

of the Charles Olson Society

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JULY 26 Robert Duncan, San Francisco
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 AUGUST 9 Denise Levertov, New York
 AUGUST 16 Charles Olson, Black Mountain

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a Vancouver 1963 issue

1104 Maple St Vancouver BC V6J 3R6

Vancouver, 1963

“Those nights I went to my funeral there in Vancouver...”
- Charles Olson to Robert Creeley, 10 October 1965

What is now known as the Vancouver Poetry Conference was a conglomeration of formal university-sponsored activities (12 panel discussions, three sets of workshops, and 9 public evening readings) and informal private readings, talks, and festive gatherings, over 24 days. Olson arrived via Seattle, two days late, on July 26th, but remained until the final sessions on August 14th and 16th, when he read the entire *Maximus IV, V, VI* in manuscript. Though dubbed an “Olsonfest” by Margaret Avison, Olson is not prominent during the majority of the panels, where the voices of Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Allen Ginsberg dominate. His influence was felt, instead, by students during the workshops and informal activities outside of the university. In this special issue of the *Minutes*, we present three sets of documents relating to the conference:

1. Letters from Warren Tallman to Robert Creeley, 1962-1963

This series of letters shows the development of the conference from conception, through negotiations with the University of British Columbia, to its final configuration, and last-minute panic at the thought that Olson may not show up.

2. University of British Columbia English 410 Documents

Records include an official information page for prospective students, an annotated list of credit and audit students prepared for afternoon workshop faculty, and a general class list with assignments. Selections from several of these assignments appeared in *OLSON 4* (Fall 1975). The documents originate from the Robert Creeley and Denise Levertov papers at the Department of Special Collections at Stanford University, the Warren Tallman papers at the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University, and the University of British Columbia Archives.

3. “Polis is Eyes” - A Transcript of the July 31st Panel Discussion

The discussion during the fourth morning revolved around the significance of seeing, prompted by the lines of *Maximus* “Letter 6.” Though Olson led the previous day's discussion of *'istorin* (transcribed in *Muthologos* vol. I pp. 1-19), he was silent during most of these two hours, preferring to listen to the interpretive comments of Creeley, Duncan, Ginsberg, and the student audience.

A second Vancouver issue of the *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* will appear next year with excerpts from student journals, photographs, and recollections.

Aaron Vidaver, Guest Editor

April 8, 1962
2527 W. 37th

Dear Bob and Bobbie,

It's the end of the school year here (read that again, man) which means that I'm too damn busy to write at the moment on all the hundred and one topics I'd like (such as the way in which this WILDERNESS OF WORDS essay is chrysalizing in my mind, such as a good many ideas about the first five chapters of your novel, particularly the taxi, car, bikes, bulls—particularly the bike riders up over the handlebars and the opposite bull fighting incidents (horns) and the town-city, sea-island which I want to get to as soon as the debree of papers and exams is got through). But since the meeting over the writing conference will be in a week or so I would like to say what I have in mind just for any suggestions, corrections, etc you might have.

First off, I usually disbelieve in such affairs if only because of all the phoniness and well I don't need to spell it out. But since I have found that Duncan's idea of a scene has proved out (as for instance, wonder of wonders, we start with nothing at all so to speak and already we have Creeley) I feel that it makes sense to hurry on down whatever paths open out. And so, in my conception it had best, if it is going to be a conference, be big and wild. Like a month, like:

It MUST be big because that is the only way possible to get writing students from way on out, over, and down, to come so far west and because it is the only way to put in the prestige people who would draw them so that they could be subjected to the impact of the real people, Olson first and foremost. So my thought is three poets, three fiction men, two critics, two drama. In all 10, with 15 students per man, in all 150. Now the preliminary facts are two, both connected with Earle Birney. 1. He wants such a conference to put the UBC writing program on the map and second he wants Layton as one of the poets because he thinks that Layton's Toronto-Montreal mob still don't know that UBC exists. So let me explain it all in terms of the three poets. Olson, and Academic and Layton. Each man is offered 800 for three weeks. We solicit 45 writing students who pay \$50 for one month—that is 15 students per man. Each student submits ____ pages of poems and these are sent on to the men prior to arrival. Then

On Mon Wed Fri of the first week lets say that Layton comes on with three talks, and Mon Wed Fri of the second week lets say Olson comes on with three talks and Mon Wed Fri of the third week the Academic comes on with three talks. So all 45 students sit in on these nine talks in three weeks. Now, go back to Layton. After he finishes his first week (the three talks) he shifts into a series of conferences with his 15 students that will go Mon Wed Fri of the second week and Mon Wed Fri of his third week. Each conference will be with 5 students which means that his 15 students will each have two of these conferences. Same for Olson. Same for the Academic. Point of the 5-student thing: saves the poet from dragging up his guts 15 times over, saves him from the duds, permits

cross reference between the students as well as between student and poet. Would be enough time for the poet to spot the student with something going. By keeping it on a Mon Wed Fri basis, Tues Thurs Sat Sun would be free in two ways. One, the poet could arrange to talk with the students that interested him; Two, the students could manage on a catch as catch can basis to corner and contact the poet who happened to catch their fancy. That is, it would leave leeway for things to happen. Same with the three fiction men, same with the two critics, same with the two drama men. Now in addition, each writer also gives an evening lecture, talk, reading for the general public (say \$0.50) to which the students have a pass. In fact, point is that the registered student has a card which permits him to anything (poetry, fiction, criticism, drama, talks) and a general understanding that he can at least try to corner any one of the ten men at all should that man catch his fancy. Dig.

Now the problems. First off that \$800 for 3 weeks isn't in itself very much when you consider that 250 or 300 will go on transportation, leaving only 500 clear. But to make sure that the 500 would be clear it is necessary I think to establish an open house guest arrangement in which 10 people here agree at least to offer to invite one writer for free for the three weeks he'd be here. That is, you Olson, Tony a drama man, Earle Layton, Jake Zilber a fiction man, the Goses someone, ourselves someone,—so that they could take the \$500 home. Next, a strategy of invitations to these 10 in which we first get acceptance from those who would tend to draw the others so that they would enjoy coming just for the crowd that would be here as well as the money. Like a month of the literary life. La something Vita.

Now people:	Ours	Academic	Whomsoever
Poets	3	Olson	Merwin 1. Lowell 2. Roethke Wilbur
Fiction	3	yourself	1. Baldwin Bellow
Criticism	2	Zukofsky	Kazin Donald Hall
Drama	2	Albee Gelber,	I'm really blank and Tony would know.

Explication:

Granting all the plans that they might have for the summer of '63, I see it so: You could get Olson and I think that in the academic league Lowell would be the best,

but if he wouldn't work out I think I could get Roethke. From there to Baldwin and Kerouac. That is, I don't care if Kerouac just wants to sit still in a corner or any damn thing, if we could get Olson, Lowell or Roethke, Baldwin and Kerouac we'd have it made. That is, students would say WOW. And come on. That would open it out for Zukofsky and Hawkes. Still working it, I'd rather have Donald Hall but we do have a pipeline to Kazin and again that damn academic thing. But anyway and overall I'm sure you see the point, one by one and two by two in order to pull in people who might not otherwise be interested. Now, so far as I schematize it you are left out, and Duncan is left out. What I begin to see has to do with the evening PUBLIC thing. That is, obviously the CHAIRMAN of the shebang will be BIRNEY, but what about, little as I like the word, yourself as CO ORDINATOR ["MODERATOR" written in margin] and that instead of the evening lecture or reading it be set up as say—for the month—readings and symposiums to be arranged and run by yourself, drawing on the various writers. This could be argued as a big money draw to extension. That is, your task to pull it all together by virtue of the say 8 or ten evening events, which extension could announce, promote, etc, yourself hired in at the \$800 minus travel (say \$600) to moderate, chair, co-ordinate, think up combo's, introduce, have a hell of a time, etc—but mainly bring out the issues, lines, Olson against the Academic, or you and Olson asking Zukofsky the right questions, or Kerouac coming on with a reading, or the three fiction men, like anything you wanted that would chrysalize it all. By ear. All the writing students free of course. Creeley's Literary Carnival. And of course as Ringmaster you could put them all down if it got boring and read 7/8 hours of your own poems. Leaving Duncan. It would be a ghastly irony if the one man who has done the most to pioneer the whole spirit of the scene (Birney has pioneered the details, but Robert is the one who picked it all up) were left out. As easily as he might understand the compromise logic of the choices—it still would make no sense and doesn't to me either. That is, he's the one who read in our basement for \$35. He's the one who read at the '61 Festival for \$200. He's the one who came up last summer for \$100. So what's to do. We must have Olson or the whole thing is sour. We must have Layton. We must have an academic draw. We deal with Extension (who run the summer session things) and while the 10 writers and yourself as co-ordinator would all be covered by potential income to cover what they pay, there's no room left. What I'd really like would be that all of us who are interested somehow manage it so that Duncan gets an invitation to come on at the last as GRANDE FINALE to simply give a reading that would wind it all up with everyone there and the big DO afterward, and we'd damn well have to make up the fee. Like this could be part of your own arrangements with the evening series. You as RINGMASTER could make the invitation official, could include him in on the various evening combos and with that wind-it-up role as plum and honor he would be having the role in it all he deserves. You introducing, Olson, Zukofsky in the audience, all us with great love and gratitude! Some details:

