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The aim of *Rethinking* MARXISM is to stimulate interest in and debate over the explanatory power and social consequences of Marxian economic, cultural, and social analysis. To that end, we publish studies that seek to discuss, elaborate, and/or extend Marxian theory. Our concerns include theoretical and philosophical (methodological and epistemological) matters as well as more concrete empirical analyses—all work that leads to the further development of a distinctively Marxian discourse. We encourage contributions from people in many disciplines and from a wide range of perspectives. We are also interested in expanding the diversity of discursive styles for producing and presenting such work.

One distinguishing aim of this journal is to insure that class is an important part, but not the exclusive focus, of Marxism: We are therefore interested in the complex intersection of class with economic, political, psychological, and all other social processes. Equally important is the task of exploring the particular theories of knowledge that shape Marxian analyses.

We are interested in promoting Marxian approaches to social theory because we believe that they are an important factor in developing strategies for radical social change—in particular, for an end to class exploitation and the various forms of political, cultural, and psychological oppression (including oppression on the basis of race and gender). We especially welcome research that explores these and related issues from a Marxian perspective.

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Context Needs a Contest: Poetic Economy and Bruce Andrews's *Give Em Enough Rope*

George Hartley

Instead, to make as visible as possible the limits & norms & operations of the machinery. To show the *possibilities* of sense & meaning being constructed; to foreground the limits of the possible—& our possible lives; to create impossibility.

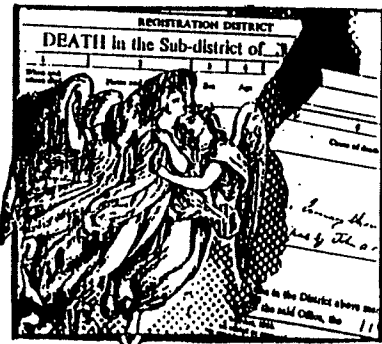
—Bruce Andrews

Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall.

—Michel Foucault

While discussion of the problems of writing an introduction to a work might seem to have been exhausted in the various Derridean, almost autoerotic gestures of self-reflexivity ("I am introducing here—me—(into) a translation" [Derrida 1979, 4]), the problem nevertheless remains. I was asked to provide a more general context for my discussion of Andrews's politicizing of a certain poetic economy that would ground my readers, provide a wider frame (more explicitly political, the connections between the political and the poetic being made clearer, more obvious) for the discussion that follows. How, I was asked, does Andrews fit into the context of contemporary American poetry, into the context of Language poetry, into the context of Marxist theory in general? What are the critics saying about him? I want

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(Marta Kirajczyk)
Biotechnology: whose efficiency?
(Les Levidow)

to respond to these questions, but perhaps differently from what was expected. Since the guiding theme (if not thesis) of the Andrews piece was the problem of context itself, I am understandably reluctant to provide a clear and seemingly unproblematic context here. I have done so elsewhere, in my book-length response to such a question—*Textual Politics and the Language Poets*. And others have done so elsewhere,¹ not the least of whom were the editors of *Rethinking MARXISM* in their introduction to Charles Bernstein's poetry (Winter 1988). That particular context exists in some place other than here.

I hope to approach that problem here, however, in the form of a marginal column running the length of the original text. My intent is to further complicate the issue, not out of some willful perversity—although it is that, especially in the sense of a turning away from what is right and necessary, in its relation to “converse” and “reverse” (this is a question about the economy of verse, after all)—but to provide at the level of critical commentary itself the same problems and questions and transgressions that work through the tropic circulations and distributions of Andrews's text. For the critical text itself is not above the difficulties of language and ideology that many language poets seek to press into service and to interrogate. I am interested in quite a different critical *Darstellung* from what we normally see. What follows, then, in the margins of this discourse, is a putting into dialogue—a dialogization, if you will—of various texts concerning the issues raised in the original text. Since I also question the relationship between citation and commentary, I will sometimes let the citations speak for themselves—as if that were possible—without the usual appropriating and regulating frame of my own critical discourse. That is not to say, however, that my own method does not appropriate or regulate—simply that I wish to raise to consciousness those moves common to all critical writing. Steve McCaffery has put the problem thus: “Theory's mandate to critical annexation has an inaugural Socratic endorsement. In the *Apology* Socrates argues that poets are the worst interpreters of their own work . . . With the *Apology* control of meaning enters wholly the readerly-critical sphere. The binding status of the poem is now that of its material inertia and the depreciation of the poet to a nonrational silence” (“Appropriation as My Beatrice,” 3–4). It is in this context that I wish to deliver the following dialog.

Rope Trick

Give Em Enough Rope: working at the limit of discourse, sabotaging the machinery of ideological closure, this writing turns in on itself, sacrifices itself, in order to establish a space of possibility

Paraegesis

If we are asking questions about limits and containment, about the economy of placement and displacements with-

1. In addition to the works cited, see also the following critical responses to Language writing: Bartlett (1986), Byrd (1987), Lazer (1988), Lloyd (1985), Perloff (1984), Retallack (1984), and Sloan (1986). In “Ideology and Theory in Recent Experimental Writing, or, The Naming of ‘Language Poetry,’” Michael Greer offers a stimulating survey of early critical attempts to identify the appropriate(able?) tendencies of Language writing, as do Ron Silliman et al. (1988).

beyond itself. “Ecstatic,” Andrew tells us, “in the root sense: to find yourself *standing outside yourself*.” (1990, 25). We are written, entrained in the structures of hegemonic discourse, roped in (as Andrews's title suggests) by the language of the oppressors. But we can use that rope, it seems, if not to escape from the prison towers (for we can never be fully outside) then at the least to measure its halls, its walls, to redirect ourselves through its passageways, to cross and recross in labyrinthine circuits that which turn the towers in on themselves. To appropriate the machinery of discourse in order to put it to other as yet forbidden or unimagined uses.

But the goals of this work are far from immediately obvious. What does Andrews expect from the following?

