and self-determination. The structure of the poem itself can be seen as a metaphor for the historical process that Poulantzas describes in his complex, conflictual model of the social formation.

Contrary to the implications of Jameson's schizophrenia analogy, Perelman isn't suggesting that we can do without narration, only that (1) the particular narrations into which we are inserted are coded justifications for the status quo, and (2) there are alternative ways of structuring (constituting) our experiences. Such alternatives *foreground* our social relations, not reify them.

Ironically, Perelman and other so-called Language poets can be seen to meet Jameson's call for a new political art whose "aesthetic of cognitive mapping" in this confusing postmodern space of late capitalism may achieve "a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing [the world space of multinational capital], in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" ("Postmodernism," 92). The foregrounding of the materiality of the signifier at this time is meant to draw attention to the socially inscribed gestural nature of language, the dialectical consciousness of which capitalism seeks to repress by valorizing what Ron Silliman calls the "disappearance of the word/appearance of the world syndrome" of realism. Seen in this context, poems like "China" must be taken as critiques of and Utopian compensation for the reification of language in late capitalism. This critique of reification is the subject of the next chapter. Its compensation is the subject of chapter five.

FOUR

Realism and Reification

The Poetics and Politics of Three Language Poets

In the "Politics of Poetry" double issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine (9/10 [October 1979] Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein published a forum on the views of various so-called Language poets on the politics of their writing. The common editorial procedure for that magazine was to publish related passages from the works of writers from other fields or times. Thus the editors included, without accompanying commentary, a passage from Terry Eagleton's review of *Aesthetics and Politics*, a collection of documents from the famous Brecht-Lukács debate on realism and modernism. Part of Eagleton's passage reads:

> Consider this curious paradox. A Marxism which had for too long relegated signifying practices to the ghostly realms of the superstructure is suddenly confronted by a semiotic theory which stubbornly insists upon the materiality of the signifier. A notion of the signifier as a mere peg of occasion for a signified, a transparent container brimfull with the plenitude of a determinate meaning, is dramatically overturned. On the contrary, the signifier must be grasped as the product of material labour inscribed in a specific apparatus—a moment in that ceaseless work and play of signification whose sheer heterogeneous productivity is always liable to be repressed by the bland self-possession of sign systems. A centuries old metaphysic of the signified is rudely subverted: the signified is no more than that always half-effaced, infinitely deferred effect of signifying practice which glides impudently out of our reach even as we try to close our fist upon it, scurrying back as it endlessly does into the privilege of becoming a signifier itself. . . . The literary names for this are realism and representation. (*New Left Review*, 21–22)

What role does this passage play in the double issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E?* Andrews and Bernstein most likely have read the rest of Eagleton's essay and know that the passage is a caricature of the French journal *Tel Quel's* position on realism (a position articulated by Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and other frequent contributors). So to what extent does the above passage characterize, rather than caricature, the view on realism of a few or more Language poets?

Certainly the *Tel Quel* position on realism hardly matches the common caricature of the "vulgar" Marxist critic—the party hack who demands that all art provide a "realistic" representation of the evils of capitalism and the progress of the socialist state. But the Marxist background for the positions on realism of certain Language poets begins not with "vulgar" Marxism but with the more sophisticated models argued for by Georg Lukács, members of the Frankfurt School, and Louis Althusser.

Fredric Jameson's recent challenge to the poetic practice of the so-called Language school (see his "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism") makes urgent the need to formulate the aesthetical-political positions of these poets. Ironically, Jameson and some Language writers all base their critiques of certain literary modes on the notion of reification. But this single notion has led to quite opposing conclusions (see also my "Jameson's Perelman: Reification and the Material Signifier"). The Jameson-Language school debate, so to speak, in many ways resembles the Brecht-Lukács debates earlier in this century. Not surprisingly, Jameson and members of the Language school base their own arguments in part on arguments developed in those earlier debates. For a full understanding of the positions on realism of Ron Silliman, Steve McCaffery, and Bruce Andrews, then, we need to review the crucial issues of the Brecht-Lukács debates, as well as the modification of those issues by Louis Althusser.

Lukács, the Frankfurt School, and Althusser

In the essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" Lukács offers the following definition of reification: "Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people" (p. 83). The concept is a translation, so to speak, of Marx's notion of commodity-fetishism, which in turn depends on Marx's distinction between use-value and exchange-value. "The utility of a thing," Marx writes, "makes it a use-value. But this utility is not a thing of the air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity" (*Capital*, 1:36). (This concern with the physical properties of the commodity recurs in the Language school's emphasis on the materiality of the signifier.) Exchange-value, on the other hand, exists as an abstraction apart from the commodity, its physical properties no longer in sight. What determines the exchange-value of the commodity is not any quality of the product itself but the quantity of labor time that went into its making; that is, exchange-value is a social relation, a result of the labor process. "A commodity is therefore a curious thing," Marx continues, "simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour: because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour" (p. 72). Just as in religion the creations of the human brain become hypostatized as independent objects (gods, angels, devils), so the products of workers' labor become fetishized.

Lukács then appropriates Max Weber's notion of rationalization (Taylorization, the increasing fragmentation of social processes into discrete quantifiable units) and Hegel's concept of estrangement (the objectification of spirit, the fragmentation of subjectivity into objectivity) into his own conception of reification as a process of fragmentation of the social totality. Through the process of reification human beings are alienated from their true nature as social producers, their own labor itself becoming a commodity, a thing to be sold on the market like any other commodity. Since society for Lukács is an organic expressive totality—a totality in which "the individual elements incorporate [or express] the structure of the whole" (*History*, 198)—then each level (economic, aesthetic, political, etc.) is structurally homologous to the totality's essential level: the mode of production. Consequently, the effects of a mode of production based on commodity-production will influence all other levels. A mode of production, in other words, which gives rise to reification will cause that reification to spread throughout the totality.

Reification is no accident but part of an overall historical process. For Hegel the historical dialetic represented the subject of history's, or Absolute Spirit's, coming to consciousness of itself. Estrangement is not to be mourned but to be seen as a necessary moment of such a coming-to-consciousness, during which the subject of history becomes manifest in the objective world and then recognizes itself in those objects, thus reconciling once and for all the schism between subjectivity and objectivity. Just so, reification for Lukács is the historically determined moment when the subject of history—now the proletariat—becomes wholly objectified. What follows, then, is the proletariat's recognition of itself as history's subject, as the end of the material process of dialectical contradiction. The immediate task of the Marxist is the raising of class consciousness and revolution.

