

Charles Bernstein

1950-

An Autobiographical Interview Conducted by Loss Pequeño Glazier



Charles Bernstein with his son, Felix, 1992

This interview was written in the summer of 1995. Questions and answers were exchanged by e-mail.

LPG: My first question is one that has been on my mind for quite some time. Reading your work, there seems to be a presence of your early life in your writing, certainly from the point of view of language and surface texture. Yet not much has been published on this subject. You were born in New York, correct?

CB: Yes, at Doctors' Hospital, Upper East Side, Manhattan, on April 4, 1950. As my father had

it on the announcement: "Sherry Bernstein, Labor; Herman Bernstein, Management."

LPG: I'd also be interested in hearing about your parents. Certainly, the idea of poetry as a business and the generational conflict—for example, in "Sentences My Father Used"—makes this of great interest.

CB: My father, Herman Joseph Bernstein, was born Joseph on December 22, 1902, in Manhattan; he was the eighth of eleven brothers and sisters: Joseph (who died before him, so the name was never really used), Sadie, Harry, Gad, David, Pauline, Ceil, Evelyn, Sidney, and Nahum. His father, Charles, died when my father was young; his mother, Jenny, died in early 1945. Both immigrated from western Russia in the 1890s, settling in the Lower East Side and then the Village. Jenny ran a Jewish resort in Long Branch, New Jersey, for a while but was put out of business by an epidemic; later she ran a restaurant in lower Manhattan. My father's grandfather spent his days studying the Talmud and the like; he did not work. Many of my father's brothers were very successful in business and real estate. My father mostly worked in the garment industry, eventually as co-owner of Smartcraft Corporation, a medium-size manufacturer of ladies' dresses, one of the first firms to make cheap (\$12) knock-offs of fashion dresses. Back taxes did him in in the early 1960s; he had a heart attack but eventually rebounded as the American consultant to Teijin, Ltd., Japan's largest textile manufacturer. He married my mother on December 12, 1945, at the age of forty-three. He died January 20, 1978, of leukemia.

My mother was an only child. She was born on February 2, 1921, and lived with her mother, Birdie Kegel, on Avenue P, near Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Birdie, born Bertha in western Russia

in 1891, was abandoned by her father, Louis Stolitsky, who left for the United States. Her mother died, and she was sent, alone, to the U.S. when she was seven; she went to live with her father and stepmother, an unhappy circumstance for her. She married Edward Kegel in 1918. He was a successful Brooklyn real estate developer; he died of a streptococcus infection in 1927.

LPG: Given that both your parents had their roots in western Russia, might I ask specifically where in western Russia they came from? Importantly, did you grow up in an environment of spoken Yiddish or Russian? Do you have any familiarity with or memory of either of these languages?

CB: I don't know the precise locations where my grandparents on my mother's side were born. My father's mother emigrated from Lithuania in about 1888, when she was in her early teens; his father emigrated from near Odessa. But this was ancient history to my father, who, after

all, was born in New York, and I don't ever recall him talking about it, except in the oral history I did with him just before he died, which I had to listen to again in order to answer your question. My father did not dwell on such things, at least not so as I could tell. Maybe it was that he didn't want to trouble me, or my brother and sister, about it; maybe he didn't think we'd be interested; maybe he didn't want to think about it. The main thing was that the family got out. In things like this I found my father quite opaque: he didn't seem at all introspective, although to say that is to reflect an enormous gulf between his own cultural circumstances and my own. In many ways my father seemed foreign to me, which is not to say unfamiliar; so it is all the more startling that I now find myself resembling him in so many ways. The early poem that you mentioned, "Sentences My Father Used" (in *Controlling Interests*), tried to think this through; much of this poem is based on the oral history I did with my father. (I'm sure I'm not alone in finding Paul Auster's evocation of his



The Bernsteins: (from left) Charles, father, brother Edward, grandmother Birdie Kegel, mother, sister Leslie, 1953

father, in *The Invention of Solitude*, very close to my own experience of my father.)

But equally, in the case of my mother and my grandmother, origins and roots were rarely a topic. The only grandparent I knew was my grandmother, who always lived very close by, but since she came to America as a little girl, any echo of Yiddish was long gone. My mother says the only time she remembers hearing her parents speak Yiddish was when they were saying something they didn't want her to understand. So, no, we had only American English at home, except for the occasional Friday night Hebrew prayer, although neither of my parents, nor my grandmother, knew much Hebrew, and what Hebrew was around was the product of religious education. That was the context in which I learned a very little Hebrew in the couple of years before I turned thirteen, at Congregation Rodeph Shalom, a Reform synagogue on the Upper West Side.

LPG: But wouldn't your father have been familiar with these languages? And if the background of your parents was not a linguistic presence, wasn't it of importance in their political outlook?

CB: My father probably spoke Yiddish as a kid, but there was no hint of that in our household, except for the pervasive idiomatic insistences that come naturally from any such linguistic background and add texture and character to a person's speech. For example, my father would say "close the lights" or "take a haircut." I know there must be dozens more examples, but I can't bring any to mind right now, only keep hearing him saying, "Can't you kids close the lights? This place is lit up like Luna Park."

My parents were assimilationists who nonetheless had a strong Jewish and later Zionist identification. As for many of their generation, this made for interesting contradictions. We were loosely kosher in the "beef fry" years; but in other years the bacon fried plentifully and tasted sweet. Or we were kosher on Friday night when my Aunt Pauline came to dinner but not the rest of the week. Of course, on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when dozens of relatives descended on our apartment for gigantic and endless meals that I grew to dread for their tediousness, we were strictly kosher, with once-a-year Pesach plates and cakes made from matzoh meal. (Those who might "correctly" say you can't



Charles with his mother, Sherry Bernstein, 1954

be a little bit kosher ignore the actual practice of Jewish ethnicity.) My father's family was associated with the Congregation Sherith Israel, the hundreds-year-old Spanish and Portuguese synagogue relocated across the street from our building; I occasionally attended the Orthodox services in their august main sanctuary. But as I say, for my parents the religious end of Judaism was less pronounced than a decisive, but at the same time mutable, ethnic identification.

In politics my parents were liberal Democrats, but not especially political, though I can still remember handing out leaflets on Broadway and 74th Street for Adlai Stevenson when I was six. And while I am pleased to have been enlisted into the Stevenson camp, and have holes in my own shoes to prove it, my politics and that of my parents grew further apart. When I was a teenager, my father and I used to have vituperative exchanges at dinner about Vietnam and about racism as he embraced Hubert Humphrey and I drifted leftward. More recently, my mother expressed her exasperation that I was the only Jew in New York who

supported Jesse Jackson, though I pointed out to her that my brother had also voted for Jackson. (I center here on my father not only because it is more relevant to your question but also because my relation with my mother continues in a way that makes me less apt to characterize it.)

In any case, my father's concerns were centered foursquarely on success, and too often, and very painfully for him, failure in business. As he put it, "One can achieve success and happiness if the right priorities are valued." "The right priorities" was not a particularly elastic concept for him, and in this he represents, more than less, a new-immigrant generation that didn't have the leisure to question what their very hard work made possible for my generation.