What is likely to happen here: If you send back an OK on what I have outlined with any corrections and suggestions, I plan to go at conning Elliott, Tony and

Jake enough to get the main lines set up, laid down. Then the meeting in which all of us con Earle into it. Earle is here until June, then off for a year. Before he leaves we have step two, which is to con the EXTENSION DEPARTMENT, who run the summer show. That is, they'd love it but would have to be convinced it would break even. Can do, I think. Next, I do take it that your choices go OLSON, Zukofsky and Hawkes. It is Zukofsky that I would like a rundown on since my own acquaintance is Via BLACK MOUNTAIN 6, which has the thing on "Bottom". Next, you yourself would have to be ready, should it work out that way, to do the initial conning with Olson, Hawkes, Kerouac, Zukofsky, Donald Hall (I more and more feel that yes we could bypass Kazin and get Hall). That is, during this summer we would have to get a yes from all these people so that we could send out the announcements during the fall so that we could get students committed by spring. Myself, I do go for Kerouac and it is my main point that we are hick enough here so that if he doesn't go for the schedule set up, well we wouldn't be surprised if 5 or 6 of them didn't, and since I don't myself—just want a big jamboree and all that Mon Wed Fri Jazz is for the EXTENSION DEPARTMENT—he'd be great, I think. Like I want it to get out of hand as to formal arrangement but to be real, like men who are committed to the literary life. And open enough to talk to this student that student. I do think that each writer should realize that it would be a big open house with everybody available to everybody and it all swinging. Month of July, 1963. OK?

May 21, 62

Dear Bob,

Like I've been waiting to see if anything can be started up and as of the moment it looks possible though radically revised—That is, the general conference won't go, for money reasons, but it may be possible to save a kind of poetry conference with, I hope, about 6 or 7 poets. But the details of it all have been and still are shifting about so rapidly that there is no sense detailing today a set of circumstances that may get all changed by tomorrow. It seems that one must deal with the creative writing committee, the English department, the summer school people and the extension people, each with somewhat different aims and purposes. Well, if the present plan works it may all come out a jamboree with three poets here for three weeks and three more here for a week each and one other to oversee the plantation and hand around the mint julips, like yourself. I was about to send off a huge letter detailing all that has happened thus far but it became obsolete as of last Friday just as this one may be obsolete by the time it reaches you. Anyway, I am determined that we've got to float Olson down the river into Vancouver whatever else

The news of the moment is that Layton's job in Montreal has more or less folded, that he has applied here, and that Birney is more or less out of his head to get him. Being more or less out of his head over it all he has thus far succeeded in a head-on clash with Daniels which doesn't auger well for Layton's

chances. Ah well, like everyone else I'm only interested when I'm interested and I can't get very worked up over this one. But Earle sure is.

We have resumed the TISH Sunday evening meetings and plan to put in most of our time on Pound and Williams, that is to go on back to everything that got bypassed when various people here began to focus on Olson. That essay I started has now worked itself around to Imagination and seems to be leading me toward Duncan's poetry. A tape of your poetry reading is being done soon and will send soon as possible. Ellen says to remind you that your pay checks start coming in as of July 26. Do you have any idea, if all these poets were collected here, what it would cost to have someone like Brakhage do a half hour film like Poetry On A Summers Day? Think I'll just toss that in to watch the extension man's expression. Incidentally, while we are in Berkeley this summer we have a place to stay free so you see a world without money is possible. Reason for going to just poetry is that it seems better to have a number of poets rather only one or so of each variety and also this makes it possible to bring Duncan in for a week but then I've also begun angling in my mind for including Denise Levertov. It is just barely possible that the fee thing may be worked at \$900 plus travel and room for the 3 week people and \$300 plus travel and room for the 1 week. Its also just possible that we might get someone from England, in which case, whom? That is Summer School and Extension would be doing it for prestige, pure and simple, and are willing to put out the travel money to get someone from England. Against that possibility, send a name since I'm blank. That is, if this is to happen at all the fact of it will have to be before June 1st when Earle and the Summer School man both leave for the year. The choices of it would have to follow shortly. But if we can get the fact of it established the choices can be very heavily politict (I mean rigged) by us, particularly if choice can be stalled until after we tell Earle Bon Voyage. But I see that I'm beginning to talk out ahead of what is at the moment. And at the moment the above is possible, nobody has closed the door, but its still a problem of getting through.

our love
Warren

May 30, 62

Dear Bob,

Well now then man the boat is AFLOAT, somewhat a matter of tacks and strings at the moment I will admit, but still very definitely afloat and on its way down the river toward Vancouver, due in about July 24, 1963. That is, creative writing has said yes, Daniells has said yes for the English Department, Summer School has said yes and Extension has said yes. Lots of calking to be done, readjusting of ballast, and steering to avoid snags, snits, snarls and snafus. And this is the way it is to be stocked with poets: Summer School will pay \$900 plus travel to three 1st class passengers who will have to put in 24 days, probably

July 24 to Aug 19. Extension will pay \$300 plus travel to three more for 1 week each during the same period. I won't go into details other than to say that there will be a daytime series to involve all six. We wanted 7 in all with you as captain, ringmaster, plantation overseer, foreman, top dog, but man they didn't like what it would cost so you get demoted to crew member i.e. one of the \$900 24-day daytime poets. Fortunately for this particular moment, Earle is in the process of a monumental tantrum (because the University has not it seems gone for Layton) has pulled out of the committee, off the boat, and since he abandoned us this will leave us free to abandon Layton as a passenger, which means we can have you, Olson and one other, necessarily some academic I think (maybe Lowell). Then for the evening ones a San Francisco poet say I, like Robert Duncan it happens, and a New York poet say I, like maybe Denise Levertov perhaps, and maybe some Montreal type, though not necessarily. Now it also just happens that the Extension man, one Docherty, is it turns up a member of the Vancouver Summer Festival Of The Arts (music, dramer, entertainment, etc jazz) and it also so happens that he's the one who conned Cage and Cunningham for the University thing last Feb, and it so happens that he is now conning the Vancouver festival to bring Cunningham and Cage back for next summer downtown and it so happens that he thinks why not some hot poet too, and it so happens that I at once put Olson into his ear as the one and only Merc Cage of contemporary poetry, so he is going to put this possibility to the Festival committee at their next meeting, which means that we may be able to boost Olson's take-home pay by a special festival reading. And then there is CBC. Since the whole center of the whole plan was simply to get him here, and that now seems possible, the new center becomes to put as much loot as can be had into his hands. Re: Stan Brakhage, the Festival people do a Film Festival as part of their program. If you write quick to Brakhage telling him to write quick to Mr Ian Docherty, Extension Department, University of British Columbia. I will call Docherty on an I-hear-tell basis and it might be that Brakhage could in this way establish contact with whatever possibility there might be. The more he could mention Cage, Cunningham, yourself in his note to Docherty the better. Who knows, maybe we could con a half-hour film thing too. No use letting all that talent wander around for 24 days without using it.

