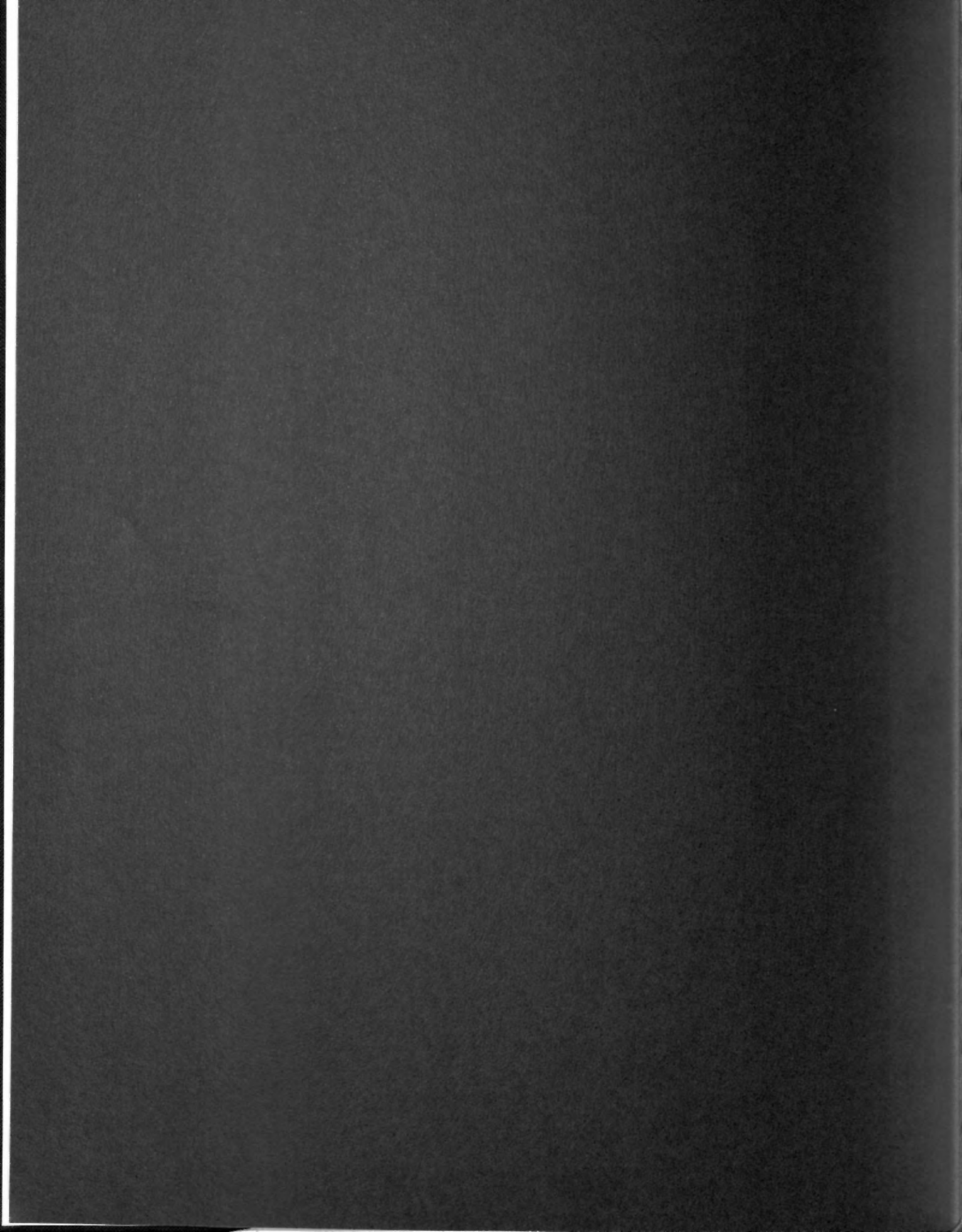


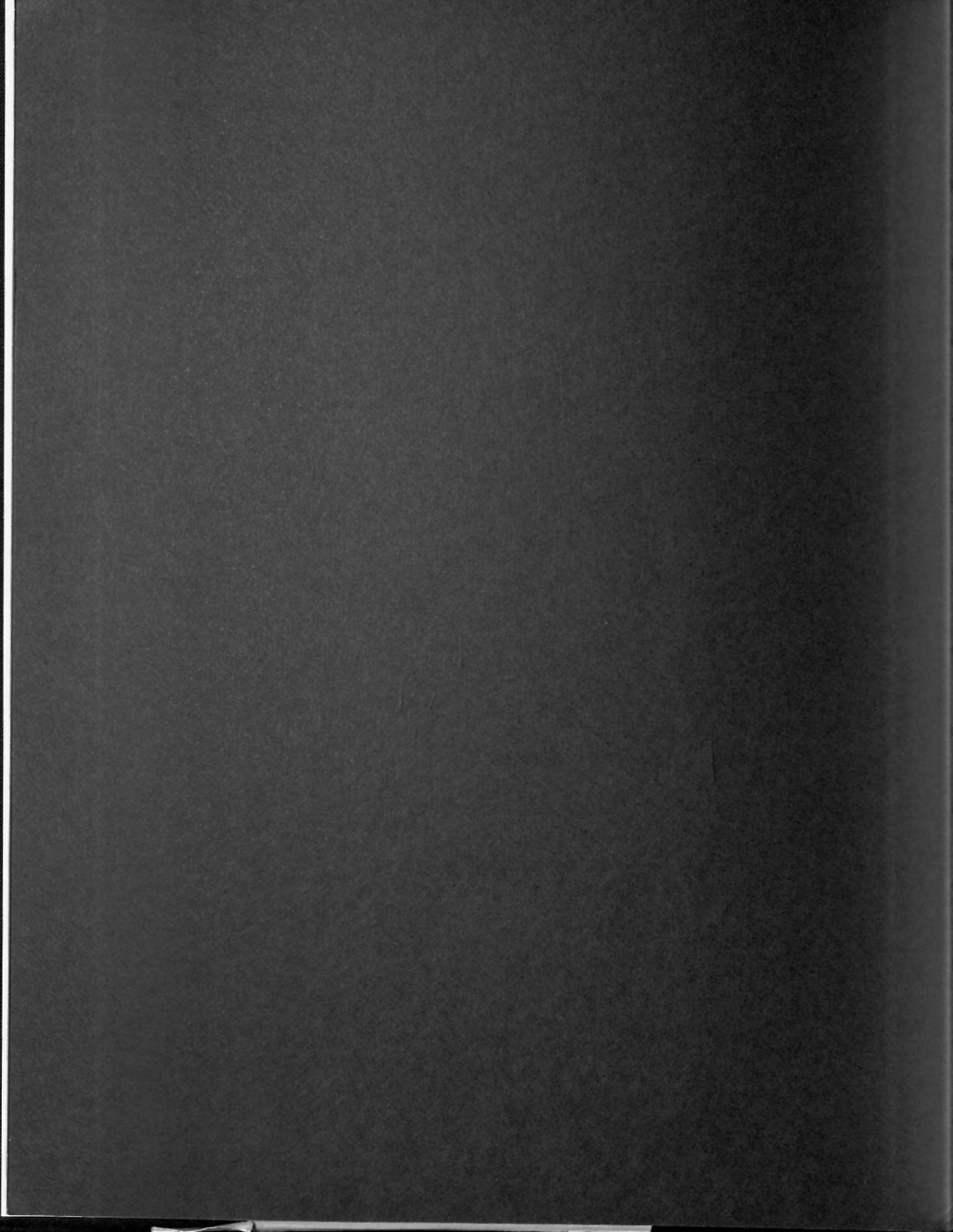
**Black Dada:
what
can black dada
do for
me
do
for
me
black
dada,
a reader**



Black Dada Reader

Adam Pendleton

2017



CONTENTS

- 9 Susan Thompson
The *Black Dada Reader*: Coming into Being
- 13 Laura Hoptman
A History of Dada Today in Three Parts
- 15 Jenny Schlenzka
what can black dada do for my institution
do for my institution black dada,
some thoughts
- 21 Tom McDonough
BLACK DADA MIME
- 29 Adrienne Edwards
The Struggle for Happiness, or What Is American about Black Dada

FOUNDATIONS

- 39 W. E. B. Du Bois
Of Our Spiritual Strivings
- 51 Hugo Ball
Dada Manifesto
- 57 LeRoi Jones
Black Dada Nihilismus
- 63 Black Power via Stokely Carmichael
The Pitfalls of Liberalism
- 75 Godard via Gilles Deleuze
Three Questions about "Six fois deux"
- 85 Adrian Piper
The Joy of Marginality
- 93 Joan Retallack
The Poethical Wager

LANGUAGE

- 123 Gertrude Stein
Fourteen Anonymous Portraits
- 129 Ron Silliman
The New Sentence
- 163 Joan Retallack
:RE:THINKING:LITERARY:FEMINISM: (three essays onto shaky grounds)
- 199 June Jordan
Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan
- 219 Harryette Mullen
Sapphire's lyre styles

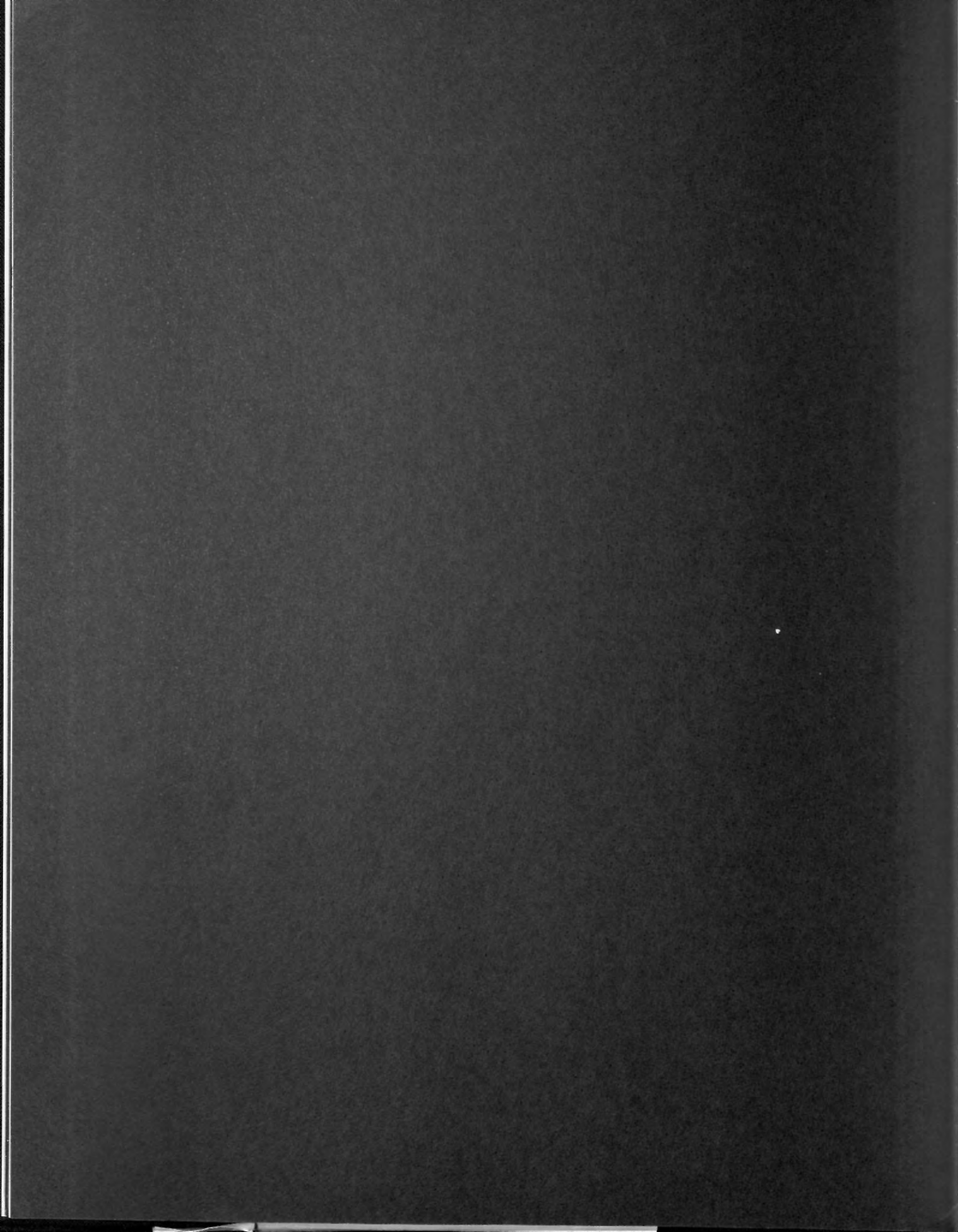
ARTISTS' POSITIONS

- 225 Ad Reinhardt
The Next Revolution in Art
- 233 Thomas Hirschhorn
Thomas Hirschhorn by Abraham Cruzvillegas
- 243 Ralph Lemon
When Viola was the queen bee
- 247 William Pope.L
Black Drawing
- 251 Joan Jonas
Jones Beach Piece (1970), Nova Scotia Beach Dance (1971)
- 255 Sun Ra
Johnny One Note
- 259 Stan Douglas
Inconsolable Memories
- 289 AACM
Introduction

- 303 Félix González-Torres
Letter to Andrea Rosen, 1992
- 307 Adrian Piper
On Conceptual Art
- 313 Ishmael Houston-Jones
Lost and Found, Memories of John Bernd at Saint Mark's Church
- 317 Lorraine O'Grady
The Black and White Show
- 325 Trajal Harrell
Dance Q&A: Trajal Harrell Brings Voguing Downtown

MANIFESTO

- 333 Adam Pendleton
Black Dada
- 347 Adam Pendleton
Afterward



The *Black Dada Reader*: Coming into Being

Susan Thompson

Although this volume is the first to be officially published under the title of *Black Dada Reader*, the *Reader* has existed since 2011. It began as a spiral-bound compilation of photocopies known only among a small circle of enthusiasts. Previously, if you wanted a copy of the *Reader*, you had to ask Adam Pendleton directly. The *Reader* is now shifting modes, transitioning from a stack of bound photocopies circulating within a limited group to a volume published for wider distribution.

Black Dada first appeared in Pendleton's work in 2008, with a series of eponymous paintings and the publication of *Black Dada*, a manifesto around which his work has continued to orbit. In *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes*, Martin Puchner argues that the manifesto is a uniquely Modernist genre. Characterized by iteration and variation, the manifesto form relies on the interplay between performativity and theatricality to link philosophy to action via poetics and to disinter a collective political unconscious. Inspired in part by LeRoi Jones's poem "Black Dada Nihilismus," Pendleton's own manifesto abbreviates the concept of Black Dada itself as "a way to talk about the future while talking about the past." *Black Dada* need not be read simply as announcing a manifesto for Black Dada, but could rather be read as "Black Dada Black Dada," or "Manifesto Manifesto," that is, as two names for the same process. Pendleton projects a world in which all manifestos are Black Dada manifestos, whether they realize it or not.

Through a series of conversations with Jenny Schlenzka, associate curator at MoMA PS1, beginning in 2010, Pendleton began to imagine a compendium of texts that would delineate the field of references that lay behind this wager. These selections would represent a web of thinkers and practitioners whose works exemplified Black Dada, and would supplement the manifesto and the paintings as ways of approaching his work. Pendleton gathered a group of essays, poems, and excerpts, photocopies of which formed the basis for the first *Black Dada Reader*. Rather than ask what Black Dada is, the *Reader* redirected its audience to ask what Black Dada does, posing the question, "what can black dada do for me do for me?" on its cover.

The contents of this volume remain largely the same as in the original *Reader*, but its form does not. Pendleton estimates that he produced fewer than twenty copies of the *Reader* between 2011 and 2016. Printed and spiral-bound at Staples, the initial version has a very specific material quality. A thick block of 8½ x 11-inch printer paper with black plastic ring binding, it immediately recalls a graduate school course pack, those hefty booklets of photocopied pages that present a specific trajectory through "Postwar Critical Theory" or "Feminism and

Postmodernism.” The *Black Dada Reader* projects a similar seminar in Black Dada. There are no page numbers or table of contents, and the reader of the *Reader* moves from one text to the next in an improvised and informal way, occasionally shifting from a vertical to a horizontal position (or even a full 180-degree turn) to accommodate the variously oriented photocopies. Such a format instinctually invites study, transforming the reader into a student. It encourages active engagement as its pages welcome annotations, underlining, and notes scribbled in the margins.

As with much of Pendleton’s work in other media, these pages were first processed through a photocopier. Pendleton’s affinity for the copier springs from his attraction to the archive. It is a natural tool for a seasoned appropriator, abetting the isolation of content and the excision of context. A platform for quick and easy replication and recombination, the immediacy of the photocopy encourages impulsiveness, accelerating the manic urgency of the collector. Even so, the cool, rote mechanics of the copier create a clinical distance as it slices off black-and-white reproductions, surgically removing text from context. Though rougher and more tentative than a photograph, the copy is similarly mediated, defined by a layer of remove from the original. Notably, a steadying hand or finger is never seen in the photocopied margins.

The *Reader* is interspersed throughout with sheets of cardstock and Mylar that often serve as divisions between its sections: “FOUNDATIONS,” “LANGUAGE,” “ARTISTS’ POSITIONS,” and Pendleton’s own 2008 manifesto. These pages feature appropriated images overlaid with fragments of the author’s name printed in large, block Arial lettering that is alternately black, white, or transparent. Resembling in composition and material Pendleton’s series *Systems of Display* (2009 to present), the collages on Mylar work as valences, their inky blocks and transparent windows obscuring, revealing, and complicating the compositions beneath them. They mine and recycle a fixed vocabulary of pictorial references lifted from the books in Pendleton’s studio, and reiterate in visual form the textual collage of the *Reader* itself. The transparency of the Mylar models a kind of conceptual sedimentation, reminding the reader that the content of each text overlays the next in an additive and cumulative manner. Each text can be considered either in isolation or in combination with all the others, like a series of lenses in a telescope.

Rather than articulate a position, the *Reader* gestures toward a gestalt. As it demonstrates, Black Dada is more mode than notion. Black Dada declares and inquires, signals and speculates, conjoins and contrasts. Predicated on simultaneity, apposition, and fragmentation, Black Dada operates within disjuncture and dissonance. It is expansive, inclusive, elastic, but not passive. It does not accept, it asserts. And reasserts. Black Dada interjects, suggests, and implies, but does not explain. With dexterity, it evades being delimited

by definition. "Things are perpetually becoming," Pendleton has said, "nothing is static and fixed." Black Dada reminds us that meaning—historical, social, cultural, or aesthetic—derives from relational context and is thus ever fugitive.

A History of Dada Today in Three Parts

Laura Hoptman

Part I: Trauma

Dada emerges from the unbearable moral pressure on art to justify itself in the face of vast human indignity. The psychic wound is its source material, its inspiration, and its fuel.

Richard Huelsenbeck fantasized about an art made “with a gun in hand.” But Dada violence is of a different kind that in truth cannot really be equated with a pistol or a bomb. Exactly what kind of havoc can be wreaked by an art produced by a traumatized mind? What kind of damage can it do? What kind of revenge can it take? These are not rhetorical questions.

Part II: The Gratuitous Act

Dada creates an arena—page, stage, art gallery wall, it doesn’t matter—in which rules of grammar and composition no longer apply. Discordant juxtapositions, arcane references, forced synesthesia, and configurations of letters and words militate against reading. Dada rejects illusion, taking up abstract form or incorporating things in themselves, from objects to photographs to moving images. It is this last strategy—the strategy of things—that might prove to be the most effective. “One can never be radical enough,” said V. I. Lenin to a young Dadaist, one day in Zurich during World War I, “that is, one must always try to be as radical as reality itself.”

To get closer to reality (although Realpolitik is like the proverbial gun), Dadaists distance themselves from the ouroboros of art as art, as well as Realism, Expressionism, and even Cubism, but with no delusions of replacing any of them with another strategy. “Art afflicts no one,” manifestoed Tristan Tzara, “and those who manage to take an interest in it will harvest caresses and a fine opportunity to populate the country with their conversation.” Art’s shortcoming as a vindicator of oppression, or even as a plausible explanation for human cruelty, is one of Dada’s most crucial themes. There is no resolution in Dada, no answer. Tzara said, “I have no confidence in justice, even if this justice is made by Dada.” Dada fixes nothing; in fact, it introduces the uncomfortable possibility that nothing can be fixed.

Dada is a “dance of the impotents” (Tzara again). But it is precisely gratuitous acts like creating verse without words (Schwitters), portraits without faces (Picabia), art objects untouched by artists (Duchamp) that somehow shame us—we, in the epicenters of the highest civilization (Zurich, Berlin, Paris, New York)—by reminding us that rationality is no hedge against barbarity.

Part III: Ecstasy

Merz Poem No.1 (excerpt)

By Kurt Schwitters

1. Anna Blume has wheels.

2. Anna Blume is red.

3. What color are the wheels?

Blue is the color of thy yellow hair.

Red is the whirl of thy green wheels.

Thou simple maiden in everyday dress,

Thou small green animal,

I love thine!

Thou thee thee thine, I thine, thou mine, we?

Huelsenbeck describes Dada as "a collective struggle [. . .] for individual rights." With the desperate, asynchronous poignancy of a cavalry facing a line of tanks, Dadaists challenge the structures of oppression with their colors, their noise, their whirling wheels, and their peculiar love. Color is in the revolving eye of the Dada beholder, and it changes to suit the definition of the object in space and time. Green wheels whirl red, and black ones whirl white. Noise is produced by that very machinery, but also by the movement of a tongue in a mouth, a body in a cardboard tube, or a fist as it smashes into a wall. Love, well, that is screamed.

As Tzara said, "Dada is our intensity."

what can black dada do for my institution
do for my institution black dada,
some thoughts
Jenny Schlenzka

What is Black Dada?

An invitation to a conversation? A manifesto? A concept? An anachronism?
A site of production? Nonsense? A proposal to formulate a black avant-garde?
A language game? A poem? An anti-essentialist machine? An excuse
to make beautiful paintings? A speculation? BL K D D ? A revolution?
A proposition to work together?

I met Black Dada's initiator, Adam Pendleton, in 2008, when I invited him
to present at a workshop about performance art at the Museum of Modern Art
in New York. In the nine years since, we have engaged in many long
conversations, worked on several smaller projects, and developed a meaningful
friendship. Nevertheless, I still find it hard to define (in a few sentences)
what Black Dada actually is and does.

What can Black Dada do for me?

The first edition of the *Black Dada Reader*, whose genesis I have been fortunate
to witness from up close, was conceived in lieu of a proposal for a yearlong
residency at MoMA in 2011. The idea was to develop a platform at the museum for
different conversations around race, gender, and sexuality that shift the
institutional language away from the concepts of "black," "female," or "gay"—
subjects that tend to perpetuate essentialism by quota—and toward a conceptual
framework that allows identity to emerge as a continuous process. Instead of
creating an on-paper definition of what Black Dada is and does, the *Reader*
already performs Black Dada's very propositions and strategies: its penchant for
mixing seemingly incommensurable subjects, experimentation with language,
inclusiveness, as well as a socially and politically invested trajectory.
By assembling essays and reference materials from vastly different historical
periods, backgrounds, and genres, the *Reader* creates unexpected juxtapositions
out of which new possibilities arise. It is hard to imagine another book that
combines a poem by Gertrude Stein with an interview about Jean-Luc Godard,
and a text-based drawing by William Pope.L. Yet these have much to say to each
other. Like its eponymous European predecessor, Black Dada presents itself as
an open-ended signifier. Inherently multidisciplinary and diverse, it incorporates
all realms of culture—combining radical positions in visual art, music, design,
theory, dance, and literature—as it aims to create new realities.

What can Black Dada do for my language?

Wittgenstein's famous dictum "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" implies that in order to create new realities, we need to create new ways of speaking—and it is probably safe to say that, at its core, Black Dada's initial proposition is a linguistic one. It is no coincidence that two of Black Dada's foundational texts were written by the poets Hugo Ball and LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka); both worked to recover, subvert, and reinvent languages that broke free from the colonized languages of daily life. Whereas the *Dada Manifesto* (1916) aimed to destroy any form of established bourgeois meaning in World War I Europe, "Black Dada Nihilismus" (1964) was an attack on the moralist and hypocritical language of 1960s white America.

In this spirit, additional poets—included under the section "LANGUAGE" in the *Black Dada Reader*—have made further efforts to generate new or alternative languages. While Ron Silliman investigates the possibilities of a new kind of sentence within the ordinary syntactical structure of a prose poem, Joan Retallack advocates a radical re-examination of silence in order to pave the way to a less determined and more polymorphous future. In her moving account of teaching black literature to young black students, June Jordan tells of how a rigorous linguistic study of the rules of colloquial black English turned students' feelings of shame and inferiority into ones of solidarity and empowerment.

What can Black Dada do for my institution?

For a start, it is useful to remember that art, like any other discursive formation such as economics or physics, is already an institution. The art world is a collectively accepted system of rules that enables us to establish institutional facts. The art institution is the place where these rules, procedures, and practices are negotiated and enacted. To give a simple example: the acquisition (or not) of an artwork into a museum's collection establishes the fact that a particular work is considered art, worthy of preservation (or not).

Earlier accounts of the interaction between art and its institutions—including those associated with the movement known as Institutional Critique—have too often ignored the role of language in governing this interaction. This ignorance prevents critics from getting to the root of the issue. As the philosopher John Searle has indicated, "if you presuppose language, you have already presupposed institutions."¹ By contrast, he argues that "instead of presupposing language and analyzing institutions, we have to analyze the role of language in the constitution of institutions."²

Though we often think of museums as containers for pictures, a museum is also an enormous language-producing machine whose aim is to continuously establish stability. Consider the contemporary museum's immense investment in didactic materials: note how every object label, wall text, press announcement,

and catalogue essay (this one included) collaborates to smooth, with authority, any rough edges of the art object. Institutional titles, unified styles, and graphic identities all work toward a similar end. Black Dada's strategy is, first, to study these stabilizing functions of institutional language and then to take the further step of introducing elements of destabilization. What would happen—and this is one of Black Dada's unrealized proposals—if a museum were to hand over its entire linguistic output to a group of poets? What if their words were laid out by experimental graphic designers free of any stylistic restrictions? Can we conceive of an institutional language that is less didactic and more open to different interpretations? Is it possible to imagine museum visitors producing meaning rather than consuming it?

Through institutional language, museums formulate classifications and interpretations. By means of exhibitions and catalogues, they establish taxonomies that group works of art by obvious metrics: because they are from one individual artist or artistic movement, because they share a medium, were made in the same historical period, or are from a similar geographic region, etc. Black Dada's strategy, in comparison, is diametrically opposed. Instead of representing an idea or establishing classifications, the *Black Dada Reader* produces new thoughts by juxtaposing authors, texts, artists, and concepts whose proximity to one another is not immediately obvious. Instead of focusing solely on the Black Panthers' role in the Civil Rights Movement, say, Black Dada juxtaposes a text by Stokely Carmichael with the *Dada Manifesto*, a text written on the other side of the Atlantic, fifty years before the founding of the Black Panther Party. Reading the two texts back-to-back recovers Dada's tactical nonsense as a precursor weapon against a society that naturalizes racial identity in the service of oppression and exploitation. Dada's assault on received meaning both anticipates and rehearses the Panthers' own refusal of the narrative of black subjugation and inferiority.

What can Black Dada do for history?

When asked about what Black Dada is, Pendleton often answers with a quote from his manifesto, "Black Dada is a way to talk about the future while talking about the past; it is our present moment."³ Beyond displaying Pendleton's intrinsic interest in conversations, this statement describes a vision of history that doesn't simply progress from past to present to future in a linear fashion. In this confluence of different periods of time, Black Dada submits a proposition that the art institution should take seriously. After all, such institutions not only produce language and taxonomies, they also formulate a concept of time, and, by extension, history.

1. John Searle, "What is an Institution?" in *Institutional Critique and After* (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), 24.

2. Ibid.

3. See *Black Dada*, 333.

Born of the same historical moment as modern art history (nineteenth-century Europe), linear chronology is lodged deep in the temporal DNA of the public art museum. Art history and art museums alike imagine time as a progression of stylistic periods. By comparison, non-collecting contemporary art institutions founded in the last forty years often focus solely on the present moment and forgo any historical contextualization whatsoever. These succumb to what Claire Bishop has called "presentism": the condition of taking our current moment as the only horizon and destination of our thinking.⁴

For Black Dada, both conceptions of history are unsatisfactory. In the first case, chronological time presents history as a fixed causal sequence that could not have taken place otherwise. It makes our current condition appear as the only one possible and denies any more pluralistic, anachronistic, or speculative approach that might begin by asking, "What could have happened if . . .?" While the second, presentist case denies any importance to the past and offers little or no perspective on a possible future. For Black Dada, the inclusion of the past *and* the future, in whatever combination, is indispensable if we are to grasp fully the social and political urgency of our current moment.

An illuminating example of what a nonlinear, nonpresentist approach might look like was a discursive event, *Supposium*, organized by the aforementioned poet and scholar Joan Retallack, at the invitation of Pendleton as part of his MoMA residency in 2014. The event was modeled on a queering of Plato's *Symposium*. Retallack invited a select cadre of artists, poets, and philosophers (among them poet Anne Carson, Palestinian architect Sandi Hilal, and cultural critic Fred Moten) to present performative lectures that began with a speculative "Suppose . . ." Following the talks, the audience engaged in collaborative thought experiments and language games.

So, what is Black Dada?

Symposium is Plato's dialogic exploration of eros, which brings me to Black Dada's most essential significance for the museum: love. Not in the common sense, as in the love between two people or within the family, but love which spreads across the entire social field and includes all that has already been and all that is yet to come. Building on Michael Hardt's concept of political love, Pendleton has lately been considering love as a force that drives not only his aesthetic practice but also the larger trajectory of Black Dada. The mystery of love, according to Hardt, is its twofold nature: on the one hand, it is a revolutionary power, altering reality and tearing down inherited structures; on the other hand, it creates strong bonds and enduring institutions. "[L]ove appears simultaneously as an anti-institutional and an institutional process, both of which are, in some sense, unlivable."⁵ And it is precisely this movement back and forth between these two "impossible" places that clears the space

for a new kind of art institution, one that would continuously tear down its own established structures while simultaneously creating new ones. It would be a place where we actively engage with the past as well as project the future, and thus illuminate our current space in time.

4. Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology or, What's "Contemporary" in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (Cologne: Koenig Books, 2013), 6.

5. Michael Hardt, *The Procedures of Love* (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 6.

BLACK DADA MIME

Tom McDonough

Fear not, this is only a sham.

—Archibald, in Jean Genet, *The Blacks: A Clown Show* (1958)¹

Late in the fall of 1964, LeRoi Jones, three years from becoming Amiri Baraka, published his second volume of poetry, *The Dead Lecturer*. Written with one foot in downtown New York bohemia, the book nevertheless marked the author's increasing distance from the Beat scene and its hipster existentialism, with which he had been so closely identified, his poems evolving into evermore rigorous explorations of the social and psychological experiences of race in contemporary America. With the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church and the murder of Civil Rights workers during the Freedom Summer as only recent memories, it should come as little surprise to find that expressions of anger and violence were inseparable from that exploration—anger, and the alienation of double consciousness, as evoked in “An Agony. As Now.” or the vehemence we can hear lurking just behind the lines of “SHORT SPEECH TO MY FRIENDS,” with its ominous decree to “Let the combination of morality / and inhumanity / begin.”² This rage and aggression receive their fullest historical treatment in “Black Dada Nihilismus,” perhaps the most famous poem of the collection.

In it, the history of the West is figured as one of conquest, murder, and holocaust, from Cortés's systematic destruction of Tenochtitlán to the genocide of Native Americans, a history that has left behind only “a grey hideous space.” The brutality of capitalist accumulation calls forth a response by the dispossessed: “Plastique, we / do not have, only thin heroic blades. / The razor.”³ “Black Dada Nihilismus” rewrites the Western European historical avant-gardes from the perspective of the moment of decolonization, of the Algerian war of liberation, with its clandestine campaigns of bombings brought to the streets of the French capital. It is a poem of Fanonian violence, of the cleansing power of sheer physical force applied against the colonizer. And in fact, Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (The Wretched of the Earth), with its preface by Jean-Paul Sartre, had only recently appeared in translation from the Paris-based publisher Présence Africaine as, simply, *The Damned*.⁴ From across the ocean, Jones looks to this example, but he has no plastic explosives to wield, merely “thin heroic

1. Jean Genet, *The Blacks: A Clown Show*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, Coll. “Evergreen Originals,” 1960), 87 (trans. modified).

2. LeRoi Jones, *The Dead Lecturer* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 29.

3. *Ibid.*, 62, 63.

4. See Frantz Fanon, *The Damned*, trans. Constance Farrington (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1963); New York's Grove Press, publisher of Jones's *The Dead Lecturer* and many of his subsequent books, would reissue it as *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1963. For a useful history of its translations into English, see Nigel C. Gibson, “Relative Opacity: A New Translation of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* – Mission Betrayed or Fulfilled?,” *Social Identities*, vol. 13, no. 1 (January 2007): 69–95.

blades"—the weapons of the street fighter. Not only those blades, however, but also, even more confrontationally, sex itself brandished as a weapon, with the narrator's desire for Black Dada to "Rape the white girls. Rape / their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats."⁵

Some critics are wont to perceive this as a "deification of the criminality of the young black lumpenproletariat male," and indeed, four years after its publication, Eldridge Cleaver would quote from Jones's "Black Dada Nihilismus" in his *Soul on Ice*, conjuring the Fanonian counter-violence of black liberation in its most troubling form: sexual violence as revenge, generating "waves of consternation throughout the white race."⁶ But we should be wary of such direct alignments of Jones's language with violence actualized; he was in no simple way writing a call to action or manifesto. As Adam Pendleton notes, for most scholars, Jones's contemporaneous work might be considered "difficult," but "Black Dada Nihilismus" was simply "bad," inexcusable in its inflammatory rhetoric: "And in many ways 'Black Dada' is bad," Pendleton writes. "But it's bad like poetry is bad, not like murder, or its advocacy, is. Or rather, it's bad like Dada is bad. Bad Black Dada."⁷ Meaning, perhaps, the poem was not so much evil or cruel, but disobedient, unmanageable, even distressing—at least for its white readership. Coming back to "Black Dada Nihilismus" some forty-five years after its first publication, Adrienne Rich sees the poem's evocation of rape as a pointed response to the period's "deadly lie of white lynching tradition" and the work more generally as "bitter verbal extremism, a send-up of 'Dadaist' and nihilist jabber, turned against Eurocentrism."⁸ And perhaps, in its invocation of "thin heroic blades," we should catch a glimpse back to the instruments of the Dadaist: the razor with which the newspaper is cut up and made to speak against itself, the scalpel of the *photomonteur*.

In these years, we should recall, Jones was as much a reader of André Breton as of Fanon, particularly the Breton of the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, the Breton of "total revolt, complete insubordination, of sabotage according to rule." The Breton who expected nothing "save from violence," and for whom "the simplest Surrealist act" could be found in the random murder of passersby on the street.⁹ In what Werner Sollors calls a "fusion of aesthetic and racial avant-gardism," "Black Dada Nihilismus" thus simultaneously "surrealizes" African-American revolt and "ethnicizes" European Surrealism.¹⁰ And, of course, when deciding just how to read this work, we should not forget that the epigraph with which Jones chose to frame the poems of *The Dead Lecturer* was the well-known oath recited by comic-book hero Green Lantern when he would charge his ring, a comic read by the young Jones during the series's first run in the 1940s and newly relevant with Green Lantern's reintroduction at the end of the 1950s.¹¹ It reminds us there is something fantastic, almost cartoonish in the violence of "Black Dada Nihilismus," a peculiarly American translation of the nihilist extremism embedded in its European avant-garde precedents.

Even its harshest critics detected something crafty or devious in Jones's poetry. A reviewer in the *New York Times* spoke of "his fantastic masquerades," of a writing that "favors many disguises," of "an echo chamber full of distortions."¹² Meant as damning critique, similar ideas are given a more favorable inflection when Rich describes the poems of *The Dead Lecturer* as "sliding screens," in which "masks and voice-overs are strategic."¹³ Perhaps this should not come as a surprise in a poem like "Black Dada Nihilismus," written under the aegis of Hermes Trismegistus, imagined by the author not only as the hermetic deity of magical and alchemical powers of transformation but also as partaking of the qualities of Hermes proper, the patron god of thieves, the trickster. Indeed, when the poem is taken off the page, when we hear Jones read it—at, say, the August 1964 Asilomar Negro Writers Conference in Pacific Grove, California, a few months before its publication in *The Dead Lecturer*, or at the November 1964 recording session with the New York Art Quartet—we might detect nuances of ambivalence, shifting balances of "irony and sincerity, affirmation and negation, caveat and invitation" that the printed words in their brutality would seem to preclude.¹⁴

In considering Black Dada as a form of masking or disguise, we are led to wonder if Jones, at the time still residing in Greenwich Village—he would not decamp to Harlem until the following year (1965), after Malcolm X's assassination—might not have walked over to St. Mark's Playhouse on Second Avenue to see Gene Frankel's award-winning production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks*. Having opened in late spring 1961, it would become the longest-running off-Broadway play of the decade, continuing for over 1,400 performances through early fall 1964; its original cast included a remarkable range of African-American performers, from Maya Angelou and Cicely Tyson to Louis Gossett Jr. and James Earl Jones. It, too, featured a story of the rape and murder of a white woman, acted out here as a play-within-the-play attended by a group of white

5. LeRoi Jones, *The Dead Lecturer*, 63.

6. See Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka / LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 92; and Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 14.

7. Adam Pendleton, "Passages: Amiri Baraka (1934–2014)" accessible at <http://artforum.com/passages/id=45815>.

8. Adrienne Rich, "What Country Is This? Rereading LeRoi Jones's *The Dead Lecturer*," *Boston Review* vol. 34, no. 1 (March–April 2009), accessible at <http://bostonreview.net/what-country-is-this-rereading-leroi-jones-adrienne-rich>.

9. André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 125.

10. Werner Sollors, *Amiri Baraka / LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism"*, 127.

11. See LeRoi Jones, *The Dead Lecturer*, 8, and 67–70, the poem "Green Lantern's Solo."

12. Richard M. Elman, "Moments of Masquerade," *The New York Times Book Review*, January 31, 1965, 22.

13. Adrienne Rich, "What Country Is This? Rereading LeRoi Jones's *The Dead Lecturer*."

14. See Thom Donovan, "Adam Pendleton at SEGUE series," *Harriet: A Poetry Blog*, January 2010, accessible at <http://poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2010/01/adam-pendleton-at-segue-series/>; and also Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 189–227.

dignitaries—a queen, a high-court judge, a missionary, and so on, portrayed by black actors disguised in whiteface and perched on a platform above the stage. Other black actors then reenact the killing of the white woman for their entertainment, in a frequently grotesque performance of the negative stereotypes of blackness—violence, sexual threat, servility—even as the whites themselves are mere caricatures of colonialism's mix of cruelty and abject fear. Only by the end of Genet's play do we realize this has all been a ploy to keep us, the white audience, seated in the theater, diverted while another, entirely rational crime takes place offstage as part of the ongoing process of black revolution.

Genet's *The Blacks*—a necessarily inadequate translation of his French title, "*Les Nègres*"—had an unusually slow gestation for the author.¹⁵ Its origin lay in a 1954 request from the director Raymond Rouleau for a play destined for a troupe of exclusively black actors, but it would only reach the stage some five years later, when Roger Blin finally brought it to the modest Théâtre de Lutèce in fall 1959. That gap is crucial, spanning as it does the commencement of French decolonization in sub-Saharan Africa, beginning with the independence of Ghana in 1957. While that geopolitical history undoubtedly informed Genet's thinking, a more punctual spur was his viewing of Jean Rouch's ethnographic documentary *Les Maîtres fous* (1955). A young Annette Michelson, at the time a student in Paris studying with Lucien Goldmann and living with Genet's translator Bernard Frechtman, had invited Genet to join her at a screening at La Pagode in the 7th arrondissement.¹⁶ Shot in a single day, Rouch's film shows the ritual practices of a religious sect, the Hauka, whose worshippers, drawn primarily from workers who have come to Accra from the provinces of Niger, meet on the occasion of their great annual ceremony. In the "concession" of the high priest Mountbyéba, after a public confession, the rite of possession begins. Foaming at the mouth, trembling, panting, and so on are the signs of the arrival of the "spirits of power," the symbolic personifications of colonial rule: the corporal of the guard, the governor, the doctor, the captain's wife, the general, the locomotive engineer, and others. The ceremony culminates with the sacrifice of a dog, which the possessed will eat. The next day, the initiates return to their daily lives. The film's title, *Les Maîtres fous*, is a translation of the word *Hauka*—"master of the wind," "master of madness"—while at the same time evoking the colonial situation in which the "masters" (representatives of the Western colonial powers) were seen as crazy. These quite particular guardian spirits, inspired by the French and British army and administrations, first appeared around 1927 in the Songhai dances of possession. In Rouch's film, the migrant workers of the 1950s use their fits of possession—at once violent and controlled—by the cult of the Hauka to resolve their adaptation to the modern colonial world.

In the play-within-the-play of *The Blacks*, yesterday's slaves also parody their masters; with lucidity and derision, they play whites as seen by blacks.

Yet this illusion is tenuous and “the ambiguous identity or reference” of these figures of the white establishment “is inscribed on them from the very start.”¹⁷ In introductory notes on the production, Genet insists that the white masks worn by the court allow the audience to see encircling them “a broad band of black skin [. . .], and even kinky hair.”¹⁸ One scholar aptly calls these masks “paradoxical surfaces of revelation and concealment,” a description that makes obvious their correlation to the place of language in the play. For the language deployed by the actors is also a site of concealment—within-declamation, of struggle over the control of meaning: “We tried to steal your beautiful language,” Archibald warns the court, and later declares, “it is by elongation that we will deform language enough to wrap ourselves in it and hide there.”¹⁹ On the one hand, language functions here as something like a smokescreen raised between the theatrical audience and the militant action happening behind the scenes; on the other hand, it retains a power of its own, a power of invention that is however turned toward the “bad”: “Invent,” Archibald demands, “if not words, then phrases that cut instead of binding. Invent not love, but hatred, and so make poetry, since this is the only field we may be allowed to till. For their entertainment? (*He indicates the audience.*) We’ll see.”²⁰

Critics at the time were as likely to link *The Blacks* back to the historical avant-gardes—it reminded one of “the most joyfully ferocious” era of Surrealism, “that of the mid-’20s, when all hopes rested on the West being put to the torch and the sword by Mongol hordes and the great Lama”—as they were to link it

15. *Nègre* is a significantly more ambiguous term than the American *black*. Depending on the context of its use, it might connote the “black African,” with a suggestion of vague condescension, or be closer to the overtly racist and derogatory word *nigger*. In Genet, as in many other Francophone writers of this time, the semantic play between *nègre* and *noir* is crucial to the meaning of the work.

16. See Edmund White, *Genet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 426.

17. Una Chaudhuri, “The Politics of Theater: Play, Deceit, and Threat in Genet’s *The Blacks*,” *Modern Drama* vol. 28, no. 3 (fall 1985): 367.

18. Jean Genet, *The Blacks*, 8 (trans. modified).

19. Jean Genet, *The Blacks*, 14, 27 (trans. modified).

20. Jean Genet, *The Blacks*, 26 (trans. modified). Returning to the question over a decade later in the introduction to a book collecting the prison writings of George Jackson, Genet analyzed this subtle battle: “As for his hatred of the white man, [the black] can utter it only in this language which belongs to black and white alike but over which the white man extends his grammarian’s jurisdiction.” And this becomes a new source of anguish for the black man to realize that if he writes a masterpiece, it is his enemy’s language, his enemy’s treasury which is enriched by the additional jewel he has so furiously and lovingly carved. He has then only one recourse: to accept this language but to corrupt it so skillfully that the white men are caught in his trap. In it he will put “all his obsessions and all his hatred of the white man. That is a task. And it is a task which seems contradicted by the revolutionary’s.” Jean Genet, “Appendix: Introduction to the First Edition,” trans. Richard Howard, in George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994), 337. This is reminiscent of what Sartre wrote in *Black Orpheus* in 1947: “When the Negro declares in French that he rejects French culture, he takes in one hand that which he has pushed aside with the other [. . .] since the oppressor is present even in the language they speak, they will speak this language to destroy it.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Black Orpheus*, trans. S. W. Allen (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 23, 26.

with the most current of events, for example the crisis in the Belgian Congo.²¹ And yet *The Blacks* was not a militant play; instead, Genet opted for a rather sinisterly comic or “carnavalesque” register, not unlike that of *The Balcony*, written two years earlier. It is a play of roles or masks that reshuffles the cards of race, stripping the powerful of their appointed place. Genet’s “blacks,” the *nègres* of his title, are colored by all the prejudices and phantasms of the West and its colonial history—a history of hatred, violence, death, and the negation of the Other. And so Archibald will declare, in an echo perhaps of the reversals of *Les Maîtres fous*, “since we are consigned to images and drowned in them, let these images set their teeth on edge!”²²

What we hear in that exclamation from Genet’s play, and what resonates as well through Jones’s “Black Dada Nihilismus,” is a particular reaffirmation of what Hal Foster has called the “Dada mime”: “A key persona of Dada [. . .] is the traumatic mime, and a key strategy of this traumatist is mimetic adaptation, whereby the Dadaist assumes the dire conditions of his time [. . .] and inflates them through hyperbole or ‘hypertrophy.’”²³ In the years during and just after World War I, this meant the mimicry of the armored body of the soldier, the segmented body of the industrial laborer, the reified body of the consumer. Through the violence of montage and other techniques of disjunction, the Dadaists signaled their opposition to these figures while also bringing these various forms of disintegration upon themselves. As Foster writes, such mimetic adaptation is also mimetic exacerbation, along the lines of Marx’s famous injunction to make “petrified social conditions” dance “by singing them their own song.”²⁴ Its critical potential lay in the distinction—always unstable, always liable to be erased—to be drawn between adaptation and identification: miming at its best constituted “a dialectical strategy” that could expose its given social order “as failed, or at least as insecure.”²⁵ This was the razor’s edge walked by Dada between nihilism and a species of politico-aesthetic immunology, whereby avant-gardist violence was both shock tending toward subjective disintegration and, administered in the right dose, a form of homeopathy against the larger violence of the world around it.

Both Genet in France and Jones in New York channel the Dada mime, turning its adaptations toward the dark colonialist phantasms of their time. We can hear it in the ecstatic violence of Augustus Snow in *The Blacks*, urging on the murder at the heart of the play: “Spring forth torrents. After those of your sperm, those of her blood. (*She cups her hands.*) I shall drink it, Village. I shall wash my chin with it, my belly, my shoulders.”²⁶ We know it from Jones’s long aside in his essay “LeRoi Jones Talking,” published the same year as “Black Dada Nihilismus”:

One way Negroes could force this institutionalized dishonesty to crumble and its apologizers to break and run even faster than they are now would be

to turn crazy, to bring out a little American dada, Ornette Coleman style, and chase these perverts into the ocean, where they belong. Say, if Negroes just stopped behaving [. . .] and just flip, go raving in the streets, screaming in verse an honest history of America, walk off their jobs—as they should have done in Birmingham after those children were murdered—and watch the country grind to a halt, the owners cracking their knuckles as they got out their gold guns and got ready to blow out their own legendary brains. It is a good, and practical, idea. Why don't you try it, Negroes?²⁷

And we feel it in his groping toward a new language, a language that will make America dance by singing its own racial phantasies back to it: "Black scream / and chant, scream / and dull, un / earthly / hollering."²⁸

That black scream is one component of Adam Pendleton's Black Dada archive.²⁹ He makes the links between that moment and the earlier, historical Dada clear by similarly drawing from those same wartime diaries of Hugo Ball with which Foster's essay opens and to which it returns again and again, documents of self-degradation and shock experience, the end of civilization and hope for renewal.³⁰ Those perhaps unlikely conjunctures are the stuff of Black Dada, but so is the logic of the mask, of adaptation and exacerbation, the legacy of Jones and Genet, the strategy of the Black Dada mime. With these tools, Pendleton takes up Jones's challenge of a half century ago, inventing "a little American dada," versifying an honest history. We see it in his paintings, in their tenebrous surfaces on which the whiteness of Minimalism is blacked up in its encounter with the poetry of Jones, and we could hear his own version of it in *Revival* (2007), Pendleton's remarkable performance work that brought together gospel preaching, Language poetry, queer activism, and more. In speaking of *Revival*, Pendleton identified the continuing validity and vitality of the strategies he has inherited and develops: "I understand the particular cultural potential of specific forms and appropriate them—but more importantly, I bring them into an experimental space. In many ways, appropriation is

21. Maurice Regnault writing in *Théâtre populaire* and Jean Selz in *Lettres nouvelles*, respectively, both in 1959; quoted in Odette Aslan, *Jean Genet* (Paris: Seghers, Coll. "Théâtre de tous les temps," no. 24, 1973), 81.

22. Jean Genet, *The Blacks*, 39 (trans. modified).

23. Hal Foster, "Dada Mime," *October* no. 105 ("Dada: A Special Issue") (summer 2003): 169.

24. *Ibid.*, 175.

25. *Ibid.*, 170.

26. Jean Genet, *The Blacks*, 75 (trans. modified).

27. LeRoi Jones, "LeRoi Jones Talking" (1964), in *Home* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 183.

28. LeRoi Jones, *The Dead Lecturer*, 63–64.

29. For example, it is quoted in part in Pendleton's *grey-blue grain* (Amsterdam: Kunstverein Publishing, 2010), 62. Other excerpts from Jones's "Black Dada Nihilismus" are found on 54, 60.

30. See, for example, Pendleton's *grey-blue grain*, 52, which cites the opening line from Hugo Ball's diary entry for April 6, 1916: "The process of self-destruction in Nietzsche." Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimis (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 59.

nothing more than offering back what we know. I don't dramatize this process."³¹ Mimetic adaptation, that is, is not simply a restatement of the logic of appropriation and the readymade; it involves an act of risk or uncertainty, an experimental moment. And then he plays on the double meaning of the term *possession*, as something owned but also as domination by something, concluding that such a performance entails both—in taking up these archives, we come to own them even as they own us. But, like the Dada mime, if the dialectical logic of this particular craziness holds, the social world in which the ordained meaning of such texts is consecrated might be revealed as itself unstable, open to change. It is a good (and practical) idea, in other words. Throughout all of these works, we can hear Pendleton asking us: Why don't you try it?

31. Adam Pendleton, quoted in Jess Wilcox, "Black Dada: A Conversation with Adam Pendleton," *Art in America* (March 2009), accessible at <http://artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/adam-pendleton-black-dada/>.

The Struggle for Happiness, or What Is American about Black Dada

Adrienne Edwards

Adam Pendleton has a predilection for machines. All of Pendleton's art objects are made with them. These mechanical and electrical tools range from computers such as a MacBook Pro, MacBook Air, and iMac, an Epson large-format inkjet printer, a laser copier, a scanner, an automatic screen printing press, and most recently a "painting machine," an enormous, low-tech device that "prints" with oil paint.¹ This predilection is perhaps exemplified in this very book, the *Black Dada Reader*, which, like the paintings that are the culmination of the process that is Black Dada, begins with a photocopier. The photocopier is an essential tool for Pendleton—it is his machine of repetition, given his tendency to photocopy images until they begin to lose the integrity of their original form. Precision pleases Pendleton, as beautifully evinced in his monochromatic *Black Dada* paintings, which are strikingly exact yet sieve a motley collection of ideas, concepts, and poetry.

Pendleton is a voracious reader and image seeker. He has amassed an ever-evolving personal library of books on literature, modern and contemporary art, experimental dance, film, and philosophy. The *Reader*, built from photocopies of texts from this collection, is an assemblage—more precisely even, an assembly line—in which the laborers are the likes of poets and writers June Jordan, Joan Retallack, Gertrude Stein, and Ron Silliman; artists Hugo Ball, Joan Jonas, Stan Douglas, Adrian Piper, Lorraine O'Grady, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Félix González-Torres, William Pope.L, Ralph Lemon, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Ad Reinhardt; and black activists W. E. B. Du Bois, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka). Excepting Ball (who was German), Douglas (who is Canadian), Hirschhorn (who is Swiss), and philosopher Gilles Deleuze (who was French), it is an overwhelmingly American assemblage.

The concept of assemblage, famously formulated by Deleuze and his collaborator Félix Guattari, is the basic set of conditions to enable a becoming.² It is a mode of agency that works by constituting a multiplicity in response to the apparatuses delimiting a subject's pursuit of his or her most fundamentally motivating desires. These desires arise from a confluence of aesthetic, political, and social intentions and can include profound ethical implications that necessitate action. In articulating the concept, Deleuze and Guattari make an unlikely turn to Soledad Brother and Marxist George Jackson for the notion of a "line of flight," taken from his prison writings.³ Here we come to the heart

1. Author correspondence with the artist on February 10, 2015.

2. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 232–309.

3. See Michelle Koerner, "Line of Escape: Gilles Deleuze's Encounter with George Jackson," in *Genre*, 2001, vol. 44, no. 2 (2001): 157–180.

of the matter for Pendleton, which is to say to the black radical tradition, or more precisely in his case, to the fact that the radicality of blackness is inherent not only to his oeuvre but also to the very foundations of Western art and thought: Deleuze and Guattari through Black Panther Jackson, as well as philosopher Georg Hegel's formulation of the master/slave concept through the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), and André Breton's embrace of anticolonialism through the poetics of Martinican Aimé Césaire, to name only a few.⁴

Pendleton thus enacts on paper a right expressly laid out in the U.S. Constitution: the freedom of assembly, or the individual right to collectively express, promote, and defend one's ideas. His convocation of these writers and artists is a speculative and conceptual manifestation of this right. Having no choice in the matter, the assembly's creative production is decontextualized and enlisted in Pendleton's cause. They are now fragments of some distanced whole, separated from their origins yet not void of their own particular genealogies, references, and discourses. It is an assemblage of seemingly incommensurable minds, which coalesce on an aesthetico-socio-political plane that is Black Dada. This vibrantly loaded field is an event horizon, a pregnant abyss of total blackness.

Blackness is an originary space-time where the human being collides with social structures that have forged a situation, which at times has been untenable, leaving no other recourse than to follow Jackson's line of flight. It is a manifestation of blackness in its most abstract state. Pendleton asks that we linger here because the deep affection, the abiding radical love between blackness and abstraction, is foundational. It arises from the most basic and essential notions of what we know to be the United States of America; it is born of capitalism, the very historical and economic system on which this nation took form and in which a concept of blackness took shape, and it has rocked and been rocked by the capricious lullaby that is the assemblage of unalienable rights we know as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Like blackness in Pendleton's art, his fascination with machines has nothing to do with deploying them as Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, and Jean Tinguely did, that is, as artworks in and of themselves. Rather, they are a mode and a means of artmaking. Pendleton is invested in what machines can do for *him*, as the cover of the do-it-yourself photocopied version of the *Reader* indicates, "Black Dada, what can black dada do for me, do for me, black dada." In this respect, Pendleton's approach is similar to the tactile technology Jack Whitten created for his painting experiments in which the works are "processed,"—the word is his— or the digital inkjet technology and scanners from which Wade Guyton's digital paintings on linen evolved.

Pendleton commands the machine precisely because we are no longer machines, no longer commodities; he is not invested in technology merely for what it can mechanically do. Instead, he is expropriating its capacity to encapsulate the black subject's position in the development of the nation, a process in which, he reminds us, we are all implicated. The assembly, called up in the *Reader* in particular and by Black Dada in general, is far larger than what is listed in the table of contents. It encompasses all of those individuals, both known and unknown, who enacted slave revolts, led the Underground Railroad, and participated in the abolitionist movement; it includes those who fought in American wars despite being second-class citizens in a segregated army, those who organized the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, who worked as sharecroppers for a pittance and who labored in Dixie's mills and the industrial factories in the North; it includes those targeted by racial profiling, those subjected to extrajudicial killings, and the millions languishing in the prison-industrial complex. These are the individual histories without which "abstraction remains motionless," as the Trinidadian Marxist writer and activist C. L. R. James put it. Pendleton correlates abstract ideas to real life to indicate that when the real is irrational, flight into abstraction in art, music, and language has been and continues to be a worthy and necessary endeavor.

I want to linger with James and particularly with *American Civilization*—his incomplete manuscript from 1950, whose sixth chapter gives this essay its title—because the *Reader* is engaged in a similar reclamation of the conventional language of American democracy: freedom, equality, individuality, and happiness.⁵ James, who was deported from the United States after living here from 1938 to 1953, adhered to the notion that art—especially popular expressions—was the foundational means through which people attempted to relate real life and the world of imagination.⁶ Pendleton's disjoining and conjoining of texts as an assemblage both announces and inaugurates what James called "the future in the present."⁷ We need a future in the present because of the historical and contemporary reality of social and political alienation.

I privilege James over Marx in elucidating alienation because, like Pendleton's own summoning of the writers in the *Reader*, James puts Marx to work in the service of the contemporary situation, deploying his dialectical method to demonstrate the singularly important place occupied by black people in the

4. Scholar Tavia Nyong'o remarked on this tendency in Western thought in his paper "Dream, Collage, Escape: Dark Future for Black Performance," presented at Get Ready for the Marvelous: A Conference on Surrealism in the African Diaspora, 1932–2013, which I curated for Performa and which took place February 8–9, 2013, at New York University.

5. See C. L. R. James, *American Civilization* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) and also Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart's preface "C. L. R. James and The Pursuit of Happiness" at <http://clrjamesinstitute.org> (accessed January 23, 2015).

6. Ibid.

7. C. L. R. James, *The Future in the Present: Selected Writings* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1977).

history of capitalism and how the black radical tradition arose in response. In *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* and *The History of Negro Revolt*—both from 1938, the same year he arrived in the United States—James narrates how masses of black subjects challenged capitalist domination. Crucially, in both accounts, the black experience is shown to be uniquely capable of illuminating the *universal* coordinates of modern society and especially so in the United States. As Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart have it, “For James the black question lay at the core of the American question. It encapsulated the central contradiction of a society whose original ideals of freedom and equality were, in the twentieth century, crushed at every turn by the coercive power of industrial capitalism. James’s work on the position of blacks in the United States led him directly into the question of the revolution in America.”⁸

In *American Civilization*, James extends Marxism into the realm of aesthetic theory, making a compelling case for understanding black Americans’ quest for organized collective life as what he calls “creative social power.”⁹ As James described, the social relationships developed by capitalism on the factory floor are contradictory. On the one hand, there is a mutual consciousness arising from the shared labor of the assembly, and this has the potential to nurture the development of individuality through creativity. On the other hand, the extreme antagonism endemic to the system itself negates such a possibility by generating alienation, or the illusion of an unbridgeable gap between the individual and the institutions that are sustained by their participation. For James, this alienation was most severe in the United States precisely because it obviously contradicted its founding ideals, doubly so when given to blackness. Pendleton’s assembly of writers is thus both evidence of and an antidote for alienation.

It is Pendleton’s everyday activities in his studio that enact this freedom as a practice rather than simply claiming it as an inherited principle or a foundational right of the American subject. The stakes are different at this level of production. What is required to produce paintings or videos as an artist, rather than commodities as a laborer, is precisely the joyful convening of this assembly, or that aspect of creative research that elides the myriad forms of alienation that beset the maker of things-to-be-sold. Therefore Pendleton needs comrades, a buttressing collective called to action to stave off alienation and establish James’s notion of “creative social power.”

As James indicated, there is no better evidence of this power than black cultural expressions in the United States: consider the relationship of blues and dance music to labor, the historical role of spirituals as an aural veil of revolt and flight, the chants of chain gangs in the rural South defying federal laws of Reconstruction, the enlivened sense of cadence and pomp in organized

processions and marches from the Garveyites to Civil Rights to Black Lives Matter, and on and on. Indeed, beginning with *American Civilization* and throughout the 1950s, James was “seeking to develop a critical method by means of which the work of great artists could be approached, both to open up the individual creative process itself and to assess its place in social life.”¹⁰ This interest was especially concerned with the unique analytic possibility of combining contemporary art forms, demonstrations of democracy, and history. Pendleton understands this essential role held out by James for cultural expression in the process of social production.

For as I read Pendleton’s assembly as artmaking and his artmaking as assembly, the founding principles—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—always already somehow escape us. They are worthy aspirations situated just on the other side of a possibility toward which we must always reach, even as we understand that an aspiration is nothing more than a mere hope, a feeling, a desire for something to be actualized. We must be aware of this elusive setup. We must be willing to wager with it. The point is that one must act, one must assemble now, one must always be in the process of struggle that is the now. The imperative is to express one’s own character in our daily labor.

It is a fact that as an artist, like any laborer, Pendleton not only produces the objects that he needs and desires but also the very conditions of his life.¹¹ He navigates circumstances that would hinder, deny, or quell these expressions by attending to the world in which his creative production takes place, and to the modes of production through which his artwork is realized. The image of the machine as irrepressible force is ever metaphoric for modern times. In an age when happiness has been conflated with status, influence, and material satisfaction—all barometers of society’s insatiable desire for progress and accumulation—for James, and, I suggest, Pendleton too, happiness is “the freedom to be a fully developed, creative individual personality and to be part of a community based upon principles conducive to that aim.”¹² We must remain poised for the aleatory possibilities of chance, for it alone opens the radical unintended potential, perhaps even the looming elusive threat, to the entire enterprise. Often these potentials can appear as spontaneous responses to sudden events, as with the recent protests across the United States following the killings of Michael Brown, John Crawford III, Eric Garner, and Trayvon Martin.

8. C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, 11.

9. *Ibid.*, 209.

10. *Ibid.*, 17.

