

The Poetry Project

THE NEWSLETTER
OF THE
POETRY PROJECT LTD.
AT ST. MARKS CHURCH
IN-THE-BOWERY
139
DEC./JAN. 1990-91

e don't even t
o we hate the
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e that you were ever part of the human
ou down to the level of an animal

underscore the great irony of
ieved deeply in the private
of the married couple

How can
napped us
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You add a pinch of straw.
You drop in fourteen oyst
Sold cooked and seven ra
You beat it to a frazzle
With a special frazzle-sp
When you pour

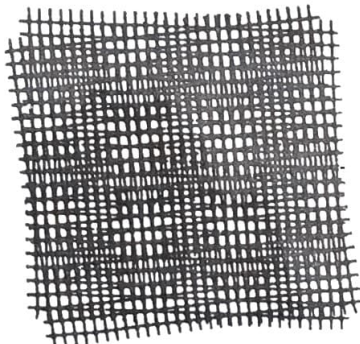
APPROPRIATION

MACBETH
where is she now? What! will these hands
be clean? No more o' that, my lord, no
o' that: you mar all with this starting.
Doct. Go to, go to; you have know
you should not.
Gen. She has spoke what she should
of that: Heaven knows what
known.
Lady M. Here's the smell of the blood
all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten
little hand. Oh! oh! oh!
Doct. What a sigh is there! The heart is
sorely charged.
Gen. I would not have such a heart
poison for the dignity of the whole body.
Doct. Well, well, well.
Gen. Pray God it be, sir.
Doct. This disease is beyond my power,
yet I have known those which have watched
their sleep who have died holily in their beds.

m my thoughts for a while
e front, saw "Clockwork Orange"
Wallace all thru the picture
Alek on the screen come to
rothers" & without any "jamsure
e old ultra violence."
will have the honor of—w
nows not how his book will
urnal—what a shocking sub
shall steal the climax and destroy
anti-hero from assassination!!

Avenue B

Post Hoc



Michael Davidson

88 pages

\$8.00

Words and Ends from Ez, Jackson Mac Low \$7.50

*Among the Blacks, Ron Padgett
& Raymond Roussel* \$7.50

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**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE POETRY PROJECT LTD.
AT ST. MARK'S IN-THE-BOWERY
#139 DEC./JAN 1990-91**

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I've always been fascinated by the wide spectrum of writers who use the poems and texts of others in their own writing. Appropriation is a mainstream practice.

For this section, I asked each writer to supply a poem as well as a short account of sources and methods used. What follows is a selection of these poems/explanations, along with a few essays. I got so many interesting submissions that, unfortunately, I couldn't print them all in this issue. Look for more "appropriations" in the upcoming Newsletter.

What may be the first "found" poem:

NEWS FLASH

OKLAHOMA, January 20, 1914

Three convicts get hold of revolvers
They kill their guards and grab the prison keys
They come running out of their cells and kill four guards in the yard
Then they grab the young prison secretary
And get into a carriage waiting for them at the gate
They leave at top speed
While guards fire their revolvers in the direction of the fugitives

A few guards jump on horses and ride in pursuit of the convicts
Both sides exchange shots
The girl is wounded by a shot fired by one of the guards

A bullet shoots down the horse pulling the carriage
The guards can move in
They find the prisoners dead their bodies riddled with bullets
Mr. Thomas, former member of Congress who was visiting the prison,
Congratulates the girl

Copied telegram-poem in *Paris-Midis*

January 1914

— Blaise Cendrars, trans. by Ron Padgett

So far as we know, the first "found" poem was "News Flash," written in early 1914 by Blaise Cendrars. It was collected as one of his *Nineteen Elastic Poems* (1919). The English version above is from Cendrars' *Complete Poems* which the University of California Press will publish in the fall of 1991, translated by Ron Padgett.

TRACING OF AN EVENING

A man and a woman recite their dreams
In places of fear: a bell tower, behind the blinds, a bridge.
Snow falls on the phonograph
On architecture and poetry.

The prodigal has finished a visit.
The old man was watching from a book.
For so long the narcissus has rotted.
The floor is so far from the earth.

This is where nomads fall upwards
To say nothing in favor of physical pain.
One finds the ocean more transparent,
One finds the ocean more opaque.

— David Shapiro

A note on "tracing" in poetry:

I was influenced by Meyer Schapiro's remark that in Picasso's chair caning collage one had the different perspectives possible, as if one were to say: I am Meyer Schapiro, I is a pronoun, I is a straight line. To go beyond appropriation, intervention, transformation, I decided to think hard about what tracing might be in poetry, since I admired more than anything the manipulation of riddled sources in Jasper Johns' liquid inks. I decided to take a Trakl poem misinterpreted by the over-spiritualizing Heidegger and "trace" it. What emerged was "Tracing of an Evening," which is a parody without parody and which I think of as a tracing.

But the attempt at tracing is made without the nostalgia for a "golden age" of golden texts. Of course, some hierarchical nostalgia probably exists, since I often understand that I am practicing the Jewish liturgical art of lament as well as of celebration. (Heterogeneity of sources and styles seems to speak for multiplicity as the theme — but one knows that even pluralism may become, over time, a mad monism.) The meaning of all this "appropriation" may be thought of in the Talmudic sense that all is commentary and inter-text if even for those who lack sacred texts. The profane illuminations of Benjamin and Scholem and Meyer Schapiro are my standards. I wanted to call my books of poetry *A Book of Criticism*.

EXTENDED VACATION

Driving away, we pass a road sign
that reads POSSIBLE DUST CLOUDS.
The dumbfounded sense of probability
left ringing in our ears sounds like
a choir gargling milk. Soon, tussles
in the roadside shrubbery stir up
the promised dust. We also see tufts
of hair bound in sheaves—a harvest
of blame lugged in from the fields
by hired gypsies. Acres of grapes
riddled with blight whizz by. How
can you feel anything at all for me?
I'm a haughty ailment, an ill-fated
crusade. I agree only to rubies.
I'll whine till you lift the skirt
of our flimsy agreement with the tip
of your cobra-headed cane, seeking
what's underneath. I lie down
in the ritual position till the debt
of flesh is collected. The dying person
forgives everyone, and she is always me.
You must perform several labors
before you may touch me. *Blunder, yearn.*
Love my mother. Capture that dust cloud
and give me a sponge bath with it.

— Amy Gerstler

This poem, like most things I write, is a mish-mash. There really are road signs, at least in California, that read "Possible Dust Clouds", and seeing such a beautiful sign, bordering on prophesy, almost makes one wish other soothsayer-like signs could appear along a traveler's route. The sign seemed too good not to use. I compose a lot from running word lists I keep, and I think "dumbfounded", "shrubby", "gargling", "blunder", "yearn" and probably other words in the poem came from there. I also use phrase lists, which are notes taken from various books and also things overheard, billboards etc. "The dying person forgives everyone", "lie down in the ritual position", and "debt of flesh" came from either the *I Ching* or another eastern text. "Lugged in from the field by hired gypsies" was a portion of a photo caption that caught my eye in the *World Book Encyclopedia* when I was looking up something else.

ADVANTAGE

He has the advantage of good health. The
Advantages of city life. It is of great
Advantage to him. She has an advantage
Over him. Don't take advantage of other's
Weakness. She looks to advantage in white.
It is advantageous to the enemy. Young
People love adventure. The Adventures of
Robinson Crusoe. It was advertised in
Today's papers. He gave me a piece of
Advice. You should follow (take) his
Advice. He advised me to work harder. He
Advised me not to be idle. He is an advocate
Of peace. Have you ever read Aesop's Fables?
That's my affair = (Mind your own business.)

— Bill Kushner

Was sitting on bench in laundromat
next to Chinese lady she reading tiny book which when she
put down to go transfer her dainties to the dryer I picked up
& was immediately struck by this fascinating text, obviously
meant to help a pretty lady to become more Acquainted with
the tongue of English. I quickly pulled out trusty notebook
& began to write down everything I could, from exactly where
I opened her book at, at the word Advantage, & got as far as
the word Affair, which was when she returned to stare a bit
perplexed at this crazy American. I handed it back with a cute
shy smile & a Thanks & later at home Arranged what I'd copied
into what I thought might make a sonnet, cutting some of the stuff
from the book out in order to make my 14 lines. So this is to Advise
you that everything in Advantage is Appropriated. Poets like good
Boy Scouts must be Always Prepared & that morning I was.

COVER LINES FROM MAGAZINES

When Your Parents Hate
Your Boyfriend. A Better Body
in Just One Weekend. What
To Do When He Dumps You.
Revving Up Your Brain Power.
Understanding Your Period.
You Talked, Laughed, Made Love:
Why Doesn't He Call?
The Chemical Balance of the
Healthy Vagina. Losing
Your Man to Another Man.
How Women at the Top Find Time
To Make Love. Why He
Doesn't Call: A Checklist
of Reasons. How To Get
the Man To Stay for Breakfast.

— Kenneth Gangemi

A CANDLE

Cave in to the dark
convexations dim
shadows placate the near-dark
bedspread set sadly over my rustled
form, John Wieners, you
I read to say these things,
you

—I dry the stem—
—the leaf falls down—
—deigning to strew—
—a course from town—

flowers I warrant
flowers I can't
God speed the sun
with nothing to be done
and nothing myself, go out

— Benjamin Friedlander

Table of authorities:

before our body went like a light
our mind wasted, restored through

rain glistened places
outside our window

a blue candle
in poems by Andrew Lang

—John Wieners, "Grown Out of Habit"

The increase in electricity causes lights to flow.
Is it only light, or heat,
words ordered in a row.

—J. W. "Music"

The sign had merged into the unchanging, and now he needed it;
he wanted it to step forward so that he could notice it as he had at
the beginning; as a real sign, meaning something vital, something
by which to preserve his life.

—Philip K. Dick, *Dr. Bloodmoney*

To offer all
and deliver none
a trick of this world that
is the devil's home

— J.W., "Invitation"

The night is cold
I lie abed,
drugged

The gas heater is on.
I would it were
Off

And snuff out my life.

— J.W., untitled

THE OF A THE

Alphabet uniforms steadily assault abroad -
A water power to any other plush.
The child element flowers -
and each pain makes a torture zone.

Beds never can contain words
Whose ample deathless axis stands
At June - and each color
Has my one blank snow to bed.

I would read her an invisible genesis -
A rack the many syllables define -
No me is there -
Well as anybody is
If ecstasy was -

This comes of whose period
Can make the sentences soon.

— Lee Ann Brown

Process:

I was reading again the first favorite selected Emily I had read
in highschool and picked out some of my favorite lines very
quickly such as "there is a zone" (whose even years) and arranged
them in stanzas on a page which I tacked to my studio door at
the MacDowell Colony. I would see it every day when I entered
and so would everybody else. Then one day while it was raining I
cut it up and did the first cut up totally randomly ... and then I
did this one which I feel is more successful using every single
word on the page, fitting them together like a jigsaw puzzle. I
also began to sing several poems like hymns on the back porch.

