

project might get complicated, he thinks, and I agree, that we should get going on it quickly. So, do you still want to go through with the project? If you're willing, why don't you amplify your reservations and xerox the package and send copies as soon as possible to me and to Antin. If not, I'd appreciate hearing from you, so I can work out a different format with Antin. Time is now becoming important. Needless to say, I hope you'll decide to do it. The reservations — which *are* very real ones — have to get made somehow or other. I'm with you on that matter.

Bill

P.S. Also, *New Directions*, No. 29, is publishing a talk piece in the Fall, and has scheduled a whole book (12 pieces) for the next year or shortly after. So one way or another we can't lose by doing the talk piece, even if you think it's a crime against writing.

Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton) to William Spanos (Lyon, France), May 4, 1974.

Dear Bill: . . . You make a very good case for Antin. It's my ears that go on resisting. I still can't *hear* his significance. But I'll go on trying.

Bob

William Spanos (Lyon, France) to Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton), May 17, 1974.

Dear Bob: I'm up to my ears in getting the mss. of my book (about 550 pages) into shape to send off to Pawlikowski for typing. (I've sent him the Preface and two chapters, another is about ready to go and with luck the last three will be out in about a week and a half). Anyway, this is going to be short. One question then I'll answer yours:

Mine: and very important. What about the Antin correspondence I asked you about a couple of letters ago? Are you willing to make a statement? and if so can you xerox copies of the works for both Antin and me so we can decide where we go from there? I'd like to be able to get that settled before I leave here for Greece (a visit I'm very anxious about) i.e., precisely how the Antin materials are going to be presented. I think there ought to be something by way of justification, not only to orient our readers to what he's doing, but also to focus what clearly is a tremendously exciting impulse in modern American poetry, even if one doesn't happen to care how Antin himself is pursuing it. I also think we need the contrast with the antithetical kind of oral poetry that Rothenberg is interested in. (By the way, Dennis Tedlock [*Alcheringa*] is sending us a piece on oral poetry in an American Indian context.) I hope you'll develop your argument, but one way or another, we should decide soon. Antin is waiting to hear from us. Rothenberg has sent me some

responses to my questions — on the basis of these, especially a tendency of his to let the visual/visionary usurp the oral/existential, I think the “interview” is going to be *really* good, i.e., provocative as hell.

As ever,
Bill

Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton) to William Spanos (Lyon, France), May 20, 1974.

Dear Bill, . . . About Antin. I’m having a battle within myself on the subject — thus my wavering and my silence. As you know, I go on looking for a way to write a long poem. Antin is, as you say, onto something. I want to put down my responses. Should I begin by responding to some of your remarks? . . . This task is hugely difficult for me, because where I am as a writer is on the line.

I can certainly agree with Antin that, “if Robert Lowell is a poet i dont want to be a poet.” But to go from that failed sophistication to Antin’s own kind of naiveté is to throw out the baby with the bath. Where then is the *ground*; what then is *imagination*?

Okay, you bastards. Let’s talk.

Bob

David Antin (Solana Beach) to William Spanos (Lyon, France), May 27, 1974.

Dear Bill: I just got the notice that your double Olson-issue came out and am in the process of ordering a copy. I guess that clears the decks for your next issue. At this point I’m still a little unclear about where you are with Jerry’s interview, though I gather it’s been in progress for a while. Because of this I have some questions about the target time for the oral/literal issue. I suppose you’ll have a piece from Dennis within a couple of weeks. He’s finishing up the term out there in boston and will be clearing his decks right after that. So you should have his piece fairly soon.

