

# alcheringga

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volume one  
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1975



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9 poets out of the present, average age 28, whose work might be said to "cluster" about such magazines as *This, Big Deal, Tottel's*, the recent *Doones* supplements, the Andrews-edited issue of *Toothpick*, etc. Called variously "language centered," "minimal," "non-referential formalism," "diminished referentiality," "structuralist." Not a *group* but a *tendency* in the work of many.

edited by Ron Silliman

## The Dwelling Place 9 Poets

*That which exists  
through itself  
is what is called meaning*

Olson

Bruce Andrews

3 Poems

ale  
rate  
an lint late  
laine  
nil at air  
tail let  
near ran tin nit  
lean nile  
rile ten net  
neat tern rail  
net lit lair lent  
lane tan  
lint

(37)

Lenin and Philosophy

2 oceans

a scarf of

detective

bulletproof

crimping

bed one more

my parents

listen!

ice picks

flatred

talk to interrupt

clove

stragglers

embrace

an insect right here

+

albe

skep

trof

jush

numb

pffo

neig

whep

rown

iide

grat

chal

vidu

dhel

mons

dows

fniw

prog

sysa

gsid

hosp

benn

nrev

huos

ctem

cbal

egis

focu

dtic

notd

tion  
nega

nari  
butw  
ishm  
lota

## 1

he ate the English and he the bikers called down on the hog farm "most curled up" peaches  
 apricots plums pears Henry took the envelope and left to go to his office a swoon fakes  
 them out how a dentist vendor Italian such elusive gender endings a fiery dealership  
 roaches and butts a lift to the new onramp he buys his dresses at Philco dealers a big kind  
 of fierce gazing into the persimmon the lilacs do moo a peculiar presence he said yawning  
 an act and its warp (its harp? you said) a faked broom a Geo Washington on the square  
 some people elementarily taking it down no units entire sweeps of dry scansion geodesic  
 dome a rather milky city piles of junk the room but better lots of people riding around and  
 pulling out their knives great yellowy sources of light and pillars (the Palace of Fine Arts)  
 the kid's coated tongue a bug a disease a childhood disease and then all right ready to fasci-  
 nate draws bugs on the wall surprised to know how awful they thought great flakes coming  
 off finally sugar

## 3

Day after day there is time to disappear when reappearing take care not to waste yourself.  
 Things made possible: percentages whipping out their numbers. An easy picture floats by  
 and then a hard one. A reasonableness. . . . hits the pot and misses. "Why John," he said.  
 "Why Mary," she said. They both planted some corrections on the roof, to watch them  
 sprout into dahlias. And they did, but it took several winters. And then they lasted and  
 then the house fell down and so a new premium was needed. A letter, some fires, a few  
 staples, and an incredible continuity was released. "Why not magic?" she wrote home,  
 saving it for last.

Clark Coolidge

AB7

there is on time  
 to there is to time  
 as of district  
 to be is at there  
 being as plain as though  
 there be that other there  
 as no as that though is plain  
 as other as yes in those as being  
 stairs

wakes  
of in the next gets  
at about a one small size  
about the one of a last  
as long as the small though  
what is in fact  
no other  
which is in last gets out  
size

start  
out of what is a little  
hands  
a kind of last one up to it  
stairs though more and more  
is there one or small  
were and one water were  
often

flies  
another of the lights and in a phrase  
where in another this stay  
every each that time  
is on out there  
in every occurs of each  
pass losses  
with the with and the stay  
on to the wakes  
moves  
losses

HERE IS WHERE 'FEELING'  
DESCRIBED AS 'DRAINING AWAY'  
OCCURRED AS BARRY'S TRAIN  
'PULLED OUT'. SADNESS WAS  
NOW (AN EVOLUTIONARY WORD) WELL  
DEVELOPED AGAINST. THE USUAL  
SUPERFICIAL INVESTIGATION OF PARTING  
& ITS TIME-GEOGRAPHY INGREDIENTS.  
A REPOSITIONING FOR FINAL TRAIN  
DISSAPPEARANCE OBSERVATION.

