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Language Writing

"Why go on reading Language poetry?" asks Stephen Fredman in 1983, suggesting a cultural finality after its first decade of formulation.¹ Similarly, Marjorie Perloff, a long-time ardent supporter of Language writing, has more recently questioned its currency. Quoting short passages from writers as diverse as Bruce Andrews, Diane Ward, and Peter Inman, she assesses them collectively as written in "a period style" sharing "specific features."² This chapter tries to answer these questions toward its end but opens with a different interrogation – "What is Language writing?" – and in deference to the aforementioned two skeptical claims, it is written partly in the present and partly in past tenses. (The switch will be deliberately indiscriminate.) I have further chosen to address the topic of "Language writing" rather than "Language poetry" as the more accurate term for a key feature in this movement's formulation, which involved not only a consensual denial of the difference between poetry and theory, but also a deliberate erosion of the fixed partitions between prose and poetic genres.

By the late 1970s, the term Language (or L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E) Poetry came to identify a loose collection of writers whose different approaches to style and form must be admitted, but whose unanimity condensed around a shared belief that language was not a neutral conduit for ideas or feelings but an active agent (through its applications and manifestations) in the social construction of being and the real. A common tenet united them: the need to de-idealize language, revisit the very notion of communication by rethinking the relation of the latter to textual materiality and production, and envision new political possibilities for poetry. This chapter focuses on the foundational theorizations of this writing, and pays less attention (for reasons made clear later) to the vast range of poetic output.

Language writing did not originate by way of a collective manifesto; what is certain, however, is that during the 1970s, what subsequently became labeled "Language" poems began to appear and disseminate through an autonomous infrastructure of small magazines, talk series, workshops,

residencies, and readings (primarily, but not entirely, within the Bay Area).³ The Tasahara Bakery, the Grand Piano, 80 Langton Street (San Francisco), Saint Marks Poetry Project, The Ear Inn (New York), and A Space (Toronto) were some of the venues, and *Doones*, *This*, *Tottels*, *Hills*, *Big Deal*, *Toothpick*, *100 Posters*, and *Miam* were a few of the magazines.

Many of the early attempts to formulate an alternative to the "New American Poetry" (embalmed inside the pages of Donald Allen's historic 1960 anthology) emerged through the latter half of the 1970s from epistolary correspondence, a vibrant series of public talks and discussion groups, and arguments over drinks in bars and restaurants, which supplemented printed material and helped foster community.⁴ The correspondence among three foundational theorists (Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman) at the time reveals a mutual searching for conceptual frameworks in contemporary continental theory and especially Structuralism.⁵ A lone declaration registers its anecdotal origin: the now-legendary 1971 words of poet Robert Grenier "I HATE SPEECH," which appeared in the first issue of Barrett Watten's magazine *This*.⁶ Another important inaugural document is Silliman's short "Preface and Notes" to "The Dwelling Place: 9 Poets," which appeared in the ethnopoetics journal *Alcheringa*.⁷ Significantly Silliman does not announce the launch of any new movement in 1975 but rather a *tendency* among diverse young writers: "Called variously 'language centered,' 'minimal,' 'non-referential formalism,' 'diminished referentiality,' 'structuralist.' Not a *group* but a *tendency*."⁸ Silliman's notes make clear that the "tendency" is to fracture a poetry of diminished rather than non-reference. As he correctly points out, words cannot be non-referential owing to the fact that words always "originate in interactions with the world."⁹ Prototypical Language writing thus sought a reduction of the referential vector, not its absolute negation. Silliman situates this tendency in a rich genealogy that embraces then-current continental and Marxist theory (Lacan, Barthes, Rossi-Landi, Voloshinov, Bakhtin, Derrida), the European avant-garde (the Russian Futurists and concrete poetry), senior American poets (Robert Creeley and Larry Eigner), and preliterate, oral cultures. It is here too that public mention is first made of the Balinese Ramayana Monkey Chant called *Ketjak*, a name that Silliman will later adopt for the earliest published example of what he termed the "New Sentence."¹⁰

