristics of meaning-filled speech: nouns and verbs are where one expects them. By the third section of the book this is no longer the case. Instead, there is a series of 21 short poems whose organization is essentially acoustic (and, to a lesser degree, spatial). Even mock syntax is gone. Nouns dominate the sequence, freed of any but the vaguest associations with an object-world, cut loose from any attachment to a speech-chain; even their relation to the usual paradigms is disrupted, since the decision-making is predicated upon acoustic demands rather than a process of selection from a conceptual cluster of synonyms. In twelve of the pieces there are terms shifted away from their center, that singular, unconjugated form they would take on in a dictionary, by the addition of a terminal, transforming nouns into verbs (*milks*) as well as pluralizing. It is in this series that Coolidge for the first time clearly articulates his basis for a poetry of language.

Its potential however, if founded solely on the elements present here, would have been limited. The requirements of such tight acoustic structures sharply restrict the total number of terms that might be deployed in any one work. (Though both are exploring much the same territory, Coolidge seems to conceive of language as a kind of grinding hum of backbrain information, *langue*, where for Grenier it focuses into a series of points, words flickering into consciousness, *parole*; it's a difference perhaps as simple as that between the language as Self (Grenier) and the language as Other (Coolidge).)

In the final section of *Space*, Coolidge extends the principles and realms of possibility enunciated in this sequence. In a particularly intriguing short piece,

A  
per  
ginning  
verted

he tentatively reintroduces memory and meaning back into the writing, the work pointing variously toward such possible formulations as "A perfect beginning inverted," and "A perverted beginning." A comment perhaps on Zukofsky's device for opening each section of his long poem. Signification here takes the form of aiming not at the object-world, but from a realm of fragments to another, parallel realm of completed words. This aiming, this use of direction, more than any acoustic device, is what gives the piece tension and force.

In "A D," the twenty pag final poem, Coolidge demonstrates strategies capable of carrying the poetry of language beyond the miniatures of the third section. Where in those short works the relationship between individual words and the poem as a whole was predicated on the limited number of terms (analogous to a large canvas, say a Still, with 8 or 10 areas or strokes of color), building upon tight acoustic organization, these same tactics are reformulated and redistributed at different levels in "A D." The relationship of part-to-whole is first of line to stanza, secondly of stanza to page, finally of page to whole (the concept of the page as a unit will resurface transformed in *Polaroid*). Now it is each line which is the acoustic structure, closer to real music forms than to any conventional metrics. With precursors, therefore, such as Zukofsky on the one hand, but certainly Kerouac's bop prosody on the other. There are attempts, primitive in comparison to Clark's later work, to devote specific pages to the exploration of particular word types, such as page 115 where no term has any distinct referential object, or the last four pages made up of word fragments, the final act in the book's dissolution of language. Nearly all the strategic prerequisites of *The Maintains* and *Polaroid*, works that follow the period covered by *Space* by a few years, can be located in "A D."

In contrast with the gathering of diverse pieces that, save for the third section, gives *Space* the feeling of almost accidental organization, each of these two other volumes contains a single poem nearly identical in length. *The Maintains* is a deep exploration of possibility in the acoustic structure of the line, as such, and of line-to-stanza relations. The page, unlike "A D," is not a formal unit, so that stanzas do not stand out starkly, but accumulate into a larger musical flow, equivalent perhaps to the environmental and "eventless" compositions of Lukas Foss, such as *Geod* (1969).

The stanzas are as 'weak" in their relation to the whole as they are "strong" an ordering device for the lines and terms they contain. They are at first short-five of those on the first page have five lines or less-, a tactic which enables Clark to forcefully demonstrate their tight organization, to bring the reader *into* a work whose order is based neither on the logic of discourse nor on any familiar (and necessarily closed) poetic form. The opening stanza is a flourish, with the acoustic strength of the short works in the third section of *Space*.

laurel ratio sharp or hard  
instrumental triple to or fro  
granule in award

The second one, a single line, isolates and displays the line, as such, as a unit. The third, containing four one-term lines followed by a line of four terms, articulates the role of the single word and its relation to the line-as-unit. Coolidge uses the fourth stanza to show how the logic of acoustic structure can result in a form which is open and casually organized, relaxed, not unlike a Berkson or Fagin. In the fifth, to demonstrate just the opposite-how the use of repetition (memory and expectation, the word *directed* across the page) can tie a stanza together: thus both the *th* and terminal hard *t* of *that* in the first line recur in the three succeeding lines in the word *the*, *part*, *plots* and *bolts*; the *r* of *fair* becomes the *r* of *part*; *plots* reinforces *part* (in one sense suggesting that the beginning and ending of the term forms a frame, which the interior letters "color in" with meaning and implication); *plots* converts to *bolts*, which in turn finds repetition in the *ol* of *wholes* and *golds*; the terminal *s* (*plots*, *bolts*, *wholes*, *golds*, *divides*) concludes five consecutive lines. [This stanza is quoted in toto in the fifth section of Don Byrd's article in this issue.]

As *The Maintains* builds, stanzas becoming longer-short ones, as on page 76, function as counterpoint-, what is created is not a narrative (not even of formal development, the horizontal dimension of *Maximus* and *Passages*), but an environment. Having located a specific mental plane (or pitch), Clark maintains it: thus the title, which is no less careful than *Space*. The definition of content in this work is identical to that which Peter Yates has proposed for music per se: aesthetic consistency. Nor is it far from the "coherence" by which Roland Barthes defines reality in a language system. Coolidge has in fact created both.

Within this environment one finds, beyond the pure pleasure of its formal qualities, a level of fragmented, disruptive, often funny, flashing associations, which Coolidge calls an image-track. It is the sum of the meanings of the terms as they occur in sequence within the work. Meanings that, in an inherently referential work (the novel, the short story, the sentence), would form into the description of an object, a belief, an action, a milieu (e.g., the dreaming preconscious of a personified Dublin). In Coolidge's work, their affective dimension remains undiminished. But with their referentiality effaced, they take on a new kind of order.

In a referential work, it is difficult at times to remember that individual terms do have meanings as such. Instead an order is posited which appears to exist outside of the language (outside of the language used to describe it) as though it were the location of meaning, the source of definitions, associations. (Hence the most pessimistic and brilliant of Wittgenstein's statements: *Ein Bild hielt uns gefangen. Und heraus konnten wir nicht, denn es lag in unsrer Sprache, und sie schien es uns nur unerbittlich zu wiederholen.*) The language of the referential appears to be meaningful to the extent that it reflects and reveals this order. In Clark's work, no such order is proposed. The meaning of any individual word is the series of associations affixed to it by social convention and personal experience. Meaning, in *The Maintains*, is something which is given off by the text like sparks, but which refuses to gather itself into that larger, hypothetical order which subverts the direct experience of language.

