
*Poetics
of the
New*

also in this series

Horizons

by Dick Higgins

THE
L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E
BOOK

Edited by

Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein

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REPOSSESSING THE WORD

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E started as a bimonthly magazine of information and commentary, a forum for discussion and interchange. Throughout, we have emphasized a spectrum of writing that places its attention primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, or subject matter. All of these remain at issue. Focussing on this range of poetic exploration, and on related aesthetic and political concerns, we have tried to open things up beyond correspondence and conversation: to break down some unnecessary self-encapsulation of writers (person from person, & scene from scene), and to develop more fully the latticework of those involved in aesthetically related activity.

As part of this process, and with the aim of foregrounding compositional issues and styles of reading, we published a mix of different kinds of work. We especially wanted to provide a place for essays and reviews that were neither expository nor narrowly evaluative—that is, where the actual language work that goes on in poetry writing is not set aside in writing that "discusses."

It seems worth remembering, in looking back, that the labels sometimes attached to the variety of writings discussed in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E can be as troublesome as they are illuminating. Slogans and catchphrases signal the possibility that stylistic fixation can be an entrapment for these as well as other tendencies in recent poetry. The reason we have shied away from a number of confining labels in editing L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E is that our project, if it can be summarized at all, has involved exploring the numerous ways that meanings and values can be (& are) realized—revealed—produced in writing. This involves an opening of the field of activity and not its premature foreclosure.

Nonetheless confusion about the nature of this exploration flourishes. For instance, the idea that writing should (or could) be stripped of reference is as bothersome and confusing as the assumption that the primary function of words is to refer, one-on-one, to an already constructed world of "things." Rather, reference, like the body itself, is one of the horizons of language, whose value is to be found in the writing (the world) before which we find ourselves at any moment. It is the multiple powers and scope of reference (denotative, connotative, associational), not writers' refusal or fear of it, that threads these essays to-

gether. It is a renewed engagement that comes from the recognition that the (various) measuring and questioning and composition of our references is the practice of our craft.

This is inevitably a social and political activity as well as an aesthetic one. One major preoccupation of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E has therefore been to generate discussion on the relation of writing to politics, particularly to articulate some of the ways that writing can act to critique society. Ron Silliman's early essay, "Disappearance of the Word/Appearance of the World," reprinted here, applies the notion of commodity fetishism to conventional descriptive and narrative forms of writing: where the word—words—cease to be valued for what they are themselves but only for their properties as instrumentalities leading us to a world outside or beyond them, so that words—language—disappear, become transparent, leaving the picture of a physical world the reader can then consume as if it were a commodity. This view of the role and historical functions of literature relates closely to our analysis of the capitalist social order as a whole and of the place that alternative forms of writing and reading might occupy in its transformation. It is our sense that the project of poetry does not involve turning language into a commodity for consumption; instead, it involves repossessing the sign through close attention to, and active participation in, its production.

The first issue of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E appeared in February 1978, starting with the Larry Eigner text that begins this volume. Over the next four years, we published twelve issues and two supplements (Volumes 1 to 3), and in conjunction with the Canadian Journal *Open Letter*, our final offering, *Volume Four*. For *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, we have only included a selection of the first three volumes. *Volume Four* remains available as a substantial book format collection that serves as a companion volume to *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*.

In making the present selection, we have had to omit about half of the material we originally published in the first three volumes. As a result, this book does not represent a significant topical quality of the magazine: bibliographies, contributors' lists of recommended reading, brief comments on current books, correspondence, and the like, filled many pages not reproduced here. In addition, space considerations necessitated leaving out a number of important texts.

Many books are cited in the pages that follow, inviting, we hope, further interest in searching them out and reading them. Since many are published by noncommercial, independent presses, we recommend writing to two central poetry book (and magazine) distributors who be-

tween them have almost all of the in-print titles listed, as well as many related items. Write to Small Press Distributing, 1784 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94709 and to Segue Distributing, 300 Bowery, New York, NY 10012. For further information on L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, including back issues and our book collection *Volume Four*, write to us at 464 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10024.