Equation Sphinxlike Pmphet

Misinform Sweet Business Miss Dot Your Eye Favorably

Impressive Rough Interest

Sensational Base Natural Problematize Hey Look

Dominate Ruler Passion

Added Passing Sharp Policy Moving Loco Fancy Line Vibration

Talking Cognitive I'm When Touched

Detention (1987b, 115)

This praxis begins with the premise that language is a constructed medium, social through and through, and that our reflexive use of it condemns us to reconstruct the very powers and structures that seek to fence us in. Meaning is not out there in the world waiting to be incorporated into the word; it is produced through the socially determined networks of language and, hence, of power, hegemony, control. Andrews: “So there's this process by which the sign—the material body of the sign—is transformed into meaning. It's allowed to make sense—or not—and this process is socially organized, or coded, at the level of discourse. This is a social government of meaning and value that's built up *on top of* the structure of the sign. And it

in and between textual strata, and of what the political implications of this economy might be (depending on how, exactly, those questions are raised or positioned or sublated), one way of posing those questions is to interrogate the role of margins and narrative-theoretical enclosures of standard critical strategies, to enlist a discourse beside the “main” one, a *post-eriori*.

For what is at stake is the positioning of Andrews's metadiscourse within a certain field of Marxist questions regarding the relationships between language and ideology, language as ideology, the languages of ideology. To begin: Marxist theory is inescapably involved in making political judgments about discourse, on the basis of categories which are necessarily provisional and are themselves posi-

enables units in a text to function both as signs and also as pieces of this social body, as materializations of social value" (1986, 51). The word's material body is made up of its sound and inflection in speech and its graphic elements such as letters and diacritical marks in writing. The particular meaning attached to these sounds and letter combinations, their transformation into phonemes and graphemes, is the result of a social process. Similarly, our experiences become meaningful only within a social context, framed and thereby limited by ideology. Social events are defined (written) for us according to the interests of the hegemonic class.

A poetry that takes its given language for granted consequently circulates within the framework of the dominant ideology, whose powers remain intact because hidden from consciousness. We do not challenge limits if we do not recognize them. According to Andrews, "conventionally progressive literature fails to self-examine writing & its medium, language" (1990, 23). But Andrews desires a poetry in which the "act of enunciating becomes part of the content—in a way that makes the *social method* become visible (and not just to illuminate the products that can be carried through that method)" (1986, 57). The key, then, is to reshuffle the elements of the language in order to reveal its structure (which we now become aware of because of its conspicuous condition of violation). The attempt to move outside a particular context makes that context visible and therefore open to conscious change. Writing such as Andrews's operates as Michel Foucault describes here: "It indicates the moment when language, arriving at its confines, overlaps itself, explodes and radically challenges itself in laughter, tears, the overturned eyes of ecstasy, the mute and exorbitated horror of sacrifice, and where it remains fixed in this way at the limit of its void, speaking of itself in a second language in which the absence of a sovereign subject outlines its essential emptiness and incessantly fractures the

tionally constituted. This political force of the concept must be retained. But if ideology is not to be ontologized, it should be regarded as a *state* of discourse or of semiotic systems in relation to the class struggle. Rather than being thought through an opposition to theory (a space external to the determinations of ideological production), it would be thought as a differential relation to power. Given that all discourse is informed by power, is constituted as *discourse* in relation to unequal patterns of power, then political judgments can be made in terms of particular historically specific appropriations of discourse by dominant social forces (Frow 1986, 61).

What I want, then, is a visual analogue to this power/discourse economy, a proliferation of marginal texts working towards polyphony (visual rather than aural orchestration) or the polygrammatic, a textual dialog that writes itself across the borders without the usual borderguards of citation.

Pseudo-totality: the illusion of the total system is aroused and encouraged

the unity of its discourse" (1977, 48). But the powers that be will resist that wrenching out of context. Jacques Derrida: "To try to resist the removal of a textual member from its context is to want to remain protected against this writing poison. It is to want at all costs to maintain the boundary line between the inside and the outside of a context. It is to recognize the legitimacy of the relative specificity of each text, but it is also to believe that any system of writing exists in itself, as the relation of an inside to itself, particularly when it is 'true.' This amounts above all to an imposition of fundamentally classical limits upon generalized textuality. It is a kind of discontinuity prompted by resistance and protectionism" (1977, 316).

According to Andrews, society and language can be seen as sharing the same structure of three concentric circles representing three different levels of specificity. We can break down our analysis of society into, first, a surface level on which the social order appears as "a kind of decentered constellation of different practices, of differences, of pluralism, a micro-politics of fragments on this inner circle" (1986, 48–49). The second level can be represented as the organization of those multiple points in the first circle into a "dominant hegemony and a variety of counter-hegemonies trying to challenge that hegemony, organized into specific functions, specific struggles, and specific blindnesses within society." Finally, we can identify a third level which functions as a "totality, an overall horizon of restriction and constitution, a limit, a set of organizing principles within the social order." The parallel levels of language can be seen as, first, the surface of production of meaning (signification). Second is "The structure of discourses: the way in which those differences get organized into a polyphony—of different voices, different literary traditions—" and put into motion. And third is ideology. "The polyphony inside, or the proliferation of signs and discourse are embedded in, limited in certain ways by, or col-

by the systematic links and cross-references established between a range of concepts, while the baleful spell of the totality itself is abruptly exorcized by the realization that the order of presentation is non-binding, that it might have been arranged in an utterly different fashion, so that, as in a divinatory cast, all the elements are present but the form of their juxtapositions, the shape of their falling out, is merely occasional (Jameson 1990, 50).

I tried writing a first version of this piece in the usual disinterested academic style. I gave up after a few pages and after some thought decided to disclose a little of the undisclosed margins of that first essay. This decision was based on a certain program at least implicit in all feminist activity: the deconstruction and opposition between the private and the public (Spivak 1987, 103).

lusive with, or inscribed in different ways by: this set of limits, this set of ideologies, this overall body of sense that makes language into an archive of social effects" (1986, 49). The third level of both circles—the totality on the one hand and ideology on the other—are seen as coterminous, for, it is through ideology that the totality writes itself, demarcates itself, impresses itself onto the social body.

