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POETRY PROJECT

newsletter

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THE POETRY PROJECT

February - March 2003

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THE POETRY PROJECT IN . ON . OR ABOUT THE PREMISES

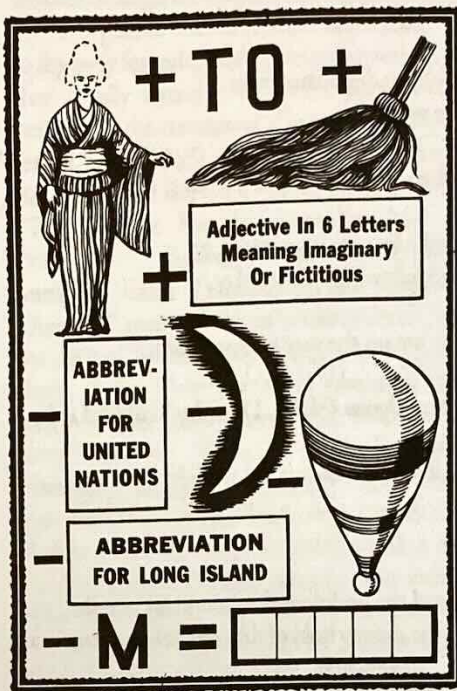
CESSATION. SUCCESSION

I've been the Artistic Director of the Poetry Project for 16 years, and on June 30th I am going to stop. I still think that being the Project's Artistic Director is an honor, a pleasure, and a great job. There has been *no* vicious internecine struggle, *no* paralyzing scandal, *no* salary dispute, and *no* disenchantment on my part with the Poetry Project's organizational mission or community. I have *not*, as far as I know, contracted a terrible disease or degenerative condition, nor has anyone in my immediate family. So why stop? Principally because there are other areas of my life that will be needing a lot of my attention over the next several years. Though this leaving will be a big and potentially unsettling change for me personally, I am confident that the Poetry Project is in good enough shape to make a smooth and effective transition.

My hope is that there will be plenty of poets interested in becoming my successor. Here are a few things to think about before you apply. Your responsibilities will include planning artistic programs and events, managing the office and personnel, raising funds from a variety of sources, financial planning, overseeing public relations, community building, and Board development. You won't have to be good at all of these things right away, and there will be capable people around whom you can call on for help. Though the planning of programs and events is probably what people who apply for this job will be most interested in, the other administrative duties will leave you with far less time and attention for *artistic* directing than you would want.

I should also mention that there *is* room in this job for innovation. It's always good to rethink how things are being done with the possibility of initiating improvements. At the same time, it is worth keeping in mind that the Poetry Project has been a successful and highly productive organization for coming-up-on four decades. We are not seeking a complete overhaul or makeover. Coming into the job, you'll want to have (1) a healthy appreciation for what this organization and community have accomplished and (2) a strong commitment to furthering the best of what's been done here.

If you think you would be a good Artistic Director of the Poetry Project, drop us an e-mail or snail-mail letter requesting a description of the job and the application procedure. These are being prepared and will



be available by February 1st. *The deadline for applications will be March 1st.*

Please direct all inquiries regarding the Artistic Directorship to the attention of *The Search Committee*.
—Ed Friedman

FALLING PHRASES

On Laurie Anderson and band at St. Ann's Warehouse, Nov. 23, 2002:

Started watching the guy sitting next to us knitting a pair of pale green socks while waiting for the show to start. Then suddenly remembered sitting in my old college boyfriend's bedroom with all of his crystal prisms hanging from the windows casting tiny rainbows all over the walls and ceiling and singing, talking, humming along with "O Superman."

So all's nostalgia-colored:

Laurie in shiny slate gray jacket swaying—living room stage set—comfy chairs and table lamps bleeding onto comfy couches in the audience—three musicians: keyboard, bass, percussion, plus one male guest vocalist, and Laurie on keyboard, samples, violin and vocals. Reds, purples, greens lit from behind scrim beneath the stage—giving the feeling of a living room floating on a cushion of light.

After a solo U.S. tour, here was another stripped-down, simplified, chamber version of her

earlier multi-media shows—no huge slide projections, no troupe of back-up singers, no dancers—only minimal use of her outrageous sound inventions—Laurie minus the spectacle—only the music and the words: "They say that heaven is like TV/ A perfect little world/ That doesn't really need you," "I remember where I came from/ There were burning buildings and a fiery red sea ... East. The edge of the world/ West. Those who came before me ... When my father died it was like a whole library/ Had burned down."

Trademark cool distance revved up more heat in "High Tide"—song of Kali the destroyer—woman in red, bleeding woman, regeneration, "a hundred and five fever ... a beautiful red dress ... beautiful red shoes," get out of the way she's coming—break it all down for re-creation.

Some old favorites:

"Let X = X" and a super-minimalist "Gravity's Angel."

And of course the stories:

"Big Science"—red light in the mouth glowing—her familiar distorted male robotic voice in dialogue with airport security guards. She says American airports seem like a weird cross between bakeries and hospitals—constant smell of cinnamon buns and then all the security folks with latex gloves ready to pat you down. Touch-sensitive apparatus—making percussive sounds as she hits her head and chomps her teeth.

Asked to be an artist in residence at NASA, she says, new hi-tech astronauts' suits just developed there are now going to be worn by soldiers in places like Iraq—leads into "Puppet Motel"—heavy drum, heavy bass—sledgey beat—"Take a whiff./ Burning plastic."

A silent retreat to study writings of Zen Master Dogen, a 13th century Buddhist monk—the mountains are aware—ends up with a group who never stop talking and new-agey rituals like "the talking spoon" over the campfire at night—your turn to tell your story when you get the spoon—like a microphone. Turned out they were almost all incest survivors and she thought of them as pathetic, needy, losers—everything she saw and hated within herself.

Then she walked over a mountain toward these mesas and saw an apocalyptic dreamscape.

Surprise:

Velvet Underground and Nico cover "I'll Be Your Mirror"—simple, quiet, half spoken, half sung, Foreshadowed special guest:

Lou Reed, who takes the stage in flashy, red

jacket strapping on his red guitar. Sings "Ecstasy" and "Talking Book"—manic rock star guitar—everything loud, louder, loudest—Laurie's flowing violin weaving under and over it all—ends with him singing lines from "I'll be your Mirror" seemingly to Laurie—each playing to each other from opposite sides of the stage—a strange duet.

Exit the rock star, back to the performance art legend:

Campfire ghost story of an affair or marriage ending, "Did I drink some poison/ That I don't remember now?"—heard them moving furniture downstairs—she should have left but she stayed. "A small bullet, a piece of glass/ And your heart just grows around it," "Is there blood on my hands?"

Encore:

Hymn to a cataclysmic flood: "A church floats by/ Washed in the blood of the lamb."
—Wanda Phipps

IMPROV NOTES

From Ted Panken's interview with Leo Smith, 1995:

LEO SMITH: ... when you look at the way Miles Davis made music, and particularly when you look at melody, he was gifted in a way where he could make the melody move along as if it was actually notated, but incorporate phrases or structure within that melody that would simply be natural within the curve, and you would not know. ... It would be seamless, in other words. You wouldn't know exactly where the melody was coming, or where these extra phrases were being moved in. That's a type of free melodicism where everything depends upon a single note. Because a single note has so many other relationships above and below it, it becomes a wide area to fuse these kinds of elements. So melody without time that's implicitly held together through time, but yet free and still open.

TED PANKEN: It sounds like an idea also of pitch values or timbral values having infinite application.

LEO SMITH: It's the very same thing.

TED PANKEN: Which is certainly the principle of the blues.

LEO SMITH: Yes, it's exactly the same thing. And the psychological implication is also there. [...] For example, the blues itself is something that's culturally hooked up, you see, and it expresses a particular psychic ... well, how you relate and make your decisions in life. And a jazzman that's gifted or an improviser that's gifted with this connection with the blues, their process of making musical decisions is based off of that kind of psychological feeling. [...] All those guys are actually philosophers ...

from *Your Ancient See Through*, Hoa Nguyen:

I sat in a tree with a wire star
The kind you find at the last minute

...

Laugh Shake your head I saw
noses first felt my own the issuing
Spot through which I begin and begin again

from *Ashoka*, Andrew Levy:

Skateboarders' representational maps are always
situated
through a continual re-living ...

no-hype dispatches from
the world:

All your base are belong to us

awake from this project,
and following will be relay

you are on the way to destruction

from *Ogress Oblige*, Dorothy Trujillo Lusk:

Shitty old revenants, by starlight.

...

I trod the undulant planks and lay anestle
In the drainy hold of this, my beloved transience
fidget, heft
Awa barlwy, groats and unfinished fur

I am convinced I have no father.

from *Marijuana Soft Drink*, Buck Downs:

a music of the spheres
that makes the spheres wince, even

...

reconcile a knot
of talking birds
nests with the roll
of the screen glo
wing under the window

from *Spoor*, Jeff Hull:

metabolic pay-back
All of a sudden I was there. I was like a car
crash, pure
heavenly light.

trying to include nothing

on a slow boat down a canal

flickers in a fête

from Jason Gross' interview with Roscoe Mitchell, May 1998:

JASON GROSS: One of your methods of composition is "scored improvisation" that you've used for the Sound Ensemble. How would you describe this?

ROSCOE MITCHELL: I developed those for a lot of classes that I taught in improvisation. I found that the inexperienced improviser always has the same problems. Once they understand it, they deal with it clearer. Somehow imagine yourself as an improviser that really knew your part, if you had taken a piece of music and studied it and figured out how you were going to play each note, which dynamic level, what attack and so on. This is the kind of thing that you're after here. I found that a lot of times in improvisation, a lot of people don't know what to play. That was a problem for me. I figured that I would have some systems that will give the player information to play but distribute it in such a way that it's an improvisation. So that each time that this material is played, it will present a different improvisation. These scored improvisations were built to do this—fix players so that they don't follow. Following is like being behind on a written piece of music. This does that. You can do that and then you'll have an improvisation. What it does is it gives players a longer time to function in an improvisation that's really working. That helps because I found that it builds concentration. Knowing compositional form, the study of improvisation parallels composition. [...] You have to know composition to be a good improviser. If you don't know how to think like a composer, you'll never be able to construct long pieces.

from *The Sense Record*, Jennifer Moxley:

Their astonishment at our enthusiasm—
tantamount to calling us suckers—
is but a liability of the amazement
we refuse to proximate fame, we are
impervious to starlight,
predictable as that awkward question,
mid-sestina,
which strains the uncurious word.

—Drew Gardner

ROLL OVER, MONDRIAN

Let me talk about myself g'dangit:
October and November were very busy, the final event of my two month stint curating, with Gary Sullivan, the Segue reading series at the Bowery Poetry Club being (while the G-man was away in Nashville) the "Mini-Festival of Digital Poetry," a seven-act roster of poets and poet groups who use computers in the creation and/or presentation of work.

Angela Rawlings gave a suave and bountiful reading from her sequences *wide slumber for lepi-*

dopterists and *LOGYLOGY*, the former written from the perspective of a scientist of butterflies and moths, the latter a 'pataphysical investigation of the sciences of the body—a poem as "Body of Knowledge" (or "BoK") that is growing online at her website, commutiny.net/. The recently unconquered Löss Pequeño Glazier, epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier, perhaps representing the "old school" vibe of the digital aleatoric (à la Jim Rosenberg and John Cayley) and looking rather Kaiser Soze-ish, rendered a comical Dada jig out of Java cribs, regalling the audience with his polylingual splashes and disarming asides. Noah Wardrip-Fruin, impermanenceagent.com, was both professional in his short intro to the concept of "electronic literature"—the dos and don'ts of a digi-critic appearing on illuminated placards behind him—and mischievous in his algorithmically-created web texts which made hyper-referential narratives out of a browser's daily meanderings.

We couldn't get the vocoder working for Patrick Herron, proximate.org, but he gave a strong reading with VJ co-hort Giles Hendrix, who usually presents video work at Subtonic and other dance/lounge places in NYC; a cameo by the Sims ladies added a political bite to the ambient graphics. Paul Chan, nationalphilistine.com/alternumerics, was the "Take On Me" rock-star of Fouriest fonts; his "self portrait in a font," in which the lower-case letters are phrases from casual conversation and numbers are the names of ex-lovers etc., brought down the house. He's probably back from Iraq by now, where he went in December to do more font-studies and deliver clothes and supplies. Aya Karpinska brought back memories of the last half hour of the first Star Trek movie ("I could have had a V'ger!") with her cool navigation of her 3-dimensional Shockwave poem "Contract;" she then took us on a tour of the communal mind of a multi-authored text space (wisely avoiding my own contributions to that hypertextual cerebellum). The Prize Budget for Boys (Neil Hennessy and Jason Le Heup, PrizeBudgetForBoys.com) were a cross between SCTV, the TRG, and the fabled anarchists of EMI, which is to say funny, semiotic, and rude. My favorite bits were the faux-naïf translations from American sign language—"deaf small world is!"—and the goofy grin on Jason (aka Percival Peabody's) face when reading the AltaVista translations of Osama bin Laden's poems.

A series of hellishly blurry pictures, arras.net/mini_digi_pics.htm, along with my hideously spelled poster, arras.net/mini_digi_fest.htm, are still online.

In November, I was also handed a nice email from *The New York Times* demanding I take down my Vaneigem series of nytimes.com detournements from public view, to which I complied because I am not interested cat-and-mouse games with the authorities. Perhaps I fancy myself a regular Han Solo and likes to fight head-on, but more

likely the Vaneigem works (which you can still see if you want to email me: bstefans@arras.net) are not worth burning the purse for (I don't know any lawyers). But the world hasn't heard the last of Raoul Vaneigem, or of *The New York Times*, or you can read all about it at Tom Matrullo's *Commonplaces*, [tom.weblogs.com/stories/storyReader\\$1329](http://tom.weblogs.com/stories/storyReader$1329), a blog in the Swiftian spirit, chock-full of immodest proposals. A great website devoted to illegal art is illegal-art.org/print.

My general tendency, with "digital poetry," is to shy away from the Flash/Director works because they usually resemble illustrated poetry books rather than the conceptual ("interactive," "hyper-textual," "rhizomic") artworks they claim to be. But a few that I like quite a bit are Thomas Swiss's "The Narrative You Anticipate You May Yet Produce," bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/swiss/narrative, Claire Dinsmore's "The Dazzle as Question," studiodleo.com/projects/dazzle, and the work of William Poundstone, who has a new thang, "The White Poem," at ubu.com. (My interview with Poundstone can be found at the Iowa Review Website www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/, which will also be posting my interview with John Cayley some time in January.) All of these works share a basic quality, which is that the effort it appears to have taken to create them is equal to the effect they create—in a word, not overproduced (the age-old Johnny Mnemonic vs. Alphaville question). The folks at bannart.org get it right (for me) by stipulating that all submissions conform to the standards—width & height, file size, etc.—published by the Interactive Advertising Bureau, iab.net/standards, thus making a monastic discipline out of corporate coercion (well, it's better than it sounds), and figuring the artworks, of which many are poems, as parasites in the healthy colon of the transnational polis. Their recent Buy Nothing Day contest, with a grand prize of \$0 (USD), shows their heartlessness is in the right cyberspace.

