AT THE FLASH & AT THE BACI

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Presented as part of the requirement for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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South Australia

August 2003
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abstract

The thesis consists principally of a book-length manuscript of poems, called *At The Flash & At The Baci*. An exegetical essay forms the second part of the thesis. The prospective book's title derives from the purely incidental fact that most of the poems were worked on at those establishments (the Flash and the Baci) and some were begun and even finished there. The collection does not pursue any particular theme. It is organized chronologically and divided into three parts: the middle, dividing section is a group of three poems, elegies that mourn or reflect upon the death of poet John Forbes and my responses to it and to him. These poems differ from the rest of the collection in being less concerned with 'everyday life' and in being more expressly 'focused'. The third group are labeled 'newer poems' and include a group begun in Rome—not, then, the 'everyday' of Adelaide.

The exegetical essay is written as a poem. This was done as a way of achieving a tone not at variance with the poetry itself, but also for the access it gives to a more mobile, elliptical approach to the poems and my memory of their motivations and connections. The exegesis does not explain the poem's 'meanings' to any great extent—these, I think, are fairly clear—but considers the poems' relation to each other and to poems written in the past. In fact it casts the poems as developments of past strategies, as alternatives to those strategies: variants, continuations, alternatives, changes of tack.
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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signature

date   20/19/03
These poems were mostly conceived & written, & all of them considerably worked on, in the mornings before work or in workday lunchbreaks - at the two establishments which lend the collection its name, The Flash & The Baci, coffee shops in Hindley Street, downtown Adelaide.

My presence certainly hasn't made these places more glamorous - though they have some glamour of their own. I would like to express my gratitude to the people who have worked behind their counters over the years.

The drawings before & after the poem 'Rumori' are by the author. Those illustrating the 'Three poems for John Forbes' are a photocopy of a newspaper reproduction of Philip Guston's painting 'Smoking, 1'; a photograph by Weegee, 'Girls watching movie, Palace Theater', c. 1943; and a photograph, 'Muddy Waters Relaing Between Gigs', by Val Wilmer.

acknowledgements

Hometown, A Picture, Coffee & John Forbes Poem, and A Prospect of the Young KB appeared first in HEAT; News of the Day in Overland Giles Auty Furioso (illustrated) was shown at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia Walk on the Wild Side in Overland and in Untimely Meditations Walking Down from the Star Grocery in Untimely Meditations Hometown & Walking Down from the Star Grocery also appeared in the UK in Shearsman To Generalize in The Famous Reporter Double Portrait and Horizon in JACKET Hi, John & Cat-bag poem in Southerly Catching Up With Kurt Brereton in Newcastle Prize Anthology Long Distance Information in UTS Review Amaze Your Friends in Famous Reporter & Tin Fish (USA) American Friends in Slope Traffic Noises in Sidewalk Tiepolo in Shampoo (USA)
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notes
Driving into work while
Cath reads about driving around London
& wondering when will I next write a poem
or whether to just work on *Gwendolyn*
a poem of John’s & mine & maybe I should
it *is* half mine, I drop Cath off, do a
U-turn & scoot down to the EAF, park, go inside
check the mail empty my bag a little
lock up again & set off for the coffee shop
where I’ll read or write a poem or a
review - or work on *Gwendolyn*, I suppose, is
a possibility . . . I feel sophisticated to be
wearing my long black coat - which, however,
does not really make me look
like my idea of a New Yorker: it’s a little
beaten & more groovy than suave
& doesn’t reflect wealth, & the thought of
my poverty - when I ask for coffee - makes
me amused & reflective. “The heater’s on,”
I say to the waitress. And she says “Yes.
You like?” “It’s Great!” I say. It is.
I ask could I have some banana cake please
with such diffidence she is surprised and
I realize the thoughts about my poverty
& entitlements have affected my emotions a little.
She says I can have some & goes off to get it.

Which is where the poem could end. It could all
be about the small things in life - how I
do get coffee etc.

Cath thought Laurie’s
latest poem could be broken up into lots of
smaller ones, or broken with numbers, asterisks -
so you’d know when to stop re-read & have a think (etcetera).
Not that she wanted little poems, of shape & mild
flick-of-the-wrist closure.

This waitress has served me coffee
for over ten years now. She used to work at the *Flash Café*
- actually called *Flash Gelateria* - but known to most as just
'The Flash' - but they changed hands finally & she came down here where this new place opened. Whose name I don't even know - where I've been coming nearly a year now. What is it called? *Baci* - I look out the window find the sign. *The Baci* is big & airy - you can stay all day I imagine. The view is very Richard Estes - in a busy kind of way - which I think recommends it. Though to whom does it recommend it? No one I know, to speak to, daily knows Richard Estes' paintings. Except Paul, & Richard at a guess - Richard would & Paul would like the aesthetic though not, probably, the art - my only Ruscha friend, Paul - "if I may so term his aesthetic". (Ha Ha.) Though who am I on daily speaking terms with? Cath - & Laurie & Pam & John Forbes & John Jenkins - in my mind. Realier I guess than talking to Frank O'Hara or Tony Towle - whose speaking voice I have no idea of - probably silent &, alternatively, garrulous. I imagine him mostly staring plumply out a picture window - floor to ceiling - is that 'picture'? - hands in pockets, shirt untucked slightly saying something rhapsodic & complaining. It's dark outside & raining. Hullo, Tony. There, I did it. Now I realize I am beginning to talk like him. Which amuses me - though talking like him is not my purpose. What is my purpose in life? the joke answer & the serious, & why am I not up to either or both? Because that's life. One is to fail exemplarily. "We are gathered here today ladies & gentlemements ..." - SPLASH - Somebody has fallen off the pier. The Fellini figure pauses briefly & they carry on - it was Malcolm Lowry, the outsider. He fell off. Not me - I'm in the Richard Estes painting in the middle of Adelaide, that only I know about, going, tonight, to the Post-West opening, that everybody knows about. Their shows are so frequent & the gallery so small I think the artists have them just to drink & natter every fortnight. Though tonight the art promises to be good, or not hurtful, maybe in fact alright.

* 

When I get there Richard is sitting against the wall with Suzie. Paul is hanging about the door, drink in hand. He does know Richard Estes I am relieved to find out & I talk to all the artists - Aldo & Shaun, & Louise
shows up & later Michael & Mary. Shaun’s bought my book. We discuss Raymond Roussel, Micky Allan’s photographs, Harry Mathews, Perec, Svevo, Jr Walker & Wilson Pickett, employment

* 

What matters? What is important to say?

From reading all morning I can manage a series of assertions - or I feel that way - I can remember none, right now except: “Daniel Buren’s art - (followed by some blunt denial of his importance)” But I always knew that.

Walking into town to deliver an article to the 
Advertiser feeling deliciously alone - & modern, the way John Tranter feels when he cleans the pool, but actually for the Tranter/Benjamin reason : Paris, the streets, arcades, the winter light & clouds, the suggestion of rain another article done, anonymous, but it will appear above my name but I feel anonymous - I see Tubby Justice across the street, waiting. I wave. She waves, & disappears hurries off, ahead. I smile & she reappears & we say hullo. My friends are like ghosts in Adelaide. What is real here? The only intelligent people I know who read The Advertiser
buy it for the TV guide & movies & I think movies are crap. That’s about it for my relation to an audience.

Still, it helped me feel modern that day crossing the road. I could just as easily have written a poem - & I’d’ve felt okay in that light, in that atmosphere, in that coat, in that cold, amongst the early morning crowd, in the Central Business District though strangely, I’d’ve felt less a public person - more crestfallen as Tubby disappeared, scarcely assuaged when she reappeared can "assuaged" float about free like that? can only hurt be assuaged? or something analogous?

Adelaide looked so Kertész at that moment Life could make you weep It would given time, but we move so quickly - it will, in time, maybe. Time now to look for John Forbes to read to calm down : I can't find my Strange Days Ahead (Michael Brownstein) a much liked book to check from the cover how to spell Kertész & get it right I am mad - but it must be somewhere I sometimes imagine an open letter to Peter Schjeldahl but there is so much I admire that he doesn't like (e.g., Brownstein)
though I admire him -

would that be a basis on which to write?

So much of what

I write is an open letter to someone: Laurie, Pam

or is meant

to be read aloud by my collected peers a small society

that doesn’t exist, unfortunately, around a table

like the Royal Society

meeting somewhere

- instead, like Tubby,

they go their own way

each isolated, with their own projects,

own worries, own apostrophized thoughts / complaints to / versions

of things

as do I.

It is not Kertész anyway

on Brownstein’s book. It’s Sander. I did mean Kertész. On the streets

of Adelaide does anyone resemble the portraits of Sander? Some. But

who stands still that long? Not me.

Here are the newer John Forbes poems, in the later pages

looking for a good first line:

here’s one with Spencer Tracy -

though I see it says “Spent tracer

flecks Baghdad’s sky”

- I’m going blind -

& there’s the one for me “Frank O’Hara

never went skating

but he liked to dance.”

If O’Hara taught us timing like the poem says,

I wish I’d paid attention.

Did I learn anything from him?

it has worn off with this moving around.
Walk On The Wild Side

Tomorrow: shop, bank, wash hair.
Gym
fix salad
maybe put prices
on the new books arrived at
the E.A.F.
I guess read the paper
have coffee. An eventful day? There
are new poems to work on at last
- I left these at the E.A.F., tonight -
there are poems of Miriel’s to look over,
dinner at Cath’s.
Anyway,

now
I take Little Walter off
and put on
Lou Reed - *Walk on the Wild Side* -
not a judgement:
I will put
Little Walter on
a lot more times
in my life.
Lou is sweet
... and I read the poems of James
Schuyler, the one about Auden, the one
about

*Dining Out with Doug and Frank.*
Better than sweet.
I mean, I love Lou -
but this is something else.

- Time goes by.
I put the record back to the first track. -
Actually, Lou reads some of these guys.
I wonder if he reads Jimmy Schuyler.
Or does he only read
the Burroughs / Warhol
connection?
Probably not. But probably
he had some one-liner

summation

of the

New York 'School' -

that let him off

the hook.

I wouldn't

have him

be different.

- Time passes. -

Well,

a great poet!

I listen

to Walk on the

Wild Side again.

Sleep.
Walking down from the *Star Grocery* from the far side of Morphett Street I saw the lion on top of the Lion Building. The first time I have noticed it, in quite a while.

Its scale is increasingly and loveably inappropriate to North Terrace, as it modernizes and the lion seems small, earnest, and straightforward. And the sky looks great beyond it.

I have chocolate frogs for Becky and Julie - for Martin I just casually stroll into the Park Lane Liquor Store and order a bottle of Strega - no, Martin is in Sydney ...

and that is a joke ... a famous poem by a favourite poet has something like that sequence - gifts bought for people and the stroll for the Strega purchase. My life is miles from that - I wear a battered leather jacket that if I thought about I'd be embarrassed
- when could I
last afford scotch for someone,
or go to a dinner laden with presents?

on the other hand - I am a poet.
Different stars shine down on me. I am on
the other side of the world.

Today I talked to Yvonne Rainer,
a New York artist. I said, Hullo,
I liked your film. And then I asked her

about the dedication to Ronald Bladen
- "in memoriam" - I didn’t know
that he was dead. She asked -

and I said I knew just the few
well known works
and had for years. She said

he was a painter originally, romantic,
expressionist.
There was going to be a retrospective.

I held Bladen’s work in only
an affectionate regard. I think I had
originally thought not much of it

- but the most usual photo of one,
*The Big X* (his sculpture) I had liked
and had liked to do drawings of,

sending it up, but liking it really.

At the far end of the photo
beyond the enormous X that filled
the two storey gallery, which had

classical pillars around it,
was a 19th century Roman sculpture -
Diana, say - some modest naked
nymph or woman, such a
strange contrast to the big minimal
sculpture. I used to like doing the
drawing, to bring out this contrast.
Once I put also two people in it
small, obviously walking and talking,
oblivious, to the sculpture and the statue.
Did I? or were they
always in the photo?

I write my first fan letter -
to a favourite poet in America. I had
intended to for years. I had intended to write
to others:
Joe Turner ... This week

I have been confused, and
acting strangely, my heart
in panic at its foolishness.

This -
is a day for decisions. I orientate myself
between a Frank O'Hara poem and the sculpture,
and this new information
about Ronald Bladen, and the little lion
on the “Lion” building

- in my leather jacket,
that looks, now that I recall it, like one
James Schuyler wears

in an early photograph
and that looks very ‘unlike’
him
- the bomber jacket
- on such a poet - as unlikely as it looks on me - but then, I am

hardly here I guess. I
know the lion is doomed, more or less,
but I will likely be gone before it. Is that

true? Well, the thought is to the point.
It is the Canutish aspect to the lion I love -
standing dark and silhouetted,

against the brilliant clouded sunsets -
that seem like history
Halogen Pam

I picture
Pam's halogen lamp sending
a warm cone of light down
onto her desk
- white -
& the warm, transparent brown brandy
- or what was the drink? - sits there -
- still,
exuding calm
& "just reward"
- merely by its light translucence -
undisturbed.
Pam is seated to right, a silhouette
down lower than the desk, somehow, as I picture it -
reading;
determinedly - & successfully - 'lost' -
after the irritation of walking home from work
into a drying, hair-blowing wind.

But she is fractiously lost, at best, her mind
coming back to sorrows, till the book succeeds -
in calming her to think them through,
or to leave them & follow the book, talk to Jane,
check the garden or whatever it is that
Pam does do - shower, change her clothes,

do some washing & read again then hang the washing
out & cook maybe & plan the night: to
read or write or watch television,
or go out: I think she & Jane
visit more - than I do. Though I expect
visits would be planned, arranged more in advance
& she would likely not have had the drink or done the chores
or would have done them at once if they were going out.
The idea of the casual visit - of dropping in - of even ringing,
to say "I'm coming over - alright?"
is a dream it seems, for me, though why is that?
I know no one, have no transport, never 'think'
to use the phone (have work, am tired . . .) - habits,
developed over time, to keep me from what I might do.
What kind of friend can I be - to my friends - really?

A disappointment. Imagining the drink,
standing, still, in a deep, 'martini' glass,
I try to imagine it as painted: but I imagine it more 'real'

than Vuillard, who would be intimate enough - more
detailed, less modish, than Margaret Preston, not
as brushy as a Monet flower piece - a still-life I saw in

a catalogue recently that was so evenly
& thickly inflected - all grey? all rose? like a Leon Kossoff -
is that right? - but far nicer: every stroke was

small & flicked & petal-shaped - pink (or grey) &
loaded with white & it was an instant of perception
of contentment heightened & raised & made live on -

but when I return to what I'm thinking about - the picture
of Pam -
it is inappropriate. I think briefly of Janet Fish (it
should be more clean-lined) whom I had not thought about much,
in years, though I have not forgotten - a picture
I saw of hers once made an impression though I am not sure
at this distance how great or how reasonable

that impression was. It was a picture of gin bottles -
up close - Gordons or Gilbeys - through which
light reflected & bounced. A kind of new realism - a
bit like early Susan Norrie - though less claustrophobic, less 
boringly pointed - though in the book I saw the Janet Fish in, 
the reason why I think of her again - it is surrounded 
by other artists doing similar things to Norrie. (So that 
kind of thing 
happened in America, too: overdetermined: the time required it 
though it didn’t need it (much) (if you ask my opinion -

anyway, I’m giving it). Walter Sickert, maybe, could paint it, 
though I want less gloom. Anyway - I was going to say - 
Richard made this joke about Janet Fish when I pointed to it 

how she was like [someone he named] only obviously on 
hallucinogens 
& alcoholic. It sounded pretty funny. Only, 
I didn’t get the art reference & so I don’t remember it.

It would be great to visit Pam now - 
for a few stiff drinks - just ghost in & 
sit, or stand - having them with her, 

looking out the window 

at the garden, or the harbour, modern, 
either at a restaurant, which is too noisy & ‘ends’ anyway, 
or at a loss for words (because I’m no conversationalist) 
& ghost out again, conversation done, or just 
sink to the floor drunk mildly (though thoroughly),
a visitation.

* 

as I sit in this coffee shop Pam, 
the next morning, about to send this letter, to you, 
& this poem - looking out
at the Richard Estes view - maybe
from this angle it is Ralph Goings -
I watch some twenty year old drunks
carousing a little as they cross the street
pathetically buoyed by their idea of themselves -
drunk still, at 10 in the morning,

pretending to hail a car, in whose way
they nearly get in crossing
& stagger down the road less heroic than they imagine

in pale t-shirts & baggy shorts & thongs, gormless.

I have behaved that way too, in all probability
though less through certainty in my uniform
or my enlistment in the order of good ol boys.

But certain about something, probably.
Best not to think about it. Conformism does
make people feel better: I like being a human too -

& the differences I congratulate myself on
don’t measure up to much.

You probably do remember
Richard Estes, Pam. Typically he paints
a photographic looking New Realism: a line of

new pickup trucks, parked out the back,
of The Texas ‘Bean’ Diner - all shiny & bleakly
meaningless - plenty of blue sky, lots of

chrome & glass & metallic paint-job & cement & macadam.

Reality looks better, though sometimes it is
aided by resembling these pictures.

Pam, you’ve tried
Adelaide - & it didn’t work for you. Otherwise
you could be here. Would we see each other much
living in the same city?
Sydney - could I live there & be happy?

After all, you can't spend all your time
looking at the harbour, listening to the frangipani leaves
slither & rattle, late at night, a drink in your hand

feeling cheerfully or melllowly existential. After all, do you?

Though there are other things to Sydney - the balmy,
milky, soft air on a cool summer day,
the radios buzzing with the races, that emanate quietly
from the pubs &

TABs, the old men in thongs, cigarettes in their
t-shirt sleeves,
so nicely seedy, the corner shops - but these things
are tiny patches:
of Annandale, & other bits - of 100 yards or less - of

footpath and aged picket fence, & the mixture of cars -
broken &
flash - the particular charm of which
is tolerance for everything else, or reads that way.

One facet of a tough city. Can you 'say' that?
And there's the poetry scene.
(One down here too.)

"Decoupage" - I guess that does mean putting
a lining inside something (a box you said) rather than
cutting little bits, from the top of a box, to make it

castellated - like a toy soldiers' fort - because you say
you are doing it
to some cupboards too. I have an image of you & Jane,
in triangular paper hats, dressed in primary colours

holding aloft small wooden half-swords,

bursting out of open cupboards (slightly castellated)
- a crowded, vertical composition - a little like
those de Chirico gladiators: they're usually
waving their swords about - with a bit of pillar handy
& one incongruous lounge chair,
a fallen bit of pediment - though my picture of you & Jane

is more ‘Stanley Spencer’ - though less crowded
& manic & airless. Though anyone who behaved like that - imagine stepping into your house & finding you & Jane yelling
& whooping

looking up, interrupted, while playing ‘pirates’!
At that thought I nearly spit nonexistent cake
from my mouth
- a noise like a motorbike starting - the little Greek man opposite

looks up. We often sit at tables near each other - he
with The Greek Herald, me with The Guardian. (Didn’t you know
I was English?)

Actually, Pam, you should move down here: I go outside -
& the air is exactly what I want from Sydney - so moist
it is almost cool, & softly bright - & there’s another thing

that is very Sydney - or Melbourne’s idea of Sydney - the great
doorsway to the T-shirt shop, filled with the fake jaws of a shark -
that you step through. When it first opened up

I saw a Japanese tourist
delightedly getting his wife to photograph him
standing in it. Unfortunately, the t-shirts they sell

are terrible - full of jokes about sharks - gross
views of Australian life, the sense of humour they appeal to
making one despair - of creeping Americanization
- like an old man.

On the other hand, they seem to be going out of business.

I write this
with a pencil - it’s my lunchbreak now (these last
seven lines). But the pencil drags too slow -
on this particular paper - so I stop here:
back at the same table
in the coffee shop.

I read instead.
Poem (Dynamic Sleeper)

Cath
- a dynamic sleeper -
makes a curved nougat line
under the doona, an
islamic-looking comma,
er her dark head at the end.

As I try to figure
what I am
Cath has moved

(I sit beside)

(& think of Laurie & Pam
why is it always them? &
when I think that I think: Dennis, John Forbes -
& Johnny J.
Anna Couani

Mary Christie
Bronwyn Platten
    Mill.
Becky Davis
    - a warrior tomorrow.

Thom Corcoran

Thinking: maybe I will write
a little like Mr Whalen

Shoot off a few opinions
All isolated from each other

Tho he is a Buddhist &
    the ideas
    hang together
Is man not naturally good, Mr Johnson?
No Madam, no more than a wolf!
And woman? No more so. This is worse than Swift (sotto voce says woman)

*Scenes of Life at the Capital*
(I am reading)

Margot is going to curate some Adelaide Postmodern for the regional galleries almost ten years post time

At the Flash I read the paper

At the Baci I think & stare

& write review of Anton.
& finish it home in bed.

a good idea I nearly have

goes wandering - to where in

the room?

I sit patiently

for its return A couple of times it

nearly comes goes off again

it is a good thought - I know - at

last it comes I write it down

Hmm.

Yesterday I was offered
8 “contact hours” - teaching -

at the art school - no preparation

Maybe they want me

to just shoot off.
random ideas -
   free associate
   from my 'collected' 'wisdom'
   (see the inverted commas there?)

the knowledge I have
   gained
in all my years of careful
   - carefree? -
   unemployment

underqualified

finally, not having done 'anything'
   has come to seem
   the ultimate wisdom?

Or it's the reviewing: he has opinions -
he can teach our students! (?)

Honours course on Popular Culture!
(hilarious)

To tune of "Yesterday" intones:
   Underdale

   do-doot do do do do do do do do

I remember when we (every week) drove through Thirroul
   I would sing Thigh rule thighruuule . . . it's
   a wonderful place
   to tune of
   NY NY

Probably an endlessly talking David Antin / is /
"what this place needs"
Well I'm not it

Most art ideas are so easy to poke your
   finger thru one really feels you've
   got to watch your 'lip' self
censorship

Most art fails as art : most craft succeeds as craft       (Maxim)

but that's its trip! that's
why we like it, or are interested

This is not the materialist or sociological view
 - tho I can talk that way, too -

but why not? at the bottom of the pyramid
is art school - most of the students don't become
artists - perfectly consonant with that
/ is / most artists don't hit the target
we admire it cause it's difficult -
or rare

imagine talking the other jargon : common sense,
deconstruction, & cultural studies
 "The Cultural Efficacy of Hey Dad"

I see Becky at work over the weekend : they won
the game (hockey) against
a team of toughies. She was
looking forward to it,
   a toughie herself

And now - months later (I'm
in bed again, writing this -
she is leaving : 4 years
in the job - the best person -
why didn't I get to know her?
  better? more?
I don’t want her to go -
why can’t she stay? She can’t
that’s all
- moving on;
    moving away

I remember when she first came:
"weren’t but ‘this’ high"

“Scenes of Life at the Capital”

now I am at the capital - Sydney -
attending to the last years
of my dad
    closing up the house
putting him on a plane, an emotional
time
    When he’s on the plane
I will phone Pam - till now
I have been so taken up with my father
cooking  talking  finalising accounts
care of the house  the redirecting of mail
I have not been able to call /
    anyone -
not with a view to meeting.

I’m glad I did : it’s been an
intense time.

I am in bed again - that will be the
principle of the poem  maybe -
“Poem written in bed”

in beds.

Is that the kind of poet
he is? - makes me sound
like Rochester, John Wilmot
a 17th century rake
alternatively, someone who almost never sleeps: 3 times to bed in so many months (I)
To Generalize

We sit at a table in The Baci,
an indoor table -
with a view of the tables outside, that may act
as a springboard,
    the false limb,
or 'pseudopod',
of a primitive one-cell animal,
    - tho to
what end -
    I compare our brains to:

We are not outdoors, no
But we are not quite inside
    either
- because of the windows -
    Tho should it rain
we are entirely inside, & glad
of it.
( In fact, it won't rain.
    And -
another fact - the fan is on 'too hard'

- but half an hour, what is
a lunch hour, that one can afford
to move,
or complain,
    unless one does it right away?

Yep?

Right? )

Take The Guardian, a newspaper:
open it - & you are transported,
far away.
    I sit, 'literally', in The Baci, the
literal one - others sit, or sit metaphorically,
as you do, Reader,
at metaphorical Bacis & think away too, aware,
as I am - for I 'generalize' -
of the larger world, the larger tides

& patterns that
pass through it,

& of their smallness
& the incidental nature

of their own lives
in relation to these tides,

even of the
invigoratingly

'human dimension'
this knowledge lends

- & its practical inutility.
You look outside, at the beautiful, slightly glaring light
that lands on Cacas' Chemists - & lands, too,
on whatever you're looking at - & consider the traffic,
the passersby,
the scope of the disasters in Africa - which is almost
Medieval - though modern because man-made -
& the scandals in the City - which are Hogarthian,
English, & 18th century, though modern, too -
& your own problems, which are contingent &
practical - how to rob a bank,
(whether to move from that fan) whether
to get another coffee - which you need
if it is metaphorical & this stuff
brings you down.

If it is not metaphorical
but a real one, you must have
a whole hour for your lunch hour -
mine has 30 minutes.
Now, did you take your newspaper? No?
Take mine, the Guardian. It is an eye,
a balloon on which you float, "Eighty Days" style,
around the world, never really touching down,
and also, of course, like a limb. You pick it up,
hit something with it,
perhaps a fly. And the world
is that li'l bit littler.
Or it is a steady state.
There are people bashing flies
all over the world - Hong Kong Herald here,
Bombay Tribune there, The Lima Truth, Montreal's
famous Examiner - killing perhaps the only fly
in that part of Canada - or did it get away. Who knows? The
waitress looks up -

what is that guy
swatting at,
at The 'Syrup & Muffin' Diner? He settles down.
Her eyes
return to the jars in front of her.

Your eye
takes in the window
& the scene outside - cars, pedestrians, Cacas the Chemist -
& is 'drawn' outside, & with it you
(with the assent of your brain - which in truth
according to some theories, is
an outgrowth, a sophistication, a development
of that optical organ) are drawn outside also.
You arrive together, your eye delighted,
your brain keeping up, & your 'self' rounding out their number,
invigorating to be up & doing - up &
'going', unfortunately, back to work -
in five more minutes.
A Picture

In Manet's great painting
_The Insomniacs_ the three readers

share the bed and white
bedspread, two with books held up before them

reading, a girl and her mother,
the other, a man, has books too, on the bedspread before him

but writes in a pad - _in pencil on a pad_ -
their story. His books are:

(black and white) - the poems of Towle -
and (pink and black ) - Violi.

The girl, who lies on her back, and holds her book -
a pumpkin yellow, with blue and red flashes in it - almost above her,
reads _Mallory and the Mystery Diary_. Her mother, beside her,
and who reads propped up -

though she has slid down a little
by the time

of the moment the picture is showing -

has a pile of books,
between herself and the girl - where their knees would be. These

are chiefly blue, and the book
she holds is green and black, _Troubled Waters_.

You can see
that the woman's face

is of a type much used
by the Impressionists, by Manet and Morisot, the features
delicate and a little sharp, rather than round.
But it is not Morisot's face

as painted by Manet, or
as in Morisot's

portrait of herself - or Monet's
last portrait, of his wife, as she lay dying -

though it has that imprecision, which makes it seem
'Vuillardy' -

it is Cath Kenneally,
wear a round-necked top

of the palest, scrambled-egg
yellow, thinking deeply -

yet attuned - at least slightly - to the girl,
her daughter, beside her, wearing lilac pyjamas.

Anna. Her face
is round, unlike her mother's, and her eyes are wide and dark -

where her mother's
are paler, green - and her hair

is long, and braided in one
single plait - pulled behind, in-

visible in the painting, which emphasizes (or only sees)
the subsequently rounded head. Her

mother's hair, by contrast,
is dark and a little red - and short and stylistically

a jarring note in Manet's painting - or might
perhaps be

if the painting's manner were sufficiently sharp,
detailed enough, to pick this up - but the brushwork

is very generalized and summary: who would notice?
Beside them I am more incongruous.
I have a watch on for one thing

though in the style I am proposing it could read as
anything (a bracelet?) - a smear of colour

at the wrist, the kind of detail that remains inexplicable -
but incidental even in a style this broad

and part of what ... well, what Manet saw -
and which makes it all convincing, as a gestalt. (A word

I guess Manet did not use: they talked though
of the decorative effect, the unity, and truth and sincerity -

"Nature through a temperament.") The watch hand
goes to my head

which is bent, writing, writing this.
I tell the girls, and we all look up: Anna smiles,

Cath looks 'poised' and I, because I've been concentrating,
have a frown disappearing. Hi.
Mostly Hindley Street

“He never spoke out” - Mathew Arnold

I think the same thing is happening again

Same waitress  same coffee  same street
   “A black coffee & a …
   .. Baclava.”
   “We’re out, I’m sorry.”
“Oh well,”
   - points to rumbaba -
   “The rumbaba.”

I take it to my table
   A big smile
   to the waitress
      who has brought me coffee
for 15 years now
   less some years
than others
   & look at the view
  the State
Bank
or some bank
   its name changing
   as it goes broke, gets bailed out, gets
sold off
   same building at any rate
floating there, handsome, in the grey rainy
sky
   above the small-town, 1930s, two-storey
street facades
on Hindley Street
   housing
pleasantly cruddy, & crass, dance clubs, drink
barns, & … Hellenic Travel … The Singing Restaurant!
one I never noticed
   must’ve opened in the last
week or so, or is it still being renovated
dismal tuneful future? & tuneless

If I feel happy again

isn't that good?

The radio's playing *Werewolf Of London*

how nice of them & I exit & stomp

confidently to work

Ar - ooo!

Well, I *will*.

For now, I look

out the window at all the clean surfaces - lovely

New Realism-style colours.

A terrible

art movement -

paintings mostly dull -

but it sure made reality look good for

looking a bit like it - as if the art movement

gave a certain style of scene

an ideal

to live up to

- to which,

    in certain conditions -

bit of 'down & out', bit

of nothing-going-on &

    the right light -

it could aspire

    Suck in that gut! straighten

that back!

    pull the collar up &

forward slightly,

    act casual!

    & my heart goes out.
I write to Laurie about Thomas Gray, & his short walks a man well before his time -

he’d’ve loved day time TV

Anyway, taking a short walk now I see Millie’s friend Steve lead singer with Free Moving Curtis a band named after a black male Barbie Doll that never sold in Australia: I think they saw an ad for it in a magazine & loved the name Steve was something of a martyr to day time TV himself when he lived at Westbury Street, as I remember I could come out at almost any time & there he’d be watching it late at night early in the morning day time TV he watched the worst of whatever was on:

Late at night he could find Day Time TV tho - unlike Thomas Gray -

(!) Steve was steeling himself, pondering, planning his future

I see him now making long strides down Hindley past Cacas Chemist’s, past Jerusalem Sheshkebab, & on tight black jeans, his hair reddish for a change -
pursuing the gig I guess

"He never spoke out."

Unlike Thomas Gray Steve speaks out regularly a band of humour & rage

At least, I hear they're okay.

Gray wrote that one poem, more or less, & seven others - nothing for years on end - saying 'it pays to keep busy' so he catalogued this, made a list of that, wrote in the margins of his books - taught nothing, wrote nothing, "he never spoke out," Arnold said - & went for short walks, as I told Laurie, collected seeds, grew some flowers in his rooms. He "kept himself to himself" - a phrase I always loved - Yes, he did that, too.

Of course it is a short walk to the EAF (where I will walk)

Will Steve hit the big time? the odds are against it More chance in poetry (!) - tho a smaller big time

I bought some chive seeds myself last week That I probably won't even get round to planting - tho Cath will.
I see I am
drawing
a comparison
& that it can’t make me
very happy.

The fortunes of a lunch hour -
one moment exhilarated

moments later - gloom

I guess these are the rocky rapids, & breakers,
Gray rode at the refectory
imagined slights
of the undergraduates of Cambridge

Prithee, what
does Mr Gray ‘do’?

Nothing.

Well, I hear he ‘Never Speaks Out’! (huh-ha-hah)

Letter from Laurie today

who says
Wasn’t Gray supposed to be a “bit of a prig”?

Well -

the impression he gave

& tho the biography hates Arnold’s

phrase

& attempts to defend Gray’s life on the graveyard
shift

staying ‘occupied’ collecting buds
noting the
weather

the arrival of the first grasshoppers
& emendations to various lexicons
— his fear of giving his first lecture:

& which he never gave —

still, ...

Yes

“prig” came to mind -

along with “insipid”

all to an almost hilarious degree applicable & the ‘life’ of quietism & depression - maybe (the only excuse) he couldn’t help it.

One can imagine

Samuel Johnson headbutting him

“Gray was dull sir.

Dull in public, dull in his closet, dull to himself.

He invented a new way of being dull -

and some people admired him for it.”

They never met.

Gray saw him in the street once, lumbering past, & said - “There goes Ursa Major.”

Prig & Drip

of the first order.

*

Tonight I talk on Modernism -

(Rock Hudson leans to Doris Day’s ear

“The arts shall march

in the very van ...”

“Oh, Rock! Cut it out!”)
- but tonight I do - post modernism, too!

* 

Very full today. The Baci
Which I remark
to the waitress
who looks almost relieved
when I say it

   Mill!
   who I will ring
when I get to Brisbane in a few weeks time.

Not John Stuart Mill
   - Millie Dickins.

Sitting here in the pub

Feeling like Whistler's Mother -

Waiting for Crab

   This always happens
tho tonight I don't mind
   (yet)

   (in another hour I'll be
dis-satisfied)
in black jeans,
   black-brown ('coal'?) jumper

   - Yves Saint-Laurent?
someone French -

   long black coat

In the corner seat
in the quiet 'nook'
writing
    drinkin', thinkin', writin', sittin'

a smile to this couple here
    that guy there

her
    A bit of a look
    at the Brute who approaches

the bar
    (large guy, officer, of the ‘Brute’ type -
enormous jaw, flat nose - seems
,actually, Mr Gentle

    I rock back & forth

like Whister’s mother, like Crabby’s mom
many times since,
    thinking
    When will he come?