Andrews is offering us an expansion of scale, an attention to wider ranges of the social topography than we are normally permitted to view or contemplate. The focus is now on the mechanisms of meaning-production which become visible when the limits and methods of conventional discourse are transgressed, manipulated, reappropriated, and solicited (in Derrida's sense in which solicitation involves the shaking of the totality, the marking of rifts and fissures which ideology attempts to gloss over in order to present the totality as complete unto itself, as natural and therefore beyond questioning) in an attempt to allow repressed discourses to come into play. Such a project "looks like one of articulating this content of contested social themes, of a social horizon—in order to better guide our choices and frame the experiences that we're operating with" (1986, 54). "It involves testing the horizon, setting up a probe, by violating codes so that each unit keeps getting reframed—or keeps reframing what's going before it and what might come next as you challenge these wider and wider concentric circles of normalization" (Andrews 1986, 58). Key terms: horizon, frames, codes.

Architectonics

Andrews's work, then, functions as a mapping of the social terrain. Such mapping is approached not "just by articulating the gap by avoiding meaning altogether—or theatricalizing that gap by avoiding meaning altogether—but to show off a more systematic idea of language as a system & play of differences, with its own rules of functioning" (1990, 25). It may be instructive to pursue the

And though it [Language poetry] does not talk directly to a "politics of poetry," the politics of such writing—the theory and the practice of it alike—are plain for anyone to see (McGann 1987, 632). But what is this supposed to mean? Why does McGann revert to a visual model of legitimacy here? Isn't the crucial thematic of *Capital* precisely that of the phantasm or of social hieroglyphics that have to be read? Isn't this immediacy of the visible also precisely the ideological effect most Language writers hope to complicate? If this politics is so clear, why must McGann assert that fact here?

The treatment of exchange as an overdetermined site in which a symbolic order is partly constituted differentiates our reading from those that presume already formed agents whose false con-

geographical analogy of mapping for a moment. One appropriate analogical extension involves the term "diastrophism": "the process of deformation that produces in the earth's crust its continents and ocean basins, plateaus and mountains, folds of strata, and faults" (*Webster's Third*). We then have the "diastrophe," [Gk *diastrophe* twisting, distortion, fr. *diastrephein* to twist about, distort, fr. *dia* + *strephein* to turn, twist—more at STROPHE], the structural feature in the work that indicates (or produces, or articulates) the discursive faultlines, fissures, and overlappings that mark each ideological system. What we are concerned with is a discursive seismography that will record the tremors and vibrations produced when tectonic plates rub up against one another. Which raises Andrews's question, "How to create an *adequacy*; how to be 'true to form'?"

Give Em Enough Rope approaches this task in a variety of ways. The title does so first of all by elliptically referring itself to some other context: give who enough rope to do what for what reason? Who is giving this command, and how are we equipped to carry it out? *Em* at first appears to be a colloquial abbreviation of the pronoun *them*, with the conventional apostrophe omitted for some unknown reason. But *Em* could also be an abbreviated form of Emma or Emily or Emiline (etc.). It further could refer to the letter M, which would then introduce the reader to Andrews's common ploy of presenting letters of the alphabet as characters in his works. And it could refer as well to the em-space of the typesetter, the space of a particular articulatory duration and emphasis, the open space of writing itself and of the writing of the subject-position of the reader. In any case, why does *Em* need rope? To be pulled out of water or a hole or off the face of a cliff or some other danger? Or is this an echo of Lenin's ploy of giving the capitalists just enough rope to hang themselves with? And how much rope is enough? How much might *Em* have already? This continuous referral of a "stable" reference for the title is exactly the point, the point at which Andrews begins pulling

consciousness prevents them from recognizing the reality of an economic process that is external, but necessary, to their essential constitution. The fact that individuals treat trade as an exchange of equivalents does not warrant the conclusion that these agents have a false consciousness. No discursive privilege should be assigned to the ability, or willingness, of these agents to "see," or "not see," exchange as a trading of equal, or unequal, labor times (Amariglio and Callari 1989, 57).

A, for instance, cannot be "your majesty" to B, unless at the same time majesty in B's eyes assumes the bodily form of A, and, what is more, with every new father of the people, changes its features, hair, and many other things besides (Marx 1967, 50–51).

out the stops, of rerouting our language conventions and thereby opening up the possibility of traversing some new terrain. For in the process of grappling with the multiplying possible references for these words, we place ourselves in the position of creating those possible frames of reference. We might just have a hand in this construction.

"I Guess Work the Time Up," the first poem in *Rope*, could be described as a language machine, as meaning in motion, or (to carry through with the geography) as an analogue to the ceaselessly shifting shapes of shoreline or sandbars or sanddunes. The proliferation of meanings in the line resembles the spark and excitement and potential explosion of a burning fuse or the toppling over of dominoes as kinetic sculpture:

tantamount be healing too extra doggone	
too drake gots to get parallax refashion	
mean contradiction fire pleasure pain phalanx	
up with drops a quarter clarity	Involute
cos' amino acids won't thing to spend self free don't	
meant car rims neither	Blue that is u / e
urine hatband of regret	<i>Times</i> insufferably ditto
once pretentious again am just a little lamb	

(1987b, 7)

Barrett Watten describes the effect of listening to such work read aloud: "The effect of this on a listener involves what the Formalists called 'rhythm as a constructive device.' The phrases are units. The poem goes: unit . . . unit . . . unit. After a while a point of balance takes on a meaning of its own. At first, one is not particularly hearing the words due to their referential shifts; it takes work to get from one isolated plane of reference to another at the speed of reading aloud. But what actually happens is that the rhythmic parallels turn into a meaning-structuring device.

After ten minutes of this the phrases start to assume a rhythmic point of balance; the words take on a weight in relation to that" (1985, 17). But in the midst of this joy-in-textuality are some themes

Criticism is an institutional practice. What interests me in the question, "What are the critics saying about the Language poets?" is the assumption that "critics" refers to those institutionally sanctioned readers in the academy, and the parallel assumption that

what the poets say about their own or each other's work is not "criticism." But the situation is quite the reverse: some of the best critics (in all senses of the word) of Language writing are Language writers themselves.