Lukács claims, however, that such consciousness is not inevitable, but only a "concrete possibility"; in other words, historical conditions make such consciousness possible but not automatic. Class consciousness must be fought for by those who have seen through what Lukács calls the "veil of reification." Literature, determined by its isomorphic relationship to commodity production, thus becomes an arena for class struggle. In *Realism In Our Time* Lukács argues that the modernism of Joyce, Musil, and Kafka contributes to the reifying effects of commodity production because such art is "anti-real." The world view implied by these authors takes the appearance of fragmented reality as truth. The individual for these writers, Lukács claims, "is by nature solitary, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (p. 20). These authors fail to recognize that such thrownness-into-being, as Heidegger

puts it, is only the historically determined state of modern society, not a universal condition of life. The technique of stream-of-consciousness in Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance, presents life as an aimless, directionless agglomeration of random, static details. In the more realistic work of Thomas Mann, on the other hand, such as *Lotte in Weimar*, every "person or event, emerging momentarily from the stream and vanishing again, is given a specific weight, a definite position, in the pattern of the whole" (*Realism*, 18). Realism (or more accurately "critical realism" as distinguished from "naturalism" and socialist realism) reveals the connections between the individual and the social totality, thereby showing the relationships which have been occluded by reification. Realism thus becomes a tool for consciousness raising, while other literary modes only perpetuate our present mystification.

Not all Marxist aestheticians, however, share Lukács's view of the political effects of realism. The classic counter to Lukács's position, of course, is that of Bertolt Brecht and his associates of the Frankfurt School; among Marxist aesthetic theories, this one has most influenced the Language school. Brecht agrees with Lukács that literature must reveal some truth in order to be effective: "The ruling classes use lies oftener than before—and bigger ones. To tell the truth is clearly an ever more urgent task" (*Aesthetics*, 80). But *how* that truth was told is the issue. "Realism is not a mere question of form," Brecht continues. "Were we to copy the style of these [nineteenth century bourgeois] realists, we would no longer be realists. . . . Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must change. . . . The oppressors do not work in the same way in every epoch" (p. 82). Realism, in other words, is a historically determined mode of representation that cannot be made into an ahistorical absolute, as Lukács seems to do. If modern reality is indeed determined by commodity production—and Brecht and the Frankfurt School agree that it is—then earlier representative modes are not only outdated but will serve to confirm the "realistic," empiricist notions that the bourgeoisie passes off as natural, as common sense.

"The unity represented by art and the pure humanity of its persons are unreal," Herbert Marcuse wrote; "they are the counter image of what occurs in social reality" ("The Affirmative Character of Culture," 102). Such Utopian visions of unity spur the desire for change. But those desires then "are either internalized as the duty of the individual soul (to achieve what is constantly betrayed in the external existence of the whole) or represented as objects of art (whereby their reality is relegated to a realm essentially different from that of everyday life)" (p. 114). The reification of modern society must be shown, Marcuse suggests, not some ideal realm of the past. Reification may even have its positive role: "In suffering the most extreme reification man triumphs over reification" (p. 116). The Language school's foregrounding of the material signifier attempts such a triumph, offering seemingly meaningless words in order to draw attention to the production of meaning itself.

Such is Brecht's position as a dramatist. Walter Benjamin, in his discussion of Brecht's "Epic Theater" in "The Author as Producer," writes that at "the centre of [Brecht's] experiments stands man. The man of today; a reduced man, therefore, a man kept on ice in a cold world. But since he is the only man we've got, it is in our interests to know him" (*Understanding Brecht*, 100). Benjamin describes Brecht's method as follows:

> . . . Brecht went back to the most fundamental and original elements of theatre. He confined himself, as it were, to a podium, a platform. He renounced plots requiring a great deal of space. Thus he succeeded in altering the functional relationship between stage and audience, text and production, producer and actor. Epic theatre, he declared, must not develop actions but represent conditions. As we shall presently see, it obtains its 'conditions' by allowing the actions to be interrupted. Let me remind you of the 'songs', whose principal function consists in interrupting the action. Here, then—that is to say, with the principle of interruption—the epic theatre adopts a technique which has become familiar to you in recent years through film and radio, photography and the press. I speak of the technique of montage, for montage interrupts the context into which it is inserted. (*Understanding Brecht*, 99)

What is the political effect of these interruptions? First, they work against creating an illusion of life, of audience identification with the characters as people other than actors on a stage. Just as the Russian Futurists "laid bare the device" in order to draw attention to the medium itself, Brecht foregrounds the dramatic medium in order to "estrange" the audience from its usual expectation. Second, "It [interruption] brings the action to a standstill in mid-course," Benjamin explains, "and thereby compels the spectator to take up a position towards the action, and the actor to take up a position towards his part" (p. 100). The spectators and actors are forced into active positions rather than the traditional passive ones of bourgeois mimetic art, in which the "realistic" technique carries the spectators and actors along on a predetermined path. And third, in an increasingly totalitarian society—reification having spread throughout the totality, German Fascism having come to power, Stalinist oppression having obliterated free thought—such a demand for active, critical thought works against the "naturalness" of the status quo.

Falling back on traditional modes of representation, then, will force no one to think about how such mimetic illusions come about and, by extension, how ideological justifications come about. Realism, even in the hands of the committed Communist artist, Benjamin claims, "functions in a counter-revolutionary way so long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat only *in the mind* and not as a producer" (p. 91). Like any other progressive producer, authors must pursue the "functional transformation," as Brecht put it, of the artistic means of production—which have been appropriated from their bourgeois context—liberating those means from the regressive uses to which they are put under capitalism.

How far the Frankfurt School has come from Lukács's position is clearest in the theoretical works of Theodor Adorno. Ironically, Adorno's interest in Marxism began with his reading of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness.* (See Susan Buck-Morss's study, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics,* and Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination* for a discussion of Adorno's relationship to Lukács.) For Lukács the antinomies of bourgeois thought, such as Kant's dualism of phenomenon and noumenon, grew out of the increasingly reified conditions of capitalist society. Lukács's resolution of these antinomies, by Hegelianizing Kant, resulted in Lukács's belief that the proletariat was the class which could finally resolve Kant's epistemological dilemma. But for Adorno there is no positive *Aufhebung* of the dialectic between these antinomies, as Fredric Jameson explains:

> [T]he very mark of the modern experience of the world itself is that precisely such [a resolution] is impossible, and that the primacy of the subject is an illusion, that subject and outside world can never find such ultimate identity or atonement under present historical circumstances. Yet if that ultimate synthesis toward which dialectical thought moves turns out to be unattainable it must not be thought that either of the terms of that synthesis, either of the conceptual opposites which are its subject and object, are any more satisfactory in their own right. (*Marxism and Form,* 55–56)

