

Stefan Ripplinger

Shit, Pudding and all the Trappings

On Dieter Roth's Books

Henceforward, following our example, you will recognize no other gods

but Chaos, the Clouds and the Tongue, these three alone.

Aristophanes, *The Clouds*

There are writers and poets who want to say nothing, others who claim they say nothing because it is impossible to say anything, and yet others who want to say something.

Dieter Roth numbered among those who want to say something, although he knew that it is possible to say anything.

But did he genuinely wish to say something with his first books? They consist of bright coloured sheets that can be slid over and across one another, making a kind of do-it-yourself Constructivism or Op-Art *avant la lettre*. What indeed could this kaleidoscope be saying? Does everything have to say something?

The first clue comes in the title. In the circles which Roth frequented at that time – which included Eugen Gomringer, co-founder of concrete poetry, abstract artist Marcel Wyss, the poet and dramaturge Claus Bremer, and Daniel Spoerri, at that time *premier danseur* at the Stadttheater Berne – in those circles cool was “in”, and the exact sciences were emulated in the form of “Constellations”, “Extensions” and in the extreme case “Articulations”. Such were the typical titles of their books, while Roth named his first work *Kinderbuch* (children's book), his third *Bilderbuch* (picture book), and then a whole series of works simply *Buch* (book) or, in the language of the country in which he made his home, *bok*, explaining some 30 years later that:

I wanted to appear a bit socially-minded, fond of children...¹

The children's book was in fact conceived for a child, Bremer's young son. But even the artist had his doubts as to whether that child ever got to see the book, or whether indeed a child would have made much of it.

It's so easy, children cannot protest. You push it over to them and they say, "aaah, circles and squares". At least that's what I thought, but I think no children have almost seen this book. They would be fantastically bored.²

The child envisaged by these first books was Roth himself, who responded to the detachment of the abstract and concrete artists with cunning simplicity, replacing their toothless deductions with the views of one yet to cut his teeth. The infant began to distinguish between the colours in its environment, to grasp and arrange forms, and finally ventured to take its first steps.

The "bokur" show lines, dots, and letters that converge and scatter and join together in space. Visual poetry, but not a harmless game, not the decorative "intermedium between poetry and painting" that so many concrete poets tried to produce from their concrete mixers,³ but a process of orientation and perception over many pages. This is already revealed by the way that individual pages never stand for themselves alone. When blank, black or perforated pages are inserted, they give a value to what precedes or follows them, or what is to be recognised by them, a "meening" as Roth formulated in his elegant orthographic script⁴.

leev wun payj empti / it reseevs enuf meening from otha payjes wair sumthing iz ritten⁵

This is not some psychological experiment, but a very private exploration. What already distinguishes Roth at this time from the academism of his contemporaries is that he did not pretend to be greater, cleverer and more mature than he was, but instead smaller, more naïve and more immature. He did not look at the world from above, but from below, like a child.

i don't no wat maturitti is is it the abiliti to dy tomoro morning ... incidental: we ar stil teribli imatur we shud lern to get along without flateri especiali from eech otha we ar greenish shitti dunces we soft yuths we palid ravens we unhelthi no-nuthings⁶

This makes it all the more curious that the first works by Daniel Spoerri were propagated at the time as examples of “objectivism“, with the goal apparently being

to eliminate the subjective point of view of the author.⁷

That was quite clearly not Roth’s goal, but he continued to hide his childlike aims behind grown-up purism, and in this he was not alone.

admittedly his early poems were (like ours) cool and stark when viewed from a theoretical distance, undulating beneath was a hot effusion... (Oswald Wiener)⁸

At some point between 1956 and 1959 the child entered the burbling phase. Space is no longer simply one of perception, but of language. In *bok 1956 –1959*,⁹ the symmetrical letters "d" and "b" whirl about inside this empty space and, arranged in star-like groups of four, begin to turn around each other and then vanish. Thereupon two chains of consonants and vowels enter our field of vision.

... r r t r t r t r t r t r t ...

... eo a oa e oe a ae o ae e ...

These then interlock on the following pages like the teeth of a zip fastener:

atoretoratorateroterat

Here the author’s name emerges among the hitherto seemingly senseless row of letters: “rot“ (Roth spelt his name at that time Diter Rot), which is simultaneously German for the primary colour “red“, and when written and pronounced “ròt“ is the Icelandic word for “evil person“ or “disorder“, and written and pronounced “rot“, the Icelandic word for “unconsciousness“. ¹⁰ Also recognisable for those who wish is the “rat“ [=advice] that is “dear to the a(u)t(h)or“ and a ”tor“ – a gate or fool. ¹¹ This row of letters is permuted over the next couple of pages, with the word “rot“ emerging once again.

This is then followed by linking “a“ with a variety of consonants, and “r“ with various vowels:

... ar ak af ab af ab af ak ra ra ra

and

ar ur ar ir re ra re ri ro ru or ir er

The series prepares the way for the dramatic appearance of a single

ir

It stands for “ihr“, or “your” in English, and not only summons all of the German personal pronouns to the arena, “ich du es vir ir si“, but also prompts the source, the ego, which faces it with no less pathos on an otherwise blank page:

ich

Finally the pronouns begin to swivel in space and, as Dieter Schwarz has pointed out¹², Roth returns once more to turning round the letters “d“ and “b“, to produce for instance “np“ and “qn“, or what can be seen as mirror forms of “du“ [= you]. On one of the following pages the space is taken up by a cross made of prepositions (lplus the indefinite article “ain“ [= an], which suggests its nominalization).

ain

für

in für mit gegen aus

gegen

in¹³

The space or “deictic field“¹⁴ is torn open by structuring, demonstrative words, prepositions and pronouns shorn of independence. The book presents the game, indeed drama of orientation within the world of language. It is neither general nor abstract, but unmistakably directed to the person who is groping about in search: rot.

This raises the big question that he was never to shrug off for the rest of his life. And for which he used more means, from sonnet to video installation, than any other artist or writer of his century in his attempts to answer. Yet the question always remained the same. Who or what is Roth? What made him, whence cometh he, where is he, whither goeth he? Why must he suffer like that? Everything else scarcely interested him.

A decade after the “bukur“, and by now a famous artist on the international scene, he published an essay entitled *wer war mozart?* [= who was mozart?]¹⁵. The answer can be found at the centre of the otherwise almost completely blank brochure:

I don't know.

This might have been a nice little joke, were it not for the fact that he followed the slim volume with another that same year: *wer ist der der nicht weiss wer mozart war?* [= who is it that doesn't know who mozart was]¹⁶ Once more at the centre:

I don't know.

The first contains an epigram as its motto:

Es füllt sich mit Erwartung da rein	He filled himself there with expectancy
das kleinste Buch – so soll es sein.	the smallest book – that's how it should be

16 stapled pages, which take on a topic of such immense consequence to cultural history and with such succinctness, fan the highest expectations. As it is should be. And then he shows how it should not be, but nevertheless is.

Es füllt sich mit Erwartung da rein	He filled himself there with expectancy
das kleinste Kind – so soll es sein.	the smallest child – that's how it should be

The wild ignoramus portrays himself in the motto of the second essay as a very small child, on which the greatest expectations have been placed. He has failed to meet them. He is unable even to answer the question “who are you?“ - something that everyone can respond to with at least a house number or a school report - or at most he reacts as with Mozart by firmly ignoring it. At the age of 41, the essayist does not know who he is. And he still did not know at 46. And even less so at 50 or 60¹⁷.