Where is that boy?
    Actually I look a

little more like,
    probably,
    the companion to that painting, a

symphony in grey,
    the portrait of Carlyle -

or was it Ruskin? -
    some prim dork sitting stiffly

a little huffily in a chair in his greatcoat -

as I sit here. When in walks Crab ... !

The fat guy, outside
the tattoo shop,
holds a baby on his
chest - well, sitting on
the swell of his big black T-shirt.
A wife - girlfriend, sister, defacto sister-in-law - watches.
A *paterfamilias* act
on-the-cheap.

(We
don't like each other, it is true: he felt some need
to crowd me on the footpath one night,
to assert what he imagines
is superiority. Oh well,
who's perfect? Not me.
Not him.)

Has

my coffee shop shed custom -
in the change to smaller premises?
I want it to survive.

A little 'man' - that is, a kid
probably - cycles by. No hands.
A courier, seemingly rolling up
the cuffs of his gloves - looking remarkably like
the bad guy in *Doonesbury*. (Duke?
is that his name? the one with
the Vietnamese girl assistant?
who does scams?) Same large head,
same nose - & crash helmet &
goggles making the face look large & caricatured.

This takes
longer to describe than his
whipping past!

No Futurist !! -

just a moseyin' kind of guy.
(Hi, pard.)

Anyway, now he's gone - in fact
he appeared only briefly in the space
between a car & a truck -

("I did but see him
passing by - & thought
Doonesbury")

& I look at my short black
take a last taste
& return to work

I write a bit more
of the Richard Grayson review
add a word
I'd been waiting to appear in my memory
- since I started it
  some days ago -
Simone
rang just before I left for lunch
  from
another gallery
  to ask
Did the E.A.F.
have a hot glue gun?
  Nuh
  was the answer, finally -
when I had looked around -
  I wished her luck
her show 'opens' tonight.

Things, in art,
are always very last minute.
  or, like Michael's piece
(last minute, too?)
  they don't work
the day after the opening.
  So I ring them.
("Your show isn't working.")
I forgot to bring the Tranter interview

how he's *tired* of poetry

- about

Well, who isn’t?

tho when you’re writing it

you wouldn’t do anything else.

What I will do

‘tho’

is go back to work - in

just 10 minutes.

Dinner, tonight, with Cath

whom I always have dinner with

but dinner ‘out’

is our plan

& afterwards, Crab

- Crab’s band -

plays at the Exeter

& we might brave the

beergarden - enclosed

but, in winter, still cold -

the cigarette smoke

& all the rest, to hear them

drummer, trombone & a sax

sort of *Salvos-do-Fred Wellsely*

- and - *Swordfish Trombone*,

only piquant.

We’ll see.
News of the Day

*je est un autre* - Arthur Rimbaud

*I'se another, too!* - Lou Costello

Peter B. poet in Rome

w. “difficult second album” problems

- follow-up to first book, need
to be different etc

I spend the morning
giving (an) improvised talk
to high school students

on *The Nature of the E.A.F.*

& intro to a rather formalist, light,
&
decorative
artist

Naturally emphasising his
‘conceptual’ bits

My own difficult xth book

- difficult “whatever” book -

will be coming out soon,

one in which

I emphasize “the conceptual bits”, too

(Unshaven

& slightly boho looking)
I hope this

contradicts

interestingly

the 'aesthete' piece of my

talk

tho the students

as likely

- as correctly, too -

thought

What a dill.)

I don't

'know'

that my poems

say anything new

'conceptually'

well maybe they do

- Doomed to say

everything

twice -

(Twice! you should

be so lucky. Twice!)

Don't the Velvet Underground do?

(say things twice) ?

[& I quote]

"too-too, too much"

I ain't

never had

Too Much Fun
(( wistfully ))

A blues I sing, one way

or another

in every poem

: I've

had

'enough',

: I've

had a little -

but I ain't never had ... (etc)

#

This place

... the students here ...

Uni students this time

- mostly Japanese, all

talking to each other: it is

pleasantly

animated: every

word

emphasised easily

as they

read essay questions

out

quizzically

quotes from articles

etc

their beautiful voices

sophisticated

Optimistic
about their futures

Actually, I look around
& she is

Indian
Tho the ones in view
(male & female,
in pairs, at every
table)

are Asian.
(Busines Studies)

Then,
some mixed -

foreign & Australian.

Some all-Australian tables

all Australian -

you Jane?

*

(Sweet Jane.

*

doot doo ... )

doo-do doo-do,

*

Anyone who had a brain
you think that
they would use it

     Not me
     I'm going back to work in just a second!

( in
a 'sec'!)

* 

An essay
By a poet I

... well, 'like', but regard

apostate

Saying what I think

but wish she hadn't said

- So that's the Church I'm in! -

Explains

that it is not a

matter

of explaining yourself

I buy a pen from the Chinese lady

in the Chinese
shop
pale mauve
( She offered me black )

( Out of deference to my
Baudelairean demeanour )

*
Kids seem to have invaded the city again

- is it holiday time? -

the girls being cute, the guys being tough

ho hum How much

longer will I inhabit etcetera

*

Howard looks more glumly simian than ever

chump, chimp, & PM

Sumo wrestlers, soon, come to town

The Japanese student who lives with us

- Tomoko -

briefly interested

Nostalgia for home where uncle and brother are enthusiasts where the domestic noise of them,

watching it on television ... so much more familiar than the sound here -

where, however, Tomoko fits in

Foreigners, us.

I'm just an other myself
a line I think I have never read in the original

imagine having only read the original

Julia Kristeva's little head looks at me quizzically from the book on the table near where my coffee once was

- swept now to the kitchen by the cook a cheerful type, in high spirits:

I think it is his first day -

her head rests on her hand (&) in the light of what I've said is severe disapproving.

"Ideas come to us as the successors to griefs."

Remember how world weary we would feel adult, woozily melancholic,

iron entering the soul at 15?

when the Walker Brothers sang "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore"?

They sing it now on the coffeeshop radio

altering the whole key of my thought
I exit - at last, & briefly -
"considered"

A noble teenage sentiment
wrapped about me

which I never thought would
still fit

manfully I stride

thoughtless, modern

mildly sad a little blank unaggrieved
to the traffic light

where I think, straight against the light I cross

but wait
"I think continually of those who were truly great," someone said, but I like to think of things like the erased de Kooning, as considered by, say, Giles Auty.

I'm funny that way.
I'm funny like that.
That way I'm funny.
(Etc.)

- Sol Le Witt

I used to find amusing the idea of Donald Brook greeting Cy Twombly - like King George. *Scribble, scribble, scribble, eh Mr Twombly.*

But, as the artist's funny name has become more prominent the anecdote about Gibbon & George has been forgotten.

I can't do that any more

Without entering the realm of the private joke

- sometimes my favourite realm.

Are you with me? There's no point. I can't make sense much longer - Cochise?

- Who, me?
Yes. Take this nail & hit it into my forehead.
Firmly.
- You crazy, boss!

When

I feel like this I read the poems of Ron Padgett
- NO OFFENCE! -
I jump down, turn around
pick a bale of cotton

A little wine in the morning,
a little breakfast at night.

Where is the great
but absent art of our age, Giles Auty,
huh?

Take your hands out of your pocket when you
talk to me, son!

Crusty old fool
you sketchy cruiser

To the right of the critic - the picture is on the left,
large, smudged - to the right the wainscot drifts away
& becomes, after a passage of irresolute drawing,
sand - there stands the figure of Napoleon.
And he is in one helluva mood, as always. His
function is purely allegorical - as we must point out
to him. He represents the mood
of Mr Auty, on a relatively bad day - the tide of history,
the impoverished taste of most of this century. What
am I even doing in this allegory, he thinks -
Napoleon is drawn weakly, as if by
some amateur - say Victor Hugo,
inspired but easy, an idea, not a figure observed.
Though it's Napoleon alright, & stormy clouds of brushed ink
loom immediately right of him, ineptly complementing
the vague grey,
at left, of the erased de Kooning.

Further right -
what is this, a bad dream!? - some vacant fool like
Larry Rivers is fucking a chair. Must I be
associated with this? What is this called,

The Raft of the Medusa.

... for me the rot sets in sometime after Delacroix -
he had colour.  Ingres had "the probity of drawing".
But look at Chassériau ... & then
the Symbolists came along & it's been downhill
ever since.  That dill for instance - Puvis de
Chavannes!

& yet, could we have had Gauguin
without him?  I would prefer to.

           Just as I would
prefer the late Derain without the earlier -
though that is his whole point.  Why couldn't Bonnard
be stronger - couldn't he see where it led?
Hard to approve the politics of David,
or even Caravaggio - a lout probably - I can't see him
reading The Spectator.  Was there no one round
like me to listen to?  Or is that the point, not listening?
The whole thing becomes pretty terminally ill
with Duchamp.  Just look at the deleterious effects
his permission had on lesser talents - Picabia, Arp -
though this gives Duchamp credit for talent
he never had.

It leads directly to all this nonsense with
Sherrie Levine, Daniel Buren - art as
mere conceptual gesture - in this country John Nixon,
the idiotic self portraits of Mike Parr (drawn as if
from a funny angle - what is the point of the
anamorphosis, somewhere different to stand in the gallery?
squinting, backing into sculpture?), the grandiosities
of Imants Tillers.  Young man, the academicians
were right!  Look at Sickert - & go back from there,
being selective, avoiding the mistakes of Turner, for what
was good about him, yet not so far as Poussin; Velasquez
was a high point, if only generous in very small measure.
Hard men, he & I.  Let me introduce myself,
Giles Auty - my eyes narrowed, my jaw firm - doomed
to wander, through time, homeless, a brooding figure,
part Napoleon, part Goofy, caped.  I'm right.  You
do know that.  I used to write for The Spectator.

Johann Winckelmann
notes

- "A marked decline in deference". This decline the Spectator noted as it became apparent to even its readers that John Major's Tories would be defeated at the next election. The Spectator is home to Peregrine Worsthorne, Auberion Waugh & others of Auty's ilk who've been trotted out to the colonies from time to time - to ginger things up with their ebullient views.
- "I think continually of those who were truly great" - a line from Spender, I think.
- Robert Rauschenberg erased a de Kooning drawing - a kind of 'significant gesture' ironising the gestural artist's endeavour, erasing it, doubling it etc.
- Cy Twombly - the odd, but not so odd, monicker of a European-based US artist whose works are often described as pure mark-making, codeless meaning, automatism, & delectable, moody & poignant.
- Scribble, scribble, scribble - eh Mr Gibbon! - King George's response to Gibbon upon publication of the latter's Decline & Fall.
- Donald Brook - cool & mocking doubter of all things expressionistic, transcendent & idealist in art - in fact rather doubtful of art itself. Excepting art-as-properly-so-called.
- Cochise - in this poem the American Indian - any American Indian - as traduced by that country's cowboy-&-injun movies of the 50s, once a staple of daytime TV.
- Ron Padgett - in many ways the leading US poet of his generation.
- from "jump down, turn around" to "hands out of my pocket" are quoted, respectively, Leadbelly, Lou Reed, Clement Greenberg, Otis Spann.
- "Crusty old fool, sketchy cruiser" - Adelaide teen street argot, circa 1997.
- Victor Hugo - people forget the windbag's efforts as watercolorist & draughtsman.
- "fucking a chair" - Larry Rivers, perhaps the leading US artist of his generation: a later work represents (i.e., depicts) this harmless adolescent activity of the artist's.
- An Allegorical Disparaging of Giles Auty - I think this must be the alternative title or job description of the poem - though "Allegorical" aspires to airs.
- The Wreck of the Medusa - why do people unfailingly say 'Raft'? - is a painting by Gericault.
- Delacroix - had colour.
- Ingres - had the probity of drawing. (Or was drawing "the crucible of his style"?)
- Chassériaux - tried some of both. (These entries are sourced from The Dictionary Of Received Ideas.)
- Puvis (de Chavannes) - solemn, hilarious, he had something though.
- Gauguin - was played by Anthony Quinn in that movie about the life of the other guy.
• Derain - part of the Return to Order.
• David - Jacques Louis David, hot-head radical.
• Caravaggio - we actually know that Caravaggio subscribed in his Roman years (nothing is known certainly of those following) to *The Lanced Tumour Review, We're Dirt & Easy Chicken*. Caravaggio contributed to the second & third issues of *Modern Painters* - a *letter from Parma & a letter from Venice* (though he is not thought to have visited Venice). He appears never to have been paid.
• "Sculpture? - something you back into while looking at painting." - Ad Reinhardt's view. Actually he had backed into the critic, Hilton Kramer.
• Auty "protests too much"? (Shakespeare) I'm not so sure Auty did write for the *Spectator*. 
Double Portrait

down amongst this pile of books by the bed
the bottom of a magazine sticks out, as it
has for some weeks now, announcing “Chuck Close”
- an exhibition - & consequently, if briefly, I think of him,
a career I know almost
nothing about: one portrait, that resembles

the IRA’s Gerry Adams, but which - more, presumably - resembles
Close himself. Also by the bed
another’s portrait, someone I have met - almost
diaphanous, evanescent, in the photo. I met the poet it
depicts years after it was taken. Tony Towle. It seems therefore magical
& fictive, like a fable about him -
a fable he has been cast in - relative to the solidity of the few facts
that, for me, say, constitute Close.

A more recent image of Chuck Close -
a photo - has him in a wheelchair. He is painting, & it resembles
that same portrait, so I take it that it was him
all those years ago - done in grids, pixellated in appearance, looming
over artist, wheelchair, bed,
table-with-brushes - though (in greys) it could almost,
or easily, be a drawing. It

suggests some struggle, this photo, heroism... True, it
is something I hadn’t known about Chuck Close.
For seconds each night, regularly almost -
though subliminally until today - which, irritatingly, resembles
suddenly the day before it, in that again for some seconds this morning, in bed,
unwillingly I entertain my only two images of him -

they ‘pop up’: & once more I dwell on them - on him -
(or don’t) momentarily. It
is my memory’s almost empty file on Chuck Close - &, in bed,
unwanted, it makes itself available to me. Normally it wouldn’t, and thinking of Close
I think pretty immediately of Thomas Ruff, whose work his resembles -
the German photographer, in large format, of faces & streets. While I have almost
never thought about the American I have thought about Ruff - who almost
came to Australia, I think: someone phoned once to ask should we bring him.
Out of regret that I didn't push harder I've attended to Ruff ever since. All of which
in no way resembles
my feelings for this other portrait - a poet whose work I love, so that it
is pure good faith, this relationship. The 'cool' of the early Close
I found unimpressive, & ugly - in a fashionable way, whose fashionability I wasn't
buying. Chuck's by the bed

by accident, a name only. By contrast, the poems are by the bed permanently. It
is the poet's *Selected*, now out of print. On it Towle resembles other pictures I have seen
of him,
though this is the most curious. He might almost have borrowed the coat he wears. He
will regret, amusedly, his hair. The guileless heroism of the smile, the
eyes, he will not regret. But the poems I keep close

he might have wanted more for. I grant Close
the pathos of the new works - though I have only experienced it via
magazine pages, one or two pictures ...
*Then*, Minimalism & Pop 'had had their day'
as things new & imperative. I didn't find them
(or him), in '74, inherently compelling. Not the way

I found about the same time, say, Tuckson, Robert Ryman. (In this 'indirect' way
guilt maintains a close connection between me and a particular sub-set of art works.

As close
or closer than between me and works I've liked probably. I remember them
ruefully: a history of opinions - mine - via
mistakes I might have made.) Literalism was my big thing. Will the day
come when it is not? I'm not sure it still isn't - the pictures

on the back of Towle's books regarding me quizzically as I say it - pictures
in which his face has altered from a kind of resolute simplicity, looking the way
David would paint Napoleon say, towards a more casually raffish, day-
at-the-office pose: open collar, hair tousled, the close
New York weather (tho Larry Rivers' artwork suggests Via
dei Carrottieri, Via del Corso... a coffee shop or bar on one of them,
or an Italianate church or library as setting) ... the weather plasters strips of hair to the forehead. Near them the hand upon which the head rests, the face looking at us, amused though withdrawn.

The pictures never tell us who is in that gaze - though of one we know, via a poem he wrote, that he wondered would people assume - as they made their way past him - he was famous? & would the smoke appear, as it blew close by (from left to right, I guess, as we look at the photo)? It doesn't. One imagines him that day stepping out of his office for the portrait - unfairly less certain of fame, or knowing that one day his name would make one of a minor configuration of names. People would read them and a certain New York charm, wistfulness, way of life would be evoked - the close of the century, the American century perhaps. Of all the various pictures I have of New York, mentally, those I like best are intimately architectural, way more domestic than skyscrapers, say. (Footpaths. Leaves. Shop-fronts.) Images gained via TV shows - but also my one trip there, and Tony Towle's poems. The connecting shots, where we move, via the coffee shop, to Jerry's apartment, to Elaine's new boyfriend's. Night in Towle pertains always to New York, for me, but day can be either New York's apartments, streets ... or a kind of dazzling, elating, studio-lit clarity - that plays over Tiepolo's clouds, de Chirico's white horses & crazed senators, way-laid armchairs, pillars & pilasters - neoclassical, absurdly ornamented. While this is true of them the poems are also restful, airy. Poems immensely civilized. Noble, grandiloquent - & amusingly indirect as method. Like Close's pictures they are large, but they are gestures of self-effacement, miming a kind of huge Romantic pathos: self-directed irony - but a fictive self, the formally preserved reticence as to the real self its single enormous gesture. Large - like the Close portrait with its squared, detachedly close-rendered sheets of detail: the big identity conveyed via isolated fragments, all attention to technique. The artist's single pictures locate one seeming moment of a day, typically the moment that begins or ends it, in a mirror. The poems say more, do more, pass lightly, even, over the moments of portraiture or exaggerate them terribly. Except on the back cover, the poet, to be seen, looks away.
Three Poems For John Forbes
Funny, the Guston selfportrait
I always associated with myself
I associate with you - “he
became his admirers”
not much of a fate
for you in my case.
Your new book is out
I’m reading it in
exactly the place you’d have
imagined me in - a
nondescript Adelaide coffee shop
your picture of me too cruelly true
- well, not “cruelly”, but “true” -
taking the world in manageable bites:
there was me, there was the
art world (I knew all the artists)
there was Poetry - an idea
I held in my head -
there was politics in the papers
& out the windows Hindley Street -
reality, the
‘modern world’ -
I could have a think
maybe a bit of a write
putting things, keeping things,
in their place.

The new poems
are great. But that’s it
the end of the supply -
poems that as they came along
seemed admonitions, a wake-up call -
& we rose or didn’t
to the occasion
knowing there’d be more,
thinking of you. I pictured
you, typically, in late night concentration -
in your place, rather barren
a naked light maybe over you -
your head, your glasses, a
T-shirt, maybe TV going
in the corner - the sound down
behind you. Was it like that?
I feel like phoning Gig -
saying what did he look like
there writing?

Late at night?
in the morning? kitchen table?
did he face the wall, the
fireplace?
I visited - once or
twice -
I remember the scene.
He liked it. It was not what you would call
‘comfortable’.

The young look cute to me
just for being young. A couple
walks by her hand for warmth
in his hippocket, arms around each other.
John saw them
as he saw everything maybe
more accurately. I don’t know.
I think it’ll be weird -
those wake-up calls that were
the poems will now come to seem
a period, a ‘moment’ as we
Marxists say (parentheses here for
har har) now passed -
to which Australian poetry
never responded.
Hi John

in the lecture The Idea of The City / Modernity /
The Suburban Mall I plan to quote my favourite poets

but find I am looking out the window
looking up from the cream of the paper -

green leaves, ivy-covered tin
(of the fence some feet away), but mostly

rust, & darker brown: leaves -
unswept, on the brick & at the base of the olive tree - the

ancient plum whose
leaves & arthritic black limbs

frame this, I think. A bird moves maybe
or the sun shines, intermittently,

that little bit brighter.
I look again at various poems that,

as it happens, could be
models for talking of you - though

in each case
I doubt if I could do it,

sustain the particular sort of beauty
possessed in the original.

It’s interesting - or is it,
is it just adventitious? -

that beauty is the desired effect.
Maybe it is fair enough -

a number of your poems
achieved such grace
& as well,

beauty seems the kind of
balm that should

be offered the lack you felt -
recognition withheld.

This seems not
to be that poem. Not beautiful.

But that’s me, as you
might point out, not you. In fact

I did point it out. I do all
the talking here.

I’m alone - as are
others, your friends - in my case

with the curious goad
of many of the poems before me

you loved, I’d guess. “Buried At Springs”, “Salute”,
Berrigan’s, Frank’s. Whom it is always

weird calling that. Tho
‘the literature’

encourages it. And odd -
when I had not got very used

to referring to you as “John”.
You were in my thoughts a lot

in later years. And were John then, and are - alternately -

both now: the fearsomely good
poet designated by the surname,
& “John” - the pleasure in your remarks, gratitude for late night phone calls: a review I’d written, some idea I’d like - our concern, finally, for your own cares.

When I said goodnight to you - ‘composed’ beneath a 40 watt bulb, on a sagging camp bed - the doctor having told you you might die, it was hard not to be amused as well as worried: you wouldn’t die of course, but would you be well?

(The doctor, we took it, putting the frighteners on you.) Anna, twelve, resembled you a few weeks ago - conked-out, the TV going, a blanket pulled high, her round, angelic head, her buried chin. The term that mediates or bridges her image & yours a Guston picture, of a head smoking (called “Smoking”), its eyes wide, a profile, worried. And then you died.

I wonder when I will die? Though if you came back
it would not be to talk about that, but to admire

some certain turn of phrase, or - you being you -

the compressed but pivotal implication

in something you had seen - something of mine

if you were being generous, some point purchased

with the concomitant faults attendant on it -

in my writing at any rate, not in yours.

Since I've mentioned Anna you'd ask after her (she's going great)

& Gabe & Kim (them too)

- as you always did.

Tho I would be impatient for the literary talk

that (in any case) I didn’t do well.

It was a calming sort of thing, to talk about them:

the kids you seemed to find both an irritant and
hope-giving sign
of things to come:

miraculous youth.
You enjoyed their energy, the

connection of mind to
body, the reflexes, the hormones - the promise.

Then we'd rabbit on.
(Poetry.) Now we must all attempt

to do that for each other, your friends.
You're gone. I listened

to a tape of you a few days ago.
One I forgot I had.

Spot on.
People Passing Time

On the wall
pictures of people passing time
Young girls

photographed by Weegee
at the movies
Sleeping,

lying on each other, blowing gum,
bored,
transfixed

-at the spectacle probably
of Adult Life
presented to them

Muddy Waters
- in the other pic -
playing cards

About to snap one down,
smiling
in the pic John wrote about

John who is dead
As is Muddy
As are the girls
probably

Dead or dying
photographed in 1942
migrant

New Yorkers
their human, evaluating faces

As is Guston

who has painted his own head
a rounded cartoon in profile

eyes wide, smoking
staring sightless
at a ceiling, at his life ...

But not me yet
& I've "got a drawing to do"

for Micky Allan

... Late at night & passing time

an old tape

music

So my time passed

which was given me upon earth

as Brecht & Eisler said
dead too

O sky of streaming

azure blue

Micky, is this any good?

does drawing.

It's too late, too late -

Too late too late too late

I'm on my way to Denver

& I cannot hesitate

Joe Turner said that.

Anyway,

I've tried everything I could / just to get along with you

& now I've done this drawing

It shows the Five Basic

Attitudes to life
considered as a problem - Sleep

Rapt attention, Boredom, Intelligent appraisal

(after all, this may happen to you best to have an opinion)

& Half aghast

(- could Life 'be'

so Mean?)

girl puts knuckles in her mouth

against her face protection consolation

Where Where

where, will you be tonight?

In a world of trouble says Joe.

I say I've got the main girl right The others are just shapes, but you get the idea Don't you 'Too cute!' I hear John say from the grave

The basic attitude.

I wonder whose voice said those things to John in his mind? Gig's? Laurie's? Mine, maybe, on occasion.

His speaks to mine
as always -

#

His was alive

mine was asleep

dozing

like a very quiet limb

his supply of

bon mots

was amazing

I’ve pronounced that “motts”

by the way

disfiguring the poem

- tho it sounds

better that way

just as I’ve disfigured the drawing

but

the main girl

is okay

& the scribble I’ve added, left,

fixes it.

What would a similar shading be for the poem -

some classical allusion

about John, the poet, ‘from the

grave’ etc

- something moving

Like my last

picture of John

that resembles the Guston

composed on his bed contemplating

death

Tho I didn’t think he would die

nor did he, maybe
John, forgive me for being a jerk

#

Not that there's any point saying it now

God, this will bring me down.

#

maybe, to write to Laurie

The 'late' Sam Cooke is singing 'live' "For Sentimental Reasons".

- 'Very funny'.

but I don't care & not too cute

I am like the girl now, blowing gum. Life. God, I'm glad I live in a century with electric light.

Jesus, it occurs to me to say something really horrible

... but I won't

The fluoro desk lamp when I sit back makes a great white diagonal against the dark blue of the curtains

Which drape like Renaissance drapery (or Baroque) tho they drape mostly over jars of pencils pencil cases I never open
that has collected against the window ledge.

the mess of papers, folders
   - books
   - watch, toothpicks
biro caps
   - a cup
   - a yoghurt container
   - that fill the rest.

'Bernini'
   (the curtain)
   - & this contemporary detritus

Brilliantly lit
More comforting than lovely

attention to it
meaning
like John was
I'm alive.
Muddy Waters relaxing between gigs

PHOTOGRAPHER VAL WILDER
Newer Poems
Your Being Away

I'm searching for - I guess - a minor Frank O'Hara poem
a late one whose name I can't remember. Not one
I should find

Too sentimental perhaps to bring out
my best

But one I'm in the mood for. And isn't

that

why we write poems occasionally? -
not responsibly

but anyhow?

The late hour

& a cigarette

have made

me sensitive to sound

I think

so my ears ring with the

silence

John Pilger & Pam Brown

enjoin me

Not to be sentimental

or at least to be

sharp

Cath's daughter, Anna,
gone to bed,

Cath

away -

for tonight,

& the next

&

Gabe completing an assignment

before catching a plane -

& flying to the bars & surf,

monkeys

etcetera

of Indonesia -
dishes done, 
NATO bombing in Kosovo; 
a program 
on the 
Warsaw ghetto - 

What will I be sentimental about?

"He says
'hello',"
- to quote the poem,
which I've found -

"this is
George Gordon, Lord Byron"
- Frank speaking on the phone
to a loved one.
Byron liked the Albanians, I know.

"And for once it is not three in the morning,"
(the poem says next)
Tho for me
it almost is. For Frank
I think
he meant
it wasn't his usual late night call, tired &
emotional.
I am
not on the phone.
Tomorrow.

Tomorrow I will call.

'He' - the poem has the first person
transposed to "he" throughout -

especially moved
to see her
(who is you) -

tho only a day or two removal is all there will be -
enough to constitute 'me'

as lonely,

or alone,

tho pleasantly -
dreaming of you, your finely nerved,
beautiful & expressive face -
on the pillow, or,
characteristically, reading,

the eyes so liquid

drinking the book in intelligently:
happy to watch

your intelligence,

more balanced more calm

more finely tuned than 'his'

(mine),

except when watching you

- To sleep, now

(or - as I'm staying up - later)

"protected

only by your love"
poem (‘cat-bag’)

down the back
the light is on
so my dad,
if he wakes, can see.

The rain
beating down creates
a kind of silence, a sound
that blankets all the others — fridge,
fluoro light —
   a bubble
in which I work,
sit really

seeking to avoid cliché —
& thus reduced to silence

A review
in front of me that I
don't want to write.

The poems
of a poet I admire — full of things
that it's
   alright for him to say

(That is,
"but I can't").

A big selection
of Samuel Johnson to fall back on —
to pass the time

It is interesting
how it would change things if I named
the other poet

"Interesting"? how is
that used here? shouldn't it
be interesting, the consequence of
what you say?

Or are these
paths one merely "assents" to,

as in -
"not down that path again"? -
to quote a poem of mine & John's,
Solipsism the only integrity.

Cath
comes out - squeak of door
to the hall - appears walking scrunched
a little, eyes scrunched, half closed
to remain asleep. Bathroom, &
back to bed. We talk a little.

The Banana grows older each week
& tonight came in to say goodnight,
Cath already asleep, so
she said it anyway & asked me
to come & check on her (instead)
"in ten" & when I did
it was dark, her radio going
quietly - "Are you asleep?" "Nearly -
what do you want?" "Your ten minutes.
You said to check. You alright?"
"Yep." "See you in the morning." All
of this whispered. Sort of amusing.
In fact I'd told her she should
'come back in ten' & check on Cath -
but a joke I'd told before. Now
I get some water for Cath & say
goodnight, again, to her,

& read:
Samuel Johnson, or the poet - Jimmy
Schuyler.

There, that's the cat out of that bag.

What
do other people do with their time -
smoke, watch TV, get on the phone? -
I mean, time like this?
They look for poetry like you write, Ken.
Joke. Point
taken. Integrity again, a
careful system of checks &
balances - joke again, tho
the point of the joke is lost on
someone slow as me,
 tho its form I recognize.
It was my joke of course.

I wrote a
poem once that said “Chuck-chuck chuckling thru the Night.” Doesn’t
the word “joke” appear a lot (above)?
& the word “again”? Doesn’t it
tell you something? I suppose it
does - time to smile now,
ruefully. Tho on another night
I’ll be laughing, up late, spinning
records (tapes, vinyl - CDs if
I’m in this room), reading books,
daydreaming
strap-hanging - on
the train that is my life
as it takes me to my destination, the
light & dark of the stations meanwhile
flashing by

now
I read
“The Walk”
the lines
so slim
& delicate
the timing
almost ec-
statically quiet
so great it
caps the night.
Extinguished,
I crash out.
American Friends

“I am ashamed of my century
for being so entertaining
but I have to smile” - Frank O’Hara

Ah nuts! It’s boring reading English newspapers
in Adelaide as if I were a Colonial waiting for my gin
somewhere beyond this roof a jet is making a sketch of the sky
where is Laurie Duggan I wonder if he’s reading under a dwarf pine
stretched out so his book & his head fit under the lowest branch
while the great southland sun rolls calmly not getting thru to him
not caring particularly tho the light in Sydney does not get
to see so many poets, while in Blackheath or Marrickville
Pam - particle or wave theory? - divides her time
between them, reads Eileen Myles or Susan Schultz
(American friends) everybody here is running around or sitting tight &
being grim I once saw Laurie swim ‘backstroke’ - so he motored
feet first around a pool I dreamed I saw Pam
in a play I never wrote - wave theory
might explain this, crazy, intense, the picture ghosting

inexplicable Steve Kelen where is he, et famille? In Viet Nam?
Adam, where him? I emailed but did not look
to see where. Back soon. Alan is in Honkers
Dipti in Melbourne Richard & Suzy are in New York
buying the CDs that will fill out his collection - that is culture
right? & maybe making art did I see Jenny Watson’s painting of herself
sleeping in New York in New York? If I did will Suzy see it? a
bed in Central Park. Susan Hiller calls & sees them
who would be so New York, wouldn’t she, in New York? the way
she didn’t seem in Adelaide tho exotic, sure, an

American friend - Dennis Hopper was the American Friend
when I first saw it a washed-up American almost,
a mercenary, like the character, an American ‘for hire’ which made it seem
subversive or sophisticated, the use of him. My American Friend here
is O’Hara so I expect that I am subverted
I expect the charge - in any case - I deal with him again
to see can I gain advantage poetically Surely if I get
out of my depth Frank who was by many accounts
quite a swimmer can come powering thru the surf
to save me as the life saver does now for a little kid
'in difficulties' amongst the many bods & standing figures & figures swimming
round her - like me, with Laurie, Pam, Adam
(who lives by a beach). Horseshoe Bay, Pt Eliot is where I am,

whereas Adam when he gets back gets back to Bondi,
a real beach. The lifesaver carries the curly headed girl -
aged 8, aged 5? to the very edge of the sand, under one arm,
above his hip, jokingly & places her in the wet sand
where the surf just reaches as she runs away from him
& up the beach no doubt relieved or filled with an
adventure
to tell

where are my friends -

having adventures?
do

they picture me, & as I am, writing this, sitting
in the shade at a beach, the cries of kids, mild,
thinking of them?

I can't help noticing

how wrong

O'Hara's opinions about this
American Century

have turned out to be

& remembering

how much I liked them

tho they were wrong then

they were wrong

even when he wrote them - like Dennis Hopper in the film

wishing it were not so

So here I am,

protective of these opinions for being even
as blithe as they are but you are the American, wrong -
even here, in this client state, my hero
Horizon

“In this dawn as in the first
it’s the Homeric rose, its scent
that leads on”
- Frank O’Hara, Ode to Willem de Kooning

“As a people we are now called Australians because a vast & lonely land has touched us with her differences”
- George Ivan Smith, 1953
preface to For The Term Of His Natural Life

“it’s noble to refuse to be added up or divided”
- Frank O’Hara

"Beyond the sunrise
where the black begins" -
& the lights of the city, we
imagine, twinkle or blaze ...

the horizon line here
a curve of butter yellow,
slightly oxidized - lined,
at its rim, by olive-green ‘natives’ -
hides a city that if I am
facing the right way
must be doing its afternoon trade
relaxed this last few days after December 25th
but ready nonetheless for the big push
at night, the raid on
fun desire release -
selling mostly coffee, wine,
Michael / rolls a joint has one
then rolls several others children
contemplate navels - the girls their own
with quiet pride, the boys the girls’
with longing puzzling as it is strong
Mary paints her nails, reads, Cuban music
playing. What of Margaret, of Crab? they do
those things normative in a utopia
a cork is popped, Marg plays
fado, the soulful music of Portugal
or Crab practises on sax
reads some politics, some mayhem, reads
the poems I gave him. 1
try to seize upon that greatness
which is available to me
if it is available at all
(am I facing the right way?)
 thru art.