In the course of his cutups and foldins, Burroughs discovered that content (aesthetic consistency) was retained even as referentiality was obliterated because the possibility of the larger external order which lay under the uncutup, unfolded text existed among the associations attached to each and all of the individual terms regardless of their order. All of the words *aimed* at that order. The altered text reflected that constant sense of direction as if it were a pressure within the language. In *The Maintains*, Coolidge distills this process of aiming, of direction. Technical jargon, for example, might reflect ("mean") both the logic of the scientific method and that world-model which geology and/or botany reflects. Word fragments aim at their whole selves (often carrying a further tension by their ambivalence, their refusal to identify a single orienting term, such as with *verted*). Meaning is no longer just a question of identifying something in the world which corresponds to the word, the Lacanian formula *S/s*. there is also the direction which the word must take to reach that meaning and this is as much an aspect of the term (to be explored, manipulated, exploited by the poet) as any other.

Alter the aiming element of the terms, the direction, and you alter the basic nature of the image-track. As much as anything, that is the discovery and thrust of *The Maintains*. Specific lines confront this issue directly, if provisionally, often deliberately focusing or blocking any image track: *from as to drip* (p. 41), *by or as if by* (p. 42),

*to mass to mind of sight mind*  
*as as*  
*like as*  
*to as to only before which* (p. 78).

In the final pages of the work, page 91 and following, Clark turns the language more and more toward this particular kind of aiming, toward words whose meaning exists not on a paradigm but as a derivative of context: *such, which, a, so, like, that, this, as, to*, etc. These horizontal terms do not yield an image-track when, as here, they exist outside of a syntagmatic system. Instead, they create a blind language. Where words present themselves only. Thus *The Maintains* enters a place where the poetry of language has been purified of referentiality. It is hardly sound poetry in the narrow sense of that offshoot of concretism; it is in fact a poetry of meaning where meaning is tested by the absence of referents.

If the reductive thrust of Coolidge's work culminates, in the last ten pages of *The Maintains*, in a horizontal vocabulary with a strictly acoustic set of rules (with which to process the matter, the words), *Polaroid*-a term synonymous with the development of the image-begins to move in a new direction, outward, to introduce new elements (and dimensions) into the writing. Even more strongly than at the close of the previous poem, the language in the first pages of *Polaroid* is *horizontal, blind*. Not without sight, but with a specific, sightless vision. From the start, however, that middle-level ordering device is back, the page-as-unit. The line-to-stanza relation is thus magnified; the accumulative acoustic structure thus recedes.

The reason for this shift in tactics becomes evident on page 12 where, in the second of two stanzas, Clark inserts a referential term, *you*. It is the most subjective of referential terms, what Jakobson calls a *shifter*, its meaning different for every reader, and it dominates the next half-dozen pages. Its presence is drastic, literally polarizing the language in the writing: it is much more a margin, an object of return (rhyme)-one expects it, one gets it, one remembers it, is delighted and energized by it-, than the margin itself.

Clark then begins to insert a second and secondary internal order, positing numbers of horizontal terms into the work so as to also rhyme in the structure (e.g., *still, all, till, whole, will* on p. 17, *never, ever, even, either*

on p. 18). Many of these terms continue to recur on future pages, a feast of memory and desire. On page 19 a second referential shifter is added, *it*. Unlike *you*, it is referential only by prior context, which is missing here. Another more clearly horizontal term, *both*, is brought in, while others such as *still*, *never* and *either* carry forward from previous pages.

In *The Maintains* individual words tended to recede into, and dissolve in, the perceptual flow. In *Polaroid* certain terms (and only certain terms) leap forward, directed not at objects in a referred world, but across the page(s) at one another. The meaning of a word is no longer just the interface of its acoustic form and its aim at the image-track, it is also its location and aim (in the words of the definitionpreface to *Space*, its "position and direction") at earlier and later occurrences, a horizontal dimension: *ubeity*.

The most referential of shifters, that most loco of loci, the word *I*, is added on page 25. On the next page Clark adds *they*. By this point the formal dynamics of the acoustic structure are beginning to change, strengthening the directionality of the terms, this new inhouse referentiality:

*it's I*  
*they are you still even*  
*then*  
*as what's you I this some*  
*do*  
*as I as you even they as a one*

In part, aiming is starting to transform other levels. In part, the small, restricted, horizontal vocabulary (where vertical terms are brought in only as needed, one as a time) is less well suited to an environmental all-over surface that was the result of the acoustic strategies of *The Maintains*. Gradually, the sound of *Polaroid* moves close to the affect of the music of Steve Reich.

Clark extends and explores these issues through the next two dozen pages, especially the question of line length and organization. Finally, on page 51, he takes what must have seemed to him to be an inevitable step and abandons the line altogether, investigating for several pages spatial ordering techniques reminiscent of some of his (largely uncollected, although a few do show up in *Space*) early works. Here the word must relate outward to the entire page, an outer structure almost without an inner one. The tactic is more useful as a transitional (transformational) device than it is interesting in and of itself. On page 59, Coolidge begins to reformulate the line, centered now around the new demands of the language. The line is generally somewhat longer than before. The acoustic dimension of individual terms is less significant (in the narrow, literal sense that it *signifies* less of what is going on in the word now). The polarity between horizontal and vertical words is even more strongly felt, vertical terms occurring as eruptions on an otherwise horizontal plane. The line-as-unit continues to be the focal point through page 67, and is stressed throughout by double-spacing.

On 68, Clark uses this new sensibility to create a page of five stanzas. It is the last instance of the stanza as a subdivision of the page (like the line, a middle-level ordering device, perhaps even more so, but the removal of which strengthens rather than weakens this new language in which satisfaction and desire are the primary conditions). It is also the last instance of a relatively short line. Beginning on 69, Coolidge equates page and stanza, which in the next several pages permits line and stanza both to expand, filling space. The importance of the carefully determined and orchestrated vocabulary becomes evident here. The experience of reading mind as it travels over these stanzas is on devoid of an image-track, but where memory and expectation, need and gratification, are everything: elements, once posited, recur constantly. Their triggering and retriggering becomes the form of the experience, dominant over the acoustic dimension (which remains strong) and the referential one (which does not, which exists only in the thrust of specific referential terms, often shifters).