Kristmas tree splinters Christmas tree splinters in the. In the motion and experience machine, like the brine in the roast. Like the way Mrs Swine sits in the form of small chunks inside Mr Rabbit, represented in the form of his own back. Oh dear! How many rounds of his life later will the Krits Christmas-stake-splinters still be resting in his soft parts in the soft muscle cords of his motion machine? The Christmush tree splinters will still rest in his central organ many many rounds later. What is the central organ called, what is it cold, or hot? It's not called beating around the bush, Mrs Cat! For we are talking here, as you can well readddd, about the Pauline stake, which R., also know abbreviatedly as D.R. has slowly twisted out of or from without of his motion and experience combine – as he says.¹⁸

The *Lebenslauf mit 5C Jahren*¹⁹ [= CV at 5C] varies the one done at 46²⁰ and intersperses it with other texts by the author.²¹ The beginning depicts D.R. as a softly done roast peppered with splinters from a Christmas tree, as a body-machine, a recording apparatus, as an impaled St Paul,²² and his life as a race. The reader is compelled to think of the race between the tortoise and the hare, in which Roth plays the role of the hare or more specifically the “piss hare up shit creek“ or the “Scheisshasen“²³ [= shit hare, Swabian for a timid person] in a fix, who is vexed by the crafty tortoise's “here I am!”

Now comes the all-embracing thumbstucks called ambition or the urge to get on. Also known as The thumbstick or the chest or heart cage of constriction, the all-encompassing presswurst-machine, the heart-aspic pressing board, ambitio the great, devoureress of the nine muses, muse number ten. her name.²⁴

But the fix in which he finds himself is not simply agonizing ambition. He also sees himself stuck firmly in a “darkest dark hole“, successively in that of the body, of the family, of fear, of civilisation, of physical desire, of Germany, Switzerland, Iceland, marriage and above all language.

Born among the gob-shiters, camouflagedly called people. Death and murder to all who fail to learn to evacuate themselves through their mouths. Learn to shit and piss with their gob.²⁵

Already in *Mundunculum* he described himself as a “smoking and drinking and shit-eating Rot“.

When in the *Lebenslauf* he notes that one must also shit back out the linguistic shit that one has gobbled down, he not only describes a general law and fate, but also the

metabolism of Roth the artist. Whatever is stuffed into him he tries to bring back up again, as completely as possible. In this, shit is never viewed as something pleasant, as perhaps a soft, sweetish mass, but always as alien, formless and revolting.²⁶

Thus Roth describes his life in terms of shitting and being shat on, although also in terms of a “curve“, “tendon“, “curving tendon“, “arch“, “arching tendon“, “bend“, or of bending (in which context one is reminded of his “conjugations“),²⁷ of being bent and of a “curve into the void“ or, drawing on Kierkegaard, a “race to death“. The terror of the Hitler period is recalled, the nightly bombings, the moral hell of Switzerland, his despair on Iceland. However, he only spends a few pages on all this before a story bursts in and disrupts a life that is already shown as in ruins. Its protagonist, named by turns Friedemann, Friedebert, Friedrich and Fritz, realizes to his horror that his architect’s office has been destroyed by a bomb. It is not that his notes and drawings have been destroyed that shocks him, but that they are lying out there in the open, unprotected. He compares them with little whales that have been driven up onto the shore where, left to the greed of the hunters, they will perish.

The drawings, like when whales are driven onto the shore and slaughtered there in their helplessness. They are driven onto land and slaughtered in great numbers. It looked like a whale shoot here, served up on a plate for everyone who desired. One could see all one could wish for – assuming one desires such things – drawings and manuscripts lay tattered in tatters, unusable, some bits still usable, all around, and should anyone desire such a find, they could find it here, as at a whale hunt, they had simply to reach and take what they most desired. As when whales are driven on land in hordes, that’s how it must have looked for he who could get no Serbian pork. Everything lay out or around there in the open, as when little whales are hunted, lying there openly for all who desired it. All that was looked for lay here for those who looked for it, as at a whale hunt, open and helpless, ready to grab, there. Anyone who sought what lay here openly must have felt or seen it as like a pack of small whales hunted and driven and lying there helplessly.²⁸

The sentence is repeated in several dozen permutations, not in the manner of Gertrude Stein’s fugues, but of Roth’s self-correction. There is a distinct difference in style to the autobiographic frame story. In place of its fragility and emotionality comes a distanced reflection on the material of the narrative itself. The scene of destruction that it paints can, according to Schwarz, be read

as a metaphor for the text; the paragraphs lie around like tatters of an erstwhile whole...²⁹

But since this text deals with very genuine bombs, with “cannibals” and the slaughter, pickling and eating of a child, the metaphor must clearly be directed to the person who himself is being portrayed. *O, what a noble mind is here o’erthrown.*

Roth wouldn’t be Roth if he did not come up with a couple of wiles in this darkest of darkneses. He begins by stating that the inserted tale comes from the – for his readers – well-known translation of the novel *2 tvöfaldir & 4 einfaldir*. He titles it *2 Doppelverhehlte plus 2 Einverhehlte* [= approx.: 2 twice-concealed plus 2 concealed-in], because the Icelandic word “tvöfaldur” means both “doubled” and “double-faced”. An initial section of the translation appeared 1969 in the magazine *Poetrie* (later *Poeterei* or *PoEmetrie* or *Posiererei*) that Roth published together with Rudolf Rieser,³⁰ a second as a “fragment. abandoned part of a serialized novel 1969-1971”,³¹ and a third in *Das Fatal-Original*, the third of Roth’s “Bastel-novelle”.³²

One procedure in his re-interpretational translation already becomes clear from the way the writer’s *nom-de-plume*, Hreggviður Hlynur is given in the 1969 version as “Schreckholz Alleiner” [= Shockwood Alone], where “Holz” is a literal translation of *viður*, and “Schreck” imitates the sound of “Hregg” (literally “storm, hailstorm”) and “Alleiner” that of “Hlynur” (literally “maple”). These are purely superficial translations. In his *Lebenslauf* the author appears as “SCHRECKFUSS ALLEINER” [= Shockfoot Alone], thus alluding to “Vigfús”, the legal name of the author and friend of Dieter Roth. Responding in this way to the sound of the words and taking words literally, the translation of the enthralling story Roth did in 1969 begins as follows:

The large encasement of the Amalgamated Science Union Works lit up, just like a giant star, over the peaks of the City of Smokebight, one briefday. That was said that this new city centre had become that into the bargain nextly in one night. – Glorious sign of Enoughtoliveon, artistically pure comprehension and bigheadedness.³³

In his *Lebenslauf mit 50 Jahren* of 1980 we read:

The building of the Amalgamated Structural and Civil Engineering Companions towered and shone like a large star out over the City of Reykjavík, the smokebight, which actually should be called steambight. THE LARGE ENCASEMENT OF THE AMALGAMATED SCIENCE UNION WORKS LIT UP, JUST LIKE A GIANT STAR, OVER THE PEAKS OF THE CITY OF SMOKEBIGHT, ONE BRIEFDAY. It was on a

dark winter's day, such as are accustomed to stretch across the City of Smokebight. The high-rise of the Amalgamated Construction Companies shone like a gigantic constellation down from the highest part of the town. On one of the black winter's days that are accustomed to stretch across the City of Smokebight, the high-rise, the famous high-rise of the engineers towered up and over the whole city. It was on a black wintry day. It was a winter's day, dark as they are accustomed to stretch across the City of Reykjavík. The high-rise of the Amalgamated Technical Companies shone like a gigantic star. IT WAS ONE OF THE BRIEF WINTRY DAYS, BLACK, AS THEY WERE ACCUSTOMED TO STRETCH ACROSS THE CITY OF REYKJAVIK. The tall building of the Amalgamated Work Compatriots and Engineers lit up like a constellation over the upper parts of the city. Or it glittered like stars or like the constellations, or simply: it glittered like an enormous constellation, or yet simpler: it glittered like stars. The high-rise of the Amalgamated Construction Companies. That was the high-rise, tall and elegant, that twinkled away across the city, many a poor person lived in the darkness of other towns, indeed! and yet the short day, the long night, all this or this one or these two together brought order among the guests of the peoples' representatives with their self-evident vested interests in industriousness, who came from the darker side of the company, but which here only showed the side that had managed the greatest similarity to the brightness of the dark day, which is to say almost no brightness. The high-rise radiated it alone, this light which one may be tempted to attribute or ascribe to the daylight. For this light, from time immemorial something dark that did not radiate or irradiate as one might be accustomed to or indeed accustomed is from the word light, radiated not brightly but also not darkly, but it simply seemed that way, i.e. a building, large as the one named, the high-rise of the Association, which seemed to be either bright or scorning, for it had something quite light and scornful about it.³⁴

Although the revised translation comes closer to received German, it is darker than the original, which is repeated once again in capitals. The high-rise shines like a star in the darkness of the winter's day. But what is the darkness of a day? What is a day, what is a night in Reykjavík? What kind of light streamed from the tall building, one belonging to the day, one belonging to the night, a night time light by day, a daytime light by night? The sentences are forever interspersed with such new variations of these childish questions. For language hates nothing more than when we get too close to it, and as Valéry remarks it is only comprehensible

as a result of the *velocity with which we traverse the words*. On no account should anyone touch down on it, for as a punishment the clearest speech dissolves into riddles, into more or less complicated illusions.³⁵

The *décomposition* through deceleration and literalization is pursued, in defiance of the "gob-shiters", with the greatest delight, and anyone who wishes to separate Roth's serial works from his material and decomposable ones should bear in mind that serialism is sometimes the best compost. While the translation of *2 tvöfaldir* in

Poesiererei is still a boisterous game, when turned into a commentary on life and work it acquires a more cryptic dimension. Such as when Friedrich/Friedebert/Friedemann/Fritz, who is equated with “Diedrich ..., Karlerich, the Third, Karl-Dietrich I., Didi the Dodo”, makes maudlin comparisons between his papers now exposed to the curiosity of his colleagues and slaughtered baby whales. Yet the older Roth grew, the more magnanimously he delivered his papers, his beloved things, even the most intimate events in his life, in scraps, tatters and “table ruins“, into the public’s hands. It is to be remarked in passing that this was not a matter of exhibitionism. His concern was always with the no less painful than self-ironic answer to the question, who is it that doesn’t know who Mozart was.

One climax of this journey of exploration was his contribution to the 1982 Biennale, for which he used super-8 films, Polaroids and diary entries

to show ... my ways of dayly living³⁶.

Documentation and diary, both integral parts of his work since at the latest *snow* (1964)³⁷ and *die blaue flut* (1967)³⁸, became from 1982 onwards his overriding preoccupation. Above all the “copy books” that he produced from the late 1980s onwards, mostly in tiny editions of photocopied sets of notes or works, offer autobiographical material, extending from the early notebooks of the 1960s, to his last jottings of the 1990s. As ever, banality and despair lie side by side. In *Notebook '88*³⁹ he reports for instance on 17.1. that his ink pen (“Rotring No 0.25”) does not work, demonstrates this fact with Polaroids, discusses the “laundry situation”, before suddenly musing on the philosophy of language

“This language is so & so”

Nonsense (?) does not talk of the people (who speak it)...

then adding a

translation (in pencil, to get back to drawing and patterning)⁴⁰...

and reporting once again on his work situation, and the various pens and pencils he uses. This is followed by the note:

(today, still 31 of Jan) mostly in bed. 'Flu on top of everything else (withdrawal symptoms), no more money at the bank (only small and insufficient sales which in some cases (I) have (had) to put off because am after all ill?

in mid January, when tried: to stop drinking Alc., to eat almost nothing (diabetes from overweight), stop smoking ...⁴¹

The more Roth addressed his own life, the more he turned from the products of others with whom he had still been much involved in the fifties and sixties. Right until the end Roth, rarely perceived others, whether parents, siblings, friends, enemies, classicists or modernists, as anything but competitors, opponents, foes, as threatening and ready to rob him of his say. Yet precisely this general opposition drove him on, caught as he was in the thumbscrews of ambition and fear. The "ir" provoked, indeed compelled the "ich".

The artist whom friends and acquaintances laud for his generosity,⁴² enjoyed putting his money and influence at the disposal of others, published books by friends and relations in his "Familienverlag", and opened his *Review for Everything* to everyone without exception who wished to contribute. Yet he remained completely on his own in the works signed with his name, and hidden behind a title like *Franz Eggenschwiler der Jünglich, der Mann, die Zeit, das Werk (bis heute 2.4.71 [= Franz Eggenschwiler the Youngly, the Man, the Times, the Work (until today, 2.4.71)]*⁴³, which provokes very clear expectations in a particular direction, is nothing more than a somewhat drunken Roth story with not a trace of Eggenschwiler. Even the "collaborations" with Arnulf Rainer, Richard Hamilton, Stefan Wewerka and others were frequently seen as "duels", as an "art of division".

The results were growths, formations and constructions, which some might terms contrasts, comparisons, paraphrases, or pastiches, as we drew away next to one another and described a dividing line between us in order to make an exact separation, which could only be crossed at a penalty (100 DM per line) in order to prevent any mingling⁴⁴...

as Rainer described one of their collaborations. Roth's relationship to his colleagues was one of competition, to tradition one of defence, to the prevalent culture one of revulsion, and to the bigheads of the present day one of hatred. Although he placed all the great names in the shade, he still hit out at the right people:

I find Frisch stupid, and Dürrenmatt appalling, and Brecht revolting, and so. Simply so. Just like that.⁴⁵

Only the death of others had a way of gently mollifying his opinions.

So I've outlived my mother – she's gone thank heavens. My father – gone, thank heavens. They're all gone. And now I can't... now I've no longer got the game of deliberately outdoing people and pushing them away and shoving them aside. And for that Frisch and Dürrenmatt are too small for me, I don't even have to brush them aside, they've already rotted away, right.⁴⁶

In much the same way the pages that he cut out of Icelandic daily papers,⁴⁷ comics,⁴⁸ the *Daily Mirror*,⁴⁹ the *Kölner Express*⁵⁰ or *Quick*⁵¹ can be grasped as a process of overcoming, rectifying, annexing the enemy. And as such, they are far removed from Pop Art. Unforgettable the treatment to which he first subjected the *Daily Mirror*, later Günther Grass's *Tin Drum*, or the works of Alfred Andersch, Hegel, and the *Spiegel*. He soaked the pages, seasoned them according to the butcher's art, and stuffed them into sausage skins. This is likewise a genuine literary work, and Barbara Wien has categorically remarked:

The literature sausages are books.⁵²

Not only are they (mostly) made of books, they have also become Roth books, prisoners of war, incorporated into his own empire.

