

Other works by Steve McCaffery

Books

Shifters

Carnival: Panels 1 and 2

Dr. Sadbu's Muffins

Ow's Waif

Intimate Distortions

Knowledge Never Knew

Panopticon

Evoba

Legend (with Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Ray Di Palma & Ron Silliman)

In England Now That Spring (with B.P. Nichol)

Sound Poetry: A Catalogue (with B.P. Nichol)

Horse d'Oeuvres (with The Four Horsemen)

The Prose Tattoo (with The Four Horsemen)

Translations

Six Filliou's

Records (with The Four Horsemen)

Canadada

Live In The West

Cassettes

Wot We Wukkers Want

Research on the Mouth

Avoiding the Beautiful (with Whitney Smith)

Manicured Noise (with Richard Truhlar)

Whispers (with David Lee and Bill Smith)

Videotapes

Permanent Performance: A Sound & Action Poetry Sampler

∇ Beyond the Ideo

North of Intention
Critical Writings 1973-1986

Steve McCaffery

that a lie attacks language at its weakest fabricative point: reality itself. Swift saw the lie as constituting the essential difference between a man and a horse, Dewdney shows it as the chief agent of anti-matter, as the shaper of new forms at the margins of reality, chiselling away at the mass of "that which is" to release the fragments of "what are not" and which equally well "can be". "from A Handbook of Remote Control" is 'pataphysical hyperbole in the grandest Swiftian manner, a dextrous overstatement of the notion that language has its worth more in the capacity to mis-inform (and hence create) than in the ability to inform and consolidate what's already there. Information, the honest statement of the facts, is the path into the entropic state of fossil. As lie, however, language is a weapon at the service of a guerrilla epistemology and is, in the words of George Steiner, "the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is".

1975

Writing as a General Economy

I've chosen to approach writing and the written text as an economy rather than a structure. The latter tends to promote an essence as relational, which has the clear advantage of avoiding all closed notions of the poem as "a well-wrought urn" but suffers from a presupposed stasis, a bracketed immobility among the parts under observation and specification. As an alternative to structure, economy is concerned with the distribution and circulation of the numerous forces and intensities that saturate a text. A textual economy would concern itself not with the order of forms and sites but with the order-disorder of circulations and distributions. A writing by way of economy will consequently tend to loosen the hold of structure and mark its limits in economy's own movement.

Specifically, I want to focus on writing as a general economy and start by presenting Georges Bataille's concise definition of it:

The general economy, in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without meaning.

The application of this definition extends far beyond scriptive practice and would include all non-utilitarian activities of excess, unavoidable waste and non-productive consumption in which one might specify orgasm,¹ sacrifice, meditation, The Last

First presented to the Department of Social and Political Theory, York University, Toronto, November 1984 and in revised forms at the Poetry Project, St. Mark's, New York, January 1985 and New Langton Arts, San Francisco, January 1986.

1. Incest, for example, could only exist within the operation of a restricted language. As Lyotard describes it "only in words can the mother be conceived as a mistress; in

Supper,² and dreams.³ It would connect too with the theories in Barthes' later writings regarding a certain hedonism in reading and a shift in emphasis from a utilitarian understanding (including a readerly production of meaning) towards a pleasure or "jouissance" of texts.⁴ Apart from a brief look at potlatch, however, I will limit the discussion to writing and approach the subject from two directions. The first will be descriptive and try to indicate the unavoidable presence of general economic operations as an aspect of language's fundamental constitution. In a second part I will consider general economy as a model for writing, hinting towards an extremely tentative "poetics of the general" that might serve a praxis of challenge to conceptual dominants of traditional writing such as transmission theory of communication, the continuous subject, the valorization of representational and referential procedures etc. and try to show how a strategy of the general economy can help loosen the philosophical hold that utility, as an unquestionable value, has maintained historically over the notion of writing.

