"Art as Technique"

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by: Viktor Shklovsky

If we start to examine the general laws of perception, we see that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all of our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic; if one remembers the sensations of holding a pen or of speaking in a foreign language for the first time and compares that with his feeling at performing the action for the ten thousandth time, he will agree with us. Such habituation explains the principles by which, in ordinary speech, we leave phrases unfinished and words half expressed. In this process, ideally realized in algebra, things are replaced by symbols. Complete words are not expressed in rapid speech; their initial sounds are barely perceived. Alexander Pogodin offers the example of a boy considering the sentence "The Swiss mountains are beautiful" in the form of a series of letters: T, S, m, a, b. [1]

This characteristic of thought not only suggests the method of algebra, but even prompts the choice of symbols (letters, especially initial letters). By this "algebraic" method of thought we apprehend objects only as shapes with imprecise extensions; we do not see them in their entirety but rather recognize them by their main characteristics. We see the object as though it were enveloped in a sack. We know what it is by its configuration, but we see only its silhouette. The object, perceived thus in the manner of prose perception, fades and does not leave even a first impression; ultimately even the essence of what it was is forgotten. Such perception explains why we fail to hear the prose word in its entirety (see Leo Jakubinsky's article[2]) and, hence, why (along with other slips of the tongue) we fail to pronounce it. The process of "algebrization," the over-automatization of an object, permits

the greatest economy of perceptive effort. Either objects are assigned only one proper feature - a number, for example - or else they function as though by formula and do not even appear in cognition:

I was cleaning and, meandering about, approached the divan and couldn't remember whether or not I had dusted it. Since these movements are habitual and unconscious I could not remember and felt that it was impossible to remember - so that if I had dusted it and forgot - that is, had acted unconsciously, then it was the same as if I had not. If some conscious person had been watching, then the fact could be established. If, however, no one was looking, or looking on unconsciously, if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.[3]

And so life is reckoned as nothing. Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been." And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important...

After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it[4] -hence we cannot say anything, significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways. Here I want to illustrate a way used repeatedly by Leo Tolstoy, that writer who, for Merezhkovsky at least, seems to present things as if he himself saw them, saw them in their entirety,

and did not alter them...

Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects. For example, in "Shame" Tolstoy "defamiliarizes" the idea of flogging in this way: "to strip people who have broken the law, to hurl them to the floor, and "to rap on their bottoms with switches," and, after a few lines, "to lash about on the naked buttocks." Then he remarks:

Just why precisely this stupid, savage means of causing pain and not any other - why not prick the shoulders or any part of the body with needles, squeeze the hands or the feet in a vise, or anything like that?
I apologize for this harsh example, but it is typical of Tolstoy's way of pricking the conscience. The familiar act of flogging is made unfamiliar both by the description and by the proposal to change its form without changing its nature. Tolstoy uses this technique of "defamiliarization", constantly. The narrator of "Kholstomer," for example, is a horse, and it is the horse's point of view (rather than a person's) that makes the 'content of the story seem unfamiliar. Here is how the horse regards the institution of private property:

I understood well what they said about whipping and Christianity. But then I was absolutely in the dark. What's the meaning of "his own," "his colt"? From these phrases I saw that people thought there was some sort of connection between me and the stable. At the time I simply could not understand the connection. Only much later, when they separated me from the other horses, did I begin to understand. But even then I simply could not see what it meant when they called me "man's property."
The words "my horse" referred to me, a living horse, and seemed as strange to me as the words "my land," "my air," "my water."

But the words made a strong impression on me. I thought about them constantly, and only after the most diverse experiences with people did I understand, finally, what they meant. They meant this: In life people are guided by words, not by deeds. It's not so much that they love the possibility of doing or not doing something as it is the possibility of speaking with words, agreed on among themselves, about various topics. Such are the words "my" and "mine," which they apply to different things, creatures, objects, and even to land, people, and horses. They agree that only one may say "mine" about this, that or the other thing. And the one who says "mine" about the greatest number of things is, according to the game which they've agreed to among themselves, the one they consider the most happy. I don't know the point of all this, but it's true. For a long time I tried to explain it to myself in terms of some kind of real pin ' ' but I had to reject that explanation because it was wrong.

Many of those, for instance, who called me their own never rode on me - although others did. And so with those who fed me. Then again, the coachman, the veterinarians, and the outsiders in general treated me kindly, yet those who called me their own did not. In due time, -having widened the scope of my observations, I satisfied myself that the notion "my," not only has relation'to us horses, has no other basis than a narrow human instinct which is called a sense of or right to private property. A man says "this house is mine" and never lives in it; he only worries about its construction and upkeep. A merchant says "my shop," or "my dry goods shop," for instance, and does not even wear clothes made from the better cloth he keeps in hi's own shop.

- There are people who call a tract of land their own; but they never set eyes on it and never take a stroll on it. There are people who call others their own, yet never see them. And the whole relationship between them is that the so-called "owners" treat the others unjustly.

There are people who call women their own, or their "wives," but their women live with other men. And people strive not for the good in life, but for goods they can call their own.

I am now convinced that this is the essential difference between people and ourselves. And therefore, not even considering the other ways in which we are superior ' -but considering just this one virtue, we can bravely claim to stand higher than men on the ladder of living creatures. The actions of men, at least those with whom I have had dealings, are guided by words - ours by deeds.

The horse is killed before the end of the story, but the manner of the narrative, its technique, does not change:

Much later they put Serpukhovsky's body, which had experienced the world, which had eaten and drunk, into the ground. They could profitably send neither his hide, nor his flesh, nor his bones anywhere.
But since his dead body, which had gone about in the world for twenty years, was a great burden to everyone, its burial was only a superfluous embarrassment for the people. For a long time no one had needed him; for a long time he had been a burden on all. But nevertheless, the dead who buried the dead found it necessary to dress this bloated body, which immediately began to rot, in a good uniform and good boots; to lay it in a good new coffin with new tassels at the four corners, then to place this new coffin in another of lead and ship it to Moscow; there to exhume ancient bones and at just that spot, to hide this putrefying body, swarming with maggots, in its new uniform and clean boots, and to cover it over completely with dirt.

Thus we see that at the end of the story, Tolstoy continues to use the technique even though the motivation for it (the reason for its use) is gone.

In War and Peace Tolstoy uses the same technique in describing whole battles as if battles were something new. These descriptions are too long to quote; it would be necessary to extract a considerable part of the four-volume novel. But Tolstoy uses the same method in describing the drawing room and the theater:

The middle of the stage consisted of flat boards; by the sides stood painted pictures representing trees, and at the back a linen cloth was stretched down to the floorboards. Maidens in red bodices and white skirts sat on the middle of the stage. One, very fat, in a white silk dress, sat apart on a narrow bench to which a green pasteboard box was glued from behind. They were all singing something. When they had finished, the maiden in white approached the prompter's box. A man in silk with tight-fitting pants on his fat legs approached her with a plume and began to sing and spread his arms in dismay. The man in the tight pants finished his song alone; then the girl sang. After that both remained silent as the music resounded; and the man, obviously waiting to begin singing his part with her again, began to run his fingers over the hand of the girl in the white dress. They finished their song together, and everyone in the theater began to clap and shout. But the men and women on stage, who represented lovers, started to bow, smiling and raising their hands.
In the second act were pictures representing monuments and openings in the linen cloth representing the moonlight, and they raised lampshades on a frame. As the musicians started to play the bass horn and counter-bass, a large number of people in black mantels poured onto the stage from right and left. The people, with something like daggers in their hands, started to wave their arms. Then still more people came running out and began to drag away the maiden who had been wearing a white dress but who now wore one of sky blue. They did not drag her off immediately, but sang with her for a long time before dragging her away. Three times they struck on something metallic behind the side scenes, and everyone got down on his knees and began to chant a prayer.

Several times all of this activity was interrupted by enthusiastic shouts from the spectators…

Anyone who knows Tolstoy can find several hundred such passages in his work. His method of seeing things out of their normal context is also apparent in his last works. Tolstoy described the dogmas and rituals he attacked as if they were unfamiliar, substituting everyday meanings for the customarily religious meanings of the words common in church ritual. Many persons were painfully wounded; they considered it blasphemy to present as strange and monstrous what they accepted as sacred. Their reaction was due chiefly to the technique through which Tolstoy perceived and reported his environment. And after turning to what he had long avoided, Tolstoy found that his perceptions had unsettled his faith.

The technique of defamiliarization is not Tolstoy's alone. I cited Tolstoy because his work is generally known.

Now, having explained the nature of this technique, let us try to determine the approximate limits of its application. I personally feel that defamiliarization is found almost everywhere form is found… An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it, its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it…

Such constructions as "the pestle and the mortar," or "Old Nick and the infernal regions" (Decameron) are also examples of the technique of defamiliarization. And in my article on plot construction I write about defamiliarization in psychological parallelism. Here, then, I repeat that the perception of disharmony in a harmonious context is important in parallelism. The purpose of parallelism, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the

usual perception of an object into the sphere of new perception - that is, to make a unique semantic modification.

In studying poetic speech in its phonetic and lexical structure as well as in its characteristic distribution of words, and in the characteristic thought structures compounded-from the words, we find everywhere the artistic trademark - that is, we find material obviously created to remove the automatism or perception; the author's purpose is to create the vision which results from that deautomatized perception. A work is created "artistically" so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception. As a result of this lingering, the object is perceived not in its extension in space, but, so to speak, in its continuity. Thus "poetic language" gives satisfaction. According to Aristotle, poetic language must appear strange and wonderful; and, in fact, it is often actually foreign: the Sumerian used by the Assyrians, the Latin of Europe during the Middle Ages, the Arabisms of the Persians, the Old Bulgarian of Russian literature, or the elevated, almost literary language of folk songs. The common archaisms of poetic language, the intricacy of the sweet new style [dolce stil nuovo][5]the obscure style of the language of Arnaut Daniel with the "roughened" [harte] forms which make pronunciation difficult - these are used in much the same way. Leo Jakubinsky has demonstrated the principle of phonetic "roughening" of poetic language in the particular case of the repetition of identical sounds. The language of, poetry is, then, a difficult, roughened, impeded language. In a few special instances the language of poetry approximates the language of prose, but this does not violate the principle of "roughened" form.

Her sister was called Tatyana
For the first time we shall

Willfully brighten the delicate

Pages of a novel with such a name,

wrote Pushkin. The usual poetic language for Pushkin's contemporaries was the elegant style of Derzhavin; but Pushkin's style, because it seemed trivial then, was unexpectedly, difficult for them. We should remember the consternation of Pushkin's contemporaries over the vulgarity of his expressions. He used the popular language as a special device for prolonging attention, just as his contemporaries generally used Russian words in their usually French speech (see Tolstoy's examples in War and Peace).

Just now a still more characteristic phenomenon is under way. Russian literary language, which was originally foreign to Russia, has so permeated the language of the people that it has blended with their conversation. On the other hand, literature has now begun to show a tendency towards the use of dialects (Remizov, Klyuyev, Essenin, and others,[6] so unequal in talent and so alike in language, are intentionally provincial) and or barbarisms (which gave rise to the Severyanin group[7]). And currently Maxim Gorky is changing his diction from the old literary language to the new literary colloquialism of Leskov.[8] Ordinary speech and literary language have thereby changed places (see the work of Vyacheslav Ivanov and many others). And finally, a strong tendency, led by Khlebnikov, to create a new and properly poetic language has emerged. In the light of these developments we can define poetry as attenuated, tortuous speech. Poetic speech is formed speech. Prose is ordinary speech - economical, easy, proper, the goddess of prose [dea prosae] is a goddess of the accurate, facile type, of the "direct" expression of a child. I shall discuss roughened form and retardation as the general law of art at greater length in an article on plot construction. [9]

Nevertheless, the position of those who urge the idea of the economy of artistic energy as something which exists in and even distinguishes poetic language seems, at first glance, tenable for the

problem rhythm. Spencer's description of rhythm would seem to be absolutely incontestable:

Just as the body in receiving a series of varying concussions, must keep the muscles ready to meet the most violent of them, as not knowing when such may come: so, the mind in receiving unarranged articulations, must keep its perspectives active enough to recognize the least easily caught sounds. And as, if the concussions recur in definite order, the body may husband its forces by adjusting the resistance needful for each concussion; so, if the syllables be rhythmically arranged, the mind may economize its energies by anticipating the attention required for each syllable.[10]

This apparent observation suffers from the common fallacy, the confusion of the laws of poetic and prosaic language. In The Philosophy of Style Spencer failed utterly to distinguish between them. But rhythm may have two functions. The rhythm of prose, or a work song like "Dubinushka," permits the members of the work crew to do their necessary "groaning together" and also eases the work by making it automatic. And, in fact, it is easier to march with music than without it, and to march during an animated conversation is even easier, for the walking is done unconsciously. Thus the rhythm of prose is an important automatizing element; the rhythm of poetry is not. There is "order" in art, yet not a single column of a Greek temple stands exactly in its proper order; poetic rhythm is similarly disordered rhythm. Attempts to systematize the irregularities have been made, and such attempts are part of the current problem in the theory of rhythm. It is obvious that the systematization will not work, for in reality the problem is not one of complicating the rhythm but of disordering the rhythm - a disordering which cannot be predicted. Should the disordering of rhythm become a convention, it would be ineffective as a procedure for the roughening of language. But I will not discuss rhythm in more detail since I intend to write a book about it.

Notes

1 Alexander Pogodin, Yazyk, kak tvorchestvo [Language as Art) (Kharkov, 1913), p. 42. [The original sentence was in French, "Les montagnes de la Suisse sont belles," with the appropriate initials.]

2 Leo Jakubinsky, Sborniki, 1 (1916).

3 Leo Tolstoy's Diary, entry dated February 29, 1897. [The date is transcribed incorrectly; it should read March 1, 1897.]

4 Viktor Shklovsky, Voskresheniye slova [The Resurrection of the Word] (Petersburg, 1914).

0. Dante, Purgatorio, 24:56. Dante refers to the new lyric style of his contemporaries.[Trans.]

6 Alexy Remizov (1877-1957) is best known as a novelist and satirist; Nicholas Klyuyev (1885~1937) and Sergey Essenin (1895-1925) were "peasant poets." All three were noted for their faithful reproduction of Russian dialects and colloquial language.[Trans.]

7 A group noted for its opulent and sensuous verse style. [Trans.)

8 Nicholas Leskov (1831-95), novelist and short story writer, helped popularize the skaz, or yarn, and hence, because of the part dialect peculiarities play in the skaz, also altered Russian literary language. [Trans.]

9 Shklovsky is probably referring to his Razvyortyvaniye syuzheta [Plot Development](Petrograd, 1921). [Trans.]

10 Herbert Spencer, The Philosophy of Style [(Humboldt Library, Vol. XXXIV; New York, 1882), p. 169. The Russian text is slightly shortened from the original].

1933

García Lorca

Theory and Play Of The *Duende*

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Between 1918 when I entered the *Residencia de Estudiantes* in Madrid, and 1928 when I left, having completed my study of Philosophy and Letters, I listened to around a thousand lectures, in that elegant salon where the old Spanish aristocracy went to do penance for its frivolity on French beaches.

Longing for air and sunlight, I was so bored I used to feel as though I was covered in fine ash, on the point of changing into peppery sneezes.

So, no, I don't want that terrible blowfly of boredom to enter this room, threading all your heads together on the slender necklace of sleep, and setting a tiny cluster of sharp needles in your, my listeners', eyes.

In a simple way, in the register that, in my poetic voice, holds neither the gleams of wood, nor the angles of hemlock, nor those sheep that suddenly become knives of irony, I want to see if I can give you a simple lesson on the buried spirit of saddened Spain.

Whoever travels the bull's hide that stretches between the Júcar, Guadalfeo, Sil and Pisuerga rivers (not to mention the tributaries that meet those waves, the colour of a lion's mane, that stir the Plata) frequently hears people say: 'This has much *duende*'. Manuel Torre, great artist of the Andalusian people, said to someone who sang for him: 'You have a voice, you understand style, but you'll never ever succeed because you have no *duende*.'

All through Andalusia, from the rock of Jaén to the snail's-shell of Cadiz, people constantly talk about the *duende* and recognise it wherever it appears with a fine instinct. That wonderful singer El Lebrijano, creator of the *Debla*, said: 'On days when I sing with *duende* no one can touch me.': the old Gypsy dancer La Malena once heard Brailowsky play a fragment of Bach, and exclaimed: 'Olé! That has *duende*!' but was bored by Gluck, Brahms and Milhaud. And Manuel Torre, a man who had more culture

in his veins than anyone I've known, on hearing Falla play his own *Nocturno del Generalife* spoke this splendid sentence: 'All that has dark sounds has *duende*.' And there's no deeper truth than that.

Those dark sounds are the mystery, the roots that cling to the mire that we all know, that we all ignore, but from which comes the very substance of art. 'Dark sounds' said the man of the Spanish people, agreeing with Goethe, who in speaking of Paganini hit on a definition of the *duende*: 'A mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained.'

So, then, the *duende* is a force not a labour, a struggle not a thought. I heard an old *maestro* of the guitar say: 'The *duende* is not in the throat: the *duende* surges up, inside, from the soles of the feet.' Meaning, it's not a question of skill, but of a style that's truly alive: meaning, it's in the veins: meaning, it's of the most ancient culture of immediate creation.

This 'mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained' is, in sum, the spirit of the earth, the same *duende* that scorched Nietzche's heart as he searched for its outer form on the Rialto Bridge and in Bizet's music, without finding it, and without seeing that the *duende* he pursued had leapt from the Greek mysteries to the dancers of Cadiz and the headless Dionysiac scream of Silverio's *siguiriya*.

So, then, I don't want anyone to confuse the *duende* with the theological demon of doubt at whom Luther, with Bacchic feeling, hurled a pot of ink in Eisenach, nor the Catholic devil, destructive and of low intelligence, who disguised himself as a bitch to enter convents, nor the talking monkey carried by Cervantes' Malgesi in his comedy of jealousies in the Andalusian woods.

No. The *duende* I mean, secret and shuddering, is descended from that blithe daemon, all marble and salt, of Socrates, whom it scratched at indignantly on the day when he drank the hemlock, and that other melancholy demon of Descartes, diminutive as a green almond, that, tired of lines and circles, fled along the canals to listen to the singing of drunken sailors.

For every man, every artist called Nietzsche or Cézanne, every step that he climbs in the tower of his perfection is at the expense of the struggle that he undergoes with his*duende*, not with an angel, as is often said, nor with his Muse. This is a precise and fundamental distinction at the root of their work.

The angel guides and grants, like St. Raphael: defends and spares, like St. Michael: proclaims and forewarns, like St. Gabriel.

The angel dazzles, but flies over a man's head, high above, shedding its grace, and the man realises his work, or his charm, or his dance effortlessly. The angel on the road to Damascus, and that which entered through the cracks in the little balcony at Assisi, or the one that followed in Heinrich Suso's footsteps, create order, and there is no way to oppose their light, since they beat their wings of steel in an atmosphere of predestination.

The Muse dictates, and occasionally prompts. She can do relatively little since she's distant and so tired (I've seen her twice) that you'd think her heart half marble. Muse poets hear voices and don't know where they're from, but they're from the Muse who inspires them and sometimes makes her meal of them, as in the case of Apollinaire, a great poet destroyed by the terrifying Muse, next to whom the divine angelic Rousseau once painted him.

The Muse stirs the intellect, bringing a landscape of columns and an illusory taste of laurel, and intellect is often poetry's enemy, since it limits too much, since it lifts the poet into the bondage of aristocratic fineness, where he forgets that he might be eaten, suddenly, by ants, or that a huge arsenical lobster might fall on his head – things against which the Muses who inhabit monocles, or the roses of lukewarm lacquer in a tiny salon, have no power.

Angel and Muse come from outside us: the angel brings light, the Muse form (Hesiod learnt from her). Golden bread or fold of tunic, it is her norm that the poet receives in his laurel grove. While the *duende* has to be roused from the furthest habitations of the blood.

Reject the angel, and give the Muse a kick, and forget our fear of the scent of violets that eighteenth century poetry breathes out, and of the great telescope in whose lenses the Muse, made ill by limitation, sleeps.

The true struggle is with the *duende*.

The roads where one searches for God are known, whether by the barbaric way of the hermit or the subtle one of the mystic: with a tower, like St. Teresa, or by the three paths of St. John of the Cross. And though we may have to cry out, in Isaiah's voice: Truly you are a hidden God,' finally, in the end, God sends his primal thorns of fire to those who seek Him.

Seeking the *duende*, there is neither map nor discipline. We only know it burns the blood like powdered glass, that it exhausts, rejects all the sweet geometry we understand, that it shatters styles and makes Goya, master of the greys, silvers and pinks of the finest English art, paint with his knees and fists in terrible bitumen blacks, or strips Mossèn Cinto Verdaguer stark naked in the cold of the Pyrenees, or sends Jorge Manrique to wait for death in the wastes of Ocaña, or clothes Rimbaud's delicate body in a saltimbanque's costume, or gives the Comte de Lautréamont the eyes of a dead fish, at dawn, on the boulevard.

The great artists of Southern Spain, Gypsy or flamenco, singers dancers, musicians, know that emotion is impossible without the arrival of the *duende*. They might deceive people into thinking they can communicate the sense of *duende* without possessing it, as authors, painters, and literary fashion-makers deceive us every day, without possessing *duende*: but we only have to attend a little, and not be full of indifference, to discover the fraud, and chase off that clumsy artifice.

Once, the Andalusian 'Flamenco singer' Pastora Pavon, La Niña de Los Peines, sombre Spanish genius, equal in power of fancy to Goya or Rafael el Gallo, was

singing in a little tavern in Cadiz. She played with her voice of shadows, with her voice of beaten tin, with her mossy voice, she tangled it in her hair, or soaked it in *manzanilla* or abandoned it to dark distant briars. But, there was nothing there: it was useless. The audience remained silent.

In the room was Ignacio Espeleta, handsome as a Roman tortoise, who was once asked: 'Why don't you work?' and who replied with a smile worthy of Argantonius: 'How should I work, if I'm from Cadiz?'

In the room was Elvira, fiery aristocrat, whore from Seville, descended in line from Soledad Vargos, who in '30 didn't wish to marry with a Rothschild, because he wasn't her equal in blood. In the room were the Floridas, whom people think are butchers, but who in reality are millennial priests who still sacrifice bulls to Geryon, and in the corner was that formidable breeder of bulls, Don Pablo Murube, with the look of a Cretan mask. Pastora Pavon finished her song in silence. Only, a little man, one of those dancing midgets who leap up suddenly from behind brandy bottles, sarcastically, in a very soft voice, said: 'Viva, Paris!' as if to say: 'Here ability is not important, nor technique, nor skill. What matters here is something other.'

Then La Niña de Los Peines got up like a madwoman, trembling like a medieval mourner, and drank, in one gulp, a huge glass of fiery spirits, and began to sing with a scorched throat, without voice, breath, colour, but...with *duende*. She managed to tear down the scaffolding of the song, but allow through a furious, burning *duende*, friend to those winds heavy with sand, that make listeners tear at their clothes with the same rhythm as the Negroes of the Antilles in their rite, huddled before the statue of Santa Bárbara.

La Niña de Los Peines had to tear apart her voice, because she knew experts were listening, who demanded not form but the marrow of form, pure music with a body lean enough to float on air. She had to rob herself of skill and safety: that is to say, banish her Muse, and be helpless, so her *duende* might come, and deign to struggle with her at close quarters. And how she sang! Her voice no longer at play, her voice a jet of blood, worthy of her pain and her sincerity, opened like a ten-fingered hand as in the feet, nailed there but storm-filled, of a Christ by Juan de Juni.

The arrival of the *duende* presupposes a radical change to all the old kinds of form, brings totally unknown and fresh sensations, with the qualities of a newly created rose, miraculous, generating an almost religious enthusiasm.

In all Arab music, dance, song or elegy, the arrival of duende is greeted with vigorous cries of 'Allah! Allah!' so close to the 'Olé!' of the bullfight, and who knows whether they are not the same? And in all the songs of Southern Spain, the appearance of the *duende* is followed by sincere cries of: 'Viva Dios!' deep, human, tender cries of communication with God through the five senses, thanks to the *duende* that shakes the voice and body of the dancer, a real, poetic escape from this world, as pure as that achieved by that rarest poet of the seventeenth century Pedro Soto de Rojas with his seven gardens, or John Climacus with his trembling ladder of tears.

Naturally when this escape is perfected, everyone feels the effect: the initiate in seeing style defeat inadequate content, and the novice in sensing authentic emotion. Years ago, an eighty year old woman came first in a dance contest in Jerez de la Frontera, against lovely women and girls with liquid waists, merely by raising her arms, throwing back her head, and stamping with her foot on the floor: but in that crowd of Muses and angels with lovely forms and smiles, who could earn the prize but her moribund *duende* sweeping the earth with its wings made of rusty knives.

All the arts are capable of *duende*, but where it naturally creates most space, as in music, dance and spoken poetry, the living flesh is needed to interpret them, since they have forms that are born and die, perpetually, and raise their contours above the precise present.

Often the composer's *duende* fills the performers, and at other times, when a poet or composer is no such thing, the performer's duende, interestingly, creates a new wonder that has the appearance of, but is not, primitive form. This was the case with *the duende*-haunted Eleonara Duse, who searched out failed plays to make triumphs of them through her inventiveness, and the case with Paganini, explained by Goethe, who made one hear profound melody in vulgar trifles, and the case of a delightful young girl in Port St. Marys, whom I saw singing and dancing that terrible Italian song 'O Mari!' with such rhythm, pauses and intensity that she turned Italian dross into a brave serpent of gold. What happened was that each effectively found something new that no one had seen before, that could give life and knowledge to bodies devoid of expression.

Every art and every country is capable of *duende*, angel and Muse: and just as Germany owns to the Muse, with a few exceptions, and Italy the perennial angel, Spain is, at all times, stirred by the *duende*, country of ancient music and dance, where the *duende* squeezes out those lemons of dawn, a country of death, a country open to death.

In every other country death is an ending. It appears and they close the curtains. Not in Spain. In Spain they open them. Many Spaniards live indoors till the day they die and are carried into the sun. A dead man in Spain is more alive when dead than anywhere else on earth: his profile cuts like the edge of a barber's razor. Tales of death and the silent contemplation of it are familiar to Spaniards. From Quevedo's dream of skulls, to Valdés Leal's putrefying archbishop, and from Marbella in the seventeenth century, dying in childbirth, in the middle of the road, who says:

> The blood of my womb
> Covers the stallion.
> The stallion's hooves
> Throw off sparks of black pitch...

to the youth of Salamanca, recently killed by a bull, who cried out:

Friends, I am dying:
Friends I am done for.
I've three scarves inside me,
And this one makes four…

stretches a rail of saltpetre flowers, where a nation goes to contemplate death, with on the side that's more bitter, the verses of Jeremiah, and on the more lyrical side with fragrant cypress: but a country where what is most important of all finds its ultimate metallic value in death.

The hut, the wheel of a cart, the razor, and the prickly beards of shepherds, the barren moon, the flies, the damp cupboards, the rubble, the lace-covered saints, the wounding lines of eaves and balconies, in Spain grow tiny weeds of death, allusions and voices, perceptible to an alert spirit, that fill the memory with the stale air of our own passing. It's no accident that all Spanish art is rooted in our soil, full of thistles and sharp stones: it's no isolated example that lamentation of Pleberio's, or the dances of that *maestro* Josef María de Valdivielso: it isn't chance that among all the ballads of Europe this Spanish one stands out:

If you're my pretty lover,
why don't you gaze at me?

The eyes I gazed at you with
I've given to the dark.

If you're my pretty lover
why aren't you kissing me?

The lips I kissed you with
I've given to earth below.

If you're my pretty lover,
why aren't you hugging me?

The arms I hugged you with
Are covered with worms, you see.

Nor is it strange that this song is heard at the dawn of our lyrical tradition:

In the garden
I shall die,

in the rose-tree
they will kill me,
Mother I went
to gather roses,
looking for death
within the garden.
Mother I went
cutting roses,
looking for death
within the rose-tree.
In the garden
I shall die.
In the rose-tree
they'll kill me.

Those moon-frozen heads that Zurbarán painted, the yellows of butter and lightning in El Greco, Father Sigüenza's prose, the whole of Goya's work, the apse of the Escorial church, all polychrome sculpture, the crypt in the Duke of Osuna's house, the 'death with a guitar' in the Chapel of the Benaventes in Medina de Rioseco, equate culturally to the processions of San Andrés de Teixido, in which the dead take their places: to the dirges that the women of Asturias sing, with their flame-bright torches, in the November night: to the dance and chanting of the Sibyl in the cathedrals of Mallorca and Toledo: to the dark *In recort* of Tortosa: and to the endless Good Friday rituals which with the highly refined festival of the bulls, form the popular 'triumph' of death in Spain. In all the world only Mexico can grasp my country's hand.

When the Muse sees death appear she closes the door, or builds a plinth, or displays an urn and writes an epitaph with her waxen hand, but afterwards she returns to tending her laurel in a silence that shivers between two breezes. Beneath the broken arch of the ode, she binds, in funereal harmony, the precise flowers painted by fifteenth century Italians and calls up Lucretius' faithful cockerel, by whom unforeseen shadows are dispelled.

When the angel sees death appear he flies in slow circles, and with tears of ice and narcissi weaves the elegy we see trembling in the hands of Keats, Villasandino, Herrera, Bécquer, and Juan Ramón Jiménez. But how it horrifies the angel if he feels a spider, however tiny, on his tender rosy foot!

The *duende*, by contrast, won't appear if he can't see the possibility of death, if he doesn't know he can haunt death's house, if he's not certain to shake those branches we all carry, that do not bring, can never bring, consolation.

With idea, sound, gesture, the *duende* delights in struggling freely with the creator on the edge of the pit. Angel and Muse flee, with violin and compasses, and

the *duende*wounds, and in trying to heal that wound that never heals, lies the strangeness, the inventiveness of a man's work.

The magic power of a poem consists in it always being filled with *duende*, in its baptising all who gaze at it with dark water, since with *duende* it is easier to love, to understand, and be certain of being loved, and being understood, and this struggle for expression and the communication of that expression in poetry sometimes acquires a fatal character.

Remember the example of the flamenca, *duende*-filled St. Teresa. Flamenca not for entangling an angry bull, and passing it magnificently three times, which she did: not because she thought herself pretty before Brother Juan de la Miseria: nor for slapping His Holiness's Nuncio: but because she was one of those few creatures whose *duende* (not angel, for the angel never attacks anyone) pierced her with an arrow and wanted to kill her for having stolen his ultimate secret, the subtle link that joins the five senses to what is core to the living flesh, the living cloud, the living ocean of love liberated from time.

Most valiant vanquisher of the *duende* and the counter-example to Philip of Austria, who sought anxiously in Theology for Muse and angel, and was imprisoned by a *duende* of icy ardour in the Escorial Palace, where geometry borders on dream, and where the *duende* wears the mask of the Muse for the eternal punishment of that great king.

We have said that the *duende* loves the edge, the wound, and draws close to places where forms fuse in a yearning beyond visible expression.

In Spain (as among Oriental races, where the dance is religious expression) the *duende* has a limitless hold over the bodies of the dancers of Cadiz, praised by Martial, the breasts of those who sing, praised by Juvenal, and over all the liturgies of the bullring, an authentic religious drama, where in the same manner as in the Mass, a God is sacrificed to, and adored.

It seems as if all the *duende* of the Classical world is concentrated in this perfect festival, expounding the culture and the great sensibility of a nation that reveals the finest anger, bile and tears of mankind. Neither in Spanish dance nor in the bullfight does anyone enjoy himself: the *duende* charges itself with creating suffering by means of a drama of living forms, and clears the way for an escape from the reality that surrounds us.

The *duende* works on the dancer's body like wind on sand. It changes a girl, by magic power, into a lunar paralytic, or covers the cheeks of a broken old man, begging for alms in the wine-shops, with adolescent blushes: gives a woman's hair the odour of a midnight sea-port: and at every instant works the arms with gestures that are the mothers of the dances of all the ages.

But it's impossible for it ever to repeat itself, and it's important to underscore this. The *duende* never repeats itself, any more than the waves of the sea do in a storm.

Its most impressive effects appear in the bullring, since it must struggle on the one hand with death, which can destroy it, and on the other with geometry, measure, the fundamental basis of the festival.

The bull has its own orbit: the toreador his, and between orbit and orbit lies the point of danger, where the vertex of terrible play exists.

You can own to the Muse with the *muleta*, and to the angel with the *banderillas*, and pass for a good bullfighter, but in the work with the cape, while the bull is still free of wounds, and at the moment of the kill, the aid of the *duende* is required to drive home the nail of artistic truth.

The bullfighter who terrifies the public with his bravery in the ring is not fighting bulls, but has lowered himself to a ridiculous level, to doing what anyone can do, by playing with his life: but the toreador who is bitten by the *duende* gives a lesson in Pythagorean music and makes us forget that his is constantly throwing his heart at the horns.

Lagartijo, with his Roman *duende*, Joselito with his Jewish *duende*, Belmonte with his Baroque *duende*, and Cagancho with his Gypsy *duende*, showed, from the twilight of the bullring, poets, painters and composers the four great highways of Spanish tradition.

Spain is unique, a country where death is a national spectacle, where death sounds great bugle blasts on the arrival of Spring, and its art is always ruled by a shrewd *duende* which creates its different and inventive quality.

The *duende* who, for the first time in sculpture, stains with blood the cheeks of the saints of that master, Mateo de Compostela, is the same one who made St. John of the Cross groan, or burns naked nymphs in Lope's religious sonnets.

The *duende* that raises the towers of Sahagún or bakes hot bricks in Calatayud, or Teruel, is the same as he who tears apart El Greco's clouds, and kicks out at Quevedo's bailiffs, and Goya's chimeras, and drives them away.

When he rains he brings *duende*-haunted Velasquez, secretly, from behind his monarchic greys. When he snows he makes Herrera appear naked to show that cold does not kill: when he burns he pushes Berruguete into the flames and makes him invent new dimensions for sculpture.

Gongora's Muse and Garcilaso's angel must loose their laurel wreaths when St. John of the Cross's *duende* passes by, when:

> The wounded stag
> appears, over the hill.

Gonzalo de Berceo's Muse and the Archpriest of Hita's angel must depart to give way to Jorge Manrique, wounded to death at the door of the castle of Belmonte. Gregorio Hernández' Muse, and José de Mora's angel must bow to the passage of de Mena's *duende* weeping tears of blood, and Martínez Montañéz' *duende* with the

head of an Assyrian bull, just as the melancholic Muse of Catalonia, and the damp angel of Galicia, gaze in loving wonder at the *duende* of Castile, so far from their warm bread and gentle grazing cattle, with its norms of sweeping sky and dry sierra.

Quevedo's *duende* and Cervantes', the one with green anemones of phosphorus, the other with flowers of Ruidera gypsum, crown the altarpiece of Spain's *duende*.

Each art, as is natural, has a distinct mode and form of *duende*, but their roots unite at the point from which flow the dark sounds of Manuel Torre, the ultimate matter, and uncontrollable mutual depth and extremity of wood, sound, canvas, word.

Dark sounds, behind which in tender intimacy exist volcanoes, ants, zephyrs, and the vast night pressing its waist against the Milky Way.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have raised three arches and with clumsy hands placed within them the Muse, the angel and the *duende*.

The Muse remains motionless: she can have a finely pleated tunic or cow eyes like those which gaze out in Pompeii, at the four-sided nose her great friend Picasso has painted her with. The angel can disturb Antonello da Messina's heads of hair, Lippi's tunics, or the violins of Masolino or Rousseau.

The *duende*....Where is the *duende*? Through the empty archway a wind of the spirit enters, blowing insistently over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents: a wind with the odour of a child's saliva, crushed grass, and medusa's veil, announcing the endless baptism of freshly created things.

1956

The Unvert Manifesto and Other Papers Found in the Rare Book Room of the Boston Public Library in the Handwriting of Oliver Charming. by S.

The Unvert Manifesto

1. An unvert is neither an invert or an outvert, a pervert or a convert, an introvert or a retrovert. An unvert chooses to have no place to turn.

2. One should always masturbate on street corners.

3. Unversion is the attempt to make the sexual act as rare as a rosepetal. It consists of linking the sexual with the greatest cosmic force in the universe - Nonsense, or as we prefer to call it, MERTZ.

4. Sex should be a frightening experience like a dirty joke or an angel.

5. Dirty jokes and angels should be frightening experiences.

6. An unvert must not be homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, or autosexual. He must be metasexual. He must enjoy going to bed with his own tears.

7. Mertz!

8. All the universe is laughing at you.

9. Poetry, painting, and cocksucking are all attempts of the unvert to make God laugh.

10. The larger the Dada, the bigger the hole.

11. Sidney Mertz was the only man ever arrested for drunken driving of a steam locomotive. He is now the bartender of the American Legion bar in Jackson, Wyoming.

12. Jews and Negros are not allowed to be unverts. The Jew will never understand unversion and the Negro understands it too well.

13. An unvert loves only other unverts. He will, however, consent to perform an act of unversion with almost anything except lovers and mountain lions.

14. God loves God.

15. Mertz must be applied to sex. People must learn to laugh into each other's gonads.

16. God is an unvert.

17. Sex without love is better than love without sex. Sex without Mertz is never better than Mertz without sex. Nonsense is an act of friendship.

18. The larger the Dada, the bigger the hole.

19. Nonsense, Mertz, Dada, and God all go to the same nightclubs.

20. So does Graham Macarel.

Excerpts from Oliver Charming's Diary

October 31, 1953:

"I must unvent someone named Graham Macarel. He should be about seventeen or eighteen and have a large Dada. I can use him as the hero and victim of my Mertzcycle . . ."

November 5, 1953:

"Laughed all day. The elements of imagination are exhausting as Hell."

November 23, 1953:

"It was more successful than I expected. He is beginning to become mythical. I saw him today and he told me that he is taking a course in his art school in which he has to clip examples of racial prejudice from Tarot cards and give their exact date. His art school's name is the California School of Fine Flowers. His teacher's name is S. We talked for awhile and I am already beginning to destroy his universe. . . . Method is everything."

December 1, 1953:

"Love must only be applied at the wrong time and in the wrong place. It must be thrown at the unsuspecting like a custard pie made of poison . . . Nothing destroys Mertz more than custom. Nothing destroys it less than treason."

December 7, 1953:

"I return to Graham Macarel. (Note - I must be sure to call him Mac. Graham reminds the uninformed imagination of crackers.) He has become a combination of a Boy Scout and a depth charge. He appeals to the primitive sources of nonsense and despair.

I suspect that his teacher, S., is secretly an unvert - or, at least a spoiled unvert. Something is going on between S. and history. I wonder if Mac realizes that an unvert is an agent of Kubla Khan."

December 9, 1953:

"'An unvert is an angel of Kubla Khan.' - that's what Mac said to me last night in the men's room of the Palace Hotel. At the time he said it he was . . . which is certainly Dada if not Mertz."

December 10, 1953:

". . . suspects . . ."

December 18, 1953:

"It is Christmas vacation at the California School of Fine Flowers. S. was in the bars last night, very drunk. I think he is planning to unvert somebody."

December 19, 1953:

"I had a conversation with S. late last night. He was again very drunk. 'Why did you have to invent Graham Macarel?' he asked me angrily.

'I thought it would be good for your poetry,' I answered.

'Why didn't you invent syphilis instead,' he asked contemptuously. So yesterday I invented syphilis. Today I am going to . . ."

December 22, 1953:

"S. is in Los Angeles."

December 23, 1953:

"To appear as human among homosexuals and to appear as divine among heterosexuals . . ."

December 24, 1953:

"Nobody remains in this city and I have done all my Christmas shopping.

The Dada in painting is not Duchamp. The Dada in poetry is not

Breton. The Dada in sex is not De Sade. All these men were too obsessed with the mechanism of their subject. A crime against nature must also be a crime against art. A crime against art must also be a crime against nature. All beauty is at continuous war with God."

December 25, 1953:

"Merry Christmas, Graham Macarel."

December 26, 1953:

"It continually amazes the unprejudiced Mertzian observer that even the people who struggle most against the limits of art are content to have sex in ordinary academic ways, as if they and their bed-partners were nineteenth-century paintings. Or, worse, they will change the point of view (top becomes bottom, male becomes female, etc. etc.) and think, like the magic realists that they are, that they have changed something.

Everybody is guilty of this - from Cocteau to Beethoven."

December 28, 1953:

"A sailor asked me last night what the unvert thought of Kinsey. I told him that we held that Kinsey was a valuable evidence of the boredom of un-unverted sex - that ordinary sex had become so monotonous that it had become statistical like farm income or rolling stock totals. I told him that Kinsey was the Zola preparing the way for the new Lautréamont.

It is remarkable how even science fiction has developed no new attitudes toward sex. The vacant interstellar spaces are filled with exactly the same bedrooms the rocketships left behind. It is only the unvert who dares to speak Martian in bed. I wonder if Kierkegaard had wet dreams."

December 29, 1953:

"*How The Zen Masters Taught Sex To Their Disciples* - such a book would be the most useful book a man could publish. Sex is a metaphysical experience. Zen taught that man can only reach the metaphysical by way of the absurd. No, absurd is the wrong word. What is the Chinese for shaggy-dog story?

The book should be illustrated pornographically but the general style of Mad Comics. It should have a blue cover."

December 30, 1953:

"S. is in town again. I saw him at the Black Cat. He looked confused at all the lack of excitement around him, as if he believed that a holiday was like a snowstorm and people should notice it.

We began discussing homosexuality. I, by bringing in subtle pieces of unvert propganda, and he, embarrassed and overintellectual as if he thought, or rather hoped, that I was trying to seduce him."

