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BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

Philip Jenks and the Poetry of Experience

Poetry is, from one perspective, a treasury of memorable statements; from another, it is a name we give to a particular experience we have of language. In the first case, the emphasis falls squarely on interpretable meaning, though the memorability is clearly indebted to the power of language as something experienced. In the second case, meaning is deemphasized and even repressed in favor of an intensification of sound values, visual patterning, and syntactic deformation. Meaning, of course, need not occur in the form of a statement. Experience is also meaningful, quite apart from the sense we might make of it in retrospect. Nonetheless, insofar as "statement" and "experience" remain the two fundamental possibilities of poetic language, meaning is more prominently an attribute of the former.

The distinction I am drawing here between statement and experience is sometimes described in discussions of poetry as a difference between linguistic transparency and opacity.[1] Yet insofar as "transparency" defines communication metaphorically—that is, as a matter of unimpeded vision into a world distinct from the language we use to represent it—the term is more evocative than explanatory. Obviously, a declarative statement need not depend on the possibility of "seeing," and nothing stops us from constructing a poetics emphasizing statement yet free from such visual presumptions. Though Marianne Moore called her most important book *Observations*, an

[1] Yvor Winters makes an analogous but more invidious distinction between reasonability and obscurity in his famous attack on experimental poetry, *Primitivism and Decadence* (New York: Arrow Editions, 1937). Winters, however, was far from oblivious to the virtues of such writing, and his attack is well worth reading even today for its detailed description of an "obscure" (in my terms, "experiential") poetry's basic forms.

allegedly "transparent" poem like "To a Steam Roller" ("The illustration / is nothing to you without the application. / You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down / into close conformity, and then walk back and forth / on them") is no more usefully conceived of as a window than Gertrude Stein's "opaque" *Tender Buttons* ("No cup is broken in more places and mended, that is to say a plate is broken and mending does do that it shows that culture is japanese").[2] Indeed, one might well argue that Stein's work is the more determinedly optical—that "To a Steam Roller" demands our understanding, while *Tender Buttons* provokes a visualization.[3] In this respect, the difference between poetry as statement and poetry as experience has less to do with transparency and opacity than with the construction of intelligible and sensible objects of knowledge.

The poetry of Philip Jenks is decidedly experiential. If Moore and Stein define a continuum, then Jenks is closer to Stein. Though a political scientist by training and teacher by profession, he is manifestly less concerned with intelligibility—that is, with the sharing of a determinate, knowable content—than he is with the registration and production of sense impressions. Like Stein—and unlike Moore—he takes a greater interest in the *nature* of experience than in its *significance.* This does not mean, of course, that his work's content is *in*significant, only that the purpose of this content cannot be grasped by reading the poems as a series of discrete statements. Neither personal expression nor source of wisdom—though it mimes both at different times—*On the Cave You Live In* (Chicago: Flood Editions, 2002) is, if anything, an attempt to come to terms with the precondi-

[2] Marianne Moore, *Observations* (New York: Dial Press, 1924), 21; and Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 21.

[3] The distinction I am making here is not stylistic; in place of Moore and Stein I might just as well have put William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane. Moreover, as the differences between Stein and Crane (as great as those between Stein and Moore) suggest, the poetries of statement and experience do not divide the world into neat, distinct hemispheres. Statement and experience are permeable modes, and what matters most, perhaps, is the interplay between them—an interplay evident to a greater or lesser extent in all four of these poets.

tions for such writing. In this respect, the book is also a philosophical inquiry, one whose purpose is easily missed in the negotiation of utterance and affect that gives this work its particular tonality. We can, it is true, approach these poems as a profiler might and construct a kind of dossier on their author, but if we want to come to terms with Jenks's project (and not with Jenks himself), then a different approach to reading will be needed.

