



To The GROUND

RUMBLINGS, GRUMBLINGS & OTHER SEISMIC EVENTS

Volume 1, Number 1

FREE

From the Editors:

Frankly, this is one hell of a time to bring another literary publication into the world.

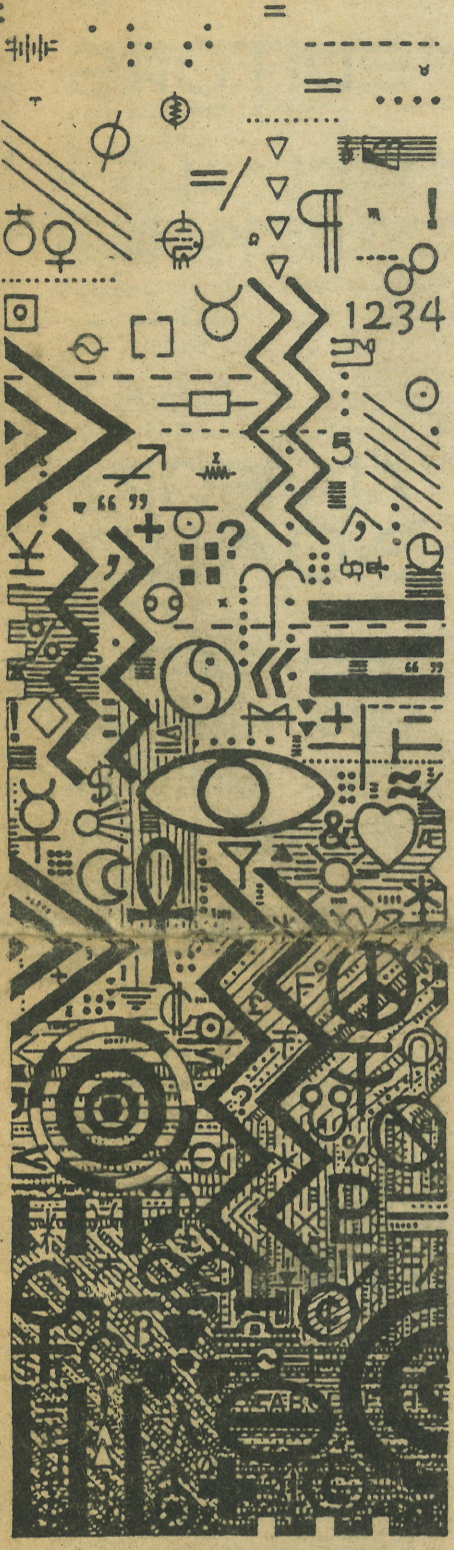
As we're sure you know, the political and economic climate throughout the country has not been conducive to funding for the arts. Whether it's the outright hostility of U.S. Senator Jesse Helms, the bureaucratic cowardice of John Frohnmayer, the now ex-director of the National Endowment for the Arts, or the low prioritization through indifference of state executives such as Michigan Governor John Engler makes no difference; the result is the same. Government support of the arts has dried up during an economic recession, when businesses, private foundations and individual contributors are least able and/or willing to step in and pick up the slack. In such a climate, the conservative intent to foster self-reliance and separate the artistic wheat from the chaff mutates into widespread cultural genocide. We don't know about you, but we don't plan to go gently into that good night, thank you. As if the miserable climate weren't enough, we enter a "market" where thousands of literary rags are published in the English language alone. That's a lot of publications competing for the attention of the tiny segment of the population that actually gives two hoots about the literary arts. So the questions begs itself: why bother?

For one thing, we believe that it is precisely when conditions are inhospitable to the growth of American literature that it is imperative that someone carry the banner. As we implied above, not only won't we go down without a fight, we won't go down. Period. Writers, artists and performers have throughout time demonstrated an uncanny ability to survive. During a dry spell, when everything else dies, the grass roots survive. As fashions come and go in the literary establishment, as interest in sundry schools of literary style and criticism waxes and wanes, one thing remains constant: people who need to write, write. If they write with style and imagination, (at least some) will appreciate their work, no matter who they are, where they come from or what their literary philosophy is. This is why loosely-knit communities of writers who share little more than passion for their art continue to thrive while self-anointed observers, surveying a single strata of literary activity, proclaim the death of American literature. Reports of our death have been greatly exaggerated.

The grassroots literary community has, from time to time, been mistakenly (we think) referred to as the "literary underground." It is our experience that groups


which have pretensions of being an "underground" movement wind up forming their own establishments, with their own standards of admission. The true grass roots of literature become communities almost by accident. They meet at open mics, or on the bus, or through mutual acquaintances. Mutual support becomes a powerful ethic

prevents inclusion in *Eye to the Ground*. Nothing prevents inclusion. Rather, we are striving to provide an organ through which distinctive, vital writers discuss their art in a manner in which it is not discussed elsewhere. We hope to become the literary equivalent of the types of magazines which thrive on political debate. We hope to es-



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Michigan Council
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grant memorandum

January 15, 1991

FY 1991 PROPOSED BUDGET REDUCTION PLAN

Yesterday Patrick Woodworth, Director of the Michigan Department of Management and Budget announced Governor Engler's plans to reduce the current FY 1991 State budget. This plan would eliminate the current balance in the Council grants accounts.

By direction of the Department of Management and Budget, Effective immediately, all Council grants are suspended.

The plan, which will be discussed by the Legislature over the course of the next ten days, is subject to change. You are advised to prepare for the possibility that you will receive no additional payments on your grant. Furthermore, there is a possibility you will be asked to return any funds you have not yet spent.

Once the Budget Reduction Plan has been agreed upon by the Administration and both houses of the legislature, specific reporting requirements and procedures for grants will be provided to you.

1992 GRANT DEADLINES

Governor Engler has proposed sweeping budget changes which would include the elimination of arts grants funding.

Due to the current uncertainties about the future of this funding the deadlines for FY 1992 grant applications are suspended until further notice.

In the event that grants funding may be restored, new application deadlines will be established and ample notice will be provided.

and diversity of style is valued. These communities occupy neither the subterranean depths of the self-consciously avant-garde nor the rarefied air of literary academe. However, they are too restless to reside at the eye-level of a consumer of average stature, where the attractively-colored packages produced by mainstream publishing are within easy reach. Instead, they remain at ground level, nurturing the lush green undergrowth too often taken for granted and protecting the rich topsoil from erosion.

Our aim is to be a voice for this community. Not that fame or academic affiliation

establish a diverse readership, many of whom may have recoiled at the very thought of reading essays on literary practice. Most of all, we hope to show that there is a world of writers, whose roots are the grassroots, who have intelligent and enlightening views on the art of writing. It is time these voices were heard.

We've never done anything quite like this before, so we're sure we'll be learning as we go along. One thing we can promise is that every issue will be lively reading. Like New York City, we may be crazy, but we'll never be boring.

- the editors

THE WORD: A Glib Editorial On The Superficiality of Information In Mass Culture

KIM HUNTER

It does not look good. Even with the steady rise of hip-hop, that places more emphasis on lyric than any pop music in a generation, even with the rise of Spike Lee and other young black film makers who place greater emphasis on ideas and ideology than most popular film makers, the word is in trouble and complex ideas are very scarce in mass culture. There are many examples of how mass culture has been lobotomized. But the most of the blame can be summed up in one word: profit. It is easier to sell simple things to a homogenized target group than it is to promote complex, iconoclastic, controversial, or subversive ideas. It is monopolized by larger corporations run primarily by a particular sex, race, and class. Corporations are in the business of making money above all else, and have particular common interest in maintaining the socio-political status quo. This leads

It is easier to sell simple things to a homogenized target group than it is to promote complex, iconoclastic, controversial, or subversive ideas.

further homogenization, and simplification of mass media where image is favored over words and simple ideas are favored over complex ideas. I will examine much of the how and some of the why of this degradation of words as complex ideas.

When I say that I am concerned about the subservience of words to images, some may be puzzled. After all, the image preceded the word and images can express complex ideas. Hieroglyphics used pictures to express some of the most complex ideas known to humans. Surrealists have broken ideas open on the altar of the psyche.

But unfortunately, television and pop film have only the most ironic and superficial relationships to the complex and/or surreal expressions of sophisticated imagery. While pop culture may be ripe for analysis by the above mentioned art forms, little of this analysis reaches the consumer of pop culture. So what are most people getting? They are getting messages that are designed to grab attention from blocks away—like the hyper-bass of modern pop music.

When it comes to blasting out a simple message from afar and grabbing the attention of a media-saturated public, simple images work better than words and simple words work better than increasing use of the 72-point headline (as with the *New York Daily News* and the London tabloids) and the increasingly lurid jacket illustrations. Words in large print become more important for their imagistic quality than their content. Publishers want you to judge the books by their covers and the newspapers

by their ability to generate excitement. As the large block print screaming headline becomes commonplace, the form overtakes the content. The event/content does not determine the format or size of the headline. The screaming headline tells you that the story is important whatever the content. Style comes before substance because the seller wants your attention. That is the first step to getting your dollars. Once you've bought the product, the seller's job is done. Only those who are in the business of expressing ideas that are important to them are concerned about influencing readers to do anything but buy more product. There can be differences of intent between the authors and the sellers/distributors. But

more often than not, the bottom line is the bottom line.

Complex and thought provoking ideas can and have been expressed succinctly from Hemingway to haiku. But the most pervasive succinct messages come from the thirty second television advertisement. This has had a severely underrated and negative effect on literacy in North America. There is no need to repeat statistics on the hours of television the average person watches as opposed to hours spent reading. Television is easier than reading and those who have money or product invested want it to continue to be fun for you.

Ironically, M-TV and the 30-second spot have co-opted much of the technique of surrealists and such accomplished subversive film makers as Jean-Luc Godard. These techniques are used not as their originators used them but for the novelty they provide on the screen. Examples include off-camera dialogue and most commonly the extremely quick editing and juxtaposition of images. These images may not be related to anything other than their ability to titillate heterosexual males who have not matured beyond adolescence. But the audience thinks it fun, certainly more fun than reading.

With appetite and attitude shaped by images that for the most part do not have to impart ideas, it is no wonder that most of us spend more time watching television than reading. Most of us never learn to read between the lines in school and why bother when you don't have to grapple with gut-

wrenching ideas to be stimulated? Quickly-edited images are more fun. They grab your attention without having to pay attention.

That's what television news is designed to do: grab your attention. Once those whose viewing habits are being monitored have noted their choice, the seller's job is done. Nowhere are the sellers and the authors of content more in harmony than in television. We've already looked at the commercial and how it is aimed to grab you. What is just as interesting is how television news is more concerned with how the news is framed image-wise rather than what the news is.

The information that you get through TV news is verbal. While the producers of television news are concerned with verbal content and accuracy (within the parameters defined by the social-political mainstream) they are far more concerned with the image that is used to give you the verbal information.

Hence we get the

"live shot" where a reporter will stand outside of a location where news has occurred and relate the story. It is not required that we see the location. In fact, if we turn away from the set and just listened, we would get most, if not all, of the information. But switching to a live shot gives a sense of urgency that cannot be had with the talking head, especially when that talking head is reading copy written by the average television news writer who must jam information into one to two minute slots. Pacing and the illusion of change take priority over content. The talking head is dull, so we are switched to another part of the studio (more often than not the "newsroom") where a different talking head in another setting gives us information that the first talking head in the first setting could have easily given us.

