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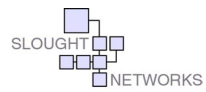
**Don't Know Alan**

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**Don't Know Alan**  
**notes on AD**

Alan Davies with Miles Champion

Slought Books, Philadelphia



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## Introductory Notes

"Don't Know Alan" began as a few pages of notes made in preparation for a talk on Alan's work which I gave in London, England in October 2000 at the invitation of Robert Hampson. Shortly afterward, Louis Cabri suggested the notes might interestingly serve as an open letter to Alan himself, and so I sent a copy to him. Now, just over a year later, we can see how right Louis was. And, while we both knew we could expect a considered response, I certainly didn't expect anything as substantial and generous as what follows. My thanks to Alan for that.

## MILES



Miles sent me his Don't Know Alan notes in the course of a challenging and productive correspondence that had engaged us for some time. I was flattered by the attention. But more to the point I found myself fascinated and gripped by Miles' notes. In some ways they seemed like notes that I might have made to myself. So when the notion came along that I respond to them for possible publication I was delighted. I also knew that I had a lot of work ahead of me. And I was more than a little interested in finding out what my critical faculties were like after they had lain dormant for some years (years? yes. years) (at least as regards specifically critical work written down).

I scanned the notes and printed them one-to-a-page for ease of perusal. I worked on them in an order dictated by whatever captured my attention at the moment. A note that might one evening have seemed impenetrable the next seemed to be giving voice to its own words-in-response. Most of the writing was done toward the end of a day and at an Internet cafe on Avenue A or at a non-Internet cafe on 9th Street.

I am pleased / grateful that some of this collaborative work (Miles gave me an assignment is how I saw it) will be seeing the light of day in print. And that all of it is now available online. I very much wanted the dialog that Miles began and into which I entered to be available as a locus for response and further dialog by one-and-all (that there would never be any thing such as one-as-all). Critical discourse is one thing that I think does not (and must not be allowed to) exist to end in a book. Welcome!

ALAN

## Don't Know Alan

### notes on AD



From a letter to Miles (14Feb01):

Thanks for sending your "Don't Know Alan" notes. Me too I don't know! Each of your notes is poignant. As with music it is the "differences" of the notes that makes it. The relationship between life and language is. As also with writing(s). Everything (all of this) is just thinking. How do we get beyond it? How do we get to a place before it? For those of us in the west Wittgenstein gets closest. But not "there." And your selections from Barthes are apt in that he has much to say that resonates and at the same time soothes. And your very funny "Or where Saussure would have us, in the missionary position: S over s." and that being also very much to the point (of what we want to void/avoid). Saussure left out (at least) a couple of other "s"s (the seer and the sayer). So: seer says signifier satisfies signified. Or something like that. You write: "Zen: an enormous praxis destined to halt language." The practice of zen interrupts our attachment(s) to language. Then language is just language.

## poetry / poetic



The poetic is to poetry what religiosity is to religion. When used as an adjective (“In his poetic works...”) its meaning is not too deflated. But the fact that it has a nominal (sic) function (“The poetic is...”) softens its use anywhere that it is used as a word.

Ginsberg used to like the word poesie. This even more dated (and dateable) word would also seem to be heard most often as a further fluttering of the sense of poetry. His use of it certainly meant nothing in the way of disrespect. I think he used it by way of flirting with language the better to bed poetry whenever it offered itself. I heard Allen introduce Ashbery in Boulder one summer. He described Ashbery’s words as “skating on the surface of language.” By that phrase I do think that he meant to qualify a poetic practice that he did not sanction. Allen wore words the way he wore the world and he used words to say so.

**The noun is larger ("a noun is writing" – Larry Price). But to write is to leave nouns behind? Or to use words only negatively? Latency = boredom. Beuys/CC: the particle-wave ("a sitting noun is in motion" – Olson). Adjectives: the price-tags of language (Chris Marker).**



Nouns verb.

Verbs noun. But not so much. No. Not in the same way.

To write is to leave words behind.

Nouns think. Nouns think they're in control.

Verbs noun. Tend to stasis. Verbs die. And if death doesn't look like a noun I don't know what does.

Latency = excitement. That too holds. The what of what is about to happen.

Yeah. I guess so. Adjectives are what nouns cost. Adverbs verbs.

Is there a negative of language? Or is language itself the negative of no known positive?

Or. What is the adverse of verse? The verse of adverse? Yeah. The verse of adverse. I'll write that. This nounverb will write that.

**To write at the object, not about or around.**



Things seem to turn up in my head. Or sometimes the impulse turns up slightly ahead of the word things. Seems like it can work either way. (From a letter to Miles 14Feb01)

Writing occurs by accrual.

Webster defines accrual as “to come into existence as a legally enforceable claim”. So you better be ready for it! That’s where craft and experience come in. Which gets us to Webster’s “the wisdom that *accrues* with age” example by way of definition.



The critical faculty within my mind seems to be fairly (well) developed. It concerns itself (concerns itself) much of the time with discernments and demarcations and distinctions.

But what is my relationship to my mind? What is the relationship of one to one’s mind? That question is of the utmost importance.

Write where you are.

To write is to think. But to think is also (and equally?) to write. Yes. Equally. Why not say equally?

To say my mind is already to make a distinction. But between what and what? My mind makes my world. My mind makes the world. My mind makes me.

So if to live is to write (as for me it is) and if to write is to think and to think is to make me then to live is (just that) to make me. To live is to make me.

To live is to think we live. To live is to think us alive. And to die is to think us dead.

And the rest (too) is (just) thinking.

**Will I carry onward the plural noun's verb energy,  
or leave it resolve into a still group of similars?  
Coolidge**



To we or not to we. That is the question.

Literature is seemingly a solitary task. But that is essentially the author's point of view. Or (more pointedly) the view of (of) the author. The author sees it as the author sees it.

But literature is essentially (among so many myriad things) (and non things) a we making activity. We making. That's probably what saves it and (from time to time) us.

The single noun's verb energy impregnates (vitalizes) (furiates) (and on) the plural nouns' verb energy. To make literature is (at its very best) (and maybe always) to make life.

**To sterilize metalanguage (criticism).**

**The requirements of an average culture (Barthes): that art vaccinates enjoyment.**



I especially don't know what anything means.

The relationship between art and enjoyment is (a) haphazard (one) at best. Art is as likely to infuriate as it is to (say) edify. It is as likely to bore to tears as it is to please.

What does (does) it do? What it does (the question of what art does) takes us into the realm (worlds) of meaning. And I especially don't know what anything means.