We will oppose this economy to restricted economy whose

orgasm, she is no longer the mother, no longer anything". Outside of interested meaning, in the system of general economy, libido would not be of the order of a transgression (a crossing of boundaries that simultaneously annuls and preserves the partitionality) but of a liquidator of social definition and categories.

2. The Last Supper, as a problematic moment in diachronic Christology, has been dealt with by Hegel in his early theological writings; it is the issue of the predication of transubstantiation upon an alimentary model. In the conversion of Christ's body and blood into bread and wine (and bear in mind the eucharist is not a simple metaphoric substitution) there is an intrinsic contamination of two codes. Christ becomes bread and wine, yet the attendant implications of the subsequentality (digestion, absorption and elimination) are carefully avoided by the early Fathers, who ignore the repercussions of Communion as a general economic action.

3. Dreams, it would seem, occupy a liminal, indeterminate position between a production and an involuntary expenditure. This indeterminacy is reflected in Freud's own hesitation in affirming the dream as either an absolute communication (and hence capable of being submitted to interpretation) or a conflictual, intrapsychic "spillage". Freud hence draws the distinction between the dream *per se* (which is of the order of an involuntary outlay and eludes intentionality) and the dream *text* which is open to interpretation. It was Freud's inability to incorporate all elements of the dream text into the productive sphere that led also to his positing of certain *hieroglyphic determinatives* or meaningless elements, whose function is "to establish the meaning of some other elements". (S. Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. XIII p. 177). Finally, to take note of Freud's theory of neurosis, it would seem that the latter is located inside a restrictive economy. Freud sees as inevitable, the transition from the primary process, which is understood as a direct discharge or expenditure, to the secondary process that postpones this discharge and channels it off into *investment*. This passage from primary to secondary processes, according to Freud, constitutes a necessary condition for the formation of neurosis.

4. The French word *jouissance* is notoriously untranslatable (itself a case of unavoidable loss) but signifies both "bliss" (as a state of pleasure) and "ejaculation" (the precise moment and intensity of the coming).

operation is based upon valorized notions of restraint, conservation, investment, profit, accumulation and cautious proceduralities in risk taking. Both these economies need to be distinguished from political economy which articulates the bourgeois theory of production and from Rousseau's use of the term "general economy" in his *Discourse on Political Economy* of 1758 where *general* and *political* are bracketed together and contrasted with *private* and *particular* economies i.e. the economies of an individual household or family. I want to make clear that I'm not proposing "general" as an alternative economy to "restricted". One cannot replace the other because their relationship is not one of mutual exclusion. In most cases we will find general economy as a suppressed or ignored presence within the scene of writing that tends to emerge by way of rupture within the restricted, putting into question the conceptual controls that produce a writing of use value with its privileging of meaning as a necessary production and evaluated destination. Often we will detect a rupture made and instantly appropriated by the restrictive. The meaningless, for example, will be ascribed a meaning; loss will be rendered profitable by its being assigned a value. In effect, what will be dealt with is a complex interaction of two contrastive, but not exclusive economies, within the single operation of writing. Restricted economy, which is the economy of Capital, Reason, Philosophy and History, will always strive to govern writing, to force its appearance through an order of constraints. The general economy would forfeit this government, conserve nothing and, whilst not prohibiting meaning's appearance, would only sanction its profitless emergence in a general expenditure; hence, it would be entirely indifferent to results and concerned only with self-dispersal. A general economy can never be counter-valuational nor offer an alternative "value" to Value for it is precisely the operation of value that it explicitly disavows. It follows also that the general economy can never offer a full critique of value but only risk its loss, accompany it to its limit and in the slide of value and meaning throw both into question. It will engender neither uses nor exchanges but eruptions without purpose within structures of restraint as that economy which shatters the accumulation of meaning.

