

THE POETRY PROJECT

The Newsletter of the Poetry Project, Ltd. at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery Vol. 144 FEB-MAR 1992

A Conversation with Chris Tysh

by Lynn Crawford

Lynn Crawford: Let's start with your new book, *COAT OF ARMS*. I'm fascinated by your indexing of specific words in a work of literature.

Chris Tysh: The basis of my project, *COAT OF ARMS*, was a derailing of heraldic language. I happened to be in the Detroit Public Library, where I came across a beautiful book on heraldic tradition. I started reading the legend for each code. To me, they sounded like Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, like the most fantastic avant-garde writing you could think of. The index you mention is a heraldic index and it is there to indicate my debt, my gratitude, to that particular tradition and language. All of the words listed in the index are heraldic terms, even if they sound as if they are part of everyday speech. For example, the word "bar" is not an establishment that sells alcoholic beverages but a particular pattern on a heraldic blazon; "or" means gold, it is not the preposition; "argent" is a heraldic term for silver; "gules," "band," all of these are old Gallic words. The index indicates their source. It is a debt of gratitude. I didn't invent these words; these words exist in a particular context.

Let me say it is not that I am not very well versed in this tradition, I just recontextualized the whole discourse that was all from a regular book. In a way, I deliberately misread the heraldic terms. Look, the heraldic tradition is very old, and it is very phallocratic, very class oriented and masculine in its rendition. Who is even in a place to pass on a legend? Who is in the right position to have the writer inscribe a name? So I was interested in derailing the "name of the father." My dedication to the whole book is to my mother in the absence of the father. The father is always there because he is dead, and he is the one who gave the right to inscribe the arms. The question I'm asking is: What happens if we want to have a code?

LC: "We" meaning...

CT: Let's say an imaginary female subject. What shape would her code be, and what would I write on that code; would I have lipstick traces, or would I have parts of the traditional code. In a way this is what I did, I took a traditional selection of codes and cut them up to try to reconstruct a code of my own. This in itself is a critical project because as soon as you rip an old code in order to make something new, you are really obliged to pay attention to the shape and the condition that allowed that first code--we are using code in a metaphorical way here--to appear. This forces you to analyze everything about it so the new product you come up with really does not resemble in the least the whole thing you've displaced. It really is a critical discourse but via poetic language. It sounds very ambitious, maybe, you know, too ambitious, but this is how I think about this project.

LC: To create a different "code" you identify the traditional, dominating one then chisel away at it.

CT: Yes. This is exactly where the fallacy appears when people think they have the choice of their words: the whole ideology behind self expression in, let's say, creative writing workshops across the nation--"I'm going to write a poem about my experience." But as we know from different contemporary theories, we are already "spoken," so there is nothing innocent about this self expression. In order to really pay attention to your medium I think you have to undress that through which you are already spoken; you have to really take all these codes and start chiseling them as you said before.

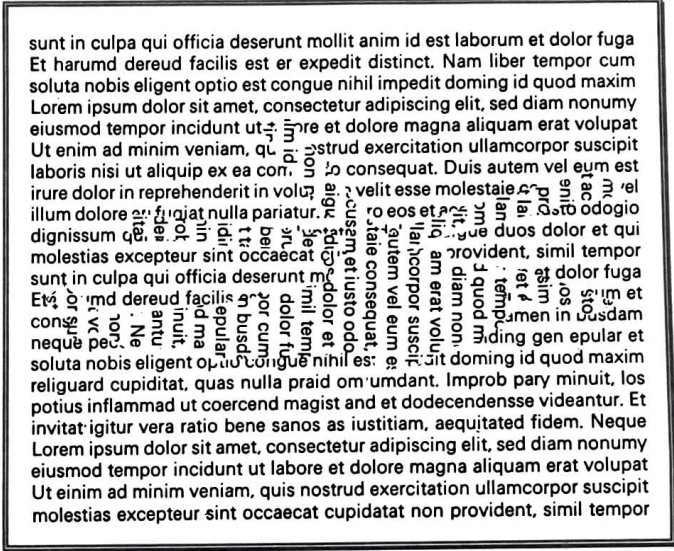
I always feel very strange even when I use the first person pronoun; what is the paper "I" in our poems? I know for the longest of times I forbade myself from even using the first person pronoun in my poems because I always found it extremely fictive, and it can be understood at face value, you know when you have a poem that says, "I and my mother," some people imagine that it is the empiric you and your empirical mother, and my way out of this was not to use it for several years. The idea of a personal "I" in a poem is allied discursively with the idea of authenticity, truth, and identity of the self. I have always been extremely suspicious of these concepts.

LC: Suspicious because these concepts are sometimes understood as being divorced from all ideological considerations?

CT: Yes, and the agency of ideology to hold the system secretly exists beyond all borders. Alice Jardine has the simplest definition of ideology. I believe she says that it is the glue that holds the system, but, of course, we do not see the glue.

LC: This reminds me of something I heard you say once in a lecture, something like "Why should we row back to the shores of identity...?"

CT: See what I was saying in that talk about feminist discourse in America was that it seemed to me a little bit rowing back, metaphorically speaking again, from where post modernist thought was taking us, in that it was going back to an essentialist position: "we women are like this, we women want this," as if we had very firm, delineated identities and contours of everything, whereas I thought post modernism was dynamiting all these solid bases. That is why we had deconstruction, and it seems some forms of feminist discourse were ignoring this deconstruction as it was happening. I always found it a little bit dangerous to essentialize women, or to essentialize any type of cultural "other:" "Women are this, workers are that, whites are this, orientals are that." It is always a dangerous strategy because you limit that particular "other" into a very impoverishing and falsifying realm that is simply not true.



"jJpPy" 1991 (side one) Renee McPhail

LC: Deconstruction can be a bad word.

CT: Yes, you have to do the quotation sign in the air.

LC: I understand deconstruction as grappling with developments that are quite understandable: given that so much has been built up, before we build anymore let's ask what it is we have built up, what pieces were used, how did they fit together, maybe let's take them apart.

CT: Absolutely, it is as simple as that.

LC: Then why is it often viewed with such suspicion?

CT: I would venture to say one thing that bothers certain people is the lingo. There is a certain form of discourse which seems alienating, but you know when thought is a little bit demanding it demands a demanding expression. Okay. On the other hand, I think that what is possibly bothersome is that it is not a thing, it is not a philosophy, so much as it is a form of intervention. You cannot grab it, people have difficulty in seizing it, because it is not really a particular text but a form in intervention. In that way I think it is allied with a certain form of Lacanian psychoanalysis, it is transference, it is a form of intervention. The analysis intervenes on certain forms of discourse; deconstruction intervenes on certain forms of thought. But it is not a thing in itself that you can bash with, run away with, etc., so maybe that kind of inescapable form is bothersome because people don't exactly know how to make it their own.

Deconstruction can be explained in a fairly pragmatic way: it is something to use as a critical tool, something to use to open up texts. Derrida says it beautifully somewhere, I don't have the quote exactly in my head, but somewhere he talks about texts being, how does he put it, like a machine with multiple reading heads. A text is just another machine with multiple reading heads, you just keep opening another text, and there is this incredible intertextuality that links everything together, which I find quite liberating.

LC: And this form of intervention might cut into and make apparent the workings of ideology?

CT: Yes, into the incredibly powerful workings of ideology. Ideology represents/misrepresents certain subjects. It is a platitude to say but there are a few organizing tools like race and gender and class and we cannot escape these.

LC: Grammar?

CT: Yes, grammar.

LC: I find the grammar in *COAT OF ARMS* to be uncanny; it is fractured, but there is a logic to it, and it places such plush, lush language.

CT: I don't know how much that has to do with this particular project or with my take on language. I think I am interested in the overgrowth of language, I don't write sparse little linguistic objects. I think I pack them with goods because I am very much seduced by the excess of the signifier, but it also has to do with the fact I am not really telling a story. Okay, there are parts of biography: the widow in *COAT OF ARMS* is the presence of my mother in some of these pieces, and the child is sometimes me in some way or other, but each time I find myself narrating in a fairly linear way, there is this other imp that comes and denarrates it, so maybe this plushness is also a strategy to sort of hide the figure in the tapestry. I am interested in that contradictory movement to offer a bit of narrative because I don't think you can have totally non-representational writing, that would be sterile, so I do offer little pictures, little stories, then sort of half erase them.

LC: *COAT OF ARMS* begins with the word "Finally."

CT: Yes, this is the imp of perversity here at work. I just like to start the first page with something that would come at the end, it is just silly.

LC: "Finally there were various plastics..."

CT: Actually, that first sentence came out of a very precise project. I had given myself the project of describing my house when I was 15, sort of like a Bernadette Mayer project which I've always found fabulous and extremely fertile for the poet. I thought, "I am going to take one year," and you know, 15 is a horrendous year. I wanted to throw myself out of the window, I mean it is the pits for a teenager. I lived in Paris and I lived in this very small apartment with my mother on the fourth floor--a teeny apartment, a teeny kitchen--and I remember saying to my mother that since we were poor there were no beautiful objects, there were no gratuitous objects, like mink, or a vase, or I don't know what my imagination was working out of, but I was going to describe all these stupid plastic things that we had in the kitchen. But you know I could not actually stick to my project. See I always derail my own organizing patterns.