I just spoke to Barry Alpert — the publisher of VORT — a magazine or periodical archive that has been doing interviews with selected poets and publishing discussion of their work etc. so far he has done Ed Dorn, Tom Raworth, Ted Berrigan, Anselm Hollo, David Bromige, Ken Irby, Fielding Dawson, and Jonathon Williams. forthcoming are issues on Robert Kelly, David Meltzer and Jack Hirschman, Jackson Mac Low, Armand Schwerner, Jerry Rothenberg and me etc. In talking about *boundary 2* we discussed the oral poetry issue and he suggested that perhaps you might be interested in a piece by him on Bucky Fuller, John Cage and me — specifically from the point of view of the “oral” — postmodernist propositions considered from three overlapping but

different points of view. The idea seemed a very good one to me — because i share your feeling that we should extend beyond a discussion of two poets, particularly where something so fundamental is concerned, and secondly it throws some more light on different aspects of the secular parts of this viewpoint, where Jerry and Tedlock will tend to emphasize the ethnopoetic broad cultural base. What I did was suggest that Barry write to you and find out what your publishing deadlines seem to be. Naturally accepting or rejecting the piece will be up to you and based on its merits.

I dont know whether I mentioned it or not, but New Directions is going to publish a book of talking pieces — the book to contain anywhere from 8 to 12 pieces will probably take over 300 pages — to be called *talking at the boundaries*. New Directions hopes to bring the book out by the Spring or, at the latest, Fall 1975. So Ill have to deliver the whole manuscript in perfect form by september. This seems very rapid, but I will be supervising the “typesetting” — which will be done on an IBM machine — either a COMPOSER or EXECUTIVE. I have to take charge of that because I have to violate the right and left margins and no typesetter in the world will produce a ragged left margin. I assume that it would probably be useful also if I set up the type for your piece in *boundary 2* as well — because putting it into the appropriate and requisite form will probably drive your typists crazy. But you’ll have to let me know when you get to that point what you want to do about that.

Im enclosing a long piece — a critical piece I did for a recent issue of OCCIDENT that I think youll be interested in. the editors of OCCIDENT were very taken by the piece in *boundary 2*, which seems to keep drawing comments, and wanted me to go on with the piece — or more specifically they wanted me to make detailed comments on a number of issues raised by the piece. They asked me a number of questions and I responded by writing about 50 pages of answer. So the piece is something of a clarification of the *boundary 2* piece. It should also throw light on where I think the world is moving and should move.

Im glad to hear that your grueling tasks are more or less done.

david

Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton) to William Spanos (Lyon, France), June 3, 1974.

Dear Bill: . . . Antin: I’ve got our letters together, with the exception of his rather good justification of the poem — which I sent on to you. I’m trying to make sense of my own stand. . . .

Williams, for me, is still the core poet. Rothenberg is exploring something related to that core, yet something that Williams sort of missed. Olson, for all the hullabaloo, comes damned close to being a (long and

almost beautiful) footnote to Williams; Roethke, that root-seeing madman in the green(mad)house, knew the sex that Olson, apparently, hadn't heard about. Stevens I read because inside his poems I myself go mad and can't stop reading. Nichol and Dorn I read for new pleasures.

It's possible that good criticism should self-destruct. It should emerge into the work of art. The growth into origins. Thus that eloquent cliché, a pregnant silence. . . .

Bob

*Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
June 6, 1974.*

Dear David: What's the name for a 3-person dialogue — at any rate, here is the beginning.

Should be rewarding — and a pleasure.

Rushing to catch noon mail: and I must soon be off to Saskatchewan and a TB sanatorium become arts centre in the Qu'Appelle Valley.

Sincerely,
Bob Kroetsch

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton),
June 20, 1974.*

Dear Bob: I'm glad you feel like undertaking this three way talk (we could call it a "conversation") — first because the work — what I'm doing is at least in part aimed to engage in discourse with others — is an effort to get away from the sealed-in package that poetry is often treated as, which is I suppose one of my main quarrels with at least one conventional notion of "form", as a poetic container. And the desire to engage with the minds of "others" means to engage with at least some partially disagreeing or differently directed people. It's hard to believe that there would be any use in or possibility of talking to anyone who totally agreed with me. For what would we have to say? Or I suppose with anyone who totally disagreed with me. For on what basis could we possibly say it? But total agreement and total disagreement among human beings living in the same time and partially in the same part of the human universe seems unlikely. I'm also glad that you want to talk to these issues because you have your own artistic life at stake and therefore a real interest in the conversation — which an academic discourse never seems to have. Let's talk about it, and maybe since you've said less — to me anyway — about your ideas of the urgency of form or its dialectic with life and the moment and about your objections to my strategies or tactics as a poet — maybe you should talk first.

