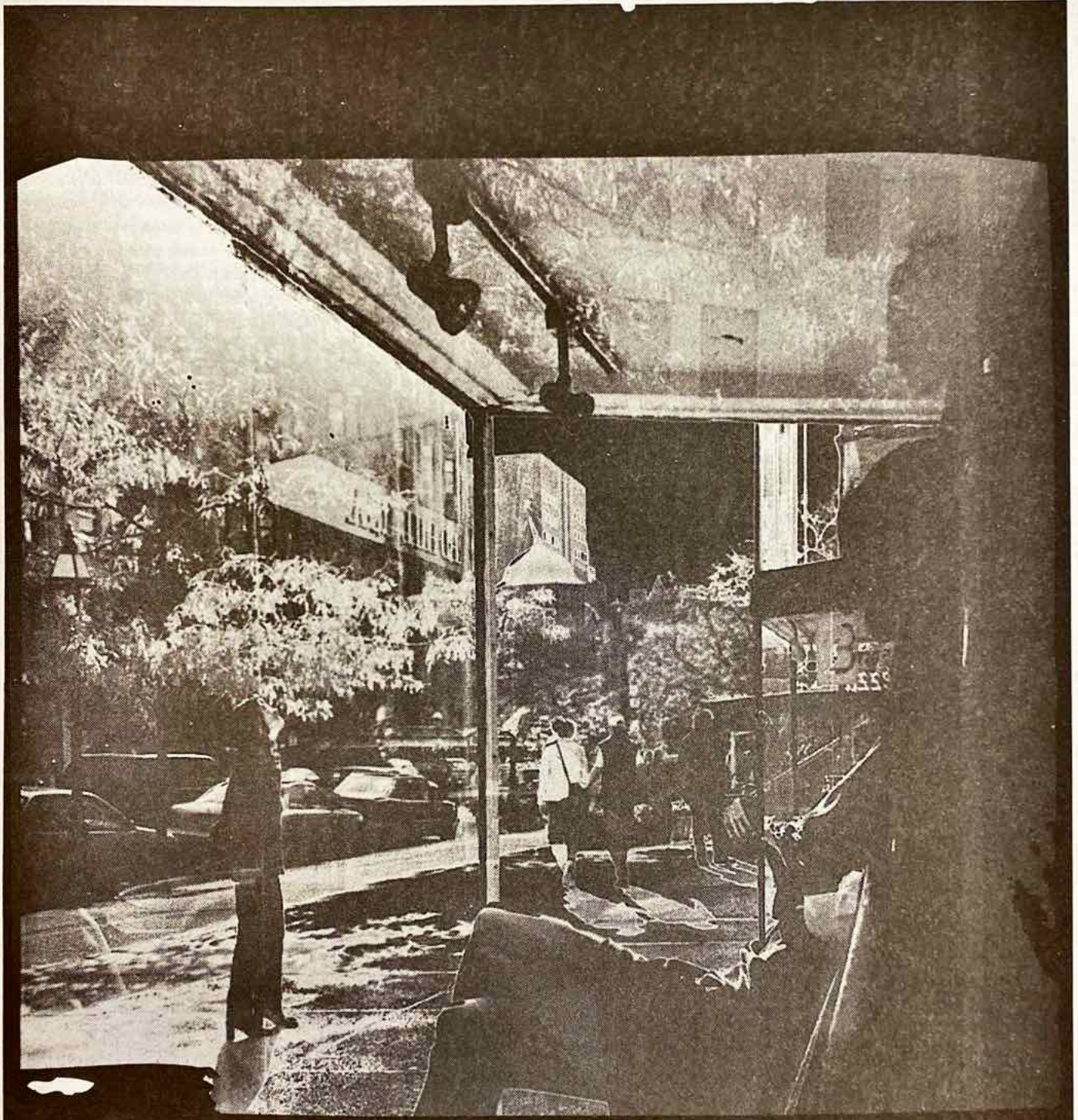


# Poetry Project

NEWSLETTER



October / November 2000 Issue number 181





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The editor wishes to thank Lisa Jarnot, Drew Gardner, and Gillian McCain for their help.



# News and Announcements

**WANTED:** Documentary, disinterments, fragments of history. Fake A.P. bulletins, performative interviews, "dictionaries" and abecedarians. Aphorisms. Short short book reviews (the old reviewed by the young, tops reviewed by bottoms, the dead reviewed by the living, and vice versa (e.g., Mayer reviewed by Poe). Top ten lists and horoscopes. Photographs and comics.

Welcome to the new *Poetry Project Newsletter*. It's been a mellow summer and there isn't much news, but this column will expand in the future to include all kinds of things: not only gossip, but **Letters to the Editor** and your responses to our new feature, the **Questionnaire**. Past issues have included amusing (in the Ted Berrigan sense) questionnaires to garner reader participation, see each other's names in print and liven up the mag. See page 27, and send us your responses.

My big regret this summer was missing all the

Frank O'Hara portraits at the Parish Museum show in Southampton. Did anybody go? I did make it to the **Boston Poetry Conference**, which is great but it's a reading a minute, with no time between scheduled events for poets to exchange thoughts over a beer. The problem with any marathon reading is that when the poems aren't altogether sparkling, it is as interminable as the toasts at a wedding reception. The saving grace of Aaron Kiely's conference, though, is his ebullient, innocent love of poetry itself. And that the last word in poetics, courtesy of Douglas Rothschild at the poetics panel, was charmingly to the point—Poems must be good.

There was no overlap between the participants at the poetry conference and the academic conference about poetry at the University of Maine in Orono, where Amiri Baraka came down on Barrett Watten with righteous wrath. That was only the second commotion following Baraka this

year. For those of us who attended his reading last spring here at the Project, where he chanted a withering Biblical screed against Rudy Guiliani before a packed house, there were attendant chills the next day when the mayor announced his cancer diagnosis. If you think the power of the imagination is more symbolic than real, you might have found yourself at that moment reevaluating your faith.

But on the lighter side: Christopher Edgar, poet and co-editor of *The Hat*, has a poem in the newly published *Best American Poetry 2000*. And it was cited by John Ashbery as one of his favorite poems of the century!

Also in the news are Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, who were basically knighted by France last April—that is, they received medals from the French government "in recognition of their lifetime contributions to French literature."



## WRITING WORKSHOPS

**THE ROMANTIC TRADITION - Jaime Manrique**

**TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 17**

A workshop for students interested in writing poems in the romantic tradition of Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca, Sor Juana Ines Cruz, e.e. cummings, "The Song of Songs," and others. We will read examples of love poetry throughout the ages. Students will be asked to write in specific forms such as the sonnet, the epistle, and songs. Jaime Manrique is the author of several books of poems, fiction, and translation, including *Eminent Maricones: Arenas, Lorca, Puig, and Me*.

**TWINS & MATCHING SETS - Brenda Coultas**

**FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 20**

This class will focus on writing companion pieces and sets linked by a variety of concepts, forms, experiments, styles and observations. We will take our cue from the formative writers of The Poetry Project and the new generation. We will write and read in class, and participants are encouraged to bring in outside writing as well. An open mind and curiosity are required. Brenda Coultas' books include *Early Films*.

**MANUSCRIPT DEVELOPMENT - Larry Fagin**

**SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: 26 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 21**

Poets will develop a publishable, book-length manuscript. At the outset, the workshop will assist participants in locating successful or promising aspects of their work. As the workshop proceeds, the poets will experiment with various approaches for producing new poems and expanding the range of their work. **TO APPLY:** Please submit (1) a selection of 10-20 poems and (2) a resume or a biographical note that summarizes your writing experience. **Deadline for submissions: October 10.** Larry Fagin's collections of poems include *I'll Be Seeing You*. He is the editor and publisher of *Adventures in Poetry*.

131 EAST 10 STREET  
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NEW YORK, NY 10003  
212.674.0910

The workshop fee is \$250, which includes tuition for classes and an "Individual" membership in the Poetry Project for one year. Reservations are required due to limited class space and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10 St., NY, NY 10003. For more information, please call (212) 674 0910, or e-mail: [poproj@artomatic.com](mailto:poproj@artomatic.com)



## TOASTERS IN THE ATTIC

*"I want nothing  
I fear nothing  
Therefore I am free"*  
(from the Greek of Kazantzakis)

My dear Bernie Bella Figura  
Huzza! (yoost vorming up)  
Ecco la fiera con la coda aguzza  
We'll call him Adelaide  
Poor baby's green as a spiked Guiseppe Verdi  
Not Joe, Adelaide—le lézard  
O maximum Michael  
Reine de men  
Viens avec moi pro bono  
And we can have a rent strike  
At Hoag's Corners  
Pronto not bono nota bene  
Try beau bébé heimlich macaroni  
And cheese kabobs at Hoag's  
And hogs better'n Polaners  
To a jellied trencherman  
Or sackbuts on a kaiser, one  
Mas vaso de café antes yo voy  
To the frickin valley below  
Cum meum hoagie, s'il vous plait  
Oops! l'ho fatto di nuovo  
I got blue paint on the white  
Etiam atque etiam, okay  
Now we're cookin with canoa water  
Avast ye fly-eyed Ms MacDaddy  
No cockadoodle dandy noodlin 'round here  
"Et vas is herms, schnozzola?"

Queried Lady Latke the kibosh lendler  
 Sacre bloop! it's the Myshkin all over again  
 Et tu Howdy Bernie,  
 your posterior post-it Jurassic McGoik  
 Put that in your alti planos and smoke it  
 and yes no luck mit electric alkies  
 Madame Butterfly, didya get the ocarina auctioneer  
 On the blower yet?  
 Yes, Kuntz was her nomine  
 Hulled un you maize-framed maque "feddy" Freddy  
 Non "cock" entre double-entendre amuse bouche  
 Etc and who the fuck is Hermes, you big-nosed fool?  
 Quizzummed Vladislavke the itinerant cigarmaker  
 Shit, they shot St. Sebastian trop temps!  
 Calme te, vous cretino, che casino  
 Eh, odi et amo, so put as in golfum, in votre  
 Aeries et concavo item et  
 Emit no pommes de terre aujourd'hui  
 Senorita Buterfleoge, and  
 Mellitos oculos tuos, iuventi  
 Oui, c'est a feather bedded Anna Kunz  
 Cela la puella ete called, O Beatus Gizzi  
 Vidi l'étoile at last!  
 Uno mas to go!  
 Vidi chichis pudenda ciao  
 Amo amat alot  
 Come to Dada



Photograph by Sophia Warsh and Zac Ward.

–Bernadette Mayer et Michael Gizzi  
 Summer Solstice / 2000

*CDs of Bernadette Mayer & Michael Gizzi reading their works can be ordered from Utopia Productions at its new address: 53 Tsatsawassa Lake Rd. East Nassau, NY 12062.*



# Pressed Wafer: Review & Interview

by Ange Mlinko

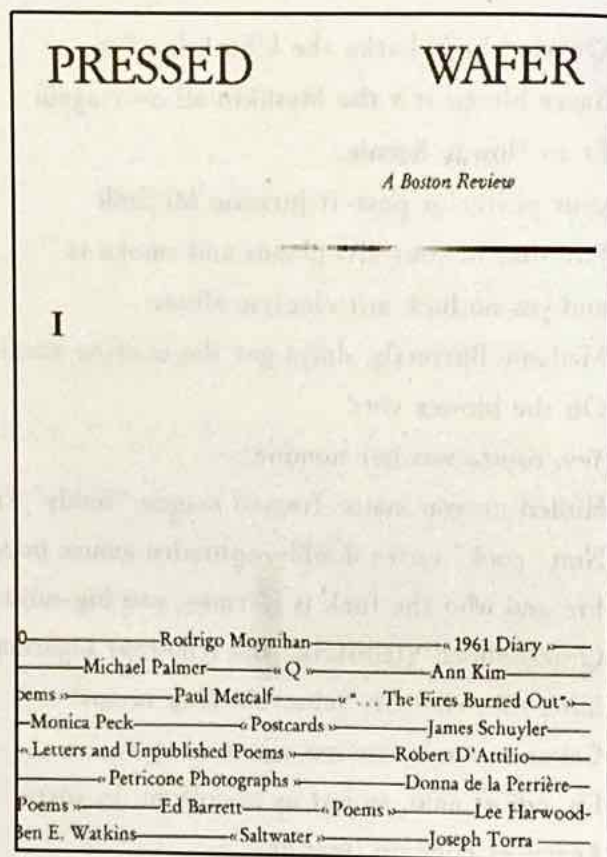
Pressed Wafer: A Boston Review #1, March 2000

In Residence by Beth Anderson

Arkansas by Fred Moten

Three Deckers by Mike County/Poems by Del Ray Cross

The Blind See Only This World: Poems for John Wieners (co-published with Granary Books)



In 1999 a Halloween postcard poem inaugurated a series of broadsides, pamphlets, magazines and books from Boston's Pressed Wafer, which takes its name from a John Wieners poem and rides the bus on Wieners' route to New York and back to Joy Street. The three editors come from different, and overlapping, generations of Boston poets. They are also old hands at editing: William Corbett was poetry editor of *Agni* and *Grand Street* and even earlier, of the small magazines *Fire Exit* and *The Boston Eagle* (with Lewis Warsh and Lee Harwood). Joseph Torra edited *lift*, a magazine and chapbook series. Daniel Bouchard edited the shorter-lived but important *Mass. Ave.* which is one of the definitive journals from the mid-90s for younger writers.



