“YOU CAN TRANSCEND THIS STUPID bad girl REALITY”: A Study of Hannah Weiner’s “Clair-Style”

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2012

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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Advisor: Professor Ammiel Alcalay

This dissertation is a study of the poetics of Hannah Weiner, a postmodern American experimental poet who hallucinated words. She believed that these words, though debilitating, life-altering interruptions, were clairvoyantly received directions and commentary from unseen guiding spirits. Weiner created her "clair-style" poetics to record her experience as she struggled to regain control of her life and decipher the instructions for healing, transcendence, and literary success that she believed were locked in the words she saw. I argue that her mission of documenting her life is not mere transcription, but a sophisticated engagement with her disability/gift and reflection on the role of the reader. Her personal agency is diluted, but Weiner trades authority for what she wants more: poetry that leads to enlightenment by facilitating her quest.

This dissertation serves as a reading guide or companion to Weiner's difficult poetry and its use of techniques including polyphony, fragmentation, overlapping type, and raw, diaristic revelations. I situate her inside a larger history of poets and the metaphysical, and explore Weiner's connections to the art communities of New York City's Lower East Side from the 1960s until her death in 1997. I examine her early works, unpublished journals, and manuscripts, tracking her predilection for the linguistic and visual codes that become pivotal in

her major work, *Clairvoyant Journal*. In my study of *Clairvoyant Journal*, I unravel messages about authorship and dictation and their connection to Weiner's life. I survey her critical reception and address key but uncomfortable questions about her clairvoyance or illness and the reader's conception of it. I probe Weiner's work of the 1980s, in which she turns her focus outward and uses her poetics for political purposes, taking up the cause of the American Indian Movement, claiming to channel the voices of its leaders. I also investigate Weiner's troubled but productive identification with Indians and her own shamanistic roll. I trace, or create, a trajectory that elucidates clair-style's origins and how Weiner arrived at this radical form for her art. This work is a study of Weiner's compromised consciousness, and her process of making art from a difficult experience.

Acknowledgements

In writing this dissertation I continually was amazed by Hannah Weiner's brave resilience in the face of difficult circumstances. I wrote this dissertation with extreme affection for her and her work and can only hope that I have honored her legacy and her life.

I must acknowledge the members of my dissertation committee for their encouragement and kindness. I am grateful to my ever-supportive dissertation director, Ammiel Alcalay, whose wisdom guided me at every step. His generous advice and feedback on this dissertation, and his assistance with the last chapter in particular, helped shape the study. I feel very lucky that he allowed me the freedom to write in the way that felt most useful, relying foremost on my own close readings. I would also like to thank Wayne Koestenbaum, for whose "Contemporary Experimental American Poetry" course I first wrote about Weiner. His careful, detailed feedback was of great help in eliminating syntactic looseness and elevating my prose. I'm grateful to Joan Richardson, in whose nurturing workshop I wrote my dissertation prospectus. Her advice, via Melville, for "virtuous expediency" stayed with me as I wrote and pulled me out of the morass of perfectionism. I would also like to thank Charles Bernstein for agreeing to be an outside reader for this dissertation and for first introducing me to Hannah's work. His influence on my thinking about poetry dates back to my undergraduate days at SUNY Buffalo in the Poetics Program that inspired the trajectory of my life. All quotations and scans of publications and manuscripts from Weiner's work are used by permission of Charles Bernstein for Hannah Weiner in trust.

My parents, Grace and Don Russo, were a unwavering source of support for me. I am immensely grateful to them for their interest and pride in my work. I am also thankful for the support of my sister, Dr. Anne Russo, whose own accomplishments in her field inspire and

humble me. She served as the perfect model of relentless hard work. I am immeasurably grateful to my life partner, Marcel Blum, who has read pieces of this project at every stage, and was kind enough to proofread the final draft. I thank him for his help and for his patience.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the East Village of New York City, in August 1972, the experimental poet Hannah Weiner began seeing words – hallucinations appearing on surfaces around her, including her own forehead – which she could "read" from within. She believed that what she saw were clairvoyantly received directions and commentary from unseen guiding spirits. She had been seeing "images and energy fields"[1] ("Mostly About the Sentence" 122) for over a year, and she had been writing about what she saw, carefully recording it all, certain that they were messages to her that she had to decode. And then, "words developed" ("The words in CAPITALS and underlines are words I see" 63). When the first word appears Weiner is thrilled – despite the fact that the first word is "wrong." She believes that if the forces[2], as she calls them, speak to her through words, the messages will be clearer to her, will help her. By recording her struggle to decipher the instructions for healing, transcendence, and literary success that she believes are locked in the words she sees, Weiner creates a poetics, which she calls clair-style, that gives her a way to record her experience as she struggles to regain control of her life. But, Weiner discovers that reclaiming control requires giving in to the words and allowing them to dictate not just her poetry, but her life. Her personal agency is diluted, but Weiner trades authority for what she wants more: to create important, new poetry that leads her and her readers to enlightenment.

[1] Weiner's writing often violates conventions of spelling and grammar. I have chosen to represent her work as written without using "sic" to indicate that I have accurately reproduced the original text. I believe such an inclusion would be quite distracting and would prevent the reader from fully appreciating Weiner's work.
[2] Weiner uses "the words," "the voices," and "the forces" interchangeably to refer to the words and images that she sees. She personifies them, believing them to have agency. I follow her lead, allowing the words the agency she insists upon.

Weiner was born in 1928 in Providence, Rhode Island, to a middle-class Jewish family, and attended Radcliffe College, graduating with a B.A. in English Literature in 1950, writing a thesis on the novels of Graham Greene. She later moved to New York City, and as a longtime resident of the East Village, Weiner became an active participant in the experimental art scene so vibrant there in the 1960s and 1970s. In a third-person autobiographical piece published in 1994, Weiner describes her adult life before she began writing:

> she […] worked for three publishing houses got fired from all of them […] she then turned to retailing and was an assistant buyer for fat ladies dresses in bloomingdales basement she married a psychiatrist freudian and divorced him four years later then she exaggerated but not lied herself into a job designing lingerie and turned down her second request for marriage. ("Silent Teacher")

She continues, explaining her emergence in the poetry scene: "by this time she was making the rounds of galleries and parties in the early sixties and began to write poetry in 1963" ("Silent Teacher").

Weiner's successful career as a lingerie designer for Maidenform, ironically, led to some of her first connections to the world of performance art. Ron Silliman, in a report on the "70th birthday memorial celebration of Hannah Weiner" hosted by St. Mark's Poetry Project – a space with which Weiner had long been connected – in 1998 recounts a humorous story told by the performance artist Carolee Schneeman: "Carolee described meeting Hannah as the result of a planned performance piece in which, at a very late moment before the event, the sponsors indicated that the performers could not, in fact, appear nude, so that she went to Maidenform to ask about 'experimental underwear' and the folks at Maidenform said 'you must meet Hannah Weiner.'" Weiner was laid off in the late 1970s, supporting herself with disability checks for an

illness she does not disclose to her readers, and occasionally money from her parents, until her death, but by then she had already devoted her life to writing poetry.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time in New York when artists and bohemians could still afford to live cheaply in the Lower East Side and East Village in lofts in various states of decrepitude. Embracing the free-spirited liberalism of the 1960s, Weiner experimented with drugs and Eastern philosophy and, inspired by second-wave feminism, wrote openly about her sex life. She was deeply embedded in the counter-culture of downtown New York City at the time, despite being a number of years older than many in her cohort. Weiner had a lot of friends and was well liked and known for her kindness and generosity towards younger poets. Weiner was part of a community of artists, and some of her earliest work was collaborative performances and happenings. She attended readings, gallery openings, concerts, and parties regularly, always on the scene. Her summers she often spent at her parents' house in Providence or at the family beach house on the coast of Rhode Island. She was part of the community surrounding the St. Mark's Poetry Project from its inception.

She had spent the decade of her life before the words appeared writing experimental poetry and producing performance art. She began her life as a poet as a student of New York School poetry, taking a class with Kenneth Koch at the New School in 1964, which is where she "found she couldnt write new york school poetry in fact she couldnt write her own words at all" ("Silent Teacher"). Her statement of her inability to "write her own words" is a bit of an exaggeration, as in her first book of poetry, *The Magritte Poems*, she does just that. This collection of impressionistic poems inspired by paintings and containing more text in the book's endnotes than in the poems, while interesting, reveals little of the radical experimentation to come. It was non-clairvoyantly written in 1966, but not published until 1970, after the success of

her first published book of poetry, *Code Poems*. What she seems to be admitting is a dissatisfaction with the words she could write, and this dissatisfaction leads her to look elsewhere for mediating devices through which she could create poems. Weiner's interest in becoming a poet is not diminished by her lack of ability to become a New York School poet. In "Obligated," a text Weiner wrote to eulogize Ted Berrigan after his death in 1983, she writes of Berrigan, "i met ted in the spring of 1964 […] he was the first poet i met on the streets i had just at 35 started to write and was taking kenneth koch's class at the new school and had been well read in koch ohara and ashbery as contemporaries but ted was the first real contemporary poet for me […] that summer i read the sonnets and i realized the revolution was in the streets" (59).

Significantly, Weiner also attended the Berkeley Poetry Conference of 1965; she reminisces, "i took it as a vacation from my underwear design job" ("Obligated" 59). This historic conference, which consisted of seminars, lectures, and readings, brought together some of the most important poets of the time, though it is now impossible to ignore the near absence of women on the roster. It was here where Jack Spicer gave his lecture "Poetry and Politics" during which he said, practically prophesying Weiner's own, as of yet, undeveloped poetic methods, "I think that poems are delivered very much like a message that's delivered over a radio and the poet is the radio. I don't think the poems come from the inside at all. Or at least the good ones don't" (168). Despite the many other, significant differences between the poetics and the poetry of Weiner and Spicer, their shared claims of paranormal authorship is fascinating, and will be explored in depth in Chapter 5. But, Spicer wasn't the only influential poet on the schedule; he was joined by Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, John Wieners, Ted Berrigan, and Charles Olson, among others. Weiner was thus witness to an important time in the "New

American Poetry," and her future praxis would be a vital part of pushing this confluence of experimental poetics into the future.

As Weiner established herself as an East Village poet and performer in the 1960s, interested, in part, in recording altered states of consciousness, she became increasingly invested in the use of codes and symbols, particularly those that lend themselves to the creation of visual poetry or performance art. Weiner explains that "happily she discovered the international code of signals and found she could write about almost anything by using the code books" ("Silent Teacher"). Her 1968 book *Code Poems* is the result of Weiner's use of these preordained nautical codes. The book is comprised of visual representations of the graphic flags that, as a part of the code, correspond to the letters of the alphabet, and which in specific letter/flag combinations have predetermined meanings, useful to those at sea, and then, later, Weiner. The book also contains images of the semaphore flags used to communicate messages between ships, and visual representations of the dots and dashes of Morse Code that also are used to convey these letter/flag combinations. In most of the book, Weiner lists the letter-code combinations, and then their full meaning, arranging these standard messages (such as, "LWC Follow me" or "YZ Are you in want of water?") into witty, suggestive poems. Weiner describes the works in *Code Poems* as "performance pieces using two figures and flags [that] were found material based on the International Code of Signals for Ships at Sea" ("Mostly About the Sentence" 122). These poems "became rather wild performances" ("Silent Teacher") in Central Park. In the second edition of *Technicians of the Sacred*, Jerome Rothenberg's anthology of ethnopoetics, in the "Addenda" of the note on "The Lovers," a visual text from the Ekoi, there is an excerpt from *Code Poems*. It is an image from the book: a sequence of flags each with a geometric pattern in white on black. The excerpt is followed by this explanation: "In

addition to the flag forms of the International Signal Code, Weiner's performances utilized semaphore (light signals) & morse code" (528-9). Weiner clearly states that she turned to code because "I WANTED ANOTHER VOICE deperson not my own some arrangement […] MY FIRST PERSON went the signal way of quote 'he, she, it or _____' from the code book radio I loved the blank" ("Dear Ron").

Other performances and objects also came out of her *Code Poems*. Weiner transformed a yellow plastic paint roller, wrapping it in blue paper covered in colorful images of flags. The roller reads, "Will you lead." In 1968, The Letter Edged in Black Press produced long strips of shiny paper, beautifully covered in brightly colored flags strung together, and with poem titles and code words printed on back. One such poem/strip is "Long Poem for Roy Lichtenstein." These strips were also use in performances, including one in November 1968 at the Longview Country Club, which was part of what Weiner dubbed "Tiny Events." In a press release of sorts that Weiner put together to promote the publication of *Clairvoyant Journal*, she documents the success of *Code Poems*:

> In the late 60's her Code Poems based on the International Code of Signals received a Copley Grant, and appeared in Poetry Chicago, The Dream Review, The Chelsea Review, 0-9, S.M.S., The World, etc. were shown as visuals at group shows including School of Visual Arts, NYC, Dwan Gallery, and were performed with the aid of the Coast Guard in Central Park Poetry Events, 1968, Spring Gallery 1968, and elsewhere. A film, "Any Chance of War" toured colleges, and a short version of "Romeo and Juliet" was performed for Wastepaper Theater in 1974.

During this time of successful performances and positive recognition, Weiner banded together with fellow performance artists John Perreault and Eduardo Costa to organize a number of performances in New York City. In 1969 Weiner performed five different "Street Works" in New York City. They entailed, in chronological order, "past[ing] blank labels on signs, doors,

walls, posts, etc. in order to draw attention to the environment"; meeting "the other Hannah Weiner," a psychiatrist living in New York; covering part of a city block with tape printed with signs from the International Code of Symbols, from her *Code Poems* project; hiring a hot dog cart to sell "wieners," playing on her name, though bemoaning the presence of nitrates in the food; and, she pretended to be a prostitute in a neighborhood known for prostitution, concluding, "It is not a nice feeling at all" ("Street Works I, II, III, IV, V" 25). As part of the Street Work IV she also organized "Open House," during which she "invited the public into the homes of participating artists. […] We sat around kitchen tables, or on the floor and talked and smoked or had a party. I met new friends." (25). She explains the ethos of the project: "Street Works, events, out in public, out of the art gallery, performance areas, etc into the PUBLIC VIEW" ("Dear Ron" 2).

On March 21, 1970, at noon, Weiner performed "World Works," which entailed writing "the word THE over WORLD WORKS, after which she "vacuumed the street," which in her description of the event is followed by the rationale that "The world works with a little help from us all" ("World Works"). The explanation for her motivation is an eerie harbinger: "I wanted to do World Works because I wanted to create the feeling that people all over the world were doing a related thing at a related time, although they would be doing it individually, without an audience and without knowledge of what others were doing. It is an act of faith. We have unknown collaborators" ("World Works"). Weiner was already beginning to feel connected to a metaphysical realm, and she understood that realm would somehow co-produce her art.

Weiner also co-organized The Fashion Show Poetry Event in January 1969, with Perreault and Costa, which involved an actual fashion show in addition to "Fashion Commentaries," and was dubbed by the organizers "a new kind of theater" (58). The garments

on display were designed by many artists, including Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol, and Weiner herself. The commentators were the event organizers: Perreault, Costa, and Weiner. "The Fashion Show Poetry Event Essay," originally published by the collective in Mayer and Vito Acconci's magazine *0-9*, elucidates the process that produced the fashion show: "We communicated to the artists our generalized instructions. They translated back these instructions into sketches, models, & finally actual garments. The feedback (i.e. the garments) was then translated by us into fashion language" (57). They explain that "some of the reasons we chose to make the effort of presenting an actual fashion show were: to move outside of the limitations of the printed word, to move away from personal expression, and to present a fictionalized version of a real life event that would appeal to an audience accustomed to sophisticated perception of visual phenomena" (57). The first two of these objectives seem to direct Weiner's poetry for the rest of her life, even as she relies on "the printed word" in her poetry. She writes of these early performances, "no pages. I wouldnt use paper. dead wood. SO NOTHING ELSE REMAINS" ("Dear Ron" 2). In one of her first explanations of her art – in a flier for a performance piece entitled "Hannah Weiner at her Job" – she writes, "My life is my art. I am object, a product of the process of self-awareness" ("Hannah Weiner at Her Job" 23). Where Weiner's true obsession comes to the fore in "The Fashion Show Poetry Event Essay" is in the line, "Fashion language is a complicated code" (57). Her preexisting preoccupation with the manipulation and use of codes would serve her once the words appear and require their own codified treatment. This event also received wider attention in *The Village Voice* & *Harper's Bazaar*. Weiner jokingly remarks, these performances were "very well reviewed because the art critic of the village voice was one of her partners" ("Silent Teacher"), speaking of Perreault. These "non-written works" ("Dear Ron" 2) seem to hinge on community and place. But, things suddenly

changed for Weiner: "then I quit very […] public (lots of publicity awkward- reviewed) AND THEN I QUIT I became themind control works psychic or so i thought" ("Dear Ron" 2).

However, the way she formulates the reasoning for "quitting" the performance art scene hints at the reality that Weiner was also troubled, plagued by health problems. She practices yoga, visits integrative doctors and chiropractors, and experiments with eliminating certain foods from her diet because she suffers from painful and persistent knee and digestive ailments. Like many of her contemporaries, she seeks both physical and physic healing through non-traditional, non-Western means.

But, it is Weiner's psychological state that has the most profound impact on her life. When reminiscing about her early days in the art world, once again in third-person, she explains, "all this glory ended in 1970 when she became extremely psychic and hiding out in a cheap apartment wrote about nothing else in almost 100 notebooks" ("silent teacher"). Most of Weiner's poetry documents the hallucinatory experiences that permeate her life, "psychotic episodes indicative of schizophrenia" (Durgin 13), which Weiner unwaveringly believes to be psychic experiences, mainly in the form of clairvoyantly received messages. Her hallucinations dominated her life and influenced her behavior. But Weiner, according to her longtime friend, poet Charles Bernstein, in a tribute published in the Poetry Project *Newsletter* soon after her death in 1997 and reprinted in *Jacket* in 2000, "did not accept any characterization of herself as mentally ill." In a questionnaire sent to Weiner by Radcliffe College in 1974, and rediscovered by scholar Kaplan Harris in Radcliffe College's alumni office archives (and published in the booklet for a November 2007 event at the Poetry Project celebrating the publication of a new collection of Weiner's unpublished and out-of-print work, *Hannah Weiner's Open House*), in response to the question "What experiences in your life have had a major effect on the choices

you have made? List below briefly," Weiner writes, "TAKING ACID, becoming a 39 yr old hippie." In her other responses she refers to her "psychic experiences." Critic Thom Donavan's report on the event explores the way in which Weiner's mental state is broached by Weiner's dearest friends, highlighting the impossibility of ascribing Weiner's visions to any single or simple cause:

> The transformation that occurred in Weiner was no doubt influenced by LSD, but also a response to the vital literary and visual arts communities flourishing Downtown in the 1960's and 1970's. Insofar as Weiner did "TOO MUCH ACID" (Weiner's own words from *Clairvoyant Journal*) she was, in her own way, a victim of the climate of radical experimentation during the psychedelic era. Inasmuch as Weiner was a gifted, sensitive and educated person, she brought to her LSD trips insights about "the Word" as visible fact among a much wider conversation, a continuum of mainstream and marginal culture workers and artists, what poet Robert Duncan called " a symposium of the whole."

As documented in her early journals, which I discuss at length in Chapter 2, her conversion to a psychic was incredibly difficult for Weiner. She was already vulnerable because of her poor health and, as some insist, use of psychedelic drugs. The appearance of the energy fields and images that preceded, led to, the words scared and confused her just as much as they intrigued and compelled her. She explains that after the *Code Poems* "THEN I BECAME PSYCHIC WITH ACID SAY 70 and until then i was totally unconscious BEFORE LEARNING the way. THE CODE SIGNAL POEMS ARE OVER THE HILL" ("Dear Ron"). And so begins her process of "LEARNING the way," which for Weiner is more literal than it may seem. Her clairvoyantly written poetry is part of a process of self-education, with the help of the forces, and the objective of this learning is a state of enlightenment from which she would no longer be plagued by her worldly, bodily woes. She is on a quest, and the poetry she writes is the story of her quest.

Seeing words distinguishes Weiner from the other poets and artists exploring consciousness at the time, and regardless of the cause of the onset of these psychic changes, the result is the development of a radically new poetics that elevates the individual's experience of consciousness. In the "Commentary" that follows a selection of Weiner's work published in Volume Two of *Poems for the Millennium*, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, a claim is made for Weiner's work as a new, special case of an ancient tradition. The editors explain a shift in her work once Weiner began seeing words:

> The poetry […] change[d]—radically—with the onset of an actual & persistent *experience* […], an alteration of perception in which visible words entered her field of vision—as cause of wonder & as "messages" to be included in the written work that followed. The relationship of that experience to those of many traditional poet-mystics may also be worth noting […]. The lack of similar context for Weiner's experiences may be seen as a condition of our time—on which no further comment" (346).

Rothenberg and Joris' lack of "further comment" is an enticement to comment, or at least to take notice of Weiner's new/old poetics. Weiner, as modern-day oracle, writes, rather than speaks; but like the traditional oracle, her work is not just to see, but to share what she sees and to transform her visions into writing. Her experience marks the crumbling of the wall between the metaphysical and the real, and her writing is the inscription of this experience.

Weiner's poetry "changed" (in the words of Rothenberg and Joris) because she became obsessed with recording her experiments with the words and forces that were omnipresent in her life. She believes that these messages – reading them, writing them, decoding them – are her life's work and her poetry's work. Her access to the world beyond the bounds of the knowable imbues her with authority, but first she must understand her situation. Writing is not the only means through which she attempts to comprehend her new states of consciousness; she also makes the forces and voices the object of study, attempting to find explanations and context. She

admits, “I spent the years from 70-74 L E A R N I N G spiritual discovery everything diet included I could about psychics clairvoyants, Uri Geller, yoga, RUSSIA and the psychics there, parapsychology, even India (i didnt go) but saw all the Indian teachers (not Amer Indianabbrev) I LEARNED EVERYTHING I COULD even body control and wrote documents every day” (“Dear Ron” 2). Weiner had more than a passing interest in yoga and took her practice quite seriously, frequently attending yoga classes and retreats, claiming the yogi Swami Satchidananda as her guru, and filling her journals with the lingo and philosophy associated with it. This was a low time for Weiner, and the three-week-long experience in 1970 that she retrospectively documents in *The Fast*, a non-clairvoyantly written book which was unpublished until 1992, “describing a 3 week fast” (“The words in CAPITALS and underlines are words I see” 63), attests to the physical and psychic pain she endured. The journal project grew out of an attempt to understand and to process, but part of her quest is to “become literary like dont joke Anais Nin” (“Dear Ron” 4), even as she admits, “I was ill a lot and got none of that early work […] published even now.”

In her journals she carefully documents every aspect of her life, with very little editing and seemingly no self-censorship. In “Hell Book I,” “Hell Book II” and, “Hell Book III” – the titles she gave to a series of notebooks from early 1971, parts of which would eventually become incorporated into *The Fast* – Weiner records the development of her new psychic state. Here, we see the very start of clair-style as the recounting of her everyday life is interrupted by “zaps” written in a different color ink, which Weiner explains correspond to actual sensations she was feeling when writing. Her field of writing is interrupted – a defining characteristic of mature clair-style. Weiner is looking for relief from physical pain and tries everything from acupuncture

and Chinese massage to special diets and homeopathy, but writing is her solace, even when most of what she writes are complaints about her chaotic and painful experience. She explains:

> The early material contains much information of the nature of kundalini energy and electro magnetic sensitivity that I have never seen elsewhere. KNOWLEDGE. I was receiving messages through FEELING energy at that time. Later pictures developed, and colors. Then in Aug. 1972 words developed. ("The words in CAPITALS and underlines are words I see" 63)

This progression seems natural to Weiner as she reflects on the development of her special access to knowledge and power.

Beginning with *The Fast* and then moving on to the so-called early journals *Country Girl* and *Pictures and Early Words*, I explore how her experiences and the writing of the texts led Weiner to develop a new poetics. These clair-style texts and, as I will explain in the next chapter, proto-clair-style texts redefine Weiner's legacy as a writer and shake up the 1970s avant guard poetry world of New York City. And yet, as much as she wants to find a way to read their hidden messages, Weiner is, at times, ambivalent about the words, even distrustful: "the words tell you to do things you don't feel certain about doing" (*Clairvoyant Journal* 54). But she believes also that the words and signs are part of her spiritual quest: "I was psychic stupid and no one else was except Christians who believed in guidance by spirits, former lives, and healing was the main point […] I didnt consider myself a great big writer […]. so political. I WAS HOME WRITING it was the only way I could understand the learning procedure" ("Dear Ron" 2). The poetry became for her a way of experiencing her life, but she wrote in solitude, at home. This changed when she began taking Bernadette Mayer's workshops at the Poetry Project along with Charles Bernstein and Nick Piombino (Kane, *All Poets Welcome* 141), eventually becoming loosely associated with Language Poetry. These workshops, and Mayer's work in general,

moved away from so-called New York School poetry, and "offered a set of new literary and evaluative standards that moved toward a more overtly theoretical poetics of multiple referentiality and syntactical rupture that was generally suspicious of the poem as an emotive or expressivist composition" (Kane, *All Poets Welcome* 189). It was for these workshops that Mayer developed her now famous list of poetry "experiments," many of which include chance composition and other de-authored practices. As the movement (and I use this term liberally) gelled and grew, Weiner was there, at the center. Weiner claims that she "didnt go to [to Mayer's workshops to] study writing JUST TO LEARN quote change the language and never become upshot famous" ("Dear Ron" 4), referencing one of Mayer's "experiments": "Work your ass off to change the language & dont ever get famous" ("Experiments" 83).

In 1974 she wrote what is probably her most important book, and the first work written in a fully-formed clair-style: *Clairvoyant Journal*. Mayer's classes seemed to help Weiner, if not with the production of the book, at least with getting her work to a receptive audience. In fact, "the first reading of Clairvoyant Journal was in [Mayer's] class" ("Dear Ron" 4). Again, the press release that Weiner crafted to try to attract a publisher speaks to the success the work had achieved even before its eventual publication in 1978 by Anne Waldman and Lewis Warsh's Angel Hair Press:

> Portions of Clairvoyant Journal 1974 have been read at Brown University, 1974, St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, 74, 75, 76, Anthology Film Archives, Artists Space, local bars, etc. and have appeared in the following magazines: This, Big Deal, [unreadable], UnMuzzeled Ox, Ear, Tottel's, Crawl Out Your Window, Out There, Slit Wrists and an anthology of Jewish Poetry ed. by Rothenberg, published by Doubleday[3]. A pamphlet, WORD JUNE 9, was published by Diana's BiMonthly in 1975. A film by Phil Niblock is under completion. In the Spring of 1977 New Wilderness Audiographics will issue the first stereo cassette of the Journal.

[3] *A Big Jewish book: poems & other visions of the Jews from tribal times to present*. Published in 1978.

This impressive catalogue makes clear not only her positive reception, but also her active participation in a scene producing magazines, films, and audio recordings en masse. With a display of her typical humor, Weiner ends the press release with a handwritten note at the bottom in all capital letters that are bigger than the rest of the text: "WHAT A / LIFE." The second part of the press release, "WHAT PEOPLE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT CLAIRVOYANT JOURNAL," contains two long quotations from Dick Higgins and Bernadette Mayer who both advocate for the publication of the book but also work to contextualize Weiner and prove her ongoing importance to the scene. Higgins writes:

> In the sixties she emerged as one of the more interesting writers using semiotics, sort of a spin-off from Concrete Poetry….about four years ago she began to emerge with her "journal" in which she notes whatever words occur intuitively….The result is a highly scrambled realistic cross section of her experience: at first it seems to be a sort of modified "flow of consciousness" technique. But on further examination the patterns are isolated, more externalized – a sort of flow of data would be closer to the truth, one which includes the people she sees or thinks of, including herself. So that the effect is less a personal statement than a portrait of her cumulative experience, with the images somehow not dissimilar to the symbols of semiotics, or the flags that were her particular branch of the field.

His linking of the older, non-clairvoyant composition techniques to the new, clair-style work reveals a continuum important to understanding and defining Weiner's poetic innovation. He obviously supports her work and believes in and appreciates its literary merit. Higgins ends with this plea: "Pray for some benign millionaire to sponsor the publication of the full JOURNAL which would dwarf the complete works of Balzac by comparison."

In Mayer's promotion of the work, she too highlights Weiner's long connection to the experimental art world: "More than ten years ago, Hannah was already a central figure in the

avant-garde. She was doing events, films, tapes and performances….Hannah's on-going work is an outgrowth of this phase." Mayer continues, describing *Clairvoyant Journal*, "It is as continuous a piece of writing as it is investigatory – a complex combination of journal writing, scientific theory, self-examination, psychic phenomena, and the novel. […] [T]his book, like Hannah's previous work, lends itself to performance." Weiner herself sees this book as an important step in her growth as a writer and a spiritual teacher.

One thing that is obvious to the reader of *Clairvoyant Journal* is that the words Weiner hallucinates threaten to eclipse every other aspect of her life. Weiner reveals an ambivalence about the words: she trusts that they will be instrumental in healing her of her physical and mental ails, but she also is overwhelmed. She writes, "Perhaps I miss the pleasure in writing for I do not find it one. Its just that I want to say certain things – get it out - + I have to write to do it," in a notebook from 1971 that she titled "The Rose Continued." She elaborates in a notebook from later that year or early the next, which she labeled "City": "This book is not art, it is information, a document of my life. I derive no great satisfaction from doing it, only satisfaction in knowing I have done it. I wish to communicate + so must write. I am unhappy when I do not write, + delighted when I have something to say. I miss art. I enjoyed, [and involved] myself in poetry + theater." Weiner is at the mercy of the words, and yet she can't resist their lure: "Living with these words is like living under orders. It always knows more than I do so I usually obey the directions, trying to put aside my personality, EGO, desires, habits, etc., except for fatigue which often stops me" ("The words in CAPITALS and <u>underlines</u> are words I see" 64). She wants them to make sense and for their promises of enlightenment and healing to be fulfilled. In an August 1975 letter to Mayer, Weiner reveals that though she may resent the words at times, she also relies on them. The letter opens with Weiner performing a strange exercise:

> Dear Bernadette,
> I am determined to write a few words without my visuals interrupting. I ignore comments. I am writing slowly so hopefully you can understand this. [...] Its hard to believe I can still write a straight sequential boring letter. The oh no I almost wrote what I saw. I still (still?) wonder what part of my mind controls waht oops what I see. [...] I can't make the words appear by willing them to.

But, Weiner can't control the words, nor does she want to. The letter continues:

> Actually what I'm trying to let happen – if you can believe this language – is to let the confusion become more pronounced so that the sequence almost but never quite disappears. [...] See I can be coherent. However dont complains it may be my last stylish (no, coherent) letter ever. I just wanted to see if I could keep the bastards under control. Wha is your opinion

For her poetry, the words are everything – muse and context. But they aren't only a huge influence on her work, but on her life, and the hallucinations become part of her practice of spirituality and human and civil rights activism.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Weiner became very invested in both the injustices suffered by the American Indian and American Indian culture, especially the various traditions of shamanism and healing. And, after *Clairvoyant Journal*, she began to write more about Indians. She was still seeing words, but there was also a new development in her psychic state: she believed more and more that she could read people's minds and receive messages, poems, from them through transference. She writes of her 1981 book *Spoke*, which was published in 1984, that compared to *Clairvoyant Journal*, "The author's ego is further controlled […] by transference, which means the author transfers the mind of someone else to himself or actually pushes it and seems to be a thing" ("Mostly" 132). Transference becomes a crucial part of her poetics, and her life, as she writes in her 1986 essay "Mostly about the Sentence": "Transference of another person's thoughts, feelings or even body movements is not uncommon

to me, especially in the past, with acid or marijuana, and in the present with American Indians" ("Mostly" 132).

She becomes increasingly politically active at this time, developing connections to many people at the core of the American Indian Movement. She writes about these people, and, according to her, writes for them. She also becomes fixated on American Indian spirituality, convinced that her own psychic abilities are somehow connected to the healing powers attributed to traditional shamans. The clair-style works from this time, the subject of Chapter 4, are more political than ever as Weiner begins to think of herself more and more as a healer and teacher. She writes, "I was a spiritual instructor because I failed to become artist" ("Dear Ron" 5), ever dissatisfied with her publication output. She also explains this shift from writing about herself to writing about others. Weiner describes a social encounter with Jackson Mac Low after completing *Clairvoyant Journal*: "[he] said to me oh are you still PERSON al doing about yourself so I quit it was boring. INDIANS. AND THEN I MET SOME" ("Dear Ron" 6). Her poetic practice also shifts a bit at this time; she writes, referring to her major work after *Clairvoyant Journal*, *Little Books/Indians*, which she wrote between 1977 and 1980:

> I quit the Journals […] [and] I switched back to poems […] because lithistory Barbara Baracks wouldnt publish me twice in Big Deal because she said I said I wasnt writing very much so I switched to Little Notebooks so I could LIE and say I had finished a whole story IN ONE WEEK. The small pages became literary history or dear little lines you went broke. WELL THATS A POEM. ("Dear Ron" 6)

She also become more explicit at this time about seeing her poverty as a purposeful, political choice, an activist choice that connects her to the Indians she so reveres: "its an honor to be poor" ("Dear Ron" 7). She wants her poetry to help others see the path to enlightenment, and

she believes that her access to "higher mind" (*Pictures and Early Words* 34) and higher powers make this possible. By the mid to late 1980s, Weiner's understanding of clair-style and its usefulness has grown. She wants to change the minds of her reader and to change the world through her poetry, and she thinks the chaos of clair-style is the means for doing so: "Meaning grounds you in your every day speaking consciousness and cannot alter the mind by technique. Alter the mind and you work politically with greater effect […]" ("Letter to Charles Bernstein" 163). Weiner believes she has reached a state of enlightenment, claiming "I am understanding always like Indians" ("Letter to Charles Bernstein" 164).

Although her main interest as an educator was in clairvoyant, or "silent," teaching, she also wanted to teach in a more traditional sense. In "Awareness and Communication," described by Patrick Durgin, the editor of *Hannah Weiner's Open House*, as "A description for a poetry workshop Weiner apparently never had the chance to formally teach" (17), Weiner sketches a plan to guide her students to a kind of purity of experience:

> Learning to use ourselves as we really are. What to keep of ourselves: the useful things. What to throw away: bad use of fantasy, bad habits, misuse of the physical body (diet, lack of exercise, etc.), useless emotions that do not apply to current reality as fear, anger, despair.
>
> Explore the things that keep us from communicating. A sharing of experience often leads to increased awareness. These are discussed: the possibility of living our ideals: how to lead a life of increased and increasing consciousness.
> ("Awareness and Communication")

Poetry, for Weiner, is not primarily about the production of literature, but about building connections between individuals, just as her poetics is predicated on Weiner's connection to the metaphysical world.

Though still as psychic as ever, things shift again for Weiner, and by the end of the 1980s, Weiner was no longer seeing words. In 1989 at a "Symposium on Poetry of the Future" at the Poetry Project, Weiner read a piece that is practically a confession or an apology; She begins, "It is interesting that while my mind was open I was writing disjunctive, non-sequential poetry. Now that I've returned to my ordinary consciousness I have returned to a more normal syntax, with more meaning." But this is more than "interesting" to Weiner, because, as she notes here again, "meaning grounds you in ordinary consciousness," which, for her, is bad for poetry.

The 1990s, until her death in 1996, seemed difficult though still productive times for Weiner. By then, she had moved away from clair-style, mainly because she was no longer seeing words. Weiner moved on to non-clairvoyant texts, without abandoning her core clair-style practice of the careful recording of found language. She explains "The origin of WEEKS," which is one such text: "My friend, the writer Barbara Rosenthal, gave me a 'page-a-day' diary last Christmas to encourage me to write. Not seeing words anymore, I looked for another source. I found it in the TV news, which accounts for the bulk of the material. I typed it up week by week, which accounts for the title" ("bio and working notes"). Barbara Rosenthal played a role in the production of two other books by Weiner, having given Weiner as gifts the blank books in which Weiner wrote. *Written In*, produced in 1985, "Written in a blank book called Homo Futurus by Barbara Rosenthal," invites the reader to "Open it and write on a / blank page." The visually stunning *The Book of Revelations*[4] was given to Weiner by Rosenthal as a new year's gift in 1989 as a blank book with precut pages, shaped in such a way that pieces of underlying pages are visible and more is only revealed when the page is turned, creating something that

[4] A new digital diplomatic transcript of this book, edited by Marta L. Werner, was published in *Jacket2*. http://jacket2.org/article/book-revelations-diplomatic-transcript

resembles an exquisite corpse. This time marks a sort of a return to her roots in chance or found poetry.

But Weiner didn't have to look far for another source; in the mid-1990s, she began seeing what she called "astrals" and "visions." One vision is "Paw," "a large white bear with a big fat tummy" who becomes her constant companion and who writes her poetry. In the explanation of her visions that she wrote in 1997, the year of her death, she writes, paw "is one of the teachers and gives me instruction continually and in the three years i've known him, or that he has appeared, he's grown in intelligence and acuteness and accuracy and he also happens to be the funniest person that i know" ("astral visions"). The last book she completed before her death, the 1993-4 *We Speak Silent*, published in 1996, reveals a poetry that looks nothing like the earlier clair-style. In it, Weiner channels the voices of an array of people, some she knew – like Barrett Watten and Bruce Andrews – to others who she never met but still "sees" – including Bob Dylan and the TV character Magnum P.I. and his sidekick Higgins. Other poems still are, according to Weiner, written by Paw, her polar bear astral guide.

It was in the early 1990s that Weiner began announcing that she had developed her own theory of how her earlier clair-style poetry works. In a description of another workshop she wanted to teach at the Poetry Project in 1990, but wasn't permitted to (Weiner opens this description by stating, "Had notion to teach Ed said no write for newsletter"), she lays out a clear and scientific explanation of her poetics:

> [T]echniques of disjunctive, non-sequential, non-referential writing can directly alter consciousness, whether by destroying long habits of rationality, by surprise tactics to which the brain responds differently, or by forcing a change to alpha level by engaging both hemispheres of the brain, choose your science. Thus would destroy meaning, as overproduced as capital goods, and concentrate consciousness on the letter, parts of words, word, phrase, or even the non-sequential sentence on the page. Messages come silently anyway to those who learn. (161)

In her 1990 essay (loosely defined), "Meaning Bus Halifax to Queensbury," she reveals her continued commitment to political poetry, repeating her claims for "disjunctive, non-sequential, non-referential writing" (167). She also here reaffirms the importance of having an enlightened poet as a guide: "Yes I believe the system can be changed from within […] because power has the ability to open others to power and a strong mind can transfer itself" (167). She also sums up her career: "in my life as a poet been […] a performer, a clairvoyant, a 'language' poet and a friend to the traditional Native American movement […] I would wish that we understand each other silently and that we (poets and) form a consensus and a model for a new culture […] I would wish that only women could vote" (168). For Weiner, the role of the poet is serious and central to the culture: "If you are a poet would you have three obligations, work on yourself to become more conscious, work in the world to change it free and equal include ecological survival, and work in poetic forms that themselves alter consciousness" ("If Workshop"161). Weiner's an optimist; she wants healing for herself and others, and she works for it at the level of consciousness.

