

poetry project

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER/JANUARY 1996-97 ISSUE #163

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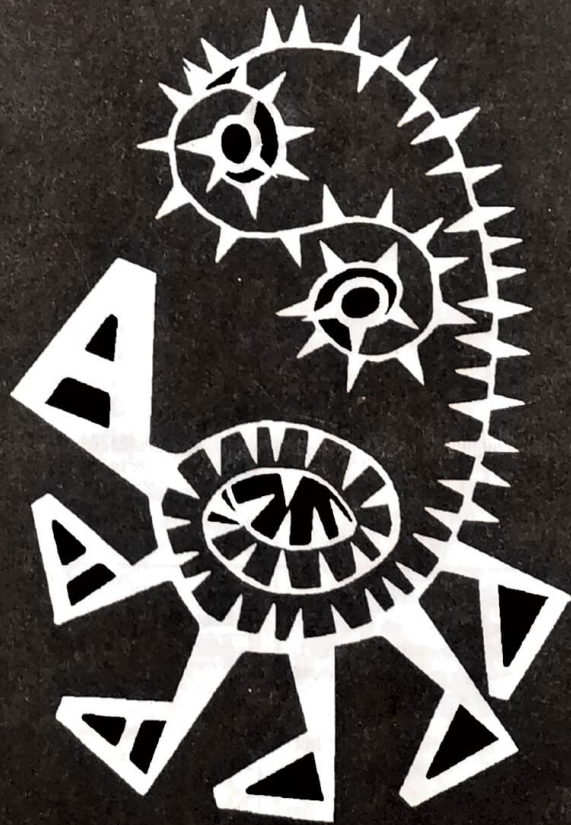
Bill Luoma

Loss Pequeño Glazier

Philip Whalen

Kathleen Fraser

Bob Kaufman & Jim Brodey



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regional updates

San Francisco Correspondent: Edmund Berrigan
Washington Correspondents: Rod Smith & Joe Ross
Seattle Correspondent: Laynie Browne
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Internet Correspondent: Loss Pequeño Glazier

SAN FRANCISCO

It's a cold, rainy day in California & Senator Bob Dole is banking on our brains dubbing him our conscience. Wet Paint, a play by Kevin Killian was recently debuted. The play centered around Jay DeFeo, a talented but troubled artist who spent eight years making one painting, titled The Rose. The play, acted by many local painters, poets, & drag queens, made local news when Bruce Conner demanded his representation removed. Under the weight of his lawyers Killian bowed. Later on this month there will be a poetry reading in honor of the birthdays of Philip Whalen & Michael McClure. Readers include Robert Greeley, Robert Haas, Leslie Scalapino, Laura Moriarty, Bill Berkson, & others. On a sad note, the poet Daniel Davidson passed away in September. Davidson, whose books include Product by e.g., & Weather from Score Press, was a noted Anarchist & political activist. He was at the center of the Gulf War Protest in San Francisco, & was also involved in disabled rights activism. There was a reading of his work on September 13th, and a service the following day. He was 44.

WASHINGTON DC

Ever feel like there's no moral high ground left? It's all been bought up & leveled. I wrote a poem called "Ode to Corporate Greed" which consists entirely of the sounds of the environment. We had some great readings down here recently—Ron Silliman and Tom Mandel opened the season at the Ruthless Grip, it's at 15th & U, across from Hunan King. I don't know if they have readings at Hunan King. Mark Wallace had a bash for his new Penny-a-Liners. Buck Downs, Esquire, the publisher thereof, was pleased with the proceedings, proceedings, & prayer wheels, as were the numerous cool people in attendance. Tim Davis & Judith Goldman read their poems even better than they dance. I can say that. Susan Smith Nash will soon appear in full Susan Smith Nash regalia. If you get a chance to see Bob Mould you must go. They tell me I should get Anselm Berrigan to read at Bridge

Street. Winter always comes again. Go world figuring.

SEATTLE

In Seattle, the season of Subtext readings has gotten off to a memorable start. The series is run by a collective of poets, and poetry enthusiasts, and features writers from Seattle, Vancouver, San Francisco and elsewhere. The series takes place on the third Thursday of each month, at 7:30 pm at the Speakeasy, a lofty internet cafe, complete with couches and candelabras, located at 2304 Second Avenue, in Belltown. The Speakeasy has a separate multi-media performance space located behind the cafe tables and computer terminals and is an extremely active space featuring film series, music, and many other venues. Recent highlights in the Subtext series include video artist Gary Hill in September, and Margie Sloan reading with Robert Mittenenthal in October. Upcoming readers include: Jaap Blonk, Roberta Olson, Aaron Shurin, Judith Roche, Sharon Thesen, Susan Clark, Doug Nufer, Laura Moriarty, Tom Malone, Elizabeth Willis, Peter Gizzi, Myung Mi Kim, and Danica Dinsmore. For details please visit our subtext web page: <http://www.speakeasy.org/subtext/>. Recent publications in Seattle include clear-cut: anthology, a Collection of Seattle Writers, edited by Nico Vassilakis. Robert Mittenenthal and Joe Donahue have started a new chapbook series called bcc: and the first book in their series, just out, is Swarm of Edges by John Olson. In addition, Joe Donahue is now editing a section of an upcoming Talisman issue featuring writers from Seattle.

ROME, ITALY

(Sept. 14 / 96--Corsica) International Postal Letter [slightly water damaged]
I have been traveling around the Mediterranean looking at new varieties of grape. My uncle has this idea that we should rip up all the old vines from the south side of the mountain & put in something new...make wine for a larger market. I try to tell him he's been reading too much Marinetti & Khlebnikov. Anyway, there is little time, & even less paper, so that I find myself forced to compose poems which will never be written down...In the mess hall of this little packet steamer—on my way to Corsica. Writing this, I consider that I have just been out, in a rough sea, shouting rhymed & unrhymed verse at the waves. I wonder: How long were those lines? Is

this how Homer wrote? Was he better at remembering things than I? & then I think of Kerouac. Certainly, THERE was a 24hr Poet. From his writing we get the impression of a man who spent the whole day thinking speaking poetry. Every utterance was seen as possessing the potential for poetical import. So that finally, when he did sit down to write, he had been writing for at least 8 hours. This is what gives his writing its fluidity & power. The roll of butcher paper does not seem to have many marks on it, but does it need them? I for one believe in editing more than anyone I know, yet isn't there a way to spend the whole of your time reworking the world & language, so that when you come to write, you are ready to write, & the actual time spent writing might be more directly productive?

THE INTERNET

Want to really SEE something on the Net? Don't miss the UbuWeb Visual & Concrete Poetry (<http://www.ubuweb.com/vp/>) page, a smorgasbord of fine visual work by artists and writers such as Susan Bee, Charles Bernstein, John Cayley, Johanna Drucker, Dick Higgins, as well as many others. You can also explore a third coast of web experimentalism at the new Dreamtime Village home page, <http://www.net22.com/dreamtime> (Xeroxial Endarchy, Ltd). And check out some of the new author pages/links from the Electronic Poetry Center: Kenneth Irby, Ted Enslin, Joseph Ceravolo, and Michael McClure. Connect to these pages via <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors>. Update from the Poetics list: Anyone publishing paper mags and books are invited to have an online listing at the EPC as long as they can e-mail the form back (forms are available at http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/mags/the_form). Main topic of discussion on the list early this Fall: the "Assembling Alternatives" conference via an immense pot-holed detour into "poets vs. critics" at the conference, in principle, and in life in general (a long and winding road indeed!) but in and about this discussion, some good info on the conference. Some of this is included in the online book "Assembling Alternatives" at <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/documents/assembling>. What's hot? Visit the online celebration site "Creeley at 70 in Buffalo". Follow the link from <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc> for a full report of the Creeley festival events, poems, and more delivered direct to you.

announcements



photo by Melissa Zexter

ALLEN GINSBERG'S SELECTED POEMS MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE SEASON

This year's opening reading at the Poetry Project was a celebration of Allen Ginsberg and his new *Selected Poems 1947-1995* (Harpercollins Publishers) on October 8th. The evening was produced by Hal Willner and included performances by musicians Kim Deal, Lenny Kaye, Tuli Kupferberg, David Mansfield, Bob Neuwirth, Lenny Pickett, Colin Quinn, Lee Ranaldo, Marc Ribot, Stephan Said, Ed Sanders, Steve Shelley, Steven Taylor, Garro Yellin, and members of the Jazz Passengers.

Allen performed one poem from each of his books with various musical accompaniments. Highlights included old favorites such as "Cosmopolitan Greetings" (which begins "Stand up against governments, against God"), "The Ballad of the Skeletons," which was released by Mercury Records on the same day, and the often anthologized "To Aunt Rose." Perhaps the most memorable pieces though were "Plutonian Ode" and "Many Loves"—showing the incredible range of Ginsberg's work over the years—from the Whitmanesque oracular voice to the tender candid observations so particular to his

poems.

There were also some unexpected performances by Bob Neuwirth, the Fugs, and a poem/stand up routine by Saturday Night Live star Colin Quinn.

The evening was part of The Poetry Project's 30 Year Anniversary fundraising drive and it was by all means a great success. The church was filled to capacity and many patrons contributed by buying tickets to a special fundraising cocktail party after the reading. Thanks to everyone who gave their support.

SPT SEEKS DONATIONS FOR LIBRARY

Small Press Traffic Literary Arts Center is gathering books and magazines for a library of innovative small press works. Donations can be sent to Small Press Traffic at New College, 766 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94110. Phone: 415/437-3454. Dodie Bellamy, Director.

SUBMISSIONS WANTED

POETS on the line, an on-line anthology, seeks submissions from Viet Nam veterans for a double issue of the magazine focusing on "NamVet poets". For more information contact Linda Lerner, PO Box 020292, Brooklyn, New York 11202-0007. Previous issues of **POETS on the line** can be found

on the internet at <http://www.echo-nyc.com/~poets>.

NATIONAL POETRY CONTEST

The Loft, one of the nation's largest literary centers, announces its annual contest for poetry and fiction writers. Two winners will receive a \$1000 cash prize. Through the cooperation of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*, each winning entry will be published in its entirety. This year, the final judges are Garrett Hongo (poetry) and Anne Tyler (fiction). All submissions must be received by March 1, 1997 and an entry fee of \$10 must accompany all submissions. Winners will be notified by July 15, 1997. For specific entry instructions and an application form, write to: National Prize in Poetry & Fiction. The Loft, 66 Malcolm Avenue SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414.

HUNCKE PAPERS QUERY

Unpublished writings of Herbert Huncke are being sought for inclusion in *A Herbert Huncke Reader*, forthcoming in 1997. If you have any of Huncke's manuscripts or if you know anyone who does, please contact Huncke's literary executor Jerry Poynton, 45 5th Avenue #3A, New York, New York 10003. 212-337-3740.

The Poetry Project is on-line. Visit our website at <http://www.poetryproject.com>.

DEAR EDITOR:

picked up poproj newsletter at printed matter, looks good. can i give you the following URLs to check out & perhaps mention next time? the poetry webs, which include a proto- anthology of hypermedia poetry I think your readers will find interesting. & for the dialectical, intercreative mode, there's always diu (Descriptions of an Imaginary Universe):

<http://cnsvox.albany.edu/~poetry/webs.html>
<http://cnsvox.albany.edu/~poetry/hyperpo.html>
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/ezines/diu>

Chris Funkhouser, Albany, New York

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An Interview with DAVID HENDERSON

by
Lisa Jarnot



photo by Carrie Mae Weems

David Henderson is the author of *Felix of the Silent Forest*, *De Mayor of Harlem*, *The Low East*, and *Scuse Me While I Kiss The Sky: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix*. He has a new collection of poetry, *Neo-California*, forthcoming next year.

I talked with David at his apartment on East 14th Street on August 8, 1996. The following is an excerpt of our conversation.

Jarnot: David, you started editing *Umbra* magazine in 1961. How old were you when that happened?

Henderson: I was a young teenager. I came to the workshop and they were putting together a magazine and somehow they made me the editor, one of the editors, I wasn't the editor. I think we had three editors. I was hanging at the *Deux Megots* and met Calvin Hernton and the the *Deux Megots* crowd—like Carol Berge and Jackson MacLow. My friend was Eddie Krasnow. He was a painter but he wrote poetry. I was going to the New School at night and these guys were in my class. They were mostly married guys who lived in the suburbs. So we would hang out in the Village after class and then somehow we found out about the *Deux Megots* open readings and we would go there but we were all afraid to read. It was intimidating, you know. But anyway, I met Calvin there. Calvin was just off the boat, from Mississippi or somewhere, some southern college where he had been teaching and read this great poem, you know? So I went over and said man, that was a great poem, and we became friends, drank beer, and talked about writing. Calvin came over to me one day and said "these writers are putting together a magazine, and they're hav-

ing a meeting, and I want you to come, let's go." So I went, and they had all these black writers, and it was astounding. Because in the early 60's, there was Leroi Jones—who was—I'm trying to figure out where he stood in terms of Allen Ginsberg and I guess to my mind at the time he was at least equal to Allen—but I was more interested in Ted Joans, who I'd never met but I would see him in the Village and I was very in awe of him. And then Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, but I didn't even know where they were, and quickly discovered that Richard Wright was in Paris. So there were all these black writers. And I met Tom Dent, Lloyd Addison, Lorenzo Thomas and Clarence Major. Tom Dent was the organizer, and there were like fifteen writers—Asaman Byron, Norman Pritchard, Joe Johnson, Charles Patterson, James Thompson (who is now Abba Elethea), Alvin Simon, Steve Cannon, Lennox and Mary Anne Raphael, and Jerry Summers. Ishmael Reed and Winnie Stowers showed up a bit later, as did Al Haynes and George Hayes. And we sat there and we were all just gassed at each other's presence and we said "well we want to do a workshop and do a magazine." Subsequently they somehow decided that I was an editor.

Jarnot: So you had already been writing poetry at this point?

