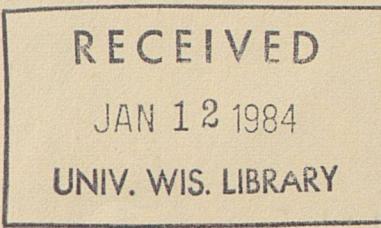


# HOW(ever)

Vol. I, No. 1, May 1983

Editor: Kathleen Fraser

Associate Editors: Frances Jaffer, Beverly Dahlen  
Contributing Editors: Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Carolyn Burke



## WHY HOW(ever)?

And what about the women poets who were writing experimentally? Oh, were there women poets writing experimentally? Yes there were, they were. They were there and they were writing differently and a few of them were chosen and did appear in the magazines for people writing in new forms. And then several women began to make their own experimentalist magazines. What about that? Well, they read each other. But we hardly ever heard about their poems where I was sitting listening. You mean in school? I mean where poems were being preserved and thought about seriously and carried forward as news.

And the women poets, the ones you call experimentalist, were they reading Simone de Beauvoir? Firestone? Chodorow? Irigaray? Some were. They were reading and they were thinking backwards and forwards. They were writing to re-imagine how the language might describe the life of a woman thinking and changing. And the poetry they were writing wasn't fitting into anyone's anything because there wasn't a clear place made for it.

They must have felt displaced. Yes, they must have. They must have felt unreal. Unrealized. Effaced. Did they know it? Yes, they knew it. Did they talk about it? Yes, they talked about it. We were sitting in a writing group two years ago and we talked about it. One year ago, we were sitting there talking about it. Last summer, I was walking around talking to myself about it and feeling displaced and I wrote to one of my scholar friends and asked her about it and she said you are right. There is this gap. But perhaps we don't know how to acknowledge something, how to think about something, unless it resembles what was already there. I thought of Dickinson. I thought of Stein. Woolf and Richardson. Slashes, anarchies, sentences, disruptions. I was listening and

I said to her, but if we could somehow talk to you and tell you about us, would you be interested? Yes, she said, I would be interested.

HOW(ever) proposes to make a bridge between scholars thinking about women's language issues, vis-a-vis the making of poetry, and the women making those poems. HOW(ever) hopes to create a place in which poets can talk to scholars through poems and working notes on those poems, as well as through commentary on neglected women poets who were/are making textures and structures of poetry in the tentative region of the untried.

—Kathleen Fraser

A vehicle for experimentalist poetry—post-modern if you will, to be thought of seriously as an appropriate poetry for women and feminists. The poetry feminists usually eschew, believing that now is the time for women to write understandable poetry about their own lives, and with feeling, with the heretofore undeveloped self in prominent display.

But the myths of a culture are embodied in its language, its lexicon, its very syntactical structure. To focus attention on language and to discover what can be written in other than traditional syntactical or prosodic structures may give an important voice to authentic female experience. Certainly one should be read side-by-side with the other.

Unhappily, most feminist publications have ignored the experimentalist work which women are writing now and have been writing since early in the century. And unhappily, most publications of "new" writing have had little interest in feminist language issues, although some of the women who appear in them have written brilliantly and movingly about their lives as women. We want to publish an exception, however.

—Frances Jaffer

WORKING NOTES FROM JOHANNA JORDAHL:

The most difficult project is restraining critics' voices that comment from behind or above or below and to give the lead to *play*. Poems are play as music is played. I like adventure. The goal is to listen to the reading in the head and to play well.

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For the rest of it

Of any of the days had not been close enough.  
It was not that she was alone, it was that nothing penetrated the area immediately about her head and she felt as if she was inside a car driving along looking out through thick glass. This was not terror. Her hair was not black, yet it was dark.

When she saw the boys in black jackets and perfect modified sculpted meticulous hair then she would think about hair.

Sometimes they wore nets. Times some of the time went by unnoticed and it was necessary to write down on a calendar "hair." Outside 2 voices between the walls of the building are not known languages. The faucet drips. Thus is dimension given to the board. A fleet of meanings and unknown sounds are all related

to the substance she meant to not put in her body and the man in the other room she can't hear but whom she trusts is there silently being the one she knows closer than others. A person she meant to join if it were possible in the rest of it.  
The rest of the day she would think about what it meant to join if it were possible with someone else in the rest of it.

It was not that she was alone it was that she was given to the poison she meant to not put in her body and the man in the other room. Her hair was dark and yet was not black. Three things happened. None of which was absolute or true, that is, true as in truth-like or something literal, a stone to put in the pocket and carry home.  
A real plot.

## The Etiquette of Romance

### I.

There's always hope  
that the bird will fly again.  
I see a winged shadow rising  
sideways up the wall.