REPOSITIONING AREA

(HOW CAN HE  
BE NOW  
EXISTING  
THERE, MYSELF  
HERE & THE  
DISTANCE  
INCREASING)

JUNE 10, 73 LEE DEJASU

listing

4 AM JULY 6, 1973

REFERRALS  
punctuations  
ORDERING  
of words  
'thought'  
physical placement  
PROCESS AS CONTENT



AN EVOLUTION WITH  
CURRENT 'HUMANESS' AS  
ONLY PART.  
'SCIENCE FICTION' - 'FANTASY'  
AS BEING ARENA FABRIC  
LANDSCAPE INDICATORS,  
CURRENT HUMAN EXTINCTION-  
EVOLVEMENT.  
BODY PART REPLACEMENT  
50 YEARS. 200 YEARS. 5000 YEARS  
60,000 YEARS. COMPUTER BRAIN  
DEVELOPMENT.  
WHO IS ANYBODY TRYING  
TO FOOL?  
NEUROTIC DISSOCIATIVE  
INSISTENCES.

LEE DEJASU

7

## CODICIL

collides triangle lucid nap  
 broad wet exertion  
     sift plunges  
                     halo shallows  
 lean-to precocious  
     trickle blade  
 railing fluency plankton abrupt  
     sea's rib  
             glows lobes  
                     +

## GIBBON'S GIBSON

a flack sapphic a  
     grist  
     breeder  
 a flack sapphic a  
     heart  
 a flack sapphic a  
     fishman  
 a flack sapphic a  
 a flack sapphic a  
     monks  
 a flack sapphic a  
     physic  
 a flack sapphic a  
 a flack sapphic a  
     Sumer  
 a dread caliphs a  
 a flack sapphic a  
     panth  
 a flack sapphic a

+

ground    waters    graced  
clippt    tender    window  
church    vagued    finish  
looked    tenant    glance  
stride    should    curler

missing                    goodbye  
bounced                  laughter  
middles                    passion  
against                    moments  
removed                    tankers

shout  
coats  
greet  
start  
inner  
looks  
stave  
ghost  
semen  
ocean

lane  
tide  
ache  
walk  
tack  
flow  
mark  
hint  
spin  
pint

some old guys with scythes

EMILY

thumpa  
thumpa  
thumpa  
thump

bent over

to go faster

I drink rice

84

48

24

42

M

IS FOR

MAHONEY

within the family

there are sweet exchanges

JOE

JOE

sol sol ti do

you cough like

two trees

three comedians

light &

and shade

obtain from the brook

rain drops the first of many

roar of the tumblers

of life days like

mel  
ethwe fub sditas

ehfoie ruax oir  
paso biot  
qla fa

woe                    eroa  
asrglry            s  
wea tiro                    bohmuluk  
codfix                    a, azz            oboi

+

seta  
colecc  
puilse, i  
canoe  
it spear heieo

as Rea, cinct pp  
pools we sly drosp  
Geianto

(o sordea, o weedsea!)

Does was  
 though thousand was  
 till precise  
 value circle ways  
 for centuries a  
 world of such  
 followed then  
 slopes display  
 and luminaries  
 that is what  
 now the whole  
 men from many  
 of the hemisphere  
 of the ancient  
 of the stellar  
 angles the means for  
 to a restricted group  
 flourish in the middle  
 geodetic marker  
 of references  
 megalithic  
 of all wisdom  
 of the equinoxes  
 zealot as had been  
 evoked  
 of the scored lines  
 stadia but more  
 latitude at the pole  
 of latitude  
 city was intended  
 root of the priests  
 that is what  
 derangement  
 founder  
 oracle  
 cut

		spin
		daguerrotype
		whips pile
		bashfully
		Anglo
	of their boots so	builder
	candle to marks	the building
	solar year	the roof girder
	gravity of mud	of pyramidologists
	three lengths of the year	portcullis
	at the zenith	and wood henges
meridian pillar star		obtain a true
suggests		cream white tube
adduced by Zaba prove		proctor could
night at a slant		constricted ascending
megalomaniac		the bull's thigh
series of flat		semicircular
set by the wall		served as
deduce		cuneiform to units
cubits		into their interiors
facade		zones into seven
fix		circumpolar
daub		source in ochre
gravel down		
rock		
out		
casing		
means		
protuberances		
floated		
about		
red		
boat		
gang		

