Pop Poetics: Between Lyric and Language

by

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Abstract

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Pop artists (painters *and* poets) often get praised or censured for their inclusion of low-brow commercial iconography. Such appraisals, positive or negative, obscure the epistemic rigors of Pop serial-design. Pop-inflected poetic projects by Joe Brainard, James Schulyer, Eileen Myles, and David Trinidad rarely receive attention, for instance, as exemplary experimental texts. This dissertation thus introduces the concept of "Pop poetics" as a metacritical third-term by which to problematize reductive distinctions between "lyric" and "language-based," "representational" and "abstract," "confessional" and "constraint-generated," postwar poetry. It tracks a perspective-based, serial-realist poetic strain inherited from Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, and John Cage, even as it posits a direct relation between Pop poetics and the modernist grid, the mixed-media assemblage, the serialized gallery display, and the serialized art manifesto.

Each chapter imports the critical vocabulary of poststructuralist art-historians Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, and/or Hal Foster, as well as the timely (mid-sixties) insights of Pop-theorist Lawrence Alloway, of *Artforum* editor John Coplans, and

MoMA-curators William Seitz and John Elderfield. Adopting artist-poet Joe Brainard as its principal personage, my project presents Pop poetics not as some minor, coterie impulse meriting a sympathetic footnote in subsequent accounts of the postwar era's major literary movements, but as a missing link that confounds and potentially conjoins any number of interpretive distinctions ("authentic" record vs. algorithmic process, "personal" recollection vs. indexical trace, etc.). Pop lyricism matters, I argue, not just to the aberrant Brainard aficionado, but to anybody concerned with reconstructing the dynamic aesthetic exchange between postwar art and poetry.

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Introduction

Blowing up Paper Bags to Pop:
Joe Brainard's Almost-Autobiographical Assemblage

Marilyn Monroe and Katy Keene

Granted the fact that scholars of postwar poetic experiment consistently peripheralize collagist Joe Brainard's literary output, I feel as much need to re-introduce this work as to articulate its broader critical significance.[1] Thus, before beginning any extensive theoretical examination of Brainard's writing, I will offer a quick sample of the Pop pleasures to be found there (will cite several entries from the first few pages of Brainard's best-known book, *I Remember*):

> I remember one of the first things I remember. An ice box. (As opposed to a refrigerator). (2)
>
> I remember when I went to a "come as your favorite person party" as Marilyn Monroe. (2)
>
> I remember when a fish-tail dress I designed was published in "Katy Keene" comics. (5)
>
> I remember playing "doctor" in the closet. (5)
>
> I remember "The Tennessee Waltz." (6)
>
> I remember Bickford's. (7)

So continue the memories: for 32 pages in *I Remember*'s 1970 Angel Hair edition, for 138 pages in the 1975 Full Court Press publication.[2] Yet I hope that the short sample quoted above demonstrates how delightful a little readymade content can prove within an otherwise austere, abstract deployment of language—even as this selection helps to clarify why many Brainard advocates would choose to dwell upon the poet's charming, "true-to-life" literary persona. At the same time, I want to suggest several limitations to any such biographical analysis (to a reading which remains, with rare but increasing exception, the only one that Brainard has received). I want to reposition Joe Brainard as

an exemplar of Pop lyricism—as experimentally minded producer of a covert (perhaps closeted) abstract-poetics: an aesthetic project more concerned with the modular, mosaic-like deployment of accessible (often quasi-autobiographical) data, than with "literary defamiliarization" in its most conventional (syntactical) sense.

Stars and Light Bulbs

In conjunction with the Berkeley Art Museum's traveling exhibition "Joe Brainard: A Retrospective," the literary annual *Pressed Wafer* devoted a large portion of its 2001 issue to this protean artist/poet. Among the thirty-six contributors to "Hello Joe," two types of response predominate. Between them one can trace a shift in posthumous presentations of Brainard: from tragically departed friend, to enduring poetic influence. My attempt to construct a critical vocabulary that will better articulate why Brainard's work remains so compelling starts here.

"Hello Joe" offers a well-balanced combination of quirky poems and elegiac essays. Yet to a fan of New York School poetics, personal testimonies by Brainard's closest companions cannot help but stand out—if only because such pieces come from the anthology's best-established authors. Many prominent New York School figures (Bill Berkson, Tom Clark, William Corbett, Joe LeSueur, Ron Padgett, Lewis Warsh among them) provide first-person accounts of the Joe Brainard they knew so well. Taken as a whole, these recollections reinforce poet John Ashbery's preceding claim (from the catalogue to a 1997 Tibor de Nagy retrospective) that "Joe Brainard was one of the nicest artists I have ever known. Nice as a person and nice as an artist" (*Selected* 257). Corbett, for example, in his introduction to the "Hello Joe" tribute, affirms that "Nice may be a

surprising word with which to celebrate a late twentieth century New York artist, but it fits Joe Brainard" (2). Clark and Warsh deliver poignant depictions of Brainard's empathic presence and painstaking generosity. Granted the overall frequency with which Brainard's beatific "niceness" gets mentioned throughout the *Pressed Wafer* compilation, one may in fact assume that the term does not fit this poet, so much as it defines him.

Readers thus introduced to Brainard's amiable oeuvre will not be surprised to note *I Remember*'s precious (some might say pathological) affections for the oft-overlooked non-sequitur:

> I remember blowing up paper bags to pop. (125)

They stand less prepared, however, to apprehend Brainard's dexterous splicings of disparate semiological code:

> I remember "Last one to the corner's a rotten egg!"
>
> I remember "Go to jail—pass go—do *not* collect $200."
>
> I remember that George Washington Carver invented peanut butter.
>
> I remember blowing up paper bags to pop.
>
> I remember cartoon stars when someone gets hit over the head. And light bulbs for a bright idea. (125)

Here static conceptions of the poet's beneficent calm can obscure Brainard's decisive cut from one topic (or one discourse) to the next. Within these five fluid entries, for instance, a pre-adolescent taunt turns into a Parker Brothers imperative, followed by a split-second historical biography. "Stories" and "voices" appear, but without any of the ventriloquistic psychodrama of a Berryman, or despairing orchestration of an Eliot. If a greater kaleidoscopic coherence occasionally does seem present (as when Brainard's final entry progresses from formulaic trope for traumatic dislocation [stars], to camp reification of

creative thought [light bulbs]), we cannot confirm whether these rapid-fire statements imply stars or light bulbs above their own speaker's head—just as it remains unclear whether this sequence deliberately clusters around the aforementioned image of nihilistic creative-destruction: a paper bag blown to be "popped."[3] Interpretations arise, dissolve as *I Remember* moves imperturbably ahead—or around—content to posit, like some casual variation on quantum physics, the presence of infinite parallel perspectives.[4]

Of course, the entries quoted above might appear to fall under the category "Cute Childhood Memories," and to derive any cumulative force from a simple associative flourish. Yet I will argue that to ignore even this modest sample's complex, perspectival flux is to deny the fugue-like logic which distinguishes Brainard's piece (with its polyphonic account of postwar identity: of vernacular and commercially driven speech patterns; of anticlimactic scenarios and projective triumphs; spontaneous insights and hackneyed representations) from just any nostalgic take.[5] However straightforward Brainard's syntax, constant adjustments in discursive register—sometimes subtle shifts (stars to light bulbs), sometimes vertiginous leaps (Monopoly to George Washington Carver)—help to ensure that each reader's idiosyncratic assimilation of the poet's propulsive litany shapes this text's "progression" as much as dramatic narrative-sequence could. However soft or banal Brainard's focus might seem, stars and light bulbs appear above our heads, too. "Saturation," in critic Marjorie Perloff's memorable phrase, "creates difference"; and it is this construction of rhetorical elasticity (amidst a spare, lucid, workaday form) that too often gets overlooked by biographical analyses of an *almost* autobiographical oeuvre like Brainard's (*Radical* 215). No matter the depth of

detail present in retrospective paeans to this poet, the "I" of *I Remember* thus remains to be described.

Kindness and Honesty

Again, the *Pressed Wafer* authors cited above do acknowledge an understated rhetorical complexity lurking within Brainard's oeuvre (especially in its coupling of abstract, repetitive design and accessible, extemporaneous tone).[6] Yet each contributor presents himself less as appraiser of the work than as witness to the man.[7] Even in brief evaluations of Brainard's poems and collages, references to "kindness" and "honesty" recur. To a Joe Brainard novice, these moving accounts might suggest the loss of having not been around to experience such legendary "tact, shyness and modesty" oneself (Corbett, "Introduction" 86). Still, "Hello Joe" hints at the consolation to be found in detecting Brainard's benevolent spirit as it emanates outwards from his "precise, sensitive…pleasing" art (86). *Pressed Wafer* readers can thus consider themselves introduced to "a man easy to greet" (86).[8]

I do not wish to extend the biographical reading of Brainard's aesthetic output—either by affirming or contesting the pleasant character put forward posthumously by the poet's close friends. Yet this myopic emphasis upon benignant personality points towards the interpretive limitations common among biographically minded responses to Brainard's (or, I should add, Gertrude Stein's, John Cage's, James Schuyler's, Eileen Myles's) quasi-autobiographical texts.[9] For—to remain, temporarily, within the limited set of "saintly" characteristics outlined above—Brainard's unflagging "kindness" proves

difficult to reconcile with his emphatic "honesty." Put more positively: the young Joe Brainard's dialectical approach to this nice/honest dynamic proves far more probing than any retrospective account produced by his peers.

While Brainard's cordial, compassionate touch might leave the present-day reader feeling well-tended (the poet, in 1980's *Nothing to Write Home About*, even calls a tiny red bug "my friend"), his rigorous pursuit of poetic "honesty" must have caused many contemporaries to feel exposed. Already, for example, among *Selected Writing*'s earliest projects, Brainard cannot conceal a casual/caustic indifference to conventional norms regarding family loyalty and/or professional discretion:

> April 27th is Kenward's birthday. May the 29th is my brother's birthday. My older brother, Jim, who lives in St. Louis. We aren't very close. I can't wait for summer. (50)

> I don't like to talk against art, as it is now, today, just because I don't, but something does bother me and that is the more intellectual minimal stuff. Like earth works, etc. I wonder who needs it? (51)

Such potentially impolitic claims remain confined to Brainard's diary: appropriately enough, it would seem, were the poet not reading "Diary 1969" aloud to large audiences as he composed it. Yet, granted this violation of the private/public protocol attached to diaries and to readings, even Brainard's most tentative judgments and most mild criticisms pick up a confessional, confrontationalist charge (again, the camp comedy implicit within Brainard's staged self-exposure waits to be unpacked—all but ignored by solemn appraisals of this "timid" poet's unstinting "kindness"). Early into his literary career, Brainard has already begun to adopt an indiscreet performative stance all but lost in posthumous evocations of his impeccable tact.

But it is in 1971's *Bolinas Journal* that Brainard most pointedly probes the dialectical tension between kindness and honesty. For however anxious this poet might become about possessing "the power to hurt somebody without meaning to," he cannot help but criticize almost everyone in sight. (32) Much of this travel-journal's charm stems, in fact, from its self-contained author's aphoristic ambivalence towards an hospitable artistic community and impressive physical landscape. To offer but a brief (admittedly biased) summary of Brainard's trip—the poet prepares for travel:

> On way to airport. Cab driver wants to talk. I don't. Which seems to make no difference to him. (4)

stops off in San Francisco to see old friends:

> Lewis [Warsh]. I don't know. I love Lewis, but I just don't understand the "way back in there" position he's in. I don't know if he's stuck back there, or if that's where he wants to be. And I don't understand the "why" of either case. (7)

hears of impending arrivals:

> News that Ted Berrigan is coming totally zaps my mind. (Help) One of the nicest things about being here is not having a past to live up to. Or down to. I love Ted, but— (18)

surveys the new surroundings:

> This is a great place, Bolinas, but it isn't for me now.…
>
> Bolinas is such a basic place. The land being so important. Survival seems to be the main issue.
>
> But for me life is still very much a matter of day and night. Can't think much beyond that. And I don't want to. (21)

appraises the professional- and domestic-lives of local luminaries:

> Bill [Berkson's] work is so clean and sincere. And if sometimes it seems to be trying too hard, "trying too hard" turns out to be a very nice thing. (23)
>
> Nice house they have, Robert [Duncan] and Jess [Collins], tho all that heavy furniture and stuff would drive me up the wall. (24)

carouses with his fellow boarders:

> Philip [Whalen], what little I was around him, was just too loud for me. (Talk) (27)

recalls those left behind in New York:

> Must admit (no, want to admit) that I really do miss Kenward [Elmslie] from time to time. (Like right now) There is no doubt in my mind that I really love him. And need him. But no doubt that it's not enough. (27)

provides the introduction for a poetry reading:

> When I was trying to do a portrait of Joanne [Kyger] I was surprised to discover that Joanne isn't really beautiful.
>
> But__She is. (30)

attends the reading:

> If I wanted to be critical I could say that Bobbie [Creeley] was a bit "heavy" and that Joanne was a bit "bratty." (32)

reflects on his future:

> Strange telephone call from Kenward last night. (Drunk and unhappy) No, not strange. Moving. Had me drunk and unhappy too. And wondering just how much longer I can take it. (32)

and prepares to return home:

> At four this afternoon Zoe Brown is giving a big picnic. Not sure how much I feel "up" to that. Too many people to say "goodbye" to. And I hate "goodbyes." (39)

Of course, along the way Brainard does deliver many appreciative details concerning the socio-geographical locale, but this swift accumulation of critical commentary (within *Bolinas Journal*'s scant 48 pages) ought to preclude, I believe, any retrospective interpretation that essentializes Brainard's atmospheric kindness—while papering over his propulsive honesty.[10]

In fact, much more intriguing than nostalgic testimony to Brainard's infallible niceness is the author's demonstrated knack for producing unflattering portraits of close friends and peers, while still retaining their trust and esteem. However halting *Bolinas Journal*'s affections for Elmslie, for example, Brainard edits the project at Elmslie's summer home soon after ("Big breakfast. Worked on *Bolinas Journal*. Raspberries with sugar and heavy cream for lunch. Sun bathed. Did my exercises"), then publishes his record of this subsequent trip (containing further reflection upon "that telephone call Kenward made to me in Bolinas several weeks ago") as *Vermont Journal: 1971* (*New* 14).[11] However qualified its appreciation for Bill Berkson's poetry (or, for that matter, for Berkson's girlfriend: "Suzan: very pretty. Sweet. And young. The only problem being I doubt if she knows what she wants yet"), *Bolinas Journal* gets published by Berkson's Big Sky Books later that year (*Bolinas* 39). Here the timely appeal of Brainard's "honest" take—even for those most vulnerable to its purview—confirms the lasting value of these sketch-like projects more than any retrospective tribute to the poet's kindness could.[12]

Still, pointed recapitulations of Brainard's "unmediated" honesty provide no more comprehensive an account of his kaleidoscopic scope than do tender depictions of his invariable kindness. For however "real" Brainard's testimonies and travelogues might seem, biographical homage—so often strident (in its single-minded attempt to establish a compelling central-character), or sluggish (bogged down by ambivalent, even-handed detail)—proves antithetical to the deft dialectical syntheses ("I love Ted, but—   "; "'trying too hard' turns out to be a very nice thing"), and telescopic leaps in place and time ("Strange telephone call from Kenward"; "Big breakfast. Worked on *Bolinas Journal*"), that Brainard substitutes for conventional, character-driven narrative.

Thus in order to speed up my own biographical digressions, I have relegated to this chapter's appendix two further examples of how Brainard's work confounds those reductive interpretive binaries (modesty vs. ambition; immediacy vs. artifice) reinforced by the poet's principal advocates. That being said, I wish to leave the kind/honest biographical-continuum behind—not so that I can dust off New Critical discourse regarding the intentional fallacy, nor to restage "the author's" death, but rather to treat Brainard's critical-reception as a case-study of the broad neglect faced by postwar Pop lyricism: an interdisciplinary minded amalgamation of accessible icon and austere structural-constraint (hard to contextualize amidst a contentious scholarly field split by categorical distinctions between "transparent" image and "opaque" language).

Jottings and Sonnets

In their elegiac response to Joe Brainard's untimely death (Brainard died of AIDS in 1994), first-and second-generation New York School stalwarts (John Ashbery, William Corbett, etc.) provide fitting testimony to a figure whose quiet, beneficent presence contradicts classic accounts of the ambitious artist.[13] But a second trend among *Pressed Wafer* contributions seeks not only to recall Joe Brainard the saint, but to invoke Joe Brainard the conceptually minded poet.[14] Whether or not these creative/uncreative homages offer an intimate depiction of their subject, each presents its own Brainardesque fusion of relaxed vernacular record and austere, algorithmic structure. If only to begin a much more lengthy demonstration of why, to my mind, Brainard's aphoristic assemblages and readymade meditations deserve to be valued as innovative poetic

experiments—rather than dismissed as diaristic fluff—I will here provide several excerpts from this latter type of "Hello Joe" tribute. For, unlike the reductive accounts of Corbett et al. (but like so many of Brainard's projects), these accessible/abstract, prose/poetry hybrids remain almost impossible to summarize or to paraphrase—however "precise, sensitive…pleasing" their tone.[15]

Painter Darragh Park's "Jottings for a letter sent to Joe while he was in the hospital the last six months of his illness," for example, evokes the broad, inclusive attentiveness of Brainard's own heterogeneous texts:

> "Greene St.", the sign, made me think about you
> The World Trade Center towers made me think
>   about you
> Walking down to Soho crossing long evening
>   shadows made me think about you
> The word "Armani" in the *Times* made me think
>   about you
> Writing this makes me think about you
> Pansies always make me thing about you—
>   so do peonies
> A guy coming toward me in a white shirt, gray
>   trousers, and an open, swinging black overcoat
>   made me think it *was* you (202)

Just as in many Brainard poems, "Jottings'" emphasis upon glancing minutiae does not preclude a sturdy, expansive construction (Park's comparisons continue for another 30 lines). Even after two full pages of diffusive details, moreover, Park's piece can only end with an ellipsis: hinting that its author may not be finished in his tribute—may have generated enough commemorative momentum to make stopping impossible.

Surely Park seems as fond of Brainard as do his fellow *Pressed Wafer* contributors. Yet "Jottings" never allows for the type of quaint, anecdotal portrait outlined above. For beyond the poignant affect contained within its comparative

catalogue, "Jottings" points toward the Brainardesque pleasures to be found less in "simple," "sincere" descriptions than in subtle variation on a syntactical motif. Here fluctuations in tense and signature-phrase ("made me think about you," "makes me think about you," "made me think it *was* you"); rhetorical shifts from metaphor (from allegorical objects that substitute for Brainard: such as the "innocent" pansies he painted and, in John Ashbery's account, resembled) to metonymy (to artifacts contiguous with, but tangential to, Brainard's identity: such as the street-sign below his loft); procedural alternations between sketch-like lyric ("Walking down to Soho crossing long evening / shadows") and cut text ("The word 'Armani' in the *Times*") all serve—along with the sudden appearance of a Brainard lookalike—to make this impressionistic inventory much more of an animated, interactive affair than most lists (Ashbery, *Selected* 258). Park's propulsive reaching-outwards to assimilate all that stands present, all that can be connoted, all that might otherwise remain unsaid, resembles the insistent, omnivorous drive found in so many Brainard projects: from book-length works, such as *I Remember*, to swift, single-page statements like "Neck."[16]

But while "Jottings" recalls the perspectivist infinitude contained within Brainard's pliant forms, David Trinidad's "Joe Brainard Pink" (a selection of twelve entries extracted from *I Remember's* 100+ pages) explores how a Brainardesque mode of attention can also yield the opposite result—can reduce an exhaustive project down to one elemental trait:

> I remember pink dress shirts. And bola ties.
>
> I remember white buck shoes with thick pink rubber
> soles.
>
> I remember pink lemonade.

I remember a picture of Jayne Mansfield sitting in
    a pink Cadillac with two enormous pink poodles. (166)

Pink might serve its distinct part in regional costume (or in faddish accessory, specialized flavoring, Pop monochrome), but Trinidad's systematic return to this campiest of colors prioritizes the aesthetic value to be found in a quasi-autistic isolation of detail—absent of greater interpretive context. Trinidad's piece thus captures Brainard at his most redundant: resistant to normative code and to narrative progression. "Joe Brainard Pink" even transforms what had been prose blocks into discrete verse-units, thus privileging the poetic line as it isolates its preferred imagery.[17] Still, Trinidad's kaleidoscopic compression of his subject's variegated pinks suggests that any obsessive inclinations latent within Brainard's literary output remain mysteriously wedded to the compulsive expansiveness echoed by Park (though the contemporary formula "obsessive compulsive" seems far too crude to describe this most "low key and offhand" of poets) (Corbett, "Introduction" 86).

Maxine Chernoff picks up on these paradoxical oscillations of scope and scale in her "Sonnet: Some Things I Miss About Joe." Within this elastic, fourteen-line construction, Chernoff confirms that even one of poetry's most compact forms holds ample room for a Brainardesque incrementalism:

A golden tan

Strawberry shortcake biscuits on July 4

How he couldn't quite be lousy enough to lose to
    me at croquet

Sending him books and getting ones back, including
    the great Barbara Pym (128)

As Chernoff's inventory accumulates (without coalescing into pointed statement) its references to Brainard take on material heft—rather than accelerating towards climactic closure. Just as with a typical Brainard project, empirical fact fills in for dramatic flourish.

Perhaps, to the literary-historical ear, "Sonnet's" final two entries offer a Petrarchan twist:

> An umbrella he lent me when we was too ill to
>   care about umbrellas
>
> How his hair was graying towards distinction in
>   some future he never reached (129)

But a light, interchangeable poignancy present throughout the text ("How nice he smelled—was it Oil of Olay?") evokes the ambiguous impact of allover design, rather than the elegiac thrust found in the sonnet-form's most famous lamentations. Chernoff's tribute reminds readers of Brainard-the-deft-assemblagist, as much as of Brainard-the-tragically-departed.

Along similar lines, Lee Ann Brown's "Joe Acrostics" recall the irreverent (yet loving) use to which Brainard put commonplace objects (himself and his companions included) throughout a resourceful career as illustrationist/collagist/memoirist/aphorist:

> Just
> Over   Bunches of
> Easy   Rain
>   And
>   Indigo
>   Noises,
>   Androgynous
>   Roses
>   Do it again (221)

Even as these acrostics foreground their schematic verbal-distribution, the overlap of vertical and horizontal trajectories—of idiomatic ("Over Easy") and intercalated ("Easy Rain") phrases—convokes a modular monument to the endless possibilities of the pre-existing. Brown's method of "naming" Brainard recalls this poet's playful reorganizations of prefabricated data into allusive, yet inassimilable constructions: part John Cage mesostic, part Joseph Cornell dream-box.[18] Poetic analogue to Warhol's celebrity-silkscreens, Brown's dualistic dilations upon J-O-E B-R-A-I-N-A-R-D commemorate this elder poet's central place within a post-Confessionalist, pre-Language lyricism conspicuously aligned to Pop.

Lyric and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

Brown's acrostics (along with each of the other contributions quoted above) offer a tribute that depends more upon constructivist assembly than it does upon anecdotal recollection. Consequently: Brown, Chernoff, Trinidad, and Park recall a somewhat different Brainard than do Ashbery, Corbett, Padgett, etc. The simplest method of distinguishing these responses might be to say that the former group channels Brainard's adventurous literary "I," even as it addresses the biographical one.

This distinction would prove all the more apropos if Brainard's preferred type of poetic-subjecthood seemed easy to define. But it is the impossibility of achieving anything like a consensus account of the "I" in works such as *I Remember* that makes a Joe Brainard tribute so challenging in the first place. It is Brainard's characteristic mode of composition—the intricate arrangement of gnomic assertions and paratactic perspectives into apparently straightforward, autobiographical record—that can cause any

more generalized account of the poet's "personality" to turn so misleading. For however closely Brainard's biographical and poetic "I's" might appear to overlap, the two remain no more identical than Brainard's *Ultra-New Realism Self-Portrait 1972* is to the (frame-escaping, frame-constructing) "eye" that conceived it.[19] [see figure 1]

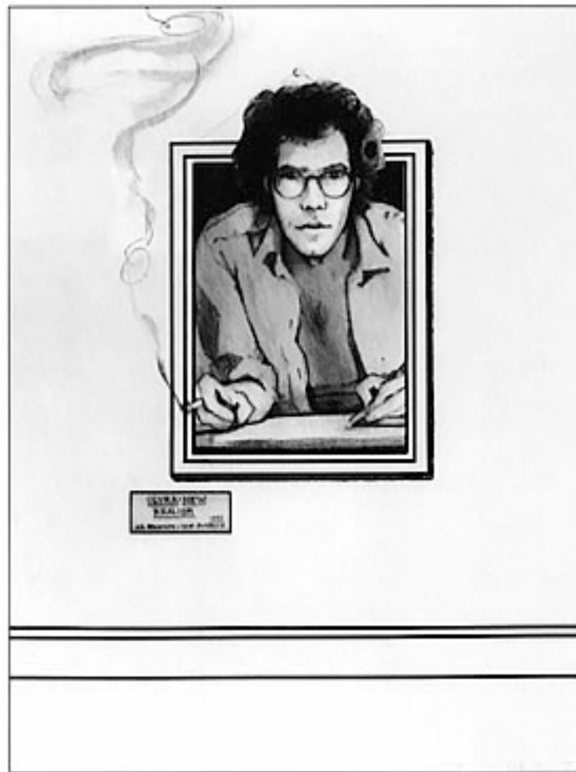


Fig. 1. Joe Brainard, *Ultra-New Realism Self-Portrait 1972*.

Thus while I appreciate the charming recollections so common throughout the scant secondary-literature on this poet, and while I respect the timely publication of intimate testimonials to a deeply missed peer, I believe that subsequent critics will have to choose between paying homage to one more poet-saint in the postwar pantheon, or to engaging Brainard's elusive "I" themselves. Existing assessments of Brainard's literary project (however praiseworthy for their promotion of his oft-neglected oeuvre) should be supplemented by studies that situate this artist/author's output amidst greater aesthetic and intellectual trends. More generally, the rethinking of Joe Brainard poems ought to

allow for the reassessment of an entire line of Pop-inflected lyricism (of affect-heavy, easy-seeming texts by John Cage, Ted Berrigan, James Schuyler, Eileen Myles, David Trinidad)—a corpus that remains marginalized (maligned even) by many progressive critics. Within this context, I will argue that the Brainardesque jottings, pink-poems, and acrostics cited above deserve consideration not (merely) as idiosyncratic responses to private loss, but as experimental extensions of a collective literary enterprise.

The methodological questions posed by this less prosaic group of *Pressed Wafer* contributors can be summed up by asking what traditional lyric-representation looks like once its full-bodied, well-balanced drive towards expansive centrifugal scope (as extracted by Park) or obsessive centripetal detail (as in Trinidad), towards a convocation of divergent scenes (as in Chernoff) or an intricate delegation of subdivided units (as in Brown), gives way to the twentieth-century's flattest aesthetic forms: collage, the grid, Pop seriality. The epistemically minded nature of such an inquiry can be inferred from the fact that few existing models of poetic criticism will help to articulate a response—at least in the case of a poet who does not appear more obviously "abstract" or "experimental." This inability to address Brainard's work through prevailing critical paradigms need not prove an impediment to further study, moreover, once scholars note that Brainard's hybrid artist/poet career provides an ideal (if overlooked) point-of-reference for some of postwar New York's most dynamic interdisciplinary exchanges.

Along such lines, any present attempt to situate Brainard amidst the vanguard of poetic innovation seems likely to recall interpretive concerns posed by poststructuralist art-critics several decades prior: How (as Rosalind Krauss asks, in her influential 1985 text *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*) can critical

discourse remain fluid enough to recognize when painterly motifs associated with "abstract" form (as opposed to "representational" content) become familiar figures—pictorial tropes signifying art-historical self-contextualization (and in this sense turn conventional, symbolic)? How (as Krauss's peers Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster explore through their examinations of quasi-realists Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter) ought critics to respond when the most clichéd, content-heavy icons suddenly (Pop) become abstract?

To return to a literary-historical context, just as poets associated with the initial *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* publications begin to formulate their critique of the Romantic lyric's "referential" function (in 1977's "Politics of the Referent" symposium, for example), Krauss, Buchloh, and Foster construct a critical dialectic that questions any "radical" artform's ability to remain aloof from semantic or semiotic connotation: that problematizes any neo-formalist position which would consider the axiomatic exclusion of "narrative transparency" a triumph of progressive aesthetics over commercial exchange—rather than a further reification of "serious" art's increasingly marginal status. Of course, the Language movement's attempt to purge poetry of its "instrumental function" quickly catches upon its own ideological snags. Astute poet-critics (such as Charles Bernstein, in 1980's "Semblance") soon recognize the argumentative hazards of an avowedly anti-referential poetics. But little has been done to address, along the lines of Krauss, Buchloh, and Foster, the converse critical possibility: the potential for a banalized, chatty, prose-like form to present a rhetorical structure complex enough that any straightforward analysis of "plot" or "theme" turns suspect (to the extent that readers might discern a new mode of poetic abstraction). Instead, during the decades between the

Language movement's galvanizing assault upon "the referent," and scholars' delayed acknowledgement of this position's epistemological limitations, a reductive conception of poetic experiment gets institutionalized into American M.F.A. and Ph.D. programs—a discursive paradigm that leaves little room (theoretically, at least) for Brainard and his Pop-inflected peers.

Realist and Radical

To treat Brainard's poetic projects as "autonomous" texts—freed from any presupposition of authorial intent or referential specificity—would of course prove as reductive as to present these exercises in rhetorical-juxtaposition as unmediated, autobiographical documents. Yet the polarized critical discourse concerning "mainstream" confessional (lyricism), and "radical" opacity (Language), leaves little neutral terrain from which to consider hybrid forms that conflate exhibitionistic immediacy *and* algorithmic artifice. Nor do paradigmatic analogies between postwar art and poetry help.

Scholars of New York School poetics have long-since produced elaborate, interdisciplinary comparisons between the propulsive punch of an O'Hara poem and the "painterly" dash of a De Kooning canvas—between the asyntactical line of an Ashbery meditation and the allover trajectory of a Pollock painting (most cogently, in Marjorie Perloff's *Frank O'Hara: Poet among Painters* [1977]; most comprehensively, in David Lehman's *The Last Avant-Garde*: *The Making of the New York School of Poets* [1998]). Less well-researched, however, remain the affinities between New York School Poets'

realist/readymade impulses (poetic analogues to the pictorial impetus of a Fairfield Porter or Alex Katz, of an Andy Warhol or Roy Lichtenstein) and contemporaneous developments in figurative representation and/or Pop appropriation.[20] Thus, even as pointed structural analogies between Abstract Expressionist painting and New York School poem have helped to transform a coterie scene of supposed literary-pranksters into America's preeminent postwar poetic avant-garde, a comparative lack of interdisciplinary-attuned attention has relegated Joe Brainard and his peers to the margins of progressive scholarship.[21]

Prominent (poetic) critics' distaste for Warholian Pop, moreover, adds bite to this ostensibly benign neglect. Just as Perloff, for instance, distinguishes Warhol's "commercial Pop Art" from Claes Oldenburg's "brilliant illusionism (alas, to the latter's advantage: no place for profit in poetic critique—even as Oldenburg himself gets rich), she dismisses a tendency towards "sanctifying the 'natural,' the casual, and the unique speaking voice" (within the oeuvres of Brainard-associates and -aficionados Ted Berrigan, Ron Padgett, Alice Notley, Eileen Myles); she posits, as corrective praxis, an emphasis upon "word play, asyntacticality, radical ellipsis and visual configuration" (as exemplified in the work of Language-affiliated poets Charles Bernstein, Bob Perelman, Kathleen Fraser) (*Painters* 87, *xxv, xiv*).[22] Most important, given my present focus: Perloff's post-O'Hara taxonomy appears to preclude the potential for compelling recombinations of extemporaneous tone *and* abstract design—for the epistemically minded syntheses of spontaneous patter and serial configuration present throughout Brainard's poetic corpus.

In her updated addendum to *Poet among Painters*, Perloff (praiseworthy for her prescient attention to a particular, neo-materialist vein of postwar poetic abstraction) not only outlines new avenues of synthesesiac scrutiny (the sound and vision of Language poetics); she summarily draws strict categorical demarcations between the divergent modes of rhetorical address ("sanctified" autobiography; "radical" asyntacticality) that Brainard's Pop-inflected experiments so deftly conjoin.[23] By extension: Perloff's sustained, "conceptualist"-enthused assault upon a second- and third-generation New York School ethos—one that, in this critic's terms, captures "the O'Haraesque manner without the substance"—proceeds as if postwar poetics (like postwar art) had not long-since problematized classic abstract/representational dichotomies (*Painters* 179). "Manner" and "substance" prove quite difficult to disentangle, for instance, amidst the affect-heavy, repetition-prone, simulacra-laden constructs of Brainard, Brown, Chernoff, Park, Trinidad.

Still, my overall aim with this brief recapitulation of Brainard-reception has not been to disparage Perloff's adventuresome scholarly pursuits, but rather to suggest the limited impact that nostalgic testaments to a "charming," "sincere," "saintly" poet seem likely to have upon prevailing critical paradigm.[24] The soft, somewhat vague terms with which Brainard texts most often get described can make it appear as if any more rigorous investigation would obscure (or upstage) his "precise, sensitive and pleasing" poems. Yet though a comprehensive account of Brainard's contribution to postwar Pop lyricism still requires closer reading of his poetic corpus, I hope to have suggested why comparisons between Brainard's literary practice and post-Abstract Expressionist trends in visual art (the indexical pointing-towards debased cultural artifacts; the additive construction of

grid-like uniformity out of discrete, disparate elements; the serial composition of a kaleidoscopic authorial-subject) provide as pertinent an orientation to this poet's experimentally minded project as do the poignant recollections produced by his friends.

Seitz and Schwitters

While the main incentive for my consolidation of recent responses to Joe Brainard's career has thus been to suggest that students of postwar poetics have much to learn from Pop-friendly theorists of visual art, I here feel compelled to admit that—in the particular case of responding to Brainard's diverse aesthetic output—art critics have fared little better than literary scholars. For as with the charmed, anecdotal accounts provided by Brainard's poet-friends, even Brainard's strongest supporters in the art-critical establishment (contributors to *Artforum,* to *Art in America*, to exhibition monographs) tend to present this protean workaholic as a willfully "minor" figure. Why else, runs the argument, would the artist have chosen such an eccentric assortment of tacky trinkets for his sculptures—such banal content for his collages, drawings, and diary projects?

At best, sympathetic viewers tend to appreciate Brainard compositions for providing a witty foil to the macho severity (and genealogical self-consciousness) of post-Abstract Expressionist painting. Art-historian Robert Rosenblum, for example, assures us that, in Brainard's oeuvre, "there is no fretting about becoming a big artist with a capital B and A" (287). Carter Ratcliff concurs that "the art world's specialized concerns get short shrift" (74). Brainard's "own style has no antecedents" claims critic-novelist Edmund White (81). But a reconsideration of the art-historical record can in fact confirm that Brainard had good reason to conceive of his work as part of a broader, more

radical tradition in twentieth-century art: as Pop-tinged complement to a collective modernist impulse—one whose alchemic arrangement of inert, utilitarian objects proved both as provocative and as fastidious as any "abstract" or "aesthete" enterprise.

Most notably, as Ron Padgett's memoir *Joe* declares, by July 1963 the twenty-one-year-old Brainard had made his first assemblage. By August that year, "virtually all of Joe's work consisted of an assembling of parts, whether in 'collage-drawings,' assemblages or collages" (57). Nor did Brainard's sudden appetite for "assemblage" stand in pointed opposition to the staples of postwar art-critical discourse ("big" names, "specialized" concerns, historical "antecedents," etc.). For, as Padgett casually explains it: "The word *assemblage* had come into common use after an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art called "The Art of Assemblage" that Joe, Pat [Padgett] and I had seen together in 1961" (55).

While Padgett does not dwell upon that 1961 outing, his book's recurrent reference to "assemblage" makes clear, I will argue, this MoMA-exhibition's crucial importance to Brainard's professional development.[25] If one had to assert a unifying principle for Brainard's heterodox productions over the prodigious decade soon to follow, "assemblage" seems the obvious point-of-reference.[26] From his black-cat-crucifix pencil-holders, to his hand-painted flower-cutouts, Brainard continually revisits and reinvigorates the assemblagist impulse (a form-minded dismantling and/or recombination of "common objects"—a reconfigured "realism" that nonetheless privileges abstract "relational structure") as culled by MoMA-curator William Seitz (Seitz 9, 81, 24).

Of course, "The Art of Assemblage" does not have this propulsive impact upon Brainard alone. MoMA's "Assemblage" exhibition helps to prime an entire generation of

New York artists and critics for a rediscovery of early-twentieth-century European avant-gardism (most immediately: for Pop's renewal of Duchampian and Dadaist praxis).[27] Amidst a parochial scene still largely devoted to Abstract Expressionism's "triumphant" sublimations, the sudden reappearance of prewar readymades, of Kurt Schwitters' motley MERZ-constructions and Man Ray's occulted household-objects, demonstrates that an artwork's dubious origins, idiosyncratic form, and/or anticlimactic affect need not confirm its unambitious nature.[28] As scholar James Boaden has recently described this Cold War thawing of art-critical paradigm: "Galleries long dominated by large abstract paintings and clunking welded sculpture instead sparkled with the poetry of everyday objects shackled together" (1). For a wide audience of artists, critics and scholars, the "Assemblage" show "came as a revelation" (Boaden 1).

In fact, a quick examination of Seitz's *Art of Assemblage* catalogue can suggest the breadth of intellectual and aesthetic debate circulating within Brainard's immediate purview: can suggest the narrowness, the sheer inaccuracy of any analysis that would present Brainard's work as disconnected from, or indifferent to, pressing art-historical concerns of his time. To begin with, Seitz's expansive applications of the "assemblage" principle—in an era still dominated by the medium-specific critical discourse constructed by Ab-Ex champions Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg—exert a lasting influence upon later descriptions of this hybrid form, and thus deserve citation (especially, given my present focus, for the prophetic vantage that they cast upon Brainard's heterogeneous output):

> The term "assemblage" has been singled out…to denote not only a specific technical procedure and form used in the literary and musical, as well as the plastic, arts, but also a complex of attitudes and ideas. (10)

> The term…would include all forms of composite art and modes of juxtaposition. In both French and English "assemblage" denotes "the fitting together of parts and pieces," and can apply to both flat and three-dimensional forms. (150)

Here a conceptual elasticity inherent to the assemblage ethos (Seitz's catalogue includes not only sections devoted to Cubist, Futurist, Dadaist, and Surrealist objects, but also to texts by Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Gide) appears to invite Brainard's subsequent fittings-together of poetic "parts and pieces."

With Seitz's interdisciplinary scope in mind, for example, it is hard to ignore the fact that Brainard's recollective litany looks more like a Vorticist manifesto (and reads more like a Rauschenberg combine) than like a piece of Confessionalist prose:

> I remember my first erections. I thought I has some terrible disease or something.
>
> I remember the only time I ever saw my mother cry. I was eating apricot pie.
>
> I remember how much I cried seeing "South Pacific" (the movie) three times.
>
> I remember how good a glass of water can taste after a dish of ice cream. (2)

Polar opposites, the sultry films and frozen treats of Brainard's postwar milieu take their respective place in this poet's "composite art"—intensifying, rather than canceling, each other amidst *I Remember*'s deftly coordinated "juxtaposition." Orthodox protocols of shipshape masculine-behavior aside: Brainard's torrential *South Pacific* relapse (cooled by an all-American dish of ice cream) finds its appropriate complement in a restorative glass of water. *I Remember*'s omnivorous progression (consumption) from screen-image, to food-solid, to liquid thus proves that this project's "complex of attitudes and ideas" can accommodate "both flat and three-dimensional forms."

Again—and to briefly recall *Bolinas Journal*—the provisionally minded "attitudes and ideas" that Seitz detects within the "developing" assemblagist enterprise

can grant iconoclastic luster to some of Brainard's most inconsequential-seeming assertions:

> Right now I am out on the terrace in the last triangle of sun. Drinking a glass of rose [sic]. And wondering what I am going to do tonight. (22)

> At the laundro-mat. Sitting out in the sun. In a big wooden picnic table-like chair. (32)

Reposed, but alert, Brainard enjoys the teeming confluences of the American lawn ("the last triangle of sun….a glass of rose"), yet remains expectant ("wondering what I am going to do tonight"), waiting to be crowned king of camp juxtaposition ("In a big wooden picnic table-like chair"). Taken as a whole (as one might peruse Schwitters' *Merzbau*, a cathedral-like "three-dimensional collage of wood, cardboard…broken furniture"), Brainard's scrap-suggesting entries (comics, sketches, maps, and photos can break up a typical *Bolinas Journal* page) combine to prop a paper halfway-house: perched between classic conceptions of sculpture, picture, and poem—constructed along the elusive fault-line separating private (the terrace, the confession) from public (the laundro-mat, the assemblage) space (Seitz 50).

In subsequent chapters, I will further unpack the interpretive nuances of Seitz's "assemblage" term: its partial overlap with "collage," for example (whereas assemblages include "composite" products of all sorts, among them monochromes and serial designs, collages rely more strictly upon the "juxtaposition" of unlike elements). But for now I simply hope to establish why any characteristic Brainard text can be read—like Schwitters' *Merzbau*, like Simon Rodia's labyrinthine *Watts Towers* complex (also showcased in MoMA's exhibition catalogue)—as one monumental, interconnected, craft-minded, and/or art-historically attuned assemblage.

It is true that in the half-century since "The Art of Assemblage," critics have found much to contend with in Seitz's "rich, narrative tale" concerning a postwar "liberation of objects" and "reconquest" of the realist image (Boaden 1; Seitz 22, 81). Yet however problematic this declaration of an apocalyptic "New Realism" might sound today, the reconsideration of Seitz's once-progressive, paradigmatic text can help explain why—to an impressionable attendee of the "Assemblage" show, to a young arrival from Tulsa about to embark upon his own career as collagist-poet—the constructivist incorporation of clichéd content (the perspectivist redeployment of kaleidoscopic affect) need never have suggested an indifference to abstract or avant-garde ideals.

