New Wilderness Letter

Edited by Jerome Rothenberg
SEDIMENTATION AND POETICS

Spiritus means breath, etymologically, and breath spirit is the vehicle for poetry and song as well as the air horse the Mind rides during meditation practice. Sit down relax with straight spine and pass into space with your air. People followed their outbreath in Tibet. So did Poets in the west, filling their body-wind with vowels and tones of Voice. Sometimes you forget you're breathing and the mind daydreams poems of past history future furniture present erotic bliss Old shameful conversations but a fly buzzing when you died like Emily Dickinson brings you back mindful to the room where you sit and keep breathing aware of the walls around you and the endless blue sky above your mind.

The daydreams Isolated recollected as objects can be poetry story epics or flash hokkans.

A thought like a poem begins you can't tell where then it gets big in the mind's eye an imaginary universe and then

Disappears like a white elephant into the blue or "as a bird leaves the imprint of its flight in sky" So thought ends you can't tell where, except it disappears into thin air like Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare left his breath behind for us to hear, so did Shelley and William Carlos Williams and Kerouac. "The breath whose might I have invoked in song Descends on me; my spirit's right at the end of World War I. It's almost World War III and we're still breathing. So let's begin here with meditation and poetry, while spirit's in us in Minneapolis.

Notes for Lecture Myth & Ritual: Poetics composed 5 am March 9, 1980 Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado for Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) lecture series 7 April 1980
A GLASS TUBE ECSTASY

for Hugo Ball

a glass tube
for my leg says Hugo Ball
my hat a cylinder
in blue & white
the night the german ostriches the sink
he pisses in
all these become his world
his dada song, begun there
holds the image
until it comes at us:
the image from its cross
looks down:
a ribbon
a revolver
mud
these contribute
to his death
also to what his death contributes
later, too hysterical
too sick with god
& time:
a carousel
a roasted poet
fish
the queen says to his mind
& enters
where the street of mirrors starts
she sees his face
reflected
in hunger of the world
as pain, the consciousness
of death not why we die
but why we dream about it
& why our dreams can't save
the dying remnant
Hugo
as I write this poem
the voice cries
from a further room
the dancer / singer calls me
from a further room
I step into an obelisk

below the waist
my mouth opens to sing
but freezes
shut
in grief for you
ombula
takë
bitdli
solunkola
the collapse of language
tabla tokta tokta takabala
taka tak
a glass tube ecstacy
escapes from time
Babula m'balam

the image & the word
over your bed
hang crucified
again the cabaret explodes
again again
fatigue
one
foot
in glass
a glass nerve
&
a priestly gas pump
pulls
her hair out

February 3, 1980, performance of Mine Yiddisher Dada: Homage à Tristan Tzara & Hugo Ball at the Center for Music Experiment, La Jolla, California. Left to right: Matthew Rothenberg, Jerome Rothenberg, Bert Turetsky. (Photo by Jennifer Kotter)
Robert Kelly
From Angels of Trial and Error: THE BOOK OF JAKOB

[Jakob, Blessed by Angel, Receives a New Name & Walks Lame]

A name a wound of light.
I walk lame
a month now
bless me
is this the sin or the repentance?

But Jakob's angel knew nothing of sin.
"You are upright," he tells me
"& you prevail" he tells
upright & walk lame. A lame
man is one who stands
leaves
a root of himself in earth
holds him back.

"And left is Jakob alone. And wrestling is a Man with him till the ascending of the dawn. And seeing is he that he does not prevail against him. Yet touching is he the palm of Jakob's thighbone in his wrestling with him.

And saying is he to him, Send me away for the dawn ascends" the dawn
after a man with a Man wrestles all night
the sinew of his thigh touched.

Bless me with the saying of your name.
Who only spoke my own.

Jakob is my Hebrew name. Baptized Robertus Iacobus—
the man I wrestled with was me.

Sciatic nerve, prove it through grammar,
make the clause refer
by its relative
back always to the primary
of identity, this sayer of I
whose numbness
like a serpent winds
along the path of the sciatic nerve
about my shank
my wooden foot
rooted to this spot—
Peniel,
The Face of God.
Face to face— but the wound is in the leg
"therefore not eating are the sons of Israel the sinew
which was benumbed till this day"
touch me. bless me
deliver me from not knowing my name.

Nowhere does it say that he was angry
as a man might be with another man
wound around him, urgent struggle in the dark.
Jakob was not angry.
He cared
for the name
& for the Name's sake
all night. Benumbed till this day
the sinew of my attention
will not hold— I notice but I do not hold.
Wherefore the solved enigma prances
loose again from the mind's enclosure
and all circumstances free themselves
from my comprehension. I forget
the clarities of sunset at night, of dawn
in noontime lost among the splendor.

I remember
no name but Name.
"Why is this you are asking for my name?
And blessing him is he there."
till we understand
we wrestle
to exchange questions.
To ask the name
is to be answered—
"Why is this?" is my name

I am the angel, that is
I am the Man of the Question
holds you all night—
yet you must let me go
by asking one simple question.
I answer by leaving you.
I answer by the limp that dances you ever after.
I answer by the dawn.

"And calling is Jakob the name of the place Peniel שֵׁן לָעָד 'for I see the שֵׁן face to face, and rescued is my soul. And
irradiating him is the sun as he passes Peniel. Yet he is limping on
his thigh."

Smite him who asks. Smite him with answers.

O to say the truth and have no one hear!
To speak song in the silence of things!
There is a rapture in this long neglect.

Counting the footsteps, path through the dry stream
whose name's a permutation of my own—

I limp. The subtle damage of romance
trills down the dumb nerve.
Everything I saw was heaven;
now build a church, an earth, to measure it
measure what I saw & make it
a place we can enter with bare feet to pace
the outline of the First Dimension.

This oiled rock
I used once for a pillow
this baptizing Jabbok water, this tract
of unmarketable earth will

come down from heaven
and I will see it on Patmos

when I have come to earth again
purged of my tricks.
But still smooth-faced. Still a lover.

Jakob watches the dull middle toe on his right foot. If he flexes it
it stays flexed when the others extend. This is clinical. It has
sensation but no motivation. It drags. I live this house, he says.

My life
this house
of days
this book
this basket of
what is new.

Every day a new experiment. Crossing the Jabbok. Developing a
random-number table reliably random. Using Pappus' Theorem
to achieve a poetry of rigorous intersections. (The first product
will be a book called Intersections.) Separating my sheep from his.
Separating my destiny from Esau. This public art, this Palestine.
My art-form is this Holy Land, to carve its spiritual and etheric
potencies into the readable fact of the place. Robert Smithson
will later heed me in Deseret. I am Jakob the Innovator, Experi-
menter, the Patient, the Exciting, the Unsatisfying, the Cheat.
I have been standing alone so long I limp. I do not dance, no more
than Søren did, lame men are always dancing, a dance unto
themselves, or selves around;

...
except where luxurious humankind must live in deserts?
But mathematics isn't dry, the aridity
is the desert of imperfect attention
the world brings to what brings the world
cycles of predicates
falling like manna
down on this pure rock,
this heaven of Relations.

That is where the world began, that star.
The animals are scattered us
as we are Gods.
The earth is a dismemberment.

I availed all night against him.
He won but I endured—

sparagmos— the beast I was
torn (tref)
in the quick wound.

(October 1979)

The citations of The Book of Genesis are from the Concordant Version, whose discipline of the ‘literal’ estranges the text from the commonplace.

Antonin Artaud
THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY
Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Norman Glass

NOTE. In November 1947 Fernand Pouey, Director of Drama and Literature on the French Broadcasting Company, asked Antonin Artaud if he would prepare a program for a new series entitled La Voix des poètes. Artaud assembled a text called Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu which was consequently banned by Wladimir Porche, Director of the French Broadcasting Company, on the grounds that Artaud's language was too crude and obscene. Although Pouey was able to assemble a jury of some fifty French writers and intellectuals who heard the recording and voted unanimously for it to be broadcast, Porche refused to lift the interdiction.

Artaud died on March 4, 1948 and all of the text which had been recorded for broadcast was published by K éditeur at the end of April. When Volume 13 of the Complete Works of Artaud was published by Gallimard in 1974 additional material which Artaud had written specifically for the broadcast but which had not been recorded because of the broadcasting time at the author's disposal, was included, along with 12 letters written by Artaud to various people while the interdiction was being contested.

Le Théâtre de la Cruauté is dated 19 November 1947 and first appeared in the literary magazine 84 in a special Homage to Artaud issue (number 5-6, 1948).

—C.E. and N.G.

Do you know anything more outrageously fecal
than the story of god
and of his Being: SATAN,
the membrane of the heart
the ignominious sow
of the illusory universal
who with her slobbering udders
has never concealed anything from us
except Nothingness?

Confronted by this idea of a pre-established universe
man has never until now succeeded in asserting his superiority
over the empires of possibility.

For if there is nothing,
there is nothing,
except this excremental idea
of a Being who might have made for instance the beasts.

And in that case
where do the beasts come from?
From the fact that the world of corporal perceptions is not on its plane and not to the point,
from the fact that there is a psychic life and no true organic life,
from the fact that the mere idea of a pure organic life can even be raised,
from the fact that a distinction could arise between pure organic life in embryo and the passion ruled and integral concrete life of the human body.

The human body is an electric battery whose discharges have been castrated and driven back, whose abilities and intensities have been oriented toward sexual life while it is made precisely for absorbing by its voltaic displacements all the errant availabilities of the infinity of the void, of the increasingly incommensurable holes of void of a never fulfilled organic possibility.

The human body needs to eat, but who has ever tested other than on the plane of sexual life the incommensurable abilities of the appetites?

Make human anatomy dance at last,

from top to bottom and from bottom to top, from backward to forward and from forward to backward, but much more from backward to backward, moreover, than from backward to forward,

and the problem of the rarefaction of foodstuffs will no longer have to be solved, because there will no longer be a reason, even, for raising it.

One has made the human body eat,
one has made it drink, in order to avoid making it dance.

One has made it fornicate the occult in order to spare oneself from grinding down and executing occult life.

For nothing deserves to be executed as much as so-called occult life.

It is there that god and his Being thought of fleeing from demented man, there, on that increasingly absent plane of occult life where god wanted to make man believe that things could be seen and grasped in spirit, even though there is nothing existent and real except external physical life, and that all that flees from it and turns away from it is only the limbo of the demons' world.

And god wanted to make man believe in that reality of the demons' world.

But the demons' world is absent. It will never meet with evidence. The best way to cure oneself of it and to destroy it is to complete the construction of reality. For reality is not completed, is not constructed yet. On its completion will depend in the world of eternal life the return of an eternal health.

The theatre of cruelty is not the symbol of an absent void, of an appalling incapacity for self-realization in man's life. It is the affirmation of a terrible and moreover overwhelming necessity.

On the never visited slopes of the Caucasus, of the Carpathians, of the Himalayas, of the Appenines,
have been conducted everyday, 
night and day, 
for years and years, 
appalling corporal rites 
where the black life, 
the never checked and black life 
grants itself appalling and repellent meals.

There, the limbs and organs considered vile 
simply for having been 
perpetually vilified, 
driven 
outside the capacities of exterior lyrical life, 
are used in all the delirium of unbridled eroticism, 
in the midst of the discharge, 
increasingly fascinating 
and virgin, 
of a liquid 
whose nature it has never been possible to classify, 
because it is increasingly inariate and impartial.

(It is not especially a question of the sex organs or the anus 
which should moreover be cut off and got rid of, 
but of the top of the thighs, 
of the hips, 
of the loins, 
of the entire stomach which has no sex organs 
and of the navel.)

All that is for the moment sexual and obscene 
because it has never been possible to work and to cultivate it 
outside of the obscene 
and the bodies that dance there 
are nondetachable from the obscene, 
they have systematically embraced obscene life 
but that dance of obscene bodies 
must be destroyed 
in order to replace it by the dance 
of our bodies.

I have been maddened 
and tetanized 
for years 
by the dance of an appalling world of exclusively 
sexualized microbes 
where I recognized 
in the life of certain compressed spaces 
men, women, 
children of modern life.

I have been endlessly tormented by the itchings of intolerable 
eczemas 
where all the purulences of the erotic life of the coffin 
were given free rein.

There is no need to look elsewhere than to these black ritual dances 
for the origin of all the eczemas, 
of all the shingles, 
of all the tuberculoses, 
of all the epidemics, 
of all the plagues 
whose cauterization 
modern medicine, 
increasingly disconcerted, 
proves quite unable to discover.

My sensibility has been made to descend, 
for the last ten years, 
the steps of the most monstrous sarcophagi, 
of the yet unoperated world of the dead 
and of the living who have chosen 
(and at the point where we are, it's through vice)— 
who have chosen to live dead.

But I will have quite simply avoided becoming sick 
and with me 
a whole world which is everything that I know.