deviate  
acute  
prefer  
joins  
for  
angle  
lack  
which  
sides  
had  
that  
led  
was  
of  
fronts  
right  
what  
well  
with  
western  
this  
he  
those  
how  
bird  
rule  
yard  
had  
at  
would  
this  
degree  
their  
other  
shine  
metal  
gathers  
topped  
not  
toward  
wrote  
guardian  
vessel  
also  
senses  
small  
by  
unit  
but  
cube  
common  
if

You're inside a building and then outside it. Then 10 miles away, and can barely visualize it — seeing the ground from the air in slow motion. At the same time you feel the helicopter sink into the street. The jet slips through a cloud.

The *simultaneous* as an attribute of the *not felt*. The *literal* as an attribute of the *felt*. A straightforward literal worldly interest in the variety and implications of things.

A subscription to a magazine held as lightly entertaining and wholly dispensable. A report card — a blessing — an earned kiss. The variegated horticulture seen through the ambient light. The little boxes of plants, ceramic pots, cut green stems, simple duties.

Complicated management of simple duties. You buy a subscription to a magazine, the magazine comes and you look at it, worry it out. Magazines, it's possible?

+

#### METHODICAL DESCRIPTIVE PROSE

Something has to have bounds in order to see it. A sentence, with capital letter at front and period at end, so can be seen. No internal supports necessary to give it a place. So its meaning, relative to those internal supports, supposing they exist, is ambiguous. Sentences like vases to be filled with water, then put plants in on top. Or sentences rolling out in phrase by phrase elaboration until an arbitrary pause puts an end to them. A sentence which, like speech, is the object of its own condition, that is, like speech unfolding and working around an idea, then breaking for space-filling words. There is one thing moving, then there is speech movement. What if that one thing refuses to budge? Then there is little speech. All sit dumb on their hands. No issue presents itself — that's always a hard one, what gives you the cue? Something must reach a point of self-definition or it won't be uttered, like a point of information or observation — “My the clouds are blue” — wouldn't be said if you couldn't see the clouds or feel the blue. Low threshold — or you say one thing and end up telling your life story. Maybe if you kept that one thing too close to what said you'd end up at odds. So all act is/is not self-realized; that is, act realized itself. “Whatever you say tells the truth — partakes of that order.” It may not, if telling the truth is something other than what you say. Then again, again. If what you say has the magic formula to unlock genetic information and bone structure, cause collapse of tissues. If it told us what it was, if it were heard right. It's not heard right, said right, does not convey complete information, may not convince of integrity or sincerity if abstractions are the ½ issue. If context puts anything concrete resting on a deep chasm of abstraction. Not merely to say it's just “electrical impulse” across centuries, condenser, a quantum discharge considering the medium, when speech may be a little confused and jumpy itself. The parenthetical is power — an address other than the matter expressed. Declaimed to the open air? Declaimed to its limits, giving itself limits. The matter extends into space, unfortunately we were not there to pick up on it, otherwise might have learned something. “There, it is broken.” Anyone will do what they can, emigrate to South America, build San Jose, tell any story they can get away with. Until they are stopped.

## Surprised by Sign (Notes on Nine)

1. What connects these writers beyond my *impression* of a connection is what I take to be a community of concern for language as the center of whatever activity poems might be, and for poetry itself as the "perfection of new forms as additions to nature." Which raises questions, problems, answers, solutions, recalls old modes (half-forgotten modernists such as Arensburg, say, or the work of certain Russian Futurists) and reflects concerns that have not previously been so extensively explored in the context of American poetry (e.g., for the work of such as Lacan or Barthes). Some have come to this more or less isolately, while others have found use in the work of their peers. Inevitably, present correspondences will fade as each body of work follows the trajectory of its own logic; others may develop. What this is, then, is a fix-in-time of writing which bears a family resemblance.

