THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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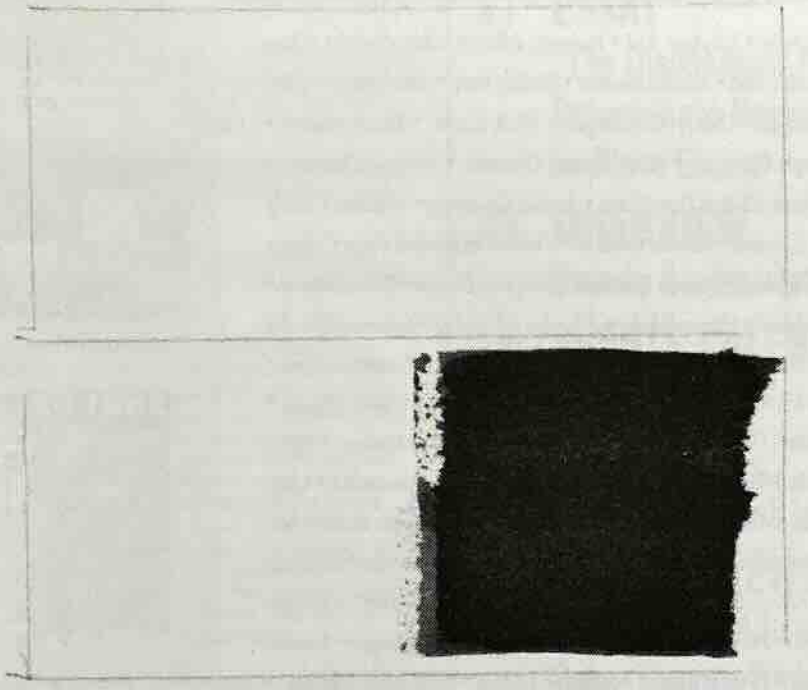

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NYSCA

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

We're getting the guts of the Poetry Project up and running for a 39th year amidst the late-August sounds and smells of protesters and cops hanging about St. Mark's Church in tribute to the arrival of Republican delegates in NYC for their big Bush lovefest, which by now will be old fucking news to you (one hopes) in advance of our next version of a national election. Between dodging plaster chips twirling down from the fifty thousand dollars worth of holes in the Church roof and enduring the latest wave of post-millennial paranoia and greed wearing a costume of politics (graveyard partying being the newest craze on the island that never stops flopping), we will endeavor to bring our faithful audience another nine months of mindful po-splatter and chatter.

And beyond the aching-to-be (non)quality of this combustible political season, which promises not to remind us with any real intelligence or sense of history that we are in the midst of an endless war against "bad," WE WILL put forth two to three poetry readings a week (with cheers to Regie Cabico for returning to rejuvenate the Friday Late-Evening Series), five writing workshops this fall (and perhaps another five in the spring), and every effort to circulate the news as it's written and unwritten around and through us. And despite the fact that The Poetry Project hasn't been declared a national treasure and thus given some kind of medal we can hock for the year's rent, there will be no increases in admissions and membership fees.

We will not attempt to tell you what poetry is, claim to have the only good shit, waste our time with existential hand-wringing about poetry's plight in this age of decreasing collective literacy, or tell you how to get published in the *Flush Left Casket Review*. No. But there will be hundreds of poets, writers, artists, thinkers, citizens, levitators, cranks, crackademics, sweethearts, and demons coming in and out of the doors of the Church this season who may overwhelm you with generosity of spirit and intellect if you get down here and check it out, or measure it from afar. We make space for the work to be, and to be heard. For starters. You are welcome to join us. Have a good Fall.

Love,

Anselm Berrigan

39 KISSES

The old ones are the old ones, as they say, and it's decidedly same old same old round here as we drag ourselves (excitedly) into our 39th year. Not that nothin' has changed, no sir: the fair Maggie Nelson has vacated the Monday Night Coordinator slot in favor of teaching something somewhere, and, as I type, her office (hah!) is being tackily redecorated by our very own Corina Copp (that's Mademoiselle Lundi to you). Those of you who live in New York may well be familiar with Cori through her residencies at Grassroots Tavern and the Telephone Bar, and will understand why we urge her to eat bigger breakfasts this year (to line the stomach, y'know). Go Lundistes! Meanwhile our old pal Regie Cabico has dry-cleaned his Friday Night Series pantaloons, so look out for events of a more partyish flavor from him. And this season's readers are (obviously) different too, although there may be some ontological/stylistic overlaps ("I'm going to finish with a longer piece," "Do I have time for a few more?" etc)—not that we're jaded, yunnerstan, we live for this shit. So, that's the news, dudes. Maybe see you some time on those rare evenings when poetry wins out over TV and alcohol as an option.

GOOD NEWS

A summer correspondent reports: "For many of us, the most wonderful news of the summer was the successful bilateral lung transplant performed on our dear friend Bill Berkson, nine years after being diagnosed with emphysema. Bill says, 'For current and ex-smokers, yearly check-ups for pulmonary function [spirometry] are advised.' It's great to see Bill in good health again. He'll be back teaching at San Francisco Art Institute in the fall. Recently, he and Connie were seen taking mambo lessons. No kidding!"

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Basil King writes: In Ange Mlinko's enthusiastic review of *Black Mountain College*, edited by Vincent Katz (February/March 2004), she incorrectly states that Twombly, Rauschenberg, and Wieners were faculty. Twombly, Rauschenberg, and Wieners attended BMC as students. I'm not faulting Ange. Because it is amazing. They were students! And they became masters of their respective crafts while they were there as students.

STEVE'S STAND

A NOTE FOR STEVE LACY, 1935-2004

STEVE LACY, BOSTON, MA, 2004
PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM RAWORTH

There's no way simply to make clear how particular Steve Lacy was to poets or how much he can now teach them by fact of his own practice and example. No one was ever more generous or perceptive. Although I knew his work from way back when he was recording with Cecil Taylor—"Easy Living" would be one great instance—it's during the time he is playing with Thelonious Monk that it all seems to come together, both his own defining sources and his immaculate mastery. He and the band he got together after Monk's death played Monk like no one else could, the idyllic readers indeed. Years later when I was visiting Connecticut College with Steve, he asked the assembled group, the college's jazz club, if they had a *Fake Book*, i.e., a collection of transcribed scores, which give a range of jazz standards. Someone answers eagerly, "Yes!" and Steve then says, "Throw it away. You have to listen yourself to what was played. Transcriptions only generalize it."

So it's all as ever a fact of attention, of literal listening, of recognizing what's happening each time it does. The several times I had chance to visit him, when he and Irene were still in Paris, there'd always be a pile of books on the floor alongside where he was accustomed to sit. In great good faith he'd often ask me a quick question about some text of criticism or philosophy he'd been into, always leaving me standing there with some lame response like "I haven't got around to that yet, Steve..." Actually I never "got around to it," not in the way he did. He was an old time reader, whose appetite and habits kept him effectually in training the same way a boxer might—he loved it, what books could tell you, and the modes and manners in which they did it. Somewhere back in the '50s there was a time when people read to get senses of possible reality, to get facts, to get hold of what's out there:

...I walk up the muggy street beginning to
    sun
and have a hamburger and a malted and buy
an ugly NEW WORLD WRITING to see
    what the poets
in Ghana are doing these days...

Mal Waldron, then playing piano for Billie Holliday (see "The Day Lady Died" by Frank O'Hara), played a lot with Steve too. "He and Lacy performed together for 42 years, appearing in a quartet on the classic 1958 recording *Reflections*, of all-Thelonious Monk compositions, and most recently on the 1997 duo *Communique*. They appeared together as part of the Jazz at Lincoln Center 'Duets on the Hudson' series in May 2000. Waldron died in December 2002."

What do you know? is always a good question—asked without contest, with no intent to compete. Just *what's happening?*—nothing more. Steve opened a lot for me in the most quiet way. Music was only the beginning. I remember having a meal once with him at some modest restaurant in Paris close to the rue du Temple where they lived—Irene was away—and it had such an easy feel of simple intimacy, the way he responded to people and they to him. It made the world friends without the least blur or sentimentality. I was moved in like sense when he was bleakly in hospital this past June and we were trying to get in touch with Irene by phone from France. The person who answered was his old friend and bass player, Jean-Jacques Avenel. He'd come over from Paris to help Irene. That was Steve's company.

Once, on a visit, Steve asked me what I thought of Kenneth White's poems. In fact, I had never read one. Steve might well have known of Kenneth White, who was a long time in Paris too, but again he was paying attention in ways too often not the case. How else would he know of the Bengali poet Taslima Nasrin, whose work he set? Or Melville, or Beckett, both of whom he paid the like compliment? So here's a Kenneth White poem:

Family Alchemy

When I think of them all:

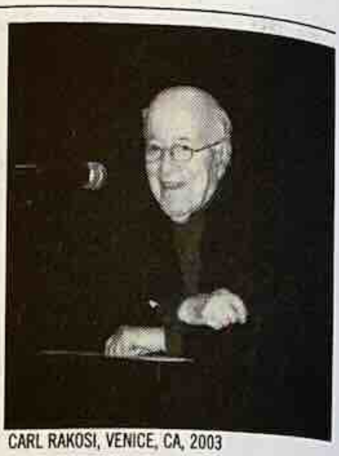
a dancing rascal
a red-bearded fisherman
a red-flag-waver
a red-eyed scholar
a drunken motherfucker...

