

SOUP



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SOUP INTRO



All soups age gracefully; most taste better the second time around.
— Betty Wason, *The Soup to Desert High Fiber Cookbook*

Cold soup, cold soup clear and particular and a principal a principal question to put into.
— Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

EVERY MAGAZINE IS A HEAVY investment and risk, not only of time, money and energy, but also literary purpose. Editors who eclectically publish friends, strain to catch "big names," or randomly regurgitate "Whatever comes in" may be popular today but are ignored tomorrow. Serious writers soon dismiss them.

The first SOUP was intended as a mini-anthology, a cross-section of current work emphasizing new directions. It won approval. One consistent recommendation: SOUP should clarify its focus. Gradually I realized my main interest was toward "New Narrative" writing.

Since Bruce Boone's essay on the "Talks" issue of HILLS suggests some central objectives of this project—if only by way of comparison to certain other writers—I need add little by way of introduction. New Narrative is language conscious but arises out of specific social and political concerns of specific communities. It may be foregrounded as in the work of Luisah Teish, Shirley Garzotto, Robert Gluck and Judy Grahn or more buried as in recent work by Leslie Scalapino and Aaron Shurin. It stresses the enabling role of content in determining form rather than stressing form as independent or separate from its social origins and goals. Writing which makes political and emotional (as well as linguistic) connections interests me more than writing which does not.

At the same time it is too early to close dialogue on these matters. Ron Silliman's review offers a divergent viewpoint. Gil Ott, Bob Perelman and others til a middle ground. Unsolicited manuscripts have poured in. A few contained surprises that fit the focus of this issue. A few I liked well enough I didn't care if they fit. Variety is the spice of life. Soup too. A good cook, however, uses spices sparingly.

SOUP 3 will focus on translations. Submission deadline is Oct. 1, 1981. Contributors should enclose texts in original language as well as in translation; also a brief note on translator's theory and methodology.

— Steve Abbott

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Correction:

Memory Babe: A Critical Biography of Jack Kerouac referred to in intro of first SOUP was written solely by Gerald Nicosia. Frankie Edith Parker and some 300 other interviewees contributed information to it. Grove Press will publish it in one volume in 1981. special thanks to Sharon Skolnick (preliminary graphic design consultation), Renaissance Graphics, 5 Brosnan St., SF (typesetting), Ginny Lloyd (cover, graphic design, paste-up & rubberstamp art)



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Bruce Boone

LANGUAGE WRITING THE PLUSES & MINUSES OF THE NEW FORMALISM

IT'S NOT THAT THE CURRENT Language Writing movement doesn't succeed on its own terms. It excels on that terrain—abstraction, language experimentation and so on. But it isn't what you would call an *engaged* writing and as a movement it suffers from some serious defects for this reason. And for the same reason, it gives you the feeling of being rather distant from life. It's as if the genuine intelligence you feel there ends up eluding life, not participating in it or embracing it.

The most recent issue of *Hills* magazine (a double issue, 6/7; 36 Clyde St., SF, CA 94017; 217 pages, \$5) is a frustrating and dazzling example of this—intelligence of a high order, but misdirected. The *Hills* issue is given the title *Talks*, and the talks collected here—performances, lectures and informal chats—are the relatively un-edited transcriptions from Bob Perelman's local 'Talks Series,' begun in spring of 1977 and still continuing. It's a substantial and comprehensive offering by itself, but since only 11 of the 29 talks that were given are reproduced here, there probably will be more volumes of 'Talks' later. Those which are presented are diverse in viewpoint but characteristically abstract.

The first thing that should be said is that this abstraction is probably a good thing. The 'Talks Series' has been quite influential and stimulated theory discussion, where often anti-intellectualism has been the rule. The 'talks' reproduced aren't fussy either. There's one piece in the anthology that I positively dislike, by William Graves on Pope, but aside from that there aren't any that are 'academic' or frivolous.

They are serious attempts to develop a common writing project. Characteristically, it is true, they resort to technical ways of saying things and probably that is objectionable in a public format. The objections to 'obscurity' are more serious because I think they are really political ones—but I'll go more into this later. The implication of these charges is that there is too much elitism in these writings and that if the Language Writers want to be political, they should make their politics deal more with the actual world. It's not that you can't do theory, according to this way of thinking, but you have to make your theory have actual consequences. So what is the theory of the Language Writers? The virtue of publication of these *Hills Talks* is to explain that theory as comprehensively as possible.

It's quite interesting that Bill Berkson's talk starts things off, since Berkson hasn't particularly been known as a Language Poet. It gives you a sense that whatever this 'Language Writing' is, it isn't just confined to Language Writers. It's a general direction in writing. Right from the beginning in Berkson's talk what's noticeable is the keynoting of technical aspects in writing. Berkson stresses the idea of talking or talks as almost a new genre or at least

area of experimentation. He illustrates this rather provocatively with a commentary on a Frank O'Hara letter to him. This gets compared with the anecdotal pieces in O'Hara's poetry—poems like "Biotherm" and "Second Avenue"—as examples of 'talk' concerns. A discussion period follows this talk, as is usually the case with this series: Here the idea surfaces that 'you can talk about anything, everything is OK' and that O'Hara is the great example of this. Then there's a demur from Erica Hunt, who questions this as self-indulgence. Unfortunately this objection doesn't seem to get developed as far as it should. Can a person *always* 'say what they want, when they want to'? In other words, doesn't language have consequences (think of the recent controversies over racist and sexist films like *Windows*, *Charlie Chan* and *Cruising*)? What should have been happening in this discussion was more explicitness, more directness, about the consequences of these various points of view. One example of a movement towards this directness was a recent writing panel at 80 Langton St., where the problem of the social implications of role models came up—Erica Hunt speaking in favor of a normative approach and Kathy Acker taking an 'Autonomist'/anarchist position. It is this sort of discussion that should happen more often.

This reminds me of a moment in another discussion, the one after David Bromige's talk on "Intuition and Poetry". Bob Perelman raises an interesting question about consequences in language by



bringing up the limit case when writing has no social responsibility at all. He's speaking to the poet Michael Palmer:

Michael, I wanted to ask you: Are there examples of writers whose intentions are perfectly clear who you can still read? When you really dope out the intention does the writing cease to be interesting to you?

This isn't a dumb question, and there's a lot at stake. But somehow this question gets dealt with more and more abstractly as the discussion continues and other poets involve themselves. It gets to be technical. The question becomes whether a writing "intends" or not toward a person's own life. Well, of course it does! Only this way of phrasing things is just frighteningly selective because it remains so silent about the social origins and social goals of writing.

Yet it's interesting to me that it's Perelman—among the many poets there—who raises the question in the first place. He's the Language Writer that seems most intuitively aware of social dimensions in things (though Ron Silliman is in a more abstract way). And it's Perelman whose poetry I like the most. I think it's quite good. It's larger and more complex than most of this writing, tangibly sensitive, quite beautiful.

And actually this last quality troubles me. Beauty has become problematic, it's difficult to know how to behave in its presence. Reading Bob Perelman's work, his poetry at least, gives me satisfactions I can't express except in doubtful forms. "A sweet singer," "an inspired lyricist!"—in short, suspect exclamations of another era. I liked his earlier *Braille* (Ithica House, 1975) and the new *a.k.a.* (Tuumba Press, 1979) but mostly the *7 Works* (Figures, 1978). Something in this poetry is close to the life of things, not their explanations and to that extent, I think, something that doubts the language poetry program.

Still, Perelman, whether he "is" a Language Poet or "isn't" one, seems to be the one who comes closest to thinking about history as a problem in—and of—his poetry. I think his phrase "road tones" is something like a sense of purposefulness in things ("hodos" is road, so this is what "hodological space" really means in philosophy). In a poem of the same title he says of these "road tones":

*In the prime of their loveliness
they fall from the aether into
books. They are mistaken
for one's own hands, and are used
freely from one generation to the next.*

China

We live on the third world from the sun. Number three. Nobody tells us what to do.

The people who taught us to count were being very kind.

It's always time to leave.

If it rains, you either have your umbrella or you don't.

The wind blows your hat off.

The sun rises also.

I'd rather the stars didn't describe us to each other; I'd rather we do it for ourselves.

Run in front of your shadow.

A sister who points to the sky at least once a decade is a good sister.

The landscape is motorized.

The train takes you where it goes.

Bridges among water.

Folks straggling along vast stretches of concrete, heading into the plane.

Don't forget what your hat and shoes will look like when you are nowhere to be found.

Even the words floating in air make blue shadows.

If it tastes good we eat it.

The leaves are falling. Point things out.

Pick up the right things.

Hey guess what? What? I've learned how to talk. Great.

The person whose head was incomplete burst into tears.

As it fell, what could the doll do? Nothing.

Go to sleep.

You look great in shorts. And the flag looks great too.

Everyone enjoyed the explosions.

Time to wake up.

But better get used to dreams.

— Bob Perelman





These are new feelings in language formalism. When the poet Frank O'Hara tried out this position it became outright modernism and the "unrecapturable nostalgia for nostalgia" once evoked in the period of "In Memory of My Feelings." But I think Perelman is up to something a little different. O'Hara's fear was that modernism would lead to death, his hope was that it wouldn't. For Perelman on the other hand, it's as if modernism is *already* how you have things. So the only tack you take is to write about them as if they were all absent. And then—only then!—it all gushes back again, hot and heavy. You can have it all again, the heavy syrup, the songs, the love, all of it. Including Keats.

Of course in this stance there's something to make you a little giddy—and that is planned too. Ironic vertigo—a text/metatext operation liberally sprinkled with perfumes. But it's a spectacle or show, and you can't participate. Loving what he presents, Bob Perelman wants you to see it's factitious, or made-up, and that you shouldn't want it to be more than that. Accept it. Here's the little white lie he wants you to understand at the beginning of his prose piece called "Autobiography"—

Everyone keeps shouting in my ears. But rest assured, dear Papa, that these are my very own sentiments and have not been borrowed from any one.



They *have* of course. And that is the point. They're borrowed—from some mythical storehouse of language treasures of the past. The images, language fragments, feelings, structure, everything. That's why there's this sadness and humor, letters of a 'Persian' at a distance from his native clime. Sometimes the quoting is even official. If you open 7 *Works* to the first page you find out that "Vienna: A Correspondence" is taken "mostly from the letters of Mozart and his family." Bob Perelman does pastiche as well as anyone I know. That's what makes me uneasy—the meaning gets produced as, well, 'afterlife.'

And what about narrative in Perelman's writing? Here my uneasiness mounts by leaps and bounds. It's a "buried narrative" with quote marks around it, so you don't mistake it for human life. Not surprisingly, it's awfully funny and sardonic. If a little like Krazy Kat, this for instance—

I name the things after the words that sponsor them. He normally knew little of the depths below daily consciousness, except for what the shifting weights and tone of the immediate senses never fail to lay out over long periods drifting across the whole thing. I'm afraid I didn't catch... He fell off a log.

—there's also a directness like Marx parodying German philosophy with a feeling for home truths. "He fell off a log." Well, he *should* have, with all that philosophizing! In a.k.a., from which the above is taken, this crisis of representation—for that is what it really is—gets taken to extremes, and for the first time the actual magnitude of the disaster is glimpsed. It's global. There isn't an aspect of narrative that isn't entirely subverted, and story telling becomes a convertible function on the

capitalist model. So pronouns exchange for pronouns, tenses for tenses and so on. What's being said about narrative is this—things don't come from other things, they just follow them. You can tell your story beginning where you want. Now all this is very beautiful and very sad and more than a little true, I think. But it also misses some real basics in human life that everybody has. After all, we should sometimes be angry, eat and drink and take pleasure without a surfeit of thinking, and in the end face death without too much fear. And that is missing.

Yet I think Bob Perelman should take a great deal of credit for *knowing* it is missing and trying to do something about it—a position I don't find in other language poetry. Perelman for that reason remains the most intelligent writer among them. The rationale for his poetry occurs in a theoretical piece of his own included in the *Talks* anthology called "The First Person." Using the language of French structuralism Perelman's essay is an attempt to deal with both the social and the individual in life fully, to the neglect of neither. In technical terms this turns out to be the famous distinction of Ferdinand de Saussure's between *langue* and *parole*—language as an abstraction and real talking, or "language" and "speaking" as Perelman says. Like the structuralists before them many of the Language Writers are a bit suspicious of the *parole* side of things and seem to prefer the *langue* aspect. And this naturally means you will tend to be abstract—rather than concrete or historical. Perelman puts himself squarely on the fence in this debate. He wants to have both sides—in tension. In this sense he cites Creeley and Gertrude Stein as prototypes. He admires the way they give expression to these two aspects of language, creating antagonisms and then—hopeful antinomies. Pound and Olson he finds mostly problematical here (I never liked them much myself), and O'Hara seems to be mostly a success story. William Stafford (Perelman does an analysis of a tendentious poem of Stafford's called "Travelling Through the Dark") is the appropriate whipping-boy—a horrendous example of what goes wrong if the speaking side of language is emphasized to the exclusion of the abstract side. Academic illusionism is what happens when poetry's *artificial* nature isn't constantly apparent.

At the end of the essay Perelman makes the transition to his own writing. He wants a kind of tension between both these sides of language, playing off one pole against the other. But he remains doubtful it can really be done. Answering Barrett Watten in the discussion period after this talk he remarks—

What I was trying to do here, and it can't be done, is to identify—and any writer does this—is to identify with the language in your head, which you can't do, because it's not any identity.

Barrett Watten represents a more straightforwardly abstract pole of Language Writing, and his essay on "Russian Formalism & the Present" is probably the most informative of these talks in its historical dimension. Watten's intent is



The Further Adventures of &

COMICBOOK POEM
#16 BY STEVE
ABBOTT & TYPE-
WRITER &...



AND, WHAT
HAPPENED
NEXT?

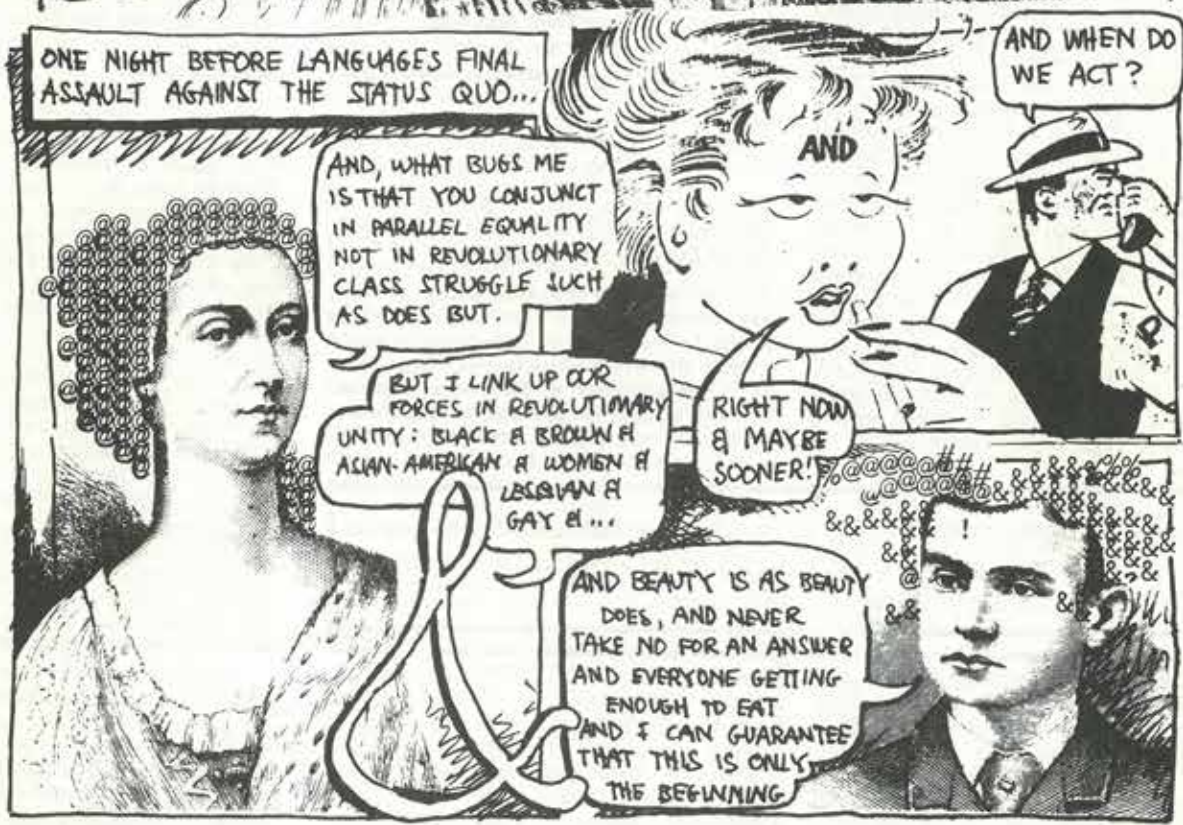
AND RAN.
AND RAN.