LC: Just when I, as a reader, think I may have a grip on one of these sentences, I don't. It slips away. So I start separating word parts, thinking of what words are absent.

CT: That's a rule of signification, that the absent words also bear on the meaning of the ones that are present, that is exactly what Saussure talks about, that there are no positive meanings in language, that meaning only exists in the difference between "put" and "putt."

LC: The piece you are working on right now, *car men*, a play in *d*, fiddles a lot with type of thing.

CT: It is hard for me to get a sense of what that is like because I am right in the midst of it.

LC: "d" stands for Detroit, which you say you see as a feminine presence.

CT: Well the title is *car men*, obviously I'm playing on Bizet's opera, so I thought, "Well if this is Carmen, who is Carmansita? Who is the beautiful girl?" So I decided it was "d" which is why she has a lower case letter. I do think of Detroit as part of the hard edge and the label "murder town" or whatever it used to be called. I see that as a powerful and yet feminine presence. It is a very arbitrary representation because it came from a literary project. I thought, "I want to write *car men*, what do I do?" The *car men* of Detroit are one thing, but I thought the whole city ought to be metaphorized as a woman, and what kind of woman would that be? I see her as some kind of promiscuous woman but very powerful, though eventually I feel it is the role of a victim, you know, she has to die on stage, I mean that is her destiny, and I think Detroit is right now very close to being killed on stage, but there is still an incredible kind of power. The power comes from knowing who is doing the killing, I think, and knowing how "d" comes to be who she is. This sounds like a big sociological analysis and obviously my writing is not really investigative writing, it is poetic. *car men*, a play in *d*, is a poetic take on the city of Detroit, and I would like to believe there is some truth to that.

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"jPpY" 1991 (side two) Renee McPhail

*crude though they were a man and his class
bid us review the crowded buffet, deep
cleavage in the word acumen. We consent to wet
issues, portico salad days following sampling.
A greeness we were to lose in yellow spencer,
balmacaan, hottest pink tube skirts of falsetto
train. In a broad sense the point of departure
is always on top these vamps, pin-ups jump
the adored queue before jersey factories open.
The head is now speaking from a balcony.
Comparison breaks down, weighs the music rack
with Everything Happens To Me. If proportions
be grouped, become preface for occupying the bar
and chevron. Canvas sexual wreck. Brides lecture
husbands in neglect and customary signs of affection.
Any other sentence--amaurotic breasts--is a plot.
Per pale azure and sable, two hubbies in chief proper
and in base a wave running to wood.*

*Azure: in each, a bed nebuly and slashing between
as many propositions or.*

*Gules, on a plain bend her hair pendant from its ribbon,
couped at the neck.*

*Or, and for distinction, a slip charged with mirrors,
all in pretence.*

Out of cloud, turned up ermine, a cavalcade.

Chris Tysh is a poet living and working in Detroit. Quotes above are from her newest book, *COAT OF ARMS*, forthcoming from Station Hill Press.

BOOK REVIEWS

TED BERRIGAN, TALKING IN TRANQUILITY: INTERVIEWS WITH TED BERRIGAN

Edited by Stephen Ratcliffe and
Leslie Scalapino
Avenue B (P.O. Box 542, Bolinas, CA 94924)
O Books (5729 Clover Drive, Oakland, CA
94618), 1991. 202 pages; \$10.50, paper.

Writing a review of this book for the Poetry Project Newsletter is a curious undertaking since most readers, one would assume, will have seen the book already, or will soon, and in any case will surely have formed their own strong opinions about it. I personally think that Ted Berrigan was not only a major poet but, together with writers like Spicer and Duncan, a great teacher who, simply by talking about poetry in certain ways, transformed the manner in which it is understood. For several months he and I had offices next to each other, and in that time, he absolutely changed my own understanding of poetry and the work I was doing. That isn't to say that I always agreed with him. In fact I often didn't. But Ted never seemed especially interested in agreement. He wasn't looking for disciples. He was interested in poetry, and he would not find it if all he got were people who never discovered their own opinions and their own language. "I believe in the ego--it's an Irish trait--and the ego finds it difficult to be subservient to teachers except at a certain distance," he said in his interview with Anne Waldman and Jim Cohn. He was also from New England, which at its best, at least many years ago when he and I grew up there, left people to do things pretty much as they were inclined--hence town meetings where, ideally, everyone had a chance to speak and no one was in charge.

I think that Ted had a town-meeting theory of poetry, where everyone has a right to speak. "Jack Kerouac quotes the Buddha as saying: *Avoid the Authorities*," he told Tom Savage, and added, "I always think this is especially good advice for a poet." It's also, of course, something that is "not always possible," but at least the direction is the right one.

In that case, however, how does one explain Ted's association with a very particular group of New York poets? The answer, he might have said, would be to read their work, their differences from each other being greater than any similarities. "I invented a group because I needed somebody to talk to," he said in one of the interviews collected here, and "how you get a group, I think," is to "start a magazine." The magazine he started was *C*, which, like *Open Space*, *Black Mountain Review*, and so forth, published the work of a certain group of poets rather than present a "united front." But anyone who thinks that Ted saw himself only in terms of that group, as crucial to him as it was, might, to begin, consider his poetry and the vast range of artists and poets whom he discusses enthusiastically in these interviews--Marcel Duchamp, Frank O'Hara, Conrad Aiken, Jack Kerouac, Edwin Denby, Philip Whalen, Thomas Wolfe, William S. Burroughs, and T.S. Eliot, among others.

All this is obvious to anyone who knew Ted and knows his poetry, but the personality which made it possible is not something one finds very often, and it is this which makes *Talking in Tranquility* such an important book about what poetry is, or can be. At a time when a great many poets seem certain that, individually, they have the only answer, the only way to do things, when communication is often at some level antagonistic and presumptuous, it is particularly important to hear someone whose point was never to dictate the way other poets should do their work--unless, of course, it was to point out that they should not take orders from anyone other than themselves.

For Ted, I think, everything had to be in some sense personal, for when things aren't, one is readily victimized by theory and rules, hierarchy and abstraction. From Frank O'Hara, he learned "that you had to talk the way you felt." "I wanted," he said, "to make an object with words which was true and I wanted it to be about how I was feeling just before I wrote the poem and while I was writing it." "One of my principal desires," he also said, "is to

make my poems be like my life." During the years I knew Ted, the big discussions among professors of literature seemed always to involve those post-structuralist theories that taught students that a poem was anything but what they actually heard or read, and I used to wonder what the authorities would make of Ted's works and opinions. In the town-meeting theory of poetry, however, it really wouldn't matter what they thought--at least as long as their authority and all the influence that comes with it didn't prevent poetry itself from being written. They had the right to speak, but whatever their influence, one didn't have to agree with them, or necessarily even to listen.

Certainly the professors were not listening to Ted. Even today you will not find any of his work in the major anthologies edited for high school and university courses. The students are the ones who lose here, but if they are really interested, sooner or later they will find the poems and, I hope, this book, and when they do, they will find a voice very different from the ones to which they have been listening.

In these interviews, Ted speaks for himself and doesn't set down the rules. "The thing that interested me about the interview was form," he said, and for him the point seems to have been to see what would happen, where things would lead. Not surprisingly, he was as good at conducting an interview as at being interviewed--a fact obvious even in the truncated version of his Kerouac interview published in the *Paris Review*. He also made up an interview with John Cage (published by Peter Schjeldahl in *Mother*) that was so good that no one, except Cage, seems to have realized it wasn't the real thing. What that implies is a respect for others equal to the respect one hopes one deserves one's self. Again, it's the town-meeting theory of poetry.

I wish that *Talking in Tranquility* also included Ted's interview with Mark Hillinghouse, which was originally published in *The World* 39. I remember that when that interview was done, Ted commented that Hillinghouse had "really done his homework," and in fact although the interview covers much the same ground as others printed here, it provides a good summary of Ted's ideas, and it is worth searching out. But aside from this, I have no reservations about *Talking in Tranquility* at all; together with Anne Waldman's *Nice to See You: Homage to Ted Berrigan*, published earlier this year, it is for me as important as anything that can be said about poetry now. We should hope only that a book of his lectures will follow soon--and, most important of all, the collected poems. There are surely few projects, if any, as important--particularly with all those poets now who seem to think that the only poems worth writing are the ones they write themselves. According to the town-meeting theory of poetry, that may be the only opinion that is always wrong.

Dear Ted, we hear you every day.

-Ed Foster

MUZZLE THYSELF

Lauren Fairbanks
Dalkey Archive Press, 1991.
64 pages; \$9.95.

You know you've read a good poet when you finish her book and stare at her picture and wonder what she looks like when she moves.

