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## Locus Solus: *The New York School Poets' Missing Manifesto*

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### ABSTRACT

Although the New York School of poetry is at its core a literary coterie, critics have been hesitant to consider the New York School an organized group. An exploration of *Locus Solus*, a literary journal edited by John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, Harry Mathews, and James Schuyler, however, reveals that the poets were most definitely concerned with presenting themselves as a joint force in American poetry. Through close reading and archival research, I untangle the poets' instrumentalization of *Locus Solus* as an elaborate manifesto, exposing how the first three volumes were used to present the New York School poets and poetics, trace a poetic lineage, and put forward a succeeding generation.

### KEYWORDS

New York School Poets, *Locus Solus*, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, poetics

In 1960, a small publishing house called Grove Press published one of the most seminal of all postwar American anthologies: *The New American Poetry 1945-1960*, edited by Donald Allen.<sup>1</sup> Heralding, indeed, a *new* poetry, most of the poets featured had hardly been published, let alone in a volume of such magnitude and reach. Besides presenting poetry that, according to Allen, broke with the reigning literary mode and drove Modernism into a new era, where it built on, adapted, and discarded it in order to do something completely different, the anthology presented the poets as belonging to distinct groups, classifications that have lasted to this day: the Beat Generation, the Black Mountain poets, the San Francisco Renaissance, and the New York School poets.<sup>2</sup> These poets 'existed in

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<sup>1</sup> D. Allen (ed.), *The New American Poetry*. New York: Grove Press 1960. Grove Press was founded in 1948. In 1950 Donald Allen joined as an editor. Grove Press' owner Rosset referred to Grove's activities as combat publishing: his choices not uncommonly landed him in court. See R. Philips & C. Stevens (eds.), *A Secret Location on the Lower East Side: Adventures in Writing, 1960-1980*. New York: New York Public Library 1998 (101).

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, there was a 'fifth group' as well: those poets that had allegiances to neither a location nor other poets.

the margins, outside mainstream publication and distribution channels. Of necessity, they invented their own communities and audiences (typically indistinguishable), with a small press or little magazine often serving as the nucleus of both.’<sup>3</sup> This article takes as its subject one such magazine, *Locus Solus* (1961-1962), and shows how it acted as an elaborate manifesto for a group of poets tired of writing in the margins.

Three of the four groups presented in Grove Press’ anthology, had on previous occasions embraced their classification. Three years prior to the anthology, *Evergreen Review*, another Grove Press/Allen project, devoted its second issue to the San Francisco scene, featuring work by Beat writers Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso and others. In 1957, the Dutch poet, prose writer, and critic Adriaan Morriën asked temporary Europe-resident Corso to contribute an article to *Litterair Paspoort*, a Dutch journal focused on international literature. This invitation resulted in ‘The Literary Revolution in America’, an article by Corso and Ginsberg, in which they declared the rise of the Beats, and war on the academics. This was also ‘one of the first essays in which the Beat movement was discussed by two of its own members.’<sup>4</sup> A year later, the rather more in-the-eye *Esquire* magazine featured an article by Kerouac on the meaning of ‘Beat’.

The poets of the San Francisco Renaissance, too, had joined pens since the movement’s early days in Berkeley in the late forties, and by the mid fifties had organized themselves firmly and combatively around the City Lights Bookstore and City Lights Press.<sup>5</sup> The Black Mountain poets had an entire college at their disposal. A year after he published his influential manifesto ‘Projective Verse’, Charles Olson became Rector of Black Mountain College, an experimental liberal arts college in North Carolina where he had taught since 1948 and would stay on until the college’s closing in 1956. In the period 1954-1957 Robert Creeley edited *The Black Mountain Review* there, a journal of poetry, prose, criticism and visual art.