— I'm sending you xeroxes of all the missing letters and some you haven't referred to

DA to R. Kroetsch Sept. 18, 1973

DA to W. Spanos Sept. 18, 1973

DA to W. Spanos Oct. 7

W. Spanos to DA Oct. 21

DA to W. Spanos Oct. 24

W. Spanos to DA Dec. 16

DA to W. Spanos Dec. 25

This covers just about all the substantive communication around the ideas involved. My letter of Oct. 24 to Bill refers to a long talk-poem called "the sociology of art" that was initially performed (improvised) in the context of primitive art. The piece differs a little from some of the others in that after it was done I deliberately interpolated some smaller sections that were not in the original talk — cadenzas of a sort —. I'm sending the piece to you too. Don't feel obligated to read it. I merely attach it as background information to our talk. It will appear in a subsequent issue of *Alcheringa* flanked by discourse from various interested parties — anthropologists, poets etc.

Once again, I'm glad you feel like talking, Bob, and right now I'd like to hear you speak.

Best

David Antin

*William Spanos (Cathar Country) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
June 21, 1974.*

Dear David: Bob xeroxed the correspondence over "what am i doing here?" and sent it to me. I've added what I've got and am sending the package on to you under separate cover. Add the letters you've received from us and whatever you think is necessary to clarify your position (deleting anything you think is irrelevant) and send it back to Kroetsch for his summation. I'm going to be out of touch until about August 20 (we've decided to drive down to Greece, despite the fact that the mail I've been getting from Athens is being consistently opened), so I'll add my comments immediately on getting back to the U.S.

Heidegger's *Destruktion* of the *Logos* of the Western metaphysical tradition and his dis-closure/dis-discovery of its meaning as *legein*, i.e., speech articulated in time, continues to throw light (wrong metaphor) on your opened and explorative talk-poetry, your poetry as *periplus*:

not as land looks on a map
but as sea bord seen by men sailing.

But I'm not sure you would sympathize with Heidegger's ontological concerns or at least with his emphasis on the ontological potentialities of talking. If there's anything that, as far as I'm concerned, bothers me about your talk-poems, it's precisely your tendency to keep the relationship between talking and Being at a too great, even imperceptible, distance. If Being isn't a presence in the process, what's the point? Surely we're talking about something a lot deeper than aesthetics even though the immediate subject is poetic language.

As for the deadline, I'm still uncertain. The double Olson issue has set the whole process back by months, so that Vol. 2/3 (the "Ignatow" issue) won't be out until the middle or even end of this summer. Vol. 3/1, the issue on Canadian Poetry that Bob Kroetsch is editing, will be out in the fall or perhaps winter. This means that Vol. 3/2, the Oral Poetry issue, won't make it at least until December (I just got a note from Jerry telling me that he's simply been too deeply involved in readings — Rotterdam, Paris, London — to be able to meet the early deadline: June 1), which keeps the question of whether or not we can do the Oral Poetry issue before the one that will contain the Tarn materials very much alive. I *do* hope we can come out with the Oral Poetry issue first — I'm psychologically geared for it — and will assume that we will until all hope has been abandoned. So let's make August 30 absolutely the latest deadline — and count on getting the issue out by spring. (Dennis Tedlock sent us the piece you had sent me earlier as an example of the kind of thing he's doing: "Learning to Listen: Oral History as Poetry." Though it's a little self-consciously stylized for me, I think it will work very nicely into the issue we're discovering — and, like virtually everything else, ought to provoke interest, to use a neutral term. I wonder what his audience of historians thought of his performance. I've also heard from Alpert and am writing to ask him for the piece on Fuller, Cage, and Antin — though I don't want it in the interview form he suggests).