'We homosexuals are the only minority group that completely lacks any vestige of a separate cultural heritage. We have no songs, no folklore, even our customs are borrowed from our upper-middleclass mothers', he said."

The trouble with S. is that he doesn't understand Martian. I must tell him about the time . . ."

December 31, 1953:

"I rebel against the tyrrany of the calendar."

January 1, 1954:

"My analyst is teaching me French."

January 2, 1954:

"S. says that it is inconsistent for an unvert to have a psychiatrist. He does not understand unversion. The relationship between the analyst and the patient is the firmest and most hallowed, if the most conventional, sexual relationship in the modern world. This is precisely why it must be shaken. It is our task to experience and unvert all sexual relationships."

January 3, 1954:

"Sometimes, in moments of depression, I think that all this talk of Dada and Mertz is merely the reaction of the unsuccessful cocksucker or artsucker who doesn't understand beauty when it offers itself to him. Witness Western civilization or the bar last night . . ."

January 4, 1954:

"Now that I have Graham Macarel, S., and a psychiatrist, all that I need is an angel. One cannot, however, safely invent an angel . . . Lot was the last person to safely invent an angel. He was bored with his lover, with their children, and with all the inhabitants of the

immense and sandy Turkish bath that they were living in . . . He invented an angel and then everybody had to kill him . . . Everybody had to kill him not because the angel was as dangerous as a hydrogen bomb (which he was) and not because the angel was beautiful as a Florida hurricane (which he was), but because the angel was a stranger and it is always the habit of Jews and homosexuals to kill strangers . . . They almost caught the angel once in Lot's chimney, and a sailor once managed to catch hold of its groin as it was disappearing into a broom-closet, but soon fire and brimstone were descending on the town and Lot was walking with his lover along a deserted road on the first range of foothills carrying a packed suitcase . . . The lover looked backwards, of course, to make sure that the angel was not following them and was immediately turned into a life-sized salt statue. It is very difficult to suck the cock of a life-sized salt statue or to sample the delight of sodomy with a pillar . . . Lot left him there and trudged onward alone, with an angel on his back.

I must take warning from this. There are some inventions even sex does not make necessary."

January 5, 1954:

"No angel as yet. I wonder if I could steal one. By a bit of clever propaganda I have arranged that Mac will have to report on angels to his history class. This should bring things into focus.

Mac asked me about angels yesterday - whether I thought they really existed, what they did in bed, etc. etc. I told him that very few people under twenty-five had angels at all. That they were like a kind of combination of Siamese cats and syphilis and for him not to worry if they occasionally tugged at his pubic hairs. He was still uncertain: 'How can I find any chronology in it?' he asked plaintively."

January 6, 1954:

"There is a morning when it rains in the corner of everybody's bedroom."

January 7, 1954:

"My psychiatrist, Robert Berg, considers that it is his duty to unvent angels. It must be understood that unvention is as different from unversion as psychoanalysis is from poetry."

January 9, 1954:

"Mac tells me that he saw an angel resting in a tree above his art school. This must be the angel we have been waiting for."

January 10, 1954:

"I have seen it too. It is a bearded angel, small as a bird, and answers to the name of Heurtebise. S., being what he is, pretends not to believe and says that it is only an owl or some unlucky night creature. He says that he is sorry for it."

January 11, 1954:

"The angel keeps screaching in the tree. It is behaving more and more like a bird. We are doing something wrong . . . Perhaps it isn't our angel."

January 12, 1954:

"I am gradually able to have the most Mertzian sexual

1959

BELIEF & TECHNIQUE FOR MODERN PROSE

Jack Kerouac

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1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside yr own house
4. Be in love with yr life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumbsaint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry but exactly what is
11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time

15. Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
16. The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
17. Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
18. Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
19. Accept loss forever
20. Believe in the holy contour of life
21. Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
22. Dont think of words when you stop but to see picture better
23. Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
24. No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
25. Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
26. Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
27. In praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
29. You're a Genius all the time
30. Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven

POLITICAL LIFE

Poetry, Violence, and the Trembling Lambs or Independence Day Manifesto

Recent history is the record of a vast conspiracy to impose one level of mechanical consciousness on mankind and exterminate all manifestations of that unique part of human sentience, identical in all men, which the individual shares with his Creator. The suppression of contemplative individuality is nearly complete.

The only immediate historical data that we can know and act on are those fed to our senses through systems of mass communication.

These media are exactly the places where the deepest and most personal sensitivities and confessions of reality are most prohibited, mocked, suppressed.

At the same time there is a crack in the mass consciousness of America—sudden emergence of insight into a vast national subconscious netherworld filled with nerve gases, universal death bombs, malevolent bureaucracies, secret police systems, drugs that open the door to God, ships leaving Earth, unknown chemical terrors, evil dreams at hand.

Because systems of mass communication can communicate only officially acceptable levels of reality, no one can know the extent of the secret unconscious life. No one in America can know what will happen. No one is in real control. America is having a nervous breakdown. Poetry is the record of individual insights into the secret soul of the individual and because all individuals are one in the eyes of their creator, into the soul of the world. The world has a soul. America is having a nervous breakdown. San Francisco is one of many places where a few individuals, poets, have had the luck and courage and fate to glimpse something new through the crack in mass consciousness; they have been exposed to some insight into their own nature, the nature of the governments, and the nature of God.

Therefore there has been great exaltation, despair, prophecy, strain, suicide, secrecy and public gaiety among the poets of the city. Those of the general populace whose individual perception is sufficiently weak to be formed by stereotypes of mass communication disapprove and deny the insight. The police and newspapers have moved in, mad movie manufacturers from Hollywood are at this moment preparing bestial stereotypes of the scene.

The poets and those who share their activities, or exhibit some sign of dress, hair, or demeanor of understanding, or hipness, are ridiculed. Those of us who have used certain benevolent drugs (marijuana) to alter our consciousness in order to gain insight are hunted down in the street by police. Peyote, an historic vision-producing agent, is prohibited on pain of arrest. Those who have used opiates and junk are threatened with permanent jail and death. To be a junky in America is like having been a Jew in Nazi Germany.

A huge sadistic police bureaucracy has risen in every state, encouraged by the central government, to persecute the illuminati, to brainwash the public with official lies about the drugs, and to terrify and destroy those addicts whose spiritual search has made them sick.

Deviants from the mass sexual stereotype, quietists, those who will not work for money, or fib and make arms for hire, or join armies in murder and threat, those who wish to loaf, think, rest in visions, act beautifully on their own, speak truthfully in public, inspired by Democracy—what is their psychic fate now in America? An America, the greater portion of whose economy is yoked to mental and mechanical preparations for war?

Literature expressing these insights has been mocked, misinterpreted, and suppressed by a horde of middlemen whose fearful allegiance to the organization of mass stereotype communication prevents them from sympathy (not only with their own inner nature but) with any manifestation of unconditioned individuality. I mean journalists, commercial publishers, book-review fellows, multitudes of professors of literature, etc., etc. Poetry is hated. Whole schools of academic criticism have risen to prove that human consciousness of unconditioned spirit is a myth. A poetic renaissance glimpsed in San Francisco has been responded to with ugliness, anger, jealousy, vitriol, sullen protestations of superiority.

And violence. By police, by customs officials, post-office employees,

by trustees of great universities. By anyone whose love of power has led him to a position where he can push other people around over a difference of opinion—or vision.

The stakes are too great—an America gone mad with materialism, a police-state America, a sexless and soulless America prepared to battle the world in defense of a false image of its authority. Not the wild and beautiful America of the comrades of Walt Whitman, not the historic America of William Blake and Henry David Thoreau where the spiritual independence of each individual was an America, a universe, more huge and awesome than all the abstract bureaucracies and authoritative officialdoms of the world combined.

Only those who have entered the world of spirit know what a vast laugh there is in the illusory appearance of worldly authority. And all men at one time or other enter that Spirit, whether in life or death.

How many hypocrites are there in America? How many trembling lambs, fearful of discovery? What authority have we set up over ourselves, that we are not as we are? Who shall prohibit an art from being published to the world? What conspirators have power to determine our mode of consciousness, our sexual enjoyments, our different labors and our loves? What fiends determine our wars?

When will we discover an America that will not deny its own God? Who takes up arms, money, police, and a million hands to murder the consciousness of God? Who spits in the beautiful face of poetry which sings of the glory of God and weeps in the dust of the world?

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Meditation and Poetics

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the text of a speech given at the New York Public Library in the winter of 1987.

It's an old tradition in the West among great poets that poetry is rarely thought of as "just poetry." Real poetry practitioners are practitioners of mind awareness, or practitioners of reality, expressing their fascination with a phenomenal universe and trying to penetrate to the heart of it. Poetics isn't mere picturesque dilettantism or egotistical expressionism for craven motives grasping for sensation and flattery. Classical poetry is a "process," or experiment—a probe into the nature of reality and the nature of the mind.

That motif comes to a climax in both subject matter and method in our own century. Recent artifacts in many fields of art are examples of "process," or "work in progress," as with the preliminary title of Joyce's last work, *Finnegans Wake*. Real poetry isn't consciously composed as "poetry," as if one only sat down to compose a poem or a novel for publication. Some people do work that way: artists whose motivations are less interesting than those of Shakespeare, Dante, Rimbaud, and Gertrude Stein, or of certain surrealist verbal alchemists—Tristan Tzara, Andre Breton, Antonin Artaud—or of the elders Pound and William Carlos Williams, or, specifically in our own time, of William Burroughs and Jack Kerouac. For most of "The Moderns," as with the Imagists of the twenties and thirties in our century, the motive has been purification of mind and speech. Thus we have the great verses of T. S. Eliot:

Since our concern was speech, and speech impelled us
To purify the dialect of the tribe
And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight,
Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age
To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.
First, the cold friction of expiring sense
Without enchantment, offering no promise
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit
As body and soul begin to fall asunder.

There's a common misconception among puritanical meditators and

that high poetics and art as practiced in the twentieth century are practiced as silly Bohemian indulgence, rather than for the reason that one practices mindfulness in meditation or accuracy in commerce. Western fine art and other meditation practices are brother-and-sister-related activities. (Which is quite different from the notion that East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet—an idiot slogan denying the fact East and West the brain's the same.) It's an important insight to have so that as meditation practitioners and businessmen we don't become inhibited in expressing and probing ourselves through various art means that we've inherited—from poetry to music to tea ceremony to archery to horsemanship to cinema to jazz blues to painting, even New Wave electric music.

Major works of twentieth-century art are probes of consciousness—particular experiments with recollection or mindfulness, experiments with language and speech, experiments with forms. Modern art is an attempt to define or recognize or experience perception—pure perception. I'm taking the word "probe" for poetry—poetry as a probe into one subject or another—from the poet Gregory Corso. He speaks of poetry as a probe into Marriage, Hair, Mind, Death, Army, Police, which are the titles of some of his earlier poems. He uses poetry to take an individual word and probe all its possible variants. He'll take a concept like death, for instance, and pour every archetypal thought he's ever thought or could recollect having thought about death and lay them out in poetic form—making a whole mandala of thoughts about it.

Kerouac and I, following Arthur Rimbaud and Baudelaire, our great-grandfathers among hermetic poets and philosophers, were experimenting naively with what we thought of as "new reality," or "supreme reality." Actually that was a phrase in use in 1945; we were thinking in terms of a new vision or a new consciousness, after the little passage in Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell:* "Noël sur la terre!" "When shall we go beyond the shores and the mountains, to salute the birth of new work, new wisdom, the flight of tyrants and demons, end of superstition, to adore—the first!—Christmas on earth!" In fact, the phrase "new consciousness" circulated among Beat Generation writers as our poetic motif in the early fifties. The specific intention of that decade's poetry was the exploration of consciousness, which is why we were interested in psychedelic or mind-manifesting substances—not necessarily synthetic; they might also be herbs or cacti.

ence of the lives, old age, sickness and death of his father and his older brother, whose dying he experienced as he took care of them and watched them in their beds, close to their deaths. As he wrote in *Visions of Cody*, in 1951:

> I'm writing this book because we're all going to die—in the loneliness of my life, my father dead, my brother dead, my mother far away, my sister and wife far away, nothing here but my own tragic hands . . . that are now left to guide and disappear their own way into the common dark of all our death, sleeping in me raw bed, alone and stupid: with just this one pride and consolation: my heart broke in the general despair and opened up inwards to the Lord, I made a supplication in this dream.

As a motive for writing a giant novel, this passage from *Visions of Cody* is a terrific stroke of awareness and *bodhisattva* heart, or outgoingness of heart. So I'm speaking about the ground of poetry and purification of motive. A few Buddhist *dharma* phrases correlate charmingly with the process of Bohemian art of the twentieth century—notions like "Take a non-totalitarian attitude," "Express yourself courageously," "Be outrageous to yourself," "Don't conform to your idea of what is expected but conform to your present spontaneous mind, your raw awareness." That's how *dharma* poets "make it new"—which was Pound's adjuration.

You need a certain deconditioning of attitude—a deconditioning of rigidity and unyieldingness—so that you can get to the heart of your own thought. That's parallel with traditional Buddhist ideas of renunciation—renunciation of hand-me-down conditioned conceptions of mind. It's the meditative practice of "letting go of thought"—neither pushing them away nor inviting them in, but, as you sit meditating, watching the procession of thought forms pass by, rising, flowering and dissolving, and disowning them, so to speak: you're not responsible any more than you're responsible for the weather, because you can't tell in advance what you're going to think next. Otherwise you'd be able to predict every thought, and that would be sad for you. There are some people whose thoughts are all predictable.

So it requires cultivation of tolerance towards one's own thoughts and impulses and ideas—the tolerance necessary for the perception of one's own mind, the kindness to the self necessary for acceptance of that process of consciousness and for acceptance of the mind's raw contents, as in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," so that you can look from the outside into the skull and see what's there in your head.

The specific parallel to be drawn is to Keats' notion of "negative capability," written out in a letter to his brother. He was considering Shakespeare's character and asking what kind of quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature. "Negative capability," he wrote, "is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching out after fact and reason." This means the ability to hold contrary or even polar opposite ideas or conceptions in the mind without freaking out—to experience contradiction or conflict or chaos in the mind without any irritable grasping after facts.

The really interesting word here is "irritable," which in Buddhism we take to be the aggressive insistence on eliminating one concept as against another, so that you have to take a meat-ax to your opponent or yourself to resolve the contradictions—as the Marxists took a meat-ax to their own skulls at one point, and as the neo-conservatives at this point may take a meat-ax to their own inefficient skulls. A current example might be the maniacal insistence that the Sandinistas[6] are the force of evil and that our C.I.A. terrorists are patriots like George Washington. That's a completely polarized notion of the universe—the notion that everything is black and white.

A basic Buddhist idea from 150 A.D. is that "Form is no different from Emptiness, Emptiness no different from Form." That formulation is one that Keats and all subtle poets might appreciate. The American poets Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, Kerouac and Burroughs in their work do appreciate this "highest perfect wisdom," both in their own intuition and from their study of *Prajnaparamita* texts.

As part of "purification" or "de-conditioning" we have the need for clear seeing or direct perception—perception of a young tree without an intervening veil of preconceived ideas; the surprise glimpse, let us say, of insight, or sudden Gestalt, or I suppose you could say *satori*, occasionally glimpsed as esthetic experience.

In our century Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams constantly insist on direct perception of the materials of poetry, of the language itself that you're working with. The slogan here—and henceforth I'll use a series of slogans derived from various poets and yogis—is one out of

Pound: "Direct treatment of the thing." How do you interpret that phrase? Don't treat the object indirectly or symbolically, but look directly at it and choose spontaneously that aspect of it which is most immediately striking—the striking flash in consciousness or awareness, the most vivid, what sticks out in your mind—and notate that.

"Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective," is a famous axiom or principle that Pound pronounced around 1912. He derived that American application of twentieth-century insight from his study of Chinese Confucian, Taoist and Japanese Buddhist poetry. There was a Buddhist infusion into Western culture at the end of the nineteenth century, both in painting and in poetry. Pound put in order the papers of "the late professor Ernest Fenellosa," the celebrated essay on "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry." Fenellosa-Pound pointed out that in Chinese you were able to have a "direct treatment" of the object because the object was pictorially there via hieroglyph. Pound recommended the adaptation of the same idea: the Chinese poetic method as a corrective to the conceptual vagueness and sentimental abstraction of Western poetry. In a way he was asking for the intercession of the *bodhisattvas* of Buddhist poetry into Western poetics because he was calling for direct perception, direct contact without intervening conceptualization, a clear seeing attentiveness, which, as you may remember, echoing in your brain, is supposed to be one of the marks of Zen masters, as in their practice of gardening, tea ceremony, flower arranging or archery.

That idea was relatively rare in late-nineteenth-century academic Western poetry, though Pound also drew from advanced Western models—old Dante to the French modernist poets Jules Laforgue, Tristan Corbière and Rimbaud. The tradition was initiated by Baudelaire, who had updated the poetic consciousness of the nineteenth century to include the city, real estate, houses, carriages, traffic, machinery. As Walt Whitman said, "Bring the muse into the kitchen. Drag the muse into the kitchen? She's there, installed amidst the kitchenware."

Another slogan that evolved around the same time as Pound's and with the same motif was William Carlos Williams' famous "No ideas but in things." He repeats it in his epic *Paterson,* a little more clearly for those who haven't understood: "No ideas but in facts." Just the facts, ma'am. Don't give us your editorial; no general ideas. Just "give me a [illegible]

instance"—correlate the conception with a real process or a particular action or a concrete thing, localized, immediate, palpable, practicable, involving direct sense contact.

In one of the immortal bard's lyrics, divine Shakespeare gives you nothing but things:

When icicles hang by the wall
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail . . .
And Marian's nose looks red and raw . . .

That was Shakespeare's vivid presentation of unmistakable winter. You don't need to make the generalization if you give the particular instances. A poet is like a Sherlock Holmes, assembling the phalanx of data from which to draw his editorial conclusion. William James' notion was of "the solidity of specificity." Kerouac's phrase for it was, "Details are the life of prose." To have it you've got to have "direct treatment of the thing." And that requires direct perception—mind capable of awareness uncluttered by abstraction, the veil of conceptions parted to reveal significant details of the world's stage.

Williams has another way of saying it—homely advice to young poets and American art practitioners: "Write about things that are close to the nose." There's a poem of his, much quoted by Buddhist poets, called "Thursday." It goes like this:

I have had my dream—like others—
and it has come to nothing, so that
I remain now carelessly
with feet planted on the ground
and look up at the sky—
feeling my clothes about me,
the weight of my body in my shoes,
the rim of my hat, air passing in and out
at my nose—and decide to dream no more.

Just try! Actually that one single poem is the intersection between the mind of meditation—the discipline of meditation, letting go of

thoughts—and the Yankee practice of poetry after William James, where the poet is standing there, feeling the weight of his body in his shoes, aware of the air passing in and out of his nose. And since the title of this series of talks is "Spiritual Quests" we might make a little footnote here that "spirit" comes from the Latin *spiritus,* which means "breathing," and that the spiritual practices of the East are primarily involved with meditation, and that meditation practices usually begin with trying to increase one's awareness of the space around you, beginning with the fact that you're breathing. So generally you follow your breath, in Zen or in Tibetan style. It's a question of following the breath out from the tip of the nose to the end of the breath and then following it back into the stomach, perhaps, or the lower abdomen. So it's sort of charming that Williams arrived at this concept of his own: "air passing in and out at my nose—and decide to dream no more."

Another Pound phrase that leads the mind toward direct treatment of the thing, or clear seeing, is: "The natural object is always the adequate symbol." You don't have to go chasing after far-fetched symbols because direct perception will propose efficient language to you. And that relates to another very interesting statement, by the Tibetan lama poet Chögyam Trungpa: "Things are symbols of themselves." Pound means that the natural object is identical with what it is you're trying to symbolize in any case. Trungpa is saying that if you directly perceive a thing it's completely there, completely itself, completely revelatory of the eternal universe that it's in, or of your mind as it is.

In Kerouac's set of thirty slogans called "Belief and Technique for Modern Prose" there are a few mind-arrows, or mind-pointers, which are instruction on how to focus in, how to direct your mind to see things, whether it's "an old teacup in memory," or whether you're looking out a window, sketching verbally. Kerouac advised writers: "Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better." William Blake's similar slogan is: "Labor well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones." It's very pretty actually; take care of the little baby facts. Blake continues:

> He who would do good to another, must do it in Minute Particulars
> General good is the plea of the scoundrel hypocrite and flatterer:
> For Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized

A classic example of William Carlos Williams in America seeing minute particulars clearly, precisely, thoroughly, is in the famous and most obvious of Imagist poems, "The Red Wheelbarrow." Because the thing was seen so completely the poem seems to have penetrated throughout the culture, so that people who are not interested in poetry—high school kids or thick-headed businessmen—know this as the totem modern poem.

> so much depends
> upon
> a red wheel
> barrow
> glazed with rain
> water
> beside the white
> chickens.

That's considered the acme Imagist poem of direct perception. I think it was written in the twenties. It's not much, actually. Williams didn't think it was so much; he said, "An inconsequential poem—written in 2 minutes—as was (for instance) 'The Red Wheelbarrow' and most other short poems." But it became a sort of sacred object.

Why did he focus on that one image in his garden? Well, he probably didn't focus on it—it was just there and he saw it. And he remembered it. Vividness is self-selecting. In other words, he didn't prepare to see it, except that he had had a life's preparation in practicing awareness "close to the nose," trying to stay in his body and observe the space around him. That kind of spontaneous awareness has a Buddhist term for it: "the Unborn." For where does a thought come from? You can't trace it back to a womb, a thought is "unborn." Perception is unborn, in the sense that it spontaneously arises. Because even if you tried to trace your perceptions back to the source, you couldn't.

To catch the red wheelbarrow, however, you have to be practiced in poetics as well as practiced in ordinary mind. Flaubert was the prose initiator of that narrowing down of perception and the concretization of it with his phrase "The ordinary is the extraordinary." There's a very interesting formulation of that attitude of mind in writing poetry by the late Charles Olson, in his essay "Projective Verse." This is kind of caviar, but

of his own ideas to another generation. It contains several slogans commonly used by most modern poets that relate to the idea of direct seeing or direct awareness of open mind and open form in poetry. Here's what Olson says:

> This is the problem which any poet who departs from closed form is especially confronted by. And it evolves a whole series of new recognitions. From the moment he ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION [Olson means the field of the mind] . . . he can go by no track other than the one that the poem under hand declares for itself. Thus he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of some several forces just now beginning to be examined. . . .

The principle, the law which presides conspicuously over such composition and when obeyed is the reason why a projective poem can come into being. It is this: FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT. (Or so it got phrased by one Robert Creeley, and it makes absolute sense to me, with this possible corollary, that right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of the content under hand.) There it is, brothers, sitting there for USE.

By "content" I think Olson means the sequence of perceptions. So the form—the form of a poem, the plot of a poem, the argument of a poem, the narrative of a poem—would correspond to the sequence of perceptions. If that seems opaque to you, the next paragraph from Olson's "Projective Verse" essay might explain more. He says this:

> Now the process of the thing, how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished. And I think it could be boiled down to one statement (first pounded into my head by Edward Dahlberg): ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at all points . . . get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split-second acts [the decisions you make while scribbling], the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you set up as a poet, USE, USE, USE the process at all points. In any given poem always, always one perception must, must, must [as with the mind] MOVE INSTANTER ON

> ANOTHER! . . . So there we are, fast there's the dogma. And its excuse, its usableness, in practice. Which gets us . . . inside the machinery, now, 1950, of how projective verse is made.

I interpret that set of words—"one perception must move instanter on another"—as similar to the dharmic practice of letting go of thoughts and allowing fresh thoughts to arise and be registered, rather than hanging onto one exclusive image and forcing Reason to branch it out and extend it into a hung-up metaphor. That was the difference between the metaphysically inspired poetry of the thirties to the fifties in America after T. S. Eliot and the Open Form, practiced simultaneously by Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams and later by Charles Olson and Robert Creeley. They let the mind loose. Actually, that's a phrase by one of the founders of our country: "The mind must be loose." That's John Adams, as reported by Robert Duncan in relation to poetics. Try that on the religious right. Leave the mind loose. One perception leads to another. So don't cling to perceptions, or fixate on impressions, or on visions of William Blake. As the young surrealist poet Philip Lamantia said when he was asked in 1958 to define "hip" as distinguishable from "square": Hip is "Don't get hung up."

So we have, as a ground of purification, letting go—the confidence to let your mind loose and observe your own perceptions and their discontinuities. You can't go back and change the sequence of the thoughts you had; you can't revise the process of thinking or deny what was thought, but thought obliterates itself anyway. You don't have to worry about that, you can go on to the next thought.

Robert Duncan once got up and walked across the room and then said, "I can't revise my steps once I've taken them." He was using that as an example to explain why he was interested in Gertrude Stein's writing, which was writing in the present moment, present time, present consciousness: what was going on in the grammar of her head during the time of composition without recourse to past memory or future planning.

Meditators have formulated a slogan that says, "Renunciation is a way to avoid conditioned mind." That means that meditation is practiced by constantly renouncing your mind, or "renouncing" your thoughts, or "letting go" of your thoughts. It doesn't mean letting go of your whole awareness—only that small part of your mind that's dependent on lin-

ear, logical thinking. It doesn't mean renouncing intellect, which has its proper place in Buddhism, as it does in Blake. It doesn't mean idiot wildness. It means expanding the area of awareness, so that your awareness surrounds your thoughts, rather than that you enter into thoughts like a dream. Thus the life of meditation and the life of art are both based on a similar conception of spontaneous mind. They both share renunciation as a way of avoiding a conditioned art work, or trite art, or repetition of other people's ideas.

Poets can avoid repetition of their obsessions. What it requires is confidence in the magic of chance. Chögyam Trungpa phrased this notion, "Magic is the total delight in chance." That also brings magic to poetry: chance thought, or the unborn thought, or the spontaneous thought, or the "first thought," or the thought spoken spontaneously with its conception—thought and word identical on the spot. It requires a certain amount of unselfconsciousness, like singing in the bathtub. It means not embarrassed, not jealous, not involved in one-upmanship, not mimicking, not imitating, above all not self-conscious. And that requires a certain amount of jumping out of yourself—courage and humor and openness and perspective and carelessness, in the sense of burning your mental bridges behind you, outreaching yourself; purification, so to speak, giving yourself permission to utter what you think, either simultaneously, or immediately thereafter, or ten years later.

That brings a kind of freshness and cleanness to both thought and utterance. William Carlos Williams has an interesting phrase about what's wrong when you don't allow that to happen: "There cannot be any kind of facile deception about it . . . prose with a dirty wash of a stale poem over it." Dirty wash of a stale poem over your own natural thought.

When I met Chögyam Trungpa in San Francisco in 1972 we were comparing our travels and our poetry. He had a heavy schedule and a long itinerary, and I said I was getting fatigued with mine. He said, "That's probably because you don't like your poetry."

So I said, "What do you know about poetry? How do you know I don't like my poetry?"

He said, "Why do you need a piece of paper? Don't you trust your own mind? Why don't you do like the classic poets? Milarepa made up his poems on the spot and other people copied them down."

That's actually the classical Buddhist practice among Zen masters and Tibetan lamas, like the author of "The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa." These songs are the most exquisite and hermetic as well as vulgar and folk-art-like works in all of Tibetan culture—classic folk poetry, known by every Tibetan. But Milarepa never could write. The method, again, was spontaneous mind, on-the-spot improvisation on the basis of meditative discipline.

What Trungpa said reminded me of a similar exchange that I had with Kerouac, who also urged me to be more spontaneous, less worried about my poetic practice. I was always worried about my poetry. Was it any good? Were the household dishes right, was the bed made? I remember Kerouac falling down drunk on the kitchen floor of 170 East Second Street in 1960, laughing up at me and saying, "Ginsberg, you're a hairy loss." That's something that he made up on the spot, a phrase that just came out of his mouth, and I was offended. A hairy loss! If you allow the active phrase to come to your mind, allow that out, you speak from a ground that can relate your inner perception to external phenomena, and thus join Heaven and Earth.

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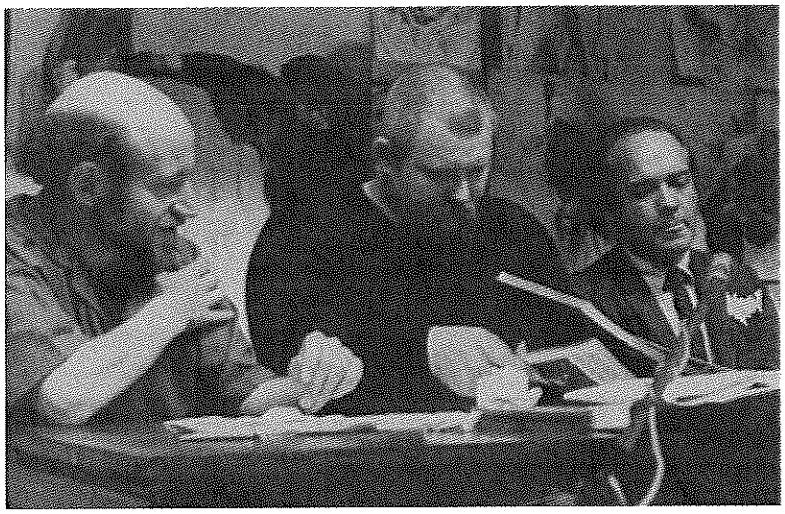
Exercises in Poetic Candor

1. Meditation instructions and five minutes sitting
2. Write down in chronologic sequence the main external perceptions and internal ruminations or chains of thought that passed thru your head.
3. Surprise Mind: "Nazi milk"
   Word associations with key word
   Seventeen syllable declarative sentence
4. Top ten most vivid recollections since childhood:
   Spots of Time: Wordsworth
   Vividness
5. Top ten fears

Gustav Metzger: Auto-Destructive Art

Gustav Metzger painting with hydrochloric acid on nylon. South Bank, London, 1961/1966.



Gustav Metzger, Wolf Vostell and Al Hanson at the Destruction in art Symposium (DIAS), London, 1966

Gustav Metzger: Auto-Destructive Art (1959)

Auto-destructive art is primarily a form of public art for industrial societies.

Self-destructive painting, sculpture and construction is a total unity of idea, site, form, colour, method, and timing of the disintegrative process.

Auto-destructive art can be created with natural forces, traditional art techniques and technological techniques.

The amplified sound of the auto-destructive process can be an element of the total conception.

The artist may collaborate with scientists, engineers.

Self-destructive art can be machine produced and factory assembled.

Auto-destructive paintings, sculptures and constructions have a life time varying from a few moments to twenty years. When the disintegrative process is complete the work is to be removed from the site and scrapped.

Gustav Metzger: Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art (1960)

Gustav Metzger: Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art (1960)

Man In Regent Street is auto-destructive.

Rockets, nuclear weapons, are auto-destructive.

Auto-destructive art.

The drop drop dropping of HH bombs.

Not interested in ruins, (the picturesque)

Auto-destructive art re-enacts the obsession with destruction, the pummeling to which individuals and masses are subjected.

Auto-destructive art demonstrates man's power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature and to order them.

Auto-destructive art mirrors the compulsive perfectionism of arms manufacture - polishing to destruction point.

Auto-destructive art is the transformation of technology into public art. The immense productive capacity, the chaos of capitalism and of Soviet communism, the co-existence of surplus and starvation; the increasing stock-piling of nuclear weapons - more than enough to destroy technological societies; the disintegrative effect of machinery and of life in vast built-up areas on the person,...

Auto-destructive art is art which contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time not to exceed twenty years. Other forms of auto-destructive art involve manual manipulation. There are forms of auto-destructive art where the artist has a tight control over the nature and timing of the disintegrative process, and there are other forms where the artist's control is slight.

Materials and techniques used in creating auto-destructive art include: Acid, Adhesives, Ballistics, Canvas, Clay, Combustion, Compression, Concrete, Corrosion, Cybernetics, Drop, Elasticity, Electricity, Electrolysis, Feed-Back, Glass, Heat, Human Energy, Ice, Jet, Light, Load, Mass-production, Metal, Motion Picture, Natural Forces, Nuclear Energy, Paint, Paper, Photography, Plaster, Plastics, Pressure, Radiation, Sand, Solar Energy, Sound, Steam, Stress, Terra-cotta, Vibration, Water, Welding, Wire, Wood.

Gustav Metzger: Auto-Destructive Art Machine Art Auto-Creative Art (1961)

Each visible fact absolutely expresses its reality.

Certain machine produced forms are the most perfect forms of our period.

In the evenings some of the finest works of art produced now are dumped on the streets of Soho.

Auto creative art is art of change, growth movement.

Auto-destructive art and auto creative art aim at the integration of art with the advances of science and technology. The immediate objective is the creation, with the aid of computers, of works of art whose movements are programmed and include "self-regulation". The spectator, by means of electronic devices can have a direct bearing on the action of these works.

Auto-destructive art is an attack on capitalist values and the drive to nuclear annihilation.

33 THOUGH SEPARATED FROM his product, man is more and more, and ever more powerfully, the producer of every detail of his world. The closer his life comes to being his own creation, the more drastically is he cut off from that life.

34 THE SPECTACLE IS *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image.

1967

from The Society of the Spectacle

II

THE COMMODITY AS SPECTACLE

The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression.... As labor is progressively rationalized and mechanized man's lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more contemplative.

– Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

35 THE SELF-MOVEMENT of the spectacle consists in this: it arrogates to itself everything that in human activity exists in a fluid state so as to possess it in a congealed form – as things that, being the *negative expression* of living value, have become exclusively abstract value. In these signs we recognize our old enemy the commodity, which appears at first sight a very trivial thing, and easily understood, yet which is in reality a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties.

36 HERE WE HAVE the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by things whose qualities are "at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses." This principle is absolutely fulfilled in the spectacle, where the perceptible world is replaced by a set of images that are superior to that world yet at the same time impose themselves as *eminently* perceptible.

37 THE WORLD THE SPECTACLE holds up to view is at once *here* and *elsewhere*; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience. The commodity world is thus shown *as it really is*, for its logic is one with men's estrangement from one another and from the sum total of what they produce.

38 THE LOSS OF QUALITY so obvious at every level of the language of the spectacle, from the objects it lauds to the behavior it regulates, merely echoes the basic traits of a real production process that shuns reality. The commodity form is characterized exclusively by self-equivalence –

it is exclusively quantitative in nature: the quantitative is what it develops, and it can only develop within the quantitative.

39 DESPITE THE FACT that it excludes quality, this development is still subject, qua development, to the qualitative. Thus the spectacle betrays the fact that it must eventually break the bounds of its own abundance. Though this is not true locally, except here and there, it is already true at the universal level which was the commodity's original standard – a standard that it has been able to live up to by turning the whole planet into a single world market.

40 THE DEVELOPMENT of the forces of production is the *real unconscious history* that has built and modified the conditions of existence of human groups (understood as the conditions of *survival* and their extension): this development has been the basis of all human enterprise. The realm of commodities has meant the constitution, within a natural economy, of a surplus survival. The production of commodities, which implies the exchange of a variety of products among independent producers, was long able to retain an artisanal aspect embodied in a marginal economic activity where its quantitative essence was masked. Wherever it encountered the social conditions of large-scale trade and capital accumulation, however, such production successfully established total hegemony over the economy. The entire economy then became what the commodity, throughout this campaign of conquest, had shown itself to be – namely, a process of quantitative development. The

unceasing deployment of economic power in the shape of commodities has transfigured human labor into labor-as-commodity, into wage-labor, and eventually given rise to an *abundance* thanks to which the basic problem of survival, though solved, is solved in such a way that it is not disposed of, but is rather forever cropping up again at a higher level. Economic growth liberates societies from the natural pressures occasioned by their struggle for survival, but they still must be liberated from their liberators. The *independence* of the commodity has spread to the entire economy over which the commodity now reigns. The economy transforms the world, but it transforms it into a world of the economy. The pseudo-nature in which labor has become alienated demands that such labor remain in its service indefinitely, and inasmuch as this estranged activity is answerable only to itself it is able in turn to enroll all socially permissible efforts and projects under its banner. In these circumstances an abundance of commodities, which is to say an abundance of commodity relations, can be no more than an *augmented survival.*

41 THE COMMODITY'S DOMINION over the economy was at first exercised in a covert manner. The economy itself, the material basis of social life, was neither perceived nor understood – not properly known precisely because of its "familiarity." In a society where concrete commodities were few and far between, it was the dominance of money that seemed to play the role of emissary, invested with full authority by an unknown power. With the coming of the industrial revolution, the division of labor specific to that

revolution's manufacturing system, and mass production for a world market, the commodity emerged in its full-fledged form as a force aspiring to the complete colonization of social life. It was at this moment too that political economy established itself as at once the dominant science and the science of domination.

42 THE SPECTACLE CORRESPONDS to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see – commodities are now *all* that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity. The growth of the dictatorship of modern economic production is both extensive and intensive in character. In the least industrialized regions its presence is already felt in the form of imperialist domination by those areas that lead the world in productivity. In these advanced sectors themselves, social space is continually being blanketed by stratum after stratum of commodities. With the advent of the so-called second industrial revolution, alienated consumption is added to alienated production as an inescapable duty of the masses. The *entirety of labor sold* is transformed overall into the *total commodity*. A cycle is thus set in train that must be maintained at all costs: the total commodity must be returned in fragmentary form to a fragmentary individual completely cut off from the concerted action of the forces of production. To this end the already specialized science of domination is further broken down into specialties such as sociology, applied psychology, cybernetics, semiology and so

on, which oversee the self-regulation of every phase of the process.

43 WHEREAS AT THE PRIMITIVE stage of capitalist accumulation "political economy treats the *proletarian* as a mere *worker*" who must receive only the minimum necessary to guarantee his labor-power, and never considers him "in his leisure, in his humanity," these ideas of the ruling class are revised just as soon as so great an abundance of commodities begins to be produced that a surplus "collaboration" is required of the workers. All of a sudden the workers in question discover that they are no longer invariably subject to the total contempt so clearly built into every aspect of the organization and management of production; instead they find that every day, once work is over, they are treated like grown-ups, with a great show of solicitude and politeness, in their new role as consumers. The *humanity of the commodity* finally attends to the workers' "leisure and humanity" for the simple reason that political economy *as such* now can – and must – bring these spheres under its sway. Thus it is that the totality of human existence falls under the regime of the "perfected denial of man."

44 THE SPECTACLE IS a permanent opium war waged to make it impossible to distinguish goods from commodities, or true satisfaction from a survival that increases according to its own logic. Consumable survival *must* increase, in fact, because it continues to enshrine deprivation. The reason there is nothing *beyond* augmented survival, and no end to its growth, is that survival itself belongs to the realm

of dispossession: it may gild poverty, but it cannot transcend it.

45 AUTOMATION, WHICH IS at once the most advanced sector of modern industry and the epitome of its practice, confronts the world of the commodity with a contradiction that it must somehow resolve: the same technical infrastructure that is capable of abolishing labor must at the same time preserve labor as a commodity – and indeed as the sole generator of commodities. If automation, or for that matter any mechanisms, even less radical ones, that can increase productivity, are to be prevented from reducing socially necessary labor-time to an unacceptably low level, new forms of employment have to be created. A happy solution presents itself in the growth of the tertiary or service sector in response to the immense strain on the supply lines of the army responsible for distributing and hyping the commodities of the moment. The coincidence is neat: on the one hand, the system is faced with the necessity of reintegrating newly redundant labor; on the other, the very factitiousness of the needs associated with the commodities on offer calls out a whole battery of reserve forces.

46 EXCHANGE VALUE COULD only have arisen as the proxy of use value, but the victory it eventually won with its own weapons created the preconditions for its establishment as an autonomous power. By activating all human use value and monopolizing that value's fulfillment, exchange value eventually gained the upper hand. The process of exchange

became indistinguishable from any conceivable utility, thereby placing use value at its mercy. Starting out as the condottiere of use value, exchange value ended up waging a war that was entirely its own.

47 THE FALLING RATE of use value, which is a constant of the capitalist economy, gives rise to a new form of privation within the realm of augmented survival; this is not to say that this realm is emancipated from the old poverty: on the contrary, it requires the vast majority to take part as wage workers in the unending pursuit of its ends – a requirement to which, as everyone knows, one must either submit or die. It is the reality of this situation – the fact that, even in its most impoverished form (food, shelter), use value has no existence outside the illusory riches of augmented survival – that is the real basis for the general acceptance of illusion in the consumption of modern commodities. The real consumer thus becomes a consumer of illusion. The commodity is this illusion, which is in fact real, and the spectacle is its most general form.

48 USE VALUE WAS formerly implicit in exchange value. In terms of the spectacle's topsy-turvy logic, however, it has to be explicit – for the very reason that its own effective existence has been eroded by the overdevelopment of the commodity economy, and that a counterfeit life calls for a pseudo-justification.

49 THE SPECTACLE IS ANOTHER facet of money, which is the abstract general equivalent of all commodities. But

whereas money in its familiar form has dominated society as the representation of universal equivalence, that is, of the exchangeability of diverse goods whose uses are not otherwise compatible, the spectacle in its full development is money's modern aspect; in the spectacle the totality of the commodity world is visible in one piece, as the general equivalent of whatever society as a whole can be and do. The spectacle is money *for contemplation only*, for here the totality of use has already been bartered for the totality of abstract representation. The spectacle is not just the servant of *pseudo-use* – it is already, in itself, the pseudo-use of life.

50 WITH THE ACHIEVEMENT of a purely economic abundance, the concentrated result of social labor becomes visible, subjecting all reality to an appearance that is in effect that labor's product. Capital is no longer the invisible center determining the mode of production. As it accumulates, capital spreads out to the periphery, where it assumes the form of tangible objects. Society in its length and breadth becomes capital's faithful portrait.