To turn to the promised descriptive project and look at the

presence of general economy in language's fundamental constitution: speech and writing "originate" as material substances in the act of incising graphic marks upon a substance, in the physical act of gesticulating (sign language for instance) and in the expulsion of certain sounds through the buccal cavity. In all three cases there is an uncontested graphic, phonic or gestural materiality that is a necessary condition of, yet insubsumable to, the ideality of meaning. A profit, in this way, shows itself to be predicated upon a loss, for the physical act of speaking or writing must withdraw so that what has been said or written can appear meaningful.⁵ Meaning this way is staged as the telos and destination of the de-materialization of writing. The sound and rhythmic components of language can never be reduced to the operation of language per se. Hjelmslev is one of several contemporary linguists who distinguish language as a system from its material support in sound and ink. The phonē (i.e. any objective speech sound considered as a physical event regardless of how it fits into a pattern of meaning) is just such a threshold. As its material support, sound and ink are separable from the signifying process, but at the same time the process is unsupported without it. In light of this one could consider language's materiality as meaning's heterological object, as that area inevitably involved within the semantic apparatus that meaning casts out and rejects. Language fractures at this radical point of support, severing the system per se from a plurality of speech and writing effects. It is because of this general economy of materiality that writing can function as an entirely referential project, pointing out beyond itself to an adequated zone of non-linguistic "reality". When writing situates in a reference to a field of objects it relates to something other than itself becoming projective and a carrier of meaning. So writing's initially

5. Greimas, for one, speaks of the radical *bi-isotopic* nature of language. For Greimas, the two isotopies are "enunciation" and "statement" (*énoncé*). The latter's subject is determined retroactively, hence, a production of restricted economy, whilst the subject of enunciation "enacts" itself in real time through the production of linked and temporally deferred utterances. The letter is pure contiguity and pre-symbolic. Indeed, Lacan has gone so far as to claim that the time of enunciation is a "thing" and as a thing, exists outside the *structured* time of symbolizing discourse. We might compare Greimas' notion of the posterior statementalization of enunciation with the recently developed notions of digital and analog codes. Through this latter availability, the statement would be comprehensible as a co-optation of a digital (i.e. discontinuous or paratactic) by an analog (or continuous) code. The affiliations (real or imaginary) between these satellitic couplings (digital-analog, paratactic-hypotactic, enunciation-statement, restricted-general) is too large and complex an issue to be dealt with adequately in this footnote.

general economy is immediately recuperated as a restrictive operation by which writing does not lose a world of objects but appropriates and retains this in itself as an homogenized territory of meaning, ideality and sign.

As well as this expenditure of materiality from language, the field of objects must also de-materialize, drawing away into nomination and denotation (the targets for deixis) in order to be present *inside* language as a referent. Two instantly appropriated general economies then, are immediately invested back into ideation. Under this restrictive action language never presents itself as a breached system involving two intersecting economies of both waste and retention. The language of instrumental reference will always repress this breach and downplay the constitutional presence of a material exhaustion.

METAPHOR

I want to consider metaphor as a second example of a general economic operation. Clearly metaphor is not a simple designation but a substitutional device that carries a noun or nominal phrase (as a virtual designator) elsewhere *towards* another term. I am stressing the word *towards* because the problematics of the transit inform the very nature of the figure. We will examine this point shortly. Metaphor, in fact, attacks the notion of absolute meaning. At least one aspect of the metaphoric operation involves the institution of an identity between dissimilar things, an annexation of *otherness* and the suppression of difference, and if this aspect comprised the entire action of metaphoricity, then it would stand as a unilateral operation of equivalence that *prima facie* would sanction exchange. But this reduction of difference to identity is never an absolute moment in metaphor; there is always another constitution that threatens presence, an operation of metaphor not as trope but as locus for the contestation of difference. In effect, there is always the threat of substitution going astray in the substitutional passage, of the movement elsewhere towards the appropriation of the otherness collapsing and actually engendering a heterogeneity. Curiously enough it was Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) who first sensed the errant nature of metaphor. There Hobbes confined the figure to the realm of sedition. Approaching metaphor's more political and philosophical implications, he noted the

