

## Post modernist poetics: Four views

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Poetry as creation, turning over the ground of the man, 'the plot', 'the great myth' is the fiction of what man is.

H. D.

... the arduous path of appearances.

HEIDEGGER

A poetic is not merely a writing code but an attitude towards life. It hews vision & pushes language towards its frontiers. American poetry explores possibilities & produces poets that share the audacity that typifies their society. Cultural, military, & economic superiority on a world scale gives their language its edge & confidence. The American poet speaks the tongue of power. The world has to listen. His verbs threaten economic sanctions or V-8 bombers. He has a technology that gives him immediate access to information & leaves the world's image-bank at his disposal. In an affluent society the rules are invariably crass & simplistic: do what you like but don't rock the boat. Although the individual poet can do little to correct the crazed antics of this particular jumbo jet, he can, at least, use its energy for his own ends, making of it the occasion for discovering the latent meaning of his world.

In the sixties the poet shared in the protest against a series of social & political injustices. Ginsberg, Bly & Levertov all wrote against the murderous emptiness that fuelled the Vietnam War. LeRoi Jones refused to use white publishers or white distribution circuits & thus echoed the black withdrawal from the 'Great Society'. Yet poetry has no power

to implement what it advocates, & sincerity all too easily subsides into gesture. A sharper focus was required, something where word & act could merge. The poet returned inwards towards the roots of his life & language, to the place in which a man lived & to the contours that formed his speech. He sought to define a base from which he could mark out his limits. Paradoxically a society cushioned by transient illusions & built on unrestrained material ambition has given birth to a poetic vision demanding clarity & spiritual regeneration: a poetic of immanence.

The move is, then, towards an active language, to what Creeley has called 'a process of writing that made both the thing said & the way of saying it an integral event':

the proposition, Gerhardt  
is to get it straight, right  
from the start

(OLSON)

They want, in other words, a language that enacts rather than one that describes. Yet the fact remains that at a time when poets have, as Robert Duncan puts it, a responsibility not to seek effect, a great many of them continue to do precisely that in almost every line. The 'poetry establishment' is still all too often dominated by concerns for intellectual dazzle, of providing texts for an 'explication de texte'. Richard Howard's *Alone in America*, one of the few extensive studies we have of American poetry after 1950, shows just how entrenched this attitude is. In a list of forty-one poets he manages to exclude Duncan, Olson, Dorn, McClure, Rothenberg, Oppen, Zukofsky in favour of such names as Bowers, Finkel, Moss & Weiss. It's a perverse selection with a marked preference for skating on brilliant but brittle surfaces. I would like in this essay to talk of poets who argue that a poetry without energy is a poetry without need, of poets who advance towards an adventure. A poem, like a man, is a becoming, part of the 'will to change'. Every moment of life is a struggle to come to life, & the poem shares this struggle to achieve a form that convinces. Form, consequently, manifests itself as an immediate relationship with a particular in process. Creeley wants us to deal with the primary terms of experience. He wants us 'naked' in our own condition, 'in that necessary freshness, however exposed, because all things are particular & reality itself is the specific content of an instant's possibility'. We can find, perhaps, numerous examples of the energy charge behind this notational proce-



ture in Fielding Dawson's collection of short stories, *The Man who Changed Overnight*. Dawson makes the American idiom act as a counterpoint to the sheer presence of the black & Puerto Rican kids on the street:

They all streamed along the street loud mouthing & badmouthing a lot of things & people, in their theater of the streets, as they moved to stoops & luncheonettes, & the IRT & BMT subway at Union Square.

They were loud, aggressive, & sexually flagrant. The black & PR girls were plump, fat, skinny & well-built, too, in tight sweaters & mini-skirts, as the boys freaked in sneak, tee-shirts, & tight black pants walking tall, keeping the neighbourhood on edge.