By contrast, the New York School poets, consisting primarily of poets John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, Frank O’Hara and James Schuyler, never seemed to care much for presenting themselves as a group.<sup>6</sup> As Ashbery noted:

This label was foisted upon us by a man named Bernard Myers, who ran the Tibor de Nagy Gallery and published some pamphlets of our poems... I think the idea was that since everybody was talking about the New York School of painting, if he created a New York School of poets then they would automatically be considered important because of the sound of the name. I don’t think we were ever a school.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Philips & Stevens 1998 (13-14).

<sup>4</sup> J. van der Bent, “‘O fellow travelers I write you a poem in Amsterdam’”: Allen Ginsberg, Simon Vinkenoog, and the Dutch Beat Connection.’ [College Literature 27:1](#), Winter 2000.

<sup>5</sup> See M. Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Guest is often considered one of the group’s members. However, her involvement in *Locus Solus* was very limited, from what I can make out from the correspondence.

<sup>7</sup> P. Stitt (ed.), ‘John Ashbery, The Art of Poetry No. 33.’ [The Paris Review 90](#) (1983): n. p.

Echoing the poets' ostensible disapproval of the term 'school', critics have been reluctant to consider them an organized group. The positions range from those of David Perkins and Harold Bloom, who suggest they be read only as individuals, to that of David Lehman, who hesitantly introduces them as a casual movement, a happenstance school:

While the four core members of the New York School did not set out to recruit disciples, never issuing public statements or devising a group program in the manner of the French Surrealists, they had a close sense of community and an awareness that their destinies as poets were intertwined. [...] Eventually it would be seen that the poems they wrote and the magazines they edited had casually performed the task of manifestos and pronouncements. Without searching for them, the poets attracted apostles, who understood that their works implied a collective point of view and a finely honed sense of taste embodying that point of view.<sup>8</sup>

This attitude was interrupted in 2010, when Mark Silverberg argued that, in the Wittgensteinian sense of a network of family resemblances,<sup>9</sup> the New York School could most definitely be considered a school, and therefore more attention should be paid to the group's social function, 'the group's interactions among themselves and the others, and their role in educating their readers and canonizing themselves.'<sup>10</sup> It is especially this last remark concerning the *active* role the poets had in presenting themselves, which sets Silverberg apart from critics before him.

I, too, believe there is nothing casual about the New York School of poetry. The birth of *Locus Solus* marked the moment the poets officially took their poetics public, and a reading of the journal and the correspondence surrounding it reveals that not only did the journal serve as a textbook for who was in and who was not, it provided a space from which the poets could present their artistic forefathers and a succeeding generation, securing – or demanding – a place in the literary canon.

John Ashbery and writer Harry Mathews conceived of *Locus Solus* in 1959 while both living in Paris. The journal ran from 1961 to 1962 and appeared four times; the third issue was a double issue. The journal was edited in New York and Paris, the first issue was printed in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and the subsequent issues in Geneva, Switzerland. Mathews took care of most of the practical tasks, and the New York School poets managed the journal in terms of content and distribution. Although not much attention was directed to the latter, they briefly employed the poet Bill Berkson as 'distributor', and the painter Jane Freilicher drew up the occasional promotional poster.

The idea of a journal for only New York School work was not new. Quite a few years earlier Koch wrote to O'Hara saying:

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<sup>8</sup> D. Lehman, *The Last Avant-garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets*. New York: Anchor 1999 (2-9).

<sup>9</sup> In other words, there is no essential core or feature that the New York School poets share, but there is most definitely an intricate network of similarities that connects them. Wittgenstein elaborated most extensively on his ideas of family resemblance with regard to language in *Philosophical Investigations* (published posthumously in 1953).

<sup>10</sup> M. Silverberg, *The New York School Poets and the Neo-avant-garde: Between Radical Art and Radical Chic*. Farnham, England: Ashgate 2010 (12).