In this respect Silliman's groundbreaking work on the social origins of referentiality outlined in his 1980 essay, "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World," is a salient, recuperative move back to a language of the gestural and linguistically "meaningless" identified with poetical economies before techno-capitalism's hegemonic triumph.¹¹ Silliman cites a translation of a sweatbath poem of the North American Fox tribe

and the early-sixteenth-century poet John Skelton as marking the diachronic and cultural diversity of the gestural in poetry. The Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara provides another convenient precedent here in his own ethnographic researches into African languages. (It was sometimes Tzara's practice to mix authentic African song into his so-called *chants nègre* that he performed alongside sound poems at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich.) Silliman, however, stands somewhat alone in this cultural mapping, and the direction taken in subsequent Language theory neither embraces nor develops the central tenet of ethnopoetics (announced in 1970 in *Alcheringa's* first issue): to stage and demonstrate the surprising affinities within translated tribal poetics to twentieth-century avant-garde practices. The subsequent foundational theorizing of Language writing largely marks a departure from ethnopoetic affinities (grammatical distortion, nonsense, the powerful materiality of words, minimalist texts), to formal linguistic disruption (including many of the pre-capitalist so-called gestural elements), to a broadly based Marxist critique of language. Form thus becomes politicized, and a critico-political stance emerges as the mandatory designator of a necessary and urgent poetics.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E became the name of a movement more by accident than merit. Launched in 1978 under the joint editorship of Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, the journal of that name found itself propelled into academic debate in 1984 with an abridged version, *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, which facilitated the rapid domestication of Language writing inside the academy.¹² After its publication, difficult texts became teachable, and "Language Poetry" found itself added to the curriculum of contemporary and twentieth-century American poetry. Here it may prove useful to revisit its initial manifestation. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E was set up to be a journal not of primary creative texts but theoretical conjectures and statements *about* poems and poetics. Short jottings were favored over extended theoretical proclamations moving toward a forum of shared ideas (the editors' call to readers to supply a list of nonpoetic texts that they have found influential or significant being one example).¹³ Of equal importance to understanding and encountering the first three decades of Language writing is the journal *Poetics*, coedited by Lyn Hejninian and Barrett Watten from 1981 to 1999, which assumes the role of critical mouthpiece after the termination of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E in 1981.

The theoretical demarcations of Language writing were further consolidated in the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s with the publication of essay collections and monographs by major practitioners, including Andrews, Bernstein, Hejninian, McCaffery, Perelman, Silliman, and Watten, as well as important critical volumes on these same writers.¹⁴ Starting in

the mid-1980s, Language writing also gathered momentum and academic endorsement from established and emergent scholars like Lee Bartlett, George Hartley, Jerome McGann, and Marjorie Perloff.¹⁵ And from 1986 to 1994, a trio of important anthologies appeared that served both to gather tendencies and expand the reader base: *In the American Tree*, edited by Silliman (1986), *"Language" Poetries*, edited by Douglas Messerli (1987), and *The Art of Practice: Forty-Five Contemporary Poets*, edited by Dennis Barone and Peter Ganick (1994).¹⁶

