

FROM THE FRAGMENT

A POETICS

edited & collected by
Barbara Henning
1996-97

Revised 2000

Dear poets and students in my writing workshops-

As a poet committed to teaching poetry workshops with an experimental/radical practice, I have always asked that students read a number of essays on poetics along with several books of poetry. Several years ago, I began to collect passages from various essays by poets, philosophers and critics in the hopes of reducing the amount of reading in the class while focusing on some of the issues that experimental poets consider as they create their own practice & theory. The intent has been to stimulate dialogue, not to write a manifesto. As this file grew, I began organizing the passages and writing my own responses. Finally, I realized that I was a compiling a small book.

Some of the areas that are covered include: (1) To approach language as material; (2) To live a poetic life, collaborating with other poets and artists; (3) To break rules and make up new forms and constraints; (4) To write the truth, as you know it; (5) To acknowledge and consider the slippery nature of truth, language and thought; and (6) instead of attempting to reproduce reality, attempting to change it.

There are approximately 115 passages, including my own text; the passages range from one short sentence to 150 words. I hope that this fragmented collection of manifestos, interviews, essays and statements on poetics will introduce you to some of the history and slanted thinking about experimental poetics and poetry, at least by those writers who have influenced my writing and thinking. Perhaps you will consider jotting down your own thoughts and quotes from other writers in the right hand margin.

With humor and confusion,
as poetry baffles,
so will this
Barbara Henning

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MATERIAL & EXPRESSION

Language as a real thing is not imitation either of sounds or colors or emotions it is an intellectual recreation and there is no possible doubt about it and it is going to go on being that as long as humanity is anything. Gertrude Stein ("Poetry and Grammar" 238)

I do not transcribe. I construct. This has been even the old ambition of Flaubert. To make something out of nothing, something that would stand alone, without having to lean on anything external to the work. Alain Robbe-Grillet (162).

One isn't putting things into poems, then at least not as my own experience of writing informs me. There is never a "subject" about which one constructs an activity called "poetry." Nor can one, as Williams says, "copy nature," take from that which is elsewhere informed some felicitous appearance whether a rhyme or a so-called sentiment . . . what emerges in the writing I most value is a content which cannot be anticipated which "tells you what you don't know," which you subvert, twist, or misrepresent only on peril of death. Robert Creeley (272-73)

Pound and Williams both were involved variously in a movement which got called "objectivism." . . . What seems to me a more valid formal action for present usage is "objectism," a word to be taken to stand for a kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as a necessity of a line or a work to be as clean as wood is as it issues from the hand of nature, to be as shaped as wood can

be when a man has his hand to it. Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which Western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For man is himself an object. Charles Olson ("Projective Verse," 59-60)

Literature is concerned with plot and character. Its intention is to be "well-written" and "comprehensible." It's a very commonplace activity. Then there is the progression towards writing . . . writing as writing . . . I mean simple textual writing. . . . It is that desire to do something new which compels one to move from literature to writing and from writing to *matière écrite* . . . brutal matter . . . no wasted words or wasted time. I also colored in the poem . . . the manuscript itself is a piece of visual art . . . There is an oral aspect to it, as well as a visual and a musical architectural aspect . . . This is no longer "writing," it's the process of working with a material that is common to all art. An artist who reaches this point-like Beethoven in music of Cézanne in painting-no longer knows, in the final count, how he does what he does. I am convinced of this. I call this a state of wisdom. Pierre Guyotat (19)

If you start with rules, you've really got a tough road. What I think is that you start with materials. You start with matter, not with rules. The rules appear, the limitations appear, and those are your limitations and the limitations of the material. Clark Coolidge (159-60)

Once again I want to insist that I offer no rules to make anyone a poet, by following which he can write poetry. Such rules simply

don't exist. A poet is a person who creates these very rules. (13) . . . establishing rules is not in itself the aim of poetry, otherwise the poet turns into a scholar exercising his powers in formulating rules for non-existent or useless things and propositions (14). . . . Materials. Words. Fill your storehouse constantly, fill the granaries of your skull with all kinds of words, necessary, expressive, rare, invented, renovated and manufactured (19). . . . A poet regards every meeting, every signpost, every event in whatever circumstances simply as material to be shaped into words. (24)
Vladimir Mayakovsky

I think a simple one phrase definition of poetry is: the invention of life or reality through language. To invent reality through words, this is what poetry does. And it isn't such a high falutin' thing. . . . It must make people want to dance, or to make love, or to sing. It must fill them with the impulses to do something real in life; it must stimulate their imagination and their mind. It must entertain them and give them something to think about and provide them with solid information. I believe that good poets and good poems do this. David Rattray (5)

Think of a poem as a place in which you can put a lot of strange beautiful things, in strange beautiful settings. . . . when the feeling arises in me that I have enough material to make three or four poems, I will sit down perhaps and make one. And I'll use that material plus what comes to me from starting to put the material in the places that it should go, in the places that it indicates it should go. Ted Berrigan (55-56)

When I was young, perhaps eight years old, my mother gave me a diary with a key. A place for secrets. When I was eleven and my mother died, my diary became a place to talk to her, a place to grieve and wonder. Later as a young adult, I began to collect quotations and ideas and to think about philosophical and practical problems. As I became more aware of the polyphonic nature of language, the voices in my thinking found their way onto the page. With an awareness of the materiality of language, writing and poetry, I began experimenting with various approaches to journal writing by using different books, different pens and typewriters, and also by pasting in objects and subverting the linear approach to writing by using columns and entries on entries.

My mother also taught me how to make quilts from circles of fabric which were cut out of old clothes and sheets. We would cut and sew around the edges, pulling the thread to create little pockets. The pockets were then flattened, sorted by color and design, and sewn together to make the cover for the quilt. Because her resources were limited and she had four children, she was an expert at collecting and organizing scraps of this and that to make doll clothes, our clothes, drapes and other household items.

Likewise, I sort the scraps of language from my notebooks into different categories depending on the questions and designs I am thinking through. Information, images and partial encounters are part of our everyday urban life. Some of life's fragmentation is beautiful. Some of it is disturbing. Filth and decay can be swept up and recycled. Nails and screws can be sorted. A terribly difficult book can be enjoyed and traces kept with notes. I pull out the beautiful-terrible-banal from my journals, my reading and listening and I write poetry--discovering, layering, experimenting. bh

Don't imagine that the art of poetry is any simpler than the art of music, or that you can please the expert before you have spent at least as much effort on the art of verse as the average piano teacher

spends on the art of music. Ezra Pound ("Retrospect" 38)

The poet is never inspired, because he is the master of that which appears to others as inspiration. He does not wait for inspiration to fall out of the heavens on him like roasted ortolans. He knows how to hunt, and lives by the incontestable proverb, 'God helps them that help themselves.' He is never inspired because he is unceasingly inspired, because the powers of poetry are always at his disposition, subjected to his will, submissive to his own activity. Raymond Queneau (43)

Inspiration which consists in blind obedience to every impulse is in reality a sort of slavery. Raymond Queneau (41)