To give a visual representation of the extent to which this positing of directed language goes on, a page can be reduced to a given number of elements, which can then schematically describe the whole stanza. By converting page 78 into a very rough collection of 14 such elements,

*t = to*  
*p = part, point*  
*a = out*  
*e = a, an, as, and, at*  
*u = one, once, on*  
*s = some, same, seem*  
*X = you*  
*l = less, lest, lost, let, last*  
*m = matter*

*n* = match, much  
*i* = it  
*z* = seldom  
*h* = that, than, thus, the  
*o* = all other terms,

capitalizing *X* because it is the only referential shifter for which the reader has an image-track, we can transform the page into:

*tpauXtp*  
*spootos*  
*Xotpoesoho*  
*pXhXsotoo*  
*tehoiesXupt*  
*uaootupeooi*  
*eopoXoutoooo*  
*tuXopholuh*  
*eonepbehXo*  
*poztooxtm*  
*otpaueuoXeu*  
*onpoiXhuos*  
*tpuoXuhXstpt*  
*loooooestop*  
*uatoolohupuo*  
*loooooupoX*  
*iopoXilepsXpt*  
*epoostzhmo*  
*lhptaoXohlho*  
*etopihXistup*  
*tobhpnuXeeoo*  
*hphuhooXXotlo*  
*ooiptouahX*  
*iohXostloelo*  
*tpaoothhisepo*  
*oezuoopouh*  
*ohoseoepthoo*  
*uXltepohlotloo*  
*huXepohzuXop*  
*tpuepXopa*

Excluding the place-holding *o* from our discussion, we still find 8 elements which occur at least 14 times within the space of 30 lines. This is something which I doubt has a parallel anywhere in English-speaking literature, including Spenser, Shakespeare and Zukofsky. Of these elements, six occur at least two dozen times. Two occur more than 30 times (*p* 38, *t* 32). Patterns appear, raising questions (for example: the number of times *t* and *p* occur on the same line, often together; the way in which *l* and *h* are introduced, so to speak, slowly into structure; the location of *X* within the line; the number of times when multiple *os*. place-holders enter the work in a cluster): does close, multiple repetition increase expectation (desire): does recurrence after a long absence (*X* misses 3 lines in a row near the end, a gap felt all the more strongly because of the special nature of the term); is the sum of the page gratification or desire, or is it impossible to separate the two? These are questions which have never been asked before. But then no one has so transformed language before to the extent that its major experiential components have been memory and expectation before. It is only in the face of the total possibility inherent in such a transformation that we can begin to judge the value and accomplishment of Coolidge's work (and it is good to recall that he is not alone in the exploration of this territory, joined most notably by Grenier, whose works are presently much less available to the public). I said at the beginning of this note that I believed Clark's work was moving toward a condition of prose. I am now in a position to clarify that. It seems, at the conclusion of *POLAROID* that the issue directly ahead of the work is a full examination of the horizontal, combined with a further look at the varieties of direction which occur within words. To enter into such an investigation requires a shift in space, to incorporate types of knowledge and perception we primitively group

under the rubric of syntax. The line would be transformed into its equivalent device in prose, the sentence: similarly, the stanza would change into the paragraph; the importance of the acoustic dimension would continue to recede. Beyond the horizon of such a vast undertaking one can see the limitless dimensions of the vertical. For what Clark Coolidge is about, literally, is the reinvention of language.

A CORRESPONDENCE

by Paul Metcalf & Clark Coolidge

[All editorial notations are enclosed in brackets. All of the letters were signed, but the texts, all provided by Paul Metcalf in the order presented here, appear to have been typed, except for the year of the dates, which have been added in pen.]

In defense of *SPACE*: a wise old man once told me that the only *work* in any creative endeavor is keeping things from falling together too soon. Mebbe that's what you're doing --keeping all your options open...

RFD no. 1, Box 26  
Chester, Mass. 01011

December 24, 1971

Clark, Sir:

God-damn. Voices out of the past. And you over in Hancock all this time, jes' torra side o' the fiats. Whuddaya, some kinda hoimet, or somethin'?

Anyway, thanks for *Space*. Bucolic I don't think I am, entirely, but psychedelic I guess I ain't either, or dah-dah, or sure real list tick, or whatever. I recognize some of what you're doing in terms of your title, also a free experimentation in sounds, language, etc., but I fail to recognize some sort of orienting principle (except, perhaps, a negative one, i.e., look what I'm *not* doing). The old saw about the three legitimate art forms: the building, the string of beads, and the fruit cake. Accepting yours as the latter, still, citron, rum and cherries, even though sliced, enjoy a symbiosis that was in the mind of the chef, no? This is what I'm hunting for, and the night groweth dark, the woods full of terrors, and I but a humble pilgrim, etc. Pow! pow! pow! Please, Mr. Clark, enlighten me.

So here, with my compliments, es mi gusto, senior, is *GENOA*. Take a glance at it, and then, if you still want to talk to me, we'll get together-possibly at The Restaurant in Lenox, run by my son-in-law, Al Weinman. No, his bride is not Anne, but our youngest, Adrienne, now just short of 18. Anne is still living in Providence, engaged, sort of, but not yet married [...]

Cheers, and may '72 be THE YEAR!

Paul

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jan 7 friday newyear  
1972

Dear Paul,

Good to hear from you! & great thankfulness for *GENOA*, which helped me over the "flu epidemic" we seem to have contracted (for) here Pittsfieldward. Wholefamily outfit, making for a noddied-out Xmas, but now back on the mend thankgoodnessforthat. Watchout for that "bug", if n it gets over the mountain to youfolks, it's got a mean IO3temp attached...

*GENOA* is terrific in its spread, & I love your juxtapose nodes. Seems to open my way back to Melville (the ones I haven't yet read, & maybe even Moby Dick for the 8th or 9th time I've lost count, I used to read it every summer on The Vineyard as a kid once I found out I'm related to the Nantucket Coffins on ma mother's side & resultant whaling interests). I even peeked into the HermanRoom at Berkshire Atheneum othernoon...

Wellsir, maybe I put you off a hit talking *SPACE* as "spychedelic" (oops) or whatever actually I recall the word OleJonathon used was "electric", but neither (term) is actually here nor there as opening to the book. Natch I hope one can read into it without any preface, get a feeling of my feeling of words anyway, which is near the crux. "options open" ain't bad either it seems indeed a catch to find *any* new options for words thesedays. & I really didn't want to dive into a vast aesthetic discuss here in letterform, easir (easier) in person, talky mebbe, if you're interested. I like Barney Newman's "aesthetics is for artists as ornithology is for the birds"

still in such regard. As you might figger, I've had many years pleasure & turnon "at the hands of" the NY 50's painters, & Gertrude Stein, whose proposals (from back in the teens) still seem untakenup by almost all writers in English: just what are words & what do they do?

Here's a few notes I jotted down reading your letter & thinking (artists ain't too good at that mode?) it over again for you. Take'em or heave'em over thebackfence -it's all still a matter of what you can & can't use I guess Ezzz?!?!?!

- the Necessary Negatives: 'cause the subconscious gets so loose.
- Creeley's "you want/the fact/of things/in words,/of words."
- DeKooning's "it's very tiny, content"
- to work at the zone of interface tween unconscious & Frontbrain (thought / word)
- the Language as Present Fact
- I'd rather the Fudge than the Shine.
- Reversing the Syntactic Polarities arcs new energy across the blocks.
- Composition by Unit: read it that way.
- I'd rather risk destroying the whole language than bore myself.
- Give myself something to read.
- "expressive", "rhetorical", "descriptive", "explicative" whatever statement is too abstract to me (by that I mean: removed, vague).
- I can't add to all those books.
- Differences, edges, oppositions, polarities, twins, offshades, silences, blanks, erasures, shrubbery, echoes, strata, repetitions, phasing, plain it.
- If you got something to say you should be a *speaker* ("something to say", "whether he tells the truth", etc = all part of the Oral Tradition anyway).
- I want a movement of language that stands for me as sum of all the axial drives in universe.

