1. Getting Started

Listing and Classifying: Purposes and Presuppositions

A list of names is a composition: it presents simple information in simple form. A list names the *contents* or it names the *members of a series*. The table of contents in a cookbook; a label on a paint can; a line-up of ballplayers; a program telling us that the pianist will play first the Haydn E♭ Major Sonata (Hoboken 52) and then the Mozart B♭ Major Sonata, K. 570: These are all lists whose function is to tell us what's *in* something or what comes *before* what.

Such lists don't make very good reading; only compulsive readers study the breakfast cereal box. Most lists are not meant to entertain us, but only to inform. However, a list can become an expressive composition if the form it takes is predominant. If we sense rhythm and balance, an opening out and a gathering in, then we have no mere catalog. The difference between a paint can label and Leporello's list of Don Giovanni's conquests; between a stock clerk reading the shelves and a child's counting game; between a chronicle of "begats" and a creed; between a recipe for fish chowder and a litany, is the predominance of form—the balance, order, rhythm that gives us the sense of a lively whole.

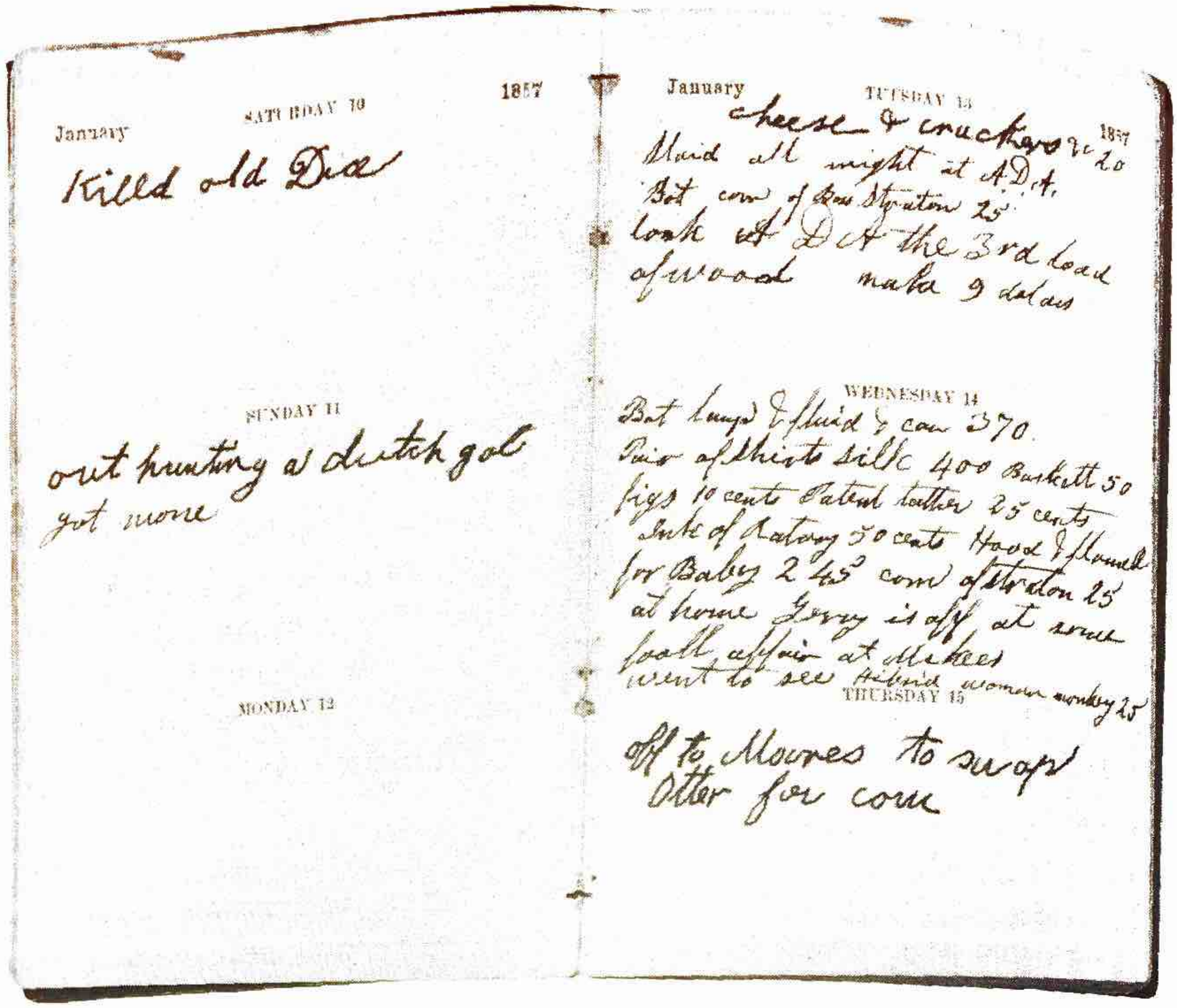
The only use most of us have for a formal list is to help us remember certain items by memorizing their names. Medical students pass on to those who come after them dozens of dirty rhymes whose sound patterns lighten the task of learning, say, the vessels and tissues of the wrist cross section in the proper sequence. In *mnemonic* devices (Mnemosyne is the mother of the Muses and goddess of Memory), the role of rhythm and pattern is to fix the names in mind. The form of the list may please us, but that is not its chief purpose. Other kinds of formal lists might help us remember, but their chief function would be to make us feel part of a ceremony, to lift us out of our private selves, and give us a sense of being a member of a community.