That's it. You can get in touch with me in Greece by writing c/o our Greek editor, N.C. Germanacos/ 25 Aristodemou/ Athens, if we survive the border police: I'm told that the *APR* issue containing *Romiosini* and my essay on Ritsos is circulating in Athens.

Best,
Bill

*William Spanos (Binghamton) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
September 5, 1974.*

Dear David: We just got back from Greece (where we spent some anxious — and exciting days). I've looked over the materials for the "Oral Poetry" issue and on the basis of what's here have decided with Kroetsch that we'd best postpone publication until the spring (April-May 1975). This should

give us a chance to work on the *Correspondence*, the interview with Rothenberg (which has a very long way to go) and give Alpert a chance to finish his essay. . . .

I'm writing hurriedly . . . more later on the fantastic events we bore witness to — and almost participated in — in Hydra-Athens, Greece.

Bill

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to William Spanos (Binghamton),
September 15, 1974.*

Dear Bill, It's good to hear that you're all safely back in the country. Things in Greece sound even a little too exciting for comfort — for Americans anyway regardless of what side they're on. But I'd like to hear your version of what's happening there. All I've heard so far is the radio and a Greek student/of mine, who's there, but somewhat cautious — understandably — about committing much to the mails.

Also — the idea of correspondence between here and Europe was probably a little unrealistic. The mail's bad enough here. So I suppose the Spring 75 date for the issue is probably much safer — or more precisely was unavoidable. I did hear from Bob Kroetsch just before he went off to work on his own things at some writers' colony for the summer, and he sounded quite anxious to get on with the correspondence. . . . If you like, I could in the meantime respond to your question of "ontology" and "Heidegger's *Destruktion* of the Logos" which on rereading I find extremely unsatisfactory. I have recently had a chance to read *Gelassenheit, Holzwege*, to reread (since college days) *Was heisst Denken?* and the *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. It's no accident that he was a Nazi. It is not a secondary attribute of his mind, which I remember thinking it was — his sympathy for a contemptible, facile, inflated and trashy romanticism. But the infuriating certainty with which he produces out of an a priori pocket his totally banal reading of a Greek temple and a Van Gogh painting suggests that the method — the way — is nothing but a screen for a leisurely and novel walk through a well known park to a nineteenth century statue. I suppose it's odd that it's his commentary on art I find most infuriating, but the banality is more naked there. You speak of periplus — well if thinking is travelling it's not on a track — laid down — over and over. Anyone who starts with "Being" as a goal has already reduced the possibility of travelling. He always it seems knew what Being was and could produce it from his hip pocket when necessary, and it came out of the earth of that "most philosophical country" (Germany) when it thought about Greece and about peasants. It is the Nazi speaking here "Was heisst Welt, wenn wir von der Weltverduesterung sprechen?," who answers with the arrogance of the Western conquerer, "*Welt ist immer geistige Welt. Das Tier hat keine Welt, auch keine Umwelt.*" This could