Well man I realize that all this is pretty sanguine for a boat that just got launched but at least it's moved from the problematical to the possible. Now tomorrow I have a little talk with Daniells who must once again be the real captain as he was in floating you into town. Once I can (I hope) reach an eye to eye understanding with him the next stage will be a meeting of Jake Zilber, Elliot Gose and myself to work out a tentative slate of poets. What this should come to is yourself as insisted on by Summer Session, and Olson as I think will be agreeable to all concerned, and a principle that we go by cross sections as to geography and camps—that is one strong university academic type, one San Francisco man and one New York person (East Coast, West coast). As I say, it may come down to one Canadian as a concession to national whatever pride. Anyway, I want us to go for just you and Olson. Then we will be writing letters to yourself and Tony for further suggestions and confirmation etc. Then the

summer work will be simply lining up Yeses from the 6 poets with everything coming to rest until October when the committee (there is always a committee) that oks the summer slate of courses meets. That is, all invitations must go out with the rider that the whole show is contingent upon October approval by this committee. However, Summer Session indicated that this is more a formality than it is a threat. Also Daniells is a big man on that particular committee. Also, if we can firm the whole thing up with a cargo of poets on board and Daniells (the key) and the Summer School man (very pleasant) and Docherty (great)—all this diminishes the likelihood that someone will be able to sink it. Beyond that our part of the real work of the thing will be to get 15 local 30 outside students. The 15 local are no real problem but the 30 outside, man we have to get starting in November thru May. Well. Now, for the moment, sit tight until you hear from Zilber, Gose and myself asking for confirmations and recommendations and we hope we can get it far enough along by the time you go east so that you can persuade Olson. In the meantime if you can get Brakhage to come on quick to Docherty, who knows maybe we can turn it into a great summer. Get Duncan here the first week and then keep him around, ring him in on everything, dare him to steal the show. When he and Snodgrass were here a year ago Feb he had poor old Snodgrass (Snoodgrease as Duncan pronounced it) reeling in the corner clutching his Pulitzer Prize because he didn't have anything else to hang onto. I somehow see him dancing on the tables, flinging his arms about overhead, eyes crossed 8 ways, while all the rest of you poets try to carry on SERIOUS discussions. And if there was a camera around! By which I mean that I think Duncan may very well have wandered into this world from the land of imagination, slightly possessed, and if we could get him going who knows how it would orbit. Like, anyway...

Feel sorry for Earle, who thinks, feels, deals directly from his ego and I don't need to tell you what gyrations that produces. Anyway, he staked his ego on UBC hiring Layton so the first moment they resisted he began sulking in the corner and ever since has been either sulking or going to the other extreme of arranging meetings with the president and the upshot of it is that Layton is getting nowhere, Earle is taking it as a personal insult, threatening to resign from the University, has resigned from the creative writing committee, etc. I don't care enough about Layton who seems to me to be another ego, mannerist poet with all that Me, Me, Me limitation, to feel concerned about that. But I do feel sorry for Earle who, when his ego fits are not upon him, is a nice man, very democratic, started the creative writing thing here, doesn't try to dominate the committees he chairs, likes students, even likes the TISH poets knowing perfectly well that they date him. But oh so SELFish. Well, tomorrow he leaves for Mexico and Europe for a year and just as well. It'll take that long for the top of his head to stop smoking. In the meantime, amigo, I plan to get right at making this boat seaworthy, riverwise. Page 40 is where your manuscript breaks off. On the postcard you said you would be here "mid April". Come again?

Our Love
Warren

June 8, 1962

Now Amigo,

I enclose (but please return) the document which bridges the whole thing across from a possibility to an actuality and I think you can see what a tenuous cable—strand—it all is. But procedurally a masterpiece of notification since to Chant it can only mean some summer school offering or other that Daniells approves of and ditto to Baxter and Creighton, the appointment committee members, who are very unlikely to rush in and say we disapprove. Sliding it past the snags not by asking them to say yes but by inviting them not to say NO. All this simply to indicate once again that the real key and clue to progress is the good will and intelligence of Daniells and his essential lawlessness. Not that Chant, Baxter or Creighton couldn't snap the cable by an inquiry because they could but just that given the rigamarole of a huge organization that bristles with rules and regulations this kind of document is a model, I think. Their probable silence—busy or indifferent—is our go-ahead.

So, Jake, Elliott and I have gone ahead and I'm supposed to canvass you as follows. And since your letter will be addressed to all three of us through me I will put it in a form that will keep lines straight, like

Dear Bob,

The summer offerings that I have mentioned have shaped up as follows: Summer School is willing to sponsor 3 poets to conduct a credit course from probably July 24 to Aug 16 (24 days) and to pay each one \$900 plus travel. But they insist that you be one of the three so that there will be a local man to ride herd on the whole thing. Jake, Elliott and myself met and have decided that we would also like Olson as a second and to balance this either a University-Academic-Traditionalist poet (Lowell, Roethke, Donald Hall) or an Englishman. We would like to know (1) Are you willing to take on one of the poets, (2) would you be willing to try and persuade Olson to take on another, and finally (3) in view of our wish to get good men and of our need to get outside students—which Academic or Englishman would you recommend. (N.B. Looking at it for all in all, I feel that we would do best to go by a geography of it all and that therefore an Englishman would make more sense than even a highly placed US academic. That is, it seems to be turning out that we don't have to pay too much attention to camps and respectability which means that if you like Christopher Logue better than Tomlinson you should cite this in strong terms—part of this because up here in this neither-nor country (nationally) if we could advertise an Englishman the people in various places like administration, and officialdom, would be more pleased than if we could advertise Lowell. That is, I think I'd rather have someone who was hip to the English scene than some well known US academic. Particularly since summer school have stressed that if we will put a local no-travel-pay poet on the books they will go for the big travel cost on an English poet. Comprenez?) From your "Orts for the Sports" Logue sounds very good to me. Also, Extension has agreed to invite three more poets (At \$300 plus travel)

for an evening extension series and we agreed that there should be a leading San Francisco poet like Duncan and a leading New York poet like Denise Levertov (e e cummings also mentioned). Questions are (1) does the geographical scheme make sense? If so (2) do Duncan or Levertov make sense, or, have you other suggestions? Finally, we thought that the third of the one-week poets ought to be out Toronto-Montreal or some Canadian place. Problem here is that we now feel Layton is more or less ruled out—that is he'd be more likely to come out only in order to spit, and this leaves one Alden Nowland, or Dudek or a prairie poet, Wilfred Watson or a Toronto area academic name of James Reaney. Probably you would rather leave that up to us. Although it might make more sense to try Layton for a week anyway since there is still that problem of getting 30 of our 45 students from outside here. Some other names mentioned in various places were Shapiro, Eberhart, R. Wilbur—(but I think you can see they are just out of the ragbag)

etc
W.T.

I think you can see that what we'd like to know is (1) are you willing? (2) Other than yourself, is Olson agreeable? (3) Other than yourself and Olson would you rather have an Englishman, and if so which, or a US Academic like Roethke, Lowell, D. Hall or _____, and if so which? (4) Do you like the idea of an SF and a NY poet and if so do Duncan and Levertov make sense, or what others? (5) Do you agree that a Canadian poet should be in, and if so which? or should we make up our own minds? (In thinking of these, kindly remember that Levertov, as poetry editor of Nation and Hall as an editor of that Anthology would have pull for students, but that our overall purposes would probably be better served if an English bloke were on the scene). Yet finally, if you think Zukofsky would come for a week, best to get the best since we have the chance—that is, as it is set we already have Olson and Duncan in the bag, which leaves you free to come on strong for another and what it really comes down to is which ones would be best for the students. Still, if Levertov would come for a week. Like

Credit Course, 24 days, \$900

Creeley	Olson	? U.S. Academic / Traditionalist English ?
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Extension Series, 7 days, \$300

Duncan	Levertov? Zukofsky? _____?	Canadian
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I fill in the ones you can just agree to, leaving one you can insist on in each

category. Something like Levertov or Zukofsky in the one week and Lowell, Roethke, Hall or Englishman in the 3-week.