I think it's about time for you to do something with your beautiful prose style about us unknown geniuses. Why don't you write that article we spoke of months (?) ago, beginning with 'The politeness...' Even if a magazine won't take it, it seems to me the kind of thing *New World Wrtg* [sic] or *Discovery* might just love; if no more widely circulating magazine would take it, you could put it in *Folder* & then send copies of it around to newspapers (whoopee! am I dreaming?), magazines *Perspectives* (tra la). *New Directions* would like to print such an active & angry thing about poetry too I think. It could further be used as an introduction to a cheap little anthology of poems by our gang; I'd be willing to put up some money toward this, like 50\$ or something. It does appear to me that unless we do something about ourselves nobody will; why should they? Since if our poetry is good theirs is (mostly) out of date and shitty (which it is). Something in *Art News* too, after all, it would make a lovely article about new painting & new poetry, how more or less difficult it is for each to get seen, what the forces of reaction are, etc. But I am obviously up in the clouds of speculation; if you would write the article, I could start off again from a firmer runway. I think we have to more or less make a public for ourselves which isn't the same as the public of the *Partisan Review* etc though it may consist of a lot of the same people. I know it's easy to ask you to write the article & hard to write it, but I haven't any prose that is winning and clever and supple and you do.<sup>11</sup>

In 1957 O'Hara writes Koch to inform him that Allen Ginsberg is in town, promoting what he calls 'the new poetry', 'and is even moved to mention Ashbery-Koch-O'Hara in his promotion as being part of [it]'. He continues, writing that Donald Allen, too, is around, and is interested in devoting an issue of *Evergreen* to them, 'but [Allen] hastened to add it would not be done as East Coast Poets or anything [...] It also seems there's a woman on *TIME* (the mag) who's interested in "the new poetry". Is this what you always wanted? I hope not [...]'.<sup>12</sup> Koch replies, cautious of the denomination 'new poetry': '[Do] you and I and Allen Ginsberg write it? That's enough of a strain, but if Jack Spicer writes it too, then I am getting off right here at Scarsdale and walking the rest of the way in.' But he is also thrilled about the attention and what it might entail:

Dear Frank,  
 Thanks for your thrilling letter. Here is a poem it has inspired:  
 When you and I are old, we too shall be famous.  
 You will wear a white beret, and I will wear a red one.  
 We will read our verses to admiring students  
 And they will carry us down the hedgerows, wreathed in flowers.  
 Kenneth Koch

The name of it, which I forgot to put in, is To Frank O'Hara. Now certainly we want to be as great and as much admired as we possibly can, Frank. The whole thing is that, well, just who are our admirers going to be? No, that's a defeatist attitude, I guess. Let's get famous. Do you think we should be choosy about our means?<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Koch to Frank O'Hara, dated 'Thursday.' Kenneth Koch Papers, ca. 1939-1995 (MMS Koch). The Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, The New York Public Library. From now on, I will refer to these papers simply as BC.

<sup>12</sup> Frank O'Hara to Kenneth Koch, 29 January 1957, BC.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Koch to Frank O'Hara, 1957, BC.

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# LOCUS SOLUS

## I

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Besides welcoming the possibility of presenting to the world the work of ‘Ashbery-Koch-O’Hara’, Koch is not at all unwilling to forge a name for their little club: ‘How about “Big City Poets” as the title of our *Evergreen* issue? Or The Poets in New York?’ Unfortunately, The *Evergreen* issue fell through: instead, it presented an issue of San Francisco Renaissance and Beat poetry. Perhaps this is what drove the poets to *Locus Solus*. For, after all the postponing of manifestos, anthologies and whatnot, Ashbery and Koch quickly warmed to *Locus Solus* as ‘the mouthpiece of our confused and blotto ideals’.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of poetics there are three concerns that are introduced in *Locus Solus* I and that reappear in issues II and III/IV. These are the foreign, the social, and a semiotic approach to language. Ashbery’s and O’Hara’s poems perhaps best exemplify the first. When Ashbery moved to France, he initially felt isolated. Unable to use the language he heard around him, something he was very much used to doing in New York, he turned to other sources available to him – English-language books, letters, newspapers, movies. In ‘Idaho’, for instance, the title already revealing a focus on ‘home’, Ashbery makes use of fragments from William Le Queux’s 1917 pulp novel *Beryl of the Biplane*.<sup>15</sup> The somewhat ‘disintegrating’ poem reveals a breakdown of communication, an exploration of the English language through colloquial, All-American phrases such as ‘diet of hamburgers and orange juice’ and “‘Hullo, honey!’ said Cornelia’, and a curious use of punctuation.<sup>16</sup> Here, and throughout *The Tennis Court Oath*, Ashbery’s 1962 collection of Paris-poems, Ashbery makes use of a foreign place and language to further his own, American, poetics.