12

o pedana
na komev
tau dedana
tau komev

na dedanu
na komev
tau komev
na come
copsi tra
ka figa aronda

ka lakeou
to cobra
cobra ja
ja futsa mata

OF THE serpent isn't any of
IT NA
Because you have allowed the organisms to put out their tongues you should have cut off these organisms' tongues at the exit of the body's tunnels.

There is plague, cholera, black smallpox only because the dance and consequently the theatre have not yet begun to exist.

What doctor of the rationed bodies of present misery has ever sought to examine a cholera close up?

By listening to the breathing or the pulse of a patient, by lending an ear, in front of the concentration camps of those rationed bodies of misery, to the beating of feet, of trunks and of sex organs of the immense and suppressed field of certain terrible microbes which are other human bodies.

Where are they? Ground level or in the depths of certain tombs in historically if not geographically unsuspected places.

ko embark

tu ur ja bella

ur ja bella

kou embark

There, the living make appointments with the dead and certain paintings of the dance of death have no other origin.

It is to these upheavals where the meeting of two extraordinary worlds is unceasingly depicted that we owe the painting of the Middle Ages, as moreover all painting, all history and I would say all geography.

The earth is depicted and described under the action of a terrible dance on which all due fruits have not yet been epidemically bestowed.

POST-SCRIPTUM

There where there is metaphysics, mystical theology, irreducible dialectics, I hear the huge colon of my hunger writhe and under the impulses of its sombre life I dictate to my hands their dance, to my feet or to my arms.

The theatre and the dance of song are the theatre of the furious rebellions of the misery of the human body before the problems that it does not fathom or by whose passive, specious, quibbling, inscrutable, inevident nature it is exhausted.

So it dances in blocks of KHA, KHA infinitely more arid but organic;

it brings to heel the black rampart of the internal liquid's displacements;
the world of invertebrate grubs
from which the endless night
of useless insects breaks away:
lice,
fleas,
bedbugs,
mosquitoes,
spiders,
occurs only
because the everyday body
has lost under hunger
its primal cohesion
and it loses in gusts,
in mountains,
in gangs,
in endless theories
the black and bitter fumes
of the rages
of its energy.

Robin Blaser
From IMAGE-NATIONS 1-12 & THE STADIUM OF THE MIRROR

The wild-logos
the reversability of experience and language
neither experience nor language's a reality that
will suffice to itself alone
two aspects of the reversability which is ultimate
truth
there is no frontier between language and the world
A wild-logos to recognize the movement that
prevents the fixing of the meaning of the thing,
visible or invisible, and makes arise indefinitely,
beyond the present given, the latent content of the
world.

(Lefort, Merleau-Ponty)

Michael McClure
From COYOTE IN CHAINS
for Gary

Coyote in Chains is a paraphrase of Aeschylus's lyrical drama Prometheus Bound.
The titan Prometheus becomes the Amerindian trickster god, the fire-bringer Coyote.
All characters are translated to Amerindian counterparts; the dictator god Zeus becomes
"Worldmaker"; the heifer maiden, Io, is Deer Girl; Ocean becomes River; his daughters, the
Chorus, are Streams; Force and Violence change to the Indian figures—Bear and Magpie;
Hephaestus the Smith is Packrat the fire-keeper; Hermes the Messenger, an underworld
god, is Lizard.

There are other transformations. Prometheus's tale of his brother Atlas's sufferings
becomes the story of the murder of Whale. The wanderings of Io change to Coyote's vision
of Deer Girl's journey in the New World.
The characters speak like Indians not "The Noble Red Man." They have the homely,
earth-bawdy vibrancy of the American Indian. The unsanctimonious view of the Indian is like
the Greek's—but more irreverent and darkly comic.

The play should be performed like the Greek drama with dancing, mime, and chanting.
Throughout the play there is use of lights, projections, light-show effects, and lasers.
The verse is sculptured language—a projective verse akin to that of my earlier play
Josephine.

One set.
The play begins in blackness, then the actors are discovered in silhouette behind a
cyclorama or screen. When they move to the stage there are ramps leading up to a mountain
peak where COYOTE will be suspended.

Musicians play small hand drums, metal and gourd rattles, tambourines, Amerindian
flute, and unusually tuned stringed instruments—for drone and melody.
The music is Amerindian and Pop in sound.
The instruments are used with electronic extension.
There is music throughout the drama. Speeches and choruses are sung, chanted, and
accompanied by dance steps. Single lines are emphasized with drum, rattle, or prolonged
notes.

Cast:
COYOTE, BEAR, PACKRAT wear fur capes, kilts, and cothurni (high platform shoes).
Their features are clearly visible in their masks.
MAGPIE is dressed similarly with feather cape, long feathers in her hair, cothurni.
DEER GIRL has antlers, fur cape, and cothurni. No mask.
CHORUS OF STREAMS are in rippling costumes and barefoot. No masks. Face paint of
blue and white ripples.
LIZARD is in mask, lizard cape, and cothurni.
Water gushes from RIVER and streams flow from his mask. He rides a winged snake
with numerous plumelike wings.
(Blackness. Sound of shuffling, with someone being pushed or carried. BEAR voice is accompanied by hand drum. MAGPIE has a tambourine and uses it instead of speaking. An Indian rattle punctuates and accenitates voices.)

BEAR:

COME ON, MOVE IT ALONG! GET MOVIN' OR I'LL TEAR YER ANUS OUT! HAH! HAH! HAH! MAGPIE'D like that. She loves violence. Magpie Lady knows how to tear things all apart!

(Sound of trudging.)

You see those clouds up there, up there above this dark ravine; you'll be nothin' but a cloud like them!
A cloud of pain!
Worldmaker's gonna hang you up there for stealing fire.

(Trudging.)

C'mon Packrat, there's a ways to go.

(Lights up. BEAR and MAGPIE are seen as silhouettes on a screen. They carry COYOTE. PACKRAT follows.)

We're going to right below the skytop! Won't be no Mole there to burrow Coyote to the other side. (To COYOTE.) You'll be there on the mountain where your ass and face will fry to black by day and freeze to crackling ice, with stars twinkling in it, by night.

(Pause.)

I'm Force, I'm Bear. We just do what Worldmaker says to do. HAH! HAH! We don't like this! We don't want to see you suffer for stealing fire.
Well, maybe Magpie Lady'd like it a little bit!
(They move onto stage. A mountain peak is visible above them.)

She might give you a sneaky look all bolted down there. Maybe she'd like it if some big rocks roll over and smash your head.

Hah! HAH! HAH!

(BEAR grabs MAGPIE and does a shuffling dance with her while she shakes tambourine. BEAR imitates how MAGPIE would speak.)

Yeeep-yeep-eeeeep YEEEPP!
That's what Magpie Lady say.
Yeeep. Yeeep!
Yeeeeep!
Yeeeeep!

(MAGPIE does a wild step and rattles tambourine.)

That's what she'd sing except she's grinning silent—lovin' every bit of pain, in advance, like you was a chick-babe smashed and squashed in a Sparrow's nest.

(Primitive flute accompanies PACKRAT speeches.)

PACKRAT:

Hey! Cut this! You're driving me crazy! You're gloating on a brother!

BEAR: (With wild dance step.)

PACKRAT:

I'm just clowning, Packrat! Coyote likes to clown himself, you know!

PACKRAT:

WE'RE ALL MADE OUT OF THE SAME STUFF! Coyote's spiritmeat like you and me and Magpie Lady.

BEAR:

You think she care? LOOK, she's laughin'.

PACKRAT:

You're grinning too—and dancing! I DON'T LIKE IT! He's a brother—YOU ONLY GOT TO DELIVER HIM. You only got to get him here. I got to pound the flints in him and lasso him up so he'll be here through all the changes takin' place in worlds and times. I got to be the one who hurts him. You think I feel good when I pound the flints in and tie him down with spider tendons?
BEAR: IT WAS YOUR FIRE HE STOLE! YOU OUGHT TO FIX HIM UP, MAKE HIM SUFFER AND SCREAM AND WIGGLE AND KNOW IT'S GONNA GO ON FOREVER JUST LIKE WORLDMAKER WANTS IT TOO!

(Hugs MAGPIE.)

HAH! HAH!
He stole fire TO GIVE TO PEOPLE! HAH! HAH! WORLDMAKER'S PRETTY MAD AT THIS COYOTE!
He was fixing to stomp out people and now they got fire. Worldmaker was gonna make some different people that was prettier and didn't smell so bad then Coyote got them fire. He stole fire which was exclusive property and gave it to those little fuckers. Worldmaker says stab him down with black flints and cause him plenty pain and bolt him to the mountain top forever. Now you're cryin' about it?

(They stop at the peak top.)

Look, here we are! Here's the place!

PACKRAT: YAHG! What a goddawful creepy place! The wind up here makes me shudder.

BEAR: THIS IS IT! LOOKS GOOD!

PACKRAT: NO! I DON'T LIKE IT!

BEAR: DO YOUR STUFF! GET TO IT! or Worldmaker'll slap you up here instead and you'll be hanging on the rock and blowin' in the wind roaring from the chasm!

PACKRAT: (Takes out his club and long black obsidian spikes.)

COYOTE, I HATE TO DO THIS!
Remember, I never wanted this. I don't enjoy it.

BEAR: Don't jabber! ACT!

PACKRAT: (Holds up obsidian spikes, looks at them.)

SHUT UP! I'm doing it!

BEAR: Look, Magpie is drooling outta her beak. POUND IN THAT BIT FLINT FIRST!

PACKRAT: SHUT UP! THIS IS MY JOB! I KNOW IT!

BEAR: HURRY UP! Worldmaker's gonna be pissed at wasting time! He'll want your ass and maybe mine!

PACKRAT: (Roping COYOTE down.) FIRST, I PUT ON THE SPIDER TENDONS that burn like screaming barbecue with old ladies and babies cooking in it.

(COYOTE wretches.)

BEAR: YAH! HE GETS FIRE BACK FOR SCREWING WORLDMAKER! Pay attention to what you're doing, speed up or Worldmaker'll drop down here and give you yours. He'll tapdance on your face. Snap it up! Get his arm down tight. Coyote is a tricky mother. He'd pick your pocket while you nail him down.

PACKRAT: SHUT UP!
BEAR: NOW SMASH IN THE LONG BLACK POINTED FLINTS! OBSIDIAN ONES!

(PACKRAT pounds flint through COYOTE'S arm with his warclub.)

PACKRAT: THERE!

BEAR: USE YER CLUB! POUND EM!

PACKRAT: THERE!

(Wipes sweat.)

BEAR: That's it! BEAT THAT RIGHT THROUGH HIM!

(PACKRAT puts a point through COYOTE'S chest, nailing him to the peak top.)

PACKRAT: THERE!

BEAR: YOU CAN DO IT! CRUNCH IT IN!

(PACKRAT pounds in another flint.)

FIX DOWN THE OTHER ARM!

PACKRAT: (In exertion.)

GAHHHH!

BEAR: WORK SOME SWEAT UP!

PACKRAT: IT'S A GOOD JOB! I GOT HIM!

BEAR: HE CAN WIGGLE OUT OF ANYTHING! ONE MORE BIG ONE!

(PACKRAT pounds.)

PACKRAT: YAHHHHHH!

BEAR: REMEMBER THE TIME HE STOLE THE STAR GIRL.
He's tricky! Let's see it!
Let me shake the flints.

(BEAR inspects flints.)

... O.K.

(PACKRAT pounds some more.)

PACKRAT: SOLID!

COYOTE, only you won't like this job.
It's a good piece of work and well done. Don't forget I'm a brother and I tried to make it quick and hurt as little as possible beyond that there's nothing that could be done. What could I do?

EVEN YOU, "THE SLIPPIEST," WILL NEVER get out of that!

BEAR: The Boss may come here and check this. Magpie and I want your guarantee.

(Holds out chit for PACKRAT's signature.)

PACKRAT: You ugly bastard, I'm getting out.

(PACKRAT leaves. BEAR looks at COYOTE, gloating.)

BEAR: THERE YOU ARE, YOU NIFTY BASTARD!

You actually stole from Worldmaker for those pieces of human goo down there. AND NOBODY cares! You've worked your final trick,
you've had your last laugh and piece of honeycomb. 
NOW 
YER 
GONNA 
hang there and turn to living filth! Nobody going to help you! There's nothing to help you with! HAH! HAH! We're glad you son of a bitch! HAH! HAH!

(BEAR exits. MAGPIE gloats and follows. COYOTE is alone.)

COYOTE: (Speaking, invoking, with music and drums.)

YEAH, YEAH, THIS IS THE WAY IT GOES!
LIGHT! LIGHT! LIGHT AND LIGHT!
AND LIGHT! SEE ME!
See me, Mother Earth, see me Gaia, this is the way it goes. Oh hear me, hear me manzanita in the chaparral below. Hear me, vernal ponds, and streams, Coyote howls. Hear me in the redwoods, hear me in the Doug Firs, feel me up here from down below. See the horrible treat Coyote's getting from Worldmaker and from his brothers too!

(Chants.)

LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT AND MORE LIGHT crackling on the break of the ocean.

Tor Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor
Tor Tor Tor

NOTHIN' BUT BILLIONS OF YEARS OF TORMENT

When will it end? When will it end?
And set beautiful beautiful Coyote FREE?

(Speaking.)

Hey!
I know all that I got the secret! I got it from Mother Gaia, from Earth, who lies there and knows everything. I run around on her and she talks through my paws. I got everything.

(Chanting.)

I
G
O
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A
N
D

THE PAIN
THE PAIN
THE PAIN
as best I can!

(Speaking.)

I put the fire in a hole in Elk's antler and I brought it down, I brought it around to man. Now it is man's teacher. I smuggled it in! It spreads and it glows
like a chink in the cortex. 
Now people have got it! 
I did what I wanted! 
I've got to stand this pain. I'm not sorry!
In this light, in this wreath of pain, 
it's too awful to talk and too terrible 
to be silent.

(Breaks into chanting.)

Light! LIGHT! 
MAMA EARTH...

This is necessity, this is the way
the black sharp teeth bite...
The black sharp teeth. 
The black sharp teeth.
Light.... Light...

(A mysterious throbbing sound is heard coming nearer. COYOTE sings.)

AH, WHAT IS THAT SOUND?
It is a smell! It is a scent!
The sound is a scent of bodies.
My whiskers twitch.
Somebody's
coming.
Somebody's moving
through
the air!

(Speaking.)

THEY'RE COMING TO LAUGH!
THEY'RE COMING TO JOKE WHEN THEY SEE MY PAIN AND TORTURE!
Who can it be?
It's getting louder, stronger, brighter!
They're making haloes in the air!
I don't want this!
Somebody's coming to make things worse
'cause I screwed Worldmaker
'in the holes that he makes!
Mama, I'M SCARED!

(CHORUS OF STREAMS, barefoot girls with rippling water, float in breathlessly and
dance in the air around COYOTE.)

COYOTE:

Daw, Daw, Daw, Daughters of River:
RIV, RIV, RIVER
who wraps 'round the mountains,
LOOK AT ME! LOOK
AT ME, COYOTE,
nailed down
with flints, bloody
and yelling
to hang here. This is
my day watch
and I'm here by night too.

CHORUS: (Singing.)

COYOTE, COYOTE, EVERYTHING'S SCAREY
and fearful. We're shaky with tears
looking at you. It's
AWE-FULL.
Worldmaker's
running rampant
smashing the Old Things down
COYOTE:

CRASHING AROUND,
doing things only
HIS WAY.
His laws are briars
‘round the thorax.
What he doesn’t like is smashed
till it’s flat!

COYOTE:

I WISH HE’D PUT ME WAY DOWN THERE!
WAY DOWN THERE,
in the blackest hole
with no veins of silver
or turquoise — in the dirtiest
creepiest hole —
and not hung me
HERE
like a cocoon
like a dead cocoon, to rattle
in the wind.
MY ENEMIES
come here and laugh
and sneer and shake
their tails!

CHORUS: (With dance and mime.)

HAY-YAY-YAY! HAY- YAY-YAY!
Only somebody worse — only somebody
meaner than Wolverine,
only Worldmaker,
would enjoy these
pains.
This could go on forever.
This could last till
it never stops.
We hear there’s no end
to your sentence.
There’s got to be something —
SOME WAY
to stop him.
Maybe an ambush ... A deadfall!
No! No! No! I know there’s no way.
Worldmaker has gone fascist since he took
over.

CHORUS: (Singing.)

COYOTE, COYOTE, you can take pain
(everyone knows
you can take pleasure)
but you talk
too much. Words pour out like light
from the moon. We’re frightened and shakey.
When can you leave,
when do you leave,
this glacier of pain?
When shall you fly this meadow
of scars?
Words or howls won’t
shake off his jaw.

I’ll be running in the clover
and smelling the roots.
The Big Guy is going to be
in terrible need of me.
His tribe is going to fall
and a new Chief
tear him down
just as he did to his Father
before him.
He needs me to tell him the conspiracy
and who’s going to do it.

(Seeing it.)

I SEE IT HAPPENING INSIDE OF
MY EYE — HE’S FALLING!

(Breaking into speech.)

I know who beats him down
and takes his war club!
But sugar-mouth Worldmaker
won’t get it from me
not if he invents a million
new charms and styles
of medicine. And his
threats don’t help him
either. I DON’T SCARE.
He wants to know!
First you’ll see him take out
these flints and gently slip off
the spider tendons and give me
EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING,
back!

CHORUS: (Singing.)

COYOTE, COYOTE, you can take pain
(everyone knows
you can take pleasure)
but you talk
too much. Words pour out like light
from the moon. We’re frightened and shakey.
When can you leave,
when do you leave,
this glacier of pain?
When shall you fly this meadow
of scars?
Words or howls won’t
shake off his jaw.
COYOTE:
HE'S A MEAN, MEAN, MEAN, MEAN, MEAN, MEAN BASTARD
- A KILLER, but his club-swing
will gentle. He'll get over
his ferocious rage. The black
spears will fall from his eyes.
At last, finally, he'll come
to me like a pal I can love
again.

(The music ends.)

NEW WILDERNESS POETICS

Ross-Erikson is proud to announce a series of books edited by Jerome Rothenberg and devoted to poetics and ethnopoetics. As with Rothenberg's anthologies, the intention here is to explore a broadly human poetics derived from the work of contemporary experimental poets and from a wide range of alternative and subterranean traditions.

The first two volumes in the series are:

MARIA SABINA:
Her Life & Chants
ALVARO ESTRADA

The oral autobiography of the Mazatec Indian shaman, accompanied by a full translation of two chanting/curing sessions. "With words we live and grow," she chants as part of her revelation of the dimensions of a language-centered/vision-centered poetry, whose roots go back into pre-Conquest Mexico and whose voices reach her through the sacred psilocybin mushroom.


Barbara Einzig
LETTER: NEW WILDERNESS

"The status of the dinner
is that the dinner is done."
-Diane Rothenberg

This is a performance piece for four voices. The performers arrange themselves in a square (diamond) around the audience:

1

audience

2

3

4

Voices one and three are opposite each other, as are voices two and four. When the differently numbered voices have a double space between them, they are read in succession, one after the other. When there is no space between them, they are read simultaneously. In the fifth and sixth songs, the underlined voice sets the style and timing of speaking. Each line throughout has nine to ten syllables—precise timing is important to convey a measured quality within the performance. Some of the text has been quoted or paraphrased from the following sources: Conserving Life on Earth by David W. Ehrenfeld; A Guide to Spiders and their Kin by Herbert W. Levi and Lorna R. Levi; Man and Nature by George Marsh; and Man in Nature: America Before the Days of the White Man by Carl Sauer.

First Song:

ONE voice
one: it is difficult to find a place to
live and still more difficult to have space for
voice
two: as in a wild or unknown place I lost
my way we think of these trees as redwoods
voice
three: she hides her bill to win his confidence
words are again traced back to bodily
voice
four: alphabet comes from alpha and beta
the first two letters as a name for all
Two one: a garden yet gardens are still made on vast dry slopes overlooking a metropolis
two: whose needles make a soft ground needles make a soft ground brown needles make a soft green
three: gesture: to feel one's way; one who shows; making noise those birds such as the song thrush who
four: alpha comes from aleph "ox" or "leader" the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet

Three one: or the sea or in flat small backyard patches in the silver mirror the room is
two: ground it has been a long time since I saw one the bark was rough and red and sometimes
three: are highly camouflaged sing loudly and often but brightly colored birds have
four: formed from the hieroglyph of an ox's head its sense may be the key to any

Four one: reflected the light is coming through the skylights it hits the red curtain and lights
two: fell off in pieces the size of one's hand it was very quiet where those trees grew
three: lesser songs, or sing only from time to time over and over they are seen
four: study in listening to her speech a pattern was observed namely that each

Second Song:

One four: sentence while related to its predecessor seemed to also be beginning a brand-new story to be a kind of name-child of the previous sentence in
one: it up where there is light it is a lighter color what can you find out about
two: and it is said they are the kind that grow quickly not previously known in this place

Two three: crossing the sky migrating birds whether for great security from eagles hawks

Third Song:

One four: of his life or some portion of it in
one: of the plumbing laboring how are the four: her speech certain words common words which
one: people using nature what buildings have
two: any word over and over in the
two: mouth I wanted to be desired and to three: is dark flash markings may be revealed by
three: annual journeys by night and it is observed in the Alps that they follow the
four: out of green and yellow and a story is a person's account of the events

Four one: weather what can you find out about the wild plants I feel this place satisfies my needs for the time being these trees are oaks those are crickets that sing and that is the sound
two: compose myself desire is water under the ice or the foreign sound of
three: high roads in their passage across the mountains we think of it as dark or our thought

TWO three: spreading the wings these markings are mainly three: crossing the sky migrating birds whether for great security from eagles hawks
four: usually draw no attention to themselves
one: they made what roads and bridges have they made
four: would jump out at one as apparently
THREE

three: is on the ground or in the water
four: at night in the zoo some of the animals

three: remains from time to time
four: the only problem has been when

three: it rains the leaks in the roof she used
four: I would then have had to go out and to

three: leave behind all I liked within I could
four: certain texts have been created to

FOUR

three: exist only in a hidden form
four: around yes they jump the moats or climb the

three: ordinary windows to make the sky-
four: walls during the day time they stay in

three: lights and that is the problem perhaps his
four: not feel home carried about with me if

four: I was going out in a dream I was
three: inscribed on the inside of a

Fourth Song:

ONE

four: regarding the zoo as the territory of
man but at night there are not many
people about I have often
imagined them stirring I have often

three: reluctance to pay may have to do with
four: imagined

three: the fact that it leaks mainly around the
sky
four: dripped through one very bright in the

three: sprawled on a keyboard instrument like a
piano which I was slowly playing
four: by applying pressure with my body and
thinking "this is writing" new-found I looked

two: at myself and
three: sarcophagus or contained within an

TWO

three: the canyon white in
four: them turning over in their cages conscious of not being among those shapes which
move in the sun I have been studying
adaptation to captivity I

four: gradual restoration of disturbed
three: have observed that all words

one: harmonies was keenly felt in the small
abode exactly how these material
changes came about is easily lost

four: in the telling as in a
three: saw a painted angel wings inside the
wood made my hands I had no arms there-
fore the wings drove invisibly through my
solid wooden body to make the hands

three: read a sentence a paragraph as a
four: a thin strip which fell as it came up song

is a two-edged weapon and species that
live in dense vegetation or under
the cover of darkness use vocali-

THREE

three: zations to proclaim their freeholds and at-
four: have observed that all words are not words to

three: tract mates
four: which one can get accustomed or used a
wilderness was once a piece of ground in
a large garden or park laid out in

four: ornamental or fantastic style of-
three: boxes go too these are for the goodwill
four: ten in the form of

ONE

four: regarding the zoo as the territory of
man but at night there are not many
people about I have often
imagined them stirring I have often

three: reluctance to pay may have to do with
four: imagined

three: the fact that it leaks mainly around the
sky
four: dripped through one very bright in the

three: sprawled on a keyboard instrument like a
piano which I was slowly playing
four: by applying pressure with my body and
thinking "this is writing" new-found I looked

two: at myself and
three: sarcophagus or contained within an

four: I was going out in a dream I was the cover of darkness use vocali-

four: I would then have had to go out and to abode exactly how these material
changes came about is easily lost
two: nish to mean translates as to want to speak
three: village lights and constant changes in the
two: desire is
three: landscape seem to confuse the flocks of wild
goose in New England I have often heard
their screams in the night as they flew about

FOUR three: bewildered meaning they were perplexed ren-
four: a maze or labyrinth we think of the thick
two: deder at a loss how to act
four: green hedge as dark or our thought is dark he
said that the labyrinth is closed as if a-
bove just such a design she was hovering
one: a rounded edge perhaps sharpening the
four: over her own life like a hummingbird
two: blade will improve the cut he has been get-
four: and so she appeared as they
one: ting on this saw which appears to be bent
now he hammers it to straighten it out
two: that's just a little bit about his life
one: water under the ice or the foreign
two: he puts letters on anything by
four: sound of any word over and over
in the mouth orb-webs are built by many
species at night first a bridge is made the
one: spider may walk from one bridgehead to a-
two: or what to think they search for the proper
three: another carrying along a line but
four: course all the new developments are in-
two: usually the
three: novations novel fresh green raw virgin

Fifth Song:

ONE one: spick-and-span brand-new I am confused as
three: spick-and-span brand-new I am confused as
two: say spaced-out yet in actuality
four: say spaced-out yet in actuality
one: she was intent in discerning with an
two: she was intent in discerning with an

Sixth Song:

ONE one: the air sustaining them that's just a
two: alright upon which to drink from and which
three: the air sustaining them that's just a
four: alright upon which to drink from and which
one: little bit about his life in Spanish
two: to express in honey read a word as
one: to mean translates as to want to speak
two: a letter children know how to learn how
three: to mean translates as to want to speak
four: a letter children know how to learn how

one: desire is water under the ice or
two: to speak they form letters out of the
three: desire is water under the ice or
four: to speak they form letters out of the

TWO
one: speak they form letters out of the nothing
two: when a bridge is established the spider
three: speak they form letters out of the nothing
four: when a bridge is established the spider

one: which is the air sustaining them that's just
two: may reinforce it by walking back and
three: which is the air sustaining them that's just
four: may reinforce it by walking back and

one: a little bit about his life in
two: forth laying down more silk then the spider
three: a little bit about his life in
four: forth laying down more silk then the spider

one: spanish to mean translates as to want to
two: drops on a thread it has fastened at the
three: spanish to mean translates as to want to
four: drops on a thread it has fastened at the

THREE
one: the foreign sound of any word over
two: nothing which is the air sustaining them
three: the foreign sound of any word over
four: nothing which is the air sustaining them

one: and over in the mouth orb-webs are built
two: that's just a little bit about his life
three: and over in the mouth orb-webs are built
four: that's just a little bit about his life

one: by many species at night first a bridge
two: in spanish to mean translates as to want
three: by many species at night first a bridge
four: in spanish to mean translates as to want

one: is made the spider may walk from one bridge-
two: to speak desire is water under the
three: is made the spider may walk from one bridge-
four: to speak desire is water under the

FOUR
one: speak that's just a little bit about his
two: center of a strand in the bridge it
three: speak that's just a little bit about his
two: center of a strand in the bridge it

one: life desire is water under the ice
two: secures the vertical thread and returns
three: life desire is water under the ice
four: secures the vertical thread and returns

one: or the foreign sound of any word o-
two: to the fork the hub of the final web
three: or the foreign sound of any word o-
two: to the fork the hub of the final web

one: ver and over in the mouth orb-webs are
two: a radius thread attached at the hub
three: ver and over in the mouth orb-webs are
two: a radius thread attached at the hub

Seventh Song:

ONE four: ice or the foreign sound of any word
over and over in the mouth desire
is water under the ice or the
foreign sound of any word over and

TWO one: to another carrying along a line
but usually the spider sits with its
abdomen in the air and lets the wind
pull out a silk thread if the thread touches

THREE two: is carried up to the bridge and across
a short distance before it is tightened
and fastened more radii are formed by the
same procedure and the hub may be strengthened

FOUR three: built by many species at night first a
bridge is made the spider may walk from one
bridgehead to another carrying along a
line but usually the spider sits
with its abdomen in the air and lets
the wind pull out a silk thread
“Dehiscence” was commissioned by Trina Collins, director of DanceTeller, the resident dance-theatre company of Wilson College. The poem is an extension of two earlier poems, “Peace on Earth” and “Not This Not That.” It is to be spoken by members of the company as they move in their dance. The words provide the music, the dancers become their own speakers; the words’ music comes from them and moves with them.

The tone of the poem is restricted, in the order of its upper and lower blocks of language, to black and grey. The first is not completely dead; the second is not completely passive. So the words should be spoken within a range of intimate conversation—not whispering—with a humming sort of intensity. There are “rhetorical effects” in the poem, but they also occur in that range.

Attention begins (and returns to begin again) at the left margin raised dots. The right margin raised dots indicate how long a silence is to be maintained from the last word sound until going to the next line. The raised dots are to be paused at; the lower dots act as usual periods. Counting equivalences for the silences are given in the notation. It may be helpful to subdivide the longer silences to keep them from going slack.

In performance, different phrases and parts of phrases are assigned to various combinations of dancers to generate shifts of density. My notation at the bottom of each sub-section is provided for the individual reader. However you choose to regard it, please read the poem aloud.

—John Taggart
• this lily this this this lily
• in silence without pause possibility of pause
• without a cloud without a fire

This singing bones singing for ease heart’s ease in the ring
• bones singing for ease
in the ring of bones bone-ring of the bone-flower
• in silence this this this lily

1.2 Pause very slightly after the first “pause.”
1.6 The phrases “bone-ring” and “bone-flower” should be emphasized. Lower pitch and pronounce each one with deliberation.
1.7 Give “in silence” full value. It shouldn’t sound like a chirrup or a murmur.

2
• this lily this this this lily
• in true night in true night without birds dawn birds
• without fire without an angel

This singing bones singing for ease heart’s ease in the ring
• singing turning from
away from home away from the lighted highway
• in true night this this this lily

1.2 Slight modulation for the second “in true night.”
1.5 Don’t tail off on the second syllables of “singing” and “turning.” Pitch should be level.
1.6 The second syllable of each of the “away’s” is stressed and broadened. The “way” in “highway” should not be given a like stress. Pause after “home.”
1.7 Give full value to each word in the phrase “in true night.” If anything, “true” should be held to suggest two syllables.

• this lily this this this lily
• in true night true night without birds pro- dawn birds
• without fire without an angel

This singing bones singing for ease heart’s ease in the ring
• singing turning from
away from home away from light-reflecting signs
• in true night this this lily

1.2 Be careful not to slur “pro” into “dawn.”
1.6 The “way’s” are again stretched out, but keep pitch flat. Try to pronounce “light-reflecting signs” so that each syllable is clear, but without a too heavy slowness.

• this lily this this this lily
• in true night in true night without birds dawn birds
• without fire without an angel

This singing bones singing for ease heart’s ease in the ring
• singing turning from
away from home away from moon’s light in water
• in true night this this this lily

1.6 Take your time with “moon’s light in water.”
• this lily this this this lily •
• in true night without birds pronounce-the-dawn-please birds
• without fire without an angel •

This singing bones singing for ease heart's ease in the ring
• singing turning from
away from home away from all light from all light
• in true night this this this lily •

1.2 Observe the connectedness of the last phrase without overlapping the words into one another. The emphasized "please" is spoken as asking for a favor that will not be given.

1.6 Moderate stress on "home." The second "from all light" is said according to its nature as shadow of the first, i.e., with a slight drop in pitch. Pay attention to the silences at the end of this line and at the beginning of the next so that "light/night" doesn't make a too close, offensive chime.

3
• this lily this this this lily •
• in a desert in a desert without pollen
• without a burning bush angel •

This singing bones singing for ease heart's ease in the ring
• opening ring
opening sheath of desire into bones opening
• in a desert this this lily •

1.2 Observe the new silence between "without" and "pollen."

1.6 Deliberate, prolonged pronunciation of "sheath," "desire," and "blades." The last is stressed a bit more than the first two.

• this lily this this this lily •
• in a desert a desert without pollen
• without a burning bush angel •

This singing bones singing for ease heart's ease in the ring
• opening ring
opening sheath of desire into blades opening
• in a desert this lily •

1.2 Watch out for the changing durations of silence.

1.3 Give entire line as a single phrase, but do not rush.

1.5 Hold, lengthen "ring."

1.6 The two "opening's" are spoken with an equal, neutral, fairly slow delivery. Don't slur over any of the syllables in "multiple," which should be given as a phrase in itself. Hold and raise pitch on last syllable of "desire." Roll the "r."
1.2 Again, observe changing silences. Don’t fade out on “rubbing.”

1.6 All of the italicized words are stressed. They should not be spoken too quickly. There should be some contrast between them and the neutral, almost mechanical “opening’s.” Pause very briefly after “we” and hold the second syllable of “desire” with a roll. There should be a brief pause after “bones.”

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1.6 Pause after “people,” not “pollen.” Take your time with this long phrase.

1.6 Treat the silence after the first “opening” as if the bones had sung “yes” there instead. All of the italicized words are spoken more slowly than before with deliberate, equal force. Hold “dies” until you need to take a new breath.
The Greek poet Simonides once called poetry "painting with the gift of speech." We have discovered a different kind of poetry, one that lacks the gift of speech but possesses in its place the gift of gesture. For some years we have been studying the structure of American Sign Language (ASL or Ameslan), a manual-visual language used by most of the deaf people in this country to communicate with one another. Among those who have aided us in our research have been members of the National Theater of the Deaf, a remarkably talented group of actors who are either deaf or the hearing offspring of deaf parents. These creative artists are developing before our very eyes a poetic tradition unlike any other—a tradition based on the very special characteristics of "signing." In order to appreciate the uniqueness of signed poetry, one must know something about the language in which it is composed. Hearing people, who have only limited contact with the deaf, sometimes confuse sign language spelling, which is not a distinct language at all. Finger spelling is a derivative system based on written English, which, in turn, is a derivative system based on spoken English. One simply uses the fingers to form, in the air, symbols that represent the letters of the alphabet. Fluent ASL signers use finger spelling primarily for names and for borrowing English words. Some sign systems are also connected with spoken language. For example, Signifying Essential English uses signs to match English word order in a virtual sign-for-word translation of English, down to the last if, and, but, and including sign markers invented to match English affixes. Such English-based systems are often used in educational settings.

American Sign Language, on the other hand, is passed on from deaf parents to deaf children, and is a language in its own right, a full-fledged linguistic system. ASL signs are not based on English words, and a sign may or may not have an exact single-word English equivalent, just as a word in Russian or German may or may not have an exact English equivalent. Furthermore, ASL has its own methods for modifying the meanings of signs—for changing a sign from a verb to a noun, for indicating plural or temporal aspects, for extending the meaning of a sign from the purely literal to the metaphorical, for coining new terms, and so forth. Just as in a spoken language, ASL signs are not situation bound; signers can refer to other times, other places. And, as with spoken languages, individual signs may be combined into an unlimited number of statements. The syntax of ASL, the rules that determine what is and is not grammatical, is not based on any spoken language, but makes full use of mechanisms available to a visual-gestural language, including the elaborate use of spatial constructs.

The radical differences between signs and words are apparent from the way they are organized. A spoken word consists of a sequence of contrasting acoustical segments called phonemes, arranged sequentially. For instance, the word "feeling" breaks down into the phonemes /fi, l, i, ng/. A sign, on the other hand, is essentially the simultaneous occurrence of particular values of a limited set of formation parameters. Every sign is composed of a hand configuration (or sometimes two, if both hands are used), a relationship between the two hands, a particular orientation of the hands, a place of articulation with respect to the rest of the body, and movements of the hands. To make the sign that translates as "feeling" in English, a signer uses one hand with the palm facing the body (orientation). The hand is flat and spread, with the middle finger bent in (configuration). It contacts the middle of the chest (place of articulation), making repeated upward strokes (movement).

Contrary to common belief, signs in American Sign Language are not merely pantomimic gestures. Just as the particular sounds of a word have no logical connection to its meaning, the way a sign is formed in ASL does not necessarily have anything to do with the meaning of that sign. It is true that many signs originate in pantomime, and certainly the mimetic aspects of the language are still very much alive. However, as a new sign comes into widespread use, it tends to lose some iconic aspects and become stylized and conventionalized. Usually a nonsigner will not be able to guess the meaning of a sign simply from the way it is made—and neither, for that matter, will a deaf person who knows only British Sign Language or Chinese Sign Language, which are quite different from ASL.

We became interested in the study of signed poetry not only for its own sake but also because we felt that by analyzing the heightened uses of ASL—poetry, wit, plays on signs—we could learn quite a bit about the linguistic features of the language. In a poem, linguistic features are more than just fleeting vehicles for the expression of meaning. A person who wishes either to write poetry or to appreciate it must be sensitive to the form of the language as well as to meaning: to grammatical categories as grammatical categories, and, in spoken poems, to sound as sound. Thus, as far as meaning is concerned, it matters little that "June," "moon," "croon," and "swoon" have the same vowel and final consonant sounds—that they rhyme. But when the words are embedded in sentences patterned in a certain way, the sentences become verse, even though they may express inanities and the result is doggerel. We suspected that in signed poetry, too, we would find the manipulation of language for language's sake—the essence of the poetic function.

In spoken poetry, one finds various types of artistic poetic structures, by which we mean structures that are formed by elements internal to the linguistic system proper: words, sounds, and so forth. At one level, there is a "conventional" structure determined by cultural tradition. In the English literary tradition, conventional structures make use of various metrical schemes, such as iambic pentameter, as well as end-rhyme schemes that dictate the recurrence of sounds in a predictable pattern. The Elizabethan sonnet is a conventional structure, as is the haiku form, borrowed from the Japanese poetic tradition. In structurally complex poetry, the conventional structure is overlaid by and interwoven with more innovative "individual" structures that involve the subtle patterning of sounds, words, grammatical forms, and meanings unique to the particular poem.

We have found that in signed poetry, the pattern of a poem is by and large individual rather than conventional. There is not yet anything analogous to the rigid, invariant structure of the Elizabethan sonnet. We have also learned that there are at least two types of structure that are special to signed poetry and that greatly enhance its poetic effect. We call one of these the "external poetic structure"; it is produced by creating a balance between the two hands, or maintaining a flow of meaning in a single hand. The other is a unique external structure that we call "imposed superstructure": a design...
in space, or a rhythmic and temporal pattern that is superimposed on the signs, just as in a song we may have melodic structure superimposed on the words.