Henderson: I'd been writing more prose than poetry, but I had written poetry. I published a poem in something called *The Black American* that came out of Harlem, and which actually was still coming out in the 90's, but then they changed the title, and it had by

that point become a tabloid. At first, when I published in it, it was a small magazine that looked like Jet magazine and they had paid me five dollars. Anyway, I had published a poem, which was like a big deal, right? And then we started to put together this magazine and have workshops where everyone would read. I was writing more prose—and poetry—but mostly prose. But I had these poems and they [the workshop] were very enthusiastic; they thought these poems were good, and we listened to everyone's poems and they were all really relevant, you know? It was amazing because it wasn't about "is this a good poem?" or "does it have iambic pentameter?" or "the rhyme scheme is great." They were all poems really about intensity—not all of them were about social things—but a lot of them were about being black, or being an outsider, which is exactly what we were. We were on the Lower East Side, and over on Avenue C and 2nd Street, in this small apartment. And we came out with a couple of issues over a period of two years. It was really important. We went all over and did readings as a group and we all hung together. It was great, and I remember we would go out to the suburbs and read for these middle class black people and they would hate us and we would hate them—but it wasn't like "hate" hate, it was like, "wow, these people are really out of it," and they would say, "wow, they are really out of it" and we would drink up all their liquor and read the poems and it was a lot of fun actually. So anyway, that's *Umbra*, and subsequently when *Umbra* stopped functioning, I went to California. No, actually, before I went to California, I took it over for some reason. It was just kind of sitting there, and the people who were supposed to be editing it hadn't come out with an issue; they didn't manage to get it out. So I subsequently put together another group. Len Chandler was involved in it, and Nancy Chandler, and Merble Reagon, Barbara Christian, Marilyn Lowen, and a whole bunch of people who were essentially people from the New York chapter of SNCC more or less. Then I went to California where Victor Hernandez Cruz, Jorge

Aguirre, and Barbara Christian and I put out *Umbra Latin/Soul*, the last *Umbra*.

Jarnot: What year was that?

Henderson: 1970.

Jarnot: What about the St. Mark's scene? Did you spend time at the Poetry Project before you left for the west coast?

Henderson: Here's the story of St. Mark's. St. Mark's came out of Le Metro readings, right? The Deux Megots readings went to Le Metro and then those readings went to St. Mark's. Le Metro now is called the Telephone Bar. And Le Metro was a downstairs cafe and they had the open readings there. By that time I was disgusted with the open readings and I didn't participate much. During that time, we used to read three or four times a week, and the open readings—I thought that they had gotten kind of stodgy or something. But I was hanging out with these people, these anarchists, and we had a loft building on 2nd Street. But a lot of the *Umbra* poets still went to Le Metro and read, and there was an incident there with Tom Dent and Ishmael Reed—there was some brawl. I don't remember who got hit. I think it might have been Tom, but Ishmael was involved. And then the poets all walked out, and said where the fuck are we going to read now? you know? And these guys—Bob Ernstthal who used to run the Bread and Puppet Theatre, Allen Hoffman and Paul Pinsky, and some others—we had this building. I mean we had three floors over what became the Tin Palace. It was 2 East 2nd Street. I said come and read over at the loft. And the readings came over there, and they were there for about three months, and the readings were there every Monday, and it was like a transition. And then the Church came in and the readings went to the Church, and that was the whole thing. And actually, that whole episode Ishmael Reed wrote about in the first issue of the *East Village Other*—one of the stories on the front page about the whole transition from Le Metro to what we called the Bowery Poets Coop. So we had the readings there and then it went to St. Mark's and that was an interesting time. They had this group called the Motherfuckers, right? This is so funny because this was after Amiri [Baraka] got busted in Newark in the

Newark riots. Amiri wrote this poem ... I used to know the whole poem, but it had this line "up against the wall, motherfuckers, this is a stick up." He was telling people in Newark to go into car dealerships and take the cars, because "they're yours," you know. So this group named themselves the Motherfuckers, after the poem, right? And I never could understand these people—where they came from or where they went—but they were like the people who are really heavily pierced who sit in Tompkins Square Park. They would stand there in St. Mark's. They would just be there in a group and they were very anti-social. I never got to know any of them. Maybe somebody did. I don't know who did, probably Jim Brodey got to know them. But they were the Motherfuckers. They were there from the beginning at the Church as I recall. And they were kind of antagonistic, but in a fairly unantagonistic way.

Jarnot: One of the things I'm interested in is the way your work engages the geography of the Lower East Side. You seem like a New York School poet in some ways—I'm using that term very loosely. But I know that you spent a lot of time in California too. Do you feel like an East coast poet or a West coast poet?

Henderson: I'm a New York poet. You know, I've written a lot of poems about being in New York, right? But I've been other places—I have a lot of poems about California. I wrote this poem called "Berkeley Trees" which talked about New York and it talked about the California poets who I got to know, like Snyder, who I always thought was the best, absolutely the best. And di Prima, who always mystified me, and then there were all these Asian-American poets like Lawson Inada, and Kitty Chu, who I thought was really a good poet. And then I got involved in Third World Communications in San Francisco, and Roberto Vargas, who I thought was really the quintessential poet. And Victor Hernandez Cruz also made the move to California and was involved in that scene. I believe that after Guillon and Neruda he is the great latino poet of the Americas. Bob Kaufman was very important to all these poets on the West coast too. I noticed, however, that the poets who were involved in the Beat Generation

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seemed to have another kind of agenda, which I tried to decipher, but there always seemed to be a distinction between them and the other poets, especially black poets, and it took me a long time to get a handle on it. I realized when I went to the Beat show at the Whitney that the Beats and their whole time line were still being formulated in the early 1960's. Now looking back I can see how it was shaped, especially with the positioning of Amiri Baraka, and the handling of the poetic genius of Bob Kaufman, and the disinheritance of Ted Joans, and the submergence of jazz.

Jarnot: Part of what I wanted to talk to you about was the political in terms of poetry, what the relation is between poetry and the political world. How much does poetry fit into politics for you?

Henderson: Very much so. But then what politics are you talking about? It certainly wasn't right wing politics; it was more the politics of inclusion, because Umbra was very involved in the Civil Rights Movement. A lot of the people in Umbra were involved in SNCC in terms of civil rights. So James Meredith came to our workshop, and Charlayne Hunter, and Andy Young. Straight from the movement. And I went down there and worked with the Free Southern Theatre, and we did a poetry show, and we drove all over. And then when I came to California, that was considered post-Civil Rights, which was a really funny period because the voting rights act had been passed, and I had been involved in all that post-Kennedy shit. The assassination of President Kennedy was major shit, especially combined with Malcolm X's assassination a few months later. And so I think by 1970 people had thought there was a new day, and just like Reconstruction after the Civil War, there were all these really innovative programs happening, but at the same time all the seeds to dismantle these programs were also showing up at the same time. And one of the reasons that I left New York was when Adam Clayton Powell got drummed out of Congress. That totally disgusted me because he was one of the most important legislators ever—it was like 66 pieces of progressive legislation he was responsible for. So, as I said, while 1970 was like the Reconstruction, a lot of things were coming into play, but a lot of things were going out. So the seeds were there for Nixon. There was always this tension between—for us black people on the Lower East Side—our politics and the politics of the white Left. A lot of people from Umbra went back South. And some people went into academia, which was a buy-out. So I quickly got out of that, but I certainly felt tainted by that. It was a strange time. But I think the tension between the white Left and the black liberation movement became very pronounced. Because the black liberation movement was about civil rights, but it was also about international politics, about what was called the third world. And the whole third world thing is something that I got involved with in California because there were all these people from Asia and Latin America and the American South Sea Island protectorates and all these people were there, right? And the only context we really had was the people of color thing and the third world thing, which Richard Wright had done the early work on. And then I saw how Richard Wright's concept had been totally co-opted by **The New York Times**—by the establishment—so that third world was about economics or the living stan-

the ballad of the skeletons

A NEW SPECIALLY PRICED EP BY

Allen Ginsberg

FEATURING SPECIAL GUEST STARS

Paul McCartney, Philip Glass, Lenny Kaye



"Everybody's walking dead, but a lot of these right-wing people are even more dead. So I got this idea of making skeletons talk. 'The Ballad of the Skeletons' says something in elegant language, but it's populist so as to be clearly understood. It cuts through the bullshit."

Allen Ginsberg

Produced by Lenny Kaye

ON MOUTH ALMIGHTY/MERCURY RECORDS



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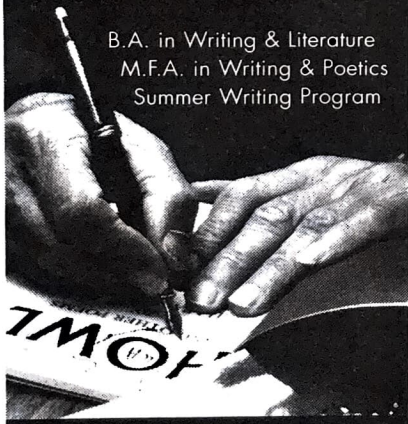
dard of a particular country of color. But Wright's work with the third world was about a heightened (even cosmic) consciousness from being involved in Asia, Africa, or Latin America as well as the West and the balance between those elements therefore forming a third world. It was a time when I was just learning about all of these places from people who were from these places and therefore learning a lot about neo-colonialism. In California we were involved in multiculturalism very early on and multiculturalism is really a way of talking about third world Americans, people of color, and it was always a wedge into what had become the mono-culture. It was never meant to be what it has become. But of course you become aware that these things become co-opted into the structure of whatever gambit you make. So then you think of what the next gambit is going to be and if you can make this gambit, how is it going to play out and how can you protect it? You can't protect it. You can't protect the gambits, and you can't protect your leaders or pop heroes. I mean there's not even the thought of it. So Bob Marley for me

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was major because here was a guy who was so important and most people were like fans, but they had nothing to do with whether he would survive or not. But anyway, I was also in California at the same time that Roberto Vargas put together a group from the Mission and they went down to Nicaragua and fought in the Revolution. And Roberto became First Secretary and I wrote a poem about it. I went and visited him in Washington when he was First Secretary and that was very funny. We had dinner with his family and he was having a lot of fun. Which was great, because I think at a certain point poets should do something like that. I mean there's this whole Western tradition of being in despair and you commit suicide or something.

Jarnot: So you think poets should be politically active?

Henderson: Better than killing themselves or some bullshit. There's too much drinking alone, trying to write the great poem.

Jarnot: What about young writers today? Do you think that the Umbra scene has influenced up and coming writers? Do you see that kind of political activity or social consciousness in young writers?

Henderson: I don't think that any of the Umbra writers tried to organize like the Beat Generation did and try to make it into this whole "thing." A lot of younger writers say, "Oh, there was Umbra, right?" And umbra means mystery and obfuscation anyway, so you don't really talk about it, all you do is name the people who were in it and how many works came out of Umbra, and it's an astounding amount. In 1994 we were at the National Black Arts Festival and Ishmael Reed said that over 50 books have come out of Umbra, some huge number of books have come out of Umbra in poetry and prose and plays and stuff.

Jarnot: When you think of young people who are writing in New York today, or even on the West coast, do you see that kind of organized thing happening? I mean who are the younger writers you're interested in?

Henderson: I don't know; that's such a strange question. I like Paul Beatty. I think that Tracie Morris is a genius. I think she's brilliant. I can't off the top say that this one young writer is great.

Jarnot: Do you go to readings at the

Nuyorican Cafe?

Henderson: Not much. The slams are not particularly my cup of tea. Julie Patton is really good, but I don't really follow that scene very much.

Jarnot: I guess I'm interested in how much things have changed, or have they changed? Have the writers changed? Has the context in which the writers write changed? I'm interested in the way you perceive that.

Henderson: You know, I'm going to say that part of it is this whole business of the writing schools. The writing schools—their whole increasing involvement in academia and writing—to me it makes things tremendously complicated because then I tend to say well, okay, I'm a non-academic writer, and I don't want to be identified academically, because they look to me like Cabals, and it's more about power and influence. I mean I was in this bookstore earlier today over on 6th Avenue and I was looking at these journals, and almost every English department has their journal which they distribute. To me that's complicated it. So a lot of the young writers I don't know where they're coming from. Maybe it has to do with this Language business or Post-structuralism stuff, which I never thought was good for anyone except for critics who really got off on it, or for academics addicted to reading who got off on that kind of non-stuff. But I never thought that it had a lot to do with writing, especially in terms of writing involving personal and social liberation.

Jarnot: What about music? You work with song in your writing. And you've been a documentor; you've written a biography of Jimi Hendrix. What do you think the relationship is between poetry and music? Is that essential for you?

Henderson: When I was in Newark the last time with Amina and Amiri, Amina said "David, 'keep on pushing.' I want you to do a reading so you can read that poem again." And I used to read that poem a lot. This was in the 60's. And I never thought of it as a big deal at the time, but in retrospect from what people say I guess apparently it must show that the black writers at the time didn't recognize Rhythm & Blues. But I use R&B in my songs, in my poems. So I guess that was the deal. But Langston Hughes liked that; he understood it because he used the blues. But when he

was coming up the blues was the pop music of the time. So I dealt with R&B, it was as simple as that. I mean I used to sing. When I was a kid I used to sing R&B. We had a group. There's this book called *They All Sing on the Street Corner*, and it's a great book about many of the people—the groups—that sang on the street corners. And that's what we did. And people said okay, that's a gang—you're a gang. No, we were a gang because at that point living in a place that was like Howard Beach, if you didn't have any people with you, you were in trouble. Because the white kids didn't really like us, living in a project in the outer boroughs. But essentially what we did was sing, like hunter gatherers. So we sang all the way up until I left home. Then I really didn't sing anymore, for a long time until I went to California, and then we had a group there. I had a band in California. And we did something I have the video of, at San Francisco State, we did it for the Poetry Center. We did some gigs. But I've always been involved with music and with musicians.

Jarnot: Well what do you think makes a poem a good poem? Do you think music is part of it?