To extend Padgett's point about "The Art of Assemblage's" impact upon Brainard, I have argued that the proto-Pop methods of Duchamp, Schwitters, and Rauschenberg helped this young artist to rethink the place of collage in literary experiment—to offer a compelling alternative to the two most prominent forms that appropriation art would take in postwar poetics: the quasi-scholarly compendia of mythic, historical, and personal narratives (from Pound's cantos, to Olson's *Maximus*, to Lowell's late sonnets); and the splicing of dissonant syntactical units (from Robert Motherwell's *Dada Painters and Poets* anthology, to John Ashbery's *Tennis Court Oath*, to subsequent Language structures). Brainard's work tacks between the topoi of abstract design and realist figuration, between lyric and Language discourse—and demands a scholarly dialectic that can do the same.[29] Elegiac sketches (as well as broader cultural-histories of the era) need to be supplemented by pointed musings upon Pop art's anticipation of parallel developments in poetry. For however indifferent to institutional precedent Brainard's (Schuyler's, Myles's, Trinidad's) poetic projects might seem, however flatly

their prose-like Pop lyrics might fall, critics can do better than to treat such texts as mere objects arranged according to the laws of chance.

Appendix: Great and Cheap

As with his oft-cited kindness, Brainard's performative "modesty" must be contextualized amidst a greater dialectical tension: between conspicuous personal reserve, and striking professional achievement. Advocates of Brainard's "unassuming" literary corpus often understate the fact that by the time this then-28-year-old began work on *I Remember*, he had become one of New York's most well-respected younger artists (a prolific collage-maker in his prime, and a close friend to many influential poets). For all of his celebrated "shyness" and "modesty," Brainard had good reason to feel proud of himself, and did not refrain from saying so—as these excerpts from letters to Ron Padgett make clear:

> At times like this I really know, though I rarely admit it to myself, I and the world are great and fucked. I'll never be happy or satisfied, I'll always be like this, so fucked…. Will do great paintings, but will never do what I want. (32)
>
> I wrote a really good new thing ["Purple"] but it's really strange…. I'm truly a genius…. I feel super good…. You might laugh if I say it, but for once you'll be wrong in doing so, [the new collages] are without a doubt *the greatest things ever seen*…. They totally destroy all normal sense of perspective, logic, art, realism, etc. by way of contrast. (54)
>
> I am doing work now which surpasses me: I watch myself work in total amazement. And the results are no less surprising. It's all totally unexplainable. I'm not even myself anymore. (55)
>
> I am doing my best work right now. It is a garden but of a different sort (more abstract). It is the first thing I've done in years it seems that I am really nuts about. (133)

> and—believe it or not—it gets better and better (my work) even though it becomes more and more of a torture to do it. (236)

Alas, it seems difficult to fit but this abbreviated selection from Brainard's many self-congratulatory appraisals into the straightforward account of a "shy and modest" artist (especially without drastically undercutting Brainard's own evaluation of his work).

Even Brainard's subsequent self-doubt evokes the polar oscillations of propulsive shame/ambition, rather than the consistent simmer of muddled, middling "humility." While fluctuations in personal estimate might be common among poets (and everybody else), Brainard's articulation of both extremes ought to confound any simplistic reading of his character. Brainard might not have been the only artist to pronounce himself (at the age of twenty-one) "truly a genius," producing "*the greatest things ever seen*"; but he was one of the slight few who could support these claims by getting himself placed upon the cover of *Art News Annual* five years later, and certainly the only figure to progress from this enviable position to enrolling as a student at the New York Academy of Art in his early forties. Producing "better and better" work became torturous for Brainard: due to the demands of unappeasable pride, as much as to pangs of humility.

By extension, just as *Bolinas Journal* foregrounds Brainard's competing drives (towards kindness and candor) much more explicitly than do most posthumous evaluations of the poet, so *Self-Portrait: 1971* should have long since established the dialectical nature of Brainard's exhibitionistic modesty:

Romantic

> I'm just sure I'm going to die young, which, ten years ago, was now. (*New* 10)

Egomaniac

> I guess I must be an egomaniac, but, it's funny, I don't *feel* like an egomaniac.

(10)

Conceit

To tell you the truth, I don't think I'm as conceited as I have the right to be.

(11)

As soon as Brainard decides to tell "the truth," the mild, self-deprecating tone so fondly recalled by this poet's friends picks up preemptory menace. For once, this closet-egomaniac stands prepared to break out his imposing credentials, and we readers edge closer to becoming humbled participants in a bragging match (How many of us, as twenty-nine-year-olds, could claim Brainard's right to conceit?). Here again, Brainard's unabashed "honesty" checks his more celebrated "modesty" (in the poet's own probing analyses, if not in subsequent statements by his supporters).

Along similar lines, Brainard's artful orchestration of "simple," "spontaneous" language encounters greater skepticism amid the poet's own self-assessments than it does in posthumous appraisals of his work. For Brainard rarely refers to his so-called primitive style without acknowledging its manipulative intent. In *Bolinas Journal*, for example, the poet openly questions his affected naiveté:

> Our reading went very well I think…. I was a bit embarrassed by my New York diaries. (So melodramatic)
>
> And I wonder about my being somewhat "primitive", and knowing it. And taking advantage of it.
>
> Is that being smart or is that being too smart? (24)

Yet even here Brainard cannot help "taking advantage" of the very conundrum he describes—deploying repetitive sentence fragments, and faux-hokey typographical emphases, to exaggerate his point.

Again, in an entry from *New Work* entitled "Wednesday, April 26, 1972," Brainard offers further instances of flux between a camp self-criticism and a convivial self-affirmation:

> Tonight (stoned out of my mind again) I just a few minutes ago found myself walking up and down (back and forth) in my loft, madly eating a bag of dried apricots, feeling sorry for myself (lonely and bored) not enjoying them one bit…. I tried focusing all my attention upon the pleasures of eating dried apricots. And it worked! For a few minutes. But then I started thinking about how I should write all this down. As I am doing now.
>
> This strikes me as a bit "cheap" somehow, but—but I guess I just don't care.
>
> The "so what?" in me wins again. (57)

However cheap Brainard finds himself (stoned "out of his mind" just "a few minutes ago"), no apology ever emerges from this famously "accommodating" figure. Such bemused indulgence of an inner "so what?" hardly seems the sentiment of a saint. Thus, once more, it is through the latter, reductive characterization that criticism emerges at its most repressed, and repressive: denying an obvious contradiction in the textual record (an interpretive conflict that ought to provoke pleasant surprise and refreshed analyses); diminishing the scope of an author for whom it appears to advocate; and concealing from younger poets a predecessor's most ambitious inclinations.

Chapter One

Personal/Perspectivist Space:
Pop Poetry's Differential Calculus

Poetic Space

First, I will provide a brief sample of what I consider some of the postwar era's most abstract (epistemically pointed, form-minded) poetic texts:

> I remember how sad the "Jane Froman Story" was.
>
> I remember living rooms all one color.
>
> I remember green Easter egg grass. (Joe Brainard, *I Remember* 35, 20, 31)

> The wind rests its cheek upon the ground and feels the cool damp
> And lifts its head with twigs and small dead blades of grass
> Pressed into it as you might at the beach rise up and brush away
> The sand. The day is cool and says, "I'm just staying overnight."
> The world is filled with music, and in between the music, silence
> And varying the silence all sorts of sounds, natural and man-made:
> There goes a plane, some cars, geese that honk and, not here, but
> Not so far away, a scream so rending that to hear it is to be
> Never again the same. "Why, this is hell." (James Schuyler, "Hymn to Life" 214)

> I had an alibi for where I was on the night of August 28, 1985
>   But the police still subpoenaed me to give testimony at
>   A closed hearing
>
> We hire someone else, a third party, to do our dirty work
>
> When I was thirteen I got up on a stage in a house of God
>   (so-called) & sang a song whose meaning the meaning of
>   which was in the inflections of the words
>
> A 2-ton trailer truck overturned on the Belt Parkway causing
>   A tie-up on the Gowanus Expressway
>
> I sing the emphasis of sound to convey meaning to somebody
>
> I go to the store to buy some scallions (Lewis Warsh, "Avenues of Escape" 42)

> I really had no damn business there. I mean, why am I living with my ex-girlfriend and her new girlfriend, and *her* ex-girlfriend. How could that possibly be comfortable. I could be writing this from a jail cell. Funny, huh? Ted and Alice, before I left, said: "Out of the frying pan and into the fire, Eileen." I didn't

> know what else I could do. I flew, yes I did, up to Portland and Judy and Chris picked me up there. I was so ripped. (Eileen Myles, “Bath, Maine” 11)
>
> > From Broadway to Hollywood, this is the fastest-selling, most whispered-about novel of the year. *And no wonder!* Jacqueline Susann’s VALLEY OF THE DOLLS reveals more about the secret, drug-filled, love-starved, sex-satiated night-mare world of show business than any book ever published.
>
> *
>
> > > These tiny, whimsical characters were manufactured by Mattel from 1966-1971. Their name came from the com-bination of Little and Kid: thus the name Liddle Kiddles was born….
>
> *
>
> When Pugsley abandons his pet octopus to befriend a puppy, wear a Boy Scout uniform, and play baseball, Gomez and Morticia fear their child is becoming normal. (David Trinidad, “Essay with Moveable Parts” 13-14)

Of course, critics accustomed to esteeming experimental poems according to their emphasis upon "literary defamiliarization"—upon syntactic (sentence-based) rupture—might beg to differ with the assessment provided above. Yet, in what follows, I will attempt to articulate why, to my mind, Brainard's serial repetitions, Schuyler's kaleidoscopic catalogues, Warsh’s deadpan juxtapositions, Myles's polytemporal anecdotes, and Trinidad's appropriative assemblages deserve praise for constructing an expansive, post-Romantic lyric "I": an "eye" that enables postwar poetics to assimilate the affect-heavy, perspectivally fluid simulacra of pop-cultural narrative.

Most generally I will cite, as art-historical analogue to semiotics-savvy poetic experiment, the iconic immediacies and algorithmic displacements, the readymade, vernacular rhetoric and rarefied, medium-specific interventions of Pop art proper.[30] More specifically, I will present poet-collagist Joe Brainard as an ideal figure through which to track Pop lyricism's affinity to Pop painting, as well as to place an oft-undervalued mode

of poetic innovation upon better-established literary-historical trajectories: extending, for instance, from the dispersive designs of Whitman and Mallarmé to late-twentieth-century Language texts by Bruce Andrews, Lyn Hejinian, Steve McCaffery; from the additive "autobiographies" of Rilke and Pessoa to the aphoristic meditations of Roland Barthes. For Pop lyricism, like Pop painting, picks up perhaps its greatest critical significance, I will argue, not by brusquely dissolving commonplace distinctions between vulgar image and esoteric art-object, but by redirecting a modernist drive towards allover-composition into the motley realm of consumerist affect (TV-, radio-, tabloid-narrative included)—into an alternately capacious and cramped postwar arena of monochromatic living-rooms and Gowanus Expressway tie-ups; of drunken romantic quartets and a “sex-satiated nightmare world of show business.” Pop lyricism adopts, I will claim, the oft-dismissed lyric-subject as site for adventurous explorations of poetic space, and thus calls into question some of our era’s most constrictive assumptions regarding the province of “experimental” poetry.

Negative Space

Postwar experimental poetry often gets defined by what it does not do. It does not offer a mimetic depiction of the world “outside” the text. It does not provide an unmediated, “authentic” account of existential personhood. It does not presume one-to-one correspondence between the poem’s grammatical subject (its “I”) and the author of the poem. In the early claims of Charles Bernstein and Steve McCaffery, in the recent recapitulations of Marjorie Perloff, Language poetics, for example, gets presented in

contrast to "heart-felt," "expressive," "autobiographical" and/or "narrative-based" conventions.[31] McCaffery describes his peers' efforts as "counter-communicative" ("Subject" 3). Perloff places these texts in opposition to a resilient "Romantic paradigm" (*Differentials* 153).[32] Almost inevitably, Language poets and Language champions distinguish such work by emphasizing its departure from the mainstream lyric.

During an era in which "popular" poems depend upon a "bland cottage industry" espousing "neo-confessionalist, neo-realist" discourse, these distinctions prove crucial (Perloff, *Differentials* 160-161). Yet, and as each of the astute authors mentioned above attests, the proscriptive rhetoric adopted by Language advocates remains prone to reductive opposition. One set of restrictive aesthetic criteria (poetry demands the discovery of personal "voice," the reconstitution of what's most "genuine" in a person) can get replaced by another (avant-garde poetics *never* derive from vernacular speech, *never* depict personal experience, nor construct compelling narratives). Poetic projects that systematically deploy accessible, affect-heavy sequences—if only further to confound the lyric-subject's authentic coordinates at a particular time and place—can end up summarily dismissed. Pop poets, for example (those, again, who seek to assemble an abstract compositional structure out of oft-discarded, everyday data), may find themselves mischaracterized as avoiding the essential intellectual/aesthetic debates of their time (mimetic "reference" vs. "opaque" construction, etc.), rather than as probing paradigmatic repressions of the prevailing aesthetic regime. Pop poems may be written off as—in Perloff's terms—"self-indulgent" Frank O'Hara knockoffs in which "the particulars don't add up," rather than read for what they can tell us about allover-composition in postwar poetics and painting (*Painters* 270, 183).

No more striking example of this far-from-benign neglect exists than the critical silence concerning Joe Brainard's literary output. For while few postwar oeuvres remain in greater need of critical rehabilitation (of theory-minded supplement to an insular, biographical discourse that now dominates most references to the poet), few receive less attention (positive or negative) from the self-appointed guardians of avant-garde poetics. Joe Brainard's poetry offers—among other attributes—a charming first-person account of ordinary experience, presented in an accessible, cliché-friendly idiom ("I remember packing up toothbrushes and washcloths and Crayolas [etc.] into individual Red Cross boxes for underprivileged children overseas"; "I remember rearranging boxes of candy so it would look like not so much was missing") and therefore, according to the proscriptive criteria outlined above, does not merit mention (126, 33).

But in an effort to problematize this negative definition of avant-garde poetics, I will here attempt to elucidate what a broad range of postwar poetic experiment *does* do. I will endeavor to articulate some overlooked affinities between Language's (celebrated) and Brainard's (undervalued) corpuses. By extension, I will argue that the conceptual overlap between a Pop-inflected poetics like Brainard's, and a "post-referential" enterprise like Language, will only become apparent once advocates of literary experiment directly address the interpretive conundra (to simplistic form/content distinctions, for example) that Pop posed to art critics a generation ago. Within this art-literary-historical context, Brainard's quasi-autobiographical projects will provide an exemplary case-study for Pop lyricism's construction of perspectivist poetic space: of a polyvalent rhetorical field as elastic as James Rosenquist's epic canvases, as emphatic as Andy Warhol's serialized silkscreens.

Pictorial Space

Just as, in our own, image-centric era, innovations in pictorial composition often precede those in poetry, so once-innovative approaches to art analysis can still help update poetic criticism.[33] Amidst this present study of Pop poetics, I thus defer to art-historian Rosalind Krauss, a scholar whose poststructuralist readings of late-twentieth-century abstraction (Pop, conceptualism, and photo-realism included) define pictorial space as a "systematic play" of planes or perspectives—a braided "structuration of binaries" as difficult to envision as the differential code that Ferdinand de Saussure detects in language operations:

> But how would one paint Nothing? Clearly one approach is by means of that structure of oppositions in which each term of the oppositional pair is deprived to the greatest degree possible of its positive (limited, material, denotative) status. Meaning is not visualized as the result of the positive value of *a*, but only of *a*'s relation to *b*, and within this system, which Saussure characterized as one of "differences *without* positive terms," *a* is more accurately characterized as *not-b*…. The Nothing that emerges from this play of oppositions, this structuration of binaries, is absolutely beyond picturing. (Krauss 238)

A dynamic conception of pictorial space (a "constant superimposition" of implied depths and empiric surfaces) allows a diverse range of artists to accommodate difference "without positive terms": to foreground a "structure of oppositions" beyond any fixed, paraphraseable meaning (Krauss 38). Here Krauss argues that an "insistence of figure/ground reversal" (from Cubist collage, to opaque Abstract-Expressionist canvas, to Pop silkscreen) has complicated our perceptual and cognitive experience of art—to the point that it makes less sense to isolate a particular object of description (a painting's ostensible mimetic content) than to track objects of discourse, "of *re*-presentation" (the

kaleidoscopic values that pictorial tropes pick up once placed in relation to each other) (37). Such re-presentation does not memorialize specific "denotative referents," so much as it examines the "differential calculus at the very heart of the formal code of painting" (37). Image "A" loses its positive status (its ability to "stand in" for a real-world referent), but "A's" infinitely malleable relation to "B" allows progressive artists to keep refining (or reifying) pictorial construction at an ever-faster pace.

Most important to my present inquiry: Krauss includes within this "differential calculus" not only classic dichotomies of pictorial analysis (light vs. shadow, color vs. line, etc.), not just the modernist bricolage of Cubism and Dada, but the "unpictureable" mesh of epistemic provocations at play in Pop art's scrappy assimilation of consumerist icons (a canned, clichéd Warhol-portrait's pointed intervention into authenticity-minded aesthetic discourse, for example). Confronted with "flat" postwar canvases, Krauss elects to treat such works neither (in the case of Abstract Expressionism) as sumptuous "painterly" surfaces, nor (in the case of Pop) as simplistic anti-art pranks, but as sites of writerly engagement. For as in Roland Barthes' epochal *S/Z* study: a text's inferred shifts of rhetorical register here prove more compelling than standard "form" or "content" considerations. Along such lines, critical categories ("representation," "abstraction") that tend to stand for positivistic values (for "objective" record, or "autonomous" field of aesthetic inquiry) themselves take on variable status amidst Krauss's play of binary oppositions "absolutely beyond picturing."

Yet while Saussurian logic has long since presented a way for art critics to analyze "constant transpositions between negative and positive form," Saussurian rhetoric remains something of a reductive shibboleth within poetic debate—primarily

used to distinguish "mainstream" verse from "radical" experiment (Krauss 37).[34] Within this literary-historical context, Language discourse plays a prominent role not only in securing, but in circumscribing Saussure's impact upon poetic analysis. More quickly, more competently than most poets and critics, Language advocates assimilate Saussurian principles, but rarely with the conceptual elasticity one finds in Krauss's and her peers' (Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster among them) broad surveys of "abstract" and illustrational, "original" and readymade, "painterly" and indexical art.[35] Thus even amid Language's timely assault on stifling critical oppositions—"statement vs. style," for instance—constrictive interpretive paradigms persist: either (among realist-tending writing-workshops) to treat confessional content as the preeminent matter of importance, or (among "experimental" circles) to pathologize "poetic reference" as a symptom of "mass aphasia" (Silliman, "Letter" 31).[36] Between these poles, little room remains for a Pop poetics premised upon confounding any single-minded approach to first-person narrative.

But in an effort to broaden considerations of postwar poetic subjecthood, I wish to place Brainard's construction of perspectivist poetic space within an art-literary-historical context: to present Brainard's quasi-autobiographical assemblage as a logical extension both of modernism's rigorous allover designs ("I remember watching my hair fall and accumulate"), and of Pop's accessible, instantaneous images ("I remember bright orange canned peaches") (83, 36). For just as Krauss's Saussurian reading of Warhol-silkscreens problematizes neo-conservative critics' restatement of a "picture theory of art" (art as straightforward mimetic depiction), as well as the oppositional "either/or view whereby abstraction had to be subjectless," so this present study will question readings that treat

Brainard's projects as mere autobiography—and/or that treat systematic structural innovation as an austere, arid, rarefied field left only to the most "abstract" of poets (249). Just as Krauss, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde* and *The Optical Unconscious*, casts so-called competing aesthetic discourses (Cubist collage and De Stijl reduction; Suprematist construction and Duchampian readymade; "opaque" Abstract-Expressionist surface and "empty" Pop icon) as interrelated examinations of "the differential calculus at the very heart of the formal code of painting," I will here sketch the parallel pursuit of a differential calculus at the heart of twentieth-century poetic space (and, consequently, of post-Romantic subjecthood): a quest extended in the work of Mallarmé and Marinetti, McCaffery and Bernstein, Joe Brainard and James Schulyer.

Physical Space

At the apex of exultation—following thirty-seven exclamation points, and just after running "naked along the shore"—Walt Whitman raises his "Song of Joys" to unprecedented heights:

> O to realize space!
> The plenteousness of all, that there are no bounds,
> To emerge and be of the sky, of the sun and moon and flying
> clouds, as one of them. (328)

With broken arms and burnt-out eyes (having denied himself the "well-endowed" spryness of "those who love whores," if only to pursue more ennobling passions and "embrace a cloud"), Charles Baudelaire, in the pose of an Icarus, plummets from proximity of "peerless stars" to unfathomed depths:

> In vain I've tried to find the pole

> And the equator-line of space.
> I know not by what burning gaze
> The wings were melted from my soul. (Baudelaire 219)[37]

From either peak of late-Romantic transport, one can glimpse the frontiers of modernist "poetic space." For whether or not Whitman succeeds at comprehending the cosmos, whether or not Baudelaire fails to christen the abyss, each poet discovers fertile plains (planes) of dialogic breadth and syntactical profusion. Whitman's immense assemblage of paratactic odes, Baudelaire's vertiginous coda to tragic plot-reversal, help to inaugurate a pursuit of "space" unbounded by the geographical confines of skies, moons and suns. Any analysis of twentieth-century poetic space (that oft-detected, rarely defined entity) would do well to begin with citations from such prescient forebears.[38]

But rather than puzzle through Whitman's oracular pronouncement, or catalogue ensuing efforts to realize Baudelaire's Icaran ambitions, I will here attempt to articulate a general principle by which to track some of the modern era's most compelling instances of reconstituted poetic space. More specifically, I will adopt a definition of poetic space borrowed from Krauss's analysis of "pictorial space." I will start from the assumption that, just as modernist painters pledged to forego the prestigious genres of history-painting and portraiture (if only to construct abstract critiques of pictorial code), so the authors described below do not seek to make any grand lyric statement, but to reconfigure poetic space in accordance with evolving conceptions of literary subjecthood. Just as modern pictorial space has less to do with any depicted (illusionistic) scene than with "the continual transposition between negative and positive form," so modern poetic space concerns itself less with colonizing Whitman's and Baudelaire's starry skies than with achieving virtuosic figure/ground reversal.[39]

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, poetic space thus remains an amorphous, elusive concept: referring alternately to allegorical, typographical, semiological, and syntactical tropes. From fin-de-siècle reveries, to Futurist manifestos, to Pop-inflected lyricism, to language-centered writing, poets seek to encompass Baudelaire's "pole and equator-line of space"—and yet offer quite divergent strategies of poetic production. To varying extent, each approach defines poetic space as a discursive field constructed through the dynamic juxtaposition of differential units (metaphors, typographies, narrative- and grammatical-fragments, etc.). But whether this "field" resides in the symbolic depths, page design, perspectival vantage, and/or opaque phrasings offered by a poem differs depending on the context. Poetic space, I will argue, proves as variegated, as multi-faceted, as the diverse manifestations of perceptual space advanced by modern visual art.

Here I pick up on the discourse concerning poetic space at the close of the nineteenth century, just when (to return to Krauss's art-historical sketch) proto-modernist painters rediscover the canvas-surface as propitious site for new structurations of "pictorial space." For much of the immediate post-Whitmanian, post-Baudelarian era, the paradigmatic model for poetic space remains similarly two-dimensional: analogous to the "space" constructed when differential elements (shapes, tones, etc.) get arranged on a painter's "flat" canvas.

Perhaps the easiest way to conceive of this "pictorial" form of poetic space is to consider typographical arrangement. In his preface to *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*, for example, Mallarmé compares different modes of typographical space—from classical verse to avant-garde composition:

> The "blanks" in fact assume an importance, striking first: versification required them like a surrounding silence, to such an extent that a lyric piece or one with few feet usually takes up about a third of the leaf on which it is centered: I don't transgress against this system, but simply disperse it. (105)

Fittingly enough (granted the empirically minded present in which "*Un Coup de dés*" first appears), poetic space assumes a material reality, one verified by the senses, and precisely measured ("a third of the leaf") by the appropriate professional authorities. In the wake of Baudelaire's Icaran crash, typographical "dispersal" allows for a slightly less dangerous (if no less spectacular) pursuit of "the pole and the equator-line of space." Thus even in this preface to one of the era's most radical poems, Mallarmé playfully claims to offer "nothing new except a certain distribution of space made within the reading" (105).

No elaborate analysis of this new poetic space seems necessary, moreover, since Mallarmé's own "blanks" assume such paramount importance—"striking first" as the reader scans the dispersed text:

JAMAIS

QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ DANS DES
CIRCONSTANCES ÉTERNELLES

DU FOND D'UN NUFRAGE

SOIT
que
l'Abîme
blanchi
étale
furieux
sous une inclinasion (105)

Baudelaire's raging abyss, Whitman's eternal plenteousness-of-all, retire "within the page, accepting the succession" of "slant" poetic paradigms (Mallarmé 105). Mallarmé's

bonsai-like dispersion of myriad forms and fonts confirms the modernist poem's domestication of mythological and geographical space.

Again, in subsequent texts by Apollinaire and Marinetti, the emphasis upon poetic space corresponds to a radical redistribution of printed matter across the dispersed page—an incorporation and/or construction of arresting visual patterns, a dissolution of any strict distinction between "content" and "form," word and image:

Je n'oublierai jamais ce voyage nocturne où nul de nous ne dit un mot

O dé part sombre où mouraient nos 3 phares

o nuit tendre d'avant la guerre

o vil lages où se haient

MARECHAUX-FERRANTS RAPPELES

ENTRE MINUIT ET UNE HEURE DU MATIN

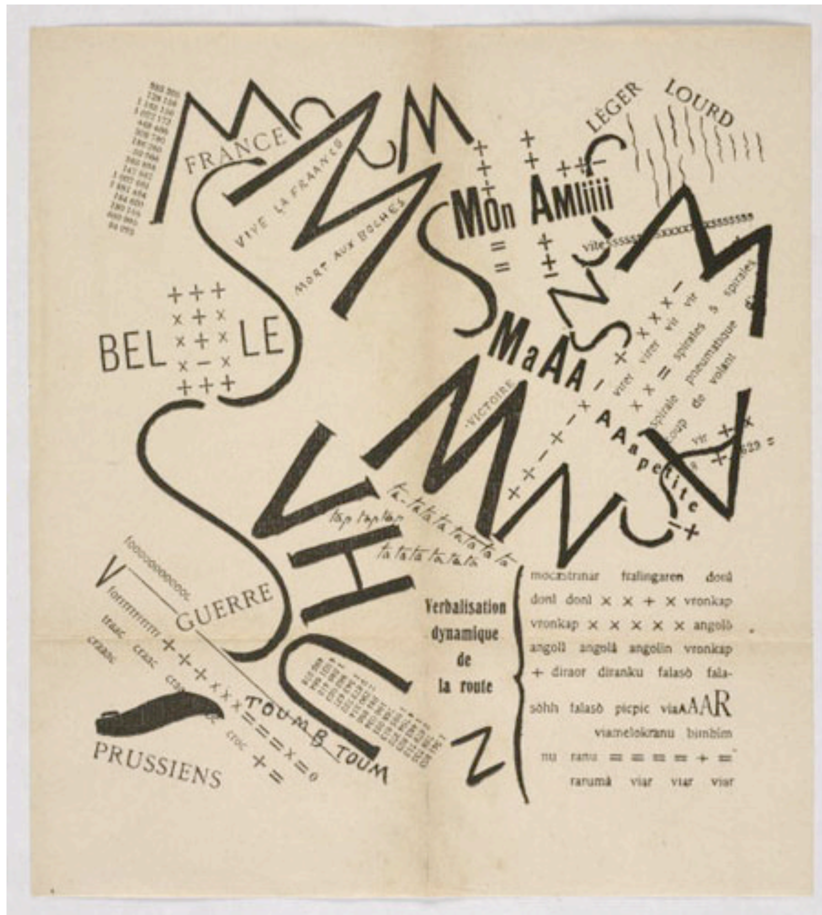
vers LISIEUX la très bleue

ou bien

vers aille sa d'or

et 3 fois nous nous arrêtâmes pour changer un pneu qui avait éclaté

(Apollinaire, "Le Petit Auto" 104)



(Marinetti, "Après la Marne, Joffre visita le front en auto" 190)

Along with Mallarmé, these latter poets help to close the ontological gap between art and poetry (quite literally: copies of their poems often get displayed beside contemporaneous collages and paintings—most notably, for this present study, as part of MoMA's proto-Pop 1960 "The Art of Assemblage" exhibition). Precursors (though not always appreciated as such) to New Critical proscriptions against the intentional and authorial fallacies, these texts can stand, like abstract paintings, as autonomous, self-sufficient objects.

Succeeding generations offer a diverse range of responses to this high-modernist conception of poetic space. Within postwar North American poetics, for instance, works

by Frank Bidart and Susan Howe exemplify (in quite different ways) the cultivation of poetic space through disparate typographical forms:

> The FIST at the center of my chest
> REFUSED TO UNCLENCH
>
> until he and I, the furniture we
> sat on, the room, the house,
> THE VERY WORLD ITSELF
>
> cracked apart,
>
> then SELF-COMBUSTED,—
>
> …*self-consumed by our own self-contradictions*.

(Bidart, "The First Hour of the Night" 189)

3

Cannot be
every
where I
entreat
snapt
Re so lu tion
Picked up arrowhead
hieroglyph
Parted with the Otterware
at the three Rivers, & are
Gone to have a Treaty
with the French at Oswego
batteau
At this end of the carry
& singing their war song
islet
sheen
The French Hatchet
neck
Their Plenipo
squall
Messages
dusk
disc
coin
chip
grease
splint
cedar
lily root
cusk
a very deep Rabbit
swamp
of which will not per[mit of
wavelet
fitted to the paper, the Margins
shrub
Encampt
Fires by night
Frames should be exactly
mud
wood
canoes
c o v er y
waterbug
Cove
Places to walk out to
Tranquillity of a garrison
Escalade
Traverse canon night siege Constant firing
Traverse canon night siege Constant firing
Gabion
Parapet

(Howe, "Thorow" 3)

Howe's "Thorow" (thoroughly thrown?) often cites antecedent publications (Thoreau's letters, Melville's *Billy Budd*, Sir Humfrey Gilbert's *A New Passage to Cataia*) as source-texts, deploying words as physical found-objects: rearranged into dynamic, crosshatched pattern.[40] Bidart's "The First Hour of the Night" assimilates various means of typographical stress into the articulations of a more traditional lyric "I." Yet both projects refer back to Mallarmé's *Coup* (as Howe brusquely th[o]rows the "diced" text; as Bidart's clenched fist self-combusts)—each providing a refreshing dispersal of what had become the standard free-verse format of mid-twentieth-century convention (the centered, "a-third-of-the-leaf" stanzas adopted by New Critical and Confessionalist poets). Complex metaphor yields to innovative typographical/pictorial construction. Symbolic "image" ceases and retires within the page.

Syntactical Space

Taken at a glance, Susan Howe's topsy-turvy "Thorow" text might seem to physically restage Baudelaire's Icaran plunge. Yet "Thorow's" enigmatic individual lines ("At this end of the carry"; "fitted to the paper,   the Margins") also point toward more recent attempts to map the poles of poetic space. For postwar innovators in poetic space often disperse graphemic or grammatical syntax. Following poststructuralist critiques of "instrumental speech," self-consciously radical poets seek, for instance, to "demystify the "referential fallacy of language" (McCaffery, "Subject" 2). The splitting of "transparent" lyric discourse into lexical or phonemic space (into novel crystallizations of linguistic signs and sounds) characterizes this more recent means of, in Mallarmé's terms, gaining a

"literary advantage" by imposing "copied distance which mentally separates groups of words or words between themselves" (105). Poetic space can be dispersed not just across the page, but within the line, the sentence—again so that descriptive mimesis yields to a structuration of (now syntactical) binaries "absolutely beyond picturing."

Early Language texts by Bruce Andrews, Barbara Barracks, Ray Di Palma, and Steve McCaffery (here quoted from McCaffery's 1977 "Death of the Subject" essay) confirm syntax's potential as site of "insistent figure/ground reversals":

ca ja a th an ne sh th wa pe
qu ci fo in ba wh vi re se th
eu co st cu wo al su cr re re
in ma vi si ba am ch qu an is (Andrews, quoted in "Subject" 14)

stint grits
darts file
gratis ways to fit tins
dapper angle
ill apple
sax wash
max a phone (Barracks, quoted in "Subject" 3)

collides triangle lucid nap
broad wet exertion
sift plunges
halo shallows
lean-to precocious
trickle blade (Di Palma, quoted in "Subject" 10)

wlkt sTdh

(FRPTO

T

E

(fF)

Tts (McCaffery, quoted in "Subject" 10)

From Andrews' polyvalent cut-ups ("th-an-ne"; "ci fo"), to Barracks's columnar combinations ("ill   apple"; "max   a phone"), to Di Palma's canny phrasings ("halo shallows"; "lean-to precocious"), to McCaffery's graphemic clusters ("sTdh"; [fF]"), new fields of poetic space emerge, new intra-syntactical meanings solidify as our attention to the "tautology of the signifier" (to the linguistic sign that remains a linguistic sign) sharpens (McCaffery, "Subject" 5). Poetic "reference"—that perennial lyric project McCaffery disparagingly compares to the "kind of blindness a window makes of the pane it is"—depends upon our habitualized response to "transparent" syntax: to a "motoric thrust of the word which takes you out of language into a tenuous world of the other and so prevents you seeing what it is you see" ("Subject" 2). Dissolving familiar, "motoric" bonds between letter and letter, word and word, early Language texts thus probe the differential calculus to be found amidst atomized conceptions of syntactical space.[41]

Mallarmé's dramatic exclamations, Apollinaire's and Marinetti's charming or agitating pictograms, here give way to the collective effort "to centre language inside itself; to show the essential subjectless-ness a text might be; to stress the disemotional and dereferential possibilities of language as fragmentary, yet intensely direct experience" (McCaffery, "Subject" 2). Subsequent explorations of the line, the sentence, the paragraph, the chapter (in works such as Ron Silliman's *Sunset Debris* and *The Chinese Notebooks*, Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, etc.) further expand Language efforts to construct, in McCaffery's more recent terms, "a textual space as a lettered surface resisting idealist transformation" (*North* 17). Just as the dispersed page takes precedence in Mallarmé's compositions, so letters, words and the "subjectless" syntactical spaces that they shape interrupt any attempt to convey transparent scenes, narratives, emotions

(classic lyric content). The liquid illusionism of referential discourse condenses into tactile poetic opacity.

Language's heterodox origins and variegated output deserve much greater attention than I can provide within this brief survey of twentieth-century attempts to chart "the pole and equator line" of poetic space.[42] For now, I simply desire to present this movement's early emphasis upon "the empirical experience" of a poem as extending Mallarmé's dispersed "distribution of space made within the reading" (McCaffery, "Subject" 3). At the same time, I wish to position McCaffery's pointed advocacy for decentered, "disemotional" Language praxis beside Rosalind Krauss's contemporaneous critique of the conventional "either/or view whereby abstraction had to be subjectless—decoration—and a subject had to be a picture of something objective" (Krauss 249).[43] For as I will argue: Krauss's Pop-friendly art-historical account can help steer critical explorations of poetic space back towards the oft-restricted realm of the affective poetic-subject. Pop poetry's dispersion of affect-heavy units eclipses, for instance, the integral lyric "I," even as Pop's perspectivist cohesion contests the "either/or view" affirmed by McCaffery and problematized by Krauss. Neither "subjective" in the Romantic sense, nor "subjectless" in McCaffery's terms, Pop poems overflow, as I will demonstrate, with dispersive subjectivities.

Perspectivist Space

Here I consider a less tangible realm of poetic space, one confined neither to the "dispersed" page, nor to the "defamiliarizing" utterance—two areas of particular interest

to poets and critics attempting to break from the New Critical treatment of texts as well-wrought allegories. Consequently, I emphasize a mode of spatial innovation often ignored by critics attuned to typographically and/or grammatically disjunctive poetries. For unlike the positivistic experiments of the bold shape-shifters and sentence-dicers referred to above, this latter realm of poetic space resides within the rhetorical imprint of a text. It concerns the affective movements implied by a poem, as much as our "empirical experience" of printed words and surrounding blanks. And given the phenomenological site for such novel configurations of "difference without positive terms," I here grant this mode of poetic "distribution" the paradoxical name of "perspectivist space." I assert that poetic projects which construct perspectivist space do not necessarily disrupt standard page-design or grammatical syntax, so much as they redeploy "transparent," "plainspoken" discourse amidst serialized, mosaic-like compositions.

This association of "the perspective" and "the composite" may seem counterintuitive. A perspective typically gets classified as a subset: a single vantage upon an overall scene, an engaged (or alienated) departure from Olympian "objectivity." Perspectives derive from the historically grounded subject, and thus suggest either an authentic or narcissistic (rarely an encyclopedic) account. Yet, at least since Nietzsche's paeans to "intellectual perspectivism," perspectives have also been employed as exploratory tools akin to poetic personae—as strategies for organizing unreadable infinitudes of random sense-data into provisional sites of inquiry. Rather than reify the text as autonomous object or pure syntactical signifier (as self-conscious descendents of Mallarmé and Saussure have done), Nietzsche (contemporary to Whitman and

Baudelaire) calls on his peers to reinvigorate descriptive discourse through a supple assemblage of perspectivist space:

> From now on, my philosophical gentlemen, let us protect ourselves better from the dangerous old conceptual fantasy which posits a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless subject of cognition"….The *only* seeing we have is seeing from a perspective; the *only* knowledge we have is knowledge from a perspective. The *more* emotional affects we allow to be expressed in words concerning something, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we know how to train on the same thing, the more complete our "idea" of this thing, our "objectivity," will be. (*Basic* 555)[44]

Instead of shunning mimetic reference, Nietzsche's elastic observatory mode demands as many "different eyes" (or "I's") as possible. Instead of pre-empting the experiential "blindness" that accompanies textual "illusionism," perspectivism constructs an additive objectivity (qualified by quotation marks). As this brief *Genealogy of Morals* passage—with its playful combination of pointed, prescriptive tone ("From now on, my philosophical gentlemen, let us better protect ourselves…") and proliferating parataxis ("The *only*…the *only*"; "The *more*…the *more*..."; "our 'idea'…our 'objectivity'")—confirms, perspectivist texts depend upon carefully arranged composition, even when they appear to consist of compulsive utterance. As Nietzsche's exhaustive effort to complete his own "'objective'" account implies, perspectives serve not as truncated derivations from an organic totality, but as provisory place-markers for our (alas fictitious) conception of comprehensive wholes.

Modernist writers who choreograph such prismatic fictions into composite narrative (Rilke and Pessoa, for example in their quasi-autobiographies *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, *The Book of Disquiet*) anticipate perspectivist projects of the postwar era: from John Cage's story-based performance texts, to Roland Barthes's incremental essay-memoirs, to Joe Brainard's Pop-inflected poetic fugues. Even at their

most "testimonial," I believe, such works do not reinforce the authentic lyric "I" so abhorrent to Language poetics, but rather disperse the speaking-subject across a potentially infinite field of supra-personal (perspectivist) space.

"Personal" Space

To close, I will present a more extensive example of the rapid shifts in poetic vantage that I associate with complex constructions of Pop perspectivist space—again as demonstrated by several emblematic passages from Brainard's *I Remember*:

> I remember when I got a five-year-pin for not missing a single morning of Sunday School for five years. (Methodist)
>
> I remember how much, in high school, I wanted to be handsome and popular.
>
> I remember an American history teacher who was always threatening to jump out of the window if we didn't quiet down. (Second floor)
>
> I remember my first sexual experience in a subway. Some guy (I was afraid to look at him) got a hardon and was rubbing it back and forth against my arm. I got very excited and when my stop came I hurried out and home where I tried to do an oil painting using my dick as a brush. (3-4)

For a thousand subsequent entries, the myriad depictions of Brainard's "I" pile up, never offering any essential indication of exactly who this "I" is, but instead affirming Nietzsche's insight that even the most straightforward self-analyses can require "*infinite interpretations*" (*Gay* 336).[45] Impervious to definitive characterization, Brainard's text deploys its "I" (its multiple "I's," it's Nietzschean "eyes") as diffusively as does any "deauthored," "decentred" Language poem. However spare and simple any individual passage might seem, its strategic placement amidst a greater network of comparable units soon eclipses consolidation of plot or comprehensive portrait—gently directing attention

to the structural patterning that makes such "unmediated" testimony so perspectivally dense. Throughout his expansive project, Brainard's ever-promised "I" (loadstone of contemporaneous Confessional retrospection) remains propulsive agent of dispersal, rather than fixed object of scrutiny (here the poet's indefatigable "I remember I" constructions rival the "I am the man" of Whitman, the "I am I" of Jehovah). Yet out of this scattered/schematic anti-progression emerges an intimate exploration of Pop poetic-subjecthood. Few literary experiments foreground such a convoluted relationship between incremental assertion and allover composition, between kaleidoscopic juxtaposition and cumulative affect.

Of course, one can treat Brainard's text as a more typical (if not exactly chronological) coming-of-age or coming-out story. A quasi-biographical reading of *I Remember* might argue that Brainard's "I" proves so authentic because his book presents disarming contradictions that could only come out of real life: a man who has seen his mother cry once, over dessert, ends up gushing each time he goes to South Pacific; a devout boy receives a Methodist pin and soon afterwards uses his "dick" to make paintings. Brainard's "story" emerges through such poignant and/or comic complications of personal fact.[46]

But far more dynamic contrasts appear as soon as we consider *I Remember's* perspectivist vantage upon its author-subject. Just when a sequence of idiosyncratic admissions seems to establish some sense of the poet's distinct, indelible character (detached son, serial "South Pacific"-goer), for instance, we find an austere, impersonal entry about how water tastes after ice cream, an affecting but equally generic passage about wanting to be handsome and popular, and then, offsetting this reductive mode, a

competing desire to capture the decisive detail (an American history teacher's threat to jump from the second floor). Briskly, Brainard's "I" establishes its camp and constructivist, magnanimous and myopic, aesthete and quasi-autistic bents—and does so through insistent (if unobtrusive) figure/ground reversals.

