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This was designed by Joe Milutis and Sean Higgins.

This, they say. But what is *this*—*this* what? Perhaps all literature is in this anaphoric suspension which at one and the same time designates and keeps silent.

—Roland Barthes

From *Ketjak*

Write this down in a green notebook.

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Write this down in a green notebook.

Write this down in a green notebook.

Write this down in a green notebook.

This this this this.

This is the alphabet.

Would you know if this was prose.

This before, this after.

This used to be a nice place.

How do I know if this is page or wall.

One knows how to receive this because it is a poem, because it bears that family resemblance, because one gradually understood how to receive the last one and the one prior, because one has learned how to receive them in general without seeming conspicuous.

This is or is not an object, its words as bricks.

This is the fable of objects.

Write this down in a green notebook.

Could you trace this to its source, particular, iridescent, useful only as it
disappears.

Twang in the rope, what holds the new apple tree to such wind as this.

This this this this.

This is here if you think it is.

This is the alphabet.

Here is Spain, that is Africa, this the water.

This is an exhibit for the prosecution.

Is this winter or is this morning.

This is no more than an hypothesis, haltingly proposed.

Here is an empirical fact, this word is used like this.

The unceasing effort to force this to reveal its absolute self-existing
quality of mass.

This is the city that never went to town.

Would I read this.

This is due process.

This is about this.

Would you know if this was prose.

On why this is a poem.

This before, this after.

This used to be a nice place.

How do I know if this is page or wall.

Write this down in a yellow notebook.

This is a piece of information directed at you.

One knows how to receive this because it is a poem, because it bears that family resemblance, this assertion, because one gradually understood how to receive the last one and the one prior, because one has learned how to receive them in general without seeming conspicuous.

How many times have you read this.

This is taking longer than I thought.

This is or is not an object.

This is logic.

This will be hell to type.

See how sane this is.

This is a test.

All this only lately translated from the Korean.

Got this from a fortune cookie.

This is not a new sentence.

This is the fable of objects.

You understand this because of the common social convention that it is
language.

Write this down in a green notebook.

Was this the topic sentence.

Could you trace this to its source, particular, iridescent, useful only as it disappears.

No reason to have read this, to read it now.

Write this down in a red notebook.

This is to thought and signs as algebra to geometry.

Twang in the rope, what holds the new apple tree to such wind as this.

This is the fifth meaning of glass.

This this this this.

This is here if you think it is.

Because last night as I was about to go to sleep I thought of words to add to this but did not write them down, I have lost them, using these instead to hold their place.

This is the alphabet.

This will be the hill poem.

Do you remember this.

This shuts anything not included out.

Here is Spain, that is Africa, this is the water.

This is an exhibit for the prosecution.

This is the zone.

Facing up to this.

This is before we knew of Cointelpro.

From *The Chinese Notebook*:

The first time this occurred, an instinctive fear seemed to run through
me.

This is not philosophy, it's poetry.

Could this be good Poetry, yet bad music?

But yet I do not believe I would, except in jest, posit this as dance or urban planning.

This is not speech.

This was how I came to smoke cigars.

This has substantial impact on teachers' credentials, or the right to practice medicine or law.

If this were theory, not practice, would I know it?

Because I print this, I go slower.

This seems to me now a basic form of verbal activity.

Only when you achieve this will you be able to define what it is.

Everything you hear in your head, heart, whole body, when you read this, is what this is.

This is also the case for certain kinds of poetry.

The presumption is: I can write like this and “get away with it.”

What does this mean?

What if the person to whom I was explaining this had no alphabet, no writing, in his native tongue?

If this bores you, leave.

If I am correct that this is poetry, where is its family resemblance to, say, *The Prelude*?

Some forms of sloppy surrealism or pseudo-beat automatic writing are particularly given to this.

I couldn't write this with my left hand, or if I did learn to do so, it would be a specific skill and would be perceived as that.

Put all of this another way: can I use language to change myself?

This included no verbs of change.

And isn't this essentially the history of the planet?

This jumps around.

In what way is this like prose?

In what way is this unlike it?

How do we know this?

This leaves me with two possible conclusions.