I do not mean to suggest that *On the Cave You Live In* lacks meaningful statements, only that their graspability tempts us to overestimate their importance and thus to mistake the work as expositional in intent. As Stein's more popular writings indicate, an experiential emphasis need not preclude the possibility of intelligibility. Indeed, it is the tendency of a rationalized discourse to obscure language's other possibilities that leads Steinian writers to eschew straightforward statement in the first place. In framing Jenks's poetry as "experiential," then, I mean above all to place its statements in a perspective that preserves the legibility of his work's other virtues as well.

To clarify what I mean by "experiential," let me cite two passages from this book, the first straightforward, the second mysterious. Here, first, are two lines from "Kingwood, West Virginia," one of several poems in this collection that make reference to coal mining:

> The world is cut open
> like a deer is cut open. (40)

And here, by contrast, are lines more typical of Jenks's writing, the first half of an untitled poem that articulates—in a special sense I will explain below—an animism equivalent to that broached less flamboyantly in "Kingwood, West Virginia":

> His speech is from crevices
> running diagonal through the
> underneath what was A&P
> or that pissy beer mattress by the smokehole
> he collect his water from Decker's
> can a voice be frozen? (13)

The first passage is succinct, grammatically coherent, self-contained,

and moderate—moderate because the suggestion of animism is put forward in the form of a simile. The second passage is instead metaphorical, assuming as fact what "Kingwood, West Virginia" merely considers as possibility: that the earth is a living creature. Sprawling, grammatically incoherent, and context-dependent (we know, for instance, from the poem on the facing page that Decker's is a creek), the passage goes beyond assertion, enacting mimetically—and thus providing an experience of—the geographically expansive "speech" it describes.

What kind of articulation is possible in a poetry that prizes experience over statement? In *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, "articulate" and "intelligible" are synonyms; yet experience—Plato notwithstanding—is often less intelligible than *sensible*.[4] We see, hear, touch, taste, and smell things that remain unintelligible to us. Are such sense impressions susceptible of being made articulate? Yes, but not in the manner of "Kingwood, West Virginia"—i.e., not in the form of "clear and effective utterance" (the primary definition in *Webster's*). Rather,

[4] See *The Republic* 509c-511d, where Plato argues that we pass *beyond* the sensible *to* the intelligible, suggesting that the senses alone are insufficient for establishing the reality of the world. Later philosophers preserve this privileging of intelligibility, though with important qualifications. The most radical revaluation of sensibility occurs in Husserl, as Emmanuel Levinas shows in a beautiful summary:

> Sensation is not an *effect* of the body. It introduces, into a relation that is maintained as subject-object polarity, a belongingness of the subject to the object. This occurs neither as a causal effect in the objective order, nor as an integrating part within this order, nor by including the object in the subject through the mediation of 'subjective sensations' into which the object would be dissolved in the manner of Berkleyan idealism. It is a matter of a new configuration: the subject faces the object and is *in complicity with it*; the corporeity of consciousness is in exact proportion to this participation of consciousness in the world it constitutes, but this corporeity is *produced* in sensation. (*Discovering Existence with Husserl*, tr. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith [Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998], 145.)

I quote this passage at length because its notion of "complicity" illuminates the more drastic "configuration" of subject-object relations in *On the Cave You Live In*, taken up in detail below.

such sense impressions become articulate in the manner of a skeleton, that is, as a system of separate parts "united by flexible joints" (a secondary, anatomical definition).[5] This, indeed, is a primary model of articulation for Jenks, as his allusion to an old children's song makes clear:

> ("the hipbone connected")
> the underbed bone connected
> to the nazi eyes bone
> the eyes bone connected
> it connected all the way down
> to the talk beneath the stone. (11)

I certainly do not want to cite this passage as if it were a clear statement proving my point. Do I understand what Jenks is "saying"? Hardly. What I do grasp, however, is his identification of three mysterious and seemingly unrelated things ("underbed," "nazi eyes," and "talk beneath the stone") as a species of "bone" mysteriously connected in a system ("a hectic arrangement" as Jenks subsequently calls it [12]) of seemingly discrete parts.