The full impact of the anthologies is uncertain; however, in the case of *In the American Tree*, I believe one effect is. What initially appeared as a recurring critique of late capitalist discourse among a range of writers finally emerged as an identifiable movement constructed along stridently national lines. Silliman's is a hugely important (and epoch-defining) anthology, yet it excluded British and Canadian writers "for reasons of space and clarity."¹⁷ What "clarity" means here is left unexplained, but the gesture in these exclusions (and in the allusion to William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain* in the title) is clear: Silliman is interested in a national construction via an American narrative and debate. Whether *In the American Tree* consolidates a facet of American cultural history or amputates an international potential (a world as opposed to a national poetic revolution) remains a moot point. Certainly, parallel manifestations of linguistic critiques, poems of similar stylistic and formal affinities, were being produced in the United Kingdom and Canada at this time, but in England no substantial ancillary theorizing occurs. British poet Allen Fisher's long poem *Place* is in part a bold revisioning of Charles Olson's poetics of place via a theory of quantum communication. The foregrounding of the material nature of the sign was probably carried to its extreme in the destructive writings of Bob Cobbing and others in his London-based Writer's Forum, and to its most erudite and obscure in the poetry of J. H. Prynne. Veronica Forrest-Thomson introduced the radical work of the Parisian Tel Quel group into contemporary poetic parlance, but her tragic death in 1975 prevented the possibility of any truly trans-Atlantic alliance.¹⁸ It is left to further research whether an international Language writing movement was or still is tenable.

In the United States, Language writing quickly revealed its oppositional stance to several major literary proclivities: 1) the consecration of the individual voice (linguistically marked by the axis of the "I" understood as a marker of self-plenitude, "truth," and "sincerity") in the ego-chamber of the confessional lyric stance that had been entrenched via the poetry of Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Louise Glück, and Jorie Graham in a multiplicity of MFA programs and those poems that populate the pages of such venues as the *American Poetry Review* and the *The New Yorker*; 2)

the ego-cosmological syntax that Robert Duncan expounded in "Towards an Open Universe" and the processual, physiological, and predominantly speech-based poetics grounded on organic models of the poem that had gained momentum through the 1920s via the early Williams, to culminate in Olson's valorization of breath and syllable in his important 1950 pamphlet "Projective Verse" and Denise Levertov's theorizing of the poem as organic form;¹⁹ and 3) the so-called poetry of accommodation: Jerome McGann invoked the term to describe a prevailing poetry of social disaffection that failed to advance into an area of meaningful linguistic critique. All of these tendencies assumed unquestioningly a governing instrumental logic whereby the poem could appear to function as the unproblematic, unmediated transmission of experience or emotion from the writer to the reader.²⁰ Language writing resisted these familiar poetic tendencies with texts based on nonorganic matrices, and a socio-poetics that confronted the inescapable mediation of all discursive production of both self and experience. It is perhaps Ron Silliman more than any other Language writer who has emphasized this ineluctable mediation of the self through language: "The words are never our own. Rather, they are our own usages of a determinate coding passed down to us like all the other products of civilization, organized into a single, capitalist, world economy."²¹

British critic Geoff Ward is correct to claim that the work of Language writers proffers "a standing rebuke to the prevailing mediocrity of America's cultural output during the Reagan and Bush administrations."²² Language writing's primary engagements then are discursive and ideological (if the two are indeed separable): the broad fate of language under supply-side monopoly capitalism, where exchange and seriality order the governing logic, and an ideological horizon entrenches speech, sincerity, narrative, referentiality, and representation as the unquestionable desiderata of linguistic function. Its critical-political method is certainly not that of orthodox social protest (outrage at American imperial policy, for instance, the common rhetoric of defiance, verbal solidarity with the downtrodden, etc). Poems of emotionally charged disaffection enjoy a rich genealogy and ultimately resolve into a lyric attenuation that at its base seeks to clarify a single subject position.

Without doubt the most vexed issue among practitioners in the first decade of Language writing is that of referentiality (understood as a socio-historical outcome of reference) and narrative (held to be the dominant literary paradigm of the commodity-centered ideology of contemporary capitalism). The latter, understood as a destination outside linguistic constructions, commits language as such to the simple role of a conduit, a projectile carrier that "falls away" when the desired extralinguistic destination (plot) is reached. McCaffery and Silliman especially teased out these implications by way

