

Philibert — part of a 9th to 12th century abbey — an absolutely perfect model of that powerful and grand style of architecture that had its fulfillment at Cluny) very moving.

Bill

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to William Spanos (Lyon, France),
October 7, 1973.*

Dear Bill: I'm glad to hear that you are firmly convinced of the value of the piece, and I understand Kroetsch's objections, i think, well enough. My own feeling about what to do under the circumstances is that, if Kroetsch is willing to squeeze the piece into this issue [Vol. 2,3] I would rather do that — naturally because i have a commitment to the time in which a thing is done. Because I don't feel that alien from David Ignatow — immensely different as we may be — because we are still somewhere on the same side of the poetic domain at least in relation to the notion of an American vernacular dialect. On the other hand, Ignatow is much too framed a poet for me to identify with fully, much as I like his work. To my mind lovely as he can be within his poetics, he approaches a "poem" too much as a framed object and I am I suppose moving away from that conscious framing. The only framing I will allow is the framing that the attentive mind produces by its intense concentration on the task at hand — and I will also insist on allowing all that looseness that is there before the intensity finds its path or rises from discovering that there is a path, where before it was just walking and is now walking somewhere. That's why I'm glad you had so strong a take on the American voice. Implausible as it may seem I feel a strong identity with Twain and Kerouac and Whitman, without their lyricism maybe, and without the folksiness, but I never was plain folks, nor are my neighbors. So I can see why it would also be reasonable to go for the special emphasis of an issue where Jerry and I could be featured together. If that's the way you prefer it, it might make even more sense. I'll be willing to leave the decision to you. If it's too tough to fit the piece into the "Ignatow" issue, where I wouldn't be an entire stranger, well then we can go for the issue with Jerry.

If you let me know what you prefer, I can make corresponding supporting moves. Especially if you decide for the issue with Jerry. It might also be good if for such an issue there was some other talk about these issues — from yourself perhaps among others. I think your own interest in Ritsos and the Greek vernacular of the Romios has a bearing on this. Incidentally, I have retranslated part of the Iliad in a new talking piece scheduled for the Winter issue of *Alcheringa* to show how much of a talking poet Homer is. Similarly I could make a case and have for Aristotle's "Poetics" as a talking lecture that could never have been prepared for writing in that way. His definitions are just too freakily casual

to have been carefully thought out ahead of time. They are all improvisations leading in the direction he wanted to go – to talk about a poetry that was not dependent on musical accompaniment because he wanted to get away from that to get to the center – for him – of the drama – the myth structure or narrational structure of the drama poem. But we can talk about this in a more leisurely way once you've decided what you want to do. In any event don't feel bad about the difficulties. I really do understand the problems, and Kroetsch has every right to his own esthetics, which I suppose I'm challenging head on.

Incidentally you may be interested in a funny story about the meaning of the term Roumi (compare with Romios) in Arabic. My old Arabic teacher was an American scholar totally fluent in Arabic, but still an American. He happened to be in a conversation with a bedouin who used to come in to work for a friend of his during the date harvest on his friend's farm. My teacher got into a discussion with the bedouin – of the war – the 1948 war between the Israelis and the "Arabs" – since the farm was in the area now called Israel. The bedouin was confused. He said that "we Arabs cant keep track of the troubles among the "Roumi." Apparently to the bedouin the nationalism of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and whatever does not involve 'Arabs,' to whom the whole lot of them are 'Roumi,' (i.e. Greeks of the Byzantine-Roman line).

Give my best to Peg, to whom "coraggio" on the thesis.

Best to you all
David

*William Spanos (Lyon, France) to Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton),
October 19, 1973.*

Dear Bob: I sent you back by surface mail the prose pieces by Brian Swann. I think we should seriously consider publishing some of them. It's really postmodern stuff. . . . The prose poem is indeed becoming a presence in my thinking about contemporary literature as you suggest. It just may be – for poetry – the postmodern form. Just as all the prose writers of the *Modern* period wanted to make poems out of their prose, so a lot of contemporary poets want to make prose out of their poetry. This is closely related, of course, to the oral impulse of postmodern American poetry: *Logos* as *legein* (speaking) rather than as The Word, as again Heidegger points the way. . . .