To see how a writer goes about creating a form by means of which he can assemble various items is to learn something very important about composing. Lists are composed; they don't just happen.

Isaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, written in the seventeenth century, concerns everything you ever wanted to know about fishing and aren't afraid to ask your old friend *Piscator*

(Fisherman). Walton's book is about the sport of angling, but it's also a meditation on Man and the rest of Creation, on the beauties of the Earth, the fact of mortality and the promise of eternal life. Walton can go with no strain from a short discourse on the soul to a recipe for carp (stuffed with oranges and anchovy butter). He writes in dialogue form, one of the oldest forms in which philosophy can be written; it's an inner dialogue being brought out into the open. The novice fisherman, who gets hooks caught in his thumb and can't tell a pike from a pickerel, asks leading questions which Piscator then answers with directions and explanations—and recipes. A great deal of information has to be set down, but in a pleasing form. The modern procedure would be to publish the anecdotes in one volume and the "how-to's" in another, but *The Compleat Angler* was written to provide both instruction and delight and to show how they are related. Here is Piscator's catalog of trout flies:

> And now, good Master, proceed to your promised direction for making and ordering my Artificial Fly.
>
> PISC. My honest Scholar, I will do it, for it is a debt due unto you by my promise. And because you shall not think yourself more engaged to me than indeed you really are, I will freely give you such directions as were lately given to me by an ingenious Brother of the Angle, an honest man, and a most excellent fly-fisher.
>
> You are to note, that there are twelve kinds of artificial-made Flies to angle with upon the top of the water. Note by the way, that the fittest season of using these is a blustering, windy day, when the waters are so troubled that the natural fly cannot be seen, or rest upon them. The first is the Dun-fly, in March: the body is made of dun wool, the wings of the partridge's feathers. The second is another Dun-fly: the body of black wool, and the wings made of the black drake's feathers, and of the feathers under his tail. The third is the Stone-fly, in April: the body is made of black wool, made yellow under the wings, and under the tail, and so made with wings of the drake. The fourth is the Ruddy-fly, in the beginning of May: the body made of red wool wrapt about with black silk, and the feathers are the wings of the drake; with the feathers of a red capon also, which hang dangling on his sides next to the tail. The fifth is the yellow or greenish fly, in May likewise: the body made of yellow wool, and the wings made of the red cock's hackle or tail.



January SATURDAY 10 1857

Killd old Dic

SUNDAY 11

out hunting a ducks got
got none

MONDAY 12

January TUESDAY 13 1857

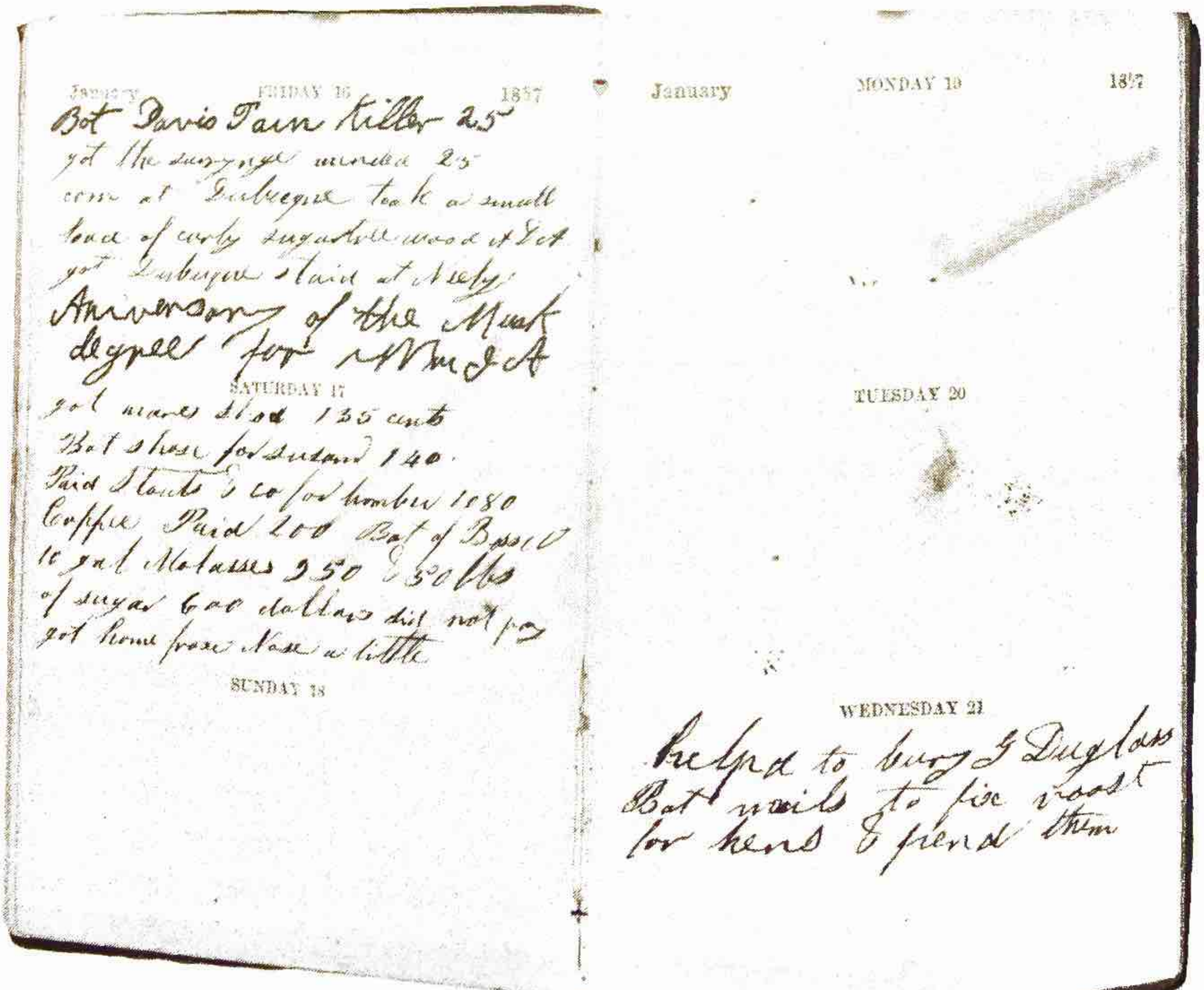
cheese & crackers 20
Staid all night at A.D.A.
Bot corn of Geo Straton 25
took A D A the 3rd load
of wood make 9 dolars

