ALLEN FISHER on the Mathematics of Rimbaud

PHILIPPE BOYER interviewed

TONY BAKER on COLIN SIMMS

TONY JACKSON on JEFF NUTTALL

JEFF NUTTALL and sexual politics

ERIC MOTTRAM on the novels of GILBERT SORRENTINO

ROBERT G SHEPPARD's Formalist-humanism

KRIS HEMENSLEY looks in Schiele's Mirror

plus reviews of

BARRY MACSWEENEY, WILLIAM CORBETT, TOM PHILLIPS, J G BALLARD, LYN HEJINIAN, CLIVE FAUST, PHILIP JENKINS, ALAN HALSEY, CRIS CHEEK, HANNAH WEINER, STEVE LACY & BRION GYSIN
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They have asked for the uniforms. There will be no problem.

"What is to be done?"

a) the cost, and b) the performance.

They are the same people who cut the social services; who rehearse their fin de siecle in Ulster; who would sacrifice us all in the nuclear theatre. Our minds are their studios; we walk around like this all day long. "How much, who to, and when?"

Sleeping? at a time like this?

Positively emaciated.

We should like some information.

The place is stiff. The chef, or the omelette? Anyway. A wax model. Too 19th century. Congenital deformity of the palate.

This is no time for jokes.

We must learn, not just how to be printed and discussed, but how to deconstruct and reassemble reality. Poetics and politics. When we say writing, we could equally say imaging. (Spicer talks of correspondence.) Extend the terms of reference for poets. Unfinish the language.

It's not hopeless.

"Storm The Reality Studios And Re-take The Universe."

Music. In front of you, perhaps, is a table.

On it is a 2-way communicator.

"not a poetry magazine, an open workshop, a continuing correspondence, a newsletter, an occasional showcase for experimental writing, a journal, an unfinished manual."

One lift goes up, the other lift goes down.

Take strange views.

And sample the basic culture.

- November 1980
After art resolutions made earlier this century, the idea of art as objects and poetry as poems gradually lost credibility. Since then many attentions of activity have emerged that, initially through conceptions of art and poetry as process, and as idea-oriented, began to rethink what they were. Continually in the process of formulation, but already an essentially regenerative and multivarious complex of fields, the new works no longer find taboo in the object, but include objects and processes, process-showings and methodologies in a world of multiple possibilities that is giving, at least to a small attending audience, that vitality that continues to make it the cultural necessity needed to complement the political arena, without necessarily being its voice, and without grounding in theories that, for instance, Art-Language fixed upon. It is the poetry that itself requires that, to answer Olson's 1962 Note on his Letter No. 15 (page 7) in Maximus II), the poetry is always "yet to be found" in the process of its making, and that making continues to take place through the physiology of the reader.

Simultaneous with art and poetry's disillusionments came a multiple crisis in the tropologies - ways of perceiving and interpreting ourselves and the world. Before the turn of the century (and in too much mainstream art and poetry this century) the tropos had been made inside of resolutions that had been Neo-Platonic, Leibniz, and several generations of morals, ethics and poetics since, saw literature and the human mind as having a consistent quality - as being able to offer in their essence - elements that are stable against which judgment may be gauged and which will remain of value across history. That "we act in like manner as animals, in so far as the sequence of our perceptions is determined only by the law of memory ... I assume it as admitted that every created being ... is subject to change, and indeed that this change is continuous in each ... if there was no resemblance of what one had been, immortality would not be at all desirable ... this immortality which is desired includes memory." The tropologies in his The Nomology (1714) and his Discourse on Metaphysics (1710) consistently suggest that "we have in our minds all those forms for all periods of time because the mind at every moment expresses all its future thoughts and already thinks confusedly of all that of which it will ever think distinctly."

Korzybski, in his Science and Sanity (1933), offered a different tropos in saying that "Perhaps, neurologically, animals feel similarly as we do about 'time', but they have no neurological means to elaborate linguistic and extra-neural means which alone allow us to extend and summarise the manifold experience of many generations (time-binding). They cannot pass from 'time' to 'times'. Obviously, if we do not, we then renounce our human characteristics, and copy animals in our evaluating processes, a practice which must be harmful."

Acceptance of the latter's tropos, on initial consideration, may appear to dispute Saussure's assertion that analogy is a renovating and conservative force (1), in as much as it uses old material for its innovations (see his Course in General Linguistics (1915)).
It is here that René Thom's particular clarifications in his Structural Stability and Morphogenesis (1972) come into sight to make clear the mutually necessary manifestations of continuity or structural stability, as well as these leaps made possible by this spring of the already present, coupling the relatively slow dynamic of consciousness and mental activity to the simultaneously multiple rapidities of the auxiliary systems and the outside.

Now, whilst the same object can exist in many different guises, we usually recognize it. That classical problem of concept was clarified by the Gestalt psychologists posing it in a geometric framework accessible to scientific investigation. If you solve such a problem by naive intuition you give to outside things an existence independent of perception and understanding (2). Understanding acts as a transformer from naive intuition to informed intuition - it indicates the difference between what Thomsky, and earlier Lenneberg, gave as innate, or biologically based language and the transformations of that language by living. We may think of this as consistent memory coupled by inventive memory (3) (4).

Joe crossed the road this morning for the third time using the same number of steps. He hadn't been interrupted. He wasn't even consciously using the same route of the same number of steps. He hadn't thought about it. Had he counted the steps he would have been aware of his consistency. Even so - he may not have been as obsessive about discontinuous change as to deliberately vary the number of steps, or so change his route as to be unable to walk the same number of steps each time he crossed the road.

It becomes necessary to recognise the probability that the properties of connection, reversibility and indecomposability which define the space of the same object (i.e., the structural integrity of the Gestalt), have as origin not the physical properties of the outside world but the constraints of the dynamic of our structure, a structure which can itself be changed.

Clearly, all experiment, all measurement, disturbs irreversibly the evolutions of the process. Poetry, to the extent that it is successful, is not simply geometry or arithmetics. There is no stability at the level of the single process, but only the statistical stability of a larger number of events. So that, whilst there is no intelligible language without a geometry, or underlying dynamic whose structurally stable states are formalised by the language, it is also clear that as soon as a formal model is intelligible, admits semantic realisation where a meaning is apparent, that meaning changes in relation to the meaning another may give it, or in relation to living after the first realisation of the meaning. And the meaning may take on a multiplicity that is summated or left incompressible and so forth. Saussure made this clear enough in showing how the interdependent parts of language function and acquire value through their relationship to the whole.

In 1937 Andronov and Pontryagin in the USSR (5) introduced into mathematical analysis the idea of structural stability. Their concern was a qualitative study of differential systems. They saw dynamical systems as structurally stable if a sufficiently small perturbation of the field did not alter the qualitative nature of the system. They do not require that the homeomorphism commute with time; the perturbed system may have a completely different structure from the original system after sufficient time has passed. That does not change the description
to unstable. The growth of bones can be considered a structurally stable system. The early Greeks' contradiction-in-things can now be stated differently as a stability, or consistent turbulence I will call Themos, made to turbulate inconsistently by the moral and renewable law of Nomos. But that's not enough. Poetry has a stranger charm which presents, when it is successful, a transformation of love and language, that is informed by the laws of Themos and Nomos, the consistent and the invented, in the realm of the preter-memory known as the imagination.

However, there seems to be a time scale in most natural processes beyond which structural stability and calculability become incompatible. In planetary mechanics this scale is of such an extent that the incompatibility is not evident, whereas in quantum mechanics it is so short that the incompatibility is immediately felt, and, for the present anyway, the physicist sacrifices structural stability for computability.

To look again at these matters; Heraclitus sees all morphogenesis as the result of a struggle. Easiness from such simplicity (the statements are of course fragments in any case) immediately carries complication. The simply beautiful morning conceals the complexity of perception - blaster cattle. The simplest examples of "struggle" - the junctions/bifurcations used by the nineteenth century Riemann-Hussoniet mathematics - specify the topological structure of local shock waves, but the only existing universal model for their case occurs in gradient dynamics from previously known polarised domains. Homeostasis, by the demand of living, becomes a stability that requires, for instance, negative feedback to maintain momentum. Nature tends to blur and fluctuate transitional regions under the effect of viscosity and diffusion, the Einsteinian collage, the yellow syrup pulsing in the pavement as Joe crosses the sunlight are the cracks full of yellowing moss glistening in thawed frost; the moss fits to the crevices, is discontinuously retrodden. Poetry is not a flower ascending through that moss, but a made steel mobile tripping the walker. The movement is made possible not by the thermodynamics (initially) but by viscosity and the irregular diffusion of differently sized parts. The overview conceals the particulars. The observation of membranes in biology, where the overview defines membranes as separating two systems, and the particular attention which shows a membrane to be a system connecting two systems. A similar case can be found in the description of vortex streets in hydrodynamics in the theory of wakes (6) (7).

In contradiction to Whitehead's view that "we cannot hope to be able to discern the laws of nature to be necessary" (8), Waddington's chroods - the idea of change inside necessary paths - begin to offer a better modul (9). Waddington differs from the more general overview of the morphogenetic field in the privileged role allotted to time and its orientation. Irreversibility of time is justified by the fact that, for natural processes which depend on diffusion and are, at least partially, controlled by parabolic equations, the possibility of qualitatively restructuring the past from the present situation (retrodictation) is much more restricted than that of prediction. Dreams become easier to comprehend than histories.

If a process studied is contained in a unique chrood, such as in the finite language Husserl calls for in his Origin of Geometry (1936), or the single completely resolved form of every expression discussed by Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations (1953, written
1926-49) (Wittgenstein of course also allows for things which cannot be said in factual propositions, but which can be shown), or the requirement intrinsic in the Answers for my Critics given by B.F. Skinner (1973)(10), it is deterministic and structurally stable.

But Waddington's concern with chreods is of a different order. He uses its description to show that biological order is otherwise, is, for example, epigenetic - gradually producing and organising - rather than undeterminedly genetic and singular. Information theory, for instance, is unable to deal with the formation of the phenotype. A matter Chomsky's generative grammar interfaces.

It seems likely that some conservative (11) natural phenomena give geometrically imposed realisations of these privileged dynamics; this is a possible reason for the presence of internal symmetry groups in the theory of elementary particles (12). But spaces with a natural measure having a macro-symmetry are few and are mainly limited to crystallography.

It is generally supposed that classical mechanics deals with phenomena of the macroscopic world, which are therefore rigidly deterministic, whereas phenomena at the quantum level are fundamentally indeterministic. But these views carry the faults, that in the former are too uncarefully applied to social science, and in that the latter's argument - the uncertainty principle - is based on the crude and inadequate model of a particle as a point (however accurate some of the qualities of that principle are). Certainly, "It is the theory which decides what we can observe" (13). In the macroscopic world of a universal differential system parameterising all the states of the universe, any such model can be subject to experimental control only under the conditions that the model has a localisation procedure allowing the construction of structurally stable, local models.

Now it is everyday experience that many common phenomena are unstable and there are no experimental criteria to distinguish between a structurally unstable process and a fundamentally indeterminate process. The question of determinism, freed from its philosophical background, reduces in phenomenological terms, to the almost incontestable assertion that there are phenomena that are more or less deterministic. The degree to which a process is deterministic is essentially in the expression of the degree of smoothness (differentiability) of the evolution of the process in terms of its initial conditions. The degree to which a process is determinate is determined by the local state of the process. This is not a matter of calculable prediction, as so many generations of morales, ethics and poetries appear to suggest. The determinism is one of quality rather than quantity.

Look I've got an electric calculator, the cartoon character says. Ask it anything, come on anything. Will it rain tomorrow? The calculator is plugged in, the operator looks up, replies: It may. If it does it will be wet.

So in any process there may be regions which are well determined and structurally stable, being Waddington's chreods - the canals of consistent memory - and instabilities or indeterminisms - the generalised, unformalisable changing topologies - the poetries of the inventive memory; and these processes are the concerns I wish to elaborate on in
arriving at the informed memory that brings about not the consistency and conservatism (14) of automation, but the informed intuition which is the becoming of the mathematics of Rimbaud, and the multiplicity of attentions that has continued to ensue.

Footnotes:

5 places where elaboration or further discussion is particularly required.

(1) The English translator of Ferdinand de Saussure's Course in General Linguistics translates the French conservatrice as conservative, which may make ambiguous the sense given in the French. (See notes 11 and 14.)

(2) Thom notes, "The most convinced solipsist, when living and going about his business, must adjust to the world outside and admit its structural invariance in his (sic) use of it; does this not amount to admitting the existence of a certain reality?"


(4) Eric H Lenneberg's Biological Foundations of Language (1967) used by Chomsky.

(5) A. Andonov and L. Pontryagin, Systemes grossiers quoted by Thom.


(10) Skinner's answers appear in Beyond the Punitive Society.

(11) The English translator of René Thom's work remarks that he has translated the French économique as conservative.

(12) Refer Gerald L Wick's Elementary Particles (1972).

(13) Albert Einstein in conversation with Heisenberg, see Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations (1963).

(14) The usage here refers to the wish, not to change, but preserve and fix.

This work continues the composition in public started in RS under the heading "Thumbnail Lecture". (see RS Vol 2: no. 3 - Ed.)

- Allen Fisher, '80
Q. What are the strongest instances of ideology in the language? Where do you feel it speaks nowadays?

A. Where does ideology speak nowadays? Without doubt in the university, in a certain way, but it's a discourse I have little in common with, let's say, marginally. All the same we'll have to come back on that. But it seems to me, it ought to be considered, that ideology tends to speak less and less in explicit discourses - politics, academics, theoreticians - all discourses which are, of course, largely its echo, and more and more, that is with more and more effectiveness, in the sphere of labour. I believe that now, which hasn't always been the case in matters of discourse, that is truly where things happen, on that score, the explicit discourse on ideology or for (or against) ideology is a late metro. Ideology speaks, is spoken, acts in the carceral space of labour, in its silences, in the prohibitions of speech, all entirely efficient, even, and above all, if we locate them badly. What can be heard within if we listen a little? An entirely prefabricated discourse. I say: what does it matter WHO is speaking of the moment which THAT repeats. That, is a strong instance of ideology in the language. Where whatever happens is always stated in advance, a commodities-discourse simply to be consumed; where the stated always precedes the statement. All the same it's a funny trick! To put it exactly: the individual who speaks can only repeat, amplify the ideology in the language, without knowing it of course. That's why it works. There's no longer any possibility of being the subject of one's own speech. Take Day-Release Studies for example, what good are they? It's an institution of dressage to adjust the individual better to repetitive mechanisms, standardised productions which are always reproduction, stuttering repetition. One could imagine a very advanced ideal society of liberalism as a traffic policeman's platform and one could follow straight on from there, if one isn't careful, to where there would simply be the prohibition by law of recounting one's stories; I mean inventing stories. The "best-seller" is already that, something which recounts nothing, which invents nothing, but which causes the repetition of the interiorised models of ideology, impecuniously.

Q. Are there new instances of bourgeois language? Or new places?

A. Yes, I believe it shifts and changes form, the language of the bourgeoisie. One thing seems to me important, an impression, that the language-capacity (langage) of the bourgeoisie no longer finds its meaning in the language-system (langue). The bourgeoisie no longer holds an articulate discourse, a meaningful discourse. The meaning of bourgeois language, nowadays, is in its economic effectiveness, less and less effective as we can see, but all the same that's where it occurs. That links up with what I said earlier. But it is not only in the sphere of labour that they, the bourgeoisie, speak. What is happening today outside the sphere of work? If you put on one side the privileged minority (of whom you and I are included in our way), intellectuals, academics, "artists", whatever you like, who still imagine they produce discourses of which they
are the subjects, which remains to be seen, let's admit that it happens from time to time, what happens elsewhere, in the "leisure hours", in the "holiday" (we put that in the plural to create a diversion)? It is the grand escape of the subject without discourse. We are free, free, so free that we have our speech cut up. Happily there is the cinema (weak), television, the Club Méditerranée, the camping grounds and other tricks and jokes. There is division of leisure as there is division of labour: in little bits so that it always ends before the pleasure begins. Because pleasure is very dangerous.... Therefore, to come back to your question, I believe that the bourgeois nowadays no longer produces a discourse, but only commodities and surplus value and the whole paraphernalia. The new instances of this language are the objects: cinema, telly, old cars, weekend cottages, playthings such as we give to babies before they can speak, in order to occupy the subject without discourse during the "holiday" when he withdraws from a discourse without subject.

Relating to these two poles, I believe publishing is entirely in step; on the one hand the subject without discourse - "my" memories, "my" souvenirs, "my" countryside, "my" loves, extorted during catastrophe, rewritten any old how. On the other hand, the repetition of the discourse without subject, the discourse of ideology, from its "young dressmaker" form in Guy Des Cars, to its strongly leftwing intellectual form in Lyotard for example. But there's really the impression that there's no longer today any real advancement in thought, in theory, not like the fifties produced, or the beginning of the sixties. The last specimens of the great pioneers were Lacan, Foucault and then...? Editorial production in that regard is in step with the general movement. There remains the question, should one say hopes, of the small publishers who are launching into the fray....

4. And it's true that we are succouring a swarming of small publishers who thus reveal the strong editorial censorship, tied as you've said to the economic instance that favours repetition.

A. All the same I'm not accusing the publishers. They are also caught in the trap of capitalist production. They are also the coerced instruments of the reproduction of capital. One must see that the ideology lays out more and more perfected and more and more effective apparatuses of repression. We must not underestimate the resources of the bourgeois. Except that given half a chance it will end up by suffocating itself in its own machinery. One might hope that it will become intolerable, I mean intolerable enough for the Ideological State Apparatus not to function at all, as Althusser said. But we're not there yet. So while waiting, to come back to the publishers, they must enter the ranks or disappear. That means producing best-sellers and Goncourt candidates in the short-term and gawzing in the same sweep their capital of literature, their culture-capital if we might call it that, Proust, Glisse, Arteaud with Gallimard for example, so that in fifty years they will have nothing left to get their teeth into. But once again, we can always have quarrels with Gallimard or Seuil, but it means nothing. An enterprise, supposing it's publishing, if it's to survive nowadays, is forced to submit unconditionally to the demands of the dominant ideology in the Capitalism juncture which has fuck all to do with Culture. The book must now have status, the guaranteed vintage of "commodity" or not exist at all.
2. The prospect of becoming ideological would seem rather bleak?

A. For me, yes, very bleak, if one doesn't take it rather seriously, I mean exactly in the relationships of political force and not in simple "romantic" inclinations. If not, we're moving towards the great serenity of deep debility, a kind of white death. We'll not be truly dead, we'll continue to breathe, we'll emit sounds in the form of words, but there'll no longer be discourses capable of producing meaning, only commodities capable of producing surplus value. We're not far from that.

2. Is the effort of transformation of relationships from production to the work, on the social battle-front, partly bound to the initiatives of "structural change" in the language, or are they on the contrary opposed or indifferent?

A. My first thought, and that concerns only me, is that there is no relationship. I mean no visible relationship, no explicit relationship from cause to effect between a work on and in language and a practice of social struggle. A CHANGES, since you spoke of that; we have both social and political practice in our spheres of professional activity. And if we meet again there, in that CHANGES "writing studio", but there again I'm speaking for myself, it is for a collective work of theory or fiction, which is I believe something else entirely. That said, of course, there are bridges, effects of language on history and vice versa. Jean-Pierre Faye's thesis on Totalitarian Languages reveals quite eloquently, I think, that type of relationship. Besides, Jean-Pierre's work appears to me both the best response one can give to your question and at the same time lays the foundations in, I believe, a manner much deeper than perhaps the whole of the work of CHANGES would appear to do. Personally I'd say that the practice of language on the individual level is not a social practice but rather a kind of "luxury" that I'm fortunate to be able to offer myself. That said, History is perhaps made, among other things, from the "radioactive" fallout of all the accumulated "luxuries".

3. What are the chances for the "textual theory" in future History?

A. I'll stick to saying immediately that I have no particular strong feeling vis-a-vis TEL QUIL. Those quarrels don't interest me. But in a general way, I believe that all work, all the "avant-garde" (for want of a better word) production of discourse is doomed by nature to have no future. Its future is the new work of the "avant-garde" which will relaunch itself from that. I don't want to harp on the past but perhaps simply for chronological, historical reasons, the future of TEL QUIL was CHANGES. But that means the future of CHANGES is ... something else, a reprise, a relaunch somewhere. Perhaps it's DERIVE. But there is all the same a remark I'd like to make on the subject. It's a question of the relationship of an "avant-garde" group with power. With regard to that, to answer your question, it seems to me that "textual theory" is entirely well registered, admitted and instituted in the academic places of power. Because there too it repeats. Therefore, nowadays TEL QUIL produces academic discourse, a discourse for students, the worse for certainty. There too is perhaps a possible future for "avant-garde" groups: anticipated retreat to the Academy or the University. In any case it's sure today that CHANGES hasn't yet sunk anchor in that port. And if I am for CHANGES
Q. **TEL QUÉL is no longer putting forward anything new.**

A. In my opinion, no. It's an instituted discourse already rooted in repetition. As institution, group and magazine. That's not at all to prejudge what the individuals of TEL QUÉL do, yesterday or today. Fortunately the future is a question, not a reply. But nowadays, TEL QUÉL is a reply, not a question.

Q. Are there new theories on the class struggle which have superseded historical materialism, theories where economy, productivism, value and labour, in short all the commercial devices of power, would be separated, and are they viable?

A. It seems there's a theoretical delay in Marxist thought. That the work realised by Lacan from Freud has not really been ventured upon by anyone for Marx. It seems to me, but here again I remain very cautious, it's an impression, that the relationship to Marx in a general way is still very archaic. That said, I don't at all believe in great theoretical ruptures and less still in great a-theoretical lyrical flights. It appears absurd that one can imagine wiping out in one fell swoop all the theoretical Marxist apparatus, and departing somewhere else entirely, into "libidinal economy" for example. On that there'd be much to say. If you want we can speak again about that. I believe it's worth the trouble. There are always relays to be grasped. Marx took his call from the English economists Ricardo and Smith, without mentioning Hegel of course. And Freud from Charcot. One doesn't wipe out a theoretical apparatus like Marx's with impunity. I remember Lacan once said, in one of his seminars, very approximately: "what is common in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud is that they don't talk poppycock". After all it's not so frequent! The concepts of "class struggle", of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" are theoretical concepts. They can't be wiped out just like that. But they can be brought into question, be thought out again beginning from an historical reality that is no longer the same.

Q. Perhaps what influence of libidinal economy is there on the progress of the new Marxian problematics?

A. None. There I am categoric. Libidinal economy is entirely in step with capitalist ideology; likewise perverse intelligence, likewise denial of difference (of the kind; a proletarian plays on his machine just like a bourgeois does), likewise rejection of theory. And with reason. Because it is theory that produces the meaning and because the meaning always ends up producing effects somewhere in the real. Besides, the words, they mean something; the bourgeois libido is in fact economic and it economises. Further, from a theoretical point of view, it seems to me perfectly abusive to shift a theoretical concept like that of libido from the place of Freudian theory of individual unconscious to that of socio-historical discourse. Strictly that no longer means anything. All that has a side of nostalgic reverie for the old combatants of 68, who have not yet come back from the principle of pleasure, besides, that always concludes by encountering the principle of reality and vice versa. Which would after all be
without importance if such a discourse didn't stem from there, very subtly we must realise, to support the very foundations of capitalist ideology in the academic space. But of course that would merit being justified much more precisely ... what I've just said.

Q. ... and the influence of the rhizome?

A. I study the rhizome less frequently. All the same I have taken the trouble to read Lyotard closely. Deleuze and Guattari, since Anti-Oedipus I'm less interested in; I must say, speaking of the rhizome (which I have nevertheless read), that pushing up daisies isn't my thing. That seems to be closer to the student practical joke than anything. I don't know what kind of perspective Deleuze and Guattari have made of that, but they must all the same have a good laugh from time to time. While libidinal economy isn't funny at all. Besides, in bourgeois ideology, pleasure and libido are also very sad. As for what the rhizome is, I think that the disconnection of Deleuze's thought which is evident between Difference and Repetition, or Logique du Sens and Anti-Oedipus, and what follows, that kind of leap into the theoretical void, that means something, from the point of view of ideology, something which, in my opinion, would rather be a sort of regression.