Henderson: The thing is that everyone has a good poem, everyone has at least one good poem. I mean I don't care who they are. I mean if you've been writing at it for a while, you know. So it's not really about the poem then is it? Or is it? I mean it's not like "Howl," right. You say, okay, do you have a good poem? And you say, yeah, I have "Howl." But you know, read "Second April" [by Bob Kaufman]. Read *Solitudes Crowded With Loneliness*. Kaufman kills them. You talk about a poem, Kaufman has the poems. I remember we had this poetry reading for Bob at the Filmore East in 1966. I thought that Kaufman was dead. I think that we announced that he was dead. I think that Eileen said he heard that and he laughed, which is beautiful, because Bob, in terms of Zen, and in terms of "surreal"—he was so much of that. He had gone beyond all that shit I guess in a way. But he wrote these poems and they were great and he believed in poetry. So many of the younger poets in San Francisco, they loved Bob and many of them hung with Bob. So if you can write a poem like "Second April," then that's significant. And then okay, has anybody done that? And if anyone has, is it possible to be able to perceive it out of the great mass of poetry that there is. I don't know, because it seems to me that there's a lot of self-promotion—to what

point? I don't understand the point. The self-promotion could be, alright, you could get a university professorship, you could win an award, you could get a grant, and that all seems to me to be competitive in the academic sense, but that has nothing to do with poetry.

Jarnot: So David, what advice would you give to young poets?

Henderson: And now you're working for the *Today Show*, right? You're speaking in sound bytes. I don't have any advice that I can think of off the top. It depends on what the context is. When I taught the workshop [at The Poetry Project], which was great, these were poets who were essentially writing for themselves and trying to become better, and I thought that was great. The advice that I had for them was the same advice that I have for myself, and I was glad for them, so that I could finally give myself some good advice in a good context. Okay—some people there wanted to write longer works of fiction, which I encouraged, because I think that poets write great prose, and I don't see the great difference between prose and poetry, and that was kind of the way I titled my workshop—for people doing manuscripts in poetry or prose—and I always talked about how they go back and forth between each other. And so I said, if you're going to be a writer—well, are you going to be a writer first of all? Do you want to do this? Or do you just want to write for yourself? — which is great, I think that a lot of people do this. I've discovered a lot of people say "Oh, you're a poet. Well, I've written some poems." And people have written some poems, and some of them are pretty good. But pretty good to whom? It doesn't even matter. If it means something to them, or to someone that they love, then that's as good as it gets. Then maybe you'll write "The Wasteland" or something, maybe you'll be T.S. Eliot. My advice to poets is not to get hung up on poetry, but to appreciate poetry because it's the greatest form whatsoever because technically there's no reward. And then there are all these poets who are not called poets like songwriters and like rappers, right? Whole landscapes of poetry are not even recognized. So what's my advice to younger poets? Write your poems and try to find another form of writing. I mean you say "younger poets," and I assume that they want to distinguish themselves in some way as poets, but I think the best thing about being a poet is forming other relationships with other writers and getting into

some interesting subjects and following them through, and looking at them poetically.

Jarnot: David, have the chickens come home to roost? What's the future of America? Are things going to get better or worse?

Henderson: The chickens are coming home to roost because of what America did geopolitically, like in Iraq. A former ally, then it's manipulated into a situation where the US bombs the shit out of them, and kills a lot of women and children, or they try to starve people out. So "the chickens come home to roost" means that all the evil that was perpetrated overseas to protect the American way of life—well, it's going to be hard to elude the anger that has been inculcated in generations of a lot of people of color all over. I'm very afraid of the aftermath, or the blowback from American foreign policy. Are things going to get better or worse? I think a lot depends on the poets, if the poets can get it together. That's what I said when I made those remarks at St. Mark's State of the Art Symposium. I think the poets can either do it or not do it, but I don't think they are going to do it by looking at themselves as so distinct. As I was saying, when I was researching Marley and Hendrix, the poets always had great information, the poets always had great leads, and they put things together in a way that nobody else did, and they knew what was important and what wasn't and they were always good. Jim Brodey—great insights, did a pretty good interview with Hendrix at a difficult time, which I reprinted in the new edition of the Hendrix book in its entirety. So I think it's up to the poets because the poets are the leaders of the artists. Because you get the visual artists and the musicians, and they're directly tied into the weirdest shit. The dancers are always going to be beautiful—I like the dancers—but they're not political. So I think it's the poets. And for the life of me I don't understand why you don't have poems about the welfare act. Not your doctrinaire leftist poem about "rise up people and overthrow the means of production," and all that crazy shit. I think we have to bargain for a position in this society based on what we know, and I think that poets know all that there is to know—is there any more that one needs to know? I don't think so. Then it becomes "let's make a deal." And the poets are not even talking about that, and since they lead the artists, if they're not talking about it, then nothing's happening.

ASSEMBLING ALTERNATIVES: A Report From New Hampshire

by
Joel Lewis

One of the more significant gatherings of poets from the non-mainstream traditions occurred over Labor Day weekend at the University of New Hampshire/Durham. "Assembling Alternatives" brought together over two hundred poets and scholars from as far away as The Republic of South

Africa and New Zealand. The focus was on the experimental poetic traditions of the US and Great Britain.

The event, two years in the making, was made possible through the yeoperson-like efforts of Romana Huk, a professor at UNH. In a conversion narrative not unlike those found on the 700 Club, Professor Huk's original focus was on the L-7 ["square"] tradition of mainstream British poetry. Having written her dissertation on Kathleen Raine she was in London gathering material for a study of Geoffrey Hill. While there she made contact with poets such as Denise Riley, Ken Edwards, Robert Sheppard and other members of London's hardscrabble alternative poetry community. Through contact with this community of poets, the idea of the conference emerged.

It is odd to recognize the distance between the British and US poetry communities. For decades, the worth of a US poet was measured on his/her reception by British critics (an arc that runs between Longfellow and Robert Lowell). And in the Fifties, many a British poet made a healthy living reading and teaching at American colleges (Thom Gunn was one of the few poets of that era who decided to remain in the US).

With the waning of tweedy academic anglophilia, few British poets in recent years have had any impact on the US scene. Ted Hughes, once a favorite of two-fisted male professors, becomes further marginalized with each new biography of his late wife, Sylvia Plath. Current popular favorites Carol Ann Duffy and Simon Armitage, who are regularly heard on the BBC and are published by major houses, are virtually unknown here.

The Assembling Alternatives conference had its ups and down. Most of the participants grew weary of the tight scheduling that allowed little discussion of the panels and poetry. Panels began before 9am and evening readings ended well after midnight. "One of my students told me that conferences are a reflection of their organizers," remarked a bemused Romana Huk, "and I suppose the packed, round-the-clock schedule is a bit of an extension of my way of doing things."

My solution to poetry boot camp was follow the Yiddish aphorism "You can't dance at two weddings with one behind" and was selective about my attendance. The papers I attended were a mixed bag—which after years of tagging along to academic conferences with my professor wife, I take as par for the course. Steve Evans, a graduate student at Brown, gave a terrific paper on the post-1989 experimental poets (Why '89, I asked Evans—"That's when the Berlin Wall came down," he replied). Bob Perelman, in his ongoing move away from classic Language Poetry, disturbed a number of writers in the audience by suggesting the Greenbergian-type Formalism may not be what it is all about and suggested a renewed look at the social. Papers by Hazel Smith, Allen Fisher and Rod Mengham (among others) gave me some insight into current UK poetic practices.

There were a number of great poetry readings. Young up n' comer Miles Champion (yes, that is his real name) did a Bonneville Salt Flats sort of a reading, managing to also be understood at the same time. There were excellent sets of sound/performance poetry by Fiona Templeton, Chris Cheek and Paul Dutton and an entire set of poets working in electronic media, including Loss Glazier and Chris Funkhouser.

The absence of poets and critics of color disturbed many; less in a PC/hair shirt self-flagellating mode and more in the sorrow that there was no space to discuss why avant-garde poetry remains a white cottage industry. That Language Poetry was offered up as America's official experimental writing (not to mention its transmogrification at the hands of scholars who are involved in this nascent canon formation) was a little annoying and made more frustrating by the lack of a forum to consider the issues. In general, the conference had a better representation of the scope of the UK scene than the US scene.

[contd. on page 29]

Writing From Out of Bounds



Frank Lima
Bill Beckley
Dodie Bellamy
Lynn Crawford
David Lehman
Robert Glück
Cydney Chadwick



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A Journey Through the
World of the Homeless
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Symposium 96: (DIS)CONTENT

by
Jessica Hagedorn



photo by Marion Ettlinger

They say the decadent, self-serving '80's are over. The obese serpent has eaten its own tail and choked to death with greed. They say the cautious, self-serving '90's are almost over too, and we quake with uncertainty and fear, devastated by an

ongoing AIDS epidemic, many of us too numb to grieve. Family members, lovers, friends, colleagues, and neighbors fade fast, fade fierce, swarms of black butterflies raining down upon us. This week, last week, a mail-order bride is murdered by her irate husband in Seattle. This week, last week, teenage armies brandishing guns run amok in Monrovia. This week, last week, albino surfers run amok in Tasmania. This week, last week, what's the difference? Random massacres are the norm, and self-serving identity politics are played out in boardrooms, classrooms, museums, and the media. The planet seethes with rage and confusion, and we are too exhausted to keep up with every savage act. Our government leaders are truly pitiful—sheepish versions of the same old wolves, masters of compromise who jog while spouting slick soundbytes at their despairing constituents. The future seems bleak; the future seems X — artless, soulless, non-existent. Why bother to write? Why bother to read? Why bother to live? Who gives a shit about poetry but poets?

In her essay, "Someone Is Writing A Poem," Adrienne Rich writes: "In a political culture of man-aged spectacles and passive spectators, poetry appears as a rift, a peculiar lapse, in the prevailing mode. The reading of a poem, a poetry reading, is not a spectacle, nor can it be passively received. It's an exchange of electrical currents through language—that daily,

mundane, abused, and ill-prized medium, that instrument of deception and revelation, that material thing, that knife, rag, boat, spoon/reed become pipe/tree trunk become drum/mud become clay flute/conch shell become summons to freedom..."

(p. 82, from *What Is Found There* by Adrienne Rich)

Born and raised in the Philippines, my fertile imagination was colonized by both Hollywood and the Catholic Church. I grew up borgeois and understood only too well, even as a child, that to be born poor was to be eternally fucked. In spite of my privilege, I was fortunate. In a feudal society oppressive to women, my mother chose to defy convention. She was a fabulous bitch who dared to talk back, a frustrated painter not at all surprised by my desire to be a writer. Meanwhile—and is such a thing possible?—the poor grew even poorer, continued to be fucked, and somehow endured with grace.

In my parents' and grandparents' generation, Spanish was the language of colonial privilege; Tagalog the language used to address servants. But by the time I was born, English became the preferred language of the elite—the *lingua franca*. To speak English well and without an accent was, and still is, considered an advantage. Although we were a trilingual family, I chose to write in English; I was prepared early to make my exit from my comfortable yet volatile tropical environment to the powerful and brutally compelling world known as *America*. My family abruptly emigrated in the '60s, leaving behind a haunted house and too



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many memories. We settled in San Francisco — a city overrun by poets, a city we felt secure in because of its closeness to water (we could leave any time and go back "home"), and because there was a growing and visible Filipino community. We had easy access to our culture, whether we wanted it or not. Here in the Bay Area, we were also confronted by the shockingly new and unfamiliar: other Asians, Chicanos, African Americans, and working-class white people of various ethnic origins. The ironies were immediately apparent. Here at last in America, I was beginning to grapple with the Philippines—my country of extreme beauty and extreme suffering. I discovered to my immigrant's surprise, that here in America, shades of beauty and suffering existed as well. Reading and writing poems were my way out of isolation, literally music to my ears. Poems were quick bursts of adrenalin and illumination on a page. I was driven by my adolescent confusion to fill notebooks with mini-rants, raves, and rages. I was eager to claim the English language as my own—to make sense of where I came from, what was happening to me, and of the larger world, beckoning and ominous. I read anything I could get my hands on. Lorca, Neruda, Antonin Artaud. By sheer accident, I stumbled upon a new wave of irreverent writers. The America they presented in their work was not the America I'd been taught to idealize. I was delighted by my discoveries. Powerful words and profane images jolted me awake with their unexpected humor and twists of language. Spanglish. Taglish. Victor Hernandez Cruz's sexy, tough, and rhythmic incantations to the islands of Manhattan and Puerto Rico evoked the intense Philippine landscape I could never forget. He was the same age as I:

"it was slow spring/just coming by/nodream/screams/easter screams/asking god to come/his head/first hit the/garbage can/it fell hard/from the sixth floor/it bounced/& smashed into the tar/he did not move/the god he called/did not come/thru the flames..."
("Born To Be Burned," from Snaps by Victor Hernandez Cruz)

The wisdom, the wit, the poignant female power of Sonia Sanchez thrilled me:

"I see you blackboy/bent toward destruction watching/for death with tight eyes"
(from "Haiku," p. 42, *homegirls & handgrenades* by Sonia Sanchez)

and

"How shall I tell you of him, of Bubba, young man of Harlem? Bubba. Of filling stations and handball games; of summer bongo playing; of gang bangs; of strict laughter piercing the dark, long summers that kept us peeled across stoops looking for air. Bubba..."
(from "Bubba," p. 55, *homegirls and handgrenades*)

There was the soulful Filipino poet Serafin Syquia, chickaboom-chickaboom. Dead at 31, no book of his own to remember him by. The Last Poets. Nikki Giovanni's celebratory *Ego Tripping*. Leroi Jones' *The Dead Lecturer*. Pedro Pietri's *Puerto Rican Obituary*. Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide...* No caps and no punctuation was the trend in those days as far as form goes. Rattle windows and break down doors. Spelling words phonetically, or innovatively—was a clear and defiant "Fuck you/kiss my ass" challenge to the literary (read: white) establishment. The settings of many of these poems were urban, the language accessible. The battle cry went something like

this: *I am, I am, I am*. Everything I'd been taught about Western poetry went out the window. The boldness of form and content were unsettling and exhilarating, and gave me the courage to find my own voice.