Perhaps to mean only works as an intransitive verb. I.e. no object (no object). But then that hurls us suddenly into the lap (the laps) of intention. Which is a sort of thumb sucking place to be at best.

Art happens.

In the sense of shit happens.

Make art happen.

In the sense of make shit happen.

**When we write we make a kind of love to life. But what kind? And critical writing is usually only a kind of bad rewriting. But with the lovemaking mixed at least in it anyway.**  
**AD**



That what kind (what kind?) is already the interrogative of critical thinking. Criticism occurs somewhere between the interrogative and the legislative.

Critical writing inhabits a lot of societies. The letter of appreciation to a friend. The book review. Theoretical writing. And the broader theoretical writing of the philosopher. The tribute. The copy. All of these and more (much more) are included.

Of what does the critical gesture (motion?) itself consist? Just that we respond to things I guess. Just that we notice (we've noticed). And that we ask ourselves why. Why the work the way it is. And why the response (the way it is). The critical gesture (motion) seems to be a way of resolving the distance between the apprehender and the apprehended. It's a way of measuring a distance (an at times barely perceptible distance). And a sort of argument about the measuring devices themselves.

**Explanation is energy at its own doorstep.**

**AD**



At which doorstep? At energy's doorstep? Or at explanation's doorstep?

I'm sure you can parse the grammar of this sentence. It's quite straightforward. But how would you parse its meaning? (And this points at a limitation of grammar. That it might attempt to define – to nail down – the skeleton of utterances. But not the whole body of the thing coming out of the hole of the mouth.)

Explanation is energy at explanation's own doorstep. Explanation is energy at energy's own doorstep.



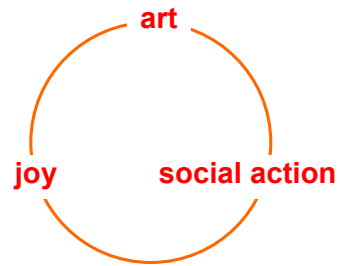
Lyn Hejinian wrote a book called *Writing Is An Aid To Memory*. The title of that book might serve as a sort of definition of explanation. At least as when viewed from say one side of it.

But writing is not an aid to memory. Writing is an aid to forgetting. Only by voiding the mind (from time to time) can we go on (with) living. (Cf. dreams) Only forgetting staves off senility.

## the pose of fact



A fact is a fiction of course.



This ideogram surrounds the site of (situates) pleasures and revolutions.

See also Barthes' Sade/Fourier/Loyola where also a trinity is invoked. The father the son and the holy ghost spell paternity and semen. What else is a ghost but spent seed?

Art is (in part) getting inside the mind of time. Social action is action in spite of (in spite of) its mindlessness. And joy is everything else. Everything is joyful.

Every sign is a joyful act.

Turn the wheel.

## the jargon of veracity



Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity* is the only book of his that I ever found it entirely possible to read. This is probably due at least in part to the handsomely compact and therefore apparent obtainability of the hard cover American edition.

Also it is an attack on Heidegger which is not so important a thing but that it attacks authenticity (the appearance of the authentic) did strike a chord.

In the same way veracity is the appearance (appearance) of the verifiable. The true.

Wittgenstein argued at one period of his thinking career for two types of the true. The tautological. And the empirically (scientifically) verifiable. It is hard to argue with the notion of the tautologically true. The notion itself seems to be (almost) tautologically true doesn't it? Truth confined to the realm(s) of logic. But where has that game (alone) ever gotten us? It's not even as compelling as chess because logic is about consistency and chess is all about rupture (rapture). And the empirically verifiable? Every morning science wakes up and undoes what it did the day before. Scientific truth is the truth of (a) narrative. And only rarely is it well written. And then only in retrospect. And rarely if ever as close to the bone as those stories that seem always to have haunted our lives since say before our parents were born (borne).

It is precisely the *ity* of veracity and of authenticity that cannot be confirmed. Or even affirmed. That cannot be verified. That cannot be authenticated.

What is the truth value of anything anyway? What is most true is that what we don't know (what can't be verified) (what doesn't need to be) (what can't be authenticated) (what doesn't need to be) does not in any event over cloud our minds.

**(lying fallow)**



Yes it's all a lie. All a fabric of lies. Just that there is no truth (no truth to reach). Hence the not that that does lie fallow until something miraculously (i.e. equally instantly in and of the moment) sprouts.

The I-am-lying-to-you conundrum. Only a conundrum because it assumes (it assumes) a veracity in language.

I-am-not-lying-to-you is equally an absurd.

That we set anything in motion at all somehow floods over and against that (these conundrums) and a small boat blips to the surface of the surveyable swamp. And we call it meaning. And we make it art.

**[Mallarmé] annihilated the distinction between primary and secondary work, he brought the critical functions so poignantly into the gesture of his primary work that he elevated the critical functions to that level and there was no longer a question.  
AD**



Mallarmé spoke with his mind. That's how he spoke writing. That's how he wrote speaking. I don't know about his salons. Maybe there and then he spoke a little more with his voice. The afternoon of a fawn. Maybe Valéry lived on to speak more with the voice of his mind the way that Mallarmé spoke with his. At / during his salons.

Valéry just that little bit more listless than Stéphane ever was. Just that little bit more thinking too much all the time. The way he'd thought (the way he'd learned to be thought) sitting there just Paul thinking as Stéphane spit from his mind some words in song.

**Life: an ongoing project (or a reference point for understanding literature).**



The relationship between life and literature is (capable of) filling all our thought. Perhaps it is because the relationship is both so broad and so deep that only with difficulty can we give expression to even a scant bit of it. Scant attention.

Life is presumably larger than literature. But to say even that is to speak in metaphors. Large being an expression of what (?) possible dimension(s). And yet literature's tendency is to engulf life. We tend to think it best when it most encloses it. But in that sense (in the sense of that) literature is never more than a charade. It never more than postures what it can't attain.

In a simple (and again metaphorical) sense literature flowers in and amidst life. But we all know that it's more complicated than that. We just don't know how to put it.

## experience + imagination



Imagination is prescient instinct. It is a way of trying out in our mind what we're not yet ready to try out in the world of actions. That is its basis in our animal brains.

So imagination occurs within experience as a way of getting (temporarily) outside of it on a trial basis. Gee I wonder what that would be like.

exper(imaginat)ience(ion)

Like all human mental functions imagination tends to go beyond (beyond) itself. Suddenly we find ourselves wondering what that (that) would be like quite apart from any need or intention to ever do it within the grounds of those other every day actions we occasionally mistake (take) for life. At that moment the imagination begins to engender art.