 The view is
 quintessentially Australian, which is its
 problem - for me - tho not classical
 & in its particulars
 is information (where the classic typically presents
 only sign). The essays of
 Meaghan are to hand which might
 stiffen my resolve or form it: not to be
 inimitably weak & picturesque myself
 but standing forth a subject not a spectacle.
 There are daisies nearby & a shin-high wall
 of loose but flat-laid shale or slate twelve feet
 beyond - a standard country wire fence; the
 field of grass; on the horizon a distinct
 curve of hill three hundred yards away, a
 water tank nestles in to the furthest reach
 of the olive ‘natives’ -
 can I drop the scare marks from
 that word now, hasn’t it
 done enough? &
 I rest their case
 “for now
 a long history slinks
 over the sill”,

 & with it history’s ironies, reversals
 sarcasms so de rigeuer. I never wanted to be postcolonial
 or colonial just modern which is
 the joke on me - but who wants to be a category?
 Many would be right - it will do me to be interested - &
 one accepts the truth like a tired disguise handed out
 for the party - is this me? - & joins the crowd
 as the brave must always ascend, always the musts:
 the Eiffel tower, the flight over London, the café
 table - in Rundle Street or rue de la Rocquette
 where Lorraine lived & we stayed tho for me, today,
 this hill is my focus, the clouds - (for I must ascend) -
are beautiful & white & echoing fluidly the hills’ shape, the splotches of green that mottle the yellow & remind of ‘Minor Moderns of South Australia’ a line I join of precursors - Horace Trennery, Dorritt Black - pondering a relation to the minor English, Europe, the universal - & its status as ‘the wrong question’ which strolls now & then into a field & sits down like a forgotten rock while ‘we’ walk on to an horizon line, that’s beautiful, keen, precarious, & doesn’t tug - not ‘rose’, but serene, & melancholy, & joyous, all at the same time, a kind of benediction that says, I’m free & I’m gratuitous why not feel better? & since you do you do return: into that inanimate world of voices cross-questioning you, no longer like your father, a man in an open necked shirt eating an icecream (& just, perhaps, ‘going for a walk’), but in a shirt I bought in Melbourne made by migrant Vietnamese late at night, yet in which I feel Australian, whatever that is - a point mapped by shifting co-ordinates you momentarily ‘keep your eye on’, or don’t, being yourself or a moving target (do the hills you climb as no one count? The hostess explains, As we leave administered life there is a slight discomfort - the tug of gravity on re-entry returns, you may feel tired. Where, the open neck shirted men, women in thongs & sandals, ask is our shimmering ideal? If O’Hara had such timing John his last move suggests he blew it Tho exits are notoriously hard to make. “I live above a dyke bar & I’m happy” - I might too for all I know. Am I? Occasionally, occasionally very. The female of the tiny blue jay or ‘wren’ appears, bouncing, across the grass outside then some of the ‘men’ & move across my field of view from left to right ...
Catching Up With Kurt Brereton

Hi Kurt.

(!) I’m sitting up

(here)

(at night)

the Pharoah Sanders I bought while staying

with you playing

gentle mania

waxing  waning

*quietly doing its nut

* (in the corner)

"Is Sal alright?" my main question

That I should ask her

My question to you:

“What’s doing?”

Right now, a Sunday night,

will you be stretching the weekend: music spinning …

ilighting a number, painting,

making notes on things

the fish zipping about, watching you, saying

I hope he plays the James Reyne tape again?

But fish - what would they know?

their

red & blue, flickering, the bubbles rising out of that diver

paintings of swimmers

- humanity at its rare least guarded -

around.

‘Around’!

what are you floating about like

that

get back with the other swimmers!

Ya wanna know

what I think? in Peggy’s words

("Nick,
ya wanna know what I think?"
"Hey, Nick!..." Etcetera.)

A mantra

*   *

I should ring you

*   *

but don't know where
the phone will ring -
in the house

If it was to hand
in the studio & you picked it up on just two rings
& said, mellow & unphased,

Yeah?

that would be

the greatest thing

(am I stoned?)

what is this thing

with being stoned - I,

who almost never come out of

my tree

except by coaxing myself down -

a coffee, a

long quiet night?

Like Krazy Kat now

I stand

at the foot of that tree (in fact a lamp post

incredibly
tall

a foot or two beyond the perimeter of its

light

(its penumbra)

pretty benign

charmed

(by my 'own song')

big-eyed

- dumb, yeah,

but what's new -
"I never said I was smart”

Actually, Lou said “tasteful”

why can’t I?

‘Smart’, eh?

Then

time to

attempt it

I pick up the phone

& dial you

Hello?

I do a drawing, standing, at my desk,
a hat near some papers & jars & a jar of flowers -
#
looking down.
#

Keeps me going for an hour
#

& call it “August 6th” tho it’s April

& years

later

... & the poem I do it for

was probably

not written on August 6th either

the months just have

such evocative names,

Of what are they evocative?

just evocative, that’s all:

leaves, sky, weather

This hat

on which I look down -

so

definite,

so casual -
suggests to me scotch

tho I have none now -

& the races, gambling,
A masculine world
the adult world of my father

A flat in Elizabeth Bay
frangipanis, the harbour

where Sal & Laurie live

The light from the lamp
gives a thin firm shadow
round its brim, on one side -
which my charcoal seizes
other details drop out
& as I draw & look
& draw again
it is 1951 - the humidity, the slight
sweatyness of Sydney
I feel tough & gentle
calm
It is the nostalgia of the style,
the hat
the flower: the flower pink & pale - hibiscus -
against dark green leaves, the jar small &
six-sided the hat is wheaten yellow straw, with
a band of brown the harsh light of the lamp
whitening everything - sheets of paper, bits of writing,
a pen, pencils
the drink this all suggests
is nowhere to be found an absence that keeps the whole
unsettled
provisional suggesting a moment, not an hour

I get two long-necked bottles from the fridge, put them
in a bag & catch a tram up the Cross meet Cath Pam
Sal & Laurie & continue down the beach
where we meet you
near where you lived forty five years later

I'm not
wearing a hat, & neither are you, tho Laurie is
aside
from that everyone is dressed pretty much as normal -
classic,
eh?  Pam has a rollie

Sal an Ardath
I rub Cath’s neck simultaneously in 1951 & now
& Rosemary hands you the corkscrew, whose handle is a
bottle-opener, & Sarah & Laurie hold out glasses -
beer really was beer till some time in the seventies -
Laurie says Well, cheers! & we clink the glasses
Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices

“What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be in Rome?”

- Tony Kirkman

I can remember coming here
for the first time, when The Flash moved
from its old spot across the street.
Larger, brighter, it was a week
or two, or three, before the move

was not sharply regretted. Jules
declared the new Flash off her round
so severely did it lack the
charm the old possessed - the
hole-in-the-wall, small town

refusal of economies
of scale, 50s / 60s pale green
walls, every booth filled more or less
by six or seven regulars,
older Italians who’d been

there every day for years - which made
luck-outing and getting a spot
a privilege. Incognito
one sat in silence, espresso,
paper, book, sunglasses on or off

the balm of being out-of-time -
The Cone Of Silence descending
around you. Suddenly what had
often been the chief complaint had
been transformed in remembering

to a virtue. The clatter - and
sometimes pandemonium - of
The Flash not much changed. When did
it move? Who cares? (Years ago - six,
eight.) She is reminiscent of

Julie, this waitress, though with less
idea of makeup - Julie would
point out - and I’d agree. Less hip.
A man watching women. Let this
not be one of those poems. Could

I be said to do anything else?
Watching people. E.G., I never think
of the cosmos. Though politics,
philosophy I read. The trick
is the sudden fit - lack of fit -
then fit again, of enormous
   Abstraction - and the attendant
force and pity and accuracy -
with the individual you see
   drinking coffee, daydreaming, bent

on buying a belt or handbag,
   breaking up with their girlfriend or
choosing to answer question nine
on the essay list for Design
   and Society, say, or sort

sadly through their mail today, or
   hum a tune. I realize that
these theories understand me -
   explain, and hold me - just as cruelly
   as they do any other, that

they do so more probably - though
   I don't see it as 'cruel' - that
lack of exact fit a kind of
supplement for the human. Does
   this suggest some space left that

'makes room for' the soul, the mad vibe
   that keeps the motor ticking? It's
a rhetoric I can't stand. I
just want to have my thoughts, not
   understand them. Does this

make sense? Nope. "The Cone of Silence",
   a phrase I've learned from friends younger
than me, fans of Maxwell Smart - though
is my usage correct? I know
   The Way-Back Machine (of Doctor
Peabody's), I know Gilligan,
   I remember Maynard and "Work!?"
exclaimed with shock and surprise. I
never really approved the tie
   Steve, say, felt, to the afternoon world

that colonized his brain, or Adam's (?)
   though they're common currency now
between Crab and me. The Way-Back
Machine - something this poem has
   become, inadvertently. Now

“My heart, in the tenderness of
   Friendship” - in Johnson's phrase - wishes
to address itself to Julie,
Mikey and Chris and be solely
   in the present - or Rome, with its
busier streets, strong coffee and
entirely interesting (because
foreign) surfaces, feel and past
that will be new to us. ‘Rome ‘starts’
in two weeks - we’ll live a few floors
up, in an old building, in Trastevere, the studio of
Malcolm Fraser’s sister and B. R. Whiting, not watering the
plants growing on the balcony hung
above the street - though I hope to
stand on it mornings and dusk
and watch the street and skies. Though is
this reasonable - maybe there is
no view - or space to stand? A brusque

turning on the door, I gather,
announced an officious poliziotto (the dictionary
gives a term that is maybe
better, considering, which is

vigile urbano): he’d come
to reprove one previous tenant
for causing water to drop on
the heads of those below - his own
one imagines. Urban vigilant,
caped crusader eyeing testily
some geraniums and - out-of-focus - white wrought-iron railing...
and tile and slate roof, miles of it -
or am I thinking Paris? (Doves,

maybe a church tower or dome.
I will see when I get there. The
tower suggests Northern religion,
whether Catholic or Protestant,
and where the Italian dome

says Belief the dark, grim spires
of the British-style churches I know
suggest threat and mostly drear
failure to comfort.) I’ve no idea
what we’ll find. No view. Maybe no

geraniums. But sky, and clouds -
those heavy shutters that close to
keep the sun out. I loved them when
I was there before - July and
fairly fierce sun. In Adelaide who
has not put up with far worse, liked
it even? I loved the nondescript
street we stayed in, briefly, the first
time in Pisa. Admittedly I used
to love the view of Rundle Street....

from my office window at night -
a neon light said Rossini’s,
another said Prudential. We used
joke about a wise, even ju-
dicial drink that beckoned via these
red and blue lights in the dark night
and amid softly lit doorways,
windows, and parked cars. In daylight
I loved it too. Supposed to write
from there I did manage. The change
of scenery might do the trick
again. Change and stability -
in this case writing might be the
stability - and Cath’s presence.
Repeatedly, I see Julie

across a table from me, in
Rome, excited, curious, her
head turning, focused on the flow
around us. Mikey and Chris, both,
would fit in smoothly - more Southern

in appearance, though each bearing
their British surnames - Grimm, Chapman.
Like Julie I look anything but
Italian, she Anglo, my mug
Irish, I gather, and foreign -

plainly - in dress, stance; Australian
by virtue of diet and weather.
Cath’s lovely dial delicately
Irish and refined - fluently
speaking Italian I hope: her

brain our forward defence. Her French
is great. For me six months as a
Cigar-Store Indian, standing in
silence, behind, beside. The words spin
by too quickly. “Cigar-Store Indian”

an objectionable phrase, as
well as obsolete: do they still
exist? Better Il Cono di
Silencio. Could I seem
‘Bohemian International’? -
Maybe, with Cath nearby. I should encourage her to pack her most raffish clothes. Funny, to be training for Rome at The Flash, where being Australian has - almost

as often as ‘being modern’ -
been my main preoccupation.
One’s life resembling an oyster’s:
breathing in, breathing out what is
close to hand - a meditation

on (duh) Time, and History, Style - and
Subjectivity - from The Flash!
Basically, a guy who reads a lot
is reading, having a think: - What
Is going on here? A brief clash

of traffic noises, cups, voices - the
sudden pathos, beauty, truth-to-type of some passing figure, the
recurrence of the familiar,
a change of the light - the girl who

looks like Julie - just barely - here
recalls Catherine Demonget -
was she the oddly dream-like one,
in Zazie In The Metro? - one
is plunged into deeper thought, a

sudden empathy for someone’s
imagined situation. IS
THIS JUST COFFEE?! Intellectual-
without-portfolio we call
poets. Every day, oyster-like: sift;
sift. Though to me it seems human.
If inefficient.
Dear Crab,

It would be great to be drinking with you here - because

There Are So Many Bars

& walking between one & the next is terrific at night.
Rome resembles a beautiful film set:
mysterious, melancholy, & hip, hip & corny existing
side by side - but the corny is them, not you, so you
don't have to worry - & the hip you can emulate
or blend with - & you'd be up to it.

I keep intending to write: remarks mostly, all trivial.
Otherwise we're travelling - this place was nice,
that one wasn't - sort of thing.

What's going on in Adelaide?
Are you busy? Playing music much?
Working on things?

The travelling

- Pisa, Florence, Bologna, Venice

(with Anna)

(each for just a few days)

Terracina then down to

Lecce - the South - Cath & me;

a small reading part of a conference, that consisted mainly
of dinners, lunches & parties enormous Germans
walking into plate glass doors & rebounding sobered

'A Greci' band earnestly representing their remnant culture
(a 14th century survival of Greek settlements) & The Beautiful People

(some) & arties, hipsters local aristos or 'notable families'

#
So, seen a lot of historical art - the Baroque in Lecce is 'something else'.

In both senses I.e., not Baroque & way out.

I've become slightly interested

In Italian painting of the 20s to 50s very melancholy & dispirited

I used to just think it was hopeless - hardly having looked -

now I like it

Bought some CDs by Jimmy Scott - popular

in the 40s & 50s, with 'sophisticated black audiences' - one of bad 'live' recordings

& another from 1999. His voice is amazing - it never broke really
due to a rare medical condition - but his style is mannered. It
sounds like Nancy Wilson (as I remember her, from the sixties -
though it was she listened to him)

& he sings Bryan Ferry &

Mick Hucknall ballads, 'Jealous Guy' & things. A mistake
to buy them probably.

No music here. I sing 'Down in Black Bottom' a lot, some Fats Waller,
Johnny Littlejohn, Howlin'

Wolf- & whistle a bit of bop.

Hey, our tape from Supermild 's disappeared. Hold on to yours & I'll copy it.

Strega is a great drink. This I have found.

Though $3 at the Bar

San Calisto buys about 5 inches of it. Almost enough to lay you out.

And as I drink less & less these days & don't have much
to say it is the walking about, the setting down, the first

taste & the getting up, gladdened, everything rendered alcoholicly greater

I dream about.

The Italians themselves don't drink

a great amount or not to excess
slightly crooked would make you feel boorish a foreigner
most specifically one who had willingly declared himself alien
& therefore uncouth rude at any rate which
the Italians don’t warrant John Forbes’s notes to this place
- all past residents at the studio leave tips, advice - include
a theory for Why Italian rock music’s no good Which goes
Italian kids are too well loved to feel alienated & to go
& sulk in their garages with the amps turned up
they don’t experience the same need for oblivion
exist
- mostly calling themselves Madigan’s Molloys
or True British Pub (like their teas - Sir Winston’s
Sir Andrews, Sherwood) -
but the Italian kids don’t stagger from them
ripped.

We lived a few days above one in Lecce. Each night
closing time resembled Adelaide’s - young people standing about
outside
a few sitting - daringly, in la maniera inglese -
on doorsteps.
In 15 minutes they were all gone - no
fights, no shouts, no crying
Little cuties.
So, come to Italy & go on the wagon! Though curiously
I saw two beggars who seemed drunk complementing each
other
sprawled more or less identically
at opposite sides of the Oviesse steps a kind of
upmarket, down-scaled Target calling out to people.
They looked as if they’d been lifted from somewhere like the corner of
Raphael’s School of Athens
of course they seemed happier

'though I doubt if they'd been drinking Strega

Anyway, people, old ladies took no notice, used

the stairs to Oviesse to get in & out the babble of voices

not suddenly hushed, in fear or embarrassment. Where

the Oviesse is seems very French to me: that is, it doesn't, but I can't work it out why doesn't it?

The 'French' thing is the plane trees that are pollarded

so each tree is like an inside-out umbrella, pretty leafless still, branches ecstatically imploring the sky, looking

any of celebratory, austere, calm, awaiting.

Their trunks are pale grey & speckled; the sky thru & behind them -

looks bright & silver & far away & sort of serenely unpitying,

or blue & quietly Fauve.

I guess it is Italian after all - as well as Parisian - & in Paris the buildings

might be uniformly taller, coloured more neutrally

no yellows, no reds - more Citroens & Mercedes?

It is somehow a little less thinly 'sharp' than the French feel more mellow, less sad

Enough of this. I love it. You would too.

Stendhal says, in his Guide, how ashamed he is to have announced an instant love of Rome

It is a commonplace & he's embarrassed & as he wrote the thing without even being here, you have every right to the same opinion! (By some logic.)

The Logic of the Strega Time for me to whistle bop a bit collect my 'thoughts'

or let some more home in the head resembling a kind of dove-cot.

(I'm reading an older poet, whom I'll probably meet in the next few weeks - poems about Death, held in abeyance

by his ironic manner
framed, triangulated, via high-cultural props
- the Renaissance, the Baroque
  Brahms, Mozart & Wagner -
but, then, he chose to live in England... )

Speaking of warriors & music
the bus shelters here
all have pix of Lazio soccer stars, photographed as if they're
centurions or gladiators - one looks like Little Stevie
of the Easybeats.

Another thing you'd like: the back page
of Rome's Yellow Pages
it goes by that name maybe internationally?
- is one big ad for a Telly Savalas-looking
guy who's a Private Detective

Tony Ponzi

bald head,
collar of his trench coat pulled up
"the certainty of knowing everything. Always," it says.
"Resolve your personal problems. (Beware of others using
similar name.)"

There must be competition. Seems to handle divorces, industrial
espionage, everything. Anyway, I may tear it
for you.
(Should you need a detective he operates
I note, "in tutto il mondo"

So do I, tho strictly via

airmail
Tiepolo

In the 14, 15th & 16th centuries it was all happening in Italy artistically tho by the 17th other countries had joined in. By the 18th Italy was definitely off the pace. Still, I happen to think Tiepolo was a major artist tho employed mostly by palace owners to fill space - before the invention in our own time of the smoke machine that so readily solved this problem - for disco proprietors, rave parties etcetera. In the last week of third year old Bernard pulled out all the stops in the lecture on Tiepolo. I was there. Not alone, but almost. (Others were at home, preparing for exams, finishing last, overdue essays.) Like Professor Smith's lecture that no one heard Tiepolo was designed not to be looked at. Like the smoke the machine pumps out: billowing cloud ... some armour ... flesh & garments - the suggestion of excitement - that no one buys - least of all the lonely type, who can't dance & stands, staring into a corner at a trick of the light.
Tiepolo's *Three Angels Appearing To Abraham* in the Venice Accademia is like that. He is the dud guy bottom left - kneeling, dirty feet, beard. The angels, thin limbed, glamorous, surf up on their rubber dinghy of cloud - & look down incuriously - except to remark, perhaps, the dirt - & vouschafe a glimpse of beauty - a limb dangled Abe's way, silhouetted against cloud. As if to say, You can go home now, Abe, patron-at-disco, better not to wait for more. You've been catered for - it costs a lot, but they've got everything here. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Which doesn't solve your problem. Ciao!
Rumori

Down in the windy park the leaves all turn
over at the same time - it's the climate
explaining the weather to the workers

- The Romans, John Tranter

A problem, that, solved, would render one almost
no longer Australian.

- The Bias That Makes The Ball Roll, Ervin Thomas

out the window rises the hill,
with the houses of the rich people. Apartments.
The view - unusually after a month in Rome of
good weather - overcast.

Lively, bustling Rome - where there is plenty of the past, definitely,
though where, for me, ghosts of my own country's past
approach & murmur & back away as if,
having taken their number on entering the room,
they queue & file, waiting to be processed - imagery I think
that comes from Nadezhda Mandelstam - & my own experience

of buying a lamp at the electrical store - Vorrei una lampada:
men - builders, handymen, electricians -

standing about in overalls & caps & parkas
to buy the fittings, yards of wiring
they would need.

Destinies. Aspiration. Ideas
more or less capitalized - Romantic & abstract.

And the pathos of 'the human'.

For me,
always, cities suggest these things. So that
to visit them
brings these questions up.

Though I never answer. And they return each time
familiar, with additional features, histories of their own - their history

of my not dealing with them.
("Dealing" - which suggests some finality.
That will never come.) Merely, "these are the things that I think about".

("Ken, your friends are here."

Oh-oh. And they walk into the room -
Christopher Brennan, Slessor, Grace Crowley:
suits & coats & mufflers, a paper bag with alcohol in it.

A flat I visited very young a few times-
Connie, a friend of my mother's - down
steep steps, it looked out through trees to the harbour.

Cremorne ... Mosman. The characteristic Sydney trees & flowers,
the tremulous fifties
-a kind of
Adrian Feint view, out a window.
A small wicker table. I wonder how accurate
all this is.

The thematic fifties personalities -
thirties & forties - imagined entirely, though I've seen
photos of Slessor.)

*

I shut the windows to the apartment.

A famous painting by Boccioni, that I love -
because I love the idea I suppose, but also

its domestic & feminized form in the picture -
is Street Noises Invade The Apartment:
a woman (mother, wife)

leans over a balcony or window sill
& all the activities of the street
'penetrate' - through the walls, through her & the opening.

It was an embarrassingly large number of years (decades?)
before it finally twigged for me
that where it said on the slide, or reproduction,

"rumori", the word did not mean "rumours"
(or "suggestions") but "noises". Futurism:
so deadly - or loveably - clunky

in its 'execution' of ideas.

But they are like rumours - hints, ghostly

callings - the noises from the street here.
Shutting the windows reduces them to a rumbling, pleasant
background. I will open them again later. The view

reminds instantly of the densely housed rise
up Kings Cross from Wolloomooloo.
(From somebody's
flat you saw that - Sal's old place? an architect's office I visited?
The same view
you saw more distantly from the Art Gallery.)
Or -

a Sydney city beach suburb's view. Bondi. But the Trastevere area is more built up, the styles more various -

'30s' thru to now, the ornamentation more particular. What else? White features less often. A huge salmon pink number is dominant on the left. Otherwise
tans & yellows, some shades of orange - stepped & ranked down to street level - where you peer down from our patio:
at Station Pizza, small shops, garden walls. Trees occur

at more frequent intervals than in the equivalent view in Sydney & a different sort - tall dark pines, cypresses (which must always spell 'Italy'), olives &, more surprisingly, wild,
exuberant-looking palm trees. Our first morning
I was particularly struck by the closest palm, that grows near an angled junction of roads opening out
onto the main road beneath. The tree fills & overflows its space. So 'twenties' it reminds me
of a Roy de Maistre painting - that I assume exists.

(Am I thinking of a flower piece, or a quite different view?)

I decide it will make a drawing - in
my mind's eye I can see it looking like
de Maistre, Kirchner, Matisse - & also Brett Whitely.

(Though how, if I'm going to do it?)

How will it look, when it's done?
The hill overall reminds me of Grace Crowley
Her picture called ... The Italian Girl? Probably not.

Tuscan Landscape, maybe - but a hill
of similarly graded cubist planes.
Cath comes home, has a sandwich, cup of tea
& goes to bed - to nap & read - before
we visit Pietro, our 'third Italian'. We have at last begun
to make contacts here - after days & days

of adventurous walking - along the Tiber
& into town - through ruins & monasteries & parks & villas Vespas, ambulances.

"Goethe's Foreboding," the latest
TLS is headed. I've scarcely read him - & should.
The picture one has - a cross between Mme Recamier & Oscar Wilde. Rising to the occasion of his picturing,

all that is on his mind. Not foreboding. He worried about The Poet's Place In Society. Or his own? At the Protestant Cemetery, despite
the signs that promise it, we fail to find him.
We find Gramsci.

*

The tree's exuberant,
20s feel - via the association with de Maistre -
& the immediate identification of the hill opposite

with the Cross, usher in this same group of thoughts
I have often in Sydney - as
a 'foreigner', particularly. That is, I never had them

when I lived there. Though maybe it is Time -
these things would have come to me 'eventually', & did, have.
From Sal's newer flat, from Laurie's, they have

swelled romantically, like heavy weather, banked
clouds over the headlands: the intense, romantic blue
of the harbour - yachts, boats even, being

'of the past'. Sydney - 1938? '46? '52?
At Coogee at Michael & Di's I list these themes, the list
surfaces from time to time - lost eventually.

Ideas mocked & evoked by a sight one time at Kurt's -

As they are mocked & evoked, as it happens,
in Kurt's thinking. (Do we all think this? shuffle
these same cards?)

'Sydney' - a group of images - that says 'Nix' to dreams.

Yet the elements - its beauty - encourage them.
Hence the town's pagan & hard-bitten quality. Which I read
as acceptance of failure. Like the falling back of the waves.

Slessor. The failure of its artists (their names
all minor). And, like any city, it suggests the aspirations & failure
of capital 'c' Civilization - & of its politicians, by whom we mark the years (Gorton:

deposed as party leader -

"And what are you going to do now, Prime Minister?" "Go home
& watch Countdown like everybody else." Keating,
Hawke, their various bitternesses): highrise Development

& the Unknown Past... - the beer ads of the 30s & 40s -
that decorated, once, all the pubs. Preposterously,
men in suits; women in formal wear, bare shouldered;

waiters, aspidistras, smokes;
the long-necked bottles of the beer itself
memories of my father.

It all proves nothing,
it seems to say - though, individually, each piece
says something else - like the surf's tumult ending in a hiss, as it fails to take the beach. Like the leaves that turn over in another's poem.

I visited Kurt one day - & leaving, on my way down the steps, the vertiginous view between buildings showed - quite close - the intent figure of a bodysurfer, deep brown, frowning - in the grip of the moment's exhilaration - bright flecks of light bouncing off the blue. 'Life'. These aren't questions exactly.

Undivided pleasure - small, yet it looms. Perspectives that are incompatible. Is it this pathos Sydney is about? or Australia? Me, merely? A life as if *writ in biro* (more modern, more sensible than water?) My new pants,

surely more sensible than Goethe's. Though like me he may have found his get up eminently suitable, in Rome - & been less wrong in this than me, too

- though he'll have paid more - all that white silk - & been right of course, about so much else beside.

**The intent bodysurfer** -
what does it mean: *I should swim more often?* Things look great but they're *not*? -

yet surely better they look that way than worse? Or is that the trap that suckers you - for 'this unhelpful binary': Bernard Smith after a lecture - chin rising defiantly.

*

Like a sore you regularly finger, an ache you press - these notions, this 'idea' of Sydney: clouds gathering dramatically out to sea, rolling in - (me, moved & conscious of it, thinking

Why did I leave? Will I come back? What have I ever made happen?) On the house high up, on the right, on the verandah, grows a cypress that has exactly the hunched brooding shape of the Böcklin figure I know from de Chirico & Klinger. It sulks or worries there every day, arms folded, chin on its chest, comic, inconsolable,

a dark presence. The 1880s, subjective, German view of Italy - its olive green melancholy, its quiet, its liquid stillness, & depth. Or something. Cath says today, looking up from
whatever she is reading, It's Goethe's son, not
the man himself, we should have found at the cemetery.
Odd, then, the signs proclaiming 'Goethe's Grave This Way'.

We joke about
*The Lost Sock*, an imagined series of Klinger engravings.
We've lost one, at the laundry.

There's the sock thrown in the corner of the room -
there, alone, in the clothes dryer - a dog trots down an alley,
a crow flies off - with the sock.

Once, friends had thought
Klinger was the German in *Hogan's Heroes*
& that the old reviewer, Elwyn Lynn, was being unusually hip,
to mention him, in connection with their work - in which clothes
were eerily depicted.

Hip, but differently.

The first few days in Rome I feel myself
turning into an 18th century Englishman,
a plump guy in breeches & short frock coat - with a tear

in his eye - bits of Rome looking so sub-Claudian:
ruin; medieval addition; a stand of trees - needing only a shepherd
to admit that, yes, it is the Picturesque, or stage machinery.

Hard to have an attitude to it that seems modern - without
ignoring it. Which I don't want to do. I zip
into town & find the central post office - a square

that always turns up about when I'm about to give up on
finding it - & post our letters (Anna’s, Cath’s, mine) & go off to rendezvous with them at the library -

our impressions of Rome winging home to Adelaide.

Time to do that drawing.

*

Ideas that are no Big Theme. That pose no question.
Just 'the way I see things'.

Olsen

is not so minor. Tuckson isn't. Grace
Cossington-Smith's drawing -
of men going on strike, a protest, a rally - I like.

And the loss of heart & confidence in the twenties -
the deaths, the small
place afforded, after the War, in the wider world
our volunteers signed us up for -

diffidence, caution, disappointment
get built in, built around & built upon
become character. Which makes me just the frown, the

slight stammer Australia bears into the coming aeon,
a kind of polishing of the glasses - what is the gesture?
a chewed lip? a narrowed mouth? Whatever -

& whether true or not - I like this view of things:
iron taken into the soul - which strengthens,
like the small dose of poison. If nothing matters,

nothing matters then. It is all
"in the face of negativity": Tuckson, Guston, Pollock ...
Grace Crowley - whose work I love, more than Kandinsky's -

for the contingent reason: its tentativeness registers so much of this.

*  

A puzzle you pick up & put down, & walk away from.
Small objects on a table - a marble, an ashtray, a postcard view.
A shelf of books beneath the window.

*  

Amusingly, the students we read to
remark the next day how 'humble' we were
- which we explain as national style. The Italian guy

who read after, introduced his poems at considerable length
giving them, probably, strong recommendation - then read them
with a lot of feeling, seemingly surprised at how good they were.

The students were nice.

And Rome is great - walking aimlessly through it
as it is lit up tonight, all of it is beautiful, much
resembling a film set - Rome in the 60s, actresses, models

sportscars, fountains - light picking out the textures
of walls, greenery thrusting from stone & brick, streetlights
bright & fluorescent - and a constant randomness

to the flow & sound: darkness, quiet,
then sudden flaring of headlights
(Vespas, voices, bodies emerging from a doorway -

& entering a car, parked at such an angle & in such a way,
that joining the traffic now streaming past will be an effort -
an adventure, and achievement - but won't mean running me down, thanks).
The road I'm on rises before me, peaks, disappears, & appears again higher, further away. Phosphorescent, silver white, the streetlights strung beside it like pearls rise & dip too. I am reminded of Melbourne - though which part - & Sickert & Whistler - & Clarice Beckett! that same sad eye: a vision that strikes me as 'teenage'

not because it is inaccurate or to be bettered: that is the age at which it becomes available - an intensely sad & stoical projection. I think of Laurie as I write this. - 'Mr Melbourne'

(though others are thought to be - & want to be - or are only that & seem diminished ...). His letter today. I wonder

do I have Clarice Beckett's 'eye'? "Oh-oh, a lonely teen-age-er" - lines from a song John Forbes used often remind me of. - Why Must I Be A Teenager In Love? (Another.)

John was Sydney. As is Pam. For Love Alone - doesn't that have descriptions of Sydney I always meant to read? Where can I get that book in Rome? I am somewhere, now, near Via Dell' Umbilta & Via Del Corso, & undecided -

not between those things though - humility & business. I'm for business. At least, I think, tonight I am. I go home, call the drawing finished - spray it with fixative.

It looks okay. A bit of Rome, a bit of Sydney - perhaps London a bit. 'The London Years of Roy de Maistre' - a Sydney remembered.

A Sunderland appears & lands whitely in the harbour, a corsage. I think of frangipani & carnations, look out the dark window - at a Rome that isn't visible -

& see
the hill, the variegated pink & cream houses, verandahs.

A puzzle you pick up & put down, & walk away from. A rebus. Flaws in the glass by which to see. I replace them, this constellation, small objects on a table - a marble, an ashtray, a postcard view,

a 1960s beer coaster. Items that mean nothing - though they make up 'a sentimental picture of Australia'.

A perspective - distant from Europe - that lets you see more accurately than they do, do things with less assurance - but do them anyhow,
amused to be making the gestures that are art with all those gestures claim, or make them with no claims. In fact, the co-ordinates I love.

As someone, somewhere in Rome, a Roman, must be making a painting, making a poem, knowing Rome is not a centre any more, that Italy is not central.

Yet they go on, happy, thoughtful, Rome's night air outside the window, spelling *Rome*. Many happy hours, Pard.
HOLDEN SONG - or, Homesickness Was His Middle Name

Here, plastic furniture seems like a good idea,
more natural on a marble chip
& concrete terrace, as though
what we treat as objects,
they take for granted

(hence ‘style’)
and how for us this word belongs in ads
- Roman Poem, John Forbes

Reading about Marie Henri Beyle
I suddenly wonder if Murray Bail hasn’t named
himself
after Stendhal - Marie Beyle. Why shouldn’t he
of course, despite... Or are the similarities numerous?
Anyway, an act of faith. Cath, Michael, & Di
have gone down to the markets.
I, in an act of enlightened disbelief -
after all I have been before -
remain & quietly read
&, now, inside, write -
another act of faith. As the trams
roll by & traffic noises - horns mostly,
but distant ones - bleat & sigh, complain,
or mechanically & pleasantly
drag the moments by. From where I sit I see,
outside, the white plastic chairs
John was so caustic about, momentarily, in his poem -
& beyond them, six feet further - green shrub
& the pink-&-biscuit-coloured facetted climb
of buildings on the hill opposite: warm, calm, marked by
the grey-white horizontals of verandahs -
the vertical accents of window frames, aerials,
&, dominant, one dark green pine.
Above, blue sky, & a bit of awning hanging down
outside our doorway,
the door I look out to see all this.
John joked severely
that the plastic chairs that, to us,
would look less than ideal
or even cheap, at home in Adelaide
in Rome look sensible, approaching elegance, & closes
with those Australian expatriates
looking fondly on them, turning
their hearts against Australia.