51 THE ECONOMY'S TRIUMPH as an independent power inevitably also spells its doom, for it has unleashed forces that must eventually destroy the *economic necessity* that was the unchanging basis of earlier societies. Replacing that necessity by the necessity of boundless economic development can only mean replacing the satisfaction of primary human needs, now met in the most summary manner, by a ceaseless manufacture of pseudo-needs, all of which come down

in the end to just one – namely, the pseudo-need for the reign of an autonomous economy to continue. Such an economy irrevocably breaks all ties with authentic needs to the precise degree that it emerges from a *social unconscious* that was dependent on it without knowing it. "Whatever is conscious wears out. Whatever is unconscious remains unalterable. Once freed, however, surely this too must fall into ruins?" (Freud).

52 BY THE TIME society discovers that it is contingent on the economy, the economy has in point of fact become contingent on society. Having grown as a subterranean force until it could emerge sovereign, the economy proceeds to lose its power. Where economic id was, there ego shall be. The *subject* can only arise out of society – that is, out of the struggle that society embodies. The possibility of a subject's existing depends on the outcome of the class struggle which turns out to be the product and the producer of history's economic foundation.

53 CONSCIOUSNESS OF DESIRE and the desire for consciousness together and indissolubly constitute that project which in its negative form has as its goal the abolition of classes and the direct possession by the workers of every aspect of their activity. The opposite of this project is the society of the spectacle, where the commodity contemplates itself in a world of its own making.

III

Unity and Division Within Appearances

A lively new polemic about the concepts "one divides into two" and "two fuse into one" is unfolding on the philosophical front in this country. This debate is a struggle between those who are for and those who are against the materialist dialectic, a struggle between two conceptions of the world: the proletarian conception and the bourgeois conception. Those who maintain that "one divides into two" is the fundamental law of things are on the side of the materialist dialectic; those who maintain that the fundamental law of things is that "two fuse into one" are against the materialist dialectic. The two sides have drawn a clear line of demarcation between them, and their arguments are diametrically opposed. This polemic is a reflection, on the ideological level, of the acute and complex class struggle taking place in China and in the world.

– *Red Flag* (Peking), 21 September 1964

The Scum Manifesto

by Valerie Solanas

From the back cover of the Phoenix Press booklet:

"Valerie Solanas' SCUM Manifesto was written in 1967 and published in 1968, the year she shot and wounded Andy Warhol. The text used here is that of the 1983 edition of the Manifesto that was published by the Matriarchy Study Group."

The
SCUM Manifesto
by Valerie Solanas

Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and destroy the male sex.

It is now technically feasible to reproduce without the aid of males (or, for that matter, females) and to produce only females. We must begin immediately to do so. Retaining the male has not even the dubious purpose of reproduction. The male is a biological accident: the Y (male) gene is an incomplete X (female) gene, that is, it has an incomplete set of chromosomes. In other words, the male is an incomplete female, a walking abortion, aborted at the gene stage. To be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples.

The male is completely egocentric, trapped inside himself, incapable of empathizing or identifying with others, or love, friendship, affection of tenderness. He is a completely isolated unit, incapable of rapport with anyone. His responses are entirely visceral, not cerebral; his intelligence is a mere tool in the services of his drives and needs; he is incapable of mental passion, mental interaction; he can't relate to anything other than his own physical sensations. He is a half-dead, unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness; consequently, he is at best an utter bore, an inoffensive blob, since only those capable of absorption in others can be charming. He is trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes, and is far worse off than the apes because, unlike the apes, he is capable of a large array of negative feelings -- hate, jealousy, contempt, disgust, guilt, shame, doubt -- and moreover, he is *aware* of what he is and what he isn't.

Although completely physical, the male is unfit even for stud service. Even assuming mechanical proficiency, which few men have, he is, first of all, incapable of zestfully, lustfully, tearing off a piece, but instead is eaten up with guilt, shame, fear and insecurity, feelings rooted in male nature, which the most enlightened training can only minimize; second, the physical feeling he attains is next to nothing; and third, he is not empathizing with his partner, but is obsessed with how he's doing, turning in an A performance, doing a good plumbing job. To call a man an animal is to flatter him; he's a machine, a walking dildo. It's often said that men use women. Use them for what? Surely not pleasure.

Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities and obtaining, if he's lucky, a barely perceptible physical feeling, the male is, nonetheless, obsessed with screwing; he'll swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy awaiting him. He'll screw a woman he despises, any snaggle-toothed hag, and furthermore, pay for the opportunity. Why? Relieving physical tension isn't the answer, as masturbation suffices for that. It's not ego satisfaction; that doesn't explain screwing corpses and babies.

Completely egocentric, unable to relate, empathize or identify, and filled with a vast, pervasive, diffuse sexuality, the male is pyschically passive. He hates his passivity, so he projects it onto women, defines the make as active, then sets out to prove that he is (`prove that he is a Man'). His main means of attempting to prove it is screwing (Big Man with a Big Dick tearing off a Big Piece). Since he's attempting to prove an error, he must `prove' it again and again. Screwing, then, is a desperate compulsive, attempt to prove he's not passive, not a woman; but he *is* passive and *does* want to be a woman.

Being an incomplete female, the male spends his life attempting to complete himself, to become female. He attempts to do this by constantly seeking out, fraternizing with and trying to live through an fuse with the female, and by claiming as his own all female characteristics -- emotional strength and independence, forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc -- and projecting onto women all male traits -- vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc. It should be said, though, that the male has one glaring area of superiority over the female -- public relations. (He has done a brilliant job of convincing millions of women that men are women and women are men). The male claim that females find fulfillment through motherhood and sexuality reflects what males think they'd find fulfilling if they were female.

Women, in other words, don't have penis envy; men have pussy envy. When the male accepts his passivity, defines himself as a woman (males as well as females think men are women and women are men), and becomes a transvestite he loses his desire to

screw (or to do anything else, for that matter; he fulfills himself as a drag queen) and gets his dick chopped off. He then achieves a continuous diffuse sexual feeling from `being a woman'. Screwing is, for a man, a defense against his desire to be female. He is responsible for:

War: The male's normal compensation for not being female, namely, getting his Big Gun off, is grossly inadequate, as he can get it off only a very limited number of times; so he gets it off on a really massive scale, and proves to the entire world that he's a `Man'. Since he has no compassion or ability to empathize or identify, proving his manhood is worth an endless amount of mutilation and suffering and an endless number of lives, including his own -- his own life being worthless, he would rather go out in a blaze of glory than to plod grimly on for fifty more years.

Niceness, Politeness, and `Dignity': Every man, deep down, knows he's a worthless piece of shit. Overwhelmed by a sense of animalism and deeply ashamed of it; wanting, not to express himself, but to hide from others his total physicality, total egocentricity, the hate and contempt he feels for other men, and to hide from himself the hate and contempt he suspects other men feel for him; having a crudely constructed nervous system that is easily upset by the least display of emotion or feeling, the male tries to enforce a `social' code that ensures perfect blandness, unsullied by the slightest trace or feeling or upsetting opinion. He uses terms like `copulate', `sexual congress', `have relations with' (to men **sexual** relations is a redundancy), overlaid with stilted manners; the suit on the chimp.

Money, Marriage and Prostitution, Work and Prevention of an Automated Society: There is no human reason for money or for anyone to work more than two or three hours a week at the very most. All non-creative jobs (practically all jobs now being done) could have been automated long ago, and in a moneyless society everyone can have as much of the best of everything as she wants. But there are non-human, male reasons for wanting to maintain the money system:

1. Pussy. Despising his highly inadequate self, overcome with intense anxiety and a deep, profound loneliness when by his empty self, desperate to attach himself to any female in dim hopes of completing himself, in the mystical belief that by touching gold he'll turn to gold, the male craves the continuous companionship of women. The company of the lowest female is preferable to his own or that of other men, who serve only to remind him of his repulsiveness. But females, unless very young or very sick, must be coerced or bribed into male company.

2. Supply the non-relating male with the delusion of usefulness, and enable him to try to justify his existence by digging holes and then filling them up. Leisure time horrifies the male, who will have nothing to do but contemplate his grotesque self.

Unable to relate or to love, the male must work. Females crave absorbing, emotionally satisfying, meaningful activity, but lacking the opportunity or ability for this, they prefer to idle and waste away their time in ways of their own choosing -- sleeping, shopping, bowling, shooting pool, playing cards and other games, breeding, reading, walking around, daydreaming, eating, playing with themselves, popping pills, going to the movies, getting analyzed, traveling, raising dogs and cats, lolling about on the beach, swimming, watching TV, listening to music, decorating their houses, gardening, sewing, nightclubbing, dancing, visiting, `improving their minds' (taking courses), and absorbing `culture' (lectures, plays, concerts, `arty' movies). Therefore, many females would, even assuming complete economic equality between the sexes, prefer living with males or peddling their asses on the street, thus having most of their time for themselves, to spending many hours of their days doing boring, stultifying, non-creative work for someone else, functioning as less than animals, as machines, or, at best -- if able to get a `good' job -- co-managing the shitpile. What will liberate women, therefore, from male control is the total elimination of the money-work system, not the attainment of economic equality with men within it.

3. Power and control. Unmasterful in his personal relations with women, the male attains to masterfulness by the manipulation of money and everything controlled by money, in other words, of everything and everybody.

4. Love substitute. Unable to give love or affection, the male gives money. It makes him feel motherly. The mother gives milk; he gives bread. He is the Breadwinner.

5. Provide the male with a goal. Incapable of enjoying the moment, the male needs something to look forward to, and money provides him with an eternal, never-ending goal: Just think of what you could do with 80 trillion dollars -- invest it! And in three years time you'd have 300 trillion dollars!!!

6. Provide the basis for the male's major opportunity to control and manipulate -- fatherhood.

Fatherhood and Mental Illness (fear, cowardice, timidity, humility, insecurity, passivity): Mother wants what's best for her kids; Daddy only wants what's best for Daddy, that is peace and quiet, pandering to his delusion of dignity (`respect'), a good reflection on himself (status) and the opportunity to control and manipulate, or, if he's an `enlightened' father, to `give guidance'. His daughter, in addition, he wants sexually -- he givers her **hand** in marriage; the other part is for him. Daddy, unlike Mother, can never give in to his kids, as he must, at all costs, preserve his delusion of decisiveness, forcefulness, always-rightness and strength. Never getting one's way leads to lack of self-confidence in one's ability to cope with the world and to a passive acceptance of the status quo. Mother loves her kids, although she sometimes gets angry, but anger

blows over quickly and even while it exists, doesn't preclude love and basic acceptance. Emotionally diseased Daddy doesn't love his kids; he approves of them -- if they're `good', that is, if they're nice, `respectful', obedient, subservient to his will, quiet and not given to unseemly displays of temper that would be most upsetting to Daddy's easily disturbed male nervous system -- in other words, if they're passive vegetables. If they're not `good', he doesn't get angry -- not if he's a modern, `civilized' father (the old-fashioned ranting, raving brute is preferable, as he is so ridiculous he can be easily despised) -- but rather express disapproval, a state that, unlike anger, endures and precludes a basic acceptance, leaving the kid with the feeling of worthlessness and a lifelong obsession wit being approved of; the result is fear of independent thought, as this leads to unconventional, disapproved of opinions and way of life.

For the kid to want Daddy's approval it must respect Daddy, and being garbage, Daddy can make sure that he is respected only by remaining aloof, by distantness, by acting on the precept of `familiarity breeds contempt', which is, of course, true, if one is contemptible. By being distant and aloof, he is able to remain unknown, mysterious, and thereby, to inspire fear (`respect').

Disapproval of emotional `scenes' leads to fear of strong emotion, fear of one's own anger and hatred. Fear of anger and hatred combined with a lack of self-confidence in one's ability to cope with and change the world, or even to affect in the slightest way one's own destiny, leads to a mindless belief that the world and most people in it are nice and the most banal, trivial amusements are great fun and deeply pleasurable.

The affect of fatherhood on males, specifically, is to make them `Men', that is, highly defensive of all impulses to passivity, faggotry, and of desires to be female. Every boy wants to imitate his mother, be her, fuse with her, but Daddy forbids this; **he** is the mother; **he** gets to fuse with her. So he tells the boy, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, to not be a sissy, to act like a `Man'. The boy, scared shitless of and `respecting' his father, complies, and becomes just like Daddy, that model of `Man'-hood, the all-American ideal -- the well-behaved heterosexual dullard.

The effect of fatherhood on females is to make them male -- dependent, passive, domestic, animalistic, insecure, approval and security seekers, cowardly, humble, `respectful' of authorities and men, closed, not fully responsive, half-dead, trivial, dull, conventional, flattened-out and thoroughly contemptible. Daddy's Girl, always tense and fearful, uncool, unanalytical, lacking objectivity, appraises Daddy, and thereafter, other men, against a background of fear (`respect') and is not only unable to see the empty shell behind the facade, but accepts the male definition of himself as superior, as a female, and of herself, as inferior, as a male, which, thanks to Daddy, she really is.

It is the increase of fatherhood, resulting from the increased and more widespread affluence that fatherhood needs in order to thrive, that has caused the general increase of mindlessness and the decline of women in the United States since the 1920s. The close association of affluence with fatherhood has led, for the most part, to only the wrong girls, namely, the `privileged' middle class girls, getting `educated'.

The effect of fathers, in sum, has been to corrode the world with maleness. The male has a negative Midas Touch -- everything he touches turns to shit.

Suppression of Individuality, Animalism (domesticity and motherhood), and Functionalism: The male is just a bunch of conditioned reflexes, incapable of a mentally free response; he is tied to he earliest conditioning, determined completely by his past experiences. His earliest experiences are with his mother, and he is throughout his life tied to her. It never becomes completely clear to the make that he is not part of his mother, that he is he and she is she.

His greatest need is to be guided, sheltered, protected and admired by Mama (men expect women to adore what men shrink from in horror -- themselves) and, being completely physical, he yearns to spend his time (that's not spent `out in the world' grimly defending against his passivity) wallowing in basic animal activities -- eating, sleeping, shitting, relaxing and being soothed by Mama. Passive, rattle-headed Daddy's Girl, ever eager for approval, for a pat on the head, for the `respect' if any passing piece of garbage, is easily reduced to Mama, mindless ministrator to physical needs, soother of the weary, apey brow, booster of the tiny ego, appreciator of the contemptible, a hot water bottle with tits.

The reduction to animals of the women of the most backward segment of society -- the `privileged, educated' middle-class, the backwash of humanity -- where Daddy reigns supreme, has been so thorough that they try to groove on labour pains and lie around in the most advanced nation in the world in the middle of the twentieth century with babies chomping away on their tits. It's not for the kids sake, though, that the `experts' tell women that Mama should stay home and grovel in animalism, but for Daddy's; the tits for Daddy to hang onto; the labor pains for Daddy to vicariously groove on (half dead, he needs awfully strong stimuli to make him respond).

Reducing the female to an animal, to Mama, to a male, is necessary for psychological as well as practical reasons: the male is a mere member of the species, interchangeable with every other male. He has no deep-seated individuality, which stems from what intrigues you, what outside yourself absorbs you, what you're in relation to. Completely self-absorbed, capable of being in relation only to their bodies and physical sensations, males differ from each other only to the degree and in the

ways they attempt to defend against their passivity and against their desire to be female.

The female's individuality, which he is acutely aware of, but which he doesn't comprehend and isn't capable of relating to or grasping emotionally, frightens and upsets him and fills him with envy. So he denies it in her and proceeds to define everyone in terms of his or her function or use, assigning to himself, of course, the most important functions -- doctor, president, scientist -- therefore providing himself with an identity, if not individuality, and tries to convince himself and women (he's succeeded best at convincing women) that the female function is to bear and raise children and to relax, comfort and boost the ego if the male; that her function is such as to make her interchangeable with every other female. In actual fact, the female function is to relate, groove, love and be herself, irreplaceable by anyone else; the male function is to produce sperm. We now have sperm banks.

In actual fact, the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems crack jokes, make music -- all with love. In other words, create a magic world.

Prevention of Privacy: Although the male, being ashamed of what he is and almost of everything he does, insists on privacy and secrecy in all aspects of his life, he has no real **regard** for privacy. Being empty, not being a complete, separate being, having no self to groove on and needing to be constantly in female company, he sees nothing at all wrong in intruding himself on any woman's thoughts, even a total stranger's, anywhere at any time, but rather feels indignant and insulted when put down for doing so, as well as confused -- he can't, for the life of him, understand why anyone would prefer so much as one minute of solitude to the company of any creep around. Wanting to become a woman, he strives to be constantly around females, which is the closest he can get to becoming one, so he created a `society' based upon the family -- a male-female could and their kids (the excuse for the family's existence), who live virtually on top of one another, unscrupuluously violating the females' rights, privacy and sanity.

Isolation, Suburbs, and Prevention of Community: Our society is not a community, but merely a collection of isolated family units. Desperately insecure, fearing his woman will leave him if she is exposed to other men or to anything remotely resembling life, the male seeks to isolate her from other men and from what little civilization there is, so he moves her out to the suburbs, a collection of self-absorbed couples and their kids. Isolation enables him to try to maintain his pretense of being an individual nu becoming a `rugged individualist', a loner, equating non-cooperation and solitariness with individuality.

There is yet another reason for the male to isolate himself: every man is an island. Trapped inside himself, emotionally isolated, unable to relate, the male has a horror of civilization, people, cities, situations requiring an ability to understand and relate to people. So like a scared rabbit, he scurries off, dragging Daddy's little asshole with him to the wilderness, suburbs, or, in the case of the hippy -- he's way out, Man! -- all the way out to the cow pasture where he can fuck and breed undisturbed and mess around with his beads and flute.

The `hippy', whose desire to be a `Man', a `rugged individualist', isn't quite as strong as the average man's, and who, in addition, is excited by the thought having lots of women accessible to him, rebels against the harshness of a Breadwinner's life and the monotony of one woman. In the name of sharing and cooperation, he forms a commune or tribe, which, for all its togetherness and partly because of it, (the commune, being an extended family, is an extended violation of the female's rights, privacy and sanity) is no more a community than normal `society'.

A true community consists of individuals -- not mere species members, not couples -- respecting each others individuality and privacy, at the same time interacting with each other mentally and emotionally -- free spirits in free relation to each other -- and co-operating with each other to achieve common ends. Traditionalists say the basic unit of `society' is the family; `hippies' say the tribe; no one says the individual.

The `hippy' babbles on about individuality, but has no more conception of it than any other man. He desires to get back to Nature, back to the wilderness, back to the home of furry animals that he's one of, away from the city, where there is at least a trace, a bare beginning of civilization, to live at the species level, his time taken up with simple, non-intellectual activities -- farming, fucking, bead stringing. The most important activity of the commune, the one upon which it is based, is gang-banging. The `hippy' is enticed to the commune mainly by the prospect for free pussy -- the main commodity to be shared, to be had just for the asking, but, blinded by greed, he fails to anticipate all the other men he has to share with, or the jealousies and possessiveness for the pussies themselves.

Men cannot co-operate to achieve a common end, because each man's end is all the pussy for himself. The commune, therefore, is doomed to failure; each `hippy' will, in panic, grad the first simpleton who digs him and whisks her off to the suburbs as fast as he can. The male cannot progress socially, but merely swings back and forth from isolation to gang-banging.

Conformity: Although he wants to be an individual, the male is scared of anything in himself that is the slightest bit different from other men, it causes him to suspect that he's not really a `Man', that he's passive and totally sexual, a highly upsetting

suspicion. If other men are "A" and he's not, he must not be a man; he must be a fag. So he tries to affirm his `Manhood' by being like all the other men. Differentness in other men, as well as himself, threatens him; it means **they're** fags whom he must at all costs avoid, so he tries to make sure that all other men conform.

The male dares to be different to the degree that he accepts his passivity and his desire to be female, his fagginess. The farthest out male is the drag queen, but he, although different from most men, is exactly like all the other drag queens like the functionalist, he has an identity -- he is female. He tries to define all his troubles away -- but still no individuality. Not completely convinced that he's a woman, highly insecure about being sufficiently female, he conforms compulsively to the man-made stereotype, ending up as nothing but a bundle of stilted mannerisms.

To be sure he's a `Man', the male must see to it that the female be clearly a `Woman', the opposite of a `Man', that is, the female must act like a faggot. And Daddy's Girl, all of whose female instincts were wrenched out of her when little, easily and obligingly adapts herself to the role.

Authority and Government: Having no sense of right and wrong, no conscience, which can only stem from having an ability to empathize with others... having no faith in his non-existent self, being unnecessarily competitive, and by nature, unable to co-operate, the male feels a need for external guidance and control. So he created authorities -- priests, experts, bosses, leaders, etc -- and government. Wanting the female (Mama) to guide him, but unable to accept this fact (he is, after all, a MAN), wanting to play Woman, to usurp her function as Guider and Protector, he sees to it that all authorities are male.

There's no reason why a society consisting of rational beings capable of empathizing with each other, complete and having no natural reason to compete, should have a government, laws or leaders.

Philosophy, Religion, and Morality Based on Sex: The male's inability to relate to anybody or anything makes his life pointless and meaningless (the ultimate male insight is that life is absurd), so he invented philosophy and religion. Being empty, he looks outward, not only for guidance and control, but for salvation and for the meaning of life. Happiness being for him impossible on this earth, he invented Heaven.

For a man, having no ability to empathize with others and being totally sexual, `wrong' is sexual `license' and engaging in `deviant' (`unmanly') sexual practices, that is, not defending against his passivity and total sexuality which, if indulged, would destroy `civilization', since `civilization' is based entirely upon the male need to

defend himself against these characteristics. For a woman (according to men), `wrong' is any behavior that would entice men into sexual `license' -- that is, not placing male needs above her own and not being a faggot.

Religion not only provides the male with a goal (Heaven) and helps keep women tied to men, but offers rituals through which he can try to expiate the guilt and shame he feels at not defending himself enough against his sexual impulses; in essence, that guilt and shame he feels at being male.

Most men men, utterly cowardly, project their inherent weaknesses onto women, label them female weaknesses and believe themselves to have female strengths; most philosophers, not quite so cowardly, face the fact that make lacks exist in men, but still can't face the fact that they exist in men only. So they label the male condition the Human Condition, post their nothingness problem, which horrifies them, as a philosophical dilemma, thereby giving stature to their animalism, grandiloquently label their nothingness their `Identity Problem', and proceed to prattle on pompously about the `Crisis of the Individual', the `Essence of Being', `Existence preceding Essence', `Existential Modes of Being', etc. etc.

A woman not only takes her identity and individuality for granted, but knows instinctively that the only wrong is to hurt others, and that the meaning of life is love.

Prejudice (racial, ethnic, religious, etc): The male needs scapegoats onto whom he can project his failings and inadequacies and upon whom he can vent his frustration at not being female. And the vicarious discriminations have the practical advantage of substantially increasing the pussy pool available to the men on top.

Competition, Prestige, Status, Formal Education, Ignorance and Social and Economic Classes: Having an obsessive desire to be admired by women, but no intrinsic worth, the make constructs a highly artificial society enabling him to appropriate the appearance of worth through money, prestige, `high' social class, degrees, professional position and knowledge and, by pushing as many other men as possible down professionally, socially, economically, and educationally.

The purpose of `higher' education is not to educate but to exclude as many as possible from the various professions.

The male, totally physical, incapable of mental rapport, although able to understand and use knowledge and ideas, is unable to relate to them, to grasp them emotionally: he does not value knowledge and ideas for their own sake (they're just means to ends) and, consequently, feels no need for mental companions, no need to cultivate the intellectual potentialities of others. On the contrary, the male has a vested interest in

ignorance; it gives the few knowledgeable men a decided edge on the unknowledgeable ones, and besides, the male knows that an enlightened, aware female population will mean the end of him. The healthy, conceited female wants the company of equals whom she can respect and groove on; the male and the sick, insecure, unself-confident male female crave the company of worms.

No genuine social revolution can be accomplished by the male, as the male on top wants the status quo, and all the male on the bottom wants is to be the male on top. The male `rebel' is a farce; this is the male's `society', made by **him** to satisfy **his** needs. He's never satisfied, because he's not capable of being satisfied. Ultimately, what the male `rebel' is rebelling against is being male. The male changes only when forced to do so by technology, when he has no choice, when `society' reaches the stage where he must change or die. We're at that stage now; if women don't get their asses in gear fast, we may very well all die.

Prevention of Conversation: Being completely self-centered and unable to relate to anything outside himself, the male's `conversation', when not about himself, is an impersonal droning on, removed from anything of human value. Male `intellectual conversation' is a strained compulsive attempt to impress the female.

Daddy's Girl, passive, adaptable, respectful of and in awe of the male, allows him to impose his hideously dull chatter on her. This is not too difficult for her, as the tension and anxiety, the lack of cool, the insecurity and self-doubt, the unsureness of her own feelings and sensations that Daddy instilled in her make her perceptions superficial and render her unable to see that the male's babble is babble; like the aesthete `appreciating' the blob that's labeled `Great Art', she believes she's grooving on what bores the shit out of her. Not only does she permit his babble to dominate, she adapts her own `conversation' accordingly.

Trained from an early childhood in niceness, politeness and `dignity', in pandering to the male need to disguise his animalism, she obligingly reduces her own `conversation' to small talk, a bland, insipid avoidance of any topic beyond the utterly trivial -- or is `educated', to `intellectual' discussion, that is, impersonal discoursing on irrelevant distractions -- the Gross National Product, the Common Market, the influence of Rimbaud on symbolist painting. So adept is she at pandering that it eventually becomes second nature and she continues to pander to men even when in the company of other females only.

Apart from pandering, her `conversation' is further limited by her insecurity about expressing deviant, original opinions and the self-absorption based on insecurity and that prevents her conversation from being charming. Niceness, politeness, `dignity', insecurity and self-absorption are hardly conducive to intensity and wit, qualities a

conversation must have to be worthy of the name. Such conversation is hardly rampant, as only completely self-confident, arrogant, outgoing, proud, tough-minded females are capable of intense, bitchy, witty conversation.

Prevention of Friendship (Love): Men have contempt for themselves, for all other men whom they contemplate more than casually and whom they do not think are females, (for example `sympathetic' analysts and `Great Artists') or agents of God and for all women who respect and pander to them: the insecure, approval-seeking, pandering male-females have contempt for themselves and for all women like them: the self-confident, swinging, thrill-seeking female females have contempt for me and for the pandering male females. In short, contempt is the order of the day.

Love is not dependency or sex, but friendship, and therefore, love can't exist between two males, between a male and a female, or between two females, one or both of whom is a mindless, insecure, pandering male; like conversation, live can exist only between two secure, free-wheeling, independent groovy female females, since friendship is based upon respect, not contempt.

Even amongst groovy females deep friendships seldom occur in adulthood, as almost all of them are either tied up with men in order to survive economically, or bogged down in hacking their way through the jungle and in trying to keep their heads about the amorphous mass. Love can't flourish in a society based upon money and meaningless work: it requires complete economic as well as personal freedom, leisure time and the opportunity to engage in intensely absorbing, emotionally satisfying activities which, when shared with those you respect, lead to deep friendship. Our `society' provides practically no opportunity to engage in such activities.

Having stripped the world of conversation, friendship and love, the male offers us these paltry substitutes:

`Great Art' and `Culture': The male `artist' attempts to solve his dilemma of not being able to live, of not being female, by constructing a highly artificial world in which the male is heroized, that is, displays female traits, and the female is reduced to highly limited, insipid subordinate roles, that is, to being male.

The male `artistic' aim being, not to communicate (having nothing inside him he has nothing to say), but to disguise his animalism, he resorts to symbolism and obscurity (`deep' stuff). The vast majority of people, particularly the `educated' ones, lacking faith in their own judgment, humble, respectful of authority (`Daddy knows best'), are easily conned into believing that obscurity, evasiveness, incomprehensibility, indirectness, ambiguity and boredom are marks of depth and brilliance.

`Great Art' proves that men are superior to women, that men are women, being labeled `Great Art', almost all of which, as the anti-feminists are fond of reminding us, was created by men. We know that `Great Art' is great because male authorities have told us so, and we can't claim otherwise, as only those with exquisite sensitivities far superior to ours can perceive and appreciated the slop they appreciated.

Appreciating is the sole diversion of the `cultivated'; passive and incompetent, lacking imagination and wit, they must try to make do with that; unable to create their own diversions, to create a little world of their own, to affect in the smallest way their environments, they must accept what's given; unable to create or relate, they spectate. Absorbing `culture' is a desperate, frantic attempt to groove in an ungroovy world, to escape the horror of a sterile, mindless, existence. `Culture' provides a sop to the egos of the incompetent, a means of rationalizing passive spectating; they can pride themselves on their ability to appreciate the `finer' things, to see a jewel where this is only a turd (they want to be admired for admiring). Lacking faith in their ability to change anything, resigned to the status quo, they **have** to see beauty in turds because, so far as they can see, turds are all they'll ever have.

The veneration of `Art' and `Culture' -- besides leading many women into boring, passive activity that distracts from more important and rewarding activities, from cultivating active abilities, and leads to the constant intrusion on our sensibilities of pompous dissertations on the deep beauty of this and that turn. This allows the `artist' to be setup as one possessing superior feelings, perceptions, insights and judgments, thereby undermining the faith of insecure women in the value and validity of their own feelings, perceptions, insights and judgments.

The male, having a very limited range of feelings, and consequently, very limited perceptions, insights and judgments, needs the `artist' to guide him, to tell him what life is all about. But the male `artist' being totally sexual, unable to relate to anything beyond his own physical sensations, having nothing to express beyond the insight that for the male life is meaningless and absurd, cannot be an artist. How can he who is not capable of life tell us what life is all about? A `male artist' is a contradiction in terms. A degenerate can only produce degenerate `art'. The true artist is every self-confident, healthy female, and in a female society the only Art, the only Culture, will be conceited, kooky, funky, females grooving on each other and on everything else in the universe.

Sexuality: Sex is not part of a relationship: on the contrary, it is a solitary experience, non-creative, a gross waste of time. The female can easily -- far more easily than she may think -- condition away her sex drive, leaving her completely cool and cerebral and free to pursue truly worthy relationships and activities; but the male, who seems to dig women sexually and who seeks out constantly to arouse them, stimulates the

highly sexed female to frenzies of lust, throwing her into a sex bag from which few women ever escape. The lecherous male excited the lustful female; he **has** to -- when the female transcends her body, rises above animalism, the male, whose ego consists of his cock, will disappear.

Sex is the refuge of the mindless. And the more mindless the woman, the more deeply embedded in the male `culture', in short, the nicer she is, the more sexual she is. The nicest women in our `society' are raving sex maniacs. But, being just awfully, awfully nice, they don't, of course descend to fucking -- that's uncouth -- rather they make love, commune by means of their bodies and establish sensual rapport; the literary ones are attuned to the throb of Eros and attain a clutch upon the Universe; the religious have spiritual communion with the Divine Sensualism; the mystics merge with the Erotic Principle and blend with the Cosmos, and the acid heads contact their erotic cells.

On the other hand, those females least embedded in the male `Culture', the least nice, those crass and simple souls who reduce fucking to fucking, who are too childish for the grown-up world of suburbs, mortgages, mops and baby shit, too selfish to raise kids and husbands, too uncivilized to give a shit for anyones opinion of them, too arrogant to respect Daddy, the `Greats' or the deep wisdom of the Ancients, who trust only their own animal, gutter instincts, who equate Culture with chicks, whose sole diversion is prowling for emotional thrills and excitement, who are given to disgusting, nasty upsetting `scenes', hateful, violent bitches given to slamming those who unduly irritate them in the teeth, who'd sink a shiv into a man's chest or ram an icepick up his asshole as soon as look at him, if they knew they could get away with it, in short, those who, by the standards of our `culture' are SCUM... these females are cool and relatively cerebral and skirting asexuality.

Unhampered by propriety, niceness, discretion, public opinion, `morals', the respect of assholes, always funky, dirty, low-down SCUM gets around... and around and around... they've seen the whole show -- every bit of it -- the fucking scene, the dyke scene -- they've covered the whole waterfront, been under every dock and pier -- the peter pier, the pussy pier... you've got to go through a lot of sex to get to anti-sex, and SCUM's been through it all, and they're now ready for a new show; they want to crawl out from other the dock, move, take off, sink out. But SCUM doesn't yet prevail; SCUM's still in the gutter of our `society', which, if it's not deflected from its present course and if the Bomb doesn't drop on it, will hump itself to death.

Boredom: Life in a society made by and for creatures who, when they are not grim and depressing are utter bores, van only be, when not grim and depressing, an utter bore.

Secrecy, Censorship, Suppression of Knowledge and Ideas, and Exposes: Every male's deep-seated, secret, most hideous fear is of being discovered to be not a female, but a male, a subhuman animal. Although niceness, politeness and `dignity' suffice to prevent his exposure on a personal level, in order to prevent the general exposure of the male sex as a whole and to maintain his unnatural dominant position position in `society', the male must resort to:

1. Censorship. Responding reflexively to isolated works and phrases rather than cereberally to overall meanings, the male attempts to prevent the arousal and discovery of his animalism by censoring not only `pornography', but any work containing `dirty' words, no matter in what context they are used.

2. Suppression of all ideas and knowledge that might expose him or threaten his dominant position in `society'. Much biological and psychological data is suppressed, because it is proof of the male's gross inferiority to the female. Also, the problem of mental illness will never be solved while the male maintains control, because first, men have a vested interest in it -- only females who have very few of their marbles will allow males the slightest bit of control over anything, and second, the male cannot admit to the role that fatherhood plays in causing mental illness.

3. Exposes. The male's chief delight in life -- insofar as the tense, grim male can ever be said to delight in anything -- is in exposing others. It doesn't' much matter what they're exposed as, so long as they're exposed; it distracts attention from himself. Exposing others as enemy agents (Communists and Socialists) is one of his favorite pastimes, as it removes the source of the threat to him not only from himself, but from the country and the Western world. The bugs up his ass aren't in him, they're in Russia.

Distrust: Unable to empathize or feel affection or loyalty, being exclusively out for himself, the male has no sense of fair play; cowardly, needing constantly to pander to the female to win her approval, that he is helpless without, always on the edge lest his animalism, his maleness be discovered, always needing to cover up, he must lie constantly; being empty he has not honor or integrity -- he doesn't know what those words mean. The male, in short, is treacherous, and the only appropriate attitude in a male `society' is cynicism and distrust.

Ugliness: Being totally sexual, incapable of cerebral or aesthetic responses, totally materialistic and greedy, the male, besides inflicting on the world `Great Art', has decorated his unlandscaped cities with ugly buildings (both inside and out), ugly decors, billboards, highways, cars, garbage trucks, and, most notably, his own putrid self.

Hatred and Violence: The male is eaten up with tension, with frustration at not being female, at not being capable of ever achieving satisfaction or pleasure of any kind; eaten up with hate -- not rational hate that is directed at those who abuse or insult you -- but irrational, indiscriminate hate... hatred, at bottom, of his own worthless self.

Gratuitous violence, besides `proving' he's a `Man', serves as an outlet for his hate and, in addition -- the male being capable only of sexual responses and needing very strong stimuli to stimulate his half-dead self -- provides him with a little sexual thrill..

Disease and Death: All diseases are curable, and the aging process and death are due to disease; it is possible, therefore, never to age and to live forever. In fact the problems of aging and death could be solved within a few years, if an all-out, massive scientific assault were made upon the problem. This, however, will not occur with the male establishment because:

1. The many male scientists who shy away from biological research, terrified of the discovery that males are females, and show marked preference for virile, `manly' war and death programs.

2. The discouragement of many potential scientists from scientific careers by the rigidity, boringness, expensiveness, time-consumingness, and unfair exclusivity of our `higher' educational system.

3. Propaganda disseminated by insecure male professionals, who jealously guard their positions, so that only a highly select few can comprehend abstract scientific concepts.

4. Widespread lack of self-confidence brought about by the father system that discourages many talented girls from becoming scientists.

5. Lack of automation. There now exists a wealth of data which, if sorted out and correlated, would reveal the cure for cancer and several other diseases and possibly the key to life itself. But the data is so massive it requires high speed computers to correlate it all. The institution of computers will be delayed interminably under the male control system, since the male has a horror of being replaced by machines.

6. The money systems' insatiable need for new products. Most of the few scientists around who aren't working on death programs are tied up doing research for corporations.

7. The males like death -- it excites him sexually and, already dead inside, he wants to die.

8. The bias of the money system for the least creative scientists. Most scientists come from at least relatively affluent families where Daddy reigns supreme.

Incapable of a positive state of happiness, which is the only thing that can justify one's existence, the male is, at best, relaxed, comfortable, neutral, and this condition is extremely short-lived, as boredom, a negative state, soon sets in; he is, therefore, doomed to an existence of suffering relieved only by occasional, fleeting stretches of restfulness, which state he can only achieve at the expense of some female. The male is, by his very nature, a leech, an emotional parasite and, therefore, not ethically entitled to live, as no one as the right to life at someone else's expense.

Just as humans have a prior right to existence over dogs by virtue of being more highly evolved and having a superior consciousness, so women have a prior right to existence over men. The elimination of any male is, therefore, a righteous and good act, an act highly beneficial to women as well as an act of mercy.

However, this moral issue will eventually be rendered academic by the fact that the male is gradually eliminating himself. In addition to engaging in the time-honored and classical wars and race riots, men are more and more either becoming fags or are obliterating themselves through drugs. The female, whether she likes it or not, will eventually take complete charge, if for no other reason than that she will have to -- the male, for practical purposes, won't exist.

Accelerating this trend is the fact that more and more males are acquiring enlightened self-interest; they're realizing more and more that the female interest is in **their** interest, that they can live only through the female and that the more the female is encouraged to live, to fulfill herself, to be a female and not a male, the more nearly **he** lives; he's coming to see that it's easier and more satisfactory to live **through**her than to try to **become** her and usurp her qualities, claim them as his own, push the female down and claim that she's a male. The fag, who accepts his maleness, that is, his passivity and total sexuality, his femininity, is also best served by women being truly female, as it would then be easier for him to be male, feminine. If men were wise they would seek to become really female, would do intensive biological research that would lead to me, by means of operations on the brain and nervous system, being able t to be transformed in psyche, as well as body, into women.

Whether to continue to use females for reproduction or to reproduce in the laboratory will also become academic: what will happen when every female, twelve and over, is routinely taking the Pill and there are no longer any accidents? How many women will deliberately get or (if an accident) remain pregnant? No, Virginia, women don't just adore being brood mares, despite what the mass of robot, brainwashed women

will say. When society consists of only the fully conscious the answer will be none. Should a certain percentage of men be set aside by force to serve as brood mares for the species? Obviously this will not do. The answer is laboratory reproduction of babies.

As for the issue of whether or not to continue to reproduce males, it doesn't follow that because the male, like disease, has always existed among us that he should continue to exist. When genetic control is possible -- and soon it will be -- it goes without saying that we should produce only whole, complete beings, not physical defects of deficiencies, including emotional deficiencies, such as maleness. Just as the deliberate production of blind people would be highly immoral, so would be the deliberate production of emotional cripples.

Why produce even females? Why should there be future generations? What is their purpose? When aging and death are eliminated, why continue to reproduce? Why should we care what happens when we're dead? Why should we care that there is no younger generation to succeed us.

Eventually the natural course of events, of social evolution, will lead to total female control of the world and, subsequently, to the cessation of the production of males and, ultimately, to the cessation of the production of females.

But SCUM is impatient; SCUM is not consoled by the thought that future generations will thrive; SCUM wants to grab some thrilling living for itself. And, if a large majority of women were SCUM, they could acquire complete control of this country within a few weeks simply by withdrawing from the labor force, thereby paralyzing the entire nation. Additional measures, any one of which would be sufficient to completely disrupt the economy and everything else, would be for women to declare themselves off the money system, stop buying, just loot and simply refuse to obey all laws they don't care to obey. The police force, National Guard, Army, Navy and Marines combined couldn't squelch a rebellion of over half the population, particularly when it's made up of people they are utterly helpless without.

If all women simply left men, refused to have anything to do with any of them -- ever, all men, the government, and the national economy would collapse completely. Even without leaving men, women who are aware of the extent of their superiority to and power over men, could acquire complete control over everything within a few weeks, could effect a total submission of males to females. In a sane society the male would trot along obediently after the female. The male is docile and easily led, easily subjected to the domination of any female who cares to dominate him. The male, in fact, wants desperately to be led by females, wants Mama in charge, wants to abandon

himself to her care. But this is not a sane society, and most women are not even dimly aware of where they're at in relation to men.

The conflict, therefore, is not between females and males, but between SCUM -- dominant, secure, self-confident, nasty, violent, selfish, independent, proud, thrill-seeking, free-wheeling, arrogant females, who consider themselves fit to rule the universe, who have free-wheeled to the limits of this `society' and are ready to wheel on to something far beyond what it has to offer -- and nice, passive, accepting `cultivated', polite, dignified, subdued, dependent, scared, mindless, insecure, approval-seeking Daddy's Girls, who can't cope with the unknown, who want to hang back with the apes, who feel secure only with Big Daddy standing by, with a big strong man to lean on and with a fat, hairy face in the White House, who are too cowardly to face up to the hideous reality of what a man is, what Daddy is, who have cast their lot with the swine, who have adapted themselves to animalism, feel superficially comfortable with it and know no other way of `life', who have reduced their minds, thoughts and sights to the male level, who, lacking sense, imagination and wit can have value only in a male `society', who can have a place in the sun, or, rather, in the slime, only as soothers, ego boosters, relaxers and breeders, who are dismissed as inconsequents by other females, who project their deficiencies, their maleness, onto all females and see the female as worm.