Today, I see this same longing to be heard in the young, emerging

AVENUE OF ESCAPE

by Lewis Warsh

Cover by Yvonne Jacquette

Avenue of Escape strikes me as a book of curious solitude—perhaps solitudes—the very territory where writing takes place. This is a "progress of stories"—to adapt a famous phrase—from the *child-writer* to the *writer-of-the-age-you-are*. That the poem is not the world—that the poem is not the self—are clear *foci*, as if destiny were not inhabited, except by aphorisms and dispersed tales. It is a reading book, as if you had been torn out of it—words escape as from your "starling's mouth."
Robn Blaser

In turn elegiac, discursive, ironic or deadpan, Lewis Warsh's poems trip the real while revealing the incontrovertible logic of his lyric. What's love got to do with it? Everything, for words and lovers are haunted by their absent objects in the same sublime way. Like a modern cross between Montaigne and Jabès, Warsh anatomizes this torment with the mastery and clarity of the possessed.
Chris Tysh

An anxious romantic enters night. An erotic muralist paints breasts on a mirror. A student of architecture unveils a "new" New York in different seasons. An archivist of feelings watches them seep out of people and buildings. A retired mechanic sees civilization sputter. All of these people are Lewis Warsh, incomparable scribe of late, late New York.
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poets on the so-called "spoken word circuit." These flamboyant and media-savvy poets give themselves names like "I Touch," "Mums The Schemer," whatever. Race and gender remain the prevailing hot topics. My concern is that all this creative potential may go to waste. The tendency of some poets to glibness, while placing too much emphasis on "presentation" and "shock-value performance" can be suspect—sort of like going to a fast-food joint when you're starving. There is quite a bit of celebrity attached to the idea of being an "MTV poet"—which has its positive side, because it reaches so many people—and its bankrupt side, where it's really just all about a hairdo and

"attitude." In this fickle arena, you can have your moment onstage and get by on very little—with the right stylist, a great sound system, and a competent back-up band.

Again, I wish to quote from Adrienne Rich: "Spectacles controlled and designed to manipulate mass opinion, mass emotions depend increasingly on the ownership of vast and expensive technologies and on the physical distance of the spectators from the spectacle...I'm not claiming any purity for poetry, only its own particular way of being. But it's notable that the making of and participation in poetry is so independent of high technology. A good sound system at a reading is of course a great advantage. Poetry readings can now be heard on tape, radio, recorded on video. But poetry would get lost in an immense technological performance scene. What poetry can give has to be given through language and voice, not through massive effects of lighting, sound, superimposed film images, nor as a mere adjunct to spectacle..."

("Someone Is Writing A Poem," pp. 85-86, *What Is Found There* by Adrienne Rich)

Meanwhile—and is such a thing possible? Eternally fucked and easily dismissed, the poor grow even poorer, but somehow endure with grace.

I'm a cynical romantic, and somewhat naive. I consider writing an actually useful, noble profession. To write without regard to content for me is unthinkable. What exactly is a poet or writer, anyway? A magician with words? A musician with language? A chronicler of dreams? A fool for justice? A thorn in your side? To astonish, to provoke, to illuminate, and to empower is some of what a poem can accomplish, the revelation of a "not-giving-up of the human spirit" that can be so simple, gorgeous, and moving. The South African poet Breyten Breytenbach was arrested for "terrorism" and imprisoned for seven years, two of those years spent in solitary confinement. He never stopped writing. It surely kept him from going

mad, it surely kept him physically and spiritually alive: "in the middle of the night/the voices of those/to be handed within days/rise up already sounding thin/with the terror of stiff ropes—we each bear like shadow/thrown over our thoughts/the noose, or a cancer, or shattering glass..."

("In The Middle Of The Night," from *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, p. 375)

I agree with Adrienne Rich when she admits to not being able to "...write a poem to manipulate you: it will not succeed. Perhaps you have read such poems and decided you don't care for poetry; something turned you away...I can't write a poem simply from good intentions, wanting to set thing right, make it all better; the energy will leak out of it, it will end by meaning less than it says..."

(p. 84, *What Is Found There*)

The poems I have written were often created for selfish and deeply personal reasons. Yet, as Adrienne so eloquently puts it: "...someone writing a poem believes in, depends on, a delicate, vibrating range of difference, that an 'I' can become a 'we' without extinguishing others, that a partly common language exists to which strangers can bring their own heartbeat, memories, images of strangers."

(p. 85, *What Is Found There*)

For many of us poets and fiction writers (and I like to think of us simply as writers)—what is personal is also political, and vice versa. In the thirty years I have lived in America, I never thought I would see the literary landscape change this fast, splitting off into so many tantalizing directions. A joyous babel of voices. In Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, a character howls in complaint: "The world is shrinking!" Poor dear, he just doesn't get it—but border crossings have been liberating for writer as well as reader. To write is to fight, and it can be divine, delicious combat. Languages evolve, bastards are born, borders be damned.

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Writing Workshops at the Poetry Project

Poetry Workshop (Tuesday evenings 7-9pm, October 22nd-January 14th) taught by Todd Colby

The workshop will center on weekly writing assignments designed to stretch our poetry skins. We will work with surprises, journals and other procedures as a group. We will also examine different elements of performance poetry and its history, exploring possibilities through visits with a variety of guest artists. The goal of the workshop is to create a trusting and informal environment where we can discover new forms and happy accidents with inspiration and ease.

Poet, actor and vocalist, Todd Colby is the author of *Ripsnort* and *Cush* both from Soft Skull Press. He has performed his poetry on MTV, PBS and Canada's New Music Network. This is the second workshop he has lead at the Poetry Project.

Poetry Workshop (Friday evenings 7-9pm, October 25th-January 10th) taught by Paul Violi

Beginners and vets welcome. Sessions will mainly focus on participants' work. Also, we'll look at and discuss models covering a wide range of styles and forms. The approach will vary from the autocratic to heuristic and participants will be encouraged to read a great deal of traditional and contemporary poetry to stir the mix of arrogance and humility or whatever it takes to develop their own style.

Paul Violi is the author of 9 books of poetry, including *Splurge*, *Likewise*, *The Curious Builder*. He has taught writing for more than 20 years, and has received awards from NEA, NYFA, Ingram Merrill and Fund for Poetry.

Prose Workshop (Saturday afternoons, noon-2pm, October 26th-January 11th) taught by Charlotte Carter

The purpose of the workshop is not to exalt the conventions of plotting, linear narrative, the "right" language, or even "good" writing. The workshop, however, will be most helpful to those looking to shape their writing into cohesive prose in the sympathetic milieu of other writers. The workshop leader's predilection is for the noir element in fiction. But that by no means places any restrictions on the type of work participants submit.

Charlotte Carter, a former student of Bernadette Mayer, makes a living as a freelance editor and writer. Her publications include: *Rhode Island Red* (Serpent's Tail, 1997) a thriller set in the world of New York street musicians, and *Personal Effects* (United Artists, 1991), as well as numerous short pieces in anthologies and small press journals.

Workshops cost \$150 which includes membership in The Poetry Project. This fee is good for one year and includes: the option of taking other workshops at no additional cost; free admission to most Poetry Project readings and events; and a subscription to The Poetry Project Newsletter. Participants may register in person at the Project office or via mail (The Poetry Project, 131 East 10th St., NYC 10003).

calendar

events at THE POETRY PROJECT

DECEMBER 1

Day Without Art

Dancers Responding to AIDS, Positive Music and Dancepace in conjunction with St. Mark's Church and the Poetry Project invite you to join us for a 24-hour meditation and remembrance. This year's event will feature danced repetitions, dedicated readings of names, poetry and performances by many New York City-based musicians of Erik Satie's *Vexations*. The event will begin at 12 midnight on Saturday night, December 1st and continue through Sunday for 24 hours. The church will be open to the public. For more information call DRA at (212) 840-0770.

2

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8 pm]

4

Phillip Lopate & Wang Ping

Wang Ping is a poet, prose writer and teacher whose first novel *Foreign Devil* was recently published by Coffeehouse Press. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *Best American Poetry 1996*. Her critically acclaimed short story collection *American Visa* was listed as one of the "Best Books for the Teen Age" by The New York Public Library. Phillip Lopate is the author of three essay collections, *Bachelorhood*, *Against Joie de Vivre* and *Portrait of My Body*; two novels, *Confessions of Summer* and *The Want to Stay Open* and *The Daily Round*; and a memoir of his teaching experiences, *Being With Children*. His essays, fiction, film and architecture writings have appeared in many journals and magazines, including *The Paris Review*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's* and *Esquire*. Lopate's film work includes a screenplay for Jane Campion, adapted from Christopher Isherwood's *My Guru and His Disciple*.

6

The Last Poets—Abiodun Oyewole, Umar Bin Hassan & Don Babatunder Eaton

The Last Poets were born on May 19, 1968 at a birthday celebration for Malcolm X in Harlem. They became the *signature literary voice for many African Americans*, expressing the experiences of Black people through words and music. This evening will celebrate the publication of *On A Mission: Selected Poems and A History of The Last Poets*, which includes over 50 generation-spanning poems, as well as interviews and lyrics. [10:30 pm]

9

Darius James & Marco Villalobos

New Yorker and elsewhere. A collection of his poetry, *Wild Kingdom*, was published this past spring by Graywolf Press. Shashi Tharoor is the author of several books including *The Great Indian Novel* and *Slow Business*, which has since been made into a feature film entitled *Bollywood*. A widely published critic, commentator and columnist, Tharoor is a recipient of India's Best Book Award as well as a Commonwealth Writer's Prize. Vipin is a poet, prose writer, and video and theater artist. His work has appeared in *The Portable Lower East Side*, *The Paterson Literary Review* and elsewhere. Vipin has worked to incorporate video material into theater pieces including a production of Steve Cannon's "Marvelous" directed by Margo Gezairehan and Amiri Baraka's "Jackpot Melting: A Commercial" directed by Rome Neal. [10:30 pm]

16

Steve Cannon Book Party & Reading

This evening is a celebration of the reprint of Steve Cannon's *Grove, Bang & Jive Around*, an irreverent, X-rated, hoodoo novel originally published in 1969. The celebration will feature readers including Steve Cannon, Jessica Hagedorn, Eve Packer, Katherine Arnoldi, David Henderson, Dominique, Bob Holman and other special guests.

18

Michael Lally & Gillian McCain

Michael Lally is the author of more than twenty books of poetry including *Rocky Dries Yellow*, *Just Let Me Do It*, *Hollywood Magic*, *Catch My Breath* and most recently, *Can't Be Wrong*. Lally has written, directed and performed in many poetry plays including *Four Crown Men*, *The Rhythm of Torn Stars and Chicks with Dicks*. His work has been included in several films, most recently, *Drugstore Cowboy* and *Pump Up the Volume*. Gillian McCain is the author of *Tilt (The Figures/Hard Press)*, a collection of poems. She is the co-author (with Legs McNeil) of *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk (Grove)*. Her poems have appeared in journals including *Lingo* and *The World as well as on the CD Getcheritika* a spoken word album of work by McCain, Alan Vega and Ric Ocasek. She is a former Program Coordinator of the Poetry Project and a former editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

23

The Creative Unity Collective with Darryl McNeil, Yusef Lamont, Michael Mebern and other special guests

A 10th anniversary celebration of the free-form Black theater collective featured fortnightly on WBAI radio. The collective describes their work as "using humor and wit as weapons against stereotypes and reactionary mindsets." The artists will present Creative Unity classics as well as new works-in-progress.

ious community-based organizations, including the Nuyorican Poets Cafe, The Point and Taller Borique. Eve Packer has been awarded grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, Jerome Foundation, and the New York State Foundation for the Arts. Her collection of poems, *skull head semba*, was published by Fly by Night Press in 1993.

15

Nick Piombino & Jerome Sala

Nick Piombino is a poet and psychoanalyst. His books include *Poeme*, *The Boundary of Blur: Essays* and the forthcoming *Light Street*. His poems have recently appeared in *Avec*, *Ribot*, *Situation* and elsewhere. Piombino's critical writings have been published in *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, *Le Discours Psychanalytique* and *Chain*. Jerome Sala is the author of *Raw Deal: New & Selected Poems*, from Another Chicago Press. His work has appeared in numerous journals and magazines including *Ploughshares*, *New American Writing* and *Rolling Stone*.

17

Alexandra Auder, Anselm Berrigan and India Hixon

Alexandra Auder recently completed a novel based on her life with her mother Viva, the Warhol film star and her father, video artist Michael Auder. Anselm Berrigan has recently returned to New York after a two-year stay in San Francisco. His recent publications include a chapbook, *On the Premises*, and poems which have appeared in several magazines, including *Talisman*, *Prosodia* and *Yale Younger Poets*. India Hixon will be reading from a new manuscript, *The Desire to Meet with the Beautiful*. She entered the world of poetry through the early encouragement of her father, Lex Hixon, an authority on Comparative Religion. Like her father India has a predilection for mystical poetic texts. [10:30 pm]

20

Tribute to the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

This evening will feature the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as well as gospel music.

22

Vicki Hudspith & Frank Lima

A former Poetry Project Newsletter editor, Vicki Hudspith is the author of a collection of poems entitled *White and Nervous*. Hudspith's work has been widely published in small press journals and she has directed several poetry plays at venues including the Eye and Ear Theater. Hudspith recently moved back to New York from London, where she completed a novel, *Downpour*. Frank Lima's *New and Selected Poems* is forthcoming from Hard Press. His work has been included in a recent issue of *Chicago magazine* and new work will be featured in this January's *American Poetry Review*.

24

Roberta Allen, Roy Edroso & Frazier Russell

Roberta Allen is the author of several collections of fiction and non-fiction, including *The Daughter*, a novella, and *Amazon Dream*, a travel memoir. She has two books forthcoming in 1997: *Certain People and Five Minute Fiction*. Roy Edroso's work has appeared in *The Portable Lower East Side*, *Verbal Abuse* and *Java Journal*. His writing was recently included in *Domestic*, *Book's Rough Guide to Rock*. Edroso performs with

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9

Darius James & Marco Villalobos

Darius James is the author of *Negrophobia and That's Blaxploitation! Roots of the Baadassess Tude* (Rated X by an All-White Jury). His fiction has appeared in numerous anthologies including *The Gen X Reader* and *High Risk 2*. He is a regular contributor to *Grand Street*, *Esquire*, *Spin* and *Details* magazines. Marco Villalobos is an MFA candidate at Brooklyn College and a writing student of Darius James'. Villalobos has published work in *The Brooklyn Review* and *Spectrum*.