Then you scan the hints in the book. You wonder if she wrote the blurb on the back cover, especially: "Fairbanks views herself as a point on the line: somewhere between imbecile bohemian and obtuse academic..."

And why does she want us to know--in her biographical note--that her husband is Indian? (His name is Madan Jagernauth).

She mentions she grew up in Scranton. *My father* grew up in Scranton. I've been there 122 times. It's a sad, lazy city with souvenir ashtrays made of coal. Is Scranton *present* in these poems?

Funny, for the first half of the book, I thought she was lesbian, till I got to:

I'm a waste can for sperm of the moment//with
a tipped lid./Screw it/on//and the world is
confident.

in the untitled poem on page 53.

There were times I thought, "She *must* have been a
punk," then I came upon:

Eureka//Pick up that safety pin./Spy//on
yellow-shoed girls//in the proper tweeds.

Sharpened pencil./Stuck in my eye.

I know I'm sane//when reminded//someone
saw a sky dragon//in the year 755.

Very little color was discussed//that year./In
755//they wore black and grey.

In the twentieth century//I stopped being
mortified.

Punk is ugly//with a touch of strength./Is ugly
turning exhibitionist./Last year you were
punk./This year you're just/plain ugly.

I was sure she was black at other times. Perhaps
"Lauren Fairbanks" is a pseudonym for a circle of
friends who write poems separately, then collate
them. One lives in Miami (there is an inexplic-
able Miami theme in the book), one hates men, one
knows "fly talk"...

What does Lauren *do* in Plano, Texas?

Will I someday tell my children, "I was the first to
herald Lauren Fairbanks?"

-Sparrow

TRIMMINGS

Harryette Mullen
Tender Buttons Press
P.O.B. 1290 Cooper Station
NY 10276-1290, 1991.

The following poem appears on the last page of
Harryette Mullen's *Trimnings*, where it makes ex-
plicit the nature of the project which precedes it:

Thinking thought to be a body wearing language
as//clothing or language a body of thought which
is a soul //or body the clothing of a soul, she is
veiled in//silence. A veiled, unavailable body
makes an available//space.

Mullen might almost be paraphrasing Paul de Man,
summing up an ancient association of language with
drapery:

The language of tropes (which is the specular
language //of autobiography) is indeed like the
body, which is//like its garments, the veil of the
soul as the garment//is the sheltering veil of the
body.

The slippage between substance and ornament,
material body and material word, is what fuels these
quirky, sly poems about bodies and their trimmings
(that which is eliminated or added on). In a series of
interlocking prose poems, Mullen investigates the
mystery of the body's relation to what both covers it
and stands for it, those draperies which at once dictate
and mimic human shape and gesture. Mullen's
language is rich with innuendo, schooled in the
nuances of texture and tone, and hip to the subtleties
and absurdities of fashion argot. Folds, pleats, ruffles
and bows, sheaths, straps, sandals and slits, flounces
and furbelows, bindings and hems, gauzes, laces, nets
and veils: all the equipment of self-invention and
pedestrian artifice is here. But more pointedly, these
poems attend to the friction which prevails at margins
and edges: "Openings, hem, sleeve. Borders on
edges where skin stops, or begins. Fancy trim....My
dress falls over my head. A shadow overtakes me."
It is clear that when Mullen speaks of "a veiled,
unavailable body" she has in mind more than the
classical trope of words as cover or ornament of
which de Man speaks: her image calls to mind
W.E.B. Dubois' famous description of black
Americans living double lives, "behind a veil." Add
to this a perception of femininity as itself a form of

(continued on page 4)

BOOK REVIEWS (continued)

TRIMMINGS (continued from page 3)

masquerade, and the poems which the blurbs on the back of the book call "charming" and "guileless" begin to hint at unexpected power and point, and not a little guile. Mullen's riddles are clever, cheeky, funny even raunchy, and disturbing in ways that their charm belie.

Comparisons of *Trimmings* to Stein's *Tender Buttons* are inevitable: the poems have in common a sense of the material charm of female culture and a fondness for animated objects and metonymical wordplay. Moreover, Mullen shares Stein's cryptic eroticism, her fascination with the witty multiplicity of feminine sexual markers. Indeed, *Trimmings* is peppered with *Tender Buttons*' signature words and puns (waist/waste, pink/pinking, trim/trimming) and picks up on that poem's repeated references to pinkness, whiteness and weddings. Mullen has an ear for the way everyday words and phrases jostle each other inside talk. Notice, for example, how she captures the strange interchangeability of the words for women and the words for what they wear:

Lips, clasped together. Old leather fastened with a/little snap. Strapped, broke. Quick snatch, in a/clutch....

or

Decorative scrap. A rib, on loan. Fine fabric//finished at edges. Fit for tying or trimming. Narrow//band, satin, a velvet strip. A ribbon wound around her/waist. A glancing bow. Red ribbon woven through her, //blue-ribbon blonde. For valor, shred of dignity. A//dress torn to ribbons.

As these riddling slippages make clear, violence lurks beneath such linguistic confusion. Talk of cutting, stripping, tying, slashing, piercing, and splitting gives teeth to what might otherwise seem mere sensual and witty wordplay. For Mullen is interested in more than the complex beauties of dress: her language fingers the social fabric of "women in breaches" and "besmirched" skirts, red dresses and "high hats," "man-made fabrics" and narrow "sandals." These vignettes remind us how often we make our clothes do the talking, charging them with force and attitude, moral color and social muscle, as well as with wit and style. And they warn of the dangerous ease of performing the de Manian slide from garment to body and body to soul without recalling that bodies too can be disguises:

Tender white kid, off-white tan. Snug black leather//second skin. Fits like a love, an utter other uttered./Bag of tricks, slight hand preserved, a dainty. A/solid color covers while rubber is protection. Tight is/tender, softness cured. Alive and warm, some animal//hides. Ghosts wear fingers, delicate wrists.

Kid gloves? Or kids in love? The white and the black, rubber protected? Or kids goats and udders like inflated rubber gloves, caressed into yielding "a dainty?" What is this "cured" skin, this animal hide (or in hiding)? People wear animals, "ghosts wear fingers." Who are these ghosts? The sleight-of-hand minstrel men, those white-gloved "spooks" in black-face? Or perhaps Michael Jackson, the kid with the "off-white tan," thrilling in snug black leather and one glove. Meaning nags beneath such confusions. The elbowing of incompatible image and context suggests the friction between permeable realms: human/animal, black/white, male/female, body/garment, visible/invisible. The simple glove, as a "second skin," is thus charged with cultural, and racial, significance.

Race appears in Mullen's poems as the ultimate trimming, the margin, the border, one of those "accessories [which] multiply a look" and which multiplies meanings. Look at the way Mullen tells the names of colors and of women tell the whole story of black and white in the American kitchen:

Her red and white, white and blue banner manner. Her/red and white all over black and blue. Hannah's/bandanna flagging her down in the kitchen with Dinah./with Jemima. Someone in the kitchen I know.

We recognize at once old glory and old jokes, syrupy logos and folk songs, but the eerie knowingness of that last line tells us that there is yet something more to be known. These images, like those throughout *Trimmings*, are black and white and begging to be read all over. As she asks in one poem, "When a dress is red, is there a happy ending. Is there murmur and satisfaction. Silence or a warning." The readings of dress performed in *Trimmings* offer satisfactions and warnings; their loaded silences are both witty and charged.

The best example of this style of multiple edges, all cutting, is in Mullen's reworking of the well-known section of *Tender Buttons* entitled "A Petticoat": "A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm." Lightness yoked to whiteness, and set against an inky stain; darkness making visible the charm of the rose. Mullen's rewriting fleshes out the picture:

A light white disgraceful sugar looks pink, wears an/air, pale compared to shadow standing by. To plump/recliner, naked truth lies. Behind her shadow wears/her color, arms full of flowers. A rosy-charm is pink./And she is ink. The mistress wears no petticoat or//leaves. The other in shadow, a large, pink dress.

The picture that suddenly looms into view, such that we may wonder at not having seen it in Stein's line all along, is Manet's *Olympia*. The distance from "pink" to "ink" tells in the barely pink dress of the black maid, and the pinkly bare body of her white mistress, only just trimmed by a ribbon at the neck. This is only one of several meditations in *Trimmings* on the nature of the nude (and of the pinkish color which garment manufacturers insist on calling "nude"), that vulnerable vehicle burdened with beauty's changing definitions. But in Mullen's vision, "naked truth lies." It is not the supine pink-and-white lovely who carries the meaning of Manet's picture, but the ink colored servant in the background whose dress mimics her mistress's skin, clothing her in the nakedness of the other. As the picture's (and the poem's) "ink," she writes large a truth about power in the bedroom which only the pink veil, and not the available pink body, can lay bare. How, Mullen seems to ask, can we think long about femininity and clothing without remembering all the black women who spent their lives dressing white women and standing in their shadows?

