

INVESTIGATIONS
& OTHER SEQUENCES

A Collection of Poems By

Márton Koppány



*aha***dada**



books

tokyo / toronto

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION:

An Interview with Márton Koppány

Márton Koppány, artist, poet, and translator, was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1953. This interview took place via e-mail from Japan to Budapest and back again during the summer and fall of 2001—Jesse Glass.

Question:

What drew you into this strange business of being a conceptual poet/artist/questioner of borders?

M.K.:

Although I'd published a few poems and essays in Hungarian literary magazines, as a young writer, I'd felt almost completely isolated in Budapest in the atmosphere of the late 70's and 80's. So perhaps [my writing] started with my claustrophobia.

Actually, I should have put it this way: I'm an outsider "in" Hungarian literature and I don't know exactly how I got to that no-place or no-position. Maybe I was born to be an outsider. Or Hungary is not the right place for me. Or I'm not a good writer. Or I'm not a writer at all, because my idea of literature is too different from the valid, working, influential ideas.

Or: I started writing "seriously" (I mean: writing in a state of consciousness "here I come writing!") at 12 or 13—so as early as in the mid sixties. A few years later, thank God, I lost this feeling of seriousness because the whole process of writing (and thinking) became so problematic to me, that naivete

and seriousness ceased to be opposites. They got somehow to the same side. I don't know exactly, what "conceptual" means, I think it has different meanings for different persons, the same way as "postmodernism", "empiriocriticism", "beefsteak", or "cirrus" have. Anyway, I've never tried to present ideas. What I've been interested in is the IS—and HOW I don't know anything about it: the process of introspection.

Or: My inclinations ("spiritual temperament") have always directed me toward the (actual, ever-changing) limits of verbal communication. In 1991 I went to Milwaukee with a set of minimo-minimal poems rewritten in English. In the fantastic Golda Meir library of the state university I realized that my poems written in Budapest in the 70's and 80's were not unrelated to the minimal-conceptual-concrete-Fluxus tradition. But I'm not an *-ist*. Anyway, by that time I'd lost my interest in publishing in Hungarian and started publishing texts in English—or rather texts in-between.

Question:

Is there a tradition in Hungarian literature of minimalist or Fluxus-like writing?

M.K.:

Just a few exceptions, I think, amounting to even less than a "tradition of exceptions". Although I have no idea—just a remote feeling—what, for instance, a "Fluxus-like tradition" would/should look like.

Question:

When I met you so long ago in Milwaukee, you presented me with your Coracle Press book. Could you please tell me a bit about its publication?

M.K.:

In the second half of the 80's, I had the opportunity to make three short trips to London. I had a small exhibition in the library of the Barbican Centre and I also met Simon Cutts the poet and publisher at his gallery (Victoria Miro) and he was interested in bringing out a booklet containing one of my series—which was actually my first publication in English, apart from the catalogues of the international mail art exhibitions in which I had participated in the late 70's and early 80's. Later I reworked that series and now it can be read as a

part of the electronic version of my Institute of Broken and Reduced Languages, co-edited with Karl Young.¹

Question:

Could you tell me a little about your collaborations with the composer Yehuda Yannay?² What did they involve?

M.K.:

My first arrival in Milwaukee was a lucky one in September 1991. The first or the second day I walked into the local art museum with a set of my work. One of the curators—an elderly lady—was kind enough to find a little time for the rather confused stranger who tried to metacommunicate with almost no English. She apparently had no idea what on earth my cards meant to represent but she was wise or sympathetic enough to advise me to go and see the Woodland Pattern people. So I met Karl Gartung and his wife Anne Kingsbury, who invited me for an exhibition and, to make a long story short, thanks to the exhibition I had the opportunity to make friends with Yehuda and Marie³ (and also with you!). Yehuda and Marie performed one or two of my series on several occasions—sometimes with me, other times without me and I played two small roles in a quasi-documentary working up of the life of Wilhelm Reich, the music of which was composed by Yehuda. Yehuda also played the main characters, both Reich and his father. As well as personifying the Third Guard I played the teacher of young Reich—and the lover of my real-life wife, who played the mother of Reich as a child...

Question:

How do you see your work in relation to visual or concrete poetry?

M.K.:

I like a few poets who were also published in anthologies of concretism, first

1. See: <http://www.thing.net/~grist/ld/koppany/koppany.htm>

2. Yehuda Yannay is a composer, conductor and professor of music theory and composition at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. A musician of international reputation, he is the creator of more than 100 works for virtually all musical media.

3. Marie Mellott is a studio artist residing in Milwaukee. She has a Fine Arts Degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and has also studied with William Wegman.

of all Robert Lax. My interest in "concreteness" (without knowing the term) started perhaps with the claustrophobia (that I've already mentioned) in a culture where words had lost their meanings. Now what I like in Lax (or in George Brecht or in Bern Porter by the way, who have belonged to different circles), is that his poems are based on the equivalence of words, spaces and sequences. And the things represented or rather shown are as much processes (of perceiving, understanding etc.) as "things". My first encounter with a couple of Zen koans happened in the 70's. They were translated into Hungarian and published as cartoons in a marxist magazine of human sciences. I'd never seen anything like that before (and they were almost completely distorted) but they seemed to be "familiar" at once. I had similar experiences with Lax and Porter at the beginning of the 90's when coming across their work in the state university library in Milwaukee. (I knew Brecht and the Fluxus tradition(s) from some time earlier.)

I've always had problems with the term "visual". Therefore I started using "broken and reduced" for personal purposes. The "brokenness" of the Institute comes simply from "broken English", my broken English, more exactly. It has nothing to do with destruction. In a more abstract sense "broken" is: imperfect. And "reduced" is the experiment of making something "perfect" out of the imperfect.

Question:

I sense a metaphysical humor in your work. Could you please tell us about humor, and in particular the use you make of it in your "Investigations" series.

M.K.:

Concerning "Investigations", the title refers to Wittgenstein and the form that I filled in (and out) is a found object and the whole thing is just a little joke about the options we have when inquiring and getting answers. In a certain sense all my work is an investigation.

Humor takes us back to "Fluxus-like". When I wrote that I wasn't sure what you meant by "Fluxus-like", I didn't mean that I didn't know (more or less) that tradition. I rather wanted to say: "what would the tradition of a non-tra-

dition look like?" "There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is nonbeing. But I do not know, when it comes to nonbeing, which is really being and which is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something." (ChuangTzu, as quoted by David Doris—see his "Zen Vaudeville" at the Institute of Broken and Reduced Languages) Etc.