Then, Tony is out of town but due back June 20. If we have your letter back by then we can finalize these choices by the end of June and then see how good the fishing is during the summer. With your task, plain and simple, to convince Olson and perhaps one other.

All our love
to all the Creeleys
Warren

June 17, Sunday, 62

Dear Whirlybird,

All those letters and cards settled down on the doorstep yesterday and Ellen, who has a talent for making officials who might otherwise say NO come on with at least MAYBE and even possibly YES is at work. It'll let her document her phone calls to customs, etc. But anyway and in any event DON'T WORRY because the fact is that even if the rules can't be stretched or fractured the fact is that you can leave Albuquerque just when you please and enter when you get here just as tourista then go back down to the border (_ hour drive) and enter officially when the day comes round. As I say, Ellen may be able to improve on this. Anyway, as of tomorrow we are sending to 28 Fort Square a key to the house and a tape of your Feb 16 3:30 to 5 reading. The latter is so that if there is a tape machine around you can use it if you see fit as propaganda to con that man Charles Olson into saying yes. What you probably didn't realize is that the 350 of the 400 who stayed on were missing their rides home and, as I think the tape very amply demonstrates, they didn't care and didn't want you to stop. Anyway, please tell him that we will do any mortal and as many financial things as possible if he will only consent. As I have mentioned, his presence is from our view out here the key and clue. That is, when Duncan was here last summer he mentioned this as IMPERATIVE and we have found that taking Duncan's word for things has proved out.

In the meantime, we will be waiting and hoping that you can persuade Olson, then when Tony gets back (June 20) we will begin talking about the others. I think it is very likely that we will try to get LAYTON for one week if only because this is after all Canada and we do want some students out of Montreal. What we don't know is what variety of poison Earle may have poured into his ear by now, what with Earle ready for some measure of revenge. As you say, if we could hold off for a while maybe the antagonism of it all will settle down. Particularly since the NO on Layton isn't absolute.

In the meantime, we have been holding the Sunday evening sessions, and

one reason everyone wants you here pronto is so that (a) you may be willing to sit in on the discussions which will be Pound and Williams oriented and (b) will be willing we hope to do a three evening talk series. Last summer Duncan spent one evening on Olson, one on his "Structure of Rime" poems and a third on the whole shooting match and it was from the general excitement that those sessions generated that TISH took off. These three, if you are willing, would be late in August to a group of about 20 for about \$100. Which should be enough to send TISH galloping off for another year.

In the meantime, I hope that TISH 10 has arrived at 28 Fort Square by the time that you get there since I think that the Sam Perry note on MAXIMUS is, right or wrong, quite a tremendous thing. Would be curious to know how Olson reacts to it. ...

Wed. July 3 '63

Dear Bob,

New applicants are beginning to come out of the walls but I am shoohing them into auditor category and keeping the workshop group at 40, i.e. 13 1/3 students per poet. Wow. Over the 4th-7th we will be in Seattle and Olympia which means I will arrange with John McGeachern on Monday the 8th travel pay. All of the books are in except the announced but evidently not published Roots and Branches and Denise L's With Eyes At the Back of Our Heads. This means:

Olson - Maximus, Distances
Avison - Winter Sun
Levertov - The Jacob's Ladder
You - For Love
Robert - Opening of Field
Allen G. - Howl, Kaddish, Reality Sandwiches

100 copies of each with 50 reserved for class. Robert's Selected Poems and Denise L's Here and Now are both out of print.

+ 50 each of Prose Keys
Sullen Art
New American

We ordered 25 copies of your novel but were informed not until Sept. But the order stands. This past week I sent Charles Olson a note and included an "If you want travel money please let me know." Felt diffident about doing this but just wanted to be sure there would be no hangups. I'm beginning to be thoroughly terrified by the whole show. Maybe we could turn it into a checkers tournament or guessing how many hairs in Allen's beard. Like ... why couldn't it be six poets

and six students in someone's back yard for about two afternoons. Well, onward. And wow, the Creeleys coming into town soon— ...

George Bowering made it today on his M.A. exam.

Frank Davey has a one-year job on Vancouver Island at the military academy (a branch of the Canadian West Point) so we may have turned out a mighty fine general there ...

Why not hire six persons to impersonate and all take off for a vacation in the mountains.

Just nerves
love
Warren

Actually, it is my impression that at least half of the students will be great.

July 11 '63

Dear Bob—

Whew! Thanks for the quick word that all is well re Charles Olson. I was beginning to feel as though the bottom had dropped out of the town. Now it all seems twice as good. I'm wracking my brain for a way to force the administration's hand re that travel money. Where there's a will, etc. In the same mail a note from Allen G., due to arrive at 11 a.m. the 21st. And yesterday, as I mentioned, the note from Denise L. So Monday it seemed all about to fly away but today it seems all coming into place. As it tentatively stands places are arranged: yourselves and Olson at Roy's / Robert, etc, Denise in Wah's apartment house / Ginsberg and Margaret Avison with us. The less scatter the better, I thought. It all seems improbable enough to be great. I am particularly hoping that the people from elsewhere, students and poets, will somewhat dent the small town provincialism of the Tish and other Vancouver children (interesting that "children" was involuntary). Thank god for you man for getting Olson and Ginsberg in on this. And yourself. Once it starts the word is free.

more soon
Wow
Charles Olson we have you

love
Warren

University of British Columbia, Summer 1963 Poetry Offerings

INFORMATION

From July 24 to August 16, 1963 the university will offer (1) English 410, a credit course in poetry writing, (2) an Extension Department non-credit course in contemporary poetry, and (3) a series of four Friday Readings -- as follows:

1. English 410 (credit course), \$66. Limited to 45 students, the course will be conducted by Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, and Charles Olson with Margaret Avison, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov contributing. It will consist of morning lecture sessions and afternoon workshop sessions. The morning sessions will consist of lectures, panels and discussions by the poets on the basis of which students will write a critique demonstrating their understanding of modern verse writing. For the afternoon workshop sessions the students will divide into groups of 15 and meet with the poets to discuss the problems and possibilities of their own verse practice. The poets will rotate among the groups so that, for instance, one group of students will meet with Mr. Creeley the first week, with Mr. Ginsberg the second and with Mr. Olson the third; etc. On the basis of these meetings the students will write a critique explaining and justifying their own verse practice. Students registered for this course will be expected to attend the non-credit evening sessions.*

1a. English 410, Auditors, \$33. A limited number of auditors, who may attend the morning lecture sessions but not the afternoon workshop sessions, will be accepted. If such is your desire, please indicate on the accompanying application.

2. Extension Department, non-credit course, \$12 (\$8 for credit course students). The course will consist of 11 Monday, Wednesday, Friday evening meetings from Wednesday July 24 through Friday August 16, 1963. Margaret Avison, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov and Charles Olson will contribute readings and panel discussions designed to improve understanding of contemporary poetry. No pre-requisites, no assignments. For information contact Department of University Extension, U.B.C., Vancouver, B. C.

3. Friday Readings, \$5. On successive Fridays, July 26, August 2, August 9 and August 16, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov and Charles Olson will read their poetry. These readings are part of the non-credit course but others may attend them as a separate series. Tickets available from Department of University Extension or from Vancouver bookstores, approximately June 1st.

*NB Because enrollment for the credit course is limited to 45 students, permission to enroll is necessary. Those interested should consult the accompanying application and forward the appropriate information to Robert Creeley, English Department, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B. C. at once: first come, first serve. Notices of acceptance will be forwarded as soon as possible.