LPG: Louis Zukofsky and Charles Reznikoff are writers who have been consistently of great interest to you in their ability to "create a new world in English, a new word for what they called America." How does the experience of your family inform your reading of these authors? I was wondering if, especially in Reznikoff's work, other than the literary and documentary qualities, there are specific events or issues that you find particularly resonant in your personal history?

CB: Yes, my relation to Zukofsky and Reznikoff is tempered by this history. Zukofsky and my father were virtually the same age and grew up near each other, but there seem few other points in common. Zukofsky and Reznikoff interrogated and resisted the very ideologies that my father accepted as the givens of American life. And both had gone well beyond the high school education my father possibly completed. (My mother's education was not much more extensive, though she had a few years of "finishing school" after high school. But that is a different story.)

My father certainly had no sympathy for artists, whom he thought of as frauds (in the case of "modern" art) or slackers (as in the case of his own rabbinic grandfather, whom he saw as something of a family black sheep). And we grew up surrounded by popular American culture but very little in the way of literature or art. While my parents hardly even played music on the radio, the newspapers—the *Times*, the *Post*, the *Daily News*, and later *Women's Wear*



Charles with his father in Italy, 1966

Daily—loomed large. We did have books, but they were mostly inherited popular novels of the previous decades supplemented by a few contemporary best-sellers or condensed books (just add boiling water). My mother had decorated a large part of our apartment in a very formal French colonial style. The large living room, for example, was for company—not for everyday life. In this context, books become decor, as with a complete set of Ruskin's work bought by the yard for a beautiful antique bookshelf. As far as I can tell, the Ruskin was never opened during my childhood, though I do appreciate the fact that it presided over us, in some subliminal way.

Zukofsky and Reznikoff are important to me because they suggest a totally different sense of Jewishness than anything I knew of in the 1950s, something along the lines that Isaac Deutcher, writing from a Left perspective, describes as the "non-Jewish Jew," but also part of the heterodox context chartered by Jerome Rothenberg in *A Big Jewish Book*. This is something of a circus sideshow to "serious" Juda-

ism, with opening acts by Maimonides and the Baal Shem Tov, Spinoza and Heine, or, in the main tent, Groucho and Harpo and Chico Marx, Lenny Bruce, Woody Allen, Bob Dylan. While I never mentioned Jewishness in my college piece on Stein and Wittgenstein (and the subject is largely unmentioned in each of their works), it is, of course, an obvious point of contact as well as a crucial, if implicit, reference point for me.

But let me end this string of thoughts by quoting a passage from Amos Oz that, by a delicious coincidence, Eric Selinger e-mailed while I was answering your question:

Now suppose a new Kafka is growing up right now, here in San Francisco, California. Suppose he is fourteen-years-old right now. Let's call him Chuck Bernstein. Let's assume that he is every bit of a genius as Kafka was in his time. His future must, as I see it, depend on an uncle in Jerusalem or an experience by the Dead Sea, or a cousin in a kibbutz or something inspired by the Israeli live drama. Otherwise, with the exception of the possibility that he is growing up among the ultra-Orthodox, he will be an American writer of Jewish origin—not a Jewish American writer. He may become a new Faulkner, but not a new Kafka. ("Imagining the Other: 1," in *The Writer in the Jewish Community: An Israeli-North American Dialogue*, ed. Richard Siegel and Tamar Sofer [Associated University Presses, 1993], 122.)

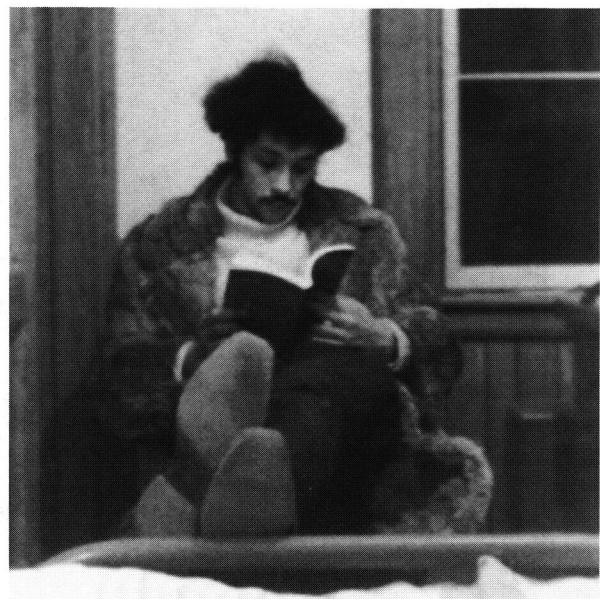
It seems to me this tortured and reductive conception of identity is just what the tradition of writers I've mentioned have refused. And it is in exploring and realizing alternative identity formations that at least one sliver of a Jewish tradition may be of use; in this, Kafka is our dark and imploding star.

LPG: As your father was a manager in the garment industry, how did this reflect upon your own sense of self while growing up? (In other words, his work could have seemed petty or commercial compared to your own engagement with social concerns, or you may have felt pressure to become a part of the "cottage" industry.) Did you have to fight pressure to participate in your father's commercial enterprise?

CB: One day I woke up and found myself metamorphosed into a tiny businessman. All that I have

done since, political and poetic, has changed this not at all. For poetry, after all, is the ultimate small business, requiring a careful keeping of accounts to stay afloat. Not to mention all that "small press" stuff like distribution, promotion, and book manufacturing. That is to say, I have wanted to bring poetry into the "petty, commercial," indeed material and social world of everyday life rather than make it a space in which I could remain "free" of these things, or, better to say, chained to an illusion of such freedom.

Because my father and his brothers were "self-made" men, they believed that theirs was the only practical, and therefore right, course in life. The proof was that it had worked for them, and, as far as I can tell, they never came to understand how the lives so created could look so hollow, if not misguided, to at least a few of the next generation. To start a business on nothing, as my father had done in the 1920s, when he bought and resold short end pieces of fabric rolls that would otherwise have been discarded ("the trim, the waste"), meanwhile being weekly hounded by his successful brother to repay a small loan, sets in place a pattern of anxiety and diminished expectations for the, what? "quality" of life, if aesthetics can be defined, so, that doesn't eas-



At Harvard College, Thayer Hall, freshman year, 1969

ily, if ever, unravel. The business isn't something you do to make money; it's what you do, who you are. Family, like cultural or social activities, is an extended lunch break.

And what went with this, at least for my father, was an unquestioning belief not only in progress and industry in the abstract but also in the absolute value of industrialization, Western Civilization, the market system, and technology that the catastrophes of the Second World War did not, finally, touch. I imagine that the 1920s and 1930s passed my father by as he worked, singly and single-mindedly, to establish himself, to create his own estate. That came, finally, during the war, and he married for the first time in the very first year of the postwar era, and at pretty much the age I am now, starting a family when most men of his generation had grown-up kids. He came the closest to his American Dream in the 1950s. It was as if his life had led him to this decade of prosperity and surface tranquillity, and he remained, for the rest of his life, its unshakable constituent.