Question:

The Humor of Beckett, Kafka, Rabbi Nahman of Brestlev, Zen and Chuang Tzu...and now Márton Koppány! Do you think this is the perfect note on which to end?

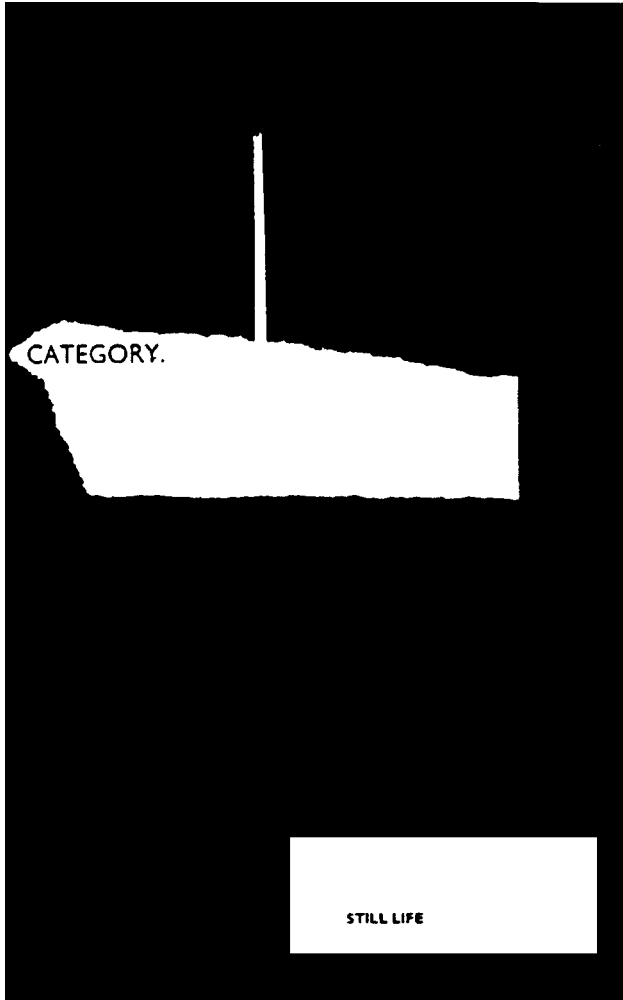
M.K.

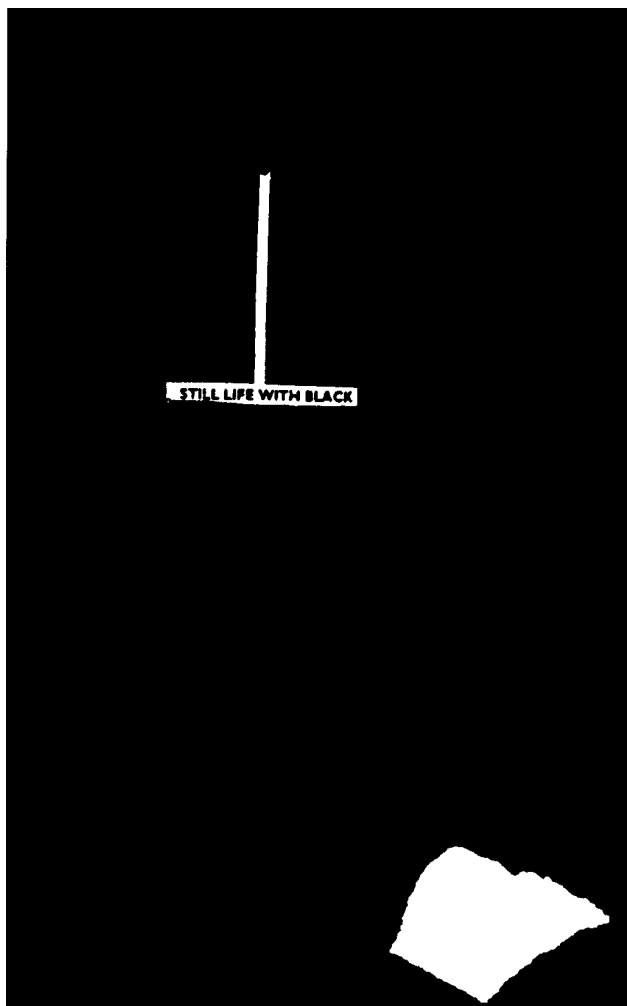
I do! Gertrude [M.K.'s beloved dog] is calling me!

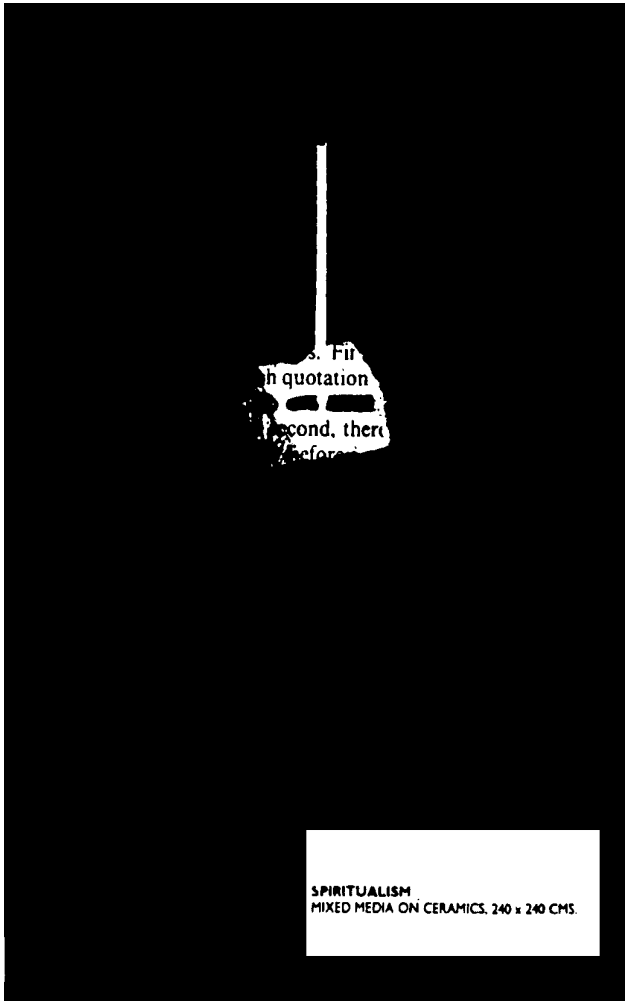
"The phenomena pass, I seek the laws."
—Isidore Ducasse

TITLES









SPIRITUALISM
MIXED MEDIA ON CERAMICS, 240 x 240 CMS.