I take a look in the mirror
and I wonder

Presumptive no doubt but I think Steve would want you to know that Kenneth White's *Open Worlds: Collected Poems 1960-2000* was published a year ago, and that, in a recent interview, Kenneth White had this comment: "I learned to say the most with the least. Then there's rhythm. With regard to that, I can say that I learnt a lot simply by looking at waves and at the clouds in the sky..." Sounds like he knew Steve too?

—Robert Creeley
Waldoboro, Maine
August 8, 2004

REMEMBERING CARL RAKOSI, 1903-2004



CARL RAKOSI, VENICE, CA, 2003
PHOTO COURTESY OF TOM DEVANEY

Miraculously healthy until his final days, Carl Rakosi died at home in the Sunset District in San Francisco on Thursday, June 24, 2004. He was 100 years old and the last of the Objectivist poets. He was with his beloved companion of 15 years, Marilyn Kane, his daughter Barbara, and his son-in-law Dan. Shortly before Carl's death the family played classical music and Dan read him one of his favorite books, Mark Twain's short satiric novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson.*

It is well known how much Carl loved classical music and should surprise no one that Carl loved Twain and this novel so much. The book exemplifies so many of Carl's interests as a poet: his use of a pitch-perfect vernacular; his independent (and on occasion stubborn) streak; his writing of "social significance"; and his use of humor and epigrams.

Twain's hardy sensibility is embedded in Carl's notable "Americana" poems—there were no false steps in word choice, no clever endings, and no adverb seemed ever to escape his attention. In 1933 Carl published "The Lobster," an excerpt here:

Halicystus the Sea Bottle

resembles emeralds
and is the largest
cell in the world.

Young sea horse
Hippocampus twenty
minutes old,

nobody has ever
seen this marine
freak blink.

Highlighting Carl's early Objectivist roots and his vivid grasp of physical things via science and technology, "The Lobster" also echoes Twain's interest in the developing science of fingerprinting. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Twain writes:

> If you will look at the balls of your fingers—you that have very sharp eyesight—you will observe that these dainty curving lines lie close together, like those that indicate the borders of oceans in maps, and that they form various clearly defined patterns, such as arches, circles, long curves, whorls, etc., and that these patterns differ on the different fingers.

What made Carl such a wonderfully incisive and human poet? I keep thinking it was his drive to know the pattern and whorl of each finger exactly—finger by finger, poem by poem. As Carl writes in "Poetry":

Its nature is to look
both absolute and mortal
as if a boy had passed through
or the imprint of his foot
had been preserved
unchanged
under the ash of Herculaneum

Carl's story has been told many times, which is fitting since it's one so worth telling: How he was born in Berlin and spent his early childhood in Baja, Hungary, moving to Kenosha, Wisconsin, at the age of six with his father (his mother and grandmother died in Auschwitz). How in his twenties in the '20s he was published in the famed *The Little Review.* How in the Great Depression he was briefly involved with the Communist party, writing (under a pen name) for *The Nation* and *The New Masses.* How he corresponded with and was published by Ezra Pound (in *The Exile*) and was friends with the young Louis Zukofsky. How for over 35 years he had a career in social work, changing his name to Callman Rawley (less ethnic than Rakosi), eventually directing the Jewish Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis. How a letter, out of the blue, from English poet Andrew Crozier led Rakosi to break his poetic silence of 25 years and return to poetry in the late '60s.

And the story continued. In the middle '80s, The National Poetry Foundation published Rakosi's *Collected Poems and Prose.* And, jumping ahead, in 2002 the Kelly Writers House hosted an audio Web cast honoring Carl on his 99th birthday. Last summer the *American Poetry Review* featured Carl on its cover, publishing eight new poems and an interview. One poem from that feature, "In the First Circle of Limbo," was chosen by Lyn Hejinian for *The Best American Poetry 2004.* Last November Steve Dickison and the Poetry Center hosted a gala celebration for "RAKOSI'S ONE-HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY" at San Francisco's Main Public Library, which attracted nearly 400 people. And though Anne Waldman was unable to attend, Carl mentioned how much he enjoyed a movie she made with Ed Bowes after Carl's poem "Le Menage" with a Jean Redpath song as the soundtrack.

And again in December, Jen Hofer and Fred Dewey organized a reading to celebrate Carl, with a capacity crowd of over 100 people, at Beyond Baroque in Venice, California. Carl gave a solid reading, and sporting a fresh haircut and fine navy sports jacket, he looked as handsome and feisty as ever. Jerome Rothenberg, Paul Vangelisti, Wanda Coleman, and I also participated in that evening along with several others. I read a Rakosi poem entitled "OK," in which the speaker holds forth, offering up and shooting down, possible origins of the phrase "OK."

Your correspondent must be kidding when he says
that OK came to us from Obediah Kelly a freight agent
who used to sign his initial on bill of lading.

Why, there are a dozen explanations more intriguing
such as an invention of the early telegraphers

or variant of okeh a Choctaw word meaning "it is so"

To my mind it is one of Rakosi's most successful "Americana" poems—a masterful coupling of folk and intellectual energies, what Bob Holman once dubbed as "the breathing space of Rakosi." The poem exemplifies the journalist's concern for facts and information transformed by Rakosi's lyric poetical gifts. The poem also displays another winning characteristic: Rakosi's rustic authority. Here, Rakosi reveals there is nothing plain (adjectives, metaphors, analogies not excluded) about his seemingly plain sense of things.

Perhaps the last gift Carl gave me was my friendship with Jen Hofer, who had known Carl since she was two through a fortunate accident of family friendship. Two days before Carl died, when it was clear to everyone that he did not have long to live, Jen wrote: "I know what I am to learn from him…that is, to take the world into myself and give myself out into it open-armed & open-eyed, to be honest & good & whenever possible happy…, but knowing what I am to learn is not the same thing as being able to put that learning into practice." Knowing Carl has affected my life in many ways and I will miss him very much.

READING REPORTS

CONTINUING TO PONDER BORDERS

Continuing to ponder borders, i.e. the wall the Israelis have been building, assaults & bombings on mosques in Iraq, invisible although not territorialized "enemies," the Green Zone, Guantanamo Bay, the pen for protestors in Boston, the unavailability of Sheep Meadow as a protest zone in Central Park, NY, citizens fleeing Darfur's borders, various other identity crises, gay & lesbian marriage rights struggle, genocides, disease, genetic & robotic divisions/explorations, & so on, most troubling—and in that spirit dipped into *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Hugh Elton) to further consider some historic "linearity." Where on earth did the Roman Empire end? The late great Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* also worth a visit in this vein: "Survival is about the connections between things," as is *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom* by Catherine Clinton, Amy Goodman's cogent *The Exception to the Rulers*, & *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism Through Literature* by Miriam Cooke (Routledge). Also finally got through Stein's *Wars I Have Seen* (while sitting amongst a meadow of Rocky Mountain wildflowers) with its alternately irritating/delightful whimsy & brilliant sentences. I always loved Stein's irony re: America being the oldest country because it had entered the 20th century first. How heartbreaking that seems now with the country's "new" empiric global reach. Reverting to childhood star book (H.A. Rey, *The Stars*) as a safe borderless (terrifying! awesome!) zone.

—*Anne Waldman*

OPEN MIKE AT THE FINGER

The Finger is a queer open mike held the third Sunday of every month at Early to Bed, a sex toy shop in Chicago's trendy Andersonville district. I featured there August 15th. The eclectic, enthusiastic audience filled several rows of folding chairs set up in the middle of the shop. The series is curated by underground dyke celebrities Ana Jae and Nomy Lamm. (Nomy was named Woman of the Year by *Ms.* Magazine.) Nomy and Ana Jae were lively hosts, performing ad lib routines between readings. For one hilarious segment, Ana Jae read a passage from a sex toy manual on how to select a dildo, and Nomy grabbed various dildos from store displays and demonstrated whatever Ana Jae was reading about. The Finger is set up as sort of a cabaret, with poetry, memoir, and musical acts. One woman read a *New York Times* profile of Ellen Degeneres and rolled her eyes. A guy with a pink spiky mohawk played a tiny accordion and sang. An art student read esoteric experimental poetry and everybody applauded heartily. The evening ended with Nomy playing a toy xylophone and singing a song that was so sad and lovely it made me teary-eyed.