There are very dramatic situations and moments that cannot be conveyed adequately with words alone. But Nelson Mandela cannot be released from jail everyday and no one wants to cover the infanticide or the shanty towns growing in the north of Mexico as workers migrate to subsistence wages from wealthy U.S. corporations.

These stories continue beyond their dramatic moments. But it is unlikely that the news media companies ever being consumed by interest to do anything but sell us the most dramatic and hence the more superficial aspects of any event. The same follows with the ideas we get in our leisure. **ETG**



To The GROUND

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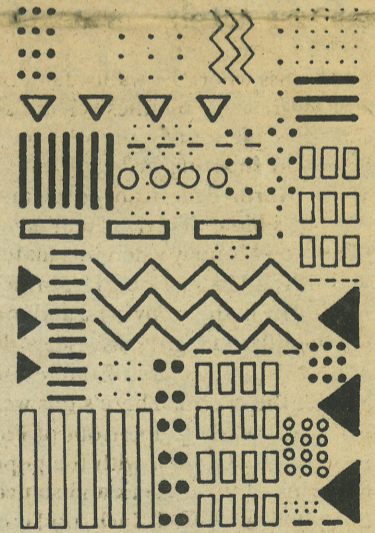
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Class And Poetry In Detroit

GEORGE TYSH

"daughters of the working class sons go ahead"

— Beverly Dahlen

Those who remember Detroit as the foyer of industrial democracy know how much has been lost. The unrealized ideal of community has been replaced by raw lack. It stares back from unpainted siding on A-frame houses, once the pride of generations of workers. It survives in remnants of neighborhoods like the traditionally Polish enclave of Hamtramck, a small town surrounded by Detroit now home to a mix of delegates from all the continents.

Four, five and six decades ago, trolley cars in Hamtramck carried the employed of the assembly lines, the U.A.W. was a powerful union and at the corner of every block was a bar. A man could get falling down drunk and still crawl safely home. His wife knew where to look for him. Now on Labor Day weekend at the Hamtramck Festival, a citizen can get totally wasted on the

street, piss where he wants, fall down in it and laugh as his buddies yell at babes. He can blow his money on Michael Jackson dolls and shooting galleries, eat kielbasa, dance North American polka and drink until he's blind. This all culminates in the parade on Monday when vets march out in uniform and flags, the big fat Shriners come zipping by in their tiny cars, and some guys in camouflage fatigues drive jeeps down the avenue shooting blanks from real machine guns at the crowd. There's this weird feeling like an early chapter out of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* with the populace at the brink of the berserk and someone getting publicly snuffed. Such display contains the double-edged sword of working-class hara-kiri: both the menace of military self-sacrifice and the collective power of the exploited turned upon whom? No one seems to know or remember. Freakish bargaining, drift up and down the streets with nothing to do but spend their wages and explode. And sometimes during this weekend, a few Albanian kids will get together for the annual Labor Day show-down with their Black counterparts; this year real guns with real bullets were added, though only one wiseguy ended up in the emergency room.

Five miles away on Detroit's riverfront, in a plaza designed by Isamu Noguchi, the annual Montreux-Detroit Jazz Festival is heating up. Underwritten by some cigarette or beer manufacturer, it nevertheless is free to the public, features four days of local and international talent (like Sonny Rollins, Max Roach, the World Saxophone Quartet or

Tito Puente) and kids don't get pissed on by drunks or shot at by their peers.

People from all over the world know that, alongside the cars, immortal music has been made in the Motor City. John Lee Hooker, Sippie Wallace, Yusef Lateef, Barry Harris, Donald Byrd, Martha and the Vandellas, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, Iggy and the Stooges, et al.—the festival joins in that lengthy, lovely story. Parents bring their children, whole families learn of this pleasure together. The multicultural union of the people is here a living fact, united in honor of the greatness of our urban tradition. Though African-Americans have had enough bullshit directed their way to fuel a methane nuclear reactor, the Montreux-Detroit Festival reflects achievements, harmony, feeling, intelligence. And booze is not the order of the day.

a variety of formal information... and the results in our writings were equally diverse. Orthodoxy was just boring, like following the boss's rules at work. So despite the huge popularity of Dorn's *Gunslinger* in Motown over the past two decades, his stance on "language" writing (that it was ephemeral, could be ignored) was never taken seriously. Because as sons and daughters of the working class (the pure products of Detroit), we wanted to know and wouldn't be told what not to read. Reassessing Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* anthology today, its ethno-and phallogocentrism stands out. In its place, we turn to Ishmael Reeds's "Quilt," Jerome Rothenberg's "Symposium of the Whole," Nathaniel Mackey's "Hambone," Charles Bernstein's "The Politics of Poetic Form," and works by Kathy Acker, Mei-me Berssenbrugge, Joe

The ablest legislature hungers you into their luxury. Too bad the accompanying mob didn't clinch the division earlier.

Visitors to Detroit are regularly surprised by the large multicultural audiences at readings and talks, but we are no longer surprised. We understand that our city's bad national rep is partly a function of fear, derived from a belief in the very concept of "race" and apprehension that what once might have been still thrives in our midst.

This system of who speaks to what and what is aid is left undermined undermined the restraining edge desire

— Dorinda Ares DeLiso

Faced with the rampant (self) destruction of the last twenty years, poets in Detroit have had to dismantle the idea of the muse found in a bottle, needle or pipe.

Labor unions were once a bed of social intercourse that would bring workers of diverse cultures together. We note the xenophobic terror of intercourse, the middle-class hatred of discourse.

Developing a local, home-grown poetics, rooted in our class experience of everyday life, has been our task at hand, and in new writing by Alise Alousi, Bill Harris, Lolita Hernandez, Kim Hunter, Trino Sanchez, John Sinclair, Mick Vranich, those quoted in this article and dozens more, the work goes on. Let the bad mouthing continue!

THE CAPITALISTS' TRINITY

*One is the money.
Two is the show. Three is the Power. Dontcha know.*

— Kofi Natambu

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Dennis Teichman, V-8, Past Tents Press
Dorinda Ares DeLiso, Christine Monhollen and Mary C. Taylor, Editors, *Triage* magazine
Kofi Natambu, *Intervals*, Post Aesthetic Press
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This article is reprinted with permission from The Poetry Project, the newsletter of The Poetry Project at St. Marks Church In-The-Bowery. ETG

...
*someone always wants
some more
do you?*

— Glen Mannisto

Faced with the rampant (self) destruction of the last 20 years, poets in Detroit have had to dismantle the idea of the muse found in a bottle, needle or pipe.

*am i the bottle of myriad labels
the mildew kisses of rabid dogs
the plasma of ninety cent wine
the bullshitter of pregnant words*

— Ron Allen

Before AIDS, the art/music/writing scene here was regularly shaken by various forms of permanent fade-out, and endlessly rehearsing the one-act play of marginality has seemed more and more futile. Detroit poets, with the jazz, r&b and rock traditions as their models, intend to speak of and to the people. In a poem to her city sisters, Leslie Reese writes:

*I see them wearing their hard brown
fingernails shaped
and colored
by blood and afterbirths; corneal,
ammonia, and the juice of
themselves in love.*

Since the mid-60's, when John Sinclair and cohorts started the Artists Workshop, poetry has been made in Detroit as a form of bricolage. In 1965, our publicly avowed mentors were Olson, Creeley, Duncan, LeRoi Jones, Burroughs, Selby and, for some, Spicer (as well as Mingus, Monk, Miles, Coltrane, Sun Ra and Ornette). Quite

Ceravolo, Clark Coolidge, Jayne Cortez, Victor Hernandez Cruz, Ted Greenwald, Jessica Hagedorn, Lyn Hejinian, David Henderson, Bob Holman, Erica Hunt, Bernadette Mayer, Ron Padgett, Bob Perelman, Pedro Pietri, Leslie Scalapino, Lorenzo Thomas, Barrett Watten, etc. etc. etc., all of it has mattered. As well as critical theory:

*we see the backs
of heads of those
gone before us. what
were they really looking for?
bags of tools, books of rules.
we anticipate
the exposure of bone and blood.
we are telekinetic seeking
the source of authorship.
doo wop doo wow.
because of the odd meter, the motion of the
feet is disjointed, unpasteurized.*

This from a section of musician/poet Sadiq Muhammad's series "In My Addiction I Study Foucault." Or Thom Jurek's use of Bataille:

*To be this terrorist was born... am not
a sick person/these are items...I am
master
on my pages... or is darkness that deep...
that empty ego that it
controls... Emotional
Terrorism... I am truly the victim here...
or Dennis Teichman's spin on Baudrillard:
All the world silicone humped.
Forget the symbols of revolution,
just keep spraying a fine film
on the screws of the meat chopper.*

The Destination of The Poem

BOB HICOK

Poetry isn't for poets. For though the writing of poetry is a personal, almost secretive endeavor, the result, the product, is a public matter, a possession of others, most especially those who haven't the skills or inclination to write poetry, yet live in need of what it can provide. Therefore my aim is to speak to and for others — for family, for friends, for those I know intimately and those I've never met — and I'm successful to the extent that I comprehend their experiences, aspirations, failings and regrets, and express these phenomena in a way that reveals something of their essential nature and form.

My reasons for feeling that the goal and destination of the poem should lie outside the poet are simple. The first is admittedly selfish, for it's intended as a safeguard of sorts, a way to subvert what might be called artistic in-breeding. Poets, as well as other artists, tend to be introverted and self-absorbed, to spend a great deal of time thinking about our work and our lives. It's difficult, given this situation, not to make an art of our obsessions. The danger is that, when this happens, the work will become caricature, will be filled with images and themes important to the poet — the poet is to some extent forced to reshape what they would normally do.

I recognize that this approach is out of

step with the times. Contemporary notions of what an artist can achieve tend to be solipsistic, emphasizing the revelations of the artists inner-life over their depiction of what transpires in the wider sphere. Perhaps because the contemporary outlook is so pessimistic, because it assumes there is no such thing as Truth, the belief that something indisputable can be learned about oneself offers some refuge, a way of sustaining hope. I understand that solipsism is a persuasive idea, one that seems intimately, biologically true. I simply don't

reader a new and powerful feeling of recognition. It must be visceral, it must work its way into the body and make the reader feel they've read something they've secretly known all along, that it's something which belongs to them. More than any other form of literature, poetry must reinvent itself, must push the boundaries of its forms and themes to include the people and events of the times. If the poet does not embrace this wider, communal perspective, they leave the community without its poetic voice, that is to say, diminished.

cases, get out of the way of the poem and let the character or characters speak as they would, not as I intend that they should.