If bourgeois Marxist theorists have no direct access to the *Ding-an-sich,* in other words, they nevertheless are in the best position to criticize society precisely because of the process of reification. "Only when the established order has become the measure of all things," writes Adorno, "does its mere reproduction in the realm of consciousness become truth" (*Prisms,* 26). When commodity production affects all levels of society, that is, then the "truth" of that society is reification itself. Only in the complete separation of mental and physical production, Adorno claims, can cultural production be completely free to criticize all of society, "the truth of which consists in bringing untruth to consciousness of itself" (p. 28). Such truth is disruptive in that dialectical thought can never rest on a positive note but must continue to search out the positive and negative sides to all social phenomena. As such, though the product of reification, dialectics "means intransigence towards all reification" (p. 31). The relationship of Adorno's negative dialectics to art comes in the view that the "successful work . . . is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (p. 32). In a curious way the totality, so prized by Lukács, has been turned inside-out, reification now being total. There can be no comfort in such knowledge, however: "Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (p. 34).

Adorno's negative dialectics, in its denial of Hegel's positive synthesizing

movement, comes close to the structuralist (or poststructuralist) positions of Derrida and Althusser, who in quite different ways appropriate Saussurean concepts into their own ideology critiques. Such a move, as much as the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory, lies behind the political claims of some Language poets, especially Silliman's (as we shall see). While the application of the linguistic model or metaphor carries with it the danger of allegorism or homology—the reduction of one field of study into the categories of another—such a move may be justified, as Jameson points out, by pointing to "the concrete character of the social life of the so-called advanced countries today, which offer the spectacle of a world from which nature as such has been eliminated, a world saturated with messages and information, whose intricate commodity network may be seen as the very prototype of a system of signs" (*Prison-House,* ix).

Saussure's first theoretical move in attempting to outline a method for analyzing sign systems was his distinction between synchronic and diachronic, a move that would return in different form in Althusser's distinction between structural and expressive totality. In order to counter the geneticist fallacy of semantics, Saussure insisted that for the speaker the language as a total system is complete at every moment; only the current meaning of a word matters. Therefore, the Historical linguists, in their dependence on etymology and other evolutionary (or diachronic) models, could not sufficiently explain the total structure of a language at a given moment. They could explain individual, isolated changes of a word, but they could not explain the immediate (or synchronic), lived experience of meaning itself. While Saussure's emphasis on the ahistorical, static, synchronic conception of language seems at first at odds with Marxism's emphasis on history, that concept surprisingly leads to a perception of the social construction of language quite compatible with Marx's emphasis on the social construction of value.

The power of Saussure's insight lies in his shift from a substantialist concept of meaning to a relational one. Words are no longer to be seen as acquiring meaning through their relation to the things they name but to all the other words of the sign system. Any sign, Saussure claims, is made up of two sides: the signifier (the vocal sounds of the word) and the signified (the concept to which the signifier refers). A sign's meaning is arbitrary in that its signifier has no essential connection to its signified; "cat," "chat," and "gato" all refer to the same concept. The sign acquires its meaning through its negative relationship to all other signs of the system; that is, "cat" refers to the concept of the animal because we distinguish it from "cad" and "mat." "All of which simply means," Saussure tells us, "that *in language there are only differences.* More than that: a difference normally presupposes some positive terms between which it is established; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (cited in Jameson, *Prison-House,* 15). Meaning results from the social contract, so to speak, that establishes the perceived

differences between "cat," "cad," "dog," and so on. Any claim to a natural connection between a word and a concept, then, misperceives the social nature of meaning. Just so, for Marxist critics any claim to a natural value, natural right, or natural hierarchy misperceives the social construction of value, rights, and social orders.

Saussure's next move is to distinguish *langue* from *parole. Langue* refers to the total synchronic system of signs through which a specific *parole,* or act of speech, makes sense. *Langue* is the total ensemble of speech conventions which makes any *parole* possible. But the *langue* has no existence in itself; it only comes into being through the act of *parole.* Through these concepts Saussure provides a way of thinking about the relationship between parts and wholes without separating and subordinating one to the other, as the New Grammarians did with categories of species, genus, and so on. The totality structures the possibilities of its specific manifestations, but it exists only in them; as Althusser puts it, the totality is immanent in its effects through a metonymic relation of causality. This conception of the totality and the part avoids the substantialist traps of organicist notions of totality, such as the notion of a collective unconscious; at the same time it avoids the positivist claims that all there are are parts, the whole seen as an idealist projection.

So where does realism come in? First, Saussure's conception of meaning as an effect of a system of differential relations, as we have seen, calls into question any claim to a natural connection between language and the real. I would claim that all realisms, in one way or another, posit such a natural relationship, and thus are to be seen as ideological projections. Such a situation must today be seen as negative, for reasons soon to be clarified. But "realism" as a particular aesthetic mode in the early nineteenth century was a revolutionary force. Jameson describes the revolutionary role that bourgeois realism once played:

> that processing operation variously called narrative mimesis or realistic representation has as its historic function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular "decoding," of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens. In this sense, the novel plays a significant role in what can be called a properly bourgeois cultural revolution—that immense process of transformation whereby populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively programmed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism. The "objective" function of the novel is thereby implied: to its subjective and critical, analytic, corrosive mission must now be added the task of producing as though for the first time that very life world, that very "referent"—the newly quantifiable space of extension and market equivalence, the new rhythms of measurable time, the new secular and "disenchanted" object world of the commodity system, with its post-traditional daily life and its bewilderingly empirical, "meaningless," and contingent *Umwelt*—of which this new narrative discourse will then claim to be the "realistic" reflection. (*Political Unconscious,* 152)

In order for these processes of demystification and of the constitution of a new, properly capitalist, "referent" to come into play, however, there must be an equally revolutionary change in the concept of the subject, the creation of the monadic cogito, the subject. The "free agent" of capitalism must be fashioned out of the more decentered effect of subjectivity in precapitalist society. While the monadic subject is in one sense a mirage, it is nevertheless "in some fashion an objective reality. For the lived experience of individual consciousness as a monadic and autonomous center of activity is not some mere conceptual error, which can be dispelled by the taking of thought and by scientific rectification: it has a quasi-institutional status, performs ideological functions, and is susceptible to historical causation and produced and reinforced by other objective instances, determinants, and mechanisms" (p. 153).