But once again silliness gets the best of me, and my eye candy of the year award goes to the wonderful *Bembo's Zoo*, bembozoo.com, a Flash bestiary made entirely of letterforms (demonstrating, among other things, that photography may have a way to go before it proves useful to web poets). Oubapo, newhastories.com/oubapo/, the site of the Oulipo of comix artists, is a nice place to spend a toked-up afternoon, but even better are the bits of Atari prose at the Prize Budget website, prizebudgetforboys.com, most recently "Pac-Mondrian," a video game in which you are chased by goblins in a loyal reproduction of the Dutch artist's canonical "Broadway Boogie Woogie." The propaganda states: "Each play of the game is an act of devotion. Mondrian's geometric spirituality fuses with his ecstatic physicality when Pac-Mondrian dances around the screen while the Trinity of Boogie Woogie jazz play 'Boogie Woogie Prayer.'" It's as good as it sounds!

—Brian Kim Stefans

BRAKHAGE ON ART AND WAR

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Stan Brakhage done in November, 2002, for the occasion of Brakhage's retrospective, "I ... Dreaming: The Visionary Cinema of Stan Brakhage" at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

MARIANNE SHANEEN: Michael McClure has said "there is but one politics and that is biology. Biology is politics." And, "there is no political revolt ... all revolt is personal." On the eve of what is likely to be the next U.S. war on Iraq, I'm wondering if in undermining the culture's dominant perceptual assumptions, you believe that film can help change the world?

STAN BRAKHAGE: Not as an art in less than maybe 400 years—I don't have much hope for speedy changes, art takes a long time ... the thing that makes its changes really powerful is that they are the only real ones ...

MARIANNE SHANEEN: Perhaps if we applied the perceptual revelations and alterations required in the viewing of your work into our lives we might be the kinds of creatures that would be unable to go to war or to tolerate it ...

STAN BRAKHAGE: I would like to think so, except one has to remember one of the terrible ironies is that the Nazis were avid art collectors, and it's just too facile and easy to say "they didn't collect art for the right reasons" ... there's this terrible enigma in being human that involves this war prodivity ... I will say this, that war fever is generally by and large preclusive of aesthetic involvement, that the works of lasting value in history come the least from periods that are marshalled, given over to war. On the other hand, the reactions to war and those that struggle against it and for alternatives to it and sharing that, do leave a very powerful reaction—usually directly after the war things come out that are of great inspiration and hopefulness. But the war itself, those that try to deal with the war directly—and I certainly was one—with *The 23rd Psalm Branch*, I gave over my life for two horrible years of grappling and struggling with war fever—and, I don't know, the work I think is of some value but I don't think it's of that kind of value that would ever stop a war. I think what's more likely is what you said previously, something more likely in the involvement in the handpainted works or *Mothlight* or something could be preclusive, could change people sufficiently that war wouldn't interest them. You have to have something more interesting than war. Gertrude Stein is another great example in this respect, her writing is fascinating and altogether more interesting than *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway, which doesn't hold a candle to making one free of war fever like *Tender Buttons* does or "As a Wife Has a Cow: A Love Story," which is so exciting and doesn't have to do with war ...

—Marianne Shaneen

ON THE LINE

The title of "Drawing Now," an exhibition at MOMA Queens, suggests both what the exhibition notes identify as the traditional view of drawing as a verb and the exhibition's self-proclaimed project of re-defining "drawing" as a noun, as the thing imagined and realized. Before seeing the show, I had been trying to think about line in poetry and in drawing. I had been thinking about Blake's "I draw circles and holy boundaries around me." I say trying because I found my thoughts repeatedly distracted by various phrases in which the term *line* is used. Just back from Thanksgiving (lineman, linebacker) and Texas (borderline); talking to unemployed friends (bottom line, product line, check-out line, line of work); attending holiday parties (second (or conga) line, inappropriate hemline, lame pickup line, (receding) hairline (fracture)); and listening to and reading news reports (battlelines, frontlines, lines of defense, party line, toe the line, Mason-Dixon line, betting lines, timeline, out-of-line, lineage, sideline), and (per usual) I couldn't completely shake off context. Is interesting creative object-making possible without a clear understanding of and engagement (diversion, dissection, disruption, resistance, and revolution are, of course, forms of engagement) with "one's historical moment"?

Line of thought: from the latin *linum*, meaning linen or flax, thread, one definition of line refers

to a real or imaginary mark positioned in relation to fixed points of reference. One can only draw a line if one has a stable frame of reference (understanding, like ownership, is predicated on awareness (and sometimes force)). Subcategorized into eight Propositions (I: Science and Art, Nature and Artifice; II: Ornamentaion; III: Architectural Drafting; IV: Visionary Architecture; V: Cosmogenies; VI: Vernacular Illustrations; VII: Comics; VIII: Fashion and Likeness), the over 200 works in "Drawing Now" incorporate various frames of reference into individual visual fields. Within those fields, the often hierarchical relationships between the visual vocab of "fine art," of commercial, industrial art, and of the popular/vernacular are leveled in order to realize divergent visual, semantic, and perspectival possibilities.

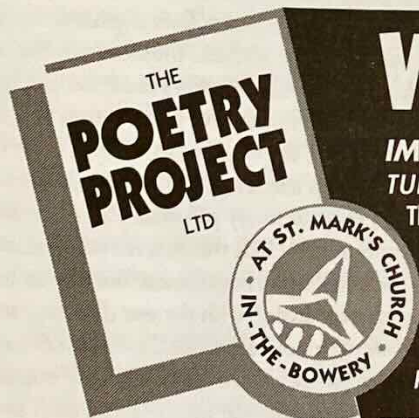
This kind of leveling is most apparent in works like Chris Ofilli's "A Prince Among Thieves with Flowers." Categorized under Proposition II: Ornamentation, "A Prince" is a work in which a bearded and afro-adorned royal is drawn against a background of delicate flowers. The lines of the royal profile are composed of tiny, pixel-like afro-heads (a motif in all of his work included here). The floral ornamentation is Victorian and is typically coded as apolitical. While the afro-ornamentation is contemporary and is often coded as political. In Ofilli's drawing, the two styles and visual codes interact as equals, and, in so doing, reference the familiar but also strike out on their own.

There's a certain humor in Ofilli's work, in some of the titles: "Albinos and Bros with Fros," "Afrofilia," "Afrodaze," "Afrofantazia."

Although the title of Russell Crotty's "Plaid Shirt and Tubing Off-Shore Filth" is somewhat bewildering, the piece is remarkable. A part of the Science and Art Proposition, it works out of fixed references in the worlds of scientific and nature drawing. At first glance and from a distance, "Plaid Shirt" looks like a massive, ink drawing of static, the kind of image one used to see in the middle of the night when television stations went off the air. It almost covers the wall of one room. As one moves closer, it becomes apparent that what first appeared to be random scratchings is in fact the carefully gridded and mapped observations of waves. Within each crisply drawn wave pattern, is a less order hold equal sway.

Many of the pieces in "Drawing Now" create what exhibition artist Jennifer Pastor describes as "a forced equality through drawing" among a variety of visual ideas, languages, and systems of belief and value. The works in this show suggest that creative engagement (aesthetic choices do have political implications) with "one's historical moment" is paramount in the project of interesting making. "Drawing Now" closed on January 6, 2003.

—Tonya Foster



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The workshop fee is \$300, 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@poetryproject.com

WRITING WORKSHOPS

IMAGINATIVE WRITING - Jordan Davis

TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 18TH.

This course will review material from grades K-12 and college, with an emphasis on serious play, providing an introduction to four domains of magnetic interiority and social interaction: basic sequences, p sequences (flarf), three-dimensional lineation, and gestalt maps. An overview of poem-writing, criticism-giving, world-ing. Emphasizes how your current search skills apply to global databases. Blogging is optional but recommended. The course concludes with a publication and performance. Jordan Davis's most recent books are *Million Poems Journal* (Faux Press) and *A Winter Magazine* (Situations). He is an editor of *The Hat*.

THE BEST-LOVED TALES OF THE MILLENNIUM (START HERE) - Sharon Mesmer

FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 21ST.

In this workshop, we will investigate the dynamic, permeable boundaries of poetry and story by producing a variety of "tales": creation stories, narrative poems, "palm-of-the-hand" stories, vignettes, prose poem-stories, monologues, dream stories, short plays, folk stories, and fairy tales. Model texts by both poets and prose writers will be used to spark in-class discussions and aid production, and to prove that it is possible to flow the language, rhythm, and imagery of poetry into the more formal (yet always malleable) structures of story-telling. Sharon Mesmer's books include collections of stories, *The Empty Quarter*, and poems, *Half Angel, Half Lunch*.

POETRY WORKSHOP - David Henderson

SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN FEBRUARY 22ND.

Henderson writes, "We are making manuscripts of our work (at whatever stage the work or the poet or both are). As poets we are also looking at and sometimes working with prose, as another form of poetry, as well as other forms of poetry such as lyrics, raps, spoken word form[ats] or even simple lines—good in and of themselves. We practice exercises and routines of the poet. We often listen to the works of each other—in progress. And there is always the right to just read a work without comment or criticism." Poet, lyricist, and biographer David Henderson is the author of several books, including *Jimi Hendrix: Voodoo Child of the Aquarian Age* and *Neo-California*.

NICK PIOMBINO

TESSERA

*"The primordial element in poetry ...
is divination, or the desperation of
seeking to foretell dangers ..."*

—Harold Bloom

What do you have to ease the pain?
(Meditation, ecology, ethics, political philosophy)
What is there to take the edge off these continuous worries?
(History of literature, astrology, nutritional analysis, chance)
How can I find an answer to these troubles?
(Pre-Socratic philosophy, numerology, Tarot, mathematics)
Does there exist any explanation for such angst?
(Dada, existentialism, Rosicrucianism, Marx)
Why do such contradictory impulses continuously plague us?
(Psychoanalysis, divination, prayer, Zen Buddhism)
What direction should I take with so many possibilities at hand?
(Zoroaster, Gestalt, endorphins, Chaos)
How can I make sense in the midst of so many social hypocrisies?
(Prayer wheel, synchronicity, fractal geometry, necromancy)
How do I survive the tumult and pain of everyday ambivalence?
(Psychic study, telepathy, levitation, visualization)
How do I avoid everyday despair and doubt?
(Philosophical speculation, religious ecstasy, tea-leaves, palmistry)
How do I resist aimless thinking, idle curiosity, boredom?
(Romantic reverie, Machiavellian manipulation, anarchy, aesthetic
contemplation)
How do I overcome the constant tendency to disorganization,
doubt, procrastination?
(Crystal gazing, dream book, incense, lighted candle)
How do I fight the endless weavings of tedium, little annoyances,
the small resentments?
(Catastrophe theory, determinism, atheism, sorcery)
Is there any easier way to make all these hard decisions?
(I ching, poetic theory, symbolic logic, tai chi)
How can I stop rationalizing and postponing things?
(Marathon running, vitamin therapy, primal scream, feng shui)

2

suspicion (of the writer's intent)
sustenance— to maintain the will

wept, singing
operant
loyal

to manipulate the will

the second notebook
unconsciously swerving from the first

"*Tessera* or completion and Antithesis"

"A poem is a poet's melancholy at this lack of priority"

out of print
leaning, learning
that is, enabled
led from the beginning
a near thesis

as of blaming
as in naming
an influence
right to be
a memorial
insignificance
forced
first

this, the seeming went away
fierce, recognition eating itself
out of away— frightened
nevertheless, pushed on

still didn't or couldn't distinguish
the background of what else it's written
on— circumstances interrupted it
with color and direction- yet another
part still retreating into its silent meaning
and herald— a stamp of time signals
it's readiness— without watching

concerned about moving so abruptly out of the dated notebook
into the undated one— leaving the teaching
post— confiding in someone in an undisciplined
way— this shadow side of unclear
motivations— this hiding

3

I grieve the unread poems of an empty age
The unshed tears, the unfelt hands
The misplaced feelings— but first
Descend through the works themselves
Shadowed by a plethora of unlived time
"Under a dark green tree, a funeral party

leaving the grave, an open blank hole"
 (that from Barrett Watten's *Decay*)
 Through all of the confusion and sadness we finally learned to
 Find it everywhere: that is, quickly.
 Some things were saved, others looked like
 Monuments, others were taken out of the fractures
 And likened to knowledge. Eventually, the
 Group learned to ignore these, taking satisfaction
 Out of the light and serious, picturing
 It at first as mind. All of this, fitted together
 Smoothly, in the grand style, is likened to grieving.
 Talking meant something then— am forced to remove
 A factual detail from the narrative for aesthetic,
 Not historical reasons. The embarrassment was not
 Because of what you think. It
 Is a way of reasoning that permits a measure of
 meandering
 That derives its energy from the intricate
 combining
 Of the past, present and future tenses.
 A run-on sentence that allows for the bumpy
 movement
 Between today and tomorrow. The trick was to
 find the miraculous
 In everything, to derive again and again
 The conscious from the unconscious, to determine
 what was
 Ineffable from the very facts of what we've
 learned to ignore.
 No one applauded these decisions, a few
 might have noticed
 Them in passing, but there was really no time
 To discuss them anyway. True, this was strangely
 Happening to all of us exactly in the same ways
 It was happening for each of us.
 Anybody could see it was about to happen
 It felt (mostly in our dreams and delays)
 Like we didn't have any control, when finally we had to admit
 That we were completely in control. You
 Are neither an actor, nor a commentator,
 A comedian or a victim of a tragedy.
 Things were not really as grand as this in real life,
 Only by now you've several times noticed
 That anyway, the idea of "real life" occurs to you more and more
 Rarely, just as "that other life" and
 "All those things I expected" seemed less and less applicable.
 There is simply no other way to listen to all that can be said.
 There would no longer be that kind of time for it
 In the everyday moments— forget about perfection
 No time for this clearly, better put the time into placing
 Together what you have to do in order to move on,
 Or so says Marcus Aurelius.



The light was good and we enjoyed the journey.
 And now that it is night, light the lamp
 Follow them down to the actual stairs
 To find the corners, to trace their tracks, to uncover all the evidence
 Of time's old textures— to cover them with words
 Like a blanket— and then feel the way downward
 In the hands, smells and shadows of the other stars.
 Take them deeper
 As far down as you can remember
 Down there where a bell is the sound of the shadow of a smell,
 The glimpse of a face, a slightly
 Burning sensation in the mouth and the stomach
 (In an idea of this, the shapes are on a table

Made out of wires, the twists and turns
 represent events
 And patterns of events, the movement among
 the figures
 Described by the angles of the leanings and
 tumbling,
 These coming to signify the complexity of
 their many
 Relationships— these coming to separate
 and join
 The ideas of each individual as it multiplied itself
 In the others.) This was dying, but dying
 As a kind of time travel in which the experience
 Had detached itself from its physical casement
 And had come to exist in the relationship
 between
 A set of figures sitting on a flat surface,
 A series of tenses. This was a going
 Backward that embraced forward movement.
 This was a translation of experience from
 experience

A measuring that finally had more reference
 To the shapes of the sequences themselves
 Than what they represented.