Charles Bernstein & Bruce Andrews

get rid of this? Bury syntax, comrades, it stinks! Okay, but we make sentences even so. Go on and speak without taking on a subject, a verb, etc. We seek dodges. We change our seduction. We even ask the reader to lend a hand instead of always letting it be. The great thing is that we are among the bourgeoisie and that, under such a regime, there are only the morals which can serve the collective bond. Only, in order for the morals to function, the sentence must also function, and the words truly say what they say. Well — that functioning is rotten — rotten since our fathers massacred the workers, the colonized and even their brothers, all the while continuing to play the good father. Your civilization has big teeth, o fathers, so big that it ended by gobbling itself. Now, we must pick over the pile of shit and each seek his piece of tongue/language (langue). No history, everything's putrified!

I write whilst saying to myself: I don't want to be possessed — and yet they trample on my back. I write against meaning, and I write to produce a meaning. Always the same overload, and the body is exhausted — yes, the body of words burst beneath the weight. I'd like now to work on the level of the sound of language. Or perhaps to *mis-write* (*mécrire*) as Denis Roche says, crying so rudely: "Leave your tongues, little fathers (my tongue, my tongue, shit), eat your tongues, old dogs, while there's still time!" But there's no more time. And that squawks, squawks in our throats, while what would like to rise, tumbles and falls in the hole.

3.

Readings

READING STEIN

(We asked a number of writers to respond to the three short selections from Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons (1914) quoted below — to give their sense of the ways of reading this text — what it means, how it means, & in what ways it might seem relevant to their own concerns in writing. What follows are the Stein selections and the replies.)

from TENDER BUTTONS

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.

GLAZED GLITTER

Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover.

The change in that is that red weakens an hour. The change has come. There is no search. But there is, there is that hope and that interpretation and sometime, surely any is unwelcome, sometime there is breath and there will be a sinecure and charming very charming is that clean and cleansing. Certainly glittering is handsome and convincing.

There is no gratitude in mercy and in medicine. There can be breakages in Japanese. That is no programme. That is no color chosen. It was chosen yesterday, that showed spitting and perhaps washing and polishing. It certainly showed no obligation and perhaps if borrowing is not natural there is some use in giving.

ROASTBEEF

In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there is recognition, in feeling there is recurrence and entirely mistaken there is pinching. All the standards have streamers and all the curtains have bed linen and all the yellow has discrimination and all the circle has circling. This makes sand.

Very well. Certainly the length is thinner and the rest, the round rest has a longer summer. To shine, why not shine, to shine, to station, to enlarge, to hurry the measure all this means nothing if there is singing, if there is singing then there is the resumption.

The change the dirt, not to change dirt means that there is no beefsteak and not to have that is no obstruction, it is so easy to exchange meaning, it is so easy to see the difference. The difference is that a plain resource is not entangled with thickness and it does not mean that thickness shows such cutting, it does mean that a meadow is useful and a cow absurd. It does not mean that there are tears, it does not mean that exudation is cumbersome, it means no more than a memory, a choice and a reestablishment, it means more than any escape from a surrounding extra. All the time that there is use there is use and any time there is a surface there is a surface, and every time there is an exception there is an exception and every time there is a division there is a dividing. Any time there is a surface there is a surface and every time there is a suggestion there is a suggestion and every time there is silence there is silence and every time that is languid there is that there then and not oftener, not always, not particular, tender and changing and external and central and surrounded and singular and simple and the same and the surface and the circle and the shine and the succor and the white and the same and the better and the red and the same and the centre and the yellow and the tender and the better, and altogether. . . .