. . . Your reference to getting Tarn and work about him into Vol. 3/2 and Antin's response to my compromise suggestion that we postpone his talk poem until Vol. 3/2 because it will work better with the Rothenberg material both open up the whole question of the contents of Vol. 3/2. . . . My impulse: 1) to make the Rothenberg-Antin thing central in that issue and 2) in reference to Antin's suggestion that there be "some

other talk about these issues," to publish the editorial correspondence or an edited version of or developed statements from it. This kind of format would, I think, be tremendously interesting as such, simply because it addresses a crucial and very controversial postmodern issue as an open question; at the same time it would constitute a provocative breakthrough in academic journal editing. Let me know what you think, so I can get back to Antin and to Rothenberg. . . .

What did you think of my article on Ritsos in *The American Poetry Review*? If and when we go to Greece I'm going to go all out to get an interview from him. He's never given one on principle. But the breakthrough in America for him might open him up. Anyway, it would be a great coup, I believe – and immensely important as a follow up to the big spread in *APR*. What do you think?

Our baggage finally arrived after 7 weeks. Christ, what a relief for all of us. To celebrate, we're going back to Autun in Burgundy to look at the great 12th century sculptures by the master Gislebertus – the reclining Eve drives me wild – at the Cathedral of Autun, this time at a more leisurely pace. And after that we're going to splurge and have escargots, boeuf Bourguignon and *Hospice de Beaune* in some small country inn in the hinterlands of Burgundy.

Bill

P.S. We heard on BBC with dismay of Nixon's dismissal of Cox etc., and are immensely disturbed about what's in the offing. Is that man going to try to overthrow constitutional government? Where does the Army or rather the Pentagon stand on this? I hope the Congress stands *en masse* against this unbelievable act of contempt for democracy, but we're worried.

*William Spanos (Lyon, France) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
October 21, 1973.*

Dear David: Bob Kroetsch will go along with the "compromise" I suggested to him, i.e., publishing your talk-poem in Vol. 3/2 (early fall, 1974). And though I would have included it in Vol. 2/3 had it been possible, I now really believe it belongs with the Rothenberg material. As a matter of fact I'm enthusiastic about the potential of a substantial section devoted to your and Rothenberg's entirely different kind of oral experiments in the context of the problematics of oral composition or composition for oral expression. So let's do it that way. I understand your concern about time, but in the long run I think it will benefit both you and us if we put the talk-poem in the context of this immensely crucial "postmodern" issue. If we published it in Vol. 2/3 it might simply get lost for most readers or what is more important made easy to dismiss. In the larger context both these possibilities would become more difficult. And I *do* want *boundary 2* to serve the purpose of making the academic world

take note of these new poetics that are emerging on the American scene. The phenomenological reduction by violence.

If we should start moving in this direction, we've got to get in touch with Jerry Rothenberg. He already has a first series of questions. What I suggested — and as I've done in the Ignatow "interview" — is that he answer a few questions the first time around, which becomes the point of departure for further comment and questions until the thing "discovers" its own shape. Given the more certain focus that your work provides, I'd have to add a couple of basic questions to that original list. So your suggestion that you get in touch with Jerry sounds good. I'm also writing to let him know of this turn. Your suggestion that some other talk on these issues be included strikes me as being right. What immediately comes to mind — indeed, I suggested this to Kroetsch when I broached the compromise — is to publish the editorial correspondence, or edited versions of it, or statements based on the exchange (though my own impulse is that we simply publish the correspondence, including your letters both to me and to Kroetsch, for the sheer immediacy of the thing). This more than "statements" should provide a great context for "what am i doing here?" and at the same time, at least in a minimal sense, be in keeping with the oral theme. I also think that, as format, it will do something that most academic journals won't do.