radical ambivalence of metaphor, its striation of both truth and falsehood that commits it to general economy. Metaphor is seditious precisely because it loses that which it purports to retain, replacing the unequivocal relation of the word to truth with skew, breach and uncertainty. In a simple metaphor such as "the talons of the law", there is a loss of clear, incontestable reference to bird and a similar loss of abstraction in the term "law". Rather than effecting an indisputable substitution (which would presuppose the transcendental principle of equivalence that institutes the exchange economy) the semantic mechanism is rendered nomadic, meaning wanders from one term to another and any relationship through substitution and equivalence can only be asserted within the framing and staging of a certain loss.

We would examine further this constitutional ambivalence with a consideration of metaphor's binary *other* in the great structuralist drama: metonymy, and argue that metaphor, as a substitutional figure, requires a necessary passage through metonymy (its other term). Any purported resemblance between two terms (such as metaphor necessitates) must be predicated upon a contiguous scene, a pre-figurational, pre-rhetorical placement of terms in a scene allowing the spatio-cognitive assertion of resemblance. Now this is a metonymic predication. Jakobson, of course, in the footsteps of both Freud and Saussure, established metaphor (the axis of selection) and metonymy (the axis of combination) as a coupled opposition which subsequently became the diametrical matrix of all structuralism. But metaphor shows itself to be much more than a discrete figure, indeed it reveals itself to be radically contaminated by metonymy, unavoidably ambivalent in its functional relationship to both substitution and equivalence. Terms such as "mother tongue", "table leg" and "watch face" seem structured on this contaminated sense, an indecision between metaphor and metonymy, marking a hesitation between substitution and contiguity.

We can see metaphor as a figure of economy rather than structure, predicated upon a certain scarcity (i.e. the lack of a univocal designator of an object or target term) that distributes its indeterminacies among the signifiatory scenes it helps to establish, offering displacement as a *potential* disposition but fixing a residual potentiality between the two terms. What

seems incontrovertible in this "improper" displacement of metaphor is the loss of both heterogeneity and identity. The move towards the annexation of the difference occurs as much because two things are *not* the same as because of any similarity between them. The movement to resemblance effects an escape of difference, yet there is always an irreducible, unmasterable remnant in the figure that is neither resemblance nor difference but the indeterminacy of both. Metaphor then, would inhabit the two domains of exchange and residue as well as being inscriptional of both profit and loss.

THE PARAGRAM

A text is paragrammatic, writes Leon S. Roudiez, "in the sense that its organization of words (and their denotations), grammar, and syntax is challenged by the infinite possibilities provided by letters or phonemes combining to form networks of significance not accessible through conventional reading habits . . ."⁶

The percolation of language through the paragram contaminates the notion of an ideal, unitary meaning and thereby counters the supposition that words can "fix" or stabilize in closure. Paragrammatic wordplay manufactures a crisis within semantic economy, for whilst engendering meanings, the paragram also turns unitary meaning against itself. If we understand meaning in its classical adequation to truth and knowledge, then paragrammaticized meaning becomes a secretion, an escape or expenditure from semantic's ideal structure into the disseminatory material of the signifier.

The paragrammatic path is one determined by the local indications of a word's own spatio-phonetic connotations that produce a centrifuge in which the verbal centre is itself scattered. Paragrams are the flow-producing agents in a text's syntactic economy inscribing themselves among that other economy whose notion of word (as a fixed, double articulation of signifier/signified) upholds the functional distributions of a presentation.

6. Quoted in Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, tr. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) p. 256. Sections of this discussion of the Paragram occur in a slightly altered form in *The Martyrology as Paragram* in this present work. Both discussions were written in ignorance of Kristeva's own article *Pour une semiologie des paragrammes* (in *Tel Quel*, Spring 1967) to which the reader is encouraged to refer. Both Kristeva's and my investigations seem to have been inspired by a common source in Saussure.