My point? None, as usual.
Two months to go, of our stay here in Rome -
where the chairs look okay, to me,
though, true, I wouldn’t like them
at home - where
I can’t wait to go
though happy for the time to run out
at its own pace -
where the sight of the first aged Holden
will make me smile - like the thought
"Murray Holden Bail."
A Prospect of the Young KB as a Critic

"For a long time I stayed in bed very late." - Marcel Proust

I remember with a kind of spiritual/intellectual ‘wince’ the boredom of the papers on Sunday. The comics.
The last page, if you still hoped
for some relief (it was, after all, ‘the last page’), featured Val (Prince Valiant), Raddish, Laredo Crocket & maybe
The Potts ... (& some puzzles, Chucklers, I never did).

_Raddish_ I remember with some affection. Though did
I feel it then? Rarely. In it a couple - or a threesome? - engaged in
Intellectual problems thought to typify their late-middle-aged, maybe
almost ‘battler’ status. There was no action in these comics -
& in this instance, invariably, the old lady, her hair worn (unlike Val
’s) in a bun (Val sported, when I think about it, a curious Cleopatra cut), dried a dish or waved an admonishing finger - & hoped

or worried that - say - money, which she hoped
would arrive, _would arrive_ - & pay their bills. The bloke, though he
did
hardly anything (& nothing that didn’t go wrong) - read the paper,
bottled beer - or carried his device, a manly hammer - tightened
a val-
ve that needed loosening - & while he talked over his shoulder she
wiped up & talked back. (As fair to call this "intellectual"
as “abstract”, I think.) _Maybe it would happen_, maybe it wouldn’t,
whatever ‘it’ was & one rarely knew. In these comics
long-foreshadowed action - maybe

because it took so long & was uneventful - like tension ‘going away’
rather than definitively ending - did not _seem_ like action, & maybe
_Raddish_ held some microscopic fascination - how I think of it now -
because, in a pasture out the window he grazed, the ‘wild’ or
trump card we hoped
might one day be played - in a rescue of narrativity, surreal but
consequential. _Raddish_, the last of the comics
on this last page, took its name from the badly drawn, sway-backed
horse - suspended _leit motif_, incendiary loose-cannon narrative device -
available, should its creators feel (as I did)
the need for it. In fact weeks would go by in which we did not catch sight of the beast - & then we did - leading his contemplative (not to say intellectual) life, truly a Life of Riley, munching, chewing, raising his tail. Was he their unconscious? their libido? The Potts' id? "Val,"

Prince Valiant's flaxen-haired betrothed would say, "Val, stick it to me." But she never did - though she admired him, as I never could, while he practised his archery, sharpened his sword, 'had moods'. Was this maybe muscular Christianity avant la lettre? or a puritan paganism? Val never promised the violently insurrectionary the way Raddish did, or even the intellectual far-fetchedness & 'possibility' of the horse - who had a rumoured history as a one-time winner: hopes hoped of him had some basis. Val on the other hand, had done nothing - text-book stuff, dutifully, text-book battles, text-book dispensing of justice, text-book falconry. There was no melodrama. Val did everything in orderly fashion. He would never even grow bored with himself, bored enough to come bursting through the door, cigar in his mouth, gun in improbable hoof, announcing He-haww! The Drinks are on me, as the horse would ... or would in the comics

I desired. Was the strip named after the horse, as I imagined? Then who were The Potts? OrWally & the Major? Why, of the comics on the other page, was the one I understood least the most intriguing - the modern one, temporal miles from Val but geographic miles from me (I assumed it was America, though almost too literate - which made it, then, socio-economic miles from me, too)? where what they did was sit, & amble around, in an airy open-planned lounge or den - & maybe read the comix, or Sunday papers or a magazine. The heroine hoped she would not be bored, & father - handsome, quizzical, sporty dresser - made dry remarks - as did mom (another intellectual)?

The young girl (eighteen? twenty-two?) wore Prince Val's hair-do, better than Val did, & torreador pants & maybe lounged on her spine, oblique & petulant - & hoped her boredom would end: like me she hated the comics ... & Sundays ... an attractive young bourgeoisie - while I remained, like Raddish before me, a 'dark horse' - yet, like the girl, soon to grow fiercely intellectual.
Ju - Ju

Wayne Shorter when you don’t need him to be great is good when you need help is no use

which I think is maybe A Definition of Cool -

a gift & congratulations - to your good mood.

‘Trane is more reliable & is Great but is never cool. I would buy both your music a drink. Yes, tonight yours Wayne too
Amaze Your Friends

I watch an old Errol Flynn movie

Custer

The last half

Terrible reception

What nobility

Then the last third or quarter

of an old

French movie

beautiful & rivetting

A

Simplicity

that is almost humorous, if you

Contrast it with modern films

- soundtrack

Of rustling, & a lone bell

& the beautiful,

Intent teenager

moves with deliberation through it

Before it ends

Anna, our teenager, comes home

A little like Mouchette the film’s heroine

soaked

& moving deliberately

but happier than

the actress

Nadine Nortier’s character

Then

I pull out an LP

I haven’t played for a while

to fill the end of

A tape I’m making

& the tracks Devil’s Island

Moon of Manakoora, Black Orpheus

are great

Did Wayne Shorter ever do anything better?

well,
The stuff with Miles equals it

- Dolores, Freedom Jazz Dance

Gingerbread Man -

but by Island & Moon I'm made

As happy as music has ever made me.

Earlier,

Tonight,

singing an old song my father used to sing

& thinking of him

has maybe set me up

For this untroubled ascent of spirit

Banana

Takes herself off to bed

last night she refused

& fell asleep on the couch

wouldn't wake to rise

I watched a bit of Rage there beside her, her

Blissed out body

lit by the TV screen. It was

hosted

This night by Tex 'Whoever'

From The Cruel Sea

Who showed old clips - mostly it seemed for reasons

Of physical deformity or abnormality

Mick Jagger's

Big lips

singing Girl With The Far-Away Eyes

very funny

& my heart warms to him too,

his send-up of Gomer Pyle

His dial prettier than, but resembling, Barney Fife's

a girl

with

Very big tits

is the stated reason for the next clip

as tho

To say "I know this is an odd reason

but wait till

you see them!"

Then Iggy Pop working very hard

To an entirely unresponsive Countdown audience
The young

who fail to wave their arms, scream, or smile

even -

Tex's point. Well, I try to wake Anna
again

Decide she's warm enough where she is
& go to bed.

The

Needle lifts off

from the vinyl, a second time.

I play it again.

A friend's poem once commented on

his bladder's being

his metrical device

- he was writing in a pub -

something

I have almost never done

- or never to good effect -

The needle lifting tho

I've experienced that

Sudden attention
drawn

To the relative quiet

& to some aspect of your concentration

A gentle sound.

Moon of Manakoora

Written by Alfred E. Newman

the father of Randy Newman, &

Whose name featured on all those film credits

- late night & midday movies I watched

as a kid -

& for that same reason apparently

chosen

For Mad Magazine

that irritating lunk-head

who was their logo
What Me Worry?  

Well, I'm in it, & of it

Thinking just today, at the gym, 

where Bruce Springsteen was playing

- unusually: usually

it's disco, hip-hop -

What better confirmation of Adorno's point

- the masochistic use of music's repetition.

Songs sad, & to be loved ...

& Born In The USA - an anthem

red-necks cheer for, on American Wrestling -

to honor

their boy

& chant identification

yet the song means to point

To disillusion.

Know yourself I guess. I'm

Too serene tonight

to want to think that thru

to any diminishing conclusion.

My father went before me

& had, maybe, all these notions

in t-shirt & shorts

On the back steps, in

the kitchen, down the bush

that started beyond our yard

They are

their own reward

point to the fact of the time

& freedom to have them

- brief.
Hindley Street Today, with a view of Michael Grimm

What to do
when the day’s heavy heart,
settled,
rises then -
thru some quality of the light -
& you your own mug
raise up
to see it,
register it
bing!
the way counter staff would
gain change
in the old days,
but not any more -
& not ‘today’, today
being now
(&) in this ‘day & age’ -
Those old-time cash registers
having gone
before the electric typewriter, even, disappeared
- tho I never
had one of those.

Why,
pause, & reflect, & look down the street
where Michael Grimm might come
- & with any luck holding
in his hand
the tape you requested
& he was pleased to deliver
notionally.

Tho ‘notionally’
Notionally might well mean “Never”
Have you got it? Well
give it here!
Maybe he does.
On it several versions of Bauhaus:
“Bela
Lugosi’s
Dead”.

It's too bright & clear

    in Hindley Street -
    for him to be about,
    the Count.

Yet “Yeah, I frighten a lot of people,”

    the waitress says

jokingly

    tho without much effort

    as she clears the table
    where I sit today
    outside

to a patron whom she’d startled

    - & actually, tho she’s
    pretty enough

her makeup’s vaguely 'Goth'.

I find her interesting

    - as I look up today

& down the street

    looking for it to confirm my intimation
    & expanded heart

With a view of, say, seraphic Michael Grimm

    & my tape

on which

    Bela Lugosi's dead
    studio version & 'live'.

*He’s* dead

    & Dion

    & so is Bing.

Bob Hope lives on, I think,

    tho barely
    but I’m alive

& Michael & Julie & Chris -

    & those dead-heads from
    the Arts Department

they’ve moved in

    & now they find *us* 'more alive’ -
    we

laugh

    at that,
    'good naturedly',
the street is cleaner, too
since
they arrived
   a reason why
   the light strikes things better now
& if this coffee haint improved
     my mood has
as I think, Yep
   of Michael,
     The Grimster -
      will he have done it yet?
Too soon.
    "Too Soon"
      - the Nirvana story
       it usually is
too soon, I guess
   even Lugosi might have thought
One more day, a week!
   I think, "not yet"
    I've got
the 'Hindley Street' template out & operating again, the
details falling in
    - 'signed up' for the long ride,
Tho less some days than others
    but
just this minute I'm up for it.
    The street looks grey & white
& muted
   benign - or tired - or
more forgiving
   Is that just the lack of traffic?
Temporary.
    And the lull between the late
breakfasters
    & the early-lunch crowd, the time
given
    the waitress to talk
    the old men
at their tables, plotting
    - plotting nothing -
the Tech teachers at elevenses, me,
& fucking
Michael Grimm

the nut
NOTES

Home Town - “Gwendolyn windswept”, a poem of John Jenkins’ and mine; O’Hara and Towle are two New York poets; Estes and Ruscha are American artists; The Advertiser is Adelaide’s newspaper, for which I wrote art reviews for a time; Tubby Justice is a singer; Kertesz is an early mid-century photographer, of Paris particularly; August Sander was a German photographer, one of whose works is on the cover of American poet, Michael Brownstein’s book, Strange Days Ahead. Peter Schjeldahl is a New York poet and art critic. The other names are those of friends & artists, mostly in Adelaide: Cath Kenneally, John Jenkins, Laurie Duggan, Paul Hewson, Richard Grayson, Suzie Treister, Aldo Iacobelli, Shaun Kirby, Louise Dauth, Michael Zerman, Mary Christie, Pam Brown.

Walking Down From The Star Grocery: Painted blue & white, the Star Grocery - since disappeared - gave Adelaide a country town aspect: an old-fashioned, blue & white Greek grocery on the intersection of Hindley & Morphett Streets. The poem echoes a little Frank O’Hara’s “The Day Lady Died”. Yvonne Rainer and Ronald Bladen are American artists. As it turns out James Schuyler is not wearing a leather jacket in the photograph I was (therefore) misremembering.

Halogen Pam - is or served as a letter to Pamela Brown, Sydney poet, following on from the earlier poem “Home Town”. In the poem I imagine her routine, as she had described it, and imagine the scene - though I’ve never seen it - as it might be painted, by various artists. Richard Estes and Ralph Goings are American New Photo-Realist painters.

Poem (Dynamic Sleeper): - was it Rochester or Lord Byron who wrote a poem using a lover’s back for support? Or Sedley or Buckingham - one of that crew! Scenes of Life at The Capital is a book-length poem by Philip Whalen.

Mostly Hindley Street: mentions Laurie Duggan, Cath Kenneally; artists Richard Grayson, Simone Hockley; ‘Crab’ (Graig Tidswell) - of various bands: Speedboat, Crab’s Cocktail Hour, The Tuesday Welders, Soulpower, Powertools, This Is Hip, The Hip Replacements, Hipsters in Paradise & others.

News Of The Day: “too-too, too much” - from a song of the same name that the live Velvet Underground album, 1969, has combined with another, “Sweet Bonnie Brown”; “(Ain’t Never Had) Too Much Fun” - not Chuck Berry, but who?; “Sweet Jane” - the Velvet Underground: "simian" - a reference to Howard’s physical resemblance to an ape; “straight against the light I cross” is from a Frank O’Hara poem.

Double Portrait reports my idle (& uninformed) comparison of Tony Towle, a poet I admire greatly, & painter Chuck Close, whose life & work I know little of. The form is two sestinas, linked at the ‘envoi’ stanza of the first. Other artists mentioned probably don’t (for the poem’s purposes) require explaining.

Three poems for John Forbes. These were written in a bunch a few months after John died in early 1998.

Your Being Away: the O’Hara poem - from which are taken the quotes my poem so obscurely structures itself around - is “Those Who Are Dreaming".
American Friends: The American Friend is the movie treatment of a Patricia Highsmith 'Ripley' novel. Set in Germany, the film stars Bruno Ganz with Dennis Hopper as 'the American friend'.


Catching Up With Kurt Brereton: Ardath was a cigarette brand of my early childhood: red packet with a small cat as logo I think. I thought them sophisticated.

Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices: The 'Cone Of Silence' features in some episodes of Get Smart, whose hero was Maxwell Smart; the 'Way Back Machine' allowed Dr Peabody (a professorial, cartoon 'dog' who wore glasses & expounded confidently & 'equably' on history) to visit significant moments in the past. Gilligan & Maynard G Krebbs were played by Bob Denver (in, respectively, Gilligan's Island & The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis).

Long Distance Information: "Down In Blackbottom" - Joe Evans, recorded in 1931.

Holden Song: One of Murray Bail's novels is Holden's Song.

Amaze Your Friends: The film, Mouchette is from 1967 & directed by Bresson. The Wayne Shorter tunes are rather restrained & - within his oeuvre & for the time - conservative, but I like them. Tex Perkins is okay by me. Barney Fife was the deputy in The Andy Griffith Show & played by Don Knotts. Gomer Pyle is the character from the show of that name, played by Jim Nabors.
At The Flash and At The Baci

by Ken Bolton

English Department
August 30, 2003

Part two
exegetical essay

How I Remember Writing Some Of My Poems—Why, Even
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   Of My Poems—Why, Even — 4

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Notes on the text

List Of Abbreviations
Some of my own books are referred to in passing and will on occasion be identified by italicized initials in the right margin:
Four Poems, Sydney, Sea Cruise Books, 1977 — FP
Blonde & French, Bundeena, NSW, Island Press, 1978 — BF
Talking To You, Melbourne, Rigmarole Press, 1983 — TTY
Notes For Poems, Adelaide, Shocking Looking Books, 1984 — NFP
Blazing Shoes, Adelaide, Open Dammit, 1984 as BS
Sestina To The Centre Of The Brain, Adelaide, Little Esther, 1990 — STC
Selected Poems, Penguin, 1992 — KBSP
‘Untimely Meditations’ & other poems, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 1997 — UM
Happy Accidents, Adelaide, Little Esther Books, 1999 — HA
AF&B indicates the manuscript of current poems—At ‘The Flash’ & At ‘The Baci’. Others cited frequently are Ted Berrigan: So Going Around Cities (SGAC), The Sonnets; Frank O’Hara: Collected Poems (CP); John Forbes: Collected Poems (CP).

Appendix
Some poems are quoted in part or in full in an appendix following the body of the essay as illustration of the argument, though they are optional for the reader. The presence of relevant material in the appendix is indicated on right of page by the letters APPDX.

Citation
Works cited are noted in the right margin and are listed as such after the essay, appendix, and footnotes. They appear also in the bibliography. However, in accordance with the essay’s conversational tone merely passing references are not noted. Nor are works noted with every mention.

Note the usages “for example” and “that is” in this text are never abbreviated. That is, where “E.g.” and “i.e.” are employed in the poems, and in this text, it is as the two-syllable synonyms for those phrases which are pronounced “eye-ee” and “ee-gee”. Consistency has been attempted where possessive case occurs—except that with a name such as Wallace Stevens, for example, the possessive might take the form of an apostrophe after the final ‘s’ or of an apostrophe followed by an additional ‘s’. The latter option indicates that the word gains an extra syllable in pronunciation.
HOW I REMEMBER WRITING SOME OF MY POEMS—WHY, EVEN

Time I suppose to see
just what I've been doing
writing poems—lost, in the
middle of a dark wood
or whatever—at any rate fifty,
and enrolled, for this degree. (For why?
you ask, as in fact I ask myself.) I know
what I think I've been doing
but these things will have
changed, over time. Changes I sometimes
will have 'noticed' merely,
other times willed. But sometimes
I will have noticed nothing
or stopped, after a time, noticing.

And I will have changed—my ideas
(though ideas were not important to me—
in the sense of themes to 'pursue'—
only that there should be some), my
style and conception of form—as
one gambit after another
ruled itself out, through repetition,
or my glands and reflexes grew
gaining wisdom and sclerosis.

Those things together
constituting 'change', development
or something more in the nature
of contradiction—discrepancies to be
explained, or shrugged away,
concerns or habits that like
a shirt have worked their way
low in the drawer and you say Oh,
I don't wear that anymore—
it's hard to say why.

Or it's obvious.
The process poem, for example, that strikes me as such a seventies thing, and would have me 'respond' — *This coffee shop—I won't eat here again*! Though in fact I will, despite the fluctuating price, the mathematical inadvertance that accompanies lunch each day—the sensitivity of the teenage girl who administers it precluding objection.

Not that she is aware of this.

I have only ever *used* the conventions of that sort of poem, not been bound by them as rigor: a device for changing the subject. Though 'subjects', like ideas, were not the point exactly—

or *were* the point ... of the self that entertained them, were just the *figure* or 'theme' on the other hand of the one writing the poem—and you were *both* these people, and you might not have to decide between them—unless the power of one called for its being overruled and even then it may have been a matter of ceding ground, regrouping redefining the goal or conception, the ambition or gestalt:

two people endlessly moving the goalposts to gain advantage.

Or an impossible coalition—say, the Labor Caucus.

(Prospective Content and Vague Form, aligned provisionally.

Though conceptually
they are of different order:
more Incommensurable than Opposed
— incommensurable and opposed? —

and, really,

fictive entities:
the form can only express
or otherwise stand in relation to
a 'content', which itself cannot exist independently.)

The Labor Caucus.
(Or something more cooperative.) In
any case the tension between the two—

form and content—being productive,
and the poem side brought off best with no
one pole too long dominant. Though this

is to offer a generalization, not a memory.
What poem do I remember this way? Well,

'A Terrible Attitude, Based on Mourning' might
be a candidate— is one,
so perhaps there were others.

Having something that must be satisfied,
that might even 'drive' the poem—besides 'art'—
was necessary. An impulse or orientation
I think of as Protestant or Puritan—though
what thing Catholic—if that is its opposite—
is it distinguished from, the Baroque?

(Why did I say I wouldn't eat 'here', any more—
and then admit I would?)

The effect is to change the subject
—but, more interestingly—since or if or
to the degree that 'subjects
are not the point'—a level of sincerity
is introduced, or introduced
critically:

an 'earnest' of it—
a marker—introduced
as, simultaneously,
it is undermined—
a promise
of unreliability

and a foregrounding of artifice
—or, more correctly, of the form
of some sort of
bond with the reader. I hope it did all that

—because as illustration of
a 'worn out form'—the shirt
never to be worn again—
it backfires: there I am
using it/wearing it.

The failure
set up here, maybe 'demonstrates'
continuity?

Or is this a moved
goal-post?

In some ways good if it is.

Perhaps this is that process
where you talk to get out the truth,
that is, my beating about here,
trying to locate this essay's 'method'?
Like the stoolie who 'sings'.
One part of me (the formalist?)
is the soft cop
who encourages this,
'facilitates' it? (Then
who is the hard cop?)

Did Robert Lowell
have this problem? Doesn't everyone?

The Baroque I have some tolerance for
and it would mean in this context
the excessively, or entertainingly conventional
and artificial. Certain kinds of
postmodernism favor it. I like it
where it is comedic
but find it tiresome otherwise, time-
wasting, fake, not credible. I guess
the rigor of some higher aim
(by the logic of the binaries
I seem to think in, shuffle between)
—that eschews the Baroque and the
conventions—I associate
with Modernism (which seems to me
Protestant, puritan, functional
—where "ornament is crime"
—Adolf Loos, where function is ethical
—Reyner Banham, where "form
follows function" (though I can't think
who said that—Gropius, Mies
van der Rohe? Or was it Olson?).

("(F)orm follows function"—the Bauhaus
and, later, Functionalist line.
Olson: form is never anything
but an extension of content
I think.)

Being virtuous, chaste even,
I associate with Creeley—
and don’t like it, much, in him—
though where he has a virtue
that is it, often. Though I don’t
wish, often, to concede it. Well,
there was The Purity Of Diction
In English Verse,

which I liked too—
without liking, much,
the contemporary poems
it ‘spoke to’. Or liking them
but not feeling them ‘contemporary’.
I mean Davie and Larkin. ‘Chastity’ in verse
was a concept I might have first
met here. I had
better ideas—I thought—enthusiasms—
than being virtuous:
the more positively exhilarating pleasures—
of Thought—that moved-swiftly and was not ‘poetic’
that was amusing, that had the formal excitement
of collage, its disjunctions: Ted Berrigan, O'Hara.

Where I liked, or 'employed', conventions
I wanted them laid bare.

I saw Berrigan's Sonnets and 'Bean Spasms'
as like Rauschenberg
and read Rauschenberg
through the ideas of Minimalism and Kozloff
(or so I thought or think now I thought)

—but mostly

I just liked the poems, found them
speedy and smart.
John Forbes's poems
I liked the same way. (*speedy and smart*)—

Forbes's poems
were not just smart—
and the attraction
was not just that they 'knew things'.
"They were a kind of argument
or demonstration
of how it is being smart—
a blueprint, a way of
actively thinking."

(Poet Cassie Lewis in a letter to the
author.)

So much of what was Poetry
seemed dumb, does still, lame,
indefectual.

Poetry—as one
usually came across it—
seemed out of date, hopeless.
I thought the way was, in part,
to avoid metaphor, push
intellection
and selfconsciousness.

What did I mean
by these, quite aware
that they were matters
of nuance, of emphasis—
that they were relative,
not available
as pure positions?
Being less metaphoric
could only be
a matter of degree: like, for example,
the twenty-something
in the kitchen with her mother:
*The trouble is
I'm a feminist
but I still like men—*

mother, scarf
around her head, picks a nibplet
from the plate between them—
*Like you're a
Vegetarian but you
still like Crispy-Skin Chicken?*
These two cartoon frames
were in the kitchen and
stayed for ages.
Dumb.
I think Mary
liked the mother and daughter figures themselves
as much as anything:
their large tired eyes, their
identical expressions.

Simile
is regarded as metaphoric
but it seemed to me
that simile was a little more open
in its ‘argument’, less insistent
than metaphor was
of its case. And it was less
of a ‘marker’ of Poetry.

A lot of the poetry
I disagreed with
employed a ‘powerful’ image
(apocalyptic, derived probably
from ‘Howl’ and Bly—
I don't know, really)—usually signaling
more the heaviness, the amount
of thrust behind the finger
your chest got poked with
than describing ‘vividly’.

Allen Ginsberg

The joke was tired.
The humor was in the cartooning.
To me it seemed a sort of cheating—
and uninteresting and hectoring.

    Poetic ‘sentiments’

seemed dumb—invariably
regretting the contemporary world
—as though to be out of place
were the point,
demonstrating an acquired,
a learned,
    a pretended (?)

    helplessness.

Did this all stem
from the Romantics
—Wordsworth—
Gray’s Churchyard?
‘The Deserted Village’? I’m sure
y they didn’t know, these audiences.

    The wryness

with which these attitudes
were held reflected well—
as designed—on the poet,
you could tell, and the audience
could nod and applaud, saying in effect,
    We’re hopeless, too
(Oh, for this respite from
the pressures of the world!).

Instead
one attempted a ‘thoroughly contemporary idiom’
—mixed in ways
which reflected contemporary complexity
and a truth to one’s
background, politics, thinking—
to the time’s, the world’s, complexity.

    (I now ‘sign off’,
    microphone in hand,
in an overcoat, in a field in
war-torn somewhere...)

But then—that’s manifestos!

No position guarantees
the ensuing product—
some produced poems
that were terminally hip, terminally glib,
or marked only by the
with-it surface,
the content being unremarkable
or dumb—usually, in some common sense, Romantic.

The puritanism endemic to the position
could lead to a too meagre
verbal mix—all
color, exoticism, heat
abjured or unavailable. Wearing
that shirt again, the black one?
Guess so.

And all weight,
all focus or movement,
centred on pacing, phrasing,
the idiom of speech. An
aural dullness was one risk.
One 'achieved' it, probably, often. Another—not even an alternative—
was the impersonation of the self,
even the sincere self, the
authentic self—a presence meant normally
to function as guarantor.
This felt so unpleasant it had to be avoided.

By the 80s this had become generally recognized
as the problem of the Subject, I think, and of 'presence'.

Though poets mostly regarded it
as
'playing the Sincere card'.

I think poetry should
(probably 'can')
only inhabit spaces
where it is in danger ... of
the nil result, of error.

(Some kind of fakedness—falsity, false
(rhetorical) authority—
is always a possibility—
from any aesthetic. And nothing
—as necessary or sufficient—
guarantees the outcome.
Paying attention helps.)

I notice
I've slipped from talking
of my own work
to that of a phalanx of
related others—initially out of modesty:
who could bear to say "I attempted
a thoroughly contemporary idiom"? Perhaps
if I'd dropped the "thoroughly".
And I don't think, personally, I ever produced
"the terminally hip"—
or that it's relevant
to belabor those who did.
I've written enough duds
to know bad poems
are their own 'reward'—
own, punishing reward.

I notice also
that it's difficult to talk
of past intentions
except with the mindset
of those intentions—
the arguments I had rehearsed
so many years ago.
They're a little embarrassing
and one notes
'problems' with them now—

not always one's
own problem with them—

and, in this case, finds
the truisms of today
demand you define yourself
as, to a degree, in opposition:

it looks like you're a modernist
to some extent, or would-be avant-gardist.

(Though back then
it was more that I thought
that that was how
art changed—through
avant-gardes—
than that I thought
I was demonstrably ‘of’ one.)

Both have gained a
sort of respectability
since the high-tide
of postmodernism’s
rise and rise,
and now its seeming stalling
—as though postmodernism now felt
much less confident of its future
or of its distinction from the past.

Though the valency of this word
seems to change and diminish
every few months—
its high-water mark
in terms of éclat
a distant decade ago.

(And that’s how you feel,
right?)

Still, a kind of
crusty, modernist/avant-gardist insistence,
it’s true, can look impressive.
I guess
all this must be ‘gone into’.

It is amusing, ‘instructive’ (i.e., Who’s
amused, instructed?) that, as one begins,
these themes exfoliate, blossom, radiate
(... um, outward).

The alternative to proceeding thus
would be to state
an intended itinerary
and follow it:
a little like explicating
the not very eidetic code
of a map
and then producing it
—an acknowledgement of the inevitable
coarseness of grain, loss of detail,
verisimilitude,
of ‘accuracy’ even.
But at least
it would be
legible, read.
The intimate,
responsive flexibility
of the prior tangent-chasing
(to ‘name’ a method)
might claim to touch more bases
but not offer the clarity of abstraction.

Think of ‘The Oath of the Horatii’. No, no!
Think of maps—as contrasted with in situ photographs.

And it might be infinite, relatively infinite,
the “tangent-chasing” … (Did you in fact
recognize it as “intimate”, “responsive”? Or
am I just saying that?).

And how interesting
is my poetry, or ‘thought’,
that it should be endlessly analysed?

How interesting is anybody’s
(a safer question)

that second-degree description
is more rewarding
than the primary thing?

“Is this the case
for changing tack, then?”
(A small English comedian
dressed in women’s clothes—
and possibly a woman, though
you know English comedians—
asks this question,
of another comedian,
a tall one dressed in
railway worker’s uniform.)

Or is it
the formal requirement
of a change of tone,
or of focal distance? or time for a joke—
a quip to relieve
tension, tedium, brain space?

Certainly
I’d rather be writing a poem than
writing this!—ha ha—(which signals ‘joke’).
Though it’s
not entirely different:
like reflecting on a
channel-identification advertisement—
glimpses, of all those
whacky shows—rather than
sitting at a table in
a cafe, writing
what I normally write:
a letter to a friend,
making up a story, say
—(the things I do)—

instead, fleeting references
to poems of the past,
so that they are recalled
but barely and briefly
and dropped again:
That’s the guy in…
Isn’t she from
Neighbors, The Bill? —
the reason—and the manner in which—
this seems
not satisfactory enough
to be a poem. Well,
maybe Charles Bernstein
would not—on those grounds—object

(He has his problems, too, right?)

I'm tossing up between two methods—
that a little resemble the tussle between
the two figures with their goalposts—
and will have to decide.

It seems I'm talking
about past practice
—and must at some stage
talk about concurrent work
and decide where past practice ends,
some continuing present
takes over. I'll put the past's rationales
in its own terms
as I remember them
and comment on those terms
as I see them now. The success
or failure, then,
of those early poems
will not be relevant.
A pity, because I like them—
most a little innocent
and confident, concerned
more exclusively
with aesthetic issues.
Some led where I am now.
Some are where I still am
in one way or another—
same ideas, or similar,
still signed up
for the same event—
my technique a little looser
a little tighter, willer, more
direct, or less so,
guard up more, footwork slower,
ing ring craft more sure
etc etc
But what else—
blather on about the
'austerities' of a 'late style'?
(Am I a painter?!)

There should be
swelling music here,
or a sudden silence, the
ambient sound-track maybe spookier—
the light should change:
I'm about to make
the necessary statement
delimiting what I'll set out to do,
what I won't be doing, my method

(Death by a thousand similes—metaphors abandoned in
mid extension?)...

Of the two procedures
chasing tangents seems
so likely to invade in any case
that it should not be entirely
given its head
and nominated as 'the rule'.

Rather,
the discussion—
by poem or group of poems—
quoted a little and included
as an appendix, 'tabled'
in some way—maybe
to go unread, but
'on the record'—
might be the best way to go.

There must
be so many more prejudices,
'themes', ambitions I had
that I still haven't covered—
though this is just the prelude.

(‘themes, ambitions’—one theme
might be the interpersonal,
a concern with friendship
—an ideal, or notional, community
... or solidarity—marked
by the concomitant use
of (real) personal names.

Not a theme
I consciously pursue—
or even find interesting
in the abstract
though I see it's something I do.)

But maybe 'significant highlights',
a kind of typology, and examination
of major cases
will flush those remaining un-named
into the light—

will, in fact, give substance
to what has been abstraction, rumor!
I.E., —"he must write about something!"

(Though poems are so ghostly,
in their way:
    it might be like
handing round negatives
to friends—who hold them
up to the light, squint, and try
to reconfigure
the picnic, party
or travels I'm expounding.
"On", "on". (I think the line
should not end on "on"—
but "expounding"
requires the preposition.
    I supply it.)

But that is a doubt,
 isn't it? And neither
here nor there. On!

'(H)appy snaps' of the past—
check 'em out!
There seems so much to say about the early poems. I cared about them at the time. But what they didn’t do meant so much more than what they did: a series—or simple instances of—exemplary avoidances of what I considered then to be error and which added up to a style of subtractions. I guess ‘cool’ is always a matter of ‘less is more’. Maybe I thought the poems exciting in their severity? The audience whipped—and a little shocked but liking it, or lapping it up? Maybe I didn’t think this—as I read mostly to friends, the like-minded or moderately rivalrous ‘peers’ of similar or different persuasion.

The influences at work and the theory in play, for me, were New York School writers like Berrigan, O’Hara, Ashbery, Koch, to a lesser degree Padgett, Schjeldahl—Berrigan’s Sonnets in particular, some early long poems of O’Hara’s (‘Day & Night In 1952’, ‘Meditations In An Emergency’—

—other poems of O’Hara’s
I know I re-read regularly as I slowly made my way through the Collected Poems: O’Hara, Collected 93 ibid 197
'Oranges: 12 Pastorals', 'Homage To Rose Selavy', 'Memorial Day 1950', 'A City Winter', 'Blocks', 'Romanze, the Music Students', 'Aus Einem April', 'On Rachmaninoff's Birthday', 'Poem In January'... And in a way it is almost as important that I liked things about almost every poem from about page 200 on —to maybe the 400s— and that I read them slowly and often over more than a year. 1974/75/76);

and

Ashbery's books, up to Three Poems. 'For Grace After A Party' for example. A number of specific poems I returned to:

'Tricks for Danko'

('For Grace After A Party' is by Frank O'Hara, not a poem that is usually much remarked upon—but I liked it a lot and wondered at its slippery ease.

'Tricks For Danko' is by Robyn Ravlich, another poem I liked a great deal.)

John Forbes's poems of the early 70s (and Tranter's) I admired—for their confidence, uncluttered, un-sentimental clarity: their evasion of thinking
that came bearing its excuse
in the form
of the conventional markers
of 'poetry'
and introduced therefore
as already failed,
as cornball, a waste of time—poetry that said
"I'll get out of your way now," having tugged at your sleeve
and gone, and—in a mildly ironic, chastened, reflective way—made one comparison
and ruefully backed away
from useful conclusions—
except to tighten its lips
and say, in a pretence at 'grimly', bitterly, or
philosophically, something like
"So that's that," or
"It's fucked—how about that, eh?"—Poetry's own variation
on "If it's not broke don't fix it":

"It's a disappointment—
so it'll need a poem."