As France teased out the Americanness in Ashbery,<sup>17</sup> it might not be surprising that he also chose O’Hara’s more Europe-minded poems for inclusion in *Locus Solus*.<sup>18</sup> During 1958 and 1959 O’Hara prepared a number of shows for the Museum of Modern Art in Europe, including *The New American Painting* and a Jackson Pollock retrospective. Gooch points out that Ashbery felt O’Hara’s trip produced a subtle realignment in his friend’s character: ‘His first trip to Europe changed him and made him much easier to get along with,’ says Ashbery. ‘I think that people who have never been to Europe have a certain chip on their shoulder.’<sup>19</sup>

The influence of the French language and literary ideas are evident in O’Hara’s writing. As is a preoccupation with European art. However, O’Hara’s relationship with Europe was a lot more complex than simply preferring one culture over the other.<sup>20</sup> His poems resemble ‘hyperscapes’ in which texts (poems, languages, topographies) occupy

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<sup>14</sup> In a letter from Ashbery to Koch, n.d., BC.

<sup>15</sup> J. Ashbery, ‘Idaho.’ *Locus Solus* I, 1961 (55-60).

<sup>16</sup> See also D. Piccinnini, ‘Ashbery in Paris: Out of School.’ [Jacket Magazine 37](#) (2009): n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Herd 2003; Sawyer-Lauçanno 1992.

<sup>18</sup> In doing so he overruled Schuyler’s pick of O’Hara’s poems.

<sup>19</sup> B. Gooch, *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O’Hara*. New York: Knopf 1993 (309-310).

<sup>20</sup> For more on postwar American culture, see S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*.

Illinois: The University of Chicago Press 1985. For more on O’Hara’s French influence, see R. Mengham, ‘French Frank.’ In R. Hampson & W. Montgomery (eds.), *Frank O’Hara Now: New Essays on the New York Poet*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2010 (49-58).

the same space at the same time.<sup>21</sup> It is this quality of O'Hara's work that makes it possible to suggest there is another, albeit paradoxical sounding, reason why Ashbery might have preferred O'Hara's newer poems: while they flirt with Europe, they also testify to a great embeddedness within New York's literary social scene, a characteristic of the New York School's, and O'Hara's work in particular, that would become one, if not the, defining characteristic of their movement.<sup>22</sup>

It is the final concern, *Locus Solus*'s semiotic approach to language that truly sets the journal apart from other reviews and newsletters in the United States. In 'On the Go', the five-page short story by Koch that kicks off *Locus Solus*'s inaugural issue, 'John and I' take a road trip. At the end of the trip, one is left with the feeling that the territory that is crossed is not the United States, but poetry itself. Rather than being interested in a conflation of life and poetry, as, for instance, the Beats were, *Locus Solus* reveals an interest in the representation of experience through language, a belief in 'the Saussurean principle that it is language which is primary, and that far from preceding language, meaning is an effect produced by language.'<sup>23</sup>

*Locus Solus* II is an issue of collaborations, but more importantly it presented the New York School's genealogy. The issue is a journey that begins in 800 AD with Chinese poetry, continues across eras and continents, and finally ends in present-day New York with the New York poets. Because this is not the place for an in-depth discussion of the individual poems, I will highlight only two things from this issue: the importance of the inclusion of the French Surrealists, and the importance of the exclusion of the New York School poets' most direct predecessors: the Anglo-Saxon Modernists.