But here's where the ethnic ethos comes in again: it wasn't for us, the children, to continue in business but to become professionals, free from the grinding labor and terrorizing uncertainty of business. The pressure, then, was to be a physician or lawyer; my own choice, at least initially toward downward social mobility, was rankling and fundamentally unacceptable and must have made me seem ungrateful and disrespectful of the whole struggle of the business, of his life. I know my father often complained about my lack of respect and certainly had no respect to spare for my choices. I pretty much ignored the pressure, which is to say, adamantly rejected the life so envisioned for me, and never really looked back.

LPG: Tell me about your brothers and sisters. Did you grow up in New York? What was your early life like?

CB: I have a brother, Edward Amber (changed his last name), born October 8, 1946, and a sister, Leslie Gross (married to Donald Gross),



Susan Bee Laufer, at the time she and Charles Bernstein first met, with a painting of her by Miriam Laufer in the background, 1969



Charles and Susan, about 1972

born June 16, 1948. My parents moved from 81st Street just west of Columbus to 101 Central Park West just before I was born; my mother still lives in the same luxurious twelfth-floor apartment, which overlooks Central Park. Classic Upper West Side.

Like my sister and brother, I went to a self-congratulating “progressive” school of the Deweyite persuasion, the Ethical Culture School. I was there kindergarten to sixth grade. None of us did very well there, and I intensely disliked the social, cultural, and intellectual environment. This was a place that, even if you were “comfortable,” the other kids, and their parents, made you feel like you were a pauper. On the school’s part, they did not think much of me, as I was repeatedly told: my penmanship and spelling were abysmal; I was slow to read and in constant need of remedy in the form of remedial groups; I did not socialize right; my appearance was somewhat ajar. I give a sense of this in “Standing Target” in *Controlling Interests*, where I quote some reports from Fieldston day camp, which was run by Ethical. My favorite thing to do was stay home; some years I missed as many as forty days. And at home, there was the chance for reverie, for sleeping late, for making tuna fish sticks sprinkled with paprika, for watching daytime TV. I read *TV Guide* religiously in those days and knew

all the panelists on the celebrity game shows, all the actors on the sitcoms, and all the comedy shows from the early 1950s that I had missed the first time around.

I liked TV and hanging out at home—but not sports! I was the kind of kid that was always picked last for the team and put in right field or its equivalent. By the time I was in high school (after a brief flirtation with soccer, all dressed in black to play goalie, in junior high school), I used to put my hands in my pockets whenever I was thrust into a game. I never played catch with any member of my family, but we used to go out to Chinese dinners on Thanksgiving and Christmas, and I liked that.

I can still remember my delight at the reaction of my sixth-grade teacher, Miss Green, when I sported a button that read “I may look interested but I’m just being polite.” I’ve always tried to be polite. But I did like one thing about Miss Green’s class: for months, it seems to me, we read, always starting from the first page, *The Old Curiosity Shop*: “Night is generally my time for walking.” I loved that and could, no matter how awkward I otherwise felt in the class, fall into that prose and be transported.

I was not admitted to Fieldston, Ethical’s upper school, a routine matter for my classmates, and went on, to my great relief, to a small, highly conventional, private school, Franklin, for seventh and eighth grades, and it was there that the worlds of history and literature opened up for me. What I hated about Ethical was that you never received grades but were given pop psychology reports about your development and social integration. At Franklin, there were concrete tasks assigned and measured by tests; the right attitude was less important than the right facts. Certainly, there were some tough times adjusting. I wanted to do really well and can remember cheating a few times on tests in seventh grade, as if that would prove to myself that I knew a thing or two. Actually, the academic side of the school became the great focus of my life as I began to read the history of Greece or China and especially to read literature. I remember a great, thick collection of international short stories, with a gray cover, that I got while at Franklin, and the excitement I felt when I read, even if I could not fully understand, Kafka, Genet, Camus, and especially Sartre. Then one day in seventh or eighth grade an English teacher

named Francis Xavier Walker wrote on the board, "Bun is such a sad word is it not, and man is not much better is it." He said it was by Samuel Beckett, and that he liked the way it sounded, the way it focused on the sound of the words man and bun. That was kind of like hearing about the theory of relativity. I was hooked; in fact years seemed to go by when all I wanted to do was stay in my small room overlooking the park, which at that point I rarely stepped into, and read books and watch TV.

LPG: Yes, you have written that "My work is as influenced by *Dragnet* as by Proust." This comment, of course, is indicative of the sources of "information" we have in a media culture like ours. Did your interest in the classroom experience change when you went to high school?

CB: Well, I always loved those clipped voice-overs. But I have to say, the influence of *Dragnet* was nothing compared to the Manhattan Yellow Pages.

I spent high school at a terrific school, the Bronx High School of Science, where, in my senior year, I edited the school newspaper, *Science Survey*. Science was a "specialized" school, something like today's magnet schools, but pretty much the only such schools in New York, in the *Sputnik* era, were science schools, so my interest in going there was for the quality of the school and not for the science and math, which I never had much interest in. Strangely, I always did very well on standardized tests of physics, chemistry, geometry, algebra, and the like, but I never felt like I "got" it. My interests were literature, history, social studies. Indeed, I coordinated our high school Forum series, which sponsored speakers every month; I remember in particular taking a cab back into the city with James Farmer of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality]. There were great, even inspired, English teachers at Science. The one I was closest to was Richard Feingold, who gave vivid lectures on *Hamlet*, Jonathan Edwards, Emily Dickinson, and Robert Frost. Feingold is now a professor of eighteenth-century poetry at Berkeley. He came to my reading there a few months back—I hadn't seen him in over twenty-five years.

During high school I started going to the movies a lot, and also to the theater. I grew up with the big musicals of the period, but at this point I got interested in Pinter and im-

ports from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Peter Brooks's productions, but also off-Broadway stuff: I can still remember being riveted by Leroi Jones's *Dutchman*. You know, the whole world of "high culture" and modernism opened up for me and I was always making lists of what I should know about. I remember sending for WQXR's Martin Bookspan's list of the one hundred most important classical records and then checking them out at the library or buying them. I mean, I had no information about this kind of thing but I was fascinated. My parents, like I said, didn't listen to music or read very much beyond the newspapers and magazines (though my mother would occasionally read a best-selling novel), but they did do things like get me a subscription to Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic, and they were happy to buy me tickets for lots of other concerts all over the city, which I generally went to by myself. When I was sixteen, my father, sister, and I went to Europe. We visited London, Paris, Florence, Rome, and Berlin. In London I went to plays every night and saw all the museums, all the sights. It was thrilling, although it was quite difficult to travel with my father, and the deep generational and political divisions between us were never so apparent.

LPG: When did this divergent cultural information begin to coalesce for you?

CB: Everything fell into place in the mid-1960s: those great movies from Fellini and Antonioni and Godard, Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan and Richie Havens, and much that holds up far less well these days (I still have my Procol Harum and Incredible String Band records), the Be-Ins, the smoke from loose joints. While I had a Bar Mitzvah at thirteen and was, at the time, quite religious, all that started to come apart within a year or two. The civil rights movement, the sit-ins, the Mississippi Freedom summer, Martin Luther King, and then the Vietnam War all increasingly focused my politics. I tuned to WBAI, Pacifica radio in New York. I was around for the demonstrations during the Columbia University strike during my senior year in high school, and also involved with demonstrations at my high school (against regulations prohibiting "shirts without colors and dungaree-type pants," among other things).