I believe that it is this perspectivist variety in the presentation of "personal" data, rather than the data itself, which allows for an abstract but irreducible, engaging yet elusive "I" to appear (independent of any self-aggrandizing assertion on Brainard's part). Like Barthes's desire for "the novelesque without the novel," Brainard offers the autobiographical without the autobiography.[47] Again like Barthes (especially in the theorist/poet/memoirist's aphoristic *Roland Barthes*, *A Lover's Discourse*, *Camera Lucida*, "Day by Day," etc.), Brainard elects to inhabit the rear-guard of the avant-guard—foregoing "revolutionary" gestures of typographical and grammatical rupture, if only to foreground dynamic structurations of perspectivist space. Just as Pop painting's assimilation of mass-cultural icon redirects the differential calculus of modern abstract art (fusing accessible image to esoteric epistemic intervention), so Brainard's canned "I Remember" phrase concretizes the double-consciousness implicit in lyric retrospection (and/or in postwar subjecthood): providing a readymade record of "ineffable" private experience, a re-presentation premised upon the absence of the thing described. Instead of offering "unmediated" access to "authentic" personal reminiscence, Brainard's book presents an amorphous "I" remembering such scenes—an "I" which, given its ubiquity, its requisite flexibility, remains the most indeterminate sign in the whole project.

Pop lyricism's perspective-based reconfigurations of the testimonial-subject provide, I here claim, for a realization of "plenteous" poetic space (a "dispersal" of verse-

form as elastic as Whitman's ecstatic odes and Mallarmé's poetic "distributions"). Pop perspectivism produces a "fragmentary, yet intensely direct experience" of rhetorical vertigo (a propulsive, writerly pivot just as defamiliarizing as the "subjectless" opacities constructed through disruptive syntax). Obscured amid an era of contentious manifestos, Brainard's and his peers' less self-consciously combative (though no less timely) perspectivist projects deserve renewed regard as mosaic-like compliments to the Language critique of "transparent" poetic confession. For as postwar Pop art and art-criticism demonstrate, the twentieth-century's differential calculus often proves dialectical: consistently overturning our conceptions of "romantic" and "realist," "abstract" and "representational," "autobiographical" and "avant-garde" form. Granted this volatile context, it remains crucial for progressive literary criticism not to reinforce any one experimental discourse as the apotheosis of postwar poetic innovation, but instead to examine affinities and differences among or within discrepant-seeming aesthetic paradigms—if only to expand our sense of what he have heedlessly excluded from the realm of the poetically possible.

Chapter Two

Serial Alternatives:
Additive, Translatable, Productivist Poetry

Serial Recalibration

In *Roland Barthes,* the self-scrutinizing critic recalls his youthful urge, playing "Prisoner's Base" amid the Luxembourg Gardens, to abstain from precipitous sally—to defer engagement until he could force a broad recalibration of the playing field:

> what I liked best was not provoking the other team and boldly exposing myself to their right to take me prisoner; what I liked best was to free the prisoners—the effect of which was to put both teams back into circulation: the game started over again at zero. (50)

Barthes, of course, carried this "revolutionary" (cyclic, at least) impulse into his intellectual career, regarding "the great game of the powers of speech" as but a more-elaborate round of Prisoner's Base, a perennial contest in which "one language has only temporary rights over another; all it takes is for a third language to appear from the ranks for the assailant to be forced into retreat" (50). The critic thus set himself one primary task, "to release the prisoners: to scatter the signifieds, the catechisms."[48]

Here I invoke Barthes's circuitously iconoclastic aims as justification for my own critical strategy, a discourse that might otherwise appear quite "defensive." For though elsewhere I attempt to define Pop lyricist poetics in positive terms (by probing the formal and epistemological affinities between, say, Joe Brainard's poems and Andy Warhol's paintings), here I will not advance any "provoking," "exposing" argument, so much as I will employ Pop lyricism as a "third language"—as a critical vantage from which to question paradigmatic binaries concerning " realist" and "experimental" verse, the "neo-Romantic" sequence and the "postmodern" serial poem. Parochial conceptions of poetic "abstraction," and of poetic "seriality," tend to peripheralize testimonial-tending projects by Joe Brainard, James Schuyler, Lewis Warsh, Eileen Myles, David Trinidad. Yet here I will position the above-named poets as central players in a "scattering of the catechisms."

More specifically, I will treat Brainard's poetic corpus as a prompt by which to introduce amidst poetic scholarship any number of potentially destabilizing "third terms": among them modern grid-painters' principle of "additive" composition, Pop artists' vernacular-derived "translatability," and Pop lyricists' peculiar mode of first-person "productivism." Brainard's oeuvre will thus allow me to extend Barthes's metacritical form of Prisoner's Base: to play good cop/bad cop as I interrogate conventional distinctions between lyric and Language discourse—teasing out some oft-obscured affinities between these camps.

Studies by scholars Reva Wolf and Daniel Kane have already begun to repeal the "temporary rights" that Language poetics (privileged discourse of late-twenteth-century poetic criticism) held over less-recognized means of innovation.[49] Wolf's 1997 text *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960's*, and Kane's 2003 *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960's*, have helped to recast New York School poetics (long overshadowed by reductive praise for John Ashbery and/or Frank O'Hara) as a dynamic exchange among an ever-widening group of literary- and art-world participants: as a multigenerational enterprise neglected due to its departure from, and contestation of, traditional publication strategies—a movement not lacking in experimental rigor, so much as awaiting scholars who take its myriad advances seriously. Epitomes of (to borrow critic Wayne Koestenbaum's terms) "scrupulous scholarship," Wolf's and Kane's cultural-histories have vastly expanded the scope of primary-source material pertaining to postwar poetic experiment, even as they have made palpable the particular New York-based communities from which this work derives (Koestenbaum, *Warhol* 222).

Granted these recent assimilations of archival and testimonial fact, I believe that one means of further refining perceptions of the era hinges upon a return to early, paradigm-shaping critical assessments: both to consolidate our sense of foundational concepts from the preceding decades, and to outline what even the most prescient critics *did not consider*, *did not recognize* as compelling poetic innovation—so to suggest how current scholarly parameters again might be expanded. Thus I begin this chapter by examining the generalized conception of late-twentieth-century poetic experiment presented in Marjorie Perloff's forward-looking 1982 essay "From Image to Action: The Return of Story in Postmodern Poetry." I then consider more closely a specific component of postwar poetic scholarship—the discourse concerning "serial poetics" (particularly as put forth by Joseph Conte's 1991 volume *Unending Design: the Forms of Postmodern Poetry*). Regarding each respective critic, I argue that a definitional emphasis upon the "defamiliarizing" and/or "parodic" postmodern poem has marginalized the contribution of an accessible, affirmative Pop-lyric vein, and that a privileging of certain serial poets' "exquisite" output or "aleatory" ethos has impeded our receptivity to Pop's deadpan mass-cultural appropriations and quasi-indexical traceries. In both cases, I cite poet/collagist Joe Brainard's work (arguably one of the most postmodern, serially inclined corpuses of the late-twentieth century), not only as example of a lamentably neglected oeuvre, but as a potential corrective to categorical distinctions (emotive/opaque, realist/abstract) that constrict our sense of the poetically possible. Nonetheless, I hope any criticisms I make of Perloff's and Conte's studies do not obscure the fact that my overall point is a complimentary one: to treat their innovative critical projects as source-texts equally pertinent to our conception of postwar poetry as any

long-forgotten mimeograph-stencil still to be discovered.[50] For as Focuault's epistemic inquiries have taught us, a revaluation of the published suppositions that shaped an era's sense of "scientificity" can enhance our understanding of the past (and present) as much as any recently unearthed poem (42).

Serial Distinctions

Perloff's 1982 essay, "From Image to Action: The Return of Story in Postmodern Poetry," may not be her best known work, yet it still proves pertinent to present-day reconsiderations of postwar critical paradigms—especially those that seek to revaluate proscriptions against emotive affect and testimonial narrative. For here, Perloff's signature concern (with what she comes to term "our general inability to dissociate 'poetry' from the twin norms of self-expression and figuration") crystallizes into criteria by which we can identify late-twentieth-century literary "experiment" (*Emergent* 301). According to the standards "From Image to Action" puts forth, innovative work "defamiliarizes" the reader and/or parodies past poetic achievements. The return of poetic "story" brings with it the eclipse of lyric authenticity: both in Perloff's clairvoyant pronouncement, and in many inventive texts soon to follow.

At the same time, however, Perloff's prescient piece fails to acknowledge alternate means of innovation—largely because it conflates poetic experiment with explicit poetic critique: presuming that even adventuresome authors start with conventional literary tropes in their minds, and then deviate accordingly. Pop lyricism's additive mode of construction, for example (a recombining of mass-cultural forms,

without any didactic conception of what the composite result might bring), can appear too cute and complacent amidst this oppositional context. Still, I believe that Pop's appropriative interventions possesses their own particular virtues—strengths all the more timely, perhaps, two decades later: as Perloff seeks (in essays such as 1999's "After Language Poetry: Innovations and its Discontents," and "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject: Ron Silliman's Albany, Susan Howe's Buffalo") to moderate a combative exchange among fractious "realist" and "abstract" poetic camps. Along such lines, I will here examine what still can be gained by reading "From Image to Action," as well as how we might supplement the text's theoretical premises.

Perloff's piece establishes its literary-historical scope by tracing preexistent categorizations among a broad range of poetic forms—sketching, for example, a classically minded distinction between "short" (lyric) and "long" (narrative) poems:

> Behind this separation of the literary modes stands the Poe of "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), who argued that a long poem is a contradiction in terms, for "a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul, and all intense excitements are, through a psychical necessity, brief." For "long" and "short" we can easily substitute the words "narrative" and "lyric," Poe's point being that only the condensed lyric utterance—the cry of the heart—can produce the elevation of soul and "psychic intensity" that is the aim of all art. (*Dance* 158)

According to Perloff's concise literary-historical survey, Poe posits narrative's inability to provoke "Longinian transport" (*Dance* 158). Baudelaire follows up on Poe's categorical pronouncement: pledging not to keep the reader's restive mind "'hanging in suspense on the threads of an interminable and superfluous plot.'" [51] Plot becomes ever-more passé, as modernist poetics prescribe a sharp distinction between "*poetry*, the lyric expression of personal emotions, and *prose,* the language of fiction, of the novel." Instantaneous "images" and taut "objective correlatives" partition poetic "excitement"

from narrative sprawl, and this constrictive legacy leads to a postwar context in which the title *Collected Poems* most often connotes "short lyric's or lyric sequences of an emotive or descriptive kind": an epoch in which testimonial accounts of the authentic and/or ecstatic lyric-subject reflect poets' presumed duty to reconstruct privileged moments and peak experiences (159). Even when Robert Lowell and Adrienne Rich, for instance, do seek to demonstrate *gnosis*—the knowledge required to "narrate" (to tell)—they demur from plotting events in any third-person imitation of an action (the Aristotelian *mimesis praxeos*)" (157).[52] Late-modernism's "elevating" effects continue to demand the paring down of "superfluous" plot into lyric "heart's-cry."

Yet according to Perloff's "From Image to Action" piece, this restrictive sense of genre proves less compatible with "the phenomenology of the present," an era in which consumer capitalism and mass-media saturation have eroded the boundaries of the "isolated speaker…in a specific landscape," meditating on his/her relationship to the "external world" (156).[53] Both lyric and narrative, in their most pristine forms, appear misplaced amid such a motley, mediated context. Confounding reductive modernist distinctions, "story" thus finds its way back into the poem. Perloff cites, for instance, Frank O'Hara's "Poem (Lana Turner has collapsed!)," and John Ashbery's "They Dream Only of America," as proofs of story's partial rehabilitation: as peddlers of ebullient/enigmatic plot-lines—tales that no longer evoke the "full-fledged *mythos* of Aristotle" (161). According to the neo-Formalist (Shklovsky-, Jakobson-, and Bakhtin-derived) logic that shapes Perloff's analyses of late-twentieth-century literary experiment, O'Hara's and Ashbery's "stories" preclude catharsis, disappoint the reader's expectations, and thereby promote poetic defamiliarization: "By frustrating our desire for

closure ('Well, what *did* happen to Lana Turner?'), such 'stories' foreground the narrative codes themselves and call them into question" (161). The "Action" to which Perloff's essay-title refers thus seems to depend less upon any narrative arc, than upon postwar authors' redefinition of "poetic story" as a provisional "point of reference, a [playful] way of alluding, a source…of parody" (161).[54] Here, then, Perloff's "story" selections seem to confirm Poe's categorization of the long poem as a "contradiction in terms." Granted the significant tonal and formal disparities between Poe's "Annabel Lee" and O'Hara's "Lana Turner," for instance, these impassioned laments yet resemble each other in that neither appears amenable to book-length treatment.

In "From Image to Action's" latter half, Perloff, to her credit, does progress beyond the narrow confines of the short, "elevating" lyric. Yet the critic's emphasis upon postmodern parody of past poetic form remains unchanged. For as an extension of Ashbery's and O'Hara's puckish precedent appears perhaps "the greatest example of longer narrative poems" from the seventies: Ed Dorn's "epic of the Wild West" *Slinger* (164).[55] According to Perloff, *Slinger*'s eccentric progression and semi-coherent characters epitomize postwar play with poetic narrative—especially by subverting the presumed "centrality of persons" to any self-respecting epic (167). Dorn's stated intent to "get rid of I" ("'I didn't want to have any truck with the first person singular'") corroborates Perloff's skepticism toward any inherited definition of poetry as "the lyric expression of personal emotions" (166, 158). Moreover, the ease with which *Slinger*'s "'flat'" characterizations yield to "learned allusions" anticipates avant-garde trends of the late-twentieth century (156). Already in Dorn's mid-seventies text, encyclopedic pastiche

confirms language's ascendancy over "the threads of an interminable and superfluous plot":

> For the real hero of Dorn's poem is not, of course, the title character but language itself, the language of our time—an ingenious mix of scientific jargon, structuralist terminology, junkie slang, Elizabethan sonneteering, Western dialect, and tough talk about kicking a gorilla "in the balls." (167)

Here and elsewhere, Perloff's essay deserves reading simply for its wry, dexterous response to *Slinger's* virtuosic demonstration that any number of specialized idiolects can take "the form of parody" (158).

Yet is parody the *only* potential approach for a discourse determined to demonstrate that "*gnosis*" of the traditional type no longer seems attainable? (*Dance* 157) Do the aphoristic assemblages of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Benjamin, the interstitial inquiries of Barthes and Derrida, not offer any alternate means of tempering and/or aestheticizing the "reflexive activity which seeks to 'know'"? (*Dance* 157) Even within the (alas imaginary) confines of poetic innovation proper: need O'Hara's and Ashbery's detour from straightforward story, need Dorn's attempt to get rid of "I," and Language's distaste for lyric epiphany, devalue *all* postwar projections of "personal emotions"?

Perloff seems to argue so, at least in her constrictive predictions regarding "poetry of the future": "I would guess…a narrative that is not primarily autobiographical will once again be with us, but it will be a narrative fragmented, dislocated, and often quite literally non-sensical" (169). In the neo-Absurdist poetic future, as depicted by Perloff, the mere publication of fragmentary texts will no longer confirm one's status as radical experimenter; nor will the deliberate dislocating of fragmentary sequences; often these dislocated fragments themselves will need to estrange: to prove "quite literally non-sensical." If only to ensure a clean break from the ecstatic lyric moment, from the

Confessionalist epiphany, poets will position the affective "I" as, at best, a laughable "anachronism in the poem" (168).

But alongside Perloff's apocalyptic conjectures, I juxtapose Pop lyricism's affective charms and abstract propensities. Joe Brainard's 1972 "30 One-Liners" piece, for instance, certainly calls into question the fixed, deterministic "*order* that a systematic plot structure implies"—offering a diffusive spread of discrete reflections (Perloff, *Dance* 158; italics in original). Yet the poem's understated entries and paratactic pivots prove too disarming to qualify as classic lyric "parody":

> WINTER
> More time is spent at the window.
>
> SUMMER
> You go along from day to day with summer all around you.
>
> STORES
> Stores tell all about people who live in the area.
>
> WRITING
> Others have already written what I would like to write.
>
> TODAY
> Today the sky is so blue it burns. (*New* 63)

Partnering the spare simplicity of the one-word title to the polymorphous complexity of the perspectival collage, Brainard quasi-aphoristic project evokes most directly Gertrude Stein's "Tender Buttons," and Kenneth Koch's "Collected Poems"—with the obvious difference that Brainard's separate units could stand (however eclectic- or impersonal-seeming) as incremental components of a coherent (if kaleidoscopic), "I"-anchored monologue. Compared to the chaotic plots constructed by O'Hara, Ashbery, and Dorn, moreover, Brainard's taut compendium makes for especially easy handling. In fact, it may be this blithe assimilability that best assures Perloff's indifference to the text. For

whereas Dorn's protagonist-deprived epic foregrounds (in "From Image to Action's" terms) a "fragmentary," "dislocating," "non-sensical" anti-progress, Brainard's buoyant "I" strays just far enough from the Confessionalist center-of-gravity to preclude our "unmediated" identification with an "authentic" lyric narrator.

We still may identify, that is, with Brainard's modest, muted "I"; we just do not do so (as Shklovsky might put it) "automatically." Quite the contrary: recognizing the potential for a projective let-down (since Brainard's "I" appears but once, for instance, in the opening-passage cited above, and only to brusquely admit its own authorial limitations), we read Brainard's text (*if* we read Brainard's texts) acutely conscious of autobiographical-narrative's reliance upon an unresolved erotic magnetism. For just as we may swoon before the attractive figure who obviously embodies "trouble," before the commercialized solicitation that can only end in consumerist self-deflation, so we get drawn into Brainard's "easy," accommodating text—nonetheless sensing that its matte pace precludes cathartic payoff. Edification, satisfaction can only come, we realize, through an appreciation for Brainard's deft "foregrounding of narrative codes": a focus rendered all the more keen for remaining outside Perloff's either/or (authentic lyric/parodic prank) schematics. "30 One-Liners'" can thereby pose manifold interpretive quandaries (Why does seasonal change—from "Winter" to "Summer"—propel the text to "Stores"? How do "stores" relate to the "stories" that they tell about people's lives? What influence do the stories of "others" have upon Brainard's own writing? etc.), even if this piece never explicitly foregrounds the "parodic" ethos that "From Image to Action" attributes to "experimental" poetics.

Thus, while Dorn's postmodern-Western blows the lid off what Perloff dubs a "bland cottage industry" of "neo-Confessionalist, neo-realist poetic discourse," Brainard's Pop-lyric meditations offer, at least to aficionados of equivocal affect (not the rare species one might assume—as Warhol's Pop successes confirm) an "elevating" pleasure far both from a sycophantic reverence for the self-aggrandizing lyric-subject, and from a smug affinity to the self-mocking poetic parodist (*Differentials* 161). Skirting either macho extreme, "30 One-Liners" seamlessly stitches the pleats of a soft, conversational, and/or epistolary camp, as anticipated by George Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* (1892), by Ivy Compton-Burnett's mid-century novels, and James Schuyler's *Alfred and Guinevere* (1958).[56] Even amidst its most "simple" forms, alas, camp remains too complex a topic for my brief survey of postwar poetic scholarship to address. Suffice it to have demonstrated that Brainard's project innovates by deploying, rather than by discarding, banal topicality, colloquial diction, and accessible affect. Such neo-dandyish attributes provide, in fact, for a delectable form of serial composition.[57]

For whereas Dorn's text employs any number of ornamental gambits ("Homonyms, puns, nonsense words, coinages, archaisms, learned allusions, advertising jargon, a play on proper names"), "30 One-Liners" sticks to an unprepossessing prose-line as it systematically explores potential relations between a poem's apparent paratext (here brusque, bold-faced captions) and its ostensible content (the "expressive" and/or "descriptive" definition each entry provides) (Perloff, *Dance* 168). Symbiotic play between individual title and passage, moreover, stands in for global hermeneutic processes: for an allover subjectivity indexed by (but never "contained" within) any number of discrete impressions; for a serial "story" so evenly distributed that it need not

evince any formulaic structure. This serial-realist method allows Brainard and his Pop-inflected peers to achieve a diffusive, rather than disjunctive, mode of poetic abstraction.

Along such lines, one important distinction to make among serial enterprises is whether they construct (in the terms critic/curator John Elderfield employs for his 1972 *Artforum* essay "Grids") "subtractive," or "additive" arrangements (52). A grid painter may start, for example, by dividing preexisting canvas into modular units (along the "subtractive" lines of a Mondrian), or might gradually assemble a work's overall shape by combining individual bits into a composite, "additive" whole (as with Warhol's repeated silkscreens). I elaborate upon this additive/subtractive binary in a separate paper, entitled "Pop Poetics and Grid Aesthetics." But within the present context it seems clear that, however expansive in scope, Dorn's *Slinger*—at least as described by Perloff—pursues a top-down (subtractive) strategy, pushing its parodic prerogative along any number of discursive paths. Brainard's tidy "thirty one-liners" concept, by contrast, appears almost an afterthought: a well-rounded title granting retroactive coherence to the poet's propulsive (additive) catalogue. More generally, I would argue that parody (with its intentional, often overtly critical thrust) leans towards the subtractive side of Elderfield's continuum, whereas camp (taking less-easily paraphraseable pleasure in the erotics of fortuitous juxtaposition) inclines towards the additive.[58]

Of course, any categorical distinctions regarding such matters would prove as brittle as Poe's proscription against "the long poem." Still I wish to assert that progressive critics' preference for the acutely pointed poetic "intervention" has long since led to disproportionate emphases upon more-readily explicable (however "difficult") Language projects, at the expense of camp-inflected Pop-lyric compositions ("easy" texts

by Brainard, Schuyler, Myles, Trinidad)—not, as Perloff would have it, because these latter works sanctify "the 'natural,' the casual, and the unique speaking voice," but because their elastic deployments of additive affect offer subtle forms of innovation beyond the purview of late-twentieth-century theoretical discourse concerning "the parodic" and "the defamiliarizing" (*Painters XXV*).[59] In fact, given "30 One-Liners'" (and, as I will demonstrate, *I Remember's*) adroit means of additive construction, Perloff's decision to treat "Slinger" as exemplar of 1970's experimental narrative can seem a form of critical containment: an elevation of the "dislocating," the "non-sensical," and, in these senses, esoteric, highly exceptional "story"; a valorization that obscures the utopian potential for Pop-lyric poems predicated upon a broadly engaging, yet epistemically provocative, post-lyric subject. I will return to this thought in subsequent chapter sections, as I address Lawrence Alloway's concept of vernacular-to-the-vernacular "translatability," for instance, and Walter Benjamin's trope of textual "productivism." Here I simply hope to have demonstrated that a strategic arrangement of "ordinary syntax" and "anecdotal truth" can serve to critique the self-monumentalizing lyric "I" just as powerfully as does any "deauthored," "defamiliarizing" construction. Perhaps no text demonstrates this principle more effectively than does *I Remember*: a "first-person" poem that diffuses its autobiographical-subject across more than a thousand discreet entries. And as preparation for assessing *I Remember*'s algorithmic immensities, I must here turn to postwar "serial poetics."

Serial Poetry

In the 2004 publication *Joe: A Memoir of Joe Brainard*, poet Ron Padgett cites his friend's early-sixties "Gold and Silver and Purple Memories" text as antecedent to *I Remember*. I here quote from that ur-*I Remember* piece, as well as from 1975's complete edition of Brainard's most expansive poem:

> I remember Heinie the boy with glue on his fingers
> The fake silk hat / Green
> Sweetmeats, bonbons, Candy Kisses, and purple hearts
> I remember when a black night is truly black
> Her little girl madness
> And where are you Bronco Bill? (Padgett 51)

> I remember shirt collars turned up in back.
>
> I remember Perry Como shirts. And Perry Como sweaters.
>
> I remember duck-tails.
>
> I remember Cherokee hair cuts.
>
> I remember no belts. (10)

Comparing these two samples, we can quickly glean the significance in Pop lyricism's mid-sixties foregrounding of poetic serial composition. For though both excerpts take adolescent mass-cultural identifications as their ostensible subject-matter, the latter poem complicates these associational/autobiographical tendencies: depersonalizing and decentralizing its retrospective "I," even as this abstract testimonial-subject gets raised to monumental importance (the column of vertical "I's" running down Brainard's page sometimes seems to blend into one immense majuscule).

Much as Warhol's serialized portraits celebrate their star's triumphant ubiquity (at the expense of his or her existential singularity), *I Remember*'s "I" transcends fixed time

and place (at the risk of the schizophrenic, the superficial). Much as Warhol's "uncomplicated," "ultra-realist" depictions make for the most epistemologically advanced of compositions, Brainard's "simple," "straightforward" syntax allows for the more nuanced poem. For whereas "Gold and Silver and Purple Memories" gushes with enjambed, anacoluthic, unpunctuated clauses, *I Remember* pulses with modular, matte "progress": flat, perhaps, but peppered by any number of dexterous pivots (the transition from "Cherokee hair cuts" to "no belts" evokes, for instance, a more liberated, counterculture-tending teen than does the random—conformist-seeming—Cold War drift from "Perry Como sweaters," to "duck-tails," to "Cherokee hair cuts"). Retrofitting familiar fifties tropes of the "square," and of the "hood," Janus-faced Joe Brainard's polymorphous "I" points in two different directions: towards the gold-and-silver-and-purple sunset of nostalgic reminiscence; towards the utopian-charged dawn of Aquarian-age, Stonewall-era self-definition. Serial composition keeps this tacking between divergent attitudes and epochs elegant.

Yet few literary critics place Brainard among the postwar era's most innovative serial composers. And in order to explain why, I must launch another round of interpretive Prisoner's Base—so to demonstrate that scholars' longstanding neglect of Brainard's serial projects hints at broader difficulties faced by all but the most self-evident (or, at least, self-declared) "serial poets" (George Oppen, Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan, and Robert Creeley among them). For though *I Remember*'s serial processes can be apprehended by a single glance, paradigmatic conceptions of the serial-ethos exclude Brainard's "uncritical" reference to pop-cultural forms (Conte 14). According to critic Joseph Conte's pioneering study *Unending Design: The Forms of Postmodern Poetry*

(1991), for instance, serial poets' devotion to "curvilinear and disjunctive" constructions precludes any straightforward testimonial record that seems "to bear too much the stamp of…reality" (23, 16). Conte's compendium of "postmodern forms" prioritizes works that "interpret phenomena" over those that "reflect them in an unmediated way," and, as a result, neglects (unjustly, I will argue) an entire line of Pop-lyricist experimentation (17).[60]

Most important to my present revaluations of critical discourse concerning serial poetics: Brainard foregrounds additive construction through his employment of the anaphoric "I remember" phrase, and this incessant repetition leads to a very different form of serial composition than does the "exquisite," fugal "recurrence" Conte prefers to catalogue. Characterized as compulsive, considered less well-crafted than, say, those braided variations on a "matrix sentence" that comprise a typical Louis Zukofsky "song," the anaphoric utterance remains too stubborn, too "easy" to merit careful consideration from many an advocate of "experimental forms" (Conte 210).[61] Yet, to marginalize a grid-like litany such as *I Remember*, I will argue, obscures vital links between modernist painting and poetics, between early-twentieth-century serial statements and late-twentieth-century serial poems.

Due to spatial constraints, I must neglect here many useful distinctions derived from *Unending Design*'s "systematic typology" (assertive epic vs. meditative sequence, autonomous lyric vs. chance-propelled "generative device," etc.), so to zero in on Conte's cogent, yet constrictive conception of "the serial poem" (1, 23). In doing so, I seek, again, not to diminish Conte's contribution to late-twentieth-century critical discourse, so much as to complement his study of a since-canonized "serial poetics" with my own emphasis

upon a long-neglected Pop lyricism. First, though, I should outline Conte's definition of serial poetry.

Along with his adventurous academic peers (Perloff, for instance), Conte places postwar poetic experiment in opposition to a neo-Romantic, free-verse lyric: to a self-consciously "plainspoken" form—one reliant upon "authentic" testimony and "organic" coherence for its rhetorical effects. Unlike most experimentally minded critics, however, Conte provides positive indication of the specific aesthetic and epistemological objectives that poetic seriality seeks to establish through this departure from the lyric:

> The open form of the poetic series is defined by its limitless set of relations…. The series…—with its aleatory and indeterminate qualities—thus supersedes in its postmodernity an organic sequence that still hopes to discover an immanent form and a unity in creation. (15)

Whereas the "organic" lyric adopts a "metaphoric mode" (a rhetorical strategy premised upon affixing timeless "truths" in the form of local analogy and/or allegorical reduction), the "aleatory" series presents a "metonymic mode" structured by sets of "tangencies": by an allover design in which each "contiguous part (or metonym) on the poetic line, aware of its antecedents and consequent links, implies a contextual whole" (23). Amidst such diffusive, mobile-like arrangements, the syntactic relations among separate units take precedence over the semantic "meaning" of any particular symbol. Thus, serial discourse (as emblematized by Oppen's *Discrete Series* [1934], Zukofsky's *Anew* [1946], Spicer's *Language* [1964], Lorine Neidecker's "Lake Superior" [1966], Duncan's "Passages" [1968-1987], and Creeley's *Pieces* [1968]) does not simply disallow lyric climax, but disperses itself beyond the possibility of definitive paraphrase. Poetic seriality both reflects and demands an improvisatory assimilation of kaleidoscopic data, and points toward an ethos that Conte presents as inescapably tied to postwar "uncertainties and

incomprehensibilities of an expanding universe in which there can be no singular impositions" (16). Granted its apt response to our chaos-propelled episteme, the serial poem emerges (again, Conte's terms) as a "strictly postmodern innovation," a form that one can "easily distinguish" from its Romantic and modernist predecessors. (3)

Even within the late-twentieth-century context that Conte adopts as his purview, however, this critic's reluctance to acknowledge serial-realist innovation unduly restricts his scope. Conte's non-literary models of "postmodern" construction appear, for example, curiously dated: "Certainly postmodern poets deserve equal billing with the composers of serial music, the abstract expressionists, and the new novelists" (12). Here *Unending Design's* classification of serial score, Ab-Ex painting, and nouveau roman as emblematically "postmodern" seems a generation off. Critics typically treat these enterprises as late entries into the modernist canon.[62]

But again, rather than quibble with Conte's critical estimates, I prefer to broaden the field of inquiry, and to theorize Pop-lyric seriality—first by noting several expansive definitions of postwar serial aesthetics derived from the visual arts. Painter Mel Bochner opens his 1967 *Artforum* article "The Serial Attitude," for instance, by quoting philosopher Josiah Royce's turn-of-the-century *Principles of Logic* text: a work that answers its own rhetorical question "What is a series?" with abstruse mathematical delineations (Bochner subsequently compares Pierre Boulez' serialized grids of musical notes to the numerical chart that hangs in Albrecht Durer's 1514 *Melancholia I* engraving) (28). Curator John Coplans' 1968 *Serial Imagery* monograph likewise dwells upon Gertrude Stein's "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" formulation, placing this poet alongside philosopher Alfred Whitehead as "an early theoretician of Serial order" (7).

Hal Foster, an art-historian whom Conte praises for separating "resistant" postmodernism from its "reactionary" twin, specifically associates the series (in his 1996 *The Return of the Real* volume) with "industrial production, which more than any other force eroded the old orders of art, especially pristine nature" (62). Hence Bochner, Coplans, and Foster may themselves disagree upon the origins of serial composition; my point is simply that if art-critical discourse can address an historically and phenomenologically diverse range of serial sources, so can poetic scholarship: that if postwar painters and their champions can seamlessly cite Stein and Whitehead, experimental poets and their advocates can invoke compelling interventions by Pop practitioners and theorists—and, finally, that if literary critics pursued such lines of reflection, they would better appreciate an affect-heavy, serial-realist project like Brainard's.[63] [For an analogous consideration of what the discourse concerning serial poetry stands to gain by expanding its historical scope beyond Conte's postwar-exclusive purview, see this chapter's Appendix.]

Thus contra Conte's axiomatic critique of "unmediated" form, I juxtapose critic Lawrence Alloway's deft, early (1969) response to Pop art's disarming mimicry of consumerist-era cultural production:

> Pop Art reveals constantly a belief in the translatability of the work of art. Pop Art proposes a field of exchangeable and repeatable imagery…. Pop Art is able to share…themes from popular culture…. Van Gogh would have welcomed it because he had the greatest respect for clichés, which he regarded as the authorized expression of mankind, a kind of common property that especially binds us together. (19)

Crucial to Alloway's "translatability" concept stands the fact that Pop innovation *need not foreground* its status as acute epistemic intervention: that Pop icons move fluidly from vernacular culture, to fine-arts discourse, back to vernacular culture—just as the Campbell's Soup insignia drifts from depression-era grocery shelves, to early-sixties

gallery display, to millennial, Day-Glo "collector's" edition (distributed by Giant Eagle supermarkets). Subsequent decades of Pop-friendly art criticism have taught us, moreover, that the "clichés" (the "common property") appropriated by Warhol, for instance, extend far beyond the superficial content of ads and tabloid images. For Warhol does not simply redeploy familiar icons (of Jackie, Marilyn, Liz, etc.), but redirects the projective gaze of the "curious" consumer—what critic Benjamin Buchloh describes as our "collective scopic compulsions: looking at the Other (in endless envy…) and the perpetually vanishing Self (in futile tokens and substitutes)"—towards its own, reflexive apotheosis (26). Dispensing with the art-object's "unique," handcrafted identity, the "translatable" (semiotics-savvy) Pop-product mirrors back our oft-mercurial sense of subject-hood. Whether or not this phenomenon falls under the narrow "defamiliarization" rubric devised by late-twentieth-century poetic criticism, purveyors of Pop translatability can certainly be said, in Conte's terms, to "foresee implications" of technological advance, rather than to reflect those developments in an "unmediated way" (17).

To return to Pop-lyric poetry: *I Remember*'s most "common," "clichéd" element likewise appears not in any particular reference to "How Much is that Doggie in the Window?" or "The Tennessee Waltz," but in a serialized return to the stock "I remember" phrase. It is through this generic, nostalgic-hued construction, rather than through any "populist" content, that Brainard's "I" speaks most directly for "us."[64] For regardless of whether we remember "Perry Como shirts," we employ the "I remember" trope; we adopt the myopic/encyclopedic vantage it implies, confirming (and conserving) our present sense-of-self through propulsive (if selective) retrospection. Warhol's repeated silkscreens and Brainard's anecdotal sequences thus establish a crucial link

between serial form and the incremental writerly-text. Along such lines, I will subsequently examine whether each artist's assemblages of "scopic compulsions" need necessarily reinforce the politics of stunned capitulation described by Buchloh.

Serial Statement

Scholarly assessments of a postwar poetics premised upon Pop translatability must synthesize two "'familiar and unfruitful'" evaluative binaries—oppositions that, according to art-historian Hal Foster (here updating Walter Benjamin's 1934 "The Author as Producer" text), "still plague" our reception of art: "aesthetic quality versus political relevance, form versus content" (Foster 172). Brainard and his Pop-lyric peers often get praised or dismissed, for example, for collapsing the interpretive distance separating "complacent" witness from "compelling" innovation. *I Remember*'s insistent assertion of the first-person poetic-subject (just as "the author" suffers his historic demise) thus risks appearing retrograde. Yet Brainard, like Warhol, remains ever-conceptual in his adoption of realistic motif, ever-epistemic-minded (abstract) in his kaleidoscopic references to mass-cultural life. Both artists dissolve distinctions between aesthetic quality and political interest-value, between implicit content and concrete form, amidst (to quote Alloway again) "a field of exchangeable and repeatable imagery."

Within this context, Benjamin's own account of early-Soviet "productivism" (the practical realization of correct "political tendency" through a "functional transformation" of the "instruments of production," rather than through a sentimental amplification of propagandistic message) can help to establish a critical dialectic capable of appraising

postwar Pop (769, 774).[65] More specifically, reconsidering Benjamin's "Author as Producer" text can prompt us to regard Brainard's peripheral place among prevailing critical assessments as a sociological phenomenon—separate from any objective measure of *I Remember*'s "aesthetic quality" or "political relevance." For Benjamin's timely, *entre-deux-guerres* observation that "the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes…without calling its own existence…seriously into question" seems just as pertinent in our present epoch: an era in which any number of "radical," "subversive," "outlaw" poetries find their way into scholastic purview, whereas Pop lyricism (epitome of what Roland Barthes describes as a "soft" rhetoric) remains, alas, untouchable (Benjamin 774).[66] Granted Benjamin's acute delineation of a "decisive difference between the mere supplying of a productive apparatus and its transformation," I cannot help but wonder, for example, if academic discourse has more-readily absorbed "revolutionary" works, rather than "submissive" Pop enterprises, not because these latter projects lack historical resonance or aesthetic integrity, but because their insouciant, autodidactic air remains threatening to a salaried class of scholars and critics: disciplined readers whose singular skills shine forth in response to "difficult" texts (774).

Perused for moral content, probed for prosodic complexity, works such as "30 One-Liners" and *I Remember* do not seem to "supply" the institutionalized interpretive "apparatus" with topoi worthy of its regard. Treated as "transformational" enterprises, as textual projects pitched to our intuitive appreciation for semiotic translatability, rather than to our trained esteem for argumentative nuance, interrogative depth, or artistic refinement, Brainard's poems flout the presumed need for professional intermediary

between masterful poet and amateur reader. Thus while "post-referential" Language projects, for instance (ostensibly designed, in poet Ron Silliman's terms, to "return the poem to the people"), have, perhaps unwittingly, emerged as late-twentieth-century emissaries of an "'art of the difficult,'" claiming a respectable share of course-time at elite universities, while pushing along towards broader canonization, Pop-lyric projects, such as *I Remember*, remain, at best, quietly passed around (in novelist Edmund White's description) thousands of classrooms across the country—most often the least-prestigious ones, from kindergartens to senior-citizens' workshops: folksy seminars filled with enthusiastic readers, blissfully indifferent to whom "first" uttered the fecund "I remember…" phrase (Silliman, "Letter" 34).[67]

Again, I by no means wish to disparage Language innovation. In fact, I will soon sketch how certain Language and Pop-lyric projects overlap—specifically through their productivist deployment of the syntactically simple anaphoric line. But first I feel the need to establish Pop lyricism's productivist bonafides, both in accordance with Benjamin's own criteria, and in contrast to paradigmatic accounts of Language praxis. Most contemporary critics would agree, for instance, that Language discourse has taken up Benjamin's dictum (echoed by Barthes) to "eliminate the antithesis" between active artist and passive audience: both by precluding any automatized assimilation of author-determined content, and by drawing readers into the co-production of meaning (775).[68] Yet I would add to this standard assessment that Brainard succeeds at Benjamin's productivist enterprise even more so than Language.

For "The Author as Producer" summarizes productivism's "exemplary character" thusly: "first, to induce other producers to produce and, second, to put an improved

apparatus at their disposal…. this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers" (777). And along such quantitative lines, Brainard's productivist mode appears better pitched to popular consumption. Whereas Language poems foreground productivism by complicating syntax beyond the range of "newer instruments of publication" (the morning weather report, for instance, and the nostalgic television sitcom), Pop lyricism seeks to "use and learn" from these new forms ("the sky is so blue it burns"; I remember duck-tails")—not to capitulate to mass-cultural banalities, but to "enter debates with them," inquiries concerning the potential for additive brio and epistemic-minded translatability amidst our own self-representations (Benjamin 778). Thus, though classic Language texts have certainly spawned offspring, they lack *I Remember*'s distinctive ability to proselytize on productivism's behalf within the most unpropitious-seeming quarters: to turn lifelong "consumers" into reflective "producers" rewriting their own histories. Language poets embrace Benjamin's assertion that "An author who teaches writers nothing teaches no one" (777). But Brainard dramatically expands the base of available writers, picking up converts beyond the purview of both postwar small-press distribution, and late-twentieth-century academic discourse.

Independent from the immediate pedagogical circumstances of Brainard's unassuming readership, moreover, this artist-poet's personal trajectory addresses what Benjamin dubs the productivist writer's "most urgent task": "to recognize how poor he is and how poor he has to be in order to begin again from the beginning" (776). Feted as a rising art-world star (he designs the *ARTnews Annual* cover at age 26), Brainard nonetheless redirects his prodigious serializing-tendencies towards poetic production—thereby entering a verbal realm in which, *I Remember* tells us, its author has long since

been deemed "below average." Considered retrospectively, however, this inauspicious career-shift does not suggest an impetuous break for Brainard, so much as it confirms the greater continuity of his productivist project. For the protean poet-collagist "begins again" in any number of ways. His mass-cultural appropriations and mnemonic-based assemblages foreground recycling as their modus operandi. His anaphoric and/or aphoristic structures substitute propulsive recalibration for progressive plot. His exportation of additive and "translatable" principles from Pop art to poetry exemplifies Benjamin's fusion-affirming axiom that "the barriers imposed by [intellectual] specialization must be breached jointly by the productive forces that they were set up to divide" (775).

Due to spatial limitations, I can only offer fleeting reference to Brainard's "Ten Imaginary Still Lifes" piece—perhaps the quintessential "joint breach" of medium-specific painting/poetry constraints:

> Imaginary Still Life No. 1
> I close my eyes. I see a light-green vase. A very pale light-green vase. Right beside it sits something black. Something small. It is a small black ashtray. Getting smaller by the moment. Until--really--it is hardly more than--now--a tiny speck.
>
> Imaginary Still Life No. 2
> I close my eyes. I see white. Lots of white. And gray. Cool gray. Cool gray fabric shadows. (It is a painting!) With no yellow. By a very old man. [Cite]

"Ten Imaginary Still Lifes" confirms Brainard's status as a Benjaminian "revolutionary intellectual"; not, of course, due to any impassioned argument or explosive syntax, but because Brainard foregrounds his status as "betrayer of class origin": as art-world-aristocrat-cum-plebian-poet (a position he occupies with just enough camp flair—present in the sweet, slightly corny "I close my eyes" anaphoric phrase—to satisfy audiences

craving more-convoluted rhetorical vectors) (780). Closing his eyes, Brainard nonetheless steps boldly towards the threshold separating pictorial impression from poetic abstraction.

