Jackson Mac Low

Thing of Beauty

New and Selected Works

Edited by Anne Tardos

University of California Press
Berkeley Los Angeles London

SIMPSON

IMPRINT IN HUMANITIES

The humanities endowment
by Sharon Hanley Simpson and
Barclay Simpson honors
MURIEL CARTER HANLEY
whose intellect and sensitivity
have enriched the many lives
that she has touched.

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the
generous contributions to this book provided by
the Simpson Humanities Endowment Fund of the
University of California Press Foundation
and by Yoko Ono Lennon.

Thing of Beauty


Ballads begone!
Bone
designates a
a distiller!
Estriol
glossie.
stone.
A bird and a
Borges on
Land rail
is being
tree.
Sinbad
are
Dante
anodes.
realisable
translit
and stilted. table

Jackson Mac Low

Thing of Beauty

New and Selected Works

Edited by Anne Tardos

University of California Press
Berkeley Los Angeles London

University of California Press, one of the most distinguished university presses in the United States, enriches lives around the world by advancing scholarship in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Its activities are supported by the UC Press Foundation and by philanthropic contributions from individuals and institutions. For more information, visit www.ucpress.edu.

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

For acknowledgments of permission for previously published poems, please see credits, p. 449.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mac Low, Jackson.
Thing of beauty : new and selected works / Jackson Mac Low ; edited by Anne Tardos.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-520-24936-3 (alk. paper)
1. Experimental poetry. 2. Performance art—Texts.
I. Tardos, Anne. II. Title.

PS3563.A31875T45 2008
811'.54—dc22 2007026357

Manufactured in the United States of America
16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is printed on New Leaf EcoBook 50, a 100% recycled fiber of which 50% is de-inked post-consumer waste, processed chlorine-free. EcoBook 50 is acid-free and meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/ASTM D5634-01 *(Permanence of Paper).*

Contents

* Previously unpublished.

Selected Dances from *The Pronouns: A Collection of 40 Dances for the Dancers, 3 February–22 March 1964*

Selections from PFR-3 Poems

Selections from Odes for Iris

Selections from *Pieces o' Six*

Selections from *42 Merzgedichte* in Memoriam *Kurt Schwitters*

Selections from *Twenties: 100 Poems*

Selections from 154 Forties

Selections from the Stein Poems

Foreword

I met Jackson in 1975, when mutual friends introduced us. Jackson had just moved from the Bronx to a loft in Washington Market, the part of lower Manhattan now known as Tribeca, the same loft from which I write these words, a few months after his death. This is where Jackson and I spent 26 years together: writing, creating paintings and collages, traveling, participating in festivals, recording radio plays, and performing in our own, each other's, and our joint works. Jackson was a major influence on my work and on my life, and even during his painful last years, our life was cheerful and happy.

I call this book *Thing of Beauty* after Jackson's first antiwar poem and because I consider his work exactly that—a thing of beauty. While the poem of that title he wrote at 15 made clear a reference to Keats, I am not doing so directly, nor am I saying that the most outstanding feature of Jackson's work was lyrical beauty. I am pointing to his distinct concern with the value of beauty in art, and though he rarely wrote about it, we had innumerable conversations on the subject. It was not until late in his life that he finally spelled out his preoccupation with beauty in art, in the instructions he wrote for the musicians interpreting one of his compositions:

> I intend that pieces such as this one should give full scope to the imagination, initiative, and sense of beauty of each of the performers. I ask them to be co-composers with me in making use of the musical materials I give, within the loosely defined limits I propose, to make a complexly beautiful object existing in time.
>
> The beauty of it is "complex" in that it will incorporate the results of decisions that may often be "imperfect." The many forces at work within the individuals and the community of performers and the environment in which they make and implement their decisions will only flickeringly bring about moments of beauty.

> For beauty is not the only value embodied in these acts of communal composition. The senses of beauty of the composer-performers will inevitably differ, even sometimes conflict, and will be expressed differently. The decisions made by others than the "instigating composer" are not controlled by him. He asks only for certain qualities of good will and intense mutual attention to all the sounds audible as well as to all the composer-performers.
>
> He values freedom—everybody's freedom within this composer-performer community. He is neither the dictator nor (when he participates in the ensemble) the primary soloist. He is willing to risk that moments will occur in performances that he will not perceive as beautiful.
>
> Often such moments will embody other values than beauty, such as energetic initiative or imaginativeness, but the consequences of freedom—as vaguely as it may be defined—are sure not to accord at times with the senses of beauty of all members of any particular community of composer-performers, much less those of every member of its community of hearers. This is a risk I am deliberately taking.[1]

In many other performance instructions Jackson asked for this "good will" on the part of the performers, and only late in life did he get as specific as asking for beauty. He had an uncanny ability to see beauty in virtually everything that was not vulgar. Some perceive Jackson's work as being about consciously disregarding aesthetic values, at least during the periods when he was working with systematic chance operations; however, this is a simplistic take on what he was doing, and it overlooks both the constants and the fundamental changes in his attitudes and ways of working over the years. One constant during his life was his love of, and striving for, beauty. His intermittent work with nonintentional and indeterminate methods, such as chance operations, never precluded or interfered with his attention to beauty, even when he was looking to free himself from allowing individual taste and other artistic value judgments to interfere with the results. In his work, beauty was always present.