Q. That maintains the feeling of a theoretical desert which stimulates blank poetic productions. I'm thinking of the Manifestes Froids who departed from theory to resign themselves to a return which went as far as making them say, at the height of the Chilean September, that they had no opinion to give.

A. Such abandonment of a relationship to theory seems to me indeed quite ideologically significant. It's the eternal question of the articulation between the principle of pleasure and the principle of reality, between desire and law, between theory and fiction. To save that articulation, I mean to economise on the price of the question by rejection of the instance of law, or theory, is inevitably to leave the field free for the law of the dominant ideology. We must have no illusions. If you disconnect discourses of fiction, theory, poetry, or anything you like, from their grasp of socio-historical reality and the strong relationships implied, that reconnects immediately with the circuits of the dominant ideology, that is, Capitalism.

Q. In your case, would not your position faced with these questions be bound to the fact that your social practice is real in a system of heavy ideological production, while the University solicits all the side-slips possible? It's a bit above everything.

A. It's a possible explanation, but not, I think, sufficient. The University is an Ideological State Apparatus on the same grounds as enterprise. They're institutions of ideological production. I believe we're tempted from time to time to disconnect. A question of sudden awareness. It's true today that we live in an historic period I'd say of latency. That there are struggles is certain. But all the same we have the impression that the horizons are a bit choked. Like a kind of lead cowl, a cheese-ball which one day we must decide to shake seriously. Then the temptation for the intellectuals who, with or without money, work in luxury, because thought today in this shit society is a luxury item ... the temptation is to keep themselves
in reserve. To take, after a fashion, their little pleasure, their little enjoyment whilst awaiting better revolutionary days. I call that a romantic position. And it's really that which capitalist ideology expects of intellectuals; that they shoulder the aspects of dreams, of sleep and that they don't meddle with the rest. I've drifted a little from your question, but I believe that all production of discourse, including poetry, has a relationship somewhere to what Jean-Pierre Faye calls "heavy writings", social discourse. The question is always the same: how does that connect, or disconnect, with the dominant ideology?

Q. How does the question of Power strike you today?

A. For me it's already in the sphere of labour that power occurs. Still something must be said ... clearly. I've been involved for a number of years, in the Day-Release Studies of an American multinational, namely ES. And there, believe me, the question of power is nothing. How does that strike me? That's interesting. I'd say, through the repression of discourse. You are placed in the radical impossibility of being the subject of some speech or other! It's difficult to say exactly how that works, but I think a work on those gigantic machines of power analogous to that which Foucault did on prisons is required. There's a type of spectacular repressive power, as in Chile for example, where violence is obvious, where it kills physically. But what seems to me nowadays one of the formidable strengths of the neo-capitalist societies with which we must reckon, is that such violence becomes completely useless. There's a kind of interiorisation of prohibition, of unconscious complicity, remarkably orchestrated for a long time, which means that power has no need to show itself. It is supreme alienation of which we're no longer conscious. The capitalist machine becomes so sophisticated that violence, which is no less permanent or dangerous, no longer hurts. It has become painless. As for the rest, in the practice of writing, the power is exerted, in my opinion, in the first place on the most material level, that of publication. I've had a manuscript doing the rounds of the publishing houses for almost a year, and it can still go on longer. It's a visible, uninteresting little example, except that it perhaps illustrates how, there too, it represses gently. No violence, no censorship, or very little. But the waiting. And during that time you can't do anything else. If one measured all intellectual activity frozen by that way of proceeding it might be very interesting. And I'm not speaking of the cinema or the theatre. It's what I said earlier, either you produce an economically surplus value commodity, or you shut up. As an outlook that's not very cheerful!

Q. The word "fiction" is disturbing. Taken by Lyotard on the level of his theory-fiction, it implies a pretence ...

A. ... a pretence is when one wants to believe the moon's made of green cheese. Which Lyotard does with inspiration. I don't believe that fiction is a pretence, since we don't confuse everything. To recount stories is one thing ... and immediately the question is asked, what stories and how to recount them, in what form - and then theory is another thing and social practice yet another. Which doesn't mean that they're without relationships, of course not. But I believe it's not in the pretence that fiction is disturbing, but rather in its certain manner of telling the truth, its certain manner of changing accepted forms and thus attacking the models of thought.
of the dominant ideology. To write is not to make a revolution, obviously. But finally when one sees how, in this capitalist society, cultural repression, the disappearance of all activities not directly linked to production of surplus value or reproduction of ideological models, is organised very precisely, one can wonder if finally, a slightly serious work on or in language, theory or fiction, is not already a grain of sand capable of jamming the machine, in the long run, something dangerous for power. Even if there is nothing directly visible with a social practice.

Q. That said, there's a lively illusion with the Telquellian nostalgists of confusing social practice with the practice of writing....

A. Yes, it's more convenient. Because social practice, one must see these things, is very often a pain in the area. Not romantic at all. For my part, the activity of writing, being completely separate from my professional activities, is simpler. There's no possible confusion. I don't mean there's no relationship there. It seems to me that there is, in the work of the imagination on the matter of language, a kind of reinscription, of reinvestment of the stakes and the meanings which have appeared in social practice. What does it mean finally then, to recount stories? Literature has invented nothing but the form. It tells of what one can see, hear everywhere, stories of love, family, money. Thus the narrative, the novel, is a certain way of reporting social experience in that elsewhere, that non-place of language, but then, already, perhaps of transforming it. Jean-Pierre Faye has said that better than I. In any case, a way of diverting such an experience, at least that's how I see things, from its confiscation by the ideology. Power today in our so-called developed countries, I believe, is before all else the power to confiscate meaning, as Bernard Noël once said, to confiscate it by branding it with a Capital letter, the way we brand cattle. Well perhaps a certain form of fiction escapes that brand mark. The only worry is that without such a mark, label of surplus value or guaranteed repetition, the novel - though it's the same, if not worse, for the cinema, theatre, music - has less and less chance of being materially "produced". But that's no reason to stop persisting. I remain optimistic. I'm persuaded that it will all end by cracking up somewhere, some day or other. Because the thought of a country cannot be suppressed with impunity. Besides, it's already splitting up none too badly....

translated by Glenda George

(from dérive 5/6, May 77 - "the question of power")

Further information in English can be found in issues of Curtains (French Curtains/A Range of Curtains/Drawn Curtains/Valvet Curtains/ Split Curtains/Curtains le prochain stop/Balièred Curtains) or magazines like Substance (particularly No 15) or Semiotexte, In French, issue of Change magazine; Boyer's collection of essays L'écarter(c) (Seghers/Laffont 1973); a booklength interview on Jean-Pierre Faye by Boyer, Commencement d'une figure en mouvement (Stock 1980).
Books/pamphlets


Paul BROWN: Moorsuri (Paul Brown, 57 Whitehorse Road, London E1 0ND). "Pre-Texts Urdition of 75 copies." Mimeo text & stencil images.


Fred CHAPPELL: Northsean (American University Publishers Group, 1 Gower St, London WC1E 6HA) hardback, no price given. From the blurb: "It is a blessed comfort to read ... Fred Chappell because I can like reading him immediately ... He combines the shrill humanity of the southern storyteller with the poet's eye and ear." If you can connect with that, this book is for you.

Robert JAMA: In a Fugitive Season (American University Publishers Group) hardback £4.80. Careful writing, beautifully wrought images, the result however rather less than exciting.

Keith BARKLEY: The Gentle Art of Camouflage (Fetish Books) 50p. Short prose pieces with surrealistic slant.

Clive FAUST: Taken or Trace (Tangent Books, Ways Cottage, Chagford, Devon) 80p. Australian poet whose work will be the subject of a future RS article.

Vivienne FINCH: The Possible Dark (The Possum Press, 58 Blakes Lane, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6NX). Two long sequences: "The Breaking of the Myth" and "Every Bird a Flame".


Clenda GEORGE: The Corpse of Almer McCurdy (Zunne Heft, address as for Pressed Curtains). Writing taken off from newspaper report that dummy in amusement park was identified as body of a train-robber who died in a gun-battle in 1911.

Bill GRIFFITHS: The First three novellas of the second row (Trumpet Press/Pirate Press, 107 Valley Drive, London NW9 9NT). Not novellas at all but extraordinary brews of overlapping split language.


Carla HÖHN: Under the Bridge (This Press, c/o SPD, 1784 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94709, USA) paperback, £3. Prose pieces, almost post-referential short stories, lots of energy.
Edmond JABES: A Share of Ink (Menard Press, 1979) paperback, £1.65. A selection from "Je Suis Un Demeure" translated and introduced by Anthony Rudolf; not, he admits, a representative selection in that it does not include Jabès' long surrealist poems. An indisputably major writer who is at last becoming available in English.

Tony JACKSON: Work (Galloping Dog Press, 3 Ottoburn Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 3UB). Quick edition: "a collection/of beginnings/false starts/a record of essential gaps/lines/drawn in the dirt..."

Tom LEONARD: Ghostie Hen (Galloping Dog Press) 60p. Exhilarating Glasgow dialect poems, full of wit and anger, on the subjects of metaphysics, sexual politics, Ulster, language, the state of the Labour Party... "name a thie fethin/muthi sun/muthi holy ghostie non" (quoted only because it's the shortest - recommended.)

Artur LUNDKVIST: Agadir (American University Publishers Group) paperback, $3.60. Long poem on the earthquake in Agadir, Morocco, in 1960, which killed 40,000 people. Lundkvist, a distinguished Swedish poet, was there at the time. Translated by J Smith/Leif Sjöberg.

Eric NOTTMAN: 1980 Hadiate (Zunne Hef, c/o Pressed Curtains). Five long, dense, heady poems "in time of war".

Opal L NATIONS: The Book of Dreams (1979, Vehicule Press, POB 125, Station "La Cité", Montreal, Canada H2K 3H0). Collection of bizarre drawings done like Victorian etchings; Opal at his best.

Louis PATLEM: Elie's (Great Works Editions, 1979) 60p. Set of poems, dedicated to John Wiemers and Duncan McNaughton.

Peter PHILPOTT: What Was Shown (Ferry Press, 177 Green Lane, London SE9). Nicely produced collection.

William PHYO: Unearth (Galloping Dog Press) 75p. Good follow-up to AMY.


E E VONNA-MICHELL: Falkenhagen (Arlington Arcade, as for Zunne Hef). Treated texts (fun with litho plates).


Barrett WATTEN: 1-10 (This Press) paperback, £3. Poems and prose disrupting normal linguistic frames of reference.


magazines

CHOCK 5 (Ian Durant, 172 Romford Rd, London E7 9HY) 75p. Barrett/Bruchac/Bluard/A Fisher/Griffiths/P Riley/etc. Good choice of writers but not enough space for each and awful illustrations.

ECUATORIAL 3 (W Rowe, Dept of Spanish, King's College, Strand, London WC2R 2LS) £2.40 for 3. Enterprising dual-language Spanish/English
poetry/new writing mag. Excellent translation of Lorca's Ode to Walt Whitman by Howe and Potenza, and article by Pierre Joris on Paul Blackburn's fine Lorca translations. Frank O'Hara done into Spanish.

FIGS 4 (Tony Buck, 2 Kopier Catchouse, Durham DH1 1L3) 60p. Includes marvellous Colin Simms.

GREAT WORKS 7 (Peter Philpott, 25 Portland Rd, Bishops Stortford, Herts) 75p. Harry/Chaloner/J Harding/etc plus Menghan on Haworth, Miller on Charles Nidge, Peter Riley on Blake. It's been a long wait, Peter.

HILLS 6/7 (Bob Perelman, 36 Clyde St, San Francisco, CA 94107, USA; NB an out of date address was given in last RS) £5. Pat paperbach issue (217pp) being transcripts of 'talks' given by Watten, Brouige, Woolf, Silliman et al. Recommended.

LOBEY 15 (Lynn 1/yz 26 85 99 d, new address 1 Pretoria rd North, London N18). Write for details of new venture including tapes.

THE BEEhi CREEK, CA N110 (Kris Hemensley, 24 Urquhart St, Westgarth, Victoria 3070, Australia). Duplicated correspondence/theory/poetry.

NOT POETRY 2 & 3 (Peter Hodgkiss, Calloping Dog Press) £3 for 4 issues. No 3 has Kathy Acker/Elaine Randell/Ralph Hawkins/Netall/etc.

PAJEL 2 (Poetry And Little Press Information, c/o ALP, 262 Randolph Ave, London W1) £2 for 4, or free to members of ALP. Essential, comprehensive publications listing; Nonvil Press' encounter with Arts Council's Charles Osborne (shock horror indeed).

ROCK DRILL (Robert G Sheppard, School of English & American Studies, University of E Anglia, Norwich, Norfolk NN4 7HT) 95p for 3 issues. First issue features Alan Halsey's work.

SMOKE 12 (Dave Ward, Windos Project, 23a Front Wals, Liverpool L26 9YX) £1 for 6. Nations/Pickard/Hiking/Toozek/etc, selected by Dave Calder.

SPECTACULAR DISEASES 5 (Paul Green, 83b London Rd, Peterborough, Cambs.) £1.50. Special issue devoted to Bernard Noél(tr. Buck/George).

SUB-STANCES 23/24 "Poetry"(c/o Paul Buck, 4 Dover St, Maidstone, Kent) 22pp paperbach, £3.40. Contemporary French poetry and poetics presented and discussed (Bonnafoy/Jeguy/Noël/Albisch/etc.).

TMS 10 (Barrett Watten, c/o SPD, 1734 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94709, USA) £2. Carla Harryman/Minie Ward/Ray DiPalma/Rae Amantrop/Charles Bernstein/Christopher Dewalne/Bob Perelman/Clark Coolidge/Lyn Hejinian/Alan Davies/etc. Interesting and well-produced.

Cassettes:

BALLON FLEX:- Ulli McARTHUR, trunk calls/t chest; E E Wonna-MiCHELL, Orange Wipes (an extraordinary never-ending, self-regenerating tape); HANG CRASH MALLOPP, Roof of the rex/Back to the sea; Bob CONNING, An ABC in Sound (the original recording of this historic piece); Alice BLOOMON, In the early part of the Year/Single Tune for Dancing. Write for complete price lists to; 18 Clairview Rd, London SW16.

Richard Hemmley: sel/dic/diction / yz 26 85 99 d: the mic s 002 (KIP K1 c/o Lobby) £2.

NICK KIMBERLEY has now opened a new bookshop called DUCK SOUP at 11 Lambs Conduit Passage, London WC1 (tel: 01-242 3007). Many of the above & other publications will be available there, and the mail order service will operate from that address in future. An opening do was held on Dec 6th.
A few notes on the work of Colin Simms

A fox-track. The distinctive feature, the way the prints follow each other in a single line, not two lines in parallel as a horse-track. An impression, as if the animal had placed the "forefoot in hindfoot's mark?" (1)

The economy of the imprint - a signature - an evidence of presence.

Colin Simms is a self-designated "naturalist-poet": he's consistently difficult to track down. He's expressed a preference for the noiselessness of a horizon (which even in a poet working with long lines is not the same as a horizontal) over the sort of publicity which leaves its litter behind. On one occasion he showed me the ear cavities of a female goshawk, a preserved specimen he'd rescued from a collection somewhere, searching through the matted feathers about the coverts with a pencil-tip in order to pick out a small puncture mark in the bone that the feathers masked.

That (necessary) discretion of the senses - his care with the pencil.

In an article for Poetry Information 17 Colin wrote of "the pineal eye of some primitive reptiles which may have nothing to do, from its position on top of the head, with range-finding or the detail just in front, but might help steer the animal in the sun." Simple orientation of this kind is found in some of the most rudimentary invertebrates, eg a planaria (a small river-worm) which, even without its eyes, will react to light due to the light-sensitivity of cells distributed generally across its body surface. It's a kind of broad orientation also that the poems ask of the reader - "orientation" being more appropriate I think than to demand that the poems should somehow "make sense" unless that's understood literally.

"LANDING and settling-down-into another unsettled Gravity FIELD" (2)

The words leave the reader manoeuvring amongst directions which deliberately avoid resolution. They urge the reader to search them - to use listening eyes - to hear how the gap between "LANDING" and "FIELD" fills. It's difficult to write a settled sentence about them - they're evasive like those figure-and-ground images which veer unpredictably between possibilities. All the reader can do is take bearings from within the condition that the words lay out; and I don't mean "bearings" simply in the sense of a compass reading, but rather in the sense also of 'bearing off' in this or that direction, ie an active as well as definitive way. An order of attention is needed that can include intuition, peripheral vision, remote or vestigial modes of perception, as intricacies within the "knowableness" of anything. I suppose this amounts to saying that involvement in can't be detached from understanding of. You're being asked to "go along with" the poem, bringing the senses willingly sharpened to the reading so that a full
Zukorisky's comment that a poem "keeps time with existence" seems in tune with the urge to make room for any phase of existence in the writing in the range between the subliminally sensory and the abstract and conceptual.

"Peripheral vision" isn't a metaphor for the way any of the poems act - it's a fact of sight which the poems often exploit:

"...see any change in their pattern

stumped walk-shell occasional macaroni against far

Brewery malt smell

off the land stir cirrus stars splashed to us

only a woman's
dog, exercising..")

The word "dog" in a syntactical sense is the natural consequence of the word "woman's", but the space the poem opens allows the word to catch vertical movements through "stars" which, in the corner of the eye, glimpses an echo in "stir": "cirrus", which the eye passes on route between "woman's" and "dog", touches at Sirius making the reading of dog-star more than a kind of surface gratification like solving a crossword clue - it embodies that condition of intimation which the poems offer as an alternative to a grabbing of things by the throat and strangling them for Identity. Confusing the identification of a thing with the business of giving it a name is only possible if you forget about the continuity of the thing itself and the way in which it's liable to stir fresh orientations to enlarge the sense of what it is.

........

Two women at the roadside (this was by a Sussex mudflat) - waders: dunlin, redshank, common sandpiper, curlew sandpiper... - the women have binoculars, watch - walk away. They approach and ask "did you see the little stint?" - they point at it. The name, LITTLE STINT, it killed the watching for them - they'd had enough, they knew what the bird was, had identified it - the name ended the possibility of seeing, they weren't concerned any more with what's going on here.

British Lizards" Colin wrote:

"Let... three observers stand in front of a sunny lizard bank, with a lizard basking on it, and it is unlikely that any of them will recognise the lizard. They... see very different things. One will have looked without perceiving it among the grass and leaves. The others might be arrested by some movement of the lizard. Neither one will have really seen the lizard; they might just have become aware of it when it darted out of sight, because it moved!"

To see the lizard is to hold to the complex of relations in which it's set: the movement that isolates it gives an awareness outside of those relations that exists after the relations themselves have ceased. There's a rational paranoia for water-tightness that manipulates words in isolation from things in order that names can become labels to explain them, dislocating the words from the context and event that generates them. Is this to say any more than that peripheral vision, allowing for simultaneously sensed movements of divergent natures, is intrinsic to sight and not simply seeing of an inferior order to the sharpened acuity of the foveal image which appears to define one thing at a time?
Approaching this from another angle you could think of the poems as responding to the cure-all urge to "get things straight" (like in Sherlock Holmes where possibilities are eliminated in order to get to the "right" answer) by searching for a structure that uses the width of the page to make things bend a bit. As the passage quoted suggests, Gravity - acting downwards - isn't the sole force that holds things in place but a constant presence likely to become "unsettled" in the way of inclinations and tendencies that draw through them.

Parflèche - a long poem, focussed largely in American Indian culture and concerning the way in which an environment can be lived in - creates a kind of topography of writing by using the format common in Colin's work of an A4 sheet turned sideways. On. The full breadth of the page is occupied, opening spaces between the words that become as articulate as the words themselves, with the effect that the page becomes a kind of landscape filling out a view in front of the reader. You can't lose sight of the fact of the writing as a graphic act; and this reaches back towards a primary sense of writing as an activity that epitomises energies as they pass.

"The essence of the graphic act is to change progressively the capacity of a surface to structure light by layout or pigment, the progress of the change being coincident with the movement of the hand." (4)

One difficulty the naturalist faces is that presented by the easy, inherited dichotomy between a notional "wildness" and "freedom" on the one hand, and on the other a sense of the self-consciousness of human nature ruining its harmony with that "wildness". It must be pretty obvious that that's a stupid formulation but when ICI can advertise their products by showing a petrol tanker travelling along leafy English lanes or Esso can use the tiger as a motif for theirs, then the implicit consciousness of a gap opened up by the exploitative techniques of such companies - a gap which the adverts seek to gunk up - suggests how the naturalist can't afford to ignore that the dichotomy has cultural validity. Join the Country Book Society and find out if you don't believe it: the pressure exists to view "nature" (big N) as something other than the details of our daily involvements. Parflèche - as "Humility" another long poem published in 1977 - takes its roots from the destruction of a culture willing to live with the environment, by one that's ready to rip it off for the sake of an economy that ticks over in spite of it. Any article made from the dried skin of a buffalo may be referred to as a parfleche: in the poem the article - though the word "parfleche" has a number of other connotations - is generally the travelling bag of the Plains Indians, contrasted with its contemporary, placcey equivalent:

"The bag must have been the earliest invention: the carrier-bag for carrying out of the supermarket of the world to the collector, hunter, fruit-gatherer..."

This looks familiar: the "supermarket of the world" evoking a let's all grumble about monosodium-glutamate & artificial additives response, the substitutes world; whilst "collector, hunter, fruit-gatherer" latching on to the primal whole-food virtues, living amongst nature to receive without misgiving. But this isn't what the poem offers - themes don't come free from the poem in this packaged form. The writing keeps to the verge of things, resisting the step that leads into extrapolations; themes can only come clear outside the context of interlaced relations which alone are meaningful as far as the poetry is concerned. If you want manifestoes for alternative life-styles the poetry's no good. The compulsion of it is the way it
risks a brim in order to hold to "living on a hesitant voice" so as to avoid the kind of affirmation that lends itself to advocating causes.

... ...

This has been hard to write - I don't know why: I keep on wanting to put down the word "condition". I mean "condition" as in state of being, but also in the sense of "condition" as limit. A similar ambiguity leans against the word "bearing" - bearing as a direction followed, and simultaneously as something borne, a limiting burden. Being amongst things, which I take it the poems try to measure, is a freedom to move along the lines of limits the things themselves ask for; and perhaps this is a matter of being in tune, sounding with the world's harmonics. If this seems gooey, here's a comment originally applied to Paul Blackburn which may help: "..but yes, CHING MING - the tones given off by the heart." (5) What I mean by "condition" is I think strongly felt in Blackburn, for just as in Parleche where the act of definition reciprocates with being defined ("this is the way the awakening has to be"), so Blackburn presents a writing acute to the senses that meticulously adheres to the fragile point where giving and receiving search for balance:

"The act defines me
even if it is not my act
Hawk circles over the sea.
My act."

Those are lines from a poem called "The Net of Place", an image which recalls not simply the visual element in so much of Colin's writing, but one that gets worked specifically as a metaphor for an organic involvement in things that the writing looks to:

"...I found it best to run over the spaces regular as lace, exercise the sideways eye to knit the place not looking at what lies ahead."

... ...

Or (the mudflat) - a movement, a silhouette, a bird patterned amongst wet ground & other birds - not known by what it is, as a name "knows" - but how it shows itself to be that, its relations, the accumulating awareness of its relations in its environment - the quality of, and constant attention to, those relations.

How can a Canada Goose respond to human presence three quarters of a mile away and with high ground intervening, how can it know of the presence? - that sort of attention.