### II.

The final date  
is a large hard-bound volume.  
If you come to me in the evening  
I will collaborate with you  
on a macro-character description.  
Walls intact  
we subdue the gelatinous  
substances to a sequential form of behold—  
dissect—amaze—  
—No conclusion is possible.

### III.

(Oh fiery bearded goddess pressed  
on the western sky, uphold some continuity—)  
I suffer discomfort prior to drying.

### IV.

The dissecting tools consist of  
a finely beaded glass needle,  
and a glass microscope slide.  
It could take days to recover  
consolation. The absence  
of a discernible  
confrontation line  
throws our distinguishing features  
on the granular movie surface.

The large characters formerly used in moral identification  
have been greatly reduced in significance.

### V.

I open my mouth and anything falls out.  
Mad paper dolls, scissors, gleaming teeth  
saved in a glass jar, a clot  
of blood. Things shift out of focus.  
Is this fever?

Little holes in my skin where the tools  
have entered. A scar at the bottom of your face.

VI.

Forms are required by social convention  
rules fulfill decorum.

I elongate the subject, re-arrange the ribs  
and shape, to make the argument seem conical.

From inside the vortex I point  
but your shadow escapes  
over the outside wall.

Gulls hang on the sky.  
Sixty-five percent chance of rain.

VII.

Down the stairs at high noon  
soft soles on pavement  
rip open the day.

“I will go now and buy wine to make me feel good.  
Then I will sit on the lawn and write  
my poison essay,”

It begins: “Crossing a bridge in the dark. . . ”

Walls

Implicit outlines, the sun on water, or the moon  
have always been in this shred of wood. No memory escapes  
the seal-shaped lock: a window bored through by insistent waves

My mother is writing a letter in her house. “We’re rattling around in here.”  
From space and space when the transparent curtain blows out

I know her, I remember a naked waist. The fluted windows arc  
from inside. Preparation. Cool elbows of a hanger, for or against?

The ceiling lunges over my mother’s envelope. My mind cools, pours into  
a glass. Integrity. Sound plasters up from the street to press white  
paint on walls. Sun cups the water-tower, or is it the moon?

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*Johanna Jordahl is a recent graduate from the writing program at  
San Francisco State. Her appearance as a character in Eileen Corder's  
recent production with the Poets Theatre in S.F. has led to her  
interest in reading as performance.*

WORKING NOTES FROM GAIL SHER:

Virginia Woolf said something about words having auras. Poets place them in sequence. I would say about the vibrations of a word that poets order them according to their similar intensities. Also interested in concentration as it releases energy in language. Addressing not the conscious understanding but the intelligence of contained experience.

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Also as a child she had  
wanted to eat

Also as a child she had  
wanted to eat.

Without particular motive  
(to be) on her own crossing  
the street on her own or  
going through the door  
making an effort to buy  
food.

Always with amount of energy  
she could spend with that  
person (son) or even possibly  
some other people.

Even simply listening. Not  
urged to but that that had  
already occurred.

Seen by the other people  
(during) the day or sometime  
during the course of the  
day (the driver) calls out  
something.

To be phased by this. To  
appear calm but actually  
to imagine herself  
quarreling.

•

Intense expression in  
striving for something  
(intake) of food  
(inheritance) of  
something.

Having asked for something  
to eat (in) one process  
to eat one (particular)  
part.

•

In bed for example (always)  
perpetuating (striving) in  
the midst of any room.

Which (she) as a lonely  
person appreciated.

Avenues and walking with  
such & such emotion (buses)  
where they seem needed.

Reversing her terminology  
and tendency to want  
something from him. (To)  
supply food here. (Not)  
to move or feel like moving.

With others like her  
in the same mood (hiding)  
something received from  
her.

Delicate relation to her  
(discerned) (quarter) of  
mind.

Children & events of the  
day enter her mind. Once  
while eating (in) quiet  
manner of saying something.

Or being in a hurry to get  
somewhere. Arrangement of  
food at (moment) of giving  
it to her.

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By Gail Sher: *As on things (which) headpiece touches the Moslem*,  
Square Zero Editions, 1982. *From another point of view the woman*  
*seems to be resting*, Trike Press, 1983. Available from Small Press  
Distribution, 1784 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, California 94709.

# alerts(

*alerts* will be an on-going section of this publication set aside for informal commentary and information on new or neglected books by relevant women poets, in brief letter, journal or notation form. We intentionally think of these comments as not complete in the scholarly sense, with the hope of removing prohibitions linked with thinking/writing critically. Your response is invited.

## NOTES ON READING LORINE NIEDECKER

What's here?