1. From Instructions for "Music for Gathas in Memory of Armand Schwerner" (1999), part of a work entitled "Four Vocabulary Gathas *in Memoriam* Armand Schwerner," a piece we wrote collaboratively, but to which Jackson later added a musical score. I did not include the piece in this book, since it is featured prominently in a recent book of Jackson's performance works, *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces, 1955–2002* (New York: Granary Books, 2005), wherein an excerpt of the music notation also appears, albeit without these instructions from which I quote.

In the following outline of the history of Jackson's work I rely not only on reconstructing my own experiences with Jackson and our many conversations, but also on quoting and adapting talks he gave and papers he wrote toward the end of his life, in which he continually reformulated his view of the progression of his life's work. In writing the introductions to individual poems and groups of poems in this book, I have also relied heavily on Jackson's own descriptions and terminology. In addition, I've included his essay "Poetry and Pleasure" as the "author's introduction" to this book. Jackson worked on this essay from 1999 to 2002, and I think it helps open up the world revealed in this book.

From 1937 to 1954, Jackson wrote many poems, most of which were written in ways then generally considered "traditional." At first he wrote free verse, but in 1939 he began writing metrical verse, both rhymed and unrhymed, as well as prose. Until 1954 and occasionally thereafter, until his death in December 2004, Jackson continued to write both free and metrical verse. Late in 1954 he began devising and using "systematic" methods in composing both verbal works and musical and performance works. His first such methods involved various kinds of chance operations, and the first work he wrote this way was "5 biblical poems" (the "2nd biblical poem" is included in this book).

In using chance operations, Jackson was not concerned (at that time or later) with getting results that would be "interesting" or "about" anything specific; rather, he used them to make works that were (to the greatest extent possible) free of his own individual taste, memories, and psychology, including any artistic and literary traditions that might otherwise have influenced his process of composition.

Jackson's motivation for writing verbal works and composing music in these more "impersonal" ways came from an interpretation of Zen Buddhism that led him and various other artists of the 1950s and 1960s and later to try making artworks that were minimally egoic. In a talk he gave in Tucson in 2001, he said that he and these other writers and composers

> tried to make artworks with as little intervention as possible from the individual ego. We considered the ego a formation that stood in the way of one's perceiving "reality as such." The use of chance operations seemed at the time a good way to minimize egoic motivations. The definition of the

term "ego" implicit in this case was that of Zen Buddhism, not that of Freudian psychology. It included all the Freudian "institutions of the psyche"—id, ego, and superego—all "layers of the mind," conscious, liminal, and unconscious. To use a Zen Buddhist term, I was attempting to write and to make other kinds of audible and visible artworks "from the No-Mind."

It was only later, after years of studying and irregularly practicing Buddhism, as well as years of utilizing such artmaking methods, that I realized that using those methods is as egoic as other ways of making artworks—that, in short, there are no shortcuts to "enlightenment."

Moreover, while Buddhism enjoins us to lessen the hegemony of the ego in its most widely accepted sense—the dominance of what one experiences as her individual will—it more importantly calls us to realize that the self is ultimately illusory. As the 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume observed, we never experience the self but only perceptions. "When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other," Hume wrote. "I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception." But an understanding of the self—even though the term is ultimately meaningless—is only attained by working *through* what each of us thinks of as "my self," not by attempting to evade or abolish it.

However, by the time I realized that the artmaking methods that I'd mistakenly thought were "nonegoic" are not, I had come to value them for their own sake. As often happens, what were conceived and devised as means toward a highly elevated end came to be valued, if not as ends in themselves, as means toward less exalted ends: I liked the kinds of poems and other verbal works and the music that I could make with those methods. So I continued to employ them (though not exclusively) and came eventually to combine them with other artmakingways. Buddhism had led me to them but no longer provided me with justifications or motivations for utilizing them.[2]

Jackson used systematic methods exclusively, including chance operations and "translation methods"—that is, systematically translating the notation of musical works into words and vice versa—from December 1954 until May 1960, when he began devising the two main groups of methods he called "deterministic" (the acrostic and diastic methods, which I describe

2. "A Talk about My Writingways, University of Arizona, Tucson, 24 January 2001." Written in New York, early December 2000–24 January 2001. [unpublished manuscript]

below). Each of these deterministic methods uses two texts—a source text and a seed text—to produce a raw output, which Jackson might then work on in various ways.

In the 1960s, when he first devised deterministic methods, he thought of them as kinds of chance operations. It was only in the early 1990s that he realized that such methods were fundamentally different from chance operations, because deterministic methods do not involve what could rightly be called "chance," unless one makes a mistake. That is, if one applies a deterministic text-selection method multiple times to the same source text and seed text, making no mistakes, the method's output will always be exactly the same. Chance operations are likely to produce a different output each time. Nevertheless, even though deterministic methods don't involve chance, you cannot predict their output.