Similarly Olson makes of the act of speech a 'high-energy construct':

He left him naked  
the man said, and  
nakedness  
is what one means  
that all start up  
to the eye & soul  
as though it had never  
happened before

The poet's role is to function as a nexus of energy, prehending the energies of the world about him. The laying down of the words, the phrasing, flow from the rhythms & cadences of the poet's own body. Breath acquires a new significance. It serves as a measure of our involvement in the world outside, registering both physical effort & the graph of our emotions. Etymologically breath also relates to soul & spirit. Snyder refers to 'inspiration' as a taking in of the world & to 'expiration' as the returning of one's presence to the world. Olson insists that breath is the most intimate of registers, accurately measuring the way in which the poet's energies are engaged. It catches & weighs sounds in whatever form they take, as syllable, as word, as line:

the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE

McClure refers directly to what he terms a 'body-language': 'What comes straight through the nerves & synapses of the body without recirculation & channellings of habit & custom — straight from the spirit & unbuffered'. It's a view that owes much to Olson's concept of 'Pro-

prioception', by which he means 'sensibility within the organism by movement of its own tissues', or to say it more simply the body's own knowledge of itself.

Poetry pushes at the frontiers of whatever range of experience is 'visible' to an age. It's a pulse for our matrix of viewing, etching meaning from the murmuring of the shell we live in. I would like now to concentrate specifically on four poets & the notions that underlie some of their most recent texts.

## I. ROBERT DUNCAN

For Duncan the unique contribution of poetry to man is its reenactment of the invisible order of the Cosmos. The poem is an autonomous life-form, part of the ongoing evolution of forms. It's not a mimesis of life, it has life. He defines the poem as the mode whereby we become conscious of 'things as potentials for making the universe real ... celebrating or evoking ... what is'. The poet, living within this 'shell of murmurings', hears the meanings & invisible order that surround him as potentials. He doesn't create them, he discovers them. The poem is a struggle to make life actual. The poet works with what is *actually happening* — as event, as memory, as imaginative association. He deals with whatever comes into the area of composition, or the 'field' as Olson accurately chooses to call it. He has to take immediate decisions concerning the tensions of the word both as sound & as idea, & the separate parts of the poem assume, in their larger identity, related & finally interchangeable roles. 'The artist ... works with all parts of the poem as polysemous, taking each thing of the composition as generative of meaning, a response to & a contribution to the building of form'.

Duncan sees the word as much more than simply a part of speech carrying an idea or part of an idea, as far as he's concerned the word *lives* & has an urge to create. 'The universe strives to be what it truly is to be. 'The poem that moves me when I write is an active presence in which I work. I am not concerned whether it is a good or bad likeness to some convention men hold; for the Word is for me Living Flesh & the body of my own thought & feeling, my own presence, becomes the vehicle for the process of genetic information.' The words store meanings beyond their surface sense. 'For words are not thoughts but *ideas in things*, & the poet must attend not to what HE MEANS TO SAY but to what WHAT HE SAYS MEANS.'

Yet the word itself is, of course, made up of a multiplicity of elements, & thus we are forced back again to the notion of form within form & the interdependence of all the diverse parts:

The vowels are physical  
corridors of the imagination  
emitting passionately  
breaths of flame

Despite the rhetoric Duncan simply means that the vowels can lead the movement of the poem, that the poet must listen to the particular music underhand & recognise that it has its own volition. The poem is, therefore, an organism, part of an ecology of forms. Duncan speaks of it in the following terms: 'It has never seemed to me that the true form of a poem was a convention or an ideal of form, but, as in life, a form having its information in the language of our human experience, as our bodies have their information in the life-code of the species & our spirit in the creative will ... The beginning of the poem stirs in every area of my consciousness, for the DNA code it will use toward its incarnation is a code of resources my life pattern itself carries; not only thought & feeling but all the nervous & visceral & muscular intelligences of the body are moved. Awakening, listening, seeing, sensing, — to work with the moving weight & duration of movement; to cooperate in the aroused process. Attending. From the first inspiration, breathing with the new breath. Man's myths move in his poetry as they move in his history, as in the morphology of his body all his ancient evolution is rehearsed & individual; all of the vertebrate imagination moves to create itself anew in his spine.'