—*Dodie Bellamy*

BAY AREA POETRY MARATHON

I dropped into one of the summer-long sessions of the Bay Area Poetry Marathon, organized by Donna de la Perriere and Joseph Lease, and was struck most by Yedda Morrison's performance of a new poem from a series she's writing (and making visual work for) called GIRLSCOUT NATION. The piece, "Laura Bush" began prosily enough as a lead-in item on a newscast pushing Bush's garden work. "Laura Bush is systematically removing non-native, invasive plant species from her 30 thousand acre west Texas ranch." The crowd—this liberal San Francisco crowd—gave an automatic snicker at the mere mention of any member of the Bush dynasty. But then our snicker went south. Slowly the poem lifted into motion, as details from the natural world, resembling the baneful locusts at the end of *The Exorcist Part II: The Heretic*, seemed to soar into flight with a busy, hissing whack. Morrison, chic and poised, seemed to be channeling the warp and woof of the empire, its dusts and insects. It was as though the war we're all so outraged about had receded into only one of the wrongs and denaturings we had done to this world in some "epic bio-perversity," some Meret Oppenheim nightmare: "Or a national pocket lined with leaves or a jockstrap of fire and deforestation/ Or the cadets at the root of the bush pumping their axial progressions."

—*Kevin Killian*

CELEBRATING RENEGADE PRESSES IN AMERICA

Alongside 12 other "small" (if not equally so) presses, Belladonna Books (Erica Kaufman and myself) participated in David Kirschenbaum's monthly series at ACA Gallery that goes by the catchy title: *d.a. levy lives: celebrating the renegade press in america*. Each press representative gave a small talk on the press's origins, workings, and driving forces. A short incomplete list of highlights: Ryan Murphy and Patrick Masterson of A Rest Press showed us the gorgeous accidental beauties they created as untrained (or pre-trained since there is much learning by doing in this subset) publishers, and their policy of giving it out for free. Bob Hershon of Hanging Loose talked about his press being older than most of the individuals in the room (b. 1966), and of the name's origin: the original magazine was loose pages in a folder (honoring the transitory nature of poems, make useful what you don't like, pin up what you do). He explained how it can be easier to publish books than magazines since the former aren't perceived as outdated a few months after their publication. Christopher Stackhouse described and defended *Fence*'s editorial decision-making process, followed by a debate as to how "political" *Fence* is and whether or not there is reason to remain skeptical of "high production value." Jordan Davis of *The Hat* revealed his goal of creating a poetry magazine that could enjoyably be read from cover to cover in a couple of hours. Lee Ann Brown spoke of the origins of Tender Buttons in her publication of Bernadette Mayer's *Sonnets*, and of the recent publication of Laynie Brown's *Pollen Memory*. The four editors of *Pom2* (Jen Coleman, Allison Cobb, Sue Landers, Ethan Fugate) illustrated the magazine's chain reaction poetry (all work published in *Pom2* responds to previous work published in *Pom2*) by reading an original piece and three tiers of transformation through other writers. Several, including Jill Magi who runs Soma Press, spoke of fundraising through series subscriptions. Anna Moschavakis of Ugly Duckling Presse noted the clash between that method and spontaneity. She also reported on a conversation in the UDP collective of the possible benefits of remaining "junior" artists, not beholden to systems that claim you. The other presses present were the prolific and elegant Brenda Iijima's Yoyo Labs, Brendan Lorber's waterproof and ubiquitous *Lungfull!*, Open 24 Hours, and my very favorite, Futurepoem.

In the future, it may behoove us to have a series of events focused on particular issues such as problems of distribution, editorial stance, technology, etc. Generally the *d.a. levy lives* events highlight small presses from other cities. August's event had a special New York focus that gave us a rare chance to see/hear what each other is doing. It also celebrated Boog's 13th anniversary. It was happily celebratory, social, and inspiring.

David Kirschenbaum's series is well worth following. Look for the November 4 Kelsey St. (San Francisco) 30th year anniversary celebration.

—*Rachel Levitsky*

READING REPORTS

THE GREAT BOSTON POETRY MASSACRE

The only vacation I took this summer was to Cambridge, MA, for the Boston Poetry Massacre (July 30 to August 1), hosted by Jim Behrle at Wordsworth Books in Harvard Square. Fellow wordsmiths were in attendance from all over the country and it was interesting to place faces and names together, nice to feel a larger sense of community. Behrle was a stellar host. He organized the reading in a really smart way, with plentiful breaks, and the slightly more than 10-minute time limit was perfect.

Sadly, I was only able to stay for Saturday's festivities. But Christina Strong was kind enough to fill me in on what I missed. She described Friday's festivities as "wavering between personal, funny, surrealist New York stuff to sincerity to wordplay." Strong mentioned the range of different work read, including quiet lyricism from Dana Ward and a poem from John Mulrooney about security on the T ("if you see something, say something").

Saturday was so full of new and good work that it is hard for me to narrow it down to "highlights." I'll stick to poets that I heard for the first time.

Mark Lamoureux's verbiage made me appreciate cheeseburgers (although I am a die-hard vegetarian). He also read with Chris Rizzo from their new chapbook, *Grim Little* (Anchorite Press)—a great team.

Tina Brown Celona's wide-eyed reading stance matched my response to her work. "You can't have ego salad without personality toast." It was refreshing to hear someone read work simultaneously gutsy and visual.

Hassen read accompanied by a handheld tape recorder. Her poems were syntactically gorgeous, balancing a certain lyricism with a scientific tone.

Stephanie Young read from a long poem "Age of the Mercenary," a perfect mixture of pop culture, politics, and personality.

Aaron Kunin read from a novel where women were represented by umbrellas. I loved this, especially since umbrellas are actually defined as utensils used to protect.

David Hess, in his cowboy hat, represented as the "Poet of Quietude."

Tracey McTague read work that felt very geological, made me long for that book I used to love on plate tectonics, not because of its technicalities, but because of attention to details I would never notice otherwise.

Alli Warren read her own poems as well as some collaborations with Tim Yu. The range of work presented in a short span of time impressed me greatly.

Strong's reading really stuck out. A moving collage of news headlines teamed up with Strong's own brave lyric were intensely political in an effective way.

On Sunday, to quote Strong, "Michael Carr seemed to be channeling Coolidge if one can do that" and "Noah Eli Gordon just seemed to have endless breath when he belted his poems out." I really wish I had been there for the entire festival.

All in all, I felt privileged to be a part of such a cornucopia of poets from Boston, NYC, Philadelphia, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. Thanks to all those who participated and helped to make the reading the success it was.

—Erica Kaufman

FROM 101 DESIGNS FOR THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

Joe Elliot

The world's largest mosque.

A goat preserve. Tastefully landscaped and fenced in. You pay a fee. You are given a goatsherd costume, are allowed to herd goats, ride a camel.

An enormous self-contained vertical metropolis given over to the Palestinian people. Here, at least, they won't be policed and shot at.

Guilt Away Amusement Park.

An Airstrip.

A sky-high bullseye.

An enormous garden dedicated to Iraqi and Afghani flora, especially those that are disappearing.

The Sleep Center. As the war on terrorism deepens and begins to grow grey hairs, the collective lack of conscience will become enlarged and burdensome and sleep will begin to overtake us. No one will be able to go more than a block or two without napping.

Leave it. Don't touch it. Don't move a single piece.

24/7 Spiritual Fact Propaganda Machine. The dissolution of the body, the unreality of the ego, the blindness of the mind, the loneliness of the tomb, etc., and yet the miraculous flight of the hummingbird, for instance, is blared from loudspeakers as an antidote to the unremitting propaganda of materialism that is not seen as such.

The New U.S. Treasury. A center for valuables. Once a year each citizen, perhaps on his birthday, perhaps on a date allotted to her by the ministers of greater vision, makes a pilgrimage to this spot, bearing his most prized possession. A ring, an old box, a painting, a sports car, a mink coat, a first edition, a CD, a pair of Super Bowl tickets, a child, etc. There is ritualized waiting and anxiety accompanied by scripted discussions and ejaculations, and then the participant trades his treasure in for nothing in return. A brief period of mourning is followed by the dance of joy, every step of which has been rehearsed for maximum effect, as the burden is released and the participant set free. All proceeds go to the community. This is where you physically meet your fellow Americans.

An exhibition hall for designs for the World Trade Center such as these that will revolve and as our understanding evolves and remains elastic and compassionate so that no single response becomes instituted, ossified, and turned into a hammer.

FROM 101 DESIGNS FOR THE WORLD TRADE CENTER

A Second Pentagon, only this time in the shape of a huge star. Here, the newly recognized arm of the economy will do its highly publicized paramilitary training. Spin-off products such as mercenary action figures will be merchandized to further fund this private enterprise and relieve the taxpayer somewhat. Here also, studies will be undertaken and seminars held that will examine the relationships between preparing and opening up markets and destabilizing popular governments.

Exact replicas of the first two, only hollow.

A huge model of downtown Manhattan itself on such a scale so that the streets are hip wide and you can negotiate that like a leviathan. Each time a real estate transaction takes place a small yellow light blinks and a sleigh bell rings on the site. Frank Sinatra plays non-stop.

A munitions plant. Specializes in the manufacture of a new bullet that has a camera chip embedded on its tip. Each day newly disappeared citizens of the world appear in the on-going movie that is broadcast on the enormous billowing sail of the retro tour boat that circles Manhattan twice or thrice a day.

A huge playground, a portion of which is an amphitheater in which selected children do battle to the death over questions of autonomy, ownership of toys, and extent of realm. If the combatants stop and try to talk it over, the parents are required to shout, "Use your hands, not your words!" from the nice wooden bleachers in the shade of tall trees.