*A Possible Range*

manipulation of language particles	--->	resultant new aggregates of "meaning" elements	--->	forces of all aspects of language structure as "metaphor" for (as-yet-unseen?) physical states-of-matter
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That's no doubt enuff-or-toomuch for now here. But, a few thoughts, mebbe you get take on, see where I am...

Maketh me to feel a bit grandiose! Can't help feeling the works do it better all to the gooder. My more recent things more in vein of (above) present thought-ramblings (*Space* stops at end of 1968; newer things presently scattered in mags eventually to be collected in book).

I think it'd be nice to get together sometime, & we needn't got at it hammer & tongs (re above), or we can, or whatever seems right at the time. I fondly recall visit to your digs yearsago (Good Laord, when was that?!?!). Maybe let me know when you be in Lenox an afternoon & I come over providing thisyear's snows don't drift me t'other way...

fire at moment?

Hope so.

Like, I can read Melville or your stuff or whatever, but now seems to me time for other options, a new grasp on language, before we can find the grasp of it as tool to open the world further again. Take it as One Head's View...

& yeah, THE YEAR, this!

best wishing,  
Clark

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You got a new book on the

R.F.D. no. 1, Box 26  
Chester, Mass. 01011

January 14, 1972

Clark, Sir:

Your letter does make *SPACE* more plausible and intelligible, at least opens channels through my density to your traditions, i.e., Stein and the NYfifties painters. This tradition isn't still my platter of oolong, but nevertheless I can understand and respect it.

I can recall with what excitement I used to read Navaretta's *It Is...*

Generally, we have lunch at The Restaurant (15 Franklin St., Lenox) every Thursday about noon, but this week it might be Friday, we don't know yet... so suppose we call you during the week?

And if that doesn't suit, I'm enclosing a map with directions to our Estate, in which case you call *us*, and c'mon over.

In any case, looking forward to seeing you again, meeting Susan, Celia, etc.

Cheers!  
Paul

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R.F.D. no. 1, Box 26  
Chester, Mass. 01011

August 7, 1972

Dear Clark,

I can get into you more clearly in this-and also in your pieces in the Berkshire Anthology-than I could in *Space*. Many of the poems seem to integrate for me-to have roots, development, finish. The origins in Stein, and the New York painters, are clear now in the work itself, and not simply as a statement.

Many of them read aloud well: *COLOR SLIDES*, *THE NEXT*, *WHOBODY*, *DARTMOUTH WASHBOARD*. [The text here is the Clark Coolidge issue of *Big Sky* magazine.]

And I much like *The Road Log*-all them motel Johns: old fashioned repetition of design, and an accurate statement of what happens on those stupid long trips.

tomorrow is maybe today  
tomorrow's again  
day for it  
today fixed

...each day like the next, but today to be chalked up,  
accomplished.

The role of silence is to restore objects.

...this line is  
important to you yes? The language revived and refreshed through the myriads of words unspoken,  
surrounding the few chosen to be heard. Again:

It must be some time between sentences sometimes.

...this, of course, true on a long car trip-- but the  
trip is metaphor for the journey through life, yes?

Homer's Argos  
hearing Handel's largos  
as the ear goes

and

The sound of one shower clapping  
...these are a delight to the ear...

One final note:

The last line of the poem:

dots

and the last line in the book:  
A huge white wall  
    ...words, chosen and chiseled, surrounded by spaces...  
    am I reading you right? Right or wrong, you come across to me in many of these and I'm  
delighted to have the book-many thanks [...]

Paul

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August 12, 1972

Dear Paul,

Great! A pleasure to have your generous take on my works, especially coming now in midst of (my usual) summer let-down & distraction sequence (unexpected guests who stay too long, car troubles etc). Looking thru your letter again I see it's practically a "review", which just means I wish those who seek to do a job on me would come as close to the work as you do. You're "reading me right" indeed!

This *BIG SKY* outing has pleased me too in that it has proven a sort of (as I'd hoped) "Coolidge Sampler", presenting a clear range of my recent work & awakenin interests in it in folks who previously couldn't get into it. *THE ROAD LOG* especially has gotten thru to lots, maybe because (in part) it presents my concerns with clear edges, oppositions / antipathies, "words surrounded by spaces" (as you say), etc. animated in a more common content. Plus, what always amazes, that one can catch (on the fly) & sculpture material of a near-randomness.

Yes, "The role of silence is to restore objects"-Actually my reversal of a Beckett equation that's always stuck with me: "To restore silence is the role of objects." & I suppose I'm (ethically?) bound, since you enjoyed it enough to quote it, to properly identify the authorship of that "Homer's Argos... "bit-it's from Zukofsky, in his *CHLORIDE OF LIME AND CHARCOAL* piece in *SOME TIME. THE ROAD LOG's* actually full of recall-lines, mine & others, tho I didn't want to interrupt the suddenness with which they came into my head, hand on wheel eyes on road (the way most of the piece came to me-something to do with rhythms of car engine too), by printing authornames following in proper literary sequences-also wanting to save quotationmarks for actual heard-speech (such as Celia- lines etc).

The Zuk inclusion also refers to a leetle "game" I once got into with friends in NY where we'd each try to type out from memory some lines of something we liked, interest being to see how the lines/words got changed in the memory processes. Like that old partygame of passing a joke around the room, somewhat.

Wondering if you've heard anything fresh off the Colonel Hissself from the OtherSide recent? I sent him a big letter (& copy of *SPACE*) soon after our March Restaurant binge, but have nary a peek from him since. Presume he's OK, just buzzy? & that the problem be that he still finds me works a trifle lacking in Bucolicism. Guess he's ripe for a *BIG SKY*...

Got a copy of Leyda's *MELVILLE LOG* from Lenox Library, happily adrift in that. Liking his method of giving up the compleat strata, even enjoying the puzzlement therefrom. Makes me want to reread great lengths of Melville Hawthorne et al. Keeping all thefamily & friends (names) straight is sometimes a task worthy of them Russian Novelists!

Hope to see you at the reading sunday. M'God, under the apple tree?!! If all goes well & I can arrange everything so's I make it. Dug reading your Biography in BerkAnthol. Somehow hoped there'd be a piece of one of your latest ventures in there too (as David S once Allowed me there would be). Y'mean I gotta come over there & plunk down in a chair with the mss??? OK, why not?

Thanks again.

Best to you & Nancy,  
Clark

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R.F.D. no. 1, Box 26  
Chester, Mass. 01011

August 2, 1973

Dear Clark,

From the interview, in *this 4*:

"Like if I close it down much, beyond a certain point I feel like I'm writing things that have already been written. I'm sort of taking hole units that I've read, and using them. And it gets too, I can't move that much furniture. I have to sort of move the individual units. There I can work. I can work in between those. Like if I take a whole, not even a sentence, but a clause, the referential nature of it is to so much frozen literature, that I feel that I can't move those things apart. I don't know if you can even understand this, but, it's just another way of saying that's been done, and that there's nowhere for me to work, I can't get in."