When soon-to-be New York School poet James Schuyler moved to Europe he was immediately included in W.H. Auden's New York clique, Auden's apartment serving 'as a sort of graduate seminar in how to live and work as a publicly engaged, professional poet.'<sup>24</sup> When Auden was tasked in 1955 with choosing the manuscript that was to receive the Yale Younger Poets Prize, and found none of the manuscripts were to his liking, Schuyler arranged for Ashbery's and O'Hara's to be sent over. Although Auden had his reservations about both poets, he went on to award the prize to Ashbery.

In a letter a month later O'Hara compares Ashbery and himself to Cain and Abel. Andrew Epstein convincingly argues that O'Hara, 'always concerned with (what he calls in one poem) his "lineage / poetic or natural", must be contemplating their contrasting relationships with *artistic* fathers or predecessors.'<sup>25</sup> Auden was, indeed, an artistic father, not only to Schuyler, who worked as his personal secretary for years, and to Ashbery,

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<sup>21</sup> This term in relation to O'Hara's work is taken from H. Smith, *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: Difference, Homosexuality, Topography*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2000.

<sup>22</sup> See *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara: Difference, Homosexuality, Topography*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2000.

<sup>23</sup> P. Rice & P. Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2001 (113).

<sup>24</sup> A. Wasley, *The Age of Auden: Postwar Poetry and the American Scene*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2011 (176-177).

<sup>25</sup> A. Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006 (257).

Summer 1961

\$1

# LOCUS SOLUS

## II

*A Special Issue of Collaborations*

*by*

AESCHYLUS, PEDRO DE ARAGON, JOHN ASHBERY,  
BASHO, MICHAEL BENEDIKT, BILL BERKSON,  
PAUL BLACKBURN, ANDRÉ BRETON,  
WILLIAM BURROUGHS, JOSEPH CERAVOLO,  
THOMAS CHATTERTON, S. T. COLERIDGE,  
GREGORY CORSO, ABRAHAM COWLEY,  
RICHARD CRASHAW, JOHN DONNE,  
DWIGHT EISENHOWER, KENWARD ELMSLIE,  
PAUL ELUARD, JANE FREILICHER,  
URI GAGARIN, MILTON GILMAN, ICHIEI,  
DONALD KEENE, KENNETH KOCH,  
DANIEL KRAKAUER, RUTH KRAUSS,  
ERN MALLEY, MARINETTI, FRANK O'HARA,  
BENJAMIN PERET, JOHN PERREAULT,  
PO CHÜ-I, RIMBAUD, THE EMPRESS SADAHO,  
PEIRE SALVATGE, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,  
JAMES SCHUYLER, ROBERT SOUTHEY,  
SIR JOHN SUCKLING, YVES TANGUY,  
PEIRE VIDAL, EDMUND WALLER & OTHERS.



who wrote his final year thesis at Harvard on his work, but also to O'Hara, who boldly claimed 'Auden extended our ideas on what poetry could be', and to Koch, who took from Auden the liberty of form experimentation: 'Auden's *Selected Poems* was for me a great amusement park, a park of poetic forms to try out.'<sup>26</sup>