This emphasis on connection has several implications. First, by offering the body as a model of articulation, Jenks makes the case for experience as a form of meaning distinct from the meanings abstracted from the body and articulated grammatically in statements. To put this in another, more provocative way: by privileging sensibility over intelligibility, Jenks presents meaning as "nature" rather than "significance," "essence" rather than "construction." Second, then, by looking for meaning in nature rather than in the significance we derive from nature through language—in the essence of an experience rather than in its social construction—Jenks asserts through the example of his own practice the primacy of physical connection over conceptual disconnection. We see this most notably in his "Poem af-

[5] See the entries for the adjective and verb forms of "articulate" in *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1990). Interestingly, the definition for the noun form, "articulation," reverses this priority of meanings, placing anatomy first and language second (there, however, the emphasis is on articulated *sound* rather than meaning).

ter Duncan." There, taking his cues from "My Mother Would Be a Falconress"—Robert Duncan's poem in which a hooded falcon is viewed without qualification as the human falconer's child (and the two together as a single, murderous entity)—Jenks writes:

> Head hung out of and for the window
> softening in blue ridicule which is
> just to say on this morning a lack of distinction
> workride in cough exhaust radio connected to the
> legbone...how unforeign? (29)

The "lack of distinction" between human and machine parts and activities ("head" and "window," "cough" and "exhaust"; "truck fixed so it's both of us / breathing") is a function of their cyborg-like articulation in a driver ("connected to the / legbone": foot on gas pedal) heading to work.[6] Or is the drive itself work? This would depend, presumably, on whether one adopts the driver's perspective or that of the vehicle. And if one refused to make the distinction? This perhaps explains the neologism "workride."

A third and final implication of this emphasis on connection is hinted at in "Poem after Duncan" in the apparent anthropomorphizing of the sky (its "softening in blue ridicule"). For if the vehicle and driver are now to be taken as a single entity, why not include the sky in their configuration as well? Indeed, if the "radio" is also part of this enlarged sentience, why not also include everyone who is listening to it?[7] In other words, having offered the body as a model of articulation and articulation as the body's determinant characteristic, Jenks

[6] Donna J. Haraway, the foremost theoretician in this area, is emphatically anti-essentialist, but insofar as she associates "[b]iological-determinist ideology" with "an *imagined* organic body" and the "cyborg" ("a hybrid of machine and organism") with "social and bodily *realities*," it is clear that her ultimate aim is a privileging of experience over concept, hence an alternative essentialism of the sort noted above in the poetry of Jenks. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149, 152, 154 (emphases added).

[7] Note, in this connection, the earlier lines "latenight bigcity radio waves / steeple all the people" (15).

offers the possibility that *all* articulated systems are forms of animate existence. Language, deemphasized and even repressed as a *tool* for obtaining intelligibility, here returns as an *organ* of sensibility, that is, as a kind of nervous system for linking far-flung ("how unforeign?") components together in a single "social body."[8]

Earlier, I spoke of this book as a philosophical inquiry. Its method, philosophically speaking, is an extreme version of Hume's empiricism as described by Deleuze: not a search for causes, but a scrutinizing of effects.[9] Jenks, however, unlike Hume, also treats the *scrutinizing* as an effect. The end result is a near-total avoidance of causal analysis. Eschewing both proof and conclusions, treating all forms of connection (in Hume's terms, "relation") as equally meaningful, Jenks chooses instead to impress upon us the seriousness of his obsessions.[10] Taken all together, in the context of the book as a whole, these obsessions attain the status of philosophical problems, and for the sake of clarity I am going to present them as such here. It is important to remember, however, that they arise in the flux of reading, not as fully formed questions, but as inklings of meaning.

[8] In *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), Mary Poovey writes that "[t]he images of society as a machine and as a social body were both offered as symbolic representations of a system that was too large and complex to comprehend except through some kind of abstraction, which often took the form of statistical tables" (42). Yet as Poovey goes on to note, the social policies that resulted from this effort at comprehension proved capable of producing an acute consciousness of the nature of that system, that is, they led to "a kind of knowledge that is based not on generalizations abstracted from disinterested observation but on personal experience, preferably gained by one body's immediate contact with another" (54). For Jenks, of course, as noted above, the experience of social totality isn't simply a function of body-to-body contact; merging the two symbolic representations together—society as a machine and as a body—he conceives of the social totality as a cyborg.