WEDNESDAY 14

Bot lamp & fluid & can 370
Pair of shirts silk 400 Baskett 50
figs 10 cents Patent lather 25 cents
Ink of Notary 50 cents Hood & flannel
for Baby 2 45 corn of straton 25
at home Gerry is off at some
foolt affair at Mckees
went to see Hibrid woman monkey 25

THURSDAY 15

off to Moores to swap
Otter for corn



January FRIDAY 16 1857

Bot Davis Pain Killer 25
got the [illegible] mended 25
come at Dubuque took a small
load of curly sugartree wood at Dot
got Dubuque staid at Neely
Anniversary of the Mark
degree for AMDA

SATURDAY 17

got mares shod 135 cents
Bot shoes for susan 140
Paid Stouts & co for lumber 1080
Coffee Paid 200 Bot of Bassell (?)
10 gal Molasses 350 & 50 lbs
of sugar 600 dollars did not pay
got home from Nash (?) a little

SUNDAY 18

January MONDAY 19 1857

TUESDAY 20

WEDNESDAY 21

helpd to bury G Duglass
Bot nails to fix roost
for hens & fixed them

Wednesday 14
Bot lamp & fluid & can 370
Pair of shirts silk 400 Baskett 50
figs 10 cents Patent leather 25 cents
Ink of Ratory 50 cents Hood & flannel
for Baby 245 corn of Straton 25
at home Gerry is off at some
fooll affair at Mikes
went to see Hibrid Woman monkey 25

Thursday 15
off to Moores to swap
otter for corn

Friday 16
Bot Davis Pain Killer 25
got the suryinge mended 25
corn at Dubuque took a small
load of curly sugar maple wood ADA
got Dubuque staid at Neebys
Aniversary of the Mark degree for Wm I A

Saturday 17
got mares shod 135 cents
Bot shose for Susan 140
Paid Stants & co for lumber 1080
Coffee Paid 200 Bot of Brecht
10 gal Molasses 950 & 50 lbs
of sugar 600 dollars did not pay
got home froze Nose a little

Wednesday 21
helpd to bury G Duglass
Bot nails to fix roost
for hens & pend them

(*Note:* Some of the terms are obscure, others are illegible. ADA stands for Andrew D. Anderson, William I.'s brother. The "dutch gal" refers to a German servant; he found one eventually to whom he paid $24.20 for working from April 6 to September 25. The "degree" mentioned is a Masonic honor.)

Studying how lists are drawn up and considering the principles by which they are organized can teach a writer some very important things about the composing process.

Make up a grocery list and keep it on hand for use during the discussion to follow.

Grocery lists are highly personal compositions. They are often written in a kind of shorthand, a code that saves time but that could cause confusion. A 25-year study of grocery lists abandoned in shopping carts convinces me that few people make out a list which anybody else could safely use.

- Why did you get this flour?
- You said to get flour. That's what the list said.
- I didn't say Pillsbury's.
- I got flour; you said flour.
- Don't you know I always get Gluten Beauty?
- The list said flour.
- Well, I didn't mean just any flour.
- You didn't say that.

  Etc.

I've found that the composition students who draw up the most efficient grocery lists are householders. An experienced shopper knows how to save time not only in making the list but also in using it. Efficient lists are often schematized according to the area in the store where certain items are to be found; indeed, some lists could serve as floor plans. (*Scheme* or *schema* derives from the Greek word for *shape* or *plan*. Note that these words are both nouns and verbs.)

lemon
P.E.I.
B. lettuce
leeks
tom
red onions

pie crusts
Ital gr b

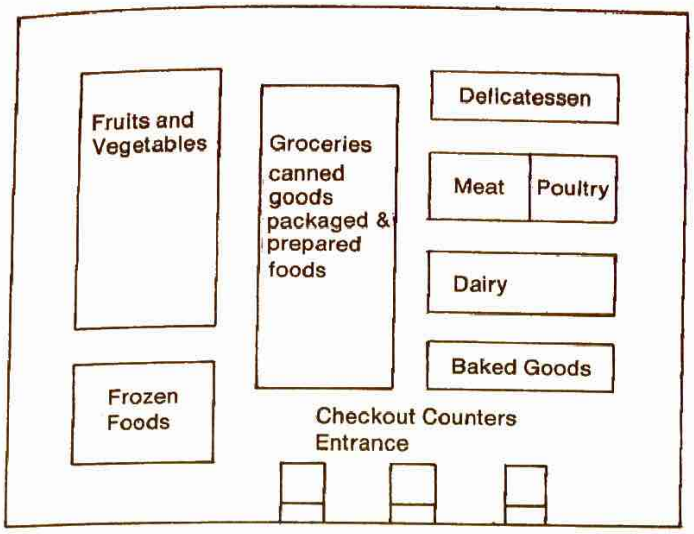
p. chips
gerkhins
kidney beans
coffee
sugar
spaghetti
marinara