Concerning the poets' attitudes towards the Modernists, two letters sent by Schuyler and Mathews are telling. In the first, Schuyler solicits material from Chester Kallman, and asks him if his partner W.H. Auden would like to contribute, too; 'the other otters would love to have him'.<sup>27</sup> The 'other otters', it would seem, did no such thing. In a letter to Koch, Mathews writes: 'At first we thought that to launch our business gloriously we would cull contributions from celebrities (he [Ashbery] from Auden & Mathieu, I from Graves, &c.) but then this seemed a shoddy policy and – considering the short life the magazine will probably have – a wasteful one'.<sup>28</sup> And indeed, the only sight of the Modernists in *Locus Solus* is in the second issue's opening poem 'To A Waterfowl', a cento written by Ashbery in which every line is taken from another poem, and in the poems by Ern Malley, the invention of the Australian poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart, who, fed up with what they considered the nonsense produced by Modern poets, wrote 'the whole of Ern Malley's tragic life-work in one afternoon': poems put together by randomly drawing words and quotations from books.<sup>29</sup>

By presenting Ern Malley as their sole direct English-language predecessor, Ashbery and Koch at once dismissed and embraced the Modernists. While they were definitely influenced by Auden and others, they were not interested in the Modernists' high seriousness, their politics and ideologies. Divorcing ideology from language, as in 'To A Waterfowl', they managed to use Modernism as a discourse, a set of rules and forms to try out. At the same time they cleared space in which to present the writers they wished to be considered as their ancestors: the French Surrealists.

*Locus Solus* II features five translated Surrealist texts: an excerpt from 'The Immaculate Conception' by André Breton and Paul Eluard; eight of the hundred-fifty lines of 'Surrealist Proverbs' by Eluard and Benjamin Péret; Breton's and Yves Tanguy's 'Question and Answer Game'; excerpts from 'Cadavres Exquis' by Eluard and others; and two poems by René Char and Eluard, 'New' and 'Landings'. In *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*, Elza Adamowicz writes: 'The disruption of fossilized linguistic forms, and by extension of dogmatic thoughts, serves both to question intellectual certainties and to suggest the possibility of new linguistic and intellectual formulations'.<sup>30</sup> In *Surrealism and the Book* Renée Riese Hubert contributes that '[p]roverbs

<sup>26</sup> Wasley 2011 (51); Kenneth Koch, *The Art of Poetry: Poems, Parodies, Interviews, Essays, and other Work*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan 1996 (193).

<sup>27</sup> James Schuyler to Chester Kallman, 3 September 1960, BC

<sup>28</sup> Harry Mathews to Kenneth Koch, 10 August 1959, BC.

<sup>29</sup> This quote appeared originally in Sydney's *Sun* magazine supplement *Fact* on June 5, 1944. Quoted here from *Locus Solus* II.

<sup>30</sup> E. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998 (73).

and maxims in their customary formulation rely on a central chain of certain beliefs about behavior and ethics. [...] Surrealist proverbs advocate freedom instead of restriction'.<sup>31</sup>

For the New York School poets, the Surrealists offered this freedom in two ways. The collaborative poem as it is presented in *Locus Solus II*, in which two voices merge as one, relieves the writers of their status of author and the responsibilities this entails. In 'Death of the Author' Barthes writes: 'We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single, "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'<sup>32</sup> Foucault further excavates the notion. According to him, the author does not precede the work, rather, the author-function is:

the result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call 'author'. [...] Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusion that we practice.<sup>33</sup>

The Ern Malley poems consist of layers and layers of texts. Meaning and narrative are continuously deferred, and a plurality of voices change owner with such agility they leave the reader at every moment in the reading process feeling as if he is just inches away from finding out what, or who, lays behind the text. In a Surrealist text such as 'Question and Answer Game', the process of reading and the process of writing, too, become conflated. In three groups of coupled lines, each consisting of a 'q' and an 'a', the text sets out in a mysterious game of Ping-Pong, producing a certain openness which invites the reader to rearrange the lines himself, as there seems to be no 'theological', to stay within Barthes' terminology, sense of order.