"Lyric poetry should express desire directly." "It should please the heart and mind." "It is meant to be sung or at least have metrical language and a pattern." "Elevated words and figurative uses." But desire is that which flees reality, that which can never be satisfied let alone clearly articulated. Perhaps those who are born into the symbolic order with a promise might experience their desire as more tangible. Those, however, who live their separation, fissure, splinter and division as a given part of their human condition can only speak of desire indirectly. Should they attempt to speak directly? Remain mute and wordless? Or allow desire to pass through their songlike talklike machinelike poems indirectly. Cut across and out of patterns, the playful possibilities in language. bh

Artifice, in this sense, is less a matter of ingenuity and manner, of elaboration and elegant subterfuge than of the recognition that a poem or painting or performance text is a made thing-constructed, constructed, chosen-and that its reading is also a construction on the part of its audience. Marjorie Perloff (27)

And I was really fascinated by the fact that you could do all your manipulations on a single page, and that the material was right there in this block, and there were terrific kinds of control over words that you didn't have when you were writing stories, and it all came down to the words, and I guess that's when I found out that I was a poet. So it really turned out that I was more interested in words than I was in stories or a kind of narrative flow. I wasn't interested in creating a reality, I was interested in doing something with words and truth. Alice Notley (Interview 89)

THERE is too much of human material now everywhere: the world is covered with "the man-made." None of our problems can be solved by making more of it, more of the material, including books. Shiny-covered, same-looking books everywhere. To go into a bookstore & be made sick by all the books there, is almost the same as to be made sick by all the dead cars in new Jersey, seen from the train window, early in the morning. All achievement, writerly & poetic achievement included, must become more invisible. The notion of "soul," of the Invisible, must be taken up again. Alice Notley ("Homer's Art", v)

There is an inner and subtle quality that creates the fundamental difference between expert and artist. This quality is to achieve the

technique and forget it. A truly spiritual artist is one who forgets himself and in that self-forgetfulness achieves the bliss which is called Ananda. (Rukmini Devi)

-No. No. Picasso said [to Vladimir Tatlin] Waste not a minute. Go do what you want to, what you can. Get a lifetime of work into a week. Plan nothing. Make. Guy Davenport (22)

CONSPIRE & COMMUNE

Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency, either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it. . . . Let the candidate fill his mind with the finest cadence he can discover, preferably in a foreign language, so that the meaning of the words may be less likely to divert his attention from the movement. Ezra Pound ("Retrospect" 38-39)

I read all of Pound and saw what to put into poems, I got the direct message from Pound--put everything in your poems, everything that's going on in your life, what it says in the letters you get, in the books you read, what you see in the street . . . What you're reading . . . Ted Berrigan (Homage 09)

And it [a new poetry] has come out of a conflict--more or less deeply felt--with inherited forms of poetry, literature, language, discourse: not in every instance but where there are recognized repressive structures, forms of categorical thinking that act against that other free play of possibilities just alluded to . . . a poetry of change. Jerome Rothenberg (134-135)

And the best thing to do when you begin is to pick some poet whose poems you like, and imitate some. And then find other poets & other poems and imitate them. The worst thing you can do is to tell anyone who you are imitating. Because then everyone will think that all the good parts in your poems come out of being a good imitation. When, in fact, the exact opposite will be true. The

good parts will come out of where you misunderstand entirely what the poet you are imitating is doing, & so write something that is completely dumb, but that turns out to be very good.

Misunderstanding is one of the truly creative procedures in writing.

Ted Berrigan (43)

RC: I'd advise students to read. Study with someone who intrigues you, or provokes you, even confuses you. SH: People have to find their own voices somehow. To me poetry is, I hate to say it, something holy, and I hate to confuse it with a career. The brochure of the creative writing program I'm teaching in now says things like, "We have so and so students published in The New Yorker, the Antioch Review" -this whole thing of contests and magazine publications connected to poetry makes me sick. RC: it's particularly offensive with poetry because poetry is a communal art. poetry is a company, however sentimentally that puts it. I feel it has a kinship with music. I always admired or envied the way musicians would hang out together. In the literary arts, the only group that hangs out together are poets. SH: The one good thing about a writing program is the community. Robert Creeley & Susan Howe (21-22)

In the spring of early summer of 1912, "H.D.," Richard Aldington and myself decided that we were agreed upon the three principles following: (1) Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective. (2) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. (3) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome. Ezra Pound ("A Retrospect" 36)

When I returned from deportation [in 1960], we began to meet more and more often, for no other reason than to wallow together in what interested us so passionately. Imperceptibly, as we gradually became conscious of belonging to a sort of knighthood of the heteroclite, the affinity we felt in the beginning was transformed into profound friendship. François Le Lionnais (74)

I will describe experiments I performed with Brion Gysin and Ian Sommerville twelve years before Breakthrough was published and, in fact, before it was written. These experiments started not on tape recorders but on paper. In 1959, Brion Gysin said, "writing is fifty years behind painting," and applied the montage technique to words on a page. These cut-up experiments appear in Minutes to Go, in 1959. Subsequently, we cut up the Bible, Shakespeare, Rimbaud, our own writing, anything in sight. William Burroughs (63-64).

Then I learned about Evergreen Review and suddenly started reading all these modernist poets such as Leroi Jones and Frank O'Hara, and I subscribed to the magazines advertised in Evergreen Review like Leroi Jones' Yugen and Wallace Barman's Semina. And when I looked at magazines like Yugen, I saw they were just little things stapled together, and so I went down to a local printer and asked, How to you do this? And he said, Oh, it's nothing-it's real easy. So I decided to start my own magazine. I invited Dick Gallup, who was still across the street and was writing poetry, to be co-editor and Joe Brainard, who was the best artist in school, to be the art editor. . . . Yes, I met Ted in the spring of 1959, I was working in the bookstore, and Ted walked in with three friends of his. Ron Padgett (102)

In 1974 Kit Robinson published a one-shot magazine, *Streets and Roads*, in San Francisco, bringing together for the first time writing by himself, Watten (who had also settled in the city and was now entirely in charge of *This*), Provincetown poet Alan Bernheimer, Bob Perelman of Boston and two Los Angeles residents, Steven Benson and Carla Harryman. Within three years, all would be living in San Francisco. Watten would begin a reading series at the Grand Piano. Perelman, who began *Hills* before he came west, would host talks on poetics by writers at his Folsom Street loft. This concentration was further deepened with the arrival of Lyn Hejinian, Tom Mandel and others. Ron Silliman ("Language, Realism and Poetry" xvii)

When we, the six founders of Kelsey St. Press, began as publishers we were aware of the authorial presence of the female voice in literature. The actuality of Woolf, Stein, and H.D. resonated in readings that we read to ourselves and to each other. We were going back to sources, conscious of how these writers had been neglected in our own college studies. The textual sound of Adrienne Rich reading *Diving Into The Wreck* had just occurred. We were women, five of us poets, who had been meeting in a group to read and provide critical commentary on each other's work. It was nineteen-seventy-three. . . . An anthology of Bay Area Beat Poets had just been released. It neglected to mention women writers. We bitterly resented this deletion in a history that canonized the Beat poetic voice. Co-founding a press to publish new writing by women was a means of questioning the centrality of the male figure in writing. Rena Rosenwasser (92)