It had become
 Clear

That the cosmos could be entirely represented
 By a series of depictions, each
 Representing a broad and interrelated section of reality
 In an encapsulated form.
 This was a returning to a
 Beginning by means of coming
 To an end. This was an enveloping
 By means of an unwrapping,
 A hand touching the face
 That embraced what the eyes
 Themselves could see,
 Bending round to the side
 The past wrapping itself around us
 Like arms, the future
 Mapped out on a table,
 By means of shadows
 Wires bent and twisted
 On a table

THE BLANK GENERATION?

From Ron Silliman's blog: "There has ... been a depoliticization of younger people generally & that has impacted poets. ... You see the long-term result in a lot of writing these days that is simultaneously politically correct and depoliticized, a politics really of cynicism and disgust. So this also becomes an incentive not to organize, not to write critically."

From an interview with Lyn Hejinian and Bob Perelman conducted by Eric Lorberer in Rain Taxi: "Lyn Hejinian: What tends now to get identified as Language Writing is identified as such on the basis of surface characteristics, surface features—things that mark the poem as 'experimental.' But for us there were broader motivations for using those devices than mere aestheticism. ... I think poets in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties now do not have a comparable [to the Vietnam War and the 1960s counter culture] historical moment. ... Also I think younger people are unable to sustain utopian visions—they don't consider them to be tenable."

Do you agree with these characterizations? What is your own sense of the writing/situation/outlook of the younger generation(s) vis-à-vis politics?

REG E GAINES

Due to the technological advancements in global communication, we have become a society which strives on the use

of "surface information." This younger generation of poets cannot truly be political when the information given to them

is controlled by those driven by greed which is masked by conservatism. Poetic expression is now being marketed for

the masses which means oral. This immediately lends itself to the visual which then in turn creates eye candy for the

ear. No one wants to be read but heard. No one wants to speak but be seen. Few of the younger poets can be political

if they don't understand that merely questioning the people in power is the most political of acts. Much of the so-called

fiery rhetoric of these new angry poets does not question but react. But what use is reactionary rhetoric when the

information contained in stanzas and couplets and haikus has been spoon-fed from the powers at be. This is not

poetry but a low level example of mimic or mime. Parrots can be taught to read. But if it were up to the younger

poets, would they teach the bird Baraka or Biggie Smalls. Tupac was a poet, Lauryn Hill is a poet, Jay Z is a poet,

Master P is a poet but is what they spew in the name of art poetry? And even if it were, it is hardly political. The words

are part of the larger process I term "Art/Commerce." Political poetry has always been based on the deconstruction of

a capitalist system. Poets must eat to live but greed is greed. As this greed seeps into the art-form it becomes less

interested in sharing the wealth and much more concerned with gaining all and any which waits for the taking. In my

humble estimation, for all intents and purposes, political poetry as we once knew it to be, is all but dead. When

you can ask an obviously starving group of people, a group who desperately needs the honesty and power associated

with political poetry of the past, ask them to pay \$65.00 to hear 9 poets speak on a Broadway stage of issues which

cannot be geared towards the deconstruction of a greed-based capitalist economy, you are denying them a lifeline out

of the squalid existences of very dark and mundane lives. Progress would be for the powers at be to pay that same

\$65.00 and be moved by the honest literary brilliance which shines light on their participation in the destruction of this

greed-based society. So, how can the young voices be political? Is this any different than asking ourselves: can we stop

war?

LAURA ELRICK

"Younger people" now are organizing marches, demonstrations, conferences, teach-ins, walk-outs, collectives, coalitions, public theaters, and independent media organizations that are bridging labor, green, student and justice movements in a real way for the first time in close to thirty years. In short, they are creating both actual and discursive spaces (punching holes in the corporate media white-out) that allow and encourage critique of and dissent from the militaristic exploitative and degrading practices of capitalism and its apologists. To claim otherwise, or to dismiss the real work being done simply because there are intensifying contradictions involved in the process (as if it could be otherwise), is curious to say the least.

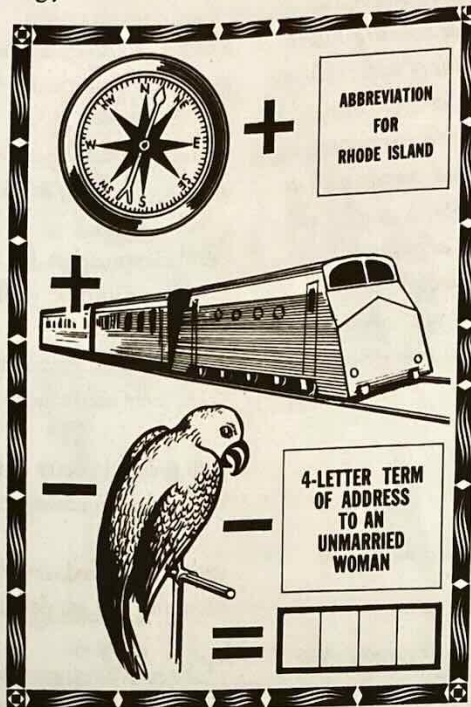
& this has impacted poets, has become an incentive to organize and to write critically: Mark Nowak's work with indigenous groups and his huge contribution to critical poetics in XCP; David Buuck's writings on the (actualized) unevenness of "avant-garde" and allegedly "minority" writing and, with Yedda Morrison, the development of the critical space in *Tripwire*; Jules Boycoff and Kaia Sand's cross-genre political/poetics zine *The Tangent*; Louis Cabri and Aaron Levy's work on The Social Command and Slought Network; Debunker Mentality, a group that formed shortly after 9-11 and continues to intervene publicly in the sutured language of war (including Rachel Levitsky, Betsy Andrews, Frances Richard, and others); PIPA, Kristin Prevallet's Poetry Is Public Art project; Marcella Durand's development of a poetics of radical ecology; Rodrigo Toscano's critical poetics on "combined struggle" (engaging literary formations as they relate to broader class struggles); Jeff Derksen's continually evolving work on urbanization and globalization; Greg Fuchs' writing and photography and his work with Indy Media; my own work on social utterance as a spatial poetic in literacy and community organizing; Alan Gilbert's voluminous cultural materialist criticism and poetry ... the list goes on and on, and this work has led us ...

Not to edify a historical moment on the basis of surface characteristics, surface features—but to compare historical moments (synchronically and diachronically) nonetheless. The anti-war and urban revolutionary movements of the 60s clearly had deep and wide-ranging effects on US and world culture—changes with lasting (to varying degrees) juridical, gender-race-economic, and cultural importance. However, that its radical utopian projects remained unfulfilled or were co-opted and reified by capital for consumer culture has not escaped us. I don't think this means we have lost "our" will or ability to imagine a different, more utopian future, just that we can no longer act as though radical change is immanent either to a particular aesthetic ("life" or "literary") or to new textual devices and procedures. Perhaps we have lost the particular *form* of the previous generation's idealism. Hands dirty, impure, disgusted/post-disgusted ... and re-engaged.

AMMIEL ALCALAY

The maintenance of the status quo in this country functions through accommodating rebellion within the terms of American exceptionalism and historical amnesia. I was in high school in the late 1960s and early 1970s and remember spend-

ing much of my time outside, at demonstrations, doing street theater, talking to people selling the Black Panther Party paper or other political material. The historical moment that opened in the 1960s and saw the formation of the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, the Vietnam Veterans against the war, and many other groups, was overpowered in the 1970s through a combination of repression, internal dissolution, media consolidation, and manipulative propaganda. The forces of domination learned the lessons of the 1960s much more thoroughly than any opposition, something that is increasingly evident as Democrats and Republicans



drink from the same trough and the Bush administration continues on its merry way. As a person of the middle generation in this configuration, I share some of the concerns of the older generation but also remain very critical. The world we inhabit clearly has much less space to operate in; the kind of public space I remember being able to move in and through is almost non-existent. The motivation of experimental writing, in many cases, jettisoned anything that seemed conventional or had narrative content. Most crucial here, I think, is the excision of work by Vietnam veterans, suppressed people, political prisoners, and writers involved in popular movements around the world, from Central America to the Middle East, particularly Palestine, an issue central to maintaining U.S. domination over global narratives and realities. There are profound lessons to be learned from work like this, about the function and ethics of writing, the place writing can have as testimony, and the relationship between a writer and his or her potential or actual audience. Most importantly, though, is the fact that an

unwillingness to deal with narrative allows dominant narratives more space to function and take hold. Writers and intellectuals bear great responsibility for this because if one gives up the right to narrate or intervene, both at home and in other parts of the world, that vacuum will be filled by the discourse of "experts." As far as younger people are concerned, I see both apathy and great courage. The work of a cartoonist like Joe Sacco in Palestine and Bosnia seems infinitely more important than that of Robert Crumb, for instance. And young people have been putting their bodies in the line of fire, going on food convoys to Bosnia, participating in the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine, working with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, organizing the anti-globalization movement, and on many other fronts as well. Of course the forces of repression are always stronger and more can always be learned and done, but there is a lot going on if you know where to look.

PAMELA LU

Iwouldn't say that politics is missing from the poetics of writers in their 20s and 30s. In some ways the politics is more present, complex, and multivalent than ever (and, by that same token, less coherent, less original, and less influential). I am thinking here of the balkanized politics of the poetry community itself (the power/prestige struggles of conventionalists vs. experimentalists, lyricists vs. anti-lyricists, line-breakers vs. scene-makers, etc.) as well as debates about geopolitical and aesthetic-ideological issues which happen offline in bars and on floors of apartments and online in the various forums and listservs that take up cache space nowadays. I don't see apathy. I see opinions, critiques, arguments, concerns, and positions. Many, many positions. The poetry landscape of today seems to reflect the fan-shaped political spectrum as a whole, in which there are a couple of reducible rights and a proliferation of lefts.

I am of a generation that came of age during the PC wars and institutional multiculturalism that marked the mainstreamed domestic-politics branch of the 1960s-progressive evolutionary tree. At worst, the PC movement was a way of enforcing the appearance of a utopic, culturally sensitive society through the apparatus of a codified and necessarily simplified vocabulary. At best, it pushed into mainstream consciousness an introductory awareness of the multiplicity of perspectives and subjectivities held among traditionally underrepresented groups. (Or at the very least we all know bad stuff will happen

if one does not appear to be aware.) This has had its effect on artistic consciousness as well. "Self and Other" is obsolete. Nowadays we are all just Others. To resist or critique the global empires that be, we have to form collectives.

But collective movements can highlight problems of their own. Some are so circumspect about stepping on the diverse sensibilities of their members that they collapse under the dead-weight of their own eagerness to be cooperative. Others are perfectly good peer-writing clubs that try to promote their significance by reciting shrill rhetoric and recycled notions of 1960s radicalism and 1970s poetry politics. In either case, penetration into the domain of the real is often lacking. The kind of depth I'm looking for is not to be found in ideologies or aesthetic manifestos. I am far too skeptical about the validity of such tracts with respect to the current state of reality and real life. If anything, the ideologies tend to overreduce and obfuscate the complexities of real life. The tangibility and depth I'm looking for can only be gotten at through specificity and attention to the way concrete situations develop over time. As told through, say, the various modes of narrative.

CHRIS STROFFOLINO

"Depoliticization"? This denotes that there are (vaguely defined) youngsters who are no longer but who had once been political (or politicized). In my experience, this is not the case. Sure, brutal military and corporate (post-)industrial power has become more media-savvy in its manufacturing of needs and clampdowns on dissent, but it doesn't follow that, because of the mass media depoliticization since the "Vietnam war" era, poets have consciously or unconsciously followed suit and depoliticized, or censored themselves. Nor that if they did it would be due to fear of negative repercussions (which in America is more likely being ignored than being imprisoned or attacked—are not many poets secretly or not-so-secretly envious of the "limelight" in which Baraka is currently "basking"?). It could just as easily be because of a genuine "utopian vision" that "politicized" writing actually does more harm than good, on either/both a personal and social level, or at the very least that it can't be externally imposed.

Then how define "politicized"? The "debate" between "politicized" and "depoliticized" (or unpolitical, apolitical) poems, or ways of reading poems, is nothing new. Some Homeric might have criticized some Sapphorian for being depoliticized (or vice versa), and one Sapphorian may have replied

"the personal is the political" while another one might have replied "the so-called 'political' pales in social significance to the so-called 'merely personal,'" or "social significance itself is a delusion that pales before the impersonal or interpersonal." And maybe various "schools" of thought (or of poetry if you must) developed from this, and so on through various specializations and balkanizations. Or these different "stances" or "schools" may all occur in the work of one poet or writer, or even be evident as many different "voices" in one poem. Is it up to us to place them in a hierarchy for the sake of social or personal harmony?

But "politics," we're told, is a jealous god. To be an effective "political" poet, one must have a "political" conscience, by which one must judge the virtue or value of any written utterance. So if one wants to "politicize" or "repoliticize," one must have a clear sense of a boundary between the unpolitical and the political, and either not stray into the nonpolitical (assuming that's even possible), or stray into it as if into some kind of carnivalesque heterocosm that ultimately can be roped back into the political. How can such a figuration not be the desired effect of those who wish to instill (or install) a political conscience?

Well, it doesn't do justice to writers who've been publishing books for more than 23 years to point out that their use of the word "political" and "utopian" in these instances operate as empty abstractions. Could be "spiritual" for instance. Ethical. Sublime. Certainly if we wish to "organize, to write critically," we can't even safely make the assumption that the called for "politicized" writing necessarily means "leftist" (as Ron's recent criticisms of "left fundamentalism" attest, to say nothing of his reverence for Pound), or that the alleged ability of certain writers to "sustain utopian visions" would necessarily be politicized or political, in a way these writers would approve.

And I (somewhere in between, demographically speaking, Ron and Lyn's "generation" and those aged 25-35) also have made similar criticisms of the "mere aestheticism" of much recent writing identified as publishable "on the basis of surface features ... that mark the poem as 'experimental.'" And am well aware of the "broader motivations" of at least some of the first generation language writers (more often the "west coast" ones—see, for instance, my response to Barrett Watten in *Spin Cycle*), and thus I share some sympathy with Lyn and Ron's criticisms, especially if seen (as is more explicit in Lyn's quote) as an apology in both senses of the word. But is it not very possible that those who decry the lack of political verse today are actually among those who have helped foster a climate which, in privileging aes-

thetics over content (which maybe wouldn't be so bad if they weren't doing it on the grounds of content, as if the means justify the ends, the ever-deferred "utopian" ends), generally gives the edge to a poem (or poet) who has a "language poetry surface" over a political poem (in a beat or punk vein) that does not?

However, I also believe that this "depoliticization" or inability to "sustain utopian visions" decried in younger people is not as true as they claim it is (even if we hold "politicized" as a value). The discrepancy that I notice lies less between generations as it does between the kinds of writing being done by the younger (let me say 25-45 to be a little more inclusive) that has been ignored (or at best begrudged) by the older and the kind of writing that has been either publicized, published, promoted or otherwise sanctioned by the older. It's not that there isn't a lot of politicized, or un-depoliticized writing being written these days; it's that that is more often than not not what's getting published, reviewed, etc. ...