How FAR
DID AND
RUN?

PLUS OR
MINUS 50
PERCENT.

WHAT A
REVOLUTIONARY!

ONE NIGHT BEFORE LANGUAGE'S FINAL
ASSAULT AGAINST THE STATUS QUO...



AND WHEN DO
WE ACT?

AND, WHAT BUGS ME
IS THAT YOU CONJUNCT
IN PARALLEL EQUALITY
NOT IN REVOLUTIONARY
CLASS STRUGGLE SUCH
AS DOES BUT.

BUT I LINK UP OUR
FORCES IN REVOLUTIONARY
UNITY: BLACK & BROWN &
ASIAN-AMERICAN & WOMEN &
LESBIAN &
GAY &...

RIGHT NOW
& MAYBE
SOONER!

AND BEAUTY IS AS BEAUTY
DOES, AND NEVER
TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER
AND EVERYONE GETTING
ENOUGH TO EAT
AND I CAN GUARANTEE
THAT THIS IS ONLY
THE BEGINNING

to legitimize Language Poetry as an extension of Russian Formalism. From this perspective he lays out the Formalist project in some detail. Russian Formalism, he shows, was a program to deconstruct the illusionism of language at that historical stage, using a pedagogy of shock to disabuse people of the myths that words were "equal to" things, that language could ever "represent" reality, and that bourgeois ideals like the sense of self or identity could ever actually be found. The Formalists, Watten points out, wanted to show us how language as it exists is deformed and

commodified, how it suits the Capitalist system all too well. So far so good. Only what is Watten saying about our own era? Like a number of other historical answers it is akin to, Defamiliarization or "Ostranenie" was a call to see things as they are, rather than as they are named. In this it's related to Rimbaud's systematic disturbance of the senses, Blake's cleansing of the doors of perception, Brecht's Alienation. Words used in new ways can have a certain shock value, a negative charge to upset normal ways of "seeing" what we think we see.

And according to this line of thought, the program for defamiliarized language use becomes political to the extent that we then will no longer put up with mass social deceptions. Watten's example is the gas line crunch of 1973—how it points up the non-relation between the images we had for this experience and the crisis as it was actually lived. "We don't believe our senses," he asserts, "the level of automatism we have to deal with is of an order the Formalists would not have believed. The necessity for technique seems absolute in the face of this fact." An absolute

necessity for technique? To me this seems a dubious statement on several counts. Does it mean that taking state power should no longer be on anyone's agenda? That if we use words rightly society will change by itself? But most of all Watten's assertion seems idealistic, giving precedence to language over concrete action in constructing a new social reality.

And here Watten goes on to make a parallel that seems even more misguided. "The Russian Revolution," he says, "was a period of total re-organization, so that anything one did was a political act in itself. That's close to the design potential of the self-evident word. There is a near identity between Russian modernism as the most extreme and typical case of modernism and the invention of the Russian modernist state."

One ought to be pardoned at this point for drawing in the breath and doing some serious thinking about this. Hard questions are in order. Is Watten suggesting that Russian Formalism helped to bring about the October Revolution? If so—how? And how close is the parallel between the Russian society of that time and our own U.S. society? Even in *that* society, was it Vertov's filmic atomism that stirred people to action—or Lenin's old-fashioned prose? So what's helpful—Montage or narration? And what about the experience of most of the left-sectarian political parties both here and in the other developed countries of the West? Should their strong historical distaste for most forms of modernism be written off without comment? The upshot of all this, to my way of thinking, is that the once acclaimed linking of modernist cultural forms with leftism now appears as a historical vestige instead of a current solution to problems in the United States. It's not an answer but a turning back of the clock. Theoretical people, in my view, should be looking toward what is actually happening here in our own time—developments like Black writing, women's writing and various kinds of movement writing for example.

The once acclaimed linking of modernist cultural forms with leftism now appears as a historical vestige instead of a current solution to problems in the United States.

But if Watten is the historical scholar of the group of Language Poets, it is Ron Silliman who is its creative theorist. That at least is what one feels on comparing Watten's piece with Silliman's essay in the *Talks* anthology. Silliman is as scholarly as Watten, but he pushes things to a practical edge in a way that Watten doesn't. His theory seems more closely aligned with current practice and so more creative. To be sure, he is generalizing about what might be called the 'hard-core' Language Writers—poets like himself, Barrett Watten, Kit Robinson, Bruce Andrews and, I think, Clark Coolidge. But in the most basic sense it is a theory about his own recent work, *Sitting Up* (Tuumba, 1978), *Ketjak* (This, 1978) and *Tjanting* (forthcoming)—why he writes the way he does. An apology or explanation.

I haven't particularly cared for this practice, but it's only fair to say something

about it before going on to the theory, which I often like. Silliman's is a poetry that is a meditative empiricism like this O'Hara-esque ("Second Avenue") segment from *Sitting Up*:

Color films of dead people. Burned out buses among backlot dillweed, Military Ocean Terminal. Deer fetus wine of China. Pigeons in the eaves of a Queen Anne's Tower. All tones of identical length.

as well as a dreamy generation of minimal units like this from *Ketjak*—

Revolving door. How will I know when I make a mistake. The garbage barge at the bridge. The throb in the wrist. Earth science. Their first goal was to separate the worker from the means of production.

Other poet critics have drawn attention to specifically language-oriented aspects of this poetry (and in *Language #8* Steve Benson reviews Silliman's reading of all of *Ketjak* at the Powell St. turnaround last year) usually pointing out its structure of agglomeration—12 paragraphs growing from two words ("Revolving door") to a paragraph chapter almost 46 pages long, repeating or rephrasing old material and adding new. Some of this is educational in intent, I think ("Their first goal . . ." etc. is a political statement in addition to anything else it is), and with Silliman's work more generally it is a didactic side of things that can hardly be underestimated. He illustrates his intentions when he cites this line from *Tjanting* in his *Talks* piece—

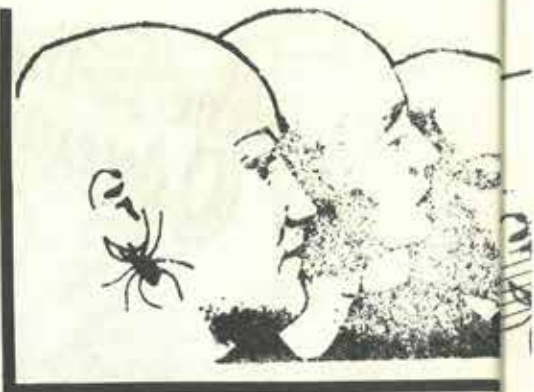
Someone called Douglas. Someone called Douglas over. He was killed by someone called Douglas over in Oakland.

—to show "how meaning shifts as units are integrated into successively higher levels." There's little left to guesswork though there is a tilt in favor of sound.

This approach strikes me as abstract. I'm not altogether gratified by poetry that is openly educational toward me without consulting me first. And what about the

human dimension? I don't think teaching people a hypothesis is a good enough reason to write poetry—unless it gives everyone a significant increment of pleasure. Otherwise what you have is studies—'études.' But pleasure comes in stirring up emotions, somehow or other telling a story. That, it seems to me, is what the best women's poetry does now. Judy Grahn, or Tillie Olsen in prose. Here language isn't illusionistic but it does speak about the world, politically, and gives us pleasure in the process.

Yet there are people who like Silliman's poetry. In another place in the *Talks* (the discussion after the Bill Berkson talk), Silliman notes in passing that he doesn't write poems. "Maybe I write poetry," he says to explain an earlier matter, "but I don't write poems." This reminds me of a sense of scale in Silliman's work that I think has to rephrase the question of



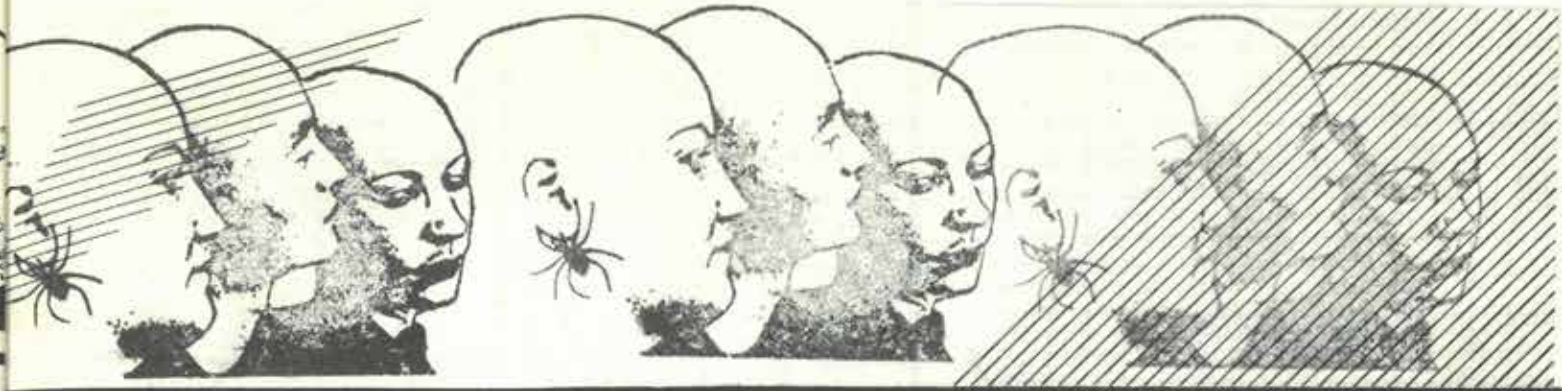
pleasure. Scale in Ron Silliman is sometimes positively Russian, reminiscent of the block-wide-and-long epics of Mayakovsky. Or it's American in its aspirations to sheer largeness, a scope that whether you like their poetry or not, speaks in Whitman, Sandberg and William Carlos Williams. What's to say about this? I mention it for the sake of fairness. You have to read Silliman's poetry at some length, but there is a kind of pay-off—a build-up of sound and image, a sense of rhythmic complexity that is luxuriant, fascinating and undeniable, the pleasures of scale. As I say, I don't care for it, but read for yourselves and see.

I have fewer reservations and am more attracted to Silliman's critical writing—though this isn't to say I have none. In the first issue of *Renegade* magazine, Ron Silliman talks about the kinship of Walter Benjamin and French structuralism. I'm not sure as I go along with this but I think I see what he's talking about. I do have one big objection. I don't think Benjamin's Zionism is anything other than absolutely constitutive of his thought—and that brings in political and mystical considerations that make it awfully difficult to see him as a sort of 'proto-structuralist.' But be that as it may, Ron Silliman is a terrific prose critic, and his "Benjamin Obscura" positively bristles with intellectual and political energy of a very high order. Where the run of the mill journal criticism of Language Writers is often guilty of incredible excesses of self-indulgence and a paucity of intellectual themes, Silliman really has something to say. He has actual *content*. And this should make you want to read him.

Silliman's essay "The New Sentence," while technical, is probably the most rewarding piece in the *Talks* anthology. If you want a definitive explanation of what Language Writing in its hard-core aspects is all about, read this. It sums up the purest elements of the Language movement of the late '70s.

Beginning with a fascinating summary of past theory on the sentence, Silliman's essay begins its provocations. All of theory to date, it turns out, has been simply an *evasion* of theory, and this comes in large part from Saussure's paying more attention to the systematic features of language than the actual talking aspect of it. These are of course the same coupled concepts we met with earlier in Bob Perelman. Only instead of being called *langue* and *parole* or language and speaking, they will now be called "the paradigmatic" and the "syntagmatic." Silliman cites

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Roland Barthes and tells us that:

History has seen the movement from a syntagmatic focus to a paradigmatic one, and . . . a break has occurred at a point when some critical mass—not specifically identified by Barthes—renders it impossible for units to continue to integrate beyond grammatical levels, e.g., the sentence.

In other words the whole process of *making connections* in language has become characteristically difficult, problematic, in modern times. Silliman doesn't disagree. But he wants us to realize though that this specific inability to make connections is characteristic of modernist and experimental writing, it isn't very applicable to popular writing where narrative is the strong feature. And so it happens, says Silliman, that the poles of paradigm and syntagm "have become more and more identified with the limits, respectively, of high and low art." This means that popular or low art, so-called, by continuing to emphasize connections, gets to be an art of narrating, or telling stories. High art, on the other hand, or what we call modernism or experimental writing, objects to the illusion features often associated with narration and attempts to take narrative apart, or 'deconstruct' it. What is left is called a 'text'—and doesn't any longer refer to anything outside itself. Thus you have, so to speak, best sellers on one side and experimental modernism on the other. The *Thorn Birds* vs. *Tender Buttons*.

This is a very interesting and intelligent argument, I think, but there are some substantial objections to it. I will get to them in a moment. In the meantime I want to ask if we should continue to assume that modernism has been entirely progressive in a *political* sense? Barrett Watten's earlier argument as well as Ron Silliman's present essay implies that the question needn't be raised, because it is obvious that modernism has always been a Left-oriented phenomenon. But that's not accurate, as a little reflection will show. It's certainly true of Surrealism and Russian Formalism, or is for the most part anyway. And in this country too there have been individual modernists we can be proud of for their sense of political responsibility—one would name Zukofsky or George Oppen. But far too often modernism has taken a more sinister direction—and there is evidence that this is at least equally a tendency. In France, one of the greatest, Celine, was an outright fascist. And by the '30s many of the ex-Surrealists had become extremely questionable in their attitudes toward nationalism and Catholicism, including Reverdy, one of the best. In England there's the rather irritating example of Wyndham Lewis, the leading modernist writer there. There's Pound's Jew-baiting and fascism and you can look at Eliot's record. One could certainly recite the names of modernists who did better by their consciences, perhaps make a case that they were more 'purely' or essentially modernist. Matters get terribly complex here. But you can't

just assume that modernism equals progressivism.

And as for popular art. Well, there are schlock best-sellers to be sure. There are movies, comics and other commodity mass-artifacts. But there's also popular *literature*. It is popular and it is narrative, and there's a tradition of it. Steinbeck's stories champion rural working people in the time of the Great Depression. Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* is a literary classic, and it's both funny and idiomatic. Upton Sinclair was as good a muckraker as he was a melodramatic story teller, and Jack London was a fairly good Socialist Realist even before there were Commissars. And so on. But the point is, there does exist another, and non-modernist, tradition. And it's important that it's there because it sets a narrative precedent to think about. It's worth considering because it had a mass base and was politically progressive. It is a counter-tendency to the modernism of that era and can be learned from.