Jackson offered this explanation of the reasons behind his use of deterministic methods:

> I felt these ways of working allowed me to lessen dependence on the illusory ego and let "the rest of the world" enter into the works. Especially, I wanted to allow linguistic units "to speak for themselves," that is, without having to express an ego—its likes, opinions, transitory emotions, and so on. In short, I tried "to evade the ego"—let reality speak rather than this illusory person.[3]

Later, he came to realize that neither chance operations nor deterministic methods are truly nonegoic. We often talked about the fact that even when he used a nonegoic system, he was still consciously choosing the verbal materials (e.g., the source and seed texts used in some deterministic methods); thus, his conscious mind and personal tastes were inevitably involved in the compositional process, as when his pacifist anarchism and other political convictions become evident even in works made using systematic methods.

Despite the realization that neither chance operations nor deterministic methods used in artmaking are nonegoic, the *illusion* that they were

3. "Person, Personae, Look on the Page, Orality and 'Voice,' or, Living as a Verbal Artist as a Person." Talk written for presentation at Naropa Institute, Boulder, Colorado, in July 1994, and subsequently revised. [unpublished manuscript]

motivated him and justified their continued use. (Actually, he rarely employed chance operations alone after April 1960, though he did continue to use them as auxiliary methods.)

As we can see in the selections from *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* and *Asymmetries,* his first deterministic text-selection method was an "acrostic reading-through text selection," which was the principal method he used when making poems and other verbal works from May 1960 to January 1963. In using this and related methods, he would read through a source text to find, successively, words and/or other verbal units—word fragments, phrases, other sentence parts, or even whole sentences—that have the successive letters of the words of a seed text as their first letters. For example, he might have spelled the word *cats* acrostically by finding, as he read through the poem's source text, the words "*C*astrated *A*nimals *T*ire *S*oon." The verbal units he selected were chosen deliberately or by chance operations or by some other impersonal method at the beginning of each poem's composition. He often used the title of the source text as the seed text for the poem that was being written.

In early January 1963, Jackson devised and began using the deterministic methods that he called "diastic reading-through text-selection methods." Here, as with acrostic methods, he used a seed text to select from a source text the words (or other linguistic units) that became the method's raw output. However, in using diastic methods, he would spell *through* the seed text in words (or other linguistic units) that he would come across as he read through the source text. That is, he would select words or other linguistic units with the letters of the seed text in the positions that they occupy in the seed text. For example, he might have spelled through the word *word* by selecting "*W*hite g*O*ats ag*R*eeably hee*D*." (After 1989, he employed a computer program—written for him by the poet and critic Charles O. Hartman—that automated this diastic method.)

Jackson didn't always use diastic methods in completely straightforward ways. For instance, the poems in *The Pronouns* (1964) were made by a modified diastic method that involved selecting words or phrases with an "ing" (e.g., "being" or "making something") that he had written on index cards, which then functioned as the source text. Each card had one to five such words or phrases written on it, and Jackson would incorporate each word or phrase into a sentence, along with adverbs of time. Each of the

forty poems in *The Pronouns* comprises a connected group of instructions for dancers or other performance artists.

He wrote *Words nd Ends from Ez* (1981–83) by reading through Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and finding words and ends of words (ranging from all except the first letter of a word to only its last letter) by means of a diastic method in which the name "Ezra Pound" was the seed text.

Most of his verbal works from the 1980s were written either by diastic methods or by methods involving "liminal decisions"—selecting thoughts on the threshold between consciousness and the unconscious or not quite conscious, what he often termed "direct writing" or "intuitive composition." From 1981 to 1989 he alternated between these two methods.

The 100 poems in *Twenties* (1989–90) were made by gathering words, phrases, and other linguistic material from his inner and outer environments—he frequently wrote original drafts while traveling, at concerts, and otherwise away from home, which he would later revise at home. He would put this environmental material into a simple verse form, each poem consisting of five unrhymed quatrains with lines of varying lengths. He termed such loose constraints on form "fuzzy verse."

From November 1990 through early 1995, he wrote the first drafts of his 154 Forties using the same method he used to write the *Twenties:* gathering words, phrases, and sometimes whole sentences that he saw, heard, or thought of as he wrote. He used no other method in making these "fuzzy verse" poems, each of which consists of eight five-line stanzas where the first three lines are rather long, the fourth line is very long, and the last line is short.

In April 1998, he began writing his Stein series, poems based on texts by Gertrude Stein, which he finished (except for some later revisions) on Christmas Day 2000. The series includes 161 poems, most of them two to four pages long, but some much longer (the longest is 55 pages). Of these poems, Jackson says:

> The way I wrote making the Steinpoems permitted me to use all of my writingways, or just a few of them, as I preferred. It also allowed me to intervene in the makingprocess more flexibly than when I only selected source and seed texts (personally or methodically) and ran them through the diastic word-selection process without altering its output in any significant way.