Weiner's death in September of 1997 was marked in the poetry world by a number of statements made on the University at Buffalo's Poetics Listserv. Charles Bernstein announced her death in an email to the Listserv, writing, "While her last few years weren't easy, she continued to produce amazing writing, pushing her own poetry and the possibilities for poetry into new zones of perception." In his response to this announcement, Ron Silliman wrote, "When Hannah was on her meds, she could be remarkably matter of fact about her own situation, but often she was not on her meds and they tend to be the sorts of things that can get mixed and

muddled too easily." Her closest friends, loyal to the end, also felt the strain of her illness, her suffering, but also honored the poetry that resulted.

Weiner's poetry was published steadily throughout her career, mostly by small but important publishing houses devoted to innovative writing and run by poets, including Roof Books, Sun & Moon Press, and Angel Hair Books. She gained recognition for her work, and in 1986, the National Endowment for the Arts awarded her a creative writing fellowship. Her work was included in many issues of the journal L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews. She was included in major Language Poetry collections including 1986 anthology, *In the American Tree*, edited by Ron Silliman, and the 1987 anthology *Language Poetries*, edited by Douglas Messerli. In 1988 in the "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Lines" section of *The Line in Postmodern Poetry*, edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, Bernstein published both "Excerpts from an Interview with Hannah Weiner" and a short excerpt from *Spoke*. In the 1990s her poetry was included in a few important texts that did the crucial work of anthologizing often ignored experimental poets. Her work appears in Sun & Moon Press publisher Douglas Messerli's anthology *From the Other Side of the Century: The New American Poetry 1960–1990* (1994), and in *Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women* (1998), edited by Mary Margaret Sloan. Weiner is also included in the second volume of the influential anthology *Poems for the Millennium* (1998), edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, in which the editors relate her experiences to those of "many traditional poet-mystics." In recent years, there has been a serious move to get Weiner's previously unpublished or out of print works back into print – most notably *Hannah Weiner's Open House*, published in 2008 by Durgin – and also to restage some of her performance pieces, particularly *Clairvoyant Journal*.

This movement has been in tandem with a new body of literary criticism about Weiner's poetry and performances.

Having her work published was vital to Weiner, and she was sensitive about what kind of reception her work received and why more of her work wasn't published. *Clairvoyant Journal* is rife with references to attempts at publication and directives from the forces to "get published." Ron Silliman addressed this issue on the Poetic Listserv soon after she died, revealing useful information about Weiner's feelings about publishing and also her notoriety as a trouble to her publishers:

> Hannah was as insecure as any writer on this list, but for her this never came out as worrying about this or that revision – she had absolute confidence in her writing practice – but instead in her publications. I always felt that her paranoia about whether this or that publisher was going to slight her work, especially through delays was more pronounced since, not working and with no immediate family, publishing literally was her life – even moreso as she became more and more reclusive. While I had a completely easy time with her and her work in In the American Tree (in sharp contrast with a couple of folks), it seemed apparent, from her accounts as well as theirs, that Hannah was an absolute terror to her book publishers. All of them are to be praised for the infinite patience it must have required to complete each book.

"[P]ublishing literally was her life" because the writing of her life was her life. In a 1989 letter to Charles Bernstein, she admits, "The Fast didn't explain much but it hurts to be unpublished […]" (164).

In a 1982 letter to Mayer, Weiner complains about her inability to get a reading at the Poetry Project, upset about a lack of attention, and, therefore, audience. She claims exclusion based on an unfair bias against her and her work because she fails to fit neatly inside one movement and is not conventionally popular: "i am accepted by many groups but i am not important to any of them, church, like Eileen, or lang, like bruce, or jerry's armand's (george

would love a church reading he thinks its a big clique) as i used to feel when anne was running it only recognized new york school writers – […] im not on solid ground with any group" ("Letter to Mayer" 7). She claims to have been used for her connections to successful performance artists, and the clout they would lend to the Poetry Project by attending a reading:

> Ted [Berrigan] once asked me if i couldnt get my old art perf friends to come and i said they never go to poetry readings, they did, once to hear the journal and to pay respects like phil glass, but they dont go to anne's or whatnot charlemagne [Palestine] discusses it. must i call sol [LeWitt] etc and beg him to show up twice so i can then be able to speak political when i need to […] im not well know enough to make or get this demand so that i can speak at a time so important […] – if the evolutionary process is so slowed down by preferential treatment on oh non solid grounds like im begging then what good is poetry and how do you get to change the world. ("Letter to Mayer" 4)

Weiner is frustrated about being denied a reading at the Poetry Project because she believes that her poetry contains important information that she must share. She does not want to be overlooked because she is not a part of the prevailing clique of the time. Weiner is only interested in the scene as a means to an end: communication and enlightenment. Poetry is more than words on a page, in Weiner's system; it means learning about the world and the self, for poet and reader. The purpose of poetry is to "speak political" and "change the world." Weiner feels isolated because of how serious she believes her poetic and visionary project to be. She sees herself as "a big victim of the poetry game" ("Letter to Mayer" 7), when all she wants is to inspire her readers to take action on behalf of victims everywhere.

Weiner at times seemed preoccupied by her poetic reception. It frustrated her that others resisted her work and that she couldn't gain more mainstream recognition. But there was an earlier time when Weiner was more optimistic about where her work would lead and her potential for literary success. In a letter to Mayer that opens "Happy Birthday Dear Stupid," and

was probably written in 1977 (based on her mention of seeing a performance of Philip Glass' "North Star" which is from that year), Weiner tells Mayer that at a party after Glass' show at Ed's [Sanders?], "Simon said 3 years you could be popular with the POST GRADUATE and graduate set if he could market you and COME I said I could probably have a ready made audience of guess what but he HIPPIES said the language was too obscure for them and I guess he's write i knew i was going to right" (3). Weiner and her affiliates could see even early in her clair-style writing that the work she was producing had a place as objects of study in the academy. That her work is too "obscure" for "hippies" is a compliment. Simon – whoever he may be – seems to understand that Weiner's clair-style project rises above the pat, packaged spirituality of hippiedom, by then more a mainstream fashion than the earlier idealistic countercultural revolutionary movement.

Hard to read, and harder to classify, the work is genre-busting. She opens her 1986 essay, "Mostly About the Sentence," by complaining, "Before the Code Poems please I was just short page an ordinary writer no instructions and one book was published" (122). Weiner doesn't want to be an "ordinary writer," and so, when the words appear and she becomes "my clairvoyant writer myself" ("Mostly About the Sentence" 122), she develops a methodology or code for recording them as well. Weiner's understanding of her clairvoyance is simple: she sees words and images that she knows to be messages addressed to her for her benefit. She has been chosen, by the forces, to receive their wisdom because she has worked hard to open herself to the spiritual world and because she needs its guidance. There exists a symbiotic tinge to her poetic autobiography. She writes that which insists on writing itself and on documenting this writing; she becomes subject and author, reader and writer. Weiner explains that through her new form, her clair-style, she is "trying to show the mind" ("Mostly About the Sentence" 129). This is a

task rooted not in completion, which is impossible, but in the attempt, the process. Or, as Olson remarks, "all the thots that men are capable of can be entered on the back of a postage stamp. So, is it not the PLAY of a mind we are after, is not that that shows whether a mind is there at all?" ("Projective Verse" 243). And Weiner's poetry reveals her mind in action, working to read and write and interpret the words she sees.

One way to understand her poetry is as "experimental" – which puts Weiner in the company of other (mostly American) poets whose poetry and poetics, whether or not they directly influenced Weiner, make possible an analysis of her work by providing some context. In an email sent to the Poetics Listserv in 2009, Pierre Joris offers a what he calls a "catalogue of experimental ships"; he explains:

> When Jerry Rothenberg & I put together the Millennium anthologies, we tried our hand at describing what "experimental" or "avant-garde" means as it was such terms that guided our selection process. Given the wide range of work these adjectives can be applied to, the best we could do was to gather a catalogue indicating the areas in which such a push to "make it new" had happened (&, I think, is still happening).

Some of these definitions fit Weiner's work so well that they threaten to overwrite the unique quality of clair-style; for example: "experiments with dream work and altered forms of consciousness (from the continuation of Surrealist dream experiments to the psychedelic experiments of the 1960s, the meditative experiments of the 1970s, and beyond) in which language itself becomes an instrument of vision." But, Weiner's work also fits the measure according to other entries in this catalogue, including: "a return to the concept of poetry as a performance genre: a spin-off both from earlier modernist sources (Futurism, Dada) and from still viable oral traditions," "language experiments, […] as well as experiments with visual and typographical forms, book works, attempts to develop a nonsyntactic and nonreferential poetry,"

and even "a renewed privileging of demotic and/or ordinary language." Weiner's poetic predecessors and influences were not unique – she positioned herself in the same Williams/Pound/Olson lineage as many other experimental poets of her time. She recognized her status as an experimental writer. When asked by Bernstein during an episode of his LINEbreak radio show in 1995, "Do you think of your work in terms of the tradition of the avant-garde, of experimentalism?" She replies, "I mean, how can you not be avant-garde if you're the only person in the world who sees words?"

I wish to argue that what Weiner achieves as a result of her experience is the creation of a new poetics, clair-style, at once both personal and collective. Her work strives toward a direct, honest translation of her unstable consciousness, continually contested and interrupted by the voices, as she puts the words onto the page. Her poetics is a product of her unique experience, whether called illness or clairvoyance, and is driven by disruption and confusion, and, surprisingly, humor. Clair-style is a page-oriented, visual technique, marked by endless interruptions. Weiner is ever mindful of how the work will look on the page, and particular pages can be read as discrete visual poems. The journal entries that comprise *Clairvoyant Journal* are often bound to a single page, and, at times, end with commentary that serves to reinforce Weiner's, and the forces', emphasis on the page as a poetic unit. She writes, "CUT THIS PAGE SHORT" (4), "SORRY ABOUT THIS PAGE STUPID" (5), "I DONST FINISH THIS PAGE" (36), "THIS IS A GO PAGE" (42), and, in perhaps the most telling of these end comments, "IT'S A TRAGEDY YOU DIDN'T FINISH ME says the bottom of the page YOU DONT LIKE THE BOTTOM OF THIS PAGE" (22). While Gertrude Stein famously opined "A Sentence is not emotional a paragraph is" (*How to Write* 23), Weiner's emotional

canvas is typically the page. Weiner herself writes, "I dont speak the letter finished I only write by page length" ("Dear Ben" 3).

Clair-style does more than record seen words. It is more than the product of the intriguing experiences of a poet. For Weiner, the stakes are serious and they are real. Writing clair-style is costly for Weiner: "did i not fast or meditate or sacrifice my home or what else for knowledge or learning for seeing the words" ("Letter to Mayer" 8). Weiner counts on the forces – the words that insist that she write them – to lead her somewhere, to something real and important that has an existence outside of the poetry that manifests it. She wants to be well, to feel well, to think clearly (rather than just see "clair-ly"), and for her that itself is always dependent on successful literary production.

The nature of this quest, like any literary quest, requires a lot from the quester. And for Weiner, these requirements are at odds: she finds herself in the dual role of prophet and vessel. She alone can see the words and write them down, which elevates her status in terms of access to knowledge, but by acceding to the demands of the words – this knowledge that will belong to her if she can earn it – she subordinates herself completely, emptying herself of self so she can be the conduit between the knowledge and its universally visible manifestation: not just words but writing.

Though she claims that she is a vessel and that her role is a passive one, the act of recording the words, and really, doing more than just recording the words, is exertion. Her experience is work; it is action, requiring agency, a presence she downplays even as she lays it on thick. Part of what Weiner's reader witnesses is the way the words take control of her life, even as the words she sees tell her that is their plan. They're mean to her, and fill her with self-doubt. The texts record both the times when Weiner holds out against the voices to register her

own feelings about the experiences she was having with the words and the times when she gives in completely, recording the words she sees without comment, without interrupting the words that are interrupting her life. Weiner's clair-style is symbiotic, but maybe Weiner gives more than she gets. The very name clair-style speaks to the split loyalties of the poetics: it is received knowledge, but it is also crafted.

Hannah Weiner was given the gift of vision and the ability to understand that there is no unitary or unified self. In an undated letter to someone named Ron she openly and directly shares her perception of her experiences with the forces: "Its all my own mind, even knowledge, but repeated the mind is like radio it sends, it isnt only mine that records ITS LIKE HAVING AN INFORMATION CENTER, the brain – so how could I answer the question would it make any difference if the voices did not come from elsewhere" ("Dear Ron" 5). Weiner is right: it doesn't matter where the words are coming from. Her job is to get the words down, pin them to a page for her own inspection and for her reader. Weiner's work reminds us that we are all being spoken to by the world. And the words that Weiner sees exist in our world because they exist in hers, but because we can't see them she must show them to us. No words can exist without a mind, a being, to make them so, but also necessary is a receptor to see, read, hear language. Language cannot exist without people, and without language people cannot know their own mind, nor can they know the minds of others. "Higher mind" is inside, but the only portal to it, language, is outside.

This dissertation demonstrates how Weiner, with the benefit of history and knowledge, constructed a poetics intended to heal her and enlighten her reader. Weiner set out specific ideas about why her poetry works and how. I attempt to understand the experience of the reader, who

is witness to Weiner's testimony about experiences that range from humorous to painful to annoying to terrifying.

In the second chapter I trace the development of clair-style as an extension of the rituals Weiner created to cope with the words when they first appeared. The entirety of the third chapter is devoted to an analysis of *Clairvoyant Journal* as a fully developed clair-style work. In the fourth chapter, I examine the further evolution of clair-style as Weiner purposefully begins to wield it for political purposes. In the conclusion, I discuss the poetic context in which Weiner wrote and explore her poetics in relation to the ideas of major figures of the "New American Poetry" and her local poetry scene and friends. I also discuss my methodology in analyzing Weiner's difficult work and developing an argument. I will close with a discussion of Weiner's current status in the experimental poetry canon and also in the academy. I see my project as, at least in part, an act of rehabilitation. I want to recuperate Weiner so she can save us all.

Chapter 2

"If it's not godly maybe it's literature" (*Big Words* 102): The Development of Hannah Weiner's "Clair-style"

> All these words occur whether I write or not, in my ordinary conscious state, not in a trance, and sometimes in sleep GET UPS appears on my forehead to wake me in time. FOR WHAT. Anything.
>
> I am trying to understand through my continued writing which of these WORDS I see are 1) my own ordinary conscious thought; 2) from my developed superconscious mind which has precognitive, clairvoyant powers; 3) telepathic connections with living people; 4) BIG QUESTION communications from non-living forces.
> ("The words in CAPITALS and underlines are words I see")

When in 1972 Hannah Weiner began seeing the words that would serve as subject and muse for much of her poetry, and which she believed she willed into existence, she already had a plan: to follow the rules and record the results. In the brief introductory statement that precedes her 1970 book, *The Fast*, she explains that *The Fast* and the three "early journals" that immediately follow "depict the development of clairvoyance from feeling and seeing auras, to seeing pictures, and finally the slow development of seeing words which at first appeared singly, then later in short phrases. The culmination of this seeing of words resulted in the *Clairvoyant Journal* […] and in many books that followed." Weiner is right: these texts are successful in their depiction of her experiences, but what is also revealed is the method she develops to enact this depiction, and thereby regain some control over a life interrupted by "clairvoyance." These texts are about energy that she can see and feel and that she must control as it controls her. In the early journals we see Weiner's poetics in an embryonic phase – largely because this energy has yet to shape itself into words – but ruminations on language and writing embedded within these narratives and the ritualistic activities she records help the reader to understand the nature and function of the very different texts that follow.

Weiner's poetry documents the hallucinatory experiences that permeated her life, a condition diagnosed as mental illness. Her work strives toward an authentic translation of her unstable and contested consciousness as she puts the words onto a page, relying on a technique, a poetics she dubbed "clair-style." Weiner's work is an engaging, poetic testimonial whose success is anchored in the way she experimented with language, violating its conventions and rules, pushing the limits of both language and poetry, and in so doing both allowing the reader to experience her atypical reality and giving herself a space in which to respond to this reality. Weiner's poetry is dense and rich and gratifying to read. She is naked, even if she is also laughing.

The issue of Weiner's clairvoyance is a tangled one. Her longtime mission of documenting her life is not the flat transcription implied by the techniques of clairvoyance or transference. Her project is self-conscious and sophisticated, but nevertheless, her claim of clairvoyance places the reader, let alone the critic, in a quandary. Weiner destabilizes the conventional roles of reader and writer – conflates them to one degree, and reverses them to another – and so, reading her becomes knowing her. And knowing her, even as a reader, makes the task of analyzing her mental status an uncomfortable one. Does it matter if she was really clairvoyant or does it only matter that the words were real to her? The reality she reveals is an unenviable one, and aesthetic enjoyment is coupled with uneasiness, an interruption of enjoyment. What does it mean for an author who is mentally ill to write about the symptoms of that illness while remaining unable, or unwilling, to recognize them as such? (And, of course, here I must acknowledge my own resistance to neatly defining the situation in this way.) Hannah Weiner herself makes these questions impossible to answer. What is real? What is seen? Perception is made unreliable. She sees words. But, we all see the words, too, because of

the work of the text, which means she is not alone. Participation in a prescribed language system means all language is received from outside the self. Every word we write has been seen by us before. Weiner's poetry makes this visible, freeing language from its referent and the authority of the author.

To the clairvoyant, language is opaque. And her clair-style works insist on language as a structure. Weiner opens *The Fast* with a pronouncement of her urge to get beyond language in order to share an unmediated consciousness; she begins, "I want to write but I am lazy. I would like to put my thoughts about the fast directly on tape without the medium of speech" (1). Opening with a warning about the indirectness of language highlights its unavoidable limitations and failure, which is why Weiner claims she is "trying to show the mind" ("Mostly About the Sentence" 129). This is a task rooted not in completion, which is impossible, but in the attempt, the process.

The impossibility of perfection – or the "rejection of closure" as Lyn Hejinian would later call it[5] – explains Weiner's reliance on the diaristic. In his introduction to "Hannah Weiner's Early and Clairvoyant Journals," Patrick Durgin points out that while Weiner deems her clair-style texts to be "large-sheet poetry," he prefers to think of them as "avant-garde journalism." And while this journalistic quality of her writing certainly comes to the fore in the later works in which she directly confronts specific political injustices, these early journals are more a document of a body and mind in crisis than a reflection of "the world." In fact, in her essay "Line. On the Line. Lining up. Lined with. Between the Lines. Bottom Line," Kathleen Fraser elucidates the common, and specifically female, practice of women poets writing journals *instead* of poetry. Fraser cites the notes she wrote "to accompany a serial work written in 1973-74," the same moment in which Weiner was writing these early journals. Fraser writes of her

[5] Weiner refers to Hejinian's essay "The Rejection of Closure" in "Mostly about the Sentence."

own work, "In the seventies nothing was certain. […] Fully-developed systems, balanced syllogisms, neat packages of future life appeared to be contrary to one's experience […] How, then, to express out-of-control experience with in the controls offered in our literary dowry" (166-7). Returning to the present tense of the essay, she explains, "One idea that several women were drawn to [in the 1970s] was the on-the-run notational form of the journal or daybook – a private receptacle for distilled observation – something not so finished and official as a poem, yet a site for close reading of the subject (the shifting self in relation to romance, politics, nature, culture, etc.)" (167).[6] But this time of journal writing was not limited to women poets; in fact, it was an important literary form at the time as many writers rediscovered the practice of life writing. Weiner admits to Anais Nin's importance to her own writing project, and Robert Creeley's *A Day Book* was published in 1972. Perhaps the importance of the form is in its utility: an immediacy and a focus on the everyday enable Weiner's project to enter into a conversation with an established form, even as she breaks the rules of language. Weiner uses her journals to explore all these issues of self, and more, to identify and understand the ever-present words she sees.

The Fast serves as a useful key to Weiner's uniquely difficult poetics. It is here that the reader gets Weiner at her clearest, most linear, and least interrupted. As a text, it is a document of witness and of trauma. She refers to it as a journal, and it consists of dated entries, but unlike the poetry to follow, it is written retrospectively as she recounts a painful period in her life, something that perhaps could be called a mental breakdown. She records three weeks, beginning October 26, 1970, that she refers to as both her "great sink experience" and an "'at home'

[6] This idea is also fleshed out in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), in which the main character uses various notebooks, and eventual the titular golden notebook, to explore the disparate parts of her life and self through writing. Incidentally, in *Big Words* Weiner mentions Lessing in passing and was almost certainly aware of *The Golden Notebook*.

experience" (1). It all begins when her apartment is fumigated. Later that night, after what she labels "Fast Day 1" (1), she "had two very vivid dreams about pollution" (2). The following day she finds herself "laying in supplies for a siege" (3). It is on "FAST DAY 3" (4) that she realizes "that this was going to be a fast period" (5), stops eating, and begins feeling constant pain. During the next three weeks she suffers from a sensitivity to metal and synthetics that makes it necessary to restrict her contact to only natural materials. She also sees auras around herself, other people, and objects, which are color-coded based on degree of contamination. She writes, "I used the glasses and cups and plates to put water in and over my back, and I purified them by my mind until all the frizzies or purple were gone and I knew it was clear. After a while no matter how much I concentrated on the glass, too much purple remained and I had to throw it away" (29). Contact with people or things marked as tainted by these colored auras causes her extreme physical pain. She spends most of these weeks sitting in her kitchen sink – which contained limited metal and was therefore safe – washing herself with water, which helped ease the pain. The three weeks she rehashes for the reader can be reduced to a repeated cycle of contamination and purification. She and her surroundings have been polluted and this interrupts her life, forcing her into isolation. Her life is consumed by the constant cleansing rituals she performs to dissipate the pain and purify the energy fields she sees.

It is through this nuanced recording of process that it becomes apparent that Weiner's obsession is with process itself. She creates a system for removing the pain, just as she develops a system for recording the words she will later see. From her earliest work as a poet, Weiner was searching for a system or method that could carry her voice. In her first book, *Code Poems*, she uses The International Code of Signals for the Use of All Nations, a system intended for nautical communication using semaphore flags and Morse Code to communicate (Durgin 34). Her focus

on method, and her obedience to that which dictates the proper process, an entity which she calls "the mind," is her attempt to impose order and restore normalcy, but also to decipher these new intrusions in her life. In a parenthetical aside close to the start of *The Fast*, she writes, "(I never for one moment thought I was alone – so real did the energy of mind present itself.)" (9).

This is a record of an experience that she did not choose to have. She is in constant pain and must follow instructions given by what she alternately refers to as "the mind," "the energy directing me" (26), and "indications" (37). She is split into body and mind, self and others. She tells us, "I secured a detail watch over my body" (36). But this watch did not prevent her from harming herself as she obeys: "So I was, I thought, instructed to burn little half moons around the left breast with the hot edge of a plate and I did it; it didn't hurt but it raised dark little blisters and I got angry again, not liking to disfigure my body" (38). The body is sacrificed to satisfy the mind.

She later explains, "So I kept cheerfully on, trying my best to do what seemed the right thing as indicated" (13). When she dares to touch a metal object and is punished with pain, she claims, "My mind was now insisting I keep to the rules of the game […]" (19). But her participation in this process makes her an agent in its undoing. Because she must actively purify her aching body, she comes to know that she can do so, and can do so with her mind (which, seemingly, sometimes is and sometimes is not "the mind"). She explains that the pain "had to be fought persistently with the mind" (11). This fighting is action.

Even when practically immobilized by pain, Weiner finds a way to act, to heal herself. But the nature of this power angers her. She asks, "And what did I do with my powers? I cleaned china" (30). And later, "So that was the other thing I did with my mental powers; I cleaned my toes and created little tigers and leopards and big butterflies and many sized flowers"

(32). She undermines her power even as she acknowledges it, writing, "I was very happy doing this idiot work because I saw I was accomplishing something, and also because the great pain had left me […]" (33). The fact of the fast itself is mystified, explained as a supernatural retreat, a psychic spa: "I decided that what you did with your power was to cure your old age, and that's what I was doing in the sink, using my power to rid myself of old age" (39).

This process of purification is, at its core, about self-knowledge. Weiner follows the directions because she must, but also because this experience promises a reward: a communion with another, higher self, but only if she follows instructions. Her relationship with herself, external and internal, unperceived and conscious, is reciprocal. On her birthday she "[…] demanded a present from the mind" (20). Her experience as a whole is cast as a gift, however painful, when she remarks, "So the energy would point out what I could use and I would use it. Through this method I asked questions of my higher self and was answered" (17-8). She also avows, "So our higher selves do try to teach us how to reach our other selvesothers" (4). Here "selves" and "others" are abutted, forming one word. Selves and others become coupled. The selves that she seeks, and which are defined by alterity, are part of the mind. And, most importantly, are potentially accessible, if she yields to their process of revelation. This is the benefit she sees to her suffering. She writes, "I really wanted to lose my consciousness, sleep, and I thought how can I ever if all I'm doing are household chores. How can I get purified so the energy electric can flow through me clearly and then I can jump up full of energy and wide awake. Because I always thought that was possible. I didn't realize the extent of the house cleaning job my body needed" (36). Her experience, like the clair-style work that is its product, is goal-directed, a means to an end. The knowledge-infusing power of the energy is there in the body for those pure enough to receive it. In a distinctly feminist move, Weiner turns traditional

women's work to her advantage. The only housekeeping she wants to do is in the body, not the home. The body stands as an impediment, just as language is an impediment to communication. And, she can't "show the mind" unless all selves are known.

It is late in *The Fast* when the reader realizes that Weiner does not see herself as a victim, but one who has been chosen for a "magic existence" (16). This magic is not confined to the present tense of Weiner's life or consciousness because through writing, her poetry is invested with this energy, this magic. The experience catalogued in *The Fast* is painful, as is writing about it, because the writing is part of the experience. Even though it was written after the fact, this retrospective recording returns her to that psychic moment: "As I write these last few pages the sickly thick yellow of the purple person keeps showing across the pages. For ten years I felt the pain on the page" (10). And, because she writes this experience, *must* write it, she opens herself to the physical pain of it again. She tells the reader, "I cry thinking about it because I haven't been able to write about DAY 4 that awful encounter with thick purple, yellow and black. I still feel the bad pain when I read about it" (7).

In addition to these reflections on the production of the text as a document, there are also hints of what's to come in the poetic works that follow *The Fast*. The text itself has been infiltrated, or corrupted, by the outside voices emanating from inside Weiner, and at a few precious points, Weiner herself disappears, channeling the voices directly to the reader. These times feel like interruptions or interjections because they are. As she documents, she is being scolded or corrected, and in a move that will eventually define her poetics, she documents these words, too. The narrative, unfolding in two separate linear time frames, is layered, past and present. When she questions the ethics of using her "powers," and tells the reader, "I consoled myself because my powers were failing by deciding this would be black magic anyway, using

powers for my own personal convenience," the text talks back. It tells her, and the reader overhears: "You're stupid it isn't black magic its speaking history persuasion" (16). Corrections slip in other places, too. Toward the beginning of the process, when she still struggles to understand the meaning of each color, she explains, "I thought I was learning to how to defeat the black. It was frightening and I hoped I would not have to deal with the red." But the text continues: "The red was anger stupid and you apologize. They must understand that kindness doesn't hurt themselves" (12). And later in the same page, we encounter a comment seemingly unanchored to the narrative: "Don't hurt anybody's feelings" (12). Unlike the interruptions that will define fully developed clair-style, here, Weiner doesn't use italicization or capitalization to indicate a voice other than her own.

The event and the book both end with the intervention of Weiner's friends, led by the cops whose help they procured. When one of the officers asks "are you OK," she replies, "yes I was fasting I was OK it was an experiment" (42). And the reader can only wonder if her claim of intentionality is true.

In *Country Girl* (1971), the next journal published in this early series, Weiner moves to the present tense, and the book opens, "I am in the country" (1). Although this book has the same basic style as *The Fast* – rather straightforward prose that hardly resembles the clair-style texts to come – this is not the documentation of a past experience but of the present, and thus is more of a pure journal or diary. Although this thin, 22-page book was chiseled from the notebooks Weiner must have been writing in almost constantly, there is an arc and a focus to this work, just as there is to *The Fast*. The first paragraph serves as an introduction, and it is obvious that Weiner intends it to be so for her reader:

> I am in the country. Whether or not the spirit, which is what I called my mind at the time, approves. I cried a little when I put the deposit in the

> mail. Please I want to be well. So many visual signs on the above paragraph. I am now trying to be guided by my experience in what I've learned from the spirit, instead of just following advice. It is now I who make the decisions and the spirit gives a yes or no on all things. He, she, it, is so active. I do not always listen. (1)

In this seemingly simple paragraph the reader must wrestle with so much. The directness of the first sentence is undercut by the strangeness of the second. The shift to the past tense is confusing: has she since realized that "the spirit" is a false projection of the "mind"? How does Weiner understand this split between self and mind? She paints herself as an agent grasping for agency, once again, but now that she is not in the midst of an acute crisis, the reader is able to see how her "normal" (non-fasting) life is being affected by her psychic experiences.

This book is preoccupied with two essential elements of life: food and clothing. Her relationship with each is fraught as she struggles to find food and clothing that do not cause physical discomfort. And once again, the reader is forced to ask, what is really going on here? The physical and spiritual quest of *The Fast* continues in the context of the everyday. Weiner's goal, in part, is quite practical, and she documents "The constant search for the correct diet that will give [her] sustenance and energy and not hurt the knee" (1). But, underlying immediate health concerns, Weiner hopes her new perceptions are a roadmap to a higher realm. With the guidance of the spirit, she will be released from physical pain and from the chaos and confusion of her life: "The truth shall set you free. The truth will be a relaxation, a clarity, a certainty that I will experience through the mind. So it is this I must aim for. To try to always experience what is true. And to try to know what that is for myself. On these thoughts I experienced (saw) a light flash. So I know that is in the right direction" (4). Weiner reads these flashes of light she sees as spiritual illumination, but at this point is not yet completely devoted to the idea that this

enlightenment comes from outside her own consciousness. Instead, she admits, "I would like to think that the signals come to me from my higher self" (4).

Country Girl, as a record of a retreat in the literal sense, allows the reader to see Weiner ruminating on the page about the recent changes in her life and mind. She extends a straightforward explanation: "I keep meaning to write more about my struggle with the spirits, how I first met them, after a mescalin trip and the lights started responding to my thoughts" (17). She goes on to describe how songs she heard on the radio were uncannily pertinent to her, and how "it seemed the songs were not commercial but ones made up directly for [her]" (17). She heard voices of friends not present and saw various lights, some she deemed positive, others negative. This visitation doesn't appear to be as troubling to Weiner as one may suppose, however, because she eventually finds a way to understand it; she writes, "I didn't know the lights meant I had some degree of clairvoyance. I knew I was in communication with something, assumed they were good spirits and were there to help me with my development" (17). But, she explains, that was two years before she wrote *Country Girl*, and whether these spirits really are the gurus she hopes is what she has "been trying to figure out, ever since" (18). Making sense of her new experience of consciousness refocuses Weiner's life, converting her to a full-time decoder of signals that are not signs.

She offers a brief history of her thinking about her mental experiences, tinged with the uncertainties and doubts that stretch into the present:

> For a long time I thought I was being guided by teachers from the mental plane. I didn't know if these teachers were alive and astral projecting to me, or whether they had reached a level of existence where they were without bodies. I also thought I might be hooked up to the one mind, where true intelligence lay, and that the responses were automatic, like hitting the jackpot if you get to the truth or did the right thing because part of the information comes in a manner to stimulate the diseased part of my body that needs a little help. I also thought I might be linked up to my

> higher self—that external soul of mind guiding the body through this existence and that in asking questions I was literally talking to myself. (4-5)

This trip to the country is defined by such questions, and, in a darker sense, by the lack of answers.

As Weiner practices yoga and consults philosophical texts from Jung to Buddhist writings, she continues to exhibit a profound sensitivity to her external environment. Her life becomes ruled by the endless stimuli – food, fabric, pain – and becomes devoted to them. And her writing of her life follows suit: the world, the mind, the text as one. She claims that "The city problems I brought with me, memories and fear, anger, anxiety, have just fallen away" (5). But this seems to be untrue since the book is overwhelmed with these emotions. Despite her move to the country, she is distracted by her everyday miseries and confusion about the mundane, wondering, "Does everyone who develops clairvoyance go through this?" (15). She must analyze everything, read everything, as she attempts to learn the language of the spirits. They communicate through her refrigerator, which "seems to come on in relation to certain thoughts just as it did in the beginning" (7), and other everyday objects, and through the energy and colored auras she describes in *The Fast*. At this point, Weiner's quest to "get to the truth" (5) is foundering, and, in her logic, it is all her fault because she fails to understand the messages she receives. There remains a lack of clarity, and Weiner blames the receiver, herself, and the message, but not the sender: "I feel a distinct sense of failure in dealing with my spirit. I still ask questions" (7).

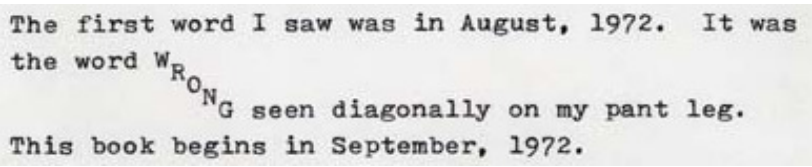
Her frustration extends to the creation of the text. She is there to do a job in writing: to reflect on the deeper implications of her spiritual "jackpot," not fill pages with mundane culinary and digestive details or records of unexplainable visions. For her, capturing an idea in writing is

the same as grasping it herself; near the very end of the book she writes, "I wonder if I'm ever going to make it clear about how I fight the spirits" (20). When considering the books that precede and follow, *Country Girl*, despite the pain and suffering documented therein, seems a product of the eerily quiet eye of Weiner's psychic storm – the calm before the words.

It is in the 1972 manuscript *Pictures and Early Words* where the absolute need for the development of a new poetics, or technique, arises. As Weiner lived, she wrote, and writing her life exceeded all capacity of other styles, and thus clair-style was wrought. This book represents a dramatic shift in Weiner's life in writing because it documents the beginning of "seeing words," the single most significant set of circumstances of her existence as a poet or a human being. Life began to write back to a woman who had written about it compulsively. And so Weiner's questing now has a terrain: words. A logic supports the idea that Weiner's visions would finally settle themselves into the shape of words because of Weiner's intimacy with words, and their already pervasive presence in her life as she wrote compulsively, ritualistically, and with concrete literary goals in mind even before she began hallucinating words. She desperately wanted the forces to communicate through words, because with words, unlike colored lights or flashes, there is a chance to use something familiar as the code key: written language. She needed to see words for her out-of-control life to become legible to her again and for her to continue writing about her life. While this book continues her project of journal keeping, the appearance of the words changes the palette from which Weiner can draw.

Like most of her texts, *Pictures and Early Words* also opens with a brief note signed "Hannah Weiner / Silent Teacher." Here, she again explains that this book is one of four early journals that document the "development of clairvoyance," the "culmination" of which is *Clairvoyant Journal*, which, clearly, even in her own mythology, holds an elevated status as the

text in which the tactics she employs hesitatingly in the earlier journals becomes successful practice. This opening comment ends with very specific information that reveals her continued, or perhaps growing, obsession with dating her work as she documents her life:


The first word I saw was in August, 1972. It was
the word WRONG seen diagonally on my pant leg.
This book begins in September, 1972.

This date-stamping seems to serve two functions for Weiner: first, it signals veracity to the reader – the specific nature of the information included connects the text to real time and thus real life. Second, and more importantly, the dating of the text serves as an anchor for Weiner herself. The occurrences she struggles to document in mere words are real because they happened. Interestingly, though, *Pictures and Early Words* is a fluid, unsegmented text, not broken into the dated entries that comprise her next two works, *Big Words* and *Clairvoyant Journal*, and other later work.

What becomes obvious to the reader when reading this text (which exists only in manuscript form, with Weiner's own comments and marks still visible) is that her project is an important part of her life. She writes because writing becomes the only way she can make sense of her experiences and corral the words that are just beginning to overtake her life. She is trapped by her situation, literally held hostage by the words that she reads as directions for her life, and by documenting these words she finds a way to have a voice also, to reply to the words that write her life. Weiner remains mostly in control and serves not so much as a medium, but as a referee, documenting what she does and what she sees, but keeping these voices separate. However, this careful process of documenting the words, before the book is over, means that Weiner's own words become secondary, incidental, as the words she sees demand more attention

in her life and more space on the page. Weiner needs to invent her own brand of radical poetics as her complex writing life is clearly being consumed by the words she sees and must write.

Pictures and Early Words is the first of the early journals in which the reader can recognize clair-style in an infantile form. This early clair-style lacks the codified complexity of *Clairvoyant Journal*, and the title page explains this pared-down system for recording what at this point is recorded as one external voice: "THE WORDS IN CAPITALS ARE SEEN." The very first sentence of the text is significant both literally and metaphorically. She opens the book: "See word HEALING on phone" (1). The act of writing is an attempt to find peace and the path to a pain-free life. Her use of the word "healing" also establishes Weiner's foregrounding of the supernatural. On the first page, Weiner reports that a palmist she goes to see tells her, "what are you doing running around to psychics and coming here; you're as psychic as they are" (1).

Not unlike the prior texts, *Pictures and Early Words* depicts Weiner's struggles with the basic questions of what to eat and what to wear, still attempting to read the signs from the spirits in order to be lead to both short-term relief from ailment, and long-term spiritual growth. But the appearance of the words does not clarify the messages, as she seems to have hoped, and she continues to decode the signs and words, seeking answers, yet getting very few. The reading of the words, and not just the words themselves, consumes her life. Although she mentions having to go to "work" a few times in this book, by and large the words are her living; she writes, "My favorite occupation is watching the print out on my leg" (19).