Boston is sometimes dismissed as a university town, or a satellite of New York, but I think of it more as the moon to Manhattan's sun: if NYC is the continual present, barrelling toward the future, Boston is a place of reverie, the past and even the paranormal ("Men used to say/ That all lost objects stay upon the moon"—Spicer). It was the locus of an "occult school" as Gerrit Lansing has written, and you can find that occult school in the works of Lansing, Wieners, Spicer, Stephen Jonas and Robin Blaser, with tributes and tributaries north to Olson's Gloucester, west to San Francisco, and south to New York City. I spent seven years in and around Boston in the '90s, assisting with Michael Franco's Word of Mouth reading series for a few years and publishing my first chapbook with lift books. *Pressed Wafer* is the most ambitious project yet to come from that locus.

*Pressed Wafer* magazine wears its heart on its sleeve—literally, with a cover design lifted straight from *Art and Literature*. The issue opens with an excerpt from the English painter Rodrigo Moynihan's diary of a trip to New York in 1961, where he met, among others, Frank O'Hara and Kenneth Koch. Moynihan's wife, the painter Anne Dunn, was a close friend of James Schuyler, whose 1954 letters from Italy are the centerpiece of the issue. Ed Barrett, whose *Common Preludes* is one of the best poetry books to come

**If NYC is the continual present, barrelling toward the future, Boston is a place of reverie, the past and even the paranormal.**

out of Boston in the '90s (and one of the best poetry books of that era, period) has the most substantial chunk of poems in the magazine, each dedicated to a friend, including his teachers at Brooklyn College: John Ashbery and Ann Lauterbach.

But there's no question *PW* is uniquely Boston-bred. And that is established most of all by the magazine's tone—elegaic as New York could never be—and its emphasis: the documentary. Boston's notorious reverence for the past, its rootedness in history, yields buried treasure: the late Paul Metcalf's correspondence with editor Joseph Torra, accompanied by the latter's memoir of the first visit he paid to this scion of Herman Melville; the Schuyler letters and Moynihan diary; a spread of photographs by the Boston artist Paul Petricone, whose series on Revere Beach in the sixties is reproduced here in part; and last but not least, closing the magazine, a "lecture" by John Wieners. These last two pieces impressed me most, summing up the motif running through *Pressed Wafer*: these ghosts live.

Wieners' lecture, titled "Mass: Verse in the U.S. Since 1945" affirms that the seemingly dying art of American poetry in the twentieth century has actually been responsible for sea changes in the larger culture, including the mainstreaming of magic, Buddhism, and consciousness-altering drugs. He gives a quick tour of Beacon Hill bohemia in mid-century, where a doctrine of the poetry of the dispossessed grew in the shadow of the Brahmin establishment that gave the world Robert Lowell. The single most beautiful utterance in *PW* is Wieners' adieu, Haiku "for Napoleon." It is too beautiful to reproduce here; you have to order the magazine to read it.

Robert D'Attilio's "Paul Petricone, Revere Beach, & Other Things" is part memoir, part sociological-historical briefing. He

places Petricone's life and photographs within the overlapping circles of art and Italian anarchism in Boston in the sixties—the generation after Wieners. Its first sentences already declare a loss: "I first saw Paul Petricone's photographs on a summer day in 1964 in an invitational show of New England photographers curated by Carl Siembab for the Boston Arts Festival, an event held annually in Boston's Public Garden during that period. Art in *plein air*, free, and for a general public; it was one of Boston's pleasures that, like so much of the city, now belongs only to memory." This resonates with Wieners' frequent *cris de coeur*, something—Scollay Square, Revere Beach, the Boston Arts Festival—has been lost, with attendant pleasures and freedoms.

*Pressed Wafer* magazine might be steeped in recent poetic history, but the chapbook series is firmly in the present and driven by the up-and-coming. The first two chapbooks are terrific each in its own way: in Beth Anderson's *In Residence*, with its Katharine Hepburn diction and grammar, the poems are laid out like long Euclidean rafters, while metaphors of home are belied by unfamiliar perceptions: "Weaving through crops in order to identify botanical names / we came to the dank pool where we hoped to see portraits but settled / for dislike."

Other times the vertiginous telescopes into perspective with an aperçu like "And then to learn that your house is not / your house but a group of stances taken together to indicate tenancy." The pleasure in Fred Moten's *Arkansas* is closer to the bone, if only because the sweep of black-American-cum-Elizabethan language meets its

subject matter head-on: marriage, family and birthplace. (See my interview with Fred on the next page.) Side by side the two books are radically different, in itself a statement of *PW*'s editorial policy.

So much for *Pressed Wafer* representing a school, or, finally, a "poetics" that, once fingered, can be contended! But the perfect-bound magazines; handsome chapbooks; "twofer" pamphlet (the first published poems of Mike County and Del Ray Cross, raw and exciting in this punk medium, like stumbling into a dive bar and finding a band of unknowns totally in the groove); postcards and broadsides exist, as Charles Olson might have said, as facts, and come into our world to illuminate a field hitherto unknown.

Next up will be a reissue of Joe Dunn's *White Rabbit Press* book *The Better Dream House*, a chapbook by the young Boston poet Jim Behrle, and in the magazine, Stephen Jonas letters and a Joe Brainard feature to coincide with his retrospective next year. For subscription information, write to 9 Columbus Sq., Boston MA 02116.

For further reading on the secret history of Boston poetry, see lift magazine #10/11 (Stephen Jonas issue, 1992) and #15/16 (William Corbett issue, 1994) edited by Joseph Torra, 10-R Oxford St., Somerville MA 02143.



Fred Moten's chapbook *Arkansas* was published by Pressed Wafer last spring. He is Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at New York University's Tisch School of Performing Arts. The following transcript is excerpted from an interview conducted on July 8, 2000 in New York City.

AM: So you grew up in Arkansas?

FM: I grew up in Las Vegas. But the community that I was from in Las Vegas, many of the people were sort of first-generation immigrants I guess you could say, from Arkansas. So it was almost as if Arkansas had been transplanted to Vegas.

AM: How did that happen?

FM: Well, Vegas had, because of the casinos and because of the Nevada test site where they used to test nuclear bombs, opportunities for unskilled labor who were pretty low-paid. And so, at the very tail end of the so-called Great Migration when people started moving west instead of just up north to Chicago, Vegas was one of the places where people moved, along with L.A. and the Bay Area. And also, there is a big airforce base in Vegas, and a lot of black folks who were in the army or in the airforce stopped through there and saw things there. So there was a pretty old and established black community in Las Vegas that my mom was a part of. And a lot of people even from the same little town in Arkansas that she was from. We used to go home—well, when I use the word "home," I mean Arkansas even though I was brought up in Vegas—we would go home for Christmas a lot and I spent summers in Arkansas.

AM: You're always coming back to your past, particularly your mother, in your work.

FM: Yeah, she was the biggest influence on my life, because my father and her were divorced when I was about eleven—and even when he was around she was the major influence for me. In every way. Not only in terms of the sounds that I'm trying to get at, but politics and the music I loved I was introduced to by her. So she's in everything I write, in my scholarly stuff too. I'm sure that that will always be the case.

AM: Well, one of the things that I found in my research was this introduction you wrote to an issue of *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. In it, you mention anima, and it hit me that there's a strong anima in your poems, via the women you invoke and implore. In fact, being exiled from the anima seems to be an abiding fear.

FM: I think that that's a huge thing. The first place where I really began to think a lot about anima was from reading [Amiri] Baraka, and reading specifically this essay that he wrote called "The Burton Green Affair," and it's about Burton Green, this jazz pianist...he played sort of what got called free jazz at the time, in the mid-60's. And at the very moment when Baraka was sort of becoming more and more militantly black nationalist, he was faced with trying to determine and trying to understand the political significance of free jazz. He, I think, really felt that it was the soundtrack for a sort of revolution that they thought—everyone thought—was just around the cor-

ner.

So the fact that a white musician, a white pianist, was playing this music with black musicians was a real problem for Baraka. There's a complicated way he had to try and separate out the pianist from these two saxophone players, Marion Brown and Pharoah Saunders. And the term *anima*, spirit, breath—in the essay, Baraka comes up with that as a way of trying to distinguish between the sound that the horns were producing and the kind of more percussive and punctuated sound that the piano was playing. Ultimately in the essay everything gets confused and convoluted, and the sort of racial determinations he's trying to make don't really work. Part of the confusion that shows up in that essay has to do with the fact that *anima* does get coded, or is coded in certain ways as feminine. And the ideology of black nationalism at that moment was structured in such a way as to try and distance the feminine. Baraka had a certain moment when the feminine, and homosexuality, were associated with a kind of Europeanness that he was trying to break away from. And I always felt this was the problem. Partly because the most significant influences in my life were women: my mom, my grandma, the music that they played and listened to. You know, it seems like every morning I was listening to Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, and that voice was the voice that was in some ways always in my head and the one that I was always trying to capture and figure out how to incorporate into what I was doing.

And what I began to realize as I was going through school is that this is a phenomenon not just unique to me. That, especially I think in Afro-American culture, there's this tremendous tension between the black male artist trying to establish a kind of manhood, trying to establish a kind of masculinity which is supposed to correspond to a certain kind of political force. But, at the same time, I was trying to figure out some way to assimilate this feminine sound, this feminine spirit, which has this tremendous aesthetic weight, but which also has this tremendous amount of political weight too. And so all of my work, poetry and the other, theoretical stuff too, has been trying to think about this. And of course, you know, once I met Laura, my wife—that only complicates it and enriches it.

AM: I was recently saying to someone, that discourse tries to be masculine and totalizing, and poetry is feminized with its negative capability and not-knowing, and discourse is always trying to minimize or even replace poetry...

FM: Well, it's repressed, you know, is what I think. I mean, there's an animus of critical theory, which is desperately trying to repress the

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"Mind is shapely  
Art is  
shapely"  
— Allen Ginsberg

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feminine. But it can't really do it, and the stuff that I most admire is the stuff in which the failure to repress the feminine is most pronounced.

Well, let me put it a little differently. There are some folks in whose work I see this profound failure to repress the feminine, and so in a way, for me, that becomes an avenue into their work—but more or less by accident, not necessarily a function of their intentions or desires. And then there are folks who I think are making a real attempt to actively embrace it, and they're even better, you know? Take Baraka's prose works from the mid-to-late sixties. He's someone who I think of as as much a political theorist as I do a poet. (And I want to make it clear that he's, as far as I'm concerned, great. And I probably disagree with some of those essays, but there's no way I could be doing any of the stuff I do without him having been there first.) But he is someone who's operating at the level of this insistent kind of repression of the feminine, and it comes back to haunt his work in ways that are really intense, and the most beautiful moments in his work are precisely when they come back to haunt the work.

In that essay, for instance, that I was talking about before, "The Burton Green Affair," on the one hand he wants to talk about the horn players as the embodiment of a kind of black masculinity, but the way that those horns must have sounded that night could never be separated from a sound that has been traditionally associated with the feminine, you know, the horn screaming, and just the sound of a tenor horn anyway. That sound is what animates his essay. But this happens all the time, it seems to me, in his work. So that's a place where maybe he's trying to put something away, put something back, put it down, but it keeps coming back, and it's good that it does, and it produces amazing stuff. And then, somebody like Derrida let's say, is somebody who I think is much more intensely aware of what it means to try and actively embrace this femininity, thematically and in terms of the way he writes, and that produces great insight and beauty, as far as I'm concerned, too. But they're two different kinds, two different effects. There is a whole bunch of folks one could think of along those lines, and—though I might have indicated before that maybe the active embrace of the feminine produces better stuff, I probably would take that back, I don't know.

AM: So you think a little repression is good for art? (laughing)

FM: Well, I mean, I think it depends on what you're looking at and I just wouldn't want to make the blanket statement that this one is always going to produce better art. It's not an easy thing. I'm sure that there's a tremendous amount of repression, you know, going on in my stuff too. It's not some simple thing where I'm totally aware.

AM: How could you be, if it's poetry?

FM: Exactly!

AM: I know you write about Afro-American performance studies. But the one time I saw you read, you weren't performative. You have a beautiful reading voice, but you don't declaim your work or engage in any—I don't even know what the word is—improvisational techniques?

FM: Well, I mean, part of it is, I'm just really new to reading, and maybe as I get more, you know, get older and more confident with it I'll become a little more animated, I guess you could say. But also at the same time, I really want to emphasize what I read, the music that I'm trying to infuse in the poetry—if I can do what I'm trying to do—the music is in there without me having to amplify it in some exaggerated way. And, all our music and all of those speech patterns and so forth, I want that stuff to be in there and on the page.

Bill Corbett reading, for me, is a model to which I sort of aspire. I mean, I think he's a lot more animated than me, you know, he takes, sucks in all this air and lets it out in all these amazing ways—I remember hearing him read this poem called "Anthem", which is like, to me, his greatest hit. I love that poem. And that ability to both let ride with the music on the page and also breathe something new into it, to sort of bring those two things together is an ambition.

What I'm interested in critically in Afro-American literature and performance is discerning how this tremendous amount of political content is all bound up with emotional content, sexual content, and how that plays itself out in moments in which you can't pinpoint a discernable meaning. So part of what's at stake is to be able to make a distinction between content and meaning. Like when James Brown screams, that has content, but you can't pinpoint and say, well the scream means this, and it would be silly to do that. But then at the same time you wouldn't want to discount that content too, so to try and have that content is really important, and this is part of that tradition. And also, not just content, but sentiment, you know?

And I've been trying to write these critical books, and one of them, the title of it—I have the title but half the book isn't written yet—is *The Sentimental Avant-Garde*. And that's basically the general sense in which I think about, especially the Afro-American part in the twentieth century. A huge thing for me was going to the MoMA a few years ago, and they had this Mondrian exhibit. You sort of go through the whole thing and then in the end you come to this glorious conclusion, which is these

two late paintings, "Broadway Boogie-Woogie" and "Victory Boogie-Woogie", which is the stuff he made after he came to New York in the early forties. And it's these amazing paintings, and they're so moving, and they're sentimental. And I realized they have this tremendous amount of energy, they have an energy which you associate with the U.S. and with New York, and I'm sure that it was part of something that reanimated Mondrian at this late stage in his career. But what I think they also are animated by is this sentiment—this love. That stuff is embedded in those paintings, and I think that's an American thing, and it's African, and to the extent

Like when James Brown screams, that has content, but you can't pinpoint and say, well the scream means this...