Jameson's notion of the constitution of the subject draws on the Althusserian translation of Lacan into a Marxist theory of ideology. Lacan, having translated psychoanlysis into Saussurean linguistics, sees the creation of the subject as an effect of the process of signification. Through a series of alienations or separations the infant proceeds from a state of undifferentiated existence—in which neither subject nor object can be distinguished, the only distinctions being between total satiety and void—to a position of predication. But predication is only possible once the infant has been inserted into the Symbolic Order, the *langue* or potential for signification, in which both subject and object have been projected or alienated into the position of signifiers. The subject-as-signifier implies the positing of the self as other, the splitting of the self and the insertion into the radical alterity of the signifying chain. Language, that social nexus of relationships existing before our birth, speaks us, so to speak, before we speak it. Herein lies the key to a Marxist recuperation of Lacan's psychoanalysis.

Althusser, in a move quite influential on various Language poets, translates the Symbolic Order into ideology, seeing it as the condition of possibility of the subject's praxis within society. Ideology, like language, exists before us and mediates between us and the real—that absent register that shows itself only in its effects, its frustrations of the fulfillment of desire, of reunification of subject and object. Or as Althusser puts it: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (*Lenin and Philosophy,* 162). No society, therefore, can do without ideology for no society can ever come into direct contact with the real, the real being History, that absent cause which determines the effects of the totality but exists nowhere outside of those effects. Such a position could be seen as Adorno without Hegel, Hegel's expressive totality having been replaced by Saussure's diacritical *langue.* If no society can do without ideology, then again any claim to a natural or true relation to the real is "ideological," unaware of its own socially mediated (i.e. not immediate) awareness. Any claim to realism, then, will in this sense be ideological.

Language and Reification

Of all the so-called Language poets Ron Silliman has carried on the most sustained analysis of the interplay of realism and reification. Drawing on the theory of the Russian Formalists (particularly Roman Jakobson), the Frankfurt School (particularly Walter Benjamin), Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and most importantly Louis Althusser, Silliman's poetic theory and practice explore the likelihood that capitalism has "a specific 'reality' which is passed through the language and thereby imposed on its speakers" (*The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book,* 123; hereafter *LB*). Althusser and Poulantzas's notions of social formation and overdetermination complicate any discussion of a "single, capitalist, world economy," as Silliman has stated (*LB,* 167)—a problem he inherits from the Frankfurt School's reliance on the Hegelian expressive totality. But Silliman's generalizations about capitalism and reification can be seen to have a local validity, as Jameson has put it, in that the sustaining power of capitalism has been the increasing "impression" or "existential experience" of capitalism as a thoroughly totalizing, seemingly inescapable system (see Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*) or a seemingly natural and inevitable state of affairs (as the promoters of capitalism would have us believe). In the Age of Reagan, capitalism's reach certainly appears total, extending to religion, education, and the sense of self (witness such strategic events as the 1984 Olympics and the 1987 Miss USA Pageant, in which individual achievement is transformed into a victory for U.S. capitalism). When the total population is trained to equate the word "freedom" solely with "capitalism" and "America," then the power of language as ideological mediation becomes especially clear.

But Silliman's notion of a single capitalist system also can be valid so long as one keeps in mind that capitalism, though not a pure and single entity, is nevertheless the hegemonic influence, the structure-in-dominance, of Western society. For if capitalism's effects were total, then there would be no possibility for people such as Silliman to escape its influence, in however partial a way. Silliman acknowledges this by pointing out that, although the role of ideology is to repress any notions or impulses that may conflict with the smooth operation of the hegemonic structure, repression "does not, fortunately, abolish the existence of the repressed element which continues as a contradiction, often visible, in the social fact. As such, it continues to wage the class struggle of consciousness" (*LB,* 126).

Silliman's equation of realism and reification depends on what he sees as the essential differences between tribal society and modern capitalist society due to the historical development of language. If the mode of production of a given society determines the language of that society, then the stage of historical development, Silliman claims, "determines the *natural* laws (or, if you prefer the terminology, the underlying structures) of poetry" (*LB,* 122).

And if that language determines the consciousness of the members of that society, then poetry, as a language practice, plays a role in ideological production and is an indicator of the social assumptions about language. How *extensive* a role poetry plays in ideological production and how *thoroughly* the language habits of a given society are determined by its mode of production, however, is not clear in Silliman's formulation. Nevertheless, whatever the ultimate validity of such a formulation, Silliman's contrast of the language habits of tribal society (which functions as an ideal and Utopian projection of his politics) to modern capitalist society does reveal, in my view, the subtle relationships between linguistic and ideological production. The tribe, Silliman claims, is structured as a "group," a social organization which integrates individuals and provides a backdrop against which individual differences can be perceived (as opposed to the "series" of capitalist society, in which individuals are reduced to mere ciphers in an equation). In tribal society, reference exists in its "primary form":

> In its primary form, reference takes on the character of a gesture and an object, such as the picking up of a stone to be used as a tool. Both gesture and object carry their own integrities and are not confused: a sequence of gestures is distinct from the objects which may be involved, as distinct as the labor process is from its resultant commodities. A sequence of gestures forms a discourse, not a description. It is precisely the expressive integrity of the gestural nature of language which constitutes the meaning of the "nonsense" syllables in tribal poetries; its persistence in such characteristics of Skelton's poetry as his rhyme is that of the trace. (*LB,* 125)

The difference between "the gestural nature of language" and "the nature of gestural language" reveals much in Silliman's conception of the inherent social nature of language. "Gesture," the manipulation of objects (words) in the creation of language, is not simply one historically specific condition of a particular society's language habits but the *nature* of language in general. The gestural makes its appearance in the conspicuous materiality of the elements of language organization, such as sound, rhyme, and rhythm. In the conventional organization of material elements in the sonnet, for example, one can see the traces of the social production of language. One never loses sight of the gesture behind the object; in Saussurean terms, one never loses sight of the signifier behind the signified; in Marxist terms, one never loses sight of the labor process behind the commodity. However, according to Silliman:

> What happens when a language moves toward and passes into a capitalist stage of development is an anaesthetic transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word, with corresponding increases in its descriptive and narrative capacities, preconditions for the invention of "realism," the optical illusion of reality in capitalist thought. These developments are tied directly to the nature of reference in language, which under capitalism is transformed (deformed) into referentiality. (*LB,* 125)

However useful the distinction between reference and referentiality may be, the important point here is the process of the increasing transparency of the signifier. The word which no longer reveals the gesture behind it is, therefore, the reified word. Lukács's definition of reification can now be read as follows: "Its basis is that a relation between people [language] takes on the character of a thing [the transparent, self-sufficient word] and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace [gesture] of its fundamental nature: the relation between people."