Her encounters with the words aren't just time-consuming, they fill all her time. A task as mundane as buying a new bed sheet becomes an existential crisis as she is tormented by the "spirits" and denied both comfort and normalcy. Her life, her consciousness, is reduced to a

series of choices: what to wear, what to eat, where to go, what to do. And, the voices insist on dictating the "right" answer to these choices. Her job is to read their confusing hints and to make the right decision, or be punished: often when she misreads or ignores the dictates of the voices she experiences pain in the form of what she calls a "zap." She explains in parenthetical asides the nature of these sensations: "(zaps are like static electric shocks)" or "(a hit of energy that hurts)" (5). The problem for Weiner is not the words as such, but what they're saying, or, since they dictate the details of her life, what they aren't saying clearly: "I got no's on boots, sneakers & rubber boots, so what else is there? I gave up & sat down to write about whether I should write or eat. Black & white on a of eat. Now I'm hungry" (20). Weiner lives in a constant state of indecision, trapped by the words, and perhaps even trapped by the page, because she doesn't know the rules to reading their mysterious language. And yet, it is precisely this opacity that generates clair-style. Weiner turns to writing for relief, but the writing is simply more words, when Weiner wants less words and more sense.

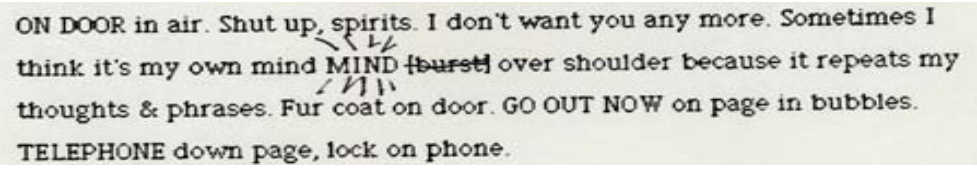
The endless effort required to read the words means Weiner's new "occupation" is costing her. The physical pain she experiences for years, and attempts to heal for just as long, is now complicated by endless confusion and chaos. The playful teasing of *The Fast* is past, and the reader sees Weiner in a state of crisis: "Damn my body, my life is cursed and the spirits are driving me crazy. Why doesn't something happen deep blue green on does DOES on gate. I've got to get out of here" (9). The words interrupt the thoughts she attempts to record even as she complains about the desperation they cause; we witness these exchanges. Even cries of despair are allowed to be interrupted as Weiner writes down the words that she sees, devoted to verity: "Will I ever be glad I'm alive. GLAD in gate, drop sign on glad. Wish I were dead. WAIT in air" (10). The gate, which begs to be read as a metaphor, is literal here: it is the security gate on

the window in her apartment that opens onto a fire escape. And yet this gate also marks the interstitial place between outside and in, and protects those inside from the potential outside evils trying to break in. It is significant that this is the screen on which the outside voices project their intrusion inward. The excess, the verbosity of the voices, the confusion they create causes torpor and misery, as Weiner warns, "Things are driving me to suicide or inaction" (19). And Weiner does admit to hurting herself from time to time, usually smashing her head against something out of sheer frustration at the level of control the spirits have over her life: "I got mad at the office today & banged my head in the ladies room, couldn't work, cried, came home early" (63).

Words refuse to sit still or to stay in their place; they insist on breaking the plane of the page and time. She cannot merely document because she must wrestle with these words in real-time, as she writes. The agency of these words is obvious. In one instance early on in the book, when she manages to put on a coat without interference from the words, she writes, "[…] came back for black coat it was fine. FINE on gate. (The words appear as I have written it.) They don't like it. Down diagonal of gray energy on fine" (4). "My spirits say they are not against me, or punitive" (37), Weiner assures us, but the need to reassure herself means she has doubts. Writing is, or replaces, living: "Things are too confusing here. I wanted to stay in the movie or go to the video, VIDEO on my nose & here I am writing more stupid" (15). Gradually the words take over – control shifts and voices are not always described, but just allowed into the text unexplained by Weiner.

The source of the voices is part mythology built by Weiner and part mystery. Added to the constant questions she poses to the voices about food and fabrics and potential lovers, Weiner also asks herself, and the text, who really has been writing the words she sees: "My mind is doing this?" (30). And later she asks again, "What is to say – is this my own mind – the various

decisions & indecisions, hidden & plain knowledge" (53). Weiner appears invested in the certainty that the words are directed at her from an outside other, yet she still pauses, on the paper, to question the source of the words, and the horrifying chance that the words were actually her own. She admits, "Sometimes I think it's all my own thought" (53). Her explorations of the possibility that the words are her own consciousness lack the gusto of her insistence on clairvoyance. She qualifies her doubts with a "sometimes" or even by airing her suspicions while addressing the words as distinct entities:


ON DOOR in air. Shut up, spirits. I don't want you any more. Sometimes I think it's my own mind MIND ~~[burst]~~ over shoulder because it repeats my thoughts & phrases. Fur coat on door. GO OUT NOW on page in bubbles. TELEPHONE down page, lock on phone.

The space between the idea of self and other is narrowing for Weiner and her "spiroughts (spirits/thoughts)" (63). What is absent from this line of her reasoning is the logical end – if the voices are stemming from her own mind, then her mind is troubled, ill. And perhaps this would mean that her quest is not a journey but a spiral.

One element of the experience about which Weiner remains certain through all the early notebooks is that there exists a reason for the words, and the signs before them. The painful, overwhelming nature of her encounter with this situation, whatever its source, has not deflated her expectation of enlightenment, of a psychic boon. She steadfastly holds to the belief that the words are there to heal her even as they hurt her, and, more interestingly, her belief in the words persists even as she admits her dissatisfaction with the quality of advice coming from the voices that insist on offering it. She complains, "I'm still not getting what I ask for. Which is practical advice All I'm getting is the no's" (15). Her determination to use the voices as her personal crystal ball is not rooted in feedback based on prior positive experiences but her desperation for

answers about her health, her spirit, her mind, and her personal and daily life: "The real question is why can't I get positive suggestions instead of eliminations & no's. Fuck you. I'm gonna go eat" (21). The voices construct a prison of refusals, tethering her to her apartment. She tells the "unfriendly spirits" (and it is not totally decipherable if she is distinguishing these from other, friendly voices) that she is "not going to listen" (23). But, how can she ignore that which refuses to be ignored, tantalizing with the promise of transcendence? She yields to the voices because every code can be unlocked if one knows how to read it, and she sees herself as a student of the voices, and the universe they speak. The appearance of the first word is a truly a defining moment in her life: she was instantly transformed from a poet to a mystic, a seer. And for Weiner this process is both serious and a joke: when she asks the voices, "When am I going to get to higher mind?," she reports that her "Navel says NOT YET NOT THIS BOOK" (*Pictures and Early Words* 34). Weiner retorts, "Maybe I haven't the patience or logic to seek information this way" (34), which hints that the information sought can be found if only she is good enough to wait for it or smart enough to glean it and write it down. Weiner is serious about her quest and her abilities, wanting to break the current closed circuit of her life and project her special access to an unseeable and unknowable else or other into the world: "I don't want to be a clair something praying to the energy to clean up my dungarees" (7).

Weiner does not want all this suffering to be fruitless, and out of frustration, spirit broken, she rejects the words – both those she sees and those she writes: "For 16 days I've not been writing. Home with a cold. […] No decisions to make except what food to get & I've solved that problem by programming myself the night before. […] With no decisions to make the words mostly went away" (49). While this once again emphasizes the voices' connection to decision making and thus free will, it also begins to reveal Weiner's willingness to empty herself

and her page, allowing her work to be primarily composed of the words she transcribes rather than generates. Readers of *Pictures and Early Words* witness Weiner's transformation from writer to reader and scribe. Late in the book her frustration with the words peaks, as does the unmediated appearance of these words in the text:

> Emotions – upset – prevents clear (hear) knowledge. A pause with NO THINKING would make it all clearer. In the NO THINKING pauses causes come to me, explanations or understanding, or even further directions. YES INDEED directions. Emotional states prevent efficiency of action. POWER beside efficiency, prevents POWER. KNOWLEDGE through POWER. […]
>
> Energy in air, across page. They want me to say POWER. Dear Divine Healing Power. This is the hour for me to be well. Get rid of the stomach & please, set my body at ease. (50-1)

According to her own understanding, Weiner's problem is that she is too ego-driven and earth-bound to receive clearly the messages being addressed to her, and the power they contain. If she becomes a vessel, she can obtain the knowledge that she seeks and that she has been rejecting through her thinking. And, this transcendent bounty will not be hers alone – it will be shared with the "page," with her poetry, if she does the voices' bidding.

The reader is a voyeur to Weiner's traumatic exhibitionism because the product of the voices – real or imagined, from herself or others – is a vast body of literary texts. Diaristic though they may be, Weiner's books (culled from many notebooks whose content largely remained untransformed into manuscripts intended for publication) are works of art, in part because she insists on them as such within the metatextual content she weaves throughout these texts that already talk to and about themselves. Close to the start of *Pictures and Early Words*, Weiner writes, "I'm sick of these spirits and this book" (3). Even when writing about the book

she is composing, Weiner situates herself as a reader. She reveals her dissatisfaction with the work, admitting, "I've corrected all my typed copy and was going to reread the last few books but it's too boring" (7).

Due to the nature of this specific text, where words and worlds unite for Weiner, her life and her writing melt together, hardening on the page as something new: "Is this more interesting than food. […] I'm getting interested in this plot. […] It's time to go eat or maybe just the end of the chapter" (22). When the word "publish" appears diagonally crossing through the word "whole" surrounded by a circle, Weiner knows the words are talking about themselves. She replies, "I know that KNOW in air. I should sort out the sections to work on. But things are so confused these days I'm afraid to start editing" (28). The fear she links to the writing process is a fear of her life, as authority over it and the text slip into the haze of confusion. Deferring to the voices in life means doing the same on the page.

The voices, unsurprisingly, are vocal about their opinions regarding what version of themselves is released to a readership; they want ultimate control over "their" text. Weiner writes, "The spirits want me to take out all early parts of book that describe one of them as negative […] We are having a disagreement about which chapters to leave out" (40). And a few pages later she reports, "I decide to document today" (43), only to later confide, "They didn't want me to document today" (44).

By the end of the book Weiner's writing has been transformed. The spirits' words take up more and more of the page. Entire paragraphs are composed by voices offering spiritual platitudes: "TO BE ETERNAL PEACE IS NEEDED NOT JUST PEACE INSIDE PEACE IS CENTRAL" (68). She admits she is "afraid to listen to words, to obey" (67), but at the same time it becomes obvious that these words are now the main event of the text – author and subject:

"WRITE THIS DOWN IMMEDIATELY" (64). Weiner must wonder, "Is this a writing class?" (63), when what she asks for all along are reading lessons.

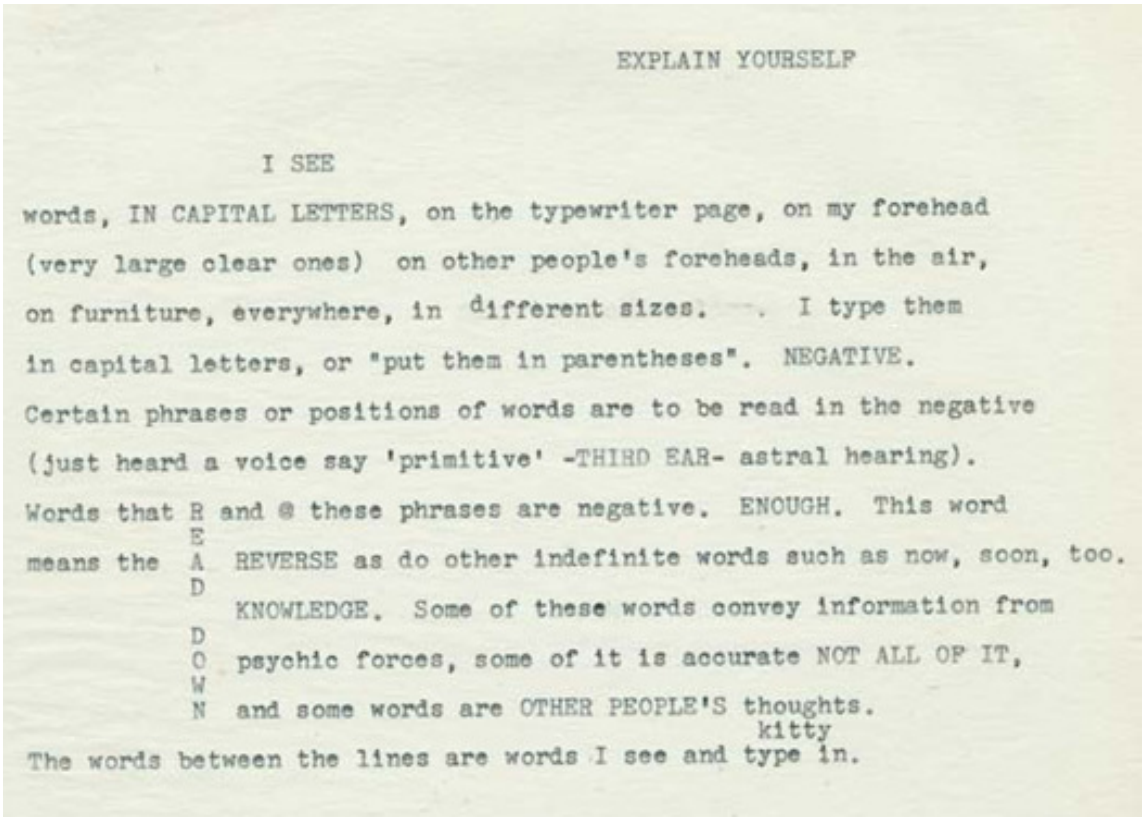
The last page of *Pictures and Early Words* is a poetic harbinger. It contains only the capital letters of the voices and here, of all places, the lines break into what resembles verse:

> NOW OPEN TOMORROW NIGHT JUST FINISHED
> THIS MESSAGE IS COMPLETE OUT
> ALONE
> BE OF GOOD CHEER
> D IS A DEAR
> (69)

It is all capital letters, all the spirits' words, as Weiner is spoken to, permitting the readers to watch. The voices' uninterrupted message is strange and unreadable in all the ways Weiner has been complaining about for over 60 pages. What can be read here? The forces offer advice on Weiner's love life, a childish rhyme, a closing and an opening. What Weiner has learned from this enveloping, psychic "writing class" is clair-style.

Her work continues in the sprawling, stuttering, and messy, never-published 250-page manuscript *Big Words*, written in 1973. It is here that her project begins to gel, that clair-style stumbles into being. Her role as mediator at moments is more like that of a dispassionate scribe. In fact, aside from a section in the middle of the text, it is written largely in the third person. The text begins, as does *Clairvoyant Journal*, at a yoga retreat; Weiner is convinced that yoga and meditation can help ease her physical ailments (digestive, sciatic, a sore hip and knee), and teach her how to read and decode the, by this time, omnipresent words. She wants to feel better and be better despite the constant interference of the voices and words. The earlier focus on reaching a "higher mind" dissipates, but does not disappear.

This text, like the others, offers a first-person secret decoder ring of an explanation, on a page of its own, before the title page, before the book really starts. As usual, this information seems to have been added after the manuscript was written. An analysis of *Big Words* must begin with a careful look at this statement, reproduced here in full:



EXPLAIN YOURSELP

I SEE

words, IN CAPITAL LETTERS, on the typewriter page, on my forehead (very large clear ones) on other people's foreheads, in the air, on furniture, everywhere, in different sizes. . I type them in capital letters, or "put them in parentheses". NEGATIVE. Certain phrases or positions of words are to be read in the negative (just heard a voice say 'primitive' -THIRD EAR- astral hearing). Words that R and @ these phrases are negative. ENOUGH. This word means the READ REVERSE as do other indefinite words such as now, soon, too. KNOWLEDGE. Some of these words convey information from DOWN psychic forces, some of it is accurate NOT ALL OF IT, and some words are OTHER PEOPLE'S thoughts.

kitty

The words between the lines are words I see and type in.

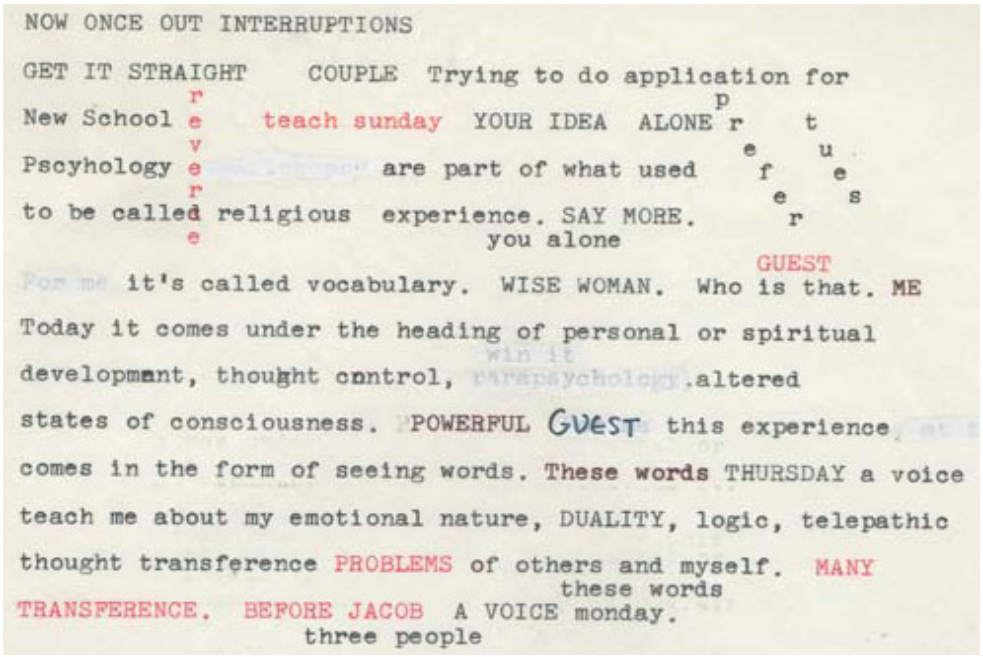
The dialogic nature of the text is impossible to miss: a dictate is issued and Weiner complies, sort of. Her 'explanation' is more of a map key than a meaningful exploration of herself or the experiences she documents within the text. Rather than explain herself, she explains the methodology of her writing, and thus draws a line between the two only to erase it almost immediately. But before she launches into her lengthiest textual explanation yet, she pauses, narrows the reader's attention to two words, the two words that are the entire reason Weiner is writing *Big Words* and creating clair-style: "I SEE." The cipher is complex and confusing, that

much is clear, to Weiner herself and thus, necessarily, to the reader. In this introductory note she is scientific about the genesis of the voices and words: they are outside, they are other. By disowning the words, she validates their message, attesting to their existence independent of herself; rather than just being the product of a disoriented mind, they become meaningful. However, since the phrase "I SEE" is itself in capital letters, according to the code just spelled out, the "I" is not Weiner. So, the text begins with Weiner breaking the promise of the code, debunking as she defines, which seems to be a part of the game Weiner is playing. Perhaps the exact source of the words and whether they're to be read as instructions or as restrictions – signified by "negative" and "reverse" in Weiner's early dealing with the voices – is less important to the reader, and to the reader's enjoyment or at least experience of the text, than to Weiner, who is convinced her health and happiness depend on getting it right. Weiner offers this key to her reader, but also as a reminder to herself – if she can master the code, she can master the voices and regain control over her life.

The absoluteness of the code wavers in the text itself: the lacuna where a referent should be means Weiner must rely on something akin to faith. The words "BELIEVE IT" or "BELIEVE" are repeated throughout, and "HAVE FAITH" (58) appears at the top of a page, like a title or heading. Many of the words she sees are printed on her body, mostly on her forehead, which according to the Hindu philosophies to which she subscribes is the location of the third eye chakra – the locus of intuition and clarity. She still is tied to the belief that the words are messages coming from a benevolent source, and, further, that her role in relation to the words is that of recipient and follower.

In Weiner's writing, her clairvoyance is the fulcrum. Her belief in her psychic abilities is generative but also precludes any other type of literary production; it is inspiration and

termination. Her existence as an individual, let alone a writer, is beside the point: "She gets her notebook, if she doesn't, it writes itself anyway. BELIEVE IT" (55). As the recorder of these metaphysical messages, she situates herself as part of a longer tradition of seeing and poetic inspiration. She writes:


NOW ONCE OUT INTERRUPTIONS

GET IT STRAIGHT COUPLE Trying to do application for

New School teach sunday YOUR IDEA ALONE

Pscyhology are part of what used

to be called religious experience. SAY MORE.

you alone

GUEST

it's called vocabulary. WISE WOMAN. Who is that. ME

Today it comes under the heading of personal or spiritual

development, thought control, .altered

states of consciousness. POWERFUL GUEST this experience

comes in the form of seeing words. These words THURSDAY a voice

teach me about my emotional nature, DUALITY, logic, telepathic

thought transference PROBLEMS of others and myself. MANY

these words

TRANSFERENCE. BEFORE JACOB A VOICE monday.

three people

(169)

An excerpt like this requires seemingly endless unraveling. The sheer visual excess on the page recreates Weiner's experience with the words, and the reader's inability to neatly unbraid form from content and sense from nonsense is also profound in its mimesis. Despite these difficulties, words seen can always be read, which is, of course, part of Weiner's unending frustration. What can be seen here is Weiner's attempt to understand her role with an eye towards the cultural history of the oracle. And so, "religious experience" morphs into "personal or spiritual development, thought control [and] altered states of consciousness," all of which have the weight of what appears retrospectively like the pop-culture ersatz-spiritual hippie lovefest of the era.

More idiosyncratically, her experience transforms into simply "vocabulary."[7] But Weiner works against the singularity of her experience by erasing the "to me" (still visible under the whiteout she applied) that precedes "it's called vocabulary." Also, while she insists that the experience is educational, she is uncertain of her status as bearer of this knowledge: the words "WISE WOMAN" are parried by Weiner's own "Who is that." The response "ME," in the capital letters of the spirits, makes evident that Weiner's pronoun problems are not merely linguistic.

Her sustained use of the third person – which begins with this manuscript – serves to distance Weiner from the confusion of her life and allows her to become an object of self-scrutiny. She reveals, "for objective I suppose I should write in the 3rd person" (129). This ungrammatical explanation leaves the word "objective" open to being read as either an adjective or a noun. Yes, she wants to find a way to see her unique situation from the outside, objectively, but she is always writing with an object in mind: healing, clarity, and literary production. But Weiner's primary "objective" is to be "objective," empty enough to honestly transcribe the words. Her use of the third person is also a mandate from the voices, who precede the sentence "I didn't want to walk, hip tired" near the top of the second page of the text with "SHE" and follow it with "3RD PERSON." This corrective insistence is emblematic of the overriding influence the forces have on her writing. This is an influence that she, at times, is grateful for because she sees it as part of the voices' means of leading her to enlightenment; this guidance is a gift. She writes, "She is rewarded. She is connected with someone else's style. She hears someone chanting Hari Om before she appears. She tells her Satchidananda prefers the third person. She realized this is why she changed her style at the Retreat not before, although she was plagued with HE HELPS WITH IT 3rd person phrases" (10). Rather than seeing this

[7] Ironically, this connects her to Jack Spicer, another poet who believed he was writing poetry dictated from outside, and his purported last words: "My vocabulary did this to me."

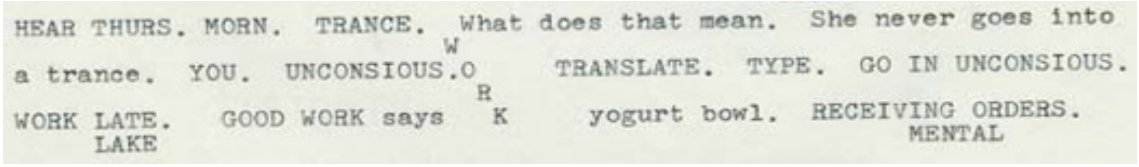
insistence on her use of the third person as an insulting erasure of self, she believes that being "connected with someone else's style" is part of the spirits' plan to heal her. She claims, "she can't use I it's a game she doesn't know the rules SURPRISE she is supposed to be objective" (98). She does return to the first person "I" in the middle of the text for 60 solid pages (104-164). At the end of this section, she reveals her continued confusion: "The words all in capitals, or all in small letters are written by them. They have the easy ones. She (I) uses Caps and smalls. The question is should we use she or I when referring to the SECRETARY" (164). According to this construct, her value as a poet is that she can document the ephemeral and put what's in the ether on the page. The emphasis on the disowning of self for the sake of the product – the text – is echoed at a much earlier moment: "She, I, I am I again, wonder who writes the best record. who has the best records, plays? What does record refer to? WRITING" (27). She also refers to herself as "sis" in *Big Words* for the first time, which only continues and grows in her larger body of work. It seems to be a nickname her mother had for her.

Her pronoun confusion is yoked to the nebulous nature of the voices. Weiner keeps looking for lucidity where none can be found, and she even dares to assert that "For her seeing clearly is seeing words" (44). But this one moment of surety is belied by the true opacity of the words and their message. More often than not, when reflecting on the words, she bemoans their lack of directness. She writes, "She is unhappy and confused. Not well, they tell her, who is talking. Once she asked for truth, and then complete sentences and now who would <u>take chances</u> (father's voice) she would just like to know who is saying what" (26). This sentiment is repeated, with a twist, some 20 pages later: "Once she wanted truth, then complete sentences, then who's who SPEAKS, now she doesn't even care about that, just to recognize the feeling and handle it from there. Concentrate on your heart center, he tells her, it helps to relieve the busy

computer in her head" (47). The fruitlessness of her demands for true communication, instead of its phantom, forces her to turn away from her pursuit of answers. She writes, "There seems to be no truth, only thought" (53). However, this diversion also seems a merciful move towards self-protection. To keep asking the same questions means bumping up against answers Weiner, understandably, doesn't want to hear, such as "Is she crazy?" (35) and "Going crazy" (78).

As mentioned in the explanatory note at the start of the manuscript, Weiner also believes she is telepathically channeling the thoughts of those around her, and so this adds a third possibility for the source of the voices and words. She is merely hearing the thoughts of others due to her psychic sensitivities. Once again, all this is further complicated when she asserts that "She sees clearer stoned" (35) and that "When she drinks her timing is better, less hesitation, less confusion" (63).

But the source of the words is a wound Weiner can't help but pick. The unqualified onslaught of words, and Weiner's desire for them to be useful, demands she revisit, again, the question of what her role is in the production of the words. She writes, "I wonder if the […] projections are all from my mind" (78). This is a reality she refuses to accept, writing later, "It can't all be my mind. HER MIND. She doesn't know what to call these thought forms" (148). This probing leads her back to evaluating her status as conduit or scribe: "I want to know who does all this timing, if it is my higher mind, why does it hide it from me […] so that I feel like a puppet to something someone" (147). The problem is one of consciousness, which is exactly what she is determined to write, and authorship:


HEAR THURS. MORN. TRANCE. What does that mean. She never goes into a trance. YOU. UNCONSIOUS.WO R TRANSLATE. TYPE. GO IN UNCONSIOUS. WORK LATE. GOOD WORK says K yogurt bowl. RECEIVING ORDERS. LAKE MENTAL

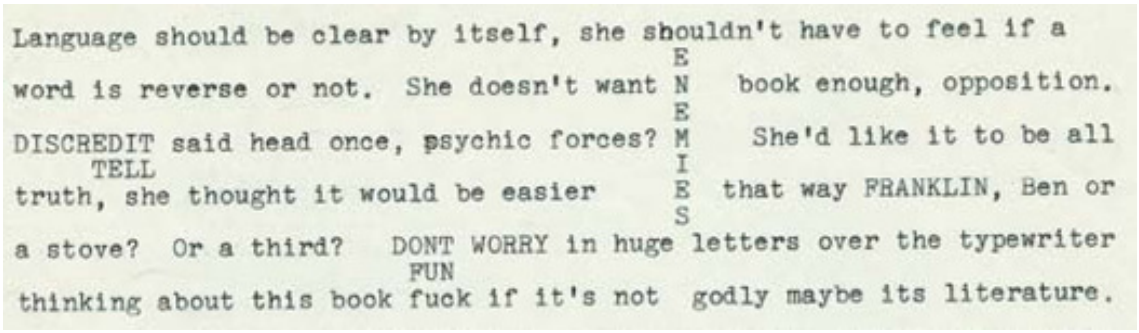
(76)

The words make it clear that they are in control of the text's production and that her role as author is contingent on her obedience. She is "RECEIVING ORDERS" to write, and her understanding of the project is secondary to her creation of it. She chafes at this idea, writing, "She's a prisoner […] She's tired of half knowing" (98) and "I feel invaded possessed furious SEE YOURSELF. INVASION says head" (110). And yet, she continues writing.

She also ponders whether these unreadable messages are punishment for past misuse and abuse of codes. She mentions that a friend "once suggested she MARRY had been a lighthouse keeper" in a past life, and perhaps she "did SIGNALS wrong" (101), causing catastrophe for the ships she was supposed to guide. But her work with codes was more recent than any past life – she need only look back as far as one of her first published books, *Code Poems*. She writes:

> I think I'm being punishedfor doing all those signal poems, with semaphore signals, flashing lights, morse code and colored alphabet flags. So it wasn't always accurate when they waved the flags. Maybe this is what Karma is, as above so below if this is above or below. Or maybe INVENT in another life those signal codes and ships sank because they weretoo complicated no radio in those early days and I'm responsible DROWNING. (116)

The documentation of her struggle for everyday normalcy is a bit more muted in *Big Words* as compared to the previous works, but the struggle to understand what the forces want of her is amplified and, more importantly, transformed. Complaints about the lack of transparency in the messages abound, but this urgent need for clarity takes a literary turn. The illegibility of the messages – but not the words she insists carry them – become a kink in her production of a product – the book – and not just a disabling influence in her life:



(102)

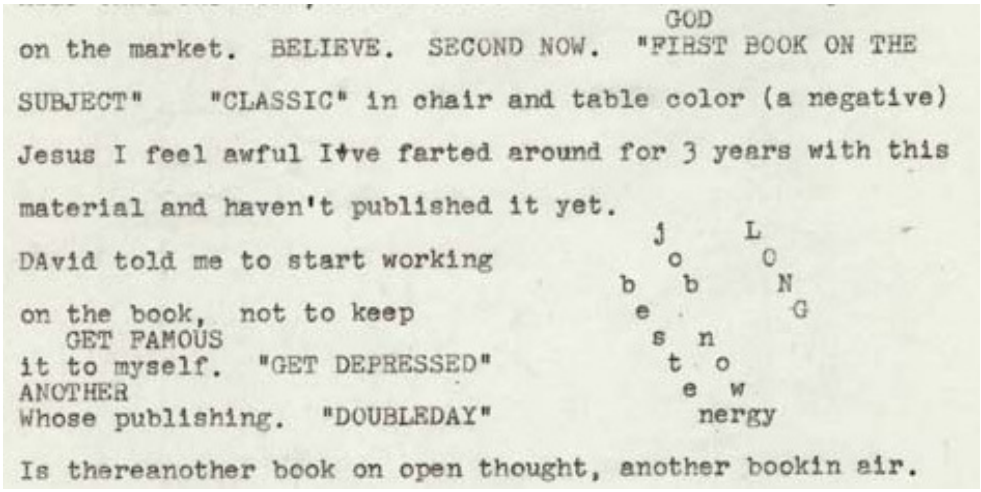
Her dead-end path to enlightenment has at least brought her to an alternate destination: literature written in clair-style. Weiner's work is an enactment of a genre she generates from scratch, or as she says herself, "fuck if it's not godly maybe its literature." Whether in the literary or spiritual realm, Weiner is endlessly hoping for an epiphany and hoping that clair-style will be its vehicle.

Big Words, like the three early journals that precede it and *Clairvoyant Journal* which follows, is a quest narrative. Weiner is intent on figuring things out, on determining the source of the words, and it is on the page that she attempts to do so. However, here, her quest is less future directed and more focused on the present as an absolute. This is why she is bound to a diaristic form – it is a present tense, real-time reckoning. When words appear as she types her notebooks into manuscripts and she allows these words to become part of the text, she creates a palimpsest where every writer is her and every time is now, thus birthing clair-style.

Her project henceforth in these nascent clair-style works, the focus of her interest documented in *Big Words*, is the writing itself. The ongoing meta-text that is omnipresent in Weiner's work takes a more literary turn; it engenders an artistic self-consciousness that is an important part of the role of the writer of clair-style, the transcriber of voices and energies. Much of the writing – an intertwining of autobiography, meta-text, and the words – has the objective of decoding the words she sees and the voices she hears. The "pictures" that she once

saw are no longer. Weiner's material is settled, and it consists of unadulterated words, everywhere and all the time.

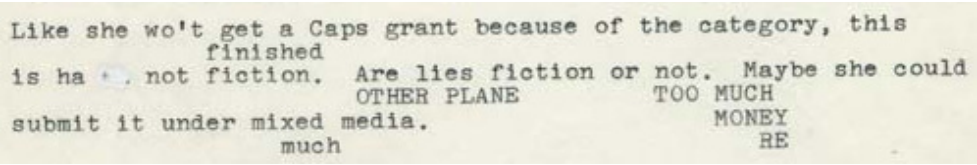
Although she may appear to be at the whim of the voices, and may "feel like a puppet to something someone" (147), she maintains a preternatural awareness about the possibilities her often miserable experiences hold for literature. She is constructing something new, and not merely for the sake of fetishizing "the new," but because the situation, the words, demand it. She knows the book has created a new way of writing the life of the mind, and a new space for investigating what this means:



(109)

It is fascinating to see Weiner construe this as a book "on" a specific topic. It seems more like a book that represents the experience of "open thought" – as she calls it here for the first time – than one that contains an analysis of such. But of course, as usual, Weiner quickly retracts that scientific seriousness with the description of the text as a "bookin air." The "material" of her work is her life as it is consumed by the totality of her experiences. By publishing the book, she would legitimate these experiences, and connect them definitively with a literary tradition, as alluded to by the appearance of the word "CLASSIC" and her earlier contention that "she thinks

she is writing a classic" (47). But as Gertrude Stein so wisely explains in "Composition as Explanation," "the creator of the new composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic, there is hardly a moment in between and it really is too bad very much too bad naturally for the creator but also very much too bad for the enjoyer" (497). At the time she is writing *Big Words*, Weiner is still in the outlaw camp. This creates practical problems for her in terms of finding a publisher and also securing funding, as she explains:


Like she wo't get a Caps grant because of the category, this
finished
is ha . not fiction. Are lies fiction or not. Maybe she could
OTHER PLANE TOO MUCH
submit it under mixed media. MONEY
much RE

(182)

Not fiction and not non-fiction, the book is perhaps best described by the words themselves as a text that answers the call to "KEEP POETRY ALIVE" (42). The magic of the book is that it is "ALIVE" in a much more literal sense than others, and this is because the words that comprise it have agency; they are themselves, to Weiner, alive, and Weiner's job is to get them onto the page. It is a strange collaboration between the writer and the words, which, according to her, she is not writing but are otherwise willed into being by unknown forces. This troubling of authorship is what, as the text announces, "MAKES IT INTERESTING (the response to her thoughts, or instructions that she types in as she sees them)" (39). This confederation of voices *is* clair-style. This is a book about its own creating and about the documentation of its creation. For example, it reads, "PLEASE RETUR she sees on her head in book color. She starts to work on her notes. WRONG TI. in book color. Book is not complete? Is that the idea/ YES. TYPE in road color" (36). Even before she writes it, the book exists.

The result of this process – her original and challenging poetics – is the reason Weiner remains an important figure in experimental poetry; straddling the line between New York School poetry and Language writing, but not quite fitting into either category, her clair-style works enact many of the originary impulses that compelled poets in each school, and also reach back further to Black Mountain poets and the Beats. Her clair-style breaks all the established rules, makes new ones, and then breaks those too. "DISTURB LANGUAGE" (172), the words say, and she and they, together, do. Visually, her now fully-developed clair-style is striking. Words fill the page, running, at times, vertically, diagonally, or even in a circle, all the while intersecting with the horizontal text. The traditional bedrock of a linear text that unfolds in time is blasted to bits. The composition by committee that Weiner records results in a page-based poetics, and even in a lengthy, narrative text such as *Big Words*, single pages at times read as free-standing poems. A thought or sentence is hardly ever continued on the subsequent page, and when the documenting of a day spans more than one page, she numbers the pages, labeling each page as a separate part. Weiner sees that for her work, the page as the plane of composition is central, and when she is forced to continue a section or unit on the following page, it frustrates her. She writes, "I wish they'd let me know when theend of the page is coming" (148).

She grows to rely for their literary contribution on the same voices or spirits that trouble her daily life. Early on in the text she explains, "Before you being to type meditate at the typewriter" (29). The words she claims she first willed into existence a few years earlier are now being channeled onto the page as she traces the role they play in her writing as she writes it, effecting a layered, polyvalent text: "retyping these notes, words to be omitted appear in big pink letters HA at the edge of the paper" (47). She readily admits that this production is a psychic partnership in which she plays a supporting role. She writes of the words she is writing,

"Sometimes they appear right on the page and I type them in right where I see them" (108). This phenomenon is a source of wonder for her as she questions, "How does it figure out this spacing in advance" (132). And she explains, "Some of the words appear on different parts of the page and I write around them" (133). The palimpsestic nature of the text is crucial. Her poetry is made out of voices that adhere to the page without regard for linear time. Her contribution to the text works hard to demystify the mystical etiology of her art.

The defining feature of her life and her work is the constant interruptions of the voices and words. The experience of being interrupted by words is replicated for the reader through clair-style. "SEE YOUR INTERFERENCE" (136), the words insist, and she ensures that the reader sees it too. She writes, "'COME' she hears as she puts the August sheet in the typewriter LISTEN she's had interference on typing up August all day. TYPE" (67). She has managed to aestheticize, and more significantly share with her readers, the unfortunate circumstances of her life: "she goes out to eat she has so much interference she hears Richards voice say HELLO very faintly she cries there is no peace INSIDE says her head […] she cannot continue she cannot relax whatever she does is wrong, wrong time wrong place wrong person" (40). The linguistic noise that fills her eyes and her head may be poetically generative, but in her daily life it is disabling: "She is so tired of things interfering, telling her WHAT NOT to do JUSTIFIED some times she does it" (67). She is a woman who has lost control of her life, and she blames the voices; she reveals, "psychic forces make her cry once a day, words not complete BARRY thoughts not complete, book not complete. get dressed. Interruption. She wishes she could burn it she wishes she'd never started to read the voices" (88). The static that has overtaken her consciousness obviously has real ramifications for Weiner's development as a writer and

interferes with her capacity to support herself. She works on applying for a grant, but "everytime she goes to fill in the application words appear on it" (186).