And so I had a long talk with Ron Padgett, who at that time was eighteen years old, and I told him everything I understood and then I didn't remember any more about it until a good number of years later, and then I asked Ron one time if he remembered that talk, and he said he remembered it very well, it had changed his life. So I asked him what I said, but he didn't remember either. Ted Berrigan (47)

The avant-garde movement of the Lower East Side in the early 1960s-when it turned, for some people at least, into the "East Village"-was a remarkable period. Grim though the walkups might have been, the atmosphere of creative and artistic energy was exhilarating. There was ludic buoyancy-perhaps from hunger, or too much herbal tea. Maybe it was because there was so much jazz in the air, maybe because the poets knew the musicians who knew the painters who knew the dancers. . . . The relative lack of racial animosity-at least among the artists-was a notable feature of life on the Lower East Side. . . . The moment of the African American avant-garde writer on the Lower East Side was superseded in the second half of the 1960s by the Black Arts Movement . . . As Harlem had been the locus of the Renaissance of the 1920s, it was-in part-to the Lower East Side that Time magazine turned in 1970 to assess the new directions in the arts pioneered by African American artists. Lorenzo Thomas (573-578)

Ken: When the young language folks were in the workshop, what was the dynamic like? Bernadette: It was great. It was over that period of years that we made the experiment list. Then, after a while, the workshop became a true collaboration. The very last year that I was doing it I wasn't even doing it anymore. We had a rotating leadership, so that every week somebody in the workshop

would do something else. People came up with different experiments and it would go on for 4 or 5 hours. Bernadette Mayer & Ken Jordan ("The Colors" 8)

Ezra Pound admonished, "Make it new!" Gertrude Stein had said, "Anybody that creates a new thing has to make it ugly." I took these as urgent commands to get on with my own work, however raw and crude it might be, as well as to help create a forum for younger writers, which would simultaneously honor the "elders." The only criterion for judgment would be whether the work truly "breathes," (in Emily Dickinson's sense of the term). (2) . . . We decided to call our new venture a poetry "project" because we saw it as an ongoing event requiring hard work and perseverance. We also had in mind the sense of an outward projecting, "to direct one's voice to be heard clearly at a distance." (Anne Waldman. "Introduction" 4)

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BREAK & REMAKE

In April of 1997 I was sitting with my friend Allen Saperstein who was dying. He was full of fluids and his penis had slipped back into his body. In his wretched/agitated state, I sang, calming him as we had calmed our babies. His sex became meaningless. And yet as I talk about him, I mark him, I gender him. The first thing we announce when a baby is born is, it's a girl, it's a boy, it's a question. And this helps us imagine a life to come, a life to pass, in our community and language. As gender marks out a social order, along come expectations and demands and sometimes a rigid armor. We often forget the whisper before the words. The poetic word undoes, confounds, so I am a perpetual eraser and rearranger. A powerful poetry, I think, breaks and remakes, speaking differently, the language of the mad, the genius, the imaginary, the ordinary, -: rhythm, music, hunger, timbre, loss, gesture, color, form, laughter, agony. All art disrupts the symbolic order (and conventional notions about gender, the real, normal and natural) unless it is made to keep the king in power. Even then, it might secretly be a little disruptive. I think poetry should disturb rather than support the status quo, the conventions and my own expectations about gender, genre, sentence and sense. To revise, examine, analyze and introduce other voices and discourses into everyday language and everyday thought. To listen to noise. To call into question culture, history, the future. To call into question what I think. what I write. what I say. Easily. what I leave out. What eye. bh

Ideally an experimental writer reinvents language anew for every work or every phase of his artistic life. . . . unwillingness to experiment is mere death. Ezra Pound (ABC).

Experimentation. The devising of experiments is one of the important methods of interrogating nature and getting significant data. The essence of an experiment is the control of the factors and conditions of an occurrence. By means of control, the experimenter is able to eliminate factors and notice the effects, or combine them, or vary them one by one, or introduce new factors. Within certain limits, he can do with nature as he wishes and make it answer his questions. Thus experimentation is a method of controlled analysis, synthesis and variation which enables men to get nature to do definite things repeatedly. (R. W. Sellars The Essentials of Logic 185)

It is not the poet, but the poem: the most that the poet can do is to be a wise, experimenting parent.

Experiment, however, may be interpreted in two ways. In the first sense it is a delicate and constantly alert state of expectancy directed towards the discovery of something of which some slight clue has been given; and the system in it means only the constant shifting and adjustment of the experimenter as the unknown thing becomes more and more known: system is the readiness to change system. The important thing in the whole process is the initial clue, or, in old-fashioned language, the inspiration. - scientist should have an equal power of genius with the power, with the difference that the scientist is inspired to discover things which already are (his results are facts), while the poet is inspired to discover things which are made by his discovery of them (his results are not statements about things already known to exist, or knowledge, but truths, things which existed before only as potential truth).

Experiment in the second sense is the use of a system for its own sake and brings about, whether in science or poetry, no results but

those possible to the system. . . . experiment in the second sense is the general method of the labouring, as against the inventive, side of science, perhaps properly so.

Poets, then, who need the support of a system (labourers pretending to be inventors, since in poetry, unlike science, there is no place for labourers) are obliged to adopt not only the workshop method of science, but the whole philosophical point of view of science, which is directly opposite to the point of view of poetry. For in science there is no personality granted to the things discovered, which are looked upon as soulless parts of a soulless aggregate, with no independent rights or life of their own. Such poets, therefore, produce poems that are only well-ordered statements about chosen subjects, but new, independent living organisms; facts, not truths, pieces of literature, not distinct poetic personalities. Poetry of this sort (and there has been little poetry of any other sort, as there have been few real poets) is thus the science of poem-training instead of the art of poem-appreciation. - poet is a poet by reason of his creative vision of the poem, as - parent is a parent by reason of his creative vision of the child: authorship is not a matter of the right use of the will but of an enlightened withdrawal of the will to make room for the will.
Laura (Jackson) Riding (Survey 125-127)

For the experimenter it is more important to have beauty in one's experiments than to have them fit mathematics.
The most real, the truth, the beauty of the poem is a configuration, but also a happening in language that leads back into or on towards the beauty of the universe itself. I am but part of the whole of what I am and wherever I seek to understand I fail what I know. Robert Duncan ("Towards")

Where certain individuals see an example of original, conscious, and lucid poetic innovation, others will see only empty acrobatics, pretension, and literary madness. Warren F. Motte, Jr. (3)

I'd get Americana magazines like Esquire, open the pages, get a phrase from it, and then start writing on my own. When I ran out, I'd go back to the magazine. It was pure experimentation. John Ashberry (1976 interview).