**Language resembles us in that we must flex it at every joint to avoid its getting flabby.**

**And narrative prose "hangs off our hands."**



To have time on our hands makes us write. Because we write when we have time on our hands we are writers. And what a struggle it is (much of the time) to have it on our hands. When time has us on our (its) hands writing becomes us.

When we can't run from ourselves we write. That (that) is what is really being apprehended. That being apprehended by is what we apprehend when we write.

Writing too is a practice. I have two of them. To write and to zen. Those are the verbs that most inhabit me when I inhabit them.

And that is more and more the narrative of this (this) life. When time hangs off these hands. When time hangs off these hands (at this moment) this is what they do.

**Neither the person nor the work is to be valued over the other. They are coterminous.  
AD**



(Your name) (me) (you) (my name).



Nothing to add.

Nothing to subtract.

No fuzzy math.

No math.

**experience = imagination**



That is actually more like it.

Experience does (tend to) equal imagination when much of the time it takes place in our minds.

I suppose art is an effort to instantiate this equation. To prolong it against the rush of the insubstantial and impermanent. Which it sometimes finds itself on bending knee accepting.

**Structure as concrete abstraction (Barthes): a corpus of intelligent forms.**



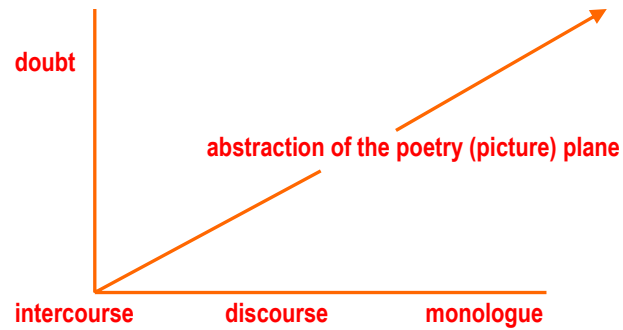
From a letter to Miles (14Feb01):

Something you wrote in your email strikes me:

“Reading Barthes has always been a pleasure for me too, and his works alongside your own have gone a long way toward determining what I look for in criticism (the kind of “negative” criticism which he elaborates, post-Mallarmé, in *Criticism & Truth*, where it is understood that there is nothing clearer than the work [as the work itself is clarity] and that the object to be grasped is always what finally evades knowledge).”

It’s the phrase “the object to be grasped is always what finally evades knowledge” that strikes me. And this is why: In my zen practice we speak of “don’t-know mind.” This doesn’t refer to something the mind doesn’t know or to a mind that doesn’t know something (some thing). Actually there’s no mind and no knowing and no thing to be known. It refers to the mind before knowing. There are lots of names for this mind in zen. But the function for example of koans is precisely to bring the mind to that point where the mind equals don’t-know. It’s a very refreshing place to be. Among other things that might be said about it. But I started thinking lately that this don’t-know mind is what art at least evokes and at best creates. It could be called a sense of wonder but it is so without name and therefore without qualification. So this is what for me for the moment passes for my sense of what happens when we encounter/are encountered by “the beautiful.” We don’t-know. This theory which is in any event probably not “new” does seem to cover that place in our thinking where we wonder why and in what way “the beautiful” and our experience of it is applied both to some of the things of what we call “nature” and some of the things that we call “art.”

So I guess then that in more specific terms what could be called negative criticism refers in some way to a criticism that is a “negative” (in the sense of a mold – the sculpture kind not the biology kind – although the biology kind might unintentionally intuit a kind of negative criticism too!) to the “positive” of the work. That would be an interesting way to think about it – the critical work certainly in some way(s) takes an impression of its object. And on another hand I’ve always felt considerable affinity for the old Chinese adage that Pound translates/quotes about the function of art being to imitate nature in its methods of operation. That “methods of operation” always seems like the important part to me. And so if we look at criticism vis-à-vis the primary text in those terms then the two (criticism / text) are just say two types of plant flowering in close proximity to one another. Of course one might be parasitic. One might be a spore. One might be dead. One might be taking over the territory. And so on.



Intercourse is dialogue. There are two speakers. And (hopefully) two listeners.

A monologue is an impoverished form of address. No matter how many listeners there are until the respondents (literally) take over it remains a clown act. The political speech. The pedagogue. This writing.

And discourse (a discourse) (a) (discourse) is almost always pedagogic too and almost always in an unexamined sort of way.

As long as doubt is the alternative (the alternative axis) to these three nothing but doubt is possible. And doubt can be (can be) productive.

But if joy (and doubt can be joyful) replaces the vertical doubt axis then the abstracting poetry plane can lend place to the concrete experience of the every day mind. Then (then) we have a place from which to begin. To begin what? To begin the concrete experience of the every day mind.

## Intercourse: the image-repertoire goes to the Devil.



That has always been my experience.

Or at least the image repertoire becomes identical with those that are at hand. That's one of the things that we like most about love making. That we are then completely identical with our actions. That our mind is then for a while no longer absent. That what we are thinking and what we are doing are one. And what we are feeling too.

And this is why self love is for most of us at least never nearly as satisfying as making love with someone(s). Fantasy is precisely not (not) a substitute for reality.

And that when making love we have the experience that there is no other. Your pleasure is my pleasure and my pleasure is your pleasure. And then (and then) there is only pleasure.

but all "lonely discourses" unescapably social



Style is to things what mood is to feelings.

And feelings are mostly about things. Hence mood about style (in a way). Hence mood's about style(s) (in a way). Hence moods about styles.

Morandi leapt far beyond a synaesthetic collocation in treating of those two. He united them.

Morandi –

I am essentially a painter of the kind of still-life composition that communicates a sense of tranquility and privacy, moods which I have always valued above all else.

It takes me weeks to make up my mind which group of bottles will go well with a particular tablecloth. Then it takes me weeks of thinking about the bottles themselves, and yet I often still go wrong with the spaces. Perhaps I work too fast.

(Quoted in "Finding the Universe in a Vase" by Alan Riding, in the International Herald Tribune, July 7-8, 2001)

## Adorno, Baudelaire, Mallarmé



I once thought that I'd be quite satisfied if critical theory did not go beyond Barthes and Benjamin and Burke (Kenneth). But then I'd be bereft of Luce Irigaray who writes so well that I'd read her (her) even if she were writing about something otherwise quite uninteresting. I realize that it's largely a matter of style. Style (style). These exemplary choices. With the possible exception of Burke whose style is nothing more than solid (in a courageous sort of way) throughout (any given text). Yet in his work too the content (the sum total of the messages) so informs the style that it promotes it (it promotes it) so that a kind of cumulative and beautiful form results (results).

