Responses to my January editorial, "Beyond Revival", have been varied: from cryptic approval to lengthy qualification; from admonishments from an older writer for suggesting artistic change without the evidence, to a plea from a younger writer to start a literary movement!

Four complete statements of response are included in this issue. They focus, mainly, upon areas of debate, whereas in the letters accompanying their texts two of the authors were more outspokenly affirmative. Nevertheless, there seems to be a solidarity about the importance of a number of issues. The central question, involving the political potential of the work of art, seems to be: how can a radical poetics engage a radical politics while either negotiating, by-passing or eradicating the language of representation? The name Lyotard is mentioned in three of the pieces, but it is not to The Postmodern Condition but to "The Critical Function of the Work of Art" (in Driftworks) that we must look for the terms of the debate around this "either/or" question. (My own "Flashlight Propositions", due to appear soon in Peter Middleton's and Tim Woods' new journal, with notes for clarification by Allen Fisher, attempted to begin this, though in terms often discredited here.) If there is a response to theory, in the sense that the word is often now used, there is also a response to the practice (and theory) of the American language poets.

I was pleased to read, in a review by Ken Edwards of the Silliman language poetry anthology (in Reality Studios 9), independent confirmation of the central thrust of "Beyond Revival". Ken asks "what significance" language writing might "have for poetry in this country, both actual and potential? This is a difficult question to answer." Or impossible: given that that poetry is barely nascent, as he realises, "I have a sense of a poetry as yet largely unwritten, one which will move the terms of agreement on from the great burst of energy of the early 70s. "Such a poetry," he continues, raising important questions, "would have to reassess its stance towards both the mainstream British context and the transatlantic experience which for the last 20 years has provided us with support in opposition - the picture today being complicated by the emerging alternative oppositional poetries produced by feminists and by ethnic minorities."
One correspondent suggested that *Pages* become the mouthpiece of this poetry and its poetics, but I feel that *Pages* should be a variable forum, however useful its frequency is to the immediate dissemination of ideas (but there's unfortunately only space enough for assertion, not analysis). Hopefully, another journal might see itself as an anthology of this writing. It is my business to encourage and present, and to maintain a sense of community; to exclude, say, post-Objectivist writers is unproductive. Indeed, their expected agnosticism can be instructive. Tony Baker, as a "student of Bunting", complains that I "give too much weight to the various critical apparatuses that follow in the wake of 'artistic practice'". But poetics is not a literary critical activity, not a theory of poetry, but is a necessary sorting out of what Ken calls "the terms of agreement" between the writers. This seems to me vital; as Tony speculates, "Are we at a crucial point right now: the Paladin anthology, the Various Art.... is the hegemony of the 2nd generation Movement-ists beginning to fail because so transparently enfeebled that it can actually be seen even from within?" Tony underestimates the way the Movement orthodoxy can perpetuate itself by organizing minor modulations as significant development; but 1988 could well be a crucial point. There are important publications due (selecteds of Harwood and Raworth, as well as anthologies); and it is high time that a proper literary critical assessment of the British Poetry Revival should appear. But, even more importantly, it is time for an active poetics to begin to help delineate a poetry that is "as yet largely unwritten", to encourage writers to take up its challenges, and to pay detailed attention to the little of its poetry that is already written.

ROBERT SHEPPARD
I share the sense of being one of a group of writers with "operational axioms in common", though I am not convinced any two of us would subscribe to the same set. What I take to unite us broadly at this stage is the example of Modernism in its most pertinent radical thrusts - Russian Futurism and Dada to I novissimi, OULIPO and L=A=N=G=U=A=T=E - which cannot be responded to by attempting to continue a "tradition", but only by adapting and inventing strategies for a similarly "critical" art - in the sense defined by Lyotard. What seems to me to have confused the issue is an in fact normative version of Modernism that assimilates what it can to a "rich pluralistic culture". This version - traceable, along with a general inability to cope with ideas, to our pre-eminent anti-intellectual academic institutions - had sufficient insidious influence to place some of the writers born on the first wave of small press activity who reacted within its framework of assumptions at the mercy of the inane schoolboy enthusiasm for tendentious "explanation" of Pound and Olson, the souped-up, head-free Romanticism of Ginsberg, the camp fashion-consciousness of certain New Yorkers or the less-than-fashionable (though not for lack of advocates) languid provincial neo-Romanticism of post-war England. Against all that I would range an art that privileges neither concept (beware Lyotard) nor reputation; an art that challenges the received opinions of an apparently docile society and the conventions that perpetuate them by means of asserting radical discontinuities that release the demystified potential of language. The primary need for such an art will not cease for as long as a menacing social order holds its own. If there is to be a next stage for the poets concerned it could follow from a politics of the word - adopted without illusions - which seeks to question and extend the versions of a critical poetics that have been applied to the task and ignored or marginalised in consequence. ADRIAN CLARKE
Dear Robert