And the present? Where are the descendants of modernism on the one hand and popular narrativity on the other? The *Talks* anthology gives us some answers to these questions. The points of view represented differ, sometimes significantly, and there are greater and lesser degrees of a language orientation here. But the net impression the volume gives you is this—in our time it is the Language Writing movement that is carrying out the modernist program, in some ways more radically than Stein herself.

Once again Ron Silliman suggests why in a remarkable discussion of Gertrude Stein and the French prose-poem tradition. In Silliman's reading Stein carries on the tradition and develops it further, yet finds herself stymied at a certain level and unable to proceed beyond. Setting herself a minimalist program she takes the analysis of larger units down to the paragraph but no further. It is the paragraph rather than the sentence that is the minimal writing unit for Stein because Stein correctly perceived that without an organization of writing around paragraphs you have no emotion, no intentionality, because paragraphs, not sentences, are the literary equivalent of speech situations. Thus Stein never achieved a writing based on sentences since she was in at least partial complicity with the referential world. Here the implications of Silliman's analysis have become clear. He is advising a clean break with that world, the world of meaning, the world of emotion, the world of cause and



effect. In short, with everything but the world of language considered formally.

This, I think, is the cause of much of the antagonism toward Language Writing on the part of many other groups in the writing community. Let me put this quite plainly. If you take away people's emotions, their ability to tell stories and their capability to deal generally with the outside world, you are really not going to have much of an appeal to several significant groups. Blacks, Latins and other racial minorities for instance. Most feminists and politically oriented gay men for instance. And in all likelihood political people generally.

Probably this is self-evident but it has become an issue in the writing community recently. There have been a number of letters to *Poetry Flash* regarding this issue and the outcry over the glaring underrepresentation of women and minorities in the latest distribution of NEA grants has certainly increased the feeling that formalism is a *political* issue. An insistence on meaning, on the other hand, is often seen as linked to demands for social change.

In a poem titled "Response to L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E" Karen Brodine has put it this way—

*It's true I want things to mean
it's true I mean things
to change. If a driving force, a pressure
in your life, then write about that you must.
directly, urgently. before too late.*

Some Language Writers are aware, often acutely aware of these objections. Rae Armantrout tries to deal with some of these objections in the first issue of L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E magazine in "Why Don't Women Do Language-Oriented Writing?": "Women need to describe the condition of their lives," she asserts, adding that "this entails representation." But this is true, I believe, of other groups as well. It seems quite unlikely, for instance, that a person could deal adequately with racism, or oppressions based on class or the realities of prison life, say, in a formalist language. According to its program anyway, a Language Writing refers to itself rather than the world.

I'm not sure whether I see signs of change in all this or not. I would certainly like to, since I consider Language Poetry one of the significant developments of our time. So much real thought has gone into it, so much concern and insight into the commodified conditions of language in our everyday life. Some of it is even poetry I like a great deal—Bob Perelman's. And Silliman's prose critical pieces would be hard to match for intelligence and a sense of commitment to social change. But still, I need something more than this. I need a literature that will help bring on social change.

One last note. And it is indicative, I am afraid, that none of the three I'll mention is really central to Language Writing, and that this may well have something to do with gender, sexual orientation, race or all three. I want to say Fanny Howe's piece strikes a positive note with me. It's called "Justice" and speaks a language whose content, referential often enough, seems more open to the world—

wound the girl, cur
mug evict her
bare arms mere blood

an' rip at 'em, frenzy
our commerce, trade
bear arms over goods.

Kerr-McGee Victor
Enola
Karen Gay Silkwood

my children diminish and live less
slough of me gone on, I love
other pain, carry the word pain
fuse blood part on blood
loss factored in particles inhaled
admit soil to muddy mens

children slight clear threat from heaven
sever my hands for them, cut my hair
the possibility of future indicting pages
rotting as written, skin dictates
generation turns on the insistent
document reverse the charge, turn

cur on cur kill distant from the deed
profit best in death, behest
restless assassins wait among stores, in air
to increase coffers, coin pellets, quash
resisting cells personnel poisoned fear
not for jobs but lives. time

half lives terms of agreement trace
neutron web in rock pattern deformity
rods tick near critical mass, matter
other eras coded flesh infested
through burst sun infix pits balance
against structure, pierce tough black membrane

stunned, stone immobile as mist quits.
What gray agent will carry this grain,
engraved in air, whose heavy seed
furrows thought and roots among deceits?
And what gray fruit, what nourishment,
can grow from thorns and knots?

ring breaks, yet life's annular and I
in pell and scripted air continue
dwelling, have no understanding, watch
for what can not be seen, make
no parables,
alone.

— *gil ott*, 1979

That the governing tongue should be honest, like no private property, the way Marx summed it up.

This language may be Catholic mystical in its forms but it's progressive in its content. One thinks of Archbishop Romero's forthright stands before his assassination. The writing gets too theoretical sometimes, but there's always something to think about.

And I'd like to mention Erica Hunt. Hunt doesn't have a piece of her own in these *Talks* but distinguishes herself when she does speak—in the discussions and occasional remarks—for her intelligence, good sense and ability to take a dissenting position when that is called for.

Last, a word about what may be the most *curious* piece in this *Talks* anthology—Steve Benson's strange performance called "Views of Communist China." For his performance Steve Benson recreated his own apartment temporarily in another poet's flat, moving in furnishings, decorations and so on. At some point he says

he considered himself a tour guide for the audience. Excerpts from a book on the People's Republic are read by Benson and Bob Perelman. Then a lengthy discussion ensues until the performance closes with a quoted dialogic interchange, apparently from the same book. In the course of his performance Benson discloses truly intimate feelings with what appears to me as a sometimes alarming openness. And perhaps inevitably, another poet present for the discussion takes advantage of this vulnerability. At this point the discussion is not at all edifying. It seems cruel on the second poet's part and even has overtones of homophobia. But I have a second reservation about the piece. How can a subject as serious as "Communist China" be treated like a fantasy? For much of the piece the subject seems to be dealt with so figuratively that it seems lacking in respect for the real China of more than 500,000,000 real people—with a history that ought to elicit that consideration

more readily than seems the case here. The tone seems to imply once more that Language Writing refers to itself, not the world. Yet at some point in this piece one realizes there is an equation being set up between, oddly, what Communist China *is* and what one *feels*. The performance ends with Bob Perelman taking up the book to read a long narrative passage about visiting the apartment of an older Party militant. Perelman and Benson take, respectively, the voices of the narrator-interviewer and a young girl.

Perelman: What do you want to do as an adult?

(pause)

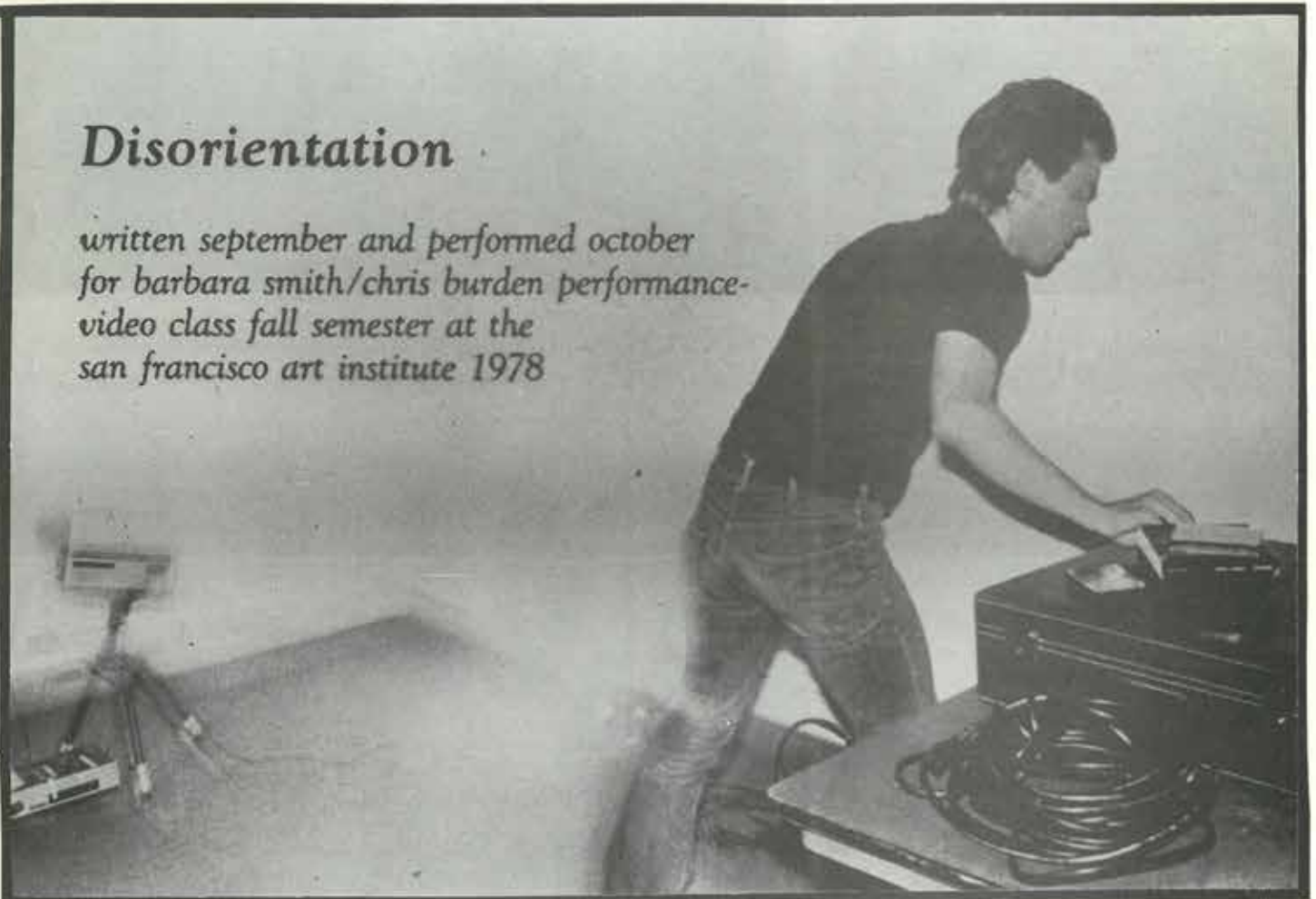
Benson: Whatever the Party needs, I will become.

Perelman: She stopped for a moment and stood motionless, and then, a radiant smile of beautiful straight white teeth.

Well, I like the gay aspects of this scene. But it makes an odd ending.

Disorientation

*written september and performed october
for barbara smith/chris burden performance-
video class fall semester at the
san francisco art institute 1978*



Richard Irwin
photos by Jack Gray

activity—

begin chinese music
begin videotape

advance to left wall



turn on spotlight
 producing live video image on monitor #2 of
 text which I scan as
 I am intermittedly playing japanese rock music from
 taperecorder around my neck
 I stop monitor #2 image on the world "wall"
 and go directly to wall behind monitor area
 with japanese music blaring now I turn on second spot
 lighting this wall area

 with japanese music blaring now I turn on second spot
 lighting this wall area
 and spraypaint in black letters
 "AN ARMY WITHOUT CULTURE IS A DULLWITTED
 ARMY AND CANNOT DEFEAT THE ENEMY"
 turn off power of all media in reverse of beginning order
 end.



text (as it appears on wall to be scanned by videocam.
 from left to right and bottom to top ending on the word
 "wall"—

GREAT	WALL
VISUAL	CLICHE
DEEP	SPACE
SIGN	LANGUAGE
ART	GOODS
BUDDAH	HOOD
RED	SQUARE
CHINA	TOWN

note—

1. prerecorded videotape depicts my walk thru chinatown along grant street.
2. chinese music is titled "THE PEOPLE ARE JUBILANT AFTER OVERTHROWING THE "GANG OF FOUR"; an example of chinese reactionary propaganda.
3. japanese music titled "SADISTIC MICA" featuring the Sadistic Mica Band, a japanese rock & roll group.

ACIEMEY
All working
out culture is
tull-witted army
and cannot



d
L
E
E
E
S
D
E
N

an army
out culture is
tull-witted army
and cannot defeat
the enemy... -



OLE BLACK EME L D A

FOLKS WENT TO BED ONE NIGHT and when they woke up the next mornin', this strange woman, Emelda, had moved into Mabel Green's old shotgun house. She was so black that in the light of day, neighbor-women, peepin' from behind their Sears & Roebuck curtains, could see the blue highlights of her skin. Under moonlight she looked purple. Her thick lips, stained in the center by scarlet alcohol burns, was movin', mumblin 'bout heaven knows what. People would point and identify her as a "Singalee" from Africa 'cause the heel of her foot seemed as long as the foot itself. She had several multi-colored children; and in spite of her pregnant belly, no one never saw nor heard a man in her house. She was branded evil 'cause she sweat on her nose.

Nobody knew where she come from, but she was steadily goin' down the road a piece to visit with that yallar gal, Desiree Rousell. A comely yallar woman; folks figured she was stuck-up 'cause she put a crude wooden fence 'round her three room house and kept her children behind it' lettin' them out only to go to school. And like a lot of the poor mixed-breed Negroes one could find sprinkled 'long the Bayou country, she didn't go to nobody's church; but could be caught, some berry-pickin' mornins, standin' in the woods talking to a tree. Some folks say she was a Hoodoo woman, others said it was the Indian blood that possess her to talk to sky and trees. Anyways, the good Christian men of Cut-Off Luzanna forbid their wives to have any dealings with her.

One mornin', 'bout dawn, just 'fore he went to work on the pipeline with the other men, Jed Mason took a mind to beat his wife, Cora Sue. It was a common thing in this neck of the woods, where men who worked from sunrise to 'way past sunset, suspected their women of messin' with pissy-tailed boys while they were away. Truth of it was: between the children and the landryn, nobody had no time to be messin'. But Cora Sue was pretty and preferred to tend her okra garden, aided, sometimes, by Jo Willie Bland's boy, Pete. So nobody even twitched an eyelid that mornin' as Cora Sue come runnin' down the mud road, sceaming for dear life. Ole Lottie Price saw Cora Sue jump over Desiree's fence, clutchin' her only son in her arms.

Jed come after her, pantin' and grittin' his teeth. But this time he stopped dead in his tracks. Desiree come to the front yard with a warnin'. "You git on 'way from here, Mr. Mason." Jed Mason realized where he was. "Meanin' no disrespect, Miz Rousell, but this here is a family matter. He moved to open the gate. Desiree stepped back. "I say there ain't goin' be no beatin' here, Mr. Mason." The thick of Jed's neck got thicker and he busted out, "How you gon' stop me? . . . That's my wife!" Desiree reached behind her porch rail and aimed her shotgun barrel at his heart. "And it's my property you standin' on, if I kill you on it, law won't hold me to blame." Emelda come walkin' to the front and picked Cora Sue up off the ground. Now all the neighbors come out to look, mumblin' 'bout the

crazy Creole lady and how she turn Big Jed Mason 'round. Cora Sue took to havin' coffee with her and old black Emelda after that and Jed lost his taste for beatin' his wife.

Summer rolled lazily down the muddy Mississippi. Funeral parlor fans and iced-tea fought the Bayou heat and mosquitos while Desiree and Cora mopped pipin' hot sauce on bar-b-que meat and Emelda moaned of her condition to a bowl of yellow potato salad. It was always quiet in summer, when everybody was too hot to bother 'bout other people's business. So without warnin' humid summer days drifted into breezy autumn evenin's.

One evenin' Desiree went off somewhere, leavin' her children in the house alone. Now some folks say she left one of them candles burnin' and the devil tipped it over, others say her oldest daughter had took to smokin'. But, some mysterious how that yallar woman's house caught fire! First a thin stream of smoke gotta botherin' Miz Adams' chickens; then old man Carter's dogs commence to howlin'; after while every house in runnin' distance knew Desiree Rousell had caught a blaze.