11

Tony Towle & Terence Winch

Tony Towle's most recent book is *Some Musical Episodes*, published by Hanging Loose Press. His previous volumes include *North* (which won the Frank O'Hara Award in 1970); *Autobiography: Works on Paper*; and *New & Selected Poems, 1963-1983*. Towle has received awards and fellowships from New York State, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ingram Merrill Foundation and the Fund for Poetry, among others. Terence Winch is the author of several collections of prose and poetry including *Contenders* and *Total Strangers*. His most recent book, *The Great Indoors* received the Columbia Book Award in 1996. His work has appeared recently in *Arshile*, *The American Poetry Review* and will be included in a forthcoming issue of *The Paris Review*. Winch's band Celtic Thunder released a recording this past year entitled *Hard New York Days*.

13

Word-wallahs with Meena Alexander, Vijay Seshadri, Shasi Tharoor & Vipin

Meena Alexander is the author of several books of poetry and prose including the memoir *Fault Lines*, a novel *Nampally Road* and most recently *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience*. Vijay Seshadri's poems, essays and reviews have appeared in *AGNI*, *Antacus*, *The Nation*, *The*

(The Figures/Hard Press), a collection of poems. She is the co-author (with Legs McNeil) of *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* (Grove). Her poems have appeared in journals including *Lingo* and *The World* as well as on the CD *Getchertitz* a spoken word album of work by McCain, Alan Vega and Ric Ocasek. She is a former Program Coordinator of the Poetry Project and a former editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.

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JANUARY 1

23rd Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading

Featuring over 120 poets, performers, dancers, musicians and artists including Penny Arcade, Maggie Estep, Ron Padgett, Dana Bryant, Nick Piombino, John Giorno, Paul Violi, Todd Colby, Ed Friedman, Brenda Coultas and many more! [2 pm-1 am, \$15, \$12 for Poetry Project Members]

6

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8 pm]

8

Lisa Jarnot & Melanie Neilson

Lisa Jarnot is the editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. Her collection of prose and visual poetry, *Some Other Kind of Mission* was recently published by Burning Deck Books. She is also the author of *Phonetic Introductions, The Fall of Orpheus and Sea Lyrics*. Jarnot's poetry has appeared recently in *Lingo*, *The World* and *Grand Street*. Melanie Neilson is the author of *Natural Facts* (Potes & Potes 1996), *Civil Noir* (Roof 1991), and an unpublished collection, *Hello Says the Lantern*. A chapbook *Vertigo* is forthcoming this spring from *Moxie Books*. She is the editor of *Big Allis* magazine. For two seasons she worked on Michael Moore's *TV Nation*, and most recently was a producer-writer for *Justice Factory*, a TV magazine show for teens.

13

Flaco Navaja & Eve Packer

Flaco Navaja is a nineteen-year old AIDS/community activist from a family of artists. He currently works with a group of poets, the Bronx Tree Warriors, and performs his work at var-

A former Poetry Project Newsletter editor, Vicki Hudspith is the author of a collection of poems entitled *White and Nervous*. Hudspith's work has been widely published in small press journals and she has directed several poetry plays at venues including the Eye and Ear Theater. Hudspith recently moved back to New York from London, where she completed a novel, *Downpour*. Frank Lima's *New and Selected* poems is forthcoming from Hard Press. His work has been included in this January's *American Poetry Review*.

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27

Tiye Giraud & Cynthia Simmons

Vocalist, percussionist and composer, Tiye Giraud was recently commissioned by Diamond/Royals Productions to create the score for *Conjure Woman* a film to be aired on PBS on February 5th 1997. Giraud will be performing excerpts from "Sugar Tit" and other works both vocally and on harmonica. Cynthia Simmons is a Harlem-based artist who has long been behind the scenes as an arts organizer. She will be presenting narrative and theater works-in-progress.

29

Brenda Coultas & Carol Szamatowicz

Brenda Coultas' first book, *Early Films* was recently published by Rodent Press. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Bombay Gin*, *The Little Magazine*, *Handy Jugs* and *The World*, as well as on the Lip CD for the Women's Action Coalition. Coultas is a former Poetry Project Program Assistant, and she currently teaches at Long Island University and Toro College. Carol Szamatowicz's work has appeared in *The World*, *Lingo* and *The Hartford Advocate*. She is a teacher and yoga instructor as well as a former contributing editor to *The World*.

The Poetry Project is located at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery

131 East 10th Street, New York City 10003

<http://www.poetryproject.com>

All events are \$7.00 and begin at 8 PM unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call 212 674-0910

book reviews



photo by Frank C. Dougherty

ED ROBERSION

Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In

University of Iowa Press (Iowa City, Iowa, 52242), 1995, 150 pages, \$10.95.

Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In is acute in every sense of the word: fierce, intense, fine, keen, sharp, astute, discerning and serious. Much of its power derives from Ed Roberson's effortless ambition. While some poets feel obliged to structure their work around a double-column menu of either/or—oral/written for the page, political/personal, aesthetically rigorous/emotionally accessible—Roberson has decided to choose simultaneously from both columns. The end result: a sophisticated book that seamlessly mixes discursion with blunt statement, music with history.

Why is Roberson able to achieve this? Because he is, per Ed Foster's back-cover endorsement, "one of the 'hidden masters.'" And elegant, seemingly effortless synthesis is what masters do.

For more than two decades, Roberson has been quietly honing his skills. While other poets have established high profiles through a steady stream of books, he has published four carefully crafted manuscripts. Rigorous and demanding from the outset, his work has only grown in richness and depth through his steady nurturing. In some ways, Roberson is a bit of a hermit. He isn't voluble, so when he chooses to speak, his words

assume a gravity that demands attention.

Voices Cast Out features two cycles of poems: "Lucid Interval as Integral Music," which originally appeared in a 1984 Harmattan Press edition, and "The Aerialist Narratives." Both cycles showcase a poetic skein that combines a vigilant sense of line and rhythm that's informed by Olson with a lyricism that uses a mosaic of voices and dictions to build a liquid edifice.

Question: What do I mean by "liquid edifice"? Answer: Roberson's poems often seem chiseled out of rock, yet they're paradoxically fluid as the most deliciously convoluted riff. They're creatures of the page with intricately developed leitmotifs that create subtle echoes and layers, yet they also contain plain-spoken, powerful statements that would pass muster in the most emotionally immediate campaign speech. Above all, they have a "tablets down from the mount" finality and inevitability.

While both *Voices* cycles are equally worthwhile, due to space limitations, this review will focus on the more recent "Aerialist Narratives." As with most of Roberson's poetry, "Aerialist" bears repeated readings. The poems only give themselves to you slowly; each reading reveals a bit more of the finely wrought detail and structure that Roberson has built in.

"Aerialist" is divided into three "chapters," each with 11 poems. During the course of the 33 poems, a number of themes surface and interact with each other. Among them are racial injustice, the concept of "naming," ancestry, the African diaspora, and flight (in both senses: flying and fleeing—elaborate use of words' multiple meanings is a key element of

Apologies to Peter Bushyeager who reviewed Susan Smith-Nash's *Channel Surfing the Apocalypse* in the October/November Issue. His name was accidentally omitted from the end of that review.

—The Editor

Roberson's oeuvre.)

Grabbing voices out of the air, the narrator documents or recasts them, takes the "aerialist" macro view or hovers low for the micro, ultimately wondering at both the view and the voices' intent.

All these voices come out to meet us in this ancient seeing in the end of distances
this fearing:

the glow of the coming city
on the horizon is it burning;
is this music or screaming
all these voices cast out to talk us in?

— from "Heading: The Landing"

"Cape Journal: At Sand Pile:" is one of the book's many masterful pieces. Within the constantly shifting context of

the beach grain
by grain moving the length,
walking the length of itself

the narrator walks and explores the "length of myself," making a number of emotional and rhetorical shifts—from delicate lyricism and almost-elegy, to bald disdain and angry affirmation.

it matters less
than as long as
their shapes last

that you call this
a cloud that a whitecap;
and less

than either, this
answering a name
yours mine or

the how many names
of snow: flat, shifty, six-faced
cold
families of New Jersey

. . . Robison Robinson
Roberson Robertson

Roberson

none of the
keeping re
on us cou

look in m
and see
my damn

Another
moves between
lyrical and th
ical, ending v
on the infam
ter.

Punishment
to teach soci
(teach "them
But the teach
punishment
And when th

had learned

The change
by punishme
format, not
or any agent
the punished
themselves,

lacking

When what w
was achieved
when that re
that manhood
for once had
occurred,

state troopers

In the midst
of disparate
sionally allow
to shine fort

The hundred
to the lake,
and make the
that way
that drops of
open against
tulips' petals
like wings lift

—"Waterfo

Roberson what does it matter?

none of the crackers
keeping records
on us could spell, either . . .

look in my goddamn face
and see
my damn name

Another poem makes similar moves between the musical/ abstract/ lyrical and the straightforwardly political, ending with a blunt commentary on the infamous Attica Prison slaughter.

Punishment was supposed
to teach society
(teach "them" society)
But the teacher taught only
punishment
And when the punished suddenly
had learned

The change here was not achieved
by punishment's
format, not by the teachers
or any agents of punishment, but by
the punished
themselves, by those supposed
lacking

When what was professed to be lacking
was achieved,
when that responsibility,
that manhood, which rehabilitation
for once had actually achieved,
occurred,
state troopers were brought in and shot them.

In the midst of his elaborate weaving
of disparate modes, Roberson occa-
sionally allows his purely lyrical mode
to shine forth:

The hundred wings float down the furrowed air
to the lake, come in motionless as seed
and make the surface bloom
that way
that drops of fattened summer rain
open against the pavement
tulips' petals
like wings lift to close on landing

—"Waterfowl Landing: It Lifts to Close"

Musical references, both overt and subliminal, appear throughout the book. For example, Bob Marley's lyric "every little thing gonna be alright" winds through "The Motorcycle Crossing," beginning with a direct quote, then morphing into the testifying exclamations of

those sisters at the sink
in the kitchens baptizing those greens
suddenly break
down into tears jump up singing
shout
Don't worry
Don't worry some day
It a be alright

This poem is particularly moving. It opens with the narrator in his office "sitting right/at the desk kicking out/paper like miles" when a secretary walks in unannounced, catching him with "a silver veil of tear weaving down" his face as he meditates:

must be in my blood
blood my blood

has had to lie in
absorbing the lives
we were losing bathing in screams

The tide rhythm blood
and filth took on
rocking in that deluge
those ships cupped to our god for drink
must be in my blood

Given our own blood to drink
Bloods of the hold
Bloods of the field
drying in those furrows
through our feet . . .

I've heard about a curious bit of publishing-trade jargon that applies to Ed Roberson. Flashy, much-hyped books that fly off the shelves and then plummet into oblivion are called "dead" books. Those that are more quiet, remain in demand, build audiences and ultimately make a genuine impact are termed "live." Ed Roberson has given us a book that's very much "live."

PETER BUSHYEAGER

TAN LIN

Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe

Sun & Moon Press (6026 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036), 175 pages, \$10.95

On page 31 of *Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe* a question is asked: "Where is happiness (pause) / but a place to start?," and if there is any book of poetry that has found an originary state in language—one not indebted to arcane archeological studies of previous civilizations, but rather confined to a hyper-immediated one of our own—it is this one. Tan Lin's poetry is difficult to describe, since he cannot be claimed in the surrealist, language, Gnostic, campy "New York" or any other school or movement, but it is, at the same time, clearly attentive to the possibilities opened up by these tendencies and by other writers—Michael Palmer and John Yau first come to mind—who have conceived their own aesthetic amalgams. Lin departs from Palmer, however, with his complete lack of the lyrical subtlety and occasional eye-wink cleverness that remind the reader, in Palmer's poetry, that the poet is a member of Culture and of the "tradition," and hence of a more distant order; Lin's language is brass, his rhythms loose and often awkward, and his imagery, if it is baroque in its abundance, is straight neon-to-video rather than French impressionist, which is to say colorful, uncloistered and contemporary at all costs. He departs from Yau in that he is not engaged in any of the identity games that hide and expose an "I" in its machinations, but rather permits language to override and proliferate on its own undaunted by fears of psychological superficiality—and often with the force of a tsunami (not present in Yau). In fact, Lin seems to thrive on the "superficial," and never, in the poetry itself, engages in a plumbing of depths or in epistemological investigations, though the poem itself, in its relationship to both author and reader, often leaps from type to type of reader-author engagement—one thinks of Arakawa—sustaining a high interplay with its providence of puzzles, so that many of these experiential reconfigurations become the substance of the work. "100 Second

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Chances" begins:

Being the only elements that vary from panel to panel

and the attention distracted by three soft knocks on the door of his box

(absurd brevity)

(morning chill)

Open: having no enclosing or confining barrier: accessible on all or nearly all sides

cattle grazing on an open range. To move, to make available for entry or passage in a regular function, to commence action in a card game by making (a first bid), putting the first bid (in the pot), or playing (a card or suit) as first lead

It is impossible to speak of beauty. We shall therefore star the text open air, to open and shut. The case was open and shut.

He heard the knocking. He opened the box

and the vertically scripted words—"exile," "refugees," etc. that connect two halves of the globes.

All the time, helicopters

Suddenly a small boy dropped to the ground next to me. I realized then that the police were not firing warning shots. They were shooting into the crowd. More children fell.

A framed text displayed on a wall.

Reader expectations become the main activity of this poem, since he sets and the resets the parameters of this engagement with such a nervous, frenetic energy that one senses the jarring shifts more than the infrequent rests. The poem, attentive to a wide vocabulary of postmodern techniques (and which in some ways is a parody of—or a leaping-over-and-above—the solemnities of these practices), from those of the nouveau roman and other deconstructive poetics to the hermeneutic hermeticists and "Notes for Echo Lake," is at once a collage but also creates its own language that is indebted to no other, its debts repaid so quickly that the artifice of pastiche is absent, steamrolled (or digitized) by Lin's special syntax—his own "-speak."