But SCUM is too impatient to wait for the de-brainwashing of millions of assholes. Why should the swinging females continue to plod dismally along with the dull male ones? Why should the fates of the groovy and the creepy be intertwined? Why should the active and imaginative consult the passive and dull on social policy? Why should the independent be confined to the sewer along with the dependent who need Daddy to cling to? A small handful of SCUM can take over the country within a year by systematically fucking up the system, selectively destroying property, and murder:

SCUM will become members of the unwork force, the fuck-up force; they will get jobs of various kinds an unwork. For example, SCUM salesgirls will not charge for merchandise; SCUM telephone operators will not charge for calls; SCUM office and factory workers, in addition to fucking up their work, will secretly destroy equipment. SCUM will unwork at a job until fired, then get a new job to unwork at.

SCUM will forcibly relieve bus drivers, cab drivers and subway token sellers of their jobs and run buses and cabs and dispense free tokens to the public.

SCUM will destroy all useless and harmful objects -- cars, store windows, `Great Art', etc.

Eventually SCUM will take over the airwaves -- radio and TV networks -- by forcibly relieving of their jobs all radio and TV employees who would impede SCUM's entry into the broadcasting studios.

SCUM will couple-bust -- barge into mixed (male-female) couples, wherever they are, and bust them up.

SCUM will kill all men who are not in the Men's Auxiliary of SCUM. Men in the Men's Auxiliary are those men who are working diligently to eliminate themselves, men who, regardless of their motives, do good, men who are playing pall with SCUM. A few examples of the men in the Men's Auxiliary are: men who kill men; biological scientists who are working on constructive programs, as opposed to biological warfare; journalists, writers, editors, publishers and producers who disseminate and promote ideas that will lead to the achievement of SCUM's goals; faggots who, by their shimmering, flaming example, encourage other men to de-man themselves and thereby make themselves relatively inoffensive; men who consistently give things away -- money, things, services; men who tell it like it is (so far not one ever has), who put women straight, who reveal the truth about themselves, who give the mindless male females correct sentences to parrot, who tell them a woman's primary goal in life should be to squash the male sex (to aid men in this endeavor SCUM will conduct Turd Sessions, at which every male present will give a speech beginning with the sentence: `I am a turd, a lowly abject turd', then proceed to list all the ways in which he is. His reward for doing so will be the opportunity to fraternize after the session for a whole, solid hour with the SCUM who will be present. Nice, clean-living male women will be invited to the sessions to help clarify any doubts and misunderstandings they may have about the male sex; makers and promoters of sex books and movies, etc., who are hastening the day when all that will be shown on the screen will be Suck and Fuck (males, like the rats following the Pied Piper, will be lured by Pussy to their doom, will be overcome and submerged by and will eventually drown in the passive flesh that they are); drug pushers and advocates, who are hastening the dropping out of men.

Being in the Men's Auxiliary is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for making SCUM's escape list; it's not enough to do good; to save their worthless asses men must also avoid evil. A few examples of the most obnoxious or harmful types are: rapists, politicians and all who are in their service (campaigners, members of political parties, etc); lousy singers and musicians; Chairmen of Boards; Breadwinners; landlords; owners of greasy spoons and restaraunts that play Muzak; `Great Artists'; cheap pikers and welchers; cops; tycoons; scientists working on death and destruction programs or for private industry (practically all scientists); liars and phonies; disc jockies; men who intrude themselves in the slightest way on any strange female; real estate men; stock brokers; men who speak when they have nothing to say; men who sit idly on the

street and mar the landscape with their presence; double dealers; flim-flam artists; litterbugs; plagiarisers; men who in the slightest way harm any female; all men in the advertising industry; psychiatrists and clinical psychologists; dishonest writers, journalists, editors, publishers, etc.; censors on both the public and private levels; all members of the armed forces, including draftees (LBJ and McNamara give orders, but servicemen carry them out) and particularly pilots (if the bomb drops, LBJ won't drop it; a pilot will). In the case of a man whose behavior falls into both the good and bad categories, an overall subjective evaluation of him will be made to determine if his behavior is, in the balance, good or bad.

It is most tempting to pick off the female `Great Artists', liars and phonies etc along with the men, but that would be inexpedient, as it would not be clear to most of the public that the female killed was a male. All women have a fink streak in them, to a greater or lesser degree, but it stems from a lifetime of living among men. Eliminate men and women will shape up. Women are improvable; men are no, although their behavior is. When SCUM gets hot on their asses it'll shape up fast.

Simultaneously with the fucking-up, looting, couple-busting, destroying and killing, SCUM will recruit. SCUM, then, will consist of recruiters; the elite corps -- the hard core activists (the fuck-ups, looters and destroyers) and the elite of the elite -- the killers.

Dropping out is not the answer; fucking-up is. Most women are already dropped out; they were never in. Dropping out gives control to those few who don't drop out; dropping out is exactly what the establishment leaders want; it plays into the hands of the enemy; it strengthens the system instead of undermining it, since it is based entirely on the non-participating, passivity, apathy and non-involvement of the mass of women. Dropping out, however, is an excellent policy for men, and SCUM will enthusiastically encourage it.

Looking inside yourself for salvation, contemplating your navel, is not, as the Drop Out people would have you believe, the answer. Happiness likes outside yourself, is achieved through interacting with others. Self-forgetfulness should be one's goal, not self-absorption. The male, capable of only the latter, makes a virtue of irremediable fault and sets up self-absorption, not only as a good but as a Philosophical Good, and thus gets credit for being deep.

SCUM will not picket, demonstrate, march or strike to attempt to achieve its ends. Such tactics are for nice, genteel ladies who scrupulously take only such action as is guaranteed to be ineffective. In addition, only decent, clean-living male women, highly trained in submerging themselves in the species, act on a mob basis. SCUM consists of individuals; SCUM is not a mob, a blob. Only as many SCUM will do a

job as are needed for the job. Also SCUM, being cool and selfish, will not subject to getting itself rapped on the head with billy clubs; that's for the nice, `privileged, educated', middle-class ladies with a high regard for the touching faith in the essential goodness of Daddy and policemen. If SCUM ever marches, it will be over the President's stupid, sickening face; if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.

SCUM will always operate on a criminal as opposed to a civil disobedience basis, that is, as opposed to openly violating the law and going to jail in order to draw attention to an injustice. Such tactics acknowledge the rightness overall system and are used only to modify it slightly, change specific laws. SCUM is against the entire system, the very idea of law and government. SCUM is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights within it. Also, SCUM -- always selfish, always cool -- will always aim to avoid detection and punishment. SCUM will always be furtive, sneaky, underhanded (although SCUM murders will always be known to be such).

Both destruction and killing will be selective and discriminate. SCUM is against half-crazed, indiscriminate riots, with no clear objective in mind, and in which many of your own kind are picked off. SCUM will never instigate, encourage or participate in riots of any kind or other form of indiscriminate destruction. SCUM will coolly, furtively, stalk its prey and quietly move in for the kill. Destruction will never me such as to block off routes needed for the transportation of food or other essential supplies, contaminate or cut off the water supply, block streets and traffic to the extent that ambulances can't get through or impede the functioning of hospitals.

SCUM will keep on destroying, looting, fucking-up and killing until the money-work system no longer exists and automation is completely instituted or until enough women co-operate with SCUM to make violence unnecessary to achieve these goals, that is, until enough women either unwork or quit work, start looting, leave men and refuse to obey all laws inappropriate to a truly civilized society. Many women will fall into line, but many others, who surrendered long ago to the enemy, who are so adapted to animalism, to maleness, that they like restrictions and restraints, don't know what to do with freedom, will continue to be toadies and doormats, just as peasants in rice paddies remain peasants in rice paddies as one regime topples another. A few of the more volatile will whimper and sulk and throw their toys and dishrags on the floor, but SCUM will continue to steamroller over them.

A completely automated society can be accomplished very simply and quickly once there is a public demand for it. The blueprints for it are already in existence, and it's construction will take only a few weeks with millions of people working on it. Even though off the money system, everyone will be most happy to pitch in and get the

automated society built; it will mark the beginning of a fantastic new era, and there will be a celebration atmosphere accompanying the construction.

The elimination of money and the complete institution of automation are basic to all other SCUM reforms; without these two the others can't take place; with them the others will take place very rapidly. The government will automatically collapse. With complete automation it will be possible for every woman to vote directly on every issue by means of an electronic voting machine in her house. Since the government is occupied almost entirely with regulating economic affairs and legislating against purely private matters, the elimination of money wand with it the elimination of males who wish to legislate `morality' will mean there will be practically no issues to vote on.

After the elimination of money there will be no further need to kill men; they will be stripped of the only power they have over psychologically independent females. They will be able to impose themselves only on the doormats, who like to be imposed on. The rest of the women will be busy solving the few remaining unsolved problems before planning their agenda for eternity and Utopia -- completely revamping educational programs so that millions of women can be trained within a few months for high level intellectual work that now requires years of training (this can be done very easily once out educational goal is to educate and not perpetuate an academic and intellectual elite); solving the problems of disease and old age and death and completely redesigning our cities and living quarters. Many women will for a while continue to think they dig men, but as they become accustomed to female society and as they become absorbed in their projects, they will eventually come to see the utter uselessnes and banality of the male.

The few remaining men can exist out their puny days dropped out on drugs or strutting around in drag or passively watching the high-powered female in action, fulfilling themselves as spectators, vicarious livers*[FOOTNOTE: It will be electronically possible for him to tune into any specific female he wants to and follow in detail her every movement. The females will kindly, obligingly consent to this, as it won't hurt them in the slightest and it is a marvelously kind and humane way to treat their unfortunate, handicapped fellow beings.] or breeding in the cow pasture with the toadies, or they can go off to the nearest friendly suicide center where they will be quietly, quickly, and painlessly gassed to death.

Prior to the institution of automation, to the replacement of males by machines, the male should be of use to the female, wait on her, cater to her slightest whim, obey her every command, be totally subservient to her, exist in perfect obedience to her will, as opposed to the completely warped, degenerate situation we have now of men, not only not only not existing at all, cluttering up the world with their ignominious presence,

but being pandered to and groveled before by the mass of females, millions of women piously worshiping the Golden Calf, the dog leading the master on a leash, when in fact the male, short of being a drag queen, is least miserable when his dogginess is recognized -- no unrealistic emotional demands are made of him and the completely together female is calling the shots. Rational men want to be squashed, stepped on, crushed and crunched, treated as the curs, the filth that they are, have their repulsiveness confirmed.

The sick, irrational men, those who attempt to defend themselves against their disgustingness, when they see SCUM barrelling down on them, will cling in terror to Big Mama with her Big Bouncy Boobies, but Boobies won't protect them against SCUM; Big Mama will be clinging to Big Daddy, who will be in the corner shitting in his forceful, dynamic pants. Men who are rational, however, won't kick or struggle or raise a distressing fuss, but will just sit back, relax, enjoy the show and ride the waves to their demise.

- end -

Editor's notes

This is the only copy of the SCUM Manifesto I've ever seen. This version was published by PHOENIX PRESS, presumably in the UK (price given as "75p"), though no contact information was provided. I have no idea what, if any, changes were made to the text. I tried to change nothing except change some obvious (to me) Anglicizations back to Americanisms (eg. empathise to empathize). The copyright is certainly retained by Valerie's estate. Seeing how it's a manifesto, and the Phoenix people certainly don't own it, I figured Valerie Solanas wouldn't mind my typing this all in and giving it away for free.

-- tomj@wps.com (Tom Jennings), Jan 1994

1996 note: Valerie Solanas died in San Francisco in 1988. There is a movie about her called I Shot Andy Warhol.

1997 note: Fixed some typos.

2000 note: All of you, please stop emailing me that Valerie died in 1988. By the way, there is a movie about her called I Shot Andy Warhol. Yes, you.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti
1970s

Populist Manifesto No. 1

Poets, come out of your closets,
Open your windows, open your doors,
You have been holed-up too long
in your closed worlds.
Come down, come down
from your Russian Hills and Telegraph Hills,
your Beacon Hills and your Chapel Hills,
your Mount Analogues and Montparnasses,
down from your foothills and mountains,
out of your teepees and domes.
The trees are still falling
and we'll to the woods no more.
No time now for sitting in them
As man burns down his own house
to roast his pig
No more chanting Hare Krishna
while Rome burns.
San Francisco's burning,
Mayakovsky's Moscow's burning
the fossil-fuels of life.
Night & the Horse approaches
eating light, heat & power,
and the clouds have trousers.
No time now for the artist to hide
above, beyond, behind the scenes,
indifferent, paring his fingernails,
refining himself out of existence.
No time now for our little literary games,
no time now for our paranoias & hypochondrias,
no time now for fear & loathing,
time now only for light & love.
We have seen the best minds of our generation
destroyed by boredom at poetry readings.
Poetry isn't a secret society,
It isn't a temple either.
Secret words & chants won't do any longer.
The hour of oming is over,
the time of keening come,
a time for keening & rejoicing
over the coming end
of industrial civilization
which is bad for earth & Man.
Time now to face outward
in the full lotus position

with eyes wide open,
Time now to open your mouths
with a new open speech,
time now to communicate with all sentient beings,
All you 'Poets of the Cities'
hung in museums including myself,
All you poet's poets writing poetry
about poetry,
All you poetry workshop poets
in the boondock heart of America,
All you housebroken Ezra Pounds,
All you far-out freaked-out cut-up poets,
All you pre-stressed Concrete poets,
All you cunnilingual poets,
All you pay-toilet poets groaning with graffiti,
All you A-train swingers who never swing on birches,
All you masters of the sawmill haiku in the Siberias of America,
All you eyeless unrealists,
All you self-occulting supersurrealists,
All you bedroom visionaries and closet agitpropagators,
All you Groucho Marxist poets
and leisure-class Comrades
who lie around all day and talk about the workingclass proletariat,
All you Catholic anarchists of poetry,
All you Black Mountaineers of poetry,
All you Boston Brahims and Bolinas bucolics,
All you den mothers of poetry,
All you zen brothers of poetry,
All you suicide lovers of poetry,
All you hairy professors of poesie,
All you poetry reviewers
drinking the blood of the poet,
All you Poetry Police -
Where are Whitman's wild children,
where the great voices speaking out
with a sense of sweetness and sublimity,
where the great'new vision,
the great world-view,
the high prophetic song
of the immense earth
and all that sings in it
And our relations to it -
Poets, descend
to the street of the world once more
And open your minds & eyes
with the old visual delight,

Clear your throat and speak up,
Poetry is dead, long live poetry
with terrible eyes and buffalo strength.
Don't wait for the Revolution
or it'll happen without you,
Stop mumbling and speak out
with a new wide-open poetry
with a new commonsensual 'public surface'
with other subjective levels
or other subversive levels,
a tuning fork in the inner ear
to strike below the surface.
Of your own sweet Self still sing
yet utter 'the word en-masse -
Poetry the common carrier
for the transportation of the public
to higher places
than other wheels can carry it.
Poetry still falls from the skies
into our streets still open.
They haven't put up the barricades, yet,
the streets still alive with faces,
lovely men & women still walking there,
still lovely creatures everywhere,
in the eyes of all the secret of all
still buried there,
Whitman's wild children still sleeping there,
Awake and walk in the open air.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Printed poetry thrives in personal magazines, and in the efforts of one-man publishers—not in magazines which need a huge circulation. We almost hand our poems around—the way they did it in the seventeenth century.

Donald Hall
1978

Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird

The Psychic Origins of Poetic Form

When we pursue the psychic origins of our satisfaction with poetic form, we come to the end of the trail. It is deep in the woods, and there is a fire; Twinbird sits quietly, absorbed in the play of flame that leaps and falls; Goatfoot dances by the fire, his eyes reflecting the orange coals, as his lean foot taps the stone. Inside the fire there is a mother and child, made one, the universe of the red coal. This is Milktongue.

1. Some Premises

First, in connection with oppositions:

1. Any quality of poetry can be used for a number of purposes, including opposed purposes. Thus, concentration on technique has often been used to trivialize content, by poets afraid of what they will learn about themselves. But concentration on technique can absorb the attention while unacknowledged material enters the language; so technique can facilitate inspiration.

On the other hand, a poet can subscribe to an anti-technical doctrine of inspiration in a way that simply

substitutes one technique for another. Surrealism can become as formulaic as a pastoral elegy.

2. When a poet says he is doing *north*, look and see if he is not actually doing *south*. Chances are that his bent is so entirely *south* that he must swear total allegiance to *north* in order to include the globe.

3. Energy arises from conflict. Without conflict, no energy. Yin and yang. Dark and light. Pleasure and pain. No synthesis without thesis and antithesis. Conflict of course need not be binary but may include a number of terms.

4. Every present event that moves us deeply connects in our psyches with something (or things) in the past. The analogy is the two pieces of carbon that make an arc light. When they come close enough, the spark leaps across. The one mourning is all mourning; "After the first death, there is no other." This generalization applies to the composition of poems (writing), and to the recomposition of poems (reading).

5. The way out is the same as the way in. To investigate the process of making a poem is not merely an exercise in curiosity or gossip, but an attempt to understand the nature of literature. In the act of reading, the reader undergoes a process—largely without awareness, as the author was largely without intention—which resembles, like a slightly fainter copy of the original, the process of discovery or recovery that the poet went through in his madness or inspiration.

And then, more general:

6. A poem is one man's inside talking to another man's inside. It may *also* be reasonable man talking to reasonable man, but if it is not inside talking to inside, it is not a poem. This inside speaks through the second

language of poetry, the unintended language. Sometimes, as in surrealism, the second language is the only language. It is the ancient prong of carbon in the arc light. We all share more when we are five years old than when we are twenty-five; more at five minutes than at five years. The second language allows poetry to be universal.

7. *Lyric poetry, typically, has one goal and one message, which is to urge the condition of inwardness, the "inside" from which its own structure derives.*

2. Form: the Sensual Body

There is the old false distinction between *vates* and *poiein*. It is a boring distinction, and I apologize for dragging it out again. I want to use it in its own despite.

The *poiein*, from the Greek verb for making or doing, becomes the poet—the master of craft, the maker of the labyrinth of epic or tragedy or lyric hymn, tale-teller and spell-binder. The *vates* is bound in his own spell. He is the rhapsode Socrates patronizes in *Ion*. In his purest form he utters what he does not understand at all, be he oracle or André Breton. He is the visionary, divinely inspired, who like Blake may take dictation from voices.

But Blake's voices returned to dictate revisions. The more intimately we observe any poet who claims extremes of inspiration or of craftsmanship, the more we realize that his claims are a disguise. There is no *poiein* for the same reason that there is no *vates*. The claims may be serious (they may be the compensatory distortion which allows the poet to write at all) and the claims may affect the looks of the poem—a surrealist poem and

a neoclassic Imitation of Horace *look* different—but the distinction becomes trivial when we discover the psychic origins of poetic form.

I speak of the psychic origins of poetic *form*. Psychologists have written convincingly of the origins of the *material* of arts, in wish-fulfillment and in the universality of myth. We need not go over ideas of the poet as daydreamer, or of the collective unconsciousness. Ernst Kris's "regression in the service of the ego" names an event but does not explain how it comes about. But one bit of Freud's essay on the poet as daydreamer has been a clue in this search. At the end of his intelligent, snippy paper, Freud says that he lacks time now to deal with form, but that he suspects that formal pleasure is related to forepleasure. Then he ducks through the curtain and disappears. Suppose we consider the implications of his parting shot. Forepleasure develops out of the sensuality of the whole body which the infant experiences in the pleasure of the crib and of the breast. The connection between forepleasure and infancy is the motion from rationality to metaphor.

But to begin our search for the psychic origins of poetic form, we must first think of what is usually meant by the word "form," and then we must look for the reality. So often form is looked upon only as the fulfillment of metrical expectations. Meter is nothing but a loose set of probabilities; it is a trick easily learned; anyone can learn to arrange one-hundred-and-forty syllables so that the even syllables are louder than the odd ones, and every tenth syllable rhymes: the object will be a sonnet. But only when you have forgotten the requirements of meter do you begin to write poetry in it. The resolutions of form which ultimately provide the wholeness of a poem—resolutions of syntax, metaphor, diction, and sound—are minute and subtle and vary

from poem to poem. They vary from sonnet to sonnet, or, equally and not more greatly, from sonnet to free verse lyric.

Meter is no more seriously binding than the frame we put around a picture. But the *form* of free verse is as binding and as liberating as the *form* of a rondeau. Free verse is simply less predictable. Yeats said that the finished poem made a sound like the click of the lid on a perfectly made box. One-hundred-and-forty syllables, organized into a sonnet, do not necessarily make a click; the same number of syllables, dispersed in asymmetric lines of free verse, will click like a lid if the poem is good. In the sonnet and in the free verse poem, the poet improvises toward that click, and achieves his resolution in unpredictable ways. The rhymes and line-lengths of the sonnet are too gross to contribute greatly to that sense of resolution. The click is our sense of lyric *form*. This pleasure in resolution is Twinbird.

The wholeness and identity of the completed poem, the poem as object in time, the sensual body of the poem—this wholeness depends upon a complex of unpredictable fulfillments. The satisfying resolutions in a sonnet are more subtle than rhyme and meter, and less predictable. The body of sound grows in resolutions like assonance and alliteration, and in near-misses of both; or in the alternations, the going-away and coming-back, of fast and slow, long and short, high and low. The poet—free verse or meter, whatever—may start with lines full of long vowels, glide on diphthong sounds like "eye" and "ay" for instance, move to quick alternative lines of short vowels and clipped consonants, and return in a coda to the long vowels "eye" and "ay." The assonance is shaped like a saucer.

The requirements of fixity are complex, and the conscious mind seldom deals with them. Any poet who

has written metrically can write arithmetically correct iambic pentameter as fast as his hand can move. In improvising towards the click, the poet is mostly aware of what sounds right and what does not. When something persists in not sounding right, the poet can examine it bit by bit—can analyze it—in the attempt to consult his knowledge and apply it.

This knowledge is habitual. It is usually not visible to the poet, but it is available for consultation. When you learn something so well that you forget it, you can begin to do it. You dance best when you forget that you are dancing. Athletics—a tennis stroke, swimming, a receiver catching a football—is full of examples of actions done as if by instinct, which are actually learned procedure, studied and practiced until they become "second nature." So it is with poetry. The literary form of poems is created largely by learning—in collaboration with the unconscious by a process I will talk about later. Possible resolutions of metaphor, diction, and sound are coded into memory from our reading of other poets, occasionally from our reading of criticism, from our talk with other poets, and from our revisions of our own work, with the conscious analysis that this revision sometimes entails. New resolutions are combinations of parts of old ones, making new what may later be combined again and made new again.

When the experienced reader takes a poem in, his sense of fixity comes also from memory. He too has the codes in his head. The new poem fulfills the old habits of expectation in some unexpected way. The reader does not know why—unless he bothers to analyze; then probably not fully—he is pleased by the sensual body of the poem. He does not need to know why, unless he must write about it. The pleasure is sufficient. Since the

poet's madness is the reader's madness, the resolution of the mad material is the reader's resolution as well as the poet's. The way in is the same as the way out.

Whatever else we may say of a poem we admire, it exists as a sensual body. It is beautiful and pleasant, manifest content aside, like a worn stone that is good to touch, or like a shape of flowers arranged or accidental. This sensual body reaches us through our mouths, which are warm in the love of vowels held together, and in the muscles of our legs which as in dance tap the motion and pause of linear and syntactic structure. These pleasures are Milktongue and Goatfoot.

There is a nonintellectual beauty in the moving together of words in phrases—"the music of diction"—and in resolution of image and metaphor. The sophisticated reader of poetry responds quickly to the sensual body of a poem, before he interrogates the poem at all. The pleasure we feel, reading a poem, is our assurance of its integrity. (So Pound said that technique is the test of sincerity.) We will glance through a poem rapidly and if it is a skillful fake we will feel repelled. If the poem is alive and honest, we will feel assent in our quickening pulse—though it might take us some time to explain what we were reacting to.

The soi-disant *vates* feels that he speaks from the unconscious (or with the voice of the God), and the *poiein* that he makes all these wholenesses of shape on purpose. Both of them disguise the truth. All poets are *poiein* and *vates*. The *poiein* comes from memory of reading, and the *vates* from memory of infancy. The sensual body of the poem derives from memory of reading most obviously, but ultimately it leads us back further—to the most primitive psychic origins of poetic form.

3. Conflict Makes Energy

People frequently notice that poetry concerns itself with unpleasant subjects: death, deprivation, loneliness, despair, if love then the death of love, and abandonment. Of course there are happy poems, but in English poetry there are few which are happy through and through—and those few tend to be light, short, pleasant, and forgettable. Most memorable happy poems have a portion of blackness in them. Over all—Keats, Blake, Donne, Yeats, Eliot, Shakespeare, Wordsworth—there is more dark than light, more elegy than celebration. There is no great poem in our language which is simply happy.

Noticing these facts, we reach for explanations: maybe to be happy is to be a simpleton; maybe poets are morbid; maybe life is darker than it is light; maybe when you are happy you are too busy being happy to write poems about it and when you are sad, you write poems in order to *do* something. There may be half-truths in these common ideas, but the real explanation lies in the structure of a poem; and, I suggest, in the structure of human reality.

Energy arises from conflict.

A) The sensual body of a poem is a pleasure separate from any message the poem may contain.

B) If the poem contains a message which is pleasurable (a word I have just substituted for "happy"), then the two pleasures walk agreeably together for a few feet, and collapse into a smiling lethargy. The happy poem sleeps in the sun.

C) If the message of the poem, on the whole, is terrifying—that They flee from me, that one time did me seek; that I am sick, I must die; that On Margate Sands/I can connect/Nothing with nothing; that Things fall

apart, the center will not hold—then pain of message and pleasure of body copulate in a glorious conflict-dance of energy. This alternation of pleasure and pain is so swift as to seem simultaneous, to *be* simultaneous in the complexity both of creation and reception, a fused circle of yin and yang, a oneness in diversity.

The pain is clear to anyone. The pleasure is clear (dear) to anyone who loves poems. If we acknowledge the pleasure of the sensual body of the poem, we can see why painful poems are best: conflict makes energy and resolves our suffering into ambivalent living tissue. If human nature is necessarily ambivalent, then the structure of the energetic poem resembles the structure of human nature.

The sensual body, in poems, is not simply a compensation for the pain of the message. It is considerably more important, and more central to the nature of poetry. When we pursue the psychic origins of our satisfaction with poetic form, we come to the end of the trail. It is deep in the woods, and there is a fire; Twinbird sits quietly, absorbed in the play of flame that leaps and falls; Goatfoot dances by the fire, his eyes reflecting the orange coals, as his lean foot taps the stone. Inside the fire there is a mother and child, made one, the universe of the red coal. This is Milktongue.

4. Goatfoot, Milktongue, Twinbird

Once at a conference on creativity, a young linguist presented a model of language. Xeroxed in outline, it was beautiful like a concrete poem. I looked for language as used in poems and looked a long time. Finally I found it, under "autistic utterance," with the note that this utterance might later be refined into lyric po-

etry. It reminded me of another conference I had attended a year or two earlier. A psychoanalyst delivered a paper on deriving biographical information about an author from his fiction. He distributed mimeographed copies of his paper, which his secretary had typed from his obscure handwriting; he began his remarks by presenting a list of errata. The first correction was, "For 'autistic,' read 'artistic' throughout."

The newborn infant cries, he sucks at the air until he finds the nipple. At first he finds his hand to suck by accident—fingers, thumb; then he learns to repeat that pleasure. Another mouth-pleasure is the autistic babble, the "goo-goo," the small cooing and purring and bubbling. These are sounds of pleasure; they are without message, except that a parent interprets them as "happy": pleasure is happy. Wittgenstein once said that we could sing the song with expression or without expression; very well, he said, let us have the expression without the song. (He was being ironic; I am not.) The baby's autistic murmur is the expression without the song. His small tongue curls around the sounds, the way his tongue warms with the tiny thread of milk that he pulls from his mother. This is Milktongue, and in poetry it is the deep and primitive pleasure of vowels in the mouth, of assonance and of holds on adjacent long vowels; of consonance, mmmm, and alliteration. It is Dylan Thomas and the curlew cry; it is That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea; it is Then, in a wailful choir, the small gnats mourn.

As Milktongue mouths the noises it curls around, the rest of his body plays in pleasure also. His fists open and close spasmodically. His small bowed legs, no good for walking, contract and expand in a rhythmic beat. He has begun the dance, his muscles move like his heartbeat, and Goatfoot improvises his circle around the fire. His whole body throbs and thrills with pleasure. The

first parts of his body which he notices are his hands; then his feet. The strange birds fly at his head, waver, and pause. After a while he perceives that there are two of them. They begin to act when he wishes them to act, and since the *mental* creates the *physical*, Twinbird is the first magic he performs. He examines these independent/dependent twin birds. They are exactly alike. And they are exactly unalike, mirror images of each other, the perfection of opposite-same.

As the infant grows, the noises split off partly into messages. "Mmm" can be milk and mother. "Da-da" belongs to another huge shape. He crawls and his muscles become useful to move him toward the toy and the soda cracker. Twinbird flies more and more at his will, as Milktongue speaks, and Goatfoot crawls. But still he rolls on his back and his legs beat in the air. Still, the sister hands flutter at his face. Still, the noises without message fill the happy time of waking before hunger, and the softening down, milktongue full, into sleep. The growing child skips rope, hops, dances to a music outside intelligence, rhymes to the hopscotch or jump rope, and listens to the sounds his parents please him with:

Pease porridge hot
Pease porridge cold
Pease porridge in-the-pot
Five days old.

Or himself learns:

Bah, bah, black sheep
Have you any wool;
Yes, sir, yes, sir,
Three bags full.
One for my master,
One for my dame
And one for the little boy
That lives down the lane.

The mouth-pleasure, the muscle-pleasure, the pleasure of match-unmatch.

But "Shades of the prison house begin to close/Upon the growing boy." Civilized humans try gradually to cut away the autistic component in their speech. Goatfoot survives in the dance, Twinbird in rhyme and resolution of dance and noise. Milktongue hides itself more. It ties us to the mother so obviously that men are ashamed of it. Tribal society was unashamed and worshipped Milktongue in religion and history. Among the outcast in the modern world, Milktongue sometimes endures in language, as it does in the American black world, and in the world of the poor Southern whites. In Ireland where the mother (and the Virgin) are still central, Milktongue remains in swearing and in the love of sweet speech. Probably, in most of the modern world, Milktongue exists only in smoking, eating, and drinking; and in oral sexuality.

But Milktongue and Goatfoot and Twinbird have always lived in the lyric poem, for poet and for reader. They are the ancestors, and they remain the psychic origins of poetic form, primitive both personally (back to the crib) and historically (back to the fire in front of the cave). They keep pure the sensual pleasure that is the dark secret shape of the poem. We need an intermediary to deal with them, for a clear reason: Goatfoot and Milktongue and Twinbird, like other figures that inhabit the forest, are wholly preverbal. They live before words.

They approach the edge of the clearing, able to come close because the Priestess has no eyes to frighten them with. The Priestess, built of the memory of old pleasures, only knows how to select and order. The Priestess does not know what she says, but she knows that she says it in dactylic hexameter. Goatfoot and Milktongue and Twinbird leave gifts at the edge of the forest. The

Priestess picks up the gifts, and turns to the light, and speaks words that carry the dark mysterious memory of the forest and the pleasure.

The poet writing, and the reader reading, lulled by Goatfoot and Milktongue and Twinbird into the oldest world, become able to think as the infant thinks, with transformation and omnipotence and magic. The form of the poem, because it exists separately from messages, can act as trigger or catalyst or enzyme to activate not messages but types of mental behavior. Coleridge spoke of meter as effecting the willing suspension of disbelief. They are the three memories of the body—not only meter; and they are powerful magic—not only suspension of disbelief. The form of the poem unlocks the mind to old pleasures. Pleasure leaves the mind vulnerable to the content of experience before we have intellectualized the experience and made it acceptable to the civilized consciousness. The form allows the mind to encounter real experience, and so the real message is permitted to speak—but only because the figures in the forest, untouched by messages, have danced and crooned and shaped.

The release of power and sweetness! Milktongue also remembers hunger, and the cry without answer. Goatfoot remembers falling, and the ache that bent the night. Twinbird remembers the loss of the brother, so long he believed in abandonment forever. From the earliest times, poetry has existed in order to retrieve, to find again, and to release. In the man who writes the poem, in the reader who lives it again, in the ideas, the wit, the images, the doctrines, the exhortations, the laments and the cries of joy, the lost forest struggles to be born again inside the words. The life or urge and instinct, that rages and coos, kicks and frolics, as it chooses only without choosing—this life is the life the poem grows from, and leans toward.

Poetry Is Not a Luxury (1985)
Audre Lorde

The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless-about to be birthed, but already felt. That distillation of experience from which true poetry springs births thought as dream births concept, as feeling births idea, as knowledge births (precedes) understanding.

As we learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and to flourish within it, as we learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us.

For each of us as women, there is a dark place within where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, "Beautiful and tough as chestnut/stanchions against our nightmare of weakness" and of impotence.

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.

When we view living, in the european mode, only as a problem to be solved, we then rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious.

But as we become more in touch with our own ancient, black, non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes.

At this point in time, I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches as keystone for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry. I speak here of poetry as the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean — in order to cover their desperate wish for imagination without insight.

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action.

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

As they become known and accepted to ourselves, our feelings, and the honest exploration of them, become sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas, the house of difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would have once found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy, but the true meaning of "it feels right to me." We can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that matches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives.

Possibility is neither forever nor instant. It is also not easy to sustain belief in its efficacy. We can sometimes work long and hard to establish one beachhead of real resistance to the deaths we are expected to live, only to have that beachhead assaulted or threatened by canards we have been socialized to fear, or by the withdrawal of those approvals that we have been warned to seek for safety. We see ourselves diminished or softened by the falsely benign accusations of childishness, of non-universality, of self-centeredness, of sensuality. And who asks the question: am I altering your aura, your ideas, your dreams, or am I merely moving you to temporary and reactive action? (Even the latter is no mean task, but one that must be rather seen within the context of a true alteration of the texture of our lives.)

The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us-the poet-whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom. However, experience has taught us that the action in the now is also always necessary. Our children cannot dream unless they live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours?

Sometimes we drug ourselves with dreams of new ideas. The head will save us. The brain alone will set us free. But there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves, along with the renewed courage to try them out. And we must constantly encourage ourselves and each other to attempt the heretical actions our dreams imply and some of our old ideas disparage. In the forefront of our move toward change, there is only our poetry to hint at possibility made real. Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real (or bring action into accordance with), our fears, our hopes, our most cherished terrors.

For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were meant to kneel to thought as we were meant to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets. And there are no new pains. We have felt them all already. We have hidden that fact in the same place where we have hidden our power. They lie in our dreams, and it is our dreams that point the way to freedom. They are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak, and to dare.

If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is a luxury, then we have given up the core-the fountain-of our power, our

womanness; we have give up the future of our worlds.

For there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt, of examining what our ideas really mean (feel like) on Sunday morning at 7 AM, after brunch, during wild love, making war, giving birth; while we suffer the old longings, battle the old warnings and fears of being silent and impotent and alone, while tasting our new possibilities and strengths.

Who Killed Poetry?

Joseph Epstein

There are certain things in which mediocrity is intolerable: poetry, music, painting, public eloquence.

—LA BRUYÈRE

I AM NOT about to say of poetry, as Marianne Moore once did, that "I, too, dislike it," for not only has reading poetry brought me instruction and delight but I was taught to exalt it. Or, more precisely, I was taught that poetry was itself an exalted thing. No literary genre was closer to the divine than poetry; in no other craft could a writer soar as he could in a poem. When a novelist or a dramatist wrote with the flame of the highest inspiration, his work was said to be "touched by poetry"—as in the phrase "touched by God." "The right reader of a good poem," said Robert Frost, "can tell the moment it strikes him that he has taken an immortal wound—that he will never get over it." Such quasi-religious language to describe poetry was not unusual; not so long ago, it was fairly common. "The function of poetry," wrote Robert Graves, "is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites."

Both these quotations and several others in the same spirit are to be found at the back of Oscar Williams's *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry* (revised edition), a small stout volume that has something of the look and heft of a missal or other religious tome. Even Delmore Schwartz, not a man noted for heightened rhetoric or empty ecstasy, referred to the poet as "a kind of priest." To those for whom literature, and culture generally, came increasingly to stand in as a substitute for religion, poetry—and modern poetry specifically—was High Church.

The copyright date on my edition of Oscar Williams's anthology is 1950, and it was during the 1950's that poetry last had this religious aura. Many of the high priests of the cult—T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams, E. E. Cummings and W. H. Auden—were still alive and still writing, even if the best of their work was already behind them. The audience for poetry was then less than vast; it had diminished greatly since the age of Browning and Tennyson. In part this was owing to the increased difficulty of poetry, of which T. S. Eliot, in 1921, had remarked: "It appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists, at present, must be *difficult*." Eliot's justification for this difficulty—and it has never seemed quite persuasive—is that poetry must be as complex as the civilization it describes, with the modern poet becoming "more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect." All this served to make the modern poet more exclusive as well, which, for those of us who adored (a word chosen with care) modern poetry, was quite all right. Modern poetry, with the advance of modernism, had become an art for the happy few, and the happy few, it must be said, are rarely happier than when they are even fewer.

But such snobbish considerations aside, the generations of poets between W. B. Yeats (1865-1939) and W. H. Auden (1907-1973) produced an impressive body of poetry—of the kind that, in Frost's phrase, really does make "an immortal wound"; once read, it never is quite forgotten. Nor were all of these poets imposingly difficult: Yeats isn't, nor is Robert Frost. The most difficult poems of all, the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, seem over the years to have slipped outside the canon of great modern poetry and to be thought instead the interesting fragments of a great cultural impresario—the Diaghilev of modernist poetry—who finally flipped, betraying both his country and himself. These poets did not, except occasionally, teach. Occupationally, they ranged from physician (William Carlos Williams) to editor (Marianne Moore) to insurance executive (Wallace Stevens); in personal style, from traditionally formal (T. S. Eliot) to bohemian (E. E. Cummings) to suicidally desperate (Hart Crane). But for all their variety, no one would ever think to describe them as academic.

They were, however, the first living poets to be given the full academic treatment. Their works were dissected in classrooms, the intellectual quarterlies ran solemn essays about them even while continuing to run their poems, book-length critical studies about them began to be written and continue to be written even now. Their fame was

JOSEPH EPSTEIN is the author of *Plausible Prejudices* and *Once More Around the Block*, among other books. A new collection of his essays, *Partial Payments*, will be published by Norton early next year.

neither of the general nor of the wealth-producing kind that Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner knew—though T. S. Eliot was an international celebrity—but within the circumambience of the university they were revered. No body of critical writing produced during this period was more efficacious than that of T. S. Eliot, whose essays could affect the reputation—"the place in the canon," as academics now put it—of writers born three hundred years earlier. In the view of F. R. Leavis, Eliot, along with Samuel Johnson, Coleridge, and Matthew Arnold, is one of the four great English literary critics, yet without the authority lent his criticism by his poetry, it is plain that Eliot's critical power would have been nowhere near so great.

But the clearest evidence of the reverence in which these poets were held is found in the way they were worshipped by the generation of poets, or at least those in America, who followed them. Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Delmore Schwartz not only wrote some of the most brilliant essays on their immediate poetic forebears, but in their lives they tended to be obsessed with them. The young Robert Lowell set up a tent on the lawn of the home of Allen Tate, to learn at the feet of one of his masters. Delmore Schwartz viewed T. S. Eliot as a culture hero, pure though not so simple, and his letters and conversation were filled with references to Eliot. Randall Jarrell, after writing about Wallace Stevens's latter-day weaknesses, capped his criticism with the thought that Stevens was "one of the true poets of our century, someone whom the world will keep on reading just as it keeps on listening to Vivaldi or Scarlatti, looking at Tiepolo or Poussin."

Jarrell, Lowell, Berryman, Schwartz, as anyone who has read much about them cannot mistake, were all immensely ambitious men. Had their ambitions been applied to business or politics or perhaps anything other than careers in poetry—and all four were the most careful caretakers of their careers—they might not have ended as sadly as they did: in repeated mental breakdown, alcoholism, early death, and suicide. I believe poetry was implicated in their disastrous lives in that they had set out to forge brilliant careers like those of their predecessors and knew that, for a complex of reasons, they could not make it. Jarrell wrote an essay entitled "The Obscurity of the Poet," which he claimed had to be surmounted if civilization were to carry on, and another entitled "The Taste of the Age," which he found trashy. Delmore Schwartz wrote essays on "The Isolation of Modern Poetry," "The Vocation of the Poet," "Views of a Second Violinist, Some Answers to Questions about Writing Poetry," and "The Present State of Poetry," a state that he thought, to put it gently, uninspiring. The main modernist poets had written with assurance in their bones, as if they knew their worth and knew that posterity would one day know it, too. But the poets who came after them were less sure; they knew something had gone wrong. And they were right. It had.

BEFORE I attempt to get at what I believe has happened, perhaps I ought to describe what I think is the situation of contemporary poetry. Pressed to formulate this situation in a single sentence, I should write: contemporary poetry in the United States flourishes in a vacuum. Today there are more than 250 universities with creative-writing programs, and all of these have a poetry component, which means that they not only train aspiring poets but hire men and women who have published poetry to teach them. Many of these men and women go from being students in one writing program to being teachers in another—without, you might say, their feet, metrical or anatomical, having touched the floor. Many colleges and universities that do not have formal writing programs nonetheless hire poets to teach a creative-writing course or two; and the course in writing poetry has also become a staple of the community-college and adult-education menu. None of this puts poets up there with the Helmsleys and the Trumps, but it has made it possible for a large number of poets—and more than 6,300 poets and other writers are listed in the most recent edition of the *Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers*—to earn their living in work closely connected with their craft. Such work, thirty or so years ago, was available only to a small handful of poets, and these of the highest stature.