In his earliest verse Williams constantly uses the irregular caesura, the multiple caesura, and the runover line; lines that end in "the," "of," "and," "with," "but," fascinate him. What he is after is a strophe that breaks the syntax and creates an anti-logic, an anti-rational wit which finds a new rationality and a new logic-- Gertrude Stein, André Breton, Korzybski, Norbert Weiner, Whorf--the effort to free the thought processes of modern man living in a polyvalent, polymorphous, multiphonic universe opened up by his technology, from the Euclidian patterns of Aristotelian logic based on the idealization of Greek grammar and syntax. This becomes a battle cry of poets, logicians, philologists, psychiatrists, and all sorts of people as the twentieth century grows old. Kenneth Rexroth (82)

The classical playwright who writes his tragedy observing a certain number of familiar rules is freer than the poet who writes that which comes into his head and who is the slave of other rules of which he is ignorant. Raymond Queneau (41)

Every literary work begins with an inspiration (at least that's what its author suggests) which must accommodate itself as well as possible to a series of constraints and procedures that fit inside each other like Chinese boxes. Constraints of vocabulary and grammar, constraints of the novel (division into chapters, etc.) or of classical tragedy (rule of the three unities), constraints of general versification, constraints of fixed forms (as in the case of the rondeau or the sonnet), etc.

Must one adhere to the old tricks of the trade and obstinately refuse to imagine new possibilities? The partisans of the status quo don't hesitate to answer in the affirmative . . . Should humanity lie back and be satisfied to watch new thoughts make ancient verses? We don't believe that it should. François Le Lionnais (26-27)

When Arnold Schoenberg told his pupil John Cage that he had no talent for harmony, the young man disregarded harmony in his musical experiments; when Gertrude Stein was told her writing was often ungrammatical, she made her principle experiment the possibilities of ungrammatical English. Richard Kostelanetz ("Avant-Garde 245)

As a method of learning how to write, the obfuscated poem must still cover to hide a real energy in training. . . . The best obfuscation bewilders old meanings while reflecting or imitating or creating a structure of a beauty that we know. . . . The idea that real change-and its consequent repellent revolution where your best friend's suddenly the prison warden in the rigid stumbling of professional belief-is not at the heart of experiment in which lies the chance for liberation, is the kind of scam where you might find the book you

are reading grabbed from your hands. Bernadette Mayer (166)

You say that I want someone to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act. I name Moses, Solomon, Esop, Homer, Plato. William Blake. (Letter to Dr. Trusler 8/23/1799)

When a poem is attacked for obscurity it is either because the reader has gone to the poem in order to be put into a poetic mood (not to have reality uncovered for him as it can be uncovered alone in poems)-or because the poet has been concerned neither with providing a poem nor with stirring up a poetic mood in his readers, only with enjoying the display of his own faculties. . . . The reply to the charge of obscurity from the poet who writes poems for the reasons of poetry, can only be: my poems represent so much poetic learning, and you can learn from them as much as I have learned-if you admit the reasons of poetry . . . Poems will not serve as reading-matter when you want detective fiction, or a play, or anything but poems. Laura (Riding) Jackson ("Original 1938 Preface" 408-411)

That is the paradox, because to be accessible usually means buying into an established set of formal guidelines and traditions. The very nature of establishing those forms defines the certainty that the moment of their relevance has already past. In other words, any form that's already defined comes from another age. . . . And, of

course, it's not just the difficulty or discontinuity that makes the poet inaccessible-an accessible poet is not necessarily simple, but safe-i.e. safely using forms of the past without questioning them. Rob Fitterman (7)

One perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception. . . . get on with it, keep moving, keep in speed, the nerves, their speed. Charles Olson ("Projective Verse")

By 1955 I wrote poetry adapted from prose seeds, journals, scratching, arranged by phrasing or breath groups into little shortline patterns according to ideas of measure of American speech I'd picked up from W.C. Williams' imagist preoccupations . . . Howl . . . the whole section typed out madly in one afternoon . . . I depended on the word "who" to keep the beat . . . Ideally each line of Howl is a single breath unit. My breath is long-that's the measure . . . so these poems are a series of experiments with the formal organization of the long line . . . Whitman's form. . . A lot of these forms developed out of an extreme rhapsodic wail I once heard in a madhouse. Allen Ginsberg ("Notes for Howl and other Poems", 318-321).

Sonnets always seemed interesting just because of the way they let you think within the poem. Sonnets permit you to think in a way that other poems might not. You couldn't think the same way given another really strict form. You don't think in a sestina the way you think in a sonnet.

I like the idea of fooling around with the question of beginnings

and middles and endings, those concepts one always hates in writing, especially in fiction and the sonnet has them. The traditional form of the sonnet is to set up the scene, and then develop it in the middle, and come to a conclusion in the end couplet. And that's really stupid.

That's not the way we think; but it is structurally fascinating to do it. To not do it while also doing it. I'm not sure of how that's done, but if you're always aware that you're doing that, and you're not doing it at the same time . . . Bernadette Mayer ("The Colors" 8)

But my point here is that the minuet, the game of tennis, the heroic couplet, the concept of form as the imposing of rules and establishing of regularities, the theories of civilization, race and progress, the performances in sciences and arts to rationalize the universe, to secure balance and class--all these are a tribal magic against a real threat of an up-set and things not keeping their place. . . . A change in mode, in what was permitted, once threatened demonic disorder. Now, unconventional usages threaten loss of reason or insurrection. It is an architecture built up of symmetries for the mind feels even visual departures from the norm will bring vertigo and collapse. There must be regular sequences and a repetition of stanzas because thought must not wander, possibility must contain the reassurance of an end to possibilities. Robert Duncan ("Ideas of the Meaning of Form" 208)

I think that one reason there is so much ugly antipathy to writers who are breaking form in anyway is because people know that language taps an unpredictable power source in all of us. It's not the same in the visual arts where there are many abstract or form-breaking artists who enjoy wide popularity, are embraced by a

critical establishment, and sell their work for a tremendous amount of money. You will see their work in museums and books about the work on large glass coffee tables. Try the same thing with language, and you may find your writing lost. This is because words are used as buoys, and if they start to break up . . . Susan Howe (65)

TRUTH & LIES

It is one of the greatest glories of this universe that the common and inconspicuous life of ordinary men contains a thousand daily opportunities of spiritual splendor. Ernest Wood, 41.

I think we ought to read only the kind of books that wound and stab us. If the book we are reading doesn't wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for? . . . But we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief. Franz Kafka (16)

Why are such books so rare? Because those who write the books that hurt us also suffer, also undergo a sort of suicide, also get lost in forests-and this is frightening. H  l  ne Cixous (18)

And if there is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames. Antoine Artaud (13)

Like jazz, poetry must address a deep and total reality of being, and it must, somehow, perform a redemptive function. Lorenzo Thomas ("Communicating" 297).

We are led to believe in a lie
When we see with not through the eye
William Blake

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It is my hope to go through the combined materials of the poem, using our "real" world somewhat as a spring-board, and to give the poem as a whole an orbit or predetermined direction of its own free from my own personality as from any chance evaluation on the reader's part. (This is, of course, an impossibility, but it is a characteristic worth mentioning.) Such a poem is at least a stab at the truth. Hart Crane (220).