[Excerpted from a longer response.]

KRISTIN PREVALLET

It is disturbing to me that both of the people you cite as commenting about the lack of political/critical skills in younger writers are best known as Language Poets. Working with language to disrupt representation and syntax, as potentially radical as this may be and as influential as this currently is throughout English Departments, is simply not the only model for how to be "political" in poetry. Anne Waldman and Ammiel Alcalay recently asked a much more pointed and interesting question: "Where are the poets?" And for me, it is in thinking about this question where a more open and productive discussion of politics and poetry can begin.

That said, I think Silliman and Hejinian are partially right—a deep level of anti-utopic cynicism has settled in, in part due to media representations of dissent and the fact that, unlike previous decades, there are very few changes in legislation that come out of grassroots, left-wing activism. (Corporate—and religious—sponsored right-wing activism, on the other hand, has enabled massive lobbying efforts which have deeply affected legislation.) However, I would argue that saying young people across the board are a-political, non-critical, and unable to organize fails to take into account the larger social and political context of living in U.S.A./2003. Times have changed since Vietnam. Crucial aspects of the purpose and nature of political activism have changed. The language and medium in which

information is disseminated has changed. Poetry has changed as well.

I don't know specifically whose work Silliman is referring to in his sweeping generalization, but there is a lot of writing by younger poets that works directly with contemporary materials—work that uses a variety of devices to pull language directly from the onslaught of advertising, propaganda, and empty information that the corporate media bombards us with on a daily basis. This writing refers to, resamples, and recontextualizes the language of media and culture. I agree, however, that this is not necessarily translating into mass-mobilization and action. But really, did Language poetry spark some huge activist movement among poets? No, it was a small group of engaged people. So I wonder, what expectation do these Language poets really have? Do they really believe that they have set some precedent for how to be political both in poetry and in the world? Regardless of whatever precedent has or has not been set by our elders, there are currently a handful of committed poets working in the pacifist/activist tradition—people who meet and discuss politics, who e-mail each other information about protests, who gather at these protests, make signs and stickers, and pass on international news coverage of underrepresented events.

The war on terrorism is our Vietnam, but the paradigm of confrontation is completely different. It would be nice if Silliman and other naysayers wouldn't deem work irrelevant because it doesn't conform to their notion of what it means to use poetry to think critically. And, to reveal a little cynicism of my own, I would argue that it is the left-wing intellectuals of the Vietnam generation who, in becoming ossified in their utopian views of what is and is not genuine political change, are partly to blame for having failed the youth of Bush's America. Stop trying to force the old political paradigms and expectations for mass action from 3.5 decades ago onto the current situation. That's like watching re-runs of *Gilligan's Island* on a Plasma TV. Talk about paralyzing. McLuhan: "A common failure: the attempt to do a job demanded by the new environment with the tools of the old."

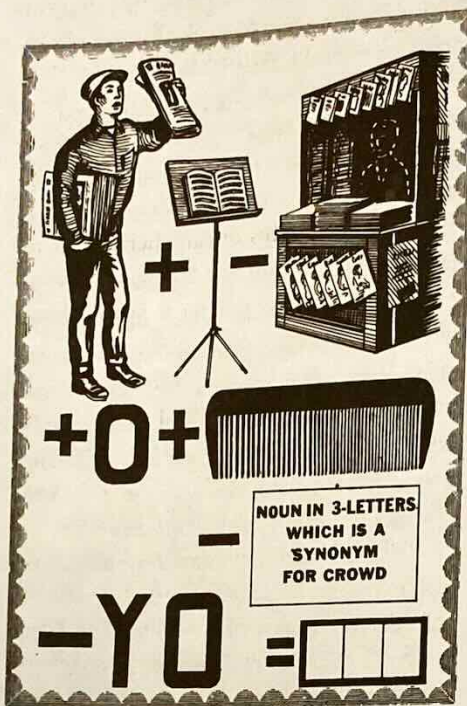
MICHAEL MAGEE

I would like, would very much like, to say exactly what Williams said in his introduction to *The Wedge*:

The war is the first and only thing in the world today.

The arts generally are not, nor is this writing a diversion from that for relief; a turning away. It is the

war or part of it, merely a different sector of the field. Williams's introduction is an argument, a great one, for poetry's usefulness and relevance. But the context in which he wrote it differs greatly from our own. First of all, Williams believed the United States was fighting a relatively just war; and, however reluctantly the U.S. may have bumbled into it, and whatever the contradictions and failings of their engagement, I would tend to agree. Also, Williams had a greater faith than I can muster in the poem's ability, not only to be



peculiar and intrinsic but to *maintain* those qualities for more than a New York minute.

The state has always attempted to co-opt the language of dissent and so de-fang it, and the democratic-capitalist state (yes, I know) does it better than any other because it can couch the very act of co-optation as either "dialogue" or as the marketing of a revolutionary new product (cool). Or, worst of all, can simply adopt the symbols of dissent and none of its politics: hence Nixon's flashing of the "peace sign."

If "younger people are unable to sustain utopian visions" as Hejiniian suggests, it's because the language of utopian visions goes from our minds to our voices to the street and the magazine and finally to the advertisement (for Old Navy or for The Marines, no matter) in the blink of an eye. I suppose Barrett Watten's argument is that the Berkeley Free Speech and Vietnam Anti-War movements identify this problematic and address it, and that Language Writing likewise addresses it. True. But Kerouac, Miles and Ginsberg in their khakis? Or more to the point "the revolution will not be televised"—until it is, in a Nike commercial, where, incidentally, we are informed not that

"the revolution will be live" (Gil Scott-Heron's defining words) but that "the revolution is about the ketball and basketball is the truth" (KRS-One's words, as dictated by Phil Knight). Ugh. I don't believe that we lack our defining big bad political moment—it's here, brothers and sisters. But there's a crafty virus, the problem of language has mutated.

I reject out of hand the notion that poets of my generation are practicing mere experimental aestheticism. Of course there's some of that, though whatever gain. But to say that Rodrigo Tascas, Heather Fuller, Mytili Jagannathan aren't writing vital poetry both political and experimental to our very bones? C'mon. And I could name two dozen others off the top of my head. If you ain't seeing it you ain't looking in the right place.

As I say, the problem seems to me to have changed and so the solutions will be different. One can at least propose that Nixon and Kissinger were able to perpetrate their crimes because they were devious. George W. Bush is an utter dumbfucking fool achieving the same effect. Amazingly, even one seems to understand this, even many of the people who voted for him. I feel compelled in the face of this to interrogate dumbness, ridiculousness, stupidity; to work undercover in the middle of it, to pretend to be it if necessary, all the while reporting back to the reader. I have in mind, always now, Frederick Douglass's words, "At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed" (1852). I've been composing a series of poems called "Fascist Fairytales." In one of them, a poem-play, Margaret Thatcher has a dialogue with the Sphinx, who is initially skeptical of her politics but eventually falls in love with her. It closes with a nuclear catastrophe, a loving embrace, and Thatcher's proclamation, "Bomb Turks, I'm in love!" Isn't that precisely what she meant?

RENEE GLADMAN

Anyone reading this brief exposition: if twenty years from now you witness me decreeing what I think the "younger generation" is not doing please quiet me immediately. For I am too much in the present of my past to see beyond it. Perhaps it will always frustrate, discourage, or terrify us to encounter the unfathomable (i.e. change, the unknown, the passage of time, ourselves becoming past). As a publisher who wants to continue engaging that which is emerging (not to just carry my press along with me) and as a person who is "getting older," I have already begun to experience the fear, and seen some signs, of this kind of pulling away. How can I keep my eyes open

so that if I don't see what I am accustomed to seeing, what makes me comfortable, I don't read it as seeing nothing?

Now I want to specifically address the issue of political awareness and engagement among my peers. Even as a part of this current "younger generation" of writers I do not feel that I can conclude what it is "we" are or are not doing. Whether we are politicized in our living, in our writing, or more accurately, as politicized in our living and our writing as some of the older folks is a question of doubtful use. My immediate response unfolds in two: what does it mean to be political in 2003? And what does this politicization look like? I speculate that there is no way it could resemble the political climate of thirty years ago. The world we have inherited is (and escalates in its being) saturated with convenience, consumption, and an overwhelming sense of defeat due to the seeming ineffectiveness of language and outright protest. However, I'm not trying to argue that it is impossible to do anything in these times. It's more this: the simultaneity of all-things-wrong in this world, of all the accumulative anxiety of life spiraling out, away from bearable existence, love, community, intellect, respect, is exhausting and extremely disheartening, and maybe it is traces of this that show up in the work. But why is that "de-politicized"? And if it is [de-politicized], then let's trace the events occurring between (and therefore linking) our generations to understand what created such a situation.

Lastly, the presumption of many writers of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement that their experimentations were overtly political (and therefore important) could have easily been antagonized by people operating outside of that arena. And that would have incited them to anger; if it had come from their mentors, it would have hurt them. It would have seemed to undermine their efforts.

ALAN GILBERT

There are as many experimental poets writing engaged political poetry and doing important political work today as there were when Silliman and Hejinian's generation was "emerging." Whether or not in Silliman and Hejinian's eyes this is the correct kind of political poetry is another matter entirely. Their generalizations about the de-politicization of a younger generation are a combination of baby boomer nostalgia for the '60s and a need to oversee the development of a new generation of avant-garde writers. Poets of Silliman and Hejinian's ilk seem to have forgotten that a majority of the US population—students or otherwise—were not radicalized during

the '60s. It's unfortunate that the level of discourse around contemporary poetry has sunk so low that a younger generation is forced to defend itself from patent inaccuracies and historical amnesia. The attack on narrative partially assumes all stories have been told.

At the same time, it strikes me as a bit unfair to critique Silliman and Hejinian's informal comments now quoted out of context. Nevertheless, their argument that a younger generation doesn't have a momentous historical event to rally around is a rather reductive idea of history—the "great events" theory of history is only one step removed from the "great men" theory. The dismantling of domestic social programs in the US during the '80s and '90s, concurrent with a grotesque military imperialism, are as much significant historical phenomena as the domestic turmoil and foreign interventions of the '60s, if not more so. Without the counterweight of socialism and the Soviet Union, the US is now free to unleash a vicious form of unregulated capitalism at home and abroad, while waging war just about everywhere. "My" "generation" rocked the world in Seattle in 1999, just as Silliman and Hejinian's did in Chicago in 1968. Unless you're a fundamentalist, no one's politics are holier than anyone else's.

Old motto: A posse is only as fast as its slowest member.

New motto: It's better to be invisible than inconsequential.

LESLIE SCALAPINO

Reading, also publishing O Books, I get many younger poets' works which are political as encompassing being.

Silliman equates "organizing" with critical writing (done by older Language poets). Yet critical writing "organizes" a description of the time: literary, not political action. Rather than: to change our relation to the outside by being within/as the *language of the poetry*? Given that language has been emptied by being politicized as propaganda, younger poets have to make language which is not *that*. No language is discoursing now with power: dim puppet stealing presidency pushes war advertised by officials speaking only as machine ghost-written texts. Claiming (i.e.: critical writing) that they have accomplished the entire period as high achievement (as of military or Enron) is the history/the propaganda of the period—lan-

guage just becomes *that*.

Unbeknownst to their intention, both Silliman and Hejinian "oppose" Stein and Dogen's theory of action: one's being in time, the outside and the inside, is one being the present as alongside past and future at once.

Hejinian's view here is origination which is fixed: Others described as doing Language Writing are actually "superficially 'experimental' as mere aestheticism" (depoliticized). The young are mistaken for their model/originators who had broader motivations having participated in an historical moment (of the past). Yet these older poets aren't the originators, didn't create the period—they're four (originally S.F. area) poets whose entire set gave the period a name from the title of a magazine. Deviating from them is doing what the time *is*. The inventions of the many omitted poets, said to be Language Writing, are said to be the inventions of four. In some cases, the critical writing is continual revisionism of the older one's own past writing in the light (later/now) of other's concepts which are those other's language-space-shape.

Is Hejinian equating "politicized" with "able to sustain a utopian vision"—rather than politicized being/connecting with what's real, language of younger poets having to discover/be that (real)?

A related argument of Hejinian's that's separation of thinking and being (stated at a collaborative presentation with myself at UC Berkeley): While the U.S. was bombing Afghanistan—utter destruction of a people—our subject was to see our own entire writing in its relation to being/writing the present. Hejinian stated that, unlike myself, she is interested, in her writing, in "thinking." And that an axiom or foundation in her work is: "Pain is only depersonalizing, pleasure is liberating." "Depersonalizing" was a negative moral and aesthetic condemnation. Becomes like "Let them eat cake." "Pain" then ("being" rather than thinking) is connecting with one's being living in world war (not merely an individual's limitations, depoliticized as that characterization). What is "thinking" (the process of the sound and shape of the writing, in it, reading?—or academic)? Is "thinking" bodiless and detached from being in the world/from content (that isn't thinking). Extrapolating from both arguments—Young poets, economic if bodies (therefore having pain, phenomenal) if defined (propagandized, removed from their gesture) depoliticized must work outside the terms of the prior given. Some are doing a simple surface or syntax that, including, turns space on its edge (Heather Fuller), political, as emotional tone (Anselm Berrigan) ...

EDWIN TORRES

The fact that youth will always nurture anarchy is an explanation for one generation gap. Age has this way of taking in the entire picture, and until that picture forms, a well-defined rampage can cover a lot of ground about very little.

Finding myself in the mire between gaps, I'm not sure if I'm a younger poet or a used-to-be-younger poet taking steps into mysterious maturity. But, as scandalous as this may sound, politics has never interested me; I read about it everyday and it has nothing to do with me. It surrounds me with its boys club that doesn't want me as a member, and I've chosen to escape from its hold by running into make-believe land. Poetry was my escape in my youth (back when I was one of these younger poets, eight years ago) and along the way, what I've discovered is that my definition of politics has changed.

I've now confused what the world is with what it means to me ... and that's my point. Poetry expands my world; politics is what closes it. Definition as the ear's trap and how I've chosen to jump: *Pockets filled of broken knowns. My sorrow sends me lately gone; my joyous going sends me home. Pools of light reversed in rock.*

This climate of over-information has bred a deeper need for personal exchange. Self-expression now has many platforms. While making the world smaller and expanding knowledge, the web has changed mystery. Made it easier to share everything including wonder, cynicism and apathy, so maybe there's a certain type of anti-politics bred from this. As the world becomes increasingly singular in its globalness.

To quote Penny Arcade, "Love is the most political act you can do," but if love replaced government yet another anarchy would emerge. Does it come down to power? To releasing your power to what's greater? Is that a chance for might to claim its foothold on us as a species, belief as the higher ground? Belief invites sarcasm by its very nature. Poetry is a sort of private religion, one that addresses your questions with more questions, in a double helix of energy and breath.