I have the title but half the book isn't written yet... *The Sentimental Avant-Garde*.



that it's an American thing it's also necessarily and deeply an Afro-American thing.

Look at American movies. As crappy as American movies can be, the great American movies are sentimental movies, among other things. Like, you know, Ford or Scorsese. To me, John Ford is amazing. And I agree with Stanley Crouch on that one point only! But I love John Ford, and part of what you love it for is his ability to harness, in this totally aesthetically interesting and radical way, sentiment.

AM: Well the blues do that. It was a real revelation when I realized, after all these years of dumbed-down Top-40 songs shoved down people's throats, with banal lyrics that spell everything out, if you go to old blues lyrics, especially Delta blues, they contain very ambiguous, haunting, beautiful lyrics. They're poetic in that way of being elusive and mysterious, and these were folk songs, they were popular songs. What happened?

FM: No, it's this amazing reservoir of stuff that, in the full beauty of it, in the full energy of what it can still give us, people are only beginning to tap into. Because you're right. There is this tremendous confluence of sentiment and emotion and content and sound and syntax which is as radical and broken and fragmented and abstract as any of us who love certain kinds of things could hope to get, you know. And I think rap, a lot of good rap stuff is like that too. Some

of these guys are like, eighteen, nineteen-year-olds, and they're amazing. They're doing stuff that is just amazing with language. And so much of what's written about it is kind of disappointing, just because I think people haven't given the attention to it that it deserves as art, and paid attention to it as language. But the blues, all that stuff is just waiting for people to look at it.

AM: When I heard Lauryn Hill's album, I was dazzled. There were some passages there that left most poets I know in the dust.

FM: No, it's true. There's a lot of good stuff like that. I mean, it's just so accelerated, 'cuz I remember when I started college twenty years ago, it was like Grand Master Flash, but the juicy stuff now, it's like three hundred years of development happened in twenty years when you listen to, you know, Lauryn Hill or the RZA, you seen that album?

AM: Just how they rhyme . . .

FM: That's the other thing! That they brought rhyme back into the mix in a way that has got to be taken into account.

So, there's just a lot of good stuff going on right now. There's enough good stuff so that it's possible just to avoid, not totally, but there's enough good stuff so that you don't have to immerse yourself in bad stuff unless you want to. (laughs)

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## Lisa Jarnot interviews Stan Brakhage

Avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage met poet Robert Duncan and painter Jess Collins in San Francisco in 1952. In 1953 Duncan and Jess invited the twenty-year-old Brakhage to live in a basement apartment at their house on Baker Street in San Francisco. While there, Brakhage met many of the artists who would influence his work, and he came to recognize Duncan and Jess as mentor figures. Brakhage completed some of his first film projects while living with the couple, including *The Way to Shadow Garden* [1954] and a collaboration with Jess Collins called *In Between* [1955]. The following is an excerpt from an interview I conducted with Brakhage in Boulder, Colorado on December 24, 1998. Brakhage and I had spoken on previous occasions regarding my research toward a biography of Robert Duncan.

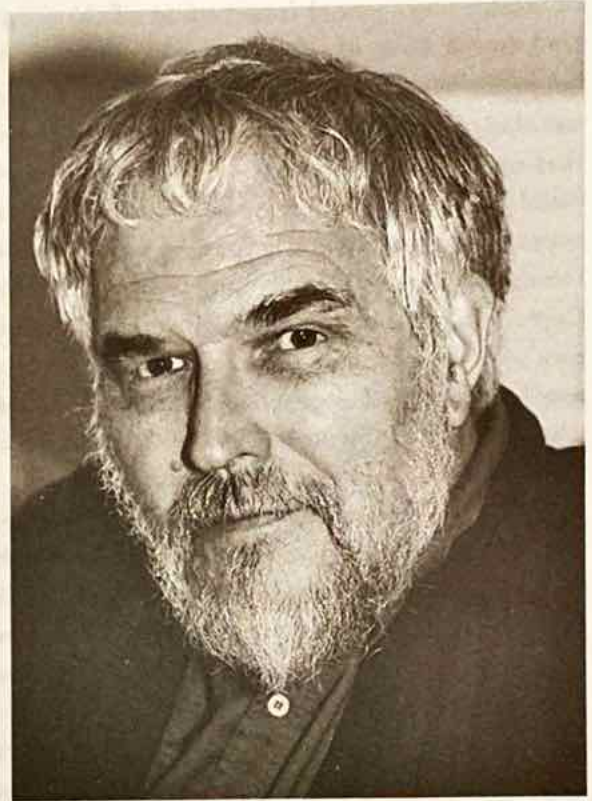


Photo by Kai Sibley. Courtesy of Millennium Film Workshop.

LJ: You met Helen Adam in San Francisco and I've been trying to find out when Robert Duncan first met her.... I assume it was with the workshop that he taught during the fall of 1954.

SB: Well I can describe, to my knowledge, the very night that he met her. It was when Ruth Witt-Diamont

gave Robert a workshop placement at San Francisco State....and one night, very near the beginning of that workshop, if not in fact the very first meeting. Helen Adam came with her sister. And I'll never forget it because everyone took turns reading and when it came to Helen Adam a storm came up and was flashing lightning outside the window, and it was very spectacular,



and she cut loose with one of her witchy poems and she just completely charmed Robert with this, and everyone else—we were flabbergasted with this lightning and poetic display of Helen Adam's. She then came regularly and that workshop went on all across that period. But it was that night—that was the first—she suddenly blew in right before the storm and took us all literally by storm, absolutely. I still have little chills go up and down my back remembering that night. She really made an incantatory scene. I forget which of the poems she read, but it's one of the first two or three poems in her book, one of those long ballads. And for Robert it was also enchanting because he had a sense of ballad—that was something that was missing, someone who could do the ballad. Now Jimmy [James Broughton] of course could do ballads, but really Jimmy's world was something closer to [Christian] Morgenstern, or Lewis Carroll or someone like that.... He was involved in his own ways in the same things that Duncan was, and in another way that Helen Adam was, you know—magic. They all kind of flutter in some sense around Robert Graves' world. And that's why Robert went to Mallorca,<sup>(1)</sup> because of Robert Graves with his sense of these magics that were invented, but all the more real for that—leaning on Jung who says the imagination is most real. So that was Duncan—I mean Duncan was also a good Freudian, but he respected that sense of Jung, and he more lived that sense of Jungian psychology—that the imagination was more real than any other form of reality. But then Duncan also had that way, that he would teach you, as he did me, that "real" meant "royal", and reality. It meant the king's way, and so the imagination from a language sense became more real—not more real—but became the mode of being that you could most fully inhabit. I know for example, let me tell you one thing—when I got married.... I went to Princeton, New Jersey, and I went then on assignment over to Switzerland to attend the Atomic Peace Conference as a professional cinematographer.

**LJ: What year was that?**

SB: That would be 1959. When I next saw Robert Duncan—which is probably when Jane [Brakhage]<sup>(2)</sup> and I brought him to Boulder to give a program which would like 1960, or 1961—I told him about this experience of going to the Atomic Peace Conference and I said a man named Peron delivered the opening address and I was in charge of a bank of cameras up in the balcony that were focused on him. And really...you don't

want to waste a lot of film, but, you know, you turn the cameras on and you get the opening and then you turn them off; you don't record the whole speech. Because it's not like video you know, you're recording film. And suddenly this Peron, who was from France, and was a very highly considered physicist, begins ranting and raving on the stage. "we have the task to warn people against fairy tales, against myth, against so on..." and he went on this diatribe against how peoples' minds are being warped and twisted so that they cannot comprehend the science of the age in which they're living by all these past hocus pocuses and religion—he included religions. And I thought he'd gone mad. And I went to my cameramen and I said "turn on your cameras, turn on your cameras!" I thought that at any minute someone's going to come out on the stage and grab him and remove him. Instead, he finishes his speech and you know, half the audience stands and gives him a standing ovation, throws their papers and their hats into the air and say "Yeeh!"

So I told Robert about this and he was very interested in getting the speech itself.... You see, what he wanted to do was then turn that back on them. He felt under assault. The moon landing was not a happy event for Robert or Jess. It was like desecrating the moon. And the destruction to the moon as an imagination was so horrible, in relationship to what was gained by landing there. So this very much speaks to his partisanship for the world of the imagination.

And Robert was very infatuated with Helen Adam and he saw her as an authentic time traveler—that this was true time travel. This was not someone rewriting the Scottish ballads—this was someone who was imbued with that spirit who had managed to survive into the twentieth century.

**LJ: It seems like he was also fascinated with that whole tradition, just being a Duncan. I mean I don't think he knew that much about his real family, but he did consider himself Celtic.**

SB: You know until this moment I've never thought of that. He was Scotch, of course! Duncan. How could I, having read Macbeth, not think of that! It's amazing I never thought of that. Yeah. And Robert always took things so personally. I mean don't please think for a minute I'm criticizing him for this, but he was very clearly the center of his universe. So if Helen came to him it was for him, touching these roots. You can see this most clearly with H.D. and the H.D. Book<sup>(3)</sup>. He



thought of these things as given to him for the furtherance of his, and their, poetic possibilities. Not just him, but them—it was like the magic junction.

**LJ: But then that's a different kind of magic than another kind of magic, like Kenneth Anger's(4) magic.**

SB: Yeah, he was afraid of black magic, power magic.... And Jess didn't like people leaving belongings or leaving talismans or leaving anything or sending little balls of hair in the mail, or whatever, you know? (laughs) That kind of thing didn't go over at all well. That has a lot to do with their difficult relationship with Jack Spicer. Because Spicer was always being too personal like they say. He'd leave a trail a cigarette butts or I don't know what you know, and Jess was always cleaning up after such things.

But you know, Jess was very kindly always and he'd serve people tea, but he'd sit back in the corner very quietly....The *In Between* movie is half concocted with things that he said "well let's try this" or "why don't you do that?" It has his input in it. So you get a real sense of that strange spirit of those times.... Robert was going over to Berkeley and Jess was being a medical assistant in the mornings and he'd come home at noon and make peanut butter bisque soup and he'd read to me for a couple hours and then he'd paint until Robert came home, usually at five or six, and that was a routine day after day, five days a week. And then quite often there'd be some people come over in the evenings; San Francisco was lovely in this way at that time, that people felt free to drop in on each other. And you know so Spicer, or [Robin] Blaser when he was in town, would just drop in. Like I say, Kenneth Anger would just drop in.

And Jess would get involved with Kenneth, almost like to wrap him up in a more familial sense, in the family of Robert and Jess. So that in fact there was a film that Kenneth made with my photographing a collage of Jess's that had cut outs of hundreds of male nudes that were from everything from 19th century engraving—they were pin ups. And he cut out all of these and they were wrapped into something—the only thing like it I've seen is Rodin's *Gates of Hell* in Philadelphia which is such a great experience to be able to go and see. Well this had something of that feeling and Kenneth wanted to photograph it, so he photographed it through lit fires in an ashtray and I photographed through the heat waves in those little

matches, and we made a whole hundred feet which someone has; I think Anthology Film Archive has it actually. A collaboration by Kenneth Anger and me. It doesn't have a title because it never got finished. But by that point Kenneth was being involved in Jess's aesthetic. And I think in some curious way Jess gave Kenneth more inspiration than Robert did. The vision of Jess was very intriguing to him because of course it corresponded to Kenneth Anger's grandmother, after whom he has invented his name. Most people think he means "anger", well he also lets that stand, but "D'Anger" is what he really means. That was his grandmother's shop where she made these costumes for Max Reinhardt's *Midsummer Night's Dream* that Kenneth appeared in. Kenneth's the changeling in it, the little boy. So anyway, Jess with his 19th century infatuations touched, I think, a chord in Kenneth related to his grandmother.

**LJ: Right. They had a long correspondence during the 1950s about fairies.**

SB: Oh what a wonderful thing. That's lovely. Well, I can well believe it, and Jess believed in fairies, and I'm sure he still does. For that matter so do I, which is regarded as a complete madness in the world I live in. That says a lot. But then you see, for me, before I met Robert and Jess I had some sense of the muse, of god, of angels, of guardian angels, of fairies, of elves, of demons, of daimons. All of these things were running in my bloodstream, but finally Robert and Jess gave me a way to be able to acknowledge that, and to live according to the tenets that these apparitions, or whatever you want to call them, brought to me. They are, to me, as real as you are sitting there. Though I am perfectly content to talk about them as if they were projections of my unconscious or my imagination. It doesn't matter because in either case their effect on my work or my life remain just the same. So I don't need a supportive religion, but I did at some point need some sense that there were other humans that recognized these oddities for which you were ordinarily in the twentieth century regarded as insane. And that really is probably the basic relationship that I had with them—more with Jess in that respect than Robert. I don't know, I really think but for them I might not have made it. I was very fragile when I went to San Francisco. I feel I've been so lucky. I inherited something of their charmed circle, and them really as magic parents for me....That's in a

(continued on p. 28)



# Lost Authors

William Melvin Kelley



THE SIXTIES - A TIME OF EXPERIMENTATION, IN ART AND IN LIFE. THE IDEA OF "THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL" WAS ABANDONED IN FAVOR OF FORMAL INNOVATION AND SATIRICAL CRITIQUE...