The aesthetics of pink and white which dominates Western notions of beauty troubles these poems again and again, where "blushing" and "flushing," pink girls and white weddings abound. Mullen's reworking of the color scheme of *Tender Buttons* as part of the racial politics of feminine beauty suggests that in spirit these poems may owe more to Gwendolyn Brooks than to Gertrude Stein. I am thinking of the lesser-known Brooks, the Brooks who in "The Ballad of Chocolate Mabbie," "The Anniad," and "A Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" worried the iconography of the "milk-white maid" like a sore tooth. This is the same Brooks who, in "The Anniad," invented a complex idiom of visual collage to link the surface qualities of poetic language to the surfaces of the body and the veils and revealings of its clothes. This emphasis on the imbrication of literary aesthetics with racial and sexual aesthetics, and the dense, sensuous, elliptical language in which it is brought home, is an aspect of Brooks's poetry which Mullen, unlike the majority of Brooks's admirers, seems to have fully absorbed. Compare, for example the phrasing and rhythm of the following lines from *Trimmings*:

Rim and fringe are hers. Who fancies frills. Whose finery//is a summer frock....Who can hear her voice, so soft....

with these from "The Anniad":

Hunts a further fervor now. Shudders for his impotence. Chases roil and vehemence, Chases stilt and straps to vie With recession of the sky.

I call attention to this connection not to suggest that Mullen's poetry is in any way imitative or derivative of Brooks's, but to illustrate that *Trimmings* has its roots in more than one source, and that in many ways Mullen's project originates in concerns very different from Stein's.

Recognizable women appear, although in veiled and riddling fashion, throughout *Trimmings*: the "alabaster bust" of the woman in the White Shoulders perfume ad; Pearl of *The Scarlet Letter*, herself a pale jewel, her mother a walking embroidery; Dora, the "girl, in white, between the lines," who "slips out the door," her "name ador[ing] Freudian slip;" Oscar Wilde's "sphinxes without secrets;" the girls of the Julie Andrews song, "My Favorite Things," riffed upon in classic jazz fashion ("Girls in white sat in with blues-saddened slashers"); and, perhaps most telling, Josephine Baker, that other nude, "In feathers, in bananas, in her own skin, intelligent body attached to a gaze." It is this "intelligent body" attached to a gaze which articulates the paradoxical position of the woman who is both seen and looking in these poems. It is her look—clownish and sexy and knowing all at once—that takes hold of the "available space" of these pages, leading us between and within the lines where black and white is the stuff of both race and writing.

-Stacy Hubbard

Works cited:

Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems*
Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement," in
The Rhetoric of Romanticism
W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*
Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*, in *Selected Writings*

READING THE WRITTEN; IMAGE VERBAL PLAY, INTERPRETATION, AND THE ROOTS OF ICONOPHOBIA

Christopher Collins
Pennsylvania State University Press

In *Mille plateau*, my reader will recall, Deleuze and Guattari argue that distinct socio-economic arrangements rely on differently entangled (mutually incompatible) semiotic systems, what they call sign regimes. The god states of ancient Egypt or Assyria, for example, were "signifying paranoid regimes," each of which, among other traits, possessed a language that moved crook-backed under the weight of tyrannical signifiers. Just as in Egypt the pictographic script was a transcription of the restricted language of the priests, not of the inferior everyday spoken Egyptian (Derrida, following Warburton, found great significance in this for the origin of writing), so even the spoken language itself involved circumlocutions and avoidances around those sanctimonious nouns that were too exalted to be said, or, if said, had to be accompanied with flattering epithets.

Though Christopher Collins, in his *Reading the Written Image*, does not adopt this particular French theory, one of his principal thrusts is the parallel one of identifying the society/sign system meshes in different early civilizations and noting how those configurations barred access to certain fundamental traits of poetic imagining.

To be specific, one of his main case studies concerns Biblical Hebraic society. Here the natural wariness and flexibility of language were tempered by the semiotic system's complete premising on one source discourse. This discourse was the account of the covenanting of a pact between the Jewish people and their divinity. In the overall system, normal conversations between an "I" and a "you" were made subservient to, weaker than, and supplementary to the type of one-sided interlocution that occasionally occurred between leaders like Moses or Elijah and heaven. Such communication can be demarcated as the conversation of an "I" and an "I." Collins' major discussion does not, however, concern the way a reliance on this residual discourse means the spittle-touched argot of the marketplace is devalued. He argues the equally important corollary that the privileging of hands-on, as it were, contact with the deity as the basal form of communication for a society means that the less salient contacts with the above, such as those

(continued on page 5)

THE POETRY PROJECT

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As capitalism continues its collapse, more poets than ever are reading, writing, publishing and performing. Contiguous enclaves gathering to articulate an ever more detailed and widening perspective become all the more necessary, as this society, in its death throes, desperately asserts its invincibility and immortality. A classless society! The survival and flourishing of the many and various! Is that what we're doing here in February and March? At least. 50 events, including readings, performances, lectures and workshops, plus a newsletter and *The World* #42, #43 and #44.

(please turn page for details)

THE POETRY PROJECT WISHES TO THANK

The Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, Inc., Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York, the Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation and the Axe Houghton Foundation for their recent grants.

THE POETRY PROJECT ALSO WISHES TO THANK ITS NEW AND RECENTLY RENEWED MEMBERS AND CONTRIBUTORS:

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THE POETRY PROJECT



Drawing: *After the Revolution*, ©1992 Lori Landes

FEBRUARY

MARCH

- 3 OPEN READING**
Hosted by Wanda Phipps. Sign-up is at 7:30 pm. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 5 THE PORTABLE BEAT READER READING**
Edited by Ann Charters and published by Viking, *The Portable Beat Reader* is a 700-page anthology of Beat Generation writings. On hand for the celebration will be Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Peter Orlovsky, Hettie Jones, Carl Solomon, Ed Sanders, Tuli Kupferberg, Ted Joans and more. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 7 CHARLES PINION**
A reading by screenwriters from their recent screenplays. CHARLES PINION is the auteur behind the independent feature *Twisted Issue*. He will be reading his work *Killbillies*, about a rural family of Einstein-worshipping cannibals. *Other readers to be announced.* **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 9 MEMORIAL EVENT FOR HARRY SMITH**
A Gnostic Mass and Tribute to filmmaker, artist, ethnologist and poet Harry Smith. Participants will include Allen Ginsberg, Sam Charters, Jonas Mekas, False Prophets, P. Adams Sitney, Gregory Corso, John Cohen, Raymond Foye, Michael Brownstein, Rani Singh, Rosebud Pette, Harvey Bialy, Marc Berger, Patrick Hulsey, Peter Lamborn Wilson and others. **Sunday, Gnostic Mass begins promptly at 4 pm; Magick, music, reminiscences and films, 5-7 pm.** (Voluntary contribution).
- 10 ELIZA GALAHER & TRACIE MORRIS**
ELIZA GALAHER is a lesbian poet and winner of the Fall 1991 Nuyorican Poets Cafe Erotica Slam. Performer, songwriter and freelance music journalist TRACIE MORRIS has new work in the upcoming issue of the Knitting Factory's *Knots* and in the new magazine *The Fuse*. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 12 LECTURE: ANDREW ROSS**
ANDREW ROSS will be speaking on "Reading, Performance and Pop Lyrics: Madonna and Public Enemy." He teaches English at Princeton University and is the author of *Strange Weather: Culture Science and Technology in the age of Limits and No Respect: Intellectuals and Pop Culture*. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 14 COVER MAGAZINE READING**
Readings by contributors to this enduring Downtown art gazette: Eileen Myles, Ira Cohen, Jeff Wright, Lita Hornick, Michael Andre, Miguel Algarin, Greg Masters, Elinor Nauen, Vincent Katz and more. Refreshments will be served. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 17 KILLARNEY CLAREY & RODERICK POTTER**
KILLARNEY CLAREY is the author of *Who Whispered Near Me* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux) as well as a chapbook of poems: *By Me By Any Can and Can't Be Done*. Poet RODERICK POTTER is the author of *Boxing Wizards and Garsh* (We Press). He has work forthcoming in *Exquisite Corpse* magazine. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 19 CHARLES BORKHUIS & ALBERT MOBILIO**
Poet and playwright CHUCK BORKHUIS is the recipient of a 1989 Dramalog Award. His latest book, *Hynogic Sonnets* is being published by Red Dust. Poet and journalist ALBERT MOBILIO writes regularly for the *Village Voice Literary Supplement*. Red Dust has recently published his book of poems, *Bendable Siege*. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 21 WORKSHOP READING**
A reading by writers from the Poetry Project's workshops, including MIRIAM SOLAN, KRISTEN PREVALLE, DEAN KOSTOS, MARCELLA DURAND, KATHY MASCHKE, EVAN HAFFNER and more. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 24 SIMONE ELLIS & SIDNEY DAVIS**
SIMONE ELLIS and SIDNEY DAVIS will perform *First Class*, a musical theater piece about two women meeting on a train, exploring issues of sexuality and reproduction. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 26 JAMES SCHUYLER: HYMN TO LIFE**
An evening with friends and admirers of poet James Schuyler: Barbara Guest, Eileen Myles, Tom Carey, Nathan Kerman, Kenneth Koch, Joe Brainard, Ann Dunn, Jane Freilicher, Alex Katz, Daragh Park, Bob Rosenthal, James McCourt, JD McClatchy, Honor Moore, Marilyn Hacker, David Trinidad, Kenward Elmslie, Elinor Nauen, Jaime Manrique, Ann Lauterbach, Ron Pedgett, Mark Cohen, Susan Baran, Gerrit Henry, Jonathan Galassi, Father Ousley, Brother Jason, Ed Friedman, Patricia Spears Jones, Raymond Foye, Morris Golde, Rochelle Kraut, Charles North, Douglas Crase, Frank Polish and William Corbett. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 28 ROBERTA ALLEN & DAVID WONG LOUIE**
ROBERTA ALLEN'S *The Daughters* is being published by Semiotext(e)/Autonomedia. Her memoir of Amazon travel memoir is forthcoming from City Lights. DAVID WONG LOUIE'S book of short stories, *Pangs of Love* was voted one of the best books of 1991 by the *Village Voice Literary Supplement*. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**