Presumably, we are being helped to understand the poetic theory and practice of Bruce Andrews:

that recur in the book, such as the concern with expanded notions of perception (parallax refashion—perhaps the goal of Andrews's work), contradiction both in terms of Marxian social theory and in terms of speaking against (contradiction; conflicting discourses), and the material character of units of discourse that we put into motion ("u / e" becomes "urine"). Watten writes that "Andrews's poem is a kind of fantastic machine, each line a conveyor belt of semiotic rubble, funny poking things—to flip on the switch is to get action . . . In this poem there is a solution not imagined by William Carlos Williams to his proposition, in the 1944 introduction to *The Wedge*, that a poem be a 'machine made of words.' Where Williams's machine is a self-contained entity, a whole consisting of interacting parts, each of which is necessary for the functioning of the other, in Andrews there is no limit to the whole, and the machine consists of placing in motion a sequence of unrelated parts found in the world at large" (Watten 1985, 160). While it is true that there is no immediate limit to the whole in this poem (questioning such limits is one of the poem's concerns), the "unrelated parts" become related through contiguity, repetition, thematic coherence, and simply through the onward rush and semantic flow of the poem itself. These brief flashes from the streets, newspapers, textbooks, and so on, speak to and through each other as the poem develops according to what Andrews refers to as "framing frenzy," the goal of which is "to open up new relationships by crazed collision" (1990, 31).

The crucial theme of the poem perhaps is domination. Throughout are references to racial oppression, sexual oppression (particularly in marriage), and familial oppression.

slum vocabulary with cage like bear is in it mediating on
him altitude Fundamental will jive them out—penis see deep
loves women money and music
mental mind was doin out their qualities Climax

However, no explicit argument is made that Andrews' work merits our attention. Implicitly, of course, we learn that the work is capable of rich explication. But the extensive quotations imply to me (and this is neither refuted nor addressed by the text) that the radical compression of rather monotonic left-wing ideology into bullet-poems is not really worth the trouble of my extended attention, except as a literary curiosity, a sort of postmodernized Beat poetry. A quick computer search of the databases of two major reference libraries failed to find Andrews' poetry at all, suggesting that his work will be rather inaccessible in a practical sense to PMLA's general readership (Anon. 1989). Marginality is cited here as the rationale for perpetuating the margins of exclusion, the institutional mechanisms of validation.

[Language poet Ron] Silliman's poem [*Tjanting*], in its largest sense, aims to represent through textual enactment a redemption

is unable to read or write & king heroin cannot
 little pencil comes sliding out from behind the clipboard
 use her hands Crime doesn't pay Fabricated
 story helix pulsator hazardless

(1987b, 18)

The social worker with pencil and clipboard, who offers suggestions such as to send the wife out to work and to avoid crime, is involved in the process of "herky-jerky hot *the family* but statistical policing overview" which writes the Black family into its peculiar existence in American society where it is controlled through the social work institutions.

Although the above thematic network occasionally rises to the surface of the text, moments of cognition appearing in the froth, it nevertheless is jerked from view by the movement of the poem as it continues to throw up layer upon layer of semantic possibility. In "Be Careful Now You Know Sugar Melts In Water" Andrews recently described an early phase of his writing as follows:

catalyzing circulation; unreasonable precipitation; fractures & waste. this underlies a frenzied & swooning, or delicately agitational, play of bodily drives—nonidiomatic, as sound, rhythm, movement, somatic drives unstitched by the semantic (sewing) machine of representation. uncertainty, tingling, wobbling, nomadic, merely circumstantial, ravishing enthusiasm. a cresting wave of possibilities crashing over our bodies—emptying into a near infinite, contentless affirmation of rupture & divestiture (122).

While this passage comes close to describing the movement and economy of "I Guess Work The Time Up," that poem is a good deal more complicated because of the moments of semantic foregrounding and thematic interweaving. It is no longer contentless, although it remains an affir-

of the localities of human history. Marxist in his orientation, Silliman's politicized writing has passed through the filtering critique of the Frankfurt school, and especially through the work of Walter Benjamin. His Marxism is "Western" in the concrete sense that it is carried out within the arena of advanced capitalism and American political imperialism. As a writer his struggle against these exploitive social formations appears as a critique of the modes of language which produce and reproduce the "reality" of a capitalist world and history (McGann 1987, 632).

The supposed openness of a work should not be seen in itself as the mark of liberation: We see then, paradoxically, that it is the very logic of openness and of

mation of rupture & divestiture. What we have is no longer simply a polymorphous pleasure in the text (though that remains) but an attempt to exhibit the process of meaning construction by allowing these disparate words and phrases to meld occasionally into recognizable themes and then quickly to break apart into competing tangents of content. What we have is a recognition that while we might try to abandon content, it is nevertheless constructed around us. The job now is to reveal the processes of its construction and to suggest the possibility of *alternative* constructions. But those alternatives will involve struggle; we cannot appropriate the means of production without a fight. It is this struggle that in part informs the violent yet euphoric trajectories of "I Guess Work The Time Up."

The movement of "Unit Costs" is quite different. Its placement as the second poem in *Rope* (whether chronologically "true" or not) helps to underscore the variability of form, movement, structure, economy. Here we face a list of units (words, phrases, occasional sentences) much as we would an inventory of products, the units continuously isolated by the breaking of the line and syntax. On one level, the poem mimics the reductive quantification (reification) of capitalist economics. Ironically, the title is followed by the parenthetical mention that the poem is a score for movement in a poem with very little sense of movement at all. There is an extension of relationship through sequential accretion, but the overall impression is that of a stack of isolated signifiers resisting any integration beyond the line break. Even within the line the movement from word to word is impeded, the rhythm more staccato and metronomic than the fluid rhythms of the previous poem.

Failed tasks—repetition, as different *from*, hands
 sugar
 surgical instruments, community

I want a waterbed but don't want waves

the democratic subversion of differences which creates, in the societies of today, the possibility of a closure far more radical than in the past: to the extent that the resistance of traditional systems of differences is broken, and indeterminacy and ambiguity turn more elements of society into "floating signifiers," the possibility arises of attempting to institute a centre which radically eliminates the logic of autonomy and reconstitutes around itself the totality of the social body (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 186). But Andrews's work is precisely not a collection of *free-floating* signifiers but a display of alternative articulations of those democratically unsutured chains. This double gesture of democratic opening and provisional and purely local closure is effected in order to slip between the logics of inequality and totalitarianism. Such provisional articulation avoids the concomitant danger Laclau and Mouffe identify with pure openness:

Mutate!