"It's broke!
This won't fix it."

That this may have been unfair—which
I don't feel the need to concede, except hypothetically—
seems no objection to it, at this remove
especially. I think art develops that way. (through such impatience))
I thought it then too (though I was not hindered especially
by the thought that I was wrong about the poetry
I objected to).

Art history seemed
to back up this view: the annoyance, impatience
the Minimalists, the Hard-Edge crowd,
Rauschenberg and Johns felt with each other
but all felt with the Abstract Expressionists—
second-generation especially: suddenly
all the sincerity, directness, expression, 'touch',
vigor, the 'tough' quality ascribed (I think)
to Tenth Street gallery style—became suspect,
risible, distrusted, its credit blown. (Picasso's scorn
for Bonnard is an example. We can see Bonnard’s painting as beautiful, and still evolving through the 30s and 40s—where Picasso, with no justice, but with profit to his own determination, saw it as weak, “pissy”. His term.

Language is far more strictly and richly coded than the media of visual art whose immediacy and phenomenologically rich physical presence are so much greater. (One has a rich or enriching code—the other has a rich medium and weaker code.)

This renders many reductive procedures in visual art not easily, or profitably, transposable to poetry. On the other hand the slightly anaemic, weakly willed presence of Lyrical Abstraction and of artists, like Rivers, mixing the modes and diluting their aesthetic intensity as kinds—though for some payout in the individual pieces produced—seemed to me not so debilitated as applied to poetry. Here, in fact, a conceptualist’s rigor applied to poetry emptied the field of much interest.

Witness the early work of David Antin. Antin’s later ‘talks’ follow another literalist reduction enabling him to bring a lot of resources to a limit case example of Poetry.
But not one I wanted to take up—
extcept in its refusal
to rule any subject out of poetry.

This
is what I mean by “So much to say”. And yet
it doesn't describe the process: small, thin things
aesthetically, my poems. But it describes how they were intended.

(Sigh.)

Also in the mix

---am I talking
like a footnote here?---

were the injunctions of Robbe-Grillet
and, soon, the rather sheer—pace Peter Craven (is there
any term more suspect than “sheer”—especially
“sheer quality”, even from a critic “at
the height of his powers”?)—sheer cynicism of
Gilbert Sorrentino. How late did I come across

*Imaginative Qualities Of Actual Things?* By ’78, surely.

To close this footnote: my own rather old-fashioned
avant-gardist reading of modernist art history
which I generalized and transposed to literary history
automatically ... This was in the mix—gingered up
a little bit, to some degree—by the coolly cerebral effect
of Donald Brook’s views; study of Nelson Goodman’s book

*Languages Of Art*; etc—and close involvement/immersion
‘with’y/in’ the vocabulary (and attendant attitudes)
of the art criticism

in *Studio International* and *Artforum—*

Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg
versus the Conceptualists, Kosuth, Judd, Smithson.

#

(A Cloud Of Knowing )

#

All of this formed—what?—a cloud, a
rebus, a lens that focused my ideas and
intuitive writing and enthusiasm for some of the effects of the poetry I was steeped in. I think one puts one's shoulder to the door and pushes and cracks appear and you break through—but which and where? Where Theory indicated? Not necessarily. It is not so linear and directed, the process. Or not reliably. I could approve more poetry than I could write, for instance. It is all improvisation against what is not or no longer allowed or possible, against what you or your limitations make impossible—and an alertness always over eager—easily roused, easily dampened—for light at the end of the tunnel—a new poem begun, taking shape, a gestalt suddenly imagined. The theories are just the stilts, trainer-wheels, tug boats by which you've manoeuvred the giant gun-boat of your 'giant' ambition into place and have it firing at its target, a kind of imprecise or 'good enough' orientation—and your faulty character, weird inhibitions and desires, solipisms, solecisms, humor and the rest of it (sensibility, taste, style) drive it.

So, the poems?

The reason I go on at such length—is that the inchoate list of ideas and influences has not changed so much so much as it has grown a little and maybe refined itself—some self-correction—and new art has been experienced—poems, art, TV, reading—but not much real revision: adding up to a more hedged about, more
qualified thesis or body of opinion ('weaker' in the philosophical sense of 'strong argument')
that is closely related to the earlier, brasher, bolder, more 'certain' form.

The poems—'Terrific Cigarette', 'Nerve', 'The Mysteries', 'aeiou', 'Minimal Poem'—do a few things
that will seem to fit with the above.

Their culmination,

  first peak, as it felt,

were the poems in my initial publication.

(Four Poems, Sea Cruise Books, 1976.)

What were the theories? I'll tell you
but at the time 'Theory' had not been capitalized,
and for me it remains mostly in the same state ...
I believed in ideas, thought poetry should not bar them:

but I read mostly poetry and art criticism—
and the access that gave me to, say, Jasper Johns' or Robert Rauschenberg's way of working
was pretty much empathetic conjecture (only)—

I thought The Sonnets and 'Tambourine Life'
worked the same way, or somehow similarly
and that was how I read them.
A theory? If the theory was wrong
is the poetry? I don't see it.

But, for curiosity's sake:

I might here, as well
as anywhere else, give a list
of some constituent nodes of theory,
of attitude,
  of concept
and a brief account of them—a little late
coming? too early, who knows?

  * Minimalist Literalism. This meant
    an insistence on presented structures—
    materials in the art work,
composition etc, being strictly
non-symbolic. A step beyond Pound's
"No symbols where none intended".
No symbols tout court. Typically,
minimalist works were sculpture—
simple shapes like boxes and cubes,
a line of bricks, pieces of metal
leaning against a wall, or against
each other, a repetition of units
(the bricks, a set of rungs ascending a wall,
Eva Hesse’s perfunctorily random series
of tubes against a wall).

But literalism was a big factor
in the sensibility of US art generally
at the time:
the sheer (?) expansiveness of the paintings
emphasizing their physicality,
the material nature of their facture;
the poker-faced quality
of the images that much Pop Art
re-presented:
the Ben-Day dots
of Lichtenstein’s comic strip frames,
the centrally placed and deadpan presentation
of images in Warhol, the
mysteriously unexplained
juxtapositions (of paint with
feathers, with silk-screen image,
with real chair or stuffed bird or
drinking glass—in Johns and Rauschenberg
(the ambiguity of ‘real’ expressive
brush stroke
beside (real or depicted) flag—
itsel a thing or a design?)
The literalism of Ed Ruscha
in his books—Nine Swimming Pools,
Real Estate Opportunities, 26
Gas Stations. It’s in Frank Stella,
Robert Ryman, Cornell even—in fact
Cornell is one example of it as a factor
that (merely?) counterbalances and retards
a too easy translation
into meaning—because obviously
his work is 'poetic'—
but the poetry derives
from the objects' aura as things, depends
upon their slow yield
to symbolic meaning
(to any meaning), upon their
inner tension as
a constellation
of equal parts—rather than as
orchestrated intentional staging.

Literalism as present in
Rauschenberg or Cornell (whom
I'm surprised to be talking about—
he was no more than a curiosity
for me in the 70s, though likeable)
is clearly more transposable
to poetry than that of the Minimalists
(like Serra, Andre, Judd, Morris)—
though their insistence on a deliberate
(or 'dumb') literal understanding
of procedure
could be attractive: a sculptural process
might consist of (only) laying down,
adding, subtracting, leaning, pouring
a material
(to demonstrate its character
and the logical exposition of the
constructive procedure. All should be known—
no mystification).

*the arbitrary.* I think I have explained already
most of its charm
in discussing "literalism". I mean
the jolt that the arbitrary can give,
its contrast with what surrounds it—
a la Rauschenberg. This charm
and the (in part) rather deliberate
working method can be seen I think
in Berrigan's *The Sonnets;*
O'Hara's shocks—of disparate imagery—are more old-fashioned in derivation—coming from the licence given by Surrealism, and Mayakovsky.

- **collage** is of course just the technique of affixing many or various pieces to a flat surface, usually combined with paint—as begun by the founding Cubists and by the Dadaists (Arp, Schwitters, Ernst). Johns and Rauschenberg were called for a time Neo-Dadaists for this reason. Burroughs' cut-up technique is a kind of collage (but overlaid with a faith in its ability to produce higher truths). Berrigan similarly (in *The Sonnets*) draws from a more or less uniform or unified pool (like Burroughs) but not with the tone or formal expectation of higher truth so much as that of surprising or beautiful or amusing combinations.

A series of decisions.

#

Recognition—as a process—is the arbiter in this collage compositional process. But, for the degree of 'blindness' necessary to the process—of seeking the arbitrary, the arbitrary-yet-somehow 'good'—the artist need not (needs to not) know or acknowledge this basis!

This augurs badly, I think, for the lasting value of these works—they will surely
be found to be more conservative and predictable than they knew—or allowed themselves to know. Still, I have liked the results.

Generally collage affords—and works—by contrasts and unexpected consonance: pieces betray (or simply stand for) their different origins, their difference in kind, difference of material. But they also possess shape, duration within themselves—as well as (and apart from) their function as an accent, say, part of a rhythm or of a composition within the larger work, where they function as light or dark, sharp or amorphous, slow or quick in contrast with their surround—also working to seem (relatively) historic, contemporary, real/representational, coherent/truncated, dramatic/calm etc etc.

There were a number of artists not highly thought of at the time who (as well as stars like Johns and the Pop artists) were employing collage: taschists, second-generation Abstract Expressionists (like Joan Snyder) and Robert Motherwell himself (of the first generation)

• Abstract Expressionism should not need much explanation. But note its largeness of scale (relative to the time), supposed directness.
and avoidance of symbol. This last
is not so secure—though it fits
with Kline and much of De Kooning
and Pollock, Guston and Rothko.
Many began using symbol and allegory
(as New Deal Social Realists—
or with psychoanalysis of one type or another
in Pollock’s case) and could be argued
to have striven to work the new style
back to it—in Pollock’s case maybe,
in Rothko’s (if the late works
are all held to be symbolic—
a kind of one-note painter in different keys and tones?).
The non symbolic reading
was also the ‘advanced’ reading of the day
(the 60s and 70s)—of Greenberg, Fried,
and Minimalists and literalists. Like the repressed,
the symbolic readings and interpretations
were not long kept at bay.

The second-generation Abstract Expressionists
and subsequent Lyrical Abstractionists—
were not seen as of much chop
(advancing less, risking less,
less existential and edgy,
less pioneering—and therefore—
doomed to being hackneyed).
But many I liked.
Not that I knew a great many
examples of their work.

- Alain Robbe-Grillet’s positions, as
outlined in his Towards A New Novel,
I found consonant with much of the above:
the emphasis on the literal,
the phenomenological, experiential.
(La Jalousie could be the latest—then—
in a line from Gide’s The Immoralist through
The Outsider). His ideal
was an objective style
(Barthes’ Degree Zero)
with no anthropomorphism
or seemingly all-seeing/knowing
authorial presence. An inherent contradiction
comes with the last—which I think turned him
towards game and pastiche.
And the ‘degree zero’ is
an unattainable ideal—
and maybe a chilling and limiting one,
though I liked Jealousy a great deal and some of the others.

I also liked Duras
(the earlyish books Moderato Cantabile,
The Square, The Sailor From Gibraltar,
The Little Horses of Tarquinia—
and I read the later books in the 80s)
and Butor (whom I know really
only through Passing Time and
A Change Of Heart).

• **Clement Greenberg** (see his
Art and Culture, or more
recent collections of his essays)
was the critic most responsible
for clearing the way for the Abstract Expressionists.
His critical influence
peaked in the 60s
by which time he had pretty much
stopped writing. His ideas were developed
and argued by Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss,
Barbara Rose and others
in Artforum magazine
through the 60s and early 70s—and defeated, finally,
as necessary doxa
by their own narrowness:
an increasingly delimited modernism,
made more and more thinly pure,
had arrived at paintings
(by Louis, Olitski and others)
that could not compete for interest
with the art of the Minimalists,
Conceptualists, Pop artists
and performance artists present
at the same time. Nor
could this position
point to a likely seam
for further development. Postmodernism—
perhaps heralded by and consisting of
this competition—
put paid to his ideas. (that is, Greenberg’s)

His essay ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’
I liked a great deal and found persuasive.
Centrally he proposes
that real art—the avant-garde—imitates
the methods of art
(i.e., isolates, identifies, purifies,
the essential means), while kitsch
(i.e., most other art)
imitates the effects of art
(the general look and feel
of past, acknowledged art).

It may be Ptolemaic of me,
but I think Postmodernism
can be brought under this rubric—its dependence
on irony and parody and criticism
meaning
that it does not imitate past works
(not as its point at any rate)
but works on their methods and conventions.

A favorite phrase of mine is Greenberg’s
“Where is the great but absent art of our age?”
Foolishly he goes on to list its possible characteristics
and bemoan its non appearance,
pretending to be convinced
of his later, forthcoming vindication.)

- Donald Brook’s position (and fate)
was akin to Greenberg’s—
admittedly they were critical opponents—
in that for Donald
art ‘as-properly-so-called’
(his phrase, naturally)
was innovatively, exploratively conceptual
and critical. Art that was not
(i.e., most art) was in fact craft:
the use of known methods
for a known result—
some comfortably expressive art,
or decorative art,
that functioned as signifier of taste,
as conversation point,
as, indeed, decoration. Brook
taught me at Sydney University
and I enjoyed the experience—though few did.

- the decorative, the lyrical abstractionists.
An idea of the late Greenberg school
was that the decorative could be
'heroic', achieve a major key
(escape the pejorative sense of the word)
and mean, though mean by being.
And here I think they referred
to their usual quartet of contenders—Louis,
Noland, Olitski and to the better but, they figured,
ideologically apostate,
Frank Stella.

It seemed or attractive to me (i.e., —the decorative as heroic)
as fitting many of O'Hara's
larger poems—their conception of themselves—
and lesser artists ("lesser"?—Tuckson, Norman Bluhm,
Jack Bush, Twombly, Joan Snyder,
Motherwell). O'Hara's
(never clearly articulated) concept
of 'composition by field'
seemed likely to aspire
to such ambitions and desiderata,
transposed to poetry:
producing an immanent, enlivened field
of verbal moves and tensions and textuality.

- Olson, Creeley, Davie. I hardly
want to talk about Olson and Creeley—
though for a while they were in there,
furnishing the back of my mind,
urging a poetry of intuitive discursive
nerve and an emphasis, therefore, on phrase,
on expressive rhetoric rather than
on metaphor and older kinds of formal unity.
(“Closure” I guess is the term now.)
Donald Davie’s theories (see
Purity Of Diction In English Verse and
Articulate Energy) I found
compatible with what I chose to go with
of the Projectivists:
again it focused on phrasing, diction, rather than tropes.

#

Now the poems—‘Terrific Cigarette’, ‘Nerve’, ‘The Mysteries’
‘aeiou’, ‘Minimal Poem’, ‘Lyric (For Nature)’, ‘Sardine-Can Experience’ and a poem I remember now as having a dog barking in it.

The poem ‘Terrific Cigarette’ is probably meant—or had tickets on itself—as a demonstration of poetry created out of the
everyday and ordinary without needing to indicate
‘everyday’ by a shift in its tone
or by framing it as special
within ‘the cultural space’ of Poetry.

It is determinedly
down-at-heel urban:
plumbing failures, trips to the laundromat,
a scenario of (the)
woman-goes-to-work, (the) man-
stays-home.

The poem states an enthusiasm for O’Hara and
delights in his flatly literal reading of ‘In Dreams
Begin Responsibilities’ (Delmore Schwartz)—i.e.,
“responsibilities start in bed”. The poem is also a love poem
which it tells with a deflationary simile at its end
meant partly as comment on poetry's reliance on such practices. I'd better read the poem to see if there's any more I should say—or if it bears out what I've so far said.

("poetry's reliance on such practices"—NB other poetry, the wrong poetry. But 'such practices'? Love? I suppose I meant too clinching, too powerful (too poetic) similes

'Nerve' is a joke made of false naivety and repetition, and an apparently merely rational voice and mentality: again a poem made out of nothing. It describes a poetry reading featuring friends of mine, joking about their favorite poems. I must've written it hard on the heels of writing 'The Mysteries' (a title that now recalls John Forbes—as a source of the fascination of that word). 'Mysteries' is a poem that explains and then makes more interesting the word "mystery"—by replacing its referent with another.

Something like that. The fly crawling along the rim of a lampshade is from Robbe-Grillet I think (In The Labyrinth)—not that it matters—and the poem also derives somewhat from the clarity and arbitrariness of John Ashbery. These are things I note about it merely.

'aeiou' and 'Minimal Poem' are poems that, in their tiny ways, applied a particular reading of Minimalism to poetry. If painting should be color (with no gesture to import "drawing")—then sculpture should be purely carving (i.e., subtraction of elements) or assembling (the addition of parts to each other) and composition (in either case) should be unemphatic, non-illusionistic, non anthropomorphic procedure—a neutral order that represented nothing and not 'Order' as any platonic concept (in this I echo Greenberg, Judd and others, Stella say). Poems could do
something similar. 'aeiou' likes its couplets, lines more or less self-enclosed, emphasising their extendability. Each pair plays on one vowel (or means to). The second half in a willful abandonment of rigor mirrors the first half visually and is simply (i.e., 'hardly', or *in no very tightly demonstrable way*) an emotional equivalent and extension of the first half. It's almost 'winsome', cute, as a love poem. Though hard to hate I hope. 'Minimal Poem' decides to consist entirely of simile or analogy—as the mark or province of poetry—and to evacuate the comparisons of (their) meaning. Not a great poem.

Another that attempted this was 'beers', a poem I like a lot better: again, made of deliberately failed, inadequate, 'understrength' comparison: something is compared to "something", or to a drawing that might be a drawing of clouds or that could be taken to resemble clouds. And if something is only like something that could be said (only) to resemble something else how much is it like that thing?

Ha, ha. Still, it amused me. And there it is.

A poem called 'Lyric', sarcastically I think, and subtitled 'for nature', is 'about' a build up of tension through the postponement of the discovery of the source of a sound. It describes an ambient atmosphere that is 'boring'—or experienced as desultory—and the misplaced attribution of a noise (as the source of a mild irritation)—along with the build up of an atmosphere suggesting imminent rain. Imminence
is all. Then suddenly and unclimactically it is all over. Not a bad poem: 'natural' processes i.e., weather and industrial noise, reading, disease—a trip to a chemist's for an ointment—make the 'nature' urban.

The dog-barking poem and 'Sardine-Can Experience' both quote, unattributed or distinguished by quote marks, phrases from Harold Rosenberg, Greenberg's rival for the meaning of Abstract Expressionism—and the loser of that debate. He was less of a formalist and more willing to insist on a psychologizing and Surrealist reading—and to write a less restrained, more poetic critical appraisal. Action Painting and the emphasis on Expressionism in the term 'Abstract Expressionism' were his contribution—and the existential individualism and implicit criticality. (Greenberg stressed the progressive delimitation of painterly means and a derivation from Cubism and Picasso—a Cubist, Picasso—Miro, and from Arshile Gorky: a high-water mark of European achievement, set by Picasso and Matisse, and inflected by Klee, Kandinsky and others—reducing Painting to its proper, essential means—the meaning of modernism: distillation—color, not drawing, not illusionism, not narrative sequences but a unified (if complex maybe / maybe not) gestalt compelling because it effectively said, This is painting and nothing else, nothing extraneous and it is enough and is more—because more pure, less trammeled—more satisfying, more overpowering for not telling a story, depicting a beautiful woman or a cavalry officer on a horse—for being an arrangement of colors on a flat plane and not denying that plane. This is to paraphrase Greenberg in the vocabulary he would Approve—the terms of Maurice Denis in the 1890s. These terms Greenberg would have lead to Stella, Noland, Olitski, Louis.)

But I forget the poems! They're rather small beside this argument and its imperatives. I fell asleep writing the 'Sardine-can' poem—and very much liked the way the words I deciphered, the words I'd written as this happened, had begun to stray and, in their straying from sense, have
a lulling almost narcoleptic effect for the reader—if not 'on' the reader (though for all I know people regularly cannot get past that poem awake, heads hit the table regularly maybe at that point). Anyway, I like it. It quotes bits of what were arguments for the 'still-life', for the collaged bit of 'reality' (the sardine-can, say), as being signally or emblematically Modern. There's a bit of Stevens, too, though via Rosenberg. (I wasn't a Stevens reader—never have been.)

More of Rosenberg's characterizations of 'the modern' turn up in 'Life At The Grande Jatte', the title I find I had given the barking dog poem. I have it here before me. It has pleasingly large quotes from Rosenberg, adding to them the aural suggestion of the dog's barking—and of confusion and tension—to sit beside his 'modern'—and make it more modern I guess.

'Minimal Poem' consists mostly in a description of a poem that is like a tennis player or is like a system of organization or system of canal locks, or a case moving through (legal) courts, or like rhyme or a poem whose sense (or organization really) lurches from simile to simile discarding each for the next and so on— with some suggestion (or attempt at it) of a moebius strip's return and repetition. (A poem called 'Girls' attempts to divide the sound of the word from its (gendered, connotative) meaning and then to associate (as if not logically) the meaning with the word. (!)

It seems not unlike 'Minimal Poem' in its way—in this way. Generally this kind of writing was never going to allow me to say a great deal except—allegorically, or 'by the by'—
on what might be an
'ostensible' surface.

'beers' seems smarter than some of the others
and cleaner in its language.

As well, there are
a few overheated poems—in that first collection,
Blonde & French—an attempt at O'Hara's
'rarishing' phrasing.

The real climax
of this youthful writing had been published earlier
in a smaller pamphlet: these were
longer, collaged poems that manage to mix
the techniques and aesthetic determinations
of the poems discussed so far
with the prettier language,
and imagery, and diction
of O'Hara (or licensed by
O'Hara ... and by Berrigan and Koch and John Forbes—his
'Admonitions' (written with Mark O'Connor)—
and Rauschenberg—
and second-generation Ab Ex painters—whose work
was not critically rated high
but which I was attuned to (a major
misgiving for me
in relation to these techniques and procedures—
or a major misgiving
tempered and suppressed into a minor one:
I like a lot of painters whom I can not so easily
approve or justify,
and, conceptually,
distinguishing between
taste and judgement
doesn't help. Still).

O'Hara's language and range are impressive.
But in these poems of mine
the shifts, I think,
show the constituent parts
often to be
quite different in origin
and not to emanate
from a single voice
— as O'Hara's poems do—
though the unity of the poem
(say 'Terrific Days')
does register,
but as musical,
to do with
orchestration
or emergent order.
If the poems are thought to work.

("distinguishing between taste and judgement")
I don't have a fixed usage
for the term 'taste' but here
I am thinking of it as unreconstructed
and not very reconstructable—

like the sense of
"ideology"
that says
it is 'false'
but that 'scientific ideology'
("judgement" my term here)
can 'correct' it or see beyond it.
Punishingly Althusserian I don't intend to be.

There were three
of these long poems, published—together with one short one—
as *Four Poems*: they were 'Four Poems', 'nonplussed'
(in *KBSP* 25)
(the short poem), 'Water', and 'Terrific Days Of Summer'.
(*KBSP* 26, 34)
(This last, published also in *Blonde & French*, David Malouf singled out
as surpassing anything in *Four Poems* ... (?) ... but good
of him to praise it.)

Anyway, those four poems. I think they
bear more attention
than the poems I've so far
spoken of. Generally they are of
a higher attainment (a so much
more *important* word
than 'standard') and are
more ambitious aesthetically.

They are—or appear to be—
collage (as I've used that term so far)
and by that means
do not locate a speaking voice
or do not locate that voice
—if and where
it is seen to be one—
as an unproblematic, lyric
'subject'. At the time—
if I had needed to,
and I didn't—I would have thought
it was simply 'not subjective',
or that the subjectivity was 'modern'
(meaning the experience was
fractured and myriad and fast-paced
and delivered through various registers—
intellectual, emotional, physical,
sophisticated, 'dumb'—through various cultural
filters). Like 'real life'—
and that it was Abstract, was
evidently Art.

The first, 'Four Poems', has a motif of
narrative, filmic grabs, used quite
shamelessly (i.e., 'literally')
as a formal device. The last poem,
'Terrific Days of Summer', is to my mind
lyrical enough
but breaks up any propositional coherence
sufficiently
—again
the characteristic relational usages
parts are put to
in collage, as I've described it—
to seem,
while emotional, still, *impersonal*—
a structure more than a voice.

'Water' is the third poem
and begins as tacked-on
to the preceding short poem 'Nonplussed'.
It begins with the
roman numeral (II)
indicating it is part two—
and it reprises the 'story' of the short poem.
'Water' is collage—but in a more
(deliberately cheesy) comedic
(i.e., comedian's) way. So it
uses fewer elements than 'Four Poems'
or 'Terrific Days'.
It discusses a hangover
and a feeling of "belatedness" (to use
Bloom’s phrase—is it his?)—anyway,
an anxiety
about influence: that of the New York poets.
It selects a number of lines
from the New York School
using the word "pill"—and some, too,
of the Johns Tranter and Forbes. The word
"pill" was attractive to all of them
for its phonetic oddness
and its contemporaneity and mundane quality
as an object or referent. It was
my intention to joke slyly
with this locally fascinating importation—
suggesting it, implicitly, as an indicator
of cultural imperialism or colonization.
I disown this tack finally. The poem
also makes use
of a deliberate and gratuitous tangent
or interruption—transparently
a means of upping the tempo
which was flagging.
This interruption was plainly an out-take
from the narrative riffs used in 'Four Poems'.

'Terrific Days' was compiled
by going through filled
and much worked and mined
notebooks—circling good passages, phrases,
words—from poems that had
not come off, had failed,
as well as bits of writing transcribed
from art criticism, aestheticians etc,
phrases overheard.
Because I deliberately
opened these exercize books
at any page at random
(when I originally used them—and turned the book
upside down
when blanks became hard to find easily—
and started again, as before, till it felt
full once more) the passages
were free of any too close
chronological sequence.
I chose a spot to start
or some spots
and then typed them up—
if I liked them—in
the order they appeared,
I added to them
whenever inspired to. As
the poem began to take
a shape and thematic form or gestalt
I could occasionally riffle through
to passages I knew
I wanted next
and then go back to the system's
own delivery of the arbitrary, the
stunning, the banal. Maybe a third of the poem
was new work written in the process. Maybe less.

Lots of editing.

The distance of the voice
from that of a conventional lyric Subject
(a locution it tries me to write. I do it
for you, o examiner!), the use—
as (an evident) method—of
collage and of quotation,
appropriation—(a term the
art crowd used to love
so amusingly a few years ago,
pronouncing it with great nicety,
knowing it ennobled *so much*)—this
let the lush
and poetic language—that I had not been able
to make seem unforced
in earlier poems—read as detached
and acceptable, rendering
the previously objectionable
purple, striving, *forced* imagery and diction
now 'second degree': to seem
quoted, held in objectifying pincers of
(unstated, unquantifiable)
irony:

at once a kind of distance and a kind of immediacy.

((At some point I thought of these poems—
with their kind ad hoc system
and willing departure from it—as like
Larry Rivers' painting

*Washington Crossing The Delaware*. Which

I knew

as parodying the corn of the subject
and deliberately putting itself at odds
with shibboleths

held dear by the Abstract Expressionists

and the cooler, newer crowd—

while availing itself of their modes

and attitudes. It was like Johns and Rauschenberg

(a kind of composite in my mind)—

but less programmatic. 'Lighter', too, admittedly.

*Washington Crossing The Delaware*

by Larry Rivers.

Rivers was of course a favorite

of the O'Hara set. I knew that

and I knew that O'Hara's taste and affiliations

were not seen as all that avant-garde

by the 60s art world. I could see

that they weren't.

On the other hand

I do genuinely like much of Rivers' work.

The picture manages to take life

from the heroism it parodies
(the staged grandeur of the
History Painting genre), and from
the ‘expressivity’ (homeless, untethered)
of the expressionist manner
— as well as from
the cool casualness
of the work’s ‘perfect’ incompletion,
sketchiness, cheeky estimation of what is
‘good enough’.

If ‘Terrific Days’, for me, broke any ‘rules’ at the time
it was the crime of being ‘romantic’—at least
in ‘subject matter’. But it escapes that by
holding it all in its manner of presentation. A
cake had and eaten.))

#

I’ve written other collaged poems.
Each, usually, at some interval from the last.
I have not wanted them to become too similar.

‘Blazing Shoes’, ‘August 6th’ are the
main ones. In terms of length. ‘Life
Your Weight’, ‘Italian Drink’ are others.

‘Beginning The New Day’ is a slightly special case—
it has rules binding its procedures.

(Three-line stanzas, the middle, or second line of which
was a second line from a particular John Ashbery volume.)

Some poems begin with and in the framework
associated with the process of collage, take
energy from it, and become more ordinarily discursive
or meditative poems thereafter. Or switch in and out
of that mode: ‘Double Trouble’ is one such.

One avoidance of what was for me
the disablignly conventional meditation
was to attempt a poetry of statement—
neutral in tone, but allowing many sorts of discourse (fragmentarily) to operate. ‘Talking To You’ did this—as did ‘A Terrible Attitude, Born of Suffering’. The correct title ends ‘Based On Suffering’.

(Ken Bolton Collected Poems, Penguin 1992)

In all these—many of them—it is not clear whether the poem’s discursive content is at the heart of the poem’s conception or something more formal: prospective shape, a range of tones. Where a switch occurred, a transformation or conversion, it was more often to the discursive.

The reverse I would think was, with me, less likely. Though the formal may have reasserted itself to end a poem.

In any case, I think it probable that the discursive’s drama is formal in its effects, that they have a formal dimension.

(Is this a dumb idea? I mean they would be analogue to the ‘sense’ wouldn’t they? As in, Of course—well, durrghhh!)

(“ha ha, / me & Mondrian” ends ‘Terrible Attitude’—a kind of cranky bathos,

which strikes an attitude at the end. For example.)

To follow change of subject for formal reasons is to parody the genre—along the way to keeping pace with comic thought
—(whereas) changes that reflect
a 'realization' of some sort—
thought at the discursive level within the poem—

aim at contemporaneity and a mapping of thought-in-context;

changes that reflect unknowingly or guiltily
a flight from certain contents
create speaking (or at least 'present') absences,

a subtext of the evaded.

The crude opposition 'form and content': it is
not a mystery that they're not soluble—
surely purely category-based, abstract philosophy,

or 'purely' aesthetic poetry,
would be more a mystery. (Though there
are candidates—Austin? symbolic logic? Swinburne?)

Do I have to have an attitude here
as to whether Adorno is literature, whether
prose is poetry?

Does an attitude that says
Philosophy, and Poetry, are rhetoric
help? count? need defending?

Probably I do some injustice
to both Austin (who is
just a memory to me: a brief encounter

with How To Do Things With Words
or Sense and Sensibiliala) and Swinburne
(him too I've hardly read or

'read successfully'—'Hendecasyllabics'
was a poem I was impressed with.
Beyond that—I subsided with the

usual response to him: I can't think
above this din! Though
'A Din Melodious').
It seemed to me
—at one stage, at some stage, I thought this ... 
and think it still!—that poetry
should do philosophy. In my father's usage
this would mean a swift punch
to the solar plexus, a rabbit chop
and a knee to the chin, as Philosophy
goes 'down'. But I mean
the gentler usage of
'doing the same job'. Both
are speculative, Philosophy and Poetry,
and deal with the same things—a
cotermininity (to coin a useful
'though' amusing term we won't expect
to see again) that Plato's
late reaction against Poetry
acknowledges. He feared Poetry's
'affective dimension'.
His problem, in my view. A partial,
complicating rejoinder is to posit
Philosophy's dealing calmly
in 'abstraction' and 'the discursive'
as rhetoric

—that is,
'affective—not an original move
even when I made it,
though it seemed so
to me at the time—at the same time
as it felt 'belated', 'unnecessary'. Some notions
of 'academic philosophy' hold that the latter
is more responsibly constrained
by conventions of argument, burden of proof
etc. Poetry, from
this perspective, might be held to
'try philosophy out' without these obligations—
a kind of dressing-up, or play—Let's Pretend
or Let's Imagine—that the poem will attempt
to inhabit and to extend its guise—
often in the face of
acknowledged or possible objections
(to the tenability of doing so)—and be applauded,
the ploy revisited time and again,
for its very untenability. It doesn’t seem to me
that this is beyond philosophy: Nietzsche?
Benjamin, Foucault—mystics?

The view that allows Benjamin as philosophy
would not bar poetry—might, in fact,
tend to dismiss much academic philosophy.

(On the other hand if the word
is to remain useful we have
to allow it some distinction from
Thought or mere Consciousness.)

But, as well, I don’t see that poetry may
only ‘do’ philosophy under
these conditions, this
dispensation: irrational, akin
to Benjamin. Footnotes (though included
here) may well be absent,
‘i’is and ‘t’is not dotted and crossed,
but propositions might still be put
and considered with whatever degree
of clarity or probity the poet determines
and from a basis of knowledge—if one
has it.

(A poem, a poet, advertizes
the ‘conception
under which the poem operates’—
that is, states the rules, implicitly,
and not always with legalistic clarity
as to how binding, how committed to them
the poet is.) (See footnote 10 above.)

In an age
of specialization everyone
—even poets—will have one,
a specialization, some
special knowledge.
Why not use it? This applies
particularly to vocabulary—the verbal tools
of education in any area should pollinate
the received language of poetry.
Again, not a new idea
and the process has been part of
Modernism’s project
and of Romanticism’s, and the 18th Century’s. Poetry’s
taking up the discursive
may seem a non Modernist move (if
Modernism is to be taken as described
by New Criticism—as uniquely ‘presentational’
rather than ‘discursive’ knowledge)—
then this marks the division
Modern / Postmodern
as well as showing continuity—
linking them to each other—
and the Postmodern
to the Romantic, —and the Enlightenment.
All arguable, and not to my purpose.
(I think —unless I will crucially
need to assert a connection with
Diderot and Coleridge, Shelley and
Blackmore.)