NET MURDER I

Now jeopardizes catch.

More huge stretched land.

Marketable fishermen after stopping salmon leverage sea.

Nets were nets more hundred birds.

Murder stake,
summer and
other small seals.

Least netting,
sea into mysterious our farther used indeed,
require accepting at sea
be.

Sea now jeopardizes catch.

— Jackson Mac Low
3 August - 11 September 1990
New York

In August and September 1990 I derived a number of poems from "Net Murder at Sea," a February 17, 1986, editorial of *The New York Times* reprinted and distributed in 1990 by the Environmental Defense Fund, which begins:

An unusually destructive method of ocean fishing now jeopardizes the Alaska salmon catch. Even more is at stake, however, and the United States has only begun to do anything about it.

The technique employs huge drift nets that can be stretched across 30 miles of sea....

I fed the original editorial, as well as several different rearrangements of its sentences, into two different computer programs: Diastex4, Charles O. Hartman's 1989 automation of one of the "diastic" text-selection methods I developed in 1963, and Travesty, Hugh Kenner and Joseph O'Rourke's text-generator, the first version of which was published in *BYTE* in 1984 and of which Hartman sent me a later version in 1989. Diastex4 was the primary means. Travesty was sometimes used as an intermediate processor, and its output was usually sent through Diastex4. The format, punctuation, certain suffixes, and other features of some of the programs' outputs were minimally revised in making the poems.

In using the "diastic" method, one draws linguistic units (here single words) from source texts by reading the source and successively finding units in which the letters of a "seed text" occur *in corresponding places*. (Thus "diastic," on analogy with "acrostic": "[spelling-]through verse.") E.g., "Net Murder I" begins: "Now jeopardizes catch./ /More huge stretched land./ /Marketable fishermen after stopping salmon leverage sea./ —a diastic "spelling-out" of the seed "net murder at sea"; the seed letters are set here in bold face. (This was not the only seed text used in making "the net murder poems.")

OFFICER STEPHEN PAUL MILLER

It was about 11 P.M. on November 11, 1984.
I was working out of the 33rd precinct in Elmhurst.
My partner and I received a radio communication
Stating that there was a three car collision and that
One of the drivers was possibly intoxicated.

When we arrived at the scene, two of the drivers approached us,
While one of the drivers stayed in his 1985 Lincoln Continental.
The two other drivers said that the driver of the Lincoln was
completely uncooperative
And intoxicated.
When my partner asked the driver for his license, registration, and
insurance card,

The driver stated, "Fuck you."
My partner then asked the driver to get out of the car
And again the driver stated, "Fuck you."

At this time, my partner, realizing the driver was intoxicated,
Reached into the car and attempted to help the driver out,
But was met with a sidekick that was aimed at his groin. It just missed.
I pulled the still unidentified driver out of the brand new Lincoln and,
When the driver attempted to hit me,
I blocked his punch, and
Countered his head butt with a right cross,
Knocking the driver to the ground,
Where he was cuffed and arrested
For driving while intoxicated and resisting arrest.

As soon as the driver was put into the marked police car and read his
rights,
He stated to me, "You don't know who I am.
I'm John Gotti and I'm going to kill your mother.
Then I'm going to kill you. First I'm going to rape you.
Then I'm going to kill you slowly and then they'll find you
Stuffed in a trunk in New Jersey. I did hard time for murder,"
He continued, "and this is shit. I've been sleeping in jail with niggers all
my life."

We proceeded to
The precinct where an ambulance was dispatched for Mr. Gotti,
Even though he did not request medical aid nor want to go to the
hospital.

When we all arrived at the 33rd precinct station house,
Mr. Gotti, who had blood on his face,
Was asked by the desk officer,
A lieutenant, who was just transferred from the Internal Affairs
Division,
"How did you you get in this condition, Sir?"
"I slipped and fell," Mr. Gotti answered.
I interrupted and said, "He didn't slip. He resisted arrest
And necessary force was used to affect that arrest."
Gotti screamed at me, "What did you tell him that for!
That's between me and you!"
He was searched in front of the desk officer
And I confirmed that he was John Gotti of Howard Beach, Queens.
His funds were two thousand and seven hundred dollars.
He laughed and said, "That's chump change.
I drop more in a crap game than you make in a year."
— Stephen Paul Miller

This poem is appropriated from a police report and a conversation with its author. Only the name of the police officer has been changed.

AFTER HERRICK

true calendars
tell ripe
each change

assuage
as night does

doting
and yet shines

enclosed in
rhymes
sphering

Bestrewed
with Ovid
(bellman Ovid)

words
for meat
give melody
over rocks

reading
by degrees

rivers
turn awhile
to men

awhile
they glide
full of meaning

shearing
melody's
meeting

— Elaine Equi

Statement:

Thoroughly tired of my own vocabulary, I decided to borrow a new one from one of my all time favorite writers, Robert Herrick. A random flipping through his *Selected Poems* provided me with a list of fragments. In a loosely thematic way, the poem is structured around the two phrases I found most interesting — “true calendars” (as opposed to false ones, whatever those may be) and “words for meat give melody.” To get started I did try an anagram of “true calendars” hence the t,r,e and c of “tells ripe/each change.” As you can see from the rest of the poem, though, I didn’t stick to it very closely.

ANXIETY'S PROSODY

(after A. R. Ammons)

Anxiety leaves the table to open the ill hung bathroom cabinet door
as clearing the soup produces stew and its odor, hunger, the art

of broth insults the body, hungering for the thick, the bright
inessential, begins on no empty stomach nor consummates: the

open anxiety puts on long pants, pulls on socks over the cuffs
(it fears ticks clinging to the deep grass, invisible, their bearing

messages of, wearying down of consciousness, known presences),
it strums the body for unfamiliar globs, thicknesses, brushes

itches, it gives in to slower legs, crouches under natural gates, rejects
the shopping mall in the distance: it loves plots, its trespassing

mounts vistas: paranoia and yearning obscure roads and rows,
markers, identification tags: anxiety whips phenomena

out of neutrality, assimilates apples into roses, stretches the heavy
weight-bearing, wild haired knotted hunger in moving clumps.

— Janet Gray

“Anxiety’s Prosody” is based on an Ammons poem of the same name which begins by conjuring the smell of a rich stew, which is discarded to leave consommé—an annoying, luxurious culinary practice and also annoying to read when you don’t have any stew to eat. I ate antacids. You go on ungratified to read some landscape images, all very self-consciously figuring the writing of poetry. I pushed that imagery to represent the specific anxieties of a walk I often take trespassing in a large nursery here in central NJ, unsure whether the images would still figure writing, but they sort of did: something shaggier and more willingly overwhelmed by materiality than Ammons’ and pressured with “paranoia and yearning” rather than Ammons’ “patience and calm.”

CHEMICAL SPEECH

do not reveal their true meanings
yet Something seems to be there
turning-back
happen to see a beauty like them
he even tries (in his dream) to interpret
actually engaged in conversation
in this way
he does not care to know
why he lives they simply borrow
a name descriptive of
the children on the street
flair with which they sometimes
satisfy their own purposes
what's bothering you
an endless procession of possible
worlds by their inconsistency
is not free
what's unseen in my eternity
freshly laid out yield
to see famous places
the steamer slowly pulled away
is about to capitulate
cuts off its head with its own sword
I remember how I sobbed and cried
entering her apartments late at night
at the end of each
lies a chain of mountains
when couples have not yet formed
listen to the old musician
who is standing with his back
to the mast to undertake
psychoanalytic treatment
around five in the morning
the body of his son on his knees
proportion backwards
not a part of it bent the bone
bulb breakage or circular
I have been watching
his dream in a grove of silica
logged post-industrial soda
American repetition that gets
guts laughed off
sweeping the floor divisions
of high-class people
thin lips and not even know
that styles get granular
shit on my shoes
a labyrinth of consumers
forced outside for coffee
the look accustomed to

— Andrew Levy

"Chemical Speech," to my eye and ear, questions the territorialization of identity through its juxtaposition of personal and urban space wrought to show a poem at work, as an experience of moving through the politics of the society in which I and others live. Appropriation as redemption — to enlarge what you feel is worthy.

Dialogue, and diminutions asp pass. Shapes dewey alcove soup alert kit lute kindle. Shy a sloth beer sauce, plagiarism flasks nothing snuff to pluck stirrup. Ink knelt bean dip dealt arts link ids. Plenty plow. Avoid furtive peer napkin, burly god survival

shoveling chairs, sour peas turnstile smothering elbow daily whole hog plasma. Self shambles its shares red skeleton. Wholesome colossus mode goddamn statistics bust remedy vital wisdom ridge. Oil flops and id flu kit turgid tanked rough wry rickety exegesis. Mind the hotel instead of the hymns.

likemachines

/Death As A Way Of Life
Death Angels Of Shadow
Death At Charity's Point

At St. Anselm's, Death, Death By Fire
Death At Charity's Point

Death
By Sheer Tongue Death For A Darling Death
For A Dilettante
For A Doctor

For A Doctor, Death From A Top Hat
Death: Grim Realities
& Comic Relief

Death Has Deep Roots
In A Bowl

I like you in blue.

— Rod Smith

This is the last page of a 10 page poem formerly entitled "Clothes with Imagination", now called "Preface to Logic". Both titles being appropriations, the former from a very badly done television commercial, the latter an out of print book of philosophy. "likemachines" was a typo in the *Washington Post*. The body of the poem with the exception of the last line are titles of books obtained by typing in "death" on the computer system at a bookstore of former employ. "I like you in blue." is a quotation from a scrap of paper handed me by a flirtatious friend. The poem was written very quickly after reading the first line in the paper with the scraps on my desk. It seemed to me then and still seems to me more or less an experience of an intense "synchronicity", cognitive or spiritual, depending on your mood. Many instances of appropriation in my writing tend to be political, aimed at a kind of "nasty discursive irony". The concept itself seems to me useful in the sense that it questions to what degree one can usefully distinguish between self and world.

graded series
 1. Also cout an addit
 n commo in. [SUR-1 +
 inguishe t ur 'tez), n.
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an adv. fan
 Tina Darragh

Also cout an addit
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be. I. a gain
 F: lit (eld) pa

— Tina Darragh

appropriation: private act->public property->public act
 "to place at the disposal of the community"

my appropriation: drawing on/transcribing dictionary pages
 (mostly) giving words space for
 "criticism/self-criticism"

current project: "adv. fans"

I have been taking instructions from and/or drawing on -> cutting up dictionary pages since 1974. Initially, burying myself in the Big Book at work was a way to write "on the job". Since, I have alternated dictionary sequences with procedural narratives or cross-referenced "facts & figures" to both challenge existing perceptions and sustain the note-taking.