Pius 12 (Nahautl) pippin.
 Common Bot. Stop talkin!
 (Peep) Earliest (Mastic tree)
 Wrestled christ chinese
 Kunklebone (Mees) Any
 Groshl Monkeys Horses
 Abt. 25 miles up (full moon)
 Zauschneria hanj-
 Ing
 Forth 70 obs. (Honigcumb)
 Suck respect and english
 Man huggah-homo-greek
 Names and heb. hypop.
 Jambey zhak-me-no caucus me-
 Yawcus mother MOTHER
 HYSrix ANNA BI-BI
 BI¹⁶

There is a non-utilitarian, hedonistic pleasure derivable from the non-productive consumption of this text. The text has numerous points of indeterminacy (for example is "Comon Bot." a sentence or an abbreviation? Is "Kunklebone" a typographic error? Or further, what would constitute an "error" in a text like this?) all of which call attention to the material relationship of the poem's parts.¹⁷

As an example of the eruption of a more momentary general economy, I've chosen a short poem of Wordsworth's — one of the Lucy Poems:

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
 Beside the springs of Dove,
 A maid whom there were none to praise,
 And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone
 Half-hidden from the eye!
 Fair as a star, when only one

16. Rochelle Owens in *Yugen* 6, 1960, p. 25.

17. Samuel Beckett's prose economies require an entirely separate treatment. At this point, however, we might take note of his work *Fizzles* (ca. 1960 but not translated until 1973) whose original French title *Foirades* means "shit" or "diarrhea" and solicits appreciation of the works as expenditures. The constant passage of words in these pieces through metonymic relations and juxtapositions (the techniques of anaphora and parataxis are frequent) certainly suggests an alimentary model for the writing.

Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
 When Lucy ceased to be;
 But she is in her grave, and oh,
 The difference to me!

Cleanth Brooks, in a reading typical of the New Criticism, explains the poem as structured by an ironic tension that treats the images in the second stanza as equivalent.¹⁸ On close scrutiny of the poem however, it seems difficult to uphold a unity of tension by a mode of irony. Brooks forces essentially heterogenous elements to confirm to his own presuppositions of what a poem should be. Brooks initiates the following question: "Which is Lucy really like — the violet or the star?" and goes on to answer she is a violet to the world and a star to her lover. Brooks creates the classic double bind; he excludes the third possibility that Lucy is like neither and effaces the fact that the grammatical data in the three stanzas do not support a reading of the images having a common referent. It is certainly permissible to treat the opening shifter "she" as referring to the "maid" of line 3, yet there is a rupture between stanza one and two that introduces an undecidability. Do we treat the "violet" as a metaphoric device substituting for both the maid and the pronoun of stanza one? or does it introduce a fresh referent? There is a semantic wandering across the gap of the stanzas, the substitution (if it is a substitution) goes astray and heterogeneity threatens the poem's unity of subject. Line 7 adds a further indeterminacy. Does the stellar simile refer to the violet in the same stanza, or to the maid of stanza one? In the final stanza the proper name enters as designator, but significantly enters at the precise moment death is announced, entering the poem to mark immediately its own erasure. In a poem predominantly of a restricted economy (the symmetrical balance of line and stanza and use of rhyme scheme all suggest an exchange economy of signifier and signified) these compound indeterminacies erupt and cause the poem's referential certainties to slide. In the penultimate line, moreover, something quite catastrophic happens to the entire semantic order. The abrupt

18. Cleanth Brooks, "Irony as a Principle of Structure" in *Literary Opinion in America* ed. M.D. Zabel (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) p. 735.

ending of the line with the gestural cry "oh" injects a sovereign implication that momentarily abolishes both meaning and subject; it is the one point in the poem where the material body inscribes a subject, not as a continuity or a self-consciousness, but as a pure operation of outlay. In the gestural cry, and in a manner similar to laughter, the speaking subject is utterly de-commissioned and language, as a semantic, restrictive economy, is put in question. Are we in or out of meaning at that point in the poem? There is a risk taking, a sliding away from communication and exchange towards expenditure in what Bataille would call the poem's *heterological moment* of total expulsion, a suspension of meaning within the scriptive parergonics of meaning, an eruption of silence within sound forcing the text to confess its own precarious status as signification.