I was having these Blake visions [ca. 1949]. So the thing I understood from Blake was that it was possible to transmit a message through time which could reach the enlightened, that poetry had a definite effect, it wasn't just pretty, or just beautiful, as I had understood pretty beauty before-it was something basic to human existence, or it reached something, it reached the bottom of human existence. But anyway the impression I got was that it was like a kind of time machine through which he could transmit, Blake could transmit, his basic consciousness and communicate it to somebody else after he was dead, in other words, build a time machine. Allen Ginsberg (Paris Review)

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Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere

opposed; the keenness to recognize it although it is everywhere concealed; the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; the judgement to select those in whose hands it will be effective; and the cunning to spread the truth among such persons. These are formidable problems for writers living under Fascism, but they exist also for those writers who have fled or been exiled; they exist even for writers working in countries where civil liberty prevails. (133) .
..What is necessary for all writers in this age of perplexity and lightning change is a knowledge of the materialistic dialectic of economy and history. This knowledge can be acquired from books and from practical instruction, if the necessary diligence is applied. Many truths can be discovered in simpler fashion, or at least portions of truths, or facts that lead to the discovery of truths.
Bertolt Brecht (136)

The only poetic tradition is the Voice out of the burning bush. The rest is trash, & will be consumed Allen Ginsberg. ("When the Mode of the Music Changes the Walls of the City Shake". 327)

Of course, I circle "the truth" with all kinds of signs, quotation marks, and brackets, to protect it from any form of fixation or conceptualization, since it is one of those words that constantly crosses our universe in a dazzling wake, but is also pursued by suspicion. I will talk about truth again, without which (without the word truth, without the mystery truth) there would be no writing. It is what writing wants.. . . Paradise is down below. According to my people, writing isn't given. Giving oneself to writing means being in a position to do this work of digging, of unburying, and this entails a long period of apprenticeship (6)
... Our lives are buildings made up of lies. We have to lie to live. But to write we must try to unlie. Something renders going in the

direction of truth and dying almost synonymous. It is dangerous to go in the direction of truth. (36). . . Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable: thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort. Painting is trying to paint what you cannot paint and writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: it is preknowing and not knowing, blindly, with words. (38) H el ene Cixous

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It's a mistake, I think, to posit the self as the primary organizing feature of writing. As many others have pointed out, a poem exists in a matrix of social and historical relations that are more significant to the formation of an individual text than any personal qualities of the life or voice of an author. . . . I am interested in a multidiscourse polyvocal writing practice. Charles Bernstein (408-9)

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The inclination for avowal, the desire for avowal, the yearning to taste the taste of avowel, is what compels us to write: both the need to avow and its impossibility. Because most of the time the moment we avow we fall into the snare of atonement: confession-and forgetfulness. Confession is the worst thing: it disavows what it avows. . . . Try to look for the worst in yourself and confide it where there is no process of erasure, where the worst remains the worst. Try to write the worst and you will see that the worst will turn against you and treacherously, we try to veil the worst. For we cannot bear the worst. Writing the worst is an exercise that requires us to be stronger than ourselves. H el ene Cixous (45)

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Poetry (...) could be a force for the re-establishment of the invisible, for making people's inner lives more important than this

constant assertion of substance. For poetry is not about words or how one thinks, or makes things. It is about essence-the secret inside the material. It uses rhythmic speech to tell what it knows, because measure helps the defining of essence, because whatever is done should be done attractively, because rhythm is bound up with living. Poetry aims at truth. But the truth is not intellectual, it is the truth Alice Notley ("Homer's Art", v-vi)

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THE SLIPPERY & THE CERTAIN

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns. That is what poetry does, that is what poetry has to do no matter what kind of poetry it is. And there are a great many kinds of poetry. (231)

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And then, something happened and I began to discover the names of things, that is not discover the names but discover the things the things to see the things to look at and in so doing I had of course to name them not to give them new names but to see that I could find out how to know that they were there by their names or by replacing their names. And how was I to do so. They had their names and naturally I called them by the names they had and in doing so have begun looking at them I called them by their names with passion and that made poetry, I did not mean it to make poetry but it did, it made the Tender Buttons, and the Tender Buttons was very good poetry it made a lot more poetry, and I will now more and more tell about that and how it happened. (235)
Gertrude Stein ("Poetry & Grammar")

Things are in a continual state of motion and evolution, and if we come to a point where we say, with certitude, right here, this is the end of the universe, then of course we must deal with everything that goes on after that, whereas ambiguity seems to take further developments into account. . . . I think I am trying to reproduce the polyphony that goes on inside me, which I don't think is radically different from that of other people. . . . on the whole I feel that poetry is going on all the time inside, an underground stream. One can let down one's bucket and bring the poem back up. . . . I don't

believe in automatic writing as the Surrealists were supposed to have practiced it, simply because it is not a reflection of the whole mind, which is partly logical and reasonable, and that part should have is say, too. (46-51)

...

I think I am more interested in the movement among ideas than in the ideas themselves, the way one goes from one point to another rather than the destination or the origin. (55) John Ashbery

The spirit of zen is to baffle, excite, puzzle and exhaust the intellect until it is realized that intellection is only thinking about. (19) . . . Thus Zen is sometimes described as 'straight forwardness' or 'going right ahead' for Zen is to move with life without trying to arrest and interrupt its flow; it is an immediate awareness of things as they live and move, as distinct from the mere grasp of ideas and feelings about things which are the dead symbols of a living reality. (52) ..How can truth be known if it can never be defined? Zen would answer: by not trying to grasp or define it (58) . . . The Zen masters distinguished between two kinds of phrases--the dead and the living--the dead being those which were amenable to logical analysis and solution, and the living, those which could never be confused to any fixed system of interpretation . . a realization that life can never be grasped, never possessed or made to stand still (75). Alan Watts (Spirit of Zen)

Madwomen, as we saw earlier, invert the order of the world: their ravings reveal the truth because they are deeply subversive. Catherine Clément (110)

Writing poetry for me is often more a matter of texture than form.. . . I continue to use what Stephen Yenser identified as "multivalent fragments," which produce a layered effect of multiple and sometimes contradictory semantic meanings and cultural allusions. I am also interested in the textural effects enabled by what Roman Jakobson called "subliminal verbal patterning" in literary and folk poetry.. . . My writing process is improvisatory, and certainly I have been influenced by instrumental and vocal improvisations of blues and jazz musicians. Some of the lines I write aspire to certain moments in jazz when scat becomes a kind of inspired speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, moments when utterance aspires to pure music.. . . Muse & Drudge, like the jazz soloist who plays "mysterious" music, locates itself in a space where it is possible to pay dues, respects, and "props" to tradition while still claiming the freedom to wander to the other side of far. Harryette Mullen

Someone asked at the last session what the tape voices have to do with poetics. Answer: Everything. Writers work with words and voices just as painters work with colors. An important point here is the misconception that a writer creates in a vacuum using only his very own words. Was he blind deaf and illiterate from birth? So let's dispense with this "originality" fetish. Is a painter committing plagiarism if he paints a mountain that other painters have painted? Even if he paints a mountain from another painter's painting of a mountain.