INVESTIGATIONS



For Your Approval

For Your Action

For Your Information

X

Investigate and Report Back

X

Prepare Reply

X

Note and File

Note and Return

See Me Concerning

For Your Approval

For Your Action

For Your Information

Investigate and Report Back

Prepare Reply

Note and File

Note and Return


See Me Concerning

- For Your Approval
- For Your Action
- For Your Information
- Investigate and Report Back
- Prepare Reply
- Note and File
- Note and Return
- See Me Concerning



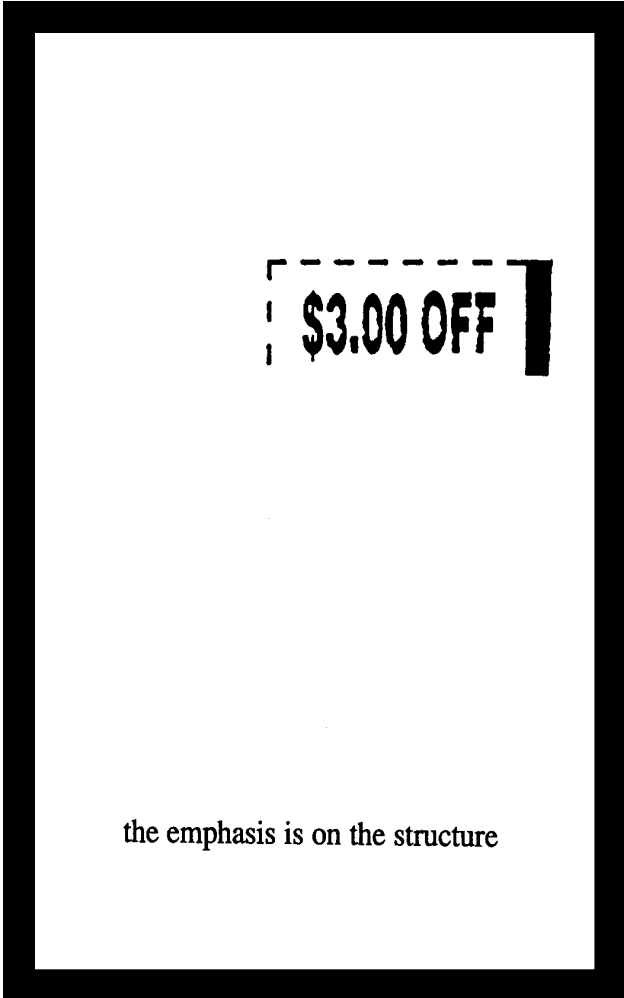