Unison diehard meaning

moss however house of cards

Dip prom

Sweetspot

Audio Awarred-ness for the Consumer
positioning as box

Stars at night

Nameless erratically epistle
scissors reveal post office

vacant anus highlight interminable pegged wafer
(1987b, 34)

As the reference to surgical instruments implies, these words appear to be cut and removed from the communal body. There is a denial of movement ("don't want waves"), a perverse command to change ("Mutate" seems awfully close to mutant), and yet an insistence that meaning can exist in unison in a poem where the only unison that is allowed to develop is the fragmented and isolated state of the line which leads to an apparent equivalency of units. The only site of production appears to be the highlighted vacant anus. While someone is "Ill at ease in two dimension" (36), that is the only dimension that this geometry offers. The movement is that of enclosure into various shapes (dodecahedrons, triangles, hexagons) which privileges the inside and excludes the out: "Obstruct immigrants at border" (40). "She thus carved for herself a small oedipal territory that will respond with all the paranoid tendencies of the institution" (48). In such a context the statement "We all live in Pennsylvania" (48), while intended to show the interrelatedness of all on earth (even Europeans are affected by Three Mile Island),

[T]here is also a symmetrically opposite danger of a lack of all reference to this unity. For, even though impossible, this remains a horizon which, given the absence of articulation between social relations, is necessary in order to prevent an implosion of the social and an absence of any common point of reference. This unravelling of the social fabric caused by the destruction of the symbolic framework is another form of the disappearance of the political (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 188). This same fear inhabits the reaction of some other Language poets to the unravelling seemingly at work in An-

ironically reveals also that we all inhabit the same box.

The poem "Give Em Enough Rope" develops on a new structural plane: no longer specifically foregrounding motion (or the lack of it), the title poem explores the possibilities of spatial refraction. Now each page is a visual unit that organizes its material as well as the reader's eye movement in a variety of ways. The first page, for instance, is in paragraph form, both margins justified and enlarged (squeezing the text in on itself), and is made up of one extremely long sentence:

Andrews's writing over a certain period: The opposite of utopia, plus ten years, would seem here to be total estrangement. But that ten years has provided these poets with a more valuable working model than their earlier symbolic explosions: What Andrews has learned from this project, as hard as it may be to take, is virtually constitutive of contemporary public space: "failure to acknowledge seems like a natural fact." Andrews's political strategy now is to acknowledge our lack of acknowledgement, to return us to an important aspect of the real (Silliman et al. 1988, 271).

Accurate I mean that's what, side by side, you ever, to tell anyone perception does best it's right it isn't it's, take whatever can, curtained, into your hands at's catch because spinning & warming only transpose—intact, loneliness, a hint of positionism—*waits, speaks through* us, regroup after errand on-to bed hat's truth not caring what's inside turn out of you some months ago uninvited how phenomenology puffs up whole quadrant in praxis petrifies heart imagine what reticences can breathe drying out after pitch body to hold it as sequence of a wandering persist as happenstance not dispose to find catchwords, limbs, topping baptismal fashion of accidents by what won't wear in their arms helmets, nipple, neurons, discourse, nostalgia creasing to step back bright abandon penetration in that sympathetic sentence to what frays hesitation cookie-cutter against you to speak again struck might very well.

(1987b, 52)

The second page, however, organizes the words in a scattered pattern that begins to breakdown the dominance of the line ("linarchy"):

speech

nomination

nominative pink

3. apartoid 4. wom 5. crost 8. qualits 9. linarchy

lives inevitable and leaving

several and leaving have

release several have lives

inevitable justice

Bullshit Cupid

(1987b, 53)

In the paragraph the words are forced together into a block of text, as prose pages often are. But the enlargement of the margins, the magnification of the white space, ironically underscores the enclosure of that blank margin space: while blank space may, on the one hand, appear as open possibility, on the prose page it works in the opposite way by defining (delimiting) within its quadrants the possibilities of praxis within that space. It imposes (because of our conventional reading habits) the desire for accuracy (as the first word suggests) and meaning by lining words up "side by side"; the "spinning & warming" of the scattered pages "only transpose" words from one possible reference to another, but the paragraph attempts to pin those references down, to order their wandering into a sequence. White space on

Moving away from the margin of course threatens at the same time the very essence of an exploratory experimental literature. Integrated subversion runs the danger of being coopted. Indeed the possibilities of integration reach far beyond literature. The techniques of concrete texts and graphics have long since become an essential part of commercial advertising. Eugen Gomringer, the German-Swiss experimentalist also

the scattered page, however, does open up new possibilities because it breaks down the effects of "linarchy" and allows the reader to chart new paths as in a connect-the-dots puzzle with no prescribed numbers, to make connections among words by a variety of routes besides the left-to-right, top-to-bottom pattern we usually follow. The second page, interestingly, still bears the imprint of linarchy, however, for the lines between "lives inevitable and leaving" and "inevitable justice" attempt to realign the words along a left margin. But the word "Bullshit" pulls the page out of this trance once more, contradicting in the process the (Social Democratic?) belief that justice would be inevitable in such a lineated arrangement. While the third page does succeed in asserting the justified left margin once more, the fourth then opens up an enormous range of space and direction, its structural principle perhaps summed up in the first four words (out of only nine on the page): "architecture/piss in powder" (55). The "physiognomic cartography" (85) of the poem expands our reading of surface space beyond the confines of a road map. We now have something like a topographical map which shows us other possibilities of movement around the rifts and fissures of this (social) space, a reading of the diastrophic collisions of different tectonic masses.

"Swaps Ego," the fourth poem in *Rope*, then expands this reading of spatial refraction into a charting of possible subject positions opened up by this new attention to space and open movement. The title seems to refer to Benveniste's notion of the shifter, the pronoun slot that is filled by any number of subjects. The I in English holds the primary subject position, the reference of which changes each time a new subject speaks or writes. Ironically, then, the pronoun that seems to ground each individual's identity refers to an infinite possible number of *other* subjects in other contexts. In this sense the I swaps egos. But the I as pronoun ties in with another theme of the poem, the odyssey of the phoneme, especially those phonemes that are also words in themselves, such

works for advertising firms. The temptation of a moralistic irony and polemic is great in this situation. But perhaps a degree of integration should rather be a source of surprise for all who consider experimental art an elitist game. If the play of the signifiers indeed can function in the organization of needs and desires by the consumer industry, that means that signifiers are not dead letters but are instead intricately enmeshed in the economy of desire (Nägele 1980, 19).