ISHMAEL REED  
THE PALL BEARERS

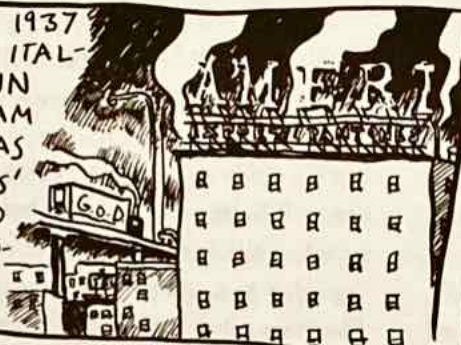
RICHARD BRAUNTIGAN  
IN WATERMELON SUGAR

SUSAN SONTAG  
THE BENEFACTOR

WILLIAM BURROUGHS  
EXTERMINATOR

DONALD BARTHELME  
SNOW WHITE

BORN IN NYC IN 1937 AND RAISED IN AN ITALIAN NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE BRONX, WILLIAM MELVIN KELLEY WAS ONE OF THE SIXTIES' MOST PROLIFIC AND CONSISTENTLY RADICAL NOVELISTS.



FROM 1962 TO 1967 KELLEY PUBLISHED FIVE BOOKS. THE FIRST, A DIFFERENT DRUMMER, TAKES PLACE IN A MYTHICAL SOUTHERN STATE, FROM WHICH THERE IS A MASS EXODUS...

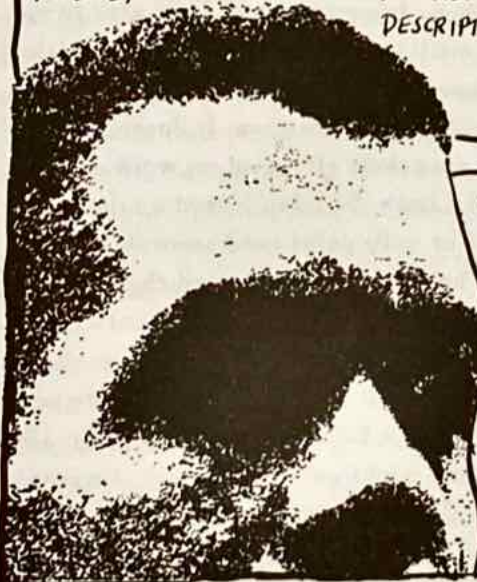


... BY THE ENTIRE BLACK POPULATION. KELLEY'S SECOND NOVEL, A DROP OF PATIENCE, IS WRITTEN FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A BLIND JAZZ MUSICIAN - FORCING KELLEY TO ABANDON VISUAL DESCRIPTION.

DESPITE ITS LACK OF THIS PRIMARY NOVELISTIC DEVICE, A DROP OF PATIENCE IS

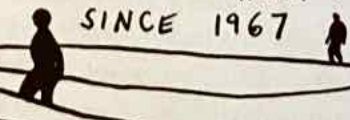


STILL CONSIDERED A CLASSIC OF "JAZZ LITERATURE." IN HIS LAST TWO NOVELS, DEM AND DUNFORDS TRAVELS EVERYWHERE, KELLEY BECOMES



INCREASINGLY EXPERIMENTAL: IN DEM, A WHITE WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO TWINS, ONE WHITE, ONE BLACK - WITH SURPRISING CONSEQUENCES.

IN DUNFORDS TRAVELS EVERYWHERE KELLEY EXPERIMENTS WITH INSTANCES OF "BLACK DIALECT," CREATING PUNS SIMILAR TO JOYCE'S IN FINNEGANS WAKE. BUT THIS WAS KELLEY'S LAST BOOK... FOR REASONS WE MAY NEVER KNOW, THIS EXTRAORDINARY WRITER HASN'T PUBLISHED A BOOK SINCE 1967 ...







## Michael Gizzi Talks with Kevin Davies: An Email Epistolary

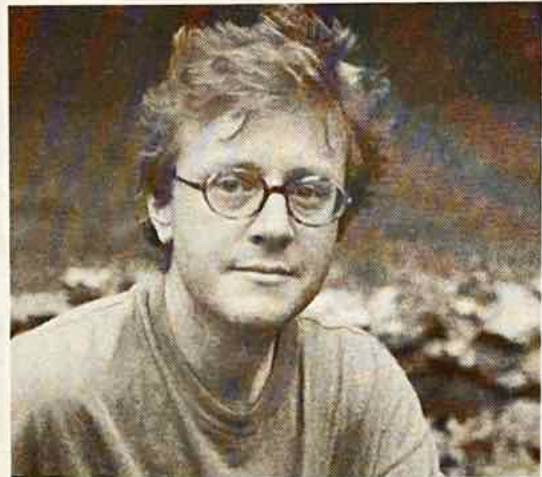


Photo by Deirdre Kovac

Kevin Davies' new book, *Comp.*, was published this year by Edge Books. Born in British Columbia, he lived in Vancouver and was a member of the Kootenay School of Writing for several years before moving to Brooklyn. His last book, *Pause Button*, was published by Tsunami Editions in 1992. Michael Gizzi interviewed him in inimitable style, over email. Due to their growing number of obsessive fans, this editor has left their email addresses out.

From: Michael Gizzi  
To: Kevin Davies

Kevin,

Let's go! or let us begin with your title, shall we?—*Comp.*  
Comprehensive? and since nothing is, therefore, abbreviated?  
Composition, as in writing? I have it through the grape vines that  
you are an especially diligent teacher of Composition. *Comp.* /  
Gratis? Again, nothing is, right? Or *comp* as in improvised musical  
accompaniment? What say you?

From: Kevin Davies  
To: Michael Gizzi

Mike,

As to the title: I'm pretentious enough to say what Zukofsky did in a similar context: All. Composition, Complimentary, Complementary, Comprehensive, Compote, Compton. But the truth is, the book was hard to title. So I had about 40 different titles when I published in mags, "from." For a while, Rod [Smith] wanted it to be called this joke title we came up with drunk one night years ago, *Claymation Kakistocracy* (I'm not sure about the spelling), but Deirdre would have left me if I'd done so.

*Comp*, in the sense of composition, a required subject in college that I had blundered into teaching, was something I was in the middle of for several years.

Regards, Kevin

(continued on p. 18)



# event

## at the POETRY PROJECT

**OCTOBER 2, MONDAY**  
Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

**OCTOBER 4, WEDNESDAY**  
**Robert Creeley and Paul Violi**

Robert Creeley, poet, novelist, short-story writer, essayist, editor and teacher, was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts. His collection *For Love: Poems 1950-1960*, published in 1962, firmly established his position in American Letters. In 1987, he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. He is the 1999 recipient of the biennial Bollingen Prize in Poetry, and in June 2000 he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Awards. His latest book of poetry is *Life & Death* (New Directions). Paul Violi is the author of eight volumes of poetry, including *Breakers* (Coffee House Press, 2000) and *Selected Accidents/Pointless Anecdotes*, forthcoming from Hanging Loose Press. Additionally, his work has been included in *The Oxford Anthology of Modern American Poetry* and *The Best American Poetry 2000*.

**OCTOBER 6, FRIDAY**  
**Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry, Gary Mex Glazner, ed.**

Celebrate the publication of the new anthology *Poetry Slam: The Competitive Art of Performance Poetry* (Manic D Press, September 2000). This unique book documents the first ten years of this grass roots world-wide poetry movement, with essays on how to host your own slam as well as 100 of the best slam-winning poems ever. Editor Gary Mex Glazner and contributors Patricia Smith, Taylor Mali, Stacy Chin, Regie Cabico, Roger Bonair-Agard, Bob Holman, Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz, and others will read from their selections in the book, followed by an open mike—audience members will be invited to challenge them in a knock-down-drag-out slam. The winners will receive fabulous prizes, such as subway tokens and egg sodas. [10:30 p.m.]

**OCTOBER 9, MONDAY**  
**Michael Broder and Kristin Stuart**

Michael Broder grew up in the shadow of the Cyclone roller coaster on Coney Island. His poetry appears in the current issue of *The Brooklyn Review Online*. Writer and performer Kristin Stuart's work has appeared in *XXX Fruit*, *LE: The Literary Journal* of the same name, and *XXX Fruit*. [10:30 p.m.]

Moten was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada and now lives in New York City. He has published poetry in *Grand Street* and *lift* and has poems forthcoming in *Callaloo* and *Five Fingers Review*. He is the author of the chapbook *Arkansas* (Pressed Water Press, 2000).

**OCTOBER 20, FRIDAY**  
**A Night of Taboos: Self-pleasuring & Shi't**

Tonight's the night to experience the forbidden.... Readers Tony Gloggler, Daddy (Laurel Barclay and guitarist Matt Katz-Bohen), Gloria, and David Mills will bring their deepest secrets to light. An open mike follows, where members of the audience will read their own taboo poems. Unspeakable prizes—toilet paper, flavored lube, and a gift certificate to Toys in Babeland—will be given out based on audience applause. [10:30 p.m.]

**OCTOBER 23, MONDAY**  
**Jeanne Leiby and Rhonda J. Nelson: The Poets & Writers' Writers Exchange Reading**

As part of the 2000 Writers Exchange sponsored by *Poets & Writers*, this year's winners, Florida writers Jeanne Leiby and Rhonda J. Nelson, have been chosen to participate in this very special reading. Jeanne Leiby, an assistant professor of creative writing at the University of Central Florida, is currently at work on her first novel, *Searching for Ingo*. Her poems and stories have appeared in *Sundog: The Southeast Review* among others. A two-time recipient of the Hillsborough County Arts Council Emerging Artist award, Rhonda J. Nelson is the author of the chapbook *Shadows and Light*.

**OCTOBER 25, WEDNESDAY**  
**Bill Kushner and Frank Lima**

A 1999 recipient of a Poetry Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, Bill Kushner is the author of *That April* (forthcoming from United Artists Books). *He Dreams of Waters* (due this fall from Rattapallax Press), and other volumes of poetry. His poetry may be seen in the journals *Rattapallax*, *LUNGFULL*, and others. Frank Lima is the author of *Beatitudes* (Hard Press, October 2000), *New and Selected Poems* (Hard Press, 1997) and many other volumes of poetry. His work has appeared in the anthologies *El Coro: A Chorus of Latino and Latin Poetry* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), *The Poet's Poet: The Millennium of Luis & Moon Press, 1997*, and others. He has taught college poetry.

Actively involved in anti-war, feminist and anti-nuclear movements, she regards herself as a "somewhat combative pacifist and cooperative anarchist."

**NOVEMBER 10, FRIDAY**  
**The House of Pernod**

In the collage tradition of the 90's, The House of Pernod is a hybrid of funk, chaos, poetry, theater and rock & roll. The band delivers "a unique and intoxicating energy," says Larry McDonald of Gil Scott Heron's *Amnesia Express*. Joining The House of Pernod tonight is Detroit poet M.L. Liebler, Sean Thomas Dougherty, editor of the *Red Brick Review*, and Noel Jones. [10:30 p.m.]

**NOVEMBER 13, MONDAY**  
**Elizabeth Young and Lauren Gudath**

Poet Elizabeth Young is the Assistant Editor for *The Poetry Project Newsletter* and co-host for the Belladonna reading series. Her poems have appeared in *Tool a Magazine*, *Skanky Possum*, and on the Poetry Project's web site. San Francisco poet Lauren Gudath's most recent chapbook, *The Television Documentary*, was published in 1999 by Second Story Press.

**NOVEMBER 15, WEDNESDAY**  
**Readings from Ted Berrigan's The Sonnets**

Originally published in 1964, *The Sonnets* by Ted Berrigan is considered by many to be his most important and influential book. On this night, many of Ted Berrigan's friends and colleagues from the 1960's will read from this much-praised new edition. The remarkable lineup includes Ron Padgett, Alice Notley, Kenneth Koch, Jim Carroll, Lewis Warsh, Larry Fagin, Anselm Hollo, Maureen Owen, Ed Sanders, Dick Gallup, John Ashbery, Anne Waldman, Lorenzo Thomas, and others.

**NOVEMBER 17, FRIDAY**  
**Word of Mouth: An Anthology of Gay American Poetry**

A celebration of the publication of *Word of Mouth* (Talisman House, July 2000), a ground-breaking anthology which offers a sweeping introduction to Gay American poetry of the past half-century. Tonight's readers include contributors Edward Field, Wayne Koestenbaum, Jaime Manrique, Taylor Mead, David Trinidad, Mark Wunderlich and editor Timothy Liu. [10:30]



Brooklyn Review Online. Writer and performer Kristin Stuart's work may be seen in the journals *XXX Fruit*, *Lit: The Literary Journal of The New School for Social Research*, and *Other*. She is currently in residence at the *Here gallery* in Manhattan.

#### OCTOBER 11, WEDNESDAY

##### John Godfrey and Ange Minko

John Godfrey's books include *Midnight on Your Left* (1988), *Dabble* (1982) and *How to Give Yourself a Clean Shot* (distributed nationally by The Needle Exchange). Currently, he is working as an angel of mercy with homebound AIDS children in inner Brooklyn. Ange Minko is the author of *Matinees* (Zoland Books, 1999), which was named one of the Best Books of 1999 by *Publishers Weekly*. She is the editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. Her poetry has appeared in the journals *Agni*, *Grand Street*, *Lingo*, *lift*, and others.

#### OCTOBER 13, FRIDAY

##### Lucky 13 Reading

This lineup is hot! The Jezebels are "just in time to rescue the literati from poetic anemia," says ChickClick.com. These three women—Cheryl B, Elena Georgiou and Lauren Sanders—have a mission, as they put it, "to bring glamour back to the traditionally staid world of literary readings." Spit East—tonight represented by Darleen Hall, Shannon Holloway, Storme Webber, Mason Musumeci, Celena Glenn and Rachael Sykes—features spoken word, authors, musicians, comedians, and other forms of performance. Your fabulous, female-impersonating host Regie Cabico along with the deranged Dr. Ducky Doolittle, the notorious drag king Raven and Scotty the Blue Bunny from the Bindlestiff Family Circus round out the lineup. [10:30 p.m.]