In part, this describes a drive that you have described to me before, in a letter: this ineluctable drive toward originality, the absolute avoidance, almost as though in fear of contamination, of anything that's been done before.

This suggests several things to me, but I would say first that the drive itself causes me no problems, but there seem to be certain tensions and exclusions that go along with it, that I wonder about. And this is not a criticism-but I find myself thinking about such terms as "capacity for the ordinary", as an hypothesis, a postulation, and because it is opposite to what I conceive your drives to be. I immediately want to put the two together.

I am reminded also of Tom Meyer's poem, "A Holler For A Tricky Yankee", in the Metcalf issue of *Lillabulero*. Although he's writing about me, I think it could work with you, as well: the Yankee tinkerer, with words as manipulable counters, as in a chess game, your hands drawn to them.

When I was a little boy, my mother gave me a new toy, a tin automobile, or some such, and I spent a happy afternoon taking it apart. When Mother saw it in pieces, strewn over the floor, she was furious with me, I hadn't respected her gift's constructed intentions. And I couldn't understand her anger...

I think also of your interest in caves-mineral spaces-and minerals themselves: words as stones-again, counters in a game.

From the interview:

"To get it out in front a lot more than it has been, instead of always some sort of mental reservoir that's feeding the words out. Putting them out there, and then feeding them back in, so you can see what's going on. Instead of being completely in the grip, or more in the grip, of some sort of unconscious selection, see what I mean. It's very interesting to me, where that point in the mind is that words do exist. I don't think anybody really knows for sure. Where that is that they become, where thought becomes words, or words are grouped, like I'm talking now, how you get them, and put them out. Where do they exist, how inextricably connected to the brain processes are they, all that sort of phenomenology, maybe."

Again, words as articles, as particles. And I wonder about that mental reservoir, the degree of confidence any of us should place in it. My own instinct is to trust it.

"In a way one of the things I have to do is watch out that I'm not repeating the structure I've made. After a while you get words that go together in a certain way, you've done that. You realize that you've imposed that on them to some extent. And then that becomes your increments, kind of. A certain use of syntax, which somebody would call non-syntax, that it isn't the usual syntax, I don't know what you would call it. Then becoming your building blocks and you relate to that. You could get stuck. .

That relentless drive toward the original.

"Mystic. That's one of those words I ... I just wonder what mystic really means. There we are, that could be the answer to anything. No, mystic seems like what you fill in the blanks with. .

Right on! Here you and I, a couple of pragmatic Yankee tinkerers, are in full agreement. Mystic is one of those lazy words, to fill blanks.

"I guess I get bugged when somebody says well I don't think you can ever know. I don't believe that."

Part of the same argument, and I couldn't agree more. Howdy, Yank!

"Particles are interesting."

Okay... I have talked about this.

I don't know whether all this is any use to anybody. It is not intended as criticism, more as definition. It is mostly that, when I read the interview, things got into my head, and I am writing this now to move 'em on out. Okay?

Cheers!

Paul

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sunday 5 august  
1973

Dear Paul,

Great. You really get home with a lot of matters I've been thinking on since the interview, about the interview, etc. Your take the best (fullest) I've had on same; most feedback being merely reactions of "good", "pretty good", "why didn't you...", etc. Such spot reactions not being helpfull. You really extend the matters discussed into an on-going process, that it doesn't stop at "judgement," what passes for "definition", etc. That thought *ain't* imutable.

Makes me wish for a work produced over a long-enough stretch of time, starting with the interview (say), then proceeding to a tape of you/me talking our thought out of the interview, that material then being passed through other later further levels of thought discussed, etc. So, you'd end up with a piece more analog to the mind moving, not just pastthoughts frozen in time ("what you forever think"). A work displaying a decent section of neighboring strata of thought.

Interesting that you end up (in letter) saying "things in my head" "now to move 'em on out". Right. Reminds me of a discussion with Guston, re other interviews he's had etc., wherein he said "I find I use interviews, or teaching-talk, to get rid of all the thoughts I thereby find I don't think anymore". I find that too & agree. I prbly had such thought in some corner of me brain during *This* interview, tending to make me push some statement to extreme so as to clear it out, make me rethink on it, etc. Not to cop out in any way on anything I did say there (he hastens to state!)-I mean I *do* rummage 'round lots on just *these* issues, they're there in mind fluid (hopefully). Like the point I made on not trusting helpless product of that "mental reservoir", that you picked up on & took at issue (showing you'd thunk much on same too?). That point's been largely afloat in my mind ever since I started writing at all. The ole Yankee Skepticism (you & I certainly share) made me to devise a way of bypassing that, like it seemed to me from reading lots of books-past that folks had trusted that mebbe too much, so it had come into question (again?), needed to be set out clearly for a looksee before going onward with words, etc. I mean I had an absolute horror (less so now, I find, as I grow my own definition in work more clearly) of finding I'd absently written whole lines 2nd-hand, that I absolutely understood the meaning of (I think I contrary wanted not to understand them, definitely, as well), the *structure* of which, tho, I didn't understand. Whew, a rackety sentence there! But... I wanted to get *in* there, tween the words, taken apart to see how they did (or possible didn't) go together.

You're totally right: my feeling for words as rocks, particles (a fave word), counters, etc. & your taking apart the tin-car: right to this point. I recall doing that too, with similar incomprehension of my father's anger. Also I recall the first time I saw minerals laid out, in the old Boston Museum of Natural History (longsince torn down): it all jumped out at me (I must've been 8 or so), the separations, the space around each specimen clearly defined, the mineral named as to specie, the completeness & power of each rock (some would contain more than one mineral at a time, the several acting together in some way). Total fascination. The furthest I can trace back what became a major drive in meself...

But, that "mental reservoir". . . I return to it here as I do so many times over the years in work-process anyway. That I mentioned it (interview) in extremis, that it would thus be lit up for rethinks in other minds & in my own (possible usefulness of that act), push myself there & see what I'd do, etc. Of course I find I do, & have, trusted it, even if only in the *selection-process* of words-used. But, damn it, I don't wanta be stuck with, say, my own vocabulary even! Like, as if a writer were inexorably stuck with just the words he'd been fed over childhood, later years' development, etc. Want *all* the material there can be (also other structures than the "normal" syntax" can provide), at hand, toward making. I wanta shake the mental reservoir, feed back in structures that may literally (physically?) change my mind. Find I hate helpless patterning, etc. I think *my instinct* is to trust it too, but immediately comes rushing in the drive to change it, take it apart, rip it up & start again.

Makes me wish somebody would work on, to find out if poss, just what does happen in mind where words & thoughts come together, blow apart, print out, exchange form, get metamorphosed endlessly. Why don't they get into that, instead of messing with "psychological behavior" only?? Maybe they have (& here comes in our present plethora reading-problem: too much data) & I havn't see to read it????

Christ. Anyway....