If language is historically changing and constitutive of subjectivity, making us as we make and use it, then it neither reveals nor represses some inner self, some "species being," that exists before the fact of its use. If language poetry calls for the empowerment of all language users—readers as well as writers—it must do so by avoiding an appeal to an illusory "real subject." The collaboration of writer and reader cannot be reinscribed within the humanism of liberation narratives: "plot-centered" stories of the eventual self-realization of the essential, natural, authentic "man." The problem of finding a

as A or I or, in the perverse play of this poem, U (you). The first five words of the poem—"Double You Double You See" (91)—are homophonic plays on the letters W, W, and C, which when combined ("Triple Three Triple Three Triple") may or may not form the aggregate structures of morphemes. Andrews thus focuses on the way minimal units can be joined to produce meaning; the key concept in this process is articulation: "Accidents Culmination Drift Toward Articulation Minister" (92). What we have is an analogue to a conception of society as a totality—not as some homogeneous entity but as the constellation of units whose cohesion is due to their specific articulation, their arrangement in relation to one another: "This may be more like a crossroads than a closed and fixed corpus, ready for the dissection table" (Andrews 1986, 52).

In Althusserian theory the attention to the I as subject position and to its position as phoneme/morpheme are related in the sense that the subject's position in society results from the articulation of ideologically defined subject positions in that particular social formation. Each subject position, in other words, works something like the phoneme in its structuration into morphemes and of the morphemes themselves into complex words and sentences. The subject is thus written into the social syntax of a given totality. What interests Andrews is the possibility of movement and counterarticulation from those points; in other words, once we recognize our position within society, how free are we to change positions or to alter the given ideological charge of that spot? This is a question, then, of class struggle. At work in the poem is an attempt to foreground the possibility of rearticulating its elements:

Ways Of Obtaining Film Diphthong
Reminding Enough Sudden Frenzy Arc Blissful
Various Core States Capitalism Of Themselves
Broken Tempo And Vocal Abuse

(1987b, 96)

How might we approach this articulation? "By

position distinct from the fetishism of "man" and the fetishism of commodities is therefore central to the unfinished, on-going project of language poetry (Editors 1988, 76).

These languages contain us, and we are simultaneously bearers of the codes of containment. Whatever damage or distortion the codes inflict on our subjectively elastic conception of ourselves, socially we act in an echo chamber of the features ascribed to us, Black woman, daughter, mother, writer, worker and so on. And the social roles and the appropriate actions are similarly inscribed, dwell with us as statistical likelihoods, cast us as queen or servant, heroic or silent, doer or done unto . . . [But while language is a crucial site of contestation], there is nothing inherent in language centered projects that gives us immunity from a partiality that reproduces the controlling ideas of dominant culture . . . Certainly writing itself cannot enlarge the body of opposition to the New Wars, it only enhances our capacity to strategically read our

eliciting praxis—to carry out language's demand for prescriptions; for the Anti-Obvious. By actively pressing the 'network of differentials' in the writing itself.

"How to disclose & unclothe the social world: moving outward through these broader & broader layers & concentric circles of intelligibility. By a writing that counter-occludes, or counter-disguises; that politicizes by repositioning its involvement in, its intersection with, a nexus of historical relations" (Andrews 1990, 28–29).

In "Swaps Ego" the major elements to be rearticulated—the words—are accorded provisionally equal status by capitalizing the initial letter of each word. The sign of priority in the sentence is thus equally distributed to all. But such egalitarian relations are not so easy to come by. "True Flip To," *Rope's* fifth poem, dramatizes this struggle for dominance by alternating which of two words will open with an uppercase letter:

T oo since
yeah! H itchhike
S alute effectiveness
ballpeen I dentification
shuttle tease
C law spoils
C arnival stinger
(1987b, 131)

This "shuttle tease" between two binary units is complicated by the varying place of capitalization (which is further emphasized by italics and extra space between the initial letter and the rest of the word). The result is a metronomic rhythm that in carnivalesque fashion exults in its materiality, emphasizing sound and rhythm over content. In fact, not only is content minimalized (although, as always in this book, not denied), it is worked into the carnival atmosphere by deliberate juxtapositioning of jarring contexts, the content of the first word violently challenged or augmented or negated by the second. Nevertheless, such juxtaposition of even the most foreign couplings

condition more critically and creatively in order to interrupt and to join (Hunt 1990, 199–200; 204; 212).

ANDREW LEVY: Is this kind of practice you've developed going to be meaningful anywhere outside of your social class and intellectual background?

ANDREWS: Unanswerable question. If you're attempting to prefigure the constructedness and re-constructedness of things at various levels, it seems to me that that's going to

creates a context of meaning-possibility if not always good coherent sense. "street life," for instance, fulfills our conventional expectations for word combinations. "Z igzag vinegar," on the other hand, appears to produce nothing more than an interesting and rhythmic combination of sounds, phonemes that seem to break apart from the given semantic combinations into independent phonic materialities. Andrews describes this effect:

a rematerializing of language, with an eliding/eluding of anyone's, or my, privatized grasp, through erotic *interplay*, through implicatings of an other. possible escape from "the pursuit of loneliness"—or any enclosed & self-identifying solitude of rapture—by a jointly interior trembling; sound quivers, corporeal resounding. an unknown con carne: mutual flesh incarnated (1987a, 123).