Linguistically innovative poetry (for which we haven't yet a satisfactory name) has been operating since 1977, you say, "in fragmentation and incoherence". This would presumably include fewer opportunities to look at and buy books; decreasing publishing opportunities; wide gaps in continuations of public (i.e. small-magazine) discussions; a one-way "dialogue" with oppositions that largely expunge us from more public discussions, leading to dangers of self-aggrandisement, jargon, premature contempts or daft tolerances, paranoias beyond the well-founded; at the same time, movement in a less visible, less real poetic community.

Public invisibility of the poetry combines with ditto of a theorising discourse. Newcomers to readings are confronted with the exciting, moving, incisive, comic etc dispersed in the difficult and disorienting, that refuses to account for itself in other terms - and how could it, at one reading? The context is (at least) the high level of conflict accepted by 80s government along with hegemony of consumerist and instrumentalist views of art inside competitive stimulations.

As for the three "operational axioms" you list of the mid-80s poets: I'd quarrel with "delaying naturalization" and substitute eradicating it - though we'd need to be clear, for instance, on the points at which "nature" is likely to be invoked as a stabiliser in a culture fascinated with change, ruthless curtailment of job reliabilities, share-owning, and the legitimating professionalism (having accepted the fact) of the set-up.

For the "dominant reality principle", I think we need something like Lyotard's focusing on the "false abstract universality" of exchange (via all-translating money), and work relations: "permutations change nothing, which is what reveals alienation" - a grating between experience and universality that any number of discourses fall over themselves to bridge and exonerate. The "dominant reality principle" cannot, therefore, be equated with "realistic" discourse in its narrow sense. Advertisements are ample in "discontinuities" - at the level, at least, of scenes, if not of scenarios. Leisure (which means buying) accepts the desire that is "fantasy", i.e. unreal; work and voting take the rest; unemployment is waste. It's breaking down in many ways. Allen Fisher calls attention to art as "necessary business" - posing absolute challenges to the essential separation between "exchange value, use value and desire value" (Guattari).

Cutting across formations categorised as discrete, "discontinuity" is so only if it makes other relations; or else it is mimesis of actual informational chaos. But it is the varied positivities of the forms being made in the 80s that your axioms (which could be applied to so many forms) give no guidelines for ascertaining - and point to the necessity of the debates your concluding paragraph calls for.

"Defamiliarising" can be seen as more or less a by-product of making. Charles Bernstein quotes Stein, "I am a grammarian," which he glosses as "meaning she wasn't being 'anti' grammatical she was discovering what the grammars of our language are by making them".

Stein discovered a lot of grammars. How does that go with aesthetic desires?

Gilbert Adair
RESPONSE TO ROBERT SHEPPARD

I agree with Robert Sheppard that Allen Fisher's enterprise is important: it's easily the most innovative, modern and responsive around: it has the most information, the lowest noise to signal ratio and the highest sense of poetic vocation (Blake). But there is a danger that to pose indeterminacy, fractals, the self a mirage blur among conflictual codes, will amount only to a lament in the margins of what is a vastly over-determined, reified world.

Thus I disagree with Robert's emphasis on Lyotard's diagnosis of our postmodern condition. To privilege what a work "does and incites" over its meaning may be indeterminate in a reactionary sense in that it reproduces capitalism's imposed trajectory through consumer images and the bizarre farrago of an imaginary history. (In this context, a lot of "non-referential" poetry looks like libidinal finger dabbling). Indeterminacy may, in Fisher's memorable line, reward the "burning gap" (society), rather than the "mere phenomenal actualization" the self has become. Capitalism has drained meaning out of life. To embrace non-meaning in driftworks is to embrace capital, Law, the machine.

The way through might be to try and articulate these crippling multiple determinations (economic, sexual, political) on the body of the socius and the self (in the way Williams, Olsen and the earlier fisher did) and pose against them not indeterminacy, a kind of quasi-scientific hex that pulls the rug but leaves the carpet in place, but nodal points of coherence that can be grasped and worked through, that do not dissolve and like all that is solid melt into air. These points, epiphanies or images, are only productive when a sense of the intractability of the real is felt. Class and commodity constitute this intractability, a resistance for which avant gardism substitutes the intractability of artistic material (language) while bourgeois art pretends there is no problem at all and enjoys its epiphanies in the same way as bankers do canapes.