A house of mirrors. The only way to keep yourself from becoming lost is to secure a guide. The only way to secure a guide is to leave your self-importance at the door. There are metal trays into which you dump your unreality and from which you can, if you insist, retrieve it afterwards.

A towering twisting steel and glass structure that reaches up to heaven where the souls of those lost now reside as a testament to the undying courage and resiliency of this great nation . . . DUH!

Joe Elliot is the author of Opposable Dumbs, *forthcoming from Subpress. The complete* 101 Designs for the World Trade Center *will be available online at www.fauxpress.com/e this fall.*

THE DISOBEDIENT POETICS OF DETERMINATE NEGATION

by Steve Evans

Kevin Davies begins his brilliant long poem, *Lateral Argument*, with an epigraph from the historian of Buddhist thought and practice Paul Williams: "Persons exist/ as practical ways of speaking about// bundles." One might say the same of poems, at least of the kind Davies has been composing since his dash-and-bracket dizzy debut *Pause Button* came out from Vancouver's Tsunami editions in 1992, followed eight years later by the five-phased guerilla exercise in dismantling the rhetorical tools of "the neo-feudal / info order" that was *Comp. Lateral Argument*, published in a striking chapbook edition by Baretta in 2003 after having been available online at Alterran Poetry Assemblage since late 2002, now joins these earlier works in proving that there is no quicker, subtler, or more grimly hilarious mind at work in poetry today, nor one more adept at arranging bundles of utterances into jagged, collapsible totalities that stage the dramatic undoing of persons and groups abandoned by or evicted from an absurd and unsurvivable social order.

Stitched together of asymmetrical sequences—some as brief as a half-dozen words, others extending to 30 or more variously-indented lines—*Lateral Argument* shifts scenes, subjects, and situations at a pace quickened by frequent enjambment right to the verge of, though without ever crossing into, cognitive blur. But for all that is fleeting, happenstantial, and radically alterable in this textual universe given freely to science fiction-like postulations of worlds that resemble while decentering and relativizing our own, there are a handful of dark constants: human subjects abandoned to merciless natural forces ("The plane a buzzing dot/ against sub-Arctic mountains in the distance./ No bug spray even./ Not cold, but it will/ be cold"); the natural world besieged by human agency ("Hey, let's bury our radioactive garbage in the desert for/ several thousand years"); the individual cast out of the social ("A familiar weight presses down on the shoulders// aiming you toward the receptacle"); the social order visible principally in the irrational contagions it serves to circulate ("Ledges of the pockmarked earth give way/ to fog psychosis, a ringing phone/ insider a solid crystal cube/ Eager to fall in love, to retreat to the car barn/ The amusements out of control") and the surveillance grid it continues to perfect ("a young-adult global/ civilization, a meta-literate culture with time on its/ prosthetic tentacles, at this point slightly more silicon/ than carbon, blinking vulnerably in the light of its own/ radiant connectedness").

If the *Heart Sutra*—which Davies only half-jokingly cites as a source text for *Lateral Argument* in a recent interview with Marcella Durand ("it's actually a very loose translation")— answers the direness of human existence by counseling the nullity of phenomena and the wisdom of abiding in an appearance-negating awareness that "form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form," this self-abnegating stance is not so much offset or balanced by, as held in a state of irresolvable tension with, another, more politicized take on the social distribution of suffering in class society. By his own account, Davies is a "kind of anti-Buddhist Buddhist, plus a commie and the commie thing takes precedence." These competing orientations both imply a break with the immediacy of socio-political, physical, and psychological givens, but the seriously intended (if humorously phrased) assertion that "the commie thing takes precedence" stands, at least as I read it, as a deliberate refusal of the political quietism often associated with the Buddhist tradition.

But this is not to say that Davies's participation in what I call the disobedient poetics of determinate negation—a term I'll try to unpack a bit in a moment—stems from any naïve illusions regarding the political efficacy of poetry. Asked by Durand whether *Comp.* should be thought of as a "political argument," Davies responds that he thinks not: "I'm reminded of Ed Dorn saying something like 'You're handing me this piece of paper and telling me it's political? It's about as political as a gopher hole.' I'm totally agnostic about the ability of unpopular verse to affect change in the political world. I just don't believe it. I don't think for a second, oh, here I am striking a blow against capital. Political change is not made by the choices that we're making in verse. We're doing this so that certain possibilities can exist in the world. So that works of art can exist, temporarily, and they'll certainly bear traces of our political vision because if they don't they're no good."

The statement is very near to one by Lambert Zuidervaart, a commentator on Theodor Adorno's scandalously opaque *Aesthetic Theory*, who lays out Adorno's position with admirable clarity in the following few sentences: "as reconstellations of what exists, the best modern works are determinate negations of contemporary social reality. They recollect what society represses, and they anticipate what society and its members could become if domination would really turn into reconciliation. Even though the prevailing relations of production continually thwart utopian possibilities, modern art gives a negative testimony for the possibility of the possible."

In building up a working definition of the disobedient poetics of determinate negation, something I've been intermittently occupied with over the past year or two, I've looked closely at the work of a number of poets—from Charles Reznikoff and Louis Zukofsky, through John Cage and Frank O'Hara and Amiri Baraka, to Gil Scott-Heron, Robin Blaser, Jayne Cortez, Craig Watson, Alice Notley, Bob Perelman, as well as somewhat younger writers like Heather Fuller, Daniel Bouchard, Robert Fitterman, and Kristin Prevallet—in an attempt to identify some of the strategies that might distinguish a poetics of *determinate negation* from a poetics of indeterminacy that has, for all its continued productivity in many hands, shown itself conformable to the apolitical or post-political fabulations (wherein, typically, a weird thing happens to an isolated consciousness in an abstract space stripped of social coding) that currently glut the slick biannuals.

The primary strategies of determinate negation that I've been able to identify—stooping to assonance, they might be ticked off thus: naming, framing, evaluating and position-taking, negating, and anticipating—all involve engagements with, within, against, and across limits. Some of those limits are textual, and the related strategies involve steering the hermeneutic process so that plausible interpretations of signs that are always at least potentially polysemous can be determined with relative confidence. Others involve the limits imposed on human subjects by the social order, i.e., the everyday determinations of individual and collective identity that stunt certain forces and overdevelop others. Where these latter limits are concerned, the process of determinate negation involves the second of a two-phase operation described in Hegel's *Science of Logic* (and henceforth updated by everyone from Frantz Fanon to Jean-Luc Nancy and Slavoj Zizek). "To negate the negation" means to cancel, undo, or transcend the category that repressively defines and delimits an identity, something Marx wished to do for the category of "worker," Fanon for "the wretched of the earth," and feminism for the category of "woman."

THE DISOBEDIENT POETICS OF DETERMINATE NEGATION

A dramatization of such an act can be seen in Jayne Cortez's poem "Rape," in which two rape victims of the 1970s— Inez Garcia and Joanne Little—are celebrated for responding with lethal force against their aggressors ("and once again/ from coast to coast/ house to house/ we celebrated day of the dead rapist punk/ and just what the fuck else were we supposed to do?"). As a powerfully focused ideological intervention, Cortez's poem enters into and attempts to win a specific argument concerning the legitimate use of deadly force, likening the women to a "department of defense" in wartime and thus conferring the same legitimacy on their violence as is arrogated to itself by the state. Struggling to negate the moral argument that no matter how horrible rape is, it does not warrant the use of lethal force in response to it, the poem stages itself—using a gesture found also in Frank O'Hara's "Ode: Salute to the French Negro Poets"—as an address, and more specifically as an interrogative: "*and just what the fuck else was she supposed to do?*" This question, appearing at the close of each of the poem's two main sections (the doubling demonstrates the systematicity of misogynist violence and the necessity of responding to it at a structural level), is by no means rhetorical: it is aimed at determining what might be the real, socially existing and socially actualizable *alternatives* to this use of lethal force.

Cortez's poem employs many of the primary strategies of the disobedient poetics of determinate negation: it *names* particular human subjects and *situates* them in historical time and geo-political space; it *frames* the conditions these subjects encounter, *evaluates* those conditions, and *takes a position* on them; the work of *negation* is not limited to the acts represented in the poem, but manifests itself in the poem's counterfactual *displacement* of events from the strict economy of contradiction-riddled real time onto the plane of a symbolic address (the poem as a whole, and specifically the apostrophic "and just what the fuck else was she supposed to do") that *anticipates* a future in which these contradictions no longer determine human action (just as O'Hara's "Ode: Salute" projects a simultaneously post-colonial *and* post-homophobic future from a moment in the late 1950s when each goal could be separately envisioned but hardly anyone could imagine them to be inextricably linked).

Lateral Argument employs many of the same strategies seen in the Cortez poem, but because of its extended duration (27 pages), and the extreme rapidity with which its frames shift, its staging of radically-counterfactual consciousness has an amplitude that puts it nearer to a long project like Alice Notley's book-length poem *Disobedience* than to Cortez's short poem. The phrasal units of *Lateral Argument*, though often darting in unexpected directions, admit of a fairly high degree of semantic resolution, but local intelligibility is coupled to and troubled by strategies of non-narrative, non-syllogistic juxtaposition that create a jagged, striated whole, the coherence of which must be sought not in the events staged but in the staging and arranging consciousness operating out of frame.