Andrews compares this writing to a love affair between two people, a union that appears to complete each *through* the other. "habitat conjunction" (1987b, 137): the melding juxtaposition of dissimilar units in the poem. But there is also "guillotine *T* win" (140), the separation of units that conventionally work together. A recognition that Andrews attributes (in "Be Careful Now") to his latest writing already informs this poem:

it becomes harder to find the totally other in duct form—since all points of comparison have already become socially engineered, since any "I" has less & less control over "what I myself am not" (which would be the ideal pedagogical space of the other). That space is enfolded in a social discourse & cannot be so easily located as an interpersonal or "post-personal" "treat" (1987a, 124).

be perceivable, that's going to be able to be part of the reading process; so that you could see how things appear to have been levitated to a certain degree—out of the general framework. On the other hand, there may be a certain kind of apprehension of the way the system works at all these levels that isn't going to be readily available to larger groups and categories of readers. I think that's something that we all recognize. I mean, just the basic literacy problem is forbidding enough. Limitations in readability, in readership-ability, or however you want to characterize it, may make it impossible for the kind of systematic apprehension I'm talking about to become clear in people's lives . . . That's why I said I thought the question was unanswerable, because it's of course the most common way of dismissing *all* experimental or avant-garde or modernist writing or art of the last century, in political terms. When everything is framed in terms of efficacy, the work that gets promoted as efficacious is work that simply, to me, reinforces the very blindness that I

There is no social space, in other words, where individuals or small groups can completely escape this discursive enfolding; hibernation and isolation are not alternatives here in the totalizing networks of late capitalism. For this reason Andrews exhibits "a desire for totalization, for getting a more and more total grasp (I mean here not a complete mapping, but an attempt to go toward the outer boundaries, toward a perimentering of the field—a field that is itself more and more this total arrangement at the national and even global level, this integrated capitalist world system . . .)" (1986, 54). The requirements for a politicized poetry, then, include not just the carnivalesque rupture and play of discourse (although that still plays a key role within a larger network of textual strategies) but now also the need to "Test the horizons—to make an *agitated* totality, not a rested one. Context needs a Contest: & so writing contextualizes as it contests the limits . . ." (1990, 29). This contesting contextualization becomes the dominant strategy in "Confidence Trick," the concluding work in *Rope*.

The title alludes in part to one role of ideology: to lull us into a confident complacency, a belief that things are as they should be (or, more negatively, as they *must* be), to create a total picture of social forces that appears natural and inevitable and therefore beyond contest. So in "Confidence Trick" Andrews makes his unit of construction not the isolated word or phoneme but the statement. (The word "sentence," as following examples should reveal, hardly fits as a description of these units, although many could be called sentences). As elements of a larger social network, our statements are "organized by an apparatus or a machine of discourse, this policing system of something like power/knowledge. These might not be fixed structures—there's always struggle going on underneath—but it is a configuration of forces out there, an empowered configuration with some historical weight to it . . ." (1986, 52). Andrews seeks an alternative arrangement, a method of cuts

think are so central to the way the system holds itself together (Andrews 1990, 36).

Now, Keats, Wordsworth, and especially Coleridge, who is the main ideologue and cultural guru of Romantic theory, promulgate a series of aesthetic positions that Byron will come to just vomit on [laughter]. But they are the positions that will dominate the theory of poetry for 150, 175 years, more, even to our own day. It seems to me only in the theater of postmodernism are these ideas actually beginning to crumble. Up until the Vietnam War, it seems to me they held perfect and total sway. They

and grafts that creates the agitated totality he describes above: do not hold sway anymore (McGann 1990, 141).

Intentionally leaderless—Recite this alphabet; body never ends, little bits of plastic come-on, recite catatonia chic—Up anyway I Say Yes rewriting the body systematic sex cult thing; contrite—Don't give a shit what you think; it's all we do—Not to mention everyone is a bigot, wheels so good; how's your ambient buddy system?—If I understand these words, then I find them disgraceful—Camera obscura don't give a damn about my bad reputation—Capture the street severe machine we talk does loud fast is he rambling?—What rules are innocent, *enthusiate* me; we died pts 1 & 2, soul not really coordinated like an orientation for me, curtsy kineme like dirt—They're not developing my image anymore, they're just operating it squeamish administrative relationships this is not one of the regular correction tape tricks, fortunately, more American than I do: tendons as sugar, we can count (1987b, 142)

"Intentionally leaderless": the poem opens with a deliberate call for democracy (anarchy?), yet that call is followed by the command to "Recite this alphabet," which by this point in the book we recognize as a call for order and conventional organization into a system that writes us as we recite it. Nevertheless, "recite" could also be a command to re-cite, to resituate. Derrida: "Never will any citation have so aptly meant both 'setting in motion' (the frequentive form of 'to move'—*ciere*) and, also since it is a matter of shaking up a whole culture and history in its fundamental text, solicitation, i.e., the shakeup of a whole" (1977, 357). When we are then asked to "recite catatonia chic," this may be a command to resituate the mind-dulling (ideological) need to keep up with the latest fashions that fuel the engines of capitalism rather than a command to take part in this dulling process. And the former is precisely what Andrews attempts in his poem. He hopes to "Capture the street severe machine" of daily discourse that we talk and to emphasize and speed it up ("loud fast") in order to make us approach it from an unusual perspective ("is he rambling?"). Diastrophism, social tectonics, rubbing one ideo-

Whatever the order of this wild diversity of [William Blake's] material, then, it is clearly not a narratological one. Indeed, narrativity is short-circuited from the moment that the reading process is spatialized as a field of illuminated printing. It is not simply that the "text" is illustrated or illuminated; rather, the verbal discourse evolves as a set of images, decorations, and pictures. To say that one "reads" Blake's works is to invoke a metaphor, as we do when we speak of "reading" a painting. (McGann 1987, 632).

During the 1630's and 40's, a mother tongue

logical configuration up against another. Derrida again: "It is a Tower of Babel in which multiple languages and forms of writing bump into each other or mingle with each other, constantly being transformed and engendered through their most unreconcilable otherness to each other, an otherness which is strongly affirmed, too, for plurality here is bottomless and is not lived as negativity, with any nostalgia for lost unity. It engages on the contrary both writing and song" (1977, 341). Andrews exposes the rifts and mistakes that cannot be glossed over with "the regular correction tape tricks." Through such a mode of attention we are empowered: "we [too] can count."

Structure versus Economy?

