

INCRETION

Brian Strang

Spuyten Duyvil, \$10

Appeared in *Rain Taxi*,
Volume 9, No. 2, Summer 2004 (#34)

by Andrew Joron

It is perhaps curious that, for the title of his first full-length collection, Brian Strang has chosen the colorless technical term *incretion*. Yet its dictionary definition, "internal secretion," is suggestive enough--might language be compared to an organism that internally secretes poetry? Moreover, the word "secret" offers itself as an incretion within "incretion." Thus, Strang's book is crowned by a word that refers to something distilled and, by association, hidden.

The title also serves as an indicator of Strang's poetic method: his lines and sentences flow away from denotative meaning, turning to "reflection in a forbidden turbulent eddy." Shadowy scenarios of social oppression and alienation are processed into language-events linked by an abstract seriality. "Matter has gone up in a breeze, a night of lights, of grave silences, of silhouettes moving around a fire. These figures try to connect."

Strang, like other post-Language poets, makes use of metonymic jump-cuts to defeat an ideologically-imposed discursive unity. At the same time, his work remains haunted by the presence of a subjective observer, albeit one reduced to the extreme passivity of a recording instrument: "A split eye opens, trying not to become attached, not to feel anything." Strang's dispassionate observation-language ultimately enacts a moral choice, for it constitutes a mode of *bearing witness* that allows alterity to manifest itself: "Move away from the favorite words toward a vacant hole in your language: something new has come into existence here."

In fact, the first-person pronoun "I" is nowhere to be found in Strang's collection; instead, with rigorous consistency, the poetic subject has been transformed into an inter-subjective "you." This use of second person gives priority to horizontal (rather than hierarchical) relations within the social reality of language: indeed, such mutuality appears to be this work's organizing principle. More than most poets, Strang is concerned with constructing a lyric language in which all techniques of domination have been deactivated. To approach a rare and delicate otherness, it seems, the poet must hold his breath. In this respect, *Incretion* can be compared to the quiet, minimalist, yet intensely engaged compositions of Morton Feldman. Within the hypnotic hush of his words, we hear the advent of "something new."