If we track what Edward Said called "the structure of attitude and reference" (*Culture and Imperialism*, Knopf, 1993) operative in *Lateral Argument*—that is, its manner of projecting and populating a world—we find the attitude to be one of generalized disobedience (at one point matter itself is radicalized: "the load-/ bearing walls composed of particles/ who prefer not to, who strike against the conditions,/ who saw nothing and ain't talking") to which a specific atlas and census-report have been matched. That census turns up—in addition to the many nameless and perhaps in the Beckettian sense unnameable persons in varying states of unsheltered duress—a large number of named historical and contemporary figures, and the atlas flips from Quebec to Langley, the East River to Kamloops, Mexico to Kyrgystan. On one page, Tito "dream[s] of access/ to the Albanian shore," on another Franco feels his "ear hair" rustled by the breeze generated by "a moth / in New Zealand," and, towards the close, from the other side of the political spectrum, three members of the "Squamish Five"—jailed by Canadian authorities for the 1982 bombing of the Cheekeye Dunsmuir Hydro substation on Vancouver Island and other acts of "propaganda by the deed"—are referred to by their first names and celebrated for having very pointedly negated, with several hundred pounds of dynamite, an imminent ecological threat.

Mallarmé may have claimed that "the only bomb I am aware of is a book" ("*le livre c'est le bombe*") but in the book that is *Lateral Argument*, the culmination of radical consciousness in "Direct Action" (as the group called itself) establishes a standard, at least semi-seriously intended, for significant political intervention, even if a taste for politically irrecuperable destruction can also be detected in the lines: "But at least they can look back from old age and think,/ yeah, goddamn it, we blew something up, we blew/ something up, didn't we? The rest of us, what did we blow up?/ A few hairdryers in domestic rages, correct?/ Not really the same thing."

The brilliantly orchestrated acts of radical consciousness that crackle across every intricately latticed page of *Lateral Argument* do not amount to "the same thing" as an *attentat*—as Dorn, Davies, or anyone who has given serious thought to the matter will rightly conclude—but these acts of consciousness do carry an indispensable truth content of their own. By their swiftness and acuity, their precise articulation, their cathartic humor, and their unswaying hostility to dominance and the agents of its reproduction, they serve to negate the distractions, delusions, and complicities of everyday life. Fucking with the structures of conformist thought, negating them on their own ground, these acts of "negative testimony to the possibility of the possible" belong more to a poetics than to a politics, but they are not not political.

Notes: Kevin Davies's interview with Marcella Durand appeared in The Poker 3 *(2003).* Lateral Argument *presently lacks a distributor, but the sequence will be included in the forthcoming Edge book,* The Golden Age of Paraphenalia. *Lambert Zuidervaart's book, Adorno's* Aesthetic Theory, *was published by MIT in 1991. Jayne Cortez's poem "Rape" was first published in her collection* Firespitter *(1982).*

Steve Evans teaches contemporary poetry, poetics, and critical theory at the University of Maine, where he also coordinates the New Writing Series and works for the National Poetry Foundation. He tends a Web site at www.third-factory.net. "The Disobedient Poetics of Determinate Negation" is a revised and abridged version of a talk that Evans gave at the Poetry Project on May 7, 2004.

BRENDA COULTAS

Tells the Truth TO MARCELLA DURAND

When the news hit the city that Brenda Coultas's book, *A Handmade Museum* (Coffee House Press, 2003), had been selected by Lyn Hejinian for the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America, there was all-night jubilation and dancing in the streets. Well, not exactly, but among poets there was the rare feeling that once in a great while all goes right in the world and that awards are given to the writers who most deserve them. Coultas is a poet of origins and a remarkably original poet: she starts with matter most overlooked by us preoccupied, overloaded souls, finds the right, new, fresh language for it, and then moves on to find the language for us preoccuped, overloaded souls who are ourselves overlooked. A contemporary transcendalist, a non-judgmental "transparent eyeball," and a democrat as generous in her spirit as in her writing, Coultas finds an abandoned beanie baby as deserving of attention as the almost unbearably "poignant formation" (as Hejinian writes in her note for the award) of people writing their wishes down on small pieces of paper on the soon-to-be-"developed" (or ruined) Bowery. In writing and in life, Coultas has a resume few can match, and has worked as a farmer, a carny, a taffy maker, a park ranger, and as the second woman welder in Firestone Steel's history. Her previous publications include *A Summer Newsreel*, *Early Films*, and *Boy Eye*.

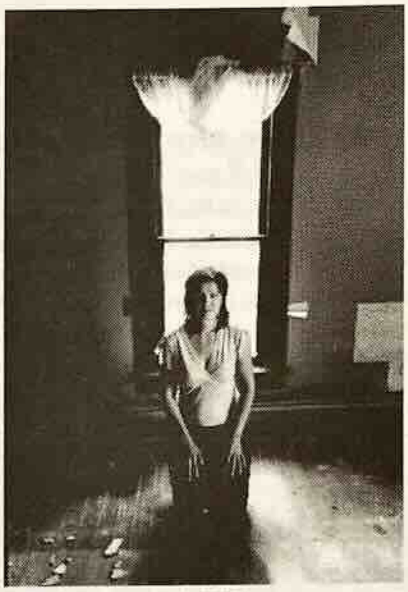


PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB GWALTNEY

Marcella Durand: When did you start writing?

Brenda Coultas: I tried to write when I first started reading at age six or so. I read all the time, I was totally in love, I read under the covers. I think that when I was around 10 or 12, sixth grade or so, I tried to write a novel, but then I never got past the first page.

MD: A one-page novel?

BC: It wasn't intentional. I didn't know about white space. I didn't know you could use paragraphs to move things along. I recorded everything. *And then Marcella adjusted her glasses, and then she smiled and thought to herself, Oh, I've got a live one here.* Like I couldn't figure out that I could have a blank space. It drove me crazy. I couldn't do it because I was going nuts. I was trying to describe everything, the green grass and the color of the formica table. Then I had these little projects, like I'm going to read every book in the library. I'm going to read all the plays written this year. I could never quite fulfill those goals.

MD: What sorts of things did you describe?

BC: Daily life. I remember being really angry at the way country people were portrayed, so I thought I would write about them in a way that they aren't just rednecks or fools. I thought I'd write about Spencer County. I remember wanting even as a very young person to write about the Midwest and rural life where the characters were not stereotypes. Something that showed the complexities.

MD: But you're an urban poet, too. How do the two come together?

BC: Bowery is Dutch for "farm." When you're in the East Village, you think of Peter Stuyvesant or Peter Stuyvesant's farm—at least, I am. People who pass by Peter Stuyvesant's statue every day, like we do, probably think more about it just because they're on his burial grounds and his farms, walking on his farm.

MD: So in a way, New York is part of the country.

BC: I've been in NYC almost 10 years now, so I pay attention to what's going on around me, or at least I try to. The corny thing I always tell you, you know, about writing from the heart, usually means pretty schmaltzy, schlocky work. But I think you have to have a gentleness toward people, even if you're pissed off or ranting. I think the job of a poet is to uplift and to criticize. Certainly, we need lots of criticism right now. Maybe the people don't so much, but the government does.

MD: Not the poets!

BC: Not the poets, for god's sake. But poets can uplift people. People turn towards poetry in times of sorrow. Funerals, particularly, a time of very deep sorrow, many people turn to poetry. I had a conversation with Jo Ann [Wasserman] and David [Cameron] and Eleni [Sikelianos] and David was asking us, well, which poet did you turn to during 9/11? All of us thought of Whitman. He was a poet of Brooklyn, lower Manhattan, that particular area, the older part of the city. He was a democratic poet, which I love about him. His inclusiveness and his openness, his candor. It's the 19th century and he's writing about getting naked and sleeping with young men.

MD: Do you try to be candid in your work? I think of your work as particularly truthful. It's interesting that you said you tried to describe everything. I still see that.

BC: In some ways. Obviously, you learn not to tell on yourself. You have to be protective of your own self. I was way too candid in my 20s before I became a writer. Just in my personal life. Too much information. I've learned to withhold, or at least not to say. Just to be more private. I realized why people change their names, so that they can write candidly. I should have changed my name so I would be able to write candidly about my family. Since I didn't, I have to think. Invading my own privacy is one thing, but if I talk about my brothers and my sisters, I have to think about them. It's not just me. Did you change your name?

MD: No. Kristin [Prevallet] says it has to be close to your own name. Like mine would be "Cella And." Yours could be "Enda Oultas."