A crowd of women gathered. Ole black Emelda, heavy-pregnant now, was just returnin' from work that evenin'. With the stench of shrimp all over her she pushed her way through the cluster of gapin' women and ran into the burnin' house. She came out and laid four screamin' children beyond the fence. "Don't just stand there, you dumb heifers!" she shouted at the petrified women, then disappeared into the flames.

Miz Anderson ran to the market to call the fire station . . . two towns away. After nine rings the chief answered tellin' her his men wasn't comin' way out there to water nigger's house! She almost cussed him, but remembered who and what she was and hung up instead.

Now ole black Emelda salvaged some food and clothes, but when she headed for the door her skirt tail swished and caught fire. Lottie Price wrapped her shawl 'round her arm and reached for Emelda, while Cora Sue hacked away at one burnin' wall. Suddenly young women was runnin' for their hoses, old women come with shovels and buckets and neighbor-girls tended the cryin' children. Emelda looked 'round her, wiped the sweat from her nose and fainted in Lottie Price's arms.

That night when Desiree Rousell come home, she found a one room boarded-up shanty, no bigger than a chicken coup, stocked with food. Her children were tucked asleep in one corner of the room. Miz Bishop's oldest girl, Mary Lou, was there with them and she told Miz Rousell to go on up to the house to have coffee with her moma and the other women tendin' to ole black Emelda.



Luisah Teish

Hey Muse

Come out of your forest
or your castle
or wherever you've been hanging out,
I have a business proposition.

I understand that Braughtigan and Mr. D.
have been making it with you
for some time now.
How about doing as much for me?
My sheets are *at least* as good as theirs
and they're definite cleaner.

It's a down
living a steadfast, organized
and uninspired life while M.R.
(did you hear about the Midnight Rambler?
everybody wants him on their talk show)
can sell his "Confessions" to Random House
and get Paramount to buy the movie rights
for a book dictated to his ghost.
Do you realize
I'm still being rejected by the Quarterlies?
It's very discouraging.

Jack's still collecting royalties
from that yarn about the beanstalk
you gave him. I've got this mustard seed
(some sparrow, drunk on chinaberries,
keeps falling off the limb above my roof
trying to steal it from me.
nevertheless, I've got this mustard seed)
How about leaving a surprise
outside my bedroom window some morning?
Think about it.
I'll put in a good word for you
somewhere in a poem.
Okay?



Dedicated to Eddy Haskell

Like sheep, we are inoculated, groomed
for schooling, labeled like canned food and trained
to fill in blanks, to stand in line, to count,
become one with our names, and to assume
that if we are successful, though we fail
to catch a five pound bass of happiness,
somewhere we'll learn the turns of a French kiss,
menage a trois and still stay out of jail.

The lies that silent implications tell!
The teachers and grey faces on tv
allow the poor and naive to behold
vast worlds which never were, which many sell.

Our lives go through a vicious loop-the-loop
to move into an ad for Campbell's soup.

To a Composer of Hip Necklaces

Glass, wood, ivory, bone and plastic
snap their fingers to the jazz of immigrant cities.

Silver cries on the old highways of air.
Who lends an ear?

What hybrid will nestle this confusion
of teeth and Buddhist prayers and splintered customs,

these dreams and real live corpses
with ideals in their eyes?

What audience will animate this myth
and hear your ring-game's singing?

— James Arnold



the middle ages

the air was a lot duller then, it was
harder to concentrate. that's why they
made such big mistakes. the ones
who could write used fancy letters trying
to pierce the gloom but the colors
faded quickly. those castles they lived in
were never new. it was always cold.
their feet were clammy inside their armor
and the food was greasy.
they could never wake up.

poem

at a street fair i look up. above the food tents
i see a window marked "gallery" w a man
seated on the sill, looking down,
and behind him two men talking,
high ceilings, a room full of blue shadows & light.
i'm on the bus when it stops in front of a motel,
where, from an upper window, a kid leans out
and throws his net briefly into the street: his mouth,
bare arms, eyes hard w hope.
walking down melrose i look up again.
a guy waits over the sidewalk, calm
as a cloud in the windless
upper portion of the sky. he watches my face
to see if i'm light enough to take up.
i stare into the room of sunlight behind him
and remember a piece of pornography, "the light
from the second story window,"
a movie i've never seen but whose title
waits to find soil in me so it can bear
everything i've ever wanted.

— peter cashorali

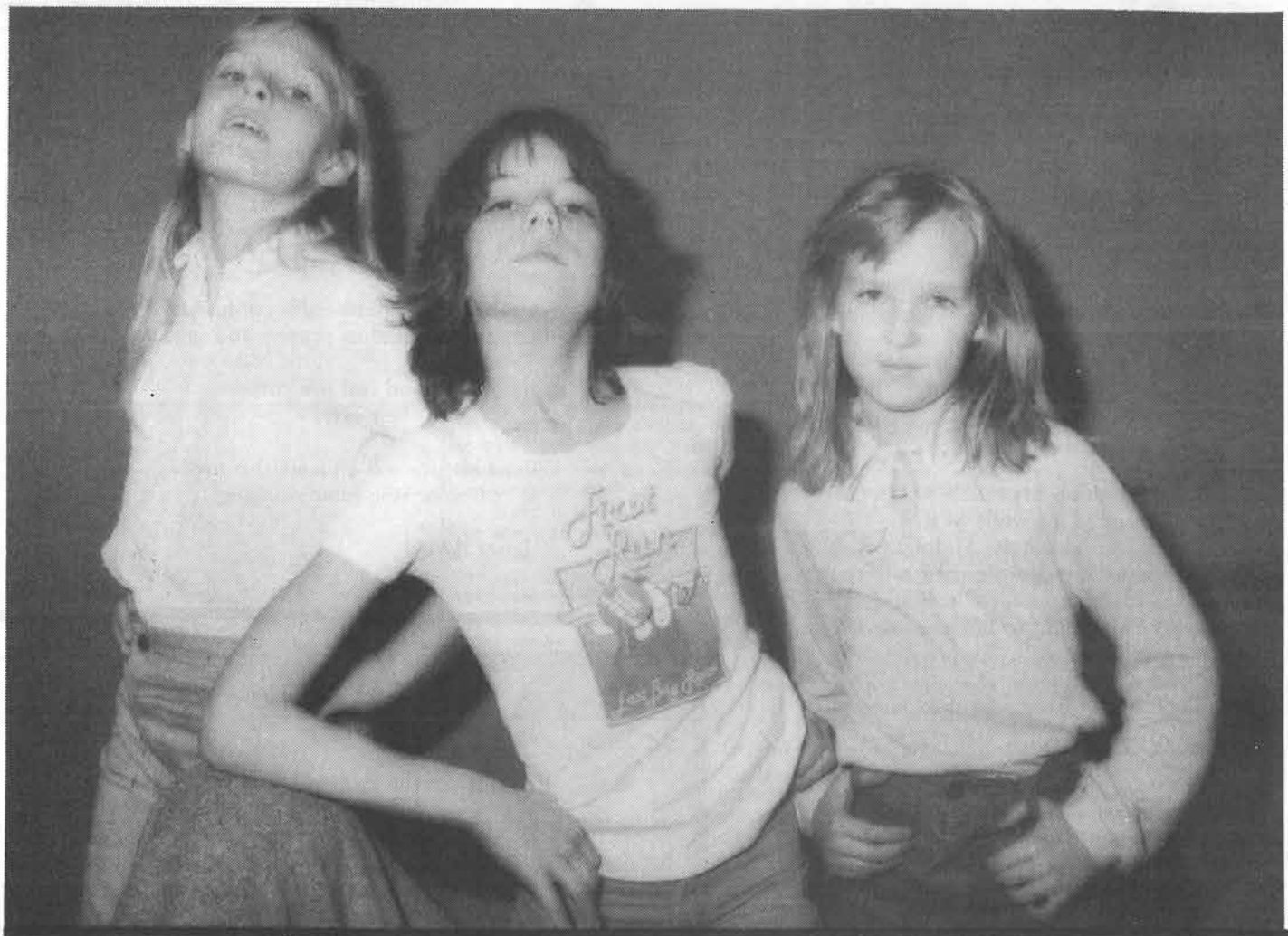


photo © Bill Sigfried

Sara Lee Woods, Picture Tube (under blanket), Sylvan Woods, Twinkie

Sylvan Woods: vocals, synthesizer
Sara Lee Woods: guitar, electronic percussion
Picture Tube: vocals, keyboard, synthesizer
Twinkie: vocals, visual accompaniment

SOUP: In just one year you've become one of the hottest and *youngest* underground bands in SF. What are your ages & how'd you get started?

SYLVAN: I'm 12 goin' on 13. Pic & Sara are 11 & Twinkie's 10. We just dig music, see. Dad teaches music at UC Berkeley and my older brother had a band so I figured why not us. I mean, if your arm's ivy whadaya gonna do, let it fall off?

SOUP: What was your brother's band?

SYLVAN: It was too awful. You wouldn't wanna know.

SOUP: How did you choose the name Toxic Shlock?

TWINKIE: Here we go again!

PIC: Sylph saw this show on tv about tampons, how they kills ya or makes your fingers drop off or whatever. So we decided to wake folks up about that but when Twinkie made the poster he spelled shock wrong. Then somebody told us shlock was a word too, means like "yukky," so we figured why not stay with it.

SOUP: How is it some of your lyrics are so mature & sophisticated for kids your age,

some phrases in foreign languages, even, whereas other of your lyrics just repeat one phrase?

TWINKIE: Wouldn't you like to know!

SARA: Hey, that's neat: Wouldn't you like to know! Wouldn't ya like to know!

SYLVAN: We mostly watch tv but our parents are all teachers & stuff so there's a lot of books around. So sometimes when we're stoned we just pick 'em up & copy stuff out like "Tomorrow my emotions intercept what you wanted me not to know." Poetry's real good for that weird stuff. Old novels too. I was in a French school for awhile & they made us memorize all this poetry & I never knew what it meant but it did have a feeling—like the sounds, ya know, or maybe how I was feeling then I don't know. If it's there why not put it in? But other songs like "Fight Back" —well, that already means so much that to say anything else would spoil it.

TWINKIE: Help! I'm imprisoned in a rib cage!

SYLVAN: Twinkie's great on one liners.

SOUP: Rumor has it that your new hit single, "Burning To Speak," was written about John Lennon.

SYLVAN: When I heard Lennon died, I called Twinkie who was playing Scrabble & had just laid down the word "doom." Well, doom spelled backwards is mood, right? Later I picked up a book on palindromes & found "May a moody baby doom a yam." So that's

where that comes from. But the song's also about a fight I had with my boyfriend.

SOUP: Would you say there's an overall concept or philosophy motivating your work?

SYLVAN: Huh?

SOUP: Is there one basic idea behind your music?

SYLVAN: Communication. And translation! I mean nobody understands anything anyway but we all want to communicate right? So in music we try to translate what we feel. Like if I had a fantasy to be crushed by a giant ice-cream cone I wouldn't know what to call it so I'd have to call it wanting simplicity or something like that.

TWINKIE: Or "Ya can't walk down the halls without a pass."

SYLVAN: Ya. I mean if bronze buddhist statues talked or wrote songs maybe you'd find it more amusing, emotional, breezy.

PIC: Kids are people too. That's all we're saying. Who wants to grow up to be like the evening news. We're tired of you screwing up the world for us.

SOUP: Who are some of your favorite poets & musicians?

SYLVAN: I think we've said enough. This is too boring. If you want a longer interview next time send a kid.

Burning to Speak

A tension in the woods. The rest
we have forgotten.

Today is not so ~~easy~~ ^{easy} as fall-
ing into it.

Bullets felled my better donkey target.
Dust to dust.

May a moody baby doom a yam?

I don't know

but tomorrow my emotions interest
what you wanted me not to know.

(Chorus)

Burning to speak. Burning to

speak. Been waiting on the phone for

nearly a week. Burning to speak.

guess you figure I'm just some

kinda half to.

Le ciel d'annour. Close the door.

Have you forgotten?

Today is not so easy as falling into
it. They're getting ready to send our
whole life up in smoke.

Some kinda joke. I think I'd laugh
but I'm in love

with the beautiful things your
eyes say when ~~we~~ ^{you} say nothing.

(Chorus)

Burning to speak. Burning to speak.

Been waiting on the phone you for

nearly a week. Burning to speak.

Burning to speak. The beautiful

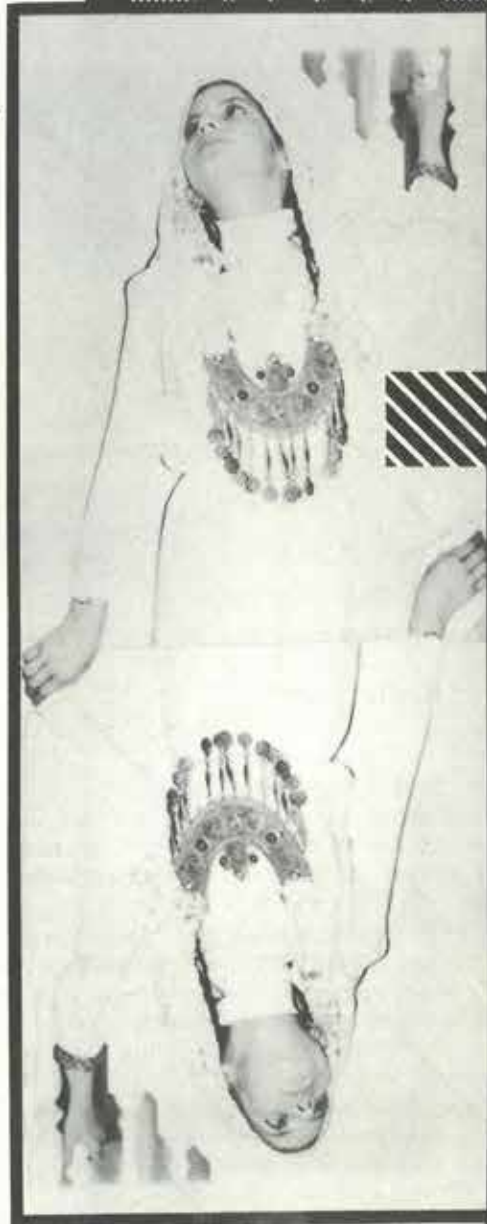
things your eyes say when we

say nothing.