ENGLISH 410

- ① ✓ Anderson, Rosemary. Vancouver
 - auditor. graduate English student. Australia
- Aston, Tim Seattle
 2nd Year, U. of Wash.
- Auxier, Peter Vancouver
 U.B.C. -- Tish -- took 410 from Dudek 4th yr.
- Bayes, Ron LaGrande, Oregon
 Colorado State and U. Of Penn. graduate schools. Teaches at Eastern Oreg
- Belazi, Sandor Vancouver
 Creative Writing major, U.B.C.
- Bowering, George Vancouver
 Tish. poems in Delta, Evidence, San Francisco Review etc.
- Bromige, Dave Berkeley, California
 Creative Writing at U.B.C. Woodrow Wilson at Cal.
- Buckle, Daphne Vancouver (published in Delta, Prism)
 Bob's Class. MacMillan Fiction Prize. Tish
- Burdak, Leo Vancouver
 interested in Verse Drama U.B.C.
- ① ✓ Carmichael, John Trail, B.C.
 - auditor. - non-writer, interested in New American
- Coolidge, Mrs. Antigone Providence, R.I.
 - observer. librarian for American Mathematical Society
- Coolidge, Clark Providence, R.I.
 - 2 yrs. Geology. percussionist, jazz drummer
- Copithorne, Judith Vancouver, B.C.
 -English major, U.B.C.
- Cull, Dave Vancouver
 Tish. Creative Writing Major
- Dawson, Dave Vancouver
 Tish. Bob's Writing Class. Graduate English student
- ① ✓ Downes, Gwladys Victoria
 Victoria College
~~d'Easum, Mrs. Lillis~~ Vancouver
 high school teacher
- Fisher, Mrs. Bernice Kinnaird, B.C.
 creative writing major, U.B.C.
- ② ✓ Foxall, Tanis Vancouver
 auditor, observer. English major U.B.C.
- Franklyn, A. Frederick Hollywood, Calif.
 poems in Northeast, Outcry, El Corno Emplumado, Trace (Assoc. Editor)

ENGLISH 410

- GR (2) ✓ Prentice, Roger Vancouver
 audited 410 from Dudek auditor
 O Proust, Rosemary Los Angeles
 U.C.L.A. philosophy major
 O Reid, Jamie Vancouver
 Tish, Drama, English student. 410 from Dudek. published Delta etc.
 O Robertson, Peg Vancouver
 English Major, creative writing, U.B.C.
 O Ruskin, Olga Vancouver
 U.B.C.
 O Rumpf, Marcella Vancouver
 U.B.C.
 O Schaff, David Wayne, Penna.
- (3) ✓ Yale. edits Yale student mag
Selman, Dallas Vancouver
 auditor
 O Sherry, Mrs. Helen Luster Lomita, Calif.
 conducts a writing class in Calif.
 O Smith, Patricia Vancouver
 Bob's class
 2 (3) ✓ Stubbs, John Vancouver
 auditor
 O Tree, Lisa Vancouver
 O Vague, Maeydeth Vancouver
 Bob's class
 O Van Aelstyn, Edward Eugene, Oregon
 editor North West Review. observer
 O Wagner, Linda Perrysburg, Ohio
~~teacher~~ instructor at U. PhD on Williams
 O Wah, Fredric Vancouver
 Tish. MacMillan poetry prize. published Evidence, Prism, Mountain
 O Watson, Richard Seattle
 graduate student at U. Of W. published Raven, Prism. (formerly U.B.C.)
 O Webster, Thomas Tucson, Arizona
 Harvard. Modern European Hist. & Lit.
 3 (3) ✓ White, Marilyn Vancouver
 Bob's class. auditor.

Handwritten: Schaff and
Hence - after class.

AFTERNOON WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Group 1

Bayes, Ron
Belazi, Sandor
Bromige, David
Buckle, Daphne
Copithorne, Judith
Cull, David
Goodell, Larry
Hadson, Mrs. Rona
Hawkins, William
Hogg, Bob
Kessel, Mrs. Gerrye
Luster, Mrs. Helen
MacSkimming, Roy
McLeod, Dan
Wagner, Mrs. Linda
Watson, Richard

Group 2

Aston, Tim
Auxier, Pete
Bowering, George
Burdak, Leo
Coblige, Mrs. Antigone
Coolige, Clark
Dawson, Dave
Hill, John
Keys, John
Frost, Rosemary
RSid, Jamie
Robertson, Peg
Rumpf, Marcella
Ruskin, Olga
Vague, Maeydeth
Van Aelstyn, Edward

Group 3

Fisher, Mrs. Bernice
Franklyn, Fredric
Graves, Allan
Hadley, Drummond
Hindmarch, Gladys
Johnson, Karen
Kearns, Lionel
Killough, John
Moser, Norman
Palmer, George
Perry, Sam
Schaff, David
Smith, Patricia
Tree, Lisa
Wah, Fredric
Webster, Thomas

ASSIGNMENTS

1. A journal (approximately 5000 words) to be your record of the poetry discussions and readings. Due August 16
2. A 1500 word paper in which you elaborate on any entry in your journal that seems particularly valuable to you. Due August 2
3. Same as #2 using a different entry. Due August 9

OFFICES

Robert Creeley. Buchanan 354
 Allen Ginsberg. Buchanan 360
 Robert Duncan. Buchanan 464
 Charles Olson. Buchanan 368

Handwritten:
 Some aspect of writing that has come out of the context of the journal - as idea/concept - got from the discussion.

Handwritten:
 The point is we the context do what you want.

"Polis is Eyes"

Morning Session, July 31, 1963
Vancouver Poetry Conference

Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Charles Olson

Creeley: I'd like to use this meeting, this time, to take out all this accumulation of the last few days into the particular senses that you may now have of it. In other words, to be logical (which is my own curse), we have two possibilities—either we can continue with this process of statement that each of us has been involved with, say, beginning with Allen and myself the first day giving you a literal, across the board sense of what the physical act of writing was for us and then taking that into more particular, more sensitive, ways of feeling about it. Then with the next, Robert's giving you the context of writing as it involves people beyond their particular senses of their own use, and then the discussion last time. But you see what's going to happen, we're getting a split. In other words, what's happening in the classes becomes, frankly, more and more interesting, and what's happening in these morning sessions becomes more and more, to myself, uninteresting, in that we're separating. We ought to get closer now, literally closer, to the terms, or to the senses that are involved in you individually, the senses that are involving us in this relation with you. So I'd like to literally put it up to you. There's no threat or aggression, but I want to know what is occurring to you, what things are coming now into your own minds as context or senses of this—anybody—I've got that demand to begin with something that's coming out of all this.

Audience: I wonder if we could start with going back to the statement, "I am." Well, I was wondering about eyes, "polis is eyes."

Creeley: [writes "polis is eyes" on chalkboard] Literally, does everyone understand?

Duncan: [laughs] Does anybody?

Creeley: What does this word mean? ["I am"]

Audience: Is it part of a discussion that went on before class?

Olson: No, not at all, I think it was a spill-out, wasn't it, from a previous session.

Audience: What we were getting into last time was the statement of the historical "I am now," so that you've got another term which is history. You say in one poem at the end, "this is polis" and after "I am one with my skin."

Creeley: "I have this sense that I am one with my skin."

Duncan: That's all that the "I am" is.

Creeley: Allen was emphasizing at the first meeting that in this poem of Charles', this "I come back to the geography of it," there's a point in that poem where there is the statement "I am" and this is not a psychological assertion, it's in the present. It is not confined by any external interpretation. It's not because a doctor tells you. It's not Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," where the whole context of being is lodged in some instance of a mental activity. There is an assertion that states "I am" in this context of "polis is eyes." What does "polis" mean, does anybody want to help with that? What does the word "polis" mean literally?

Audience: It means "town."

Olson: What is "town," a bio-organization, what? You mean to actually—

Audience: As I was saying, the town is, in the sense that you're using it as a poet, an organization of eyes in all kinds of situations, seeing.

Creeley: Yeah, but he says there is "no such many as mass, there are only eyes in all heads, to be looked out of."

Ginsberg: There are no categories, no hierarchies, no such many as mass, only eyes to be looked out of.

Creeley: From all heads. ... Really, the primary ground for me seems *where are we—where am I? What context for reality can I gain? Literally, what ground can I find under my feet?* That's why I think I go back to this, and I'm curious to know where you are at, literally. Where are we? But *we*, see, I go back equally to the plural of "I" as a false value unless it's realized in something other than a specious collectivity of persons, literally with no active principle to join them, even if they're joined in prayer, or any kind of premise.

Ginsberg: Are you talking about society?

Creeley: I don't understand society anymore.