The local passage from meaning to meaning is traditionally conceived as an accumulation or integration within a larger meaning and instituted upon the productive basis of a value. In the following example meaning cites itself within a purposeless continuum. The Lucy poem reaches sovereignty as a momentary rupture within the fabric of the meaningful which however, in its elusiveness, risks meaninglessness to the full, whereas this text contests discursive difference and articulation (a motion within restricted economy) by grounding signification in a continuum, not of presence, but of expenditure:

The night Carson knocked the owl over. I'll go out on a temperature mountain. Cent calls by the way. Vista cardboard. Subgum forks. The Seven Caves. The tribute to the aluminum cylinder. Packed to line up the sights. They buried the openings among the blocks to be carted away. Ball courts. Dogs should have licence plates. Front and back. A plastic thermometer. Stalactite plunged in cement. Fossil tubes. Animate gossamer rides on amber beer. Gothic Avenue is dusty. Selected AM radio stations. Cod portions. Vermillion.¹⁹

Meaning here slides away from a directed purpose into a perpetual overturning of signs that never coalesce into an exchangeable identity. The refusal to integrate and raise to a higher compound level of meaning releases contiguity from the institution of hierarchy. Writing here attains the level of a waste in Barthes' insightful notion of that term as a proof of "the

19. Clark Coolidge, *Smithsonian Depositions* (New York: Vehicle Editions, 1980) p. 22.

passage of the matter it contains".²⁰

In conclusion let me compare general economy with gift economy of the kind enacted in the Haidan potlatch ceremonies or the Kula ring, which Marcel Mauss and Bronislaw Malinowski have detailed²¹ and to which I'll appeal in a concluding examination of the following proposition: TO WASTE IS TO LIVE THE EXPERIENCE OF WEALTH.

We can contrast gift economy to barter, a pre-Capitalist exchange that bears striking similarities to the semantic exchange within the dominant conception of translation. Barter rests on the protection of a third, transcendental term, a copula of equivalence which sets up the exchange as an action directed towards equilibrium. Worth (like the notion of a "third" equilibrated meaning between the source and target texts of translation) is inserted as a universal third term against the scale of which the sets of bartered terms float until a point of stasis or equivalence is reached.

In gift exchange, however, the object is exhausted, consumed in the very staging.²² The status of equivalence is removed along with any structurally necessitated reciprocity. In the potlatch, commodities have an alimentary status and wealth is literally expelled. Consumption is understood as a movement and hence a certain momentum replaces equilibrium as the controlling notion of the exchange. In this way, potlatch can be seen as structureless, or at least as avoiding the closed binary correlation of a giver and receiver in which consumption can only occur across the partition preserved through a condition of purchase and ownership. Potlatch does not demand a presupposition of reciprocity. A receiver is not obliged to return.²³

20. Roland Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice*, tr. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985) p. 273.

21. See especially Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* tr. I. Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967).

22. There are certain gesture signs that suggest a similar exhaustion in their staging. Pointing, the opening of arms, embraces, handshakes, relate as much to a system of expenditure as a semiotics of transmission.

23. There are limits to which this analogy can be taken. Potlatch, we must not forget, is an agonistic act designed to elicit a return with interest in the form of further loss. Consequently, a fundamental exchange is preserved to operate as the *raison d'être* of the potlatch. As an example of symbolic exchange, it nonetheless illustrates an important transaction that is not based on preservation (beyond the preservation of the exchange itself as continued loss). The exchange, though present, is immediate and instantly subordinated to a termination.