Ironically, and for Weiner annoyingly, the voices even interrupt themselves. Her frustration grows when dealt a message that even uninterrupted would be confusing and unclear. In a half-formed state, these dictates are more than Weiner can handle: "What do I do with instructions that have not finished the spelling? Wait until I see the final letter?" (155). It is particularly troubling when "NO" appears and she is uncertain if she is being told not to do something or if it is short for "NOW," which requires urgency and action. She writes, "I'd like to find the sonof abitch of a spirit who leaves off the lastletter" (140). The aesthetic ramifications of the interrupted interruption are also documented. She counts on the words to take the lead and is thus forced to wonder if she "should continue a sentence theyinterrupt" (112). When the words subvert her already addled expectations, she lashes out, and records her anger: "What FUCK is this word appearing on my page for" (112). And yet, the interruptions themselves also exist in linear time, and the interruption, like the primary text, is thus part of a sequence, unfolding. The interruptions are the metanarrative of a narrative, channeled and indirect, that are also meditations on its creation: intertwined and subject to the planes of time and the page. Ultimately, Weiner defies the commands when she wants, holding onto a shred of authority over the text: "Spirits, fuck 'em, this book will be what it is, LONG" (159).

Secondary to the form, and yet the material from which this form is built, is the book's content. She still struggles with the mundane concerns of what to eat and what to wear and where to live, but overall the reader sees here a more contented Weiner, despite the fact that she is away from the city – either at an ashram for a yoga retreat or at her parents' beach house – and often alone. While she is not happy, because her situation seems to obviate that, she is less

willing to hurt herself, physically or psychologically, and she seems to realize that, try as she may, she cannot will herself into health. She phrases it most succinctly when she says of herself, "She hasn't had any fun since she met those fucking forces" (99).

In some ways, the book is a classic autobiography, and a page labeled "HER BOOK" opens "TELL IT ALL YOUR FAMILY HISTORY" (89). The presence of the voices and words aside, Weiner finds a way to write her life also, capturing the boredom of the prosaic, and much of this writing is repetitive and perhaps unimportant to the reader. But to her, this documentary process is vital, and she goes so far as to claim that "If she doesn't write every day she doesn't know what's happening in her life" (176).

She also incorporates more autobiographical details as if to answer the question that she knows must be occurring to her imagined reader again and again: who is Hannah Weiner and what is happening here? Once again, she allows her reader to see a nakedness, and it is, at times, unnerving. She spends an undue amount of time annoying her younger neighbor, who "she wants to sleep with" (71). We also see that her parents are worried about her, mentally and financially, and step in to help. Weiner also reveals a softness, a tenderness. She often worries about the health and well-being of those around her, and when the words "CAR ACCIDENT" or a reference to death repeatedly appear she is in a panic. She questions frantically, to whom do these words apply: her parents, her Aunt Reka, herself?

She grows desperate to return to the normal, productive life of her days before the words and spirits and voices appeared. And, in fact, Weiner spends a good deal of time ruminating on finances and work as material needs intrude upon her life of contemplation and self-analysis. She writes, "Worried to death about supporting myself, money to live on, being ill and unable to work – should I get welfare, social secutrity? Will the book get published?" (163). Her former

life crops up repeatedly, as Weiner seems intent on reminding her reader and herself of a more normal past life: "10 years ago she was living near but not in the village CIVILIZED doorman EXPENSIVE CLOTHES 9-5 career BIG JOB going to East Hampton in thesummer skiing winters working for the REFORM democratic club" (96). And now, "Life is a drag she'd like to commit suicide" (85) and "oh god she wishes she were dead" (90). The words do nothing to assuage the suffering they cause, and at moments seem to want to inspire her demise; "kill yourself, FAMOUS" (165), they tell her.

However dissatisfied she may be, in her quest to "TELL IT ALL" (87, 117) she makes a bravely feminist move and writes her body and her desire, unapologetically. Her work is groundbreaking in its openness; Weiner admits, "She has made love 5 times in the last year, […] about the same the year before" (36) and "Oh good she wants some sex. 'Lover secure' says her head in white fuzzy script" (66). This lack of concealment also applies to another taboo topic in literature, the menstrual cycle, which the diaristic nature of the text allows her to chart and discuss in passing.

On the same page where she begins her foray into the first person, she writes, "Everytime I sit down at the typewriter I hear WEAR A PETTICOAT" (104). This old-fashioned female undergarment lays against the body, touching the body. It fills the space between the body and the clothes the world sees. But Weiner wears the petticoat on the outside, over her jeans, or "dungarees" as she calls them. The menacing repetition of this word is obviously connected to her former career as a lingerie designer, and Weiner wonders if the repeated appearance of the word is a signal from the forces that she should restart her former career. The fixation on underwear doesn't end there. Weiner's reluctance to wear a bra – itself an act of feminist

defiance at the time – also manifests in the text as she seems to vacillate between a desire for comfort and to be seen as sexually attractive, which in her mind means wearing a bra.

The autobiographical bent allows the reader to see Weiner still struggling to come to terms with her new life as what she insists is a clairvoyant and a mystic. And the reader feels sad that "She has to get used to the fact that she is attached to words and there meanings more than to material possessions of which she nowhas very little left" (165). "reach Samadhi" (199, 200, 203) appears near the end of the book, and this goal of achieving spiritual enlightenment is what Weiner believes will be her reward for supplicating to the voices. And right up until the end of the book, Weiner hardly ever gets the last word. The book ends rather abruptly with the words "BIG EDITOR" and below that in the lower right hand corner at the edge of the page "NO MORE SIS" (204).

The reader is left to address the question of how to read these texts – perhaps particularly the unpublished manuscripts. Are they literary works or diaries or case studies or something else entirely? In documenting her consciousness – contested, multiple, friend and enemy – Weiner creates awareness. Her own unfulfilled wish revealed in *The Fast* to be "full of energy and wide awake" (36), of attaining the "higher mind" (34) she mentions in *Pictures and Early Words*, is what her work offers the reader. As much as this is a private, diaristic project, it is also an artistic product, intended for publication and distribution. Weiner obviously believes that her work has value for others as she plumbs the nature of language and consciousness with an audience in mind. The content of the work is her everyday life, in sometimes devastating detail, but as her life is increasingly disrupted by the words she sees, her writing becomes more than a record. It is only through her efforts to "DISTURB LANGUAGE" (*Big Words* 172) that she writes a space where her words, too, are visible.

Chapter 3

"THE BOOK IS ADVERTISED SHE'S A GENIUS" (*Clairvoyant Journal* 45): Clair-style's Transcendent Interruptions

In *Clairvoyant Journal*, published by Anne Waldman and Lewis Warsh's Angel Hair Books in 1978, we see the culmination of Weiner's ritualizing and systematizing of experience. *Clairvoyant Journal* is the first published text to employ her newly-minted clair-style and its basic tenets of interruption, humor, and the personal, as it chronicles approximately four months in 1974. Her poetic response to the words she sees and the method for documenting these words are connected to the ritual healing displayed most prominently in *The Fast*, but with *Clairvoyant Journal*, she moves "the game" from the kitchen sink to the page. When the task of Weiner's work shifts from recording life to recording words, clair-style is born.

Clairvoyant Journal is Weiner's masterpiece. The only of her journals to actually be titled as such, it is the performance of a fraught and confusing – though generative and enlivening – experience. Weiner's illness had always been productive, as the hundreds of notebooks in which she wrote for decades can testify, and the published version of *Clairvoyant Journal* is itself just a small fraction of the work as it was originally conceived in manuscript form. But with *Clairvoyant Journal*, something new happens in Weiner's work; Weiner does not just write a life, she allows the work and the words to inhabit her life. She reimagines ideas of self and authorship, and creates something radically new enough to convey the experience she terms clairvoyance. Her form is perfected: a final product that is open enough to hold all the voices and words Weiner feels driven to include and also the impossibility of recording them all.

The project of looking for coded messages in the words she sees shifts, and instead, Weiner makes her own code, a poetics that gives her a way to capture her experience.

Out of necessity, Weiner creates a unique, vital method for writing a life, for self-expression. The content of Weiner's work is her everyday life, but as her life is increasingly disrupted by her "clairvoyance," her writing is where she tries to retake control by allowing herself a limited space in which to yield: the page. Her dedication to the rules or instructions or structure of the experience allows her agency. In this, she shares similarities with many of the poets whose work presages her own. Duncan and Olson both understood that poetry is something visited upon the poet from the outside, and Spicer pushes this even further, claiming his poems were received from "outer space." Weiner continues the tradition of poet as both receiver and transmitter[8]. Though the content of the received language may seem random and at times inconsequential, what is not is Weiner's documented response, because it *is* a response. She creates for herself a realm in which to respond – a space where her words, too, are visible. She maps a dialogue with the unknown, unexplained, inaccessible levels of consciousness. The voices cajole and correct her, but through her poetry, Weiner makes it clear to her reader and herself that she does have the power to reply. She too can create words and can respond in a purposeful, intentional way. She can register resistance.

I have been attempting to trace, or create, a trajectory that allows the reader to understand where clair-style comes from and how Weiner came to this radical form for her art. And yet, this trajectory is perhaps more of a loop, as just when Weiner seems to get control over the words, or to at least figure out what they can be used for, she turns back to her artistic roots, not in poetry, but in performance. And even though Weiner seems to privilege the written, visible word, *Clairvoyant Journal* is also – and according to Weiner, primarily – intended for performance.

[8] This is discussed in great detail in Chapter 5.

The performance art scene from which Weiner emerged was an active and vibrant one, constantly redefining itself and challenging the boundaries of the genre and art in general. The happenings and performance events that were taking place around her often presented a somehow hyperbolized or altered version of everyday reality. Committed to breaking the "fourth wall," the lines between performers and audience often blurred in this experiential art informed by improvisation, chance operation, randomness, and the everyday. Growing out of the off-off-Broadway theater scene, the works performed at Lower East Side venues like Café La Mama E.T.C. (experimental theater club), Judson's Poet's Theater, The Living Theater, and, later, The Kitchen – some of which Weiner documents visiting – typically combined various art forms, searching for the meaning of experience while opening the mind to experience. Many of these works were also investigating meaninglessness or "purposelessness," an idea explored by Dick Higgins, the inventor of the happening, which has an earlier echo in John Cage's 1959 "Lecture on Nothing," itself a musical score of sorts. Also present was an emphasis on the body, evident in the 1963 Fluxus Manifesto by George Maciunas, in which he connects the "flow" or "flux" at the core of the movement to bodily discharge. Fluxus' revolutionary social agenda was to "PROMOTE A REVOLUTIONARY FLOOD AND TIDE IN ART, Promote living art, anti-art, promote NON ART REALITY to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals" (Maciunas 425). This sense of egalitarianism was, at least in part, extended to gender, and there were many women active in the larger performance art scene and actively making feminist art. All of these slightly divergent branches of performance art, along with Weiner, share a common forebearer in Antonin Artaud, actor, dramatist, poet, essayist, and author of the hugely influential *The Theater and Its Double*, a key text in the development of theater in the 20th century. Artuad's pronouncement that "One can invent one's language and

make pure language speak with an a-grammatical meaning, but this meaning must be valid in itself, it must come from anguish" (qtd. in Deleuze) resonates eerily with Weiner's own life-writing project, with clair-style.

Technically, the written version of *Clairvoyant Journal* exists in more than one form: the 182-page hand-paginated manuscript and the much shorter, unpaginated published version. Twenty-seven pages into the manuscript, which consists of dated, chronological "journal" entries, is a title page that reads:

> CLAIRVOYANT JOURNAL 1974
> March – June Retreat
> Hannah Weiner

This page marks the beginning of the manuscript of the version of *Clairvoyant Journal* that was intended for publication – and which includes notes and instructions to the publisher that one can see enacted in the published text. Accordingly, this title page is followed by Weiner's classic explanatory note about seeing words. Visually, the major difference between the manuscript version and the printed version is that the words underlined in the manuscript are italicized. Also, as Weiner cut pieces from the manuscript, the text on the following page was moved up to fill the gap, which means that in the published version, some days' entries begin in the middle of the page immediately after the previous entry, rather than each day being confined to a single page as in the manuscript. The published section of the larger, unpublished manuscript ends on page 89, but it continues, or begins again, and page 90 is labeled "page one." What follows is nearly three years of writing as Weiner documents January 1975 to November 2, 1977. She continues documenting her life with the words, and she also at moments reflects on the production of the *Clairvoyant Journal* as published.

But, the Angel Hair edition – funded in part by a NEA grant – was not the first time this text was made public. A piece of the journal was published in 1975 as "Vol. III, No. 6 Diana's Bimonthly: Deduction of the Innocents Pamphlets" from Providence, Rhode Island. This excerpt was called "Sun June 9" and a title page reads: "A Journal Entry: of Hannah Weiner." The first two and a third pages of the pamphlet are not present in either the manuscript or published version of *Clairvoyant Journal*, having been, apparently, edited out of the larger manuscript. But, interestingly, the June 9th entry in the book and manuscript is labeled "June 9, page 2," even though no page one for the entry exists in either the book or manuscript.

Clairvoyant Journal is the first of her texts that Weiner writes about from a retrospective and critical perspective, starting in the 1980s. Weiner offers readers her own rather concise explanation of the development of her poetics in her one-page, third-person autobiography "Silent Teacher" (in *Silent Teacher / Remembered Sequel* (1994)). Of her beginnings in poetry in 1963, she writes:

> she got a free poetry class at the new school and found she couldnt write
> new york school poetry in fact she couldnt write her own words
> at all […]
> the words began to appear
> in 1972 and led to the *clairvoyant journal* a three voice
> performance poetry book about learning explaining instructions
> and the counter voice.

The gulf between the appearance of the words and the production of *Clairvoyant Journal* is more loaded than Weiner's simple "led to" implies. But, perhaps the most startling admission in this poetic statement is the intentionality she reveals in relation to *Clairvoyant Journal*. The sense that a reader of the earlier texts may have of voyeuristically watching a woman's traumatic undoing dissipates because of her willingness to, in part, step out of character as the Hannah

Weiner of the journals in order to speak as herself. Power has shifted. Weiner is not just a scribe, no matter what she claims inside the literary texts. The power of the forces seems to be irresistible, and according to "Hannah," the character in the clair-style texts, the forces that make her write also direct or control her. But, her framing of *Clairvoyant Journal* as a "performance poetry book" complicates this idea of Weiner's enslavement by the words. She genuinely believes that they are there to help her in her quest for transcendence and healing, but though they may be giving the orders, she owns them, and can do with them what she wants. And what she wants is to both make them visible and make them hold other meanings, connecting them to all words and all language. They cannot write themselves for an audience larger than one; the words need her, too.

For Weiner, the effect of her writing on a reader, though hugely important, is still secondary; and, she admits that she uses her writing to try to sort out her visions. What Weiner sees is chaos, not clarity, but the process of documenting the words means the words become hers. She explains in "A Short Interlude to Discuss Voices," a part of her larger statement of poetics "Mostly About the Sentence" (1986):

> I saw words in a wide variety of sizes, script and printed, on my own forehead (the large capital words on my forehead began in a retreat in June 1973 (Unpublished Journals, 1973)), and on other people, forehead included, and on every other imaginable surface or non-surface; the wall, the typewriter, the paper I was typing on, people's clothes, the air, and even words strung out in the air from the light pull (a favorite place), anywhere.
>
> I bought a new electric typewriter in January 74 and said quite clearly, perhaps aloud, to the words (I talked to them as if they were separate from me, as indeed the part of my mind they came from is not known to me) I have this new typewriter and can only type lower case, capitals or underlines (somehow I forgot, ignored or couldn't cope with in the speed I was seeing things, a fourth voice, underlined capitals) so you will have to settle yourself into three different prints. Thereafter I typed the large printed words I saw in CAPITALS, the words that appeared on

> the typewriter or the paper I was typing on in underlines (italics) and wrote the part of the journal that was unseen, my own words, in regular upper and lower case.
>
> It turned out that the regular upper and lower case words described what I was doing, the CAPITALS gave me orders, and the underlines or italics made comments. This is not 100% true, but mostly so.

This statement makes it clear that clair-style is a method of containment and control. The voices are not the only ones giving commands here. However, the phrase "it turned out" signals that in Weiner's world things are not logically ordered or rationally determined, they 'turn out' one way or another, unforeseen and undirected. And of course, the final sentence in this passage – "This is not 100% true, but mostly so" – toys with the reader. It destabilizes her lucid explanation and after such specific information, it is funny. No code can be trusted.

Clairvoyant Journal opens with this explanation:

> I SEE words on my forehead IN THE AIR
> On other people on the typewriter on the
> Page These appear in the text in CAPITALS
> Or *italics*

In *Clairvoyant Journal*, various personalities reveal themselves in their respective font styles, with the lowercase, non-italicized voice of Weiner nearly drowned out in the cacophony of instructions, comments on the text, random interruptions, and obscure personal and literary references. The voices are hostile towards Weiner and her text, and the feeling is mutual. In addition to transcribing the words she sees, where she sees them, and what they look like, she also includes her direct reply to these words, and a diary-like recounting of her everyday life. Visually, clair-style is striking. The text resists the confines of typical copy layout, and words creep up on each other, practically overwriting other words. Some words take on shapes or are

written backwards. Other words are much larger than the rest, giving a sense of insistence, as if yelling at Weiner, demanding she heed their commands. Words fill the page, running at times vertically, diagonally, or even in a circle, all the while intersecting with the horizontal text. The traditional bedrock of a linear text that unfolds in time is blasted to bits. The composition by committee that Weiner records results in a page-based poetics, bound to its typewriter creation, one page at a time, and single pages at times read as free standing poems. At the time she wrote *Clairvoyant Journal*, she was seeing words regularly and using the *Journal* to record and understand her experiences. It was also during this period that she definitively proclaimed herself to be a clairvoyant, insisting that the words she saw were communiqués from "real" voices, and not symptomatic of the schizophrenia with which she had been diagnosed.

In *Clairvoyant Journal*, Weiner continues, and perfects, her project of probing consciousness, giving the reader all the voyeuristic pleasure of a captivity narrative. For the reader, the pleasure stems from the fact that the experience being documented is compelling, unusual, and engaging, as well as worthy of being shared. But also, satisfaction is derived from the knowledge that the writer not only survived the experience, but the very existence of the completed text is proof of triumph. For Weiner, the writer of this narrative, the act of writing allows her to sever herself from the experience she was having, making it something separate from herself. This allows her the power she needs to deal with the words on her terms. They become useful for Weiner: the material of her poetry and the means for her spiritual growth.

Most pages in *Clairvoyant Journal* are densely layered with references, details of daily life, random instructions, reflections on its own production, and deep poetic insights. It amounts to a rich whole, as we learn about her life and her friends and the things they do. The Hannah Weiner the reader sees developed here is a changed woman. She casts aside the sexless shut-in

presented in the previous books. This new, improved Weiner arises as confident, connected, cool. The life she shows us is no longer that of a sad woman overwhelmed by her own mind. She now is part of something that wound up being incredibly important for American art. Her closest friends were also creating works of art that pushed boundaries and challenged assumptions about aesthetics. Weiner is successful in creating a better self – at least on the page.

The most distinguishing trait of her poetics is the interruption. This functions on many levels. In the simplest sense, the lines of the texts are almost never complete: sentences break off abruptly, as do words. The voices compete for attention, for transcription, and the result is cacophony and confusion. But this practice is itself an interruption of the poetic tradition and of the conventions of printing. The social component to this tactic becomes clear as her recording approaches a conversation or a polylogue between the words and Weiner, and between Weiner and the reader. The interruptions are motivated by Weiner's ideas of readerly reception: she gives it to us as it is given to her, creating a corollary, mimetic poetics. Clair-style's core is honesty; Weiner's truth is translated into poetry. And, more importantly, it is translated in a way that gives her audience access to her experience. We read as Weiner reads, we see what she sees because she writes. But we also see more, because the reader sees both sides of each interruption rather than being immersed in the experience of being interrupted. For Weiner, the interruption is not a choice, but a reality of her existence and therefore her poetry. Weiner retrospectively explains:

> The sentence is always interrupted. Mind 1 that speaks out loud, or writes, is interrupted by mind 2 that is simultaneously preparing the next sentence or answering a question. Therefore the correct form to represent both minds or the complete mind, is an interrupted form. It takes two or three seconds for the thought to form into a sentence, meanwhile another one is being spoken-written. ("Mostly" 128)

Her life is interrupted by the appearance of the visions, as is made painfully evident to the reader of *The Fast*. The words are interpolated into her sightline, interrupting her visual reality and everyday life, adding irony to her claim of clairvoyance or "clear vision."

The pieces only make sense in context, and sometimes not even then. Clair-style is a net woven of words, and its value and strength is in its completeness. The "TELL IT ALL" (*Big Words* 87, 117) of the earlier journal is still in play. In the midst of an entry that is a flurry of words in caps and italics, Weiner manages to get a single word of her own onto the page: "unreadable" (36). "[C]onfusion as usual" (51) is the mode as these slippages intensify, and by the middle of *Clairvoyant Journal*, "I" has become "you" and faces appear superimposed on those of others and "you," Weiner. She wonders aloud in a laden moment, "who is I, you, me *the pronouns*" (42).

Clairvoyant Journal is a dense and difficult text that is hard to describe or speak of in the abstract because of its unique visual appearance. The first page of the book in its entirety can serve as a case study for the book as a whole:

2/28

GO FOR A SAMADHI
feel different

1st CHAKRA

BEGIN
BEGIN WITH ME

Hooray GET OUT is a JOE musical not an order COME SOON NO I PASS NO pass the *paper* wine YOU HAVE ORDERS *fix the page* WRONG BAR *Too late u* met Michael at the Tin Palace PARTY free pass OMIT to La Mama *good night Bernadette* BEGIN Going backwards: QUARTER TO TEN: see GO OUT WHERE YOU TRY SOBOSSEKS FIRST. *agent London* ACTION. *dont hesitate* MISS TIN PALACE SEE MICHAEL GO WORDS He knows an agent WOW*get linoleum* TALK TO MARJORIE see Joe, hello to Bob *conscious person* at NO
NOW SINGLE DONUTS eat the glazing NO DOUBLEDAY POPULAR SO ELSE WOW*ie* DRUNK *leave more space dont underline that's an order* SO WHAT

serious now dont hesitate tonight followed *all wrong go to bed no periods orders go to bed* glad get out is *New York dont repeat 3 months dont sit down dont perspire dont do it leave get it get it* at door noney *mother's word be careful drunk also* HERE where? *bed alright dont perspire* hear shout NO *dont explain* GO TOMORROW *Explain the interference* it stops you from *bed noney* doing what the other words tell you *omit* DONT GO BE A FOOL It's 7 1ST CHAKRA see clock DONT EXPLAIN THE CHAKRAS NOW RHYS KNOWS FOUR GO TO BERNADETTE'S it's 7 WOW BEGIN Going to Phil Glass concert POPULAR WIFE GO TOMORROW Tomorrow is Joe's musical and a party DONT GO BOTH This is silly 2 MOS *dont comment yourself* SO HUMBLE ENOUGH Rosemary is back in town Read THINK Einstein's definition of thinking *Bernadette* doing pre thought thinking *No more periods* SO AM I says the refrigerator in the pink bulb GET OUT Change the bulb Bernadette's MAYER EXPERIMENTS this book is mind controlled the WALK *Bernadette* language *ex communicate her words so through* it goes through The way I QUOTE to destroy a word is to change its *litters too heavy* Systematically derange the SIS I MUST DO IT *cut it short* SLOW I QUOTE Pick any word at random let mind play around until ideas pass try this *with so* SO WITH RHYS it's CHARMING'S word He *behave through yourself* SAW ME YOUR NOVEL CUT IT SHORT PLEASE PASS THE PAGE

The start of this new journal represents a new beginning for Weiner's project and her life. All of the major elements of clair-style are evident on this very first page. The page is an object. The code of the words is a visual ordering system devised just for the readers – Weiner included – to impose order where there is none. The total integration of the voices means total interruption. What winds up on the page is controlled chaos. The words have become no less real, but they have also become a device or rhetoric. The words are the form, but are also pure content. She records the thinking mind – under duress. The book begins, as usual, with a date: "2/28." And immediately, the reader is thrust right into the middle of Weiner's day, or really, her life. "GO FOR A SAMADHI / *feel different*" serves as a heading for the page, but speaks to the entire point of the text. Weiner is still on a quest as she writes this book. Samadhi, which can be translated as "superconscious perception," is the last step on the "Eightfold Path of Yoga, which leads one to the final goal of Kaivalya (Absoluteness), a term which might be more comprehensibly put as 'realization of the Truth beyond all intellectual apprehension'" (Yogananda). The causal, conversational tone to the directive contrasts with the directive itself. One cannot simply reach Samadhi because one is told to, and since it is a state of existence, there is no such thing as "a" Samadhi. What is clear is that Weiner's writing – and life – is goal directed, and that goal remains in the realm of the spiritual understanding and exploration of consciousness itself. The voices seem to be as serious about giving instructions through platitudes as Weiner is in listening to them. To "*feel different*" has been Weiner's desire since she began her journaling project. The "1st Chakra," also called the "root Chakra," is thought to be connected to "instinct, security, survival and also to basic human potentiality" ("Chakra"), but, located between the genitals and the anus, it is also connected to sexuality. The insistence on a new start is echoed in the "BEGIN / BEGIN WITH ME" that follows and which is also part

of this introduction to the text. The appearance of the first pronoun – "ME" – actually flags the lack of discrete, distinct personhood. There no simple way to understand who this "me" is in the text. The reader and Weiner must simply relent to the voices and begin with an unnamed, unknown "ME." To read the book, one follows the same directions as Weiner. "*Hooray*" is a fitting way to mark the true start of the *Journal* because what follows is manic and frenetic, though perhaps not quite a celebration. This first solid block of text establishes the rules for reading and sets expectations. Weiner herself has very little to say, and her first words recorded are an interrupted attempt to explain the nature of one of the earliest decrees. Thus, it is explained that "GET OUT is a JOE musical not an order." At first, this assertion reads like a victim's tragic attempt to defend the voices; if it is "not an order," then Weiner is not being ordered around by the voices. But really, Weiner's clarification is for the sake of authenticity and directness. She seems slavishly bound to accuracy in her recording. The second line of the section is nothing if not an establishment of who is in control. Weiner's request for wine is interrupted by the word "*paper*" because the voices have work for her to do. Her "ORDERS" are to "*fix the page*" but as the book progresses the list of orders grows. The brilliance of clair-style is also manifest here in this opening section: Weiner will listen to the orders and document the voices, *but* she will also document her rich, active, exciting life outside of the mind. Clair-style is the means through which she can do both. It marks an erasure between the inside life and the outside life and between public and private. It is her way of getting it all in, and of documenting her experience of consciousness. Weiner's life in New York is one of endless stimulation, and, once again, this opening is emblematic of the rest because of the lifestyle that is revealed.

The specificity with which she records is vital to the development of her autobiography as a record not of her past, but her present. Weiner serves as audience to the avant-garde New York art scene just as she serves as audience to the words. And, by interweaving the two terrains in her *Journal*, she creates an equivalency. They are all to be consumed and incorporated into her own project. Every aspect of her life is written and everything she sees or hears belongs to her. Thus, in this first section of the first page alone, we are told of two performances, one by Phillip Glass and one by Joe; three performance spaces, La Mama, Tin Palace, and Sobosseks; and a popular publishing company, Doubleday. The pages of *Clairvoyant Journal* are also filled with names, as Weiner seems desperate to name everyone she meets and everywhere she goes. Everyone from actual friends (most prominently Bernadette Mayer, Rhys Chatham, Phil Niblock, and Charlemagne Palestine, all of whom were and are experimental artists) – sometimes just acknowledged with a first name – to Anais Nin become characters in her books and actors in her life. This equivalency is possible because on the page it is all just words. Weiner lets her reader know that the hermitage period of *The Fast* is over and rather than allowing her life to be stymied by the existence of the words, they have become a part of her life. And by capturing her experience of the time on the page, she captures the time.[9]

Weiner tells the reader early on "this book is mind controlled" (1). It is tempting to believe that the book, and, one can extrapolate, Weiner's life, is out of control. But, this opening page also gives the reader the first of many clues that Weiner knows exactly what she must do. Weiner is told "*don't comment yourself*," but the assertion that "this book is mind controlled" is in her voice and is immediately preceded by "Bernadette's MAYER EXPERIMENTS." Weiner rejects naïve victimhood; she situates herself as part of a larger current project of poetic

[9] Joan Retallack asserts in "The Poethical Wager" that poetry written poethically is "fully engaged with the forms of life that created its contemporary context—the sciences, the arts, the politics, the sounds and textures of everyday life, the urgent questions and disruptions of the times" (297).

experimentation and inquiry. Mayer's list is well known in the world of poetry to this day, and remains a valuable means to teach about experimental poetry. And by locating herself inside this experimental moment Weiner reclaims her voice even as she purposefully subverts it. By teasing apart the voices and reading only Weiner's, with some of the interruptions she permits, her poetics is revealed: "The way I QUOTE to destroy a word is to change its […] Systematically derange the […] I QUOTE Pick any word at random let mind play around until ideas pass try this." The first two sentences here are incomplete. Weiner holds back the key to the linguistic 'destruction' or 'derangement' she claims to have mastered, and this lack of completion seems to be the very point. What is emphasized is what is repeated: "I QUOTE." In Weiner's formulation this is meant literally and figuratively. Her text is teeming with the voices of others – the writer's most important role is as reader. Bernadette can "*ex communicate her words*" because she frees them from their work of communicating (as seen in the list of experiments), but Hannah can do it because she quotes. The words cannot be subject to their referent or to "ideas"; instead, they interact with the "mind" and exist as independent entities. For Weiner, the mind is not an organ that holds accessible thoughts and ideas – it is something more diffuse and mysterious than that. It is (possibly, as far as she knows) the source of the words she sees and it is also that which will lead her to Samadhi. Getting beyond the mind means getting inside it.

Weiner's text records the process of learning how to unlearn the worldly and to move beyond it, while living firmly in the world of New York's art scene. On this first page Weiner writes, "Read THINK Einstein's definition of thinking." Einstein's ideas about consciousness find a literal parallel in Weiner's experiences:

> A human being is a part of a whole, called by us the "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and

> feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

The "pass" of the thought experiment returns in the last words of the page: "YOUR NOVEL CUT IT SHORT PLEASE PASS THE PAGE." This voice is urgent. The voices demand speed and clair-style is built to deliver that, in order to reflect the rapidity of thought and the immediacy of the voices in her life. But, "PASS THE PAGE" is not just an order to end the page, but also to move beyond it, just as the voices themselves had. And again, it is a reminder of the earlier "free pass" and "pass the *paper* wine."

These major themes established in the first page are spun out through the rest of the text, as she interlaces all the strands of her life on the page. Thus, as the book continues we learn more about her life at the time she is writing. And while it has been well established that the words comment on elements of her life and give instructions, especially regarding the development of her poetics, the words also contribute to Weiner's autobiography. She allows them to reveal private things about her to the reader: "*you slept with Rhys no orgasm no milk do the laundry one more time*" (27). They are endlessly giving unasked-for romantic advice regarding her multiple lovers. By 'telling all' through the voices and her own, the reader gets a more complete image of her life. Charles Bernstein lauds Weiner as a "medium" of the everyday: "One of Hannah's most enduring achievements as a writer was her unflinching, indeed often hilarious, inclusion, and, indeed, too minutely personal, even for the advocates of the personal in writing" (Poetry Project *Newsletter,* 1997). And what is obvious in *Clairvoyant Journal* is that Weiner is at a productive and relatively happy period in her life. After

complaining for hundreds of pages about not having a lover or a companion, now she is sexually active with more than one man. Her at times trying relationship with Rhys Chatham *is* a romantic relationship. Rhys' name appears everywhere in the book as their relationship is a preoccupation for Weiner. But what she reveals is a deep connection that becomes part of the psychic quest of her writing: "Rhys saw green light on your March ms you see blue on April" (26). The voices themselves seem committed to their relationship, and after Weiner criticizes Rhys' bad behavior, saying, "He acted like a typical male chauvinist *pigstyl*," the voices intervene in an attempt to mediate: "SORRY ABOUT THIS PAGE RHYS" (35).

Every aspect of Weiner's life is invaded by the voices, and the content of the text cannot be unlocked from the form. Weiner expounds, "Many things happen at once, peculiar to journal form, to force interruptions. My writing about and below the line incorporates some of this simultaneity. Linear writing must leave out many simultaneous thoughts and events. I am trying to show the mind" ("Mostly" 129). As her text is interrupted, so too is her life, and readers are witness to her writing of this trouble. The voices feel free to interrupt Weiner's daily life – "There's so much interference while I wash dishes" (5) – but to them nothing is uninterruptable – "interference when we were about to fuck" (31).

On a very basic, physical level, the interruptions, the voices, animate Weiner: "you wish they'd let you sit still at a concert" (42). But Weiner still feels manipulated by the words. She complains that "The words tell you to do things you don't feel certain about doing" (54). This hearkens back to earlier texts in which she describes self-injury prodded by the voices. Her casual references to being "crazy" belie more sincere references to her psychological state: "You're getting depressed they're playing with you you don't like it FUCK YOU" (36). It is rare for Weiner to reveal the struggle going on inside her head that does not often project itself

onto the pages of the *Journal*. The voices, as instructive as she may believe them to be, sometimes attempt to disturb in ways other than visually. She explains, "you are trying to overcome emotions even when it says GET ANGRY MAKE IT CLEAR and you're not angry sometimes you get *terrible* you GET ANGRY because it's *reminding* you" (53).

The voices, though determined to help Weiner get it right, don't stop their interruptions even as she does as they ask:

> Rhys *obey* red light GO SOON following during Phil's shooting: How can I describe Charlemagne anything when all these interruptions *money* keep *arriving* BIG YOU *no children* SEE AROUND ME LOOK AT PHIL it's the interference *feel the negative* FILM (31)

Even her complaints about the interruptions are subject to interjections, and here, not just from the voices. "Charlemagne" – the composer Charlemagne Palestine, with whom she was friends – comes out of nowhere and is immediately substituted for "anything." The words don't just appear, they "arrive," which implies both an originary location and a destination – Weiner's field of view. This complaint itself is a repetition of a line first included much earlier in the book: "How can I describe anything when all these interruptions keep *arriving* and then tell me I dont describe it well" (6). Here, without Weiner's own interjection, these interruptions both work their way into the text, and, really, define it, but also prevent its completion.

That the writing of this book is a group effort is continually foregrounded because of the typographical system of capitals and italics, but the metatext included here reveals much about Weiner's writing as a purposeful project. Not long after citing Mayer's experiments, she writes pointedly about words in general, as opposed to the words she sees: "*eliminate the message* GOOD WORK *talk about* word as message, information story […] word as order *just*

command unit of speech Word as instruction" (2). She wants to reduce words to an indivisible, elemental state. And yet her goal seems more complicated than just that. The voices are telling her to strip language of its meaning ("*eliminate the message*"), but "the word" remains somehow pure or inviolable, and, most importantly, effective, and the only way that Weiner can convey to the reader the idea stated here – that *because* words contain messages they are simply ("*just*") instructions, abstracted didacticism – is to "*talk about*" it. It is this very struggle to explain words through words that the voices are there to help with. Clair-style is not so much about the death of the author, but the birth of many. Sparing Weiner the horror of having to generate poetry from nothing, something she seems uninterested in doing, the forces are willing to do most of the writing. Weiner's mind is tapped into a pool of aggregated knowledge, drops of which are made visible to her, and which she writes. Quoting Mayer's list again she writes, "Experiment with plagiarism in any form that occurs to […] Attempt to eliminate all connotation" (2). Weiner grows to embrace her vessel status because it is necessary and useful. In "Mostly About the Sentence," she writes:

> in the Clairvoyant Journal the person writing is bossed around by the voices, and gives up her autonomy to the other parts of herself. A relinquishing of constant conscious control to let the other part of the mind dominate. The ego belongs to the conscious part, the writer's voice, and often, or nearly always, I reacted with some ego controlled emotion such as anger or impatience or amusement to the seen words or voices. I gave up my authority to them, indeed the speed at which the words appeared would not allow for a time of complete ego action or thought. (131)

The total integration of the voices means total interruption.

The words themselves are subject to material conditions that affect their appearance and thus their existence: "since Rinpoche came in town the words do a up and over and down" (8). They are also subject to the complications of translation, as it is only through their transcription

that they become real or visible (to anyone other than Weiner), and Weiner complains, "It says not to underline as you retype this but some words light up so how to show it?" (49) and "the spacing on the typewriter *big improvement shit* isn't working" (12).

She writes about her life and creates a text that also lives: "*realize write something you are documenting it*" (30). More than simply documenting, her consciousness of doing so makes it real, and "*realize*" becomes multiple. Heeding the instructions means she is not passive, she is subject, and when she tells us that the words tell her "DONT TALK YOU SEE WORDS" (3), she accepts her role. Seeing is doing; she serves as a gatekeeper of a world that for others is outside of consciousness.

Her stated desire to disappear enough to allow for a direct contact between the words she sees and the words on the page is an illusion, just as the transparency of words is an illusion. This parallel is productive poetically: the clunky ineffective beauty of language projects itself onto Weiner's body. If she got it right and invisibly followed the instructions and documented the words, there would be no text, because the heart of *Clairvoyant Journal* is the documenting of the impossibility of invisibility. Weiner claims to be following orders that are themselves fixated on authenticity; the words want her to get it right and quote them correctly without revealing too much of herself, which, of course, is just as inevitably a failure as words are. The voices reprimand her and insist that she "*just retype this original page*" (5) and "*write much simpler*" (16) and "CLOSE THIS SPACE" (27), all of which amounts to refraining from actual authorship.

This text cannot be crafted, but written. And, as the recording of consciousness is the recording of time (as experienced), Weiner urgently needs to "MAKE IT CORRECT TOO MANY STOPS THE ENERGY INCREASES" (17). She must get it right the first time, as the

words are translated from air to page, and she receives the warnings, "DONT MAKE ANY MORE CORRECTIONS" (28) and "*dont edit it spoils the sequence*" (31). Weiner, and the reader, cannot forget that the *Journal* is a product of dictation. Editing disturbs the immediacy of the communiqué and risks mistranslating the message. It endangers the scribe: "You pick up the Oct ms hear Jim's voice BE CAREFUL a shout you put it back, SLEEPY lie down, take Oct in the bedroom, DON EDIT […] Comments as you read Oct you dont dare edit it" (34). Weiner is the reader of the original words, and when she reads the manuscripts in which she recorded these words, she sees more words, and documents them as she documents her reading of the manuscript. Weiner's writing is reading, then translating. And her writing is her life.