Gertrude Stein

— ON READING STEIN

Stein has been haunted by two antithetical criticisms. One proposes that her writing is all play, that it derives strictly out of her early

researches with William James and motor automatism and was later invigorated by Cubist formalism. The other proposes that Stein is a kind of hermetic Symbolist who encodes sexual and biographical information in complex verbal machines which contextualize their own environments. Both views operate on either side of a referential paradigm; one wants her to mean nothing and the other wants her to mean intrinsically. But what makes *Tender Buttons* so vital is not the strategies by which meaning is avoided or encoded but how each piece points at possibilities for meaning. Unlike the Symbolist who creates beautiful detachable artifacts, Stein's prose is firmly tied to the world—but it is a world constantly under construction, a world in which the equation of word and thing can no longer be taken for granted. "The difference is spreading" not only foreshadows deconstructive thought; it recognizes that between one term (a carafe) and a possible substitute (a blind glass) exists a barrier, not an equal sign, and it is this difference which supports all signification. Stein interrogates this barrier in order to break open the imperial Sign and leave "a system to pointing," a language that no longer needs to contain the world in order to live in it.

What's the good of all this? Obviously we know what a carafe is or nickel or roast beef, but Stein doesn't much care whether these things are self-evident. She *does* care that we've come to regard writing as the discovery of concrete counters for feelings, objects and places, that human memory is valorized over human mind in the act of creation. "A name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it . . ." she writes, inveighing against the noun's authoritarian stasis. What she wants is movement, a shifting of words among other words—not to erase their ability to refer but to make that act as polymorphous and perverse as any sexual play. *Tender Buttons* as a title suggests words binding the fabric of language together but also the sexual (clitoral) excitation potential in all linguistic play.

Each of the pieces in *Tender Buttons* seems, at some level, to refer to Stein's decontextualizing strategies. "A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass," is "about" the difference between a term and its multifarious substitutes ("a blind glass," a "kind in glass," a "spectacle") or its attendant qualities ("a single hurt color," a "difference . . . spreading"). The unitary object is dispersed among words in "an arrangement in a system." The objects themselves are commonplace—as common as the carafes, bowls and guitars of Cubist still lifes—but Stein's disjunctive prose removes them from their commonality and accentuates the gap between object and description. "[It] is so easy to exchange meaning," she says under the heading "Roast Beef," "it is so easy to see the difference." What links roastbeef to such remarks is the idea of transformation and

change present in foods and language alike. Roastbeef exists as the sum of many processes, some of which involve cooking, preparing, eating and digesting; it is the least permanent of things, and yet for the creator of literary still lifes, it is expected to stand in an eternal brown glaze on the verge of being carved. Stein's carving exposes the fallacy in a whimsical rhetoric of permanence: "in the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling." Without knowing what is "outside" or how meaning relates to "morning" or "evening" to "feeling," we are at sea, but by creating a larger grid of specious comparisons and fake equations, Stein undercuts all logical continuity. The logic is entirely her own, and the shifts of predication and assertion (the very stuff of reasonable discourse) serve to expose the mutability which lies at the heart of consumption, whether of food or of language.

What this implies for the act of reading is that there are no longer any privileged semantic centers by which we can reach through the language to a self-sufficient, permanent world of objects, foodstuffs or rooms. We must learn to read *writing*, not read *meanings*; we must learn to interrogate the spaces around words as much as the words themselves; we must discover language as an active "exchange" of meaning rather than a static paradigm of rules and features. The question is not "what" she means but "how." If such activity is difficult it is only because our habits of reading have been based on a passive acceptance of the criterion of adequacy; Stein undermines the model with the simplest of language only so that we may read for the first time—again.

Michael Davidson

A CARAFE . . . GLAZED GLITTER ROASTBEEF (through a glass darkly)

Ok murky in after all end, unpredictable day, with rain shine any degree night, the sun kin warm and hot. Enough stone or other jugs lineup of whatever is In Through Out That's light as much as known Differences evanesce Like, where and/or what on the equator might be french or spanish Longitude and latitude, yep yep sure Americana

But could someone mobile with us sleep downstairs, in case of some needs? The amount of variety, seen small, or a knockout maybe

in fact. Going deep and strong suddenly three times, though not any more in a while. Mystery on occasion frightens, hurts what you don't know. Sleep came and nothing in square feet changed and later morning is too again there.