> Though the whole makingprocess starts out with someone else's work and a deterministic method (which may be preceded by auxiliary chance operations), this combination of writingways allows me "to engage with contingency" rather than simply "to accept the results of contingency"—as I did before and during the 1980s at those times when I composed verbal and musical works by means of chance operations and/or deterministic methods.[4]

In 2001, Jackson began making poems using combinations of ways similar to those he had used to write the Stein series, but using sources and seeds by authors in addition to Gertrude Stein. In the HSC and HSCH series, for example, as in the Stein series, Jackson used a text-selection method to gather a vocabulary of words and phrases that he then worked into their final shape.

The three parts of this book reflect Jackson's three major "writingways." Part I includes work from 1937 to 1954 and is the shortest section of the book, not because I consider the works from that period less important than his later works, but because that was Jackson's own preference—he was actively involved in the planning of this book up until his final days. As he says in his introduction to *Representative Works: 1938–1985,* which also emphasizes work created after 1954:

> Readers will quickly discover [that] the years since 1954 are much better represented than those before. This isn't because I think badly of my earlier work. I can imagine a fairly substantial *Selected Earlier Works*. But with the "5 biblical poems," begun in December 1954, I started producing poems and performance pieces markedly different from both my own previous works and those of other verbal artists.
>
> Why did I begin at that time composing poems, musical works, group performance works ("simultaneities"), and plays by means of chance operations? Why did I begin to *view performance* as central and texts as primarily notations for performance (if only by a silent reader)? Why did my work begin to include silences longer than those occasioned by punctuation marks (sometimes *much* longer) as well as indeterminate features (ones realized differently at each performance)?
>
> Certainly, no one—least of all [John] Cage—tried *to persuade* me to

4. "A Talk about My Writingways."

> change my ways. And when I first encountered aleatoric methods, I felt strong reservations about them, which I openly expressed. Nevertheless, not much later, I found myself employing systematic-chance methods of my own—and composing both determinate and indeterminate works with them—with great pleasure and gusto. The explanation, if any, must be sought not only in the realm of my artistic activities, but in the wider sphere of my life in general.[5]

Part II, covering the period from December 1954 to March 1979, begins with one of the "5 biblical poems" and includes selections from published volumes and from such previously uncollected works as the later asymmetries and miscellaneous pieces that were not part of any series. The works in this part, as in the book as a whole, appear in roughly chronological order, except for the selection of Light Poems, which were written intermittently over several decades but are presented here as a group.

As we've already seen, there were never any hard-edged transitions in Jackson's ways of working. Even as he wrote poetry by means of wholly or partially nonintentional methods involving chance operations and deterministic methods, he also continued to write traditional verse, as in the Odes for Iris (1971), a book-length series of highly personal poems. I've included many lesser-known poems in the deliberately large selection from this work.

Jackson was also a prolific visual artist, and I have included a few drawings and photographs, but I've kept these to a minimum because the emphasis here is on his poetry. (Many of his visual performance scores were recently published in *Doings: Assorted Performance Pieces, 1955–2002.)*

Part III covers the period from September 1979, when he created the room-sized poetry environment "A Vocabulary for Annie Brigitte Gilles Tardos," to September 2004. The early 1980s marked another turning point in Jackson's work, one that, like the turning point in late 1954, is undoubtedly associated with the wider sphere of his life in general. During this period, as I've already mentioned, he moved away from nonintentional and systematic writing and returned to free writing and intuitive composition. (Even though the French Sonnets were written mainly in the early 1980s, I placed them in Part II, because they were composed entirely us-

5. Jackson Mac Low, *Representative Works: 1938–1985* (New York: Roof Books, 1986), xv.

ing systematic methods.) In his 1985 introduction to *Representative Works,* Jackson wrote:

> I feel sympathy for my self of the middle 1950s, since in the 1980s other changes have been happening in and to me. I find myself questioning all my beliefs and ways of working—*questioning though not rejecting* [emphasis added]. Some beliefs, such as my opposition to warfare, interpersonal and interspecific violence, exploitation, and authority depending on violence, are stronger than ever. About others I have reservations of varying intensity.
>
> Without rejecting compositional methods followed over a quarter century, I am exploring new ways as well as reexamining older ones. I am, for instance, much more interested in texts per se—works primarily for readers, though they can also be read aloud or performed—and in works written or composed directly (sometimes spontaneously), rather than by means of chance operations.[6]

In 2002, Jackson wrote in an unsent letter to a friend: "The first thing you (& everyone else) should know about me, my works, and my ways, & how I think about them now is that all of them are always changing. But, also, that I've never repudiated any work I've written, composed, or painted (or otherwise made for visual reception)."

A year earlier, he said on the subject of not using nonintentional methods exclusively:

> I didn't feel there was "anything wrong" in expressing my opinions or emotions or perceptions. Merely that the attempt to produce determinate and indeterminate literary works by nonintentional methods was both worthwhile in itself and consonant with Buddhist insights about the world and the person.
>
> But I never stood in one place. In 1960 I began to allow performers' choices to determine significant features of performances of nonintentionally composed verbal and musical scores as well as of ones intentionally composed. In short, I allowed what some Buddhist teachers call "the conventional ego" to interact with what was determined nonintentionality.
>
> . . . I write and compose both "directly" and "indirectly," but I truly believe that the works I now write directly [e.g., the Forties] are less suffused and determined by the conventional ego than they would have been had I

6. Ibid., xvi.

not—for several decades—written and composed primarily by nonintentional methods.[7]

In Part III, I have included a large number of poems from the 154 Forties, previously collected only in small groups and many appearing here for the first time. The Forties were written freely and without the use of any system or method other than a predetermined verse format. They reveal the inner workings of Jackson's mind and his encyclopedic knowledge as no other works do.