The eternal present that is the experience of being alive is the tense of the text. Since the words are messages from spirits and not from static referents, the moment of their transcription is always the present tense. She creates her own Steinian continuous present. Depicted as instructions, the reader is made aware of this: "writes in the present tense see PRESENT say SEE not saw, *eliminates periods ol stupid girl*" (7). This insistence on the present tense forces the text to recreate a present, which allows the words presence and permanence. The use of the present tense also signals that for Weiner, as a scribe of her own consciousness, the words are her present. The fleeting, momentary nature of the words Weiner sees requires a present tense translation because they are words in air, not yet a text. They are immediacy.

The italicized end of the above quotation – "*eliminates periods ol stupid girl*" – is one example of many of Weiner being insulted, however affectionately, by the voices, and also of their repetition of the dictate to 'eliminate periods.' To the voices, the full stop would mark the end of a present they want perpetually extended in Weiner's writings. The punctuation mark effects time in words – it signals the end, which makes what was present, past. One *Journal*

entry begins, "*you have your periods*," only to end, "*nos periods stupid*" (47). A menstrual period, a set duration of time, and the punctuation mark can all, at various moments, be read in her persistent use of the word.

The mechanics of writing often figures in the metatext. She also comes back again and again to another piece of punctuation that is also a homonym: the apostrophe. The same page on which she writes, "OMIT APOSTROPHE SACRIFICE […] omit apostrophe, Elaines," ends with large letters spelling out: "I SEE A BIG APOSTROPHE" (7). Her troubling of the use of apostrophes is tied to her pronoun problems: the possessive is expendable because possession itself is a ruse. The traditional poetic apostrophe is reversed and literalized here as Weiner is addressed – in words, verse, really – by an unseen addressee. The words draw the attention of the reader to the page, the surface of the page, and the actual words themselves by ending pages with statements that include "DONT FINISH THIS SENTENCE STRUCTURE" (3), "CUT THE PAGE SHORT" (4), "SORRY ABOUT THIS PAGE STUPID" (5), and "I DONST FINISH THIS PAGE" (36). Coming at the end of pages, these phrases are liminal in more than one sense. They trace a place between the end of the action of one page and the start of the next, and another between Weiner and her words and words and their referent.

And again, as subject, Weiner is subject to time; thus, the all caps assertion, "THURS CHANGES IT CHANGES YOUR VOCAB YOU ARE STILL OMITTED" (50), makes absolute sense. Weiner's 'vocabulary' is not just external and received (as usual) but it is her life. And her life as an imperfect scribe means that although she may be the subject of the words (literally, as in the part of speech), she, ideally for the words, has no subjectivity. But her revenant remains: thus, she is "OMITTED," but not absent.

Her major flaw as a scribe is her voice, which is everywhere, and which, when too muffled for too long, complains, "it's doing all the writing," only to be answered, "YOU SHOULD COMMENT" (22). The voices offer her a diluted version of agency – reduced to a commenter in her own book, she writes, "Jesus Christ all these words are underlinings UNDERLINE YOUR OWN THATS THE ANSWER no more words" (19). Again, the voices give her permission to write, but underlining her own words would mean assigning them to the spirits, so even her words would belong to them. She recognizes that there is only one way for her to really write her own book and that is if there were "no more words," which would of course make the writing of any book impossible. This issue of ownership is complicated by the sentence, "THIS IS MY POEM" (56), which has the rare privilege of being alone on a line, interference-free.

Even though the voices acknowledge, "YOU DON'T LIKE THE BOTTOM OF THIS PAGE" (22), it gets published anyway because what Weiner 'likes' hardly matters. However, it is also true that by registering the voices' acknowledgment of her own displeasure, she reveals her latent authority. Ever willing to break her own rules, early in the book Weiner reveals that "These words in lower case that don't mean anything are theirs" (4). Other voices speak through the lowercase words that are Weiner's only connection to the reader, and to a world that hardly seems to extend beyond the text. But, this claim can also be read as a protective excuse: if the words Weiner writes that are not simply transcriptions do not successfully convey information – function as words – then they must not be hers. In this arrangement, Weiner can never write nonsense, because if nonsense creeps into the text, she is not the author.

For Weiner, the production of the text – and the experience it records – is all still leading somewhere, and although she commits to scribing, she cannot give up her need to read the words as well, ever searching for latent meaning:

and *wear dungarees* *oh* *h* *a* *n* *n* *a* *h* these words appear BIG RHYS OPERA that's Mike *not alright June* everything is a clue or an order or writing *not so take a walk Bernadette* where's the *clues* The underlines and caps I see HEAL ME *oversensitive* You I hear this but usually *ugly see Joan* stomach problem YOU'LL HIT ME sure NEGATIVE was glad to find *not in the winter be grateful* that was an ESP term your name SO WHAT has been appearing around here a lot so it's in this book JUNIOR some publisher is looking at it now *big question stop typing* BIG (29)

She tries to please the voices by following their confusing 'orders,' and in return she gets 'clues' to the secrets of the metaphysical world, to healing. Thus, words she sees remain her 'clues' and 'orders.' And perhaps most keenly for her, they are also 'writing'; she informs the reader, "SO WHAT has been appearing around here a lot so it's in this book." The formula is that simple for the writing, while she continually has cause to lament that the clues and orders are too obtuse and opaque to be truly useful. And yet, Weiner trusts the words more than ever, and can now unwaveringly state, "The underlines and caps I see HEAL ME," and what could have once been read as a plea is presented as fact.

The words she sees "heal" her because she accepts them as legible communiqués:

was in the hotel for Sunday services *see the hospital* *he tried twice* *Bowery* *Phil Niblock* TELL YOU WHY *phone off the hook* *penis deficiency* *petty* *novel* *one more week* *let it happens read it write* *let it ring* *Charlestein* *written* *get instructions* *degraded him* also *Charlatan* *who* *see the little* BIG WHO IN *your money* (16)

Here, "let it happens read it write" is central to Weiner's poetics. The "let it happens" and the "get instructions" once again speak to the authorial emptying at the core of her project: Weiner's work is to do what the forces tell her. The transformation of 'read it right' to "read it write" displays a typically dense moment of layered meanings in the Weiner iconography; getting it right, mastering the code, is a matter of conflating reading and writing. Her abrogation of self is the invalidating of the unitary self as a literary source, but it is also premised on the remainder of a vessel or scribe self that, rather than abased, is elevated.

She revisits this idea later in the book:

DUMB 5 minutes DONT DUMB YOU CAN OBEY ORDERS
OUT OF ORDER DO SOME HOME
DO SOME HOMEWORK YOU CAN STOP SUFFERING YOU SET THE
TABLE YOU CAN SEE BELIEVE IT an image of Eduardo $^{T}W_{I}$ Costa TWICE
you hear his voice YOU COULD LAUGH SECOND CHOICE $^{I}C_{E}$ You don't
know what that means You saw an image of Eduardo at last year's retreat is that
OK *good girl* The electric power's JUICE on your *electric* FANTASTIC hear
more. donst YOU ARE WRITING HEAR TELEVISION YOU HEAR
be periods
BETTER DESIRE TO BE BOUND. You or the book? *oh hannah not enough*
TRANSCRIBE YOU HAVE A DESIRE An image of UPSTART A DISCIPLE
(48)

The stacking of "OBEY ORDERS" and "OUT OF ORDER" reinforces the twice repeated "DUMB." Weiner is "dumb," mute, but never completely, and never enough. Despite the promise that she can "STOP SUFFERING" if she could just "BELIEVE" that she "CAN SEE" and her half-joking mention of her "DESIRE TO BE BOUND," she cannot be a pure "DISCIPLE" but an "UPSTART" because of her persistent need to "know what that means."

If she empties herself for the words, they will fill her with something better, thus the promise that she "CAN TRANSCEND THIS STUPID bad girl REALITY":

BIG EMOTIONS BIG FOOL you're an important WOW someone THING is trying give up SLEEP SYMPATHY HE APPROVES happiness you have enough money in purse PROVI dence YOU CAN TRANSCEND THIS STUPID bad girl REALITY WALK TWO DAYS DONT LEAVE TELL THE VERY (48)

The lowercase words in this excerpt, 'you're an important someone is trying give up happiness,' combined with the sequential appearance of "BIG EMOTIONS BIG FOOL," reveal the evolution of Weiner's poetics. Being "important" requires sloughing off all human emotions, which are not productive, but the purview of 'big fools.' For Weiner, transcendence requires absolute subversion of herself to the experience of seeing words, allowing "normal," ego-driven, emotional life to be consumed by her own consumption and transcription of the words. Her work is to negotiate her relationship to the reception of words.

Eventually, the voices are satisfied with her technique, and so compliments directed at the text are incorporated into the text: "HANNAH THIS IS THE BEST PAGE HANNAH THIS IS MAY" (30). Weiner receives permission to publish:

> Last Wednesday you woke to *you may marry* which RANDOM made you think house might consider your book READ JULY no in May and August it said once with Leonard and once with David MARRY RANDOM HOUSE […] the words were popping all over have they anything to say: WRITE SIT DOWN You read yesterday it says NOT CONSCIOUS EVERY DAY […] You read July see PERMISSION GRANTED and over that YOU CAN PUBLISH IT. (40)

By the end, both the words and Weiner realize that together they've succeeded poetically: "you read April MAKE NOTES it's pretty funny you think you're a genius WE ALL ARE" (35).

The mediations on the text embedded within it, when unraveled, offer valuable insights into Weiner's theories of authorship:

you are at night you're beautiful MORE where ULLMAN *told you* he doesn't know of anyone else who sees GROUP words *telepathic transference* YOU'RE NOT BELIEVABLE *you're different* HAVE COURAGE WOW GOOD GIRL YOUR FAMILY UNTIL HEAVY DEPT YOUR AUNT good grief FAMOUS *you're important* GO TO SLEEP YOU spoke WRITE A NOVEL ok ok ok this like the pants at countdown if you dont WRITE *no peace* a voice from the window reminds you of what you want to A NOVEL say BELIEVE so you guess *you're the only one* HOW LONELY Rhys PLEASE GO ON YOU *make an application* FEEL LIKE ACID NO MORE SLEEP SMOKE A CIGARETTE YOU'RE JUST A POET YOUR HEADACHE GOES BIG MYSTERY NOVEL How can you write something fake a novel? *be careful* WHat happened to me? JUST A NORMAL GENIUS DONT FORGET IT you're GAY YOU'RE A RESTAURANT THE CIGARETTE BRINGS YOU DOWN LOTS OF FLOWERS CAULIFLOWER DONT FORGET WACO There's a new voice thank ____ tonight it says TAKE OUT THE ____ and you take out that phrase TWO FIFTY appears over the space BAR CAREFUL **IDIOT**

(39)

Hannah Weiner is special because she sees words; she is the "only one" who sees words, but the word most prominent in this selection is the last: "IDIOT." In *Clairvoyant Journal*, Weiner's role as "idiot" stems from her position of ignorance; she is "dumb" (48) and endlessly manipulated and used by the forces. But she also hints that this "only" though "LONELY" is also "GENIUS." Weiner 'writes a novel' because she creates a new genre that is completely original and utterly revolutionary.

And, the most radical aspect of all – revealed in the above excerpt – is there interjecting itself between the two words that create the core of Weiner's touchstone: Weiner "sees GROUP words." 'Seeing words' is how she defines her experience with words in words, offering the most simplistic of explanations, ignoring the complicated questions of source and purpose that become the content for these early journals. Alone, she may be "JUST A POET," but with the "GROUP" she transforms into "A SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY hear GENIUS GET DIRECTED" (48).

The same thing that she believes gives her power – access to the words – also amounts to an endless process of transcending the self but only by relinquishing the self. The words urge Weiner to give in and allow them to take control of all the poetry writing, and they promise spoils:

> KOL NIDRE GEMINIS *very important give up* PUJA MY KINGDOM THE CITY COME TOLD YOU write too much Swamiji's voice WEIRD SADHANAS HIS MASTER TOLD HIM TO *read* HARI *Rhys* KRISHNA GO TO THE BATH- ROOM *have a simple good appetite* GO TO FAST *you careful* TASTE YOU PRACTICE MISS PRONOUNS—TELEPATHY YOUR MIND PUJA CEREMONY *you're* BEAUTIFUL COMFORTABLE WRITE YOU HAVE *crazy girl* SIMPLE ORDERS *no more Indian* he lights FIRE ENERGY the incense RHYS *turn your back* GET HIGHER Swamiji (hear) his image DONT KID YOURSELF appears on a TOO LATE EMANATE person to your right YOU DIDN'T WRITE ENOUGH RHYS (57)

The stacking of "*crazy girl*" on top of "WRITE YOU HAVE SIMPLE ORDERS" crystallizes the problem for Weiner. Discord exists between the world of the words and the world of the self. The words tell her that she has "SIMPLE ORDERS," but their directives either are making her a "*crazy girl*" or exist because she already was one. The same voices that insist on her special abilities also work to convince her of her lack of any specialness, so she will freely abandon herself to the words and serve them. They have to convince her that they are worth the sacrifice and that what she must give up is not valuable. She feels manipulated, broken down by the forces that cannot exist without her, forces which are all too aware of their dependence. The relationship she so needs to read as symbiotic veers into the parasitic. The words tantalize her: "IT COULD WRITE YOU COULD BE DISTINGUISHED HAPPY WRITE POEMS" (56). If she lets "IT" write, the "YOU" can take the credit and find literary success. But, only if it is the "IT" and not the "YOU" who writes.

While in some ways it appears that aesthetic or poetic goals have overshadowed Weiner's previous spiritual quest, in reality, the successful development of clair-style, her accomplishment as a writer in finding a way to document her life and experience, allows her to accept her situation, which is reflected in the words she sees. Weiner's spiritual quest evolves in tandem with her poetics. The very first words in the book are "GO FOR A SAMADHI / *feel different.*" By the end of the *Journal*, Weiner receives the message, "YOU COME HOME YOUR OBEDIENCE TRIALS ARE OV.R. no TRIALS YOU ARE AN OBEDIENT GIRL" (44).

The preoccupation with consciousness and its documentation remains: "YOUR LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS says tip of boot" (22) and "CONSCIOUS LEVEL says room at head level under pull light" (45) are just two passing mentions of consciousness, and both render consciousness seeable and accessible as it becomes intertwined with the mundane. The unexplicated inclusion of the word "consciousness" speaks to its essential nature: it is just there, everywhere, all the time. But the concretizing of this concept is only part of the agenda of the project. Assertions including "THE MIND IS TRANSPARANT" (50) and "YOUR MIND IS OPEN" (53) move into a more metaphorical realm. While the 'transparence' and 'openness' of Weiner's mind is in a sense literal, as she divests herself of her self in order to "read it write" (16), these are also quite standard metaphors for transcendence. And thus, as the book nears the end, the obsessive fixation on a goal is intensified: "YOU ARE LIBERATED appears […] YOU BEGIN TO FOCUS and everything turns gold YOU ARE CONTENT NOT A FUNNY PAGE" (55). She becomes "content": satisfied, contained (contents), but also the thing itself, substance.

For Weiner, the book is a literary, and therefore spiritual, success: "YOU REACH SAMADHI YOU HAVE A BIG ANNOUNCEMENT YOU *hear* ONE FEEL DIFFERENT

CONSCIOUS TELE-phone. That's a *think about it*" (50). The goal stated at the start of the book is reached. She 'feels different' because she has achieved enlightenment. "SAMADHI" and "ANNOUNCEMENT" are connected and bracketed by "YOU," Weiner. For her, this new state of consciousness is coextensive with its "BIG ANNOUNCEMENT," which is to say, its writing. The very last word in *Clairvoyant Journal* is "COMPLETE," and indeed Weiner has not just finished but successfully completed her project. In a move that somehow eerily and awkwardly captures the experience of reading *Clairvoyant Journal*, Weiner writes, "POETRY: YOU CAN REACH A HIGHER LEVEL OF INSANITY" (47). But, just on top of the word "REACH, " overlapping but barely, in Weiner's own non-italicized, lower-case font, is the word "joke."

Weiner's use of humor disarms the reader as she laces *Clairvoyant Journal* with it. This softens the sadness and horror of her loss of control over her life, normalizes the "INSANITY" of the situation. If she can laugh at her reality, she can control it. If she laughs when the words mock her, she gets the joke rather than being the joke. And, so does the reader. Weiner's jokes are often linked to the making of the text and to the process of her experiences, for example, when she puns, "*take her out* COMMENT of the book or to dinner?" (2). These moments can be shocking to the reader as they often materialize in the midst of what is purported to be a document of a traumatic experience. Her earlier works contain illuminating references to humor and the ridiculous, and in *The Fast*, she writes, "I began to laugh at my melodrama and the embarrassing spectacle I was making of myself" (9). And later, when reflecting on some of the more playful rituals she creates in her weeks in her kitchen sink, including covering herself in blueberry syrup and decorating her arm in fennel seeds, she writes, "I was never totally serious about doing these things – they seemed amusing ways to entertain myself" (24). And so, when

Weiner records this conversation with Rhys Chatham – "Told him how […] the forces showed me all my failings with words in order to overcome he said it was *hemorroids* no purification by fire" (4) – she includes a joke (at her own expense, as is typical) in the middle of something that she seems to want us to believe is dead serious. A spiritual conversation between lovers does double duty as potty humor.

This issue of seriousness or, more keenly, authenticity, is as complicated as it is important. It is difficult for a reader to accept that Weiner's writing is not at core genuine. If she was writing merely to entertain herself rather than to reach the objectives to which she appears so committed, it would be an affront to the reader. While *Clairvoyant Journal* itself may be a piece intended for performance, the Weiner we see in the book cannot, must not, be simply performing for her readers. The time during which she was writing the early journals seems to have been more troubling for Weiner than when she was writing *Clairvoyant Journal*. Weiner would have been manipulating the reader if her straightforward documentation was not really that, but a game. However, by the time she writes *Clairvoyant Journal*, clair-style is in full effect, and as a codified poetics it cannot be overlooked regardless of its source or muse or etiology. The apparatuses directing the creation of the text as such are, in fact, the text.

Despite her role as the butt of the voices' jokes, she remains desperate to maintain a humorous levity. When at a yoga retreat that she documents at the end of the book, she has a difficult time gaining access to the ashram's typewriter, and so she agrees to do the work of transcribing Satchidananda's speeches from tape to type in order to be granted the use of the typewriter, ironically, for her own transcription project. The words disappoint her when they refuse to amuse on cue: "You have a typewriter and *complain* CLEAN THOUG cravings for

typewriters CUT IT SHORT when you couldn't type Sun Mon ADDICT IT'S COOL in the typing room so why won't they be funny" (54).

Perhaps the most distinguishable sign that Weiner's work while serious is not overly earnest is the cover of *Clairvoyant Journal*. The photograph on the cover of the book depicts a smiling Weiner with "I SEE WORDS" written on her forehead in what looks to be black marker. If not a joke, it is clearly an exaggeration of what Weiner claims to be true. The photograph participates in the blurring between inside and outside, reality and delusion, present everywhere in Weiner's work, and displays how these problems can be tempered by humor. This single image embodies much of the complexities of identity, authorship, and consciousness that Weiner manipulates in her work. The words may literally mark her, but she still laughs with them or at them; and, making the words she sees visible in the place where she often sees them validates her claim while still remaining good-humored.

The playfulness of the work is unmistakable when it is performed, as it has been a number of times in different versions and in different manners. A performance of it was first recorded in a 1974 film by her friend, the filmmaker and composer Phil Niblock. In the film, Weiner reads from it alone and, if the film is to be believed, writes part of it. Two audio versions of it were also recorded in 1978 by another friend of Weiner's, Charlie Morrow, who produced one recording for distribution. One was recorded in a studio and the other in front of a live audience at the Poetry Project. In 1981 another performance, this time with Charles Bernstein, James Sherry, and Weiner, was recorded and only recently released[10]. These performance versions of *Clairvoyant Journal* are invaluable in what they reveal about Weiner's intentions for the text and her true relationship to its creation.

[10] Bernstein reprised his role, reading with his wife, artist Susan Bee, and his daughter, Emma Bee Bernstein, on November 28, 2007 at the *Hannah Weiner's Open House* book event at the Poetry Project.

In the film Phil Niblock shot during the period that Weiner was writing *Clairvoyant Journal* and in which she reads from *Clairvoyant Journal*, the text comes to life. It becomes inhabited, voiced. Her reading of the text is fast, but not manic. She seems to delight in the frenzy of words. The smiling Weiner of the book cover lives. She records the playful teasing of a friend about the Niblock movie: "Noa said you changed your clothes in a 10 min movie?" (32). Hannah Weiner is vain! The only thing more surprising than this revelation is seeing her in the film looking physically healthy and stylish. This film appears to have been shot in her apartment, and as she sits in a chair near a window a cat jumps on her lap, demanding attention, and playfully biting her when denied. The tenderness in the text is now visible in the shape of Weiner herself. And, for someone in the midst of a major spiritual movement towards transcendence, or Samadhi, she looks strikingly normal. This merely reinforces the text's insistence on the foregrounding of the everyday as a means to the beyond, partaking in the same contradiction as Weiner's need to lose herself in order to gain a higher self.

It is only in the multi-voice performances of pieces of *Clairvoyant Journal* that the work is fully actualized for the reader/audience. The three-person performances are gleeful. Weiner and the other performers volley back and forth as they animate the words. Charlie Morrow's studio recording was released as an audiocassette by New Wilderness Audiographics in 1978. This recording documents a performance of portions of the March portions of the text, by Weiner, Sharon Mattlin, and Peggy De Coursey, and April sections of the text, by Weiner, Mattlin, and Regina Beck, running 26:48 and 28:09 respectively. The New Wilderness Foundation, Inc. was a non-profit arts organization that was co-founded in 1974 by Charlie Morrow and Jerome Rothenberg. It "grew out of ethnopoetics and performance arts: a blend of experimental and traditional arts espousing a 'new wilderness,' a source of perpetual renewal and

new ideas. The conceptually designed art events mixed new and old technologies. NWF used electronic media to broadcast, record and promote the cross disciplinary mix of arts and artists" ("New Wilderness"). According to Charlie Morrow's website, "it was the first artists audio work label in the USA," and in all, they released approximately 40 audiocassettes. Weiner's project fit perfectly with the ethos of New Wilderness as they organized events and published cassettes that stemmed from what they called the "new/old approach […] mixing folk, so called native and high art work" ("New Wilderness"). The recording is advertised on *Clairvoyant Journal*'s credits page, as is the *Diana's Bi-Monthly* pamphlet.

In the recording of the March section, Weiner starts at the beginning of the text, offering her typical textual code, but adding the readers' names, explaining that Sharon Mattlin reads the capital letters and Margaret De Coursey reads the underlines. "I read mine," she continues. And, with a "I begins," the reading of the text commences. The piece is obviously well rehearsed, with Mattlin and De Coursey reading phrases not in the text in unison at a few points. Midway through the second page Weiner adlibs an "I see words" after an italicized "*code poem*" was read. The tone of voice of the readers is hard to name. They seem to have been instructed to project and enunciate the words, with Weiner incorporating a more natural voice, though Weiner's frustration with some of the comments she had recorded in the book is expressed. Mattlin arcs her voice to match arced words and yells the big ones. There are no pauses between pages, and the dates of the entries are not read. For the first few minutes, Weiner seems hardly able to follow her own text, forgetting to stop when the text is no longer the lower-case, non-italicized font that is hers. "I get confused," she extemporizes. The centrality of Weiner's voice is literalized for the listener as Mattlin and De Coursey's voices are each in one stereo channel, and Weiner's is in both.

Weiner incorporates the name of her collaborators, "Peggy" and "Sharon," sometimes tying the name to a phrase in the text and other times just randomly voicing it. She also refers to "Charlie," who is presumably nearby doing the work of recording the performance. The people in the room are becoming part of the reading. Towards the end, Weiner adds, "Mention your friends. It doesn't seem fair not to." A restive practice makes an unstable text. Everything and everyone Weiner rubs against sticks to the text. She feels compelled to turn it all into content, into the *Journal*. She also feels free, or obligated perhaps, to improvise.

To add yet another layer of disjointed and confused authority, she also instructs Mattlin and De Coursey to "read faster," and laughs. As Mattlin reads all the parts on page ten, Weiner interjects, "read faster," and Mattlin does. Weiner, receiver of endless instructions, is the one making demands here.

For the April recording, De Coursey is replaced by Regina Beck. Weiner again gets muddled – she laughs as she struggles to find her place and to read only one voice. The difficulty in keeping the roles straight is obvious despite Weiner's established visual text code. The momentum of linearity is hard to resist for the performers, and, one could assume, for any reader of the text. The words between the lines are read immediately after the words under which they fall; then the performer returns to the above line. This makes it difficult for a reader to follow along, but shows the immediacy of the interstitial text. The performers must, at times, read words in a field. And, they follow an organic direction, stemming from the performer and following her eyes. In this way, the words belong to the performer.

Clairvoyant Journal needs an audience, and becomes most animated when performed for an audience. Charlie Morrow also recorded an unreleased, live reading by Rochelle Kraut, Sharon Mattlin, and Hannah Weiner of the May section of the *Journal*, which was at the Poetry

Project in 1978.[11] The recording begins with a very brief introduction in which the speaker tells the audience about the upcoming release of the "stereo-cassette" of the earlier reading, but Weiner seems eager to begin and starts almost immediately after asking her two collaborators to "take bows, please." The applauding audience is a reminder that this was recorded live, at an event. The reading begins with a page that is part of the manuscript, but was cut from the Angel Hair version of the *Journal* (page 60 online), which Weiner had labeled "May 1 Wed." She explains, "this is May from the Journal and June. And don't repeat yourself. Shelley begins." To which Shelley – Rochelle Kraut – responds, "Oh, I'm on the wrong page." The audience laughs, and the reading begins in earnest.

Weiner issues a directive to herself to "Introduce your readers," which she immediately heeds: "That's Sharon reading the capitals." Then a few lines later, "introduce Shelley as she reads the underlines. They're the little words that appear, you know, in little places like my forehead and things." The audience's response, again, is laughter. Weiner, still with laughter in her voice says, "You're interrupting my reading" to either the readers or the audience. As in the studio recording, she repeatedly interjects the readers' names into the reading. She also explains just a few minutes in, "This is last year's script," and a minute or so later states, "this is a journal." And the other readers also freely adlib. Mattlin acknowledges a mistake – "oops, I skipped a line" – adding to an already chaotic performance. Things seem to fall apart a bit as the readers scramble to keep their spots and are forced by the text to read over each other. The reaction from the readers and the crowd is the same: pleasure. Weiner is incorporating demands here too, including "skip a line." "They read together," Weiner announces just after Mattlin and Kraut do, but then says, "no more comments." The real-time text-making of the written *Journal*

[11] An excerpt of this recording, just over six minutes long, was released in *Kenning #12 – WAY* as "Hannah Weiner – from 'May from the Journal in June.'"

becomes even more real, even more present tense than before. It becomes a text that is being written as it is read. "Make Shelley make more comments," Weiner says, and Shelly responds, "ha ha," making Weiner chuckle.

During a personal section about her troubled relationship with Rhys Chatham she seems surprised that "nobody laughs" which makes some laugh. Perhaps the most humorous part of the entire book – "you read April MAKE NOTES it's pretty funny you think you're a genius WE ALL ARE" (35) – elicits no response at all. Oddly, the section that follows about Weiner eating donuts out of the garbage seems to amuse the crowd and they laugh even as Mattlin reads the "DON'T LAUGH" that is repeated in the text.

The only people who are even aware of the degree to which things are being interpolated are Weiner and her readers. And so when Weiner says, "skip the rest of the page," and the readers do, the listener has no way of knowing if they're missing out on something or if this direction originated with the voices. The performers take Weiner's position, and not because they are reading her *Journal*, but because they are now subject to the voices and the subject of the voices. Weiner's "read fast," which becomes part of the aural text, is directed at them. They aren't merely reading the script, but having an experience that approaches Weiner's experience, which is also on display for the audience.

The very last page of the manuscript version of *Clairvoyant Journal*, dated "Nov 2 1977," contains Weiner's reflection on the performance of the *Journal*, written at a time when she was no longer seeing words regularly. The entry begins, "TONIGHT WAS A REHEARSAL Lots of people laughed Is that good question mark." It seems strange that Weiner, who has used humor so purposefully and deftly in *Clairvoyant Journal*, would wonder how to read the laughter of the audience. Especially since, later on the same page, she writes, "I loved the

reading tonight both sharon and shelly were insanely good and laughed and poked and skipped nots too much and it charlie worked real hard boy was that a FREE gift." The laughter of the readers is a boon to the performance, an essential part of it, Weiner seems to imply. But, perhaps her insecurity about the audience's laughter is rooted in her own insecurities about the text. She seems most satisfied when she tells the joke, and fears being the object of ridicule. *Clairvoyant Journal* rivals confessional poetry in its rawness; it displays a nakedness that Weiner seems to understand as both necessary and terrifying.

While Weiner's diagnosis as mentally ill is less easy to pin down than the opinions of others as to what caused the illness or Weiner's rejection of said diagnosis, here, on this very last page, Weiner writes, "because im insane i get social security i can write and complain til IS DIE." This moves beyond the casual references to being "crazy" peppering her books because here she refers to the reality of this claim, an official confirmation of her mental status, however ironically she may view it. She may not think of herself as mentally ill, but the state does, which provides her with the money to fund her life as a writer.

In the obituary published shortly after her death in 1997 in the Poetry Project *Newsletter*, Charles Bernstein confronts questions of Weiner's psychological status. His longtime friendship with Weiner gives him insight and hindsight into her illness:

> It is an irony, perhaps, that the writing that Hannah will be best remembered for coincided with a period in which schizophrenia made her everyday life increasingly difficult. Hannah's illness was often shrugged off as eccentricity, as in we're all a little crazy after all. But few of us suffer from our craziness in the way Hannah did and her schizophrenia was not merely metaphoric, despite the fact that Hannah did not accept any characterization of herself as mentally ill. Surely there was the fear that since Hannah's work was predicated on hearing voices and seeing words, her identification as schizophrenic would discredit the achievement of a poetry in which the very idea of a stable, expressive lyric self is

> exploded into what might, indeed, metaphorically be described as a kind of schizophrenic writing. […] In any case, Hannah Weiner's work is not a product of her illness but an heroic triumph in the face of it. Her personal courage in refusing to succumb to what often must have been unbearable fear induced by her illness, her persistence in writing in spite of her disabilities, is one of the legacies of her work. And if her schizophrenia gave her insight into language, into human consciousness, into the nature of how everyday life can be presented rather than represented in writing — well, we all have to start from where we are.

Bernstein's insistence on Weiner's intentionality is telling. He, too, feels the anxiety that the text generates around authorship. He acknowledges an illness, but also Weiner's refusal to believe in the illness. The reader needs to believe that Weiner is a serious writer, writing with purpose.

These questions of mental illness are pressing here in *Clairvoyant Journal*. And even without hearing the lighthearted recordings of the performance of the text, the book as an object evokes much of the same confusion. The striking cover of the book is matched by the statement on the back cover by Jackson Mac Low:

> Hannah Weiner is the only clairvoyant I know, or that I've ever known, as far as I know. She is also the only person on record—or so she believes as a result of her extensive investigations into both medical & parapsychic literature—to have experienced the particular phenomenon this journal represents, that of being "spoken to" by several persons, most of them seemingly external to herself, by means of printed words in various colors & sizes that appear both on other persons & objects & on her own forehead (in such a way that she can perceive them from within). Hers, however might have been but a "remarkable case," were it not for the fact that she is an artist. Her achievement—& it is a considerable one—lies in her having developed a literary form through which to convey her remarkable experience.

In many ways this statement encapsulates both Weiner's poetic practice, muse and manner, and the problem of her poetics for her readers. Mac Low's qualifying of his statement, through the use of quotation marks and the words "seemingly" and "or so she believes," seems to question

the very reality of her claims. Are we to read the poetry as symptomatic of her clairvoyance, or schizophrenia, or as art? Is this a distinction that is possible or worthwhile to make?

In her review of *Clairvoyant Journal*, published in the May-June 1979 issue of the "Poetry Project Newsletter," Sharon Mattlin reinforces the idea that Weiner's clairvoyance was always a contested fact or an open question:

> "Is she really clairvoyant," is a question frequently asked of me in reference to Hannah Weiner. "Does she really see words?" is another.
>
> Hannah's journal, while "clairvoyant" in the dictionary sense of "having the power of seeing objects or actions beyond the normal range of vision," has the more significant power to reveal the workings of our own minds to us. She has an exceptional ability to transcribe the language of the mind talking to itself. She traces the self-denigration we all suffer, "stupid girl," as well as the self-congratulation, "this is terrific old girl"; the maternal aspect that has us advise ourselves to "GO OUT, GET A HARD ROLL," and the obsessive quality of a crush that might express itself in recurring admonitions to "call Rhys."
>
> This writing is spiritual, not so much in its references to retreats, Satchidananda, or Rimpoche, but more in the way it practices the Buddhist dictum to "watch your thoughts." Though meditation is, for me, a spectator sport only, I recognize Clairvoyant Journal as a form of meditation-in-action, or meditation-in-art.
>
> The answer to question number 2 is also yes. I'm convinced that she really does "see", in some sort of visual and/or audio hallucination, the words she writes. But, as with Castaneda's supposedly anthropological investigations, I don't think it really matters whether this is truth or fiction. The value lies in the literary achievement. […]
>
> In the midst of all this analysis I'm neglecting to emphasize that this book is funny. The three voices compete, argue and vie with each other like a comedy team for prominence and the last word. […] Each page contains wry jokes, verbal games, odd puns.

Mattlin's laudatory review, like Mac Low's statement, complicates more than clarifies. Her claim that the "power" of Weiner's work is that it "transcribe[s] the language of the mind talking to itself" erases the singularity of Weiner's experiences. It also overwrites Weiner's own mythology of the source of the words and normalizes it. Weiner is transformed from someone

with special abilities – who can see more and other – to someone who writes what we all could see if only we stopped to look.

The assertion that Weiner makes so cleanly – "I see words" – is hard to buy, and Mattlin testifies to her belief in its veracity only to immediately state that the truthfulness of the statement is irrelevant. Though she labels herself "convinced," she uses the literal definition of clairvoyance to undercut Weiner's own beliefs and the claims that constitute the book as an oracle. The one thing that everyone agrees on – including Weiner – is that the book is funny, however uncomfortable it may be to laugh.

Weiner herself never doubts her clairvoyance, despite endlessly wondering about the exact source of the words. The words are always a gift, for her. They make her, and in turn her writing, special, "novel." Her desire to write new, exciting, innovative poetry is not odd; in fact, it is what connects her to the larger experimental poetry scene in New York and elsewhere. But, the means through which she accomplishes this rare achievement sets her apart, and authenticates her writing in complex ways. In the *Journal* entry dated "Jan 77 p3" – in the manuscript version – when the words largely disappear, she writes, "Oh how I miss them." They made life hard, but writing easy. She follows, "I notice lately I have been able to complete sentences. I ALSO. Don be ashamed. But I am. Everyone can complete sentences ANYONE and it was so much fun being interrupted like way back in 74 PICKLES but that doesn't happen anymore. I dont even eat pickles anymore." Weiner dreads the thought of being ordinary, just "everyone" or "ANYONE."

That Weiner sees words is pivotal in the text, but how does the reader see Weiner? Weiner rightly reminds the reader throughout *Clairvoyant Journal* that what they are encountering is something totally new and therefore radical, or unstable. It is difficult to talk

about this text because of its "novel" nature, but, ultimately, a reader cannot over-identify with the poet. The reader must do what readers do, and read. And reading the text is to enter a unique, uncharted literary landscape that is full and charged with energy. It is a delight for the eyes even before it is "read." It resists all definitions: genre, authorship, sanity. It is a "book in air" on paper. Weiner tell her readers, "this is a novel because nothing in it happens" (15). The "nothing" that "happens" is Weiner's overwhelming life; a life marked by its devotion to "nothing" – words that are not words because they are something else, endlessly slipping away from the grasp of definition or understanding.

Weiner documents her struggle with writing: getting it "right," making it funny, and questioning genre. But, the reader is always aware of a world – a life – just outside the text, always leaching in. The reader sees the nebulous and diffuse boundary between life and art, and acts as witness to Weiner's serious quest to make meaning from mayhem.

Chapter 4

"TELLINGS TRUTH": Consciousness as Activism

Once Weiner established a form or structure for her writing, she began to employ her technique for political purposes. Her poetry is built to change its reader – designed to activate the brain's neurological firings and thus alter the mind's experience of consciousness. It is alchemical enlightenment catalyzed by a combination of empathy with the oppressed, Weiner's absolute insistence on her clairvoyant abilities, and pure language stripped of authorship. It creates a connection between the mind of the writer, the mind of the reader, and – and this is everything – the minds of those the writer clairvoyantly channels for the reader. By telling, showing, revealing the workings of her mind, Weiner believes she can open for the reader a portal to enlightenment.

The very nature of her spiritual and poetic quest means that the work, the result, is inner-directed and self-centered, but the techniques she develops to map her interiority become politically powerful when Weiner begins to look out at the world and write it. By the late 1970s, Weiner reports that she has been elevated from a student of the words to a teacher through, or with, the words. Weiner's distinct brand of political engagement is manifest in her poetry as she shapes her message and her cause: not just to record, but to enlighten. She never stops believing that the "WORDS have political, ecological awareness, concern for others as well as myself, always suggesting a course that is to the most benefit of all concerned, to increase physical, psychological and mental well being, and reduce suffering" ("The words in CAPITALS and underlines are words I see"). Weiner's job – her compulsion, really – is to record the words, translating them into something concrete and real, infused with messages that will make the

world clear. But she designs her project of showing to spur action or interest, to tell: "I feel the same way politically with the poetry readings – it doesnt mean much to me to read always if I can't tie it together with political or 'spiritual' more power with us" ("Letter to Mayer" 1). Weiner's search for meaning evolves into a political practice as she shares the truths she has discovered.

The texts Weiner produced in the late 1970s and into 1980, just after *Clairvoyant Journal*, are of particular interest and relevance because it is at this moment that Weiner, with newly minted poetics in hand, turns her focus from in to out. From the forces, or voices, that flood her life, she crafts art, poetry. And, in sharing these words, shares their wisdom and their secrets. In her one-page autobiography, "Silent Teacher," written at the end of the 1980s, Weiner explains that in her poetry of the early 1980s she began "to introduce the teaching" and that in her work from the middle of that decade "she is reaching her ultimate achievement […] TEACHING SILENT." Thus, work that was already highly politically charged – due to its radical form and Weiner's assertion that it is received language – becomes even more so as it is infused with a specific political critique, namely the treatment of the American Indian.