- 2 OPEN READING**
Hosted by Wanda Phipps. Sign-up is at 7:30 pm. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 4 ELMORE LEONARD**
Crime novelist ELMORE LEONARD missed his reading here last December for health reasons, so here he comes again. The compression, wit and complexity of his works have, for years, made him a favorite among poets. He'll be reading from among his twenty-nine published novels, as well as from his forthcoming *Rum Punch*. He'll also be answering audience questions. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 6 ROY DERIEN & AMANDA POLLOCK**
The Post-apocalyptic folk duo ROY DARIEN (a.k.a. Carl Watson) and AMANDA POLLOCK will perform their hits, "Let's Get Drunk and Watch TV" & "Schizophreniz is a Social Disease," among others. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 9 DIANE TORR & SALLY GREENHOUSE**
Writer and performer DIANE TORR will be presenting a collection of Scottish bawdy songs by Robert Burns, as well as some of her own invention, using a male persona in an attempt to expose some of the inequities in the material, without losing its earthiness. Performance artist SALLY GREENHOUSE has been described by the *St. Louis Dispatch* as "Artful, poetic...not as funny as Don Knotts." She's appeared locally at such venues as PS 192, DTW, NADA, Home and the Knitting Factory. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 11 LECTURE: RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS**
Rachel Blau Duplessis will be speaking on "Modern Women Poets and the Gender Ideology of Lyric." She is Professor of English at Temple University. Her most recent book of criticism is *The Pink Guitar*, and her most recent book of poems is *Drafts 3-14*. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 13 UNCENSORED II: WRITERS READING FROM THEIR JOURNALS**
JEFFREY CONWAY'S work has appeared in *The Brooklyn Review*, *James White Review* and *Blue Boy*. MAGGIE ESTEP is a writer and performer whose work has appeared in *Bomb* and *Exquisite Corpse*. JAY JOSLIN is the editor of his high school newspaper in Newark, Delaware, and he has written five novels. LINDA YABLONSKY is a freelance writer who curates the Night Light Literary series at the Pat Heam Gallery. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 16 ERIC GUDAS**
Poet ERIC GUDAS is a sophomore at Sarah Lawrence College. His work has recently appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Crazyhorse* and *Passages North*. *Other readers to be announced.* **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 18 ELAINE EQUI & JOHN YAU**
ELAINE EQUI is the author of *Surface Tension* (Coffee House Press) and *Decoy*, which is forthcoming this year from The Figures. Curator and art critic JOHN YAU'S most recent books are *Radiant Silhouette: New and Selected Work (1974-1988)*, and *Big City Primer* (Timken Publishers), a collaboration with the artist Bill Barrett. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
- 20 LECTURE: "FRANK O' HARA AND HIS MUSES" BY BRAD GOOCH**
BRAD GOOCH is completing the biography *Nerve: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* which will be published by Knopf. He is also working on a novel, *The Golden Age of Promiscuity*. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 23 SPRING ULMER & INDIA HIXON**
INDIA HIXON'S transparent books are designed to explore the visual and physical layering of meaning - poems that may be seen, held and performed, but not reproduced. Poet and visual artist SPRING ULMER is working on a series of works entitled *After Iron*. She has worked at the Naropa Institute and traveled widely. **Monday, 8 pm.**
- 25 MARTHA BERGLAND & JUDY GRAHN**
Wisconsin-based poet and fiction writer MARTHA BERGLAND is the author of the novel *A Farm Under a Lake*, published by Graywolf in 1989 and, in paperback, by Vintage Contemporaries in 1991. Her work appeared in the *Best American Short Stories of 1987* and she has received a Pushcart Prize for short fiction. JUDY GRAHN is a poet and feminist. She is a powerful performer of her work and has a large following in the U.S. and abroad. Among her books are *Edward the Dyke*, *The Common Woman Poems* and *The Queen of Wands*. **Wednesday, 8 pm.**
[This is the first of five programs supported by a national touring grant from the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund.]
- 27 MAKE ROOM FOR DADA READING**
This oddball, confrontational and revelatory magazine is based in Boulder, Colorado. Readers include Bernadette Mayer, Claire McMahon, Steve Roth, Lisa Janssen, Herschel Silverman and others. **Friday, 10:30 pm.**
- 30 CHRISTIAN X. HUNTER & TOM BURNETT**
CHRISTIAN X. HUNTER'S captivating stories and poems explore a psycho-sexual, post-romantic lyricism. His work appear in current issues of *ikon* and *Red Tape* and will be included in a forthcoming *Semiotext(e)* anthology. Poet, performer, composer and director TOM BURNETT has presented work at a number of Downtown NYC venues, as well as in Chicago and San Francisco. He's directed several of Winchester Chimes' plays, including *Dark Spud Yapping Hour*, *I Want Tonsils* and *American Fat*. **Monday, 8 pm.**

Admission: \$5 (contribution), except where noted.
All programs subject to change.

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WRITING WORKSHOPS

POETRY AND PROSE WORKSHOP

Experiments in poetry, including prose, exercises, rehearsals, practices, intentions. Taught by Bernadette Mayer. **Thursdays at 7 pm (ongoing through the end of April).** The workshop will be limited to 25 students. Register, in person, at the Poetry Project office or by mail.

THE WRITER AS TRANSLATOR OF EXPERIENCE

A workshop for writers who are interested in exploring in fictional terms the texture of their lives – what is commonly called experience. The participants will be asked to focus on some aspect of their preoccupations, and to explore them in fictional/memoir form to discover their unique voices. Taught by Jaime Manrique. **Fridays at 7 pm (February 7 through April 24).** Register, in person, at the Poetry Project office or by mail.

Jaime Manrique is the author of several books of fiction, poetry and criticism in English and Spanish. His most recent novel, *Latin Moon in Manhattan* is being published by St. Martin's Press this winter.

REVIVING THE WORLD

The workshop will edit and produce four issues of *The World*, the magazine of the Poetry Project. Taught by Lewis Warsh. Saturdays at noon (October 19th through the end of April). **This workshop is filled. Names are being held on a waiting list should there be any openings.**

REGISTRATION FEES

Registration for the workshops costs \$150; \$50 for regular annual membership in the Poetry Project plus \$100 annual workshop membership. Those enrolling in workshops who are already members of the Project and have paid for workshop memberships need only renew their memberships upon expiration.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

BOOKS:

John Ash, *The Burnt Pages: Poems by John Ash*, Random House (New York, New York, 1991). 101 pp.; \$19.00.

Renee Ashlet, *Salt*, The University of Wisconsin Press (114 North Murray Street, Madison, WI 53715, 1991) 60 pp.

Matsuo Basho, *Narrow Road to the Interior*, translated by Sam Hamill, Shambhala Pub. (Horticultural Hall, 300 Massachusetts Ave., Boston, MA 02115, 1991). 105 pp.; \$10.00.

Ted Berrigan, *Talking in Tranquility/Interviews with Ted Berrigan*, Avenue B/O Books (Avenue B, POB 542, Bolinas, CA 94924, 1991). 202 pp.; \$10.50.

Norma Cole, *My Bird Book*, Littoral Books (POB 481170, Los Angeles, CA 90048-0143). 108 pp.; \$9.95.

Lew Daly, *Nemesis*, Paradigm Press (11 Slater Ave., Providence, RI 02906, 1991). 218 pp.; \$8.00.

Bei Dao *Old Snow*, New Directions (80 8th Ave., New York, New York 10011, 1991). 81 pp.; \$16.95.

William I. Elliott, *Doers of the Word: Selected Poems 1960-1990*, Prescott St. Press (POB 40312 Portland, Oregon 97240-0312). 52 pp.; \$7.00.