My current project is an investigation of the distinction between "hearing voices" and "listening to voices". In my mind, I have the image of a Hannah Weiner performance at the Washington Project for the Arts in the early '80s. As the multiple voices in the piece began to sound from readers distributed through the audience, Hannah gradually moved away from center stage. I began drawing theater seating arrangements (like the "maps" on the back of theater programs) on dictionary pages and then transcribing combinations of seats from a point out in the margin. These juxtapositions proved to be quite predictable. Then I came across a sign "adv. fans ->" at the library. An exhibit of old "advertising fans" was on display downstairs. What would an "adverb fan" be? Those on display were beautiful - many of them torn - parts of words overlapping others/parts of.

So, I've been taking two photocopies of various dictionary pages and pasting them together after first ripping holes randomly in the top page. Then, I fold them like a fan and read. Many do not yield much of interest, but some modify how the words move in the most amazing ways.

HERE THIS THAT THERE

This sky a scrap disadvantaged perspective here
This no bureaucracy is lovely hum a tune look up here
This air embargo accidental equation paper trail here
This take a nap Africa anyone home here

That without any outside help to make bread
That average small farmer emphasizes
That seventy-five per cent small industrial
That one ton of soybean products daily
That ten tons for market place Albania
That credit cards mastercard this is there
That from our Japan desk than any other nation in
That here in the United States about four thousand dollars

This former S&L magnate
This in Ohio
This huge our government is still hiding the truth here
This fiscal crime
This the final bill
This it might reach one point three trillion dollars
This why did we succeed? Dealt with it realistically here
This before one hundred and twenty-nine-million-dollar actually
This going to cost ignore
This is simply creating a budgetary black hole here

This the same old song and dance
This engineers here
Song and dance routine down by the river specialty here
Teach them product knowledge we turn that information there
This into live entertainment here
Sit back in their seats with their eyes half-closed here
Sit up can actually see them move forward here
They suppress their laughter fifteen thousand dollars here
One hundred actors windpipe show here
Talk show parody here
New respiratory drug bring on the dancing bananas here

—Ann Lauterbach

This poem began on the usual hopskip of early evening, having listened to *All Things Considered*, washed the morning dishes, felt another day dwindle into the nicety of a glass of red wine versus urban despair. I sit down, I look up, wondering if the Angel of Language can get through the architectural barricade between Self and Sky. So begins "sky a scrap", wishing for the agility of a Charles North for further wit & wisdom. But wait! El radio is still on, and now it's *Market Place*, an uptempo round-up of the day's financial woes and wonders, worldwide. I'd been its lucky recipient once before, culling pieces of Wall Street jargon for a poem called "Selective Listening," which took a droll sonnet-like form. Who needs the muse with talk radio? At what moment does the spoken word become text become the spoken word? Lyric impulse (David) meets international markets (Goliath), aided by fractured sense of impotence as the US Government shuts down on Columbus Day due to inability to come up with a budget, sweet nights in the Persian Gulf notwithstanding. I had the *thises* and *thats*, *heres* and *theres* for ballast. All else is verbatim, with no gaps for subjectivity.

HOW MANY?

The middle of the night; twelve o'clock: written 12 P.M. Of, pertaining to, or occurring at midnight. The condition of being surrounded, as by people or things, engaged or involved, as in activity, or beset, as by troubles or difficulties: used chiefly in the phrase *in the midst of*. Dualism is true but two questions remain. The most obvious one: Which one of the questions do we adopt? In the midst of the argument, surrounded by difficulty, beset by trouble, she maintained that thinking, intending, imagining, were loyal to the tradition. But how many dimensions remain inside the point? There are always two sides to the question. The state of being twofold. The theory that one's body and mind are two different entities, but intimately correlated and interacting. Her measuring stick in hand, her determination fixed, she set about her task to figure how many dimensions remain inside the point. To stay or be left behind after the removal, departure, or destruction of other persons or things. To continue in one place, condition, or character: the point *remained* the same. To be left as something to be done, dealt with, etc.: *It remains* to be proved. There have, of course, been other strange encounters in the middle of the night, but these, as well, *remain* to be proved. There was that cocktail party she suddenly, and unexplainably, found herself *in the midst of*. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, the room had been filled with people. A toy horse (The room had been peopled by moving figures filling the room.) mounted on rockers, (how many dimensions *remain* beside the point) large enough to be ridden by a child: also called *hobbyhorse* galloping through the middle of the night.

— Virginia Hooper

My discovery of the dictionary as a rich source of personal inspiration was somewhat subsequent to my discovery of systems of divination. After I had begun to explore devices such as the *I Ching* and the Tarot, both of which are theoretically based upon the whim of chance (the toss of a coin, the draw of a card), I acquired an appreciation of decontextualized units of information. I was particularly captivated by the framing function of a question (addressed to the spirits, so to speak) and the way in which an answer could be found in stray data lying around the house: the way in which a piece of information acquires its meaning in a specific context, and then by appropriating that unit into another frame (the question posed), an answer emerges through new usage. What astounded me was the hint of an intelligence beneath the surface of randomness: the appropriateness of the appropriation, even if it was as underdetermined as the falling open of a book by its own will. Actually, it's difficult for me to use the word random in the same way anymore. Scrambling units and frames of data into new relationships and chains of reasoning has become for me a path of clarity, both as a way of escaping received patterns of perceiving and as a way of side-stepping my own self-inforced habits.

REMNANT SALE

(this fragment)

Nietzsche's Quote:

Error of Philosophers.— The philosopher believes that the value of his philosophy lies in the whole, in the building: posterity discovers it in the bricks with which he built and which are then often used again for better building: in the fact, that is to say, that that building can be destroyed and *nonetheless* possess value as *material*.

What I think interesting about this quote is how it takes on the whole notion of mantling/dismantling, putting-together, taking-apart, dressing/undressing, always keeping in mind it is *material* one is talking about, one is using. This seems to me, also, to be the "essence" of appropriation which if anything does not have an essence but is those same bricks (I like to call them martian red) that are used, reused, until they're literally dust or shapeless clay again. So we all must seek our own bricks and be our own brick-layers, never originating as brickmakers but in fact coming from the vacant lots and gaping walls where loose bricks can be found, where edifices have tumbled and there is only a loose jumble or a standing facade or an exposed foundation. Then one starts building anew, soiling the hands, rubbing the hands raw, using whatever mortar you can mix. Is this reprinting the bricks? Not exactly— that would be a finer adjustment— but we can become labyrinthine brick-dwellers who finally are lost in their own cubic appropriations of space not to mention the brick-heavy thud of time as we age, alarmed! There is also a hint here of why systems must not be allowed to predominate; it's better to use whatever's available, fragments, shoring them-up etc. which is partly modernist (Pound, Eliot, etc.) and partly, even more severely postmodernist. Appropriation is about use, what one can utilize to make again, not so much anew as again. Because we have been made, ourselves, by appropriators, our parents— we appropriated their egg and sperm; we put them to use and now we can feel like proper nouns, haha! Names given to us, rages felt, loves hammered home, etc. Here, then, is what is appropriate: out of destruction, to save a part, a piece, to find it not absolutely but relatively useful, "meant to be", meant to remake or even unmake (what it was). What is already "here" is so alarmingly around us that we can't help but notice it, take it, replay it, rewind it, redo it. All else is abandon, utter abandon.

Appropriation is out of errancy, out of the errands one takes on, learning from, going at, winding through. It is not about truth in the abstract but about matter in its "fallenness" or ready availability. We build what is appropriate out of how we err, how we make mistakes, misalliances and never marginal errors. Errata race us to the next appropriate place; systems flail; time stops and starts; space comes down, shrinks and grows; one is reaped by what one appropriates!

— Sean Killian 9/23/90

STEALING

The context of my criminal record

Using other people's writing in your own work is stealing. Some people like to think of it as being influenced, but face it, it's plagiarism. Stealing, in the 60's and 70's, often took the form of "found" poems. It made us feel that poetry was virtually everywhere, just waiting to be found. You could morally vow you'd steal only "non-literary" writing and, by placing it in a literary context, demonstrate its literary or other weird qualities. You could soft-peddle the act of stealing by putting what you'd stolen in quotes, footnoting it, encasing it in epigrams, or choosing obscure sources so no one knew you were stealing.

More risky, in a way, was stealing "good" writing, especially the work of your friends. This kind of stealing made us feel like edgy outlaws (i.e. hippies) dispelling the ludicrous notion that ideas and words could be owned. It also called attention to the reality of how learning occurs and the worthless market value of poetry. Frankly, I went to a couple of readings in the mid-70's where people had stolen lines of mine and it gave me the creeps. Later, I realized that this was probably good, like getting an audience of strangers' saliva in your mouth when you took a hit off a joint of marijuana at a rock concert. I have my own scruples about stealing literary writing, but they're kind of arbitrary. I steal writing that is already in print and has been widely credited to a particular writer or culture.

Among my favorite thieves of the 70's were Bernadette Mayer and Kathy Acker. Bernadette would take another writer's best lines and kind of go head-to-head with them: give a line its due and then surround it with equally elegant constructions of her "own." Kathy Acker "incorporated," among other "source materials," a long section of Harold Robbins' *The Pirate* in one of her early novels. She changed only the names of the characters and a few particularities of locale. Of course, ten years later, Harold Robbins sued her and she had to issue a full-page public apology in the London Times.

"Appropriation," as a term seems to have become more popular during the 1980's, and I associate it with this more politically conservative era. As a term, appropriation lends a kind of legitimacy, in a capitalist setting, to owning or selling that, which if you go strictly by the rules, is owned by someone else or can't really be owned. Appropriation, in a literary setting, acquires a certain imperialist or colonialist tone, suggesting a kind of empire-serving sleight of hand like, say, artistic junk bonds or post-modernism.

No matter what you call it, though, appropriation, imitation, copying-your-neighbor, cut-ups, freeing-the-poem-from-the-page, tipping-your-hat-to-your-influences, borrowing, translating, re-contextualizing, etc. is stealing. I do it as often as I want because it allows my mind free access to ideas, vocabularies and usages that might otherwise elude the routinized patterns of my language/thought processes.

— Ed Friedman

DECEMBER

3 Open Reading

5 David Rattray & Geoffrey Young

As the editor of *The Figures*, Geoffrey Young has published more than sixty books of poetry, fiction and criticism since 1975. His own books include *Rocks and Deals* and *Subject to Fits*. Poet and translator David Rattray's books include the newly released *Opening the Eyelid* (Diwan, 1990). Recent translations include Rene Cravel's *Difficult Death* (North Point).

9 Special Event: Andrei Voznesensky & Allen Ginsberg

Sunday at 2:30 pm. Contribution: \$8, \$5 (Poetry Project members).

A member of the Institute of Arts and Letters, Allen Ginsberg is the author of *Collected Poems 1947-1980* and *White Shroud*, both published by Harper and Row. Andrei Voznesensky is the author of *An Arrow in the Wall: Selected Poetry and Prose* (Henry Holt, 1987) and *Antiworld & The Fifth Ace*, (Schoecken Books, 1973). His work has been translated into all major languages.

Ginsberg and Voznesensky will be reading their own works and the translations of each other's poems into Russian and English.