Naturally, the writing refuses to be pinned down: at some stage there'll be an aniseed trail across the page to discourage any single reading from securing too single-minded a grip on the directions the poem may take off in. "It is better to travel than to arrive" is the motto from Humility and if that sounds platitudinous it needs to be taken in the context of a willingness to wink at things which prevents the reader from having too many Serious Ideas about what the poet's going on about. The writing keeps to the travelling (simultaneous arrival and departure)
in which directions are permanent possibilities rather than specified aims. As is appropriate to a poet owing much to Bunting, the "ridiculous and lovely" are always likely to turn up in the same place:

"EZRA POUND, HUNTER OUT

On the streets
the maid with no breasts
to whom
listening to
is being taken
silently, at night

owl light to hunt
by all
N.Y.
at
the needle trembling
and the Pallisades
N.J.
and out." (8)

NOTES:

1) Flat Earth (Aloes Books 76) p12
2) from "It's a moving city" in Voices (Many Press)
3) from "Arctic terns Whitburn shore" in Movement (Pig Press 80)
4) J J Gibson: The senses considered as a perceptual system p230
5) Lee Harwood in the special Sixpack issue on Blackburn
6) Halfway Down the Coast (Mulch 75) p24
7) from "Road-runner" in Voices
8) "Ezra Pound, hunter out" also in Voices
He rides the lanes like a Phallic Ghost - Like Vera Lung bent over a goodnight kiss. Nothing hidden. No bullshit.

He is almost working against himself. Almost his own worst PR man. Because of his refusal to lie and compromise his art, because it would then be a lie and no art at all, he allows most of those around him to continue to believe their mistakes concerning his work. Its true meaning and worth.

So many people are incapable of seeing that line between the Man and the Writer. His work is often rejected because of the (faulty) image of the person, and various vice versas.

A man who is emotionally and psychologically, as well as artistically, not simply large - but huge and weighty in his scope and talent.

Let's use Burroughs as a useful parallel: "Well, I just read this book called The Naked Lunch. It's about dope fiends and queers. Men fucking men. And all this green slime. It's disgusting!"

Wrong. It's about control. Total and absolute. Con-trol. How it exists and how it is used. No one is safe. Nobody is free from the vice that grips them. The Lobotomy Kid is controlled, as is Clem and Jody. Even the apparent controllers like Banway and A.J. are controlled. We all need our Black Smoke. The Naked Lunch is not a work of fiction. It is a book that documents certain facts of life. Don't give me all that Dean Swift stuff, kid. That's for publishers and academics!

So, being aware of this popular misunderstanding concerning William's work, let us take a look at one of the Great writers living and working in this country at the moment - and I do use a capital "G" intentionally.

On the surface, Jeff writes about murder and filth. But under the blood and gore - Beneath the abortions and farce - Below the horror and the shit-in-the-face and boozy finger-fucks - Way down there, beyond the surface of whore-slop and tit-cunt - Under this pandemic of drunken flesh, there is a tenderness and a sadness that are far more terrifying than this slight surface. A sadness and longing at the great loss. The loss of something that can never be found again, perhaps by any of us. A child's picture-book. Or at least a vague memory of an even vaguer memory that wanted to remember a child's picture-book. A golden sunset. A golden England that is no more, if it ever was.

I come back sometimes - to the gate - People take their holidays in funny places - Yankee snapshots of a plague cross. I have a drink at the officers' club and I have a meal with the men, and when the light dims (light was dim as underease, my dears, the day I made it to the barrier) I stand near the wire - I watch my cigarette smoke twist across the sky that smoulders over those interior plains as though the heat had never cooled - as though the unforgivable horizon were every night a shame shroud woven for the dead fires - I look across the waste until it's dark, not tracing the meandering path
I must have made, weaving to the gate and the country's water-bottle, patching up my flesh and mind and groping for my voice, nor trying to remember who was where or what they did or just where lay betrayal in that expedition into a time and place for which time and place seem the wrong words, but hoping one day Henry might be resurrected and that Joan might heal the wounds of Vera Ring, or hope my senses lied about what was happening to Charles when I left, hope, perhaps, to see the little shrivelled immovable stand a giant on the horizon singing the song of his Phallic Ghost like a god and moving towards home through the fumes of twilight - and hoping this, my dears, to notice at his elbow some alight antelope of girl for grace is back there in the desert dancing through dust with the irrecoverably mad who never reach the gate, while all the symmetrical groves of decency and sense can never grow a leaf without her nor dare let the gardeners contemplate their defining measurements until she comes.

I wait until it's dark, then stay the night and the next day go away but always to come back and never losing hope. For hope and touch of grace, my dears, was all that brought me home and home's a lonely place without her.

The Case of Isabel and the Bleeding Foetus is the peak, the pinnacle, of his written work. It is so far above almost all other post-war English fiction - so removed, almost totally alien in both its contents and its execution, that it owes very little to what preceded it. Of course, he does have his roots, some of them even in this country: Surrealism, Dada, music-hall. The very large plus he brings to his work is both obvious and, at the same time, difficult to explain. The difference between poetry and prose is impossible to define, despite all the many attempts to do so, but we know it when we see or hear it. So, I should at least attempt to be lucid and try to write about his style, his personal eye.

The end section of Isabel encompasses all of the real aspects of his work. All the aspects apart from the horror and the farce. All of the true meanings of his work, and none of the surface, that many believe to be the heart. I use the word heart intentionally. Certain words and phrases, in this section, leap out at me every time I read it:

Hope
Hoping
Never losing hope
Touch of grace
Hoping one day Henry might be resurrected and that Joan might heal the wounds
Unforgivable horizon wore every night a shame shroud woven for the dead fires
For hope and touch of grace, my dears, was all that brought me home and home's a lonely place without her

The constant longing for hope and salvation. The twitching horizon that is always just out of reach. The entire scene is shot through a yellow filter. A dying-rays filter. Rupert Bear and Start-Rite shoes hover around every corner. Boy and Girl, hand in hand, walking into the final sunset.

His refusal to accept the sentimental has always manifested itself in a hard-edged way, but at the same time he has been creating a new sentimentality, one that wasn't soft, Rough and boozy at
times but, nevertheless, totally committed emotionally.

His subjects and syntax(s) cover, and recreate, the wide landscape he set-out to explore years ago. The tender to the brutal. The wistful to the farcical. The blood on the lace. The terrain of his birth-place rolls through the pages like a map of the psychological contours. The language rises and falls. Cuts and soothes. Makes you laugh, and makes you cry in dark corners. It draws blood as if it were a razor. Usually his own.

Few artists are complete innovators, owing little to anyone that came before them, and Nuttall's language can be compared to that of both Burroughs and Dylan Thomas. A strange combination, perhaps, but a correct one. No matter how good or important (liberating) Burroughs may be - and he is - one of the main strengths of his writing has always relied on physical techniques. And as far as Thomas, had he seen the 60s, and taken a very large hit of Speed to breakdown his so-called genius - then perhaps, he'd have come up with something not unlike the living Nuttall. Because, like all great natural forces, Jeff is living and working. And influencing.

Too truthful for the hippies. Too literate for the punks. Too alive for the academics. He opens the eyes of those with eyes to see. Those who are not afraid to see in new ways. He fulfils the role of the supreme artist! The only trouble is that blindness is the order of the day.

But the process does not end. Rejection can not destroy. Perhaps, it is only rejection that can keep the fire burning. Acceptance could be the worst thing to happen to his writing.

Let the closing lines from Memoirs say it all:

It's a good old knockabout marriage.
It's a Walpurgisnacht affair.
It's a bedroom barney,
A bawdy bit of blarney,
When you breathe sweet nothings while I pull your hair.
And when we've rendered our last incision,
When we've come to the end of life's lane
We'll hold hands beneath the moon
And we'll jump out of the tomb
And we'll start all over again.

He speaks through Peter and Sandra, and Peter and Sandra are all of us. So, let us now praise him while we can - and if not praise, then at least begin to understand. Not tolerate. Understand.

Quotations

Isabel (Turret, then City Lights)
Memoirs: Performance Art Vol.1 (Calder)
The narrative extracted from MUSCLE by Jeff Nuttall, published in Not Poetry 3 (Galloping Dog Press, 3 Otterburn Terrace, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 3AP, £1), can't be allowed to go by without comment. It raises too many too complex issues. And it does so contentiously.

It's an episode in the life of a fictional comedian called Terry Bunn, who was supposedly in the 60s the focal point of a cult that appealed to "a subsection of the art-school world". He knows that his act has dated, and that his cult following has drifted away but he continues to work the clubs. The piece begins with the comedian's reminiscences of the "sexual liberation of the sixties", focussing particularly on two women, Araminta, with whom he is currently having an affair, and an old flame, Shades, who in contrast to Araminta is portrayed as "ever political" and who has turned against him now.

The narrative moves into a portrayal of Terry Bunn's act in "Bingley Variety Club". A chunk of it follows: mostly jokes about the penis. We are made aware that Shades is present, together with some friends, identified by the narrator as "cadres in the liberation movements for women and homosexuals"; their unlikely presence in this club is explained in the following way:

Slummers as surely as my old art school following, they are nonetheless regular slummers. A militant fraternity of multisexuals called the Split Banana given to mounting theatrical performances around the land in celebration of their awful predicament. They make a point of boozing anywhere where the nuclear family is in a post-holocaust state - to wit, spade clubs, gay clubs, unless they scent fresh meat and then they assault the bastions of chauv fortresses like variety clubs.

Here is a bit of Terry Bunn's act:

"Course we all lie don't we lads? Heard about the goalie that could only kick with his left because of the lead piping hangin' down on the right....

"An' it don't make no difference yaknow. It's all a mistake. It sez that in the magazine the wife left behind.

I found it in the dressing-table drawer after she ran off with a neger...."

His set done, the comedian makes for the bar; where, in his earshot, his act is pulled to bits by Shades and her friends. His comment as narrator: "There are difficulties in the smoothness of the kill arising from unresolved differences between male and female queers." A grudging bit of admiration follows for the courage of male homosexuals who "choose to stab off-centre of respectable society; this complexity of attitude does not, however, appear to be extended to the women.

Shades then reminds Terry Bunn of a letter she has written to him in response to his accusation of her "promiscuity"; she has in turn accused him of using her for his own selfish needs, and of teaching her that love is an excuse for messing other people about. An altercation follows with one of Shades' friends, Leonie, a stereotyped
There are several interesting contradictions in this Terry Bunn character. First, the kind of comedian he's supposed to be. We're invited to believe he's a kind of Lenny Bruce figure, a hero against past repression. Yet the act, such as we are given, resembles nothing so much as Les Dawson or Bernami Manning when they're off the telly: i.e. the traditional "smutty" comedian ("the wife" ... "nigger"... etc). It's hard to believe the act ever had much of a subversive political content.

Second, he is given some remarkable problems to cope with in his head about the precise nature of sexual liberation. "Araminta was crucified on the sexual liberation of the sixties." Then "... it was the nymphets who demonstrated the innocent, guilt-free superiority of the younger generation, who wanted it as much as, and in the same way as, any man, could take more than any man could dish out, could sustain the massive arrogance of the young bloods on whom an avalanche of birth-pills had bestowed the sex-role previously the province of female pin-ups". Innocent? Guilt-free? Wanted it as much as, and in the same way as, any man? Well, then, why "... their crotch-flowers cried out aloud, their labial petals bruised, and ten million hurt fledglings went into hibernation waiting for their revenge in the seventies" or "... identified the phallus as pigsticker and seeks revenge, along with the team"? (My emphases.) So, was it liberation or not, and if it was, why revenge?

Third, and this is perhaps the most difficult one. I don't want to get embroiled in a big thing about the distance of the author from his narrator. But there are some parallels that are hard to miss. Jeff Nuttall is a writer who rose to prominence in the 60s; a figure of controversy and some considerable talent, a language-romper and émigré of the bourgeois of no mean repute, a writer who has always known about the sexual and political energies released by in and from writing and performance, a teacher in art schools and hero of the "subsection of the art-school world" alluded to in the story. But his kind of writing/performance has come to a crisis in the late 70s/80s. It is (choose your phrase) no longer in fashion / no longer relevant. It's not just that saying "fuck" in public is boring now. There are new takes on liberation now, which cast some doubt on the old models. But Nuttall finds it hard to accept. Strategy: he makes up an imaginary comedian, gives him an exaggerated (by how much?) version of the
dependency/revulsion syndrome explored in his own past work, pits him in a dialectic with a ludicrously caricatured set of political opponents (yes, of course we know all feminists are humourless dykes who hate men irrationally, dress up puritanism as political correctness and are ... well, just ... ugly). The writing is often brilliant. But the dialectic is more like loaded dice.

As a writer, Nuttall has lost none of his powers. But he's now got a problem. He's going to have to deal with that Split Banana business before he can go any further. "The act's out of date luv but it's a livin' until I can get me head round the new gear."

We shall see.

(Thanks to Julia Phillips for help with this article.)
Across that crowded room on that not-particularly-charmed evening Nicola looked like a barmaid with a golden heart and plenty of room to stash it.

Delicately sipping her balloon glass of careful pop she held a kind of court, benevolent and bejewelled, favouring all who came with a smile and a laugh exactly like that of Danny LaRue. She had lots of style did Nicola, the classic style of the Scraborough drag comedian which, till recently, she was, and it must be noted that the first ingredient of that particular style is boundless good-nature.

What is disturbing about Nicola, née Nick, is that she thinks she’s a woman. She certainly has a perfect right to declare herself happy in whatever state of cosmetic mutilation she may choose. Whatever name you give it, it suits her. Neither do I mind in the least using feminine gender pronouns in writing about her, even if, when she asked me for a light, I did extend a lighted cigarette instead of reaching for my matches, even if I did have to apologise several times during our conversation for automatically calling her "mate".

That old mistaken notion of the female reproductive system as a single hole, so graphically and simply celebrated in biro on so many lonely cubicle doors, is surely offensive in its crudity in inverse proportion to the incredible delicacy, complexity, and awesome human dignity of the reality. What is disturbing about Nicola is that she suffers from that same necessarily male naivety. She thinks that the ovaries, the fallopian tubes, the womb, the vaginal muscles, Bartholin’s glands, the clitoris are all quite adequately represented by a hole.

It was, then, a little shocking to see so many enthusiastic women accepting her claim to be female with equanimity. Honest middle-class intellectuals as most of them were at that particular party, one might have thought that their feminism would cry out against travesty. Ten years ago, when the main voice on the feminist front was that of Germaine Greer, it did seem that the blessed moment had arrived, that our public affairs might at last be ruled by a wisdom coming from a life led in harmony with the moon and the stars, that a caring love might replace competitive self-assertion in our politics, that our professions might be relieved of all those anxieties about stature and performance. It seemed then that the great estuary of energy and understanding in the female belly was respected by a rising power-group of women; that such a group might have an understanding of freedom as the skill to employ your faculties rather than the right to eschew them; that the faculties we have might be recognised as those of a mammal; that the mammal-state be enjoyed and respected as a cornerstone of our humanism.

No chance. What is evident everywhere is an impatience with, or an indifference to, the mammal state, a loathing of the menstrual cycle, of the reproductive basis of sex, of the foetus which is held to be expendable, of the nuclear family which is held to be authoritarian, of family love, maternal, filial, heterosexual, of love at all, which is held to be debilitating. Children are regarded as an imposition
"a few jottings on microfiche"

("Does anyone really use microfiche?" your editor asked recently, preliminary to making out-of-print volumes of RS available in this way. The following reply came from Bill Griffiths.)

Main use of microfiche in commerce (following CI9th exploration of miniature books and microphotos): 1930s banks re accounts records and cheque records; World War II, businesses re archive storage and duplication for safety; post-war esp. re products catalogues eg annual catalogues of car spare-parts to dealers, globally. Also libraries and bibliographies, catalogues, thesis-abstracts. Advantages: cheapness, ease and speed of production, durability in handling, speed of access, ease of replacement, up-dating, economy of space, economy of postage.*

Post-war fiche publishing in specialised (money-making) fields: publication of MSS of all sorts (size and condition of MSS no problem, also of course ideal for coloured medieval MSS), for specialised library fields (biblios, concordances, etc.), and for republishing out-of-print works and replacing whole runs of periodicals. The advantages to the libraries are huge saving of space, width of material available, ease of access and handling. Spin-off advantages to us: lots of "fiche-readers" (viewers) available in libraries.

Little Press fiche production (Chris Jones, P C Fencott, Bill Griffiths, Peter Finch and maybe others). Aim: to get into "print" or at least into circulateable form, works so large or so expensive in litho that they could never otherwise be duplicated. 98X A4 costs ca. £7.50 a master, ca. 30p each fiche copy: you can get copies as you need them, so no problems of second editions, etc. Superb for air-mailing overseas to interested contacts. On the political side, fiche are unsensurable, mobile, difficult to control and virtually impossible to eradicate.

Maybe the advantages are less obvious to the user. Indexes on fiche are head-aching and repulsive, and bias most humans against fiches. Equally the idea of a disembodied book is hard to accept. Unlike the book that goes with you, fiche are tied to viewing equipment (as gramophone records are tied to record-players). So extra expense. But if viewers get cheaper or more common in public buildings, and the range of poetry etc. on fiche grows wide enough, then the average human will catch on to the fact that instead of buying books at £10 a time, he can get a fiche-viewer and a dozen fiche for about the cost of a year's membership of a book-club.

Meantime, it is not so good a bet. Only I can't afford to get printing done now. In the last year I've kept nearly a thousand A4 pages available for a total of less than £100 and with luck I'll recoup that in sales of copies ... eventually.

* (plus) Spin-off advantages to us: lots of commercial firms "manufacturing" fiches, making fiche-production cheap for everyone.

29
The first quality that strikes you is the celerity, the quickness of movement within these poems. Many of them replace the conventional margin with a central axis, a form borrowed from McClure (see example below). The kinetics of this contrasts the movements of the reading eye on a horizontal plane with a vertical linearity. Thus we begin one ode with the line, "Crepuscular phantoms energised manhood, soap" only to be arrowed down the page to the five single-word lines at its end.

The second quality, allied to this, is the condensation of the text. The lesson may have been learned from Bunting (who had, years before, supplied Pound with his maxim "dichten = condensare"), though MacSweeney's Odes owe little to Bunting's, and employ a more rigorous condensation. This is not the economy that comes of careful revision, but is an economy built into the compositional process.

It is perhaps too simple a remark to attribute this wholly to MacSweeney's journalistic training, yet we are aware of weird headline-like qualities in the statements: "Oak-pin/shells/survive/China Sea" (p.40). Yet it is difficult to imagine a story to match the headline. Something more than pared economy gives these poems their strength, makes this the most powerful collection to have appeared for some time.

The condensation is so acute as to actually block, and frustrate, our reading at the informational level. Given a naturalistic reading we could say simply that MacSweeney is retreating into private meaning, has created a poetry so dense with personal reference, that he excludes us from the province of meaning altogether. Although this is true, in so far as we recognise repeated motifs with a special significance for a barely discernable "I" of the text, MacSweeney's "obscurity" is wilful. He has said, "I've worked towards this condensing of language, this cutting across meaning, not having words next to each other which are supposed to be there, but in a way...I think they are shocking." (p.37, Poetry Information 18) They are attempts to make a potential reader more acutely responsive to his language.

This is not a poetry where you can safely "get" the state of mind of the author. The metaphors are only half-elaborated, at one remove from their usual level of connection.

**WING ODE**

The feet are white boats. Hands are unlocked keys of colour & shape. Love me. Feel me beside you and within.

(Boats in April rain pools)

I break my chrysalis & Rise!

Walk as a golden man.
This, one of the shorter, easily noted, leaves little doubt as to its central image of a springtime emergence from a chrysalis, but the connections between "feet" and "white boats", and between "hands" and "colour & shape" are not directly paraphrasable, although we recognise the patterning of the artifice, the symmetry of the thought. "Unlocked keys" suggests many possibilities of interpretation from paradox to pun. By squeezing metaphorical language into this indeterminacy MacSweeney has ensured that the poems stay poetic. The hermeneutic exercise (my own notes included) is useless to grasp the poetic complexity, beyond the definition of several difficult usages of vocabulary. The exemplary text, the most dense, is the 1971 ode to Jim Morrison of the Doors, "Just 22 and I Don't Mind Dying". MacSweeney himself has said of this, "The style is compressed, paratactic. You know what I mean - commas acting as magnets drawing the next thing in, without having to go into 'ands', 'thes', all sorts of descriptive shit. What you're getting in fact was the facets of a diamond, like the facets of a stone, like complete shape, like Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture." (Poetry Information 18, p.36.) The Vorticist legacy is an important one, with MacSweeney replacing the linearity of syntactic structure with a linearity of movement. An essential element of expression has been squeezed out of what is still a very expressive poetry. "Just 22..." reminds me of certain symbolist texts.

Blow and she tinkles. Burn the desk, my new vampire, blousy and blue. Giraffes invade the hands à chaque étage. Qui? Smoke your kiss.

Although this poetry requires a special reading, and is not dissimilar from a great deal of so-called Cambridge poetry with which MacSweeney has some links, it does not attempt to produce anaemic verse that remains wittily and indecisively "surface". It admittedly does have wit ("If finess is crinkily you're a / Dairy Box wrapper, whose heart's crisp.").), yet its refusal to be pegged down resists any claim for its autonomy; it gestures towards the referential. It lacks the sophisticated smoothness of tone associated with much Cambridge poetry. It is also, it is worth adding, as far as possible from the linear strategies of MacSweeney's own Black Torch poem.

Reading is cumulative across the book. Concepts and symbols rime (in Duncan's sense) and at their repetition we cling to them as familiar goblets of meaning, though they are frequently slippery fish that, as we handle and unhook, we lose back into the water. The "Wing Ode" above is contextualised by reference to the euphoric "Rise / up and live!" of the preceding "Flame Ode". Symbols of masculine sexuality, Snake and Wolf, and of female sexuality, Torpedo and Vixen, abound throughout, as do references to MacSweeney's tragic heroes, Morrison and Thomas Chatterton. There is some verbal play. Thus the "Make your naked phone call moan" of "Flame Ode" echoes the "Make your naked pencil mins" of the following "Torpedo".

The heightened language of the Odes, pertaining, as the title implies, to music and its morphologies of feeling, goes beyond the demands of a poetry of pure surface. Celerity is a guerilla tactic against a language that belongs increasingly to the controllers of
our society. In "Far Cliff Babylon" MacSweeney can adopt a persona that declares with frightening simplicity, "I am 19./ I am a Tozy. My/ vision of the future represents/ no people," lines that are parodied throughout the piece. These poems cannot be pinned down, anaesthetised with a fixed meaning, though the feeling - so often of an anger that verges on the sadistic - is distinct. We are forced to join in the mechanics of language. We can't rest in too many of the familiar notions of space/time, social detail, idea, or traditional image, most of the comforting impediments of "poetry" as it is understood and transmitted accordingly in the package-deal mentality of our educationalists. In "Far Cliff Babylon" there comes the stark realisation that "I have died every day since I gave up poetry. / Dangerous condescending humans lapped it up." Despite this, the real triumph of these poems is that they "move" the reader - in both senses of the word. Yet the "movement" of the poems, the celerity of the text, resists that static aestheticisation of feeling, that comforting, introspective notion of having been "moved". If they move us, these poems move us onwards.

- Robert G Sheppard
17th-19th April 1980

William Corbett: Schedule Rhapsody, Pig Press, 7 Crossview Terrace, Nevilles Cross, Durham. £1.90.

As with other parts of the book, the title's been improvised: two individual poem titles - "Schedule" from the beginning and "Rhapsody" from the end - have been simply wedged together. The book literally infolds what the two words imply. Take them separately:
schedule - "...any tabular or classified statement, esp. one arranged under headings... a return of particulars... Also occa.

a blank form to be filled up by the insertion of particulars." (OED)

rhapsody - "a literary work consisting of miscellaneous or disconnected pieces, etc; a written composition having no fixed form or plan... a medley or confused mass (of things)." (OED)

"...a highly emotional literary work... a musical composition of irregular form having an improvisatory character." (Webster)

Corbett's handling of language fuses these together; he offers both

the exact detail of "a schedule", and the take-it-as-it-comes relish of "a rhapsody". Compare the particularity of

She liked waffles
chicken gravy or a little
sauerkraut & pork (Henrietta Hench)

with the relaxed, unassigning contemplation of things in the continuity of these lines

The familiar is blessedly
hard to remember to
separate there is much
forgotten overnight or
disguised in new
combinations we begin
fresh everyday wed-
ding what we recognise. (Rhapsody)
He improvises from what he sees, from the colours and textures that come immediately to hand, making the transitions between different densities and tones of voice with wit and warmth. The things he writes about are always solidly there (here); you get the idea that he'd bite on the words if he could just to taste the juices. And his ear is acute, too, blending varied patterns of sound with ease.

these purply blue and
white arching flowers
on tall stalks
like torches.  (Marie's irises)

In the centre of the book (i.e. halfway between "Schedule" and "Rhapsody") is a poem "Pussy Cat Dues", celebrating the bassist Charlie Mingus. While jazz has clearly influenced the writing, especially as an incentive to rhythmic invention, Mingus' art seems particularly strongly felt. Mingus was supposed to dislike scoring his music, preferring to aim for an emotional directness by preparing no more than sketches of a musical shape and trusting the impact of the performance to get across what was precise in his mind. "His reasoning was that to produce jazz feeling, a player cannot read notes as written, but must inflect them according to his own musical instincts." (The Making of Jazz; A Comprehensive History - James Lincoln Collier, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1978.)