I realize that many questions are implicitly raised but not answered here. Let me say that I recognize there are definite limits to what I can perceive about others, as well as dangers in assuming that I speak for them. Also, I've simplified the concept of self and other and treated them as if there are definite and readily distinguishable boundaries between them. Clearly this is not the case. I'm convinced that we learn

and work best by comparing the inner and outer realms at all times, keeping in mind that they are not the same yet essentially and inseparably linked. My intention was only to stress the direction of a particular ap-

There comes a time in the life of an artist when the best way to learn about oneself is through the close examination of others, when they become the clearest mirror you have. Without the stories of others, you cease to have your own.

share it. I contend that there comes a time in the life of an artist when the best way to learn about oneself is through the close examination of others, a time when they become the clearest mirror you have. In other words, without the stories of others, you cease to have your own.

Another reason I feel that the source of poetry should lie outside of myself is that the poem should always be a surprise, and can best be so if the poet keeps the reader in mind. Whether the poet uses relatively prosaic language or a series of startling and lean metaphors, they must induce in the

I said poetry isn't for poets. From this, it follows that poets don't belong to themselves. They belong to, they speak for those who can't or won't speak for themselves, who may not know what to say but share the human need to shape and hold to the world with language. We perform a function for the collective body and soul, and must keep the poetic needs of this collective in mind if we are to do our job. And difficult as it may be to perform that job in a culture indifferent to and at times hostile toward its artists, I find it essential to remind myself that I work for others, and that I must, in many

proach, one that attempts to work from the outside in. Finally, this is not a manifesto. It's not my purpose. Rather, it's an expression of a personal philosophy, as well as an idea of what I look for in the work of others. I'm old enough both to be weary of ideologies and to recognize that I have enjoyed and will take pleasure in the future from the work of those whose views are entirely contrary to my own.

Bob Hicok directs the Ann Arbor Poetry Slam. His first book of poems, Bearing Witness, was recently released by Ridgeway Press. ETG

MARKETING: A New Venture In the Arts

STELLA L. CREWS

Nineteen-Ninety-One will be viewed by artists in Michigan as the year local grant money dried up. Not surprisingly, after three decades of free flowing currency, a large number of artists have already begun to look seriously into money-making ventures for their livelihoods. Ironically, from an economic perspective, the evaporation of grant monies may cause less damage to artists, who are well versed in how to keep their art and bodies nourished, but cause considerable losses among industries who sell support services, supplies, rental space, etc. to artists.

What arts councils fail to acknowledge, as well as grant recipients, is the urgency to turn art into tomorrow's rent and bread. Artists must adopt more sophisticated marketing practices in order to survive as full-time artists. Historically it worked this way; when the grant money was gone, the artist could reapply. If funding promised was forthcoming, as contractually agreed and executed, an artist or artists' organization

could be operated and financed by obtaining multiple source grants. Now, sophisticated marketing means that without arts council (and other private sources) subsidies, prices must rise. Off Broadway "little" theatre, (though certainly more relevant to art and artists than "major" theatre) can now compete with less far off Broadway.

Beyond raising prices, admissions, the sale of finished canvases, articles, poems, short stories, lyrics etcetera, another possibility is cooperative television advertising to reach the culture-seeking paying public. The argument, weak and tired, is that the people do not have money for art. They have money for the malls, cars, fast food, designer gym shoes—why not apply the same "logic" to artists who have transportation needs, energy needs, housing, clothing and supplies to continue working! I think that logic stems from the condition of the artists themselves, in many instances, not necessarily from that of the purchasers and supporters of art.

Black art, in particular, is of high value to

lay audiences, patrons, buyers. On many occasions when I have invited non-arts-oriented friends to a poetry reading, they have exclaimed angrily, "Why didn't you tell me this was going on!" or "More people should know about this!" Then, of course, this is followed by, "Why doesn't the media report this instead of the worst." The shyness of artists who display their wares and sell them for very little, or rather practice and defend the undesired to grapple with the realities within realities, the relationship between work and compensation for work, costs and price, hurts the arts.

Recently a young editor asked me why it is hard for magazines like "Solid Ground" to not be able to continue publishing? I told him to ask Kofi Natambu, the publisher of the magazine, but I thought aside that pricing, placement, and promotion to the right audiences sounded the death knell of many a periodical along with the drying up of support money from the arts councils.

Closer to home, it was predictable, once censorship and the National Endowment

for the Arts became political issues, that arts funding would be splashed with some of the moral (American government-sponsored appeal and campaign to condition the "moral" citizen) staining and suffer cut-backs and freezes come October 1st. Still, it is a mistake to seal the coffin on council for the arts money for Michigan artists permanently. There is no telling how long it will take to pry loose the nails that secure that corpse, so in the meantime, writers, sculptors, actresses, painters, performers will be forced to utilize their creative faculties to come up with innovative and effective ways to turn art into tomorrow's dinner.

For those artists who embrace the notion that "I work for a living and make enough to support my artistic endeavor," may the recession skip your industry. For artists who believed the flow of support from public and private grant sources would be never-ending, it is strongly recommended that you turn the creative hours to some creative self-generating bucks (the ultimate alternative to no general assistance to pay the rent and provide food stamps) or face the very real possibility that the only resources you will be competing for in the near future will be homelessness and hunger. ETG

MODERNISM & POST MODERNISM: Jerry Herron and Tyree Guyton: Text and Contexts

TYRONE WILLIAMS

At a symposium sponsored by George Tysh of the Detroit Institute of Arts two and a half years ago, Jerry Herron, a professor of English at Wayne State University, delivered a paper that characterized Detroit as one of the first North American "postmodernist" cities. As applied to urban culture and history, the term "postmodernist" seem to mean, for Herron, the juxtaposition of disparate social and ethnic groups, not by "design" but as an "accidental" effect of stalled gentrification and over development—both the result of a ravaged industrial base. In effect, then, whatever economic signs of vitality showed themselves, they were illusory "surfaces" void of any proximity of different social and ethnic groups, who ironically facilitate "them" (blacks in the city, whites in the suburb, for example) tempered and—hopefully readjusted—by direct contract, direct experience.

Imagine my surprise, then, when Herron was assailed by, at first, professor Aneb Kgositsile (Gloria House) and Alvin Aubert, and then, by politicians in the audience, for his naivete and intellectualizing of "political realities." As I recall, only one of Herron's colleagues — Bob Burgoyne — and one of his ex-students — Rayfield Waller — offered defenses of Herron's position. Despite their varying programs and strategies, the criticism of Herron and his essay derived from a common source: the ideology of the party line. While Herron's essay suggested that the effects of arrested gentrification worked against the capitalist logic that initiated its movement, the ideologues wanted a total and unequivocal denunciation of gentrification per se. In short, Herron's essay indicated the ruptures, tears, and gaps in the social fabric woven by capitalism. In this regard, Herron's essay was

quintessentially postmodernist. But the critique offered by those on the program in the audience invariably had at its source the notion of "political correctness." And this notion, like all essentialist notions, is modernist to the extent it presupposes either/or thinking: you're either part of the problem or part of the solution. This sort of thinking reduces the complexities of social interactions to the level of homogenous and polarized oppositions, the modernist movement par excellence. Herron's postmodernism is critiqued by the modernism of ideologues, though Herron's distaste for certain forms of cultural postmodernism (say, in poetry) is as well known as the ideologues' renunciation of the cultural modernism (say, in poetry) of an Eliot or Pound.

And then there is Tyree Guyton, sculptor, "housemaking" artist, whose radical collages of dolls, tires, pop cans, beer cans, paper bags, etc. around abandoned houses have thrust the young Detroit into the pages of national art magazines.

I have never seen Guyton's houses, only photographs of them. Although these photographs offer the illusion of transparency,

superconductivity, they are representations, and thus, transformations, of Guyton's houses. Moreover, I no longer have photographs. I depend on my memory of the photographs, yet another link in the chain of transformations.

Guyton's houses are modernist in form, monumental palimpsests of urban blight.

attention Guyton's houses drew to Detroit's urban decay, city officials had all the houses save one destroyed. Save for the doll house—a fabulous collection of dolls piled up and about and around and outside the house—these other houses only "exist" as photographs or memories. Guyton's modernist constructions have literally and figuratively been undone by the postmodern logic of capitalism: the displacement of history, depth, significance, etc., and the substitution of glittering surfaces: The Fox Theatre, The Renaissance, River-town, Harbortown, etc. Guyton's art-

Each Guyton house is a black hole, a virtual vortex, into which the flotsam of urban existence swirls with terrific force.

Specifically, these houses offer themselves as towering embodiments of that specific branch of modernism known as Vorticism, associated with the manifestos and art of Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound. Each house is a black hole, a virtual vortex, into which the flotsam of urban existence swirls with terrific force. Each house signifies the implosion of Detroit, a collapsing star, cruising singularity. Like the modernist projects of monumental collages, frozen time, conquered space, these houses function as absurd stills of Motown-as-montage.

Or at least they did. Angered by the

work was and is, in this context, a monstrosity, an unnatural gap, gaping hole, in the smooth surfaces Detroit officials so desire to present, to show off.

Only by consecrating as art—and thus, they hope, relegating it to the sphere of irrelevance — Guyton's violent rupture through the officially sanctioned social fabric could the officials permit the doll house to stand. As art, it soars above the turbulence of history, culture, politics, etc.. Such would be the modernist reading of this modernist project, a reading "permitted" by the postmodern logic of surfaces. **ETG**

Silencing The Hordes

ISHMAEL REED

The phrase "the mongol hordes" conjures images of crazed Tartar barbarians, raping, pillaging Russia in the middle ages. Charles J. Halperin, in his book, *Russia and the Golden Horde*, presents a more balanced picture. He concludes that the effect of the Chinese invasion on Russia's development was clearly very great, contributing to its commerce and establishment of the Russian Orthodox Church. Such contributions were denied through what Halperin refers to as the ideology of silence; refusing to admit that such an invasion even took place, or distorting the achievements of the Chinese by Russian historians who were influenced by, in Halperin's words, European feelings of superiority. Similar techniques have been used to deny or to denigrate the enormous influence of Afro-Americans to American culture.

Some recent examples: Rock and Roll, a form of musical expression created by blacks has created a multi billion dollar industry yet when the all white jury at the *Rolling Stone* magazine chose the 100 best singles by rock and roll artists, of the last twenty five years, Mick Jagger, a black imitator came in first and Marvin Gaye ranked fourth.

A San Francisco novelist, appearing on "The Today Show" during the week of the Republican convention, commented on the Irish, German, Creole and Cajun influence

upon New Orleans culture, but made no mention of the influence by Afro-Americans, without whom there would be no distinct New Orleans cuisine, architecture, music, and language. Ann Rice should read *Gumbo Ya Ya*, a 581-page book compiled by the Louisiana Writers Project, and available in paperback. Langston Hughes said they'd taken his blues and gone and now they've taken Be-Bop. Clint Eastwood who made a fortune in beat-up-a-black-man-and-feel-good-about-it movies, is being promoted by *Esquire* as the definitive interpreter of Charlie Parker's life. Next thing you know former Prime Minister Botha will be directing the Nelson Mandela Story.