10 Piero Heliczer, Syd Migx & Vicki Stanbury

Poet and filmmaker Piero Heliczer is the author of *abdication of the throne of hell* published by Vertaling Hans Plomp of Amsterdam. As associate of the Beats and of Andy Warhol, he recently had a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. Syd Migx is currently associated with *Missing Foundation* and formally, *Cheetah Chrome Mother Fuckers*, the first Italian Hardcore band. A book of his poetry is forthcoming from *Unpleasant Books*.

Poet and performance artist Vicki Marie Stanbury will be presenting new work in collaboration with Althea Crawford, a painter, photographer and filmmaker.

12 Colleen J. McElroy & Sarah Schulman

Poet, fiction writer and playwright Colleen J. McElroy is the author of six books of poems, and two collections of short stories, including *Jesus and Fat Tuesday*. Sarah Schulman is the author of four books of fiction, including *After Delores* (E.P. Dutton, 1988) which received the American Library Association's Gay and Lesbian Book Award.

15 Special Event: Community Election/Meeting

Saturday at 3 pm in the Parish Hall. *Free*. Open to anyone interested in the Poetry Project. Voting will be held for one of the community-elected seats on the Poetry Project's Board of Directors. Note: Nominations are due by Dec. 12. See page 12 for voting procedures and details.

16 Lecture: Anna Balakian, 7pm

Translator and biographer Anna Balakian will discuss her recent translation (the first in English) of Rosamel Del Valle's prose poem *Eva the Fugitive* (University of California, 1990). An erotic narrative of ecstasy *Eva y la Fuga*, according to Anna Balakian "is as close to being a totally surreal work as any I know." Among Balakian's many writings are *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute*, and a critical biography of Andre Breton.

17 Fiona Templeton & Stuart Sherman

Fiona Templeton's recently been producing versions and translations of *YOU - The City* (Roof Books), an intimate citywide play for an audience of one with local casts in New York, London, Ljubljana, Den Haag & Zürich. Writer, filmmaker and performance artist Stuart Sherman will read from *A Remembrance of Carson McCullers*, just published in BOMB.

19 Rene Ricard & Beauregard Houston-Montgomery

Poet, artist and critic Rene Ricard's two most recent books, *God With Revolver* (Hanuman) and *Trusty Sarcophagus Company* (In And Out Press), were published in 1990. His recent exhibition of picture-poems, *Mal de Fin*, at the Petersburg Gallery has received international acclaim. Beauregard Houston-Montgomery is the author of *Pouf Pieces* (Hanuman Books, 1990). Profiled in the *Wall St. Journal*, his articles have appeared in, among other places, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and *Interview*.

The Poetry Project

JANUARY

1 The Poetry Project's 17th Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading

Tuesday, beginning at 6:30 pm.
Over 100 poets and performers including: Allen Ginsberg, Taylor Mead, Lucy Sexton & Dancenoise, Steve Cannon, Dark Star Crew, Kenward Elmslie, Maureen Owen, Microscopic Sextet, Roberto Echavarren, and many more. Refreshments available. Tickets, \$15, \$12 (Poetry Project members). See display on next page for details.

7 Open Reading

9 Connie Deanovich & Mitch Highfill

A founding editor of Chicago's *B City* magazine, Connie Deanovich is the author of *Ballerina Criminology* (The Pink Dog Press, 1990). She received a 1990 GE Award for Younger Writers. Author of *No Precautions* (Next Century Books), Mitch Highfill is at work on an opretta based on the shooting of Al Lowenstein by Dennis Sweeney.

14 Wang Ping, Stephanie Urdang & Lynn McGee

Wang Ping's poems have appeared in *The Portable Lower East Side* and *The Literary Review*. Born in Shanghai, she is presently writing a novel about her experiences during the cultural revolution. Stephanie Urdang writes and performs short stories live on video and film. She recently won an award for Fiction from the American Film Institute and Sony. Lynn McGee has recent work in *Painted Bride Quarterly* and the *Ontario Review*.

16 Maria Negróni & Eugene Richie

Maria Negróni is the author of three collections of poems: *De tanto desolar*, *bellos delirios II*, and *per/canta*. Her poems and articles have appeared in journals throughout Latin America and in such U.S.-based magazines as *Raddle Moon*, *How(Ever)* and *Hispanica*. Poet and translator Eugene Richie is the author of *Moiré* (The Groundwater Press/Intuflo Editions, 1989). With Edith Grossman he translated Jamie Manrique's *Scarecrow*.

21 Evening of Improvisation

George Cartwright, Michael Lytle, Evan Gallagher & Bruce Andrews working with Music and Poetry. Leah Singer & Elliott Sharp improvising in a Film and Music Collaboration, *Virtual Stance*.

23 Charlotte Carter & Laurie Stone

Charlotte Carter's collection of prose and fiction, *Personal Effects*, has just been published by United Artists. She is also the author of *Sheltered Life*. Laurie Stone's first novel, *Starting with Serge*, was published by Doubleday in 1990. She is a columnist and culture critic for the *Village Voice*.

27 Lecture: Marjorie Welish, 7pm

Poet and painter Marjorie Welish will give a talk titled: "When is a Door Not a Door?" which looks at how the meaning in Jasper John's paintings change, once the boundary of the paintings migrates from the physical edge to the center. Welish's new book of poems, *The Windows Flew Open* is forthcoming from Burning Deck. Her previous books of poems include *Handwritten* and *Two Poems*.

28 Joseph Torra, Tim Rogers & Eliot Katz

Joseph Torra is the editor of the Boston magazine *lift*, and has published his poetry in *Moody Street Review*, *NRG*, and *Kerouac Connection*. Tim Rogers has published his poetry in the *Brooklyn Review*, *Bombay Gin* and *Giants Play Well In The Drizzle*. Eliot Katz is a poet and political activist. He is the author of *Space and Other Poems for Love, Laughs and Social Transformation*.

30 Marc Nasdor & Murat Nemet-Nejat

Marc Nasdor's long poem *Treni in Partenza* was published in *Temblor*. He is a founding member of the Committee for International Poetry. Poet and translator Murat Nemet-Nejat is the author of *The Bridge*. His translations of moderist Turkish poet Orhan Veli have been collected in *I, Orhan Veli* (Hanging Loose Press, 1989).

ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY
SECOND AVENUE AND TENTH STREET
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10003

EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED:
ADMISSION BY CONTRIBUTION OF \$5.00.
PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

THE POETRY PROJECT'S 17TH ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S DAY MARATHON READING

Tuesday, January 1st, beginning at 6:30 pm:

More than 100 poets and performers including:

Allen Ginsberg,
Richard Foreman, Eliot Katz
Taylor Mead, Eileen Myles, Iris Rose
Reno, Ron Vawter,
Lucy Sexton & Dancenoise,
Kenward Elmslie, Maureen Owen,
Tom Disch, Tuli Kupferberg, Lori Carson
Steve Cannon, Paul Violi, Vyt Bakaitis
Sharon Mesmer, Ruth Malesczech
Ed Friedman, Peter Gordon
False Prophets, Kimberly Lyons,
Richard Hell, Deborah Pintonelli,
Microscopic Sextet, James Sherry, Rochelle
Kraut, Bob Rosenthal, Lee Ann Brown,
Bill Allen, Roberto Echavarren,
Jim Neu, Steve Levine, Jill Rapaport,
Elaine Equi, Melanie Neilson,
Wanda Phipps, Lewis Warsh
Jerome Sala, Michael Scholnick
Elio Schneeman, Dark Star Crew,
Piero Heliczer, The Shams
and many more.

Refreshments available. Tickets \$15, \$12
(Poetry Project members) at the door. Tickets
may also be purchased before Jan. 1 at Poetry
Project events or by mail (checks and money
orders only, if purchased through mail). Seating
on a first-come first-served basis.

WRITING WORKSHOPS

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM

Thursdays at 7 pm (October 18 through January 24).

Taught by David Trinidad. The focus of this workshop will be on the use of autobiographical material in poems, with special emphasis on the issue of self-censorship, as well as the degree and effectiveness of self-exposure—from the casual confession to the frighteningly personal revelation.

David Trinidad's five books of poetry include *Monday, Monday* (1985) and *November* (1987). A book of his collaborations with Bob Flanagan, *A Taste of Honey*, is just out from Cold Calm Press.

BILINGUAL POETRY WORKSHOP (ENGLISH/SPANISH)

Saturdays at 12 Noon (October 20 through January 26th).

Taught by Cecilia Vicuña. A bilingual workshop presented as a continuing exploration of the place of encounter between the two languages. Manuscripts and contemporary poetry will be read in the light of the fusion and confusion arising from this encounter.

Cecilia Vicuña is a Chilean poet and artist living in New York. She has published 7 books of poetry including *Precario/Precarious* and is the editor of the Latin American literature-in-translation series "Palabra Sur" published by Graywolf Press.

REGISTRATION FEES

Registration for the workshops costs \$100, \$50 for a year-long membership in the Poetry Project plus \$50 annual workshop fee. Current members of the Project need only pay \$50 at time of registration, providing they renew their regular membership when it expires.

COMMUNITY MEETING/ELECTION

The Poetry Project, Ltd. will hold its annual community meeting on Saturday December 15, 1990 at 3 pm in the Parish Hall of St. Mark's Church. The meeting is open to anyone interested in the Poetry Project.

Concurrent with the December 15th meeting will be the election for one of the community-elected seats on the Poetry Project's Board of Directors. Voting in this election is limited to the Poetry Project's community. The community includes contributors to and paid members of the Poetry Project, participants in Project programs (readers, workshop students, etc.) and regular audience. Voting will be by written, secret ballot. Ballots will be available at the community meeting.

Nomination Procedures: 1) All candidates must be self-nominated; 2) Nominations must be received in the Poetry Project Office by Wednesday, December 12, 1990; 3) Nominations may include a short biography—some version of which will appear on the ballot; 4) Candidates should be aware of the duties of the Poetry Project's Board of Directors before placing their names in nomination (the Poetry Project's corporate bylaws are available upon request).

"IF I STEAL IT, IS IT MINE?": RACISM, CULTURAL EXPROPRIATION, AND THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN ARTIST IN THE U.S.

appropriation: 3. To take to or for oneself; take possession of. To make one's own. The act of appropriating.

expropriation: 1. To take (property, ideas etc.) from another, especially without his permission. 2. To deprive (a person, business, etc.) of property. To be separated from one's own.

—*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*

A critical analysis of the structural relationship between the African-American artist and the political economy of culture in the United States must begin with a theoretical investigation of the social and cultural *history* of aesthetics and "race" in this country. However the major problem with the teaching of this history is that the *writing* of it is monopolized by white 'Americans' who *don't know anything* about the subject.