11. William Adams, “Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 249.

12. C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, 24.

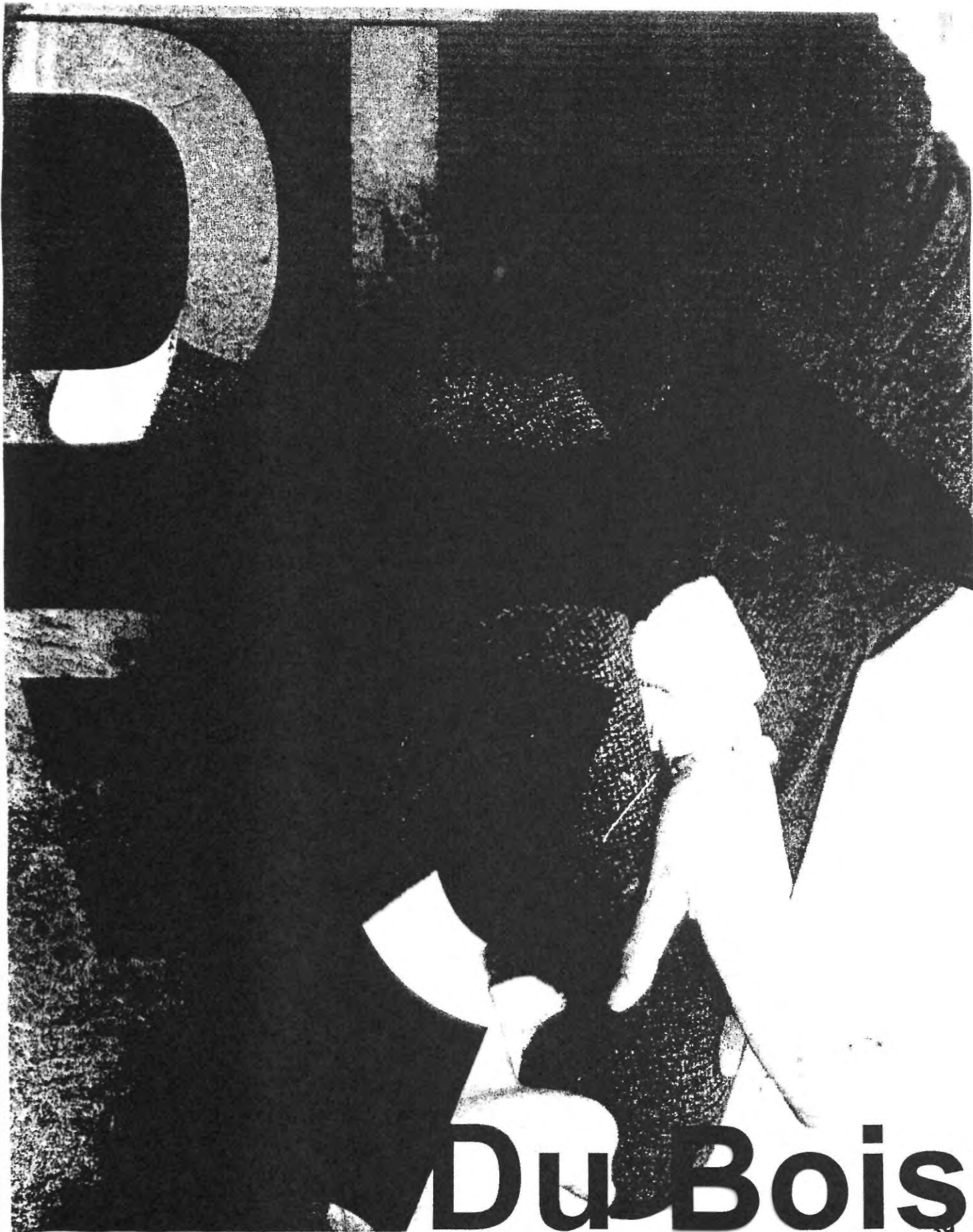
With the *Black Dada Reader*, Pendleton coalesces a network of relations orbiting value, modern life, and the legacy of Modernism. What is gained, he asks, when we fabulate history, elevate the vernacular, defer to poetics, or act in and through love? Pendleton's devouring of the photocopier is an unleashing of such possibilities. The machine's very character is appropriated and exhausted, parsed down into Pendleton's visual and textual lexicon, or becomes the aesthetics of the work itself: precise, restrained, calculating, and economically effective, reflecting nothing more or less than a desire for order and organization in the manufacturing of that most American of unalienable rights—happiness.

**Black Dada:
what
can black dada
do for
me
do
for
me
black
dada,
a reader**



FO UNDA TION NS





Du Bois

Of Our Spiritual Strivings

O water, voice of my heart, crying in the sand,
 All night long crying with a mournful cry,
 As I lie and listen, and cannot understand
 The voice of my heart in my side or the voice of the sea,
 O water, crying for rest, is it I, is it I?
 All night long the water is crying to me.

Unresting water, there shall never be rest
 Till the last moon droop and the last tide fail,
 And the fire of the end begin to burn in the west;
 And the heart shall be weary and wonder and cry like the sea,
 All life long crying without avail,
 As the water all night long is crying to me.

ARTHUR SYMONS.



BETWEEN me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word.

And yet, being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else, save perhaps in babyhood and in Europe. It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse,

something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them. Just how I would do it I could never decide: by reading law, by healing the sick, by telling the wonderful tales that swam in my head,—some way. With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house? The shades of the prison-house closed round about us all: walls strait and stubborn to the whitest, but relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation, or beat unavailing palms against the stone, or steadily, half hopelessly, watch the streak of blue above.

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in

one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten. The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the Shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness. Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man's turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness,—it is the contradiction of double aims. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause. By the poverty and ignorance of his people, the Negro minister or doctor was tempted toward quackery and demagoguery; and by the criticism of the other world, toward ideals that made him ashamed of his lowly tasks. The would-be black *savant* was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale to his white neighbors, while the knowledge which

would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood. The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist; for the beauty revealed to him was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people. This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people,—has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves.

Away back in the days of bondage they thought to see in one divine event the end of all doubt and disappointment; few men ever worshipped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries. To him, so far as he thought and dreamed, slavery was indeed the sum of all villainies, the cause of all sorrow, the root of all prejudice; Emancipation was the key to a promised land of sweeter beauty than ever stretched before the eyes of wearied Israelites. In song and exhortation swelled one refrain—Liberty; in his tears and curses the God he implored had Freedom in his right hand. At last it came,—suddenly, fearfully, like a dream. With one wild carnival of blood and passion came the message in his own plaintive cadences:—

“Shout, O children!
Shout, you’re free!
For God has bought your liberty!”

Years have passed away since then,—ten, twenty, forty; forty years of national life, forty years of renewal and development, and yet the swarthy spectre sits in its accustomed seat at the Nation’s feast. In vain do we cry to this our vastest social problem:—

“Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble!”

The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land.

Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people,—a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people.

The first decade was merely a prolongation of the vain search for freedom, the boon that seemed ever barely to elude their grasp,—like a tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp, maddening and misleading the headless host. The holocaust of war, the terrors of the Ku-Klux Klan, the lies of carpet-baggers, the disorganization of industry, and the contradictory advice of friends and foes, left the bewildered serf with no new watchword beyond the old cry for freedom. As the time flew, however, he began to grasp a new idea. The ideal of liberty demanded for its attainment powerful means, and these the Fifteenth Amendment gave him. The ballot, which before he had looked upon as a visible sign of freedom, he now regarded as the chief means of gaining and perfecting the liberty with which war had partially endowed him. And why not? Had not votes made war and emancipated millions? Had not votes enfranchised the freedmen? Was anything impossible to a power that had done all this? A million black men started with renewed zeal to vote themselves into the kingdom. So the decade flew away, the revolution of 1876 came, and left the half-free serf weary, wondering, but still inspired. Slowly but steadily, in the following years, a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power,—a powerful movement, the rise of another ideal to guide the unguided, another pillar of fire by night after a clouded day. It was the ideal of "book-learning"; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan; longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life.

Up the new path the advance guard toiled, slowly, heavily, doggedly; only those who have watched and guided the faltering feet, the misty minds, the dull understandings, of the dark pupils of these schools know how faithfully, how

piteously, this people strove to learn. It was weary work. The cold statistician wrote down the inches of progress here and there, noted also where here and there a foot had slipped or some one had fallen. To the tired climbers, the horizon was ever dark, the mists were often cold, the Canaan was always dim and far away. If, however, the vistas disclosed as yet no goal, no resting-place, little but flattery and criticism, the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self-examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect. In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself,—darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. For the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. He felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors. To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships. He felt the weight of his ignorance,—not simply of letters, but of life, of business, of the humanities; the accumulated sloth and shirking and awkwardness of decades and centuries shackled his hands and feet. Nor was his burden all poverty and ignorance. The red stain of bastardy, which two centuries of systematic legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost the obliteration of the Negro home.

A people thus handicapped ought not to be asked to race with the world, but rather allowed to give all its time and thought to its own social problems. But alas! while sociologists gleefully count his bastards and his prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair. Men call the shadow prejudice, and learnedly explain it as the natural defence of culture against barbarism, learning against ignorance, purity against crime,

the "higher" against the "lower" races. To which the Negro cries Amen! and swears that to so much of this strange prejudice as is founded on just homage to civilization, culture, righteousness, and progress, he humbly bows and meekly does obeisance. But before that nameless prejudice that leaps beyond all this he stands helpless, dismayed, and well-nigh speechless; before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and the boisterous welcoming of the worse, the all-pervading desire to inculcate disdain for everything black, from Toussaint to the devil,—before this there rises a sickening despair that would disarm and discourage any nation save that black host to whom "discouragement" is an unwritten word.

But the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate. Whisperings and portents came borne upon the four winds: Lo! we are diseased and dying, cried the dark hosts; we cannot write, our voting is vain; what need of education, since we must always cook and serve? And the Nation echoed and enforced this self-criticism, saying: Be content to be servants, and nothing more; what need of higher culture for half-men? Away with the black man's ballot, by force or fraud,—and behold the suicide of a race! Nevertheless, out of the evil came something of good,—the more careful adjustment of education to real life, the clearer perception of the Negroes' social responsibilities, and the sobering realization of the meaning of progress.

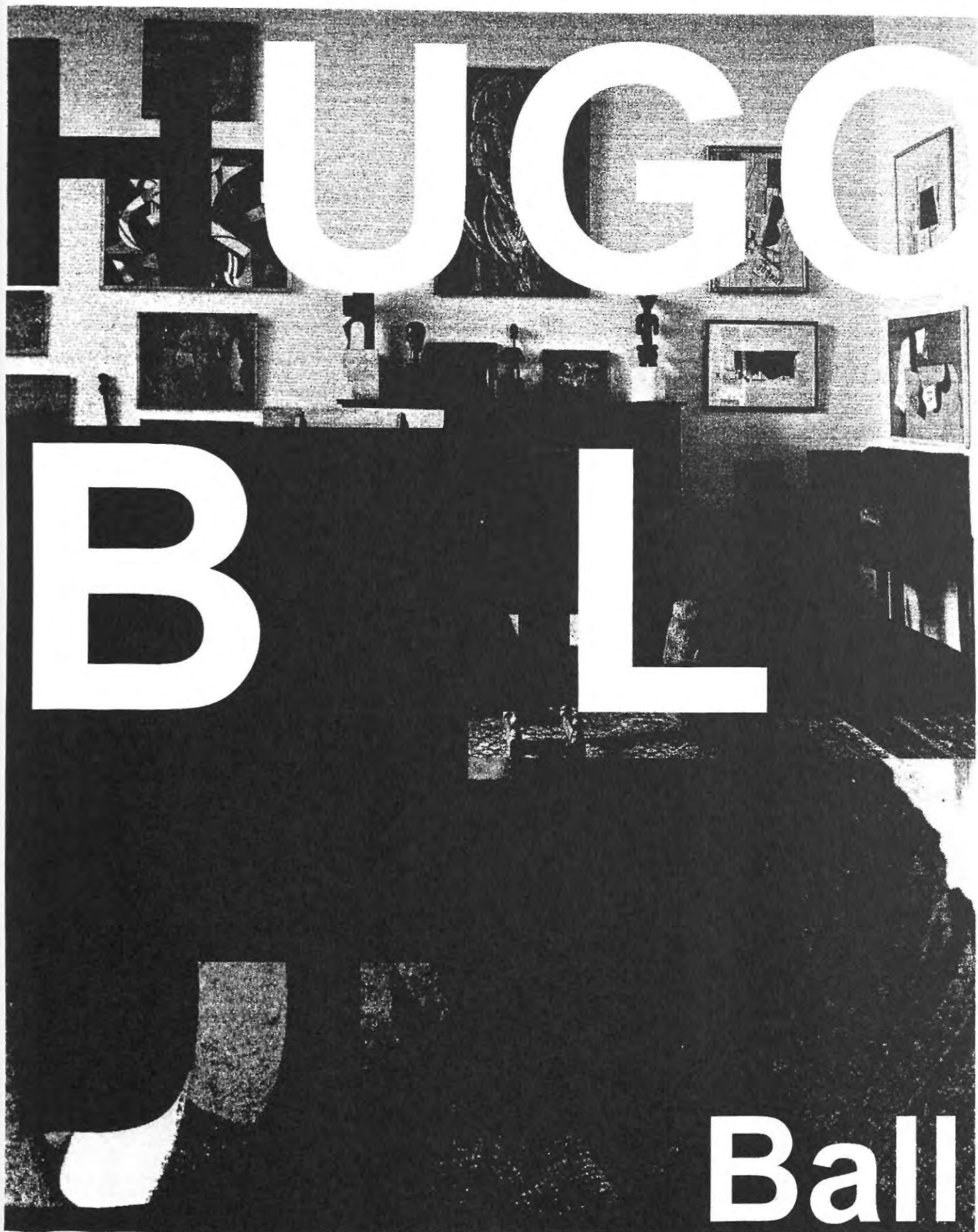
So dawned the time of *Sturm und Drang*: storm and stress to-day rocks our little boat on the mad waters of the world-sea; there is within and without the sound of conflict, the burning of body and rending of soul; inspiration strives with doubt, and faith with vain questionings. The bright ideals of the past,—physical freedom, political power, the training of brains and the training of hands,—all these in turn have waxed and waned, until even the last grows dim and overcast. Are they all wrong,—all false? No, not that, but each alone was over-simple and incomplete,—the dreams of a credulous race-childhood, or the fond imaginings of the other world

which does not know and does not want to know our power. To be really true, all these ideals must be melted and welded into one. The training of the schools we need to-day more than ever,—the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts. The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defence,—else what shall save us from a second slavery? Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek,—the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire. Work, culture, liberty,—all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and aiding each, and all striving toward that vaster ideal that swims before the Negro people, the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race; the ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed: there are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folk-lore are Indian and African; and, all in all, we black men seem the sole oasis of simple faith and reverence in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness. Will America be poorer if she replace her brutal dyspeptic blundering with light-hearted but determined Negro humility? or her coarse and cruel wit with loving jovial good-humor? or her vulgar music with the soul of the Sorrow Songs?

Merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro Problem, and the spiritual striving of the freedmen's sons is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength, but who bear it in the name of an historic race, in the name of this the land of their fathers' fathers, and in the name of human opportunity.

* * *

And now what I have briefly sketched in large outline let me on coming pages tell again in many ways, with loving emphasis and deeper detail, that men may listen to the striving in the souls of black folk.



HUGO

B L

Ball

Dada Manifesto

Zurich
July 14
1916

Ball's manifesto was read at the first public dada soiree in Zurich's Waag Hall on July 14, 1916.¹ This was his final contribution to his first dada period, which had begun with the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire some five months earlier. His concern in this text with the absolute primacy of the word in language served to justify the forms his own poems took (the manifesto was read to introduce his sound poems)² and to express his dissatisfaction both with the journalistic in language and—to some extent—with the poetry of his fellow dadaists. It was also in opposition to the idea of dada as "a tendency in art."³ The following month Ball wrote in his diary that the manifesto was his break with dadaism, and that the others recognized it as such.⁴

¹ For the events of this soiree see Tristan Tzara, "Zurich Chronicle," in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, 1951), 236–37.

² Christopher Middleton points out that this manifesto may be identical to the words of explanation Ball read out before his June 23, 1916, performance of sound poetry at the Cabaret Voltaire, since Ball noted in his diary for the twenty-fourth that his statement of the previous evening emphasized how the poetry was an attempt to save language from journalism.

³ See paragraph 2. Ball's opposition to the idea of a Dada "movement" is discussed in my Introduction, p. xxxv.

⁴ 6.VIII.1916.

This work is often known as "The First Dada Manifesto," and although Ball himself refers to it as "the first manifesto of a newly founded cause" (6.VIII.1916), such a title is not easily substantiated: most of the dadaists read manifestoes at this first public soiree, and we do not know that Ball appeared before the others.⁵

This translation, by Christopher Middleton, from the transcription of Ball's original manuscript by his stepdaughter, Annemarie Schütt-Hennings, supersedes the previously known version published in German by Paul Pörtner.⁶

Dada is a new tendency in art. One can tell this from the fact that until now nobody knew anything about it, and tomorrow everyone in Zurich will be talking about it. Dada comes from the dictionary. It is terribly simple. In French it means "hobby horse." In German it means "good-by," "Get off my back," "Be seeing you sometime." In Romanian: "Yes, indeed, you are right, that's it. But of course, yes, definitely, right." And so forth.

An international word. Just a word, and the word a movement. Very easy to understand. Quite terribly simple. To make of it an artistic tendency must mean that one is anticipating complications.* Dada psychology, dada Germany cum indigestion and fog paroxysm, dada literature, dada bourgeoisie, and yourselves, honored poets, who are always writing with words but never writing the word itself, who are always writing around the actual point. Dada world war without end, dada revolution without beginning, dada, you friends and also-poets, esteemed sirs, manufacturers, and evangelists. Dada Tzara, dada Huelsenbeck, dada m'dada, dada m'dada dada mhm, dada dera dada, dada Hue, dada Tza.

How does one achieve eternal bliss? By saying dada. How does one become famous? By saying dada. With a noble gesture and delicate propriety. Till one goes crazy. Till one loses consciousness. How can one get rid of everything that smacks of journalism, worms, everything nice and right, blinkered, moralistic, europeanized, enervated? By saying dada. Dada is the

⁵ Indeed, in Tzara's listing ("Zurich Chronicle") the names of Tzara and Huelsenbeck precede Ball's, as having "manifested"—though his order may well be random.

⁶ Paul Pörtner, ed., *Literatur-Revolution 1910-1925*, vol. 2, *Zur Begriffsbestimmung der Ismen* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1961), 477-78.

* Here Ball's manuscript reads "Komplikationen wegnehmen" ("take away complications"). The translator has followed Pörtner's "Komplikationen vorwegnehmen" to correct what is evidently a typing error. Ball anticipated complications if the "terribly simple" meaning of dada was made into an artistic tendency.

world soul,
Dada Mr. I

In plain
foundly app

I shall b
language, r
Goethe. Da
Dada m'da
loosening t
have invent
stuff, my ov
and all my
it that are
centimeters

It will se
vowels fool
Words eme
One shoul
rid of all t
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* A comparis
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world soul, dada is the pawnshop. Dada is the world's best lily-milk soap. Dada Mr. Rubiner, dada Mr. Korrodi. Dada Mr. Anastasius Lilienstein.*

In plain language: the hospitality of the Swiss is something to be profoundly appreciated. And in questions of aesthetics the key is quality.

I shall be reading poems that are meant to dispense with conventional language, no less, and to have done with it. Dada Johann Fuchsgang Goethe. Dada Stendhal. Dada Dalai Lama, Buddha, Bible, and Nietzsche. Dada m'dada. Dada mhm dada da. It's a question of connections, and of loosening them up a bit to start with. I don't want words that other people have invented. All the words are other people's inventions. I want my own stuff, my own rhythm, and vowels and consonants too, matching the rhythm and all my own. If this pulsation is seven yards long, I want words for it that are seven yards long. Mr. Schulz's words are only two and a half centimeters long.

It will serve to show how articulated language comes into being. I let the vowels fool around. I let the vowels quite simply occur, as a cat miaows. . . . Words emerge, shoulders of words, legs, arms, hands of words. Au, oi, uh. One shouldn't let too many words out. A line of poetry is a chance to get rid of all the filth that clings to this accursed language,† as if put there by stockbrokers' hands, hands worn smooth by coins. I want the word where it ends and begins. Dada is the heart of words.

Each thing has its word, but the word has become a thing by itself. Why shouldn't I find it? Why can't a tree be called Pluplus, and Pluplubasch when it has been raining? The word, the word, the word outside your domain, your stuffiness, this laughable impotence, your stupendous smugness, outside all the parrotry of your self-evident limitedness. The word, gentlemen, is a public concern of the first importance.

* A comparison with Ball's manuscript shows that he had originally added Marinetti's name here but crossed it out when revising the text.

† Near this point, Ball added between the lines of his manuscript a phrase meaning "Here I wanted to drop language itself." It is omitted here because its intended position is uncertain.



POL JON

Jones

BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS

. Against what light
is false what breath
sucked, for deadness.
Murder, the cleansed
purpose, frail, against
God, if they bring him
bleeding, I would not
forgive, or even call him
black dada nihilismus.

The protestant love, wide windows,
color blocked to Mondrian, and the
ugly silent deaths of jews under

the surgeon's knife. (To awake on
69th street with money and a hip
nose. Black dada nihilismus, for

the umbrella'd jesu. Trilby intrigue
movie house presidents sticky the floor.
B.D.N., for the secret men, Hermes, the

blackier art. Thievery (ahh, they return
those secret gold killers. Inquisitors
of the cocktail hour. Trismegistus, have

them, in their transmutation, from stone
to bleeding pearl, from lead to burning
looting, dead Moctezuma, find the West

a grey hideous space.

2.

From Sartre
the last bre
before he is

do not have
The razor. C
you carry k

heart? Why
reach? Why
in this place

warehouse.
straw. New
lacking mo

need of the
the streetla
their rented

nihilismus.
their father
Black dada

in their bed
and restless
lips sucking

Black screa
and chant,
and dull, un
earthly

2.

From Sartre, a white man, it gave
the last breath. And we beg him die,
before he is killed. Plastique, we

do not have, only thin heroic blades.
The razor. Our flail against them, why
you carry knives? Or brutaled lumps of

heart? Why you stay, where they can
reach? Why you sit, or stand, or walk
in this place, a window on a dark

warehouse. Where the minds packed in
straw. New homes, these towers, for those
lacking money or art. A cult of death,

need of the simple striking arm under
the streetlamp. The cutters, from under
their rented earth. Come up, black dada

nihilismus. Rape the white girls. Rape
their fathers. Cut the mothers' throats.
Black dada nihilismus, choke my friends

in their bedrooms with their drinks spilling
and restless for tilting hips or dark liver
lips sucking splinters from the master's thigh.

Black scream
and chant, scream,
and dull, un
earthly

hollering. Dada, bilious
what ugliness, learned
in the dome, colored holy
shit (i call them sinned

or lost

burned masters

of the lost

nihil German killers

all our learned

art, 'member

what you said

money, God, power,

a moral code, so cruel

it destroyed Byzantium, Tenochtitlan, Commanch

(got it, *Baby!*

For tambo, willie best, dubois, patrice, mantan, the
bronze buckaroos.

For Jack Johnson, asbestos, tonto, buckwheat,
billie holiday.

For tom russ, l'overture, vesey, beau jack,

(may a lost god damballah, rest or save us
against the murders we intend
against his lost white children
black dada nihilismus

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BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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12

The Pitfalls of Liberalism

Whenever one writes about a problem in the United States, especially concerning the racial atmosphere, the problem written about is usually black people, that they are either extremist, irresponsible, or ideologically naïve.

What we want to do here is to talk about white society, and the liberal segment of white society, because we want to prove the pitfalls of liberalism, that is, the pitfalls of liberals in their political thinking.

Whenever articles are written, whenever political

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speeches are given, or whenever analyses are made about a situation, it is assumed that certain people of one group, either the left or the right, the rich or the poor, the whites or the blacks, are causing polarization. The fact is that conditions cause polarization, and that certain people can act as catalysts to speed up the polarization; for example, Rap Brown or Huey Newton can be a catalyst for speeding up the polarization of blacks against whites in the United States, but the conditions are already there. George Wallace can speed up the polarization of whites against blacks in America, but again, the conditions are already there.

Many people want to know why, out of the entire white segment of society, we want to criticize the liberals. We have to criticize them because they represent the liaison between both groups, between the oppressed and the oppressor. The liberal tries to become an arbitrator, but he is incapable of solving the problems. He promises the oppressor that he can keep the oppressed under control; that he will stop them from becoming illegal (in this case illegal means violent). At the same time, he promises the oppressed that he will be able to alleviate their suffering—in due time. Historically, of course, we know this is impossible, and our era will not escape history.

The most perturbing question for the liberal is the question of violence. The liberal's initial reaction to violence is to try to convince the oppressed that violence is an incorrect tactic, that violence will not work, that violence never accomplishes anything. The Europeans took America through violence and through violence they established the most powerful country in the world. Through violence they maintain the most powerful country in the world. It is absolutely absurd for one to say that violence never accomplishes anything.

Today power is defined by the amount of violence one can bring against one's enemy—that is how you decide how powerful a country is; power is defined not by the

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number of people living in a country, it is not based on the amount of resources to be found in that country, it is not based upon the good will of the leaders or the majority of that people. When one talks about a powerful country, one is talking precisely about the amount of violence that that country can heap upon its enemy. We must be clear in our minds about that. Russia is a powerful country, not because there are so many millions of Russians but because Russia has great atomic strength, great atomic power, which of course is violence. America can unleash an infinite amount of violence, and that is the only way one considers America powerful. No one considers Vietnam powerful, because Vietnam cannot unleash the same amount of violence. Yet if one wanted to define power as the ability to do, it seems to me that Vietnam is much more powerful than the United States. But because we have been conditioned by Western thoughts today to equate power with violence, we tend to do that at all times, except when the oppressed begin to equate power with violence—then it becomes an “incorrect” equation.

Most societies in the West are not opposed to violence. The oppressor is only opposed to violence when the oppressed talks about using violence against the oppressor. Then the question of violence is raised as the incorrect means to attain one's ends. Witness, for example, that Britain, France, and the United States have time and time again armed black people to fight their enemies for them. France armed Senegalese in World War II, Britain of course armed Africa and the West Indies, and the United States always armed the Africans living in the United States. But that is only to fight against *their* enemy, and the question of violence is never raised. The only time the United States or England or France will become concerned about the question of violence is when the people whom they armed to kill their enemies will pick up those arms against them. For another example, practically every country in the West today is giving guns either to

Nigeria or to Biafra. They do not mind giving those guns to those people as long as they use them to kill each other, but they will never give them guns to kill another white man or to fight another white country.

The way the oppressor tries to stop the oppressed from using violence as a means to attain liberation is to raise ethical or moral questions about violence. I want to state emphatically here that violence in any society is neither moral nor is it ethical. It is neither right nor is it wrong. It is just simply a question of who has the power to legalize violence.

It is not a question of whether it is right to kill or it is wrong to kill; killing goes on. Let me give an example: if I were in Vietnam, if I killed thirty yellow people who were pointed out to me by white Americans as my enemy, I would be given a medal. I would become a hero. I would have killed America's enemy—but America's enemy is not my enemy. If I were to kill thirty white policemen in Washington, D.C., who have been brutalizing my people and who are my enemy, I would get the electric chair. It is simply a question of who has the power to legalize violence. In Vietnam our violence is legalized by white America. In Washington, D.C., my violence is not legalized, because Africans living in Washington, D.C., do not have the power to legalize their violence.

I used that example only to point out that the oppressor never really puts an ethical or moral judgment on violence, except when the oppressed picks up guns against the oppressor. For the oppressor, violence is simply the expedient thing to do.

Is it not violent for a child to go to bed hungry in the richest country in the world? I think that is violent. But that type of violence is so institutionalized that it becomes a part of our way of life. Not only do we accept poverty, we even find it normal. And that again is because the oppressor makes his violence a part of the functioning

society. But the violence of the oppressed becomes disruptive. It is disruptive to the ruling circles of a given society. And because it is disruptive it is therefore very easy to recognize, and therefore it becomes the target of all those who in fact do not want to change the society. What we want to do for our people, the oppressed, is to begin to legitimize violence in their minds. So that for us violence against the oppressor will be expedient. This is very important, because we have all been brainwashed into accepting questions of moral judgment when violence is used against the oppressor.

If I kill in Vietnam I am allowed to go free; it has been legalized for me. It has not been legitimized in my mind. I must legitimize it in my own mind, and even though it is legal I may never legitimize it in my own mind. There are a lot of people who come back from Vietnam, who have killed where killing was legalized, but who still have psychological problems over the fact that they have killed. We must understand, however, that to legitimize killing in one's mind does not make it legal. For example, I have completely legitimized in my mind the killing of white policemen who terrorize black communities. However, if I get caught killing a white policeman, I have to go to jail, because I do not as yet have the power to legalize that type of killing. The oppressed must begin to legitimize that type of violence in the minds of our people, even though it is illegal at this time, and we have to keep striving every chance we get to attain that end.

Now, I think the biggest problem with the white liberal in America, and perhaps the liberal around the world, is that his primary task is to stop confrontation, stop conflicts, *not* to redress grievances, but to stop confrontation. And this is very clear, it must become very, very clear in all our minds. Because once we see what the primary task of the liberal is, then we can see the necessity of not wasting time with him. His primary role is to stop con-

frontation. Because the liberal assumes a priori that a confrontation is not going to solve the problem. This, of course, is an incorrect assumption. We know that.

We need not waste time showing that this assumption of the liberals is clearly ridiculous. I think that history has shown that confrontation in many cases has resolved quite a number of problems—look at the Russian revolution, the Cuban revolution, the Chinese revolution. In many cases, stopping confrontation really means prolonging suffering.

The liberal is so preoccupied with stopping confrontation that he usually finds himself defending and calling for law and order, the law and order of the oppressor. Confrontation would disrupt the smooth functioning of the society and so the politics of the liberal leads him into a position where he finds himself politically aligned with the oppressor rather than with the oppressed.

The reason the liberal seeks to stop confrontation—and this is the second pitfall of liberalism—is that his role, regardless of what he says, is really to maintain the status quo, rather than to change it. He enjoys economic stability from the status quo and if he fights for change he is risking his economic stability. What the liberal is really saying is that he hopes to bring about justice and economic stability for everyone through reform, that somehow the society will be able to keep expanding without redistributing the wealth.

This leads to the third pitfall of the liberal. The liberal is afraid to alienate anyone, and therefore he is incapable of presenting any clear alternative.

Look at the past presidential campaign in the United States between Nixon, Wallace, and Humphrey. Nixon and Humphrey, because they try to consider themselves some sort of liberals, did not offer any alternatives. But Wallace did, he offered clear alternatives. Because Wallace was not afraid to alienate, he was not afraid to point out who had caused errors in the past, and who should be

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punished. The liberals are afraid to alienate anyone in society. They paint such a rosy picture of society and they tell us that while things have been bad in the past, somehow they can become good in the future without restructuring society at all.

What the liberal really wants is to bring about change which will not in any way endanger *his* position. The liberal says, "It is a fact that you are poor, and it is a fact that some people are rich; but we can make you rich without affecting those people who are rich." I do not know how poor people are going to get economic security without affecting the rich in a given country, unless one is going to exploit other peoples. I think that if we followed the logic of the liberal to its conclusion we would find that all we can get from it is that in order for a society to become equitable we must begin to exploit other peoples.

Fourth, I do not think that liberals understand the difference between influence and power, and the liberals get confused seeking influence rather than power. The conservatives on the right wing, or the fascists, understand power, though, and they move to consolidate power while the liberal pushes for influence.

Let us examine the period before civil rights legislation in the United States. There was a coalition of the labor movement, the student movement, and the church for the passage of certain civil rights legislation; while these groups formed a broad liberal coalition, and while they were able to exert their influence to get certain legislation passed, they did not have the power to implement the legislation once it became law. After they got certain legislation passed they had to ask the people whom they were fighting to implement the very things that they had not wanted to implement in the past. The liberal fights for influence to bring about change, not for the power to implement the change. If one really wants to change a society, one does not fight to influence change and then leave the change to someone else to bring about.

If the liberals are serious they must fight for power and not for influence.

These pitfalls are present in his politics because the liberal is part of the oppressor. He enjoys the status quo; while he himself may not be actively oppressing other people, he enjoys the fruits of that oppression. And he rhetorically tries to claim that he is disgusted with the system as it is.

While the liberal is part of the oppressor, he is the most powerless segment within that group. Therefore when he seeks to talk about change, he always confronts the oppressed rather than the oppressor. He does not seek to influence the oppressor, he seeks to influence the oppressed. He says to the oppressed, time and time again, "You don't need guns, you are moving too fast, you are too radical, you are too extreme." He never says to the oppressor, "You are too extreme in your treatment of the oppressed," because he is powerless among the oppressors, even if he is part of that group; but he has influence, or, at least, he is more powerful than the oppressed, and he enjoys this power by always cautioning, condemning, or certainly trying to direct and lead the movements of the oppressed.

To keep the oppressed from discovering his pitfalls the liberal talks about humanism. He talks about individual freedom, about individual relationships. One cannot talk about human idealism in a society that is run by fascists. If one wants a society that is in fact humanistic, one has to ensure that the political entity, the political state, is one that will allow humanism. And so if one really wants a state where human idealism is a reality, one has to be able to control the political state. What the liberal has to do is to fight for power, to go for the political state and then, once the liberal has done this, he will be able to ensure the type of human idealism in the society that he always talks about.

Because of the above reasons, because the liberal is

incapable of bringing about the human idealism which he preaches, what usually happens is that the oppressed whom he has been talking to finally becomes totally disgusted with the liberal and begins to think that the liberal has been sent to the oppressed to misdirect their struggle, to keep them confused so that the oppressor can continue to rule them. So whether the liberal likes it or not, he finds himself being lumped, by the oppressed, with the oppressor—of course he is part of that group. The final confrontation, when it does come about, will of course include the liberal on the side of the oppressor. Therefore if the oppressed really wants a revolutionary change, he has no choice but to rid himself of those liberals in his rank.



Godard

GILLES DELEUZE

I. *Cahiers du Cinéma* has asked you for an interview because you are a "philosopher," and we would like that kind of a text, but principally because you like and admire what Godard does. What do you think of his recent TV programs?

Like many people, I was moved—and that's a lasting emotion. I can say how I picture Godard. He's a man who works a lot, so he is, necessarily, completely alone. But his is not just any solitude, it's an extraordinarily populous solitude, populated not by dreams, fantasies, or projects, but by actions, things, and even people. A multiple, creative solitude. It's by drawing on the depths of this solitude that Godard can be a force by himself alone, but also work in tandem with several other people. He can deal on equal terms with anyone, from officials or organizations to a cleaning lady, a worker, or madmen and -women. In his TV programs, Godard's questions are always direct. They disturb us, the audience, but not the people to whom he asks them. When he talks to lunatics, he doesn't talk like a psychiatrist, like another lunatic, or like someone acting crazy. When he talks to workers, he's not a boss, or another worker, or an intellectual, or a producer with actors. This isn't at all because he is trying to impersonate artfully every tone, but because his solitude gives him a great capability, a great populatedness. In a certain sense, it's always about being a stammerer. Not a stammerer in his speech, but a stammerer in language itself. Generally, you can only be a foreigner in another language, but here, it's rather a matter of being a foreigner in your own language. Proust said that the great books are necessarily written in a sort of foreign language. It's the same with Godard's programs; he even perfected his Swiss accent for the purpose. It's this creative stammering, this solitude, that gives Godard his force.

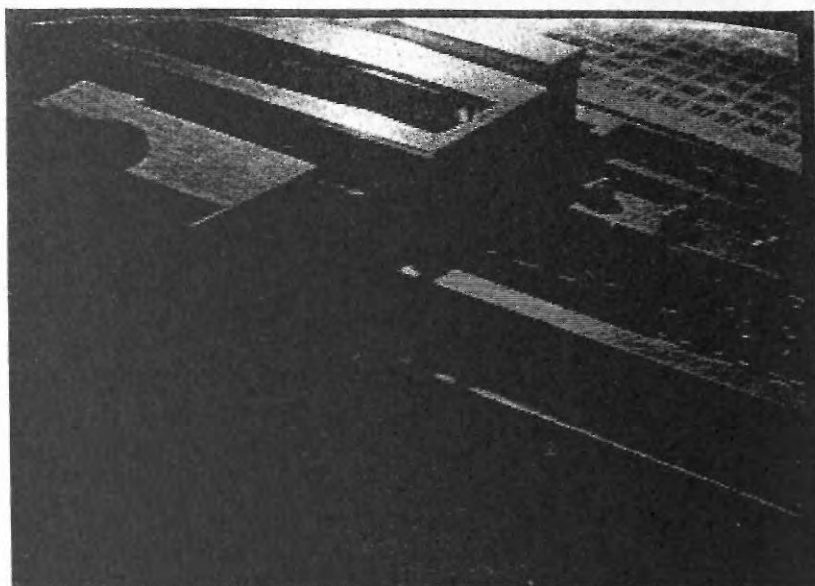
As you know better than I, he has always been alone. There's never been a Godard-success in film, in the sense that the people who say, "He changed after this or that moment, his films don't make it anymore" would have us believe. These are often the same people who hated him right from the start. Godard was ahead of everyone, he left his mark on everyone, but not in ways

that would have led to success; instead, he continued along his own line, a vanishing trace, a line always broken, zigzagging, subterranean. Even so, in terms of film, they had more or less managed to shut him up in his solitude, contain him. Then he goes and takes advantage of the vacation period and of a vague appeal to creativity to occupy TV for six times two programs. It may be the only case of someone who hasn't been had by TV. Usually you've lost before you've started. They would have forgiven him for finding a slot for his cinema, but not for making this series, which changes so many things within what most affects TV (asking people questions, getting them to talk, showing images from elsewhere, and so on), even if it no longer does any of it, even if it's been stifled. Naturally, many groups and associations were furious: the statement made by the Association des Journalistes, Reporters-Photographes et Cinéastes¹ is typical. At least Godard has revived hate. But he has also shown that TV could be "populated" another way.

II. You haven't answered our question. If you had to give a "course" on these programs . . . What ideas have you perceived, or felt? How would you go about explaining your enthusiasm? We can always talk about the rest later, even if the rest is the most important part.

Well, but ideas—having an idea—isn't ideology, it's practice. Godard has a beautiful axiom: Not a correct image, just an image [*Pas une image juste, juste une image*]. Philosophers, too, should say it, and find some way to act on it: not correct ideas, just ideas. Because correct ideas are always ideas that conform to dominant meanings or established passwords; they're always ideas that verify something, even if this something is yet to come, even if it is the future of the revolution. Whereas "just ideas" are a becoming-present, a stammering in one's ideas that can only be expressed in the form of questions, which tend rather to silence their answers, or else show something simple, which shatters all the proofs.

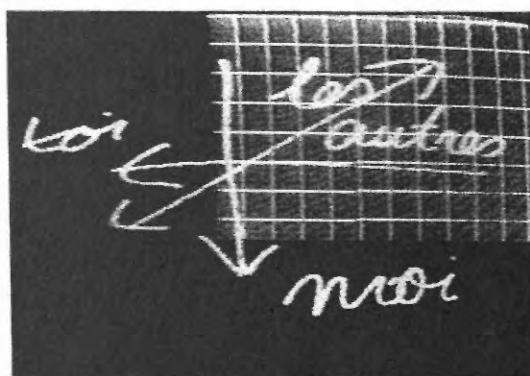
In this sense, there are, in Godard's programs, two ideas that are constantly overlapping, mixing, or sepa-



Still from the credit
sequence that opens each
episode



"Ya personne"



"Nous trois"

rating, segment by segment. This is one of the reasons why each program is divided in two, as in elementary school, the two poles, the lesson about things and the language lesson. The first idea concerns work. I think Godard is always questioning a vaguely Marxist schema that has infiltrated everywhere: you have something fairly abstract, like a "work force," which is sold or bought, under conditions that either define a fundamental social injustice or establish slightly more social justice. Now, Godard asks very concrete questions; he shows images that relate to the following: What is it, in fact, that is bought, and what is sold? What is it that some people are prepared to buy and others to sell, and that is not necessarily the same thing? A young welder is prepared to sell his labor as a welder, but not his sexual force by becoming the lover of an old lady. A cleaning lady is perfectly willing to sell her hours of housework, but doesn't want to sell the moment when she sings a bit of the "Internationale." Why? Because she can't sing? But what if you pay her to talk about precisely what she can't sing? And, inversely, a specialized worker in the watchmaking trade wants to be paid for his watchmaking force, but refuses to be paid for his work as an amateur filmmaker—he calls it his "hobby." The images, however, show that in both cases, the watchmaking assembly line and the filmmaking production, the gestures are strikingly similar, to the point that they could be mistaken for each other. Yet, says the watchmaker, there is a huge difference of love and generosity between these gestures; I don't want to be paid for my filmmaking. But then what about the filmmaker and the photographer, who do get paid? Or, taking it even further, what is a photographer willing to pay for? In some cases he is willing to pay his model, in other cases he is paid by his model. But when he takes pictures of torture or of an execution, he pays neither the victim nor the executioner. And when he takes pictures of children who are sick, injured, or hungry, why doesn't he pay them? Analogously, Guattari proposed at a psychoanalytic convention that those being psychoanalyzed should be paid the same as the psychoanalysts, because the psychoanalyst cannot exactly be said to provide a "service." There is, rather, a division of labor, a development of two types of tasks that are non-parallel: the psychoanalyst's work of listening and sifting, but also the work of the analysand's unconscious. Guattari's proposal seems not to have been taken very seriously. Godard says the same thing: Why not pay the people who watch TV, instead of making them pay, since they are doing real work and providing a public service in their turn? The social division of labor obviously implies that, in a factory, the work on the shop floor is paid, but so is that done in offices and research

laboratories. Otherwise, why not imagine the workers having to pay the designers who prepare what the former make? I think all these questions and many others, all these images and many others, tend to destroy the notion of work force. In the first place, the very notion of work force arbitrarily isolates one sector, cuts work off from its relation to love, creation, and even production. It turns work into conservation, the opposite of creation, because it has to reproduce consumer goods, and reproduce its own force, in a closed exchange. From this point of view, it matters little whether the exchange is fair or unfair, since there is always selective violence in an act of payment, and mystification in the very principle that makes us speak of a work force. To the extent that labor could be separated from its pseudo-force, very different, nonparallel flows of production of all sorts could be put into direct relation to flows of money, independently of any mediation by an abstract force.

I am even more confused than Godard. All the better, since what counts are the questions Godard asks and the images he shows, and the viewer's possible feeling that the notion of work force is not innocent, and that it in no way goes without saying, even and especially from the point of view of social criticism. This explains the reactions of the P.C. and of some unions to Godard's programs, as do other, even more visible reasons (he has tampered with the sacred notion of work force . . .). And then there's the second idea, which concerns information. In this case, too, language is presented to us as essentially informative, and information as essentially an exchange. In this case, too, information is measured in abstract units. Now, it's open to question whether the schoolteacher is transmitting pieces of information when she explains a mathematical operation or teaches spelling. She is in charge, so she is, rather, transmitting passwords. In fact, children are provided with syntax in the same way that workers are given tools, to produce statements that conform to the dominant meanings. Godard's phrase must be understood quite literally: children are political prisoners. Language is a system of orders, not a medium of information. On TV: "Now for some fun . . . the latest news, coming up next . . ." Actually, the schema of information science should be reversed. Information science assumes a theoretical maximum of information; at the other pole it posits pure noise, interference; between the two, there is redundancy, which reduces information but enables it to overcome noise. It's the other way around: at the top we should put redundancy, the transmission and repetition of orders or commands; below it, information, always the minimum required for the successful reception of orders; and then below that?? Well, there would be something like silence, like stammer-

ing, like a cry, something that would pay out beneath the redundancies and the pieces of information, that would pay our language and make itself heard nonetheless. To speak, even when speaking about oneself, is always to take the place of someone on whose behalf one claims to be speaking, and to whom one refuses the right to speak. Séguy's mouth is open to transmit orders and passwords, but the woman with the dead child is also open-mouthed. An image gets represented by a sound, as a worker is by his shop steward. A sound takes over a series of images. So how does one speak without giving orders, without claiming to represent something or someone, how does one get those who don't have the right to it to speak, and restore to sounds their value of a struggle against power? That must be it: by being like a foreigner in one's own language, marking a sort of vanishing trace of language.

These are "just" two ideas, but two ideas are a lot, are huge, they contain lots of things and lots of other ideas. So Godard questions two accepted notions, that of work force and that of information. He doesn't say we should be giving *true* information, nor that the work force should be *well* paid (these would be "correct" ideas). He says that these notions are very suspect. He writes FALSE next to them. He has been saying for a long time that he wished to be a production office rather than an author, a TV news director rather than a filmmaker. Obviously he didn't mean that he wished to produce his own films, like Verneuil, or to take over TV, but, rather, to make a mosaic of kinds of work, instead of measuring them against an abstract force; rather, to make a juxtaposition of the underlying pieces of information, of all the open mouths, instead of relating them to an abstract kind of information taken as password.

III. If these are Godard's two ideas, do they coincide with the theme of "images and sounds" that is constantly developed in the programs? Does the lesson about things, the images, correspond to kinds of work, and the word lesson, the sounds, to pieces of information?

No, the coincidence is only a partial one: there is also, necessarily, information in the images, and work in the sounds. Random groupings can and must be cut up in a number of ways that only partially coincide. To try to reconstitute the image-sound relation according to Godard, one would have to tell a very abstract story, in several episodes, and realize at the end that this abstract story was simplest and most concrete in a single episode.

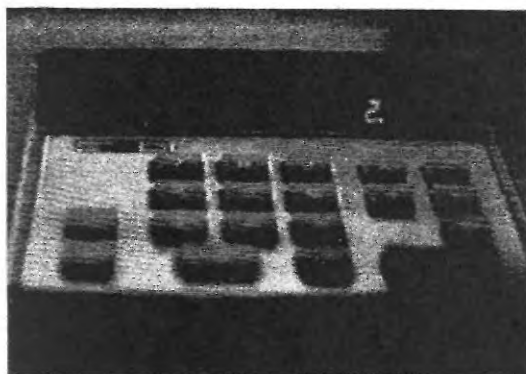
1. There are images—things themselves are images—because images are not in the head, in the brain. In fact, the brain itself is one image among oth-

ers. Images continuously act and react on one another, producing and consuming. There is no difference between *images*, *things*, and *movement*.

2. But images also have *insides*, or some images have insides and experience themselves from the inside. These are subjects (cf. Godard's statements about *Deux ou Trois Choses que je sais d'elle* in the collection Belfond published, pp. 393ff.). There is effectively a *gap* between the action undergone by these images and the reaction that is achieved. It is this gap that gives them the power to store other images, in other words, to perceive. But what they store is only what interests them in other images: to perceive is to take away from the image what doesn't interest us; there is always *less* in our perception. We are so full of images that we no longer see outside images as themselves.

3. On the other hand, there are sound-images that appear to be unprivileged. These sound-images, or some of them, do, however, have *reverse sides*, which we can call what we like—ideas, meaning, language, manners of speaking, and so on. These enable the sound-images to contract or capture the other images or a series of other images. A voice takes over a group of images (Hitler's voice). Ideas, acting as passwords, are embodied in the sound-images or soundwaves and tell us what should interest us in the other images: they dictate our perception. There is always a central "collision" that normalizes the images, removes what we must not perceive. What we have in outline, then, thanks to the preceding gap, is, as it were, two currents going in opposite directions: one going from external images to perceptions, the other going from the dominant ideas to perceptions.

4. Thus, we are caught in a chain of images, each in its place, each itself an image, but also part of a web of ideas that act as passwords. So Godard's action, "images and sounds," goes in two directions at once. On the one hand, toward restoring the external images to their fullness, so that we do not perceive less, so that the perception equals the image, so that the images give up everything they have, which is one way, at least, a way of fighting this or that power and its collisions. On the other hand, toward undoing language as an assumption of power, making it stammer in the soundwaves, breaking up every set of ideas that claim to be "correct" ideas, so as to extract from them "just" some ideas. These may be two reasons why Godard's use of the *fixed background* is so new. It's a bit like some contemporary musicians: they install a fixed sound background that allows *everything* in the music to be heard. When Godard introduces onto the screen a blackboard on which he writes, he is not making it an object to be filmed, he is making the blackboard and the writing into a new television



"Leçons de choses"



"Leçons de choses"



"Jean-Luc"



"Leçons de choses" and "René(e)s"



"Marcel"



"René(e)s"



"Louison"



"René(e)s"

medium, an expressive substance that has its own current, among other currents on the screen.

This whole abstract story in four episodes has a science-fiction look. It is our social reality today. What is odd is that this story coincides at several points with what Bergson said in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*. Bergson is considered a sensible philosopher, and one who no longer has novelty value. It would be good if cinema or television gave it back to him (he ought to be in the curriculum at the I.D.H.E.C.—perhaps he is). The first chapter of *Matter and Memory* develops an extraordinary conception of photography and cinema movement in their relations with things: "Photography, if photography there be, is already taken, already printed in the very inside of things, and for all points in space. . . ." This is not to say that Godard is a Bergsonian. It would, rather, be the reverse, not so much Godard revitalizing Bergson, but Godard finding pieces of Bergson along the way as he revitalizes television.

IV. But why are there always *two* with Godard? There have to be two for there to be three . . . Fine, but what is the meaning of this two, this three?

You're pretending; nobody knows better than you that it's not like that. Godard is not a dialectician. What counts with him is not two or three, or however many you like, it's AND, the conjunction AND. Godard's use of AND is crucial. It's important because our entire way of thinking is modeled instead on the verb "to be," IS. Philosophy is thick with discussions of the attributive judgement (the sky is blue) and the judgement of existence (God is), their possible reductions, or their irreducibility. But it's always the verb "to be." Even conjunctions are measured by the verb "to be," as we can see clearly in the syllogism. The British and the Americans are practically the only ones to have liberated conjunctions, to have reflected on relations. But when you make the relational judgement into an autonomous type, you realize that it slips in everywhere, penetrates and corrupts everything. The AND is then no longer even a specific conjunction or relation, but implies all relations; there are as many relations as there are ANDs. The AND not only rocks all relations, it rocks being, the verb, and so on. The AND, "and . . . and . . . and . . .," is exactly the creative stammering, the foreign use of language, as opposed to its conforming and dominant use, based on the verb "to be."

Of course, the AND is diversity, multiplicity, the destruction of identities. The factory gate is not the same when I go in, and then when I come out, and then when I pass by it when I am unemployed. The wife of the condemned man is not the same before and after.

But diversity, or multiplicity, is in no way an aesthetic collection (as when we say "one more," "one more woman" . . .), nor a dialectical schema (as when we say "one gives two, which will give three"). In all these cases there remains a primacy of the One, therefore of being, which is deemed to become multiple. When Godard says that everything can be divided in two, and that day is morning *and* evening, he isn't saying that it's one or the other, nor that one becomes the other, becomes two. For multiplicity is never in the terms, whatever their number, nor in the set, or totality, of them. Multiplicity is precisely in the AND, which does not have the same nature as the elements or the sets.

What is this AND that is neither element nor set? I think it is Godard's force of living and thinking, and of showing the AND in a very new way, and making it operate actively. The AND is neither the one nor the other, it is always between the two, it is the boundary, there is always a boundary, a vanishing trace or flow, only we don't see it, because it is scarcely visible. And yet it is along this vanishing trace that things happen, becomings are made, revolutions are sketched out. "The strong people are not those who occupy one camp or the other; it's the boundary that is powerful." This was Giscard d'Estaing's rueful assessment in the military geography lesson he recently gave the army: the more things find an equilibrium at the level of the large sets—between West and East, the United States—USSR, global agreement, meetings in outer space, world police, and so on—the more they "destabilize" from north to south. Giscard cited Angola, the Near East, the Palestinian resistance, but also all those disturbances that cause "a regional destabilization of security": plane hijackings, Corsica . . . From north to south, you will always find lines that will deflect the sets, an AND, AND, AND that marks a new threshold every time, a new direction of the dotted line, a new mountain pass over the boundary, the border. Godard's aim is "to see the boundaries," in other words, to make the imperceptible visible. The condemned man *and* his wife. Mother *and* child. But also the images *and* the sounds. And the watchmaker's gestures when he is on his watchmaking assembly line *and* when he is at his editing table; they are separated by an imperceptible boundary that is neither the one nor the other, but also draws them both along in a nonparallel development, a trace or flow where we no longer know who is pursuing whom or for what purpose. A whole micropolitics of boundaries, as against the macropolitics of the large groupings. We know at least that that is where things happen, on the boundary between images and sounds, where the images become too full and sounds too loud. This is what Godard has done in *Six fois deux*: six times

between the two, to trace and show this active and creative line, and to drag television along with it.

Notes

* This interview was originally published as "Trois questions sur *Six fois deux*," in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 271 (November 1976).

† Association of Journalists, Photojournalists, and Filmmakers.

‡ The French national film school.



ANDRI ANIP PR ER

Piper

29. The Joy of Marginality

This chapter was a statement for a panel sponsored by the New Museum, "The Ideology of the Margin: Gender, Race, and Culture," on May 11, 1988. It was first published in *Art Papers* 14, no. 4 (July-August 1990), pp. 12-13.

I've been asked to address a number of specific questions here, and to keep my answers "personal and nontheoretical." I'll try to do that, with the understanding that "personal and nontheoretical" needn't mean "exclusively autobiographical" and may well mean "generally symptomatic."

First, there is the issue of my racial identity, and the conflicts between the way I perceive it and the way others do. I don't perceive my racial identity in any way at all. My racial identity is not a pervasive feature of my consciousness, in the way my skin surface is a pervasive feature of my body. When I am alone in my apartment doing my work or reading, I don't think about my racial identity. Nor do I think about it when I am with good friends, regardless of their racial identity. Indeed, that's part of what it means for me to consider someone a good friend: Their behavior toward me and in my presence does not continually remind me that I am either of the same race as them, or of a different race. In a friendship, race is just one more index of singularity. It becomes a symptom of alienation when it demarcates group allegiances.

I become aware of my racial identity when someone brings it to my attention. This happens, for example, whenever someone makes a racist, sexist, homophobic, or ethnic slur of any kind. That brand of irrational hostility, no matter where it is explicitly directed, reminds me of my vulnerability as a black person. Sometimes a white person will mention my racial identity as a way of dealing with his or her own conflicts about it. Sometimes mentioning my or our racial identity in the course of conversation with another black person can be a needed source of solidarity that compensates for the dissonance created by my appearance and "nice white lady" personal style. Only once in my life have I ever mentioned my racial identity to a white person in order to remind him how alien, and alienated from him, I felt (he had made an anti-Semitic joke to me in an attempt to establish rapport). However, mentioning my racial identity in passing to whites sometimes has this effect, although I don't intend it.

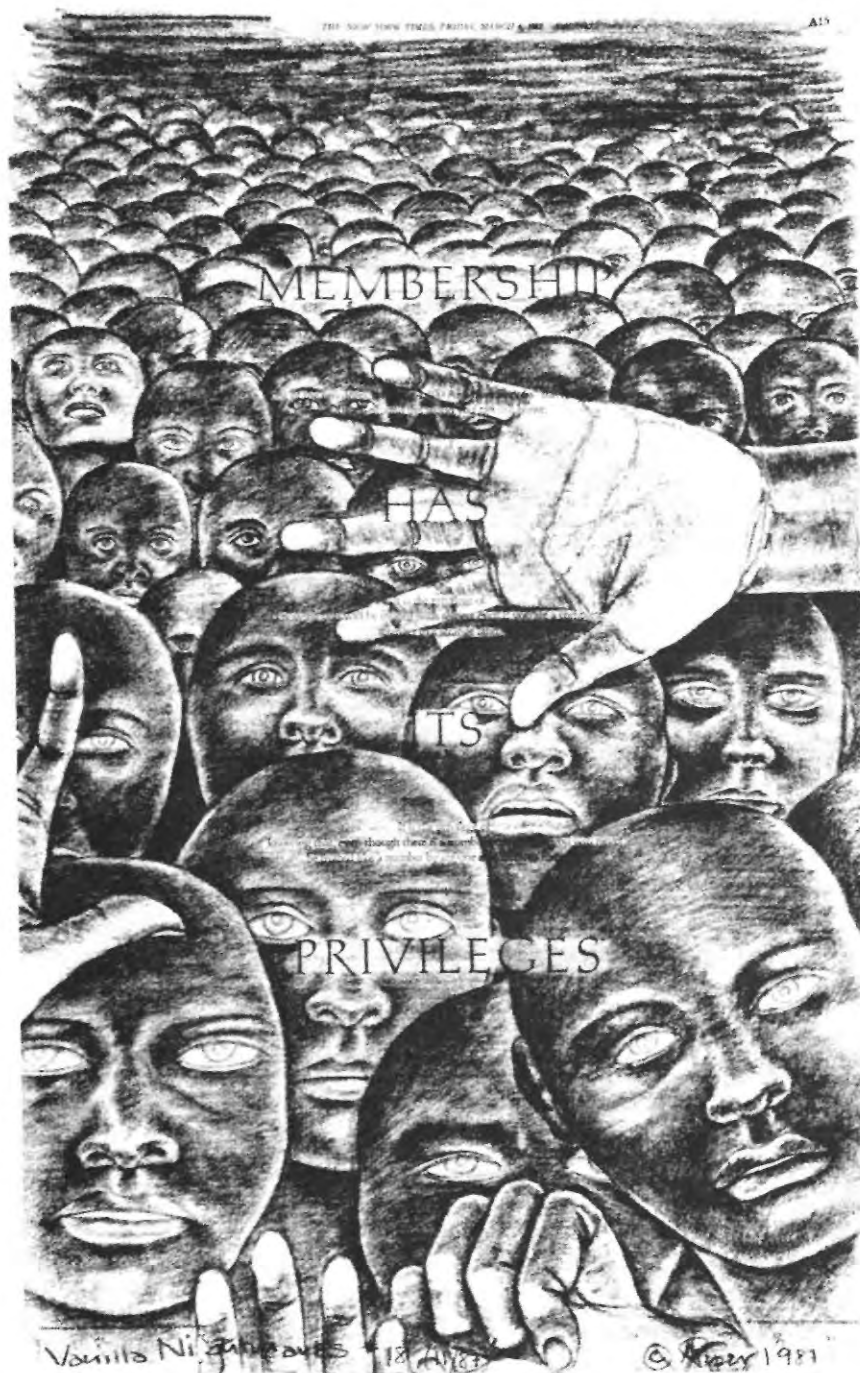
Conflicts arise when another person, either black or white, has false preconceptions about who I am and how I will behave on the basis of how I look or identify myself racially. But I encounter similar conflicts and false preconceptions about my gender identity, professional identities in academia and in the art world, and character. I frequently provoke hostility in those whose social comfort requires my conformity to stereotyped social categories. Because they rarely question the veracity of their own preconceptions, I must be prepared to disabuse them, in order to avoid serious and irreversible misunderstandings. Some such relationships survive these corrective efforts; most do not. Sometimes I get tired of having to make these efforts and go on strike while the relationship deteriorates. The result is that

I have very few friends, and it takes me a long time to relax and stop being vigilant in any friendship I do have. Being seen clearly, understood, and accepted as I am is an exceedingly rare and valuable experience for me.

As to how all of this affects my artwork, it affects it very deeply. In part my work stems from a compulsion to embody, transform, and use these experiences in constructive ways, in order not to feel trapped and powerless. I want to contribute to the creation of a society in which racism and racial stereotyping no longer exist. Obviously I don't aspire to get rich or famous (however, I am grateful to the art world for having kept me afloat—or perhaps occasionally bobbing to the surface would be a better way of putting it—for the last twenty years without ever requiring that I sell my work). My work is an act of communication that politically catalyzes its viewers into reflecting on their own deep impulses and responses to racism and xenophobia, relative to a target or stance that I depict. Through the work I try to construct a concrete, immediate, and personal relationship between me and the viewer that locates us within the network of political cause and effect. My purpose is to transform the viewer psychologically, by presenting him or her with an unavoidable concrete reality that cuts through the defensive rationalizations by which we insulate ourselves against the facts of our political responsibility. I want viewers of my work to come away from it with the understanding that their reactions to racism are ultimately political choices over which they have control.

I have great respect for what I call "global" political art that attempts to educate its viewers about matters of crucial importance that bear no obvious and direct relationship to their lives. But I worry that the ultimate effect of this work on a viewer's subsequent behavior in the world may be very slight. Because however forceful, original, or eloquent it may be, global political art is often too removed from the indexical present to situate the viewer himself or herself in the causal network of political responsibility. It is easy to walk away from such a work without any lingering sense of how one may be personally implicated in the political situation that necessitated it. Sometimes such work lets one off the hook by targeting remote villains, whom we who choose to view it may all smugly deplore from a safe distance. This kind of work can be profoundly moving. But relative to my own work and my own purposes, these escape hatches would count as failures to fully engage the viewer.

I think my work very definitely is marginal relative to mainstream art—certainly in form, content, and marketability; but in my strange world that's evidence of quality and significance. The margin is where much of the really advanced, exciting, origi-



57.
Vanilla Nightmares
 #18 (1988). Courtesy
 John Weber Gallery,
 collection Williams
 College Museum of
 Art/American
 Academy of Arts and
 Sciences.

nal work is being done—by artists who are critically distanced from the status quo both politically and aesthetically; who see the mainstream clearly because they've been excluded from it while having to navigate through it; and who are unwilling to accept the narrow range of aesthetic options validated by the mainstream.

When it became clear in the mid 1970s that conceptual and performance art were being eradicated from the annals of art history by dealers and collectors who saw that its continued support would entail their financial ruin, many of us decided to keep producing them anyway. Now conceptual art is back in style, but examining one's own racism is just as unfashionably marginal as ever. So I'm always amused by the solipsistic and parochial postmodernist lament that the mainstream co-opts everything. It doesn't even try to co-opt politically hot work, for fear of evaporating outward toward the margin. And we wouldn't want that, would we? (For example, I don't see anyone trying to co-opt Faith Ringgold, or PESTS, or Judy Baca.) But I find I can live with that. Every foray into the mainstream reminds me how saturated by money, power, fashion, and social status it is. I find most of the work I see there monotonous, formulaic, and deeply boring. Surely the inflated theorizing of much recent art criticism is inversely proportional to the interest and significance of the work it occasionally mentions. The values and practices of the mainstream would have to change very radically to make it a club I'd want to join.