Selecting from the voluminous Forties and the even more voluminous Stein series was the greatest challenge in putting this book together. Neither of these two book-length series has been collected, although many appeared in magazines. Their substantial representation here along with Jackson's other later works, such as selections from the books *Pieces o' Six* and *From Pearl Harbor Day to FDR's Birthday,* is intended to extend the momentum of *Representative Works,* the last "new & selected," which was published in 1986.

Many of Jackson's introductions, endnotes, and descriptions appear throughout this book, which makes for a certain amount of redundancy, but Jackson favored redundancy, and more importantly, the notes are intrinsic to the poems—in some cases, they are longer than the poems themselves. In a sense, some of these notes are themselves poetry.

As a lifelong Buddhist, who understood that in order to live life fully it's necessary to embrace one's death, Jackson was on intimate terms with his own death, as we can see from many poems, most notably the 1958 poem "Sonnet of My Death," which ends with the lines:

My death arises through the limbs like vine
and nuzzles silently the heart and tongue;
it rubs against the brain and through the eyes
it gazes like a wistful dog whose one
communication is to lick and touch
and claim the body I do not call mine.

7. "A Talk about My Writingways."

During the final months of his life, when we were both quite conscious of the upcoming and sadly inevitable event, I kept coming across one of his very last poems lying around the house, entitled "It Will Glow Unseen Until It Doesn't" (HSCH 1). It was one of his many ways of saying good-bye.

I have often thought of Jackson as an alchemist, who could, as if by magic, transmute simple verbal, musical, and visual elements into things precious and solid. I am grateful to him for all the beauty and strength he brought into my life and into the world we inhabit.

—Anne Tardos, 2006

Poetry and Pleasure

JACKSON MAC LOW

for Anne Tardos

It often seems to me that the whole point of art is pleasure—the pleasure of making artworks and the pleasure of experiencing them.

"Whole point" is both an overstatement and ambiguous. I wished to bring back to attention the fact that people make artworks both because doing so is pleasurable and in order to cause pleasure to others. There are also other notable reasons for doing so. The primary reason for making an artwork is to bring it into being. All others—even pleasure—are subsidiary to that.

There are many kinds of art—probably more kinds today than ever before. This may be because many more kinds of pleasure are admissible and admitted today than formerly. Some artists and art-experiencers gain simple pleasures from simple artworks. Others experience complex pleasures from complex artworks. But then, some obtain complex pleasures from simple artworks or simple pleasures from complex artworks. People are widely various. It follows that artworks are also. This variety is in itself one of the positive pleasure-giving aspects of living in a society where many kinds of people and many kinds of pleasure and many kinds of artworks are admissible and admitted.

It is probably a paradox that this can happen in a society in which many people and actions of people cause many kinds of pain—often kinds of pain that do not come about necessarily, as from diseases and injuries that cannot be avoided. The kinds of pain that people suffer in present-day societies are often due to clumsy social, economic, and political arrangements that simply need not be so clumsy, so slovenly. Some of them are the result of—and help to further the ends of—overweening impulses and desires. Many others are due to the infrastructures that bulwark present-

An earlier version of this essay was posted on the Internet in 1999.—A.T.

day political, economic, social, and psychological systems. Now, the most glaring of all of these are the current wars and their results. So now more than ever there is a pressing prevailing need to change these arrangements and to prevent warfare and other causes of unnecessary suffering.

So many artists and experiencers of art believe that the point of art is to change these slovenly, pain-causing—and boredom-causing—arrangements. I do not think this "point" is at odds with pleasure. Artworks that cause pleasure can also—just because they give pleasure and because of the kinds of pleasure they give—cause shifts in social and economic arrangements, sometimes subtle shifts that may be partially caused by changes in the ways the materials of the arts are used and shaped. However, this is seldom something that can be aimed at directly. It is of course untrue that artworks "make nothing happen." But what they may make happen is never really predictable. This is why most agitprop artworks are such dismal failures, both as art and as social sanitation.

I refer, of course, to W. H. Auden's saying, in the second part of his poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (February 1939) that "poetry makes nothing happen: it survives / In the valley of its making where executives / Would never want to tamper; . . . / . . . it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth." This followed a period in the early 1930s when Auden, like a myriad of other idealistic people, was a "communist sympathizer" with no knowledge of the millions killed in the Soviet Union during the forced collectivization and murder of well-to-do peasants (1929–33) or of the Great Terror begun with the murder of Sergei Kirov, and the ensuing Moscow Trials (1936–38). (He was certainly no "Stalinist.") When he went to Spain, for seven weeks in early 1937 to become an ambulance driver for the Loyalists, but was put briefly to writing propaganda instead, he was shocked to find the churches in Barcelona closed. Though he had rejected the church, he found that the existence of churches and what happened in them were important to him. He supported the Loyalist government because he realized that if fascism spread worldwide, it would make life and work impossible for most artists and for everyone who cared for justice, liberty, and culture, but his poem "Spain" (April 1937) is much less committed than it seemed when he wrote it. By the end of that year he seems largely to have rejected political solutions to the current political, economic, and social horrors of which he was all too strongly aware.