*Dante Etudes*, his most recent work, achieves a wonderfully modulated revelation of this process at work: a poetic elaborated within 'the swarm of human speech', totally in tune with its music, an intimate flowing of ideas:

he but imitates  
in noises that he makes  
this speech in every sense  
the world surrounding him

Body & mind serve thus as sounding-boards:

to speak my mind  
unfolds the secret of the heart  
breathe word of it,  
take soundings in the passage out

He moves back into his childhood, living in a surge of presences:

from the language we first heard  
    endearments      whisperings  
        infant song & reveries  
a world we wanted      to go out into  
    to come to ourselves into,  
    organizations in the sound of them  
    verging upon meaning

Duncan believes that the child seizes the underlying essences rather than the surface subject matter. The story provides meanings & from them the child can make the world real for himself. The form is truly what the poet makes of what is happening:

    It is the ordination of the whole  
        in each event intent  
our art but to articulate  
& know the direction of justice  
                          thru & thru

He talks of this fusion<sup>1</sup> between poet & poem in his superb essay *Truth & Life of Myth*: 'Both poem & poet are part of an ongoing cosmic order where the body cells, the verbal units, are only part of the larger order: if I take the truth of things to be the truth of their belongingness to this form of forms, having its completion in the end of time & space, surely beyond my individual comprehension, in my poetics I let go of striving to claim some authenticity that arises from the store of human experience acknowledged in the language that gives whatever depth to my own experience, a feel of form acknowledged in its own inception to be no more than feeling ... It is not that I take the nature of man, my own nature, to be written in a secret key, but believing all Creation to be in process an evolution & revelation of Itself, & the meaning of the parts, meaning of all definitions, to be posited finally in a totality of resonances, I hold too that the meaning & form of any poem is momentous, yes: but has its motive beyond the conscious & personal intent or realization of the poet. My poetry has, as my individual body has, its own interior systematic structure regardless of 'me'.

For Duncan poetry is:

    'a place of first permission'  
    'an eternal pasture folded in all thought'

## II. ROBERT CREELEY

Creeley sees the poem as the immediate & intimate measure of experience, not a reflection *on* it but a way of being *in* it:

Measures  
ways of being in one's life  
happy or unhappy  
never dead to it

The instant is both shape & law, literally the way a man defines himself within the surrounding field of activity. Man lives & takes place within what Cage calls 'a total field of non-focused multiplicity'. The form of the man & of the poem are consequences of the way this field is dealt with. Creeley acknowledges how Olson succeeded in changing his notion of the normal idea of progression in a poem: 'seeing a poem as a *field* ... we assume a sense that points to one basic means of coherence; a relevant & actual tension between divers parts present, to come to (in this sense *only*) what we call the 'whole'. 'Man creates within a changing reality & as the terms of reality change the terms of consciousness must also change to stop man being overwhelmed. Choice produces the tension, the cohering we call 'form'. Yet Creeley rejects the poem as a vehicle for attitudes, arguing that his thoughts necessarily inform the poem & provide its essential climate. If a poem is made into a stretcher for ideas then the poem fails because the real urgency of occasion lies somewhere outside it. 'A poetry denies its end in any *descriptive* act, I mean any act which leaves the attention outside the poem. Our anger cannot exist usefully without its objects, but a description of them is also a perpetuation. There is that confusion—one wants the thing to act on, & yet hates it. Description does nothing, it includes the object—it neither hates nor loves.' To use Pound's phrase, it's the 'quality of emotion' that matters. It's not what the poem talks about that is significant, but 'the senses & the intensity of the emotion thus engendered'. Creeley wants the poem to exist in its own right & that's impossible as long as some subject significantly elsewhere is involved. 'There had' he observes, 'to be an independence derived from the fact that words are *things* too':

here is  
where there  
is

This isn't to say that Creeley doesn't have his particular obsessions: 'I can recognize looking back that some concerns have been persistent: the terms of marriage, relations between man & woman, sense of isolation, sense of place in the intimate measure'. It's an accurate locating of theme. Creeley's way of experiencing emotion is to tighten it up, to make the synapses into taut springs. Personal relationships are exposed, abused even: 'I want it all, so I tend at times, understandably, to exhaust my friends — keep pushing, pushing, pushing ... I so love the intensity of people that I can't let anything stop until it's literally exhausted':

I think I grow tensions  
like flowers  
in a wood where  
nobody goes.  
Each wound is perfect  
encloses itself in a tiny  
imperceptible blossom  
making pain.  
Pain is a flower, like that one  
like this one,  
like that one,  
like this one.