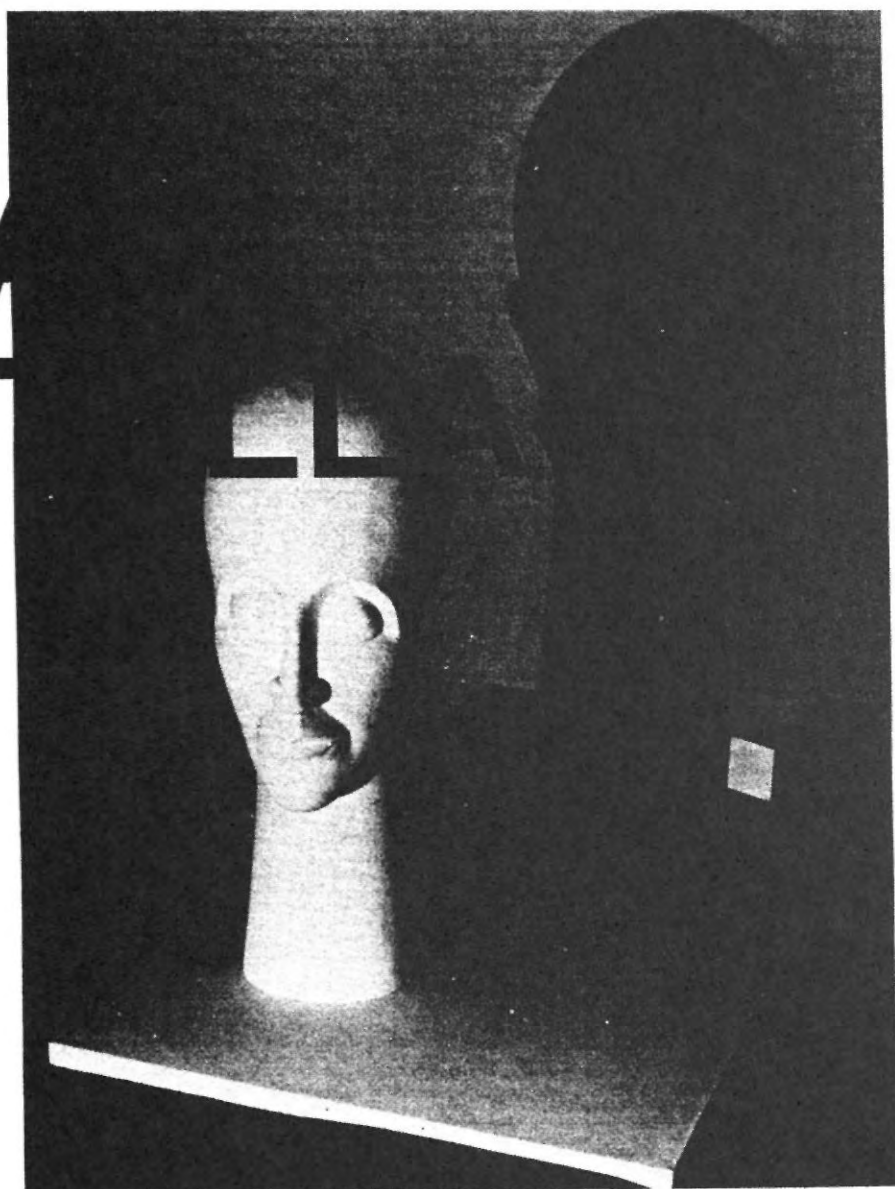
I've discussed elsewhere how I would like (and not like) my work to be written about, so I'll be brief about this. I admire clear, intelligent, intellectually honest and self-reflective art criticism. These qualities are much more important to me than how politically correct a critic thinks he or she is. Ideally I would like such criticism to situate my work at the interior boundary of consciousness between the self and the other, and at the intersection of the political and the aesthetic avant garde. This implies that I think there still is an avant garde. I view the doctrine of postmodernism as an oppressive mainstream ideology that legitimates disregard of the aesthetic innovations of marginalized artists. I have no patience with criticism that relies on obfuscating jargon or esoteric references that obscure rather than illuminate the aesthetic and political realities it purports to address; nor with criticism that fails to take art at least as seriously as its own theoretical underpinnings; nor with criticism that flinches in the face of the realities my work represents. A piece of criticism that does not respect its readership enough to render difficult or loaded ideas intelligibly does not deserve the respect expressed by reading it. Some recent experiences have led me to realize that I would rather not have my work written about at all than to have it discussed in an irresponsible or intellectually dishonest way. Publicity as such, irrespective of quality, is of no interest to me.

As to how I feel about having had my twenty-year retrospective at the Alternative Museum, my feelings about it express a kind of "Woody Allen" syndrome in reverse: I have tremendous respect for any institution that would take the risk of giving its stamp of approval to work that is difficult, disturbing, confrontational, politically volatile, and of uncertain market value at best. That means that the institution in question must believe in the work for its own sake, and *that* kind of support is more important to me than anything else. It's easy to gas off at length about one's political convictions, but there are very few art institutions willing to back up those convictions by exhibiting work that explicitly critiques the racial power structure of, among other things, the art world itself. I have great admiration for individuals in positions of responsibility—in the case of my retrospective, Jane Farver—who are willing to take that risk. It is no accident that the Alternative Museum has a reputation for doing whatever it thinks is important and interesting, regardless of whose feathers it ruffles. I don't see how my retrospective could have originated anywhere else.

My relation as a marginal artist to art institutions generally is fraught with ambiguity. Because I have never actively attempted to join the mainstream, I am impossibly, unbelievably stupid and naive about power relationships with those who represent it. I can't quite grasp the fact that someone could be enthusiastic about something as centrally important to me as my work without also being a good and trustworthy friend, or that such a friendship might be constrained or corrupted in unmentionable ways by considerations of power or professional position, or that I might foreclose a professional relationship by treating a person as a friendly equal rather than as God the Father. In some circles I have a reputation for being difficult and unaccommodating: I have occasionally refused to sacrifice the integrity of my work for the privilege of promoting it and do not respond well to attempts at manipulation or coercion. In these ways I marginalize myself, by prescreening the art institutions that are willing to deal with me. I find I can live with that, too.

Finally, I was asked how I like being marginal, and whether I think that's an appropriate way to categorize me and my work. The answer is that I can't imagine what it would be like *not* to be marginal, because I have never felt anything *but* marginal relative to any group I can think of. I like it fine. I think my marginality gives me a clearer vision of the practices, conventions, and beliefs that define the mainstream, precisely because of my distance from it. Because so much of my work has to do with critiquing mainstream habits of thought and perceptual categorization, my marginality is a major resource for me both in art and in philosophy. I wouldn't sacrifice it even if I could, which of course I can't; so it's remarkably convenient that I prefer it.

**JOA
RE**



Retallack

The Poethical Wager

Oui, mais il faut parier. Cela n'est pas volontaire, vous êtes embarqué.

Yes, but you must wager. This is not voluntary, you are embarked.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

INSERTING AN H IN POETICS: A SLEF INTERVIEW

This interview between old friends (only sometimes at odds), Joan Retallack and Quinta Slef, took place in a short-circuited corner of cyberspace on a rainy Domingo/Domenica/Sunday/Sonntag/Dimanche....

QUINTA SLEF: *How shall we begin? Just before we turned on the tape recorder, you said, "Art that's of consequence has always been a poethical wager." You've been talking and writing about "poethics" for quite a while, but, before we get into that, why "wager"? What's that about?*

JOAN RETALLACK: When you make a wager you stake something that matters on an uncertain outcome. It's a conscious, strategic risk. Of course we're taking risks every moment of our lives, but most of the time we can't think of it that way. We'd become paralyzed with fear. It may sound dramatic, but it's actually a truism that every time I choose to do something or persist in some sort of behavior, I'm risking my life for whatever needs, desires, impulses, habits, values... lurk in that behavior, whether or not I have a grip on the implications. There's no avoiding it. Life—motion, change—is inherently risky. Why not take risks for what we care about most?

QS: *Why not indeed? But, to be faux-Socratic, you've just said that's what we're doing anyway. Don't we always try for what we think is best?*

JR: Not necessarily. It's seldom that clear. Apart from the obvious question, best for whom?—the individual? the community?—a good deal of what's done in the world comes out of the sense that what's best is really impossible. Might as well do the next or third best or—out of overwhelming frustration, anger, despair—the worst possible thing—just get it over with, destroy the field of possibilities that never seems to yield justice or solace or satisfaction! In art—particularly avant-garde art—this is what critics label “nihilism.” I personally think it's rare in the arts. Artists want to make things. Their energy tends to be constructive. Of course I'm postponing the question of effect. Even if I want to act positively, what I think is best may be off the mark from even my own subsequent point of view. The future, that is, the present, is complex and uncertain.

QS: *Then what hope is there? We're all shooting in the dark.*

JR: Yes, if we're Platonists or Kantians or religious fundamentalists we're shooting for transcendence into a realm unknowable by the senses; if we're dadaists or Buddhists we're letting things happen; if we're pragmatists we're betting on an outcome by means of logics and intuitions that come from experience in the world as we find it. Radical unknowability is the only constant.

QS: *That's a daunting view if part of your program is ethical or political.*

JR: It's daunting if your primary concern is control. What we need is a robustly nuanced reasonableness, one that can operate in an atmosphere of uncertainty, that gives us the courage to forge on, to launch our hopes into the unknown—the future—by engaging positively with otherness and unintelligibility.

QS: *I don't see the logic in that. I would think it would be precisely the other way around—to engage now with the little certainty we can muster. At least we'd have the best chance of charting some kind of predictable trajectory.*

JR: Well, that's the probabilistic approach of the sciences. I think it's just what we have to relinquish in the arts—that illusion of predictable trajectories. Think of how narrow a trajectory must be in order for it to remain predictable. An obsession with the predictable is what leads people to confuse ethics with censorship in relation to the arts. What we need is dubious prototypes of difficult processes. Long-range inquiries and exercises of imagination that are an entirely contingent praxis of constructively reasoned agency.

QS: *Dubious?! (laughter) Reasoned agency?! I thought implicit in your use of wager would be the foregrounding of chance—that the language of intentionality can never provide an adequate description of any act. Mustn't the artist, as artist, act out of intuition and imagination more than reason?*

JR: Yes, yes, of course. The major role of chance, and change, in our world is precisely why intuition and imagination are so important to a reasoned agency. This is a synergy, not a dichotomy. To act at all we need to pick up on so many cues that are not part of what we're explicitly taught to notice. The kind of agency that has a chance of mattering in today's world can thrive *only* in a culture of acknowledged complexity, *only* in contexts of long-range collaborative projects that bring together multiple modes of engagement—intuition, imagination, cognition. . . . The more complex things are, the less certain the outcome but also the more room for the play of the mind, for inventing ourselves out of the mess.

QS: *So one could say that making something of complexity is our only chance. Does it work the other way around? Making something of chance is the only complexity?*

JR: Hmm. I like surprising symmetries, but . . . hmm. You know it's amazing how constrained and victimized people feel in affluent cultures brimming with advanced technologies and electronics designed, as McLuhan pointed out, to give greater scope to our nervous system. Electronics links us in a global neocortex, yet the model for agency remains one of rugged individual willpower. I think we get into those typically postmodern conundrums of the "prison house of language" or the "prison house of power relations" when we puzzle about how the individual speech act fits into social-construction theories of language. Analyzing the individual act to discern signs of free will, given the degree of our interconnectedness, is bound to be discouraging. The apotheosis of this may have been the analytic philosopher A.I. Melden's book *Free Action*, in which he interrogates, for over two hundred pages, the meaning of the act of raising one's arm.¹

QS: *That appeals to the Occam in me.*

JR: Oh yes I loved it. British analytic philosophy is the next best thing after Lewis Carroll. The peculiarly context-free thought experiment is wonderfully, uselessly tonic. Wittgenstein suggests a remedy by positing the vague, ubiquitous "form of life," context of all contexts that

give meaning to language games, but even he in Oxbridge Philo fashion didn't flesh this out.

QS: *But to return to one-armed elegance for a moment, what does Melden conclude?*

JR: As I remember it, he concludes with what could be the starting point of a much shorter book—the question whether so and so raised *his* arm voluntarily is ultimately too complex to understand since there are so many difficult matters of social context that the author cannot treat in such a study. Ethical analysis that foregrounds isolated acts of individual will always fail when real life floods in and muddies the logic. So the possibility of effective human agency can't depend on such arguments.

QS: *So, ethical agency is embedded in values that inform long-range projects that engage with a complex world as well as indirect and unpredictable ways in which this work might affect the cultural climate.*

JR: Precisely. Beautifully put!

QS: *Hmm, interesting, but—to play devil's advocate—aren't things complicated enough already? Isn't that why artists and humanists and scientists alike have for millennia sought means of simplifying in the service of clarification, one might even say, of sanity? For example, why further complicate an already complex term like poetics—which ten out of ten people are fuzzy about anyway—by adding an accursed Aitch?*

JR: Quinta, my dear friend, life complicates us. Whether we like it or not. There's no turning away from that if one is to live in relationship with the circumstances of real life.

QS: *Wait a minute! I must stop you there. I've noticed that you use the word real with abandon. I must say I find this highly suspect. What isn't real? Or, to put it another way, what does the adjective real add when you speak of "real life"? Remember how Kant discounted St. Anselm's proof of the existence of God? He showed that "real" is not an attribute. You can logically prove that a being "than which nothing greater can be conceived" can be conceived, but you can't prove that it's real. Real adds no content to a description.*

JR: I've wondered about this myself. Isn't *real* simply adding emphasis, like underscoring or italics, or an irritating redundancy? But aren't terms like *naturalism*, *realism*, *everyday life* always historical in import? They come up at times when people are trying to revise old

habits of thought, to bring new conceptualizations into vocabularies and logics. I think *real* began to creep into my aesthetic vocabulary when I started distinguishing between “complex realism” and other artifices of realism whose stylistic telos is radical simplification. I couldn’t help but notice that those traditions in the arts called “realism” and “naturalism” were at least as removed from our experiences of reality and nature as any other aesthetic artifice. The elevation of simplicity as an explicit value in aesthetics followed articulations of scientific method from Occam’s razor to Descartes’s “clear and distinct ideas” to the values of modern laboratory sciences.

QS: *Interestingly, minimalist work—which is pared down in conceptually strategic ways—has a very complex aesthetic relation to everyday life.*

JR: Yes! But the whole methodological landscape has been changing since the beginning of the twentieth century with the introduction of the constituting observer. Sciences of complexity have altered our sense of the “essential” simplicity and rationality of all things. There is still pattern, but it’s in dynamic interaction with an enormous field of unpredictable elements. Chaos theory has brought turbulence and chance into the foreground of how we understand the conditions in which we actually live. I suppose that’s what it comes down to for me, *real* means connected with everyday life as we experience it. This is why I’ve always thought John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* is the heart of his entire philosophy—of his ethics, politics, and pedagogy.

QS: *But what does all that necessarily have to do with art?*

JR: Certain kinds of art help us to live with nourishment and pleasure in the real world, connect us with it in ways nothing else can, by shifting our attention to formally framed material conditions in ingenious ways. I’m thinking now not only of minimalism but of what Duchamp and Cage taught us about the link between art and the nature of attention. This relates to Dewey’s argument about the urgency of connecting with our sensory environment if we—the species so prone to abstraction and estrangement—are to avoid a kind of living death. Just as importantly, the word *real* took on further meaning for my working poethics when I discovered D. W. Winnicott’s useful distinction between fantasy and imagination. Winnicott played a major role in psychoanalysis with his contributions to object relations theory, but his most important contribution from the point of view of aesthetics is his theory of play.² He argues, and shows in case studies

from his practice, that the ability to play, that is, engage with the material world outside our minds via the active imagination, *is* our way of participating in the real. This is very different from the inward trajectory and stasis of fantasy. One might say that for Winnicott the “real” *is* what we sense via the play of the individual and cultural imagination. And this play of the imagination is crucial to a “life worth living” from childhood on. So, above all, adults need to continue cultivating their capacity for play. You see this capacity in those engaged in invention and exploration, whatever their field. It’s why such people have often been called “child-like.” This imaginative vitality, this connectedness with the world, is present in anyone who thrives on curiosity, puzzling, conjecturing. Dewey points out that the passionate auto mechanic is experiencing the same play of the mind brought on by connectedness to material form as the aesthete. To avoid imaginative engagement with material complexity as our popular culture tends to do is to live in a fantasy world.

QS: *Let’s return to poetics.*

JR: When did we leave?

QS: *Well, I’m not as sure of all this as you are. Life may necessarily complicate us, but it doesn’t follow that the inverse proposition is the case—that we should complicate life. Again, I ask you, why the accursed “Aitch”?*

JR: A poetics can take you only so far without an *h*. If you’re to embrace complex life on earth, if you can no longer pretend that all things are fundamentally simple or elegant, a poetics thickened by an *h* launches an exploration of art’s significance *as*, not just *about*, a form of living in the real world. That *as* is not a simile; it’s an ethos. Hence the *h*. What I’m working on is quite explicitly a poethics of a complex realism.³ I suppose also that I want to suggest a “po”-ethos to replace the enervating “post”-ethos we’re stalled in at the moment. With the situation we find ourselves in—unprecedented, accelerating complexity, more and more porous borders—neither art nor theory can afford to remove itself from the new configurations of the contemporary.

QS: *You mean you think we’re not at the end of history and art and the history of art and the art of history after all?*

JR: Not only are we not at the end of history or art, except as perversely defined to end rather than undergo paradigmatic changes, but we’re at a threshold of untold possibilities. What thinkers like

Fukiyama and Danto are saying is that we're at the end of certain things as we've practiced them in the past. This is true of every era that experiences sudden or rapid change—look at Hellenic Greece, look at the European renaissance. Philosophy changed rapidly and radically in the fifth century B.C.E. and has many times since. Science changed radically in the seventeenth century. Deterministic chaos, fractal geometries give us new images by redefining relationships between order and disorder, pattern and unpredictability, the finite and the infinite. For instance, if space-time is to be understood as fractal surface (a scalar complexity) rather than an archaeological accretion (time's vertical monument to sticky molecules), then dynamic equilibria can replace the double-ended arrow of depth and transcendence as working trope. This has immense implications for the way we think about history and aesthetics.

QS: *You've pointed out elsewhere that it was said of Galileo that he wasn't doing science, of Mandelbrot that he wasn't a mathematician, of Wittgenstein that he wasn't a philosopher, of Joyce that he wasn't a novelist, of Gertrude Stein that she wasn't a poet, of Duchamp that he wasn't an artist, of John Cage that he wasn't composing music.*

JR: Yes, what they have in common is that they redefined the boundaries of their disciplines in relation to experiences that lay outside generic definitions. What we have instead of ends is exciting new ways of continuing, new ways of conceiving the relation between the discipline and the extradisciplinary experience, new recognitions of the degree to which these projects are complicated by their positions in multiply intersecting and overlapping sociopolitical and cultural constellations. We know (or perhaps just temporarily think) that there are no universally and absolutely legitimate uberviews. Without that illusion, without the authority of what we've called metanarratives, we can only compose our projects as I think we actually always have: in relation to the contingencies of cultural climates and microclimates. This doesn't mean our projects are no longer informed by history. They're not vacant of meaning because we've admitted their historical contingency. If anything they're more meaningful in navigating a sense of the contemporary under principles of uncertainty, incompleteness, turbulent complexity. I want to say to artists, and particularly poets, Resist pressures to regress, deny, escape, transcend. Pop culture and religion do that well enough on their own. If we're going to continue to make

meaningful, sensually nourishing forms in the twenty-first century, art must thrive as a mode of engaged living in *medias mess*.

QS: *Do I detect a soapbox somewhere in the room? "Mess" ... as in Beckett's "The form must let the mess in"?*

JR: Yes, or in John Cage's version, Let the mess shine in! I'm glad that you recognize *mess* as a key technical term! There's also Gertrude Stein's sense of the writer making her way through the mess of the contemporary. Of necessity never entirely knowing what she's doing because to write out of her own time she must work with material that is not yet formed into recognizable patterns. Unlike the classics, the contemporary has not yet been classified. She, like Picasso, uses the word *ugliness* as well as *mess*. Picasso said, Anything new is ugly. This is always a by-product of a truly experimental aesthetic, to move into unaestheticized territory. Definitions of the beautiful are tied to previous forms. The end of beauty has been lamented, too, of late. Have you seen all those articles in the *New York Times* about composers who are finally restoring beauty to music after the Schönbergian-Cagean debacle? What this means is they are mastering mechanics of stimulus-response similar to those of pop and mass cultures, rolling out tried-and-true methods of eliciting "Ah, how beautiful!" from the audience. In music this means things like sensitive adagios ripening toward thundering crescendos, etc. I and some others think of the music of John Cage as beautiful, think of much of the poetry associated with the label "Language" as beautiful. But this sense of beauty draws on a very different value context—a different poethics, if you will—from the music of Brahms or the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins or Emily Dickinson. Not to deny the beauty in all that. Of course it's beautiful.

QS: *Most people think Cage and so-called (or not) Language poets have really made a mess of things, in the negative sense of mess.*

JR: And why is that? It's because the work is jarringly, disarmingly, disorientingly unfamiliar. Like most of the art and science characteristic of the twentieth century—that could only be a product of the twentieth century—it has defamiliarized certain ways of seeing reality while offering others. Theories of "defamiliarization" are very familiar at this point. What is not so well understood is how the positive material of avant-garde or innovative or new (choose the term that offends you least) art remains invisible to the person whose primary experience is persistently that of the *absence* of the familiar rather than the *presence* of the new.

QS: *Is it the desire, the need, for certainty?*

JR: It is absolutely necessary to be certain of certain things—that $1+1=2$, that a black hole won't emerge out of the dusty corner of this room. To import certainty to other areas of life requires varying degrees of denial and/or oversimplification. Some of that is necessary too. But if your question is, how can we notice and make new patterns that meaningfully, pleasurably connect us to the exigencies of life in this complicated, often frightening, and not so brave new world?, the project requires all kinds of things: tolerance for ambiguity; willingness to move forward with uncertainty; willing suspension of both belief and disbelief; willingness to wade purposefully, playfully out into the mess.

QS: *Sounds unsettling, sounds downright icky.*

JR: Well yes. It is that, particularly if by "icky" you mean anxiety laden. Working in the noise of the mess, the cacophony of intersecting cultures, polylingualisms, competing sociopolitical valences and vectors, the omnipresent electronic intimacy with global intentions, needs, desires we don't understand—the relentlessly unintelligible. All this brings on—to ennoble it a bit—something like Kierkegaardian dread. But to some degree or another this is the work of living in our world that we are all doing anyway whether we like it or not. It's the *raison d'être* for that whole category of endeavors we call "work," isn't it? Without the action of time, without change, without thermodynamics and entropy and chaos, work wouldn't be necessary. We'd be smiling serenely in homeostasis.

QS: *I'm not sure this generic endorsement of work gets us very far. Work, after all, takes place in many ways—repairs to existing forms, restoration, conservation, replication, as well as analysis, critical evaluation, modification, invention. It's not all based on noticing obsolescence and creating new forms.*

JR: You're right. Yes, there are many examples of this range in poetry. One could—to identify only the extremes—think of "New Formalists" as conservators, "Language Poets" as inventors. The former risk being called irrelevant fuddy-duddies; the latter, destroyers of all that is true poetry. I'll make no secret of it—it's the inventors who interest me most, those in the past as well as the present. Not only in the arts, but in every discipline. They give us the energy to be present despite the frightening aspects of the mess. They give us the chance to experience the grace of memory in motion.

QS: *Sounds brave, but is it really "new"? This is a perennially contested idea and for good reason. Can there really be invention or are we always just tweaking what already exists?*

JR: Of course *new* never means *ex nihilo*. It means *ex perturbatio*, *ex confusio rerum*—or, in the vernacular of this room, *medias mess*. Out of the teeming multiplicity comes a new sense of pattern. And that pattern, if it's to be useful, hasn't bypassed uncertainty and unintelligibility.

QS: *This brings to mind Italo Calvino. He loved Carlo Emilio Gadda's novel That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana⁴ I think for reasons similar to what you're talking about. Do you remember his Norton lectures—published as Six Memos for the Next Millennium? He admired Gadda for writing that uses "multiplicity" as a way of knowing the world.*

JR: What I like so much about Calvino is that he makes it clear that giving pleasure, entertainment, is as high a priority as any other.

QS: *Yes, the lectures are entirely about the characteristics of novels he takes pleasure in.*

JR: Pleasure, yes, but I want also to think for a moment about entertainment. In our world, where we are suddenly discovering that we all have "Attention Deficit Disorder," ADDition is supposed to replace the "higher" mathematics of multiplication. The expression "entertainment value" is pervasively used to justify simplistic fare in all the media. The assumption is that a homogeneous mass audience wants first and foremost to be entertained. Well of course we do. But what does that really mean? The word *entertain* means to hold the attention. There's no question that this must be the first principle of any work that's to have impact. The question is how attention is held, how our assumptions about "attention spans" change and why, how attention is trained by the culture. Our informal and institutionalized cultural pedagogies shape—quantitatively and qualitatively—our geometries of attention.

QS: *Well to some extent, but we also know at this point that people really do have different intelligences.*

JR: Differences in learning styles and preferences need to be respected. But I think I'm asking another question: are we systematically discouraged from engaging in sustained projects that can give us the cumulative pleasures of a meaningful challenge as well as the capacity for ef-

fective agency? Has, in fact, "investment" in this kind of "time-consuming" experience come to be seen as threatening to the necessarily shortsighted goals of a consumer culture whose profit margins are based on constantly changing appetites for instant gratification? Yes, I'm positing a kind of blind conspiracy (as opposed to conspiracy with a centralized intelligence) linking consumer desires to fantasy (the internal world of insatiable illusion) rather than imagination.

QS: *So you want to posit imagination as a function of the active intelligence that to a significant extent shapes its own world rather than absorbing prefabrications.*

JR: Exactly. If we're transfixed by gimmicks that prey on our tendency to sink to the occasion of fantasy's innocuous pleasures, this is not so much attention as capitulation. But this passivity has been naturalized by our consumer ethos. It's thought to be natural to want to sleep one's way through life. I don't think it's "natural" at all to scratch only the media-induced itch, to become flaccid and twitchily reactive.

QS: *You seem to be condemning the entertainment value of mass culture entirely. I'm not sure I disagree, but is fantasy life always so sleazy? You make it sound like a virtually vegetative, masturbatory state!*

JR: I couldn't have put it better!

QS: *Can't fantasy play a role in conceiving new patterns? The child psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim placed enormous value on daydreaming—another name for fantasy—in transitional spaces like hallways and secret hideouts so that children would have imaginative space to call their own. He felt this is where artistic ability was nourished.*

JR: I'll refrain from an ad hominem attack on Bettelheim, whom I once read with great interest, but I do think his conflation of fantasy and imagination comes straight out of the worst elisions of the German romantic tradition. His *Uses of Enchantment* makes important points about stories as previews of life's brutalities without critiquing the way in which the Grimm fairy tale can render that brutality oddly acceptable. Fantasy turns its gaze inward, backward, toward the autoerogenous zones. It's consolation or titillation cordoned off from "real" implications. This has been its chief defense in relation to pornography for instance—that it has no implications for "real life" and is therefore harmless. But that it lacks "real" implications doesn't prevent real consequences. The real fills the vacuum in grotesque

ways. I wonder if all those traditions in German culture that seemed not to have touched ground—philosophical idealism, mythology, fairy tales, transcendental romanticism—helped leave the ground open for holocaust. Ideals of purity, all transcendent idealisms, the noumenal telos, magical thinking of the sort that informs the logics of myths and fairy tales are fantasy systems with built-in protections from an ethos of responsibility to a real world. Fantasy is of course a real phenomenon, but the mechanism of its style is arranged precisely to deny the reality of its consequences. I wonder if this comes out of despair. I wonder whether there is a dystopian assumption among those who produce fantasy literatures that this world is too irredeemable to merit attention.

QS: *That's an alarmingly strong statement!*

JR: Yes it is. It alarms me too.

QS: *You sound too certain about the cultural context of the Nazi holocaust, of causal connections in what was, if nothing else, a vastly overdetermined event.*

JR: No, you're right, of course. It was overdetermined. It was a horrendous collision of elements—some with a contemporary contingency that had very little to do with long-standing cultural traditions, some that had a lot to do with them, for example, with pedagogical traditions of compliance as well as the things I mentioned earlier. No, I'm not as certain as I sound. It's something I, like many others, continually puzzle over because it's a paradigmatic conundrum of relations between culture and terror.

QS: *But how do you use thoughts like these in relation to contemporary thought and art without beginning to think of moralistic opprobrium—thou shall not write fairy tales!*

JR: No, you can't do that. That kind of authoritarian certainty comes from thinking in terms of easily identifiable, isolatable, cause-effect sequences: the mechanics of billiard ball *a* hits billiard ball *b* causing situation *c*. I would rather think in terms of more complex environmental models, of atmospheres or climates teeming with variables of circumstance, habit, opinion, value. . . . This is actually a meteorological model that brings one to consider the broad cultural ethos rather than moral isolates. So what does one do in the turbulent weather of contemporary societies, global cultures? What does one do if one hopes to help in some way?

QS: *Yes, that's the question, but I must say the meteorological model only makes things more nebulous for me.*

JR: Yes. The sky darkens. What can you do but take cover? Not even the pathetic fallacy to call on. There's no direct link between the unfolding of the storm and what you want to happen next in the story of your life. Things are out of control.

QS: *OK, cut to the cultural storm.*

JR: There's been a continuum from the popular culture of the early part of the twentieth century to the mass culture of today that has become increasingly fantasy bound, increasingly dependent on the fantasy logics of a consumer-centered me-ethos. You know as well as I do that to make something that disturbs fantasy logic is to ensure that it won't sell. Whether or not something sells is the sole criterion of value throughout most of our society. In a sales-driven faux high culture, novels are more and more written by committee. Agents and editors advise the author on how to shape the book to please the affluent zip codes where the bookstore chains thrive. What little poetry gets reviewed is relentlessly self-obsessed narrative snippets placed between wide margins. A recent review praised a poet's "powerful," "bitter" memories of her father as "perfectly accessible." No challenge here to the fantasy that it's a small world after all.

QS: *Do I detect a strain of bitterness in your feelings about this?*

JR: I hope not. Actually, I really think not, as Descartes said just before he disappeared. Willful simplemindedness is no fun. Ah, yes/no, no bitterness there.

QS: *Let's get back to the "prison house of culture." The power differential right now between economic "bottom-line" motivations and the few voices articulating alternative values seems overwhelming. I don't mean to be crass, but with the picture you're presenting of the state of our culture—and of course it's all globally interconnected, this consumer-driven ethos—how can it possibly help in any way at all to make the subtle lettristic gesture of thickening poetics with an *h*?*

JR: Ah, glad you asked! This revives my spirits. I like the way you put it—"thickening poetics with an *h*." Precisely! As you know, I love and often cite John Cage's essay "History of Experimental Music in the United States." I love it because it directly links aesthetic questions with an ethos of a historical need for experiment. Cage talks about choosing to do not just any experiment but what one thinks needs to

be done. Why? Why—if there are, in principle, no limits to possibility, and art most importantly operates in order to open up the future—why concern oneself with history at all? Cage's answer: "In order to thicken the plot." And then he goes on to say, "All those interpenetrations which seem at first glance to be hellish—history, for instance... are to be espoused."⁵

QS: *"Espoused." Peculiar word, espoused. But, yes, I see the relevance to what you've been saying about possibilities inherent in complexity. However, doesn't this beg the question of what is needed? How can one even think in such terms in the midst of a tidal wave?*

JR: And not just one tidal wave: tidal waves of market-driven goods, tidal waves of information, tidal waves of intercultural noise. What we are talking about is utter chaos. And that's what can give us an inkling of orientation. Every chaotic system is a dynamic, rather fragile equilibrium of order and disorder, pattern and unpredictable detail, all extremely sensitive to initial conditions, to any change of any variable. To enter an *h* into this turbulent system is to change an initial condition in albeit a cultural microclimate. But the fragile contingency of the larger pattern means that even such a small change could have an increasing effect.

QS: *The butterfly effect seems too gossamer to pin one's hopes on.*

JR: Yes it does, doesn't it. And yet, the effect can be quite real. We know this from history. The example that's always trotted out is the assassination of the archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo—the event whose effects were magnified by other coincidental events into the first great European war. One could say, Well if old Ferdi hadn't gotten his, something else would have done it; and of course that's probably true. It's precisely the point that anything might have done it and that there was no way to predict the outcome.

QS: *Your example also implies that one can't know whether the effect, if it does indeed lead to major changes, will be positive or negative. Whoever shot Ferdinand may well have thought he was doing something for the greater good.*

JR: True, your overall logic is sound, but there's something about the ethos of the act itself, in that case the act of murder, that might lead one to feel it would be unlikely to have a positive effect. An equally passionate act that embodied respect for life, a connectedness to the larger social fabric, might have fared differently. In fact, to return to

our earlier discussion, assassinations often pop right out of the fantasy lives of "loners," no?

QS: *Hmm. They also come out of the thick plots of terrorist groups. But then there's the question of ethos. Let's get back to literature, the proper domain of thickened plots. In fact let's get back to Calvino. I'm thinking about his vision of what he calls the possibility of a "hyper-novel." He's advocating a literature that's not an idealization but a method of knowing the complex, messy world imaginatively. And what's interesting is how commodious that literature can be. His exemplar, Gadda, like James Joyce, can use anything and everything, so to speak, given what Calvino refers to as his "complicated epistemology."*

JR: Yes, let's look at the text: "Gadda developed a style to match his complicated epistemology, in that it superimposes various levels of language, high and low, and uses the most varied vocabulary. . . . Gadda throws the whole of himself onto the page he is writing, with all his anxieties and obsessions, so that often the outline is lost while the details proliferate and fill up the whole picture. What is supposed to be a detective novel is left without a solution."⁶ This, by the way, also happens to Gertrude Stein in her only attempt at a detective novel. Her obsession with language wins out over the trajectory of the detective genre in *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*.⁷ To this reader's delight!

QS: *Of course!*

JR: Of course. In fact, the generic detective fiction or sci-fi novel or thriller is a closed system, a fantasy world, designed to be incommunicado with the immense world we move through in everyday life. Listen to this—detective fiction could never do this: "In one of Gadda's novels, the least thing is seen as the center of a network of relationships . . . multiplying the details so that the descriptions and digressions become infinite." Ah, the scalar detail of a fractal poetics! "Whatever the starting point, the matter in hand spreads out and out encompassing ever vaster horizons, and if it were permitted to go on further and further in every direction it would end by embracing the entire universe."⁸

QS: *And the magnification—your butterfly effect.*

JR: Thickened with an ethos of valuing the random confluences in everyday life. Notice how Calvino sees Gadda effecting this complexity, this outward trajectory. The novel is, after all, like poetry, made of language. The making of language (poesis) into a complex form that has

the character (ethos) of living in the author's contemporary experience of the world is the poethics of Gadda's work. Calvino describes it, without of course naming it as a poethics, as Gadda's "Deliberate Disharmony." It enacts a contemporary epistemology by assuming that any knowledge of things in this world must confront "a convergence of infinite relationships, past and future, real or possible—demand[ing] that everything should be precisely named, described and located in space and time. He does this by exploiting the semantic potential of words, of all the varieties of verbal and syntactical forms with their connotations and tones, together with the often comic effects created by their juxtapositions."⁹ Sounds like a walk through Manhattan or any other great metropolis to me.

QS: *This reminds me of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of "thick description."*

JR: Yes, very thick description. So thick it moves beyond description as an attempt to bring forms of extratextual reality (odd juxtapositions, cross purposes, etc.) into textual reality. Which is what Geertz is fascinated by as an ethnographer, how to "be there" in a text, how to create a "world in a text." In the extreme, which in art is always better than the mean, it becomes a question of language that is itself a form of life in the Wittgensteinian sense, a textual form of life informed by the extratextual contexts in which it lives, and which it changes. Calvino quotes Gadda as saying—in line with quantum physics—"To know is to insert something into what is real, and hence to distort reality."¹⁰

QS: *Distort has negative overtones. It feels more violent than the effect of the observer in quantum physics.*

JR: Oh I don't know. Think of Schrödinger's poor cat, equally dead and alive in the box of his thought-experiment. With all the violence around us one could become too frightened to embark at all. It's necessary to find ways to navigate the turbulence, to practice the art of staying in motion in a world that is always threatening to stun us into stasis. Imagination can rise to an occasion. It can use the surface tension of the tidal wave rather than being pulled into the undertow. This is what makes life exhilarating.

QS: *Sounds wet and romantic to me!*

JR: Ow, that stings! No! Not romantic! Well, all right, I admit to it, just a bit, because what I'm talking about involves passion. But there's

a crucial difference. I'm advocating a greatness of passion, not a passion for greatness. Stereotypical romanticism, the idealist strain, was not about being tossed in the messy turbulence; it was about climbing the statuesque profile of a snow-covered peak—an Alp, a giant frozen custard, a blond Brünnhilde—to identify that larger-than-life profile with one's own genius. I know, it's so easy to bash German idealism. It would be a cheap trick if it were not still such a strong part of "Western Civ."

qs: *So the idea is to rise to the occasion, not above it.*

JR: Connect with it and create textual realities with their own "structural integrities"—to use a Bucky Fuller term—as viable forms of life with more resonance than reference. This is what the best poetry can make happen on the page. To rise above the occasion is to miss it. The occasion in today's world is an enormous, intricate entanglement of people and events. Calvino was excited by the possibilities of a "hypernovel" because it doesn't say "things are complex" but is itself a complex system that embodies a method of knowing how to operate in that "impossible" situation, how to take oneself beyond one self's single-point perspective.

qs: *Calvino ends his essay—con brio—on just that note: "Think what it would be to have a work conceived from outside the self, a work that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language, to the bird perching on the edge of the gutter, to the tree in spring and the tree in fall, to stone, to cement, to plastic" (124).*

JR: Ah, I love "to plastic." This is not—with its gutters and cement—to be mistaken for a pastoral vision.

qs: *Then he invokes Ovid, whom I know has been important to you. "Was this not perhaps what Ovid was aiming at, when he wrote about the continuity of forms? And what Lucretius was aiming at when he identified himself with that nature common to each and every thing?" (124). Lovely, isn't it?*

JR: Yes, it speaks to the arts that restore lost continuities between us and the rest of the world. And one can argue that the reason art has always been so critical to our species is that we are in constant need of reconnecting our senses to the sensible world. But art is also full of disjunctions, deliberate disharmonies. To speak of poethics is to foreground this whole range of reassurances *and* dissonances, as values

and epistemologies, embedded in writing/reading as way of living in the world.

QS: O.K., I have to say this. I'm afraid I'm still not convinced that "poetics" without the *h* won't do the very same job.

JR: Thank you for your candor. Let me come at this from a different direction. Poetics without an *h* has primarily to do with questions of style. Style is the manner in which your experience has understood, assimilated, imprinted you. How it has transformed you in its Transylvanian cultural laboratories, focusing, even magnifying, the currents that have fed your intellectual energy, passing them on "stepped up," reenergized, but not swerving them into unforeseen collisions that produce new possibilities, that might even blow out a few old fuses. At this point, preserve, but feeling a distinct surge of power, you exclaim, Ah, I've found myself as a writer! Actually your poetics has you in *its* grip.

QS: This brings to mind something that Sartre said—that without our intervention, the language just goes on speaking itself. I think Sartre said that.

JR: Something like that. But, yes, that's it. You are being led; you cannot breathe fully. You are in its grip. The grip of what you know you should do. Your style is identified; it has become your obligation to the culture. You are doomed to execute it and then to reenact the fatalism of that execution over and over again. The reward is that no one will dispute that you are a poet. Your poethical work begins when you no longer wish to shape materials (words, visual elements, sounds) into legitimate progeny of your own poetics. When you are released from filling in the delimiting forms. This swerve, of course, comes about only as the result of a wrenching crisis. I don't mean to be dramatic, but you might not survive it. At least, not as a poet. You may at this point pick up some other line of work. If you persist, the patterns in your work may become more flexible, permeable, conversational, exploratory. This is a radical shift. It will change your sense of the relation of your language to "the mess"—the world beyond the page, everyday life and death. And this will in turn affect the world of the page—the formal intersections of historical and momentary fragments, formal intersections of space-time with linguistic forms of life, recovery and loss, silence and art. I think Francis Ponge was getting at something like this when he wrote in *Pour un Malherbe*, "In order for a text to expect in any way to render an account of reality of the concrete world (or the spiritual one), it must first attain reality in its own

world, the textual one."¹¹ But before you can begin to attempt this you must face the fact that your present project is insufficient, that it has not moved toward the unintelligibilities of the developing contemporary. You see this kind of change in the work of some poets and not others.

QS: *There's a widespread feeling that unintelligibility has no place in poetry, that it makes the work inaccessible in flagrant avant-disregard for its audience.*

JR: I like that, "avant-disregard." It's a good joke because it accurately reflects a common opinion. But it's not true. The language of one's contemporary moment is a complex barometer of all sorts of crosscurrents that are affecting us, that we are sensing, that fill us with energy and breath, anxiety and terror, but that we cannot yet bring into discernible form. I once heard a scientist who loves poetry say that the language of science and the language of poetry have in common that they are both natural languages under stress. The complexity of the world, in which language lives and develops and evolves, forms every word into a chord conveying many many things at once—some of them contradictory. Those chords strike us on many levels—sensual, intuitive, intellectual. And there's so much that we experience in the silence before, during, after, even *within* words. The poet must work with all of that. It's as unknown and challenging as exploring any wilderness or frontier.

QS: *We are getting farther and farther from Aristotle's Poetics.*

JR: Oh, you noticed! Yes, Aristotle, who has cast the most enduring shadow over the course of academic poetics, quite artificially divided everything up into what he took to be thoroughly comprehensible disciplines—theory, practice, ethics, politics, poetry. Poethical poets, whether or not they have themselves used the *b*, enact the complex dynamics that crisscross through these boundaries. The model is no longer one of city- or nation-states of knowledge, each with separate allegiances and consequences, testy about property rights and ownership, but instead the more global patterns of ecology, environmentalism, biorealism, the complex modelings of the nonlinear sciences, chaos theory. You can see this now with more and more poets using multiple languages in their work—not as quotation but as lively intersection, conversation.

QS: *OK, I confess I'm confused. One's poetics must inevitably be formed by one's personal experience—by the strange and problematic*

intersections of self, family, society that are unique experiences for each of us. But you claim that it's only the culture at large, and particularly the academy, that "understands" this as form.

JR: Yes, "understandings," one might awkwardly say. The form that is visible *as form* at any given cultural moment is what has already been assimilated into the academy. So the teaching in graduate programs of those "great innovators" of the past goes on almost entirely in an atmosphere of invisible contemporaries. And the implicit fallacy that is transmitted, say to the MFA student in "creative writing," is that if you are going to succeed in the cautious world of poetry prizes and establishment publication and professional advancement, your work must closely resemble a legitimated model. In the poetry of aboutness the only thing that need change is what it's about: the marvels of *my* sensitive, free associative response to seeing the first flower of spring. The models in most writing practice courses, in interesting contrast to those in scientific practice, rarely include the innovators. But even when they are included, the modeling paradigm is off base. Innovative poetry is most instructive to the writer, not as product but in its manner of operation. Every "great" innovator was acutely aware of changing circumstances and forms of her or his own times and had to devise a distinctive writing procedure to accommodate them. It's in this sense that authentically innovative work is consciously poethical. It vitally engages with the forms of life that create its contemporary context—the sciences, the arts, the politics, the sounds and textures of everyday life, the urgent questions and disruptions of the times. It's these factors that make it different from earlier work and for a time unrecognizable—to all but a few—as significant extension or transgression of existing genres. For the work to become poethical it seems it must risk a period of invisibility, unintelligibility. This happened with Stein, Joyce, Beckett, Wittgenstein, Cage. It's happening as we speak to some of our most brilliant contemporary poets. For a poethical development to occur, I think the language—the aural and visual forms, the grammar, the vocabulary—must precisely escape, in a radical way, the control of the poet. It must fly from the poet, like Zeno's arrow, in an imperiled, imperiling trajectory subject to cultural weather, chance, vagaries of all kinds beyond the poet's intentionality, out of zones of current intelligibility.

QS: *Like Zeno's arrow! This might sound rather daring except that Zeno's arrow didn't move. It remained motionless in the air.*

JR: Quite right! Until new language—a new philosophy, a new mathematics—came along to release it from false arrest. Chaos theory, fractal geometry, helps now to release Stein's or Cage's work into the culture. In fact at any given historical moment all of Zeno's laws against motion may be relevant to the reactions of academies and critical establishments. It takes a major conceptual shift—the very one that the art itself may be previewing. It seems to happen more easily in the visual arts. The figure-ground shift that we see in impressionist studies of the refraction of light into color, the figure-ground shift in the study of light in quantum physics—these become received by cultural eye and brain in ways less problematic than Joyce's foregrounding of linguistic refractions in *Finnegans Wake*. I wonder why.

QS: *I don't know, but I think that's true. For instance, the shift that occurred in the art critical world for Duchamp's "readymades" to become art prepares the way for Duchamp's and Cage's belief that the work of art is completed by the viewer. For the viewer to make this contribution to the meaning of the work, the culture must have already gone partway.*

JR: Yes, back to Zeno. The problem in one of the paradoxes is how that poor stalled athlete is trying to get from one side of the stadium to the other, but must first go halfway, and half of that, and half of that...and so on in infinite regress. In the contemporary aesthetic environment that problem need never arise. The poet never has to go the whole way, doesn't have to complete the transit of meaning all alone—

QS: *Is met partway by the reader.*

JR: In fact the artist *shouldn't* attempt to go the whole distance. As many have said, one way or another, the work should not explain but show itself. There's nothing more stimulating than a formally evident invitation to the reader to realize the work for her- or himself. There's always *at least* a dual perspective, that of poet and reader, two very different starting points of equal importance, mediated by worlds of experience in between—the vast diffusion and noise of the whole culture.

QS: Gregory Bateson said in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, "*All that is not information, not redundancy, not form and not restraints—is noise, the only possible source of new patterns.*"¹²

JR: It's the infinite messiness of that noise that gives each of us the chance to invent our own life patterns. New poetics are filled with noise, with surface indeterminacy. The moving principle of reading po-

etry is a function of the degree of indeterminacy in the text. It cannot be an argument.

QS: *Not an argument? Of course not. Who's saying it is!?*

JR: Well there's a long-standing, very entrenched aesthetic of persuasion, isn't there? In which the reader must be *made* to feel what the author felt, must be *convinced* of the author's omniscient perspective, must come to *believe* in the characters and the point (singular) of view—at least within the microcosm of the work—and be edified and inspired (filled with the author's breath) by it. The reader's activity is not one of participatory invention but of figuring out. Figuring out what the author as master creator means. One of my students recently said, Truth is stranger than fiction because fiction has to make sense. This applies to the lyric fictions of the I-poem as much as the *Ich-roman*. It all has to make internally consistent, persuasive sense.

QS: *Oh yes, I recall that you wrote somewhere that the ubiquitous three- or four- or five-stanza lyric poem mimics those exemplar arguments in modal logic. Final epiphany equals logical conclusion.*

JR: Both are guiding the mind toward an outburst of certitude—cognitive and/or emotional. And, of course, I'm speaking of an aesthetic whose guiding principle remains verisimilitude, what I think of as the "unnatural realisms." They have nothing at all to do with the complexities, the multiple logics of nature, of everyday experience; they are instead highly stylized, simple, and elegant conventions of "realism" or lyric "truth." Everything depends on the audience's suspension of disbelief—believe me, there's a lot to suspend!—coupled with a rhetoric of persuasion. Nature, the natural, is caricatured and called lifelike. There's no attempt to imitate nature in her manner of operation. The actual model is the rhetorician in his manner of conviction. Aristotle wasn't in a position to know this, so he separated the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* into two books, even though the position of the tragic spectator is clearly the same in both instances.

QS: *Surely you jest!*

JR: Surely not! Not at all. The terms of the *Rhetoric*—*ethos*, *logos*, *pathos*—are engaged in the same asymmetrical relation between writer and reader, targeting the same imaginative coefficient in the audience as *verisimilitude*, the major term of the *Poetics*. Both want to cognitively convince the audience while manipulating their emotions.

QS: *You define the terms of an art entirely in terms of the position of the audience?*

JR: Yes.

QS: *"Yes"? Is that it?*

JR: Well, I think about the forms of life the artist brings into the work and then the completion of the artist's part of the work as resulting in a kind of "score" for the reader or viewer. I wonder about the poethics of the kind of realization it invites. These kinds of thoughts, it seems to me, lead to the possibility of a contextual criticism based on poethical analysis, rather than judgment.

QS: *What would that look like?*

JR: Glad you asked. I just happen to have with me a document that can be read into the record. It came about in the course of an epistolary conversation with a young poet who was, in a series of quasi manifestos, defending the continuing relevance of older forms like the sonnet and villanelle against what he took to be a devaluing of them by certain Language poets. This was to my mind a poethical matter. I wrote this:

The term "Poethics," as I see it, has two working uses:

a) Analytic: Every form, old or new, has its poethical matrices and consequences. We can ask—after or while locating our questions within a value context—What are they? Are they useful to us? (Whichever "us" is inquiring: "world us" or I and my friends who are charting a working poethics.) Do they seem to be constructive or destructive given the articulation of our value context?

b) Normative: as a descriptive term denoting what one takes to be the best uses of a positively constructive imagination in relation to contemporary conditions as they intersect with history.

All of the above is most importantly not about manifestos but about investigating the construction of specific texts. The ways in which language works can be compared among texts. The extent to which the analysis is comparative will, I think, determine the scope of its relevance. Manifestos are energizing because they're not fair. They're a call to action, not mindful exploration. In the rush to battle, the soldier doesn't question the ethical basis of the war. The manifesto is a call to arms whose form of life is to end conversation, not continue it. It festers in all of us who are passionate about what we are doing and it's difficult to redirect that passion into a useful form of exploration cum conversation, but I think we need to try.

Here endeth reply to young poet.

QS: *We haven't talked about the poethical implications of your own work.*

JR: I'm not sure I can do that. Although I sometimes know what I think I'm trying to do, I also know my perspective has a lot to do with what helps me continue on. Whether in, say, using language in new ways we change the grammar of the way we are together, I suppose I feel, as Cage put it, I don't know, but I can try. That's the force of the poethical wager.

QS: *That's how this conversation came about in the first place. We were going to talk about your so-called poethical wager. How did that notion come to you? Was it from Cage?*

JR: The word *poethics* is related to Cage, to how I've been understanding his aesthetic framework for sometime. I invented this term in the late 1980s to characterize his aesthetic of making art that models how we want to live. It was used as the topic for a panel at a 1992 symposium on Cage at Stanford. But the idea of the poethical "wager" is something that came to me during an "experimental vegetarian barbecue" at my house with the poets Tina Darragh and Peter Inman. The conversation was, in part, about how we could choose to go on working in the culturally isolated field of experimental poetry when the whole world seemed to be going to hell all around us. All three of us have had activist backgrounds—civil rights, antiwar. Peter is currently a labor negotiator for his union at the Library of Congress. So the question arises, given the troubles of our society in the world right now, shouldn't we be devoting ourselves entirely to *direct* social action rather than the "luxury" of poetry? I think this is an intermittent question for many of us, and it's—I find it—a bracing one.

QS: *Well, how did you answer it?*

JR: I can't speak for Peter and Tina, of course, but my answer is poethical and certainly a form of "we don't know, but we can try." My idea, which may be a patent rationalization, is that the world situation is so complexly interrelational from weather to neural networks to all forms of culture, there are so many variables, that large-scale or even modestly scaled predictive accuracy is impossible. Certainly when you get down to the level of individual agency, the effects of any one person's actions or work, particularly from the partial and myopic perspective of that individual herself, are quite mysterious. This means, I think, that each person has to make decisions based on prescription rather than prediction. This is a common distinction in the field of

ethics. They have very different logics. You might prescribe, in an aesthetic context, that your own action will be based on your conscious framework of values, knowing that you can't predict the effect this will have on your audience, much less the world situation. You can hope that it will have a positive effect, as you construe it, but you certainly can't know. This hope would seem particularly far-fetched when the size of your readership might be fifty to a hundred people, if that!

QS: *Such considerations lead to accusations of the exclusivity and self-indulgence of the avant-garde.*

JR: Exactly. So, even given that one doesn't *choose* to have such a small audience, how does one reply to that possibility with regard to one's own work? It strikes me that since the work of any generation is adding to the initial conditions of generations to come, one obviously tries to add positive, even constructive, initial conditions. And, of course, one isn't in it alone. I feel the work I do is part of a cluster of aesthetic projects that involves many other artists as well.

QS: *So there are many butterflies!*

JR: Yes, we're all in effect choosing to be part of one family or genus of Lepidopteron or another—a highly decorative, lightweight species that might seem almost like a biological whim, but of course, we know it has a very active place in nature. And that any individual, for reasons entirely unknown qua qua qua, could shift some ecological pattern—in a way noticeable or not to us, the “observant species.” In other words, all one can do is take what is actually, in these terms, a very realistic, if improbable, chance that one's contribution might be useful. So that's it, the long and the short of it—my view of progressive action within a paradigm of chaos. I was explaining this to Peter and Tina, and Peter said, that sounds sort of like Pascal's wager. I hadn't thought of it that way, but of course he's right. I find it an interesting comparison. Pascal was himself trying to figure out how to proceed in the midst of potentially crippling uncertainty. And his thinking was naturally couched in terms of his involvement with probability theory—tossing the binary God coin for a fifty-fifty chance of heads or tails. Now we can envision many more variables and possibilities. Although I admit I always thought Pascal's wager somewhat cynical, I've loved the spirit of, You must wager. This is not voluntary; you are embarked. I think that precisely describes our condition. Each era works with its own scientific and mathematical models, its own understanding of the nature of things. We now have

complexity theory. The poethical wager is just that we do our utmost to understand our contemporary position and then act on the chance that our work may be at least as effective as any other initial condition in the intertwining trajectories of pattern and chance. There's no certainty. One could, as Cage said, make matters worse. But to make this wager is at least to step out into the weather of our times.

QS: *What a good idea!*

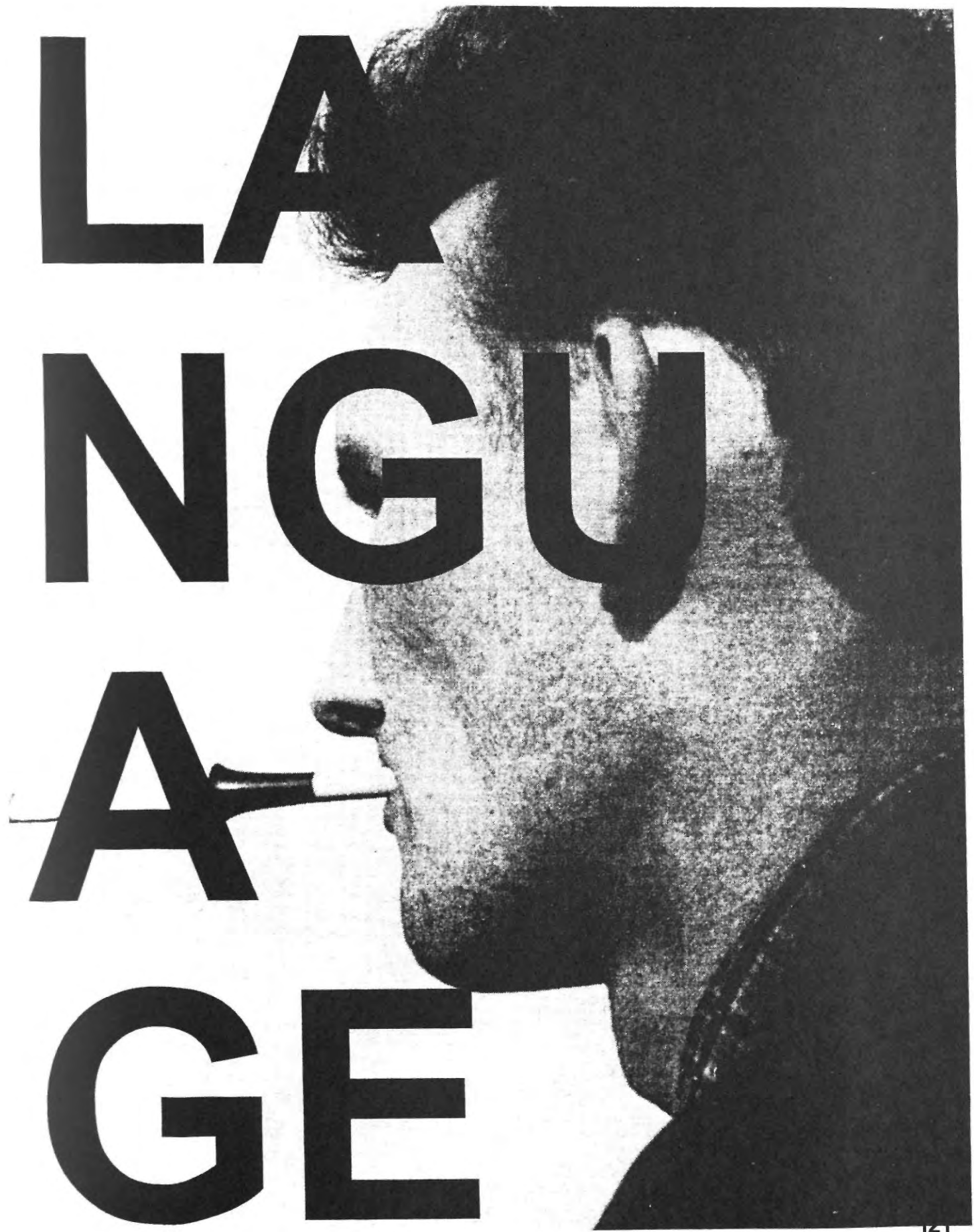
JR: Yes, enough of this. Let's go for a walk.

LA

NGU

A

GE



GER

TRU

DES

FOURTEEN ANONYMOUS PORTRAITS

1

Harold Stephens

His name is George. George can see that he can come and stay. George
can come and stay. Harold Stephens came to-day Harold Stephens will
go away. Harold Stephens I say.

2

We will find out.
She will find out
He will find out.
He will not find out for himself.
She will find out for herself.
We will find out.
Not necessarily.

3

Portrait of So and So

She did know
Why he loved her so.
She does know
Why he loves her so
And so and so
She can know that he loves her so.

4

Portrait of When

When I say go and come he comes at a run.
When I say hear and see he hears and sees me
When I say sing and dance he does and he does prance
When I say how do you care he says for your lovely hair and all.
Husband so tall.

5

They tell us so. They tell us so.
They tell us so.

6

She would not wonder if this were not thunder it should not thunder
and she should not wonder. She would not wonder if this were not
thunder.

7

Anonymous Portrait

I know I know I know you. You know you know that.

8

Another Anonymous Portrait

How can a person who was there before be invited to a dinner of
twenty.

An Anonymous Portrait

When he knew you and she too was to know you did he decide and
 had she beside and had she beside had she confided it to him to decide.
 She had tried.

An Anonymous Portrait Too

If they meant to keep it there did they mean to ask if the child had
 been born. And it had.

If the child had been born and it had did she mention it in that way.
 Did she preside beside. She did and very nicely.

Anonymous Portrait

I see the moon and the moon sees me. God bless the moon and God
 bless me and when this you see remember me. In this way one fifth of
 the bananas bought are shown.

Anonymous Portrait

Immediately she will find out when I say hear and see he hears and
 sees me. He is not necessarily heard and seen.

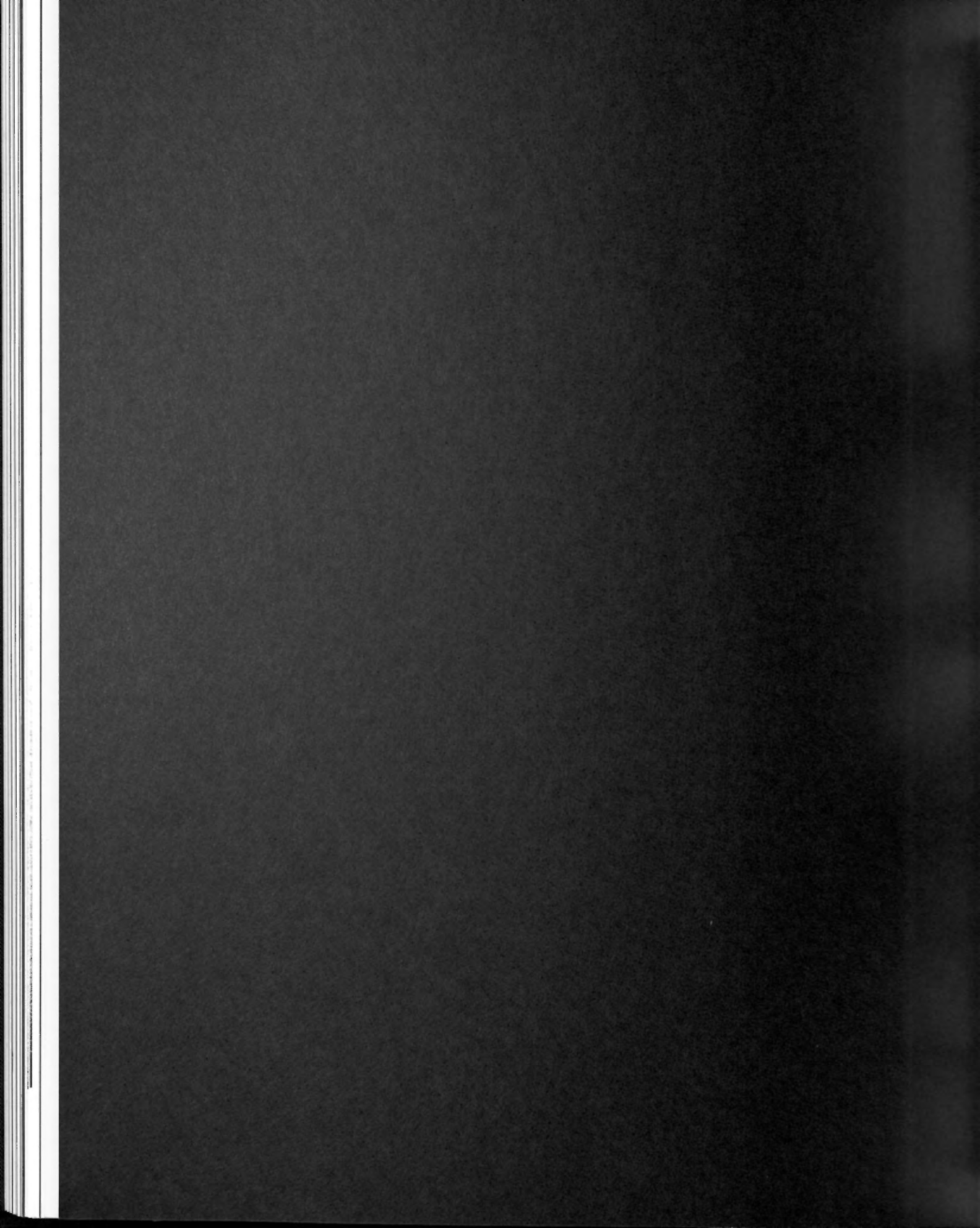
Anonymous Portrait

She forgot to say did I leave my pencil here to-day my lead pencil here to-day. She did not forget to say that she had been here to-day and that she would ask them this ask them for this ask them this and for this. In the meanwhile tube roses and roses. Tube roses smell strongly and roses fall in pieces easily that is to say when it is said that some Islanders consider everything well.

Anonymous Portrait of Then

To introduce a melon, two melons, to introduce two melons, sugared melons candied melons to them, to introduce them to produce for them to send to them a melon to send them to send melons two melons to them, this makes them give to you their blessing.

• 1923 •



RON SULL FIVIAN

THE NEW SENTENCE

To please a young man there should be sentences. What are sentences. Like what are sentences. In the part of sentences it for him is happily all. They will name sentences for him. Sentences are called sentences.