Style is the vehicle whereby we read the text.

We might posit a sort of style line between a place where at one end the volume of the text carried by style gives way at the other end to a place where the volume of the text is carried more by the messages. Like any theory and like all thinking this one oversimplifies. Even an elaboration is an oversimplification of what it touches and attempts to hold. And even a fantasy is a (potentially insane) reduction of all of the what that is at hand.

For me given the few exemplars I've chosen above that style line would go from Irigaray through Barthes and Benjamin to Burke. But just as my momentary choice of these four and of a line both over and under simplifies so does this arrangement of these members of this supposed (and posited) species. At all times it could of course be otherwise. For that is the nature of thinking. And especially more so of thinking about.

on the picture-plane: Rilke



Rilke is Celan.

The cancellation of Rilke. The erasure of Rilke. The subtraction of Rilke. The minusing of Rilke. Rilke divided. Rilke top and bottomed. Rilke questioned. Rilke (above and foremost) questioned. The absenting of Rilke. The deRilkeization of Rilke. These Rilkes are Celan.

But note that this line through Rilke also unites Rilke. It ties Rilke together. Bundled up. Not forgotten. But drawn together toward some kind of close (not closure) and that close (not closure) (no) (not closure) is Celan.

And Celan? Celan is Rilke.

**Freud: the slip of the tongue; Jakobson: the phoneme**

**||**

**fractal growth / language / the future**

**(or chaos as durable, pattern-like)**



Humans from earth.



It's hard writing this. It's hard to say exactly what I want to say. So that I can think. So that I can make thinking. So that the range of the field of the thinking (the interpretation) can be of just such a size so as to permit it (it) (itself) while at the same time to limit (to limit) it (it). To make meanings is to impose (to compose) limits (limits).

All of that (this) thinking. Where does it go? All of this (that) writing. Where does it go? That (that) is the question. To write is to try to answer it.

### “confusion in strict order” – Coolidge



What's curious here is the alliance of terms (confusion) (strict order) in a grammatical structure that mocks an equation but between terms that are not themselves parallel.

So whatever meaning there is here is between terms mocking the parallel and in a form mocking the equation.

This is how this little phrase generates meaning. Apart from that it has none.

And perhaps that is true of any artifice. It enacts (a) meaning it does not possess.

There is no meaning.

We just make it up. We do persist in that. Just look at this that I'm writing. Just look at this that you're reading.

## Oculist Witnesses (Duchamp); A Hundred Posters (Mallarmé)



Oculist Witnesses. To see. With both eyes (all three) (there are three of them) (the middle eye) open. And / or the straight nominative sense of it. The oculist witnesses. The (the) oculist witnesses.

A Hundred Posters. Mallarmé said that everything exists to end in a book. So yes. Posters. For the oculist to witness. A hundred posters.

And actually any critique on / re Mallarmé must begin with that. That a man who thought / wrote that everything exists to end in a book should have (made) so little go into one. A vast mind pared.

And Duchamp made everything not only to be looked at but also as (as) looking. The small glass to be looked at with one eye only. And the water and the gas with that same vantage championed. What one eye sees instead of two. The disparity of those vantages insisting on the surface of art as the surface of the eye(s). And the mind's eye. That a pun is a mental work of art. Likewise (like wise) a joke.

**You can never settle the problems of language through art, as language is always turning back on itself.**



I would have to weigh in with Wittgenstein on this one. To the extent that art can let the fly out of the bottle it too can solve language problems.

This might be for example why Barrett was so interested in the Art + Language people and their works.

It is certainly (among the reasons) why I'm so interested in Robert Ryman's work where the problems of language are exploded off the picture plane. Except for the most careful (and cared for) reminders (usually around the edges of the canvas). Or the works of Cy Twombly where the language problem is simply (simply) exploded into (into) and as (as) graphic beauty. Even with (and for him by way of) the baggage of myth it works. He still gets away with it. Or Morandi who over and over again painted the most clear and simple and elegant and expressive sentence(s) I've ever seen. And (forgive me) I could go on.

It's interesting that in making his formulation Wittgenstein may not have considered (in his mind) (an image of) the bottle as something that might have more than one opening. He may not (for instance) have considered a bottle in the form of a worm. A one sided (surfaced) three dimensional object with two openings out of both of which language problems (we call them problems) (we make them problems) might be seen to more or less continuously and / or more or less erratically evolve and / or devolve and / or dissolve and / or revolve. And / or so on.

The solutions to any human problems are mostly about letting go (of them). So how to have language let go of language problems? Check out a poem. Most of them are at least trying. Albeit.

**I say: a flower and...musically there rises the fragrant idea itself, the one missing from all bouquets.  
Mallarmé**



Oh! Mallarmé.

Mallarmé wrote not only extremely well but also completely. Painters (have to) deal with the edges of the canvas. Sculptors with the enveloping space and sometimes also with the surroundings. Poets don't exactly have this sort of problem (to solve). But Mallarmé solved it anyway and (I think) in each thing he wrote. His words fill (fulfill) the page. Or something like that.

He not only dealt with the problem later posed in praxis (and in theory) by Olson and Duncan and others. He solved it piece by piece.

Anyway. I have nothing to add.



On bended knee  
I give to you  
this sound bouquet.

So tell me true:—

Perhaps he [Coolidge] got tired of 'significant' language, as Duchamp became sick of retinal art.  
AD



I wonder.

There's no getting away from significant language (language that signifies). I wish there was.

And certainly language that strains away (aggressively away) from what is otherwise thought (taken) to signify (to be significant) at the moment nonetheless signifies (and signifies strongly) among other things the doing of that (of that). I'm thinking at the moment of P. Inman's enormously beautiful (and beautifully crafted) poems.

To live is to signify. To die is to signify. To be (to be) is to signify. That's the way our minds work.

But to signify. What is that? Maybe to attempt (to attempt) a plethora of something in a vacuum (a vacuous place). Putting legs on a snake. When the arrow has already flown past.

**I like to think of the artist as an exceptionally well person.  
Richard Prince**



I like to think of the artist as a person. But I'm not sure that I can make that all cohere. The artist is as surely the moving point of some broader deeper process as is the moving point of this pen. The moving stylus of this printer. The movement as the pixels appear a shattered spray of apparent reality in some place at some time. The movement of the words in the mind of the writer. In the mind of the reader. In the mind of the writer in the mind of the reader. In the mind of the reader in the mind of the writer. In all the minds of all the possible readers everywhere and at all possible times.