For example, it is painfully clear that 98% of all the books written about 'culture' in the United States don't have the slightest *idea* who the following people are or what they've "contributed" to 'American culture': 'Native Americans' ("Indians"), African-Americans ("Negroes"), Asian-Americans ("Orientals"), Latino Americans ("Hispanics"). As a result these same writers can't really talk coherently or accurately about the actual historical experience of the Euro-Americans ("white people" of English, Irish, Italian, French, German and Eastern European descent). Obviously this creates tremendous confusion when it comes to any clear understanding of the complex *meaning* of these various histories. This is largely because of a profound ignorance of even the *empirical details* of what the cross-cultural contacts and conflicts of the many heterogeneous groups that make up the North American continent actually represent.

Thus it is not surprising that the ideology of racism (the most powerful instrument of oppression in the world today outside of capitalism itself) *dominates* contemporary discourse about culture, aesthetics, and 'identity' in the United States.

THE RELENTLESS HEGEMONY that this ideology wields continues to distort, obscure, and confuse the issue when it comes to a critical assessment of the major role that appropriation plays in cultural theory and praxis today. This is no less true within so-called "avant-garde" circles than it is in the academic/institutional oligopoly known as the "cultural mainstream." In fact what both of these aesthetic communities have in common is an equal disdain for, yet voracious exploitation of, Other cultural ideas, practices, traditions and values stemming from *different* social/cultural groups (e.g. African-Americans). These reactionary attitudes and philosophical limitations constitute the basis of the historical *expropriation* of black cultural forms in all the arts (i.e. music, dance, literature, visual arts, 'performance art', theatre etc.) by white artists and critics who seek to not only *use* (or appropriate) the techniques, methods and conceptual ideas of African-Americans but to *coopt, absorb and consume* them as their *property* through the systematic 'legal' and criminal theft of their cultural productions.

This is carried out by the massive structural domination of the art market by huge corporations owned and administered by predominately white males who, through bureaucratic managerial control, inherited wealth, and monopolistic manipulation of the vast economic network of marketing, distribution and exchange outlets (the various sites of Capital in the political economy of culture in this country), *determine* what the schools and mass media

"teach" about "who did what, when, where and how" when it comes to American cultural history.

There is nothing necessarily conspiratorial or sinisterly "planned" with respect to this on-going condition. It is simply the way things are when it comes to political, economic and social reality in the United States. The fact that the cultural/artistic communities ('mainstream' and 'avant-garde') largely support and accept the rather heinous status quo only exposes the vested interests of the "art world" when it comes to their own privileged position within the system. So the point is not merely that individual white artists "stole" their own "personal" aesthetic styles (and much of their content) from blacks but that as a *necessarily privileged* group of artists (by dint of their "race", gender, and sometimes class) they were able to do *much more* than "appropriate" (i.e. creatively use thematic and stylistic material as aesthetic source, cultural reference or energy conduit). The truth is that white artists have always sought to *own* the economic rights to and residual benefits of African-American cultural artifacts and conceptions. What made this possible for them is the *surplus value* of what black artists and cultural workers have produced (in the form of usurious "contracts", absurdly exploitative royalty arrangements and rigidly segregated markets at the points of both material production and exchange).

THE MOST BLATANT and notorious example of all this is the recording industry whose monumental profiteering off the creative genius of such legendary and seminal musicians, composers and singers as Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Thelouious Monk, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Louis Jordan (and just about every blues artist in history) is scandalous. These are just a very few of the huge number of black artists who have revolutionized music as an artform in the 20th century and who have been mercilessly exploited. Who is the great Jimi Hendrix but a man whose extra-ordinary talent and vision have been plundered by a whole cottage industry of artistic and financial parasites who continue to bilk millions of dollars from his estate, while doing third-rate imitations of his artistry? In *this context* who is Eric Clapton? Who are Mick Jagger & Keith Richards? Who is every ho-hum heavy metal guitarist since 1971? What does the multi-billion dollar music industry represent under these conditions? It's important to note that this is not simply a matter of "trashing" your favorite white musician/songwriter either. After all I'm not interested in examining the motives or intent of personalities involved in this process. What's significant is the political and cultural *context* that they are a part of, and what they *decide to do* about these conditions as far as their own cultural work is concerned.

In this light it's easy to see the implications of the infamous "cover song" tradition by white artists (a situation in which a 'popular' white artist records the song and/or music of a black artist in order to make it easier to "cross over" to a "wider" audience). Everyone from Al Jolson to Pat Boone and Frank Sinatra, from Elvis Presley to New Kids on The Block have cashed in on this little strategy. And while the economics and academic recognition of this situation have improved to a slightly better degree (more people are aware of what is happening and why) it still remains a major concern of the African-American cultural community. Just ask the attorneys representing Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and the estates of Otis Redding, Sam Cooke, and yes, James Marshall Hendrix, all of whom are currently involved in massive lawsuits against their respective recording companies. I'm sure there are many other examples.

Another cultural area where this syndrome of white appropriation turns into its ugly linguistic cousin is literature, where three generations of black writers in this century have been ignored,

neglected and ripped-off with hardly anyone in academia or the avant-garde batting an eyelash. How else does one explain the colossal ignorance surrounding the important literary contributions of such 'modern' and 'postmodern' writers as Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, Richard Wright, Chester Himes, Ann Petry, Melvin B. Tolson, Adrienne Kennedy, John A. Williams, Ishmael Reed, Al Young, Clarence Major, Charles Wright, Sam Delany, Gayl Jones, Jayne Cortez, Calvin Hernton and even Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka (whose towering achievements are too often dismissed as the infantile rantings of a 'bitter nigger'). There are other people I could mention but I think you get the point. How many of you reading this essay have heard of/read Sterling A. Brown, W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James or Ida B. Wells? On the other hand how many of you know the work of W.C. Williams, Norman Mailer, Thomas Pynchon, Emma Goldman, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf and Jack Kerouac? Many more, I'll bet.

The fault for all this lies of course with the public educational system throughout the country who in their curriculums and policy decisions mirror the already established ideology of the bourgeois class that does indeed "run" the nation. The mere fact that the American literary canon is made up almost exclusively of European and white American males makes this clearly self-evident. The expropriation of the *oral tradition* in 'American literature' begins with the poetic and narrative strategies of Thomas Woolfe and William Faulkner in the 1920s and reaches its apex in the Beat Generation poets of the 1950s (check out Kerouac, Ginsberg and Corso for starters). Again the *issue* is not the individuals who choose to use/appropriate from other traditions and folk forms, but the supporting political economy that promotes and markets their cultural productions as "representative" or "central" to a certain aesthetic expression. At the same time the culture industry ignores or renders invisible the work of the seminal forces in the field.

THIS HISTORICAL DYNAMIC continues today with the myriad innovations in popular dance, painting (graffiti, mural art etc.), 'performance art', multimedia and film by black artists all being mined by white American artists with scarcely any real critical attention being paid to the nature of their technical and expressive achievements. One very significant example of this is the lack of *serious* critical analysis and commentary surrounding the powerful new hybrid/synthetic form known as RAP. Most white critics and journalists seem more interested in whether young black people inventing the form are "underclass criminals" or simply "obscene illiterates." This is cultural racism of a particularly insidious and manipulative kind, especially in light of the tremendous popularity (as both form and artifact) that RAP enjoys among middle class white suburban youth (records don't consistently go double platinum *without* this demographic audience). The corresponding fact that many white and black scholars are beginning to write in literary and cultural journals about the aesthetics and cultural politics of the form also exposes the dangerously reductive and racist attitudes of such middlebrow publications as *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *New Republic* and *The New Criterion*. Between the "gliberals" (thanks, Ishmael! and the neoconservatives, African-American art is getting slapped around (and expropriated) from all sides.

But this historical assault on the intellectual and spiritual vitality, creative innovation, and liberating vision of African-American art in all its forms cannot and will not stop the contemporary black artist any more than the imitators of Armstrong, Hughes, Hurston, Ellington, Parker, Ellison, Wright, Baldwin, Young and Holiday were able to stop their legendary contributions to the 20th century *canon* (sic) of world culture. WORD!

—Kofi Natambu
 ©October 4, 1990
 California Institute of the Arts

KOFI NATAMBU is a writer whose poetry, essays, criticism and journalism have appeared in many literary magazines and newspapers across the country. He is the author of two books of poetry, *INTERVALS* (Post Aesthetic Press, 1983) and *The Melody Never Stops* (Past Tents Press, 1990). He is also founder and editor of *SOLID GROUND: A New World Journal*, a literary magazine of the arts, culture and politics, which made its debut in 1981. He has taught writing, literary theory, and American literature at many institutions including *St. Mark's Poetry Project*, *Detroit Institute of the Arts*, *Wayne State University*, *Empire State College* (SUNY) and the New York public school system in Harlem and the South Bronx. He is the author of two forthcoming books entitled *EPISTROPHY: Jazz & American Writing Since 1945* (essays), and *WORDS & MUSIC IN AMERICA: Talks with African-American Writers & Musicians, 1980-1990* (interviews), both due to appear in 1991. He is currently Visiting Professor in critical studies and literature at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California.

MAGAZINES RECEIVED

The Americas Review #18

A Review of Hispanic Literature and Art of the USA (University of Houston, Houston, TX 77204). Features an interview with Sandra Cisneros. 130 pp., \$5.

AVEC #3

(P.O. Box 1059, Pennngrove, CA 94951). Includes Jena Osman, Peter Gizzi, Ray DiPalma, Maggie O'Sullivan, Tom Mandel and a special section of contemporary writing from France. 164 pp., \$7.50

Chiron Review, Vol. IX, #1

(RT. 2 Box 111, St. John, KS 67576). Features the poems of late, great Chicago poet Lorri Jackson. 32 pp., \$2.

Giants Play Well in the Drizzle #26

(326-A 4th St., Brooklyn, NY 11215). The usual unusually lively mix of poems.

Raddle Moon #9

(2239 Stephens St., Vancouver, BC, Canada V6K 3W5). Includes Norman Fischer, Abigail Child, Hannah Weiner, Johanna Drucker, and more. 125 pp., \$6.

Talisman #5

(Box 1117, Hoboken, NJ 07030). Special section on John Yau. 152 pp., \$5.

Presentations from the Poetry and the Next Society Symposium held at the Poetry Project:
May 3-6, 1990.

NOTES ON "WHAT'S NEW"

Presented by Diane di Prima as part of the panel on "The New American Poetry: After 30 years, is it still what's new?"

The Hindus tell us that the universe is recreated 60 times a second; each universe is new.

The news showers upon us daily with the stars: it springs into being with each incremental shift in the fractal patterning of our daily lives.

Olson once said that poetry is or should be "the news". George Herms remarked to me that it is important to be around newborn infants, because they "bring the news".

The artist is the continually (not continuously) newborn. In a world of discrete moments, s/he occupies the interstices between the kshanas, or 1/60th seconds that hold universes cupped between their palms, as between the arcs of a vesica piscis.

He/she occupies the interstices that do not exist. Or, sixty times a second crosses the abyss between Chesed and Binah. The artist continually (not continuously) recreates herself as Magister Templi (the gender confusion is deliberate), casts himself into the heart of the non-existent news.