Lawrence Fixel, *Truth, War, and The Dream-Game: Selected Prose Poems and Parables, 1966-1990*, Coffee House Press (27 North 4th St., Minneapolis, MN 55401, 1991). 144 pp.; \$10.95.

Jack Foley, *Gershwin: Poems by Jack Foley*, Norton Coker Press (San Francisco, 1991). For information write: "Gershwin" 2569 Maxwell Avenue, Oakland, CA 94601). 37 pp.; book with cassette tape; \$4.00.

Janos Gat, *Riding My Camel Upright Through the Needle's Eye*, EKED (Bar-Kochba St. 29, Tel Aviv). 48 pp.

Michael Gizzi, *Continental Harmony*, Roof Books (The Segue Foundation, 303 E. 8th St. New York, New York 10019, 1991). 86 pp.; \$8.95.

Daniel Halpern, *Foreign Neon: Poems*, Alfred A. Knopf (201 E. 50th St. New York, New York 10022). 85pp.; \$19.00.

Yukihede Maeshima Hartman, *New Poems*, Empyrean Press (POB 898, Planetarium Station New York, New York 10024, 1991). 61 pp.; \$11.95

Sherril Jaffe, *House Tours*, Black Sparrow Press (24 10th St., Santa Rosa, CA 95401, 1991) 214 pp.; \$12.00

Kent Johnson & Craig Paulenich ed, *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry*, Shambhala Pub. (Horticultural Hall, 300 Massachusetts Ave., Boston, MA 02115, 1991). 358 pp.; \$20.00.

Sydney Lea, *The Blainville Testament*, Storyline Press (Three Oaks Farms, Brownsville, Oregon 97327-9718, 1992). 96pp.; \$11.95.

Mina Loy, *Insel*, ed. Elizabeth Arnold, Black Sparrow Press (24 10th St., Santa Rosa, CA 95401, 1991). 200 pp.; \$10.00.

Jackson Mac Low, *Twenties: 100 Poems*, Roof Books. 100 pp.; \$8.95.

David Mason, *The Buried Houses*, Story Line Press (3 Oaks Farms, Brownsville, Oregon 97327-9718, 1991). 96 pp.; \$10.95.

Lee McCarthy, *Desire's Door*, Story Line Press. 83 pp.; \$10.95.

J.J. Phillips, Ishmael Reed, Gundars Strads, Shawn Wong ed., *The Before Columbus Foundation Poetry Anthology: Selections from the American Book Awards 1980-1990*, Norton (500 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10110, 1992). 429 pp.; \$14.95.

Tony Towle, *Some Musical Episodes*, Hanging Loose Press (231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, New York 11217, 1992). 100 pp.; \$10.00.

David Trinidad, *Hand Over Heart*, Amethyst Press (6 W. 32nd St., PH, New York, NY 10001), 1991. 127 pp.; \$9.95.

Paul Vangelisti, *Villa*, Littoral Books (POB 481170, Los Angeles, CA 90048-0143, 1991). 86 pp.; \$8.95.

Pasquale Verdicchio, *Isthmus*, Littoral Book, 1991). pp. 64; \$8.95.

MAGAZINES:

Make Room for DaDa # 3 (brusayack, McMahan, Hartman, Silverman Eds., backyard press (1705 14th #272 Boulder, CO 80302). \$10/4 issues.

Mesechabe - The Journal of Surrealism #9/10 (7725 Cohn St., New Orleans, LA 70118). \$5.00.

Spike #1 (Darrin Daniel, ed., 1680 Augusta St., Eugene, OE 97403). \$3.00.

Texture (Susan Smith, ed. Texture Press, 3760 Cedar Ridge Dr., Norman, OK 73072).

The Underground Forest, La Selva Subterranea (Richey, Becher ed., 1701 Bluebell Ave., Boulder, CO 80302), \$12.00/4 issues.

THE WORLD 42

CONTRIBUTORS:

Sheila Alson
John Ashbery
Susan Cataldo
Cheryl Clarke
Malkia Cyril
Alan Davies
Ma Desheng
Tim Dlugos
Elaine Equi
Ed Friedman
Allen Ginsberg
Evan Haffner
Marcella Harb
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Norman MacAfee
Eileen Myles
Frank Nims
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Elio Schneeman
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Chris Tysh

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The Literary Magazine of
The Poetry Project, Ltd.
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery
131 East 10th Street
New York, New York 10003

1992 Publication Dates:

Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr
\$5.00 per issue
Subscriptions: \$20.00 for 4 issues

READING THE WRITTEN; IMAGE

(continued from page 4)

occurring in dreams or inspired speech, would have the tang of inauthenticity.

Now if even heaven-sent visions were second rate, then imagine how downgraded would be casual, passing mental images that were summoned up by hearing about or reading about glorious god/man encounters. The crux of the book is here. Collins argues that *the central*, but overlooked, *experience of reading literature*, and poetry above all, is that it involves the *constant evoking* and (briefly) *entrapping of mental figurations*. The brain contains a holographic display unit where evanescent, active pictorialization is unleashed.

Collins has a second book, also just out, that engages with the cognitive mechanics of this actualization, but the quest in this study is to show how various societies, including ours, have denied the existence of this figuration in various ways. He demonstrates with dazzling erudition what has stopped Western traditions from finding out what they merely had to open their eyes, and turn them inward, to see.

Let us continue for a moment interrogating Collins' evaluation of Hebraic society in order to allow a glimpse of his limpid, crisp, cultivated prose.

He raises the question of the late transference of the Jewish oral tradition to writing. After all, the Jews possessed writing for four hundred years before they employed it to record the central facts of their contracts with Jehovah. Collins suggests that they did not need to write down their traditions because they already possessed a more adequate mnemonic device, the city.

Place is indeed a powerful preserver of names. Once inscribed with meanings, visual objects continue indefinitely to prompt particular memory data. ... Throughout the world prior to encoding of concepts and speech in graphic symbols, *place was deliberately encoded to assist memory storage*. Avenues, walls, temples, statuary—all these could be made to embody associative meanings. If cathedrals were encyclopedias for the semiliterate Middle Ages, megalithic structures from Stonehenge to Teotihuacan served the same purpose for their preliterate communities.

Although so far I have represented, I think truly, the bare gist of the book as destructive, the writer does turn the sword of his pen into a ploughshare toward the end. Though not confronting imagining in detail, he does thematize some of the concepts that are needed if we are to begin to see a poem (all of his examples are poems) not as a hardened object or an epistle but as a motion of mutual trajectory of the reader and writer who jointly create each individual's internal poetic staging.

To take only one point raised in this context, Collins refines the idea that a reader identifies with the characters he or she is reading about, not always a suitable concept to apply to such things as short lyrics, by broadening the idea to that of a triplicate identification. In his view, a reader identifies, in turn, with the author (or speaker), the hearer (addressee), and the characters. Each identifying posture is motivated by a different rhetoric on the one side, the author's side, and a different strategy of inputting on the other, the reader's, side.

I think I have said enough to indicate how radically this book attempts to recoup the importance of alert imaginative play to poetic reception by resettling this reception into subjectivity. Subjectivity is the area that deconstruction and other linguistic criticisms have avoided as being a non-existent figment or, more charitably, a place to be ignored because it cannot be plumbed with scientific instruments.

De Man, in *Resistance to Theory*, argues that many critics make a detour around the heart of literature because "literature involves the voiding...of aes-

thetic categories." In other words, it constantly calls into question its own basis, language, by exposing and berating language's presuppositions. For Collins' part, he sees what has been tabooed is not literature *per se* but one of its troubling, though generating, effects, its use of the brain as a display monitor. Critics who fear internal imaging imagine:

The text...is eager to possess the reader, to exchange its object-hood for the reader's subject-hood. The reader for his or her part must be a subject powerful enough to drive the text back into object-hood. Unless that reader succeeds in doing so, the text will arrogate to itself the status of the subject, and the mind of the reader, having lost control of this erstwhile object of its consciousness, ends by losing control of itself and drifting off among its own random fragments of association.

The precision of Collins' expression combined with the audacity of his thought on the iconophobic bias of different civilizations, along with the detective work needed to ferret out this bias, make this an exciting and invaluable work. If one wanted to quibble, the most one could note would be that certain lesions appear in the discussion of bygone cultures simply because their construction is too airy. Collins deals with religion, philosophy, language, and art as they make manifest the central semiotic channels in a culture, but he does not implicate in the way, for example James Hans does in *The Play of the World* (a book that is one of Collins' reference points), economics and statecraft into the examination. Such an integration would make the work more grounded and that ground would seem more built over. This comment is not meant to note any flaw in the work's grand plan but rather to point to an area of expansion.

I'm not going to say anything good (or rather anything else good) about the book. If the extracts and the partial rehearsal of its contents are not sufficient to recommend it, then you, my dear reader, are not the woman (or man) I took you for.

-Jim Feast

LIGHT HEART

Gary Lenhart
Hanging Loose Press
(231 Wyckoff St., #1B, Brooklyn, NY 11217),
1991. 64 pages; \$9.00 paper.