of a broadly Marxist critique of narrative as unavoidably commoditizing linguistic signs as well as erasing the mode of the production within writing. Narrative reference was considered less a path out of language into a real or fictive world than an active pathology within the sociocultural sphere, remarking the quintessential commodity fetish. The critique of referentiality was forged against the backdrop of Vietnam and Watergate. (In Canada it was first against the historical tapestry of Canada's involvement with supplying napalm to aid in that war, then against the trauma of the "October Crisis" of 1970.)²³ This critique of referentiality is not inaugurated by Language theorists; it develops from misgivings articulated by an earlier generation of poets. In his 1966 poem, "Wichita Vortex Sutra," Allen Ginsberg claims accusingly that "The War is language" and worked in that poem to expose the mythic foundation of "common reference" that choked the products issuing as news and comment from the "language factory" of journalism.²⁴ Ginsberg's comments themselves echo early Dada sentiments around the insidious periplication of language and war. In March 1915, Hugo Kersten and Emil Szittyta, the two editors of the literary newspaper *Der Mistral*, launched a frontal attack, not on the military conflict of World War I itself, but on the linguistic structures of the bourgeois institutions – religion, law, politics, and the news industry – that collectively comprised a "grammar of war." Poems were included in the March issue that deliberately undermined grammatical and syntactic norms. (The choice is telling: there are calligrammes by Apollinaire and examples of Marinetti's *parole in libertà*, or words in freedom).²⁵

Two years after Silliman published "Preface and Notes" to "The Dwelling Place," the concept of "diminished reference" would drop away, and he would move toward a distinction between "non-referential" and "post-referential" writing in order to advocate the latter.²⁶ In a letter to McCaffery dated November 8, 1976, Silliman articulates a still unknown "post-referentiality" onto collective practice: "non-referentiality: this is simply the attempt to void commodity language by specific context, a negation: thesis-antithesis. what is needed is the *next* step: a future synthesis to a post-serial collective language, a language of the group not the series. I'm for post-referentiality, even tho I don't today really have a full grasp as yet as to what it might wld be."²⁷

One might ask where precisely is the class struggle located in Language writing, and we find the answer in the sociopolitical ramifications of readership: "[A Language-centered poem] ... is the first step (and only that) of the return of the poem to the people. It is a politicized poem not a 'political poem' (which is a counter-tendency occurring within the commodity fetish). It tells you these words are empty until you fill them with your presence,

reading them, being them."²⁸ The recognition of the reader function as an issue of ideological contestation rather than an unproblematically "given" structural coordinate within a semiotic system thus remains a primary insight that catalyzed the early primary Language texts of all its foundational practitioners.

Hejinian offers a definitive formulation of this recognition as the "open text" in her 1983 essay, "The Rejection of Closure": "The open text, by definition, is open to the world and particularly to the reader. It invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies."²⁹ The notion of the open text, with space left for productive intervention on the reader's part, developed through a pattern of Marxist thinking (rather than through either Umberto Eco's theories of the open work or Jaus's and Iser's theories of reader response).³⁰ In Hejinian's words, the open text "resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material and turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification."³¹ An emancipation was desired from the historically determined passivity of reading understood as the consumption of a commoditized language object. Andrews and Bernstein jointly call in their preface to *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* for "a repossession of the linguistic sign through close attention to, and active participation in, its production."³² This should not be construed as a broad call to neologism (although it does cast the transrational linguistic distortions and truncations of poets David Melnick and Peter Inman in a novel light), but rather a refusal to treat reading as a predominantly consumptive act.³³ Where its earlier generation questioned the ideology of predetermined form (concretized in Robert Creeley's well-known assertion that "form is merely an extension of content"), Language writing questions the sociology of predetermined methods of reading and insists on the fundamental politicality of the reader-writer relation.³⁴