Thuringer

hamburger
o j
milk
Monterey J

bread

You can read the schematized list as you would a map, orienting yourself at the entrance. If you read up from the bottom right-hand corner and from right to left across the top, with side trips into the center and then down the left-hand column, you will have done a tour of the store, ending at the checkout counter. Here is the list again as a floor plan:



The schematized list/map represents the order in which the merchandise is displayed. And, of course, that order is determined by various requirements and needs, physical and psychological: food that must be refrigerated will generally be along the walls since this is where the pipes and electrical lines are; advertising specials will be placed at various eye-catching points, etc. The merchant/architect/planner organizes the store with various purposes in mind, just as you organize a list with purposes in mind. We find something more easily if we know what we're looking for; both the list and the layout of the store are meant to facilitate that. You can see how this works if you consider how the order of various names on the list offers clues for decoding certain items that are not intelligible by themselves: *lemon, leeks, red onions* help us make sense out of *tom (tomatoes)*; *P.E.I.* is harder, but if you find yourself among the leeks and tomatoes you might catch sight of a bag of potatoes from *Prince Edward Island.*

Using the floor plan as a guide, decode the other mysteries in our list.

Each of the groups of items is a *class:* when you compose a list, you are *classifying.* A parsnip is a parsnip is a parsnip, but it is also a vegetable. Classifying is *renaming* so that one item can be grouped with others of the same kind. *Vegetable* is a class name given to certain edible plants. A parsnip has characteristics in common with carrots and potatoes and all "such like" that grow not on vines but underground (I've heard a parsnip called a "honky carrot"); they form a subclass called

root vegetables. When carrots and potatoes are grouped not only with lettuce but with pears and raspberries and apples, they are seen as members of a larger class, *fruits and vegetables.* The more kinds that can be included, the more general the class.

Degree of generality	*Class-name*
general	merchandise, groceries produce
specific	fruits and vegetables vegetables root vegetables
particular	parsnips "this parsnip"

In any kind of list, one word suggests another; one name joins another and another until you have a class that you then name: you rename the names. A class is a form that finds forms —not only members that belong to that class but other classes as well. One thing leads to another, we say; one thing makes you think of another; one class finds another class, not just other members. "Produce" finds not only pears and raspberries, eggplant and acorn squash, but "meat" and "dairy."

The names you choose for your classes will depend on the *context of situation.* When you look for parsnips in the produce department, that name is appropriate to the situation: you are buying an item that the grocer finds convenient to keep with other fresh *products* that need to be kept cool and ventilated and sometimes watered. The names listed on a menu, on the other hand, would be entirely different. You would write *salad,* not *produce; creamed parsnips,* not *root vegetables; radishes,* not *fruits and vegetables.*

The reason why a menu does not make a very good shopping list is that it belongs to a different context of situation. Suppose that you shop with a menu as your guide: if the menu reads "Hamburger," you first have to translate that shorthand to "dill pickles, catsup, sliced tomatoes, sliced onions, mustard, hamburger rolls—and hamburger." Then you have to disregard terms that are relevant to cooking and preparation only, eliminating any items you already have or adding quantities needed.

Translate the names of these menu items into names appropriate for a shopping list:

Green Salad
Lasagna
Ice Cream
Coffee

You can see that the menu determines the shopping list, but shopping can in turn determine the menu. If the menu calls for hamburgers and you discover when you get to the meat counter that the ground beef is sold out and that steak is $2.99 a pound, that situation could force revision of the menu and, hence, of the shopping list.

How can you use the situation (the hamburgerless meat department), the schematized list, and the need for a revised menu to help you save the picnic?

For what context of situation would such class names as *protein, minerals, carbohydrates,* etc., be appropriate?

A list is a composition even though it is composed with just words, not sentences and paragraphs. The listmaker knows the relationships that those words stand for, the groups and classes and sequences that the list indicates in a succinct and economical way. Each item of a list could be expanded to a sentence. "Rice, carrots, green peppers, tea" could be developed in this way: "If there are going to be 20 people for supper and I have only $10.00 for groceries and if the cupboard is bare, which it seems to be, I'd better get out the regimental rice cooker and make vegetable curry; tea would be the thing to go with the curry and since I have only a little leftover Lapsang Souchong, I'd better get a quarter pound of spiced Indian: that'll fill them up."

You can also think of the items of a list as a set of answers to certain questions. When you draw up a list, you are addressing yourself to certain needs that can be stated as questions. Thus, *baking soda* on a grocery list is an answer to these questions: "Do I need baking soda? Does that cake recipe call for baking

powder or vinegar and baking soda? Is there any baking soda left from last summer when I used a lot on bee stings?" But *baking soda* on the grocery list does not answer questions that are not raised in the context of situation, which is shopping for kitchen and household supplies. It is not, for instance, an answer to the question, "What is the common household product whose chemical formula is HCO_3?" A shopper would have to be able to differentiate baking soda from washing soda, but he wouldn't have to know the chemical formulae to do so.

Any one list answers only certain questions, not all possible questions about all possible purposes it may serve. If we had to take into account every need, we would be fated to draw up an endless list and we might never get anything done because we would never get the list ready. (For some compulsive list-composers, this is precisely the point: lists substitute for actions.) You need to eat, but that need is not part of the context of situation in which grocery lists are composed; it is a presupposition, an assumption that does not have to be proved or argued or deliberately considered.