From the mid-sixties onwards the artist amused himself simply by altering annoying books rather than turning them into sausages. These included *Germania* by Tacitus, Hermann Broch's *Death of Virgil*, a dodgy book on Nietzsche, and a translation of Benjamin Péret's *Histoire naturelle*. In an article by Ulrich Dibelius, "Abfälle – Ausfälle. Notizen zum Musikbegriff bei Dieter Schnebel", he altered the first sentence by crossing out words:

~~Musik als die umhögte Region des ästhetischen Wohlbefindens für Naive, Weltflüchtige, Unentschiedene, Ausgestoßene, auch allzusehr Angepaßte and Integrierte oder anderweis Geschädigte müßte wohl zu einem kulturellen Sektendasein verkümmern, wollte (darüber geschrieben: überliesse) man sie allein den Ansprüchen oder Interessen dieser Anhängerschar von Sonderlingen and Schwärmern überlassen.~~⁵³

~~Music as the lovingly cared for region of aesthetic well-being for naïve, escapist, indecisive people and outcasts, as well as for those who are too conformist or integrated or in other ways damaged, would~~

~~inevitably decline to a cultural sectarianism if one chose (written above: if one left) to leave it solely to the interests or demands of these eccentric and smitten admirers~~

The alterations were not completed, but it is nevertheless clear just how elegant and beautiful the world would be if revised by Roth. This is all the more clear from his improvements on *Couples, Passersby* by Botho Strauß, who wrote:

The general impression one gets from the people who were saved is disappointing. In retrospect they find only the most insipid words, if any, for their situation before the great crossing.

Roth jotted on the margin:

The people who were saved are disappointing, they speak insipidly...⁵⁴

Much of what he produced was correction, and everything was self-correction. Before he found his way to the “Constructivisticians”, Roth had written poems that they had rejected as sentimental, and which he destroyed in a poetic act: he let them sail off down the Aare in a little self-made boat. Even as he returned in the 1960s to the traditional form of the poem, to sensitivity and passion or quite simply to his own self, as is particularly evinced in the “Scheisse“ books, he often formulated this self as a defence against others.

The forms that Roth chose, sometimes elaborate ones that he frequently referred to with irony (“hexe, meter, wer ist es?“, “Ah, so nett“, “Sonettengeist“ [= literally: “witch, metre, who is that?“ “Ah, so nice“, “Such a nice soul”]), and sometimes popular in the sense of lavatory-wall graffiti, counting-out and goat rhymes, or so-called nonsense, show the extent of his desire to dissociate himself from contemporary developments. In terms of writing, the Swabian poets⁵⁵ seemed closer to him than the Vienna Group⁵⁶, Wilhelm Busch closer than Ernst Jandl. He preferred to bend the debris of the occident, which determines our thoughts and feelings through immortal epigrams, truisms, fairytales, prayers and verses, into a shape he could use, rather than venturing into the hitherto-never-thought-of-or-done. Indeed, his poetry seems to live from the resigned realization that things past simply carry on in language, and that anyone who wishes to think something new must first get to grips with that.

Die Backe knackt,

T

The buttock goes crack

dass die Kacke klackt
auf den glatten Trakt
in schnellem Takt .

and quickly the cack
lands with a clack
on the smooth track .

Da saust man geschwind
dahin wie der Wind ,
das himmlische Kind .

And people fly off , wild ,
like the wind, the child
the heavenly child .

Der himmel blaut,
und das Auge schaut
wie das Selbst das §i Ich verhaut .

The sun lights the sky
and reveals to the eye
how the self pounds the §i I

Unbekuemmert dass man Aengste kriegt
die Kacke fliegt ,
dass sich die Backe biegt
und sich bange fragt, wer da wohl wen besiegt ?⁵⁷

Unconcerned by feelings of fright
out flies the shite ,
till the buttock bends in its plight
and timidly wonders which one won the fight ?

In this poem from the first volume of *scheisse* (1966), the coarsely described act of shitting is followed by an elevated mood, which is characteristically couched in a rhyme from *Grimms Fairytales* that is now a familiar idiom – even in this case “The wind ... the heavenly child” is doubtless a fart. Likewise “Der Himmel blaut“ comes from the famous poem “Wacht am Rhein“ and summons up German poetry that has become common property:

Auf blickt er, wo der Himmel blaut,
Wo Vater Hermann niederschaut,
Und schwört mit stolzer Kampfeslust:
„Du, Rhein, bleibst deutsch wie meine Brust!“

He looked up to where the sky clears
From whence Father Hermann peers
And swears with dauntless pride, “O Rhine
Stay German as this breast of mine!”

Those who are initially amused by this collision of sentimentality, stale doggerel and coarse humour may become somewhat bemused when all of sudden the self argues with the I, and ask whether someone is not shitting themselves in fear?

This mingling of humour and bewilderment is no less typical of Roth than his methods for dealing with our culture debris. He was particularly prolific in the attentions he paid to the time-honoured institution of the epigram, which in his hands, in this case thanks to rigorous schematisation, easily turns into a nonsense poem:

bleibe dabei :	stick to your guns :
bei eins	stick to one
und zwei :	and two
– vielleicht auch drei .	or three if you ask me.
an vier	but ride
reite vorbei !	past four !
and sechs auch .	and six as well .
sieben ist zu gross !	seven is extreme !
acht ist das zu grosse leben !	eight is the extreme life !
- leb da vorbei ,	- live on by it ,
and auch alles drueber	and everything over and above
ist vom uebel ! ⁵⁸	is also bad !

As far as we know, Roth never did ride past. He was not one to sit on his high horse. But nor did he wish to be taken for a ride.

It is conspicuous that at this time, when the author was being jettisoned in literature and literary criticism, he bowed, if scornfully, before the masters. He even slipped into their guise, and enjoyed poetising “in competition with Goethe “:

Die Wiege mit mir meiner Sehnsucht stand an eines Fließchens Strand. Wir wollten gern zugeritten sein, da drangen die Alten zu uns herein and trampelten uns beide weich and klein.	The cradle and my longing by my side I stood down at the riverside. We'd so much liked to have had a ride but then the old folks came in at a rush and trampled the two of us to a mush.
---	--

Das stellte ich meine Wiege weiter landein, and lud mir eine Geliebte ein. Als ich ihr einen Ritt anbot, ritt sie mir die Sehnsucht wund and rot, und ritt uns beide halb tot.	Then I moved my cradle further ashore and invited a lover I adore. She rode my longing red and sore As I invited her to a ride, She rode us till we almost died.
--	--

Da trug ich mich and meine Sehnsucht an des Meeres Strand, dort waren die Kindlein all zur Hand und sprangen auf meiner Sehnsucht herum, und hetzten uns beide kurz and krumm und brachten uns fast um.	Then I took my longing and me to the sea, where the children all were waiting for me, and they leapt on my longing gleefully and drove us on at a rush and nearly spelt the death of us
--	--

Da stellt ich die Wiege ins Wirtshaus rein	Then I moved the cradle to an inn
--	-----------------------------------

und will nur noch besoffen sein.

Ich trete mich and meine Sehnsucht in den Arsch,
und blase uns beiden einen grausigen Marsch,
und schreie wie ein Barsch.⁵⁹

and now want only to fill my skin.

I blow us a dread march and make a great din,
and kick me and my longing both up the ass
and bellow like a largemouth bass.