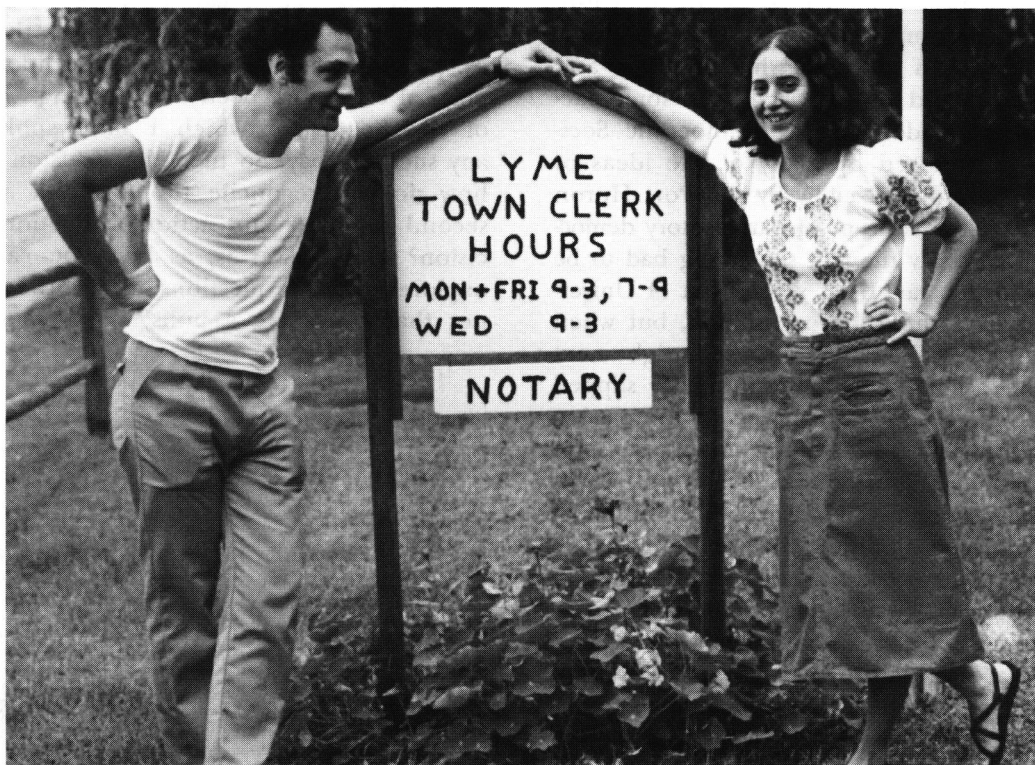
I've never shaken the shock and sadness I felt when Martin Luther King was assassinated; it was my eighteenth birthday. In the summer of 1968, after a trip I took by myself to Scandinavia (I wanted to see the fjords) and also to Greece (where you could still get by on a couple of dollars a day), I returned to the U.S. to go to the Chicago demonstrations during the Democratic National Convention. Like everyone else there, I got gassed, got "radicalized" (again), and got to hear Allen Ginsberg chant "Om" to the crowd.

I met Susan (Bee Laufer) in high school—at a party in Greenwich Village on February 9, 1968. Her parents had both grown up in Berlin, had left in 1936 on a youth aliyah to Palestine when they were teenagers, and had met in Jerusalem. They came to New York in 1948—Sigmund keeping the same job, until a couple of years ago, and the same apartment all this while. Susan's parents were both artists: her mother, Miriam, a wonderful, unjustly unrecognized, painter doing 1950s-style expressionist paintings of, among other things, female nudes,

and a later series painted on car windshields. The Laufers, who had been sympathetic with the Left when in Palestine, were a remarkable political and cultural contrast to my own family. With Susan, I started to go to the art galleries and then also up to Provincetown.

LPG: Then you attended Harvard, correct? This must have been quite a change from the cultural and social excitement of Manhattan. Was this a satisfying experience?

CB: I found Harvard a rather unpleasant place and was shocked by the snobbism and arrogance. It was unbelievable to me that the "men" at the Freshman Commons would clink their glasses when a woman walked into the hall. If Katie Roiphe and other post-feminists would like to go back to this time, they can have it. This was the last year that you had to wear a tie and jacket to dinner; there were parietals in effect in the still all-male dorms. I found the environment suffocating and depressing. And living in Harvard Yard was like living in a zoo—



Wedding photo—Charles Bernstein and Susan Bee Laufer, Lyme, New Hampshire, August 17, 1977

with all the tourists taking pictures of you and your environs when you poked your head out the door.

I have to say, it was an eye-opener to realize how few of my classmates actually cared about the arts, literature, history, though after a while it was possible to find like-minded souls. Still, Harvard students, on the whole, seemed contemptuous of the arts and of learning in a way I never encountered at Bronx Science; I soon came to realize that the enhanced admission for students from elite prep schools pulled down the intellectual, cultural, and moral level of the school, just as it does the country. Talk about affirmative action. In my year only one student from all the public schools of Chicago got into Harvard, while 40 percent of the classes at the elite schools were admitted. I got a real sense of where this was all going when I had a job doing childcare at a twenty-fifth reunion. At the Boston Pops concert, the middle-aged Harvard grads gave a standing ovation to an orchestral version of "Rain Drops Keep Falling on My Head." I keep that image in mind when I think of our "elite" institutions and what they are doing for our culture.

I was not alone in my distress. In my freshman year I became involved in the antiwar movement, even if my somewhat anarchic and pacifist politics did not sit well with some factions of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]. I was impressed by many of the ideas of the New Left, and especially by the Port Huron Statement and the concept of participatory democracy. And I certainly thought something had to be done to stop the war. I was in and out of University Hall during the 1969 occupation, but when the police were called, I was in bed, right next door to the occupied building. I quickly slipped into the building and was arrested for trespassing in a case that was ultimately dismissed. Despite the dismissal in a court of law, I was put under indefinite "warning" by Harvard's Committee of Rights and Responsibilities ("We're right, you're responsible"). I have been amused and appalled to see how in the intervening years some of my classmates who did not take a stand of principle against the war have parlayed their own failures of political judgment into a source of pundit power: I am thinking here of James Fallows and Michael Kinsley.

LPG: The political informs your work on many levels. It seems relevant here, given your experience

with politics at the Columbia and Harvard strikes and the (one would presume extremely significant) Chicago demonstrations, to ask whether you were considering political activism as a future involvement. What influenced you in this regard? And wouldn't "literary" action be considered less than effective? How do you reconcile this?

CB: I never wanted to be a professional activist, although in some ways maybe that is what I've become. I always thought protest was for the informed citizen, taking the time out of her or his everyday life, time hard to spare but required by the very demands of citizenship. The demonstrations of the 1960s and 1970s were exhilarating, and I dearly miss that level of idealism and activism in the U.S., dearly miss the time when the political and cultural Left, or shades of it, set the national agenda rather than the religious Right, as now seems the case. Still, I was amazed at a reunion held on the twentieth anniversary of the Harvard strike how many of the people spoke of those events as the high point of their life. I think my own preoccupations were and are elsewhere.