Admittedly

—which

one says so easily when
making a claim
and not an admission—

I can admit that
all is ‘indeterminate’, like any
hard-hat deconstructionist,

and that it is the suggestive play
of the language and concepts that is
the point, with the rider

that trying to believe them
(being able to believe them,
believability as precondition)

as you write, is fun
and ‘enabling’—better to mean more
rather than less.

Though there are different means of meaning.

(Finally, I don’t see the logic, the logical possibility, of claiming that all speech acts outside of those by Deconstructivists, are suspect. Why can’t poetry be just as self-conscious—intent on reading its own agenda, and the culture’s

"(J)ust as selfconscious”—that is, as Philosophy, Criticism, Theory.)

That said—what did I do with these impulses?

The Usual story: not much. Not much in the way of philosophy—or philosophy as it’s usually described.

It turns out I am not my time’s, or place’s, great thinker. Not its most systematic either.

All these chosen vectors were operating—continue to—in my writing—beside each other.

I sought to mix dictions and vocabularies (and their perspectives), use the antipoetic cerebral and abstract usages and rhetorics, attempt
various sorts of literalism:
one foregrounding the found
or appropriated, the quoted speech
of an elsewhere—another attempting
a discursive, flat speech of
degree zero. Some poems tried
a similar range through parody.

'Talking To You'
was grave—and 'Terrible Attitude'
was grave parody. I must have been

in a serious mood.

Were they any good?
Do they bear upon more recent work?
Same? Different?

Are they so
because of something
that worked? that didn't work,
in the earlier poem?

I suppose

that sort of thing is
what I'm looking at
with these poems—

has there been 'development'
and how do I feel about it?

'A Terrible Attitude, Based On Suffering'—not
as I had it earlier 'Based on Mourning',
which confused it with another poem,
another poem's title or best phrase
(I couldn't remember how 'mourning'
was involved)—starts out

with poet Chris Burns' summation
of the line that has the Ern Malley hoax
fatally block the way of modernism
here (or, "on our shores" as
the more portentous put it).

KBSP 61, 172

APPDX 49
It then states(;) my own supposed relation to modernism; the latter’s now unfashionable obsolescence; and in a detached but sarcastic way casts an eye over the changing dicta and orthodoxies that grip the visual arts: Michael Fried’s wish to be “compelled to conviction” by great paintings— seeing this desired state as escapist transcendence, an experience which the poem compares to a (particular) ‘systematic derangement’ of the senses that I would practise in the more boring lessons at high school. (A comparison is made with glue sniffing.) The poem then begins a litany or Credo made up of the names of the artists I did / do care about—

These poets seemed equivalent in attention & attitude to the art I thought was serious—their work, & their light & grace, their avoidance of crap, & conceptions of art, and life, as qualifying for all one’s attention, & their despair of the symbolic.

- I still like all that. And that is what I liked then.

The love, now, of the paintings I associate with that I still have - or the idea of the paintings - it is ‘extra’, sentimental, I could jettison it. Or not.
It is my ‘taste’.

Having believed, simultaneously,
in those big paintings,
in the ‘End’ of painting, & in
‘the Conceptual’, etc,

I can only attend
now

“with interest”.
Though as life goes on there are

more & more pictures that have
‘blown me out’

Pass me
that glue,

once again.
Is that what it is like?

The poem continues—

Well,
it tried to be terrific, that painting,
in my head at any rate,

and its trying,
plus the fact

it might all turn out
to be a mistake, no good, over -

only made it all the more serious didn’t it?
‘embattled’?

The litany is a little fuller, the Credo
exactly the same,
as I have given it
in this poem, this essay.

Then the Credo becomes still more
‘tough’ minded—states
basic attitudes:

well I won’t work,
but I do brush my teeth,

I have jeans & a suit,
but no car. There are those that say
I should do more
that I don't take them seriously enough,

I am too involved with art,
or not enough.

I keep my life
free enough to work, to not feel
too strung out—& I manage this -

Well, it accepts poverty, states
that enough balance is maintained
to write poems occasionally.
It claims solidarity with—
Incidentally—another Adelaide writer
and more determinedly
with a second, a singer
Tubby Justice (seen
in the poem
walking—across the street).
The poem jokes some more
about accepting the
artist's life, having
signed up for it. And ends.
The poem
passes through many tones
of 'realism'—
where "real" means
"stoical".

It's not based
on any particular
model. It would be
stretching it to say
it was much like Coleridge's
'Lime Tree Bower' poem, for instance.
Though it has an aspect
where isolation from friends
is considered. Its boldness
of tone
is the thing I liked best about it—
apart from the jokes it contains
and which I still find funny—
and its discussion
of high art, high school,
high modernism—and a high if better dudgeon—
and the everyday
(the latter not just present
as background
but part of the material existence
the poem talks about).
No level need
apologize or
defer to another,
the vocabulary remains
‘objective’ throughout.
   A tone,
equivalent of an
‘eye’ that is jaundiced,
attains a kind of affirmation.

The poem’s framing irony
probably extends
to neutralize this development
as something comic in itself—
or to register this revision
as the speaking subject’s own—
or as available
to that position: a poem
that is finally full of fight
or that is absurdly ‘full of fight’—
a parody of the
redeeming turn. Hmmm.

Around the same time
I had written
a couple of poems
that attempted criticism. One was
‘The Artists’, the other ‘Criticism’! (!)
‘The Artists’
describes the themes and manner
of four Adelaide artists
in an exhibition
I had curated—
begun partly
as a way of expunging
the memory I had
of having written the catalogue essay.
‘Criticism’ is a parody:
the ostensible speaker
is a near apoplectic
art critic and goes
picture by picture
through the exhibition
(that had been current).
It’s genuine art criticism
of a kind,
though exaggerating
the function of delivering judgements.

Some time later—
asked to take part in a conference—
I began a poem called ‘Untimely
Meditations’.
While this one parodies the
lecture format to some extent,
it also offers most of its points straight.

And I hear somebody remark

\textit{What’s so important}
\textit{about YOUR attitudes?}

somebody who hoped I would not just
state my own

but take this opportunity
to be an expert

responsibly talking
in the voice of reason and platitude

- enunciating views
that are not my own?

Is that responsible?
\textit{Then talk naturally!}

Though theory has taught us
there is no such thing

that even prose
is rhetoric, is untransparent -
though it is mostly prose
it has taught us that in.

Theory sees my point—
though I'm sure it doesn't like it.

In part it is a conventional discussion
of the primacy
of the Australian landscape tradition,
an attack on the politics
of Les Murray (but also
those of Adamson and Tranter)
and a description
of the experience of the arrival here
of Theory and
the postmodern.

The poem 'Dazed', written
probably not much later,
offers a deliberately plodding
transcription and reading
of John Forbes' poem 'Nostalgia'—
contrasting his
mental speed with mine. It's
partly a homage,
partly a joke
(that has forgotten its ruefulness

—as it becomes more rueful.
The speaking position
of the poem
eventually centers in
the speaker as protagonist
within the poem's encroaching
and increasingly detailed
landscape effects
so that, at the end anyway,
the speaker presents an amusingly
sentimental/tragic figure—
'Object' rather than 'Subject')
and it’s point, literally, was
to do such a thing in poetry
and yet be entertaining.

('Happy Accidents' was another
poetic essay. More consistently jocular
but focused on a very few intentions:
it gives a history of what ‘everyone’
in my scene—was reading, was
acknowledging as influence. In
the mid to late 70s. A kind of documentation
and bibliography.)

John Forbes'
main influence on me has been
as an embodiment
of standards and as
a pointer to the work
of Berrigan and O’Hara (at
least initially). I have
been more influenced formally
by his less flashy friend
Laurie Duggan. Laurie's
more scattered manner of
the 70s (his poem—
a book—Under The Weather
and poems of that sort—
E.g., ‘The New England Ode’),
his enthusiasm (late 70s)
for Philip Whalen.

These things
combined—together
with the airy structures of
O’Hara, Berrigan and others—
as a formal model
(and model for the tone, mode of
address, under-determined
subject position): the loose,
stepped lines. Admittedly,
I was writing this way
before I read Laurie—or when I’d
only read a few small, more tightly formal things of his—
but his example
would have further extended
permission—and exampled
further tones or stances that give entry
to this manner. I know, I know—Who needed
permission? Encouragement, then. Readyness.

My point in much of the above
is the attraction of flat statement
(its attraction for me)—
as having the flavor of ‘literalism’,
as a move from lyricism and New Critical compression
to 18\textsuperscript{th} century discursiveness
(a refusal
not so much of the disabling
Two Cultures divide
as of the demotion of Poetry
from serious engagement
with philosophy and argument)

—as a means towards
admission of a greater range of experience
and the language to talk about it

(maybe a "greater range of reflection"—
what ‘experience’ was I having?)

#

\textit{Learn To Stutter — Scenes
From Damaged Life!}
Is that the true title
of this apologia?!

A traditional path
to aesthetic
seriousness
has been
"the pursuit
of the direct and the difficult"
(Lucy Lippard). As
writer and art critic
Gary Catalano once said—

of artist Ken Whisson—

(that) (he) “resists
all facility”.

“Risible? You bet,
but all that I’ll soon forget
with my man
ner of working” (Billie Holiday). (‘My Man’)

Rhetorical facility
(especially of the
readily available ‘going kinds’) must be resisted.

At the same time
“all is rhetoric”
(Johnny Mercer)—

so what to do about that?
That’s the bind,
“and yet

the bind is the point”
(Bobby ‘The Brain’ Heenan). (World Wrestling Federation)

A purchase on interest—on
‘authenticity’
even—is gained
through involvement
with the form
and the medium,

with tools
of artlessness and irony,
parody, resistance and the rest.

“Damaged life”—I’ve not
read all of Adorno by a long shot
and don’t know
where the phrase occurs—

but Bogart/Sam Spade
utters his lines
in reply to Elisha Cook's
observation
that Spade talks easily, 
confidently.

“What should I do—
learn to stutter?”

‘Scenes from Damaged Life’
is the subtitle to Adorno’s
*Minima Moralia*. The Spade character
“utters these lines” in
*The Maltese Falcon.*

In the case of Poetry
the answer is, maybe,
*Yes.* One of the kinds
of resistance
I want to posit
—have I posited it already—
if *not*, maybe, *discuss*—
is the resistance
to a too easy rhetoric,
at least when spoken
from a subject-position
that can be construed
as the poet’s.

But I
*will* discuss it! Give me
one more cup of coffee!

One effect
of a poet's sensitivity to words
even one such as mine
will be
a difficulty
and self-consciousness
about utterance—
and about banality,
  *seeming* importance, portentousness of tone
  or cloying sincerity—

and a consequent
deal of difficulty
about where to begin,
and a resultant silence.

This
self-censure will be—
by means of projection—
experienced
as the medium's resistance.

E. — you
don't know
how hard this is.

The obvious way
round it is
parody or genre,
where the model chosen
can be both object
and vehicle of your
analysis.

Adorno's sense
that the luxury required
to have complex, analytical
or speculative thought
is incriminating
is another sense of resistance
in (or to) the very
occasion of writing.
And you trick yourself
out of it,
or around it or plow
on occasion directly over it
but accord it a degree
—varying degrees—
of difficulty, surely.

The equation
of civilization with barbarism
is Benjamin's formulation
originally, but elaborated by Adorno
in *Minima Moralia* and elsewhere.

Billie Holiday,
and Johnny Mercer...
and even Bobbie 'The Brain'
Heenan, from International
World Wrestling! That makes this
Cultural Studies practically.
Doesn't it? "We have no culture
just aerials"? Isn't that
what the bohemian young
eminence grise said?

Or as one
Justin Clemens has it,
"All Cultural Studies
Aspires to the Condition
of bad rock journalism." (a variation on Walter Pater)

Good to say that somewhere.

Yes, Poetry must 'defeat'
Cultural Studies. They have
the same job description:
'Intellectual-
Without-Portfolio'.

("(D)efeat"—that is, as in Harold Bloom,
*The Anxiety Of Influence*.)

And maybe we don't
have to defeat it.

Back to the poems!
Time for a coffee?
Yoiks—time for work!

#
So—

‘Notes For Poems’ (early 80s) was a deliberate choice of a more flowery diction and an alternately hysterical and rhapsodic discursive manner.

Capital ‘P’ poetry. Chosen as a way out of the dead-end that degree zero and the process poem had—temporarily? permanently? necessarily?—brought me to.

US poet Tony Towle was probably the main influence, though the poem bears little resemblance to his productions. (Actually ‘Notes For Poems’ took off from the opening paragraph of some old-fashioned Guide To Classical Music I had found.

I think it had the phrase "species of fine frenzy descend from the sky"—and I was away.)

The signs of Towle’s presence are apparent to me though—in the deliberate artificiality, the persona (to a degree), the linked, extended, ‘classical’ similes, metaphors, and rhetorical patterns or schema, the great show of their ‘deployment’.

At various times I wrote poems as letters (instead of letters even in most cases) and the first published of them I think were three from France and Italy (appearing in Untimely Meditations). These allow an intimacy of address and tone and make plausible a greater freedom of association. I suppose they also involve a degree of self-representation and representation of the addressee (their expectations, background, opinions). A kind of negotiated relationship.
Their attraction for me
as letters or surrogates for letters
was that they gave me
access I normally don’t have
when writing letters
to areas of free association.
One should have access
to this in letter writing
but I don’t normally seem to.

Almost none of these poems
did I conceive of
in the terms I have used. I conceived of them
pretty much wordlessly and intuitively.
Involving a recognition
perhaps readied by these kinds of thinking.

#

I was reading John Koethe recently
(Poetry At One Remove)
whom I knew as an interesting poet-critic
of Ashbery’s,
though whose poetry I didn’t know. (In fact
I thought I’d read a novel once
by him, slightly *nouveau roman*,
and not liked it). Anyway, Koethe
is professionally a philosopher
at the Uni of Wisconsin.

He says, "The conception of poetry
that animates my work
is based on what I take to be
the fundamental impulse
underlying romanticism: the enactment
and affirmation
of subjectivity
and the contestation of its
inert, objective setting
in a world that is emblematic of its annihilation".

... I thought, Wouldn’t knowing that
beforehand reinforce a feeling of
‘Here we go again’? Like
Russell Crowe’s character
going once more, each time,
out into the ring, a gladiator—same
old foe, in one guise or another,
same old triumph sought?
Koethe doesn’t strike one as weird enough
(an idea that came with the phrase
“in one guise or another”)
to be an El Topo character—primed to meet
‘the same foe’ but in weirdly Zen and
Magic Realist guises. (‘Geezers’?)
Fighting a baby here,
there a legless guy
on a blind guy’s shoulders,
a hermaphrodite etc.
—i imagine
it is always him
in his lime-tree bower.
(A little like me.)—
(Yet I disapprove?)
He goes on to say,
of this heroic enactment scenario,
“one form this enactment takes
is the representation
of an attenuated version
of the experience Kant called
the dynamical sublime,
in which the self—
at first threatened
by its perception of a world
that reduces it to insignificance—
attempts to attain a vantage point
from which that world can be
encompassed in thought.”

And I thought,
That’s exactly the opposite of the plot
—or at any rate, outcome—
enacted in ‘Dazed’
where the attempted theorizing
is defeated and the landscape
(nothing very awesome or sublime)
comes even so to assert the speaker's smallness. If this
is black comedy
then does it, by inversion, assent to
the same model Koethe invokes?
I don't feel it does. Though I don't
'think' that it doesn't either.
I likely share
much of Koethe's orientation
but with less seeking after
the spiritual triumph at the poems' close.
I'm not opposed
to that latter instinct. But a consciousness of it
—self-consciousness about it—
prior to writing—"exterior
to the poetic impulse," Koethe would say—
would for me preclude its being allowed
free rein. I would want
maximum self-consciousness and reflexivity
in the poem, in the poem's process.
#

(The letter poems' making plausible "greater freedom of association")

"Make more plausible"? I mean
conventionally more plausible—
or expected—because they are poetry
and have less of the utilitarian tone
of contemporary, debased, truncated, not-very-well-mannered
communications. The poems
signal that they are Poetry
by convention
and that their humor
consists partly of the ill fit
of their notions (the notions they express
thereby) with 'Poetry'.

(Not that these poems set up to demolish
that idea of Poetry—considering it demolished already—
but invoke it to bounce off.)
What sort of ill-fit? The usual: the everyday, but also the more abrasive and, if not shocking, impolite: watching a big Frenchman's little dog cower under his chair, small, leonine and cowardly; watching cars park; remarks on the disappeared mosques of the Jewish Quarter; jokes about Australian War artists; anti-clerical sentiments; quick artistic judgements on the French Baroque's taste in Italian art; a drawing of the Sienna square done as if lying drunk in the middle of it. And so on. These things fill out the 'letter poems'.

On this tour of the various formal gambits, or moves, I've made—"formal/attitudinal" might have been the more circumspect phrasing there— their motivations, their characteristics, I'm left with a small bunch of poems with traditional form: some sestinas and a moderately long poem called 'Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices'. And with the fact that I've written a lot of poems in unrhymed couplets and triplets— since the mid 80s I think. I think the latter were an attempt at a less obtrusively ("ostensibly" used to be Donald Brook's great phrase—as in "look there", "it's obvious")—um, less obtrusively apparent Subjectivity— through a greater regularity of look, but also (as it transpired, but not of necessity) greater regularity of tone—and argument.

Not really a category, these, as the manner is adopted in works already categorized: 'Dazed' for example.

The sestinas were written mostly in the 80s when I finally realized
that some poems I liked *had* that form
and that it explained part of their mystery
and appeal. (Ashbery’s ‘Faust’ — being one. It recalls mostly the Claude Raines *Phantom Of The Opera* movie of the 40s.)
I used them in the spirit
of the Ou Li Po (of whom
I didn’t know anything at the time)—
as productively restrictive form.
The sestina formula
was a machine you strapped to your brain
and the product was something
you could not have produced
otherwise. ‘Bunny Melody’
is one I think is successful. My first, ‘Funny Ideas’,
I began by choosing the amusingly nutty blurb
from *The Fontana Dictionary Of Modern Knowledge* and making it
the middle stanza of the six
and plotting the determining end-words
for the other stanzas
from that mid-point—and ‘writing’.

Limited returns set in, I’ve found,
after a time
and I don’t revisit the form very often.

The other poem ‘Traffic Noises…’
—but that is to jump ahead, to poems that are ‘current’—
the destination in a way
of this whole exercize. We must be nearly there.
Word Count could tell me
exactly how far away it is.
Exciting? And just
as I’ve got the hang of this—
got it, lost it a few times,
but basically ...

So, *later.*

Finally,
I’ve done more in the collage line, too.
Not so much—and this time not because
Diminishing Returns threatened, 
but because I feared 
that the more purely 'aesthetic' determination 
—'aestheticist' even— 
would come to govern, 
that I would have to think of myself 
producing 'confections', 
the verbal equivalent 
of the Lyrical Abstraction paintings that, 
though I could like them, seemed to trade 
on the look of daring abstraction 
(daring accident, risk and etcetera), and which 
controlled that look pretty perfectly, 
orchestrated their colors, their 
randomness, their accident—
too conveniently, whose daring was in fact 
already and long ago acceptable.

So, to avoid this embarrassment.

As well I had mostly turned this process 
upon a quite large mass of well digested 
and abandoned material, usually a good while 
abandoned. I was producing less of this 
(fewer fragments of unfinished poems)— 
was less of a bower bird of others' fragments— 
or of 'fragments' of my own. The discursive and flat manner 
I had been maintaining 
did not generate these nuggets. So, 
few examples: 'Blazing Shoes', 
'August 6th'. The latter, because it is later, 
shows the effects I have been describing. 
It is made up 
much less of small verbal, linguistic 
units. It is itself (consequently?) larger 
and cloudier—whole discursive chains are set up 
and run for a page, or pages.

I like the poem very much— 
but it is commodious, capacious 
and stands at different sorts of angle to 
—different sorts of distance from—
its material. It is their voice
more often: more often close
to first person Subject-position—
though it is more openly and more quizzically
ironic about the voices it mimics, voices it quotes and ‘affects’.
But voice and subject
are a more determining principle
with it than with ‘Terrific Days’—
which could be regarded
as having no Subject position. So,
a difference.

There are a few shorter poems
done this way: ‘Italian Drink’,
‘Life Your Weight’—and a number of poems
that begin with the method or incorporate it
at some stage (‘Double Trouble’, ‘How I’m Feeling’)—
and maybe it is almost a habit of thought
or attention I now bring to writing. This, though,
would be less ‘collage’
than free association. (“Free”, what a nutty idea.)

#

(I think we’re there.)

#

Well here I am,
in The Flash Café, having
shocked the woman behind the counter
by ordering tea:
she likes to guess, long black?
latté? But my throat is sore—
coffee would hurt.
I’m about to embark now
on the exegesis
of the new poems
that have been collecting under the title
At The Flash & At The Baci—
poems written here, written
or revised here. Or at the Baci
down the street. A few weren't.
Or, if they were, I associate them
with the desk at home: one of
the John Forbes poems
(the second, 'Hi, John' the title)
looks out that window
at a plant outside
and another was written
late at night
("People Passing Time")
and depended on pictures I had
taped or blu-tacked to the wall.
Similarly the poem for Kurt:
(entitled “Catching Up With Kurt Brereton")
I was doing a drawing or had
just done. A few others—
the 'Manet' one—I was with
(‘A Picture’ is the title)
Anna and Cath, another I was
watching television while Anna slept
in front of it or—no I wasn’t—
I wrote it the next night
while alone—watching Mouchette.

(The poem is ‘Amaze Your Friends’

Mouchette is a 60s French film.)

Because I'm writing this here
at The Flash in a poem with
the waitress in it—looking at
poems I wrote here too—will she
be able to see them—by some
weird sort of On Being John Malkovich logic?

If she could
she would like her appearances
I hope—though I can imagine
Whadya mean 'Gothic'?
And who's this stylish bitch
you work with that knows so much?
Would she like the poems—um—
on 'purely aesthetic grounds'?
No one else does—ha ha ha.
The best poems in the book
are not necessarily the ones to talk about
I guess, though it might turn out
they get covered. The newest poems
at the back
are to do with Italy, in part,
where I was last year (in the first half of 2000)
—and the coffee shops
*Flash* and *Baci*
are Italian—the poems
consider frameworks, locales
perspectives
from which experiences can be seen
or my thinking can.
Nervously relative. In fact my
trip to Italy *to* another perspective
was the seemingly longed-for,
or wondered-at, coming true—
disconcertingly, as
might be expected.
Anyway, I am not
a markedly ‘centered’ poet
though I live with that
happily enough: tethered
here—but lightly, barely.
The constants might be friends,
Relationships—and a mix of
culture, in which I’m at home,
(though it’s partial, not ‘adequate’,
in various ways—but then I’d
‘have all the answers’ if it were
which would be boring
or boring because ‘not me’. Who knows?)
(Somebody once said
that was a recurrent phrase
in my poems.)

I seem
To have talked myself
into a curious mood. Maybe
I should write a real poem
instead of ‘this’ then? (A
joke I like, which I've made
a number of times
not being sure what its import is
or caring to decide.)

The whole relativism ‘thing’
I would like to bracket out
—like my ideas—as non literary.
It's not a conscious theme, or
—and this is literary, I guess—
is boring for its repetition
and embarrassing: like
some other themes—Who wants
to seem this sook
who always needs his friends?
Similarly poems looking out
a window, or up late at night
thinking. ‘Thinking’?
“Thinking—but never making up
his mind!”

Not
that I mind repetition
in the poets I admire.
(But I'm not one of them.)

So what's in this putative book then—

apart from the issues above
which indicate ‘more of the same’—

anything good?

The first poem in the book,
‘Home Town’, is okay.
It could be characterized
as an ‘I-do-this, I-do-that’ poem
James Schuyler-style.
I do this I do that
is associated with particular
O’Hara poems. If it’s ‘James
Schuyler’ it is in being,
initially, a narrow column
and in being less jumpy—
in the ordering and kind
of events and ideas, than F. O'H.
Not that this is 'true' exactly
or that I thought about it
that way then. But as shorthand.
The poem breaks up into
staggered lines after a while
—as concepts and moods
begin to dictate its pace
rather than the more ('telegraphic'?)
actions and events. It begins—

Driving into work while
Cath reads about driving around London
& wondering when will I next write a poem
or whether to just work on Gwendolyn
a poem of John's & mine & maybe I should
it is half mine, I drop Cath off, do a
U-turn & scoot down to the EAF, park, go inside
check the mail empty my bag a little
lock up again & set off for the coffee shop
where I'll read or write a poem or a
review—or work on Gwendolyn, I suppose, is
a possibility . . .

and later goes on
to become a series of thoughts
about my 'place' in the world
how it feels etc and the insubstantiality
evanescence
of the terms
in which I think these things.
The poem affects a wistfulness
that it mocks—though to which
it resigns itself finally (if
'formally' only) at the end
in ruefully examining the lines
on O'Hara John Forbes communicated
to me: about timing, grace.

"Frank O'Hara never went skating
but he liked to dance," Forbes tells me
in 'Thin Ice', finding O'Hara
an acceptable link between us.

Two other poems early in the MS
would seem comparable—'Walk
On The Wild Side' and 'poem ('walking
down from the Star Grocery')'.
Both feature walking, obviously,
as does much of 'Home Town'
but actually 'Wild Side' contemplates
future daily events

—'Tomorrow:
shop, bank, wash hair'—
and, still more banal, "put prices
on books arrived at the EAF"
(my job) "have coffee".
"An eventful day?" the poem asks.
The poem then goes on
to calibrate loyalties
to various 'heroes'
Little Walter, Lou Reed
James Schuyler—then ponders
further nebulous things
pleased to be making no
firm decisions. It is
a far more measured poem
than 'Home Town', biting off
almost less than it can chew.
'Home Town' takes a number
of big bites. The
'Star Grocery' poem
has some of the same
measured qualty and is
in relatively grave
three-line stanzas.
But it is midway between,
or somewhere between—or

a provisional plural—
"somewhere(s) between"?
Is it a literary convention,
or realism, that academic jokes are dull?)

between
the contentedness of 'Wild Side'  
(the contrast with its title  
is its joke) and the anxiety  
of 'Home Town'. 'Star Grocery'  
runs unfavorable or slightly down  
and crestfallen comparisons  
of oneself (me, not you)  
with the major players of  
cosmopolitan centres  
and sort of decides to take them  
on the chin which it 'bravely'  
holds up in its  
last lines—contemplating  
total annihilation. In fact. (!)  
A bit histrionic.  

Other poems in the book  
treat 'the street'—  
this same street, Hindley Street.  

'Mostly Hindley Street' does so—  
but more in the framework  
of the process poem: cursorily  
diaristic, sketching shops and sites  
and characters of the street  
and thoughts produced that way.  

It happens upon  
a kind of thesis or question—  
Is my 'compass' any broader than  
Thomas Gray's—whom I rather thoughtlessly  
deride. 'Halogen Pam' is a more circumspect  
account of my life in urban Adelaide  
constrasting it with those of friends—  
constrasting their imagined attitudes, too,  
to mine. It is in three-line stanzas  
and does a fair bit of thinking. Is its tone  
too heavy? Unrelieved? Later poems,  
like 'Hindley Street (with  
a prospect of Michael Grimm)' and  
'Amaze Your Friends', seem not similar.  
Their mood is less self-critical.
'Amaze Your Friends', anyway, is not about the street but was simply written about the same time. 'Prospect' begins in emulation of some lines and the feel of Ted Berrigan, his poems like 'Ann Arbor Elegy' or (particularly) 'Peace'. But readers won't notice. And it doesn't matter—it got me started—and its, or similar—repetitions are what 'Prospect' seeks for, overreach being its intent though hoping to 'save' or 'recoup' it.

Interesting, I hope, is a satirical poem 'Giles Auty Furioso' which starts sort of scrappily—like a comedian at half pace, (maybe rehearsing a show, it occurs to me now)—then clicks into gear: the supposed voice of mad Giles Auty bemoaning the state of Australian Art Today, of art today generally. It's funny, if it is funny, because of the extremity of its views—but also because of their similarity to his. In my view, at any rate. The notes to the poem are amusing in something like the same way, if maybe more slyly.

A poem called 'A Picture' but which I think of usually as The 'Manet' poem is I suppose 'ekphrasis' which, if this weren't a process poem and I was going to revise even a line, is a word I'd drop (usually
I cannot remember it—it
seems to mask the ordinariness
of an ordinary enough
concept). Describing a picture.
This poem describes a painting
by Manet that, it becomes apparent
quickly enough, is imaginary.
My partner Cath, her daughter Anna
and I are in it, sitting in bed
reading—they are, and I am
or I might almost be
but I'm writing the poem in question.
I describe our respective books
and the appearance of mother and
daughter. Cath's description is mediated
through characterizations of
Monet and Berthe Morisot
and a bit of pondering
on Manet's likely attitude
to detail—that is, is the anachronistic
wrist-watch I'm wearing
likely to show up in the painting
recognisably? We all look up
for the last line of the poem—
and say 'Hi'—a reason why
for a long while I used to toy
with the idea of calling it
'Polaroid'. The poem is moderately
columnar, ranged from
the left margin in one version—
in another in longer-lined couplets.
This last gives more control
but slows the overall poem.
A nice poem—but with
very much the air of a set piece.
A nice poem I don't care about.
Far more interesting—but
does it work?—the poem
'Double Portrait'. Not conceived
as 'ekphrasis'. It's a kind of
doubled sestina, linking a second
to the first—at the 'copula' of
the first envoi or
final three lines (that is,
the envoi that would end—
be the final three lines of—
an ordinary sestina). It’s
the product of fabulous New York:
the sight of a New York artist—portraitist
mainly—one whom I’ve never liked

(Chuck Close: he was
sometimes included
under the rubric ‘Pop Art’ and also
as a New Photographic Realist,
though their subject matter (not his)
was usually pick-up trucks and
chrome-and-glass Americana.
These latter artists
have now mostly been forgotten.

Close’s paintings are enormous.
He has lately been
confined to a wheelchair
and with very little motor control
of his muscles
yet has devised a way to continue.)

“... one whom I’ve never liked"
or thought much of. He is contrasted
in all his art-world success (a
second-stringer’s degree of it)
with the comparative and undeserved obscurity
of poet Tony Towle—whose
work I like. I discuss
a Chuck Close self-portrait
and a series
of photographic portraits
of Towle. My ambivalence
about Close—who has
risen above adversity
in recent years—and about
my opinion of him, and of
other artists, is discussed.
It's all complicated enough and I like it as a kind of ruminative thinking that might belong in an essay in some people's view but is less usual and stronger too in a poem. The form might be the fault in the poem, or cause of its faults, but it also gives the ideas' expression some strength. It was absorbing fun to write a serious—seriously toned—poem in the sestina form.

Which links it, though at some months' remove, with 'Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices'. This poem, too, and unusually for me, takes a 'tight' form—the stanza pattern of FT Prince's poem 'Memoirs in Oxford'. These few months' removal is not much, 'Double Portrait' being examined two or three times a week most weeks for the next three or four months, given a rest and subjected to it all again—minor revisions being made or visited upon it, the poem gradually obscured, cleared and obscured again but fixed I think finally: over longer and longer periods left in the dark (to be read freshly). I decided it was complete about the time I finished 'Traffic Noises'.

It is a more serious or heavier-toned poem than 'Traffic'. And interesting, more interesting—if in fact it retains the reader's attention: it is less comfortable
with its own thoughts—their status
as reasonable opinion, mere opinion
capricious opinion, unjust even.
As well, I like 'Double Portrait'
for the manner
of its thinking about art—which is
usually done with an eye to History.
In fact poems usually discuss work whose
status is, or seems, decided.
'Portrait' discusses mere taste and
fallible judgement—and error giving
some works a special longevity
for me.

(That is, a kind of 'critic's guilt'
at having got the work wrong:
there are subsequently
works I remember especially—
and disproportionately—
having originally underestimated them.)

'Traffic Noises' is much
lighter in tone. It anticipates
a trip to Rome, bemused
to run through its file of information:
knowledge of Rome generally, of
the studio in which I would be staying
etc—the point/points being
contrasts of notional Italy
and the 'Italian' coffee shop in
which I write—and Adelaide.
The poem is 'a bit civilized'
in my judgement—'polite'
in a way I find diminishes any
urgency or immediacy... into an
entertainment.

But still,
something to have done.

Maybe
each poem is calisthenics, training
for the next, or 'a' next. The same moves
get made in more pressing contexts
or avoided, topped. Modified
as they approach again. Like
philosophy, I think. (Would like
to think.) Or do I mean
'thinking' rather than philosophy?

The three poems for John Forbes
are a response to his death
and explain themselves that way:
in summary, they recount
the following: that John
was a kind of point-of-reference
a constant in my thinking—
intermittently invoked for
purposes of comparison (my writing,
my life, attitudes ... 
compared to his) and as
a kind of bench-mark
I could apply. He had
stayed with us shortly before
his death—not in good health
but maybe prepared
to 'look after' himself. In
the second poem I reprise
much of this.
Both poems begin with,
and mix in, everyday occurrences
and return to John. The third
is less anchored to the everyday—
partly it is that it is written at night
in a 'study'-work room—so that
intrusions are less random, more
chosen, and partake more of the subjective—
maybe it is somatic, too (the
body late at night): the poem
as it turns out is a bit more
'about' death as well as being
—well, mostly—about John.
It looks at three images—
on my walls as I wrote—
a large A3 photocopy photograph
of 'Muddy Waters playing cards
between sets', a photo
(photocopy again) of New York migrant kids,
girls mostly (or all)
by Weegee from the 40s,
and a photocopy reproduction
of a Philip Guston painting
Smoking l.

This last I have had on my walls
for years—a photocopy actually
of the picture torn from a page
of newspaper so it consists
of the rectangular image, the titling
underneath and a triangular fragment
of newspaper type still further below.
I like it as black and white graphic
more than as colored painting, I think.
I can kick on with it all night
to any accompaniment—Velvet Underground.
jazz, anything. It is ‘about’
staying up late. Though for Guston—
I know this—it is
also about insomnia, its
worries and bad conscience and hopelessness.
This is the reason it reminds me
of John. As the poem/s say or said
—we had John resting down the back
exactly like that, a waking, un-
blinking head contemplating
the warnings he had received
about his health. Plainly
I didn't know what was going on.
Maybe he did. (Maybe not.)
He was frightened, surely,
to a degree.