BC: That's horrible! Usually you take the maiden name of your mother. It's too late for me. What am I going to write about my family now?

writing workshops

at the POETRY PROJECT

AT ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY

Surrealism and the Radical Imagination - Janet Hamill

Tuesdays at 7 pm: 5 sessions begin October 12th

"'Surrealism and the Radical Imagination' will examine the complex nature of imagination and its elements - illusionism, unreality, appearance, magic, phantasm, fancy etc. - and the capacity of imagination to mediate between the world of objective phenomena and subjective experience. Through means of Surrealist games and methods, participants will be encouraged to cultivate their own imaginations and enhance their imaginative writing skills. A desire to rescue poetry from some of its present unimaginative abuses is the only requirement." Janet Hamill has authored 4 books, most recently *Lost Ceilings*, a collection of prose poems. A second CD of words and music, in collaboration with the band Moving Star, is slated for release in early 2005.

Brainlingo: Writing the Voice of the Body - Edwin Torres

Tuesdays at 7 pm: 5 sessions begin November 30th

"As artists we create our own communication. How we listen affects how we speak. How we see our language affects how our voice is heard. Where the senses meet each other is where poetry can begin. This workshop will be an active creative laboratory that will explore how we communicate by exercising the languages inside us. This is an active writing workshop requiring a bottomless well and an open mind." Edwin Torres's books include *The All-Union Day Of The Shock Worker*, *Fractured Humorous*, and *I Hear Things People Haven't Really Said*, and his CDs include *Holy Kid* (Kill Rock Stars) and *Novo* (www.oozebap.org).

Writing in the Stepmother Tongue - Oz Shelach

Thursdays at 7 pm: 10 sessions begin October 14th

"Many of us today write in English without being at home. A disability? An advantage? How and when to adapt, defy, write with an accent, subvert, merge in, stand out? We'll play games devised by and for non-native writers in English; read worldwide fiction; use supportive criticism. I hope all of us will come out with deeper confidence in making our writing effective by drawing on the richness of our difference." Oz Shelach moved to NY after working as a journalist in Israel and writing in Hebrew for many years. His novel, *Picnic Grounds*, was published by City Lights in 2003.

Having It Both Ways: The Prose Poem - Larry Fagin

Fridays at 7 pm: 10 sessions begin October 15th

"A workshop designed for writers of both poetry and short prose (any genre), who are interested in investigating the boundary between the two areas, or those who have discovered such boundaries to be less than trustworthy. We will read (Baudelaire, Stein, Ponge, Ashbery, Lydia Davis, Killarney Clary, et al), exchange ideas (story, description, image, abstraction, the personal), and refine our writing with an eye toward publication. Weekly reading and writing assignments." Larry Fagin edits Adventures in Poetry (books) and *Sal Mimeo* (magazine). He teaches "experimental poetry" at New School University. *Coma Rock*, a prose poem, will appear as a chapbook in Winter 2004.

Rocks and Ideas - Rachel Levitsky

Saturdays at 12 pm: 10 sessions begin October 16th

"William Carlos Williams famously said, "Say it, no ideas but in things," a line that can be variously interpreted. In our virtual era, ideas and things may a) be difficult to distinguish and b) have a tendency to morph into each other. In this workshop we will experiment with things while having big fat ideas. We'll look at other important modern and postmodern works like Anne Waldman's *Iovis*, Harryette Mullen's *S*PeRM**K*T* and Will Alexander's *Asia and Haiti* (and others) to help us along." Rachel Levitsky's books include *Under the Sun*, *Cartographies of Error*, and *Dearly*. She is the founder and co-curator of the Belladonna* Series in New York City.

The workshop fee is $300, which includes a one-year individual Poetry Project membership and tuition for any and all fall and spring classes. 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. 10th St., NY, NY 10003. For more information please call (212) 674-0910 or e-mail info@poetryproject.com.

www.poetryproject.com

MD: Tell me about your family.

BC: Well, in Spencer County [in southern Indiana], my family had a small political dynasty going, a hillbilly dynasty. My uncle was the mayor of the county seat for 22 years, before he went to jail for buying votes. I think they'd give you a bottle of whisky, or a goat, or a chicken with your vote. It was the old days.

MD: When were the old days?

BC: My grandfather was a local politician after the Great Depression and then my uncle, his namesake, became a politician. They were all Republicans.

MD: Are they all Republicans today?

BC: It's like they were born Republicans and therefore they are Republicans. There's no questioning. It's not about philosophy. It's more like, it's my team. Obviously, many people are like that.

MD: Do you think that can change?

BC: Not all of my siblings are Republicans. My brother who was a Republican joined the Union and is now—probably an Independent or a Democrat, but mostly a cynic. One of my sisters is a Democrat.

MD: Do you have a vision of America?

BC: I have a transcendentalist or utopian impluse. I'm very attracted toward ideas of community. I guess I'm idealistic—the world could be a better place. People could be more generous with each other. Governments could be more responsible. A lot of the work I'm doing now is going back to the 19th century, looking at Abraham Lincoln. I grew up 10 miles from the Lincoln homestead, so he was always a large figure in my life. I didn't realize until now that I'm 45 that this was so. Recently, I've been thinking about what difference he might have made in how I think, as opposed to other Midwesterners. I was reading a book about abolitionists living on the Ohio River and this town Ripley, Ohio, and the problems they had with slave masters. Slave hunters would cross the river into free territory and look for runaway slaves. They (the Kentuckians) tried to enact laws to punish the Ohio abolitionists. It was insane, these horrible slavemasters. They were running the country. Imagine knowing that one fourth of the population across the river from you were enslaved, and that anyone who interfered was at risk of being arrested or murdered by a mob. I plan to visit the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center that opened in Cincinnati this summer.

MD: This idea of America being on one side of the river and watching this horror unfold on the other side of the river is riveting.

BC: I was reading through the Naropa University Summer Writing Program catalogue and the first week was about borders. I started thinking "borders." This border I grew up on was still very vivid to me, but I hadn't explored it. It was still part of who I was, living on the free side and crossing this border every day as an ordinary act, which 139 years ago would have been going into another country, the Confederacy. I started to think about the differences between people raised on the free side and people raised on the slavery side and to explore what sort of difficulties people (free or enslaved) were faced with during that time. In winter slaves froze or drowned while trying to walk over [the Ohio River] in the middle of the night. Steamboats came through that the slavetraders would stop and get on board trying to find runaways. It was horrible, horrible.... If you go down to Spencer county, there's a plaque that shows where Lincoln took off on his flatboat trip to New Orleans where he first saw slavery and he said, I'm going to end this. He swore that he would destroy slavery. I guess maybe in some sense it gives me some hope that someone like Lincoln would come out of this country.

MD: He wrote poetry, too.

BC: And he was a poet! He was pretty amazing. He was big and strong, but melancholy, very thoughtful.

MD: I just can't dispose of America altogether. There are such beautiful things and then such awful things.

BC: It's like anything else. You have to be able to reconcile the contradictions. What is it when you can hold two opposing Americas in your mind?

MD: Paradoxical?

BC: They're both the same country.

MD: How does this connect to your work on ghosts?

BC: A lot of it has to do with my childhood. Ghost stories that I heard growing up. I had cousins who saw monsters.

MD: Were these local monsters?

BC: Yes, there was the Spotsville monster, the Silverdale road monster. Teenagers especially would see monsters.

MD: So there were haunted areas?

BC: Border areas particularly. In thickets or woods, people would see Sasquatch-type monsters. The weird thing is that Evansville, Indiana, is a hotbed for UFO sightings. I don't know why, but southern Indiana is where a lot of UFOs are seen. Maybe it's culturally isolated, or maybe there really are UFOs. I knew a guy who said he got abducted. He told me his abduction occurred when he and a friend were relic-hunting and they came across an open grave.

MD: What do you mean by relic-hunting?

BC: Looking for native American relics. There are a lot of relic hunters in southern Indiana because in that area along the Ohio were Mississipian cultures. Mound-builders.

MD: Are they related to the Hopewell mounds in Ohio?

BC: Could be. I'm talking about Angel Mounds in Evansville, Indiana which flourished from 1100-1450 AD. There are a lot of mounds and a lot of burial grounds and archaeological sites in that part of the country. Some are documented and some are not. Usually when they build a highway they come across something and they're required to have an archaeologist look at it. It's dense with Native American presence.

MD: How do you deal with skeptics?

BC: It's part of the human experience. Whether it's physically true or not is irrelevant, but more that it's emotionally and psychologically true. People want to see or do experience—they actually are having experiences—but whether they are hallucinations or what we call reality is not proven. I'm interested in both. Are they really real? It's part of what makes things more interesting. I want there to be something more, even though it's really scary.

MD: How do you investigate this in poetry?

BC: A lot of it through reading UFO literature and Web sites. Then talking to people who have seen them. Quite a few people have seen UFOs or experienced UFOs, or some sort of paranormal incident. The only kind of criteria I have is that the person believes it to be true. They may be found wrong later, but this is something they believe to be true. It's an eyewitness account, or even a secondhand account of an experience. I think it's fascinating whatever it is. It's part of the great mysteries: is there other life out there? Is there life after death? Does personality continue or do you join a collective consciousness or do you just become food for worms?

MD: Do you follow standard investigatory procedures? Do you use Ed Sanders's techniques?