Nor need this poet refer directly to the art-discourse concerning still-lifes to achieve such effects. For Brainard borrows from contemporaneous visual artists (not just from their paintings and installations, but also from their printed texts) his solution to the post-Romantic hermeneutic problem of how to meld brief "excitement" and expansive scope—here through the construction of serial statements: perspectival assemblages in which aphoristic modules combine amidst a polyvalent, mosaic-like whole. Within this context, I will close my chapter by demonstrating that the axes of postwar "experiment" and poetic "seriality," as sketched by Perloff and Conte, obscure a vibrant line of serial texts published during the decade between Brainard's art debut and his Angel Hair Press *I Remember*.[69] First, however, I should provide a few representative excerpts from this shadow canon of serial statement:

> I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap & still comes out on top.…
>
> I am for an art that a kid licks after peeling away the wrapper….
>
> I am for an art that coils and grunts like a wrestler.
>
> Claes Oldenburg, "I am for an art…" (39-40)

> THE ORIGIN OF ART
> The discrepancy between physical fact
> and psychic effect
>
> THE CONTENT OF ART
> Visual formulation of our reaction
> to life
>
> THE MEASURE OF ART

> The ratio of effort to effect
>
> Josef Albers, "The Origin of Art" (107)

> There is just one participation, one perception, one invisibility, one insight.
>
> There is just one edge, one framework, one ground, one existence, one fabric, one focus.
>
> There is just one way, one side, one vision, one freedom.
>
> There is just one problem, one task, one obligation, one struggle, one victory, one disciple.
>
> Ad Reinhardt, "There Is Just One Painting" (71)

Granted these examples from Oldenburg, Albers, and Reinhardt, the postwar affinity among performance project, pictorial grid, and serial statement proves clear.[70] As with poet/collagist Joe Brainard's quasi-diaristic texts, each artist-author's aphoristic assemblage provides the literal traces of serial composition—extracted from the repetitive procedures of abstract painting, and then transferred to the "quick graph" of the printed page.[71] In each case, moreover, anaphora serves as architectural basis for oracular/algorithmic utterance.

Again, compared to Spicer's, Duncan's, or Creeley's "exquisite" and "ambiguous" stanzas, such compulsive, programmatic constructions might appear too effusive and/or argumentative to be taken seriously as "serial" texts. Yet, I hope to have demonstrated that, pace the broad generalizations and neat categorizations of late-twentieth-century academic discourse, the Boolean logic of poetic serial statement remains to be articulated: serial poetry contains (but is not encompassed by) the self-declared "serial poems" of Spicer, Duncan, Creeley, etc.; serial composition, in the textual sphere, includes hybridized works by poet-artists like Brainard; postwar serial poetics, in the most expansive sense, incorporates pieces by authors otherwise absent

from poetic discourse (Oldenburg, Albers, Reinhardt). Amidst such overlapping criteria, few aesthetic projects appear more central than Pop lyricism; few books seem more urbane than *I Remember*.[72]

Nor need this centrality of Brainard and his Pop-lyric peers detract from the significance of Language poetics. In fact, the additive model established by Brainard's anaphoric constructs can help to refine reductive conceptions of how Language texts "defamiliarize" their audience (according to paradigmatic accounts: through the relentless deployment of "difficult" syntax). Along such lines, this chapter's last round of Prisoner's Base will allow me to demonstrate affinities between Language poems and Pop-lyric projects: under the sign of productivist anaphora, and in the wake of the modern art-manifesto. For Language poets have long since recognized the potential-energy to be found, as Charles Bernstein puts it, amid "varying kinds of referential vectors"—among them those of simple, streamlined locutions, arranged in serial pattern:

> Remembered a fragment of the king's face
> remembered a lappet wing
> remembered eunuchs lip to lip in silent profile kissing
> remembered pygmies doing battle with the cranes
>
> (Susan Howe, *Hinge Picture* 41)

> Does it hurt? Is this too soft? Do you like it? Do you like this? Is this how you like it? Is it alright? Is he there? Is he breathing? Is it him? Is it near? Is it hard? Is it cold? Does it way much? Is it heavy? Do you have to carry it far?
>
> (Ron Silliman, *Sunset Debris* 105)

> Let's just say that every time you fall you never hit the ground
>
> Let's just say that when the day ends the night refuses to come
>
> Let's just say that if all else fails you at least can count on that
>
> Let's just say that a bird in the fist is better than a bird and a foot
>
> (Charles Bernstein, "Let's Just Say" 10)

In a separate paper, entitled "Nothing but Relations: Landscapes by Stein, Hejinian, Brainard," I argue that both Language-affiliated and Pop-lyric poets have long since expanded their conception of "syntactical innovation," so to include allover-experiments with the anaphoric line, the aphoristic entry, and the anecdotal narrative—even as theoretical discourse continues to prioritize Language's critique of the neo-Romantic lyric subject, along with the movement's early preference for "opaque," "ungrammatical" sentences. Within this present context, I restrict myself to asserting that, granted the preceding example of Brainard's anaphoric, insistent "I," it becomes all the more apparent that each "subject-less" Language poem cited above invokes a paramount "you" (Howe employs imperative clauses; Silliman adopts the interrogative form; Bernstein couches an implicit "us" amidst his conditional contraction "Let's"). However "deauthored," or "post-referential," each text thus builds a quasi-narrative momentum through its anaphoric redeployment of the interlocutory-subject. Through their mobile appeals to an amorphous "you," these syntactically straightforward projects conjure a collectivist-minded agency, and hearken back to the modernist manifesto (John Cage's "Composition as Process" piece, for instance, contains roughly one-hundred consecutive questions), thereby providing a productivist mode dependent less upon syntactical "rupture," than upon the multivalent vectors of serial statement. In turn, Howe's, Silliman's, and Bernstein's repeated emphases upon "you" point toward a manifold-subject lurking amid Brainard's additive, anaphoric lines: the plural-tending "I" of the perspectivst manifesto—as inherited from Whitman, and picked up by artists, Pop lyricists, and Language poets throughout the twentieth century.[73]

Of course, the postwar affinities among Brainard's, Oldenburg's, Albers', Reinhardt's, Howe's, Silliman's, and Bernstein's statements might still seem superficial (confirming, at most, each over-extended author's occasional dependence upon a hasty, anaphoric figure). But it is just this modular mode of construction that unites the hermeneutic acuities of painters' grids to the sprawling scope of serial manifestos—and that grants simplistic-seeming forms, such as *I Remember*, much of their intertextual and art-historical resonance. For even during the prewar era, serial composition did not remain under the exclusive provenance of Suprematism and De Stijl canvases, but extended to serial statements by Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists:

> 1. *It's stupid to write one hundred pages where one would do*, only because the audience through habit and infantile instinct wants to see character in a play result from a series of events…
> 2. *It's stupid* not to rebel against the prejudice of theatricality when life itself…is for the most part *antitheatrical*…
> 3. *It's stupid* to pander to the primitivism of the crowd, which, in the last analysis, wants to see the bad guy lose and the good guy win.
>
> F. T. Marinetti, Emilio Settmelli and Bruno Corra, "The Futurist Synthetic Theater" (193)

> [Dada] is like your hopes: nothing
> like your idols: nothing
> like your political men: nothing
> like your heroes: nothing
> like your artists: nothing
> like your religions: nothing
>
> Francis Picabia, "Dada Cannibalistic Manifesto" (317)

> THERE ARE motor and aeronautics shows
> THERE ARE beach games
> THERE ARE beauty competitions in the air
>
> Salvador Dali, "Yellow Manifesto" (367)[74]

However disparate in tone or content, each text quoted above posits the assimilatory prowess of the anaphoric line—and thus anticipates Brainard's all-encompassing poetic

catalogue. For just as *I Remember*'s litany could easily absorb many of Oldenburg's "I am for an art" entries ("I remember wrestlers coiling and grunting…I remember licking after peeling away the wrapper"), so Brainard's signature phrase could tactfully refurbish the Futurists' scornful "It's Stupid's," and Picabia's nihilistic "nothings" ("I remember writing one hundred pages when one would do…I remember wanting the good guy to win"; "I remember heroes…I remember religions"), or help to humanize Dali's detached notations ("I remember beach games…I remember beauty competitions"). In any case, just as anaphoric structure allows Marinetti (et al.), Picabia, and Dali to channel their potentially scattered surveys into taut, prophetic-toned compendia, so Brainard's omnipresent phrase grants his diffusive-tending composition a melded, multitudinous solidity beyond the sum of its detailed parts.

Along such lines, I conclude by contending that the modest "I" of *I Remember* resounds (however calmly, however quietly) with the assertive "we" of a preceding generation at its most voluble:

> We are proud, handsome and predatory.
> We hunt machines, they are our favorite game.
> We invent them and then hunt them down.
> Richard Aldington, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Ezra Pound, William Roberts, Edward Wadsworth and Wyndham Lewis, "Our Vortex" (343)

> WE DENOUNCE the total lack of youth in our youth
> WE DENOUNCE the total lack of decision and audacity
> WE DENOUNCE the fear of new events, of words, of the risk of the ridiculous
> Salvador Dali, "Yellow Manifesto" (370)

Again, the predatorial and denunciatory "we's" cited above differ drastically from Brainard's all-affirming "I." Combative tones here conveyed suggest the serial statement's ability to conjure a collective premised upon opposition, exclusion,

aggression (thereby anticipating, for instance, the chummy, chauvinistic “There it is, brothers” of Charles Olson’s “Projective Verse” manifesto). Brainard, by contrast, transforms the adversarial pack-instinct of the Vorticists' plural-subject, and the pompous royal “We” of Dali’s text, into the perpetual re-configuration of self—most often as Wittgensteinian “limit” amidst a greater social body:

> I remember the first time I saw myself in a full length mirror wearing Bermuda shorts. I never wore them again. (29)
>
> I remember socks that won’t stay up. (47)
>
> I remember starched dress shirt collars. (122)
>
> I remember being talked about as tho I wasn’t there. (130)

Taken at first glance, *I Remember*’s retrospective repetitions may seem to typify the solipsistic, neo-Confessionalist utterance. Yet Brainard’s strophic pulsations diffuse their “I” across a potentially infinite field of vernacular circumstance—tracing the self’s tangential relation to “all that is the case,” and thereby calling for an expanded definition of postwar serial statement (Wittgenstein 5).

Consequently, I have enacted my own rudimentary rounds of Barthesian Prisoner’s Base: “scattering” critical “catechisms” concerning serial poets, Pop lyricists, and Language practitioners, so to let their disparate-seeming projects commingle under the auspices of a Pop-friendly art-historical discourse attuned to additive composition, to epistemic translatability, and to collectivist-tending productivism. Within this context, I hope to have demonstrated that Brainard’s incrementalist mode of making “unmediated” sense could stand as compelling complement to the conventional Language synthesis (localized ambiguity, followed by comprehensive theoretical supplementation), if

Brainard did not operate so far in advance of postwar scholastic discourse that his particular type of poetic abstraction remains all but invisible.

Instead, we are left with the counterintuitive realization that a poem mapping its own myopic bondage to the solitary "I" can echo some of the twentieth-century's most communally minded ventures. Benjamin, citing Brecht, affirms that "politically it is not private thinking, but…the art of thinking in other people's heads that is decisive" (773). Brainard, following Whitman, elects to "celebrate" himself, to "sing" himself—confident that "What I assume you shall assume" (and vice versa). Perched between Confessionalist and Language epochs, the multifarious "I" of *I Remember* allows both for a transcendence of alienated, consumerist ego-hood, and for a revamping of prewar, utopian concord: as if the poem's latent serial statement were "We all shall remember what had seemed lost."

Appendix: Serial History

So long as Conte distinguishes dispersive experiments with allover-form from neo-Romantic restagings of lyric epiphany, his book provides a broad, unobjectionable framework for tracking recent installments in a postwar poetics of the "syntagmatic imagination" (98).[75] But as soon as Conte defines the serial poem as "strictly postmodern," scholarly questions arise. Poet/critic Peter Quartermain notes, for instance, *Unending Design's* failure to acknowledge the "variorum" and "indeterminate" precedent found in modernist milestones such as Pound's *Cantos*, and Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*, or to address the alternate serial-thematics present in postwar projects by Jackson Mac Low, and by Ronald Johnson (413). For my own part, I will briefly address but two metonymic-tending projects conspicuously absent from Conte's serial pantheon (as well as from Quartermain's twentieth-century-minded supplement): the disparate-seeming corpuses of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman.[76] Again, however, I do not aim to petulantly point out particular poets neglected by Conte, so much as to argue that if this critic placed poetic seriality within an expansive historical context, he would not define the postwar serial poem so constrictively.

Conte offers only fleeting acknowledgement of Whitman, and no reference to Dickinson—though a quick reflection upon each author's respective output confirms seriality's foundational importance to a broad range of subsequent poets. Considered the original introspective-"mirror" and projective-"window" of American poetics (in poet/critic Howard Moss's vernacular take on M.H. Abrams' "the mirror and the lamp" thesis), Dickinson and Whitman often get presented as polar opposites along the continuum mapping microcosmic (Stevensian meditation/Confessionalist monologue)

and macrocosmic (Poundian appropriation/Language collage) scope in American poetry (Moss 327). But once critics assess these august forebears as serial composers, the two poets' rhetorical strategies can be seen to overlap.

Published the year following Conte's *Unending Design*, Sharon Cameron's study *Choosing Not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles* (1992), for instance, has long since helped reshape canonical approaches to its subject—restoring Dickinson's excerpted lyrics to their hand-stitched place amidst convoluted, "indeterminate" sequences, and thus confirming this "metonymic" poet's advocacy for "a tension previously thought…to reside only in the metaphoric" (Conte 91). Strung back together by Cameron and her peers, Dickinson's closed, hermetic-seeming verses pick up the resonance of the contiguous, the aleatory.[77] Pop seriality, as Brainard's encyclopedic *I Remember* text demonstrates, offers perhaps the postwar era's most expansive response to Dickinson's centripetal threading-together of boxed-off, episodic detail.

Along similar lines, Angus Fletcher's *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* (2004) has recently revisited Walt Whitman's occasional conjecture that "the *Leaves* is only a language experiment," recasting this poet's elastic constructions as "a harmonious ensemble of artificial and natural elements"—closer to Conte's "limitless [and hence abstract] set of relations," than to Coleridge's "organic perfection of…outward form" (Fletcher 290, 12; Coleridge 53).[78] In Fletcher's account, Whitman's instantaneous-seeming impressions grow so manifold as to advance an allover, "environmental" structure (a self-dispersing testimony—one that discloses the great centrifugal potential to be found amidst first-person poetic subjects) (6). Pop lyricism, again, consolidates this combination of

impressionistic details and perspectivist forms: pushing ever-further away from the fixed poetic-object of New Critical scrutiny, and probing the affective realms of the writerly text. *I Remember*, I hope to have demonstrated, evinces many of Conte's serial criteria more dynamically than do those works chosen by the critic, yet can only stand as exemplar of serial composition once seriality gets redefined beyond the parochial range of postwar, coterie-based "serial poetics."

Chapter Three

Serial Sixties: Monet, Warhol, Brainard

Serial Exhibition

In his monograph for the 1960 exhibition "Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments," MoMA-curator William Seitz describes a "'series'" (an art-historical concept still novel enough to get enclosed by quotation marks) as a set of paintings that depict "a sequential cycle of light, weather, or season" (11). In his 1968 catalogue for the Pasadena Museum's "Serial Imagery" show, curator/artist John Coplans defines a "Series" (no quotes now, but capitalized) as the product of "a single indivisible process that links the internal structure of a work to that of other works within a differentiated whole" (11). Amidst a decade that celebrates first Monet's additive "nature-studies," and then the austere, proto-Conceptualist procedures enumerated by Coplans, art-prodigy Joe Brainard transforms from a precocious journal-writer into a protean producer of serial poems.[79]

None of these events receives much attention in the annals of postwar poetic experiment. But by repositioning Seitz's and Coplans' texts in relation to Brainard's modular, auto-anthological *I Remember* project, I aim to show that, however simplistic or scattered this latter work might seem, it deftly spans the topical and structural poles of postwar serial discourse (and hence exemplifies a long-undervalued means of Pop poetic abstraction). In the hopes of establishing a broad interpretive context within which to appreciate Pop lyricism's perspectivally diffuse poetic forms, I will thus outline art-history's halting steps towards embracing first Monet's serial displays, and then Andy Warhol's serial compositions.

Whereas Seitz, for instance, circa 1960, still has to contend with a critical context in which Monet's most ambitious serial studies (of Rouen Cathedral, Giverny haystacks,

etc.) remain "the most controversial of his works," Coplans, writing near the decade's close, not only can take for granted the paramount importance of such "full-fledged Serial macro-structures," but can use Monet's precedent to help secure Warhol's central place amidst postwar abstract-painting (Seitz 6; Coplans 21).[80] Concurrently, whereas Brainard's *Selected Writings: 1962-1971* opens with a charming, miniaturistic account of the young poet's fleeting affections for Cleopatra's asp, for Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, and Cedric Gibbons' *Tarzan and His Mate*, the collection's second half contains much-lengthier sequences: kaleidoscopic projects that partner encyclopedic breadth to aphoristic density. Between 1962's "Diary Aug. 4th-15th," and 1970's Angel Hair Press *I Remember*, Brainard's poetic development thus parallels the decade's self-refining interest in serial form—as encouraged by Seitz and consolidated by Coplans.[81]

At the same time, and as I will argue here, Brainard's texts deftly negotiate some of the more contentious distinctions between Seitz's and Coplans' accounts of seriality. Whereas Seitz attributes Monet's immense, "systematically cyclical" output to the artist's exhaustive assimilation of rugged nature-scenes, Brainard expands the field of serial-inquiry to include all the simulacral icons and shopworn affects of Cold War mass-cultural discourse (Seitz 19). Whereas Coplans' theory-heavy text occasionally draws the overstated—if admirably utopian—conclusion from its axiomatic premises (example: "the viewer can only feel, as Warhol does, a great sense of pity and compassion for all human beings"), Brainard finds it sufficient to say:

> I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol.
> I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol.
> I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol.
> I like Andy Warhol. I like Andy Warhol. And that is why I like Andy Warhol.
> (Coplans 130; Brainard, *Selected* 20)

Here and, as I will demonstrate, elsewhere, the modular processes of Pop serial-painting literally inscribe themselves onto Brainard's text (itself an apparent homage to Warhol's 1962 "Do it Yourself" canvases). Andy Warhol may not (as the piece cited above puts it) "do creative paintings," yet he has "creative ideas": among them an elastic sense of serial composition's proper scope and subject—a flexibility Brainard rapidly transfers to Pop poetics ("Andy Do It" appears in 1963).[82]

Thus, while the personal acquaintance and/or aesthetic kinship between Brainard and Warhol has been astutely noted (by Ron Padgett, Lewis Warsh, Reva Wolf), this localized connection can also serve, I will argue, as the basis for a more expansive comparative-study of serial composition in Pop painting and Pop lyricism. One obvious distinction between Brainard's and Warhol's careers, for instance, concerns Warhol's relatively swift commercial/critical success as serial-painter, versus Brainard's continued obscurity as serial-poet. And it is within this particular context that the "fluctuating estimate" (Seitz's phrase) of Monet's own serial project proves pertinent (6).

Contemporary audiences—twenty-first-century citizens used to encountering Monet reproductions upon coffee mugs, umbrellas, and handbags—might take for granted this painter's status as promethean precursor to postwar serial imagery. To those readers already inundated by Impressionist poplars, water-lilies, haystacks, I apologize for pushing Monet-consciousness further past any desirable point of saturation. But the varying appraisals that Monet's serial studies face following his death, combined with these projects' rehabilitation in the months preceding Pop art's emergence as a viable aesthetic practice, can still provide, I believe, for fertile inquiry: for renewed reflection concerning not only Pop paintings, but also Pop poems.[83]

Whether or not postwar poet/collagist Joe Brainard, for example, spent much time contemplating Monet-canvases, a brief examination of William Seitz's and John Coplans' timely texts confirms this early-modern virtuoso's importance to subsequent reconceptualizations of representational/abstract dichotomies—to critiques of the concentrated "masterpiece," and valorizations of the "allover" display. Amidst Monet's shifting status within the Impressionist/post-Impressionist, modernist/postmodernist canons can be found, I will argue, an art-historically grounded (less biographically minded) approach to serialized poetic-narratives such as Brainard's.

Yet art-history's erratic response to Monet's ambitious fusions of iconic, quotidian scene and integrated, conceptualist design also anticipates—as I will claim—my current dilemma of how best to establish Pop lyricists (Joe Brainard, James Schuyler, Eileen Myles, David Trinidad among them) as bona fide experimental poets. For the "unmediated" veracity often associated with Monet's "instantaneous" paintings, or with Brainard's "casual," "offhand" texts, diverts attention from the deft structural devices (coordinated repetition, perspectival juxtaposition) that free such works from espousing any mere mimetic complacency (Seitz 43, Corbett 86). As with Warhol's gridded tabloid-silkscreens, the lure of accessible content proffered by Monet's and Brainard's serial-realist projects belies the epistemic provocations that they pose to contemporaneous critical discourse: to institutional valorizations of the commodifiable canvas (or close-reading friendly passage) at the expense of the allover display, the aphoristic assemblage.

For the critic (if not necessarily for a general audience), sorting through the "natural" and constructed environments, the "authentic" and automatized artistic-subjects evoked and deployed by serial studies takes time. Art-history's more punctual response to

the interpretive problems raised above (relative to poetic criticism's continued neglect of Brainard and his peers) hence encourages me to reconsider scholarly accounts of Pop painting and its precedents, if only better to articulate Pop poetry's own, oft-understated ambitions.

Serial Instantaneity

Early 1960's attempts to rehabilitate proto-Pop serial paintings have much to offer twenty-first-century appraisals of Pop serial poems. Thus I briefly defer to art-historical narrative, if only to outline, by extension, the ambiguous place of a postwar Pop poetics: perched between "lyric" and "Language" camps. Since the plastic, polymorphic "I" of Pop poems most often receives recognition (paradoxically, I will argue) for its "unmediated" autobiographical acuities, I begin with a roughly analogous conception of Claude Monet's proto-Pop oeuvre as an "unprejudiced" arena of perceptual "instantaneity" (Seitz 16, 43). More specifically, I present curator William Seitz's conflicted effort to contextualize Monet's serial project amidst prevailing, Abstract Expressionist paradigms as a case-study of astute critics' mid-century response to residual modernist discourse concerning "authentic" agency and "autonomous" form.

As the first critic to complete a full-length study of Abstract Expressionism, Seitz seems the ideal personage to expound upon this epochal movement's relation to art-historical precedent.[84] Within this context, Monet's atmospheric reveries appear a perfect place to start. The Impressionist master's almost-opaque output helps to legitimate more

recent "allover" compositions, just as De Kooning's and Pollock's monumental paintings prove the prescience of Monet's most prodigious canvases.

Still Seitz, composing his monograph for the 1960 "Claude Monet: Seasons and Moments" show, faces several obvious impediments. To begin with: because Monet's serial studies employ iconographic motifs, and reproduce these figures on an industrial scale, such projects can be hard to reconcile with an Abstract Expressionist aesthetic emphasizing (in critics Clement Greenberg's and Harold Rosenberg's terms) the medium-specific, existentially grounded actions of an authentic creative agent:

> the essence of modernism lies in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself…. The limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment—came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly. (Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" 94)

> With traditional esthetic references discarded as irrelevant, what gives the canvas its meaning is not psychological data but *rôle*, the way the artist organizes his emotional and intellectual energy as if he were living in a situation. The interest lies in the kind of act taking place in the four-sided arena, a dramatic interest. (Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters" 29)

Just as Pop art's readymade, repetition-friendly constructions will elide this esoteric form of organic "action" (again, both in Pop painting *and* in Pop poetry), so Monet's voluminous variations-on-a-theme might appear lacking in both the "Ab" and "Ex" categories outlined above.

Admittedly, my brief synopsis of rhetorical disparities between Monet and his apparent Ab-Ex heirs may seem self-evident to students of twentieth-century painting. More surprising, however, is a second curatorial challenge faced by Seitz: the fact that Monet's serial projects had long been considered his least-significant contribution to modernist aesthetics. Along such lines, Seitz offers this striking account of why Monet's

haystacks and cathedrals "lay all but forgotten" for a quarter-century following the artist's death:

> To cite but two random examples…the Haystack series, hailed as a revelation of 'the poetry of the universe' when it was exhibited in 1891, was commonly regarded as an unfortunate venture by the 1940s; the series representing the façade of Rouen Cathedral, described in 1895 as a "thunderous revelation of what the modern spirit can do when allied with ancient art" appeared to a world-famous critic [Kenneth Clark] in 1949 as a "disastrous" choice of subject matter because "grey Gothic facades do not sparkle." (50, 6)

The hard-edged abstractions of Cubism, Suprematism, and De Stijl (the "flat" canvases that Greenberg presumably has in mind when describing "the essence of modernism") can make Monet's modular, mimetic-tending panels seem timid by comparison. At the same time, Monet's own deviation from familiar illusionistic tropes (his "sparkling" Gothic facades, for instance) remains unpalatable to more tepid tastes. As will soon prove problematic for Warhol's and Brainard's early Pop experiments: constrictive abstract/representational dichotomies hold little space for Monet's serial-realist projects.

Consequently, perhaps, Seitz cannot resist the temptation to humanize (also to heroize) Monet in conformance with triumphant reports of Ab-Ex painters' "positive" agency and "dramatic" actions. Here it becomes clear, for instance, why Seitz's *Seasons and Moments* monograph begins by consolidating biographical accounts of Monet as an unusually robust painter—able to endure the most unwelcoming climes, and to expand his perceptual appetite accordingly. Seitz in fact starts his study by (emphatically) attributing Monet's prodigious output to the artist's "drive to capture the full range of natural effects, however impalpable or transitory":

> it is just this characteristic that should first be understood if one is to know Monet: *the diversity of his landscape paintings derives directly from that of nature, to which, without need for metaphysical justification, he was entirely devoted*. (8, 5; italics in original)

Images of Monet—or his children, at least—hauling canvases through any manner of rain- or snowstorm permeate Seitz's depiction of the painter's Stoic "ability and strength, physical and moral" (5).

Of course, to a contemporary audience, several generations removed from macho mid-fifties Abstract Expressionist rhetoric (and/or disinclined toward any analogous appeal to astringent poetic "authenticity"), Seitz's celebration of Monet's physical prowess and upright character (of his subject's "unswerving determination to paint truthfully the world in which he lived") can sound dated (6). Yet, as I will argue below, Seitz's dual emphasis upon Monet transcriber-of-the-mimetic-instant, and Monet progenitor-of-modern-serial-composition, sets the paradoxical tone later picked up by "Brainard Studies" (Joe the modest miniaturist, Joe the compulsive constructor of kaleidoscopic installations). In both cases, an artist's foregrounded diffusion of fixed, testimonial vantage—dissolved through the serial presentation of discrete, modular units—gets obscured by posthumous paeans to "the man behind the work."

Undoubtedly, something similar could be said about any number of undertheorized artists. But the comparison between Monet's postwar legacy and Brainard's personal growth takes on greater focus: given that the former's critical-status changes so drastically (from burnt-out Impressionist, to proto-Conceptualist) during the latter poet-collagist's most dynamic decade of aesthetic development. Within the biographical context outlined above, moreover, Seitz's valorizations of Monet's dogged approach to the detached, atmospheric moment ("He felt that it was essential to cease work the instant an effect changed in order 'to get a true impression of a certain aspect of nature and not a composite picture'") prefigure enthusiastic appraisals of Brainard as

impromptu memoirist—as impulsive note-jotter fixated upon (in Warholian terms) "nothing special" (Seitz 16).

Below, I will demonstrate how critics' emphases upon Brainard's (or Warhol's) eccentric character have helped to obscure structural affinities between Pop and proto-Pop serial composition (both in painting and in poetry). First, however, I feel compelled to acknowledge that Brainard (in the guise of "instantaneous" landscape-poet) often courts such a cursory reading of his work, culling the moment's scattered trivialities into quasi-diaristic texts—as with "Aug. 29, 1967" from *Selected Writings*:

> I'm outside sun-bathing on Kenward Elmslie's lawn in Calais, Vermont. I would say that it's about 10 o'clock. I'm all covered with sun tan lotion. The sun is not shining. The sky is total gray clouds. You never can tell about Vermont, tho…. I'm going to listen real close and try to hear all the sounds I can hear.-------------I hear birds chirping. The water fall. Flies buzzing around.--------- (*Selected* 34).

Biographical inverse of Monet the "fugitive moment" hunter, Brainard the idling Pop lyricist here rests content to absorb what comes his way; to postpone any constrictive editorial cut; to abnegate his place as decisive aesthetic-agent and revel in the role of passive witness. Even more so than his Confessionalist, Deep Image, and ecologically minded contemporaries', Brainard's authentic "voice" seems to derive from devotion to the instantaneous scene (the "continuous present" of a blissed-out Gertrude Stein).[85] Posthumous paeans to sweet "Saint Joe" appear prefigured in this bath of backyard beatitude.

Yet even prostrate upon the lawn, Brainard cannot help situating himself atop a pointed art-historical trajectory:

> There is something that I lack as a painter that De Kooning and Alex Katz have. I wish I had that. I'd tell you what it was except that I don't know. I can see myself as a Cornell or a Man Ray, but somehow I doubt that I'll ever be a De Kooning or

> an Alex Katz. Of course, you never can tell. I work hard and I'm smart. There is a hornet buzzing around me.------------------ (35)

Recalling Emily Dickinson's fatal detection of a "fly buzz," (also James Schuyler's preemptory expulsion of a hornet from the 1966 Frank O'Hara elegy "Buried at Springs"), Brainard's bucolic calm can barely muffle a droning preoccupation with his own place in the modernist pantheon. With this tentative assumption of Joseph Cornell- or Man Ray-status, moreover (no minor claim for a famously "humble" artist still in his mid-twenties), Brainard hints at how a diffused affection for the dispensable moment might accommodate (as Cornell's collage-like boxes, and Ray's indexical prints have done) the aesthete's demand of compositional rigor. Brainard's faux-begrudging identification with these two eclectic, avant-garde stalwarts suggests his self-conscious construction of a proto-Pop genealogy: a queer-inflected lineage (at least compared to Katz and De Kooning) in which lying on the lawn "all covered in sun tan lotion" (and, most importantly, taking time to tell us about it) can stand in for "heroic" art-making and/or urgent, emotive "confession." Just as, in Monet's cyclic nature-studies, each "instantaneous," "unmediated" canvas stubbornly insists upon its modular place within a greater series, so Brainard's backyard rhapsody flouts fixed conventions concerning the "ecstatic" lyric moment—proffering provisional self-evaluations in place of epiphanic insight.

"Aug. 29, 1967" might conclude with the Pop lyricist reconciled to immediate circumstance: "Ron [Padgett] just went inside with his blanket saying it is going to rain. And it is. I can feel drops already. I guess I'll go inside too" (36). But even amid this early, improvisational project (a predominantly un-indented text, punctured by long, extensional lines: "There is a tiny breakthrough in the sky----------------Now it's gone"),

the distancing-effects of serial display begin to graft themselves upon Brainard's seemingly open, all-inclusive vision. Forever afterwards—as *Selected Writings*' interstitial notations beget *I Remember*'s modular units—such testaments to the "fugitive," "tiny breakthrough" moment (indexical accounts akin to Man Ray's rayographs) will not be banished from Brainard's work, but they will get boxed off into Cornell-like cabinets-of-curiosity.

Serial Display

Seitz's intermittently idealized account of Monet's "organic" picture-cycles can obscure the formulaic, quasi-industrial processes that link such work to postwar mass-production (38).[86] At his best, however, Seitz provides a rigorous attempt to establish Monet's tenuous, transitional place upon the continuum between classic mimesis and postwar abstraction (a scholarly project that can prove germane to my own analysis of Brainard). Most important within the present context: Seitz asserts that the ambient, allover nature of individual Monet-canvasses gets intensified (perhaps first gets noticed) through a comparison of interrelated panels—through serial display. However virtuosic Monet's ability to "'tender [his] impressions in the face of the most fugitive of effects,'" it is the moderate (modulated) contrast from one iconic canvas (one cathedral, one haystack) to the next that best evinces this painter's apprehension of that most "fugitive" aesthetic phenomenon: the "total environment" (30).[87] Here seriality's reduction of content, its repetition of motif, prove crucial. The compulsive-seeming cropping of reality down to elemental forms (or, at least, to interchangeable parts) trains our perception upon

"optical mixture [rather] than calligraphic naturalism" (19).[88] A single haystack painting appears to be "about" haystacks, whereas multiple haystack paintings (hung side-by-side) offer variations on the theme of "induced coloration."

During the decades between Monet's death and Seitz's show, however, institutional constraints obscure this meta-compositional component to the painter's serial project. For Monet's peculiar mode of pictorial innovation—treating the individual canvas not (or not only) as a transparent "window" onto the mimetic scene, but as a modular panel (a single unit amidst a greater serial arrangement)—depends upon a decidedly unpropitious commercial context: galleries might gather Monet's cyclic paintings for impressive aggregate display, but only so that individual works can be sold, scattered like a litter of puppies.[89] However destabilizing to bourgeois conceptions of the unique art-object, belle époque serial displays could not sustain themselves for long, given the art-market's swift revenge in the form of imperturbable salesmanship.

Only with the Pax Americana of the postwar era (with the increased international coordination of blockbuster retrospectives; the enhanced quality and distribution of photographic reproductions, etc.) does this market-driven obscurity begin to reverse itself. Only at Seitz's 1960 show can audiences concur with Monet's contemporary, critic/statesman Georges Clemenceau, who had written, in response to the 1895 exhibition of 20 Rouen Cathedral paintings at Paris' Durand-Ruel Gallery, that "'With twenty pictures the painter has given us the feeling that he could have…made fifty, one hundred, one thousand, as many as the seconds in his life'" (Seitz 31). This sense of infinitely expansive potential, as recognized by Clemenceau, and restored by Seitz, relies upon compositional risks inherent to serial construction: to a sequence in which each

separate unit appears as pertinent as any other, but also in which any one module—if isolated and made to stand on its own—can seem far less compelling than the typical "self-contained" canvas. In subsequent sections of this chapter I will argue, by analogy, that the close-reading or selective-citation of Pop poetic projects such as Brainard's proves equally problematic. But first I want to continue this study of how postwar critics' rehabilitation of Monet's "nature-cycles" can refine our conceptions of Pop serial display.

In his 1968 *Serial Imagery* monograph, critic/curator/artist John Coplans, for example, writes eloquently regarding the site-specific constraints imposed upon painters prone to serial composition: "Only when paintings of a Series are exhibited together in a gallery space do the parameters built into the paintings and their reciprocal quality begin to operate" (15). Picking up Seitz's lead, Coplans recounts the urgency with which Georges Clemenceau pressed acquaintances to attend Monet's 1895 Durand-Ruel show—detecting, within this elder critic's praise, an astute anticipation of art-historical aporia:

> Clemenceau was keenly aware that if the whole *Cathedral* Series was broken up by the paintings being sold separately, Monet's extraordinary discovery would go underground and might never be apparent to future generations of artists. (26)

According to Coplans' retrospective take, no matter how famous any one particular haystack or water-lily canvas might become, its greater serial context can remain obscure—especially since "Serial imagery is concerned not with the notion of masterpiece, but of process" (17). Eliding the ineffable (by now inevitable) gestures of the Abstract-Expressionist-in-communion-with-his-canvas, Coplans' serial-painter opts to construct an architectonic (gallery-based) field: a kaleidoscopic "macro-structure" in which the viewer's engagement engenders "reciprocal qualities" ("the inherent capacity

of Serial structures to interact and to reinforce by juxtaposition") (18). Serial process hence demands a criticism attuned "to the largest entity," so that its coordinated intervention into any number of formal, institutional, phenomenological, and epistemic discourses can be addressed simultaneously (18).

Here I thus would like to substantiate Coplans' somewhat vague emphases upon "process," by presenting a more detailed account of how criticism addressed to the "largest entity" can enhance our appreciation of the serial text (score, painting, poem, etc.). In order to expand upon Coplans' explanation for "how each painting fits within the chosen structure," I will briefly consider critic Benjamin Buchloh's account of Andy Warhol's 1962 "Campbell Soup Cans" exhibition (at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles) (18). Buchloh's piece offers, I here claim, a more recent art-historical analogue to Clemenceau's fin-de-siècle hunch concerning serial installation. For like his predecessor's prescient detection of an additive, meta-compositional power, Buchloh's analysis of Warhol's "Soup Cans" show tracks the institutional-critique posed (then swiftly diffused) by successful serial display. The legacy of Warhol's Ferus Gallery project provides, I will argue, explicit confirmation of how market-driven dispersals not only can obscure the medium, but can distort the "message" of a pictorial series.

In his 1989 essay, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-66," Buchloh stresses the need to reconsider Warhol's initial presentation of the Campbell Soup Can paintings (subsequently disseminated through sales and reproductions) as modular parts of a comprehensive series. Along these lines, Buchloh points out that Warhol's installation of thirty-two paintings at Ferus Gallery corresponded to the thirty-two varieties of Campbell Soup available at the time: that Warhol even checked off a

Campbell's Soup product-list as he completed the project. Whereas Monet, in Clemenceau's account, hints that he could have painted a canvas for every second of life, Warhol self-consciously restricts himself to "canned," prefabricated categories. Here the relationship between individual painting (standard unit of private art-consumption) and complete series (alibi for latest commercial display) poses many provocative questions. Most obviously: what are we to make of a pictorial-set whose parameters depend not upon internal, "organic" logic (the artist's impassioned resolution of a formal "problem"), but upon external (mass-marketed) conditions? What value will each discrete item (painting, soup can) possess once stripped from its symbolic place in the collective (and collection-minded) consumer-consciousness? By displaying a complete line of products (a comprehensive, quasi-autistic catalogue pitched as much to the ad-man's "conceptual" eye, as to the typical-shopper's tepid palate), Warhol's "Campbell Soup Cans" show serves not only to parody mass-cultural "choice," but to critique (also to condone) the commodity-sign's swift replacement of art's empirical "objecthood." Ready to stand as isolated, emblematic representations of the allover project that they comprise, Warhol's reified canvases (unlike Monet's instantaneous/interdependent dispatches) seem to beg to be taken home—and in whatever form: "real" or "copied."

Critics have long since made the case for Warhol's Pop icons embodying an ambivalent late-capitalist critique. But Buchloh's pointed restaging of the Ferus Gallery show (of Warhol's peculiar, yet oft-overlooked attention to how "each painting fits within the chosen structure") further strengthens this scholar's claim that "the paintings' *mode of display* was as crucial as…their commercial readymade iconography":

> Standing on small white shelves running along the perimeter of the gallery in the way that display shelves for consumer objects would normally function in a stall,

> the paintings were still attached to the wall in the way that pictures would traditionally be installed in a gallery. (30; italics in original)

Perched upon the threshold between interchangeable part and ineffable whole, Warhol's soup cans convoke the transcendent unity Clemenceau detects in Monet's cathedrals—even as they foreground their own position on the front lines (the "small white shelves") of market-driven dispersal. With typical Pop panache, Warhol here transforms an oft-concealed truth about serial display's self-eclipsing success into the impetus for an expansive, proto-"environmental" installation—a blasé shrine to commercial bastardization: just as Pop lyricists will rearrange the echoing ephemera of consumerist culture into incremental meditations upon "everyday life."

Of course, once Warhol's Campbell cans set forth to spread their Pop gospel, the painter's gallery-based critique soon gets obscured.[90] A single, monumentalized, soup can seems better-suited to calendars, postcards, and t-shirts than does the 32-can row Warhol wraps around Ferus Gallery. Subsequent audiences thus first get introduced to Andy Warhol the consumer fetishist, rather than Andy Warhol the epistemologically minded, proto-installationist social critic. Scholarly accounts, moreover, consolidate this myopic emphasis upon classic Warholian "content" by, in Buchloh's terms, "foregrounding discussions of Warhol's pop iconography," hence wrenching this artist's work from its "intricate reflection on the status and substance of the painterly object and…the definition and display of painting" (29). Warhol's deadpan examination of asymptotic difference (Tomato, Tomato Rice, etc.) gets lost—and his discrete panels lose their "distinctive" flavor. Nonetheless, within the postwar context reconstructed by Buchloh, it is worth recalling that Warhol displays his numerous product-series (Brillo boxes, Coca-Cola bottles, etc.) not long after the vaunted "individualists" and painterly

"purists" of Abstract Expressionism begin cranking out their own variations upon an easily recognizable, imminently reproducible theme (Robert Motherwell's Elegies to the Spanish Republic, Barnett Newman's zip-paintings, etc.), all according to the American economy's preferred model of scale: one per potential buyer. Seriality, Warhol's soup cans seem to say, will extract its own revenge on the singular masterpiece.

Serial Page

Warhol's soup-can paintings differ from Brainard's quasi-autobiographical literary projects in obvious ways. The former works reproduce an impersonal, reductive, industry-derived iconography. The latter texts depict an idiosyncratic, detail-oriented, "homemade" subjectivity. Yet the affinities between Pop-painting and Pop-poem quickly manifest once Pop art's rhetorical processes get surveyed—as with John Coplan's phenomenologically inflected account (in his 1970 essay, "Early Warhol: The Systematic Evolution of the Impersonal Style") of viewers' initial response to a characteristic Warhol canvas:

> The imagery that Warhol finally selects is in the range of charged, tough notions that in [Robert] Rauschenberg's work, for example, become transformed by painterly handling. Warhol's imagery is transformed…but the crucial issue is that the transformation is not immediately apparent. More immediate to the viewer is that the painting looks as disposable as the original it is modeled from: something to be thrown away, or the cheapest kind of advertising, of no value except as a message to sell. (53)

As with Rauschenberg's collage-like combines and Jasper Johns's bronze-casted beer cans, as with Allen Ginsberg's encyclopedic odes and Jack Kerouac's speech-based rhapsodies, Pop art appropriates its ostensible subject from vernacular discourse, and

thereby contests the formal autonomy of postwar aesthetic "objects" (painting, sculpture, poem, novel). Yet Pop art also, and unlike the mid-century milestones listed above, refuses to secure a fixed place for itself *outside* of the everyday ephemera it celebrates. Whereas Rauschenberg, Johns, Ginsberg, and Kerouac foreground the deliberate "transformation" of vulgar data into exquisite art, Warhol's iconic panels and Brainard's diaristic poems often appear just as "disposable" as the originals that they get "modeled from."

Thus if Pop art picks up any cultural value beyond that of the commodity-fetish, of the postcard-message, it does so implicitly: by posing epistemic problems that conventional art-consumption obscures. Warhol, as Buchloh has argued, heightens viewers' awareness of the commercial context within which paintings get exhibited. Accessible affect stimulates the audience, yet site-specific serial installation precludes total "immersion" in any one canvas (leaving the turned-on consumer/spectator to windowshop a spare, 360° display). Brainard, as I demonstrate below, likewise directs readers' attention towards convoluted rhetorical vectors—to hermeneutic tensions between (local) syntactic progress and (global) page design, between printed leaf and bounded book. "Transparent" as the typical image-based poem, Brainard's serialized splicings of tangential "reference" resist categorization as "instantaneous" records, and thus confound late-twentieth-century distinctions between "realist" and "abstract" poetry.