On page 282 of *Imaginations*, Williams writes “This is the alphabet,” presents the typewriter keyboard, except that where the s should be there appears a second *e*.

Whether this was “in error” or not, it tells us everything about the perception of language.

What is it that allows me to identify this as a poem, Wittgenstein to identify his work as technical philosophy, Brockman's *Afterwords* to be seen as Esalen-oriented metaphysics, and Kenner's piece on Zukofsky literary criticism?

But is it a distortion of poetry to speak of it like this?

This would permit the exclusion of Kosuth and Wittgenstein, but the inclusion of this.

What if I told you I did not really believe this to be a poem?

Periodically one hears that definitions are unimportant, or, and this implicitly is more damning, “not interesting.”

I reject this, taking all language events to be definitions or, if you will, propositions.

I find myself not only in the position of arguing that all language acts are definitions and that they nonetheless are not essentially referential, but also that this is not a case specifically limited to an “ideal” or “special” language (such as one might argue poetry to be), but is general, applicable to all.

If I could make an irrefutable argument that non-referential language does exist (besides, that is, those special categories, such as prepositions or determiners), would I include this in it?

One type of criticism would simply describe the formal features of any given work, demonstrate its orderliness with the implicit purpose of, from this, deducing the work's intention.

This brings us into the realm of political and ethical distinctions?

If I were to publish only parts of this, sections, it would alter the total proposition.

Could this be poetry if I have proposed it as such?

Is this not what Robert Kelly does?

I imagine at times this to be discourse.

I am still apt to do this.

“This in which,” i.e., the world in its relations.

The 'organic' sentence (truncated, say, by breath, or thought's diversions) versus the sentence as an infinitely plastic (I don't mean this in the pejorative sense) one, folding, unfolding, extending without limit.

But there is no way to repeat this in language.

But this is not the ocean.

Is this a proof?

This is it.

From *Sunset Debris*

Is this too soft?

Do you like this?

Is this how you like it?

Is this where we get off?

Is this anise or is it fennel?

Will this turn out to be the last day of summer?

Is this the right exit?

What if I want this so plain you can't see it?

What about this?

Do you feel this?

Is this it?

How do I open this?

Which zone is this?

Can you recall if you have read this?

Does it locate this to say that I'm standing at the northeast corner of
Clay and Van Ness?

Could you recognize this as an insect?

Will you admit to this?

Is this the prison?

Is this fog or rain?

Is this what it will be like from here on out?

In what way is this risk?

Is this the plane?

What if I told you this was a form of seduction?

What if I did this differently?

Is this what you call the sun?

What makes you think this is a voice?

Is this just something which happened?

Is this an expression of concern?

In what way is this different from the tranquil plane?

Is this what you intended?

What makes you think this is fennel?

Is this not a challenge, an insult, a lie?

Why is this not form, but a process?

Why is this not theater, not dance?

What does this exemplify?

Is this more mellow?

In what ways will this change the house?

Does this change who we are?

Is this the road to branberry cross?

Is this what you expected?

Is this the morning-after odor of red wine on my breath?

Is it like this in dream?

Is this raising the right issues?

Is this what it is?

Does this disprove the null hypothesis?

Is this the confusion space?

Is this the dream?

Is this the higher level, the new plane?

Is this a disease, a compulsion?

Is this the clearing?

Is this slow, passive, neutral enough, without interest for it sees interest
as a false issue, bland, muttering, whispering, here?

Is this a knock-knock joke?

Is this the cemetery of buses?

Is this all just part of the poetry hustle?

Is this J-town?

Is this auto row?

Is this what is called a cable crossing?

Does this mean they are putting the pipes in?

Is this how it's done in Jakarta, in Kuala Lumpur?

Why is this not a pseudopredicate?

When is this not an assertion?

What makes you think this is a question?

Is this anything more than the presence of words?

Is this a one-liner?

Do you have this in my size?

How unadorned can I make this?

Is this the cold you caught from Pierce?

Why are reading this?

Why do we label this sunset debris?

Is this an example of extensional schema?

Is this fog or loss of the visual field?

Isn't it crucial that this only be viewed in the context of certain other workers, e.g., Acker, Watten, Andrews, Coolidge?

Is this a permanent condition?

Is this where the one-track mind jumps the track?