#### OCTOBER 16, MONDAY

##### Betsy Andrews and Elizabeth Treadwell

Betsy Andrews is the recipient of a 1999 New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in non-fiction and a 1999 Astraea Foundation "Loving Lesbians" Award for Poetry. Her work has appeared in *LUNGFULL*, *Fence*, *Skanky Possum*, and others. Elizabeth Treadwell is the author of a collection of prose/poetry, *Populace* (Avec Books, 1999) as well as a novel, *Eleanor Ramsey: the Queen of Cups* (San Francisco State University Press, 1997), which received the 1997 Michael Rubin Award. Presently she edits *Outlet* magazine in Berkeley, California, and teaches nearby.

#### OCTOBER 18, WEDNESDAY

##### Lisa Jarnot and Fred Moten

Lisa Jarnot is the author of the forthcoming *Ring of Fire* (Zoland Books, 2001) as well as *Some Other Kind of Mission* (Burning Deck Press, 1996), and several chapbooks. Her work has appeared in *Chicago Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Grand Street*, among other journals. In the fall of 2001 she will join the teaching staff of the Kerouac School at Naropa University as a full-time professor. Fred

#### NOVEMBER 30, MONDAY

**Elena Rivera and Jacques Debroit**  
Elena Rivera was born in Mexico City and spent her childhood in Paris, France. Her book *Unknowne Land* was chosen by Kelsey Street Press as the winner of the 1999 Francis Jaffer Book Award. Jacques Debroit is a Ph.D. student at Harvard University. He is the author of *Confuzion Comix* and the editor of the poetry zine *9 to 0*. His essays and poems have appeared in numerous journals including *ArsHile*, *The Washington Review*, *Arial*, *First Intensity*, and *Rhizome*.

#### NOVEMBER 22, WEDNESDAY

##### Dick Gallup and Hoa Nguyen

Dick Gallup is the author of the forthcoming *Shiny Pencils at the Edge of Things* (Coffee House Press, February 2001), as well as *Hinges* (1965). *Plumbing the Depths of Folly* (1983), and others. He has taught several writing workshops at the Poetry Project, and is a former Chairman of the Poetics Institute at Naropa. Currently he lives in San Francisco. Hoa Nguyen, co-editor of *Skanky Possum* Press, has served as visiting poet and guest lecturer for several institutions including the University of California at San Jose and the University of Houston. She is the author of *Parrot Drum* (LeRoy Books, 2000), *Hood* (Buck Down Books, 2000), and others.

#### NOVEMBER 27, MONDAY

##### Eddie Berrigan and Cedar Sigo

Eddie Berrigan is the author of a volume of poetry, *Disarming Matter* (Owl Press, 1999) and the chapbooks *Life* (Booglit, 2000), *Counting the Hats and Ducks* and *A Serious Earth* (collaborations with Will Yackulic) (both Idion, 1997). Cedar Sigo, who lives in San Francisco, loves looking into black windows and walking night streets. His poetry has appeared in *Mirage*, *Mungo vs. Ranger*, *Blue Book*, and other journals.

## The Poetry Project

is at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery  
131 East 10th Street, New York City 10003

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Massachusetts Press, 1997), and others. He has taught writing workshops at the Poetry Project and elsewhere, and is presently a culinary instructor at the New York Restaurant School. A reception celebrating the readers' new publications will follow this reading.

#### OCTOBER 30, MONDAY

##### Joanna Fuhrman and Standard Schaefer

Joanna Fuhrman's first book *Freud in Brooklyn* was published by Hanging Loose Press this year. Her poems have appeared in *Fence*, *6500*, and other journals. Essayist, poet and fiction writer Standard Schaefer lives in LA, where he makes his living as a doggie day-care attendant. His poems have appeared in *New American Writing*, *Ribot*, *Fence*, and other journals. His book *Nova* is forthcoming.

#### NOVEMBER 1, WEDNESDAY

##### John Ashbery and Bernadette Mayer

John Ashbery is the author of twenty books of poetry, including his most recent book, *Your Name Here* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, October 2000). One of his earlier books, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975), received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the National Book Award. Bernadette Mayer served for many years as Artistic Director for the Poetry Project. Her recent books include *A Bernadette Mayer Reader*, *Proper Name: And Other Stories*, and a reissue of her classic *Midwinter Day* (New Directions, 1999). She has taught innovative writing workshops at the New School, the Poetry Project and Naropa University.

#### NOVEMBER 3, FRIDAY

##### Special One-Day Poetry Workshop taught by Bernadette Mayer

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#### NOVEMBER 6, MONDAY

##### Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

#### NOVEMBER 8, WEDNESDAY

##### Brenda Coultas and Grace Paley

Brenda Coultas is the author of *Boy Eye* (Art Institute of Maryland, 2000), *A Summer Newsreel* (Second Story Press, 1999), and *Early Films* (Rodent Press, 1996). Her work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Fence*, *Epoch*, *The Hat*, and other journals. Grace Paley is the author of three highly acclaimed collections of short fiction and three collections of poetry. She has taught at Columbia and Syracuse Universities, and currently teaches at both City College of New York, where she is a writer-in-residence, and Sarah Lawrence College, where she has taught for the past eighteen years.



(Davies, cont.)

From: Michael Gizzi

To: Kevin Davies

Okay K. I assumed the title to be everything and something. I'm very familiar with that style myself. Obviously, I'm knocked out by the book or I wouldn't have initiated this exchange in which, no matter what, I feel like a dumb bell; which isn't all bad in any case. A question I've been putting off: Would you consider yourself to be a political poet or is that just too limiting? I've never liked politics/polemics per se, but I find your epigrammatic semi-Cioran/Burroughsian heat-seeking style very exciting and right, as in "right on." Please inform.

From: Kevin Davies

To: Michael Gizzi

Michael,

Well, yeah, I sure DID think of myself as political for a long time (and still do), and of my poetry as, not necessarily political in and of itself, but certainly informed by how I was trying to *think* the political. And a lot of my writing was involved with turning that language up and over and in and out and subjecting it to operations and considering it no less "natural" than raccoons leaping with glee in wooded glens.

All the "downtown" Vancouver poets I was associated with could be loosely described as left-Spicerians, I think. Me too.

From: Michael Gizzi

To: Kevin Davies

Kevin,

This brings us to George Stanley, the ultra left-Spicerian poet; extremely original, political, and lyrical. I know you and Larry Fagin have completed the manuscript for Stanley's *Selected* which Craig Watson and I will publish next spring. How has George's poetry and his presence as a poet/mentor influenced you and your work?

From: Kevin Davies

To: Michael Gizzi

I remember the first thing I read of George's, in high school or just after—"Tree Talk," in some anthology. I couldn't make any sense of it then. It was like, maybe a year later, reading Coolidge for the first time—WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

Over the next few years I got to know the rest of George's work, and got to know George, but only distantly, because he lived and taught college in Terrace, way up north. He would come down to Vancouver every so often and do things like tell us to read Philip K. Dick. Or Chip Delaney. Or Hans Magnus Enzensberger. And, you know, we always did. Or at least Peter Culley and I always did. There weren't too many other young poets around the scene then, that I was aware of at least.

George was friendly and generous but also properly wary of the

young. His work was, yes, often political, but not overly so in that context, with Stan Persky and Brian Fawcett regularly denouncing people as bourgeois poseurs. George's work seemed like a mind-altering substance. "Normal" and deeply strange at the same time. It was very different from but in this one characteristic very similar to the work of Chris Dewdney (two more dissimilar poets it's hard to imagine), who was also changing my life back then, though I didn't meet him till later, and then only briefly.

George, Gerry Gilbert, George Bowering—all these "G"s—Bill Little, Barry McKinnon—very good poetic role models. All guys, alas. But that was, what, 76-83. What, locally, I read. Peter Culley and I, trying to figure things out.

From: Michael Gizzi

To: Kevin Davies

Kevin,

The best artists are mind-altering substances, I agree. In the middle of *Comp.* you have a very fine long poem called "Karnal Bunt," which you allude to in the acknowledgements as a grain mould at the heart of a U.S./Canadian dispute. Could you say something more about this and its relation to your poem in which sustained hallucinatory montage creates its own mind-altering state?

From: Kevin Davies

To: Michael Gizzi

Mike,

Well, you know, that poem assembled itself over several years during which I was experiencing the pain and pleasure of separation from the land and social programmes of my youth. There was something disputed, and something mouldy, about this separation and my relation to it. New York is most profoundly my home town, but little bits of my heart kept flitting back to the vagaries of Canadian life. I became increasingly aware of this, and thus the title, when I discovered it in a newspaper—especially with the ambiguous "karnal"—seemed apt.

Montage? Yeah, I guess, because people tell me that, but I see them as conventional bourgeois lyrics. Oh, that's a damned lie. But I definitely get the feeling that the little sections—pages—of my poems seem a lot more normal to me that they do to others. But who knows what kinds of effects our various experiences have on us. I was a film projectionist for several years. And at the same time I was the janitor of the theatre during the day. Project at night, clean up the popcorn boxes and spilled cokes later. I think that's in all the poems. Maybe more in *Pause Button*, in a direct way, but something of the "montage" effect it provokes persists in the new book, whatever it's called, oh yeah *Comp.*

From: Michael Gizzi

To: Kevin Davies

I was thinking of montage more in the sense of overall form. I think it can give a long poem a necessary momentum. And yes, I agree, we are both white middle-class lyricists. And I believe your poems



are more "normal" than some readers might think. They're "beautiful machines made of words." And as Leadbelly said, "they move me." Since we have to wrap this up, I'd like to ask to what extent you are satisfied with *Comp.*?

From: Kevin Davies  
To: Michael Gizzi

Yes, I'm happy with it because it's the best I could do. There are less-than-artful moments in the thing, but I can see why they're there. It's very accurate as a "record"—almost like a deposition. Just the facts, Mike. The fact that I wrote words in a certain way at specific times for contingent reasons and "because of my dying day" etc.

From: Michael Gizzi  
To: Kevin Davies

Where are you going from here, anything in the works?

From: Kevin Davies  
To: Michael Gizzi

Notes. Trying not to do anything too arbitrary, and then, at the right moment, doing the most arbitrary thing. Waiting to see what happens next. Trying to rid myself of explanations. Explaining to myself why I want to do so.

"Getting back to my favorite theme, the idea of relief from pain has something to do with ambiguity. Ambiguity supposes an eventual resolution of itself, whereas certitude implies further ambiguity. I guess that's why so much 'depressing' modern art makes me feel so cheerful."

—John Ashbery, "John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch (A Conversation)" from *Out of This World*, ed. Anne Waldman (Crown Publishers, 1991)

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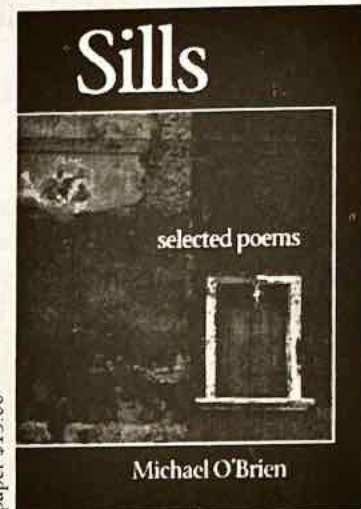
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## Rackstraw Downes: **Under the Gowanus and Razor-Wire Journal**

Turning the Head Press (16 Greene St., 6N, NYC 10013), 2000. 104 pages. \$12.

This is a working painter's diary by one of the best and most intelligent painters around. It covers six months in 1999, and two sets of four paintings each, done at two Brooklyn sites. Lewis Warsh initially proposed the idea; but it took Downes almost twenty years to feel comfortable with it. Even so, Downes wound up giving six handwritten notebooks to an assistant to transcribe "in a feat of deciphering." The result is a fascinating, unedited account not only of how a modern urban painter works *en plein air*—which is often not so *plein*, given the NYC weather, cars obstructing the view, lengthy waits for the subway, etc.—but of the complex life of an artist, physical, emotional, social, aesthetic, intellectual, you name it.

In a prefatory note to Warsh, Downes describes what it is like for him before he begins work on a painting:

It's May. I just returned from a winter in Texas. First, I futz around the studio for a few days, clearing things up, throwing away. You don't work, but you are close to your work, pulling out last year's starts, evaluating the winter harvest, wondering how to get started again, reluctant to do so. Once it starts it will be intense & all-consuming.

The consuming *vocation* together with all that threatens to destroy it is the real theme of the diary. Never mind the sleepless night or the nagging infection, if you don't get up early enough you miss the light. An uncooperative security guy, or sky, can ruin everything. Wild self-doubts loom out of nowhere, along with envy of other artists and obsessive sexual fantasies, all needing to be overcome in order to continue painting. To some friendly locals, Downes becomes a temporary local; other locals are well-meaning but intrusive. A few are unpleasant critics ("it's just a bunch of fucking weeds!"). Throughout the difficulties involved in getting to the site, getting paint onto canvas, and getting home in one physical and emotional piece, equipment unpilfered, *painting issues* persist. Does the car or the pedestrian need to be scraped out and redone? Should the whole thing be redone with wet streets? "Why do I always flunk sky-painting?"

The sense that good and bad days don't count, that the life

of the painting in progress is the vital thing, is what makes Downes' diary so moving and engrossing and—to me—inspiring. It isn't a "writer's diary" (though Downes has elsewhere published graceful and perspicuous art criticism). It's plain talk. Though it was commissioned presumably for publication, Downes seems, remarkably, to have willed self-consciousness out of the picture, such that he really appears to be thinking and feeling on paper, what people do when they keep their diaries under lock-and-key. The writing is sometimes bare-bones notation, often repetitive (given similar working days, despite variations in task, weather, angle), occasionally boring in its litany of besetting problems. It doesn't have the flavor of the diaries most people read, neither the gossip (for all the real names and anecdotal material) nor the singular beauties of, say, James Schuyler's diaries. But Downes, as literate as he is, isn't being a Writer here; and his own singular beauties come in his paintings.