BC: I was a student of Ed's and his teaching assistant at Naropa. I investigated a murder. A friend of mine's mother had been on a jury. The murder took place 75 miles from me, and I had never heard of it. A guy had kidnapped two women. One of them was killed and one of them escaped and that's how he got found out. I talked to my friend's mother. I think he

POETRY PROJECT

EVENTS_CALENDAR

OCTOBER_NOVEMBER 2004

SEPTEMBER

22 & 29 WEDNESDAY

"Hell," an opera by Eileen Myles & Michael Webster

The workshop premiere of an opera in one act by poet and 1992 presidential candidate Eileen Myles with composer and recording artist Michael Webster, and directed by Simon Leung with sets by Beth Stephens and costumes by Milena Muzquiz. Loosely based on Dante's *Inferno*, *Hell* is about public speech, corporate silence, global politics, and poetry.

27 MONDAY

Open Reading: Sign-up at 7:45 pm [8 pm]

OCTOBER

1 FRIDAY

Hip-Hop Poetry & The Classics

Michael Cirelli is the author of *Hip-Hop Poetry & The Classics* and current director of Urban Word NYC. Performing with him will be members of the 2004 Urban Word NYC Teen Poetry Slam Team, as well as poets from the New School, including Matthew Yeager and Erica Miriam Fabri. **[10:30 pm]**

4 MONDAY

Sawako Nakayasu & Dana Ward

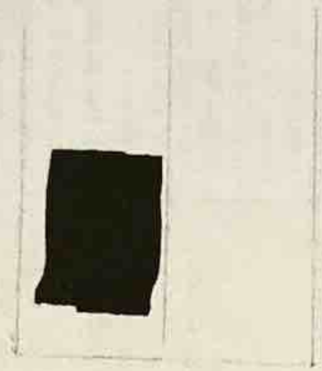
Sawako Nakayasu's first book, *So we have been given time Or*, was chosen for the 2003 Verse Prize. Dana Ward is the author of *The Imaginary Lives of My Neighbors* (Duration, 2003).

6 WEDNESDAY

Anselm Hollo & Basil King

Anselm Hollo's books include *Caws & Causeries: Around Poetry and Poets*, *Notes on the Possibilities and Attractions of Existence: Selected Poems 1965-2000*, and a translation of Pentti Saarikoski's *Trilogy* (which

umentary prose/poem/media work, *Mirage*, have been published as *The Complete Miniatures and Devotions*, *Warp Spasm*, and



18 MONDAY

Jean-Michel Espitallier & Lisa Lubasch

Jean-Michel Espitallier's books include *Le Théorème d'Espitallier*, *Gasoil*, and, forthcoming in translation, *Fantasy Butcher (grotesque)* from Duration Press and *Espitallier's Theorem* from Seismicity Editions. Lisa Lubasch is the author of *To Tell the Lamp*, *How Many More of Them Are You?*, and *Vicinities*, and the translator of Éluard's *A Moral Lesson*, forthcoming from Green Integer Books.

20 WEDNESDAY

San Francisco State Poetry Center 50th Anniversary

A celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Poetry Center at San Francisco State University, featuring a rare public screening of original 1965 footage from the National Educational Television series *USA: Poetry* from the Center's archives, and programs on Philip Whalen and John Wieners. Fanny Howe will talk about John Wieners and Larry Kearney will address Philip Whalen and his work. The evening will be hosted by Steve Dickison, director of the Poetry Center.

22 FRIDAY

A talk on Ralph Ellison's engagement with American pragmatist philosophers such as William James, Alain Locke, John

NOVEMBER

1 MONDAY

Open Reading: Sign-up at 7:45 pm [8 pm]

3 WEDNESDAY

Ron Padgett

Ron Padgett's books include *You Never Know* and *Oklahoma Tough: My Father, King of the Tulsa Bootleggers*. His poetry has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Guggenheim Foundation. Tonight he will read from his new book about a lifelong friend, *Joe: A Memoir of Joe Brainard* (Coffee House Press).

8 MONDAY

Just the Thing: Selected Letters of James Schuyler

A celebraton of the publication of James Schuyler's *Selected Letters*, edited by William Corbett and published by Turtle Point Press, including letters to a who's-who of poets and artists in the downtown New York art scene from the early 1950s until Schuyler's death in 1991. Readers include John Ashbery, Arden Corbett, Robert Dash, Anne Dunn, Nathan Kernan, Carl Little, Eileen Myles, Charles North, and Simon Pettet.

10 WEDNESDAY

Alice Notley & Prageeta Sharma

Alice Notley's new selected poems is forthcoming from Wesleyan in 2006, and *Coming After*, a book of essays on the "second-generation New York School poets," is due out from the University of Michigan Press next spring. With her sons, Anselm and Edmund Berrigan, Notley has recently edited *The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan*, forthcoming from University of California Press in 2005. Prageeta Sharma is the author of *Bliss to Fill* and *The Opening Question*.

15 MONDAY

New York Nights. Kerri Sonnenberg's first book, *The Mudra*, is umentary prose/poem/media work, *Mirage*, have been published as *The Complete Miniatures and Devotions*, *Warp Spasm*, and *Mirage: a poem in 22 sections*.

8 FRIDAY

Free Radicals Book Party

A party for *Free Radicals: American Poets Before Their First Books*, edited by Jordan Davis and Sarah Manguso, and published by Subpress. Readers are B.J. Atwood-Fukuda, Jim Behrle, Carston Cistulli, Katie Degentesh, Alan Gilbert, Cole Heinowitz, Jennifer L. Knox, and Max Winter, and a set by the Flash Orchestra, led by Drew Gardner. **[10:30 pm]**

11 MONDAY

Guillermo Juan Parra & Matvei Yankelevich

Guillermo Juan Parra is currently editing an anthology of Venezuelan poetry in English translation. Matvei Yankelevich is editor of the Eastern European Poets Series for Ugly Duckling Presse, where he also co-edits *6x6*.

13 WEDNESDAY

Linh Dinh & Marcella Durand

Linh Dinh is the author of two collections of stories, *Fake House* and *Blood and Soap*, and a book of poems, *All Around What Empties Out*. He is also the editor of the anthologies *Night, Again: Contemporary Fiction from Vietnam* and *Three Vietnamese Poets*. Marcella Durand is the author of *Western Capital Rhapsodies*, *City of Ports*, and *The Anatomy of Oil*, forthcoming from Belladonna.

15 FRIDAY

Rattapallax's "Songs and Bombs"

Emily XYZ and Myers Bartlett will perform poems for two voices from *The Emily XYZ Songbook*. Cristobal Bianchi, from the underground Chilean literary organization Casagrande, will be joined by translator Idra Novey and poets Edwin Torres and Rodrigo Toscano. **[10:30 pm]**

A talk on Ralph Ellison's engagement with American pragmatist philosophers such as William James, Alain Locke, John Dewey, and Kenneth Burke, and how Ellison describes jazz and multi-ethnic, multi-vocal American speech as forms of symbolic action. Michael Magee is the author of *Morning Constitutional* and *MS*, as well as a book of literary criticism, *Emancipating Pragmatism: Emerson, Jazz and Experimental Writing*. **[8 pm]**

22 FRIDAY

The Time at the End of this Reading

A book party and multidisciplinary performance featuring poet Paolo Javier, electronic artist Guillermo E. Brown, performance artist Ei Arakawa, and filmmaker Vinay Chowdry. **[10:30 pm]**

25 MONDAY

Harryette Mullen & Lorenzo Thomas

Harryette Mullen is the author of *Tree Tall Woman*, *Trimmings*, *S*PeRM**K*T*, *Muse & Drudge*, *Blues Baby*, and *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, a finalist for the National Book Award, Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and National Book Critics Circle Award. Lorenzo Thomas has published several collections of poetry, including *Dancing on Main Street* and *Chances Are Few*. He was a member of the Black Arts Movement's Umbra Workshop, a group that included Steve Cannon, Tom Dent, Calvin Hernton, David Henderson, Ishmael Reed, and Askia Toure, among others.

27 WEDNESDAY

Yu Jian & Eleni Sikelianos

Yu Jian is a major figure among China's "Third Generation Poets" after the "Misty Poetry" movement of the early 1980s. His works include a long poem "Zero Dossier," *A Collection of Works by Yu Jian*, and *Green Train Station*, a documentary film. Eleni Sikelianos's two new books are *The California Poem* and *The Book of Jon*. Her previous books include *The Monster Lives of Boys & Girls*, *Earliest Worlds*, and *The Book of Tendons*.

New York Nights. Kerri Sonnenberg's first book, *The Mudra*, is forthcoming from Litmus Press.

17 WEDNESDAY

Peter Gizzi & Tom Pickard

Peter Gizzi's books include *Artificial Heart*, *Some Values of Landscape and Weather*, and a reprint of *Periplum* along with 60 pages of early and uncollected work from Salt this fall. He is also the editor of *The House that Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*. Tom Pickard's new book of poems, *The Dark Months of May*, has just been published by Flood Editions. He is the author of ten other books of poetry and prose, including *Hole in the Wall: New and Selected Poems*.