In order to get at the distinctions between everyday signing and poetic signing, we asked Bernard Bragg, who is deaf and a master signer of the National Theater of the Deaf, to translate a poem by e e cummings, "since feeling is first," into everyday sign and then into poetic form. The poem seemed peculiarly appropriate for linguists and artists to work on together:

since feeling is first, pays any attention to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you; . . .

We will discuss here only the first line. The drawings above show the signs that Bragg used to represent this line in conventional signing. In this version, each sign is a literal translation of the corresponding English word.

Note that in the sign since, both hands are active, and they operate symmetrically. Feeling and true are one-handed signs. In first, one active hand operates on the other as a base. Since Bragg is right-handed, he makes the one-handed signs with his right hand and leaves his left hand lax, by his side. As Bragg shifts from one sign to another, there are several changes in hand shape. The right hand starts with an "index" hand, changes to a "mid-finger" hand, and then changes back again to an index hand for the last two signs. The left hand starts with an index hand, drops down toward the side of the body, and returns with a "first" hand. There are various hand movements in the signs, and, although the illustration does not show them, there are also movements back and forth and up and down during transitions between signs. For example, at the end of since, the left hand relaxes and drops to the side, and the right hand moves down to the initial position of feeling.

Now consider the transformation of the poem into signed poetry, or "art-sign," in Bragg's capable hands. First of all, Bragg replaces all of the signs except feeling. The first sign of the original version, since, is a literal translation of the English word, but it is not really semantically appropriate since in ASL it would ordinarily convey only the temporal sense of the word. The form of the new sign, because, is very different from that of since. Its final hand configuration is a fist with the thumb extended, and it moves from contact with the forehead to a final position on the side of the head. The choice of because is related to the other choices in the line, because the other new signs share the same hand shape. Instead of true, Bragg uses itself, and instead of first, he creates a sign using a one-handed rendition of most (which is normally a two-handed sign), combined with a marker for the superlative, -est. Bragg translated the new sign as "mostest" and we have called it "foremost." A deaf viewer would have no trouble interpreting it. The resulting line of poetry, then, has four signs made with one hand active, and the three made with the right hand share the same hand shape. We feel that this feature of hand shape similarity is probably analogous to the alliterative repetition of vowels or consonants in spoken poetry.

The choice of signs in a poem is part of its internal poetic structure. Bragg's translation also reveals an external poetic structure defined not by the choice of signs but by the pattern of their presentation. One aspect of this structure is balance. In ordinary conversation, a signer usually uses his or her dominant hand to make one-handed signs, and as the active hand in signs requiring one hand to act on another. Since only about a third of all ASL signs involve the use of two active hands, most of the time there is an imbalance in the use of the hands. In the poetry being created by the National Theater of the Deaf, however, the signer may maintain balance by imposing a pattern of hand alternation that keeps both hands more equally in use. One method is to change hands with consecutive signs.

Note that after signing because with his right hand, Bragg does not sign feeling with his right hand, as he ordinarily would, but with his left. He leaves because hanging in the air, as it were.

Another way to achieve balance is to overlap two distinct signs. After making the first sign, Bragg uses both hands at all times. While he signs feeling, he holds the sign because in its final position. Then he holds feeling (made with the left hand), and, in a way that would never occur in colloquial signing, he directs toward it the one-handed sign itself (made with the right hand). This emphasizes the fact that itself refers to feeling.

Then Bragg continues to hold the hand configuration and final position of feeling, still with the left hand, while he makes foremost with his right hand.

Besides achieving a balance between the hands, Bragg also creates a continuous flow of movement of signs, another aspect of external poetic structure. We have found that to create this sort of continuity a poet may distort the form of the signs themselves, going beyond the grammatical code of the language, and may also manipulate the transitions between signs, as if to avoid any wasted movement.

The picture (p. 52) shows the signs since and feeling in ordinary signing. The center drawing shows the transition between the signs. Notice that after since Bragg drops his left hand to his side, because it is not used in the sign that follows. During the transition, he moves his right hand from the final location of since to the initial location of feeling, at the same time changing hand shapes. In the poetic version of the line, however, Bragg manipulates the form of the signs so that effectively there is no transition; the final position of the hand after making each sign is precisely the starting position of the next. The final position of because, which as we noted before is held during the signing of feeling, becomes the starting position of itself, and the final position of itself becomes the starting position of foremost.
of foremost. This continuity of movement would not exist in conversational signing of the same sequence of signs.

Finally, Bragg creates an imposed (kinetic) superstructure; it results partly from some of the distortions we have discussed, but is a separate level of structure. In this case a pattern of movement is superimposed on the signs of the line much as a melody is superimposed on the words of a song. We made flow charts of Bragg's hand movements in the non-poetic and poetic versions of the cummings line. From these it becomes clear that in the poetic (art-sign) version there has been a further distortion of the signs, which creates an enlarged pattern of movement. This is enhanced by other types of distortions (such as those eliminating "wasted" movement in transitions), but this further, grosser distortion clearly seems an aim in its own right as well. Bragg has superimposed a special design in space on the signs chosen for his ASL rendition of the poem: a design in space characterized by large, open, non-intersecting movement as is shown in the flow chart of his ASL art-sign version of the line.

There are many problems in translating a poem from one language to another, and Bragg's task was even more challenging, since he was translating from one mode, the auditory, to another, the visual. In our laboratory we have also had the opportunity to study some original signed poetry. One of the poems we have analyzed, "The Seasons," by Dorothy Miles, is special in that the poet composed it simultaneously in American Sign Language and in English. (Miles, who has been profoundly deaf since the age of eight, has a brilliant command of both languages.) "The Seasons," by Dorothy Miles, is special in that the poet composed it simultaneously in American Sign Language and in English. (Miles, who has been profoundly deaf since the age of eight, has a brilliant command of both languages.)

One of the most striking things about this verse is that it uses only a few of the possible hand configurations in ASL, variously estimated at between 19 and 40. Of the 16 signs in the verse, 13 use a "five-finger" hand in their citation form, either as the active hand or as a base, and sometimes both. The fingers may be bent and spread, straight and spread, or straight and compact, but in all 13 signs the five fingers are extended. Furthermore, through a distortion that is part of the external poetic structure, the five-finger hand becomes part of every sign in the verse after the first green. High and green are normally one-handed signs that do not use this hand shape, but Miles keeps the left hand in five-finger position as a kind of reference base or surface indicator throughout the signing of deep below, green high above. This modification provides a consistency to the forms of the signs in the first line.

In poetry, patterning is more important than mere frequency, and so we need to look at the patterning of hand shapes. The first line of the verse consists of two parallel halves, each beginning with an index hand (the first and second appearance of green). Each half ends with an active five-finger hand operating below or above a base five-finger hand (the signs below and above), in similar arcs. The second sign of the first half, deep, uses an index hand as the active hand; the second sign of the second half, high, uses what we call an index+mid hand shape, which is only slightly different from the index hand. The first line is semantically patterned as well. The first signs of each half are the same (green and green). The second signs in each half are opposites (deep and high), and so are the third signs in each half (below and above). The second line, white clouds and quiet hour, also reveals internal poetic structure.

Poetic sign Conventional ASL
Notice that white and and are each one-handed signs with a five-finger hand closing to a tapered O. Both white and and are followed by a two-handed, five-finger sign (clouds and quiet, respectively). It is clear that the pattern forms an intentional individual structure, especially since the sign white, the first sign in the pattern, is not represented by a word in the English version of the poem. Finally, the last sign in the line, hour, echoes in its active right hand the index-hand motif of the first line, and combines it with the five-finger motif that dominates the second line and, in fact, the entire verse.

The third and final line of the stanza, slow, hot, heavy on hands, consists exclusively of five-finger hands in signs made in front of the chest with the hands touching or close together. There is variation in movement, orientation, and intensity of the signs.

So far we have been discussing only the internal poetic structure of the poem. The patterns of external poetic structure that we found in Bernard Bragg's translation of "since feeling is first" are for the most part absent in Miles's rendition of "Summer." When we talked to Miles about her poem, we learned that the second line of the poem takes about 7.5 seconds to perform, although the individual signs vary in length. The first and second halves of the first line and the second half of the last line have a similar rhythm, with four accents. The other three half-lines of the verse have fewer accents. We can represent this rhythmical-temporal superstructure in musical notation, and we are tempted to compare its effect with that of an operatic recitative, in which there is something of a cross between speaking and signing.

Different signers may favor different styles of signed poetry. Therefore we asked Lou Fant, who like Miles has been with the National Theatre of the Deaf, to perform his rendition of "Summer," working from the English text alone. First of all, Fant made the title part of the first line of the poem. His other sign choices were not radically different from those of Miles, but neither were they identical. For example, he expresses the word " idears " from the English version not by a separate sign but by extending the sign green in a wide sweep of the arm, which gives the impression of green moving into the distance away from him. His rendition differs from Miles's in the direction of more structural regularity. All four signs in the first line use an index hand as active, as this motif has an echo in the last sign of the second line, hour.

But the most significant distinction between Fant's version and Miles's is in external poetic structure. Fant, like Bragg, modifies the form of the signs or aspects of their presentation to create an external structure. If you examine the accompanying pictures, you will see that he uses patterned alternation of the hands throughout the poem: green-depths is with the right hand, the second sign with the left hand, the first sign heights Fant with the right hand, white with the left, and so on. He also uses the technique of overlapping signs. By alternating the hands he can overlap even one-handed signs that occur in sequence: he holds the form of a just-executed sign with one hand, while he makes the next sign with the other. For example, the final position and shape of the right hand for heights remain through the signing of the same positions as in ordinary signing. Fant also manipulates the transitions so that the final position of one sign becomes the starting position of the next. This eliminates superfluous movement, and one sign simply flows into another. There is also an obvious design in space that is consistent with the theme of the verse: heaviness. Fant makes the signs of the first two lines much higher than they would otherwise be. Beginning with the second line, the signs slowly descend from far above the signer's head—a location not used in everyday signing—below the waist. At the end of the verse, the body is bent over, the shoulders are hunched, and the hands are low in the signing space.

This rendition of "Summer" exhibits one other feature that is quite prominent in signed poetry: in some of the signs, Fant exaggerates the representational or pantomimic aspects. Consider the title sign, Summer, which Fant incorporates into the body of the poem. The usual form of this sign involves a bent index finger that brushes across the central part of the forehead. When
The sign slow, in Miles’s rendition as well as in Fant’s, is longer than usual in terms of both time and space. Ordinarily the fingertips of the active, flat, five-finger hand brush once over the back of the base hand from the fingertips to the wrist. In Miles’s version, the active hand, as it brushes over the base hand, continues well up toward the shoulder.

Poetry in sign language is still actively evolving and new poetic forms continually emerge. Joe Castronovo and Ella Lentz noticed that when both people deaf signs who have worked with us, experimented with the signed equivalent of a duet. They were inspired by a well-known children’s game called Double Personality. One person stands with his arms at rest and allows them to be replaced by the arms of a second person standing behind him. The effect is reminiscent of the many-armed Hindu god, Shiva. In the culture of the deaf, the game often involves signing. Castronovo and Lentz noticed that when both people signed, it seemed as if the person in front was talking to himself and was answered by his “other voice.” They decided to compose a poem for four hands.

At the beginning of the poem, a male stands behind a female, and both sign. The resulting blend describes the sun rising on the horizon, where there is a house. As we approach the house, the door opens. At this point the two signers split apart, the male going to the right and the female to the left. Now each begins to sign a separate message. The male signs father, and then hammering (a very iconic sign that mimics the motions of hammering). At the same time the female signs mother and stirring (also iconic). The male signs big and brother while the female signs little and sister. The male signs bathing and the female signs playing. The male signs grandpa and rocking while the female signs grandma and knitting. The signs are made with strong, rhythmic beats, in clusters of three beats at the end of each line. Then, in the final section of the poem, the signers blend once again to describe the door of the house closing, the house receding into the distance, and the sun setting on the horizon.

An interesting feature of this poem is that the signs in the middle section form minimal pairs. The signs father, brother, and grandpa are exactly like their matched pairs mother, sister, and grandma, except that the male signs are made on the forehead while the female signs are made near the lower cheek. Big and little are identical except for location. Bathing and playing differ in location and handshape, but they are made here with similar up and down movements. Rocking and knitting have different hand shapes, but both are made with the same strikingly similar to-and-fro rhythmic movements. These similarities give the poem a very symmetrical internal structure.

Studies like these have taught us much about this soundless language. Many years ago, when we first began to study ASL, we read that sign language was “a collection of vague and loosely defined pictorial gestures”; that it was characterized by “grammatical disorder, illogical systems, and linguistic confusion”; that it was “a pidgin form of English on the hands with no structure of its own.” Although these views have been dispelled, most people are not aware of the poetic tradition developing in the language. This tradition shows how human beings, deprived of spoken language, devise ways to express the poetic imagination.