This instinct to trust/drive to dismantle thing. My binary sense of mind. Noticed that you immediately want to bring in such as yer "capacity for the ordinary" (right! I'd like to hear you more on that) "*to put the two together*"! Yes, right here we're on the node of the thinking-process that barks: opposite poles attract. Why not put the two together (a stratification?), not to agree on which's best, but to see if they blow, if they stick, how much space they cause tween, etc. (?) A unified (?) field theory of thought?

Glad to have your solidarity on the "mystik" deal. Out in California they shoot you for saying such. Or they would if they weren't too damn lazy. We seem to have a processive agreement down beneath the obvious evidence of what each has published, which is shared from back & beneath where we now stand, that fascinates & allows ongoing & generative whatever we want to & now do with it, etc. (Another great gippy sentence!) I mean, finally it *ain't* only what it looks like???

Wow, lotsa thoughts from reading yer letter! All the etceteras up there (I now notice) attest to the great extensivity of all these regions. In otherwords, somethings gotten going! I wanta slip one additional in here now anyway: I recall when I first saw a pome of WCW (or later Creeley's) & noticed he had one word (or maybe two) sticking out there by its lonesome on a line, I thought hey here's a guy who's looked/heard/thought the word as a particle, with its own & separate properties energies, etc. That particularity of stopping & looking, holding in his paw, not taking for granted (granite?) at all. Like, look, here's (first principles) what we're dealing with as writers...

Wish I could get all this together & make a fist of it (or at least, a hammer?). Not to clout somebody with (tho ther's them that deserves it), but to start building the house...

Right now (among lots of other projects, a busy time) clearing together some notes on Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* to send off to the *Mulch*-twins (for them since they carried on so much re JK with me that afternoon), see if they'll wanta print same. & let me not get done here without grand plaudits to you & Nancy for one of the FINEST WING-DINGS this Yankee ever's been pleased to attend!! A couple of stiff-laigs keep on rerunning that mass badminton bash (lest I fergit)!

Cheers & Further Beers!!  
Clark

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R.F.D. no. 1, Box 26  
Chester, Mass.

August 31, 1973

Dear Clark,

"I used to have this notion when I was a kid that the minute you said anything, it was no longer true. Of course it would have driven me crazy very rapidly if I hadn't dropped it, but there's something similar in what I'm trying to say. That once it's been done, you want to go someplace else. There's just some sense of straining." - Diane Arbus.

Ring a bell?

On the other hand, when Rilke was asked once if he would be interested in psychoanalysis, for himself, he said (paraphrase) that he didn't want to disturb his devils for fear of upsetting his angels.

This leads us again to the "reservoir", the undisturbed reservoir as a line into all humanity, Jung's collective unconscious, if you wish. And we are not remote, now, from my notion of "capacity for the ordinary" -as, Sherwood Anderson, whom I have been re-reading for my fiction class, Winesburg, Ohio. And what I am dealing with here is not "the common touch" or "liberalism" or some other schlocky philosophy, but that he is drawing directly from life sources, and not parasitically or incestuously from Art -and this refreshes his work, prevents the flashy sort of quick-life-and-quick-death of such phenomena as Op Art.

As for "particles," I find myself on both sides of this matter, wanting at times to dismantle, to separate, to push 'em out, at other times to draw, blind, from the reservoir, to agree with

"There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again."

-T.S. Eliot

And who'd a thot I would ever be quoting T.S. Eliot?

(Anagram:

"O! let sit,

Toilets!")

I'm sending you a xerox copy of a new thing of mine, *THE MIDDLE PASSAGE*. I'm in no hurry to have it published -*APLACHE*, due this winter, should come out first-so I'm sending copies around to various friends, for bouquets and brickbats, as the case may be. Anyway, I believe this piece shows both conservative and radical aspects: each of the three parts is a particle, extended; and yet in a way I am saying, there is only history.

*GENOA*, with Columbus, Melville and Carl Austin Mills, and *PATAGONI* (Pat a gonad, as Jonathon calls it), with Ford and the Incas -are these conservative or radical? Sometimes they seem to me whole, old-fashioned books; and yet the arcing back and forth, between disparate elements, is modern.

One of the things, incidentally, that most fascinates me about Olson, is the mixture of the traditional and the radical.

I feel that the machinations in the reservoir, fully revealed and rendered conscious, would produce a thoroughly modern effect, full of stainless steel and arcing voltage, that would both intrigue and repel me-the steel repelling, the arcing intriguing.

Back to particles again-those isolate words in a WCW poem-how far out do you push 'em? are there organic laws governing this? or is it merely a matter of the writer's and reader's timidities? or what the form will accomodate at a given stage of its history? These are questions to which I don't have answers... one does what one must do, and judgements follow [...]

Gawd, ain't it hot!

Cheers!

Paul

P.S.-Have just discovered I don't have a spare copy of *THE MIDDLE PASSAGE*- thot I did. Will have to wait til one comes in, then ship it on to you.

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thursday 6 september  
1973

Dear Paul,

Better get to this before anything else breaks loose. We've had visitations (friendly) aplenty this past month. Then peculiars of a more unnatural sort (that twister that ate the truckstop-not our hill but too close for any comfort, it bammed down at Queechy Lake too not two miles from here) (a most wicked lightning storm that burned out our well-pump motor & whacked our nearest neighbor out cold, quote: after I heard the crack I could feel it coming through the wall circuit & I knew it was coming for me, then a blue ball re e up out of the wallsocket & hit my right hand like a hundred-pound sledge). Nuff of that...

Yeah, that Arbus quote hits home, just what I mean. "You want to go someplace else", sometimes you mean to, and othertimes mostly you just go anyway, wherever & often not where you meant. & sometimes, in the saying of it, I've been aware of consciously putting it out there, to see if it dies of its own or somebody relivens it later. That mind artifact is mutable, thank the lord...

The Rilke shoots into another area I think. Arbus talking of the mind machinery applied to something, entire & engaged. Rilke worrying at the possibility of the machine itself getting tooken apart, then to lie irreparable by his own designs. Like, the shrink leaves out an "unnecessary" bolt & you're

forever sunk. I too don't wanta mess with that (psychiatry is the real primitive?). Feel I've just about now got it so it starts to turn over to function...

I guess, to me the "ordinary" would be what's otherwise been called "the real", or better *the enigma*: what won't budge no matter how you deform it to recollect it. The surrealists really got off the track when they turned (everything) to the weird, the perfumed, the exotic exception. A can on a board in a field takes off further in every direction, no? The word "of"...

I was thinking, this summer when we were standing in Arches National Park amid all that torsion of red sandstone up in the sun, about maybe did Tanguy think a world of rocks was "surreal" only because he'd never seen one? & there it is right out there for all to see. And none the less enigmatic for all that, in fact more the so.

Guess I'll have to reread Winesburg (it's been years since college deformation of), & what other Anderson would you recommend? But WCW is good example (ex-maple?)... example in this direction (yeah, I seem to wanta move everything too, a verbal universe?). His "ideas in things" I always read axial on that "in": where are the ideas then? in things. & what are these things in front of me in my head I'm using? words. So be it. That that it be so. Etc.