Jochen Schulte-Sasse, in his introduction to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, explains the intervention into the sociopolitics of readership effected by the open text in a sentiment (if not a vocabulary) that allows us to situate Language writing within a directly classic (i.e., Bürgerian) genealogy of the avant-garde: "The avant-garde saw that the organic unity of the bourgeois institution of art left art impotent to intervene in social life, and thus developed a different concept of the work of art. Its concept of art sees a chance to reintegrate art into social praxis if artists would create unclosed, individual segments of art that open themselves to supplementary response."³⁵ If not an entire reintegration of "art into social praxis," Language writing creates works designed to integrate the reader into a semantically creative praxis. The *konstellationen* of Eugen Gomringer

(formulated in the late 1950s) offers an antecedent to this productive integration, either unknown to or at least not commented on by foundational Language theorists. In his 1968 preface to *The Book of Hours and Constellations*, titled "verse to constellation: aim & form of a new poetry," Gomringer writes: "the constellation is a system, it is also a playground with definite boundaries. the poet sets it all up. he designs the play-ground as a field-of-force & suggests its possible workings. the reader, the new reader, accepts in the spirit of play, then plays with it."³⁶ The stress, of course, falls on the ludic, not the political.

On the strategic point of readership McCaffery stands as a lone revisionist. His "Writing as a General Economy" attempts to theorize a poetics developed from the ideas of Georges Bataille (1897–1962), especially his theory of the two economies: a restricted economy of calculation, cautious investment, driven by profit, and a general economy of indifferent, profitless expenditure – an economy, I might add, that characterizes several pre-capitalist formations.³⁷ Bataille provided a useful way to think of poems as economies, rather than forms or structures, circulations of sound pulses, rhythmic materialities, and pressures. Bataille also opened a way to expand on Silliman's early call for a gestural poetics modeled on pre-capitalist patterns of culture and economy. McCaffery's theory inverts the model of production outlined by Silliman and attempts to revision the indeterminacies of the open "Language" texts not as sites for productive engagement (which McCaffery considered at that time a capitulation back to capitalist paradigms), but rather as a semantic locus in which to experience the risk of a loss of meaning. The reader, thereby, is neither returned to the role of a passive consumer of narrative and description, nor emancipated in productive engagement, but thrust into affect and then reflection.

The call to post-referentiality hardly met with unanimous assent. In a 1980 editorial note to *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Andrews and Bernstein appear keen to absent themselves from "The Politics of the Referent" and any consequential binding:

The tendencies in writing McCaffery is talking about under such headings as "language-centered" are as open to the entrapments of stylistic fixation as any other tendency in recent poetry.... In this context, the idea that writing could be stripped of reference is as troubling and confusing a view as the assumption that the primary function of words, one-on-one, to an already constituted world of "things." Rather, reference, like the body itself is a given dimension of language.³⁸

It is clear that the advancement of a precise revolution in poetics was not the governing mandate for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*; the desire was to offer ideas toward a wide range of alternative styles and forms.

The issue of referentiality and the referent did not sustain interest beyond the last half-decade of the 1970s, and through the 1980s the polymodal tended to dominate the majority of Language writing. Rather than abolishing traditional styles, it incorporates a multiplicity of them via discursive collage. As Bernstein notes, "There is a willingness to use, within the space of a text, a multiplicity of such different discourses [i.e., politics, autobiography, fiction, philosophy, common sense, song ...]"³⁹ For Bernstein at least, the Language *tendency* is an inclination to syncretic formations as opposed to absolute discursive constructions, to a re-territorialization and re-amalgamation of, for example, philosophical, personal, and political elements. Indeed, the range of stylistic modes in Language writing (readily sampled in the previously mentioned anthologies) reveals a multiplicity so stunning as to counter any claim to a unitary poetic. From the "Fired Reading" method of Alan Davies and Nick Piombino, to the New Sentence as practiced primarily by Hejinian, Watten, Silliman, and Carla Harryman to the rich thesaurus of "experiments" itemized by Bernadette Mayer, to the atavistic neo-zaum (or transrational) texts of Inman and homophonic translations of Melnick, to the mixed and intermedia performances of Andrews and Sally Silvers and the transcribed improvised utterances of Steve Benson, through the material ruptures of Susan Howe and the semantically unsettling early poems of Michael Palmer, it is impossible to tender a total or adequate assessment, let alone offer a clear definition. Certainly, they demonstrate that non- and post-referential aspirations did not win the day. In this respect Andrew Ross's 1989 interview with Andrews and Bernstein proves revealing. In it they offer a "definition" of Language writing as something that resists definition (unwittingly echoing Friedrich Schlegel's definition of Romanticism). The coeditorial *telos* of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* is contemporary eclectic, offering in its pages a "diverse body of radical, or radial eccentricities."⁴⁰ The refusal to support a post-referential writing, the resistance to an institutionalizing discourse, and the concomitant embrace of heterogeneity is one of the most important contributions of the Language legacy to contemporary literature. This centripetal dissemination rather than centrifugal condensation into *definiens* and *definiendum* stands in broad concurrence with Bakhtin's theory of diversity, that "heteroglossial" cultural topography that began to emerge in Anglophone regions in the 1960s.