(There should be a word and a grammar and a lexicon and all that that fixes space and time as one gesture. Not the two we're always left with. Left by.)

I like to think of the person as an exceptionally well artist.

Can't you take a joke?  
AD



Can't you take a joke?



Idealism is just another ideology. One that encroaches upon the spiritual. Ideologies cause wars. Ideologies are (are) wars. The cold was an oxymoron. Is that the right word? A negative tautology. And solipsistic too. That's idealism for you.

Hence the appeal (to me) of Camus whose ideology had an existence before it had an ethos. Contre Kant (for example). There are many. (Examples.) Camus' meaning(s) existed in a way apart from thought(s). The thoughts followed the actions. (Cf. his demise.) Praxis had a (fresh) (all senses) start. Before and without the ethos of ideologies. Quite refreshing (really).

This diagram's dip to idealism is tacit understanding of all that.

Duchamp is mechanism. His art (of gestures as objects / objects as gestures) explodes all that. At times allows them (gestures) to implode. At those times that implosion is the source of his humor(s). When they explode (ex) (plode) they're more about / of the manufacture of meaning. Implosion closer to the heart (what the heart speaks).

Constructivism (the Movement) (the movements) is much more conservative than that. When it exploded (as it often did) it itself was (about) the contained explosion. Constructivism is always very aware of its space. Both the space it is / creates and the space(s) in which that happens. It is always an act (in a box).

So yes. Mechanism does degenerate (uncreate) when led into constructivism (the ideology of constructions) which flags somewhat off and down when bled into idealism. Mechanism is (is) escape. There is no escape from idealism (whenever and wherever it is tolerated).

**"epistemological break" – that would-be radical thing which often leaves the things of the world unchanged (Bourdieu)**



Webster's heirs describe epistemology as "the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity." What's interesting here is the apparent need for duplicity at every turning. Study or (or) theory. Nature and (and) grounds. Limits and (and) validity. Epistemology (which might rightly be described as the science / art of naming) seems to be a thing which itself cannot be (readily) named.

Maybe there's something there in the Webster if we let the terms walk all over each other vertically.

study.....theory
nature.....grounds
limits.....validity

I don't see anything. Do you? But I do feel (feel) that there's something there if we follow the tractor treads of those words down.

Knowledge is (ultimately) the province of poetry and (and) of philosophy. Or is it a province bordered by them? Perhaps knowledge is a region like that of the Basque and as such is always seeking freedom from the tyranny of philosophy and (and) the tyranny of poetry.

In any event it's a temporary site. Not really (like) a place at all.

Christ! I almost forgot about science. The knowledges that science touches are (for the most part) the most transient of all.

That which can be known can be superceded. It can be rescinded. It can be forgotten. It can be questioned. It can be attacked. It can be derided.

Probably the writing that most closely and most clearly approaches knowledge is that which proceeds with / as itself being the strongest unity of poetry and philosophy. Heraclitus. Dogen. Novalis. Wittgenstein.

**The dehistoricizing effects of any historical study (of Baudelaire, eg).  
The ahistorical nature of use as opposed to the literary? Etymology  
as weight?**



The deromanticizing effects of any romanticist study (of). The dechristianizing effect of any christian study (of). The destructuralizing effects of any structuralist study (of). The demarxistizing effects of any marxist study (of). The demythologizing effects of any mythological study (of).

This is just the effect of study. Study removes (attempts to remove) (creates) the study's essence (the study's essential methods) from the object (from the objects) of the study. It's real function is to disclose its methods. To that end it frequently makes some considerable pretense of having found (of actually having found) those methods in (in) the object (the object) of study. That's its object.



Nothing transcends time. Not since we have started to think of (started to think via) it.

Nothing transcends time. Literally.

Even something as simple (nothing is simple) as use is embedded in it. By (by) (by) our thinking.

Wittgenstein wrote about use as though (as if) it were outside of historical time. In that sense (in that way) he made of it an ideal (a platonic ideal). Use value (in the hands of other thinkers) did not (on the contrary) seek to avoid time. But it did still valorize use.



Etymology is a trace (the trace) of a word's use.

Words do have weight. They appear to have (appear with?) weight. But where? Is it the word that weighs? Is it the mind? Is it the apprehending mind (the reading / listening faculty) that weighs?

Is it the weight of time? Time weighs words down.

And so does this (this) (this) (this) thinking about them. This use (use) (use) (use) of (of) them.

**logotherapy = foolishness**



Speaking in tongues. No lie! Running at the mouth as I think my mother used to say. Repeatedly. And pretty much non stop.

Idioglossolaliasts are we. Not ideo-glossolaliasts! No to anything that loses us the insanity of it!

Please help me always remember that it was ideo-logy that killed the jews and gays and a shitload of goyem too about 60 years back. I wonder if ideology doesn't surround itself with professors in order to maintain the guise of something other than something that only kills.



Lacan.

We all have a tendency to overreact. (At times.) At time.

Against this we (can) posit Luce Irigaray whose objections never reiterate. She's strident. She's strident with grace. She's conscious. Her writing is its own mind.

Logotherapy. Can we recover from consumerism? I don't think so. It used to take a bullhorn and a voice to control a crowd. Now a logo will do. The Marlboro logo (the logo alone) is worth more than a lot of countries. (Money. In terms of money.) Everybody at the ballgame with a mark like a slushy check mark on their shoes and / or hats and / or shirts and / or jackets and / or pants and / or. Control. The Society of the Logo.

Value (that poor sad bastardized word) now not (manifestly not) about supply and demand. Not any more. Just market share. Market share is (is) demand. Market share creates demand. Supply takes care of itself. Market share rules the day.

Foolishness yes. Yes foolishness. The fool is the emperor of the moment. What are (popular) performers but fools? Fools' gold. But still a little bit (bit part) outside (outside). A little bit of freedom. The illusion of freedom? Probably. But still and all y'all.

I do like Christopher Smart.

**the *lector*: one who experiences a revolution in the order of words as a radical revolution in the order of things**



My dad was a lector.

And then there's Hannibal Lector who in his eponymous autobiographical Hannibal reads the mind of one of his victims to (to) him (in as) serving to him sweet meats just sculpted from his (the subject's) own brain. I almost said mind. But no. That is not at all certain. But that Lector does read to him his own mind of that we can be certain. A penny (penance) for his thoughts.