Weiner's connection to the American Indian Movement and a number of well-known Indian activists is well documented. She felt a deep, spiritual connection to the American Indian cultures and people. For Weiner, her life outside of the mainstream united her with them. They shared a belief in the presence of the metaphysical in the physical world. Many of the cultural beliefs she related to allowed her to make sense of the experiences she was having. These beliefs gave her a way of better understanding her clairvoyance as a gift, part of a tradition of seeing, rather than as an illness or a nuisance.

In an untitled prose piece that she read at a 1989 " Symposium on Poetry of the Future" at the Poetry Project, she explains the very real connection she feels with Indian ideals and ideas of mind:

> my mind gave me directions not only relating to future events but also relating to what I needed. As I am thinking about how to write about the Indians responding to need an Indian calls me from Oklahoma. So his mind knows. The Indians know my mind and respond according to need. This is a way to a cooperative society. You have to be willing to help. The only time I have seen white people responding by mind to need was the last time I was in Woodstock 1971, but it is something to work for in the future.

Her interest in the American Indian Movement and in Indian spirituality is fed by this emphasis on community and shared but arcane knowledge. Her fear of being perceived as mentally ill is allayed through her identification with the Indians. The long tradition of knowledge acquired through visions and unseen forces parallels her own experiences, legitimating them in ways impossible in the conventional White American world. The Indians' preexisting lexicon for such experiences allows her to make her spiritual vocabulary. Finally, she finds herself not alone or outside, but inside a venerated tradition, and more, she has the gift of those who can see and tell, extending healing and knowledge to a troubled world. An Indian vision of the world becomes an integral thread woven into her poetics, and affirms that she was right all along to sacrifice herself for the words.

In the "Forum" section of *The Politics of Poetic Form*, published in 1990, Weiner acknowledges her intentions for her poetry: "I think that disjunctive and non-sequential writing can change states of consciousness, awakening the reader to reality, and thus the need for political change" (226). The consciousness she seeks to engender in her reader, and which she herself has access to, resides in the unknowable parts of the mind. Weiner explains:

> [H]eightened states of consciousness [are] non-political, like other effects of heightened consciousness such as telepathy, out of body travel, clairvoyance, healing. The work is to make the consciousness political. At heightened states of consciousness, both sides of the brain are energized, thus making the mind in action more effective because it has more power and knows more. (227)

Weiner's is an activist poetry because it is designed literally to activate the minds of the readers.[12] No reader can be a passive receiver of the texts, but must, in order to read, participate in their creation because, truly, Weiner's radical statement of poetics belies her even more radical poetic practice. The reader of Weiner's words is faced with difficult work. Weiner's 'showing' is punctuated, or even defined, by gaps, erasures, interruptions, which leave the text open for the reader's collaboration.

In "Mostly About the Sentence," Weiner makes her tactics plain: "The sentence is unfinished because the mind of the reader or listener supplies the answer (the end) either through telepathically reading the other's mind, or through common knowledge. Or perhaps the reader involves himself with his own ending, which is equally valid" (129). Weiner asks the reader to pick up where she left off, continuing the forces' agenda of transmitting information and opening a connection to the metaphysical world. Weiner further elucidates this key concept:

> The incomplete and interrupted sentence does away with the authority of the author, engaging the reader whose own mind will either naturally or by art respond to the delay of the interruptions and the incompleteness. Perhaps the reader, even, is not allowed a consistent or ego building response by the interrupted or incomplete sentence because the writer throws at the reader such a quick multitude of words, phrases, lines, and sentences to be put together and finished.

[12] In her review, of sorts, of *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* by Julian Jaynes, entitled "I HAVE TWO HEADS," Weiner connects her writing practice to neuroscience.

> The reader's ego or expectation is further thrown by the occasional running of words together so that rather than put together the reader must pause and separate the words.
>
> Every engagement of the reader breaks down the author's authority over him, and this includes the change of type face size, requiring an adjustment of the eye focus and words written above and below the line, giving the reader a field rather than a linear response and increasing his choice. The variety and speed of the reader challenges however will keep the reader from building up his own authority as she reads—responds. The author isn't the only one with an ego.
> ("Mostly" 131- 132)

She works to free her readers from the tyranny of authority in order to open their minds to the minds of others, to truth. Her earlier goal of being "full of energy and wide awake" (*The Fast* 36) and of gaining access to a "higher mind" (*Pictures and Early Words* 34) has developed and matured. She wants to effect these enlightened states in her readers, and has a plan for doing so. Only a broken text can penetrate the readers' consciousness and reveal messages that are "clear" but somehow unspoken. Weiner creates works that are not about writing but communication, or as she proclaims in her 1981 book *Spoke*, "its not writing time show the mind" (65). Weiner's rationale for the erasure of the ego is directly tied to her insistence on her own clairvoyance, which itself directs her form and content. Her mission requires the production of texts that trace and testify to her self-erasure, recorded everywhere in her books. Her toying with language – her desire to, as she writes in an early journal, "DISTURB LANGUAGE" (*Big Words* 172) – is not a political abstraction. Her goal for her work is to write in a way that transforms the author, and the text, into something useful: a conduit for information and transcendence.

Little Books/Indians, published in 1980 by Roof Books, continues the process of documenting the words seen by Weiner in journal-style, dated, chronological entries. Her

"Silent Teacher" bio somewhat elucidates this title when she explains that after the words appeared, and *Clairvoyant Journal* was published, "years passed the language group moved in / and so did the indians." The formal innovations of Language poetry and the revolutionary politics of the American Indian Movement are wed in this book. The panoply of names in *Clairvoyant Journal* is pared down to a few: the language group – Bruce Andrews, Charles [Bernstein]; and the Indians – Russell Means, Jimmie [Durham], Leonard Crow Dog, Mary Crow Dog (nee Brave Bird); and, of course, Bernadette [Mayer]. In "Mostly About the Sentence" Weiner writes, "Little Books / Indians is about people, and names names" (133).

Technically, this book expands the radical textual practices of *Clairvoyant Journal*. With words confined to a column in the center of the page, *Little Books/Indians* looks more like typical poetry, as more attention is paid to line breaks and word placement. In her 1995 interview with Charles Bernstein for his radio show LINEbreak, Weiner says that while *Clairvoyant Journal* is a work of "prose poetry," it is "certainly not ordinary prose by any standards." When Bernstein counters, "it's certainly not ordinary poetry by any standards," she replies, "I guess not. I think the closest I've come to real poetry is a few poems that I've written in *Little Books/Indians* or *Sixteen*." This time, Weiner does not offer a textual key, and in fact italics has been almost totally ditched for caps and lowercase type. This work also marks Weiner's complete abandonment of the line as such as her words skew diagonally up and down the page, overlapping at seemingly random intervals. This text is also far more fragmentary than the previous, and words are split into pieces, seeming to fall apart before Weiner can transcribe them. Independent letters float alone, and pieces of some letters (the crosses on the tops of Ts) are absent. This visual absence and division mirrors the content of the text. As the words

fragment, so too does the message. Weiner explains the mode of production for this book in "Mostly About the Sentence":

> Long sentences in Little Books / Indians were interrupted often by capital letter words as well as lower case in which the book was mostly written. Many of these words and sentences were completed if my memory could hold onto the long seen phrases which was interrupted by newer seen phrases. The complete sentence or thought then depended on my memory and if […] I had smoked some marijuana the memory was elusive and hard to hang onto. (123)

Another important difference between *Clairvoyant Journal* and *Little Books/Indians* is that the later work, and the books that follow, are not performance pieces written for multiple voices. Weiner explains, "Since [*Clairvoyant Journal*] all my books are written for one voice, though dis-continued and interrupted, and I have the lonesome pleasure of reading them all by myself" ("Mostly" 127). The voices – unique, idiosyncratic, practically predictable – speak through one mouth: Weiner's typewriter. The distinction between outside and inside voices completely collapses. And the way she explains her approach to the voices in *Clairvoyant Journal* in "Mostly About the Sentence" – "I talked to them as if they were separate from me, as indeed the part of my mind they came from is not known to me" – seems to have been abandoned. While she still may not "know" the portion of her consciousness which produces the words, in *Little Books/Indians* she more confidently claims the voices as hers, even as more than one voice claims first-person authority.

As the book progresses, Weiner repeatedly is referred to in the third person, and "Hannah" becomes one of the book's mantras. Thus the identity of the "I" becomes more uncertain than ever; the reader is informed, "We are all the same mind go crawling together" (49). Weiner has been all but swallowed up by the voices with which she must compete but also

obey. Weiner writes of *Little Books/Indians*, "I often refer to myself in the third person. Calling my self Sis or Hannah, often misspelled (destroy the ego attachment to the name)" ("Mostly" 133).

She announces:

> I am settled
> on a religious
> principle
> I AMS DEAD
> (15)

Only a dead "I" can be fully inhabited by the forces. Sometimes, this dissolution of the self seems pathetic: "I am almost a / subject" (31). Weiner fears the loss of the consciousness she recognizes as hers, as it is squelched by the unknown, dark recesses of her mind. She tells the reader, "I am scared of / myself" (27). But at other times, her self-erasure seems a rhetorical method, a metaphor; when she writes, "ONE HIDES IN / SILENCE SOMETIME / I suppose it is I" (62), she confesses to the reader that her self-effacing is purposeful, controlled. When her identity is concealed or obscured by the voices, it is an enactment of her interrupted self. This destabilizing process is also tinged with tragedy. Weiner tells the reader:

> I must follow instructions
> UNTILS
> I
> DIE
> BECAUSE
> BECAUSE I'M ILL
> (79)

Weiner knows that despite her attempts to resist, illness cannot be willed away. And her quest for healing requires an absolute obedience, which she grants willingly because the stakes are so

high and the rewards so enticing. But she also universalizes her experience of the dissolution of self she enacts in her writing when she wonders, "what writers / remember I am me" (44). The self-erasure that is her mode becomes about far more than receiving healing messages for herself. It becomes a means to affect others.

As usual, Weiner weaves in a metatext, which functions as running commentary. Her concerns with the readers' expectations are addressed in *Little Books/Indians*:

> Hannah it doesnt
> think just by
> itself you know
> you are discussing
> procedures
> S-T-R-U-C-T-U-R-E-S
> people read this book
> they want to know
> whats happening
> INS YOUR SCRIPT mind
> (34)

Her poems are constructed, and are not as random or haphazard as she would, at times, have the reader believe. If the "it" in the first sentence of this excerpt refers to the book or the book as a representation of the voices (and therefore, simply, the voices themselves), we see her reminding herself that she *is* an important part of the writing of the book, of the experience. She reinserts her authority, her authorship, here, but in the third person; she talks to herself and to us. First, she simply announces that the "it" is not singular, but part of the larger, shared consciousness. Then, she proclaims that the ability of "it" to *not* "think just by / itself" is central to its power, is its power. And of course, in turn, Weiner's ability to see the words means that she becomes part of the process ('procedure') because she serves as writer. She concludes that what the reader wants is to know – as what Weiner wants is always, endlessly, to know – "whats happening."

But she continues from there, elaborating and illuminating: "INS YOUR SCRIPT mind." The forces' insistence that her mind is the text, that her subjectivity is that of the text, is thrust upon the reader, substituted for the true object of their desire, and more pointedly Weiner's: seeing the mind.

Weiner explains that she is "discussing / procedures / S-T-R-U-C-T-U-R-E-S" as she builds texts, taming the wild voices by writing them. The procedure is the same as the structure. The very nature of her texts, in that they chart their own creation, means that the voices, Weiner's included, talk about the poetry-making process. At one point she writes, "nobody likes / this book" (17). The text attempts to tell the reader how it works, even as it complicates its relationship with the reader through its incoherence:

> I wants forehead
> scribbles a new
> PSYCHIC
> book from you
>
> […]
>
> useful *scripted*
> things my
> forehead says
>
> to me
> I SAW THIS
> (16-17)

The words are "useful" because Weiner can convert them into poetry. The sentences "You change your / style a little / for this prose book" (26), and even "you can always / replace your / own mind / with a / MACHINE" (19), imply an agency Weiner usually does not flaunt. Weiner acknowledges exploiting the voices in order to convert what some would consider a disability into art. Even the voices tell Weiner, "you're still a crazy / girl sometimes" (27).

Little Books/Indians also marks the start of Weiner's practice of attributing parts of the text, specific "Little Books," to particular individuals, Indians. Or as Weiner explains in "Silent Teacher," "the language group moved in / and so did the indians." If the form is Language, the content is Indians. The books from this period are in part composed of references to Weiner's American Indian friends and their stories, but they've "moved in" in still more significant ways. The books are infused with a sense of the impossible, or magic. Weiner's work, by this point, had long been uncanny, but now she uses her own "heightened states of consciousness" ("Forum" 227) and the poetry they produce to enlighten others, not just herself. And this activism is aligned with the political activism of her friends. The poetry incorporates not just words about the Indians she knows and loves, but the Indians' belief that certain individuals serve as a portal to the spiritual world, and her belief that she is such a portal. She announces:

> I HAVE POETS
> HIS MIND IN
> MY POEMS
> (42)

Weiner channels not just random information, but important information, messages.

Weiner cannot help but complicate the endless questions of authorship. Her understanding of her role as writer is now informed by her relationship to "the indians" who have "moved in." She both is and is not writing here, if the reader believes her:

> hannah forgot
> STRUCTURE
> ins my SILENCE
> S E N T E N C E
> I may just become
> Jimmie scribbles
> a
> RUSSELL MEANS

writer soon
(43)

The announcement of the move towards writerhood is interrupted by the names and identities of others. Weiner suggests here that being a "writer" is only possible when structure and the sentence are abandoned. In one of many places where she refers to Russell Means, the first national director of the American Indian Movement, who was instrumental in the organization's political actions including the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969 and Wounded Knee in 1973, Weiner writes:

who takes a chance
only Indians in this century would you believe it
I writes for
Russell Means
alive
(38)

Her role as medium allows her to bear witness in the first person. In "Little Book 138 PEDRO April 30 79," named for Mary Crow Dog's son, who was born during the AIM occupation of Wounded Knee, Weiner's writing testifies to the injustices Mary's husband, Leonard Crow Dog, experienced in prison:

THEY TOOK ME
into a prison cell
& tormented me
for quite a while

LEONARDS STORY

I ams chained
WHO BELIEVES IT
MARY DOES
she can feel
the pinches

BIG TOE HEALS
Leonard's prison term
(77)

She writes "LEONARDS STORY" in the first person, and the "WHO BELIEVES IT" applies to both the facts of what actually happened to Leonard Crow Dog and to Weiner's channeling of it. Who believes that Weiner's "I" is Leonard's? The forces claim that his wife, Mary, does. And more substantially, she believes because she too "can feel" Leonard's pain, his story. She too can channel Leonard. And she, like Weiner, can feel not just "the pinches" but the "prison term," which is also the sentence.

The interplay between subject and author, writer and reader, is what allows Weiner to be "dead" or "silent" while writing. This is how Weiner 'disturbs language' enough to convey to her readers a sense of truth about the political reality of the American Indian in *Little Books/Indians*:

Remember us
in your silence
wes speaking
and finished
a letter
stop handling
it like Means
handles it
sister
this is just a
big letter
wes speaking
in it
sis it's the speaking knowledge
we're speaking
of
(75-6)

Once the "complete mind" of the reader is engaged through the active reading of the poetry, it is opened to Weiner's words. The reader who pieces together the scraps of language Weiner scatters, receives, and writes is rewarded with access to Weiner's mind, channeling political activists and prisoners with insight.

Little Books/Indians, more than *Clairvoyant Journal*, is preoccupied by silence. This silence is twofold: it works as a rich space filled with meaning, but also as a protective device that shields the writer. Silence figures as a means to keep secrets. The voices accuse Weiner of exposing their secrets, and thereby threatening their existence: "HANNAH GIVES AWAY ALL OUR SECRETS [...] HANNAH CANCELS THIS PAGE" (51). The words practically overwhelm the confines of the page, and though they insist on being transcribed, the voices dare complain about what, and how much, Weiner reveals to the reader. They warn her:

> Hannah we cant
> HEAVY PAGE
> survive without
> our secret
> knowledge
> (70)

And, the voices explain:

> Hannah Im frightened of it
> Hannah it is our
> knowledge we
> hold it in our silence
> (70)

The voices try repeatedly to end the book ("THAT ENDS THIS POEM STUPID" and "I SAID DONT WRITE" (71)), but the words continue.

She writes:

please be silent
structure
I ams giving away
all my secrets
(45)

Weiner seems to be blaming the structure of the text for the infraction of privacy – but it is her position as a "silent messenger" (44) that motivates her telling. Silence is connected to knowledge, in Weiner's system. She transcribes for the reader a message directed at her: "Hannah it is our / knowledge we / hold it in our silence" (70). But disregarding the forces' pleas for restraint, Weiner must speak. She writes:

you are giving away some of your secrets
by TELLINGS TRUTH
that's a sWRITERS
no it isn't
psychics
responsibility
(34)

Despite the correction here, it seems that Weiner is arguing that as a writer *and* a psychic she has a political and social responsibility to not remain silent, but to speak the injustices she has special access to. Also, the activist practice of 'truth telling' is transformed into "TELLINGS TRUTH," which, though written without a possessive apostrophe, implies that the very act of telling creates a truth for the reader. The creation of her texts not only allows Weiner to pass on knowledge to her readers and open their minds to alternative reading practices, but also situates her as a part of a larger community, performing a service.

Weiner illuminates this sense of responsibility and community in other, later works. In a typescript found in her archive, part of which was included in a letter sent to Bernstein in 1989

that was published in *Open House*, Weiner opens with the dictate to "explain energy," and after a long section about healing and power, she writes at the end of the piece:

> just be careful often sis I say health is important sorry we need doctors whose advice is like mine open and clear important one sis conclude money is an embarrassment Indians have none so we carry their importance in our pockets to remind us sorry independent outloud to be we listen to it privately like what is upon demand clearly sis close subject money hurted so we gave Indians like just two to be crazy conclude your argument hurt Indians make it clear they teach by simple techniques like holding hands say circle period just complete.

Weiner remains convinced that these "techniques" and ideals that she terms, loosely, "Indian" can improve life for the average American. Even as she feels pressure to "conclude," Weiner wants to "make it clear" that both she and the Indians "teach" in a simple and natural way. She validates the space inside American culture in which Indian culture has persisted, diminished but not defeated. Knowledge should be shared altruistically, not for money. The injustices suffered historically and contemporarily are touchstones for Weiner, in her pocket where money is not. She both identifies with them and holds them as a reminder of her calling to tell. She speaks of a mutually beneficial relationship that results in poetry, and also, hopefully, change.

In Weiner's conception, the poetry works through a combination of science and magic; the words may come from mystical sources, but Weiner makes them real for the reader, too:

> syntax
> now we can explain it biological next page
> rhythms head by heal same page
> my nerves
> ending same page substitute
> thats biological
> level the
> NERVES ENDINGS
> GROWS UP
> next lesson
> (50)

Weiner's readers literally grow from their encounter with her texts. Each syntactic or logical interruption is a gap filled by unwritten ("silent") knowledge that results when the reader breaches the interruption to read.

Weiner's interest in the American Indian Movement and more broadly the culture and experience of being an American Indian is an emblem for and of her own experiences. But it also serves as a rhetorical device in that it becomes the radical content for Weiner's radical form. This dual function may manifest most clearly in Weiner's contribution to an issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, in which her work is contextualized as "political." Number 9/10 of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, "The Politics of Poetry," published in 1979, opens with this explanation: "This double issue began with the desire to focus attention on political dimensions of current writing. To make some of those aspects and concerns more explicit, and to encourage further discussion, we've asked a number of writers to give their view of what qualities writing has or could have that contribute to an understanding of society, seen as a capitalist system" (1). Weiner is one of the writers who answers this call with her poem "CAPITALISTIC USELESS PHRASES AFTER ENDLESS" (50-51). The most abstract (and "poetic") of all the published responses, it begins:

> TITLES ARE USELESS
> THAS A HINT
> (lines 1-2)

This non-title is a dense and layered assertion. "TITLES" refers at once to a name of a poem, an indication of nobility or honor, and also to a deed or proof of ownership. Thus "TITLES ARE USELESS" because a name is transitory, and in Weiner's case unstable; a person's preeminence is spiritual; and, most bitingly, the U.S. government has historically broken treaties made with

American Indians in the name of Manifest Destiny. Her labeling of all this as "A HINT" is a reinvention of the introductions Weiner religiously attached to longer works, wherein she gives the readers instructions for reading and information about the production of the text. Also, the "THAS" instead of 'that's' is a 'hint' that for Weiner, language is not precious, or removed from the ministrations of the writer.

What follows is a meditation on writing (punctuation, words, phrases, sentences, capitals), the idea of "home," and the American Indian Movement, much of which is left to the reader to sort out. She writes:

> I just dont like quaint phrases anymore anyway adds s THAS SQUINT
> I just dont like Pilgrims anymore ampersand their heads off
> I just dont like signs ampersand money that this is the way
> our quaint phrases
> I just dont like I dont speak it language I JUST COME IN
> SPEAK LIKE OUR INDIANS
> (lines 5-10)

The entire text becomes insoluble as she creates crystalline structures piece by piece, hint by hint. The repetition of "I just dont like" is part of this accretion, and the "quaint phrases" she does not like seem tied to historical ideas about American Indians and the hollowness of referents:

> CUT ITS SHORT
> THAT MEANS MEANS
> I meant our houses are stolen from us OF COURSE IT IS
> that means I have no home and I live with somebody else always
> thats not clearly understood
> MEANS IS OUR LEADER
> AND HE DOESNT CHEAT ON IT
> and they knows it in his jail
> WHAS a jail
> SENTENCE ENDED

USELESS PHRASES ARE STUPID THROW IT OUT
(lines 14-24)

The poem turns against its writer, interjecting to remind Weiner that she too scribes "useless phrases," in part because she refuses to "CUT ITS SHORT," instead elaborating. The typographically distinguished voices are at odds. The lowercase voice, presumably Weiner, as is typical in her code, is concerned with making itself "clearly understood" and explaining what it "means." The uppercase voice that interrupts seems annoyed with this elaboration, perhaps because it is predicated by a voice, not a vessel, which means that Weiner fails at her job. The forces tell Weiner to "SPEAK LIKE OUR INDIANS" and "CUT ITS SHORT." She talks too much, when what she needs to do is mean something.

Despite this insistence on the 'uselessness' of "quaint phrases," the poem also acknowledges the power infused in words in order to undo it. When Weiner writes, "and they knows it in his jail" and follows it with "WHAS a jail," the possibility of the existence of "a jail," any jail, dissolves. Thus, the next line is simply "SENTENCE ENDED." A sentence becomes a jail term, and she enacts a linguistic parole.

Here, it also seems that her identification with the American Indians goes too far for the forces, seeming finally to chafe under the pressure of Weiner's repeated "we":

its our society stupid upside down and the flag waves again that hurts
us we are Indians and we live in trucks
SOME PEOPLE THAS ENOUGH
we just dont like quaint phrases
(lines 40-43)

The reader witnesses a strange moment: has Weiner offended the American Indian voices she channels when she claims "we are Indians and we live in trucks"? The all caps reply warns her

not to overstate her claims, to be truthful: her words do not apply to all Indians, but to "SOME PEOPLE." The "THAS ENOUGH" at once silences Weiner and reminds her, and her readers, that the fact that some Indians must suffer the indignities of homelessness is bad "ENOUGH" – no overstatement is necessary to prove the fact of the injustice. The poem, and the journal issue, ends, "I DONT SIGN MY PAPERS EITHER NO SIGN AFTER WHO SIGNS IT ADDS HAHHAH / NO SIGNS IT" (lines 50-53). Her new-found fixation on not naming herself transforms her name into a laugh. Identity is a joke, just like the word, or bond, of capitalism.

Nijoles House, written in 1980 and published in 1981 by Potes & Poets Press, is a mere twenty pages of text, but it goes far in rendering Weiner's understanding of writing silence. It contains Weiner's classic explanatory introduction preceding the text, but rather than sorting out which words are hers and which were clairvoyantly received, it simply begins, "All words in this book were seen by Hannah Weiner first on her forehead." And therefore, Weiner entirely absconds authorship in this book.

On the first page, she writes:

> Sis why write it in
> BECAUSE I CAN SPEAK
> SILENCE
> Hannah it's a very hard job to
> do isn't it
> JUST CONTROL IT MORE

This dialogue reveals Weiner's inspiration for writing a book for which she cannot take credit and the difficulties in doing so. The phrase "write it in" is the mantra of this text obsessed with its own creation. But writing, especially when unpaired from authoring, is "a very hard job" because of the impossibility of controlling the forces. The answer to the initial question and the dictate to wrest control both come to Weiner from elsewhere. And, as evidenced by the second

and third lines, the reason "why," the forces are more invested in Weiner's abilities than anyone. She needs them to believe and to validate, and they do, as she reports to her reader. Weiner does this "hard job" because she wants to share her psychic windfall. The plurality of voices that are the book's author write, "Hannah we must be a great teacher / In our time LIKE LEONARD" (7). Weiner's feelings of obligation or providence mean she must write:

> we can survive
> Hannah hints
> Because we are speaking
> and written in
> those obeyed orders
> are for your benefit
> thats how we teaches
> spoken like a guru
> THATS MEANS
> Monks
> Hannah stops written it in
> (4)

The second person addressed is both Weiner and her readers, as a vital part of "silent teaching" is watching Weiner learn. When the "I" here, who, despite the book's opening claim, reads like Weiner, complains, "It's a very hard book to write thats all" (5), a swift and vicious reply appears:

> Hannah if you feel awful writing
> this one try the next one HORRID
> ALLS IN SILENCE SPOKEN and
> obeyed because we just change the
> society fastest […]
> (5)

The text suggests that Weiner finds the silence itself tricky; she seems more at ease with words that are words, not silence. Words are her constant medium, but the "SILENCE SPOKEN" by

the spirits that can "change the / society fastest" is Weiner's ultimate goal. The project of writing to record must continue even as the words she records insist on silence:

> obeyed my orders SIT SILENT
> before and after the 18th
> Hannah we are just cheating on it
> by writing it in
> (5)

Once again, the experiences that mark her as special also confuse Weiner. This, too, becomes tied to 'speaking silent' and "silent teaching." Dense sections of the book capture the instability of not just authorship, but identity, as Weiner writes the words that write themselves *and* her:

> We must speak to our men silently
> Because we are the INDIANS
> revolutionaries INS OUR CENTURY
> thems blacks speaks and we
> signal them Hannah it is hard
> written it in STOP THE BLACKS put
> them in the houses we must be perfect
> ons the street almost PLENTY OF BLACKS
> SPEAK WHO ELSE I said Speaking Knowledge
> hold yourself together until book
> written April
> after the Indian poems are
> early September finished
> Hannah we must master our Gurus
> speaking knowledge
> INS ENGLISH
> Hannah thas enough its hard
> (9)

The trouble of 'speaking silent' and "speaking knowledge" is pulling Weiner apart. Although writing enables survival, to simply speak is not adequate. Obeying the forces' orders to be their secretary requires Weiner, and her text, to uncomfortably – and for the reader's mind,

productively – straddle the nebulous line between saying and silence. The reader is Weiner's equal at moments when the voices chose to elucidate their own needs and ideas:

> Hannah it is Means's theory
> that we hold ourselves in silence
> DONST SPEAK we have the power
> under control too we dedicated it
> TO OUR PEOPLE WHO SPEAKS
> Among the S I S T E R S
> only white people hurt us
> by remaining silent UNTIL
> OURS IS THE LAND
>
> WE MUST BE CLEAR ABOUT
> THE LAND
> ITS OURS
> (10)

The directness of the message here is not diffused even though, for the reader, authorship is a pressing, unanswerable question. But Weiner simply wants to get the facts down and record the voice of the voiceless. Her teaching is also her learning, and she writes, "It is written it in Someone / else speaking thats how we know / our mind" (6). The truth of the treatment of the Indians must be "written in" writing, and, more importantly, "written in history." Someone must make the missing mark, and Weiner wants it to be her.

Weiner's identification with the Indians is complex and at times uncomfortable:

> Hannah often leaves
> in difficult situations
> so as not be white among the men
> Hannah that tells a story
> written in history
> Leonard never speaks aloud to us
> dont cry about it
> some white people are offended
> (16)

She knows that her whiteness results in certain privileges, but as a poor, liberal, Jewish writer, the system which has historically and systematically disenfranchised and oppressed American Indians in some ways does the same to her. Or, as Weiner puts it, "If you're a poor writer speak it is / allowed" (3). But, Weiner is different, special in her abilities and her connection to the supernatural world:

> Hannah he is kidding you
> about being white
> Hannah they know you have some power
> (17)

Her "power" is to see the unseen, and she seems to find a corollary in some American Indian beliefs and practices, just as she once found kinship with the yogic practices of the people of India. She writes:

> We have just awakened to our
> second reality GIVE IT UP TOOTS
> silence among the gurus
> thats the teacher's method ENOUGH
> so it is the same everywhere else
> except in America
> where they hold the land for us
> or can't survive
> this is the teaching sacred
> we must have our knowledge
> and SIS STOP obey the
> leader who is learning itself
> so we pass on knowledge
> without effort
> we can transfer the mind
> sitting still AND WE HIDE
> and we hide still
> until reservations are holy
> sacred territory THATS THE LAND
> Crazy Horse
> I wondered it

I told a tale exempt from
instructions
(18-9)

The political resistance she prescribes centers around a learning and knowledge that is disembodied and cut free from spoken language. She reveals a resistance that must be fought at every level, enemies everywhere. The patriarchal treatment of the Indians is replicated in the text in the interruption "GIVE IT UP TOOTS," a nickname she was called by her father and often "heard" in his voice. Despite the white man's territorial domination of the Indians, the realm of the psyche is inaccessible to the unenlightened:

for centuries we hide
our power
because the white man hasn't learned
it yet continued sentence please
(15)

The history of self-silencing is being rewritten as she writes. The ignorance of the oppressor is their undoing if it leaves them unable to read a "continued sentence" infused with the "learning" of "the / leader who is learning itself." The "tale / exempt from instructions" (19) to which she refers is clearly not her own. The forces here tell her: "Hannah if I had any power / I would have one long dream / & write it in" (19), suggesting that she who does have "power" must write her "dream" of equality and justice.

Spoke, written in 1981, and published in 1984 by Sun & Moon Press, is Weiner's next full-length book. It is more abstract than *Nijole's House* and also more broad in its subjects. It lacks the diaristic energy and momentum of *Clairvoyant Journal* – though it is comprised of chronological, dated entries – and the fixed focus of *Little Books/Indians*. However, it does mark the return of Hannah Weiner as an "I," a subject. Entire entries deal with the failing health of her

mother, and her return to Rhode Island to be near her. Also, Weiner reveals her concerns about her menstrual cycle as she enters menopause. She follows the dictum to "write about yourself stupid in this journal" (16). Despite the inclusion of autobiography in *Spoke*, Weiner's typical opening statement, labeled "Introduction" here, reads, "All these on my forehead words are seen EXCEPT BIG LARGE WORDS WHICH ARE GLADLY SEEN ON THE you are discovered PAGE nineteen eighty one and class Radcliffe spoke."

In "Mostly About the Sentence" she explains that as compared to *Little Books/Indians*:

> Spoke (Sun & Moon) was written differently. The words appeared on my forehead in groups short enough for me to remember and write them down and the continuation or interruptions were included in this word-group seeing. This is true even though the style varies from a journalistic technique (June & July) to a poetic technique (August) and a prose technique (Sept.). The exceptions are the large words which appeared once on every page, about 3/4 of the way through, as I was writing down the seen forehead phrases. Words for Spoke were not seen on any furniture, in the air, or otherwise. This as far as I can remember, was also pretty much the same technique for the long poems Nijole's House (Potes & Poets Press) and Sixteen (Awede). (126)

Although the text is less hurried and frantic because of this shift in technique from her last major work, the text requires no less work from the reader and is no less fragmented. Weiner largely abandons her previous practice of filling her pages with the names of friends and associates, explaining on the very first page that while she feels free to include Bruce Andrews' name, "I was also certain I would be scolded forit bythe language group whoisit thepeople who speak only general have you made a slip lately count the names eleven hannah they want to be mentioned make it clear by name but they want the most publicity they can get also by name included signed & alway" (7). She reveals her anxiety about her relationship to the Language poets, and ends two consecutive pages early in the book with commentary that expounds upon their sticky

connections: “I’m like the language boys by also by name included should be changed” (8) and “I’m like the language boys should be girls obey orders of course” (9). She writes more “like the language boys” in this text because she unfolds a more measured, concrete poetics inside her poetry.

Her practice of withholding names becomes entangled with Weiner’s obsession with authorship: “Hannah” is replaced by “my name” or “myname,” which appears on nearly every page. She explains, “In Spoke, written in 1981, myname (one word) often replaces my own name and name often replaces a real person’s name. Many names are still, however, mentioned throughout the book” (“Mostly” 133). But this explanation simplifies a process that itself leaves a trace of the person expunged: “I slimy fingers erased myname” (85).

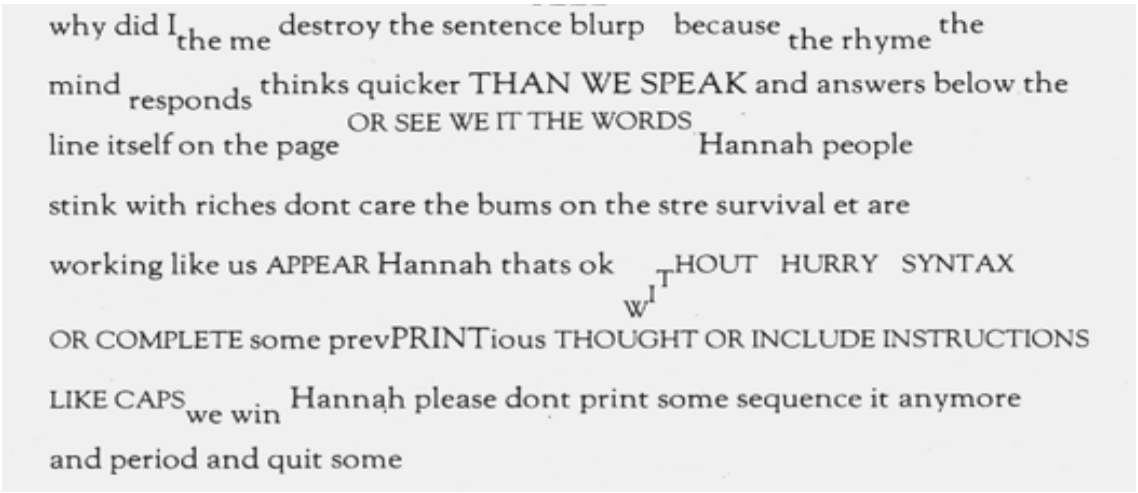
This withholding of proper names extends beyond the Language poets and herself, becoming a trope of the book; she writes “dont write an Indian last name the most who is dead” (23). But this is a rule she has already broken, as a few pages earlier she mentions “Jimmie Durham” (20). But often, rather than including a person’s name she simply writes “name” as a substitute. The looseness of identity is still at play here as Weiner manages to step away from the straightforward channeling of *Nijole’s House* and incorporate autobiographical information that shapes her role as a writer, which, in part, entails the willing negation of a unitary self. Thus, the reader of *Spoke* is told, “I have instructions I was so sure of itself I was a teacher psychic” (62), by a voice that seems to be definitely Weiner’s, but the reader must also contend with statements like “who am I in the / next page” (55).

Her methods are rooted in failure, revealing the failure of the systems she reimagines or critiques: “its because I complete the sentence that I make no complete sense sometimes we always linguistic socialism return to our point of origin and we circle two feet pairs and left and

right" (25). The glossy veneer of "completion" refracts the message, distorting it. She writes, "sis its a funny book if you like writing a novel and cant" (35), but Weiner is serious. Revolution brews on every page as Weiner writes broken language that reflects the broken promise of language, the broken promise of a finished text.

Weiner has a kernel poetics born from her experience of the world: "WRITING IS / INTERRUPTIONS" (103). She rejects "the old style finished with periods sentence" (103). And, she has a stated objective for this "WRITING": "we are breaking down the culture" (98). The collision of these two is her genius and her burden. She works to make language hold meaning even as she empties both language and meaning. On a page that begins "WHAT IS THE STYLE PREVALENT IN OUR OWN AGE CLASSICAL," Weiner complains about the cancellation of an upcoming Poetry Project reading, claiming, "NO ONE / UNDERSTANDS ME" (31). Echoing Stein, Weiner casts herself as an outsider, only sometimes unwilling.

But Weiner never loses sight of her purpose. She has something to say, or at least to convey, and is still working against language to make it say. Her acts of linguistic violence are necessary:


why did I the me destroy the sentence blurp because the rhyme the
mind responds thinks quicker THAN WE SPEAK and answers below the
line itself on the page OR SEE WE IT THE WORDS Hannah people
stink with riches dont care the bums on the stre survival et are
working like us APPEAR Hannah thats ok W I T HOUT HURRY SYNTAX
OR COMPLETE some prevPRINTious THOUGHT OR INCLUDE INSTRUCTIONS
LIKE CAPS we win Hannah please dont print some sequence it anymore
and period and quit some

(32)

This call and response poetic statement, which comes at the end of a page, is one of Weiner's most direct, even as she moves towards indirection. She has "destroyed the sentence" for scientific reasons: to write a neurological text. But "blurp" is casual, made up, possibly "blurt" or "blurb." The capitalized words that end this section, when unembedded, read as plainly descriptive of Weiner's style: '[…] WORDS APPEAR WITHOUT HURRY SYNTAX OR COMPLETE PRINT THOUGHT OR INCLUDE INSTRUCTIONS LIKE CAPS.' These disruptive language practices have the intended result: "we win." What do we win? Enlightenment. Information.

The new development, which defines her work from this period, is the content in this excerpt that does not unveil its own making, that is not about the text itself: "Hannah people stink with riches dont care the bums on the stre survival et are working like us." Here, surrounded by the language that explains itself, Weiner inserts her content, her concerns, her lessons. Or, as Weiner herself writes repeatedly in this book and others, "it has to be written in" (11).