It seems like it can never be stated often enough that the claims made for "the politics of poetic form" are against the idea of the political efficacy of poetry. If anything, the politics of the poetic for which I have spoken mute any such efficacy. So then the question becomes, how do you reconcile thought and action, or second thoughts and action, reflection and decision? The answer is, as best you can. Poetry explores crucial questions about the core values that constitute a polis; it allows for reform-



Charles and Susan, 1978



Sulfur Conference, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 1988: (top row, from left) James Clifford, Michael Palmer, Clark Coolidge, Eliot Weinberger; (middle, from left) Clayton Eshleman, Caryl Eshleman, Charles Bernstein, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, John Yau; (bottom, from left) Jerome Rothenberg, Jed Rasula, Marjorie Perloff

mulations of the basic issues of political policy and the means we use to represent them. It may even mock what men, and women, hold most dear, so that in our laughter we may come to terms with what we cling to.

Poetry thickens discussion, refuses reductive formulations. It sings of values not measurable as commercial sums. But such poetic politics do not exhaust one's political options or commitments. I don't suggest that aesthetics replace politics. I just don't believe in a politics that abolishes aesthetics.

LPG: If Harvard was a disappointment culturally, I wonder what your expectations had been. Did you expect a revelation in terms of education? Was there a specific grant or scholarship that encouraged you to attend? Why did you choose to go to Harvard?

CB: My choice was to go to the best college that I could get into, where "best" was conven-

tionally defined. This was a given, which I had no means to contest. I bought the image of Harvard as the ultimate place of Higher Learning, in which I would be able to pursue my studies in a manner that deepened and extended what I most liked at Bronx Science. In many ways this was possible at Harvard, and I certainly did have the extraordinary opportunity to read and converse. I just had no idea what went with this; my studies had not prepared me for the fact that the fruit of learning would be laced with nausea-inducing poison and that for many the lesson learned was not to eat that fruit, or not eat very much. That is perhaps the chief product of the Harvard education: willful ignorance, learned callousness, and an ability keep your eye on your personal bottom line (defined by money and social status). So, yes, this was disillusioning, and it hit me hard and almost immediately upon arriving—that "learning," as I had romanticized it, was not disinterested and indeed was being used as a



"Objectivist" Poets Conference, Royaumont, France, 1989: (from left) Emmanuel Hocquard, Pierre Alferi, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Jean-Paul Auxémery

means of preserving social injustice; that one had to struggle, even at a place like this, to create a space for thought, reflection, art. These are lessons I have found very useful. But perhaps, looking back, it's not Harvard that shocked me but America, an America I had not yet met in the culturally rich, but unrepresentative, precincts I had inhabited up to that point in my life.

LPG: Your involvement with philosophy is well known. Certainly, "Thought's Measure," among others, qualifies as a consummate philosophical essay. You studied philosophy at Harvard?

CB: Yes, I concentrated in philosophy at college: though my interests were more in the history of philosophy and "continental" philosophy than in analytic philosophy, toward which I was antipathetic. As a freshman I took "Introduction to Symbolic Logic" with Willard Quine. He mumbled to the blackboard during most of the lectures, though I did find his books witty and provocative. I had a dream one night in which I was haphazardly trying to stuff all my clothes into a suitcase and Quine came over to show me how they would all fit if neatly folded. I shot him. (This was a time in which Quine was widely quoted as saying that we should

handle the student demonstrators in the U.S. the way they did in South America: bring in the militia.) Then there was Hilary Putnam, who was in his Maoist period. And John Rawls, whose *Theory of Justice* had just come out: the most rational man in the world but, well, somewhat boring and stiff for my taste at the time. In contrast, I was very impressed with Judith Shklar, the social historian.

Two philosophers, Stanley Cavell and Rogers Albritton, were particularly important for me at Harvard. The first year I was there they split one of those grand tours of Western thought, Albritton from the pre-Socratics to the Middle Ages, and Cavell from the Enlightenment on. Each brought his own quirky, thought-filled style to the occasion. I had heard about Wittgenstein before coming to college and felt an immediate fascination, so to fall in with these two Wittgensteinians was marvelous. I also had the great pleasure of spending a fair amount of time talking to Cavell and Albritton, and though I have remained friends with, and been influenced by, Cavell all these years, it was those long late-night conversations with Albritton that initiated me into philosophical conversation. My senior thesis was called "Three Compositions on Philosophy and Literature" and was a reading of Stein's *Making of Americans* through Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. (A bit of this was recently published in

Gertrude Stein Advanced, edited by Richard Kostelanetz.)

LPG: It seems to me that Stein and Wittgenstein would not exactly be considered “canonical” in any institution at the time. Were these writers approved or encouraged in your program? Was it a struggle to gain acceptance for these writers as the focus of your thesis?

CB: As I mentioned, Cavell and Albritton were both very committed to Wittgenstein, especially the *Investigations*, so within that microcosm, Wittgenstein was the canonical, albeit “anticanonical,” modernist philosopher. I had no companions in my enthusiasm for Stein, however—not surprising in a philosophy faculty in any case, and most decisively not in the English faculty, with which I had little contact. Of course, Stein had studied at Harvard with William James and at Emerson Hall, the site of my own studies; but that was a fact of little import in 1971. Since mine was an undergraduate thesis, I was pretty much left to do what I wanted and wasn’t required to gain any acceptance for Stein, which would not have been possible. I did have a third reader for the piece though, a witty and genial visiting British philosopher named G. E. L. Owen, whose specialty was classical Greek philosophy but who had read, and expressed some sympathy for, Stein.

LPG: Were your thesis readers comfortable with the connection between Stein and Wittgenstein?

CB: At the time the idea of a connection between Stein and Wittgenstein was completely farfetched, the first of my crackpot theories that end up, over time, not seeming nearly so cracked. If the linking of these two names now seems unsurprising, that takes away from some of the brash humor I had in mind for it years ago. My own name for the project was “Three Steins.” But I can’t explain how, when I was twenty-one, I fell upon a matrix of thinking and writing that would continue to occupy me until this day. For the writing and thinking I was starting to do then is very much of a piece with my work now. Let’s say it was an intuition that bore out.

LPG: What was the occasion or relation or particular event that might have put you in contact with these writers? How did this come about?

CB: Wittgenstein I had first heard about in high school, just a passing remark by a friend returned from college, but I became fascinated and curious since it seemed to go significantly beyond what I had been finding so interesting in that wonderfully intoxicating high-schoolish way about existentialism (with a puff of Hesse, Zen, the Beats, and the Beatles mixed in), and so I was happy to pick up on that in the next few years, especially in the context of reading over a range of philosophical works. I can’t quite place my interest in Stein, certainly not from any class or reading list! I know I was consciously looking for literary equivalents for the modernist and abstract expressionist painting that I was so passionately taken by, and while I appreciated what I was offered—Joyce or Celan or Kafka or Woolf or Proust or, indeed, Faulkner—I felt there was something missing, something I did see, though, in Beckett’s *Stories and Texts for Nothing* and Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* (I realize my examples here are all prose writers). Meanwhile, in 1970 Susan [Bee] was taking a seminar with Catherine Stimpson at Barnard, one of the first courses to be given on women’s literature. This was way before there were anthologies or even recommended syllabi for such classes, before much of the material now at the center of women’s studies courses was reprinted. Anyway, Stimpson apparently assigned *Three Lives*, and I must have heard about that from Susan. I don’t think I more than glanced at *Three Lives*, but I soon found *The Making of Americans*, *Tender Buttons*, “Composition as Explanation,” and much other Stein material, some of which was beginning to be published in new editions at this time. When I first read these works of Stein I was completely knocked out: this was what I had been looking for, what I knew must exist, and I was giddy with excitement.