It is instructive to compare Silliman's concept of the gestural with Walter Benjamin's concept of aura. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin distinguishes between the original art object and its reproduction. The original is marked by four qualities or conditions: (1) its unique existence; (2) its relative permanence; (3) its cultic use value; and (4) its unapproachability. The reproduction, on the other hand, exhibits the opposite conditions: (1) its reproducibility; (2) its transitory existence; (3) its commodified exchange value; and (4) its relative immediacy. A further distinction related to the third and fourth conditions above is between the mode of participation or reception of each. The relationship between the viewer and the original object constitutes what Benjamin refers to as the work's aura, its essential and discrete otherness, its distance from the perceiver. "The definition of aura as a 'unique phenomenon of a distance however close it may be'," Benjamin explains, "represents nothing but the formulation of the cult value of the work of art in categories of space and time perception. . . . The essentially distant object is the unapproachable one" (*Illuminations*, 243, n.5). With the increasing reification of modern life, however, and its concomitant demand for realism, visual art is stripped of its aura by means of photographic reproduction.

It is important to note here that the work's aura is not an ontological constituent of the work itself but instead a result of a social context (the cultic object situated in a cathedral viewed by awed and reverent worshippers). This is important because Benjamin's complaint is not so much against reproductions themselves (although this does seem to play a role here) but against the *age* that demands such re-presentations: the imperial age of capitalism. In fact, mechanical reproduction even in the present age, Benjamin claims, has its positive side: "The progressive reaction [of the masses to film] is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert" (*Illuminations*, 234). (For an elaboration of a similar point, see his "What is Epic Theater?" in *Illuminations*, 147–54.)

Two questions remain, however, in extending Benjamin's "aura" to Silliman's "gesturality": first, what is the literary equivalent to the original painting? In other words, can there be an original locus of the poem? Peter Bürger argues that "in literature, there is no technical innovation that could have produced an effect comparable to that of photography in the fine arts" (*Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 32). The effect he refers to is photography's appropriation of painting's mimetic role; how could a painting compete with the photograph's reproduction of reality? As a result, or so it seems, the pictorial arts were forced to develop in a non-mimetic direction, towards abstraction. And the second question is, can there be a mode of mechanical *literary* production which would appropriate some prior mode of literature? Silliman's concept of gesturality provides a possible approach to these questions.

Silliman opens his essay, "Benjamin Obscura," by noting that "Benjamin's characterization of the photograph . . . functions also to note the role of the camera in a crucial step toward the fetishized realism which embodies the capitalist mode of thought. . . . [T]he hand in the process of pictorial reproduction is stripped of its gestural content" (*LB*, 63). By the latter statement Silliman evidently means that the mark of the artist, such as the textured brush stroke or the variation in performance, is effaced from the photograph. At any rate, the translation of aura into gesturality resituates the problematic. We are now not so much concerned with an original object as we are with the entire social matrix out of which all aesthetic objects evolve, the traces of which we see in the gestural dimension of the work. The rise of literary realism thus parallels the rise of photography in the effacement of the gesture. Second, Silliman identifies the development of a mode of mechanical reproduction, the printing press, which transforms an earlier literary mode. "Gutenberg's moveable type erased gesturality from the graphemic dimension of books" (*LB*, 63). The invention of the alphabet, the development of bards, the arrival of the book, and the standardization of spelling, capitalization, etc., also led to the repression of the gesture through the increasing division of literary labor.

But what does all this mean for contemporary poetic practice? First of all, it leads Silliman to explore the ways in which units of meaning integrate into larger units—words into phrases, phrases into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, paragraphs into the total work. What Silliman claims to discover is that the sentence is the hinge between fragments and wholes, the privileged point of focus for his study of reification and language. Use value, as we have seen, depends on the material of the object itself, whereas exchange value ignores that material in order to pass on to something beyond the object (the apotheosis of this being money). By analogy, the use value of a linguistic object involves a concentration on the materiality of that object, while exchange value in language involves passing through the language to something else—meaning. The sentence is the smallest written unit, Silliman claims, which leads to a complete statement (exchange value), yet the sentence in isolation tends to be the largest unit which can be viewed as a material object (use value), keeping the reader's attention focused "at least partly in the present, consuming the text" ("The New Sentence," 205). At this point three possible artistic modes become available: focusing (1) below the sentence, (2) on the sentence, or (3) above the sentence. Realism, in its reach

for reference, relies on syllogism, "the classic mode of above-sentence integration" (p. 204) which erases the material dimension of language. *Zaum,* with its dependence on sub-sentence, even sub-word, units, goes in the opposite direction and erases meaning itself. Adorno, in a letter to Benjamin about the latter's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," comments on these two modes:

> The reification of a great work of art is not just loss, any more than the reification of the cinema is all loss. It would be bourgeois reaction to negate the reification of cinema in the name of the ego, and it would border on anarchism to revoke reification of a great work of art in the spirit of immediate use-values. . . . Both bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change. . . . Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up. (*Aesthetics,* 123).

The dialectical approach to both realism and *zaum,* then, would be a focus on the mediation of the two at a point of their intersection and an insistence on the historical validity and regressiveness of both. Both must be thought at once—and that is what Silliman attempts to do through his focus on the New Sentence, which as we have seen involves the de- and re-contextualization of sentences in order to foreground the logical leap between sentence and syllogism, a leap whose "logic" will be determined by the reader's ideological frame of reference. (Silliman later calls this leap the Parsimony Principle: "Whenever it is possible to integrate two separate elements into a single larger element by imagining them as sharing a common participant, the mind will do so" ["Migratory Meaning," 39].) It is this analysis that lies behind Silliman's poetic practice, such as the following excerpt from section VII of his poem "Carbon" in *ABC:*

> We, the mind, rainstorm, five card stud, settle, setting doves adrift in the air above the volley. But pigeon's mode's debris, deuce. Atari tacked to cauliflower starts to walk. Jacks scuff along the surface of the plaza, face up. Bulldog in a derby closes the lone eye with a doubloon. Tint the world, fore of clubs, amber of bourbon. Therefore tree's bad as its bark.

Though the passage above, for instance, might appear to be a random collection of words, the reader very likely will begin to recognize or create larger contexts for those words. One should notice, for example, the number of words which refer to card games. Through this process the reader becomes the producer of context rather than the passive recipient. Instead of a transparent route to meaning, the reader is faced with the poet's "gesture" of presenting seemingly random words as a poem, their arrangement as well as their content to be read and thought about.