[9] See Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, tr. Constantine V. Boundas (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 25.

[10] Deleuze credits Hume with "the first great logic of *relations*, showing in it that all relations (not only 'matters of fact' but also relations among

The first of these obsessions is the mystery of "interiority," which is much more, obviously, than the sum of a body's interior parts. Why is it that we experience ourselves as having an inside, private to ourselves, to which no other person can gain access no matter how invasively they might stare into our eyes or pick through our bones? Several passages in the book (not least its title) attest to this obsession, some more explicitly than others. I will cite a few of them:

> guts pick themselves
>
> up and wave to one another
> behind infinite faces (4)

* * *

> you're not a freight
> of snakes but you body hisses
> and whistles like a reservoir of curses (15)

* * *

> failed articulate inside
> as invocation. His body mute
> colony and god lonely industry (43)

In this last case, however, it is not clear that the body at issue is that of an individual. Does it matter? Does it still make sense to ask about

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ideas) are external to their terms" (x). His succinct elucidation of this insight is relevant to Jenks, who seems to ascribe a similar freedom to "connection." Deleuze: "Relations are external to their terms. This means that ideas do not account for the nature of the operations that we perform on them, and especially of the relations that we establish among them" (101). It is in this radically empirical perspective that Jenks's essentialism takes shape as something other than a biological determinism. He invites us to take what is given (the effect) as the essential fact about a thing, however much our understanding of the cause tempts us to think otherwise. The car and driver *are* a creature. The categories of "living person," "machine," "separate existence," and so on are constructions.

interiority if we enlarge our definition of body beyond the biological to include social bodies and entire ecologies? For Jenks, it apparently does. Equally interested in the stream of consciousness and in the consciousness of a stream, his "skoal cradled / in hidden / hillbilly" (20) invokes a relationship between subject ("hillbilly") and object ("skoal") modeled on parental care ("cradled") and pregnancy ("in hidden")—pregnancy serving as the ultimate and perhaps only literal manifestation of being as interiority. The end result would seem to be an *evagination* of self such that the mystery of inner life extends outward into the world, with no important differences inhering between individual consciousness, pregnancy, a parent's care for its child after birth, and subject-object relations more generally.

A second obsession, less prominent than the first but related to it, is the difference between living and dead matter. In the lines discussed above, for instance, the words "skoal" and "hillbilly" summon by sound the words "coal" and "hill," drawing an ironic analogy between the environment and its inhabitants (ironic because here, linguistically, the environment inhabits the person). Yet if the difference between a "hillbilly" and a "hill" is one of scale rather than kind, what accounts for the fact of death, which only afflicts the former? Jenks explores this dilemma indirectly in "The Effects of It," which draws a correlation between the "black lung" within a miner, and the miner "crushed up like a cup" within a hill (7). The end result in each case is death, but the situations are reversed. Killed from within in one instance, and in the other from without, the miner both *has* and *is* an interiority. Which is more important? And what happens as a consequence of this double perspective to the difference between "spirit" and "flesh"? The allusion to Matthew 23:25 ("Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess") only complicates the question by inverting the Bible's spatial distinction between literal cleanliness (lungs) and spiritual excess (mining). The difference between living and dead matter is also at issue in Jenks's various references to animism: the subterranean stream addressed as if it were a resurrected body ("so will you shoot up from underneath, / still connected?" [12]), the prison that becomes a kind of demonic being in the very act of being named ("We would call it Panoptikos /

and the calling itself become / tower and eye" [24]), the bio-mechanical architecture of "skull rafters…outside of my head" (house? sky?) in which the "clanging birds hang" (50). More relevant still are these passages:

> This much always fits the frame—
> It's not that you yourself
> Don't matter—you're in the same
> Shape on either side of the mirror. (6)