Writers work with words and voices and where do these words and voices come from? From many sources: Conversations heard and overheard, movies, radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, yes and other writers; . . . voices while he is hearing all the time whether he knows it or not . . . Look, listen, and transcribe-and forget about being original. William Burroughs (77-79)

The mutability of the truth, Ibsen said it. Jefferson said it. We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in the new mode. There has to be new poetry. But the thing is that the change, the greater material, the altered structure of the inevitable revolution must be in the poem, in it. Made of it. It must shine in the structural body of it. William Carlos Williams (In Rothenberg, 14)

How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens about us of which poems write so much, without incorporating its essential fact-the relativity of measurements-into our own category of activity: the poem. . . . Relativity applies to everything, like love, if it applies to anything in the world.

What, by this approach I am trying to sketch, what we are trying to do is not only to disengage the elements of a measure but to seek (what we believe is there) a new measure or a new way of measuring that will commensurate with the social, economic world in which we are living as contrasted with the past. It is in many ways a different world from the past calling for a new measure. William Carlos Williams ("Field" 238)

Nonetheless, any poetic line is composed under the compulsion and constraint-the sentence-of syntax.

Just as, in one sentence you cannot turn into she, run cannot turn into ran, you can't, in your desire to be free of a certain moment, be

somewhere else immediately. This is the judgement of time, history and gender as it is reflected in any written line.

And just as the sentence contains only as much language as it can bear, so can it be viewed as an image of the pressure of temporality. The facing of what is in front of you, by sorting out what is behind, goes into the careful syntactical processing of a sentence. Law and grammar must coexist in that cell. This coexistence requires the exaction of judgment.

Poetic judgement goes to the extreme with this exaction, and the more extreme it is, the more otherly it becomes. It transforms the state of being lost into that of being free, by making judgement on judgement itself. Poetry writes twice and produces another sound from the ordinary. In this sense it is free out of its longing to escape the cell of syntax. Fanny Howe (54)

What Roussel did was to take a completely banal sentence heard everyday, taken from songs, read on walls, and with it he constructed the most absurd things, the most improbably situations, without any possible relationships to reality. (178). . . Roussel's process incorporates word play and double entendre which are considered trivial by us, but are basic aspects of Japanese poetics (180). . . . But the knowledge that there is a process throws the reader into a state of being uncertain and even while knowing that there is no way of rediscovering the process, and even if one enjoys simply reading the text, the fact that there is a secret transforms the experience of reading into one of deciphering, a game, a more complex undertaking, more disturbing than anxious than one reads a simple text for the pleasure of it . . I'm not convinced that a knowledge of the actual text from which it starts is at all necessary. Michel Foucault (181)

THE REAL & THE UNIVERSAL

To speak well in colonial America was to speak straightforward and in a plain manner, that is to say, within the narrative structure and metaphors of the bible. The successful colonizer was considered a biblical type, a saint (a nation of heroes) and his life was a biblical allegory in the making; we might think that the bible provided a necessary structure to justify clearing the land of pestilence (the Indians). The errand: progress, conquer. Later with the scientific and industrial revolutions, descriptive language became the norm. As I see it, most simplistic descriptions "pretend" to add or subtract nothing, as if a straightforward literal, transparent language is possible, true and accurate. In contemporary America, to speak straightforwardly and literally is to speak within the narrative structure and metaphors of advanced capital (rather than the bible): the anti-intellectual, journalistic, so-called transparent language of advertising. Speaking and writing in these ways might be interpreted as implicit acceptances of the system. And so aware poetic writing questions, disrupts and dislocates conventional notions of "real/realism" and "normal/natural", refusing to universalize the status quo, and instead of attempting to reproduce reality, attempting to change it.
bh

Realistic poetry, at its best, is likely to meet the following conditions: (1) it will describe normal situations and average characters in ordinary setting (often with emphasis on the lower strata of society.); (2) it will renounce far fetched images and metaphors; (3) it will endeavor to reproduce actual speech and tend to approximate prose rhythms. "Realism" Princeton Encyclopedia (685)

The untruth of a painting or a photograph is that, in spite of its concreteness it drops the element of natural succession. . . the fundamental reality of time . . . A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature. Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points, of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snapshots. Neither can a pure verb, an abstract motion, be possible in nature. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them . . . But in nature there is no completeness . . . motion leaks everywhere like electricity from an exposed wire. All process in nature are interrelated and thus there could be no complete sentences save one which it would take all time to pronounce.

According to this definition thought deals with no bloodless concepts but watches things move under its microscope... All truth has to be expressed in sentences because all truth is the transference of power. Ernest Fenollosa (16-18)

In any given instance, because there is a choice of words, the choice, if a man is in there, will be, obedience of his ear to the syllables. . . . It is from the union of the mind and the ear that the syllable is born . . . The other child is the LINE. And together these two, the syllable and the line, they make a poem. . . . And the line comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes . . . Because breath allows all the speech-force of language back in. (53-56)

...

I say a projective poet will, down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs. Charles Olson (61)

The Fairy tale of the 'realistic' novel whispers assurance that the world is not mysterious, that it is predictable-if not to the characters then to the author, that it is available to manipulation by the individual, that it is not only under control but that one can profit from this control. Ronald Sukenick. (433)

A stylistic, one might say a cultural, ideal for Western Civilization, the best style is the style not noticed; the best manners the most unobtrusive. Richard Lanham (266)

All deep things are Song . . . the primal element of us; of us, and of all things. . . Poetry, therefore we call musical thought. The Poet is he who thinks in that manner. At bottom it turns still on power of intellect; it is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a Poet. See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it. Robert Duncan quoting Carlyle ("The Hero as Poet" in Heroes and Hero-Worship 1840).

The poets in this anthology have all foregrounded language itself as the project of their writing. For these poets language is not something that explains or translates experience but is the source of experience. Language is perception, thought, itself; and in that context the poems of these writers do not function as "frames" of experience or brief narrative summaries of ideas and emotions as they do for many current poets. Douglas Messerli (2)

One would perhaps admit that it [Oulipo potentiality] opens onto a perfectly authentic modern realism. For reality never shows more than a part of itself, authorizing a thousand interpretations, significations, and solutions, all equally probable. Jacques Bens (72)

My statement is this: that poetry to go forward, in my view, has to begin a voyage into the description of historical reality. . . . an era of investigative poesy, a form of historical writing-this is as potentially dangerous to the poet as a minefield or those small foot-snuffing blow-up devices the defense department used in Vietnam; but it is a danger thrillingly magnetic to a bard wandering through the electromagnetic aeon. Ed Sanders (367-370)

All writers believe they are realists. . . . Realism is the ideology which each brandishes against his neighbor, the quality which each believes he possesses for himself alone. It has always been the same: out of a concern for realism each new literary school has sought to destroy the one which preceded it. . . . When a form of writing has lost its initial vitality, its forces, its violence, when it has become a vulgar recipe . . . it is indeed a return to the real. Alain Robbe Grillet (159)

