

**WRITTEN
1976–2013**

P. INMAN

ifp then q classics

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Introduction by
Craig Dworkin

~ V ≡ ⊡

***"For Tina, as always
and for Jack, Ali, and Mikayla"***

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The Work of the Work / *Le travail de l'œuvre*

Le travail: ce qui fait œuvre, sans doute, ce qui œuvre — et ouvre, ce qui *ouvrage* et *ouverture*: le travail de l'œuvre en tant qu'il engendre, produit et met au jour.

[Labor: that which makes a work; no doubt, that which works, and which works to open: *book* and *overture*; *stitching* and *opening*. Labor: the work of the work in as much as it creates, produces, brings to light and puts into play.]

—Jacques Derrida¹

Peter Inman came to Language poetry late, and from out of town.²

Although Language poetry is often tidily divided between San Francisco and New York, a kernel of key writers first emerged from the Washington, D. C. area, a mid-Atlantic periphery that was necessary to the foundation of the New York City core, even as its origins have been casually forgotten.³ Inman first published as part of that D. C. scene, which had come to be centered, in the early '70s, around DuPont Circle. The writing was manifest in venues such as *Everybody's Ex-Lover* (a journal edited by Inman), S.O.U.P. (Some Of Us Press), *Mass Transit* (the magazine of a publishing collective which also hosted readings at the Community Bookstore), and, slightly later, a reading series at the P Street Folio Books.⁴ Hair was long, consciousness was raised, and the era's tension between individual personal expression and coöperative identification is legible not only in the nature of those collaborative DuPont community events and periodicals but also in the poetry they promoted, which frequently combines colloquial intimacy, sensitive self-examination, and offhand vignettes of relationships fraught by an awareness of the social politics of gender and sex.

Inman's first two books, *What Happens Next* (Some Of Us Press, 1974) and *P Inman USA* (Dry Imager, 1975) [neither included in the present collection], are direct products of this context.⁵ They feature poems in a mode of outré surrealism: short sentences in a direct style of grammatically unobtrusive dream-narration within which a calculated crudeness — credentialled by the bohemian counterculture of the DuPont Circle scene — bids for attention. Bodily fluids are copious, as is copulation; hallucinatory

metamorphoses manage the transitions between episodes; a physically and psychically uncomfortable world repeatedly menaces, though usually from a safely distanced nightmarish irreality. The poems are peppered with proper names, and the writers mentioned sketch Inman's loosely surrealist aesthetic background in broad strokes: Rimbaud; Rilke; Garcia Lorca; Vallejo; Cortázar.⁶ Accordingly, one section of a poem from the period, "solo ridge," published in Michael Sappol's *Personal Injury Magazine*, obliquely references Max Ernst by performing the language of a passage from Uwe Schneede's monograph on the artist. Inman's stanza begins:

The principle of collage is the choice of an original, which then invites modification, then incorporation, till the process rebounds Elsewhere, the repetition of which rips a toenail... (lacked exposition, too eclec. otherwise) so the ego puts on a lot of weight, a lot of pills in a white hand.⁷

The source, highlighted for comparison, reads:

The so-called artistic process consists in the choice of an original which invites modification and thus incorporation into art [....] By its very nature, the collage — here as elsewhere — keeps its various levels of reality intact.⁸

By collaging, modifying and incorporating a text about the incorporation and modification of collaged material, without exposition and perhaps too eclectically for coherence, this section of "solo ridge" offers a kind of "composition as explanation" (to adopt Gertrude Stein's term), enacting precisely the process Schneede goes on to describe:

the creative procedure is therefore identical with the changes undergone by the initial material, once adopted. The process of individual artistic creation through formal invention is replaced by the principle of modification of objects taken from reality.⁹

"wagon box fight," a poem from *P Inman USA*, applies the same procedure to itself. Inman rewrites the first section of the poem in subsequent sections, offering a spaced erasure in Part Two and a