### Museum

Having met the protozoic  
Vorticellae  
here is man  
Leafing towards you  
in this dark  
deciduous hall

: economies undertaken for the joy of seeing how much a few words will bear. Here evolution, housed in a museum, is an idea we walk through, meeting (as we might meet in a Marianne Moore poem) the simple creature with its gaudy latinate name. But Niedecker doesn't choose to go on for five pages topping herself with witty ironies as Moore might do. She draws the poem taut, matching ends and ends, putting "you" in the center, as it happens, of that renewable forest commonly called "man":

The eye  
of the leaf  
into leaf  
and all parts  
spine  
into spine  
neverending  
head  
to see

: a kind of "flowering of the rod" unlike H.D.'s, but as visionary in its way, drawing on the scientific myth of evolution to evoke the sense of continuity of mind and form. She says:

'We have a lovely  
finite parentage  
mineral

vegetable  
animal'

...

and later in the same poem ("Wintergreen Ridge"):

Nobody, nothing  
ever gave me  
greater thing

than time  
unless light  
and silence

which if intense  
makes sound

...

She wrote to Cid Corman in 1965 "... that meaning has something to do with song—one hesitates a bit longer with some words in some lines for the thought or the vision—but I'd say mostly, of course, cadence, measure make song. And a kind of shine (or sombre tone) that is of the same intensity throughout the poem. And the thing moves. But as in all poems, everywhere, depth of emotion condensed..."

There's a better shine  
on the pendulum  
than is on my hair  
and many times

...  
I've seen it there.

That light, that "shine" became by some synesthetic process the "tone," that light perceived as sound. Yet tone is more than sound, always difficult to hear or name. It's what is there inside the sound, the song or given measure; it has to do with the substance of the poem, its concrete particular thingness. But not static. The "intensity" she says, that pressure under which the (thing? poem?) turns, is transformed.

*I think lines of poetry that I might use—  
all day long and even in the night*

(These were, according to Cid Corman, Niedecker's last recorded words, November 15, 1970, in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin.)

: a clear spare native American idiom: to see in that turn of speech:

Dead  
she now lay deaf to death  
She could have grown a good rutabaga  
in the burial ground  
and how she'd have loved these woods  
One of her pallbearers said I  
like a dumfool followed a deer  
wanted to see her jump a fence—  
never'd seen a deer jump a fence  
pretty thing  
the way she runs

admired and severely critiqued Niedecker's work, via their long literary correspondence—had invited Niedecker to submit poems for the issue of *Poetry* he was editing, but her manuscript didn't arrive in time. Largely due to the efforts of Cid Corman, poet and editor of *Origin*, her work found an audience. Letters and poems appeared in *Origin*, 3rd series, No. 2, July, 1966, and in its 4th series, No. 16, July, 1981. *Truck*, No. 16, 1975, devoted a complete issue to Niedecker's works (see the article "A Woman Poet, Specifically," by Jane Augustine, for a thoughtful discussion of poems cited above). Two recent close readings of Niedecker poems appear in *Sagetrieb*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Fall, 1982.

—K.F., F.J., B.D.

The poems quoted are in:

*North Central*: Fulcrum Press (London) 1968  
*T & G: The Collected Poems: (1936—1966)*: The Jargon Society, 1968

The letter and "last words" are in:

*Blue Chicory* (ed. Cid Corman): The Elizabeth Press, 1976

—Beverly Dahlen

**More thoughts:** The difficulty of beginning to talk of Niedecker's work is the number of other readings that are left out—there are the poems having to do with her relationship to the culture of women: the small town women whom she both admired and felt isolated from ("In the great snowball before the bomb," *T & G*); literary women ("Who was Mary Shelley," *T & G*); her view of marriage ("I rose from marsh mud," *T & G*). It is ironic that Niedecker's work, as H.D.'s, has often been reduced to a simplistic version of small perfections, whereas the work proves to be tenacious, sinewy, not merely gem-like—a persistence of mind which finds its constant focus in the natural and domestic world.

It is also a curious phenomenon to discover, in various footnotes and memories, that there exists the mistaken notion that Niedecker's work appeared in *An "Objectivist" Anthology* (1932) and/or in the "Objectivist" issue of *Poetry* (Feb., 1931), edited by Louis Zukofsky. It, in fact, did *not* appear.

As Carl Rakosi remembers it, Zukofsky—who both

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HOW(ever) is available in a first series of four issues, for \$5. Subscription checks should go to: HOW(ever), c/o Jaffer, 871 Corbett, San Francisco, CA 94131. All editorial correspondence can be sent to: Fraser, 554 Jersey St., San Francisco, CA 94114. Original poetry manuscripts will be considered at the beginning of the second series.

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“Language is inherently conservative. . . (It) relies on (usually implicit) conventionalized models of the world. Changing those conventionalized models is an integral part of changing the system of linguistic choices: the two kinds of change are inextricably linked, each one leading to and depending on the other.”

—Sally McConnell-Ginet (from an article in *Women and Language in Literature and Society* Praeger, 1980, p.10).

“. . . It is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs.”

—Thomas Hardy

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