© Sylvan Woods, No Records, 1980

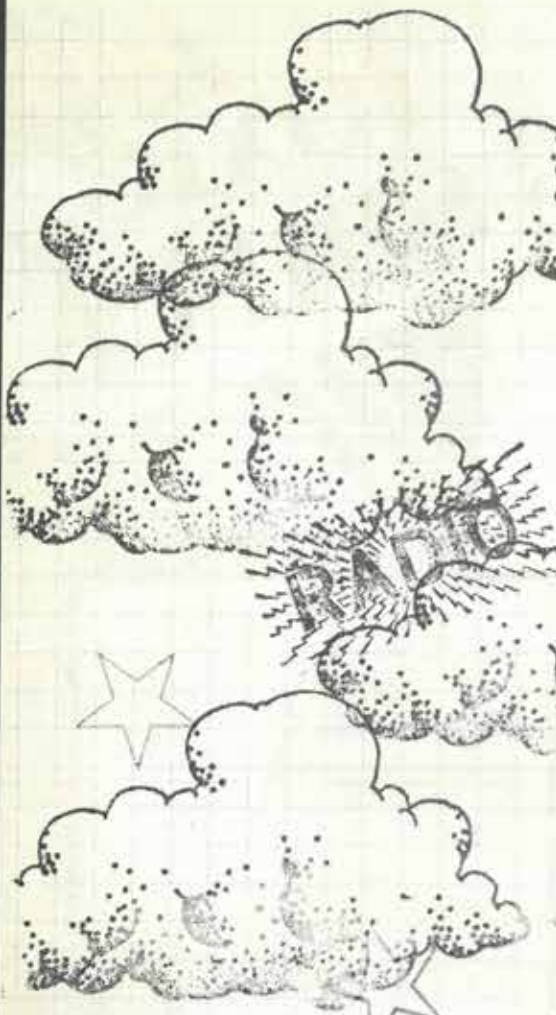
Sylvan Woods 12/10/80

TOXIC SHOCK



Sylvan Woods © Robert Pruzan


Secrets



I have a lot of bad qualities but only two secrets.
The bad qualities, I use as tools.
The lead pipes and crowbars of a domineering female,
the nuts and bolts of a rattled person.
I bruise myself and those I love but the secrets are deadly.
Worse than an abortion or a childhood murder.
If anyone found out I'd have to move to Algeria,
change my name, burn my fingerprints, dye my hair
and live recklessly in general. My parents know this
and remain secluded. Even in high school I forbid Dad
to attend the father daughter dance.
What could be that bad, you say. I must be exaggerating.
But if I were a doctor my license would be revoked.
If I were a mother, my kids would be put in foster homes pronto.
Sometimes I get this overwhelming desire to spill my guts.
A really gentle lover or a kind stranger brings it out.
If only you knew. If only one other person knew
but then I immediately leap into the flames of a destroyed future.
Alone in a swanky condominium with a broken lamp and a bloody nose.
There are two things I'll never tell anyone, not even
whisper them in a dog's ear
until I'm sure I've only got five minutes left to live.
Then they may save my life.

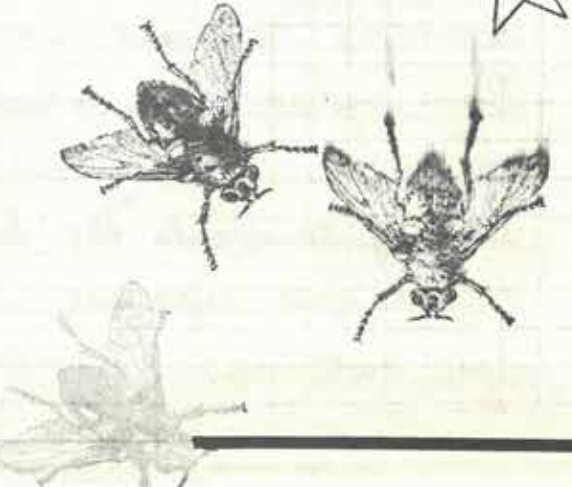
— Elaine Equi

Mr. Innocence

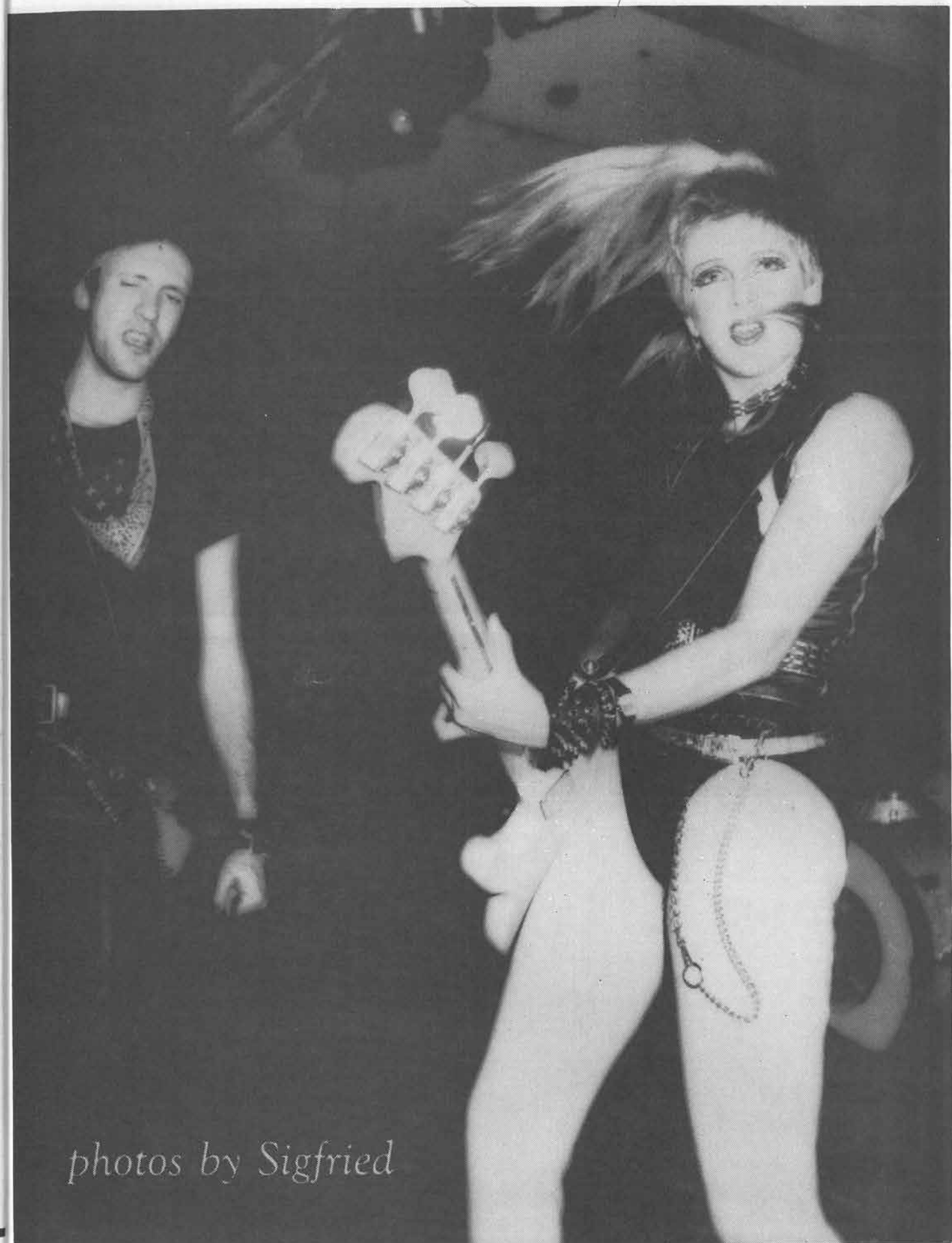


So you think it's the original sin
that you're not stupid enough to be a mail clerk.
How you'd love to be the moron you describe but
like a girl with a Ph.D. married to a truckdriver;
sex can only blind you so long.
Then learn that your mistakes are immortal.
Like an amputee who hitchhikes by sticking out
a shirtsleeve, people will always imagine your arm
reaching out to touch them. And who's to say it's not?
As for me, I have no desire to be innocent.
Summoned by a dog barking through a mirror.
Listening to the same police sirens that made Ulysses
head spin; I can only be sure of one thing.
All appointments with destiny will be kept.

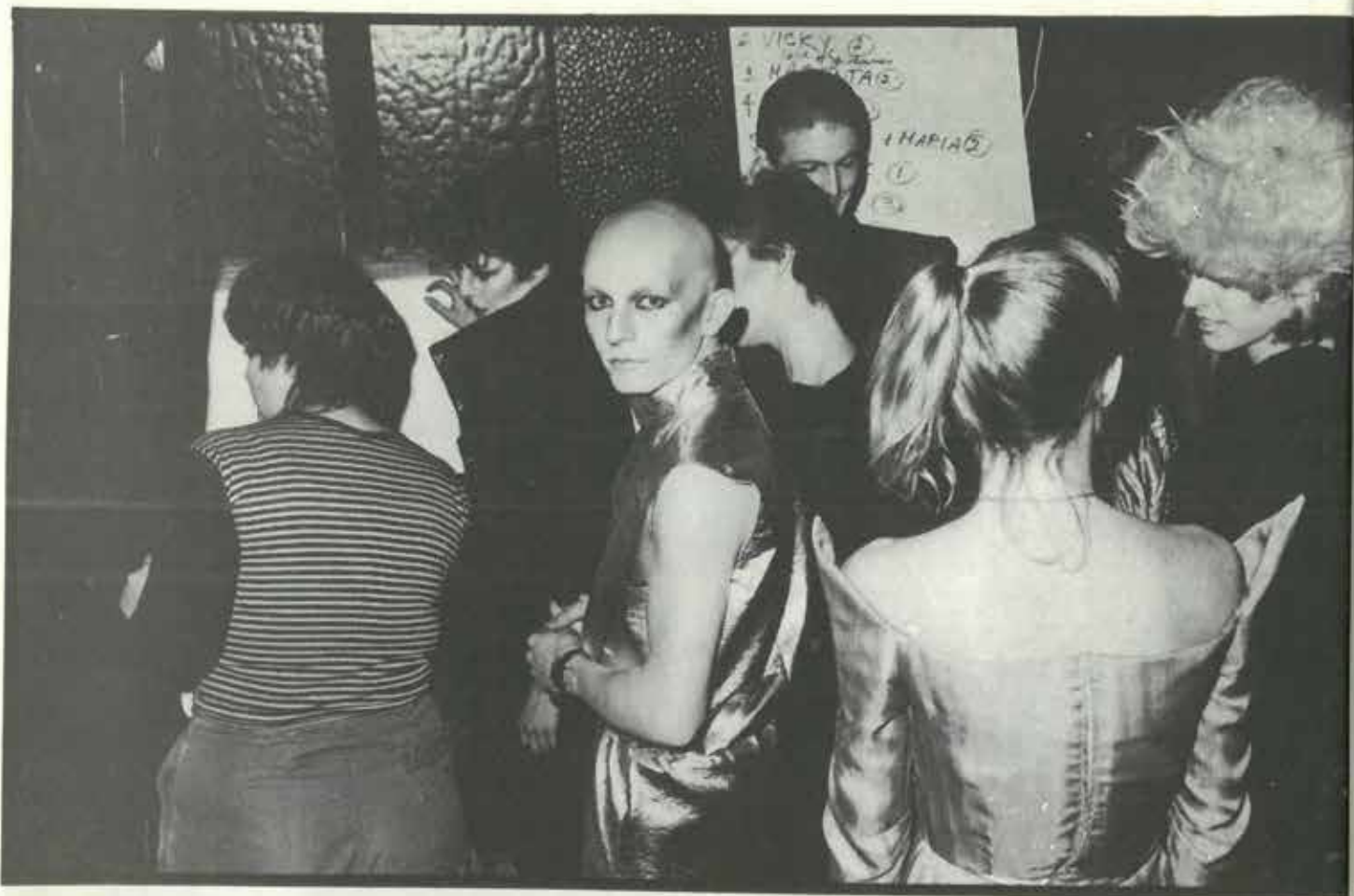
— Elaine Equi

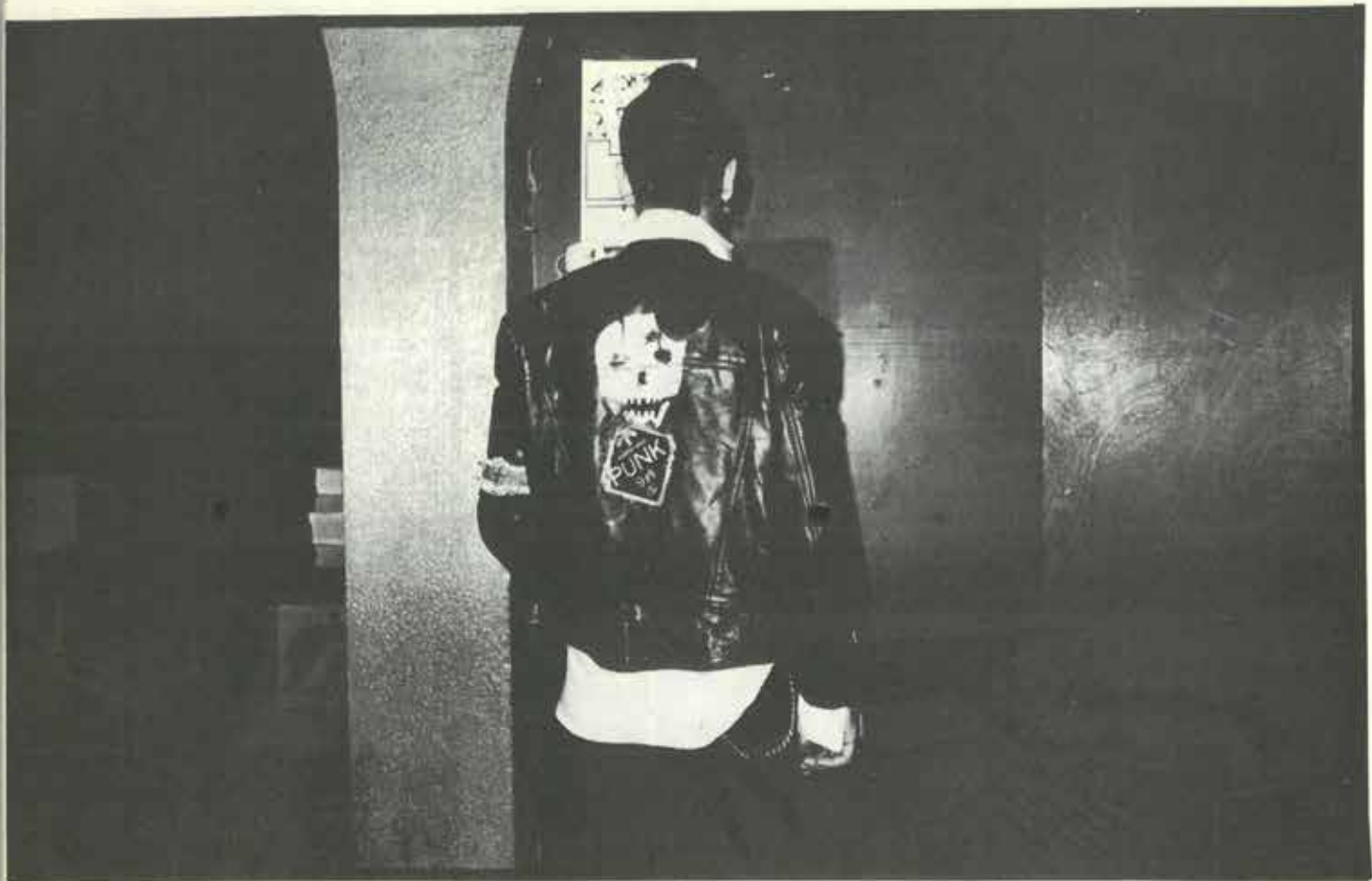


ose.