Anyway,
the poem considers the images:
the young girls, shown together
watching a movie, a crowded
afternoon matinee session with
other kids—all now, probably, aged
or dead; Muddy (in
the pic John had liked and
wrote about a few years before
when he’d stayed another time and seen it on my wall)
dead too; Philip Guston, dead.
And maybe I was listening to Joe Turner
(dead—do I say that, in the poem?)
or was it just the repetitions
reminded me of him (‘On My Way
To Denver’—It’s too late—
too late, too late, too late:
Too late, too late too late, too late.
Says the woman, whose speech Joe reports in the song:
she’s on my way to Denver—tomorrow
It will be too late.
She is dying of TB.

Anyway, for an overdetermined number of
reasons, given my aurally spurred
memory, I mention Joe Turner.
The poem says John’s dead
and I’m alive, and doesn’t know
what to say or ‘know’ further.
Some elements—my doing a drawing,
friend Micky Allan, just things
‘on my desk’ (pencils, jars, the
curtain closing out the window I face)—
are allowed in, partly because
the curve of the poem is so powerful
it will bend anything to its purpose,
the concentration on its theme.

Technically—though as O’Hara says,
“you just go on your nerve”,
(that caveat)—I guess the poems
do the ‘I do this / I do that’
thing, but also allow themselves
or the third poem does
the freedom of the collage style
(not collage, but similar randomness).
And I think they shift gears
often enough in terms of
different registers of ... cultural reference,
tones and dictions. Not that, in this circumstance, this was planned. Training, you see.

Is this the place to say:
John was not—in terms of style or technique—an influence for me:
too different temperamentally,
too big in the front brain department,
more interested in compression than I am.
But he represented a position
I spoke to occasionally,
addressed explicitly, or
undisclosedly on occasion,
and he represented a finger-wagging critical presence—in my imagination—though amusing, a kind of comic 'ravishing super-ego'.

Also influences, in variations of the same way, were Pam Brown and Laurie Duggan.—Less comically different from me, but different enough.

John's early death has made him more central to my poems recently. I don't know whether permanently or as a blip.

The Italian poems—'Traffic Noises' was one in anticipation, and we've dealt with it (on other grounds— not as anticipation, but because it was in a somehow 'fixed' form, a stanza pattern)—what to say of them?

There were three basically: 'Rumori',
'Long Distance Information', and 'Tiepolo'. 'Tiepolo' is very much, and inevitably, in the shadow of John Forbes's 'On Tiepolo's Banquet of Antony & Cleopatra'—which is a better poem—though about a painting I don't much like. I've liked Tiepolo forever—bought prints of his drawings from Rowe Street Art Shop when I was first a student (finding out years later that it had once been importantly a connection with Europe for Sydney artists. By the time I happened upon it it was genteel and faded). I've always preferred Tiepolo's brushier, less formal compositions. I describe one I saw in Venice, beginning with a potted history—

In the 14, 15th & 16th centuries it was all happening in Italy artistically though by the 17th other countries had joined in. By the 18th Italy was definitely off the pace. Still, I happen to think Tiepolo was a major artist

and an account of Tiepolo's isolation within the Fine Arts course at Sydney Uni—too important not to be included, not central enough to fool the students. Forbes's influence I think is in the comparison of the begging saint-figure with a lonely guy at a disco—a comparison John might have made and would have liked, might even have identified with. The poem is something of a 'set piece'—like the Manet poem—and (that is, Tiepolo wouldn't feature in the exam)
for that reason I dislike it.
Maybe poems about pictures
are not my thing—or not
where 'Art History'
has entered its verdict.

'Rumori'
is a long poem about daily life in Rome
and my preoccupations there
with 'Australian artistic identity':
Australians' looking to the Larger World
—though there are only powerful centres
that seem to constitute it—this larger world:
London, Rome. (New York.) The loss of nerve
and failure of certain Australian art and careers
—Slessor, Crowley—and the pathos
that attaches—were difficult in the poem
to verbalize, or prove. It felt true
—felt true more than it seemed it—
and seemed and felt hysterical, projection.
This reduces the poem, I think,
to reiteration and shrinking from
conclusion. Rome's own independence
from these pressures (at least
as a context or working space) is made
absolve the feeling.

But not logically.
It might as easily be seen
that Rome (cf the Tiepolo poem's
potted history) was no longer competitive.
Like Sydney—or Slessor's Sydney.

Well, there are good things in
It—but propositionally the poem
is weak and uncertain.

Written
at the same time is a 'letter poem'
to a friend in Adelaide, 'Long
Distance Information'. The phrase
is from Chuck Berry and
'Long Distance Call', the Muddy Waters song,
might be hipper as a title (as
a reference, surely) but there
you go: it does purport
to give information—to a friend
back home. Some of it
is fanciful and some of it is true
and most of it is humorous. Good
fun, but no more—in terms
of authoughr satisfaction.

No fun
writing poems is it? I enjoyed it
at the time and I don't hate the poem.
But it was not the big pay-off
and never was going to be.

Similarly
'Amaze Your Friends', 'Hindley Street
with Michael Grimm' and
'News of the Day'—all
likeable. 'News' deals notably
—though was that its point?—
with Asian students; 'Amaze'
with sitting up at night, with rock clips, our
daughter Anna (have I mentioned this?)—
and 'Michael Grimm' is another
portrait of Hindley Street
from The Flash—all in stepped,
scattered lines. I have
talked about this.

Some poems that link with 'Rumori'—
its themes of art-making and identity—
are 'Horizon', 'American Friends'
and 'Catching Up With Kurt Brereton'. The last
fits in perhaps because it was
of that time—and it celebrates
a Sydney aesthetic—mostly pretending
my friends and I are having a reunion
aged 50—but 50 years ago,
in the Sydney of then.
'American Friends' wonders where
my writer friends are. (I'm on
holiday as I write it myself.)
The poem expresses ambivalence
as to the effect of O'Hara *et al* on those so far away. (The movie, from a Ripley novel, is about inadvertent betrayal of a German by an American.)

film title: 'The American Friend'

But "those so far away"?
Is this a 'class action' I'm proposing—though I seem, conspicuously, the only victim?

US Imperials

*New York blend*—it said on the pack so I knew what I was doing.

'Horizon' summarizes as similar—but is higher toned and more poetically obscure: it too begins with quotes from O'Hara—chosen almost at random but to fit my situation of looking out a country window.

I do this and think of what my friends are doing—it is Xmas time—and wonder at the country / city divide, the Australian landscape tradition, Australia—which I would like, or *had wanted*, to think of as modern—in this *post-modern* 'age' is 'post-colonial': how diminishing that is.

The poem considers Meaghan Morris's contrast of Les Murray's "ordinary man with an icecream" (Les's, or Donald Horne's?) and John Forbes' different take on things. I think the poem addresses John again near the end. The poem concludes but is not conclusive.

(Morris, 'On The Beach', *Too Late Too Soon*)

(AF&B 89 APPDX)

APPDX

APPDX

82
It's good,
I think—and was different for me
in its manner—of looking for a
new piece of text to push off from
whenever it stalled. I chose
fragments from the less well-thumbed
O'Hara poems—not always signalling this
with quote marks—and kicking off
from them. Choosing O'Hara,
while contemplating the Australian countryside,
was a deliberate or perverse ploy, a
self-incrimination, since the poem
is about cultural imperialism
to some extent.

The poem affixes my
usual declarative style
to a structure jointed at
or powered from (in part)
images, passages ... that are
less 'transparent' than that style—
but are poetically weighted or resonant.
These are the O'Hara lines—
quoted before the poem and, italicized,
at its beginning—
and again some pages further in, more—
(italicized: "not to be / inimitably
weak & picturesque myself /
but standing forth a subject
not a spectacle");

later, un-marked:
"as the brave must always ascend,
always the musts" and
"which strolls now & then
into a field / & sits down like
a forgotten rock".
The next O'Hara quote is signalled
(by quote marks)
and is from memory and
meant to be recognized: "I live
above a / dyke bar & I'm happy".
"I might, too for all I know. /
Am I?" the poem asks.

I have
a more detailed and critical
view of O'Hara than I did
in the 70s. I didn't read him
a lot in the 80s—and use him now
partly as emblematic—not just
out of enthusiasm. ("Emblematic":
'my' America—or
an early, important
enthusiasm.) I still
like his work immensely,
but see it more clearly. (Does this
sound like 'knowledge'? Then
I mean "clear-eyed").) (And it may be
that I see it
no more accurately.)

Not that
I think the story of my poetry
is of a relation to O'Hara's poetry
—is it?! Is Dick Watkins
about Picasso? Or Tuckson
about Pollock? Should they
not be? Anyway, if it were so
that it could be seen that way
it would be news to me.
A possibility of course.

Or is it not news:
exactly what I expect?

The smart thing for this book
would be a blurb that directs attention
this way—since it will be inevitable—
and seeks to control it. Something along the lines of
"re-examines the place of O'Hara and others
in an Australian poetic."

If it does, still, that
is not my point at all.
Thinking is, then?
or poetry
(form, art,
the aesthetic)?

Poet considers a shirt he used to wear—
why did he do it? how could he? would
he do it again? Should this shirt be destroyed
forever—is it a museum piece, tragic
—or empowering—handy for someone else? Is this, in fact,
the same shirt?

Scene—The Op Shop of the poetic heart:
What a lovely shirt. Somebody should wear it!
Not me.
No, you've got too many like that already.
Really?
It's very like what you're wearing.
APPENDIX

This appendix quotes excerpts from poems of mine and others. The appendix does not offer argument—but as the exegetical poem assumes a knowledge of poems that will in fact quite likely not be known, the following samples serve as a supplement in some degree.

Indication is given of those pages of the exegetical poem to which the excerpts are relevant.

Book titles are indicated, after their first appearance, by initials.

* reference page 9

From Ted Berrigan, whom I saw as “speedy and smart” —

One dollar, you Mother!
Make all your friends
STOP!
(now there's an idea)

Back to the wall

(it’s all in California)

Thanks to Jack

I mean it’s all right here
it’s morning
and I’m looking over the wall
at Mr. Pierre Loti and his nameless dog
they work well together
on paper i.e. this here

chasing a tiger across white expansiveness
that is not lacking in significance
(what is?)

from Ted Berrigan. ‘Tambourine Life’,
So Going Around Cities. Berkeley, CA: Blue Wind, 1980. 84
It is night. You are asleep. And beautiful tears
Have blossomed in my eyes. Guillaume Apollinaire is dead.
The big green day today is singing to itself
A vast orange library of dreams, dreams
Dressed in newspaper, wan as pale thighs
Making vast apple strides towards "The Poems."
"The Poems" is not a dream. It is night. You
Are asleep. Vast orange libraries of dreams
Stir inside "The Poems." On the dirt-covered ground
Crystal tears drench the ground ...

from Ted Berrigan, 'Sonnet XXXVII',
The Sonnets. NY: Grove, 1964. 28

Asleep in
the milk bars
daylight saving annuls our tuxedo
& happy to breathe again
like a revived dance craze
we gulp fresh air, our speeches to the telephone
so various,
so beautiful—

from John Forbes, 'Ode To Tropical Skiing'.

And —

The happiest of cannonballs
is a burger,
a labour of love walking naked
along the beach
thinking: 'Will our shit return to us in Paperback?'
    ah Sweeny Todd
    will we ever forget 'Him'?
    swallow slowly with a glass
    of water

— from John Forbes & Mark O'Connor
'Admonitions',
CP, B&S. 42
Frank O'Hara —

FOR GRACE, AFTER A PARTY

You do not always know what I am feeling.
Last night in the warm spring air while I was
blazing my tirade against someone who doesn't
interest
me, it was love for you that set me
afire,
and isn't it odd? For in rooms full of
strangers my most tender feelings
writhe and
bear the fruit of screaming. Put out your hand,
 isn't there
an ashtray, suddenly, there? Beside
the bed? And someone you love enters the room
and says wouldn't
you like your eggs a little
different today?
And when they arrive they are
just plain scrambled eggs and the warm weather
is holding.


Robyn Ravlich —

TRICKS/DANKO

I sometimes think how nice it
would be if/
you really were my alter-ego

2

In the uncontrolled riot of my room
there is one thing quiet, white, and striped
with red - the teatowel that you gave me
hangs stiff on the rail, reminding me
of your best behavior

3

Ha, yes when we met
you could have almost clicked your heel
and I/ gesticulating like a
yellow canary

4

Your investigation of the alphabet
is more surprising than any poet's/
leading me to note
BIZARRE

5

Often we have passing conversations
direct questions and schizophrenic answers
that somehow seem more appropriate
and are always very amusing

6

The trick is to drink beautiful
cups of tea. Coffee is always highly overrated

7

Is gauloises, Sunday afternoons
/drafts of a poem that begins
'I know your name . . .' 

Robert Rauschenberg
Ted Berrigan —

LXXIV

"The academy of the future is opening its doors"
- John Ashbery

The academy of the future is opening its doors
my dream a crumpled horn
Under the blue sky the big earth is floating into "The Poems."
"A fruitful vista, this, our South," laughs Andrew to his Pa.
But his rough woe slithers o'er the land.
Ford Madox Ford is not a dream. The farm
was the family farm. On the real farm
I understood "The Poems."

Red-faced and romping in the wind, I, too,
am reading the technical journals. The only travelled sea
that I still dream of
is a cold, black pond, where once
on a fragrant evening fraught with sadness
I launched a boat frail as a butterfly

— Berrigan, 'LXXIV', The Sonnets. 62

from XV

In Joe Brainard's collage its white arrow
He is not in it, the hungry dead doctor.
Of Marilyn Monroe, her white teeth white-
I am truly horribly upset because Marilyn
and ate King Korn popcorn," he wrote in his
of glass in Joe Brainard's collage
Doctor, but they say "I LOVE YOU"
and the sonnet is not dead

— Berrigan, The Sonnets. 20
the 'jolt' of the arbitrary— as provided by Ted Berrigan

II

Dear Margie, hello. It is 5:15 a.m.  
dear Berrigan. He died  
Back to books. I read  
It's 8:30 p.m. in New York and I've been running around  
all day  
old come-all-ye's streel into the streets. Yes, it is now,  
How Much Longer Shall I Be Able To Inhabit The Divine  
and the day is bright gray turning green  
feminine marvelous and tough  
watching the sun come up over the Navy Yard  
to write scotch-tape body in a notebook  
had 17 and 1/2 milligrams  
Dear Margie, hello. It is 5:15 a.m.  
fucked til 7 now she's late to work and I'm  
18 so why are my hands shaking I should know better  

— Berrigan, Sonnets. 8
Terrific Cigarette' begins —

relaxing lying back  
after reading the inspirational texts
of the poets I love  
— briefly — & watching
your back & side  
as you write, naked, in
bed  
calm & pale  as a cigarette that is smoked,
lying here am  
I smoking one, aren’t I?
responsibilities  
"start in bed" you hardly seem like
a responsibility & I take you  
the responsibility
of taking you, & later finishing
your writing
up  
you take me  
o terrific cigarette

The poem ends thus —

& now I think  
you are far more
‘natural’ than a film,  
& like a cigarette in existing
in ‘real time’, & of course better than both, because you’re
a person.
but not one comparable with any other

—

from Ken Bolton. 'Terrific Cigarette',  
Selected Poems. Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1992. 3 - 4
'Nerve' begins —

at the reading Nigel read
'a poem with a quote from
Auden'; & Rae Jones read 'Moira'
& a few others; & a few
others read a few things they'd read
other times too; & so did I - I read
one or two I'd read other times; Carol read
one she'd read a lot at a lot of readings
a lot of times: 'The Eye, The Moon, & The Tree' (you've
heard it before); & who else was there.
& what did they read? Kerry was there & he
was very defensive about this poem he'd read a lot
& he said he'd read it a lot & he read it. (though
he read it very well.) Anna read a story that was ...

— from Bolton 'Nerve'. SP. 7

From 'The Mysteries' —

A mystery appears & doesn't mention
intelligence or death.

A mystery appears & climbs into a tree
yelling 'Intelligence!', "Death!" It is
a diversion

Above the roof
is a mystery. It steers its way along & between
chimneys, mysteriously, & is it weeping or is it chuckling
as it veers around the unlit neon sign mounted on the roof

in the paper bag the greyhound the mystery the
hydrant. Mysteriously moth.

(& so on)

above the trees there is no mystery. There is
just the plane it is crawling slowly along the
sky like a fly along the rim of a lampshade.

— from Bolton. 'The Mysteries', SP. 5 - 6
'aeiou' begins —

today,
aflame with love for you my main
feeling is un-nameable & is concerned with the way

these attitudes, which you weave about you, you weave about you. which are these? - your
As to 'winsome': the poem continues -

best, you look like you might do that to me - me in the wire basket
of your bicycle you pedal me to the picnic smiling

not at me but at the clouds little white Magrittes
against the quiet, loud blue so I can see your chin. You're
pedalling.

— from Bolton. 'a e i o u', SP. 8 - 9

From 'beers' —

the lines were just scribbled
but approximated to the outlines
of roughly drawn clouds

but only if the clouds
were only partly drawn

& one just looked like scribble

for the most part,
but against the white ground
it was possible
to see them all as
clouds.
this was the point :
it was conventional:
they looked like clouds
or they didn't :
it was a matter of "seeing them
'as''

The poem ends -

like 'quotes' they said
"clouds"

plainly.
or they didn't.

'Lyric' begins —

o the fabulous long blue lines of rain!

suggesting

Odes to sensitivity,

last year at Marienbad.

— an

inopportune line

has suggested itself;

& so the poem
develops, like the afternoon rain:

not coming as the

heat builds up, & as clouds fail to show; then finally

they show — but not the rain; then it does, — but briefly;

& over the city,

grumbling in the distance, & over the

bridge

,that holds all the traffic up,

— as a ship goes

through — & hence the silence —,

bruisy air develops

full of rain.

—— Bolton. 'Lyric'. SP. 50 - 51
I invite you
into poetry,
sardine can

— which are nothing else
than experience,
the roller of
big cigars, as
absolutely 'real'
an experience

— as image, or
sound —

as you could want
for a poem
of hard facts,
written down
to be
indigestible
like irreducible ore,
sending the mind
on tacks
to try to find a
way in

— hard
as a Gris painting
a sharp, light-hearted one
whose attraction
is that of one

whose attraction
wears off
only to leave
the lover there
un - enamoured;
there was
nothing killing you
that wasn’t happening
any day. the mystery
of those sad romances,
these lines

into which
we would inject
a little glamour,
or little charisma
into these lines.
will keep you
out of the pool shots
& out of prostitution

"Now I'll
never have to
see a whale. I
enjoyed it. were you lighting me a match/
No? Good. he will
be back soon & then we will
have to leave

— Bolton. '(The) Sardine-Can Experience'. SP. 10 - 11
From 'poem, the terrific days of summer', which begins —

the fabulous limp calligraphy of the afternoons
(the terrific mornings!)

zorro

little rictus, & the mystique of normalcy

the air risks itself among her hair & everything is aroused

the air & things are all aroused & everything, & that.

It was like some sort of 'stuff'.

— from Bolton. 'The Terrific Days of Summer', SP. 34, 36

From 'Four Poems', which begins —

Intricate days / portrait of certain people as/
Spanish assassins;

& a portrait of Rrose Selavy's uncle,
the assassin; & of

Rrose Selavy's assassinating desires.

irritable rose & black Coltrane Jazz & blues over-eating days
the thought of you a blue cool mile
from the ways I can feel on these days, now, days like the longest afternoon in history through which

— from Bolton. 'Four Poems'. SP. 15
Narrative motif in 'Four Poems' -

a black citroen pulls up.
pulling out
from the curb, a black citroen.

a relentless formalist sensitivity
projects sixties Miles Davis passionate irrepressible repressed structuring everywhere.

desire . an angry languor,
ancient person of my heart, old lover, makes
spiritual miles distant the thought of you

— Bolton. SP. 15

The poem ends eight pages later -

below, in the distance, coming across the sand, the black suited figures of gangsters can be seen, combing the narrow beach for you.)

like a betrayal that makes one's heart, & one's mouth, gape
that instant 3 citroens pull up blocking the street
& men get out

* 

swift as the thought of you
you become aware of a black citroen
below, in the square

* 

Feeling like a cross between
Frank O'Hara, Laurence Harvey being desperate.
& Danny Kaye or some fool you hop into
your light blue Skoda. Can you escape?
citroens are suspended silently in the rear view mirror

— from Bolton. 'Four Poems', SP. 23 - 24
From 'Water' —

At home,
feeling like a New York poet, or some Australian derivative,
I watch an aspirin slowly turn a glass of water blue

Un
expectedly
Suddenly, a golf ball comes in through the window
& lands, crushing
the pills
of aspirin on my desk
& which now lie in pieces round it
like the wreck of 3 or 4 white garden statues
(of egrets), or like a ring
of broken aspro pills
around a vitamin pill that is huge (—'big' as a golf ball).

I stare at it.
The shock has spilled some of the water from my overfilled glass,
& the edge of this spill is softening some parts of crushed pill
on the
left of the glass
which crumbles slowly & whitely
like a film I saw
as a child
(with Richard Widmark in it),
which, while the credits showed,
showed the ice & snow coasts
of Iceland
crumble, & fall into the water
(this we saw from the fishing boats).
And now it is happening
on the table
in miniature.

all my desk seems covered with water. I'm looking at it everywhere.
But I'm looking at it somewhere else now. (joke!)
"It's the water in the drinking glass the tulips are in".

— from Bolton. 'Water', SP. 26 - 30
"I wonder if I'm fooling myself about pills."

— Ted Berrigan, which is quoted in 'Water'

See also this early John Forbes poem 'Angel' — which ends —

and I'd like to kiss you
but you've just washed
your hair, the night goes
on and we do too until
like pills dissolving
turn a glass of water
blue it's dawn and we
go to sleep we dream
like crazy and get rich
and go away.

- from Forbes, 'Angel', CP. 60
At one point the poem 'Water' shouts "INTERLUDE!" - in bold caps with a box around it, then continues.

"INTERLUDE!"

I know a guy called Michael Witts. For some reason suddenly, I imagine him in a citroen: it is a black one; I do it for a joke

& I consider that "I become 'blue'
at the thought
of a pill & a glass of water"

from Bolton. 'Water', SP. 28

From 'the terrific days of summer' —

( & suddenly (ha! ha!)
the poems of Reverdy seem mannered )

incredibly long days.
days of what must be a legendary chromaticism; days/
without parallel.

& days, days & days of them, that are all exactly-the-same

* frankly stellar *

the brilliant sunlight more brilliant
than the sunlight is from your view, in your apartment, is flashing existentially in the water's blue bleaching on the shore. dolorously. dostoyevsky?
is of you, is of you fabulous eyes,
& the smell of your sweat sleeping, in the sheets in the sun.

days without parallel,

of
let’s go sleeping &

leaving Bondi beach at dawn

— from Bolton. ‘The Terrific Days Of Summer’. SP. 38 - 39

Any passage from Kenneth Koch’s ‘Sleeping With Women’ would indicate a source for the enjoyment of repetition-with-variations that is in ‘Four Poems’ & ‘Terrific Days of Summer’ -

Sleeping with women and causing all that trouble
As in Roumania, as in Yugoslavia
Asleep and sleeping with them
Anti-Semitic, and sleeping with women,
Pro-canary, Rashomon, Shakespeare, tonight, sleeping with women
A big guy sleeping with women
A black seacoast’s sleeve, asleep with them
And sleeping with women, and sleeping with them
The Greek islands sleeping with women
The muddy sky, asleep and sleeping with them.
Sleeping with women, as in a scholarly design
Sleeping with women, as if green polarity were a line
Into the sea, sleeping with women
As if wolverines, in a secret line, as if sheep harbors

Compare this, from 'Terrific Days' —

days
   full of people (like the film
**the longest day**):
   & a tiny day
— you occasionally get them, recovering from the others,
very small, & where nothing happens.
*
& days as if!
days as if nervous
& days as if
   the whole world had stopped for the "pause
that refreshes" & could not get going. days
when walking through Glebe
   is so multiplicit
as if everyone actually was 'marvellous'.

as if 'arid'
like a dry sandwich,

as if reproachful
: there are lingering opportunities for things one
must do

   — from Bolton. 'The Terrific Days Of Summer', SP. 41
Concerning purple being recycled (from 'Terrific Days of Summer') —

— lines, their beauty consisting of their pursuit of the breadth of the page beautiful & cool & tendril-like (like the arms of cranes above the tallest buildings of the city,

days like tendrils.
elixir days,  days like Miles Davis  days/
like Alex Katz

effectual days
days like
"the mysterious armature of the poem"  when I
almost thought he said  ARMCHAIR.

— from Bolton. 'Terrific Days Of Summer' SP. 43 and 44

Larry Rivers, 'Washington Crossing the Delawere', 1953. MoMA.
The formal "may have reasserted itself [so as] to end a poem". Two examples follow, the first from August 6th, the second from poem ('cat-bag')—

It is as if the river sighed, became
that degree more sad. The pale ash cloud has darkened;
the sky above it is a deepening blue. I wonder
did Shelley breathe this breath, feel similarly
the river's non-committal bearing him upon its surface.

Did he see the scene
where her little legs
walk down the hall?
(Claire's? Mary's?)

"Should pleasure,
in the form of a perpetually
perambulating woman" lead you on, this might be
just the thing, the wick of a bomb,

a bomb in Pisa.

what a funny day you've been, August 6th


33 - 35

And the ending of 'Cat-bag' —

... time to smile now,
ruefully. Tho on another night
I'll be laughing, up late, spinning
records (tapes, vinyl - CDs if
I'm in this room), reading books,
daydreaming

strap-hanging — on

the train that is my life
as it takes me to my destination, the
light & dark of the stations meanwhile
flashing by

now

I read
"The Walk"
the lines
so slim
& delicate
the timing
almost ec-
statically quiet
so great it
caps the night.
Extinguished,
I crash out.

— from Bolton. 'Cat-bag', At The Flash & At The Baci
'A Terrible Attitude' begins —

Chris's joke
about Modernism in Australia —

that it's like the guest
who arrives late

— "Sorry I am late.
I was mugged."

History's view
Of the Ern Malley hoax. Irreparable damage & all that ...

— from Bolton. 'A Terrible Attitude, Based On Suffering', *SP*. 172
'A Terrible Attitude' ends -

I don't know how to 'deal'

With poverty, in poems, except realistically
— to state it —

or ignore it. Both. I am poor. I
hate it, but it has not been inflicted on me

A writer friend says she hardly knows
how to talk to the local arts officer, now,

now she's got a grant,
when mostly such duds have —

I say "Shit, I wouldn't 'stop'."
— as advice,

though certainly I wouldn't bother
Tough?

A terrible attitude. Born
of suffering —

ha ha,
me & Mondrian.

— from Bolton. 'A Terrible Attitude, Based On Suffering' SP. 182 - 183
From 'Dazed' —

You stand there, your spirit does, weaving about

(while your body sits, or leans still probably,

intrigued by this idea)

. . . 'Pardon me, monsieur.'

It is the greenkeeper guy. He bends over

and looks into the face of one.

'Qu'est que vous?' you say. (Your French is rotten.

Mine is.)

He says, 'Monsieur —

you have fallen down?'

'No, I'm sitting,' you say,

Though plainly you look what would pass for completely out of it,

sitting beside a stone bench,

one arm stretched, proprietorially,

lovingly, over it.

the figure warns —

'it will be dark soon,'
Earlier passages, which followed upon the protagonist's being hit, perhaps by a golf ball, give some idea of the parkland setting. But disorientation sets in early —

Life does not make sense.

You are standing in the wrong place.
Get down off that roof immediately!

—Bolton. *UM*. 94
From Laurie Duggan's *Under The Weather*, the section ‘Sleeping in the Dining Room’ begins -

being actually always careful

to keep myself together & pursue

Poesy & have a forwarding address

— Allen Ginsberg

1

a vase of dead yellow chrysanthemums

green apple, persimmon, purple grape
capsicum, chinese gooseberry

LEGEND GIN ashtray

air conditioner
cistern
wind
airliner

cerebral junk

ecstasy

nose sniff

“it feels like winter”

letterbox (empty)
one advertisement

boiling water


(The previous section of *Under The Weather* features Anna Couani & me; some of it, possibly, is a little bit ‘in my manner’. A nod from Laurie.)
'Notes For poems' begins —

My first note, though I don’t know why I make it, is the bridge at Redfern Station. Near dusk, or at night. Near dusk it is unbearable & I rest against its sides, my head lowered, on the wall & choke with emotion regret lost inspiration, I might almost say species of fine frenzy descend from the sky wash over me, & pass. Instantly I’m tired. & again ‘alive’, awake & refreshed, though with nothing on the page.

“the beach is rather Boudin — if you want to know, & if that helps, otherwise you must just accept that it is a nice beach, or reserve judgement, — Boudin might have died weeping for all I know & maybe it is a terrible beach, though I can’t see how.

But how would I know, when I “left myself” so to speak, weeping at the sight of the city I love, prostrate amongst the black dust & fluctuating thunder of the traffic, my fingers on the bricks, eyes sightless (etc)

from Bolton. ‘Notes For Poems’ SP. 91
‘Dazed’ ends like this —

‘Pardon me, monsieur.’

It is the grenkeeper guy.
He bends over

and looks into the face of one.

‘Qu’est que vous?’ you say. (Your French is rotten. Mine is.)

He says, ‘Monsieur — you have fallen down?’

‘No, I’m sitting,’ you say,

though plainly you look what would pass for completely out of it,

sitting beside a stone bench,

one arm stretched, proprietorially,

lovingly, over it.

‘Are you Daniel Buren?’

‘No sir. But my golfball — did it not pass this way? Did it not hit you perhaps?’

‘No, mate, I’m just sitting here wondering how to seize the day.’

‘It will be dark soon.,’

says the Buren figure
quietly.

A nice guy.
You rise.

from Bolton. 'Dazed', *UM*. 98—99

(Daniel Buren is a French conceptual artist the poem's speaker had earlier raged against.)
The 'letter-poem' 'Florence to Loraine Lee' begins —

Dear Lorraine,

    Cath & I have made it
to Florence
    where, in part of it, I sit in
my undies
    (red)
    at the 'bureau' (blond)
& write to you.

    Cath sleeps
just
behind me
    looking comically
looking comically
    like that
painting
    by Vuillard
    that is chiefly grey
I think
    in which a few dark lines
(etc)

— from Bolton. 'Florence To Loraine Lee', UM. 108
‘Bunny Melody’ parodies novelistic conventions: it begins —

Had Gwendolyn's life ever seemed less than a melody thought the Duke, 
As he drove, himself, into the small drive to Gwendolyn's. Outside 
Late afternoon sun broke through the trees: he remembered Gwendolyn, 
running, 
Her yellow hair, tiny frocks, her cry, running from the training kennels then 
Some distance from the house. He had had his trainer select a young 
dog from the current batch for her & badly 
Hoped that she would like it. ...

— Bolton. 'Bunny Melody', SP. 85

‘Funny Ideas’ begins —

If we would only ask ourselves the phrases our friends would least likely 
shout, & then why 
These are so unlikely we have begun something both entertaining & 
interesting - not a collage 
Of random statements, & though better, not just a silly tableau - we have 
the grammar 
Begun of an amazing argument...

— from Bolton. ‘Funny Ideas’, Sestina To the Centre Of 
The Brain. Adelaide: Little Esther, 1990. 1

But the poem was planned by working outwards from the end-words of the third stanza 
which consists mostly of the blurb from The Fontana Dictionary Of Modern Knowledge:

... But ‘Structuralism, operant conditioning, generative grammar, 
Historical materialism, vorticism, pedology, situation ethics, 
Oligopoly - what do these terms mean 
And in what context are they used? What was the Bauhaus & why 
Was it important? What is the difference between a shame culture & a 
guilt culture, hardware & software, collage 
& decollage? Do beat, creep, black hole gate &

Model mean what you think they do?'...

— from Bolton. ‘Funny Ideas’, Sestina. 2
There are allusions to remarks that could be construed as mildly critical of the waitress: in ‘Traffic Noises’ & ‘Hindley Street with a prospect of Michael Grimm’.

On this waitress (from ‘Hindley Street Today’) —

“Yeah, I frighten a lot of people,”

jokingly
tho without much effort
as she clears the table
where I sit today
outside
to a patron whom she’d startled
— & actually, tho she’s
pretty enough
her makeup’s vaguely ‘Goth’.

I find her interesting
— as I look up today
& down the street

— Bolton. Flash. 127—130

And, from ‘Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices’ —

She is reminiscent of

Julie, this waitress, though with less
idea of makeup - Julie would
point out - and I’d agree. Less hip.

— from Bolton. ‘Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices’. Flash. 97—101
O'Hara's well known 'The Day Lady Died' is an 'I do This I do That' poem:

It is 12:20 in New York a Friday
three days after Bastille day, yes
it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine
because I will get off the 4:19 in Easthampton
at 7:15 and then go straight to dinner

and I don't know the people who will feed me

I walk up the muggy street beginning to sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days

I go to the bank

... 

—from Frank O'Hara, 'The Day Lady Died', CP. 325
James Schuyler is quoted here from poems conveniently to hand: from ‘Growing Dark’, which begins —

The grass shakes.
Smoke streaks, no,
cloud strokes.
The dogs are fed.
Their licenses
clank on pottery.
The phone rings.
And is answered.
The pond path
is washed-out grass
between green
winter cover.
Last night in
bed I read.
You came to
my room and
said, “Isn't
the world
terrible?” “My
dear...” I said. It could be
and has been
worse ...