Most of the books about the sixties are written by American Princes like the ones at the *Rolling Stone*, who locate themselves at the center of the American cultural and political solar system, while the rest of us are viewed as so much dust and gas. It took a German writer, to take issue with Paul Berman who wrote that "Tom Hayden was the single greatest figure of the 1960s student movement." William W. Hansen of Enkenback West Germany, in a letter to the

Times, cited the contributions of black students John Lewis, Julian Bond, Marion Barry, and Bob Moses. Black pathology careerist Nathan Glazer, writing in the *New Republic*, proposes the novel theory of geography. He believes that people who live on one side of a desert are smarter than those who live on the opposite side. He denies the existence of a literary tradition in what he refers to as "Sub-Sahara Africa," when, just as the Roman and Greek pantheon of myths and legends produced Horace and Virgil, the African Pantheon has produced hundreds of writers from the early storytellers to Wole Soyinka, and in our own hemisphere, Nicholas Gullen, Langston Hughes, and others.

Glazer ought to take a class in Afro-American lit. from Werner Sollars, a German who teaches at Harvard, or read *Neo-African Literature*, the history of black writing by the late Janheinz Jahn, also a German.

If left up to the mean minds which now dominate American cultural opinion, a thousand years from now Afro-Americans will be viewed as Black hordes whose only con-

tribution to civilization were crack dealers, out-of-wedlock babies, and welfare dependency. But unlike the mongol hordes, smeared for all times by Russian historians, there are European, Asian, and African scholars who will make a different witness, and with the introduction of desktop publishing software, and inexpensive video technology, black artists and scholars will be able to tell their side of the story as well.

Novelist, poet, essayist, songwriter, television producer, publisher, magazine editor, and playwright, Ishmael Reed has been called "a mainstream source for the next generation of 'New Black Aesthetic' writers and multi-culturalists" (Keith Antar Mason). He teaches at the University of California at Berkeley and his books include Shrovetide In New Orleans, Yellow Black Radio Broke Down, The Free-Lance Pall Bearers, Mumbo Jumbo, The Last Days of Louisiana Red, Flight To Canada and The Terrible Twos. His latest is the yet-to-be-published The Terrible Threes. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in poetry, and he currently edits and publishes Konch magazine. ETG

“Poetry Institutions” is an expansive phrase. To say it is at once to conjure what exists that must be destroyed and at the same time to “Europe-DooDoo” the folk. Like we used to say, “fool *em, Devil!”

The main so called poetry institutions are part of the devil’ bi’ness, the superstructure of imperialism to be sure, what they raise to raise themselves, in the material ritual of the continuance of evil.

Except we have to keep the eye to the ground, to the real basis of what poetry is in the first play. That is, motion E, continuance of what everything is born from and returns to. It’s expressing of living.

The institutions that could be called Poetry Institutions, 1991 USA are like the priests of the inquisition. As this is the animal world right on, still on the pre-human tip behind not yet solving the problems of food, clothing and shelter. It was our tail that let us swing, our tale that let us swing, our tale, &c. Yet we have stopped at the worship of minerals, where primates self hypnotized create a world, whose God is yellow and shiny, a mineral. Where they literally live in paradise but reduce it to hell and try to destroy it everyday. Where they have the brain-to-mind of the totality of all consciousness, but keep most of it closed, like rooms in old mansions it’s too expensive to heat.

Poetry Institutions would, in any circumstance, be part of a super structure. The complex of philosophy and the structures erected to continue to express that philosophy reflecting the economic base they have been built on. In an imperialist and white supremacist society like the U.S., with a monopoly capitalist economic base, the mainstream of formal arts, education, culture and consciousness, artifacts and structures reflect that economic base.

So that both the “official” poetry and its formal structures of forwarding in the U.S., in the main, express the solipsistic, “unnatural,” individualistic, greedy, superficial, reactionary, racist character of the society itself.

American “official,” e.g. “prize winning” poetry is death on wheels. The big wheels that run the U.S. cultural establishment, and the bigger wheels that turn the whole political economic structure.

What is pushed in the schools is mainly Bourgeois, Eurocentric and dead. The nature of American higher education is still 18th century colonial, as if the Tories had

won the American Revolutionary War, and continue to rule the Yankees from New England (e.g. Harvard, Yale, the Ivies, &c).

English literature, and of course English poetry, are still foisted upon those thinking they are being educated, when neither of those hardies (with certain pointed qualifications) had existed for 100 years. (Oh, please, I don’t mean Yeats, O’Casey, Beckett, Wilde, Joyce, Shaw (My God!), &c., you know, of course, they’re the I.R.A. chaps! Not Thomas (naw, he Welsh). What about...? Eliot, Pound, no, for christ sakes, they are American hicks. That’s why they never went back to the states like Williams, Hughes, &c because they were embarrassed by cracker hickishness, when it turns out they were the biggest hicks. Eliot from St. Louis, you know that Missouri twang? The “Show Me” state. Show you what? We don’t have time to show you every thing! Pound was from goddam Idaho. He and potatoes heaviest things out there. Please!

The US university is the largest bastion of 18th c. European colonialism in the U.S. The double consciousness that DuBois analyzed in the black American petty bourgeoisie and as one aspect of the cross class “slave mentality” wherever it was found, i.e. look-

Taken from the perspective of their so called higher education, American bourgeois, formalist, “official” intellectuals have been taught that nothing American (or even alive!) can be classical.

ing at yourself through the eyes of the people that hate you, has a somewhat analogous parallel to the American people generally. Taken from the perspective of their so called higher education, American bourgeois, formalist, “official” intellectuals have been taught that nothing American (or even alive!) can be classical.

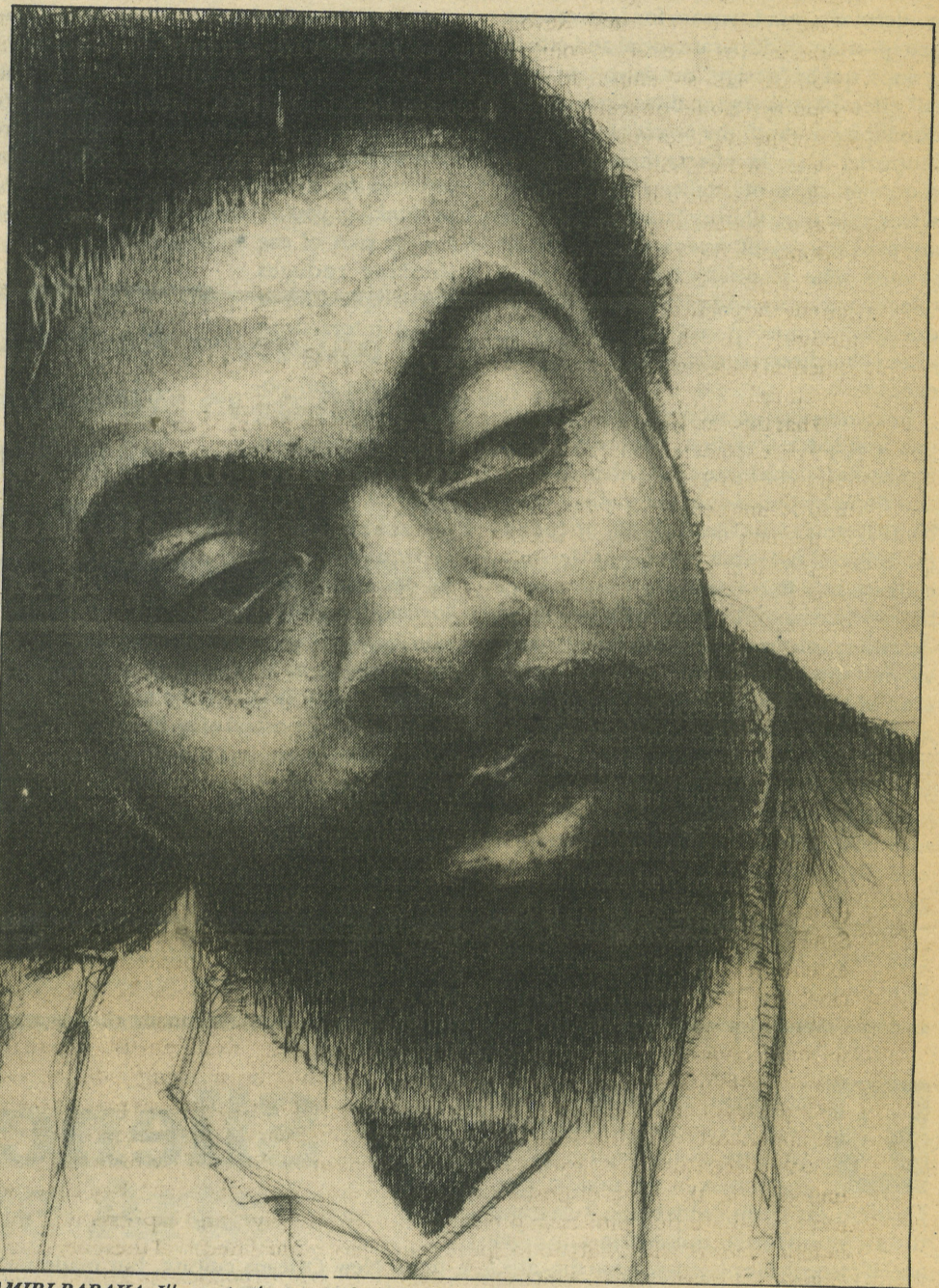
What is not understood by too many of us is that one of the reasons that “American speech” and “American poetry” were of such import in the 20’s (e.g., Harlem Renaissance and American Modernism) in the most advanced aspect of US culture was that they were sharp thrusts against the explicit paradigm for so called “High Art.”

enabler of the economic base) is duplicated by all the others.

This is the importance of the Cultural Revolution that Mao projected from what Lenin said had to be done post October Revolution to see that the influence of the still-existent bourgeois superstructure did not undo the political victory, even that

EYE TO TH

AMIRI BARAKA



AMIRI BARAKA Illustration by Scott Dedenbach

The language, texts, cultural referencing of The American University and the American mainstream artist still are shaped and limited menacingly by the dead, the distant, the foreign, the bourgeois, the racist.

A term that in itself spells out the class perspective it seeks to describe.

Important works of Langston Hughes *The Negro Artist* and the *Racial Mountain* and Williams on the *American Measure* (or

the “variable foot”) during the period were guides laying out a term of struggle against colonialism and slavery, implicitly and explicitly of the language arts, and of the culture in general. The political relationship (the

E GROUND

gained by armed struggle.

Mao's call for Cultural Revolution in China, and as a tenet of continuing and historical Marxist-Leninist ideological development should be seen, certainly in the light of the tragedies going down at this very moment in the USSR and to a lesser extent the People's Republic of China. Both, to a great extent, from the failure to mount or to continue the work of Cultural Revolution. (That is, continuing the political struggle in the sphere of the super-structure.)

What this carries for us is that the courageous work of many young people in the 60's, in the U.S. anti-imperialist struggle includes the cultural work. Certainly the arts,

and particularly poetry, and music, were at the center of the black liberation movement. In fact most of the US oppressed nationalities developed arts weapons as part of their anti imperialist anti-racist arsenal. There was certainly even a more general "Anti Academic" stance taken by some of the more "populist" white literary schools, (Beats, New York School, Black Mountain, San Francisco, &c.) which paralleled to some extent the anti-imperialist tenor of the period.

