

THE YOUNG HATE US {3}

Donato Mancini

A text secretes its own structure. Which is to say that form, in poetry, is a process of memory-sedimentation, or de-sedimentation, that takes place in time. Form isn't form as vase-shaped artefact. Form in poetry is as form in music-shaped experience. Revising now: the form of a text secretes its own structure, conditioned by time.

It's impossible to prove that form exists, or to prove a theory with a fact.

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Subjects produce poetry, poetry produces subjectivity. Texts produce the subjectivities they are often thought to capture, reflect, record, annotate, register, champion. Poet in writing blinks his/her way towards a new subjectivity, in the flicker of the dark marks over white ground. Notice how many poets don't know what they love/think/know until they write it down.

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To the music-lover who says "I like both kinds of music: country *and* western", do you answer "It's just a matter of taste"? Taste is malleable, dissoluble, not a substantial ingredient of a person's subjectivity. Taste is an indice of ideological constitution—70% water. Opinion, then, is ideological, indigestion. To understand ourselves as subjects, we need, therefore, in introspection, to work backwards through our tastes, dissolving them as we go like superstitious fats, like burnt speech.

Good Taste (GT) is good self-discipline. GT is a militant self-absorption into an inherited condition. The model music-lover above has only heard the kinds of music s/he's heard: *both* kinds. Good poetry—poetry as a social intervention—not just "quality stuff", offends GT, by directive. Erect no counter-myth. Or let's say: wear taste as a badge and wind up in a uniform.

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In his effort to overcome sidestep petty reason, Mallarmé was only partially right when he said "poems are made of words, not ideas." Poems are made of the idea of language. Each word is an idea about language. The idea of language as it manoeuvres readers towards thinking, without determining just what must be thought.

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In accord with the knowledge that poems can only be *re-read*, poetry (the poem?) only lives as long as it *can* be read. The bleeding of public libraries, then, like book-burning, is ideocide.

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Enthusiasm is obscene.
Publishing is obscene.
Jargon is obscene.
Theory is obscene.
Success is obscene.
Optimism is obscene.
Poetry is obscene.
Lists are obscene.

Should the obscene remain off-stage?

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Poetry thrives in coterie. Its strongest position is marginal. (Monk or guerrilla?) Coterie can be a powerful form of collectivity. A work is not more powerful, or more political, more effective, more moreso, because it reaches a numerically larger number of readers. To the story of a million copies sold we prefer the story: everyone who bought a copy of that book wrote a book of his/her own. No readers vs. writers; just actors.

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Don't show *or* tell; do.

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If poetry—or any text—had ever been something that can speak for itself, stands on its own two feet, serve no master, jump no flaming hoop, there would have been no criticism. Who tells you poetry speaks for itself, that person speaks for poetry. Critical silence = poetic silence. No good poetry without good readers, no good readers without good writing about reading.

Injunction: write new readings. Readers who take refuge in the poem's mere existence, words-on-the-page, are dumbfounded. If nature is not something simply *there*, to be read, neither is the poem. A poem won't stand on its own, has no legs. In discursive fact, let's say: poetry that would speak for itself should shut up.

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For prodigal returns, there are many terms I would see banished from poetics.

Aesthetic.
Craft.
Creative.
Depth.
Excellence.
Honesty.

Rigour.
Unity.

As (deserved) terms of praise, especially.

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Writing that there is no more 'Avant-Garde' (AG) is nothing like saying that younger AG poets are posthumous. AG is abandoned, recognising that the cultural position of "inventive" poetry has shifted. Younger generations no longer relate to the older ones in terms of the inter-generational struggle AG implies. The "post-avant" is not (at its best) post-revolutionary. It is (at its best) a phase of permanent revolution. Poetry now demands a re-start, a splintering at every turn. Each new work of inventive poetry redefines, redescribes, and expands the poetic. All of all of previous poetry + 1.

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Poetry's best hope for remaining a viable, and vital, practice into the future is to pluralize until 'poetry' is difficult to identify, impossible to define.

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Variable canonicity (VC). There is no longer a single canon, there are competing canons. VC. The past has not passed, it is a variable and contingent reality. The past is now. With VC, traditions are in competition with each other and within themselves.

In understanding the current confusing, pluralistic, splintering phase of poetry, VC is the crucial factor.

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Why do poets who know better, for example, still write about sentences as if they are containers?
Her sentences are full?

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Because we're slaves?
Because we like to buy shoes with money?
Because writing is a mode of social edict if/when it can be attached to speech?
Because the program runs on spatial and economic metaphors?

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And who wants to retain the evaluative containers of 'good poetry' and 'bad poetry' except in the knowledge that they are totally dependent upon each other? They produce each other, in a more direct way than saying that, for example, readers couldn't identify good poetry without bad

poetry available for comparison. At a basic level, as with categories like cliché/truth, they are exactly the same thing. There is no inherently good or bad poetry, since nothing inheres. Cliché is truth. Truth is money. "Is" produces a truth-affect. Categories are produced by the criteria of measure. Aesthetic response rehearses the aesthete's training.

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Liberal individualism is, mainly, a denial of community. For poets, it is a denial of the social predicates of poetry. Individualism produces the belief that poetry is created in geniusious isolation, heroic solitude, ivory condos. Poetry, books, etc, are produced by, written by, communities, not scenes. Poetry arises as a product of intersecting social factors—reading being foremost (maybe), but also friendship, school days, publishing, libraries, histories, traditions, learnings, leanings, ideologies. All depend on highly complex forms of social organisation and co-operation. Individuality is pure—possibly necessary—phantasm.

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"The use of words is a definition of words" (R. Creeley).