And, from ‘Korean Mums’ —

The dogs are barking. In
the studio music plays
and Bob and Darragh paint.
I sit scribbling in a little
notebook at a garden table,
too hot in a heavy shirt
in the mid-October sun
into which the Korean mums
all face. There is a
dull book with me,
an apple core, cigarettes,
an ashtray. Behind me
the rue I gave Bob
flourishes. Light on leaves,
so much to see, and

— from Schuyler. ‘Korean Mums’. MOTP. 10
From 'Hometown' - concerning 'place in the world':

... The view is very Richard Estes — in a busy kind of way — which I think recommends it. Though to whom does it recommend it? No one I know, to speak to, daily knows Richard Estes' paintings. Except Paul, & Richard at a guess — Richard would & Paul would like the aesthetic though not, probably, the art — my only Ruscha friend, Paul — "if I may so term his aesthetic". (Ha Ha.) Though who am I on daily speaking terms with? Cath — & Laurie & Pam & John Forbes & John Jenkins — in my mind. Realler I guess than talking to Frank O'Hara

— from 'Home Town'. Flash. 7
From 'Walk on the Wildside' —

An eventful day? There are new poems to work on at last
— I left these at the E.A.F., tonight —
there are poems of Miriel's to look over,
dinner at Cath's.

— from Bolton. 'Walk on the Wildside', Flash. 12
The poem ‘Star Grocery’ runs a comparison with O’Hara’s activities - the buying of presents to take to Easthampton (see his poem ‘The Day Lady Died’):

- gifts bought for people and the stroll for Strega. My life is miles from that — I wear a battered leather jacket that if I thought about I’d be embarrassed
- when could I last afford scotch for someone, or go to a dinner laden with presents?

on the other hand — I am a poet.

The poem ends with a comparison of my jacket with one I (mis)remember Schuyler having worn:

- the bomber jacket
- on such a poet — as unlikely as it looks on me — but then, I am hardly here I guess. I know the lion is doomed, more or less, but I will likely be gone before it. Is that true? Well, the thought is to the point. It is the Canutish aspect to the lion I love — standing dark and silhouetted,

against the brilliant clouded sunsets that seem like history

— from Bolton. ‘poem (“Walking down from the Star Grocery”)’, Flash. 14
See poems such as ‘Ann Arbor Elegy’, or ‘Peace’ (quoted here) -

What to do
when the day’s heavy heart
having risen, late
in the already darkening East
& prepared at any moment to sink
into the West
surprises suddenly,
& settles for a time …

— Berrigan. ‘Peace’. SGAC. 223

And, from me, from ‘Hindley Street Today, With A View Of Michael Grimm’ 
(Flash 127—130) —

What to do
when the day’s heavy heart,
settled,
rises then -

thru some quality of the light -
& you your own mug
raise up
to see it,

register it

The repetitions, either ‘lightly dark’ or ‘darkly light’ — are all about Death, The Count etc:

With a view of, say, seraphic Michael Grimm
& my tape
on which
Bela Lugosi’s dead
studio version & ‘live’.

He’s dead
& Dion

& so is Bing.
Bob Hope lives on, I think,

& Michael & Julie & Chris,

— from Bolton. 'Hindley Street Today, With A View Of Michael Grim' Flash. 127

From 'Giles Auty Furioso': the scrappy beginning —

"I think continually of those who were truly great," someone said, but I like to think of things like the erased de Kooning, as considered by, say, Giles Auty.

I'm funny that way.
I'm funny like that.
That way I'm funny.
(Etc.)

— Sol Le Witt

I used to find amusing the idea of
Donald Brook greeting Cy Twombly —
like King George. Scribble, scribble, scribble, eh Mr Twombly.
But, as the artist's funny name ...

— from Bolton. 'Giles Auty Furioso'. Flash. 56

And from the speech attributed to Auty:

Ingres had "the probity of drawing".
But look at Chassériau ... & then
the Symbolists came along & it's been downhill ever since. That dill for instance - Puvis de Chavannes!

& yet, could we have had Gauguin without him? I would prefer to.

Just as I would prefer the late Derain without the earlier - though that is his whole point. Why couldn't Bonnard be stronger - couldn't he see where it led?

Hard to approve the politics of David,
or even Caravaggio - a lout probably - I can't see him reading The Spectator. Was there no one round like me to listen to? Or is that the point, not listening? The whole thing becomes pretty terminally ill with Duchamp. Just look at the deleterious effects ...
The 'Manet' poem (its title is 'A Picture') begins —

In Manet's great painting
*The Insomniacs* the three readers

share the bed and white
bedspread, two with books held up before them

reading, a girl and her mother,
the other, a man, has books too, on the bedspread before him

but writes in a pad

- *Flash*. 34

and ends —

The watch hand
goes to my head

which is bent, writing, writing this.
I tell the girls, and we all look up: Anna smiles,

Cath looks 'poised' and I, because I've been concentrating,
have a frown disappearing. Hi.

— from Bolton. 'A Picture'. *Flash*. 36
Some of the ambivalence about art historical opinions (in ‘Double Portrait’)—

unwillingly I entertain my only two images of him —

they ‘pop up’: & once more I dwell on them — on him. 
Or don’t. Briefly. It
is my memory’s almost empty file on Chuck Close — & in bed,
unwanted, it comes to me. Normally it wouldn’t, and thinking of Close
I think pretty immediately of Thomas Ruff, whose work his resembles —
the German photographer, in large format, of faces & streets. While I have
almost

never thought about the American I have thought about Ruff — who almost
came to Australia, I think: someone phoned once to ask should we bring him.
Out of regret that I didn’t push harder I’ve attended to Ruff ever since. All of
which in no way resembles
my feelings for this other portrait — a poet whose work I love, so that it
is pure good faith, this relationship. The ‘cool’ of the early Close
I found unimpressive, & ugly — in a fashionable way, whose fashionability I
wasn’t buying. Chuck’s by the bed
by accident, a name only.

— from Bolton. ‘Double Portrait’. Flash. 62

The FT Prince stanza form (which I think he attributes to Shelley); here from the
poem’s beginning —

The sun shines on the gliding river,
   The river shines & presses through
Damp meadows and just yellowing trees;
The tall trees left without a breeze
   Stand up against the blue.

And on one side a space for cows is
   Fenced off with willow stumps and wires;
While there the place of learning drowses,
Churches and colleges and houses
   Lifting their domes and towers and spires.

— from FT Prince. ‘Memoirs in Oxford’. 
Collected Poems. NY: Sheeps Meadow, 1979. 121
'Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices' begins —

I can remember coming here
for the first time, when *The Flash* moved
from its old spot across the street.
Larger, brighter, it was a week
or two, or three, before the move

was not sharply regretted. Jules
declared the new *Flash* off her round
so severely did it lack the
charm the old possessed - the
hole-in-the-wall, small town

refusal of economies
of scale, ...

*Flash*. 97
From 'Double Portrait' (some 'critic's guilt') —

... I grant Close
the pathos of the new works — though I have only experienced it via magazine pages, one or two pictures ...
Then, Minimalism & Pop 'had had their day'
as things new & imperative. I didn't find them
(or him), in '74, inherently compelling. Not the way

I found about the same time, say, Tuckson, Robert Ryman. (In this 'indirect' way
guilt maintains a close connection between me and a particular sub-set of art
works. As close
or closer than between me and works I've liked probably. I remember them
ruefully: a history of opinions — mine — via
mistakes I might have made.) Literalism was my big thing. Will the day
come when it is not? I'm not sure it still isn't — the pictures

on the back of Towle's books regarding me quizzically as I say it —

— from Bolton. 'Double Portrait'. Flash 62—64
From 'Hi, John' —

When I said goodnight to you — 'composed'
beneath a 40 watt bulb, on a sagging camp bed —

the doctor having told you you might die,
it was hard not to be amused

as well as worried: you wouldn't die
of course, but would you be well?

(The doctor,

we took it, putting the frighteners
on you.) Anna, twelve,

resembled you
a few weeks ago —

conked-out, the TV going,
a blanket pulled high,

her round, angelic head,
her buried chin. The term

that mediates or bridges
her image & yours

a Guston picture, of a head smoking
(called 'Smoking'),

its eyes wide, a profile, worried.
And then you died.

— from Bolton. 'Hi, John'. Flash. 68—73
From 'Tiepolo' - in which a 'lonely guy', pensive amongst the smoke machine's product, at a disco is seen to resemble the begging saint from Tiepolo's painting.

Like Professor Smith's lecture that no one heard
Tiepolo was designed not to be looked at.
Like the smoke the machine pumps out: billowing cloud
... some armour ... flesh & garments — the suggestion of excitement — that no one buys — least of all the lonely type, who can't dance & stands, staring into a corner at a trick of the light.

Tiepolo's *Three Angels Appearing To Abraham* in the Venice Accademia is like that. He is the dud guy bottom left — kneeling, dirty feet, beard. The angels, thin limbed, glamorous, surf up on their rubber dinghy of cloud — & look down incuriously — except to remark, perhaps, the dirt — & vouchsafe a glimpse of beauty — a limb dangled Abe's way, silhouetted against cloud.
As if to say, You can go home now, Abe, patron-at-disco, better not to wait for more.

— from Bolton. 'Tiepolo', *Flash*. 107
Destinies. Aspiration. Ideas
more or less capitalized - Romantic & abstract.

And the pathos of 'the human'.

For me, always, cities suggest these things. So that
to visit them
brings these questions up.

Though I never answer. And they return each time
familiar, with additional features, histories of their own - *their history*
of my not dealing with them.
(‘Dealing’ - which suggests some finality.
That will never come.) Merely, “these are the things that I think about”.

("Ken, your friends are here."

Oh-oh. And they walk into the room -
Christopher Brennan, Slessor, Grace Crowley:
suits & coats & mufflers, a paper bag with alcohol in it.

A flat I visited very young a few times -
Connie, a friend of my mother’s - down
steep steps, it looked out through trees to the harbour.

Cremorne ... Mosman. The characteristic Sydney trees & flowers,
the tremulous fifties

From further on in the poem —

The tree’s exuberant,
20s feel - via the association with de Maistre -
& the immediate identification of the hill opposite

with the Cross, usher in this same group of thoughts
I have often in Sydney - as
a ‘foreigner’, particularly. That is, I never had them

when I lived there. Though maybe it is Time -
these things would have come to me ‘eventually’, & did, have.
From Sal’s newer flat, from Laurie’s, they have
swelled romantically, like heavy weather, banked clouds over the headlands: the intense, romantic blue of the harbour - yachts, boats even, being

‘of the past’. Sydney - 1938? '46? '52? At Coogee at Michael & Di's I list these themes, the list surfaces from time to time - lost eventually.

Ideas mocked & evoked by a sight one time at Kurt's -

As they are mocked & evoked, as it happens, in Kurt's thinking. (Do we all think this? shuffle these same cards?)

'Sydney' - a group of images - that says 'Nix' to dreams.

Yet the elements - its beauty - encourage them. Hence the town's pagan & hard-bitten quality. Which I read as acceptance of failure. Like the falling back of the waves.

Slessor. The failure of its artists (their names all minor). And, like any city, it suggests the aspirations & failure of capital 'c' Civilization - & of its politicians, by whom we mark the years (Gorton: deposed as party leader -

"And what are you going to do now, Prime Minister?" "Go home & watch Countdown like everybody else." Keating, Hawke, their various bitternesses): highrise Development & the Unknown Past... - the beer ads of the 30s & 40s - that decorated, once, all the pubs. Preposterously, men in suits; women in formal wear, bare shouldered; waiters, aspidistras, smokes; the long-necked bottles of the beer itself memories of my father.

It all proves nothing,
it seems to say - though, individually, each piece

says something else - like the surf's tumult ending in a hiss, as it fails to take the beach.

The 'argument' of the poem —

John was Sydney. As is Pam. For Love Alone - doesn't that have
descriptions of Sydney I always meant to read? Where can I get that book in Rome? I am somewhere, now,
near Via Dell' Umilita & Via Del Corso, & undecided -

not between those things though - humility & business.  
I'm for business. At least, I think, tonight I am. 
I go home, call the drawing finished - spray it with fixative, 

It looks okay. A bit of Rome, a bit of Sydney - 
perhaps London a bit. 'The London Years of Roy de Maistre' - a Sydney remembered. 

A Sunderland appears & lands whitely in the harbour, 
a corsage. I think of frangipani & carnations, 
look out the dark window - at a Rome that isn't visible -

& see 
the hill, the variegated pink & cream houses, verandahs.

* 

A puzzle you pick up & put down, & walk away from. A rebus.
Flaws in the glass by which to see. I replace them, this constellation, 
small objects on a table - a marble, an ashtray, a postcard view, 

a 1960s beer coaster. Items that 
mean nothing - though they make up 
'a sentimental picture of Australia'.

A perspective - distant from Europe - that lets you see 
more accurately than they do, do things 
with less assurance - but do them anyhow, 

amused to be making the gestures that are art 
with all those gestures claim, or make them 
with no claims. In fact, the co-ordinates I love. 

As someone, somewhere in Rome, a Roman, must be 
making a painting, making a poem, knowing Rome 
is not a centre any more, that Italy is not central. 

Yet they go on, happy, thoughtful, 
Rome's night air outside the window, spelling Rome. 
Many happy hours, Pard.

— from Bolton. 'Rumori'. Flash. 109—117
'Long Distance' a 'letter poem', begins —

Dear Crab,
It would be great
to be drinking with you here
— because
There Are So Many Bars
& walking between one & the next is
terrific at night.
Rome resembles a beautiful film set:
mysterious, melancholy, & hip,
hip & corny existing
side by side
— but the corny is them, not you, so you
don't have to worry — & the hip you can emulate
or blend with — & you'd be up to it.

I keep intending to write

— from Bolton. 'Long Distance Information'. Flash. 102

'American Friends' begins —

Ah nuts! It's boring reading English newspapers
in Adelaide as if I were a Colonial waiting for my gin
somewhere beyond this roof a jet is making a sketch of the sky
where is Laurie Duggan I wonder if he's reading under a dwarf pine
stretched out so his book & his head fit under the lowest branch
while the great southland sun rolls calmly not getting thru to him
not caring particularly tho the light in Sydney does not get
to see so many poets, while in Blackheath or Marrickville
Pam — particle or wave theory? — divides her time
between them, reads Eileen Myles or Susan Schulz
(American friends) everybody here is running around or sitting tight &
being grim I once saw Laurie swim 'backstroke' — so he motored
feet first around a pool I dreamed I saw Pam
in a play I never wrote — wave theory
might explain this, crazy, intense, the picture ghosting

inexplicable Steve Kelen where is he, et famille? In Viet Nam?

— from Bolton. 'American Friends'. Flash. 87
'Horizon' begins —

"Beyond the sunrise
where the black begins" —
& the lights of the city, we
imagine, twinkle or blaze ...

the horizon line here
a curve of butter yellow,
slightly oxidized — lined,
at its rim, by olive-green 'natives' —
hides a city that if I am
facing the right way
must be doing its afternoon trade
relaxed this last few days after December 25th

— from Bolton. 'Horizon'. Flash. 89

From 'Horizon' —

relaxed this last few days after December 25th
but ready nonetheless for the big push
at night, the raid on
fun desire release -
selling mostly coffee, wine,
Michael / rolls a joint has one
then rolls several others children
contemplate navels - the girls their own
with quiet pride, the boys the girls'
with longing puzzling as it is strong
Mary paints her nails, reads, Cuban music
playing. What of Margaret, of Crab? they do
those things normative in a utopia
a cork is popped, Marg plays
fado, the soulful music of Portugal
or Crab practises on sax
reads some politics, some mayhem, reads
the poems I gave him.

The poem addresses JF at its end —

... If O'Hara
had such timing John his last move suggests he blew it
Tho exits are notoriously hard to make. "I live above a
dyke bar & I'm happy" — I might too for all I know.
Am I? Occasionally, occasionally very. ...
footnotes

1 The phrase means—or I took it to mean—a poem that documents the real time of its writing. Typically such poems refer to passing time, the place of the writing/thinking situation and its self-reflexivity. These poems tend to run to some length.


3 Adolf Loos (1870 - 1933) was a Viennese architect at the turn of the century, representing a purist form of early modernism developing out of and 'against' Art Nouveau and anticipating De Stijl.

4 Reyner Banham is an architectural critic who championed the 'functionalist' 1950s/60s English architects who often followed loosely Bauhaus principles but tended to foreground the functional: exposed pipes and ducting and the perfunctorily (sometimes perversely) awkward staircase etc. Banham, R. New Brutalism. London: Architect Press, 1966.

5 Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe (1886 - 1969) and Hans Gropius (1883 - 1969) were German Bauhaus architects, later working in the USA. Mies said 'less is more' and Gropius said 'form follows function'—among many other dicta.

6 Charles Olson proposed most clearly in his essays on Projective verse a kind of kinetic/organic theory relating the poem's form to interconnected impulses of thought, breath and emotion. See Olson, 'Projective Verse'. The Human Universe and other essays. NY: Grove Press, 1967. 51


12 Charles Bernstein is a poet of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school—often amusingly barbed—is happy to conflate poetry and criticism.


14 ('though I was not hindered especially')—which is to say, that at the time I simply thought I was right.

15 Minimalism in the visual arts is characterized in various books. One of the first was Minimalism. Ed. Gregory Battcock, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1968.
16 'Hard-Edge'—a painting style of clear geometric shapes, flatly painted, often using masking tape to give the forms perfectly crisp, firm definition. It thereby avoided Abstract Expressionism's personalized, 'autographic' style.


23 Since writing I have read an article that is interesting in this respect in a number of ways. It is 'O'Hara, Judd and Cold War Accommodation: Perceptions Equalizing Ground and Figure' by Stephen Paul Miller (in The Scene Of Myselfes. Eds. Terence Diggory and Stephen Paul Miller. Maine: National Poetry Foundation/ University of Maine, 2001. 175 - 188). The essay looks at O'Hara's work, and most interestingly, for me, his 'Personism' manifesto, to show similarities of attitude between O'Hara and the Minimalist sculptor Don Judd. The thesis is that they are similarly reductive, that Judd's refusal to countenance anything but a literalist approach to the art object is akin to O'Hara's refusal of (the signs of) conventional poetic technique.

Miller's argument is seemingly persuasive. There are a number of difficulties with it, two of which he recognizes: O'Hara's statement, and the bulk of his practice, predate Judd's; and Judd's aesthetic seems otherwise quite different to O'Hara's.

This last is compounded by a fact that I think is not noted: that O'Hara was actually pretty hostile to the Minimalist movement and all the anti-expressivist movements ranged against Abstract Expressionism. (His seeming allegiances to some of these camps' members — to Johns for example—are by way of their own ambivalently expressivist tendencies.) O'Hara was regarded by the tougher minded art world avant-garde as a captive of rather twee or chi-chi taste—as far as I can tell.

None of this disproves the case. But the pre-dating does point to the real answer I think, which is that both Judd and O'Hara are part of a tendency that was general within the American avant-garde, over decades, one which underlies Abstract Expressionism as well as the opposed Minimalist art, and which in the same way underlies, probably, some of later Lowell as well as the 'opposed' O'Hara. This tendency finds convention, where it identifies it, as artificial, inauthentic and dispensable. A Lucy Lippard article, 'The Cult of the Direct and the Difficult' pointed it out (in Lippard. Changing. NY: E.P. Dutton, 1971). But Lippard would
hardly have been the first to do so: the 'directness' of the Abstract Expressionists was an article of faith among the artists themselves and was well known, as was their remarking on the too tasteful finishedness of contemporary French art.

The thesis about 'figure and ground' is also part of the Abstract Expressionist period and style (to which O'Hara was attentive as he was not to the work of such as Judd) and ties to O'Hara's invocation of 'the poem as field' and an 'all-over' style—a surface evenly and everywhere inflected. It makes the work of de Kooning or Pollock a better analogue for O'Hara than Judd's work.

What was surprising for me was seeing the 'Personism' piece in this light. I had always found it amusing, though only in part and to strain a little after its light and slightly snotty tone. I couldn't see that it was proposing much in the very memorable phrases about simply "going on your nerve", pants 'tight enough to be attractive' and "I was a track star for Minneola Prep!" But Miller suggests that this was a pointed (if pointedly casual) rejection of conventional technique—rhyme, metre, all that—associated with, for example, Lowell. A kind of dealing with materials 'direct', with full attention, but not the protection of a preordained technique to shape and control it. (The stand-off with Lowell, possibly bemusing to the older poet, if he gave it any thought at all, is symbolized in their reading together: their styles contrasted markedly: O'Hara read a poem he had written on the way to the reading (the poem in which Lana Turner collapses); Lowell remarked that he on the other hand, though it might be expected of him, would not be reading something he had written "on the spot").

(Evidence could be adduced I suppose to trace this attitude towards Lowell in O'Hara—through further remarks, earlier and later. It's not important to me to nail it down. I do know that, for example, Yugen, the magazine of O'Hara's friend Leroi Jones, carried a very vicious attack on Lowell (by Gilbert Sorrentino) and that O'Hara published in that same issue and in many others. Yugen. #7. NY: Totem Press, 1961.)

I think I had never seen the import of O'Hara's remarks about technique because technique seemed hardly part of the contemporary poetic landscape to me when I began. Partly I would not have known enough to recognize it or properly understand its workings, partly 'the job had been done' and conventional technique was simply less evident by this time. I could see that O'Hara's work was—by my lights—'better' than a lot of other poetry, but not that it lacked technique. It seemed to me simply 'flexible' I think.

In any case 'O'Hara, Judd and Cold War Accommodation' supports the characterization I have outlined in this essay—about the coherence of the critical-aesthetic environment I was writing out of.


30 Greenberg, Clement. *Art and Culture*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1973. US publication in 1961. As individual essays these were published throughout the 40s, 50s and 60s.


33 Olson, cited above, footnote 6.


35 The model for this poem is a one by Michael Benedikt, ‘The European Shoe’, collected in his book *The Body*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan UP, 1968. Benedikt’s other work seemed limited to a very non-convulsive, well-mannered Surrealism. But this particular poem I have always liked.


37 in *Blonde & French*, ibid. 28.


45 see note 44 above.

46 An unnuanced formulation that seems to me true enough is that Philosophy is not a closely defined term or field: whole national schools ignore each other, major philosophers are outside the institution very often (whatever it is at any one time and place). Academic philosophers unquestionably know (something) about philosophy, might 'do' philosophy, without being Philosophers—any more than a lab worker is a scientist. (Was Bachelard less of a philosopher when he was a postman? Does Anglo-American philosophy regard him as a philosopher in any case? Etcetera.) I don’t see that the question can be settled, that I need to settle it, or that discussing it further here is to the point. Though that sounds horribly blunt.

47 Koethe, John. Poetry At One Remove. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan UP, 2000. Some terms here, and the account of Plato, though none of the thinking (which is congenial enough), are taken from Koethe's introductory essay. (And see further regarding "legalistically explicit" etc., Koethe, ibid., 41.)

48 Sir Richard Blackmore, one of a number of 18th-century poets (with Thomson of 'The Seasons', Erasmus Darwin, John Dyer and others) who celebrate and describe science and modernising technology, full of praise and wonder at its intricacies. Dr Johnson praised Blackmore's 'The Creation'.

49 Chris Burns, Chris. 'Art Commentary – Sydney'. Otis Rush #4, 1989. Burns is a Sydney poet. His poems are not collected in book form. In chasing up the reference I found his summation of the Ern Malley hoax as the 'mugging' of Modernism in Australia not to come from one his poems but from his art criticism where it is offered as a parody of John Tranter's view (as expressed in the introduction to The New Australian Poetry).


51 A partial account of these enthusiasms (and those of others I knew in the early and mid to late 70s) is given in my book Happy Accidents. Adelaide: Little Esther, 1999.


53 An exhibition, The Naked City, at the Contemporary Art Centre, South Australia, 1988: artists were Simon Blau, John Bursill, Jon Cattapan, David Lawwill, Stewart MacFarlane, Glenn Morgan, Margaret Morgan, Pie Rankin, Steve Smith, Vicki Varvaressos. I reviewed it in Otis Rush #4, 1989.

54 Bolton, Ken. 'Untimely Meditations'. 'Untimely Meditations' and other poems. Adelaide: Wakefield, 1997. 32. The poem was written for a proposed conference on 'National Identity and Representation' that fell through. It was delivered as a paper at the 'Space of Poetry' conference, University of Melbourne, in 1993 and
was excerpted and reprinted thereafter in a number of academic journals.


61 Johnny Mercer—popular song-writer in the 30s and 40s.

62 Bobby ‘The Brain’ Heenan was/is a wrestling manager on American TV wrestling of the 1980s.


64 McKenzie Wark’s remark was more an objection and joke about the phrase ‘cultural roots’—we don’t have roots we have aerials—made at a conference or arts festival, but undoubtedly in print somewhere.

65 Clemens, Justin. ‘A Report To An Academy’, UTS Review 4.1 (1998): 107 - 122. The article contains Clemens’s variation on Walter Pater’s phrase about “all art” and “music”.


67 I note late in the process of writing this exegesis that I have neglected to mention one whole book of mine, given over to a single ‘process poem’ and a correspondingly long de-briefing coda. Two Poems - a drawing of the sky. Adelaide: Experimental Art Foundation, 1990. This is a poem of process and is diary-like. The main influence that I am aware of behind it is James Schuyler’s ‘The Morning Of The Poem’.


69 Koethe, John. Poetry At One Remove. Michigan UP, 1999. 111. Koethe’s (prose) punctuation, lineation etcetera are altered in this and the quotation that follows it in the poem.

70 Koethe, ibid., 111.

72 The Oulipo (shortened form of Ouvroir de littérature potentielle). To be made a member one has to invent a new form with strict rules. Some simple ones are Perec’s novel without the letter ‘e’, La Disparition, Harry Mathews’ stories written using only the vocabulary of a particular, simple text. ‘Restrictive form’ is held to be liberating and productive, hence the Ou Li Po’s liking for the sestina and forms like it. See the Ou Li Po Compendium. Eds. Harry Mathews and Alastair Brotchie. London: Atlas Press, 1998.


74 Being John Malkovich is a movie—whose amusing logic has people able to gain access to and ‘be’ John Malkovich for a short time after climbing through a hole. Being John Malkovich. Dir. Spike Jonze. Gramercy/Single Cell, 1999.

75 These are allusions to remarks mildly critical of the waitress—which appear in ‘Traffic Noises’ and ‘Hindley Street with a prospect of Michael Grimm’. Bolton, Ken. At The Flash & At The Baci. Forthcoming.


81 Pam Brown, Laurie Duggan, and John Forbes are the main local influences within my writing career: they are philosophical or aesthetic or political ‘stiffeners’ (as I have allowed them to be)—as much as, or more than, they have been directly poetic influences. The two things would be hard to separate.

John Jenkins and I have collaborated on a great deal of work—since the middle eighties. I do not think we have been much influence on each other’s solo work: our ideas and interests are rather antithetical—the poems we write together come mostly out of our amusement at this: many of them are dialogic. (No reference to Bakhtin intended.) Most of them neither of us would work up the volition to write alone. If I could manage the psychic momentum to write a verse play I am sure it would be indebted to our work together—an attempt to capture the same nutty energy and foolishness. But it hasn’t happened.

Laurie Duggan’s poetry I find extraordinarily impressive. Under The Weather, which has in parts lost some of its charm for me, I was very impressed with at the time of its writing—for its form and its ellipses, its overall musicality, and for being
a poem of that kind: where else was there one? (There were many, probably, stemming from Bunting, Pound and maybe Olson, in the US and the UK. I didn't see many though—and liked fewer.) I read Under The Weather as it was being written. Lauri's next books were very good (The Great Divide—with poems in it like 'The New England Ode'—and Adventures In Paradise which I published myself).

Blue Notes was more a miscellany, but with very good things in it. The Ash Range was so much less personable and was different. It was not what I wanted to write though impressive and ambitious. I published Lauri's Memorials—which I like immensely. If some of my more scattered, staggered, processual (!) poems approach this I would be very happy. Lauri's work pointed me to Philip Whalen's—if I needed another source and originating personality and temperament for writing like this. (I don't think I did. But good to have it.)

Laurie and Pam are both readers whom I imagine writing my work for. So their respective severities temper my work. Not that they are severe as people—but that what they see as bullshit counts.

I wrote numerous letters to the addresses given in Pam Brown's early books. To no avail for years—she had 'always already' moved on. Her work interested me from the mid seventies onwards. At first intermittently. It was very different from my own. Since meeting in the late 70s our work has grown closer—what a phrase—and apart again, in various ways (formally). But we share a great many attitudes. I think her influences are less narrow than mine. But we want our poetry to do many of the same things. My work sometimes takes off from lines of hers, often takes off from the imagined attitude 'Pam Brown' would evince. Laurie for me functions similarly.

John Tranter has been for me impressive without his work having any siren pull. I was fascinated by early versions of 'Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy', I remember, in the mid seventies. I read him mostly in magazines then. His early books, Paralax, Red Movie, already seemed old compared to his current work. I mention him because it may be presumed that he would have been significant for me. But no.

I suppose I should acknowledge that my influences are mostly male. But then they are also fairly few—amongst contemporary Australians they are three, of whom one, of course, is a woman. I lived with writers, Anna Couani and later Sal Brereton. Both are prose writers and I think for that reason less influential.

The US anthologies and 'schools' or movements were pretty exclusively male: One woman (Bernadette Mayer) in the NY School anthology, two or three in Donald Allen's effort (Helen Adam and Levertov and Barbara Guest). Guest seems alternately inert and diaphanous-and-wafty to me. Her critical rehabilitation is being organized but I am not a subscriber. Bernadette Mayer I've read a fair bit of and liked. Anne Waldman—I liked only her first book, Giant Night. Adrienne Rich's later, 80s work I read in the mid and late 80s and liked—but, aside from its seriousness, its 'techniques' were those I already used. (I had read her Diving Into The Wreck in the 70s.)

I now read Eileen Myles and some Alice Notley. Both okay, but hardly available to me 'back then'. Susan Schultz. The Howes, Hejinian, I read a little of. I find the former solemn. Lyn Hejinian I'll read with interest.

So, I liked only a small percentage of what was available. Should I explain why I ignored so many male writers? Influence is a matter of enthusiasms and
compatibilities—and timing and availability. Within the narrowness of my tastes—which is my business and my problem—I don't think I was culpably blind to others' talents, male or female. Still, I doubt that my social attitudes were way ahead of their time either.


83 The reoccurrence of O'Hara references in my poetry of the 90s is maybe overdetermined: my work has been to some extent in intermittent dialogue with that of (or with the figure of) John Forbes—for whom O'Hara was important. And John mentions O'Hara in connection with me, as a token of some affinity or some attitudes we might share. John's death in early 1998 brought him still more to the fore of my thinking—and possibly more present than might have been the case as I began to edit Homage to John Forbes, a book of appreciation, memoir and criticism—published by Brandl & Schlesinger in 2002.
WORKS CITED

The author's own books are referred to in passing in the text and are on occasion identified in its margins by italicized abbreviation. But not all separate books are referenced here as many of the poems are reprinted in the larger collections, Selected Poems, 'Untimely Meditations' & other poems, & in the forthcoming At The Flash & At the Baci which forms the body of this thesis.

These books are listed immediately below in chronological order, together with the initials by which they will be identified after first appearance here, in the exegesis, and in footnotes:


—. *Talking To You*. Melbourne: Rigmarole, 1983. TTY

—. *Notes For Poems*. Adelaide: Shocking Looking Books, 1984. NFP

—. *Blazing Shoes*. Adelaide: Open Dammit, 1984. BS

—. *Sestina To The Centre Of The Brain*. Adelaide: Little Esther, 1990. STCB


—. 'Untimely Meditations' & other poems. Adelaide: Wakefield, 1997. UM

—. *Happy Accidents*. Adelaide: Little Esther, 1999. HA


—. *At The Flash & At The Baci*. - unpublished: constitutes the bulk of this thesis. AF&B.


One book by the author, *Two Poems - a drawing of the sky* is inadvertently not mentioned or discussed—nor, except in footnotes, are the books written collaboratively with John Jenkins discussed.


*Artforum* magazine, any issue of the early 1970s.


—. ‘Peace’. SGAC. 223.


*The Bill*. Channel Two, presently showing.


—. ‘American Friends’. AF&B. 8t.


—. *At The Flash & At The Baci*.


—. ‘Beginning the new day’. *SP*. 59.


—. ‘Catching Up With Kurt Breteton’. AF&B. 92.


—. ‘Funny Ideas’. *Sestina To The Centre Of The Brain*. Adelaide: Little Esther, 1990. 1. (Henceforth STCB.)
—. ‘Giles Auty Furioso’. AF&B. 56.
—. ‘Halogen Pam’. AF&B. 18.
—. ‘Hi, John’. AF&B. 68.
—. ‘Hindley Street, with a Prospect of Michael Grimm’. AF&B. 37.
—. ‘Horizon’. AF&B. 89.
—. ‘Italian Drink’. SP. 1.
—. ‘Life Your Weight’. SP. 88.
—. ‘Long Distance Information’. AF&B. 107.
—. ‘Lyric’. SP. 50.
—. ‘Mysteries’. SP. 5.
—. ‘Mostly Hindley Street’. AF&B. 37.
—. ‘Nerve’. SP. 7.
—. ‘Nonplussed’. SP. 25.
—. ‘Notes For Poems’. Excerpted SP. 91.
—. ‘People Passing Time’. AF&B. 73.
—. ‘A Picture’. AF&B. 34.
—. ‘poem (walking down from The Star Grocery)’. AF&B. 14.
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—. ‘A Terrible Attitude, Based On Suffering’. SP. 172.

—. ‘Terrific Cigarette’. SP. 3.

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—. 'The History Of Nostalgia'. CP. 160.

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—. 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch'. Art & Culture. Ibid.

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—. 'Korean Mums'. *The Morning of the Poem*. Ibid. 9.


*Studio International* magazine, any issue of the early 1970s.


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— This World, This Place. St Lucia: UQP, 1994


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—. *Real Estate Opportunities*. [Santa Barbara, CA: Ed Ruscha], 1968.


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—. *Crying In Early Infancy*. St Lucia: Makar, 1978.

—. *Blast Area*. St Lucia: Gargoyle/Makar, 1974.