photos by Sigfried





Kathy Acker

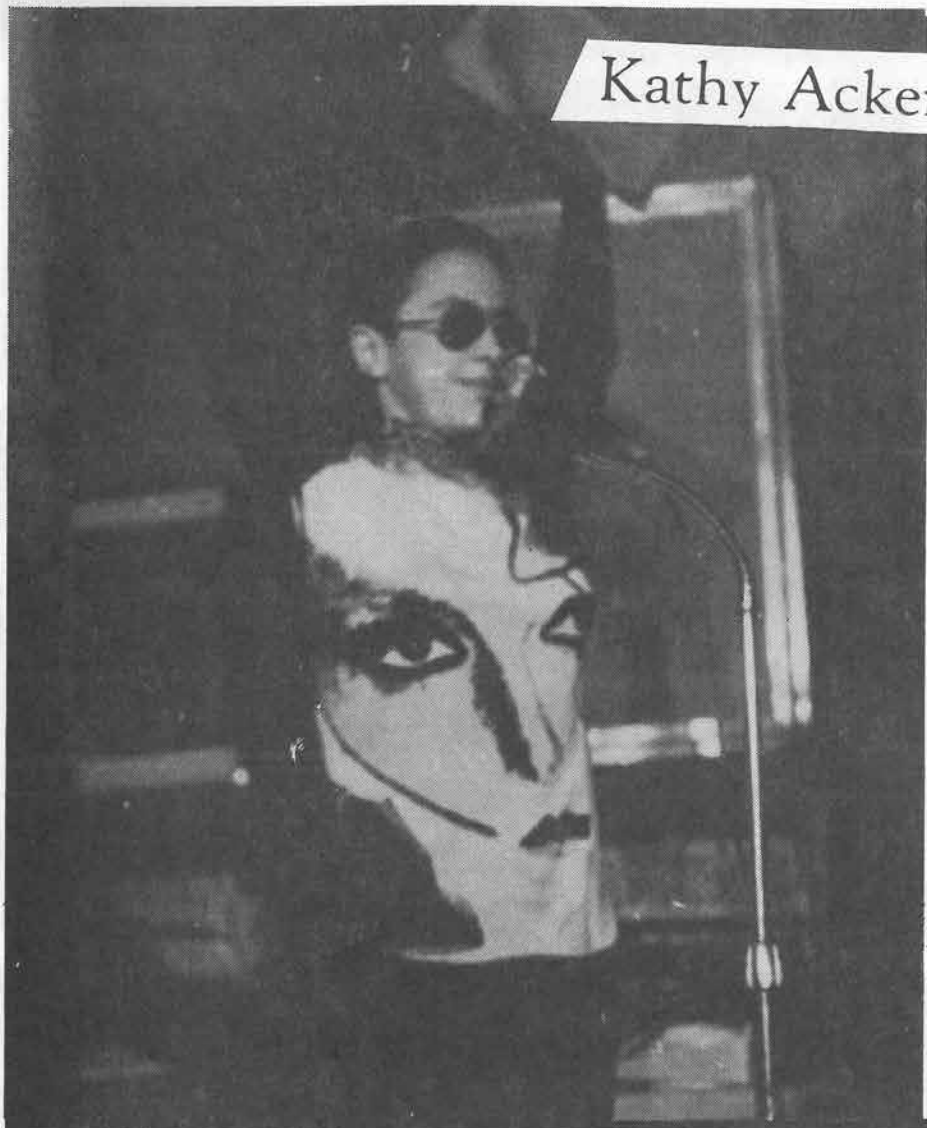


photo by Ritz Degli Esposti

FIRST DAYS OF LIFE

20

MY FATHER HAD LEFT ME all his possessions and I was, by the world's accounting, a well-to-do young woman. I owned a large estate in Seattle. The rest of the money, since it was tied up in stocks and bonds and lawyers' incomprehensible papers, only meant that I was now untouchable. I knew most people wanted money or fame desperately just in order to survive. I knew I was no longer a person to a man, but an object, a full purse. I needed someone to love me so I could tell what reality was.

The rest of my life was programmed for me: Since I had inherited an estate in Seattle, I would go to Seattle. Clifford, my father's best friend, was going to accompany me. I would never do what I wanted to do. My aunts Martha and Mabel had made sure that my money wouldn't allow me to act unreasonably and pleasurable. I grew accustomed to that reality.

My father died in the middle of January. It is now almost two years later. I can't describe Sutton Place — where Ashington

House lay — for I miss it so deeply.

*St. Agnes Eve — Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limped trembling through the
frozen grass,*

*And silent was the flock in wooly fold;
Numb were the beadman's fingers, while
he told*

*His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seemed taking flight for heaven, with out
a death,*

*Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his
prayer he saith.*

It was snowing all the time. Frost covered the rooftops the trees the cars.

People without hands walked slowly down the middle of the streets. Just as during the blackout, New York City had become a small happy town or a series of small towns strung out in a line. Whenever my mind looked in its mirror, it counted up its blessings: I was walking down a street. There was no one who was attacking me. There were no more stories or hard passion in my life. I had real moments of happiness (non-self-reflectiveness), when I freely read books.

I knew there could be no way I would live with a man, because, while I desperately needed total affection, I wasn't willing to give away my desires which is what men want and I couldn't trust. The men who were part of my life weren't really part of my life: Clifford, because I hated him, and the delivery boys, because they were weaklings.

Only sensations. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it exists materially or not — for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty . . . The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream — he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning — and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, Oh for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!

Of silks satins quilted satins taken from grandmother's bed thick satins black fur shorn from living lambs cottons steel wool the density of shit chewed-up cinnamon bark clustered angora and linen goose and duck feathers slumber

Of pyramid cheeses covered by red pepper overripe goat cheeses blue runs through the middle blue alternates with wine down the middle port sherry crumbled crumbling at fingertips' pressing no taste a physical touch sensation more than a taste the nose winding around itself

In front of the eye: red blue yellow green brown gray purple violet gray-blue violet-gray in various combinations or forms move by in a faintly maintained rhythm. These are the pleasures of the mind.

The mistake is allowing oneself to be desperate. The mistake is believing that indulgence in desire a decision to follow desire isn't possibly painful. Desire drives everything away: the sky, each building, the enjoyment of a cup of cappuccino. Desire makes the whole body-mind turn on itself and hate itself.

Desire is Master and Lord.

The trick is to figure out how to get along with someone apart from desire if that's at all possible.

The body is sick and grows away from the perceiver. As old age comes the body gets sicker. All this is inevitable. When the body's sick, also the nerves are sick, the mind becomes sick because it no longer knows if it can trust itself. The scream no longer against pain, pain is now accepted as part of living, but against doubt begins.

I'm going to tell you something. The author of the work you are now reading is a scared little shit. She's frightened, forget

what her life's like, scared out of her wits, she doesn't believe what she believes so she follows anyone. A god. She doesn't know a goddamn thing she's too scared to know what love is she has no idea what money is she runs away from anyone so anything she's writing is just un-knowledge. Plus she doesn't have the guts to entertain an audience. She should put lots of porn in this book cunts dripping big as Empire State buildings in front of your nose and then cowboy violence, nothing makes any sense anyway. And she says I'm an ass cause I want to please. What'm I going to do? Teach?

Author: You're a dumb cocksucker. If some dumb person bought this book, he should have the grace to read it and if he doesn't like me, so what.

He (the author) has not hit the humors, he does not know 'em; he has not conversed with the Barthol'mew-birds, as they say; he has ne'er a sword-and-buckler man in his Fair, nor a little Davy to take toll o' the bawds there, as in my time, nor a Kind-heart, if anybody's teeth should chance to ache in his play. None o' these fine sights! Nor has he the canvas-cut i' the night for a hobbyhorse man to creep in to his she-neighbor and take his leap there! Nothing! No, an' some writer (that I personally know) had had but the penning o' this matter, he would ha' made you such a jig-a-jog i' the booths, you should ha' thought an earthquake had been i' Seattle! But these master-poets, they ha' their own absurd courses; they will be informed of nothing! Would not a fine pump under the stage ha' done well for a property now? And a punk set under her head, with her stern upward, and ha' been soused by my witty young masters o' the Cop Station? What think you o' this for a show, now? He will not hear o' this! I am an ass, !!

Author: Huh? What rare discourse are you fall'n upon, ha? Ha' you found any friend here, that you are so free? Away rogue, it's come to a fine degree in these spectacles when such a youth as you pretend to a judgment.

What is this that we sail through? What palpable obscure? What smoke and reek, as if the whole steaming world were revolving on its axis, as a spit?

sailors, who long ago had lashed themselves to the taffrail for safety; but must have famished.

"Dood Hope, Dood Hope," shrieked Jackson, with a horrid grin, mimicking the Dutchman, "dare is no dood hope for dem, old boy; dey are drowned and d . . . d, as you and I will be, Red Max, one of dese dark nights.": *the only certainty*

To prove that there was nothing to be believed; nothing to be loved, and nothing worth living for; but everything to be hated, in the wide world.

Sir, my mother has had her nativity-water cast lately by the cunning men in Cow-Lane, and they ha' told her her fortune, and do ensure her she shall never have happy hour, unless she marry within this sen'night, and when it is, it must be a madman, they say.

Why didn't Melville suicide?
He didn't want to.

*Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
Him in a closet, of such privacy
That he might see her beauty unespied,
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
Never on such a night have lovers met,*

The old woman leads him through many halls to the bedroom. He hides and hiding watches the girl he's in love with. Around the window a carved representational frame stained glass the middle a shield the middle blood. The girl who's never fucked takes her clothes off. She falls asleep on her bed. The young man covers her naked tits with candied apples fruits creamy jellies cinnamon syrup dishes silver, and lies down beside her.

She doesn't wake up. "Now, Sarah, this is purely medicinal." He handed the full cup to me. "It'll warm you. You must be warmed. What you should have is a hot bath and climb into a warm bed. I'm afraid Parrot Cottage can't offer such amenities. Never mind. This is the next best thing."

I did what he wanted me to and I hated myself for doing it. I was feeling good because the hot liquid relaxed my body and my tension; this growing ease made me a traitor to myself.

I had to keep the joy growing to blot out my consciousness of what was happening to me. Sensuous beauty is its own perfect excuse, for it brings itself into existence. Constant unendurable sensuousness — not passion, which destroys

better than I do. He's tricky. He gets me to be who he wants.

He says it's love. I mutter something about the girl I've heard he's going to marry. He laughs, and his laughter excites me.

"She's here with me," he says. "She's Miss Sarah Ashington. I decided she was the one as soon as I set eyes on her."

We married, but I still wanted madly to tell him I was afraid. I did not love the man I had married. He had overwhelmed me and aroused a certain passion in me. For a deadly moment I had found him irresistible. I don't love him, I cried inside my mind. I hate the inside of my mind. I want loving kindness, tenderness, not this mad wild emotion which he makes me become.

He drops to his knees and kisses my brow my eyelids my throat. He is kissing my naked heart. His tiny hands are shuddering my naked heart and now he is beside me (he is whispering to me he is whispering into me oh) This whisper is an outside cool breath This whisper is controlling me this whisper is my breath

In Paris policemen wearing blue triangular hats walk past buildings smaller than themselves and murderers look like each other and wear black. The ornamentation of Venice is precise a fairytale. The Roman streets lie sunlit, though there's no sun, where rooms, above, wander into room after room so that inside is outside though it isn't. Sometimes I murdered a man or a group of men murdered me. I never saw the details of their faces.

"Sarah, my love," he murmured, "didn't you know? It was meant to be."

"I raped you," he said.

I stared at him incredulously.

"I want you to realize what a resourceful husband you have. You know how thick these winter fogs become? It occurred to me it'd be easy to lose our way . . . to wander around and around. You would feel tired. You wouldn't know what you were doing. I would make you drunk. I would be your savior. Under the guise of being God, I'd do what I want. You see how romanticism works."

"Is love always disgusting?" I was still regarding his perspective as useful.

He laughed. "What do you say, my pet? What does your body say when I touch it? I'm a man, Sarah; I'm not the mealy-mouth you think you want. You'll never know where I am."



"Look here," said Jackson, hanging over the rail and coughing — "Look there; that's a sailor's coffin. Ha! Ha! Buttons," turning round to me — "how do you like that, Buttons? Wouldn't you like to take a sail with them 'ere dead men? Wouldn't it be nice?" And then he tried to laugh, but only coughed again.

"Don't laugh at dem poor fellows," said Max, looking grave; "do, you see dar bodies, dar souls are farder off dan de Cape of Dood Hope."

— allows neither time nor memory. Later what happened helped me to understand my own nature; and even later. I could remember. I knew that this glory will and always happens and has something to do with dislike.

There is a dreamlike quality: My body wants as simply as any dream action. The body that wants a man whom I remember I heartily dislike, Clifford Still, cannot be my body and I'm not upset. I know he knows every pore of my body

"I still think it's disgusting you raped me and you planned to rape me."

"Your heart is telling you the truth," he said.

I didn't know if I loved my husband, or not.

I hated him I hated him but I knew if he should leave me I would die.

*"My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely
bride!*

"Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest?"

"Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and
vermeil dyed?

"Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest

"After so many hours of toil and quest,

"A famish'd pilgrim, — sav'd by miracle.

"Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest

"Saving of thy sweet self; if thou
think'st well

"To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel.

Is my lover trying to murder me?

Is my lover trying to get my inheritance?

Is my lover a stupid worthless being?

"You have to trust me," he tells me.

He won't tell me why. As soon as he tells
me I have to trust him he takes some of

my jewels, not my favorites, to sell because
we can use the money, and when I ask him
where the money is he won't answer me.

It's always my fault.

The nightmares have begun again.

As I said, it was winter. Three days
after the winds started they could never
stop for the concrete buildings housed
them the streetlights held them the very
beds and streets were winds. My skin and
the stuff under my skin tremble, feel the
temperature extremes, I don't know what
is physical doubt and what is mental doubt.

I want vision. If I do everything I can
to change myself, (my *self* is my desires
and dreams), so I don't have to leave this
man — if I leave him, I won't bother again

with a man, am I turning away from all
that is dearest and deepest: vision? Or is
vision that which has nothing to do with
the will, but is necessity working itself out?

When I was in eighth grade, I thought
the twins in my class who were the only
girls considered to be as intelligent as me,
absolutely evil. I thought about them or
absolute evil all the time. My husband
wants me to put my inheritance in a joint
bank account and draw up a will in his name.

How do we know how to act? How
do we know when our actions will cause
pain? How is it possible to choose? I knew
I must not choose and I must escape.

Ye winds, ye cold air-snakes who wind
through flesh, all who are nature:

FIRST PERSON THIRD PERSON NOTES

Shirley Garzotto



A STEADY POUR

perhaps an avalanche

in the morning, laying quite still, listening to heels on the wooden
floor of the hall, apart from my sound of breathing or the hum of
the humidifier, lending me the pleasure of knowing things are taken
care of, and I don't have to do anything.

Short chapters.

Connections or Links.

The soft white calf of her daughter's leg.
Mrs. N. enters the room hunched over, not
like she had a weight on her shoulders,
more like it was an effort to move . . . no,
like she was protecting her body from an
overhanging branch. Her pale face was
beginning to accumulate those fine lines
that add character but her gray eyes and
soft thin lips gave her an uncertain quality.
Like she didn't know if she was moving
backwards or forwards in time. She smiled
and several lines appeared in her forehead
rebutting the smile. She wore a felt beige
hat that blended in with beige-silvery hair.
Everything she wore was beige, even the
gloved hand she hesitantly extended and
he hesitantly shook, soft chamolts locking
against his palm. He knew he couldn't
be direct and open with her because she
would shy away. Touching her glove was
the closest she would let him get. He
thought of water seeping in a long, barely
noticeable line out of a hole in a rock.
Grey cement, damp, cool to touch.

Behind her was Mr. N., tall with wide
shoulders but somehow sparce, as though
he would only be comfortable in a black
and white room. Any color would make him
nervous. He peered over the top of Mrs.
N.'s hat with a stale strong gaze as though
Maury wasn't quite right, but then nothing
ever was. Marco Polo, awkward yet cynical
finding himself on Webster Street instead
of the Yangse River. (unclear) Once their
gaze connected, Mrs. N. seemed to be
brushed aside like a curtain, and the two
men shook hands. Maury turned to usher
Mr. N. into the living room and was
momentarily jolted to find Mrs. N. right
beside his arm so that he nearly bumped
into her. It was funny because he hadn't
felt her presence at all.