Doesn't this bore you?

Will this be a late winter or a dry one?

Is this just a random perturbation?

Is this Drop City?

Is this the elephant burial ground?

Does this mean you personally or just you in the larger sense?

Is it possible to do this out of some innocent motive?

Isn't this simply behavior?

Isn't this the part in the serial where the hero runs down a corridor only to find it blocked by a wall and spins, in terror, to see the tide of smoking lava approaching?

Is this a discussion of the ideal language?

Did you forget this?

Did you regret this?

Does this clatter, mumble, rattle?

How is it possible to know if this is a poem?

Is this the missing part?

Ain't this just chatter, soundings thrown out so that by their echoes I
may know the dimensions of my space?

Is this evidence that I'm dangerous or crazy?

Is this not the age of assholes in leisure suits?

Doesn't this linger?

Did it always occur to him, each time he arrived in some condition, love perhaps, that this was what was meant by it, its true definition?

Is this a thing you can find in nature?

Can I exchange this?

Is this the tunnel, the funnel?

What kind of turf is this, clumped, whitish, dry?

Is this not a climate of dry heat?

Is this the writing of erosion?

Is this part of a program to drink my way around the world?

Is this the poem which offers you a “complete” message?

Is this not just the journal of an analytical anti-formalist?

Isn't this one of them?

Is this the formal announcement of spring?

In what way is this not six months ago?

Is this a skill?

Is this a man in a hard hat?

Is this the chronicle of our turning and our turning away?

Is this going to get me somewhere?

Will this make collective life any easier?

Is this the shit we roll about in?

Is this how we got together, only to later change our minds?

Is it true you got up to write this, halfawake?

Is this natural light?

How is it this bridges us?

Can anybody tell that, as I wrote this, I grew a beard?

If we lie on the mattress in the closed-off old back porch at 90 degree angles, your legs lifted so that, lying on my side, I enter from behind, the fingertips of my right hand stroking your clitoris, and we go about this slowly, almost lazily, does it make for better understanding Have you noticed how there are no fathers in the park playing ball with their daughters?

Is this what is called Young and Hungry?

Can you remember when this was art?

Does this become a record of change?

How long have we worked at this, a little at a time?

Would you call this morning yet?

Who else would do a thing like this?

Is this what the writing was?

AFTERWORD

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

As modern readers we are, unlike Hamlet, presumably, more patient with the intractabilities of the earth, and have grown to expect the disenchanted terrain that incites his ire and first loaded “this.” Compare, if you will, William Carlos Williams’ “of this, make it of *this*, this/ this, this, this, this . . .” a line from Book III of *Paterson*, his epic of disenchanted landscapes. It is followed by Williams’ signature floating period, like the precipice of a cliff, Hamlet’s “sterile promontory” off which all meaning will headlong fly. But to what does “this” in Williams refer? Does it refer to its own concreteness, the pure meaningless conceptual music of the future? Not quite yet, although, happening a few pages after his famous geological cross-section passage, this is perhaps latent within its functioning. Williams has been talking about the muck of the river when the water recedes “a muck, a detritus, . . . a pustular scum, a decay, a choking lifelessness. . . . An acrid, a revolting stench . . .” Williams’ description of the “rank and gross” elements of *Paterson* is then interrupted by a fragment of a book review: “*American poetry is a very easy subject to discuss for the simple reason that it does not exist.*” Like the Ghost, or perhaps more aptly like the approach of an underestimated Fortinbras (the Ghost’s futuristic double), American poetry goes undetected by a less imaginative readership.



The weeds Ophelia is caught up in, described alternately as finger and penis: “long purples/ That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,/But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.”