Potlatch establishes status and position (i.e. social value and hence a "meaning") not from commodity possession, but from the rate and momentum of its disposal. In Kwakiutl communities televisions are thrown into the sea, precious objects broken and their parts distributed in order to catalyse the circulation. The commodity ("meaning") is always kept in movement and gains enrichment as it passes hand to hand. There is no association of wealth with investment and accumulation²⁴ but the implication of a status that accrues to such people *who would actually dispose of wealth*. Gift objects are frequently pluralized²⁵ through a kind of inverse metonymy in which the whole exists in order to generate its parts. The objects are broken and their parts scattered to increase the momentum of the giving. Accumulation is unthinkable in potlatch beyond its provisional power to permit an *immediate* distribution.

The application of this economic model to writing practice should be obvious, and though falling short of a perfect general economy, potlatch does offer an interesting analog system. The immediate tendency is to stress the homology between the "wealth" of potlatch and writing's "meaning", so that the intense exchange within the textual experience which would register as semantic loss, would not gain the status of a content (hence a transferable "transmission" to a reader) but would manifest as a loss-exchange among the signs themselves. To envisage such a

24. The notion of inevitable expenditure and outlay is a commonplace of 17th century Baroque eschatology. Among the numerous possible examples I will cite Jeremy Taylor from his *Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, a popular *artes moriendi* from 1651:

... while we think a thought we die; and the clock strikes and reckons on our portion of eternity; we from our words with the breath of our nostrils we have the less to live upon for every word we speak.

This is not Charles Olson's concept of breath as a charged energy transfer, but the profound coupling of cognition and the subject's ontology with an economy of death.

25. Pre-capitalist economy furnishes an interesting case of quasi-potlatch. Although exceptions exist, it is in general true to say that surplus value was born only with Capitalism. The Middle Ages were characterized by a type of *economic man* whose pattern of wealth was that of a vast accumulation during life, a subsequent renunciation, and a final, indiscriminate dispersal close to death. Philanthropy was born of this condition of a dramatic distribution of wealth that coincided with the moment of death. The French historian Philippe Ariès argues a profound ambivalence in the pre-capitalist man between a love of wealth as worldly possessions and an ultimate (postponed) belief (the dominant theological belief of the Middle Ages) that all material wealth was unsightly in the eyes of God and must be renounced in order to redeem the soul. Jacques Heers regards this belief and its consequent effecting of enormous distributions of donations to churches and benevolent institutions, as the

text would be to envisage a linguistic space in which meanings splinter into moving fields of plurality, establishing differentials able to resist a totalization into recoverable integrations that would lead to a summatable "Meaning". This plurality, moreover, must be irreducible and must demonstrate the intransitive drive towards de-centrality, the fact of a limitless loss and the status of writing as a scriptive gesture of infinity within the finitude wherein all spatio-temporal activities must exist. As such it could never rest at a holistic proposal but only stress the infinite play of parts within the signifiatory activity called writing.²⁶

1985

pressure to discharge wealth indiscriminately, together with the pre-industrial nature of that wealth (jewels, land, horses, precious objects) made the concept of investment (and thereby the production of surplus value) all but impossible.

There is, too, the interesting example of Adam Smith. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Smith argues that surplus income is meaningless to the recipient. The wealthy landlord (Smith's argument runs) can hardly consume more than the poorest peasant and accordingly must distribute his surplus wealth to his retinue and servants. This is a forced expenditure (or seen that way) and suggests strongly Smith's recognition of an operating general economy within the "industry of mankind" and the wealth of nations. It should be borne in mind, however, that Smith's argument is part of a complex attempt to justify the proposition that the apparent inequality of human incomes and the restricted control of wealth is in actuality productive of an equal distribution throughout the entire social spectrum (by virtue of this persistently forced expenditure).

26. It would be impossible to conclude without mentioning Saussure who posits (among several binary combinations) the relationship of *langue* (i.e. the set of linguistic rules, structures and possibilities that exist apart from the local particularities of usage) and *parole* (the local and particular applications drawn from the sets of *langue*). Saussure's is an important and in many contexts a useful distinction. Subjected, however