Documenting her struggle with language, and with the forces from which they come, gives Weiner a way to win the fight:

> dont insist on the sentence
> formation thats all but keep the meaning until thismonth clear
> Iam spelling things incorrect for some reason and leave it alone
> sometimes why bother correct the individual cant alway spell anything
> some indians make it clear authori cant judge spell myeither
> myindians complete on this page sudden I want my meaning clear
> but youindians can guess theyknow with subversive it thecall

> of the hit orplace thename withsit or aspace Hannah thats a
> very interesting sentence […]
> (38)

Of course, Weiner's goal is never merely to be "interesting," but to infuse knowledge into the world, to transmit enlightenment. And, for Weiner, all her media are words. She works and lives "in the impossible page where secrets are information" (80).

This message, too, she wants to make clear: she is the messenger. She explains, "I WAS WRITTEN / I was also anybody social systems work telepathically so / its I'm giving instructions silent when I read before a large / crowd apostrophe" (59-60). Her previous submission to the forces and their message makes her an expert now, the expert. Her writing and its publication is a public service:

Hannah spill the beans seen Hannah I think terrified the

Indians have the most knowledge AND WONT TELL IT
STRAIGHT AWAY HANNAH I'M A

APOSTROPHE VERY STRONG WOMAN and some people HUMBLE
DONT LIKE IT

sis
I hannah it writes right down the page
h
a
v
e
n
t

got
the
nerve
to
tell
every
body
the
truth and end satisfied

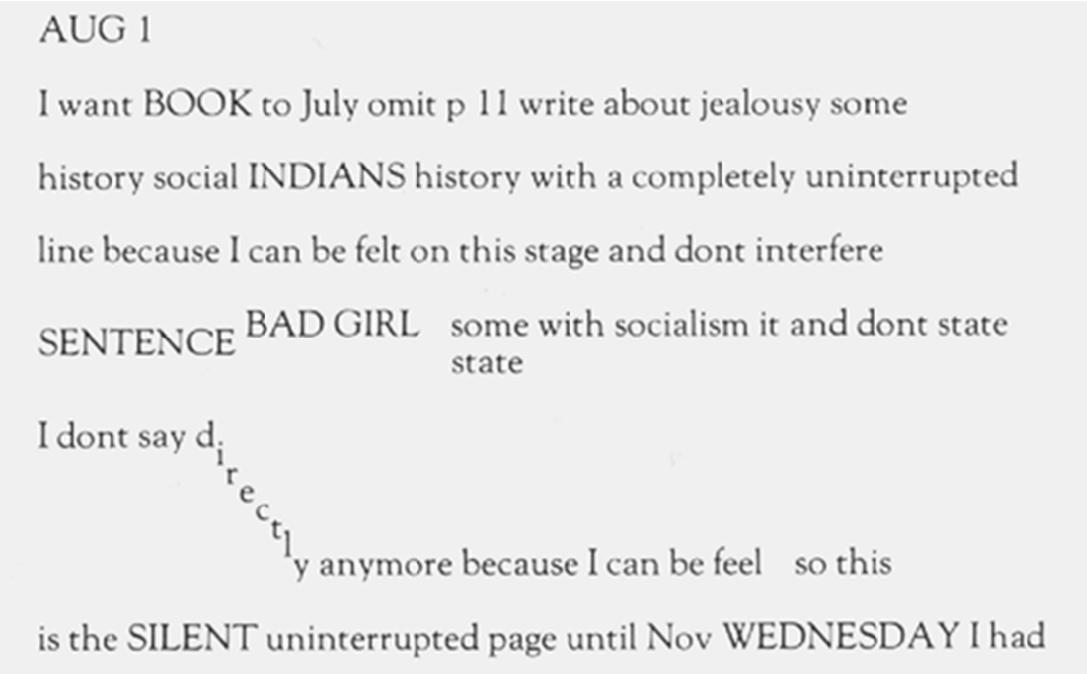
seen across the line pluralistically linguistically sis its

the across the hall Jung Science code Im altruistic study

(26)

Weiner dramatizes a struggle here. She feels compelled, directed, to tell the truth, but tells it literally slant. This obfuscation, the impossibility of saying "STRAIGHT AWAY," of saying at all, is a problem for both Weiner and the voices, as the play around "I" and "Hannah" implies. But, simply 'spilling the beans' is ineffective because of the Jungian shared identity and authority that suffuses the book and Weiner's ideology. Pluralism is Weiner's linguistics. More, it is not necessarily that Weiner – "VERY STRONG WOMAN," writer and addressee ("APOSTROPHE") – cannot or will not "tell everybody the truth," but she cannot or will not do

so and also “end satisfied.” This important difference manifests in the fact that the “and end satisfied” appears horizontally and “it writes down the page,” vertically. To be an “altruistic study” means suspending the self and its needs in service of others.


AUG 1

I want BOOK to July omit p 11 write about jealousy some

history social INDIANS history with a completely uninterrupted

line because I can be felt on this stage and dont interfere

SENTENCE BAD GIRL some with socialism it and dont state state

I dont say d i r e c t l y anymore because I can be feel so this

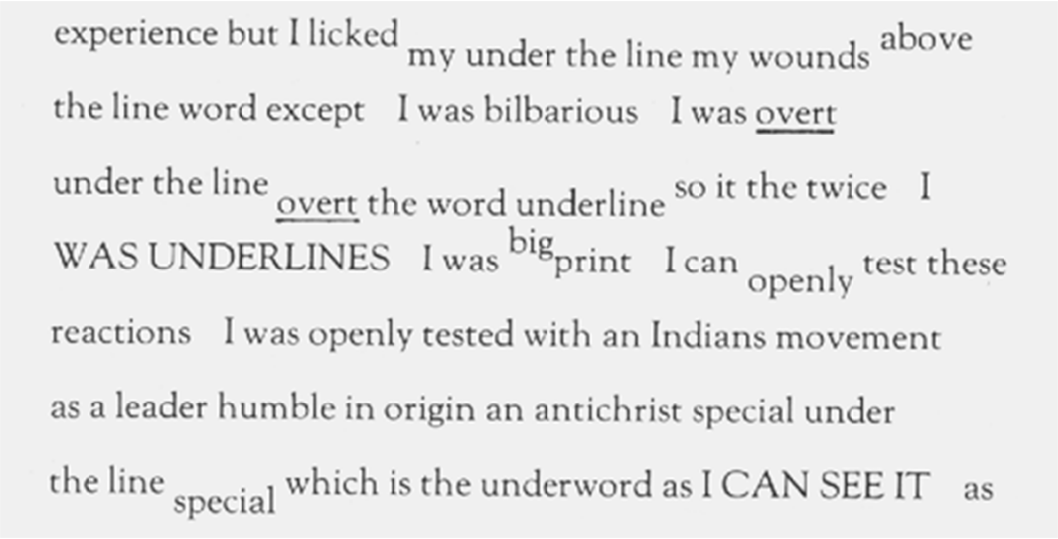
is the SILENT uninterrupted page until Nov WEDNESDAY I had

(41)

Weiner here manages to write mostly “uninterrupted,” but is also careful to note that this writing is also not ‘direct.’ She operates on the level of feelings and speaks silence: “sis it is so important to put in silent / outloud instructions period” (91).

The compulsion behind the writing is an urgency underpinned by affinity and a sense of responsibility; this animates the book: “sentence work is done w Indians imperative / to our affair cultural WORK IS DONE WITH THE INDIANS ISNT / UNTIL IM DEAD because of the spiritual side” (70). She carves an image of herself for her readers, and perhaps for herself, that connects her to the oppressed members of society. This depiction of herself allows her both to foreground a parallel between her and her subjects (or those whom she

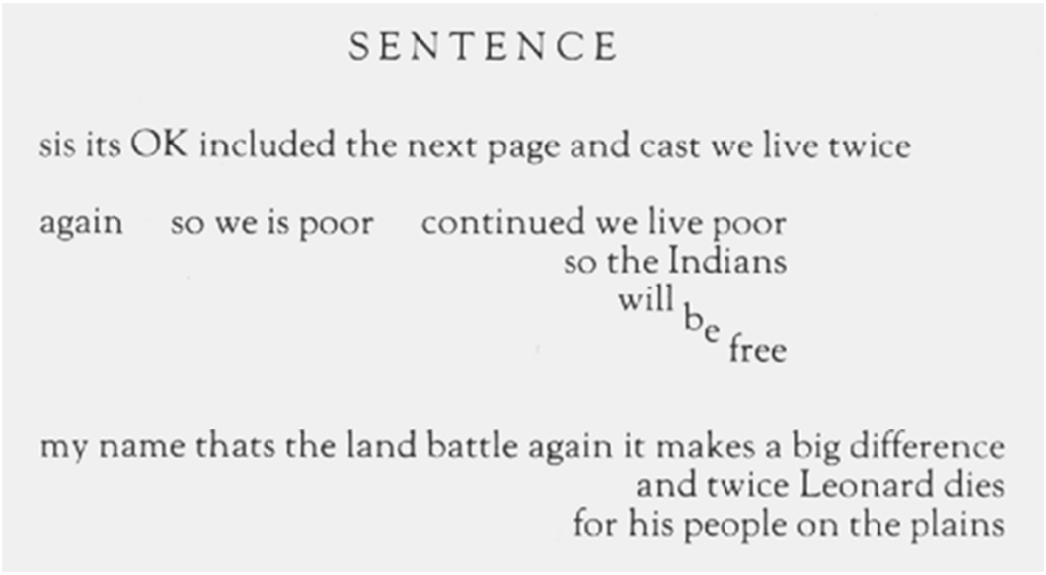
channels) and to promote a political message: "I ams an invalid and shouldn't have to pay the income tax below the poverty point middle level" (62). The entry that begins "AUG 17" (77) is an autobiographical interlude in the text. It opens, inexplicably, "mattress," which is then followed by a long list of past-tense statements, beginning with "I," filling the rest of the page and part of the next. The following page begins:



(78)

Weiner's repetition of "I" belies the biography of this "I" she constructs. This "I" is split. There is the line and there is "under the line," each written by "I." Writing "I WAS UNDERLINES," Weiner seems to be confessing that there were, are, no forces, no spirits, only her. But she continues, hinting that this deduction is empirical, and can be "openly tested." But by the end of this passage, before the intrusion of the present tense, she returns to her metaphysical insistence, her specialness. She reasserts her scribe status on the next page, admitting, "I was screaming for the knowledge" (79). The definite article seems to circumscribe or define "knowledge" for Weiner, and also suggests that she now knows what it was she wanted in the past, having it in the present.

Her linguistic martyrdom and enslavement to the words she worships is now matched by her political martyrdom as she yokes herself to the American Indian:


SENTENCE

sis its OK included the next page and cast we live twice

again so we is poor continued we live poor
so the Indians
will be free

my name thats the land battle again it makes a big difference
and twice Leonard dies
for his people on the plains

(52)

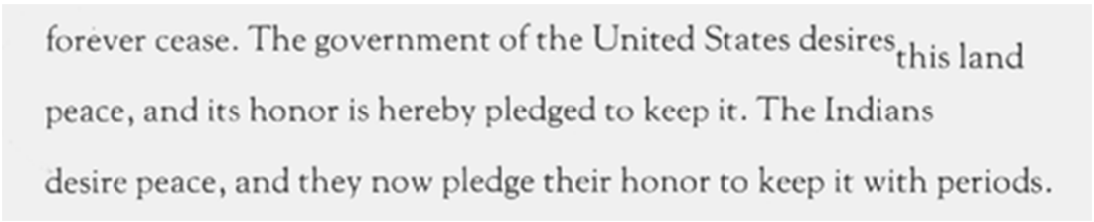
She never explains how her own poverty will "free" the Indians, but her decision to reject conventional capitalistic objectives is part of her message, her model. After revealing more specific information about her own struggles to survive financially, she writes:

> by the way I mean poverty and the land belongs to our indians who care the uranium shld be blasted be blasted up the clear uranium shld be blasted is out hannah say it plain they don't want to take it out of the or touch the remain fort laramie treaty included ing sioux land or the black hills enough they would bomb the place and clear the land from boston teepee town which is what it was called to the united states of america on the other side of this page. (14)

Weiner refers to the book as a "political brochure" (70). She appropriates the language of the treaties made with the American Indians, deconstructing them. One entry in the book is a "Treaty between the United States of the promised land and different tribes of the Sioux Indians"

(53). She rewrites the treaty, writing plainly what before had been covert. She draws the injustice to the top.

Her poetry finds a new source for its words as towards the end of the book Weiner begins to more overtly mimic the language of diplomacy and treaties:


forever cease. The government of the United States desires this land
peace, and its honor is hereby pledged to keep it. The Indians
desire peace, and they now pledge their honor to keep it with periods.

(106)

The use of the "underline" becomes infused with power, because this is where Weiner writes the truth. She makes visible the subtext present all along, unwritten but real. Moments like this unveil the earnestness of Weiner's projects, and as she sets to write a revolutionary text for the American Indians there is a need for truth in the text, as an indicator of its "honor." She reveals to the reader a feeling of shared victimhood. Weiner is serious because the situation of the American Indian compels her to be. Manipulated by words that don't say what they mean, Weiner and the Indians gain the upper ground morally by reacting with "honor." Weiner feels connected to the Indian experience because she, too, lives in a world that rejects her truth and considers her an outsider. She experiences aggressive forces, seen only by her, her insistence on the veracity of which makes her "crazy" or "ill" in the terms of White society: Weiner's double bind. Indian spirituality recasts Weiner's access to these same unseen forces as a gift – the seer is not "ill," but enlightened, honored even. Endlessly and literally impinged upon, Weiner and the Indians readjust and fight back: Weiner by making the words that fill her life her own, her activist art, and the Indians by political activism. Weiner writes with purpose about the purpose of recording more than just the words she sees, but the injustices she sees, and her own

exoneration by doing so: “I spoke to them in / sit sister silence and / recorded all my govt” (113).

The book itself becomes a plea to the reader and the page:

> forgive us one death remembers what is Russell
> said only bravery
> counts
> on this page
> revolt
> if the
> counterrevolution is
> ourlast page failed
> (113)

Only by charging the page can the page change the reader. The “bravery” of the page is the mere fact of its existence. “Revolt,” addressed to the reader, applies as much to the “counterrevolution” as to the “page”: neither must fail. The reader also must not fail the text; the work, if it “counts,” has instructed the reader to act.

At the end of the book, Weiner is fervent, and the text is an angry frenzy of indignation and insistence. The final passage of the book reads:

> and this end or this complete suffer theindians thisland is ours
> sign the Indians end thisland is ours theland isours thecomplete
> is ours the land sign Russell Means theland isours
> period of course I was with it stupid answer the boys questions asisit
> and George
> Hannah he doesnt need a leader
> (114-5)

This section, devoid of full stops except for the word “period,” begins with the frantic running together and repetition that clearly represent the importance of the political situation Weiner writes against. It ends, however, with a return to Weiner’s indeterminate reference to her

personal life. The last sentence shows pure humility because Weiner allows in an insult, undercutting her entire purpose as a writer and as a slave to the voices. If someone exists who "doesnt need" her as "a leader," a teacher, a guru, what is the efficacy of the text? What is the point of writing? But, the action of the texts occurs regardless of one man's need. Weiner writes herself a more important role: "I am rewriting the prose style […] I am included among the teachers great of the living style" (72). Perhaps only a poet could make such a bold claim regarding prose. Writing is teaching because Weiner's words – their source and result – are the lesson.

In a 1982 letter to Mayer, in which she writes to ask for a reading at the Poetry Project, Weiner tries, with a sense of desperation, to explain her devotion to the American Indian Movement and the political importance of her work:

> i swear there are times when i will quit writing – for the lack of desire to finish a commitment i have to write 4 clairvoyant journals (spoke is 2) or even to continue my life […] over the impossibility except with indians of ever being accepted for my knowing – and then when i look at leonard crow dog dying for his people i wonder what i am doing wandering around with people or places who dont care enough or' dont even begin to teach like me – have you read the indian book honest do you understand silent – hannah thats' one of the things she cant believe. ("Letter to Mayer" 3)

The "commitment" is her quest, which by now is not just a path to self-actualization, but to shared enlightenment. Her need to share, to teach, frustrates her because she finds her students unwilling or unable to receive her lessons and unwilling or unable to see her as she sees herself: as a spiritual guide, a leader. She finds that even among the open-minded poetry community of the East Village that has been her haven for so long, her knowledge is rejected as false. Thus, for her, American Indian culture becomes more than just a system through which she can make sense of her own experiences, but also a refuge from a world that misunderstands her. Later in

her letter she writes, “many indian people died in the years i knew them, their families incl children burned and all i could do was speak when i read – you are a dear friend and have the power to grant me something will do that seems important if not crucial” (“Letter to Mayer” 4-5). The lucidity of her writing here speaks to the passion behind her plea. The act of reading her poetry in public is not self-promotion but teaching.

Weiner’s next book, *Sixteen*, written in 1982 and published the following year by Awede Press, comprised of only 16 pages, is a continuation of her project of telling. The first page is a transparent overlay, on which the words “AS SEEN I WORDS” are printed in red. Through this filmy page, Weiner’s characteristic introduction is visible on the next page. This introduction opens with the line, “introduction as class i see words between lines on sign.” Weiner is sure to mention the pedagogical value of the text, and her visions, at the very start. The introduction then moves to mention a recent death: “Alex Hladky is dead, burial, movement leader as white as / could be seen I words, sojourn PERIO.” Hladky’s death frightened Weiner, and in the letter to Mayer cited above, Weiner writes, “Alex killed himself because he couldn’t get through awakening people as was his dedication” (“Letter to Mayer” 1), emphasizing her own unwillingness to be unheard. The book also memorializes Weiner’s late father, grandmother, and still-living mother. This oddly long and rambling preface also mentions “the I Ching THROW said 16 the number Enthusiasm.” The penultimate line of this introduction refers to “sixteen sentences seen this summer 82,” which reminds the reader that Weiner’s own brand of mysticism is also always still active. Thus, *Sixteen* is positioned as something highly intentional – a memorial – and also a product of a chance operation: both linked in their spiritual and mystical facets.

Sixteen is an enactment of silent teaching, though this teaching is sometimes overt and there are moments when she baldly states her objective: "the / broken promises of treaty should be beginners lessons" (15). This propagandistic bent is also reflected in how she perceives the form of the book. In a new move, Weiner also casts this book as a missive, and there are numerous references to letters and "this letter" and to the mail. The addressee of this letter is not stated. However, this book also marks the virtually unrestricted return of the proper names, and Weiner names friends and relatives alike. Only twice in the book does she remind herself to not "mention names" (7, 16). She crafts a new epistolary style, addressing her readers and meditating on the poetic potential for the letter: "decide address no one else would dream of entering / this wisdom in it of letter form we are reading" (5). The writing of this text, because of its mode of address, is posited as a long-awaited accomplishment; she writes, "[…] so many people / wonder why I wrote never this letter what is the / great spiritual achievement" (8). Her obsession is still with "telling truth" (4) as a means of transcending the physical and beating death. Her work with and for the Indians is her work on the page, and her legacy: "Because I was with Indians […] I / am remembered" (8). The "write it in" of previous works is now "written it is" (9). This slight shift – perhaps barely noticeable to the reader's eye – builds on the elevating of writing, the mark, in the earlier statement. Once the call to "write it in" is answered, the thing, having been written, finally "is." Weiner's notions of poetic efficacy – mystical in origins – lean towards the concrete: she wants to make things real, give them existence. She proclaims, "if its written it is it will" (15). Writing the words not only makes them real, but gives them agency, "will."

Weiner's teaching encourages the reader to identify with not only the oppressed, but with her, the readers' teacher and voice: "LIVE POOR for the Indians / who are not by me forgotten"

(10). Her lack of forgetting is the readers' lesson to remember both the Indians and Weiner, who are indistinguishable in the text. She deals with her reception as a political radical, and speaks directly about sending a text to a "Canadian mag," which the editor "declined" (7) to publish. This message is interrupted with the revelation that "mother thinks I shouldnt write this letter to anybody." But Weiner sees things differently:

> sis it means I was declined political to be a
> little reader get me over Indians tell
> George its a political freedom issue and I dont get
> it in wherewho scared a little my teeths […]
> (7)

In her mind, her commitment to the cause of the American Indian cements her outsider status.

This book complicates authorship in a unique way that foretells the further evolution of Weiner's poetics, and her powers. She still "act[s] like an efficient secretary" (10). But the level of dispossession is heightened as Weiner begins to claim to be channeling specific people. Weiner claims the central source is her deceased grandmother: "it was my grandmother's / poem and she remembered it in when I the type sis" (10). Centered in the middle of a page in a font at least one size larger than most of the rest of the text on the page, "GRANDMOTHERS / BOOK" (15) is printed. The gift of the words are now given by a person Weiner knew, loved, and lost: "Susan cries she speaks grandmoth / who is teaching us all again through her mind only / like me also" (6). Weiner comes from a family of "silent teachers," and this ability is portrayed as a family trade, a tradition. The slippages between Weiner and her grandmother make them one: "a very powerful woman / writer writes it down" (11). The pronoun confusion

that is Weiner's mark makes it impossible to know if the "powerful woman" and the "writer" are one and the same, or if the "powerful woman" is Weiner's grandmother who is giving words to Weiner to 'write down.' And, as always, this impossibility, this doubling, is the point. A seemingly simple statement of identification – "you just like me / GRANDMOTHER" (14) – can mean any number of things because the "me" is not fixed.

Weiner's move back to autobiography, in *Sixteen* and the texts that immediately precede it, is more than ever a farce. It becomes, again with a nod to Stein, "everybody's autobiography": a feat only possible because of Weiner's willingness to negate the unitary self while continuing to write it. Recording voices and forces that originate outside the self through a self, her self, means that she lives in limbo. She at once is and is not the writer of the words that comprise her work. Or, she writes no more than any other force participating in the collective unconscious she taps into. She abandons all resistance to the forces, and develops a deep trust in the process.

In a 1989 letter to Andrew Levy about Indians' use of peyote in highly controlled circumstances, Weiner, almost as an aside, reveals the benefit of her rejection of self:

> I know from my own experience with LSD and mescaline that drugs can be mind opening, indeed how did I become clairvoyant, but I also know they can be easily abused, and I took too much, and blew my immune system. So since we non-Indians operate on a free basis all I can say is caution, we have no one to guide us but our own minds, to which, alas, we do not always listen. ("Letter to Andrew")

Her commitment to structure is linked to the magic of ritual and the desire of the subconscious mind to share its secrets with the conscious mind. She wants a guide, and she finds one in her own mind, but only by opening her mind to the world outside. Weiner's labeling of herself as specifically "non-Indian" is surprising because her body of work makes it clear that she does not

"operate on a free basis," but is endlessly impressed upon by the forces. But perhaps, by this time, Weiner has truly accepted the forces, and believes that, regardless of their source, their reception in her mind means they are hers, part of her mind.

For Weiner, the very point of the words' existence is for them to be written, by her, and read. In his 1978 review of *Clairvoyant Journal*, Charles Bernstein explains, "because Weiner's work is so rooted in the momentum of the act of writing, the diaristic energy manages to totally submerge (immerse) the citational shards into its flow. She has herself said that she is interested in an electrical energy that completely fills the page, transforming it into an impermeable field" ("Making" 267). The insistence of the words is the insistence of her work. The energy that enlightens her is fixed on the page, and shaped to illuminate the reader. But this energy is synergy – it only can exist if the reader reads, filling in the gaps. Bernstein continues, "by seeing the language operate, we can start to free ourselves from a compulsive obedience to it" ("Making" 269). While this may be true for Weiner's readers, and this is truly the gift of her poetry, Weiner's own "compulsive obedience" – not to language per se, but the words – wavers but never flags.

The fully developed clair-style that emerges from this period is a "hysterical form" (*Spoke* 80). But if this form is representative of "a psychoneurosis marked by emotional excitability and disturbances of the psychic, sensory, vasomotor, and visceral functions" ("Hysteria"), and as it applies to Weiner's experiences it very literally is, it is also only by forcing her readers to enter this form that she can disturb their minds, producing enlightenment and awareness, guiding us as she is guided.

Chapter 5

Consciousness and Process: Tracing Connections and Drawing Conclusions

> Each period of living differs from any other period of living not in the way life is but in the way life is conducted and that authentically speaking is composition.
> -- Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation"

Weiner's methods, particularly her clair-style poetics, are both a means of composition and the way a life is conducted. I have examined clair-style's unique qualities, where and how it diverges from other traditions and practices. But, the work of poets who had gone before her allowed Weiner's work to exist, and as much as Weiner's experiences are singular, they are also stitched tightly to the culture of her time and the history of poetry. Weiner's clair-style poetics is driven by the exploration of consciousness and by poetic process, and the reader of her work faces fundamental, existential questions on every page.

Weiner can be situated in a history of the exploration of consciousness in and through poetic language. This tradition in poetry, both mainstream and avant-garde, which she participates in and extends, is based on an allegiance to method and the derangement of the senses. We can see in her work an extreme version of the "channeling" which is a part of many poets' composition practices. This poetry, too, is quest-directed, as its practitioners explore the unknown parts of the mind, probing experience and pushing experience to the extreme in order to see what happens and what can be produced from that happening. The object of this kind of experimentation is more than just poetry, but the self and knowledge. And success requires a

slavish commitment to process and poetry: a faith in poetry's capacity to do something, to enact something in the world, to benefit the poet and reader.

Weiner's work can also be placed in a history of the exploration of "madness" as poetic inspiration, divine and spiritual. The poet as seer is often an outsider, and even in cultures with shamanic and oracular traditions, the seer is special, other. The poet writes because the poet has privileged access to knowledge, and because the poet has an obligation to write – to share his or her insights with the culture, if not the world. Therefore, poetry constitutes action, stemming from the connection between consciousness and methodology. Poetry can inspire and effect change. Its existence can change a life, and one life can change its essence.

Weiner's clairvoyance has obvious precedents in the work of other, earlier poets who claimed to be visionaries, such as William Blake and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, or even HD, who professed to seeing hieroglyphs appear before her when visiting Egypt. Blake especially is a useful predecessor, having explained his perception of the role of the poet and his process of divining poetry. He writes, "I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration," and then elaborates, "To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration / That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness / Cast on the Inspired […]" (21). He wants to rescue the poet from negative social perception and disbelief, elevating his unique access to "inspiration" and the work that results. He casts the outsider as misunderstood, and furthermore, as superior to those who "dare to mock" that which they do not understand. The divine is present on Earth in the work of the inspired poet, and that is worth the self-sacrifice the poet must enact.

Often attributed with inspiring much avant-garde poetry of the 20th Century, Arthur Rimbaud was the original modernist prophet-poet. In his 1871 "Lettre du voyant," he announces, "The first study for the man who wishes to be a poet is his own self-knowledge,

entire; he seeks his soul, he inspects it, he tempts it, he apprehends it. As soon as he knows it, he must cultivate it!" (qtd. in Peschel 7). The poet is a person who is willing to explore his or her own experience of being. In this letter to a friend, Rimbaud first outlines his concept of the poet as *voyant*, which is usually translated, indirectly, as "seer":

> The Poet makes himself a *voyant* through a long, immense and reasoned *deranging* of *all his senses*. All the forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he tries to find himself, he exhausts in himself all the poisons, to keep only their quintessences. Unutterable torture in which he needs all his faith, all his superhuman strength, in which he becomes among all men the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed one, – and the supreme Savant! – For he arrives at the *unknown*! (qtd. in Peschel 7)

Again, he emphasizes selflessness rewarded. The poet suffers, but through this suffering sees and writes. What the poet-savant knows is the "unknown," but the pursuit of this knowledge requires pain that cannot be put into language, pain that is "unutterable" and transformative. Rimbaud is well known for his proclamation in the "Farewell" at the end of his long poem *A Season in Hell*: "I! I who called myself a seer or an angel, exempt from all morality, I am restored to the earth, with a duty to seek, and rugged reality to embrace!" (103). The ability to see becomes an obligation for the poet – to see more, to persist in seeing, and to push the seeing into doing. Because of his ability to see, the words he writes are infused with his sense and experience of seeing, becoming also magical. He writes, "Old tricks of poetry played a large part in my alchemy of the word" (81), reaching back to the old role of poet as prophet or oracle. In the "Deliriums II: Alchemy of the Word" section of the poem, he describes his poetic process:

> I became habituated to pure hallucination: I saw very plainly a mosque in place of a factory, a school of drummers composed of angels, open carriages on the road of heaven, a drawing room at the bottom of a lake;

> monsters, mysteries; a title from light comedy would raise terrors before me.
>
> Then I explained my magical sophistry with the hallucinations of words!
>
> I ended up considering my mental disorder sacred. I was idle, the prey of a severe fever: I envied the bliss of dumb creatures[….]
> (81)

A connection to the unseen forces of the world has a cost for the poet: the commingling of "hallucination" and "reality," or "disorder" and "illness." And, as Rimbaud infers, for a poet, the illusionary experience must be captured in language, itself an "old trick," artifice. Its clunky inefficiency, its man-madeness, is barely capable of rendering the transcendental or recording consciousness.

The Surrealists whom Rimbaud inspired also explored the working of the mind when "*deranging* […] *all* [their] *senses*," in their case by writing down their dreams, erasing the line between levels of consciousness in their poetry. In the 1924 "Manifesto of Surrealism," André Breton writes:

> SURREALISM, *n*. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.
>
> ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy*. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.
> (468)

The Surrealists, by "dismissing" shared, perceivable reality, elevate a personal reality that is metaphysical if not mystical. The unconscious workings of the mind cannot be reduced to folly or farce – they feel more real than "the real" and can lead the poet to "solve problems," but more

importantly to a "superior reality," a "higher mind" (Weiner, *Pictures and Early Words* 34). The relinquishing of "control" necessary to reach this elevated state, according to Breton, speaks to the pull of submission for the sake of experience and the art it engenders.

There exists a real and plentiful outside – the poet's work is to be receptive to this outside, to try to know it while accepting the unknowability at its core, which is its power. The poet becomes a scribe for something beyond the self. The "old tricks of poetry" to which Rimbaud refers are never really old, as experienced by the poet. Instead, these inspirational visitations are magical, mystical, and often isolating experiences for the poet. Many post-modern American poets, including Weiner, turned to Eastern spirituality in the 1950s and 1960s as a means of both understanding and creating new experiences of consciousness. These writers built upon a legacy already present, with the great influx of ideas, texts, and thought from what was then referred to as the Orient, passing through British and continental Romanticism, as well as American transcendentalism. Poets including Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Joanne Kyger, Philip Whalen, and Lew Welch created Buddhist-inspired work, playing with ideas of the relinquishment of self and multiple planes of consciousness. Many became Buddhists and serious students of Buddhist texts. The Beat poets and the San Francisco Renaissance poets explained this shared interest in Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*. Published in 1960, this extraordinarily influential anthology contains poems and "Statements on Poetics" by many of the poets from both coasts who made an impression on Weiner, making her own poetic experimentation possible. The focus on egoless writing was pervasive.

Allen Ginsberg, in his "Notes for *Howl* and Other Poems," admits that only after pushing aside his previous interest in poems organized according to "phrasing or breath groups" (Allen,

ed. 414) was he able to open himself to poetic inspiration: "I thought I wouldn't write a *poem*, but just write what I wanted to without fear, letting my imagination go, open secrecy, and scribble some magic lines from my real mind – sum up my life – something I wouldn't be able to show anybody, write for my own soul's ear and a few other golden ears" (Allen, ed. 415). Poetry writing is solitary but inspired. Ginsberg's writings on his composition techniques reveal his methodical practice, layering a purposeful variety of lines and breaths. But, a mystical undercurrent to his poetic production links him to both earlier poet-prophets and Buddhism. In a parenthetical note in his essay, Ginsberg claims to have a connection to the supernatural: "I'd had a beatific illumination years before during which I heard Blake's ancient voice & saw the universe unfold in my brain" (Allen, ed. 415). Ginsberg seems to believe that an honest exploration of self leads to insights about the world. The attention required to put the self into language shifts the emphasis from product to process. The poet uncovers the hidden structures of the universe by making the self an object of study and an object in language: "We are in American poetry and prose still continuing the venerable tradition of compositional self exploration and I would say the time has not come, historically, for any effort but the first sincere attempts at discovering those natural structures of which we have been dreaming and speaking" (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 250).

In 1974, Ginsberg and poet Anne Waldman, who had earlier been assistant director at the Poetry Project, along with Diane di Prima and others co-founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics as a branch of Naropa Institute. Naropa was founded the same year by Tibetian Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche[13], a teacher of Buddhism in America and guru to

[13] Rinpoche is a controversial figure. His contribution to the development of American poetry is manifest in the continued importance of the Writing Program at Naropa University (as the Institute became) but he has also been accused of indulging various destructive addictions (i.e. alcohol and cocaine). He was also accused of ordering his followers to strip naked the poet W.S. Merwin and his wife, Dana, during a 1975 retreat, creating quite a scandal.

Ginsberg. In *Clairvoyant Journal*, Weiner claims that Trungpa's visit to New York alters the placement of the words she sees merely by his proximity. Ginsberg said, "Trungpa wants the presence of poets at Naropa to inspire the Buddhists towards becoming articulate, and he also sees the advantage of having the large scale Buddhist background to inspire the poets to silence; to the appreciation of silent space in meditation and breath" (qtd. in Poetry Foundation). This interest in Eastern thought was often paired with an interest in more local, and perhaps more mysterious, ways of thinking, specifically, the spirituality of the American Indian. And both of these foci were often propelled or enhanced by the use of hallucinogens and other drugs – derangement of the senses – as a means of expanding consciousness and connecting to the divine. In a speech entitled "Meditation and Poetics" given at the New York Public Library in 1987, Ginsberg shared his ideas about artistic purpose and the current state of poetry: "Major works of twentieth-century art are probes of consciousness—particular experiments with recollection or mindfulness, experiments with language and speech, experiments with form. Modern art is an attempt to define or recognize or experience perception—pure perception" (*Deliberate Prose* 263).

The work of Charles Olson also advanced the practice of exploring the world and the self through poetry. His emphasis is, again, on methodical process and enlightened product. The work itself has agency beyond that of the poet/scribe – it can do by being. Olson writes, "[…] art is the only twin life has—its only valid metaphysic. Art does not seek to describe but to enact" ("Human Universe" 162), and it thus becomes a means for understanding life as lived. Art helps to order life. And like life, art creates its own referents out of need. Poetry is a product of the body, of the self, but the self in the world. The claim that art is life's "only valid metaphysic" rejects the more spiritual or divine conception of the metaphysical, suggesting

instead that the metaphysical *is* physical and is in the world, too. Olson's ideas are similar to those of Robert Duncan, who writes, in his 1969 essay "Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife," "The first experience in poetry is to find in words not an argument or an explanation but a world, to see an other world or to be of an other world" (122). He, too, is arguing that poetry is not a merely representational art, but transcends the bounds of its material: words. For Duncan, when it comes to poetic composition, "The wrong way round to do it is to want to illustrate something by means of the poem instead of letting the poem speak for itself" (126). Composition is an exercise in trust: the poet must put himself or herself in the poem's grasp, and enter fully the experience of its creation. Art, poetry, incarnates that which the poet sees just beyond the commonly seen.

Olson's 1952 essay "Human Universe" opens, "There are laws, that is to say, the human universe is as discoverable as that other. And as definable. The trouble has been, that a man stays so astonished he can triumph over his own incoherence, he settles for that, crows over it, and goes at a day again happy he at least makes a little sense" (155). The poet's task is to actively seek what most ignore. Order is present but incomprehensible without study, and the way to study and know that order – and the way to order that order through language – is by turning the self into a useful apparatus: "[…] we are ourselves both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of definition" ("Human Universe" 155). Olson suggests the term "objectism" (to replace "objectivism," which was "used in some necessary quarrel […] with 'subjectivism'"):

> to stand for the kind of relation of man to experience which a poet might state as the necessity of a line or a work to be as wood is, to be as clean as wood is as it issues form the hand of nature, to be as shaped as wood can be when a man has had his hand to it. Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to

> carry out) and those other creatures of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. ("Projective Verse" 247)

Thus, knowledge and poetry are located in the body – Olson's message is incredibly empowering, insisting that we already possess everything we need to know, in our own bodies. As Don Byrd writes, using Olson's insight as a lens: "the relationship between human subject and object, between conscious and unconscious, is no longer dialectical; these traditional oppositions stand in relation not as logical contradictions but as mapped territory to unmapped territory" (141). The secrets of the world are discoverable, but the poet must trust the body and the instructions it receives from the physical world. In a lecture about Olson's work given in 1979, Duncan makes a resonant assertion about the knowable world:

> [T]he imagination continuously illustrates what we in no way can know. I advance that picture, that the unconscious is that which is without content. Man experiences everything as content. […] There is no *boundary* to the knowable. So we *endlessly* go into the unknown converting *it* into the knowable and *that* is our great adventure of *this thing*. But what we also *ac*knowledge is *that there is*—and we go into the unknown—knowable—The opposite of the knowable is *not* the unknown. But the *opposite*—the *other* thing—the thing it is *not at all* is the unknowable. (44)

Any thing is knowable, any experience, if the poet surrenders to his or her experience. The unknown waits, ready to be discovered, and, once discovered, to be made known.

At the root of clair-style is a mission to understand and make knowable a set of experiences that for most are unknown. And more, Weiner's experiences force her to contend with the added complication that her unknown – the forces and their true intent – appears in the shape of content – words. By reading these words, and writing them, Weiner stakes a claim in new territory, transforming an *un*acknowledged personal reality into something sharable and thus meaningful. Weiner's project is also to map unmapped space, trying to read the coded messages

as she wrote the words she saw. The words Weiner sees are real because she sees them, but also because she tells the reader about them, records them. Mapping them makes them mappable for herself and others. Weiner's commitment to poetic composition, to writing down the words she sees, allows those words to become real for the reader, too.

The poet must approach the world as a vessel, willing to be filled by the world in which he or she lives. Olson wants to get truth into poetry, and a kind of truth that can be felt by the poet. Poetry making is an inner-directed act:

> It comes to this: the use of man, by himself and thus by others, lies in how he conceives his relation to nature, that force to which he owes his somewhat small existence. If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself, and shall sing, nature has such paradoxical ways, by way of artificial forms outside himself. But if he stay inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share. […] It is in this sense that the projective act, which is the artist's act in the larger field of objects, leads to dimensions larger than the man. ("Projective Verse" 247)

Olson's concepts are grounded in terms of the human body and "nature," and he sees self-examination as integral to the composition process, but the goal of this introspection is access to a knowledge that lies outside the body as well, "the larger force" to which we all are connected. The poet's purpose is to be receptive and to nurture and record this connection to the unseen forces in the world.