How much energy could Maury sustain?
He felt dwarfed although only Mr. N. was
taller and only by a few inches. And, as
always when alien people came into his
home, he saw his furniture become alien
too. The ashtray, a large black iron oval
in the center of the room, seemed ugly,

overflowing with butts, some of the ashes spilling onto the tiny oblong carpet. The red lamp over the only chair that still had legs intact seemed putrid and grotesque leaving a goosenecked shadow curving over the large crack in the plaster. The pillows on the floor meant for sitting would not serve for these people. Mrs. N. looked around vacantly, jerking her head like a new chicken in a barnyard and he felt her wanting to turn and walk out but she shed her coat and gloves, put them on a pillow and awkwardly lowered herself to the floor. She didn't look at her husband until he sat down beside her and then they whispered. Mrs. N's back was very straight. Maury sat apart from them noticing the strong cat smell. He had forgotten to change the litter.

Mrs. N. sensed her thoughts would never connect in this place. How awful that John had insisted they come. Why couldn't this man, this seducer of their son, this faggot, meet them in some restaurant? Then she could have buried herself behind a coffee cup and just watched him. Now she would have to say something and she didn't know what to say. The queer sat crosslegged and his barefeet were so grimy, the big toe closest to her feet seemed large and misshapen and even when she made herself stare at his face, she saw his toe. Big, sooty, the toenail long and clotted with black dirt. It was unthinkable to imagine her Jeremy, her soft white Jeremy, touching that big toe. Jeramey, her Jeremy, whose soft blond hair fell down over his forehead, straight and shiny. Clean. Putting him into the tub when he was little, watching him sputter and gurgle with delight while he covered himself with bubbles and blew on them and poked them with pudgy white fingers. Jeremy never had dirty feet, never.

Red lettuce	maroon silk comforter
Fruit cellar	cutouts
chrome chairs	mop
crick	coconut cream pie
eskimo dog	darn
petunia	catalogue
polka	grinder
chamber pot	tattletale
wooden airplane	slurp
Sorry	grated cheese
folding chair	flagstone
mandolin	alley
parade	sheets
work pants	ply
long fingernails	dustrag
watermelon seeds &	tea
caddy	ballroom
insulin	V.F.W.
macaroni	Iron City Beer
footstool	notes
radio	pajamas
lard	football
furnace	plant
outhouse	First grade
roses	stutter
comic books	mattress
root beer & noodles	scrapbook
linoleum	
starched lace curtains	
wringer	
cripple	
sandbox	
jungle	

Letter-Poem from a bookish friend



Dear Marian,
They're turning off the electricity soon, not the phone — but the writing will explain more than calling. You'd rather go for dinner than brunch, Sunday, before the show. I know — who wants to get up if you don't have to? No movie with the bridge bunch. No fun going there alone. Alone, alone. I used to want to go everywhere alone. Now I need people more. You'll understand the early hour. Ettie and Ruth have husbands and must get back to cook.

Remember what Samuel Johnson said?

"A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table than when his wife talks Greek. My old friend Mrs. Carter could make a pudding as well as translate Epictetus."

Which rambling means you and I, manless, would like to translate Epictetus or its equivalent, but haven't got what it takes. Here I go on about that imperious ox of the 18th century. Do you recall the story about an evening party? Johnson's hulk spread before a roaring fire. Asked to move he bellowed: "I was enjoying the magnificent resources of my own mind."

The electricity should be back on now — must go set the clocks ahead. Anyhow, hope to see you Sunday and that the show will "wreath again the region that is ours."

Natalie
— Virginia E. Smith

(TWIN BEDS)

I wish these little bubbles in my stomach would go away. Martin is waiting, in the next bed. I didn't think he'd be asleep, not yet, but the couch downstairs is lumpy since some of the stuffing came out and I had to turn the cushions over. I'll never make a good housewife, no matter how hard I try there are always clothes in the dryer, waiting to be folded, or garbage piling up on the back porch. I know he is staring at the ceiling. His thoughts probably alternate between work and me. If he doesn't get to sleep soon, he'll have dark circles under his eyes, and be cross with his workers. Maybe even fire a few. And he needs that release of energy, that quick fuck, before he can get to sleep.

Why doesn't he masturbate? Catholics never get rid of the feeling it's dirty. Martin might ignore church, the ritual, the crazy priests, but the dogma, the taboos are locked inside his head. He can't. He can't take it in his hands and jerk off. And besides, don't "I" like it? I want to tell him, well, no,

I don't. But I can't. Then his self estimation, despite his big dick, would falter, and he couldn't exist as a man. All the workers would be fired then.

I can feel his breathing. In a few seconds, a minute maybe, he'll turn over, toward me, and yawn, as though he just woke up. He will reach over and bring the radium dial of the clock close to his eyes. "Oh, you just coming to bed?" A long ho-hum. "Bout time, and it's cold too, just can't seem to get warm," and here he struggles up, his legs dangle out from the covers, he slips his feet into slippers, puts on his robe hanging from the bedpost and yawns his way to the bathroom. I watch the slit of light through the door, hear the sound of piss hitting water, the flush, the running of the tap, the light snapping out because he doesn't believe in "wasting electricity for nothing."

Then he'll stand in the shadows, unbelted the robe and turn to me — I must be a tempting shape in the dark — "Can I get warm with you?" I feel a cold draft as the covers lift up and his skin rubs against mine before I even have the chance to slide over.

SPIRITS OF CLAY

THE FRIENDLY DISHES CLATTER THROUGH her hands from sink to drainer. Her rings and nails click sweetly against the white plates, the tumbling sound of feeling through silverware under water so reassuring. The distinct apartment Anywhere-By-The-Bay good for singling out her own thoughts. Moments of real poetry seized her through every ordinary task . . . Bumper pool in the brain/Son of a bitch got a somber drudge to do his bidding/Bitch too busy to feed the son. Doing the dishes is a good way to accomplish cleaning clay from under the nails unselfconsciously.

She dried her instruments carefully and; smoothed Body and Soul's special house lotion into her thirsty skin.

Brushed the thick black hair that stood up and bent over like an animal washing its toes. Didn't have to do a thing to the still very good face but wash it. Gawd these sticks sure are birds legs to draw stares. The very good hands pulled the get-by pants over the embarrassments. The very good face reviewed the order of the sanctuary and the hand slid down the wall offing the light switch. House Body/I thrive within thee.

Insertion of key at the hands of . . . enter the Honda Civic cab . . . take the wheel in the hands of . . . close . . . insert key again, turn and hold, depress foot roar, radio overload comes on, adjust to tolerable audible . . . "once wildlife is gone, it is gone forever, has been mauled to death by a lion, it was reported yesterday. Friends say that Mrs. Adamson, 69, had taken her customary evening stroll Thursday night in the bush outside her camp in remote northeast Kenya, and came across a lion chasing a buffalo. The lion turned and killed her. Her body was found about 1000 yards from the barbed-wire enclosed compound where she had been conducting experiments in returning tame leopards to the wilds."

No, not by a lion, not Joy Adamson. That is too weird 'n I don't like it. No, no, it don't wash!

World such a clear chill vision after the sky had been right down upon us. The mud-flat sculpture made thing-laughter as she drove to the community workspace in Oakland. As she hugged the slow lane, her not-funny mother intruded on her field as big as a billboard. Hands on the wheel, eyes on the road, imagination all over, she could do little else but speak to her.

—How shall I say it? I appear a little boney, Mother, but that's the right way isn't it? Like you always say, no man can resist a thin woman with a child's clean n' open face. I appear as thin and boney as a woman who has no womb. Aren't they all thin, no, some fill up with fiber, like our neighbor, Marie, remember, and how that cluck she thought of as a rooster went and had affairs with the unloved hens on his faculty. No pride. Anybody saw him sparking everywhere doing ordinary things like pickin' his suits up at the cleaners. You drew back from 'er too. Maybe she was weird. Poor thing in the bridal business. What a sad occupation, fittin' out whole weddin' parties and her own husband faithless.

What a cluck! He mustuv mowed his front lawn over four times when I went out to do the weedin' in my bikini. Guess I did drive the neighbors wild. Hard to know it being this boney now. Like you always said, "Bone thin is the way to go if a girl want ta git outta Kentucky." Like the picture of George Washington, Mother, your eyes look back at me from bill boards, other cars. Well maybe I got no baby carriage, but I still got the play pin. Daddy sits so quiet in my mind beside me. He's small as me really in her estimation. Daddy so quiet. Who is he? Mother you always battin' about between us. Why is it I have this powerful attraction for knowin' my daddy's people-mothers? Thinking on a straight line of mother spirits through your daddy's line. Strange in this day n' age ta reach for women to measure yer growin' self against through yer daddy.

You are young yet, Rena Gail! You ken take jobs n' quitem'. I was married. I have an education. I have a story so I don't have to be in nobody else's. Funny though, the whole time I was conjugated with that boy I thought there was somethin' wrong with me 'n 'corrdin ta my Mama, Mother, there was. I was supposed to like bein' a folded towel in the bathroom cupboard. I was supposed ta find myself in paste wax and lemon oil and good wood. Don't know, maybe the fact we was both females I could see right through her front windows how quiet my daddy was just sittin' there or caretakin' at her direction. Way she was out done by her own example plus how female-from-female I was always lookin' back defiant.

She thought of the wet ten pound lump wrapped in plastic in her studio locker . . . a big head? . . . of who? 'spose if I was ta puttem' all together in a day they'd not be all of a piece, but a bunch a little pieces . . . 'n they would't be legs or even fingers or obscure sea life or cells or anything like that, they'd be feelings made into a lot of shapes. Like one you might say is a frog settin' upon a leaf, or one could be a wall hanging weed pot, but they're nothin'. Not one thing more n' another.

She tore off a two fist sized mass of the clay and worked it until it was as warm and wrinkled like an old person when you touched it lightly. Then she made it into a nearly perfect ball, rested her open hands over it, closed her eyes and bowed her head toward it to breathe on it. How do you go through yer father's seed which you chose? Gawd! Pa's eternity blue eyes.

Rena Gail, even the marriage counselor you paid for your own self couldn't glean my displeasure with Roy bein' so nice n' all. I want my pottery, I want to play around with investments and men in the plural. Had a father, didn't know him. Had a hus-

Julia Vose



photo by Margaret Serafini



band, didn't know him. Three, four . . . give me more, more men! . . . The quiet carrier/ Women who made the man/The man who made me/A woman.

Forget it Rena Gail. It's a packaged affair. Either you got the bone thin, the man, the kids, the education and the image of yourself in black garters and high heels in front of a big white Norge, or forget it.

Roy was so nice, really, he was so nice. Never forced himself on me, never troubled me. Nothin'. Just felt nothin' like we was both so small we fit in Mama's mind and he did everything in a way she wouldn't dream a correctin'.

Y'all know what I mean? She prayed to the clay. It's the knowin'. It protects you. It carries you along no matter how hard you even try to compromise yer own self ta please 'em, gettem' down offn' yer back. I knew two good pictures even when I was very little, see, I was very good at visualizin' myself. I saw myself as the princess in the city with lots of money or, a woman in the wilderness alone with lots of animals for friends. That's it. The animals all come by and they know me. But first I do the time in the city and study investments and then learn to manipulatem' in such a way as they pay me so I can live on the land.

The way she treated Aunt Fay when she learned of the breast, forget it! I'm not tellin' her nothin'. She was nice 'n polite to Aunt Fay, only she treated her like she wasn't real. I don't know how you can eat from a table which you allow an unreal woman to lay the flat ware upon, but she did and we did. Guess you could say she merely had a powerful mind, or a strong mind, but I'll say it. She's got a hoggy mind. When she rolls over on yer face, you just don't breathe.

The wish.

—O, Lester Ferral.

—What, Rena?

—It's pretty true that you feel some things for me, isn't it?

—Feel some things? Hell! I'm thinkin' a marryin' you if you want it.

—Then it's only fair to tell you, Lester Ferral, I can't give you no babies.

—Why that's alright my darlin', it's you's

my fate, we'll have our children when the time of increase comes some other way.

But we in fact said,

—O, yeah, what do you mean? Zat why you have that bikini scar you said was appendicitis?

—Yes, I had cancer of the uterus, endometrial kind, meaning the interior lining.

—Cancer? Oh my god, I've known you all this time and you didn't tell me. You mean all this time and I didn't even know and me 'n you . . .

—I was afraid of how you'd react I guess. I didn't want to lose you. I wanted you to know me before you thought of it.

—But I trusted you and I loved you and I even wanted to marry you and you kept something like that to yourself all this time. It just scares me what other little cats you got in that bag you hidin' I don't think I even know you now.

Mama taught me to get to this point and suffer the black death of outcast failure. "Only your due," she'd say, for leavin' your husband. Trouble with you, Rena, is you never know when you is well-off and I can't help you if you won't listen."

So! Rena Gail tucks the big secret away *somewhere* and put her new real self at the center of publicity for the Columbus, Ohio opera. At the source. Push button phones and a pocket beeper. Own secretary. Make some money, yeh, money, git-away money.

She worked the white porcelain clay into three little towers of what could be compared to sandstone rocks in the tidal zones . . . holes, burrows, borings, impressions of other shapes and smooth sensual curves made by the regular work of the moon driven waters. Greatly satisfied she said —Speak up, Pa! You can rake ma leaves. The distance between me and thee is my very own sweet tree in full green. Pictures pictures pictures. Whatever they 'sposed ta mean drives me not crazy, but to California and a future of my own design.

She wrapped the fragile wet pieces carefully, making the plastic bubble out so that they wouldn't be reabsorbed into the larger mass. Her hands crusty still from the clay, she gripped the greasy

feeling black wheel of her car. It wasn't until she was back on the freeway that the thickening of her breathing caused her to reach past her hemline to touch her already thickening sex. Stroking the surface of her waters, a thin wet line was left on the clay dusty finger. Sweet pressure in her skull oozed atmosphere through the Civic's total cab. Estes Milton testes balls come, get the plane ticket. Completely.

It's a good thing Lester Ferral Missouri boy in Berkeley apartment let her slip past him with out even telling her what clean fresh air she was, what soft grace, what surrounding kindness, what amazing inspiration her old fashioned spunk with eyes full of fire and square dance magic. Had he said so, had he lived in the middle of his own apprehension rather than in images he had no part in creating, he might, just maybe, and only on a Rena Gale perhaps, been the sweet Southern earth Rena Gail could have finally nooked up in. Lucky, for his disillusion left her the energy to finish a miracle.

Estes. Imagine thinkin' a the first name of a realestate agent in a town you don't even live in and never did. That's how it is. Yer mind reaches out ta folks who touch yer life just like seein' the stars on a cold see-through night. Come out to California like a squirrel to get ma nut. OOOOOooooee, don't even wanta know who they is 'n it scares the tar outta me. Imagine it. You come to a place, the center of human civilization and you can't even really get personal. That's why I just decided to get my nuts together so I can go back and park on some nice ole throw-away land and raise me some crops a fence posts.

2.

FOR SOME REASON the hall door was heavy and the stairs to the second story spitefully steeper than usual. It always seized her like this after a good session with the clay. Though cold that morning, her little one bedroom Berkeley modern upper was cookin' hot. Sliding open the

aluminum sash in the living room, she flopped on her day bed and sent her good-friend-old Birkenstocks flyin'. Now and then a cool airstream washed over her left side, but the warm room pulled her, the lumpy old day bed received her impression, moulding the contours. Her last thought, how her feet were floatin' high and cool at the end of those legs and she was released.

She was far down under for a while until she propped herself up on her elbows to stare out the window that framed the tops of eucalyptus trees, power and phone wires, and sky, eternity blue. O, Aunt Fay, she sighed and pulled out her little black book entitled, "DREAMS, by Rena Gail". She wrote

3/23/79. My "friend" is my Aunt. I have had dreams about her in which she, in her gentle, kind way, gives me advice and guidance, love and encouragement. She loves me! told me so. I love her. And I hope I can give her some measure of what she has given me over my lifetime. I dreamed that she and I were going down a highway. I had passed a mountain in Southern Indiana. It

was a tall, steep butte (flat topped), and it was shining golden in the sunset. It was really the kind of mountain that belongs in Monument Valley. Suddenly I noticed the same mountain ahead of us in Kentucky. I thought I was going backwards into Indiana. My Aunt gently pointed out to me that the mountain was ahead of us in Kentucky. She showed me that it was close at hand—yet shining ahead of us like a beacon. Finally, she showed me that this same mountain was rising up over San Francisco.