Robert Frost, when in his eighties and a great draw on the poetry-reading circuit, thought it a good thing that poets had become teachers "in a thousand, two thousand colleges," and added that colleges and universities gave poets "the best audiences poetry ever had in this world." Writing in 1985, in an essay entitled "The Poetry Reading: Public Performance/Private Act," the poet Donald Hall noted: "In the past thirty years, the poetry reading, which used to be rare, has become the chief form of publication for American poets. Annually, hundreds of thousands of listeners hear tens of thousands of readings." The great majority of these take place on college campuses, but many others are given at such cultural centers as the 92nd Street Y in New York, the Poetry Center at the Art Institute in Chicago, the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, not to mention various churches, synagogues, bars, art galleries, bookstores, and other public forums. Donald Hall reminds us that such poets as Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, and Robert Frost were giving readings in the 20's and 30's, but it was Dylan Thomas, in the late 40's and early 50's, who by providing quite beautiful performances and the added attraction of outrageous behavior really put poetry reading on the cultural map.

Poetry readings can draw anywhere from a pathetic handful of bedraggled students to a tony audience of several hundred. The fame of the poet is decisive. Fame, too, determines fees. Donald Hall, in 1985, claimed that a standard good fee for a reading was $1,000, though most poets, I suspect, accept a good deal less, while others—Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery—can command more. James Dickey claimed to have received as much as $4,500 for a reading. Sometimes two or three nearby colleges will invite a poet to read at each of their institutions, and the poet will pick up two or three fees while the colleges share the cost of a single airplane ticket. Intramurally, there are arguments about whether readings are corrupting to poets. Some claim that reading too frequently can make a poet tend to compose simpler, jokier poems that can be readily understood by an audience, whereas complex poems—imagine hearing Wallace Stevens's "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" without ever having read it—do not, so to say, play well at readings. Yet readings have helped many poets who do not have, or want, teaching jobs to keep going financially. Readings, too, are often the only payment in the coin of the realm of the ego that they ever receive, for the printed work of poets, sometimes including poets who have been at it a long while, often gets hardly any response at all in the way of reviews or even letters from readers.

No one keeps very precise records on such matters, but the general sense is that more poetry is currently being published than ever before. Poets are not being all that widely published by the major trade houses of New York and Boston, though almost all of them do publish some contemporary poets. Many university presses have begun to issue books of poetry, and some have been doing so for years. (Howard Nemerov, our new poet laureate, has been published by the University of Chicago Press for as long as I can remember.) What have come to be called the "small presses" also publish a fairly large amount of poetry. Some of these—David R. Godine of Boston, for example, or North Point Press of Berkeley—aren't as small as all that, but others, which carry such names as Dragon Gate or Aralia Press, truly are. The best general answer to the question of how well these books of poetry sell is probably "not very." It used to be said that the only serious poet in America who was ever able to live off the sale of his work was Robert Frost, but according to Donald Hall, even Frost was able to do so only at the end of his life.

Yet there is no shortage of outlets for poetry. The *New Yorker* publishes it, most of the literary monthlies and quarterlies do; *Poetry*, founded by Harriet Monroe in 1912, rolls along. And beyond such publications are the many little magazines that print vast quantities of poetry. The circulation of these magazines is often not in the thousands but in the hundreds. Almost all of them would go under without subsidization. So numerous are the little magazines that there exists an organization—an "umbrella organization," in the bureaucratic phrase—called The Coordinating Council for Literary Magazines. It, too, is heavily subsidized, in good part by the National Endowment for the Arts. Sometimes it seems as if there isn't a poem written in this nation that isn't subsidized or underwritten by a grant either from a foundation or the government or a teaching salary or a fellowship of one kind or another.

And so, as the disc jockeys say, the beat goes on. The pretense is that nothing is wrong, that business is proceeding pretty much as usual. There are today, for example, prizes galore: Pulitzers and Lamonts and National Book Critics Circle and Yale Younger Poets and Rome Fellowships of the American Academy and Institute of Arts & Letters and Guggenheims and National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and Library of Congress Consultantships and the Lilly Prize and now a national poet laureate and even—how he, most ambitious of poets, would have wryly smiled at the news—a Delmore Schwartz Memorial Award. Poets regularly parade as spokesmen and -women for their ethnic group or race or political tendency. Some few poets—Robert Penn Warren, perhaps Richard Wilbur is soon to arrive at this position—have more medals than Baron von Richthofen.

No shortage, then, of honors, emoluments, publication possibilities, opportunities to garner public adulation. In such ways may contemporary poetry be said to be flourishing.

BUT what of the vacuum? I should say that it consists generally of this: that however much contemporary poetry may be honored, it is, outside a very small circle, scarcely read. Contemporary poetry is no longer a part of the regular intellectual diet. People of general intellectual interests who feel that they ought to read or at least know about works on modern society or recent history or novels that attempt to convey something about the way we live now, no longer feel the same compunction about contemporary poetry. The crowds in London once stood on their toes to see Tennyson pass; today a figure like Tennyson probably would not write poetry and might not even read it. Poetry has been shifted—has shifted itself?—off center stage. Literarily, poetry no longer seems in any way where the action is. It begins to seem, in fact, a sideline activity, a little as chiropractic or acupuncture is to mainstream medicine—odd, strange, but with a small cult of followers who swear by it.

One might counter that poetry was in a similar state when the modernist poets set out on their ambitious artistic adventure. They published their work in magazines read only by hundreds; their names were not known by most members of the educated classes; their following, such as it was,

had a cultish character. But beyond this nothing else seems comparable. Propelling the modernist poets was a vision, and among some of them a program—a belief that the nature of life had changed fundamentally and that artists now had to change accordingly. Free verse, fragmented syntax, radical disjunctions, slangy diction, the use of subjects before then thought poetically impossible—these were among the techniques and methods employed by the modernist poets. New, too, was their attitude toward the reader, whom they, perhaps first among any writers in history, chose in a radical way to disregard. They weren't out to *épater*. If what they wrote was uncompromisingly difficult, they did not see this as their problem. They wrote as they wrote; as for their difficulty, the question was whether or not, in Henry James's phrase, theirs was "the difficulty that inspired." By that phrase I take James to have meant difficulty of a kind that inspires one to surmount it because one senses the reward to be eminently worthy of the struggle. Somehow, through the quality of their writing, the authority of the sacrifices they made for their art, the aura of adult seriousness conveyed in both work and life, the modernist poets won through. Theirs was the difficulty, ours the inspiration.

Whereas one tended to think of the modernist poet as an artist—even if he worked in a bank in London, or at an insurance company in Hartford, or in a physician's office in Rutherford, New Jersey—one tends to think of the contemporary poet as a professional: a poetry professional. Like a true professional, he is rather insulated within the world of his fellow-professionals. The great majority of poets today live in an atmosphere almost entirely academic, but it is academic with a difference: not the world of science and scholarship but that of the creative-writing program and the writing workshop. (Everything that has gone wrong with the world since World War II, Kingsley Amis once noted, can be summed up in the word "workshop.") The poets who have come out of this atmosphere are oddly positioned both in academic life and in the world at large; they are neither wholly academics nor wholly artists. They publish chiefly in journals sheltered by universities, they fly around the country giving readings and workshops at other colleges and universities. They live in jeans yet carry a curriculum vitae. I have seen scores of such curricula, and they tend to run along the following lines:

> James Silken [a name I have made up] published his first book of poems, *Stoned Jupiter*, with the University Presses of Florida. His second book, *The Parched Garden*, will be published early next year by Black Bear Press. A chapbook, *Apaches and Parsley*, was brought out by Wainscotting Books in 1983. His poems and reviews have appeared in such journals as *Poetry Northwest*, *New Letters*, *The Arizona Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and *Worcester Review*. He has given readings at Iowa State University, the University of Michigan, Drake University, and Bread Loaf. Next summer he will be a fellow at the Oregon Center for the Creative Arts. A native of Tennessee, he now lives in Tempe, where he directs the writing program at Arizona State University.

Well, it's a living.

In 1941 Delmore Schwartz, in an essay originally published in *Kenyon Review* and entitled "The Isolation of Modern Poetry," wrote that "It is not a simple matter of the poet lacking an audience, for that is an effect, rather than a cause, of the character of modern poetry." The character that Schwartz then had in mind was its difficulty (in the Henry James sense). In *Partisan Review*, in 1949, Schwartz added, "Anyone who wants to understand modern poetry can do so by working about half as hard as he must to learn a language, or acquire any new skill, or learn to play bridge well." But in fact, with an occasional exception (the obscurity of much of the poetry of John Ashbery comes to mind), contemporary poetry has not grown more but less difficult, and the audience still isn't there.

If Delmore Schwartz blamed the obscurity of modern poetry on its difficulty, Randall Jarrell, in a lecture at Harvard called "The Obscurity of the Poet," blamed the national culture. "The poet," said Jarrell, "lives in a world whose newspapers and magazines and books and motion pictures and radio stations and television stations have destroyed, in a great many people, even the capacity for understanding real poetry, real art of any kind." In more recent years, poets have taken this a step further to blame America for an anti-intellectual and anti-artistic strain in our national life. "Pushkin could count on railway workers to know his poems," John Berryman told Eileen Simpson, his first wife. "*Think of it*! Who reads poetry in America?" Poetry, it is elsewhere claimed, is ill-taught in grammar and high schools. The neglect of poetry by major trade publishers is sometimes blamed. Capitalism generally comes in for its share of lumps, sometimes for encouraging supermarket bookselling techniques, sometimes for holding up the wrong models: What kind of country is it in which Lee Iacocca is better known than A.R. Ammons? Everything, in short, is blamed but the drinking water.

Some poets, attempting to swallow the hand that feeds them, even blame the university, arguing that, through the emergence of so many creative-writing programs, poets have created their own, largely inbred audience that simultaneously requires a great deal in the way of care and feeding and asks little of them, the poets, in the way of literary ambition. ("Within five years," wrote Greg Kuzma, a poet and teacher of poetry, "there will be a creative-writing program available for

anyone in America within safe driving distance of his home.") Creative-writing programs, this argument runs, are not only producing more people who think of themselves as poets than this or any other country needs, but, through the encouraging, the somewhat therapeutic, atmosphere of the workshop, are generally lowering the high standard of work which is poetry's only serious claim on anyone's attention.

From a higher, more historical point of view, there are those who claim that the game was up for poetry with the advent of romanticism, which retained great themes for poetry but saw them through a filter of the self—whereas now, this argument holds, the great themes are gone and all that remains to poetry is a pallid subjectivity. "With the development of romantic theory in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries," the eminent critic Yvor Winters wrote, "there has been an increasing tendency to suppress the rational in poetry and as far as it may be to isolate the emotional." A grave mistake this, at least for those who tended to view poetry as a vehicle for truth and a repository as useful as any ever invented for ideas and insights. Christopher Clausen, author of an excellent little book entitled *The Place of Poetry, Two Centuries of an Art in Crisis*, underscores this point when he writes: "Since the rise of science to intellectual preeminence, poets have been less able either to show equal claim with scientists to clarify the problems Western civilization has (perhaps wrongly) seen as most important, or to incorporate and epitomize the conclusions of their rivals."

Romanticism, science; even modernism itself has been put in the dock, for draining the joyousness out of poetry or, with the introduction of free verse, depriving poetry of the delights of meter and rhyme. Philip Larkin, for one, laid the blame for the broken connection between poets and readers on what he called "the aberration of modernism, that blighted all the arts." He meant in particular the modernist tendency to deify the artistic vocation, to separate it from any obligation on the part of a writer to instruct or entertain an audience. In a three-page essay entitled "The Pleasure Principle," Larkin wrote that "at bottom poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure-seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute."

To screw things yet one notch higher, there are those who believe that the decline of poetry in our day is an inevitable accompaniment of the disintegration of language generally. Wendell Berry, a poet and essayist, writes: "My impression is that we have seen, for perhaps 150 years, a gradual increase in language that is either meaningless or destructive of meaning. And I believe that this increasing unreliability of language parallels the increasing disintegration, over the same period, of persons and communities"—and, one gathers, by extension, of the power of poetry to recover much of value from the wreckage. At a slightly lower level of generality, others believe that the use poetry has traditionally made of rhythm and meter, of image and metaphor, to bring its readers to a condition of susceptibility to the emotion and thought it wishes to convey simply no longer finds an adequate response in any but a minuscule handful of trained readers. It is as if an old human skill, like following a trail or scenting game, had atrophied and died. Still others appeal to the mysteries of history. Might we not just be going through a bad patch in the history of poetry, as the country did between, say, 1870, when Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman were still at the height of their powers, and 1910, when the modernist poets exploded upon the scene?

NO DOUBT romanticism, modernism, and other literary ideas and ideological movements have all had their effect in landing poetry in the position it finds itself in toward the close of the 20th century. Institutional, linguistic, historical factors have also doubtless exerted their influence in pushing poetry into the dark corner it now inhabits. Yet nearly every explanation of the situation of poetry in our time—attempting to account for its isolation, its seeming irrelevance to the general culture, the depressing sense that this once most elevated of human activities is now rather second-rate—seems to let the poets themselves off the hook. There may be something to Walt Whitman's remark that "to have great poets, there must be great audiences too," but, as Delmore Schwartz once rejoined, "To have great poetry it is necessary to have great poets. . . ."

Not that anyone has been claiming that ours is a great age of poetry. Literary forms, or genres, after all, have their own, odd, often indecipherable rises and falls. English drama never again reached the heights attained in the Elizabethan Age. Who could have predicted the great burgeoning brilliance of the novel in mid-19th-century Russia? It may well be that sixty or seventy years ago, in our Eliots and Yeatses and Stevenses and Hardys and Frosts, we had our Donnes and Marvells and are now living through our Wallaces and Lovelaces. Another view, one straightforwardly formulated by Karl Shapiro, holds that there is precious little poetic talent around even at the best of times. As Shapiro notes:

> I have for a long time come to the conclusion that at any one time the production of true works of art is even rarer than we think. I even devised a rule-of-thumb dogma which I call the B-S-K theory of poetry: Byron, Shelley, and Keats. According to this dogma, there can only be three poets at any one time. In periods of resplendent renaissance, the number increases slightly but not much, perhaps up to half a dozen. Around the points of these stars, there

are a certain number of satellites, and so on. Actually, this is a historically realistic way of looking at art.

But even if there were any B's or S's or K's about nowadays, it is not certain we would know who they were. Poetry is published in such plenitude that last year the Los Angeles *Times* announced it would no longer review books of poems, on the grounds that it was impossible to tell which were important. The same, by extension, applies to poets. There is nothing resembling a consensus on who might be the important poets of our day. The most lauded must be Robert Penn Warren, but one does not hear him often spoken of, or see him written about, as the kind of poet whose work is central to the lives of his readers. Richard Wilbur, the past poet laureate, is everywhere taken for eminent, and everyone for whom poetry matters reveres him for his craftsmanship, yet Wilbur does not seem to stir passionate advocacy in his readers, except when held up as a model of the literary decorum that has been lost to poetry in its confessional, sexier, Visigothic aspects. Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet who currently teaches at Harvard, is generally written about as if he were a major figure, yet his poetry, too, has failed to break out of the tight, claustral little circle of professionals. Doubtless the most famous poet in America is Allen Ginsberg, but poetry isn't really what he is famous for: politics and homosexuality and a talent for the outrageous and a small genius for publicity are the four cornerstones on which his fame rests. John Ashbery is also publicly honored and written about with critical reverence; yet, though he is not himself an academic, his poetry—about which he has said, "Poetry does not have subject matter because it is the subject. We are the subject matter of poetry, not vice versa"—is perfect for academic treatment, being allusive, desultory, and nicely self-deconstructive, which also means that it is most unlikely to hold any interest outside the academy.

Other names of equal weight are on the scene. Of the senior generation, there are Stanley Kunitz, Karl Shapiro, David Ignatow, and (in England) Stephen Spender. Of the generation of poets now in or almost in its sixties, there are Howard Nemerov, James Merrill, John Hollander, Anthony Hecht, Donald Davie, Hayden Carruth, Donald Hall, W.S. Merwin, Galway Kinnell, Richard Howard, Mona Van Duyn, Philip Levine, Maxine Kumin, Derek Walcott, Adrienne Rich, William Meredith. "When I find myself among those who don't know my name," said Virgil Thomson, "I know I'm in the real world." But the poets mentioned in this paragraph, though large names in the small world in which they operate, are again for the most part unknown outside universities or the pages of *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, and *Parnassus*.

I not long ago had occasion to hear two poets read and talk about their craft. Both were men, both in their thirties, both had regular teaching jobs at large universities, both had published two books and had their share of grants and awards. One of the two was a Hawaiian of Japanese ancestry, the other was middle-class Jewish. Both were zealous about poetry, which they took to be insufficiently appreciated in an essentially philistine country. The first poet viewed himself as a spokesman for his people, the truth of whose past he saw it as his task to keep alive in his own poetry. The second poet did not announce himself as a spokesman for the Jews, but he came across in the style one thinks of as tough but sensitive, the champion of a beleaguered art. His father, he disclosed, is a salesman, and it had been no easy thing to get him to understand his son's need to be a poet. (A salesman, evidently, can die deaths unknown even to Arthur Miller.) In their discussions after they read, both poets were full of quotations from Pound and Eliot and Kant and Rilke, giving off a strong whiff of the classroom.

As for the works themselves, the first read a lengthy poem about a visit to a strip of land in Hawaii that had once been the site of the cemetery where his grandfather was buried but which had since been plowed up by a developer. His was a poem, in short, about victimization, with a bit of anti-capitalism thrown in at no extra charge. The second read a poem entitled "Proustian" about the brief happy moments when, as a child, his grandmother fed him cookies and milk and he had no knowledge of time, and another poem about a visit to his former high-school football coach, who had always preached the powers of the body, but was now sadly powerless in a body racked by cancer. A poem, the New Critics held, cannot be paraphrased, but in paraphrasing—summarizing, really—these poems I do not think I am doing them a grave injustice. I bring them up only because they seemed so characteristic, so much like a great deal of contemporary poetry: slightly political, heavily preening, and not distinguished enough in language or subtlety of thought to be memorable.

Is it all up with poetry, then? As early as the 1940's, Edmund Wilson wrote an essay carrying the questioning title, "Is Verse a Dying Technique?" Wilson's answer was, essentially, yes, it is. Prose, in Wilson's view, had overwhelmed poetry. By Flaubert's time, he notes, "the Dantes present their vision in terms of prose dramas or fiction rather than epics in verse." Wilson mentions Flaubert because he is the first novelist to lavish the kind of care on his prose that poets did on their verse; James Joyce would be another. Yeats was the last great poet to write convincingly in iambic pentameters, which, Wilson noted, "no longer [have] any relation whatever to the tempo and language of our lives." Anti-

quated forms can only render an antiquated point of view, and "you cannot deal with contemporary events in an idiom which was already growing trite in Tennyson's and Arnold's day. . . ."

Wilson does allow that our lyric poets may be compared with any who have ever written, but he adds: "We have had no imaginations of the stature of Shakespeare or Dante who have done their major work in verse." Edgar Allan Poe had anticipated much of this a century earlier. In "The Poetic Principle," his essay of 1848, Poe wrote: "If, at any time, any very long poems *were* popular in reality—which I doubt—it is at least clear that no very long poem will ever be popular again." We shall continue to read Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, perhaps Byron and Browning, to cherish and derive great pleasure from them, but with the understanding that what they did—specifically telling magnificent stories in poetic form—can never be done again.

Not that writers haven't tried. Philip Toynbee published a novel in verse in the 1960's. Clive James has written lengthy travesties of contemporary London literary life in heroic couplets. The most recent effort, a 307-page novel entitled *The Golden Gate*, composed in a Pushkinian rhyme scheme by a young writer named Vikram Seth, appeared in 1986 to much acclaim. But it was acclaim of the odd kind that Samuel Johnson felt was owed to women preachers and dogs walking on their hind legs: "You are surprised to find it done at all." So swept away were readers by the sheer freakiness of Vikram Seth's accomplishment that they overlooked its rather clichéed Berkeleyan (California not Bishop) message about making love not war.

Poets have not altogether given up on telling stories. Some of Robert Frost's best poems are narratives. Although fragmented and disjunctive, even "The Waste Land" tells a story; so, too, in a very different way, does Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning." In *Life Studies* (1957), Robert Lowell conveyed portions of his autobiography in verse. Among contemporary poets, Herbert Morris, in finely controlled blank verse, has written dramatic monologues and accounts of his childhood that are essentially narrative in character and quite successfully so. But for the vast most part contemporary poetry has gone off in the direction of the lyric. In practice, this means a shortish poem, usually fewer than forty lines, generally describing an incident or event or phenomenon of nature or work of art or relationship or emotion, in more or less distinguished language, the description often, though not always, yielding a slightly oblique insight.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, who said of *Paradise Lost* that "None ever wished it longer than it is," said in the same essay on Milton that "All that short compositions can commonly attain is neatness and elegance." There are various reasons why so many contemporary poems are, in Johnson's phrase, "short compositions," and not the least among them is that most magazines do not provide space for long poems. They choose not to do so on the assumption, probably correct, that few even quite serious readers wish to read a poem that runs ten or more pages. (Let us not speak of the talent that it takes to sustain an extended poetic performance.) But in taking up the lyric as its chief form, contemporary poetry has seriously delimited itself. It thereby gives away much that has always made literature an activity of primary significance; it gives away the power to tell stories, to report on how people live and have lived, to struggle for those larger truths about life the discovery of which is the final justification for reading. Thus has poetry in our day become, in the words of the intelligent young poet and critic Brad Leithauser, "a sadly peripheral art form."

Even here on the periphery, though, it would help to be able to make a few distinctions. Although it hardly guarantees the production of great poets, a start might be made by deciding who are the greatly overrated ones. This, however, is not likely to happen soon. Contemporary poetry, in the cumbersome new usage of the academic literary criticism of the moment, has been "privileged"—that is, in our day it has been given a special dispensation, set apart, released from the burden of undergoing tough criticism. Helen Vendler, the most talented critic of contemporary poetry now at work, almost exclusively writes elucidary appreciations; one can only infer which poets Professor Vendler doesn't care for by her neglecting to write about them. Randall Jarrell, the most talented critic of contemporary poetry in his day, felt no such compunction; he kissed and slapped with equal exuberance. But then poetry in Jarrell's time may not have seemed as sickly as it does now. Now, for so many poets, critics, editors, small-press publishers, creative-writing programs, the chief thing seems to be keeping the patient alive.

Yet if survival is genuinely at stake, it won't do to ignore symptoms. For an account of symptoms, of what is wrong with so much contemporary poetry, one does well to consider an extraordinary essay by Witold Gombrowicz, the Polish novelist who died in Paris in exile in 1969. The essay is entitled, straight out, "Against Poets." In his second paragraph Gombrowicz states, if not his case against contemporary poetry, his condition when reading it:

> The thesis of the following essay, that almost no one likes poems and that the world of verse is a fiction and a falsehood, will seem, I assume, as bold as it is frivolous. Yet here I stand before you and declare that I don't like poems at all and that they even bore me. Maybe you will say I am an impoverished ignoramus. Yet I have labored in art for a long time and its language

is not completely alien to me. Nor can you use your favorite argument against me, claiming that I do not possess a poetic sensibility, because I do possess it and to a great degree. When poetry appears to me not in poems but mixed with other, more prosaic, elements, for example, in Shakespeare's dramas, in the prose of Pascal and Dostoevsky, or simply as a very ordinary sunset, I tremble as do other mortals. Why does rhythm and rhyme put me to sleep, why does the language of poets seem to me to be the least interesting language conceivable, why is this Beauty so unattractive to me and why is it that I don't know anything worse as style, anything more ridiculous than the manner in which poets speak about themselves and their poetry?

When Gombrowicz gets down to his bill of particular complaint, it turns out that he is put off by the professionalization of poetry—"today one is a Poet, the way one is an engineer or a doctor"—which has robbed poetry of its spontaneity, made poetry itself seem artificial, and rendered the poet a less than complete human being. Poetry has been surrounded by altogether too much piety, so that poets have begun to think themselves priestly in their exclusivity. Poets tend to keep the company of other poets, which not only fortifies them in "their ostrich politics in relation to reality," but protects them from seeing their own weaknesses. Poets create chiefly for other poets—for people like themselves, which, in Gombrowicz's view, is another weakness. Here, he notes, "I am not demanding that they write 'in a way comprehensible to everyone.' " He merely wishes that they would not so insistently pose as artists and neglect the fact that beyond their enclosed private world exist other, quite as interesting worlds. He mentions the way poets honor and praise and generally suck up to one another, writing about their fellow poets in a "bombastic gibberish so naive and childish that it is difficult to believe that the people wielding the pen did not feel the ridiculousness of this publicism." But enough.

If Gombrowicz's condition seems slightly self-exacerbated, his case more than slightly exaggerated, nevertheless anyone who has followed contemporary poetry will have shared some of his irritation with it and will recognize a general truth to his charges. No world I have ever peered in upon can seem simultaneously so smug and so hopeless as that of the world of contemporary poets, especially in its creative-writing program phase. All too often contemporary poets comport themselves as if they were self-appointed to E.M. Forster's little aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate, and the plucky. ("When what they really are," a wag I know has said, "is the insensate, the outrageous, and the lucky.") The last thing they wish to hear is that they are producing something not many people outside the classroom want; and instead they act as if those who do not appreciate what they do are, on the face of it, spiritually crippled.

But among serious poets, and people serious about poetry, there is a stabbing recognition that something has happened. It is as if poetry has lost its weight, and hence its reality, and hence its value. Speaking for myself, there have been contemporary poets I have much admired—to mention only the recently dead, Elizabeth Bishop, L.E. Sissman, Philip Larkin—but none has been able to plant language in my head the way that poets of an earlier generation could: "The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas"; "Complacencies of the peignoir, and late/Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair"; "But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep"; "In the room the women come and go/Talking of Michelangelo"; "All in green went my love riding"; "Like a patient etherised upon a table"; "a low dishonest decade"; "Something there is that doesn't love a wall"; "imaginary gardens with real toads in them."

Where did all that elegant, potent, lovely language go; or, more precisely, where went the power to create such language? Perhaps, like W. B. Yeats in Auden's poem, it "disappeared in the dead of winter."

To return to Marianne Moore, whence we set out:

> I, too, dislike it.
> Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt
> for it, one discovers in
> it, after all, a place for the genuine.

And more than the genuine, I should say, though just now the entire enterprise of poetic creation seems threatened by having been taken out of the world, chilled in the classroom, and vastly overproduced by men and women who are licensed to write it by degree if not necessarily by talent or spirit. It was Wallace Stevens who once described poetry as "a pheasant disappearing in the brush." One gets a darting glint of it every once in a while in the work of the better contemporary poets, but to pretend that that meaty and delectable bird freely walks the land isn't going to get him out of hiding, not soon, and maybe not ever.

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'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness'

from *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (1989)

As a radical standpoint, perspective, position, 'the politics of location' necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision. When asked, 'What does it mean to enjoy reading *Beloved*, admire *Schooldaze*, and have a theoretical interest in post-structuralist theory?' (one of the 'wild' questions posed by the Third World Cinema Focus Forum), I located my answer concretely in the realm of oppositional political struggle. Such diverse pleasures can be experienced, enjoyed even, because one transgresses, moves 'out of one's place.' For many of us, that movement requires pushing against oppressive boundaries set by race, sex, and class domination. Initially, then, it is a defiant political gesture. Moving, we confront the realities of choice and location. Within complex and ever shifting realms of power relations, do we position ourselves on the side of colonizing mentality? Or do we continue to stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer our ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, towards that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible? This choice is crucial. It shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practice and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts. It informs the way we speak about these issues, the language we choose. Language is also a place of struggle.

To me, the effort to speak about issues of 'space and location' evoked pain. The questions raised compelled difficult explorations of 'Silences' – unaddressed places within my personal political and artistic evolution. Before I could consider answers, I had to face ways these issues were intimately connected to intense personal emotional upheaval regarding place, identity, desire. In an intense all-night-long conversation with Eddie George (member of Black Audio Film Collective) talking about the struggle of oppressed people to come to voice, he made the very 'down' comment that 'ours is a broken voice.' My response was simply that when you hear the broken voice you also hear the pain contained

within that brokenness – a speech of suffering, often it's that sound nobody wants to hear. Stuart Hall talks about the need for a 'politics of articulation.' He and Eddie have engaged in dialogue with me in a deeply soulful way, hearing my struggle for words. It is this dialogue between comrades that is a gesture of love; I am grateful.

I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. I have confronted silence, inarticulateness. When I say, then, that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name that location from which I come to voice – that space of my theorizing.

Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words. Language is also a place of struggle. I was just a girl coming slowly into womanhood when I read Adrienne Rich's words, 'This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you.' This language that enabled me to attend graduate school, to write a dissertation, to speak at job interviews, carries the scent of oppression. Language is also a place of struggle. The Australian aborigines say 'that smell of the white man is killing us.' I remember the smells of my childhood, hot water corn bread, turnip greens, fried pies. I remember the way we talked to one another, our words thickly accented black Southern speech. Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination – a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle.

It is no easy task to find ways to include our multiple voices within the various texts we create – in film, poetry, feminist theory. Those are sounds and images that mainstream consumers find difficult to understand. Sounds and scenes which cannot be appropriated are often that sign everyone questions, wants to erase, to 'wipe out.' I feel it even now, writing this piece when I gave it talking and reading, talking spontaneously, using familiar academic speech now and then, 'talking the talk' – using black vernacular speech, the intimate sounds and gestures I normally save for family and loved ones. Private speech in public discourse, intimate intervention, making another text, a space that enables me to recover all that I am in language, I find so many gaps, absences in this written text. To cite them at least is to let the reader know something has been missed, or remains there hinted at by words – there in the deep structure.

Throughout *Freedom Charter*, a work which traces aspects of the movement against racial apartheid in South Africa, this statement is constantly repeated: *our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting*. In much new, exciting cultural practice, cultural texts – in film, black literature, critical theory – there is an effort to remember that is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able

to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality. Fragments of memory are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a 'new take' on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation. We see this in films like *Dreaming Rivers* and *Illusions*, and in books like *Mama Day* by Gloria Naylor. Thinking again about space and location, I heard the statement 'our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting'; a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.

I have needed to remember, as part of a self-critical process where one pauses to reconsider choices and location, tracing my journey from small-town Southern black life, from folk traditions, and church experience to cities, to the university, to neighborhoods that are not racially segregated, to places where I see for the first time independent cinema, where I read critical theory, where I write theory. Along that trajectory, I vividly recall efforts to silence my coming to voice. In my public presentation I was able to tell stories, to share memories. Here again I only hint at them. The opening essay in my book, *Talking Back*, describes my effort to emerge as critical thinker, artist, and writer in a context of repression. I talk about punishment, about mama and daddy aggressively silencing me, about the censorship of black communities. I had no choice. I had to struggle and resist to emerge from that context and then from other locations with mind intact, with an open heart. I had to leave that space I called home to move beyond boundaries, yet I needed also to return there. We sing a song in the black church tradition that says, 'I'm going up the rough side of the mountain on my way home.' Indeed the very meaning of 'home' changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting. 'Our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting.'

This experience of space and location is not the same for black folks who have always been privileged, or for black folks who desire only to move from underclass status to points of privilege, not the same for those of us from poor backgrounds who have had to continually engage in actual political struggle both within and outside black communities to assert an aesthetic and critical presence. Black folks coming from poor, underclass communities, who enter universities or privileged cultural settings unwilling to surrender every vestige of who we were before we were there, all 'sign' of our class and cultural 'difference,' who are unwilling to play the role of 'exotic Other,' must create spaces within that culture of domination if we are to survive whole, our souls intact. Our very presence is a disruption. We are often as much an 'Other,' a threat to black people from

privileged class backgrounds who do not understand or share our perspectives, as we are to uninformed white folks. Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them. Mostly, of course, we are not there. We never 'arrive' or 'can't stay.' Back in those spaces where we come from, we kill ourselves in despair, drowning in nihilism, caught in poverty, in addiction, in every postmodern mode of dying that can be named. Yet when we few remain in that 'other' space, we are often too isolated, too alone. We die there, too. Those of us who live, who 'make it,' passionately holding on to aspects of that 'downhome' life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive. Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice.

For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance.

In the preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, I expressed these thoughts on marginality:

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.
>
> There were laws to ensure our return. Not to return was to risk being punished. Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.
>
> This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world-view – a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity.

Though incomplete, these statements identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such,

I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

This is not a mythic notion of marginality. It comes from lived experience. Yet I want to talk about what it means to struggle to maintain that marginality even as one works, produces, lives, if you will, at the center. I no longer live in that segregated world across the tracks. Central to life in that world was the ongoing awareness of the necessity of opposition. When Bob Marley sings, 'We refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are, and that's the way it's going to be,' that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins. And one can only say no, speak the voice of resistance, because there exists a counter-language. While it may resemble the colonizer's tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed. When I left that concrete space in the margins, I kept alive in my heart ways of knowing reality, which affirm continually not only the primacy of resistance but the necessity of a resistance that is sustained by remembrance of the past, which includes recollections of broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings. Once mama said to me as I was about to go again to the predominantly white university, 'You can take what the white people have to offer, but you do not have to love them.' Now understanding her cultural codes, I know that she was not saying to me not to love people of other races. She was speaking about colonization and the reality of what it means to be taught in a culture of domination by those who dominate. She was insisting on my power to be able to separate useful knowledge that I might get from the dominating group from participation in ways of knowing that would lead to estrangement, alienation, and worse – assimilation and co-optation. She was saying that it is not necessary to give yourself over to them to learn. Not having been in those institutions, she knew that I might be faced again and again with situations where I would be 'tried,' made to feel as though a central requirement of my being accepted would mean participation in this system of exchange to ensure my success, my 'making it.' She was reminding me of the necessity of opposition and simultaneously encouraging me not to lose that radical perspective shaped and formed by marginality.

Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one's creativity, one's imagination is at risk, there that one's mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for as lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expression. The struggle may not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one's segregated, colonized community and family. So I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as 'pure.' I want

to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance. And since we are well able to name the nature of that repression we know better the margin as site of deprivation. We are more silent when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance. We are more often silenced when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance.

Silenced. During my graduate years I heard myself speaking often in the voice of resistance. I cannot say that my speech was welcomed. I cannot say that my speech was heard in such a way that it altered relations between colonizer and colonized. Yet what I have noticed is that those scholars, most especially those who name themselves radical critical thinkers, feminist thinkers, now fully participate in the construction of a discourse about the 'Other.' I was made 'Other' there in that space with them. In that space in the margins, that lived-in segregated world of my past and present. They did not meet me there in that space. They met me at the center. They greeted me as colonizers. I am waiting to learn from them the path of their resistance, of how it came to be that they were able to surrender the power to act as colonizers. I am waiting for them to bear witness, to give testimony. They say that the discourse on marginality, on difference has moved beyond a discussion of 'us and them.' They do not speak of how this movement has taken place. This is a response from the radical space of my marginality. It is a space of resistance. It is a space I choose.

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the 'Other,' to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak. Often this speech about the 'Other' is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences, that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if we were there. This 'we' is that 'us' in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. Often this speech about the 'Other' annihilates, erases: 'No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.' Stop. We greet you as liberators. This 'we' is that 'us' in the margins, that 'we' who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. This is an intervention. I am writing to you. I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different, where I see things differently. I am talking about what I see.

Speaking from margins. Speaking in resistance. I open a book. There are words on the back cover, *Never in the Shadows Again*. A book which suggests the possibility of speaking as liberators. Only who is speaking and who is silent. Only who stands in the shadows – the shadow in a doorway, the space where images of black women are represented voiceless, the space where our words are invoked to serve and support, the space of our absence. Only small echoes of protest. We are

re-written. We are 'Other.' We are the margin. Who is speaking and to whom. Where do we locate ourselves and comrades.?

Silenced. We fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us, because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in a voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.

Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice.

As Pratibha Parma notes, 'The appropriation and use of space are political acts.'

To speak about that location from which work emerges, I choose familiar politicized language, old codes, words like 'struggle, marginality, resistance.' I choose these words knowing that they are no longer popular or 'cool' – hold onto them and the political legacies they evoke and affirm, even as I work to change what they say, to give them renewed and different meaning.

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world.

bell hooks
1999

writing from the darkness

I remember childhood as time in anguish, as a dark time—not darkness in any sense that is stark, bleak, or empty but as a rich space of knowledge, struggle, and awakening. We seemed bound to the earth then, as though like other living things our roots were so deep in the soil of our surroundings there was no way to trace beginnings. We lived in the county, in a space between city and country, a barely occupied space. Houses stood at a distance from one another, few of them beautiful; always a sense of isolation and unbearable loneliness hovered about them. We lived on hilly land, trees and wild honeysuckle hiding the flat spaces where gardens grew. I do not remember darkness there. It was the blackness enveloping earth and sky out in the country at Daddy Jerry's and Mama Willie's house that gave feeling and meaning to darkness. There it seemed textured, as though it were velvet cloth folded in many layers. That darkness had to be confronted as we made our way before bedtime to the outhouse. "No light necessary," granddaddy would say. "There is light in darkness, you just have to find it." That was early

childhood. From then on I was terribly lost in an inner darkness as deep and thick as the blackness of those nights. I could not find my way or see the light there.

I was a child and his words had given me confidence. I believed with him that there was light in darkness waiting to be found. Later unable to find my way, I began to feel uncertain, displaced, estranged even. This was the condition of my spirit when I decided to be a writer, to seek for that light in words. No one understood. Coming from country black folks, seemingly always old, folks with the spirit of the backwoods, odd habits and odd ways, I had no way to share this longing—this ache to write words. In our world there was an intense passionate place for telling stories. It was really some big-time thing to be able to tell a good story, to as Cousin Bo would say "call out the hell in words." Writing had no such place. Writing the old people could not do even if they had been lucky enough to learn how. Folks wrote only when they had to; it was an awesome task, a burden. Making lists or writing letters could anguish the spirit. And who would anguish the spirit unnecessarily?

Searching for a space where writing could be understood, I asked for a diary. I remember early on getting the imitation-leather red or green books at holiday times, with DIARY written on them in bright gold letters, and of course there were those ever-so-tiny gold keys, two of them. Keys that were inevitably lost. Whole diaries gone because I refused to pry them open, not wanting what was private to be accessible. Confessional writing in diaries was acceptable in our family because it was writing that was never meant to be read by anyone. Keeping a daily diary did not mean that I was seriously called to write, that I would ever write for a reading public. This was "safe" writing. It would (or so my parents thought) naturally be forsaken as one grew into womanhood. I shared with them this assumption. Such writing was seen as a necessary stage but only

that. It was for me the space for critical reflection, where I struggled to understand myself and the world around me, that crazy world of family and community, that painful world. I could say there what was hurting me, how I felt about things, what I hoped for. I could be angry there with no threat of punishment. I could "talk back." Nothing had to be concealed. I could hold on to myself there.

However much the realm of diary-keeping has been a female experience that has often kept us closeted writers, away from the act of writing as authorship, it has most assuredly been a writing act that intimately connects the art of expressing one's feeling on the written page with the construction of self and identity, with the effort to be fully self-actualized. This precious powerful sense of writing as a healing place where our souls can speak and unfold has been crucial to women's development of a counter-hegemonic experience of creativity within patriarchal culture. Significantly, diary writing has not been traditionally seen by literary scholars as subversive autobiography, as a form of authorship that challenges conventional notions about the primacy of confessional writing as mere documentation (for women most often a record of our sorrows). Yet in the many cases where such writing has enhanced our struggle to be self-defining it emerges as a narrative of resistance, as writing that enables us to experience both self-discovery and self-recovery.

Faced with the radical possibility of self-transformation that confessional writing can evoke, many females cease to write. Certainly, when I was younger I did not respond to the realization that diary writing was a place where I could critically confront the "self" with affirmation. At times diary writing was threatening. For me the confessions written there were testimony, documenting realities I was not always able to face. My response to this sense of threat was to destroy the diaries. That destruction was linked to my fear that growing up was not supposed to be hard and difficult, a time of

anguish and torment. Somehow the diaries were another accusing voice declaring that I was not "normal." I destroyed that writing and I wanted to destroy that tormented and struggling self. I did not understand, then, the critical difference between confession as an act of displacement and confession as the beginning stage in a process of self-transformation. Before this understanding, the diary as mirror was a place where that part of myself I could not accept or love could be named, touched, and then destroyed. Such writing was release. It took the terror and pain away—that was all. It was not then a place of reconciliation and reclamation.

None of the many diaries I wrote growing up exist today. They were all destroyed. Years ago when I began a therapeutic process of retrospective self-examination, I really missed this writing and mourned the loss. Since I use journals now as a way to engage in critical self-reflection, confrontation, and challenge, I know that I would be able to know myself differently were I able to read back, to remember with that writing. Those years of sustained diary writing were crucial to my later development as a writer for it was this realm of confessional writing that enabled me to find a voice. Still there was a frightening tension between the discovery of that voice and the assumption that, though expressed, it would then need to be concealed, contained, hidden, and ultimately destroyed. While I had been given permission to keep diaries, it was writing that my family began to see as dangerous when I began to express ideas considered strange and alien. Diaries provided a space for me to develop an autonomous voice and that meant such writing, once sanctioned, became suspect. It was impressed upon my consciousness that having a voice was dangerous. This was reinforced when my sisters would find and read my diaries, then deliver them to our mother as evidence that I was truly a mad person, an alien, a stranger in their household.