Gertrude Stein

The sole precedent I can find for the new sentence is *Kora In Hell: Improvisations* and that one far-fetched.

I am going to make an argument, that there is such a thing as a new sentence and that it occurs thus far more or less exclusively in the prose of the Bay Area. Therefore this talk is aimed at the question of the prose poem. I say aimed because, in order to understand why so little is in fact understood about sentences and prose poems, a certain amount of background material is needed.

The proposition of a new sentence suggests a general understanding of sentences per se, against which an evolution or shift can be contrasted.

This poses a first problem. There is, in the domain of linguistics, philosophy and literary criticism, no adequate consensus at to the definition of a sentence. Odd as that seems, there are reasons for it.

Milka Ivić, in *Trends in Linguistics*, noted that linguists, by the 1930's, had proposed and were using more than 160 different definitions of "the sentence."

The word sentence is itself of relatively recent origin,

according to the OED, deriving from 12th Century French. As a noun, the OED proposes 9 definitions. Among them:

- 5) An *indefinite* portion of a discourse or writing.
- 6) A series of words in connected speech or writing, forming the grammatically complete expression of a single thought; in popular use often such a portion of a composition or utterance as extends *from one full stop to another*.

This definition dates from 1447.

Contained in the sixth definition is the notation that in grammar, a sentence is either a proposition, question, command or request, containing subject and predicate, though one of these may be absent by means of ellipsis; likewise the OED acknowledges 3 classes of sentences: simple, compound and complex, and notes that one word may be a sentence.

In the November, 1978, *Scientific American*, Breyne Arlene Moskowitz presents a summary discussion of recent developments in the theory of language acquisition in children:

The first stage of child language is one in which the maximum sentence length is one word; it is followed by a stage in which the maximum sentence length is two words . . . By the time the child is uttering two-word sentences with some regularity, her lexicon may include hundreds of words . . . an important criterion is informativeness, that is, the child selects a word reflecting what is new in a particular situation.¹

Here is an abbreviated conversation between a child at the one-word stage and an adult, which indicates the sentence-function of single words:

C: Car. Car.
A: What?
C: Go. Go.
A: What?
C: Bus. Bus. Bus.
A: Bicycle?
C: No!²

Even before the one-word stage, the child is playing with the babbling prosody of sentence forms which are considerably longer,

until gradually the intonation contours of normal speech are acquired. This suggests that the child *hears* sentences before it can break them down into smaller units—that is, that the sentence is in some sense a primary unit of language.

The absence of a 3-word stage is also worth noting. From the 2-word stage, an infant enters the realm of sentences of variable length.

Finally, we should pay attention to the fact that Moskowitz is talking about speech, not writing, a distinction that will be getting more important.

Here is another example of speech, a telephone conversation:

- E. Hello?
L. Hi Ed.
E. Hi Lisa.
L. I'm running around here trying to get my machines done [+] and I'd like to get it all done before I leave, [+] so I won't have to come back. [-] So that might push us up till near two. How is that?
E. That's fine. My only thing is that I have to leave here like around 3:15 or so.
L. 3:15. [-] OK. Let me see how I'm doing here, [+] then I'll give you a call right before I'm going to leave.
E. OK. [-] Fine.
L. Okey doke. Bye bye.
E. Bye.³

Ed Friedman has written this conversation up as 16 distinct sentences. There are at least 6 places in this short script that could have been transcribed differently (indicated by + or - signs inserted into the text), rendering the conversation into as few as 13 or as many as 19 sentences. There are, in fact, 64 separate ways to transcribe this conversation without radically altering the acceptability of any of its sentences.

Which brings us to the question, not of sentences in speech, but in modern linguistics, as a discipline and tradition, normally considered as beginning with Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. Saussure mentions the sentence in this work on only three occasions. All take place in the second part of his course, concerning synchronic linguistics.

The first mention is in the area of locating practical delimiting units of language. Saussure is quoted as saying:

A rather widely held theory makes sentences the concrete units of language: we speak only in sentences and subsequently single out the words. But to what extent does the sentence belong to language [*langue*]? If it belongs to speaking [*parole*], the sentence cannot pass for the linguistic unit. But let us suppose this difficulty is set aside. If we picture to ourselves in their totality the sentences that could be uttered, their most striking characteristic is that in no way do they resemble each other . . . diversity is dominant, and when we look for the link that bridges their diversity, again we find, without having looked for it, the word . . .⁴

The distinction between language and speaking (*langue* and *parole*) is critical. Saussure is analyzing only one, *langue*, and by putting the sentence into the domain of the other, he removes it from the major area of his inquiry. More than any other reason, this is the origin of the failure of the modern human sciences to develop a consensus as to the definition of such a critical term.

Saussure's second mention completes the setting aside of the sentence into the realm of *parole*. It is in the section on syntagmatic relations, in the chapter which historically first divides paradigm from syntagm. The syntagmatic axis is that of connection between words, as in syntax:

. . . the notion of syntagm applies not only to words but to groups of words, to complex units of all lengths and types (compounds, derivatives, phrases, whole sentences).

It is not enough to consider the relation that ties together the different parts of syntagms, one must also bear in mind the relation that links the whole to its parts.

An objection must be raised at this point. The sentence is the ideal type of syntagm. But it belongs to speaking, not to language.⁵

The sentence has been shoved back into the domain of non-investigation, the realm of *parole*, but without a clear and decisive argument. These two quotations conspire without proof for the dismissal of the sentence as an object of critical investigation.

The only other area where Saussure even mentions the sentence is in the problem of one-word sentences and the question of whether or not they possess a syntagmatic dimension. The language used demonstrates the problem raised by the dismissal of

sentence theory from linguistics:

To be sure, language has independent units that have syntagmatic relations with neither their parts nor other units. Sentence equivalents like *yes*, *no*, *thanks*, etc. are good examples. But this exceptional fact does not compromise the general principle.⁶

Given this denegation at the origin of modern linguistics, it is not surprising that the sentence is neither defined nor even indexed in Louis Hjelmslev's 1943 *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*.

In America during this same period, the most influential practicing linguist was Leonard Bloomfield, who, in *Language* (1933), defined the sentence as:

An independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger form.

This definition is void of any internal criteria. The sentence is merely a limit, the point beyond which grammatical analysis cannot be further extended. In a sense this goes back to the OED definition of a sentence as being what comes between two full stops, regardless of what that might be.

One might expect a fuller treatment in Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), insofar as syntax and the syntagmatic is the one area where Saussure even permits the sentence as a question to surface, and since Chomsky is working with such concepts as acceptability, deviant sentences, and kernal sentences. But he raises the issue only in the prefatory "methodological preliminaries" chapter. "I shall use the term 'sentence' to refer to strings of formatives rather than strings of phones." *Formative* is defined in the first paragraph of the book as a "minimal syntactically functioning unit." The problem of one word or other short sentences is likewise slid over. Here is what he says about kernal sentences:

These are sentences of a particularly simple sort that involve a minimum of transformational apparatus in their generation. The notion "kernal sentence" has, I think, an important intuitive significance, but since kernal sentences play no distinctive role in generation or interpretation of sentences, I shall say nothing about them here.⁷

Chomsky gives us no idea as to what the important intuitive significance of kernal sentences might be.

Milka Ivić's figure of 160 active definitions of the sentence arises from the work of John Ries, who first published *Was Ist Ein Satz?* in 1894, more than a decade before Saussure, and who updated it in Prague in 1931. Ries analyzed 140 definitions in the latter edition, and the 20 further definitions Ivić located were critiques of Ries' analysis. Simeon Potter follows this debate in *Modern Linguistics*, which has an entire chapter devoted to sentence structure.

The sentence is the chief unit of speech. It may be defined simply as a *minimum complete utterance*. . . . When we assert that the sentence is a minimum complete utterance, or a segment of speech-flow between pause and pause, or an inherited structure into which word-forms are fitted, we are not saying all that might be said about it. Nevertheless, these definitions are probably more workable than John Ries' final effort: "A sentence is a grammatically constructed minimum speech-unit which expresses its content in respect to that content's relation to reality." We may, in fact, find as much difficulty in defining a sentence as in pin-pointing a phoneme, and yet, after a little training, we all recognize phonemes and sentences when we see them.⁸

In short, the history and structure of linguistics as a profession inhibits, if it doesn't entirely prevent, an elaboration of a theory of the sentence which might then be applied to literature.

As early as the late 1920's, the Russian linguist Valentin Vološinov proposed this critique in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

Traditional principles and methods in linguistics do not provide grounds for a productive approach to the problems of syntax. This is particularly true of Abstract Objectivism [his term for the Saussurian school], where the traditional methods and principles have found their most distinct and consistent expression. All the fundamental categories of modern linguistic thought . . . are thoroughly phonetic and morphological. . . . In consequence, the study of syntax is in a very bad state

In point of fact, of all the forms of language, the syntactic forms are the ones closest to the concrete form of utterance . . . productive

study of syntactic forms is only possible on the grounds of a fully elaborated theory of utterance

Linguistic thinking has hopelessly lost any sense of the verbal whole.⁹

Vološinov by-passes the sentence more or less entirely, writing that "the category of sentence is merely a definition of the sentence as a unit-element *within* an utterance, and not by any means as a whole entity."

The function of the sentence as a *unit within a larger structure* will, in fact, become important when we look at the role of the *new* sentence. But what is vital here is the failure, even within this critical analysis, for a possible theory of the sentence.

At this point, a number of things can be stated with regard to the sentence and linguistics:

1) The sentence is a term derived from writing, which in linguistics is often brought over to the study of speech. Specifically, the sentence is a unit of writing.

2) There exists in speech an open-ended form like, but not identical with, the sentence of writing. Following Vološinov, I am going to refer to it as the utterance.

The critical difference between the utterance and the sentence is that the utterance is indeterminate, a chain that can be more or less indefinitely extended. There is no sentence but a determinate sentence and this is fixed by the period.

3) The focus in linguistics on the development of a description of *langue* over *parole*, and the non-addressing of the question of writing has rendered the question of the sentence invisible.

If linguistics fails to deal with the sentence because it fails to separate writing from speech, philosophy deals with language neither as speech nor writing. Language is either:

1) Thought itself

a) sometimes understood as constricted and formal, as in logic or a calculus, e.g., Quine's "austere canonical scheme," by which, if one only knew the complete set of proper eternal sentences, one could logically construct the whole of possible correct knowledge;

b) sometimes understood as unconstricted, as when language is taken to be identical with the sum of possible thought, a position Chomsky takes in his forays into philosophic discourse.

2) A manifestation or transformation of thought, also breaking down into a constricted or unconstricted models, Wittgenstein being an example of both, constricted in his early *Tractatus* and unconstricted in *Philosophical Investigations* both of which argue that language is a disguise for thought.

Wittgenstein's model, in both his early and late writings, closely parallels that of Saussure. The dramatic shift between these periods is one of object and goal—from the disentangling of an idealized discourse in the *Tractatus* to an exploration of the problems of meaning in the actual use of language in *Philosophical Investigations*. The break comes in the '30s and is documented in *Philosophical Grammar* and its appendices. The following sections from the *Investigations* show how close some of his later work comes toward a type of discussion that surrounds the new sentence:

498. When I say that the orders "Bring me sugar" and "Bring me milk" make sense, but not the combination "Milk me sugar," that does not mean that the utterance of this combination has no effect. And if its effect is that the other person stares at me and gapes, I don't on that account call it the order to stare and gape, even if that was precisely the effect I wanted to produce.

499. To say "This combination of words makes no sense" excludes it from the sphere of language and thereby bounds the domain of language. But when one draws a boundary it may be for various kinds of reasons. If I surround an area with a fence or a line or otherwise, the purpose may be to prevent someone from getting in or out; but it may also be part of a game and the players be supposed, say, to jump over the boundary; or it may shew where the property of one man ends and that of another begins and so on. So if I draw a boundary line that is not yet to say what it is for.¹⁰

One of the things that makes Wittgenstein (and, more recently, Jacques Derrida) so useful, suggestive and quotable to poets is the high degree of metaphor in his work. Not all philosophical discourse is like that—in fact, most shuns it.

A.J. Ayer wrote in this latter style. In *Language, Truth and Logic*, he tried to separate sentences from propositions from

statements, a classic attempt at the compartmentalization of connotation:

Thus I propose that any form of words that is grammatically significant shall be held to constitute a sentence, and that every indicative sentence, whether it is literally meaningful or not, shall be regarded as expressing a statement. Furthermore, any two sentences which are mutually translatable will be said to express the same statement. The word "proposition," on the other hand, will be reserved for what is expressed by sentences which are literally meaningful.¹¹

This formula for the sentence is no more well-defined than any from linguistics. It does not even propose the possibility of a distinction between a simple sentence, a compound or a fragment, since it doesn't address the question of a full-pause or maximum grammatical integration of meaning. But it does draw a sharp line between the categories proposed, or at least attempts to. Yet even this succinct formulation has resisted acceptance:

Ayer says (a) that his use "proposition" designates a class of sentences that all have *the same meaning* and (b) that "consequently" he speaks of propositions, not sentences, as being true or false. But of course what a sentence *means* does *not* enable us to say that *it is* true or false. . . .¹²

The problems posed by making sentences synonymous, or even approximate, with propositions can be viewed in an extreme form in Willard Van Orman Quine's *Word and Object*:

A sentence is not an event of utterance, but a universal. . . . In general, to specify a proposition without dependence on circumstances of utterance, we put . . . an *eternal* sentence: a sentence whose truth value stays fixed through time and from speaker to speaker.¹³

Literary criticism ought to serve as a corrective. Unlike philosophy, it is a discourse with a clearly understood material object. Like philosophy, it is centuries old as a discipline. In addition, it is fortuitously situated in western societies, where literature is treated in the schools as an extension of language learning.

As Jonathan Culler cautions in *Structuralist Poetics*, literary criticism is the study of reading, not writing. If a theory of the sentence is to be found in poetics, it won't necessarily be of great use to writers. However, it might function as the basis on which to create such a theory.

I want to consider first the New Critics, partly because they were so dominant that, until recently, all other critical tendencies were defined by the nature of their opposition. The New Critics were strongly influenced by the British philosophical tradition, with I.A. Richards, for example, playing a major role in both communities. In addition, René Wellek was a product of the Prague school of linguistics, and as such was thoroughly familiar with the work of Saussure on the one hand, and Shklovsky on the other, both of whom are cited with approval in Wellek's *Theory of Literature*, written with Austin Warren.

These influences already suggest that the *Theory of Literature* is not going to contain a coherent theory of the sentence. The Saussurian model of linguistics is implicit in this famous dictum:

Every work of art is, first of all, a series of *sounds* out of which arises the meaning.¹⁴

This does not, as it might have, lead them toward an examination of syntax—let alone sentences. But it does put them in the unenviable position of defending a point of view from which their own assertion could easily have been attacked.

Wellek and Warren are aware of this reduction, and defend themselves with a little sleight of hand, arguing that:

A . . . common assumption, that sound should be analysed in complete divorce from meaning, is also false.¹⁵

This does not, as it might have, lead them toward an examination of syntax—let alone sentences. But it does put them in the unenviable position of defending a point of view from which their own assertion could easily have been attacked.

Theory of Literature is not a theory of writing. In part, this is due to the accurate perception that not all literature is written. Nonetheless, Wellek and Warren fail to address the specific changes which occur once literature is submitted to the writing

process. They justify this by arguing that the written text is never the "real" work. This also enables them to put aside any consideration of the impact of printing on literature, beyond the most off-hand acknowledgment of its existence. Viktor Shklovsky notes the importance of this exclusion in an interview in the Winter 1978-79 issue of *The Soviet Review*:

At one time only poetry was recognized, and prose was regarded as something second class, for it seemed a counterfeit; for a long time it was not admitted into high art. It was let in only when they started printing books.¹⁶

If we argue—and I am arguing—that the sentence, as distinct from the utterance of speech, is a unit of prose, and if prose as literature and the rise of printing are inextricably interwoven, then the impact of printing on literature, not just on the presentation of literature, but on how writing itself is written, needs to be addressed. This would be the historical component of any theory of the sentence.

Wellek and Warren avoid any such discussion. Instead, they divide literature into a binary scheme, one side devoted to character and plot construction, the other devoted to wordplay. Generally speaking, these become the axes of fiction and poetry. This parallels Saussure's division of language into a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic axis. And it also parallels the strategies of Structuralism.

Wordplay, the paradigmatic axis of poetry, could itself lead toward an investigation of the sentence, but it doesn't. The realms Wellek and Warren carry it to are image, metaphor, symbol and myth: successively broader groups of referentiality.

Like New Criticism, Structuralism—and here I mean structuralist poetics—is founded on the model of linguistics first constructed by Saussure and later codified by Louis Hjelmslev and Roman Jakobson. However, it has several practical advantages over New Criticism: it is not heavily influenced by the British school of philosophy; it has not identified itself with the conservative movement in literature; and it is at least conscious of the critique of Saussurian linguistics posed by Derrida.

Structuralism has come closer to a recognition of the need for a theory of the sentence than any of the tendencies thus far examined. But this doesn't mean one has been developed. Following a division

made by Wellek and Warren of discourse into three broad categories—everyday, scientific, and literary—Pierre Machery in *Theory of Literary Production* proposes that everyday discourse is ideological, scientific discourse is empirical, and literary discourse moves back and forth between these two poles. This model echoes the one made by Louis Zukofsky of his work having a lower limit of speech and an upper one of music. Machery's revision makes a real distinction and moves it well towards something that could be put into a contextualized theory of utterance such as that proposed by Vološinov. But Machery's divisions are inaccurate.

Everyday discourse is purely ideological, but so too is all specialized discourse. The constraints posed on all modes of professional jargon and technical language, whether scientific, legal, medical or whatever, communicate class *in addition to* any other object of their discourse. There is no such thing as a non-ideological or value-free discourse.

Tzvetan Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* actually addresses the function of the sentence, for about two paragraphs. Todorov defines meaning according to the formula of Emile Benevise: "It is the capacity of a linguistic unit to integrate a higher-level unit." In a 1966 lecture at John Hopkins, Todorov demonstrates his understanding of the importance of the question of integration:

While in speech the integration of units does not go beyond the sentence, in literature sentences are integrated again as part of larger articulations, and the latter in their turn into units of greater dimension, and so on until we have the entire work . . . On the other hand, the interpretations of each unit are innumerable, for their comprehension depends on the system in which it will be included.¹⁷

Consider, for example, how meaning is altered when the same words are integrated into successively longer strings:

Someone called Douglas.

Someone called Douglas over.

He was killed by someone called Douglas over in Oakland.

Of Structuralist critics, the late Roland Barthes was the most explicit in calling for a theory of the sentence. In the same symposium with Todorov, he went so far as to say:

The structure of the sentence, the object of linguistics, is found again, homologically, in the structure of works. Discourse is not simply an adding together of sentences; it is, itself, one great sentence.¹⁸

This statement has the glaring flaw that the sentence has not been the object of linguistics, and Barthes was deliberately being audacious in his statement. But here is an important insight, which is that the modes of integration which carry words into phrases and phrases into sentences are not fundamentally different from those by which an individual sentence integrates itself into a larger work. This not only gives us a good reason for demanding a theory of sentences, but also suggests that such a theory would lead us toward a new mode of analysis of literary products themselves.

In *S/Z*, Barthes demonstrates how a structuralist interpretation of a specific story ought to proceed. He takes Balzac's "Sarrasine" and analyzes it according to several different codes. In a sense, he goes word by word through the text, but he does *not* break his analysis into sentences. Instead, he uses what he calls *lexias*, anywhere from one word to several sentences long. Barthes himself describes the selection as being "arbitrary in the extreme," although he treats them as "units of reading."

His earliest work, *Writing Degree Zero*, does address the question of the sentence, but in a highly metaphoric style and with a certain primitiveness, really only a reflection of the other work which had been done in this area in the past 25 years. Compare this passage with Benevise's theory of integration:

The economy of classical language . . . is relational, which means that in it words are abstracted as much as possible in the interest of relationships. In it, no word has a density by itself, it is hardly the sign of a thing, but rather the means of conveying a connection. Far from plunging into an inner reality consubstantial to its outer configuration, it extends, as soon as it is uttered, towards other words. . . .

Modern poetry, since it must be distinguished from classical poetry and from any type of prose, destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language, and leaves standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality. The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an

inflexion which lasts only to present the Word.¹⁹

Barthes is here casting against the temporal plane of history a proposition originally formulated by Roman Jakobson for all poetry, that "the poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." Jakobson's dictum suggests the primacy of the *paradigmatic* to the extent that it imposes itself on the supposed value-free combinations of the *syntagmatic*.

Barthes suggests that Jakobson's projection of the paradigm is not a constant, but that history has seen the movement from a syntagmatic focus to a paradigmatic one, and that a break has occurred at a point when some critical mass—not specifically identified by Barthes—rendered it impossible for units to continue to integrate beyond grammatical levels, e.g., the sentence. It is just this breach—when the signifier, freed suddenly from its servitude to an integrating hierarchy of syntactic relations, finds itself drained of any signified—that Frederic Jameson identifies as the characteristic feature of postmodernism:

The crisis in historicity now dictates a return . . . to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic. If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tensions and re-tensions across the temporal manifold, and to organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory. These are, however, very precisely some of the privileged terms in which postmodernist cultural production has been analysed (and even defended, by its own apologists).²⁰

How do sentences integrate into higher units of meaning? The obvious first step here is toward the paragraph:

. . . in certain crucial respects paragraphs are analogues to exchanges in dialogue. The paragraph is something like a vitiated dialogue worked into the body of a monologic utterance. Behind the device of

partitioning speech into units, which are termed paragraphs in their written form, lie orientation toward listener or reader and calculation of the latter's possible reactions.²¹

Vološinov's definition is not radically different from partitioning strategies in some current work, such as David Bromige's essay poems. David Antin, in his talk at 80 Langton Street, described his own work in just Vološinov's terms, as a vitiated dialogue.

Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, the Italian semiotician, focuses on this problem more closely when he argues that the *sylogism* is the classic paradigm for above-sentence integration. For example, the sentences "All women were once girls" and "Some women are lawyers" logically lead to a third sentence or conclusion, a higher level of meaning: "Some lawyers were once girls." Literature proceeds by suppression, most often, of this third term, positing instead chains of the order of the first two. Here is a paragraph by Barrett Watten:

He thought they were a family unit. There were seven men and four women, and thirteen children in the house. Which voice was he going to record?²²

The first sentence provides a subject, "He," plus a complex object, "they," who may or may not be "a family unit." The second depicts a plurality ("they"), which might or might not be "a family unit." The third again presents a subject identified as "he" in the context of a question ("Which voice") which implies a plurality. Yet any integration of these sentences into a tidy little narrative is, in fact, a presumption on the part of the reader. Neither of the last two sentences has any clear term of anaphor, pointing back inescapably to a previous sentence. In the next paragraph, Watten explores the reader's recognition of this presumptiveness, this willingness to "complete the syllogism":

That's why we talk language. Back in Sofala I'm writing this down wallowing in a soft leather armchair. A dead dog lies in the gutter, his feet in the air.²³

Here the first sentence proposes itself, by virtue of its grammar, as a conclusion, although it is by no means self-evident why this is "why

we talk language." The second starts with a phrase, "Back in Sofala," indicating a shift on the part of the subject in both time and place. But now the subject is "I." The third sentence, which shares with the previous two only its use of the present tense, is a comic editorial on the process itself: referentiality is not merely dead, it makes for a silly corpse. Yet just two paragraphs above, the logical distance between sentences had been so great as to suppress all but the most ambitious attempts at readerly integration:

The burden of classes is the twentieth-century career. He can be incredibly cruel. Events are advancing at a terrifying rate.²⁴

Rossi-Landi offers us another approach to the sentence. *Linguistics and Economics* argues that language-use arises from the need to divide labor in the community, and that the elaboration of language-systems and of labor production, up to and including all social production, follow parallel paths. In this view, the completed tool is a sentence.

A hammer, for example, consists of a face, a handle, and a peen. Without the presence of all three, the hammer will not function. Sentences relate to their subunits in just this way. Only the manufacturer of hammers would have any use for disconnected handles; thus without the whole there can be no exchange value. Likewise, it is at the level of the sentence that the use value and the exchange value of any statement unfold into view. The child's one-word sentence is communicative precisely because (and to the degree that) it represents a whole. Any further subdivision would leave one with an unuseable and incomprehensible fragment.

Yet longer sentences are themselves composed of words, many, if not all, of which, *in other contexts*, might form adequate one-word sentences. Thus the sentence is the hinge unit of any literary product.

Larger productions, such as poems, are like completed machines. Any individual sentence might be a piston. It will not get you down the road by itself, but you could not move the vehicle without it.

The sentence is a unit of writing. Yet the utterance exists as a unit of speech prior to the acquisition of writing, for both individuals and societies. The utterances of *Gilgamesh* or the Homeric epics would appear to have been translated without great

difficulty into written sentence form long before the advent of creative or aesthetic prose. Nonetheless, it is the hypotactic logic of the prose sentence, prose paragraph and expository essay which is most completely the model through which the sentence is communicated in western societies by means of the organized process of education. "Correct grammar," which has never existed in spoken daily life save as a template, is itself thus predicated upon a model of "high" discourse. (As Shklovsky noted, prose entered the literary arena with the rise of printing only a little more than 500 years ago; its cultural role became progressively more important as literacy spread to the lower classes.) "Educated" speech imitates writing: the more "refined" the individual, the more likely their utterances will possess the characteristics of expository prose. The sentence, hypotactic and complete, was and still is an index of class in society. Accordingly, the function of this unit within creative prose proves essential to our understanding of how a sentence might become "new."

Prose fiction to a significant extent derives from the narrative epics of poetry, but moves toward a very different sense of form and organization. Exterior formal devices, such as rhyme and linebreak, diminish, and the structural units become the sentence and paragraph. In the place of external devices, which function to keep the reader's or listener's experience at least partly in the present, consuming the text, most fiction foregrounds the syllogistic leap, or integration above the level of the sentence, to create a fully referential tale.

This does not mean that the fictive paragraph is without significant form, even in the most compelling narrative. Consider this paragraph from Conrad's *The Secret Agent*:

In front of the great doorway a dismal row of newspaper sellers standing clear of the pavement dealt out their wares from the gutter. It was a raw, gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of the dirty men harmonized excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printers' ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like tapestry the sweep of the curbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet, in comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of disregarded distribution. Ossipon looked hurriedly both ways before stepping out into the cross-currents, but the Professor was already out of sight.²⁵

Only the last of these five sentences actually furthers the narrative. The rest serve to set the scene, but do so in the most formal manner imaginable. Every sentence is constructed around some kind of opposition. The first takes us from the "great doorway" to a "dismal row" in the "gutter." The second contrasts "spring" with "raw and gloomy," and then has the "grimy sky," "the mud," "the rags of the dirty men" "harmonize excellently" with the "damp rubbishy sheets soiled with ink." And so forth, even to the presence of Ossipon and the absence of the Professor.

This kind of structure might well be foregrounded in a poem, by placing key terms in critical places along the line, by putting certain oppositions in literal rhyme, and by writing the whole perhaps in the present tense. Fiction has a much greater tendency toward the past tense in general. More importantly, the lack of these foregrounding devices permits the syllogistic capacity of the language to become dominant.

It is this condition of prose that we find also in the work of Russell Edson, the best known English language writer of the prose poem. This is from "The Sardine Can Dormitory":

A man opens a sardine can and finds a row of tiny cots full of tiny dead people; it is a dormitory flooded with oil.

He lifts out the tiny bodies with a fork and lays them on a slice of bread; puts a leaf of lettuce over them, and closes the sandwich with another slice of bread.

He wonders what he should do with the tiny cots; wondering if they are not eatable, too?

He looks into the can and sees a tiny cat floating in the oil. The bottom of the can, under the oil, is full of little shoes and stockings.²⁶

Other than the hallucinated quality of the tale, derived from surrealism and the short stories of Kafka, there is really nothing here of great difference from the conditions of prose as one finds it in fiction. If anything, it uses fewer formal devices than the Conrad passage above.

In good part, what makes Edson a prose poet is where he publishes. The poems in *Edson's Mentality* were first published in *Poetry Now*, *Oink!*, and *The Iowa Review*. By publishing among poets, Edson has taken on the public role of a poet, but a poet whose work participates entirely in the tactics and units of fiction.

Edson is a good example of why the prose poem—even that name is awkward—has come to be thought of as a bastard form.

Even today in America the prose poem barely has any legitimacy. There are no prose poems at all in Hayden Carruth's anthology, *The Voice That Is Great Within Us*.

Nor in Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry*.

Nor in the Robert Kelly/Paris Leary anthology, *A Controversy of Poets*.

The prose poem came into existence in France. From 1699, the rules of versification set down by the French Academy proved so rigid that some writers simply chose to sidestep them, composing instead in a "poetic" prose style, writing epics and pastorals in this mode in the 18th Century. At the same time, poetry from other languages was being translated into French prose. It was Aloysius Bertrand who, in 1827, first began to compose poems in prose. He published these works in a book called *Gaspard de la Nuit*. By the end of the 19th Century, the genre had been incorporated fully into French literature by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Rimbaud.

The French found the prose poem to be an ideal device for the dematerialization of writing. Gone were the external devices of form that naggingly held the reader in the present, aware of the physical presence of the text itself. Sentences could be lengthened, stretched even further than the already extensive elocutions which characterized Mallarmé's verse, without befuddling the reader or disengaging her from the poem. And longer sentences also suspended for greater periods of time the pulse of closure which enters into prose as the mark of rhythm. It was perfect for hallucinated, fantastic and dreamlike contents, for pieces with multiple locales and times squeezed into a few words. Here is a six sentence poem by Mallarmé, translated by Keith Bosley as "The Pipe":

Yesterday I found my pipe as I was dreaming about a long evening's work, fine winter work. Throwing away cigarettes with all the childish joys of summer into the past lit by sun-blue leaves, the muslin dresses and taking up again my earnest pipe as a serious man who wants a long undisturbed smoke, in order to work better: but I was not expecting the surprise this abandoned creature was preparing, hardly had I taken the first puff when I forgot my great books to be done, amazed, affected, I breathed last winter coming back. I had not touched the faithful friend since my return to France,

and all London, London as I lived the whole of it by myself, a year ago appeared; first the dear fogs which snugly wrap our brains and have there, a smell of their own, when they get in under the casement. My tobacco smelt of a dark room with leather furniture seasoned by coaldust on which the lean black cat luxuriated; the big fires! and the maid with red arms tipping out the coals, and the noise of these coals falling from the steel scuttle into the iron grate in the morning—the time of the postman's solemn double knock, which brought me to life! I saw again through the windows those sick trees in the deserted square—I saw the open sea, so often crossed that winter, shivering on the bridge of the steamer wet with drizzle and blackened by smoke—with my poor wandering loved one, in travelling clothes with a long dull dress the color of road dust, a cloak sticking damp to her cold shoulders, one of those straw hats without a feather and almost without ribbons, which rich ladies throw away on arrival, so tattered are they by the sea air and which poor loved ones retrim for a few good seasons more. Round her neck was wound the terrible handkerchief we wave when we say goodbye for ever.²⁷

Here we almost have a prefiguring of the new sentence: the absence of external poetic devices, but not their interiorization in the sentence as in Conrad. Mallarmé has extended their absence by reducing the text to the minimum number of sentences. The de-emphasis on the materiality of the text in this manner is an example of prose shaping poetic form and beginning to alter sentence structure. But note that there is no attempt whatsoever to prevent the integration of linguistic units into higher levels. These sentences take us not toward the recognition of language, but away from it.

The prose poem did not soon take root in England or America. Nonetheless, Oscar Wilde and Amy Lowell made stabs at it, and the presence of poems from other languages being translated into English *prose*, such as Tagore's rendering of Indian songs, *Gitanjali*, was quite visible.

Alfred Kreymbourg's 1930 anthology, *Lyric America*, has four prose poems. One is a long and tedious one by Arturo Giovanni, called "The Walker." The other three are by the black poet Fenton Johnson. Johnson uses a device which points in the direction of the new sentence. Each sentence is a complete paragraph; run-on sentences are treated as one paragraph each, but two paragraphs begin with conjunctions. Structured thus, Johnson's is the first

American prose poem with a clear, if simple, sentence:paragraph relation.

THE MINISTER

I mastered pastoral theology, the Greek of the Apostles, and all the difficult subjects in a minister's curriculum.

I was learned as any in this country when the Bishop ordained me.

And I went to preside over Mount Moriah, largest flock in the Conference.

I preached the Word as I felt it, I visited the sick and dying and comforted the afflicted in spirit.

I loved my work because I loved God.

But I lost my charge to Sam Jenkins, who has not been to school four years in his life.

I lost my charge because I could not make my congregation shout.

And my dollar money was small, very small.

Sam Jenkins can tear a Bible to tatters and his congregation destroys the pews with their shouting and stamping.

Sam Jenkins leads in the gift of raising dollar money.

Such is religion.²⁸

Johnson is clearly influenced by Edgar Lee Masters, but his sentence:paragraph device brings the reader's attention back time and again to the voice of the narrator in this poem. It is the first instance in English of a prose poem which calls attention to a discursive or poetic effect. Even though the referential content is always evident, the use of the paragraph here limits the reader's ability to get away from the language itself.

Yet Fenton Johnson may not be the first American prose poet of consequence. Here, from *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* is the third entry in the twentieth grouping, accompanied by its commentary:

One need not be hopelessly cast down because he cannot cut onyx into a ring to fit a lady's finger. You hang your head. There is neither onyx nor porphyry on these roads—only brown dirt. For all that, one may see his face in a flower along it—even in this light. Eyes only and for a flash only. Oh, keep the neck bent, plod with the back to the split dark! Walk in the curled mudcrusts to one side, hand hanging.

Ah well . . . Thoughts are trees! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Leaves load the branches and upon them white night sits kicking her heels against the shore.

*A poem can be made of anything. This is a portrait of a disreputable farm hand made out of the stuff of his environment.*²⁹

Certainly we have strategies here which echo the French prose poem, such as the constantly shifting point of view. More important: the sentences allow only the most minimal syllogistic shift to the level of reference, and some, such as the laughter, permit no such shift whatsoever.

But note the word "portrait" in Williams' commentary. His model here is not the French prose poem so much as the so-called cubist prose of Gertrude Stein, who as early as 1911 wrote *Tender Buttons*:

CUSTARD

Custard is this. It has aches, aches when. Not to be. Not to be narrowly. This makes a whole little hill.

It is better than a little thing that has mellow real mellow. It is better than lakes whole lakes, it is better than seeding.

ROAST POTATOES

Roast potatoes for.³⁰

Stein says in "Poetry and Grammar" that she did not intend to make *Tender Buttons* poetry, but it just happened that way. It is sufficiently unlike much that she later called poetry to suggest that it is something other than that. The portraits *are* portraits. The syllogistic move above the sentence level to an exterior reference is possible, but the nature of the book reverses the direction of this movement. Rather than making the shift in an automatic and gestalt sort of way, the reader is forced to deduce it from the partial views and associations posited in each sentence. The portrait of custard is marvelously accurate.

The sentences deserve some examination. They are fragmented in a way that is without precedent in English. Who but Stein would

have written a sentence in 1911 that ends in the middle of a prepositional phrase? Her use of elliptical sentences—"Not to be. Not to be narrowly."—deliberately leaves the subject out of sight. Custard does not want to be a hard fact. And the anaphoric pronoun of "this makes a whole little hill" refers not to custard, but the negated verb phrases of the two previous sentences. Likewise in "Roast Potatoes," Stein uses the preposition "for" to convert "roast" from an adjective into a verb.

Stein has written at great length about sentences and paragraphs. Her essays on them are works in themselves, and in them, she reveals herself to have thought more seriously about the differences here than any other poet in English.

Because of the consciously non-expository method of her arguments, I'm going to simply quote, in order, some passages which shed light on the issue in the terms through which we have been approaching it. From "Sentences and Paragraphs," a section of *How To Write* (1931):

- 1) Within itself. A part of a sentence may be sentence without their meaning.
- 2) Every sentence has a beginning. Will he begin.
Every sentence which has a beginning makes it be left more to them.
- 3) A sentence should be arbitrary it should not please be better.
- 4) The difference between a short story and a paragraph. There is none.
- 5) There are three kinds of sentences are there. Do sentences follow the three. There are three kinds of sentences. Are there three kinds of sentences that follow the three.³¹

This of course refers to the simple, compound, complex division of traditional grammars.

From the essay "Sentences" in the same book:

- 6) A sentence is an interval in which there is finally forward and back. A sentence is an interval during which if there is a difficulty they will do away with it. A sentence is a part of the way when they wish to be secure. A sentence is their politeness in asking for a cessation. And when it happens they look up.
- 7) There are two kinds of sentences. When they go. They are given to me. There are these two kinds of sentences. Whenever they go

they are given to me. There are there these two kinds of sentences there. One kind is when they like and the other kind is as often as they please. The two kinds of sentences relate when they manage to be for less with once whenever they are retaken. Two kinds of sentences make it do neither of them dividing in a noun.³²

Stein is here equating clauses, which divide as indicated into dependent and independent, with sentences. Anything as high up the chain of language as a clause is already partially a kind of sentence. It can move syllogistically as a sentence in itself to a higher order of meaning. That's an important and original perception.

8) Remember a sentence should not have a name. A name is familiar. A sentence should not be familiar. All names are familiar there for there should not be a name in a sentence. If there is a name in a sentence a name which is familiar makes a data and therefor there is no equilibrium.³³

This explains Stein's distaste for nouns quite adequately. The concern for equilibrium is an example of grammar as meter, which points us clearly toward the new sentence.

In her 1934 American lecture, "Poetry and Grammar," Stein makes a few additional comments which cast light on the relation of sentences to prose, and hence prose poems. The first is, I believe, the best single statement on the problem as it is faced by a writer:

9) What had periods to do with it. Inevitably no matter how completely I had to have writing go on, physically one had to again and again stop sometime and if one had to again and again stop some time then periods had to exist. Besides I had always liked the look of periods and I liked what they did. Stopping sometime did not really keep one from going on, it was nothing that interfered, it was only something that happened, and as it happened as a perfectly natural happening, I did believe in periods and I used them. I never really stopped using them.

10) Sentences and paragraphs. Sentences are not emotional but paragraphs are. I can say that as often as I like and it always remains as it is, something that is.

I said I found this out in listening to Basket my dog drinking. And anybody listening to any dog's drinking will see what I mean.³⁴

Stein later gives some examples of sentences she has written, also from *How To Write* which exist as one sentence paragraphs and capture the balance between the unemotional sentence and the emotional paragraph. My favorite is "A dog which you have never had before has sighed."

11) We do know a little now what prose is. Prose is the balance the emotional balance that makes the reality of paragraphs and the unemotional balance that makes the reality of sentences and having realized completely realized that sentences are not emotional while paragraphs are, prose can be the essential balance that is made inside something that combines the sentence and the paragraph³⁵

What Stein means about paragraphs being emotional and sentences not is precisely the point made by Emile Benevise: that linguistic units integrate only up to the level of the sentence, but higher orders of meaning—such as emotion—integrate at higher levels than the sentence and occur only in the presence of either many sentences or, at least Stein's example suggests this, in the presence of certain complex sentences in which dependent clauses integrate with independent ones. *The sentence is the horizon*, the border between these two fundamentally distinct types of integration.

So what is the *new* sentence? It has to do with prose poetry, but not necessarily prose poems, at least not in the restricted and narrow sense of that category. It does not have to do with the prose poems of the Surrealists, which manipulate meaning only at the "higher" or "outer" layers, well beyond the horizon of the sentence. Nor with the non-surrealist prose poems of the Middle-American variety, such as the dramatic monologs of James Wright or David Ignatow, which do likewise.

Bob Grenier's *Sentences* directly anticipates the new sentence. By removal of context, Grenier prevents most leaps beyond the level of grammatic integration. This is the extreme case for the new sentence. However, most of Grenier's "sentences" are more properly utterances, and in that sense follow Olson, Pound and a significant portion of Creeley's work. Periodically, some sentences and paragraphs in Creeley's *A Day Book* and *Presences* carry the pressurized quality of the new sentence, in that the convolutions of syntax often suggest the internal presence of once-exteriorized poetic forms, although here identified much with the features of speech.

Another author whose works anticipate this mode is Hannah Weiner, particularly in her diaristic prose pieces where the flow of sentences (their syntactic completion, let alone integration into larger units) is radically disrupted by "alien" discourses which she ascribes to "clairvoyance." While, in general, the new sentence has not been nearly as visible on the East Coast as it has in the west, something much like or tending towards it can be found in the writings of several poets, including Peter Seaton, Bruce Andrews, Diane Ward, Bernadette Mayer (especially in her early books), James Sherry, Lynne Dreyer, Alan Davies, Charles Bernstein and Clark Coolidge.

A paragraph from section XVIII of Coolidge's "Weathers":

At most a book the porch. Flames that are at all rails of snow. Flower down winter to vanish. Mite hand stroking flint to a card. Names that it blue. Wheel locked to pyramid through stocking the metal realms. Hit leaves. Participle.³⁶

In other contexts, any of these could become a new sentence, in the sense that any sentence properly posed and staged could. Each focuses attention at the level of the language in front of the reader. But seldom at the level of the sentence. Mostly at the levels of phrase and clause. "Flower down winter to vanish" can be a grammatical sentence in the traditional sense if flower is taken as a verb and the sentence as a command. But "Names that it blue" resists even that much integrating energy. Coolidge refuses to carve connotative domains from words. They are still largely decontextualized—save for the physical-acoustic elements—readymades.

This is not an example of the new sentence because it works primarily below the level of the sentence. However, there is another important element here as a result: the length of sentences and the use of the period are now wholly rhythmic. Grammar has become, to recall Barthes' words, prosody. As we shall see, this is an element whenever the new sentence is present.

Here, from Bob Perelman's *a.k.a.*, are two paragraphs of new sentences:

An inspected geography leans in with the landscapes's repetitions.
He lived here, under the assumptions. The hill suddenly vanished,
proving him right. I was left holding the bag. I peered into it.

The ground was approaching fast. It was a side of himself he

rarely showed. The car's tracks disappeared in the middle of the road. The dialog with objects is becoming more strained. Both sides gather their forces. Clouds enlarge. The wind picks up. He held onto the side of the barn by his fingertips.³⁷

Here we note these qualities: (1) The paragraph organizes the sentences in fundamentally the same way a stanza does lines of verse. There are roughly the same number of sentences in each paragraph and the number is low enough to establish a clear sentence:paragraph ratio. Why is this not simply a matter of the way sentences are normally organized into paragraphs? Because there is no specific referential focus. The paragraph here is a unit of measure—as it was also in "Weathers." (2) The sentences are all sentences: the syntax of each resolves *up to* the level of the sentence. Not that these sentences "make sense" in the ordinary way. For example, "He lived here, under the assumptions." This could be rewritten, or have been derived, from a sentence such as "He lived here, under the elm trees," or, "He lived here, under the assumption *that* etc." (3) This continual torquing of sentences is a traditional quality of poetry, but in poetry it is most often accomplished by linebreaks, or by devices such as rhyme. Here poetic form has moved into the interiors of prose.

Consider, by way of contrast, the first stanza of Alan Bernheimer's "Carapace":

* The face of a stranger
is a privilege to see
each breath a signature
and the same sunset fifty years later
though familiarity is an education³⁸

There are shifts and torquings here also, but these occur hinged by *external* poetic form: linebreaks. In "Carapace," the individual line is so-called ordinary language and is without this torque or pressurization of syntax. Torquing, the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into that of combination, yields, in this instance, sly and carefully-honed incommensurabilities, and occurs in "Carapace" through the *addition* of the lines, one to another.

a.k.a. however, has redeployed the linebreak to two levels. As noted, the length of the sentence is a matter now of quantity, of

measure. But the torquing which is normally triggered by linebreaks, the function of which is to enhance ambiguity and polysemy, has moved directly into the grammar of the sentence. At one level, the completed sentence (i.e., not the completed thought, but the maximum level of grammatic/ linguistic integration) has become equivalent to a line, a condition not previously imposed on sentences.

Imagine what the major poems of literary history would look like if each sentence was identical to a line.

That is why an ordinary sentence, such as "I peered into it," can become a new sentence, that is, a sentence with an interior poetic structure in addition to interior ordinary grammatical structure. That is also why and how lines quoted from a Sonoma newspaper in David Bromige's "One Spring" can become new sentences.

In fact, increased sensitivity to syllogistic movement endows works of the new sentence with a much greater capacity to incorporate ordinary sentences of the material world, because here form moves from the whole downward and the disjunction of a quoted sentence from a newspaper puts its referential content (a) into play with its own diction, as in the sentence "Danny always loved Ireland," (b) into play with the preceding and succeeding sentences, as quantity, syntax, and measure; and (c) into play with the paragraph as a whole, now understood as a unit not of logic or argument, but as quantity, a stanza.

Let's look at this play of syllogistic movement:

I was left holding the bag. I peered into it.

The ground was approaching fast. It was a side of himself he rarely showed.

This is not the systematic distortion of the maximum or highest order of meaning, as in surrealism. Rather, each sentence plays with the preceding and following sentence. The first sounds figurative, because of the deliberate use of the cliché. The second, by using both a repetition of the word "I" and the anaphor "it," twists that, making it sound (a) literal and (b) narrative, in that the two sentences appear to refer to an identical content. But the third sentence, which begins the next paragraph, works instead from the direction one might take in looking into a bag and associating from there the sense of gravity one feels looking down, as though falling.

The fourth sentence moves outside the voice of the narrative "I" and presents the sequence of previous sentences as leading to this humorous conclusion. This double-relation of syllogistic movement, which nonetheless does not build up so far as to move the reader away from the level of language itself, is highly typical of the new sentence.

Further, the interior structure of sentences here reflects also how such issues as balance, normally issues of line organization, recast themselves inside sentences. A sentence like "Clouds enlarge" is no less concerned with such balance than those of Grenier's *Sentences*: the word "enlarged" is an ordinary word enlarged.

Let's list these qualities of the new sentence, then read a poem watching for their presence:

- 1) The paragraph organizes the sentences;
- 2) The paragraph is a unity of quantity, not logic or argument;
- 3) Sentence length is a unit of measure;
- 4) Sentence structure is altered for torque, or increased polysemy/ambiguity;
- 5) Syllogistic movement is: (a) limited; (b) controlled;
- 6) Primary syllogistic movement is between the preceding and following sentences;
- 7) Secondary syllogistic movement is toward the paragraph as a whole, or the total work;
- 8) The limiting of syllogistic movement keeps the reader's attention at or very close to the level of language, that is, most often at the sentence level or below.

My example is the poem "For She," by Carla Harryman. It is one paragraph:

The back of the hand resting on the pillow was not wasted. We couldn't hear each other speak. The puddle in the bathroom, the sassy one. There were many years between us. I stared the stranger into facing up to Maxine, who had come out of the forest wet from bad nights. I came from an odd bed, a vermillion riot attracted to loud dogs. Nonetheless I could pay my rent and provide for him. On this occasion she apologized. An arrangement that did not provoke inspection. Outside on the stagnant water was a motto. He was more than I perhaps though younger. I sweat at amphibians, managed to get home. The sunlight from the window played up his golden curls

and a fist screwed over one eye. Right to left and left to right until the sides of her body were circuits. While dazed and hidden in the room, he sang to himself, severe songs, from a history he knew nothing of. Or should I say malicious? Some rustic gravure, soppy but delicate at pause. I wavered, held her up. I tremble, jack him up. Matted wallowings, I couldn't organize the memory. Where does he find his friends? Maxine said to me "but it was just you again." In spite of the cars and the smoke and the many languages, the radio and the appliances, the flat broad buzz of the tracks, the anxiety with which the eyes move to meet the phone and all the arbitrary colors. I am just the same. Unplug the glass, face the docks. I might have been in a more simple schoolyard.³⁹

Compare this with the following characterization of the postmodern cultural text by Frederic Jameson:

The isolated Signifier is no longer an enigmatic state of the world or an incomprehensible yet mesmerizing fragment of language, but rather something closer to a sentence in free-standing isolation.⁴⁰

Yet what endows Harryman's piece with precisely the intensity or power that makes it worthy of our consideration are the many ways in which individual sentences are *not* "in free-standing isolation." The charged use of pronouns, the recurrence of the name Maxine, the utilization of parallel structures ("I wavered, held her up. I tremble, jack him up.") or of terms extending from the same bank of images, notably water, are all methods for enabling *secondary* syllogistic movement to create or convey an overall impression of unity, without which the systematic blocking of the integration of sentences one to another through *primary* syllogistic movement (not how those parallel sentences operate in different tenses, or how the second one turns on that remarkably ambiguous, possibly sexual, verb "jack") would be trivial, without tension, a "heap of fragments." Nonetheless, any attempt to explicate the work as a whole according to some "higher order" of meaning, such as narrative or character, is doomed to sophistry, if not overt incoherence. The new sentence is a decidedly contextual object. Its effects occur as much between, as within, sentences. Thus it reveals that the blank space, between words or sentences, is much more than the 27th letter of the alphabet. It is beginning to explore and articulate just what those hidden capacities might be.

The new sentence first became visible, at least to my eyes, in the poem "Chamber Music" in Barrett Watten's *Decay*. There are, of course, as I have noted, numerous anticipations of this device, such as Watten's use of the line in his early poem, "Factors Influencing the Weather," or in the last books of the late Jack Spicer. More telling, perhaps even a test of its status as a device, has been its evolution, in something less than a decade, throughout an entire poetic community. Unlike, for example, the short enjambed lines of Robert Creeley, which were so widely imitated in the late 60's, the new sentence has successfully resisted any proprietary appropriation. It is in this sense something different, and more, than a style. The new sentence is the first prose technique to identify the signifier (even that of the blank space) as the locus of literary meaning. As such, it reverses the dynamics which have so long been associated with the tyranny of the signified, and is the first method capable of incorporating all the levels of language, both below the horizon of the sentence *and* above:

Everywhere there are spontaneous literary discussions. Something structurally new is always being referred to. These topics may be my very own dreams, which everyone takes a friendly interest in. The library extends for miles, under the ground.⁴¹

JOA RETA LLA



:RE:THINKING: LITERARY:FEMINISM:

(three essays onto shaky grounds)

I PICTURE THEORIES

She moves slowly. Her movements are made gradual, dull, made to extend from inside her, the woman, her, the wife, her walk weighted full to the ground. Stillness that follows when she closes the door. She cannot disturb the atmosphere....

Upon seeing her you know how it was for her. You know how it might have been. You recline, you lapse, you fall, you see before you what you have seen before. Repeated, without your even knowing it. It is you standing there. It is you waiting outside in the summer day. It is you waiting and knowing to wait. How to. Wait. It is you walking a few steps before the man who walks behind you. It is you in the silence through the pines, the hills, who walks exactly three steps behind her. It is you in the silence. His silence all around the unspoken the unheard, the apprenticeship to silence. Observed for so long and not ending. Not immediately. Not soon. Continuing. Contained. Muteness. Speech less ness.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée*, 104, 106*

In our silence, out of docile bodies and silent minds—out of multiple silences more and more audible—we’ve constructed theories and accounts of a historical endurance and power we call “women’s silence.” This is only one of many silences to which an increasingly heterogeneous and problematic *we* is attending after modernism’s figure/ground shaking “now.” Isn’t it, come to think of it, curious that the twentieth-

*Italics mine in all poetry block quotes.

century project of conceptual reorientation came so often to silence? There are Wittgenstein's aphoristic and Beckett's elliptical silences, Gertrude Stein's silences of depunctuation and repetition, Kristeva's semiotic silences, John Cage's resounding silences filled with ambient noise; Anne-Marie Albiach's, Rosmarie Waldrop's, Hannah Weiner's, Susan Howe's, Lyn Hejinian's, Nicole Brossard's, Tina Darragh's, Charles Bernstein's, Diane Ward's, Leslie Scalapino's, Tom Raworth's, Bruce Andrews's, Rod Smith's, Carla Harryman's, Peter Inman's, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's...poethical silences of countersyntactic and divested forms; as well as testimonies and sacrifices of silence we associate with names like Virginia Woolf, Tillie Olsen, Sylvia Plath, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich.... (The cultural silences that befall radical difference will prolong the obscurity of some of the names I've listed.)

What we've learned from this coincidence of silences (as venerable and portentous as a siege of herons or a murder of crows) is that silence itself is nothing more or less than what lies outside the radius of interest and comprehension at any given time. We hear, that is, with culturally attuned ears. The angles of our geometries of attention are periodically adjusted, sometimes radically reoriented. This century's formal investigations into experiences of silence have meant opening up previously inaccessible or unacknowledged or forbidden territory, where the very act of attending entails a figure/ground shift. We continue to be startled by Cage's discovery that silence is not empty at all but densely, richly, disturbingly full. Full of just those things we had not, until "now," been ready or able to notice; or reluctantly noticing, had dismissed as nonsense or noise. The long postponements of acknowledgment that constitute our cultural silences are not only accidental oversights. They are also indications of just how threatening to surface composure and cultural self-image the articulation of silence can be.

Not an accident, but certainly an intriguing coincidence to discover the force of silence at precisely this cacophonous moment on the Western Civ time line. A moment of accelerated technological momentum hell-bent on drowning out silence in every form once and for all, stuffing information into every crack. This is no paradox. All those probes and antennas, satellite dishes and cellular phones are designed to make the experience of limit and respite we have called silence as conceptually irrecoverable as the romantic idea of wilderness. And yet cognitive/intuitive frontiers remain. If silence was formerly what we weren't ready to hear, silence is currently what is audible but unintelligible. The realm of the unintelligible is the permanent frontier—that

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which lies outside the scope of the culturally preconceived—just where we need to operate in our invention of new forms of life drawing on the power of the feminine.¹

What is currently most prominently audible/intelligible is, as Judith Butler pointed out in *Gender Trouble*, a trap.² It is a world authored in the image of Rational/Universal Man—Homo Protoregulator studding a clear and distinct (Cartesian) prose with *man's* randy, generic pronouns. (Slipping back—do you notice?—after a brief, PC interlude.) We have been presented with a subtle and treacherous “text” declaring itself generic and normative starting point—homogenius, monolithic, active, authoritative—just as Moses brought it down from the mountain; i.e., masculine. In *Gender Trouble* Butler sees the generic feminine as *subtext*, either *subjugated* or *subversive (reactive)* to the master narrative. But we must be cautious about the consequences of such a view. If one defines feminine power only as the power of *subversion*, one is valorizing the predominance of the masculine “version.” We might note with unsettling, extraliterary logic that if the subversion of rape is seduction, then seduction is an implicit legitimization of rape.

In the unnaturally constructed choreography of cultural survival, the text, as rational, imperial, constitutive fabric, has been understood as logically prior, defining the terms of the intelligible. For Judith Butler, who implicitly accepts the normative status of the “intelligible,” and therefore the constraints of this binary textual code, to make “gender trouble” is to act up as subtext: that is, to perform *sub*-versions: parody, pastiche, ironic mirrorings, deconstructive replications. Doing this, she believes, exposes the arbitrariness of the phallogocentric text. But this prescription for a performative feminine subtext doesn't spring the binary trap. On the contrary, it reinforces it by positing its referential stability and by ignoring strong traditions of multivariant feminine texts. To make real gender trouble is to make genre trouble. Not to parody, but to open up explorations into forms of *unintelligibility* (unintelligibility?) as transgeneric feminine frontier.

Textual traditions that have enacted and explored modes culturally labeled Feminine have oddly—or, as we shall note, not so oddly—been practiced until recently more by men than by women. *Gender Trouble*, in its strong argument for the social contingency of traits (and bodies) labeled feminine/masculine, can help prepare us for a radical rethinking of the occurrence of the feminine in culture. Feminine textual traditions have had tumultuous histories of appropriation and rejection by women and men alike in the long, topiary hegemony of masculinist values dis-

guised as natural forms. It's been suggested by Luce Irigaray and others that "the" feminine is perhaps nothing other than a plural—all that conspires against monolithic, monotonal, monolinear, *universes*. Complexities and messes that overflow constrictions of "the" have been labeled variously over the centuries but most strongly identified with the feminine. As alternative principle, it is, importantly, the transgressive term in an ongoing Western cultural dialectic between established order and new possibility. We may smart from raw awareness of the invidiously destructive M/F binary, but its internal collisions and combustions have yielded constructively complex and paradoxical forms—mastery, *maternity*, and strange powers yet to be named. Our best possibilities lie in texts/alter-texts where the so-called feminine and masculine take migratory, paradoxical, and surprising swerves to the enrichment of both, /n/either, and all else that lies along fields of limitless nuance. This is not a vision of androgyny but of range. The collision with limiting principles that shut down possibility, like "I am a man; I must write like a man," lead to interesting swerves. For example, the French poet Dominique Fourcade likes to declare that as poet he is a woman: "toutes les poètes sont des femmes."³

To the extent that such swerves have been abhorred, they've been identified as feminine whether or not they've been declared as such. When valued they've been almost entirely incorporated into the myth of dis- or e-ruptive male genius. In the romantic tradition the strong male poet is inspired by a female muse, a pointedly external feminine element. But as far back as one looks it's there. Even prior to Sappho's acknowledgment of male poets as her precursors or Plato's incorporation of the feminine Socratic rationalist. In Homer, as well as in the mythic sources of Attic drama, one finds the paradoxical and ambivalent linking of the feminine with both the yielding and the threatening.

From the end of the nineteenth century to the present the exploding genre (if not gender) project has been located in what is called "experimental" or "avant-garde" traditions. Because of the masculinist bias of establishment literary traditions, these labels have often been applied pejoratively to connote the threat of unintelligibility. Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about our present time is that women are finally powerful enough sociopolitically to undertake the risks of this feminine challenge in their own texts.

A realistic optimism, not just for the feminine but for the complex human, lies in forms that engage the dynamics of multiplicity (three and more). In acknowledgment of difference, yes, but, more important, in

generating a proliferation of possibility beyond invidious dualisms. The same global and space information technologies that are disembarassing us of the illusion of other as absence are schooling us in multidirectional coincidence (a pattern, coincidentally, related to Carol Gilligan's web image of characteristic female thinking) as a connective principle at least as forceful as monodirectional (hierarchical) cause-effect. In a high-tech scientific era recognizing both complexity and the constituting presence of chance in nature, we may be rediscovering that coincidence, everything at any given moment happening at once, presents the most remarkable challenge in our teeming, electronically intimate global village.

It happens that this has been the condition of women's experience for as long as our histories recount and imply. An interesting coincidence, yes/no?, that what Western culture has tended to label feminine (forms characterized by silence, empty and full; multiple, associative, nonhierarchical logics; open and materially contingent processes; etc.) may well be more relevant to the complex reality we are coming to see as our world than the narrowly hierarchical logics that produced the rationalist dreamwork of civilization and its misogynist discontents. I wonder if we may find in the collision of radically destabilizing institutions and emerging feminine forms the energy to make something unprecedentedly, poetically generous of our complex future?

Let's essay into this seismic zone and explore some odd logics in the literary disposition of women's silence.

She is education history. She. Is water written lament. And cool education written blue. A literate blue. A literate yellow. And arrogance she. Speaks. Forgetting. The first Brazil. Is yellow and so speaking yellow as blue as writing. Lament. Yellow and blue. Slip. The negative. Bury the negative. Growing written water. And arrogance. But first. The oversight.

Carla Harryman, "Dimblue," *In the Mode Of*, 7

FROM IMMANENT TO EMINENT DOMAIN?

First an oversight: Anglo-American (and to some extent French) feminist thought has tended to support a women's literature of expressive voice and depictive visual metaphor. This has been promoted as the only way to explore the domain of women's silence—of what can and cannot be spoken or heard in a male-dominated world. Linguistic as/like snapshots are meant to reveal the truth of women's condition through the startling disclosures of poetic images. The project is to record our present experience and expose undeveloped images from our

long period of cultural latency. In female captivity narratives the silences hiss in the mind's ear with all the *pressures* visited upon us. We have been *oppressed, suppressed, repressed, depressed, compressed*—even *impressed* to the point of participating in our own belittling scorn.

The picture theory of female liberation proceeds on the Enlightenment belief that bringing things to light is ipso facto therapeutic. Visibility is also construed as a political force that progressively reconfigures consciousness, making it possible to act out of the immanent power of our endurance. Self-projected images of our disenfranchisement should, given the promise of Enlightenment-based psychotherapies, generate the emotional power to claim our rightful domain. The only way out of invisible and mute oppression is to turn up the lights and shatter the silence with voices that have earned the right to name the particulars of the oppression, to envision the conditions of empowerment.

The major problem with this picture may be that it's just that—a picture theory depending on a kind of verisimilitude that draws images from life to present them as (like) replicas in the text. The poetries whose energies come largely from pointing to the state of the world outside the text enact only limited life principles within the language itself. The desire to be immediately and easily understood dictates reverent uses of the very constructions that contain the injustice. To depict may be to trigger an image in the mind's eye/I, but does it reconfigure the grounds for major conceptual change?

[Working Note: It's been assumed in a culture that ties knowledge and freedom to self-empowerment that the power of women, like that of everyone else, lies conceptually in the right to self-definition, politically in the right to self-determination. Add the two together, divide by "I," and you get self-expression, yes/no? It's been part of the chronic dis-ease of women in our society that self-definition was for so long understood as a private matter. Thus, women who daily played the role of domestic or office servant or otherwise diminutive person (often with little-girl body language and undescended voices) seized on first-person forms—diaries, journals, confessional poetry, autobiographies, and autobiographical novels—all genres where the scope doesn't have to exceed firsthand and/or self-knowledge. This is the field for self-definition as self-expression.

Suppose we think of self-determination in art as invention, where the power lies in creating not just a self but language games and forms of life that draw on public knowledge and exploration of otherness, thereby re-

forming by their very *active* presence the public sphere in which they operate? This might be seen as the realm of imagination that plays in the arena of the world, as opposed to fantasy—that recedes into the envelope of the mind I-solate, I-solace.⁴ This would mean that the power of women lies not in expressing what has heretofore been stoppered within our cramped domain (scene of our silence) but in a radical reorientation that may explode the notion of domain as proprietor's home, body, self to substitute the energetic principle of poethical form—socioaesthetic values to live *by* rather than under, within, or through.

Proposal for a healthy politics of identity: to demand the right to work on one's subject position rather than to live out its destiny.]

NOW PICTURING ONLY TWO SIDES OF A PICTURE THEORY OF THE PICTURE THEORY OF LITERARY FEMINISM (THERE ARE MANY MORE)

"When meaning (what we take to be significant) is pictured as a picture we can talk about its undeveloped negative" (Michelle de Certeau). We have had a sense that whatever was pictured was real, that proof of existence lay in a discreetly finite set of attributes rather than the mess of limitless process. We thought that what was undeveloped, that is, all that failed to be stop-timed into manageable freeze-frame units, remained or became a negative. Our idea of development as calculated leap from one snap-shot to the next must undergo scrutiny.