Duncan: But in the polis business, really the "I," the other "I," the relation of the polis—how much have you seen of your town? The town you live in is only the town you've seen and if you were to sit down to draw it or to make its scenes—like that really good word, one really good word was "dig," and another really good word was "scene" or "making the scene"—now, then, what is that scene, and finally, that's the only polis you've got is the one you actually have seen. And when the town was entire the responsibility of the *I* was really to know

that town from the moment from its sleeping, its waking up, how the food got there, all the processes. Today many of those processes are completely hidden. You almost have to be a detective to find some of the processes in the towns we live in. In *Maximus* most people feel that it's indecent of Olson to look at Gloucester, like lifting the skirt and saying "Come here little boys and see what mama looks like, and play doctor." But playing doctor to a town today is not just mama and her skirts, the town's got skirts over everything that goes on and then went on. But that polis is really what you do see. And what you hear in the town is something else—that's everybody talking in the town square. It's been called gossip and the big gossip is the *muthos* of what the people say. But the eyes are what you know about the town. Politics today is like all the rest of the commodities, it's something we have not engaged in sufficiently so that it's given us and haven't looked at the thing that's really going on. We're asked to worry about what's going on in China, or see it on TV, when actually our business is what's going on in this room, where we're looking. And we're asked always "What do you think about Russia?" or "Aren't you friendly to the Russians?" But we'd all admit that it's a little different question about are we friendly in this room, or kind. I'm a person with very strong kind and unkind feelings. I know we're not supposed to be unkind, but I've not been raised a Christian. I have very strong marked *unkind* feelings, but that's eyes, the things you see. You don't have unkind feelings about something—or kind feelings about something—that's off where you don't see.

Creeley: We're talking about correspondences, the senses of things coming together as senses of consciousness and I was thinking Zukofsky has just published a book in which he says "eyes" like this: [writes "I's (pronounced eyes)" on blackboard]

Duncan: But now Allen—who's a world man, Pan man—has to go around the world to see. He didn't sit here and have feelings about India. He also has to go to see Russians because no poet can be satisfied with these vague feelings. When they're really there you've got to go and put those eyes where you see the way it was.

Ginsberg: You can't see the whole world because it's physically impossible. It's more possible than it was before. My eye can see everything now. I can see the North Pole and I can see India.

Creeley: [writing on board] Is it possible to see the world?

Duncan: *Posible ...*

Olson: *... video la guerra.*

Audience: I was wondering, in answer to your question, "where are we?," is this where we are: in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*.

Creeley: But that's already tricky because he's interpreting what he puts as his premises. You can't anticipate your reality. You know the disappointment, for example, of going anywhere and saying "I'm not going to like it," and when you arrive, you've made an assumption about what's going to be there, but there is no future of this order, ever. So, proposals of this kind sit among the vagaries of any attention. And this, to find out for yourself, the senses of knowing which is a verb, to know, to find out for yourself, are much more interesting than any "interpretation" or even analysis that follows. That you see the thing, that's the primary act of life, that you're, as he would say, *engaged*, but not as anything more than that. In other words, where I part with the people of Sartre's nature is that they literally weave a web of analysis and assumption upon the occasion before they've had the actual fact of it. Now why Herotodus, and why also Pausanius, are relevant to this sense of knowledge is simply that Herotodus literally wrote down all that he heard—beautiful sections on the source of the Nile where he gives you all that he could hear, all that people could tell him about the source of the Nile. While Pausanius, who literally walked through, walked from town to town, recording as he came in what he saw, going to whatever was pointed out to him as significant in the town's activities, shrines or any kind of local business of a particular order. You see, again thinking of Thucydides as a false value—Thucydides put an analysis upon the events of life prior to their occurrence. He simply wanted things to be categorized. That's the impatience with a discipline that has more or less dictated senses of human information ever since Aristotle. This categorization of human life before it occurs, which makes us all grow up into molds or into forms that become less and less possible to live in.

Ginsberg: Let's examine what's going on now in Vietnam, and the reporting of Vietnam. The military is where there is a cold war conflict, most of the reports are making their new stories out of what is handed to them by either the U.S. I.A. or the U.S. State Department or else the Russian information services. In Vietnam, however, most of the reporters have been so betrayed by all of them, that now they do not depend on government handouts for their stories, do not depend on sitting in their offices, but actually having to go out into the streets, talk to Buddhists, talk to local intellectuals, and make up their own stories out of what they see directly and contact directly rather than getting it from secondary sources. ... Apparently, most of the reporters are at the age of 27 or 28 so they have more physical energy for going out and walking the streets. It makes an enormous difference. That's why reporting in Vietnam is much more explosive than any other part of the world right at the moment. Because all of the reporters are 25 years old. Physically 25, so that means they can get out there and contact people, walk around—like if a Buddhist is going to burn himself they call him up so they can come down and see it. They are physically capable of going out and doing this, that's why we have photographs of it. Which you don't have right now in any in any other news story anywhere in the world. You don't have anything quite as *hot*, as threatening, to the American psyche as what's happening in

Vietnam.

Creeley: Take a local instance, for example, Allen has “public fame” and people try to get in touch with him by calling him up on the telephone. But why doesn’t it occur to them that if they want to see something that they come and look at it, literally, he says, like “why don’t you come *here* if you’re interested in myself as subject, why not come and look?” And this curiously doesn’t—I don’t say it ironically—I just say it ...

Ginsberg: It doesn’t always work.

Creeley: What do you mean it doesn’t always work? You can take a look. There are moments when you must, in effect, trust yourselves to an agency that you literally don’t understand. When you go to the doctor, and he says you need an operation or something, you’re involved in an agency that is beyond your consciousness.

Duncan: Bob, I think there is something here: “eyes” would rightly—let’s say if we really look at Ginsberg, this fame disappears because it’s *muthos* and we find ourselves looking in the sense that anybody looks at a body. In which in his case you see a great deal indeed. Your first, most careless sight is to try to substantiate your picture of a personality, but a doctor doesn’t see a personality when he looks at this, he sees this living organism the way it is. Your attitudes just disappear, the fame, which is a persona of the *muthos*, disappears and you’re looking at the living fact of the body as like this—even amateurishly you can begin to get an impression of breathing and blood tone and a whole series of things that suddenly give you the idea of what this is like as a physical organism. And you have to do that in order to get along yourself because you’re another organism and you’ve got to know what kinds of speeds go on between these two and your eyes are doing that all the time without your registering it.

Ginsberg: The most important thing about direct contact is, it’s the only place where you can get the actual life which is not ideas, but feelings going back and forth. You can’t get feelings from the television set really. You’re getting news stories on television or just simply a mechanical imposition of all those electronical machines that get in the way of the direct feeling.

Creeley: Literally. You can watch *anything* on television.

Ginsberg: The whole world has gone into his head. Man is lost in the wilderness of his own head. As we live not in our head alone, we live in our bodies, and our bodies have a feeling, which everybody knows. Well, most of modern culture is operating on the level of ideas, heads, or symbols or language or even sensations of a substitute nature. But the actual direct contact feeling is the only way that we know what is going on with somebody else and in ourselves, which is completely lost for the most part. That’s what I was complaining about on the

first day when I was talking about the *Esquire* article—the girl there, you know. I had the feeling together, but that feeling, by the time it came out in the article, it wasn't there. ... So what kind of politics can you run with absolutely no feeling going on? Don't you then get a completely abstract thing which can go in any direction according to the way the idea structure goes? You have any number of alternative possible universes other than the one that actually exists. I have to deal with shynesses and with throbs. And you are here with your shynesses and your throbs. We're going to throb together. That's how society is made. Society is not made by putting machines one on top of another.

Duncan: Yeah, they've got sleep machines and dream machines.

Ginsberg: They've got drugs that will substitute for feelings and will substitute for visionary states.

Duncan: And we don't have to have imagination.

Creeley: Anymore.

Audience: What about the fact that you shouldn't be dealing with *Esquire*? I don't give a god damned if he doesn't like—

Ginsberg: I wasn't dealing with *Esquire*, I was dealing with a person with feelings!

Audience: He goes over there and starts saying—because that's India! For Christ sakes, anybody can go to India and get attacked by a woman!