This tension between writing as an expression of my longing to emerge as autonomous creative thinker and the fear that such expression and any other manifestation of independence would mean madness, an end to life, created barriers between me and those written words. I was afraid of their power and yet I needed them. Writing was the only space where I could express myself freely. It was crucial to my fragile sense of well-being. I was often the family scapegoat—persecuted, ridiculed. I was often punished. It was as though I lived in a constant state of siege, subject to unprovoked and unexpected terrorist attacks. I lived in dread. Nothing I did was ever right. That constant experience of estrangement was deeply saddening. I was brokenhearted.

Writing was the healing place where I could collect the bits and pieces, where I could put them together again. It was the sanctuary, the safe place. Yet I could not make that writing part of an overall process of self-recovery. I was able to use it constructively only as an outlet for suppressed feeling. Knowledge that the writing could have enabled transformation was blocked by feelings of shame. I was ashamed that I needed this sanctuary in words. Confronting parts of my self there was humiliating. To me that confession was a process of unmasking, stripping the soul. It made me naked and vulnerable. Even though the experience was cleansing and redemptive, it was a process I could not fully affirm or celebrate. Feelings of shame compelled me to destroy what I had written. Diary writing, as a record of confession, brought me face to face with the shadow self, the one we spend lifetimes avoiding. I was ashamed that this "me" existed. I read my words. They were mirrors. I looked at the self represented there. Destroying the diaries, I destroyed that shadow. There was no trace of her, nothing that could bear witness. I could not embrace that inner darkness, find the light in it. I could not hold that being or love her.

Undoubtedly this process of destroying the diaries, and the self represented there, kept me from attempting suicide. There were times when I felt that death was the only way I could escape that inner darkness. I remember even now how much I longed to be rid of the wounded me, that secret shadow self. In Lyn Cowan's Jungian discussion of masochism she describes that moment when we learn to "embrace the shadow" as a necessary stage in the psychic journey leading to recovery and the restoration of well-being. She comments: "Jung said the shadow connects an individual to the collective unconscious, and beyond that to animal life at its most primitive level. The shadow is the tunnel, channel, or connector through which one reaches the deepest, most elemental layers of psyche." Confronting that shadow-self can both humiliate and humble. Humiliation in the face of aspects of the self we think are unsound, inappropriate, ugly, or downright nasty blocks one's ability to see the possibility for transformation that such a facing of one's reality promises.

That sense of profound shame evoked whenever I looked at the shadow-self portrayed in the writing was a barrier. It kept me stuck in the woundedness. Even though acknowledging that self in writing was a necessary anchor enabling me to keep a hold on life, it was not enough. That shame had to be let go before I could fully emerge as a writer because it was there whenever I tried to create, whether the work was confessional or not. When I left home to attend college I carried with me the longing to write. I knew then that I would need to work through these feelings of shame. One early journal entry from that time reads:

> Writing, and the hope of writing pulls me back from the edges of despair. I believe insanity and despair are at times one and the same. And I hear the voices of my past telling

> me that I will go crazy, that I will end up in a mental institution—alone. I remember my oldest sister laughing, telling me that no one would visit me there, that "girl, you ought to stop." Stop thinking. Stop dreaming. Stop trying to experience and understand life. Stop living in the world of the mind. That day I had sat a hot iron on my arm. I was ironing our father's pajamas. They were collectively mocking me. I asked them to leave me alone. I pleaded with them, "Why can't I just be left alone to be me?" I did not want to be molded. I was something. And when the hot iron came down on my arm I did not feel it. I was momentarily carried away, pleading with them. I stood there in the hallway ironing and even when the stinging pain was there I continued to iron. I stood there struggling to hide the pain and sorrow, not wanting to cry, not wanting them to know how much it hurt. I was trying to be brave. I know now that an anguished heart is never a brave heart. It's like some wounded body part that keeps bleeding, that can't stop itself. Writing eases the anguish. It is my connection. Through it and with it I transcend despair.

Writing, whether confessional prose or poetry, was irrevocably linked in my mind with the effort to maintain well-being. I began writing poetry about the same time that I began keeping diaries. Poetry writing was radically different. Unlike confessional prose, one could use language in writing poetry to mask feelings, to hide the experiential reality leading one to create. Poems on the subject of death and dying did not necessarily make explicit to the reader that I was at times struggling with the issue of whether to stay alive. Poetry writing as creative process was intimately linked with the experience of transcendence. Unlike the diary writing, which

became a space where I confronted pain, poetry was the way to move beyond it. I never destroyed poems because I felt there was nothing revealed there about the "me of me."

Then and now I remain a great admirer of Emily Dickinson, often marveling that she as living presence seemed always absent from her poems. To me they do not stand as a record of her experience but more as expressions of what I believe she felt was a fitting and worthy subject for poetry. Her poems are masks, together creating a collective drama where the self remains in the shadows, dark and undiscovered. It is difficult to look behind the poems, to see, to enter those shadows. Poetry writing may have been just that for Dickinson, the making of an enclosure—the poem as wall, a screen shielding her from the shadow-self. Perhaps there was for her no safe place, nowhere that the unnamed could be voiced, remembered, held. Even if it is there in the poems, we as readers cannot necessarily know or find it. What is clear is that writing was for Dickinson a way to keep a hold on life.

Writing that keeps us away from death, from despair, does not necessarily help us to be well. Anne Sexton could confess, "I am trying a flat mask to hold my sanity up . . . my life is falling through a sieve" and then "the thing that seems to be saving me is the poetry." I remember her, Sylvia Plath, and not so well-known black women poets Georgia Douglas Johnson and Clarissa Scott Delany because they all struggled with dangerous melancholy and killing despair. We know that poetry does not save us, that writing does not always keep us away from death, that the sorrow of wounds that have never healed, excruciating self-doubt, or overwhelming melancholy often crushes the spirit, making it impossible to stay alive. Julia Kristeva speaks about women's struggle to find and sustain creative voice in the chapter "I Who Want Not to Be," which is part of the introduction to *About Chinese Women*. There she addresses the tension

between our longing to "speak as women," to have being that is strong enough to bear the identity *writer*, and the coercive imposition of a feminine identity within patriarchy that opposes such being. Within patriarchy woman has no legitimate voice. Her voice is either constructed in complicity or resistance. If the choice is not radical then we speak only what the patriarchal culture would have us say. If we do not speak as liberators we collapse under the weight of this effort to speak within patriarchal confines or lose ourselves without dying. Kristeva recalls the Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva, who hanged herself, writing: "I don't want to die. I want not to be." Her words echo my longing to be rid of the shadow-self, the "me of me."

Writing enables us to be more fully alive only if it is not a terrain wherein we leave the self—the shadows behind, escaping. Anne Sexton reiterated again and again in her letters that it was crucial that the writer keep a hold on life by learning to face reality: "I think that writers must try not to avoid knowing what is happening. Everyone has somewhere the ability to mask the events of pain and sorrow. . . . But the creative person must not use this mechanism any more than they have to in order to keep breathing." A distinction must be made between that writing which enables us to hold on to life even as we are clinging to old hurts and wounds and that writing which offers to us a space where we are able to confront reality in such a way that we live more fully. Such writing is not an anchor that we mistakenly cling to so as not to drown. It is writing that truly rescues, that enables us to reach the shore, to recover.

To become a writer I needed to confront that shadow-self, to learn ways to accept and care for that aspect of me as part of a process of healing and recovery. I longed to create a groundwork of being that could affirm my struggle to be a whole self and my effort to write. To fulfill this longing I had to search for that shadow-self and

reclaim it. That search was part of a process of long inward journeying. Much of it took place in writing. I spent more than ten years writing journals, unearthing and restoring memories of that shadow-self, connecting the past with present being. This writing enabled me to look myself over in a new way, without the shame I had experienced earlier. It was no longer an act of displacement. I was not trying to be rid of the shadows, I wanted instead to enter them. That encounter enabled me to learn the self anew in ways that allowed transformation in consciousness and being. Resurrecting the shadow-self, I could finally embrace it, and by so doing come back to myself.

That woundedness that I was once so ashamed to recognize became for me a place of recovery, the dark deeps into which I could enter to find both the source of that pain and the means to heal. Only in fully knowing the wound could I discover ways to attend to it. Writing was a way of knowing. After what seemed like endless years of journal writing about the past, I wrote a memoir of my girlhood. It was indeed the culmination of this effort to accept the past and yet surrender its hold on me. This writing was redemptive. I no longer need to make this journey again and again.

women who write too much

There are writers who write for fame. And there are writers who write because we need to make sense of the world we live in; writing is a way to clarify, to interpret, to reinvent. We may want our work to be recognized, but that is not the reason we write. We do not write because we must; we always have choice. We write because language is the way we keep a hold on life. With words we experience our deepest understandings of what it means to be intimate. We communicate to connect, to know community. Even though writing is a solitary act, when I sit with words that I trust will be read by someone, I know that I can never be truly alone. There is always someone who waits for words, eager to embrace them and hold them close.

For the vast majority of my life I have longed to write. In my girlhood writing was the place where I could express ideas, opinions, beliefs that could not be spoken. Writing has then always been where I have turned to work through difficulties. In some ways writing has always functioned in a therapeutic manner for me. In

1995

Death to the Death of Poetry

Donald Hall

Some days, when you read the newspaper, it seems clear that the United States is a country devoted to poetry. You can delude yourself reading the sports pages. After finding two references to "poetry in motion," apropos of figure skating and the Kentucky Derby, you read that a shortstop is the poet of his position and that sailboats raced under blue skies that were sheer poetry. On the funny pages, Zippy praises Zerbina's outfit: "You're a poem in polyester." A funeral director, in an advertisement, muses on the necessity for poetry in our daily lives. It's hard to figure out just what he's talking about, but it becomes clear that this *poetry* has nothing to do with *poems*. It sounds more like taking naps.

Poetry, then, appears to be:

1. a vacuous synonym for excellence or unconsciousness. What else is common to the public perception of poetry?

2. It is universally agreed that no one reads it.

3. It is universally agreed that the nonreading of poetry is (a) contemporary and (b) progressive. From (a) it follows that sometime back (a wandering date, like "olden times" for a six-year-old) our ancestors read poems, and poets were rich and famous. From (b) it follows that every year fewer people read poems (or buy books or go to poetry readings) than the year before.
   Other pieces of common knowledge:

4. Only poets read poetry.

5. Poets themselves are to blame because "poetry has lost its audience."

6. Everybody today knows that poetry is "useless and completely out of date"—as Flaubert put it in *Bouvard and Pécuchet* a century ago.

For expansion on and repetition of these well-known facts, look in volumes of *Time* magazine, in Edmund Wilson's "Is Verse a Dying Technique?," in current newspapers everywhere, in interviews with publishers, in book reviews by poets, and in the August 1988 issue of *Commentary*, where the essayist Joseph Epstein assembled every cliché about poetry, common for two centuries, under the title "Who Killed Poetry?"

Time, which reported *The Waste Land* as a hoax in 1922, canonized T. S. Eliot in a 1950 cover story. Certainly *Time*'s writers and editors altered over thirty years, but they also stayed the same: always the Giants grow old and die, leaving the Pygmies behind. After the age of Eliot, Frost, Stevens, Moore, and Williams, the wee survivors were Lowell, Berryman, Jarrell, and Bishop. When the survivors died, younger elegiac journalists revealed that the dead Pygmies had been Giants all along—and *now* the young poets were dwarfs. Doubtless obituaries lauding Allen Ginsberg are already written; does anyone remember *Life* on the Beat Generation, thirty years ago?

"Is Verse a Dying Technique?" Edmund Wilson answered yes in 1928. It is not one of the maestro's better essays. Wilson's long view makes the point that doctors and physicists no longer use poetry when they write about medicine and the universe. Yes, Lucretius is dead. And yes, Coleridge had a notion of poetry rather different from Horace's. But Wilson also announced in 1928 that poetry had collapsed because "since the Sandburg-Pound generation, a new development in verse has taken place. The sharpness and the energy disappear; the beat gives way to a demoralized weariness." (He speaks, of course, in the heyday of Moore and Williams, Frost, H. D., Stevens, and Eliot; reprinting the essay in 1948, he added a paragraph nervously acknowledging Auden, whom he had put down twenty years before.) He goes on, amazingly, to explain the problem's source: "The trouble is that no verse technique is more obsolete today than blank verse. The old iambic pentameters have no longer any relation whatever to the tempo and language of our lives. Yeats was the last who could write them."

But Yeats wrote little blank verse of interest, bar "The Second Coming." As it happens, two Americans of Wilson's time wrote superb blank verse. (Really I should say three, because E. A. Robinson flourished in 1928. But his annual

blank verse narratives were not so brilliant as his earlier work; and of course he antedated "the Sandburg-Pound generation.") Robert Frost, starting from Wordsworth, made an idiomatic American blank verse, especially in his dramatic monologues, which is possibly the best modern example of that metric; and Wallace Stevens, starting from Tennyson, made blank verse as gorgeous as "Tithonus." Read Frost's "Home Burial" and Stevens's "Sunday Morning" and then tell me that blank verse was obsolete in 1928.

Poetry was never Wilson's strong suit. It is worthwhile to remember that Wilson found Edna St. Vincent Millay the great poet of her age—better than Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. In a late self-interview by Wilson in the *New Yorker*, he revealed that among contemporary poets only Robert Lowell was worth reading. It saves a lot of time, not needing to check out Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery, Galway Kinnell, Louis Simpson, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Robert Bly, John Berryman. . .

Sixty years after Edmund Wilson told us that verse was dying, Joseph Epstein in *Commentary* revealed that it was murdered. Of course, Epstein's golden age—Stevens, Frost, Williams—is Wilson's era of "demoralized weariness." Everything changes and everything stays the same. Poetry was always in good shape twenty or thirty years ago; *now* it has always gone to hell. I have heard this lamentation for forty years, not only from distinguished critics and essayists but from professors and journalists who enjoy viewing our culture with alarm. Repetition of a formula, under changed circumstances and with different particulars, does not make formulaic complaint invalid; but surely it suggests that the formula represents something besides what it repeatedly affirms.

In asking "Who Killed Poetry?" Joseph Epstein begins by insisting that he does *not* dislike it. "I was taught that poetry was itself an exalted thing." He admits his "quasi-religious language" and asserts that "it was during the 1950s that poetry last had this religious aura." Did Epstein go to school "during the 1950s"? If he attended poetry readings in 1989 with unblinkered eyes, he would watch twenty-year-olds undergoing quasi-religious emotions—one of whom, almost certainly, will write an essay in the 2020s telling the world that poetry is moldering in its grave.

Worship is not love. People who at the age of fifty deplore the death of poetry are the same people who in their twenties were "taught to exalt it." The middle-aged poetry detractor is the student who hyperventilated at poetry readings thirty years earlier—during Wilson's "Pound-Sandburg era" or Epstein's aura-era of "T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost and William Carlos Williams." After college many English majors stop reading contemporary poetry. Why not? They become involved in journalism or scholarship, essay writing or editing, brokerage or social work; they backslide from the undergraduate Church of Poetry. Years later, glancing belatedly at the poetic scene, they tell us that poetry is dead. They left poetry; therefore they blame poetry for leaving them. Really, they lament their own aging. Don't we all? But some of us do not blame the current poets.

Epstein localizes his attack on two poets, unnamed but ethnically specified: "One of the two was a Hawaiian of Japanese ancestry, the other was middle-class Jewish." (They were Garrett Hongo and Edward Hirsch, who testified on behalf of American poetry to the National Council of the Arts, where Joseph Epstein as a councillor regularly assured his colleagues that contemporary American writing was dreck.) Epstein speaks disparagingly of these "Japanese" and "Jewish" poets, in his ironic mosquito whine, and calls their poems "heavily preening, and not distinguished enough in language or subtlety of thought to be memorable."

Such disparagement is pure blurbtalk. He does not quote a line by either poet he dismisses. As with the aging Edmund Wilson, Epstein saves time by ignoring particulars of the art he disparages.

Dubious elegies on the death of poetry shouldn't need answers. A frequently reported lie, however, can turn into fact. In his essay, Joseph Epstein tells us that "last year the *Los Angeles Times* announced it would no longer review books of poems." In the *Washington Post*, Jonathan Yardley referred to the same event, which never happened, and applauded what never happened except in his own negligent error.

The editor of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* announced that his paper would review *fewer* books; instead, the *Review* would print a whole poem in a

box every week, with a note on the poet. In the years since instituting this policy, *LATBR* has continued to review poetry—more than the *New York Times Book Review* has done—and in addition has printed an ongoing anthology of contemporary American verse. The *Los Angeles Times* probably pays more attention to poetry than any other newspaper in the country.

Yet when the *LAT* announced its new policy, poets picketed the paper. Poets love to parade as victims; we love the romance of alienation and insult.

More than a thousand poetry books appear in this country each year. More people write poetry in this country—publish it, hear it, and presumably read it—than ever before. Let us quickly and loudly proclaim that no poet sells like Stephen King, that poetry is not as popular as professional wrestling, and that fewer people attend poetry readings in the United States than in Russia. Snore, snore. More people read poetry now in the United States than ever did before.

When I was in school in the 1940s, there were few poetry readings; only Frost did many. If we consult biographies of Stevens and Williams, we understand that for them a poetry reading was an unusual event. In these decades, the magazine *Poetry* printed on its back cover Walt Whitman's claim that "to have great poets there must be great audiences too" but it seemed an idle notion at the time. Then readings picked up in the late 1950s, avalanched in the 1960s, and continue unabated in the 1990s.Readings sell books.

When trade publishers in 1950 issued a third book by a prominent poet, they printed hardbound copies, possibly a thousand. If the edition sold out in three or four years, everybody was happy. The same trade publisher in 1989 would likely print the same poet in an edition of five thousand, hard and soft—and the book would stand a good chance of being reprinted, at least in paper. Recently, a dozen or more American poets have sold at least some of their books by the tens of thousands: Adrienne Rich, Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg, John Ashbery, Galway Kinnell, Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder, Denise Levertov, Carolyn Forché, doubtless others. Last I knew, Galway Kinnell approached 50,000—over the years—with *Book of Nightmares*.

It is not only the sales of books that one can adduce to support the notion that poetry's audience has grown tenfold in the last thirty years. If poetry readings provide the largest new audience, there are also more poetry magazines, and those magazines sell more copies. In 1955 no one would have believed you if you had suggested that two or three decades hence the United States would support a bimonthly poetry tabloid with a circulation of 20,000 available on newsstands coast to coast. Everybody complains about the *American Poetry Review*; nobody acknowledges how remarkable it is that it exists.

A few years back, a journal of the publishing industry printed a list of all-time trade paperback best-sellers, beginning with *The Joy of Sex*, which sold millions, on down to books that had sold 250,000. It happened that I read the chart shortly after learning that Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *Coney Island of the Mind*, a trade paperback, had sold more than a million copies. Because the book was poetry, the journal understood that its sales did not count.

When I make these points, I encounter fierce resistance. No one wants to believe me. If ever I convince people that these numbers are correct, they come up with excuses: Bly sells because he's a showman; Ginsberg is notorious; Rich sells because of feminist politics. People come up with excuses for these numbers because the notion of poetry's disfavor is important—to poetry's detractors and to its supporters. Why does almost everyone connected with poetry claim that poetry's audience has diminished? Doubtless the pursuit of failure and humiliation is part of it. There is also a source that is lovable if unobservant: Some of us love poetry so dearly that its absence from *everybody's* life seems an outrage. Our parents don't read James Merrill! Therefore, exaggerating out of foiled passion, we claim that "nobody reads poetry."

When I contradict such notions, at first I insist merely on numbers. If everybody artistic loathes statistics, everybody artistic still tells us that "nobody reads poetry," which is a numerical notion—and untrue. Of course, the numbers I recite have nothing whatsoever to do with the quality or spirit of the poetry sold or read aloud. I include no Rod McKuen in my figures; I include only poetry that intends artistic excellence. My numbers counter only numbers—and not assertions of value and its lack.

But I need as well, and separately, to insist: I believe in the quality of the best contemporary poetry; I believe that the best American poetry of our day makes a considerable literature. *American Poetry after Lowell*—an anthology of 400 pages limited, say, to women and men born from the 1920s through the 1940s—would collect a large body of diverse, intelligent, beautiful, moving work that should endure. Mind you, it would limit itself to one-hundredth of one percent of the poems published. If you write about Poetry Now, you must acknowledge that *most* poetry is terrible—that *most* poetry of *any* moment is terrible. When, at any historical moment, you write an article claiming that poetry is now in terrible shape, you are *always* right. Therefore, you are *always* fatuous.

Our trouble is not with poetry but with the public perception of poetry. Although we have more poetry today, we have less poetry reviewing in national journals. Both *Harper's* magazine and the *Atlantic* have abandoned quarterly surveys of poetry. The *New York Times Book Review* never showed much interest, but as poetry has increased in popularity, the *Times* has diminished its attention. The *New York Review of Books*, always more political than poetical, gives poetry less space every year. The greatest falling-off is at the *New Yorker*. The *New Yorker* once regularly published Louise Bogan's essays on "Verse." Lately, when the magazine touches on poetry, Helen Vendler is more inclined to write about a translation or about a poet safely dead. In the past, men and women like Conrad Aiken, Malcolm Cowley, and Louise Bogan practiced literary journalism to make a living. Their successors now meet classes MWF. People with tenure don't need to write book reviews.

Their absence is poetry's loss, and the poetry reader's—for we need a cadre of reviewers to sift through the great volume of material. The weight of numbers discourages readers from trying to keep up. More poetry than ever: How do we discriminate? How do we find or identify beautiful new work? When there are sufficient reviewers, who occupy continual soapboxes and promote developing standards, they provide sensors to report from the confusing plentitude of the field.

Beside the weight of numbers, another perennial source of confusion is partisanship. When I was in my twenties and writing iambic stanzas, Allen

Ginsberg's *Howl* was a living reproach. For a while I denigrated Allen: "If he's right, I must be wrong." Such an either/or is silly and commonplace: restrictions are impoverishments. In the 1920s one was not allowed to admire both T. S. Eliot and Thomas Hardy; it was difficult for intellectuals who admired Wallace Stevens and his bric-a-brac to find houseroom for Robert Frost and his subjects. Looking back at the long heyday of modern poetry, removed by time from partisanship, we can admire the era's virtuosity, the *various* excellences of these disparate characters born in the 1870s and 1880s, who knew each other and wrote as if they didn't. What foursome could be more dissimilar than Moore, Williams, Stevens, and Frost? Maybe the answer is: some foursome right now.

There are a thousand ways to love a poem. The best poets make up new ways, and the new ways mostly take getting used to. The poetry reading helps toward understanding (which explains how poetry thrives without book reviewing) because the poet's voice and gesture provide entrance to the poetry: a way in, a hand at the elbow. The poetry reading helps—but as a substitute for reviewing it is inefficient. And sometimes it is hard to know whether we cherish the poem or its performance.

At least there are many poets, many readings—and there *is* an audience. For someone like me, born in the 1920s, which produced great poetry and neglected to read it—Knopf remaindered Wallace Stevens—our poetic moment is inspiriting. As I grew up, from the 1930s to the 1950s, poets seldom read aloud and felt lucky to sell a thousand copies. In the 1990s the American climate for poetry is infinitely more generous. In the mail, in the rows of listeners, even in the store down the road, I find generous response. I find it in magazines and in rows of listeners in Pocatello and Akron, in Florence, South Carolina, and in Quartz Mountain, Oklahoma. I find it in books published and in extraordinary sales for many books.

While most readers and poets agree that "nobody reads poetry"—and we warm ourselves by the gregarious fires of our solitary art—maybe a multitude of nobodies assembles the great audience Whitman looked for.

Lars Von Trier

DOGMA 95 – THE MANIFEST

DOGMA 95 is a collection of film directors founded in Copenhagen in spring 1995.

DOGMA 95 has the expressed goal of countering "certain tendencies" in the cinema today.

DOGMA 95 is a rescue action!

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.

Slogans of individualism and freedom created works for a while, but no changes. The wave was up for grabs, like the directors themselves. The wave was never stronger than the men behind it. The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby… false!

To DOGMA 95 cinema is not individual!

Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratization of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies. But the more accessible the medium becomes, the more important the avant-garde. It is no accident that the phrase "avant-garde" has military connotations. Discipline is the answer… we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition!

DOGMA 95 counters the individual film by the principle of presenting an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie had been cosmeticized to death, they said; yet since then the use of cosmetics has exploded.

The "supreme" task of the decadent film-makers is to fool the audience. Is that what we are so proud of? Is that what the "100 years" have brought us? Illusions via which emotions can be communicated?… By the individual artist's free choice of trickery?

Predictability (dramaturgy) has become the golden calf around which we dance. Having the characters' inner lives justify the plot is too complicated, and not "high art". As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise.

The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love.

To DOGMA 95 the movie is not illusion!

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using new technology anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation. The illusions are everything the movie can hide behind.

DOGMA 95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules know as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

THE VOW OF CHASTITY

I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by DOGMA 95:

Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot.)
The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted.
The film must be in color. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera.)
Optical work and filters are forbidden.
The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)
Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
Genre movies are not acceptable.
The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
The director must not be credited.
Furthermore I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a "work", as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.

Thus I make my VOW OF CHASTITY.

Copenhagen, Monday 13 March 1995

On behalf of DOGMA 95

Lars von Trier Thomas Vinterberg

In the collection of aphorisms that Kafka composed in Zurau between 1917 and 1918 and that Max Brod pompously entitled *Observations on Sin, Pain, Hope and the True Way*, we find the following singular statement, which seems to me to contain the epitome of the shift at issue: "The fact that only the spiritual world exists deprives us of hope and gives us certainty."

In *Nine Doors*, Jirí Langer holds that this is "the most beautiful Hassidic doctrine":

> The most beautiful Hassidic teaching is without doubt the doctrine of the spirituality of matter. According to this doctrine, all of matter is full of the spiritual sparks of divine holiness. The purely physical expressions of human life—like eating and drinking, washing and sleeping, dancing and the act of love—are dematerialized by Hassidism and transformed into nobler religious exercises.

It is likely that Elsa knew this text. But, from the Kafkaesque perspective that she fully shared, this beautiful certainty is also what deprives us of hope. The loss of hope (even of that retrospective hope, nostalgia for Eden) is the terrible price that the mind must pay when it reaches the incandescent point of certainty. This is why Spinoza's celebration is the "celebration of the hidden treasure." The treasure is hidden not because someone or something buried or covered it over but because it is now exposed, beyond both tragedy and comedy in the absolute and despairing absence of all secrets. The knowledge of good and evil, which had so deeply marked Morante's tales with its shadow, finally shows itself to be, in Spinoza's sober words, nothing but the knowledge of sadness and delight; it is now up to the "angelic wild beasts" and the "ferocious knights," to men and to animals. The definitive taking leave of the lost Eden is, in this sense, the bitterest and most difficult point in Elsa's creative adventure. It is the essential moment inscribed by her "Addio," in the "blue nights without redemption," on the very threshold of *Il mondo salvato dai ragazzini*.

Giorgio Agamben
1999

§ 8 The End of the Poem

My plan, as you can see summarized before you in the title of this lecture, is to define a poetic institution that has until now remained unidentified: the end of the poem.

To do this, I will have to begin with a claim that, without being trivial, strikes me as obvious—namely, that poetry lives only in the tension and difference (and hence also in the virtual interference) between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere. This means that I will attempt to develop in some technical aspects Valéry's definition of poetry, which Jakobson considers in his essays in poetics: "The poem: a prolonged hesitation between sound and sense" (*Le poème, hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens*). What is a hesitation, if one removes it altogether from the psychological dimension?

Awareness of the importance of the opposition between metrical segmentation and semantic segmentation has led some scholars to state the thesis (which I share) according to which the possibility of enjambment constitutes the only criterion for distinguishing poetry from prose. For what is enjambment, if not the opposition of a metrical limit to a syntactical limit, of a prosodic pause to a semantic pause? "Poetry" will then be the name given to the discourse in which this opposition is, at least virtually, possible; "prose" will be the name for the discourse in which this opposition cannot take place.

Medieval authors seem to have been perfectly conscious of the eminent status of this opposition, even if it was not until Nicolò Tibino (in the fourteenth century) that the following perspicuous definition of enjambment was formulated: "It often happens that the rhyme ends, without the meaning of the sentence having been completed" (*Multiocens enim accidit quod, finita consonantia, adhuc sensus orationis non est finitus*).

All poetic institutions participate in this noncoincidence, this schism of sound and sense—rhyme no less than caesura. For what is rhyme if not a disjunction between a semiotic event (the repetition of a sound) and a semantic event, a disjunction that brings the mind to expect a meaningful analogy where it can find only homophony?

Verse is the being that dwells in this schism; it is a being made of *murs et paliz*, as Brunetto Latini wrote, or an *être de suspens*, in Mallarmé's phrase. And the poem is an organism grounded in the perception of the limits and endings that define—without ever fully coinciding with, and almost in intermittent dispute with—sonorous (or graphic) units and semantic units.

Dante is fully conscious of this when, at the moment of defining the *canzone* through its constitutive elements in *De vulgari eloquentia* (II, IX, 2–3), he opposes *cantio* as unit of sense (*sententia*) to *stantiae* as purely metrical units:

> And here you must know that this word [*stanza*] was coined solely for the purpose of discussing poetic technique, so that the object in which the whole art of the *canzone* was enshrined should be called a stanza, that is, a capacious storehouse or receptacle for the art in its entirety. *For just as the* canzone *is the lap of its subject-matter, so the stanza enlaps its whole technique*; and the latter stanzas of the poem should never aspire to add some new technical device, but should only dress themselves in the same garb as the first. (emphasis mine)
>
> (Et circa hoc sciendum est quod vocabulum [stantia] per solius artis respectum inventum est, videlicet ut in qua tota cantionis ars esset contenta, illud diceretur stantia, hoc est mansio capax sive receptaculum totois artis. Nam quemadmodum cantio est gremium totius sententiae, sic stantia totam artem ingremiat; nec licet aliquid artis sequentibus adrogare, sed solam artem antecedentis induere.)

Dante thus conceives of the structure of the *canzone* as founded on the relation between an essentially semantic, global unit ("the lap of the whole meaning") and essentially metrical, partial units ("enlaps the whole technique").

One of the first consequences of this position of the poem in an essential disjunction between sound and sense (marked by the possibility of enjambment) is the decisive importance of the end of the poem. The verse's syllables and accents can be counted; its synaloephae and caesuras can be noted; its anomalies and regularities can be catalogued. But the verse is, in every case, a unit that finds its *principium individuationis* only at the end, that defines itself only at the point at which it ends. I have elsewhere suggested that the word *versure*, from the Latin term indicating the point at which the plow turns around at the end of the furrow, be given to this essential trait of the verse, which—perhaps on account of its obviousness—has remained nameless among the moderns. Medieval treatises, by contrast, constantly draw attention to it. The fourth book of *Laborintus* thus registers *finalis terminatio* among the verse's essential elements, alongside *membrorum distincto* and *sillabarum numeratio*. And the author of the Munich *Ars* does not confuse the end of the poem (which he calls *pausatio*) with rhyme, but rather defines it as its source or condition of possibility: "the end is the source of consonance" (*est autem pausatio fons consonantiae*).

Only from this perspective is it possible to understand the singular prestige, in Provençal and Stilnovist poetry, of that very special poetic institution, the unrelated rhyme, called *rim'estrampa* by *Las leys d'amors* and *clavis* by Dante. If rhyme marked an antagonism between sound and sense by virtue of the noncorrespondence between homophony and meaning, here rhyme, absent from the point at which it was expected, momentarily allows the two series to interfere with each other in the semblance of a coincidence. I say "semblance," for if it is true that the lap of the whole technique here seems to break its metrical closure in marking the lap of sense, the unrelated rhyme nevertheless refers to a rhyme-fellow in the successive strophe and, therefore, does nothing more than bring metrical structure to the metastrophic level. This is why in Arnaut's hands it

evolves almost naturally into word-rhyme, making possible the stupendous mechanism of the sestina. For word-rhyme is above all a point of undecidability between an essentially asemantic element (homophony) and an essentially semantic element (the word). The sestina is the poetic form that elevates the unrelated rhyme to the status of supreme compositional canon and seeks, so to speak, to incorporate the element of sound into the very lap of sense.

But it is time to confront the subject I announced and define the practice that modern works of poetics and meter have not considered: the end of the poem insofar as it is the ultimate formal structure perceptible in a poetic text. There have been inquiries into the *incipit* of poetry (even if they remain insufficient). But studies of the end of the poem, by contrast, are almost entirely lacking.

We have seen how the poem tenaciously lingers and sustains itself in the tension and difference between sound and sense, between the metrical series and the syntactical series. But what happens at the point at which the poem ends? Clearly, here there can be no opposition between a metrical limit and a semantic limit. This much follows simply from the trivial fact that there can be no enjambment in the final verse of a poem. This fact is certainly trivial; yet it implies consequences that are as perplexing as they are necessary. For if poetry is defined precisely by the possibility of enjambment, it follows that the last verse of a poem is not a verse.

Does this mean that the last verse trespasses into prose? For now let us leave this question unanswered. I would like, however, at least to call attention to the absolutely novel significance that Raimbaut d'Aurenga's "No sai que s'es" acquires from this perspective. Here the end of every strophe, and especially the end of the entire unclassifiable poem, is distinguished by the unexpected irruption of prose—an irruption that, *in extremis*, marks the epiphany of a necessary undecidability between prose and poetry.

Suddenly it is possible to see the inner necessity of those poetic institutions, like the *tornada* or the envoi, that seem solely destined to announce and almost declare the end of the poem, as if the end needed these institutions, as if for poetry the end implied a catastrophe and loss of identity so irreparable as to demand the deployment of very special metrical and semantic means.

This is not the place to give an inventory of these means or to conduct a phenomenology of the end of the poem (I am thinking, for example, of the particular intention with which Dante marks the end of each of the three books of the *Divine Comedy* with the word *stelle*, or of the rhymes in dissolved verses of Leopardi's poetry that intervene to stress the end of the strophe or the poem). What is essential is that the poets seem conscious of the fact that here there lies something like a decisive crisis for the poem, a genuine *crise de vers* in which the poem's very identity is at stake.

Hence the often cheap and even abject quality of the end of the poem. Proust once observed, with reference to the last poems of *Les fleurs du mal*, that the poem seems to be suddenly ruined and to lose its breath ("it stops short," he writes, "almost falls flat . . . despite everything, it seems that something has been shortened, is out of breath"). Think of "Le cygne," such a tight and heroic composition, which ends with the verse "Aux captifs, aux vaincues ... à bien d'autres encore!" (Of those who are captive or defeated ... and of many more others!) Concerning a different poem of Baudelaire's, Walter Benjamin noted that it "suddenly interrupts itself, giving one the impression—doubly surprising in a sonnet—of something fragmentary." The disorder of the last verse is an index of the structural relevance to the economy of the poem of the event I have called "the end of the poem." As if the poem as a formal structure would not and could not end, as if the possibility of the end were radically withdrawn from it, since the end would imply a poetic impossibility: the exact coincidence of sound and sense. At the point in which sound is about to be ruined in the abyss of sense, the poem looks for shelter in suspending its own end in a declaration, so to speak, of the state of poetic emergency.

In light of these reflections I would like to examine a passage in *De vulgari eloquentia* in which Dante seems, at least implicitly, to pose the problem of the end of poetry. The passage is to be found in Book II, where the poet treats the organization of rhymes in the *canzone* (XIII, 7–8). After defining the unrelated rhyme (which someone suggests should be called *clavis*), the text states: "The endings of the last verses are most beautiful if they fall into silence together with the rhymes" (*Pulcherrime tamen se habent ultimorum*

carminum desinentiae, si cum rithmo in silentium cadunt). What is this falling into silence of the poem? What is beauty that falls? And what is left of the poem after its ruin?

If poetry lives in the unsatisfied tension between the semiotic and the semantic series alone, what happens at the moment of the end, when the opposition of the two series is no longer possible? Is there here, finally, a point of coincidence in which the poem, as "lap of the entire meaning," joins itself to its metrical element to pass definitively into prose? The mystical marriage of sound and sense could, then, take place.

Or, on the contrary, are sound and sense now forever separated without any possible contact, each eternally on its own side, like the two sexes in Vigny's poem? In this case, the poem would leave behind it only an empty space in which, according to Mallarmé's phrase, truly *rien n'aura lieu que le lieu.*

Everything is complicated by the fact that in the poem there are not, strictly speaking, two series or lines in parallel flight. Rather, there is but one line that is simultaneously traversed by the semantic current and the semiotic current. And between the flowing of these two currents lies the sharp interval obstinately maintained by poetic *mechanē.* (Sound and sense are not two substances but two intensities, two *tonoi* of the same linguistic substance.) And the poem is like the *katechon* in Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians (2:7–8): something that slows and delays the advent of the Messiah, that is, of him who, fulfilling the time of poetry and uniting its two eons, would destroy the poetic machine by hurling it into silence. But what could be the aim of this theological conspiracy about language? Why so much ostentation to maintain, at any cost, a difference that succeeds in guaranteeing the space of the poem only on condition of depriving it of the possibility of a lasting accord between sound and sense?

Let us now reread what Dante says about the most beautiful way to end a poem, the place in which the last verses fall, rhymed, in silence. We know that for him it is a matter of a rule. Think, for instance, of the envoi of "Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro." Here the first verse ends with an absolutely unrelated rhyme, which

coincides (and certainly not by chance) with the word that names the supreme poetic intention: *donna*, "lady." This unrelated rhyme, which seems to anticipate a point of coincidence between sound and sense, is followed by four verses, linked in couplets according to the rhyme that Italian metrical tradition calls *baciata* ("kissed"):

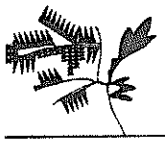
> Canzon, vattene dritto a quella donna
> che m'ha ferito il core e che m'invola
> quello ond'io ho più gola,
> e dàlle per lo cor d'una saetta;
> ché bell'onor s'acquista in far vendetta.
>
> (Poem, go straight to that woman who
> has wounded my heart and stolen from
> me what I most hunger for, and strike
> her heart with an arrow, for one gains
> great honor in taking revenge.)

It is as if the verse at the end of the poem, which was now to be irreparably ruined in sense, linked itself closely to its rhyme-fellow and, laced in this way, chose to dwell with it in silence.

This would mean that the poem falls by once again marking the opposition between the semiotic and the semantic, just as sound seems forever consigned to sense and sense returned forever to sound. The double intensity animating language does not die away in a final comprehension; instead it collapses into silence, so to speak, in an endless falling. The poem thus reveals the goal of its proud strategy: to let language finally communicate itself, without remaining unsaid in what is said.

(Wittgenstein once wrote that "philosophy should really only be poeticized" [*Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur dichten*]. Insofar as it acts as if sound and sense coincided in its discourse, philosophical prose may risk falling into banality; it may risk, in other words, lacking thought. As for poetry, one could say, on the contrary, that it is threatened by an excess of tension and thought. Or, rather, paraphrasing Wittgenstein, that poetry should really only be philosophized.)

Adrienne Rich



III

"What would we create?"

it's like being sick all the time, I think, coming home from work,
sick in that low-grade continuous way that makes you forget
what it's like to be well. we have never in our lives known
what it is to be well. what if I were coming home, I think,
from doing work that I loved and that was for us all, what
if I looked at the houses and the air and the streets, knowing
they were in accord, not set against us, what if we knew the powers
of this country moved to provide for us and for all people—
how would that be—how would we feel and think
and what would we create?

—Karen Brodine, "June 78"

I imagine this message in Congress on the State of the Union:
situation tragic,
left underground only 75 years of iron
50 years of cobalt
but 55 years worth of sulphur and 20 of bauxite
in the heart what?
Nothing, zero,
mine without ore,
cavern in which nothing prowls,
of blood not a drop left.

—Aimé Césaire, "On the State of the Union"

Yet this is still my country
The thug on duty says What would you change

—W. S. Merwin, "Caesar"

October 1990. Time to say that in this tenuous, still unbirthed democracy, my country, low-grade depressiveness is pandemic and is reversing into violence at an accelerating rate. Families massacred by fathers who then turn the gun on themselves; the deliberate wounding and killing of a schoolyardful of Asian-American children in a small California town; mass or serial murders of university students in Berkeley and Florida. Violence against women of every color and class, young dark-skinned men, perceived lesbians and gay men. More and more violence committed by children—against themselves, each other, adults: suicides, gang warfare, patricide and matricide. And the violences, violations obscured because they happen in places and to people that are out of sight, out of mind. Much violence that doesn't make the evening news, committed against people in prison, or prostitutes, or American Indians, or undocumented immigrants, or in nursing homes and state hospitals, or just part of Saturday night after a few drinks. When we try to think about this, if we're not too tired to think, we're driven to name old sores within the body politic: racism, homophobia, addiction, male and female socialization. You are tired of these lists; I am too. Some say there should be gun control; others call for law and order. We blame television, as if television were anything but another symptom. Who owns the means of communication, the cables, the satellites? who pays for the commercials? dictates the content of "entertainment"?

January 1991: War is bestowed like electroshock on the depressive nation: thousands of volts jolting the system, an artificial galvanizing, one effect of which is loss of memory. War comes at the end of the twentieth century as absolute failure of imagination, scientific and political. That a war can be represented as helping a people to "feel good" about themselves, their country, is a measure of that failure.