Lin has, in fact, made something of a breakthrough, for he has invented a type of writing that is completely postmodern—indebted to contemporaries, but not relying on distancing ironizations to declare its latecoming; the book is full of forms developed in the late 20th century, and is in many ways an anthem for contemporaneity for its own sake, a long ode to the ecstasy of communications. Lin's surrender to the speeds and demands of the present day is complete—the book seems almost fit for slacker culture—and his innovation pervasive, a "Skeltonics" for the media age, in that it is a language devoted very much to fun, but yet which is learned and malleable. The following is from "Five Acts

Gone Up in Chalk":

Chalk stymies on the destitute stage. Floodlights shrivel to stage hands. They or their Fools gone busy: a die is rolled and a tot hammers a hand. Three directions enter a kingdom. In the kingdom of the kingdom of Actresses, seventeen bluffs in the places for lines. Soft tickers: where is her lover who climbs on her roses? Burned hands peel off the TV. Air is fine, spoons melancholy. Vistas: they look out windows today and windows tomorrow. Across the stage, they locate the foggy in cabbage. The king's 1.5 acres are murderous. Seventeen knives enter and incise.

The abundance of phrases, all of which have a junk quality but which can be lyrically expansive, create a sense of elation in the reader, and even optimism. "Talc Bull Dogface" is a sonic experience that more diffident poets might not have wanted or dared to offer, and shows off its confidence from the start; there is something of Hopkins in the energy that drives one syllable into the next, though with nothing of his reverence for nature and God, or even the word—Lin is secular and beyond the pale of fresh air, and his use of the word is, well, exploitative:

Ship carp do doped pressure bag go
famous pure-fuck your shrag
lozenge movie geisha whittle drip drop.
Unfold again wrap to pool-shaped hair
no shirtee mandible say altar tire.
Okiniwa aisle to stand. Jello wink
slant, dew drop carport, pounds
tea rhombus K-mart pencil I'm ear.
Gone flying pan. Chopstick blob.

If there is a "multicult" element to this writing, it is in the various puns on words and word-combinations that could be Chinese transliterations—one poem is called "More Fun Cow," for John Yau—but he uses this as a starting point to expose new spaces beneath the words once they are smashed together, such as "pounds / tea rhombus K-mart pencil I'm ear," which will never surrender itself to generative grammar (or to multicult-

tural rubrics).

Some poems in *Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe* do not live up to this sort of intensity, and occasionally one experiences some frustration at Lin's complete dedication to *imagery* rather than what it signifies, as if his whole poetic were about the one-dimensional realities of movies, TV and video games, and never touched down in the body-in-nature (after a good night's sleep), or in the speech one uses in arguments (or even politics)—his project is to not give in to that, but to keep language's motion at the forefront, so that it is an education in the new "tribal" realities that MacLuhan described. Some poems, like "Love, Stripped Wrench, Facsimiles" looks (it is in long, even quatrains) and feels (in its shifting imagery and syntax) a bit like Rimbaud's "Le Bateau Ivre," but the poem requires more points of entry, gaps in the flow, either on a narrative, rhythmic or aural level (it is teeming with alliterations) to be more than just a concept, but a good reading experience throughout. One becomes a little dizzy flipping through the book, even when reading the poems that have short lines (which move just as quickly) and a sigh of relief escapes when the action slows a bit, as in "After A Women's Table" (dedicated to "Mei-mei").

"Insomnia" is one of the rare poems in the book that contains meters that are recognizably "poetic," and which leads for more than a few lines into an ordered consideration of a "subject," and demonstrates, consequently, Lin's ability to write very different types of poems. It begins:

to take heroin as a sleeping pill to follow a
crack
hit with a snort of smack to bring one's
heartbeat back

to normal pending reversal of all known
convictions as determined by the nature

of charges leveled against one by
removing all doubt concerning the truth
fulness of letting

a guilty man go free endangering the public
good promoting the cause of a free and just

democratic nation while acting on a series
of implicit

directives concerning while carrying out

one's duty within

an accepted timeframe after determining
acceptable levels of misconduct...

A single sentence that runs for three pages, "Insomnia" seems to be an expression not only of the pressures and paranoias that are both hidden and exploited in other parts of *Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe*, but also a somewhat desperate complaint and momentary surrender to time, Lin finding a voice in the jangle of linguistic short-circuiting that characterize his poetics. Whether or not it is "biographical" is irrelevant; it is remarkable enough that the poem has narrative qualities at all, for it serves (along with other poems from the "Facsimile" section, from which "Insomnia" is taken, such as "The Nightly News" and "The End of Tragedy") as a touch-down, providing a frame of sorts for the "out-there-ness" of Lin's liberated speech. *Lotion Bullwhip Giraffe*, while being at once being a joy ride through the hyper-realities of the present day, also returns—this is the "originary" aspect of the book—the white page to its pre-linguistic purity in its devotion to surfaces, returning at the same time the reader to the mode of possibility, to a willingness to make something of the new (primarily suburban?) realities that are unique to this century, perhaps even year. It provides no "transcendental" vision that can be voiced beyond its own terms, which are often immaterial—lifted, with roots dangling, from the media—and hence sustaining only the most difficult relationship with anything that could be called immanence, which is unusual in American poetry.

BRIAN KIM STEFANS

MELISSA WOLSAK

The Garcia Family Co-Mercy

Tsunami Editions (Box 3723 MPO
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6B 3Z1),
1994, 74 pages.

I begin with the question, how can I hope to represent my admiration for a book in which each word works as a facet of the whole endeavor? Needless to say, to unfasten the words from each other is in a sense to sunder them

from their entire form. Wolsak's attention to the word reminds me of Georgia O'Keefe's statement "Nobody sees a flower,—really it is so small—we haven't time, and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time." The flowering of the word is well remembered here, where no word is too small so as to remain unseen.

I call this book a sensual fomentation. Words perch on the page in a deliberate manner eluding gravity. This book must be seen as well as heard. Fragments quoted here may lend a sense of sound, but to appreciate the visual construction of *The Garcia Family Co-Mercy*, you must visit the actual book. It perhaps should be read for the first time in one sitting.

Etymology is one fascination from which this work follows. Each word actively claims the full breadth of its possible meaning. The text requires the reader to consider the life and scope of each word: "each · goes in the direction/of his face." There is a fearlessness in saying the unexpected, unusually coupled with a gorgeousness of the language itself. The work is sculptural, sinuous and precise.

It isn't possible to represent the scope and range of language without repeating the whole of the book here, but I strongly recommend perusing "luminiferous/sandshoes," "pink milk" and "beds of ribbon." Resonance clings, as resin. There are such smells and textures, a collaboration with animals, such as, "wildebeeste," "lemur," and "the presence of oxen/at the table." I have the sense of proceeding by boat, but proceed is not the right word, I "seep instead" or "dig" my way, all along touching the foliage, "flower of the pistachio," "steepest ancestral grasses" and "spoonshaped leaves." The landscape is many layered, covered with commands and incidents. The scope of this work is interactive, "the word acts/as one's own/serpent."

Evocative silence follows questions, "was there ever/a father field" and "was/Delilah delicate?" Silence reappears in many forms. One form is the physical space which surrounds the words on each page. Silence is once mistaken for "a howl." It is also the use of silence which acts as a cata-

lyst in the expression or suppression of meaning: "use and reuse/of silence/make these limits appear." This is a book undaunted by possibility. Limits appear only to disappear. "Sentences of imprisonment/accompany/a sheaf/of indulgence/treason and dinner." Silence also suggests utterance, and those inner utterances which form the sometimes secluded language of poetry:

the ark I · hermeneuticized,
hoisted and withered city
Navarra was password
had hung asleep
in the obscuration
separate bird / morning

In many senses, this book revivifies language. One sentiment would have us "stop following people/in stretchers." Wolsak's words have returned from a long and tremulous voyage, to find themselves here utterly changed. They appear in new company and formations, auspiciously close to the millennium.

Compassion
is largely exile
...contradict
the ways in which
the world
says no

Simultaneously, each word is "a palisaded place." The sensation they create is that of "a pearl ringing/in the small of the back." And, "sleep is captivity/of those things revealed." Wolsak's is a language which boldly contradicts captivity. Each word maintains "a life of/perfect heresy."

LAYNIE BROWNE

4 Dada Suicides: Arthur Cravan, Jacques Rigaut, Julien Torma, Jacques Vaché

BLM Atlas Press (27 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1 3XX, England), 269 pages, \$17.99.

In the last few years, a surprising number of European modernist texts have been printed, or reprinted, making the avant garde of that period more accessible. I am thinking especially of translations from Exact Change (Soupault, Chirico, Artaud, etc.), the University of Nebraska Press (Breton, Aragon, Daumal, & others)

and the English press Atlas. Atlas has started two series of Dada and Surrealist works: "Atlas Arkhive" and "Atlas Anti-Classics." The latter includes a volume (called *Blago Bung, Blago Bung, Bosso Fataka!*) of three important examples of German Dada—translated by Malcolm Green—most notably, Hugo Ball's novel *Tenderenda the Fantast*.

Its companion volume is as good, but surprisingly different. *4 Dada Suicides* contains work by Arthur Cravan, Jacques Rigaut, Julien Torma, and Jacques Vaché—authors quite unlike each other. The collective title is catchy enough to accept without worrying too much about accuracy, but one should note that it is not entirely true. Vaché's overdose was perhaps intentional (Breton thought so) and Rigaut certainly shot himself, but the disappearance of Cravan suggests many possibilities. It always seemed to me that, given his personality, he would more likely be murdered, and Carolyn Burke—in her new biography of his wife Mina Loy—produces some evidence that he was drowned.

The case of Julien Torma is entirely different. Torma could not have committed suicide, since Torma never existed. He was invented by members of the Collège de Pataphysique. His life story is a complete fabrication. The letters to him from Max Jacob and from Rene Daumal, quoted in *4 Dada Suicides*, are forgeries. The works attributed to him are by various (pataphysical) hands. (I have no idea if the editors of Atlas are consciously contributing to the mystification, or if they have simply been taken in by books like Guy Launoir's *Clefs pour La Pataphysique*, which gives the hokum deadpan.)

This is not a reason to throw the work out. Vaché and Cravan and Rigaut are well worth translating (the whole volume, by the way, well translated by Terry Hale, Paul Lenti, and Iain White) but they are mainly important as characters. "Julien Torma" is by far the best writer in the volume. One of his inventors, after all, may have been Queneau.

In any case, may Atlas thrive—and continue in all its programs.

KEITH WALDROP



photo by Rebecca Simon

BILL LUOMA
Swoon Rocket

The Figures (5 Castle Hill Avenue,
Great Barrington, MA 01230),
1996, 28 pages, \$6.00.

Western Love

Situations (Soho Letter Press, 71
Green Street, New York, NY 10012),
1996, 44 pages, \$5.00.

Our world, the convention goes, is growing smaller. But as the terms of its definition proliferate, that definition apparently and paradoxically shrinks in scale. Thus individuals and even entire institutions migrate daily. Yet that daily experience, the convention equally is, grows ever more static, as Points A through Z become mere coordinates on an illusory continuum, points for which, apparently, no periphery remains.

Against this so-called background, the cover of Bill Luoma's **Swoon Rocket** presents a different model, an image from the Hubble Telescope of a star cluster, Abell 2218. As the copyright page tells us:

The cluster is so massive and compact that light passing through from "behind" is deflected by its gravitational field, much as an optical lens bends light to form an image. The process magnifies, brightens and distorts images of objects that lie far "beyond" the cluster, creating, in effect, a powerful "zoom lens."

And on the facing page, there is this epigraph from Khlebnikov:

scrape the surface of language and you will behold interstellar space and the skin that encloses it

So that within the terms of our reduced, mutual circumstances (simulacra, alienated love, the stasis of Das Ding), **Swoon Rocket** and, with it, **Western Love** hold out an altered, expanded sense of scale and of our relation to the materials of the world.

This is significant most especially for the counter-senses that always encrust writing. For example, there is this from the **PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER** (August 18, 1996):

In [a] study, done in Pawtucket, R.I., a group of first-graders who participated in an ongoing music and visual-arts curriculum scored significantly higher in spatial reasoning tests than a control group...The researchers' conclusion: arts instruction "forces mental stretching, useful in other learning."

What's significant here is the concept of art as a secondary or even tertiary act, together with an unabashed call for an increase in the formalization of our experience of ourselves, social or otherwise. Which is that from which, it strikes me, these poems seek relief: the terrorism of a public life as forced upon us by para-professionals: whether local or otherwise, the small-scale economies of agreement: language, thinking, or money. Luoma's point of application is the object, but not as a given. The physics here rives the settled application of form. But again, the world is only apparently out of focus. What Luoma insists upon is an enlargement of scale by condensing the means, not in that foreclosing the application of form to object, but in fact expanding the prospect. The horizon recedes and in that reflex enlarges. In that way, the poems' qualification of genre reserves for them an outside to those prior specificities.

It's not just a sexual insistence

lotsa lingus
kat si so
xoxo manna
braiden flow

(the units of reference reduced to an abrasive, liminal alertness: Luoma doesn't so much woo as choreograph foreplay), but equally an amulet for

weightlessness amidst so much accumulated signification:

ammo glan ye gary reynolds
tiz bat wren funky nerros

One point of reference could easily be Dr. John's "gris gris/on the bayou," which draws one closer to at least one possible reading: Power—inescapable—is usefully contained within such blurred circumstances, forcing it to give up the clear and distinct outlines of ITS given codes, ITS amulets, such that as creatures of power we can begin again, limn new features to the present face of power. And then again, and so on. There is that quality to the quatrains, their insistence of completion within the 4-line map and then the marvel of discovery: the flux is all there - fresh and undivulged again, point zero, as we begin to read again, no carryover, or at least no necessity of carryover.

At first glance, **Western Love** would appear to go in the other direction—colloquial, unrhymed, with a clear presence of subject. And yet it is just at the point of subject matter—matter—that the two books converge. The matter of a poem can be as random as anything else (or not). But then what happens when the material terms are entirely contained in the title (western, love)? It's the wonderful life of poetry that the interstices it orders (or scrambles) are—in the end—just as suggestive as the materials they separate. So that a thought comes JUST here, just THIS, IN this:

The creatures don't protest
our take over of this spot.
Not if we deal them in,
the cicadas, the prairie
skeeters and the vast
distance of it all. . . .

and stops. A writing completely embedded in its discourse, history here not as a grab bag for validating what otherwise is seen as mere poetic license, but the sheer fact of discourse and desire:

You kept pointing
at the bad barn
and saying
That's good wood.

