American Poetry Wax Museum's application of Bennett's exhibitionary complex is a useful companion and corrective to monolithic works like David Perkins's two-volume *A History of Modern Poetry* and it is a clear statement of some of the aesthetic and political concerns informing the works of such poets as Susan Howe, Charles Bernstein, and Nathaniel Mackey.

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Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary. Perloff, Marjorie. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996.

Perloff's *Wittgenstein's Ladder* explores the ladder metaphor in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (postulate #6.54)—

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.)

—- as the basis of a "distinctively Wittgensteinian poetics" whose characteristics include an emphasis on linguistic "*dailyness*," a suspicion of "*theory* itself as an imposition on *practice*," and a belief in iterative "difference" in which "[r]epetition . . . always entails a shift in context as well as in use" (xiv). Perloff claims that passages in Wittgenstein's notebooks and other writings that appear tautologous, like "The world of the happy is a *happy world*," amount to a "foregrounding of syntactic difference [that] is closer to avant-garde writing than to the style of [Russell's] *The Principia Mathematica*" (44). Instead the "sudden break, the lack of connection, between two kinds of operation" constitutes a "uniquely Wittgensteinian" writing practice that contains a "note of irresolution" which belies the claims of those like Adorno who see Wittgenstein's famous aphorism—"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent"—as little more than a "gesture of reverent authoritarian authenticity" (12). Perloff claims that this is instead a "commonsense recognition that there are metaphysical and ethical aporias that no discussion . . . can fully rationalize" (12). She later links the apparition of these aporias in Wittgenstein's writing practices to the *dailyness* mentioned above through Victor Shklovsky's notion of defamiliarization:

> Wittgenstein's ordinary is best understood as quite simply that which is, the language we do actually use when we communicate with one another. In this sense, the ordinary need not be literal, denotative, propositional, neutral, referential . . . . On the contrary, our actual language may well be connotative, metaphoric, fantastic, the issue being quite

simply whether and in what context people use it. (57)

Perloff then applies this Wittgensteinian poetics to the texts of Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, Ingeborg Bachmann, Lyn Hejinian, and other (radical) modernists. Perloff's findings seem most useful in that they propose a departure from a method of literary interpretation and creation analogous to Bertrand Russell's analytical and symbolical philosophy. Instead she proposes a method similar to her vision of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is more in keeping with the needs and interests of Language writing and the New American Poetry of the 1960s-70s, and that proceeds to express the "mystical" and "inexpressible"—the strangeness of the ordinary—by demonstrating the "strangeness of everyday words" by decontextualizing them (182, 183).

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