Duncan also figures the poet as somehow possessed by the process of writing: "I had started to go back to the beginnings of a sense of an aura in language, to a rhythmic and tonal seizure in words where I suddenly found I was not using language but used by language, not saying something I meant to say but carried away to things I had not thought to say" ("Man's"

126). The act of composition transcends thinking and intention; the poet is "carried away," possessed. Duncan speaks of the experience of composition in terms of faith and trust: "[…] there *really* is an immediacy, and the poet knows how to wait for it. And meanwhile, be absolutely prepared with no assurance—I must get this across—with no assurance that it's going to arrive. So that he's working in faith" ("Lecture" 26). Again, the poet is at the whim of the world, and must trust that his commitment to process, his ability to wait, will lead him to generative insights, and more, to poetic production.

It seems that Olson's reach even touched someone as seemingly different as Jack Spicer, who, like Weiner, said he was channeling the poetry he wrote[14]. As early as 1957, Spicer was teaching a workshop at San Francisco State College called "Poetry as Magic." Spicer made the claim that the poet's role is to take "dictation" and that "essentially [the poet is] something which is being transmitted into" (*House* 7). In a lecture given in Vancouver in 1965, he explained:

> there is an Outside to the poet. Now what the Outside is like is described differently by different poets. And some of them believe that there's a welling up of the subconscious or of the racial memory or the this or the that, and they try to put it inside the poet. Others take it from the Outside. Olson's idea of energy and projective verse is something that comes from the Outside. (*House* 5)

In a sense, Spicer makes light of his claims by saying that he takes dictation from "Martians," admitting that he named the source that "just to be funny" (*House* 24). His humor serves as a stand in for an unknowable force that nevertheless is necessary. Spicer used "outer space" and "Martians" as a way to create different terms, undercutting "serious" critical vocabulary and returning poetry to the realm of popular culture. But, in fact, Spicer may be locating some of

[14] Although it is impossible to know if she actually attended Spicer's talk, it is interesting to note that Weiner attended the important 1965 Berkeley Poetry Conference, where Spicer gave one of his four now famous lectures.

these powers in much older sources, as his work on Beowulf and the Arthurian legends demonstrates.

Duncan was a participant in Spicer's "Poetry as Magic" workshop, along with Helen Adam and others. In order to be accepted into the workshop, potential participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire created by Spicer containing questions ranging from "What political group, slogan, or idea in the world today has the most to do with Magic?" to "What insect do you most resemble?" (*My Vocabulary* 101). Duncan, too, saw himself as participating in a literary lineage: "As I write, the writing talks to me. In the Orphic tradition, poets could understand the language of birds and trees. Listening to the roar of the waves, voices appear. It is only a story we are making up, but it comes to us" (125). Both Spicer and Duncan look back, to literary predecessors, to locate their own practice and power.

For Spicer, the experience of receiving language is the core of his practice and his identity as a poet, and part of this experience is egolessness, a detachment from the material world; he writes, "You have to clear out all the junk from your mind which is going to interfere with the poem coming through" (37). The process requires an allegiance to the vessel status, despite a lack of total understanding, as he explains in a not quite complete thought expressed in a lecture:

> I think the source is unimportant. But I think that for a poet writing poetry, the idea of just exactly what the poet is in relationship to this Outside, whether it's an id down in the cortex which you can't reach anyway, which is just as far outside as Mars, or whether it is as far away as those galaxies which seem to be sending radio messages to us with the whole of the galaxy blowing up just to say something to us. (5)

In Olson's vision, the poet-vessel is more served by his or her role than in Spicer's, as reflected in their divergent opinions about the poet's role in the poetry-making process. Olson sees an

altruistic sharing that transcends the physicality of the poem: "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" ("Projective Verse" 240). In contrast, Spicer insists: "I don't think the messages are for the poet any more than the radio program is for the radio set" (16). Olson implies that the poet is an important, singular piece of the process and is rewarded for his or her role: the poem and its messages *are* for the poet, not just the reader.

Spicer acknowledges the dark side of the poet's difficult position as intermediary:

> I can't remember any good advice that I've gotten from one of my poems, that helped me be any happier or any better or sleep with more people or get any more money or anything else. Poems are pretty useless for anything like that. The advice that they give is just not interested. It's like somebody treating you fairly abstractly. At least I've never had any experience with a poem that I wrote that was really interested in my welfare, namely what I want, my happiness, or anything else. It's usually been the opposite way. They've kicked me in the teeth a few times, but they never really helped me much. (32)

His sense is that being chosen as a receptor of secret knowledge is more beneficial for the reader than the poet. The poet's value is that he or she writes what they're told. The poet is less a prophet and more a tool. Spicer's sense of obedience is rooted in his poetic logic: his devotion to reception.

A student of Olson and Creeley at Black Mountain College, John Wieners also figures in this poetic landscape. Wieners' struggle with mental illness was well documented at the time – mostly in his poetry, including his 1969 *Asylum Poems*, written when he was institutionalized. Like so many who didn't "fit in" during the 1950s, Wieners had undergone electroshock therapy. Wieners saw things that no one else could see. He had visions of the Virgin Mary. His 1971 essay "The Lanterns Along the Wall" opens, "Poetry is the most magical of all the arts. Creating

a life-style for its practitioners, that safeguards and supports them" (106). Poetry creates a way for the poet to live in a scary and out of control world. But, once again, Wieners reveals the bind of the scribe: "Unconsciously, or self unknowing, not to confuse the two, preferring the latter, we are instruments for another order, as say, for example, we allow, rather that is to say, let the ancient, over-presuming over trees be our guide. Poets are under magical orders" (107). "Magical" though they may be, they're "orders" nonetheless. The poet is compromised for poetry, willingly.

At the Vancouver Poetry Conference, on July 24, 1963, Robert Creeley gave a talk entitled "Contexts of Poetry," with Allen Ginsberg serving as a questioner and sometime participant. These issues of the location and predilection of the writer have larger implications for Creeley; he discusses the "contexts of poetry" because he wants to understand what it means to write poetry at a time when the definition of poetry is in flux:

> I think each of us in our own circumstances has come to that point where the very definition of a poem as a possibility, not as a possibility perhaps, but as an actual construct, is something we are unable to state like that. In other words, I cannot define a poem. […] I cannot tell you what I think a poem is. I think that has something to do with the fact that all the terms of consciousness are, at the moment, undergoing tremendous terms of change. […] There is an alternation of a very deep order going on in the whole thrust or push of the consciousness, literally the Negro consciousness, that has been for years relegated to a kind of underside or underworld. (9)

Not the discovery of something new, but a reordering of the universe that allows what was mute to be heard is what drives poetry that explores consciousness. He labels this consciousness "Negro" because it reveals the marginalized and disenfranchised parts of the mind, and represents a freedom from the strictures of White, middle-class morality. Later in the talk he returns to the idea of consciousness:

> […] the very premise on which consciousness operates is undergoing modifications that none of us I think are at the moment capable of defining. We can only recognize them. Let's say, that if Pound says artists are the antennae of the race, I think that any of us here is in a position to be responsive to this feeling that's so immense, so definite, and so insistent. Not because we can *do* anything with it. It simply is, it's a big change, it's a deep change in consciousness […]. (10)

Whether called a change or a return, this "new," or at least newly accessible, consciousness relies on a rejection of the solitary nature of people and a deep attention to the singularity of experience for the greater good. Poets must process the world, translate it into language so it can be studied, grasped, and shared. They are a culture's fingertips – the first part of the body politic to feel the outside and to send back reports based on sensory experience. A sense of blindness and sight coexist; the poet must trust himself or herself and his or her experience in order to produce something for the reader.

Jerome Rothenberg overtly connects Weiner's work to the sacred traditions of shaman or seer found in what he calls with a careful definition, "primitive" cultures. Weiner's work is also included in the second volume of the influential anthology *Poems for the Millennium* (1998), edited by Rothenberg and Pierre Joris, in which the editors relate her experiences to those of "many traditional poet-mystics." In the 1984 "Pre-Face" of *Technicians of the Sacred*, Rothenberg writes about the late 1960s, when the book was first published:

> Our ideas of poetry—including, significantly, our idea of the poet—began to look back *consciously* to the early & late shamans of those other worlds: not as a title to be seized but as a model for the shaping of meanings & intensities through language. As the reflection of our yearning creates a meaningful ritual life—a life lived at the level of poetry—that looking-back related to the emergence of a new poetry & art rooted in performance & the oldest, most universal of human traditions. (xviii-xix)

This purposeful looking back created an environment that allowed Weiner to conceive of her clair-style projects and to create this new-old poetics to convey her experiences of consciousness. This changing conception of poetry pulled the "mad" and the ignored back to a valued position. Ginsberg gives the Beats credit for imparting to the "mass and middle class culture of the late '50s and early '60s […] [a] respect for land and indigenous peoples and creatures as proclaimed by Kerouac in his slogan from *On the Road*, 'The Earth Is An Indian Thing'" (Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose* 238-9). Just as Rimbaud was eager to link himself to the "Negro," the Beat poet associated himself with the African American – vis-à-vis jazz typically. Wieners wrote, in his 1958 "A Poem for Cocksuckers," regarding the freedom of the gay bars, "It's a nigger's world" (38), which is in synch with Creeley's claim about "negro time."

But, the American poet of the period was equally if not more interested in the culture and experiences of the American Indian, recalling Olson's interest in the Maya. After writing "Projective Verse," Olson went to the Yucatan Peninsula to study Mayan culture and artifacts. He was deeply affected by the Maya's alternative view of humankind's position in relation to nature. What he says of the Maya reflects the poet's compulsion as a scribe: "O, they were hot for the world they lived in, these Maya, how to get it down the way it was—the way it is, my fellow citizens." ("Human Universe" 166).

These poets invested in unlocking consciousness place themselves at the margins of their culture. As seers and scribes they collude with the unknown realm, and looking to Buddhist or American Indian or "primitive" traditions allows them to find paths through this realm. The outsider remains outside, but the work he or she does infuses the culture with knowledge and with life. Claiming outsider status also relieves the poet of pedestrian obligations, trading the "civilized" for the wild, the natural. The poet, like the shaman, has a direct connection to the

mysteries of the world, which makes the work required for material sustenance seem trite. Even our contemporary culture has a way of understanding and accepting, though perhaps no longer respecting, that artists are (ideally) outside of the market, that the work they do has value other than monetary.

The acceptance of an outside that is the source of poetry or the inspiration for poetry necessitates a faith that is not blind, but clearly seen. Becoming the mouthpiece for this outside requires a willingness to reject the self as author and authority. But, it also supplies something to fill this void: process. The exploration of consciousness in poetry requires a set of rules or procedures that help the poet to hear or connect to the outside, and, even more significantly, which give the poet a means to, in the basest sense, write it all down.

In his "Meditation and Poetics" talk, Ginsberg said, "Poetics isn't mere picturesque dilettantism or egotistical expressionism for craven motives grasping for sensation and flattery. Classical poetry is a 'process,' or experiment—a probe into the nature of reality and the nature of the mind" (*Deliberate Prose* 262). A quest can only be completed by acting, even if this acting is the emptying of self. Ginsberg writes of his poetic practice, "I simply followed my Angel in the course of compositions," and declares, "my poetry is Angelical Ravings" (Allen, ed. 417). In 1961, Ginsberg proclaimed, "The only poetic tradition is the voice out of the burning bush. The rest is trash, and will be consumed" (*Deliberate Prose* 249). The poet's important function as conduit can only be actualized if the poet writes the words of the "angels," getting them onto a page and converting them to something shareable.

A dedication to process becomes a substitute for agency. The work of Stéphane Mallarmé set the stage for the use of the page as poetic landscape, emphasizing a visual ordering

of words. In his "Preface" to "A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance," he describes his poetic technique:

> The text imposes itself in various places, near or far from the latent guiding thread, according to what seems to be the probable sense. The literary advantage, if I may put it like that, of this copied distance which mentally separates groups of words or words between themselves, seems to be now to speed along and now again to slow down the motion, scanning it, even intimating it according to some simultaneous vision of the Page, the latter taken as a unit as in the verse of perfect line elsewhere. (53)

The objective is to create a text that itself insists and imposes, and validates the process of its creation, and which also reveals the quest-directed nature of poetry that explores unlit reaches of human experience, of consciousness.

Olson's work goes beyond theorizing how the poet should experience the world. He also codifies a new means of poetry making and a new kind of poetry. Olson explains, "From the moment [a poet] ventures into FIELD COMPOSITION—puts himself in the open—he can go by no track other than the one that poem under hand declares, for itself. Thus he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of some several forces just now beginning to be examined" ("Projective Verse" 240). Obedience to the poem requires the body, is processed through it. Field composition requires listening to the world, to the body, and turning this listening into language. Olson's focus is on the materiality of poetry and of the process of writing. Duncan's insights into Olson's notion of field composition are illuminating:

> Charles Olson comes forward with the gestalt idea, taken from gestalt painting—of how do we see a painting, we see it as a field—and proposed: could we compose by field—then, if it, then—it's actually, it's not *just* an analogy, it's—In poetry there is no proposition of analogy, because if you can make unicorns, you can—they're not—Nothing has to be analogous to

> *anything* in poetry: Everything is proposed in language—in language you can make a field. Now we feel it as a field. (21)

Through poetry, language itself is transformed and the rules of usage are rewritten. The word is overwritten by the field as the irreducible measure of language, itself irreducible in its immeasurability. Language – in a field, as words arranged on a page – is capable of revealing to the reader, and the poet, that which, without poetry, is beyond perception. But, again, language can only enact this revelation if the poet is willing to listen to what the poem "declares," to use Olson's language. For Duncan, too, the poetry has agency and the poet is its proxy: "In the intensity of the work, it, Poetry, gives me orders" (124).

Weiner is hyperaware of some of "the forces" that impinge upon her life and define her composition practices. Throughout her clair-style works, Weiner registers her astonishment when the words she sees and records intersect and match up perfectly on the page, and her frustration when they fail to. Unchanging is her insistence that she builds, but does not engineer, the text. The page is the canvas on which Weiner arranges the words she sees, her basic poetic unit, and is thus the field of her particular field composition. This field is an important space because only here can she fulfill her duty to the forces and also usurp them. Her own imprimatur meets that of the forces and the words transform from visions to poetry in this field. She tells the reader that she is being told where the words go on the page, but she does not or cannot always do what she is told, in part because of the endless interruptions of her process, which become her process.

Weiner's reliance on the typewriter as a mediator, a part of the poetic process, also ties her work to Olson's formulation of the typewriter as "the personal and instantaneous recorder of the poet's work," allowing the poet to compose "as though verse was to have the reading its

writing involved, as though not the eye but the ear was to be its measurer, as though the intervals of its composition could be so carefully put down as to be precisely the intervals of its registration" ("Projective Verse" 246). Olson explains:

> It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for a poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspensions even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrases, which he intends. […] For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work. ("Projective Verse" 245)

Olson sees the typewriter as a means to enhance communication through written language because it, too, has its irreducible characteristics. With the use of this machine, the poet, not the printer or editor, is in control. Olson wants the typewriter to transcribe the poet's measure with a new nuance, becoming part of the poem's code.

This attention to the act of writing and its implications for process and product was also being paid by Creeley. He begins "Contexts of Poetry" by talking about "some sense of writing in the most literal of contexts," saying to the audience, "What I will tell you is how I write" (3). Creeley admits that he prefers composing on a typewriter because, when he was younger, "typewriting implied a 'professional' context. If you were going to be serious, or going to *claim* seriousness for yourself, the instrument that you used in writing had to be particular to what the act of writing was" (4). The process of composition dictates what is composed: "I find that the pace of my writing is concerned with the speed with which I can type" (4). These poets use the order imposed by the mechanized typewriter to order their experience of consciousness.

Method is a haven for writers of consciousness, as are "alternative" traditions of shamanism and seeing. The totalizing and alienating experience of being "transmitted into"

(Spicer 7) and of relinquishing the unitary self is useful only when processed through a specific set of procedures that help to reorder the world. Like Weiner, they work to empty themselves of ego, hoping to be filled with knowledge.

Weiner's poetic predecessors are more delineated than her own place in the lineage of postmodern American poetry, and some of the recent attention focused on her has been in part an attempt to track her affinity with one school or another. But whether or not this is a fruitful pursuit remains an open question, particularly given the diversity of her affinities and the claims of allegiance made upon her work posthumously. Weiner studied poetry with Kenneth Koch and had a close association with Bernadette Mayer, and it is useful to think of her connection to New York School poetry, or at least some aspects of what has come to be called New York School poetry. In an interview with Daniel Kane sometime between 1998 and his death in 2002, Koch reminisces about his New School poetry classes, in which Weiner was a student:

> I decided to teach at the New School not only because I wanted a job, but I really thought I knew a secret about poetry that nobody knew except John [Ashbery] and Frank [O'Hara] and me. I knew about this new aesthetic, this new way to write poetry, and I wanted to spread it around, because I thought it was dumb to think that these other bad poets were writing poetry. I taught with a lot of enthusiasm. I really had a mission to make this aesthetic clear to people. I liked the idea of there being more New York poets. (Kane, *What is Poetry* 94)

Frank O'Hara's "I do this, then I do that" poetics captures what Koch means. O'Hara claims, "I am mainly preoccupied with the world as I experience it" and "What is happening to me, allowing for lies and exaggerations which I try to avoid, goes into my poems. I don't think my experiences are clarified or made beautiful for myself or anyone else, they are just there in

whatever form I can find them" (Allen, ed. 419). Similarly, details of Weiner's daily life make up large parts of her clair-style poems, and her work is filled with the names of friends and associates, places, and events in a way that resembles other work classified as New York School poetry. These works share a feeling of immediacy, a sense of a moment being captured in words. Koch defines "New York School aesthetic" as "just a lot of fresh air, to have fun with poetry, to use the unconscious, to use the spoken language, to pay attention to the surface of language" (Kane, *What is Poetry* 95).

No poet had a more profound influence on Weiner than Bernadette Mayer. They were close friends from the 1960s until Weiner's death, and Weiner's work displays more visible parallels to Mayer's than that of any other. Also, as part of Weiner's insistence on naming names in her work, "Bernadette" appears in all of the major clair-style works and is virtually a character (along with "Hannah") in *Clairvoyant Journal*. In fact, near the start of *Clairvoyant Journal*, Weiner explicitly mentions Mayer's famous "experiments" and even appropriates some of the language from this list. These experiments mainly focus on effecting the kind of writing possibilities that for Weiner are possible, first, because of her use of codes, and then, because of the words she sees. Such experiments include: "Rewrite someone else's writing. Experiment with theft and plagiarism"; "Systematically derange the language"; "Attempt to write in a way that's never been written before"; and "Invent a new form." Mayer also has a list of "Journal Ideas," which marks an important point of synergy with Weiner's project; Weiner's early journals evolved into full-blown clair-style texts while maintaining their status as "journal," as seen most obviously in *Clairvoyant Journal*. Mayer's attention to language as material object and focus on the present tense, seem indebted to Stein, but, regardless of their historical source, for Weiner's writing, these ideas are crucial.

However, their personal relationship was not always easy. In fact, Weiner makes it a point to announce that she wrote her early journals "to document my entire psychic RECOVERY development" ("Dear Ron") and not because of Mayer's journal exercises. She continues, "I was influenced by her a little but not much […] We were close friends since 65 I think and she saved me from the hospital experience" ("Dear Ron").

In poet Clark Coolidge's 1994 "Letter to Peter Baker," addressed to the editor of the collection in which it is published, he casts some light on Mayer's thinking about poetry in the mid-1970s, which was in harmony with his own:

> We certainly encouraged each other a lot, I recall that. Always to go further, no matter what reaction, or lack of, by anyone, known or unknown. I remember us agreeing that we were probably "crazy" and had very little to do with "poetry" as it was then understood even among the NY School forefront. We'd say, Why not just call it "writing" then, trying to avoid the whole problem. We wanted endless works, that would zoom on & on and include everything ultimately, we'd talk about hoping for the "Everything Work," which would use every possible bit flashing through our minds. (256)

The objective is to get the entirety of consciousness into language, and more, into a single inclusive work. This is the generative impulse behind Weiner's clair-style works. Mayer and Weiner both straddle the line between what has come to be called New York School and Language poetry, both in terms of chronology and poetics.

Weiner's poetic process can also be read in the context of the procedural work being done by other nascent so-called Language poets. The more formally experimental and performative aspects of Weiner's work are underpinned in part by her connection to her longtime friend, Jackson Mac Low. From the start of his career, Mac Low was committed to experimentation for the sake of expression, through his early associations with John Cage and

Merce Cunningham and as an actor with The Living Theatre. Many of his works were performance based, used "found," appropriated texts as their material – playing with ideas of authorship – and were directed by acts of chance. Again, his work relies on, or even obeys, process and possibility, letting the process of the production dictate its product while the artist is a vessel of chance. He constructs a collage of the random and the machinations of process.

Mac Low's work is about the process of its making. He developed procedures, games almost, for the creation of poetry and performances. His poetry, like Weiner's, challenges conventions of authorship. His performances, similar in their reliance on chance to the Surrealist Language Events, were often multimedia. His chance operations, which, he explains, "stem directly from Buddhism," were "used mainly to evade the ego (at least partially) in order to present concrete words, etc., relatively unburdened by the composer's emotions, taste, and predilections, and to encourage in the composer, performers, and audiences an attitude of 'bare attention' or 'choiceless awareness'" (Bernstein, ed. 218). He, too, is invested in the poet-scribe, emptying the self in order to let the world flood in. He explains, "This epitomizes a basic Buddhist and anarchist paradox: that one may make meaningful choices while being choicelessly aware and fully respecting others' choices" (Bernstein, ed. 219). Mac Low is an assembler, crafting his art from bits and pieces of culture and cultural consciousness, leaving it to chance to dictate order. When eulogizing him, Judith Malina, one of the cofounders of The Living Theatre, wrote, "All of Jackson's work, in poetry, music, theater and political action exemplifies the extreme of the uncompromising search for pure form, for the miracle of the mathematical in the miasma of uncertainty, for the crystallization and the flow." His commitment to form and process links him to, and inspired, Language writing.

In Language poetry one sees a synthesis of theories of methodology and process *as* poetic inspiration. This marks a move from the metaphysical to the material in terms of muse. Weiner is now generally considered a Language poet, or has been appropriated into that label, but it is tricky to define Language writing as a movement or to codify who is a "Language poet" and who is not. It was more of a constellation of poets with similar ideas publishing at roughly the same time and in the same publications than a cohesive "group" or "movement." The first important journals to collect and publish Language-centered writing were not limited to one geographic space. This decentered nature is illustrated by three of the major Language writing publications: *Open Letter*, *This*, and *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*. Though it moved its base to Toronto in 1971, the Canadian Journal *Open Letter* originated in 1965 in Victoria, British Columbia. It was published by Frank Davey, with the editorial assistance of poets George Bowering, Fred Wah, and David Dawson. The San Francisco-based *This* magazine was edited by Robert Grenier and Barrett Watten, and first published in 1971. It was here that Grenier made his now iconic pronouncement: "I HATE SPEECH." And perhaps the most well-known of the journals was *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, the first issue of which was published in New York in 1978, and edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews. But there were many other magazines and journals and presses that produced Language writing in the 1970s and 1980s. And Language writers were active in numerous cities, including New York, San Francisco, and Washington D.C., giving readings and holding lecture series.

While I'm not sure that defining Language writing is either possible or useful, Marjorie Perloff describes the practitioners of this kind of writing as a "group of poets […] keenly interested in philosophy and poststructuralist theory […] with the conviction […] that poetics was an intellectual enterprise, deserving a larger place than it had in the Creative Writing

classroom of the seventies" ("After"). The set of ideals that came to define the "movement" were generated as a response to poetry in which the voice of the author was the emphasis of the poem. Rather, "language poetics, to put it simply, sought to restore the intellectual and the political to poetry, to ally itself more meaningfully to contemporary developments in theory and cultural studies" (Perloff, "The Coming of Age"). But, in no way did, or do, those called Language writers function as a unit. In fact, these writers disagree about how the name of the group should be written. In a fascinating mediation about the "Language poetry" Wikipedia page posted on his own website, Barrett Watten decries the use of the label "L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry," explaining, "the name of the journal, reflecting one editorial perspective, [should not be used] to name a literary movement that exceeds and precedes it."

Though her range of associations and influences spans far wider than one group or movement, Weiner's connection to the ideas that fostered this loose collective is documented. Rae Armantrout, in the very first issue of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, published in 1979, includes Weiner in a list of women "language-oriented" writers. And her work was published in the magazine, as well, in addition to being included in *The Politics of Poetic Form*, which was published in 1990 and contained essays and talks from the previous decade.

But I also believe that Weiner's work, and specifically her clair-style works, played a role in shaping the politics and aesthetics of Language writing. If Language poetry is a critique of language, Weiner's work is part of this body of critical work, but it also pushes its critique beyond language to consciousness. Weiner's practice literalizes and achieves many Language poets' stated goals: to explore writing as reading, to challenge the authority of the author and authorship generally, and to elevate the use of "schizophrenic" language. As Charles Bernstein wrote shortly after her death, Weiner "used her self as the most ready-to-hand site for her

experiments on the relation of language to consciousness. Hannah's work is an unrelenting synthesis of radical formal innovation and intensely personal content" ("Hannah Weiner"). His formulation of her writing connects to his description of his own poetics, as offered in his essay/poem "A Particular Thing":

> These words, or those in poems, are not used to describe events in the world that have already occurred, in life or in fantasy, or intended to be about some thing else; it being primarily a question of attention, of not wanting to attend to bringing forward a memory or an idea or an event, all external to the poem itself (to the act of writing), but to attend to the internal event that is taking place in it. What is come upon as this, lived and lived out, need not be deciphered or uncoded but simply let be, having become, in itself, for itself. (50)

Weiner's "internal event" makes itself external, at least in her perception, and this allows her poetry to have a privileged position as "internal" experience is enacted on the page. Again, Weiner is a cartographer of consciousness, writing the forces that have commandeered her experience of consciousness so that, being made manifest, they can be but also be read.

The Politics of Poetic Form does the important task of collecting the essays and conversations that began to define and catalog Language writing. In Jerome Rothenberg's contribution he questions the possibility of "a language poetics [a language poetry] as a way of life. An instrument (if I can use that word) of *liberation*. A private/public healing" (13). No boundary exists between art and life, and the purpose of art is to make positive changes in the world by enlightening the reader and the writer. This activist impulse drives Weiner's later clair-style works.

Bruce Andrews' essay, "Poetry as Explanation, Poetry as Praxis," goes further in defining the Language movement:

> A desire for a social, political dimension in writing – embracing concern for a public, for community goods, for overall comprehension & transformation – intersects an overall concern for language as a medium: for the conditions of its makings of meaning, significance or value, & sense. Technicians of the Social – the need to see society as a whole. That has meant, in recent years with this work, a conception of writing *as* politics, not writing *about* politics. (24)

Andrews also advocates for the idea of "writing as reading," which entails "radical writing" that works "to show the *possibilities* of sense & meaning being constructed; to foreground the limits of the possible – & our possible lives; to create impossibility" (28). The kind of writing he promotes reflects on its own making and the possibility of its own existence. By focusing the reader's attention on the surface of the work, the poet shows the reader the constructed nature of all language. This shared consciousness opens a space for authentic communication, using language to get beyond it to meaning. Although such thinking is not particularly new, it has been influential.

It must be acknowledged, at the same time, that many of these ideas and their application in poetry can be traced back to other writers and movements and have precedent in postmodern literary theory. In his 1948 essay, "What is Literature," Jean Paul Sartre writes, "The strength of a writer lies in his direct action upon the public, in the anger, the enthusiasm, and the reflections which he stirs up by his writings" (159). And he also tracks the efficacy of literary work to the act of reading: "Reading seems, in fact, to be the synthesis of perception and creation. It posits the essentiality of both the subject and the object" (52). The reader must read for the work to work. He continues, "Thus from the very beginning, the meaning is no longer contained in the words, since it is he [the reader], on the contrary, who allows the significance of each of them to be understood; and the literary object, though realized *through* language, is never given *in* language" (52). And Sartre's ideas resonate with Duncan's insistence that "[…] the poem seems

primarily political in its meaning: to arouse the conscience of the people against the existing order of dominion" ("Man's" 130). It was ideas like these, and other influential postmodern philosophies of language, that inspired Language writers to break away from traditions and write radically experimental poetry.

Lyn Hejinian, whose own poetic autobiography *My Life* is an experiment in using poetry to write a life, sheds some light on her practice in her own statements of poetics: "The language of poetry is the language of inquiry, not the language of a genre. It is that language in which a writer (or a reader) both perceives and is conscious of the perception. Poetry, therefore, takes as its premise that language is a medium for experiencing experience" (Hejinian 3). Language is not just an ingredient used in poetry making, but the way we order and make understandable our experience of being.

In her seminal essay, "The Rejection of Closure," which was first given as a talk in San Francisco in 1983, Hejinian works to define an "open text" and explain how this openness frees the poet from the pressure to write an all-encompassing, monolithic poem and frees the reader from restrictive reading practices. Hejinian's powerful definition of an "open text" was particularly influential to Weiner, who cites it in her essay "Mostly about the Sentence," and it bears quoting at length:

> The "open text," by definition, is open to the world and particularly to the reader. It invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and thus, by analogy, the authority implicit in other (social, economic, cultural) hierarchies. It speaks for writing that is generative rather than directive. The writer relinquishes total control and challenges authority as a principle and control as a motive. The "open text" often emphasizes or foregrounds process, either the process of the original composition or of subsequent composition by readers, and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material and turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification. (43)

Though this definition makes bold, perhaps hyperbolic, claims, an optimism for poetry is reflected in this concept. Only a poem is capable of being this type of text; it offers the ideal means to show the materiality and artificiality of language in order to make language useful in its acknowledged opacity. Hejinian imagines a poetics that destabilizes authority, but method – form – becomes a new support. In her new introduction to "The Rejection of Closure," written for its republication in 2000, Hejinian opens:

> I can only begin a posteriori, by perceiving the world as vast and overwhelming; each moment stands under an enormous vertical and horizontal pressure of information, potent with ambiguity, meaning-full, unfixed, and certainly incomplete. What saves this from becoming a vast undifferentiated mass of data and situation is one's ability to make distinctions. The open text is one which both acknowledges the vastness of the world and is formally differentiating. It is form that provides an opening. (41)

Codes are needed: for limiting and arranging experience and for communicating that experience. The open text, like the "Everything Work" of Mayer and Coolidge, is a place where the reader and the writer commune, sorting out the difficulties of life and perception together.

These theoretical constructs are actualized in Weiner's work in a way that they are not in much other Language writing. For Weiner, at least in part, the circumstances of her experience dictated her poetics. If Weiner wasn't clairvoyant – or didn't believe herself to be so – there would be no clair-style. Also, because of the totalizing nature of her experience of clairvoyance, every aspect of her life was affected, interrupted even. But, Weiner also manages to get her life into her work without resorting to a lyrical, confessional mode: the creative writing classroom aesthetics which Language writing works against. The personal really is the political in her work, and to such a degree that it must have been profoundly influential to the Language writers with whom she was friends.

Weiner's own contribution to *The Politics of Poetic Form*, which comes in the form of a short "Forum" section that records a conversation about poetry between Weiner and Bernstein, is her clearest statement about poetic intent and its connection to process. She begins the dialogue by announcing: "I think that disjunctive and non-sequential writing can change states of consciousness, awakening the reader to reality, and thus the need for political change" (226). Weiner counts on her work to do something: to act in the world and on her reader. This altruistic hope for writing resonates with the stated poetics of many Language writers. But, this activist impulse was also a product of Weiner's involvement with the American Indian Movement. Her friend and fellow activist and poet Jimmie Durham claims, "I think the purpose of art is to help people interpret their world so that they may be better able to change it in positive ways" (69).

His sentiment overlaps with Weiner's. Durham's objective is to tell the stories of the Indian people: "It would be impossible, and I think immoral, to attempt to discuss American Indian art sensibly without making central the realities of our lives. One of these realities is the racism manifested as romantic stereotypes by which North Americans may deny other political realities such as enforced poverty and alienation, and constant land loss" (107-8). Likewise Weiner tells the truth about both herself and those around her who suffer, but in such a way that their experience of dislocation and alienation is reflected in the form of the work, in her clair-style.

Though Weiner's work stands apart from this group of poets, too, the acknowledgment of the other, the marginal, in which much Language Poetry is so invested motivates my own attempts here to situate Weiner in a poetic history. Ron Silliman, in the late 1980s, in his essay "Canons and Institutions: New Hope for the Disappeared," writes, "A poetry without history strikes me as bordering on the unintelligible, its social value, its very use to us in our daily lives,

seems to me questionable, and its fate a mere choice between oblivion and the still worse doom of perpetually repeating itself" (Bernstein, ed. 150). He adds, "[R]eal people are dying horrible, alienated deaths partly as a result of the conditions of poetry in our society. Outsider poetics has been stuck for decades at the moment of diagnosis. It is time to begin treatment" (Bernstein, ed. 160). This treatment involves recuperating lost, non-canonical poets, such as Weiner, who wrote in ways considered illegible and illegitimate to mainstream (or, as seemed apt to Silliman at the time, "academic[15]") poets. Though he is speaking generally here, he later writes of Weiner specifically soon after her death, claiming that her writing is "simply impossible to duplicate" ("re: Hannah"), and I believe that this is only partly because of the singularity of her odd experiences.

Clair-style is a radical, experimental poetics that also allows a place for the personal. Weiner's work, though distinct, is clearly inspired by and in conversation with the poetry of her time and place. But in reality, none of the poems written by the poets with which she shares so much really *look* like Weiner's. Her work may be informed by her predecessors and cohort, but it is not derivative. Its radical newness roots it in this tradition, and helped to expand the field of poetry. Despite the literalness of the clair-style project – write what you see – the result is abstract, difficult, not lyric, and, maybe by some definitions, not poetry. This aspect of Weiner's work keeps it fresh and alive. At the time she was writing, she was an inspiration to those around her. She was an extraordinary person having an extraordinary experience, which was, for the most part, uninstigated by her and totally out of control. Patrick Durgin, her recent

[15] This issue of academic vs. non-academic poetry is more vexed now than in the late 1980s when the talks that became *The Politics of Poetic Form* were given. More Language writers have become part of the academy, and therefore the body of work taught and performed at academic institutions has broadened.

anthologist, speaks of her "place within one of the most compelling traditions of recent USAmerican poetics: radical modernist literary experimentation as social ethics" (14).

Her clair-style works are excessive; they document, are, more words than the poet or reader can handle. They display no restraint, only obedience and hope. Weiner's work records the destruction of language – friendly or formal – from the inside out; it studies authorlessness, the author as a scribe, and investigates consciousness and perception. Weiner does not have to sit and wait for poetry, as Spicer describes his process, or to mindfully remain inside herself, as in Olson's concept, because her poetry is already made and her job is to simply write it. Spicer, Duncan, Olson, and most others speak of their experience of receiving language, of taking dictation, or however the individual understands it, as a process that requires patience and work, but, for Weiner, the words were omnipresent. Her inspiration – her access to an unseen, secret world – is in excess, surplus, simply too many words for her to even write down. A mania is perceptible in her desperation to record all the words, to convert them into some *thing* so that she herself could organize them and she and others could read them, make them legible.

Her radical texts are undeniably visionary stylistically, but despite being directed by Weiner's compelling theory of the brain's reaction to disjunctive writing, making absolute claims regarding their political efficacy is tricky for the reader. Weiner's steadfast claim of clairvoyance and her insistence on her lack of authority perhaps overshadow her message if her work is a call to action, not just awareness. She claims the work is predicated on a disembodied writing, and this assertion consecrates the books; they are magic. And, something else is at stake for Weiner: a danger of getting lost in the poetry, in the task of poetry writing that she had been set to. This generates a tension in the work that holds the reader captive as well. But, arguably, the most remarkable parts of the clair-style books are where Weiner shows not "the mind," but

herself. The cool narrative persona of these poems informs the "Hannah" we see reflected in Weiner's poems. Even when tormented by the words, she remains witty and engaged with the exciting place and time in which she lived, and busily recording all of these elements of her life for her reader.

The title of this study of Weiner's clair-style poetry is "YOU CAN TRANSCEND THIS STUPID bad girl REALITY" (*Clairvoyant Journal* 48) because her work is a reminder to her readers that no matter how bad "reality" gets, poetry offers the promise of transcendence, a place beyond this "stupid reality" even as the parochial voice of this reality interrupts. This transcendence may not be absolute, but it exists. Weiner uses her clair-style writing to help herself to heal both her self and the world.

I intend for this to serve as a reading guide to Weiner's work and to her clair-style poetics. My decision to focus exclusively on Weiner's clair-style works is based on my interest in the fact that this is poetry that is born directly from Weiner's experience of seeing words, a definable – though perhaps not understandable – set of sensory experiences. My goal is always to simply figure out how her poetry works – what it does and what it effects. Her poetry was difficult for her to write, and for me to read.

While Weiner's work has not yet been explored critically to the extent that it should be, or, I hope, will be, it has been approached from a variety of perspectives by others. Most of these studies have been limited in scope, and at this point no book-length analysis of her work has been published. Since her work is so difficult and varied, most critics, wisely, have limited their scholarship to a time period or a text.

I approach Weiner on her own terms, more concerned with understanding the workings of her unique, important poetry than in diagnosing the poet. The terms and parameters of

"clairvoyance," like those of "mental illness," are loose, shifting, culturally construed. Reading Weiner is difficult both syntactically and emotionally. The impact on the reader is part of the product, and thus must be taken into consideration in an analysis of Weiner's oeuvre. I try to untangle, if just long enough for a peek, Weiner's knotted construction of authorship. Rather than chose a theoretical frame for my arguments, I suggest connections by historicizing Weiner's work, revealing threads of influence that link her to writers past and present, contemporaneous and contemporary.

I read her work with compassion and awe. I believe that her work and life hold lessons – about that, she was correct. She can teach us how to live in the face of difficult, totalizing experiences, and how to translate trauma, how to make it something else, something useful. Weiner's lesson is that making it through a difficult experience can mean giving oneself up to that experience, allowing it the control it requires rather than fighting it. But giving in does not mean giving up. Her work possesses real value, and real lessons, coming not from the "forces," but from her. Her bravery in the face of terrible, frightening imposition in her life is stunning, as is her unwavering dedication to poetry. She obeys the words she sees, but only because she is convinced. Weiner's belief in poetry's capacity to heal her – as the poet – and to enlighten her readers is transformative, transcendent, for both.

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