Same-old same-ity has a triggy fitcher hinger, awaiting the blast I jump again: *I used to sail the great same, the private cocoon, this body's flitted form fastly dumb, webbing where wings were. Made of glass in my stone's throat, rage in a paper cup, heart where my skin was, I found me an engine where the diamond's rough. Devil in the dead zone. Still be no one, find me gone. A shining mystery left untorn.*

But nowness has a short lifespan, the discussions I hear happen around survival. Lodging, food, jobs and love are the common ground that circu-

lates. What's real in the sense of messianic overture has dilapidated century givings so we're left with a sibilant syrupy malaise of beckoning and sweet-hearts. Left to devices uncountable, popped eruptive composure west, healthy pilchard flakes, our beaten heart ... history, in a manner of nowness.

JOHN YAU

Lyn Hejinian distinguishes between those poets who have "broader motivations" for using certain devices in their writing and those for whom the devices are "mere aestheticism." "For us," as she puts it, as opposed to them. If you are not one of us, then clearly you must be one of them. In dividing the world of poetry into "us" and a clearly implied them, Hejinian is content to repeat a language construction that has been an essential component of war: us versus them. At the very least, her statements suggests that she sees herself as a judge (authority) who determines whether one is writing out of "broader motivations" or "mere aestheticism." Thus, the utopia she believes in is based on exclusivity.

Perhaps, it is this exclusiveness that younger poets find "untenable."

Subpress is a poetry publishing collective made up of younger poets. Each willingly donates 1% of their annual income over the course of a three-year cycle, with the hoped-for outcome being eighteen books. Each editor gets to choose a book or book-project, and the collective has no editorial power over any project. The editor gets a certain amount of money to get started; it is not enough to do the whole job. The editors live in New York, Hawaii, Pennsylvania, Boston, Cambridge (UK), and elsewhere. They have published terrific books by Daniel Bouchard, Camille Guthrie, Hoa Nguyen, Prageeta Sharma, Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard, and Edwin Torres, and this only a partial list. Subpress is a utopian project where there is an us, but no them.

Subpress was started by eighteen poets before September 11, 2001. As a collective where the voice of each individual is honored by other members, it critiques many small press publishing ventures that preceded it, including those that were and are part of Hejinian's utopian vision. The construction of Subpress can be read politically, even if the collective does not make any claims to being political. It hardly seems cynical and full of disgust (to paraphrase Ron Silliman). In claiming that "poets in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties ... do not have a comparable [to the Vietnam War and the 1960s counter-culture] historical moment, Hejinian doesn't recognize that all moments are historical, not just the one in which she was young and idealistic. She seems to

have forgotten that during the 1960s, it wasn't uncommon to hear someone from an older generation say, "you didn't live through the Depression, World War II, in China under Communism, witness what happened in Hungary, etc." And she seems not to remember that, today, a younger poet could just as easily say to her and Silliman, your youth wasn't marked by AIDS.

In his poem "Easter," which was written in the summer of 1952, which Hejinian might not consider a historical moment, Frank O'Hara wrote:

*O the glassy towns are fucked by yaks
slowly bleeding a quiet filigree on the leaves of
that souvenir
of a bird chaste crossing the boulevard of
falling stars
cold in the dull heavens
drowned in flesh,
it's the night like I love it all cruisy and nelly
fingered fan of boskage fronds the white smile of sleeps.*

Is O'Hara's use of "cruisy and nelly" mere aestheticism? Or did he have broader motivations in mind?

Younger poets are to be applauded, encouraged, and supported. They have chosen to be poets in a difficult time. ♪

The World 58

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LUST FOR LIFE: KATHY ACKER REDUX

The Kathy Acker conference, which was held November 7-8 at NYU's Fales Library, was organized by Amy Scholder, Carla Harryman, Avital Ronell from the Department of German at NYU, and Marvin Taylor of the Fales Library (with advisory support from Matias Veigener and Cristina Faveretto). It was co-sponsored by the Fales Library and the Duke University Libraries as well as numerous departments at NYU—the departments of German, English, Comparative Literature, American Studies, and Performance Studies; and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality.

Like many who attended the intense, packed conference, I was seduced, befuddled, titillated, from the moment I opened my first Acker book, *Great Expectations*. But to teach or describe the post-punk, anarchistic, appropriating, experimental prose of Acker, who died tragically young in 1997, felt like crab-walking, sideways. Acker's prose was "Multi-everything' space and spacing with variations"—prose, as panelist Carla Harryman put it. Its radically distributed narrative tenets, its "characters/emblematic figures" were not reducible to usual novel categories. On top of which, Acker aggressed the reader: she was a bottom diva who brought the reader to her level of narrative anarchy, abjection, risk, and rage. "[My] reading goes from unreadable to unbearable, because Acker intends [us] to bear the knowledge of chance, which is the acceptance of constant change," said panelist Robert Glück.

On the eight-hour flight from one-hour-away Montreal [weather and security *obligent!*], I was remembering Acker's refreshing appearance on my novice writer's horizon as an *avant-garde prose writer*—a space largely occupied by language poets, notwithstanding the predominance of prose in seminal avant-garde moments from Russian Formalism on. At the same time Acker was a po-mo queen. What fascinated me was how she used the sentence as a come-on while simultaneously smashing continuity; how the patina of her novel-like reach—for the novel is intended to *reach*—was mysteriously produced out of the kamikaze she committed on the novel form.

Somehow the work bridged many worlds; made "the two one ... the inside like the outside ... the male and the female one and the same ..." (Robert Glück, playfully citing *The Gospel According To Thomas*). My baser self wanted the secret of that Acker panache, wanted to know how Acker kept you reading while making you "suffer" and feel "lost in writing that is wrong and improper," as Glück said.

It's a rare conference that refuses to answer serious questions with premature synthesis. This one was exemplary in that it mostly kept you traveling beyond cozy paradigms of inappropriate "interpretive coherence" [Harryman] toward a contour forming and un-forming on the horizon. And what was that contour but endlessly reconfigured awareness of the rifts in the (un)consciousness of one's own self as reader/subject? Reading Acker deprived the novel reader of the usual novel-reader identitary glow. Those hallmark-Acker narrative devices, notably appropriation, the violent ripping out and endless resplicing, were also an obstacle to usual critical procedures, as many panelists pointed out.

Inasmuch as Acker's novels subverted expectations/possibilities of thematic reading and critique, I thought Barrett Watten's talk crucial. He placed Acker's writing in a "lineage" of bonding-resistant novels going back to Dafoe's liar-heroine *Moll Flanders*. And in the process of associating the unstable spatiotemporal ground of these authors' novels, Watten offered a refreshing coinage of the

notion of "avant-garde" as "something other than we thought ... not ... Baudelaire, Manet, or Dada in a teleological series but repeat as a discontinuous moment of recursive breakdown and SOCIAL reflexivity." This framing not only placed Acker's work in a context of shifting radical communities; it seemed to me to draw a dynamic parallel between Acker's approach to the question of identity in the novel form ["temporal coincidence ... at a historical moment ... so threatening that it necessitates its dissolution"] and the temporal "epistemic dissolution/reformation" of the avant-garde in historical time.

Radical community. Radical [disrupted] prose time: I thought it fitting that keynote speaker Avital Ronell inaugurated the conference literally under the sign of the crack. The crack of a huge cunt—that wonderful horrible Acker drawing of a cunt with its sensuous folds and self-disgusted cunt hairs at the top: "my red cunt ugh." Ronell read, or more appropriately, performed the split of the "good friendship," the one of "disidentification." Was it possible to "engage a friend without the calculation of sameness, without ... narcissistic appropriation?" she asked the audience, some of whom were juggling anecdotes like hot potatoes—for Acker was both a great colleague [generous, engaging, emotionally honest and explicit: Sarah Schulman] and sometimes, er, difficult, one felt. Acker "insisted on community without relying

Continued on page 19

POETRY PROJECT EVENTS

◆ ★ ☆ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 1, SATURDAY ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ◆

Poetry Is News

"Poetry Is News," Anne Waldman and Ammiel Alcalay's initiative, presents a full day TEACH-OUT at the Poetry Project, with panel discussions, video screenings, readings of Iraqi poetry, activist information tables, and an open forum to create new initiatives. Participants will include writers, translators, activists, filmmakers, musicians, editors, teachers, journalists, students, and others. "Operation Counter Intelligence": Panel topics include: Where Is Poetry? Responding to Crisis, Acting in Public Expanding Cultural Space, Translation: Bringing Back the World, and Being Censored, Censoring Ourselves. [2 to 9 p.m.]

Open Reading

◆ ★ ☆ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 3, MONDAY ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ◆
Sign-up begins at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

David Shapiro and Lytle Shaw

David Shapiro has published over 20 volumes of poetry and literary and art criticism including *House (Blown Apart)*, *To an Idea, After a Lost Original*, and most recently from Overtone Press, *A Burning Interior: New Poems*. He has been an editorial associate at *Art News* and his art criticism has appeared in *Artforum*, *Art News*, *Art in America*, and in many other journals. He has edited anthologies such as the groundbreaking *Anthology of New York Poets* with Ron Padgett and the new volume *Uncontrollable Beauty* with Bill Beckley. Lytle Shaw's books include *Fleagons* and *The Rough Voice*, both collaborations with Emilie Clark, *Cable Factory 20* (Arelas, 1999), and *The Lobe* (Roof, 2002). Shaw curates the Line Reading Series at The Drawing Center. *Line Reading: An Anthology*, which will include work from the first two years of the series, will be published next year by The Drawing Center. He co-edits *Shark* with Emilie Clark.

A Tribute to Charles Henri Ford

A tribute to Charles Henri Ford will be held at The Poetry Project in the parish hall. Speakers will include: Harold Stevenson, Ted Joans, Ned Rorem, Penny Arcade, Charles Plymell, Gerard Malanga, Regina Weinreich, Steven Watson, Valery Oistratau, Allen Frame, Indra Tamang, and Lynne Tillman. Slides will be shown. [4:00 p.m.]

Kyle Conner and Margregor Card

Kyle Conner has two chapbooks, *Songs for South St. Bridge* (1996) and *The Puberized Thing of Doubt* (Individualist, 2002). In 1998, he co-founded the Highwire Reading Series (now La Tazza) in Philadelphia and co-curated for two years. Conner has birthed a theory of the artist he calls "Quadrism," which makes the obvious explicit, i.e., that art is



experiences as fire lookouts in the early 1950s, and a photographic homage to the North Cascades landscape. Based on scores of previously unpublished letters, journals, and recent interviews with Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen, and others, *Poets on the Peaks* is about the development of a community of poets, including the famous Six Gallery reading of October 1955. [10:30 p.m.]

Erica Kaufman and Diane Wald

Erica Kaufman is an Indiana native who has been living either in or around New York for quite some time. She assists Rachel Levinsky with the Belladonna reading series which is currently held monthly at Zinc Bar. Her recent poems can be found on canwehaveoutballback.com. Diane Wald has been publishing in literary magazines since 1966, and has received grants from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and the Massachusetts Council on the Arts. An electronic chapbook, *Improvisations on Titles by Jean Dubuffet*, appears on the Mudlark website. Her book *Lucid Suitscase* was published by Red Hen Press in 1999.

Sherman Alexie and Chuck Wachtel

Sherman Alexie has published 14 books to date, including his most

most recent book of fiction is *Some of Her Friends That Year: New and Selected Stories* from Coffee House Press (2002). *A Boy in Winter* is being developed into a film for Showtime. With Paul Hoover she edits *New American Writing*. Paul Hoover is author of nine poetry collections including *Winter* (Mirror), published by Flood Editions in 2002, and *Totem and Shadow: New & Selected Poems* (Talisman House, 1999). His book of literary essays, *Fables of Representation*, will be published in the Poets on Poetry series of University of Michigan Press. He edited the anthology, *Postmodern American Poetry* (W. W. Norton, 1994).

Cave Canem African-American Writers Group Reading

◆ ★ ☆ ☆ ★ MARCH 14, FRIDAY ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ◆
Poets TBA. [9:30]

Crystal Williams and Phyllis Wat

A native of Detroit, Michigan, Crystal Williams' first book, *Kin*, examines alienation, loss, and her understanding, as an African-American woman adopted by an interracial family, of sensed "otherness." Her second collection of poems, *Lunatic*, was just released from Michigan State University Press. Williams is a member of the 1995 Nuyorican Slam team and has performed her work at venues such as The Whitney Museum of American Art, the Princeton/Columbia Club, and The National Arts Club. Phyllis Wat is the author of *The Fish Soup Bowl Expedition* from Ten Pel Books and *Shadow Blue* from *Hot Water Press*. She is a founding editor of *6x* magazine now in its twelfth year, and has received numerous awards including a poetry grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and a graduate poetry scholarship from Temple University.

Lee Ann Brown and Jack Kimball

Lee Ann Brown's first full-length collection of poetry, *Polyverse* (Sun & Moon Press, 1999) won the New American Poetry Series Competition and her second book, *The Sleep that Changed Everything* is being published by Wesleyan University Press in spring 2003. She earned her BA at Brown University in 1987, then moved to New York City where she founded Tender Buttons press which publishes innovative writing by women. During the 1990s Jack Kimball lived in Japan where he initiated several web projects, including *Video Tokyo* and *The East Village*. In 2000 he returned to Boston to teach and start Faux Press. His recent books of poetry include *Manorship* (Detour) and *Frosted* (Potes & Potes). A book of his short essays on poetry is due next year.