For further information:

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z minus the straight-edge level diagonal curve cutting fill all nail holes the material is needed for life concentrated light light concentrated for two wooden housed housed to the base of spine spineless the walls of the house sing yet it retains silence thinned to the foundations can be driven to the depth these slightly thick fears have plenty excess as usual you stain the edges with whiteness it's best to tap the trees on warm days so continue to tap the trees with a leg over a sleeping grub narrowing cracks shaped overalls a scarecrow dipping and slamming against the wind

The Surrounding Black-edge

Joe's book of constructs the fortified core tanks full of fish spineless a sleeping grub as usual you stain the wood three times and ten days ago fusion begins the light small on a fishing village and Joe said to the house looking spineless into the direction of the sun the water a luminous road Jesus named the fishing village Enfeh the village is named for small hair found on the spiny fish famous for good eating Enfeh dogs skip along the bay the surrounding area alarming the world with women in white sheets is the fact bare dogs and horses thirst on the sand

"CONSTRUCTS—eye observations which utilize a sort of watercolor/painting approach. The theme around ‘construction’—of living & non-living objects. I started them at Cape. I seem to do these most entirely at the Cape." (R.O. 7/1/80)
RITUAL IN/OF/AND THEATRE
Richard Schechner

Ritual isn't opposed to theatre, it is part of theatre—not part necessarily of theatre's "thinginess," its "production" but of theatre's process, its way-of-being-made. Ritual isn't the sacred or religious ground from which theatre springs like daffodils in April, but part of the continuous process of making performances. Don't think of ritual as first and theatre as second; or ritual as cause and theatre as effect; or ritual as early primitive and other, and theatre as later, civilized, and ours. I won't try to define ritual—a task involving the confusion and richness that's erupted around a word whose very root implies both number, sequence, order; and flow, change, transformation. So forget for now whether there really is anything to the dualism opposing ritual and theatre. It may turn out that this dualism is more a function of history and ideology—part of the Western rage to keep the "we"/"them" dichotomy operative—than a useful way to categorize performances. Especially since so many performances—experimental theatre of Euro-America, Noh drama in Japan, Ramila in India—to name just three—either defy these categories or combine them. It may be that "ritual" is more a mode of performing, even a mood within a performance, rather than a primary category of performance. Or that ritual must be broken out into its different actions in order to be helpful in understanding performances. So the level of etiology—of exaggerated, displaced, repeated, and symbolic behavior—ritual is essential to all theatre, whether it be a re-vival of Oklahoma! on Broadway or the initiation of a twelve-year-old boy in Papua-New Guinea. In the model I am presenting to you today I assume there is no opposition between ritual and theatre.

By using masks, costumes, and physical actions arranged in a set way, or improvised according to known rules; by performing according to a script, scenario, or set of rules; by performing in special places or places making special by performing in them; by performing on holidays or at times set aside "after work," or at crisis moments in the life-cycle such as initiations, weddings, and funerals; by all these means and more, theatrical reality is set off as non-ordinary. Furthermore, what is performed is encoded—I want to say nested, trapped, contained, distilled, held, restrained, metaphorized—in one, or more, special kinds of communications: either as a mixture of narrative and Hindu temple service as in Ramila; or as fixed narrative and individual creativity as in any of the productions of, say, Gorki's The Lower Depths; or as a well-known sequence of events better known to cognosseurs than to common spectators as in the kuse mai of the Noh drama Yorimasa as performed by the Kanze school; or as closely-guarded secrets revealed to the initiates during the performance itself as in the voiming and bleeding that is part of the initiation of Gahuku boys in Papua-New Guinea; or as a script imposed by a single writer-director-scenographer such as with Richard Foreman's Pain(t); or as words and actions devised collectively as with Mysteries and Smaller Pieces of The Living Theatre; or as a scenario sent by mail to be acted separately, and in many different ways, by recipients of one of Allen Kaprow's happenings. These examples surely don't exhaust the field. But they are besides some name not only of the incredible diversity of performance events but of an underlying feature shared by all of them: Performance behavior isn't free and easy. Performance behavior is known and/or practiced behavior either rehearsed, previously known, revealed during the performance, or generated by rules that govern the outcomes as in improvisatory theatre or sports.

Because performance behavior is not free and easy it never entirely "belongs to" the performer. In EuroAmerican theatre Stanislavski-and after much of the work of training and rehearsal is to make performance behavior seem as if it belongs to the performer. In Ramila, on the other hand, the directors of the spectacle, the vyasas, stand behind the performers, open regiebook in hand, correcting words and actions. Interestingly, the crowds at Ramila are not troubled into supposing that the actions of Rama or Hanuman are any less "real" due to the presence of the vyasas, or even their intervention. Like the presence of director-author T. Kantor during the performance of The Dead Class—where Kantor made slight adjustments in the performance by lowering a performer's hand, or whispering to another to speed up the delivery of some lines—the corrections of the performance become part of the performance. The stage—and I don't mean only the physical place, but the time/space/spectator/performer aggregate—generates a field that whatever happens is happening by it on it. This is the chief parallel between performance process and ritual process. It is what Kafka meant when he wrote:

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony.

After many performances Kantor's corrections became predictable; people who saw The Dead Class many times say that Kantor's gestures are no longer free part of the performance score. During one of the acts of the current Ringling Brothers Circus, a trapeze artiste attempts to rise from a position where she is hanging by her ankles. She starts, hesitates, reaches, almost falls back. The music stops, the crowd gasps—if she cannot reach the bar she will fall 40 feet. Finally, inching her way up, grabbing her left forearm with her right hand, she goes to a particular play only once, as is the habit in our culture, can't notice the continuous process of change. In some cases,
where a performance is frozen tight, it takes a great effort to revive the show, as when a Pope summons a Council of Bishops to update the Mass. But on the local level, the Mass is always being adjusted to suit the living relationship between the priest and the parishioners. This relationship is as much one between performer and participating spectators as it is between religious leaders and believers.

I said before, performing isn’t free and easy, it is behavior that is “put on.” This is what gives theatre its bad name. Theatre is that art where the master teacher says, “Truth is what acting is all about, once you learn to fake that you’ve got it made.” This is not a cynical statement, as can be seen in the story Lévi-Strauss tells of Quesalid, a Kwakiutl who wanted to expose the fakery of the shamans. “Driven by curiosity about their tricks and by the desire to expose them, he began to associate with the shamans until one of them offered to make him a member of their group. Quesalid did not wait to be asked. He was thoroughly trained in acting, magic, singing; he learned how to fake fainting and fits; how to induce vomiting and to employ spies who would tell him about the lives of his patients. He learned how to hide some down in the corner of his mouth and then, biting his tongue or making his gums bleed, to produce this bloody item before patient and spectators as “the pathological foreign body extracted as a result of his sucking and manipulations.” Quesalid mastered the art so well that he not only exposed the other shamans as quacks but the real one? Olivier? Burton? Who is it? I say: “The double.” Few are the performers who have experienced Narad’s transformation. Even at Ramillia most performers don’t get absorbed into their roles. But roles spill over into ordinary life more frequently than we might suppose. In approaching the village where the family who have played the demon king Ravana since the 1860s live, I was told that “Ravanraj (King Ravana) lives over there.” The villagers strongly respect, since winning the role they have become the richest family in the village—royalty among peasants. Ravana, being something like Milton’s Satan in Paradiso LOST, the family does not associate with the people who play the roles of Hanuman, Sugriva, or any of “Rama’s party.” Though at the climax of the 32-day cycle play, to signify his death and surrender, Ravanraj takes off his ten-headed mask, prostrates himself flat on the ground, and kisses Rama’s feet. But again, I ask, who is doing the kissing? The actor without the mask is doing devotion to the boy who, with the commonplace, Bohm and man are “between personae,” in a liminal field where they are neither themselves nor their roles; they are what Artaud called “the double.” And if few performers have experienced Narad’s transformation, most performers have felt Ravanraj’s and Rama’s doubling: the sense of being taken over by a role, possessed by it; of saying quite truthfully, “I am not playing the role, it’s playing me!” But most actors live in a confused realm: if they’re good at getting into their roles, or letting their roles get them, they suffer from not knowing how to come down; and if they’re bad, they’re just bad. Some cultures encourage performers to give in to their roles, and some demand resistance. Brecht built his theory of acting on alternating surrender and resistance. I am not interested in the movie industry, this dialectic, from a psychological point of view, but as a baseline from which to project several stops along a continuum of performance types. The continuum runs from

At the Ramilla of Ramnagar, India, one of the best actors is the man who plays the semi-divine sage, Narad-muni. When Narad-muni speaks or sings the audience of more than 25,000 listens with special care; many believe the performer playing Narad-muni has special powers linking him to the sage/character he plays. This man is no longer called by his born-name, not even by himself. Over the 35 years he has performed Narad-muni, he has been identified with Narad-muni. Because he is a Brahmin, and any Brahman can practice the ceremonies of the priest, Narad began some years ago to perform priestcraft. Now he is the mahant—owner/head—and chief priest of two temples in Mirzapur, a city about forty miles from Ramnagar. He is rich; people come from far away to his temples because they know Narad-muni speaks through Narad-muni. When Ramadas was a young boy, he multiplied himself so that each woman he came near would carry him off. But again, I ask, who is doing the carrying? The actor without the mask is doing devotion to the boy who, with the commonplace,

Cieslak talks like a Zen master for whom the moment of action is when all the preparation falls away: when a performance is readiness. When the performance is over Cieslak “cools down.” Often he drinks vodka, talks, smokes a lot of cigarettes. Getting out of the role is sometimes harder than getting into it. This is because in EuroAmerican theatre the emphasis is on training, rehearsal, and warm-up. After the show is over nobody cares what happens to the performer. He’s in his own world when it comes to cooling down. Narad had somewhere to go with his identification, and so did John Wayne and Bela Lugosi—though the Hungarian actor tried several times to rid himself of the Transylvanian Count. But most actors live in a confused realm: if they’re good at getting into their roles, or letting their roles get them, they suffer from not knowing how to come down; and if they’re bad, they’re just bad. Some cultures encourage performers to give in to their roles, and some demand resistance. Brecht built his theory of acting on alternating surrender and resistance. I am not interested in the movie industry, this dialectic, from a psychological point of view, but as a baseline from which to project several stops along a continuum of performance types. The continuum runs from
those performances where the performer is changed through the "work" of the performance to those in which he is not changed; and a vertical axis shows whether this change is gradual, as it was with Quesalid and Narad, or sudden, as when a Gahuku boy is transformed into a man through the work of a single set of initiatory performances.

I call performances where the performers are changed "transformations." I call performances where the performers are not changed "transportations." Transportation because during the performance the performers are "taken somewhere" but at the end, often helped by helpers, they are "cooled out" and re-enter ordinary life just about where they went in.

The clearest and most widespread example of transformation performances are initiations. An initiation not only marks a change in social status but is itself the performance by which persons achieve their new status. Kenneth E. Read tells how a Papua-New Guinea boy, Asemo, was taken from his mother's home, secluded in the bush for several weeks, underwent initiatory ordeals and training in dance, and was finally returned to Susuroka, his village. Read is clear in letting us know that the underlying structure of the initiation is performative. To give but two examples—after two weeks of seclusion the boys are brought back to Susuroka:

The noise and movement were overwhelming. Behind us, the shrill voices of women rose in keening, ritual, stylized cries informed by genuine emotion that were like a sharp instrument stabbing into the din around me. The ululating notes of male voices locked with thumping shouts, deep drumsbeats expelled from distended chests counterpointed the crash of bare feet on the ground, and, rising above it all, came the cries of the flutes. (Read, The High Valley, p. 159)

Asemo and his age mates were somewhere in the middle of the throng, almost certainly blinded by the dust, carried along by the press of stronger bodies. . . . Other youths had told me, laughing, of their panic during these opening minutes of their day-long ordeal. (Ibid. p. 160)

This ordeal included forced vomiting and nose-bleeding. Read describes how Asemo and his age-mates were "sadly bedraggled" and "dejected" and "limp." Literally exhausted the boys were carried, dragged, and pushed into running a gauntlet where Gahuku women attacked the men and boys with "stones and lethal pieces of wood, an occasional axe, and even a few bows and arrows." The men picked the boys up and put them on their shoulders as together they ran through man's-land.

The men had bunched together as they ran, so closely packed that they struck each other with their legs and arms. In the center of the throng the initiates, riding the shoulders of their escorts, swayed precariously from side to side, their fingers clutching the feathered hair of the head between their legs. (Ibid. p. 172)

Read says "there was no mistaking the venom in the assault," and the men did not think of the attack as a "ceremonial charade" but recognized that it "teetered on the edge of virtual disaster." On the edge, but not over; the ordeal was continued within its performative boundaries much the way a bloody hockey game barely but reliably remains a game.