* * *

> And cast down me wretched
> sinner unto thee I am
> slightly different from
> a corpse at a funeral
> in that I am less made up
> but made up worse. (26)

* * *

> The snakeskin
> flesh of dead man
> exposed for "too long" and
> he dream of rising up like Lazarus
> dream he become
> hill, all mounded up. (35)

In this last excerpt, the double meaning of "exposed" (emphasized by several earlier references to photography) obscures the difference between a dead body exposed to the elements and the photo of a dead body exposed to too much light. Is this difference important? Perhaps not, since the "dream" would be a miracle in either case. But insofar as this difference encompasses that between experience (the dead body) and statement (the photograph), the compressed meanings of "exposed" provides an interesting link between Jenks's philosophical method and his obsessions.

A final obsession is with the nature of divinity, which—as a consequence of *kenosis* (the emptying out of Christ's godhead in his as-

sumption of an earthly form)—becomes indistinguishable at times from the nature of humanity. The most relevant texts are no doubt "The New Jesus" and "Be (John 21:1-15)," but neither poem is susceptible of exegesis in any ordinary sense. Their titles are important for pointing the reader toward a certain content, but the poems themselves are less usefully read as self-contained statements of faith or doctrine than as moments of experience indissociable from the experience of the book as a whole. Oddly—or perhaps not oddly, given the nature of his obsession—the most acute of Jenks's theological poems are those that are least explicit about their subject:

> You
> and then
> the opposite of
> you.
>
> I would say let me get there
> but on either end
> you stand. (1)
>
> * * *
>
> You're the interfused strata
>
> that and you together,
> that was incalculable. (5)
>
> * * *
>
> You are the playing backwards
> and forwards without the backwards
> or forwards. (38)

In each of these quotations the "you" exhibits a property that we associate with divinity: it is everpresent ("on either end / you stand"), without physical measure ("incalculable"), and unbounded by time ("backwards / and forwards without the backwards / or forwards"). Of course, in none of these instances are we absolutely sure that the "you" addressed is really divine—the doubt is in fact intrinsic to Jenks's

obsession. This obsession has little to do with the problem of God's existence or inexistence; nor is Jenks especially concerned with the problem of choosing or abandoning faith. His interest instead is in the very distinction between the human and divine. He is also concerned, but to a lesser extent, with related blurrings of the human and demonic ("my mind gleams like the fangs / of a viper in white heat" [27]) and of the demonic and divine ("and Christ has so many tongues / it's like some homeric demon / speaking 32 trillion dialects" [9]). The book's periodic references to epilepsy are clearly relevant here. Indeed, when Jenks writes in "Seizure,"

> the spaces between the aura
> and the jolt are shorter
> like some epileptic thunderstorm
> waiting for the eye (21)

all three of his obsessions are brought together, with the rolled-up "eye" of the epileptic storm signifying at one and the same time the empty center of a non-human being; the missing source of consciousness for a suffering, inanimate matter; and the absent God of a world momentarily at peace between creation ("aura") and apocalypse ("jolt").[11]

What do these obsessions—and, more importantly, their mode of articulation—mean for the act of reading? To start with, it means that we are likely to miss or misunderstand this book's philosophical import if we approach the poems as self-contained statements. For it is not by exposition, but by repetition and juxtaposition, that Jenks reveals the objects of his inquiry. Second, then, it means that a focus on paraphrasable content will only draw our attention off into largely irrelevant problems of logic and coherence—irrelevant because the logical knots and moments of incoherence reveal an experience that problem solving could only obscure. And third, since individual pas-

[11] Peter O'Leary provides a detailed account of Jenks's epilepsy (based partly on personal communications with the poet) in *Gnostic Contagion: Robert Duncan and the Poetry of Illness* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2002), 9-15.

sages are invariably qualified by juxtaposition with passages that are themselves qualified by juxtaposition, it means that connections between poems are more revealing of this poetry's purposes than are its isolated moments. Putting this in another way, it means that close reading of a single poem—of a single *passage* in a poem—might easily expand into a close reading of the entire book.