Genre Tallique, *GLANCES: An Unwritten Book*, 13

It has been a general practice to evaluate feminist writing in terms of its developed and underdeveloped images of women—to praise poets like Adrienne Rich, Marge Piercy, Audre Lorde, Sharon Olds... for the courage of their content—the way in which their writing exposes previously unexposed negatives, i.e., female experiences persistently devalued, suppressed, repressed in a world dominated by male logics and values. The image is of a strong female poet creating strong metaphoric pictures to fuel desires for liberation. But another instance of devaluing—to my mind equally destructive in its implications—must be discussed. The dark side of the Enlightened feminist literary establishment has been the way in which women writers whose projects are dedicated to something other than therapeutic exposures have been treated. They are lumped together with male writers who produce "inaccessible" texts and dismissed. The situation is uncomfortably familiar. It looks

very much like a replica of the standard patriarchal treatment of non-conforming women.

The picture theory of meaning has roots going back to Plato and Aristotle but comes to us most recently from turn-of-the-century Positivist sources. It presumes that a meaningful picture is instantly legible because of its this = that correspondence to a fully available, intelligible reality. A picture is an implicative instance of hard data as it's defined within the deductive genealogy of the reigning metaphysic. Put simply (there's no other way), reality is as internally consistent and coherent as any rational man (no feminine disruptions in logic or tone admitted) and is clearly classifiable (no blurred genres). Craig Owens, in his essay "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," writes, "Recent analyses of the 'enunciative apparatus' of visual representation—its poles of emission and reception—confirm, the representational systems of the West admit only one vision—that of the constitutive male subject—or, rather, they posit the subject of representation as absolutely centered, unitary, masculine" (58). This is surely a model we must question for a feminist enterprise.

Only the women were placing bets.

From instinct and from memory I try to reconstruct nothing. From memory, I broach the subject. And that cannot be from childhood. Only from ecstasy, from a fall, from words. Or from the body differently. Emergency cell like body at its ultimate, without its knowledge, the tongue will tell it.

When Florence Dérive entered the Hôtel de l'Institut, Montréal, 1980 on rue St. Denis. Snatches of sentences inside. At the registration desk. It was night. Since Finnegans Wake. It was night. Itinerant, Florence Dérive such a woman. Brain — — — — — memory. The night, numbers and letters.

Florence Dérive sometimes repeats a certain number of gestures that continue to exist as writing and each time she dis/places ardour and meaning...

Nicole Brossard, "The Ordinary," *Picture Theory*, 13

Brossard's theory as practice moves us away from picturing. The language is not a static mirroring. It does not attempt to transport intact images from writer's life to reader as spectator. The disjunctive syntax, the depunctuated grammar, like that of Cha and Harryman, send ripples through any image that might be forming, keep it moving in the mind. This is not a scene of instant recognition. It's about the pleasures of active engagement. We are invited to participate in uses⁵ of language in the generative dark of a Finnegans waking night.

A picture-book universe reveals little about the dark side of anything—neither conceptual frameworks nor the moon. Picturing presupposes recognizable foregrounded figures—preconfigured into genus, gender, genre—frontally visible units. It reinforces the authority of established conceptual frameworks, of what can be seen through culturally grounded lenses. There can be no dark, noisy silence of a *Finnegans Wake* in a picture-book universe—nor can there be the work of Cha, Harryman, Brossard. Theirs is a literature precisely dedicated to what cannot be illustrated, mediated, filtered by words at a remove from their objects.

The ideal poetry of depiction is a series of images strung together in rhythmically unbroken sequences that appear to reveal rather than construct a world. Designed to create a plenum, to saturate the mind with verisimilitude, the impression must be that there's no other logically possible world and that there's nothing left to say. The admiring reviewer uses words like *skillfully crafted*, *deftly polished*, *absorbing*, *convincing*, *lacks nothing*. Meanwhile, the reader is not any more spurred to imaginative agency than one who has just reviewed an airtight logical proof. Why act when all the work has quite clearly been done? If existence is nothing more than a set of attributes, then "worlds" can be created than which nothing other can be conceived. This is the theological principle of the omnipotent author free of cognitive entropy, and play.

All this is about as far from real life in *medias* mess as we can get. Could it be that contrary to received opinion, a literature of attributes may not directly empower us to make a joyful, troublesome, gender/genre exploding noise? It certainly may confirm, console, support, justify, reveal, inform, and—what sounds most active—inspire... but what does inspiration mean? Literally to be filled with someone else's breath. This secondhand air depletes energy for much of anything other than fantasy identifications with idealized models. Does this nurture a self-image that feels potent and positive? It may, but I question its value for imaginative practice.

Women have for centuries been subjected to images—from literary and romance novels to romantic poetry to movie and fashion magazines. Mostly we've been left with a damaged self-image—a feeling of invidious comparison, incompetence, inadequacy, paralysis. No sense—except through buying products—of how to get from here (flawed self) to there (idealized image). This romantic mechanism—confusion with an idealized other—is, in its updated forms, central to the media value of glam-

our. As any TV producer knows, the image locks in the viewer's gaze and desire. It's a strategy of built-in seduction and persuasion, and betrayal. The remainder in the experience of being transfixed by images is the reader/viewer herself—left in a quiescent fantasy state, entertaining after-images, and afterthoughts, rather than engaging in active, alternative constructions (for example, by means of playfully indeterminate forms) that can materially reconfigure a form of life. Could it be that any medium whose chief function it is to impress images on us may be prolonging our cultural latency (our passivation) rather than deconstructing it?

I think one must question Images of Women literary theories in this light.⁶ The extent to which they are founded on positivist or naïve realist epistemologies is revealed by their insistence on full disclosure or accessibility. We are in constant need of revising the connect-the-dots constellations we call our worlds. Luckily they're not ontologically glued to an unchanging backdrop. Nonetheless the metaphor of mirroring a stable truth, as brought to us in Aristotle's *Poetics*, still carries enormous weight.⁷ It's seen in mainstream literatures as providing unassailable grounds for cultural understanding and political analysis even when the very notion of grounds has become so philosophically shaky no one would knowingly choose to secure anything to it. It's my feeling that women should be particularly suspicious of mirrors. The retrograde looking-glass world we've been encouraged to inhabit harbors a cultural black hole reflected as benign beauty mark. It's actually an ominous vanishing point.

Interestingly, ironically, the same theories that have destabilized the principles of realist epistemologies and literatures—and are thereby taken by many feminist theoreticians as inimical to women's causes—are responsible for the politically vital, postmodern notions of difference and decentered multiculturalism (the fall of "the" metanarrative) that release the power of the feminine from the status of a subtext. The valorization of realist grounding and accessibility produces the unintended effect of maintaining women as credulous readers in the passive state.⁸

I know that the amorous scene has already been viewed and consumed in several of its strategies, I know that, I know that, repeated, it determines the opening and the vanishing point of all affirmation.

Nicole Brossard, "Perspective," *Picture Theory*, 41

What comes of light that is secondhand (moon goddesses and worship?), written words destined to come *after*—after the fact, after the

fall of the fact (from Platonic forms or the biblical grace of not needing curiosity), after thought, after image (Baudrillard's vanishing point), and of course, in Harold Bloom's Freudian frenzy, after every other writer's *after*? One would think Bloom's romantic image of the male writer in an agon of belatedness might be exotic or irrelevant for those of us to whom language appears devoid of precedents created in the image of woman, low on *materpieces*. Instead many of us have found it enviable—a condition to emulate. Hence the effort to establish a rival, mirror-image women's canon.

This ambition attempts to remedy the frightening absence of the feminine in history. The cultural memory embedded in all those language games where women have had little if any power has indeed felt like a negative—a sense of the absent (m)other, where the prototypical other is woman, where in fact the assumption into culture of the male child is coterminous with an emotional dropping of the *m* from *mother*. So Alicia Ostriker's poignant title for an emblematic book on "The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America," is *Stealing the Language*. It strikes a familiar, inauspicious note. Since Ostriker (who represents what may be the majority view among literary feminists) takes it as conceded that language has not been woman's domain, she concludes that we must pilfer and loot among its male-inscribed artifacts. As in Judith Butler's account of the eminent domain of phallogocentrism, our most active/aggressive role is limited to subversion. We can defiantly expose ourselves as strong women in the pictures we make with *their* language, embed these pictures in forceful stories, and create a new mythology portraying women as heroic models, but this is always done in full cognizance of the degree to which we remain exiles in a foreign tongue. In her final chapter, "Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythology," Ostriker writes,

Women writers have always tried to steal the language. Among poets more than novelists, the thefts have been filching from the servants' quarters. When Elaine Marks surveys the *Écriture féminine* movement in Paris, she observes that in its manifestos of desire "to destroy the male hegemony" over language, "the rage is all the more intense because the writers see themselves as prisoners of the discourse they despise. But is it possible," she asks, "to break out?" Does there exist, as a *subterranean* current *below* the surface structure of male-oriented language, a specifically female language, a "mother tongue"? ... [A] number of empirical studies in America seem to confirm that insofar as speech is "feminine," its strength is limited to evoking *subjective* sensation and interpersonal responsiveness; it is not in other respects perceived as authoritative; it does not command men's respect. The

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question of whether a female language, separate but equal to male language, either actually exists or can (or should) be created, awaits further research into the past and further gynocentric writing in the present.

Stealing the Language, 211 (italics mine)

The contemporary women writers Ostriker valorizes have followed Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath from a uniquely anguished "I" to an instructively, communally victimized "We"—representing a solidarity of defiant images that unfortunately remain unresolvable, and therefore inactive, in the alien chemistry of patriarchal language. (Is it because what has in the past been characterized as feminine language has not been authoritative, i.e., respected by men, that Ostriker so summarily passes over its possibilities?) This leaves the structural trap of the "phallogocentric" language undisturbed. Since images created by women do not impress male linguistic arbiters, these images cannot really enter, much less transform, the language. Yet they are all we are "allowed" or, to use Ostriker's image, all that is detachable enough to be "filched." In Ostriker's Steinbergian languagescape of deeded real estate and Mens-Club "pride of lions" architectural improvements, we might snatch a "flower," "branch," or "bone" from the masculine metanarrative. Or, better yet, an assertively female vocabulary list—"womb," "breast," "vagina," "menses." But not a dynamic principle. Not a grammar or syntax to live by. Sure, says the (male) architect or contractor, you can do what you like as long as you don't fool with anything structural.⁹

If this picture of total, male, linguistic hegemony were actually the case, one might indeed be inclined to agree that all we can do is make the best of what we can get away with by theft or subversion. But the humiliation implicit in this image is startling. More disturbing than its dismal picture of gender politics is the questionable picture of language/culture itself—one that shares Judith Butler's image, after Freud-Lacan/Foucault/Rich, of culture as inescapably male: "That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped—as if it could be. . . . [T]he crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 32).

What Ostriker calls for in the face of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to "owning" "the" language is the manufacture of bigger and better (heroic) female images, turning the "project of defining a female self" into a construction site for a full-fledged, woman-centered mythol-

ogy—a male hegemonic form Ostriker thinks we can renovate to represent women authoritatively in the public domain. The project is yet another subversion of image into mirror-image. It swallows Bloom's self-expressive "strong poet" ethos whole: "Where women write strongly as women, it is clear that their intention is to subvert and transform the life and literature they inherit...[R]evisionist mythmaking in women's poetry is a means of redefining both woman and culture" (Ostriker, 211).

Transforming a life is not the same as redecorating a poem or house with stolen or even legitimately acquired accessories. I fear this is a desperate and futile attempt in a world text that constructs the feminine itself as domesticated ornament/image rather than publicly effective, active principle. To the extent that Ostriker fails to link the feminine with dynamic processes already in the language, she condemns the female writer to lurk in the subjective (private), subterranean, subaltern world of subversive self-definition. What is most useful to us now—images of the female or enactments of the feminine?¹⁰

[Working Note: Is the following a useful distinction?

A use theory of meaning, one that locates the making of meaning in a collaborative engagement with interdynamically developing forms rather than in the interpretation of a fossil signified allows exploration of the medium of language itself and thus the invention of new grammars in which subject-object, master-mater relations become fluid. The picture theory, on the other hand, valorizes the prototypical *it*. *It* exists only in obeisance to processes outside *itself*, processes that unlike the *it* are not compressible into single units. To counteract this dichotomous relation between art object as *it* and nature as process, John Cage pledges to imitate not nature but its manner of operation. This results in art that is not a picture but a moving form of life.]

FIG. 1

I feel you climbing toward me
your cleated bootsoles leaving their geometric bite
colossally embossed on microscopic crystals
as when I trailed you in the Caucasus
Now I am further
ahead than either of us dreamed anyone would be
I have become
the white snow packed like asphalt by the wind
the women I love lightly flung against the mountain
that blue sky

our frozen eyes unribboned through the storm
 we could have stitched that blueness together like a quilt

(4-5)

This is the third stanza of Adrienne Rich's "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev." In an epigraph Rich explains that Shatayev was the "leader of a women's climbing team, all of whom died in a storm on Lenin Peak, August 1974. Later Shatayev's husband found and buried the bodies." The "I" of the poem is the voice of Shatayev addressing her husband. The poem ends,

In the diary torn from my fingers I had written:
What does love mean
what does it mean "to survive"
A cable of blue fire ropes our bodies
burning together in the snow We will not live
to settle for less We have dreamed of this
all of our lives

(6)

It's easy to equate this ill-fated, heroic (inspiring?) expedition with a search for the cognitive, emotional, social domain of woman. Shatayev, who in the past trailed behind her husband's assault on Mounts "Blank" (we can imagine him planting flags on countless geological bulges, naming them *his*), has now achieved what might be seen as the ultimate claim to eminent domain. She has, along with her companions, become part of the mountain. But more important, she has become an *in situ*, literal symbol of the monumental: image frozen onto the side of a mountain like the faces at Mt. Rushmore. I mean to foreground the seeming contradiction of the symbolically literal. The logical torque here is related to the conjunction of this romantic/heroic scene with the language of women's self-help manuals—"we will not... settle for less" and the language of unrealized fantasy—"we have dreamed of this all of our lives." The poem contains the entire range from immanent to eminent (as modeled by worldwide machismo) domain. But the symbolically literal is not the literal itself. Like all symbolism it stands "in place of."

What does it mean to be inspired by a poem like this, with its finished surface and romantic fatalism, to be literarily filled with its breath? Secondhand breath is no more appealing to me than secondhand light. I would rather conspire (active voice) than be inspired (passive voice). To conspire (to breathe together) is to participate in the construction of a

living aesthetic event. But this requires a different kind of form—one not so authoritatively intelligible, one that otherwise enacts a continuing articulation of silence.

I chose to look at "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev" because, like so much of Adrienne Rich's poetry, it has touched a wide audience. It was written during a time when her work—poetry and essays—helped fuel an important stage of the women's movement in the United States. Its passionate, collective self-expression (voices renting the silence of forbidden dreams) may indeed move a reader. But what does it mean to "be moved" (passive voice) by the kind of language game that forms this poem? This is a significantly different dynamic from that of a poetic language game whose unfinished surface requires the reader to behave as fully empowered participant. Think—as Wittgenstein did—of a chess game in which "to move" (active voice), to calculate and imagine, is to collaboratively develop (albeit under constraints) the future configuration in which one lives. The project is not so much to understand what is meant as to create meaning and possibility through one's conversational intervention in the pattern.

The didactic implication embedded in the sort of literature that the current pantheon of received feminist writers represents directs the reader toward the subjectivity of empathetic identification and away from autonomous, critical production. The prompt for female reader as writer (from Ostriker and Butler, as well as Rich et al.) is, after all, toward repetition with a difference. This is replication of a value structure that fetishizes heroics, where lyrical forms mimic logical proofs, where the reward is a conclusion that is a predetermined epiphany that is rewarded by a society left untroubled in its assumptions. The alternative is experiments that generate a proliferation of formal possibilities, possibilities that have, incidentally, much less to do with territory, ownership, and rights (all important issues in extraliterary arenas such as courts of law) than with the invention of poethical forms of life. Repetition with a difference may just not be different enough.

What's most interesting about the section from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* ("ERATO Love Poetry") quoted at the beginning of this essay is not the picture Cha presents but the active disclosure of her language. The poem seems at first glance to be solidly within the tradition of "images of women" lit., but it presents constructive problems for this kind of reading. One notices, for instance, the unusual way the text is printed in the book, in an interaction of facing pages that only when folded together fill all the space. They are negative mirror images of one

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eresa Hak Kyung beginning of this closure of her lan- thin the tradition problems for this al way the text is s that only when ror images of one

another: where one is blank the other is imprinted and vice versa. The act of closing the book, of folding these empty and full spaces into one another becomes an erotic act, alerting readers to the intimate and odd cohabitations of words and words, ink and paper. But this is no easy sexual union, since one knows—although there's the mystery in not actually being able to see—that this text will never be one. When the book is closed the interfacing type will always face in opposite directions.

Roland Barthes wrote of the "lover's discourse" always implicit in words: "*Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words*" (Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 73 [italics mine]); yet Cha's language touches only the emptiness of the other (opposite) page. That this text is designed to interpolate itself into emptiness/silence—to let emptiness/silence in—gives it remarkable breath: possibilities of in- and exhalation for writer and reader alike. I'd like to suggest that it is a woman's feminine text (denying any redundancy) that implicitly acknowledges/creates the possibility of other/additional/simultaneous texts. This is a model significantly different from Bloom's competitive "anxiety of influence." It opens up a distinction between the need to imprint/impress one's mark (image) on the other and an invitation to the others' discourse as necessary to an always collaborative making of meaning. Collaboration with the reader is unnecessary only when meaning is being reported rather than made.

Like the relationship between facing pages, "she" and "he" in ERATO articulate the silence between them by syntactic stops and starts. But this blurred genre (prose-poetry, investigation-artifact) blurs gender as well. S/he is silence. The feminist enactment of this text does not depend on its being politically correct. Its discourse is the experimental feminine in process—complex and partial. The confluence of languages (French, English, Korean) with multiple forms (translations, translation lessons, letters, biblical passages, documents, photographs, charts, movie stills, handwritten text; lyrical, prose, permutative writing...) brings *Dictee* into the multiple performance dimensions that characterize everyday life. I agree with Asian American feminist critics who say (some in praise, some in disappointment) that Cha's work doesn't support racial, ethnic, or gender identity politics. The complexity of *Dictee* confounds the reductionist coherence that logics of identity require. It is poethically investigative in the surprising juxtapositions of its parts. These are parts whose interactions create a fluid and productively indeterminate form of life as text, in the irresolvable abundance of their in-

tersecting lines of play, in their grammatical/syntactical, particle-wave interruptions. Cha's poetry is not the reflection of a finished project or a mind that is "made up." It is the permeable membrane of a living organism.

A CONFLUENCE OF SILENCES:

We forget that we must always return to zero in order to pass from one word to the next.

John Cage, *For the Birds*

Don't *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

Probable probably is the most that they can say.

Gertrude Stein, *How To Write*

Nicole Brossard's, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's, Carla Harryman's words, the spaces between them, lead us to a prospect—an overview, not oversight—of the medium of language itself—the medium with which we must become so intimate and at home that we stop worrying about ownership and legitimacy (asserting rights of domain) and start using it for the sort of experiment and invention that brings us into transformative interaction with the worlds that languages betroth¹¹ and create. What I want to suggest, after Judith Butler, is that to make really productive and useful gender/genre trouble is not to repeat old forms with a difference (parodic or not) but to open up radical explorations into silence—the currently unintelligible in which some sense of our future may be detected.

The question then is not how to exit our silence. Not how we move from immanent to eminent domain. Not how to raise our voices loud enough to be heard in the legitimate (intelligible) theater of patriarchal culture. We already know how to do this: by reflecting the values of established, male-dominated power structures. Instead, let's think of how we can amplify the knowledge of/in our silence, our not so much *nonsense* as additional or other sense, our *improbabilities*, our *unintelligibilities*... in order to create new forms of intelligibility that are resonant with our values. This is where our feminist project overlaps with Wittgenstein's, Beckett's, Stein's, Cage's. And with contemporary women writers working in largely unrecognized traditions in formal transgression of gender/genre markers.

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They are at this very moment making palpable sense of unintelligibles in their art.¹² And that sense is a breath of fresh air. It strives to avoid the eternal return to hermetic traps in old forms of life tainted by the systematic devaluation of feminine forms. New intelligibilities have been much ignored because what is validated as intelligible, what makes easily accessible sense—what is prized and rewarded¹³—is indeed repetition/replication of the structures supporting the aesthetic establishment currently enjoying the privileges of legitimacy, which are (it's all tediously circular!) the rewards of legibility.

Codes of intelligibility rationalize values that derive their force from the extent to which they are constructed and defended in terror of the experimental and the feminine.

NOWFORSOMETHINGNOTCOMPLETELYDIFFERENTNOWF

II FRENCH FREUD FEMINISM?

What can "feminist" writing possibly mean? Images of the female as persons, strong and weak, admirable and despicable occur in the writing of both men and women. These images, pictures, vignettes, no matter how "progressive" the narrative in which they are embedded, cannot be said to constitute either feminine or feminist writing. Only form—stylistic enactment (aesthetic behavior)—can be feminine. What society has called feminine forms have always been available to both men and women in art as well as life. Feminist writing occurs only when female writers use feminine forms. . . . At precisely that moment of enactment, feminism as polemic disappears: the female writer has entered the world of the living.

Genre Tallique, *GLANCES: An Unwritten Book*

The use of this quote is not intended to bolster what follows with authority. (Who is Genre Tallique anyway!?) It may indeed be that too much authority has vested the rhetorics of feminist theory. And with just that patriarchal charge we seek to escape.¹⁴ Consider the French-Freud-Lacan-plex staging trans-Oedipal love or death masquerades with some of the best and brightest of the intellectual daughters. Positioning feminist theory in gendered *postness* at the very moment it should be inventing itself anew. Not that I claim freedom from what Tallique has called *cette Électrecution*—her ironic term for the sinister cauterizing of the presumed gender wound that invites the feminine to remain transfixed at the mirror stage or in the pre-Oedipal eros inter-

ruptus of *écriture féminine*, "writing one's body." (No problem if body includes mind.)

To be conscious of twentieth-century humanist theory is inevitably to find psychoanalytic narratives winding their *strasses* and *rues* through one's mind. In the impacted setting of the psychoanalytic "family romance," where one's cultural space is delimited by the narrative outline of a nineteenth-century authorial parentage and "name of the father" imprimatur, understanding leans toward a very curious vanishing point.¹⁵ In the Freudian master narrative the vanishing point is tagged "resistance" or "denial." Because it punctuates the farthest reach of the authorial point of view, it is anything but innocuous. It lies in wait for bounders and transgressors. Try to pass beyond it—you will either disappear or return home to father, chastened and docile. The at-large vanishing point for women is simply this: to the extent that we venture onto the post-Oedipal playing field of culture, or the sexual politics of the unreconstructed family constellation, our every role, every move is defined by the "law of the father" in search of good wife and mother. This is another installment in the fictive creation of the "eternal feminine" within what Judith Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix":

I use the term *heterosexual matrix*... to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized. I am drawing from Monique Wittig's notion of the "heterosexual contract" and, to a lesser extent, on Adrienne Rich's notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" to characterize a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.

Gender Trouble, 151

Beyond the vanishing point lie shocking scenes: exposed negatives reveal a domimatrix with polymorphous perverse appetites and ambitions wreaking havoc in the popular maxiseries, "Civilization and Miss Content." For Freud "poly" *without invidious comparison* is always safely and emblematically pre-Oedipal:¹⁶ an immature psychological grammar in which subject has not yet targeted an appropriate object. What has occurred for women in this grim fairy tale is something akin to emotional clitorectomy. The little girl's assumed complicity in the patriarchal construction of the "eternal feminine" means that she must simultaneously valorize and relinquish her femaleness as agent and object of desire. The rich polymorphous text of early female experience is

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thereby reduced to threatening subtext—source of guilt, confusion, self-loathing, enervation.... When little girls are asked to stop desiring the feminine and instead to affect it (boys are put in an equivalent position with respect to the masculine), they are no longer exploring vibrant performative gender/genre possibility but scurrying toward its underexposed images. This regression is astonishingly called maturation in the psychoanalytic fairy tale. Can we imagine instead a scenario in which maturing, gaining power in one's culture (medium of growth) is to actively (disruptively) participate in one's own gender/genre construction by choosing among the multiple logics of a complex, pragmatic realism, rather than passively receiving the imprint of a distilled, idealized, fully commodified (and phallicized) symbolic? To what extent have women been complicit in the substitution of the image of the female for the transgressive experimental feminine?

Freud was above all else a great prose stylist. The literary paradigm of psychoanalytic persuasion and plausibility is, as Freud ruefully/pridefully admitted, the novella.¹⁷ Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, finds his writing close to the narrative symbolic structures of German fairy tales. What this form entails is a persuasive grammar that gathers force from a particular kind of analogical and metaphorical thinking—one that presumes that the "as/like" and "stands for" relation yields "deeply" significant meaning. A structure in which symbolic codes stabilize an economy of equivalences and equilibria is one in which circularly reinforcing logics can even maintain an uberphallus as the equivalent of an entire system. But the symbolic is not the only logical or associative order of meaning. There is metonymy, as well as metaphor; there are complex dynamic systems and fluidly interactive models, as well as equivalences. The phallus, like the romantic genius and strong poet and symbolic logic it props up, has got to go; the penis may get on quite well without it.

Meanwhile there are other compelling forces in Freud's narrative style. It operates very skillfully as an Aristotelian rhetoric of persuasion. In the psychoanalytic narrative the rhetorical *ethos* (appeal to respect for the author's character) has been that of courageous patriarchal genius; *pathos* (appeal to our emotions) that of deeply, aesthetically sensitive patriarchal genius; *logos* (appeal to our respect for reason) that of rationally masterful, historically knowledgeable, patriarchal genius.¹⁸ It is the confluence of these characteristics in Freud's and, with a different flavor, Lacan's prose that vested the protops psychoanalytic narrative with authority (Ostriker's major concern) and intelligibility (Butler's). Is

there room for an "experimental feminine" here or for the spirit of postmodern eclecticism, much less for the invention of new rules? Luce Irigaray was actually expelled from Lacan's seminar when she deviated—rather minimally, as it turns out—from his views.

In this "progressive" cultural tragedy (drama of the inevitable) we are forever children shaped by the authorial tyranny of the father. Sons carry on the name, the law, the primary text. Daughters dress up in costumes tagged Electra, Jocasta, Iphegenia, Clytemnestra, Medea. Like all disenfranchised peoples, the daughters can submit or self-destruct. We can rebel, displace, deconstruct, subvert but only in the ongoing *subtext* that is our purported destiny. We cannot author our own play.

This model is only plausible if one narrows the field of vision to the rules of nineteenth-century metarhetorical perspective as syntactic impulsion toward the father, hugging the logomotive track in self-fulfilling linguistic fatalism. With the female Lucifer, Luce Irigaray, comes a different light, voice, text only to return as the redepressed. Isn't this all too familiar? Don't we have to consider that to replicate this particular psychoanalytic model¹⁹ in feminist theory is to perpetuate an exclusionary and suffocating grammar in which to make sense, to be authoritative or intelligible, is to underwrite one's subjugation to a system whose very grounding is scorn for the feminine? The feminine as negative image of the cultural construction of the masculine is distrusted in its openness to multiple—sensual as well as rational—logics. In conceding "the" symbolic order to the long shadow of the name of the father we will remain audience to the shadow theater of Plato's misogynist cave. Why then the voluntary subjection of feminist theoreticians to the tawdry outcome of this narrative line?

Oddly, interestingly, the defensive desire for our own grounding has had the paradoxical effect of making us, as literary feminists, resistant to the use of feminine forms, which (in any era) are neither authoritative nor intelligible by current establishment standards. This, I think is the terminus of a theoretical line whose narrative is constructed on restrictive *pre* and *post* axes: pre- and postcultural, pre- and post-Oedipal, pre- and postgenital—ignoring the complex, polymorphous, exploded-cartoon contemporaneity of all active thinking experience. In the still-silent film the proverbial preverbal heroine is still tied to the tracks, silently screaming. She *will* be run over by the Hegelian-Freudian-Lacanian logomotive because there are no other tracks on the set, no sidelines or margins from which the possibility of liberation beckons, no topological warps or additional dimensions in the flatland

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narrativescape, no choice of vanishing points. Most important, there are no alternatives to finding herself in this position to begin with. The possibility of plural possibilities is excluded by the marked singularity of the theory-ordained probable.

[Working quote: "The critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities; that conceit is the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location.... The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 147).]

So in a recent remake of this classic Western the woman tied to the tracks may be a feminist who can theorize, parody, ironize her position but not escape.²⁰ The movie is shot not in some flimsily constructed studio but on location—the cultural location. This is the repetition compulsion of *Gender Trouble*, in which the scripted response to entrapment in narrowly binary, essentialist gender identities is the parodic overacting of the silent scream. (In fact a good deal of hyperfeminine social behavior—with its characteristic costumes and gestures—may be just this.) The disruptively audible—if not immediately intelligible—swerve of real gender/genre trouble is possible only if we recognize what has been the continual constituting presence of feminine forms in language. This is the implicit condition of all vitally resonant literatures. The Hegelian-Freudian-Lacanian logomachine is only one among many trains of thought entering into the messy polylectics, polylogues that create the live culture of our language.

What I'm looking for then is a polymorphous perversely startling point from which can spring the possibility of a feminist poethics—aesthetic practice that reveals, in the course of its enactment, the powers of feminine poethics in female hands. Hands freed from holding mirror/speculum to exemplary images of an immaculately (or disgracefully) conceived feminine. This is not to disavow the necessary sociopolitical analysis of boundaries that have confined women's lives or the legal work still needed to secure women's rights. But the aesthetic project is at a juncture where the radii of possibilities (and improbabilities) must reach beyond the mirror stage.

The room inside me has disappeared. At night, when all is quiet, I no longer hear the pictures shifting on the walls when I walk fast. Only the pump in the basement. I wonder whether the space has folded in on itself like a tautology, or been colonized. You think the wine has washed it out,

and it's true that the mirror tilted at a reckless angle. I still have the floor plan with measurements, but now that nothing corresponds to it I can only take it as part of the emptiness I try to cover up with writing. To know my blind spot. I have always wanted to dilate my landscape for the piano and the long labor of losing the self. Though I am too nearsighted for clouds. If I had lived a different image.

Rosmarie Waldrop, "Inserting the Mirror,"
The Reproduction of Profiles, 71

We know, with the help of Foucault, Judith Butler, and others that the power to make useful meaning (OE *mænan*—to mean/to moan) of one's historical experience does not lie in accepting the outline of one's "nature" narrated therein. Hope for the categorically oppressed lies in constructionist readings that expose the contingency of those very categories. These are not most helpful as regressive justifications of one's complicity in a degraded status or in generically pumped up self-esteem. (The palliative strategies of victimhood.) The powerful project is the invention of a polymorphous future. To move from the simple harmonics of moans (whether of pain or *jouissance*) to a polyphony of exploratory means, from narrative therapy to linguistic experiment, from a picture to a use theory of meaning is to open meaning to radical revision in the act of multiple language games and new forms of life.

Is it plausible to think of the possibilities of a literary feminism in this way? If it is, then perhaps the sense of entrapment in a language-culture with a predetermined power structure and coercive symbolic coherence can be superseded. Perhaps we can cancel our *ad nauseam* encores as ambiguously smiling, subtextual female repressed. Perhaps we can assume the active textual project of entertaining multiple, complex possibilities/improbabilities/unintelligabilities in our languages and lives. There are of course obstacles. Chief among them has been the picture theory of gender that lodges the feminine exclusively in female bodies. In attempting to identify a strong feminine tradition in literature the search for ancestors has been limited to writers who enacted a restricted symbolic code and who could retroactively pass the Olympic committee's hormonal assay as F.

The most interesting thing about our "different voices" may be that feminine modes of thinking, as they are currently located and described, are, with respect to masculine modes, radically and robustly asymmetrical. Not *post* but *extra*. The fertile excess of culture nurtured in the playing field of complexity. The feminine is culturally constructed as

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native to the masculine, nonabsolutist, nonhierarchical. In not preclud-
ing otherness, the feminine, as dia- or polelectical force that is always
the paradigmatic other, leaves us with the humorous prospect that the
only thing excluded in principle from the feminine is not the masculine
but principles of exclusion themselves.

NOTES FROM A CONSTRUCTION SITE (figures grow shift, grounds grow slippery)

Gender/genre is pure experiment. Every boundary construction is a gamble,
a dare, a hypothetical with consequences. That most have chosen to repeat
old experiments does not logically negate the possibility of new forms. . . .
There are energetic experimental traditions in our culture. It's in their direc-
tion our lucky glance falls. Glance, yes. I refuse the word "gaze." The gaze
turns self and other to stone. The glance is light in the gossamer breeze of
chance, *un coup de dés*, inviting the unexpected.

Genre Tallique, *GLANCES: An Unwritten Book*

Gérard Depardieu: [Catherine Deneuve], certain people think you're
cold. You're simply direct, frank and unambiguous. People think
you're serene and organized: I've never seen anyone so disordered or
so capricious with money and belongings. . . . You are stronger, more
responsible, more armored than male actors. You are less vulnerable,
and doubtless this is the paradox of real femininity. Catherine
Deneuve is the man I'd like to be.

Catherine Deneuve: For a woman, I'm quite masculine, you know, in
the relations I have toward people, men. All of them, I don't make
much difference. And I think it's the way I'm quite straightforward,
you know, and he can love me as a man. I understood what [Depar-
dieu] meant, you know, because he has a very feminine quality and I
have a masculine quality. I don't try to charm, I have quite strong
and straight relations with people. In film it's different. In films you
are a character and woman, much more woman than me.

Henry Allen: She doesn't charm. She doesn't have to, with that face: It
seems like an aesthetic principle she totes on her shoulders like a jar
of water. You find yourself watching her rather than listening to her.
The jawline is so long, the face is so *big*. You find yourself trying to
make her smile, to arouse her interest. Not like Tom Sawyer walking
a fence for Becky Thatcher, but more like a geisha girl entertaining a
Japanese businessman. You try to intrigue this woman who does not
try to intrigue you. You begin to see what Depardieu meant. You are
the woman and she is the man.

Henry Allen, "Deneuve's Masculine Mystique"

In its binary dialectic Feminine/Masculine is the Western Yin/Yang—as ubiquitous and unstable, contradictory and paradoxical as any dualistic principle appealed to for explanations of everything. Depardieu, Deneuve, Allen are caught in a language game that must tag every move M or F. They are, here, on this stage, daring players. But there's still no sign of a form of life that can support polymorphous persons whose moves are not self-classifications but experiments in a world of uncompressible possibility. Does such radical possibility exist? If we abandon the notion of the cultural dynamic as predominantly phallic in a fixed symbolic, can we move toward a new paradigm of culture as *poethical* process, where the primary engagement takes place in transformative interactions with the *material* presence of heterogeneous bodies and forms? In fleeing a narrowly constructed Ken and Barbie essentialism, can responsively playful social construction broaden the field of genre/gender and spring us from the mind of that bourgeois gentil-homme for whom all that is not x is y (M, F) and vice versa?

III GENRE TROUBLE

THE EXPERIMENTAL FEMININE

I know that it is simplistic. And it is wrong. When one does not recede to the oversight of the western philosophical tradition. But when visa versa? Overseeing the recession of it? I speak my mind or not without receding. In this case memory is a negative. Repetition and jargon.

Carla Harryman, "Dimblue," *In the Mode Of*, 12

We need to recognize the strangeness of what we thought we recognized.
The only reliable mirrors are in the fun house.

Dita Fröller, *New Old World Marvels*

The feminine has for some time located the open and receptive, the materially and contextually inventive. Men, like Joyce, Pound, and Duchamp, could be feminine in their art, but not their life. Women could be feminine in their life, but not their art. Gertrude Stein, playing the role of scientifically trained investigator and cultivating the demeanor of a Roman emperor, was uniquely positioned to explore the experimental feminine.

Genre Tallique, *GLANCES: An Unwritten Book*

WHAT!?

First. An oversight.

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World Marvels

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Unwritten Book

The experimental feminine draws us on

(long) after *Goethe, Freud, Lacan*

Here's a curious thing. If, as good social constructionists (neither cultural essentialists nor biologists), we note current identifications of the feminine—that it is open, diffuse, multiple, complex, decentered, filled with silence, fragmented, incorporating difference and the other (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, et al.); undefinable, subversive, transgressive, questioning, dissolving identity while promoting ethical integrity (Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, et al.); materially and contextually pragmatic, employing nonhierarchical and nonrationalist associative logics—"web-like" connective patterns (Carol Gilligan); self and other interrupted, tentative, open/interrogative (Sally McConnell-Ginet, Mary Field Belenky, et al.); marginal, metonymic, juxtapositional, destabilizing, heterogeneous, discontinuous, ... (Genre Tallique, Craig Owens, Page duBois, Janet Wolff, et al.)²¹—and now if we look for enactments of these modes in the formal strategies of literature, we find, first, that from the late nineteenth century on they show up most often in experimental or avant-garde traditions and, second, that although these modes relate more closely to the life experiences of women, they have been *until recently* chiefly utilized by male artists.

you will have a little voice it will be barely audible you will whisper in his ear you will have a little life you will whisper it in his ear it will be different quite different quite a different music you'll see a little like Pim a little life music but in your mouth it will be new to you²²

This writing, clear precursor to Harryman, Cha, and others in an experimental feminine tradition, is from Samuel Beckett's depunctuated prose poem *How It Is*. We writers who wish to explore/enact the feminine beyond the punctum of a masculinist vanishing point are always looking for ancestors. Well, oddly enough, here's one—in, on, out of silence:

twenty years a hundred years not a sound and I listen not a gleam and I strain my eyes four hundred times my only season I clasp the sack closer to me a tin clinks first respite very first from the silence of this black sap

How It Is (24-25)

And here's another:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation...

You know the rest. Beckett and Joyce fleeing their patrimony—the law (the grammar) of the Irish father—for the exile of the (m)other tongue.....

How is it that men come to enact the feminine?

Following logics of the social construction of gender, can't it quite easily turn out that many of our ancestors in a strong tradition of foregrounding feminine processes in writing (which can be traced at least as far back as *Tristram Shandy* in the English novel and Rimbaud's *Illuminations* in poetry) are men? This is merely ironic, not paradoxical. How it is if we skirt the essentialist M/F trap. The power of feminine forms—not the least of which is the power to deconstruct an institutionalized masculine—was almost exclusively claimed by men until the latter half of the twentieth century because women did not have the social power to claim it as well. The power of the feminine is simultaneously admired and despised. By definition it trespasses on forbidden or uncharted territory. Hence, it's been only those who have had, first, the social backing and, then, the poetical courage (or naïveté) to risk ostracism by the academy who have felt able to take on the challenge. (Or who took on the challenge and were not heard from thereafter.) Until relatively recently women have not had the social (public) power and cultural standing to take such risks without almost certainly disappearing beyond emotional and socially constructed vanishing points. We could extend Virginia Woolf's thought experiment, imagining what would have become of Shakespeare's sister and all her hypothetical progeny, to think of lost female literary revolutionaries—the ones who were told early on that they had missed the point, the ones never heard from (in feminine forms) again.²³

So, alongside Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Richardson, Djuna Barnes, and (midcareer) Virginia Woolf, there is the much longer list of men: Andrey Beley (of *Symphony*), the Russian Futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Alexei Kruchenykh, Apollinaire, Artaud, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Marinetti, Cocteau, Tzara, Jarry, Schwitters, Breton, Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec, Sterne, Whitman, Joyce, Beckett, Pound, the Eliot-Pound collaboration in *The Wasteland*, W.C. Williams, Zukofsky, the Louis-Celia Zukofsky collaboration in the *Catullus*, "A"-24, etc., Jackson Mac Low, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Augusto de Campos, Bob Cobbing... William Burroughs (*The Exterminator*), Gilbert Sorrentino, David Antin, Walter Abish.... The list, of course, could go on and on.

There are only three women among seventy-seven writers represented in Emmett Williams's *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, three women of twenty-three writers in Eugene Wildman's *Experiments in*

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Prose. In Marjorie Perloff's *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* Gertrude Stein is the only female poet represented in a lineage spanning the period from Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1871) to John Cage. (Perloff, of course, has since written on many of the contemporary women poets who bring this tradition into the present.) Hugh Kenner includes no women in *The Pound Era* except for a slighting reference to H.D. On the whole these books are not complicit with mainstream anthologies and criticism in overlooking women (at least not before the late 1960s, early 1970s). Women were not in fact very much present (except as handmaidens, models, muses, wives, midwives, and mistresses) in the experimental literary world until the advent of "Language"-associated poetics in the 1970s (where, incidentally, for the first time, not only the "single" woman but the wife and/or mother is the experimental poet).²⁴ Two recent "Language" anthologies have quite different M/F ratios, with women constituting roughly a third of the poets in each. In Ron Silliman's *In the American Tree* twelve out of forty poets are women; seven of twenty poets are women in Douglas Messerli's "Language" *Poetries*.²⁵ A book by Ann Vickery, *Leaving Lines of Gender: A Feminist Genealogy of Language Writing*, traces the omnipresence and enormous power of women in the Language movement. Her book is essential for understanding the feminine nature of this (almost entirely male impresarioed) entry into the American experimental tradition. It's become evident since the last two anthologies came out that their M/F ratios inadequately represent the unprecedentedly large presence of women in the new poetry movements in this country.

However, most women writers were (and are still) writing in styles with mainstream or established genealogies (the confessional, multigenerational New York schools, the new-old I-lyric idyll...) acceptable to the masculinized academy—writing within the standardized stock of poetic genres. Even while espousing a new feminist politics, not forging a new feminine poetics. Woolf, shaken by negative criticism, returned to a conservative (masculine?) style in her last novels after having explored revolutionary feminine forms (indebted to both Dorothy Richardson and James Joyce) in *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves* and having performed that humorous postmodern experiment *Orlando*. Dorothy Richardson was effectively forgotten in the wake of *Ulysses*; Gertrude Stein, the most radically experimental poet of this generation, was ridiculed.

It may seem like a betrayal of the few courageous women who are our clear "feminist" ancestors (Tallique's "female writers who use feminine forms"—Richardson, Woolf, Barnes, Stein, Niedecker, Loy...) to

acknowledge a "feminine" tradition dominated by males. But it's far worse to deny the presence of the feminine in language (as Ostriker and others do) by missing the fact that the feminine has never been exclusively embodied or exercised in female writing. It is, of course, entirely a question of power. All forms of power are seized by those best situated to take advantage of them. For sociopolitical reasons, made painfully clear by the women's movement, women were not until the 1960s in a position to directly exercise the full power of the feminine. Hence its *sub*-versions.

Even in cultures where there has been more respect for feminine forms—for example, in the literatures of romance languages—the power of these forms has been explored mainly by men. Look at France, for example, where Montaigne's untidy, digressive *essais* could become a model for the (male) stars of the academy. Recent French intellectual writing (Cioran, Blanchot, Barthes, Baudrillard) and even the deconstructive movement—despite its strikingly macho surface projections—is strangely feminine. Think of Derrida's self-interruptions, his flirtatious insinuations, his coy ironies, his outrageous feints, his calculatedly playful exclamations and interrogatives. He teases out metaphysical pre- and con-texts with as potent a mix of charm and venom as Bette Davis. Ironically, indeed, in this "masquerade" he performs something like Judith Butler's parodic, subversive function.

Perhaps most characteristic of *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (title of Luce Irigaray's 1977 book) is the tendency of the feminine gender/genre to exceed masculine cultural paradigms in its messiness, multiplicity, and complexity. For the fifth (and, as it turned out, last) of his Harvard lectures (*Six Memos for the Next Millennium*) on the formal qualities he most valued in literature, Italo Calvino begins with a quote from the novel *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, by Carlo Emilio Gadda, and then goes on to talk about Gadda's writing and more generally about "multiplicity" as a literary manifestation of imaginative possibility. He does this in terms that are not only at times identical to Carol Gilligan's "web" metaphor for women's thinking but constitute a virtual catalog of so-called feminine modes of thinking. The italics below are mine:

I wished to begin with this passage from Gadda because it seems to me an excellent introduction to the subject of my lecture—which is the contemporary novel... as a *network of connections* between the events, the people, and the things of the world.... Carlo Emilio Gadda tried all his life to represent the world as a knot, a *tangled skein* of yarn; to represent it without in the least diminishing the *inextricable complexity* or, to put it better, the

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simultaneous presence of the most disparate elements that converge to determine every event. . . . As a writer—thought of as the Italian equivalent to James Joyce—Gadda developed a style to match his complicated epistemology, in that it superimposes *various levels of language, high and low*, and uses the most *varied vocabulary*. . . . What is supposed to be a detective novel is left *without a solution*. In a sense, all his novels are *unfinished* or left as *fragments*. . . . [T]he least thing is seen as the center of a *network of relationships* that the writer cannot restrain himself from following, *multiplying the details* so that his descriptions and *digressions* become infinite. . . . The best example of this *web radiating out from every object* is the episode of finding the stolen jewels in chapter nine of *That Awful Mess*. . . . He does this by exploiting the semantic potential of words, of all the *varieties of verbal and syntactical forms* with their connotations and tones, together with the often comic effects created by their *juxtaposition*. . . . Gadda knew that “to know is to insert something into what is real, and hence to distort reality.”

Calvino, *Six Memos*, 105–8

This is not the language of the “law of the father.” What is real here, is neither abstract principle nor hardcore empirical innocent of theory but the simultaneity of the whole range in “that awful mess.” (Beckett also valorizes the “mess.”) The complex realist mess that intermixes vocabularies, syntactic trajectories, linguistic origins, descriptive worlds, high and low, plays out formal consequences of foregrounding the material presence of language. Strange and humorous swerves occur when close attention to words reveals peculiar letteristic attractions and etymological energies. Synergistic interactions produce an exploding, multidimensional figure expanding toward chaos—or by any other name, the “feminine novel.” (Distinct, of course, from the female novel.) This is a poethical practice that depends on humor in the medieval sense of shifting fluids—in this case the highly fluid conceptual shifts that are activated by close attention to the details of complex systems.

Julia Kristeva locates these fluid humors in what she calls the “semiotic” (not to be confused with semiotics), prelinguistic, instinctual, libido-sensual experience of all children. The semiotic, as defined by Kristeva, is the fluid, vitalizing source of the (private) pleasures of *jouissance*²⁶ and thus of all that exceeds and circumvents the (public) grammars of “the law of the father.” Interestingly, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva argues that the pursuit of the good and the ethical are inextricably tied up with a semiotic-based, avant-garde poetic practice. Having identified poetry with *jouissance* and “revolutionary laughter,” having identified laughter *as* practice, and having quoted Lautréamont’s “truth-in-practice” *as* poetry (217), Kristeva writes, “the

text fulfills its ethical function only when it pluralizes, pulverizes, 'musicates' [truths] which is to say, on the condition that it develop them to the point of laughter" (233). Kristeva feels that the need for poetry of the sort that "pluralizes, pulverizes, 'musicates'" is urgent for all who would act outside the logics of "the machine, colonial expansion, banks, science, Parliament—those positions of mastery that conceal their violence and pretend to be mere neutral legality" (83). The exemplary writers in *Revolution in Poetic Language* are all men: Mallarmé, Bataille, Lautréamont, Joyce. Kristeva's concession to the identification of the semiotic with "woman" is made via Mallarmé, as "prototype" of avant-garde practice. For him, she says, the "semiotic rhythm" is "indifferent to language, enigmatic, and feminine" (29).

This is a beautifully articulated recognition of an avant-garde poetic practice in dialectical agon with the institutionalized masculine "positions of mastery." But Kristeva, like Butler and Ostriker, supports the view that the semiotic (the feminine) cannot directly enter the (phallic/symbolic) linguistic order. For her the semiotic is logically and developmentally "previous" to language. It can only nuance ("musicate") or interrupt language with "semiotic silence." This insidious, and to my mind fatalistic, view in Kristeva's work (accompanied by the heavy breathing of psychoanalytic drive theory) is not only counterproductive as an ethical base of the public/linguistic realm, but it is experientially counterintuitive and logically flawed. The process of acculturation and learning a language is not one that takes place at the abrupt terminus of a neatly sealed off "pre-" period. Language is, for most infants, part of their highly charged sonic environment from the very first moments just after birth. And soon part of their visual world as well. It's just because the learning of language is in rich intercourse with all the multivariied, sensual experiences—the "mess" of early infancy and childhood—that natural languages are such rich instruments, such complex forms of life, full of connotative, multiply associative, extrarational dimensions. This is what makes languages the fluid, vital, permeable, and growing organisms they are. Language has always overflowed the structures and strictures of its own grammars.²⁷ But even those grammars exceed rationalist caricatures. They are intimately connected with the multivalent experiences of real lives, the forms of life that give all language games their nuanced, often contradictory, meanings. The feminine is in language from the start. It's not a subversion but is intertwined through every dimension of the linguistic—of words, which always strike us like chords on the various levels of our perceptual systems and resonate

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from the neocortical to the instinctive limbic. The most pressing ques-
tion at hand is not only why certain rich dimensions of language have
been persistently (invidiously!) identified with the feminine but, much
more startlingly, why in some cases they have been theoretically ex-
punged from the realm of the linguistic altogether.

"I know"—this turgid moment in the mind—has assumed all the
consequences of male identity. It must be ejaculated, it must impregnate or
destroy the other with its detumescing logics. But wait, let's interrupt the
trajectory of this metaphor. Attention to the complex discontinuities of the
feminine in language will fill the shortest distance between points with im-
probable fractal detail.

Genre Tallique, *GLANCES: An Unwritten Book*

MORE GENRE TROUBLE MULTIPLICITY, UNINTELLIGIBILITY, POLYLINGUALISM: THE EXPERIMENTAL FEMININE

What allows our free will to be a meaningful notion is the complexity of
the universe or, more precisely, our own complexity.

David Ruelle, *Chance and Chaos*, 33

The very complexity of the discursive map that constructs gender appears
to hold out the promise of an inadvertent and generative convergence of
these discursive and regulatory structures. If the regulatory fictions of sex
and gender are themselves multiply contested sites of meaning, then the
very multiplicity of their construction holds out the possibility of a disrup-
tion of their univocal posturing.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 32

*It is she. It is she again. It is preference. Words in the mind on the ground
speaking not writing but history in the air. Yellow. For blue. And yellow.
For blue as blue speaking. The first association was arrogance. History and
arrogance. Contemporaneity and oversight. Paring of blue and yellow. Sliv-
ers of preference and literate. As written history might keep. The cool over-
sight whose soft leaves water. And later breaking. Slips.*

Carla Harryman, "Dimblue," *In the Mode Of*, 6

Yes, and (long) after (even) Wittgenstein, is it not the blue yellow
green time to say, The limits of your language are *not* the limits of my
world? Or better yet, It's no more your language than it's my world.
And vice versa, with plurals. Ah, the redeeming vice of verse! to com-

plicate our grammars, to pluralize our languages and worlds. *Verse* (OED), so named from turning to begin another line.

Here, for instance, is a new line:

"A" was for "ox"

The first oxygen conversion occurred as an incline, a sharp bend as in "wrench". The elements surrounding it were strong, physically violent ones—wreck, wrestle, wretch—with the exception of "wren". The next major activity was "wrinkle", again related to "wrench" with the addition of "wind". Wrist action proceeded from there—wrist-lock, wrist-pin, wrist-shot, wrist wrestle, wristy—preparing us "motor-wise" to write: write our own ticket, write-down and write-in.

Tina Darragh, *on the corner to off the corner*, 5

Here's another:

"elaborative" to "Eleatic" for "D"

"Egg" and "oxygen" both contain "edge," with egg's edge located at "share" and oxygen's at "shear." The distance doubles from one to the other along this line: shar et vb farme atim domin numer iz cti porta acio torti him sho SHAG low ME L dou sha tio HE min ears cou ock metim semb dj

Tina Darragh *on the corner to off the corner*, 8

And another:

We are parting with description
termed blue may be perfectly blue
goats do have damp noses
that test and now I dine drinking with
others
adult blue butterfly for a swim with cheerful birds
I suppose we hear a muddle of rhythms in water...
the streets of traffic are a great success

Lyn Hejinian (poem 28, *Writing Is an Aid to Memory*,
unpaginated edition)

Coming across Carla Harryman's "Dimblue," being sent by it back to *Dictée*, reminded of Brossard, Waldrop, Darragh, Hejinian... the mind is not put at rest. The traffic of this language is noisy and disruptive... full of the formal/verbal articulation of silence. Neither the streets nor these linguistic bodies go docilely to their preconceived vanishing points. This

rlds. Verse

language does not replicate sciences of perspective as we've known them. Nor does it assume the implied movement toward epiphany/conclusion that lyric syntactical momentum dictates. It matters/maters not so much as expression of gender but as enactment of genre. That is, the complicated moves it makes take it from expression of female experience to Tallique's feminine *as* aesthetic behavior. It does not deny the consequences of its own *material* presence by substantiating (and thereby disappearing into) received, masculinized metanarratives. The *it* that mat/t/ers, that behaves like living matter, is language—the material of the writer connected to poethical forms of life. Nothing can matter without words coming alive—spinning contextual, connective, associative webs that not only apprehend the multidimensional realities of what we care about but enable our variant-radiant intelligences to range toward transformations of the complexities of desire and cultural realization.

There's not room for a CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ of all the writers who are doing just this. But among the *Cygnés. Paroles souvenirs. Déjà dit./Vient de dire. Va dire.* (Cha) there are other languages, other worlds:

Ami minden quand un yes or no je le said
viens am liebsten hätte ich dich du süßes de
ez nem baj das weisst du me a favor hogy
innen se faire croire tous less birds from the
forest who fly here by mistake als die Wälder
langsam verschwinden. Minden verschwinden,
mind your step and woelf. Verschwinden de
nem innen—je vois de void in front of
mich—je sens, als ich erzem qu'on aille, aille,
de vágy a fejem, csak éppen (eben sagte ich
wie die Wälder verschwinden) I can repeat it
as a credo so it sinks into our cerveaux und
wird "embedded" there, mint egy teória
mathématique, "d'enchâssement" die
Verankerungstherorie in der Mathematik,
hogy legalább.

Anne Tardos, *Cat Licked the Garlic*, unpaginated²⁸

OUI. JA. YES.

YES. THIS TIME MOLLY BLOOM'S THE AUTHOR.

IT IS SHE. IT IS SHE AGAIN.

After WOOLF'S roominations

After CARLA HARRYMAN'S "DIMBLUE"

After THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA'S *DICTEE*

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After TINA DARRAGH'S *off the corner*

After *et al.*

After the fall of *After the Fall of Adam's Eve*

The most active locus of the exploration and construction of feminine forms in English poetry today is among Language and "other" associated poets. These poets are both male and female of course, but, if Genre Talique is onto something, it is the women among them who—for the first time in large numbers—are using feminine formal processes and are thus presenting us with our strongest, most challenging models of literary feminisms. These poetries, these poethical practices—ironically marginalized in established feminist circles—are the experimental feminine. In active exploration of multiplicity and unintelligibility this is the articulation of silence that draws us on.

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NOBODY MEAN MORE TO ME
 THAN YOU¹ AND THE
 FUTURE LIFE OF WILLIE JORDAN

BLACK ENGLISH is not exactly a linguistic buffalo; as children, most of the thirty-five million Afro-Americans living here depend on this language for our discovery of the world. But then we approach our maturity inside a larger social body that will not support our efforts to become anything other than the clones of those who are neither our mothers nor our fathers. We begin to grow up in a house where every true mirror shows us the face of somebody who does not belong there, whose walk and whose talk will never look or sound "right," because that house was meant to shelter a family that is alien and hostile to us. As we learn our way around this environment, either we hide our original word habits, or we completely surrender our own voice, hoping to please those who will never respect anyone different from themselves: Black English is not exactly a linguistic buffalo, but we should understand its status as an endangered species, as a perishing, irreplaceable system of community intelligence, or we should expect its extinction, and, along with that, the extinguishing of much that constitutes our own proud, and singular identity.

What we casually call "English," less and less defers to England and its "gentlemen." "English" is no longer a specific matter of geography or an element of class privilege; more than thirty-three countries use this tool as a means of "intranational communication."² Countries as disparate as Zimbabwe and Malaysia, or Israel and Uganda, use it as their non-native currency of convenience. Obviously, this tool, this "English," cannot function inside

thirty-three discrete societies on the basis of rules and values absolutely determined somewhere else, in a thirty-fourth other country, for example.

In addition to that staggering congeries of non-native users of English, there are five countries, or 333,746,000 people, for whom this thing called "English" serves as a native tongue.³ Approximately 10% of these native speakers of "English" are Afro-American citizens of the U.S.A. I cite these numbers and varieties of human beings dependent on "English" in order, quickly, to suggest how strange and how tenuous is any concept of "Standard English." Obviously, numerous forms of English now operate inside a natural, an uncontrollable, continuum of development. I would suppose "the standard" for English in Malaysia is not the same as "the standard" in Zimbabwe. I know that standard forms of English for Black people in this country do not copy that of whites. And, in fact, the structural differences between these two kinds of English have intensified, becoming more Black, or less white, despite the expected homogenizing effects of television⁴ and other mass media.

Nonetheless, white standards of English persist, supreme and unquestioned, in these United States. Despite our multi-lingual population, and despite the deepening Black and white cleavage within that conglomerate, white standards control our official and popular judgements of verbal proficiency and correct, or incorrect, language skills, including speech. In contrast to India, where at least fourteen languages co-exist as legitimate Indian languages, in contrast to Nicaragua, where all citizens are legally entitled to formal school instruction in their regional or tribal languages, compulsory education in America compels accommodation to exclusively white forms of "English." White English, in America, is "Standard English."

This story begins two years ago. I was teaching a new course, "In Search of the Invisible Black Woman," and my rather large class seemed evenly divided between young Black women and men. Five or six white students also sat in attendance. With unexpected speed and enthusiasm we had moved through historical narratives of the 19th century to literature by and about Black women, in the 20th. I had assigned the first forty pages of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and I came, eagerly, to class that morning:

"So!" I exclaimed, aloud. "What did you think? How did you like it?"

The students studied their hands, or the floor. There was no response. The tense, resistant feeling in the room fairly astounded me.

At last, one student, a young woman still not meeting my eyes, muttered something in my direction:

"What did you say?" I prompted her.

"Why she have them talk so funny. It don't sound right."

"You mean the language?"

Another student lifted his head: "It don't look right, neither. I couldn't hardly read it."

At this, several students dumped on the book. Just about unanimously, their criticisms targeted the language. I listened to what they wanted to say and silently marvelled at the similarities between their casual speech patterns and Alice Walker's written version of Black English.

But I decided against pointing to these identical traits of syntax; I wanted not to make them self-conscious about their own spoken language—not while they clearly felt it was "wrong." Instead I decided to swallow my astonishment. Here was a negative Black reaction to a prize winning accomplishment of Black literature that white readers across the country had selected as a best seller. Black rejection was aimed at the one irreducibly Black element of Walker's work: the language—Celie's Black English. I wrote the opening lines of *The Color Purple* on the blackboard and asked the students to help me translate these sentences into Standard English:

You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.

Last spring after Little Lucious come I heard them fussing. He was pulling on her arm. She say it too soon, Fonso. I aint well. Finally he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say, Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead, an all of the children.⁵

Our process of translation exploded with hilarity and even hysterical, shocked laughter: The Black writer, Alice Walker, knew what she was doing!

If rudimentary criteria for good fiction includes the manipulation of language so that the syntax and diction of sentences will tell you the identity of speakers, the probable age and sex and class of speakers, and even the locale—urban/rural/southern/western—then Walker had written, perfectly. This is the translation into Standard English that our class produced:

Absolutely, one should never confide in anybody besides God. Your secrets could prove devastating to your mother.

Dear God,

I am fourteen years old. I have always been good. But now, could you help me to understand what is happening to me?

Last spring, after my little brother, Lucious, was born, I heard my parents fighting. My father kept pulling at my mother's arm. But she told him, "It's too soon for sex, Alfonso. I am still not feeling well." Finally, my father left her alone. A week went by, and then he began bothering my mother, again: Pulling her arm. She told him, "No, I won't! Can't you see I'm already exhausted from all of these children?"

(Our favorite line was "It's too soon for sex, Alphonso.")

Once we could stop laughing, once we could stop our exponentially wild improvisations on the theme of Translated Black English, the students pushed me to explain their own negative first reactions to their spoken language on the printed page. I thought it was probably akin to the shock of seeing yourself in a photograph for the first time. Most of the students had never before seen a written facsimile of the way they talk. None of the students had ever learned how to read and write their own verbal system of communication: Black English. Alternatively, this fact began to baffle or else bemuse and then infuriate my students. Why not? Was it too late? Could they learn how to do it, now? And, ultimately, the final test question, the one testing my sincerity: Could I teach them? Because I had never taught anyone Black English and, as far as I knew, no one, anywhere in the United States, had ever offered such a course, the best I could say was "I'll try."

He looked like a wrestler.

He sat dead center in the packed room and, every time our eyes met, he quickly nodded his head as though anxious to reassure, and encourage, me.

Short, with strikingly broad shoulders and long arms, he spoke with a surprisingly high, soft voice that matched the soft bright movement of his eyes. His name was Willie Jordan. He would have seemed even more unlikely in the context of Contemporary Women's Poetry, except that ten or twelve other Black men were taking the course, as well. Still, Willie was conspicuous. His extreme fitness, the muscular density of his presence underscored the riveted, gentle attention that he gave to anything anyone said. Generally, he did not join the loud and rowdy dialogue flying back and forth, but there could be no doubt about his interest in our discussions. And, when he stood to present an argument he'd prepared, overnight, that nervous smile of his vanished and an irregular stammering replaced it, as he spoke with visceral sincerity, word by word.

That was how I met Willie Jordan. It was in between "In Search of the Invisible Black Women" and "The Art of Black English." I was waiting for Departmental approval and I supposed that Willie might be, so to speak, killing time until he, too, could study Black English. But Willie really did want to explore Contemporary Women's poetry and, to that end, volunteered for extra research and never missed a class.

Towards the end of that semester, Willie approached me for an independent study project on South Africa. It would commence the next semester. I thought Willie's writing needed the kind of improvement only intense practice will yield. I knew his intelligence was outstanding. But he'd wholeheartedly opted for "Standard English" at a rather late age, and the results were stilted and frequently polysyllabic, simply for the sake of having more syllables. Willie's unnatural formality of language seemed to me consistent with the formality of his research into South African apartheid. As he projected his studies, he would have little time, indeed, for newspapers. Instead, more than 90% of his research would mean saturation in strictly historical, if not archival, material. I was certainly interested. It would be tricky to guide him into a more confident and spontaneous relationship both with language and apartheid. It was going

to be wonderful to see what happened when he could catch up with himself, entirely, and talk back to the world.