Language poet Steve McCaffery takes a quite different approach to poetic practice, however, even though he too relies heavily on the realism-equals-reification argument. His own position resembles the "anarchist" position that Adorno mentions above, a position associated today with *Tel Quel* semiotics. McCaffery claims that "Marx's notion of commodity fetishism . . . has been central to my own considerations of reference in language—of, in fact, a referentially based language, in general—and to certain 'fetishistic' notions of the relationship of audience and performer. Reference in language is a strategy of promise and postponement; it's the thing that language never is, never can be, but to which language is always moving" (*LB,* 189).

In part, Derrida's notion of *différance*—that meaning is always based on difference (as in Saussure) and on deferral, the presence of the signified always lagging behind or skipping ahead of the signifier—lies behind the "promise and postponement" of McCaffery's conception of language. But McCaffery's notion is more linguistically radical than Derrida's, for McCaffery imagines a point at which one can transcend meaning and achieve a pure presence of the material signifier, a pure use-value or—to the extent that "use-value" carries with it instrumentalist connotations—a pre–use-value. His goal rather is to "step outside of use . . . to see what a hammer is when not in function" ("Death of the Subject"). McCaffery translates the deferring structure of signification into the economic process of exchange as follows:

> Reference in language is a strategy of promise and postponement; it's the thing that language never is, never can be, but to which language is always moving. This linguistic promise that the signified gives of something beyond language I've come to feel as being central to capitalism (the fetish of the commodity) and derived from an earlier theologico-linguistic confidence trick of "the other life." It's this sense of absence as a postponed presence which seems to be the core of narrative (the paradigm art form of the capitalist system) and basic to the word as we use the word in any representational context. (*LB,* 189)

If meaning is like capital, then realism is like capitalism. Having drawn this analogy, McCaffery chooses to subvert capitalism by subverting meaning, by writing a poetry of pure presence not compromised by signification. In order to do so, he writes a poetry that obliterates the referent, presenting the signifier as a cipher: "Cipherality belongs to a synchronic poetics; it is tenseless and free from both reference and alternity, thereby centered within its textual self and available as a primary empirical experience. The cipheral text involves a replacement in readerly function from a reading of words to an experiencing of graphemes, for conventional reading involves the use of referential vectors and it is such vectors that are here removed" ("Death of the Subject". Hence:

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        al (t      ch
ph    ysto            kl
                ee
    apl
  sta
        )
        ry
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(from "Death of the Subject")

There are two approaches, McCaffery writes, that a reader can take to such a poem: one can treat it as a structural density, a complete object, and de-cipher it; or one can see it as a fragment and en-cipher, or complete, it. In either case, the point is to see the cipher "or emptied sign as a frozen dialectic within a semiotic process, less an active sign than a sign removed from function (and hence deconstructed) to be observed as event per se." Such a conception of reading gives us access to poems such as the following excerpt from Peter Inman's *Ocker:*

> glay qew , (too bone-leave,) lilm than in , quimce,
> book's hollow fix , rning , mim)le always , (other
> neck meres , ccoon , xamois
>
> mene)dennes) sit)doption.

If we *en*cipher the word "quimce," for example, we will treat it as a complete object and focus on its shape, sound, the internal relationships among letters, its position in space on the page, and so on. If we *de*cipher it, on the other hand, we will try to read it as a fragmentary unit of a larger utterance which is at least partially obscured, or read it as a relative of the word "quince."

McCaffery's own approach to the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction would very likely also lead to Adorno's charge of anarchism. Just as Benjamin stressed too heavily, in Adorno's view, the progressive nature of film, so McCaffery might be seen to stress too heavily the liberating effects of the tape recorder for the sound poet—the poet who focuses on the material qualities of the aural sign. His optimism grows out of his adoption of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Gauttari's emphasis on desire production (see their *Anti-Oedipus*) and Julia Kristeva's notion of the role of desire in textual production, as can be seen in the following claim: "Sound poetry is much more than simply returning language to its own matter; it is an agency for desire production, for releasing energy flow, for securing the passage of libido in a multiplicity of flows out of the Logos" ("Sound Poetry," *LB*, 88). Sound poetry is contrasted to language, "through its nature as representation, . . . [which] becomes a huge mechanism for suppressing libidinal flow."

McCaffery's concern with language and libidinal flow grows out of his readings in poststructuralist theory, such as Kristeva's distinction between "genotext" and "phenotext." In order to understand Kristeva's distinction, one first must grasp her distinction between what she calls the semiotic (as a noun, not an adjective) and the symbolic (her translation of Lacan's imaginary and symbolic). The semiotic, as Kristeva explains in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "includes drives, their disposition, and their division of the body, plus the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-Oedipal relations with parents. The [symbolic] encompasses the emergence of object and subject, and the constitution of nuclei of meaning involving categories: semantic and categorial fields" (p. 86). The semiotic, in

other words, continuously resists the organizing structure of the symbolic (the logical and orderly framing of language). Kristeva implicitly charges that the symbolic, because it represses the free play of the drives, is totalitarian. Freeing the drives from such order, then, is an act of liberation.

In the genotext the effects of the semiotic—the prelinguistic articulation of the drives—gain the upper hand over the effects of the linguistic organization through the symbolic, an organization resulting from the repression of unmediated libidinal expression. In the phenotext, as one might guess, the symbolic dominates. But such a distinction never exists in a pure form, Kristeva insists. Rather each text reveals the inseparable dependence and antagonism between the semiotic and the symbolic; the particular dominance of one over the other determines whether a text is genotext or phenotext. The former is marked by the dominance of the play of the phonemic and melodic properties of language at the expense of the representational and communicative goals of language use, while the latter is obviously marked by the opposite. Hence McCaffery's claim that sound poetry is a "gift back to the body of those energy zones repressed, and channelled as charter in the overcoded structure of grammar. To release by a de-inscription those trapped forces of libido" (*LB*, 89).

Whereas Silliman saw the tape recorder as a contributor to alienation (*LB*, 63) because of its obliteration of the gestural, for McCaffery it becomes the tool for creating genotexts never before imaginable. Prior to the 1950s sound poetry remained confined within the limits of the human voice, the most extreme manifestations possible being grunts, howls, and shrieks, as in the work of François Dufrene. But as *zaum* reveals, sounds remained trapped within a teleology of meaning, appearing simply as meaning-fragments rather than as things in themselves. Meaning, as Khlebnikov claimed, was rescued by estrangement, rendering (McCaffery adds) "semantic meaning transcendental, as the destination arrived at by the disautomatization of sound perception" (*LB*, 90). McCaffery continues:

> The body is no longer the ultimate parameter, and voice becomes a point of departure rather than the point of arrival. Realizing also that the tape recorder provides the possibility of a secondary orality predicated upon a graphism (tape, in fact, is but another system of writing where writing is described as any semiotic system of storage) then we can appreciate other immediate advantages: tape liberates composition from the athletic sequentiality of the human body, pieces may be edited, cutting, in effect, becomes the potential compositional basis in which segments can be arranged and rearranged outside of real time performance. . . . Both time and space are harnessed to become less the controlling and more the manipulable factors of audiophony. (*LB*, 90)

The arrival of the tape recorder thus provided a way out of this limitation of the human body.