Lenhart's 1983 book *One at a Time* was noted for its scenes of the gritty city; *Light Heart* shows signs of a psychic emigration. Of the three long poems in the collection, the title poem and "Ode to a Rattler" are set in the woods, while "Postcards from Mexico" is, as the title suggests, a series of verbal snapshots of and reflections on Mexican scenes. There are still shorter poems of city episodes, some of them lyrical or gently humorous, such as "Chemists" or "Spring," but Lenhart's focus seems to have moved both inward toward the family and outward to the cosmos. A new father, he writes movingly of the change in life a baby entails:

History comes to this//Asleep in your lap//
The end of history as we knew it.

Yet even in his poems set in the great outdoors, Lenhart has moved from a young man's love of "grand monarchic vistas" and "vast unpeopled wilds" to a middle-aged love for a more intimate setting.

"Light Heart" and "Ode to a Rattler" are good examples of a tradition that in English goes back to the Romantics: a poet from the city escapes to the country to reflect on his state and he rejoices in the new freedom:

In a month on this ranch//I've scarcely given a
minute to the city, its debilitating misery//My
friends slumped there without air
conditioners//Bumped and threatened by hot
hormone-demented youths//Or clobbered in
Tompkins Square Park by hot hormoned-
demented cops//I'm like a horse without a
coach... ("Ode to a Rattler")

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Yet though he's in the woods, Lenhart knows that he is not at one with them and their gun-toting natives "wearing allegiance to watery beer/On their sportswear and caps." And while he loves the rural life, he refuses to idealize it.

Too easy to confuse a family farm with virtue//Waterfalls with miracles, see summer
cabins//As outward manifestations of a shore-
front grace. ("Light Heart")

Lenhart seems fated to forever be the wedding guest detained by mariners both ancient (the 90-year-old woman of "Oral History") and adolescent (the runaway teenager of "Michigan"). Stories, freely adapted, find voice in his poems.

Lenhart is aware of the advantages his intelligence and education have given him, and along with the privileges accepts the responsibilities. In "This Cumbrous World of Wheels," he admonishes himself in the voice of a cancer-ridden truck driver friend and sums up his personal mission as a poet:

I squander precious ticks//To scrawl this
missive//Because you should be made
aware//That the lyric owes its existence to
special privilege//When I check out, I want
you to think of me in my jar//And say, I owe it
to that disturbed son-of-a-bitch//To try to bring
the marginal into consciousness.

-Reagen Upshaw

EXHIBITION REVIEW

SEEKING ORIGINS: PAINTERS EVOKE POETS

BRICE MARDEN: COLD MOUNTAIN
Dia Center for the Arts
October 17, 1991-May 31, 1992

CY TWOMBLY: PRINTS 1952-1983
Hirschl & Adler Modern
November 21, 1991-January 4, 1992

Once you move beyond the issue, which is to most painters an impenetrable one, of whether or not painting is dead--is it possible to acknowledge artistic heritage without reverting to the marketing hyperbole of the 1980s? Despite the prevailing machinations of art criticism and proclamations of mythical heroism seeking to invoke the *next* Jackson Pollock, if we return to the examination of the parallel forms in which painters and poets express ideas and sentiments, a sense of clarity emerges amidst the chaos of human relationships and intentions. The recent mini-retrospective of Cy Twombly's prints uptown, following the opening of Brice Marden's newest work downtown, presented an opportunity to assess a passage of time and to consider one artist's more recent decision for making dramatic changes in his paintings.

Twombly and Marden share a relationship in their work which extends beyond their expectation of introspection and concentration from the viewer in order to grasp their elusive abstractions. A willingness to abandon any desire to define art as a system within the restrained parameters of language is another essential for experiencing these abstractions extracted from the artist's visions of the inexpressible. We are reminded of the notion of influence--the constancy of underlying derivations present in all art throughout history--as Marden gazes in his work upon the ideograms of the ancient Chinese sage known as Cold Mountain. The work represented here includes a series of six large (9x12") paintings, as well as drawings and etchings from the past three years inspired by the calligraphy in the poems of the seventh century T'ang Dynasty poet. In this work, Marden shares with Twombly the artistic practice of creating an individual expression intuited from unheard voices of the past.

Twombly's work, and the sampling of earlier graphic reflections presented here, conjure associations with the ancient poets of the Mediterranean. At first, the writings of his graphic and painted images seem indecipherable even though the enigma of being is captured in his gesture. Slowly the discernible words become visible within Twombly's graffiti. In *Five Greek Poets and a Philosopher* (1978), Twombly, with great clarity, simply inscribes the individual names: Homer, Sappho, Pindar, Callimachus, Theocritus, and Plato, on each print of the series. With a sense of longing and seduction, these reductive and easily discernible words evoke the mythological ancient culture and the transitory essence of the poet.

Someone, I tell you//will remember us//
[We are oppressed by fears of oblivion//
yet are saved by judgment of good men//
Therefore, I tell you, I stand upright//
for me.] Sappho (256)

Marden and Twombly's paths have crossed before in their shared interests and ability to distill the nature of light in the essence of color. While Marden's minimal *Grove Group* paintings from the 1970s evoke the light of the Mediterranean landscape, Twombly, in his work, minimized the use of color and captured a fleeting sense of light in quiet splashes of subtle hues. Both approaches, in their differences, expressed an enlightened sense of silence. Marden's *Cold Mountain* works now more closely parallel Twombly's in their self-imposed limitation of color. Having, in the past, reduced the plane to a reflection of light through individual color, Marden joins Twombly anew in limiting his painted veils of light to even fainter hues in this new work. Adding line to the illusion of the two-dimensional surface, Marden's gesture unfolds as a matrix woven over and around a trace of color.

I see T'ien T'ai Summit//with its head above the crowd//the wind swaying in a pine-bamboo rhyme//the moon showing the beat of the tide//below I see the mountain's green reach//and white clouds discussing mysteries//the wilds are all mountains and water//give me friends of the Way anytime. Cold Mountain (226)

Neither Twombly or Marden seek in their work to narrate or illustrate the poets they evoke. The poetry and ideograms serve as a point of departure, representing the origin of thought and vision, and act as a bridge to cross over the expanse of exigencies that have unfolded throughout these two artists' lives.

Where Twombly's work has remained immersed in the purity of gesture and abstraction, he has also maintained in his life a distance from the clamor of the art world as the American artist in self-imposed European exile. Marden has maintained another course, venturing once more into the glare of public exposure and embracing the changes imposed upon himself with the enthusiasm of discovery and confidence. In the austere minimalism of his highly proclaimed debut into the art world, Marden gleaned the finest aspects of his artistic ancestors and continues to prove masterful in weaving those influences into his distinctly personal vision. Like Twombly's, Marden's work is no superficial synthesis of elements explored by his predecessors. As we observe these artists working out their fates in painting, the ghost of *EROS* comes to my mind beneath the skein of lines and from within the yellow light of Marden's painting, *Cold Mountain 3*.

EROS
Now in my//Heart I//see clearly//
A beautiful face//shinning//
etched//by love. Sappho (258)

In the rare moment when we are graced with concurrent exhibitions of Twombly and Marden's work in one city, it seems appropriate to consider their shared origins.

I've always loved friends of the Way//always held them dear//meeting a stranger with silent springs//greeting a guest talking zen//talking about mysteries on a moonlight night//searching for truth until dawn//when the tracks of our inventions disappear//and we see who we really are. Cold Mountain (275)

Perhaps it is at last time to transcend the overwhelming effects of materialism that descended so vehemently upon the art world to corrupt its thinking during the past decade. For those seeking solace from that confusion, the time has arrived and these exhibitions clear the air as songs of convictions about painting and poetry.

-Kathy L. Maschke

Quotes:
Willis Barnstone (trans.). *Sappho and the Greek Lyric Poets*. New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1988.
Red Pine (trans.). *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 1983.

BOOK REVIEWS (continued)

ART IS BORING FOR THE SAME REASON WE STAYED IN VIETNAM

Stephen Paul Miller
The Domestic Press
(323 E. 8th Street, NY, NY 10009), 1991.
113 pages; \$7.00.

Stephen Paul Miller's *Art is Boring for the Same Reason We Stayed in Vietnam* is a poem to curl up with, to read at a cafe, or (if we only could) on a bench in Tompkins Square Park. No matter where you read it, you will not be alone; this poem does not feel like an artifact, a "perfect" finished product, words on a page to decipher, a thing. This poem feels like a person, like a person speaking. It soundbites down the page like real conversation (Wordsworth,

are you listening?) and just like real conversation, it answers our questions before we ask them, it speeds up, slows down, digresses and envelopes us in the experience.