VALUABLE COUPONS





\$2.00 OFF

I am using a reduced language

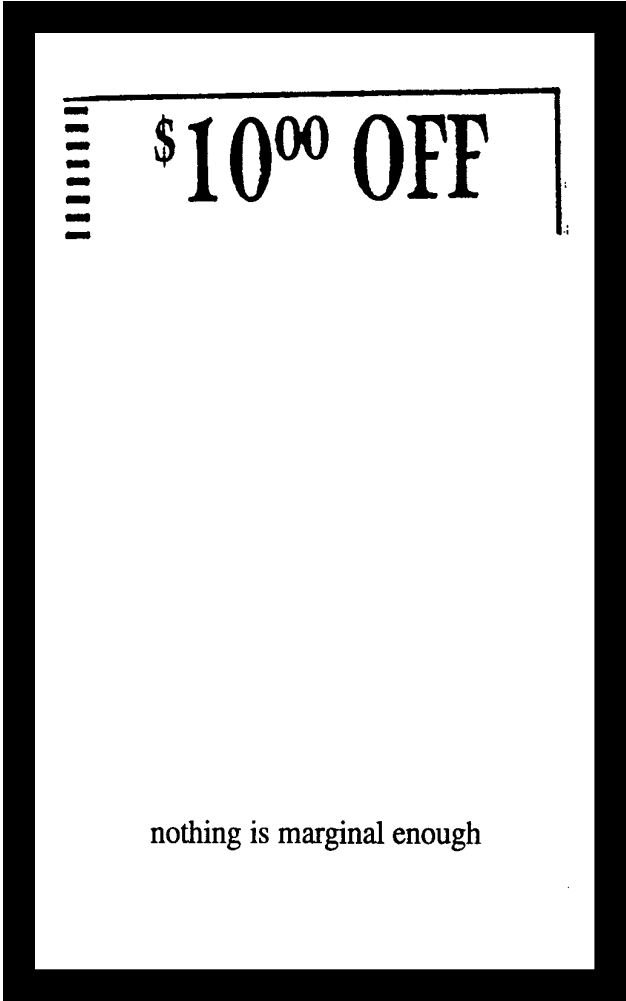


\$3.00 OFF

the emphasis is on the structure

\$5.00 OFF

the stucture is always somewhere else

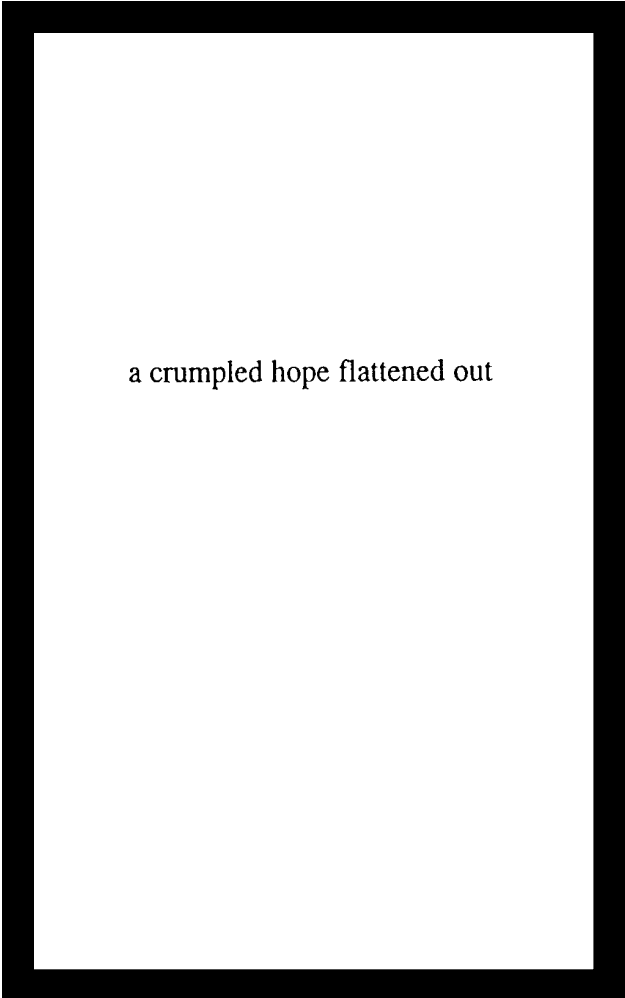


49¢

everything is in the middle

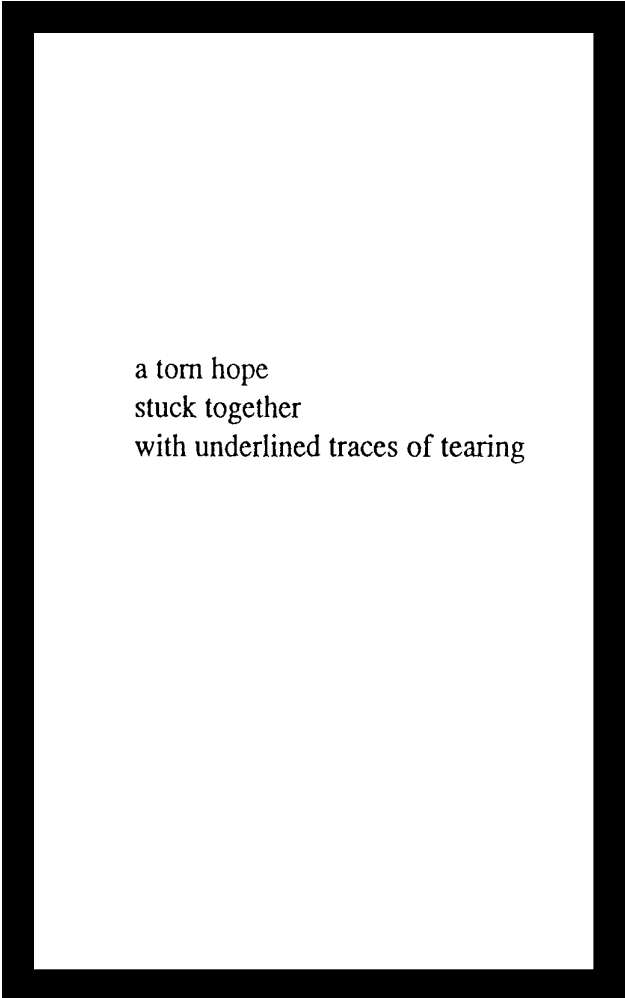
IMMORTALITY AND FREEDOM



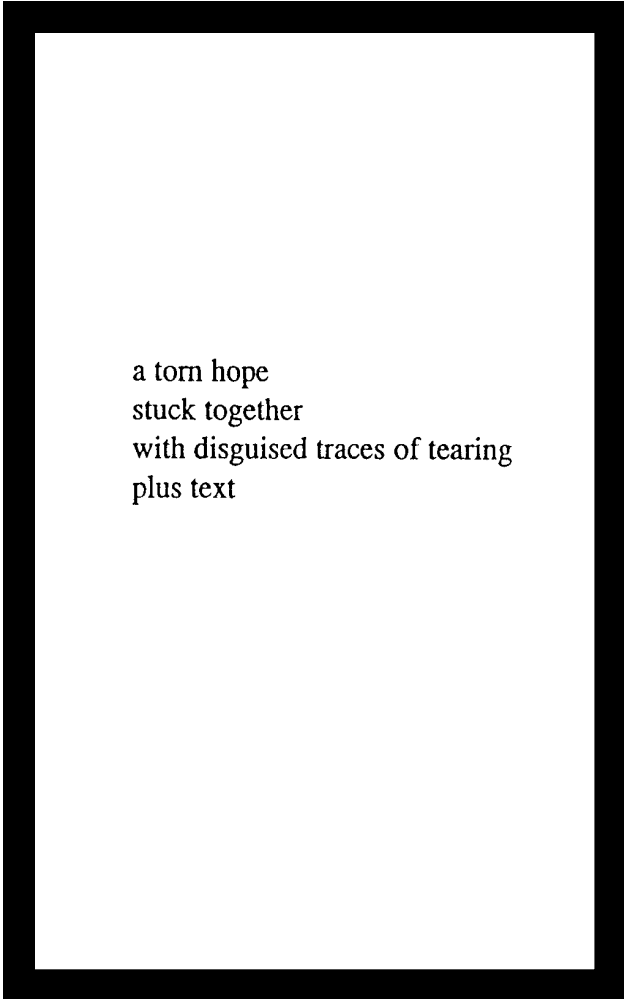


a crumpled hope flattened out

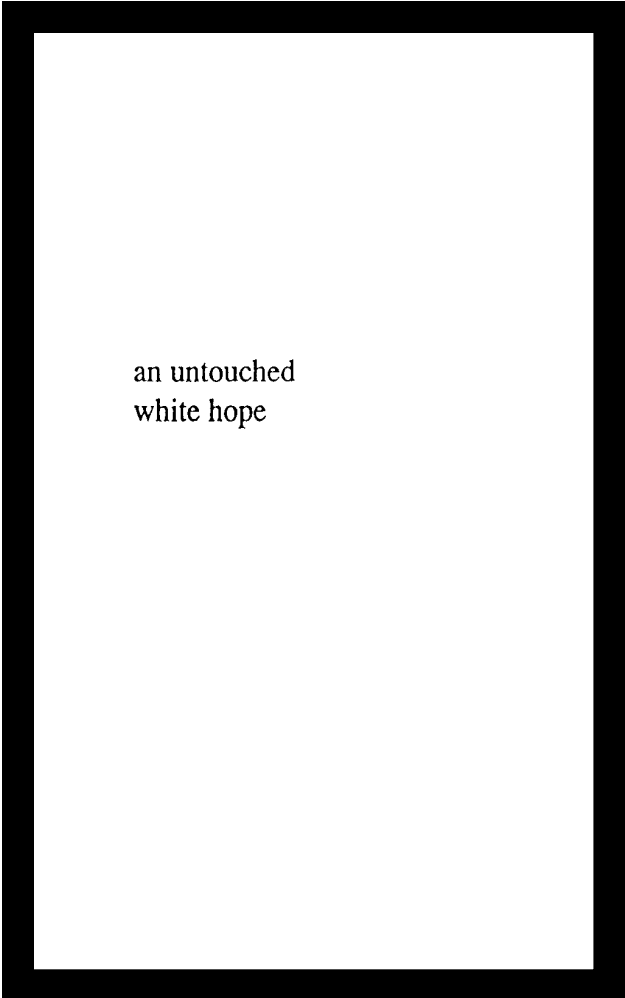
a crumpled hope flattened out
the later variant