It is interesting to remember at this point Marx's view of capital, as distinct

from capitalism. Communism for him meant not an elimination of capital but an elimination of the mode of production which expropriated capital (surplus labor) from the producers of that surplus (the workers). If ever humanity is to wrest a realm of freedom from the realm of necessity, it needs to build on the productive capabilities made possible by capitalism. Such is the insight of Marx's dialectical thought, which insists on the recognition of the progressive in even the most apparently regressive phenomenon. In contrast to McCaffery's attempt to transgress the limits of meaning—more akin to Jean Baudrillard than to Marx (see the former's *The Mirror of Production*)—it seems more to the point of a Marxist critique of language assumptions in capitalist society to point out the uses to which meaning is put. A better question might be: What is the *meaning* of our particular uses and conceptions of meaning at our particular historical conjuncture? To whose benefit is the present definition of meaning put? The initial insight of semiotics, after all, is that we function not in any immediate way but through the production of sign systems. McCaffery's search here for an immediate relationship to the signifier must be questioned as thoroughly as any other pretense to immediacy. This questioning should extend, furthermore, to his appropriation of the Kristevan conception of the "revolution in poetic language" effected by Mallarmé, Lautreamont, and Joyce, through which they supposedly brought language closer to the semiotic chora, thereby making poetic language "an agency for desire production, for releasing energy flow, for securing the passage of libido in a multiplicity of flows out of the Logos" (McCaffery, *LB*, 88). While claims for the liberating potential of this poetry can and must be made, the claim cannot rest unqualifiedly on the supposed refusal of these poets to impose repressive form on such energy flows. The apparent disorder of *Finnegans Wake* or *Ulysses*, for instance, results from a tightly controlled method of organization. Furthermore, as the Frankfurt School studies of Fascism suggest, libidinal flow does not always produce desirable results. Again, since libidinal flow is always coded through a particular structuring of signification, as Kristeva's concept of the thetic suggests, the question should be who benefits from the present economy of libidinal expression (see Jameson's *Fables of Aggression*).

Recently McCaffery actually has come closer to asking these questions himself, having reached a perhaps more sober assessment of the political potentials of tape. In "And Who Remembers Bobby Sands" he examines the influence of the media as "our culture's dominant mode and posture of telling" (*North of Intention*, 39). Whereas the "Realist" mode of representation was the cultural dominant of an earlier stage of capitalism, this is no longer the case. "The dominant manifestation of narrative is now the media," McCaffery claims, "whose electronic circuitries have imposed a violent shift in cognitive and disseminative modes. Whereas the novel tended to operate under the notions of structure, closure, and an ultimate (albeit often problematized) unity, the narrative of media is characterized by a differential implosion and a structurelessness" (*North of Intention*, 40). Curiously, we are not far from Jameson's own characterization of the cultural dominant in his essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." Through quite different methods Jameson and McCaffery arrive at strikingly similar conclusions.

McCaffery explains that the passage from realism to "hyperrealism," or what Jameson calls the simulacrum, is marked by the following shifts in narrative mode: Realist narrative, according to McCaffery, implied a public capable of reciprocal response within the communication network; hyperrealism (narrative with no referent beyond itself), on the other hand, implies a paralyzed audience never given the chance or the inclination to respond to the one-way transmissions of postmodern media such as television.

Whereas such an assessment leads Jameson to an ambivalent, though predominantly negative, view of the possibilities for art in the present environment, it leads McCaffery to an equally ambivalent though positive view:

> The media's narrative economy . . . implodes [all] terms, decommissioning the exchangist nature of transmission economy and rather than providing an alternative structural model is a model that ends structure. Which might lead us to speculate that media narrative, despite its "counter-revolutionary" inertia, has achieved what the molecular recoding strategies of the avant garde have struggled toward through its cumulative litany of failures: the structural abolition of ideological relation, the avoidance of the fetish of value and the disappearance of speaker-listener as structurally determined, ideologically alienated terms. (*North of Intention*, 41)

In other words, following Baudrillard, McCaffery sees the masses' inertia not as their subjugation but as their release from repressive structure. In a cryptic final note he posits "the media's proximity to what Bataille terms 'general economy' that is precisely an economy of waste and irrecoverable expenditure." This economy of waste is contrasted to the repressive organization of narrative structure in an earlier stage of capitalism that allowed for no loose ends—everything was made to fit into an equation. But the postmodern media, McCaffery claims, offer the possibility that " 'fascination' (the narrative condition of the masses) is of an imaginary and not symbolic order, [which might] then [mean that] the revolutionary return of the mother as the techno-phallic goddess will require a certain discourse of its own" (p. 43).

No doubt. But whose interests are inscribed in that discourse? McCaffery's position depends on and could be seen to perpetuate the very orders he loathes. His fellow Language poet James Sherry has written, "The modernists

perceived chaos; they did not aspire to it. . . . Everything is already destroyed around us. Yet what can we do to rebuild when the old forms are radioactive with the half-lives that constructed them?" ("Limits of Grammar," 111–12). Bruce Andrews suggests an alternative to both co-optation and flight: " 'wordness', 'eventism'—a way of *reconstituting* language by unpacking the tool box" (*LB*, 33).

In "Writing Social Work & Political Practice" Andrews distinguishes between three possible modes of writing, each mode carrying with it an implied approach to political and epistemological practice. The first mode is realism, which Andrews critiques in much the same way as Silliman and McCaffery do for its "assumptions of reference, representation, transparency, clarity, description, reproduction, positivism" (*LB*, 133). As such, realism relies on a linguistic fetishism. Any political practice growing out of this mode will be either reductionist (socialist realism) or ornamental, complacently reinforcing the status quo by reproducing its basic assumptions of reference. The second mode, "an alternative structuralist mode," characterizes the practice of poets such as McCaffery. This mode focuses on the diacritical structure of the sign. A radical version of this mode would be a poetics of subversion: "an anti-systemic detonation of settled relations, an anarchic liberation of energy flows. Such flows, like libidinal discharges, are thought to exist underneath & independent from the system of language. That system, an armoring, entraps them in codes & grammar" (*LB*, 134). The goal of this poetics, then, is to create a deliberate opacity and dissemination of meaning. Such a poetics abdicates the central struggle over meaning, however, thereby leaving the organization of signs and society to someone or something else:

> The Blob-like social force of interchangeability & *equivalence* (unleashed by the capitalist machine, and so necessary to the commodification of language) precedes us: it has carried quite far the erosion of the system of differences on which signification depends. It's reached the point where a coercive organization of grammar, rhetoric, technical format & ideological symbols is normally imposed in everyday life to even get these eroded differences to do their job any more (an assembly line to deliver meaning, of certain kinds). So to call for a heightening of these deterritorializing tendencies may risk a more homogenized meaninglessness (& one requiring even more coercive props)—an "easy rider" on the flood tide of Capital. (Andrews, *LB*, 135)

Andrews agrees here with McCaffery's claim that capitalism has carried out the goal of the avant-grade—the abolition of total structure. But Andrews hardly agrees that such a development is positive. The political activity of the avant-garde now lies elsewhere, as we shall see.