Another sense of freedom these texts seemed to have offered is performed on a syntactical level. Deconstructivist in nature, binary oppositions are broken down and lines are divorced from their cultural context in order to force the reader to reexamine each word as if it were new. In 'Surrealist Proverbs', Eluard and Péret rework proverbs, substituting words or combining two sayings into one, resulting in new maxims such as 'Kill two stones with one bird'.<sup>34</sup> Dependent on not-bird, in this case the stone, to be a bird, the reversing of the syntactic positions results in a heightened awareness of the qualities of both categories. In this light it is interesting to turn to 'The Kite Feathers' by Basho, Bonsho, Fumikuni, and Kyorai, in which lines such as 'Now, when parting / She hands him his sword' are followed by 'In haste she attempts / To arrange her disheveled hair / With a comb.'<sup>35</sup> Here the unfamiliar and familiar are aligned, reducing, or perhaps

<sup>31</sup> R. Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book*. Berkeley: University of California 1988 (298-299).

<sup>32</sup> R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author.' *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York: Hill and Wang 1977, 142-148 (146).

<sup>33</sup> M. Foucault, 'What is an Author?' Ed. James D. Faubion, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. New York: The New Press, 1998, 205-222 (213-214).

<sup>34</sup> P. Eluard & B. Péret, 'Surrealist Proverbs.' trans. K. Koch, *Locus Solus II*, 1961, 67.

<sup>35</sup> Basho et al. 'The Kite Feathers.' *Locus Solus II*, 1961, 13-17.

it would be more accurate to say, expanding, the words ‘sword’ and ‘comb’ to mean ‘object’ or ‘tool’, the one no more unusual than the other.

If a writer such as Ern Malley, and forms such as the cento (Ashbery’s own poem ‘To A Waterfowl’) allowed Ashbery-Koch to present the Modernist language freed from its political and psychological ideologies, Surrealism allowed for an even further disruption of the institutionalized language. The New York School, then, did not adhere to the New Criticist belief that poetry is knowledge, but rather took on a continental, post-structuralist approach to language, considering it as merely a set of signs, an abstracted systems which starts and ends with itself: ‘a tissue of quotations.’<sup>36</sup> *Locus Solus* allowed the poets to place themselves outside the American literary and critical tradition, and situate themselves in a Paris vanguard.<sup>37</sup>

Only a few years after Koch wrote O’Hara, ‘When you and I are old / We too shall be famous / [...] / We will read our verses to admiring students’, he was teaching poetry classes at the New School for Social Research in Columbia. David Lehman describes him as ‘fiercely loyal to Ashbery and O’Hara’, as he ‘campaigns tirelessly for his friends’ work, proselytizing it, making converts.’<sup>38</sup> To many aspiring poets, Koch’s classes were an entry into the nation’s avant-garde, a scene of vibrant artistic and intellectual exchange.

Koch encouraged his students to submit to *Locus Solus* as well, their contributions so manifold that Ashbery decided not only to turn the third issue into a ‘place aux jeunes’ number, but to expand it to a double issue, its page count coming up to almost three hundred.<sup>39</sup> If this seems quite innocent, I would like to point out two pieces of correspondence that reveal there was more behind this decision than simple enthusiasm. In a letter to Tom Hess asking the Longview Foundation for funding, Koch writes that he thinks ‘the continuance of the magazine is important for several reasons, but chiefly because it furnishes an outlet for a group of writers (naturally, I think, a good group) and allows them to exert whatever influence they may have.’<sup>40</sup> And if that is not agenda enough, in 1964 Ashbery writes to tell Koch an Italian publisher is interested in a volume of ‘I Poeti di New York’, and that Ashbery believes that, besides himself, Guest, Koch, O’Hara, Mathews, and Schuyler, it should include work by David Shapiro: ‘I thought David should be in it to prove that we are a continuing force in New York letters [...] and now that I think of it Bill Berkson I guess will have to be in it too, and what of Kenward?’<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Barthes 1977 (146).

<sup>37</sup> This practice of tracing a genealogy is not unlike when people do this for their family. Writing about this practice, Ronald Bishop has pointed out how ‘[the] desire to carve out, through narrative, a place for one’s family in the larger picture is a key motivation for these researchers.’ Ronald Bishop, ‘In the Grand Scheme of Things: An Exploration of the Meaning of Genealogical Research,’ *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41:3, June 2008, 393-412.