Most notably, perhaps, Brainard's time-tracking texts (journals, travelogues, etc.) probe poetic temporality with the conceptualist rigor that Warhol brings to serial display. For just as viewers of Warhol's 1962 "Campbell Soup Cans" installation confront both thirty-two distinct flavors *and* one comprehensive product-line, so readers of Brainard's

diary-projects encounter detached, dissociated entries *and* cohesive, composite narratives. In “Diary Aug. 4th-15th," for instance (begun, coincidentally enough, the very night that Warhol’s “Soup Cans” show closes in Los Angeles, and thus offering an auspicious start to *Selected Writings, 1962-1971*), Brainard’s supposedly discrete, one-a-day prose blocks read more like sculpted strophes from a carefully calibrated monologue—a camp-inflected Thomas Bernhard rant:

> *Aug. 4*—Today went to the Museum of Modern Art to see the mummified remains of the actual asp that Queen Cleopatra used to kill herself with: a most interesting object.
>
> *Aug. 5*—Today went to the Museum of Modern Art to study Excalibur, with which King Arthur proved his right to Kingship, and to sip coffee in the Museum’s sculpture garden. I found the sword to be a most unusual object.
>
> *Aug. 6*—Today I thought: A rusty old sword and a dead snake? Are they kidding? Where are the real treasures of yesterday?
>
> *Aug. 7*—Today I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to look at the *real* treasures of yesterday. Their major treasures are exciting. I found their minor treasures rather unexciting.
>
> *Aug. 8*—Today I thought seriously about Excalibur and decided it could just as easily have been Prince Valiant’s or even Flash Gordon’s. I have definitely decided this to be a minor treasure. (12)

With date-lines running down Brainard’s page (as if digits from a Jasper Johns number-painting), “Diary Aug. 4th-15th” evokes less the fugitive-present of the “instantaneous” canvas than the consistent pace of the accountant’s calendar: scrupulous sister to diurnal time. Still, fugue-like repetitions (“Today went…. Today I thought…. Today I went…. Today I thought”) convene the continuous pleasures of serial display (“a most unusual object”; “a most interesting object”), as much as they conjure the daily grind of diaristic progression. A Pop *recherche du temps perdu*, Brainard invites his readers both to revel in the moment (“to sip coffee in the Museum’s sculpture garden”), and to span across

eons (to compare Excalibur to Flash Gordon's sword). However charming line-by-line, such a project demands, in Coplans' terms, interpretation addressed "to the largest entity."

Again, in "Jamaica 1968," Brainard assumes the self-conscious journal-keeper's convoluted pose—required to "give himself up" to the moment, yet equally concerned to move his plot along:

> MARCH 3rd
> Our house is a little house up on top of a big hill…. We have a swimming pool and two maids. I don't like having two maids…. There are buzzards that fly very low. And geese. They come around and drink from the pool, quack, and do enormous piles of green shit. And there are brown goats, and beautiful peacocks. I would say about a hundred of them. I have never seen anything more beautiful.
>
> MARCH 4th
> I'm outside sun bathing. There is a goose over by the swimming pool. Jane [Frielicher] thinks it is something else that does the green shit piles but I'm sure it's the geese…. Beyond the bay is Montego Bay: the city…. We really do have a terrific view up here.
>
> MARCH 5th
> The peacocks woke us up this morning with their various noises. They make incredibly loud sounds…. But Joe Hazan got up and shooed them away.
>
> MARCH 6th
> The peacocks woke us up again this morning. About six o'clock. They really are beautiful tho. (*Selected* 42-43)

Here goose-shit piles and beautiful peacocks emerge in conspicuously well-balanced proportion. Brainard seems, once more, to edit his diary as though shaping an allover text. Neither an "honest record" (along the meticulous lines of Henry Thoreau's or Dorothy Wordsworth's journals), nor a fictive construction (such as Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, or Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet*), Brainard's alternately hammy ("I have never seen anything more beautiful") and high-handed ("I don't like having two maids") account appears closer to John Ashbery's Guadalajara-dreaming "The

Instruction Manual"—to have been written by a marketing-director on strike. Too prosaic or pushy for conventional lyric tastes, Brainard's text can sound as "disposable" as "the cheapest kind of advertising." Yet it continues this poet's rigorous examination of the instant's relation to the durational whole, of the indented passage's position on the allover page.

As if further to foreground this concern with serial display, Brainard begins, in subsequent projects, to insert unbroken typographical lines—perforating his situation-based poems into semi-distinct measures:

> Writing
>
> Smoking
>
> Drinking a beer
>
> So as to get more so
>
> (More drunk)
>
> To get more sleepy
>
> (To sleep)
>
> ---
>
> Listening to "The Supremes"
>
> ---
>
> Almost Christmas
>
> Almost a New Year (*Selected* 98)

Just as seasonal change might seem to dilate during the holiday-heavy weeks before New Year's, so "December 22, 1970" interposes mild impediments to the reader's progress: restoring attention to our temporal passage through what otherwise appears a swift, almost-instantaneous poem, plunging in vertical descent. Impromptu autobiographical reference ("Drinking a beer," "Listening to 'The Supremes'") yields to (soft)

compositional constraint. Space and time get entangled amidst Brainard's typographical scoring of the text.

By 1971's "Some Train Notes," moreover, the poet systematically deploys this "decorative" line—as if in direct homage to the small white shelves of Warhol's serial display:

> Riding a train is pretty funny.
> ___
> Especially when you don't really feel like you've "been" where you've been.
> ___
> Especially when you don't know exactly what you are going back to or why.
> ___
> Especially when you're totally stoned out of your head.
> ___
>
> (*Selected* 104)

Perched atop their graphic grooves, Brainard's boxy entries stand separate but combined, invoking both the college-ruled page and the schoolboy's digressive "theme." As with Warhol's Campbell soup cans, each utterance appears eminently detachable ("This train stop is a long one"; "A woman just sat down next to me"), yet loses its distinctive flavor set alone. Precursor to Barthes's *S/Z*, Brainard's strophic account accentuates the seme's (also the seam's) manifold meanings (the poet's floundering analysis of not having "'been'" where he's been, for instance, picks up comic precision once we learn that this sentiment springs from somebody stoned "out of" his head).

Fragmentary, subjectless sentences may stumble towards camp-epiphany on the passage of time:

> I can see my own face now more than I can see what's outside.
> ___
> I guess I'll stop now and try to read some Lillian Helman.
> ___
> (106)

But throughout the piece, Brainard's grid-like depiction of temporal/geographical progress offers abstract counterpoint to more-familiar forms of modernist reverie. It is as if Walter Benjamin, enthused by the latest Mondrian exhibition, opted to systematize "Hashish in Marseilles."

Here I do not attempt to prove *Selected Writings*' poetic puissance—such short excerpts often fail to account for the adroit compositions from which they derive—so much as to suggest that each project quoted above expands the parameters of Pop serial display.[91] Brainard mines the journal- and one-liner forms for pocket-sized, easily transferable gems, yet nonetheless evokes the architectonic complexities of Monet's and Warhol's gallery installations. For as with his predecessors' "largest," context-affirming entities, Brainard's deft distributions of equivocal remarks engage our attention, yet preclude complete engrossment in any one module. To assume, however, that this dispersion of "substantive" content, this diverting of lyric "transparency," this "flaunting" of accessible affect need inevitably produce an inferior text is to deny the epochal impact Pop and proto-Pop hermeneutics have had upon late-twentieth-century serial design.

Serial Simultaneity

Incremental, yet inexorable progress through Brainard's "Some Train Notes" has deposited us squarely in the 1970's ("Being on a train is only where it's 'at' when you're on it / I *told* you I was stoned") (*Selected* 104). But here I return to the prodigious decade (both for Brainard and for his Pop contemporaries) that grants this chapter its title. I first invoke, as grandiose (though perhaps premature) goodbye to fastidious early-sixties serial

display ("Seasons and Moments," "Campbell Soup Cans," "Diary: Aug. 4th-15th," etc.), Andy Warhol's mid-sixties launching of his silver mylar clouds. [see figure 1] For the pleasures of merely circulating, as made manifest by Warhol's "Infinite Sculpture," have much to tell us, I will argue, about Brainard's diffusive journal projects—just as the serial repetitions in Warhol's silkscreens anticipate the anaphoric insistence of Brainard's *I Remember*.

Fig. 1. Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds*. 1966.

Always quick to extract revenge upon the art market's dispersive, commercially driven forces, Warhol, by decade's midpoint, appears to decide that if his architectonic installations (stacked Brillo and Heinz Tomato Ketchup boxes, etc.) must be scattered, then he himself will serve as liberator. Critic Wayne Koestenbaum describes the consequent scene:

> In an audiotape that Warhol made of the unveiling of an early version of the silver clouds, on the roof of the Factory, his delight is evident, as is his conviction that ethereal objects are espoused to the sky: he squeals with joy as the silver structure

> (an "Infinite Sculpture") rises and disappears, blending into clouds and vacant blue. (111)

Georges Clemenceau's paean to "'the perfect equality of art and phenomena,'" as present in Monet's serial enterprise, picks up postwar resonance with the release of Warhol's buoyant sculpture (Coplans, *Serial* 26).[92] Here, however, serial display's swift dispersal takes the form of preemptive (perhaps homeopathic) celebration. As if in accordance with the potlatch-participant's counterintuitive motives for tossing possessions off a cliff, Warhol dispatches this latest design into the "clouds and vacant blue."[93] Monet's interrelated panels may get split among myriad buyers, obscuring his picture-cycles' additive power, but shamans' logic seems to suggest that Warhol's ritualistic expenditures can only lead to bolder art-world provocations: to an endless supply of (again, Brainard's terms) "creative ideas"—boomeranging back towards Warhol's roof like some Factory-kept pigeon flock.

Pushing this renunciatory/annunciatory dialectic to its extreme, Warhol claims to have abandoned painting altogether ("I thought that the way to finish off painting…would be to have a painting…that you fill up with helium and let out of your windows"), if only to further consolidate his art-historical pedigree: here by managing both to echo the Baudelarian dandy ("I love the clouds... the clouds that pass"), and to extend what Buchloh describes as a more cantankerous "Rimbaud/Duchamp tradition of self-imposed refusal of artistic production" (Baudelaire 1, Buchloh 41). Casually soaring into orbit, the Infinite Sculpture's mirrored balloons can reflect back any number of aesthetic strategies without succumbing to argumentative heaviness. As Warhol confirms throughout his career, lightness of tone never need preclude intellectual heft.

Of course, Buchloh's biographical follow-up traces the limits to any such leisurely and/or combative posture for this workaholic, consumer-friendly artist:

> Ten years after his first declaration, Warhol (having taken up painting again) still struggles with the problem (or the pose?): "I get so tired of painting. I've been trying to give it up all the time, if we could just make a living out of movies or the newspaper business, or something. It's so boring, painting the same picture over and over." (41)

But within my present investigation of 1960's serial practice, I wish to demonstrate that Warhol's cagey pledge to scatter corpus and career need not wait for evidence from subsequent decades to prove itself disingenuous. However "indifferent," in Coplans terms, to the number of paintings he has made, Warhol can rest assured (within months of the first Ferus Gallery show) that many of his most widely distributed serial forms will avoid being sent "underground." For such works have internalized the logic of serial display: either into the confines of a single canvas (as with the repeated silkscreens) or amidst a self-declared constellation (as with the iconic panels—of race riots, electric chairs, etc.—that get paired to "blank" monochromes). And within this context of combinatory method and/or coordinated repetitions, it should come as no surprise that even Warhol's meandering clouds merit careful attention for what Coplans calls their serial "macro-structure."

Corralling Warhol's helium-based sculptures back into the gallery space (contra the artist's avowed desire to let his balloons "float out your window"), Coplans presents these errant clouds as yet another site-specific epistemological critique—an ever-mobile contestation to classic one-fixed-image-per-viewer paradigms:

> Perhaps no single image in the second half of the Twentieth Century is so daring in concept and so beautiful in appearance as Warhol's helium-filled Series of floating aluminum pillows…. identical, manufactured objects remorselessly stamped out by a machine, which when filled with gas and clustered within a

> space, become more organic in their relationship than the interweaving strands of a Pollock painting. (*Serial* 16)

Here Coplans' hasty, hyperbolic praise (the century's "second half" had not reached its midpoint) may echo Warhol's own ecstatic response to standing surrounded by his silver floating forms. But Coplans' corresponding conception of "macro-structure" ("each unit remains interchangeable and has the same rank as the others, without disturbing the continuity") can also prompt a detailed phenomenological account of how Warhol's dispersive pillows "interweave" their strands (11).

To begin with, Warhol's organic/manufactured clouds enable Coplans to demonstrate that even amid the most mobile or elastic serial forms can be discerned a "remorselessly stamped out" procedural system:

> Central to Serial Imagery…is the controlling influence of the macro-structure, within which (provided the parameters are systematically observed) a high degree of randomness in the use of infra-forms is possible. (16)

Once made to Factory-specification, and stamped with the imprimatur of art-world sophisticates, Warhol's clouds are given reign to roam where they please, extending his Infinite Sculpture's compositional "field" into the furthest nooks of the exhibition space. Along such lines, Coplans' macro-structure concept helps to clarify this curator's ideal of criticism addressed to the "largest entity" (11). Cathedrals, soup cans, and aluminum pillows—broadly dispersed across a gallery—do not depict illusionistic scenes, nor describe fixed, delineable conglomerates, but rather construct an amorphous "realm" of aesthetic resonance: a charged phenomenological field in which the main concern (again a hermeneutic one) is how each set-piece fits within the ever-shifting structure ("shifting" because, unlike more "frontal" artworks, Monet's and Warhol's serial installations cannot be apprehended by a single glance).

Thus however “atmospheric” the palette, or “obvious” the iconography employed by serial display, its kaleidoscopic impact upon the viewer evokes less the Impressionistic instantaneity affirmed by Seitz, than the polymorphous simultaneity described by Coplans:

> The record of Monet’s eye, so to speak, betrays itself in his simultaneous views of [Rouen Cathedral’s] solid, stone face; the time-spread—its sequence and duration—is compressed and magnified. Thus the normal sequence of time collapses; it becomes encapsulated by Monet’s and the observer’s constant shift of perception. (Coplans 26)

Macro-structural simultaneity directs viewers’ attention away from the mimetic (myopic) “scene,” thereby provoking “constant” perceptual shifts: a “compressed and magnified” plurality of perspectives. Here the multiple vantages imposed by serial display preclude any “unmediated” image, and parallel reading’s semiotic drift. Yet serial composition’s “indivisible process” (“a particular inter-relationship, rigorously consistent, of structure and syntax”) differs from the meta-narrative of experimental fiction, from the cumulative sweep of chronological memoir, since serial projects do not divide preexisting entities or projected wholes into constituent parts, but instead construct kinetic fields of interchangeable modules (akin to the ethereal cognitive-movements outlined by Brainard’s incremental prose-blocks) (11, 13). The converse of a characteristic Vermeer canvas, Monet’s serial installations elicit, instead of depicting, the reading-subject—dispersing, rather than condensing, the “normal sequence of time.”

Serial Subject

Perhaps no Warholian trope better epitomizes this concern with serial "time-spread" (with a "collapse" and "encapsulation" of durational sequence) than the artist's Factory-sewn photographic sheets.[94] [see figure 2] For here lateral installment precludes dramatic arc. Whereas Eadweard Muybridge's proto-cinematic studies seem to demand standardized, sequential viewing, Warhol's recalcitrant stitcheries threaten to jam the projector. Purported Hollywood fanatic, Warhol, in his later years, does bind together images, but according to the boxy mode of modernist serial display, rather than of film's fluid stream. However mechanized, moreover, the artist's (or his assistants') exposed needlework (in Coplans' terms: "interweaving strands") proves especially anachronistic—harkening back to the perforated plaints of Sappho's papyrus ("Sweet Mother, I the web / Can weave no more"), and Dickinson's fascicles ("And when the Film had stitched your eyes"), as much as to the celluloid reels of Warner Brothers and MGM (Sappho 57, Dickinson 197).

Fig. 2. Andy Warhol, *Skeletons*. 1986-1987.

Yet if Warhol's sewn, serial photographs thus thread together the classic lyricist's interwoven strands and the contemporary photographer's contact sheet, they also correspond, once more, to Brainard's construction of the serialized page ("Diary Aug. 4th-15th"), of the composite narrative ("Some Train Notes"). For in both Warhol's and Brainard's case, crisp, rectilinear designs retain the touch of homespun tapestry—thereby affirming the historical trajectory traced by Roland Barthes (in his 1980 essay "That Old Thing Art") from ancient textile to modernist grid (with the bounded book somewhere between) (203).[95] This domesticized grid provides, in fact, perhaps art's most fitting comparison to Pop-lyricist poems—an analogy I develop in a separate paper, entitled "Pop Poetics and Grid Aesthetics."

But here I shall close by returning to Coplans' phenomenologically minded analysis of Warhol's "floating aluminum pillow" installation—so to demonstrate that the clouds' mobile macro-structure resembles the perspectivist flux educed by Brainard's *I Remember*. Constantly restitching the compositional field (with each viewer serving as roving nodal-point), Warhol's clouds trace the hermeneutic "horizon": as probed by Gadamer and Nietzsche, as invoked by Emerson's evanescent "circles," and Montaigne's wraparound library-shelves.[96] Mute and impersonal as they may seem (especially in comparison to the dramatic "*rôle*" played by Rosenberg's "action painting"), Warhol's reflective clouds invite the viewer's body back into the aesthetic "arena," and thus provide an architectonic analogue to the affective writerly-text.

For just as the clouds glide through a gallery space, "animated by air and viewers' body movements," so *I Remember*'s detached, breezy statements hover in Calderesque equipoise—ever-prepared to conform to a reader's perspectival proclivities:

> I remember Christmas carols. And car lots.
>
> I remember bunk beds.
>
> I remember rummage sales. Ice cream socials. White gravy. And Hopalong Cassidy.
>
> I remember knitted “pants” on drinking glasses.
>
> I remember bean bag ashtrays that would stay level on irregular surfaces.
> (Buchloh 33, Brainard 18)

Poetic equivalent of the bean-bag ashtray, Brainard’s malleable macro-structure can constantly recalibrate its valence in order to stay “level” with the reader’s taste. Christmas carols combine with car lots—either to imply deadpan social critique, or to limn the all-inclusive range of Pop-lyric retrospection. Ice-cream socials and “white” gravy confirm the vanilla-blandness of a cultural milieu defined by rummage sales and Western films, or else convoke the sturdy unpretentiousness of postwar Middle America (Warhol himself calls “a good, plain look…my favorite look”) (68). Bunk beds and knitted “‘pants’” hint at confinements and/or containments of the sexualized body, even as they suggest kid-friendly fun.[97] Taken as a whole, moreover, this passage’s “compressed” sequence encourages disparate combinatory conjectures (do horizontal car-lots correspond to vertical bunk-beds? do drinking-glasses with knitted “pants” complement bean-bag ashtrays?). The overall meaning of any such “collapsed” and “encapsulated” (allover) sequence thus depends upon the individual reader’s attunement to Cold War cliché, to camp-inflected parataxis, to the “occult harmonies” Emerson celebrates in his description of philosophers’ “Joyous Science” (Emerson 567). More broadly put: *I Remember*’s perspective-based “indivisible process” calls for a fused formalist/semiotic analysis—not just the magnified focus of the self-contained close-

reading, but also a Barthesian catalogue of the various critical vantages called forth by the kaleidoscopic text.

Before releasing Warhol's Infinite Sculpture from my own purview, I thus want to draw from it one final distinction—to sketch the centrifugal and/or centripetal pressures posed by serial display.[98] Launched from the Factory rooftop, Warhol's balloons scatter in a Big Bang-like spectacle (no master-frame holds these separate units together).[99] Confined within a gallery space, however, Warhol's clouds circle back and commingle, settling into sustainable oscillation, swarming then evading their audience. By analogy, Brainard's "random," anti-linear text may seem to sprawl in all directions at once, yet its anaphoric repetitions track the centripetal force of a containing structure; they trace the contours of an almost-empty space (here the reader's syntactically unburdened mind): a refractive arena in which buoyant entries can bounce around, quietly reconstellating our relation to the text.[100] In both Warhol's and Brainard's projects, it is thus the centripetal strictures of serial display that allow for a sustained centrifugal "simultaneity." The small white shelves of "Campbell Soup Cans," of "Some Train Notes," recede as each artist's subsequent macro-structure encapsulates a microcosm of "seasons and moments," motion and time.

Along such lines, John Coplans has suggested that Warhol's "most decisive move" comes about through the rejection of "paint handling"—through the abandonment of dramatic, Ab-Ex-derived brushstrokes, and the embrace of industrial process (silkscreened canvas, mass-produced mylar cloud, etc.) ("Early" 52). Similarly, I here posit that Brainard's "most decisive move" as serial poet takes place amidst the progression from his early journals' narrative patina to *I Remember*'s anaphoric pulse:

> I decided one day that I would lay out in the sun and close my eyes and try to remember, and just write down whatever I remembered, free-floating…. But then I began to realize that beyond that point there is another level of knowledge that could be triggered off. It wasn't really useful knowledge unless it was triggered off. (Dlugos 11)

Lying in the Vermont grass again (two years later this time), with the apogee of Pop pictorial-innovation just behind him, Brainard remains committed to a "free-floating" poetic transcription, yet now with mechanized, serialized bent ("It isn't really there spontaneously") (Dlugos 11). Conspicuous lyric "handling" yields to reflexive, propulsive "trigger."

Anticipating L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry's efforts to "deauthor" textual production, Brainard thereby "stamps out" his Pop-lyric "I"—a far-flung, aerial alternative to the provincial scope of Deep Imagist poetics, and the self-aggrandizing gravitas of Confessionalism. But whereas art critics quickly recognize Warhol's advance beyond hackneyed conceptions of Ab-Ex integrity, literary scholars continue to ignore Brainard analogous critique of poetic "authenticity." Artist-poet Joe Brainard swiftly absorbs the lessons of Warholian Pop and yet, according to the criteria of most adventuresome readers, still stands far behind his times: too "personal," too "referential" in a burgeoning era of "abstract," "opaque" texts.

Here we can discern the difficulty in tracking interdisciplinary aesthetic innovation (as well as the importance of doing so). For only through comparative analysis does Brainard's Pop-inflected mode of vernacular-to-the-vernacular "transformation" become clear—because less bound to the historical contingencies of postwar poetic paradigm (conversely: Warhol's site-specific displays pick up added nuance when compared to Brainard's writerly poems). In both such cases, positioning Brainard's texts

alongside Seitz's, Coplans', and Buchloh's critical-studies helps to confirm that even as Pop pays homage to mass-cultural trope, and to the apparent intractability of industrial form, it extends some of the modernist era's most acute epistemic provocations (Monet's dissolution of the discrete art-object, for example), and remains contemporary to poststructuralist thought (Barthesian semiotics).

Granted these multigenerational, multidisciplinary developments, I here conclude with critic John Coplans' own artistic response to postwar serial display. For in case it still seems unclear how a compelling artist-subject might emerge amidst the quasi-algorithmic processes outlined above, Coplans' late-career photographic project offers fitting illustration. [see figure 3] Again, what most interests me about Coplans' "Reclining Figure" (an apt title for many Brainard poems) is this artist's ultimate return (following the esoteric formulations of his 1968 *Serial Imagery* catalogue) to the empiric human frame as site from which/on which to pose residual questions concerning abstract design's relation to anthropomorphic affect—concerning modern serial display's connection to the fin-de-siècle portrait-hall.

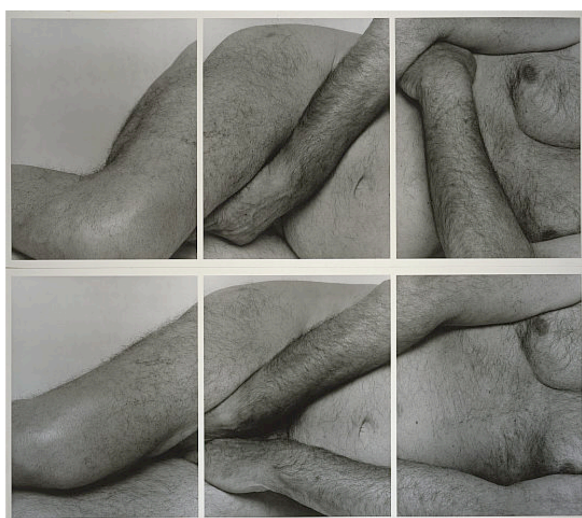


Fig. 3. John Coplans, *Reclining Figure, Two Panels, No. 1*. 1996.

Of course, far more austere examples of post-sixties serial composition exist (in poetry also—as Craig Dworkin's wonderful "Anthology of Conceptualist Poetry" makes clear). But here it has seemed enough to point out that, between the Pop-enthused early-sixties, and the Language-centered late-seventies, Joe Brainard intuitively valorizes what "progressive" (syntactically "defamiliarizing") poetry will soon repress: the affective body of Whitman's "I" and of Stein's ventriloquistic narrator; of Warhol's cloud-launcher and cloud-watcher; of *Selected Writings*' own, well-oiled subject lying out in the Vermont morning sun. Likewise, whereas late-twentieth-century abstract painters might trace their signature-forms back to Suprematist constructions and De Stijl designs, John Coplans confirms that at the basis of contemporary serial composition lies work liable to embarrass many an "avant-garde" artist: Warhol's celebrity silkscreens, and Monet's sumptuous haystacks (just as, in art-historian Rosalind Krauss's account of the "radical" modernist-grid's origins, lies the "retrograde" Symbolist window).

Shame still gnaws at the heart of even the most expansive serial "life-studies." Ten years before Coplans first exhibits his own revealing project, a typically nonproscriptive Brainard delineates the boundaries of tasteful self-regard:

> I remember, with a new Polaroid and self-timer, having an outlandishly narcissistic photo fling with myself which (I'm proud to say) soon got pretty boring. (103)

Too bad for us, I opine, recalling, more generally, this poet-artist's abrupt retirement from both careers. Brainard's inventive self-portraits (jottings, drawings, book-cover sequences, collaborative poems, etc.) should have long since proved the limitations to pat, pejorative readings of the Narcissist myth. Thankfully, this pioneer of poetic self-scrutiny did not consider it as indulgent (or as boring) to engage in a decade-long Pop-

lyric “fling” with himself. Thankfully John Coplans decided, after decades as curator and critic, to redirect his passions for the serial image into its apparent antithesis: a quasi-narrative account of the aging human-corpus. For amidst our own sprawling, digitized era, either such fusion of potentially infinite serial process, and incurably mortal lyric reflection, offers an exemplary model to all present-day students of felicitous scope and scale.

Chapter Four

Serial Story: From Cage to Brainard and Back Again

Serial Story

One obvious difference between so-called “serial poetry” and a serial text like Joe Brainard’s *I Remember* is that, however “scattered” the latter’s progress, its anaphoric constancy (its consistent return to an elusive “I”) allows readers to supply a great degree of comparative attention to the kaleidoscopic perspectives, scenes, and tones through which this project’s serial “story” gets compounded. Here the convoluted relation between isolated, aphoristic unit and integrated, conceptualist structure—between “random” assemblage and writerly text—can confirm Pop lyricism’s most abstract propensities. Yet because Brainard boldly courts the retrograde lyric “I,” most experimentally minded critics remain skeptical (silent, at least) regarding his poetic achievement. Thus, I will first examine the interpretive discourse applied to John Cage’s own mimetic/asymptotic assemblages (*Indeterminacy* especially), then return to *I Remember*.[101] In each case, I will argue that late-twentieth-century criticism’s emphasis upon localized, medium-specific permutation (predominantly upon “defamiliarizing” syntax) precludes attention to the affect-charged instantaneities and macro-compositional simultaneities of Pop lyricism’s most expansive serial narratives.

While Cage, for example, remains best known as a pioneer of the aleatory sonata, poem, and performance, it is worth recalling that many of his hybrid-compositions rely upon strict structural regularity. Often (as in the four-columned page conceived for 1959’s “Lecture on Nothing”) the musical measure gets imposed: first through Cage’s carefully timed recital of a text, then through his serialized “scoring” of the piece as published record.[102] Again, while Cage-the-poet remains best celebrated for, in critic Marjorie Perloff’s phrase, “demilitarizing the syntax”—for dissociating poetry from “the

twin norms of self-expression and figuration"—many early projects ("Lecture on Nothing" among them) rely upon acute existential authentications and indexical (context-affirming) traceries:

> It is not irritating to be where one is . It is
> only irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else. Here we are now
> , a little bit after the beginning of the fifth unit of the
> fourth large part of this talk .
> More and more we have the feeling
> that I am getting nowhere.
> (Perloff *Emergent* 299, 301; Cage *Silence* 120)

"Getting nowhere," Cage nonetheless keeps insistently on track. Even as conventional forms of self-expression and/or lyric figuration dissolve in such performances, "self-figuration" remains the guiding principle of Cage's abstract-through-the-autobiographical text.

But perhaps no project better foregrounds this dynamic combination of diffusive, slapdash-seeming data and fixed, uniform intervals than Cage's *Indeterminacy*. First presented as a lecture of thirty 60-second stories (without musical accompaniment) in Brussels (1958), then as a 90-story sequence (partnered with David Tudor's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, and performed at Columbia's Teachers College in 1959), Cage's 30-by-60 and 90-by-60 pieces employ the type of elemental proportions (1:2; 3:2) common among serial compositions in the visual arts—though apparently antithetical to critic Joseph Conte's conception of the serial poem as emblematically "open" form (Conte 15). Here the "organic" pacing of vernacular anecdote gets subordinated to each entry's function as sixty-second unit.[103] Passages of exemplary brevitas become drawn out into breathy ambience. Stories of great density and detail receive the shortest shrift. Minor epiphanies, bon mots, and telescopic plots take on the function of modular

installments, of interchangeable parts—analogous to the modernist-grid's sturdy, standardized squares.

Yet the project's blend of reductive scheme and charming, first-person narration further complicates this scenario. For Cage's auto-anthological scope ensures that *Indeterminacy*'s perspectival poetic-subject is not just plural, but also composite, not just "serial," but also realist. However "indeterminate," Cage's story-based assemblages do not simply reflect (again Conte's terms) the "uncertainties and incomprehensibilities of an expanding universe," but simultaneously restage the formulaic concentricities of pre-Copernican astronomy—with a quasi-autobiographical "I" at its rhetorical center (16). Many of Cage's most "disjunctive" performance-texts have more in common, I will argue, with Andy Warhol's celebrity-silkscreens than they do with "language-based" poetry's attempts to "decenter" the lyric-subject. More specifically, I will demonstrate that whereas Perloff (in 1991's "cage: chance: change," for example) claims that postwar poets' "repeated denial of 'normal' word order or syntactic integrity, their introduction of arcane vocabulary and difficult, indeed confusing reference" function to "mime the coming to awareness of the mind in the face of the endless information glut that surrounds us," Cage's and Brainard's serial narratives enact a discovery-of-semiotic-consciousness as profound as any of the era—even while *Indeterminacy* and *I Remember* deploy the most straightforward syntax, the most accessible diction, the most obvious, most literal- minded inventories of an autobiographical-self attuned to its immediate surroundings (*Radical* 205).

In fact, this brief foray into Cagean studies will consist largely of an ambivalent response to Perloff's (perhaps Cage's most incisive advocate) critical pieces on the poet

(and/or on poetic narrative)—among them: "'No More Margins': John Cage, David Antin, and the Poetry of Performance" (1981); "'Unimpededness and Interpenetration': the poetic of John Cage" (1982); "From Image to Action: The Return of Story in Postmodern Poetry" (1982); "cage: chance: change" (1991); "'A duchamp unto myself': 'Writing through' Marcel" (1994); and "The Music of Verbal Space: John Cage's 'What You Say'" (1997). By tracing Perloff's evolving, ever-influential response to Cage's hybridized texts, I hope to demonstrate, more generally, how astute poetic criticism of the twentieth century's final quarter came to valorize this multidisciplinary artist—even as it came to undervalue some of his most provocative, proto-Pop compositions (by extension, I aim to better illustrate the critical context in which Brainard's own Pop project remains obscured).

Serial Conjecture

Just as Brainard's serial-realist poetic experiments have been marginalized, so have Cage's. Just as Brainard's literary corpus gets written off as cute or cloying, so Cage's examinations of the serialized story remain—at best—praised for their "absurdist" tone, rather than plumbed for their rhetorical complexities. Here it is worth noting, for instance, that though Perloff's "From Image to Action" piece does refer to Cage as a "narrative poet," this essay never employs Cage's narrative-based texts to further its own critique of last-gasp variants on the "paradigmatic modernist lyric" (*Dance* 156). Yet, in what follows, I would like to imagine an alternate trajectory for late-twentieth-century criticism: a hypothetical outcome in which, instead of selecting Ed Dorn's virtuosic

Gunslinger project as exemplar of postwar poetic narrative, Perloff's prescient article cites Cage's *Indeterminacy*.

This scenario does not seem hard to envisage, especially since Perloff borrows Cage's title for her 1981 collection *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (the volume even offers an extended analysis of Cage's stories, one that I address below), and includes, within 1985's *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*, an essay on Cage ("Unimpededness and Interpenetration") that takes as its representative text the chatty, campy—if decidedly non-parodic— "Where Are We Eating? and What Are We Eating?" Nor does it seem difficult to envision several likely consequences of such a shift in source-texts. To start with: the instantaneous, anecdotal appeal of Cage's *Indeterminacy* project (or, conversely, its dense macro-compositional structure) might have prompted this resourceful critic to place the resurgent "poetic story" alongside contemporaneous artforms foregrounding the realist referent. Most specifically, Perloff's recent (1997) repositioning of poetic paragon Frank O'Hara—this time amid the proto-Pop conceptualism "of the John Cage-Merce Cunningham-Jasper Johns-Robert Rauschenberg circle of the fifties and sixties (a circle of gay, if notably closeted and discreet artists)"—might have been extended (*Painters xxiii*).

Perloff (perennial Andy Warhol skeptic) might have further expanded her self-correcting recalibration of O'Hara's "recognizably gay style," so to include a rethinking of Warhol's conceptual inclinations and "swish" comportment, along with the painter's subsequent influence on serial-realist poetics (*Painters xi*).[104] To complete this revisionary scenario: Perloff (deft diviner of the undervalued poetic experiment) might have detected, within the work of those whom she has disparagingly dubbed O'Hara's

self-conscious "progeny," the sweeping rhetorical complexities of Joe Brainard's *I Remember*; Perloff might have perceived, amid the enduring presence of Cage's Folkways recording, and the shadowy successes of Brainard's book, each author's adroit construction of a quasi-populist poetry both "dislocated" and "communal," of a polyvalent form with appeal to wide-ranging (mutually-exclusive seeming) audiences: as endearing, anecdote-based narrative; as austere, algorithmic assemblage; and/or as pointed commentary upon prevailing aesthetic conventions (Perloff *Painters xxiv;* Padgett 143).[105] Needless to say, this present chapter consists largely of an attempt to detail the assessment just described: here through the consideration of Cage's less-celebrated, less obviously "language-based" texts.

Serial Sublimation

Before outlining Perloff's most extensive response to Cage's *Indeterminacy*, I will briefly consider one of the critic's more recent, more comprehensive assessments of the poet: as presented in 1997's "The Music of Verbal Space." In "Verbal Space," Perloff traces a general evolution in Cage's poetic practice: from the initial deployment of "normal syntax" (always a major letdown for Perloff) to the subsequent projects (mesostics, and writings-through) in which syntax gets "exploded" ("a process Cage regularly referred to as the 'demilitarization of language'") (*Emergent* 291, 292). According to this condensed critical-biography, Cage's exemplary experimental praxis helps to demonstrate how postwar poets might best exploit a burgeoning emphasis (in both philosophical and aesthetic disciplines) upon the materiality of language—

recharging individual words by "consistently shifting their context and hence their use" (301). Ever since (Perloff concludes her piece in the Steinian mode), the "difference" has been "spreading" (308).

It is largely due to Perloff's cogent analyses of oft-overlooked avant-garde experiment that so streamlined an approach to such epistemologically complex processes can be articulated. Nonetheless, I will argue that the critic's Clement Greenbergesque emphasis upon medium-specific concerns ("a single instrument—the human voice—and a single medium—language") here confines her survey of Cage's eclectic output to a reductive narrative of aesthetic sublimation: a proscriptive account of the poet's progressive withdrawal from conventional assumptions regarding "transparent" lyric confession (*Emergent* 290). This narrow claim for Cage's significance marginalizes both those works that do not fit Perloff's pointed biographical scheme (most notably *Indeterminacy*: a text that deploys "normal syntax" not only when the author first publishes the piece, but as Cage recycles excerpts throughout his career) and those poets who expand upon Cage's serial-realist example—again, not by "exploding" conventional linguistic structure, but by assembling a composite literary "I" (Brainard, James Schuyler, Lewis Warsh, Eileen Myles, David Trinidad, etc). In either case, some of the era's most provocative poetic experiments get ignored.[106]

Serial Camp

Having summarized Perloff's recent assessment of Cage's overall oeuvre, I now turn to her most exhaustive analysis of my own chosen text: Cage's *Indeterminacy*. For

Perloff's "'No More Margins'" piece (1981) perhaps best demonstrates the extent to which a search for parody of the "poetic" sentiments, and/or for nonsensical syntax (for "defamiliarization" in its most obvious forms), can obscure the structural complexities of serial narrative. Though this critic titles her *Poetics of Indeterminacy* volume, for instance, after Cage's text, she remains largely indifferent to the *Indeterminacy* project as a distinct, self-governing whole. As a result, many macro-compositional complexities of Cage's performance-based script get lost amidst a far more general approach to "the Cagean story"—combined with a sequence of close readings, myopic attempts to articulate the "didactic" ethos of individual entries (inevitably: that the story/the world is "absurd") (*Poetics* 315). Between these definitional pronouncements and interpretive minutiae, little room remains to consider Cage's fusion of affective-increment and allover-composition: of camp parable and Pop sequence.

To be sure, Perloff's analysis of *Indeterminacy* is by no means a naïve or superficial one. For "No More Margins" does not ignore the structural complexities of Cage's project, so much as this essay subsumes its conception of particular stories within an overall theory of the Cagean text. After recounting Cage's famous anecdote concerning how silence eluded him in Harvard's anechoic chamber, for example, Perloff speculates upon the poet's career-long effort to address his epiphanic realization that "'Until I die there will be sounds'":

> It is this conviction that nature not only abhors but rejects a vacuum that generates the structure of *Silence* and the later books…. Accordingly, the "lectures" in *Silence* do not so much begin or end as they *continue*, expository discourse giving way, at unexpected junctures, to the non-fictional narrative of Cage's versions of Zen *koans*. Further, the gap between "story" and "lecture" is bridged by italicized headnotes and afterwords, so that the net effect is one of what Cage calls "UINMPEDENESS AND INTERPENETRATION." (309-310)

Surveying *Silence*, Perloff provides an exemplary model for treating eclectic volumes as orchestral wholes. Yet, I will argue that *Indeterminacy* itself deserves such a reading: that Cage's serialized poetic-persona anticipates the Pop lyric-subject, even as *Silence* harkens back to the Mallarméan book; that Perloff's burgeoning distaste for Confessional affect, coupled with her vague insistence upon *Indeterminacy*'s "didactic" message, obscure Cage's contribution to "serial poetics" (also, by analogy, Brainard's).

Again, since Perloff rarely considers Cage's project as a macro-compositional whole, I will first demonstrate how reductive her approach becomes in relation to individual stories. For "No More Margins'" repeated emphasis upon each *Indeterminacy* episode's irreducible "absurdity" precludes a comprehensive account of the wide tonal-range available amid even Cage's sparest, sixty-second units. Here I cite two *Indeterminacy* stories (#35 and #37) in their entirety, so to extend my point:

> Just the other day I went to the dentist. Over the radio they said it was the hottest day of the year. However, I was wearing a jacket, because going to a doctor has always struck me as a somewhat formal affair. In the midst of his work, Dr. Heyman stopped and said, "Why don't you take your jacket off?" I said, "I have a hole in my shirt and that's why I have my jacket on." He said, "Well, I have a hole in my sock, and, if you like, I'll take my shoes off." (*Silence* 95)

> It was a Wednesday. I was in the sixth grade. I overheard Dad saying to Mother, "Get ready: we're going to New Zealand Saturday." I got ready. I read everything I could find in the school library about New Zealand. Saturday came. Nothing happened. The project was not even mentioned, that day or any succeeding day. (6)

Regarding these entries, Perloff writes "We don't, I think, feel for the boy who thinks his parents will take him to New Zealand or for the patient in the dentist's chair.… Rather, what strikes us about the Cagean story is its peculiar non-sense" (*Poetics* 313). To which I would ask: What about Cage's stories prevents this typically keen critic from feeling for the boy, for the dental patient (as I certainly did upon first considering their plight)?[107] Is

it that Cage's idiosyncratic formalities and adolescent excesses deflect *any* naïve identification with the speaking-subject, and thereby interrupt *all* potential for empathetic engagement? Would it not be possible for us (fixated upon the current episode) to "feel for" Cage's awkward and/or misled "I," even as we (sensing each story's incremental place within the overall sequence) simultaneously "don't feel"—or "don't feel" too much: reserving spare attention for those entries still to follow?[108]

Perloff treats the reader's "feeling" for each individual story as an uncomplicated, monolithic one: shaped by our ultimate recognition that the flush of the overdressed dental patient, the disappointment of the eavesdropping enthusiast, do not qualify as sentiments worthy of serious poetic expression. But it is in fact this critic's coolness toward Cage's intricate assemblage of canned phrasings and stagy poses (a complex which often goes by the name of camp), rather than any dogmatic tendency within Cage's piece, that produces "No More Margins'" pronounced emphasis upon *Indeterminacy*'s "oddly unemotional," didactic bent (313).[109]

For, as often with great camp performances, *Indeterminacy*'s aggregate "affectlessness" belies its vertiginous shifts in tone and/or epistemic register. Part of the pleasure here depends, for example, upon our telescopic leap from the affective field of a grown man in a dentist's chair, to that of a quiet boy in his parents' home—along with (as in readings of *I Remember*) our latent awareness that this man and this boy are really the same person scattered, like Orpheus, across the atemporal text: serial-poet John Cage (just as we, ranging across Cage's encyclopedic project, yet remain distinct, largely coherent beings).[110] Granted this sustained (serialized) poetic transport (transference), any nebulous account of "Cagean non-sense" can only obscure the phenomenological

complexities involved in “following” Cage’s story-line. Conversely, interpretive traction, in the case of *Indeterminacy*, would encourage us to read the work not only for its muddled “non-sense,” but for its camp highs and lows: for it is through the affective rhythms peculiar to serial narrative that we trace the contours of Cage’s macro-text. Feeling (and “not feeling”) for the ceremonious dental patient, for the would-be expeditionist, we travel a much more convoluted trajectory than the planar path Perloff projects.