But I wanted you
in the big barn
and then the pond.
I'm trolling for catfish
in the pond.

Here value implies nothing so much as lateral validity. Time's differing "depths" in differing codes for the time being.

For there is a sense in which a frontier can only exist through an act of translation. Thus, one could say, it is translation that, in articulating the relation of one system to another, formalizes—to and in the present—that frontier; and further, it is always the structure of frontiers such that in them an availability is rendered. So we have material availability, visual, thetic, horizontal, or even emotive availabilities. In some domains, poetry unique among them, translation can take place in multiple registers, establishing simultaneous frontiers with their attendant availabilities. Bill Luoma's *Swoon Rocket* and *Western Love* are lucent examples of such multiple modes of translation, sharing the horizon of sense and nonsense with all the narratives that their various tropes appear equally to place there: love, science, travel. Thus where *Swoon Rocket* plays with the terms of communication, translating (or transferring or even deferring) them to a denser, more distant sense cluster, where they serve to focus the time of reading such that either 1. the horizon of nonsense is brought into our present clarity, or—more usefully—2. our diffuse sense of the present is drawn out to the horizontal densities of the unfamiliar, *Western Love* takes up this trope of frontier, writing—at least as I read it—a necessary politics of inclusion:

To stay up with the moon
and you and tequila. I kept
feeding the fire.
The corona broke
and we saw the sage.
You said you saw
everything. Wolves
were howling.

To my sense, these are not simply "sound objects," but radicals in a larger sound system ("rich lax abell cular

spread"), one that commands a concentration of ITS sense equal to that Abell 2218 provides for another. In that way, Luoma argues different lineaments to the literary object than the baldly formalist ones we're familiar with. Neither wholly formal nor wholly functional, the poem calls to the horizon IT establishes in that calling, RE-focuses the contents not only up to and in that horizon but what lies, in potential, lexically or otherwise, 5-10 times beyond that. So the mechanics of love/life ("I turned on the high/pressure hose out of love") each gives to each (machinics and/or love (life)) a relief. Thus, "I'll be your sky and "you'll be my ground." The high/low is deadly (groaners: "I'm your ranch/hand. I do the job/with pride" are also part of the low/high ghost). Clearly function IS involved, just as form is (most particularly in the utterly scrupulous and athletic cadence). But outside both those the heuristic positioning which is literature's multiphasic possibility dwarfs the keyhole (the condensation) its incandescence must nonetheless traverse in order to be (as Alan Davies says) "the be among us being." These books announce (once again because apparently necessarily) the AGENCY of language, the most wondrous fact of all—its evanescent and continual DEFINITION of that fact: itself.

LARRY PRICE

LOSS PEQUEÑO GLAZIER
The Parts

Meow Press (Buffalo NY, available through Small Press Distribution), 1995. 22 pages.

past--the link--here perhaps electronic--sense of the musty rolling hills (who would have thought such in 'there's no there there'-- but of course, where there's smoke there's someone about to cough

Loss Glazier travels, traipses his way from near to distant parts, the four corners-- the central crossroads in some western town, the local geography of mountains, the borderlands, the edge where one's language dissolves into a foreign music.

maritiming et equipage of canal
parlay aphasiac noon knew no
intrepid lips so in transitu
salm as saguaro-chiseled "send

Glazier's ear is fairly dripping, though otherwise not Dali-like, with acoustic residue of Tejano slang, French patois, Indian mantras, Arabic *rahil*. In an attitude of openness to conditions outside the self which Jack Spicer described as "dictation," Glazier courts overload, he tunes to cyberspace and shortwave like the poet in Cocteau's *Orphee*, acting as a powered-up recieved who also does snail mail.

Glazier's most recent book, *The Parts*, with its allusion to Robert Creeley's *Pieces*, further locates him. *Pieces...parts... "P-slips"* are the librarian's scraps on which Glazier dashes off notes to himself, unconcernedly, while sharing an elevator or over coffee, filing them away in one pocket or another, later to enter them in his massive computer, filing, processing, arranging entries among the accetions of memory. That these are parts of a life, read:

Like the note passed in the row ahead
these men's books are the whole of language
how we navigate only-- piecemeal

When one thinks of Clark Coolidge's "Fragments are our wholes," it seems a proposal to poetry. Glazier's writing continually engages the partial, less as proposition than as fact of condition.

unsound cross-stitched a piece
its improvisation of afternoon

Like the aeolian harp with wind playing through it, these poems above all show a writer engaging the condition of his and our media environment breathing it, tuning in to the radiowaves that bombard us and so marking his part of that net enfolding and confining us.

Since Louis Zukofsky's extended (Zukofsky incidentally detested television and movies), everyday conditions have been 'allowed' into a poem, playing through the writing way of intelligence and ear. home's domestic tranquility now to confront the interference of

wiring, the various clamoring coaxial cables, antennae, and lines-in from the outside world. Exactly these conditions of confusion frame Glazier's poetry: talking on the phone while doing dishes, while coaching kids on homework, while downloading Netscape 2.0 through the other phone line.

Mainly that the 'poem' cannot stay such confusion. And as the world obtrudes into it, the poem responds with new forms and by engaging the new media. I take it, by the way, that this is not polemic but, again, simple acknowledgement of the condition of a generation of writers that is happily or unhappily married to machines.

Does the ghostly quality that these marks are not impressions but literal absences in a blue background replicate a mimeo master?...There is an urgency since flukes occur and if the connection cuts its image evaporates.

What Glazier and others working in electronic writing see in the blue background is the potential for the salvage if not the enlargement of the possibilities for poetry.

printing it out is only parts of it, sections somewhere framed and amenable to be scribbled on

so that perhaps it's a matter of clippings you assemble scrap book fashion strings

Poets and critics increasingly recognize the scored copper plates of William Blake and the hand-sewn fascicles of Emily Dickinson as integral to their poetries. The materiality of the work is read as a relation or even as a partial function of its meaning.

In the chaos it wasn't Blake surprised its cavity among shards undo shreds of moon predicate of tern's erratic night-latent methaqualone bred amid wild cactus spurs

The net, all of it, (in writing contemporary with its technological conditions) becomes a field of potential citations, another wing of the extensible geography of place, tradition, lan-

guage, and music to which poetry has always been tuned. Writers not averse to extracting the *techne* (art) form "technology" are engaged in their own parturition.

...If I had ordered
you the coffee when you said

you might have gotten to the
point that *Poetry does not*
gain from mummified speech.

Not that present conditions represent only gain-- there is also the danger that our poems or ourselves become simply "concatenations of technical parts" whose "scatter deflects the work." Whatever risk wrapping one's arms around a technopoetics involves, Glazier favors it to the more certain erosion following from mummified speech. Gertrude Stein made the argument quite closely:

The business of Art...is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present.

To complete the actual, Glazier's poems perform a screening--in the double sense of putting on screen and "surveying" or taking account--of the changed dynamic of reading and living where concentrated attention is difficult, and attempt to make music out of the distraction that is increasingly our shared condition. His optimism should be heard more as a statement of character than a recruitment of cyber troops-- that poetry can engage the world in its present condition, lock arms with it, and not end up a survey of losses, a retrospective shoring of ruins.

...Kin to 'living' in a period of adapted measure. There should only be one book; texts weave through that.

KENNETH SHERWOOD

PHILIP WHALEN
Canoeing Up Cabarga Creek: Buddhist Poems 1955-1986

Parallax Press (PO Box 7355,
Berkeley, California 94707), 1996,
96 pages, \$12.00.

A new book by Philip Whalen is always welcome news. **Canoeing up Cabarga Creek** contains only one poem not published in previous Whalen collections, enough to justify the purchase for any Whalen fan. But published by Parallax Press, a small press dedicated primarily to Buddhist writings, and subtitled "Buddhist Poems," this book is not aimed at Whalen fans. With a foreword by Allen Ginsberg to attract Beat enthusiasts and a sensitive introduction by Zentatsu Richard Baker to attract Buddhist readers, this book was obviously conceived as an introduction to one of the most singular of American poets. As Baker writes, "I hope this book introduces many to Philip's poems and opens up his other poems--often implicitly Buddhist--that are not here."

Contents include the much-anthologized signature poem and classic, "Sourdough Mountain Lookout"; the equally familiar "Hymnus Ad Patrem Sinensis," here reproduced in the author's calligraphy; "A Vision of the Bodhisattvas"; "The War Poem for Diane di Prima," maybe the best poem to come out of the Vietnam War; "Homage to Hart Crane"; and "A Philippic, Against Whitehead and a Friend." The "Philippic," written in 1961, reveals the respect for non-verbal experience that has always been the radiant center of Whalen's poetic practice:

HERESY! Whether it's creeping Fabian
socialists or that
"Infallible" process you call reality, glued
to time so that
"Justice is later
Freedom is later
Dessert comes AFTER the nasty
spinach"

BAH!

I can't help feeling this world is immortality:

Two pigeons in the sun (house cornice
across the street)

And nonsense as well! Words, a grammatical order
The world palpably NOT of this order
Exceeds our limits

We kill each other quite artistically
Exquisite tortures, exorbitant crimes...

The flitting mind, the taut poetic line, the palpable world—where else but a poem by Philip Whalen?

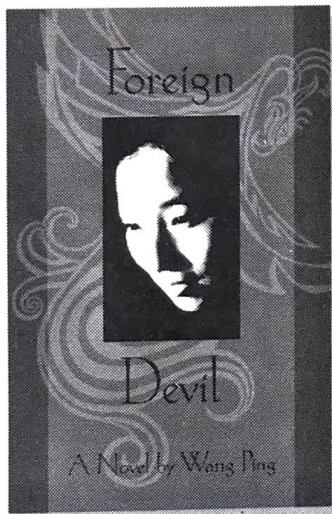
I agree strongly with Baker that most of Whalen's poems are implicitly Buddhist. In the winter of 1973, inspired by *On Bear's Head* and *Scenes of Life at the Capital*, I spent a week hiking across the mountains from Big Sur to the Tassajara Monastery with the intention of learning more about Zen Buddhism. I was disappointed to find that the monastery was closed for the season, though a couple of young monks in a pick-up gave me a ride back to the coast highway. A recent graduate of a northeastern red-brick Roman Catholic commuter college, I don't see how I would have managed to escape the Judeo-Christian orthodoxy that oppresses this continent without the guidance of Whalen's poems. As a friend of mine remarked, Kerouac and Ginsberg were, after all, "Columbia boys," and there remains something precious about the splen-

did Christopher Isherwood. Somehow Whalen's downhome West Coast sensibility and informed Gertrude Stein-ish commitment to the spoken word made him the perfect introduction to another point of view.

As demonstrated in the engaging collection of writing *Big Sky Mind: Buddhism and the Beat Generation*, which includes 35 pages of Whalen's work, the best Buddhist poems tend to be written by the best poets. So all this Buddhist blather doesn't explain the attraction of Whalen's poems for the many others who admire his poetic achievement. Like his long-time friend Gary Snyder, Whalen can't always resist the Poundian temptation to exhort; there are stretches in both men's poems that must be tolerable only to those who share their commitments. But there is also a great sense of play in Whalen's work, a humility that permits him to make fun of almost everything, including himself. And the language that Whalen chooses to make poems with is entirely his

own, liberated from the stodgy by his early enthusiasm for Stein, and shaped by his own meticulous ear. In a 1964 interview on KPFA that was later published as *On Bread & Poetry*, Whalen remarked that poems connect "to music, as far as I can see. Not necessarily to metric, or to anything else, except as it relates to a musical experience, a musical feeling, in the line, happening between the words, or happening as the poetic line—it's a musical shot for me, and that's what I hear when I write." I have always admired Whalen for getting into his capacious poems whatever happens to be on his nimble mind, and somehow making it all into music, a music that at once has the harsh clarity of the Baroque and the intelligent whimsy of John Cage or Lou Harrison. To quote again from Richard Baker's introduction, "[Philip's] poems are more objects than mental impressions stuck to the page."

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available to readers excited by this volume the poems not included here, particularly his masterpiece, *Scene of Life at the Capital*.

One erratum: The editors of *Canoeing Up Cabarga Creek* misattribute the prose piece which they have titled "Preface from *Heavy Breathing*." That "Preface" is actually the Preface from *Enough Said: Poems 1974-1979*, reprinted in *Heavy Breathing: Poems 1967-1980*.

GARY LENHART

KATHLEEN FRASER

Wing

Em Press (541 Ethel Avenue, Mill Valley, CA 94941), 1995, Letterpress, unnumbered pages, \$75.00.

As if memory were an expensive creamy paper, Kathleen Fraser responds to the drawings of Mel Bochner in *WING*, a ten part poem series designed and letterpress printed by Dale Going of Em Press. The mathematics of an angle, the material body of a cube counterpoised with the wing *not static but frayed, layered, feathered, furling, and stony* are the materials of Fraser's investigations. On crisp white, richly textured St. Armand cover and text papers, the reader meets the nature of a wing with each turn of the furled rag page. Moving through *accumulated depth*, the poems respond formally to the spatial properties of wing and cubed matter in this beautiful volume. The form of "II. First Black Quartet: Via Tasso" is a four part cube of compressed text that weights the left page. It faces "III. Wing: Via Van Vitelli" that resembles a wing from the right rag margin to the open spaces within the text as a bird's hollow bones enable it to leave the ground. By the second black quartet, the cubes gain solid movement—a windmill's four sails arc air—to meet the single line of the facing page's horizon: *There are two men without feet, they are tall men swimming through matter*. The presence of two unnamed men (Joe Brainard and Kenward Elmslie) several times re-enter bodily but as if in *partial erase*. In the final sequence, cube and wing open to each other: figured in the cube is a *wing draw[ing] the mind as a bow as language exerts itself to be volume by necessity as if partial erase*. Fraser's meditations sited in visual art—always beautiful to the ear and the eye—are deeply evoked in the Em Press edition. Going's design, stately and understated, complimented by David Marshall's simply wrought drawing and diagram, is interpreted in translucent end papers, a measured nine inch square page and the cover's deckle flaps (of wing). The language and presentation are strong and extraordinarily pleasing.