One could ask, however, how a passage from a poem of Andrews's such as the following resists the homogenization he warns against in the above:

SONG NO 129

waldio draig impyn
holl
bronwen pos
plisgo hafan
nodachfa
oed santes rhwd
illawcio
sarn
heulog
haig
achul can
job
gweithfa balm canolwar
oen nodd
rewyddiaduriaeth
blaenori tref
tramgwyddo
tosyn wele reiat
cynffon maint
medi

Andrews's answer is that "Whether we bypass the referential fetish by writing non-signs or whether we tackle & problematize it depends, again, on how we define the medium. Writing is actually constitutive of these underlying libidinal flows; it is the desire for meaning, if not message. This is a third characterization of the medium, acknowledging the usefulness of the second one but acknowledging its limitations also" (*LB*, 135). Writing is neither simply *representation* nor *repression;* it is, Andrews claims, the *production* of meaning and value. These meanings can be reinforced (realism), blown apart (structuralism), or opposed by a "political writing that unveils demystifies the creation & sharing of meaning." Andrews wants a practice through which the production of meaning can be felt, not just taken for granted or destroyed. While only "a dramatic change in the structure of capitalist society is likely to disorganize the fetish" (p. 136), poets in the meantime can draw attention to the ideological structuration of sign systems. Andrews's poem above is to be seen, then, as precisely such a focus on the building blocks and processes that go into any organization of signs into semes through the manipulation of syllables (here quite typical Anglo-Saxon ones) and space, as well as the constitution of desires, the "articulation of and on the body" ("Constitution," 163). His concern with the body in the poem, reminiscent of Foucault's body politics, can be seen in the performance instructions which accompany many of the poems in *Love Songs,* such as those for "NO 117": *"Two performers walking, the first slowly, the second swiftly, repeating their word (memorized). . . .*

Each time A crosses the path of B (the closer the better), both performers go on to the next word."

A further distinction between Andrews's concern with the production of meaning and that of a purely structuralist linguistics is his insistence that "systems of meaning . . . [are] broader than signification, broader than the structure of the sign, but something more like 'sense' or 'value' in a more social dimension" ("Total Equals What," 48). While the structuration of ideology and social organization can be seen as analogous to the structuration of language, it should not be reduced to the latter. Though the structuralist focus on the immanent process of signification helps one to see the epistemological problems of realist modes of discourse, Andrews claims that that is only one level or horizon of language. A second horizon can be seen as "the structure of discourse" which organizes the diacritical differences of signification into a polyphony of voices and puts those differences "in motion, through action, through the organization of desire, through the organization of discourse" (p. 49). The third and ultimate linguistic horizon is the set of ideologies which "inscribe in different ways" the polyphonic organization of differences. Thus, a particular ideological formation structures the limits and possibilities of discursive practices.

The exploration and explanation of the possibilities for meaning, then, serve also as a critique of ideological and social practices. For the materials of language, through their particular articulation, are transformed into meaning—a meaning which though arbitrary in Saussure's sense is nevertheless imposed, distinctions organized into interdependency, each requiring the other "as the ground of their possibility" ("Total Equals What," 52). This recognition should not lead to the abandonment of organization, Andrews argues, but instead to a more positive recognition of possibility:

> By calling attention to possibility, we're acknowledging that the totality [in Althusser's sense] isn't just a negative restrictive thing, or some deterministic program. It's also something that's reproduced by action within the system and, at the same time, it becomes a resource or a medium that can be drawn upon. . . . The social rules that are involved in it are positive, enabling, constructive, and constitutive. . . . To imagine the limits of language (as an active process, a method) is also to imagine the limits of a whole form of social life—in this case, of a predatory social order (or interlocking network of orderings) that desperately needs to be changed. ("Total Equals What," 53)

A poetry that is critical, demythologizing, contextualizing (in the sense of recognizing the codes giving shape to language) can become an active intervention as a laying bare of the device, an uncovering of the framing involved in any meaning, a framing which both sets limits and offers possibilities, extensions, alternatives.

In this way Andrews suggests a way out of the endless debate between realism and modernism. The focus of the debate has shifted, the terms now

being modernism versus "a more social [or socialist] perspective." The question, no longer about representation-vs.-repression, now is "whether form, as an activity, will help reinforce the generative qualities of language's raw materials rather than close it off" (p. 57). Such a question implies a way of looking at Andrews's "SONG NO 129" above as revealing the resonating, generative potential of language in addition to its more negative role as ideology critique. Andrews proposes a practice, then, which desires both openness and possibility.

To return to our initial question, then, of the whether to which Andrews and Bernstein might identify with the position which Eagleton satirizes (and supposing, as I do, that Andrews and Bernstein share a close enough position not to complicate such a question), the answer is both yes and no. To the extent that the *Tel Quel* position questions the hegemony of realism as a literary and epistemological mode of representation in capitalist society, then the editors of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* would agree. But to the extent that it offers no possibility of practice *within* language—there being no constructive possibility of a purely genotextual mode of praxis—Andrews and Bernstein in a qualified way share Eagleton's suspicion that history has somehow evaporated from such a view.

To what extent Andrews and Bernstein share Eagleton's call for a "materialist realist" (" 'Aesthetics and Politics'," 31), who gives off a sense of "the dust and heat of the class struggle" (p. 33), is not clear. Eagleton's prescription is vague and uncomfortably romantic. The question, at any rate, cannot be between one mode of realism and another, for realism implies the representation of what can no longer be thought of as present in the first place. "Realism" remains endlessly trapped within questions of the paradigmatic axis of language. The shift that Andrews proposes is one to the syntagmatic axis, the site of framing or structuration. The question now is the social organization of the chain of signifiers within specific and determinate discourses. Praxis is now a question of syntaxis.