To read is to eat (our own) brain.

**Who else graduated from the L= Prep School as a negative (/ordinary language) philosopher?**



Nobody.

Nick's essays are the most beautiful of those among my peers. Charles' thinking is radiant but he doesn't write prose as well as he writes poems. Barrett has one of the most brilliant intellects I've ever encountered. I think that he actually has to slow it down to explain it when he writes essays. Ron's thinking is always strong and pertinent but the form of his essays doesn't speak new things. Some of the more recent writing of some of my peers has taken (its) place too comfortably in the realm of the discourse of the academy. (There's only one academy.)

And most of the women writers have had enough sense (sensibly) to stay out of this game entirely. Their best thinking (especially Carla and Leslie) can then flavor and embolden their work (their work).

Can I say these things? I don't say these things to elevate my self or my work. I'm right here. This is my work. I'm right here doing this. The other observations touch upon what I see when I look around.

**Happy academics have no history.  
Bourdieu**



The thought of happy academics terrifies me. I can see why Bourdieu too deprived them.

Ghandi said that History is really a record of every interruption of the even working of the force of love and of the soul.

Of course we want people to be happy. It isn't a sin or anything. But I wouldn't wish continuous happiness on anything. Why not? It would deprive them of presence. They wouldn't be able to act. We have to be contrary (but not contrary to anything) in order to live. In order to feel life. This seems embarrassingly trite. And perhaps that is closer (than happiness) to the fact. When the fact is what happens.

## meaning ≠ shape



Form rides content.

The relationship between these two doppelgangers is one that everyone functioning in the arts has tried to impress (upon).

Meaning is intent.

Form and content are two ways of trying to call out (to) any one thing. Usually these things are the things of art.

Again it's a matter of naming and again it's a matter of naming what can't be named. What can only be named. When we see form we see something like an idea of what (it) is. And when we see content we think we are seeing something like the real of it.

A double take.

Two separate vocabularies both muttering away while whatever it is happens.

**Thus when we first enter the world of [symbolism], our footing is not really secure; we feel that we are wandering amongst *problems*.  
Hegel**



That is precisely my experience of sleep. Except that when preparing for and entering it I am usually as unconscious of my trepidation as I am of what my dreams will be. It's a curious thing to be in (in) dreams while they are also manifestly in (in) me. Perhaps it is this very duplicity (a sort of doubling on convex mirrors) that makes (makes) dreams symbolic (sort of symbolic) (apparently symbolic). And then again perhaps dreams are not so much symbolic as a sort of sidebar to the scrolling text of the every day.

On the plane of the every day I don't much like symbols. They're too hortatory. Too self proclaiming. Too much in the league of control. All those American flags about today in the after math of the man made World Trade Center tragedy. I suppose they're meant to soothe (among other things) (among) (other things) by way of solidarity. But why do they have to shout? Why do they have to repeat themselves so monomaniacally (with one mania) and with such stubborn unselfquestioning resolve.

Even symbols of the cute inevitably regenerate themselves as kitsch. And that should tell us something (upon reflection) about those symbols on the other (the other) side (side). On the other side (from) of the kitsch is a power (a kind of power) that has a lot of self will run riot as death in it.

Symbols make me nervous. When I see a symbol I run to get my gun (a symbol). Killing is always a symbolic act. Living isn't.

**So many people when they talk about a problem talk about it in terms that create the problem. For instance people talk about "the other."  
AD**



To change the way we think is to change the world. A change in my thinking is not (only) a change in my thinking. With that change the entire world (entire perceptible world) changes also.

The world is impermanent. A blink of the eyes and it's gone. For example. I learn the name of what for me is a new color and the color of everything changes. Everything changes. To experience life is to acquire (as experience) an infinite number of snapshots acquired by each and every one of all of the available senses.

If there were no other (in our thinking) there would be for instance no war. This is an example of the kind of flies that Wittgenstein wrote (thought) to let out of the bottle.

A problem in metaphysics is a problem in our thinking. A problem in morality is a problem in our thinking. A problem in politics is a problem in our thinking. And so on.

A spoon is a thought.

**AD<sup>1</sup>: What's absent from good writing is the writer.**

**AD<sup>2</sup>: The writer doesn't need to make room for the reader. Rather the poem is the room that they inhabit together.**



To do critical writing is to change the mind (of the person so writing). Without a change in that mind nothing gets said (transmitted). And if the object of attention doesn't warrant that change and ignite it then either nothing gets written or what does get written is not flush with critical news.

What's absent from good writing is the writer? I can't say that I think so. I must have had someone's objective correlative in mind.

Good writing conveys a message. The further that message is pushed (out) the better the writing. At least some such gauge as that is part of that (process). The writer is a messenger. The message gets sent.

Maybe the only thing we need to absent from our notion of writing is the one whereby it's either good or bad. And yet we do make judgments and it's our doing that that in part is what spurs the message on its way(s).



What is the relationship between the writer and the reader anyway? A lot has been written about this. Not too long ago a bunch of people concluding that the reader had too often and for too long been left more out of the equation than was just did sit themselves down as authors to write about that possibly endangered (engendered?) species. Those authors feeling that those readers might be lost and not wanting that to happen. Not at all. Those authors somehow presaging how lost they themselves would be if readers turned up (en masse) missing.

The relationship between the writer and the reader is the book.

**In this room there is some blue, red and green.  
Juliette in Godard's *Two or Three Things***



When we see a thing we give it a name. The Inuit have their words for snow. We have our words for love. There are even words used to express the inexpressible.

So we can't say colors so we say their names. Dogs don't see colors. We don't hear what they hear.

Language is a huge fabrication of convenience(s).

What is a word?

That's what it is.

Wittgenstein let the fly out of the bottle. Magritte trickily assisted. Duchamp gave us the empty bottles themselves.

And what of it? What do we poets do? We make stuff out of words. Word stuff. Perhaps it's as well that we're often unhindered by wordless illusions. (Illusions of wordlessness?) Aware of those illusions (having unmasked ourselves of them) we're capable of doing some real damage. And perhaps it's just as well too that we do.

**So perhaps we are *alongside* our writing (Barthes), it being indifferent to the infantile ego which solicits it. (Eros: a child with an erection.)**



So art is a sort of self pedophilia? Maybe.

So I'll just keep writing until I come? Until I sleep? Until I die?

To come. To sleep. To die. And that is all she wrote.



So perhaps when writing we are beside (beside) our self (our self) (our selves).