[typed along left hand margin:] P.S.-and another thing that might be said on subj of Olson-fascination: the mixture of what he knows & doesn't know (?)

Oh well, keep saying it, 'cause I can't think it better I guess: words gotta have a certain *solidity*, be there, not wash away in whatever statement, stand at and for their particular turnings of the mind machinery. Somewhere back in my life they've had too much devaluation (education? Guess so), like somebody could finally "get you" & the words (which were formerly *that you*) be flushed away. All this talk of "the nonverbal" gives me a swift pain in the butt. Man a thinking critter, & thought first appears on the tissue of words, etc.

I've been rereading Eigner's poetry lately with increased attention (& trying to get together some Notes On for *ATHANOR* mag issue on him) & finding he's got a firmer grasp on this word-solid business than I thought (used to think him too filmy, toward the worst side of "lyrical"). His a most nounal universe. The way all those prepositional phrases bam the noun up to the edge, again & again. Less enjambment than I thought. That nounal weight seems to provide him with the possibility of almost-solid pauses, allows his lines to "complete" (as Duncan noted) & hang there with a slight sway in the air (his fave word & matrix for all workings), not come slipping to the bottom (as they sometimes seem about to-sometimes he seems to be fighting tooth&nailed to hold everything up...)

'course WCW, another method. He don't care which word he hangs out there (huh?!!). I mean he's more various in his accents. He puts 'em there & moves on. & they stay, & damn me if I know always why they do! (still studying) Another arcing we could talk of (& we used): that between the stationary (a hard nut) & the on-going ("natural", but always beyond some point hard as hell to sustain). Williams has a nut-like quality? (& there's a quotable quote!) I always wanta say "rocklike", but.

Particles. Yeah, well to me all words are particles (not just the ones on their own, on end of, or off a line), so then you're dealing with arrangements, as in physics(?) (WCW's "imagination" seems to yearn toward the scientific, as *he* understands or doesn't it, & there's the rub). I have the feeling now I've done all the dismantling I can or have to do, & now it's all synthesis from here on (& far from downhill!). ummm... that's vague, but I'll go on...

It occurred to me there that it's always been a matter of synthesis, even or especially when dealing with words all separate on the table! & they can't ever be left at that (your "organic laws"?). I've found that there are definite points at which they lose energy (you can't just throw 'em up there, as some of my now "proteges" will learn or not... grow lame, die out. I did a tape-work once at Mills College: placing a single word on each of four tape-loops & let 'em go in & out of phase with each other (differing time-pauses between), & found out there's a precise (could be measured but I didn't have the proper chron-instruments) proximity words have to have to each other in time (in this case) in order for them to cohere into a phrase or whatever. But that's just time relations (tho no the less interesting to find), then there's the syntactical distances, etcetcetc.

I find I'm trying to avoid the (at least internal) use of terms "conservative"/"radical", "traditional"/"modern" thesedays, probly because I've been "accused" of being so goddammed "avant garde"! It's made me think. (ha!) Maybe another aspect of that Yankee Originality: that I care more for what I've done that's new *to me*, and hang (at least close to home in working) the history of form, etc. Like, the Sixties have had us Greenburg-ed to death. Any usage of the term "progressive" always a weak sister in the arts. The eternal point: where have I been, am I moving still, where, etc. The form will accomodate as I push it where I push, or it won't & hopefully I'll know (& even why)...

Shit, I'd meant to say more of your works (& will, later), but it's 4 A.M. & my fingers are forgetting how they type. *GENOA*, *PATAGONI* have all the excitement of the mind moving I could ask for, they both conserve & radicate (opposite of eradicate?). can I ask further? & *do* (pretty please) send *THE MIDDLE PASSAGE* when you get that copy, I've been lookin forward to that ever since you mentioned it a bit last time here!

[Along the left margin of the page:] Whew! A white moon & cool air at last... We'll try & join ya for repast at The Rest next Tues. up. all love to you & Nancy,  
Clark

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R.F.D. no. 1, Box 26  
Chester, Mass. 01011  
April 15, 1974

Dear Clark.

Many thanks for sending me *IN VIRGINIA*, which I read with much interest. My first reaction was double: I thought, hell, this is just a list, he hasn't distilled all this material, but then I remembered when I recommended a book called *Mobile*, by Michel Butor, to Jonathon, and he criticised it, said it was just grist, and I said, why, hell, man, that's the point. And then I went back to Wright Morris, in *THE TERRITORY AHEAD*, where he's talking about Whitman, claims that he "is the forerunner of those anonymous classics the Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogues. The poetry of things."-and he goes on to quote from Henry James:

"To be at all critically, or as we have been fond of calling it, analytically minded-over and beyond an inherent love of the many-colored picture of things-is to be subject to the superstition that objects and places, coherently grouped, disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out: to give out, that is, to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter."

And Morris goes on to say:

"A century after the Leaves of Grass, and just fifty years later than James penned his observation, objects and places, coherently grouped, still give out their mystic meaning. The mind of Thoreau, and the mind of Whitman, the minds of Henry James, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner, are penetrated to the core by the light that radiates from such artifacts. It is *this* prevailing tendency that gives our literature a tone and texture that have charmed the world, and nourished the illusion, necessary to the world, that we are still the keepers of the promise. In the *beginning*-our men of genius go on saying--this is how it was..."

So. Justification and purpose inhere, are implicit, in your listing of these caves, these places. And it is odd, and perhaps therapeutic for me, that I should be taking this position, because my own current kick is in altogether opposite direction: I have been concerned with writing as process, in which the writer undergoes and records (at times separately, at times together) organic change within himself, what Melville was after when he wrote to Hawthorne, "the very fingers that now guide this pen are not precisely the same that just took it up and put it on this paper." Quite the opposite of artifact.

So your piece has brought me up short, led me to realize that it's a large world, and opposites may nourish one another. Artifact vs. process... perhaps they're not absolute opposites, but in any case, they're *both* there.

Where did you dig up this material, where did you do the research? It is pure curiosity, I am not asking as a scholar...

Anyway, thanks again for sending it, I have enjoyed...

Cheers!  
Paul

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tuesday 16 april  
1974

Dear Paul,

Very glad to have your response to *In Virginia*. Funny, there seems to be an interesting confluence involved here. I wrote the work just after seeing you in Lenox that thursday. Something of the sort had been brewing in my head for some time but the actual putting-together seems to have been triggered from our conversation on that day. The business of names, raw materials, etc. that I get very strongly from your research method, your piece on Butor's *Mobile*, yes.

But, too, when you mention your present kick from "writing as process", that brings it right back to me. The big work I'm involved in now is just that: a bringing together of all the areas of interest to me over the years, rewriting & metamorphosing all that material through my own natural bent for process, to find what form(s) it all finally takes. That's my strongest thread. But, occasionally (sp?) I find myself bringing in (balancing over on) a work like *In Virginia*, refreshing maybe my internal process from the outside, hauling in some raw ore to sit up & take notice. *Both* somehow necessary to work in together, as you say. This very "binary" nature of mind has long fascinated me, the need for *more than one* avenue of thought/making. Density of mind makes room for many. And from whatever "disagreement" or clash of materials the energy to get up and move.