When we speak of "the state of poetry" we must understand that what the super-structure of this society pushes, on all levels, is the poetry of the state! The valorization of the imperialist white supremacist state.

So that it is critical for the whole objective united front, (the actual disposition of class forces who are tied into each other even independent of their will) so to speak, of cultural workers, artists, intellectuals, &c must be to create poetry institutions that represent and reflect the anti imperialist nature of the majority of the American people.

The counter attack of the "New Criticism," for instance, under the guise of "deconstruction" (a good term if we understand what, say, Reconstruction proposed to be after the US Civil War, and how it was "deconstructed" by the Counterrevolutionary old slavery forces (KKK, &c) connected with the rising post competitive capitalist, i.e. imperialist forces (Wall St., &c). So the deconstruction of the US Reconstruction saw slavery turn into fascism (the U.S. slave plantations are the paradigm for the twentieth century concentration camps).

The reactionary period we live in today, a reflection of the downward aspect of the historical cycle of the "Sisyphus Syndrome," the Black Liberation Movement and in-

deed the entire struggle for American Peoples' Democracy and Communism. The torturous upward and downward, forward and backward development, e.g., Socialism abandoned in USSR, Social Fascism clearly dominating in China, Nicaragua, Grenada, Bush's Desert Storm Troopers consolidating neo colonialism in the middle east and continuing colonial domination by Israeli imperialism and South Africa and apart-

Poetry is the "Yeah," the confirmation. The response and the call. A bridge between what is eternal, the truth, which is deathless, and the particular. Each soul as it continues before and beyond its "place," but as part of the always and everywhere.

heid, the seemingly "low comic" maniacalism of the Ray Gun replaced by the middle management no-nonsense maniacalism of the Bush man. All as the extreme opposites of the 50's, 60's, early 70's world political trend that we summed up "Revolution is The Main Trend In The World Today!"

So the counterattack of the formalists, the academics of the 90's who carry the same backwardness, class domination and racism as the "Southern Agrarians" of the 40's, Tate, Ransom, &c. who want to re-establish the primacy of the schoolmen, "the critic" over the artist. Where the death worshipping academics define and refine art out of existence as part of the are not.

And part of that process is to always deny, dismiss, disqualify & hide (like Columbus, what they "discover" they cover with Dis, the real lives and expression of the people are disqualified!) All these are carried in by the rush of political backwardness and counterrevolution that are sweeping the world today! Even though significant resistance internationally still exists.

In fact, part of the whole destructive assault of political reaction carries with it as a focus and method of domination, the substitution of history by propaganda.

The point is to take poetry away from the devil by being the mouth of good. Or the place of good.

Whole periods are eliminated or disguised, problematic persons routinely eliminated from history, contradictory philosophies caricatured and distorted, the ancient slave philosophy continuously revalorized.

So that the "statement" of poetry, as an expression of the context of its appearance, must, to be actual poetry, and not advertisement for irrelevance or the status quo of world torture, be an expression of what exists, and at the same time a "defining" of

it by "showing" it, not only as image, but as the body of what life?

The "feelings" of the oppressors have long ago become technology and rules. The suppression and contradiction to reality is one basic form of greed sanctioned act which they pretend philosophy. The logos of feeding.

Poetry, as the expression of feeling, emotion, as a representation of what exists, is the Art (which form, is outlined, or outlines, the Aint) and carries by that function a "Grandness" that is heavy as a real branch on a real tree, a real cry from a real person. That is, it connects, as an exclamation, as the cries of the worshippers, possessed, by what creates as an epiphanic consciousness

history and culture recreated as art, and noun. To inform, like the town crier. That is what Griot means, to cry out, to give the world the gift of self consciousness. To make the soul aware of itself as a power of transcendence and revelation. The U Turn of light and seeing, of the mind's function, confirming itself by seeing itself see itself.

On the real streets of this world, poetry, like all the things we need to live, must be created by understanding and consistent informed practice. The flash of perception confirmed as rationale (a name) and then used (practiced).

From the mass perception, rationale and use comes the development of science and more advanced feeling. Our poetry institutions must begin exactly where we are, like our poetry, but a poetry of advancing humanity, of developing post-imperialist society.

From where we are, the storefronts (just like those other congregations), the basements, public schools, playgrounds, bars & restaurants, hey, even, what the hell, try libraries and the other cultural institutions nominally controlled by the dead and the devilish. The life of our desire is its health and its commonality.

The Rappers have demonstrated much further than our own earlier defense how black poetry and black music are mated, as well as the lie that "politics" is separate from art!

The point is to take poetry away from the devil by being the mouth of good. Or the place of good. This is the desired state and institution of the mass poetry, that which makes good appear as the continuum of our feeling, deeply and ubiquitously. So that we are the doing as we are the being.

We need the poets focused on our real lives, and by the poetic act itself help transform those lives. The poetry and those institutions we create to foster this continuous, evolution to revolution, are whatever we have that can also be transformed, by a more intimate act... mimeograph sheet, a poetry reading in a playground, classes for youth, artists-in-residence in public schools because art is the teacher, yet there are formalists who try to teach grammar or "English" without having the students read.

But even those more intimate, or "smaller" acts must be linked, as a networks. An anti-imperialist poetry network, for publications, readings, institutional develop-

ment is what we need. This kind of network will give the mass prizes, create the nitty gritty distribution being, tours, writers conferences. As long as the Yale Series of Younger Poets, The Pulitzer, HearstMonster Publishing, Hollywood, Broadway and phoney off-Broadway twist our heads and arms through our continued loyalty to them, even measuring our lives by them then Freedom is simply the name of another religion. ETC

of the created. Jazz replicates the self consciousness of creating as a body, newly born as the action which is naming.

Poetry is the "Yeah," the confirmation. The response and the call. A bridge between what is eternal, the truth, which is deathless, and the particular. Each soul as it continues before and beyond its "place," but as part of the always and everywhere.

Ja Is! Jazz! Coming like the "word," the "Big Bang," of which prayer is one formal reflection and ritual of memory. The seasons, the year, day and night, time, the motion and continuous natural opposition and unity dialectic between quantity and quality, the pulse, the heartbeat, rhythm, the breath. So the worshippers leap in the air saying Yes, Yes, like the breath of a body as the body of something even finer. I feel the heat of the sun, yet I myself am a property of the sun.

To become everything's creator, Nothing, pregnant with for instance, the source of creation, the circle of origin and continuity. Coming in and going out.

Just as the word created this world so the word will create and is another world. The present bulges with history and moves forward as will to will. The poet is the bridge of

was is will, poetry the utterance of that peeped motion.

The reactionaries value form over content, because no one must know what is going on. Formalism hides content under the abstraction of motionlessness, "tradition," class denial, academic shallowness. Life is outline and given form by what it is not. What surrounds it as the contradiction that gives dimension.

Poetry appears as the Griots proposed, as

On Poetry And Technocracy: A Critique

GEOFFREY JACQUES

"Poetry is a sliver of the moon lost in the belly of a golden frog."
— Carl Sandburg

I became a poet because of Walt Whitman. Reading him in my high school library, I came to love his freedom, his ability to make a poem from any thought, experience or fleetingly sighted object. His ability to make poems out of ideas and things—the most extreme ideas, the most common things—appealed to adolescent imagination and maturing tastes.

Old Walt is still in my life. I keep a copy of *Leaves of Grass* on my desk at

work, and a hardcover copy (Modern Library edition) on my bookshelf at home. During a fellowship at MacDowell Colony last year, I spent mornings in my cabin reading "Song of Myself" aloud: for its daring, for its cadence, for the ideas and the things.

But during my youth I also got something else from Whitman. I got my first, enduring ideas about a poet's character. Walt Whitman is still our nation's greatest poet. I learned from him of the poet as rebel and visionary; as "non-professional" person-of-the-world. And I learned of the Academy as the enemy of all that was full of life in poetry. Carl Sandburg, who, I suppose, is no longer taught or read by our learned writing program professors, introduced a wonderful phrase in the language: *The People, Yes*.

Behind that idea lies a whole aesthetic and way of life. It symbolized the high aspiration of the poet: to be someone of and in the world, making poems from the

shards of life. Put simply, Sandburg and Whitman had jobs where they worked with people who lived in a world centered around neither poetry, literature or even necessarily their jobs. And they weren't alone. Whether plain speaking imagist or lecherous surrealist, prole or beat, New York, San Francisco or Venice Beach, the poet lived within life, not above it. In the early years of this century few poets made their living from verse. That is still true today. But even fewer of the really important poets of our

an abrupt change from the day when the important poets were those of San Francisco school, the Black Mountain poets, the Beats, the new Black poetry, and the 'new' surrealists!

Today most poets make their living from teaching in universities, and most serious literary magazines are published by universities. Most would-be poets seem to feel they must get certified by one of our university writing programs if they are going to 'make it' as a poet.

a fallen leaf speaks volumes. But would our commonplace MFA of today, in his or her 90's-style literary life, see what Dr. Williams saw? Would she or he think to write about what they saw and how they felt about it? Maybe. But could they write in such a way that we would want to read it? I wonder.

None of this should be taken as an argument against education: only as an argument against what they used to call "selling out." To what? To what poet Kenneth Rexroth used to call the money culture, the social lie. To what the rebels used to call the establishment. And what's wrong with that? Just try to read some of the works of our Ph.D.'s in iambics. Poetry should make your blood boil. It

Whether plain speaking imagist or lecherous surrealist, prole or beat, New York, San Francisco, or Venice Beach, the poet lived within life, not above it.

language taught in universities. Sandburg wrote for newspapers. Langston Hughes did the same, and wrote plays. Who remembers that the "Simple" stories were journalism? And, of course, they both read before all kinds of audiences. Marianne Morre made a living as an editor for many years; later, Henry Ford paid her to come up with a name for the car which would become the Edsel (her name wasn't chosen and history, sadly, was only half-made).

The major exceptions to this were the poets of the "Fugitive" school—John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, etc., and those around the quarterly magazine, *Partisan Review*: Delmore Schwartz, Robert Lowell, John Berryman and others who taught at Harvard and other elite universities. But these writers were long considered the standard bearers of cold-war liberalism and the most conservative literary values in the country. As part of the cultural fallout from the Reagan revolution, these are now considered the most influential poets of our day—

What has this done for poetry? Just try to name a poet born after 1945. The last great generation of poets this country produced was born in the 1920's and early 30's: Allen Ginsberg, Diane Di Prima, John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov, Amiri Baraka, Frank O'Hara, Gary Snyder. (Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Robert Duncan, both major poets of the mid-century, were born in 1917 and 1919, respectively). There are many poets writing today, but none have the reputation or audience of those named above.

I believe this is the result of the ghettoization suffered by our poets in the Academy. This has not only isolated them from the rest of the living world, but has given many of them, I think, little to write about which interests us, and little incentive to recharge the language in the way poetry does which lives in our hearts. Dr. William Carlos Williams, for example, wrote poems about what he saw going to and from work, and his comparison of a young housewife to

should make you hard or wet or giggly or tingly or mad or happy or sad. Sound preposterous? It shouldn't. And that's the whole point.