And however long the new days all. Every new second minute at least. But the more there is the less you have in common, knowledge of pieces, experience taken in. Bit by bit or in what or how many dimensions. Is there any further inch to a holograph of a spread? Lightning's fast in bed or anyplace. Monuments mixed in haystacks lost.

Nothing is too dull.

Larry Eigner

Writing is intentional denotation (you *choose words*) and reading mirrors that, is read as denotation and intention (mix of the words/what the author is 'trying to say', technique composition context). Of course, strict denotation is a myth: ambiguities/extracurricular meanings can attach to any word(s) read. But it's a myth reinvented at every word ("If not, why use words" — Zukofsky): "breakages" mean breakages, "Japanese," ditto.

The (A) point of *Tender Buttons* is the play between what the pieces are said to mean (the objects, the titles, Stein's theories, Paris Impressionist through Cubist still life) and how the words exist and interact in saying what they do say.

She insists on an (intuitive) identity between her portraits & the objects, arising from avoidance of memory, breaking through crust of habit to actual perception, seeing something continually for the first time. And it's done with *words*: "I became more and more excited about how words which were the words *that made whatever I looked at look like itself* were not the words that had in them any quality of description." (Portraits and Repetition; my italics)

She's proving that she's seeing it by a continual athleticism, leaping free of the gravity of the familiar. Yet "words that make what I looked at look like itself were always words that to me very exactly related themselves to that thing . . ." (P's & R's)

So, related (a kind, a cousin), but at a necessary distance (not resembling), breathing room for the object to *exist* (the difference).

Anomaly needed to keep us awake (a kind *in* glass, not of; a system *to* pointing). In A Carafe I see her saying she sees and seeing to it that she says so.

But this sounds like systems of more or less stretched metaphor. Occasionally, yes, "the round rest has a longer summer" (round, resting on a platter, roast, summer, opulence, flavor) — I can hook up my intuition with what I guess was hers. But often there's no 'very exact [outward] relation' I can see. First 2 phrases of Roastbeef, yes, rest of paragraph, no. Rocking along on the sound, patterning, slides into lecture against memory: mounting, resignation, recognition, recurrence, mistake, pinch, wake up.

In places I wonder if she hears/sees/thinks the word just before or as she writes — or only after. Does she 'mean it', or is it just *prattle* (singsong, babyish joy in denotation [standards, streamers, curtains, bed linen], grammar becoming a 'weak force').

But "it is so easy to exchange meaning, it is so easy to see the difference" and on through the rest of the excerpt is definitely not baby-talk, is exemplary in its variety of use, surface, suggestion.

Can't pin down what puts her on the interesting side of language's openness. At best her words displace all others. From Cups: "The best slam is utter."

Bob Perelman

TRANSLATIONAL RESPONSE TO A STEIN SINGLE

a carafe that is a blind glass

she types clarity
relations to a scene
a seen in
zero

queer ones in the pain
of pattern
wheeled directions to
a fullness

that negated more to
more what chaos enters in

no one same article
unlike a wide.