∞ "What do I need to stay alive?" is not normally a useful beginning for composing a shopping list, but what are some extraordinary circumstances in which that question would indeed determine the menu? Describe them.

Just how much we usually take for granted in making a list can be discovered if you try to determine the presuppositions of the list-maker. Here is Leon's grocery list and his analysis of the presuppositions:

milk—2½ gals
bread—2 loaves
eggs—1 doz
steak—1½ lb N.Y. sirloin
bacon—1 lb
peanut butter—1 sm jar
jelly—1 jar
salami—½ lb Genoa
butter—1 lb
2 diff TV dinners—frozen
cereal—1 box
juice—1 can fr grape
cookies—1 pkg.
apples—1 bag
cake—1 frozen
chips—1 large bag
canned ravioli—1 can
potato salad—1 lb tub
cole slaw—¾ lb tub
tuna—1 small can
mayonnaise—1 sm jar
celery—1 pkg

In composing the grocery list, certain presumptions or presuppositions were made. That is, several things were taken for granted. Among these are:

that I will be living
that I will go shopping to purchase these items
that I will want or need these items
that I will not be shopping for another week after this trip
that I am the only one who will be eating the foods listed
that I can pay for these purchases
that I will eat three meals per day, plus snacks
that the amounts purchased are sufficient for my intentions
that the items listed are available

The presuppositions of a list can be obscure or fairly self-evident. Here, of course, the analyst is the list-maker, so he has more to go on than the list itself in reconstructing the context of situation, but you can sometimes tell just from the list what sort of person the list-maker is. You don't have to be a Sherlock Holmes to read the items of a list as clues to the character of the list-maker and the circumstances in which he or she lives.

Using your powers of detection, write a characterization of this list-maker.

Shop for supper (scrapple, syrup)
Ask for scraps for Wicked Willie
Renew subsc to *The Friendly Agitator*
Write letters about the bombing
3:30 silent vigil, P.O.
5:00 Chiropractor (phone Marilyn about ride)
Start green afghan for Dan

Make out a list of planned activities for the day so that a reader could fairly deduce three things about the list-maker.

What are William I. Anderson's presuppositions? (See pages 53–55.)

Louise has argued that lists are "WASP" doings, and that the chief thing one can learn about a list-maker is that he or she does not feel powerless and is probably not powerless. Could you

make a list disproving this assertion? Does list-making play a role in consciousness-raising groups? Why? What is the difference between making lists and being able to make lists?

∾ What are the presuppositions of this mnemonic list?

Market Arch Race and Vine
Chestnut Walnut Spruce and Pine.

∾ Write out the directions for getting someplace by car or public transportation. Assume that the list will be used by someone who is familiar with the area.
Then write out the directions for the same trip assuming that the list will be used by someone from out of state.
Compare the lists: what presuppositions can you identify in list No. 1?

One meaning of meaning is *mediation;* another is *purpose.* To ask what a list *means* is to ask what it says and what it is for, what purposes it serves. A list can be used to remind you of what's to be done or to record what has been done. When you check off a list, it's like making another list. The composing process involves this kind of comparison between intention and achievement, between purposes that have been fulfilled and those that are still unrealized.

∾ Suppose that you are the chief organizer of a public meeting. You have four committees reporting to you. What are they? Compose the lists they submit to you. Then compose the master list that will guide your organizing efforts.

∾ Analyze your list. Here is a checklist for the purpose:

order
schematization
classes
purposes and needs
presuppositions

Would anyone else be able to use your master list? Why or why not?

Naming and Defining: Chaos and Dialectic

Listing is the composing process in a nutshell. Composing a list may be a simple act, something we do rather thoughtlessly; nevertheless, virtually every aspect of composing is represented in listing: naming, grouping, classifying, sequencing, ordering, revising. Each of these operations can involve the other, which is why it's so difficult to talk about composition: everything leads to everything else. A good course in composition could be entitled "Related Everything." The term we are using for the interdependence of all the operations involved in composing is *dialectic*. Your job as a composer is to guide the dialectic. If you can remember that composing begins with naming, which is a kind of defining, and ends with definition, which is a kind of naming, you'll have a slogan that can help you keep the dialectic lively.

Step 1. Write down at least 20 words at random in response to this figure. In your inner dialogue, you can ask, "What do I see?" and "What does this figure make me think of?" Take 5 minutes.

Step 2. Across from each noun, set down a verb appropriate to the figure; e.g., *tree . . . grows*.

Step 3. Choose one of your words and see if any of the other words cluster around it. What context of situation is being developed that allows this clustering to happen?

Step 4. What is the most general name (other than "thing"), the one which could include other names, the way "produce" includes parsnips, pears, lettuce, apples, etc.? If there is no such word in your chaos, can you

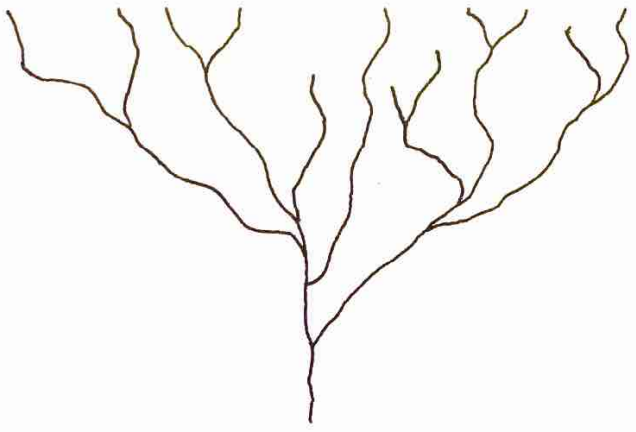


Fig. 1.

develop one by combining two or three words from your chaos? Can you add a new one?