Within this vortex, however, two commonalities are apparent among Language writers: a privileging of the material text over the representational function and textual opacity over transparency. Language poems have become notorious for their designed opacity and strategic unworkability within normative readerly expectations, for their indeterminate pronoun relations, catachresis, a preference for parataxis (goodbye John Milton!)

and non-syllogistic articulations (what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari term “disjunctive syntheses”) over grammatical and clausal subordination (hypotaxis), and extreme disjunction. Emancipated writing of this kind frequently becomes the *event* of writing and that way approximates the kind of intransitive signifying practice that Roland Barthes called for.⁴¹

In Silliman’s words, Language writing involves “taking a stance toward language, the activity of composition and reality, which will call forth strategies and structures that are both generative and unconcealing of their constructedness.”⁴² It is a stance shared by John Cage and Jackson Mac Low in their systematic chance compositions and by the majority of rule-constrained literature of Oulipo.⁴³ Language writing’s extreme disjunction is perhaps best seen in the early work of Andrews. The poems release a festive expenditure of phrases as social material free of narrative and representational imperatives. It is Andrews’s work that is most consonant with Bataille’s theory of sacrifice and general economy – a festive expenditure of signs. Indeed, it is his work that lends itself most cogently to a poetics of symbolic action.

Arguably the most significant formal innovation within Language writing is the New Sentence. Jointly conceived by Watten and Silliman (to be subsequently adopted by many Bay Area Language poets including Hejinian and Harryman), it is exclusively a production of the Bay Area poets. Watten’s testimonial in Part 7 of *The Grand Piano* allows us to date the precise birth of the New Sentence to June 1, 1974: “The next day – Saturday – Ron began *Ketjak*, a work to which we may continue to refer.”⁴⁴ Silliman’s essay “The New Sentence” outlines its pattern and primary significances. Admittedly inspired by structural linguistics, it proposes a radical reconception of the basic unit of poetry (the sentence instead of the word) and its spatial organization (the paragraph rather than the line or stanza).⁴⁵ But it is not just a matter of turning from traditional measures of poetry to those of prose. Repudiating the pattern of syllogistic logic, the New Sentence organizes sentences paratactically and without any clear relation to higher integrations.⁴⁶ “This is a sentence if it is an event,” claims Gertrude Stein in 1931, and Silliman’s formulations are certainly in concurrence with Stein’s “eventist” treatment of the sentence.⁴⁷ At the same time, the utilization of the New Sentence as a generative form whose structure remains transparent in order to expose the precise mode of textual production aligns it to the tradition of Russian Formalism and Silliman’s own investment in counter-fetishistic nonnarrative. But what exactly the New Sentence is remains a moot point between its two inventors. Where Silliman places it in a double historical tradition of the sentence as such and of the prose poem, Watten presents it as a cultural project, providing “an argument of othering ... in which objects

of dissociation are argued in from outside.”⁴⁸ Watten presents a convincing case for not situating the New Sentence within formal criteria and literary history, but rather within a cultural topology.