We're also including some sections from Nathaniel Tarn's "Lyrics for the Bride of God" and an essay being written by a young man who has done a movie based on Tarn's poetry. I'm wondering if he might not participate somehow in this section. Although his poetry is not oral-oriented, I see his late work as emerging out of the Olson *Maximus* poems and, on first reading, think he's trying to do something like Olson in his broken line. There's also his anthropology which relates him to Rothenberg. What are your feelings about this? Is it a possibility or do you think three poets would clutter the format and confuse this issue? . . .

Your brief but extremely provocative comments on Aristotle's poetics as a talk-poem follow up a section of my chapter on a postmodern hermeneutics based on Husserl's *epoché* and above all on Heidegger's interpretation of *Logos* (in the word "phenomenology") as *legein*, i.e., speech, which disintegrates the Western concept of FORM or PICTURE as basis of thinking (and ultimately of *living*, to say nothing about literary art) in favor of the speaking voice, which is to say, time and process. Heidegger, if I read his destruction (or as Derrida puts it "deconstruction") of the Western tradition right, would be enthusiastic about your insistence that Aristotle was doing a talk-poem. I also want very much to see your talk-poem retranslation of a part of Homer. Will you send me a xeroxed copy when or even before *Alcheringa* comes out?

The story about the bedouin's reference to the "Roumi" is tremendous. What he says about the bedouin implies a kind of commitment to his ground that the Romios feels for his, which is the

point about place/time/speech I make in my essay on Ritsos. It's *ground* out of which Ritsos' oral poetry flows. . . .

My work progresses very slowly. But I think this book on temporal interpretation (as opposed to reading teleologically — from the end — which is how the New Critics and the Structuralists read — and murder poetry and fiction in the process) — is saying something at least worth hearing. So it's worth the agony of translating Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology into hermeneutics.

Peg has just about finished her research on Scève and the Lyonnais Platonists and should start writing anyday. The kids really like being in French schools, and so should be fluent by the time the year is out.

That's it. I look forward to hearing from you about Vol. 3/2. The sooner you get in touch with Jerry, the better. The sooner we pin the format down, the easier it will be to plan for that issue and the next couple to follow.

Our best,
Bill

David Antin (La Jolla, California) to William Spanos (Lyon, France), October 24, 1973.

Dear Bill: I thought I'd send you a copy of my latest "oral poem". The piece was done with *Alcheringa* in mind, and it is to appear there in the Winter issue. I had been meditating on the ambiguous commitment to the notion of the "primitive" that our self-designated "civilized" society has been involved with for so long. Back in the 2nd issue of *Alcheringa* Stanley Diamond proposed the unfashionable notion that despite its difficulty the idea of "primitivity" is the key term in anthropology and possibly in our own understanding of what is "wrong" with our own culture. Personally, I always felt uneasy about this gambit. First, because the idea of primitive is part of a binary distinction — a sort of axis or cut through the domain of meaning marked at its two poles as primitive-civilized — and it seems to me that the belief in the one commits you to the other. A dangerous idea and one I want no part of. Yet there is some reason for thinking of the rest of the world's career, which seems different from our somewhat eccentric one. In any event I was thinking about this — about Vico and his idea of the primitive "poetic nations" — stupid and emotional — and thinking it was this sort of reasoning that gave rise to the invention of "prose" as distinguished from "poetry", that gave rise also to the idea of "fact" as opposed to "fiction" (sometimes called "myth" sometimes "poetry") when it was not merely "a lie" — and just at this time I was invited to talk to a seminar on the "Sociology of Primitive Art" in what was intended to be a building housing all the social sciences and named after their spiritual father Giambattista Vico. So this oral poem.

I'm interested to hear your take on it. By the way Clayton Eshleman is in Paris, and I'm not sure I gave you his address. It is 26 Rue des Abbesses, Paris.