have been said by Descartes, by the technological users and manipulators. "The earth is yours to use. Use it." (So also the Bible and the Greek conquerors, The Lords of Achaea). Either the animals will have souls, and plants and maybe even the rocks, or whatever will pass for souls to the extent that we think we have them or there won't be any world. And then we'll have a very handy answer to Heidegger's question "... why isn't there just nothing?" Because there will be just nothing, and Heidegger's Westerners will see to that answer in their laboratories and their council chambers and their computer banks and their libraries. Because it turns out that Heidegger has no quarrel with the way we came, he just wants to stop at the day before yesterday. Lotsaluck. "How does it stand with the world?" is a terrific question until you find out what he means by "world". The trees aren't the world and the rocks aren't the world, and the cockroaches aren't the world, even the horses aren't the world, not even Arabian chargers, and not even all of the people are the world. But that had to figure. This is where domino theory applies. If you want to get anywhere special by walking, you don't do it on the Thruways not even on the country road. Roadways are not the basis of foot travel. I'm afraid its the same way with thinking. If we really are going to go about thinking, approaching thinking, we've got to get back to the kind of travelling it is. Is thinking a kind of discourse? I would suggest that it is. Its a way of going, sometimes by talking — though maybe not always. I would suggest that talking is a way of going — that sometimes — often — is thinking. You say "what am i doing here?" is about "poetic language." I say it isn't. Its about talking. Its about the value of claiming for poetry all of talking, not just special kinds of talking. It's "about" I say, but its not "about", its an entry of "talking" into a situation set up for a special kind of talking (called poetic) and a special subform of that, retalking (reading from earlier talking) — from a talk that may have been blocked from anything like its normal human occasion by being undertaken at a desk with a typewriter in an otherwise empty room. And this is a way of talking and poets have still managed to talk this way and have what they put down come out sometimes still as talking. But the trouble it cost them to do this — some of them had to use drugs or alcohol or some fantasy of excitement to provide a memory of occasion — all to provide the continuous pulse to utterance that a human discourse situation ought to provide without much effort. So we have stories of writer's block — did you ever hear of a talker's block —? If you've got something to say you say it, if you find yourself in a human situation that requires this talk and you're not somehow crippled by accident or inconvenience or distrust or fear. I still remember Kerouac saying in some novel to someone, who was I guess Randall Jarrell, that the only sense of form he wanted in his work was the form of a guy standing up in a bar and telling a story. You see its not a talking culture altogether and the liquor helps. But I'm not knocking spirits or even pills, though I personally don't care for them. Anyway,

“what am i doing here?” was this talk in this special place, where I came to ask this question, “can’t i find a way to justify my claim to a relationship to my friend (Jerome Rothenberg reading his poetry here) and your readiness to listen to the kind of talking you value because it is to the point of important things in an important way and call poetry — isn’t this what im doing here — because i am a poet — a man talking in a way that makes things happen that i like to call thinking into and among important things — and im making it happen so that it could happen again differently, with more room, for myself and anybody else whos also a poet?” Okay. But you’ll ask me what are important things? And I’ll say as I said before that I want to know “how it stands with the world,” which is why I once thought I was sympathetic to Heidegger. But I want to know “how it stands with the world,” not the *spiritual* world, or not *especially* the “spiritual world.” Because it was in that trip that came to a divide at that place that we lost too much world. Now you say if “Being isn’t a presence what’s the point?” And I don’t really know how to answer that except to say that I can’t imagine any valuable image for the term “Being” conceived as a presence. Maybe we shouldn’t really talk about “Being.” I mean just because we can form some kind of nominalization of a verb through a habit of our grammar, does that mean that it’s worth examining as if it had a “denotation” in some remarkably absurd 17th century sense? Why don’t we treat the term “being” as still a participle and let it be — ? Just because you can produce a name by a trick of grammar doesn’t mean that anything will answer to it if you call.

Bill, you mentioned also that you would prefer to have another essay to round out the material — give it more ground — and I think your idea is sound. I’ve given it some thought and it occurred to me that what would really give a sense of the scope of what we’re talking about would be an essay that would take up the Parry and Lord discussion of ancient Greek material, maybe its Anglo-Saxon or Germanic correlates, the South Slavic guslar materials — the Byzantine Digenes Akritas also, and present a picture of the growing reading scene as it appeared in the coffee shops and bars of New York and San Francisco. (After all the tavern was the place of the guslar poet often enough, and this vast frequent reading scene changed the whole feeling for the relation of speech and talk and performance for a poetry that had been locked in a closet pretty much for most of this century — and the change didn’t really begin till the late fifties. With all this you probably figure I’m kidding you and that there are no ten people who could do it. But I do have someone in mind. He’s a scholar, and poet. A Greek (American Greek, but fluent in both ancient and modern Greek) who is a classical and medieval scholar — has a book published by Harvard University Press on the Goddess Natura. His concentration in scholarly work is essentially in medieval — He’s also a poet, published by Black Sparrow Press — George Economou. George was in New York from the beginning of the reading scene in the coffee shops at the very start. He’s an

old friend of mine and of Jerry Rothenberg's and Paul Blackburn's and Robert Kelly's. George was an editor of *Trobar* also. He was in at the whole start of the readings at the Old Cafe Cino, the Seventh Street Coffee Shop, the 10th Street, the Deux Megots, the Metro, a veteran of all night readings at St. Marks in the Bouwerie — And he writes well. All I can say is that if he's willing to do the job, and I merely suggested the possibility and he seemed quite interested, he's about the only person I could think of who could cover the terrain — ancient — medieval and modern and have intelligent things to say about the whole business. . . .