Here, for example, is the entirety of "First Hymn":

> That passive humility
> "been hunted" cast netted in thee
>
> You are outside of angles
> You are the playing backwards
> and forwards without the backwards
> or forwards.
>
> World comes down to earth.
> Stone and bug.
> My flesh is over there. (38)

All three of Jenks's obsessions are present here: the evagination of interiority ("netted in thee," "My flesh is over there"), the difference between living and dead matter ("World comes down to earth. / Stone and bug"), and the nature of divinity ("You are outside of angles") vis-à-vis the human ("passive humility") and demonic ("hunted…in thee"). But a tabulation of themes is not the same thing as a reading. It is, at best, a way of orienting one's attention prior to reading. To move beyond tabulation, then, let me look more closely at the poem's three central lines, which I have already mentioned in connection with the question of divinity.

On the face of it, the purpose of these lines—"You are the playing backwards / and forwards without the backwards / or forwards"—is clear: an attempt to specify the "you" to whom the poem is offered. I say "on the face of it," however, because the lines themselves are paradoxes, and tell us nothing—or nothing useful—about the "you" addressed, save the inadequacy of language as a means of specifying its identity. What, then, are they doing? I noted above that the poem is an offering (and the title "First Hymn" emphasizes this fact by

defining the poem as an offering of *praise*), but whether the poem is really an offering, or only offered for our consideration as such, must remain an open question. The difference is crucial. If the poem is really an offering, then the intelligibility of the central three lines will ultimately depend upon the specifiability of the "you" (since the attributes of that "you" do not just *qualify* what the "I" says, they *are* what it says). If, instead, the offering is purely formal, then the specifiability of the "you" will ultimately depend upon the intelligibility of the statement (since the "I" in this case would only exist as the poem's hypothesis). Of course, to speak of an "ultimate specifiability" or "ultimate intelligibility" takes us far beyond the horizon of any actual practice of reading. Yet the problem of interpretation I am highlighting here is not resolved by entertaining a *provisional* specification, since the sustainability of such specification would still need to be worked out, and—if several were to prove sustainable—their multiplicity accounted for as well. This, indeed, is precisely what occurs in a serious reading of Emily Dickinson, a poet whose language is nearly always structured as an "I"'s offering to a "you." In Dickinson, however, the I-you structure remains fixed throughout the length of the poem, however indeterminate the "I" and the "you" themselves may be. (The fixity of this structure is what permits her poems to support such detailed and varied interpretations.) In Jenks's poetry, by contrast, the I-you structure is *un*fixed, contingent, evanescent. We have no way of knowing, for instance, if the caesura dividing "thee" and "You" in "First Hymn" marks a change in addressees or a change in the I's address to a single addressee, and in the context of such a doubt even hypothetical specifications become difficult to sustain. In this respect, the choice between real and formal offering is insufficient, for if there are no guarantees that the poem's I-you structure is sound, then intelligibility is beside the point. The poem would not be an offering in either sense, but rather an experience of language that takes "offering" as its guise. Reading, in this case, might be productive of epiphanies, but these would not necessarily lead (as they do in Dickinson) to sustainable interpretations.

In proposing that the offering may be a guise, I do not mean to suggest that a reading of the poem *as* offering is mistaken. The problem with guises is not their falsity, but their unreliability, that is, the

fact that they are subject to change. But once we accept this mutability as a fundamental condition, the problem of reading—of living in a world of shifting appearances—returns. It certainly returns for Jenks, for whom the provisional or epiphanic structure (car and driver, skoal and hillbilly, hillbilly and hill, dead body and photograph) takes precedence over the fixed structure that supports a hypothetical or ultimate specification (machine, person, object, subject, figure, ground, organic matter, inanimate substance). Indeed, we need only recall the varied forms of connection that Jenks describes in this book—and the varied forms of animation ascribed to those forms—to appreciate the depth of his concern with the twofold problem of reality's appearance and appearance's reality.