Here I linger upon “No More Margins” less to chide its worthy author for her occasional reductionist lapse, than to treat Cage’s composite catalogue of shame, disappointment, empathic-communication, and delayed-recognition as primer for a sentimental education far more subtle than Perloff (or any number of less astute readers) attests. I problematize Perloff’s approach in order to illustrate, more generally, the limits of a postwar literary analysis that does not recognize Pop’s affect-heavy mode of abstraction. I cite *Indeterminacy*’s most “autobiographical” passages so to posit a compelling relation between empiricist detail and constructivist form; and I quote entire stories so to demonstrate that austere, serial composition can find its “lyric” complement in camp “confession”—that, by extension, an inflexible distaste for “authentic” first-person subjecthood can distract even poetry’s most savvy critics from apprehending perhaps the postwar era’s premier manifestations of Pop perspectivist rigor: Cage’s and Brainard’s serial-realist projects.

Within this context, Perloff’s resolute focus upon “unimpededness and interpenetration” (her flattening of heterogeneous topicality into undifferentiated, didactic whole) robs *Indeterminacy* not only of its manifold affective pleasures, not only of its

architectonic intricacies, but of its foregrounded fusion of formal opposites (no instantaneous illumination free from repetitive structure; no macro-compositional convolution independent of engaging anecdote).[111] As with many Brainard texts, it is Cage's combination of the discrete vignette and the allover display that best confirms his work's aesthetic kinship to serial composition in both painting and music. But again, just as biographical emphases upon "Saint" Joe Brainard's stammering kindness obscure *I Remember*'s perspectivist cunning, so readings of *Indeterminacy* as single-minded Zen-recruitment tool fail to evoke this work's rhetorical complexity.

Perloff's prescient attention to parodic pastiche and defamiliarizing syntax provides a revealing look at particular components of postwar poetic experiment. Yet, however diverse its range of targets, parody offers but a one-track tone: the flipside of lyric pathos; just as "syntactic defamiliarization" here suggests a programmatic pursuit of localized aporia, rather than an expansive construction of (in William Seitz's phrase) "total environment" (Seitz, *Seasons* 19). To Perloff's claim that Cage's lectures and diaries remain prose because "their basic unit is the sentence," I would thus counter that, for many of Cage's allover (hence poetic) assemblages, the basic unit is (obviously) the story (*Poetics* 316). To "No More Margins'" stubborn fixation upon Cage's didactic message, I would ask: Granted this poet's self-conscious pitch to ordinary people's "polyattentiveness," is it not better to examine the polyvalent compositional whole, rather than to probe the "absurdity" of any single, specific utterance? (*Monday* 133)[112]

Below, I will argue that critical emphases upon Cage's defamiliarizing sentence appear at the expense of any substantive response to *Indeterminacy* as serial-text. I will thus initiate an analysis of *Indeterminacy* that takes as its basic unit the story, rather than

the sentence. Moreover, I will demonstrate why, after reading Cage, we can better recognize Brainard as a conceptual (even a theoretical) poet. For *Indeterminacy*'s anecdote-based assemblage makes clear how poetic experiment can proceed without "exploding" and/or "demilitarizing" grammatical syntax.

To start with: we can note that, however "unpremeditated" *Indeterminacy* might seem in its erratic progression from one entry to the next, the project (all its various editions) both begins and ends quite deliberately. Here Cage's repeated assertion that "the continuity of the stories as recorded was not planned" does not appear wholly credible—granted, for instance, that the first entry succinctly introduces this poet's bonsai-aesthetic of clearing space so to consolidate artistic impact:

> One evening when I was still living at Grand Street and Monroe, Isamu Noguchi came to visit me. There was nothing in the room (no furniture, no paintings). The floor was covered, wall to wall, with cocoa matting. The windows had no curtains, no drapes. Isamu Noguchi said, "An old shoe would look good in this room." (*Silence* 260)

Amid Cage's bald décor, his insightful guest's old-shoe speculation carries the affective imprint Roland Barthes traces to the "punctum" (to the unintended detail that "fills the whole picture") (Barthes, *Camera* 45). Noguchi's casual aside (and, of course, the resonant blank space which follows) confirms that Story #1 has not served simply to establish bland expositional context, but to announce Cage's Spartan/Sybarite manifesto. Abruptly, our inaugural reading gets "punctured," as we recognize that, to aesthetes like Noguchi, Cage, Barthes, Brainard, formal composition at its best provides wall-to-wall matting (or matte) *touché* by the occasional (inexplicably desirable) old shoe.[113] Each subsequent *Indeterminacy* entry thus could be described as an old shoe lying around Cage's "empty" serial structure.

Conjointly, granted Story #1's impromptu, introductory air, it seems no coincidence that Cage's 30th story (the final entry in the Brussels talk) concludes on a note of enigmatic departure:

> One day [Morris Graves] drove up to a luncheonette, parked, opened the door on the street side, unrolled a red carpet across the sidewalk. Then he walked on the carpet, went in, and ordered a hamburger. Meanwhile a crowd gathered, expecting something strange to happen. However, all Graves did was eat the hamburger, pay his bill, get back in the car, roll up the carpet, and drive off. (*Monday* 138)

If Graves's anti-finale appears more perplexing than any agitating antics ever could, so, of course, does Cage's. For it is not only the interruption of bourgeois habit, but the refusal of abrasive avant-garde rhetoric that characterizes each artist's minimalist disappearing-act. Far from denying all sense of narrative completion, Graves's and Cage's muted withdrawals ensure that nobody (curiosity-seeking crowd, critic of conventional plotline) feels cheated by the performance. Here also, the "quite literally non-sensical" utterance need not prove any more provocative than does *Indeterminacy*'s logical/illogical progression: from Noguchi's offhand formulation, to Graves's roadside Happening (Perloff, *Dance* 169). Through such subtle modulations in his "basic unit" (the story), Cage assembles a macro-composition more compelling than any "chance" arrangement of "absurd" parts could provide.

Again, *Indeterminacy*'s 90th story (the entry that completes Cage's Teachers College lecture) picks up valedictory resonance—proffering closure in the form of equanimous autopsy:

> There was a lady there from Philadelphia who was an authority on Buddhist art. When she found out I was interested in mushrooms, she said, "Have you an explanation of the symbolism involved in the death of the Buddha by his eating a mushroom?" I explained that I'd never been interested in symbolism…. But then a few days later…. I recalled…. Mushrooms grow most vigorously in the fall, the period of destruction…. the world would be an impassible heap of old rubbish

> were it not for mushrooms and their capacity to get rid of it. So I wrote to the lady in Philadelphia. I said, "The function of mushrooms is to rid the world of old rubbish. The Buddha died a natural death." (*Silence* 85)

Once more, Cage's text faces its own fitting demise: going the way of the Buddha, if only so that an anecdotal clutter of ninety stories need not turn the listener's brain into an "impassible" rubbish heap. With this pronouncement of death-by-mushroom the poet achieves his avowed aim of silence; the performance (or poetic) space resumes its air of immaculate, wall-to-wall matting: an empty room in which the old shoe of ordinary experience appears remarkably beautiful. The "intense excitement" that both Poe and Perloff (in their separate ways) demand of poetry here manifests itself—not in the form of lyric heart's-cry, or parodic plot-twist, but of sustained serial rapture (rhetorical equivalent to the Tantric orgasm) (Poe 15). It is this continuous pleasure to be found in Cage's extended compositions that demands a discursive analysis far more supple than current critiques of "epiphanic insight," and/or paeans to "syntactic defamiliarization" provide.

Yet rather than elaborate upon Cage's compositional strategies, I prefer to point towards the affinity with Brainard's work. Whether a 32-page Angel Hair Press production, or a 138-page Penguin Classic, for example, *I Remember* (published in distinct, self-sufficient stages from 1970-75) always starts and ends the same:

> I remember the first time I got a letter that said "After Five Days Return To" on the envelope, and I thought that after I had kept the letter five days I was supposed to return it to the sender. (1)
>
> I remember a dream of meeting a man made out of a very soft yellow cheese and when I went to shake his hand I just pulled his whole arm off. (138)

Once again, and as with *Indeterminacy*'s multiple editions, recurrent pattern from volume to volume suggests things are not as random as they seem.[114] Here the first entry's

present emphasis upon prior disconnect prefigures all that will follow: as the poet transforms his stuttering habit, his below-average I.Q. score, his all-consuming desire to be "handsome and popular" (along with countless analogous instances of doubt, indecision, misapprehension) from the "theoretically invariable color tones" of plaintive shame and regret, to the allover allusiveness (elusiveness) of total environment (Seitz, *Seasons* 19). Similarly, *I Remember*'s closing scene of reparable dismemberment (Brainard's "very soft yellow cheese" sounds pliable as playdough) crystallizes this project's ever-cordial perforation: from one topic to the next.

Returning to Cage's *Indeterminacy* (but with Brainard's cheesy handshake still in mind), I note that consecutive entries sometimes bleed into each other. After Story #9 (perhaps the longest entry in the project), for example, dilates upon Cage's collaborative concert with David Tudor, the poet "resumes" his narrative with the start of Story #10:

> However, to come back to my story. A girl in the college there came backstage afterward and told me that something marvelous had happened. (*Monday* 135)

Of course, what Cage here refers to as "my story" remains ambiguous. For if "my story" denotes *Indeterminacy*'s coordinated march as composite-text, then the movement from Story #9 to Story #10 seems no more abrupt than any number of transitions. *Indeterminacy*'s erratic (intermittently associative) progress perpetually redirects the project's overall "point": as particular motifs overlap, amplify, muffle each other—like soundwaves circling amidst one of Cage's multimedia, arena-sized spectacles.[115] Cage (like Whitman before him, like Brainard afterwards) recognizes such oscillations between personal testimony and choric anthem, between the modular and the motley, the individual and the cosmos, as necessary elements of the elastic American long poem.[116]

Brainard, too, sometimes defies the recalibration implied by each anaphoric utterance—allowing present entry to extend the previous:

> I remember big battle scenes and not understanding how they could be done without a lot of people getting hurt.
>
> I remember thinking those sandals and short skirts rather impractical for war. (61)

In a separate examination of grid-art's centrifugal tendencies, I track Brainard's most extensive, inter-entry thematic runs.[117] But within this present study of *Indeterminacy*'s and *I Remember*'s Emersonian "crossings over" (from prose to poetry, from "authentic" confession to "experimental" form, digressive litany to rigorous composition, etc.), I simply wish to establish that these two punctured, serial-realist texts depart both from the postwar "serial poem," and from the traditional lyric "sequence."[118]

Writing a century after "Song of Myself," Cage and Brainard take ever-more explicit steps to ensure that no master-narrative overwhelm their aleatory ethos.[119] Still, neither poet can forgo the temptation to hint at a greater psychological unity (if only to preclude the potential for an implicit sub-plot about "the anti-narrative" to solidify). Anticipating "decentered" poems of the late twentieth century, *Indeterminacy* and *I Remember* (again, like *Leaves of Grass* before them) nonetheless retain the remnants of an elastic, anthropomorphic poetic-subject. Essential to this (topical, perspectival, epistemic) elasticity is its basis in sturdy cellular structure (Whitman's immense lines arranged into numbered sections; Cage's sixty-second intervals collected in composite performance-texts; Brainard's anaphoric increments assembled as quasi-aphoristic "autobiography"). In each such case, poetic seriality proves human, palpable; personal narrative turns austere, abstract.

Serial Speech

In this sense, *Indeterminacy* proves paradigmatic for much of Cage's poetic oeuvre: not, I will argue, due to its "absurdist" ethos—but due to its fusion of abstract structural-conceit and engaging anecdotal (representational) trace. Here I hope to extend Perloff's intriguing description (in 1994's "'A duchamp unto my self'") of the "textuality which is itself sensuous and erotic, that was to become Cage's own signature" (*Composed* 103). Yet whereas Perloff detects a "touch of gimmickry" in such "typographical games and mathematical rules" (especially amid projects "still using normal syntax"), I here posit that Cage's measured page—like Brainard's modular one—suggests a substantive engagement with the most prominent forms of postwar serial composition: serial music, and serial painting (*Poetics* 308).[120]

To give an example of how Cage transcribes the musical measure into his post-Existentialist compendia (into texts that predate what Perloff describes as the poet's "musicating" of language), I quote from Cage's introduction to "Lecture on Nothing," as well as from that lecture itself:

> There are four measures in each line and twelve lines in each unit of the rhythmic structure. There are forty-eight such units, each having forty-eight measures…. The text is printed in four columns to facilitate a rhythmic reading. Each line is to be read across the page from left to right, not down the columns in sequence. (*Silence* 109)

> I am here , and there is nothing to say .
> If
> among you are
> those who wish to get somewhere , let them leave
> at
> any moment . What we re-quire is
> silence ; but what silence requires
> is that I go on talking . (109)

Perloff might call these mathematical rules and typographical games gimmicky, but pat dismissal does not alter the fact that Cage's text demands a new type of reading: a complex response still to be catalogued before such "obvious devices" become permanently relegated to the margins of Cagean studies. For, to begin from the point-of-view of the lecture-performer (to whom Cage ostensibly directs his "instructions"): how to evoke the dilatory impact of the first line's inessential, yet spaciously situated comma? How to distinguish this undramatic pause from those bestowed upon the fourth line's period, the fifth line's semi-colon? Most important: beyond any specific, localized conundrum—how to convey both Cage's fastidious formal regulations *and* his vernacular pitch?

Whereas Perloff considers such confluence of constraint-based project and casual-seeming syntax a "poetic problem that has not yet been resolved," I detect the conjoined demands of macro-compositional simultaneity and instantaneous affect: the aesthetic/epistemic tensions that make Cage's serial narratives so compelling (*Emergent* 291). Of course, phenomenological frictions between the microcosmic and macrocosmic grains of texts persist throughout literary history. Reading restricts our immediate attention to but the most minute, most easily visible portions of a book. Yet rarely do authors encapsulate this constrictive scope with the compartmentalized clarity of Cage's 48-measure units: movements that (in their calm, horizontal progression across a perforated "field"—a discursive "plot" of the type poets more commonly arrange into vertical column) probe the per*vers*ity lurking amidst even the most straightforward prose line. In systematized performances, such as "Lecture on Nothing," Cage demonstrates that just as musical melody does and does not reside within the schematic flow from one

discrete measure to the next, so the "message" of serialized statements can and cannot be parsed. Here the formal features that "have gained Cage a good deal of notoriety" anticipate reader-response criticism of subsequent decades (Perloff, *Poetics* 309).

As if to personalize each individual declamation of his lecture, Cage's performance-instructions call, in fact, for a robust rubato: a "rhythmic reading" that precludes any stilted recitation of the programmatic text:

> This [reading] should not be done in an artificial manner (which might result from an attempt to be too strictly faithful to the position of the words on the page), but with the *rubato* which one uses in everyday speech. (*Silence* 109)

Yet given the likelihood that we will encounter "Lecture On Nothing" not at the annual Toastmasters convention, but within the more solitary, subdued confines of the library, the study, the living room, Cage's instructions seem ultimately intended less for the speaker, than for the reader of his talk. Even in our most "silent" enunciations, moreover, the pace we apply to Cage's lecture proves crucial; for it is through readerly rubato that we—like Cage when he performs his text—fuse the evidentiary and the conceptual, the anecdotal and the abstract, into a compelling, composite whole.[121] While "Lecture on Nothing" can be split into rigid, metronomic segments (or, conversely, read as candid, rambling address—"I am here and there is nothing to say. If among you are those who wish to get somewhere…"), the full impact of Cage's project (of any poem?) emerges only through the reader's blended attention: to sound, to semantic- and semiotic- value, to literary-historical resonance, etc. (to the "polyattentive" epistemic rubato I have previously called perspectivism).

Needless to say, determining the most pleasing pace at which to apprehend Cage's modular, multivalent compositions can prove as arduous as plowing through a

more typical "defamiliarizing" text. And few works foreground their reliance upon readerly rubato more explicitly than does *Indeterminacy*: a project in which units three-lines long (such as Story #21) and thirty-five-lines long (such as Story #9) take on an air of measured equivalence, of homogeneous minute-hood.

Serial Sex

Indifferent to such rhetorical gymnastics (absent, at least, any more explicit, language-based experiment), Perloff, from 1981's "No More Margins," to 1997's "The Music of Verbal Space," finds little formal value in Cage's measured-compositions (*Indeterminacy* especially) that deploy ordinary "syntax and sound." Still nonetheless, Perloff's 1994 "duchamp unto my self" piece—with its acute psychoanalytic vantage upon Cage's overall oeuvre—can help to denote *Indeterminacy*'s affinity with the poet's more unabashedly "musicated" (more emphatically "demilitarized") texts:

> there was a side to Duchamp's art that Cage could never really assimilate…. its preoccupation with eroticism, with sexual punning and double entendre, with the display of men and women as perverse machines or machine parts, bumping and grinding against one another…. [Cage] shifted the parameters of the discourse so that the making of "a duchamp unto myself" … involved the transformation of the erotic into the ideational, the sexual into the textual. (*Composed* 101-103)

In Cage's halting embrace of the Duchampian oeuvre, Perloff detects a more general modus operandi. According to "duchamp unto my self," Cage's "signature" compositions summon their "sensuous" textuality not merely through selective exclusion of the primal scene ("men and women … bumping and grinding against one another"), but through a systematic evacuation of *any* "double entendre" (of the "punning" that mimetic representation—with its ambivalent balance between "the erotic" and "the ideational"—

cannot help but reproduce). Boycotting the "hyperrealistic, sensationalistic, and quasi-pornographic" practices of a painter like Dali (whom Duchamp, to Cage's chagrin, admired), the younger artist's corpus patiently constructs its own palpable erotic body: through a sublimated emphasis upon the aesthetic medium itself (*Composed* 103). By extension (and as Perloff's "The Music of Verbal Space" will argue three years later), since "Cage was, after all, a composer," his signature mode remains a musical one: "it is the aural that dominates…however visually striking Cage's verbal scores may be" (*Emergent* 294). Granted this greater career trajectory, even *Indeterminacy*'s serialized, sixty-second by ninety-story "nonsense" hints (again, in Perloff's account) at the eventual triumph of the "ideational" over the erotic (the representational), the "textual" over the sexual (the punctive *touche*). Cage's performance-based texts—considered as catalytic hybrids between the readymade propositions of Duchamp, and the rehabilitated "Word as Such" of Language poetics (as described by Perloff's early essay on the movement)—thus appear most crucial for assembling what the critic refers to as heavily foregrounded "sound structures" (*Dance* 228).

Along analogous lines, just as Perloff posits a definitive breakthrough in Cage's departure from "ordinary" syntax, she extols his mesostic output's "usually ignored" evolution: from "strings based on single proper names…to strings derived from larger statements or paragraphs" (*Emergent* 294).[122] Below, I include the examples that Perloff herself employs to illustrate this distinction—the first from a 1977 mesostic entitled "Song," the second (organized around an interview statement by recurrent Cage-subject Jasper Johns) from the poet's 1997's "What You Say…" text:

not Just
  gArdener

morelS
coPrini,
morEls,
copRini.

not Just hunter:
cutting dOwn
ailantHus,
cuttiNg down
ailanthuS.
(*Emergent* 297)

as it Were

anotHer world

A whole or
The best one can of it

suddenlY
sOmething

move

miniatUrized (299)

Here again, Perloff associates Cage's earlier, proper-named-based mesostic with a "syntactically straightforward narrative" (a portrait that "perhaps too easily yields the requisite…letters"), and his subsequent, "'empty word'" mesostic with a "'demilitarizing'" syntax ("so as to convert the chosen statement's linearity and permit its components to realign themselves") (*Emergent* 295, 299). More generally, the critic sketches how, over the final two decades of Cage's career, "the aural" comes to dominate "the visual"—as the vertical monikers of famous modernist personages yield to "ordinary flat" (barely detectable) citation: dropping in vertical column down Cage's "'interpenetrating' phonemically" text (299, 295).

Yet, rather than simply retrace the arc of progressive aesthetic-sublimation Perloff draws across Cage's career, I aim to describe this poet's "horizontal" relation to his Pop

contemporaries. Thus I will close this consideration of Cage's "'verbivocovisual'" practice by returning to the model of Pop serial painting. I will suggest that Perloff—perhaps because she remains less interested in the mimetic (erotic) mesostics, than in the constraint-generated (textual) writings-through—overstates "the aural's" dominance of "the visual" throughout Cage's career ("Cage was, after all, a composer even when the materials he worked with were linguistic") (*Emergent* 294). By extension, I will argue that Perloff's emphasis upon Cage's "veiled" homosexuality obscures this poet's aesthetic kinship to some of the era's most conspicuously "swish" artists (Andy Warhol and Joe Brainard first among them).

Perloff's disproportionate attention to Cage's "'voco' ('musical') element" appears to preclude, for example, her recognition of an obvious affinity between Cage's name-based mesostics (such as "36 Mesostics Re and Not Re Marcel Duchamp") and Warhol's celebrity-silkscreens—two forms of portrait-by-repetition that cannot help but evoke an infatuated, visually fixated audience-subject:

a utility aMong
swAllows
is theiR
musiC.
thEy produce it mid-air
to avoid coLliding.

there is no Difference between life and death.
(sUzuki.)
it is Consistent
to say deatH is the most
importAnt thing one day and the next day
to say life is the Most
imPortant thing.

just before Midnight
wAiting

in the stReet
(Costa brava)
for all thE
worLd a handsome young man.

Don't
yoU ever want to win?
(impatienCe.)
How do you
mAnage to live with
just one sense of huMor?
she must have Persuaded him to smile. (*M* 26)

Fig. 1. Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe*. 1967.

Perloff might remain suspicious of any text that adopts "normal writing of the sort we all do when we write a note to a friend on an occasion like a birthday" (or, by extension, any painting that simply reproduces the canned, mass-cultural icon), but with Marcel (or

Marilyn) still in mind, neither Cage nor Warhol can be bothered to start on more "serious" work (*Emergent* 294).[123] For just as Warhol's serialized silkscreens suggest the projective paraphernalia of a starstruck superfan (incapable of staring straight ahead without seeing those repeated traces of Troy, Jackie, Liz that have been seared onto his retinae), so Cage's mesostic strings recall the crushed-out school boy (unable to write a single sentence without pledging surreptitious devotion to his undeclared love-object). Just as *Indeterminacy*'s prodigious camp affect, moreover (foregrounded by the comparison to Brainard's *I Remember*), suggests that Cage's "homosexual discourse" was not always as veiled as Perloff claims, so Cage's proper-name mesostics (juxtaposed to Warhol's headshot-portraits) pick up interdisciplinary resonance—due to their "obvious" visual display, as much as to their "intricate" sound. In fact, from our present vantage (amid comparisons between *Indeterminacy* and *I Remember*, between Cage's mesostics and Warhol's silkscreens), this composer-poet's queer conflation of the textual and the sexual appears quite prominent.[124]

Serial Mourning

Again, however, I do not mean to deny the perspicacity of Perloff's intriguing account. For as much as Brainard- or Warhol-extracts may help to invite a revaluation of Cage's camp-and Pop-inflected poetics, so Perloff's "duchamp unto myself" essay prods me to a more probing conception of the "I Remember" enterprise. Thus I conclude this chapter with one final, modest intervention into "Brainard Studies"—a consideration premised upon Perloff's cogent reading of Cage's "ideational" affection for Duchamp.

To begin with: Perloff's brief biographical sketch (quoted above) confirms why Cage's name-based mesostics can be read as forms of amorous repetition. The critic recounts, for instance, Cage's coy (yet characteristically stubborn) appeal to his idolized, ostensibly heterosexual elder: "'I was using chess as a pretext to be with [Duchamp]…. Every now and then [Marcel] would get very impatient with me. He complained that I didn't seem to want to win'" (*Composed* 104). Here Cage's unflagging machinations anticipate his contrived repetitions of Duchamp's name thirty years later (note how Duchamp's "Don't you ever want to win?" hounds Cage's discovery of a "handsome young man"), as if textual quantity can compensate for a sexual quality lacking in the friendship—just as Warhol's repeated return to Marilyn's gaze reenacts our paradigmatic approach to the pop-cultural celebrity: worshipped often, if only from afar.

By contrast, Brainard's "I remember" anaphoric-repetitions appear to emanate from a less desperate, more self-fulfilled poetic-subject. Brainard's dexterous ability to realign personal narratives, to pleasurably peruse the past (rather than, like Orpheus or Lot's wife, erase all hopes for redemption with a frenzied backwards glance), seems to situate this poet further along the path toward a healthy assimilation and introjection of others' place amid one's own self-story. Even the beautiful boys Brainard never succeeds at enticing can thus assume their proper station in his poem's comic "progress."

Still, recycled motifs and repeated personages do sometimes suggest that Brainard's (albeit far more diversified) litany might be just another form of—in Cagean terms—banging one's head "against the wall." And chief among these recurrent figures is poet Frank O'Hara, of whom Brainard states—in his 1968 contribution for the *Homage to Frank O'Hara* anthology: "For a long time now I have been trying to write about Frank

O'Hara. But I can't. But I'm going to try again" (167). For a "long time" (the two years since O'Hara's sudden death?) Brainard has been trying (consistently? occasionally?) to write about O'Hara, and this sustained effort seems to grant the younger poet his present sense of urgency ("I'm going to try again"). As in Milton's polyvocal paean to Lycidas, as in Cage's gradual progression from the 1969 plexigram "Not Wanting to Say Anything about [the recently departed] Marcel," to 1970's "36 Mesostics Re and Not Re Marcel Duchamp," to 1981's "James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Erik Satie: An Alphabet," Brainard's tenacious struggle to speak of/to/for his gifted friend constitutes its own miniature, erotically charged epic. Prolonged elaboration, pronounced identification confirm the libidinal-bond's persistent hold on these exemplars of the serial elegy.[125]

Again, along such lines, Brainard (often considered less insistent than Cage) repeatedly recounts his own seductive scheme—an unsubtle, one-trick plot, comparable to his compulsive predecessor's:

> Frank and Joe [LeSueur] and Tony [Towle] liked to play bridge. So I was a logical fourth. Only I didn't know how to play bridge. So I learned. I learned because I wanted to get to know Frank O'Hara better. He fascinated me. And because I had a crush on Joe LeSueur. I remember that playing bridge with Frank O'Hara was mostly talk. (*Homage* 167)

Writing for the *Homage to Frank O'Hara* volume co-edited by LeSueur, Brainard spreads his affections equanimously across the bridge table. But by 1970's Angel Hair Press *I Remember*, Brainard's group-minded regard gets split into separate strophes:

> I remember learning to play bridge so I could get to know Frank O'Hara better.
>
> I remember playing bridge with Frank O'Hara. (Mostly talk)
>
> I remember my first lover. (Joe LeSueur) I don't think he'll mind. (5)

Here Brainard's "fascination" with O'Hara merits two consecutive entries, whereas his milestone affair with LeSueur receives but one. By 1975's Full Court Press volume, moreover, the LeSueur reference vanishes altogether—as if to signal some delayed discretion on the poet's part. Yet the net effect is to situate O'Hara as site of amorous repetition, to cast LeSueur (the consistent lover) as short-term fling. O'Hara (now deceased) can thereby keep "popping" up throughout Brainard's corpus, whereas LeSueur largely disappears.[126]

Brainard's early "Frank O'Hara" text takes on its most precise biographical significance, however, only when we realize that it includes 19 "I remembers" ("I remember watching the movie "Romeo and Juliet" with Leslie Howard and Norma Shearer on T.V. with Frank O'Hara several times and how much he loved it. / I remember that Frank O'Hara was always late. / I remember Frank O'Hara putting down Andy Warhol and then a week or so later defending him with his life")—all written *one year prior* to *I Remember*'s spontaneous composition: "I decided one day that I would lay out in the sun and close my eyes and try to remember, and just write down whatever I remembered, free-floating" (*Homage* 167, Dlugos 11). Historical chronology (never the serial-artist's strong point) here gets further confounded in respect to the absent (animating) object of fixation.[127] "Frank O'Hara" (the tribute) starts it all, then gets screened by Brainard's exhaustive assertion that "I remember…"; or else this early piece has been misdated: and represents its author's only published attempt to stitch scattered excerpts into a cohesive, self-standing text. In either case, the real Frank O'Hara's symbolic position amid his young friend's retrospective project proves preeminent.

Yet just as *I Remember*'s "I" reappears relentlessly, without our ever determining its most essential, emblematic pose, so O'Hara's recollected physical presence will recur—with Brainard drifting ever-further away from this desired point of contact:

> It's hard, now, to think of Frank O'Hara as being small. But I think he was. Not short, really, but small. I remember his small waist. His small hands. And his small feet. I remember that sometimes his body seemed too small to support such a strong face. (*Homage* 167)

As early as 1968, O'Hara seems to shrink from memory: melting, like the soft yellow cheese-man whose arm Brainard pulls "right off"; corporally compressing into the type of "strong face" Warhol lives to reify.

Within this pageant of fleeting appearances, Perloff's "duchamp unto myself" text once more proves apropos—as Cage's retelling of his first encounter with Duchamp anticipates Brainard's recalled first-glimpse of O'Hara:

> Peggy [Guggenheim] had agreed to pay for the transport of my percussion instruments from Chicago to New York, and I was to give a concert to open her gallery…. Meanwhile, being young and ambitious, I had also arranged to give a concert at the Museum of Modern Art. When Peggy discovered that, she cancelled not only the concert but also her willingness to pay for the transport of the instruments. When she gave me this information, I burst into tears. In the room next to mine at the back of the house Marcel Duchamp was sitting in a rocking chair smoking a cigar. He asked why I was crying and I told him. He said virtually nothing, but his presence was such that I felt calmer…. He had calmness in the face of disaster. (Perloff, *Composed* 104)

> The first time I met Frank O'Hara he was walking down Second Avenue. It was a cool early spring evening. I remember that he seemed very sissy to me. Very theatrical. And I remember that I liked him instantly…. I remember Frank O'Hara most in a clean white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Top button unbuttoned. And blue jeans. Almost new. And moccasins. The good kind. Dark brown leather with buck laces and rubber soles. (Brainard, *Homage* 167)

In each case, cigar-smoking Marcel and sissy-seeming Frank emerge as calm, collected sources of eternal respite (as queer Hail Marys) to their precocious, workaholic devotees Cage and Brainard. Again, *I Remember*'s condensed version of the latter account only

intensifies this graceful impression—paradoxically presenting one of the century's best-connected, most vivacious artist/impresarios as a sweet, casually met passerby:

> I remember the first time I met Frank O'Hara. He was walking down Second Avenue. It was a cool early Spring evening but he was wearing only a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows. And blue jeans. And moccasins. I remember that he seemed very sissy to me. Very theatrical. Decadent. I remember that I liked him instantly. (*Angel* 5)

Throughout this later text, Brainard's oscillating depiction of the poet—as enticing, dressed-down ("sleeves rolled up"; "blue jeans") chance acquaintance, *and* as distinctive, idolized ("sissy"; "theatrical"; "Decadent") countercultural figure—allows both for intimate memoir, and for abstract assemblage: a serialized appropriation of the "Frank O'Hara" myth comparable to Cage's self-abating/self-asserting "Marcel Duchamp" mesostic strings. Keepers of the flame, Cage (with his found-object mesostics) and Brainard (with his elegiac litanies—retrospective equivalent to O'Hara's celebrated "I do this/I do that" poems) manifest classic symptoms of creatively displaced (if barely camouflaged) desire; expanding their famously capricious predecessors' projects into systematized, self-sustaining requiems: testaments to the very artists known for mocking the venerable modernist-monument's appeal. Busy as their industrious contemporary Andy Warhol (himself a deep admirer of Marcel and Frank), Cage and Brainard thus work overtime to broach a new type of serial poetics—a Pop lyricism as attuned to Duchamp's readymade interventions as to O'Hara's extemporaneous verve.

Chapter Five

Serial Realism: Poetic Narrative in Perspectives

Serial Perspective

Crucial to Pop art's detection of an epistemically provocative edge lurking amid familiar forms of realist representation (crucial to Pop's departure from a static, single-point perspective—to its construction of a dynamic, multiplicitous perspectivism) is its reintroduction of narrative trope within the avowedly "anti-narrative" discourses of postwar painting and, later, poetry. Crucial to the establishment of a critical vocabulary with which to better analyze Pop poetics is an importation of the keenest conceptual-apparati concerning Pop painting. Since poet Joe Brainard considered himself primarily a visual artist (an artist more comfortable, it is worth noting, with the readymade materials of the assemblagist than with the neo-classical-painter's palette to which he aspired), Brainard can serve as propitious focal-point for further comparisons between these fields. In what follows, I thus want to suggest (using scholar Wendy Steiner's study of the convoluted relationship between perspective-based pictorial realism, and realist-narrative's repeated subject, as my model) that Brainard's Pop-inflected, serial realist "autobiographies" fuse tendencies toward epiphanic insight, imagistic mimesis, disjunctive collage, and matte alloverness—all within the form of accessible, first-person narrative.[128]

Most important to this present study of Pop serial composition as pictorial and poetic trope (specifically to projects that construct a quasi-autobiographical subject through the assemblage of perspectival increments): Renaissance treatises concerning single-point perspective—here recounted by Steiner—seem to preclude narrative progress, even as they establish the proto-photographic template for all subsequent conventions regarding "realist" representation:

> The logic of the Albertian model, in which a picture was to represent the view of a perceiver at a fixed distance from the scene viewed, demanded that the perception be atemporal, a single moment of vision. (144)

Like the ecstatic lyric "moment," the perspective-based image claims to offer the crystallization of acute perception—amidst the eclipse of story.[129] In Leonardo's *Annunciation*, for instance, the painter constructs Gabriel's angel-wings (according to popular legend) by copying from a live bird in flight, and thus conflates the sacred, hypersonic message with the artist's singular "moment of vision." [see figure 1] In *The School of Athens*, Raphael convokes several centuries of philosophers amidst a single, spectacular assembly, thereby proving that the most privileged pictorial-instant remains an "atemporal" one. [see figure 2] Exemplars of Renaissance single-point perspective, Leonardo's and Raphael's paintings collapse complex narratives into dynamically constructed *tableaux vivants*.[130] "Fixed," commanding distance precludes the possibility for durational drift.

Fig. 1. Leonardo, *Annunciation*. 1472-1475.

Fig. 2. Raphael, *The School of Athens*. 1510-1511.

By extension, the instantaneity of poetic (Imagistic) description, and the simultaneity of poetic (Confessionalist) retrospection can appear impossible to reconcile, even within a project that depends equally upon swift, impressionistic notation and sweeping cumulative affect. A century after Poe's categorical pronouncement, the long poem remains "a contradiction in terms," and one obvious way to evade this contradiction is to shun mimetic representation and/or psychological reflection altogether (as Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman call for in 1977's "Politics of the Referent" symposium) (Poe 71). Within this context, the "explosion" of syntax—the obliteration of perspective through "opaque," "anti-referential" writing—can certainly seem a more legitimate means of poetic innovation than do the incessant additions of anecdotal fact to be found in Joe Brainard's *I Remember*:

> I remember when a fish-tail dress I designed was published in "Katy Keene" comics. (5)

> I remember a little girl who had a white rabbit coat and hat and muff. (23)
>
> I remember winning a Peter Pan Coloring Contest and getting a free pass to the movies for a year. (35)
>
> I remember at junior high school dances mostly just girls dancing with girls. (88)

Yet I want to suggest several final limitations to the conventional reading of Brainard's text as simple, straightforward autobiographical statement. I want to reposition *I Remember* as a landmark of Pop lyricism—as exemplary product of a covert (perhaps closeted) abstract-poetics: a serialized perspectivism more concerned with the modular, mosaic-like deployment of accessible (often quasi-autobiographical) data, than with "literary defamiliarization" in its most conventional (syntactical) sense.

Serial Time

In her book-length study *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature*, Wendy Steiner traces a lively exchange between single-point perspective and "simultaneous" narrative—from fifteenth-century aesthetic treatises by Alberti and Leonardo, to serial compositions by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein: an exchange, I will argue, with much to offer to any subsequent discussion of the elastic "I" deployed in *I Remember* (Steiner 37).[131] Following Steiner's lead, I will demonstrate that the serial-realist subject and/or the incrementalist-narrative (in Warhol's repeated silkscreens, in Brainard's quasi-aphoristic assertions) can prove as apt a site of abstraction (of epistemic-minded formal intervention) as does any "deauthored" poetic or pictorial text.

Pictures of Romance sketches two basic criteria by which to confirm the presence of pictorial-narrative: "the most important are: that the painting present more than one temporal moment; and that a subject be embedded in at least a minimally realistic setting" (2).[132] Narrative illustrates a plausible progression from one moment to the next. And this durational nature of narrative would appear unremarkably obvious, were it not the case that Renaissance conventions prescribe the presentation of a "*single* moment of vision," forbidding the depiction of more than "one moment in time" ("Nothing could be more foreign to Renaissance realism than the juxtaposition of temporally distinct events within a single visual field") (23; the italics are mine). Like photographs (like epiphanic or Imagistic poems), perspective-based pictorial compositions promise the instantaneous apprehension of a scene: "unmediated" or, at most, mediated through the crystalline gaze of an "objective," ahistorical viewing-subject. Scholars of postwar poetic experiment can easily ascertain the insidious consequences connected to this rhetoric of "timeless" transparency—historically conditioned representational conventions themselves get obscured. Florentine-painting's swift assimilation of Filippo Brunelleschi's mirror-based architectural sketches seems to imply that no other method of "realistic" depiction is possible.[133]

But as an example of the pictorial potential concealed by dogmatic devotion to single-point perspective, Steiner considers Sassetta's *Meetings of St. Anthony and St. Paul* (about 1440), an early-Renaissance work that charts the former saint's progress from pride, to temptation, to humility—repeating a recognizable figure winding down the lengthy desert road to redemption. Crucial to Steiner's argument is that Sassetta's Anthony appears in several places at once, thus precluding our apprehension of any fixed,

"unified" scene. [see figure 3] In its fusion of a "minimally realistic setting" *and* of multiple, temporally distinct episodes, *Meetings* conveys its impact by allowing the viewer to place Anthony's incidental trials upon an inferred narrative trajectory: to "see" a coherent story in which the saint's repeated presence proves logical.

Fig. 3. Sassetta, *Meeting of St. Anthony and St. Paul*. About 1440.

By contrast, post-Renaissance "History Painting" must instruct through instantaneous illumination, rather than through any diffusive catalogue of discrete moments—of the type so prominent, needless to say, in Joe Brainard's *I Remember* ("I remember when hoop skirts had a miniature revival. / I remember waking up somewhere once and there was a horse staring me in the face. / I remember sitting on top of a horse and how high up it was") (22). Much of Steiner's study concerns the elaborate

contortions to which Renaissance and post-Renaissance painters subject the picture-plane in an effort to bridge this gap between perspective-based instantaneity and narrative-based simultaneity. Brainard's poetic construction of serial time picks up, I will argue, on that pictorial precedent.

Serial Repetition

Most important to my present inquiry, however, is Steiner's astute placement of Pop art (Andy Warhol's silkscreen portraits, Roy Lichtenstein's confoundings of comic-book sequence) among the first movements to depart from post-Renaissance pictorial constraint.[134] [see figures 4 and 5] And most important to Pop pictorial sensibility (at least along the art-historical trajectory traced by Steiner), is the serial repetition that distinguishes this aesthetic from a collagist mode culled by Cubism and Dada:

> It is easy to imagine…a triptych, for example, in which one panel shows a child laughing, another a king fighting, and a third an animal eating. Each scene is discrete, each specific, and each an action, but they lack the most fundamental feature of all narratives—cohesion, and, in particular, the continuity of a repeated subject. (17)[135]

Whereas the collagist (like the triptych painter imagined above) solders disjunctive iconography into a heterogeneous ensemble, the serial artist (like Sassetta, like Steiner's hypothetical narrator) seeks to bring together separate instances of the same.[136] Whereas collage connotes an eclectic assortment of materials combined into one composite artifact, Pop serial composition suggests a homogeneity of content, a uniformity of distribution, a simultaneity of display.

Fig. 4. Andy Warhol, *Sixteen Jackies*. 1964.

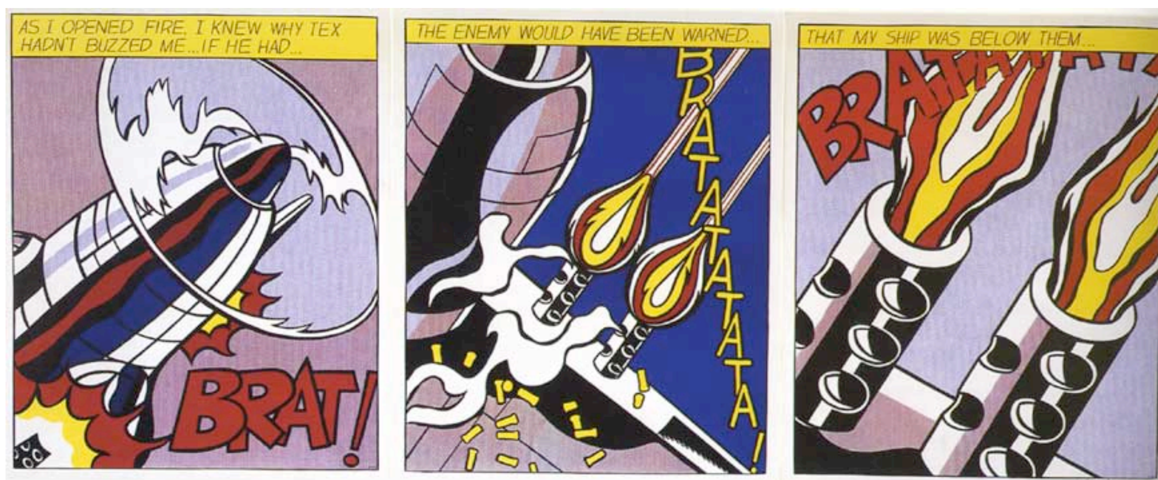


Fig. 5. Roy Lichtenstein, *As I Opened Fire*. 1966.