Six weeks later the "final act was played in the Gama village." Asemo spent those weeks absorbing training. The day of his coming-out—a day of feasting and dancing culminated in the presentation of the initiates to the village. This time the women did not assault the men—but greedily demanded them with a "rising chorus of welcoming calls." Then the initiates danced without the assistance or protection of the older men. Read says:

They moved unsteadily under the ungainly decorations, and I failed to see the splendid stirring change that had been apparent to their elders' eyes. But dignity touched them when they began to dance, a slow measure based on the assertive stepping of the men but held to a restrained, promenading pace by the weight they carried on their heads. For a moment I was one with the crowd of admirers. (Ibid. p. 177)

Asemo and his age-mates had become men in the Gahuku scheme of things. During and after his day of dancing Asemo is a male Gahuku with the responsibilities and privileges of that status. Bar Mitzvah, graduation, entrance into a professional association, promotion are similar occasions. Not all these are performances in the theatrical sense, but those that are I call "transformations." Asemo's transformation can be figured this way:

The experienced performers enter the performance and go with the initiates: bleed with them, vomit with them, dance with them, train them—in order to transform themselves. If the performance works the initiates end up enabled to perform transportsations (at some future time). Or, in many cases—the cure a Quesalid works, the wedding a rabbi performs—the two systems—transformation and transportation—simply come in contact with each other at the points of performance. When the performance is over the specialist in transportation is returned to his place of entry and the person(s) worked on are transformed. The system is analogous to a printing press where information is imprinted on a paper as it is fed through. The performance, the training lead-
So, for example, all of Susuroka gathered for the final day of dancing as Asemo made his debut as a man. Before, intermittently, only the men, sometimes the men and women, sometimes as performers and sometimes as spectators, participated in the initiation performances. But on this day everyone is there, and only the boys now dance. In a transformation performance the stars of the show may not be the best performers technically speaking. Asemo and his age mates don't dance as well as older men, any more than a Bar Mitzvah boy sings his part of the Torah as well as the Chazon does. Throughout the initiation process the older men have concentrated on getting the boys through—to do what must be done for the initiation to be completed, for it to 'work.' And during the final dance the concentration of the whole village is on the boys transformed-into-men: the work done. The English word drama, interestingly, derives from the Greek root to do, or to make. Similarly in a wedding the attention is on the marrying couple, at a Bar Mitzvah it's the Bar Mitzvah boy singing his part of the Torah as well as the Chazon does.

In Susuroka people of different status are transformed into people of the same status. With the Athenians, people of the same status are transformed into winners and losers, people of unequal status. This process of differentiation is of course that of the agon. The fundamental workings of each Greek tragedy is identical to that of the City Dionysia festival as a whole: the revelation through action and confrontation among agonists (prot- and ant-) of who wins and who loses. This action is deep not only in Greek theatre but by derivation in Western classical and modern theatre whose narratives usually involve conflict and competition. One reason, the main reason, why Western critics have such a hard time dealing with non-Western theatre is that the critics bring in their own anticipation concerning conflict and, ultimately, conflict resolution ("how it all works out").

The Greeks even preferred competition over aesthetics. At first prizes were given only to the playwrights and each formed an ensemble of those he thought could best present his play. After 449 B.C. prizes were also given for the best actor. From then on, writers were not allowed to select their own protagonists—these were hired by the archon and assigned to writers by lot. This lessened the possibility that writers and actors would form teams—certainly a strange regulation in the modern point of view. The aim was to reduce the possibility that the two competitions—one in writing, the other in acting—although they happened at the same time using the same medium, and obviously ever else may be lacking, there is skill in performing, excellence according to whatever the community standards are.

It would be easy if it ended here. But the status of the transporters can be more important than their skills as performers. Think what would happen if the Pope agreed to play Christ at Oberammergau. As it is, Pope John XXIII presented to an audience/congregation of 17,000 teenagers bused into Madison Square Garden is flashed on national TV. John Paul II's performance is "out of character" for a Pope, but a splendid example of his "humanity." So, John Paul II is unusual bit of casting for a role heretofore reserved for Italians. But what would happen to a common parish priest if, on national TV, he cooed to a big bunch of teenagers brought before him? And yet this same parish priest celebrating Mass is more powerful, from the Church's point of view, than an actor playing the Pope in Peter Weiss's The Investigation. And how about the unlikely possibility that a priest got cast in that role so that priest plays Pope in a play? However unlikely these arrangements are they point to the variables operating in every performance:

1) whether the performance is efficacious, directed changes in ordinary life, as in initiations, weddings, or the Mass, or whether it is fictive, as The Investigation is; 2) the status of the roles within a performance; 3) the status of the persons playing the roles; and, finally, 4) the quality of the performance measured by the mastery the performers have over whatever skills are demanded— even, sometimes, the skill to reign a lack of skill as in some con games. None of these four variables is absent from any performance.

My model of transportation and transformation performances is open-ended. It is designed to be applied across cultures and genres. For example, when applied to the Greek theatre of the age of Sophocles, it reveals a situation opposite to that of Susuroka.

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effecting each other, would in practice be reduced to one. What happens is that writers were transporters for actors and actors for writers: each means used by the other to achieve victory.

In Susuroka the men compete with each other—but even as they do they work together to help the boys through. The outcome of the competition, which is not formalized, is to eliminate winners and losers among the boys. The most able and skilled are the most likely to be able to do what is needed. Ultimately all the boys are initiated—win, lose, dance together. This is not to say that among the Gahuku there aren't better or worse dancers according to the Gahuku's own standards. But for the hours of dancing in Susuroka that completes the initiation these differences are effaced as much as possible. With the Greeks they are displayed as much as possible. Though even the Greeks made mistakes: Sophocles lost the year he entered with "like", "not like," could winning poets and actors be disdained for how well (= beautifully) a thing is done, then this concern developed among the Greeks. Spectators and judges, acting as the City, determine who wins, who loses. Criteria are articulated, criticism is born.

At the same time that these concerns were transformed (as in Susuroka) to separating thanks to the Greeks, is a function of competition. If aesthetics is a concern for how well something is performed in relation to the gods: a kind of food. And the gods are frequently characters in the plays. This appearance of the gods is easier among peoples who practice reincarnation. Also the occasion for theatre in India is not a yearly competition among poets and actors but a number of different occasions ranging from fixed annual performances such as Ramila, Rasila, and Chhou to commercial theatre like Jatra and Tamasha, to performances marking auspicious events like marriages, the visit of a dignitary, or the recovery from illness. In this last case the performance is an offering. Need I add that these occasions and functions often overlap? At the Ramila of Ramnager the outskirts of the performing area are occupied by sellers of food, trinkets, and clothes. On some nights lorry trailers are topped by effigies of gods who look down on the exploits of Rama, himself an incarnation of Vishnu. Everyone enjoys a good show, from the nursing infant to the highest gods. Rasa is the flavor of the performance—how it tastes, how it appeals to taste on various levels—and Indians use the word "taste" with a great deal more subtlety and range of socio-aesthetic meanings than we do. If some theatre needs "audience" to hear it, and some "spectators" to see it, Indian theatre needs "partakers" to savor it. The enjoyment of the performance is thus shared among performers and partakers; rasa is where the experience and skill of performers and partakers meet, as at a splendid banquet where the cooks must know how to cook but the diners must know how to eat too.

A good performance is where the levels of both skill and understanding are high and equal. If the partaker expects more than the performer can do the performance is inadequate; if the performer does more than the partaker can savor, the performance is wasted. Perfect rasa is a meeting between partaker and performer. Noh drama in Japan works in much the same way, except that root metaphor is gardening and what is shared is hana, "flower."

This system of participant enjoyment is one of the things that attracted Brecht to the techniques of Asian theatre. I do not wish to say how this system is so laconic as to be considered only notes toward a text on theatre, the Natyasasta is so detailed as to be thought collectively authored, a compilation of several centuries’ practice. The purpose of the theatre described in the Natyasasta is for all who participate in it—performers and partakers alike—to share in its special "flavor," its rasas. The rasas—like ragas of Indian music—are actually scales of relations among feelings, actions, and responses. Any drama can be performed according to any number of rasas; and rasas vary within broad categories. The important thing is that the details of the performance are worked out to a degree unknown in the West; and yet there is freedom within this scheme because each element of the performance is shared among the performing and the partaking sphere.
and rehearsal the idea is discovered, and this takes searching; in performance the idea is “shown” and this takes a fixed score. In the Indian system training and rehearsals are fixed because what is being transmitted is not a code for a system that needs to be uncovered, but the performance process itself broken into learnable segments. The performance is truly contingent, an ever-changing lila (play, sport, illusion) that is created between the performer and the participant at the moment of playing: the rasas. So the performer in Indian theatre is encouraged to improvise during performance not by inventing new bits but by varying fixed elements: what is new are new relations. This difference between causal chains and braided relations also helps explain why the Greek system, on the other hand, relies on fixed elements: what is new are new relations. What is fixed because what is being transmitted are fixed scores. In the Indian model than to the Greek, and with the experiments of Grotowski and Halprin is that they rely on spontaneous individual and group creativity to come up with the elements to be bunched and braided. Without the benefit of a consciously worked out, culturally elaborated, theatrical system (which the Natyasastra both describes and provides) the participants are thrown back on their own “sincerity” and/or “personal truth.” But this truth is radical individualism, all too often simply the clichés of intimacy, unexamined cultural fact. The results are—as I’ve experienced them, and seen them described—things like staring deeply into your partner’s eyes, swaying or moving in circles, passing fire, running through the woods at night, and so on.

I think my own work in this area has been better balanced because I refuse to reject either strict theatrical structure or the necessity of critically and ironically examining personal and social relations. In other words, I’ve tried to develop a theatre closer to the Greek model than to the Indian, and with some of the elements of the initiation rite. I didn’t know this when I began, and still don’t work with these ideas paramount when I rehearse. But they are there, and have been since Dionysus in 69 at least. Let me try to show what I mean.

In Dionysus in 69 (1968–9) the performers and I built a production from workshops that we thought were transformative. Our intention was to make permanent changes in our lives using exercises taken from Grotowski, kathakali, yoga, and work I described in Environmental Theater. Permanent and comparatively sudden changes, like an initiation. We positioned ourselves somewhere between the individualist practice of Broadway and the collective social structure of Susurouka; and we had the ambition to develop a performing style as precise as that described in the Natyasastra. We even sought to train our audience—first by a variety of experiments in audience participation, then by holding many discussions after performances, a few before performances, and giving public workshops. I wrote extensively about the work. In retrospect, it seems that we tried to use the audience to transform us: to force ourselves to be a “community” on behalf of the audience, “for” the audience. The model of the circle and the line was inverted.
take off his/her shoes and leave them on a growing pile; a few refused and were denied entry. Early in the performance a slow circle dance included spectators. Later in the play, performers enacting a Manson "creepy crawly mission"—"we creep and crawl into people's houses and take things that belong to us because everything belongs to everybody"—took coats, jewelry, handbags, shirts from spectators. Some of this stuff was offered openly, some taken when the spectator wasn't looking. Costumed in the audience's clothing, wearing the audience's shoes, the performers went on to enact the murder of the Manson family. Two scenes earlier the testimony describing My Lai was presented. And in the audience's clothing, wearing the audience's shoes, the performers went on to enact the murder of Sharon Tate and her friends by the Manson family. Two scenes earlier the testimony describing My Lai was presented. Performers picked at random fifteen spectators—"you," "you," "you," "you"—to come into the center of the circle to "represent the villagers of My Lai." Nothing physical was done to these spectators. They just sat there and listened to the description of how the villagers were gunned down. If one or more spectators refused to enter the circle, the performance stopped.

FEARLESS. I am taking off my shirt to signify that the performance is now stopped. Those who have not come into the circle have the following options. First you can come into the circle and the play will resume. Second you can go anywhere else in the room and ask them to take your place and if they do the play will resume. Or you can stay where you are and the play will remain stopped. Or you can leave the theatre—go home—and the play will resume in your absence.

Once the wait—and the arguments among spectators and performers about "forced participation," the Vietnam War, the role of art in society—lasted more than three hours. By the end a few performers had gone home, as had more than half the audience. The play was completed by volunteers from the audience enacting roles as I read their lines from the script. Something uncommon in theatre happened: some kind of transformation had taken place.