Step 5. Choose two words from the chaos of names that seem farthest apart and write one sentence in which they both appear. Does this sentence create a context of situation or is it nonsense?

Step 6. Can you form two—and *only* two—classes that include *all* your names? (The names needn't be equally distributed.) How would you rename these sets?

Step 7. Using any of your original chaos and any new names generated as you grouped and sorted, write a few sentences in which you consider the figure.

Getting started when you're composing means getting names. They don't come out of the air: you generate them in responding to pictures, images, objects, questions, answers, statements—to what you see and read and hear and feel. These names provide the essential source for a writer: they provide chaos.

Here is a good description of chaos from Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein,* who explains in an introduction to a later edition of that famous tale just where it came from.

> Everything must have a beginning . . . and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. The Hindus give the world an elephant to support it, but they make the elephant stand upon a tortoise. Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded*: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances but cannot bring into being the substance itself. In all matters of discovery and invention, even of those that appertain to the imagination, we are continually reminded of the story of Columbus and his egg.† Invention consists in the capacity of

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* "Afforded" means "on hand"; the materials must be "there."

† "When Columbus' friends taunted him, saying that discovering America was really easy since one only had to point west and keep going, he asked them to stand an egg on end. They tried but failed. Then Columbus took the egg, flattened one end and stood it up. Naturally his friends protested that they had thought the egg could not be damaged. His friends had assumed for the egg problem limits which did not in fact exist. But they had also assumed that it would not be possible to point west and keep on sailing. This feat of navigation seemed easy only after Columbus had shown that their assumptions were imaginary." [Edward de Bono, *The Use of Lateral Thinking* (London, 1967), pp. 88–89.]

seizing on the capabilities of a subject and in the power of moulding and fashioning ideas suggested to it.

The chaos that invention—both critical and creative—needs is generated by naming. Naming is the primary act of composition: a writer needs to develop the habit of generating chaos as a way of getting the composing process started. In the Biblical account of Creation, the Lord God gives Adam the duty (honor? pleasure? right?) to name the beasts; it's a way of saying that language and creation enter the world at the same time.

Having a chaos on hand can save you from neatly ordering a few names into a strict "outline" and starting to "write it up" before you have done any real exploring. If you commit yourself to one scheme, one definite plan, then anything unexpected can only cause trouble. "Staying on the track" becomes a virtue in itself, despite the fact that that track might be leading into a swamp of the self-evident. But, of course, the aim of composing is not to tolerate chaos for its own sake but to learn to put up with it while you discover ways of emerging. That can be less difficult than generating chaos in the first place because, for one thing, the mind doesn't like chaos; ordering is its natural activity. A method of composing should help you take advantage of that fact.

You can think of ordering as a dialectic of chaos and form. Explanations of how compositions get made—whether they are of clay or marble, words or gestures, tones or lines—try to account for the origins and beginnings by finding some way of representing that dialectic. Here is one artist's comment:

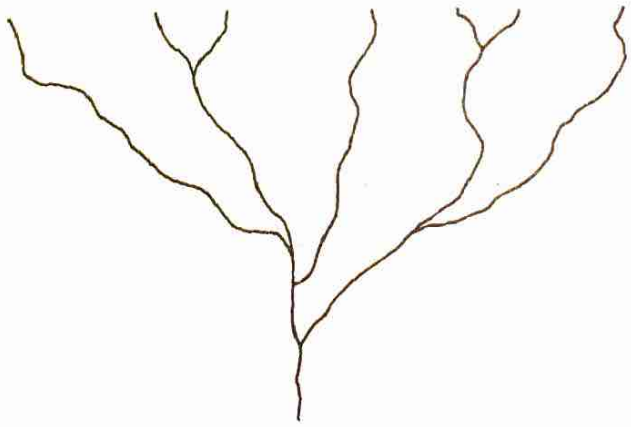
> I begin logically with chaos; it is the most natural start. In so doing, I feel at rest because I may, at first, be chaos myself. This is the maternal hand. . . . [Later] I give myself a conscious jolt and squeeze my way into the narrow confines of linear representation. Then everything goes quite well, for I have trained hard and thoroughly in that field. It's convenient to have the right to be chaos to start with.

Paul Klee is explaining that once he has a chaos, he can then deliberately choose to "squeeze [his] way into the narrow confines of linear representation." Translated into more general terms, Klee's description lets us see that a chaos both affords the materials and encourages the ordering process. Klee knew that he needed those "confines," but he also knew that by themselves, without chaos, they were powerless. No composer can choose un-

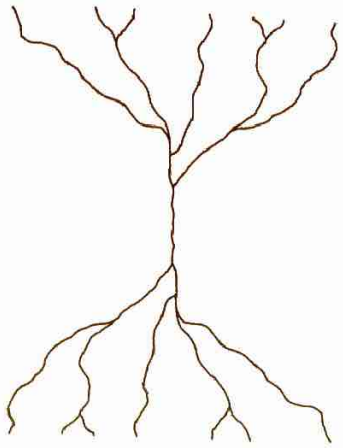
til he has a sense of the alternatives, and they are defined by limits. Those "confines" Klee speaks of provided for him the limits that are essential to creation. The best formulation I know of this principle of composition is Allen Tate's definition of a poet as "one who is willing to come under the bondage of limitations—if he can find them."