LPG: What other activities were you involved in at Harvard? What about its “literary” culture?

CB: My sophomore year I happily moved to Adams House, just at the time it became coed and when it still had a beautiful private swimming pool. (When I was on the house committee, we passed a resolution requiring bathing suits only from 7 to 9 A.M.) My main artistic work at college was in theater, though oddly, as I look back on it, I was elected editor of

the freshman literary magazine, the *Harvard Yard Journal*, and we put out two issues. In my senior year I also put out a small Xerox magazine of work by people in Adams House called *Writing*. (I stayed clear of “literary society” at Harvard, or anyway it stayed clear of me. The pretentiousness of the *Advocate* scene couldn’t mask its emptiness, and I don’t mean that in the Zen sense.)

LPG: Were there other cultural activities you found more relevant at the time?

CB: I studied theater games and improvisation with Dan Seltzer, a Shakespearean scholar who had gotten involved with acting. I directed several productions, including a rather large-scale musical production of Peter Weiss’s *Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, influenced by the radical theater work of the Living Theater, the Open Theater, and Grotowski. We did the production in street clothes (though one review seemed to think these were hippy costumes) in the dining room at Adams House. William Liller, an astronomer and the Master of Adams House, played the Director of the asylum and Marat was played by John McCain, at that time a Progressive Labor Party activist and later gay activist; McCain died of AIDS a few years back. The composer Leonard Lehrman was the musical director. It was a wild time. One night the Japan scholar John Fairchild showed up, and one of the cast rebuked him, in one of the bedlam scenes during the play, for his Vietnam policy—in Japanese. After a benefit performance for the Bobby Seale defense fund, a spontaneous demonstration moved the audience into the street. The next year I scripted and directed a work I called *Comings and Goings* that linked short pieces by Beckett and Pinter with a staging of the trial of the Chicago Eight. I also played a bit role in a play by Joseph Timko on the death of Morris Schlick, the Vienna Circle philosopher and logical positivist. My role was as the graduate student that killed Schlick and my line was “I shoot you out of jealousy and revenge: Bang! Bang!”

I spent the fall following college graduation (1972) in New York, living with Susan on Arden Street in Washington Heights and working mainly as the office manager of Sloan’s Furniture Clearance Center #45 on East 85th Street, for \$2.75 an hour. When Susan gradu-

ated Barnard in December, I took advantage of a William Lyon MacKenzie King Fellowship, which I had received, and we spent a year in Ruskin, just east of Vancouver. I had a loose and pleasant relation with Simon Fraser University, and it was there I attended a marvelous seminar on Emily Dickinson with Robin Blaser.

LPG: From what I’ve read, I would assume that you experienced a breakthrough in Vancouver. Was it at this point that the thrust of your future in writing became apparent?

CB: Not so much a breakthrough as follow-through. I moved to the Vancouver area with Susan in January 1973, six months after graduating college. During the nine months I was there I was able to read in and around the “New American Poetry,” something I knew little about before this.

Shortly after moving, I sent some of my work, out of the blue, to Jerome Rothenberg, primarily on the strength of *Technicians of the Sacred*, which I had read with great enthusiasm when it came out in the late 1960s. Remarkably, Jerry wrote me right back and suggested I get in touch with Ron Silliman, in San Francisco, who was editing a section of new poetry for his and Dennis Tedlock’s new magazine, *Alcheringa*. Ron wrote me back, also immediately, on a piece of letterhead from something called “The People’s Yellow Pages,” which seems apt for Ron. He had finished the collection, called “A Dwelling Place,” but said he was going to quote something I said in my letter to him. He also gave me a list of people to read, which, as I recall it from this distance, included Michael Palmer and Clark Coolidge and a half-dozen others, including Eigner and Creeley. I hadn’t read many of those poets and was also hearing about some of them, and a related set, from Blaser. I has access to the library and to the extraordinary poetry collection, so I had no trouble finding even the most obscure poetry I wanted. It was heaven.

As to my writing, I was onto something, but not there yet. I hadn’t yet gotten to the other side of what Ron, I think, heard as Stein’s “syrupy rhythm”; I was in a Stein period, that’s for sure, writing things like “Paddington wade, she said faded” and a mock-epic “Hermes Hermeneutic” (“Hermes Hermeneutic, the swashbuckle kid from Alacazam, swim / swam /

swum past fireflies and mint juleps, pusses in the allies and lizigator monsters”).

LPG: Then you returned to New York City?

CB: Actually, we moved from Vancouver to Santa Barbara in the fall of 1973, for no particular reason except, I suppose, that the sun was appealing after months of gray skies. In Santa Barbara I worked part-time for the Freedom Community Clinic, a free clinic, as a health education coordinator at a time when we were very involved in questions of feminism and gay rights, drug education, and, of course, sexually transmitted diseases. While I was there I continued to read around and I was in touch with other poets, getting their magazines and books. Even made it up to see Ron Silliman, although our first conversation was made almost inaudible by the loud band playing at the bar where we met. (Ron knew one of the people in the band!) In Santa Barbara I went to one of Kenneth

Rexroth’s gatherings but didn’t connect up with that context at all. *Disfrutes* and *Asylums* were written in Santa Barbara and include the earliest poems of mine that have been published.

I moved back to New York, to 464 Amsterdam, in early 1975, and that’s when I met Bruce Andrews and we discovered how much we had in common, not only as poets and artists but also, for example, in an interest in such things as the Frankfurt School, which at that time seemed an unlikely thing for a poet to be interested in. (I had read Habermas’s *Knowledge and Human Interest* with great interest and later attended a series of lectures he gave at UC Santa Barbara in 1974.)

In New York I went to lots of readings, particularly at the Poetry Project at St. Mark’s, but all over the place. And in 1978 not only did Bruce and I start *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*—actually, the planning for that goes back to 1976—but Ted Greenwald and I also started the Ear Inn Series.



At a poetry conference in Wansee, Germany: (from left) Leslie Scalapino, Charles Bernstein, Kathleen Fraser, Clark Coolidge, Susan Coolidge (below), Hannah Moekel-Rieke, and Hans Joachim Rieke, May 1992

LPG: Let me stop you for a moment here. I am specifically interested in the period from 1973, when you left Vancouver, to 1978, when *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* was founded. It is unclear, besides the mention of Stein and Wittgenstein, what your sense of your literary “elders” was during this period. In terms of contemporaries, you have mentioned Jerome Rothenberg and Ron Silliman, but I have the feeling that your reading would have been much more immense. Let me be more specific. I would like a clear sense of your position in terms of literary influences at this time.