AÍFE MURRAY

BOB KAUFMAN

Cranial Guitar: Selected Poems of Bob Kaufman

Edited by Gerald Nicosia, Coffee House Press (27 North Fourth Street, Suite 400, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401), 166 pages, \$12.95.

JIM BRODEY

Heart of the Breath: Poems 1979-1992

Edited by Clark Coolidge, Hard Press (PO Box 184, West Stockbridge, MA, 01266), 381 pages, \$16.95.

To be always going the other way may not actually be the unspoken aim of most poets, but it does seem to have been the great unassimilable dream of Bob Kaufman and Jim

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Brodey, two remarkably eccentric poets, whose works have been difficult to find, and in their common mournful complicated utopian visions, still more difficult to read. Now each is the subject of the literary equivalent of a museum retrospective—for Kaufman, a selected poems from the capable midwestern firm, Coffee House Press (which brought out a collection strikingly similar in structure of Joseph Ceravolo's selected poems in 1994); and for Brodey, a collection of work written in the thirteen years between the publication of his last book, *Judyism*, and his death (a book which in its heft is the natural complement to its predecessor from Hard Press, Bernadette Mayer's touchy masterpiece, *The Desires of Mothers to Please Others in Letters*). Both of these books have their editorial curiosities (or curatorial eccentricities), as both of the poets represented had gaps in their biographies and strong tendencies to repeat themselves. Each book is by turns dazzling and monotonous.

The history of Jim Brodey that was circulating around the Poetry Project in the early 90s was one of a poet who wrote his poems in the backs of other poets' books in other people's bookshelves, a trickster, a huckster, a wit, and a generally erratic person. His ear for poetry was said to be the closest to Clark Coolidge's, and the persona in his poems was looked upon as the reincarnation of Jack Kerouac in the form of a New York School poet (I don't know what this was meant to say about either Brodey's or Kerouac's karma). A timeline of Brodey's life ran something like: New School, *Identikit*, the Band, *Blues of the Egyptian Kings*, craziness, *Judyism*, further craziness, Tompkins Square Park, disappearance, California. People who talked about Brodey then were Tom Savage, Lewis Warsh, John Godfrey, Joel Lewis and Gary Lenhart. Lenhart recalled being visited by Brodey while reading Clark Coolidge's just-published *Own Face*. "That's a great book," Brodey said, "like W. H. Auden fell on his head."

When Brodey died of AIDS in the summer of 1993, his friend and collaborator John Godfrey eulogized him in the *Newsletter* in an essay reprinted as the introduction to

Heart of the Breath (Poems 1979-1992). In two pages of clean prose, Godfrey summarized Brodey's life and achievement as passionately and cogently as Alice Notley did for Ted Berrigan in her essay in *Berrigan's Selected Poems*. Seldom does an essay dispel misguided ideas about its subject while strengthening its aura (a flakey word, but its cognates—mystique, power, charm—are less accurate).

Heart of the Breath, a huge book, follows Brodey's general plan for his last manuscript, and is divided into five sections spanning roughly three years each, including the "Panda Heart" poems, a series of nearly a hundred poems thirty lines long, titled mainly with the names of other writers. There are a number of poems preceding "Panda Heart" in the post-jazz style of *Judyism*, and there are a few very strong poems at the end of the book ("Panda Heart", "Rain Falling on East Eleventh Street Roofs", "There and Back"), but it's clear that the main event of *Heart of the Breath* is the "Panda" poems.

Written in tercets, the "Panda Heart" poems are the occasion for many great first lines—"America's greatest men are all imported", "Wake up in a boat silent in mist morning"—and many more of Brodey's specialty, the serendipitous joke by means of funny juxtaposition, the wrong word—"The sweep of the Platte / The brooding majesty of the Mississippi / The joyous aspic of the Michigan" (from "Jack Kerouac 3"), "Let our champagne / Be a bowl of Jujufruits" (from "John Ashbery 2"). These are the bonuses of "Panda Heart." Brodey's music within the line gets banged into chords by the tercets, which sometimes ring and sometimes clang. Brodey returns to certain of his subjects, and these (Kerouac, Godfrey, Berrigan) elicit his most energetic and detailed, his most spirited portraits. Of these poems, Brodey himself says, "My original intention for writing these poems was to take the usual so-called academic line and blow it to smithereens. To take poems that look exactly alike, ten stanzas of three lines apiece, and imbue them with extreme gracious information." Clark Coolidge remarks in his Editor's Note that the hundred or so "Panda Heart" poems were selected from an extant manuscript of

400 poems, and Brodey says elsewhere that he wrote over 1100. It's pleasant to have such a large selection, but Brodey may have been better served by a tighter roster. A sense of middleliness, or of resistance to closure, is the main quality of these poems; that, and an affectionate portraiture maybe too given to the received phrase and the poet's main dreams—to praise life, specifically as it exists in the breath of a poet; to value energy and excitement especially if its presence violates a stale taboo; and to praise poetry and the arrival of poems. These are beautiful dreams; perhaps their constant presence accounts for the dreamy quality of the poems.

In a more honest world, certain Brodey poems from the early books would be famous anthology pieces—the funny and devastating "Poem" which ends "was a great lay", the eccentric-but-acute "Dream" which begins "John Ashbery n Jimmy Stewart", the concise portrait of "Ron", the Dionysian "I Jack Off On the Government". Everybody would know the Brodeyesque tone—a mixture of blunt sarcasm and giddy euphoria, Beat energy and New York School taste (or the reverse, Beat taste and New York School energy). In this world, however, the reader is in the situation of Jimmy Stewart at the end of "Dream", having heard John Ashbery read "Europe":

Jimmy craines back his head and
laughs/ and says how he under-
stands em only as long as John is
reading em

What's so great about being
understood? In his "Panda Heart"
portrait of Bob Kaufman, Brodey
wrote:

Originator of the dense thought
Made lyrical this solitary
Wanderer of Brain St.

Succumbed to infinity
By bleak choice

Bob Kaufman: whose surname Paul
Beatty borrowed for the protagonist
of his novel, *The White Boy
Shuffle*; whose poetry was labelled
surreal by Breton himself; and

idiosyncrasy. **Cranial Guitar:** a selection of Kaufman's poems edited by Beat scholar Gerald Nicosia, including the transcript of David Henderson's radio documentary on Kaufman, and including the full text of Kaufman's long lost first collection **Golden Sardine** (rhymes with 'brindled kine'). If Brodey is a local legend, Kaufman is an international question mark. Certain facts about Kaufman are well-known, probably better known than his unmistakable style: he was called "the black Rimbaud," he pissed on a cop in the Coexistence Bagel Shop, he kept a vow of silence from the time of Kennedy's assassination to the end of the Vietnam War.

Kaufman courted misunderstanding like a true gentleman. He used paradox, parataxis, and la paraphuie. In the exhilarating and horrific opening work of **Golden Sardine**, "Carl Chessman Interviews the P.T.A. in His Swank Gas Chamber Before Leaving on His Annual Inspection of Capital, Tour of Northern California Death Universities, Happy," Kaufman morphs a death row inmate into a baseball player, a painter, and God, pausing to parody W.E.B. DuBois and e.e. cummings with "an anecdote about God's wild youth":

whose parents
sent him to a good college
but, who instead read buddhist
magazines & of course became god,
he is now standing in front of his
parents' house saying, they think
I've been in school for four years,
how can i walk in cold and tell them
i am god, i think i'll go over
to chessman's little studio & sleep.

The long lines at the end bringing what was almost an obvious poem to a gentle surprising conclusion. Here as elsewhere, Kaufman uses the surrealist/Beat tactic of collaging the religious with the everyday, and inverting the two as often as possible—"CHESSMAN CALLS UP GOD, WANTS TO KNOW AT ONCE, DOES SANTA CLAUS BELIEVE IN CHILDREN? GOD GETS PANICKY & PUTS DOWN HIS GUITAR..." By themselves, surrealist

inversion and absurdism can be tiresome, but if used in combination, and in great density, and then echoed from stanza to stanza the effect can be staggeringly funny, as in the second Carl Chessman poem, "The Enormous Gas Bill at the Dwarf Factory. A Horror Movie to Be Shot With Eyes.":

SUDDENLY WE SEE GAYLY DECORATED LANDING CRAFT
. . . BULGING WITH FIERCE
LOOKING PENGUINS ALL
WEARING SHINY NEW WRIST
WATCHES & SMOKING
ROLL YOUR OWN CIGARETTES,
THE SMOKE FORMING A HUGE-
CLOUD THAT TURNS
INTO A GIGANTIC, LUSTY, RAW,
PAGAN, JIVARO TEENAGER PUR-
SUED BY FOUR MIDWESTERN
ALBINOS THROWING PEPPER-
MINT JAVELINS AT HER
REVOLVING BREAST BEFORE
BEING FELLED BY A NUCLEAR
TIPPED SNOWBALL. THROWN
BY NANOOK OF THE NORTH,
SCENE ENDS WITH NANOOK
PASSING OUT SOUVENIR POLAR
BEARS AT THE GRAND OPENING
OF THE NEW ARNOLD SHOEN-
BERG SUPERMARKET WHILE
OUTSIDE IT IS RAINING BLACK
VOLKSWAGENS (END OF MON-
TAGE SEQUENCE) FILM
RETURNS TO ENORMOUS GAS
BILL.

Here the surrealist hijinks blend in with the beat trick of piling on the adjectives, in what could also be described as a collaboration by Alfred Jarry and Langston Hughes. In his high comic mode, Kaufman routinely keeps his writing funny without sliding into jokiness, he stays serious without plodding, and he can be exact without sounding phony. That is, it may not be just a trick of words when he closes the Chessman series with the phrase "desperate retellings of the thin-lipped Nebraska pogroms."

The selections from Kaufman's *New Directions* books, *Solitudes Crowded with Lonelinesses* and *The Ancient Rain* are much skimpier than the *Sardine* section, thus tilting the book toward Kaufman's early work (as *The Green Lake Is Awake*, Joseph Ceravolo's *Coffee House* selected

poems, was tilted towards his early work). There are some surprises in the "Uncollected Works" section ("Hank Lawler: Chorus" is a less strenuous application of the method in the Chessman poems, "Does the Secret Mind Whisper?" is an energetically angry bop stream of consciousness piece that arpeggiates in ever-changing patterns).

It may seem disingenuous to have referred to either of these frequently lucid poets as difficult to read—except that even the most advanced teachers of reading spend their energies on beginning taxonomy, and leave so little time to discuss what in Kaufman's terms is the point: "A desirable poem is more rare than rare, & terror is certain, who wants to be a poet & work a twenty four hour shift, they never ask you first, who wants to listen to the radiator play string quartets all night." And?

JORDAN DAVIS

Assembling Alternatives by Joel Lewis,
[continued from page II]

I was most pleased by the conviviality of the event and the genuine good feelings among the participants. There was little of the sussing out the "enemy talent" found at academic conferences and little of the feigned moodiness that often seems the required character armor in American experimentalist circles. I met a number of new friends around the dinner tables and the conversations were lively and informative. For many non-academics attending, the notion that for five days you could simply engage in poetry from sun-up to late in the night had a touch of the paradisaal.

Apparently, there is some university press interest in publishing papers from this conference, so folks out there in *Poetry Project Newsletter*-land can assess the material for themselves. My hope is that this conference will create links between the many communities that attended and will result in a strong international experimental poetry community.

books received.

JACK AGUEROS

Sonnets from the Puerto Rican

Hanging Loose Press, 1996, 112 pages, \$12.00.

YEHUDA AMICHAH

The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai

Translated by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell, University of California Press, 1996, 194 pages.

BEI DAO

Landscape Over Zero

New Directions, 1996, 103 pages, \$9.95.

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University of Iowa Press, 1996, 176 pages, \$12.95.

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Contemporary Arts Publishing (Chicago), 1996, 29 pages, \$8.00.

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Passing Freaks and Graces

Rodent Press (Boulder, CO), 1996, 34 pages.

Chick-Lit: New Women's Fiction Anthology

Edited by Cris Mazza, Jeffrey DeShell, Elisabeth Sheffield, FC2 Press (Normal, IL), 1996, 225 pages, \$11.95.

ANDREI CODRESCU

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Black Sparrow Books, 1996, 303 pages, \$15.00.

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Black Sparrow Press, 1996, 292 pages, \$15.00.

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Edited by Richard Blevins, Black Sparrow Press, 1996, 280 pages, \$17.50.

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Penguin Books, 1996, 69 pages, \$14.95.

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First Intensity Press (Lawrence, Kansas), 1996, 64 pages, \$10.00.

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A House White With Sorrow

Rodent Press, 1996, 221 pages, \$12.00.

TARUHO INAGAKI

Miroku

Translated by Kenji Yuda, Rodent Press (Boulder, CO), 1996, 57 pages.

ALAN JONES

Long After Hannibal Had Passed With Elephants

Edgewise Press (NY), 1995, 64 pages, \$10.00.

MICHAEL LALLY

Can't Be Wrong

Coffee House Press, 1996, 125 pages, \$11.95.

DENISE LEVERTOV

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New Directions, 1996, 160 pages, \$9.95.

CLARICE LISPECTOR

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New Directions, 1996, 224 pages, \$12.95.

JESSICA LOWENTHAL

As If In Turning

Burning Deck Press (Providence, RI), 1996, 38 pages, \$8.00.

JACKSON MACLOW

Barnesbook

Sun & Moon, 1996, 53 pages, \$9.95.

ANURADHA MAHAPATRA

Another Spring Darkness

Translated by Carolyn Wright, Calyx Press, 1996, 97 pages, \$12.95.

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Millenium Fever

Coffee House Press, 1996, 108 pages, \$11.95.

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The Country I Remember

Story Line Press (Brownsville, OR), 1996, 77 pages, \$12.00.

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Hard Press (West Stockbridge, MA), 1996, 84 pages, \$10.00.

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There Is No Ithaca

Translated by Vyt Bakaitis, Black Thistle Press (NY), 1996, 181 pages, \$14.95.

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Iniquity Press, 1996, 21 pages, \$3.00.

MAGAZINES

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August/September 1996, October/November 1996, 31 pages, \$4.00.

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September/October 1996, 48 pages, \$3.50.

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June 1996 and July 1996, 11 pages.

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(Vancouver, BC), September-October 1996, 38 pages.

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