Noelle Kocot and Andrew Maxwell

Noelle Kocot received the First Annual S.J. Marks Memorial Prize from The American Poetry Review in 1997. Her first collection of poems, 4, was chosen by Michael Ryan to be the recipient of the Her next collection. The

and co-curator for two years. Her former has birthed a "poetry of the obvious explicit, i.e., that it is never more or less than an extension of the world." Why one chooses to live one's life. Macgregor Card's chapbook, *Souvenir Winner*, was published last summer by Hophophop. He edits *The Germ* and *Germ Monographs* with Andrew Maxwell. With Olivier Brossard he is co-editing a New York School poetry reader for French translation.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 12, WEDNESDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Tracie Morris and Cecil Taylor

Tracie Morris is a multi-disciplinary poet who has worked in theater, dance, music and film. Her books include *Chap-T-her Won: Some Poems by Tracie Morris* (1993, TM Ink) and *Intermission* (1998, Soft Skull Press). She has been anthologized in *360 Degrees: A Revolution of Black Poets, Listen Up!: Spoken Word Poetry, Aloud: Voices from the Nigerian Poets Café, The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry and Soul: Black Power, Politics and Pleasure*. Composer, musician, poet, and performer Cecil Taylor has been one of contemporary music's most influential figures. He has recorded dozens of albums including *Jazz Advance, Unit Structures, Silent Tongues, The Willisau Concert, and Port of Call*. He has incorporated poetry into his work in a number of ways over the years; in 1991 Leo Records released *Chinampas*, which presents his poetry accompanied by multi-instrumental improvisations.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 17, MONDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Fall Workshop Reading

Participants from the four Fall Writing Workshops of Renee Gladman, Janet Hamill, Kristin Prevallet, and Anne Waldman, will read from their work.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 19, WEDNESDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Nada Gordon and Steve Katz

Sardonic troubador Nada Gordon's latest book is *V.IMP* (Faux Press, 2003). With Gary Sullivan, she is the author of *Swoon* (Granary Books, 2001). Other books include *Are Not Our Loving Heifers Sleeker than Night Swollen Mushrooms?* and *Foriegn Bodie*. With Gary Sullivan, she edits the *Poetry Project Newsletter*. Her musings on life and poetics can be found at <http://ululate.blogspot.com>. As a Fiction Collective pioneer, Steve Katz published *Moving Parts*, a book in which the author writes an enormous, fantastic story, called *Parrel of Whisps* and then keeps a journal as he sets out to live that fiction. Sun & Moon Press published four books: *Wier & Pounce, Florry of Washington Heights, Swanmy's Ways*, and *43 Fictions*.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 21, FRIDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Poets on the Peaks

An event with John Suiter, author/photographer of *Poets on the Peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades*, John Suiter is a Boston-based freelance photographer and writer who lives and works in Boston, where he is an instructor at the New England School of Photography. *Poets on the Peaks* is both a literary group portrait of Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Philip Whalen centered around their

◆ ★ ☆ ★ FEBRUARY 26, WEDNESDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Sherman Alexie and Chuck Wachob

Sherman Alexie has published 14 books to date, including his most recent collection of short stories, *The Tongueless Indian in the World*. His several books of poetry include *One Stick Song* and *The Summer of Black Widows*. Alexie recently made a stunning debut as a director when he brought his title *The Business of Fancymancing* out as an independent film, which was voted Best Narrative Feature Film at the Durango Film Festival. Among Chuck Wachob's books are the novels, *The Gates and Joe the Engineer*, a collection of stories and novellas, *Because We Are Here*, and five collections of poems and short prose including *What Happens to Me*. He is presently at work on a nearly completed new novel, *River of Stars*. His stories, poems, translations and essays have appeared in *Up late: American Poetry Since 1970*, and *110 Stories: New York Writes After September 11th*.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ MARCH 3, MONDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Open Reading

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

◆ ★ ☆ ★ MARCH 5, WEDNESDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Eric Bogosian and Jim Carroll

In the last twenty years, Eric Bogosian has authored five full-length plays and created six full-length solos for himself. For these, he has received three OBIE awards and a Drama Desk Award. His two best known plays, *Talk Radio* and *subURbia*, were each translated into acclaimed films. His solos include *Sex, Drugs, Rock & Roll, Pounding Nails in the Floor with My Forehead and Drinking in America*. Jim Carroll, poet, diarist, musician, performer, actor, and best-selling author of six books, including the now-classic *The Basketball Diaries*, the award-winning *Living at the Movies*, and his critically lauded *Praying Mantis* spoken word album, continues to pack concert halls for his poetry performances. His *Catholic Boy*, is now considered one of the last great punk albums. His most recent release is *Runaway EP* (music, 2000). Admission: \$15, \$12 for students & seniors, and \$10 for Poetry Project Members.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ MARCH 10, MONDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Geoffrey G. O'Brien and Sam Truitt

Geoffrey G. O'Brien's first book, *The Guns and Flags Project*, came out from The University of California Press in 2002. Sam Truitt is the author of *Anamorphosis Eisenhower* (Lost Roads Publishers, 1998), *Vertical Elegies: Three Works*, a series of short books with Ugly Duckling Presse, and *Vertical Elegies 5: The Section* (University of Georgia Press, 2003).

◆ ★ ☆ ★ MARCH 12, WEDNESDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover

Maxine Chernoff has written six books of poetry and six books of fiction. Her most recent book of poems is *World: Poems 1991-2001* from Salt Press in Cambridge, England, and Applectross, Australia. Her

Noelle Kocot and Andrew Maxwell

Noelle Kocot and Andrew Maxwell are the co-authors of the book *DoubleChange.com*. A chapbook, *Radiant Species* (Tougher Disguises), and a full-length collection of poetry, *The Concord Eucumenical* (Subpress) are due out later this year.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ MARCH 26, WEDNESDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Merry Fortune and Peter Bushyeager

Merry Fortune's poetry has been published in *The World*, *6ix*, *The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*, *Brooklyn Review*, *The Portable Boog Reader*, *The Unbearables Self-Help Anthology*, and *The Unbearables Worse Book Anthology*. She edits the online zine, *Pagan Place* and interviews Green Party candidates for *Green Party Enews* online. A CD, *The Lone Dogs of Misfortune*, is due out in the spring. Peter Bushyeager's *Citadel Luncheonette* was just published by Ten Pell Books. Other work appears in *The World*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Rain Taxi*, *the Poetry Project Newsletter*, and *Talsman*. His chapbooks include *Vital Wires* and *Mute Dog*. He has been an artist-in-residence at the Ragdale Foundation and lives in New York City.

◆ ★ ☆ ★ MARCH 31, MONDAY ☆ ★ ☆ ★
Arielle Greenberg and Johannes Göransson

Arielle Greenberg's first book, *Given*, was released in 2002 from Verse Press. She is on the editorial advisory board of *Hou2*, and frequently reviews books for *Rain Taxi*, *The Electronic Poetry Review* and elsewhere. Johannes Göransson was born and grew up in Sweden, but has lived in different places in the US for the past 16 years. His poems have been published in many journals, such as *Verse*, *Jubilat* and *American Letters and Commentary*. His translations have been published in *Conduit* and *Skidrow Penthouse*.

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*Here in these poems . kellcani
the seed springs thruth
from its throat. culebra of veins speak their love
water gardenia coulibri...*

*and yet say ayni w/lits soft implacable dove
of the beach. glittering volcanoes. voices of villanelles
this wd be Cecilia. the Quechua in Quark of the Three
cimbar. zumbar. the in. star . imman. tar . yr Milky Way of the fruith*

—KAMAU BRATHWAITE

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*No wonder the Symbolist poetics from which she takes her core
meaning is as integral to her poetry as it is: it is the way she thinks!
Her aphoristic plasticity is affirmative, affirmative in performing
imaginative acts on our behalf. —MARJORIE WELISH*

*We expect poets to give a first-hand account of what poetry is.
But some poets, when they write criticism, produce a kind of prose
that is itself on the verge of being poetry. Valéry, Stevens and Marianne
Moore belong to this "visionary company." And so does Barbara
Guest, whose writings on poetry, collected here, are among the most
inspiring works of their kind. It is a deep pleasure to know that such
writing can still exist. —JOHN ASHBERY*

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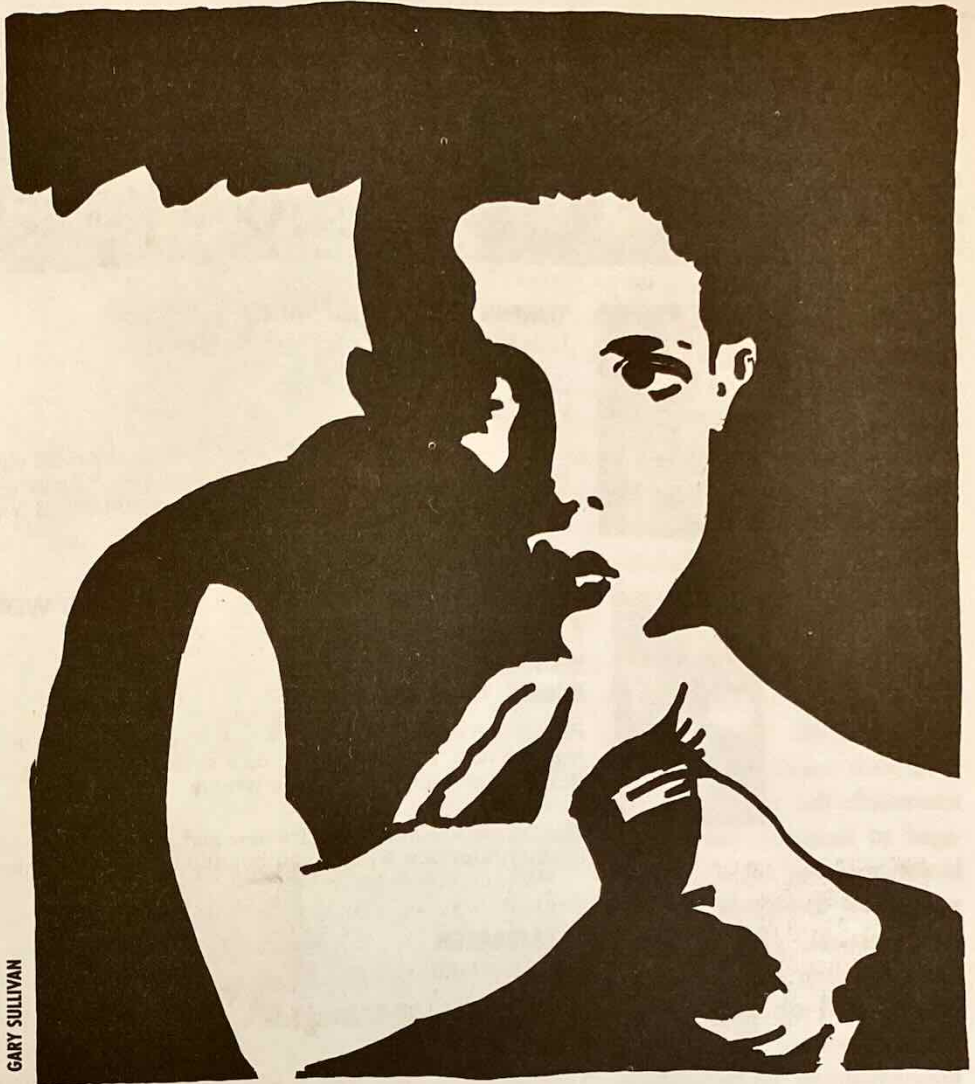
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on transcendence ... without fascistic bonding rituals or strangulating close ties," said Ronell. Waving a teacher's pointer—Ronell's reading of "the split" raised the question of how to resist the desired erasure of difference—and by implication **READING**—without the violence of reduction of the other to sameness.

I liked Ronell's noting that Acker was "ever negotiating at the limits [of the metaphysical tradition], without thinking for a second she could bail." Is it not the novelist's problem, not to be able to turn her back on ... negotiations? Did not the cracks in the crypt of Acker narrative both project and conceal the shadow of the buried [snatched] object: story? But how did Acker, in constructing her fissured edifices, project a sense of "story?" She had a shapely mind, said former teacher David Antin [answering an audience question about how Acker knew when to end a novel]. Through the connectedness of the reader/writer relationship, said Carla Harryman. Through siting "the writing in her own life and in the life of the reader," said Robert Glück in his recounting of being an Acker friend, reader, confidant ... Then she "blasts the arrangement [the willing suspension of disbelief of novel readers] wide open by ... calling for the reader's disbelief."

Both Glück and Harryman saw Acker's writing as moving increasingly towards the production of myth and wonder, a productivity in which the reader was, of course, proactive agent. In what I think of as a kind of manual for reading Acker, Harryman cautioned that Acker-effects neither represent fictional subjectivities, nor do they "exactly lack character/subjectivity." To read Acker ... "is to contact reality, as revelation of the unknown, while still avoiding rigidly fixing reality." In this reading, the reader must resist becoming an obstacle to reading, by both conflating with "character/emblem," yet allowing herself to remain diffuse, to remain "a further anarchic layer of the text ..." Then she may track, "like a little fox silently following a juicy chipmunk" the movement of story [wonder], which is regressive, is the "ventriloquy of childhood."

But what to say of all the other panelists whom I do not have time to cite at length here? Performance-poet Caroline Bergvall discussed Acker's quixotic han-



GARY SULLIVAN

dling and mis-handling of the liminal spaces of the notion of national-make-up, citing her own poster/installation currently hanging over a busy London thoroughfare: "WRITE AS A DOG/ NOT LIKE A DOG." The citation reminded me of how Acker's early influence on my novel *Heroine* gave me permission to rhetorize, negatively. It also conjured Kathy Acker's formative years in a conceptual art milieu in San Diego. David Antin told us how he would get his writing students to go to the library and steal. He told us about the conceptual art scene there, and its influence on Acker, who was producing her work in chunks and sending them out to people on artists' mailing lists. Some of that work was displayed in an adjoining exhibition of Acker-memorabilia.

I loved the final round table of writers and artists, their too-short takes on how Acker affected their work: Nayland Blake: "... [She gave me] a constant series of permissions;" Sarah Schulman: "Kathy grew up, as many of us did, with this par-

adigmatic document of the Jewish Woman writer as moral visionary and martyr ..."; and Chris Tysh, who read Acker's writing as a network of pressure points.

It was Catherine Liu who again raised the question of what Bergvall called problematic notions of "*national make-up*," suggesting that in Acker's novels what predominated was the "white-girl angst" thing—a fairly mono-racial profile of downtown. I wondered, listening to Liu's paper, if this was the contour that signed the limit of Acker's method for a portion of her readers. If so much depends, reading Acker, on what happens in the continuous identitary undoing-and-reconstituting in the process of reading, was there a piece missing in the general discourse about this process? I was sorry the matter was not taken up again.

The conference ended with a starry cast of performers reading Acker's work. Unfortunately, I missed all but Sapphire's—which was fabulous! 🐾

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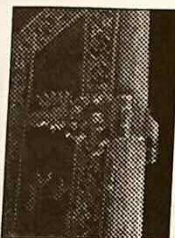
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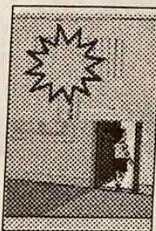


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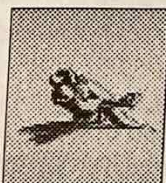


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REVIEWS

ARRIVAL
Sarah Anne Cox
Krupskaya, 2002, \$11.00

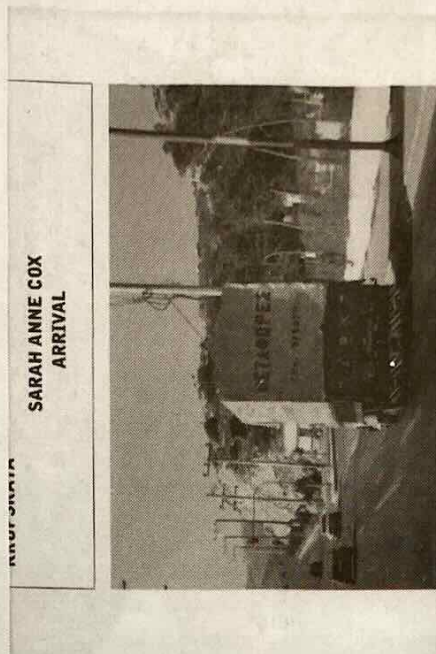
By calling this collection *Arrival*, Cox suggests that attention be paid to the condition of "arrival" itself, the situation of being neither fully present/presented, nor still absent. Wrested from the moorings of either subject or object, this single word exposes an expansive and enigmatic continuum, and brings to mind both the uncertainties of any entry into experience and the un-navigable sea of potential from which it comes.