CB: “Literary” is a problem for me since I was trying to get away from the literary, from any preset idea of poetry or of the aesthetic. It seemed to me that writing, certainly not verse—let’s say verbal art in the sense that Antin talks about it in his early essays—was the thing.

In New York I worked initially at the United Hospital Fund, writing the scintillating *Health Manpower Consortia Newsletter*, which Susan and I designed in exactly the format that we would use, a few years later, for *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*; then briefly for the Council on Municipal Performance, a public-interest group where I primarily worked on mass transit issues and against the subway fare hike of that moment; and then for a couple of years as abstracts editor of the Canadian edition of *Modern Medicine*, where I wrote about eighty medical abstracts each month. This immersion in commercial writing and editing—as a social space too, but more in the technical sense of learning the standardized compositional rules and forms at the most detailed, and numbingly boring, level of proof-reading and copyediting—was informing in every way.

As far as art goes, painting has always been intimate for me, and I mean in particular Susan Bee’s work, which crisscrosses, parallels, and leaps ahead of my “own” work. Living with a painter, seeing the paintings develop sometimes day to day from my comfortable “critic’s chair,” seeing how Susan would handle (and I mean literally handle) similar interests in collage, in the giddy rhetoric of various styles juxtaposed, well, I can’t adequately acknowledge the importance of that. Many times Susan’s work has amazed me by showing that things I thought you “theoretically” couldn’t do needed to be done, and that includes things your own ideas would seem to hold you back from. The company and work

of visual artists was and remains so much a part of the sense and texture of my work that I made a decision, at some point, not to write too much about it or else I would end up just writing about it. So I’ll leave it without further account save the fact of my immersion and the many, many shows I went to each month in the mid-1970s.

And then . . . then there’s the movies, endless movies, including the visionary and revisionary films of Sonbert, Snow, Brakhage, Gehr, Child, Hills, Kubelka, Jacobs, and such (with Vertov, Eisenstein, etc., not far behind). And the theater—Richard Foreman’s, Robert Wilson’s (I especially appreciated those early, “messy” pieces), Richard Schechner’s stuff at the Performance Garage, and so much else, including much of the performance art that was presented in New York at the time. And how about new music—thinking of so many nights at the Kitchen and other spaces—but also, and crucially, the opera? And so many poetry readings, three or more a week.

What I am getting to is that in this context what most excited me was indeed the work of my immediate contemporaries, just because, let’s say, they are contemporaries and the meaning and the trajectory of their work was not yet determined, historicized (which can happen awfully fast). This work made the most immediate sense to me.

LPG: Certainly, these are crucial elements in the constitution of a writing. But you still haven’t mentioned specific writers. Where and who were the “elders”? That is, what sense of relation was there to say Pound, Williams, or the Objectivists? Of course, there’s also a “middle” layer here: Creeley, Ginsberg (who must’ve been very active in New York), and also Olson (though he doesn’t fit exactly into either of these categories). At the same time I am very intrigued by what your sense of “contemporaries” might have been. I want a sense of who your “colleagues” were.

CB: Yes, indeed, there is a literary answer too. Rothenberg’s anthology *Revolution of the Word*, which came out in 1974 and included Riding, Zukofsky, Loy, Gillespie, Oppen, Schwitters, Duchamp, Mac Low, and others, is a good map of what was interesting me. At the same time, over those years I read and reread H.D., Williams, Stevens, Eliot, Bunting . . . not to men-

tion the Russian constructivists, concrete and visual poetry, sound poetry, ethnopoetics, Dadaism . . . to keep the list, neatly but misleadingly, to the present century.

As for the “middle layer” you ask about, I knew Corso and Ginsberg from high school on and had seen Ginsberg perform many times. I especially loved his recording of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which I got when I was a college freshman and used to sing to myself all the time (still do). But from my perspective—thinking again back to the early 1970s—I think this work just didn’t seem to me radically modern in the way that, say, Pollock or Rauschenberg or Morris Louis or Twombly or Rosenquist, or Godard or Cage or Coltrane or Stockhausen, or the poets in *Revolution of the Word*, or indeed Stein or Wittgenstein did. And that would have gone for Pound too, whom I read with greater interest only later.

But somewhere in all this I had to slow up and backtrack a bit, and this is where I started to absorb, in a big way, many of the poets grouped in, around, and about the “New American Poetry,” including Mac Low (whom I went to see perform many times during the 1970s), Ashbery, Eigner, O’Hara, Guest, Schuyler, Spicer, Antin, and Creeley (whose *A Quick Graph* and other essays I read with great interest). The work of these poets, and especially their new and ongoing work, was incredibly exciting for me, and not just as artworks to appreciate. The work made me want to write poetry and also gave me many entry points for how to do it. Reading became intimately connected to writing.

Yet even as I write this, it still seems too pat, too limited, and my suspicion of narrative gets the better of me. When you are just starting to write, all poems seem like maps of possibilities for your own writing, or did to me, and order and sequence is jumbled, irrelevant, maybe an insult. In 1975 I didn’t care very much about generations and influences or the order I read anything in, and I certainly didn’t know what was important and what not, and if I did probably leapt from the former toward the latter. In 1995, a professor no less, the historical matrix for poetry seems to me not only very interesting but determining. But in that case these lists are as important for the names I’ve left out that ought certainly to be mentioned, acknowledged.

To chart that warp and woof you’d have to do a magazine like $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$, and this is what we did.

LPG: But “charting” implies that the activity surrounding $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ was “fixed” in some sense. In fact, probably the greatest danger for people who write about “Language” writing today is that they do so as if it were defined—a finite set of texts. You are on record as once saying that $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ was one part of several efforts and that these included *This, Roof, A Hundred Posters*, and *Tottel’s*. What was the nature of the relationship among the poets involved with the $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ project?

CB: In 1976, when Bruce and I first started to discuss what would become $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$, there was no forum that addressed the philosophical, political, and aesthetic concerns that were central to us, although there were many poets and a number of poetry magazines that were working in ways with which we felt a strong affinity. Indeed, there was much hostility in alternative as well as mainstream circles, not only to the kind of poetry to which we were committed but also to our poetics—both our insistence on the value of nonexpository essays and also our rejection of received and beloved notions of voice, self, expression, sincerity, and representation.

Official Verse Culture operated then as it does now by denying its narrow stylistic orthodoxy under the cloak of universalized and unassailable poetic principles. Thus we had the spectacle of a poetry of abject conformity celebrating its commitment to individuality while flailing rather more viciously than might have seemed decent at actual individual expression. The prevalent phobias against groups and against critical thinking encouraged us to make our opposing commitments specific and partisan. If mainstream poetic “individuality” breeds unreflected conformism, collective formations might actually provide the space for conversation as well as for difference.

