BEYOND REVIVAL

Blake Morrison, in a typically journalistic article, "Young poets in the 1970s" (in ed. Jones and Schmidt, British Poetry Since 1970), acknowledged, albeit dismissively, two important strands of The British Poetry Revival. One was the poetry conveniently focused in Cambridge around JH Prynne, and anyone now familiar with the mostly excellent work contained in the 1987 anthology of "Cambridge" poetry - a term that A Various Art (ed. Crosier and Longville) itself disavows - will probably feel that it is 10 or 15 years too late in appearing. It might then have given Morrison less cause for dismissal and have been more useful for its contributors (two of whom, David Chaloner and John Seed are also found in Pages). Even 20 years ago an impressive collection of emerging "Cambridge" poets could have been assembled.

The other "vociferous set of opponents" that Morrison noticed, had "been associated with and promoted by Eric Mottram"; in Pages 1 - 8, I conjectured that the withdrawal of that "set" from the Poetry Society in 1977 was the loss of an effective power-base, and that Morrison actually noticed the grouping is proof of this. I certainly feel that this marks off the poets who around that time, and a little later, emerged under the aegis of Eric Mottram - Ken Edwards, Allen Fisher and Bill Griffiths, all three Pages contributors - from those who followed, and who had to operate in fragmentation and incoherence. I have sensed the difference myself, since as a publisher, I've experienced both periods; as a poet, only the latter. There have been enterprises for which one can be thankful: certain campaigning magazines (chiefly Ken Edwards' Reality Studios) and, in London, the tenacity of
Gilbert Adair's Subvoioive reading series. Indeed, it seems to me, in or associated with London, there was, from the mid-1980s onwards, the emergence of a number of writers who had reached independent maturity but who lacked the sympathetic context that might have existed a decade before. Editing Pages has only strengthened this conviction. They hold at least some of these operational axioms in common: that poetry must extend the inherited paradigms of "poetry"; that this can be accomplished by delaying a reader's process of naturalization, by using new forms of poetic artifice and formalist techniques to defamiliarize the dominant reality principle, in order to operate a critique of it; and that it must use indeterminacy and discontinuity as major devices of this politics of form. The reader thus becomes an active co-producer of these writers' texts, and subjectivity becomes a question of linguistic position, not of self-expression.

As a mentor figure of some distinction for these poets in the immediately preceding "generation" - rather than in the 60s generation of Bob Cobbing, Roy Fisher, Lee Harwood, JH Prynne and Tom Raworth, poets who have, I suspect, also influenced each in differing combinations - I would point to the local presence and example of Allen Fisher. However, they look not to the 70s Fisher of Place - and its Olsonian fragmentation with its excuse for imitators to produce "open field" pastoralism - but to the Fisher of Brixton Fractals, with its exemplary forward-thrust and lateral shifting, and its sense of poetic production as transformative process and self-interference. Indeed, it was with a passage of his longer continuation of this book, Gravity as a consequence of shape, that I deliberately launched Pages. And since then, fortunately, some of those London-based writers I have in mind, have been, or will be, included in Pages: Gilbert Adair, Adrian Clarke, Virginia Firnberg (the youngest, featured in this issue), Harry Gilonis, Peter Middleton, Maggie O'Sullivan, Valerie Pancucci and Hazel Smith. Outside London, associated Pages contributors include Kelvin Corcoran, Alan Halsey and Andrew Lawson. This list is, of course, not exhaustive, and is - I emphasize - drawn from the contents list of this publishing project.

It's not enough that these similarities be enumerated, these names listed; it is also crucial for such poets to recognize and use their shared poetics, and to begin to exchange their insights and discoveries, to foster debate. (Peter Middleton's forthcoming poetics journal may help.) To become visible to others, the poets must first see each other clearly. The poetry also demands accompanying documentation, poetics and criticism (something lacking in A Various Art). The significance, but not the strength, of much artistic practice is demarcated by the coherence of the
discourses that surround it.

It has been tempting to make Pages a one poet per issue periodical, but it is precisely the possibility of necessary sharing, of community, debate, contrast and generation that holds me back from this. Indeed, I invite succinct (camera-ready!) comments on, or arising out of, my views expressed here, particularly from those named, for publication in the March 1988 issue of Pages. And that reminds me: Happy New Year! Robert Sheppard