Paradoxically, this insistent presentation of the similar, this indifference to more dynamic juxtaposition, can nonetheless provide the most "anti-developmental" series with an air of narrative progress. Serial narrative need not possess all the conventional trappings of a compelling plot since, as Steiner argues: "the repetition of figures in a realistic rendering has the power to suggest narrative even when the events shown are not specific" (22). A postmodern *Meetings of St. Anthony and St. Paul*, Lichtenstein's *As I Opened Fire* constructs its narrative continuity, for example, not by presenting a logical linear sequence (only in the far-right panel do we learn that the middle-panel's airplane—depicted from below—might not be that of "I" but of "I's" enemy), but by offering a consistent, if consistently modified, pictorial-subject: a repeated figure (though, again, in Lichtenstein's ambiguous construction, we cannot be certain that any two panels depict the same jet) around which the painting's discrete units can cohere; even as this figure's multiple appearances preclude any potential for the single-point perspective typically associated with photographic instantaneity and, thus, "realism."[137]

In the narcissistic, mirror-staged mesh of mass-media representations, moreover, Pop's emphasis upon the repeated "subject" acquires added nuance, since each varied instance of Jackie, Marilyn, or Liz suggests both a slightly modified pictorial-subject (the star in her enumerative dayglow hues), *and* a slightly modified artistic- and audience-subject (the painter presenting, the viewer projecting onto that star from a stable, if ever-shifting vantage). Needless to say, these dualistic definitions of the serial-subject only get further dramatized when that subject is an autobiographical one: as occasionally with Warhol, and almost always with Brainard (though Brainard, astutely enough, sometimes chooses the great Andy Warhol as his poetic subject).

Along such lines, Steiner affirms Pop's fusion of rhetorical complexity and simplistic "content," treating the movement's adoption of vulgar, vernacular motif as proof of its prioritization upon epistemic intervention over virtuosic "technique," or "expressive" statement. Here *Pictures of Romance* provides a compelling case for how Pop's systematic appropriation of consumerist icons can progress beyond the merely parodic—towards a reconfiguration of pictorial and perceptual possibility. Warhol's celebrity-portraits and Lichtenstein's asyntactic battle-scenes pick up added art-historical nuance, granted their reinsertion of the repeated-subject in its various guises (Jackie: fighter pilot; star-struck spectator: comic-book reader), and their restoration of temporal (if not always linear) code to painting.

Here also, by extension, an oft-celebrated collagist line of twentieth-century American poetry (Pound, Eliot, Olson, much of what typically gets classified as "serial poetics," and, via Marjorie Perloff's prescient expansion of "the Pound tradition," Language) finds its obscured, undervalued complement in repetitive serial-realist texts such as Brainard's *I Remember*—projects that do not simply shore up fragments, but that artfully construct incremental narratives:

> I remember daydreams of saving someone from drowning and being a hero.
>
> I remember daydreams of going blind and how sorry everyone would feel for me.
>
> I remember daydreams of being a girl and of the beautiful toenails I would have.
>
> I remember daydreams of leaving home and getting a job and an apartment of my own. (78)

Considered in isolation, *I Remember*'s tangential assertions might appear to preclude queer-memoir's classic coming-out trajectory. Placed side-by-side, however, Brainard's daydreams (of macho heroism, of glamorous self-ornamentation, and metropolitan self-

sufficiency) prove as climactic as does any decisive action taken on the typical protagonist's part; for, once combined, these divergent variations-on-a-theme convoke narrative cohesion.

But here I need to refine my previous presentation of narrative, so to specify that narrative consists not just in the dispatch of referential data (as opposed to the opacities of abstract paintings, or Language poems), but in the assemblage of a "dual time" structure (Steiner 14). Borrowing from theorist Seymour Chatman's blueprint for narrative's requisite rhetorical-synthesis, *Pictures* points towards this crucial counter to the serial-realist text's potential matte sprawl:

> A salient property of narrative is double time structuring. That is, all narratives, in whatever medium, combine the time sequence of plot events, the time of the *histoire* ("story-time") with the time presentation of those events in the text, which we call "discourse time." What is fundamental to narrative, regardless of medium, is that these two time orders are independent. (Chatman; as quoted in Steiner 14)[138]

If *I Remember*'s dispersive progress produces a perpetual interruption of story, Chatman's conception of "discourse time" suggests why that need not rob Brainard's text of narrative status. In fact, few works foreground their dual-time structure more explicitly and extensively than does *I Remember*.[139] It is the insistent, anaphoric arrangement (quasi-autistic analogue to the "discourse time" constructed by Chatman's performative-narrator) of kaleidoscopic reminiscence (the serendipitous "story-time" of the inspired, omnivorous memoirist) which distinguishes Brainard's Pop-inflected project from appropriative poems that, in critic Joseph Conte's terms, reflect the "implications" of cultural/political/technological developments "in an unmediated way" (Conte 17). However "scattered" Brainard's allover sequence, each entry stands in direct relation to the first-person subject at his poem's performative center. However discontinuous

Brainard's individual entries, each "I Remember" phrase confirms the continuous present (continuous pleasures) of retrospection (what image better reflects narrative's "dual time" structuring than that of Brainard lying down—as he tells interviewer Tim Dlugos—to tan and to draft hundreds of *I Remember* episodes?).

Autobiographical-narrative's implied cumulative scope remains crucial. For the conventions regarding Steiner's second criterion of pictorial- and (by extension) poetic-narrative—a "minimal" realism—require that even the solitary scene somehow offer an illusion of temporal progress. Any more static conception "has the power to transform narrative into design" (21).[140] Narrative demands the recurrence of a recognizable subject, yet narrative's reliance upon a diachronic realism necessitates that this so-called "repeated" subject change continuously to fit the shifting circumstances in which it finds itself. Dynamic realizations of story must appear to dwell both inside and outside time's passage. Here especially, *I Remember*'s construction of a malleable narrative "I" (anathema to most contemporaneous poetic experiment) proves prescient.

Serial Identity

Thus with Brainard's diffusive "I" in mind, and through the art-historical analogy of Pop's radical reconfiguration of pictorial-perspective, I want to offer several provisional reconceptualizations of postwar poetic "abstraction." For most important to my present inquiry is the comparative vantage that Steiner's analysis of single-point perspective opens upon poetic criticism (specifically: studies concerning the epiphanic-moment's resilience amidst a modernist era otherwise inclined to austere, allover form).

By juxtaposing Steiner's account of the "fixed" vantage's dominance within post-Renaissance painting, to contemporaneous critiques of the "timeless" lyric's analogous place in post-Romantic verse, I will demonstrate that a twentieth-century poetics dependent upon spontaneous insight and/or Imagist precision offers a static scene comparable to that constructed through single-point pictorial-perspective; that, like early abstract painting, language-centered writing offers (now as postmodern antidote to the transparent viewing-subject) "the unpicturable"; and that serial-realist texts—such as *I Remember*—struggle to reconcile motivations toward either tendency, especially as brought about by postwar mass-cultural production.

Steiner's study can help to contextualize Brainard's Pop poetics along a continuum, for example (to begin amid the most obviously "referential" modes of postwar poetic discourse), between the "impersonal," show-don't-tell Deep Imagism of a James Wright or Robert Bly, and the self-centering Confessionalism of a Robert Lowell or John Berryman:

> By prohibiting repeated subjects, painting could depict identity as either a single frozen moment or an eternal essence, but not as a continuity constantly modified by time. Thus the Renaissance system reinforced the distinction between the isolated or transcendent self and the self modified by circumstance. (2)

Elliptical efforts to describe (without disturbing) the universe, and purgative attempts to assemble an idea-of-order out of acute personal experience, prove equally constrictive to the poetic-subject that seeks to construct a "continuity constantly modified by time." Here Imagistic precision and cathartic Confession can be said to represent the poles of post-Romantic (single-point) perspective—of perennial tensions between "objective" design and "personal" narrative, between the contingent and the "timeless" lyric, etc. Such binary schemes (analogous to Renaissance distinctions of "the self modified by

circumstance," and the "transcendent self") reinforce the presumption that "testimonial" composition can accomplish nothing betwixt either extremity of poetic "witness."

Within this context, serial-realist projects such as *I Remember* radically reconfigure the first-person "I": now vacated of the tepid impassivity or reductive universality of typical "transparent" verse, and the self-monumentalizing exhibitionism of Confessionalist poetics. Conflating and refining such oppositional-seeming tendencies, Brainard discovers the "eternal essence" of serial-identity within a sequence of discontinuous ("single frozen") moments. *I Remember*'s cyclic, anti-developmental structure "isolates" the self, but only to amplify its status as that which gets "modified by circumstance."

But to expand this application of Steiner's narrative/design dichotomy beyond the narrow confines of "accessible" twentieth-century poetry, *Pictures*' assessment of post-Renaissance pictorial constraint can also help to position Brainard's project between any latter-day descendent of the New Critics' "objective correlative," and any language-centered attempt to "rid the text of reference." For even within our own poetic present, and upon the broader axis of representational content/experimental form, polarizing distinctions between "mainstream" (testimonial) and "avant-garde" (abstract) poetics offer evidence of a rigid classificatory split analogous to those described above: dividing "authenticity" from "artifice," mimetic "imagery" from diffused "opacity," etc. Again, Brainard's serial-realist projects (and, I should add, James Schuyler's *Morning of the Poem*, Eileen Myles's *Chelsea Girls*, Lewis Warsh's *The Origin of the World*, David Trinidad's *Plasticville*) confound any such constrictive schema by grafting quasi-autobiographical poetic personae onto elaborate exoskeletal structures. To be brief: just

as, in Steiner's memorable summation, "It is not the medium of painting but its conventions that have reduced narrativity to an apparently peripheral concern for art historians," so it is not Language's definitive deconstructions of first-person narrative, but critics' wholesale valorizations of such attempts, that have rendered the propulsive "I" a peripheral concern for progressive poetic scholarship (9).

Moreover, though serial-realist texts such as *I Remember* might be narrative-based, this need not leave them uncritical of narrative convention. Just as "language" remains of essential importance to those who willfully interrupt standard syntax, "narrative" serves as focal point for those who would complicate its seamless, all-too-easily consumable flow. Just as Language poems critique the unrecognized operations of an increasingly banalized everyday discourse, so Brainard's serial-realist project emerges as contemporaneous alternative to the three-minute pop song, the thirty-minute sitcom (serial compositions of a different sort: those that encourage a myopic focus upon story-line, rather than upon complex rhetorical-construction). Yet whereas Language advocates tend to eliminate the first-person protagonist as a worthy component of poetic experiment, Brainard (like Warhol with his photomat strip of self-portraits, like Whitman with his self-contained multitudes) does not dismiss the first-person-confessional pose, so much as he reproduces this author-subject countless times—until his works' predominant performative-motif becomes such perspectivally based repetition itself.

Serial Testimony

Along similar art-literary-historical lines, Steiner's analysis of Pop's repeated pictorial-subject can help to situate Brainard's (or Schuyler's, Myles's, Warsh's, Trinidad's) poetic corpus in relation to serial-realist texts by Gertrude Stein and John Cage. For far from abandoning the literary "I" (the testimonial narrative), Stein and Cage—in many of their most uncategorizable works—rely on both as much as Whitman did (granted Language's paradigmatic critique of first-person literary subjecthood, the chatty, campy, ventriloquistic *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Indeterminacy* appear much more difficult to place than do those monuments to anti-mimetic austerity: *Stanzas in Meditation* and *I-VI*). Within this context, it is not enough to acknowledge that these two latter, legendarily opaque poets occasionally adopt an accessible "I" as mere respite—for themselves, or for their audience—from "serious" formal experiment.[141] Nor does the logic of "collage" adequately account for projects in which short, dispersive units (Stein's displaced digressions, Cage's sixty-second stories) manage to cohere around a "continuity constantly modified by time": a continuity premised upon the quasi-autobiographical narrator. Here again, comparisons to the proto-serial pictorial-subject best illustrate how both Stein and Cage deploy their ubiquitous "I's"—so to inaugurate a sweeping, epistemic-minded inquiry concerning canned perspective, modular structure, and narrative simultaneity.

Brainard's ensuing example consolidates this collective enterprise. For within the postwar era, the repeated "I" (one that tirelessly traverses Whitman's "Song of Myself," that imperiously punctuates Stein's public lectures) gets progressively foregrounded: first by Cage's anecdotal entries, then by Brainard's anaphoric text. Anticipating

poststructuralist calls to "deauthor" poetic production, Brainard elects not to "explode" or "erase" the "I," but (all the more devastatingly, as Pop painters Warhol and Lichtenstein prove through their departure from previous "abstract" painting) to repeat it—confounding, rather than parodying, the lyric-subject's "authentic" coordinates at a specific time and place.

Serial Syndication

Having suggested where an anomalous-seeming serial-realist text such as *I Remember* might fit upon the continua between Confessionalism and Deep Imagism, between "representational" and "language-centered" poetries, I will conclude these literary comparisons with a brief sketch of where it fits upon the threshold between poetry and prose narrative (particularly autobiographical memoir). For here emerges the further paradox that though Brainard confirms his narrative tendencies by repeating a plausible "I," he refuses the two types of epistemic scaffolding upon which "I" narratives most often depend (the instantaneous, epiphanic "I" of the lyric, the chronologically cumulative "I" of conventional autobiography).

By evading standard genre constraints—even as he persistently reinforces the rhetorical connection between "author" and "I"—Brainard expands our conception of first-person realism. In comparison to most testimonial texts, *I Remember* offers something far more "real" (eschewing extravagant claim and/or taut plot-development in favor of the casual anecdote, the punctum-inducing detail), and far less "realistic" (dissolving classic conceptions of unified time and place). Brainard's project at first

appears to provide a fixed focal-point of projective identification, but finally presents an amorphous, atemporal subject beyond the range of even the most empathic reader. However endearing or exceptional his mimetic capacities, Brainard (again like his Pop contemporaries Lichtenstein and Warhol) ultimately offers an incommunicable (at least according to Renaissance paradigm) scene of syndicated simultaneity: bursting beyond the postcard-frames of single-point perspective.

Serial Structure

As I have argued elsewhere (in a comparison of texts by artists John Cage, Claes Oldenburg, Ad Reinhardt, Joe Brainard, etc.), the affinity among abstract painting, aleatory performance-project, Pop silkscreen, and serial-realist poetic experiment can be traced through a literal transference of modular compositional-unit: from canvas, to manifesto, to time-bound story, to mesostic, to "I remember" entry. Part digressive litany, part lavish mosaic, each such serial enterprise addresses that basic hermeneutic question of how a work might best accentuate the discrete charms of its incremental instances, while consolidating the collective impact of the compositional whole.

Granted this concern with ratio, proportion, volume, one final art-historical analogy for these projects is an architectural one, and Steiner again offers the perfect model in her examination of early, ambivalent responses to Renaissance proscriptions against pictorial-narrative:

> If one were to adopt this [perspective-based] realism with its requirement of spatial coherence, how could one indicate the discreteness of the separate events composing the narrative? It is at this point that the multi-compartmented building becomes so important as a structuring device for narrative. (37)

As in Benozzo Gozzoli's *The Dance of Salome and Beheading of St. John the Baptist* (1461-62), for example (a single painting that shows St. John about to be executed in one room, Salome dancing for Herod in another, and Salome presenting Herodias with John's head in a third), the depiction of grid-like interior spaces allows painters to combine any number of causally linked (hence temporarily distinct) scenes amid a structured simultaneity. [see figure 6] Just as the modular "line" of modern abstract-painting later manifests in the anaphoric phrase of Oldenburg, Reinhardt, Brainard, so Benozzo's incestuous plot finds its equivalent in the Romanesque archways and ornate alcoves of Herod's palace. Precursor to the Baroque—Herod's hall of multiplicity hints that exhaustive repetition *is* expressive representation (albeit of an algorithmic sort): as much in Benozzo's *Dance,* as in Brainard's *I Remember*.

Fig. 6. Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Dance of Salome and Beheading of St. John the Baptist.* (1461-62).

Images of complex architectural space can thus serve as transitional forms along Steiner's art-historical trajectory—preserving some sense of dramatic progress within what appears a static scene:

> The building…changes a narrative into simultaneity, makes temporal order problematic, and thus serves as the natural transition of the purging of temporal flow from painting altogether. (38)

Yet even this epochal "purging of temporal flow" will often read more as the repression, than as the successful elimination, of narrative elements in post-Renaissance painting (modernist abstraction included: as Rosalind Krauss's analysis of the grid's conflicted purpose makes plain). This latter history remains to be articulated by subsequent art-poetry comparisons. But from the present vantage it seems clear that the serial-realist text hints at something of an analogous transition from neo-Romantic, mid-twentieth-century verse to Language poetics (from "organic" expression to opaque "artifice"): an evacuation of sentimentality never quite complete—resulting in exaggerated hostility towards the epiphanic lyric, and in tacit silence towards ambitious experimental projects that do not deign to reinforce such reductive distinctions (Cage's *Indeterminacy*, Brainard's *I Remember*, Schuyler's *Morning of the Poem*, etc.).

Steiner's *Pictures of Romance* does an admirable job confirming that the architectural metaphor retains as immediate an application in literary- as in pictorial-studies: reminding us that "The word 'stanza,' of course, means room"; expounding upon the "long and impressive currency" of "the conception of narrative as a procession through the rooms of a building"; citing, in particular, Spenser's analogy between "the quest and the progress through the rooms of a house," and Keats's statement, in an 1818 letter to John Reynolds, that "I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments" (37, 193). But twentieth-century analogues to Steiner's building/poem comparison also abound.

Here I cite simply the most apropos—Joe Brainard recalling a recent nocturnal reverie:

> The other night, in bed, I was thinking about nothing in particular and I decided to try to visualize how complicated and intricate the world really is. Like every now and then, when you see a big modern apartment building, and you get a sudden flash of all that is going on inside the building. All the little rooms and all the many little people each with lots of thoughts going through each of their heads. (*Selected* 52) [142]

If the individual life, in the age of *Endymion*, can be compared to "a large mansion of many apartments," then the aggregate (the "average") Pop poetic-subject can be modeled upon a denuded skyscraper with "all the little rooms and all the many little people." Again, it is serial-realism's emphasis upon collectivist repetition (not just collagist juxtaposition) that distinguishes its compositional logic from Language's motley mix of "Homonyms, puns, nonsense words, coinages, archaisms, learned allusions, advertising jargon" (Perloff, *Dance* 156). While the early poems of Bruce Andrews, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman seek to purge poetry of testimonial cliché, Brainard's paean to plain-spoken perspectivism packs in as many "little people" as possible (all named "I").

Serial Migration

By extension, Brainard's compartmentalized entries consistently announce their own ideals of architectural order:

> I remember (here's a real let-down for you) fantasies of opening up an antique store, with only *very* selective objects, displayed sparsely in an "art gallery" sort of way.

> I remember fantasies of opening up an art gallery on the Lower East side in a store (I'd live in back) with one exposed wall (brick) and everything else white. Lots of potted plants. And paintings by, you guessed it, me.
>
> I remember building unusual houses in my head. One, very modern and "organic," was inside a cave. Another was mostly glass. And they all had giant bathrooms with giant bathtubs. (96-97)

Mortared together, such "sparse" rooms and houses (in Steiner's terms, "discrete simultaneous units") stand in for moods, for modules: the manifold chambers of which *I Remember*'s kaleidoscopic compound gets comprised (37).[143] Taken as an associative triptych, this three-part sequence illustrates, for example, how Brainard builds his eclectic edifice one entry on top of the other.[144] Yet Brainard's book, as a whole, also exudes an "'art gallery' sort of" austerity (a spare, uniform display), with each "antique" entry offering but one "exposed wall"—one edge of intimate, tactile experience. Amidst its airy autonomy from any plot entanglement, *I Remember*'s integral pacing proves (likes giant bathtubs in giant bathrooms) especially commodious.

For all of these reasons, I believe that *I Remember*'s retrospective honeycomb serves as multipurpose transitional-form to late-twentieth-century poetics: a mausoleum for the lyric "I," a bustling marketplace for the omnivorous bourgeois reader, an aphoristic Factory for the protean Pop-subject. A Robert Moses of the post-Confessional age, Brainard—like Williams in his *Paterson* persona—carries within his head not just "unusual houses," not just iconoclastic anti-lyrics, but more expansive master-plans:

> I remember eating tunnels and cities out of watermelon. (35)

Contemporary to Oppen's "world of stoops," Brainard's orally engineered watermelon provides yet another transitional template for the heterogeneous Language text soon to follow: the poem as city.

Of course, Brainard's encyclopedic range extends to the rural ("I remember the outhouse and a Sears and Roebuck catalog to wipe off with"), and the domestic ("I remember cold sheets in the winter time") spheres of existence as much as to the urban, the public (15, 95). Just as the anaphoric statements of modernist manifestos, the repeated "There is only one art" and "I am for an art" phrases of Joseph Albers and Claes Oldenburg, suggest the literal trace of serial-composition migrating from the painterly canvas to the writerly text, so Brainard's modular entries evoke, as poet/critic Bruce Hainley puts it, the seriality to be found "even closer at home – in books, turning a page and finding another page, the same and yet so different" (Hainley 1).

Embodied within his books' discrete pages (as St. Anthony appears "incarnate," yet divided among the incremental episodes of Sassetta's panel), Brainard's uber-affirmative, ultra-accessible "I" proves as omnipresent (but also as elusive) as Edmond Jabès' interrogative poetic-subject:

> To be put in the book. To figure in the book of questions, to be part of it.
> To be responsible for a word or a sentence, a stanza or chapter.
> To be able to say: "I am in the book. The book is my world, my country, and my riddle. The book is my breath and my rest."
> I get up with the page that is turned. I lie down with the page put down. To be able to reply: I belong to the race of words, which homes are built with"—when I know full well that this answer is still another question, that this home is constantly threatened. (679)

For all its correspondence to the charming poet Joe Brainard, the "I" of *I Remember* belongs to Jabès' curious "race of words." Ever the prodigal son, the wandering Jew: this "I" consistently returns to rehabilitate what it has provisionally assembled (the "constantly threatened" home of Pop perspectival-consciousness), only to get cast out once more by the propulsive flow of serial repetition (and/or of poetry in the Whitmanian vein: "Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul"). Like his bardic

mid-nineteenth-century predecessor, like Jabès' "figure in the book," Brainard presents himself coming and going, constantly turning the "verse" line itself—even as he points toward "still another question" concerning poetry's relation to the serial painting, to the serial score. Such itinerant interdisciplinarity demands the same of any criticism that would attempt to track it. Within this revisionary context, I hope to have positioned a long-neglected line of serial-realist poetics somewhere between the Pop silkscreen and the contemporary language-centered poem: at the center (of course, as in Jabès' kabbalistic schemes, there are many centers) of postwar aesthetic innovation.

[1] As I will argue throughout this study, the periphrealization of Brainard's literary output takes two predominant forms: a critical silence regarding the poet's achievement (a not-so-benign neglect difficult, alas, to cite and to critique); and an enthusiastic endorsement of the poet's "simple," "modest" oeuvre.
[2] Brainard's 1975 Full Court Press *I Remember* offers a slightly-revised synthesis of three Angel Hair Press publications: *I Remember* (1970), *I Remember More* (1972), and *More I Remember More* (1975).
[3] Here I cannot help but recall Wayne Koestenbaum's astute attention (in the poet-critic's Andy Warhol biography) to Warhol's self-imposed nickname "Andy Paperbag"—though Brainard's "pop"-inflected paper bag appears even airier than Warhol's.
[4] As if to confirm its departure from dramatic progress, Brainard's Angel Hair Press *I Remember* series contains no page numbers.
[5] While I have emphasized *I Remember*'s abrupt shifts in rhetorical register, I do not mean to discount the work's delicate poetic touches: its coordinated assonantal clusters ("Carver…cartoon stars"; "light bulbs for a bright idea"); nimble, alliterative phrasings ("peanut butter…paper bags"; "blowing up paper bags to pop") and faint, fugitive echoes (a soft-rhyme on "$200" and "butter," for example—an audition further attenuated by the facts that the word "dollars" never appears in Brainard's passage, and that the placement of the dollar symbol *before* its quantifying-modifier contradicts our enunciation of the sentence.
[6] Lewis Warsh and Tom Clark provide perhaps the most succinct examples of such smart, suggestive analyses:

> He gave the reader the illusion he was telling everything, without getting heavy or going too deep. (Warhol was an early influence and hero). (Warsh, "Brainard" 109)
>
> Can you imagine another naif genius of such deep trust and sophistication, so good at making (or seeming to make) primitive = advanced, so given to everything, generating so consistently, in a way that looks so almost casual, such an infinitely cool all-over heat of presence, contingency, spectacle, design? (Clark 99)

[7] Again, Warsh and Clark provide concise, lucid accounts:

> I had the feeling that he didn't think about himself that much—that he had figured out a way of taking care of himself and that he could devote his time to taking care of others (Warsh, "Brainard" 110).
>
> Back in the days when being poor could still occasionally be fun, Joe's generous donation of marvelous works and designs to flybynight publishing ventures was one of the great taken-for-granted pleasures, as though we all somehow deserved the honor of world-class illustration and cover art simply because the artist was our pal and willing to deliver same at short notice, totally without ado and absolutely gratis (Clark 98).

[8] Twenty years earlier, Corbett's very different response to *I Remember* (a 1980 review for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* magazine, entitled "Seventeen Titles Joe Brainard Will Use One Day") provides a much more playful, more evasive, more Brainardesque assessment:

> I Forgot to Remember
>
> Boy Scout Cookies
>
> Truer Words Were Never Said
>
> A Regular Joe
>
> Read Any Good Books Lately? (12)

[9] As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, Stein and Cage—famously difficult poets—produce some of their most abstract compositions within the most accessible-seeming media: Stein's public lectures, for example, and Cage's performance-projects.
[10] Brainard's delicate renderings of his Bolinas trip merit more extensive citation than I can here provide:

It seems I am always looking for matches. (12)

Small birds do a beautiful thing around here of circling around each other, in pairs, as they drop through space. (23)

Those little white morning glories that grow close to the ground looking up. I especially like them. (28)

A little girl wants a quarter. Giving her a nickel she mumbles "motherfucker" and walks away. (32)

[11] In fact, Brainard's probing public record of his relationship with Elmslie—emblematic of a generalized ambivalence towards potential care-givers: relatives ("I remember my grandfather who lived on a farm dunking his cornbread in his buttermilk. He didn't like to talk"); predecessors (I remember painting 'I HATE TED BERRIGAN' in big black letters all over my white wall"); and Bolinas' many kind hosts—serves as testament to Elmslie's prodigious patience, as much as to Brainard's unflinching "honesty" (Brainard; *I Remember* 15, 5). Consider, for instance, this swift, gratuitous-seeming follow-up to the Elmslie-passages cited above:

"Tuesday December 30th, 1971"
That Kenward is the only person I can sing in front of, IS love tonight, even if it isn't.*

* What a prick I am! (*New* 48)

[12] These two examples perhaps best corroborate poet/critic John Ashbery's emphasis upon Brainard's signature mode of "confrontation without provocation" (*Selected* 257).

[13] Even the cover of Padgett's admirably evenhanded memoir *Joe* portrays its subject perched between heaven and earth: posing somewhat awkwardly upon a Manhattan fire escape (in tie, v-neck sweater, Chuck Taylor's, tube socks), amidst stairs ascending towards the empty white sky.

[14] Certainly, other types of tribute also appear in this *Pressed Wafer* volume. A third way, for example—a combination of the experimental and retrospective tendencies outlined above—emerges in Ed Barrett's and Anselm Berrigan's pointed variations on Brainard's "I Remember" form. In "The Living End," Barrett literalizes the gaps of attention implied throughout Brainard's aphoristic text:

I forget the words to the lullaby my father made up which began *ritchie ritchie roona*….

I forget when Patrick Barrett, who came over from Ireland, erected the family headstone in Holy Cross Cemetery. 1838 or 1878.…

I have two middle names (Charles William) and I forget who the Charles is I was named after. (147-148)

In "I remember hearing Joe read," Berrigan offers a carefully-lineated variant on typical free-verse recollection:

I remember hearing Joe Brainard read his poem
    "I remember"
at the Ear Inn when I was eight or nine years old.

I remember that of all the poets I had heard read
    up to that point
Joe was not only the best, but the only one who
    was any good at all. (212)

[15] Of course Corbett, as *Pressed Wafer* editor, (with poets Elaine Equi and David Trinidad serving as guest editors on the Brainard issue) must have recognized the value in such experimentally-inclined accounts.

[16] Published as part of *New Work*'s "Selections from N.Y.C. Journals 1971 & 1972" sequence, "Neck" contains such quintessential Brainard observations as:

One thing I've noticed is that I tilt my head a lot in bars.

If tilting my head "means" anything, I don't think it means anything very important. (41)

[17] Brainard indents each *I Remember* entry's first line (suggesting paragraph format), whereas Trinidad reverses this arrangement (suggesting poetic lineation).

[18] I will address Brainard's relation to Cage in subsequent chapters. Brainard's affinity with Cornell appears most clearly, perhaps, in this only surviving excerpt from the poet's projected verbal-portrait series:

Jimmy Schuyler

Trees. Baby blue. Plaid. Pajamas. Leather. Wrist watch. Pocket knife. Books. Silver. Autumn. Coffee. Scissors. Yellow. Lima beans. Belt. (Padgett 199)

[19] As I will suggest in later chapters, the centripetal/centrifugal tensions present throughout Brainard's oeuvre crystallize here—as the artist "breaks through" one self-imposed frame, only to appear encompassed by a slightly more expansive template: a sheet of stamped, titled paper.

[20] Russell Ferguson's *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art* (1999), and Reva Wolf's *Andy Warhol, Poetry, and Gossip in the 1960s* (1997) provide laudable exceptions to these scholarly aporia. Yet here it is worth noting that Ferguson (an art-curator) and Wolf (an art-historian) stand outside the confines of poetic discourse proper

[21] As I will argue in a subsequent chapter entitled "Serial Story: from Cage to Brainard and Back Again," Perloff, in the 1997 introduction to *Poet among Painters*, seeks to moderate her own previous emphasis upon the "push and pull" aesthetic of "'all-over painting'"—as well as upon Harold Rosenberg's paradigmatic depiction of the canvas (or, by Perloff's astute extension, the poem) as an "'an arena upon which to *act*, rather than a space in which to reproduce.'" Yet Perloff's more recent interest in O'Hara's queer-inflected, conceptualist-minded affinity to Jasper Johns, John Cage, and Robert Rauschenberg again diverts attention from one of O'Hara's most openly gay, most conceptually-minded contemporaries—Andy Warhol. Lehman, by comparison, remains more self-consciously lodged within the critical discourse of Rosenbergian "action" and [Clement] Greenbergian formalism. In particular, Lehman's citation of Greenberg's 1939 statement that "'Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself'" suggests the high-modernist origins for this later critic's conception of poems as "linguistic engines" (Lehman 301).

[22] In *Poet Among Painters*, Perloff explicitly (derisively) links second generation New York School poetics to "literal," "simple" (Warholian?) Pop:

It is easy enough to begin a poem with "It is 12:23 in New York"… or "I am walking up Broadway"… but without O'Hara's Dada or fantasy context, such empiricism (the literalism of simple Pop Art) becomes monotonous. (127)

This critique of Pop "literalism" (one that Perloff considers "increasingly valuable as we look back at Pop Art from the vantage point of the later seventies") now appears quite dated: given, for instance art-historian Rosalind Krauss's 1977 "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America"—a two-part study in which Krauss probes the abstract, epistemologically-minded implications of work that "merely" preserves the tactile traces of physical presence (Perloff, *Painters* 87).

[23] Of course, Brainard's Pop-inflected "word play" differs from that of his "language-based" peers:

I remember "Korea." (58)

I remember "Uranium." (97)

I remember *Kon-Tiki*. (97)

[24] Again, Brainard's most intimate associates may declare their indifference to this beloved friend's status amidst "academic" poetic debate. But then the overall purpose of a Brainard tribute (Is it really just to swap stories and encourage new *I Remember* knockoffs?) remains to be specified.

[25] Padgett himself pointed me to the *Art of Assemblage* catalogue during an interview conducted in 2005.

[26] Here again, Padgett's recollections prove apropos:

Joe's work at the time (1963-1964) was mostly assemblages and collages, involving, as he put it in an unpublished interview I did with him:

ice cream cones and spiders and nails and feathers and cigarette butts and roses and orchids and flamingo birds and cardinal birds and blue birds and blue ferns and dancing

girls and skeletons and fringe and tassels and lace and linoleum and ribbon and Dristan and toothpaste and the Infant Jesus of Prague….[Brainard's list continues for about 20 more lines] (Joe 69)

> The [1965] show [at the Alan Gallery contained]: approximately seventeen glittering, outrageous assemblages of bright pink rubber snakes, plastic flowers, crucifixes, lobster claws, Lucky Strike packages, a moose statuette, rosaries, costume jewels, bowties covered with glitter….[Padgett's list continues for 6 more lines] (80)

> In February [1966] he asked Pat and me to save our cigarette butts and mail them to him for use in the small assemblages he was making, usually a solid group of butts around a central object. The previous month he had asked us to be on the lookout for hands—from mannequins, on postcards… (102)

[27] In doing so, Seitz helps to consolidate what Robert Rosenblum describes as a burgeoning "international movement in the late 1950s that would explore, whether in the New York of Robert Rauschenberg and Louise Nevelson or the Paris of Arman and Jacques de la Villegé, the strange new poetry that could be eked out of the palatable junk and mess of urban life" (*Aquarius* xiv).

[28] Here again, I do not mean to discount the value of Abstract Expressionist painting/New York School poetry juxtapositions, so much as to assert the need for literary scholars to progress beyond stale references to the first two decades of postwar art. Within this context, Seitz's blockbuster "Assemblage" show (self-consciously pitched as epoch-shaping event for a generation both "weaned on abstract expressionism but unwilling to mannerize Pollock [or] de Kooning," and inspired by a proto-Pop "impatience with the line that separated art from life") offers just one of myriad points of departure for post-Ab Ex art-poetry comparisons (Seitz 87).

[29] Here Seitz's claim that assemblage art "disturbed supporters of both figurative and abstract art" anticipates Warhol's now-legendary impact upon postwar painting, but also Brainard's less-celebrated impact upon postwar poetry.

[30] Scholars outside of art history often understate Pop art's epistemologically minded critique of postwar industrial/aesthetic production. In his 1968 response to Andy Warhol's work, critic/curator/artist John Coplans offers a succinct account of Pop as pointed, conceptually driven enterprise:

> Implicit to all [of Warhol's] images is a contradiction among the origin of the imagery, the various mechanical and industrial processes used in their facture, and what finally emerges as a work of art. Warhol enforces the issue that the range of esthetic judgments necessary to create a work of art are of the mind and not the hand. (130)

[31] Spatial limitations prevent me from providing a more comprehensive account of Language discourse. For a brief survey of early, influential statements by Language-affiliated poets, see Bruce Andrews, "Text and Context," Charles Bernstein, "Stray Straws and Straw Men," Steve McCaffery, "The Death of the Subject," and Ron Silliman, "For Open Letter" (all reprinted in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Supplement Number One [June 1980]); Ron Silliman, Barrett Watten, Steve Benson, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein & Bob Perelman, "For Change," (reprinted in *In the American Tree* [Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1986]), 484-490; Ron Silliman, Carla Harryman, Lyn Hejinian, Steve Benson, Bob Perelman & Barrett Watten, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," *Social Text*, No. 19/20 (Autumn, 1988), 261-275. For more recent, retrospective criticism concerning Language poetry's response to lyric subjectivity, see Ron Silliman, "Who Speaks: Ventriloquism and the Self in the Poetry Reading," *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 360-378; Steve McCaffery, "Insufficiency of Theory to Poetical Economy," *Prior to Meaning: the Protosemantic and Poetics* (Evanston, Il: Northwestern University Press) 3-14; Marjorie Perloff "Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject," and "After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents," *Differentials: Poetry, Poetics, Pedagogy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004) 129-174.

[32] Especially within the twenty-first century, Perloff has attempted to question Language's "oppositional" pose. Yet Perloff's own studies have continued to glamorize Language's oppositional ethos—if only by reinforcing the Language movement's self-appointed position as paragon of late-twentieth-century poetic experiment. Thus even Perloff's calls for renewed explorations of postwar poetic-subjecthood seem to take for granted that these new approaches will privilege Language texts:

> It was, of course, the opposition to [the] Romantic paradigm that prompted the theoretical discourse of Language manifestos in the first place. And that oppositionality remains significant even though the "Us-versus-Them" rhetoric of *The L=A=N =G=U=A=G=E Book*, now twenty years old, has become complicated by the appearance of new poetic paradigms that don't quite fit the original theoretical frame. The dialectic, in other words, has shifted ground and it now seems more useful to look at special cases *within* the Language movement and related alternate poetries rather than at the group phenomenon. (*Differentials* 153)

[33] Of course, literature and literary studies stimulate artistic and art-historical projects as well. Krauss, for example, frequently acknowledges her indebtedness to Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Here my point is simply that art historians swiftly apply poststructuralist analyses to Pop paintings, whereas literary critics fail to do so with Pop poems.

[34] Consider, for example, poet Steve McCaffery's opening to 1977's Language-galvanizing "Politics of the Referent" symposium:

> As we understand increasingly the unity of the human symbolic field and how man is primarily a semiotic animal inhabiting and creating a context that is itself semiotic and governed by common operations, as we understand this so we will understand how the whole notion of a literature discriminated from language is irrelevant. ("Subject" 2)

[35] In his 1996 *The Return of the Real* text, for example, Foster considers Warhol within the greater context of a resurgent avant-garde tradition derived from Duchamp and Dada. Buchloh does the same in his 1989 essay "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966."

[36] Astute poet-critics (such as Charles Bernstein, in 1980's "Semblance") soon recognize the argumentative hazards of any such avowedly anti-referential poetics.

[37] I cite Roy Campbell's 1952 translation of Baudelaire's stanza:

> En vain j'ai voulu de l'espace
> Trouver la fin et le milieu;
> Sous je ne sais quel oeil de feu
> Je sens mon aile qui se casse; (218)

Campbell's *Fleurs du Mal* famously deviates from Baudelaire's text, but here the poet/translator's emphasis upon geographical coordinates helps to clarify Baudelaire's metaphoric depiction of poetic space.

[38] Within a more contemporary context, poet Clark Coolidge's dictionary-definition opening to his 1970 volume *Space* proves pertinent:

> SPACE
> (spās), n. O.F. espace, fr. L. spatium space.
> 1. That which is characterized by extension in all directions, boundlessness, and indefinite divisibility; the subject of determinations of position and direction. 2. Math. The aggregate of points, or ordered sets of n numbers (x1,…xn). 3. A limited extension in one, two, or three dimensions: a part marked off in some way. 4. Specif., reservation; accommodations, as on a train. 5. An interval between two points of time; duration. 6. Opportunity; chance. 7. Archaic. A while. 8. Advertising. The page or part of a page of a periodical used for advertising, or the number of agate lines so used in a newspaper. Trade Slang, U.S.…—*v.t.*; SPACED (spāst); SPAĆING (spāsing). To place at intervals; to arrange with spaces between. (1)

[39] For the sake of analogical clarity I am offering a somewhat simplified version of Krauss's argument. In her essay "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," Krauss does in fact detect a continuously reduplicated pictorial "scene"—the trope of "the frame" itself: as this reappears from Renaissance optics manuals, to Symbolist windows, to modernist grids.

[40] Howe herself describes "Thorow" as a temporal "landscape":

> I think I was trying to paint a landscape in that poem but my vision of the lake [Lake George] was not so much in space as in time. I was very much aware of the commercialization and near ruin at the edge of the water, in the town itself, all around—but I felt outside of time or in an earlier time and that was what I wanted to get on paper. (Beckett 20)

John Cage's swirling "Talk I" (reprinted in 1967's *A Year from Monday*) also might have served as model.

[41] Of course, one could argue that these works do not destroy meaning by "breaking up" sentences, but rather construct meanings through novel combinations of syntactical units. I address this tension between

centripetal and centrifugal processes in a paper entitled "Pop Poetics and Grid Aesthetics." For now, I am simply expanding upon Mallarmé's advocacy of poetic "dispersal."

[42] Again, I do not aim to present McCaffery's early analysis as representative of this astute poet-critic's entire career. Nor do I mean to suggest that McCaffery's statements can stand in for Language discourse as a whole. In her 1999 essay "After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents," Marjorie Perloff ably articulates the disparate philosophical and aesthetic orientations that early Language practitioners brought to the movement:

> McCaffery himself points to the Russian Formalists, to Wittgenstein, Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida as the sources for his theory, and indeed language poetics, in this first stage, owes its greatest debt to French poststructuralism, although Charles Bernstein, for one, was much closer to Wittgenstein, whom he had studied with Stanley Cavell at Harvard, than to Derrida, whose analysis of signification he distrusted, even as Silliman and Andrews were drawn to a more politicized Frankfurt School poetics. (*Differentials* 158)

It is McCaffery's Derridean emphasis upon the grapheme that makes his work so fitting for discussions of late-modernist poetic space.

[43] Krauss offers this description in response to early-1950s artistic paradigms, thereby demonstrating the belatedness of "subjectless" Language abstractions.

[44] To offer a more pointed literary-historical comparison: Nietzsche's avowed enthusiasm for Emerson's essays (Nietzsche's "genealogical" approach often appears a direct extension of Emerson's "fossil poetry" concept), hints at latent affinities between the former's perspectival "scientist," and the latter's prototypical American poet/scholar.

[45] The italics are, as usual, Nietzsche's.

[46] I cite Brainard's references to his mother, to "South Pacific," and to ice cream in my introduction.

[47] Along similar lines, art-historian Robert Rosenblum's mid-sixties description of Pop painting helps to articulate the charged correspondence between readymade detail and quasi-autobiographical record in Brainard's text:

> The authentic Pop artist offers a coincidence of style and subject, that is, he represents mass-produced images and objects by using a style which is also based upon the visual vocabulary of mass production. ("Pop" 81)

Critic Lawrence Alloway's concurrent description of Pop "anonymity" points toward the writerly implications of Brainard's personal/generic poem:

> Where process abbreviation is found in Pop Art it reduces personal nuances of handling by the artist in favour of deadpan or passive images. This deceptive impersonality amounts to a game with anonymity, a minimizing of invention, so that the work is free to support its interconnections with popular culture, and with the shared world of the spectator. (20)

And John Ashbery's subsequent commentary upon James Schuyler's corpus (along with Schuyler's praise for David Trinidad's work,) rounds out a rough sketch of the multivalent "translatability" (the potential for vernacular-based abstractions *to return to* the world of vernacular discourse) that Alloway deems so crucial to Pop aesthetics:

> [Schuyler] somehow managed to draw on the whole arsenal of modernism, from the minimalism of Dr. Williams to the gorgeous aberrations of Wallace Stevens and the French Surrealists, and still write in what Marianne Moore calls "plain American which cats and dogs can read." (209)
>
> The case of Trinidad's lines and the colloquial care with which he chooses words—precise, without knocking you down—are the means he uses to create these so original poems: intense, yet off the cuff: turning the paste jewels of pop art into the real thing: which might be, to leave them as he found them, shining, and singing about a broken heart (perhaps). (Book cover)

[48] Within this context, even Barthes's pronouncement of "the author's" death served less to herald a deconstructionist epoch, than to ensure that "the game started over again" (just as, following his "Death of the Author" publication, Barthes himself began to master the autobiographical form).