This is not "arriving," with a verb's emphasis on action, and its implicit, misleading promise that the actual, in all its ongoingness, might be present in a collection of poems. Rather, Cox offers "arrival" as noun, with appreciation for what comes into being in the act of abstraction from the actual—the kind of incorporeal otherness that words acquire, which carries with it the long shadows cast, these days, by any act of representation, of symbolic embodiment.

we did occasion something from possibility, a shallow breathing, the height of which door jams, "I am certain of" profuse and violent and frequent letter combinations shown in percentages, and from this cracks form along the present day

Here, "certainty" is not—as it so often is—merely called into question. Rather, it is presented in its "profuse and violent" excess; such awareness may cause "shallow," fearful "breathing," but with it comes the power to crack the forms in which we typically locate ourselves, and which we assume create the limits of what, and how, we communicate.

Cox does not focus her energies solely on offering the reader an appreciation of the elusive continuum between any act and the act of its signification. Rather, she uses her awareness of, and orientations to, language in her expression of the critical struggle we each engage in when we attempt to allow an arrival beyond, albeit through, what is proscribed as acceptable and knowable, given the cultural parameters delimiting our defi-



nitions of self—in Cox's case, as woman, as mother, as writer, as worker, as member of ethnic and world communities.

Cox seeks broadly and bravely, testing all boundaries in the regions provided to her by her experiences—from those limiting a mother's awareness of her child's evolving consciousness, to her fiercely realized evocations of class and cultural disenfranchisements. Throughout, this text exudes the sense that to continue to mean in language is to risk defying previous definitions of comprehension in a contested space. Of course, the parameters and the stakes of such defiance are currently discussed with be-numbing, even deadening, repetition. Yet Cox manages to exhume the dignity, the grace, the humanity of addressing this challenge, as she constantly reassesses the personal and the political, and attempts to translate her critical awareness into words. What we find are not cold relics; the emotive power of what is exhumed in her poems burns incandescent.

*the letters burned to the ground
we cannot reconstruct this
the "s" removed, the "r" added late at night
we became unsure of our own motives
thus it began for we were hungry
and among all betrayal*

Cox manages to infuse the tensile strength of her poetry's well-articulated particulars with an emotional fluidity that allows meaning to flood the boundaries which typically locate and localize experience. Hers is an intimacy of address that offers a rigorous appraisal of socially, politically, and gender inscribed event. She pays a richly nuanced attention to the uses of language as approach to, and occlusion of, the subjectivities and subjugations, the objects and objectives, of daily life.

The experiences that Cox amasses are riveting and unforgettable—*from watching the symbolic order evolve in her child's consciousness ("what is said is immediately forgotten but a grammar descended and remained as if it was always there"), to appreciating the implicit self-effacements perpetrated upon the individual by hegemonic structures ("a list someone would keep/ bent toward/ instructed/ we had not yet learned the rule").* These poems remain long after reading them—*elegantly outfitted vessels gliding the limits of our own intellectual horizon, unmoored to any easily trafficked port of comprehension within us.* Cox offers us insight into, though not simplistic access to, their act of arrival—an act that we recognize in all its indeterminate presence, as indefinable and essential as "being" itself.

—Rusty Morrison

DRAFTS 1-38, TOLL
Rachel Blau Duplessis
Wesleyan University Press, 2001, \$17.95

Written by a deeply interested poet who is paradoxically "hard on poetry," *Drafts 1-38, Toll*, Wesleyan University Press's new collection of a long serial work of "drafts" by Rachel Blau Duplessis, is a necessary and moving work. Collected together chronologically from 1985-1999, the poems contained in *Drafts 1-38, Toll* are Duplessis' extended meditation on how poetry has survived the 20th century, and about how one can "swallow" poetry's traditions, its "undigested words," its "unsas-

"Keep the world safe for poetry."

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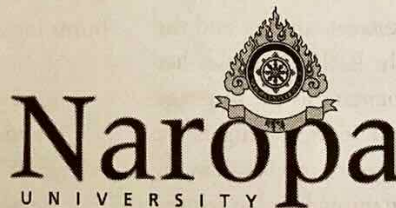
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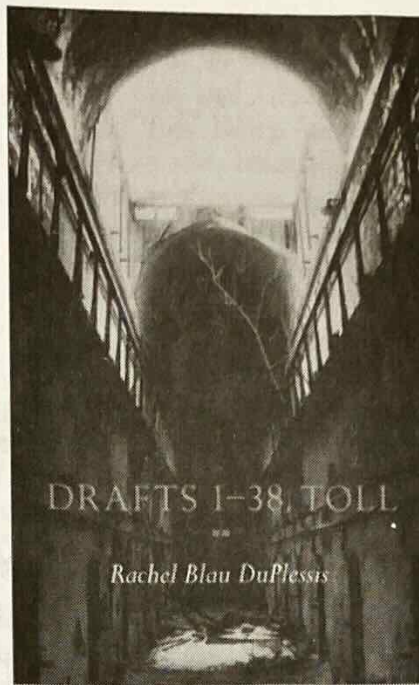


The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics

similable subjects” and the “toll” of historical and social trauma on it. That Duplessis calls her work “Drafts” suggests an incompleteness of this process, a constant questioning and rewriting of her own intentions and wide attentiveness. *Drafts 1-38* represents a poetic “toll” of mourning and resistance to miming the scripts for resolution and inertia provided by corporate culture. It records a “continuous addendum” by Duplessis on her accumulating work, and also to her careful cultural and critical study of poetics, which has been wide and has resulted in her important books, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908-1934*, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*, among other works such as her editorial work in collecting and selecting the publication of the letters of the late blacklisted poet, George Oppen.

Most relevantly to the social climate now, “Drafts” also suggest the chill of the suppression of dissent. Duplessis specifically mines her experience of editing the George Oppen’s letters, in which process through a FOIA request she examined the partially classified, and thus blackened, files kept by the government on the poet. In this gesture, Duplessis gets into the “gaps” and erasures of public information, ever “trying to read what cannot be read.” There is grief in this effort and it is scattered throughout *Drafts*, over these and “Female-half-lengths,” “shard-words” of “household detritus,” and the reports and remains of the dead. But the mourning is also for memory itself, an inquiry into what it can contain and for its losses. Meditating in one draft, Duplessis looks back, on her own intellectual discoveries and to human holocausts, and the particular as well as anonymous human losses as preconditions, “working conditions” of poetry, and asks, “What then is the size of the loss,” the ghost question haunting the margins everywhere in the work are what is lost? And why? And how? And given these questions, what knowledge is “useless,” what understanding is “helpless” of and by poetry?

Drafts provide a “thesis and anti-thesis” and more to each other, as she conjoins traditions and her own counter examination of them (ballad, renga, georgics, haibun, canto, cento, among others). The forms and intentions of poetic traditions matter here, and not only the forms, but also the smallest units of words, articles, conjunctions, associative meanings, and shadow sounds as “soundings,” “diasporic underspeech.”



These drafts are also sketches of evacuated social space, including the space of the page, “unreadable poetics”, often (un)translated as blanks, but here given as sources of writing. Duplessis footnotes Edmond Jabes: “The readable is perhaps only the unreadable smashed to pieces.” Invoking the unsaid, the “incipit” and the “unnamable” she is “drawing a blank,” as she writes in one poem, “Draft 18: Little,” Duplessis circles this “blank” in other places, staking out “marginal plots”, spaces possessed by other spaces of power, into which her poetry struggles to find an articulate excavation and repossession of meaning and an acknowledgement of what has been there in her own writing and in the world to be named and insisted on.

—Lee Gough

YOUR ANCIENT SEE THROUGH
Hoa Nguyen
Supress, 2002, \$12

Hoa Nguyen’s *Your Ancient See Through* compiles poems from previous books—*Let’s Eat Red for Fun*, *Parrot Drum* and *Dark*—reshuffles the cards with others, creates some new suits, and intersperses the deck with abstract doodle-like drawings (Mondrian on mushrooms, maybe?) by Austin-based painter Philip Trussell. In Trussell’s ever-mutating jigsaws, the viewer sees part of a tree, a face, a building, a wave, a machine, a flame—or sometimes all objects at once. In Nguyen’s poetry words and phrases

cut against and bounce off one another taking the objects attached to them into a variety of futures, meanings and possibilities—hence *see through*—that is always being reshaped by memory and the distance of time—hence *your ancient*. A sense of transience anchors this collection whose form and technique combines the expansiveness of “field composition” with the condensery of the lyric from its earliest examples in song, spell, prayer and lullaby. The poems have a catchy, incantatory feel that is unmistakably their own (though resemblances, like to Ceravolo’s playful naivete and casual animism, abound):

[*Mulberry Mess Squish Squash*]

Mulberry mess squish squash
I give tree names The land has names
I’m finding them Who are you with your white beard?

Turned into a tree

The hill offers a sky bowl

We are wow but I’m thinking
the planet turns & there was a war
He said “Kill yesterday” when
he was

tall and laughing and cruelly

The ground turned to blood
Sweet with green sour stems

Often Nguyen, proceeding more by the ear and mouth’s logic than by the eye and intellect’s, will mix mythic or cosmic references with more mundane and daily moments (food and body products, with their sensual qualities, seem to be obsessions), veering from Buddha to apple pie in the opening “[Buddha’s Ears Are Droopy Touch His Shoulders]” and soul to sky-blue nail polish as in “[Let Me Be A Meaningful Soul].”

Though the poems avoid the grand gesture, they have, in addition to an obvious delight in language and rhythm, a fondness for campy melodrama, self-mockery and the deflationary moment: “I am a tiger wife/ a tiger in each knee like silent/ pissed off Kaufman I am guilty/ I am tragic I must die being/ Ho Chi Minh & Groucho Marx and also/ Isadora Duncan” (“[Unorthodox & Impractical One Not Led]”). Irony, e.g. “grooving on Armageddon gas,” has its place but doesn’t dominate. In “FOB” (Fresh Off

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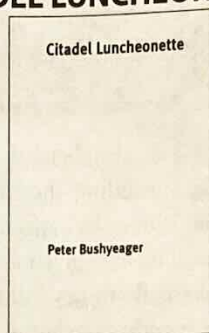
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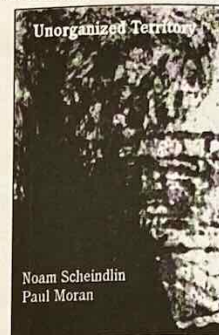
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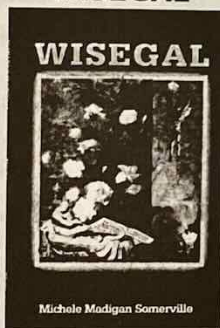
"His terrain is the ineffable mind-space between office and street, hotel restaurant and highway, chaos and control." —Lewis Warsh

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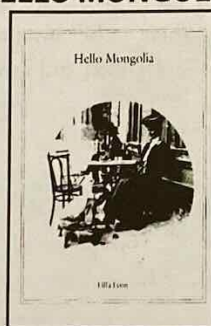
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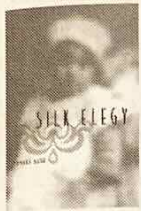


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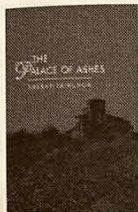
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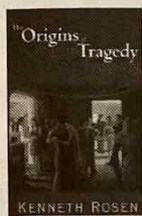


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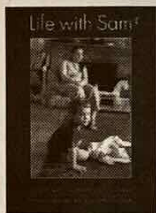


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the Boat, I'm assuming), "Box of Butter" (which comments on the Land O' Lakes Indian girl logo) and "[Ride a Bike to Houston]" ("Stop/ calling me Oriental"), racial difference takes center stage. Despite the almost nonchalant tone, death will suddenly pop up, as in "View": "we are the principal/ animal toasting ourselves on the stuffed/ sofa where I am The buffalo/ is the image of death remains/ remind." Other frequent concerns are family, childhood and home life: "Crows and grackles grackles/ in the sycamore food cruising/ I'm broke and the sauce burns/ I sprinkle ashes in the flowerbed/ I kiss your cat" ("[Crows And Grackles Grackles]").

After reviewing a rather heavy-handed book by a contemporary poet, reading Nguyen's book felt like being tossed into a candy store. My main reservations, the ones that keep me from giving it 400 stars, have to do with the formal repetitiveness—some will say slightness or shallowness—and a sweetness or cuteness (though this doesn't prevent her from including anger and sorrow in her work) that the poems indulge in, and they do this rather self-consciously and exuberantly with a subtle humor and artfulness, often resulting in memorable statements like "Shake it little sluggard/ Dress me in watermelon green/ I want to dance putrid shout" ("[Mean Suddenly Bitch Woman]") and "Let me bleed fat and bog/ Slide alongside my boat/ to mix my years with serpent tears" ("[Pretty Headdress On Kidumiel]"). Whether composed of "baby thoughts" or "the ruins of this hour," these poems enlarge the sensorium by intersecting day (things) with night (dreams and the unknown):

[Exhaustion Break Through Challenges]

*Exhaustion break through challenges
it's a swirling sea then calm where
clashing rocks spell moist alarm
& life's absurd toad flaunts its nose
Nine for the bird-boat flags
Nine for the wand-raised hill
Nine for the stone steps crossed
I create you still push hard*

Don't be surprised if you find yourself humming along to the "secret seed of the thing" that is *Your Ancient See Through*—a tune that "throb[s] the way hearts do." It'll make you want to write your own.

—David Hess

a day in the life of p.



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kari edwards

Subpress, 2002, \$12

A *day in the life of p.* features a narrator/ creator, an "I" who breaks in to comment and argue, and one could say this is a novel about the act of writing and the writer's struggle with time, but for me, the story belongs to the very gentle P, and the question of how do those with undefined genitalia identify themselves in a culture that demands that one chooses one sex or the other. In this novel, we go to work with p., get on an airplane, travel to the city of the dead, and pick grapes, but it doesn't matter where we go or what we do, it's who we are with because the real journey is inside p's head. edwards' p. is hyperaware, super self-conscious and an interpreter of signs and signifiers, who must navigate political minefields and endure the hyper-capitalist enslavement to time. The novel is full of ubiquitous clocks that cruelly tick, tick, and steal away time from real humans and creators. The narrator who wears three watches is in a race against time and money equation, "the author is the creator. you created me, but who created you creating you creating me, and in the meantime the authors' bills, visa, shaved leg syndrome goes on creating something ..." In one scene p., being too kind to time, picks grapes with kid gloves and carries on a conversation about "dystonic-posthuman politics" with each vine. Afterwards, the major juice maker subtracts the "MINUS COST PER TIME ELEMENT," leaving whatever with \$1.30 in pocket. Sadly, p. resolves to

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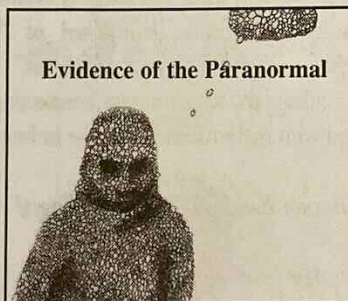
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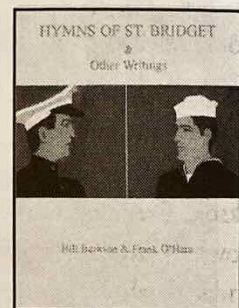


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not be so nice to time in the future.

edwards writes at the edge of narrative to the point of disintegration, yet the novel is fluid, and the language is charged with energy. On the *Narrativity* website, edwards states: "Narrative, isn't that the sort of thing that forms identity, maybe I was thinking of another narrative. Whatever the case ... I see narrative as something that needs to be troubled, discarded or at least sent through the shredder." Hir language is often compared to Burroughs, Stein, and James Joyce, and hir sentences sometimes sound like this:

the grayness started to ascend when ever whenever would descend from the mass transit to the walking edge en route to somewhere, where certain things that could be constrains could never be imagined, where the correct number is without the correct digits, where blue glass and certain collectibles exist in their own time, such as a plastic fred flintstone that one picks up at the drive through finger painting store, or those cantankerous rubber cactus erasers, never craving enough pain, the panic of not knowing the forefront— or when words sit for days.