However, artworks *do* make things happen, at the very least, pleasure and pain. And the kinds of pleasures and pains they may cause are hardly ever predictable. (Thus Horace's never-followed admonition against arguing about tastes has more than a little justification.) The politically aware artist can hope that what gives her pleasure and what gives her pain will give others the kinds of pleasures and pains that may help engender more positive social arrangements. The point is still ultimately pleasure.

The classic example is tragedy, which first causes pain by arousing pity and terror and then, by ridding one of those feelings, leads to kinds of pleasure that would not have been experienced otherwise. (Also, some works may first cause boredom but ultimately, for those who "stick with them," pleasure.)

Verbal art, of which poetry is considered the prime exemplar (why, I don't know), is often thought to have a worthier end than "mere pleasure." Both that and pleasure itself are thought to be caused by either the matter or the form of the work. In the latter case the writer may be castigated as "formalist." The "form" of the work is thought to be the "point" of it and nothing more. Traditionally, this castigation has pointed toward a lack in the work's "content." It may be damned as trivial or somehow wrong or absent, for instance.

What seems strange is that a poet is seldom condemned as "materialist." Seldom is she jumped on because she takes too much care with, or delights too much in, her words themselves—the materials of her art—or the way they relate with each other. But perhaps this does not happen all that seldom! Think of Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce. Their "materialist" works have been endlessly condemned—usually for qualities extraneous to the nature of their materials (except possibly in the case of Joyce, whose very materials—his words and/or the situations they bring to mind—have often been condemned as pornographic or scatological). Often a concentration on the materials of artworks rather than on their "content" has itself been considered "formalist."

The kinds of pleasure that poems may bring about are as various as the kinds of pleasure that poets may take in making them. (This is of course true also of the kinds of pain they may cause.) The reason why some poets delight in making poems in other ways—otherwise—than others do could be that they feel a need for other pleasures than those they've experienced

from poems hitherto. This doesn't at all mean that they need reject the poems of others—past writers or those writing presently but not "otherwise"—or the pleasures those poems may cause. (Unfortunately, many who write in more usual ways feel that "otherwise" works are attacks upon them and their own works. Those who strongly favor the coexistence of both usual and "otherwise" works get it from both sides.) It isn't even that some people "just delight in novelty." Some writers (and other artists) often delight in being surprised by what they make.

For more years than I care to remember I've often made verbal and other artworks by methods that insure that I will not always be in control of what comes into the works. (So what comes in may justly be said to be, to some significant degree, "unpredictable.") One group among many methods of this kind is what John Cage called "chance operations," which he first utilized in making music in the early '50s and began in the late '60s to use in making verbal works. Because of the fact that chance is associated with dice, works made by chance operations are often called "aleatory." This term may be appropriate for some kinds of chance-operational methods, such as the ones I devised and used most often between winter 1954 and spring 1960. However, it is quite inappropriate for other methods that also lead to unpredictable results that may surprise the artists as much as other experiencers.

A number of such methods that I've used since 1960 may justly be called "deterministic": what happens when they are utilized is not a matter of chance if one uses them without making mistakes. (I sometimes made some mistakes of this kind before my methods were automated as computer programs—and sometimes I still do so when I use unautomated methods—so chance may creep in willy-nilly.)

Two groups of deterministic methods that I've often utilized make use of two texts—a source text and a seed text. (Either text may have been written by the writer herself or by others.) Unlike chance operations, their outputs, when they're used correctly with the same source and seed texts, will always be the same. In one group the writer reads through a source text and finds successively words, phrases, sentence fragments, sentences, and/or other linguistic units that have the letters of the seed text as their initial letters. This group is called "*acrostic* reading-through text-selection methods." I devised and used some of these methods most often, but not exclusively, from May 1960 to January 1963, and occasionally since then.

The other group of deterministic methods that make use of both source and seed texts are called "*diastic* reading-through text-selection methods." I first devised and utilized some of these methods in 1963. In using them, the writer (or her digitized surrogate) reads through the source text and successively finds words or other linguistic units that have the letters of the seed text in positions that correspond to those they occupy in the seed text. (The neologism "diastic" was coined on analogy with "acrostic" from the Greek words *dia,* through, and *stichos,* line. The writer "spells through" the seed text when she "spells it out" in linguistic units successively drawn from the source text which have the letters of the seed text in corresponding positions.)

Another group of deterministic methods, which I began using while writing my first chance-operationally composed works, "5 biblical poems," at the end of 1954 and the beginning of 1955, are ones in using which the writer "translates" the notes, rests, and/or other features of the notation of a musical work "into" words from some source text by either the writer or others. (As a composer I've sometimes used the opposite method of "translating" the letters and spaces of a verbal text into musical notation.)