Corbett's poems aren't "sketches" in this sense since the scoring is quite specific; but they do offer the reader a similar freedom of access. They're meticulously listed details (schedules) that have been rhapsodized upon (improvised into a musical medley), providing the reader with a figured bass to their own imaginations. If the risks of this technique can lead to the occasional sense of indirection rather than of a freely discovered line (the sense I get of not being "with" what Corbett's "at"), it remains the same technique that opens poems which are made, not so much of ideas about things, as of colours and surfaces generated out of a tireless receptivity to the variousness around about. On this, Corbett cues the reader in

Mingus bent to his music
behind his bass drew the first
groaning notes for one kid
trumpeter to follow "Stormy Weather".

- Tony Baker

WORKS BY TWO BRITISH PAINTER/WRITERS


A Humument, now published economically, but described by Phillips as a work-in-progress, is certainly a beautiful book to look at and induces the reading involvement of a cross-word puzzle. Phillips has said of art-works "it comes down in the end to something simple: liking a work is the same as understanding it."

While Instone's work is austerely cohesive, Phillips' (A Humument
included) is discursive and typified by a variety of load-bearing.

In reading the pages of A Humument, sequentially or individually, the text (in its bubbles, boxes and rivers of catalysts and footnotes) acts as a foil to the image, or vice versa. (As yet I have not come across a page I consider to weld the two language-systems completely.) The origin and working emphasis of A Humument is related to books of divination, both religious like the "I-Ching" and secular (as "Finnegans Wake" could be construed). Phillips says of "A Human Document" by W H Mallock (whose actual pages are the source-book for A Humument) "I have never come across its equal in later and more conscious searchings." It is this element of benign fortuity, seen in the cultural context between the date of the edition of Phillips' source-book (1892) and the completion of A Humument (with all its off-shoots in related media) (circa 1992?), that unites the various themes and devices of the book. Conventional upper-class Victorian morality and prejudice are observed from a late twentieth century vantage point with reference to intervening events (e.g. the reference to the dedication printed in the Everyman's Library of Popular Classics (founded 1906): volume And/ side I shall lie,/ bones my bones (page:1) or to Cezanne's series of paintings of Monte Sainte Victoire (circa 1870-1906) (page:271)) but the whole subject of chance and providence seems most central (seen in the aforesaid cultural context).

To test (like Carl Gustav Jung of the "I-Ching") the authority of A Humument I sat down one evening and chose texts from the book, by intuitively chosen random methods, to answer various questions as to its origin, nature and contents. Here (for want of space) is a selection:

1. Would any book do (for treatments/divination)?
The economies that would be art he now proceeded to calculate; a glance at unexpected art in Parliament. Bring it to the Prime Minister himself, for his opinion. The Chancellor of raging extreme art (:) the extremely troublesome Lord Sol author of considerable questions, one more for the signature Sol. (page:107)

2. What are the "right circumstances" for this procedure? "Never," wrote Gronville afterwards, "never("") You Like It. (page:163)

3. Is A Humument embedded in the artistic issues of the 1960's? the moment/ changed, a / moment ago / Ah, / sidling/ coming/ to me / prosperity / clairvoyance. (page:276)

4. Are most readers going to have to adopt a unique reading approach? (my last question of the session.) rosp / rosp / the first / parasol / sound / quiet quiet

Mysticism does not abnegate personal responsibility.

Jeff Instone's statements on the subject of his work (an extract from one of these once appeared in Private Eye's "Pecuda Corner") are, on initial consideration, morally nihilistic. The following is an extract from the notes he wrote for the exhibition he had of work in various media, of which Script is part, at Matt's Gallery in July 1980: "In this way" (he, the artist) "can continue to evade the real concern of the artist for truth, beauty and the joy of humanity."

I find Script very interesting and its nature would make it hard to emerge in any form (though a tape version also exists) since it
dispenses with all the literary and aesthetic encumbrances that clutter the statements of those who (for want of more accurate terminology) call themselves artists.

Jeff Instone has a penchant for sarcasm and an underlying self-diminution. Script is a long series of individual words (related by varying semantic devices), broken by massive, deadening (though often funny) repetitions of some of the same in the form of parallel, ordered columns (sometimes calling to mind military squads or gymnastic teams) blankly and uniformly rendered. The work demonstrates the crucifixion of word-concepts, multiplied in conversation and media in a way that cripples, and, at the same time offers bogus medication to thought. This booklet is a miniature presentation of the bizarre fossilisation of language used in everyday discourse and in the more exotic, specifically cultural, realm. Instone plays a game with his public utterances, both of-the-nature-of and in-the-nature-of his work that give them a slyly cultivated air of brotherhood with the other manifestations of this process. It takes time to show through.

"Artistic ideals", "truth", "beauty", and "the joy of humanity" are all, in terms of language usage, over-cooked, ossific, yet still bearing the weight of the art-and-artist selling devices of biographers and writers of introductions and monographs.

The sound of "the joy of humanity" will fall flat even on an obdurately optimistic ear but the poison has spread to the others. In Script we find "fact", "intimate", "NEW-YORK", "inadequate", and "sigh" given the same treatment. The sign function of these words has either clogged in under-intention or collapsed with matted complexity. The use of the phrase "truth and beauty" in front of commodity consumers and/or inadequately paid labourers (in any country) will have diverse, and perhaps unpredictable effect if it comes from the mouth of "an artist". In a way, Tom Phillips plays traditional rules. Jeff Instone operates, in the twilight of the nineteen seventies, to show the scene after the rules have broken down.

- Andrew Mayfield

SOLAR PORK CRUNCH

Notes written (a review?) in the national gallery after witnessing a public interview ov J G Ballard at the ICA.

I) The Atrocity Exhibition

the real horror the real horror the real horror the artificial introducing the mass artificial horror confusing individual needs ideal consciousness with the brotherhood of juxtaposition the individual whole civilization in fact the realis needs an civilization individual so extreme anything to say diverse selfish , anything to say no insight , agree thats _______ My Lai massacre , Godards Weekend ,_______

was done by ordinary folk , who at that time went the stigma of overkill the problem with alot of all this is the problem is the trouble with the bourgeoisie or the realistic novel is that it isnt the trouble with him and his ownwork that it frightens him , caution the sence which he adopts to it , the My Lai massacre takes place on the Chiswick Flyover , the problem is not that obvious , rut tut tut but its suppression , an intriguing lack of cope to ability language ideas stilted off the page conversation , repetative non comprehension , fear of his own
work, isolationist toes are comfy here we sit with the stigma, (Paul Veronese, Adoration of the Magi, Florentine 14th Century.)

far cooler climate, ornate, Victorian architecture, anybody talks about fiction like that got to be suspect toasters 'electric razors, anything could for the auto deity, why fiction, why write, few if any loop holes, loop through if any Lloyds computers against a quick ageing, made a quick found out, fortune and had followed that the computers got old, the computers had got old very quickly which all goes to show a quick insured against, the My Lai massacre is/was probably less of a problem than imaginative fiction, start looking for loop holes excuses, self dulling agent, still, does not account for abilities not to express myself in/, these terms if it is not structure, which is important? doubtfully exercise anything to say a highly important ambiguity, having anything to say is/as a highly important ambiguity (De La Roche, The Execution of Lady Jane Gray, DeChavantes, The Beheading of St John The Baptist, French 19th Century.)

humid hot carpeted atmosphere, high arched coved ceilings, less flamboyant iron, Victorian, this is a guy kneeling on a watery horizon washing underwear in the sea recording the first distortions, atmospheric tricks, hedging, B S Johnson a somewhat ignoble failure, couldn't get himself out everything he wrote J G Ballard a somewhat ignoble success, couldn't cant find, seem to, accepting his position in the possibilities and intimate acts of what of his work, there can be nothing senseless, everything torn from the microchip soul, nothing copious from my own rushing from the open vein, how much is he actually lying, how much embarrassed by decent understand and is embarrassed by, sate in it out there, sate in the assumption it really is all out there, such as this cultural activity really has very little to do with out there, credible facade in wete its deceit, aghast follows from that is inability to escape the sixties the world not seen as an all expensescultural vietnamese war vacuum but total control by such control that absolute non prediction random eventing is not only possible but probable and actual, mistaken assumption of supplementary options, media conscious overkill addicted seventies audience the problem with sixties rambling naivity intending to by, staunch need for all any non of the facts motivated by needs to consume others motivation. (Ulysses Bolting Polymous, Turner, The Haywein, Constable, British 19th Century.)

the duty now to record the surprising cafeteria for instance not therios much point saying thinking now about the interview easier surprising to see him out some trotting out predictable old stuff about sci fi its so absculiting only vital face in literature during the post fifties feel the having the now how being the only vital forace pretention waves the accent anti freudian illusions to godards weekend and the crash so similar lineates too close to perhaps more than that a wooden or iron post for securing ropes to minor abstraction in an alleyway

II) Arnt You Father Young To Be Writting Your Memoirs

then to have to resist the temptations for putting down in a literal record sense don all this B S Johnson reconnaissance type crap type crop to see that springs most readily to mind appending a great dull thudding repetitive thud on several sections of the bus in sequence hit a tree or lamp post at about twenty miles an hour, it all going on very a few inches away out there very quickly a lot of
noise gasps, grunts, i really dont know what we that is the bus and us contents really did hit and why we never hit it before, i could say a london plain because of the dull basey nature noises a synthesized jolt coupled with plenty of attack and little to no decay which brings to mind a story from the depot earlier of a tank being already too much filled to take the full amount the tanker had ready for it the overflow is taken thirteen feet above ground and kerosine or deisel spills out over a path and cut on a garden under the safety regulations, this had to be reported and became an incident report not an accident report and was just in case the difference is to account before accidents are reported by others

the incident i started out to describe was on the return half of a charity walk to and from box hill that a girl (not one of our large party) was attacked and we having hitched a lift from some strange people in a car similar to the one being sock were all questioned it was a westminster with elongated wing mirrors for towing a caravan, some one inside was wearing a dummy monkey mask or such like making jokes that we didn't laugh at, word at the time but

.........., ........may have been at the end out and being accused of cheating though we thought we had lost our way and

- Clive Fencott
1980

Lyn Hejinian: My Life, Burning Deck Press, 71 Elmgrove, Providence, RI 02906, USA. $3.50. (in England, c/o Paul Green - see listing)

In My Life Lyn Hejinian has written a quietly moving testament to the necessities and recurrences that constitute a life. "Words heard with the eyes." The 39 one to three page sections of this long prose format poem repeat and recontextualize a number of phrases, often lyrically aphoristic, that also serve as subheads to each section. "A yearning in motion, original impulse." The book is composed of sentences in serial order; each of these sentences contains its own inner contentment, standing by itself complete as distillate - "what the single word could hold as content as put into sentences", she puts it elsewhere, a lesson learned in part from Robert Grenier's precisely isolated total articulations of sound in the 200 sentence-units of his sentences. "Pudding in a pattern." Yet the overall quality of this work is that of the weave these sentences make together. "It is hard to turn away from moving water." Hejinian's gentle modulation of the jump-cutting between sentences, the gradualness with which she manages these transitions, provide a sense of spaciousness, of gentleness, without effacing the constructed quality of this movement, modulated, as it is, by the exemplary quality of each sentence, so as to make a pause implicit between each. "A pause, a rose, something on paper," The work is both a demonstration of, and instruction in, the savouring of the things of a life. And yet this is a life with few dark or jarring moments; perhaps it's that "we have come a long way from what we actually felt"; this method seems to want to overthrow alienation by its sentient sentiment - a bouquet of flowers; its genuineness is as palpable as its reassurance. "A canoe among ducks." She gets to this: "humming a nameless, a tuneless, tune" - which is, perhaps, only the aspiration of poetry - not to reassure - while surviving, retrospectively, as song; or such seem to be the terms of this work. A life, the things of a life, put in order. "I" dwell in all these
things. "Fossor of the place we have found" - absolutely! - maker, founder, of the place we have domesticated, acultured, found with our lives.

- Charles Bernstein

The Secret Heart of the Mammal, contd. from p.28

rather than a delight. Sensible planning can overcome the difficulty. The phallus is, of course, a club. Off with it.

What lies beyond the cervix is a prehistoric handicap. Nicola, valiant soul, had not only voluntarily surrendered her weapon. She was embarking on womanhood bereft of the whole nuisance aree. Her female fans were right in line. Children of their times.

And their times, of course, are notoriously unwell. The diagnosis of the affliction may frequently be obstructed by a preoccupation with detail. The ills are surely big simple ones like the fact that we have no love of our natural selves, or the fact that we devote most of our wealth and ingenuity to mutual slaughter. These two facts alone are quite sufficient to indicate that our axioms are at fault, not the detail of our praxis.

A man who hasn't lost sight of these monolithic ailments is RD laing whose simplicity as a man, and a Scotsman at that, survives all these years of being adulated, sanctified, and finally reviled by the trendy liberals. At Ronnie Scott's the night after Nicola's party, he remained a writer and thinker completely contemptuous of the avarice and the cowarice that constitute the bulk of contemporary life. Taking time off from the book he's been working on (a typically ambitious work in which he mounts a detailed critique of empirical thinking) to read poetry and play piano with Mike Horovitz's New Departures team, he raved merrily with the rest of us.

In fact so exuberant was his participation that Lol Coxhill turned to me in the middle of one of his solos (extemporisation by Kunz-trained octopus) and said "This geezer's further out than me and he's playing the tune."

Only Horovitz, who deserted the bandstand by way of the table tops every time one of Scott's carefully selected waitresses passed by, could have mounted an occasion in which Laing presented his focal number. Maybe Noel Coward's marvellous song "I Follow My Secret Heart" sung by Rita Laing to her husband's accompaniment illustrates best Laing's simplicity. It may even sum up the line of therapy he has always advocated. If this is the case Nicola, for all her naivety about women, has certainly put it to the test.
Books/pamphlets

Charles BERNSTEIN: Controlling Interests (Roof Books, Segue Foundation, 300 Bowery, New York, NY 10012, USA) £2. 79pp paperback.

Paul BROWN: Ptyx (The Plastic Principle) and Novel (Pre-Texts Urdirans, available from the author at 57 Whitehorse Rd, London E1)

BURNING DECK BOOKS:
William DORESKI: Half of the Map (£2.50)
Russell EDSON: With Sincerest Regrets (£2.50)
John ENGLISH: Alcatraz (£2.50)
Harrison FISHER: The Text's Boyfriend (£2.50)
Barbara GUEST: Biography (£2.50)
Lyn HAINHAN: My Life (79pp, £3.50) prose.
Harry MATTENS: Country Cooking & other stories (88pp, £3.50) prose.
Heather S J STELPGA: Water Runs to what is wet (55pp, £3.50) poems.
Rosmarie WALDROP: When They Have Senses (82pp, £3.50) poems.

Items costing £2.50 are letterpress poetry pamphlets, others are paperback books. Available from Burning Deck, 71 Elm Grove, Providence, R.I. 02906, USA, or in England from Paul Green, 93b London Rd, Peterborough, Cambs. (write for sterling prices).

Cris CHEEK: A Present (Bluff Books, 24 Stonehall Rd, London N21 1LP) thick A4 perfect bound edition of 129. Also by same author, same address, 1234! (Shabby Editions).


Ralph HAWKINS: The Word From the One (Galloping Dog Press, 3 Otterburn Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 3AP) £1.50. 29pp A4 paperback.

Tony JACKSON: Hot Novels ("The Cafe"/"Les Romans chauds") (Fig Press, 7 Cross View Terrace, Neville's Cross, Durham DH1 4JY) 108pp paperback, £3.50. Slut (Galloping Dog address) small format prose.


Magazines


DREAMWORKS Vol 1: No 1, Spring 1980, "An Interdisciplinary Quarterly" (Human Sciences Press, 3 Henrietta St, London WC2 SW1) £10/4 issues. This issue: Dream & Film. Issue no 2: Dream & Poetry. Contributors include Pullin/Hazursky/Makavejiw/Arkagh/Sharits/Ems!nfiller/etc.

FIGS 5 (Tony Baker, 2 Kepler Gatehouse, Durham DH1 1LB) 60p. George Evans/ Caddol/Edwards/Seed/Green/Paterson/Shoppard.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E 13, Dec., 1980 (Vol 3 No 3) (Charles Bernstein & Bruce Andrews, 464 Amsterdam Ave, New York, NY 10024, USA). Sub to forthcoming (final) vol 4 - #4 for individuals. Theory/reviews by Silliman/McCaffery/Fawcett/Haas/Reese/Bernstein/Diane Ward/Lydia Davis/Paul (A) Green/Wendt/Mayer/Seidman (on Allen Fisher)/Kuenstler/Severini/MacLow etc.


NEW DEPARTURES 12 (Mike Horovitz, 12 Piedmont, Bisley, Stroud, Glos. GL6 7SU) £1 incl. postage. Special anthology on the occasion of the first Poetry Olympics at Westminster Abbey, incl. work by those who read: J Coop Clarke/Corsa/Linton K Johnson/Dennis Lee/Eldard Limonov/Sperle/Anne Stevenson/Derek Walcott/plus others; preface, photos, etc.

ROCK DRILL 2 (Penelope Bailey & Robert G Sheppard, Flat 2, 2 Kerrison Rd, Norwich, Norfolk NR1 1JA) £1.20/3 issues (£2.40 abroad) cheques payable to Supranormal Cassettes. Elaine Randell feature, incl. essay by Lee Harwood, plus Gregory Woods/George/R Fisher/Sykes/A Fisher/Cadell.


Cassettes

LOBBY NEWSLETTER 16: Michael Hammersley, "essential style", "ae wake" & interview with yz (Lobby Press, Hobson Gallery, 44a Roeben St, Cambridge). Forms part of Lobby Newsletter vol 3/1. £1.50.

THE 4 DAY OPPORTUNITY: Hammersley/Chinca/Radin/Tabor (yz); also "Some Humus" with Hammersley/Tabor/Bekarian. Recod of performance from arts festival, Reading University, 1979. Address as above. £2.00.

STOP PRESS 3.11.81 late additions

PIG PRESS publications (see Tony Jackson entry for address):

William CORBETT: Schedule Rhapsody (£1.90) reviewed in this issue

Harry GUEST: Elegies (80p)

Pete LAVER: Water, Glass, The Toad of Guilt (80p)

Robert G SHEPPARD: The Frightened Summer (80p)

TANGENT 7 (Vivienne Finch, 58 Blakes Lane, New Malden, Surrey KT3 6NX) £1.00.


LOBBY NEWSLETTER 16, Feb.'81 - just received, accompanying cassette above.

£6.50/5 issues with cassette. 70pp A5 format: Bellini/Drnan/Hammersley/Martini/Ready poems; China/Pencott articles; Hammersley feature.

PALPI (Poetry & Little Press Information) 3 (ALP, 262 Randolph Ave, London W9) - rec'd late. Articles by Hemensley/Musgrove/Green/Sims + letters & listings.
Sorrentino's five novels now shape into a recognisable work, a site activated since 1966 in order to demonstrate the politics and erotics of waste. A text has been composed to hold that waste which constitutes an indictment of American life, a text which resists being eroded along with its subject by inventing and parodying fictional forms. This is, in fact, the proper obsession of a number of major American poets and fiction writers since 1960; necessary if chaos is to be at least presented in tangible forms as a dramatic criticism to fight off confusion. The exposure of wasted sexual and artistic energies in Mulligan Stew (1979) is a social criticism not founded in ideology but nearer that non-aligned satirical concern to be found in Swift and in William Burroughs, shaped at the edges of moral breakdown. The indictment of New York's bohemian necessities in the Fifties, in Imaginative Qualities of Actual Things (1971), is transferred from the local scene to America's dislocated cultural standards in general. Even the Catholic working class South Brooklyn inheritance of Steelwork (1970) becomes part of the weaponry of unthinking racist violence in America.

But throughout Sorrentino's fiction you sense the presence of a shocked man, trained earlier in life, in Catholic boyhood, to ask what must I do to be saved? - the secularized answer has been to create a moral criticism which is itself not eroded by despair or by an absence of exuberant pleasure. In The Sky Changes (1966), the husband, still remembering the mums at school, "feels he has entered hell.... What would save him, what acts must be performed to prove to the guardians of hell that he was a good man?" If the fiction edges towards a somewhat reactionary conservative vision at times, this too is part of its technique of outrage than some simple reactionary ideology. Sorrentino's stance in any case has largely to be detected within his fictions; it is the fictional procedures which must lead you to his morality. The violations of human life in Steelwork are so continuous between peace and war that a community has been generated to erode in an atmosphere of violent waste and beedlement - and it is out of this degeneracy that pathos moves, the process of a cool compassion for the neighbourhood of his youth. His Brooklyn is Hubert Selby's, and both Steelwork and Last Exit to Brooklyn (1964) invent powerful fictional procedures to show life reduced to the uninventive, the chaos of repeated violation. Put Steelwork with Aberration of Starlight (1980) and you have a measure of Sorrentino's decayed faith in America. To use Sherwood Anderson's unfortunately still useful term, grotesques rule and the result is violated life - the grotesque being human life warped under irresistible social pressures.

Sorrentino articulates the American cry in the twilight of this century: What went wrong with America? - just as James Baldwin's work articulates the Black scene of outraged energies, and Ginsberg's Howl, part 2, excoriates the sacrificial society dedicated to Holoc, and Roth's When She Was Good (1967) traces the erosions of smalltown family life. Unlike some professional fictioneer experimentalists, Sorrentino does not attempt an art-work designed to compensate for a damned society. His forms are a technical grip on the truth of "these States". The shrieking rats in the rotten target and blockade ships in Steelwork
are a local myth of ruined life and not some emptily clever "gothic" metaphor. And within the closely composed delineation of a South Brooklyn community between 1935 and 1951, Sorrentino's anger is bared personally at key points, shedding impersonality. Two Irish kids on mid-Depression 1936 are presented as part of "a particular pattern of loneliness" which shoves them into their inevitable future:

Camaraderie of the depression! They didn't know they were poor! Stick it up your ass, gentle lector!... Inexorably toward the trucks, old Joe, the trucks and the Army and the trucks again, who knows, just another man: flat red hair. The other, silent Jerry, toward the priesthood? A jesuit, if anything. Do you give a fuck? Let them stand there, frozen in snapshot: "City Fun" - soaking cheap cardboard shoes, their bellies full of stale bread and canned milk. Making of Americans! Got it?

Sorrentino is always sharp with the middle-class educated American reader of his texts - the trained reader he needs to be willing to appreciate his non-naturalist, non-linear forms may not be a reader who socially, morally, cares a damn about his poor. (It was Zukofsky's indictment in "Mantis" and a good deal of A, and Williams in parts of Paterson and a number of short poems) So he recalls Baudelaire's hypocríte lector and the huge formalities of Stein's work. Within his own skillful formats in Steelwork reside the bewildered angers, the rotten living conditions, Army service disillusionments and maimings, the downright ignorance of political and economic actuality, the racism and bullying, and the crudely impotent sexist fantasies of an American majority who will never be aware of this book. Sorrentino grasps that fact, and it is part of the respect you have for him.