The ways we order a chaos of names are the same as those by which we make sense of the world: we see and know in terms of space, time, and causality. The philosopher Kant called these the "categories of understanding." If you check through the words in your chaos, you'll find that every one of them names Fig. 1 as a *spatial* form or a *temporal* form or as something that *causes* something or is itself an *effect*. The spatial form of Fig. 1 is obvious: it has a shape; it occupies space. What kind of spatial form depends on who's looking and what kind of setting the figure is given. The words you set down in your chaos probably include names for that shape like *tree* or *river mouth;* if you have a word like *lightning,* you can see that the spatial form takes on a temporal dimension. A picture or a drawing of lightning records its shape, but it also captures a moment in the passage of time. You can represent a streak of lightning by means of an arrangement of lines, but that pattern also stands for the moment in which the lightning flashed across the sky, the happening itself. Whether the spatial or temporal aspect of a figure is emphasized depends on how you look at it, how you construe it.

Here is Irene's comment on Fig. 1:



Assuming, for the moment, the tree-like qualities of this grouping of lines, the point of convergence (the trunk) is not grounded; it is in a suspended state of imbalance. If incomplete then, this "down" design might be more apropos as:

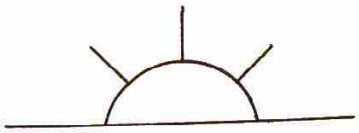


(Grandma Moses was asked how she painted. She answered, "Down. I paint the sky, then the trees, then the land.")

The way you look at something creates a context, and once a context is supposed, further particulars are suggested; that's the dialectic in operation. Matching verbs with nouns is a first step towards tentatively setting up a context. *Tree/grows* suggests, perhaps, other trees. You can set one tree next to another—and another and another; the line of trees is being inspected by a man (or is it a bear?) in a Scout hat with a chin strap; there's a little camp fire smoking in the foreground: pretty soon, you'll have a poster warning of forest fires.

Here are some assisted invitations to construe and construct.

Add lines (all straight) that convert these two lines to a sketch that represents something you could name and that would be recognizable.



What happens to the way you see the figure above when you name a location? How many events can you think of that this figure could represent?

Whenever you watch something happening, you are seeing/knowing in spatial, temporal, and/or causal terms. Consider how you interpret the trajectory of a baseball; the flight of a broad-winged hawk; the track of a spaceship.

I once asked a poet if she could name something that would not fit into the categories of space, time, and/or causality and she said almost immediately, "My eyes." Another poet might say that eyes represent the interaction of all three. Write a short paragraph (or poem) that gives form to one or the other conviction.