Lip service, at least, is now paid to the fragile ecology of the physical world, the endangerment of algae and plankton, scavengers and pollinators, trees and deserts, ozone itself, whose continuance is vaguely understood to be a guarantee of our own. But our expressive and passionate life is equally an endangered—because an exploited and manipulated—sector. We have museums of the passions, waxworks, taxidermy, emotional cram notes, emotional theme parks, emotional tourism. Feelings become instant commodities; at the San Francisco airport, early March 1991, you could buy *A Gulf War Feelings Workbook for Children* in a bright spiral plastic binder. An out-of-date commodity, soon, no doubt, supplanted by yellow ribbons, which, like flags, are safe and static emblems; they leave no question open, they keep at bay doubt, confusion, bitterness, fear, and mourning.

It's possible that our national despair is by now too intricate and interwoven for disentangling. We have individual despair, loss of jobs, loss of shelter, loss of community, isolation within community, bewildered resignation, daily, routine fear, and self-blame. We have people who do not name what they are going

through as despair, would be offended or dismissive at the thought. But we see despair when social arrogance and indifference exist in the same person with the willingness to live at devastating levels of superficiality and self-trivialization. We see despair in the self-hatred that clogs the lives of so many materially comfortable citizens. We hear despair in the loss of vitality in our spoken language: "No problem," we say, "that was a healing experience," we say, "thank you for sharing that," we say. We see despair in the political activist who doggedly goes on and on, turning in the ashes of the same burnt-out rhetoric, the same gestures, all imagination spent. Despair, when not the response to absolute physical and moral defeat, is, like war, the failure of imagination.

It's also the fruit of massive national denial, of historic national realities. The passage from Aimé Césaire is part of a poem written on the 1956 murder and mutilation of a Black youth, Emmett Till, in Mississippi, at the hands of white men, who were acquitted by an all-white jury. Césaire alludes, in the poem, to the "five centuries" of white violence on this soil, which are the fifteen-year-old Till's real age. A violence that shows no sign of abating as this century closes.

Is it possible that 1992 is to become a watershed, the year when the histories of the Americas begin to be told and listened to—not as the conqueror's narrative, but as the multiplicity of the real stories, the true voices, of two continents? Is it possible that citizens of the United States, including the most recent immigrants, might turn and face the conditions on which this country was founded, the assumptions—often in the form of images and stories—never examined, the legacies we carry from 1492, from 1619, to begin with, that shaped the propertied-class revolt we call our revolution, the national slogans that the great immigrant waves of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries received along with citizenship? Could we, still, in the name of

transforming ourselves as a people, make some national recognition of our past, of the lies we have been told and have told our children—could we then, as a people, break through despair?

For a long time I've been trying to write poems as if, within this social order, it was enough to voice public pain, speak memory, set words in a countering order, call up images that were in danger of being forgotten or unconceived. In a country where, even among the arts, poetry is the least quantifiable, least commoditized, of our "national products," where the idea of "political poetry" is often met with contempt and hostility, this seemed task enough. But I've also lived with other voices whispering that poetry might be little more than self-indulgence in a society so howling with unmet human needs—an elite art, finally, even when practiced by those among us who are most materially at risk. It's been possible to consider poetry as a marginal activity, of passionate concern to its practitioners perhaps, but as specialized, having as little to do with common emergency, as fly-fishing.

But there's been a missing term. I saw, or thought I saw, that poetry has been held both indispensable and dangerous, one way or another, in every country but my own. The mistake I was making was to assume that poetry really is unwanted, impotent, in the late twentieth-century United States under the system known as "free" enterprise. I was missing the point that precisely *because* of its recognitive and recollective powers, precisely because in this nation, created in the search for wealth, it eludes capitalist marketing, commoditizing, price-fixing, poetry has simply been set aside, depreciated, denied public space.

This is the difference between the United States and Turkey in the late 1930s, when the revolutionary poet Nazim Hikmet

was sentenced to twenty-eight years in prison "on the grounds that the military cadets were reading his poems." This is the difference between the United States and Greece, where, both in the 1930s and after World War II, the socialist poet Yannis Ritsos was interned in concentration camps, exiled, placed under house arrest, his writings burned. This is the difference between the United States and the Stalinized Soviet Union, when the poet Osip Mandelstam (among countless other writers, in Russian and Yiddish, murdered in those years) was persecuted and exiled for an anti-Stalin poem, or, in the 1970s, the poet Natalya Gorbanevskaya sent to a "penal mental institution," or, in the 1980s, the poet Irina Ratushinskaya to a prison for "dangerous state criminals." This is the difference between the United States and Chile in 1973, where the junta who came into power the day of Pablo Neruda's death sacked the poet's house and banned his books.

In the United States, depending on who you are, suppression is qualitatively different. So far, it's not a question of creating human martyrs, since the blacklisted writers of the McCarthy era, although artists denied state and federal funding as "obscene" are under government censorship, and efforts to deport the writer Margaret Randall, based on her writings, were vigorously pursued for five years by the INS. Instead, poetry itself—I mean not words on paper only, but the social recognition and integration of poetry and the imaginative powers it releases—poetry itself is "banned" (in the terminology of the South African apartheid laws: forbidden to speak in public, forbidden to be quoted, to meet with more than one or two persons at the same time). Poetry itself, in our national life, is under house arrest, is officially "disappeared." Like our past, our collective memory, it remains an unfathomed, a devalued, resource. The establishment of a national "Poet Laureateship" notwithstanding, poetry has been set apart from the practical arts, from civic meaning. It is

irrelevant to mass "entertainment" and the accumulation of wealth—thus, out of sight, out of mind.

So the ecology of spirit, voice, and passion deteriorates, barely masked by gentrification, smog, and manic speech, while in the mirrors of mass-market literature, film, television, journalism, our lives are reflected back to us as terrible and little lives. We see daily that our lives are terrible and little, without continuity, buyable and salable at any moment, mere blips on a screen, that this is the way we live now. Memory marketed as nostalgia; terror reduced to mere suspense, to melodrama.

We become stoical; we hibernate; we numb ourselves with chemicals; we emigrate internally into fictions of past and future; we thirst for guns; but *as a people* we have rarely, if ever, known what it is to tremble with fear, to lament, to rage, to praise, to solemnize, to say *We have done this, to our sorrow;* to say *Enough,* to say *We will,* to say *We will not.* To lay claim to poetry.

Newsletters come in the mail: North Carolinians against Racial and Religious Violence; The Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation; The Center for Constitutional Rights; Men of All Colors Together; The United Farm Workers; The National Coalition against Domestic Violence; The Center for Democratic Renewal—facts, appeals for money, responses to crisis. I have written checks to these and other such organizations in the past and continue to do so: this is "checkbook activism," money in lieu of or in addition to time, to actual presence. And without checks the fragile movements for justice in this country could not exist beyond the local level. I call them fragile because, although unbanned (though undoubtedly under surveillance), organizations like these are essentially responses to crisis: more than a force for new initiatives, they are a struggle

responding to erosion and violence. Yet, in an interstitial time between selective democracy, shot through with intimidation, and the fever break this country must inevitably undergo as it enters the next century, they provide essential information not available in the mainstream press. For this alone they are invaluable, and I pay the subscription price of such newsletters as the price of admission to information that in a working democracy would be furnished me daily by my local paper, by the *New York Times,* the radio and television news.

Over time, some of the facts circulated by the newsletters enter my poetry. As an image here. A voice there. Muriel Rukeyser spoke of two kinds of poetry: the poetry of "unverifiable fact"—that which emerges from dreams, sexuality, subjectivity—and the poetry of "documentary fact"—literally, accounts of strikes, wars, geographical and geological details, actions of actual persons in history, scientific invention.

Like her, I have tried to combine both kinds of poetry in a single poem, not separating dream from history—but I do not find it easy.

From a notebook, March 7, 1974:

> **The poet today must be twice-born. She must have begun as a poet, she must have understood the suffering of the world as political, and have gone through politics, and on the other side of politics she must be reborn again as a poet.**

But today I would rephrase this: it's not a matter of dying as a poet into politics, or of having to be reborn as a poet "on the other side of politics" (where is that?), but of something else—finding the relationship.

Someone is Writing a Poem *(1993)*

By Adrienne Rich

The society whose modernization has reached the stage of integrated spectacle is characterized by the combined effect of five principal factors: incessant technological renewal, integration of state and economy, generalized secrecy, unanswerable lies, and eternal present.

The spectator is simply supposed to know nothing and deserves nothing. Those who are watching to see what happens next will never act and such must be the spectator's condition.

—Guy Debord

In a political culture of managed spectacles and passive spectators, poetry appears as a rift, a peculiar lapse, in the prevailing mode. The reading of a poem, a poetry reading, is not a spectacle, nor can it be passively received. It's an exchange of electrical currents through language—that daily, mundane, abused, and ill-prized medium, that instrument of deception and revelation, that material thing, that knife, rag, boat, spoon/reed become pipe/tree trunk become drum/mud become clay flute/conch shell become summons to freedom/old trousers and petticoats become iconography in appliqué/rubber bands stretched around a box become lyre. Diane Glancy: *Poetry uses the hub of a torque converter for a jello mold.* I once saw, in a Chautauqua vaudeville, a man who made recognizably tonal music by manipulating a variety of sizes of wooden spoons with his astonishing fingers. Take that old, material utensil, language, found all about you, blank with familiarity, smeared with daily use, and make it into something that means more than it says. What poetry is made of is so old, so familiar, that it's easy to forget that it's not just the words, but polyrhythmic sounds, speech in its first endeavors (every poem breaks a silence that had to be overcome), prismatic meanings lit by each others' light, stained by each others' shadows. In the wash of poetry the old, beaten, worn stones of language take on colors that disappear when you sieve them up out of the streambed and try to sort them out.

And all this has to travel from the nervous system of the poet, preverbal, to the nervous system of the one who listens, who reads, the active participant without whom the poem is never finished.

I can't write a poem to manipulate you; it will not succeed. Perhaps you have read such poems and decided you don't care for poetry; something turned you away. I can't write a poem from dishonest motives; it will betray its shoddy provenance, like an ill-made tool, a scissors, a drill, it will not serve its purpose, it will come apart in your hands at the point of stress. I can't write a poem simply from good intentions, wanting to set things right, make it all better; the energy will leak out of it, it will end by meaning less than it says.

I can't write a poem that transcends my own limits, though poetry has often pushed me beyond old horizons, and writing a poem has shown me how far out a part of me was walking beyond the

rest. I can expect a reader to feel my limits as I cannot, in terms of her or his own landscape, to ask: *But what has this to do with me? Do I exist in this poem?* And this is not a simple or naive question. We go to poetry because we believe it has something to do with us. We also go to poetry to receive the experience of the *not me*, enter a field of vision we could not otherwise apprehend.

Someone writing a poem believes in a reader, in readers, of that poem. The "who" of that reader quivers like a jellyfish. Self-reference is always possible: that my "I" is a universal "we," that the reader is my clone. That sending letters to myself is enough for attention to be paid. That my chip of mirror contains the world.

But most often someone writing a poem believes in, depends on, a delicate, vibrating range of difference, that an "I" can become a "we" without extinguishing others, that a partly common language exists to which strangers can bring their own heartbeat, memories, images. A language that itself has learned from the heartbeat, memories, images of strangers.

Spectacles controlled and designed to manipulate mass opinion, mass emotions depend increasingly on the ownership of vast and expensive technologies and on the physical distance of the spectators from the spectacle. (The bombing of Baghdad, the studios where competing camera shots were selected and edited and juxtaposed to project via satellite dazzling images of a clean, nonbloody war.) I'm not claiming any kind of purity for poetry, only its own particular way of being. But it's notable that the making of and participation in poetry is so independent of high technology. A good sound system at a reading is of course a great advantage. Poetry readings can now be heard on tape, radio, recorded on video. But poetry would get lost in an immense technological performance scene. What poetry can give has to be given through language and voice, not through massive effects of lighting, sound, superimposed film images, nor as a mere adjunct to spectacle.

I need to make a crucial distinction here. The means of high technology are, as the poet Luís J. Rodriguez has said of the microchip, "surrounded by social relations and power mechanisms which arose out of another time, another period: . . . [they are] imprisoned by capitalism." The spectacles produced by these means carry the messages of those social relations and power mechanisms: that our conditions are inevitable, that randomness prevails, that the only possible response is passive absorption and identification.

But there is a different kind of performance at the heart of the renascence of poetry as an oral art—the art of the griot, performed in alliance with music and dance, to evoke and catalyze a community or communities against passivity and victimization, to recall people to their spiritual and historic sources. Such art, here and now, does not and cannot depend on huge economic and technical resources, though in a different system of social relations it might well draw upon highly sophisticated technologies for its own ends without becoming dominated by them.

Someone is writing a poem. Words are being set down in a force field. It's as if the words themselves have magnetic charges; they veer together or in polarity, they swerve against each other. Part of the force field, the charge, is the working history of the words themselves, how someone has known them, used them, doubted and relied on them in a life. Part of the movement among the words belongs to sound—the guttural, the liquid, the choppy, the drawn-out, the breathy, the visceral, the downlight. The theater of any poem is a collection of decisions about space and time—how are these words to lie on the page, with what pauses, what headlong motion, what phrasing, how can they meet the breath of the someone who comes along to read them? And in part the field is charged by the way images swim into the brain through written language: swan, kettle, icicle, ashes, scab, tamarack, tractor, veil, slime, teeth, freckle.

Lynn Emanuel writes of a nuclear-bomb test watched on television in the Nevada desert by a single mother and daughter living on the edge in a motel:

THE PLANET KRYPTON

Outside the window the McGill smelter
sent a red dust down on the smoking yards of copper,
on the railroad tracks' frayed ends disappeared
into the congestion of the afternoon. Ely lay dull

and scuffed: a miner's boot toe worn away and dim,
while my mother knelt before the Philco to coax
the detonation from the static. From the Las Vegas
Tonapah Artillery and Gunnery Range the sound

of the atom bomb came biting like a swarm
of bees. We sat in the hot Nevada dark, delighted,
when the switch was tripped and the bomb hoisted
up its silky, hooded, glittering, uncoiling length;

it hissed and spit, it sizzled like a poker in a toddy.
The bomb was no mind and all body; it sent a fire
of static down the spine. In the dark it glowed like the coils
of an electric stove. It stripped every leaf from every

branch until a willow by a creek was a bouquet
of switches resinous, naked, flexible, and fine.
Bathed in the light of KDWN, Las Vegas,
my crouched mother looked radioactive, swampy,

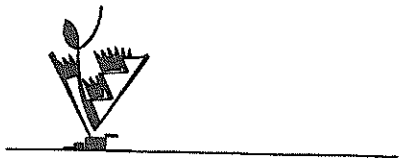
glaucous, like something from the Planet Krypton.
In the suave, brilliant wattage of the bomb, we were
not poor. In the atom's fizz and pop we heard possibility
uncorked. Taffeta wraps whispered on davenports.

A new planet bloomed above us; in its light
the stumps of cut pine gleamed like dinner plates.
The world was beginning all over again, fresh and hot;
we could have anything we wanted.

In the suave, brilliant wattage of the bomb, we were/not poor. This, you could say, is the political core of the poem, the "meaning" without which it could not exist. All that the bomb was meant to mean, as spectacle of power promising limitless possibilities to the powerless, all the falseness of its promise, the original devastation of two cities, the ongoing fallout into local communities, reservations—all the way to the Pacific Islands—this is the driving impulse of the poem, the energy it rides. Yet all this would be mere "message" and forgettable without the poem's visual fury, its extraordinary leaps of sound and image: *Ely lay dull/and scuffed: a miner's boot toe worn away and dim . . . . Tafetta wraps whispered on davenports.* The Planet Krypton is Superman's planet, falling apart, the bits of rubble it flings to earth dangerous to the hero; Earth has become its own Planet Krypton—autotoxic.

At a certain point, a woman, writing this poem, has had to reckon the power of poetry as distinct from the power of the nuclear bomb, of the radioactive lesions of her planet, the power of poverty to reduce people to spectators of distantly conjured events. She can't remain a spectator, hypnotized by the gorgeousness of a destructive force launched far beyond her control. She can feel the old primary appetites for destruction and creation within her; she chooses for creation and for language. But to do this she has to see clearly—and to make visible—how destructive power once seemed to serve her needs, how the bomb's *silky, hooded, glittering, uncoiling length* might enthrall a mother and daughter as they watched, two marginal women, clinging to the edges of a speck in the desert. Her handling of that need, that destructiveness, in language, is how she takes on her true power.

Adrienne Rich



Arts of the Possible

Given as the Troy Lecture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in April 1997. First published in the Massachusetts Review, *autumn 1997.*

I appreciate this opportunity to pull together and present some issues I've been wrestling with over the past couple of years. In fact, I confess that I've kept for more than eighteen months a folder labeled "Troy Lecture" into which I've been sliding handwritten and typewritten notes, made in various states of intense reflection, disquietude, and hope. When I shook this folder out on the kitchen table last January, its contents did not miraculously assemble themselves into the outline of a lecture, as the mountain of peas, beans, and grains sorted themselves out for Psyche in the Greek myth. But they did remind me how persistently certain realities and urgencies had been haunting me over a period of time, ineluctable visitors it seemed.

Psyche's task was to separate legume from groat, millet grain from lentil. I see mine, rather, as a work of connection.

Let me first sketch out some of my concerns, then try to show how I think they inhere with this lectureship's focus on art, the humanities, and public education—and with conditions facing all of us, but especially the young who are trying to make sense of their lives in this time.

I begin with the abrupt reshuffling of our once apparently consensual national project: a democratic republic with a large and growing middle class, and equality of opportunity as its great hope. Over the past two decades or less, we have become a pyramidic society of the omnivorously acquisitive few, an insecure, dwindling middle class, and a multiplying number of ill-served, throwaway citizens and workers—finally, a society accused by the highest incarceration rate in the world. We dangle over an enormous gap between national propaganda and the ways most people are actually living: a cognitive and emotional dissonance, a kind of public breakdown, with symptoms along a spectrum from acute self-involvement to extreme anxiety to individual and group violence.

Along with this crisis in our own country I have been thinking about the self-congratulatory self-promotion of capitalism as a global, transnational order, superseding governments and the very meaning of free elections. I have especially been noting the corruptions of language employed to manage our perceptions of all this. Where democracy becomes "free enterprise," individual rights the self-interest of capital, it's no wonder that the complex of social policies needed to further democratic equality is dismissed as a hulk of obsolete junk known as "big government." In the vocabulary kidnapped from liberatory politics, no word has been so pimped as *freedom.*

I've been struck by the presumption, endlessly issuing from the media, in academic discourse, and from liberal as well as conservative platforms, that the questions raised by Marxism, socialism, and communism must inexorably be identified with their use and abuse by certain repressively authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century: therefore they are henceforth to be nonquestions. That because Marxism, socialism,

communism were aliases employed by certain stagnating, cruel, and unscrupulous systems, they have and shall have no other existence than as masks for those systems. That American capitalism is the liberatory force of the future with a transnational mission to quench all efforts to keep these questions alive. That capitalism's violence and amorality are somehow nonaccountable. That communist or socialist parties all over the world, including those of India and South Africa, imitate the degraded communisms of eastern Europe and China.

In this particular presumption, or dogma, capitalism represents itself as a law of history or, rather, a law beyond history, beneath which history now lies, corroding like the *Titanic*. Or, capitalism presents itself as obedience to a law of nature, man's "natural" and overwhelming predisposition toward activity that is competitive, aggressive, and acquisitive. Where capitalism invokes freedom, it means the freedom of capital. Where, in any mainstream public discourse, is this self-referential monologue put to the question?

The monologue may claim to be transnational, but its roots are in Western Europe and the United States, and in the United States we have our own idioms. We're still rehearsing an old, disabling rhetoric, invoking the "free" climate and virgin resources awaiting the first Europeans on this continent, the "free" spirit of individualism and laissez-faire that allowed penniless new arrivals to acquire lands and fortunes. Generally speaking, we don't trace American opportunity, prosperity, and global power to the genocide of millions of Indians, the claiming and contaminating of Indian lands and natural resources, the presently continuing repression of Indian life and leadership; nor to that Atlantic slave trade which underwrote the wealth of Europe by introducing a captive labor force into both Americas and the Caribbean, and brought the "New World" into the international economy.

We may have heard that the era of modern slavery is finished, is "history," that the genocide against tribal peoples and the expropriation of land held in trust by them are over and done with along with the last wagon trains. But such institutions and policies do not die—they mutate—and we are living them still: they are the taproots of the economic order that has taken "democracy" as its alias. Our past is seeded in our present and is trying to become our future.

These concerns engage me as a citizen, feeling daily in my relationships with my fellow citizens the effects of a system based in the accumulation of wealth—the value against which all other values must justify themselves. We all feel these effects, almost namelessly, as we go about our individual lives and as the fragments of a still ill-defined people.

But these are also my concerns as a poet, as the practitioner of an ancient and severely tested art. In a society in such extreme pain, I think these are any writer's, any artist's, concerns: the unnamed harm to human relationships, the blockage of inquiry, the oblique contempt with which we are depicted to ourselves and to others, in prevailing image making; a malnourishment that extends from the body to the imagination itself. Capital vulgarizes and reduces complex relations to a banal iconography. There is hate speech, but there is also a more generally accepted language of contempt and self-contempt—the term *baby boomers*, for instance, infantilizes and demeans an entire generation. In the interests of marketing, distinctions fade and subtleties vanish.

This devaluation of language, this flattening of images, results in a massive inarticulation, even among the educated. Language itself collapses into shallowness. Everything indeed tends toward becoming a *thing* until people can speak only in terms of the *thing*, the inert and always obsolescent commodity. We are, whatever our generation, marked as "con-

sumers"—but what of the human energy we put forth, the actual needs we feel as distinct from the pursuit of consumption? What about the hunger no commodity can satisfy because it is not a hunger for something on a shelf? Or the hunger forced to *consume* the throwaway dinners in a fast-food restaurant dumpster?

Any artist faces the necessity to explore, by whatever means, human relationships—which may or may not be perceived as political. But there are also, and always, the changing questions of the medium itself, the craft and its demands.

The study of silence has long engrossed me. The matrix of a poet's work consists not only of what *is there* to be absorbed and worked on, but also of what is missing, *desaparecido,* rendered unspeakable, thus unthinkable. It is through these invisible holes in reality that poetry makes its way—certainly for women and other marginalized subjects and for disempowered and colonized peoples generally, but ultimately for all who practice any art at its deeper levels. The impulse to create begins—often terribly and fearfully—in a tunnel of silence. Every real poem is the breaking of an existing silence, and the first question we might ask any poem is, *What kind of voice is breaking silence, and what kind of silence is being broken?*

And yet I need to say here that silence is not always or necessarily oppressive, it is not always or necessarily a denial or extinguishing of some reality. It can be fertilizing, it can bathe the imagination, it can, as in great open spaces—I think of those plains stretching far below the Hopi mesas in Arizona—be the nimbus of a way of life, a condition of vision. Such living silences are more and more endangered throughout the world, by commerce and appropriation. Even in conversation, here in North America, we who so eagerly unpack our most private concerns before strangers dread the imaginative space that silence might open between two people or within a group. Television, obviously, abhors such silence.

But the silence I abhor is dead silence, like a dead spot in an auditorium, a dead telephone, silence where language needed to be and was prevented. I am talking about the silence of a Lexan-sealed isolation cell in a maximum security prison, of evidence destroyed, of a language forbidden to be spoken, a vocabulary declared defunct, questions forbidden to be asked. I am also thinking of the dead sound of senseless noise, of verbal displacement, when a rich and active idiom is replaced by banal and inoffensive speech, or words of active courage by the bluster of false transgression, crudely offensive yet finally impotent.

Never has the silence of displacement been so deafening and so omnipresent. Poetic language lives, labors, amid this displacement; and so does political vision.

I've been reflecting—not so much nostalgically as critically—on the early 1970s, when the emergent women's liberation movement was pouring its vitality into a great many channels: organizing, theorizing, institution building, communications, the arts, research, and journalism. For most of the women engaged with that movement, at least for a while, there was an unforgettable sense of coming alive, of newness and connectedness. You could feel the power of a social critique, a politics, that seemed capable of clarifying previously mystified and haunted terrain. Seeded for over a century in the continuity of other movements for justice—labor, anti-lynching, civil rights, anti-imperialism, antimilitarism, socialism—it called those movements to account for perpetuating old injuries of misogyny, old sexual divisions of power.

A certain elasticity of economic opportunities and means in that period, combined with intense intellectual and creative ferment, made it possible to imagine hitherto nonexistent resources and then work to realize them: women's centers for politics and culture, rape-crisis hotlines and counseling, action groups for reproductive rights, safe houses for battered

women and their children, feminist health clinics and credit unions, and also feminist and lesbian presses, newspapers, arts journals, bookstores, theater, film and video collectives, cultural workshops and institutes. As always, the new liberatory politics broke open new cultural and intellectual space. For a period at least, political analysis and activism were interactive with cultural work, and "women's culture" had not broken itself off from "women's liberation."

Quite apart from the media's brief blaze of attention on a few white faces, the movement created its own spaces for dissent and disputation. The very idea of a monolithic movement was disputed early on by working-class women, by socialist feminists, by women of color, by lesbians, by women who were all of these. There were confrontations about hierarchy and democracy, about which women speak for women and how and why; about sexuality; about how racial and class separations frame what we see and how we set about organizing. There were the tenacity and courage of those who stood up in meeting after meeting to say again what others did not want to hear: that the basic facts of inequality and power in North America cannot be addressed in gender terms only.

Granting authority to women's experience as that which has been disprized, distorted, obliterated, this movement also had to reckon with the fact that on the other side of silence women have enormous *differences* of experience.

"Identity politics" was one attempt to address this contradiction. I first encountered the term in a much-discussed and widely reprinted black feminist manifesto, the Combahee River Collective statement, first published in 1977. This "identity politics" was a necessary response to the devaluation and invisibility of African American women in all movements, but it was implicitly and explicitly seen as moving toward solidarity. The project of changing structures of inequality would

be carried on from a self-conscious and analytic knowledge of one's own location in the intersections of gender, race, class, sexual orientation. This self-consciousness was a necessary step toward the self-definition of African American women against both white and male self-universalizing, but it was not an end in itself. The collective voiced its own "need to do political work and to move beyond consciousness-raising and serving exclusively as an emotional support group."

Had such a reading of "identity politics" been responsively taken up by a critical mass of white women, it might have led us to see—and act on—the racialization of *our* lives, how our experiences of color and class were shaped by capitalist patriarchy's variant and contradictory uses for different female identities. As the 1980s wore on, "identity" became a synonym for "safe space" in which alikeness rather than difference could be explored. An often stifling self-reference and narrow group chauvinism developed.

Meanwhile, capitalism lost no time in rearranging itself around this phenomenon called "feminism," bringing some women closer to centers of power while extruding most others at an accelerating rate. A narrow identity politics could easily be displayed on a buffet table of lifestyles by the caterers of personal solutions. We are learning that only a politics of the whole society can resist such assimilation.

I have focused briefly on the women's liberation movement both because of my own ongoing stake in it and because it embodied for a while the kind of creative space a liberatory political movement can make possible: "a visionary relation to reality." Why this happens has something to do with the sheer power of a collective imagining of change and a sense of collective hope. Coming together with others to define common desires and needs, and to identify the forces that frustrate them, can be a strong tonic for the imagination. And there has

been a vital dynamic between art—here I speak particularly of writing, a seizing of language, a transformation of subjectivity—and the continuing life of movements for social transformation. Where language and images help us name and recognize ourselves and our condition, and practical activity for liberation renews and challenges art, there is a complementarity as necessary as the circulation of the blood. Liberatory politics is, after all, not simply opposition but an expression of the impulse to create the new, an expanding sense of what's *humanly possible.*

The movements of the 1960s and the 1970s in the United States were openings out of apertures previously sealed, into collective imagination and hope. They wore their own blinders, made their own misjudgments. They have been relentlessly trivialized, derided, and demonized by the Right and by what's now known as the political center. They have also been disparaged, as Aijaz Ahmad notes, in many of the texts of postmodernism, as mere "false consciousness" or "folly," while in academic critical theory Marxist or socialist thought may be dismissed outright or treated "as a method primarily of *reading.*"

In this time of manic official optimism and much public denial and despair, I know that the present generation of students must and will negotiate their own ways among such claims. Yet when I think of the political education of students now in college, I have to think of the political silences and displacements of the past twenty years. I think of the fabric of discussion, the great rents in that fabric, about the packaging and marketing of each generation's prefabricated desires and needs.

I have deplored the retreat into the personal as a current fetish of mass-market culture. The conglomerate publishing industry stays afloat in part on a blurry slick of heavily promoted self-help literature, personal memoirs by early

bloomers, celebrity biographies, the packaging of authors complete with sex scandals and lawsuits. From television talk shows and interviews you might deduce that all human interactions are limited to individual predicaments, family injuries, personal confessions and revelations.

The relationship of the individual to a community, to social power, and to the great upheavals of collective human experience will always be the richest and most complex of questions. The blotted-out question might well be: With any personal history, what is to be done? What do we know when we know your story? *With whom do you believe your lot is cast?*

If I seem to come down hard on "the personal," it's not because I undervalue individual experience, or the human impulse to narrative, or because I believe in any kind of simplistic "universal"—male or female, old or new. Garrett Hongo gives an eloquent account of the personal essay as one means for a community to come to know itself, to reject both external and internal stereotyping, to hear "stories that are somehow forbidden and tagged as aberrational, as militant, as depraved."

> **For a writer, as you live in this kind of silence, in this kind of misery, not knowing quite what it is that the world is not giving you, . . . that your work cannot address as yet, you are at the beginning of a critique of culture and society. It is the moment when powerful personal alienation slips into critical thinking—the origin of imagination. It is this initial step of intellection that enables the emergence of new, transformative, even revolutionary creativity. It occurs at the juncture between the production of art and the exercise of deep critical thought.**

Conglomerate publishing and marketing have little interest in such junctures.

I have been trying to decipher the moral ecology of this nonaccountable economy, this old order calling itself new. What are its effects on our emotional and affectional and intellectual life? Over the past decade I would have found it harder to look steadily and long at the scene around us without using Marx's perception that economic relationships—the relationships of production—will, unchecked, infiltrate all other social relationships at the public and the most private levels. Not that Marx thought that feelings, spirit, human relationships are just inert products of the economy. Rather, he was outraged by capital's treatment of human labor and human energy as a means, its hostility to the development of the whole person, its reduction of the entire web of existence to commodity: what can be produced and sold for profit. *In place of all the physical and spiritual senses,* he tells us, *there is the sense of possession, which is the alienation of all these senses.* Marx was passionate about the insensibility of a system that must extract ever more humanity from the human being: time and space for love, for sleep and dreaming, time to create art, time for both solitude and communal life, time to explore the idea of an expanding universe of freedom.

For a few years now, the Republican Congress and the Right have been repetitiously characterized by the term *mean-spirited.* By extension, the same phrase has been used to describe the mood of the disgruntled American voter. I have always found this term suspiciously off the mark. If it were only a matter of spirits! Mean-spiritedness has been as American as cherry pie—alongside other tendencies: it has designated a parochial or provincial strain in a greater social texture.

Mean-spiritedness as a generalized social symptom suggests an inexplicable national mood, a bad attitude, a souring of social conscience and compassion. But people don't succumb to

sourness, resentment, and fear for no reason. The phrase directs us toward social behavior but not to the economic relationships that Marx perceived as staining all social behavior. It refers to attitude but not to policies and powers and the interests they serve. It's a diversionary piece of cant that obscures the lived impact of increasingly cruel legislation and propaganda against poor people, immigrants, women, children, youth, the old, the sick—all who are at risk to begin with—and that also masks the erosion of modest middle-class hopes, in the name of the market or of a chimera known as the balanced budget.

We have all seen attempts to graph numerically the effects of these policies: numbers of people who have slid from apartments or rented rooms or splintered households into the streets; a population of working people without health care, child care, safe and affordable shelter. But each of these people is more than a body to be counted: each is a mind and a soul. Numbers of children left alone or in the care of other children so parents can work; of children doing time in schools that are no more than holding pens for youth and lethal for many. Each of these children possesses an intelligence, creative urge, and capacity that cannot be accounted for by quantifying. Numbers of working people, blue-collar and white-collar, who have lost full-time jobs with pensions to so-called downsizing and restructuring and the export of the production process—working several jobs piecemeal for ever-sinking wages and with mandatory overtime. Each of these people is more than a pinpoint on a chart: each was born to her or his own usefulness and uniqueness. Numbers of prisons now under construction—a "growth industry" in this country, whose public schools and urban hospitals are disintegrating. These prisons, too, are holding pens for youth, disproportionately so for young African American men. The

prison as shadow factory, where inmates assemble, at 35 cents an hour, parts for cars and computers, or take telephone reservations for TWA and Best Western—a captive cheap labor force. Women—of all colors—are the fastest growing incarcerated group, two-thirds being mothers of dependent children. A growing population of lifers and people on death row. A death-penalty system tabulated strenuously to race. In the words of the death-row journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, "the barest illusion of rehabilitation [is being] replaced by dehumanization by design" in the maximum-security, sensory-deprivation units of the penal system in the United States, and in prison policies overall.

Each of these women and men "inside" has, or once had, a self to offer the world, a presence. And the slippage toward prison of those "outside"—so many of them young—who feel themselves becoming social and economic discards, is a process obscured by catchwords like *drugs* and *crime*. We are supposed to blink away from that reality. But what happens behind bars, in any country, isn't sealed off from the quality of civil life. "Dehumanization by design" cannot take place behind bars without also occurring in public space at large. In the public spaces of the wealthiest, most powerful of all nations, ours.

Against a background and foreground of crisis, of technology dazzling in means and maniacally violent in substance, among declarations of resignation and predictions of social chaos, I have from time to time—I know I'm not alone in this—felt almost unbearable foreboding, a terrifying loss of gravity, and furious grief. I'm a writer in a country where native-born fascistic tendencies, allied to the practices of "free" marketing, have been trying to eviscerate language of meaning. I have often felt doubly cut off: that I cannot effectively be heard, and that those voices I need most to hear are

being cut off from me. Any writer has necessary questions as to whether her words deserve to stand, whether his are worth reading. But it's also been a question, for me, of feeling that almost everything that has fertilized and sustained my work is in danger. I have known that this is, in fact, the very material I have to work with: it is not "in spite of the times" that I will write, but I will try to write, in both senses, *out of my time.*

(There is a 1973 painting by Dorothea Tanning in which the arm of the woman painter literally breaks through the canvas: we don't see the brush, we see the arm up to the wrist, and the gash in the material. That, viscerally, depicts what it means to me, to try to write *out of one's time.*)

I have stayed connected with activism and with people whose phoenix politics are reborn continually out of the nest charred by hostility and lying. I have talked long with other friends. I have searched for words—my own and those of other writers. I've been drawn to those writers, in so many world locations, who have felt the need to question the very activity their lives had been shaped around: to interrogate the value of the written word in the face of many kinds of danger, enormous human needs. I wasn't looking for easy reassurances but rather for evidence that others, in other societies, also had to struggle with that question.

Whatever her or his social identity, the writer is, by the nature of the act of writing, someone who strives for communication and connection, someone who searches, through language, to keep alive the conversation with what Octavio Paz has called "the lost community." Even if what's written feels like a note thrust into a bottle to be thrown into the sea. The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish writes of the incapacity of poetry to find a linguistic equivalent to conditions such as the 1982 Israeli shelling of Beirut: *We are now not to describe, as much as we are to be described. We're being born totally, or else*

dying totally. In his remarkable prose-meditation on that war, he also says, *Yet I want to break into song. . . . I want to find a language that transforms language itself into steel for the spirit—a language to use against these sparkling silver insects, these jets. I want to sing. I want a language that I can lean on and that can lean on me, that asks me to bear witness and that I can ask to bear witness, to what power there is in us to overcome this cosmic isolation.*

Darwish writes from the heart of a military massacre. The Caribbean-Canadian poet Dionne Brand writes from colonial diaspora: *I've had moments when the life of my people has been so overwhelming to bear that poetry seemed useless, and I cannot say that there is any moment when I do not think that now.* Yet finally, she admits, like Darwish: *Poetry is here, just here. Something wrestling with how we live, something dangerous, something honest.*

I've gone back many times to Eduardo Galeano's essay "In Defense of the Word," in which he says:

> **I do not share the attitude of those writers who claim for themselves divine privileges not granted to ordinary mortals, nor of those who beat their breasts and rend their clothes as they clamor for public pardon for having lived a life devoted to serving a useless vocation. Neither so godly, nor so contemptible. . . .**
>
> **The prevailing social order perverts or annihilates the creative capacity of the immense majority of people and reduces the possibility of creation—an age-old response to human anguish and the certainty of death—to its professional exercise by a handful of specialists. How many "specialists" are we in Latin America? For whom do we write, whom do we reach? Where is our real public? (Let us mistrust applause. At times we are congratulated by those who consider us innocuous.)**
>
> **To claim that literature on its own is going to change reality would be an act of madness or arrogance. It seems to me no less foolish to deny that it can aid in making this change.**

Galeano's "defense" was written after his magazine, *Crisis*, was closed down by the Argentine government. As a writer in exile, he has continued to interrogate the place of the written word, of literature, in a political order that forbids literacy and creative expression to so many; that denies the value of literature as a vehicle for social change even as it fears its power. Like Nadine Gordimer in South Africa, he knows that censorship can assume many faces, from the shutting down of magazines and the banning of books by some writers, to the imprisonment and torture of others, to the structural censorship produced by utterly unequal educational opportunities and by restricted access to the means of distribution—both features of North American society that have become more and more pronounced over the past two decades.

I question the "free" market's devotion to freedom of expression. Let's bear in mind that when threats of violence came down against the publication and selling of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, the chain bookstores took it off their shelves, while independent booksellers continued to stock it. The various small, independent presses in this country, which have had an integral relationship with the independent booksellers, are walking a difficult and risky edge as costs rise, support funding dwindles, and corporate distribution becomes more monolithic. The survival of a great diversity of books, and of work by writers far less internationally notable than Rushdie, depends on diverse interests having the means to make such books available.

It also means a nonelite but educated audience, a population who are literate, who read and talk to each other, who may be factory workers or bakers or bank tellers or paramed-

icals or plumbers or computer consultants or farmworkers, whose first language may be Croatian or Tagalog or Spanish or Vietnamese but who are given to critical thinking, who care about art, an intelligentsia beyond intellectual specialists.

I have encountered a bracingly hard self-questioning and self-criticism in politically embattled writers, along with their belief that language can be a vital instrument in combating unreality and lies. I have been grateful for their clarity, whether as to Latin America, South Africa, the Caribbean, North America, or the Middle East, about the systems that abuse and waste the majority of human lives. Overall, there is the conviction—and these are writers of poetry, fiction, travel, fantasy—that the writer's freedom to communicate can't be severed from universal public education and universal public access to the word.

Universal public education has two possible—and contradictory—missions. One is the development of a literate, articulate, and well-informed citizenry so that the democratic process can continue to evolve and the promise of radical equality can be brought closer to realization. The other is the perpetuation of a class system dividing an elite, nominally "gifted" few, tracked from an early age, from a very large underclass essentially to be written off as alienated from language and science, from poetry and politics, from history and hope, an underclass to be funneled—whatever its dreams and hopes—toward low-wage temporary jobs. The second is the direction our society has taken. The results are devastating in terms of the betrayal of a generation of youth. The loss to the whole society is incalculable.

But to take the other direction, to choose an imaginative, highly developed, educational system that would serve all citizens at every age—a vast, shared, public schooling in which each of us felt a stake, as with public roads, there when

needed, ready when you choose to use them—this would mean changing almost everything else.

It would mean refusing, categorically, the shallow premises of official pieties and banalities. As Jonathan Kozol writes in a "Memo to President Clinton":

> **You have spoken at times of the need to put computers into ghetto schools, to set up zones of enterprise in ghetto neighborhoods, and to crack down more aggressively on crime in ghetto streets. Yet you have never asked the nation to consider whether ghetto schools and the ghetto itself represent abhorrent, morally offensive institutions. Is the ghetto . . . to be accepted as a permanent cancer on the body of American democracy? Is its existence never to be challenged? Is its persistence never to be questioned? Is it the moral agenda of our President to do no more than speak about more comely versions of apartheid, of entrepreneurial segregation . . . ?**

Well, but of course, voices are saying, we're now seeing the worst of breakaway capitalism, even one or two millionaires are wondering if things haven't gone far enough. Perhaps the thing can be restructured, reinvented? After all, it's all we've got, the only system we in this country have ever known! Without capitalism's lure of high stakes and risk, its glamour of individual power, how could we have conceived, designed, developed the astonishing technological fireworks of the end of this century—this technology with the power to generate ever more swiftly obsolescent products for consumption, ever more wondrous connections among the well connected?

Other voices speak of a technology that can redeem or rescue us. Some who are part of this pyrotechnic moment see it as illuminating enormous possibilities—in education, for one instance. Yet how will this come about without consistent

mentoring and monitoring by nontechnical, nonprofit-oriented interests? And where will such mentoring come from? whose power will validate it?

Is technology, rather than democracy, our destiny? Who, what groups, give it direction and purpose? To whom does it really belong? What should be its content? With spectacular advances in medical technology, why not free universal health care? If computers in every ghetto school, why ghettos at all? and why not classroom teachers who are well trained and well paid? If national defense is the issue, why not, as poet-activist Frances Payne Adler suggests, a "national defense" budget that defends the people through affordable health, education, and shelter for everyone? *Why should such minimal social needs be so threatening?* Technology—magnificent, but merely a means after all—will not of itself resolve questions like these.

We need to begin changing the questions. To become less afraid to ask the still-unanswered questions posed by Marxism, socialism and communism. Not to interrogate old, corrupt hierarchical systems, but to ask anew, for our own time: What constitutes ownership? What is work? How can people be assured of a just share in the products of their precious human exertions? How can we move from a production system in which human labor is merely a disposable means to a process that depends on and expands connective relationships, mutual respect, the dignity of work, the fullest possible development of the human subject? How much inequality will we go on tolerating in the world's richest and most powerful nation? What, anyway, is social wealth? Is it only to be defined as private ownership? What does the much abused and trampled word *revolution* mean to us? How can revolutions be prevented from locking in on themselves? how can women and men together imagine "revolution in permanence," continually unfolding through time?