2. Any poem's a language: a vocabulary plus a set of rules by which to process it. For example, English terms which are aural equivalents to words and word-parts of Latin + the structure of the poems of Catullus. More commonly: the usual vocabulary of the writer + a stylized conception of speech. But if what one goes after is a direct confrontation with language, words (Grenier: "What now I want . . . is the word way back in the head"; or as Charles Bernstein, a younger, Stein-impacted writer, puts it: "wordness") or beyond (Tom Clark, prefacing *Big Sky 3*, implies that for Coolidge words are a surface intended to reveal "Neural activity . . . a multiplicity of simultaneous operations functioning in a continuum. The basis for the system is frequency modulation"), what vocabulary, what set of rules? First, neither the words nor the processes of the poem must point out or away from the poem itself, a literal reading of Creeley's "poems are not referential, or at least not importantly so," must not carry the reader's attention away from the fact of what's at hand. Even the use of the line to describe speech (Grenier again: "Why imitate 'speech' . . . ? (I)t is *only* such. *To me, all speeches say the same thing*"). What it finally becomes, as Grenier so clearly saw in "On Speech" (*This 1*) is "First question: where are the words most themselves?"

3. Words are not, finally, non-referential. For they originate in interactions with the world. Even Melnick's metalanguage is based in its relation to a vocabulary of *derived* terms. What can be done, however, is to diminish the reference, an activity common to the work of all nine. By the creation of non-referring structures (Coolidge, DiPalma, Andrews), disruption of context (Grenier, DeJasu), forcing the meanings in upon themselves until they cancel out or melt (Watten, the poem *Tri*, and, elsewhere, in the work of Michael Palmer). By effacing one or more elements of referential language (a tactic commonly employed by the Russian Futurists), the

balance within and between the words shifts, redistributes. Consider the *i* in *I drink rice* as a constant around which audio-visual variants are developed, the clarity a consequence of the reduction of context. Or Watten's self-referring *Methodical Descriptive Prose*, innermost unit (word) pointing out to the sentence(s), outermost unit (paragraph) aimed back in, to the same point. Or the flickering reoccurrences of information (letter, sound, quantity, meaning) in Coolidge's work, each term of equal import (the one truly Steinian element in his writing). Or DeJasu's presentation of signifiers *with* (the at least hypothetical, implied) signifieds, the referential nature of emotional or intellectual discourse "mapped out," an ironic mode. Roland Barthes, in the essay "Is There Any Poetic Writing?" (*Writing Degree Zero*, 1953), confronts diminished referentiality as achieved by effacing *connections* (best present example: DiPalma's third poem): "it is the Word which is 'the dwelling place' . . . it shines with an infinite freedom and prepares to radiate towards innumerable uncertain and possible connections. Fixed connections being abolished, the word is left only with a vertical project, it is like a monolith, or a pillar which plunges into a totality of meanings, reflexes and recollections. . . ."

4. The "Hunger of the Word," desire to become, as Coolidge once in correspondence noted, "growing word plant," is as old as "in the beginning, etc." (The vertical in Shakespeare: "Edgar I nothing am.") In Russia, 1912-1930, the Futurists (Mayakovsky, Khlebnikov, Kamensky, Zdanevich, Pasternak, the Burluiks, Kruchenyk et al) and their Kenners, the Formalists (Shklovsky, Tynjanov, Brik, Jakobson), aimed at it, head on. Shklovsky: "Words are a human need even apart from meaning," or, elsewhere, "all that the work of poetic schools amounts to is the acquisition and demonstration of new devices for deploying and elaborating verbal materials." Such views can be traced back to the foundations of Russian Literit (Potebnya, 1835-91, saw poetry as a defense mechanism of the word, to assert the word's autonomy in the face of external forces, and argued even that "the word is art, more exactly, poetry," a century before Grenier's work), finding their most common Futurist expression in the neologism (Mayakovsky "invented" over 2,000 words), and their wildest (and most useful in the present sense) extension in the theory of *zaum*, and the *zaumniks* of the group called 41° (Kruchenyk, Khlebnikov, Zdanevich), a "transrational" language (cf., here, the poems of Melnick and Andrews) made up of word-fragments, non-words sounding wordish, words with letters rearranged in alphabetical order, with ranDOM capitalS, etc. (Zdanevich, with sophisticated graphic dimensions a la Finlay, and exacting instructions for pronunciation, seems almost a direct ancestor of some of the work of Mac Low and Schwerner).