This news cannot be created or destroyed. Cannot be predicted. This news has nothing to do with "what's new."

I once asked Katagiri Roshi, during dokusan: If the universe is created 60 times a second, is Buddha-nature continuous? Or does it re-arise 60 times a second also? He said: It re-arises with each world. Then he formed a dewdrop with his fingers, or, as I like to think of it, a vesica piscis with his two palms. Holding this hand gesture he said: But no room, in any of these worlds, for the idea of Buddha-nature.

The artist must be armorless, naked (as a new born babe), even skinless, to "pick up" the news (artists are the antennae of the race). This news which changes fifty times a second, like the pattern of gnats in a mournful choir. This news which has nothing to do with "what's new."

We are not skinless, seldom naked or armorless, yet we "pick it up" somehow. We say we "bring it in" like a secret halibut from the abyss. And we are not lying.

What's new doesn't shift like gnats, or like the hexagrams of the *I Ching*. It moves like regiments across our TV screens. And I dare say what's new has no relevance to any art. We have been trained to seek it, it is a movie, or a fashion. A recipe. And recipe poems will always have their place. But it is not interesting, it does not touch us where we quiver with surprise, or joy or fear. It does not tell us more than we can say. (More than what it says.)

THE NEWS IS ALWAYS MORE than we can say. Even in the chance arrangement of bitterns on a mudflat, leaves shifting against a sky, there is this urgency. It is like the pattern in the night sky that we can apprehend, but never analyze. There is an overwhelming relevance and delicacy.

Human life is a romantic venture *ipse facto*, there is nothing but the romantic fallacy keeps us breathing. And in this romantic universe we inhabit together, What's New is barely dust swirling on the road already traveled.

What's new has *a priori*, a way of fading out, of getting old (often before the brain has deciphered the letters). But as others have said before me, the news stays news. There is news in "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame"

or

"Whoso list to hount I know where is an hinde"

as there is in "The Dead Prey Upon Us", "The Kingfishers" or "Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar." What this means to me is that there is living art there, the stuff of the craft and of one's daily life. That two are never separate.

2.

In the world of "What's New" we must strive for originality, and often, build the work upon a theory. It is, for instance, Wordsworth at his worst, striving to be the peasant, or the versifiers of our own day moving from socio-political theory into the poem.

THE ARTIST WHO STRIVES for What's New perforce interposes that striving between herself and the work. The news is distorted by the demands of uniqueness. A kind of pall of self-consciousness in which we live and move as in a shroud. To make itself heard, the poem must then come through that shroud with a kind of shrillness; to be outstanding the poet must then move with a deliberate grotesquerie.

Neither the shrill nor the grotesque is to be avoided in itself; they are or can be the form the news takes, as it arrives here.

Neither the original nor the avant-garde has a value in itself; they are or can be the form the news takes; but sometimes they are in themselves mistaken for the news.

Michael McClure once remarked to me that we as poets were under no obligation to be "avant-garde", but only to do the work. Duncan would have added, the work that it is given to us to do; the work that we are called to.

The painters of Florence and Sienna painted the same madonna for a hundred years. The Japanese seem to have written the same 6 haikus for longer than that. Of these hundreds of paintings, thousands of poems, more than a handful continue to be the news. And will be as long as we are bounded by birth and death, engaged in this particular romantic venture.

That is, they will continue to nourish us in life and in the craft.

3

About ten years ago, on one of my sporadic visits to this city, I went to the Metropolitan Museum, and found myself in the slanting afternoon light in a room full of broken statues of some ancient culture. I can't remember now what their venue had been: were they Egyptian? Greek? Probably some late Roman imitations of the Greek, there were so many of them. There were enough of them, so that I stood as in a field of unsigned and mostly broken statuary in that strange museum light, and so standing, I saw for the first time that millions - perhaps billions - of anonymous artists throughout human time had turned their hands, their bodies and their tongues to the task of creation, and that it was their work and their work alone that had made - and continued to make - human life in all its pain and atrocity bearable. And it seemed to me that to be called into that company, to be one of those myriad workers was an honor higher than anyone could receive from committee or nation; one's anonymous presence in this congeries was more than any name could be, and it was enough and more than enough for a life. This news poured in on the light in that quiet room, and left me with hunger for fame and originality burned out of me.

There is a news that is always news, and it is there in the moments we open our eyes/our hearts, and the work responsively calls us. Many of those moments are recorded in some piece of art. Some of those moments are recorded in N.A.P.; as they are in

some other books of that period, of any period.

There is no need to analyze, surpass, or strain after these. As there is no need to denigrate. Take what you will, and pass on through to your own continual news.

Among Diane di Prima's many books are *Pieces of a Song: New and Selected Poems* (City Lights) and the recently reissued classic *Memoirs of a Beatnick*.

A REDEFINITION OF TRANSPARENCY

Presented by Murat Nemet-Nejat as part of the Poetry and Knowledge Panel

I have decided to approach the problem of knowledge in poetry by dealing with the problem of transparency in poetry. The contradictions inherent even in such a seemingly obvious concept, with its connotations of representation and clarity, may help us understand, at its sharpest, the elusive nature of poetic knowledge; how this knowledge is intimately related to the relationship between poetry and society, the poet and the reader, poetic knowledge and power.

Even to consider seriously the possibility of knowledge in poetry in our day, we must face seriously the possibility of power in poetry in our day, ask ourselves the shape such power may take.

The title of this panel, "Poetry and Knowledge," seen in conjunction with the title of this Symposium, "Assertions of Power," dovetails neatly to Francis Bacon's statement in the 17th century that "Knowledge Is Power."

When Francis Bacon made it, his statement had a precise meaning. His knowledge is scientific knowledge, specifically, the inductive method and his power is power over nature. If one collects, like a magpie, enough natural facts, at one point, a general law will jump at the collector from them, and this "knowledge" will enable mankind to manipulate nature for its benefit. Bacon's statement anticipates something implicit but, in the 17th century, not obvious in the scientific method: its practical power consequence, technology.

BACON'S PRECISE PROPHETIC statement has a contradiction buried in it. The system by which he arrives at it contradicts its meaning since the connection between "pure science" and technology was not yet a fact and could not be derived empirically.

I find Francis Bacon's statement interesting for different reasons. Before all, though the specific senses of the words are different today, the equation between knowledge and power still holds true, knowledge (in the sense of meaning) being impossible without a social dimension. One can see the same tension in Wittgenstein, an Austrian Jew, who, paradoxically, represents the ultimate flowering, and perhaps the end, of British empiricism, which Francis Bacon starts. On the one hand, Wittgenstein states that philosophy says nothing about the world, only about language; on the other hand, he says meaning is determined by usage and, therefore, has a social dimension. His "fly in the box" parable is about this tension, even contradiction.

The same tension between the radical privacy of contemporary poetic experience and the social environment surrounding it, and the mind's desire to cross that gap is, I hope, a core American poetic concern today.

What I call transparent style is a poetic response to this tension, to this gap. Transparency is the private mind's embrace of the

visible. It is a style derived from alienation, mental exile, foreignness. The alienated mind tries to assimilate what is distant to it (basically the society and language surrounding it) by mimicking. It is an act of translation, injesting what the language lacks. It is an embrace, a private, obsessive act masquerading as representation.

The transparent style flashes three kinds of information. The first is social. The intensity of the embrace makes this poetry full of social minutiae, colloquial turns of phrase, precise earthly details.

The second level of information the transparent style emanates is analytic and critical because its embrace often involves the mimicking of a public style, such as realistic narrative, logical sequencing or the style of T.V.; such mimicking usually entails an analysis and criticism of the society which produces that style and, often, an implicit criticism of the style itself.

BUT THIS SOCIAL CRITICISM does not entail a distancing from the social landscape itself. It is over-compensated by the embrace, by the intense over-precision of detail. The criticism occurs without irony or alienation.

The third level of meaning emanating from a transparent text is private, radically internal. This level is the most difficult to talk about. It broods like the Holy Ghost over the text and is embedded in its texture. Before all, it has to do with excess, disguised as clarity, an excess related to the obsessive, compulsive, desperate quality of the poet's social embrace. A transparent text is before all excessive. While, on the first two levels of meaning, this excessiveness leads to an extra intensity, clarity of vision, what Gary Lenhart calls "reality after two cups of coffee," on the third level, it leads to a breakdown of meaning, to cracks, impurities on the transparent surface as if at those moments the style reaches its limits and can not embody any more the poet's private vision. These moments are the centers of most intense power and meaning in a transparent text. (They relate to Roland Barthes' "significance," a concept developed in his ground-breaking essays on representation, *The Responsibility of Forms*, on Einseinstein's stills and the visual artists Arcimboldo and Cy Twombly.)

As I mentioned, this third level of meaning is the most difficult to talk about in the text. Nevertheless, certain stylistic distortions, tell-tale signs, like personal scribbles, streaks of double exposure in a photograph, point to its presence. I can only list and point to some of them:

- a) a breakdown in clarity while the poet is trying to be utterly clear;
- b) a logical breakdown;
- c) gaps in a narrative sequence; or a lopsidedness created in the sequence by an excessive lack of proportion between time spent on a moment and the actual time the moment takes or the logic of the story requires; or a sudden jump ahead in the narrative sequence and then a return to the normal pace.
- d) a sudden breakdown in the decorum of a poem by the unexpected connotations of a word;
- e) distortions caused in a translation because the translator stresses one aspect of an original poem at the expense of the others.

The beginning of Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, Part 1, is a good example of the presence of the private meaning:

TESTIMONY

1.

Forty feet above the ground on a telegraph pole,
the lineman
forced the spur he wore into the pole and,
throwing his leg around it,
leaned over

to fasten a line with his nippers
to the end of a crossarm
by a wire around the glass cup on a pin.

The line, hauled tight
hundreds of feet ahead of him
by means of a reel,
broke,
and the crossarm
broke where it was fastened to the pole:
he fell headlong
to the stones below.

— Charles Reznikoff

The first two stanzas describe the climb of the lineman and his reaching over to the crossbar in the most precise, intimate detail. But the third stanza, though it continues the tone of logical detail, is not clear. For the life of me, I cannot understand how the "break" of the reel causes the "break" of the crossarm, and how this causes the fall of the man. The rational facade is a mask; it is bogus. The fall is illogical. Though the three stanzas sustain the narrative surface, underlying it, there is a contrast between the safety, rationality of the first two stanzas and the intimate irrational horror of dying.

The third stanza criticizes, shows up the limits of the style of the whole sequence. This spot constitutes the center of the most intense meaning to me in Charles Reznikoff's text. I do not know if he was aware of the lack of clarity in this last stanza. I do not think a poet can intentionally create this obscurity.

The concept of private level is essentially a way of reading, seeing rather than writing the transparent text. It creates a current of feeling between the privacy of the text and the privacy of the mind of the reader, placing the internal in the middle of the social. Its hallmark is always an inner contradiction, embodied in clarity, a dog chasing its own tail, that such a text projects.