The poem is not an argument but an event. The first line is a literal sensation. The flowers are tensions. They take the shape of pain. Creeley is experiencing the fearful plucking of himself by himself. The sensation can be traced back to echoes buried in the mystery & meanings of a childhood game 'I love you, I love you not'. He finds the same wild plucking, the same presence of terror right on top of him. The final line is close to the skin, its threat imminent. Olson's dictum is clearly relevant: 'that which exists through itself is what is called meaning'. And it's Creeley himself who adds further elaboration: 'that kind of meaning, that kind of signification, is what a poem is. It *does* so exist through itself, through the agency of its own activity: therefore is, therefore, has meaning'.

For Creeley words are not mannerisms of involvement but contours of self. 'Speech is an assertion of one man, by one man, since each speech has its own character that produces form'. The sound & the act of saying cannot be separated from what is said. It's the same point that William Carlos Williams makes so persuasively in his *Autobiography*: 'The poet thinks with his poem in that lies his thought, &

that in itself is the profundity.' Creeley, in much the same way, stresses that the real intensity lies in the song & that he hears the melody long before he reaches an understanding as to what it all might mean: 'the organization of poetry has moved too a further articulation in which rhythmic structure now becomes not only evident but a primary coherence in the total organization of what's being experienced:

*Who*  
*am I*  
identity  
singing  
...  
Birds singing  
measure distance  
intervals between  
echo silence

Identity comes when the words move in the measures of song. But Creeley is not talking about some mysterious secondary level of meaning, he means an integrated act —both sound & semantic meaning: «Since words are the material, & words have meaning in other senses, that fact also has pertinence. But I do not feel that *thing* in language we call a poem has to do with a literal issue of semantic meaning. Yet that aspect of meaning is a material also, & clearly enters into the issue of image, or statement, or all such affects of something said':

Light weighs  
light, to the hand  
to the eye  
feel it  
in two places.

Meaning has to be tested & Creeley accepts Wittgenstein's proposition that meaning is use & that usage coheres value. Tradition is in essence an aspect of what anyone is now thinking, & not what someone once thought. Redefinition takes place when the situations are tense & dramatic enough to make the old linguistic order crumble. Creeley uses not so much common words but a 'common mode of address, the way of speaking that's commonly met with in conversation ... that fact in a poem is very distinct from that fact in conversation. And I think what really was gained from that sense of source in common speech was the recognition that the intimate knowing of a way of speaking ... what's gained in that way ... offers the kind of intensity that poetry peculiarly admits.'

Man's grace comes from assuming his particular identity & not living within the available lie that seems to use a generalised experience to produce 'personality' through some kind of social osmosis:

Simple to be said, a life  
is nothing more than itself  
& all the bodies together  
are, one by one, the measure.  
I am finally  
what I had to be  
neither more nor less  
become happiness

### III. — ED DORN

One of the essential accesses to Dorn's work lies in a remark that Olson directed at him in *Bibliography on America*. Place, notes Olson, is contiguous with meaning: 'All meaning is local to an instance & the poet has to know where he is to know what he is'. Place affords morality. It stems initially from somewhere inside oneself & defines an elemental tension:

the whole of it  
coming  
to this pin-point  
to turn  
in this day's sun  
in this veracity (the twist) (Olson)

And Dorn himself makes the following qualification in terms that appear to owe much to Whitehead: 'But when the *place* is brought forward fully in form conceived entirely by the activation of a man who is under its spell it is a resurrection for us & the investigation even is not extractable.'

Dorn draws from place the implication & the patterning of men's lives. He weighs what the eye sees & gives voice to what convinces. In *Recollections of Gran Apacheria* he fixes his eye on those vast territories of the S. W. where the apaches roamed. We feel the grappling of mind & body to make the landscape yield the history it so stubbornly holds. He writes with economy, precision & balance in a style that is sharp & firm enough to penetrate a hostile landscape:

the first law of the desert  
to which animal life of every kind



pays allegiance  
is Endurance & Abstinence

the children of both sexes  
had perfect freedom  
& were never punished  
they were wild to the desert  
& they were invisible  
in the mountains

We sense the compactness of the scanning process, 'the sheerings & simplicity of immediate knowledge'.