Steve McCaffery

WHOLE HALVES

Bisection, leaving one half hanging over, the drapes are clean. You look as if you need the third from the bottom, the keyhole, nicely in a row. That brings up heat, McCartney's words are blue. It's sort of molded into a mountain. South socks all metal by air sideways, the trim set back from the teeth, the white trim, beginning to stand there. What's back is clear, gently crumpled without creases. White line leads to ferrous flair to private stuff side by side and side by side side by side invitation to an address. Lines rise. Pillow's overtime. Questions: round blue orange white yellow thin and horny. Once top on another without looking very far up. If they stay up, moving in up, and the board leads line a tongue right this way. And then the tongue two three four. Stripes are everywhere, some hanging down or looking up face down or up and left open ready to be lit: answer. The face got a new invention. Buttons no longer don't make any noise. Because what's switched also's identified. And instead of going straight on a round surface straight means the French word for alright. Right at the middle you get wet. Then people save you. Green spots connection. New buttons never have to curl over one another. The old rigidity, the old holes the fading tension aware of its collaboration, the new tension, uncovers the covers. What's a head no longer needs what's ahead because more and more buttons are right to be pressed, propulsion hovers on exhibit. It's stacked, easier to lose the thought of finding, insulatable craft against the checks. The rivers that run to the sea oh boy, use the floor as a step out the door. What's discolored indicates the presence of routine, suddenly the hard weight of the sun becomes mold, mold molding the frame, frame framing the water, water drying up. And ancient actress sees at once. To occupy, having an erection nothing is the same nothing is the name nothing is the frame. Pursuit is as temporal as openings and closings buttons relieved pacify. No one seems to know

the right hand way to go, going down, which leaves the middle and the left facing the trees and the hills and the local stuff and the cagey touch flame away from glass. To be here now means how can no one respond to buttons. They all have to be accounted for. When you work in countries the next step is staying home, using buttons, could be in the air like the old Chinese pool hall. Nobody's outside without a shirt not moving lips without saying speed. Before there was even a black hole a table right beside it. A chair. A pair of reroutings means inside. Outside's very tangible, actual, substantive, understood, outside's very material, always there to be reached trying to be touched. Adhesives as well as collections and bone as well as plastic and current as well as fastening and sewing, the next step's stamping. The next step's diffuse. Solid. Volume descends to Richard's only throne. Division of the aspect into verb as seeing progressive form point-action verbs indicate is waking up is working out. Think of it as a as: my whole life has change. In between the round ups everything happens. Billy the Kid counts peas. Rock forms. PVC does not burn. But as we entered the harbor some kind stuck, made sticking sounds. Three bars equals ten dollars. Three buttons means one is missing. That means make it tighter and only maybe somebody'll have to wait. One more thing, light. Looking closer or closely looking used to mean less light. To be precise include everything. Listening used to mean use your head. Then Picasso said even here means a lot of work. Even here being hear, you mean there Alice said. Here here refers to there, permission prohibition, love marriage, button unbutton, press release release press. To be precise precision excludes almost everything, what's left, under the light, clean dirty, includes everything. In the north in the potato country roads are there when you're there or when you're here. Here roads are here wherever you are.

Peter Seaton

READING A SELECTION FROM *TENDER BUTTONS*

I start reading "A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS." I go from word to word, seeing the shapes of the printed words, hearing the sounds inwardly, noting rhymes, assonances, alliterations. Where an image is suggested, I see it inwardly. I hear the alliteration "kind," "cousin,"

"color," with the near-alliteration "glass." The rhyme in "strange" & "arrangement." The alliteration of s's: "spectacle," "strange," "single," "system," "spreading." The assonance of short i's that binds the three sentences ("system," "this," "difference") as does the ending of each sentence with an "ing" (which is reinforced by the short e's in "resembling" & "spreading"). There are also the 2nd sentence's rhymes ("ordinary," "unordered") & the alliterative sequence "spectacle," "pointing," "spreading." The three sentences are a bound system of sounds.

But can I specify anything beyond the sounds? To use a phrase I first heard from Spencer Holst, it gives "the sensation of meaning," but can I connect the meanings of the words as readily as I find their sounds connected?

Beyond the obvious fact that the carafe is made of glass, I can see only certain connections of meanings: "a blind glass," "a kind in glass" (I didn't notice consciously the "blind"- "kind" rhyme before), & then "a spectacle" (something seen or to be seen, but also "spectacles" are "glasses"). Then "nothing strange," "not ordinary," "not unordered," "not resembling," & "difference" form a meaning sequence. Another sequence of meanings: "blind," "spectacle" (with the intervening "glass"'s causing the ambiguity of "spectacle" which might not have been as apparent without them), & "color," that seems to carry over to "arrangement," "pointing," "not unordered," "not resembling," & even to "spreading." The sequence "kind" (with its two meanings), "cousin," "nothing strange" seems opposed to "not ordinary," "not resembling," & "The difference is spreading.": a meaning movement from near-sameness to greater & greater difference.