Hope things are well with you all and look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
David

*William Spanos (Lyon, France) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
December 16, 1973.*

Dear David: I just finished reading the astonishing "talk-poem," "The Sociology of Art," you sent me a month or so ago. Whatever one might say about the length, the coherence, the point — and I suspect that you have had a lot said about these from my own response, i.e., from what you would call the "literal" and what I would call the spatial or iconic consciousness — there's no denying that it's a verbal *periplus* that opens up — dis-covers, in Heidegger's word — primordial meanings in art, understanding, language, and culture that the Western world has simply forgotten. All the way through, I couldn't help comparing not only the content but also and above all the *medium* as message with what Heidegger is doing in the late essays. Indeed, I sometimes felt that what you are doing in the talk poems is even closer to what he says about hermeneutics than what he himself achieves in practice, as brilliant and moving as that often is. (Incidentally, if you don't know his little book *Gelassenheit*, translated under the ridiculous title *Discourse on Thinking*, you must read it. I think there's a fantastic affinity between that voice and the one in "The Sociology of Art," despite the Germanic and American difference.)

I got word from Rothenberg that he heard from you and that he'd like to do the interview for the Fall. Now I'm getting back to you for more of what you've got in mind. This is what I think we should include:

1) The Rothenberg "interview" (revised in the light of the new focus on the oral impulse in contemporary American poetry and your participation in this supplemental section) and some of his poetry as illustrative of the kinds of things he's doing.

2) Your talk-poem in the context of the editorial correspondence about it (Kroetsch's, mine, yours: Kroetsch has indicated willingness to play the role of the negative voice, though he'll want to spell out his position a little more fully).

I'm reluctant to give the section too much shape, because I don't want to open ourselves to the criticism that the topic is too big and important to be contained inside the discussion and work of 2 poets. Still, I'm open to your suggestions.

I've just about wound up the chapter on hermeneutics as discovery, which means that I'll be able to get to the other half-finished book on Postmodern literature by January. I'm pretty pleased with what finally came out of the long unintended haul with Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology: What it amounts to is literary interpretation based on the original meaning of *logos* as *legein* or speech and thus as dis-covery, *periplus*; not *logos* as Word or *picture* and thus as Euclidean space or Byzantine mosaic. Not *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, but dialogue.

Bill

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to William Spanos (Lyon, France),
December 25, 1973.*

Dear Bill: I'm quite comfortable with your recognition of relation between the talk-pieces and the Heidegger — the affinities are as you suspect more inherent than the result of reading. My familiarity with Heidegger does not extend beyond *Sein und Zeit* and some of the essays like *Was ist Metaphysik?* that I read perhaps 20 years ago. The later work I simply haven't read. I will surely look at *Gelassenheit*, which as you describe it sounds very reasonable, and reminds me of the strong feeling of sympathy I felt for Heidegger's mind back in my college days. . . .

I do think we should plan out the issue. Your interview with Jerry and Jerry's own work lock down one whole side of the thing. It would, I think, be necessary for me to respond to some of the questions that you ask Jerry and that he comments on — because as you know, he and I, though surely related, have quite different angles of attack. I'm not sure how you want to handle this. You could probably formulate your questions in the light of this and perhaps respond yourself to Jerry's answers or/and invite comment from me as well. Let me know what you're thinking of here.

Other figures that would make sense — It is, I think, necessary to get Dennis Tedlock into the issue. First because of his own intrinsic importance in this arena, and second because he is a perfect bridge between Jerry and me. I am sending you a xerox of a lecture he presented to the Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians in the Spring of 1973. I love the piece and if it is available I would certainly urge its publication in the issue. If it's not I'm sure we could get something else from Dennis. Probably — if we are not to confuse things by pushing toward an anthology — we should stop the inclusions right there. Mainly because though there are numerous other poets and writers who participate in the point of view — their work has been labeled for other features and this would obscure things rather than throw light on the issue. I think this is the case with John Cage's "Lectures", Ginsberg's tape recorder poems, and Kerouac's "spontaneous writing". And though I

would gladly be printed with all of these people, I'm afraid what would happen would be that Cage's interest in "chance", Ginsberg's "transcendental romanticism" and Kerouac's "demoticism", as the going cliches for dealing with these writers, would blur over the real issues. In a somewhat different vein Tarn's semi-spiritual exoticism and heavily literary tone would bury any relation. In Tedlock's case, things are quite different. First he doesn't have a label yet, and second, he is very directly involved in the same domain — the re-exploration of the oral domain, not only in the poem ritual, whatever, but in talked history and told story. Besides, I like his "cool".