Dorn has also recently completed a major long poem, *Gunslinger*. It's an astonishing poem, certain of taking its place alongside Zukofsky's *A*, Olson's *Maximus*, & Williams's *Paterson* as a further contribution to the defining of the nature of the American experience. *Gunslinger* seems like a clash between the traditions of Western learning & a comic-strip, between Old World thinkers & the curve & stretch of the American idiom. Dorn makes knowledge particular & personal, & clearly recognises the significance of Olson's comment that: a) it is not how much one knows but in what field of context it is retained & used. b) how, as yourself, as individual, you are acquiring & using same in acts of form — what use you are making of acquired information. He gives us a metaphysical comedy that gathers into itself the substance of the West. It's a surprising list of characters who manage to cohabit through sheer strength of presence — Levy-Strauss, Parmenides, a hash-high horse, Howard Hughes, & Slinger himself:

Hey Slinger!

Play some music.  
Right breathed the Gunslinger  
And he looped toward the juke then  
in a trajectory of exquisite proportion  
a half dollar which dropped home  
as the .44 presented itself in proximity  
of his head & interrogated the machine  
A28, Joe Turner 'Early in the mornin'  
came out & lay on the turntable  
His inquisitive .44 repeated the question  
& B13 clicked  
Lightnin Hopkins Happy Blues for John Glenn  
& so on  
the terse trajectories of silver then  
the punctuations of his absolute .44  
without even pushing his sombrero off his eyes

Dorn insists on a way of speaking that preserves 'a rhetorical tension'.  
None of the energy seeps out & the phrasing sticks close:

Stranger calls him a 'negra horse'  
maybe so, maybe not  
the Gunslinger inhaled  
but Stranger you got an attitude  
a mile long  
as his chair dropped forward  
all four legs on the floor  
& as the disputational .44  
occurred in his hand & spun there  
in that warp of relativity one sees  
in the buckboard,  
then came suddenly  
to rest, the barrel utterly justified  
with a line pointing  
to the neighbourhood of infinity.  
The room froze harder:

By *Book III* there's a slight slackening in tensión. The characters have a similar hip casualness but they're consumer orientated, full of peanut-butter. It's as if L. A. had entered the blood stream. Dorn could have finished with a massive western shoot-out, instead he ends up in a desolate Georgia O'Keefe landscape with a cast of television characters, Mexican Tourist Board misfits & Oil Company jingles — the whole coated with fluorescent eastmancolor:

And just as the poet, accompanied  
by Taco Deoxin & Tonto Pronto  
& our horse arrived  
there was a roar from out of town  
along the road to the monument  
when Dr. Flamboyant driving  
a bright green 1976 Avocado  
with a white vinyl top  
& full hyperbolic clutch  
slid into the lot & stopped  
after bouncing 25 geodetic feet  
straight back off the Bean  
Then he got out & squished the door shut  
with his foot  
Stylish, the Zlinger whispered  
That a smart car you got there Doctor  
whered you get it?  
I picked it off a tree in Riverside

One of *Gunslinger's* real achievements has been to find & hold what Olson termed 'the gate at the center'. Dorn adds the following observation: 'In the sense of self & center the ego lacks meaning, & this clash of senses disintegrates immediately into something cheap & commercial & psychiatric':

or when you suddenly are the guest of time  
where the afterbirth of space hangs  
in the mirror of rime  
& where one place  
is the center of this terrific actualism

#### IV. MICHAEL McCLURE

McClure has set about finding a writing of 'motion' intellect & physiology':

SING THAT I BE ME, BE THOUS  
BE MEAT  
be me, be I, no ruse  
— A MAMMLED MAN  
& stand  
with rainbow robes  
that drop away & globes  
that float in air about my hand

Language has to be made active again so that it emanates from the rhythms of the body that give it voice. 'Poetry is not a system but real events spoken of, or happening, in sounds. Poetry is an act of reason at its highest most far flung pitch — & is a demonstration of freedom.' He makes the minimum of distinction between mind & body, arguing that if the mind is in error it'll be reflected in the body. He pushes towards new definitions:

THE RETOPOLOGIZING IS RIGHT NOWS WE ARE WAVES  
& Princes  
in  
the  
surge

McClure's term 'retopologizing' implies movement + organic oneness with place, & they are, perhaps, the major concerns of his poetry.