In retrospect, many of the more ambitious proclamations of Language writing savor of a rhetoric of self-empowerment: “Our analysis [is] of the capitalist order as a whole and of the place that alternative forms of writing and reading might occupy in its transformation. It is our sense that the project of poetry does not involve turning language into a commodity for consumption; instead, it involves repossessing the sign through close attention to, and active participation in, its production.”⁴⁹ Others appear intransigently absolute, such as the following strained synthesis of poetry, language, and economics: “A grammatical critique can be mobilized by presenting language as opaque and resistant to reinvestment. A language centered writing, for instance, and zero-semantic sound poetry, diminishes the profit rate and lowers investment drives just as productive need is increased.”⁵⁰

The style and tone, however, are understandable against the backdrop of the felt urgencies of the time. A rethinking of the possible relations of poetry to language, politics, and revolution through paradigms other than representation were sadly lacking before the theories of Language writing. It is beyond dispute that Language writing collectively initiated radical writing practices implemented through a series of strategic collapses, most pre-eminently those of the unitary subject, the singular writer, and the clear partition between genres.

NOTES

1. Stephen Fredman, *Poets' Prose: The Crisis in American Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 152.
2. Marjorie Perloff, “The Pleasures of Déjà Dit: Citation, Intertext and Ekphrasis in Recent Experimental Poetry,” in *The Consequence of Innovation: 21st Century Poetics*, ed. Craig Dworkin (New York: Roof Books, 2008), 255–300.
3. Much information on the San Francisco Bay Area scene from 1975 to 1980 can be gleaned from the ten-volume *Grand Piano: An Experiment in Collective Autobiography* (Detroit, MI: Mode A, 2006–2010).
4. Donald Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).
5. “Steve McCaffery, Ron Silliman & Charles Bernstein. Correspondence: May 1976–December 1977,” edited and chosen by Steve McCaffery in *Line. A Journal of Contemporary Writing and Its Modernist Sources* 5 (Spring 1985): 59–89.
6. Robert Grenier, “On Speech,” *This* 1 (Winter 1971), 86–7.
7. Ron Silliman, ed., “The Dwelling Place,” *Alcheringa* 2 (1975): 104–20.
8. *Ibid.*, 104.
9. *Ibid.*, 118.

10. Ron Silliman, *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1987).
11. Ibid.
12. Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, eds., *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984).
13. In issue No. 3, June 1978. For a full discussion of the implications of the book's impact, see Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), especially Chapter 2, "The Secret History of the Equals Sign," 45-102.
14. Important collections and monographs by Language writers include: Barrett Watten, *Total Syntax* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984); Bob Perelman, *Writing Talks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Charles Bernstein, *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984* (Los Angeles, CA: Sun and Moon Press, 1986); Steve McCaffery, *North of Intention: Critical Writings, 1973-1986* (New York: Roof Books, 1986); Bruce Andrews, *Paradise & Method: Poetics & Practice* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996); Perelman, *The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), and Lyn Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). For major examples of early volumes devoted to these writers, see the eighth issue of Rod Smith's magazine *Aerial*, devoted to the work of Barrett Watten (1995), followed by an issue of the Santa Cruz-based magazine *Quarry West on Ron Silliman and The Alphabet* (1998), followed in turn by *Aerial* 9, devoted to the work of Bruce Andrews (1999). All three were substantial volumes, with the Watten issue extending to more than 300 pages, the Andrews to a little short of the same figure (285), and the Silliman (in *Quarry West's* larger format) to 194 pages.
15. Marjorie Perloff, "The Word as Such: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poetry in the Eighties," *American Poetry Review* 13 (May/June 1984): 15-22; Lee Bartlett, "What Is Language Poetry?" *Critical Inquiry* 12.4 (Summer 1986): 741-52; Jerome McGann, "Contemporary Poetry, Alternate Routes" in *Politics and Poetic Value*, ed. Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 253-76; George Harley, *Textual Politics and the Language Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
16. Silliman, ed., *In the American Tree* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, University of Maine at Orono, 1986); Douglas Messerli, ed., *"Language" Poetics: An Anthology* (New York: New Directions, 1987); Dennis Barone and Peter Ganick, eds., *The Art of Practice: Forty-Five Contemporary Poets* (Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press 1994).
17. Silliman, *In the American Tree*, xx.
18. It is worth mentioning, however, that Forrest-Thomson's *Poetic Artifice: A Theory of Twentieth-Century Poetry* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978) was seminal material for one major American Language text, Charles Bernstein's 1987 "Artifice and Absorption," collected in Bernstein, *A Poetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
19. Robert Duncan, "Towards an Open Universe," in *A Selected Prose*, ed. Robert J. Berthoff (New York: New Directions, 1995); Denise Levertov, "Some Notes on Organic Form," *Poetry* 106.6 (September, 1965): 420-25; Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).