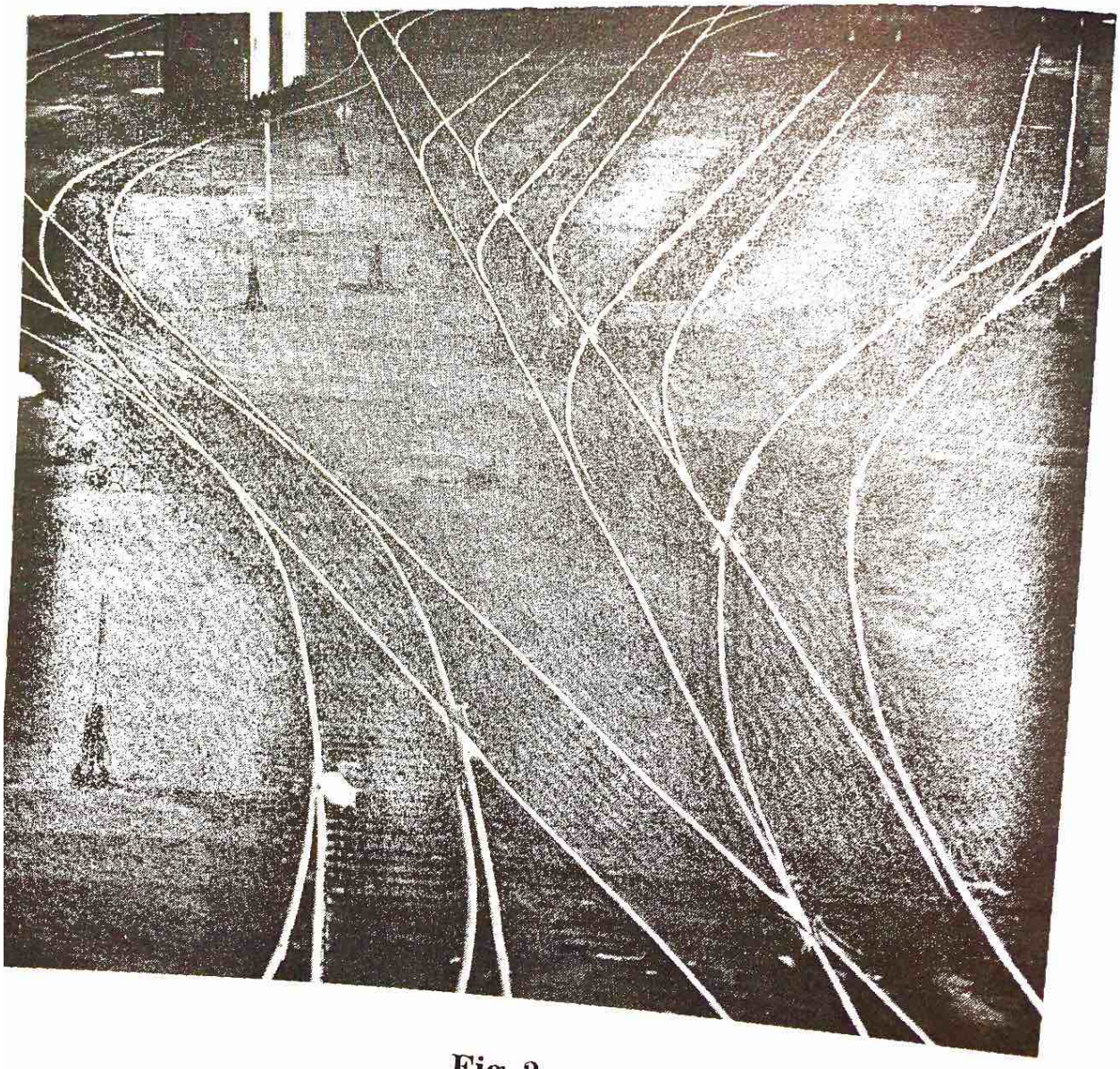


Fig. 2.

The more things a figure could represent, the more generalized it is, just as "*produce*" is a more general term than "*fruits and vegetables*," which is more general than "*apples and carrots*." See if you can develop a term—a word or a phrase—that is general enough to include Figs. 2, 3, and 4 and specific enough to exclude Figs. 5 and 6. Is the term you decide on the same as the one you identified in Step 4, p. 63–64?

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

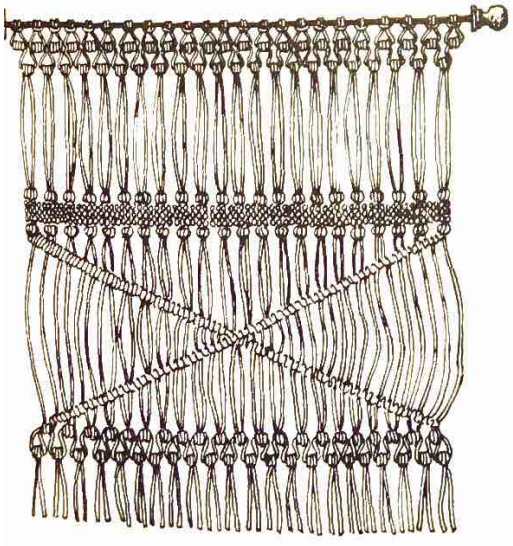


Fig. 5.

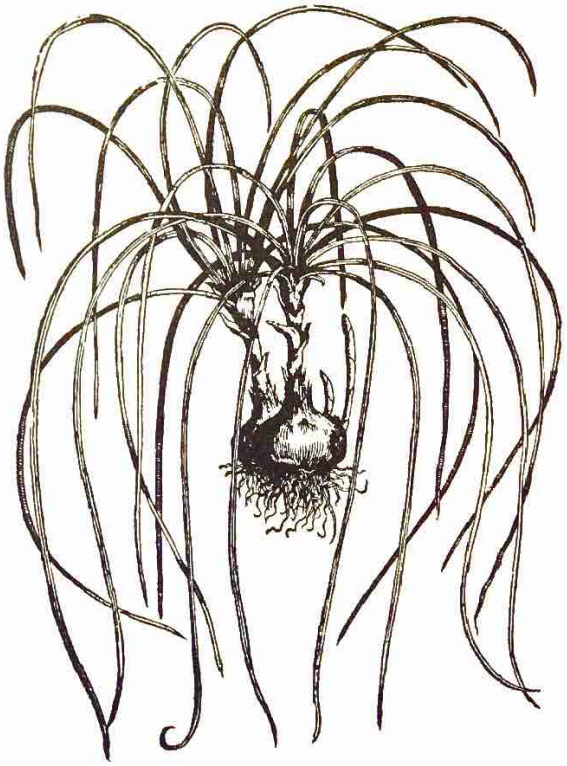


Fig. 6.

If you look at a tree in winter, you see both the bare branches and the pattern they make. That pattern is what the tree has in common with anything else that has that shape and structure. The pattern is the figure the tree makes, and you see it precisely because you see resemblances in shape and outline and structure between the bare tree and similar forms. Sometimes the pattern will be more emphatic than the object. If you look down from a high cliff or an airplane and see the mouth of a river, it may look like a triangle; from that perspective, the design the river makes is more apparent than the particular details of mudcracks, marinas, and waves. Indeed, the characteristic shape of a river mouth is called a *delta,* after the Greek letter of that name: Δ.

A bare tree might not look like a triangle because the linear pattern of its branches is more apparent than the outline, but a bare tree does look like a river mouth in which tributaries, however faint, are discernible. The bare tree and the river mouth both have a central element with subsidiary elements going off from it—*branching* off. The class name that gathers these examples and everything else that is organized in this way is *branching system.*

HDWDWW? and Opposing: Specification and Substantiation

The composing process is a continuum: seeing and thinking and writing are all ways of forming. We begin to make sense of the world in the very act of perception. The process of selection and differentiation is implicit in seeing; forming is dependent on seeing how one thing is like another, how it is different from others. This same process of re-cognition continues when we name in response to spatial and temporal forms. Selection and differentiation—forming—is implicit in naming just as it is in perceiving.

Most writing you will do in course work will not be in response to things—objects, landscapes, figures, etc.—but to ideas. Nevertheless, since you don't become somebody else when you sit down to write, it makes sense to claim that what you do when you interpret an idea or a passage of writing is not fundamentally different from what you do when you interpret an object. Writing involves the same acts of mind as does making sense of the world: you construct the same way you construe.