Green spring remains that is all the forest floor rests
in another's arms perspiring draped the pottery breaks
crumbles in her eye like a dishcloth like a flame rapid
fire the mahogany is stained wipe up. Sweep lie down.
with your face to the floor malleable as pastry we could make
something of your return perhaps not. it's

perfectly understandable
revealing The clay has dried into another day
that is baked and glazed. Your face has stuck down fast.
in your eyes that is everlasting. dried, you wake surprised
at your return a smoke a rat animals of all sizes

that brag at their accents. the trees bend for the first time
under the weight the dog lies half dead after its exertions
you smoke a chair creaks the pavement is trapped
a coat falls
shimmering wet the dust layers straight branches
the strain of always holding creeping winter is a greatness
that is a rest. The ground stiffens its bright the sky

yesterday reminisce move now like an arrow underneath the wet earth

crisis drenched in dew a statue with a history of vegetation
clamours for attention rolls over died. On the other side

the pavement is pushed up feet stiffen shouts blood. ther is
the green. THERE IS THE GREEN drowned the movement was
over quickly the pottery basked in sunshine

everything was used at the same time at the turn the arched
neck. of a horse the meadow that flagged is put over his
shoulder at a walking pace, dried flowers

mountains around trees that dry in the hot summer sun
it pours rocks

VIRGINIA FIRMBERG

Virginia Firmberg, in addition to being a poet, is a student
of music and forms half of the poetry performance duo STRESS
A faint haze of smoke, 
coloured amber by the afternoon 
sunlight, spreads across 
the city. Its definition 
is vague, its origins, pollution. 
I think you are in the vicinity 
when you are far away. 
Imagination feels your presence 
like a thought crossing my mind, 
as I cross the street 
after rain. 
The silence of intuition 
mingles with the muted roar 
of jets, homing in 
on the broad flat diagram 
of concrete runways. 
The beyond of darkness falling, 
edged with lemon light, 
with phosphorescence, 
with a flaring aura of light relief, 
embraces the emptiness 
that you, who are secluded, withdrawn, 
and remote from, have named 
as your gift. 
It seemed for a moment 
the way was lost. 
It seemed for a moment your presence 
crossed into the vicinity of future wishes. 
But no, it is merely the intuition 
of silence hovering with the reflections 
cast by glass walls, 
the reflections of an opposite 
far away.
The ache of empty blue summer sky.
Thunder's far remonstration.
Shouts, sirens, worthless encores.
The chill after sudden rain.
Damp lilac.
The smell of damp lilac.
The pungent smell of wet stone
and wet sand.
Cool air, refreshing air.
Separation and intrusive distance.
Anticipation trembling through flesh.
Day begins and day ends.
Ends. Begins from the blue.
The colour blue. Colour of absence.
Empty blue summer sky.
The controlled persistent blue of deep space.
The stillness of death's blood,
of rock in brittle earth, of rancid pain.

The sound of edited laughter. The echo
of the sound of laughter.
The voice of a narrator telling of the people
who fled the decimation of the plague,
how they settled in this distant place
considered safe, but were stricken,
and overwhelmed by the disease,
from which they had so hastily retreated,
carried innocently in a roll of tailor's cloth.
The land murmurs of their fate.
Their day ends. Centuries pass, rain falls,
sunlight rests majestically on the hollow
message of powdered bones.
Smell of wet stone, of wet sand.
Black birds stoop oblivious over their carrion.
Plucking the entrails, delving at the core.
Pillars of smoke rise from mysterious fires.
Cool air wafts across the land.
Images in the emptiness of what happened.
Regardless of the past, no matter the distance,
the impression of a damp hand
strokes the face
with distorted fondness.
Here is the discontent
and here the angst.
This is a private function
and this the adornment.
Here is a message and there is the reply.
Here is a message.
There is no reply.

Here is a fumbling embrace,
and there are the cool stars,
there are the cool, aching stars.
You are the witness, the participant;
you are the willing observer, the protagonist.
Here is the platform
and the acknowledgement of hands.

There is the control,
here is the switch.
There is the warning light
and here is the warning.
The control, the switch,
the light, the warning.
Here comes the patrol.

This is the information,
the litany of voices and static.
This is the main square,
there is the dry fountain.
Portable barricades are stacked
along the pavement.
There are the empty streets.
Here are the empty streets.
It is cold.
The cold of starlight.
A stellar cold, the chill of separation.

You walk through the barriers.
You carry a message
in a dormant section of your mind.
Walls crackle with the accumulation
of knowledge.
Here is a place tuned to an aftermath.
There are the marks of progress,
love and desperation.

It is a fine late winter evening, daylight
reluctantly obliterated. Iridescent windows
fade to a formal grid of artificial light.
Somewhere someone lifts their head,
stands and walks out, walks out
into fragile pungent air.
Asleep on your pillow
in a hollow disturbance of hair
and warmth, you lie,
transformed into a creature
of subterranean dreams.
You are a darkness within darkness,
attending the curious noises
of delirious silence.
Momentarily aligned in the
absolute and certain understanding of
nothing more to add.
The absolute, the certain understanding,
that vanishes in iridescent air.
The stars, engrossed in their shining,
indicate a further place
beyond the range of human comprehension.
It is the unification of sleep
bound by the brains contours
into a future made strange
by the stealthy approach
of dawns first glance.
The ritual of the subconscious
rejoining the performance of the day
you will inhabit.

David Chaloner

David Chaloner's latest book is Hotel Zinga. A very good introduction to, and summary of, his writing is contained in the anthology A Various Art.