And if we are writers writing first of all from our own desire and need, if this is irresistible work for us, if in writing we experience certain kinds of power and freedom that may be unavailable to us in other ways—surely it would follow that we would want to make that kind of forming, shaping, naming, telling, accessible for anyone who can use it. It would seem only natural for writers to care passionately about literacy, public education, public libraries, public opportunities in all the arts. But more: if we care about the freedom of the word, about language as a liberatory current, if we care about the imagination, we will care about economic justice.

For the pull and suck of Capital's project tend toward reducing, not expanding, overall human intelligence, wit, expressiveness, creative rebellion. If free enterprise is to be totalizingly free, a value in and for itself, it can have no stake in other realms of value. It may pay lip service to charitable works, but its drive is toward what works for the accumulation of wealth; this is a monomaniacal system. Certainly it cannot enrich the realm of the social imagination, least of all the imagination of solidarity and cooperative human endeavor, the unfulfilled imagination of radical equality.

In a poem written in the early 1970s in Argentina, just as the political ground was shifting to a right-wing consolidation, military government, torture, disappearances and massacres, the poet Juan Gelman reflects on delusions of political compromise. The poem is called "Clarities":

who has seen the dove marry the hawk
mistrust affection the exploited the exploiter? false
are such unspeakable marriages
disasters are born of such marriages discord sadness

how long can the house of such a marriage last?
wouldn't

the least breeze grind it down destroy it the sky crush it
to ruins? oh, my country!

sad! enraged! beautiful! oh my country facing the firing
squad!
stained with revolutionary blood!

the parrots the color of mitre
that go clucking in almost every tree
and courting on every branch
are they more alone? less alone? lonely? for

who has seen the butcher marry the tender calf
tenderness marry capitalism? false
are such unspeakable marriages
disasters are born of such marriages discord sadness
clarities such as

the day itself spinning in the iron cupola
above this poem

I have talked at some length about capitalism's drive to disenfranchise and dehumanize, to invade the very zones of feeling and relationship we deal with as writers—which Marx described long ago—because those processes still need to be described as doing what they still do. I have spoken from the perspective of a writer and a longtime teacher, trying to grasp the ill winds and the sharp veerings of her time—a human being who thinks of herself as an artist, and then must ask herself what that means.

I want to end by saying this to you: We're not simply trapped in the present. We are not caged within a narrowing corridor at "the end of history." Nor do any of us have to windsurf on the currents of a system that depends on the betrayal of so

many others. We do have choices. We're living through a certain part of history that needs us to live it and make it and write it. We can make that history with many others, people we will never know. Or, we can live in default, under protest perhaps, but neutered in our senses and in our sympathies.

We have to keep on asking the questions still being defined as nonquestions—the ones beginning *Why . . . ? What if . . . ?* We will be told these are childish, naive, "pre-postmodern" questions. They are the imagination's questions.

Many of you in this audience are professional intellectuals, or studying to become so, or are otherwise engaged in the activities of a public university. Writers and intellectuals can name, we can describe, we can depict, we can witness—without sacrificing craft, nuance, or beauty. Above all, and at our best, we may sometimes help question the questions.

Let us try to do this, if we do it, without grandiosity. Let's recognize too, without false humility, the limits of the zone in which we work. Writing and teaching are kinds of work, and the relative creative freedom of the writer or teacher depends on the conditions of human labor overall and everywhere.

For what are we, anyway, at our best, but one small, persistent cluster in a greater ferment of human activity—still and forever turning toward, tuned for, the possible, the unrealized and irrepressible design?

1997

The University and the Undercommons

SEVEN THESES

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney

> Philosophy thus traditionally practices a critique of knowledge which is simultaneously a denegation of knowledge (i.e., of the class struggle). Its position can be described as an *irony* with regard to knowledge, which it puts into question without ever touching its foundations. The questioning of knowledge in philosophy always ends in its restoration: a movement great philosophers consistently expose in each other.
> —Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*

> I am a black man number one, because I am against what they have done and are still doing to us; and number two, I have something to say about the new society to be built because I have a tremendous part in that which they have sought to discredit.
> —C. L. R. James, *C. L. R. James: His Life and Work*

The Only Possible Relationship to the University Today Is a Criminal One

"To the university I'll steal, and there I'll steal," to borrow from Pistol at the end of *Henry V*, as he would surely borrow from us. This is the only possible relationship to the American university today. This may be true of universities everywhere. It may have to be true of the university in general. But certainly, this much is true in the United States: it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university.

Worry about the university. This is the injunction today in the United States, one with a long history. Call for its restoration like Harold Bloom or Stanley Fish or Gerald Graff. Call for its reform like Derek Bok or Bill Readings or Cary Nelson. Call out to it as it calls to you. But for the subversive intellectual, all of this goes on upstairs, in polite company, among the rational men. After all, the subversive intellectual came under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love. Her labor is as necessary as it

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is unwelcome. The university needs what she bears but cannot bear what she brings. And on top of all that, she disappears. She disappears into the underground, the downlow lowdown maroon community of the university, into the Undercommons of Enlightenment, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.

What is that work and what is its social capacity for both reproducing the university and producing fugitivity? If one were to say teaching, one would be performing the work of the university. Teaching is merely a profession and an operation of what Jacques Derrida calls the onto-/auto-encyclopedic circle of the *Universitas*. But it is useful to invoke this operation to glimpse the hole in the fence where labor enters, to glimpse its hiring hall, its night quarters. The university needs teaching labor, despite itself, or as itself, self-identical with and thereby erased by it. It is not teaching then that holds this social capacity, but something that produces the not visible other side of teaching, a thinking through the skin of teaching toward a collective orientation to the knowledge object as future project, and a commitment to what we want to call the prophetic organization.

But it is teaching that brings us in. Before there are grants, research, conferences, books, and journals there is the experience of being taught and of teaching. Before the research post with no teaching, before the graduate students to mark the exams, before the string of sabbaticals, before the permanent reduction in teaching load, the appointment to run the Center, the consignment of pedagogy to a discipline called education, before the course designed to be a new book, teaching happened. The moment of teaching for food is therefore often mistakenly taken to be a stage, as if eventually, one should not teach for food. If the stage persists, there is a social pathology in the university. But if the teaching is successfully passed on, the stage is surpassed, and teaching is consigned to those who are known to remain in the stage, the sociopathological labor of the university. Kant interestingly calls such a stage "self-incurred minority." He tries to contrast it with having the "determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another." "Have the courage to use your own intelligence." *But what would it mean if teaching or rather what we might call "the beyond of teaching" is precisely what one is asked to get beyond, to stop taking sustenance?* And what of those minorities who refuse, the tribe of moles who will not come back from beyond$_2$ (that which is beyond "the beyond of teaching"), as if they will not be subjects, as if they want to think as objects, as minority? Certainly, the perfect subjects of communication, those successfully beyond teaching, will see them as waste. But their collective labor will always call into question who truly is taking the orders of the Enlightenment. The waste lives for those moments

beyond$_2$ teaching when you give away the unexpected beautiful phrase—unexpected, no one has asked, beautiful, it will never come back. Is being the biopower of the Enlightenment truly better than this?

Perhaps the biopower of the Enlightenment know this, or perhaps it is just reacting to the objecthood of this labor as it must. But even as it depends on these moles, these refugees, they will call them uncollegial, impractical, naive, unprofessional. And one may be given one last chance to be pragmatic—why steal when one can have it all, they will ask. But if one hides from this interpellation, neither agrees nor disagrees but goes with hands full into the underground of the university, into the *Undercommons*—this will be regarded as theft, as a criminal act. And it is at the same time, the only possible act.

In that Undercommons of the university one can see that it is not a matter of teaching versus research or even the beyond of teaching versus the individualization of research. To enter this space is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons. What the beyond$_2$ of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing; it's about allowing subjectivity to be unlawfully overcome by others, a radical passion and passivity such that one becomes unfit for subjection, because one does not possess the kind of agency that can hold the regulatory forces of subjecthood, and one cannot initiate the auto-interpellative torque that biopower subjection requires and rewards. It is not so much the teaching as it is the prophecy in the organization of the act of teaching. The prophecy that predicts its own organization and has therefore passed, as commons, and the prophecy that exceeds its own organization and therefore as yet can only be organized. Against the prophetic organization of the Undercommons is arrayed its own deadening labor for the university, and beyond that, the negligence of professionalization, and the professionalization of the critical academic. The Undercommons is therefore always an unsafe neighborhood.

Fredric Jameson reminds the university of its dependence on "Enlightenment-type critiques and demystification of belief and committed ideology, in order to clear the ground for unobstructed planning and 'development.'"[1] This is the weakness of the university, the lapse in its homeland security. It needs labor power for this "enlightenment-type critique," but, somehow, labor always escapes.

The premature subjects of the Undercommons took the call seriously, or had to be serious about the call. They were not clear about planning, too mystical, too full of belief. And yet this labor force cannot reproduce itself,

Able to see themselves properly as obstacles to society, or perhaps, with lifelong learning, students will return having successfully diagnosed themselves as the problem.

it must be reproduced. The university works for the day when it will be able to rid itself, like capital in general, of the trouble of labor. It will then be able to reproduce a labor force that understands itself as not only unnecessary but dangerous to the development of capitalism. Much pedagogy and scholarship is already dedicated in this direction. Students must come to see themselves as the problem, which, counter to the complaining of restorationist critics of the university, is precisely what it means to be a customer, to take on the burden of realization and always necessarily be inadequate to it. Later, these students will be able to see themselves properly as obstacles to society, or perhaps, with lifelong learning, students will return having successfully diagnosed themselves as the problem.

Still, the dream of an undifferentiated labor that knows itself as superfluous is interrupted precisely by the labor of clearing away the burning roadblocks of ideology. While it is better that this police function be in the hands of the few, it still raises labor as difference, labor as the development of other labor, and therefore labor as a source of wealth. And although the enlightenment-type critique, as we suggest below, informs on, kisses the cheek of, any autonomous development as a result of this difference in labor, there is a break in the wall here, a shallow place in the river, a place to land under the rocks. The university still needs this clandestine labor to prepare this undifferentiated labor force, whose increasing specialization and managerialist tendencies, again contra the restorationists, represent precisely the successful integration of the division of labor with the universe of exchange that commands restorationist loyalty.

Introducing this labor upon labor, and providing the space for its development, creates risks. Like the colonial police force recruited unwittingly from guerrilla neighborhoods, university labor may harbor refugees, fugitives, renegades, and castaways. But there are good reasons for the university to be confident that such elements will be exposed or forced underground. Precautions have been taken, book lists have been drawn up, teaching observations conducted, invitations to contribute made. Yet against these precautions stands the immanence of transcendence, the necessary deregulation and the possibilities of criminality and fugitivity that labor upon labor requires. Maroon communities of composition teachers, mentorless graduate students, adjunct Marxist historians, out or queer management professors, state college ethnic studies departments, closed-down film programs, visa-expired Yemeni student newspaper editors, historically black college sociologists, and feminist engineers. And what will the university say of them? It will say they are unprofessional. This is not an arbitrary charge. It is the charge against the more than professional. How do those who exceed the profession, who exceed and by exceeding escape, how do those maroons problematize themselves, problematize the

university, force the university to consider them a problem, a danger? The Undercommons is not, in short, the kind of fanciful communities of whimsy invoked by Bill Readings at the end of his book. The Undercommons, its maroons, are always at war, always in hiding.

There Is No Distinction between the American University and Professionalization

But surely if one can write something on the surface of the university, if one can write for instance in the university about *singularities*—those events that refuse either the abstract or individual category of the bourgeois subject—one cannot say that there is no space in the university itself? Surely there is some space here for a theory, a conference, a book, a school of thought? Surely the university also makes thought possible? Is not the purpose of the university as *Universitas*, as liberal arts, to make the commons, make the public, make the nation of democratic citizenry? Is it not therefore important to protect this *Universitas*, whatever its impurities, from professionalization in the university? But we would ask what is already not possible in this talk in the hallways, among the buildings, in rooms of the university about possibility? How is the thought of the outside, as Gayatri Spivak means it, already not possible in this complaint?

The maroons know something about possibility. They are the condition of possibility of production of knowledge in the university—the singularities against the writers of singularity, the writers who write, publish, travel, and speak. It is not merely a matter of the secret labor upon which such space is lifted, though of course such space is lifted from collective labor and by it. It is rather that to be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it, and to institute the negligence of that internal outside, that unassimilated underground, a negligence of it that is precisely, we must insist, the basis of the professions. And this act of against always already excludes the unrecognized modes of politics, the beyond of politics already in motion, the discredited criminal paraorganization, what Robin Kelley might refer to as the infrapolitical field (and its music). It is not just the labor of the maroons but their prophetic organization that is negated by the idea of intellectual space in an organization called the university. This is why the negligence of the critical academic is always at the same time an assertion of bourgeois individualism.

Such negligence is the essence of professionalization where it turns out professionalization is not the opposite of negligence but its mode of politics in the United States. It takes the form of a choice that excludes the

prophetic organization of the Undercommons—to be against, to put into question the knowledge object, let us say in this case the university, not so much without touching its foundation, as without touching one's own condition of possibility, without admitting the Undercommons and being admitted to it. From this, a general negligence of condition is the only coherent position. Not so much an antifoundationalism or foundationalism, as both are used against each other to avoid contact with the Undercommons. This always negligent act is what leads us to say there is no distinction between the university in the United States and professionalization. There is no point in trying to hold out the university against its professionalization. They are the same. Yet the maroons refuse to refuse professionalization, that is, to be against the university. The university will not recognize this indecision, and thus professionalization is shaped precisely by what it cannot acknowledge, its internal antagonism, its wayward labor, its surplus. Against this wayward labor it sends the critical, sends its claim that what is left beyond the critical is waste.

But in fact, critical education only attempts to perfect professional education. The professions constitute themselves in an opposition to the unregulated and the ignorant without acknowledging the unregulated, ignorant, unprofessional labor that goes on not opposite them but within them. But if professional education ever slips in its labor, ever reveals its condition of possibility to the professions it supports and reconstitutes, critical education is there to pick it up, and to tell it, never mind—it was just a bad dream, the ravings, the drawings of the mad. Because critical education is precisely there to tell professional education to rethink its relationship to its opposite—by which critical education means both itself and the unregulated, against which professional education is deployed. In other words, critical education arrives to support any faltering negligence, to be vigilant in its negligence, to be critically engaged in its negligence. It is more than an ally of professional education, it is its attempted completion.

A professional education has become a critical education. But one should not applaud this fact. It should be taken for what it is, not progress in the professional schools, not cohabitation with the *Universitas*, but counterinsurgency, the refounding terrorism of law, coming for the discredited, coming for those who refuse to write off or write up the Undercommons.

The *Universitas* is always a state/State strategy. Perhaps it's surprising to say professionalization—that which reproduces the professions—is a state strategy. Certainly, critical academic professionals tend to be regarded today as harmless intellectuals, malleable, perhaps capable of some modest intervention in the so-called public sphere, like Bruce Robbins's cowboy professionals in *Secular Vocations*. But to see how this underestimates

the presence of the state we can turn to a bad reading of Derrida's consideration of Hegel's 1822 report to the Prussian Minister of Education. Derrida notices the way that Hegel rivals the state in his ambition for education, wanting to put into place a progressive pedagogy of philosophy designed to support Hegel's worldview, to unfold as encyclopedic. This ambition both mirrors the state's ambition, because it, too, wants to control education and to impose a worldview, and threatens it, because Hegel's State exceeds and thus localizes the Prussian state, exposing its pretense to the encyclopedic. Derrida draws the following lesson from his reading: the *Universitas*, as he generalizes the university (but specifies it, too, as properly intellectual and not professional), always has the impulse of State, or enlightenment, and the impulse of state, or its specific conditions of production and reproduction. Both have the ambition to be, as Derrida says, onto- and auto-encyclopedic. It follows that to be either for the *Universitas* or against it presents problems. To be for the *Universitas* is to support this onto- and auto-encyclopedic project of the State as enlightenment, or enlightenment as totality, to use an old-fashioned word. To be too much against the *Universitas*, however, creates the danger of specific elements in the state taking steps to rid itself of the contradiction of the onto- and auto-encyclopedic project of the *Universitas* and replacing it with some other form of social reproduction, the anti-enlightenment—the position, for instance, of New Labour in Britain and of the states of New York and California with their "teaching institutions." But a bad reading of Derrida will also yield our question again: what is lost in this undecidability? What is the price of refusing to be either for the *Universitas* or for professionalization, to be critical of both, and who pays that price? Who makes it possible to reach the aporia of this reading? Who works in the premature excess of totality, in the not ready of negligence?

The mode of professionalization that is the American university is precisely dedicated to promoting this consensual choice: an antifoundational critique of the University or a foundational critique of the university. Taken as choices, or hedged as bets, one tempered with the other, they are nonetheless always negligent. Professionalization is built on this choice. It rolls out into ethics and efficiency, responsibility and science, and numerous other choices, all built upon the theft, the conquest, the negligence of the outcast mass intellectuality of the Undercommons.

It is therefore unwise to think of professionalization as a narrowing and better to think of it as a circling, a circling of war wagons around the last camp of indigenous women and children. Think about the way the American doctor or lawyer regard themselves as educated, enclosed in the circle of the state's encyclopedia, though they may know nothing of philosophy or history. What would be outside this act of the conquest circle,

what kind of ghostly labored world escapes in the circling act, an act like a kind of broken phenomenology where the brackets never come back off and what is experienced as knowledge is the absolute horizon of knowledge whose name is banned by the banishment of the absolute. It is simply a horizon that does not bother to make itself possible. No wonder that whatever their origins or possibilities, it is theories of pragmatism in the United States and critical realism in Britain that command the loyalty of critical intellectuals. Never having to confront the foundation, never having to confront antifoundation out of faith in the unconfrontable foundation, critical intellectuals can float in the middle range. These loyalties banish dialectics with its inconvenient interest in pushing the material and abstract, the table and its brain, as far as it can, unprofessional behavior at its most obvious.

Professionalization Is the Privatization of the Social Individual through Negligence

Surely professionalization brings with it the benefits of competence. It may be the onto- and auto-encyclopedic circle of the university particular to the American state, but is it not possible to recuperate something from this knowledge for practical advances? Or, indeed, is it not possible to embark on critical projects within its terrain, projects that would turn its competencies to more radical ends? No, we would say, it is not. And saying so we prepare to part company with American critical academics, to become unreliable, to be disloyal to the public sphere, to be obstructive and shiftless, dumb with insolence in the face of the call to critical thinking.

Let us, as an example, act disloyally to the field of public administration and especially in masters of public administration programs, including related programs in public health, environmental management, nonprofit and arts management, and the large menu of human services courses, certificates, diplomas, and degrees that underpin this disciplinary cluster. It is difficult not to sense that these programs exist against themselves, that they despise themselves. (Although later one can see that as with all professionalization, it is the underlying negligence that unsettles the surface of labor power.) The average lecture, in the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU for instance, may be more antistatist, more skeptical of government, more modest in its social policy goals than the average lecture in the avowedly neoclassical economics or new right political science departments at that same university. It would not be much different at Syracuse University, or a dozen other prominent public

administration schools. One might say that skepticism is an important part of higher education, but this particular skepticism is not founded on close study of the object in question. In fact, there is no state theory in public administration programs in the United States. Instead, the state is regarded as the proverbial devil we know. And whether it is understood in public administration as a necessary evil, or as a good that is nonetheless of limited usefulness and availability, it is always entirely knowable as an object. Therefore it is not so much that these programs are set against themselves. It is rather that they are set against some students, and particularly those who come to public administration with a sense of what Derrida has called a duty beyond duty, or a passion.

There is no state theory in public administration programs in the United States. Instead, the state is regarded as the proverbial devil we know.

To be skeptical of what one already knows is of course an absurd position. If one is skeptical of an object then one is already in the position of not knowing that object, and if one claims to know the object, one cannot also claim to be skeptical of that object, which amounts to being skeptical of one's own claim. But this is the position of professionalization, and it is this position that confronts that student, however rare, who comes to public administration with a passion. Any attempt at passion, at stepping out of this skeptical of the known into an inadequate confrontation with what exceeds it and oneself, must be suppressed by this professionalization. This is not merely a matter of administering the world, but of administering away the world (and with it prophecy). Any other disposition is not only unprofessional but incompetent, unethical, and irresponsible, bordering on the criminal. Again the discipline of public administration is particularly, though not uniquely, instructive, both in its pedagogy and in its scholarship, and offers the chance to be disloyal, to smash and grab what it locks up.

Public administration holds to the idea both in the lecture hall and the professional journal that its categories are knowable. The state, the economy, and civil society may change size or shape, labor may enter or exit, and ethical consideration may vary, but these objects are both positivistic and normative, standing in discrete, spatial arrangement each to the other. Professionalization begins by accepting these categories precisely so competence can be invoked, a competence that at the same time guards its own foundation (like Michael Dukakis riding around in a tank phantasmatically patrolling his empty neighborhood). This responsibility for the preservation of objects becomes precisely that Weberian site-specific ethics that has the effect, as Theodor Adorno recognized, of naturalizing the production of capitalist sites. To question them thus becomes not only incompetent and unethical but the enactment of a security breach.

For instance, if one wanted to explore the possibility that public administration might best be defined as the labor of the relentless privati-

zation of capitalist society, one could gain a number of unprofessional insights. It would help explain the inadequacy of the three major strains in public administration scholarship in the United States. The public ethos strain represented by projects like refounding public administration, and the journal *Administration and Society*; the public competence strain represented in the debate between public administration and the new public management, and the journal *Public Administration Review*; and the critical strain represented by PAT-Net, the Public Administration Theory Network, and its journal *Administrative Theory and Praxis*. If public administration is the competence to confront the socialization thrown up continuously by capitalism and to take as much of that socialization as possible and reduce it either to something called the public or something called the private, then immediately all three scholarly positions become invalid. It is not possible to speak of a labor that is dedicated to the reproduction of social dispossession as having an ethical dimension. It is not possible to decide the efficiency or scope of such labor after the fact of its expenditure in this operation by looking at it once it has reproduced something called the public or something called the private. And it is not possible to be critical and at the same time to accept uncritically the foundation of public administrationist thought in these spheres of the public and private, and to deny the labor that goes on behind the backs of these categories, in the Undercommons, of, for instance, the republic of women who run Brooklyn.

But this is an unprofessional example. It does preserve the rules and respect the terms of the debate, enter the speech community, by knowing and dwelling in its (unapproachable) foundational objects. It is also an incompetent example. It does not allow itself to be measured, applied, and improved, except to be found wanting. And it is an unethical example. Suggesting the utter dominance of one category over another—is this not fascism or communism? Finally, it is a passionate example full of prophecy not proof, a bad example of a weak argument making no attempt to defend itself, given over to some kind of sacrifice of the professional community emanating from the Undercommons. Such is the negligent opinion of professional public administration scholars.

What, further, is the connection then between this professionalization as the onto- and auto-encyclopedia of the American state and the spread of professionalization beyond the university or perhaps the spread of the university beyond the university, and with the colonies of the Undercommons? A certain riot into which professionalization stumbles—when the care of the social is confronted with its reaction, enforced negligence—a riot erupts and the professional looks absurd, like a recruiting booth at a carnival, professional services, personal professional services, turning pro

to pay for university. It is at this riotous moment that professionalization shows its desperate business, nothing less than to convert the social individual. Except perhaps, something more, the ultimate goal of counterinsurgency everywhere: to turn the insurgents into state agents.

Critical Academics Are the Professionals Par Excellence

The critical academic questions the university, questions the state, questions art, politics, culture. But in the Undercommons it is "no questions asked." It is unconditional—the door swings open for refuge even though it may let in police agents and destruction. The questions are superfluous in the Undercommons. If you don't know, why ask? The only question left on the surface is what can it mean to be critical when the professional defines himself or herself as one who is critical of negligence, while negligence defines professionalization? Would it not mean that to be critical of the university would make one the professional par excellence, more negligent than any other? To distance oneself professionally through critique, is this not the most active consent to privatize the social individual? The Undercommons might by contrast be understood as wary of critique, weary of it, and at the same time dedicated to the collectivity of its future, the collectivity that may come to be its future. The Undercommons in some ways tries to escape from critique and its degradation as university-consciousness and self-consciousness about university-consciousness, retreating, as Adrian Piper says, into the external world.

This maroon community, if it exists, therefore also seeks to escape the fiat of the ends of man. The sovereign's army of academic antihumanism will pursue this negative community into the Undercommons, seeking to conscript it, needing to conscript it. But as seductive as this critique may be, as provoked as it may be, in the Undercommons they know it is not love. Between the fiat of the ends and the ethics of new beginnings, the Undercommons abides, and some find comfort in this. Comfort for the emigrants from conscription, not to be ready for humanity and who must endure the return of humanity nonetheless, as it may be endured by those who will or must endure it, as certainly those of the Undercommons endure it, always in the break, always the supplement of the General Intellect and its source. When the critical academic who lives by fiat (of others) gets no answer, no commitment, from the Undercommons, well then certainly the conclusion will come: they are not practical, not serious about change, not rigorous, not productive.

Meanwhile, that critical academic in the university, in the circle of the American state, questions the university. He claims to be critical of the

negligence of the university. But is he not the most accomplished professional in his studied negligence? If the labor upon labor, the labor among labor of the unprofessionals in the university sparks revolt, retreat, release, does the labor of the critical academic not involve a mockery of this first labor, a performance that is finally in its lack of concern for what it parodies, negligent? Does the questioning of the critical academic not become a pacification? Or, to put it plainly, does the critical academic not teach how to deny precisely what one produces with others, and is this not the lesson the professions return to the university to learn again and again? Is the critical academic then not dedicated to what Michael E. Brown phrased the impoverishment, the immiseration, of society's cooperative prospects? This is the professional course of action. This enlightenment-type charade is utterly negligent in its critique, a negligence that disavows the possibility of a thought of outside, a nonplace called the Undercommons—the nonplace that must be thought outside to be sensed inside, from whom the enlightenment-type charade has stolen everything for its game.

But if the critical academic is merely a professional, why spend so much time on him? Why not just steal his books one morning and give them to deregistered students in a closed-down and beery student bar, where the seminar on burrowing and borrowing takes place. Yet we must speak of these critical academics because negligence it turns out is a major crime of state.

Incarceration Is the Privatization of the Social Individual through War

If one were to insist the opposite of professionalization is that fugitive impulse to rely on the Undercommons for protection, to rely on the honor, and to insist on the honor of the fugitive community; if one were to insist the opposite of professionalization is that criminal impulse to steal from professions, from the university, with neither apologies nor malice, to steal the Enlightenment for others, to steal oneself with a certain blue music, a certain tragic optimism, to steal away with mass intellectuality; if one were to do this, would this not be to place criminality and negligence against each other? Would it not place professionalization, would it not place the university, against honor? And what then could be said for criminality?

Perhaps then it needs to be said that the crack dealer, terrorist, and political prisoner share a commitment to war, and society responds in kind with wars on crime, terror, drugs, communism. But "this war on the

commitment to war" crusades as a war against the asocial, that is, those who live "without a concern for sociality." Yet it cannot be such a thing. After all, it is professionalization itself that is devoted to the asocial, the university itself that reproduces the knowledge of how to neglect sociality in its very concern for what it calls asociality. No, this war against the commitment to war responds to this commitment to war as the threat that it is—not mere negligence or careless destruction but a commitment against the idea of society itself, that is, against what Foucault called the Conquest, the unspoken war that founded, and with the force of law, refounds society. Not asocial but against social, this is the commitment to war, and this is what disturbs and at the same time forms the Undercommons against the university.

The slogan on the Left, then, *universities, not jails*, marks a choice that may not be possible.

Is this not the way to understand incarceration in the United States today? And understanding it, can we not say that it is precisely the fear that the criminal will arise to challenge the negligent that leads to the need in the context of the American state and its particularly violent *Universitas* circle to concentrate always on Conquest denial?

The University Is the Site of the Social Reproduction of Conquest Denial

Here one comes face to face with the roots of professional and critical commitment to negligence, to the depths of the impulse to deny the thought of the internal outside among critical intellectuals, and the necessity for professionals to question without question. Whatever else they do, critical intellectuals who have found space in the university are always already performing the denial of the new society when they deny the Undercommons, when they find that space on the surface of the university, and when they join the Conquest denial by improving that space. Before they criticize the aesthetic and the Aesthetic, the state and the State, history and History, they have already practiced the operation of denying what makes these categories possible in the underlabor of their social being as critical academics.

The slogan on the Left, then, *universities, not jails*, marks a choice that may not be possible. In other words, perhaps more universities promote more jails. Perhaps it is necessary finally to see that the university contains incarceration as the product of its negligence. Perhaps there is another relation between the University and the Prison—beyond simple opposition or family resemblance—that the Undercommons reserves as the object and inhabitation of another abolitionism.

What might appear as the professionalization of the American university, our starting point, now might better be understood as a certain intensification of method in the *Universitas*, a tightening of the circle. Professionalization cannot take over the American university—it *is* the critical approach of the university, its *Universitas*. And indeed, it appears now that this state with its peculiar violent hegemony must deny what Foucault called in his 1975–76 lectures the race war.

War on the commitment to war breaks open the memory of the Conquest. The new American studies should do this, too, if it is to be not just a people's history of the same country but movement against the possibility of a country, or any other; not just property justly distributed on the border but property unknown. And there are other spaces situated between the *Universitas* and the Undercommons, spaces that are characterized precisely by not having space. Thus the fire aimed at black studies by everyone from William Bennett to Henry Louis Gates Jr., and the proliferation of Centers without affiliation to the memory of the Conquest, to its living guardianship, to the protection of its honor, to the nights of labor, in the Undercommons.

The university, then, is not the opposite of the prison, since they are both involved in their way with the reduction and command of the social individual. And indeed, under the circumstances, more universities and fewer prisons would, it has to be concluded, mean the memory of the war was being further lost, and living unconquered, conquered labor abandoned to its lowdown fate. Instead, the Undercommons takes the prison as a secret about the Conquest, but a secret, as Sara Ahmed says, whose growing secrecy is its power, its ability to keep a distance between it and its revelation, a secret that calls into being the prophetic, a secret held in common, organized as secret, calling into being the prophetic organization.

The Undercommons of the University Is a Nonplace of Abolition

Ruth Wilson Gilmore: "Racism is the state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature (social, civil and/or corporeal) death."[2] What is the difference between this and slavery? What is, so to speak, the object of abolition?

Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society. The object of abolition then would have a resemblance to communism that would be, to return to Spivak, uncanny.

The uncanny that disturbs the critical going on above it, the professional going on without it, the uncanny that one can sense in prophecy, the strangely known moment, the gathering content, of a cadence, and the uncanny that one can sense in cooperation, the secret once called solidarity. The uncanny feeling we are left with is that something else is there in the Undercommons. It is the prophetic organization that works for the red and black abolition!

Notes

This article is dedicated to our mentor, Martin L. Kilson.

1. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), 43.

2. Ruth W. Gilmore, "Profiling Alienated Labor" (Paper presented at the Mellon-Sawyer Seminar on Redress in Social Thought, Law and Literature, University of California Humanities Research Institute, Irvine, California, 24 February 2003).

from Burn This Book 2009

1

Peril

Toni Morrison

Authoritarian regimes, dictators, despots are often, but not always, fools. But none is foolish enough to give perceptive, dissident writers free range to publish their judgments or follow their creative instincts. They know they do so at their own peril. They are not stupid enough to abandon control (overt or insidious) over media. Their methods include surveillance, censorship, arrest, even slaughter of those writers informing and disturbing the public. Writers who are unsettling, calling into question, taking another, deeper look. Writers—journalists, essayists, bloggers, poets, playwrights—can disturb the social oppression that functions like a coma on the population, a coma despots call peace; and they stanch the blood flow of war that hawks and profiteers thrill to.

That is their peril.

Ours is of another sort.

How bleak, unlivable, insufferable existence becomes when we are deprived of artwork. That the life and work of writers facing peril must be protected is urgent, but along with that urgency we should remind ourselves that their absence, the choking off of a writer's work, its cruel amputation, is of equal peril to us. The rescue we extend to them is a generosity to ourselves.

We all know nations that can be identified by the flight of writers from their shores. These are regimes whose fear of unmonitored writing is justified because truth is trouble. It is trouble for the warmonger, the torturer, the corporate thief, the political hack, the corrupt justice system, and for a comatose public. Unpersecuted, unjailed, unharassed writers are trouble for the ignorant bully, the sly racist, and the predators feeding off the world's resources. The alarm, the disquiet, writers raise is instructive because it is open and vulnerable, because if unpoliced it is threatening. Therefore the historical suppression of writers is the earliest harbinger of the steady peeling away of additional rights and liberties that will follow. The history of persecuted writers is as long as the history of literature itself. And the efforts to censor, starve, regulate, and annihilate us are clear signs that something important has taken place. Cultural and political forces can sweep clean all but the "safe," all but state-approved art.

I have been told that there are two human responses to the perception of chaos: naming and violence. When the chaos is simply the unknown, the naming can be accomplished effortlessly—a new species, star, formula, equation, prognosis. There is also mapping, charting, or devising proper nouns for unnamed or stripped-of-names geography, landscape, or population. When chaos resists, either by reforming itself or by rebelling against imposed order, violence is understood to be the most frequent response and the most rational when confronting the unknown, the catastrophic, the wild, wanton, or incorrigible. Rational responses may be censure, incarceration in holding camps, prisons, or death, singly or in war. There is however a third response to chaos, which I have not heard about, which is stillness. Such stillness can be passivity and dumbfoundedness; it can be paralytic fear. But it can also be art. Those writers plying their craft near to or far from the throne of raw power, of military power, of empire building and countinghouses, writers who construct meaning in the face of chaos must be nurtured, protected. And it is right that such protection be initiated by other writers. And it is imperative not only to save the besieged writers but to save ourselves. The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists' questions challenging authority never being

posed, unstaged plays, canceled films—that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink.

Certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination.

A writer's life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity.

2

Why Write?

John Updike

My title offers me an opportunity to set a record of brevity at this Festival of Arts; for an adequate treatment would be made were I to ask, in turn, "Why not?" and sit down.

But instead I hope to explore, for not too many minutes, the question from the inside of a man who, rather mysteriously to himself, has earned a livelihood for close to twenty years by engaging in the rather selfish and gratuitous activity called "writing." I do *not* propose to examine the rather different question of what use is writing to the society that surrounds and, if he is fortunate, supports the writer. The ancients said the purpose of poetry, of writing, was to entertain and to instruct; Aristotle put forward the still fascinating notion that a dramatic action, however terrible

2012

More Light

Lawrence Ferlinghetti's wide-angle vision.

BY LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI

View slideshow

My former wife was the inspiration for *Against the Chalk Cliffs*. The cliffs are above the beach in Bolinas, California, where we used to hang out while still living in North Beach, San Francisco. The cliffs are not really chalk but I felt that "chalk" in the title gave a sense of fragility and vulnerability to the subject. I felt she was fragile. I painted it in my first San Francisco studio at 9 Mission Street and the Embarcadero (the Audiffred Building). I inherited the studio from Hassel Smith, the figurative painter who had turned to the non-objective. There were other painters of the San Francisco figurative movement on the same floor, including Frank Lobdell. It was a marvelous studio, a big third-floor loft looking out on the Bay. There was no heat except for a small pot-bellied stove, and there was no electricity above the ground floor. (Just like Paris—which I had just left.) The rent was $29 a month. There was an Alcoholics Anonymous "Seven Seas Club" on the second floor, and during the Great Waterfront Strike of the thirties labor leaders (Harry Lundgren or Harry Bridges) also had their offices there.

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"All I wanted to do was paint sunlight on the side of a house," said Edward Hopper (or words to that effect), and there have been legions of poets and filmmakers obsessed with light. I would side with the irrational visionary romantic who says light came first, and

darkness but a fleeting shadow to be swept away with more light. ("More light!" cried the great poet, dying.) Poets and painters are the natural bearers of it, and all I ever wanted to do was paint light on the walls of life.

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I never wanted to be a poet. It chose me, I didn't choose it. One becomes a poet almost against one's will, certainly against one's better judgment. I wanted to be a painter but from the age of ten onward these damn poems kept coming. Perhaps one of these days they will leave me alone and I can get back to painting.

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Door to the Sea, a very large painting, is loosely based on Willem de Kooning's *Door to the River*. It started out as a totally non-objective painting, but human figures crept in. Growing up in New York, I naturally identified with the New York Abstract Expressionists who were my contemporaries, and I originally tried to paint like de Kooning and Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell, but I really didn't have at all the same vision, since the human figure (man or woman) always seemed to surge forth. I expressed this conflict later in a painting called *Triumph of the New York School*, a large canvas with black linear forms superimposed upon humans. I make a distinction between "non-objective" and "abstract." A non-objective painting is not an "abstract" of an actual object or scene. It is a new creation, having no referent outside of itself. Thus "Abstract Expressionists" is a misnomer, but that is how they came to be known, due to a certain critic's sloppy semantics.

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The kind sun of Impressionism makes poems out of light and shade. The broken light of Abstract Expressionism makes poems out of chaos.

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Images appear and disappear in poetry and painting, out of a dark void and into it again, messengers of light and rain, raising their bright flickered lamps and vanishing in an instant. Yet they can be glimpsed long enough to save them as shadows on a wall in Plato's cave.

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The title *Manhattan Transit* is adapted from the John Dos Passos book. It too was painted at 9 Mission Street. In those days, before Gesso came on the market, painters sized their raw canvas with rabbit skin glue. I heated the pot of glue on the coal stove. This is one of three or four abstract paintings I did in the fifties, at a time when I really didn't know how to draw. It was an easy way out. (How many other aspiring painters did the same!)

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Through art, create order out of the chaos of living.

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The drawings in charcoal were based on one-minute poses by studio models, generally called "gestural drawings," and they were done in the eighties and nineties in my studio in the Hunters Point Shipyard, San Francisco. To the original drawing, in each case, I later added another face or body, in an attempt to give it a bit of ambiguity or mystery. Not that there isn't mystery enough in any nude body, male or female.

What is any particular body doing on earth anyway, and what is its mysterious existence? Besides that, there is what used to be called "the mystery of Woman," a romantic concept that endowed her with an illusive inscrutable allure, both sexual and spiritual. Then the feminist revolution brought Woman down from her pedestal. Yet the body itself remains the same.

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Have wide-angle vision, each look a world glance. Express the vast clarity of the outside world, the sun that sees us all, the moon that strews its shadows on us, quiet garden ponds, willows where the hidden thrush sings, dusk falling along the river run, and the great spaces that open out upon the sea...high tide and the heron's call....And the people, the people, yes, all around the earth, speaking Babel tongues. Give voice to them all.

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Oh Pocahontas, Pocahontas! is meant to express my compassion for this Native American maiden and all she suffered at the hands of white admirers and exploiters. This painting has nothing to do with historical accuracy. The images of Pocahontas in this painting are remembered pictures in a children's book I must have read when I was about ten. All these years I carried this little tableau around, ready to be flashed upon my brainpan whenever. Such still snapshots make up our memory and when cast upon a canvas years later come alive again with all their original intensity (if the painter is great enough to capture it).

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Lovers is another very large painting, of probably the most beautiful model we ever had in my studio, a very young woman with red hair, perhaps modeling for the first time. There was a freshness and purity about her. I later added the head of a bearded, slightly older man, perhaps imagining what was in her future.

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Poetry the shortest distance between two humans.

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Art is not Chance. Chance is not art, except by chance.

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The sunshine of poetry casts shadows. Paint them too.

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Paint like a fiend awake, obsessed. What is important in a painting is its fascinating, mysterious manifestations of life. So tell me what life is to you in your painting. Be an enthusiast. Get excited. Don't just sit there. Excite the imagination.

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This Is Not a Man is an obvious play on *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* in the painting by René Magritte. However, the painting has nothing to do with the French. The real story goes back to the forties when one of my brothers was the assistant warden at Sing Sing prison up the Hudson in New York. He had to witness all the executions in the horrible old wooden chair with its electric cables, thick leather straps for arms and legs, and a heavy hood for the head. It was a gruesome sight even with no man in it. After my brother died, among his papers was found a black-and-white photo of a man in the chair about to be fried. On the back of the photo, written in pencil, were the instructions to the executioner: "Attach electrodes to head and legs," etc. I silk-screened the photo onto a canvas and then painted on it. It was used in a worldwide anti-capital-punishment campaign and is still available for such use. But the barbarism continues. Onward Christian Soldiers! Kill or be killed! In two thousand and twelve years of Christianity we have managed to retain our most savage instincts.

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What I have in mind is art as the locus for fathoming man's fate.

"I have beaten out my exile" has always been one of my favorite quotes of EP—a final word on his long expatriation. So much living went into that one line of poetry! It is perhaps almost as strong a life-statement as Dante's "In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood." My abstract study of Pound's head is based upon a similarly abstract drawing by Gaudier-Brzeska on the cover of the New Directions edition of Pound's *Personæ*. Besides the original which I still possess, there are three copies, slightly smaller than the original—one at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, one at New Directions in New York, and one owned by Pound's daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz in northern Italy. I visited her almost ten years ago. Understandably she could have been upset by my raucous critique of Pound in *Americus: Book i*, but evidently she is pleased with my painted portrait. She is a valiant defender of her father, of course.

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The art has to make it on its own, without explanations, and it's the same for poetry. If the poem or the painting has to be explained, then it's a failure in communication.