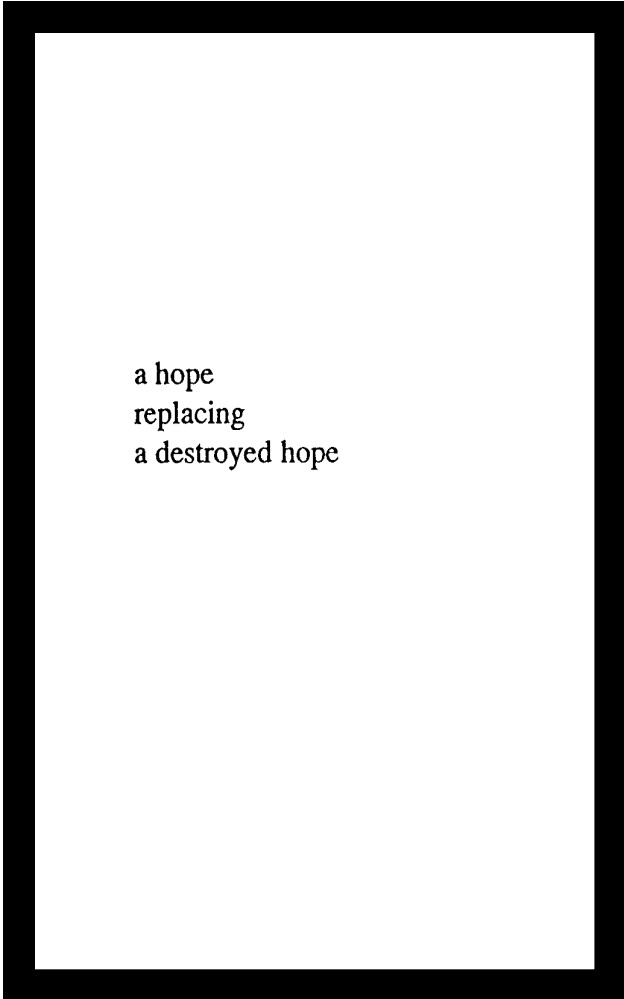
a torn hope
stuck together
with underlined traces of tearing



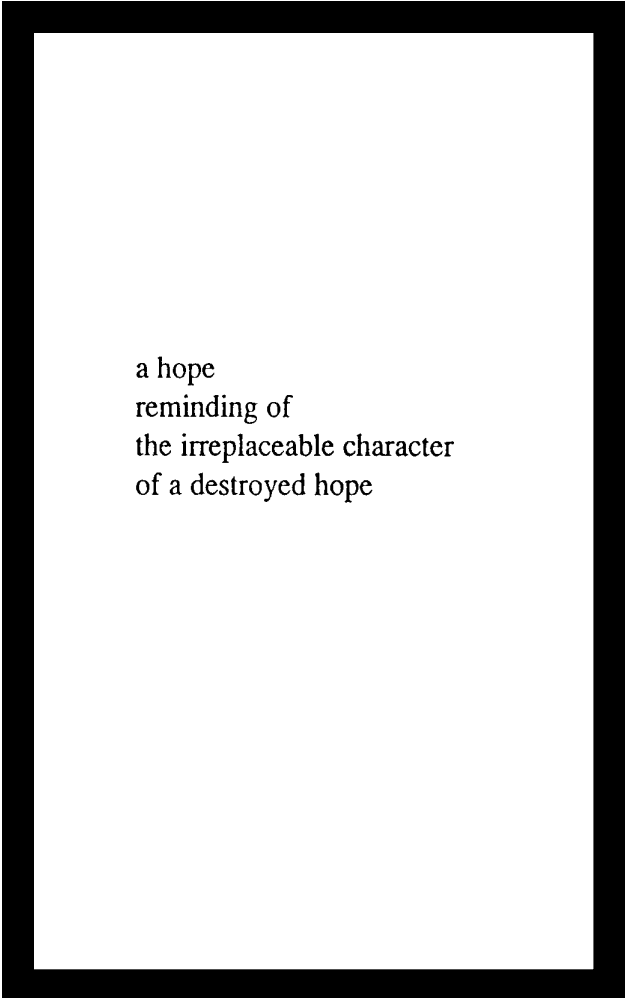
a torn hope
stuck together
with disguised traces of tearing
plus text



an untouched
white hope




a hope
replacing
a destroyed hope



a hope
reminding of
the irreplaceable character
of a destroyed hope

an expectation that something
will happen as one wishes



half-crumpled tearings
half-flattened stickings

IT'S ANOTHER WAY



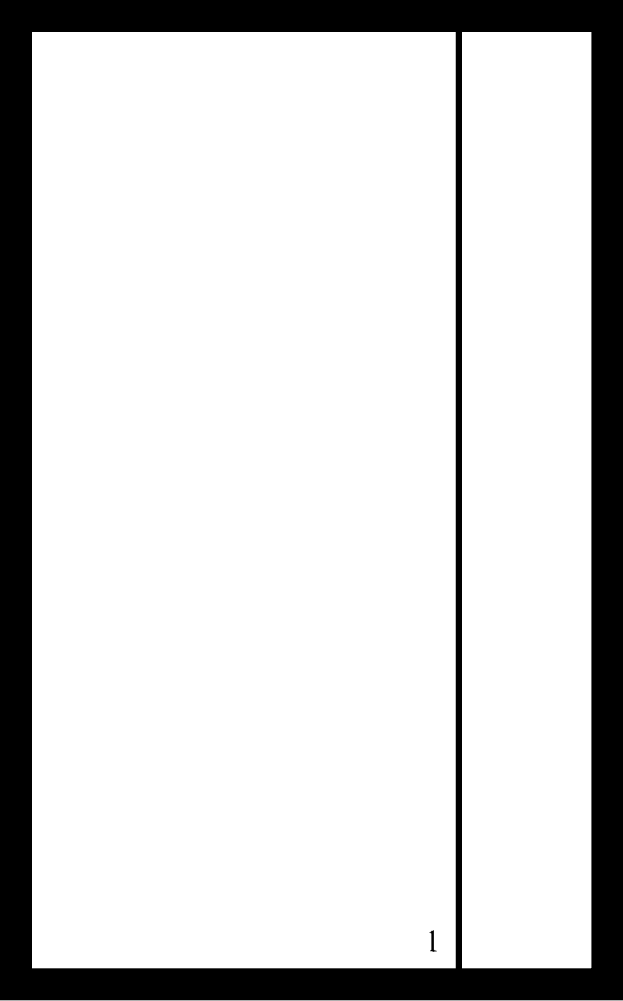
(on the sheet:)

is it another way?