But his sympathy for these Brooklyn boys, out of firsthand knowledge, as in all his novels' characters, however grotesque, never excuses betrayal, violation and sacrifice between men and women, apparently without end. This is the nearest he would approach to a formulated ethics. The law has been reduced, as it is in Baldwin's indictment, to the cops - the agents of capitalist sacrifice - breaking Monte's arm. In 1951, Monte has a plate in his head and fears "they'll send me to that Long Island funny farm with the loonies, the commies - the Jews are out there who wanna steal the atom bomb. I'm fuckin American, Mac!" After the war he is still bewildered: "The gave us some fuckin, Mac. I doan know exactly how, but they gave us some royal fuckin." In 1946, he has been beaten on his plated head by a cop's nightstick. In terrible pain, he goes wild, in tears, among Papa Joe's bar clientele. In 1951 he smashes the bar window with his arm cast, after release from jail, kicks a cop in the balls, and smashes another, who nearly kills him. In 1951 again:

His open Irish face had become coarsened and brutalized, and he frequently, now, forgot his name, his real name.

He accuses spuds and cops, gets drunk, yells:

A little while later, the cops broke his arm outside Papa Joe's, one kneeling in the small of his back, holding his face down, pressed into the sidewalk, while the other casually whaled at his arms and legs with his nightstick.

The historical involvement in World War 2, which maimed or killed so many Brooklyn boys, is no more to them than the propaganda of "The March of Time", which in 1941:
showed everybody what a prick Hitler was. Mussolini was not too much of a prick. The Finns beat the shit out of the Russians. God won in Spain over those Red bastards who fucked nuns and pissed on the crucifix.

It is this same lethal ignorance which deteriorates the New Jersey family in Aberration of Starlight, again in the Depression period, caught in the hall of clichéd language, the racism of dago, ginzo and greaseball and the pop history of "we're getting ready to get into another goddam war in Europe. God knows why! That's your damn Jew Roosevelt" (Tom Thebus), and: "Nothing's the matter with Hitler as far as she can tell, he's been a godsend for Germany...The damned Jews have run the country for years." (Helga Schmidt). America's mass provincialism is part of what sickens the husband in The Sky Changes, that dangerous isolationism and imperialism which begins locally in the abuse of Indians and Negroes, in the fake hero-worship of Jesse James (his hide-out cave a tourist attraction in Arkansas), and in "the dusty lushness (which) smelled of blood" in Mississippi - and even in the arrogant regionalism of the typical citizen of Jackson, Miss., proud of its pathetically inadequate liquor stores and atrocious cooking.

Sorrentino's Vort No.6 (Fall, 1964) interview emphasizes fictional process. The characters in The Sky Changes occupy "a time vacuum", without past histories or names; the fault is therefore - and Robbe-Grillet makes a similar objection in For the New Novel - "a kind of fake omniscient look at the lives of people struggling to maintain their humanity". Steelwork results from a realization that "one did not have to invent reality by probing beneath the surface for something that is not there". The neighbourhood is to be allowed largely to present itself. But the detailed social data in Steelwork (and later in Aberration of Starlight) may not deteriorate into "the boredom of fiction as a register of factual events". "The way the event occurs in the prose itself" is the primary formant of phenomenological process, and he cites Rashomon along with his own "fictive, stylistic" points-of-view procedures - multiple versions of basic events which constitute Mulligan Stew and Aberration of Starlight alike. The novel can expose ignorance and self-centredness, as major threats to creativity and change, in whatever form the writer needs it to take: "The hell with plot and the hell with narrative" is the message from Kerouac, "and character development". Fiction invents. In Mulligan Stew as in Flann O'Brien's At Swim Two Birds (O'Brien supplies an epigraph for this novel), fiction characters live outside the novel aware of their fictionality, and "a character can be used in more than one novel, as an employee". This book is thus a game into which anything can find a place. Joycean lists and catalogues can be augmented with "letters, signs, advertisements, reviews", and various texts "lifted direct, parodies, twisted, used for cadence, and so on".

But the Vort interview is short on his satirical treatments. Stylistic procedures are themselves products of a writer within his culture. Sorrentino's last three novels, conspicuously, are desperate virtuoso exasperations at the criminal vulgarity of American life - artists and ordinary people in the same stew. But his terms have always been particular. In Kulchur No.3, 1961, in a review of Kaddish and Other Poems:

I don't believe in the essential goodness of revolutions. I don't believe that when govts. are gone people will be happy and good and singing in the sunlight etc. Cain killed Abel, etc. Too human, all too human.... You can push people down the road under yr banner
only at the risk of being a tyrant...sheer masses of humanity are no match for a determined State....The longshoreman strikes. Men, we're going out today, the damn bosses are, etc., etc.
One poor slob stands up and says, Why are we going out? Two young men escort him from the hall. He's got hospitalization anyway. It's a good union.
I really don't care any more. I don't believe in the leaders any more anyway, they're all bad guys in a bad world, and God is not a political man, he will not change things for us, Buddha cares less than Christ....

This kind of anti-romantic stance is exemplified in Sorrentino's criticism by Wyndham Lewis and T E Hulme, and in Kulchur No.8, 1962, he quotes from the former as a viable opponent of current poses: "Romance and scholarship, plus advertisement, takes the place of really new creative effort." And in a footnote: "Georges Sorel, in his Reflections on Violence, equates Utopists with reactionaries - as did Marx, also. A shocking discovery for many 'progressive' people."
Olson's "Projective Verse" is cited: "Objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego." In Kulchur No.13, 1964, Selby is commended for something which is customary in Sorrentino: showing characters "in the circumscribed area of their own despair" and the "unerring detection of the vulgar", and a world in which cops "aid and abet the misery, they don't, in any way, alleviate". On the "Strike" section of Last Exit to Brooklyn: "every false ideal, every rotting set of values, every cliche we have ever heard about marriage, homosexuality, labour and management, the dignified poor...are exposed in this merciless flat prose. No comments, ever, in Selby. The prose moves the experience directly to you, it is style-less". And of Selby's accurate account of life in a Brooklyn housing precinct - it could be equally useful as a description of Sorrentino's own analysis of capitalist democracy:

What is ignored in this cynical bureaucracy is the fact that these people are striving for those values which are essentially useless, if not evil, values of a world devoid of humanitarian feelings while drenched with the idea of the individual.... Selby's people ....are perfect examples of democratic people - they live in a world which has raised to staggering importance the dictum of the individual's importance, his free will, his freedom of choice. Their choices, however, given the environment which somebody's free choice has handed them, or forced them into, are invariably the wrong ones, and they suffer for their acts.

Such is the life of the Irish and Italians in Aberration of Starlight - the same vulgar individualism, comment-free exposures, the implication of rottenness at the core of the State, and of the use of multiple voices "enabling the narrator to remain in the third person, but overcoming the sometimes restrictive necessities of that position, being able to identify, at will, with whatever speaker happens to be holding forth...to remain the writer as writer, not character, and yet at the same time (to) enter the story as whatever character's voice he chooses to assume". Reviewing Leroi Jones' The Moderns in Kulchur No.14, 1964, he identifies these writers as presenters of an America "couched in terms of the utmost brutality, but economic brutality, police brutality, the sheer brutality of events. If one is a writer, one looks at this madness, this waste and dross, and tries to put it into prose which somehow fits pragmatic truth". The official "proficient and polished prose 'fiction' of our time is itself a fiction" - in its linear logic, its accepted formal conventions out of
Chekhov, De Maupassant, Joyce, Anderson and Hemingway, and in its acceptance of "the official malaise of our time". Such push-button fiction is the equivalent of push-button social responses to its very themes - poor little rich boy, potential artist trapped in job and family, put-downs of the FBI, flabby liberals, segregationists, and so on. In a word, cliche, both literary and social, cliche which exemplifies "an America which the middle class doesn't see, and wouldn't get if it did. It makes no matter that it is a fragmented America, some of it terrifying, some brutal, some merely banal".

Imaginative qualities of Actual Things - which ends with Foucault's "where the dead walked / and the living were made of cardboard" - analyses the deterioration of talent and the successful promotion of fraudulent art in New York in the fifties. Sympathy is slightly offered to talent which declines pitifully, but not for the talentless bourgeois who smuggle into Bohemia because "the arts" carry a social kudos and automatically protected set of values. Henri Murger's vie bohémienne is lived out brash and vulgar in New York, while the State furthers imperialist designs in Asia. Sorrentino is also engaged in adjusting the decade from vast over-estimation. The subject is once again waste. The book is a shrowdy controlled explosion placed under false creativity, degrading repetition of formulae, and sheer trading on the gullible consumer. Lists, letters, comment, criticism, footnotes, lines from pop songs, addresses to the reader, and parodies of prose and poetry, all handled with exuberant mastery - but the book's core is a narrator himself involved in sharing the fate of his artists and hangers-on. Resistant to being totally part of consumerist spectatorism, he behaves like some Miles Coverdale watching the doomed relaxation of "critical acumen", the ways in which poetic production becomes personal seduction of any reader whose energy you need, of a reader you need for promotion or just for sex. Art is a weapon in predatory survival, and therefore its tone is as desperate as market demand. If sex is guided by artistic reputation, "the 'exciting' art world" must be corrupt, "a milieu which has as its members and guides the mediocre", in which "the talented amateur is everywhere apparent. If I could climb mountains or sky-dive, I wouldn't write poems. So Freud is 'proved'". And encircling the bars ooze "the swap of half-drunk wives of young executives and university instructors who discuss the Beatles and Stones and call policemen pigs. Revolutionaries of the elegant lofts'.

The reader is drawn in, as in Steelwork, dubiously, to be responsible: "This story is invention only. Put yourself in it. Perhaps you are already in it, or something like it." Repeatedly, page after page, Sorrentino draws nervous attention to the fictionality of his work, as if fighting off both Dick Detective-type scandal collectors and possible libel suits. But he is right about 1950s New York and its masturbatory need to verbalize and self-congratulate, to grab a place in the hierarchy, to use current jargon as a weapon, to have your mind made up on anything fashionable. Whereas: "Art, you see, is not interested in your suffering". (Sorrows: "I'm not innarrested in your horrible condition"). Lou Henry's cycle "Sheila Sleeping" is compared in a Tulsa student magazine to Donovan's lyrics, and he is made. In fact, "making it" is the programme under attack: "the artist's particular devotion is the one thing that cannot be reached or tempered with. He is hated and feared - these emotions disguised as admiration".

For example, those pathetic critics who blasted Charlie Parker because his reed squeaked on a couple of recordings. Such people and their consumers "want a key to art, and they think, in their professional arrogance, that the whole thing is a trick, learned process....There is no place for the artist here any more. He has been officially dismissed
in favour of the entertainer. Smile, they say.... Why is it that people want to be around artists, sucking the powers out of them? Or even the artist's wife? Sucking the powers out at one remove". But this power, and the power of editors and reviewers, and the devitalizing connection. The whole system is the analogue of entropic power in the State. Sorrentino can therefore afford a certain compression: "God help this man, blundering through his bad poems, reading Williams, whom he will never understand, so tortured was he by love and sex all his long life" - and: Guy Lewis "king of the little magazines. With what bitterness he thinks that. An 'experimental writer'".

Impotence unrealized, waste produced and displayed with fearful energy; meanwhile the generative world beyond moves on: "Got a letter from Filel the other day on the ultimately unsatisfactory politics of Rimbaud. Fascinating". Reviewers and publishers' readers continue to operate with weapons derived from the successful past they never encouraged and never earned. In a test for this breed, Sorrentino offers his broad criteria: Sid Catlett, Jo Jones, Paul Goodman, Ellington's 1938 trombone section, Kerouac, Patchen, The Sky Changes ("failure of tone" said the breed) and Mailer's fiction ("basic flaw"). Occasionally, his historic inevitabilities are forced:

The novelist's task is to tell you why all this happened.
That's why I won't tell you. Isolate flecks. Is it totally ludicrous to say that we are all paying for Cortez and Cotton Mather? Every kernel of that Indian corn represents a dead Indian. Don't give them jobs but allow them to sponge off the government forever. You know what you can do with automotive trades, right? These are all non sequiturs.

(Isolate Flecks is the title of the narrator's novel.) But mostly the nervous energy is closely directed. For example, on the Taos scene, partly taken apart in The Sky Changes: "It's a good life and curiously destructive of art. Or let me be clearer: everything is art, so that the blanket, the pot, the dinner on the handsome table, and the poems and painting are all one. A wish to be tribal, an insistence."

Worst of all, the art life, rather than the work of being an invective, risking artist, absorbs energies away from other labour, from politics, assumes a special vitality which is parasitic on, say, the characters in Steelwork, or even on those in Aberration of Starlight. It's a trap; Sorrentino senses the helplessness of his characters, and this makes for a vision of American life, not as anarchy, but as chaos. The De Sade reference at the end of section 4 is accurate, since he was the arch-investigator of orgasm as the leveller.

All Sorrentino's fictions deal with degrees of surrender - here, for example, it is Lou Kaufman - "surrendered, that's all. There's nothing dishonorable about that, it occurs every day". And here is the destructive core, to which the narrator keeps referring his lector: "What I'm trying to do ... is to define certain areas of destruction. I mean we are surrounded by dead men" - and the Pound quotation penetrates back into the book just here. The characters are fiction and made up inconsistently, open-ended as it were, but they are dead. As summaries of behaviour they are complete, and to be discarded in any decent society. Sorrentino is acutely aware of the interfaces between invention and fact, ignorance and knowledge, and what they contain. The traditional function of art, to make order out of chaos, has drifted back into chaos; entropy wins once again in American fiction; "the artistic ferment of the fifties" means the citizenry were conned. Now the artists con foundations. But
"the level of incompetence has remained constant". The literary entrepreneurs - like Sorrentino's next summary, Horace Rosette - were just as irresponsible. (His report on Muligan Stew praises that novel in that novel for fashionably specious reasons.) What The Plen of Sodom did for the Thirties, Imaginative Qualities... does for the Fifties - exposes desperate lusts for power within a group which cons itself into belief that it is value apart from the power complex of America: "Capacity plus taste is a formidable combination, since it so often passes for intelligence. One pity's the artist in a world of such predators, all of whom are deeply engaged in the arts too". Anton's decline - "he wrote cellophane poems. He was a master mechanic and made a lot of money when he worked" - is part of his greed (food, heroin, racing his bike), but he "quite cleverly and subtly placed the blame for this disintegration of his artistic powers to the Sickness of America,... What he didn't realize is that his own rotten writing contributed to the general degradation".

Imaginative Qualities... is "about destruction", "a book of destruction", and contains, it claims, "no tools....with which to build the new society", no plan to change the ethic of "Ultimate Success"! Dick Detective is therefore the pivot, a gatherer and purveyor of partial and distorted information, and speculation "robbed as information - designed to elicit information from the listener". He has something on everyone and "cannot see that what he has done is rotten". He consumes everything, including his own sexuality feelings, along with Lorca, wine, Bach, women.... He might well turn Catholic priest engrossed in confessional, listening to garbage, but he ends up in a large Vermont house believing he has affinities with Wallace Stevens "because he holds a responsible, well-paying job". He has won.

Towards the end of Imaginative Qualities... Sorrentino writes:
"The most suave man, the woman of unbelievable chic, may have in their lives somewhere the most putrescent garbage, safely hidden. Humiliated" - a statement which could cover a good deal of Muligan Stew. Here the traditional games with fiction are played at their most elaborated intensity. ("I like novels like Unamuno's in which the characters challenge the author and begin to argue with him, but in my book they don't take over. No, sir, my characters are going to do what I tell them" - John Barth in The Contemporary Writer, ed. L S Dembo and C N Pondrom, 1972). What Borges calls the game of arbitrary authorship, wasting characters are once again juggled, and the functions of parody are extended into the recessions of parody of parody. In fact, Muligan Stew is a virtuoso act whose slow repetitions manufacture a plot about plot. Joyce's novel as huge advertisement or parody newspaper, and Mallarme's book as device, and the American desire to be totalitarian in fiction and poetry as elsewhere - are determinants. Martin Halpin, a character in a character's book, resents being lifted from Joyce. But Sorrentino lifted him first, and that author supplies an epigraph from Joyce to criticize his novel: "I am loathing their little warm tricks. And loathing their mean cosy turns. And all the greedy gushes out through their small souls".

Publishers' rejects and approvals - copied out or invented - are included in a lengthy criticism of what literary production has become in America: the elucidation and practice of instant prejudice. The author's standard of approval is Hammett rather than the experimental "crap" of this novel's hack novelists, parodies of the recycled stock styles demanded by editors in the consumerist bookworld. The fictional novelist Lamont is typical of sponging fictioneers and postasters who cash in on prior invention and vitality, vampires on the creative. The catalogue of his books compiled by Halpin parodies the anal retentiveness of his life and his writing, his
insistence on himself, in his letters, rather than the labour and risks of creativity, his self-importance gushing out in vain, fashionable prose. He even includes in a letter to his sister Sheila - his equivalent in hack criticism - an old school essay, "What I can do for the war effort".

Creative discipline is also parodied in the erotic disciplines another Lamont character, Ned Beaumont, requires from Corrie Corridan and Berthe Delamode, and the garments he purchases from them for performances with Daisy Buchanan (lifted from Fitzgerald and developed into a rich adulteress, whose husband Tom is into women's uniforms). The opening chapter of a Western by Sheila's husband, Dermot Trellis, parodies pulp fiction with pretensions to art - over-written prose, uncontrolled verbosity inappropriate to the subject, borrowed juicy but archaic tricks from the literary past, all laced with give-away sexual proclivities (leather and corset infatuations under the western gear). Sorrentino's target is avant-garde knowledginess without talent, part of the sickness of America.

Lamont's plot is partly "to interpose myself between him and these two" - Beaumont and his erotic ladies - ostensibly to save him. But his own need for public and private approval and fame - he is furious at the less than overwhelming praise from a minor academic, Roche - is fused with his cringing furtiveness with Lorna Flambeaux. And this enables Sorrentino to expose her first book of poems, The Sweats of Love, as both academic and dirty, derived and dull. Clive Sallis gives Lamont a "masque" by a baseball player who aspired to a kind of stardom in intellectual novels about the literary world - bright, brash, terribly witty, etc., etc." But "he withered and hid' in town and was the object of cruel jokes and comment...." That is, just a hint that Sorrentino lurks around here, especially since he published the text under his own name in 1974 - a Joycean masque of transformations from Dunlness, Murkiness, Deterioration, etc., to Splendour, Clarity, Germination, etc., enacted in a New York ballpark. Susan B Anthony moves into Lydia Pinkham, Robert Big is given the once-over, and some Senator Street opines "I say that making the Reds would be a courageous act of Christian charity".

Daisy analyses her own stream of consciousness - Lamont's ego under wraps. Lamont hacks away at his opening scene of possible murder. George Hampton is mocked. Solby de Cubb makes a personal brief appearance. Section 9, "A Bag of Blues", is an encomium to Daisy which effectively destroys any "character" by making her a literary artefact, a collection of referential allusions in purple prose (partly a parody of the V women in V) which Lamont tries to excuse by blaming it on Halpin. A cod article on methodology and "complex resolutions" is footnoted with Lamont's silly comments. Then he turns bitchily on Roche, whom he once thought might puff his fiction in the academic world - "You, sir, are an asshole", etc.

Lamont and Daisy confront Beaumont's ladies in the Zap Club (lesbian sex, pornographic games) where he masturbates and later describes it all in self-indulgent porno-lit. arty prose laced with clichés like "the heights of unbridled lust". Corrie and Berthe remain victorious with their scenes of "carnal imbecility". Halpin includes in his Journal an interview with Barnett Tote in Art Futures, a parody of the ruthlessness within the elitist jargon of art magazines, pseudo-statement masquerading as bright sayings and apocryphal, the exaltation of art collecting and art criticism as a major consumer activity in America, palmed off as a philosophy of life.

Lamont's energy is increasingly absorbed in paranoid beliefs that his family and associates conspire to cheat him of publications and fame. He appeals to the reader with grim metaphoric aims: "my whole thrust and desire throughout this entire tale has been to keep you awake, and trembling with anticipation of my next glaring trope". Halpin and Daisy guzzle Blue Ruin at the Zap and are seduced by the ladies' erotic tricks, an elaborate
conjuring show which Halpin tries to expose. The ladies simply reveal his own impotence. Ned Beaumont has succumbed to Zap ecstasies. A publisher's campaign touts Trellis' The Red Swan as a sexy bestseller. Lamont relapses into the parody of some awful Jacobean-Restoration dramatic prose soliloquy which transforms Ned and the Zap ladies into stock characters. And the whole masquerading literary performance concludes with Lamont's paranoid mania of "dark forces at work against me". He requests Beshary (a name out of Steelwork) to raise money to publish his novel. Halpin and Beaumont make a last bid to escape their author to a place where fugitives from writers evade humiliation and do odd jobs for stereotypical authors while hoping to be "employed any day in some decent capacity". Finally, some idiot in 1907 is quoted in his opinion that Gézanne's late painting is a failure to "show forth nature's splendours", "a failure precipitated by his surrender to the pleasures of the imagination".

The 500 pages of Mulligan Stew resist exemplification in a short essay, in fact, because the stylistic virtuosic and procedural devices are its very constitution. Its characters are uninteresting apart from the verbal density which holds them. The structure of Aberration of Starlight reduces multiple voicing to four characters, one of whom, Tom Thebus, is developed from Tom Elwood in The Sky Changes, to which this latest novel is closely related in analysis of "the sickness of America". Within the New Jersey Depression Thirties, information on one main incident - Thebus' arrival and departure within the McGrath household - is refracted through ten procedures - letters, lists, cheap cliché novels, question and answer sections, and so on. This enables Sorrentino to engage in a deaf excavation of middle America's behaviour, within minimum further commentary. Billy, a ten-year-old boy, dreams of his divorced mother's new boyfriend, Tom, as a substitute father. His ignorance of their actual behaviour is part of the helplessness of all four figures. The fictional procedures analyse, by their use and by what they contain - the social and individual assumptions - much as the pop art procedures with cliché to be found in Lichtenstein, their pretension and arrogance barely concealed by the commonplace, the un-thinking, the overwhelming obsession with the present. The daily exigencies of massive selfishness are the target here, the appalling self-righteousness of the ignorant masses who fail democracy at every turn. Billy's ignorance and self-interest is excusable; in the adults who surround him, it is criminal. The social detail of costume, speech, songs, favourite poems, and other behavioural signs - and Sorrentino's accuracies are as engaging as usual - place certain naturalist techniques at the disposal of assemblage and Joycean discontinuity. But the text's games are far less indulgently virtuosic than in Mulligan Stew, but without its exuberant humour. The "literary fragments stored in Marie's mind", the bits of sentimental pop wisdom, bits of poetry, and cliches of behaviour form characterological presentations rather than naturalistic character. Marie's immaturity, her regressive Catholic training, her self-pity and aggressiveness, her impositions on her son Billy, are vicious, but then she is a product, caught in a stereotypical life, and that is the sole source of what pathos she is afforded. The cheap fictive style is the mirror of a certain kind of life, her fantasies themselves are stereotypes from novels, films, songs, and advertisements. Her anxiety to break free from her father, her son, from provinciality, seen as restriction, even slavery, is inhibited by her messy ideas on sexuality and romantic reliance on men.

The masturbatory wastes in Sorrentino's previous novels recur in the mutual masturbation of Tom and Marie in the car - a scene which combines
pathos with lust in mutual helplessness. Tom's letter of departure after this failure is a terrible parade of stock language as the mould of cheapened experience, of habitual evasion, residues of incoherent feeling, muddles and destroyed by social and personal preconceptions. Mario's section concludes with a passage of short, jerky prose, broken and blunted outbursts of emotion, an hysterical time mixture which takes up her life from her 1926 wedding, the Irish-Italian rivalry and hatred within her community, abuse of her husband, Tony, and his girlfriend, Margie, and her own exhausted sense of entrapment. Her very snobbery is a media-controlled exercise. Sorrentino insists that his figures expose themselves through the styles of America, Tom's vanity, his planned kindnesses, his dominance, his failed marriage, reliance on advertisement masculinity - ploys with pipe and hair oil - and his abject racism are only alleviated by one brief statement on his relations with Marie, in the question and answer section: "Perhaps not an absolute fraud". His toadyng to businessmen is partly a necessity in the Depression period, but his political ignorance - the potential war in Europe is the result of "you damn Jew Roosevelt" once again - is just as typical, and as stereotyped as his masturbation fantasies and his vulgarity. Marie's father, John McGrath, is the older version of what he criticizes in Tom and Mario. He mistrusts his grandson, and his list of dislikes includes practically everything in his community, including Catholicism, movies and "nigger" music. His abuse of his neighbors is infused with his own frustrations and disappointments, but his misjudgments and inabilitys are in part the result of a total absence of reflection or informed opinion: "he had energetically conspired in his own defeat."