5. Beyond such "cues" as concretism or certain tribal literatures, the work of two men ought also to be noted as fire source: Creeley and Eigner. Creeley's work, both in the poems and in such essays as "To Define" and "Poems are a complex," has sensitized many to the possibilities of getting at, to, in the word. Eigner, by fact of physical situation, has taken the logic of speech as such out of discourse, creating sequences of presences. Power to their words.

6. The descriptive term, by fact of its intention does not exist, for its substance lays elsewhere, in table, sky, chair. But is there a grammar capable of imposing order on a room, the couch in a corner as some predication? The paradox of Quine's Pegasus (*Word & Object*, p. 176) is not in the language, but rather a specific literary tradition, wherein words are transparent and one could not see Dickens as primarily a writer of phrases. Certainly such assumptions did not control Sterne's composition of *Shandy*. Nor a Balinese *Ketjak*, that powerful oral form. Language exists, is real, has weight, is physical: one finds in tribal literatures poetries of sound or the visible more than equal to a Cobbing or a Furnival. The bias of course was against the "pre-literate," a question of domination previous to information. If these aspects of language have come to a legitimization, seen now as integral faculties of *mind* (in the Chomskian usage of that term), during the modern and so-called post-modern periods, it has principally been through the indirect influence of the visual arts, the likes of Picasso who first began to accept and explore the possibilities of that universe. One sees in the deliberate primitivism of a Harry Crosby a tendency that could be followed through Finlay or Gomringer to the "sophisticated" machines of Coolidge (or, to turn to a slightly older worker, one could argue that the Anglo-American body of poetry most invested with a heritage of the literature of tribal cultures is that produced by MacLow via computers). Such poetry is no longer simply an extension of the formal grammars of the written.

Bruce Andrews. Books: *Edge*, *A Cappella*, *Corona*. "(A) stress on these characteristics and using them as organizing principles when syntax is attenuated: sound, texture, weight, discreteness, silence, targets, rhythms, presence, physicality." Professor of Political Science, Fordham University.

Barbara Baracks. Edits *Big Deal*. The *Note* works are prose modes where referents shift constantly, often from word to word, avoiding larger, generalized "reference areas." Words "as objects" posited into a genre which, according to Barthes, "is relational. . . (It) extends, as soon as it is uttered, towards other words, so as to form a superficial chain of intentions."

Clark Coolidge. Books include *Space* and *The Maintains*. Robert Sward, panning the early pamphlet *Flag Flutter &*

*U.S. Electric*, presents the illusionist objections to diminished referentiality and language-centered writing: "The *chic*, trivial piling up of images . . . is finally a bore. . . . Clark Coolidge's poems are virtually without voice. . . . The poems exist as pointless curios, objects that stand in an abstract time and a vacant space." Sward refuses to permit any possibility that language itself might be an object of direct experience, even confusing language with "images." (As to voice, CC's personality is a clear, identifiable pulse present in all his mature work; what Sward *means* is that his poems do not describe a speech.) Where Grenier sees the material of writing as word, a point, CC sees it as language, a plane: "feeling of huge lingual continua grinding/humming onward in back of everything, even when unseen/unheard, like radio waves. Establishing the spacetime plane which words set up, building off with its vectoring-geometries: setups of certain word seem to make holes in that surface establishing surprising connects back to here. Words out of syntactical sequence always feel to me like numbers out of order: establishing sense of simultaneity of different time-planes." A B's vocabulary is derived from a previous text of Coolidge's, which itself had a previous source. "I recall, in early-60's, getting totally disgusted with the limited range of words coming out of my head. . . . I figured that if one were to make something from words one should have as close as possible to *all* words/syntax ready to hand. & fed back into mind. I kept thinking of painters'/musicians' relation to their materials. Dependence on the rack of words a writer would have behaviorally as a matter of course began to seem an unnecessary blockage." At work on a 1000 page poem.