As for the letter exchange among the three of us, Bob Kroetsch, you and myself — I think that's fine. I have no objection to Kroetsch's refining and extending his position, though we might each want to see and comment on each other to some extent. I am a little less worried about the idea of overstructuring an issue in relation to two poets, because I don't really think that's what we're doing. Myself, I feel as if I am speaking for a whole way of being and working, hardly my own alone — as the "sociology of art" should indicate. I think Jerry feels the same way, as his *technicians of the sacred, shaking the pumpkin* etc show. What happens is that Jerry comes with his own word, advancing with an anthology of allies and friends, and I come advancing with provisional theory — mind constructs — attempting to recover or open up the old and the new terrain.

It may be that you as well as Bob Kroetsch will want to comment more extensively than your letters (not merely on my work or Jerry's, but on the issues at stake).

Best to all of you — "courage" to Peg with the dissertation, which she is probably enjoying now that she's into it. I've heard about the cost of living in Europe. Clayton is probably going to ditch Paris for some more provincial and cheaper hangout. He spoke of Wales recently.

David

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to William Spanos (Lyon, France),
April 6, 1974.*

Dear Bill Spanos: I'm glad to hear that Jerry is well at work on the questions for the interview. After reading over the questions I think that the best thing would be for me to stay out of the whole interview, because it would overcomplicate things for all of us. I have reservations about some of the questions — their relevance and pointedness — but I assume that you and Jerome can work that out between you. As you know I have very definitive positions about most of the things that you're talking about, but they are not shared wholly with anybody. All I can do to make myself clear is to continue to lay out my own line of vision. I'm content that the talk piece "what am i doing here?" will adequately open up some of my

own particular issues sufficiently. As I said, I feel comfortable in the context of Heidegger, though I feel less so in the context of David Ignatow, whose work I like but feel is very literary, totally framed, and therefore wonderfully old fashioned. It has less than nothing to do with me. I feel fairly similarly about Tarn — whose work I rather enjoy — but find so distinctively “literary” that it seems terribly remote and so on. The reason I wanted to include the piece by Tedlock is that his “lecture” is also a didactic poem that is not in itself obviously “poetic”.

About the interplay of correspondence concerning the talking pieces, I think it would be a good idea, but I would also like to add comments in return. If you and Bob Kroetsch would like to assemble a series of letters that you have and xerox them so that we all have copies, perhaps we could then begin to see what we would all want to add. . . .

I would be happy to write specifically either in response to Kroetsch or to you in letter form, expanding what I find at stake in the domain, which is very different from Jerry’s though there is a significant overlap.

This is the best I can do at the moment. If I reach Tedlock I will write you immediately.

Best to both of you
David

*I am at the moment working on finishing the typescript for yet another talking piece “is this the right place?” which is to appear in the next New Directions annual (NO. 29, which is I think scheduled for Fall publication). It is now definite that New Directions will be doing a whole book of the talk pieces (about 12 or so), which I hope to put in their hands complete by the beginning of summer. I will be supervising the “typesetting” here — a special typewriter composition that can be photographed directly — to avoid the appearance of the Gutenberg printed page. That is how strong my commitment is to insisting that a text is a “notation” not more or less. Jay Laughlin is apparently willing to go all the way on it, a fact for which I am very grateful. . . .

*William Spanos (Lyon, France) to Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton),
April 26, 1974.*

Dear Bob: I just got a letter from David Antin in response to my question as to the role he wants to play in the interview I’m doing with Rothenberg. He says it would be better simply to do the thing that we suggested earlier, i.e., “the interplay of correspondence concerning the talking piece.” I quote him: “I think it would be a good idea, but I would also like to add comments in return. If you and Bob Kroetsch would like to assemble a series of letters that you have and xerox them so that we all have copies, perhaps we could begin to see what we would all want to add.” Since the