(outside the sheet; invisible:)

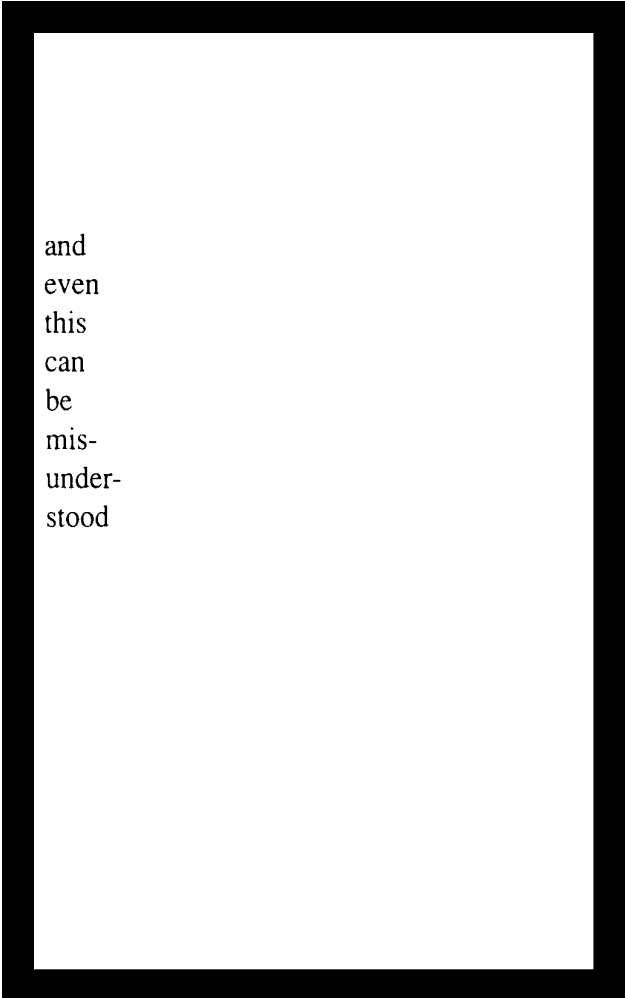
MARGINAL COMMENTS





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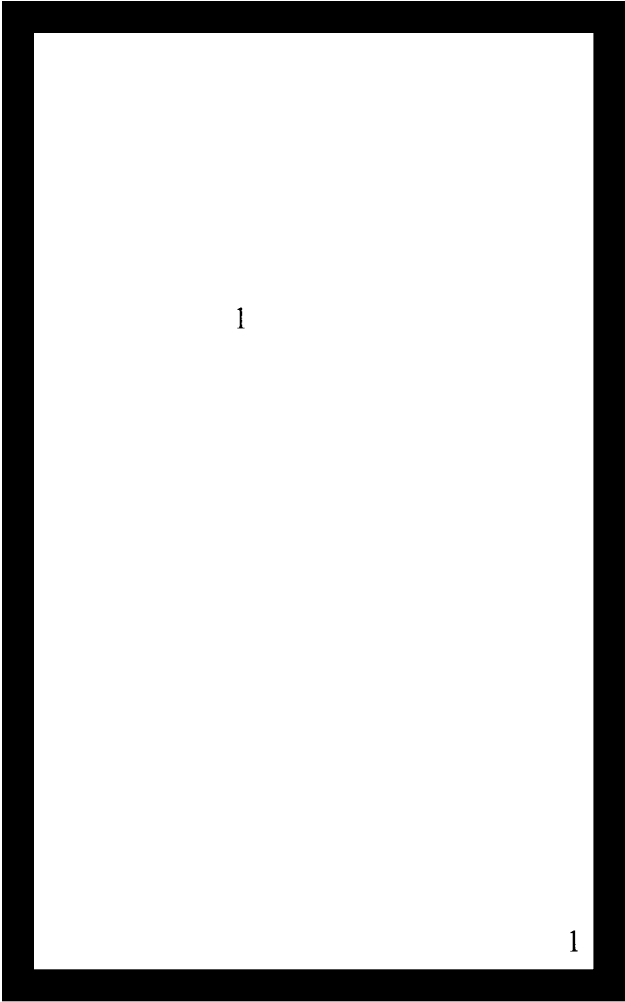
2