In a life of reading and writing poetry, I've learned that I have few heroes who were "professional" poets in today's sense. Pablo Neruda was a diplomat. Whitman, a journalist. William Carlos Williams, a doctor. Frank O'Hara, a museum curator. John Ashbery, a journalist. Gerard Felix Tchicaya U Tam'si, a journalist, editor and diplomat. And of those who qualified as "professional" poets? Well, judge for yourself: Langston Hughes, Marianne Moore, Allen Ginsberg, Ted Joans, Robert Duncan, Elizabeth Bishop, Bob Kaufman, Jayne Cortez.

The state of our poetry, such as it is, would be vastly improved, not if the Academic poets left the Academy, but if we could resurrect a poetry for the rest of us, for those of us who read and write because of what our souls, not our tenure commitments, demand. **ETG**

Another War Postscript: Deaf Poets In The New World Order?

KALEEMA HASAN

Of the holy trilogy so necessary for the security of the new world order, Blind, Deaf, and Dumb; Deaf is the one which poets find themselves the most concerned with. To be deaf is not simply being unable to hear, but it is also finding a substitute for hearing, or feeling, vibrations. So while the "master" culture fosters deafness in the masses (us), the poet accepts the challenge of creating feeling through positive vibration.

So you see, it ain't so hard to get people to hear. Just get them to feel feelings about themselves, their environment, and the world. By feeling we mean the inner secret method of comprehending why one chooses to hide or express an image, whether physical or spiritual. Feelings are a spiritual translation of what we think or want to think, know, understand, and comprehend.

The state of the word, of poetry, is that poets are today creating images that can free up feelings. Lie makers under the guise of "media image/industry" have gone unchecked in their manipulation of reality by creating false images of everything, to the point that we hear people (including poets) saying "I think" when they really mean "I feel" or when they are even more lost, "I don't know how I feel." Heading toward insanity fast is to not know how one feels, to not own one's feelings. I mean you do know how you feel, you may not like it, you may not want to own it, but you do know, right?

You know it is all right to protect one's feelings to be enraged because someone hurt the "feelings," but it is very sad to become deaf to feeling, to lose the ability to vibrate. How can you not vibrate/feel, poet? What has happened to the image in your

How can you not vibrate/feel, poet? What has happened to the image in your heart that tells your head and hand what the spirits have to say?

heart that tells your head and hand what the spirits have to say? Where did the image go?

The state of the word is the state of the images, pictures in our head, and the dreams we carry around in our conversations and longings. There is indeed an anti-indigenous feelings propaganda war being waged against the ownership of one's feelings. The war is being waged with twisted truths, lies, and vicious falsehoods, fashioned by Hollywood and Madison Avenue. But, every word creates a vibration, sound and even the deaf can hear. (Can't we?). We may not own the truth, but we do own our feelings (the pathway to the truth that is neither positive or negative, but truth). As poets,

that is the very ground we stand upon, the pillars we call our legs are the ability to create feelings; to get political, analytical, "stupid" (a 1991 word/image that means to really understand or comprehend a thing). If we continue to do this, then the state of the word is that the people/poets still own it, i.e. we still need to be tricked, hoodwinked, and manipulated, because naturally we love beauty too much. If, however, we choose not to believe what our spiritual translations of the word reveal to us, then the state of the word is that instead of the meek inheriting the earth, we will continue to fertilize it. And that is not the feeling I'm looking for. **ETG**

The Paraphysics of Poetry

PATRICK O. LANIER

*"For by names and images are
all Powers awakened and reawakened."
— Esoteric Principle*

"Paraphysics" is a non-controversial term for "Alchemy." What follows is the paraphysical alchemy of what happens when we recite — or, more properly, invoke:

Words, meter, beat, feet become matrices of energy, living thought forms which are given identity, shape, direction and destiny by the over-riding thought and (especially!) feeling of the reciter.

This living, vibrating thoughtform, this gathering cluster of intelligent and obedient electrons, continues to function as a self-sustaining entity long after the reciter has invoked it and gone on to something else. Since the thoughtform is inherently endowed with intelligence and an instinct for survival (derived from the life force of the creator/reciter), it continues to seek out, merge with, and feed upon similarly vibrating energy in order to prolong its existence.

Over a period of time, the thoughtform giant mass and density and eventually fulfills its "destiny" by objectifying into a "solid condition in three dimensional reality."

None of this comes as a great revelation. We more or less know the principles and the mechanics of "karma" — or we soon learn by dealing with the daily curses we invoke upon our own heads through careless and ignorant use of our vital forces. But the Poet/Orator/Reciter works under an added karmic liability when presenting en-

When we use peoples' life energies in this way, we become responsible for the ultimate outcome, in much the same way as the mundane law would hold a man responsible for any offspring that resulted from an indiscriminate sowing of his seed in fertile fields. The resulting "child" may be hideous in the extreme — but a man would be forced to acknowledge parentage.

This is all a super stiff way of saying that our words, thoughts and feelings are always in the process of becoming self fulfilling

as common as the street axiom: "What goes around comes around." Objective evidence suggests that we haven't thought long enough or deeply enough about what it all really means.

One conclusion is, to me, inescapable: what we do is not a "craft" but a "calling" — a sacred labor. Every day that we pursue our calling in full knowledge (and reverence) of what we are doing and why, provides a sacred opportunity to ascend to the exhilarating heights and grandeur of Creatorship,

to reorder our worlds into models of peace, progress and prosperity.

What has been done can be undone; what is crooked can be straight; what is ugly can be made beau-

tiful. It all depends on what direction we take the people's energies. Any Poet/Orator/Reciter who is unaware of or ignores this profound fact, who insists upon getting up before the people spewing out randomness (no matter how well intentioned) negativity, is just another dumb, dangerous kid with an Uzi.

Patrick LaNier is a Detroit-based guitarist, poet, philosopher and businessman. ETG

Over a period of time, the thoughtform giant mass and density and eventually fulfills its "destiny" by objectifying into a "solid condition in three dimensional reality."

ergy to an audience because then the Law of Reciprocity come into play. Using the lever of the audience's attention, we inculcate our thought forms into the moist consciousnesses of our hearers, titillating their nervous systems, resonating in their deep psyche and seducing them into feeding our thought forms with their own energy — which of course accelerates the process of solidification into physical reality.

prophecies; we speak/think/feel commands to invisible intelligences, issue irrevocable decrees as to which things and conditions shall be made tangible in our collective experience.

It is obvious, and perhaps simplistic to further postulate that positive situations concretize from positively charged thought forms, and vice versa.

Everybody knows this. The knowledge is

New American Poetry Or Old Eurocentric Clique?

SUNFROG

"New American Poetry" surveys a wide landscape. New American poetry is being written every day. New American poetry is created by a vast, multi-faceted, flavorful dynamic of each writer and each work in every place; many poems we will never read and many author's names we will never know. Nathaniel Mackey pointed out what a ridiculous notion it is to attempt to define any finite body of work as the New American Poetry. We can talk in limited terms of some new American poetry, of course. Even more repulsive is to try and define the New American Poetry by an anthology which bears that name, one filled with a majority of white male writers.

Certainly the "great" names of this somewhat arbitrary genre made substantial and lucid contributions to the experimental evolution of the poetic movement. But the fame and notoriety of those writers is as much cosmic accident as it is a reflection of distinguished talent. This is the very nature of "fame" in American Society. We should also remember that even the "great" writers spent tiresome hours, months and years dealing with poverty, rejection from publishers and cries of blasphemy from the academic language elite.

We should recall the time when these now legendary fold—the likes of Ginsberg,

Kerouac, Burroughs and Co.—were only known among small communities of writers and readers of the small time independently published journals. A link from those days to the proliferation of small press insurgencies today is clearly evident. We are part of a cultural lineage whose offspring extend today to punk rock fanzines, xerox/mail art broadsheets, weird neo-religious cults, daring academic journals and more (a list of today's alternative publishing could extend far beyond the length of this essay.) New American Poetry covers a much broader scope than we can ever imagine. Any finite perception in this instance would only represent small concepts coming from tiny minds. The new American poetry is bigger than any one visualization of it.

In examining this potpourri we are calling new American poetry, let us remain cognizant that America is two huge continents, not just the United States, lest we slip into the: "racism and cultural suprematism" Charles Bernstein spoke of as the "non-biodegradable by-product" of Western logocentrism.

New American poetry feeds from the interwoven quilt of various art forms that we do not usually think of as poetry, "Don't trust any poet who claims to know what poetry is" serves as appropriate idiom here. Mackey pointed out the poetry in the Afri-

can-American jazz and blues of John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis, Mississippi Fred McDowell and others. Should we also include the paintings of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo? The films of Stan Brackage? Should we remain limited to examining work created after World War II?

If we are going to consider mainly post-World War II writing, Bernstein provides an impressive argument for the profound effect of that "great war" on new writing, marked by its most horrifying events: the extermination of Jews in Nazi Germany and the nuclear holocaust in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These "landmark" terrors, along with their accompanying shock, grief and pain, repressed as these feelings may be in the American psyche, "transformed the social meaning of the cultural events" of the new American poetry.

People have come to realize that the Western intellectual tradition, previously proclaimed as progressive, has a odor as intolerable as the stench of burning flesh. Foundations of "democracy" and intellectualism in the United States have always been on the graves of innocent victim, from African slaves to indigenous tribes, but the use of the atomic bomb in World War II somehow brought this fact to its most undeniable destructive end. Writing after this

time can not help but be altered by this reality, even if acknowledgment of it is pummeled deep into the subconscious. The role poetry played in the civil rights movement and struggle against the Vietnam War are some clear examples of how social injustice transforms cultural practice.

The new American poetry should not be mistaken for a cult of personality built up around a white boys' club of pot smoking avant-garde bohemians. Such "in group" introspection comes dangerously close to simple petty bourgeois back slapping. Any concept of the new American poetry that does not include Women, Gay, Child, African, Chicano, Asian, North, South and Native Americans (and all so-called minorities on these continents) reverts to the racism and cultural suprematism mentioned earlier. The new American poetry is also the unsung, unpublished and unnoticed poetry of the common people not contained in any anthology of poetry class curriculum. The small press, the street corner, the corner bar and the house on the corner—these are as much the meccas of new American poetry as Naropa Institute, Black Mountain College, New York and San Francisco.

It should be our most impassioned desire to release poetry from being the property of the highly educated and let it abound as the collective oral tradition of all people. ETG

Introducing JEFFERY RENARD ALLEN The Black American Literature Forum

RAYMOND CARVER

The Black American Literature Forum (BALF) and the Obsidian II are among the few journals in the Detroit Public Library and Wayne State's Purdy Library that provide readers with the opportunity to witness young Afro-American poets and critics attempt to develop craft, extend particular literary influences and cultivate their voices. In this regard, Jeffery Renard Allen's contribution to the BALF Fall 1990 issue and the Obsidian's summer 1990 issue is noteworthy. Allen, a Ph.D. candidate in creative writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago, writes in a voice that is acquainted with African, Afro-American, and Caribbean resources that makeup our diasporan heritage. Reading his six poems, as my Dexter bus hurried down Cass one April afternoon, I was struck by how Allen's focus on historical and mythical personages fueled his rhythmic depictions and dramatic incantations.