That someone should drag both cradle and yearning about with them their whole life long, and finally into an inn, ridicules classicism and its desire for maturity and redemption, but is nevertheless “Yet another life“. The poems are liberating because they take for a ride what has taken us for a ride. The following example, which turns the ram into the shepherd, contains among others echoes of the 23rd Psalm (“The Lord is My Shepherd”) and popular prayers:

Lieber Schafbock, tritt herein!
Du sollst unser Hirte sein,
schafe die Frau,
bocke das Kind,
sodaß wir alle glücklich sind
(ich ausgenommen),

Dearest rambuck, come inside!
Come and be our shepherd guide,
ram the woman,
buck the lamb,
so all are happy
(except for me).⁶⁰

A later version questions the first:

Im Reiche der Eifersucht Nr. 3

In The Realms of Jealousy No 3

Grosser Schafbock!
Tritt hier ein,
du willst unser Hirte sein?
Willst bocken (vögeln) die Frau
and schafen (vögeln) das Kind,
sodass – wie noch nie gehabt –
wir alle glücklich sind?⁶¹

Great rambuck!
Come inside
Will you be our shepherd guide?
Do you want to ram (fuck) the woman
and buck (fuck) the chile
so that – as has never been –
we will all be laughs and smiles.

Just as Roth took gloomy models and reworked them, he worked away at his poems or allowed them to be reworked. Also by chance; the first “Scheisse“ book was typeset and printed by his students in Providence (true to the word!) who knew no German. Roth ensured that the errors were kept. This was followed by ever-new versions, illustrated editions, extensions, improvements, and improvements upon improvements. No one described this ceaseless display of talent better than Emmett Williams, for whom the “Scheisse“ books

present an almost cross-sectional view of the ideas, visual imagery and working methods of the mature artist at work and at play.

First, the pure poems themselves, printed with all their impurities in the little blue paperback. Then, from volume to volume comes the root treatment. The restoration of the texts. Their revision. Alternate readings. New additions, new revisions, augmentations and alterations. Found drawings (found in the *œuvre* of Dieter Roth, of course), explicative drawings, related drawings, and the intrusion of unrelated elements that become related as the confusion fuses from volume to volume. Gradual, and often violent, destruction of the elements as texts, drawings, and residual objects of the printing process fight for dominance. And the metamorphosis of text and sense into image, into process, into a ... into a ... I hate to use the word, it's too easy, but what, in the name of *Scheisse*, what can one call it but a *Gesamtkunstwerk*?⁶²

The original gets lost in a dense thicket of versions and disimprovements. Their emergence and disappearance becomes more important than the poetic product itself. Roth discards the process of inspection and rejection that poets use to weigh up which products are a success and which not. In his eyes everything is of equal value, the workpiece and the shavings, the product and the scrap, the high and the low. Nihilism and indifference are less important here than an ever-growing distrust of success, including his own. And, naturally, investigating the social, epistemological, structural conditions of emergence: What will get through? What not? Why does one thing get through and not the other? What cannot get through?

At this juncture, now that it is hopefully clear *what* Roth wanted to say, to wit *Roth*, we must ask the question why it was impossible for him to say precisely that: *Roth*. His most important contribution to this question has already been mentioned, his *Mundunculum. Ein tentatives Logico-Poeticum, dargestellt wie Plan and Programm oder Traum zu einem provisorischen Mytherbarium für Visionspflanzen*⁶³ (1967), in which he not only takes a highly idiosyncratic look at drawing and representation, but also as the title says erects a little world.

Roth's foreword introduces the subject theologically. Seeing – and also representing, because “Seeing is representation”⁶⁴ – is conceived as “ORIGINAL SIN”⁶⁵. Roth writes

that our wicked deeds are performed by our, by human EYES⁶⁶,

concluding that

FORGIVENESS must also follow the route from the eyes of the forgiver ... to he-who-is-to-be-forgiven⁶⁷,

such that the “act of forgiveness [must be] an act of the eyes”.

When I now come up with the tools for various eye-deeds on the following areas of paper, I am in this way creating the tools for justification and forgiveness, and the eyes' sins shall be the eyes' justification!⁶⁸

Although he often presents himself as the cheerful, comical poet and artist, such curious and dark remarks must be taken seriously. Not only physical metabolism as a whole, but also and above all that which the eyes perform with the world (“my eye is a mouth“⁶⁹) was for him in a ticklish matter accompanied by a pall of shame. The fact that in his view seeing and representing are basically speaking criminal activities reveals him as an iconoclast in the original sense of the word, as a rebel against the cult of images (advanced at the second Council of Nicea in 787 A.D.).⁷⁰ With the telling difference, however, that in his opinion in order to destroy images it is necessary to create new ones, because as he sees it language is also an image. And images are, inasmuch as they represent something, signs. Whatever he sees is grasped in language.

In an interview conducted ten years later by Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann he described the process in drastic terms:

(The) lamp says the whole time to me: you must say I am a lamp. Or: there's a lamp. The manufacturer makes the lamp so that I will say: “L a m p!” Right? I'm exaggerating now, but I say it in fact with my eyes. I regard my eyes also as a kind of writing organ. Like a pen. I am constantly writing these damned images, I keep on writing the written images of these supposed objects by the very fact of looking at them. I write the lamp directly there where it stands. You understand what I mean?

Lebeer-Hossmann: Yes.

Roth: I am a slave, completely enslaved amid humanity. I am a slave. We are slaves.⁷¹

Language not only shapes representation, but already thought and perception beforehand. When a person sees a lamp, recognises it as a “lamp“, it is as if he were writing “lamp“ with his eyes. Consequently the crime might lie in allowing this to happen to oneself. For this reason Roth investigates in *Mundunculum* the signs as tools for the crimes committed by the eyes, or for the forgiveness granted by them.

So the sign, that is something; when one says “sign“ one is talking about something that one sees pointing, one sees what is called a sign pointing at something. What I mean is one sees the sign pointing, and that there which the sign points to must be inside the world, and it is inside the world because one can see it.⁷²

Whether the world which the sign points to lies in front of or behind the eyes⁷³ is a matter of indifference. Simply because there is a sign, a something that indicates, we must suppose there to be a world in which the indicated and designated exists. The reality that is attributed to this world is of secondary importance. So signs do not interest Roth as elements of a conventional systems of signs, but as templates for thought and perception. But what, he asks slyly, might constitute an “unsign“? He gives the following example:

The pressure of the hand on the arm, where you should once again take a look at a sketch. The pressure of the hand on the arm and the feeling that the arm feels inside, beginning directly under its skin, this feeling, isn't that an image, of this feeling? An image that appears behind the eyes of the being that calls the arm on which the hand presses its own, the hand presses the image of its weight on the arm. And then the hand's weight-image, which has been received by the arm, is removed from the arm while it, the hand, removed from the arm, becomes the transfer forme⁷⁴ – of what?: of an unsign, of course. The image of the feeling of the weight of the hand, mine, the man's, is a transfer picture, and it is an unsign because it is located under the skin of the arm, the woman's arm. The skin in this lovely situation is the skin of the woman, and the image, this sign, points beyond the limits of the woman's world, i.e. out through the woman's skin, and thus one can say that it is an unsign, and the man's hand is a transfer forme for an unsign, right?⁷⁵

The image or sign of the hand also remains in the skin after the hand has been removed, meaning that it points to something no longer present and is thus an unsign. Yet essentially we must admit that all signs are inevitably unsigns, for their location is not or no longer that to which they point. If the man's hands was still pressing on the woman's arm the sign “hand“,⁷⁶ as which it is perceived, would be slightly differently from this physical sensation, it would be a single instance from the class called “hand“, perhaps an indication that “I am here“, or saying ”let's go“, an unsign, a removed transfer picture. This is all the more true of pointers, signposts, trails, pictograms, and obviously for letters of the alphabet.