In fact, sometimes it strikes me that poets are the most limited of people in the various areas of external feed-in they allow, they tend to get "stuck with themselves", trapped in a needlessly single mode of language/ thought. Too bad. As you say, it is a large world. Open the sluices. O poets, you have nothing to lose but your corners!

It struck me that cavers (as any humans closely involved in a particular activity) have a special use of vocabulary & syntax. Thus, *In Virginia* as a possible presentation of that structure to those (writers I guess I'm thinking of particularly) who wouldn't come into contact with it otherwise. America, a multi-dimensional grid overlay of many special languages, etc. That is, if it ever gets published (?!), & who knows where & how thesedays...

Also, an impulse, Names sometimes seem to want to stand up clear on their own, free to radiate their qualities, they have of all words a strange air of "completion", radioactive with generative particles. So, one side of the balance, put 'em up there, inhabit the air among them for a change. See how the synapses fire from such contact...

The material for *In Virginia* came from an incredibly thorough 761 pp. volume, *The Caves of Virginia*. A twenty year project by the Virginia Cave Survey, they checked out all 1790 caves in the state known by the year 1964. Repleat with maps, descriptions, etc. The kind of thing I love to pour over on long winter nights, dreaming of vast expeditions beneath.

At any rate it's indeed heartening to hear your response to the work as very much like my own. A rider nudging in from the great outside on my more usual & continuous finger-grained & less fathomable (!) working process.

And if said work ever sees print I'd like to dedicate it to you, since you had a hand in triggering it off.

Hope to see you soon again. Now that Spring finally seems to have gained some scrabbly purchase on our land.

All Bests,  
Clark

P.S.-Hope this missive has some kinda "coherence"! Celia's been in loud argument with a neighborkid out in the hall here all through...

FOR CLARK COOLIDGE

by Larry Eigner

m a n y h o w a  
country  
roadside arrow  
to the mystery  
nothing is everything  
no dead-end  
like trees  
into town and out

CHRONOLOGY

1939: born, Providence, R.I.  
1956-58: attended Brown University (major in Geology — one English course-never graduated)  
Summer 1958: "On The Road" to L.A. (Kerouac, Thomas Wolfe, Existentialists) began writing long letters of what was happening  
Fall 1958-Summer 1959: lived in West Village (NYC), Beat mags & readings, jazzclubs, artshows, movie binges (sometimes 3 a day), long walks around city, began to scribble for myself  
1960-61: Providence, bebop drums with Buell Neidlinger, attempts to open own coffeeshop, scribbling notebooks/poems, met Jonathon Williams through mutual interest in H.P.Lovecraft (he was vast turnon to so much) (JW, that is!)  
1962: first marriage, worked as searcher in order dept Brown U Library (3 years), began experimenting with cut-ups/chance etc. ("Bond Sonnets": most obvious published example of this-Insect Trust Gazette)  
1963: summer Vancouver Poetry Seminar (Olson, Creeley, Ginsberg, Whalen, Duncan, et al-met Michael Palmer there), met David Meltzer in SF en route  
1964: started editing *Joglers* w/Palmer (thru 1966-3 issues), met Louis Zukofsky & Paul Zuk, met Paul & Nancy Metcalf in Berkshires (thru JW)  
1965: Conference on Little Mags at Library of Congress, D.C. (met A. Saroyan there), Berkeley Poetry Conference that summer  
1966: Divorced Providence, moved to NYC (W. 85th st w/Saroyan), met Ted Berrigan (& other NY Poets), first reading at Folklore Center (July), first book published *Flag Flutter & U.S. Electric* -Saroyan's LinesBooks)  
1966-1967 (Winter): moved to Cambridge Mass., shared house with Saroyan, April 1967 to SF to join Meltzer's *Serpent Power* (band extant till Sept 1967-album for Vanguard cut in May), married Susan in December  
1968: met Bernadette Mayer, Philip Guston  
1969-1970: produced poetry program weekly for KPFA Berkeley, worked on tapes at Mills Tape Center  
May 1970: moved back East, here in Berkshires since August 1970

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Poems in *Space* were written mainly from 1966-68 (a few from 1965).

*The Maintains*, written 1971-72.

*Polaroid*, written 1972-3.

BIBLIO: COOLIDGE

BOOKS

*Flag Flutter & U.S. Electric* (Lines, 1966)

*Clark Coolidge* (Lines, 1967)

*Ing* (Angel Hair Books, 1969)

*To Obtain The Value Of The Cake Measure From Zero* (a play, w/Tom Veitch) (Pants Press, 1970)

*Space* (Harper & Row, 1970)  
*The So* (Adventures in Poetry Editions, 1971)  
*Big Sky/3: The Clark Coolidge Issue* (Big Sky, 1972)  
*Oflengths* (Tottel's, 1973)  
*Suite V.* (Adventures in Poetry Editions, 1973)  
*The Maintains* (This Press, 1975)  
*Polaroid* (Adventures in Poetry/Big Sky, 1976)

#### ANTHOLOGIES

*American Literary Anthology/1* (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1968)  
*The Young American Poets* (Follett, 1968)  
*The World Anthology* (Bobbs Merrill, 1969)  
*An Anthology of New York Poets* (Random House, 1970)  
*Earth Air Fire & Water* (Harcourt Brace, 1971)  
*Another World* (Bobbs Merrill, 1971)  
*All Stars* (Golliard/Grossman, 1972)  
*The Berkshire Anthology* (Bookstore Press, 1972)  
*Breakthrough Fictioneers* (Something Else Press, 1973)  
*Something Else Yearbook* (Something Else Press, 1974)  
*The Second Berkshire Anthology* (Bookstore Press, 1975)  
*Essaying Essays* (Out of London Press, 1976)

#### BROADSIDES

*Moroccan Variations* (Big Sky, 1971)  
*Names To the Flint* (Lodestar BroadSides, 1975)

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

*Concrete Poetry*, Something Else Gallery, NYC, 1966  
*Language & Structure in North America*, Toronto, 1975-6

#### RECORDS

*Serpent Power* (as drummer) (Vanguard Records, 1967)  
*The Dial-A-Poem Poets* (Giorno Poetry Systems, 1972)  
*Disconnected* (Giorno Poetry Systems, 1974)  
*10+2:12 American Text Sound Pieces* (1750 Arch Records, 1974)

#### EDITOR

*Joglars* (with Michael Palmer) (reprint edition: Arno Press, 1974)

#### TAPE

*Polaroid* (S Press, Munich, Fall 1976)

#### TAPES, IN COLLECTIONS OF:

Lamont Library, Harvard U. (1967 & 1975)  
Fylkingen, Stockholm (1972)  
KPFA, Berkeley (1969-72)  
U. of Iowa (1968)  
U.C.L.A. (1971)

#### INTERVIEW

*This 4*, (with Barrett Watten) (1973)