and
even
this
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stood

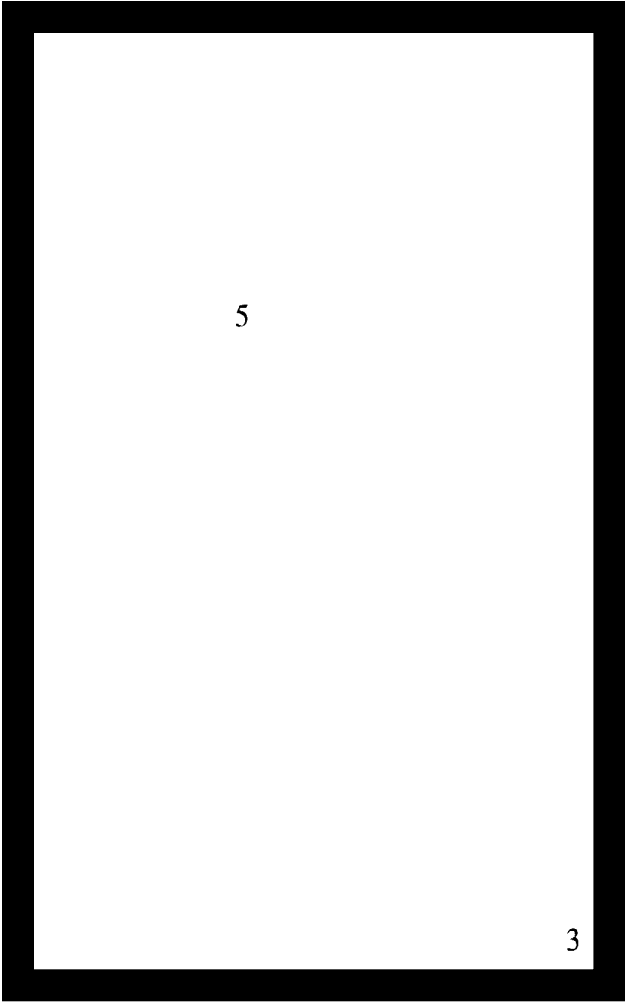
SYMPHONY NO. 9





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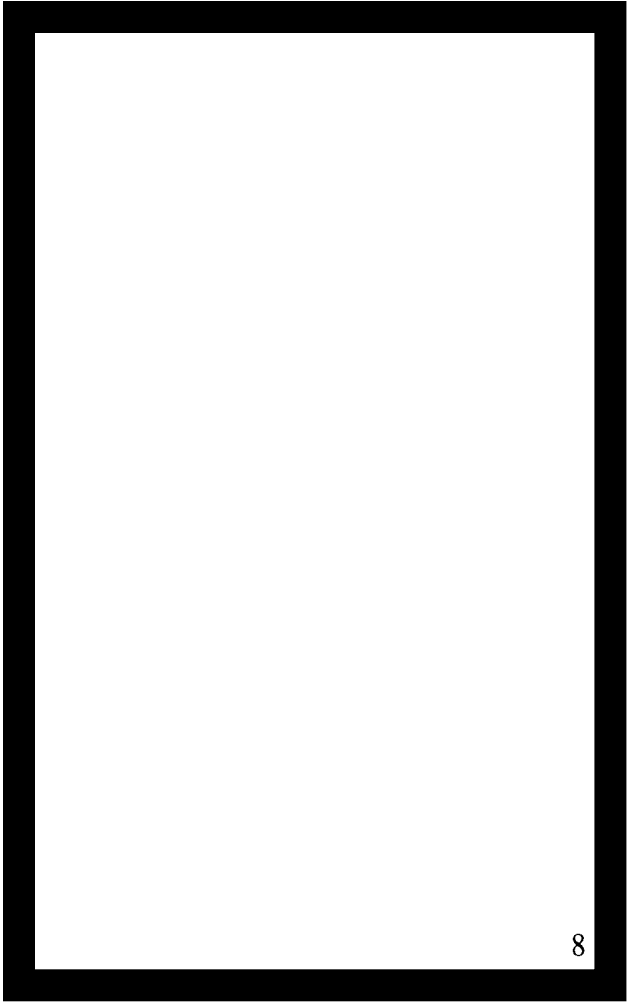
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etc.