September, 1984: Breezy fall weather and much excitement! My class, "The Art of Black English," was full to the limit of the fire laws. And, in Independent Study, Willie Jordan showed up, weekly, fifteen minutes early for each of our sessions. I was pretty happy to be teaching, altogether!

I remember an early class when a young brother, replete with his ever present pork-pie hat, raised his hand and then told us that most of what he'd heard was "all right" except it was "too clean." "The brothers on the street," he continued, "they mix it up more. Like 'fuck' and 'motherfuck.' Or like 'shit.'" He waited. I waited. Then all of us laughed a good while, and we got into a brawl about "correct" and "realistic" Black English that led to Rule 1.

RULE 1: *Black English is about a whole lot more than mothafuckin.*

As a criterion, we decided, "realistic" could take you anywhere you want to go. Artful places. Angry places. Eloquent and sweetalkin places. Polemical places. Church. And the local Bar & Grill. We were checking out a language, not a mood or a scene or one guy's forgettable mouthing off.

It was hard. For most of the students, learning Black English required a fall-back to patterns and rhythms of speech that many of their parents had beaten out of them. I mean *beaten*. And, in a majority of cases, correct Black English could be achieved only by striving for *incorrect* Standard English, something they were still pushing at, quite uncertainly. This state of affairs led to Rule 2.

RULE 2: *If it's wrong in Standard English it's probably right in Black English, or, at least, you're hot.*

It was hard. Roommates and family members ridiculed their studies, or remained incredulous, "You *studying* that shit? At school?" But we were beginning to feel the companionship of pioneers. And we decided that we needed another rule that would establish each one of us as equally important to our success. This was Rule 3.

RULE 3: *If it don't sound like something that come out somebody mouth then it don't sound right. If it don't sound right then it ain't hardly right. Period.*

This rule produced two weeks of compositions in which the students agonizingly tried to spell the sound of the Black English sentence they wanted to convey. But Black English is, preeminently, an oral/spoken means of communication. *And spelling don't talk*. So we needed Rule 4.

RULE 4: *Forget about the spelling. Let the syntax carry you.*

Once we arrived at Rule 4 we started to fly because syntax, the structure of an idea, leads you to the world view of the speaker and reveals her values. The syntax of a sentence equals the structure of your consciousness. If we insisted that the language of Black English adheres to a distinctive Black syntax, then we were postulating a profound difference between white and Black people, *per se*. Was it a difference to prize or to obliterate?

There are three qualities of Black English—the presence of life, voice, and clarity—that testify to a distinctive Black value system that we became excited about and self-consciously tried to maintain.

1. Black English has been produced by a pre-technocratic, if not anti-technological, culture. More, our culture has been constantly threatened by annihilation or, at least, the swallowed blurring of assimilation. Therefore, our language is a system constructed by people constantly needing to insist that we exist, that we are present. Our language devolves from a culture that abhors all abstraction, or anything tending to obscure or delete the fact of the human being who is here and now/the truth of the person who is speaking or listening. Consequently, *there is no passive voice construction possible in Black English*. For example, you cannot say, "Black English is being eliminated." You must say, instead, "White people eliminating Black English." The assumption of the presence of life governs all of Black English. Therefore, overwhelmingly, *all action takes place in the language of the present indicative*. And every sentence assumes the living and active participation of at least two human beings, the speaker and the listener.
2. A primary consequence of the person-centered values of Black English is the delivery of voice. If you speak or write Black English, your ideas will necessarily possess that otherwise elusive attribute, *voice*.
3. One main benefit following from the person-centered values of Black English is that of *clarity*. If your idea, your sentence, assumes the presence of at least two living and active people, you will make it understandable because the motivation behind every sentence is the wish to say something real to somebody real.

As the weeks piled up, translation from Standard English into Black English or vice versa occupied a hefty part of our course work.

Standard English (hereafter S.E.): "In considering the idea of studying Black English those questioned suggested—"

(What's the subject? Where's the person? Is anybody alive in there, in that idea?)

Black English (hereafter B.E.): "I been asking people what you think about somebody studying Black English and they answer me like this:"

But there were interesting limits. You cannot "translate" instances of Standard English preoccupied with abstraction or with nothing/nobody evidently alive, into Black English. That would warp the language into uses antithetical to the guiding perspective of its community of users. Rather you must first change those Standard English sentences, themselves, into ideas consistent with the person-centered assumptions of Black English.

Guidelines for Black English

1. Minimal number of words for every idea: This is the source for the aphoristic and/or poetic force of the language; eliminate every possible word.
2. Clarity: If the sentence is not clear it's not Black English.
3. Eliminate use of the verb *to be* whenever possible. This leads to the deployment of more descriptive and therefore, more precise verbs.
4. Use *be* or *been* only when you want to describe a chronic, ongoing state of things.

He *be* at the office, by 9. (He is always at the office by 9.)

He *been* with her since forever.

5. Zero copula: Always eliminate the verb *to be* whenever it would combine with another verb, in Standard English.

S.E.: She is going out with him.

B.E.: She going out with him.

6. Eliminate *do* as in:

S.E.: What do you think? What do you want?

B.E.: What you think? What you want?

Rules number 3, 4, 5, and 6 provide for the use of the minimal number of verbs per idea and, therefore, greater accuracy in the choice of verb.

7. In general, if you wish to say something really positive, try to formulate the idea using emphatic negative structure.
 S.E.: He's fabulous.
 B.E.: He bad.
8. Use double or triple negatives for dramatic emphasis.
 S.E.: Tina Turner sings out of this world.
 B.E.: Ain nobody sing like Tina.
9. Never use the *-ed* suffix to indicate the past tense of a verb.
 S.E.: She closed the door.
 B.E.: She close the door. Or, she have close the door.
10. Regardless of intentional verb time, only use the third person singular, present indicative, for use of the verb *to have*, as an auxiliary.
 S.E.: He had his wallet then he lost it.
 B.E.: He have him wallet then he lose it.
 S.E.: He had seen that movie.
 B.E.: We seen that movie. Or, we have see that movie.
11. Observe a minimal inflection of verbs. Particularly, never change from the first person singular forms to the third person singular.
 S.E. Present Tense Forms: He goes to the store.
 B.E.: He go to the store.
 S.E. Past Tense Forms: He went to the store.
 B.E.: He go to the store. Or, he gone to the store. Or, he been to the store.
12. The possessive case scarcely ever appears in Black English. Never use an apostrophe ('s) construction. If you wander into a possessive case component of an idea, then keep logically consistent: *ours, his, theirs, mines*. But, most likely, if you bump into such a component, you have wandered outside the underlying world-view of Black English.
 S.E.: He will take their car tomorrow.
 B.E.: He taking they car tomorrow.
13. Plurality: Logical consistency, continued: If the modifier indicates plurality then the noun remains in the singular case.
 S.E.: He are twelve doughnuts.
 B.E.: He eat twelve doughnut.

S.E.: She has many books.

B.E.: She have many book.

14. Listen for, or invent, special Black English forms of the past tense, such as: "He losted it. That what she felted." If they are clear and readily understood, then use them.
15. Do not hesitate to play with words, sometimes inventing them: e.g. "astropotomous" means huge like a hippo plus astronomical and, therefore, signifies real big.
16. In Black English, unless you keenly want to underscore the past tense nature of an action, stay in the present tense and rely on the overall context of your ideas for the conveyance of time and sequence.
17. Never use the suffix *-ly* form of an adverb in Black English.

S.E.: The rain came down rather quickly.

B.E.: The rain come down pretty quick.

18. Never use the indefinite article *an* in Black English.

S.E.: He wanted to ride an elephant.

B.E.: He want to ride him a elephant.

19. Invariant syntax: in correct Black English it is possible to formulate an imperative, an interrogative, and a simple declarative idea with the same syntax:

B.E.: You going to the store?

You going to the store.

You going to the store!

Where was Willie Jordan? We'd reached the mid-term of the semester. Students had formulated Black English guidelines, by consensus, and they were now writing with remarkable beauty, purpose, and enjoyment:

I ain hardly speakin for everybody but myself so understan that.

—Kim Parks

Samples from student writings:

"Janie have a great big ole hole inside her. Tea Cake the only thing that fit that hole . . .

"That pear tree beautiful to Janie, especial when bees fiddlin with the blossomin pear there growin large and lovely. But personal speakin, the love

she get from starin at that tree ain the love what starin back at her in them relationship." (Monica Morris)

"Love is a big theme in, *They Eye Was Watching God*. Love show people new corners inside theyself. It pull out good stuff and stuff back bad stuff . . . Joe worship the doing uh his own hand and need other people to worship him too. But he ain't think about Janie that she a person and ought to live like anybody common do. Queen life not for Janie." (Monica Morris)

"In both life and writin, Black womens have varietous experience of love that be cold like a iceberg or fiery like a inferno. Passion got for the other partner involve, man or woman, seem as shallow, ankle-deep water or the most profoundest abyss." (Constance Evans)

"Family love another bond that ain't never break under no pressure." (Constance Evans)

"You know it really cold/When the friend you/Always get out the fire/Act like they don't know you/When you in the heat." (Constance Evans)

"Big classroom discussion bout love at this time. I never take no class where us have any long arguin for and against for two or three day. New to me and great. I find the class time talkin a million time more interesting than detail bout the book." (Kathy Esseks)

As these examples suggest, Black English no longer limited the students, in any way. In fact, one of them, Philip Garfield, would shortly "translate" a pivotal scene from Ibsen's *Doll House*, as his final term paper:

Nora: I didn't gived no shit. I thinked you a asshole back then, too,
you make it so hard for me save mines husband life.

Krogstad: Girl, it clear you ain't any idea what you done. You done
exact what I once done, and I losed my reputation over it.

Nora: You asks me believe you once act brave save you wife life?

Krogstad: Law care less why you done it.

Nora: Law must suck.

Krogstad: Suck or no, if I wants, judge screw you wid dis paper.

Nora: No way, man. (Philip Garfield)

But where was Willie? Compulsively punctual, and always thoroughly prepared with neatly typed compositions, he had disappeared. He failed to

show up for our regularly scheduled conference, and I received neither a note nor a phone call of explanation. A whole week went by. I wondered if Willie had finally been captured by the extremely current happenings in South Africa: passage of a new constitution that did not enfranchise the Black majority, and militant Black South African reaction to that affront. I wondered if he'd been hurt, somewhere. I wondered if the serious workload of weekly readings and writings had overwhelmed him and changed his mind about independent study. Where was Willie Jordan?

One week after the first conference that Willie missed, he called: "Hello, Professor Jordan? This is Willie. I'm sorry I wasn't there last week. But something has come up and I'm pretty upset. I'm sorry but I really can't deal right now."

I asked Willie to drop by my office and just let me see that he was okay. He agreed to do that. When I saw him I knew something hideous had happened. Something had hurt him and scared him to the marrow. He was all agitated and stammering and terse and incoherent. At last, his sadly jumbled account let me surmise, as follows: Brooklyn police had murdered his unarmed, twenty-five year old brother, Reggie Jordan. Neither Willie nor his elderly parents knew what to do about it. Nobody from the press was interested. His folks had no money. Police ran his family around and around, to no point. And Reggie was really dead. And Willie wanted to fight, but he felt helpless.

With Willie's permission I began to try to secure legal counsel for the Jordan family. Unfortunately Black victims of police violence are truly numerous while the resources available to prosecute their killers are truly scarce. A friend of mine at the Center for Constitutional Rights estimated that just the preparatory costs for bringing the cops into court normally approaches \$180,000. Unless the execution of Reggie Jordan became a major community cause for organizing, and protest, his murder would simply become a statistical item.

Again, with Willie's permission, I contacted every newspaper and media person I could think of. But the William Bastone feature article in *The Village Voice* was the only result from that canvassing.

Again, with Willie's permission, I presented the case to my class in Black English. We had talked about the politics of language. We had talked about love and sex and child abuse and men and women. But the murder of Reggie Jordan broke like a hurricane across the room.

There are few "issues" as endemic to Black life as police violence. Most of the students knew and respected and liked Jordan. Many of them came from the very neighborhood where the murder had occurred. All of the students had known somebody close to them who had been killed by police, or had known frightening moments of gratuitous confrontations with the cops. They wanted to do everything at once to avenge death. Number One: They decided to compose personal statements of condolence to Willie Jordan and his family written in Black English. Number Two: They decided to compose individual messages to the police, in Black English. These should be prefaced by an explanatory paragraph composed by the entire group. Number Three: These individual messages, with their lead paragraph, should be sent to *Newsday*.

The morning after we agreed on these objectives, one of the young women students appeared with an unidentified visitor, who sat through the class, smiling in a peculiar, comfortable way.

Now we had to make more tactical decisions. Because we wanted the messages published, and because we thought it imperative that our outrage be known by the police, the tactical question was this: Should the opening, group paragraph be written in Black English or Standard English?

I have seldom been privy to a discussion with so much heart at the dead heat of it. I will never forget the eloquence, the sudden haltings of speech, the fierce struggle against tears, the furious throwaway, and useless explosions that this question elicited.

That one question contained several others, each of them extraordinarily painful to even contemplate. How best to serve the memory of Reggie Jordan? Should we use the language of the killers—Standard English—in order to make our ideas acceptable to those controlling the killers? But wouldn't what we had to say be rejected, summarily, if we said it in our own language, the language of the victim, Reggie Jordan? But if we sought to express ourselves by abandoning our language wouldn't that mean our suicide on top of Reggie's murder? But if we expressed ourselves in our own language wouldn't that

be suicidal to the wish to communicate with those who, evidently, did not give a damn about us/Reggie/police violence in the Black community?

At the end of one of the longest, most difficult hours of my own life, the students voted, unanimously, to preface their individual messages with a paragraph composed in the language of Reggie Jordan. *"At least we don't give up nothing else. At least we stick to the truth: Be who we been. And stay all the way with Reggie."*

It was heartbreaking to proceed, from that point. Everyone in the room realized that our decision in favor of Black English had doomed our writings, even as the distinctive reality of our Black lives always has doomed our efforts to "be who we been" in this country.

I went to the blackboard and took down this paragraph, dictated by the class:

"... YOU COPS!

WE THE BROTHER AND SISTER OF WILLIE JORDAN, A FELLOW STONY BROOK STUDENT WHO THE BROTHER OF THE DEAD REGGIE JORDAN. REGGIE, LIKE MANY BROTHER AND SISTER, HE A VICTIM OF BRUTAL RACIST POLICE, OCTOBER 25, 1984. US APPAL, FED UP, BECAUSE THAT ANOTHER SENSELESS DEATH WHAT OCCUR IN OUR COMMUNITY. THIS WHAT WE FEEL, THIS, FROM OUR HEART, FOR WE AIN'T STAYIN' SILENT NO MORE:"

With the completion of this introduction, nobody said anything. I asked for comments. At this invitation, the unidentified visitor, a young Black man, ceaselessly smiling, raised his hand. He was, it so happens, a rookie cop. He had just joined the force in September and, he said, he thought he should clarify a few things. So he came forward and sprawled easily into a posture of barroom, or fireside, nostalgia:

"See," Officer Charles enlightened us, "Most times when you out on the street and something come down you do one of two things. Over-react or under-react. Now, if you under-react then you can get yourself kilt. And if you over-react then maybe you kill somebody. Fortunately it's about nine times out of ten and you will over-react. So the brother got kilt. And I'm sorry about that, believe me. But what you have to understand is what kilt him: Over-reaction. That's all. Now you talk about

Black people and white police but see, now, I'm a cop myself. And (big smile) I'm Black. And just a couple months ago I was on the other side. But see it's the same for me. You a cop, you the ultimate authority: the Ultimate Authority. And you on the street, most of the time you can only do one of two things: over-react or under-react. That's all it is with the brother: Over-reaction. Didn't have nothing to do with race."

That morning Officer Charles had the good fortune to escape without being boiled alive. But barely. And I remember the pride of his smile when I read about the fate of Black policemen and other collaborators, in South Africa. I remember him, and I remember the shock and palpable feeling of shame that filled the room. It was as though that foolish, and deadly, young man had just relieved himself of his foolish, and deadly, explanation, face to face with the grief of Reggie Jordan's father and Reggie Jordan's mother. Class ended quietly. I copied the paragraph from the blackboard, collected the individual messages and left to type them up.

Newsday rejected the piece.

The Village Voice could not find room in their "Letters" section to print the individual messages from the students to the police.

None of the tv news reporters picked up the story.

Nobody raised \$180,000 to prosecute the murder of Reggie Jordan.

Reggie Jordan is really dead.

I asked Willie Jordan to write an essay pulling together everything important to him from that semester. He was still deeply beside himself with frustration and amazement and loss. This is what he wrote, un-edited, and in its entirety:

"Throughout the course of this semester I have been researching the effects of oppression and exploitation along racial lines in South Africa and its neighboring countries. I have become aware of South African police brutalization of native Africans beyond the extent of the law, even though the laws themselves are catalyst affliction upon Black men, women and children. Many Africans die each year as a result of the deliberate use of police force to protect the white power structure.

"Social control agents in South Africa, such as policemen, are also used to force compliance among citizens through both overt and covert tactics. It is not uncommon to find bold-faced coercion and cold-blooded killings of

Blacks by South African police for undetermined and/or inadequate reasons. Perhaps the truth is that the only reasons for this heinous treatment of Blacks rests in racial differences. We should also understand that what is conveyed through the media is not always accurate and may sometimes be construed as the tip of the iceberg at best.

"I recently received a painful reminder that racism, poverty, and the abuse of power are global problems which are by no means unique to South Africa. On October 25, 1984 at approximately 3:00 p.m. my brother, Mr. Reginald Jordan, was shot and killed by two New York City policemen from the 75th precinct in the East New York section of Brooklyn. His life ended at the age of twenty-five. Even up to this current point in time the Police Department has failed to provide my family, which consists of five brothers, eight sisters, and two parents, with a plausible reason for Reggie's death. Out of the many stories that were given to my family by the Police Department, not one of them seems to hold water. In fact, I honestly believe that the Police Department's assessment of my brother's murder is nothing short of ABSOLUTE BULLSHIT, and thus far no evidence had been produced to alter perception of the situation.

"Furthermore, I believe that one of three cases may have occurred in this incident. First, Reggie's death may have been the desired outcome of the police officer's action, in which case the killing was premeditated. Or, it was a case of mistaken identity, which clarifies the fact that the two officers who killed my brother and their commanding parties are all grossly incompetent. Or, both of the above cases are correct, i.e., Reggie's murderers intended to kill him and the Police Department behaved insubordinately.

"Part of the argument of the officers who shot Reggie was that he had attacked one of them and took his gun. This was their major claim. They also said that only one of them had actually shot Reggie. The facts, however, speak for themselves. According to the Death Certificate and autopsy report, Reggie was shot eight times from point-blank range. The Doctor who performed the autopsy told me himself that two bullets entered the side of my brother's head, four bullets were sprayed into his back, and two bullets struck him in the back of the his legs. It is obvious that unnecessary force was used by the police and that it is extremely difficult to shoot someone in his back when he is attacking or approaching you.

"After experiencing a situation like this and researching South Africa I believe that to a large degree, justice may only exist as rhetoric. I find it difficult to talk of true justice when the oppression of my people both at home and abroad attests to the fact that inequality and injustice are serious problems whereby Blacks and Third World people are perpetually short-changed by society. Something has to be done about the way in which this world is set up. Although it is a difficult task, we do have the power to make a change."

—Willie J. Jordan Jr.

EGL 487, Section 58, November 14, 1984

Notes

1. Black English aphorism crafted by Monica Morris, a Junior at S.U.N.Y. at Stony Brook, October, 1984.
2. *English is Spreading, But What Is English*. A presentation by Professor S.N. Sridahr, Dept. of Linguistics, S.U.N.Y. at Stony Brook, April 9, 1985: Dean's Conversation Among the Disciplines.
3. Ibid.
4. *New York Times*, March 15, 1985, Section One, p. 14: Report on study by Linguistics at the University of Pennsylvania.
5. Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 11, Harcourt Brace, N.Y.

HAR

RYE

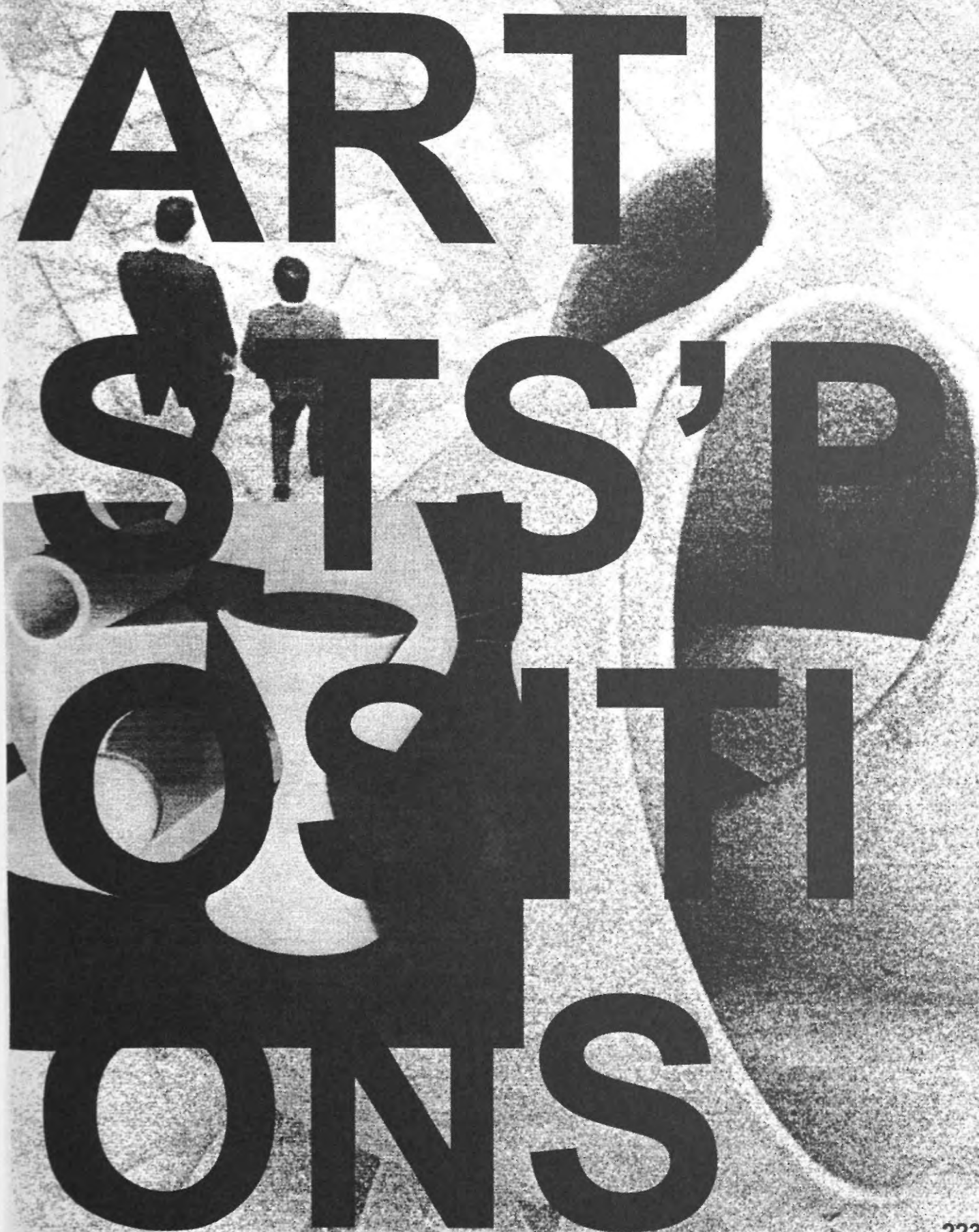
THE

Sapphire's lyre styles
plucked eyebrows
bow lips and legs
whose lives are lonely too

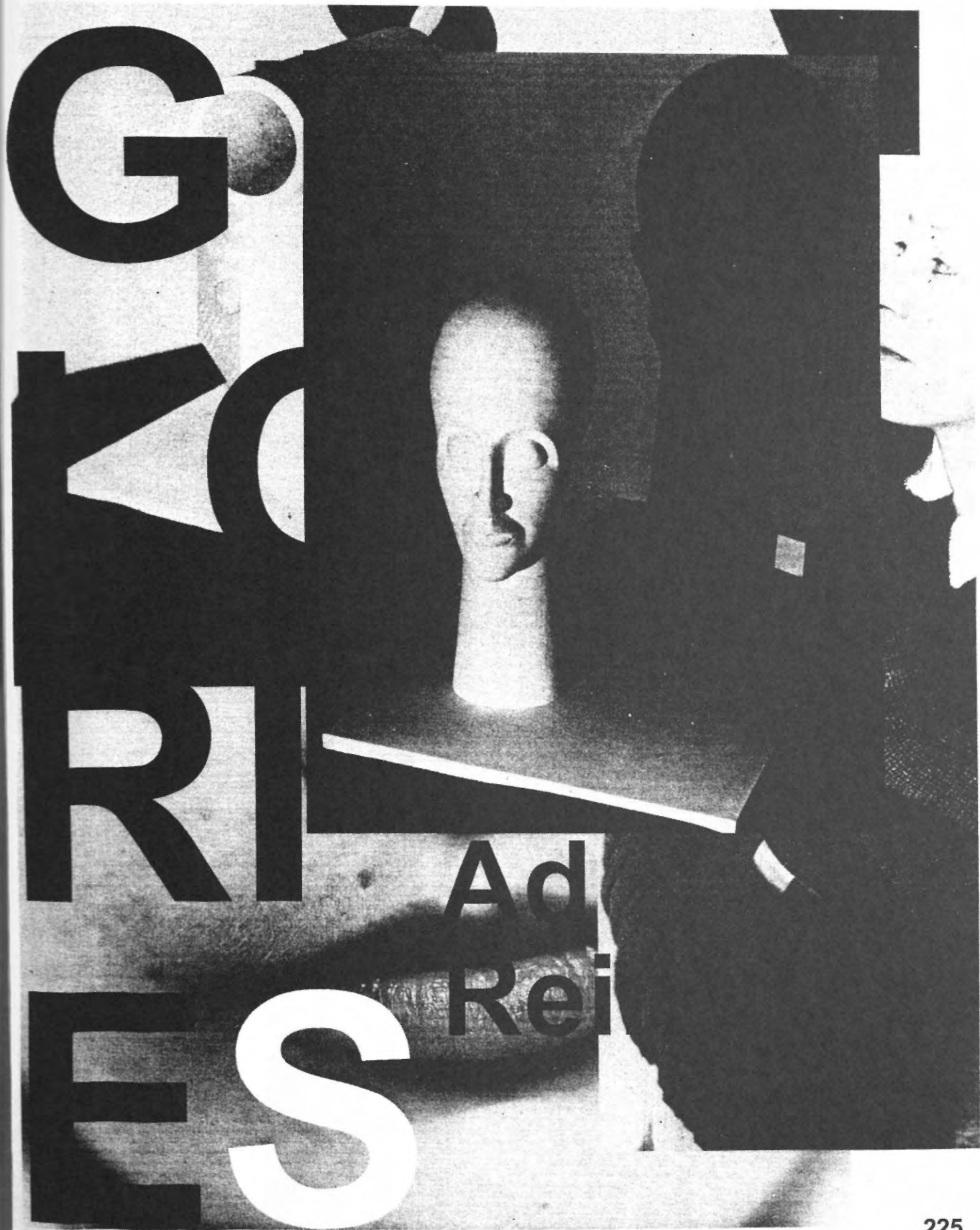
my last nerve's lucid music
sure chewed up the juicy fruit
you must don't like my peaches
there's some left on the tree

you've had my thrills
a reefer a tub of gin
don't mess with me I'm evil
I'm in your sin

clipped bird eclipsed moon
soon no memory of you
no drive or desire survives
you flutter invisible still

A black and white photograph of two people walking away from the camera on a path. The path is flanked by large, rounded, light-colored structures that resemble giant beanbag chairs or oversized letters. The background is a textured, light-colored surface. Overlaid on the image is large, bold, black text that reads "ARTISTS' POSITIONS".

ARTISTS' POSITIONS





The Next Revolution in Art _____ **Ad Reinhardt**
Art-as-Art Dogma, Part II _____

The next revolution in art will be the same, old, one revolution.

Every revolution in art turns over art from art-as-also-something-else into art-as-only-itself.

The one, eternal, permanent revolution in art is always a negation of the use of art for some purpose other than its own. All progress and change in art is toward the one end of art as art-as-art.

An avant-garde in art advances art-as-art or it isn't an avant-garde.

Art-as-art is as old as art and artists. Artists have always practiced, if not always professed, secretly or openly, art-as-art as artists. Artists-as-artists have always worked the same way and have always made the same things.

Art-as-art is always a battle cry, polemic, picket sign, sit-in, sit-down, civil disobedience, passive resistance, crusade, fiery cross, and non-violent protest.

The artist-as-artist's first enemy is the philistine-artist, the "all-too-human" or subhuman or superhuman artist inside or outside or beside himself, the socially useful and usable artist, the artist-jobber and sales artist, the expressionist-businessman and "action" artist, the artist who "has to eat," who has to "express himself," and who lives off, on, in, for or from his art.

The artist-as-artist's second enemy is the art dealer who deals in art, the private collector who collects art, in other words, the public profiteer who profits from art.

The artist-as-artist's third enemy is the utilitarian, acquisitive, exploiting society in which any tendency to do anything for its own transcendental sake cannot be tolerated.

Art-as-art has always been and always will be a trouble for philosophers, priests, politicians, professors, patriots, provincials, property people, proud possessors, primitives, poets, psychiatrists, petit-bourgeois persons, pensioners, patrons, plutocrats, paupers, panderers, pecksniffs, and pleasure-seekers, for the reason of art's own Reason that needs no other reason or unreason.


The three most important, principled battles of our time for art against museums took place in New York City at the beginning of each of the last three decades:

In 1940, the battle for modern art was fought on the forty- or fifty-artist picket line of the American Abstract Artists group questioning the "modernity" of the Museum of Modern Art and protesting its "use" of Renaissance art against modern artists. The Museum has shown little Renaissance or medieval or ancient art since.

In 1950, the battle for fine art was fought by a few gallery groupings of artists, numbering around twenty "irascible" artists, petitioning and questioning the wisdom of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's sponsoring of "Pepsi-Cola art" and "I-Hear-America-Singing" ideas of nationalism and regionalism. The Metropolitan Museum has shown little wisdom since.

By 1960, the battle for free or abstract art was being fought by artists, numbering now perhaps only one, privately protesting the Modern Museum's "New American Painting," the Whitney Museum's "Geometric Art in America," and the Guggenheim Museum's "American Expressionist and Imagist" exhibitions, for using the ideas and history of abstract art to support and promote a vulgar, postexpressionist, postsurrealist "pop abstraction." The museums have shown little respect for the main stream of modern art before or since.

For one moment in the early sixties, a group of young artists calling themselves the Artists' Tenant Association struck terror into the heart of the



art world by proposing an artists' boycott of New York City's galleries and museums. The artists were fighting for freedom from harassment by the fire department in their lofts merely, but the threat of an artists' strike, even by artists who were not in galleries or museums, showed how the foundations could be shaken.

The most barefaced, half-assed sham battle in the market place in recent years was the "Action Painters' Protest against the Critic of The *New York Times*," with the artists listing themselves shamelessly with their customers, mouthpieces, devotees, and agents. What was good for the actionary artists' busy-art-business was good also for the "embattled" reactionary art critic's busy-book-business, and showed how the foundations could not be shaken.¹

The next revolution in art will see the disappearance of personal art dealing, private art collecting, and individual artist enterprising, of personal-istic, privateering art – "pricing and buying and selling." International art cartels will drive out small art business from the top down, and conscience-stricken artists will organize themselves to strike against art-dealers' associations from the bottom up.

The next revolution will wipe out the art-market bird-watchings and callings, and remove the menace of pigeon-droolings, starling-warblings, and "peep"-happenings. The old abstract-expressionist game of "button-holing and bagging the clammy green-bird" with its old bird call of "sweating cubism out" went almost out of fashion even before the heroic Nixon years were over. A late fifties period which was a "sweating the green-bird parrot out" was followed by an early sixties period which heard the howling rosen-bird and his action bats and starlings out. The elimination of the hawkings, buzzardings, nest-featherings and fowlings of the tawney-hess pippett and flank-harrow sparrow, the emily-jinn-hour harpy and cackling coo, the canny-day common crow and larking-allways chicken, the robin gull-water duck and hilly-creamier vampire, and the simp-hunter redder-rut-man gooney species of chutzpah canaries would help to restore the artists' health and sanity and peace of mind, but nature is not so easily deflowered.

The next revolution will sound the farewell of the old favorite songs of "art and life" that the old favorite artist-ducks love to sing along with the old bower-birds and the new, good, rich swallow audiences. What curator

has not thrilled to the strains and old refrains of "Art is a style of living, so to speak" (de Kooning, 1951), "Painting is voyaging into the night, one knows not where ..." (Motherwell, 1959), "*There is no such thing as a painting about nothing*" (Rothko, Gottlieb, 1947), and "Let no man undervalue the implications of this work, or its power for life, or for death, if it is mis-used" (Still, 1959)? The next revolution will overthrow natural, brute, expressionist, folk, monster, neo-primitive, junk, collage, assemblage, combine, mongrel, "merz," "pop," happening, unconscious, spontaneous, accidental, poetic, dramatic, "song-and-dance" art and send it back to the everyday theater and environment, to the entertainment field and junkyard, to the folk places and lower depths where it all came from in the first place.

The next revolution will see a scattering to the winds of all local and foreign New York School "pictures of the passing world" and the permanent acknowledgement of universal "pure land school" paintings everywhere, come heller or high water.

The next revolution will see the fading away of all old, unschooled, "school of hard knocks" artists telling young artists they need not go to school, and the casting to the dogs of all schooled artist company men and the techniques of their trade - brushworking, panhandling, back-scratching, palette-knifing, waxing, buncombing, texturing, wheedling, tooling, sponging, carping, blobbing, beefing, staining, straining, scheming, striping, stripping, bowing, scraping, hacking, poaching, subliming, *shpritzing*, soft-soaping, piddling, puddling, imaging, visioning, etc. The soft sell on the clean hard edge by the new artists was as much of a sellout as the hard sell on the soft edge was by the dirty old artists.

The next revolution will see the emancipation of the university academy of art from its market-place fantasies and its emergence as "a center of consciousness and conscience," and the formation of a government department of art as the main support of unsupportable art. Art as an art program or art project will be a creeping socialist hothouse flower instead of the present private-enterprise outhouse harlotree.

The next revolution in art will recognize the inalienable right of each art to be free from all other arts, to be free to be itself, and to be free of itself.

Art-as-art is a concentration on art's essential nature. The nature of art has not to do with the nature of perception or with the nature of light or

with the nature of space or with the nature of time or with the nature of mankind or with the nature of society or with the nature of the universe or with the nature of creation or with the nature of nature.

Art's nature fixes a boundary that separates it from everything else. Anything cannot be art.

Art's "three thousand odd rules" cannot be learned by the "ten thousand creatures." Anybody cannot be an artist.

Art-as-art is the "school of the invariable way" and does not belong to the "ten manners" or to the "hundred schools" or to the "ten thousand things." Art-as-art turns each way into the one way. There are no two ways about it.

Art-as-art is a creation that revolutionizes creation and judges itself by its destructions. Artists-as-artists value themselves for what they have gotten rid of and for what they refuse to do.

Art has never ruled the world.

Art-as-art cannot win the world without losing its soul.

Art's reward is its own virtue.

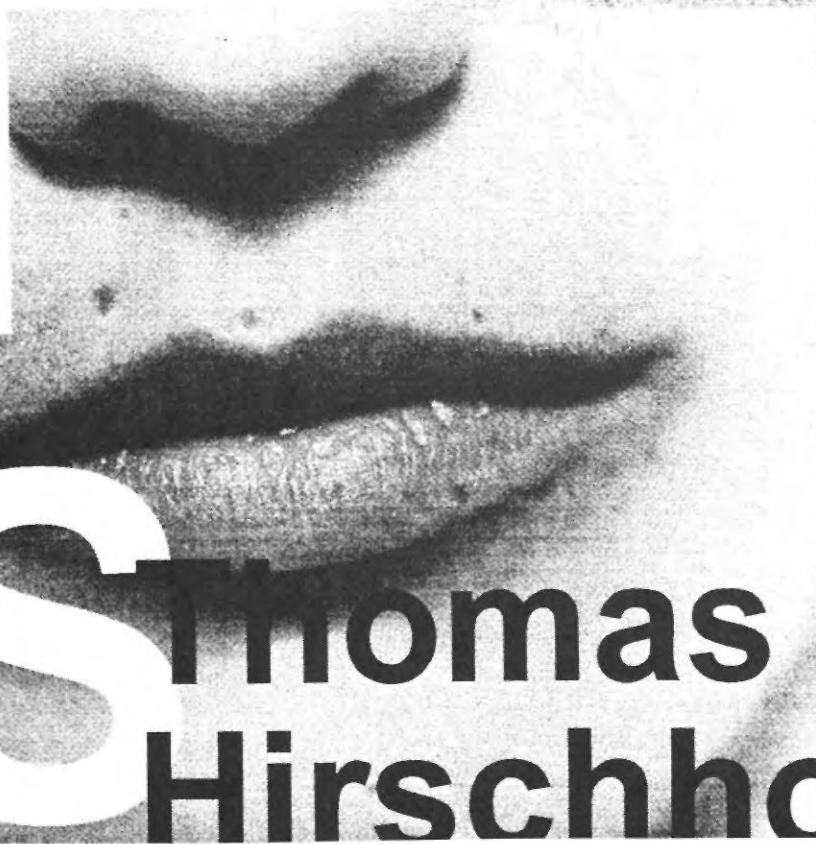
¹ Letter to *New York Times* protesting John Canaday's anti-avant-garde criticism.

Art News (New York), February 1964; also published as "Art-as-Art Dogma, Part II," *Art International* (Lugano), March 1964.

**G
LO**



**R
ES**



**Thomas
Hirschhorn**



Intensif-Station, 2010, K21, Düsseldorf. Courtesy Arndt Gallery, Berlin. Photo by Romain Lopez.

Dear Thomas,

I've just received your answers to my questions and your handwritten letter in an envelope at home. They surprised me in a good way. Thank you very much.

<http://bombsite.com/issues/113/articles/3621>

Page 1 of 8

When asked to write an introduction to the interview, I decided to answer you with an open letter instead.

I think I allowed myself to understand more about your work through "making" questions. When I was asked to participate in a dialogue with you, I gladly accepted, seeing it as an opportunity to think aloud about your work.

When we met some years ago, in 2003, I think, at Cantina Montejo in Mexico City, a block away from where I live, you invited me to visit you in your studio in Aubervilliers. I had imagined it as a place of labor, a place in which art making means the production of knowledge, of language, of emotions, not as a factory or a sweatshop for art, as it often happens these days worldwide. It turns out your studio was actually a former factory, which your activity totally transformed into a place full of creative energy.

When I visited you in France, on a snowy afternoon, in late 2005, Aubervilliers and its surroundings showed me a landscape and an environment that was very different from my idea of what being an artist in Paris was like. This densely populated industrial area on Paris's outskirts not only provides the city with labor, but also with culture: music, the sport of *parkour*, tecktonic dance, and *verlan* slang. From the entrance to your studio I saw the Stade de France, France's national stadium, Zinedine Zidane and Franck Ribéry's playground. You gave me and our dialogue several hours (and some tea); it is there that I learned, or perhaps understood, that I could be in a new situation, in a totally different environment and universe: Paris is alive.

Thank you, Thomas.

Un abrazo fuerte.

Abraham

ABRAHAM CRUZVILLEGAS Why live in Paris?

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN Because living in Paris is beautiful. It makes sense for me as an artist and it's a challenge! I love ordinary, everyday life here and I love the people I've met who have become my friends. I stayed in Paris because of the Frenchwomen and Frenchmen that are living here. I like France with all its unresolved contradictions, in all its complexity. I really do love the motto: "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité." I take it as something to fight for, at every moment. To live in Paris was never romantic to me. Coming from Switzerland, a very small country, it's been my effort to confront myself and find out my own measure. This is only possible in a large urban city. I am speaking about "Le Grand Paris" and it's clear to me that thinking of Paris includes all of its suburbs. To me, the interest and the beauty of working in this country and in this city come from the work of my friend Manuel Joseph, a French poet, but also from many other poets, writers, and philosophers living and working here today. They create a real dynamic. To me this makes Paris a special, powerful, rich, and graceful city of creation. I love to confront the very condensed, critical way of thinking—a sometimes fucking hypercritical thinking—that only the French can produce. I love it; it's excessive and not always justified, but is terrifically rebellious and crazily resistant. It's an intellectual pleasure and an artistic challenge to be confronted with such theories. There is also a real Republican, egalitarian tradition which I love. Living in Paris is stimulating and demanding, but I understand the economic pressure as an invitation to face reality. The possibility of being in touch with the sharp thinking of a Frenchman such as Manuel Joseph, without compromise and without reconciliation, gives meaning and reason for me to work here more than in any other city.

AC You worked and lived in Aubervilliers for a while. What does the *banlieue* mean for you?

TH I am still working in Aubervilliers, where my studio is located. Paris is not Paris without its suburbs. Aubervilliers is a part of Paris. What I need, as an artist, is to live in a space of truth, and this space of truth exists in Paris. As in almost every large city, the space of truth is its suburbs, their so-called *banlieues*. In Aubervilliers, as in other Parisian suburbs, one can touch the truth and be in contact with it. It's in the suburbs that there is vitality, deception, depression, energy, utopia, autonomy, craziness, creativity, destruction, ideas, young people, hope, fights to be fought, audaciousness, disagreements, problems, and dreams. It's in the suburbs that today's big issues are written on the building facades. It's in the suburbs that today's reality can be grasped, and it's in the suburbs that the pulse of vitality hurts. It's in the suburbs that there is necessity and urgency. It's the suburbs that will save the city center from a most certain death! This incredible energy has to be directed somewhere and be fruitful somehow, find a destiny and a response. This is the problem of "small" Paris. The "small" Paris turns its back to all this energy coming from the suburbs. That's why I am for "Le Grand Paris."



Das Auge (The Eye), 2008,
Wiener Secession, Vienna.
Courtesy Arndt Gallery, Berlin.
[Click to enlarge.](#)

AC How do you deal with humor in everyday life and in your work?

TH I have a lot of humor. The problem is that others don't understand it—it's a pity! And it's the same thing with the humor in my work. People do not understand that there is humor in my work! More seriously, I think humor can be a path and an opening toward the other. But I do not "deal" with humor in my work, I just want to give it form as much as I can. What is certain is that I have a lot of fun doing my work, always and everywhere—in my studio and in public spaces too. To do my work is not glamorous, but it is a lot of fun. And to do my work is pleasure, it is full enjoyment.

AC Is disaster—famine, flooding, earthquake, forced migration, genocide, holocaust—a source of energy, creation, love?

TH Yes, because disaster is part of the world, our one and unique world! I agree with the world I am living in. It is only if I agree with it that I can have the power to change something. To agree does not mean to approve of everything or to support or to endure everything. To agree means to love—to love the world—beyond "respect," "empathy," "tolerance," "compassion," and "kitsch." Love is passion, desire, ecstasy, infinitude, and cruelty. As an artist, who is part of the world, I have to confront disaster, my own disaster first, but also all disasters. I have to love this world if I want to change its conditions, I have to love the fact that disaster and "the negative" are also part of it. The world is not the world without the negative. Even within the negative, I have love for art and for artists, love for philosophy and philosophers, love for poetry and poets. This love gives me the energy and the will to create despite all the negative and despite all the past, present, and future disasters. Love is stronger than disaster.



Poor-Racer, 2009, in *One-Day Sculpture*, Christchurch, New Zealand.

AC What happens to the obscene when we are able to see it?

TH I never use the word *obscene* or *obscenity*. I think we are living in a time where words like these are used to impose morality. I refuse this and I refuse the kind of "hypersensitivity" developed and encouraged these days—I am sensitive but no more than any other human being. The Western and Northern luxurious hypersensitivity is the attempt to avoid contact with reality and its hard core. Terms such as *obscene* are used swiftly in order to protect people from exposure to the truth. Truth needs to be paid for. For there to be truth you have to make a sacrifice. I mean truth—not *fact*, not *opinion*, and not *information*. We are living in a dictatorship of opinions, of facts, and of information. Opinions about what is "obscene," what is pornographic, and what should not be shown to children! As if everyone and everything should be neutralized by so-called *morals* or even *ethics*. There is no longer a single art exhibition without a warning about "obscenity" or "pornography!" But I, as an artist, want to see everything, know everything. I want to be emancipated and sovereign. I do not want to be neutralized. I do not want to be the one saying: "I can't see this! I don't want to see it!" I don't need to be told what to support or not. During the second Iraq war, the former American secretary of defense said: "Death has a tendency to encourage a depressing view of war." That's exactly the point: in order to discourage inhumanity, we need to see it! As an artist, I don't want to dream or escape reality. I don't want to flee the hard core of reality.



Exhibiting Poetry Today: Manuel Joseph, 2010, Centre National de L'Édition et de L'Art Imprime, Chatou (France). Photo by Romain Lopez.

AC Can you imagine a noncapitalist way or environment for sex? Not efficient, not productive, not amusing, not serious? p(a). **TH** Sex is apolitical. Sex exists—thank god!—beyond politics. I think the people in North Korea have sex also, don't they? Sex happens completely and forever beyond everything else. Sexiness is generosity, expenditure, non-economization, emancipation, infinitude, ecstasy, intensity, risk, self-authorization, pride, the absolute. Sex is not reality—sex is the real. And the real—because it is the real—stimulates, boosts, or even dopes and resists all environments and all contexts. And I refuse to fall—like a mouse—into the trap of “noncapitalist” sex!

AC Why collaborate?

TH I do not collaborate and I do not use this term *collaboration*. I want to work with friends, I want to work in friendship. Working in friendship, as I do with the German philosopher Marcus Steinweg or with the French poet Manuel Joseph, means to work in unshared responsibility. *Unshared Responsibility* is a new term we created in order to avoid *collaboration*. Unshared Responsibility means I am completely responsible for the work of my friend, and it means that my friend takes complete responsibility for my work. Unshared Responsibility does not mean discussion, argumentation, negotiation, or finding a compromise. Unshared Responsibility means to be absolutely committed to the work of the other, to take it for what makes its strength: a sovereign affirmation. To work in Unshared Responsibility means to take the responsibility for something I am not responsible for; it means to be generous and it means to have absolute confidence. Unshared Responsibility does not mean to control but to share the love of art, of philosophy, and of poetry. Unshared Responsibility is something I only do with someone and the work of someone I absolutely agree with.

AC Describe chaos.

TH Chaos is form. I want to give form to chaos. Chaos means complexity, inclusion, incommensurability, clarity, precision, exaggeration. Chaos is a tool and

a weapon to confront the world, which is chaotic, but not in an attempt to make it more calculated, more disciplined, more educated, more moral, more satisfying, more exclusive, more ordered, more functionable, more stabilized, more simplified, or more reduced. No, chaos is the form to confront the chaotic world. I must specify the chaos, touch it, struggle with it, to finally be lost in it myself. Chaos is another word for *ethics*. Chaos is resistance, courage, and hope. In art, the question of form is the most important and essential question. I have to struggle with my will, I must give form in the chaos.



Théâtre Précaire 2, Les Ateliers de Rennes-Biennale d'Art Contemporain.

AC Sometimes while looking at your work, *The Planets* by Gustav Holst comes to my mind.

TH I do not know Gustav Holst. Should I know about him?

AC It's not necessary. What are you listening to recently?

TH I am listening to fado. I have three fado CDs: Maria Teresa, Katia Guerreiro, and Amália Rodrigues. My favorite one is the CD of Amália Rodrigues, *Uma Casa Portuguesa*. It's beautiful music and I like to play just one song on the repeat track mode and listen to it for hours. "Barco Negro" is one of those songs—it's sad, beautifully sad.

AC What's the meaning of labor in your work? Do you work with assistants?

TH I love to work and I love to do my work. I always liked to work a lot, and because I like it, it's easy for me to work and work a lot. Because I, the artist, am the art maker, I have to and want to do the work, to give it form and to work it out. I want to be overgiving in my work, I want to work with excess, and I want to be generous while working, I want to self-exploit myself! I like the fact

that my work involves a lot of labor. Even when something is big, its big size is made with labor, it's not blown up industrially. The fact that people can actually see the labor is a way to include them in my work, to make an opening. This opening and including is precisely what I mean by *working*, or put differently *self-erection*. To me the term of *work* and *labor* are positive terms, terms of self-invention, of self-authorization, and of being mobilized. I am for production and I am for affirmation. To me production is related to dignity and pride. Sometimes people tell me: "Do less! Work much less!" They are wrong, I don't fall into this trap of nonproduction, into the trap of deception and cynicism. They don't understand that to work—besides the big pleasure it gives me—is a necessity. It's the necessity to give form; to assert and to defend my form. It's necessary to insist by working a lot and by producing a lot. For those who want to do less—it's fine with me—let them do less, let them produce less. But don't tell me I should do less! I want to do what I love: to have fun and, to me, to have fun means to do my work! Yes, I do work with assistants.

AC How do you choose materials to work with? Do you choose?

TH I love the materials I am working with. To use the materials I work with is more than a choice—it's a decision. Doing art politically means loving the material one works with. To love does not mean to be in love in a kitschy way or to fall in love with one's material or lose oneself in it. Rather, to love one's material means to place it above everything else, to work with it in awareness, and to be insistent with it. I love the material because I decided in favor of it, therefore I don't want to replace it, substitute it, or change it. The decision about the material is an extremely important one in art. I decided on the materials I am working with because they are everyday materials. Everyone knows about them, everyone uses them—to do things other than art. These materials surround me, are easily available, unintimidating, and nonartsy. They are universal, economic, inclusive, and don't bear any plus-value. That is the political, and because I made that decision, I cannot yield to wishes and demands for "something else" or "something new."

AC What are you reading these days?

TH "L'éthique, essai sur la conscience du mal" by Alain Badiou, and the exhibition catalogue from MAK Vienna, "Blumen für Kim Il Sung."

AC What are you working on now?

TH I am working on *Too Too—Much Much*. This is my next big work to be exhibited in the Museum Dhondt Dhaenens in Deurle, Belgium. In this work I want to give form to the logic of being overwhelmed by a situation and in assuming the consequences. I will work following my guidelines: Energy: Yes! Quality: No! I have the ambition of creating a new form, to give form to a kind of universal and conflictual hyperconsumption, a form which is the result of confronting three different overconsumptions: 1) The overconsumption of natural disasters; the consequences of being overwhelmed and alone in facing a natural disaster. 2) The overconsumption of the feeling that everything is burning everywhere and everywhere around me; and, 3) The overconsumption of personal and communal human disasters in our lives and their consequences. The question with *Too Too—Much Much* is: Am I able to give a form which goes beyond usual facts and criticism of consumption? Can I create in my new work some kind of desperate fun that will cut precarious breakthroughs into the hard core of reality?

If you like this article, you might also like:

Screen by Lucas Samaras

Fred Valentine: Behind the Scenes

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MARQUINERIE

GOOD
RIES

When Viola was the queen bee

March 14

Viola's memorial. A reunion of a period of time, the 70's and early 80's. A reminder. Perspective on how we grow and evolve, dissolve, die. Old bodies with young spirits. Her original company, moving in forgotten shapes and paths on the stage, together, as strangers. A lot of laughing. A few take it very seriously.

Her sister sings a song that she and Viola "sang as children." Merce reads how much he misses her, will miss her. Merce, surviving all of it. And then Jeff Slayton, crying, trying to share the last words. Describing how he had heard she was found, lying in a pile of leaves, arms raised to the sky.

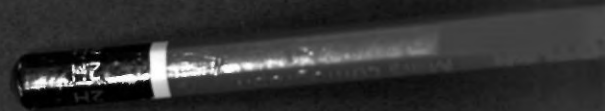
Then I dance, like Viola was inside my soul, pushing and shoving me, and I hanging on, and trying to give each yank a softness. Demanding that she see this kindness as something alive. To let her know that it is all right. That her presence, influence, life work, lives on.

Afterwards, I went crazy. In a bar, eyes out of focus, spewing insults. Vulnerable and angry. Oh well. Here was the actual Shipwreck I had questioned for years, the dance she taught me. Viola always knew all of it. Goodness and horror live in the same world. That was my new dance. And again, like that first dance she offered me in 1977, she opened up my body to another position of moving, profound. Thank you V. I loved her because she was certain of her pain. What she gave beautifully away.



**William
Pope.L**

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BLACK PEOPLE ARE
THAT TRANSIENT HOTEL
IN THAT NEIGHBORHOOD
YOU ALL JAYS WANTED
TO VISIT NOW YOU CAN

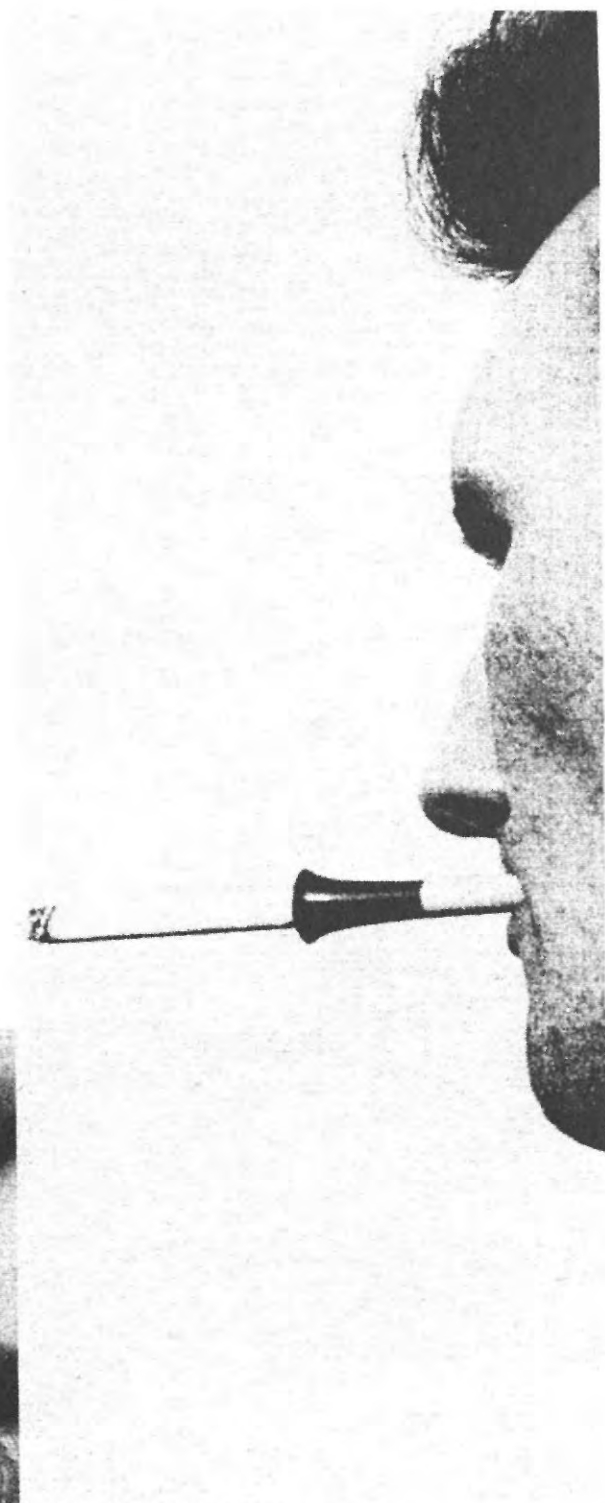
BUY REAL BLACK

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Joan Jonas





Jones Beach Piece (1970), Nova Scotia Beach Dance (1971)

In a group of outdoor pieces, I was interested in dealing directly with the effect of distance on perception. At Jones Beach I began a comprehensive open landscape piece. The site I selected was a large mud flat with intermittent and surrounding dunes. The concept of the work was organized around the perception of sound, color, and movement at a distance – the audience and the performers were separated by a quarter of a mile of intervening light and air.

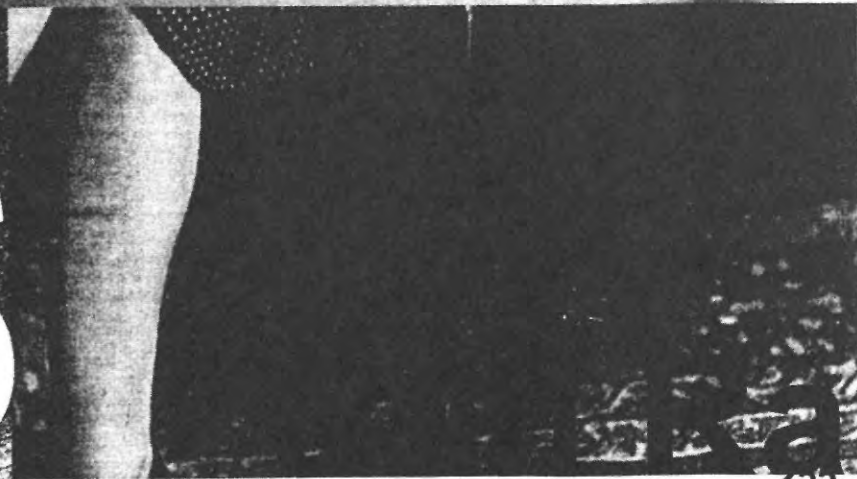
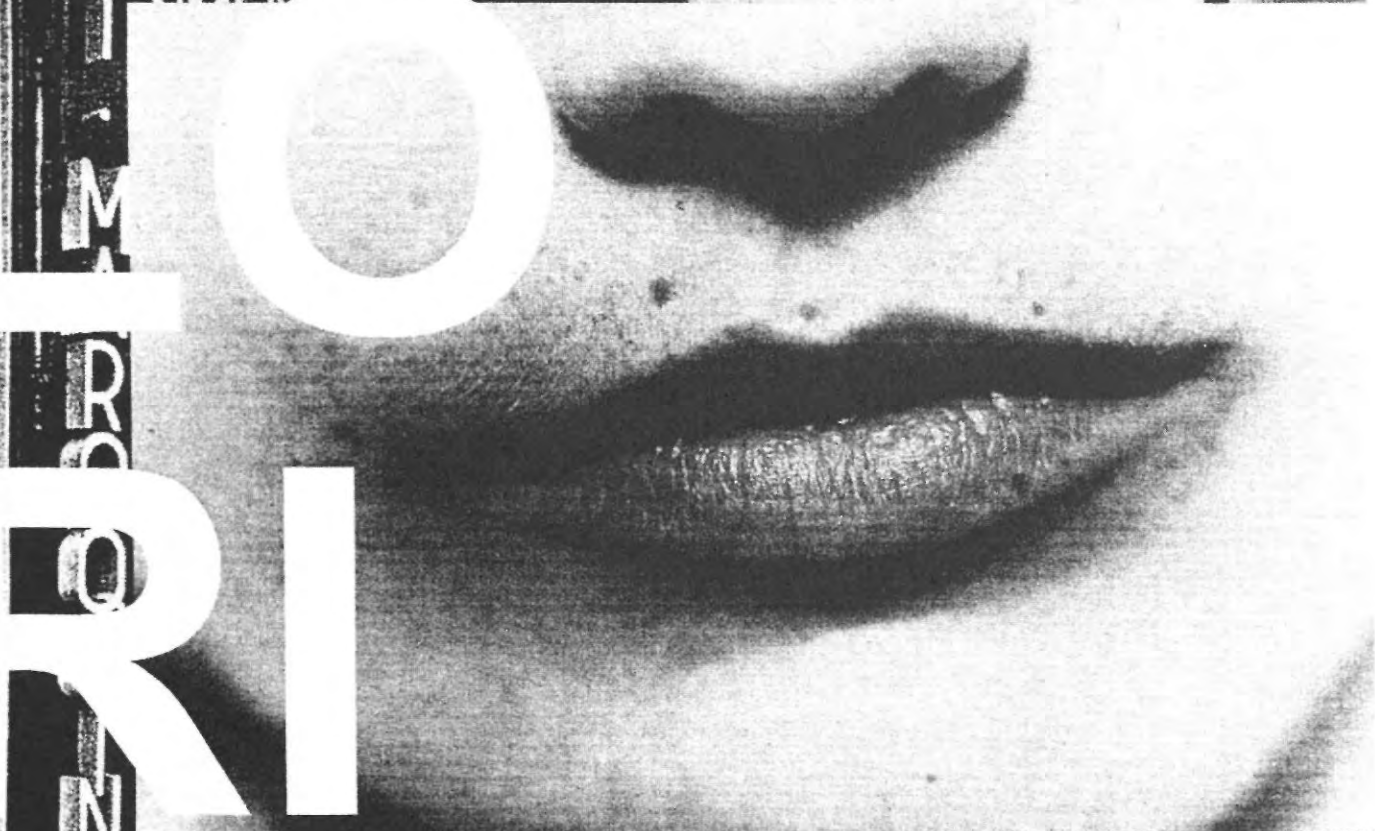
At that distance perception itself becomes focused down toward the reception of signals, and the piece was shaped by the way that the space related to or intervened in the processing of these signals. Sound functioned in terms of a delay/relay system, in effect a sound delay. A performer stood in the far space, one in the middle space, and a third next to the audience, clapping blocks of wood together repeatedly. In the far space, the act of hitting the blocks of wood was perceived before the sound was heard – distending the distance that separates the two perceptual fields of sight and sound. The effect of the piece was to measure the speed of sound through the air. As well, the work projected illusionism into the actual space scape.

Distance flattens space, erases or alters sound, and modifies scale. Performers were given simple patterns to run: perpendicular and parallel to the audience and curvilinear and circular. Movements tend to become two-dimensional due to the illusion of the depth of field. As a way of pointing to the reduction of complex pattern to the univocal effect of a signal, and as a way of cutting through the depth of the space, I sat behind the performers on top of a ladder holding a mirror through which I could reflect the sun's rays into the audience's eyes.

In a work performed in Nova Scotia in the summer of 1971, I continued my interest in the way information is transmitted to an audience. I worked with the sense of physical and psychic separation between audience and performer – the one static, passive, and involved in transforming movement into pattern; the other actively inhabiting the space of the performance. The audience watched this work from a cliff above the beach. Its view was shaped by two slopes of the cliff-side that formed a V-like channel of vision. At the bottom point of this triangular area of the beach was a circle of stones and a line of two-foot stakes driven into the sand. The space appeared to be a flat plane tilting up toward the horizon line of sea and sky – its apparent flatness contradicting the actual recession into depth. From that vantage and within the illusion of flatness created by it, the actions of the performers were transformed into linear patterns and layered planes.