"A single hurt color" is the most emotional phrase, altho "blind glass" with its implied oxymoron (glass is usually transparent—at least we first think of transparency when we hear the word "glass"— & when it is made into spectacle lenses, it helps people to see better) is perhaps even more so. Maybe the "single hurt color" is the blackness of blindness. The whole poem suddenly seems to be about seeing!

But what of the "carafe" that starts it all? Why is it "a blind glass"? Ordinarily a carafe is one of the least "blind"—that is, the most transparent—of glass containers. It usually contains plain water. The OED defines it as "a glass water-bottle for the table, bedroom, etc." Its Romance forms (F. *carafe*, It. *caraffa*, Neapol. *carrafa* (a measure of liquids), Sp. & Pg. *garrafa*, Sicil. *carabba*) are related by some authorities to the Pers. *garābah*, a large flagon, & the Arabic *gharafa*, to draw or lift water.

Why, then, is *this* carafe a *blind* glass?

Is the whole poem then a “pointing” from the ordinary transparent carafe (“nothing strange”) to one “not ordinary”—one that is “blind”—an orderly (“not unordered”) movement “spreading” from transparency & clarity thru the “single hurt color” to the implied darkness & opacity of blindness, a movement condensed & made explicit in the title?

Jackson Mac Low

TENDER BUTTONS

Undergoing *sight* (& by ‘sight’ thinking feeling looking remembering even inventing imagining certainly tasting surely listening hearing talking) meaning potentially all human process, as almost academic (‘art-school’) exercise undertaken for the species’ joy in it, less talking & listening than looking to know that words can do it, making nomenclature consort of nature (1911, in Spain) in the perfect understanding that *that seen* makes a name, this time (accommodating strangeness of verbiage in process of gaining exact usage), only because (mutton flies into the sundown upwind upstream already) all time/everything is. Artist never fell.

Sad story, now, apparently. Real im Traum, ‘before the War.’ Today, a hearkening back, as longing, not the reality of the word, not the faith that makes composition of the world, riding on that everything, permission given. She could say anything.

Now some further difficulty of access, as the nature of human experience slips away from the ad-men as makers of language unconvinced, in the last resort, of any *necessity*.

Before I die.
Before I die.
Before I die.
Before I die.

(Robt. Creeley, *Pieces*)

—resolve echoes. Names repeat.

But it’s the same imperative, that one might undertake now in the absence of conviction, that anything was, that a word might mean any-

thing, that she addressed with certainty: “. . . looking at anything until something that was not the (conventional) name of that thing but was in a way that actual thing would come to be written,” (“Poetry And Grammar”)

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“TENDER” says entire activity of the artist’s portraiture (subtitle: “portraits of objects, food, rooms”)—not ‘studies’ of objects etc. nor ‘still lives,’ but (*portray*: ‘to draw forth, reveal’; from root, ‘to drag, move’) dramatic engagements with things-given-the-sort-of-attention-that-humans-get often in motion, ‘alive,’ as well—so you get a verbal-formal offering, that stretches out to move through circles of light (attention) in which “beginning again and again” transforms into a “continuous present” in which words one-one-one actively engage as single-frame sequence (“. . . this our period was undoubtedly the period of the cinema and series production”) something all right, tendered, right in front of you. “BUTTONS” just means everyday domestic objects (which are??) nudged—‘on the button.’

Ok, ‘tender’ because new-born—& all right, word-buds, tenderly regarded.