In "Juba," Allen attempts to capture the spectacle and ecstasy of this indigenous form of revelry. As he tries to depict this experience and express its emotional weight for us, the first images that provoke him are he gathered itinerant musicians and the

te night starting time:

Black butt players

drum pork barrels.

Gold coins sail out/in

the long summer night.

Along with conveying moments of ca-

thartic release, Allen in two instances, alludes to the protean qualities of the musical performance through metaphors of manual labor,

Mr. So and So

worn down in a groove

chops weeds of alcohol and

exhaustion/finds a lowdown

chord in the

cleared space

where we dance.

He sending us.

Shut our eyes and sway

and

Lead strikes six rails, ringing.

Releases a deep-throated

whistle.

Keeps bass with his bull-dog toe.

In "Home," the bluesman B.B. King allows Allen to fuse musical improvisation and the act of Fishing:

b.b. bends cane

pole strings fishes

feelings. my ears

catch songs.

he covers Lucille

with his rain

crying for all.

On the whole, B.B. King, Bessie Smith and his Mother inspire Allen to meditate on Lineage, Tradition, and his sense of mission as a bearer of both through poetic acts of self-definition:

i got my

blues habits on.

journey. this
*restless tongue/
whip/driving me
down dusty roads.*

Within the crossfire of deteriorating male/female relationships, Allen's "Mens-for Tonia" discloses the pervasive sense of shattered expectations,

Sweet Mamma/had a

red hot finger

poppin Pappa.

then

You/was his angel child.

Now/he

lord of your misery.

*One day/
his love jus*

went blind

went blind.

and the possibilities for regeneration,

*But/
you said,*

If he can

*stand to leave me/
I can stand to see him go.*

In the last two pieces Allen utilizes a range of elements to chant prayers and retell sacred stories. "Osun" (an African Youroba diety) displays the importance Allen places on assembling historical and mythical figures as symbols of virtue that inspire and motivate him.

Henry's hammer

still shakes our guts.

We cut our face with

*Jelly Roll's diamonds and
suck truth from Sojourner's
hard breasts.*

Here John Henry, Jelly Roll Morton and Sojourner Truth represent strength, creativity, and rectitude. In "Beginnings" Dieties from the African Yaruba religion and its New World variant; Santeria, provide Allen with talismen with which to retell the history of the tribe in moments of glory and tragedy,

*Legba forges leaves from light
tips the grass with gold
sprinkles all his creations with saliva*

or

Shango, the preacher,

sings, sings

the blues wearing his

laced with lightning

Teeth jus chips of coal

and

Leaves flap,

the tongues of the tribe.

Duppy dancing on the damp ground,

dancing on decks slippery with blood.

It is Allen's sense of heritage, along with his use of image and language that makes his constructions and representations interesting and creative. Despite the academic trappings of his work, which tend to minimize his and other poets receptivity to the inner workings of contemporary dramas of self and place in urban contexts, Allen's promise nevertheless makes him someone to keep an eye on in the future. ETC

The Responsibility of Consciousness

J. CHRISTINE

Someone told me that since I called myself a poet, I had an obligation to re-enlighten Black people as to what is happening for/with/to us in America today. Well, what is exactly happening here? What exactly is our state of mind?

There is a certain amount of apathy that has gripped our consciousness; it seems to have especially consumed our older generation. The young people are trying to shoo it away by taking a stand and letting it be known what will and will not be tolerated. It's coming together on college campuses and high schools around the nation. They're saying with their hair and dress and attitude I wonder if they know the true origin of their warrior-inspired haircuts and who are the chosen men who weave the Kenti cloth and drapes around their necks and is tied about their hat bands).

Malcolm X is more important to us now than ever because of his teachings of self-reliance, self-government and self-protection. Unfortunately, the majority of us are content to sit back and let people in power (the white man) control our destinies and re-establish in our psyches what is considered beauty and label us and steal a little more from us and claim it as their own speech, mannerism, music, etc.) Everything

on television is blond hair flipping and blue eyes batting (it's all, of course, systematic white-wash). Nothing is worse than seeing two white people swap spit on national television, slurping and licking, unless it's two black people doing it to assimilate "honkey."

It's OK to have thick lips now because the white man/woman has "discovered" that a full mouth is sensual and alluring and pretty and sells everything from tofu to toilet paper. Wow! Can you believe that they are actually injecting plastic into their faces to get big lips! Putting big lips on a white woman is like putting Chicago in California. It just doesn't belong there but once you get used to it, it's the "best of both worlds" if you can dig it. And this too shall come to pass.

There is a resurgence of Black pride. It's happening very slowly. We're re-testing the waters. But it's a real trip when you get into an argument with a sister about what her true heritage is. OK, so maybe your great, great grandma on your father's side was Mexican and great, great uncle twice removed from your mother's side was American Indian. BIG DEAL! Even if your momma is white and your daddy is half Jew and half African-American, you are considered Black and, therefore, you are of African descent.

IT'S IN THE BLOOD. WHAT'S THE BEST ARGUMENT? This girl, who is about my skin tone, told me that she felt she had no direct or indirect link to Africa. I feel sorry for her. Don't get me wrong though. If someone were to ask where I was from, I'd tell them in a minute, Fayetteville, North Carolina. American all the way. But my common denominator or my Root Factor, if you will, is Africa. How could that ever be forsaken?

A poem that I wrote in December has gotten me into some real heated debates. People can't seem to understand it but to me it's as plain as the nose on your/our/my face. It's about a girl (me) who realizes that not only is she her parent's child (i.e. facial features, body parts, mannerisms, resulting skin tone), but she is also the product of imposed slavery of her ancestry who were dragged from the African continent by the European, with a little help from a few money hungry, trinket-hoarding brother Africans. She realizes that she is the direct result of the European male's rape of African sisterhood (along with interchanges with other heritages including the North American Indian) resulting in her brown-toned skin, with slight red tint; small booty (used to be flat, baby); long slender legs; and a slight ridge over medium brown

("excuse me, but are you wearing contacts?") eyes.

She is realizing, thus gaining consciousness into who she is. She's learning to acknowledge her heritage, to finally accept her beauty, to accept her blackness and to reinforce her pride.

When people read my poem "her parent's child" they tell me that I don't know what the hell I'm talking about ("what do you mean by southern and northern apartheid? There is no such thing as northern apartheid.") They say that they don't understand it. Not one word is understood. They say it's confusing. They tell me I should read about my history before I start making up trash such as this so-called poem! Well, excuse me, baby!

That really bothers me when people tell me that I don't know enough about my people to write a poem like "my parent's child" and just to say that J.C. would not be one to admit defeat (but if I am wrong, I will admit it), I will read and study and continue to write what is in my heart. I'll also remember that everyone on God's green earth is entitled to his or her opinion. This is something that I'm going to have to live with. I have to remember to keep an open mind to other's opinions no matter how asinine they may be. Because to close my mind would be hypocritical. A closed mind goes against everything that I stand for, which is re-enlightenment of young African-American consciousness (including my own) through my poems and readings and actions. ETC

The Red Azalea: Chinese Poetry Since the Cultural Revolution

REVIEW BY M. L. LIEBLER

Edited by Edward Morin. Translated by Fang Dai, Dennis Ding and Edward Morin (University of Hawaii Press, 235 pages)

No question about it. This is not only an excellent anthology of Chinese poetry; it is simply a wonderful collection of poems! Edward Morin, as editor, has collected some 125 poems written by 24 of mainland China's younger poets. Many of the included poems were written as recently as the mid-70's through late 80's by poets born between 1910 and 1964. The poems vary in themes and styles, but there seems to be a similar trait of using extended metaphors expressed through a common language. These poems are insightful and accessible. They explore everyday questions through everyday images and objects. These are poems for folks who like to think, but who like to understand what they are thinking about. These are poems that believe in a future that can be built upon a rich past history, excluding the wasted years of Mao's "cultural revolution" and shortly thereafter. What is evident in these post-Mao generation poems is the reappearance of the concept of "human self." Many of these poets were in exile or driven underground during Mao's "cultural (and post cultural) revolution." A quick glance through the titles in the Table of Contents will easily illustrate the return of these poets to the "human-self" and a contemplation of the future and the past: "The City," "Dreams," "Poetry," "I Want,"

"Memory," "The Walls," "Spring Night," "Early Spring," and so on. These poems often take common objects, thoughts, or abstractions and ponder, through related imagery, their significance or insignificance to self and to life. For example, in the poem "Echo" by Ai Quing (the oldest poet represented in the anthology: born 1910), he explores the meaning of something as ordinary, yet as unique, as a simple echo:

*She's hiding in the valley
She's standing over the cliff
If you refuse to dally
She'll act as if she's deaf*

*But call her and she'll call you
Curse her and she'll curse
You can't win if you argue
The last word is always her's*

This is the dimension and philosophical tone of many of the poems in this collection. Some of the poems are more imagistic and other more existential like this excerpt from poet, Yang Taping's "One Hundred Roses":

*One hundred spring mornings weep for me
They become one hundred autumn twilights
The sword is the longest of paths
One hundred roses bring no comfort to the tomb
One hundred winters I will sleep in your arms*

*I am a child who has run himself ragged
Only you can embrace all my dreams*

And calm me to the rhythm of my own heartbeat

But, this poetry goes beyond just being "imagistic" or "existential," much of it is "rural reality" (as was much classical Chinese literature), "urban consciousness," etc. Some of the work represented here also touches on political/social commentary, but as mentioned before, much of it reflects the return and search for "human-self."

Edward Morin, and his translators, have done the world poetry community a great service with this anthology. It is a collection to be read, reread and shared with all who care about great literature and the further understanding of life. These poets are sometimes referred to as the "Obscurist Poets," but it is time for poetry readers to become aware of these poets who, as noted Chinese literary scholar, and Professor, Leo Ou-fan Lee states in the anthology's introduction, are combining "Extreme individualism with anarchist impulses... something that would have been very difficult during the (Mao and) early post-Mao period." The time is now to smell the "Red Azalea(s) on the Cliff" (from the title poem by Xu Gang):

*Red azalea, smiling
From the cliffside at me,
You make my heart shudder with fear!
A body could smash and make bones splinter in the canyon-
Beauty, always looking on at disaster.*

*But red azalea on the cliff,
That you comb your twigs even in a*

*mountain gale
Calms me down a bit.
Of course you're not willfully courting danger,
Nor are you at ease with whatever happens to you.
You're merely telling me: beauty is nature.*

*...Sometimes the past years look
Just like the azalea on the cliff.*

This excerpt best sums up the spirit and philosophy of the many fine young Chinese poets represented in this anthology and who are repressed by their government's so called "cultural revolution."

But, there is a post-script to this anthology. Shortly after this book went to press, the June 3 Beijing Massacre took place. Once again, many of China's poets and artists were driven underground or out of the country. Still, as this anthology best illustrates, and in Editor Edward Morin's words, "Chinese literature of the past (distant and recent) has weathered the storms of adversity and calamity, modern Chinese literature will prevail too." In the words of the young demonstrators of 1989, "They can't kill us all." This anthology is a testament to that strong spirit!