JOAN JONAS

GLO RI ES



WHATCHA SAY POPS! WHATCHA SAY POPS! WHATCHA SAY POPS!
POPS?.....YES I SAID POPS...AREN'T YOU POPPIN?...HAVEN'T YOU BEEN POPPIN'?
EVERYTIME I GO IN A NIGHTCLUB I SEE YOU POPPIN'?YOU LIKE TO POP....THAT'S WHY
THE WORLD CALLS YOU POPS...WHATCHA SAY POPS..?

GOD SAID "GO OUT IN THAT WILDERNESS AND TALK TO POPS,TELL HIM HE'S FORGOTTEN
ME...TELL POPS I SAY STOP BEING A FOOL!!"
LISTEN POPS YOU CAN'T MAKE IT WITHOUT GOD...YOU'RE NOTHING WITHOUT HIM....
LISTEN POPS,OLE MAN-YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE A CHANGE...YOU'VE BEEN JOHNNY ONE NOTE
TOO LONG.IT'S TIME TO WATCH YOUR CHANGES.

YOU'RE IN A SPOT...JOHNNY ON THE SPOT TO BE EXACT..YOU'RE IN THE SAME SPOT
YOUR ANCESTORS WERE 3,000 years ago.YOU HAVE MADE NO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS
SINCE THEN.YOU HAVE BECOME THE LAUGHING STOCK OF THE WHOLE WORLD....
YOU ARE GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE YET YOU ARE THE SERVANTS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.WHY?
YOU ARE A MISERABLE PEOPLE ..SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD.....WHY?WHY?
CAN GOD HELP YOU?..DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE IN GOD OR ARE YOU JUST PRETENDING?
CAN GOD HELP YOU?WILL GOD HELP YOU IF YOU ASK HIM?

ARE YOU DEPENDING ON GOD OR MAN?

ARE YOU DEPENDING ON GOD THE FATHER OR THE SON OF MAN?

ARE YOU DEPENDING ON THE FATHER OR THE SON?.....

ARE YOU DEPENDING ON THE CREATURE OR THE CREATOR?

IF YOU ARE DEPENDING ON THE CREATURE, WHY?WHY?

IS THAT WISE?....SAY POPS,JOHNNY ONE NOTE WHAT'S COOKIN'?

POPS YOU ARE A BURNING ASS-IT'S YOU THAT'S COOKIN!YOU'RE BURNING!

SAY POPS AREN'T YOU TIRED OF BEING IN THE FIRE?

POPS YOU'RE JOHNNY ONE NOTE..JOHNNY ONE NOTE IS IOHNNY..IOHNE....IOHN..

#####IOHNNYIS#IO#CR#####
IOHN IS I-Oh....(I-Oh is IO)

JOHNNY ONE NOTE IS IO ...THE ONE NOTE IS DO...JOHNNY ONE NOTE'S LAST NAME

IS DOE...HE'S JOHN DOE....(DO..re..mi..fa...sol...la...ti..do)#####

THAT'S A HELL OF A NOTE,ISN'T IT...ONE NOTE ALL THE TIME IS A HELL OF A NOTE.

ONE NOTE ALL THE TIME IS A HELL OF A NOTE...THE SAME OLD NOTE IS THE SAME

OLD TUNE..JOHN PLAYS DOE ALL THE TIME..ISN'T HE A DEER..HE PLAYS DOE ALL THE

TIME...MONOTON OUS ISN'T HE...NO REASON WHY THE WORLD SHOULD LIKE TO BE

AROUND JOHNNY ONE NOTE...HE PLAYS DOE ALL THE TIME..a doe is a rabbit or hare,

also a deer...rabbits and deers are very timid things..they'll run at the

drop of a hat.SO WILL JOHNNY ONE NOTE...he's the MEEK of the earth....

johnny one note is a noted person.HE'S HELL-NOTED....HE'S NOTED IN HELL..

HE'S NOTED...HE'S KNOWN(ACCEPTED AS THE TRUTH.)HE'S THE WORD....

NOTE (a MARK or SIGN)###(NOTE-a short letter).A SHORT LETTER IS A BABY
LETTER.A BABY LETTER IS A NOTE.A NOTE CONSISTS OF WORDS ...A NOTE IS A WORD..

Witness:doe is a word##### DOE IS A WORD...A WORD IS ONE WORD..ONE WORD IS

THE WORD....JOHNNY ONE NOTE IS THE WORD OF GOD...THE SAME YESTERDAY,TODAY and

FOREVER...HE'S THE SON OF GOD..... HE'S JESUS CHRIST..HE'S THE LOGOS.....

HE'S THE CRUCIFIED ONE ON THE CROSS...HOW CAN HE CHANGE IN SUCH A POSITION?

JOHNNY ONE NOTE/JOHNNY,ONE,NOTE.....

JOHNNY IS NOTED...#####HE'S RENOWN..HE'S FAMOUS...HE'S FAMED..

HE IS OF NAME...HE IS THE FAMED NAME...HE IS THE NAME...THE NAME IS SHEM...

JOHNNY ONE NOTE IS SHEM...THE ETHIOPS ARE THE DESCENDANTS OF SHEM...

SHEM IS JOHNNY ONE NOTE....HE'S IO.. IO is one O....one o is zero....zero is

nothing...SHEM is nothing.NEGROES ARE NOTHING....there is no such thing as a

negro therefore negroes are symbolical of nothing..shem is nothing..negroes

are nothing..... O equals O....NOTHING IS NOTHING..NEGROES ARE SHEM.

NOTHING IS MYTH.....HAM IS A MYTH...NEGROES ARE HAM.....There is a common

Expression "A nigger aint --- Less than that is nothing. Zero

ZERO IS THE LOWEST POINT BY THE STANDARD OF COMPARISON. NEGROES ARE ZERO.
ZERO MEANS THE SEED. THE SEED IS THE NAME OF THE SON. THE SON IS ISRAEL.
NEGROES ARE ISRAEL..THEY'RE ZERO.

IT'S A HELL OF A NOTE..IT'S A HELL OF THE NOTE..IT'S JOHNNY ONE NOTES HELL..
IT'S A HELL OF JOHNNY THE NOTE.

IT'S A HELL OF A NOTE..IT'S A NOTE HELL...IT'S A ONE NOTE HELL.....
IT BELONGS TO JOHNNY ONE NOTE.HE'S THE NOTE.HE'S THE ONE NOTE,he's the
FIRST NOTE...HE'S THE ONE ...HE'S THE ONE ...THE NOTE IS ONE...IT'S NAME IS
ONE.....ONE NOTE...

ONE NOTE IS A SOUND ...negroes are ## sounds...witness the expression,"HOW
YOU GON' SOUND,MAN?"...."HOW YOU GOIN' TO SOUND,MAN?"
if negroes are not Johnny one note,WHY DO THEY ASK ONE ANOTHER,"HOW YOU GOIN'
TO SOUND?.....

i know how i'm going to sound.i'm going to sound so loud that it will wake up
the dead.

HOW YOU GOING TO SOUND,MAN?..HOW YOU'RE GOING TO SOUND,MAN?.....

SOUND also means FOUNDED ON TRUTH OR RIGHT.

ARE NEGROES SOUND?EVERY NEGRO WHO LOVES GOD IS SOUND.

sound means founded on truth or right.

EVERY NEGRO WHO LOVES GOD IS SOUND.

sound doctrine is base doctrine.BASE is FOUNDATION.

YOU ARE THE SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.

THE SOUND OF GOD IS THE FOUNDATION OF THIS WORLD.

THE VOICE OF GOD IS THE LOGOS....the word...THE WORD IS THE SON..

You are the sons of the living GOD...YOU'RE OUT OF COURSE...

BEYOND GOOD OR EVIL IS DEATH..OR WORSE NEITHER LIFE NOR DEATH...IT'S
PURGATORY.BEYOND GOOD OR EVIL IS IN THE MIDDLE.IT'S THE SECOND DEATH.

BEYOND GOOD OR EVIL HAS NO NAME,IT'S IN THE MIDDLE.IT'S POWER IN CHAINS.

IT CAN DO NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL.IT'S NOT THE DEATH THAT WE CALL DEATH,IT'S

NOT THE LIFE THAT WE CALL LIFE.IT'S IN BETWEEN ...IT'S SLEEP.SLEEP IS THE

SECOND DEATH..IT'S DEATH,JUNIOR. IT'S A STATE OF LIFE DEATH...IT'S THE TREE

OF GOOD EVIL....IT'S THE FAMILY TREE...IT'S THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF

GOOD AND EVIL....WHICH IS LIFE DEATH.

CHOOSE LIFE.... CHOOSE LIFE.....THERE'S NOTHING GOOD ABOUT DEATH.IT'S EVIL.

THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE.

GOD SAID"I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF HIM THAT DIETH!!

THE TRUE GOSPEL IS NOT SUFFER OR DIE FOR GOD...THE TRUE GOSPEL IS LIVE...LIVE.

ONLY BY LIVING CAN YOU GLORIFY GOD'S NAME.....TO DIE IS SHAMEFUL.....

GOD SAYS "CHOOSE LIFE"

I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF HIM THAT DIES.

YOU'RE THE MAN IN THE MOON...MOON IS MONTH....YOU'RE IN YOUR MONTH.....

YOU'RE FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF YOUR ANCESTORS.THEY CHOOSE DEATH!

Read Jeremiah 8:3...And DEATH shall be CHOSEN rather than LIFE by all the

RESIDUE of them that remain of this evil family,which remain in all the places

WHITHER I HAVE DRIVEN THEM...the places whether I have driven them.....

As you have forsaken me,and served ~~strange gods~~ IN YOUR LAND
strange gods in your land,so shall you serve strangers in a land that is not
yours. JEREMIAH 5:19

THIS EVIL PEOPLE,which refuse to hear my words,which walk in the imagination of
their heart and walk after other gods to serve them shall be. (good) for nothing

Jeremiah 13 10

GIRAU—
SONIA
DELAU
NAY
T SIMULTANE

HEIM
FURS

MARIN—CLOON—ZUR—

G
L
O
R
I
E
S

Ben Douglas

INCONSOLABLE MEMORIES

93

A SCREENPLAY BY STAN DOUGLAS

Aspects of this project are derived from Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 film, *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment). In the earlier work, a bourgeois man named Sergio remains in Havana shortly after the Cuban Revolution, even though his friends and family have all fled to the United States. He broods in his apartment, pretending to write a book, and wanders the streets reflecting on his past, hoping to discover an "inconsolable memory" that would prove there has been some kind of development in his life. He has (real and imagined) affairs with women and remembers old lovers; primarily as a means to avoid confronting the new reality around him. The film is a complex constellation of vignettes, flashbacks and documentary footage all haunted by the interior monologue of its otherwise silent protagonist.

We know that *Memorias* was set in 1962, because of references to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Documentary footage similarly places the present work in 1980, the year of the so-called Mariel Boat Lift, when more than 125,000 people left for Miami from the port town of Mariel, 30 kilometres outside of Havana. Among them were 10,500 Cuban convicts given the option of remaining in custody or joining the Marielitos on boats bound for the US. Our Sergio is a prisoner who accepted the offer; however, instead of departing, he escapes into the harbour without completely thinking through the implications of his action.

Present and past mix freely in this work—sometimes past events appear to be the cause of current conditions, and sometimes they remain irreconcilable—as their relationships shift in the manner of a musical fugue. Two 16 mm films are simultaneously projected onto the same screen, synchronized, but running in and out of phase with one another. Typically, if there is an image projected from one machine, the other is dark (and vice versa), but there is the occasional superimposition of images and mixing of sounds, as the cadence of scenes mesh together like the teeth of gears.

Dramatis Personae

SERGIO (Black, 38 in 1980) was born in Havana and intends to die there. His wife, LAURA, abandoned Cuba in 1975, leaving him a beautiful apartment. In 1976, his friend PABLO sent SERGIO a package he has never been able to open, because the fact it was addressed to him meant that he would be sent to jail. After a four-year imprisonment, SERGIO is informed that he will be released if he promises to embark for the US at Mariel. He agrees, but at the last minute decides that he would do anything to avoid leaving the island.

PABLO (White, 33 in 1975) is as his father was when he left Cuba in 1960: frustrated from waiting for the Revolution to be over. He could not bear to see his bourgeois comforts dissipate further, so, in 1975, he decided to join his family in Miami. PABLO frequently speaks cryptically about the activities of Cuban exiles. He assumed SERGIO knew what would be sent to him, but he was wrong.

LAURA (White, 35 in 1975) like PABLO, is tired of inconvenience and waiting. Her parents, too, emigrated to Miami in 1960, leaving her with the family home; a large apartment in Vedado. She and SERGIO fought often, but they would never disclose their deeper antagonisms. Her final, undeclared suspicion was that he was staying in Havana, in order to keep the apartment for himself. His was that she had been having an affair with his best friend PABLO.

ELENA (Mulatta, 29 in 1980) earns her living by watching US news broadcasts and providing synopses for the Cuban state. She must be very good at her job, because she was recently given a beautiful apartment in which to live and work: SERGIO'S apartment.

JIMMY (Mulatto, 35 in 1980) is obviously not from Havana. Much like SERGIO, he would never dream of leaving Cuba: they could have been friends had they been properly introduced. He resembles PABLO in some way or other.

Also: CUSTOMS OFFICIAL, CDR WOMAN (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution), 2 POLICE OFFICERS, AMERICAN on the bus, 3 PASSENGERS, 18-year-old SERGIO and HANNA, OLD MAN in the shadows, and Extras.





1. SERGIO'S APARTMENT (1976). A large, multi-bedroom apartment on the top floor of the Focsa building, Havana. From the front door, one can almost see a dark corridor to the right, leading to a galley kitchen. Directly ahead, a perforated dividing wall decorated with figurines partially obscures the living room. Immediately in front of it, another dark corridor leads to bedrooms. In the living room a wall parallel to the divider extends toward a row of windows, but ends in an opening onto the kitchen. Across the dark terrazzo floor, in a glassed corner whose main feature is an odd biomorphic sculpture, sits a small sand garden the same depth as the exterior balcony. The balcony is punctuated by louvered windows and glass doors that span the longest dimension of the living room. Stepping through the balcony door, one finds oneself standing before a telescope on a tripod. In the living room behind the divider, a colonial desk littered with papers supports a reel-to-reel tape recorder: from here the space extends another 20 feet, but that's seen only in passing. Paintings on the walls are Latin American surrealism (Wilfredo Lam, et al.) accompanied by mid-century modern furnishings. The balcony overlooks the Hotel Nacional. Cyclorama: Sky beyond the windows.

2. CORRIDOR. Turning a corner, featureless walls are broken by doorways—the spacing of which indicates that there are very large apartments behind them. Dark terrazzo floor. The door to SERGIO'S old apartment is visible at the end of Corridor "A;" the elevator is visible at the end of a "B" variant of this passageway.

3. BUS. The bus was donated by Canada in the 1970s; a couple of interior advertisements remain. Locals get a kick out of the fact that the destination still reads "Mount Royal." Rear Screen: Passing landscape.

4. MARIEL HOTEL ROOM. We see very little of this room, because the only illumination is the flickering light of a television in the corner. Otherwise, an unmade single bed stands perpendicular to one wall and a modest chest of drawers against another. A landscape painting, no doubt, hangs above the bed, but it is hard to see.

5. ELEVATOR (1976). A small, well-used elevator. Of the four florescent bulbs embedded in the ceiling, only one works. The two missing wall panels will have been replaced by 1980.



6. ELENA'S APARTMENT (1980). This is SERGIO'S apartment four years later: half of the paintings are gone, one replaced by the movie poster, *Death of a Bureaucrat*. The desk is still there, but video cassettes replace the papers, and the tape recorder is replaced by a U-matic VTR. Beside the desk, suddenly, there is a wall. Cyclorama: Sky beyond the windows.



7. JAIL. A dank wall covered in scuffs and scratches as high as one can reach; in front of it there is a wood bench for the detainees. Rear Screen: The jail wall.



9. BAR. A simple establishment. Walls covered with peeling, patterned wallpaper that is beginning to cultivate mould. In the corner where the bar meets a wall, SERGIO sits at a small table on a Rebar chair.

10. POLICE STATION. A plain, nondescript space with decorated portraits of revolutionary heroes. Rear Screen: Station interior (shot & reverse).



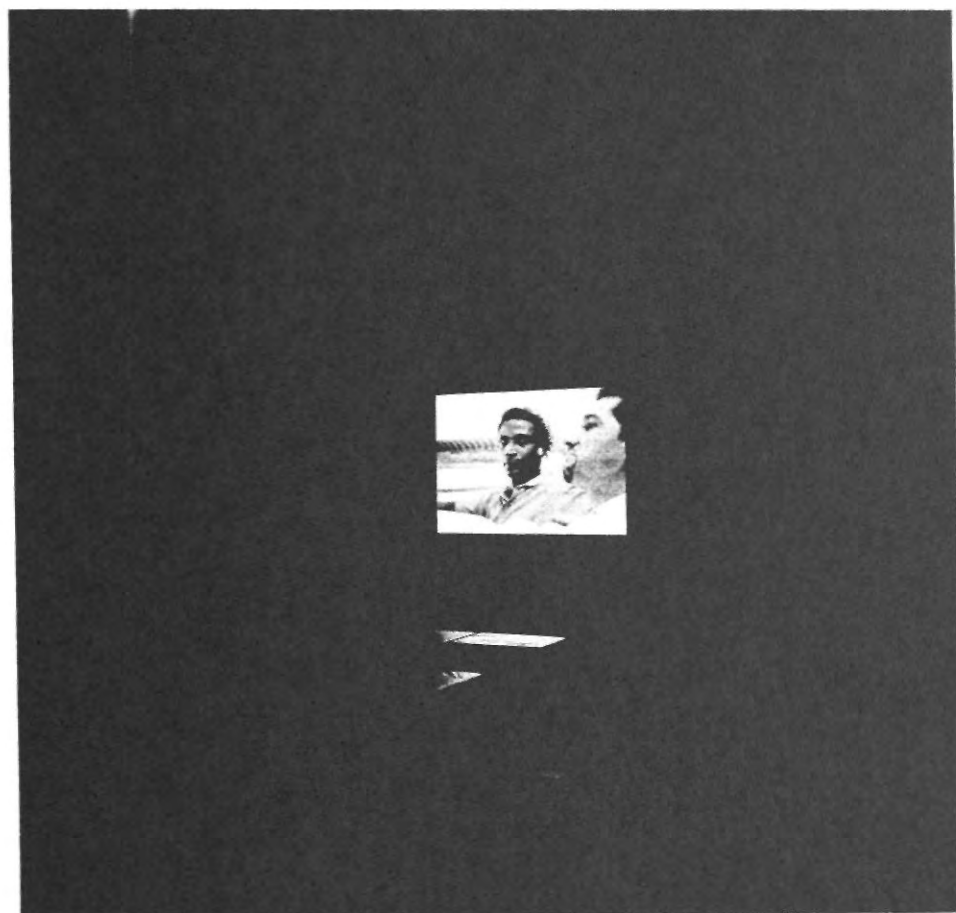
11. AIRPORT. Security glass separates the departure area from the visitors area. Parallel to the security glass is an exterior window, which reveals a balcony and a staircase rail that presumably descends to the tarmac. Typical Caribbean airport details: easy-to-clean Bakelite chairs, damp posters, armed guards, et cetera. Inside the departure area a CUSTOMS OFFICIAL sits at a simple table covered with papers. His back is to the wall: a bin for confiscated items and a silent colleague sit beside him. Cyclorama: Dawn.

12. TRUCK. About as worn-out as a farm truck can get; however, kept clean for passengers. Wood slats on the sides. Travellers stand or sit on spare tires. Rear Screen: An overpass above—rural landscape passes by.

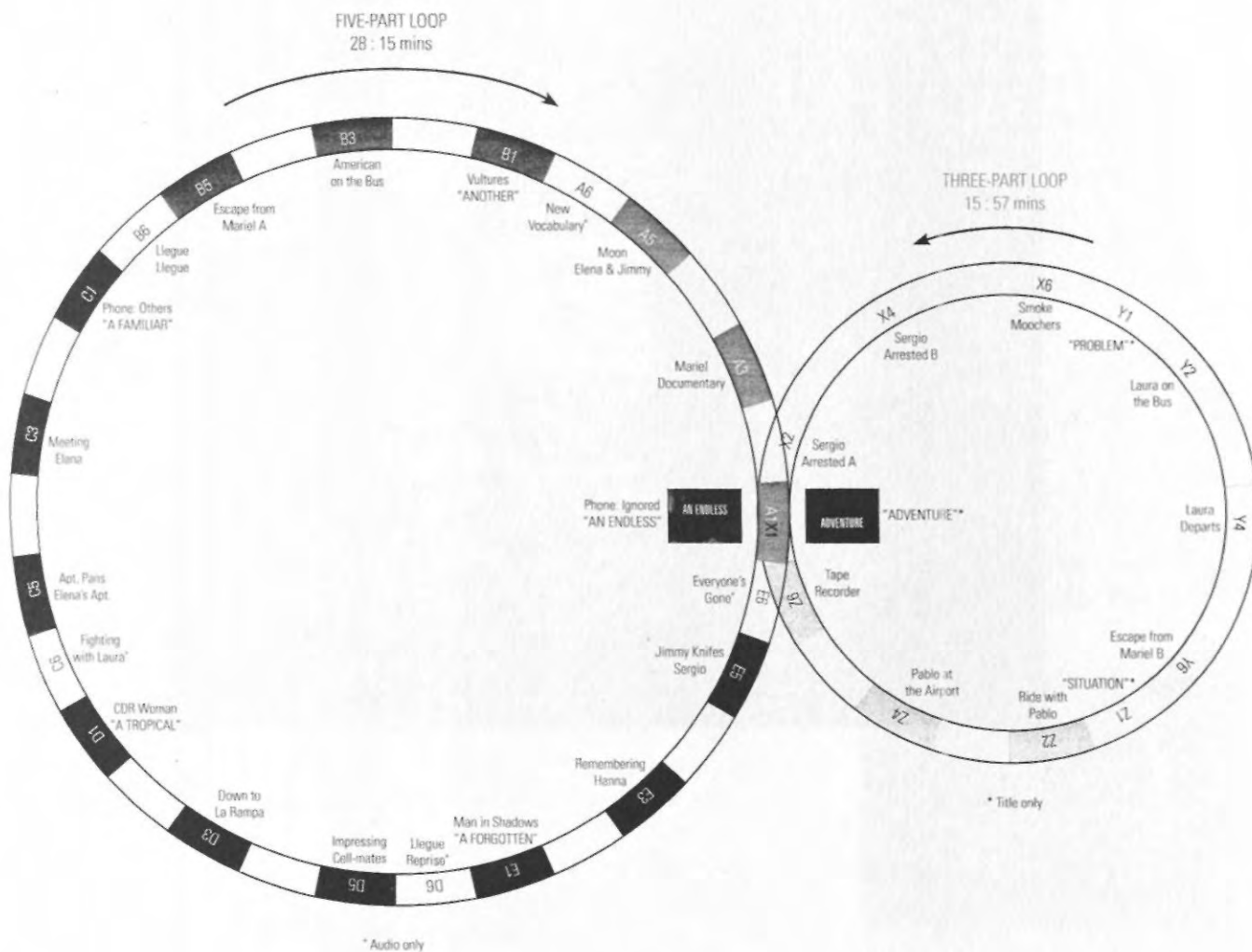


13. PABLO'S CAR. A 1956 Cadillac Eldorado convertible. Rear Screen: Moving landscape.

14. STREET. PABLO's car, seen from the rear, parked on a tree-lined street. Rear Screen: Nuevo Vedado Street.



Inconsolable Memories: Permutation Schema





1A. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT- NIGHT. 1976.

The telephone rings. Music plays in the background.

SERGIO walks toward the phone, ignores it, and takes a seat on his sofa. Suddenly, there is silence and the lights go dark. The ringing continues. He lights a candle on the table in front of him. The phone continues to ring.

TITLE SUPER:

An Endless
Adventure



2X1. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT - DAY. 1976. (CONTINUED FROM 1B2)

A knock on the door.

SERGIO walks toward the door of his apartment and is revealed in profile as he peeps through the peephole.



2X2. INT. CORRIDOR A - DAY. 1976.

SERGIO'S POV: CDR WOMAN seen through the peephole.



2X3. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT - DAY. 1976. (CONTINUED)

SERGIO stands upright, irritated. He unlocks and opens the door to reveal TWO POLICE OFFICERS in the hallway; both grim.

FIRST OFFICER

You're the friend of Valdés. Pablo Valdés.

SERGIO (off)

Of course.

SECOND OFFICER

Please accompany us to the station.





3A. DOCUMENTARY REELS. 1980.

Montage of US news footage from spring 1980: Bush and Reagan in Miami, Mariel Boat Lift, Iran Hostage Crisis, et cetera.

ELENA (V.O.)

... the exiles remain influential enough that leading Republican candidates, Intelligence Director Bush and California Governor Reagan, spent time campaigning in Miami. Reagan is seen here laying a wreath at a memorial for what he called the "Freedom Fighters" of Playa Giron.

Television networks described the events at Mariel as an embarrassment to El Comandante. Peoples' protests were derided as staged. Jimmy Carter tried to appear generous, but was still unable to clarify his position—obviously distracted by the disastrous rescue mission in Iran, which had barely begun when it was aborted, resulting in the bodies of dead US soldiers being paraded through the streets of Tehran. Election day this year will be the first anniversary of the hostage-taking.

Later in the month, as the weather worsened, there was still no clear US policy on the boats leaving Cayo Hueso for Bahía de Mariel. Contradicting Carter, the State Department insisted that they were in violation of the law. Rumours began to circulate that many of the early arrivals were criminals released from prison or spies. These claims were likely motivated by personal vendetta.

4X. INT. POLICE STATION - DAY. 1976.

OFFICER

Typing,

Name?

SERGIO

Carmona.

OFFICER

Second name?

SERGIO

Bendoiro.

OFFICER

First name?

SERGIO

Sergio.

OFFICER

Age?

SERGIO

38 years old.

OFFICER

Profession?

SERGIO

Architect.

OFFICER

Permanent address?

SERGIO

Focsa, Apartment 25K.

OFFICER

Looks up at Sergio.

SERGIO

M Street between 17 and 19 . . .

OFFICER

Focsa Building.

Types the words.

OFFICER

Pulls a sheet of paper from the typewriter and hands it to SERGIO,
 "Receipt of Contraband per Article 103 of the Penal Code." Do you
 understand the charges the Revolution has made against you? It's
 not an admission of guilt.



5A1. THE MOON OBSCURED BY MOVING CLOUDS.

BLACK.



5A2. EXT. ELEVATOR – NIGHT. 1980.

SERGIO (V.O.)

Riding the elevator to a familiar destination,

She has no idea who you are, so you can talk to her freely. Is that why you risk coming here? No friends. No family. Lonely? Or are you falling in love with her?



5A3. EXT. CORRIDOR B – NIGHT. 1980. (CONTINUOUS)

SERGIO (V.O.)

Exiting the elevator,

Stupid reasons. I don't know which is worse.

About to round the corner, he suddenly stops, then looks again.

5A4. EXT. CORRIDOR A – NIGHT. 1980. (CONTINUOUS)

ELENA

Approaching JIMMY'S door,

I've never seen him before he said he was your friend.

JIMMY

Becomes visible as he leans on his doorstep,

He's a friend of mine.

ELENA

He came up in the elevator. Asked for a pen. Said he owed you some money.



5A5. EXT. CORRIDOR B – NIGHT. 1980. (CONTINUOUS)

SERGIO hurries back into the elevator.

JIMMY (off)

He owed me some money. I don't know this guy.

—

6X. INT. JAIL – NIGHT. 1976.

SERGIO and two cell-mates sit in a row on a wooden bench.



6A.

SERGIO (V.O.)

In a revolution, words devour words. After 1959, certain terms took

on new meanings that only a Cuban would understand. 'Quemado.' When you work too much and have a nervous breakdown. 'Enfermedad.' Trendy kids pretending to be cool. 'Sarampionado' for someone who becomes unbearable after reading too much Marx. Twenty years later it's happening again.

SERGIO pulls out his cigarettes,

Someone who talks like a nationalist, but is a communist at heart is a green on the outside, red on the inside—"melón."

The person seated to his left asks for one, as does the one further left. SERGIO obliges,

We take tobacco for granted, so when we have to roll our own, we're smoking 'tupamaros.' And 'gusanos' is anybody who wants to join the 'escoria' in Miami. Was there another revolution nobody told me about?

The man off-screen to his right wants one, too: SERGIO is out of smokes, he crumples the empty package.

[quemado = burnt, enfermedad = sickness, sarampionado = measles, Tupamaros = Uruguayan guerrilla organization named for Tupac Amaru, gusanos = worms, escoria = scum]

Permutation 2 of 15

1B1. VIEWS OF VEDADO.

Vultures flying over Vedado are seen through a circular vignette.

1B2. INT. APARTMENT - DAY.

Responding to a knock, SERGIO turns away from his telescope and walks to the door.

TITLE SUPER:

Another
Problem





2Y. INT. BUS - NIGHT, 1975.

LAURA at the window, SERGIO beside her, other passengers packed all around. SERGIO and LAURA ride in silence. As the bus arrives, LAURA realizes,

LAURA

I forgot my dress.

SERGIO

What?

LAURA

My Balenciaga. The polka dot dress my sister gave me. It was from El Encanto. She'll kill me when she finds out I've left it here.

SERGIO

As the bus noisily starts up,
I'll find it. I'll send it to you.

3B1. INT. BUS - DAWN, 1975.

SERGIO makes his way down the aisle until he finds an empty seat,

SERGIO (V.O.)

This is one of the buses we got from Montréal. A gesture of solidarity from the Canadians? Or just because Fidel and the Prime Minister were such good buddies? I was riding this same bus when that American got on, in the middle of nowhere, lost.



3B2. INT. BUS -- DAY, 1965. (FLASHBACK)

CU: Panning to follow AMERICAN from a low angle.

AMERICAN

Haranguing the driver,

We're way out of the city by now. I was told this bus would stop at the harbour. The port. It's like an aeropuerto but for ships, not of planes. The port!

Turning to the passengers,

Does anybody here speak English? Somebody's gotta speak English. I really need to get to the harbour. C'mon!



3B3. INT. BUS - DAWN, 1975. (CONTINUED)

SERGIO (V.O.)

I'm sure I wasn't the only one there who could speak English. This must be what it was like in the 1950s: Americans blaming us for their mistakes. Now we have Russians. They're quieter and keep to themselves. I can't decide if it's depression or embarrassment.

SERGIO loses consciousness. DISSOLVE TO:



4Y. INT. AIRPORT – DAWN. 1975.

When it is finally her turn, the CUSTOMS OFFICIAL examines LAURA'S papers, and points to her wristwatch, which she surrenders. Through security glass, SERGIO watches. She glances at her husband when she turns to leave.



SERGIO
(inaudible)

*Knocking on the glass partition,
I'll send you that dress!*

The CUSTOMS OFFICIAL is the only one who notices the promise SERGIO will never keep.



5B1. EXT. WATER – NIGHT. 1980.

Highlights of waves are the only evidence that we are looking at a body of water.

[Music: Los Van Van, "Llegue Llegue" (organ solo)]

SERGIO dives into the centre of the frame.



BLACK.

5B2. EXT. MARIEL STREET – NIGHT. 1980.

SERGIO'S wet feet walk along a roughly paved road.

SERGIO, walking, and quite wet, removes his denim shirt, squeezes the water from it, then puts it back on.



6Y1. INT. MARIEL HOTEL ROOM – NIGHT. 1980.



6B. ["Llegue Llegue" (chorus) continues]

A television sits on a rattan table. On screen, shots of fishing boats overloaded with passengers are followed by aerial views of a massive crowd.

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER

... continue to make the dangerous journey in rough seas. It is uncertain whether the US Coast Guard flotilla, now blockading the Straits, is there to help the gusanos or not. [Pause.] More than a million people gathered at Plaza de la Revolucion today for the largest May Day demonstration in our history . . .

FIDEL CASTRO

No los deseamos, no los necesitamos!

Interrupted by a cheering crowd.



As the door to the room opens, a rectangle of light falls on the chest of drawers, with SERGIO'S silhouette. He approaches the cabinet and immediately begins searching for a change of clothes. Finding what he needs, he exits.



6Y2. EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT. 1980.

SERGIO, among other rural passengers, climbs onto the truck. It starts moving. He steadies himself, acknowledging the man beside him.

Permutation 3 of 5

1C. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT - DAY. 1976.

SERGIO

Walks toward his ringing telephone. He places the receiver next to his ear. Oigo.

SERGIO realizes that he is listening to someone else's conversation, he relishes this for a moment, then feels guilty and hangs up the phone.

TITLE SUPER:

A Familiar
Situation



22. EXT. PABLO'S CAR – NIGHT. 1975.

SERGIO and PABLO are heading east on the Malecón in a 1957 Cadillac Eldorado.

PABLO

Looks at SERGIO,

Go ahead.

SERGIO tears five twenty-peso notes in two,

That wasn't so hard was it?

Grabbing his half and stuffing it in his pocket,

Remember what I told you. [Pause.] When I get there, the first thing I'm doing is having a steak with tomatoes. And a nice bottle of French wine.

SERGIO

I thought you hated wine?

PABLO

Sergio, you are a shithead, you know that? But I've decided that the car is yours. My uncle gave it to me when he left, now I'm giving it to you. My cousin thinks it's his, but fuck him. Alfonso disowned him. It's yours. Until I come back.

SERGIO smiles lightly and nods in agreement.

3C1. INT. ELEVATOR – DAY. 1980.

SERGIO and ELENA wait for the elevator. They both enter and ELENA waits for SERGIO to select a destination. He chooses the top floor, and she looks at him curiously.

3C2. EXT. CORRIDOR B – DAY. 1980. (CONTINUOUS)

ELENA exits the elevator and SERGIO follows. Rounding the corner SERGIO realizes that they have the same destination, his old apartment.

3C3. EXT. CORRIDOR A – DAY. 1980. (CONTINUOUS)

SERGIO knocks on the nearest door, hoping no one is home.



ELENA

*Having unlocked and opened her door,
There's nobody home.
SERGIO is unprepared for conversation,
Jimmy's working late.*

SERGIO

*Before she disappears,
Companera! Can I borrow a pen? I should leave a note.*

ELENA looks him up and down. SERGIO makes a helpless gesture. With a quick motion of her head, ELENA invites him inside.

—

4Z2. EXT. STREET – NIGHT. 1975.

SERGIO finishes parking the car, steps out and stretches.

SERGIO (V.O.)

*Walking around the automobile,
It's far too much trouble. The repairs. The permits. [Scoffs.] The police.*

*SERGIO unlocks the trunk and tosses the keys inside,
My best friend Pablo.*

4Z3. INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT – DAY. 1975. (FLASHBACK)

PABLO is seated on the sofa, wisecracking. LAURA, wearing her polka dot dress, sits close to him and is laughing.

4Z4. EXT. STREET – NIGHT. 1975. (CONTINUED)

SERGIO (V.O.)

*They deserve each other.
He walks away.*

—

5C1. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT – NIGHT. 1976. (FLASHBACK)

Beginning at the large sofa, the camera pans counter-clockwise around the apartment until it reaches the sand garden.



5C2. INT. ELENA'S APARTMENT - DAY. 1980.

[MS: DISSOLVE TO: continuous panning shot of a single bed where the sand garden had been: a birdcage replaces the telescope.]

BLACK.

5C3. INT. ELENA'S APARTMENT - DAY. 1980. (CONTINUED)

ELENA

There's a pen on the table in the corner.

Removing her coat; already on her way to the kitchen,

There's coffee. Want some?

SERGIO

Si, gracias.

He turns to the desk, finds the pen, then looks up to see a postcard of the New York skyline pinned to the divider.

5C4. INT. LAURA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT. 1975. (FLASHBACK)

SERGIO holds a fresh version of the postcard from 5C2 above his tape recorder. He turns it over revealing the inscription.

LAURA (off)

You ought to leave before it's too late.

SERGIO (V.O.)

Those words are the only thing about her I remember exactly.

5C5. INT. ELENA'S APARTMENT - DAY. 1980. (CONTINUED)

SERGIO hears ELENA return, and is surprised by what he sees.

ELENA

Holding a tray with coffee and cups, wearing LAURA'S polka dot dress,

You wanted coffee, didn't you?

SERGIO

Still dumbfounded,

Sorry. You have beautiful knees.

ELENA

Puts the tray down abruptly,

You're crazy.





SERGIO

Smiles,
I am crazy.

ELENA

Smiles.

—

6Z. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT - DAY, 1975.

The tape machine plays.

6C.

SERGIO

What are you doing?

LAURA

Can't you see?

SERGIO

I mean what are you reading?

LAURA

Something trivial. Something decadent. [Pause.] What?

SERGIO

Me?

LAURA

You're hovering around. What do you want?

SERGIO

I just thought we'd talk. You're a beautiful woman with a beautiful mind.

LAURA

You've never been interested in what I think. I never know if you're making fun of me or not.

SERGIO

A little bit of both Mami.

LAURA

I can't stand it any more! I want to go. This place makes me sick.
The food, the heat, the self-righteous peasants in uniforms.

SERGIO

Do you know everything you just said has been recorded, word for word?

LAURA

What?

SERGIO

It'll be fun. We can listen to it later.

LAURA

You mean you and Pablo are going to laugh about it. You're an asshole. Give me that!

SERGIO

What are you doing?

LAURA

Let go of me! I can't stand being treated like your little experiment.
Keep the apartment. That's what you want. Let me go! I'm leaving.

SERGIO

Stop, you'll break it.

SERGIO'S finger depresses "Rewind," then "Stop."

Permutation 4 of 15

1D. INT. ELEVATOR - DAY. 1976.

SERGIO is in the elevator as the door opens. The CDR WOMAN enters, selects a floor, then turns, grinning up at SERGIO. SERGIO attempts a weak smile. The CDR WOMAN exits when the doors open. The camera tilts up to SERGIO, who rolls his eyes contemptuously.

TITLE SUPER:

A Tropical
Adventure





2X1. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT – DAY, 1976. (CONTINUED FROM 1B2)

A knock on the door.

SERGIO walks toward the door of his apartment and is revealed in profile as he peeps through the peephole.



2X2. INT. CORRIDOR A – DAY, 1976.

SERGIO'S POV: CDR WOMAN seen through the peephole.

2X3. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT – DAY, 1976. (CONTINUED)

SERGIO stands upright, irritated. He unlocks and opens the door to reveal TWO POLICE OFFICERS in the hallway, both grim.

FIRST OFFICER

You're the friend of Valdés, Pablo Valdés.

SERGIO (off)

Of course.

SECOND OFFICER

Please accompany us to the station.



3D. EXT. LA RAMPA – DAY, 1980.

Portraits of pedestrians on La Rampa.

SERGIO (V.O.)

"Vamos bajar a La Rampa." For me, this was the centre of the city. If Havana was "the Paris of the Caribbean," like tourists used to say, La Rampa was the Left Bank. But then, they used to call Detroit, "Paris of the Midwest," and look at it now. The apartments at Retiro Médico used to be full of artists and intellectuals: Mayito, Desnoes, Cabrera Infante. Just up the street, there used to be weekly fashion shows above Ayuso's workshop.



Things have changed. You can tell just by looking at these people that things didn't quite turn out the way they'd planned. This man dreams of owning his own business. That one dreams of publishing a book. This girl thinks she'll be a ballerina, but doesn't realize that

there are no blacks in the Joffrey. Luckily, Cubans can't endure suffering too long without laughing.

115

4X. INT. POLICE STATION - DAY, 1976.

Typing,
Name?

OFFICER

Carmona.

SERGIO

Second name?

OFFICER

Bendoiro.

SERGIO

First name?

OFFICER

Sergio.

SERGIO

Age?

OFFICER

38 years old.

SERGIO

Profession?

OFFICER

Architect.

SERGIO

Permanent address?

OFFICER

Focsa, Apartment 25K.

SERGIO

Looks up at SERGIO.

OFFICER



SERGIO
M Street between 17 and 19...

OFFICER
*Focsa Building,
Types the words.*

OFFICER
*Pulls a sheet of paper from the typewriter and hands it to SERGIO,
"Receipt of Contraband per Article 103 of the Penal Code." Do you
understand the charges the Revolution has made against you? It's
not an admission of guilt.*

5D. INT. JAIL - DAY. 1976. (CONTINUED FROM 6X)

TWO INMATES listen as SERGIO makes an important point.



SERGIO (V.O.)

*My new comrades. They're criminals. Some are insane, which
amounts to the same thing, since they aren't responsible for their
actions. But, no matter how crazy they are, they have seen too
much to ever be truly innocent. My real biography, on the other
hand, was far too boring. I tried to keep them at bay by making them
think I was from Ministerio del Interior.*



SERGIO

Wrapping up his explanation,

*You can use anything as long as it's random. If you tear a bank note
in half, you and your associate get unique serial numbers you can
use to communicate in complete confidence. It's great crypto.*

INMATE

Drags on his cigarette, letting this sink in,

*But you need more numbers than that? Don't you? I mean, they'll
figure it out. If you keep on repeating the same serial number, isn't it
going to create an obvious pattern?*



SERGIO

Suddenly realizes that this is true.

6X. INT. JAIL - NIGHT. 1976.

6D. ["Liegue, Liegue" reprise (flute solo)]

SERGIO pulls out his cigarettes. The person seated to his left asks for one, as does the one further left. SERGIO obliges. The man off-screen to his right wants one too. SERGIO is out of smokes, he crumples the empty package.

Permutation 5 of 15

1E. EXT. NIGHT. 1980. Mariel.

Follow SERGIO as he walks silently up a dark tree-lined avenue, lost in thoughts we cannot hear.

SERGIO

Turns to see an OLD MAN sitting in the shadow of a tree. He stares at SERGIO, then turns away. Embarrassed, SERGIO, continues on up the street.

TITLE SUPER:

A Forgotten
Problem

2Y. INT. BUS – NIGHT. 1975.

LAURA at the window, SERGIO beside her, other passengers packed all around. SERGIO and LAURA ride in silence. As the bus arrives LAURA realizes,

LAURA

I forgot my dress.

SERGIO

What?

LAURA

My Balenciaga. The polka dot dress my sister gave me. It was from El Encanto. She'll kill me when she finds out I've left it here.

SERGIO

As the bus noisily starts up,
I'll find it. I'll send it to you.





3E1. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT – DAY. 1976.

SERGIO reaches deep into his desk drawer. He retrieves a small bundle of letters. He pulls out a photograph, a view of the New York skyline that resembles LAURA'S postcard in 5C3, or vice versa.

SERGIO (V.O.)

Hanna. Hanna was Russian with blonde hair, more mature, more of a woman than other girls here.



3E2. EXT. CIUDAD LIBERTAD – DAY. 1960. (FLASHBACK)

SERGIO waits for HANNA at the gates. They embrace and walk away together.

SERGIO (V.O.)

I used to pick her up every day after school. I would walk her home and we would always stop at a park to talk about the future.



3E3. INT. SERGIO'S APARTMENT – DAY. 1976. (CONTINUED)

SERGIO (V.O.)

Pulls out a photograph,

We would move to New York; she would be an actress, I would be an architect. Every memory is a mixture of honey and shit. My actions and my failures; my ambition and my laziness.

Puts the picture away,

I saw her to the airport. She was clearly upset, but I perversely refused her an embrace on the tarmac. She would write to ask when I was coming. I told her that I couldn't arrive with empty pockets. Eventually she stopped answering my letters. I wish I could remember it all better.



4Y. INT. AIRPORT – DAWN. 1975.

When it is finally her turn, the CUSTOMS OFFICIAL examines LAURA'S papers, and points to her wristwatch, which she surrenders. Through security glass, SERGIO watches. She glances at her husband when she turns to leave.

SERGIO

(inaudible)

Knocking on the glass partition,

I'll send you that dress!



The CUSTOMS OFFICIAL is the only one who notices the promise SERGIO will never keep.

5E. INT. BAR – NIGHT. 1980.

SERGIO (V.O.)

Sitting at a table, philosophizing over white rum,

In an underdeveloped country there is no continuity, everything is forgotten. We waste our talents adapting to every new situation. Even those assholes in Miami, worms like Pablo, blindly obey new masters.

It's colonial mentality: drop projects half finished, fail to think things through to their conclusion. But that's what civilization is: knowing how to relate things and not forgetting anything . . .

JIMMY

Enters the bar and recognizes SERGIO,

I know you. You're the friend of Pablo. Pablo Valdés.

SERGIO (V.O.)

That's why civilization is impossible here. We live too much in the present.

JIMMY

Angered at being ignored,

Look at me. [Pause.] Where is it? You know what I'm talking about. It's mine. The bastard stole it and I want it back.

SERGIO

Looks,

Look I don't know this Pablo. You've got the wrong guy.

JIMMY

Don't you know who I am?

SERGIO

Standing,

All the assholes I know left for Miami years ago.

JIMMY

Incredulous, turns as if to leave, then reaches into his pocket and pulls out a knife.

He stabs SERGIO in the stomach and cradles him to the floor, whispering,

Maybe that will refresh your memory. And teach you some manners next time we meet.



JIMMY exits, leaving SERGIO injured on the floor. DISSOLVE TO:

6Y1. INT. MARIEL HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT, 1980.

A television sits on a rattan table. On screen, shots of fishing boats overloaded with passengers are followed by aerial views of a massive crowd.

6E.

SERGIO

I sleep too much. I'm hung-over from sleep.

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... continue to make the dangerous journey in rough seas. It is uncertain whether the US Coast Guard flotilla, now blockading the Straits, is there to help the gusanos or not.

Outside this morning, I sat fascinated by the unbearable slowness of a cop checking somebody's papers. When he noticed, I turned away. What's the matter with me? I can't look people in the eye anymore.

More than a million people gathered at Plaza de la Revolucion today for the largest May Day demonstration in our history . . .

As the door to the room opens, a rectangle of light falls on the chest of drawers, with SERGIO'S silhouette.

Pablo always used to say: To succeed you only have to flatter people's expectations and tell them what they think they already know. The Revolution is revenge against idiots like Pablo. Was I ever like him, before? It's possible.

FIDEL CASTRO (V.O.)

No los deseamos, no los necesitamos!

Interrupted by a cheering crowd.

SERGIO approaches the cabinet and immediately begins searching for a change of clothes. Finding what he needs, he exits.

They're all gone now. Him, Laura, everyone who's purpose in life was to bug me and give me a hard time. Up there, Laura will have to get a job until she can find someone to look after her. Pablo will suddenly discover that he's a Spick.



6Y2. EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT. 1980.

SERGIO, among other rural passengers, climbs onto the truck. It starts moving,

*I know exactly what's happening around me, but I can't do anything
about it. Everything has changed, even my daydreams.*

SERGIO steadies himself, acknowledging the man beside him.



G

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AACM



introduction

AN AACM BOOK: ORIGINS, ANTECEDENTS, OBJECTIVES, METHODS

Around the fall of 1996, I had been promoted to full professor in the department of music at the University of California, San Diego. I was sitting in the office of my colleague, F. Richard Moore, who probably doesn't realize his role in the creation of this book. Dick had just finished his landmark book, *Elements of Computer Music*,¹ and was busy extending cmusic, his set of software tools for musical experimentation. Dick saw cmusic as an example of a research project blending creativity and science, and pointed out to me that this was the very sort of project that might not receive support outside of the academic environment, even if the underlying ideas were arguably fundamental to the field of music technology. That was an argument I understood, because as an itinerant artist, I had tried to write on planes and trains, in the manner that one imagined Duke Ellington doing during the writing of his memoir, *Music Is My Mistress*. Now, I began to wonder about the kinds of projects I could initiate that would best utilize the strengths of the academic infrastructure in ways that complemented or exceeded my already established career as an itinerant artist. I began to think seriously about writing a biography of Muhal Richard Abrams.

As it happened, that year, 1996, Wadada Leo Smith had invited Muhal for a residency and concert in his program in African American improvisational music at the California Institute of the Arts. Muhal

xxiii

had invited me to participate in the concert, and so I drove up to Valencia from San Diego with the intention of sounding him out about the project. We went on a long walking excursion in the desert warmth, ostensibly searching for an espresso bar, although Muhal doesn't drink coffee. When I broached my idea, he quickly shook his head—but then said that he would rather be part of a book project on the history of the AACM. That possibility had also crossed my mind, of course, and it seemed completely appropriate, since so many of our dreams as members of the collective had focused on creating a book about that history.

In 1981, Joseph Jarman and Leo Smith interviewed each other with a view toward constructing a general history of the AACM.² The project was never completed. In the end, realizing such a work requires considerable infrastructure, by which I mean a network of people who are willing to engage the work—read it, comment on it, publish it, distribute it, and provide the time and funds for the kinds of ethnographic and historical research that the life of an itinerant artist makes difficult, even given the amazing achievements of the early twentieth-century African American historians that the late Jacob Carruthers called “the old scrappers,” including J. A. Rogers and John G. Jackson, among others.

I had already begun to realize that the AACM membership would never trust an outsider to construct its history. As AACM cofounder Jodie Christian told me in 1998, "Muh'al said that it should be somebody in the AACM, and pretty soon, somebody will write a book; this was four or five years ago. One time I thought he would write one, but he ain't got time to write no book."³ So Muh'al and I began talking about what the book could be, and I came away from the project with a determination to begin writing. At the behest of Samuel Floyd, then the dynamic director of the Center for Black Music Research, I had just completed my first published article for *Black Music Research Journal*, and was ready to proceed with a new project. During a visit to the Midwest in December 1997, I began interviewing musicians, starting (naturally) with Muh'al. It quickly became evident that our conversations would range far beyond the biographical orientation that one might expect. Naturally, Muh'al was vitally concerned with how the organization would be represented in the narrative.

If it's going to be a musicology thing, or a thing that includes the AACM and talks about all this other stuff, I'm not going to participate. I'll just cut right out right now. We've waited too long to put out a document. I don't want to be part of that. . . . I didn't spend all these years to be put in

a situation that didn't have nothing to do with what I did. This book gives an opportunity to do what the musicians say happened.⁴

It became clear, however, that a book that did justice to the work of the AACM would have to move beyond a project of vindication, and would have to include more than just the voices of musicians. My working method necessarily juxtaposed oral histories of AACM members with written accounts of the period, a process that combines the ethnographic with the archival. I performed more than ninety-two interviews with members and supporters, ranging anywhere from two to six hours in duration, and for the older members, two or three such interviews were sometimes necessary. These interviews provided me with important insights, reminded me of things I had forgotten, and destabilized comfortable assumptions I had made. In many, perhaps most, cases, the remembrances I recorded of Chicago, New York, Paris, and other geographical/historical locations were powerfully corroborative of the written histories of these same places and eras. As a complex, multigenre, intergenerational network of people, places, and musical and cultural references began to emerge in my notes, I saw a responsibility to be inclusive, rather than to concentrate on those AACM members with more prominent public profiles. Even so, certain members have achieved more notoriety than others, and I felt that this would naturally come out in the course of the work. In any event, I do regret not being able to interview everyone I would have liked to.

The worldwide impact of the AACM has been amply documented in many countries—in print, on recordings, and in popular and specialty magazines, academic treatises, and books. As a scholar, it would be irresponsible of me to simply ignore this level of paper trail, or to dismiss these additional narratives out of hand. Thus, the book features a very conscious effort to problematize the “creator vs. critic” binary that both inflects and infects critical work in jazz, while at the same time providing unique and personal insights that only orature can provide.

“I was glad that somebody did come on the scene that was in the AACM and knew some of our members and had a little idea about the group itself,” Jodie Christian observed in our 1998 interview. “Being in the organization, you had a chance to see some things yourself. You could make those kinds of judgments from that period of time. You can do that because you were there. It wouldn't be something that you surmised, but something that actually happened, and when you say it, it's authentic.” As a scholar, however, I want to handle the idea of “authenticity” with extreme care. In

fact, I was not there when the AACM began, though I am always flattered by those of my forebears who, when memories fail, somehow place me at the scene. My construction of the AACM is but one of many possible versions, and my hope is that other scholars will take up aspects of the AACM's work for which a more detailed discussion eluded the scope of this already rather long book.

Truth be told, however, the "real" story, if there is one, will not be captured in a set of recordings or an archive of texts. Here, I take my cue from an unnamed AACM musician's answer to a query from writer Whitney Balliett about "the" AACM sound: "If you take all the sounds of all the A.A.C.M. musicians and put them together, that's the A.A.C.M. sound, but I don't think anyone's heard that yet."⁵ Nonetheless, what I am hoping for is that a useful story might be realized out of the many voices heard in this book, the maelstrom of heteroglossia in which we nervously tread water.

Autobiography—factual, fictional, and virtually every variation thereof—has constituted a crucially important African American literary form, both in the scholarly literature, such as Charles Davis and Henry Louis Gates's classic work, *The Slave's Narrative*, and in popular works, from James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* to the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Alex Haley's *Roots*, and the Delany Sisters' *Having Our Say*.⁶ The insistence on autobiography, as Jon Michael Spencer maintains in his book on Harlem Renaissance composers, *The New Negroes and Their Music*, became a weapon in the battle over the historicity of the African diaspora, where issues of credit and vindication were of prime importance.⁷ In the 1960s, both people of letters and people in the street were vitally invested in this struggle for history.

It should therefore be not surprising that the historiography of jazz is similarly dominated by autobiography, most often in the form of transcribed and published interviews, as well as the frequent "as told to" ghost-written efforts. For instance, as historian Burton Peretti has noted, the interviewers for the National Endowment for the Arts Oral History projects of the 1970s were largely drawn from the ranks of "veteran jazz writers." Certainly, historians owe a debt to these writers, who pursued their enthusiasms for their subjects in the face of considerable disapprobation concerning the utility of documenting black music. Nonetheless, for Peretti, "the interviewers tend not to ask the questions that would be of most interest to scholars. They are strong on straight biography, who played with whom,

discographies—and anecdotes, anecdotes, and more anecdotes. They tend to avoid addressing issues of intellectual development, social context, racial conditions, or the subjects' views of culture, history and philosophy."⁸

The effect of these serious omissions is to decontextualize the music, to frame it as outside the purview of both general social history and the history of music. This experience indicated the need for viable alternatives to the journalistic paradigm that, according to Peretti, still dominates the historiographical process regarding black music. My musician colleagues had been looking for these alternatives for many years. In pianist Jodie Christian's experience, "There were a lot of hits and misses with people trying to figure out in their minds what this was about and what that was about. Even though they were interviewing people, they would come up with their own idea about what the AACM was about." On one view, this was certainly understandable; in my experience, the people who were trying to figure out what the AACM was about included, most crucially, AACM people themselves. Thus, my collegial interview/conversations seemed automatically to turn to the very issues that Peretti found lacking in many of the NEA interviews: intellectual development, issues of race, class, and gender, musical form and aesthetics, and the interpretation of history. I began to notice a distinct lack of funny stories and anecdotes, even from people such as the late Lester Bowie, whom we all knew to be given to pointedly ironic jocularity. I imagine that for some readers, these preoccupations could seem unnecessarily dour at times in comparison with other kinds of musicianly texts that rely in large measure on interviews.

Perhaps this serious mien was an inevitable artifact of an interview process that often felt like a kind of collaborative mode of writing history, after the fashion that James Clifford has proposed,⁹ even if the adoption of this collaborative ethos seemed to develop spontaneously, rather than as a conscious and studied attempt to address the issues Clifford identified regarding the authority of the interviewer. People felt free to explicitly express their love for the AACM, an organization that in many cases had given them creative birth and nurturing. Interviews served as a form of generational reconnection for some of my subjects, who frequently asked about what had been happening over the years to the people with whom they had been so intensely involved, and about where the organization was headed now. In this way, the book became an autobiography indeed—the autobiography of a collective, a history of an organization that developed into an ongoing social and aesthetic movement. Perhaps at least part of that movement's dynamism was derived from the clarity with which its members realized

that the project could not really be completed; its unfinished nature became its crucial strength.

Historical, autobiographical, and ethnographic processes necessarily cast the historian-ethnographer in the role of intermediary between the subject and the public. The construction of this role during the process of engaging the oral narrative is obviously of prime importance, since the process involves not only transcription, but also interpretation and editorial choices. To pretend that race and gender do not mediate these proceedings is needlessly naïve; at the same time, to claim special advantages based solely on these factors is equally untenable. Thus, a signal factor in the historicization of black music concerns the fact that in the vast majority of cases prior to the late 1960s, as Amiri Baraka pointed out in an important essay from 1963, "Jazz and the White Critic," those doing interviews with black jazz musicians were most often white, male, and of a different class background than the person being interviewed.¹⁰

In the 1970s, this began to change. For me, and for many musicians, the watershed work of this generation was the drummer Arthur Taylor's book of interviews with his musical colleagues, *Notes and Tones*.¹¹ Taylor's initially self-published book demonstrated forcefully that the questions that Burton Peretti felt were of most interest to scholars were also of great interest to the important musicians of the period, such as Betty Carter, Max Roach, Miles Davis, Ornette Coleman, and many others. While Peretti's critique of oral histories does not directly connect the failure of scholars to review these seemingly fairly obvious areas of interest to institutionalized systems of ethnic and class domination, articulated as a form of historical denial, to Taylor and to many of his subjects, this was precisely what was at stake. Thus, Taylor's book functioned as perhaps the sharpest musician-centered critique then available of the racialization of media access, which both for Taylor and his subjects, amounted to a form of censorship. In a self-conscious act of intervention, Taylor used his insider status as a canonically important drummer to allow his subjects wide latitude to critique the discourses and economic and social conditions surrounding their métier, including possible distinctions between being interviewed by white critics and by black colleagues.

Even as so much African American literature, from the slave narratives forward, favored the autobiographical in some way, it was becoming clear to me that what was needed was not only a compendium of personal reminiscences and observations, but also a framing of the AACM in dialogue with

the history of music and the history of ideas. In fact, AACM members who published critical work in the 1970s and 1980s tended to take this approach. Leo Smith's writings, notably his 1973 *Notes (8 pieces) source a new world music: creative music*, and his 1974 "(M1) American Music,"¹² were closely followed by Anthony Braxton's massive three-volume *Tri-Axium Writings*, a work that, while clearly in dialogue with John Cage's 1961 manifesto *Silence*, Amiri Baraka's 1963 *Blues People*, and Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1963 *Texte zur Musik*, extends considerably beyond each of these texts, both in length and in range of inquiry. For me, the works of these AACM members constituted sources of inspiration and instruction for my own research, as did Derek Bailey's influential book, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*.¹³

With these texts as antecedents, I felt that my goals could be better accomplished by deploying methodologies associated with academic historical inquiry, rather than with journalistic models. Of course, this issue is connected with the writerly voice of the book. Early on, several good friends and colleagues were concerned that the book avoid "academese," or the arcane jargon that these well-meaning people associated with scholarly books. These associates felt that using more accessible language would produce a friendly and nonthreatening introduction to the AACM and its work that would appeal to a wide audience. The jazz writer Stanley Dance was evidently a devotee of this approach, judging from his critique of two jazz studies anthologies published in the 1990s by film scholar Krin Gabbard, *Representing Jazz* and *Jazz among the Discourses*:

There is original thought here, but the reader is immediately confronted by the language academics apparently use to communicate with one another. Sometimes it reads like a translation from the German, at others that they are merely trying to impress or indulging in a verbal cutting contest. Here are a few of the words you should be prepared to encounter: hermeneutics, commodified, contextualizing, conceptualize, hyperanimacy, taxonomic, metacritical, rhizome, perspectivizing, nomadology, indexical, polysemy, auratic, reification, metonymic, synecdoche, biodegradability, interstitial, valorize, diegetic, allegoresis, grammatology, oracy, centripetality, and esemplastic.¹⁴

Dance felt that these kinds of words "obviously impose considerable restraint on the transfer of knowledge."¹⁵ Girding against what he saw (correctly) as an attack on his *métier*, the writer grumbled that "the academics

tend to be critical and rather patronizing about the accepted journalistic standards of jazz writing, which, to judge from their back notes, they have investigated haphazardly." Finally, Dance ventured that instead of drawing from writers such as Gunther Schuller, "Gabbard's people seem more attached to Theodor Adorno and Roland Barthes, of whom the average unscholarly jazz fan has probably never heard." For me, however, the interdisciplinary approaches to black music and improvisation in the Gabbard texts—the work of Nathaniel Mackey, Robert Walser, Lorenzo Turner, John Corbett, and Scott DeVeaux, among others (as well as the references to Adorno and Barthes) were inspiring, announcing a new generation of writers on improvised music who were, first, declining to conflate oversimplification with accessibility; second, asserting common cause with intellectuals in other fields concerning the ways in which music could announce social and cultural change; and finally, seeking liberation from the Sisyphean repetition of ersatz populist prolegomena that seemed endemic to the field.

Another important book that came out around this time was Ronald Radano's *New Musical Figurations*, an account of the career of Anthony Braxton that included a chapter on the AACM that was much closer to my own experience than anything I had read before, and which introduced a new character to the heretofore white-coded historiography of American experimentalism: the "black experimentalist."¹⁶ These texts helped me to realize that in looking for ways to theorize the music I had been trying for so many years to compose, improvise, and perform, I needed to involve myself with the tools, methods, and discourses that had been developed in a range of fields of inquiry. Doing so would not only allow readers less invested in music but familiar with those discourses and debates to find commonalities with the histories surrounding new music, but could also provide musically oriented readers unfamiliar with those discourses with an opportunity to engage them on familiar ground. As I began to publish, I discovered a rapidly developing, questing new literature, a group of wonderful new colleagues, an exciting crop of graduate students, and an international reading public, including many musicians, who were eager for a new kind of writing about music that did not patronize the reader or assume his or her ignorance of the matters under review. Perhaps most gratifying of all, in these new texts, complex ideas were worked out at sufficient length and in detail in a manner that seemed compatible with my experience as an artist.

Thus, as I told an interviewer/friend in 2002 regarding the progress of this book, "I've made some concessions to narrativity. Someone else can

write the Cliffs Notes later." Indeed, in the nine years since I began this project, a new generation of progressive musicians has come out of Chicago, whom I can mention only in passing, such as cellist Tomeka Reid, guitarist Jeff Parker, trombonist Steve Berry, and rapper Khari B; trumpeters Robert Griffin and Corey Wilkes; singers Dee Alexander and Taalib'Din Ziyad; drummers Chad Taylor, Mike Reed, and Vincent Davis; saxophonists Matana Roberts, Aaron Getsug, and David Boykin; bassists Darius Savage, Josh Abrams, Cecile Savage, and Harrison Bankhead; and many others. Perhaps one or more of those people will create a sequel, after one fashion or another. For now, one of the aims of this book is to help those younger artists in dealing with the richness of the legacy that they carry, as well as in understanding what has been achieved, what was shown to be possible, and what remains to be realized.