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Direct, unmediated experience can't exist. Sensation does not inscribe the horizon of the Real. The painful surprise of an electric shock is only experienced in the context of previous experiences, the sedimentations of which mediate new experience. Subjects are subject to discursive articulation, here. Think of how much Freud hated spinach as a boy, and how it became the chief vegetable of his manly plate.

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If the (boring) task of criticism is judgement, the mercantile evaluation of goods, then critics are just taste-testers. Poetry itself is then no more culturally important, or socially potent, than *Spaghetti w/ Bacon & Garlic Cream (And Other Poems)*.

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Religion is only tolerable to the extent that its paraphernalia is beautiful. The insane are tolerated as long as they remain entertaining. Superfluous?

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The poetics of moral crisis is (today) suffused with irony, sarcasm, parody, vulnerability, urgency, commitment. The best poetry (today) is in continual moral crisis. It is galvanised by self-doubt. Its fundamental strength grows as it labours to undermine its own position. Self-heresy (Robert Duncan) is more productive than self-consistency (Billy Collins). Morally self-assured poetry is today's blistering wallpaper.

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All publishing is a project of amassing symbolic power. All publishing poets are power-seekers. The totality of a poet's positions, tastes, opinions, etc, should therefore produce a grotesquely paradoxical self-incompatibility—interlocking and solid.

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Would you rather not? Some of the most politically potent poetry is in appearance the most useless, the poetics of abdication, of refusal. The moment of politics in poetry is in unmovement, when poetry says: "I prefer not to."

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Context. Choice. Struggle. Poets are labour activists. The daydream of poetry isn't of a Divinity. The fantasy of poetry is of non-alienated labour, of work that doesn't consume the worker, that doesn't make of his/her lifetime a perishable commodity. "I'm in Heaven...." Poets' individualism, then, is reactive, like the individualism of the oppressed: "I want my slice of the symbolic pie"—publishing emerges as the scene of territorial war.

Poets' most significant social struggles, however, are in the arena of compositional choices. Choices are made in the context of all available knowledge, from which a concept of poetry's social potential (as either motivator *or* abdicator *or* _____) arises. Local time + historical time = after that, it's a question of persistent tastes, and residue of work-habits. These traces are then reviewed in the little magazines.

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Most obvious = most misleading.

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Other possible terms:

Subversive.
Experimental.
Innovative.
Inventive.
Weirdo-po.
PoMoPo.

"PoMoPo" places poetry in a post-political circus, the cultural Olympiad. "Weirdo-po" marks the writing as harmlessly deviant. "Inventive" makes the poet an entertaining hobbyist. "Innovative" sets down the poetic artefact as a station on a teleological trainline. "Experimental" transforms the poem into a lab report. "Subversive" makes the poem a pipe-bomb.

Rather than strict subversion, then, the task is perhaps one of vigilance—sentiments of the sentinel. In hindsight, times have always been tough, vigilance about the language, as corrupting and as corrupted, has always been necessary. Because language doesn't have a clean and well lit place to sit, poets dream of such a place.

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A word's use is an action.

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Theory is indispensable to poetry today. Most of what is valuable in "criticism" emerges in *theory* with new force. Theory is sometimes indifferntiable from poetry, today.

What is the function of theory?

What is the function of poetry?

Answer either question in terms of: the struggle over definitions. Poetry and theory unhook definitions from their objects. Re-hook a new definition to an old object, or break the hook.

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Meaning is an effect inseparable from the experience of consciousness itself. (Whenever I write "meaning", I wish I could write: implications, ramifications, consequences....) Word-as-object indicates that anything in the field of consciousness enters the semiotic chain. The avalanche always ignites the category "avalanche", but never reconciles with avalanchitude.

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Rejecting the asociality of deconstruction doesn't mean rejecting its basic insights into the human condition. Humans are creatures of ideology. Ideology is textuality. The human condition is textual. Ideology arises from a congress of emotional habit (Pavlov?) with linguistic practices. If humans were fish, they'd swim in ideology, eat and excrete language. The social-space, where the wo/manfish swims, is viscous and discursive. The fish in this case would have a tendency to swim to where they already know to get the food they already know how to get.

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As small business owners, what poets must resist is not commodification as such. A poem is already a supreme symbolic commodity, like a prayer. What poets must resist is the urge to produce anything Liberalism might find useful.

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Reading is a social act. Writing is a social act. Sexual activity is social action, like reading. Intensely private and interpersonal. Performative, mutually stimulating, productive.

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It is not forbidden to write a meaningless poem, it's impossible. Every sign is attended by the many servants of competing semiotic claims. A civil war divides every word, overflows its borders. An event—a movement against, away-from—meaning is ever incommensurate with intent. Meaningless poem isn't.

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A unitary message is prose, the crack of nightstick + skull prosaic.

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1) Does eclecticism in reading habits always entail a regression into absorptive pluralism, the neo-psychedelia of post-political culturism-ism?

2) If, as they—critics and historians—say, art history is a history of misunderstandings, how can the same critics hold to a pedagogy of correct interpretation, of correct reading?

[Answer: by keeping the disciplines segregated. In this diorama poets are cattle, critics collect milk.]

3) Does a poetics driven by an ambition to be a force of good in the world veer towards a well-oiled utility (i.e. Cornelius Cardew) or towards squeaky excess (i.e. John Coltrane)?

4) Is it possible to write a perfectly generic poem?

5) Stockhausen serves imperialism?

6) How to be dogmatic, intolerant, serious, rigorous, demanding, angry, ambitious, threatening, dangerous but not proscriptive?

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[- with some sentences paraphrased, borrowed or stolen from Patrick F. Chan, Cornelius Cardew, Stephen Collis, Roger Farr, Morton Feldman, Andrew Klobucar, Ernesto Laclau, Herman Melville, Jordan Scott and Mark Wallace]

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