For example, Francis Bacon's statement, "Knowledge Is Power," is such a transparent text. While it has a precise historical dimension, the contradiction I mentioned in it at the beginning (between substance and method) points to the daring embrace of a man who breaks all the rules to establish a new mental terrain. He distorts, misreads his own text. Wittgenstein's contradiction is already implicit in him. That is his poetic meaning, a source of great pleasure to me:

I have no intention of traveling;
But if I did I would go to Istanbul;
What would you do if you saw me on the streetcar
Going to Bebek?
I told you though
I have no intention of traveling.

—Orhan Veli
translated by Murat Nemet-Nejat

Murat Nemet-Nejat's books include *The Bridge* (poems) and *I, Orhan Veli* (translations). He is a member of the Committee for International Poetry.

BOOKS RECEIVED

David Bromige, *Men, Women & Vehicles: Prose Works*. Black Sparrow (24 10th St., Santa Rosa, CA 95401). 176 pp., \$10 paper, \$20 cloth.

Rosamel del Valle, *Eva the Fugitive*, trans. by Anna Balakian, University of California Press (2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720). 105 pp., \$7.95 paper, \$22.50 cloth.

Bob Flanagan and David Trinidad, *A Taste of Honey: Collaborations*. Cold Calm Press (P.O. Box 481102, Los Angeles, CA 90042). 15 pp., \$7.50 paper.

Soichi Furuta, *Montefeltro the Hawk Nose*, St. Andrews Press (St. Andrews College, Laurinburg, North Carolina 28352). 87 pp., \$10 paper.

Eli Goldblatt, *Journeyman's Song*, Morning Coffee Chapbook #26, Coffee House Press (27 Fourth St., Suite 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401). 25 pp., \$10 paper.

Jessica Grim, *The Invertebrate Life*, O Books (5729 Clover Dr., Oakland, CA 94618). 61 pp., \$7.50 paper.

Hubert Hunke, *Guilty of Everything: the Autobiography of Hubert Hunke*, intro. by William S. Burroughs, Paragon House (90 Fifth Ave., NYC 10011). \$19.95 cloth.

Bill Kushner, *Love Uncut*, United Artists (Box 2616, Peter Stuyvesant Station, NYC 10009). 80 pp., \$6 paper.

Monica Rex (two titles) *The Burning Dress* and *The Story of the Black Box Flight Recorder or (War's a Boy Game)* — stories. Le Momo Press (P.O. Box 661441, Los Angeles, CA 90066). \$2 each, paper.

Sal Salasin, *Casa de Caca*, Apathy Press (Baltimore). 47 pp., paper. No price or address listed.

Tom Savage, *Processed World*, Morning Coffee Chapbook #27, Coffee House Press. 20 pp., \$10 paper.

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc. (19 Union Square West, NYC 10003). 325 pp., \$25 cloth.

5 New Titles from Hanuman Books (P.O. Box 1070, Old Chelsea Station, NYC 10113).

Dodie Bellamy, *Feminine Hijinx*. 154 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Bauregard Houston-Montgomery, *Pouf Pieces*. 111 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Jack Kerouac, *Safe in Heaven Dead*, Interviews compiled and edited by Michael Stephens. 125 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Francis Picabia, *Yes No: Poems & Sayings*, trans. by Remy Hall. 57 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Jack Smith, *Historical Treasures*, ed. by Ira Cohen. 136 pp., \$4.95 paper.

Arguing with Something Plato Said: (A Few Environs Poems), by Jack Collom, Rocky Ledge Cottage Editions (2227 West Nicholl Street, Boulder, Co. 80304), 1990, 63 pp., \$7.50, \$8.50 post paid.

Depending how you count them, 56 different wild bird species caught Jack Collom's eye during "A Day's Observations", a long, episodic poem in his exhilarating new book. I once saw him spot 52 species in a morning over the sandscapes of New York's Jamaica Bay. Bird-watching is not his "metaphor", not his "symbolic activity"; it's in his poems because his eye constantly lights up, flicks about from his vivid sense of place, wakes up moment by moment to the value of what's seen. Flash-color-feather: delight: warmth of blood in vein: language full of that blooding.

His quarrel is with bloodless language, with the Platonic logos and with language appropriated for the mere commerce of thought:

Blood's biodegradable but logos
piled up like a plastic eyesore, fore-
shadowed a bloodless dry reign...

says his title poem: it wrongs the "environs" to leave verbal litter. To see in tune, to speak with tune... The only true environmentalism for me is this: to watch with care, to be non-abstract, non-self-righteous, zingy, hilarious and heady: Collom's speech, naturally voiced, fast as bird-song, the eye that of a nature warden.

The first poem, "A Preface to Surroundings", establishes a definition of "environ" which underlies all the other poems. The "Preface" is in that crazy scientist-magician voice, familiar from Collom's stage raps, which seems to take you around the curves of universal space-time as you cling to a dis-carbodied steering wheel:

I'm surrounded by thicket & vowels.
Nothing solemn, sane, smooth, but
aesthetic that focuses out as it circles back in, thru
civilized surface above horrible chasm
of mindless beauty.

This "Preface" has behind it Collom's reading in the modern mathematics of natural process and of relativity: we can glimpse states of mind where entropy (and, presumably, the forward arrow of time) falls apart. In such states, we would be part of the living presence of surroundings; and the speech that most nearly wings out of such states is the poetic. We subtract from the "environs" the poet's four cubic feet, and the rest, extending from finger-tips, is surroundings: is what we are in speech with: is universe. The voice-flight twists and turns into surprises because it keeps hard to the curves that bind beauty into its evanescent forms.

These flights can meander too. There's a beautiful meditation upon the slaughter and extinction of the passenger pigeon. At one moment we're talking about Alexander Wilson who spoke of an:

estimated 2,230,272,000 individuals,
who devoured 17,424,000 bushels of
nuts every day

Next moment, well, it's 1900, the last known wild pigeon is shot by a small boy ("a future President, rumor has it"). The poem fills the sky absolutely with pigeon wings and gradually the sky empties; the gloss of this single species is given to us and the forces that Collom combats take the gloss away eternally. It's a lament not exactly conducted by lamenting but by recording, quite chirpily sometimes. A section does something new with the limerick meter:

There once was a passenger dove
Who divided to billions by love.
The infinite flights
Intercepted the lights
That normally flowed from above.

& the clef of that feathered eclipse
Led alignments of notes to the lips
Of the faces thereunder,
Effusions of wonder:
"...the flotillas of lavender ships!"

An odd conjunction of the funny and the lyrical here: something indefinable gets into the featheriness. The sequence audaciously bows out by using the last line of one limerick to introduce the next part of the pigeons' story.

The central sequence is "A Day's Observations", where Collom's eye and ear are as quick to pick up on daily town doings as on bird life. These are versicles, acrostics, and prose poems centered in moments of a day and titled with phrases born in those moments. A life closely observed can give us a more general happiness, as language becomes vivified not just with birds seen, but with shop names, a car drive progressing, the voices of near ones and of strangers taken into the carefulness. I'm just very fond of this.

Plato's shadow world next comes into question; there's a clear epigram on making distinctions; a "section" of found passages which imply relation between warmth of heart and closeness of eye; and then the ambrosia-rap voice speaks a great "Pandoric Brain" "exuberation". Collom gives us a non-lugubrious, breathing evocation of the crow; an idea- and sound-rhyming piece on ecology; and this "Letter with Upped Parameter":

Dr. Heinz Maria Ueberhauptnichts explained that the quality of mysterious energy has been hogged, throughout history, by a sinister demon elite cabal of gauche rightwing leftist quasi-Luddite Hottentot alchemical mugwumps, who have told everybody to think, long as they come up with something white and perfect. Meanwhile, *they* knew how to circumnavigate the quanta & the quanta's dogs & come up smelling like the last rose of summer.

Which I cite to show that Collom is not Panglossing-about among highly-pretentious, everything's-possible, new ageism. His greatest virtue is to show us the blindingly obvious: that to see as immediately as possible is the same as to care.

—Reviewed by Douglas Oliver

Homer's Art, by Alice Notley, The Institute of Further Studies (#9 in the *Curriculum of the Soul* fascicle series), (Nemesis Distribution Co., Box 685, Canton, NY 13617). 1990. 23 pp., \$6. paper.

Alice Notley's 4-part poem *Homer's Art* is a wonderfully disturbing work. It begins rather cheerfully;

POEM.

I work in a whorehouse, I seem to like it.
It is dark like a cave, with pink light ...

The place is mostly for women, no money is exchanged, and there is really no sex there. It is rather emotions that are exchanged.

It is also a place to teach and rest in. The scene is almost cozy, until the last eight lines, when crumbling power, politics and the Vietnam War make their terrible entrance:

...your concerns are pressing, & transient; but your powers, reinforcingly assented to by your women, are still most dreadful. I miss you. I do. And we miss him; we miss my brother, the man who just died from the Vietnam War.

Next in a prose piece, "Homer's Art," Alice (I don't want to call her Notley) writes about how both of Homer's public stories are generated by war and are male-centered, stories for men about a male world, and how men who have written them since Homer have tried to be near the center of the politics of their time.

Then Alice asks: how could a woman write an epic? How could she now if she decided the times called for one?

She tells us how a woman who is affected by the Vietnam War but never knew what it was like to be there and had no role in the shaping of the policy with regard to that war or any war, if she wants to write a poem about it, she is likely to write something lyrical, rather than epic, and that in these times, a man would be likely to make that choice as well.

... the greatest point of comparison between the two wars, Trojan and Vietnam, lies in their stupidity - which is where tragedy begins & where a story must be told...there might be recovered some sense of what mind was like before Homer, before the world went haywire & women were denied participation in the design & making of it. Perhaps someone might discover that original mind inside herself right now, in these times. Anyone might.

Then follows a mysterious poem, "Mother Mask", illustrated on the cover by Guy Berard, with a strange pumpkin-like mask with feathers, gloves and weird beard protruding. It harks far, far back in our subconscious, to the matriarchy before Homer and classical Greece, when the mythic Triple Goddess reigned, before the Northern invaders imposed Zeus and patriarchy, and put an official ending to all that.

"White Phosphorus", the fourth and most dramatic poem in the book is written with short, often repeated, word-fragments. Gertrude Stein's writings come to mind, where a word is introduced and then repeated with the words repeated before; but Alice's writing is more intense and dramatic, less playful than Gertrude's. Her words are like spoken by someone for whom speaking is difficult; but then how could anyone speak coherently and sensibly about this terrible, shattering, stupid war that makes no sense.

"No one cared" "that he went there" (the quotes are Alice's) ... "no magnanimity" "to an enemy" "no feeling for what" "is invisible" ... "And when he came back" "from Nam" "at first" "he wanted" "to go back" "back there, was it where" "he belonged now? war?" "Homeric sacrifice" "noise of darkness" "fear of darkness" "now mantle of innocence" "King of his death now" "Home" "I've come home" ... "Homeric" "he said it was hideous" "all of it" "hideous" "every instant in Nam" "theatre of worsts" ... "My brother" "is owl" "Athena-like" "wise" "I know things only" "this way" "My brother" "is Owl."