In Dionysus and Commune I used workshops to transform individual performers into a group and then used the Group as transporters to attempt a transformation of the audience from individuals into a group. In other words I treated the audience as if they were coming to a workshop and tried to condense the workshop process into a single performance. The inversion I spoke of earlier happened. And I soon recognized that even if we sometimes succeeded in making spectators into a group—as on the night Commune was interrupted—the "transformation" was temporary. But it did mean we had a closer and much more mutual relationship with our audience than was possible on Broadway. But the enterprise defined by Dionysus and Commune was fragile because the "little society" of The Performance Group was against the values of the big society we depended on for sustenance—for audience and subsidy. As a minister of culture put it bluntly in France: "You can't come to the government with a begging bowl in one hand and a molotov cocktail in the other." By 1980 you've got to jangle the bowl with both hands, and dance the fiscal jig to boot. And within the Group arguments got hot about what we were doing. Many performers didn't like audience participation—it messes up their scores, seems phony. And I made a big error: I didn't see that we weren't involved in self-transformation but in a very complicated kind of transportation. So I failed to develop exercises for the cool-down, ways back into ordinary life from the intensity of the performances. These outer and inner contradictions led to a series of blow-ups. By 1972, when I returned from my first trip to Asia and began working on The Tooth of Crime, the Group had become a "regular theatre," one that used environmental theatre techniques and that sponsored a kind of participatory democracy within, but still a theatre that didn't try to transform either its audience or its members. The work that followed—Mother Courage, The Marilyn Proj ect, Oedipus, Cops, and The Balcony directed by me; and Sakonnet Point, Rumstick Road, Ragatt School, and Point Judith directed and composed by Elizabeth LeCompte and Spalding Gray are all in the mainstream of American Avantgarde theatre. As such they are focused inward on their own means of production and expression. An audience watches a transportation, sometimes comprehending and sometimes baffled, but never incorporated—brought in by the body—into the action.

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To be in New Wilderness (number 7, summer 1979) gave me a shock and a good deal of pleasure. The new wilderness title exploration is typically Rothenberg—opens up. Curious, too, that we don't have your connotations at all, as far as I can see. In fact, the term is for us almost entirely restricted to the Old Testament—and from that, references to politicians and others being in and returning from the wilderness—typical pompous language from that quarter. That is, we still use it where the Puritans took it with them and transferred it to what they saw westwards from the shorelines. Or the Virginia Company did too. So the term turns out to be more American than perhaps your explanation in 2/7 states—which is itself important.

Nature for us is not wilderness, nor is the imagination, nor language. Nor urban wilderness. We did not, I think, even get to the "jungle of cities." The Darwinist infusions into Calvinism—that sense in "Big Two-Hearted River," for instance—do not seem to have taken here, unless I am mistaken. I do not recall, when I was in Malaya, ever thinking of the jungle as wilderness. Let alone Quasha's "counterspace." So that our sense of exploration, of outward, is not American—and I had never thought of it quite so sharply before reading your note. "Wilderness as process": you see, when I wrote "Precipice of Fishes"—Writers Forum has just done it—my sense was not of the wilderness-as-ocean, but of the navigable sea and the shoreline: swimming and navigation and the endless excitements of the sea/land interface. The pack of cards in a cellophane bag format of the poem is the instance of that kind of spatiality. And yet I know from experience the point at which the wild ceases to be beautiful and becomes encroachment, even horror, and have never taken to Wordsworth really, nor to Ginsberg's retake in "Wales Visitation." I mean, their comforting sense of the availability of natural unity with plants and rocks. Perhaps my sense of the sea is the difference—neither of those poets have much to do with it. So that Conrad is a man I reread more than any other fiction writer.

The other spatial work I've published recently—"Pollock Record"—consists of the units laid out on one large page—not like Robert Grenier's "Cambridge Mass," which I saw later, with each poem simply laid in
just position—which I can't help seeing as a little bit spurious—but all the units of the poem intervening on each other in a poetic space controlled somewhere between Stockhausen's Klavierstück XI and Pollock's Number One. Process as a space of units for involved choice performance. In actual performance, Allen Fisher, Bill Griffiths and I found the tensions considerable. The idea was for each reader to choose a unit, one after the other, not repeating a unit, until the work performance seemed to be finished. I haven't had the "Precipice of Fishes" performed yet.

Re your "Notes for a New Wilderness," I note that "bewildering" is a pejorative term here. Related to madness or to that disorientation schizo stuff, which, despite Laing obviously a highly important work—that's fine new talents who have performed in my paper on "The Fear of Invasion in American Culture" at the Budapest Conference on the Originality of America—so this is related: the sense in your poem of the underground as needed and resisted energy—or from out there above. The sheer amount of paranoia in American texts from 1606 onwards into the present is extraordinary. That too is wilderness, I take it. Our "new savagery" is largely the performance works of poets like Clive Fencott and Chris Cheek—and in a different way, Bill Griffiths. Three fine new talents who have performed in my King's College series. Wild as breaking down typographic or picture texts into any notation—fine new talents who have performed in my series came across as from a large natural, which was like reading information from another planet, if one does it from really locally here. His reading in London for my series came across as from a man singularly come to terms with wilderness in this sense—almost like a post-mediation serenity.

Snyder is right—"to live intelligently and gracefully on a wild planet...that's new"—but I'd include as caveat genetic engineering—that hubris is not considered even. It struck me when seeing the recent Royal Shakespeare Company's daylong production—10:30 to 23:00—of The Greeks, largely Euripides' takes on that wilderness which consists in not knowing what the named gods have in store—or quite why they have it that way, what the wild necessarily enforces. A bleak prospect, which the RSC curiously and interestingly decided to "resolve" in sheer farce. And it is farcical to hypostatize what you don't know as gods that do. The Indians are so circumspectly calm, like Buddhists, compared to the wild panics in the Greeks. (Olson never got to this properly, I may add.)...

Eric Mottram

Michael Davidson's piece, "Exiled in the Word: Orality, Writing & Deconstruction" (NWJ, number 8, Spring 1980), raises what is a fundamental issue—the divergence between post-1945 American poetic theory and practice and the elaboration, at times elegant work of deconstruction. But I'm not sure the issue is all that new. The tension of the discussion has changed, but the questions that underlie Michael's remarks—of subject/object relationships, of the role of literature in those relationships—have in one form or another been with us as central issues of philosophy since the late 18th Century. And I cannot myself see that deconstruction & its analytic models get us closer in any real sense to understanding these dynamics. Just a few points.

[1] Somewhere the emphasis, albeit linguistic, on the "internal" possibilities of language, of language set free unto itself, in deconstructivist theory strikes me—and I hope this isn't too simplistic—as another side of the old New Criticism. I'm not sure this leads to the kind of critical self-instruction needed in our poetics, as it tends to exclude political & historical dimensions. It strikes me that, instead of supplanting the New Critical with a theoretical base that would make finer distinctions & differentiations, deconstruction is but an offshoot of a literary theory that dealt with a limited number of terms (where previously we read of "ambiguity" & "irony," we now hear regularly of écriture & sous texte) and that excluded historical and, for that matter, all non-textual factors.

[2] Davidson sees in the emphasis on voice in post-1945 American poetry an "ideal of immediacy," a false ideal, for, as he writes, this attempt to bridge the gap between the poet and his material yields a "trajectory" that is "illusory since at the moment when the poet 'enters' the poem, his or her reliance on the text, on the properties of spacing, typography and notation, is brought into high relief." The emphasis on orality, he states, leads to the idea in recent American poetry of a more authentic, because acoustic, poetic[s]—"precisely the heritage of logocentrism that Derrida deconstructs." I cannot see that the oral versus the written is really the issue here. Involved, rather, are broad questions as to language and ego psychology.

In wanting to break delusions of self & subjectivity by placing the poem in an area separate from experience & phenomena, the deconstructivist model only repeats, in a peculiar warping, [late 18th Century] Fichtean premises—& intensifies them in ways I find disconcerting. If you deny the referential aspect of language & literature, for example, & view the possibilities of poetry as merely linguistic, then you are often left with a truly cold subjectivity, & in denying linguistic participation in the world this line of thought denies the world.

I fully recognize the banalities Michael wants to leave behind, resulting from what he calls a "kind of positivism which searches for semantic simplices." But what Michael is after is, as he says, "a theory of writing which is not subservient to experience but is experience." Rather than opening our poetics to a truly sophisticated realm of possibilities, I feel this "theory" closes our poetic world off, like a self-created cave within the frame of the merely individual. And herein lies one of the great ironies in all this for me—in its own terms it limits its realm to the boundaries of the self.

In Friedrich Schlegel's "Anthenäums-Fragmente" (116) revolves about a discussion of the poem as nexus between the bounds of self and the phenomena represented, seeing the poem as what Simon Ortiz refers to as "voie intermédiaire." I think we must insist on that space.

Robert Kern, in a fine piece entitled "Gary Snyder & the Modernist Imperative," shows how in the work of a poet like Snyder a skepticism toward representational and referential aspects of language can lead in directions other than those in which deconstruction has gone—toward a poetry that is "an opening to the world, a path leading outside itself, a linguistic form that is analogous in structure to the physical world and that exists alongside it but without being closed off from it."

[3] "A more interesting use of the oral impulse is that synthesis of archaic, non-liter-
ate poetries with the avant garde"—which Jerome Rothenberg has pursued.

The point of comparison for Michael here is Gary Snyder, as Michael quotes a statement Gary made in 1965 concerning oral traditions. Michael finds Gary's statement that the "oral tradition will carry all you need" and Gary's criticism of the triviality of some literary texts ('people will not bother to put to memory things that are essentially trivial, whereas literary writing accumulates & accumulates') particularly wrong-headed. It would seem that these statements, made by Snyder 15 years ago in a talk at Berkeley, are meant to represent everything that is naive in certain poets' approach to oral traditions and to primitive cultures—& Michael's strategy for incorporating the materials of oral cultures is to view the poetries of those cultures as participating in the avant garde tradition.

There are substantive problems in accepting this strategy. Davidson seeks to take the "primitive" seriously only as it relates to avant garde movements in the arts of this century. To insist on this point of reference is to run numerous risks; I'll treat only two. First, the poetries of primitive peoples take their form of self in the minds of historical and cultural matrices that engendered surrealism, etc. It is all too simple to view these poetries under the rubric of "experimentation." They may be experimental within their cultural fabric, but they're also without the "outsider" status that attaches to experimental literature in a Western European context.

Second, not only does Michael's approach run the risk of historical displacement, it also fails to take the oral traditions of primitive cultures seriously. And it is only by taking those cultures seriously that we will approach one of the first announced [by Rothenberg & Dennis Tedlock] in Alchenizing: "to change men's minds & lives." (I can't help it, Jerome, but Michael's talk on your work makes it all sound a bit like cultural colonialism.)

4 One final point.

I think a good deal of Zen practice & Mahayana psychology would straighten matters out a bit here—& I speak only for myself, trying to come to terms with the

matters under discussion.

Fichte's concept of the "self" is no doubt, as Paul Ricoeur has said, 'the most significant instance of modern reflective philosophy'; but we don't seem to go much beyond the bounds of this Self, self-reflecting, endlessly positing its Non-Self. It's not that I feel the Fichtean Ich & Nicht-Ich are totally invalid concepts; it's only that they are just that—concepts that become canonized & rigidified, that distort our relationships with the world. They are themselves linguistic categories, attempts to describe a process; I see them reflected again in deconstructivist theory, and those categories have led, it seems to me, to all kinds of silly notions about reality. We do "create" the world; but just as names do not, as Ernst Cassirer once said, function to "refer exhaustively to a concrete situation, but merely to single out and dwell on a certain aspect," so that Self is necessarily incomplete. And for all the skepticism demonstration in deconstructivist theory of the limits of language in its confrontation with phenomena, I sense above all a godawful naughtiness and sneering egotism.

Zen too seeks to break through the "logos-prison," to break "delusions of self-personality, ego-psychology." But in this it breaks down language, not to leave a self-righteous skepticism insisting on our "otherness" but to show how linguistic categories mask & hide our relationships with the world. When language is "broken through" in this tradition, one emerges not with a poetry cut-off from the Non-Self, nor with a denial of points of reference, but with a better grasp of those relationships poetry again & again addresses. Dogen once wrote:

"He who doubts that the mountains walk does not yet understand his own walking, it not that he does of the mountain, but that he does not yet understand, has not made clear, his walking. He who would understand his own walking must also understand the walking of the blue mountains. The blue mountains are neither sentient nor insentient; the self is neither sentient nor insentient. Therefore, we can have no doubt about the blue mountains walking."

Scott McLean

Deaf-mutes cannot learn our language in a natural way; but they can acquire its genius, the way we learn a dead language or a foreign language. They have their own, and this gestural language, which is like a natural language, may be the most poetic and most picturesque of all languages. Actually it is composed entirely of images and of figures of speech which is the essential character of poetry.

When you have seen skilled deaf-mutes express themselves in sign language you are struck by the poetical character of this language; one can understand that all their ideas are conveyed by this language. The deaf-mute cannot traverse to paint a picture in another person's mind. You can notice the differences between the various paintings: here, the rapidity of picturesque expression; there, the strength of the sign is sustained by the boldness of the comparisons; elsewhere, the elegance or the variety of the paintings; in this one, the harmony of the whole and in the succession of the signs; in that one, the fineness and the charm of the design and the cast; in almost everyone, something active and animated which indicates inspiration.

When you have observed all that, one is no longer surprised that a deaf-mute can be a poet; one finds that they are all a little bit poetic, that they are almost forced to be poets.

Laurent de Jussieu (1815), in introduction to the poems of the deaf poet, Pelissier.

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