Words have users, but as well users have words. And it is the users that establish the world's realities. Realities being those fantasies, i.e., that belong to governments, traditions, etc., which, it is must

be clear by now, can make of conflict with the singular human life all ways. The fantasy of America might hurt you, but it is what should be meant when one talks of "reality." Not only the things you can touch or see, but the things that make such touching or seeing "normal." Then words, like their users, have a hegemony-socially-which is final, right now. Leroi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka) (374)

By resisting conventional narrative strategies, poetry might call attention to the ways in which those structures have obscured, abridged, and falsified the relationships between cause and effect, subject and object, intention and action, in much of what passes for the telling of our recent common history. Poetry resists false linkages. . . . Resisting false linkages while discovering, recovering, uncovering new ones, poets might help sweep the linguistic path of its polluting and coercive narratives, helping us to re-perceive our world and each other with efficacy, compassion, humor, and mutual regard. Ann Lauterbach (38)

Probably all feelings are cliches-which is not to say that they are invalid, or stupid, or even absurd (though like anything else they may be). Feelings are common to us all, never new, stunning only to the person feeling them at the time, and foolish (or boring) to everyone else. Thoughts, however, can be affective whether one shares them at the moment or not, and they can be original. Feelings have no potential, they can never be anything but what they are. Ideals and thoughts, however, are full of potential. That is to say, love or melancholy only become more or less as they develop as feelings. Yet the idea of love or melancholy ramifies indefinitely and can lead off in an infinity of directions. Lyn Hejinian (507)

The poets' repeated denial of "normal" word order or syntactic integrity, their introduction of arcane vocabulary and difficult, indeed confusing reference, functions, I think, to mime the coming to awareness of the mind in the face of the endless information glut that surrounds us. Marjorie Perloff (205)

The fact that we live in a world in which things have been said. These spoken words in reality are not, as people tend to think, a wind that passes without leaving a trace, but in fact, diverse as are the traces, they do remain. We live in a world completely marked by, all laced with, discourses, that is to say, utterances which have been spoken, of things said, of affirmations, interrogations, of discourses which have already occurred. To that extent, the historical world in which we live cannot be disassociated from all the elements of discourses which have inhabited this world and continue to live in it as the economic process, the demographic, etcetera, etcetera. Michel Foucault (177)

Text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth) we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue-this texture-the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. Roland Barthes ("Pleasure" 64)

FIXED & FREE

Some stances. I shift in and out. Resist structures of language that define and fix identities. Define. Instead strive for a subject/object relationship that is open and always in-the-process-of-becoming. Limited. Begin by confronting or ambushing the oedipal structure of Western culture. The sentence. Refigure and confound it. The crucial narrative structure for American realist fiction and poetry rests soundly on repairing and soothing the oedipal triangle (I/you/it - I/Other/other - Subject/Object/object –

Father/Mother/boy child) following the law and language of the father; these conventions and triangles often support, ignore and use the other/Other: the poor, the woman, the strange. Rag quilts. In order to dislocate, question and disrupt the power relations embedded within the oedipal triangle, a writer can tangle the position of the author and character as hero, heroine, great soul, unitary self, natural Americans. Overlap. Tangle values of unity, significance, identity and definition. Refuse rigid narrative positions and the armor of point of view. Doubletalk. Refuse to speak authoritatively in the voice of the other. Drift away. Exceed the notion of the feminine as lack. Holes and details everywhere. Bring the body back into the text. Change the structure, content, and rhythm of the canon and you change lives. Present that which has been repressed, women's sexuality and pleasure. Threaten the order. *Écriture féminine* as defined by the French feminists is writing that foregrounds that which has usually been repressed and debased. Redraw borders. Let poetic writing strip away the facade of instrumental writing. Shift, transform and stay in the process of becoming, undefinable and particular. bh

The word "poetry" is a Greek word for making something up. It means to create; it means to make up. And so when you say, is that

true, or did you make it up, you're really saying, is that true or is it poetry. . . .Within the Christian world, which is very strongly, of course, Judaic, there was a strong sense that there was something profoundly wrong about making-up persons. God was the creator and you were stepping into the creator's place. Robert Duncan (2).

In the latter part of the twentieth century terms like "The American Dream" and "The American Way of Life" sound like fraudulent propaganda or advertising slogans to us. They did not to Whitman. To him they were terms of a millenarian vision, an apocalypse in which every vestige of fraud or exploitation between human beings had been burned away. . . . At every point Whitman offers an alternative to the epics of the rising predatory society.

Whitman's poems are full of men doing things together. . . Being is realized in the community of work and love, and love and work. The meaning of the universe. Whitman is the poet of revolutionary hope, and without hope revolution is catastrophe . . . Whitman's joyous workers . . . replaced by a frustrated proletariat . . . independent yeomen by mortgaged farms, tenant farmers, farm laborers . . So poetic followers of Whitman became, first radical populists . . then socialists . . then anarchists . . then communists. (Kenneth Rexroth 19)

That's the trouble-anything I've done has been an accident. Any good has been spoiled by my intentions-the preoccupation with irrelevant and stupid things. Ezra Pound to Allen Ginsberg ("Encounters with Ezra Pound" 17)

Poetry is the aversion to the assertion of power. Poetry is that which resists dominance. Ann Lauterbach (37)

For me it is not enough to simply put a new content in the writing. For example, in some city parks there are squares where people can look at each other and therefore it calls for talking to each other. You can also have a park where the benches are put in such a way that people cannot see each other and therefore it calls for another kind of relationship. It is the same thing if we are talking about form. Nicole Brossard (2)

The best writing is achieved in an egoless state. The writer's defensive, limited ego, his "very own words," these are his least interesting sources. William Burroughs (79)

The real "I" in literature should be an avowal. The artist's function is to reveal himself, to confess his guilt. He has to betray himself, to reveal things in his work that he would never reveal in his private life. This can never be done enough. To speak of things that have no connection to his art-mother, grandfather, all this infantile foolishness-has no interest whatsoever neither for the understanding of the work itself, nor for any other person. A work of strength requires an "I" of strength . . . exclude nothing. Pierre Guyotat (21)

I have always been averse to talking about myself and so I don't write about my life the way the confessional poets do. I don't want

to bore people with experiences of mine that are simply versions of what everybody goes through. For me, poetry starts after that point. I write with experience in mind, but I don't write about them, I write out of them. John Ashbery (43)

Abstraction (in poetry, not in painting) involves personal removal by the poet. For instance, the decision involved in the choice between "the nostalgia of the infinite" and "the nostalgia for the infinite" defines an attitude towards degree of abstraction. . . . Personism, a movement which I recently founded and which nobody yet knows about, interests me a great deal, being so totally opposed to this kind of abstract removal that it is verging on a true abstraction for the first time, really, in the history of poetry. . . . One of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feeling towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person. . . . It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person. . . . at last between two persons instead of two pages. Frank O'Hara (498)

So then I immediately regressed into writing poems like Frank O'Hara, because he was a good poet who just said, "I do this in my life and I do that in my life" . . . The idea of the abstract expressionists was, of course, to put how you did your works on the surface, and I decided to do that. (What did you pick up from O'Hara?) Personal tone. The way to use a casual tone and then long lines without having to be measured in a slow way. To write fast. I write fast. I'm fast--write as quick as my hands are . . . Whatever happened in your life was as interesting as anything else. Ted Berrigan (Homage 110-112)