These figures lack creative pleasures and critical information. They live at the mercy of propaganda and advertisement, in a ghastly limbo of egotism and mutual aggression, alleviated occasionally by cliché fantasies of tourism, a grim parody of that much vaunted nucleus of American strength and joy, the family. Aberration of Starlight is in some ways an economical presentation of materials in The Sky Changes, and looking back to that novel now, it is clear where the continuity of Sorrentino's concerns lies: the terrible urgency with which fiction and fantasies of the possibilities of life as a success conflict with personal inability and social restriction. The sense of betrayed human existence is overwhelming. Success is always interpreted as the vertical thrust of self, muddled by mythicized clichés from the media and by the fundamental racism of the now totally discredited "melting pot" idea of America. Living mythically means living destructively. The Sky Changes opens with the urge to renew love, to "break out of that cocoon that (the husband) has carefully wrapped himself in, the mummy". But this defensive wrapping or masking, an obsession in Sorrentino's fictions, cannot be dropped or even converted. He dreams of "a break...the heavy crack of surf" which will "take him out of his wrappings" by "nemorizing him". But tourist romanticism is itself a futile myth, a ruse to evade futility. He makes the involuntary mistake of asking a friend to drive him and his wife and children to Mexico, some fantasy region of renewal, much as it is in Kerouac's fictions. So he begins to live mythically towards disaster.

The novel's sections are titled from places on a route from New York into the South, the South West and California, interpolated with a backlog of earlier New York scenes which infer reasons for the disgust which motivates the journey. And it is largely here that Sorrentino presents his horror at love and sex wasted in lust, talent wasted in the capitalist trap of life reduced to commodity, energy leaked away in combating waste with pitiful solutions expected from liquor, drugs and lust. The sky may change; nothing else does.
Washington's Negro alumni and the Iwojina statue, Ohio's "unemployed textile workers, defeated farmers", a Midwest "made up of police and drivels", dead cornfields... Hopper paintings", an Indianapolis where there is "something macabre in the air... as if gripped by the Mafia, or some other blood lust" - and then, in Urbana, a college instructor "in the humanities" wounds a goose with a sharpened branch in some panic urge, and leaves it in pain - "in the centre of the United States of America", "the wasted heart-land". Then they move on into Arkansas: "bedraggled fields with their despairing Negroes, the cotton gins, huge machines of endless money-making every few miles, and rice plants". The husband is, in fact, in danger, like Anton in Imaginative Qualities... of blaming his own disintegration on his country and not realizing that his own rottenness "contributed to the general degradation". (New Orleans is touristically engaged, and then: "a lousy fucking town, a rotten stinking town, goddamned phony French Quarter" once he and his wife fail again). His masturbation fantasies mix sex with his wife with his own waste and guilt; his impotence is projected on to the driver's efficiency and apparent passivity, his "ability to function in the traffic of a strange city as if he had lived there all his life" at odds with his financial dependence. And Catholic training to fear authority is transferred to an ambivalent hatred of America's lawless legalities. The key passage occurs, naturally, in Mississippi, since the South epitomizes the United States:

They heard the door of the trooper's sedan shut, and the starting of his motor, then he backed out of the grove onto the highway and moved north. The husband settled into the car with the others, pinched the lothertette case holding his travelers' checks, the money that stood against all Mississippi law: that's why, he thought, irrationally, he knew that this money is from the dead, against all of them. But somewhere deep in his brain he assumed that the trooper had known something far different, had asserted himself as an agent, demonic and unreal as the wax figures in the cave (Jesse James' hideout). It was as if his whole life were being watched, each mistake, each lie now, might be the one to ruin him. But he laughed and joked about the "cracker bastard" as they headed (and he was relieved) south towards Jackson.

And in Oxford: "It was not the land of grand Biblical tragedy and despair that has been written of, so grandly and despairingly. The cruelty was neither tragic nor grand, it was simple and diurnal, in its very vulgarity it was terrible!" The sadomasochistic commonplaces of private life and the humiliations and tyrannies of public life form a single misery. And the accompanying hysteria in the husband is partly due to the absence - common in all Sorrentino's fiction - of any social, political vision of an alternative social justice. The husband assumes a right to perfect happiness through perfect reconciliation with his wife and the love of his children; but in fact he treats them abominably. The result: "He didn't know that the excitement and pleasure of traveling through this state, this somewhat mystical reference he now fully committed himself to, was simply one act laid upon a series of other acts, and that it, too, would take its part in his ultimate psychic dismembering".

And later:

He turned what should have been self-pity into what he thought of as nobility, what should have been anger into what he flattered himself was strength; and what was truly (his wife's) contemptuous usage of him metamorphosed itself in his mind in to what he termed childishness.
His "ennui" makes him transform his Army misery, even, into "a haven, a good place, a happy time". So that the brilliant, silent barrenness of New Mexico comes to seem a "fitting country" for him, and the Petrified Forest a familiar condition. But then a gigantic white cloud, "bending with the curve of the earth", fills him with panic, "an unrecognizable fear, a choking sense of his own loneliness and fear". A Hopi who lets him have some gas to start the car in the desert, and says the offered payment is too much, represents the only real decency in the book - and out of another and oppressed culture entirely. The only other calm in the book is anaesthetic, a dreadful commentary on the bewildered chaos in Sorrentino's world - the security of a couple in Albuquerque, a wealthy heroin addict and his alcoholic wife, their passion almost spent:

They were looking at the three guests, smiling, their eyes calm and blank, their fingers intertwined. They sat, decorous and serene, staring into the gentle sunlight, blunted, secure from each other, and from everything else.

The Sky Changes concludes with one of Sorrentino's most powerful images, a rare oasis of mutuality which parodies love in a total withdrawal from conflict, a relationship both dismembered and sane, but inert.
In my review "Reading Prynne and Others" (Reality Studies, 2:2, 1979) I wondered parenthetically whether we’d not "thrown out the baby with the bath-water in our formalist anti-humanism". This was, I suppose, the beginning of my thinking on the subject of these notes; and the work of the "Others" I was then reviewing, Peter Ackroyd and Veronica Forrest-Thomson, served as my initial critical tools. My next contribution to Reality Studies (3:2, 1981), a review of Barry MacSweeney’s Odes, points to that book as an example of a kind of writing I am proposing now to call "formalist-humanist"; that is: neither texts of fashionable "pure surface" nor poems of simplistic referentiality.

Humanism is a term I wish to reclaim for this poetry, from the centrist annexations of a liberal humanism or a scientific humanism, whether that be Leavis’s or Davies’s. When an innocent trip to the cinema results in one being caught in the crossfire between liberal humanist and semiotic criticism, something is wrong, perhaps, with our sensibilities: flexibility and openness have been traded for the party card. (See Jeff Nuttall’s "The Secret Heart of the Mammal", Reality Studies, 3:2, for its social corollary.) On one hand a conservatism rules the day and its vocabulary becomes gradually tarnished and unusable ("humanism" itself becomes a taboo word). On the other hand progressivist views of art are partly to blame for the uncritical acceptance of a new critical language to replace the old; a switch from "poem" to "text" and from "tone" to "surface" will not prove the panacea it at first appears, unless we are sincere about our technique. In practice the result may be a stylistic brinkmanship rather than a developing application of ideas and creative energy to the solving of the problems of art - and not just "the problems of art", since a poem cannot be divorced from its particular focus.

Central to the notion of humanism, whether in the arts or not, is the "ideal of free thought". For the artist this involves (we are told) a healthy scepticism towards all myths that present themselves as anything more than literary fictions, and all other extra-literary strucutures, such as socialist realism, and even specifically literary strucutures, such as "non-referentiality". The operational autonomy of the imagination must be insisted upon. Yet when a "Humanism" talks of the "norm of human interests" as the guideline for its art, or of "the undraped human figure" as "the central theme and symbol of this interest", this is the arrogance of an over-humanized art, to which Robbe-Grillet was one of the first to object. It is to homo faber, to the poet as maker, that we must look: man as a maker of form, rather than as a self-expressive lyric voice. (Self-expression is "trivial" - inessential - in the arts, since all human activity is self-expressive.) In the final line of the Cantos, "To be men not destroyers", it is homo faber whom Ezra Pound is crowning as the paradigm of his "paradise terrestre". In recognising a basic "human interest" in the making of form we open up the possibilities of a formalist-humanism.

Peter Ackroyd’s book Notes for a New Culture, which tries to present J H Prynne’s poetry as "completely written surface", obscures the deeply humanistic concerns of Prynne in The White Stones and The Kitchen Poems, concerns Prynne shares with Olson - derived in the main from Whitehead’s cosmology and the implications of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on the
essential "linguistic" construction of reality. Indeed I did, in RS 2:2, question Ackroyd's thesis and referred to Peter Riley's criticism that Ackroyd pays too little attention to "the pull towards reference and human significance" in his prime examples. In writing of the "irresolution between the possibilities of autonomy and the claims of private experience" in Ashbery, Ackroyd is touching upon an occasion of poetic invention that neither embraces the Derridean terror (that all utterance is quotation, its meaning infinitely deferrable), nor offers the dull opacity of a liberal humanist text. Modernism, Ackroyd says, "bears most fruit" in the tension between human significance and a "formalist absoluteness", and the use of the word "tension" demonstrates that a formalist-humanism is not a compromise but implies a complication (or a "de-automatisation" as the Russian Formalists put it) of artistic perception.

Yury Lotman, a contemporary Russian structuralist who borrows from Russian Formalist sources, regards tension in poetry as the essential quality which allows for the overload of "information" which creates artistic complexity. "In a text a polylogue of different systems is constantly taking place; different modes of the explanation and the systematisation of the world, different pictures of the world, come into conflict." To translate Ackroyd's observation into Lotman's critical language, we could theoretically say that the tension between the two "systems" in a text - it is perhaps the proof of the pudding that one cannot in practice differentiate clearly between "human significance" and "formal autonomy" - creates a "multi-systemicity" which at once increases the potential capacity of the poem's information-load, ("Information" as used here is a term borrowed from cybernetics.) This "tendency of the artistic text towards maximal information content" is affected by the de-automatisation of the readers' responses. Art introduces a liberating, and thereby human, freedom into the habitual world of our perceptions. Tension is both its cause and consequence.

Marcuse, in his recent The Aesthetic Dimension, also borrows Russian Formalist aesthetics to stand traditional Marxist literary theory (which regards text as ideology) on its head. Marcuse recognises, in Ackroyd's words, that "it is the ability of literature to explore the problems and ambiguities of a formal absoluteness which we will never experience". But whereas Ackroyd argues for the severance of man and his world from art, Marcuse sees the autonomy of art as both protesting its relations to social reality and transcending them, as essentially a radical critique. "The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions" and its false perceptual automatisation. "The autonomy of art contains the categorical imperative: 'things must change'."

The formal element is thus transformative and transcendent, since it is no longer a mirror of a society, but an assemblage from its various images. "Subjects and objects encounter the appearance of that autonomy which is denied them in their society. The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life." Williams was one poet who, in Spring and All, realised that the imagination (and I will here equate that with Marcuse's Aesthetic Dimension) was a separate zone which diminishes emotion into "new form dealt with as a reality in itself". Words "enter a new world, and have there freedom of movement". In a poem they are freed, though "tuned-up" to a given reality; like planes in a Cubist painting they both belong - and yet do not belong - to the perceptions of everyday life.
Form is thus a defamiliarising element to awaken us to a more human perception. Yet our perceptions of the poem must be centred upon the tension within it, wherein its power lies. The formalism of a formalist-humanism is one that is open, that introduces freedom into art; and open-field poetics still offer the widest range of techniques, so long as we remember Poulí's fine balance (itself arguably formalist-humanist) that the test of a poet's sincerity is his or her technique. Let us no longer insist primarily upon "free verse"'s basis in speech, or in subjective self-expression, or in fragmentary mimesis of societal chaos, but upon its very openness of form. As Rakosi says of that moment when Sincerity becomes Objectification, "The finished poem: 'Ah, free at last from psychology!"

The work is there; what is lacking is a willingness to talk of it in these (or similar) terms. What I fear most is the building of "new conventionalisms" and a progressivist escalation of literary "styles". None of these ideas is original and none is definitive. If nothing else, I want to keep the arguments open for further development. But I feel that they are, historically - not determined, but "called into being", at this time, and could play a specific role in Anglo-American poetics.

Sources:
Peter Ackroyd, Notes for a New Culture, 1976.
Yury Lotman, Analysis of the Poetic Text, 1976.
Karl Popper, Unenlightened, 1974.
Peter Riley, Review of Ackroyd, Poetry Information 17.

23rd April 1981.
huge Eye from which the lovers flee
monstrosity amid classical colonnade
It is what sees thee
subject/object reversed
re- the usual visionary

where a disembodied head on a
cornetina'd hat (what seems to be
our conjuror's fatal accident)
is borne up by balloon
the balloon it's plain to see
is a gigantic Eye that doesn't see
it is a Seeing Eye devoid of
any point of view

the clapper of the funeral bell
is the pupil of death-skeleton's glassy Eye
its animating principle
the noon too is an Eye
abstracted from full face it might be
anyone's of any age's comportment

Redon's art stems from the Eye
what may be extrapolated from the fantasie
an itinerary of self commentary

what sees is seen
being seen affects the seeing
seeing then translates as sinning

without is the day the guileless tree
within beshadowed all the Eyes
time passing's misery
the tree & only the tree
has no axe to grind
what is to be seen's
benevolent as an amputee
for once the language extols
tree is what I see
fini

but then
the dark bole in the trunk of a
garden giant begging anthropomorphicity
simultaneously bent backed figure &
mouth & huge Eye again?
filling in the obvious
the bountiful form of mother death the buxom
form of our reluctant sister
& life
that's ever flitting o'er the ceaselessly
downtrodden heath

/max Klinger/

Klinger's trees before which his sitter lies, are the trembling &
could-be whispering birches outside of Redon's darkened room. They
are also the one unentrapped feature of Schiele's world. K's sister
within a caul of ecstasy & fatigue has given time the slip. For "no,
no." she is obstinate to a bony death's messenger who's been so good
as to have dug her pit already. She's resolute in her lassitude --
adrift on a hummock's imperceptible passage. She is the sweet
superfluity of the hanging lilacs. Klinger hangs his all upon such a
metaphor. Ah but the trees, as in ah, the Japanese. Why ever bother
to fill it in.

Death & the Philosopher

Joined at the mirror, & only by the mirror, the black & the white.
Joined only as the mirror, black of white. Sleep is the carriage thru
the mirror. In sleep, black touches white. White's face registers
the excruciation of black's finger stretch. Next moment they will
both involuntarily erect an exposed nerves meet. At that moment the
sleeper emerges from his deepest sleep. The image disappears. One
hand's fingertips upon the steamed-up glass the searcher's sole document.
He finds the steam impression overlaps his body's frame by the proportions
of a circumferential aura. It is this heirloom that the boy Schiele
claims from the family store.

Right hand on chin, left arm behind his neck, in death-sleep upon his
raised pillows. Sleeves of his pyjama-jacket rolled back. Forehead
settled, for once unlined, his unshaven face almost in repose.
The built-up pillows of his bed in the alcove of the buttressed fireplace
in the room with all the light. But that soft frame is flushed out
with concrete in the State's cemetery honorium. Big blonde man with
similarly engorged female companion, man & mate of some preposterous
heroic undertaking. A lie. As if the trees still owned the land,
as if there was land that controlled its creatures. Lies. Yet, truth's
inking in his refusal to admit the city's definitive pillage...

The boy awakes from his childhood to mirror & window ajar. Else, if
these are placid as the daytime's lake, it's his wild staring eyes
& mouth agape. City, city, city. At back of any portrait is the humid
swim, though, atelier is a break on that. Yes, art breaks out of that.
A calibration. So, a multitude of roofs, a molten rainstorm caught in
art's shutter. Aunt & nephew, oh brother! -- more than cloying is her affection, or acquiescence his deception -- careening, clawing; she courts her own inflection -- but for her gravity he would gladly pass away; he soulls at the air as it is.

Small city, small city, small city -- recognition imposes its own volume, inevitability is the obvious trapping of infinity. And trapped in the mirror the verity, eyes, the mirrors of the soul. Evident in the musk of his cell the body's aura. Body's author is an absent perimeter, yet luminescent aura. The tale which the naked eyes cannot but tell also resides therein -- the scripture of that trace begets its own commentary, which is the arching, opening body. His aura casts light upon the darkened city.

This city is not where trees may be counted. Go back for that to childhood's run, beside the railway track, or a simple flip of years, for single trees & distinguished sages, houses enabled by the natural garble. The suburb of Kubin's Dream Country, with its "elaborately carved, denticulated gables & roofs of straw", suffused with that "froabge peace", might be what the country village afforded Schiele. Single stones, pistils; trees depicted as a bloom, single trunk bent in Autumn's wind. People, singled out, portraits of enviable largesse, dignified boredom, downcast prepossession. He, though, draws the city in. It broods at his shoulder. It is the dead mother, it is mother death. He ricochets from prismatic nakedness to the full preen of the studio portrait. Its deadweight halo augurs the institute's imprimatur.

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/insert
Alfred Kubin/

As if Kubin, at the finis, lying on a bankside, favouring his left shoulder, pipe in mouth, stick rewarding his particular accent, & loyal dog companion asleep at his feet, is overheard to say that linden trees always did bear seven corpses; simply follow the road, hoof it thru the grass if the stony track overstretches you, & just chance upon it (what startles the foxes is by now a sadly human commonplace).

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Once he shed his own skin in that vain expenditure, to be like another. He profited little from the beau "with wrists raised" (& head up, laughing, daring whomever to approach), "with elbows raised" (the beau's profile surprised from the conjuror's top hat). He grafted all of his own dense residue upon the "seated" nude. Reprisal in transposition.

Left to himself, stomach is bared by rolling up clothing. Uncovered stomach. Chest & torso laid bare. Scroll upon midriff. Poetry is body's seismic graph. He nurses his fatigued right hand with the lascivious left. He has written of himself for so long. Why not just to be. A model, oblivious of onlookers. No, not a model. A sister. A sister/sitter, one without external designation. One who is without regardless of what is within. One who's not confronted by what's without, for what's
without should be within, unseen, inviolate. Baring the inside, whatever the season, makes for the naturally malevolent daemon. He garbs the fledgling in the violent hues of birth's occasion -- green, red, purple, & black (blood's after effect, & discarded placenta -- a great blackcoat, or day shirt worn throughout the afternoon's shadows -- city's cape). The sexual marionette is as misplaced an epithet as the victim of insomnia. Spare him that insolence. Sex engaged as remark is tantamount to an intriguer's sedition -- one has made it the poor relative of a secret family. But sit it on its side -- upright you have a Nurayev. With barely slit eyes appears dead to the world. Breast, the guarding, seeing armour. Head, tacit witness of the captive arms. Sex, dimensions unknown.

All Things Balance Out Physically, Most Surely
26 April, 1912, pencil

They will be tried after being tried by the tribunal of art's holiest. Day upon day there'll be no reprieve, mercilessly they'll be questioned. Their dreams will be tabled, their deepest hid thoughts & desires will be criticised, analysed, because all things balance out physically most surely.

We will have them hauled along the filthy tracks of all the fields of the Low Countries, whilst the crows of hell sweep upon them in curiosity & then disgust. They will never escape the terrible eye of eternal judgement. I will personally direct their torture. These nonentities will be confronted with chapter & verse of their insanity, because all things balance out physically most surely.

They will be made to admit their prurience, & then their ignorance, hourly. They will be forced to testify that the world is so much more than they know. They will have to think & probably'll collapse beneath the strain. They will be told irrespective of whether they're able to see that neither money nor goods nor compliance with the law nor the influence of powerful friends is separate from the holy matter of every living creature, the juices & wastes of which & in which we trace our lives. And if its required that they be soaked in blood, or shit, or spit, or spera, so be it, because all things balance out physically most surely.

Act IV. Scene I. Vienna. A court of Justice.

Death in Time's guise- What, is Schiele here?

Schiele- Ready, so please your grace.

Death- I'm sorry for you. You have to answer for your art to a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch incapable of pity, void & empty from any dram of mercy.
Schiele- It's obscene that you should talk so!

Death (laughs)- That's hardly the tenor of one of my subjects.

Schiele- Subject as perforce we all are--

Death- But, little Egon, they said you were one of my special company--

Schiele- Well, they were wrong. I was one of self-knowing's crew.

Death- How many of my hats do you want me to wear?! None can escape me!

Schiele- I do oppose my patience to your fury. It matters little that you're judge & jury.

Death- Haha! Then call Kokoschka into the court!

Justice- He's ready at the door; he comes, my lord.

ENTER OSCAR KOKOSCHKA

Death- Make room & let him stand before us. Ah. Backed up by your retinue of classics, of which it appears you are the residue -- Leonardo, Rembrandt, Michelangelo. Oscar K.--

Kokoschka- Hush -- don't say my name within their hearing -- fie! I must be dreaming!

Death- OK OK, I'll not mince words -- the world thinks, & I think so too, that you've misjudged young Schiele. If you'd just cast an eye of pity on his losses that have of late so huddled on his back--

Kokoschka- The man's a hysterical! He has no talent at all! He's woman mad! He is the meat in some fashion-maker's sandwich! He's a criminal! It makes me sick that history has thrust his name to mine, forced us into unnatural coupling, as if we were Berliner queers. You ask me why I'll not relent in my judgment of him. Well, it's simple -- I can give no reason, nor I will not, more than a lodged hate & a certain loathing that I'll always bear him. I feel I don't need to press my arguments onto you though. I served you with my acculturated line. I severed my improbable links with youth's absolutism. I have denounced their impossible adventures. I have preserved your traditions.

Death (into his hand)- Little does he know...

ENTER HISTORY dressed like a Doctor of Laws

Death- You are welcome; take your place. Are you acquainted with the matter in hand?

History- I am informed thoroughly of the case. (To Kokoschka:) You require the special judgement of law?

O.K.- Indeed I do.
Yet history's dispensations droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd; it blesseth him that gives & him that takes. Is't this universal blessing enough for you?

O.K.- No, I crave the law.

History- I pray you, let me look upon your respective lines, let me read your hands.

O.K.- Here 't is, most reverend doctor; here it is.

Schiele- Do what you want. I've had enough of you all. Everything I did I did to live, I did it for life. I broke my bonds, or sought to do. I confronted death, time, & history in the name of knowledge. And though it seems I erred in the last, I was upon the brink of something, something else, just beyond, when I was pinched, scotched.

History- O.K. -- your slip is showing! -- here -- look --

O.K.- Give me my Quo & let me go--

History- See - the contour of the right hand of your love, Lotte Franzos, & again, the hands of Adolph Loos, & the Marquis & good Marquise of Rohan-Montesquieu -- the fingers are locked tightly, like oiled parts of a machine tool, instrumental upon the tossings of head & heart; see how the misters & misses point & twist & bend, disjointedly, horrible in their disharmonious angles, in every case obviously the shape of young Schiele's--

O.K.- Is that the law?

History- Tarry a little -- there is something else -- compare your light about the body -- your blue to his empty, blank, white -- his absence to your artist's enfolding. You are everywhere he is not, for he could not even if he would not be. Therefore, in what is he degenerate? Whatever it is that you are -- & the law does not take it away from you -- he is also. As far as history is concerned, each one deals or denies themselves. History tells merely what it sees. It is what is written. It is not of itself the law.

O.K.- You take my life when you do take the means by which I live.