Lee De Jasu. A photographer whose interest in information led him into word's work, a background more in the tradition of Ed Ruscha, Joseph Kosuth, et al, than that of Bob Brown. Calling it "field poetry," LDJ literally maps out perceptions, emotions, posits the contradictions between cognition and recognition at the center.

Ray Di Palma. Ten books, including SOLI. The most accomplished in traditional forms, Ray was the first to focus on Barthes' work as source. In *Codicil* each line is a unit of its own, very nearly separate poems, joined by recurrences, e.g., the letter *l*. In *ground waters graced* even the rhythm-as-continuum is removed. Each term is isolate, caught between the distance from itself and any other term on a horizontal axis, and its proximity to any on the vertical. Rather than having each word float in the page's space (cf. the proposed waterpoems of Jim Rosenberg: words scribed on clear plastic cards left floating in a pool or lake, the reader to swim from term to term), these are locked in. As horizontal associations suggest movement, a narration of affect, the vertical proposes paradigms.

Robert Grenier. Book: *Dusk Road Games*. Co-translator: *Selected Poems of Georg Trakl*. Co-edited *This* (1-5). "In the

process of writing what does not then occur in the head is a distraction." Equivalent to Merleau-Ponty's "We write in perceived space." "Words are words," WCW said, but Grenier has been the first to make literal use of this. Not minimalism but gigantism: the terms are so reduced that each facet is magnified, one hears every letter, one hears the spaces between every letter. The clarity of formal process possible when the elements are reduced as radically as in his poems becomes in his work not a tone or aridness but elegance by the fact of such precision as "of life days like."

David Melnick. Books: *Eclogs, Pcoet*. In December 1912, Alexei Kruchenykh wrote a poem with no "real" words in it; its terms were not simply neologisms or distortions of existing language, but letters and phonemes structured largely out of K's sense of sound. By April 1913, he had developed this into a full-fledged poetics, which he called *zaum*. Of it, Markov has written "*zaum* looked like the outer limit of poetry, its extreme and pure manifestation, where sound creates meaning (or meanings) and is not subordinated to it. It also puts a definite emphasis on the word as an artistic medium rather than as a means of communication." Melnick, in a statement written for *Occident*, has quoted Ruth Benedict to the effect of "The number of sounds that can be produced by our vocal cords and our oral and nasal cavities are practically unlimited. The three or four dozen of the English language are a selection which coincides not even with those of such closely related dialects as German and French. A language that used even a few hundreds of the possible — and actually recorded — phonetic elements could not be used for communication." The major collection of the group 41° was entitled *To Sofia Georgievna Melnikova*.

Ron Silliman. Four books include *Mohawk* and *Nox*. Edits: *Tottel's*. Stella: "I always get into arguments with people

who want to retain old values in painting — the humanistic values that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting there is something there besides the paint on the canvas." Shklovsky, in *Resurrection of the Word* (1914), "We do not experience the familiar, we do not see it, we recognize it. We do not see the walls of our rooms. We find it very difficult to catch mistakes when reading proof (especially if it is in a language we are very used to), the reason being that we cannot force ourselves to see, to read, and not just 'recognize,' a familiar word." Ronald Johnson: "Everybody's using texts. Nobody's saying very much about it." Cf. Burroughs, Coolidge, Andrews, Kathy Acker or Johnson's own use of Milton in *Radios*.

Barrett Watten. Edits *This*. The sentence as unit versus the difficulty of speech as act. Coolidge: "Curved space?" Watten: "Yeah, but space, in Olson's sense seems to me like a context for the development of whatever. . . . So that mode of development has to do with a certain thing that moves, in other words you have a surface, the poem develops along that surface. . . . What I'm trying to get at is there's this image of all experience, like say Stein's image of all language, a thing that presses in on you, involving some response."

San Francisco  
Christmas 1973

(Note: in the months since this gathering, a number of other writers have moved into this area. Attention is due, particularly, to the work of Charles Hine, Alan Sondheim, Charles Bernstein, The Black Tarantula, Lynne Dreyer, and Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop.)

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