7

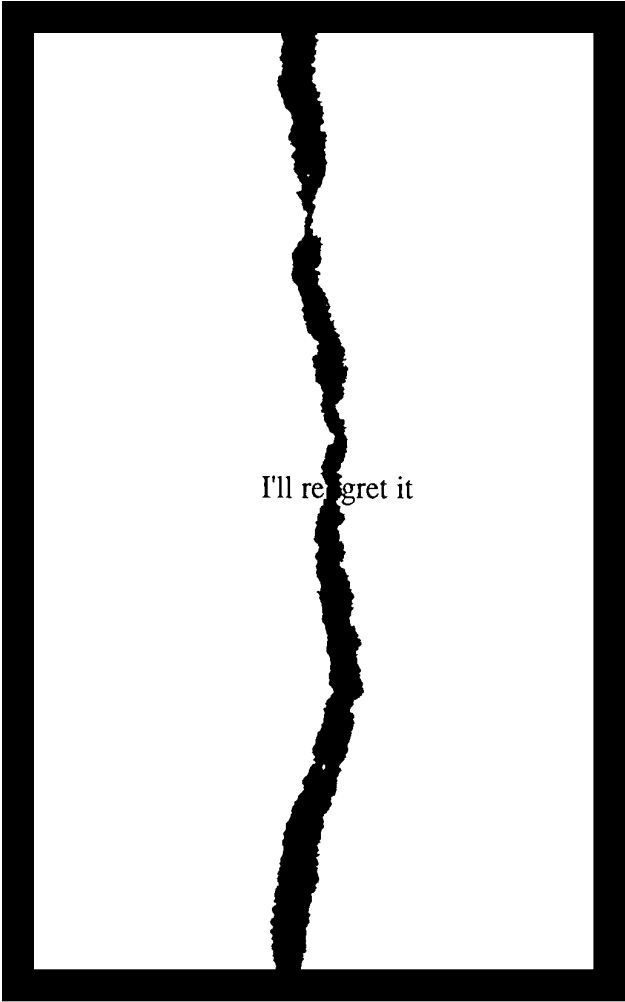


9

9

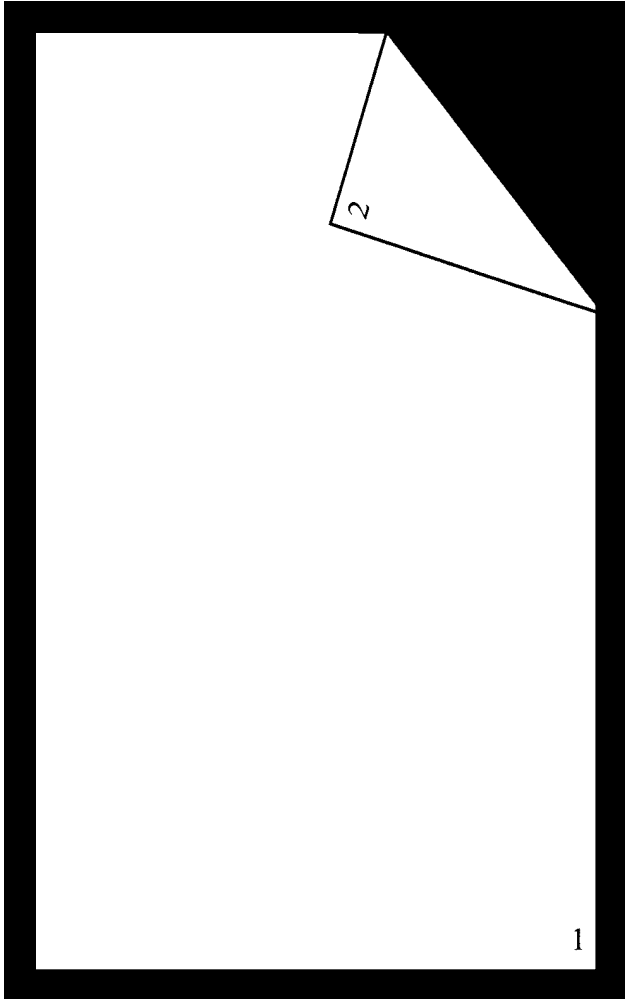
I'LL REGRET IT

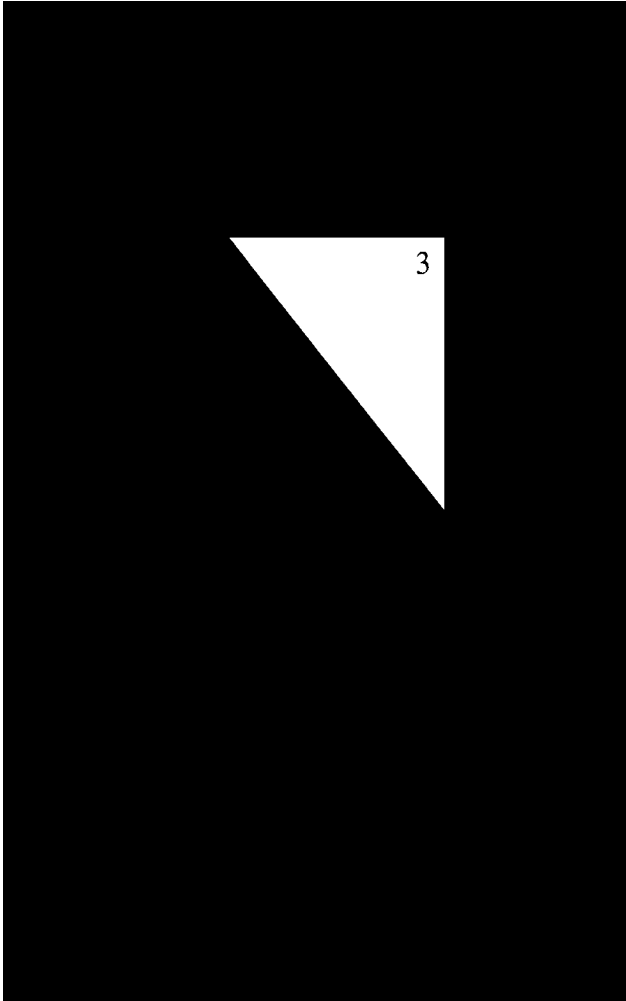




THE OTHER SIDE



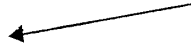




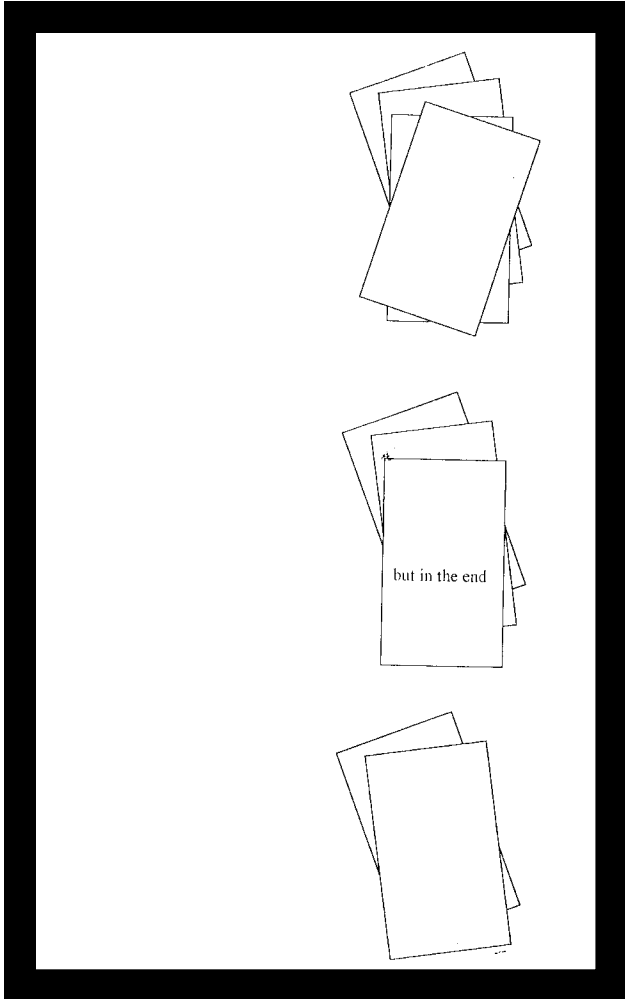
IT IS DEEPLY MOVING



alloferisidenthesame



it is deeply moving
how paradoxical
any reference is to



TO BE OR TO BE



to be or ■ to be

to be ■ or to be

to ■ be or to be

TWO LETTERS

1. To Jesse Glass

[Sunday, August 5th, 2001]

[Hungary]

Dear Jess,

Yes, oblivion...

It was great to hear from you. I just came home from the country and your letter was kindly waiting for me in the mail box.

I have no idea why we are not communicating? Perhaps our non-communication started with our non-editing of the magazine that we used to be dreaming about together... I'm a stubborn creature: I give up when I don't give up and vice versa. Anyway, we SHOULD communicate, no doubt. First of all, because we are growing older (as you rightly put it), second because we are still alive. (Sic.!)

Here are the facts:

In 1997 I founded the Institute of Broken and Reduced Languages to give a frame to my activity (and passivity).

I've edited and translated several books for Kalligram and for another

publishing house dealing with Fluxus, concrete poetry, minimalism, conceptualism etc. I've also published a new-old collection of my own series in English (you already know the stuff). Some of the publications are now available online at a subsite of Karl Young's Light and Dust anthology.

I've also started working on a new body of work in the spirit of reduced brokenism. My aim is still the same: to (meta)communicate across borders – whatever borders mean. (And to walk as much as I can with our beautiful dog, Gertrude, who is 3 years old.)

I would be happy if you would be willing to contribute something to the Institute. (But please bear in mind that the “physical” editorial office is Karl's computer, so I depend on his schedule.)

I still would be very interested in creating OUR magazine or our whatever – and to realize our idea (because I wonder what it looks like). (Plus: as an old-timer, I love hard copies...)

Thank you again for writing to me. And keep in touch. If I don't answer your message within 2-3 days, it means that I'm out of town again – as I will be several times until the end of September.

Your elderly friend in the eternal oblivion and after,

Márton

2. To Jesse Glass

[Sunday, September 2nd, 2001]

[Hungary]

I'm in touch with Yehuda and Marie but I know how busy they are and I don't want to "rush" them. Of course it would be great if YOU were able to write a few sentences - but you may also be too busy for that. Fortunately (or unfortunately) clapping of the wings speaks (or keeps silent) for itself...

What magazine on earth can be interested in MK? Anyway, I'm happy to go on with the interview process - I mean: to talk with you.

Concerning humour, what I think in this quite humorless period of my life is that I have two basic states of mind. One is the suffering/confused, when I can't write at all. The other one - which is more exceptional and keeps sometimes only for a few moments - is the happily confused one, when I can somehow cling to the air and enjoy the panorama. But if I write (or more exactly: take) down what I see (which doesn't happen too frequently), the composition generally gets humorous because suffering and confusion are still present and I see myself in the air. The only relief is that I can accept all those contradictions, at least for the moment, and humour is perhaps just accepting contradictions.

Hope everything is ok. around you. I look forward to catching site of the next cloud from Swedenborg's Airplane.

(r) eb márton¹

1. "Eb" means "dog" in Hungarian.

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