The private life of an individual, his sexual preference and his work are interrelated not because his work translates his sexual life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text. Michel Foucault (184)

I intended this work to be the repetition of historically real events the writing of which punches a hole in reality. Leslie Scalapino (21)

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall. Virginia Woolf 107)

In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say writing) by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases-reason, science, law. Roland Barthes ("Death of the Author," 147)

The reader for PSI [Poetry Systems Incorporated] product is, as is normal for TV, a digit, "a statistical guarantor of the precise scale of another kind of beast known as 'the audience'". To this PSI product audience, the "poem" is a form of instant uplift . . . Read one now and again. You'll participate in a ritual of "sensitivity" and

"self awareness" It is the mechanism of the poetry reading on campuses and in "poetry centers" across the US. Marjorie Perloff (19-20)

The Western concept of the cultivation of the voice is foreign to African or Afro-American music. In the West, only the artifact can be beautiful, mere expression cannot be thought to be. Leroi Jones (Blues People 26)

In order to avoid coinciding with the oppressive scripts which, under the pretense of empowerment relaunch the old divisive metaphors of race and subject, in order to elude the panoptic eye of ideology which enlists is as its accomplices, in order to thwart the master positions one begins by operating a critical negation, a deformation of the very categories: the I, the she, the black, the white, the male. A strategy of resistance. Chris Tysh (75)

The invitation to 'write about yourself' is alarming both because the modern fetish is that the poet's self is his/her commodity (due to the pathological withering of all public forms of public space, 'private affluence public squalor' I guess and because writing 'about' it calls for a distanciation from it: making its edges visible. . . . lead us away from self as commodity (a state fragile because unable to change) to self as process, i.e. one moving in time and composed of skepticism, libidinous fantasy and empathy in equal doses. . . . Of course to define yourself is to exclude other people's subjectivity. The dream follow up would be to interview the people who lived around the poet (those who appear in the poems as pronouns), who might (even) inform us that the poet's words were

telling, insightful and undeniable, or that the poet was self-struck, a fantasist, and cut off by his own vanity . . . Why is autobiography so privileged? (Andrew Duncan 86-88)

On the other hand one must not make poetry boring by reasoning the human figure, the poet with mouth & tongue, out of it-leaving only the mannered tracings of a mind which, by constantly denying its own existence as "someone," becomes of interest only to translators of difficult discourse, to critics. Someone, at this point, must take in hand the task of being everyone, & no one, as the first poets did. Someone must pay attention to the real spiritual needs of both her neighbors (not her poetic peers) & the future. (Alice Notley, "Homer's Art", vi)

Fixity is a function of power. Those who maintain place, who decide what takes place and dictate what has taken place, are power brokers of the traditional. the 'placeless' by contrast, are translators of the nontraditional . . . Their appropriate sign is a crossing sign at the junction. The crossing sign is the antithesis of a place marker. It signifies always, change, motion, transience, process. To adept adherents of wandering, a crossing sign is equivalent to a challenge thrown out in brash, sassy tones by a locomotive blowing by: 'Do what you can-right here-on this placeless-place, this spotless spot . . .' Houston A. Baker (202)

OPEN & CLOSED

To press against and pull away from the temptation to capture the reader with soothing, seductive and known structures and tales. Instead, I am drawn toward a poetics that purposefully leaves "holes" in the texts so to allow and demand the reader's escape through thinking and change rather than mesmerizing with beautiful little object-poems. bh

In a sense, writing begins where words stop. Each time you write, you have to make it new. You have to go beyond the language of the tribe, the old and traditional language. You have to begin where the people before you left off. Revolution in art always begins with the rebel who wants to rescue art from its fatal and presumed place of origin in everyday life. Pierre Guyotat (21)

Thought is more important than art. Without thought art could certainly not exist. Art is one of many products of thought. An impressive one, perhaps the most impressive one, but to revere art, and have no understanding of the process that forces it into existence, is finally not even to understand what art is. Leroi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka) (378)

When I am thinking about my work, I am often thinking about that thinking-its quality, motives, motifs, and instruments. Then, for me, poetry is the site of the consciousness of consciousness. Lyn Hejinian. (24)

Writing is not arriving; most of the time it's not arriving. One must go on foot, with the body. One has to go away, leave the self. How far must one not arrive in order to write, how far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure? One must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self toward the dark. H el ene Cixous (65)

So among us the poet has come to play a performance role that resembles that of the shaman . . . What do they want? the poet wonders of those who watch him in his role of innocent, sometimes reluctant Performer. But what? To know that madness is possible & that the contradictions can be sustained. . . . What do we say about the function of our poetry, the thing we do? That it explores. That it initiates thought or action. That it proposes its own displacement. That it allows vulnerability & conflict. That it remains, like the best science, constantly open to change: to a continual change in our idea of what a poem is or may be. What language is. What experience is. What reality is. That for many of us it has become a fundamental process for the play & interchange of possibilities. Jerome Rothenberg (134)

An insistence that the work deny itself the last word....I'm appalled at what people do with answers or what answers to people. And answers have consequences I don't like. They get fixed in the mind. I don't like to see fixed ends. I like to see the thwarting of ends. Jerome Rothenberg (224)

The primary ideological message of poetry lies not in its explicit content, political though that may be, but in the attitude toward

reception it demands of the reader. It is this "attitude toward information," which is carried forward by the recipient. It is this attitude which forms the basis for a response to other information, not necessarily literary, in the text. And, beyond the poem, in the world. Ron Silliman (The New Sentence 31)

This is the problem which any poet who departs from closed form is especially confronted by. And it involves a whole series of new recognitions. from the moment he ventures into FIELD Composition-puts himself in the open-he can go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself. Charles Olson ("Projective Verse" 52)

I'm interested in a particular kind of narrative-what Jack Spicer and I agreed to call our work the serial poem-this is a narrative which refuses to adopt an imposed story-line, and completes itself only in the sequence of poems, if, in fact, a reader insists upon a definition of completion which is separate from the activity of the poems themselves. The poems tend to act as a sequence of energies which run out when so much of a tale is told. I like to describe this in Ovidian terms, as a carmen perpetuum, a continuous song in which the fragmented subject matter is only apparently disconnected. Robin Blaser (237-38)

Poetry is the aversion to conformity. Charles Bernstein (37)

An epic in the real sense is the speech of a nation through the

mouth of one man. Ezra Pound (ABC)

What a service to poetry it might be to steal story away from the novel & give it back to rhythm & sound give it back to the line. Another service would be to write a long poem, a story poem, with a female narrator/hero. Perhaps this time she wouldn't call herself something like Helen; perhaps instead there might be recovered some sense of what mind was like before Homer, before the world went haywire & women were denied participation in the design & making of it. Perhaps someone might discover that original mind inside herself right now, in these times. Anyone might. (Alice Notley,. "Homer's Art," 402)

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