For the artist or man there is but one religion —the religion of being itself' & to be oneself one must first admit & accept one's mammal condition. We have first to return to that essential physicality: 'being is is the creature's contact with its surroundings & the accumulation of instint & experience-information.' *Movement*, the key definition of animal condition, becomes a poetic principle — it's the pattern of exchange between man & his surroundings & creates the necessary interdependence. 'It is the nature of most animal life to keep moving. Any life is part of the total surge of life that feeds upon itself as it expands in size & complexity. The whole surge is powered by sun energy. It becomes more complex. It grows. It expands. It is the retopologizing of the surface of the planed brought about by direct energy. Animal life keeps moving ... The human mammal body, in the billions of years of evolution of its complexity, has concretised the absolute necessity to keep moving. Movement is primal fact. The retopologising surge 'it retopologizes by making inert matter into organic being) will not slow down. It will not stop exchanging parts of itself as mourishment in the expansion of the energised complexity.' (McClure is, here, surely expanding Olson's notion of movement as move/meant.) McClure's poem, plays, & novels are all organically part of this process of expansion. In his program

Violent & concentrated action is a kind of lyricism  
 THE BLOSSOM IS AN ENERGY DRAMA  
 it creates an energy structure

In other words they virtually possess their own nervous system:

the energy of the human spirit will resume its ability  
 TO ACT  
 TO ACT IS NOT TO MIMIC BUT TO INVENT

McClure asks for the rediscovery of the mammal self & states in his introduction to *Rare Angel* that American conditions specifically permit, it, or more exactly the perpetual cycles of waste & excess demand it: 'It is thrilling to be in his waste of destruction & recreation. This is one of the sensualities of the American culture. Our primate emotions sing to us in the midst of it. No one grants credit for the brilliance we burn in.' The argument seems perverse but the emphasis falls on the phenomenon per se. He clarifies his point with a quotation from Whitehead: 'when mentality is working at a high level it brings novelty into the appetites of mental experience. In this function there

is a sheer element of anarchy. But mentality now becomes self - regu-  
 lative. It canalises its own operations by its own judgements. It intro-  
 duces a higher appetite which discriminates among its own anarchic  
 productions. Reason for McClure is considered as a major gain, &  
 he means not the capacity to simply think correctly but to act correctly,  
 & by acting he doesn't simply mean doing but assuming one's proper  
 place. REASON IS NOT THE DEMARCATION OF A NARROW TRAIL OF LOGIC. NO  
 MAN IS HUMANLY ABOVE THE VARIATIONS OF CHANGE OR WOULD WILLFULLY BLIND  
 HIMSELF TO THE SPONTANEOUS HAPPENING & CHANGES OF BEAUTIES SURRO-  
 UNding HIM & OCURRING WITHIN HIMSELF. REASON IS THE ASSUMPTION OF  
 POSSIBILITIES IN THE DRAMA.' It is reason that leads man to take his  
 place in the universe & to enact his own being in the fullness of what  
 such activity means. Reason is the ability to shed the knowledge of  
 being man & to exist in the universe as a living & free part. There  
 must be knowledge of what the body is — the image it makes in matter  
 & energy — & the entities that comprise it.':

STUDY MIND-BODY  
 TO BE BEAUTY  
 To  
 cancel  
 misdirections  
 is thy duty.  
 The orange papaya  
 heart is a law  
 from  
 which  
 follows  
 stars & planets  
 galaxies & moles  
 the goat kid  
 on the banquet table  
 gravity waves  
 & black holes.  
 The bones  
 are there  
 & moved  
 by  
 muscles.  
 The universe is where  
 our spirit rustles

Reason is not a product of the intellect as the Philosophers of the En-  
 lightenment argue but of 'the accreting body of the meat intellectivity

of men.' This is a crucial distinction for McClure. The intellectivity takes its essential sustenance from meditation & physical experience; information from books & media is simply a secondary source. The individual has to set about realising his own physical experience. Bio-alchemical investigations — concerns with the shapes & meanings of bodies — are inseparable from poetics:

we are hunters of protein grail  
NUEVO ALCHEMISTS  
man, woman & babe  
deer, bear & virus,  
cypress  
worms & bacterium ...