20. McGann, "Contemporary Poetry, Alternate Routes."
21. Ron Silliman, "IF BY 'WRITING' WE MEAN LITERATURE (if by 'literature' we mean poetry (if ...))..." in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, 167.
22. Geoff Ward, *Language Poetry and the Avant-garde* (British Association for American Studies. Keele: University of Keele, 1993), 16.
23. The October Crisis involved the twin kidnappings of James Cross (British diplomat) and Pierre Laporte (Québec cabinet minister) by the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ). Laporte was later murdered, and fears of terrorist activities precipitated the then-Prime Minister Pierre Eliot Trudeau to reinvoke the highly controversial 1914 War Measures Act.
24. Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems 1947-1997* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 401.
25. For full details, see Matthew S. Witkovsky, "Chronology" in *Dada: Zurich, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, DC: Distributed Art Publishers, 2005).
26. Silliman, "For Open Letter," in *Open Letter* 3.7 (Summer 1977): 89-93.
27. "Steve McCaffery, Ron Silliman & Charles Bernstein Correspondence: May 1976-December 1977," in *Line* 5 (Spring, 1985): 59-89, 65.
28. Silliman, "For Open Letter," 93.
29. Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 43.
30. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, tr. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
31. Hejinian, *The Language of Inquiry*, 43.
32. Andrews and Bernstein, *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, x.
33. David Melnick in his *PCOET* (San Francisco: G.A.W.K., 1975) and Peter Inman in *Ocker* (Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 1982) both resuscitate the Russian avant-gardist practice of *zaum* or transrational language.
34. Olson quotes the remark *Collected Prose*, 138.
35. Jochen Schulte-Sasse, "Foreword: Theory of Modernism versus Theory of the Avant-Garde," in Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. Michael Shaw (1974; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxxix.
36. Eugen Gomringer, *The Book of Hours and Constellations. Poems by Eugen Gomringer presented by Jerome Rothenberg* (New York: Something Else Press, 1968), xxx. Gomringer's poems in this fashion first appeared through German imprints in 1960.
37. McCaffery, "Writing as a General Economy" in *Artifice and Indeterminacy: An Anthology of New Poetics*, ed. Christopher Beach (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 201-21.
38. *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* Supplement Number One (June 1980), cover. In this repudiation of the referential model, Language writing inherits a predecessor earlier than Stein and the Russian Futurists. It is Swinburne who first unleashes a tsunami of linguistic material on the *res-verba* détante, and it is only the melopoeic violence and propensity to anaphora in his poetry that occludes this genealogy.
39. Bernstein, Introduction to "A Language Sampler," *Paris Review* 86 (Fall 1982), 75.
40. Interview with Andrew Ross in Ross ed., "Reinventing Community: A Symposium on/with Language Poets," *Minnesota Review* 32 (1989): 27-50, 28.