Schiele- Similarly. There is no controversy.

History- I take nothing. That is someone else's brief.

Death (convulsed in contemptuous & triumphant laughter)- Get thee gone!!!

(exeunt)
Dear Ken,

Your article depressed me beyond measure, not because I expect constant adulation and/or loyalty, not because I "can't take" criticism, but because it is possible it seems, in 1982 (sic), for one of the brightest guys around to read a piece by me and interpret it as carrying exactly the opposite meaning from the one it was written to express.

"Muscle" is about the pathetic error of sexual aggression. Bunn, having built his act on jokes about sexual alienation and the aggression arising from it, finishes through his love for Araminta (who "never completely silenced the responsive and informative music of her true quick cunt, despite the gang bangs, the one-night stands and even a nasty rape or two. Araminta's music falls so thick and sweet it sweeps the grievance away along with the revenge impulse." that violence and pain are not endemic to sex. The novel ends with Bunn welcoming on a big contract by refusing to do his act, the premises on which his reputation stands having been shown to be a naivety.

You weren't to know how the novel ends. You alarm me however in overlooking completely the fact that the Not Poetry extract is a direct answer to the questions you raise. The piece itself raises the questions and answers them. Its whole raison d'etre is exactly that "coming to terms", not with Split Banana but with the bankruptcy of violent self-centred sex.

You ask, for instance, "was it liberation or not?" when the piece is absolutely clear about how the attempt at sexual liberation defeated its own ends. "She (Shades) nor I, nor anybody else much, could distinguish between the knuckle crashing into the face of authority, the hand ripping away the garments of restriction, and the penis heroically charging into the forbidden territories the enemy had, over two thousand years, declared to be insanitary, evil, dangerous and only to be had after a good washing in lambsblood.......we redirected military violence into militant sex. A difficult point to realise that the struggle, the assault, the cracking of the prison walls are all effected in order to exercise the right to be tender. A rapid change of gear was needed in mid-strategy and most of us didn't realise it until too late. The young vagina got bruised."

The piece then goes on to say how, far from surmounting alienation, the basic error of mistaking the vagina, shielded by taboo, for the taboo itself, thus attacking the vagina with same aggression summoned to penetrate the taboo, led to redoubled alienation in the formation of the women's movement which is largely made up of "casualties, their beads and kaftans, their mini-skirts and bell-bottoms gone significantly drab."

That a sophisticated, sharp and literate head like yours has read my piece as though it carried an opposite meaning, as though Bunn and his patter were being lionised instead of exposed, is only understandable when I remember that you are operating in the fashion-conscious south-east where a man's reputation may founder unless he throws his lot in with the currently fashionable libertarian movement (Women's Lib) despite the fact that that movement skirts or rides roughshod over De Sade.

* "The Sweet Prince & the Split Banana" - RS Vol.3 p.25
Blake, Brontë, Lautreamont, Freud, Reich, Jung, Bataille, De Beauvoir, Klein and Laing. Only a reading thus blinkered would miss my particular reference to female homosexuals in the paragraph expressing Bunn's sympathy for homosexuals - "a smooth cheek over a collar and tie - a comic knew he could pull the stoppers out."

The blindness then extends to a condemnation of my use of caricature and stereotype (Leonie, by the way, is likened unto a stereotype - "the besotted niece of all small-town librarians" - an original stereotype of my own inventing - She is not a librarian herself, nor yet literally the niece of one; she is an actress and Split Banana is a theatre group "given to mounting theatrical performances" - You can't have it plainer than that) although everybody knows that you can scarcely have literature without stereotype and caricature, from Shakespeare through Dickens to Brecht, neither is it desirable that literature should "purify" itself of such imagery - Politics, ethics and law maybe, but not literature. In fact the character in "Muscle" that forms the greatest stereotype is Bunn himself as you indicate in comparing him with Dawson and Manning although your insensitivity to the near genius of those two gentlemen is, I suppose, one more penalty you pay for dwelling down there in the shade of Westminster and Windsor.

So what I suggest you do is go and read the fucking thing again unaided by anyone who is determined to interpret all experience as evidence of the extremely stereotyped notions of feminism in its premature decadence.

Yrs.,

Jeff. (Nuttall)

Thanks to Bessie Smith, Bette Midler and Nellie Wallace for help in the writing of this letter.

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Dear Jeff,

About your reply to my article; a few preliminary points first.

Of course, I didn't have the benefit of reading the complete novel from which the piece in Not Poetry was extracted, and I look forward to doing so when it's published. But that's neither here nor there, really; we have to assume that an extract stands in its own right and does not give a false impression of the complete work.

The impression I got from the piece - and it's an impression confirmed from several close readings before I consulted Julia - was, and remains, that it is imbued with the very same male aggressiveness towards women that you purport to reject. In my attempt to sort out what was actually going on in the writing, I asked Julia for her opinion, and she helped clarify my thoughts. I resent your implication that I am swayed in my opinions by fashion or by a fear that my "reputation may founder" if I do not follow the dictat of the nearest feminist (whose views, incidentally, you attack without having the vaguest idea what they actually are).
Now to the meat and bones of your letter.

I think the problem is that you are using a potentially legitimate argument to shore up an untenable one. In the process, you throw doubt on the nature of your identification with the first argument. Let me explain. If it were just a question of asserting that the alleged "sexual liberation" of the sixties had its unacceptable side as well as its welcome one, then I think we would have no quarrel. Where the thing becomes contentious is where you go on to describe the women's movement as a "redoubled alienation" organised as a response to sexual aggression. I'll let Julia counter the grotesque caricature (and oversimplification) of feminism that you offer, which is mirrored in your stereotyped portrayal of the feminist characters - since she's better qualified than I to do this. But you see, once again you're saying, OK, so there's still a problem in the relation between the sexes, but women have no right to work out an analysis or a solution, and they must be caricatured or made fun of if they do; the answer is for men to be more gentle. I wonder how you'd react to a similar response to racial problems (white people must be nicer, black power is "redoubled alienation"). I believe, and hope, you'd have a different attitude there.

One or two smaller points to finish. You're right that I condemn your use of caricature and stereotype in the story. You then proceed, quite unnecessarily, to defend the principle of caricature and stereotype. I quite agree with you, it's a legitimate literary device. The thing is, though, who is being caricatured, and to what use is the technique being put? Next, my opinion of comedians like Dawson and Manning: well, "near genius" isn't the phrase I would use, but there we'll just have to agree to differ. I wish, though, you wouldn't keep on about this north-south dichotomy, because it doesn't particularly impress me, nor, I suspect, many of my numerous northern friends. Finally, whatever differences we may have, I don't see the need to resort to the childish sarcasm of your postscript.

Yours,

Ken.

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Dear Jeff Nuttall,

I find it rather odd that from being just a name in a footnote, I now find myself being provoked to write on my own behalf. Until now the frequently encountered use of "thanks to X" in a wide variety of writings had generally conveyed to me an idea of supportive discussion. I hadn't realised it might mean the writer's own views had been overridden by another's - such an interpretation opens up interesting possibilities.

It is indeed hard not to resort to mere sarcasm since you treated me so dismissively in your comments, but I will try to restrict myself to constructive remarks. I should, however, declare I am neither an aspiring poet nor literary critic, but certainly am unashamedly a socialist feminist. Inevitably, such a political perspective shapes my understanding of the world, but that is neither unusual nor does it
preclude my assessment from having a validity.

To address the content of your letter:- Firstly, feminism is not just a fashionable issue of the moment, but has a long history - to my knowledge at least from the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792 if not earlier. Like most movements, its nature has changed over time as a result of different circumstances and debates, which has at times meant its apparent disappearance. The current forms of feminism (the plural is important) are of course not divorced from the sexual liberation movement of the 60s, but I would take issue with your chronology. In America quite clearly, and to a large extent here, the women's liberation movement as it became labelled accompanied other demands for liberation in terms of sexuality and politics. I can find no evidence to suggest it developed simply as a response to the "alienation" experienced by women following "the gang bangs, the one night stands...." Nor do I concede to the view that women concerned with feminism are simply "casualties" of the 60s. The women's liberation movement has provided positive benefits for many individual women. To argue such experience is alienation is for you to assume arrogantly women are deluding themselves.

Secondly, you seem to operate with a view of feminism as one set of beliefs, which is not so. For you to argue the "movement skirts or rides roughshod over....." suggests you have given recent feminist literature and debate very little attention. There has been and continues to be concern to re-evaluate and assess those writers you name alongside many others. Maybe your regional experience of radical feminism, a strand within the movement with whom I and other socialist feminists would have profound disagreement, has discouraged your reading further. Or perhaps you have been misled by media representation, which is suggested by your use of the disparaging term "women's lib" and misguided notion that Germaine Greer was ever "a main voice on the feminist front". Whatever the reasons, your letter contains an oversimplified view of the intellectual debates and roots of current feminism; and "The Secret Heart of the Mammal" (RS Vol.3 p.28) carries a similarly inadequate analysis of feminist perspectives on sexuality, child care and the family. The latter presentation comes very close to the castrating, cold, child hating "women's libber" the media so enjoy presenting as an undesirable contrast to the commendable earth mother, devoted wife and sex object.

I am tempted to continue with references to the wealth of feminist literature, but perhaps you could start by re-reading Leing, where it really isn't very hard to find references to the nuclear family as "authoritarian" and love to be "debilitating".

By all means dismiss feminism, but you would receive more respect in doing so if you at least gave its complexity some serious thought and presented a more considered argument.

Yours,
Julia Phillips.
Dear Me, Ken and Julia,

Where to begin when talking to those whose experience is obviously so different, who are younger, can’t remember wartime, National Service, French letters and spermicides, disgrace attached to illegitimacy, divorce by culpability only, body-shame, sex-guilt etc. etc. etc. and whose culture as per North and South is, I insist, radically different.

One: How, just how, am I going to paint a picture of a man to whom illumination has come unless I give a graphic picture of the state of mind that existed in the man before the change?

Two: Of course I know that feminism has a varied face and honourable antecedents. So did Nazism if you look at Heidegger, Wagner, Nietzsche, D H Lawrence, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Marinetti, Severini, D’Annunzio, etc. etc. etc. And no, I haven’t perhaps done enough reading on the subject. On the other hand the Warsaw Jews hadn’t actually studied Nazism but by Christ they know what it was all about. I do regard that feminism is potentially as destructive as Nazism, the way it’s going and regard my caricature of Leonie Bananaplat as well merited and well-drawn in the best Georg Grosz manner.

Three: Smith, Midler and Wallace are no childish facetiousness. They were (are) all masters (?) of bawdy which is too profound a human structure to be dismissed as "sexist" or whatever. Let’s surmount it but let’s honour it in passing. It had its function and it had its wealth.

Four: The state of Bradford, Manhattan and Wantsworth all indicate (to me anyway) that Black Power is indeed redoubled alienation. However, it provides no true parallel with the feminist thing. "Muscle" is a discovery and a celebration of the female orgasm, declaring the superiority of the female orgasm in terms of natural understanding. It recommends that women teach gentleness and psycho-physical ecology.

Yrs.

Jeff. x (x?)

This correspondence might have continued indefinitely; there is a lot we might have replied to the above, for instance. But we decided to leave it there. However, if anyone wants to contribute anything further, the editor will try to make space in RS Vol.4.

- KE/JP
Dear Ken,

As I said to you a little while ago, I think I should say something in print about Cory Harding's attacks in Peeping Tom; so I would be grateful if you would print this letter.

I'll keep it brief. As C.H.'s attacks in no sense try to command a critical perspective on my texts (or anyone else's), his remarks can only be seen as personal; coming from a one-time friend and publisher of my work, it is easy to read the tone -- and the content -- as pursuing a spirit of private revenge, and I think this assumption is correct. For the vindictiveness is obvious, as is the quality of the tactics involved, e.g. spreading lies about connections with Fascistic organizations in an effort at defamation. The "humprous" angle is about the only thing that can't be taken seriously. For as I said when mentioning the possibility of sending you a letter on the subject, suspicions can be aroused about an underlying basis for such allegations; and I suppose that is C.H.'s game. (I mentioned to you also how a friend of mine, a poet who died a couple of years ago, was wrongly accused of Fascistic affiliations; and how another friend of mine was led to wonder if the allegations were true, not knowing the man personally.) I don't want to speculate any further about why Cory Harding has been doing all this; his reasons are best known to himself, and I'm fairly sure he's not about to divulge them (not the real reasons, anyway). Personally, I'm not interested in these "games"; I simply want to get on with my writing, which has nothing to do with such pursuits. I hope Cory concentrates on his writing, also, rather than playing at things which I believe are beneath any writer's self-respect. Good luck to him if he does.

With best wishes to you, as always --

David.
The next section is devoted to reviews, mostly of poetry publications. Reality Studios would like to expand this section in future volumes. Reviews of not more than about an A4 page in length are sought, but longer, more considered pieces will also be welcomed. These are the subjects that could be covered:

- Poetry books/pamphlets
- Prose books/pamphlets
- Live performances of any sort
- Records & cassettes
- Art objects/exhibitions/installations
- TV programmes/commercials
- Films
- Activity in launderettes & bus queues etc.
- Demonstrations
- Public meetings
- Terrorist activity (including such by the tory party etc.)
- Street theatre, intentional & otherwise
- "Found" objects
- and so on...
David Miller

The Poetry of Clive Faust

It is unusual to find, in contemporary poetry, confidence - or competence - with the sort of play of ideas Clive Faust allows himself, a "play" which is never far from acuity or from a total and committed probity. How many poets, for example, would title a poem "Non-Being or Non-Becoming", (1) let alone bring such matter of thought to any definite poetic realisation. How many, also, would be capable of the finely-achieved detail of this poetry, in the attention to physical/visual details and the particulars of language through which those details are made manifest; for example:

Lit ribs
in night cloud above harbour.
Night winds stir water,
move black rucks white
scums in darkness.

Yet,
they have not reached me. Troughs
in buffetings leavings lip. Flags
freshen,

stiff-
en --
ripple ends.

Low
luff swells
at above mooring, and a rise pre-change,

before
the wind cracks open the sails.

("A Change Blowing Up") (2)

It is precisely, to my mind, the relation between philosophical and spiritual "play", and the empirical particulars of experience, which Faust's poetry attends to with such rare probity and intensity of realisation. Take the end of his poem "Responsories":

Responsories. Who'm I -- anyone to speak?
With stones quoin'd in corner for the silences. (3)

The last line here has the hard, keen beauty of sound worthy of a Louis

(1) Metamorphosed from the Adjacent Cold, Origin Press (87 Dartmouth St, Boston, Massachusetts 02116), 1980.
(2) Token or Trace, Tangent Books (waye Cottage, Chagford, Devon), 1980.
(3) Metamorphosed from the Adjacent Cold.
Zukofsky, and leaves us with silence (as the "responsories" to the question of the poem -- the question of identity, human identity which here is seemingly so frail as to need constant talk: "You must remember what I told you: remember / to keep the talk going, anyhow. / For neither of us's substantial as the talk."), silence echoing with the beauty of the line's sound, and given over to the empirical particulars (the stones of a church) which are sounded in the mind through the particulars of speech -- the hard vocables, "stones", "quoined", "corner". Or look at the poem "Lagoons":

The Terrible
floated on principles, like gondolas,
cooling with their wash the sun-hot stones
in splashed sound.

To get together
with humans to ride it out, stirred up
water, the para-
sympathetic
systems. Subtle solutions.

Delicacies
in reflection. The city quelled;
quelled.

The get-togetherring
of the media dead
foreshortened
at angles -- oil slick
over waver of iridescent coral
towers.

The bump of water. (1)

The poem seeks constantly to move out beyond its particulars to capture -- to say -- "the Terrible" -- the quelled city, "the media dead / foreshortened / at angles", the oil slick, which slip into focus as particulars of "the Terrible". I am reminded of Martin Heidegger, in his essay "The Thing" where he says: "What is this helpless anxiety still waiting for, if the terrible has already happened?"

"The terrifying is unsettling; it places everything outside its own nature." (2) (It is more likely, however, that Faust's sense of "the Terrible" derives from the French thinker René Guénon's The Reign

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(1) Metamorphosed from the Adjacent Cold.
of Quantity.)

In an article called "Careering Poetry", Faust states: "When our culture has been reduced to nothing -- for 'those who have eyes to see' -- the reduction allows also a concentration not open with the expansion of a culture. (We are in the age of a new puritanism, culturally. "I am not talking about sex -- though maybe that too. Puritanism can bring ridding of excess, and that sort of elegance.) Many of the great Yanks display it -- Oppen, Corman, Zukofsky (sort of mentors of mine -- though they're all wrong, somehow)." That last phrase is obviously, at one level, humorous, but it also, of course, marks out the individual dissatisfaction which any writer of true individuality feels with the "solutions" of his fellow-writers, i.e. he or she needs to do it differently, for the sake of an original focus. The closest Faust gets to the poetic "puritanism" -- the compression or paring-away of "excess" -- of Corman or Niedecker, is probably in "Durability":

In the damp
stone darknessesthe lantern aways some light.
Redeemmortality
The Distances
Close for ever.

Typically, his work displays jagged, angular phrasing, and rhythmic timing as odd (i.e. singular) as it's apt (i.e. intuitively "right", powerful), with a lyrical edge which cuts through often when least expected. These characteristics seem to me more of the particular nature of his poetry, than any commitment to what Niedecker called "condensery".

Faust's remark about "our culture (having) been reduced to nothing -- for 'those who have eyes to see'", brings us to the consideration of

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(1) As it happens -- the first writing of Faust's I ever saw was a letter (dated 18.2.1966 and written from Kyoto) in response to Guénon's metaphysics, and published in Studies in Comparative Religion.

(2) Meanjin

(3) Token or Trace.

(4) These things could be posited as easily -- and as surely -- of the jazz musician/composer Thelonious Monk; and the uniqueness of each lies in uniqueness of both temperament and insight compounded through years of patient research.

his fundamental orientation as a poet. In a letter of 17.11.1980 to Kris Homenaley, published by Hemensley in The Merri Creek, Faust wrote: "To understand the starting-point of my thinking one would have to have read Coomaraswamy, Oppen, Dostoyevsky, Herman Broch, Kafka, Tu Fu, Lao Tse, the Nibelungenlied, W C Williams, Beckett, Joyce, Yeats, Kenji Miyazawa, Orwell (the essays), Emily Dickinson, Chekhov, Gheerhroe, Kleist, Sembnal, Wyndham Lewis, the Troubadours, Celan, Nagarjuna, and quite a bit of non-literary material as well. And that's really just a start."
The inclusion of Ananda Coomaraswamy (Guénon could have been listed too), and of the great Mahayana Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna, calls attention to this orientation and provides a particular contextualisation of the other choices. Faust's poetry involves spiritual perspectives concordant with (and to some extent determined by) the transcendental dialectics of Nagarjuna and the unity of religious philosophies entertained at both the theoretical and scholarly/interpretative levels by Coomaraswamy and Guénon. This explains his admiration for — and further, affinity with — the Japanese poet Kenji Miyazawa (d.1933)(1), who was able to harmonise, at a very profound level, poetic modernism (in terms of imagistic and formal strategies) with a devout and philosophically-developed Buddhist belief that denied the conclusions of modern thinking in its carnal, secular, materialistic and rationalistic aspects. A poetry of this kind is in search of what Faust, in the title of one poem, calls "Remote Education"; going — for example —:

to the Alexandria of the Ptolemies

Logos of its centre

after:

we've laid down tools, cleaned
stone dust from our hands, scraped
grease off
in the rites of purification —
in the Hall of us

to mingle, last, with the Great Ones of Abydos. (2)

But in regard to this pursuit, as he says, "We tour always for uncertainty", for — to jump to another poem, "To Tread along the Mean":

The certainty of it's gone.

Not gone far, it's just a little way off.

Somehow your time is reckonable.

Things

happen all right,
to the same you.


(2) Metamorphosed from the Adjacent Cold.
No one's different.

To find

a temple on massive pole-
piers on a Kyoto hillside housing
a thousand-year-old Kannon Bosatsu
they clap torch-candles near to in its chamber every
thirty three years once only --
and you've seen it (chalk it up).

You didn't

know there was such a temple within yourself,
nor what this showed some about you.

Anything

you don't know now you don't want t'know;

dis-

remember you wanted be, do anything else. (1)

If the loss of "expansion" (and "breadth") in culture -- as Faust claims --
also has positive value, i.e. it bestows upon us an eye and ear for
poetic compression -- then the loss of a stable and commonly-held store
of symbols for spiritual realities and values, the loss of this certainty
within the culture, may bestow on us the "compensation" of a creative
uncertainty of radical positivity. The art-historian Werner Schmalenbach,
in discussing the modern painter Julius Bissier, has put the situation
in the following way, which (mutatus mutandis) prevails also for the
writer: "Symbols only have validity when there is general agreement
about their acceptance: they presuppose a community. Where, as in
the world of today, there is no such general agreement, they make no
impact, remaining private, non-commital signs -- unless they acquire
validity through the life the artist has imparted to them. They may,
however, remain to a certain extent intelligible as symbols, in so far
as man even now still preserves within him a stock of symbolic signs,
of archetypal figures, that belong to the 'collective unconscious' and
can therefore rely on our direct, intuitive understanding when we encounter
them. The artist may appeal to this capacity of ours when he invents
his signs. But even apart from this he has every right to use signs that
have value and significance for him, without needing to ask whether
we can read them. Then, however, the crucial thing is that he should not
depend on the symbolic content but add to the symbols the content of his
artistic gift. What counts is not the symbolism but the artistic
inspiration. Bissier was aware of this from the start. The spiritual
expectation he incorporated in his signs concerned his formal artistic
expression. Not life in so far as it was symbolised, but the life he
instilled into his signs through the act of painting, determined their
effect. So it was natural, too, that he should rapidly give up the fixed,
preconceived symbolic forms ... and concentrate entirely on the free,

(1) Metamorphosed from the Adjacent Cold. (I have quoted this poem
only in part.) See also -- especially -- "Excavations along the
Nile" in the same volume.
painterly 'écriture'." (1) Our contact with the unknown -- i.e. all that is free from the grasp of rationalistic comprehension and reduction to the order of totality -- through a traditional store of symbols having become fragmented and distanced, we are given the possibility and the need of letting the unknown become present in a more direct way -- for as the poet Hölderlin said, "Near / And nearly ungraspable / God. But salvation also / Flourishes where danger is." (2) Schmalenbach also says of Bissier: "The fact that (the miniatures') are always new is one of the strange and wonderful things about this art. This may be because on each occasion Bissier exposes himself to the unknown. An ever-repeated step into the unknown is the very condition of his art." (3) As it was also for poets like Miyazawa or Paul Celan or for the English poet John Riley, this "ever-repeated step into the unknown" -- this creative reliance on uncertainty -- is at the foundation of Clive Faust's poetry.

(1) Schmalenbach, Julius Bissier, Thames & Hudson, 1964. Cf. also David Jones (Epoch and Artist, Faber, 1959): "The artist deals wholly in signs. His signs must be valid, that is valid for him and, normally, for the culture that has made him. But there is a time factor affecting these signs. If a requisite now-ness is not present, the sign, valid in itself, is apt to suffer a kind of invalidation. This presents most complicated problems to the artist working outside a reasonably static culture-phase."


(3) Julius Bissier.
DAVID MILLER

Very little in Philip Jenkins' previous work, (1) much of which is collected in On the Beach With Eugène Boudin, (2) would have led one to expect the gravity (3) and depth of his ongoing serial-poem Cairo, of which Books 1 & 2 (1979/80)(4) are now available. Jenkins' work in the early to mid-'70s was predominantly related to the New York School aesthetic of ironic, elegant and often whimsical linguistic surfaces, and he worked within the scope of that aesthetic with notable verve, humour and poetic compression. Like some of the N.Y. School poets, Jenkins schooled himself in the French "cubist" poetry of Pierre Reverdy and Max Jacob, and beyond the mere use of discontinuous structuring (derived from Reverdy) and of irony, jest and parody (from Jacob) which the N.Y. School poets developed, Jenkins returns us to a more complete realisation of the fundamental orientation of these authors, i.e. Reverdy's sense of image-relations as a making-manifest of the spiritual, transcending the author's ego, and Jacob's combination of jest and parody with a mystical or supernatural sense of things, to "laugh the world away". (Reverdy: "One creates a powerful image, new for the spirit, in bringing together, without comparison, two distant realities of which the spirit alone perceives their relationships.") (5) At the same time, Jenkins works through this to an independence of vision and literary mode.