A sign means not-being-there, a painful philosophical realisation that Roth recapitulates very casually. A sign also means a convention, a template, a “transfer forme“, so something-not-itself, shit. And sign, understood as part of a sentence or text, means bending, not simply grammatical inflection, but also – with the “Lebenslauf“ and the “Conjugations“ – bending under, being bent to fit, subjugation.

The nominative is the unsign of a transfer picture, which language produces by the pressure of its body on the person’s papery skin. Pressure on the part of their papery skin that a German refers to as a grammar book.⁷⁷

If one remembers that this is not only a representational artist who is speaking here, one who wishes to draw and show something, but also a person who recognises that his vision, inasmuch as it can be represented, is utterly linguistic in form, the results are devastating. Whatever he sees and represents has to fit the templates of language, is subject to the unsign of absence and loss and is bent in every possible respect. If we need a reason to despair, this would be it. But after his theological foreword, Roth enters an increasingly cheerful mood.

For *Mundunculum* does not simply take stock of things, or grant an insight into animpossibility, but as already mentioned is also a little world. Roth’s “Logico-Poeticum“ stands out like a motley hut beside the windowless chamber of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. While the latter’s world of propositions is closed, orderly and logical, yet empty, lacking any connection to an empirical or intellectual reality,

6.41 The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen; *in* it no value exists – and if it did exist it would have no value.⁷⁸

Roth’s world by contrast offers a “mytherbarium for vision plants“, even if it is solely for self-cultivated species. It is formed out of 23 “pictorial elements“, or more precisely

23 RUBBER STAMPS WHICH THE AUTHOR DREW IN THE YEARS 1963-1965. EACH OF THE 23 CONSTITUTES FOR HIM – OR CONSTITUTED FOR HIM AT THE TIME HE DEvised THEM – AN IMPORTANT BEING. BEINGS NOT ONLY IN THE SENSE OF LIVING BEINGS, BUT ALSO IN THE SENSE OF INANIMATE BEINGS, SUCH AS TOOLS, THE ELEMENTS, OBJECTS, IDEES FIXES, NIGHTMARES, ILLUSIONS ETC.⁷⁹

The stamped-out pictures produce an alphabet of Roth's private language. What appears to be a funnel is for him a hole, a blossom, flower, danger, cabbage, seam, intercourse, George, Georgina, cunt, and much more, while what appears to be a man's head from above represents ego, God, Narcissus, viewer and much more.⁸⁰ Although the meaning of the light bulb, heart, island, hat, cube and other stamps is not given, they too are more than and different to what they appear to be at first sight. They are beings from Roth's world.

Using these signs, he formed words and sentences, scenes and still lifes. A stylised motorcyclist, stamped repeatedly one beside and over the other, depicts almost futuristically the course of an accident and its reversion, "being torn apart and untorn apart", (because the remembrance of an accident makes the events appear simultaneously and can also realize the wish that it had never happened).⁸¹ A hat with a funnel opening below results in a "female bridegroom", a hat with a funnel opening to the top a "female bride". Many of the sentences constructed with the pictograms remain unexplained, but even here it is not recommendable to come up with one's own associations to them. We can only surmise what might be intended. Williams sums it up in his postface when he says

Wittgenrot (or is it Rotgenstein?) has created a whole new world, the illustrated record of a cosmos that exists by and for itself, in which everything can be anything, including, of course, itself.⁸²

The stamps may appear to be like templates, but they are not templates because they do not denote, but permit rather a free play of meanings. They overcome the bounds of language but at the price of comprehension. Their range of meaning is limited by nothing more than Roth's associations, which seem to allow more or, as with for instance the motorcyclist, less scope. If, in keeping with Derrida's analysis in *Of Grammatology* (1998), it is the characteristic of symbolic signs that they are not representations⁸³, it is the characteristic of the stamp picture that it depicts solely itself, a being in Roth's world. Which is to say that here he truly wrote about himself without the outside addition of shit and conventional language. But what he wrote is no longer readable. Nor does the fact that Roth made his alphabet openly available to his readers as a "Stempel Theke" [= Stamp Bar, 1968] in any way contradict this. They can write with it, but not Rothish,

because this is my little idiotic alphabet, it's not theirs.⁸⁴

With this, an extreme has been reached. Roth is within his own bounds, but simultaneously in a solitude, however seductive it may be. Consequently *Mundunculum* also contains an attempt to a return to legibility. For this he assigns each of the stamps to a letter of the Roman alphabet to produce quasi hieroglyphic texts. When read from left to right and in each column from bottom to top it produces the verses:

When the sound reaches us / from children / who accompany the clouds on the / journey forwards / we lie
below above the mountain / of our own heart

The stamped poem continues:

That is a tongue that swells in our throat. Then the two white mouths open and spit down tears into the attentive eye. And the ship up there that wishes to depart brimful with children hangs for a little while. But then it silently rips the string just as pain often snaps. And although we are breathing we roll in silence from the black mountain that conceals itself in the greenness of its mould. And the sky has two hats as hands. The children in the swarming mass sail in that one. This one arches up over where we stay. And the sailing slices our eyes so that our hearts can continue to swell upwards, out of these mouths. And the two ends of the heart swell up into two balloons although we tie them down. They lift the hand-hat from us over the mountain, raise this prophylactic the hat the one hand of the sky higher. And then it peers over the brim of the other that eternally far-off sea on whose horizon the children's sailing boats draw their strings. Oh you fortunate children says the double heart before it breaks. No calls can be heard at the foot of the mountain and never shouting becomes our unremunerative art⁸⁵

Roth felt that he had to hide his most tender poetry.

He concealed his tears and sighs in the sea of classified adverts in the *Luzerner Stadt-Anzeiger*, between

prams, sausages and that sort of stuff⁸⁶

It took almost a year before the populace of Lucerne heard what he was whispering to them. But then they stormed the publisher with protest letters, so that no more ads were accepted from the artist. The result was perhaps his most beautiful book, dedicated "in all politeness to the Stadtanzeiger readers in Switzerland", *Das Tränenmeer* [= The Sea of Tears, 1973].

A tear is better than a nasty word.

*

Two tears are better than one tear.

*

One word is almost as good as a tear.

*

A tear is not a word.

*

A stone is not a tear.

*

A stone is not a stone

... so it began, with mutually determining and contradicting definitions and relationships, pieced together to create a fragile mobile of propositions. It begins to swing and gyrate. Now and again the moralist becomes visible.

A nasty word turns to stone.

*

Tears are better than melting stones.

*

Creatures don't always suffer in tears

*

Creatures suffer, not always in tears

*

Sadly all creatures always suffer

He made the inhabitants of Lucerne a number of dubious offers, in order to return all of a sudden to natural history and the history of humanity and the world.

Does someone who serves you back a filet steak receive a filet steak served back from me?

*

No, someone who serves me 2 filet steaks receives a filet steak served back from me.

*

A man and a woman who each serve me a filet steak each receive 2 filet steaks served back from me

*

The cows have served up the most filet steaks for us.

The book ends with an angelic coda.