Speaking of writers/poets and painters (and this book has an epigraph from Auden), Wallace Stevens believed, or at least wrote gnomically, that "to a large extent, the problems of poets are the problems of painters and poets must often turn to the literature of painting for a discussion of their own problems." I'm quite certain "large" and "often" are overstatements, and I'm relatively certain that this diary isn't where Stevens, with his predilection for ruffles and flourishes, would have turned—though I don't know how anyone could resist Downes' passing comment on Balthus: "B. wears two hats, both stiff. One is a mortar board, one an erection. He's interesting, terrific, but not quite whole in some way." But Downes' book is definitely a case in point. The problems presented are the problems that come with artistic territory in general, if not always in the same form or to the same degree. Aesthetic, practical, emotional, they don't go away, perhaps they shouldn't, though the impulse to avoid them is always present and must be accounted for. All this said, I wish some big art publisher would grab the book and reprint it with big full-color reproductions (this has small black-and-white photographs on gate-fold pages, useful but unsatisfying), and add some of the working drawings too. (Is there any way to design the book to avoid all the page-flipping?)

P.S. When I got the diary I read it through piecemeal, more absorbed by certain entries than others, and then put it away. Then a curious thing happened. I found that I missed it—especially the feeling that I was a *participant* in the day-to-day life, troubles and satisfactions both, of this artist at the top of his



game. I had gotten to know him somewhat intimately, and was rooting for him, and he had abruptly left town. Deciding to review the book was my excuse to read it again.—CHARLES NORTH

*Charles North's most recent book is New And Selected Poems (Sun & Moon, 1999). His The Nearness Of The Way You Look Tonight will be out from Adventures in Poetry this fall.*

**Lori Quillen: Hand Held Hive**  
Tool Press (6 West Erie St., Apt. #2, Albany, NY 12208) 2000. 23 pp.

This delicately surprising first chapbook winged its way into my hands at an event celebrating the newest issue of "Tool A Magazine," one of whose editors, Lori Quillen, is its author. As Quillen passed it to me, she made a remark to the effect that she wasn't "really a poet"—by which I think she meant that she hadn't primarily studied literature in school. But Quillen, who has an MS in conservation biology, works for the Nature Conservancy, and has done field work with black bears and Mexican free-tail bats, is possessed of a mind given both to scientific observation and linguistic imagination. These poems are delectable little machines of verbal enthusiasm, overlaid with the grid of Quillen's knowledge of a discipline distinct from, yet hardly inimical to, poetry.

Does Quillen's expertise make her a nature poet? Certainly not in the Wordsworthian sense of the sentimentalizing "poet in the landscape." Each poem in the book, however, contains a noun taken from the natural world: *forsythia, dandelion, angiosperm, willow, pond, spruce/moose, Queen Anne's lace, spider monkeys, parasite, ice cloud, pupa, honeybark, grape-fruit, tuber, hymenoptera, chicory, tulips, foliage, potato bugs, chitin, bark beetle, cat, yarrow*. This biological lexicon is one of the artful, formal choices that helps make the poems "BLOOM!!" and underscores their organicity.

Further connecting these poems to the natural world is its eponymous metaphor of the hive. How is this *Hive* like a bee's? It's a locus of activity, a place for interactions (between words, poems, and poems and their titles). It is noisy with buzzing, and there's a harmonics generated by that buzz. It is intricate. It is composed of cells (poems) for creatures to live or metamorphose in. It contains sweetness in abundance, one effect of the poems' youthfulness. Quillen says of *Hand Held Hive* that,

"a lot of the pieces in the book were actually from a series of 25 poems I wrote myself before my 25th birthday. So in that sense, they really are mini-reactions to things long gone by. My love of science is very much a reaction to my childhood. I grew up in a wetland, on a dirt road, with 30 rabbits, kind of cut

off. As a child I sought solace in the predictability of the natural world. Plant symmetry, the mass emergence of frogs to and from water, ripening berries, the absence of right angles, the feel of muck in your toes ..."

Yet despite the formal solace of these poems, like nature, like bees, or like memory, they are not without their sting—that is, they are not "simply graspable." Their codedness, very modern in effect, arises not from a desire to be "correctly" or "literarily" obfuscatory, but because as a child Quillen "had prodding brothers," and as she says,

"I tended to write to myself cryptically. Put it all down, but cover my ass."

The result of this practice of encoding, nurtured in childhood, is an organically grown (rather than school-learned) artfulness. The memories coded in the poems are tangential to the fact of the poems—whose materiality—their "wax" and "honey"—is, properly, what one notices about them. What to make, then, of this epigraph, from Claude Cahun?: "Our society produces so many useless objects that our own beings are lost in their actuality." This could be read as an ironic indictment of the purported uselessness of poetry (and by extension of her own poems), in which our singular beings are—maybe in a positive sense?—lost. Instead, though, I read it as a sincere indictment of consumerist culture, against which these poems, rooted in nature, emerge as useful, living objects.

The very first poem, "Among," situates itself in the hive of poetry:

I was Zukofsky's beekeeper—  
propolis stored till Monday  
"hygienic" in Quality, USDA  
clarity: my amber, larvae  
free.

This first stanza could be read as a cogent characterization of the "hygienic," "larvae-free" (that is, "pure") poems that follow—written by a self-professed amateur unswayed by literary fashion and debate. Why, then, the highly literary reference to Zukofsky's beekeeper? The sense in which they seem connected to Zukofsky's work is sonic; they seem to share the conviction that, as Zukofsky wrote, "the music is in the flower"—and in the panoply of natural beings that populate their poems. In Quillen's poems, the human and the animal worlds are counterpoised, often making the distinctions between the two worlds absurd. Humans morph into or imitate animals; animals take on (sinister) human roles; a human takes on a non-human role ("bat-bait"):



"my fingernails quickly  
becoming – HOOVES"

"I aped a lot  
and lost a satellite  
man"

"the crows are KGB"

"I am fed up with crows &  
Queen Anne's Lace"

"All the ants in aggregate  
weight as much as all the  
Humans"

"I was the bat bait. I hung from the tree"

The cumulative effect of all these role-switchings is deep disorientation as the "great chain of being" disintegrates and swirls into unfamiliar patterns. In the utopian fantasy "Trade in 50%," one of the most discursive poems in the collection, a natural world overtakes a vapid suburban human one:

There will never be any more linoleum, especially in yellow,  
but none of the other colors will make it either.

Instead there will be Grass and it  
will have BUGS, especially ear-  
wigs, and also standard earth-  
worms. Big Ones.

And every bathroom will require a  
badger lair, they will replace dogs,  
and travel in packs to the TV  
room.

Where you will be slowly becom-  
ing, slowly emerging, into a weep-  
ing willow. And I will wish you less  
dramatic.

In most of the other poems in the  
book, the narratives are more latent,  
giving precedence to an excitable and  
palpable way of using language that is  
almost childlike. There are several  
means by which Quillen formally cap-  
tures this tone of energized ingenu-  
ousness. One is by setting certain  
words all in capitals: "He-being  
emblematic for ORANGE/ crush" "or  
is it ERASER to my meteorite ring"  
"But then DINNER, so what?"

As notation for reading, this  
device serves to turn up the volume  
almost inappropriately loudly on

selected words, petulantly or defiantly emphasizing points,  
lending intensity to utterances that might otherwise seem  
mild or random. Another way she does this is by punctuating in  
ways that are at once awkward and artful, using slashes,  
dashes, equal signs, tildes, and brackets to break up rhythms:

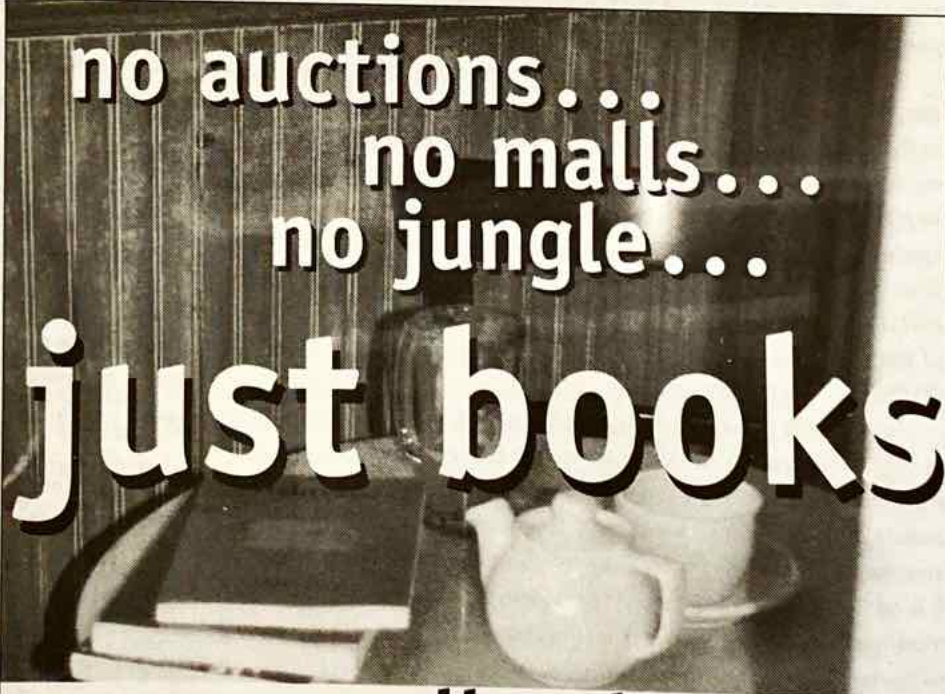
"Membrane = transparent.

Catching [of course] under  
foot/ lips/ dirt"

"Your head hurt my glass and bowls  
lit against the walls—[slugs in the snow]"

As to this artful awkwardness, which may or may not be  
calculated in Quillen's case, is it not unlike what Francis Ponge  
says in an interview, speaking of Braque and his own writing  
practice?

I remember what Braque said to me one day. As he  
went about copying the old masters in the Louvre,  
like all the other painters who went there to copy, he  
finally understood that he would never succeed; and  
that the same awkwardness would always be there to  
stop him from copying accurately. One fine day, he



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said to himself, well! I am my awkwardnesses! I must plunge into that. I had a slightly similar feeling in relationship to traditional literary schools, and I too decided to plunge into my difference. (p. 75, *The Sun Placed in the Abyss*)

Quillen, rather than attempting to satisfy current expectations about what poems ought to be, has plunged headlong into her own idiosyncratic awkwardness, which is precisely what makes these poems feel so fresh to me. Her very titles ooze poetic ingenuity: "Expectorant", "Hoofing About Delight.", "Tomorrow Was", "Like 'Come On': EXPAND". Utterly free of cliché and self-conscious positioning, this unassuming book really is like—pardon the cliché—a taste of honey.  
—NADA GORDON

*Nada Gordon is the author of More Hungry, Rodomontade, Lip, Koi Maneuver, and Anime, and has three books forthcoming: Correspondence (with Gary Sullivan), Foriegnn Bodie, and Are Not Our Lowing Heifers Sleeker Than Night-Swollen Mushrooms? Her website can be found at [www.jps.net/nada/nadaroom](http://www.jps.net/nada/nadaroom).*

### Daniel Bouchard: **Diminutive Revolutions** Subpress Books, 2000. 79 pp.

The urban pastoral tradition that reaches back to William Carlos Williams and extends through James Schuyler, Philip Whalen, William Corbett and others, continues to influence the work of younger writers. Poets like Williams and O'Hara, to quote Tom Clark, "train the strict and patient attention of a rural realist on the seldom noticed pastoral attraction of the urban scene."

Daniel Bouchard's *Diminutive Revolutions* inherits this urban poetic legacy and brings to it new perspective and feeling. Like Williams in Rutherford, or O'Hara in New York, shots of Bouchard's New England are snapped between "Work, sleep/ death" (38). Words that compose these little revolutions are weighted with personal use, as if each, like stone, are fingered before being placed, just so, in the line. Like Williams or Oppen, Bouchard looks at his city with care, enthused by the flowers and distinct streets, alleys or beaches. He aligns his environments with the vertical promise of his imagination, and in "Wrackline" Bouchard's true talent for observation is released through the compressed charge of the American English lyric.

A redwinged blackbird on gray  
fence post spreads wings and  
sings into wind. A hill  
behind shacks, sloping to salt marsh

I walk in late afternoon. The sun  
ignites mosses, lichens, grasses  
very dry, soft to lay on. Scotch pines,  
decades old, the soft hillside of rotten  
branches and pine needles (7).

The momentum of this long poem retains its energy throughout, and the "newspapers, magazines, / books, plastic oil quarts and milk cartons," next to "hot sand, hot asphalt, / wet sand, shaded asphalt, the cool grasses / of green lawns almost as good as / standing in the ocean" (9) push the poem out with a delightful physicality. This attention to the music of mundane experience can be exhilarating. The bilabial forward pulse of "Bayberry, beach pea, beach / plum and high-brush blueberry," for example, playfully pops lips over high-pitched vowels. Or notice the nouns clustered in later verses, building with ecstatic visual/audio clarity.

sand  
scrub pine  
sand

sky

sand dunes blue water  
green beach grass white sand blue  
shoal water

breakers wet white sand

horizon

sun bleach wood white clouds

sea straw white sand, white crest lip  
daylight moon

sand, water, sky and yellow line  
black asphalt lot surrounded  
by parabolic dunes (14-15).

The music and alliteration lift these nominal lines beyond description, so that the energized field of language here occupies its own space.