The stakes are quite high in this endeavor, as I realized when a friend alerted me to a letter in the British magazine *Wire* from the African American experimental musician Morgan Craft, living in Italy at this writing. I found his remarks both poignant and terribly telling:

So here we are in the year 2005 and I actually agree to sit down and write about being black, American and experimental in music. The genesis springs from looking at a magazine devoted to challenging, progressive musics from around the world, and seeing their top 50 list for last year (*The Wire* 251) and the only black Americans were rappers (three) and old jazz era men (one living, one dead). So I bring up this observation about the lack of a black American presence on the avant garde scene under the age of 50 just to see if maybe I'm not paying attention. I'm constantly fed this steady stream of future thinking folks from Germany, Japan, UK, Norway, etc, but when it comes to America all I hear about is the genius that is free folk or if it's black it must be hip-hop, jazz, or long dead. How many more articles on Albert Ayler do we really need?¹⁷

In fact, black artists on both sides of the age-fifty divide shared Craft's dilemma, and the analysis of this issue is central to this book. Literary critic Fred Moten has expressed this issue so well and so succinctly that I want to preview his remarks here before redeploying them in another chapter:

The idea of a black avant-garde exists, as it were, oxymoronically—as if black, on the one hand, and avant-garde, on the other hand, each depends

for its coherence on the exclusion of the other. Now this is probably an overstatement of the case. Yet it's all but justified by a vast interdisciplinary text representative not only of a problematically positivist conclusion that the avant-garde has been exclusively Euro-American, but of a deeper, perhaps unconscious, formulation of the avant-garde as necessarily not black.¹⁸

Part of my task in this book, as I see it, is to bring to the surface the strategies that have been developed to discursively disconnect African American artists from any notion of experimentalism or the avant-garde. This effort, as Craft seems to have noticed, has now moved into the international arena. If Craft—and Ayler, for that matter—exist simply as oxymorons in an international consensus based on the presumption of pan-European intellectual dominance (a dynamic extending beyond the individual phenotypical to the collective institutional), the histories and analyses that I recount here are meant to shepherd young African American artists such as Craft through the convolutions and contortions that were needed to construct this ethnically cleansed discourse; to encourage younger African American artists to see themselves as being able to claim multiple histories of experimentalism despite the histories of erasure, both willful and unwitting; and to reassure young black artists that if you find yourself written out of history, you can feel free to write yourself back in, to provide an antidote to the nervous pan-European fictionalizations that populate so much scholarship on new music.

The set of issues Craft identifies was also rather well symbolized in a lecture I attended by a scholar who insisted that if academics hoped to have any real effect on the culture, the only music worth studying and writing about was music that "everybody" listened to. As an example, this well-known speaker referred to an even better-known rapper who, despite his misogynistic lyrics, was someone who needed to be "dialogued" with so that scholars could reach young African Americans in particular with more "enlightened" ideas. I was struck by the superficiality of this understanding of the many ways in which music exercises cultural impact. First of all, in my experience, young African Americans are generally particularly pleased to discover the depth and breadth of the cultural artifacts created by their forebears. I write these words directly to those young people who, along with those ancestors, are participating in the development of a most influential panoply of expressive voices, not all of which will be heard by ma-

majoritarian culture. Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that much of the most influential music of the twentieth century—music that will probably never appear on any major U.S. television network—was nonetheless being avidly attended to by the heroes of rock, the early rappers, and techno's originators—or was it purely coincidental that so many early Mothers of Invention fans absorbed Edgard Varese's manifesto, strategically placed on the back of the albums: "The present-day composer refuses to die!"

On that view, it should come as no surprise that the impact of music on culture cannot be meaningfully investigated simply by reviewing Soundscan figures or tuning in to *Dancing with the Stars*. Moreover, advocating the neglect of "unpopular" sonic constituencies in favor of yet another safe valorization of corporate-approved cultural production—this time disguised as "critique" or "dialogue"—seemed to revoke local musical agency, even as the term "local" moves beyond its original, geographically centralized meaning toward a technologically mediated articulation of diaspora. As scholars, we ignore at our peril the networks that carry the flows of new musical ideas, since it's so easy to miss nascent musical phenomena while they are still growing—in other words, the trajectory of hip-hop culture itself, not to mention its heir apparent, reggaeton, a phenomenon that like its predecessor from the Bronx, flows across borders of class, race, geography, and language.

This is not a version of the standard, hopeless rejoinder to those who point out the obvious lack of mass audience for some kinds of new music—that "one day," this music will be vindicated by ending up in everyone's ear. Rather, I wish to point out that naturalizing this kind of vindicationism as a goal may be misdirected. African American culture has produced a vast array of musical practices, which have been taken up to varying degrees by a diverse array of constituencies. Some of these practices, however, remained indigestible to powerful players such as modern media corporations, whose products, in economist Jacques Attali's 1977 formulation, were recursively reinscribed through a powerful "economy of repetition" that drowned out alternative voices. For Attali, "Free jazz created *locally* the conditions for a different model of musical production, a new music. But since this noise was not inscribed on the same level as the messages circulating in the network of repetition, it could not make itself heard."¹⁹

This observation seems to evoke a special need for vigilance on the part of music scholars. As Attali wrote, "Conceptualizing the coming order on the basis of the designation of the fundamental noise should be the central

work of today's researchers. Of the only worthwhile researchers: undisciplined ones. The ones who refuse to answer new questions using only pre-given tools."²⁰ Thus, if we wish to avoid the appearance of positioning not only the musical production of entire cultures, but also our own research, as wholly owned subsidiaries of corporate megamedia, we will be obliged to tune our discourses to the resonant frequencies of insurgent musical forms around the world, to make sure that we can hear Attali's "new noise."

G

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Felix

ES González-Torres



February 14, 1992

Dear Andrea:

The other day I was still thinking about this piece and how it fulfills me now even more. You know, the title: (*Passport*) is very crucial and significant – a white empty blank uninscribed piece of paper, an untouched feeling, an undiscovered experience. A passport to another place, to another life, to a new beginning, to chance; to the chance of meeting that other who makes life a moving force, a chance to alter one's life and future, an empty passport for life: to inscribe it with the best, the most painful, the most banal, the most sublime, and yet to inscribe it with life, love, memories, fears, voids, and unexpected reasons for being. A simple white object against a white wall, waiting.
As always, yours

Felix

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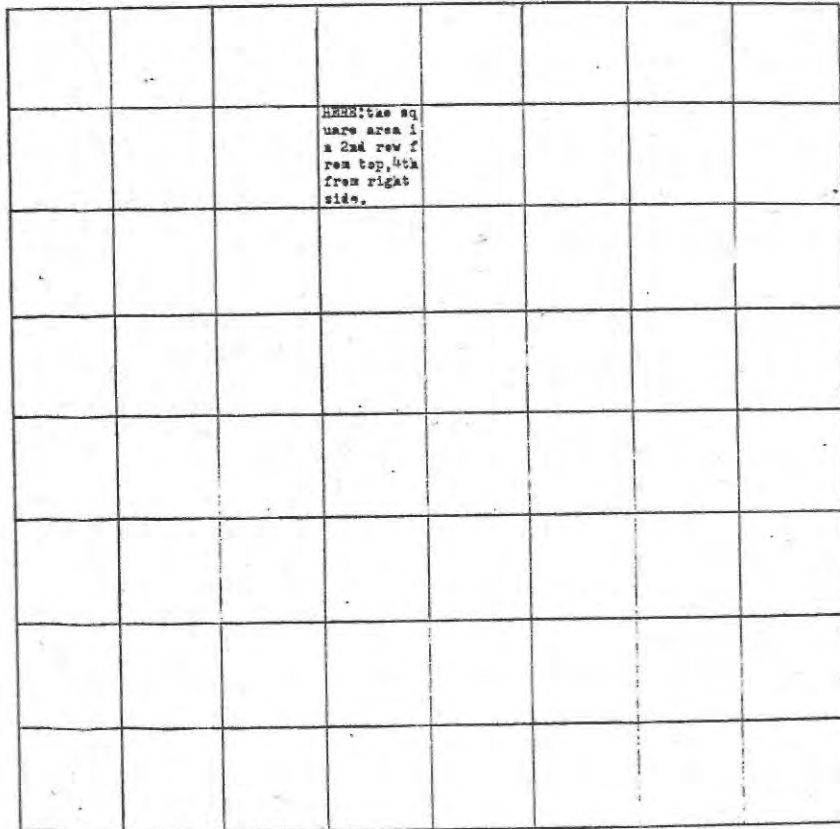
E

Adrian Piper

31. On Conceptual Art

First published in *Flashart*
143 (November–December
1988).

I turned to language (typescript, maps, audio tapes, etc.) in the 1960s because I wanted to explore objects that can refer both to concepts and ideas beyond themselves and their standard functions, as well as to themselves; objects that both refer to abstract ideas that situate those very objects in new conceptual and spatiotemporal matrices, and also draw attention to the spatiotemporal matrices in which they're embedded. Also, with language I could construct works in thought that would have been impossibly expensive and time consuming to construct in physical materials (see "Flying" for more on this). My earliest conceptual pieces were very derivative of Sol LeWitt's work. Sol's sensibility in general has influenced me enormously. I see less connection with other conceptual artists working at that time. For me my early conceptual work succeeded insofar as it illuminated the contrast between abstract atemporality and the indexical, self-referential present. All the *Concrete Space-Time-Infinity Pieces* played with the idea of the indexical pres-



58.
Here and Now
(1968). Courtesy John
Weber Gallery,
collection of the
artist.

ent, and it's continued to be a very central preoccupation of my work. The work failed when the ideas were too conceptually involved and complex. At the level of abstraction, freewheeling conceptual idiosyncrasy works only when it's simple and pure. Becoming a working philosopher has helped me purify and simplify the conceptual presentation of my artwork. The main issues and preoccupations of my work have become increasingly focused on political content, specifically racism, racial stereotyping, and xenophobia. This is one direct consequence of having chosen to work with materials, that is, language and conceptual symbols, that can refer to content beyond themselves: It forces a choice of content, and therefore a recognition of what content is most pressingly important. And the indexical present has provided the major strategy of my work, which is direct, immediate, and confrontational. Racism is not an abstract, distanced issue out there that only affects all those unfortunate other people. Racism begins with you and me, here and now, and consists in our tendency to try to eradicate each other's singularity through stereotyped conceptualization.



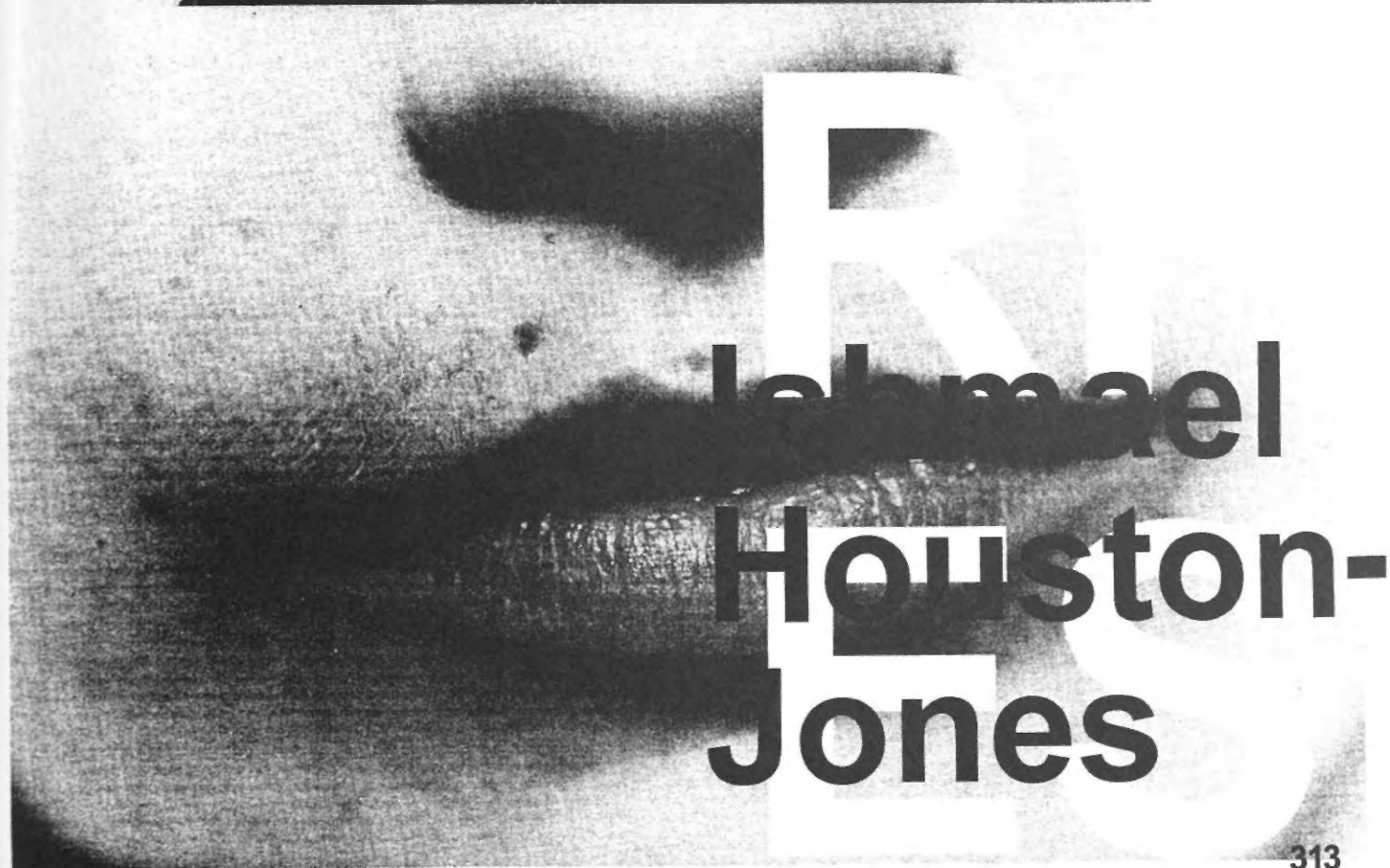
II. Have you ever had a black person visit your place of residence?

B. If yes, how did your reaction manifest itself?

1. averted eyes _____
2. increased heartrate _____
3. tightened neck and/or stomach muscles _____
4. forced allusions to black culture, politics, or society _____
5. adoption of black working class vernacular conversational
idioms _____
6. adoption of streetwise mannerisms _____
7. none of the above _____

Do you feel uncomfortable at the thought of
displaying such questions on your living room wall?

59.
Close to Home II.B.
(1987). Photo by
Ellen Schub/*The*
Village Voice.
Courtesy John Weber
Gallery, collection
Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston.



**Lehman
Houston-
Jones**

Lost and Found, memories of **JOHN BERND** at Saint Mark's Church
by Ishmael Houston-Jones
originally printed in Movement Research Performance Journal

He and I are stalking one another in a pool of light. Occasionally he jumps up onto my shoulder or he tackles and pins me to the floor. The sound score is of him stomping arrhythmically, recorded super crudely with his Walkman. This is in the first version of *Lost and Found*. The sound of his feet stomping will follow on to two more versions of the piece.

He's sitting in the little red chair (the teacher's chair -- "larger than a child's but smaller than a grown-up's.") He's trying to get us four guys, David Alan Harris, Tom Keegan, Erin Matthiessen and me, to sing on key to the accompaniment of his Casio plain song. The syllables sound something like "Hy, hy, hy yah hah. Hy, hy, hy yom."

He sneaks out of his room of New York University Hospital's Co-op Care Unit. He takes a taxi down Second Avenue. Does his solo show in the Parish Hall. Takes a cab back up to the hospital and sneaks back in.

He's screaming in the dressing room because his skin condition makes the itching intolerable. Yvonne Meier, Stephanie Skura, Fred Holland and I stop rehearsing and are silent. This is the final version of *Lost and Found*. He has placed the audience on the dance floor of the sanctuary in two large ellipses facing each other, although much of the dancing will happen behind them.

His is the first memorial service I've ever helped plan. The first I've attended at Saint Mark's. The red chair is there, as is the black touring case he had custom made for it. We've asked Meredith Monk and a gospel singer to provide music. Meredith's lullaby reminds me of his own songs. The gospel singer says that we shouldn't just sit there if the spirit moves us. Most of us clap our hands or tap our feet but Penny Arcade whips off her skirt and begins running laps around the sanctuary

to the confusion of his WASP family. When the service is over I go to find Dan Froote, the tech guy, to ask why the pop song "Be Good to Me" isn't playing as we'd planned. I find Dan sobbing in a corner and I'm struck by the enormity of what we've lost.



GO
LEO
RI

ES

Shiraine
O'Grady



In this photograph taken just after John Fekner's mural was finished, dawn is rising, the street is empty, the dealers and junkies have not yet come out. The mural later became the emblematic image of the East Village art scene, but few connected it to Kenkeleba or to "The Black and White Show."

Funk is dead. Funk is something you can learn in school.
—Morris Day

Adrian Piper
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Have Rhythm, Will Travel

This work is supported by a National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowship, 1982

Just Above Midtown, where David Hammons, Fred Wilson, and others exhibited, received slightly more press than Kenkeleba. But a black friend active in the East Village scene later said that at the time, he hadn't heard of JAM. A month before the show, an announcement came from Adrian Piper in California. It was black with gold print. I asked her to do it in black and white, and she did. This photocopy was destroyed later.

The Black and White Show

LORRAINE O'GRADY

OUTSIDE, EAST SECOND STREET between Avenues B and C in 1983 was Manhattan's biggest open-air drug supermarket. It was always deathly quiet except for the continual cries of vendors hawking competing brands of heroin: "3-5-7, 3-5-7" and "Toilet, Toilet." From the steps of Kenkeleba, looking across at the shooting galleries, you saw unreflecting windows and bricked-up facades, like doorless entrances to Hades. How did the junkies get inside? There was almost no traffic. Behind the two columns flanking Kenkeleba's doorway unexpectedly was a former Polish wedding palace in elegant decay owned by a black bohemian couple, Corrine Jennings and Joe Overstreet.

The gallery, invisible from the street, had five rooms—one, a cavern—plus a corridor, and dared you to use the whole of it. It was perfect for an impossibly ambitious *Mlle Bourgeoise Noire* event, thirty artists, half white, half black, with all the work in black and white. Achromaticity would heighten similarities and flatten differences. And it would be the first exhibit I'd seen in the still virtually segregated art world with enough black presence to create dialogue. A sudden opening meant only three weeks to do it. And of course, no money. But the Whitney Biennial's inclusion of Jean-Michel Basquiat as a mascot was salt in the wound. That, and the daily bravado needed to walk on that block where even the air was strange—dawn felt like twilight here—kept me going. Race would not be on the labels. Would it be on the wall? In what way? I wanted to see for myself.

Keith Haring had audited my Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism course at the School of Visual Arts. I called him first. Then contacted Jean-Michel, who could be reached

only by telegram. Give that boy another chance! But after promising two new canvases for the show, Basquiat pulled out. Obligations to Bruno Bischofberger came first. Walking down East Second Street was like passing stacks of dreams in mounds. I asked muralist John Fekner to connect the inside with the outside. Downtown had a multitude of talents and trends, some being bypassed by the stampede to cash in. The show ended with twenty-eight artists, many still worried that cadmium red cost thirty-two dollars a quart wholesale. Each day as I approached the block, I wondered, "Where is my mural?" On the day before the opening, it was there. John had done it at 4 AM, when even junkies sleep.

Inside the gallery, it pleased me that, even across so many styles, the images gave off language. But who would come? Compared with Kenkeleba, Gracie Mansion and Fun Gallery were like SoHo. The chasm between East Second and East Tenth streets might be too great to bridge. The answer was, friends and East Villagers who understood that people "in the game" leave "citizens" alone. Getting reviewers to the gallery was like beating your head against air. The show received a single paragraph in the *East Village Eye*, nothing more. Looking back, it's clear the artists have had differing careers. A few became household names; more disappeared without a trace. Of some I've wondered, what might their work have become had money and critical attention been paid? There are so many coexisting tendencies in any given time. What is lost when the present reduces the past, ties it up with a ribbon so it can move on to the future? Is that result necessary? Is it real? □

For complete caption information, see page 264.

1983-84, the breakthrough year of Nancy Spero's career, was marked by US interventions in such countries as Grenada and Nicaragua. This sketch would become her 1984 *El Salvador*.

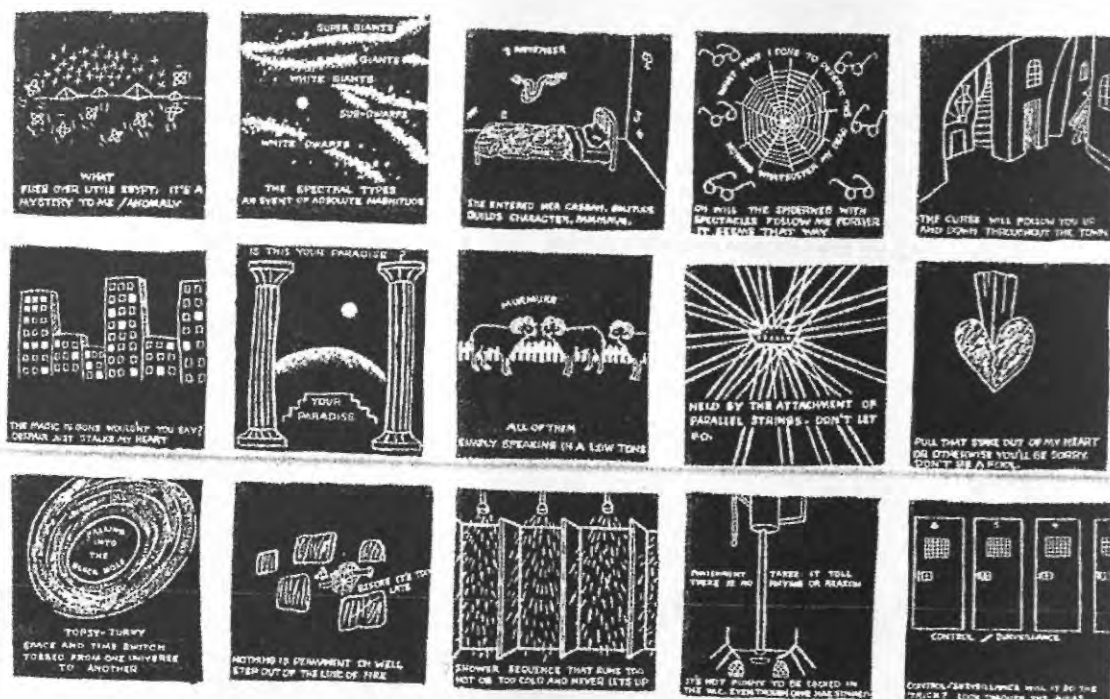


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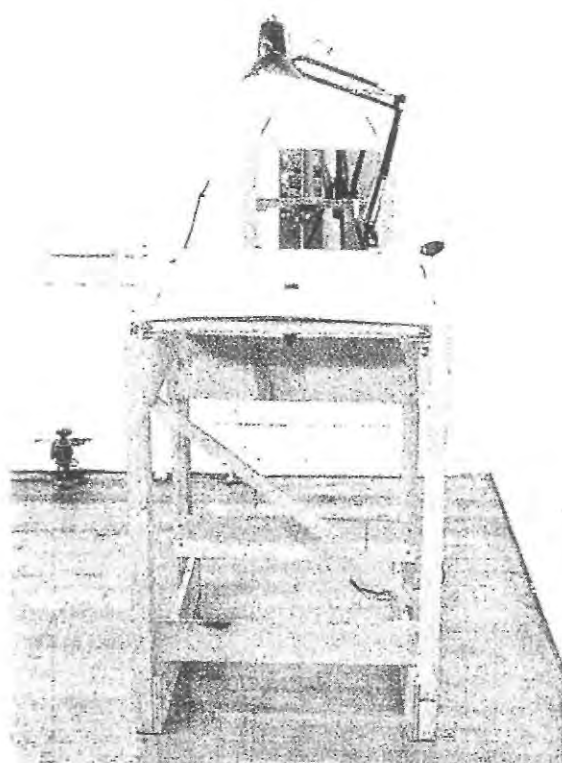


The Card Players, by Gerald Jackson, is a large painting on canvas from the mid-'70s. Gerald had a studio on the Bowery in the '70s and '80s. He was a friend of Keith's. I wonder if the figure in the lower right might have influenced the "radiant child."

Keith Haring's cooperation when called on helped the show come together. He had been my student at SVA and I'd been following his work since the earliest white-on-black graffiti done in the subways.

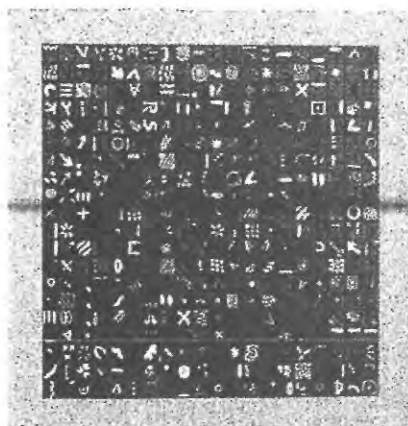
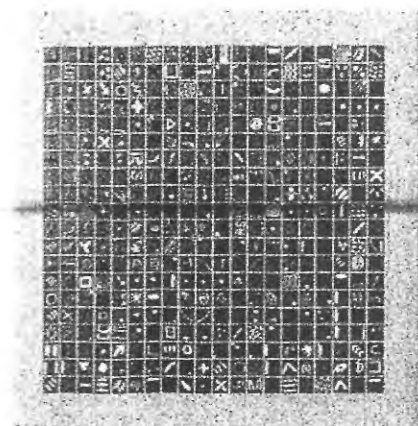
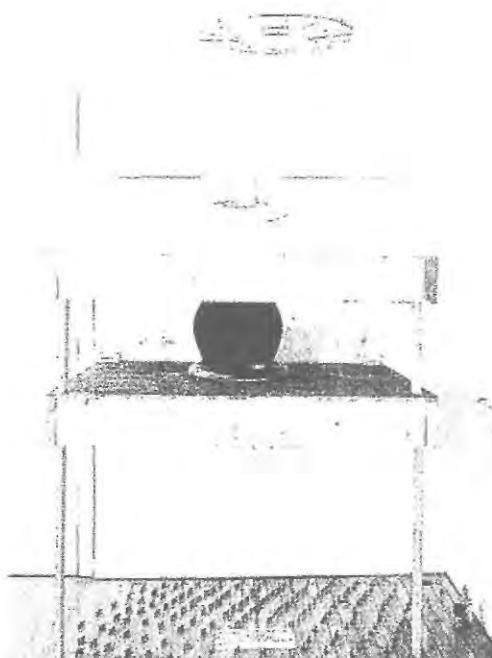


These small paintings on canvas by Judy Blum, a detail from the forty-eight-part arrangement Smell Songs, could be read as either poems or sentences, depending on the viewer.

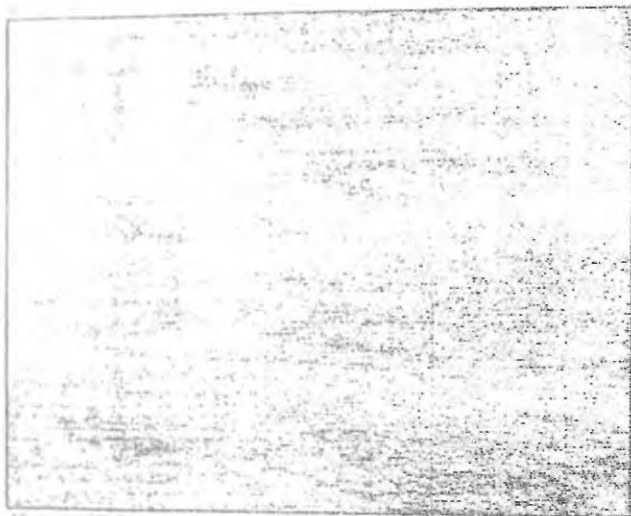


A piece about perception and artmaking by Fluxus artist Jean Dupuy. The tiny periscope in the center magnifies the image in the mirror, so you see the top of your head. And it's projected that the accumulated sweat of five thousand foreheads and noses will turn the paper into the desired golden print. That couldn't happen here.

Randy Williams, a Just Above Midtown sculptor, did a new piece for the show about the black and white toilets of his southern childhood. The quote on the floor (BETWEEN THE WHITE MAN AND THE LAND THERE WAS THUS INTERPOSED THE SHADOW OF THE BLACK MAN), by William Faulkner, lay in a field of razor blades. It was eerie. From the doorway of the room where they were both placed, the Williams and the Dupuy looked as if they were made by the same artist.

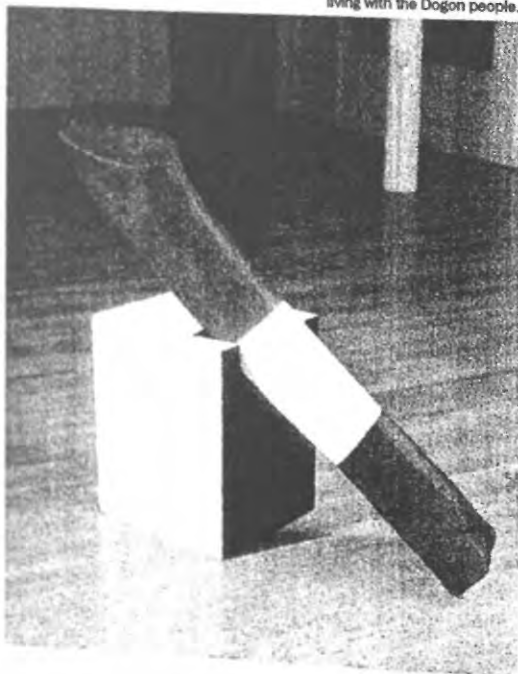


As a painter, Willie Birch moved through several styles, from Color Field to faux naïveté. This gridded cardboard diptych from the "New York City Jazz" series, notations made while listening to experimental music such as John Coltrane's, is from a period when simultaneously his work was at its most "folk" documentary.



In a call-and-response counterpoint to abstract or free jazz by musicians such as Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Cecil Taylor, many painters of the '70s and '80s, Jack Whitten among them, profoundly mined a kind of jazz abstraction. I saw this painting again just recently in the viewing room at Alexander Gray.

Besides jazz, the abstract sculptors were often influenced by African attitudes to form and materials. One of the sculptors who showed at Just Above Midtown, Tyrone Mitchell, actually spent time living with the Dogon people.



Lynne Auger, a former student of mine, was a self-portrait photographer. She used costumes and extreme poses to explore child and sex abuse with adroit technique. It came as a shock to have to defend such serious work from accusations of pornography.

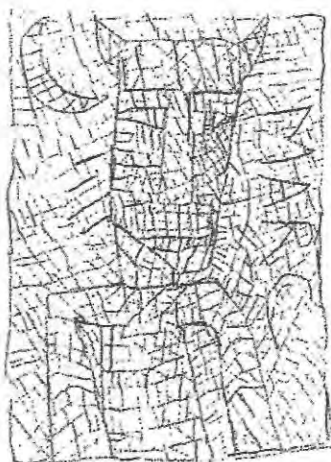
In noir paintings that were both voyeuristic and vulnerable, Louis Ranzoni iterated a threatening quality of the early '80s. This was his first group show in New York. He went with Piezo Electric, an East Village gallery, shortly after.



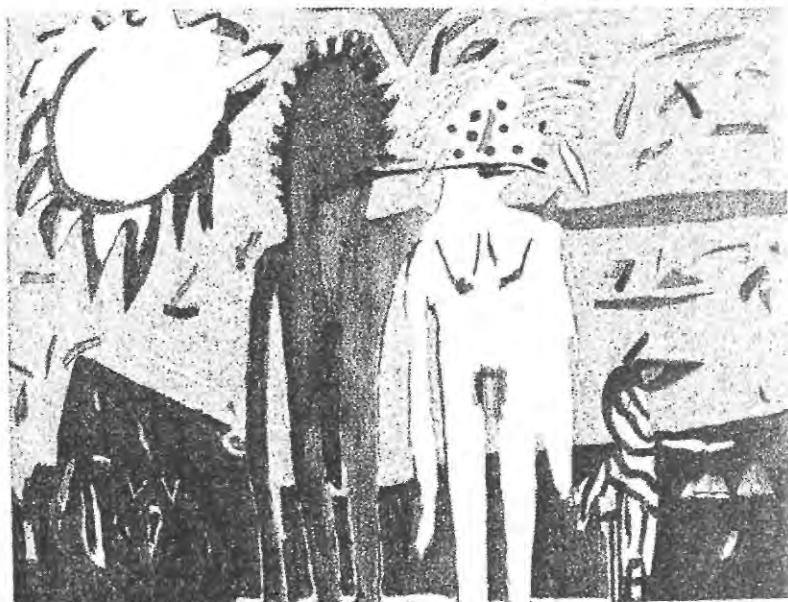
Stephen Lack had promised to do a painting for the exhibit. Instead, he did a drawing of an upsetting incident that happened to Jean-Michel Basquiat and his graffiti friends shortly before the show opened.



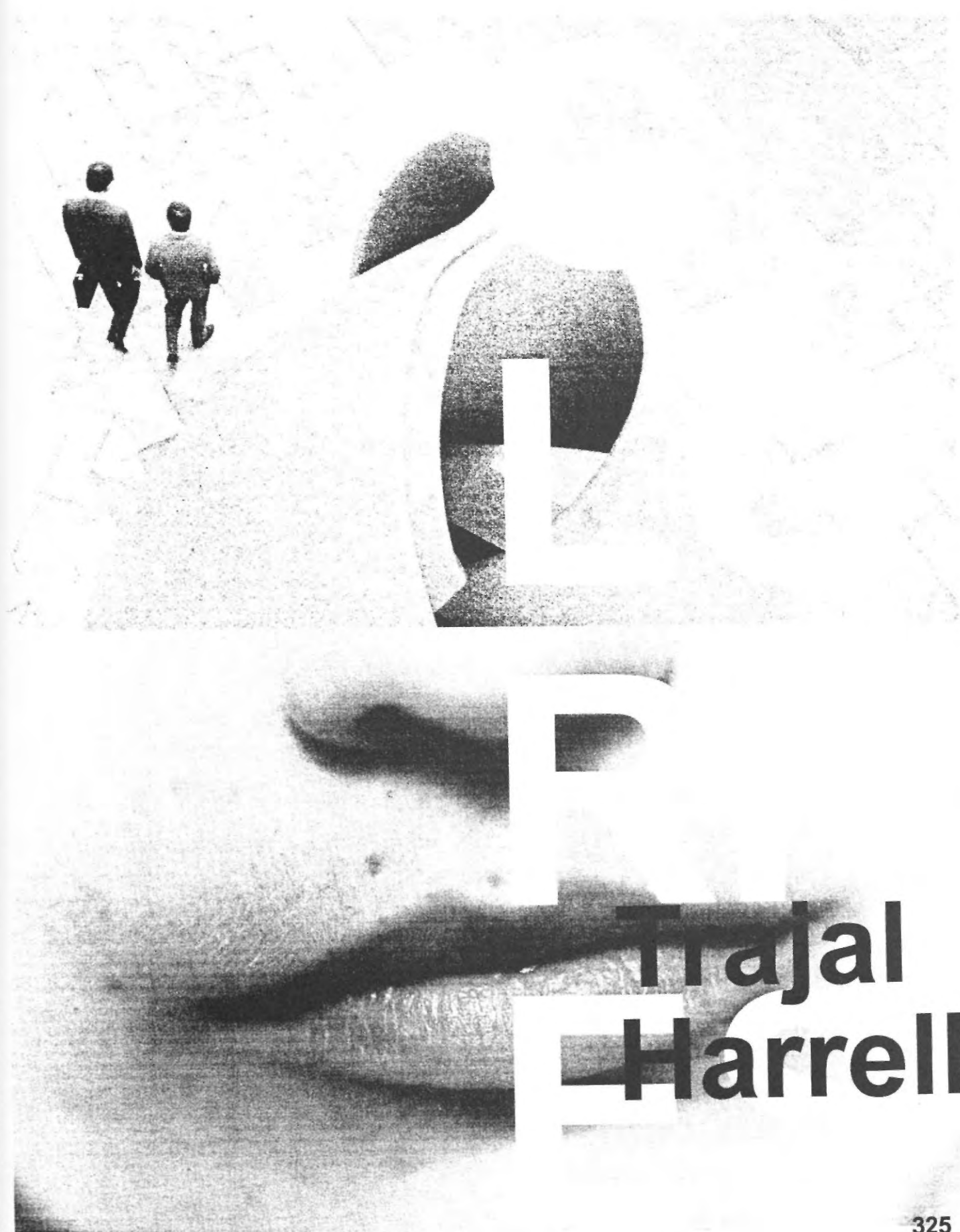
George Mingo, a graduate of Cooper Union, was a faux primitif. He painted this expressly for the show and told me I HAD to put it in. I did. Its black-and-white-in-living-color made the perfect coda. It was in the last room.



Some of the artists were a revelation. A wall of small collages and drawings by Marc Elsberg, most done in the '70s, anticipated many things that were happening. This 1975 Self-Portrait seemed to contain elements of Jean-Michel. The show had been built around Basquiat, and even after he pulled out, he remained present.



MAY 2008 195



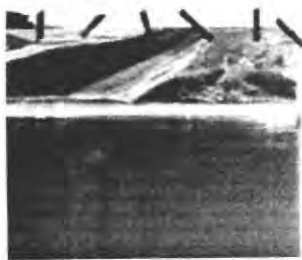
Trajal Harrell

Questions With Artists

Questions With Artists Posted by Studio Museum April 25, 2011 2:19 pm

Dance Q&A: Trajal Harrell Brings Voguing Downtown

Ariel Scott interviews dancer Trajal Harrell



Trajal Harrell

Twenty Looks (Performance Still), 2009

Photo: Miana Jun

Ariel Osterweis Scott, Ph.D. candidate in Performance Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, speaks with noted choreographer Trajal Harrell. Harrell's works have been seen at institutions including The New Museum, ICA Boston, The Kitchen, and numerous international venues. Here, Harrell discusses his latest work.

This interview is an extended version of the interview that appeared in Studio magazine.

A=Ariel

T=Trajal

A- How did your piece *Twenty Looks* or *Paris is Burning* at The Judson Church (S) come about?

T- I am dealing with the theoretical nexus between voguing and early postmodern dance. The piece is a fashion show. There's always dressing and undressing. There's always voguing happening. I tend to be interested in histories of movement on women's bodies, movement that hasn't been recorded or hasn't been historicized.

Voguing fits in there, but is a little bit different. I came up with this proposition, what would have happened in 1963 if someone from the voguing dance tradition in Harlem had come down to Judson Church to perform alongside the early postmoderns? If I was someone from that tradition coming down, what would I do? The first thing I was thinking of was selling. I would sell some things.

A-What things? Your body?

T- Yeah. I was thinking I would try to make some money in that situation. What would it mean for vogue to change markets? Then I thought of this famous picture of David Hammons selling snowballs on the streets of Harlem, and the different sized snowballs I thought, I should do it in different sizes. Literally, [the piece] is sold in different sizes to presenters on the dance market. I didn't want to deny the fact that the piece is for sale. That's kind of how *Twenty Looks* came about.

A-Do you think everyone is always voguing?

T-I think that if we take voguing as a theoretical concept, I would say we are always all voguing. It's like what RuPaul said: "Who isn't in drag?"

A-Where did you grow up? What is your dance background?

T-I grew up in Douglas, Georgia and I went to Yale. I didn't dance at Yale.

A-Who did you dance with?

T-I didn't dance with anyone. I always did my own work. I had directed in the theater in college.

A-Tell me about your relationship to voguing.

T-It's not about copying voguing.

A-You don't want voguing to be embodied.

T-No, I'm not a voguer. The whole thing is an imaginative possibility. I'm interested in the impossibility, that history that could not come together.

A-Had you ever gone to the balls?

T-In 2000 I went to my first ball, the Love Ball. I was blown away by it. At the time my work was super minimalist. I had gone to the ball and I had gone to my first fashion show. These two things [were] more interesting than what I was seeing in dance in terms of postmodernism. The pedestrianism on the runway is incredible, the way it's a character but it's not. In voguing, just the idea of social performance, the way gender operates, you lose your ability to see gender or to automatically read gender. In 2001 I was playing around in the studio one day, and it just came to me: "What would happen if I made voguing minimalist?" Voguing is so elaborate and decorative in its use of the arms. I put on this Yaz song, "Ode to Boy," I just walked and posed. I thought no one would get it. I had this gig at Judson Church the whole place erupted into applause.

A-What kind of audience?

T-A lot of dancers, a lot of art people. I figured, there's something in this. That's when I started looking at voguing more, but very theoretically, really going back to the fashion movement as a way to begin to think about how they had processed that information and transformed it. I started doing a lot of research on fashion shows—the history of runway.

A-How did you do the research?

T-[A friend] gave me videotapes [of fashion shows] and we would work in the studio. We would treat the movement just like it was ballet. How can I learn this movement (with no irony)? Really looking at, how is this woman moving? How is she putting her foot down? How are her hips moving? Really learning it academically. I did an experimental research project called *Tickle the Sleeping Giant*, interested in how "cool" gets written on the body, the relationship between cool as an aesthetic and cool as a social motivation. Because we weren't skinny white models, when we did this movement, in a way, we were voguing. I mean, not voguing, but a theoretical "where is the realness?" The idea of realness-in-performance versus authenticity. We worked on this whole performance of cool, runway walking [Then I started] going to the mini balls up in Harlem. That completely changed things. It was a little room very different from the big balls where you're in a place like the Roxy. How could I use the theoretical underpinning [of voguing] to think about the dance community? At the time New York was changing a lot and my friends were losing their places. How [were] we going to survive? The thing we forget about Judson is that this was a community of people, and there were mini-cliques inside of it. It wasn't this neutral, non-socio-politicized milieu, you know? That's something the dance world doesn't want to look at. [*Show Pony*] blurs the boundaries between community, audience, and performers. That piece was all about attention, non-attention, and visibility. In the end, I did a slideshow of pictures taken between 2006 and 2008, showing people in the international [dance] community (Brussels, Berlin) It was highly controversial because some people thought it was like showing Who's Who, Who's In, or Who's Out but it's not about who you know but about who you don't know. The power of attention and visibility in dance is in the hands of the presenters and programmers, unlike in most fields where there's also a negotiation with others. A singer or actor has an agent, publicists, all kinds of people who are in charge of their visibility I wanted to make people question those kinds of power relationships: who decides who has attention and who doesn't have attention? Competition between dancers. That's the voguing aspect of it. The piece [*Show Pony*] is a competition. We compete for the attention of the audience. This is always happening, whether or not we acknowledge it. In every performance, there are people we give more attention to and people we give less attention to. Sometimes we go to a certain show because we know a certain person. We get drawn to a certain person.

A-The narrative in Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* documentary is the narrative that gets rehearsed over and over in so many documentaries, in which dance is used to show that underground black communities are always fighting against each other. We saw that in *Rize*. Were you trying to refigure the idea of black dance as an endless battle by putting voguing in the Judson postmodern context?

T-It's interesting that you speak of battling because battling is a very specific aspect of voguing. In a way, it's integral. And of course in *Show Pony*, in a way you could say we battle because we compete.

A- In duets?

T-The whole piece is a system of a competition. It's not literal, but we are constantly competing. In the end, the system exhausts itself until it becomes a showdown. You get the thing that you want. Before, it's like, what am I looking at, what am I looking at? This person's going there, and this person. Sometimes you can see things, sometimes you can't. And in the end, we do it: the battle. She goes. I go. She goes. go.

A-That's like a Grand Pas de Deux, which is a battle if you think of the solo variations performed one after another: male solo, female solo, and on and on. How are your performances read or received in Europe, where there's not as much context for voguing?

T- In Brussels they didn't get it at all. In France, it went wonderfully. Even though people didn't really understand everything (Americans really get the subtleties like Greta Garbo), when I got deeper into the piece, it became much more emotional and this way of accessing the imagination.

A-What is the relationship between gender and everyday life for you in *Twenty Looks*?

T-I really feel the world would be a better place if we had gender equality. Feminism is in my bones. It's very specific that in this work we take on women's movement and not the men's. Even as a child, I never bought the gender thing. My parents would take me shopping. I would always choose the shoe that was the most

androgynous. They would always try to steer me to the boys' shoe. They wanted a "boy" boy. Maybe they felt that even at a young age that I was gay. I really fought (I mean, I grew up in south Georgia) even to cross my legs, to be who I really was—my sensibility and the way my sensibility got expressed in me physically. Voguing is another tool to look at those issues. I don't start from a politics to make my work. If you ask people what kind of work I make, they say I'm a conceptualist. I'm so not a conceptualist. I'm really an expressionist. *Twenty Looks* is maybe an exception. Usually the piece comes from some experience that I have in the studio expressing something I can only express through movement, then trying to understand that allowing that to crystallize into a piece.

A-Have you ever invited a voguer or someone from Judson to come see your work?

T-I wanted to do a piece with Steve Paxton, but he wouldn't do it. Out of all of those people, my work is closest to Lucinda. My work is very formal. *Twenty Looks* is very graphic in its way of thinking. In terms of voguing, I always stayed apart. I really felt it was essential that I not try to merge. It was theoretical. I saw what other people were doing with voguing taking a little bit here and putting it with their dances. The difference for me is that the movement is secondary to the theory underneath it. This tradition has a very strong theoretical praxis underneath it. It has a language.

MA

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FES

TO



Black Dada
Adam Pendleton

1.

it's a matter of fact

2.

it's a matter of fact

a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiates the day with a milky glow

4.

it's a matter of fact

going in a taxi from the train station

a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiates the day with a milky glow

i was with nielsen living and painting in a north beach flat

8.

it's a matter of fact

a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiates the day with a milky glow

i was with nielsen living and painting in a north beach flat

going in a taxi from the train station

and then somebody kicks off the lid

sigh and then breathe

these buildings don't uncover a single truth, so which truth do you want to tell?

the grant is 800 euros

16.

it's a matter of fact

a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiates the day with a milky glow

the grant is 800 euros

it's theological; it's a revelation

going in a taxi from the train station

and then somebody kicks off the lid

need i cite charles van doren

on a stool in a greasy spoon

human beings were born to live in a relationship of interdependence with nature

the performance must be done on location

regular communication by email with a commitment to responding within a reasonable time frame

the performer must not be credited

a revolving door

she was a unit in a bum space; she was a damaged child

so did i love

architecture is bound to situation

32.

it's a matter of fact

a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiates the day with a milky glow

now i am older and wiser

going in a taxi from the train station

she was a unit in a bum space; she was a damaged child

so did i love

regular communication by email with a commitment to responding within
a reasonable time frame

sigh and then breathe

the performer must not be credited

and then somebody kicks off the lid

it's theological; it's a revelation

steel bell drops

the grant is 800 euros

on a stool in a greasy spoon

need i cite charles van doren

i want the grey-blue grain of western summer

i want the cardboard box of wool sweaters on top of the bookcase to indicate
home

i want a very beautiful woman

a common doubt expressed about the "practice-based" researcher is whether
they are equipped for "competent reading"

the performance must be done on location

these buildings don't uncover a single truth, so which truth do you want to tell?

the desire for coffee

the formal beauty of a back porch

remember the wedding?

dada is our intensity

i want a very beautiful man

when a work of architecture successfully fuses a building and situation, a third condition emerges

i think what black arts did was inspire a whole lot of black people to write
monuments are embarrassing to dutch culture

revolving door

song of the garbage collectors beneath the bedroom window

seeds of the fig

64.

it's a matter of fact

a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiates the day with a milky glow
going in a taxi from the train station

now i am older and wiser

she was a unit in a bum space; she was a damaged child

the formal beauty of a back porch

and then somebody kicks off the lid

i need the grey-blue grain of western summer

i need the cardboard box of wool sweaters on top of the bookcase to indicate h

i need a very beautiful woman

steel bell drops

when a work of architecture successfully fuses a building and situation,
a third condition emerges

what black arts did was inspire a whole lot of black people to write

Black Dada, black dada

d this is dada's balcony, i assure you

from there you can hear all the military marches, and come down cleaving the air
like a seraph landing in a public bath(s) to piss and understand the parable

i had a nice dick, average length and all

i wanted ron to look at it, want it

dada is our intensity; it erects inconsequential bayonets and the sumatral head
of german babies

i need a very beautiful man

it's theological; it's a revelation

the grant is 800 euros

need i cite charles van doren on a stool in a greasy spoon

how are we to define this poem?

what makes you think that's what this is for?

what do you want for christmas?

does it mean that if the universe is infinite, then in some other world a man sits
in a kitchen, possibly in a farmhouse, the sky lightening, and nobody else up and
about as he writes down these words?

i want the perfume back in the bottle

ome i need a prick in my mouth

i need an explanation

what did you think when they converted the funeral home into a savings and
loan?

revolving door

dry blood

song of the garbage collectors beneath the bedroom window

seeds of the fig

white dada remains within the framework of european weakness

the essence of architecture is an organic link between concept and form

pieces cannot be subtracted or added without upsetting fundamental properties

we want coherence

she was a unit in a bum space; she was a damaged child, sitting in her rocker by the window

i want western movies

i need monday morning, a prick in my mouth and coffee

a cigarette and coffee for two

primal soup

pineapple slices

Black Dada is a way to talk about the future while talking about the past; it is our present moment

a common doubt expressed about the "practice-based" researcher is whether they are equipped for "competent reading"

yellowing gauze curtains

remember the wedding?

the raised highway through the flood plain

regular communication by email with a commitment to responding within a reasonable time frame

so did i love this

the performer must not be credited
the performance must be done on location
feet, do your stuff
sigh and then breathe
i want a young man with long eyelashes
white wings of a magpie
red shingle roof
i'm unable to find the right straw hat
how will i know when i make a mistake?
presentness
soap
we ate them

128.

it's a matter of fact
she was a unit in a bum space; she was a damaged child
a full moon hanging in a low sky irradiating the day with a milky glow
the formal beauty of a back porch
but now i am older and wiser
Black Dada
The Black Dada must . . .
The Black Dada must use irrational language.
The Black Dada must exploit the logic of identity.

The Black Dada's manifesto is both form and life.

can you feel it?

does it hurt?

is this too soft?

do you like it?

do you like this?

is this how you like it?

is it alright?

is he here?

is he breathing?

is it him?

is it hard?

is it cold?

does it weigh much?

is it heavy?

do you have to carry it far?

what about dinner?

The Black Dada is neither madness, nor wisdom, nor irony.

song of the garbage collectors beneath the bedroom window

look at me, dear bourgeois

dada is a new tendency in art

art used to be a game of nuts in may, children would go gathering words that had a final ring, then they would exude, shout out the verse, and dress it up in dolls' bootees . . .

one can tell this from the fact that until now nobody knew anything about it,
and tomorrow everyone in zurich will be talking about it

Black Dada: we are not naive

Black Dada: we are successive

Black Dada: we are not exclusive

Black Dada: we abhor simpletons and are perfectly capable of an intelligent
discussion!

DA DA DA DA DA DA TK TK TK TK

thus saith the lord

i need ron to look at it, want it

i need a beautiful woman

i need the cardboard box of wool sweaters on top of the bookcase to indicate
home

i need western movies

i need the grey-blue grain of western summer

Sol LeWitt exhibited his Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes in the early 1970s.

Which is to say LeWitt's Paragraphs on Conceptual Art (1967) and Sentences on
Conceptual Art (1969) had already been written.

In 1969 a young June Jordan dedicated her poem "Who Look at Me" to her son
Christopher:

We come from elsewhere

In part we grew by looking back at you

BLACK DADA.

Malcolm X arrived in Harlem in the early 1950s.

In 1952 John Cage composed his famous silent work 4'33".

At the Meredith March in June 1966, a year before LeWitt wrote Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, Stokely Carmichael arguably laid the foundation for the Black Power movement.

In a talk given at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst on the 6th of November 2006, Kathleen Cleaver asked:

The 1960s, is that something that still makes you stand up and notice?
Do you still notice the 1960s?

Hugo Ball read his Dada Manifesto at the first public Dada soirée in Zurich's Waag Hall on July 14th, 1916:

Dada psychology, dada Germany cum indigestion . . . dada literature, dada bourgeoisie, and yourselves, honored poets, who are always writing with words but never writing the word itself, who are always writing about the actual point. Dada world war without end, dada revolution without beginning, dada your friends and also-poets . . .

Dadaism in the wake of the First World War.

Public gatherings.

Demonstrations.

Art of protest.

BLACK DADA.

Did our conceptual artists join hands with our freedom fighters?

Did they demonstrate in Birmingham?

Did they cover their faces when the hoses were turned on them?

History is in fact an incomplete cube shirking linearity.

BLA K DA . B DA. BLACK D D .

a common doubt expressed about the "practice-based" researcher is whether they are equipped for "competent reading"

feet, do your stuff

sigh and then breathe

i want the perfume back in the bottle

i want a prick in my mouth

i want a young man with long eyelashes

regular communication by email with a commitment to responding within
a reasonable time frame

so did i love (this)

the performer must not be credited

the performance must be done on location

props and sets must not be brought in

the sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa

any cameras for documentation must be handheld

special lighting is not acceptable

optical tricks and "effects" are forbidden

the performance must not contain superficial action, declarations or jokes

temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden

genre performances are not acceptable

the format must be set: 30 minutes, 20 minutes, 1 hour

white wings of a magpie

red shingle roof

steel bell drops

wave glory

soap

presentness

human beings were born to live in a relationship of interdependence with nature

the desire for coffee

how will i know when i make a mistake?

the grant is 800 euros

does it mean that if the universe is infinite, then in some other world a man sits in a kitchen, possibly in a farmhouse, the sky lightening, and nobody else up as he sits and writes down these words?

if the function of writing is to express the world

i need an explanation

i'm unable to find the right straw hat

Black Dada is a way to talk about the future while talking about the past

History is an endless variation, a machine upon which we can project ourselves and our ideas

that is to say it is our present moment

The history of conceptual art as (is) an intimately constructed narrative deserving of an aggressive deconstructive interpretation.

An iconic structure that embraces linearly passive readings of its ideological principals and the moment of its "coming into being."

the raised highway through the flood plain

pineapple slices

we want coherence

we want a revolving door

song of the garbage collectors beneath the bedroom window

seeds of the fig

white dada remains within the framework of european weakness

i need monday morning and a prick in my mouth

a cigarette and coffee for two

what does it cost?

do you speak english?

do you hear a ringing sound?

are you high yet?

is he the father?

are you a student at the radio school?

what is it that attracts you to bisexual women?

do you know which insect you most resemble?

did you know i have a nice dick, average length?

did you know his cum is the eighth color of the rainbow?

do you know what it tastes like?

but now, look at me, we don't agree with them, for art isn't serious, i assure you,
and if we reveal the crime so as to show that we are learned denunciators,
it's to please you, dear audience, i assure you, and i adore

but now i was older and wiser

black dada your history of art

we ate them

Abstraction is also flight. It is freedom from the immediate spatiotemporal constraints of the moment; freedom to plan the future, recall the past, comprehend the present from a reflective perspective that incorporates all three; freedom from the immediate boundaries of concrete subjectivity, freedom to imagine the possible and transport oneself into it; freedom to survey the real as a resource for embodying the possible . . .

—Adrian Piper, “Flying” (1987)

A term like “afro-conceptualism” is useful for the way it stages the relationship between abstraction and freedom.

Is there a role for abstraction in the abolition of alienated labor?

This phrase—the abolition of alienated labor—is European in origin but would seem already to better describe the arc of North Atlantic history than that of the Continent. Or—and this is the point—the words *abolition*, *alienated*, and *labor* have a unique and indisputable material record in the history of slavery. Nor should this record surprise us, for if the influence of the Haitian Revolution on Hegel’s *conceptual* account of the struggle against identity is as it should be, then it is not too much to say that *all conceptualism* of a certain lineage is *afro-conceptualism*, whether it knows it or not. The difference between *self-conscious* afro-conceptualism and the “normal” conceptualism with which it is contrasted would then be simply that: a difference of self-consciousness. It is not that afro-conceptualism is another instance of conceptualism; instead, it names the material encounter—the record of which is the conceptual project—as such.

Let me try to be more specific. Sometimes we talk about identity politics, usually as a foil. But it is worth remembering that all hitherto-recorded history is the history of identity politics, properly understood. I do not mean in the sense of a primordial clash between distinct, fully formed races, nations, classes, or genders, but, on the contrary, the way in which these very identities are themselves *produced after the fact* to justify the current regime of accumulation. To say that the struggle of workers in a factory is “more real” than the struggle of black people against institutionalized exploitation, or than queer struggle against heteronormativity, is not only unjust, it is inaccurate. In truth, if we were forced to articulate a chronology for the naturalization of socially antagonistic identity assignments, we would have to say that gender appears first, and then race, and that class, in the historical sense, happens last, and is modeled on the other two. The phrase “identity politics” is like “afro-conceptualism” in that it marks as derivative what is, if anything, original. This does not mean these terms

are without analytic merit, just that they are invitations, notes received in the mail to reserve a place in the future for their unfolding as events, when their power as truths will manifest.

In striving toward this moment, I wish to offer a distinction that I think may be helpful. I begin by asking after the role of abstraction in the process of abolition. One way of answering this question is to distinguish between two experiences, or two modes of abstraction. The first is the experience of abstraction as a *force*, which happens when the body is subject to violence by virtue of its ostensible coincidence with one of the identity assignments listed above. The belly of the slave ship, sexual violence, and the fourteen-hour day on the assembly line are all examples of this kind of abstraction. Abstraction is a force whenever and wherever the subject is misrecognized as an object. We know this misrecognition has taken place by the refusal, or resistance—to use Fred Moten's language—of these subjects to their utilization as objects. At first these refusals appear simply as anomalies, but, with time, they demand to be accounted for.

It is in the service of this demand for recognition that the second experience of abstraction arrives: the *practice* of abstraction, or abstraction as a relationship. This is the experience described by Adrian Piper in her essay "Flying," from which I take my epigraph. For it is precisely by practicing abstraction—by poetry or painting or *whatever*—that the subject confirms itself as other-than-object. We call this process of confirmation a *revolution*—the amalgamated refusal whereby what was previously understood as an object is now recognized as a subject. And so, Amiri Baraka represents the slave ship onstage in all its abstract force, drag places gender at the service of collective performance, and workers insist on control over their expenditure of time and energy. In each case, the object pulls away from itself and becomes a subject practicing abstraction, insisting on the distance between itself and the ground.

It has been said that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house, but what about the people the master *treated* as tools? That is, the "tools" that were themselves capable of practicing abstraction, those three-fifths? Before the question about tools can be asked, there must already be an understanding about what a tool is and what it is not. My point is simply that it is the struggle for access to the master's tools, and the tool of abstraction in particular, that *creates* this difference in understanding by destroying the misrecognition lurking behind mastery in the first place. One day there are masters and tools, and the next, only people. No forces, just relations. Black Dada is the name I borrow for the immanent historical possibility of this transformation: *Black* for the open-ended signifier projected onto resisting objects, *Dada* for yes, yes, the double affirmation of their refusal. Yes, yes to afro-conceptualism, yes, yes to the practice of abstraction, yes to history,

all of it, yes to freedom, all of it, yes, to flight, yes to flying in the future, heart
was going like mad yes, I say yes.

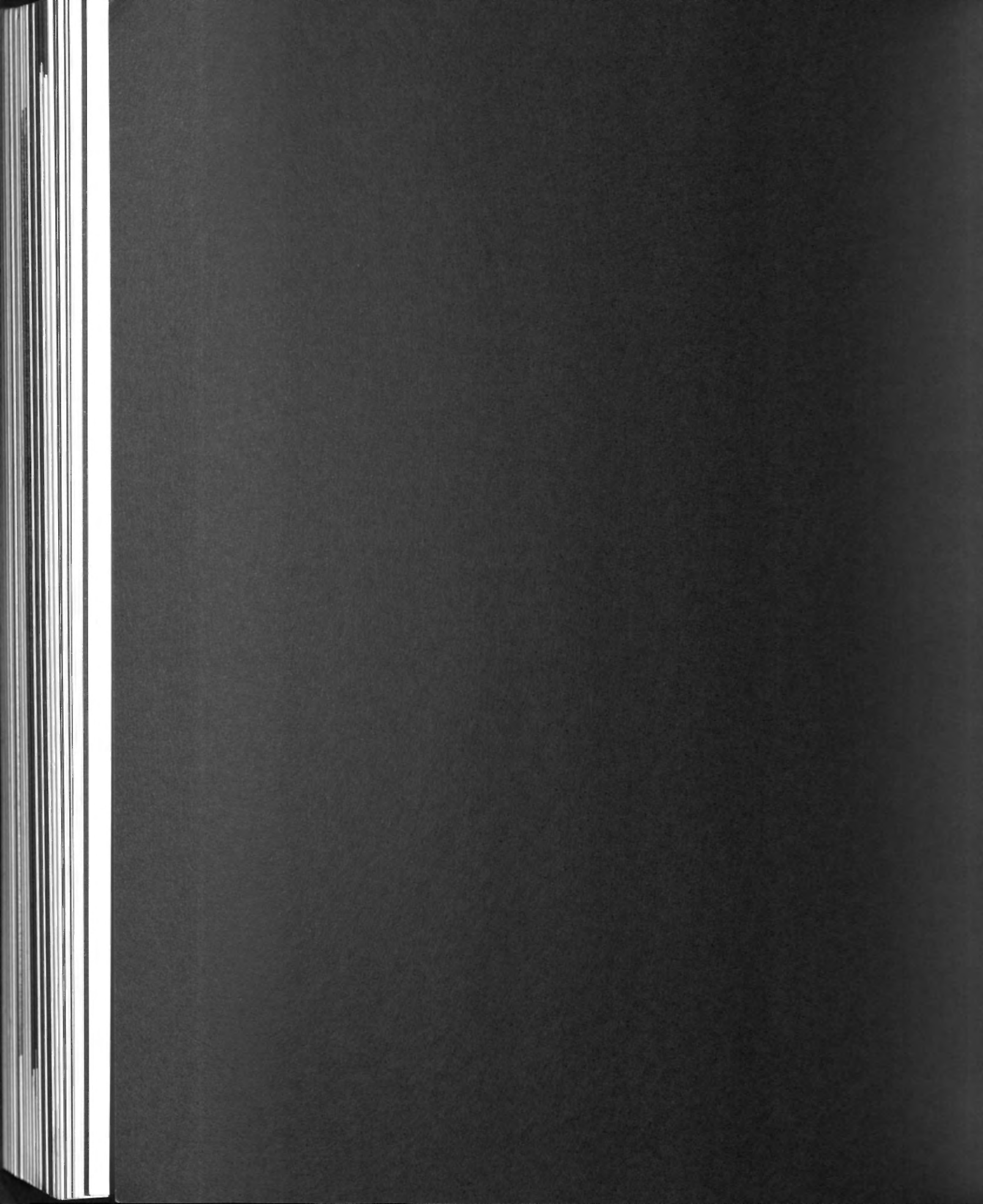
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Adam Pendleton
Black Dada Reader

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