O Engel, Deine Sehnen zäh!	O angel, your sinews so strong!
	*
O Engel, Deine Tränen jäh!	O angel, your tears so sudden!
	*
Fly Icelandair	Fly Icelandair

“Air“ in rhymes Icelandic with “jäh“ and “zäh“, meaning that a brisk breeze is driving the clouds in these sentences, which take their inspiration from the “clouds“ that Roth wrote in the 1960s on pieces of white paper and hung, as speaking cumuli, on a wall. They comprise a bright array of notes, memos, and shopping lists alternating with aphorisms, short poems and pastiches.

- 68. levelling down with the help of language
- 69. more levelling down
- 70. how did THOMAS WOLFE bite the dust ?
- 71. analytical chicken
- 72. synthetic chicken
- 73. this evening i am not afraid (stuttgarter hofbraeu, simplicity)
- 74. Ice and brooks / are freed of currents / by the rollicking tolling, / invigorating tick
- 75. I live, i.e.: I DEFEND the shape of my head in those eyes of theirs⁸⁷

The “clouds“ show the reflective, as well as the ruminative and playful side of Dieter Roth. These sentences, taken from notebooks and diaries,⁸⁸ have not been arranged in the way those are in *Das Tränenmeer* or *Mundunculum*, but are linked – just as all of the artist’s works are related to one another – to them underground. And when he describes his books as

(a kind) of a Nietzschean pudding⁸⁹,

Scheisse could be a chocolate pudding and the “clouds“ a vanilla custard. Although the “Nietzschean “ in the pudding presumably refers to its tragic aroma, the cook never forgets to offset its bitterness by placing a nice dollop of icing on the top.

The term has yet to be found that is large enough and accurate enough to capture what Roth was and did, so I propose for the moment to call him the most inventive and charming pudding cook of his day.

I wish to thank Dirk Dobke (Dieter Roth Foundation, Hamburg), Ilona Lütken (Archiv Sohm / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), Hansjörg Mayer and above all Barbara Wien for their assistance in providing me with the literature.

¹ Conversation with Kees Broos on the award of the Charles Nypels Prize, Maastricht, 31. 10. 1986, in Barbara Wien, ed. *Dieter Roth. Gesammelte Interviews*, London, 2002, p. 377

² Video interview by Ira Wool, Chicago 1978, in Wien, op cit., p. 219, English in the original.

³ Emmett Williams, "Foreword and Acknowledgments" in Williams, *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, N.Y., Villefranche, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, 1967, p. VI

⁴ Homophones or related phenomena are only assigned to one grapheme respectively: n = n, nn; o = o, oo, oh; ai = ai, ei; ö = ö, öh; f = f, v; etc.

⁵ *Gesammelte Werke* (referred to in the following as GW) II, unpag. The original reads: "aine saite ler lasen / si bekommt genvg bedoitung fon andern saiten her vo etvas stet"

⁶ Op cit. The original: "ich wais nicht was raife ist ist es die fähigkait morgen frü sterben zu können ... übrigens: wir sind noch furchtbar unraif wir solen uns den zucker abgewöhnen besonders den gegensaitigen wir sind grünlich ferschisene schafsköpfe wir waichen knaben wir blaichen raben wir ungesund waisnichtse ..."

⁷ Emmett Williams in *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, Daniel Spoerri with Robert Filiou, Emmett Williams, Dieter Roth and Roland Topor, London, Atlas Press, 1995, p. 108

⁸ "Haufen Teilverdautes", in Dieter Roth, *Frühe Schriften und typische Scheiße*, Darmstadt und Neuwied 1973, unpag.

⁹ GW II, *Ideogramme*, Hellnar, Cologne, London, 1971

¹⁰ I take this from Hans Ulrich Schmid, *Wörterbuch Isländisch-Deutsch*, Hamburg, 2001

¹¹ Ina Conzen, in Conzen (ed) *Dieter Roth. Die Haut der Welt*, Cologne, Stuttgart, 2000 (= Sohm Dossier 2), p. 18, arrives through an "anagrammatic transposition at the two terms Rot-Tod, Tat-Erare (*sic*), and Erot-Tod".

¹² Dieter Schwarz, *Auf der Bogen Bahn. Studien zum literarischen Werk von Dieter Roth*, Zurich, 1981, p. 29

¹³ The prepositions in English are (horizontally): in, for, with,, against/towards, out; (vertically) for, with, against/towards, in

¹⁴ Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie*, Jena 1934 (Repr. Stuttgart, N.Y. 1982. English: *Theory of Language. The Representational Function of Language*, translated DF Goodwin. Amsterdam, Philadelphia, 1990), p. 78ff.

¹⁵ Reykjavík 1971

¹⁶ Likewise Reykjavík 1971

¹⁷ *Ein Lebenslauf von 60 Jahren*, Basel, Mosfellsbaer, 1998. "Bound issues of *Szenario* (supplement to the Viennese newspaper *DER STANDARD*) with texts inserted by Roth that exactly match the rest of the

type page and thus are scarcely distinguishable. The artist's last literary work before his death. Of the planned 111 copies only around 40 were produced." Conzen, op cit., p. 105

¹⁸ *Lebenslauf mit 5C Jahren*, first published Lucerne 1980, cited here from *Lebenslauf mit 5) Jahren, Hermannstraße 14*, 5/1980, p. 7

¹⁹ "even if ah-how-good-that-no-one-knows why Roth writes 5C when he means 50; we do know that it's not a typing or printer's error", Tomas Schmit, in Wien, op cit., p. 632

²⁰ GW XXXVIII, *Smaller Works* (part 3), Stuttgart, London, 1980, p. 178

²¹ A structural analysis of the *Lebenslauf* is offered in Schwarz, op cit., pp. 83-107

²² The allusion here is to II Corinthians 12,7: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." In an Interview by Irmelin Lebeer-Hossmann, Stuttgart, 20.-22. 6. 1979, Roth named the Paulian Epistles as the "most revolting example" of morals; Wien, op cit., p. 116

²³ Cf Roth's "Karnickelköttelkarnickel" or "shit hares" shaped out of rabbit dung. Illustration and commentary in Conzen, op cit., p. 127

²⁴ *Lebenslauf mit 5) Jahren*, op cit., p. 7

²⁵ *ibid* p. 30

²⁶ Cf. here the present author's article "Scheiße", *Jungle World*, 25/1998 (translated by the present translator as "Shit" in "*I'll get through*", Basel, Mosfellsbaer, Amsterdam, 1999, pp. 41-2), as well as "Scheiße und Pudding", *Jungle World*, 32/2002

²⁷ GW XIII *scheisse*, Stuttgart, London, Reykjavík, 1972, and GW XVIII *kleinere werke (1.teil)*, Hellnar, Cologne, London, 1971

²⁸ *Lebenslauf mit 5) Jahren*, op. cit., p. 24f.

²⁹ Schwarz, op cit., p. 94

³⁰ GW XV *Poetrie 5 bis 1*, Cologne, London, Reykjavík, 1969

³¹ GW IXX, *kleinere werke (2.teil)*, Hellnar, Cologne, London, 1971, pp. 523-540

³² Stuttgart, Zug, 1978

³³ GW XV, see above, "2 Doppelverhehlte ...", p. 1

³⁴ *Lebenslauf mit 5) Jahren*, op cit., p. 32

³⁵ Paul Valéry: "Poésie et pensée abstraite", in Valéry, *Œuvres*, I, Paris 1957, p. 1318

³⁶ Dieter Roth, *Ein Tagebuch (aus d. Jahre 1982) A Diary (from the year 1982)*, Reykjavík, 1984, p. 5 preface (English translation by Dieter Roth)

³⁷ The original piece created by Roth, J. Frederick and students in 1964, which also contained one of Roth's notebooks, is documented in GW XI.