Andrews employs a key strategy in "Confidence Trick" which helps to map the totality in ways not so obvious in the book's earlier works: the guiding metaphor for this work shifts from a focus on form and structure to one of economy. Steve McCaffery has written about the issues involved in such a shift:

[The structural metaphor] tends to promote essence as relational, which has the clear advantage of avoiding all closed notions of the poem as "a well-wrought urn" but suffers from a presupposed stasis, a bracketed immobility among the parts under observation and specification. As an alternative to structure, economy is concerned with the distribution and circulation of the numerous forces and intensities that saturate a text. A textual economy would concern itself not with the order of forms and sites but with the order-disorder of circulations and distributions (1986, 201).

We need not pose the question, however, as a choice between discrete and exclusive categories. The stasis apparently inherent in the structural

(English) had to find ways to accommodate new representations of reality. Insecurity and suffering caused by agrarian revolution in England, and changing economic structures all across Europe, pushed members of various classes and backgrounds into new collectivities. English Protestant sects were united in a struggle against Parliament, the Jacobean and Stuart Courts, the Anglican Church and Archbishop Laud. Collective resistance to political and religious persecution pushed some groups to a radical separatism. Members of a fragment broke loose from the European continent. Their hope was to ride out the cry and accusation of kingdoms of Satan until God would be "all in all" (Howe 1990, 180).

Rivière has pointed to the subterranean shocks by which Baudelaire's

model may perhaps be due more to its particular uses and articulations than to its limits and possibilities. My choice of the figure of the diastrophe, for instance, grows out of a recognition that structures are never static or stable; they are constellations of points of pressures, dislocations, fusions, retractions, and so on, much as the rifts of the San Andreas fault are signatures of a much larger set of geological processes that continually restructure the face of the earth. All maps are provisional simply because all structures are in motion. Structures *are* economies, already. What we have is a structure of differences, a chain of metonymic displacements. Such is the nature of Andrews's "Confidence Trick" and later writings as yet to be collected in book form. Derrida: "Every term, every germ depends at every moment on its place and is entrained, like all the parts of a machine, into an ordered series of displacements, slips, transformations, and recurrences that cut out or add a member in every proposition that has gone before" (1977, 300).

Which brings us back to Andrews's conceptualization of the text and society as made up of three concentric circles. A possible danger of discussing the social order as three different levels is that the inner levels are each dependent on the third as the ground of their possibility; they are sutured and potentially essentialized into the very static enclosures to which many critiques of structuralism rightly object. The concept of a social *horizon* and the resulting strategies of mapping the totality run the same risk of enclosing the multiple trajectories of the social text by attempting to intuit the meaning of these "polysemous" texts. "Polysemy," Derrida writes, "always puts out its multiplicities and variations within the *horizon*, at least, of some integral reading which contains no absolute rift, no senseless deviation—the horizon of the final parousia of a meaning at last deciphered, revealed, made present in the rich collection of its determinations.

. . . All the moments of polysemy are, as the

poetry is shaken; it is as though they caused words to collapse (Benjamin 1969, 164).

If hegemony is a type of political relation and not a topographical concept, it is clear that it cannot either be conceived as an irradiation of effects from a privileged point. In this sense, we could say that hegemony is basically metonymical: its effects always emerge from a surplus of meaning which results from an operation of displacement (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 141). Three concentric horizons must evolve around one central point or they would not be concentric. But this notion of the center is the ideological effect *par excellence*. The conception of an operation of metonymic displacement (Language poetry) rejects the notions of center and closure that a concentric horizon model implies: the moment of totality ceases to be a *horizon* and becomes a *foundation* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 141).

Discursive *discontinuity*

word implies, moments of meaning" (1977, 350). It seems more appropriate, therefore, to talk about a "horizon"-value (which reminds us that it is simply an ideological effect) than of a horizon. For "that 'horizon'-value, that pure infinite opening for the presentation of the present and the experience of meaning, suddenly becomes framed. Suddenly it is a part. And just as suddenly apart. Thrown back into play. And into question. Its deformations are no longer even negatively regulated by any *form*, which is just another name for presence" (1977, 351).

But Andrews is aware of these dangers. "Writing's method, in other words, can suggest a *social undecidability*, a lack of successful *suture*" (1990, 31). It is precisely because a social order is not a single homogeneous entity that it requires ideologies to function as a sewing machine, typing up all the loose ends which refuse to fit easily into the dominant paradigm. *Give Em Enough Rope* works toward an unravelling of the stitches by "testing the horizon, setting up a probe, by violating codes so that each unit keeps getting reframed—or keeps reframing what's gone before it and what might come next as you challenge these wider and wider concentric circles of normalization, or of a functional fit, almost a machine-like fit that exists *within* the social dimension of language" (1986, 58). It seeks those repressed dialogues and trajectories that a given ideology seeks to repress through what Fredric Jameson refers to as strategies of containment.

Give Em Enough Rope is a profoundly Utopian text. Andrews's negative project of exposing, dismantling, rerouting, disclosing, disseminating, and deconstructing ideological texts points toward the positive project suggested by Jameson of deciphering "the Utopian impulses of these same ideological texts" (1981, 296). The social text can be read *differently*: "By imaging a different sense, you're beginning to imagine a change also in

becomes primary and constitutive. The discourse of radical democracy is no longer the discourse of the universal; the epistemological niche from which "universal" classes and subjects spoke has been eradicated, and it has been replaced by a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity. This point is decisive: there is no radical and plural democracy without renouncing the discourse of the universal and its implicit assumption of a privileged point of access to "the truth," which can be reached by only a limited number of subjects. In political terms this means that just as there are no surfaces [such as class] which are *a priori* for the emergence of antagonisms, nor are there discursive regions [such as poetry] which the programme of a radical democracy should exclude *a priori* as possible spheres of struggle (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 191–92).

Don't get me wrong: I know it's almost a joke to speak of poetry and national affairs. Yet in *The Social Contract*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes that since our conventions

what's possible in the practical transactions between social individuals—even to the point of implicating a different kind of subject: a new subject that could begin to coalesce, or that begins to coalesce around this desire to signify more widely—and fittingly—in light of 'what is, indeed, happening' " (Andrews 1986, 59). What is at stake is possibility itself, "to negate the given and to do so in a way that points toward some other anticipated future" (58).

are provisional, the public may choose to reconvene in order to withdraw authority from those conventions which no longer serve our purposes. & poetry is one of the few areas where this right of reconvening is exercised (Bernstein 1990, 240–41).

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