Some sort of dignity and justice has to be restored to the object before the self can remake itself, and that means grasping its over-determined, reified aspect and not merely hymning nature (as if it existed) or the imagination. Indeterminacy may only seal over the object again, and lose us with it. Poetry is now the last refuge of high art in a world of ephemeral cultural chit-chat: an unprecedented cultural loneliness. As "aberrant particularity" in a totally grey generalized world, poetry can either play or use that particularity in its sensuous over-determined uniqueness to convict the general of its untruth.

ANDREW LAWSON
Thankyou for page nos. 49-56 and for including me in it.
By virtually setting precedents (which, incidentally, it took me
half a day to understand, and I would never say to myself-
I 'must extend the inherited paradigms of "poetry"'......by
delaying a reader's process of naturalization, by using new
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.') - and placing me straight after them, I felt
rather strange and full of

CONTRADICTORY THOUGHTS

As soon as a name is given to the essence of poetry and a marquee
is erected with flags and speeches you lose the essence, because
the point is, that it is nameless.

However, I do think discussion is important, but only if all the
naming ceremonies are not mistaken for 'the thing itself, where
it's at now' (Howard Riley).

On the whole I agree with Rilke when he suggests that it is
'the weakest part' of the world which we make with 'words and
pointing fingers'.

But you could argue that what else are we to do, just sit and
WATCH and WAIT on the nameless space not walking around for fear
of the inevitable footprints? Obviously that's ridiculous, so,
as long as the discussion is used to find out what space is not space
being used to find out what discussion is, then that's fine.

When faced with the whole of space it's too devastating, so the
fact that you are structuring it can only be good and extremely
provocative, as most people have different ideas of what to put up
in space. As long as we are aloud to break out at any given moment.

Actually, I think it's fine to use flags etc. as long as everyone
acknowledges the PERFORMANCE of it and madly PERFORMS, that includes
the poem, it must perform on and off the page.

Surely the most exciting interaction of all time is that between
space and what crosses it, and that slight perception of what space
might be creates the tension which is the third element that makes
a poem- at least that's what it seems like.

Things that I might say to myself, but never would actually:

Find the instinct and spill it-
Find an area of language which the spillage can infuse-
Find new juxtapositions -to wake the word up- thereby constructing
an independent language with its own particular parameters-
Make it independent and strong enough to maintain its identity
when crossed by another such language-
Somehow the innate properties of that language have to be found
so, throw the raw material into the air and give it space to land
with its own weight and watch for the ripples or flurry of dust
upon landing and account for it.

All these things, however, have only occurred to me after having
written, never before.

VIRGINIA FIRNBERG.
As I gaze now at your curling photograph tucked into the corner of the chocolate box brimming with saccharine snaps,

I recall those holiday trees, stirring as though tremulous fingers were searching the scalp for lice.

He gave me my first cigarette there in exchange for my coveted condom and I was sick before the discarded match had cooled. He shrank, embarrassed, boyish, the hangman's mask flopping to a squab.

The afflatus of history in the rabbit hutch: Eden's picture covered with pellets.
"Guess who?" - soft girlish fingers pressed over my eyes.

I first saw the marbled skin of your thighs, the silvered crutch of your discarded knickers, as he kissed you (his sister) goodnight.

But the next day I refused to follow the mouse-tracks into the lichen with him, but stayed to stroke the cat instead.
TWO GIRLS

1

Daphne was a brown-haired Brownie, brushed against me In the dinner queue, once, And I watched, next gym day, Your different shape of girl In bottle green knickers. Pure Brown and green, blank as Rothko, Brings you back to me. I saw You in the tube, once, two screaming Kids in your lap, one in brown, One in green, your unbrushed hair grey.

2

Beryl the Peril you were sobriqueted, By lads over pints after a night out: They spoke of your preference for soft sand, And I imagined the soft warm craters Left there as you left to pee in the sea. They spoke of your love of Babysham And I thought of the lipstick-stained glass On the vinyl. Beryl stopped me in the street, once, And asked me for a light. I did not then smoke.

Manly, I swaggered into the local that night, Cigarette fuming but not inhaled. I offered Beryl a Woodbine; she Was an Embassy girl. That night The sand was hard but I was not.