Often all such methods—chance operations, deterministic methods, and others—are spilled into an indiscriminate bin labeled "Methods." (I avoid this term because it is all too redolent of surgery.) And all of them—along with quite different kinds of works—are often dubbed "aleatory" or "aleatoric." (This is especially true in music, where works that involve various degrees and kinds of *choice* on the part of performers—including many kinds of improvisation—are nevertheless called "aleatoric" because the composer herself has not made all the choices!) Everything in the bin may be tainted with a contempt or dislike that may arise from the fact that the artwork is thought *not* to be entirely the work of the individual artist. Whatever may come into it may not be the result of choices—on whatever level—of the artist. The dislike may arise from a kind of despair or fear that the "self"—the "subject"—is being intrinsically denigrated.

Indeed, these methods and others first arose from an attempt to lessen (or even vainly to try to do away with) the hegemony of the ego of the artist in the making of the artwork. This attempt first sprang from Buddhist considerations. Ultimately, the ego in the largest sense (in Zen and other Buddhist psychologies the ego includes all of the parts of the individual psyche, including all three of the Freudian "institutions" of the psyche, the

ego, the id, and the superego—and in fact, the entire individual self) is considered to be a kind of temporary illusion consisting of five continually changing "baskets" of sensations, impulses, perceptions, emotions, and thoughts—to simplify the matter grossly. They stand in the way of a perception of reality that is somehow selfless.

What happened to me in the course of using such methods for several decades was that I realized that these methods, too, and the actions of utilizing them, are products of the ego, that the ego is inescapable except possibly when one reaches a clear and egoless state of open perception of reality. It was always obvious that I had not reached such a state, and it seems all too probable that I'll never reach it. Nevertheless, I came to find these methods, and the works made with their help, valuable in themselves. Things happen while using the methods—valuable things—that probably could not have come about without them.

In making "simultaneities"—poems and other verbal, verbal-musical, and musical works (as well as some involving actions and/or visual components) for groups of two or more persons in which the performers make choices among the verbal materials and/or nonverbal sounds that are given as "parts of the pieces"—I came, I still think rightly, to believe that I was making works that have a directly political value. The community made up of the performers is a model of a society that has certain characteristics that I would like to see abound in the wider society: the individual performers exercise initiative and choice at all points during the piece but are also—by listening intensely and responding to all they hear, both other performers' and ambient sounds both within and outside of the performance space—constructing an aural situation that is not merely a mixture of results of egoic impulses, but an aural construction that has a being of its own.

Ultimately, artmaking, including the making of poems, seems to me to be primarily the making of "objects" that are valuable in themselves. One can supplement this "in themselves" in many directions with various "becauses." The most obvious one is what I started with: pleasure. Artworks are valuable both in themselves and because they cause pleasure—kinds of pleasure not usually available from other sources. And "otherwise" artworks are valuable because they bring about new kinds of pleasure.

Social "becauses" abound: new kinds of poems, for instance, may change the ways people use and perceive language. The late Paul Connolly, fol-

lowing Richard Rorty, said (as quoted in the flyer for the conference on poetry and pedagogy at Bard College in 1999) that speaking differently changes a culture and that different ways of speaking are most prevalent in poetry. This may well be true, but what guarantees that speaking differently will change our culture in ways we would find desirable?

Because I now find all writingways (and other artmakingways) valuable, I've pursued two main ways of writing during the 1990s and early 2000s. Both of them are deeply involved with contingency, but differently than my writings were before 1990.

From October 1990 to early 1995 I wrote the first drafts of the poem series 154 Forties, and before and since 1995 I've been revising them. I made the Forties by "gathering" words, phrases, etc., from my outer and inner environments, i.e., from whatever I happened to be hearing, seeing, *or thinking of* while writing their first drafts, and revising them afterwards. Each poem comprises eight five-line stanzas which have the "fuzzy verse form" of three moderately long lines followed by one very long line, and then a short line.

Although I revised the Forties' words in several ways, what I changed most were "caesural silences" and neologistic compounds. The former are notated as spaces of several different lengths within verse lines, which signify different durations of silence. Each of the latter link together two or more words and they are of two kinds, "normal" and "slowed-down" compounds, the former being read somewhat more rapidly than single words, the latter a little more slowly.

However, because I continue to find pleasure in being surprised by what I write, I've currently been pursuing a writingway involving both diastic reading-through text-selection, drawing sequences of single words from a source text, and careful revision of the output of this deterministic method. Prof. Charles O. Hartman of Connecticut College, New London, wrote the program DIASTEXT, a digitization of a form of diastic text selection that uses the whole source text as the seed text (a method that I had devised and discarded in 1963), and sent it to me in June 1989. Later, Prof. Hartman sent me several versions of his program that allow the use of separate source and seed texts.

With the help of DIASTEX5 (1994), I wrote Stein, a series of 161 poems, from April 1998 to the end of 2000 (frequently making revisions after that).