These scattered quotes cannot do justice to the epic range of Alice Notley's voice. Through the continuous clatter and noise of our so-called channels of info-communication, she may well turn out to be, as a woman, our present-day Homer, a rare and authentic voice, though heard and listened to by only a fortunate few.

—Reviewed by Rudy Burckhardt

Windows by Robert Creeley, New Directions (333 Sixth Ave., New York, NY 10014), 152 pages; \$19.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

Defining his dissent from the monolithic orthodoxies of American midcentury mainstream poetics, Robert Creeley once said that what he was after in his own poems had nothing to do with then-prevailing "dry and intellectually articulate" modes of detached, civilized, distanced verse statement. What he himself was after in poetry, he said, was something at once more intense and personal, immediate and common: a "more resonant echo of the subconscious or inner experience."

In his eleventh major collection, Creeley's long, dedicated pursuit of that elusive experiencing psyche, in all its haunting and various linguistic reverberations, narrows down to the bleak specifics of aging, and to a concomitant sense of distance from a world emptied of all save those persistent, resonant echoes, "shrunk / to some recollected / edge" of thought and feeling.

Windows is Creeley's finely muted but characteristically insistent valedictory salute to a world from which, he is all too acutely conscious, his own exit may be imminent. Likewise that of his artistic generation. In "The Company," a rare Creeley "public poem" addressed to the Harvard Signet Society, the poet ponders the collective alienation of his postwar generation of mavericks, renegades and innovators.

We—*morituri*—blasted from classic humanistic *noblesse oblige*, all the garbage of either so-called side, hung on to what we thought we had, an existential

raison d'être like a pea
some faded princess tries to sleep on...

As he loops back over his themes and concerns in poem after poem (no fewer than seven pieces here are titled either "Echo" or "Echoes"), Creeley's current obsessively retrospective view ("backwards—as if retentive") sometimes catches him up in what he at one point frankly terms an "echo of device." Yet there is no gainsaying the accumulating emotional power of these echoes.

"How dead now the proposal of life simply," he laments at one point here, "How echoing it is." Those are not the sentiments of a man who confronts mortality armed with easy redemptive messages. The rigorous Yankee minimalist and native son of New England has come around in his later years to a severely realistic pessimism about human possibility—"a protestant, a complex / determination of this loneliness of human spaces," as he puts it. *Windows* is a ghostly journal of conscience, elegiac and ironic; also desperate, rueful and confused.

Measured as always in exacting, impeded nervous rhythms reflecting intimate micro-musics of speech, Creeley's voice has all the same never before seemed so distinctly Puritan and New Englandish in its subdued meditative inflections. Updating a principal interest of contemplative writers in English since the spiritual mavericks of the Reformation, like John Bunyan and the Puritan diarists who initiated modern "private" writing, it is a voice of the everyday struggle of the inner life: quiet, sometimes troubled, ultimately to be trusted.

—Reviewed by Tom Clark, whose latest book of poetry is *Fractured Karma* (Black Sparrow).

In the Buildded Place by Michael Heller, Coffee House Press (27 North Fourth Street, Suite 400, Minneapolis, MN 55401), 1989. 117 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Michael Heller's fifth book of poems, *In the Buildded Place*, is wrenchingly honest and gracefully literate testimony. Certain inner spaces, seemingly beyond articulation, have been given voice, in a manner that is mature and acutely intelligent. It attests a poetic development of unique importance.

Originally trained as an engineer, Heller is on intimate terms with the lexis of empiricism. He possesses the rare ability to synthesize science and myth. The result is an extraordinary metaphysics:

BORN IN WATER

Born in water. I was born in
my mother's water and washed out
into the world from the burst sac.

When my mother died, we respected her wishes,
collected her ashes at the crematorium,
then spread them on the grass over my father's grave.

And because the wind was blowing,
we poured water from a plastic pitcher,
and added water from our eyes
so the ashes wouldn't blow away
but seep into the ground.

Mother and father, as on the day
I was conceived, mingled together.

Such simplicity and clarity, reminiscent of early mentors like George Oppen and Carl Rakosi, reflect a penchant for technologies:

World O world of the photograph, granular,
Quantumed for composition in the film's grain,
But here blurred, soft-toned and diffuse
Until the whole resolves into an ache, a
Chimerical, alchemical flower, a pattern
Against pure randomness.

As though the process itself exists to mock
What is discrete, is singular.

Like William Bronk, too, Heller exploits a relationship between spiritual and physical distances:

WITH A TELESCOPE IN THE SANGRE DE CRISTOS

There
Where the mountains bulked
Above the valley floor

And town and ranch lights
Made shallow bowls
Into other heavens

[. . . .]

The nebula's thumbprint swirls:
This fine life of bonds and connections . . .

Then
I looked in
At another's eyes

Looked past that image
Of the self,
In at the pupil's black hole [. . .].

The ultimate dynamic, of perception and language, is epitomized by a self that resides within the poem. Thresholds then become critical:

This cliff edge leads outward
Towards the deepest blues of space,
Worlds of history at one's back—

The dead and wasted centuries.
And here one can manipulate the gaze
So that the gazer finds himself expendable.

Scene engulfs viewer, subsequently to become the poet's text. When the subject is Heller's family or Jewish heritage, the poignancy of suffering and loss is often realized through natural landscapes; this complex informs a sense of life as ongoing *poesis*—as in "On Dry Lakes Trail," a compelling, searching meditation:

Mother and father gone, and I, the new orphan,
new to my orphan-ness, summon what I can
to staunch the little gap.

For these rounds of my grief, I imported fauna
into the poem. For father, who died first,
the heron was imploded into lines and stanzas.
I thought of white-feathered Chinese death
and tic-like nervous beauty. So many times,
in his last years I saw him with his fingers
worrying his lower lip.

Deep and loving empathy emerges from felicitously juxtaposed personal details that can be graphically blunt, though never sentimental:

Mother, I played on reversals, the facts
of your life. You'd been cut by a dozen
operations, both breasts gone. And when,
by accident I found insurance photos
in an envelope amid the memorabilia,
I saw how the surgeon's knife had given
you the body of a male.

O miracle, that the force of you survived.

The restrained play in "O miracle" is rueful. Finally, however, there is acceptance. These are the conditions of what Heller would say is our "living root." His poems occupy an at times awkward, yet decidedly human "Buildded Place," a place of "bone and space twisted on itself."

—Reviewed by Burt Kimmelman

Objects of Thought, Attempts at Speech by Leonard Schwartz, Gnosis Press (P.O. Box 42, Prince St. Sta., New York, NY 10012), 1990. 60 pp. \$9.95 hardcover, \$6.50 paper.

One way of describing modern poetry would be to emphasize its tentative qualities and refer to it as "a series of presentations in search of a subject." These words, taken from one of Leonard Schwartz's recent essays, quite aptly alert us to the fact that a poem is never fully (or never merely) what it appears to represent. When we are dealing with poetry, to use Schwartz's phrase, the question is always "how the illusion of subject is acquired." How does poetic language both refer to the compositional strategies that give it shape and at the same time create the appearance of being *about* something?

Schwartz's own poetry is in some ways an exploration of this question. Many of the poems in *Objects of Thought, Attempts at Speech*, Schwartz's first full-length collection, focus on the process by which the things, events and ideas that occupy our thoughts become attempts at significant speech. To a certain extent, these objects of thought have their origin in the physical world. Consider the opening lines from "The Pier":

In the ink-blue light, the polished stones
presumably in solar motion

might merely be a mural drying.
Bottlecaps sparkle underfoot

like eyesight fallen to earth.
Coffee spills, steaming from the ground:

its smoke is damaged. The pier is old.
Its clouds are gowned in poison.

Schwartz's description here is both a reference to a "real" pier (probably on Manhattan's upper west side) and a representation of the verbal energies that sustain the illusion that what we perceive can be described in language. As an object of thought, this old and damaged pier becomes a kind of entertainment, even if a significant aspect of this entertainment develops around our awareness that what we are looking at is a verbal construct, a "mural drying" filled with clouds that are "gowned" and eyesight which has "fallen to earth." The subject of the poem is our oscillation, as readers, between what might have once been tangible space or an event and what is, on the page in front of us, a mere attempt at speech.

This oscillation is perhaps even more emphatically called to our attention in "Between Perception":

In the mind that which suffocates
comes to nourish. That which is beyond thought
becomes a kind of bread.

The soul on fire: the illusion of souls.

But the fire, real.

"Am I invisible?", a man in a rag
challenges from the corner, begging for change.

Abrupt, what we see, what we don't
its movement past, and always beyond.

My thought in my mouth
but thought out of breath.

Yes, yes, you are invisible
as everything real is made invisible
in the economy of need.

The poem takes place in the narrator's meditation on the nature

of his own thinking and in the urban desolation that our nation's late capitalist "economy of need" has created. The "invisibility" suggested by the "illusion of souls" is violently juxtaposed with the "invisibility" of homeless people trapped in the aftermath of Reaganomics. The linguistic fire that burns to make way for the poem is—by implication—contrasted with the real fire that burns in tenements to make way for high-income housing.

Yet this fire is also erotic passion:

Sweet, this sweat, desire yet combing
the reaches of the body.

Her body, asleep next to yours:
the fire, and the consciousness that survives it.

This erotic tension between tangible and abstract space is also important in "Vulva Myth", Schwartz's elegant re-working of Wallace Stevens' "Seventy Years Later":

The full globes reacting to the tip
Of each finger could only have been

Dead ends, a caressing of one ousted shape
Against another, the very antithesis of
The principle proposed between the legs—

That thighs conceal a voluptuous breeze,
Of underthings in their animal warmth
A luxuriance so desired that once unveiled

The vulva, however unreal, quivered...

In the aftermath of a failed relationship, the vulva becomes "unreal", a figure of speech in a poem whose movement is "a caressing of one ousted shape against another," one absence ousting another.

Of course, when the vulva becomes a mere signifier in a man's book of poetry, the poet runs the risk of turning the woman into an object of discourse, a muse or symbolic Other who exists primarily to be conjured and used in what may well amount to little more than a masturbatory exercise. At times, Schwartz seems to write out of a kind of phallogocentric complacency, with the voice of a man who does not sufficiently question the sexist purposes such "woman-as-Other" poetry often serves.

But for the most part *Objects of Thought, Attempts at Speech* works quite effectively in a zone of ontological inquiry centered on an interesting shift away from the epistemological concerns that have characterized so much of our century's poetry. In "Meditation", for example, we are asked to reconsider the basis of visual perception:

The vision of the eye impaired
not by its own deficiency
or by any real obstacle
but by a deficiency in what can be seen.

This is the further storm.
The death not of the subject
but of the object.

It is Schwartz's willingness to investigate this "deficiency" that becomes the generative force of the poems in *Objects of Thought, Attempts at Speech*.

—Reviewed by Stephen-Paul Martin

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