As the previous sentences suggest, the problem of reading is intimately tied to that of articulation, and may even be the same problem considered from a different perspective. In *On the Cave You Live In*, where articulation occurs anatomically rather than conceptually, this presumably means that reading occurs most appropriately in the recognition of connections, for instance in the repetition of key words. Consider, for instance, the word "backwards," so enigmatic in "First Hymn," which also makes an appearance in the earlier poem "Hypothetical Antipodes, Judgment." There (as in "First Hymn"), the word appears twice, the second time set off within quotation marks as a word worth pondering:

> Whose feet then were backwards
> whose feet were needing shoes
> so badly in 1964 that millions
> virtual millions of shoes were
> sent to "Appalachia Virginia"
> for they were too poor—"backward."
> America glared haughtily at
> Local shoe burnings that Christmas. (27)

The earlier passage does not explain the later, but it does draw a connection between the economically and culturally specified backwardness of Appalachian "feet" and the unspecified backwardness of the "You" in "First Hymn." Keeping in mind the two definitions of articulation—"clear and effective utterance" and "united by flexible

joints"—we might say that the repetition of "backwards" doesn't *clarify* the book, but instead *unites it* in a "joint."[12]

Nor is "backwards" the only joint linking "First Hymn" (or even its central three lines) to other poems in the book. The word "playing," for instance, recalls an untitled poem beginning "Unopened canyon" (31), and in particular the lines

> It and the playing and the listening,
> Front and back, almost unlistenable

—which suggest, among other things, that the "you" of "First Hymn" is an interminable recording that includes the hymn itself. But my purpose in tracing out these connections is not to complete the poem's own, incomplete act of specification. Rather, I would like to show that the interconnections are one way that the poem, understood as an experience of language, articulates its meaning even in the absence of an ordinary intelligibility. The interconnections between poems are especially important for a reading of "First Hymn," since their multiplicity and complexity stand in such marked contrast to the tenuousness of the connections between the "I" and "You" within the poem. This disparity—another instance of the book's privileging

[12] Connections have a tendency to proliferate. Thus, the lines "millions / virtual millions of shoes" themselves form a connection with two other passages in the book: the "infinite / number of / eyes set at / tower windows" of the creature "Panoptikos" ("Hypothetical Anticrescendo," 24) and the "Christ" who "has so many tongues / it's like some homeric demon / speaking 32 trillion dialects" ("The New Jesus," 9). Three instances of bounty with three different meanings: one having to do with the poor ("Appalachia Virginia"), another with prison guards ("Panoptikos"), another with God or demon ("The New Jesus"). The structural comparability of Jenks's descriptions of these incomparable situations reminds us that the "First Hymn" need not be a song of praise to God, but might well be—humanizing or defiling the genre—a paeon to a person or a demon. Jenks prepares us for this possibility in the first poem in the book, in lines I have already quoted, first by drawing our attention to the fact of antinomy ("you / and then / the opposite of / you"), then by asserting that the you inhabits both of these possibilities ("I would say let me get there / but on either end / you stand" [1]).

of anatomical over conceptual articulation—gives vivid expression to the richness of sensibility and comparative deficiency of intelligibility so definitive of human experience.

On the Cave You Live In is an extraordinary first book, and as a first book invites reasonable speculation about Jenks's poetic influences and allegiances. I have avoided such speculation on purpose, believing that a treatment of this work as a literary artifact would only obscure its particular merits. Because of this work's uncanniness, its particular vocabulary and range of references, *On the Cave You Live In* runs a continual risk of being labeled out of recognition as "lyrical," "meaningful," "devout"—precisely those categories that Jenks's indeterminacies put so scrupulously into question. (It doesn't help that "lyrical," "meaningful" and "devout" have now become the property of particular poets and schools.) By focusing on this book as a philosophical project, I have tried to delineate the *kind* of articulation that experiential poetries enable, leaving to another occasion the equally valuable task of describing and categorizing their *styles.*