In this context, $L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E$ was (and in other guises and transformations may still be) an ongoing and open-ended collaborative conVERSation and exchange on a series of particular and partisan, but also mutable and provisional, poetic principles and proclivities conducted in a decentralized manner by a number of differently situated editors, reading se-



Charles Bernstein with his daughter, Emma, outside Ear Inn, Manhattan, 1995

ries coordinators, poets, and readers: a linked series of poetic tendencies and collaborative exchanges among a range of poets who desired, for a period of time, to make this social exchange a primary site of their work. By “open-ended” I’m suggesting a context in which, despite shared, if conflicting, stylistic and formal concerns, one doesn’t know what the results will be. No formal rules for participating are ever established. And while I could reiterate our specific and galvanizing preoccupations, the point of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* was not to define its own activity or to prescribe a singular form of poetry, but rather to insist on particular possibilities for poetry and poetics.

LPG: I’m also interested in the “may still be” of your answer. How do you see the *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* project—or its permutations—

projecting into the present? Certainly, the locus of such an activity is modified by, on the one hand, a number of these poets now appearing in teaching anthologies, and on the other, the number of “younger” writers entering this “location.”

CB: As names like Language poetry, Language writing, Language-centered writing, or Language-oriented writing become fixed in time, they lose generic and projective force. About ten years ago, I remember reading a call for submissions of “language” poetry for a new magazine that said, “You may be a language poet and not know it!” That seemed right to me: the terms were sufficiently underdetermined that there was room for projection. In contrast, when *The New York Times Magazine* ran a big poetry feature last spring that purported to map contemporary poetry, they carefully excluded from their list of “Language Poets” every one of the many participants in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*—a nasty business unfortunately characteristic of the sort of cultural disinformation practiced at places like the *Times*.

Still, one test of an art’s vitality is that it manages to unsettle, and it seems like this work continues to do that, and I for one am happy to embrace the description of my work as ungainly solipsistic incoherence that has no meaning. No meaning at all.

Which is to say, projection has its consequences, and one of them is that the recognition (positive or negative) accorded even a projection tends to split off, objectify, and atomize the “project,” both stylistically and generationally. Then again, there’s no need to get glued to a bill of particulars circa 1978 or 1988 when you can just as easily remain attentive to shifting conditions and contexts, new names and new work. But when this happens, and this is why it’s appealing, the “location” you mention in your question changes: just that it’s my desire to participate in the emerging locations, to reground myself. So my current identification is not with work that takes the same positions as *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* but with work that pursues these and related issues. I find extraordinary company just now, in so many magazines and books that I can hardly begin to keep up. For example, the Poetics e-mail discussion group, and the Electronic Poetry Center, with which we are both involved, seems to me to be continuing the work of

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Segue Distributing, and the like, just as the poetry publishing of Sun & Moon Press and Roof Books, or the Ear Inn reading series, for example, continue to flourish, partly because they have welcomed new writers.

And of my companions of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* days, I find it less remarkable than it probably is how contemporary, how crucial, our exchanges remain—not all, of course, but many and profoundly—after twenty years. And yet I am leery of how loyalty to old friends can form a closed circle, and I have tried, no doubt clumsily, fitfully, inadequately, to resist the temptation.

Loss Pequeño Glazier is director of the Electronic Poetry Center (EPC), co-edits RIF/T, an online poetry and poetics journal, and is presently working as web manager for the university libraries, State University of New York at Buffalo. He has recently written two entries for a forthcoming volume of the Dictionary of Literary Biography, one on Charles Bernstein and the other on Robert Creeley. Glazier is the author of The Parts (Buffalo: Meow Press, 1995); Electronic Projection Poetics (Buffalo: RIF/T, 1995); Small Press: An Annotated Guide (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 1992); a number of poetry-related articles, including "Sounding Bernstein," a study of Charles Bernstein's early work with sound texts; and over sixty published poems, including the online hypertextual poem "E: Poem for HTML" and the Little Magazine CD-ROM publication "5 Pieces for Sound File." He has presented numerous papers on poetry in the electronic environment. Recent activities include work with sound files and developing the EPC to engage the emerging graphical environment of the Internet.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Poetry:

Asylums, Asylum's Press, 1975.

Parsing, Asylum's Press, 1976.

Shade, Sun & Moon Press, 1978.

Poetic Justice, Pod Books, 1979.

Senses of Responsibility, Tuumba Press, 1979.

(With Bruce Andrews, Ray DiPalma, and others) *Legend*, Segue Books, 1980.

Controlling Interests, Roof Books, 1980.

Disfrutes, Potes and Poets Press, 1981.

(With Susan Bee) *The Occurrence of Tune*, Segue Books, 1981.

Stigma, Station Hill Press, 1981.

Islets/Irritations, Jordon Davies, 1983.

Resistance, Awede Press, 1983.

Veil, Xexoxial Editions, 1987.

The Sophist, Sun & Moon Press, 1987.

Four Poems, Chax Press, 1988.

(With Susan Bee) *The Nude Formalism*, Sun & Moon Press, 1989.

The Absent Father in Dumbo, Zasterle, 1990.

(With Susan Bee) *Fool's Gold*, Chax Press, 1991.

Rough Trades, Sun & Moon Press, 1991.

Dark City, Sun & Moon Press, 1994.

The Subject, Meow Press, 1995.

Republics of Reality: Poems 1975–1995, Sun & Moon Press, 1996.

Other:

(Editor with Bruce Andrews) *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.

(Translator) Claude Royet-Journoud, *The Maternal Drape*, Awede Press, 1984.

Content's Dream: Essays 1975–1984, Sun & Moon Press, 1986.

(Translator) Olivier Cadiot, *Red, Green, and Black*, Potes & Poets, 1990.

(Editor) *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, Roof Books, 1990.

A Poetics, Harvard University Press, 1992.

(Editor) *Live at the Ear* (CD-ROM), Elemenope Productions, 1994.

(Founding editor) Electronic Poetry Center
(<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc>).

Also the author of four librettos: *Blind Witness News*, *The Subject: A Psychiatric Opera* and *The Lenny Paschen Show*, with composer Ben Yarmolinsky, and *Cafe Bufe*, now being composed by Dean Drummond.

Work represented in hundreds of periodicals in North America, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and Korea, and work has been anthologized in these countries, as well as being represented in anthologies of American poetry and criticism in translation in Italy, France, Germany, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Russia, China, and Japan. Bernstein has given poetry readings and lectures throughout the English-speaking world and in the last few years has read in Italy, Portugal, Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Spain, Canada, England, and France.

Recent anthology appearances include *From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960–1990*, edited by Douglas Messerli; *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*, edited by Paul Hoover; *The Best American Poems 1992*, edited by Charles Simic, Scribners, 1992; *Out of the World*, edited by Anne Waldman, Crown, 1991; *Language Poetries*, edited by Douglas Messerli, New Directions, 1987; *In the American Tree*, edited by Ron Silliman, National Poetry Foundation, 1986; *21 + 1: American Poetry Today*, edited by Claude Royet-Journoud and Emmanuel Hocquard, Delta (France), 1986; *Up Late: American Poetry Since 1970*, and *New Directions* 50.

Recent magazine appearances include *American Literary History*, *American Poetry Review*, *Avec*, *Big Allis*, *College Literature*, *Common Knowledge*, *Conjunctions*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Diacritics*, *Harper's*, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, *Postmodern Culture*, *oblek*, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, *Social Text*, *Socialist Review*, *Sulfur*, *Talisman*, *Temblor*, *Tyonyi*, *Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Witness*, and *The Yale Review*.