Perhaps it isn't pedophilia after all (after all). It's schizophrenia (schizophrenia) of a particular (peculiar) sort.

Thinking of it in a darkened corner. Today. Of all days.

**Or where Saussure would have us, in the missionary position: S over s.**



The missionary position would have the man on top and the woman on the bottom. As would most of history. And especially (especially?) cultural history.

I'm told that there are matriarchal societies where the women dominate. But I haven't seen any. Why not? I haven't seen the artifacts literal or otherwise of such a place and time. Maybe it's because in such societies women dominate in name only (in name only). But it's precisely domination by name (by) (by name) that ensures much of what passes everywhere for the male presence of male power. (Cf. this writing?)

The missionary position is not only christian but capitalist. The pope then Coke. Then coke.

What does it mean (mean) that the signifier dominates the signified? Mean.

Saussure was a linguist.

And language does dominate reality. The reality of language dominates (other) realities. And that's where its energy goes. It goes all over realities. It comes and goes all over realities. That is its plunge.

Is there any language that isn't (about) control?

To name is to own. To adjectivize / adverbize is to control. To ascribe (a scribe) a verb is to claim at least kinship with the mover and more often (moreover) (more over) also victory. And that's the simple stuff (of language). Beyond that it gets really wierd. Let's not go there.

**But to isolate the sign is to return to metaphysics (what semiology absorbs).**



This is an interesting thought. That a (a) sign might be meta (meta) physics. To conflate the apparently micro (a sign) with the apparently macro (metaphysics).

There's a zen koan – The ten thousand things return to the one. To where does the one return?

In addition to the question integral to this koan we would maybe ask of ourselves – What are the ten thousand things? What is the one?

It is in this sense I think that semiology does (does) absorb metaphysics.

One sign is (is) all signs. All signs (the ten thousand signs) are (are) one.

**signification: "a putting together of impossible things"**



Impossible is naming so impossible is already impossible in that sense. Already not a thing so how can it say anything (any thing) about a thing? It doesn't make sense. It's impossible.

Yes any signification is a putting together. This means this and that. This has meaning by virtue of a putting together of this and that. Who was it who put it recently (Don DeLillo maybe in Mao II) that the digital by replacing the analog deprives us of analogy. So maybe no more putting together soon. Maybe the end of that. Maybe we're already gradually and pretty much unknowingly beginning the unremembering of that. No more analogy. Just zero or one. You choose. Countless zeros and numberless ones. You think you choose. Countless numberless times (times).

We seem to have backed up into signification. And what's there? What's left? Nothing of any significance. I can tell you that.

And yet this signification is how we make the world. It's the whole world. Entire as it is ever going to be. This instant. Go figure.

**They say that two objects can't occupy the same space at the same time.  
What are they thinking about? Don't they read?  
AD**



Reading and love making both confound the two-objects-can't-occupy dictum. The spine of the book. The spines of the lovers. The hinging open of the pages. Of the legs. Discourse as intercourse. Intercourse as discourse.

The beginning the middle and the end. Foreplay and afterplay presumably bracketing some opening(s).

Anyway (you write / say it) space and time are the biggest confound. Michael Gottlieb brought this very much to our minds. Those two vocabularies for any event. Space expressed in terms of times and time in terms of spaces. Why does event split thinking like this? We don't know. But perhaps that it does is also one of those things that propels writing. A constant scrambling to bring an event to bear on the two axes (axes) of space and time and so smithereen them into yet and still more fracturing splits of actions. Writing denying (denying) their dominance in and over life. That split thinking stop.

**Barthes: against the rhetoric of the west (which keeps S and s in disproportion), the haiku seeks an adequation of these two.**



Wow!

What a guy.

In this spry and slightly comment there is indeed a whole book. Of course we already have Mr. Barthes' Empire of Signs. One of his more slight books. And delicately so. In fact (his perception of) the Orient almost demanded it (such treatment). And let us not forget that the French had Japonisme while we (we) did not.

But what have I got to add? Briefly? I suppose I might point you in the directions of Panther and Cold Spring. I could show you the target. Or my version of it anyway.

And it's true that the signifier and the signified do come more together in Japanese thought. And in the (art) products of that thought. The Japanese facility with the miniature (garden, haiku, transistor radio) is often ascribed (at least often in large part) to the narrow and ocean bounded reach of their lands. But I wonder now if it might not have more to do with this. That for them more objects signify directly. Without the mediation of an(y) additional language(s). And that would then be more likely due to the stream lining weight of a cultural history that is long and to the kind of focus that that longer lensed thing can bring. It may also be a matter of sensibility but what is sensibility but the result of cultural history as (as) that focusing thing? And what is cultural history but an accumulation of sensibility?

What this unity of the signifier and signified means is that there are less signifieds and signifiers (as such) and more signs. And anyone who's been in a Japanese city in recent years will attest to the fact that there are more (signs) by far (there than here).

Perhaps to refer to this unity (a unity that has never been otherwise) as an adequation is not quite correct. That word doesn't quite keep up with what is being implied. Neither does the word equation (although it is perhaps somewhat more adequate). And neither does the word unity (that I've been using). (We can see it (that that we're getting at) maybe in Nam Jun Paik's two stationary video cameras videoing each other and having that looking monitored. This is the zen transmission of mind where your mind and my mind are essentially still and without attachments and therefore one (one). And those two video camera / monitor beings (which I first saw at René Bloch's Soho gallery at about the time that Beuys was visiting and lecturing there) are (are) in their clear centeredness (and by virtue of it) (and by way of it) (and as it) as compassionate as can be.) So perhaps this is what the sign is when it is (because we think of it) (because we think about it) identical to itself. Its identity is clear. Its identity is centered. And it is compassionate.

The sentient sign is compassionate.

Perhaps when the signs read us we're most secure. I hope that for all of you that will be soon.

**s/s = /**



Signifier over (relationship) signified equals over (relationship).

This is probably the L= poetry equation in Saussurean terms. Although that would more accurately be S/s = /. The relationship(s) of signifiers. A relationship of / is / as slippage.

With Saussure (three s's) the world of the signifieds is explained by the smaller s. Signifiers are bigger. Why? Because he concerned himself above all with the universe of signs. In the world of signs signifiers dominate. Why? Because he concerned himself above all with the universe of signs. And for the sign maker(s) the signifier must perforce (force) surround the signifieds. The signified gets taken (for granted).

A writing of signifieds. Is it possible? Is it (even) conceivable? A cairn. Maybe. A car. A cow. But a crown?