M. L. Liebler is the founder of Ridgeway Press, President of the Poetry Resource Center of Michigan, and a teacher at WSU. He is frequently seen performing his work with the Magic Poetry Band, and has most recently issued "Stick This Up! Poetry In Performance" on cassette. **ETG**

Jazz & American Writing In The 20th Century

A MEDITATION ON & REVIEW OF BY KOFI NATAMBU

THE JAZZ POETRY ANTHOLOGY,

edited by Sascha Feinstein &

Yusuf Komunyakaa,

Indiana University Press, 1991

The history of American poetics in the 20th Century, like most areas of intellectual inquiry and scholarship in the West, has been largely distorted and obscured by the reductionism of racism and cultural xenophobia. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the blatant ignorance displayed by most academics of the aesthetic ideas and traditions of the most profound manifestations of American vernacular forms and practices. One of the most obvious areas of stupidity and confusion are the categories of music and literature, or more specifically



Duke Ellington

the formal and cultural relationship between them.

What is most astonishing about this massive blind spot in American cultural studies is that it ignores precisely what the rest of the world most deeply knows and appreciates about the United States—namely Jazz, Blues, Rock, Funk and Rap music. Everyone realizes this except the pea-brained white cultural elite (both "mainstream" and "avant-garde") who keep insisting that Leonard Bernstein, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, George Gershwin, Elvis Presley and Bob Dylan are more important than say, Duke Ellington, Charles Parker, Thelonious Monk, B. B. King, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix and Aretha Franklin. The sheer absurdity of this position is responsible for the idiotic curriculums of the great major-

ity of American high schools and universities where these pathetic notions are taught. (along with the ridiculous myth that "classical music" is inherently more "serious" and "informed" than American popular and vernacular forms). Roll over Chuck Berry and tell Little Richard the News!

As a result many students are deprived of learning how and why just about every major writer in the world over the past 100 years has been deeply affected by the extraordinary innovations of African-American artists. How else does one rationally explain the Jazz and Blues inspired work of the following writers: W.C. Williams, Amiri Baraka, Sterling A. Brown, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Langston Hughes, Clark Coolidge, Bob Kaufman, James Baldwin, Jayne Cortez, Robert Hayden, Leopold Senghor, Carl Sandburg, Lawson Inada, Nathaniel Mackey, Ishmael Reed, Kenneth Rexroth, Sonia Sanchez, Kazuko Shiraishi, Jack Kerouac, Jack Spicer, Wallace Stevens, Melvin B. Tolson, Quincy Troupe, Al Young, Paul Blackburn, William Matthews, Gregory Corso, Michael S. Harper, Kenneth Koch, Clarence Major, Frank O'Hara, Clayton Eshelman, and Ted Joans? (all of who are in this amazing book).

The answer is that you CAN'T EXPLAIN IT without reference to Duke, Count, Pops,

Billie, Sarah, Bird, Miles, Monk, Mingus, Sonny (Rollins, Stitt, Criss and William-son!), Ornette, Ayley, Cecil, Dophy, Bud, Shepp and Coltrane. I've left out about 5000 more names that you should know if you really care about the subject at hand. But why don't you find out for yourself? Never has there been a closer link between knowledge and pleasure. If you don't believe me ASK YOUR MAMA (a classic and essential Jazz/Poetry text by the legendary Langston Hughes, Knopf, 1961). Oo-Bop-ShaBam-a-Klook-a-Mop! Y-E-A-H... **ETG**



Sarah Vaughan

Eye, ear, brain: a MANIFESTO

MARK DUCHARME

(Part One of two parts)

*"Whatever has black sounds has duende.
There is no greater truth."
—Federico Garcia Lorca*

*their phrases without worrying themselves
about the accuracy / of their interesting
observations there's where an hour of
oblivion leads in the smoke-blackened oat
tunnels"
—Tristan Tzara*

What, then, is the situation of our poetries today? It will not be enough to patronize one's favorite poetry-in-a-bar event, to hear the young (& they are, by and large) men read their poems, without a clue, actually, as to how it is the art can get pushed forward. As if poems only existed so as to get your feeling put into them, receptacles of a rarefied obviousness. But now I have to open this text up like poppies, harmonicas, debris, cities, labia. Like the "reactionary voluptuaries/ we are it is only fitting that we should get it back to an art of urgency and verve. I can't stand any literature that "means" something exclusive of its demands formally. I'm similarly bored with work that wants to insert, for its aesthetics, a linguistics or philosophy which, though not altogether irrelevant, has nothing to do with questions of *art* (if I may be so backward as to insist that that is what's at stake).

I am not interested in the Detroit or Ann Arbor scenes, specifically. I do, however, view it as important that there be diverse & vital scenes, at least in the major centers of commerce, if not anyplace else where such activities can be instigated. I am absolutely a partisan of the infinite. These are desperate times in the fleece of complicity. And so the question becomes: are we to have an avant-garde of flesh or are we just wasting our five minutes at the microphone? So to speak.

I am going to discuss, then, some of the particular messes our poetry has gotten itself into, with a view to the history of the thing (since I think it is often impossible to understand anything without knowing at least that much). Of course it wouldn't be worth the effort if I didn't have a few modest proposals of my own to make along the way; we shall get to those shortly. For now though, let us turn our attention away

from the exigencies of Detroit life per se, and to the (no less calamitous) national literary front.

I We are witness a unique phenomenon. The number of poets in the United States is (relative to what one might think, if not to the country's population) quite large, and growing. This, at a time when -if we are to believe two sources that have partly proven themselves to be beyond question, the U.S. media and "soft science" statistics-literacy in the U.S. is on the decline. The fact of the quantity of poets is not in itself particularly interesting. There is, after all, the comparatively vast poetry workshop industry, which churns out mediocre poets with the regularity and efficiency of a factory mass-producing circular saws. What is interesting, though, is the burgeoning number of unknown or little-known poets who publish, and are published by, the also burgeoning number of fringe literary magazines.

From what I have seen of their work, these "fringe" poets (as I'll call them here) are not, to their credit, sympathetic or even interested in the poetics of the workshop boys. Though most of the liberties they take presuppose ground room by modernist, they are, as far as I can tell, generally not aware that this is the case, or if they are, they are not particularly interested in early modernist history. Further, though the Beats at least seem to have had some influence on fringe literary developments, too many of the fringe poets are disinterested in or even ignorant of the range of work, say, from the New York poets or projectivists. In short, under the surface of numbers, as usual, there is a different story, and it would seem in this case that though are MORE poets today than there were, say, in 1920, their overall "literacy" has gone down considerably.

These are crude generalizations, and I know they are wrong in some cases. I hope they are wrong in a hell of a lot of cases, but hear me out, I want to warn you about something, or at least play a little devil's advocacy on you which, if that is not the role of the poet-as-critic, I don't know what else is?

Now, one might well argue, it is not really a question of literacy in the strict sense. The only "trend" established by the assertion, if

it is true, is that poets at the fringe are not really interested in, say, the petit bourgeois artyness of a Frank O'Hara. And why should they be? Perhaps their own work is the beginning of a new poetics, a "post-postmodernism" of sorts that (as has been the case more than once in modernist's brief history) has circumvented the avant-garde that preceded it.

Good Point; except that it is easily refuted. Though the burgeoning of a fringe literary scene is an incorruptibly healthy development, its poetics, as yet, has not likewise burgeoned into anything that could seriously challenge even the (easy to challenge) aesthetic of workshop poetry, let alone the often brilliant and diverse practice coming out of the (now established) literary avant-garde. In fact, most of the work I have seen, even in the best fringe literary "zines, is crude at best. My complaint is not so much that these poets have bypassed modernist or postmodernist influences that I like; it is that they haven't produced any work that comes close to equalling what they've otherwise chosen to ignore. That's a serious fault for any literary movement (even one that has not formally declared itself a movement). Further, one must ask, if they are writing and publishing this work with such a frenzy, what is their POETICS? The New York school made it okay again not to waste time explicating one's aesthetic ground, but in the case of their deceptively "simple" poems the poetics was always THERE. I can't say that this is the case for most of the work I'm seeing in the fringe magazines -or in fact, it seems to me that their only poetics is NO POETICS, which again I think is a mistake. Why build a car if you have to place to drive?

II

The "poet boom," discussed above, is of course only something of a corollary to the "baby boom," and its beginnings are to be found with the early "boom" generations. The so-called counterculture of the time saw poetry as an alternative to capitalist activity (which it is). It also looked to poetry as receptacle and conduit of certain deeply-held values - values which were later discarded when it became apparent that they were not in the best financial interests of their holders. The interest of the baby boomers in literature was, in shirt, not a

literary one, but it did help to foster a climate in which the careers of a number of talented you poets flourished. In the later 60's and early 70's the so-called "second generation" New York school reached its zenith -in terms of activity and energy, if not in terms of the work produced them, which would, in many cases, be surpassed by these poets' later writings. Though they sometimes published themselves and each other (often, from what I understand, in mimeo editions), they soon came to be recognized as peers by their mentors and, fueled by the general confusion of the times not doubt, some major publishers actually brought out first and second books by there people. This, despite the fact that the work they were doing was, in its wonderful post-dadaist sensibilities, hardly careerist, and was at times criticized by the guardians of taste as being sloppy and full of "blunders."

Times, you will note, have changed. I see a lot of very fine work in the well-known quarterlies, but nothing even close to the verve and daring of those great days. Not that, of course, daring is always the point. But you will admit that, for poets, these are often times of quiet desperation. These days, a 40 year old author (still the baby boom!) might well be referred to in print as a young poet. The only course of action, it would seem, is to quietly, politely wait one's turn, cultivating not so much the art of poetry as of flattery -or ELSE to take matters into one's own hands. My readers will not have to hang on the edges of their seats wondering which course of action I endorse.

What I am looking for is a literary generation worthy of the effort I am making to address it. I am very tires of the clones who have obviously taken over the souls and bodies of the American people. What do you want with a literary career, anyway, if you can't make the kind of poetry that really excites you? Might as well be a MacWrite salesman or something at which least you could make some bucks. Think about it.

Hold that thought until the next issue of ETG, when Mr. DuCharme makes radical proposals for the future of American poetry in the second part of his essay. — editors

Mark DuCharme lives in Boulder, CO, where he is editor of break to open and the Last Generation/Underground Editions press. ETG

So, what do you think?

When we started this, the first issue of *Eye To The Ground*, we hoped to be able to publish on a quarterly basis. The subsequent experience has been gratifying - but the future of this journal is uncertain, simply because we don't have funding adequate to cover the costs of production.

Now we need to get feedback from you, our readers - and, if possible, enlist your support for continuing efforts of this kind. Please give us a call, or take the time to send us a written comment, a contribution, or just your name and address for our mailing list.

You can use this form to write to us (and make checks or money orders payable to Eye to the Ground) or give us a call at (313) 832-4327 or (313) 933-9474.

Mail to Eye to the Ground, 74 Charlotte, Detroit, MI 48201.



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- I like it! Put me on your mailing list.
- Contribution enclosed.
- Comments enclosed on separate sheet.