Since 2000 I've been I've been pursuing this writingway while using other sources, such as poems by Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Rosmarie and Keith Waldrop and prose by the philosopher Charles Hartshorne.

Recently I've realized that Charles Hartman, by sending me these programs, "gave me permission" (as Robert Duncan would have said) to combine a "deterministic" method of text selection, whose source and/or seed texts might be determined by "nonintentional" methods and whose output is unpredictable, with the free composition of poems, within specific constraints. This happened because reading through the source text to find the output words—the most labor-intensive part of reading-through text selection—had been automated and become almost instantaneous. Since I'd come to realize that so-called nonintentional methods of composition were no more Buddhist than other ways of making artworks (because they too are egoic), there was no reason not to combine all my writingways as I usually do now.

In writing Stein, I sometimes utilized random-digit chance operations, numerological operations, or other means to locate the page numbers of source texts and seed texts by Gertrude Stein in *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla E. Dydo (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), a collection in making which the editor had recourse to the texts' earliest manuscripts and typescripts. In making later poems in Stein, I sometimes used such methods to locate "seed texts" in Stein's *Tender Buttons* to use with the whole book as source text. I usually revised the output of this automated "deterministic" method, but occasionally I chose to accept the minimally revised "raw output" of the program as a poem. I haven't yet done so when making poems by diastic text selection and revisionary composition of this output from other sources and seeds by other authors than Gertrude Stein.

To articulate the poems in strophes, I've often made use of a number sequence derived from an algebraic sequence that the French mathematician Edouard Lucas devised to test for Mersenne prime numbers and published in 1880.[1] This sequence—1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, etc.—determines the numbers of verse lines (which are often normative sentences) or of typographical lines, in successive strophes of the poems. I've sometimes em-

1. A Mersenne prime is a specific type of prime number, named after its inventor, the French monk Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), which must be reducible to the form $2^n - 1$, where n is a prime number. The 44th Mersenne prime, $2^{32,582,657} - 1$, was found on September 11, 2006.—A.T.

ployed an extension of this sequence that ascends, then descends, then ascends, etc. (e.g., 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, 18, 11, 7, 4, 3, 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 18, 29, 18, 11, 7, etc.). Alternately, I've sometimes used the sequence of whole numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) or that of prime numbers (2, 3, 5, 7, etc.), and sometimes I've found a plausible sequence of numbers of lines, etc., in the paragraphs of an unrevised output.

In short, I make poems such as those in Stein by using the outputs of a digitized method as raw materials for free composition within specific constraints. The most important constraint is to use the root morphemes of all the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in the output to make the lines of the poems. "Helping words"—structure words such as prepositions and conjunctions, but also pronouns and forms of "to be," "to do," and "to make"—are freely modified, deleted, or added to. Although in many of these poems the lines are complete normative sentences, in others they're not. Often these verse lines are such that the reader or hearer must exercise initiative and imagination to find or make these sentence sequences meaningful. When I modify the output minimally, so that all or most of the words retain the forms that the author of the source text (e.g., Stein) gave them, the reader or hearer has to "mine" the individual "sentences" for meanings.

Often the poems I make in these ways surprise me in different ways. How I modify the result of an initial method is often a function of my reaction to it, which I can hardly ever predict. Most of my recent ways of working—which during the 1990s, until I began the Stein series in 1998, hardly ever involved either chance operations or deterministic methods—have several things in common: they are almost always ways in which I *engage with contingency.*

At first I'm in charge, to whatever extent I allow, of what happens when I select the method and source and seed text. In the moment when these are "run through" the digitized method I'm not in charge at all, but from then on I am free to compose the poems (utilizing the root morphemes of lexical words and other words as described above). I am as free to make use of my imagination and acoustic, semantic, and other skills as any poet who commits herself to work within limits such as those imposed by a verse form. Though I "engage with contingency," in doing so, I've determined in each case the boundaries of that contingency. The kinds of poetry made in these ways are hardly "found poetry."

Writing in ways that combine method, contingency, and free composition and the poetry and other work produced by doing so not only surprise me. They often give me pleasure. And I'm glad to say that people I can believe have said that the results of these writingways have also given *them* pleasure.

New York: March, June 1999; March–April 2002

Acknowledgments

Danielle Ben-Veniste has my deeply felt gratitude for her indefatigable assistance in putting this book together. Her understanding and passion for Jackson's work was surpassed only by her diligence and devotion to the project. This book would not be what it is without her contribution in making the final selections and in coordinating the book as a whole.

Lenny Neufeld's editorial contributions were indispensable. My thanks to Laura Cerruti, acquisitions editor of the University of California Press, who encouraged and graciously supported this project every step of the way. Many thanks to senior editor Rachel Berchten and copy editor Ellen F. Smith for their close attention to every detail in this complex book. Personal thanks to Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Lyn Hejinian, and Joan Retallack for their constant and reliable friendship and support. I am grateful to Thomas Hummel for his selfless assistance. And most of all, thanks to Jerome Rothenberg, who was the primary force behind this book from the very beginning.

I know that Jackson would join me in thanking them all.

Anne Tardos

This page intentionally left blank