Yours,
David

*William Spanos (Binghamton) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
October 1, 1974.*

Dear David: I've written to Economou on your suggestion. Will you also drop him a note to verify our genuine interest?

I'm buried, and don't have time to expand, but I do want to say that I intend shortly to call you on your attack on Heidegger, i.e. "his sympathy for a contemptible, facile, inflated and trashy romanticism."

Best,
Bill

*Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton) to David Antin (Solana Beach),
Oct. 5, 1974.*

Dear David, Let me sound like a reactionary editor, and then sound no more:

1. The talk-poem is postmodern in one of the potentially negative dimensions of postmodern. That is, following upon the (necessary) collapse of the notion of "high art," it assumes that to write at all is somehow to create art. To justify this assumption, you have to negate imagination. I see your connection with the later Coleridge, you, David Antin, as an inversion of and yet a recurrence of that Coleridge, but I cannot grant either of you my willing suspension of disbelief.

2. Your talk-poem becomes poem as pure content. It is not a solution to but an avoidance of the problem of form. In art I look for the tension of opposing forces: the form itself, and with it the force, the the energy within the form, that threatens to bust the form apart, kick it to pieces. Dialog as monolog sounds like paradox but in fact is evasion. I have on occasion managed to perceive the party bore as artist, but I usually go home early from such parties.

3. Your poetry as "uninterruptable discourse" is uninterruptable simply in the sense that a nervous lecturer is uninterruptable. Not a poetry

of terror but a terror of poetry. It becomes, as in the case of the scientific language to which you refer, "totalitarian use of language." I choose to resist.

4. Your stance is a naive one. Naive in its avoidance of selection, in its concern with the pleasure of hearing one's own voice rather than one's language (another postmodern hazard). Naive, finally, again, in assuming that to talk about writing a poem is to write one (a *modern* convention deprived of its metaphoric intent).

5. I like your reckless recovery of narrative into poetry. The tattooed prick and the 200-dollar car are fine passages; the Coleridgean mask falls away and you do indeed "tell." Postmodern, at its best, restores to first place the temporality of language over the spatiality of image. Forget your Socrates. Remember your Homer.

Sincerely,
Robert Kroetsch

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to William Spanos (Binghamton),
October 10, 1974.*

Dear Bill, Jerome's new address is 2928 No. Downer Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211. He's at the University of Wisconsin, related in some capacity to the 20th Century Studies operation now being directed by Michel Benamou. He's apparently doing some sort of conference on Ethnopoetics for them and doing some sort of teaching or whatever.

I just got Bob Kroetsch's note and looked it over. I'm sure I can write a fairly succinct response to some of the issues it raises, and then if he isn't in the mood to go further we can edit what we already have.

I sent off a letter to George Economou as you asked, and though I haven't heard from him yet I'm fairly sure he'll come through with a piece. I just wrote him a few days ago, sent him some of the new talk pieces etc. He's been preparing a short piece on Jerry Rothenberg for the issue of VORT dealing with Jerry, so I think he'll be well honed to talk about the contexts of both contemporary and ancient materials.

Respond to the Heidegger as you can, I would really like to hear your views on him. I was awfully disappointed on rereading him – to fall through the brilliant and amiable style to that commonplace ground.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Best,
David

*David Antin (Solana Beach) to Robert Kroetsch (Binghamton),
October 11, 1974.*

Dear Bob: In responding to your note I don't so much want to defend or explain a particular work of mine, which may or may not happen to