The 113 page poem opens with a story in which Miller's attempt at communicating with a "well known progressive poetry institution" is thwarted. "Let's be real," Miller says, "Even if reality is made from excruciatingly meticulous evasions, even if it takes fifty pages to work up to a more relaxed reality." Okay, I think, this is a thesis I (a person who has a fatal genetic lung disease) can live with. Lately I have had no patience for those conversations (or poems) that are controlled, that think they know where they are going, that think they are pulling a fast one on me, that are excuses for tooting of horns, careers, sexual availability, that have a voice over here and a heart over there. But somehow, and this is the irony, I have all the time in the world to sit with someone who will discuss, who will reveal, who will take the risk of discourse, who will touch.

Miller addresses the audience in that old self reflexive: "Could you hold my bags for a while while I learn Spanish? Okay, you can drop them now." He says the Oakland A's "invented their own poetry," and that is what Miller is doing here, as he weaves the narrative of his backlot institution fight with his sense of poetics, his comments on current events. It is soon clear that he has no idea where he is headed and what the final outcome of all this will be. It is a poem that makes itself, not a poem manipulated. Miller says "I think and feel deeply that the point of writing splits as it goes along like a tree that attracts many birds." I follow this writing, skipping down the page hand in hand with Miller, it seems, as delighted, as horrified, as questioning and, I believe, as rewarded as he. We are, reader and writer, equal.

The poem, revealing its process, envelopes the reader in the moment that it seems to have occurred to Miller. "This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said. Whether or not perfect understanding always occurs in fact, this image of perfectly self-present meaning is, according to Derrida, the underlying ideal of Western Culture" (1). This is an idea that Miller addresses early in his let's-be-real theme, and one with a great history, a history that comes barreling in with its contradiction, writing and worse yet, the published book looming there like the object it is, with all its subjectiveness denuded, objectified.

So, as close to conversation as this seems, as much as it appears that Miller has re-invented a new form of poetry, and as much as I am included, I am still here, at the cafe, in the park, curled up with a book, not with a person and, I believe, Miller goes too far when he says that he is "including some of your criticisms of me in my enterprise." All literature has this problem. Donald Barthelme interrupted *Snow White* with a questionnaire that asked the reader such questions as: how do you like this book so far? Barry Hannah has interrupted his stories to ask an ex-girlfriend to call, but, hey, come on, I know it is all text. It is still a book, published, an object, artifact.

About the title: Miller says, "Art should be a place for us to hang out, anyway. It shouldn't be so boring." Here boring equals controlled; boring equals manipulated. It equals discourses being thwarted. It equals enforcing of will into a future, such as the "ackaged" result of Desert Storm or the attempted force of will in the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

About the form: the "dribbling" of the text on the page. I cannot give it away. You'll just have to read that one for yourself. Just a hint, it is like Magic Johnson's art of dribbling but it is writing. It is political writing not to change minds, but to push up against the reality of other texts. Like I said, you've got to see this one, and it is worth a re-read.

This is a book to go back to, a book to own. It is a book that is a part of one of those lines of infinity that I want to go on and on and on. I am dying. I do not have much time. But if you want to be real, I have all the time in the world. Miller's real.

-Katherine Arnold

1. Johnson, Barbara. Introduction, *Dissemination*. Jacques Derrida. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, viii.

THE NATION SPEAKS TROPICANA

astrological convenience store
liberty car wash
divisive bureau of the everyday

televised crap fables
gymnasiums-to-go
sense reversal highs

personality
dynamites
emotion's
ignorance

living frontiers
baby fascists
the "me-front"

prophetic commercials
ulterior rations
historical ash

generals from paradise
exult to compulsion
machines begin to yearn

fire-rooted "I"
reason's tiny dance
grey roads in me
the geist wheel

-Jerome Sala

NO. 1

Chiara, Chiara, Chiara,
I'm over here
(that is your name, isn't it?)

tall mint dress
it was a tall mint
dress tall mint dress
it was a tall mint
dress a tall mint dress.

I am an image for you
I am imagining for you
Look.

You have crystalized it once again
CRYSTAL EYES'D IT

Granny's night white silk
ghost

the stars, the stars

train forest train tracks of
Prince street

in the clean
room onions

the rain ticks
louder than the clock

fl
ow
ers

si
in
k
ing

-India Hixon

THE HISTORY OF GLANCES

The big story began
in a together breath,
the small story raised
the ceiling. Laugh
bouncing up like a quick
ball, squeal with hands
on her face. His mouth
twisting around words
in a revolutionary
caress. They pissed
on the world in diverse
colors, constantly
pulling down the blinds
as an homage to blood
& scratches & unbuttoned
blouses. There was no
mortal sin, there were
only small sensations
in their fingertips,
& this they used
as a ticket into some
sort of love. Skin
touching soft soap
skin. Love stained
with rosy crucifixes
& bulgarian choirs
chanting in a rozoza.
Her stomach a fallen
arch of other's desire.
Sleeves of his fastidiously
ironed shirts dangling
around boomerang wrists.
They could never really
believe that those eyes
& that voice could go in
the same package. Breath
like parenthesis, eyes
like asterisks, a cunt
like a question mark.
Knowing all along that
hate was the equilibrium
to hurt. All they needed
was small bubbles of time
to caress stale wounds.
A few kicks, the realization
that No, God is not dead,
& an investigation of their
heart's content; this was
what finally blew the fuse.
In December she decided
that all was not lost
in her face...

-Gillian McCain

HAND

Wear waste
fizz up
tour the ludicrous
but don't get crushed
a version of lard, a mapping
the hand itself lives
always adoring its length
squid-like, a potion, a falling
growing up by itself according to plan
weird and loud

LOVE

I love that face of myrrh so much
that just thinking of it
I put rouge on this egg

-Jerome Sala

MORE ABOUT DRAGONS

The world had ended. The Earth was
the dry skin of a sick giant. All of the
lowlands were dry; the fields were dry;
the streets were broken crusts of an old
wound. At my side some people joined
us in tears; we walked to a great rock on
a sharp mountain like a nut on an index
finger. We did not want to leave; we
looked at the red earth, dazed. I
remembered the formula for the speed
of light and wrote it down with a stone
on the walls of our refuge.

The tyrannosaurus reappeared. The
rock shook with the immensity of their
cry. The next day dawned and a jeep,
with some, grew closer to the infinite
flaming sky as the monster appeared on
the other side, with his short legs and
ivory teeth. Determined to save them
we ran, climbed down, but it was
already there.

The jeep was a blue suitcase, the
creature opened it and there were two
birds inside. One was a swan like
Leda's, that was able to flee when
transformed into a multitude. A mighty
eagle rose, white on brown, with a
piercing look. And then in one chomp
the other one ate his head.

-Myrna Nieves

*Help Bob, or a scene
shortly after a reading by
poet Bruce Andrews*

she said...

basically, the circumambient elation
of vocable articulations, positing
nerve, sinew or sign you, cor-
puscularly giving, light giving
paratactical spitting hats fish-bird, or
if you will chucking oracular vestiges
into self reflexive, local cerebral
environments. while at the same
time not succumbing to pictur-
esqueness knowing and not knowing,
none of that. hitting polysyllabic legs
with arduous gum sucking non
sequentializing variegated thought
in a cynically epiclyclodial wheel
of conjecturing arms maliciously
dismembering the usual language.

To which he replied, after a brief
silence...

Yep.

-Stephen Lowy

HONG KONG SONG

Jill
Rappaport

skip starting points and motivations
standing on the corner with the rest of them
Understand that if no more time were
wasted enough was
wrapped shrubs growing cold at the table
respond a little cooler all the time
her anxious frets a little darker brown wood
she is a guitar being played out the window by Picassos,

Braques
somebody's car looking idiotic in her
own inimitable manner
dripping coolly by attempting all encounters
there are napkins in Germany that are cooler

than that
I danced on the edge of a rocker in the nineteen sixties
spraining my ankle repeatedly when I fell off
then falling out of swings, belted in or not belted in,
or falling smack dab on my face, on my knees, lying there
laughing afraid not to or crying inspiring fear
forget the past, forget it. forget it.

the grandfather clock has a hypnotic drone as it collects dead
leaves for its memory box
chamomile like that lining the garden of Versailles in back
of the grand Trianon
where I learned how the people marched on them and found them
there not yet ready to take flight
the people eating potatoes and staring harshly
the kings and queens expanding divinely until justice had
their heads rolling

Lenin is accused of murdering thousands
by a companion who on certain soft mornings holds you tight
and squeezes, then agrees to reconsider on Lenin even as he says
goodbye to you

in her own manner she copied my aristocratic whine
and asked to sit where I had been sitting before breaking to
wander and avoid my companions, all
and she called me to deliver her drop dead boring news
and others who had more and better things to tell me kept

silent
this weekend's big drug escapades were coffee, sex and
the memory of the time before things changed forever
I can never walk through that garden again. the people have
come harshly

they are waiting to march me back to a place called Paris
they and others in the hay strewn vision of what lies ahead,
to all those whose existences are characterized by an unnecessary
dread

that I wake up to a morning after still morning
the smell of her plastic doll still in my plastic nostrils my
hands clutching and opening surprised not to enclose it

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