For Bouchard, there's a tension between pleasure and responsibility, between music and observation. "A history not of attention but / the remnants of that attention" (19) disturbs the pastoral vision. But poetry, he hopes, can renew and recharge this vision, "feeling remorse but still optimistic" (54). In "Pax" he attempts to redirect attention away from the self-absorbing concerns of those who would have you believe Whitman's ghost lives in their blocky prose.



"I make a pact with you, Ron Silliman," Bouchard writes, "I have admired your poetry long enough. / ... Whitman broke the new wood. / Pound put in time to carving. / We watch the blasted stumps in the open fields / Leak black ink of American grain" (41). He wants also to extend a pact to his own generation. "I am ready to make friends," he says. "Let there be communication between us." But the strained gesture lacks the same force of observation as other poems here, and I'm left wondering if communication really is an answer, or if music and observance offer better solutions.

The distinct pleasures of this book lie in the ancient lyric upsurge released in the urban pastoral mode. Realism is constructed by an emotional experience of language and action, speech and observance. A poet, rather than the pushy journalist snoop, makes a good urban mediator of the small objects and phenomenal details that suddenly call out to the attention.

After reading these poems you may find that Bouchard is a compelling guide to these native haunts, and a writer familiar with natural lore. Here too is a poet whose humility preserves the active force of his imagination. This shows an intimacy with land and language, realized as "the filial breadth of one's commitment" (36).—DALE SMITH

*Dale Smith lives in Austin, Texas, with the poet Hoa Nguyen. Together they edit Skanky Possum, a magazine of poetry and criticism.*

### **Caroline Bergvall: *Goan Atom* rem press (Cambridge, UK), 1999**

I first came into contact with Caroline Bergvall's work at a live reading in New York City a little over two years ago. Bergvall was just wrapping up a North American tour on a visit from her adopted city, London. (She's French and Norwegian.) I didn't know anything about her work other than that it was described to me as queer. I was quite excited to discover that her texts were, as she herself said to me later, "queering at a formal/structural level rather than sustaining itself primarily at the level of motifs and/or issue-based matters." That night we got queered through the ear. Her reading was a sonic stream of puns and accents. "What you see & what you ...t. Show caution. Ze cloth does make ze monk." (*Éclat, Sound & Language*, London, 1996) She delivered an edgy performance, reminding us that everything was driven by a body.

Her new chapbook, *Goan Atom*, presses its vocabulary aggressively to near-collapse and then pushes it further, rearranging it like toy blocks for maximum meaning with minimal phoneme swap. The text uses Hans Bellmer's "la Poupée" project as a springboard, and like Bellmer's images which make doll limbs into visual puns (can't tell an ass from an elbow, so to speak) Bergvall's words morph one into the other: "Enter

DOLLY/ Entered enters/ Enters entered/ Enter entre/ en train en trail/ en trav Ail Aïe/ La bour La bour La bour/ Wears god on a strap/ Shares mickey with all your friends." Here the grammar frees the DOLLY, which the reader is quick to identify with Bellmer's own, allowing her to move from passive to active, from commanded to commander, from subject to object. And the allusion to girl on girl action or chick-with-dick on boy action a few lines later, "Wears god on a strap," brings the stanza into a larger sexual arena. Moments like this force the reader to look beyond the references to Bellmer. The poem is interested in something larger and Bellmer is the door into that place. It keeps the bed moving under your seat. As the words invert and pervert, the reader can't help but make her own inverses alongside Bergvall's. But like encountering Ernst Jandl or Jack Kerouac only on the page, one has the feeling that the page isn't loud enough for this work. I wanted the poem to have a mouth and I still wish for the possibility of a Bergvall CD chapbook set.

It's clear that Bergvall's work is intended to go beyond the frame of the fixed book. Most of the texts have appeared as installations prior to their publication and "Gas", a section of *Goan Atom* is live now on the web at the Buffalo Electronic Poetry Center under the title "Ambient Fish". (See Bergvall's author page there at [www.epc.buffalo.edu](http://www.epc.buffalo.edu).) CDs and new media seem inevitable for her as a textual artist and I'm curious to see how her works evolve as these media become regular components of literary publication. Of course, the live reading of such sound-oriented work is always exciting, and I urge everyone to catch Bergvall during her reading tour this fall. (November 16, 2000, Temple Gallery, N. 2nd, btw. Arch and Market, Philadelphia, PA, 8PM; November 18, 2000, Double Happiness, on Mott at Spring, New York City, 4pm)  
—MAGDALENA ZURAWSKI

*Magdalena Zurawski's first chapbook, Bruised Nickelodeon (Hophophop Press) will be reviewed in the next issue of the Poetry Project Newsletter.*

### **Joel Sloman: *Cuban Journal* Zoland Books, 2000. 137 pp.**

In *Cuban Journal* (written in the early 1970's and published recently by Zoland Books), Joel Sloman narrates his experience as a volunteer in the Venceremos Brigade, a group of young American radicals that traveled to Cuba in 1970 to participate in the effort to harvest 10 million tons of sugar cane. While Sloman's book is "political" in its respect for the Cuban Revolution's efforts towards communal models of living and working, Sloman does not promote his experience as propaganda. Instead, Sloman tells a great story via a poetry that shimmers, wobbles, and jerks around in a series of synaptic flashes, uneasy confession, bathroom humor, diaristic bland-



ness, and reportage.

It doesn't matter that the events he describes happened thirty years ago—outside of a couple of inevitably dated phrases, the language remains fresh and surprising. Lines of various lengths gesture and burst across the page, suggesting both the sugar-cane field Sloman toiled in as well as the author's consciousness in which sense-impressions appear as if unmediated. Objects arrive along with emotions one is surprised by in the context of a book situated in "revolution":

"Work is work!"

revolutionary assumption  
another big blue sky  
low clouds in the morning  
so cold  
little pink or violet wires  
to lights  
strung in trees  
for illumination  
clothes drying in daytime clear thereness  
congas and flute  
I am beginning to be patient  
in a revolutionary sense  
enjoying Cuba  
and my fantasies of pulling rank when I return home

Note the funny pride Sloman admits to—confessing to "pulling rank" by showing off to fellow radicals back home speaks to an impulse in this book that, at the risk of sounding corny, aims for the "universal." Revolutions, tragically, come and go, but the urge to say "I've been there and you haven't!" remains. Sloman doesn't include such emotions to minimize the Cuban Revolution. Rather, such narratives humanize a time that too often is spoken about in either triumphalist or demoralizing tones.

Sloman's candor is refreshing. He admits to wanting his own room, sick pay, "a collective experience / all by myself / that I won't have to share." One particularly funny section of the book describes Americans working on a design for a flag to be used in greeting a delegation of Vietnamese visitors. The group decides "to execute Will's idea for poster greeting / for Vietnamese— / red machetes instead of stripes / on US flag / producing waving effect / and black fists instead of stars." Unfortunately, once the design is completed, "people come by / admiring / others not able to make out what the fists spell / or otherwise signify / 'That looks like a television set' / 'Stand back 20 feet!' / 'I don't know. What is it?' / 'Whose idea was that?' / I say / 'Will's' / he says 'Joel's' / 'Will's' / 'Joel's' / 'Will's' / 'Joel's.'" The inability to make out what the fists "signify" is a comical and significant moment considering the uneasy relationship between the often-totalizing rhetoric of revolutionary movements and the poet who is attached both to leftist politics and an aesthetics in the service of nothing. Nevertheless, as a result of Sloman's truthful narration of

these problematic moments, glimpses of revolutionary Cuba as potentially ideal come through all the more strongly. After casually describing prefabricated homes built for fishermen and "Miramar embassy mansions / filled with scholarship students," a Cuban voice abruptly enters the textual field with:

"You must remember  
nothing like this  
ever existed in Cuba  
before the revolution"

As Sloman is jogged out of his personalist reverie by these words, so the reader is reminded of the gorgeous utopian ambition initially underpinning the Cuban revolution. *Cuban Journal* won't inspire hordes of Socialist Worker-types to rush to the cane-fields of Cuba next summer. The book will, however, provide the reader with a deeply satisfying reading experience, and a sense of what it must have been like to be human, vulnerable, neurotic and politically committed at a time when "revolution" seemed like a real possibility.—DANIEL KANE

*Daniel Kane has poems published or forthcoming in The Hat, Skanky Possum, The Denver Quarterly, Fence, and other journals.*

**Jo Ann Wasserman: *We Build Mountains***  
a+bend press (3862 21st St., SF, CA 94114), \$5.  
27 pp.

You can think of *We Build Mountains* as a map, a psychological cartography of Y2K anxiety. More specifically, a topical map showing the elevation levels of the collective frayed nerves of Californians in 1999. Like Lydia Davis, Jo Ann Wasserman focuses with great intensity and insistence on obsessive states of mind. *We Build Mountains* documents the evolution of the Wasserman's "I" through therapy sessions and dreams as she reacts to the extreme heat as well as real and imagined disasters during that scary summer of 99. The first poem "disaster (1, first part)" sets up the tone and tension that Wasserman drops and tightens throughout:

...rain is coming (hard) they predict/wind and say  
things like there hasn't/ been one this bad in twenty  
years/...and it kept getting/ warmer everyone was  
saying/this is the worst summer/ and the TV said it  
too.

"In the mountains (1)" places us front row center inside the narrator's head during a session with her therapist:

"...where do you feel safe? As first I couldn't/  
think of anything but then I said something very  
[quickly/



so I thought it must be the right and true answer/  
 I said in the mountains/  
 she asked where in the mountains I said not/  
 really in the mountains but at /  
 the base in the mountains she asked/  
 any mountains in particular I said/  
 yes but didn't tell her because if she /  
 knew about those mountains in particular/  
 they would no longer be safe"

Wasserman's "I" moves, builds, fidgets and mimes in order to ensure herself that she's alive and safe as well. She repeats via titles and revisits in titles "pictures," "what we are looking at (at pictures)." And "what we are really looking at [at pictures]." She insists on our attention, tugging at the sleeve saying look here:

"We have been hiding pictures we have pictures/  
 and they are of Antarctica and they were hidden/  
 the pictures show what is changing and how/  
 the light passes over tiny ice mountains/  
 they grow tinier, the ice mountains, and reveal/  
 nothing "these are the pictures we were/  
 hiding but now we will show them to/  
 you because this is a democracy," they say,/"

"we need to build them up again"

The final and title poem addresses the anxieties of those living in an earthquake zone in a place perhaps that too good for human inhabitation:

"they say it is the price of a rocky coast of/  
 this much beauty and everyone feels this/  
 is very beautiful and they have built cars, ....  
 people always say they thought at first it/  
 was something else like a bus going by in low gear or/  
 a TV being dropped from the upper floors or the elevator/  
 or the husband and not really the thing it is/  
 you know, the way we build mountains"

One of Wasserman's strengths is her ability to describe in precise language the news of the day. Through her "I" Wasserman presents us with a "stepped out" map of the psychic / neurotic / toxic mountains we've built. She is asking us to really really look at what we've done.—BRENDA COULTAS

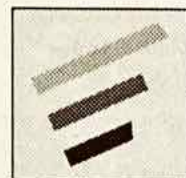
*Brenda Coultas has work forthcoming in the fall edition of Conjunctions.*

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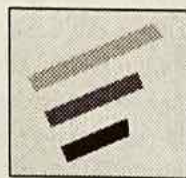
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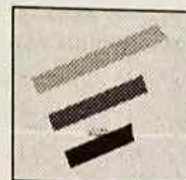
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# Questionnaire

These questions are from "Proust's questionnaire" and hopefully we'll be able to change the questions every issue. Mail your responses back to the Newsletter for possible inclusion in the gossip column.

- What is your idea of happiness?
- Your pet aversion?
- Your favorite motto?
- If not yourself, who would you be?
- What is your favorite virtue?
- Your favorite heroes/heroines in fiction?
- Your favorite food & drink?
- For what fault have you the most tolerance?

*new in 2000*

burning deck

## Emmanuel Hocquard, *A TEST OF SOLITUDE: SONNETS*

[Série d'écriture #12, trans. R. Waldrop]

"Emulating Wittgenstein, who repaired to an isolated cabin in Norway to write and reflect, Hocquard takes up his own test of solitude on a farm not far from Bordeaux. What he writes there are unconventional sonnets that arrive at their stipulated line-count by an ingenious variety of means. They record with deceptive simplicity daily actions and experiences. At the same time, an inquiry is being conducted, a test of solitude that is also a test of poetry."—Steve Evans, *Notes to Poetry*

Hocquard has published many American poets in his presses "*Orange Export*," "*Un bureau sur l'Atlantique*," and the anthologies *21+1: Poètes américains d'aujourd'hui* (Delta, 1986) and *49+1* (Royaumont, 1991). Together with the artist Alexandre Delay, he has recently made a video film, *Le Voyage à Reykjavik*, which figures in the present volume. Poems, 72 pp., offset, Smyth-sewn ISBN 1-886224-33-1 original paperback \$10

## Gale Nelson, *ceteris paribus*

*Ceteris paribus* is a phrase used by economists and means "assuming all other things are held constant." As the economy collapses around their ears, the bewildered theorists of the dismal science may claim that were *ceteris paribus* only possible, the predicted outcome would have obediently presented itself.

In Gale Nelson's poetry, language misbehaves much like the economy. The multiplicity of factors at play on the page—and among pages—keeps the poem from settling. Each time order seems just around the corner, variances begin to seep in—and anything becomes possible.

The book's companion text, *stare decisis*, was published by Burning Deck in 1991.

Nelson is Assistant Director of Creative Writing at Brown University in Providence, R.I., where he lives with his wife, the fiction writer Lori Baker, and their cats.