Ginsberg: I wasn't dealing with *Esquire*, I was dealing with a girl who I could see. That's the whole point, you can't shut it out.

Audience: Why in the hell did they send a nice young girl?

Ginsberg: You can't shut your doors.

Creeley: If you start shutting your door, then you—

Ginsberg: Pull my daisy, tip my cup, all my doors are open!

Audience: —realizing what the hell that means, not just a god damned—

Ginsberg: Why are you being so hard-hearted? Why are you being so hard-hearted?

Audience: What can I say, it's too bad. Too bad Allen Ginsberg. He got seduced by a girl because he didn't keep his eyes open.

Creeley: He did keep his eyes open.

Audience: You were dealing with *Esquire*. You were not dealing with Charles Olson.

Ginsberg: I was *not* dealing with *Esquire*. I was dealing with a living being in front of me!

Audience: Yeah, well, you see what happened. [laughter]

Creeley: You can't correct what's real.

Audience: How many doors are you going to keep open? I mean that gets pretty autoerotic!

Ginsberg: So, like in *Maximus*, presumably, Olson is keeping his feelings personal, related to what is actually going on around him in the street and what he can find out with his own eyes in the local library full of the people who wrote a hundred or two hundred year ago, he can go talk to the fishermen, he can look at the mayor walking down the street with his hat, he can compose out of that. Out of what he has felt he can propose a new personal history of what is happening there now to him, out of the scene in front of him. That is polis. ...

Duncan: I do think there's something here, since I'm sort of a closed door man, and I spent some time being puzzled by the "no hierarchies" because I was making fancy hierarchies in my mind all the time. But if you go back to this polis, when it existed and where it existed, there are personal forces, but there are no hierarchies within the polis, it disappears when the hierarchies appear, when the castes and the thing that's called society—a pattern with hierarchies and ups and downs and overs and we've got classes here and things—is the disappearance of this people with eyes and people meeting in the context in which they can all look, talk, and have their own judgements. I realized actually then, there are no hierarchies, there are individual occasions and we all miss it—in a funny way you're mistaking—John, is that right, your name—because my reaction to that *Esquire* thing was at least notably different from yours. I asked Allen, how can you get interviewed by *Esquire*, have it all be so much baloney, and one can still feel the spirit in it? And then he told me this girl who interviewed him actually really didn't get to write the article because she got sick. So, on top of my question, how can a girl interview you, go back, and not write the article, and you still have some—This is a puzzle to me because in my own world, the occasions in which I can see myself happening are few and they certainly don't consist in getting all the way through *Esquire* alive. And as a consequence I don't get to *Esquire*, I mean all my life I won't have to worry about that because it couldn't possibly happen. *Esquire's* smart, they can go to Ginsberg and have something happen, they know that if they went to me everything's shut up and there

wouldn't be anybody there except a big bore. I don't even give Christmas presents.

Creeley: Well, that's the process. In other words, unless you're going to give people access to your own life in the way that you would from others, where can you draw the line? Here's another instance which is quite different, but comes to same position. In this place in Guatemala where I was living, it happened that the administrator, this thinker, was an ex-Nazi, a Nazi storm trooper. Now what am I going to do? In other words, am I going to sit in the history of the general society from which I come or am I going to look at this man as another man? It happened by coincidence that he and I were driving a truck which struck an old Indian man who was deaf and didn't hear us coming. Suddenly we're both present in something that's as actual as anything ever is. I mean, a man is killed. Now, are we going to sit there in the division of ourselves—with myself feeling this is an ex-Nazi I'm with? He speaks of Texas, he says, "I was in a concentration camp in Texas during the war," and he spoke with difficulties. How are we to arbitrate experience except by standing witness to it? Allen, you can't say "I don't like *Esquire*, therefore I will not admit that it exists." Or, rather, exclude the possibility of the person no matter how they are present.

Ginsberg: The thing that was going on in Israel with Eichmann was the same thing.

Creeley: What a categorization that was.

Ginsberg: Nobody was looking at Eichmann with their own eyes and their own bellies, they were seeing Eichmann as an abstraction. And they killed him as an abstraction.

Duncan: As a matter of fact, they were approaching Eichmann the same way Hitler had approached Jews, with an idea of what it was he was looking at and no eyes. Hitler was a person remarkably with no eyes and shows how much force you can have in history if you literally don't yield at all to the eyes. If you're going to yield to the eyes at all you'd better have to do with them, I think that's the other part of the story. And boy did anybody hit polis right in the middle, it was something like Hitler as it's happened at times in history. We know that, we call them madmen or something but it really is a terrific force because it's closed and goes. ... I'd like to get something about the Eichmann thing because Denise Levertov did write an Eichmann poem and really got into a mess on it. It's where your feeling's located. This isn't different from Allen's picture. As I pointed out Allen does go to look at the thing that he feels he has his response to. But the other thing that often happens is you think you have a response to Eichmann, you ought to know if you haven't seen him that your response must come from something you did see. Freud at least gave you this key, that when you get upset about something and you find yourself dealing with abstractions you know then you really are upset about something and the thing you saw goes back.

And the thing you saw can very well go back to something known. You'll be very surprised because it isn't within that section you call your life, it's way back there. Then you have to find the event. You think you want to write a poem about Eichmann and you find it, really, just suddenly you're mouthing sentiments and you can tell right away, because it's not equivalent to the sense of injustice or justice or the sense of humanity of looking at the man, then you've got to find the man that Eichmann was just standing like a dream image for and look at him finally.

Ginsberg: It's yourself always.

Duncan: No, I think it's a real person. No, that's where it's different. I think you'll find the time you sought and it will be in the kind of event that you see when someone is—In the first place, I don't play cops and robbers. I don't identify with somebody who clubs other people over the head in the name of the law, or who breaks the law. I'm interested in the law. I know the law can be wrong, so there's a law. Because you know the law is unjust—what does that mean? But I'm back to why, if you're disturbed about something, and that was the political question we call today, because it's been a big screen. Yet every once in a while you'll have true politicals and they have to go back to what you saw, they're our "polis is eyes." ...

Creeley: I remember Charles once said that we are in a situation that allows our will an extraordinary play. We stand in a middle state where we can, not intuit, but we have a sense of our life that can be extraordinarily "illuminating," or can give us a sense of possibility and if we make our will the arbiter of that sense of possibility we muddle or we will destroy all that that possibility is. I find myself, for example, wanting to relax that sense of will. I don't want to kill myself in some arbitrary act of intention. So that's why, again, I feel myself bankrupt, because I've come to the end of an occasion. For the moment. I trust things, you can only do that. When you're riding on a train you've got to trust the man who's driving it. When you're living, you've got to trust the act of life. It sounds awfully sentimental but I don't know how else to characterize it. This is with all possible consciousness. It doesn't mean you have to be dumb. ... To be in the writing, when one is literally involved in the act of writing, there may be particular difficulties, but as long as that state is what one is in, that takes care of itself. I mean with all the particular difficulties that occur in it. But when you come to the end of it, when you come to the end of that possibility, you're finished in the sense that you may or may not have dealt with what was given you. But there is a hiatus or a gap that feels very uncomfortable. It just doesn't feel right. You make up your life too often in kind of specious activities, filling in. Most friends I've had who are writers are very conscious of the intervals of this order between pieces of work where there is no use of themselves that is interesting to themselves. My sense now is, as Allen was saying, of feeling bankrupt, leads to particular possibilities I've felt, I for the moment no longer really feel. In other words, I've written a kind of poem that's led me to whatever instances of it.

Duncan: Dirac recently had an article in relation to physics and he said the gains we have in our century in physics cannot possibly be the answer to the questions we have. We know one thing and that is that the questions that lie before us, what we don't know, can't possibly have anything to do with what we do because that's where we've gotten misled and gotten to the place where we can't see. And physics has a feeling also of being exhausted, as if it had gotten a picture that goes way out there, yes, but then all of a sudden meets with something that happened, where? And then he said so we know that the physics of the next period, 20 years from now, is going to be entirely different and will throw everything that we've got out. It's *out* in the sense that the perspective will be different.

Audience: Can I ask you if you have an experience of bankruptcy?