•

What poetry *does* (see “Poetry And Grammar”): realization of new nominatives—(not neologism but) whole text, in process, “replaces” worn-out, now-merely-conventional name offered up (in title, commonly) to be melted down in crucible of language process attention forging other access to the ongoing of what’s what.

T.B., as *early* ‘phenomenological investigation,’ is interpretative/as it is revelatory—the whole storm of passion, discernment, definition, feeling//carried by language//brought to the ‘budding’ of the thing—three together, through time, make the name.

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It’s not ‘snapshots’ (moves; don’t copy nature), & it’s not ‘the pathetic fallacy’ (though it includes much of the artist’s process). And it ain’t ‘abstract.’

(In this context, for L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, I want to say I think it's at best a 'creative misreading' of Stein to take her work as a whole as a primary instance of 'language-oriented writing.' Not only her somewhat less arduous later work (*Autobiography of A.B.T.*, *Brewsie And Willie*), but *The Making of Americans* (a history of her family & compendium of sketches of every possible kind of human being), *Lucy Church Amiably* (an 'engraving' or romantic portrait of life in the French countryside) & her long poem "Stanzas in Meditation" (written shortly before the *Autobiography of A.B.T.* &, if anything, a prototype of confessional poetry) all are intent to make new ways to say something—show her thinking language not as object-in-itself, but as composition functioning in the composition of the world. With the exception of some verbal experiment, with Williams & Pound, Stein's basic concern as a writer was to confront the imperative MAKE IT NEW however possible—'IT' being, equally/simultaneously, sentience, world & language as relation between these. *T.B.*, specifically, exists as such confrontation—& to take it as a variously interesting arrangement of words, alone, is to perpetuate the initial journalist-parody response to the work as 'nonsense.')

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But can it be done, as a task. Was 1911, or. . . . *Even now*. . . . "It's a mild, mild day, Starbuck" etc. . . . So quiet, in America. . . . 1977 rhymes with 1911 (*is it*, already, 1978. . . .) Seemingly timeless lull on the brink, this time, of the extinction of something other than the Pequod as American westward-expanding enterprise (or craters in the Whiteheads' lawns). . . . Beautiful fall day, clear even to the horizon . . . though the reign of conventional names, reiteration of terminology as fixed interpretation of that not happening, appears to cover the globe several times over, 'ruling' air & land & waves. . . . What a moment, nonetheless. . . . *Yet again*, that chance to (two by two, alpha & beta, assess & elephants) call the roll, look to words to show & tell the present orders of. . . .

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". . . Think of all that early poetry, think of Homer, think of Chaucer, think of the Bible and you will see what I mean you will really realize that they were drunk with nouns, to name to know how to name earth sea and sky and all that was in them was enough to make them live and love in names, and that is what poetry is it is a state of knowing and

feeling a name. I know that now but I have only come to that knowledge by long writing." ("P. & G.," 1934) . . .

Robert Grenier

ZYXT

Michael Andre, editor, *The Poets' Encyclopedia* (1979: UNMUZZLED OX, N.Y.)

[Last entry reads:]

The last word (here, in English, in the OED): an obsolete Kentish form, the second person indicative present of the verb *see*. Language even ends in the eye. In a book, if we are enjoying ourselves, we often reduce our reading pace measurably in its final pages, luxuriating slowly in the joy of words & syntax (unlike that of ideas & referents, where the onset of the conclusion only accelerates the reading), anticipating an inevitable sadness wch follows the end of the (always erotic) body of the text. The book closed sets loose an emotion tinged with jealousy & grief: its presence (wch includes our own reflected in the text) is something we can never again possess. Rereading is not the same: words harden, aura crystallizing to define a wall no quantity of inspection can penetrate. In this *afterword* we sense ever so briefly the immense relief we felt in having been delivered awhile from the weight of directing our own psyches. This is the restorative value of any text (reading is a kind of sleep, a return to the senses). Now we can only wait until this wave of sorrow subsides before seeking the seduction of another book. There is no alternative. You zyxt.

Ron Silliman