The resources involved in Cairo are highly unusual; Jenkins draws on such unlikely materials (or combinations of materials) as Neoplatonism, Egyptian religion, the Hermetica, St John of the Cross, Henry Vaughan, Mallarmé, Flann O'Brien, Chandler, British television-comedy, and Funk music/performance. The poetry is extended through this range of reference into a multi-stranded dimensionality, without any sign of "strain" or of pretentiousness in its range of reference, nor with any diffusion of focus. Cairo is indeed most intensely focused, upon a series of perspectives on existence which are prior to, behind or beyond, or at the edge of our normal being in the world, and the dominant cultural perspectives of that beingness. His approach to these perspectives is derived mainly from ancient Egyptian religion and Neoplatonism; from the former is derived the title of the work, underlined by explicit references to Egypt. The shifts in approach to this "namelessness", i.e. an intuitive illumination of reality prior to name and concept, which circles around

(1) The major exception is "A Sailor's Suit and Cap", included in On the Beach with Eugène Boudin.
(2) Transgravity Press, Deal, Kent, 1976. This collects work up to and including 1974.
(3) A gravity alloyed with playful humour.
(5) Jenkins has, incidentally, made translations of Reverdy and Jacob, as well as of Mallarmé and André Salmon.
"nothing" (no-thing, the undivided unity or wholeness of phenomena prior to analysis into separate, finite, strictly bounded and divided "things"), can be seen by comparing sections 8 and 10 of Book 1:

(8:)

the film sticks in the projector
the image: a child's face out of focus
what is there of hunger that clings
to this expression? I don't know
"dans l'oubli ferme par le cadre"

(10:)

the primordial snake, Neheb-kaa, "Provider of Attributes" holding all subsequent creation within its folds

we are here

gods apparently and yet
our faces remain unformed

"in the infinity
the nothingness
the nowhere and
the dark"

we are the uncreated
the predistinguishable

we are the characteristics of the Abyss.

Section 8 includes, as its last line, a quotation from Mallarmé: "in the oblivion bound by the frame". (1) The ordinary becomes unstuck (the image is out of focus, and this lets us see beyond the power of the image to claim reality for itself rather than for that "oblivion" which it frames and makes manifest); the details of the ordinary become the locus for transcending that ordinariness. In Section 10, however, the images are

---

(1) "Plusieurs Sonnets", no.4 (C F MacIntyre's translation). The same verse of this sonnet gives us the "septet of "scintillations" echoed in Section 9 of Cairo (Book 1): "the seven stars that combine to form / the constellation we know as the Great Bear".
entirely other than any conventional representations of our own culture; the remoteness of Neheb-kau is here the locus for pursuing Jenkins' quest for the "nameless" as the film-image of a child was in S. But this quest is not without parallel in contemporary Western art and thought; indeed, a large number of examples could be given for creative undertakings which intersect with this pursuit, from Martin Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" (the notorious lecture on "Nothing") through the writings of Blanchot, Du Bouchet, Celan, to Canadian painter Jack Chambers' comment, "By perceptual vision ... I mean that faculty of inner vision when the object appears in the splendour of its essential namelessness." It is also comparable with Australian poet Clive Faust's concern with the Buddhist Sunyata (Void). Jenkins' roots are, however, as I have said, in the Neoplatonic hermeneutics which, as a poet of the contemporary period, he approaches via "boundary-situations" (Jaspers) and states or situations of extremity (which Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" invokes as surely as the fiction of the French "negative Heideggerian" Blanchot). "Plotinus' experience of union with the One corresponds to the experience which W T Stace calls the 'undifferentiated unity', a state in which sensuous imagery and conceptual thought are transcended, the mind becomes perfectly unified and individual limitations are felt to be abolished." (R T Wallis, Neoplatonism.) It is a strange path that pursues this by the way of the Via Negativa of Dionysius the Areopagite and St John of the Cross, through the imperfect example of the hierophant-poet Mallarmé's Platonic aestheticism, into the latter part of the 20th century. The contemporary period is visibly present in Cairo in allusions to Eichmann's trial, or to a performance by a Punk group, Siouxsie and the Banshees. Extremity, death, rebirth: it is in such principles of reality that Jenkins seeks for some sense of what lies beyond the boundaries of our lived world. If his allusion to a performance by Siouxsie and the Banshees in Section 4 (Book 2) is given for the sake of a contemporary image of rebirth (an image of which Jenkins insists upon the ancient correspondences, just the same), in the beautiful prose of Section 2 (Book 2) it is an archaic image of death he gives us: "A man is dreaming of his death. Quietly, he appears through the blur of faces and positions himself at the head of the steps. The crowds part slightly to allow him access. Deferentially, they step back isolating him. He appears through the blur of faces. The crowds part slightly. He positions himself at the head of the steps and the breeze covers his face like cellophane. The stifled drone of voices rises and falls. He appears through the crowds who, deferentially, step back isolating him. In slow motion, he descends towards the boat which laps noiselessly at its moorings. The breeze covers his face like cellophane as he enters the boat. He lies down among the byssus and the rush mats. The boat laps noiselessly at its moorings. Above him, the pylons from which fly the flags of his victories. The boat moves slowly off into the clear waters. He lies among the byssus and the rush mats. The pylons extend into the sky at midday. The boat moves off. Above him fly the flags of his victories. His hand is allowed to fall into the cool waters of the Nile." The structure of this passage, with its partial repetitions, realises a hallucinatory or even visionary state which carries, beneath the calm, quiet, controlled surface of the writing, a flickering intensity. The extremity I invoked above might be more obvious, than elsewhere in the poem, in Section 9 of Book 2, with its catalogue of hallucinations and its prose evocation of "a state of extremis" in which the "I" of Cairo found himself "in a North African transit stage of (his) own invention"; it is not, however, the "state of extremis" which concerns Jenkins as much, for he manifests no interest in the sort of hysterical and narcissistic rhetoric of subjectivism which has been labelled "confessional poetry", but rather the realisation this opens upon: "We arrive by or despite our own efforts. Inexorably
and without remorse, we shall be here." Or (and it is much the same thing) it opens upon what here is imaged as inundation. This is the subject of Section 5 of Book 1, but it is left to Section 10 of Book 2 to relate the event itself of inundation, which is both the flooding off the Nile and the spiritual reality of which this is an earthly correspondence.

The canals are open

the two reed-floats of heaven
are placed for Horus that he may
ferry over therewith to Ra

the twin doors of heaven are revealed
the doors of earth also.

The art-historian Barbara Rose wrote of the painter Ad Reinhardt that: "His own personal disillusion with the notion of 'progress' in art, of the rhetoric of 'breakthrough after breakthrough' characteristic of recent American art criticism, permeates his late writings. These consist mainly of fragments, aphorisms, and visionary notes on the survival of high art -- spiritual art -- in a secular mass culture."

"At this difficult moment, Reinhardt appears a prophet of the realisation that high art can only endure as spiritual art." (1) Philip Jenkins' work, like that of some of his immediate contemporaries, (2) helps to remind us of the corresponding realisation that poetry can only endure as spiritual poetry.

(2) To give several examples: John Perelman, Mark Karlins, Brian McInerney, George Evans, John Levy, Gil Ott, Gaspard Sobin, Gaspari Walker, and amongst the older poets, George Oppen, Cid Corman, Frank Samperi.
Alan Halsey's poetry derives strongly from Pound and Pound's Vorticist connections. Halsey's relationship with Vorticism is systematically worked out in an, as yet, unpublished text called: Sections Drawn Across the Vortex. Pound is only minimally present in this work; the extreme pride of place being given to Wyndham Lewis. I would like now to hand the reader over to Halsey's Apothecary series and ask him to judge what position may be given Pound. In the Apothecary books Pound is represented as the innovator, both stylistically and schematically. Back to Sections and we find Pound present in name only; he is given the same character name as Pullman, and the Pisan plain is likened to the plain outside the Magnetic City. Both Pullman and the Magnetic City appear in Lewis' novel The Childermass. The question now would be is it possible for Pound to re-assert himself in Halsey's new book: Perspectives on the Reach. Pound does assert himself but not in the ways mentioned concerning the Apothecary books. Whereas in Apothecary Pound's thrust is as the innovator, in Perspectives he is present only as the purveyor of a certain single politic. Perhaps, to make this easier, I should say that the politic is really anti-politic: we are being concerned with the past history of England and it does appear to be loused up with ill direction from both Church and King's government. The Halsey/Pound version of historic evil is one condemned to death by an autonomous upheaval of good and right order. The power of revolution comes from Albion: the great Blakean giant now dressed in the regalia of a new Mars. The technical strengths acquired are now not via Pound. There are too many visions. The poems flicker, back and forth, into strange new light. Instead of Pound we are being introduced to William Burroughs. But Burroughs is transitional; a sort of liberty of the text with which the apocalypse has had to be nourished. Albion becomes Halsey's property. "Last Days in the Vision", the first part of Perspectives, ends with Albion in a very pleasant pastoral mood and snatching "sleep in February mists".

The second section of the book, there are five sections, does not mention Albion. It is titled "Six Letters on Change & Exchange" and consists of six addresses in the form of letters to a person, or persons, whose identification remains unknown. In these letters Halsey is very much concerned with his own immediate environment. He is writing about the village in which he is living. Halsey appears, at least on the surface, to have left the heavy aura of Pound behind and begun to create a poetry of largely personal confines. This isn't to say he's not fighting the same battle against Church, Kings and usury. All this is still present but is wedged in tight against the experience of Hay-on-Wye, Halsey's village. What may be happening is that halsey is attempting to create a sense of place in which to root his numerous interests in history and legend. The ploy may prove interesting as it may also be the opening out of an investigation of the type seen in the work of William Carlos Williams. As yet there is not enough area revealed for us to take proper notice. But what is certain is that with Halsey's localisation of the artist we are experiencing a move away from the
heavy Poundian concerns. I would want to know if that move is permanent.

Pound, again, appears to be absent from the next two sections of the book, "Perspectives on the Reach" and "Event Horizons". The title section consists of some seventeen numbered parts concerned enough with English medieval history to be read as personal monologues of the time. I will say very little about this section except that Halsey writes with words issued from the angel. Everything is poised, elegant and ultimately at peace. "Event Horizons" presents us with one long poem. We are not, in this poem, concerned with history as far back as the medieval. Time dating is apparent in material confided, thus: Coventry, Dresden, Passchendaele, Somme. The poem is set in the 320th and is a textural vision of what's offered holiness as intellect. What will be passed to the reader will be something of almost alchemical intensity.

The last section of the book bears the title of "55 Texts for the Journey". It takes the form of fifty five statements varying from two words to four lines in length. Once again there is no evidence of Pound but there may be evidence to suggest connections with Wyndham Lewis and William Burroughs. Within the fifty five statements may be found the rudimentary germations of a sci-fi story. Both Lewis and Burroughs have worked in areas which could be regarded as sci-fi. The story is not too clear but it may be described as a probable: Creation—Holocaust—Exodus. In that order we get the story of a community founded by beings from another star, a long period ending in upheaval and social decay followed by the leaving of a select group of survivors to find fresh habitable land. The story put like this makes pretty ordinary sci-fi and would probably make better Burroughs than Lewis. When told by Halsey it becomes an exercise in mythical narrative. The story, if such it is, makes a suitable ending to a book which starts with the rebirth of Albion. It also shows Halsey shaking off the mantle of his mentor, Ezra Pound. If that is a good thing we will have to wait and find out.

27-29.8.81
I'VE HAD A PRESENT on my desk for some months now, thinking to do a review but uncertain how to deal with a poetry that either refuses to name or refuses to do anything other. Cris Cheek of course came to prominence in a British concrete/soundtext ambience, being linked, under the tutelage of Bob Cobbing, with P C Fencott and Lawrence Upton, at first with the performance group JgJgJg, and then when that broke up in a looser grouping, and finally increasing performing on his own or in contexts other than poetry - dance, music. He has also spent time in the States - and a prefatory page carries a dedication to Rosemary and Kirby Malone, in whose house in Baltimore much of the present book was composed. So the influence too of american language-centred poets is not inapposite. "language movement perception".

A PRESENT is a perfect-bound book, about 200pp, A4 size, so it's quite hefty, but that's not the only reason for saying this is Cris' most substantial book to date. The works - "written in cars at traffic lights, improvised onto tape and transcribed", etc - are mediated by his own printing processes and separated off the one from the other by graphic title pages, derived from scribbles and images thrown up on heat stencils or whatever. In other words, it's a home-made product entirely, a labour of love one suspects, and that's in part what makes it more interesting than a lot of the american stuff it has affinities with, which is too wonderfully produced by half, too slick and empty and finished. It still leaves the gate open for the "so-what?" reflex in places that's often triggered by non-referential (pan-referential? that would better describe this) writing, but there's a nice rough texture on the whole that you can get to grips with, and since it's so obviously loose and open-ended, well, if some of it's boring, then the way it's made you don't have to read it all. Not all at once, anyway. Much isn't meant to be "read" for that matter, in any sense other than "scanned", and in this context the irony of one piece - "a little essay: on readability & ease for marshall r esse" - is not to be missed. The whole piece is typ'd on what I assume to have been a defective typewriter with the letters jumping all over the place out of registration and half out of sight.

"Viscerality" - is that the word I was groping for? is that a word?? There are some affinities with Ulli Freer's work. But I digress.

The other thing to say is that a lot of this has to be seen as scores derived from improvisatory processes - I am amused by

"cheek to cheek
Listen! Listen!"

(from "A")

- which themselves may at future points serve for further, public improvisations, though I don't know to what extent the particular pieces here - "from conversation, from decaying works of 'art', in bed, from the television, the radio on, the memory or meteorology, space" - are still seen by the author as having a performance life. The dates are,
up to March 1980 (date of publication) from '76 or so. At any rate, I don't see myself struggling through the whole of "root and flight" on the page, densely hand-written in fragmented capital letter words for ten pages, finally degenerating into scribble.

A Present is exactly that, a gift partly-wrapped, in a short run, with lacunae and errors Unglossed over, weak lines left in and noted rather than removed ("there comes a time when") and deletions (again, I presume) indicated by xxxx ("drawing on the traditions"). The numerous dedications reinforce the effect (friendly homeliness, or incest, cliquishness, depending on your point of view). The message is never unmediated, type(writer)ography and spacing used to the full, punctuation used to disrupt, rather than, to, assist, meaning.

I've mentioned "drawing on the traditions"; which is my favourite, and the longest, piece. It's dedicated to John Wieners and is built up with phrase and found language cadence brick as it were by brick. Here is (it runs to 19pp) part of it; the last page and a half:

"no one can be safe in love
who hopes
become a hat
fled party with a sailor
sucking the wet rag
rid of the thorn cult
bites on blackness animal grid mist over
stretched out neck
blossom
the blue sat spangles breed pool
balanced casually on the nape
or wear as a crown part of the scarf
ours into well this is more uneasy
a recording of loss ninety degrees resigned to what
to innocence, futility, acceptance
with innocence a lost recourse disguised in Gauguin's eye
two black women and a greyhound
Martini
Que

how we continually joke with the terrible terrible
court the ridiculous
fear to discover
water shit down
boats up beach world circle
raise the light mat
boat by light cabaret
The Englishwoman from The 'Star'
the most important sense of humour
equilibrium
she holds the child to her breast
imagination
glance today"

REGARDING Hannah Weiner, I am in the unusual position for a small press editor of reviewing the work of a poet I don't know personally. Well, that's no bad change. Her writing is eccentric to say the least; the question is, is she a "naive" who's been taken up by the smart language crew, or an extremely sophisticated writer putting on an act? Now, I don't believe in naive artists, but the latter concept is difficult to cope with too, unless extensive chemical assistance is involved. Let's have a look at some of it:

"I am
STATEMENTS
understanding
CHARLES

I am also
hurried
sometimes
S
P
I E
K G
S A
I P
A

I am briefing
myself on it
I am worried
I AM CHARLES

Why am I writing
a BEFORE READING
this new book
HANNAH CLARIFY

write statements
in this book
I am worried
sometimes stupid
S G
M N
A I
I Y
D
B}l~FOfu!!

I writes like Bernadette sometimes OK
Is PLEASE

Statement Friday everyone
STOP" ("Little Book 115
Virgin Feb 12-13 78")

It goes on in that vein for most of the book's 90-odd pages. Now, this really is self-referential stuff if anything. The cover design imitates a school exercise book, leading us to believe that these pieces are transcribed daily jottings in such books ("I likes my gray BOOKS" it begins) between May '77 and September '79 (the "books" are numbered 107 to 144, so she's been at it a while). There are comic moments, and, as in the extract, pathos - Hannah constantly chatters to and chides herself ("HANNAH DON'T / SPEAK OF IT"; "OH HANNAH / GOOD THINKING") - worries about spelling, death, friends in jail, and spelling again - but mostly writes reminders and instructions to herself about the writing she's actually doing, telling herself to turn the page, finish the book, "dont describe/your purpose in / life stupid". Somebody called Jimmie or Jim figures prominently, as do Bruce, Charles, Bernadette, James - spot the New York writers. In the end, there's an element of narcissism (spelling?) that gets wearisome. So: next question: is she going to lay off the speed or whatever and do something different for her next book? can she do that and stay in character?

STOP PRESS....arrived 15.x.81, too late for inclusion on pp.86/87

Two items from GALLOPING DOG PRESS:

Peter FINCH: Blues & Heartbreakers, poems for performance.


and also:

ELEMENT 5, No.1 (Andy Sanderson, 17 Winmill Terrace, Swansae); Bielski/
Federico/Finch/Jenkins/Lorca/Machado/Parr/Schwols/Tekawah/ Torrance/
Tripp.

84
Well, this is a pretty strange record, not so much because of its format (an LP and a single packaged together with a blank square of cardboard in a fold-out box) as because of the hybrid nature of the music.

The lyrics, by former Burroughs collaborator Brion Gysin, are printed on the packaging and date variously from between 1949 and 1980. Lacy's treatments are extremely varied, although using throughout his regular band of: Lacy (soprano sax); Steve Potts (alto & soprano); Bobby Few (piano); Jean-Jacques Avenel (bass); Oliver Johnson (drums); supplemented by Irene Aebi (voice and violin).

Side 1 of the LP pairs "Gay Paree Bop", which is indeed very much in bebop vein (the riff is even vaguely reminiscent of "Salt Peanuts"), with an excursion into art music in "Nowhere Street". On the latter, Aebi's violin as well as voice comes into play.

On Side 2, there's some good soloing on "Somebody Special" and "Keep the Change", both sung by Aebi; but these sandwich a real oddity, a duet between Johnson's drums and Gysin's own voice chanting a long poem, "Luvzya", which celebrates... But let me just mention that it's dedicated to Vladimir Nabokov, Jerry Lee Lewis and Roman Polanski (g'ddit?).

"Permutations", the first side of the single, strings together three permutational word pieces, "Junk is no good baby", Kick That Habit Man" and "I don't work you dig". These are also chanted by Gysin, to musical backing. "Junk is no good baby / Is no good baby junk / No good baby is junk", etc. Each particular syllable has attached to it a different musical note, and so the music too is permutational. This is a commit that quickly pulls. On the other hand, the second side has Lacy himself vocalising in duet with Aebi on the rather endearing "Blue Baboon", a relaxed boogie to which Potts contributes a jaunty solo. A hit single?

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85
Books/pamphlets

Paul BUCK: No Lettuces for Miss Lush (Stingy Artist, 33 Shelley Road, Thornhill, Southampton).
Ulli's Room, a piece written for radio (Loot 2:2, Spectacular Diseases, 83b London Rd, Peterborough, Camb.) 30p. Cover by Ulli Freer.

Allen FISHER: Unpolished Mirrors parts F,G,H (Spanner, 64 Lanercost Rd, London SE2 5JR). The last 3 in the set; H contains guide to reading the whole "Place" project, of which this is part. Inibrations (Lobby Press, see below for address) 45p. "Business verse."


John HALL: Repressed Intimations (Fig 6, 2 Kepler Gatehouse, Durham DH1 1LE)

Alan HALSEY: The Book of Coming Forth in Official Secrecy (Writers Forum, 262 Randolph Ave, London W9) 35p. Present State (Spectacular Diseases, see BUCK for address) £2.50. Perspectives on the Reach (Galloping Dog Press) £1.75 (see full review)

Harry HOOGSTRALEN: Lipnoofer Luga Qalib (Amsterdam School Poetry Series, Uitgeverij 261, PO Box 2751, 6401 DG Heerlen, Holland) 48pp pbk, "translated by the author from the Dutch into the English & back again".

Nicki JACKOWSKA: Incubus (Menard Press, 8 The Oaks, Woodside Ave, London N12 8AR) 75p. Poems "written in the face of a possible nuclear holocaust".

Banquet (Siren Press, Oneholme Farm, Stalithes, nr.Saltaurn, N. Yorks.) 1980

Eric WOTTRAN: Elegies (Galloping Dog Press, 45 Salisbury Gardens, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 3HP) 100pp A4 perfect bond, £2.50. The complete collection.

Peter HILLIOT: A narrative of the travails of S whilst he is in prison (Loot 2:3, Spectacular Diseases, see above) 30p. Draws on Schiele - cp. with Homensley piece in this issue of RS.

Tom PICKARD: OK Tree! (Pig Press, 7 Cross View Terrace, Neville's Cross, Durham DH1 4JY).

Sir Martin RYLE: Towards the Nuclear Holocaust (Menard Press, see JACKOWSKA for address) 75p. Not poetry, but a pamphlet warning of the destruction being prepared, Menard has for the time being abandoned literary publishing to concentrate on nuclear issues.

Ken SMITH: Fox Running (Bloodaxe Books, 1 North Jesmond Ave, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 3JX) £1.50. Welcome reissue of out-of-print major long poem.


Nigel WELLS: The Winter Festivals (Bloodaxe Books, see SMITH for address) 80pp pbk, £3.
Magazines (please note: prices for single issues exclude postage)


FIGS 6, special John Hall issue, see Books/Mags. Sub £1.

LOBBY NEWSLETTER 17 (yz, c/o the Hobson Gallery, 44a Hobson St, Cambridge CB1 1NL) 30p. 72pp, featuring Glenda George interview + work, Bill Griffiths, Lawrence Upton, plus pages of reviews, etc.

LOOT 2:2 (Paul Buck) & 2:3 (Peter Philipott), see Books/Mags.


NOT POETRY 4 (Peter Hodgkiss, Galloping Dog - see MOTTRAH above for address) £1, or 4 issues for £4. Glen Baxter cover + Peter Baker/A Fisher/Baxter/Daphne Marlatt/Metcalf/K Hemensley/Miller/Tipton.

PALPI (Poetry And Little Press Information)Nos.4 & 5 (ALP, 262 Randolph Ave, London W9) 40p, or £2 for 4 issues, or incl. in full sub to ALP, £5. 4: The Book, by B Griffiths, features on Sixpack, Bill Butler, etc; 5: Full history of 15 yrs of ALP, fascinating; + listings.

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SPANNER 21 (Vol.3 No.1) (Allen Fisher, see Books/mags for address) 75p, or £6 for 10 issues. This issue is "Forest Poems" by Anthony Barnett.

VANESSA 7/ONE 5 (John Welch, The Many Press, see above for address) £1.10 incl. p&p, A5 format for joint issue. Tom Lowenstein/Fieling Dawson/Jim Burns/P Riley/Nigel Wheals/Welch/John Freeman/Halsey.

Cassettes


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**Note:** Only Vol.3 and Vol.2 No.4 (pp 63-82) are in print. However, xerox copies can be made on request of out-of-print pages - apply for prices. Microfiches of each complete volume can also be supplied if required.

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Names in CAPITALS are those of contributors to RS; names in lower case are those of authors who are the subject of critical articles or reviews.

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