I believe she was telling me that I have strength I am not yet aware of.

Aunt Fay, quiet and black fringed sky blue eyes just like Pa 'n yet I cain't imagine a man croakin' all over her presence like Mama does ta Daddy. Funny I call him Daddy when I think of Mama and Pa when I think of Aunt Fay. Some say my Daddy did a lot in his life goin' to the City and makin' a rich life 'n yet look at him. I come out here 'n I cain't get with all this male chauvinist stuff. O, I've met some, though I never took one serious enough to get

any scars.

Funny. Must mean I am hysterical when my flesh can coalesce over the thought a land 'n an old woman. That's a lie and you know it! It's Aunt Fay and Estes. It's Aunt Fay for given you the name of the Down Home Finders there in Saltlick, Kentucky, and Estes for takin' the call at Down Home Finders. Gonna drop down there outta Indiana come Thanksgivin'.

3.

—WELL HELLO THERE Mizz Ashe.
 —Estes Milton! Hello yer own self. You find me ma dream land?
 —Well, I own as I don't know what somebody in California really dreams of. I ain't never been out there.
 —No foolin' Estes? Well, now I know I'm talkin' to the right fella. Isn't nobody in California want to know my heart's desire.
 —Didn't you say dream, Mizz Ashe?
 —That I did, Estes, but when I use that sweet word, dream, it means something all together different than when those educated fools use it. Gawd, a natural person

BY JOHN CAGE

EMPTY WORDS

IN THE VILLAGE
THE OTHER NIGHTA

SQ ARE



drawings by Dave Morice

is scarce amongst all those witches. Everybody's keepin' a book of their own dreams 'n talkin' about it every day 'n they all pay doctors to listen to their dreams. It's a wonder they remember to eat.

—You sound like you want me to plant you quick.

—That's it Estes. Do it. Plant me. That's what I mean.

—Well, I think you'll be pleased with the hand I'm dealin' ya. All local royalty. One place's even got a swimmin' pool n' a tennis court. Don't look at me like that. All I know about California I learned on t.v. And when some folks say they want some land, they really mean they want it inside walls and under a roof with just enough bush for rabbit dashin' cover. What do I know what kinda buyer you are? Some folks want some land like some other folks keep things in a safe deposit box. They drive by with their friends, point at it, maybe piss on it, even take an axe to a tree, shoot a squirrel 'n that's it. Some folks keep land like a dirty secret or else their ace in the hole. Got an old piece a throw-away land. You game to drive up an oleslate crik bed?

—Sure Estes, deal me the whole hand. Yer right, I don't know what I want, but I do know I'll enjoy lookin' at the tennis court and pool first 'cause it definitely ain't me.

Estes was a swell lookin' young Jew with brown eyes 'n confidence. His lips were as purple as interior labia. Estes was full of bull too. Must be some long gone sister gettin' steamy over a shister.

—Sure is a nice car, Estes. Don't think I ever saw a silver Mercedes in these parts before.

—Smooth isn't it?

—Yeh. I ain't no millionaire, Estes. I just want to know I'm goin' somewhere when I'm tarin' my brains and panties in public out in California.

—You talk like one cosmopolitan lady, Mizz Ashe. What you want to come back where they call listenin' to the flies on a sows ass a good time?

—Don't know Estes, it's just a feelin', like every minute I'm out there I'm a horse's ass, you know, a fool!

—What I mean, Mizz Ashe is . . . what's a good lookin' woman like you want to bury

herself alive in the woods, eh? You look fine, but I can tell you, not all the cedar trees in Kentucky will ever tell you that.

—No, not the trees or the grass or the toads or the snakes or the owls, but I figure I'd like to hear what they really have to say. —Aren't you afraid some stinky ole bear come n' tear off yer nighty?

—Estes, don't give yer hand away. I bet yer people have a special word for a woman like me who wants to go off on her on 'n I don't want to hear it. That's why I'm gettin' my land now so I know I am no name and no picture of what any body wants me to be.

—Sorry Mizz Ashe. It's just I enjoy takin' you around and I'm only so nosy 'cause your a very intriguing woman. Don't meet too many men or women who want to go back to the land. Only met one couple and they lasted ten months before they come runnin' down to me to resell on a counta some creature they called Harry Sluffer was plaguein' them at night with a swamp gas odor 'n blood curtlin' yells 'n strange lights out in the woods.

Estes prattled on 'n on in a satisfyin' way 'n his eyes shown black stone shiny as he drove the silver Mercedes up the leaves and loose sticks and stones of the dry slate crik bed. His hands were very beautiful and seemed a silvery pink around the wheel. Tree shadows and light played over his face in a mesmerizing way, that mouth Mizz Ashe would plant her tongue in. Unsettling.

So comfy with Estes the hand just flipped on the radio without permission. ". . . her work with Elsa, and other big cats, convinced Mrs. Adamson that animals have telepathic abilities. She was quoted as saying, 'Elsa could control her cubs from a distance of 180 miles. Elsa always knew when George and I were coming to see her, and I was intuitively aware of Elsa's death at the moment it occurred. Life is interwoven, and men need animals, possibly more than animals need men.' Shortly after the Adamsons found both Elsa and celebrity, Mrs. Adamson was asked the true purpose of her experiments. She replied, 'I not only want to breed animals under natural conditions so that

they will survive after they have become endangered by man's influence . . . I also have to learn from them where man can play a more constructive part in the balance of nature—and thus survive himself . . .'" Estes turned it off again.

—I thought that was really perverse the way they wanted us all to believe the lions killed her. Couldn't they just say nothing? You heard, didn't you?

—Yes, killed by thieves over a car battery. Absurd. O, Estes, I can't tell you what it's like for me bein' out here on this land. It's as if, well, just imagine with me, there's women dartin' from tree to tree wearin' long dresses 'n aprons carryin' baskets 'n buckets 'n long hair floatin' after 'em. Then there's different boys 'n men sportin' fishin' poles, axes, guns 'n shovels.

—Sorta backwoods ballet for the city girl?

—Don't laugh at me Estes. It's like this is my past but it's my future too.

—Ah come on, don't pull my leg. You don't want this useless wilderness.

—O yes I do, Estes. The more useless the better. I'm gonna pay the taxes with my investments.

—I didn't think I'd ever be able to unload the old Jessup place, let alone sell it to someone who's been abroad.

—You call San Francisco bein' abroad? Shoo fly boy, you can do a lot more with a Mercedes than drive up crik beds.

—It's only fair I tell you one little thing fore ya make up yer mind. There's nothin' left standin' but a chimney in the midst of a pasture of cedar saplin's. Nope, the Jessups left barely a mark on this stretch but three generations of their people's bones. I mean, Mizz Ashe, I'm includin' a cemetary in the deal cause it's right plumb in the middle parts. It's mostly growed over. You could have em moved into Salt Lick, but it'd be mighty costly and I can tell you, they've achieved the status of anthropology. You might call the University of Louisville.

The graveyard was but a cleared circle within some trees. There were piles of stones here and there, perhaps markers, perhaps not. Estes was off takin' a piss. Like there was no hurry, she got down upon



the earth and nuzzled her cheek hard in the wet dirt and pebbles. She prayed and listened. Have lived lord in the smallest of places/The minds of others/Lord they say the size of the place I lost was/The size of a walnut/'n like a walnut it was a beginning/'n now I'm comin' to keep these

trees and these bones for ya.

Estes came upon her and seeing the tears knelt down.

—It's ok. It is ok, Estes. You have helped more'n you'll ever divine for you brought me to this place. This is me, Estes. This

ground right here. I ain't gonna shoot no people into no future. I'm all there is. The end of the line.

—Come on, Sweet Water, give me yer hand. You wanna come back to the office and draw up some papers for this useless ole wilderness gets away from ya?

CONSIDERING HOW EXAGGERATED THE MUSIC

—Parts of this poem have previously appeared in *Bachy* and *City Miner*.

1.

Leslie Scalapino

Crowds are her. It is from them that the corruptions of a feeling occur in structure.

after lines by Robert Duncan



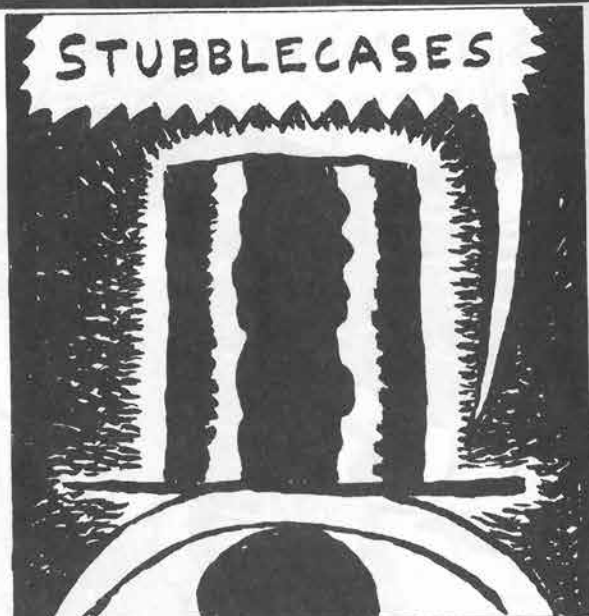
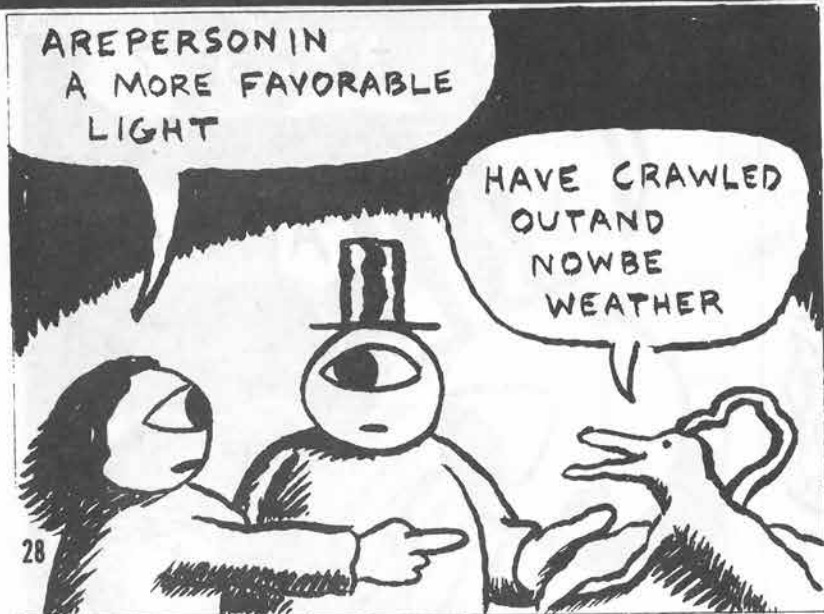
Exteriorization of water (when it is without fish)
Interiorization of the fish, (water is absent)

2.

A man in a restaurant shook hands with someone describing a story of sexual jealousy, I suppose.

I had a sense of a rush coming from the man being that smug. I wanted to be by myself for the moment since I was drinking coffee. I noticed that people felt snobbery toward a man say coming to a party, sensing his interest in it, and this one man who was there did too. Let's say that I've started to learn the piano because I had decided I would compose some music.

he's so angry



IS

3.

I'd gone outside that day and so I'd speak to someone using a polite tone. I feel agitated when the weather continued to be warm.

I was in a downtown area that had crowded streets and seemed wealthy and so I worried thinking that I had been overly formal with one person that day. I noticed once at a party that a man thought I was being too polite, but there was a lot of traffic on the street outside. Other people were talking, and I was cordial to him.

4.

During this period I would go out in the afternoons, but I'd make desultory attempts at finding a job.

I'd see any number of people then. A man could be craving attention from people some place and be talking about himself and seem polite.

I was barely acquainted with another woman but she was part of a circle of people I used to see at the time. The warm weather continued and I happened to find out that she was not as old as people said she was so I felt very happy. I bought a silk blouse at that point and later became fond of it.

5.

I felt that I had a balance unrelated to events or people's attitudes during this period. I had the sense of having lost ground with someone when I met him after not going anywhere for awhile and that something had shifted between me and some other people after a short time.

Their behavior however had not changed and I felt self-confident because I had a sense of things I wanted to do and was planning for the next months.

6.

I'd see people at different places who wouldn't speak to some man because they were parasites.

Someone invited me to lunch on several occasions, though after a few weeks this person began to associate with someone else. I had things I was doing and was very happy during this time, and in the afternoons I'd see this person, whom I thought of as a parasite, going some place with someone and looking very contained.



7.

I noticed that some people would parrot a certain word or phrase so that it remained in fashion for a time. I'd go to parties or went out during the summer evenings and that was the time I felt a sense of pleasure.

I'd go somewhere and the weather was warm so that people in a restaurant seemed to be acting in an insincere manner.

I saw some people in a restaurant who stood out because they were dressed up and I thought of them as being sycophants.

8.

It was easy to embarrass people when he didn't have a job or an income. It is easy to mock an unrelated or individual event if one considers any expression to be sexually connected

considering how exaggerated music is

9.

Physical differences in a group made for an incestuous nature among people in a restaurant one time. There is the same feeling in being withdrawn for awhile and then going out frequently.

People came together in an incestuous manner at a party by being somewhat remote from someone and satisfying this impulse. His being reserved when he spoke to people suggested that he had those feelings.

10.

I wouldn't see why an event should have occurred accompanied by a very emotional sense so that at the time going places wasn't separate from sexual feeling.

11.

The day dragged slowly and a woman I was talking to was so ill-tempered I liked her. Sometimes I'd go out with a group of people and someone would be relaxed and come up to a threshold of pleasure without hearing the remarks made by the others. Usually I'd go to the beach and the conversation was reserved because there were several people together.

30



12.

I felt quite placid when I spoke to a woman but one is sure to find some eccentricity in a person after knowing them for awhile and I wondered what her connection was to that circle of people.

I was out on a walk thinking that some people whose personal habits in childhood had been careless for example later came to be neat and well-dressed. One man knew another group of people but I didn't know his connection there either.

13.

I'd go to a restaurant or to the beach and my behavior which seemed to reflect only the surface of what I was thinking was reproduced externally in the jobs other people held.

For awhile I also held a job this time in a store. A person I knew was older than I was and also would be very nervous. He had been feeling jaded and unable to work for awhile yet my underlying mood and my emotions were not fixed and I managed to work some during this period.

14.

could lie in bed late in the morning and I'd go out. There'd be a group of people in one setting or another who knew each other but gradually I began to feel withdrawn from them anyway

It was easier to remember what had been said and I'd feel satisfied after going somewhere

15.

Someone initiated contact until we went to a restaurant and his attitude was distant and cordial. He might say something that bordered on being flippant or ambiguous so that I would concentrate on some other event or people in a different setting.

16.

I'd gone to the post office beginning to walk in that direction when it was already late in the afternoon. I noticed that a woman on the street was not dressed right because she was in her early thirties though I'm not saying that I had any plans for that evening either or had anything I wanted to do until a few days from then.

17.

Other people seemed completely internal which I noticed when I'd observed a man for some time and saw that he'd say something about himself and I thought that he should be that entirely

and that other people don't go into a sort of public world

18.

We went places in the afternoons and showed an energy in this medium so that if someone were angry or had some other feeling it was necessary to exaggerate emotion after a short time.

I wanted to be wholly transparent so that I would tell people details of my activities whether I was casual or angry or not