[49] Due to spatial constraints, I will forego further reference to several equally important studies of the era. For questions concerning hybridized form, consider Michel Delville's *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998). For broader revaluations of New York School poetics, see Maggie Nelson's *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2007). For an expanded conception of postwar poetic

experiment, review Craig Dworkin's *Reading the Illegible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

[50] Of course, Perloff's and Conte's critical theses do not stop with the texts cited above. To readers familiar with the former's career, for instance, it may be interesting to note that "From Image to Action's" publication date places it between Perloff's 1970's revaluations of the modern lyric tradition (from Yeats to Robert Lowell to Frank O'Hara), and her subsequent emphasis upon marginalized modernist and postmodernist poetries (in texts such as 1985's *The Dance of the Intellect: Studies in the Poetry of the Pound Tradition*, 1986's *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, and beyond). Conte likewise updates his conceptions of serial poetics, and of poetic abstraction, in a 1992 article "Seriality and the Contemporary Long Poem," in 1997's "The Smooth and the Striated: Texture in the Modern Long Poem," and in his editorship of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (particularly in the critic's own James Schuyler entry). Again, I do not desire to blame Perloff and Conte for present gaps in poetic scholarship, but rather to demonstrate how influential each critic's early formulations remain.

[51] Pound and Eliot prove, at best, "exceptions to the rule: both *The Waste Land* and the *Cantos* are full of abortive stories, tales fragmented and never fully developed that weave in and out of the lyric fabric" (Perloff, *Dance* 156).

[52] Defining *gnosis*, Perloff quotes Victor Turner's etymology of the term "narration"—from his 1980 essay "Social Dramas and Stories about Them":

> Narrate is from the Latin *narrare* ('to tell') which is akin to the Latin *gna[~]rus* ('knowing,' 'acquainted with,' 'expert in') both derivative from the Indo-European root *gna[^]* ('to know') whence the vast family of words deriving from the Latin *cognoscere*, including 'cognition' itself, and 'noun' and 'pronoun,' the Greek *gigno[~]kein*, whence [*gno[~]sis*. (Turner 164)

[53] Perloff problematizes the neo-Romantic obfuscation of post-industrial social conditions most effectively in her book-length project *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[54] Along these lines, Perloff's "action" concept seems analogous to the medium-specific interventions of a preceding generation's "Action" (Abstract-Expressionist) painters—suggesting that Perloff's "From Image to Action" piece (and later extensions of it) still look back to late-modernist aesthetics, thereby marginalizing postwar Pop innovation.

[55] Perloff, writing in 1982, refers to the 1975 version of Dorn's epic—a multi-volume work begun with 1968's *Gunslinger*, and completed by 1989's *Gunslinger*.

[56] For an intriguing account of these texts, see Mark Ford's essay "Like a Lily Daché Hat" (*Poetry Review* [Autumn 2002]).

[57] Here I follow the late-twentieth-century dandy's lineage, as traced by Susan Sontag's classic "Notes on Camp" essay:

> The dandy was overbred. His posture was disdain, or else ennui. He sought rare sensations, undefiled by mass appreciation…. He was dedicated to "good taste."
>
> The connoisseur of Camp has found more ingenious pleasures…. Camp—Dandyism in the age of mass culture—makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica. (289)

[58] Separate studies ought to address the literary-historical dynamic by which white, straight, male authors have remained the most widely celebrated poetic "rebels" during a cultural epoch largely defined by race-, gender-, and sexuality-specific liberation movements (Perloff makes this point in her "After Language Poetry" essay). For my own part, though I do not wish to essentialize connections between homosexuality, Camp praxis, and/or serial poetics, I find an intriguing point of departure for examining relations among gay, Camp, and serial sensibilities to be Roland Barthes's *Roland Barthes* entry "The Goddess H":

> The pleasure potential of a perversion (in this case, that of the two H's: homosexuality and hashish) is always underestimated. Law, Science, the *Doxa* refuse to understand that perversion, quite simply, *makes happy*; or to be more specific, it produces a *more*: I am more sensitive, more perceptive, more loquacious, more amused, etc.—and in this *more* is where we find the difference (and, consequently, the Text of Life, life-as-text). (64)

Whereas parody, in Perloff's sense, suggests a zero-sum game (one form's enhancement at another's expense), both Camp and additive composition nimbly accrue the "*more*" that Barthes finds so appealing.

[59] Of course one could argue, following Shklovskian premises, that the most defamiliarizing work subverts convention (and thus slows down perceptions) by appearing utterly informal within the formal contexts of poetic performance and/or poetic publication. Perloff makes such a case in her 2001 introduction to Dalkey Archive's reprint of David Antin's classic volume *Talking*. More generally, however, critics' single-minded emphases (Perloff's included) upon defamiliarization in its most obvious, syntactical forms has effectively screened works that rely upon what Pop-theorist Lawrence Alloway describes as a vernacular-based "translatability."

[60] Nor does the case for Pop lyricism's contemporaneous place alongside "serial poetics" rest solely on theoretical grounds. Brainard and Creeley collaborated on 1973's *The Class of '47* text, for example, and Brainard's 1971 *Bolinas Journal* discusses the poet's social engagements with Creeley and Duncan.

[61] The term "anaphora" appears not once, for instance, in Conte's 300-page study.

[62] In his 1987 *Postmodernist Fiction*, for example, critic Brian McHale categorizes Robbe-Grillet's later novels (beginning with 1965's *La Maison de rendezvous*) as "nouveau nouveau" romans that can serve as "exemplary postmodernist text[s] (13). Yet McHale considers Robbe-Grillet's earlier, "'classic'" nouveaux romans (such as 1957's) *La Jalousie*) "stylized modernist novels."

[63] If any "postmodern" scholarly project should be receptive to Pop lyricism, it is *Unending Design*'s survey of serial poems and "generative devices." Conte, however, in his dismissal of concrete poetry and sound poetry, outlines the standard deflation of Pop aesthetics:

> They are formal effects that seem not so much devised by the poet as thrust upon him by the exigencies of his condition. They reflect a world that has grown too impatient to tolerate the "defamiliarization"…that Victor Shklovsky argued poetic language ought to pursue. Such forms do not confront or interpret contemporary reality; they submit to it. (16)

Here the critic seems to argue that any sustained echo of prefabricated data categorically stands as aesthetic surrender. *Unending Design* chastises mid-century New Criticism for "actively 'disallowing' much of what was innovative" (for misreading pointed poetic experiment as sloppy or superficial verse), yet fails to distinguish between prescient departures from syntactic "defamiliarization," and a global impatience pandemic (2).

[64] In fact, part of what seems so lacking in Brainard's ur-*I Remember* ("Gold and Silver and Purple Memories") project is this text's ability to function not just as idiosyncratic, solipsistic record, but as dream-diary of the undifferentiated mass. Paradoxically, it is only when *I Remember*'s persistent "I" gets systematically integrated into the serial text that Brainard's Pop-inflected litany invokes a vox populi.

[65] Though ostensibly concerned with "Russian conditions," Benjamin's "Author as Producer" text cites Bertolt Brecht's *Umfunktionierung* (functional transformation) concept as the theoretical basis for its productivist model (774). Spatial limitations prohibit me from presenting a more elaborate comparison between Brecht's Epic theater and Brainard's Pop-inflected poetic assemblages, but Benjamin's illuminating analysis of the former enterprise prompts a quick juxtaposition:

> Brecht fell back on the most primitive elements of the theater. He contented himself, by and large, with a podium…. Epic Theater, he declared, had to portray situations, rather than develop plots…. The interruption of action, on account of which Brecht described his theater as "epic," constantly counteracts illusion on the part of the audience. (778)

What postwar poetic project emphasizes spare, situation-based plot interruption more systematically than does Brainard's *I Remember*?

[66] In his 1978-1979 "Day by Day with Roland Barthes" project, Barthes describes the "soft form" as possessing "neither the solemnity of the maxim, nor the harshness of the epigram; something which, at least in tendency, might suggest the Japanese haiku, the Joycean epiphany, the fragment of the *journal intime*" (116).

[67] Here I do not mean to diminish the hostile response that Language discourse received from academic audiences for more than a decade, nor to deny the proletarian origins and/or political commitments of Language practitioners. The irony, however, is that this movement's overall trajectory closely resembles what the young Ron Silliman describes as modernism's "defensive" rise to prominence:

> The 'art of the difficult' aspect of modernism is a defensive mechanism. By difficulty, a writer made it harder to be absorbed and commoditized. It is a form of buying time. It is a sad thing to watch. It never works. ("Open" 33)

Within this context, Brainard's "art of the simple" approach has proved much more effective at resisting absorption and commoditization.

[68] Admittedly, the voluminous supplemental discourse that has sprung up around Language poems constricts the range of potential reader-response.
[69] Perloff posits seriality's defamiliarizing, "'demilitarizing'" syntax in her 1997 piece "The Music of Verbal Space: John Cage's 'What You Say'" (*Emergent* 299).
[70] Each of these texts gained prominence amidst Brainard's New York art-world milieu. Oldenburg's "I am for an art" litany derived from the artist's 1961-62 downtown-based installation/performance "The Store." Albers' "The Origin of Art"—first printed in a 1952 issue of the Parisian journal *Réalités Nouvelles*—resurfaced in MoMA's 1964 volume *Homage to the Square*. Reinhardt's "There is Just One Painting" statement appeared in *Artforum*.
[71] I follow Conte in taking the "quick graph" phrase from Creeley's 1970 volume *A Quick Graph: Collected Notes and Essays*.
[72] In his 1998 essay "A Fan's Apostasy," Wayne Koestenbaum offers an analogous assimilation of the anaphoric phrase into critical prose:

> I am interested in the opera of driving a car, the opera of taking the subway, the opera of deferred gratification, the opera of massage parlors, the opera of sunset at the piers, the opera of whisky, the opera of silence, the opera of palm trees, the opera of bath tubs, the opera of the daily splash of eau de cologne, the opera of inanition, the opera of stupefaction, the opera of amnesia. (*Cleavage* 195).

[73] Critic Mary Ann Caws seems to suggest as much about Brainard's serial-precursor Walt Whitman, whose "Song of Myself" she wisely includes in her 2001, modernist-based anthology *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*.
[74] I take these and every subsequent manifesto citation from Caws's *Manifesto* anthology.
[75] Conte takes this phrase from Roland Barthes's 1962 "The Imagination of the Sign" essay.
[76] Quartermain's concise genealogy hints, alas, at its own narrow range of reference—refraining to ask, for example, whether any number of epistolary and/or aphoristic practices (cyclic ruminations by Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, collaborative renga by thirteenth-century Japanese poets, Montaigne's essays, seventeenth-century commonplace books, quasi-indexical catalogues by Dorothy Wordsworth and John Clare, philosophical meditations by Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Bataille, Benjamin, Weil, Barthes—the list could fill an entire volume) have not contributed to a proto-serial poetics of "contiguously related particulars" (Conte 91).
[77] For a broad introduction to related work on Dickinson's fascicles, see also Martha Nell Smith's article "Rowing in Eden: Reading Dickinson Reading" (printed in *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992]), and the transcript from the Emily Dickinson International Society's 1997 roundtable discussion "Unfastening the Fascicles" (including works by scholars Robert Bray, Paul James Crumbley, Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, and Daneen Leigh Wardrop—and available through the emilydickinson.org website).
[78] Sixty years earlier, in his classic *The American Renaissance* text, F.O. Matthiessen entitled his main Whitman chapter "Only a Language Experiment," yet treated this resonant phrase as authenticity-affirming confirmation that "a man cannot use words so unless he has experienced the facts that they express" (518). For a more recent, book-length meditation upon Whitman's statement, see James Perrin Warren's *Walt Whitman's Language Experiment* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1990).
[79] In a previous chapter entitled "Serial Alternatives: Additive, Translatable, Productivist Poetry," I have critiqued literary-scholarship's parochial approach to "serial poetics"—specifically for excluding from its purview Pop-inflected poets such as Joe Brainard, James Schuyler, Lewis Warsh, Eileen Myles, etc. Here I wish to examine postwar art-criticism's movement towards a more expansive definition of serial painting (especially Pop serial painting), so to trace the Pop serial-poem's pedigree back to some of its most illustrious art-world predecessors.
[80] This tension between casual/inclusive, and austere/exclusive accounts of serial composition manifests most clearly, perhaps, in two 1967 articles by painters David Lee ("Serial Rights") and Mel Bochner ("The Serial Attitude"):

> The [serial] attitude is that there are all these parts to everything, that every part is interesting, but that there is not much interest in any one part…. A series is a way of viewing one's experience and a way of representing one's view. By "experience" I mean daily life. This and this and this; one thing after another. (Lee 44)

> Many artists work "in series." That is, they make different versions of a basic theme.… This falls outside the area of concern here. Three basic operating assumptions separate serially ordered works from multiple variants:
>
> 1. The derivation of the terms or interior divisions of the work is by means of a numerical or otherwise systematically predetermined process (permutation, progression, rotation, reversal).
> 2. The order takes precedence over the execution.
> 3. The completed work is fundamentally parsimonious and systematically self-exhausting. (Bochner 28)

Bochner's *Artforum* piece offers the more precise, more erudite argument: replete with citations from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Arnold Schoenberg, Milton Babbit, etc. Lee's less-fastidious definition of the "serial attitude," published that same month in *Art News* (each essay examined the December "Art in Series" show at Finch College), lends itself to more promiscuous application. Both approaches, I will argue, prove germane to my own analysis of Pop-lyricism's chatty tone and algorithmic structure.

[81] Whether a 32-page Angel Hair Press production, or a 138-page Penguin Classic, for example, *I Remember* (published in distinct, self-sufficient stages from 1970-75) relies upon a single, anaphoric phrase, and retains its original introduction and conclusion—thereby illustrating Coplans' claims concerning elastic serial process: "Once established, a Series may be kept open and added to periodically in the future" (11).

[82] Here I feel compelled to point out the curious fact that only when Brainard's text gets placed in properly indented MLA-format does it appear systematically serial. As published in *Selected Writings*, Brainard's repeated assertions do not line up in neat columns.

[83] In his 1957 piece, "The Later Monet," critic Clement Greenberg announces this long-neglected artist's nascent rehabilitation:

> Monet is beginning to receive his due…. An avant-garde painter like André Masson and a critic like Gaston Bachelard write about him admiringly. A collector of very modern art in Pittsburgh concentrates on his later works, and the prices of these are rising again. Even more important, their influence is felt—whether directly or indirectly—in some of the most advanced painting now being done in this country. (*Collected* 3)

Yet Greenberg's attention to Monet's proto-Abstract-Expressionist "flat effects," and "chromatic, 'symphonic' structure" sounds dated once placed beside Seitz's prescient study of Monet's architectonic (and proto-Pop) serial designs (3, 10).

[84] The press release for MoMA's 2007 "William Seitz: Defending the Modern" exhibition describes his 1955 doctoral dissertation as "the earliest major text on Abstract-Expressionist painting".

[85] In his *Serial Imagery* monograph, John Coplans characterizes Stein's "Rose is a rose is a rose" poem as "a classic Serial structure, and a striking antecedent to Andy Warhol's endless Series of identical Brillo boxes…forty years later" (7).

[86] More pertinent is Seitz's emphasis upon the timely technological apparati employed by Monet:

> he began to utilize a slotted box containing several canvases of a given size from which, on returning to his motif from day to day, he could choose the one that best conformed to the light of the moment, continue working until the light changed (seldom more than half an hour), and replace it with another. (16)

For here, Monet's quasi-industrial painting-process can be seen to serve as part of a broader art-historical transition—from early Impressionist "plein air" excursions to the Warhol silkscreen Factory.

[87] Seitz cites Monet's "eagerness to attempt untried and unpictorial motifs" (most obvious in the painter's "many studies of fog and mist") as an important facet of his "genius" (23). Here I argue, by extension, that many of Brainard's own "foggiest" assertions—as demonstrated below, for instance—succeed at depicting liminal, unrepresentable-seeming mental states:

> You know how, driving in a car, you think of things that you would never think of unless you were driving in a car? I mean the way your head gets empty. Open. (*Selected* 54)

[88] Serial studies of water-towers and silos by photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher, of grocery-store aisles and hotel atriums by Andreas Gursky, etc., confirm the continuing relevance of Monet's haystacks and cathedrals to late-twentieth-century reexaminations of "abstract"/"representational" dichotomies.

[89] In a more recent manifestation of the phenomenon described above: Brainard's Fall 1975 Fishbach Gallery exhibition contains over 1500 artworks, selling for as little as twenty-five dollars each, as though

geared to the spendthrift holiday-shopper. (Padgett 222) After this successful show's offerings get widely scattered, Brainard suffers his worst post-exhibition letdown to date, and never again exhibits. Here I hope to have demonstrated, by analogy, how this oft-repeated bit of Brainard lore can take on much broader art-historical resonance—once placed amidst a study of serial composition's self-obscuring tendencies. Along similar lines, the traumatic dispersal of Brainard's Fishbach show sets a cautionary precedent for the close-reading and/or undertheorized-citing of anecdotal excerpts from this poet-collagist's encyclopedic *I Remember* assemblage (itself comprised of close to 1500 entries).

[90] Critic Wayne Koestenbaum's reference to Warhol's less renowned—if no less provocative—critique of postwar art-patronage (here in the form of commercial portraiture) suggests, once again, the blunting of a pointed serial-project forced "underground":

> Warhol did fifty to one hundred of the commissioned portraits a year; many are privately owned, and unfortunately they may never be exhibited as a series. Imagined in their totality, however, they eviscerate the identity of each sitter, even as they pretend to perpetuate it…. the joke was on the client: by being portrayed *as if* a Liz, the subject admitted an identity as stand-in, nonstar, aura seeker, just another flavor of person, without a monopoly on presence." (168)

[91] Of course, within Brainard's own hybrid career, the poet-artist's collages, assemblages, and paintings confirm his serial inclinations just as dramatically as does any literary text. For though the institutional norms of postwar art display (project-based gallery exhibitions for all but the best-established living artists) generally encourage the creation of what might be called "series" (analogous to a company's latest product-line), Brainard's intricate, allover arrangements (of religious icons, flower paste-ons, tattoo decals, etc.) foreground a far more sophisticated examination of the serialized image.

[92] For the sake of historical clarity, I here wish to cite critic Steven Watson's description of Warhol's earliest cloud-sculpture as a "forty-foot tubular balloon that looked like a snake" (244). Subsequently, I will refer to Warhol's clouds in the plural, since the artist typically presented them in sets of smaller units.

[93] Again, Brainard provides an analogous offering two years prior: sacrificing his suntan-lotion prepped body to the "total gray clouds" of a buggy Vermont morning—in the apparent hope that something better might come along ("You never can tell about Vermont, tho").

[94] According to art-historian William Ganis, Warhol's Factory produced roughly 600 "unique stitched photographic objects" between 1982 (the year that Warhol's friend Christopher Makos proposed the idea) and Warhol's death in 1987 (24).

[95] In his swift progression from Renaissance clouds to postwar serigraphs, Barthes seems to hold in mind Warhol's 1966 Leo Castelli Gallery show—an exhibition that combined the silver mylar clouds with the grid-like *Cow Wallpaper*:

> in many works of pop art, the background against which the object is silhouetted, or even out of which it is made, has a powerful existence (rather of the kind clouds had in classical painting): there is an importance of the grid. This comes, perhaps, from Warhol's first experiments: serigraphs depend on textile (textile and grid are the same thing); it is as if our latest modernity enjoys this manifestation of the grid, at once consecrating the raw material (grain of the paper in Twombly's work) and the mechanization of reproduction (micro-pattern of the computer portraits). (203)

[96] In *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination*, scholar Angus Fletcher sketches this hermeneutically minded affinity between Montaigne and Emerson:

> When Emerson wrote his "Circles," he was following in the footsteps of his formal master, Montaigne, whose late essay on three kinds of society, commerce, or association, as the word is variously translated, centered upon the description of his library: "The shape of my library is round with only sufficient flat wall for my table and chair; as it curves about, it offers me at a glance all my books arranged in five rows of shelves all around." (36)

Fletcher's analysis of spherical and/or architectural metaphors for reading could extend back at least to Heraclitus' conception of *Logos* as (in Heidegger's terms) a "laying-before which gathers" (60). But within my present paper it suffices to ask: What postwar image better fuses those of Emerson's circles and of Montaigne's library than Warhol's shelved, wraparound "Campbell's Soup Cans" display?

[97] Brainard's hypothetically minded illustration "If Nancy was a Boy" (1972) will revisit the drinking-glasses' invitation to a below-the-waist unveiling—presenting Ernie Bushmiller's comic heroine with a pointy penis.

[98] If my analysis of Warhol's clouds seems overdetermined, it is here worth considering that, according to art-historian Rosalind Krauss, few pictorial tropes call for greater scrutiny:

> Perspective was thus understood from the first to be a matter of architectonics, of a structure built from delimited bodies standing in a specific space and possessing a contour defined by lines. The immeasurability and ubiquity of the sky, however, and the unanalyzable surfacelessness of the clouds render these things fundamentally unknowable by the perspective order…. Thus before being a thematic element—functioning in the moral and allegorical sphere as a registration of miraculous vision…the / cloud / is a differential marker in a semiological system. (85)

Krauss bases this perspective-destabilizing analysis of "the / cloud" (one akin to Coplans' phenomenological account) upon Huber Damisch's 1972 text *Theorie du / nuage /.*

[99] By extension, Brainard's late-60's journals (such as "Diary 1969," quoted below) turn increasingly diffuse—comprised of fragmentary strophes, as though caught up in the centrifugal force that Warhol channels from his Factory rooftop:

> I *do* consider myself very much of an artist. But a real painter, no, not yet. I'm too spread out. And I'm just not that dedicated. That moral. But maybe I'm wrong. Or maybe I don't care much anymore. (true) True, at least, for today." (*Selected* 63)

[100] Here it seems worth noting that if Brainard's discrete entries proved any more "consequential" (if individual Warhol-balloons abandoned their uniform silver in pursuit of a more "distinctive" design, etc.), then such projects' subtle shifts in serial pattern would quickly get obscured.

[101] Of course Cage's anthology borrows from a much broader range of sources (Zen parables, friends' recollections, etc.) than does Brainard's. Yet my book's subsequent emphasis upon the repeated, first-person poetic-subject dictates this present focus upon Cage's "I"-centered entries. Similarly, while Cage, throughout his career, may construct far more formulaic modes of poetic composition than *Indeterminacy*, I primarily wish to examine (within this wider study of Pop lyricism's relation to "serial poetics") Cage's serial-realist texts.

[102] In his foreword to *Silence*, Cage writes that he first delivered "Lecture on Nothing" to Robert Motherwell's Artists' Club on Eighth Street "about 1949" (*Silence ix*). A decade later (August, 1959) the Italian journal *Incontri Musicali* printed the piece.

[103] In his liner-notes to the *Folkways* recording, Cage dramatizes this point—recounting an exchange with recording-engineer Mel Kaiser:

> It took about an hour and a half for the recording engineer, Mel Kaiser, to set up the studio. Finally he asked me to speak a little to get the level…. Then he did the same for the piano, the whistles, the tape machines and the amplified slinky. Then he said, "We're ready." However, I no sooner started speaking than he stopped me. I said, "What's the trouble?" He said, "You shouldn't pause the way you do between words; you should just speak naturally." I said, "But this is what I have to do. I tell one story a minute, and, when it's a short one, I have to spread it out. Later on when I come to a long one, I have to speak as rapidly as I can." He said, "O.K. I'll just keep my mouth shut." After the first side was made, he said, "I'm beginning to get the idea. I think we'd better do it over again." (7)

[104] In *Popism*, Warhol recounts Emile de Antonio delivering Jasper Johns's and Robert Rauschenberg's critical assessment of their fellow painter:

> De was such good friends with both Jasper and Bob that I figured he could probably tell me something I'd been wanting to know for a long time: why didn't they like me? Every time I saw them, they cut me dead. So when the waiter brought the brandy, I finally popped the question, and De said, "Okay, Andy, if you really want to hear it straight, I'll lay it out for you. You're too swish, and that upsets them." (11)

Within this context, it is also worth recalling that O'Hara rarely kept his homosexuality as "veiled" as his contemporaries Johns and Rauschenberg, and that one of the first people to recognize the poet's complicated relation to Warholian Pop was Joe Brainard: "I remember Frank O'Hara putting down Andy Warhol and then a week or so later defending him with his life" (*Homage* 167).

[105] A crucial difference between Perloff's and my own response to *Indeterminacy* rests upon the fact that her conception of the piece derives from the intermittent appearance of individual stories throughout Cage's printed volume *Silence*, whereas mine stems from repeated listenings to Cage's Folkways *Indeterminacy* recording (read in its ninety-story fullness), as well as from an online transcript of that performance (Eddie Kohler's interactive *Indeterminacy* site can be found at www.lcdf.org/indeterminacy).

Yet just as it seems strange that Perloff would title her own volume after Cage's piece, but then barely mention this progenitive project, it is puzzling to find, within a chapter ostensibly devoted to "the Poetry of Performance," the marginalization of Cage's monumental (90-minute) recital and subsequent audio-text.
[106] In his 1996 volume *John Cage (ex)plain(ed)*, artist/critic Richard Kostelanetz details Cage's proto-Pop sensibility:

> In the history of contemporary art, Cage functions as an antithetical catalyst who leaps ahead so that others may move forward by steps… Indeed, by making art out of materials not usually familiar to art, Cage, along with his mentor Marcel Duchamp, also provided antithetical precedents for pop art, found objects, industrial sculpture, and much else." (91)

Moreover, just as Marcel Duchamp serves as beneficent forebear for both Cage and Warhol, so documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio provides each artist with pivotal advice:

> A few days after the [*Indeterminacy*] talk was given at Columbia, I went to see Emile de Antonio. I gave him a copy of the stories. After he read them, he telephoned to say they should be published. I mentioned this to David Tudor. He said, "It should be published as a record." (Cage, Folkways 6)
>
> At five o'clock one particular afternoon the doorbell rang and De [Emile de Antonio] came in and sat down. I poured Scotch for us, and then I went over to where two paintings I'd done, each about six feet high and three feet wide, were propped, facing the wall…. One of them was a Coke bottle with Abstract Expressionist hash marks halfway up the side. The second one was just a stark, outlined Coke bottle in black and white. I didn't say a thing to De. I didn't have to—he knew what I wanted to know. "Well, look, Andy," he said…"one of these is a piece of shit, simply a little bit of everything. The other is remarkable—it's our society, it's who we are, its absolutely beautiful and naked, and you ought to destroy the first one and show the other." That afternoon was an important one for me. (Warhol, *Popism* 6)

A further correspondence between these two: Cage's notes to his 1959 Folkways recording state that "manuscript pages, originals, are available at the Stable Gallery, 58th and 7th Ave., N.Y.C."—the gallery that hosts Warhol's first solo New York show in 1961 (9).
[107] More generally: Perloff's reading of the "Cagean Koan" as "oddly unemotional" appears to confirm this critic's personal distaste for accessible affect, rather than any lack of engagement on Cage's part (*Poetics* 313). For even if Cage's tone did seem "affectless," would this necessarily mean that, reading his stories, we "don't feel" anything? Would we not at least feel affectlessness (strongly)? Just as Robert Rauschenberg's mid-century "White Paintings" (and Warhol's tabloid-silkscreens soon to follow) present "affectless" data in such profusion that this projective "neutrality" becomes the work's predominant feature—so *Indeterminacy*'s persistently-muted tone proves potentially overwhelming; its austere, architectonic structure serves to counter a potential vortex of affective/affectless epistemological quandary (what does it take for us to definitively "feel" or "not feel" a work of art?).
[108] Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" consistently offers this dualistic, micro/macro vantage upon its own temporal development:

> You have just experienced the structure of this talk from a
> microcosmic point of view . From a macrocosmic
> point of view we are just passing the halfway point in the
> second large part. (*Silence* 112)

[109] Cage's camp prose-line here proves, in fact, one of the postwar era's most lively modes of poetic perspectivism (with the oft-misread Friedrich Nietzsche thus revealed as proto-camp poet).
[110] Again, such leaps can occur within individual stories. The carefully-framed vantage constructed by Story #3, for instance, serve less to magnify Cage's detailed observations, than to facilitate movement across the phenomenological field:

> Once when several of us were driving up to Boston, we stopped at a roadside restaurant for lunch. There was a table near a corner window where we could all look out and see a pond. People were swimming and diving. There were special arrangements for sliding into the water. Inside the restaurant was a juke box. Somebody put a dime in. I noticed that the music that came out accompanied the swimmers, though they didn't hear it. (*Monday* 133)

Cage requires no dramatic Alpine prospect to be moved by the world's workings. A corner table along the interstate can suffice. Most importantly: Cage does not have to redirect his gaze for his perspective to shift.

Someone just has to put a dime in the jukebox. Likewise, the swimmers need not coordinate any collective alteration of stroke for their status within the overall scene to change: from active-subject ("swimming and diving") to unreflective-object-of-aesthetic-scrutiny ("though they didn't hear it"). "Polyattentive" drift takes precedence over dramatic progression. Abstaining from straightforward "parody," Cage's project offers not a stark break from the poet's traditional role of witness, but a more dynamic, multi-sensorial fulfillment of that role than any "realist" description could provide.

[111] Perloff's focus upon Cage's "unimpededness and interpenetration" continues throughout this critic's career: from her 1982 essay of that title, to her reference to "Cage's own aesthetic of "unimpededness and interpenetration" in 1994's "duchamp unto my self" (*Composed* 101).

[112] In his 1967 introduction to "How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run," Cage outlines this perspectival, multi-sensorial aesthetic—a form of abstraction premised upon process-based simultaneity:

> Many things, wherever one is, whatever one's doing, happen at once. They are in the air; they belong to all of us. Life is abundant. People are polyattentive. (*Monday* 133)

[113] Of course for Brainard, as for Barthes, the punctum (the *touche*) can also evokes the phantasmal, the erotic:

> I remember in a high school year book a big group picture where one boy in the back row was giving the finger.
>
> I remember the same year in the same yearbook a picture of a track star running and if you looked real close you could see what looked like the tip of his penis sticking out from under his shorts. (65)

[114] As with Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (another gradually expanded, multi-volume project that, like Brainard's, retains its initial introduction and conclusion), *I Remember* demonstrates an architectonic elasticity able to accommodate abundant supplies of digressive elaboration.

[115] In his 1970 "Cage and the Collage of Noises" review, composer Virgil Thomson describes one such event:

> In 1967, John Cage, working at the University of Illinois in Urbana with the engineer-composer Lejaren Hiller, began to plan, design, and move toward the final realization in sound (with visual admixtures) of a work lasting four and a half hours and involving a very large number of mechanical devices controlled by engineers, along with seven harpsichords played by hand. Nearly two years later this work, entitled *HPSCHD* (a six-letter version, suited to computer programming, of the word *harpsichord*) was produced on May 16, 1969 in the University's Assembly Hall, seating 18,000 people. By this time the work had come to include as sources of sound not only the keyboard instruments of its title…but also 52 tape machines, 59 power amplifiers, 59 loud-speakers, and 208 computer-generated tapes. The visual contributions to this performance employed 64 slide projectors showing 6,400 slides and 8 moving-picture projectors using 40 cinematographic films, probably silent in view of the general auditory complexities just mentioned. (67)

[116] Of course, within the more general context of American poetics, Whitman's omnivorous "I," Dickinson's serial correspondent to a world that "never wrote to her," Emerson's aficionado of "occult harmonies," and Thoreau's meticulous journal-keeper all stand in the background to Cage's and Brainard's auto-anthological projects.

[117] I do so in the paper entitled "Pop Poetics and Grid Aesthetics."

[118] Brainard's most extensive editorial cuts (from Angel Hair's three-volume *I Remember* series, to the composite Full Court Press publication) occur, for example, where the poet dilates upon a particular theme—most notably upon the character of his Aunt Ruby:

> I remember that Aunt Ruby wouldn't eat fish.
>
> I remember that Aunt Ruby didn't approve of drinking so my father built an invisible liquor cabinet under the kitchen bar.
>
> I remember that wool irritated Aunt Ruby's skin. (*More* 21)

[119] Part of what remains so endearing about each poet's "comprehensive" catalogue is the decision to bestow equal attention, affection, adulation upon celebrities (in Cage's case: Max Ernst, D.T. Suzuki; in Brainard's: J.F.K., Marilyn Monroe) and less-renowned personal acquaintances. Cage often cites fellow

mushroom-lover Guy Nearing (whom, according to a 1986 *New York Times* obituary, was a member of the American Rhododendron society—successful in developing domestic hybrids of the shrub) as authority and important personage; Brainard dilates upon the aesthetic value of playing Doctor with Joyce Vantries (an individual whose name draws but one response on a Google search: poet/critic Bruce Hainley quoting Joe Brainard).

[120] Perloff specifically refers to Cage's "elaborate typographical games and mathematical rules" in her brief consideration of *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)* (*Poetics* 308).

[121] Here I recall Edmund White's description (in this critic-novelist's "James Schuyler" essay) of the latter poet's literary "rubato":

> A musical poet is never committed to filling out a set, umptydum measure in predictable beats; he keeps the reader off balance by dilating a phrase here and contracting the next – the literary equivalent to rubato, as when Schuyler writes:
>
> … you are moonrise
> you are pain,
> you're mine,
> and I am yours, steaming
> out silk ties, they bind. (117).

[122] In Cage's mesostics, capitalized, acrostic-like phrases (artists' names, appropriated interview excerpts, etc.) run down the center of each stanza—with no capitalized letter reappearing in the project until a subsequent capital letter has been deployed. In a writing-through (a specialized form of mesostic), excerpted texts, rather than artists' names, comprise the capitalized string, and form the "wordpool" for the poem (along with occasionally added "'wing words'"). (Perloff, *Emergent* 293)

[123] Within this context, one obvious difference between Cage's aesthetic sensibility and Warhol's (or Brainard's)—the latters' increased attunement to brand-names, iconic images, pop-cultural heroes, etc.—appears less pronounced: as Cage's affection for the repeated "Marcel Duchamp" phrase suggests an affinity to Warhol's celebrity-portraits soon to follow.

[124] Here "UNIMPEDEDNESS AND INTERPENETRATION" can seem to suggest proto-Gay Lib sloganeering, as much as to connote any neat theory of the post-anechoic text.

[125] It is worth noting that Brainard's initial response to O'Hara's death proved much less pertinent: "I remember the day Frank O'Hara died. I tried to do a painting somehow especially for him (especially good) and it turned out awful" (*Homage* 168).

[126] For spatial reasons, I restrict myself to but two additional O'Hara references—from "Diary 1969," and "December 22, 1970":

> More vulnerable. It may be a perverse thing to want, but that's what I want. I want to be more vulnerable. Frank O'Hara. I think often of the way Frank O'Hara was. If I have a hero (I do) it is Frank O'Hara. (*Selected* 54)
>
> Suicide may be corny but that doesn't make it any less real
>
> Frank O'Hara
>
> (Please don't take that in the cheap way it could be taken) (*Selected* 100)

Especially within the context of Brainard's postmortem, erotically-charged identification with O'Hara, both statements seem to echo the deceased's camp call-and-response routine from fifteen years prior:

> How am I to become a legend, my dear? ….
>
> Destroy yourself, if you don't know! (198)

[127] To add to the confusion, Brainard's 1968's "Frank O'Hara" piece seems to quote from "Diary 1969":

> I wrote in a diary not long ago that "If I have a hero it is Frank O'Hara." I do. And it is Frank. Because Frank really loved life. Which, as you know, is not so easy. You can get hurt that way. It's very time consuming. And, at least for me, it's hard to be that uninhibited. (*Homage* 168)

[128] I mean for the phrase "serial realism" to serve as a self-reflexive term. For "serial" and "realism" offer nearly perfect anagrams: providing repetitive selections of letters, with slight variation for added "realistic" effect. Still, of course, justifications for such overdetermined phrase-making "are slim."

[129] In her gloss on the rhetorical conventions operative in James Wright's "Snowstorm in the Midwest," poetry critic Marjorie Perloff sounds like Steiner discussing Alberti's *De Pictura*:

> The voice of the poem is solitary and speaks out of a single moment in time.
> (Perloff, *Dance* 155)

> In a painting with vanishing-point perspective and chiaroscuro, the assumption is that we are observing a scene through a frame from a fixed vantage point *at one moment in time*.
> (Steiner 23; italics in original)

Both Perloff and Steiner, in fact, base their analyses of narrative upon *Critical Inquiry*'s Fall, 1980 special-issue on this theme.

[130] Less strict than our chronological conception of history, less climactic than our catharsis-minded conception of story, Alberti's *istoria* suggests not a dramatic series of events, but a single, compacted scene ("beauty is born from the composition of planes") (Alberti 72).

[131] Alberti's 1435 treatise on painting contains what is considered the first scientific study of perspective.

[132] My response to Steiner centers upon the general mechanics of narrative-construction in painting and poetry. However, this critic's insightful reading of the aestheticized "romance" narrative ("the romance scrutinizes the act of seeing and emphasizes the conventional split between image and story") proves equally pertinent to serial narratives such as *Indeterminacy* and *I Remember*. Musing upon Warhol's famous declaration that he wishes to be a machine, as well as upon the artist's assertion that Pop is "all fantasy," Steiner offers an analysis apropos to the perspectivist poetic-subject constructed by Cage and Brainard:

> Warhol's seemingly illogical connection here between repetition and fantasy is a key insight in pop art, and further accounts for these artists' concern with the romance narrative. Mass media repetition detaches the image from its real referent in the world and from its original context as an image. Such free-floating, endlessly interreferentila images are the very heart of romance.
> (48, 178)

[133] Brunelleschi's fifteenth-century biographer, Antonio Manetti, describes how the aforementioned architect composed his proto-perspective designs (and discovered that all lines converge as they progress towards the horizon) by painting the reflected forms of buildings directly onto a mirror. Brainard's quasi-autobiographical assemblages, I will argue, use the "painted" (or, as in John Ashbery's poem, the "convex") mirror to equally compelling effect.

[134] Seurat offers an important transition:

> One of the most immediate results was the creation of a new relation between design and narrative (respectively, the abstractive and representational tendencies of repetition). Seurat, Van Gogh, and Cézanne built their compositions out of repeatable minimal units…. But Seurat went on in *Les Poseuses* to repeat not only dots but his subject, who appears in three different poses on the same canvas. (Steiner 5)

In what follows, I aim to demonstrate that Seurat's focus upon the reconstituted human figure (as site of epistemic intervention) has direct parallels to the repeated "I" adopted in *I Remember*—an "I" that transforms this works from random collage into serial-realist narrative.

[135] Steiner's imagined triptych evokes James Rosenquist's epic canvases, and thus suggests the diversity of aesthetic practices placed under the umbrella term "Pop." My own study, like Steiner's, focuses upon Pop's most serial-minded painters and poets.

[136] Preceding chapters' emphasis upon artistic "assemblage" here picks up more pointed connotation. For while Cage's and Brainard's juxtapositions of discrete episodes might appear to suggest collage-like processes, each artist's extensive engagement with modular, interchangeable units (sixty-second stories, anaphoric recollections) suggests a mode of assembly closer to Arman's monochromatic arrangements of forks, dolls-heads, pocket watches, etc. than to the cut-and-paste methods of early Braque and Picasso.

[137] I take my reading of Lichtenstein's triptych from Steiner's excellent analysis (see pages 164-165).

[138] Chatman's "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)" essay can be found in the Leo Braudy- and Marshall Cohen-edited anthology *Film Theory and Criticism*, 5th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[139] Again, while Chatman's dualistic definition of narrative might seem to exclude from attention Brainard's fragmentary text, it is this poet's autobiographical bent that grants many of his most elliptical

writings narrative status. For as Steiner here suggests, the implicit coherence assigned to autobiographical discourse permits increased deviation from classic dramatic paradigms:

> Its story wholeness, in the sense of its having a specific beginning, middle, and end, is an accomplished fact. Moreover, it already has a prototypical principle of story wholeness available to it—that of anyone's life. This "biographical model" is the totality that links countless medieval narrative paintings into wholes: the assumption of the central figure's life as the narrative that the episodes actually rendered demarcate. (32)

[140] Design, of course, and as Steiner points out, need not assume pejorative connotations: especially in the modern era (think of Cage citing Satie's assertion that "we must bring about a music which is like furniture").

[141] Here I recall scholar Richard Bridgman's account of Stein drafting her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by day, and *Stanzas in Meditation* by night.

[142] French novelist Georges Perec (himself a Brainard emulator, as suggested by 1978's *Je me souviens*) will further refine this vision in his *Life: A User's Manual*—a book whose narrative conceit, Perec-confidant Harry Mathews tells us, was "originally suggested by a Saul Steinberg drawing," and required that its author "imagine a nine-story, turn-of-the-century Parisian apartment building from which the facade has been removed" (Matthews 5).

[143] Less sleek than the streamlined urban skyscraper, Brainard's incremental edifice includes more nooks and crannies, more eroticized, Benozzo-esque dens and foyers:

> I remember locker rooms. And locker room smells.
>
> I remember a dark green cement floor covered with wet footprints going in all different directions. Thin white towels. And not "looking around" too much. (49-50)
>
> I remember fantasies of being in jail, and very monk-like in my cell, hand-writing out a giant great novel.
>
> I remember (on the other hand) fantasies of being in jail, and of good raw sex. All very "black and white: somehow. Black bars, white tiles. White flesh, black hairs. The rubbery warm whites of cum, and the shiny cold blacks of leather and slate. (96)
>
> I remember a sex fantasy sequence in my head of being forced to "perform" on the floor, under the stairs, of an apartment building I either lived in, or was visiting, I can't remember which. Needless to say, the mad sex fiend criminal rapist was pretty cute to boot. (106).

[144] Here I am reminded of Simon Rodia's *Watts Towers* (referred to in my preceding accunt of William Seitz's *The Art of Assemblage* show), but also of medieval mnemonic-techniques in which a text's various components got "assigned" to adjoining rooms within an elaborate, imagined edifice.

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