When does the speaking ever stop? The signaling? It doesn't. And that's what the / is for. The slippage(s) of time. The slippage there (there) is all time (all time). Signifier / (time passes) signified = a sign. Are all signs signs of the (perceived) (that's important) (perceived) passage of time. A Remembrance of Things Past. A Dance to the Music of Time.

The Relation Ship.

**that more simple sign (from *sim-plex*: "once pleated")**



Is any sign ever more simple than any other? Isn't it just that our minds complicate some signs while we tend to see others as more simple?

A sign occurs in the mind.

And of course it's we who make signs (the signs). That they occur in the mind is a gently tendered reminder of that. So that whether cognizing them or recognizing them we're making them up.

Signs are all made.

A sign is always a sign of (of) something else. What would a sign of a sign be? A work of art maybe? Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* may be as close as any book novel ever got to (got to) sign (pure sign) (sign as sign) (de / sign). Even a thing-in-itself is already a sign that the mind has made up out of language.

There ain't no getting away from signs. No getting around em.

But for me there are increasingly from time to time those quiet moments away from them. Without (with / out) them. And then that is that.

**Two people  
smack up against each other  
at least part of the time  
and without remorse,  
that's what it's all about.  
AD**



Now we're maybe finally really getting somewhere.

And could those two people ever (not) be the author and the reader?

Lovers of in and through the word.



**See also:**

slough cup hope tantrum, Other Publications, Boston, 1975

SPLIT THIGHS, Other Publications, Boston, 1976

a n a v e s, Potes & Poets Press, Needham MA, 1981

ABUTTAL, Casement Books, New York City, 1982 MNEMONOTECHNICS,

Potes & Poets Press, Needham MA, 1982

ACTIVE 24 HOURS, Roof, New York City, 1982

PURSUE VERITABLE SIMPLES/SEND US THE DIFFICULT JOBS,

Annex, Ithaca, 1983

NAME, This, San Francisco, 1986

SIGNAGE, Roof, New York City, 1987

CANDOR, O Books, Berkeley, 1990

LIFE, Casement Books, Salisbury CT, 1990

(an untitled book collaboration with M. M. Winterford), Zasterle Press,

Tenerife, Canary Islands, 1994

RAVE, Roof, New York City, 1994

PANTHER, Other Publications, Cold Spring NY, 1995

Sei Shonagon, hole books, Ottawa, 1995

SERENITY, Other Publications, New York City, 2001



Against the over sized pillow  
on the down town side of town  
a couple of are doing  
the unspeakable.

**This will end despite myself in a book in which, without enthusiasm or passion, I will explain why there is not a single term used in linguistics to which I would assign any meaning whatsoever.  
Saussure in a letter to Meillet, 1894**



Reminds me of those three or so years during which I wasn't writing at all but then when asked to give a reading I found that I was reading a long essay about not writing that I'd written in that period.

There's no getting away from some people once they've armed themselves with a pen. Even (especially?) when that person is one's self ("self").

And yes. Writing is not the place to expect (expect) to find meaning. But it is (it is) a good place to go looking for it.

//////symbols: laminar//////



In physics laminar flow is (perhaps among other things) a stasis against the surface of things greater than that away from them. For example in heat transfer there is a sluggishness of water molecules against the inner surface of a pipe that inhibits the transfer of the water's temperature to whatever is on the outside of the pipe. In much the same way I think symbols inhibit the transfer of information to the world. We are mistaken if we think our fascination with them is for what they do. What fascinates is their relative stability (immovability) in relation to other elements of the world. It is because they slow down (because they are slow) that we notice them and think them peculiar or special or powerful.

(Myth most slow of all.)

**Zen: an enormous praxis destined to halt language.**



Actually this is very closely true to some things I once struggled with. My Korean zen teacher Seung Sahn used to say “Thinking not bad. Attachment to thinking bad. Very very baaaaad!” And with a little humor at that. In my case my attachment to language was so strong that I feared for the life of me as an author. Once the attachments are loosed the writing can flow free.



Zen is an enormous praxis. In fact it's one of the only things that's designed to be nothing else. It's the practice of compassion finally. In the process it might be the practice of silence or of a certain elegance or of posture or of actions or of verbal contacts or of nothing (*nothing* is just thinking) or of everything (*everything* is just thinking).

But zen is without preference. Zen is without preferences. It does not aim to halt language. It is not destined to do so.

What it does do is let attachments go (away). And our attachments to language are among our most perennial and unassuageable. It is through languages that we attach to what we think. And we do think that we think what we think. And so we're pretty much most of the time attached to it. Zen is all about letting go.

That's why I write. (One of those reasons.) That's one of those reasons why (seemingly why) this writing is getting written.

**In what sense does Saussure's near silence for thirty years resemble the death by despair attributed to Homer?**



I don't know much about Saussure's silence. As far as the making of any books was concerned his pen was always silent. Steve McCaffery gave a talk at the Poetry Project a bunch of years ago about Saussure's later researches. Evidently Saussure was finding veins of meaning at levels within texts where we do not usually look for it. Language's (or at any rate the text's) subconscious. Perhaps that's where the collective unconscious really inscribes itself.

Homer's despair (if that's what it was) came from seeing into things at considerable depth and at great length. At that level and by virtue of that dogged persistence suffering becomes very big and very clear. But one more step (to the other side of the same page as it were) brings the wise seer into the place where suffering can be said to cease (to have cessations). In that place we die of life.

**A word can disfigure what is otherwise represented.  
AD**



But how otherwise?

Words do disfigure. And refigure. And unfigure. And configure. And prefigure. And post. And so on. That's (some of) what words do.

I think really that this is an admonition more than anything else. Be careful. Be very (very) careful. Words like tools can unexpectedly and even unintentionally wound. They can wound that which they're about (about). And they can wound (indelibly) any number of recipients.

Mind (your) words.

**Because words are not necessary to zen, a poet practicing zen might have to stop writing.  
AD**



No.

Not necessary.

Is ok.

**Literature is an action within a community. Therefore never obscene.**  
**AD**



On September 11<sup>th</sup> US passenger planes were used to attack buildings symbolic of US power. Today (October 9<sup>th</sup>) US bombs were used to attack positions within Afghanistan. Actions that deny community. Actions that transgress community. These are always obscene.

I do believe that literature is always an action within (of?) a community. Perhaps this circumscribes its weakness relative to political discourse(s). But this too can be its strength. The sense in which the pen is (is) mightier than the sword.

Literature creates community.