McClure is calling for a vital destructuring of our system. He goes back to evolutionary origins in an attempt to get it right, quoting H. T. Odum in support of his argument: 'If the origin of life was a step by step capsulation of molecules in the sea ... the earliest forms must have been so large & had so little structuring that they have left little in the fossil record':

AND SO WE STRETCH OUT  
it is a muscular sensation  
from the neck & shoulders  
through the arm

And we are not in search of poetry but luck  
that in ten trillion Milky Ways  
that make a molecule within our chest  
or a billion feathered songs sung  
from horseback on a bison hunt  
WERE BEAMS OF LIGHT  
flash here & there  
& make new colors out of dust  
what we emit in Fields of Thought

The human organism still possesses clear traces of its paleolithic past. We hardly know anything of the way in which traits, needs, urges, retained from evolutionary experience condition our behaviour today. So far as innate responses are concerned they are still the ones that had developed aeons ago to adapt mankind to conditions that then prevailed but which have long ceased to exist. Evidence of this can be seen, for example, in the way the body mobilises itself before fear or danger:

MYCELIA  
PLUCK OUT MYCELIA OF SOCIAL PERSONALITY  
FROM MAMML STYLE

Neolithic acts in mime of torture  
Turning, twisting, very fast. Pain  
distorts from pain. Politics  
is doomed & meat is free  
to feel soft pleasures  
beams  
scents  
tastes  
& inheritance of self  
from selves. The intersections  
of the memory are points. A NET. Within — forgotten things

McClure's poetry takes in the surrounding world & whatever is taken in is given back in altered condition. As Dubos observes 'everything we perceive & interpret by thinking processes 'becomes translated into organic processes'. McClure seeks to reveal & to explore the language of these processes. His *99 Theses* bring the eye to focus:

- 1) MAN IS A CARNIVORE EXPERIENCING HIMSELF
- 12) THE SOCIETY IS A CAGE FOR THE MAMMAL.
- 17) THE WOLF SINGS
- 23) THE PHYSIOLOGICAL BODY IS PURE SPIRIT
- 35) THERE IS NOT INTELLIGENCE BUT INTELLIGENCES
- 51) MEAT IS THOUGHT
- 60) REVOLT IS BIOLOGICAL
- 68) THERE IS ONE LANGUAGE — GESTURE, VOICE, & VIBRATION OF BODY
- 70) THE BODY IS ELF LAND
- 81) MADNESS IS TEMPORARY & NATURAL
- 99) MEAT IS MOVING CAVE IN THE SOLID AIR

Let me conclude my remarks with a brief mention of two other works that have appeared in the last few years that also explore the possibilities of 'open' form. Paul Blackburn's *Journals* are an intimate record of how he faces up to the tragic issues of his life. They show us his love of place & person, & his knowledge of approaching death from illness. The perceptions flow, the instant is the event. Robert Kelly notes in his introduction to the *Journals*: 'What form can be discovered as one moves through life? So his forms are always innovative, sometimes mimetic (because he loved descriptions & people & simple

aliments & catalogues), but more often directly expressive of their interaction of the thing seen with the man seeing's. He might have been talking of Blackburn's 'La Lisiere':

How we move  
about the wealth  
of friendships:  
too often at the edge of it  
How rare, the move to center

where we live

Salvage, that word.  
Each of us stands shyly  
at the edge of woods  
fearing the valley  
chary of the sun  
waiting

This essay has argued a preference for the poem as process rather than as the objective correlative of a complex experience where the poem represents something outside itself & can be recognised by any reader equipped with similar knowledge. The notion of poem as process insists on the fact that the poem refers to nothing outside itself. It is ontologically unique, & is the issue of a primary activity of the mind or creative imagination. In the *Loom* Kelly shows, for example, how in the strands of language the activity of love can find its mate: a poetry that discovers its meaning in the act:

But the shape of love  
like the loom of morning  
could cast before it  
a light on the shape of things  
made realer by the goal  
towards which it & I & all  
hopeful things were moving.  
To make love.  
The pain was real,  
& warps me still —  
but that was realer  
everything

led to you.

The connection  
is too delicate  
to stress



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