<sup>38</sup> Lehman 1999 (206).

<sup>39</sup> BC.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Koch to Tom Hess, n.d., BC.

<sup>41</sup> John Ashbery to Kenneth Koch, 7 February 1964, BC.

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LOCUS SOLUS  
III-IV

*New Poetry*

*A Special Double Issue*

Besides revealing the poets' awareness of the importance of a second generation in order to be able to speak of a movement in the first place, what is interesting about this letter and others, and about the second-generation writers on display in *Locus Solus* III/IV, is that the writers chosen by Ashbery-Koch to represent their continuing force are not the poets we have come to know as the second generation: the more Beat-oriented official second generation is practically excluded from *Locus Solus*.

Another group of poets featuring in the 'New Poetry' issue that never made it into the New York School curriculum, are three French poets: Pierre Martory, Marcelin Pleynet, and Denis Roche.<sup>42</sup> Emphasizing the poets' Frenchness by grouping them together in the table of contents under the aptly titled denomination 'Three French Poets', Ashbery suggests the New York School's poetics were informed by a French tradition, and continues within that tradition as well. But a closer look at the poets shows something even more interesting: Pleynet and Roche would soon after the publication of *Locus Solus* III/IV join the editorial board of *Tel Quel*, the post-structuralist, avant-garde literary journal founded in Paris by Philippe Sollers and Jean-Edern Hallier in 1960 – the same time Ashbery was living in Paris.<sup>43</sup> If anything, the meeting of these two worlds, which up until now have not been considered together, on the pages of this journal, invites us to reconsider the New York School of poetry in light of post-structuralist thought at the beginning of its reign in France, and long before it touched ground in the United States.

#### CONCLUSION

*Locus Solus* would last for one more issue. This article, however, stops here, as correspondence reveals the final issue, put together by Schuyler, did not have the backing of Ashbery-Koch, and therefore does not qualify as part of the official New York School manifesto as designed by the two poets.<sup>44</sup> The journal elicited a few interviews and invites, but its true reach and influence to this day remains unclear. This article refrains from touching on many issues that surface from the journal – from the troubled relationship between the New York School poets and the Beats, to the differences between Ashbery's and Koch's pick of French poets, and all the poets' intricate indebtedness to the Modernists. It also pays far too little tribute to the individual poems – from Koch's and Freilicher's 'The Car': 'Brake: brake, brake, brake. / Shift: Shifty me you like to see', to Roche's 'As A Matter of Fact That Bird How Many': 'What silk doesn't waken in me orisons that I / Don't know are rapid and final?' Nonetheless, I hope it has sufficed in making clear how Ashbery and Koch employed it in order to establish a New York School

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<sup>42</sup> Martory was Ashbery's partner at the time.

<sup>43</sup> The poetry of *Tel Quel* aimed to examine writing itself, and break the boundaries between types of texts (S. Gavronsky, 1969).

<sup>44</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of how and why Schuyler was excluded, see E. Austin, *Zing! Locus Solus, the New York School Poets' Missing Manifesto*. MA thesis VU University Amsterdam 2013. This thesis also provides further discussion where this article leaves off.

poetics (I), trace their lineage (II), and put forward a succeeding generation (III/IV).<sup>45</sup> Although *Locus Solus* at the time was considered undeniably New York School, the journal has gravely been undervalued as *the* New York School manifesto. Paradoxically, and most importantly, it is perhaps most of all the journal's European allegiances that made it truly New York School.

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<sup>45</sup> K. Koch & J. Freilicher, 'The Car.' *Locus Solus* II, 1961, 146; D. Roche, 'As A Matter of Fact That Bird How Many.' trans. J. Ashbery, *Locus Solus* II, 1961, 110.