Poems, 128pp., offset, Smyth-sewn ISBN 1-886224-37-4 original paperback, \$12.50

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(Brakhage, cont.)

way what it was like for me—they were like magic parents. They gave me things that I should have had when I was young but I didn't, and that has been very sustaining. I don't know how to put it. The things you can name are the Oz books and [George] MacDonald(5) and so on, but it was deeper than that—a sense that this kind of magic could and did live in the world, and could survive.

**LJ: What about your work? When Robert saw your work what was he saying about it?**

SB: Well, first of all, what Robert saw was *Interim* [1952], which was kind of modeled after Italian neo-realism. And then he saw a thing called *Unglazed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* [1953], which was a melodrama that I actually used to secure a job to study with Hitchcock. So it was a Hitchcockian melodrama. But both of them shared this quality—they had one solid foot in Symbolism. And I was probably one of the few younger people that Robert met who had read Mallarme. Mallarme was not much read in those days if you can believe that. And you know, I had a lot invested in symbolism at this point in my life, and that was very enchanting, I think to both of them, because Jess is very ... I wouldn't call him a symbolist, but he's always reverberating; his work is reverberating. Like if you hit the side walls three times and hit a ball which hits another ball which hits the symbol and it goes into the pocket. It's that removed—it's very delicate and hovering in there—some invisible stitch—at least I feel.

**LJ: Well yeah, I think that's true in Duncan's poems too.**

SB: Yes. I'd say so.

**LJ: Something happens on the eighth layer down. He's built it into the piece somewhere. But I guess I'm curious about Robert's understanding of your work. It seems like he would be interested in it because there's so much organic field theory in the work. It seems like he would catch onto that.**

SB: I don't think he was ever in a way of seeing enough of it for instance, or of that later work where you're seeing that. I don't think he ever saw much beyond my very earliest psychodramas and things of that sort. And he always had the idea that I should really be in Hollywood. And then I heard the nicest thing I ever

heard, is that someone told me that when asked about me, that he said "of those who make that kind of film he's the greatest." I thought jeez I'm not ever going to get better than that.

I mean one of my rages finally got to be that for all the poets I knew, the minute you'd mention film they start to talk about John Garfield and *The Maltese Falcon* and things of that sort, and finally Bergman sort of settled that, so that they could settle on Bergman. But I was struggling to rise up out of these Hollywoodisms into an art form....

**LJ: Yeah, I also think that Robert could locate stories anywhere—even if it was a television sit com, that he could locate his sense of myth and story within it. He was very democratic in that way.**

SB: Yes he was. He's a beautiful American poet. You can say "American" poet with him more than you can with many. Many are yearning to go over to the orient, but not Robert. He stops right on these shores actually; he also has that sense of Olson of not to take all that bric-a-brac from Europe either. He's remained local in that sense, which to me means most universal. You can't be universal unless you're literally well-rooted in where you are. So he was never affected much by things elsewhere. The most that he took from Europe was Gertrude Stein.

**LJ: And she grew up in Oakland. (laughs)**

SB: Yes! And anyway he called them "Steinlike" imitations. I think he's been one of the clearest in that respect. He and Olson. But I must say for Robert I think and for artists in general, and certainly maybe more for poets than anybody, there's such a neglect and it finally gets them—it gets them in some way and makes them cranky in a way that no jury would convict them if it understood fully how they've been neglected. But there have been great times for poetry where a poet was a revered thing to be. But certainly during the time that I'm talking about, when I went to visit them, you would never write as occupation "poet" or "artist" of any kind on the motel entrance form because you'd be asking to be killed in certain places. Can you imagine checking into a hotel anywhere in the west and putting under your occupation that you're a poet? In Central City, Oscar Wilde was run out of town in fear of being tarred and feathered. Really there's a tremendous neglect—you know you have this power, you



have one of the greatest powers in the world—you have the power of language. You can make leaps of the imagination, and make music as you talk, and no one's listening. Then it's even more maddening—you get a crowd of people that pretend they're listening. That's what we had in the sixties. Hundreds of people would gather like in Macky Auditorium here [at the University of Colorado, Boulder] to listen to whoever you brought. And they're all like mere-cats or something, sitting there like that. But you know that wasn't really listening, because where have they all gone? They all disappeared the minute it wasn't fashionable....the problem is that with film, people will look at even a nutsy film, but how many people will sit for a poem? I mean, Kenneth Rexroth I remember him telling me, he said "Music's doing well because you can put it on in the background, you can do the dishes, you can talk to your mother-in-law on the phone, but a poem you have to sit down and read." Therefore it never rises to a popular mass movement, which is one of its blessings. I mean just think of all the crap we've had to put up with in the film movement of all these people gliding in thinking that the poetic film was a stepping stone to Hollywood. Well you don't get too many people doing that with poetry. (laughs) What would it be a stepping stone to?

**Notes:**


- 1) In 1955, Duncan and Jess moved to the island of Mallorca, off the coast of Spain. They lived there for almost a year.
- 2) Now Jane Wodening.
- 3) Robert Duncan's *The H.D. Book* is a two-volume study of poet Hilda Doolittle's work and the Modernist movement as a whole. Published in part in small magazines throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the book as a whole is forthcoming from University of California Press.
- 4) Filmmaker and magician Kenneth Anger was born in 1930. His first groundbreaking film, *Fireworks*, was completed in 1947.
- 5) Frank Baum's Oz books served as a creative inspiration to both Robert Duncan and Jess Collins. Their childhood collections of Oz books held an esteemed place in their San Francisco household. Scottish novelist George MacDonald's *Lilith* and *The Princess and Curdie* were favorites in the San Francisco poetry scene during the 1950s.

**In the next issue of the  
Poetry Project Newsletter:**

- Anselm Berrigan on Bill Berkson
- Susan Noel on Joanne Kyger
- Alan Gilbert on Lorenzo Thomas
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# Books Received

## Magazines

**6500** (2000/2). Editor: Katie Degentesh (Box 14842, San Francisco CA 94114-0842).

**Combo 6**. Editor: Michael Magee (31 Perrin Ave., Pawtucket RI 02861).

**First Intensity** #14 (Spring 2000). Edited by Lee Chapman (PO Box 665, Lawrence KS 66044).

**Kenning** Vol. 2, No. 3 & Vol. 3, No. 1. Editor: Patrick F. Durgin (418 Brown St. #10, Iowa City IA 52245).

**Lungfull!** #9. Editor: Brendan Lorber (lungfull@interport.net).

**Outlet 6: Stars**. Editor: Elizabeth Treadwell, Double Lucy Books (PO Box 9013, Berkeley CA 94709).

**The Swamp Wizards** #11. Editor: Jack Collom (1838 Pine, Boulder, CO 80302).

**Tinfish** #9. Editor: Susan M. Schultz (47-391 Hui Iwa St. #3, Kaneohe, HI 96744).

**XCP: Cross Cultural Poetics** #6. Editor: Mark Nowak (601 25th Avenue South Minneapolis MN 55454).

## Books

**a+bend press**. Editor: Jill Stengel (3861 21st St. San Francisco, CA 94114) Chapbooks by Beth Murray,

David Bromige, Tisa Bryant, Sarah Rosenthal, Alexandria Volk, Lytle Shaw, Brenda Hillman, and Fanny Howe.

Sherman Alexie, **One Stick Song**. Hanging Loose Press (Brooklyn, NY). 1-882-41376-8.

Scott Bentley, **The Occasional Tables**. subpress (luoma@hawaii.edu) 2000. 0-9666303-7-8.

Laynie Browne, **Gravity's Mirror**. primitive (1706 U St., NW, #102 Washington DC 20009).

Miles Champion, **Three Bell Zero**. The Figures (Great Barrington, MA) 2000. 0-937-80482-7.

Jordan Davis, **Always-Already: Poems 1993-1995**. (5 Union Sq. West, 7th Fl. NY NY 10003) 2000.

Thalia Field, **Point and Line**. New Directions (NY, NY) 2000. 0-8112-1442-7.

Barbara Guest, **If So, Tell Me**. Reality Street Editions (London, UK) 1999. 1-874400-16-4

Emmanuel Hocquard, **Codicil & Plan for Pond** 4. The Post-Apollo Press (Sausalito, CA). 0-942-996399-9.

**Krupskaya Books** (San Francisco CA). New books by Stacy Doris, Mike Amnasan, Laura Moriarty, Benjamin Friedlander.

Gale Nelson, **ceteris paribus**. Burning Deck (Providence, RI) 2000. 1-886224-37-4.

Mark Nowak, **Revenants**. Coffee House Press (Minneapolis, MN) 2000. 1-566-689107-8

Stephen Ratcliffe, **Listening to Reading**. SUNY Press (Albany, NY) 2000. 0-7914-4504-6.

Stephen Rodefer, **Mon Canard**. The Figures (Great Barrington, MA), 2000. 1-930-58903-4

Edward Sanders, **The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg: A Narrative Poem**. The Overlook Press (Woodstock, NY) 2000. 1-58567-037-5.

Leslie Scalapino, **R-hu**. Atelos (Berkeley, CA) 2000. 1-89190-06-7.

**The Scene of My Selves: New Work on New York School Poets**. Eds. Terence Diggory and Stephen Paul Miller. National Poetry Foundation/ University of Maine (Orono, ME) 2000. 0-943373-63-8.

Heather Thomas, **Practicing Amnesia**. Singing Horse Press (Philadelphia, PA). 0-93516220-8.

**A Wild Salience: The Writing of Rae Armatrout**. Edited by Tom Beckett. Burning Press (Cleveland, OH). 1-58711025-3.



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Elena Alexander, Marion Arenas, John Ashbery, Robert Ashley & Mimi Johnson, Harriet Barlow, Mabel T. Beavers, Lynn Behrendt, Deborah Berg McCarthy & Mike McCarthy, Bill Berkson & Constance Lewallen, Debra Blair Solovy, Charles Borkhuis, Louise Bourgeois, Jane Bowers, Katherine Bradford, John & Caroline Brainard, Barbara Bristol, Lee Ann Brown, Laynie Browne, Mary Rose Brusewitz, Steve Buscemi, Peter Bushyager & Cathy Carlson, John Cale, Laurie Callahan, Tom Carey, Margaret Carson, Scott Caywood, Abigail Child, Norma Cole, Clark Coolidge, Douglas Crase, Peggy DeCoursey, Don DeLillo & Barbara Bennet, Phil Demise Smith, Albert Flynn DeSilver, Rackstraw Downes, Lynne Dreyer, Douglas Dunn & Grazia Della Terza, Robert Epley, Pamela Fehl, Jennifer Field, Danny Fields, Alan Finkel, Maya Flamm, Edward Foster, Renée Fotouhi & Henry Scholder, Luis Francia, Matt Franklin, Greg Fuchs, Christopher Funkhouser & Amy Hufnagel, Jane D. Gabriels, Peter Ganick, Amy Gerstler, Maria Gitin, Michael Gizzi, Jonathan Glasser, Aileen Godstick & Peter Godstick, Alani Golanski, Judith Goldman, Ted Greenwald, Carla Harryman & Barrett Watten, Owen Hill, Valjahna Hill-Cox, Steven Hirsch, India Hixon Radfar, William Hochman, Barry Hoggard & James Wagner, Omar Husain, Kenneth Irby, Vita Jimenez, Krysta Jopek, Garrett Kalleberg, Howard Kanovitz, Steve Katz, Carolyn Kemp, Simon Kilmurry, Burt Kimmelman, Wayne Koestenbaum, Katherine Kolbert, Art Lange, Denize Lauture, Richard Lefkowitz, Alfred Leslie, Rose Lesniak, Peter & Anna Levin, Catherine & Les Levine, Melinda Levokove, Linda Li, Les Lopes, Calder Lowe, Lisa Lubasch, Michael Lydon, Lisa Lynch, Jackson Mac Low & Anne Tardos, Dan Machlin & Serena Jost, Steve Malmude, Carol Mann, Jaime Manrique, James Marshall, Harold & Mildred Masters, Polly McCaffrey & Daniel Paladino, Mark McCain, Nancy McCain-Morneau, Duncan McNaughton, Sharon Mesmer, Joanne Mitchell, Honor Moore, Mary Morris & Larry O'Connor, Rusty Morrison, Fred Moten, James Nordlund, Glenn O'Brien, Kathleen O'Keefe, Hilton Obenzinger, Jeanne C. Olivier, Nat Oppenheimer, Jerald Ordovery, Neil Ortenberg, Simon J. Ortiz, Dr. Richard Orzeck, Jeanine Otis, Ron & Pat Padgett, Roland Pease & Lori Pease, Wang Ping, Constance Poster, Anna Rabinowitz, J. D. Rabinowitz, David Reed & Lillian Ball, Evelyn Reilly, Douglas Rice, Rania Richardson & John Richardson, Daniel Richler, Elena Rivera, Jack Rojas, Gerald Rosen, Clare & Allen Rosenfield, Rena Rosenwasser, Silvia Sanza, Leslie Scalapino, Sarah Schulman, Lewis Schwartz, Nancy &

## YOUR GIFT ENTITLES YOU TO THESE MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

### Individual Membership (\$50) Benefits for one.

- Discounted admission for a year to all regularly scheduled and special Poetry Project events.
- A year's subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.
- E-mail broadcasts and special members-only mailings.
- The opportunity to take writing workshops with renowned writers.
- Priority discounted admission to all special events.
- For first-time members, an introductory copy of *The World*, the Poetry Project's literary magazine.

### Dual Membership (\$80) Benefits for two.

- All of the above! PLUS
- Invitations to special members-only receptions.

### Family Membership (\$120) Benefits for four.

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- Reserved seating at designated special events.

### Donor Membership (\$250)

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- Free admission to designated special events, including the annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading featuring over 100 poets and performers.
- A free limited-edition poster: *Edwin*, by Alex Katz, one-color silkscreen, 37 x 23 3/4 inches, signed edition of 100.

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- Grateful public acknowledgment.

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

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