³⁸ GW XIV, *die blaue flut*, Stuttgart, London, Reykjavik, London, 1973

³⁹ In Dieter Roth, *Essay Nr. 11*, Zurich, 1989

⁴⁰ Originally by Dieter Roth in English.

⁴¹ The second paragraph is in English in the original

⁴² Schmit, op cit., p. 631

⁴³ No place of publication (Stuttgart), 1971

-
- ⁴⁴ Arnulf Rainer: "DUETTE, DUELLE USW", in Roth & Rainer, *MISCH- UND TRENNKUNST. 7. JUNI BIS 28. JULI 1979*, catalogue, Galerie Klewan, Munich
- ⁴⁵ Conversation with Patrick Frey, Zurich, 18./19. 5. 1998, in Wien, op cit., p. 506
- ⁴⁶ *ibid*
- ⁴⁷ *BOK 3a* (1961), GW V, *BOK 3a*, Stuttgart, Cologne, London, 1970
- ⁴⁸ *BOK 3b* (1961), GW VII, *bok 3b und bok 3d*, Stuttgart, London, Reykjavík, 1974
- ⁴⁹ *Daily Mirror Book* (1961), GW X
- ⁵⁰ *SCHNEEWITTCHEN* (1965), Cologne, 1965
- ⁵¹ *quick*, Reykjavík, 1965
- ⁵² "Das ist die Urwurst", in Johannes Gachnang, in collaboration with Peter Erismann and Janine Perret Sgualdo, (eds) *Dieter Roth. Die Bibliothek*, Neuchâtel, 2003, p. 76
- ⁵³ GW XXXIX, *Smaller Works*, Stuttgart, London, 1985, p. 512
- ⁵⁴ *ibid*, p. 507
- ⁵⁵ An early nineteenth century Romantic school around Ludwig Uhland and Justinus Kerner that included Gustav Schwab, Edouard Mörike, and Wilhelm Hauff, and concentrated on songs and ballads.
- ⁵⁶ The writers Friedrich Achleitner, H.C. Artmann, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener from the second half of the 1950s to the early 1960s.
- ⁵⁷ GW XIII, *scheisse*, p.69
- ⁵⁸ *ibid* p. 53
- ⁵⁹ *ibid* p. 456
- ⁶⁰ *ibid* p.297
- ⁶¹ *ibid*, p. 394
- ⁶² Emmett Williams, "Dieter Roth: The Alchemist, or, Iceberg on Fire", in Williams, *My Life In Flux – And Vice Versa*, Stuttgart, 1991, p. 448f.
- ⁶³ *MUNDUNCULUM. Ein tentatives Logico-Poeticum, dargestellt wie Plan und Programm oder Traum zu einem provisorischen Mytherbarium für Visionspflanzen. BAND 1: Das rot'sche VIDEUM*, Cologne, 1967. The title in English reads: MUNDUNCULUM. A tentative logico-poeticum presented as plan and programme or dream for a provisional mytherbarium for visionplants. VOLUME 1: The Rothian VIDEUM.
- ⁶⁴ *ibid* p. 323
- ⁶⁵ *ibid* p. 15
- ⁶⁶ *ibid* p. 13
- ⁶⁷ *ibid* p. 13 f.
- ⁶⁸ *ibid* p. 14
- ⁶⁹ *ibid* p. 308
- ⁷⁰ On the iconoclasts see Roland Bainton (ed.), *The Penguin History of Christianity, 2 vols.*, Harmondsworth, 1967, vol. I, pp. 141-3, 184
- ⁷¹ Wien, op cit., p. 124
- ⁷² *MUNDUNCULUM*, op cit., p. 202
- ⁷³ Here a conceptualist view is hinted at.

⁷⁴ The word Roth coins here, “Abziehform”, plays on the word “Abziehbild” for a transfer picture, “Druckform” or printing forme, and the word “abziehen” to remove as in this case an arm, as well as to pull a print. (Trans. note)

⁷⁵ *MUNDUNCULUM*, op cit., p. 209

⁷⁶ According to Peirce’s classification an “indexical “ sign.

⁷⁷ *MUNDUNCULUM*, op cit., p. 210

⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness, London, 1961, p. 145

⁷⁹ *MUNDUNCULUM*, op cit., pp. 19-21

⁸⁰ *ibid* p. 20

⁸¹ See here Conzen, op cit., pp. 37-43

⁸² *MUNDUNCULUM*, op cit., p. 321

⁸³ See Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, Baltimore and London, 1876, p. 45

⁸⁴ “The Little World of Dieter Roth“, radio interview with Richard Hamilton, BBC, Radio 3, 23.1. 1974., in Wien, op cit., p. 200

⁸⁵ *In German (with the relevant page nos. and vertical line breaks):* (p. 106:) Das ist eine Zunge die uns / in den Hals schwillt / (p. 109:) Dann oeffnen sich die beiden / weissen Muender / und spucken Traenen hinunter / in das auf merksame Auge / Und das Schiff da oben / das abfahren will / gefuellt bis an den Rand / mit Kindern / (p. 112:) haengt noch ein Weilchen / Doch es reisst die Saite lautlos / wie der Schmerz oft zerreist / Und von dem schwarzen Berg / der sich in seiner Gruene / (p. 113:) von Schimmel verbirgt / kullern wir schweigend / obwohl wir atmen / Und es hat der Himmel zwei / Huete als Haende / Die Kinder des Gewimmels segeln / (p. 114:) in jenem / Ueber unserer Bleibe woelbt / sich dieser / Und das Segeln zerschneidet / uns die Augen / so dass unser Herz / (p. 115:) weiter heraufschwellen kann / hinaus aus diesen Muendern / Und des Herzens zwei Enden / schwellen zu zwei Ballonen / obschon wir sie fesseln / Die heben den Handhut / (p. 116:) von uns ueber dem Berge / heben hoeher / dieses Praeservativ / den Hut die / eine Hand des Himmels / So schaut es ueber den Rand / (p. 117:) des andern / jenes auf ewig entlegenen Meeres / auf dessen Horizont der Kinder / Segelschiffe ihre Saiten ziehn / Oh ihr gluecklichen Kinder/ sagt wohl das zweifache Herz / (p. 118:) bevor es zerbricht / Da hoert man kein / Rufen am Fusse des Berges / und niemals zu schrein / wird unsere brotlose Kunst

⁸⁶ Interview by Mechthild Rausch (1981), in Wien, op cit., p. 278

⁸⁷ “310 kleine wolken in memorium big J and big G“, in *poetrie* 2, reprinted in GW XV – one of several books of clouds (Wolken), the most famous for the English-speaking audience being *246 Little Clouds*, published by Dick Higgin’s Something Else Press, New York, 1968

⁸⁸ During the interview with Mechthild Rausch, op cit., p. 272, Roth noted that he jotted down his “cloud“ sentences “in between times. In those days I never sat down in order to really write, but always had the book with me and particularly when I was drunk I came up with them, these clouds, and often they’re so lachrymose, like sweeties that have ended up too big.“

⁸⁹ Video interview by Ira Wool, op cit., p. 225