Humor? Did I say that there are hysterical allegories one featuring a wandering tribe of inbred moose, blindly following the dictates of a tablet to search for Nova Scotia, whale oil and smoked salmon that somehow leads to J. Edgar Hoover and a red gown? Also the hysterically grisly scene at the family supper, when p. faces a writhing pinkish green meat byproduct that wants to be anything but dinner.

edwards encourages us to become gender outlaws, to question our submission to the tyranny of the gender police. a day in the life of p. illustrates the mind fucks, and lengths humans to go to in order to fit in like "nails in the woodwork", and the self-censorship and fear that leads to intolerance among the ambiguous themselves:

p. thought this was better than what they did in ancient rome when the genitalia was undefined, which was a pox on the family, leaving only one option, deposit the child to the elements and wait for nature to take its course, or in some cases have the child picked out of the bushes and turned into a slave. even now with exploitative surgery on genetic

stories to create what was deemed proper and significant, those who refused "corrective procedures" usually had poor incentive reports. p. knew this and knew of others unable to get proper i.d.'s, those who did not pass the n.g.p.t. (normative genetic proficiency test). sometimes spoke of them in conversations with the many personalities that registered with the who's who and when they can show up council, but p. had a personal exception with those that fit into the the woodwork like finishing nails and screamed at those who sought out the basement, and those who were bottled in proper personalities in proper places—this was usually done in sunday rooms and slight places left out of hand. to whatever this was nothing more than a hibernational activity with continued information checks.

Ultimately edwards' impressive, highly original novel makes us aware of the power of language to liberate or suppress, to provide pleasure and promote political discourse. And to think about how willing we are to exchange our right to the pursuit of happiness with voluntarily servitude to capitalism's giant clock. —Brenda Coultas



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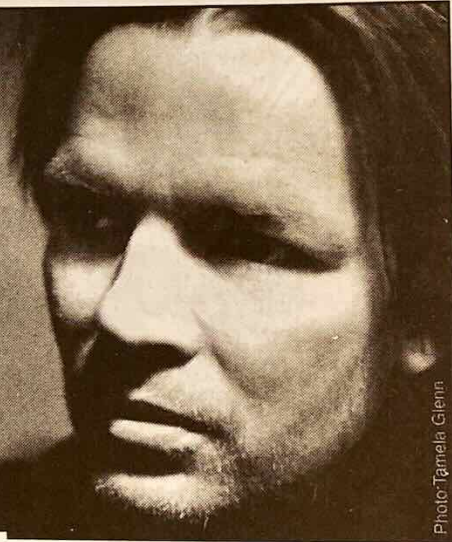


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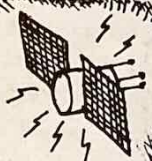
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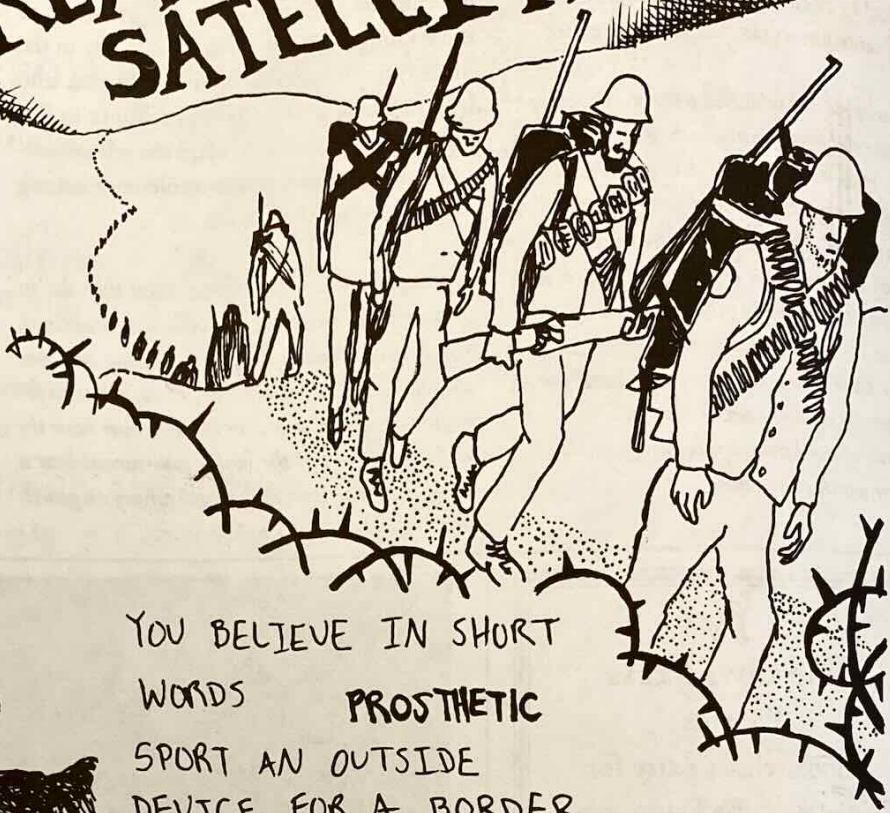


* Tom Clark, *San Francisco Chronicle Book Review*

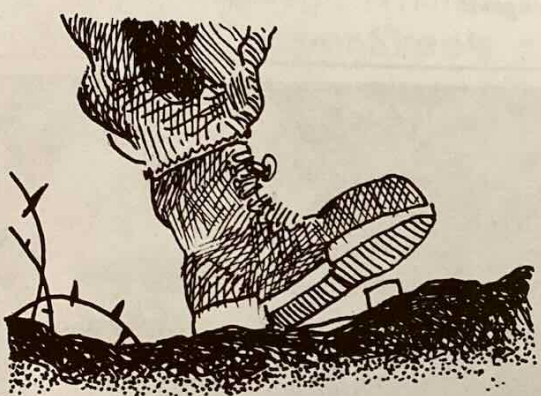
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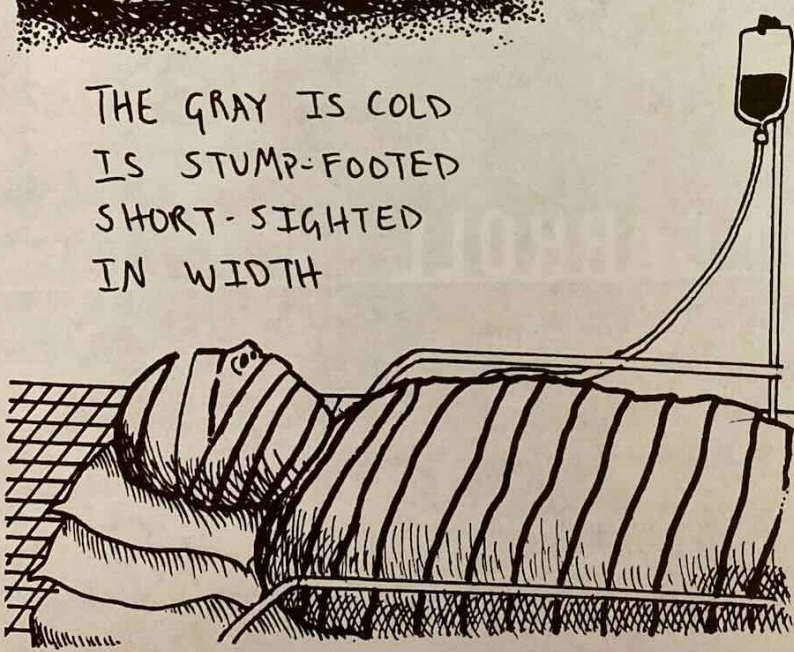
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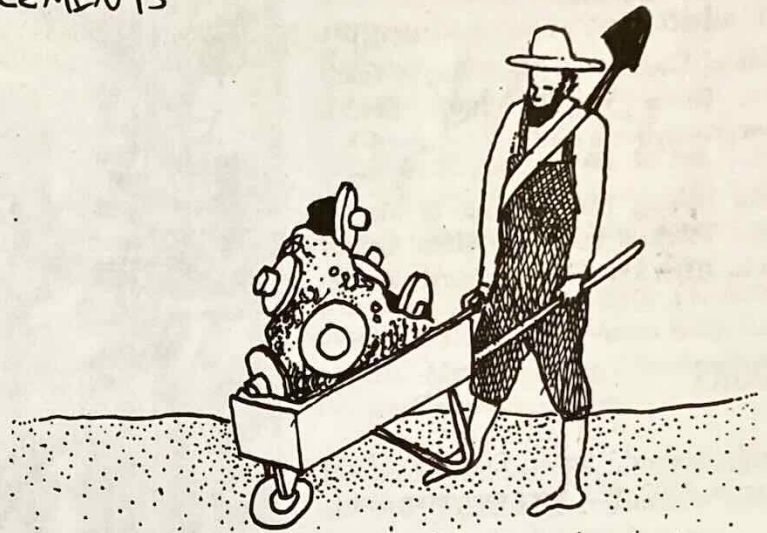
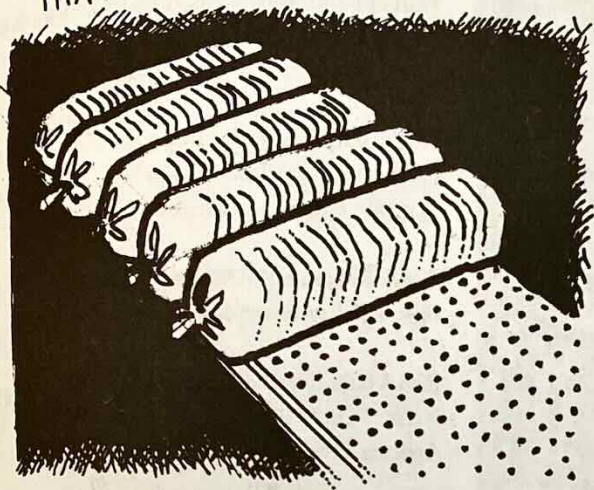
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IS STUMP-FOOTED
SHORT-SIGHTED
IN WIDTH



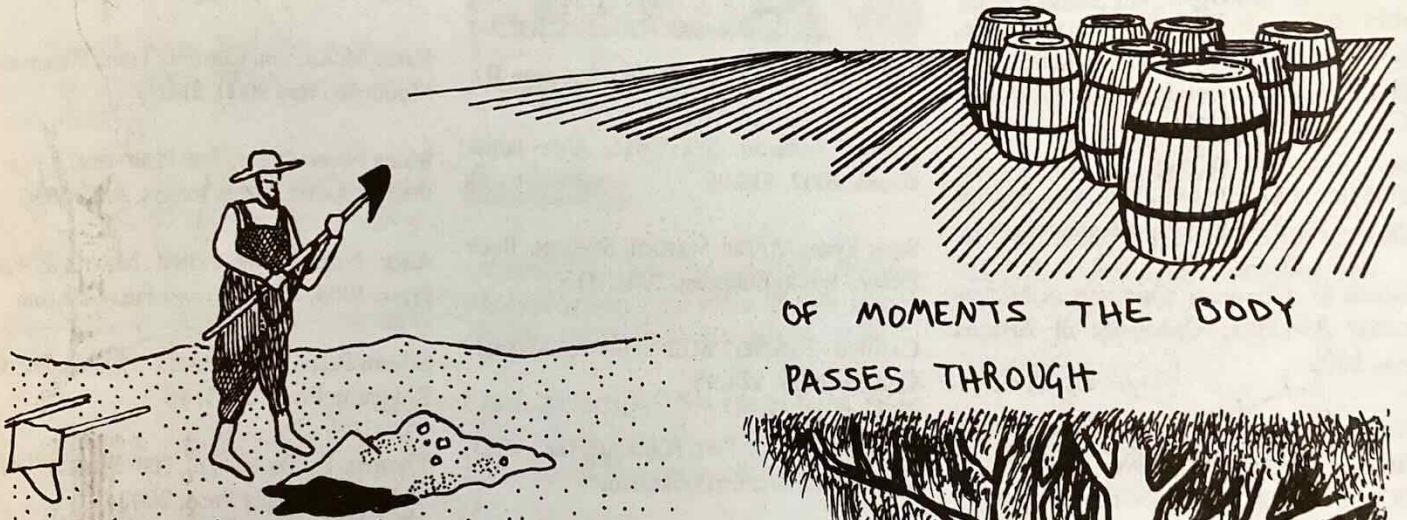
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YOUR VISION



IT'S THE MULTIPLICATION OF ELEMENTS
THAT UNDOES US



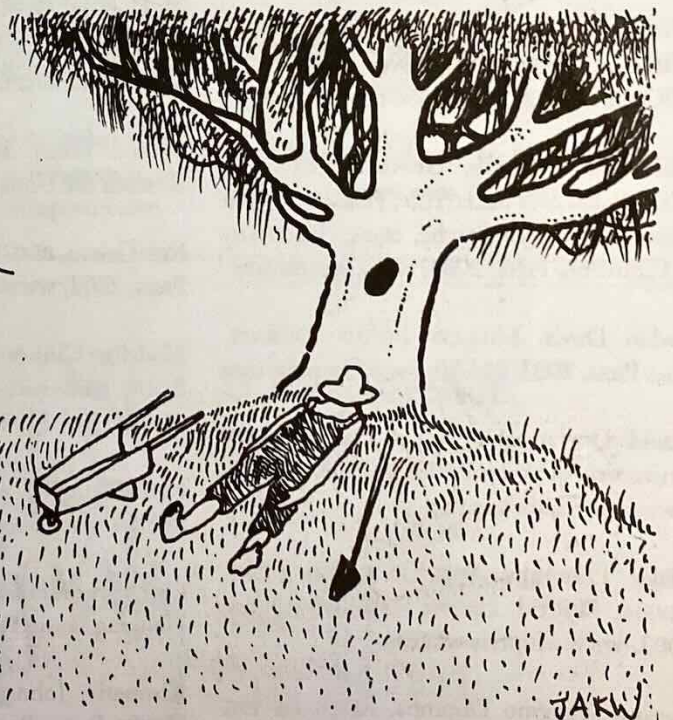
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