Duncan: I certainly do. I don't have the bankruptcy in relation to bankruptcy. And this I think is a thing about the person. For instance, I really always am contriving and so far almost managing it, to go on really without changing or developing in myself. Now Bob wants to force himself to a place where something will happen because he really does want to make it impossible for those earlier poems to happen. Whereas I really just want to make it possible for me to go on, like I remember at an anarchist meeting and Paul Goodman had just lectured about the expansive-all-orgasmic-sexual, and I said my goodness, my mother disapproves of my sexual impulses and now I come to anarchism and it wants me to be whole, generous, kindly—or Ginsberg wants me to be an expansive-touch-me—well, all I wanted from the beginning was to be cross old me and get by with it, and not be spanked or scolded and told I ought to be expansive. I know if I were expansive and loving and kind and good that, yeah sure. Charles, *Maximus*, is trying to force a conversion within Charles, make it untenable, really—there are all sorts of magical contrivances in *Maximus* to force Charles Olson. Maximus is big and Charles Olson is a little tiny man down there, you don't realize that baby, and he wants to make it impossible for Charles Olson to go on. Well, at times it sounds like he wants to make it impossible for us to go on. Duerden gets angry and he says, "why do I have to do that?" I said, "well just wake up to it." He was getting to be an awful grouch and he was thinking, "Charles Olson is the most terrible, awful, thing that ever happened to poetry." This is some years ago. I went out and I said, "you know, you don't have to be concerned about it" and he said, "I don't?" And he beamed. [Laughter]

Audience: I was thinking that what Bob was saying was true, because this past winter everyone, everybody, was writing, saying, "I've stopped writing."

Creeley: It was a bad winter.

Audience: When you can't describe it if you're in it yourself, what do you do? You either let it happen to you or you make a change.

Duncan: The hardest thing to find is the form in which writing can attack this thing. That's, I think, the most difficult.

Creeley: The more one learns about writing as a craft, the more, at times at least, you want to really take it over. *You* want to write, and you want to create the whole language and write the whole world. But when that state occurs, to my own sense, then I hate it. I hate that. In many senses, I don't want the aggression of writing the world in that way nor do I want the vanity of it. Although I do want it, you see. It get awfully corrosive. And then when I break, so to speak, whatever the ego business is, when I can't, then I grow dense with all those confusions of *why can't I do it, why can't I write a poem today*, all the invitations to write that are not actual or not valid, let's say. And then the impatience of all the sense of life that I'm aware of, which is specious, which is an ego—I don't know how to call—language becomes itself—I can't even trust words. And I can't trust my senses of life. My children then are much more interesting than me. ...

Audience: Can I go back to another point? What does "contrivance" mean, Robert?

Duncan: Did I use "contrivance"? Well, I mean I have contrived. But do you mean a contrivance in relation to how to use this feeling of having been stopped? Well, for one thing, if you are stopped certainly that means you are going to have to learn to write forms, you're going to have to talk so that it will stop. So that it will at least not go on—your word "speciously" there works—so that you won't find yourself being capable where you really aren't. When we've been talking here something else entered my mind. Why is it that at a certain time—and it must be our life intuition that does this by the way because the minute we want to reverse it we can—why is it that we close ourselves off from the resources that, for me for instance, they always lie upon calling upon powers, calling upon the earth itself, calling upon the stars? The poets have at call great powers. And you will find them always in poems, you'll find them in the poems of the stoppage, but it may be you cannot find the right one. It certainly reminded me of your story of—if we pose now the Creeley—one thing in the novel, it tells us what it's like to be a Creeley. Re-imagine the writer, and Bob is using himself as an example, to being the person in an adventure of a fairy tale. It isn't just a story, because there are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of them, stories of what it's like to go through certain configurations in life, they all come to these stoppages. So that if we were to pose this, that's where, Jamie, it won't work exactly. All of us are suffering from it at the present time, so we know that there is some *big thing* that is a stoppage. But it also is like a single person moving through a fairy tale. And having said the wrong thing to someone that I really have quite forgotten back there, here I am using that someone you're going to see in the past, but always in a fairy tale you've done a wrong thing. But then you don't go back and redo that back there. That makes an adventure. And you

come to a stoppage and then you have certain ways you've got to behave in that stoppage. Fairy tales do tell you a lot about that behavior. You really do have to open the eyes and listen. The one who gets into trouble in fairy tales is always—that's what I think of as obedience, my term *obedience*. When you don't know what to do you've got to obey. You're in an obedience now, and if you were not to obey, he could just have his powers—all he has to do is reverse tracks and use a power that's no longer appropriate, not obey the situation and Creeley could go on making Creeley poems. That's a learned ability. As a matter of fact *you* could make Creeley poems! That's the awful thing that happens. You're not in his fairy tale at all. You can make Creeley poems. And he's in the same situation that you are. He can make Creeley poems. But the obedience is closed on him and so he has to be in the poem, rightly in the poem.

Creeley: Charles said on the phone that the goddess directs you to your life. Indeed, these intervals where one is, I suppose in that sense, waiting for that which will declare one's self in a way that is not, say, simply an ego. Even the jokes and all the senses that our presence is directed by generalizations such as status, cars, clothes—the senses of person which accumulate around collections of people, which is again to my sense specious to that which they are. I don't mean this in an even theological sense specious to the life in me. Also again, this thing that Charles got from the Hopi Indians, that what is happening *here* is distinct from what is happening *there*. When I live in the *there* of my own intentions, I lose all the actuality of the *here*. You see even now when I produce Robert's references to this novel of the senses of my own writing, I sit here wondering whether or not I am not pleased by being "historical" in this sense. I have lost my way for the moment.

Duncan: That isn't what I meant by your situation.

Creeley: I know, I'm hearing it. I wonder if I am making myself up, only, you see. I wonder where my life *is*. In writing I find it most, really, that's *my* limit. In all consciousness. I have experienced the fullest degree of my own life in writing. I wonder if I don't live in—well, God, I don't want to get into that kind of thing. I mean, I think this is becoming excessive. ...

Duncan: There's something else in that *Maximus*. Actually that magazine is being attacked because—this has to do with *what and why craft at all?*—it was sloppy. It was made for eyes that weren't looking. The core of that is: what we do and what we are and what we act are for the ones who are looking. That's *anyone* who's looking so there's no hierarchy. It's not for Big Brother up there that sees everything. But it is for the person who's looking, and it is for the person who sees more than you do. So that is the drive. You damn well have to learn that craft as best you can, because the eye that is looking, and that's any human eye—we see this now because the four of us developed certain things all of ten years ago—but then that seems such a short time. And within ten years—I've just been reading through these—almost any of you younger writers

can produce this and make a facsimile of what was gained between '50 and '53. If you look at *Empty Mirror*—even the phenomenon of *Howl* which is like a breakthrough in '56—if you look at *Empty Mirror* you see it was making untenable an area in poetry. You just had to have this breakthrough. There was an apprentice piece that went on that made for this kind of out-speaking. My reaction to *Empty Mirror* when I saw it was miserable, as in which is “I’m cold, I don’t have a fuck, nobody likes me.” Then all of a sudden you’ve got, “I like everybody.” You’ve got these other kinds of voices going on. Actually, this happened then. If we were at the business any of us would know, and we’re at the business of the stop right now, the eyes that are going to inspect our work really see, at any point reading, more than we do. Helen Stein, a woman in the town, who, because she really is looking and a feeling person—you ask Ferrini, how in the world could you hand Helen Stein this thing? She isn’t going to sneer at you or anything, but how could you ask her to be concerned with this thing you’re writing? Most commodities today are made for people who are not looking, to be buying the simulacra of something. And actually, as writers, we are the most antiquated creatures left because there is a vast, very slick, productive market given commodity writing for people who do not look and don’t want to look. Who want to read without looking, who want to read without their eyes. But we aren’t writing for people without their eyes and that’s part of the problem. ... I’m aware that what Charles meant was that there was sloppy writing published in that. You compare it to the man who was selling a fish and knows that the fish is good ...

Transcribed and edited by Aaron Vidaver from a tape made by Fred Wah and deposited in the Simon Fraser University Contemporary Literature Collection.