And so, make it of this . . . With each “this,” Williams points to the overlooked, difficult sources of American poetry—the muck, the detritus, the scum, the decay—in all, a poetry composed precisely of those materials Hamlet can’t bear. It won’t perhaps be until the Pre-Raphaelites that the “muddy death” of Ophelia, floating amongst her “weedy trophies,” will be impacted by a naturalist optics, aestheticizing the erotic ruin of human meaning. Williams’ later, more dogged return to the earth, and the mind’s weedy tangle in it, asserts that the quality of perception comes from things themselves, rather than from the potentially fragile homeostasis of the poet (or in other words, a kind of “happiness”) that points them out. Williams is not “mad”—although he may be “angry”—and his is a perfectly respectable response to the unhappy disjoints between our senses and the world. He may, in fact, be pointing to another kind of alignment of the senses beyond his limited powers, if we were to hold out that Williams is secretly utopian, or, more modestly, ecologically minded. Unlike Hamlet, or any other prince, we are not given to expect that our actual body will be coterminous with a kingdom, although something in our make-up still demands some kind of reflection back from the world, a non-fragmentary affirmation of our particular being; Williams’ monadic analogy of “man like a city” is testament to this need, although

Paterson is complex enough to confound his analogy with complexities that evade the man. In the end, Williams allows, even demands, we exit from this narcissistic, mythopoetic theater, as a necessary prelude to any future literature.

And so, this continues. World systems pass. The reader follows the this particle, coursing the pearly fundamentals of the Elizabethan cosmos, through the refracted wit's end of Einsteinian relativity, and out a wormhole of the multiply folded fluxes of quantum holomovement. *This*, of course, transmutes; it is Ovidian. When Williams' "of this, make it of *this*, this/ this, this, this, this . . ." finds its way into the epigraph of Rachel Blau Duplessis' *Draft 41*, it memorializes another extended use of *this*, quite different in intent than that in either Shakespeare or Williams. For her, it has become less an evocation of Williams' constructive, hammering "this," but of the work of Ron Silliman specifically (to whom she has dedicated the poem), and the language poets in general (Duplessis included). What has happened between Williams and the language poets is precisely that these thises, like the similarly intervening Apollo missions, have gone into orbit; as well, related discourses on postmodern referentiality have taken root, so to speak. Most notably, Benveniste's analysis of how pronouns construct discourse has given us a sense of the ways in which "this" is formed, thus turning it into a fertile site of intervention. In fact, as an element of "discourse" (as opposed to more seamless-seeming "story" or "language"), it might denote intervention itself.

For Ron Silliman, this is struggle. It's not entirely the blank irreferent of the postmodern this, although to what does "this" connect if there is no image, no staging, no embodied modifier? Many of these thises speak of the work itself (although one should consider why he sometimes opts to say outright "this work"—a seeming tautology in this context—and even, almost punningly "will this book work?"). Yet, just as they point to the status of the whole, they revert in mid-air to mere pronoun. This mental vacillation has the effect of collapsing a perception of the whole into the particle, *this* fragment, as if to assert that the work is there. It's not ostensibly intended to designate any image outside the work, even if that image is of the work itself.

Yet, there is something in Silliman's "thises" that do evoke a reality "outside" the poem, however much he is resistant to a referential illusion. This could point to what he has called the "determinant coordinate of language and history," which activates the poem or poet, if it weren't for the fact that "this" is a reservoir of indeterminacy, activated at each reading. As such, it is a transhistorical loop hole open

to future configurations, rather than the melancholic stage of a missed encounter. There is some sense that for Silliman, “this” documents the ephemeral contact or even contract with the reader to “make it this”—whatever the hell this is from context to context: “Everything you hear in your head, heart, whole body, when you read this, is what this is.” The materiality of “this” alone is not enough. Its materiality, however, is kept in constant play; otherwise, such a gesture towards “head, heart, whole body” (admittedly one local instance, but implied in the rest) would seem a new-agey form of self-regard. A zen attentiveness is undoubtedly there, but the direction of attention in Silliman is more towards the material fact of language than existential consistency (compare, for example, Brian Eno’s “This” to Silliman’s).

As Derrida says, speaking of the multiple spectral effects of *Hamlet*, “There is first of all the doubtful contemporaneity of the present to itself,” and it is in every this, seeming to toll the bell of our present moment, that we are caught between the moment and its ghost. Yet, it is a particularly human piece of language, and no machine reading can suffice to unlock its powers. It may be a tool, however quixotic, in Derrida’s words to “think . . . virtual events whose movement and speed prohibit us . . . from opposing presence to its representation, ‘real time’ to ‘deferred time,’ effectivity to its simulacrum, the living to the non-living, in short, the living to the living-dead of its ghosts.”

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