19 FRIDAY

"Lovely Ladies" with Reg E Gaines

Two-time Tony nominee, playwright, Nuyorican Grand Slam Champion, and poet Reg E Gaines celebrates his latest book, *2 b Blk & Wrt*, with a performance with the band Hush Project (featuring Calvin Gaines, Matana Roberts, and Mark Wilson) and special guests Sophia Capatorto-Weiss, Marcella Goheen, Justina Mejias, and Aileen Reyes. **[10:30 pm]**

22 MONDAY

Joyelle McSweeney & Tony Tost

Joyelle McSweeney's second book, *The Commandrine and Other Poems*, is due out this fall from Fence. Tony Tost is the author of *Invisible Bride*, recipient of the 2003 Walt Whitman Award.

29 MONDAY

Talk Series: Katy Lederer, "The Heaven-Sent Leaf"

In what ways can artists thoughtfully engage with a contemporary milieu—in which the pursuit of money is axiomatic of so much else, from the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of war—without merely mirroring or balking at its assumptions? A critic and reviewer, Katy Lederer was the editor of the *Poetry Project Newsletter* from 1999 to 2000.

The Poetry Project is located at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery_131 East 10th Street_New York City 10003_www.poetryproject.com

All events are $8, $7 for seniors and students, $5 for members and begin at 8 pm unless otherwise noted.
Programs are subject to change. For information call (212) 674-0910.

got the death penalty, but for whatever reason they haven't carried it out. After class with Ed, I was very inspired, so I went to Terre Haute. I took pictures, I walked around the neighborhood, I found the house where things had occurred. I realized I couldn't do it. I couldn't write about someone else's pain. It would have been completely exploitative. It was not for me to write about. The amount of time you would have to live in that world was too much—it was too dark. I realized I couldn't do that kind of writing. It was too negative and too exploitative. I've gotten away from true crime. True crime is out the window.

MD: But you seem to approach investigative projects with this kind of creativity where you're giving something back to people. Like when you filmed people writing their wishes. You brought them something where they could express themselves.

BC: I was also very interested in performance art and guerilla theater, street performance. I guess I think of them as very democratic forms of art, being able to participate without an MFA from here or there. Just go out and do it, be a citizen. Part of it goes back too to trying to have a heart, to be gentle. Have kindness towards humans. Treat other people decently and with dignity. I think you have to start with the heart and beauty and then the other things can follow, at least for me. Part of it, as a learner, I have to be physical. I have to feel things, touch them. I'm too concrete, too grounded, too earthy. Even though I have abstract ideas, I have to have this very physical foundation—it might be a Midwest thing. Maybe being raised on a farm, working as a carny, making a home in every little hotel you're in.

MD: How did you end up at Naropa?

BC: I was 31 years old when I went to get my MFA. The first year I applied to graduate schools, I got rejected by pretty well all of them. I almost went to Gainesville where Harry Crews was, but my GPA was too low. The second year I applied again but to different schools. Someone saw the group picture of the students at Naropa and said you should apply here! Then I did. At the same time I got accepted there, I had been about to go into the Peace Corps, but I had a physical. I had checked [a box] that I had seen a psychologist and that I had depression at one time, so they kept treating me like I was a mental patient. They thought I was crazy. They said, we don't send people with a history of depression to Eastern European countries.

MD: You think you're depressed now!

BC: I met some of those Peace Corps people—they're *really* crazy!

MD: Did you feel like you found a community?

BC: I didn't know anybody. When I went there, Anne Waldman picked me up in her orange Volvo. The first student I met was Eleni Sikelianos. Then I met Bobbie Hawkins. I was like, these people want me to come here—they're so nice! It was perfect.

MD: What were you like before and what were you like after?

BC: I was an activist before I went there. My roommate and I led a protest against George Bush [senior]. He came to University of Southern Indiana to do a campaign fundraiser. He hadn't counted on me and my roommate and 20 other people having a counter-demonstration. We had signs about the environment, signs about Iran-Contra. There were two ropes and we were supposed to stay behind the one rope. Well, I got very excited when the motorcade pulled up and Bush came out and walked toward the auditorium. So I ran to the second rope and I was looking at the president, he was pretty far away. At that time, everyone behind me saw the sharpshooters turn their weapons towards me. My friends all thought I was going to be killed. I had no idea. I stayed behind the second rope. He gave us the finger. Bush gave us the finger.

MD: Wow.

BC: So there was a group of activists in Evansville who protested against the war, industrial pollution. In any community, you're going to find people like this and this gives me hope. You'll find thoughtful, intelligent people who are trying to find a way to live peacefully and trying to create social justice. They really are out there in these little communities, everywhere.

MD: You've said that lately you've been working on how to write political poetry.

BC: That's been tough.

MD: Why?

BC: My political poems are more like rants. There are people who do it really well, like Ginsberg. Anne Waldman is really great at doing curses. But mine are like, "Bush is bad. Bush sucks." I haven't found an interesting or beautiful way to say "Bush sucks." I like Kristin Prevallet's political poems, particularly. She's always finding a new way to say it.

MD: Do you think poetry can create political change?

BC: Yes, I do think so. I'm a sucker. I am one of those people who still thinks one person can change the world. I do believe that poetry can change the world—hopefully for the better.

MD: You know about this new NEA project, Operation Homecoming...?

BC: As soon as those soldiers come back and tell the truth, [that project] will be out the window. It's not going to be rah-rah, it's going to be my leg got blown off for Bush's fantasy. I think it's a brilliant project because those soldiers are going to come back and they're going to tell the truth and they're going to be shut up as soon as they do.

MD: After Naropa, did you come straight to the Poetry Project?

BC: No, I was in a car wreck and I broke my neck. I went home to recover. Then I came to New York City to work for the Poetry Project.

MD: Now, why did you do a thing like that?

BC: I wasn't ready to be in the farmhouse forever! It was a great opportunity to really be involved in a poetry community. I think that writers should live in New York City for some period of time in their lives.

MD: Why?

BC: I think it's the most American city. It's the melting pot. You lose your provincialism. It's the only way you can get a bigger picture. It challenges you. It can destroy you too, but you can't be afraid of it. It's where so many

American writers have passed through, like Whitman. If you're studying New York School and Beat poets, you have to come to New York. It gives you an edge. Your anger or your frustration can help you create. It can motivate you to write really powerful work. Where else are you going to be exposed to so many different kinds of people? I walk down the street and almost every day I see a poet. Some of them are strangers, but I know their faces. That's just amazing.

MD: Do you say you're from New York now when people ask?

BC: Usually, because it's easier than explaining. I guess because Atticus [Fierman] is from here and my in-laws live here, but I still love Indiana. It's so beautiful. I know people won't believe this, but tolerance is a very high virtue in Indiana. There's a great degree of tolerance. Maybe it was just my parents, but people of color would come to our house, it was not a big deal. I wasn't raised to have any sort of prejudice.

MD: Do you think you hold a unique place, as someone who comes from rural Indiana and yet someone who writes in the NYC hothouse poetry scene?

BC: There are a lot of transplants from the midwest to NYC, if they want to plug into that. It's also like who are you? Maybe that's a part of your essence, maybe not. I was there until I was 31. Many people leave when they're 18 or 19. The thing that unites poets is an interest in language. I mean, that's your tool. Language should come first and attention to language, and then content. That's the way I define poetry as opposed to prose.

MD: Do you think of yourself as a prose writer or as a poet?

BC: As a poet, because my first interest is language. But when my first concern is getting the story, then the language, I think of myself as a prose writer.

MD: I know for a while you were exploring narrative...

BC: I'm one of those hybrids, like Renee Gladman or Dodie Bellamy. A lot of poets are using prose lines, too. Why not? Why shouldn't we?

MD: Why not? We're experimental poets. We can do whatever we want.

BC: We can experiment. That's what I like about poetry. I don't have to think about conflict, a climax, a resolution. Not that I ever thought about those things when I was writing prose. I got bypassed on the character train.

MD: How would you say you organize a poem? There's so much in your poems, yet it all works...

BC: Every word has to count, every word has to be essential. But it's hard because you're in a particular mood when a certain kind of music sounds good to you, or a certain rhythm, and then you come back to it cold and you're like, this doesn't work. It's clunk, clunk. Mostly it's an interior cadence, an interior language. Or maybe sometimes it's just fun to talk about. But mostly it's process. I write on paper usually, taking notes, and then I start to type things up. I find a memory or an object. It's going back to that physicality. I don't know if that's so natural to be so physical. I think sometimes it's a learning disability. That's why there's so many objects in the poems, because I'm so physical and touching things, feeling their weight. I wish I wasn't so earthy sometimes.

MD: One of my pet peeves is driving in a car with poets and they never look out the window...

BC: Maybe if they were driving in the car alone they would look out of the window. I do think theory is good. It gives you a vocabulary and a context. I do think some good things can come out of it. I think we should use it all.

THE ABOLITIONIST JOURNAL

"The very state where grew the bread
That formed my bones, I see." *(from a poem written by Abe Lincoln about Indiana)*

There are two states, from the free state there is a river
then a slave state.
Turn around and there is a slave state,
a river, then a free state.
I've known many good people from the slave states,
some very good people. I've known very good people on both sides.
Could they be looking across a river at a free state?

Tried and trying again to walk in Lincoln's footsteps. Lincoln looked out over the river and saw a slave state and he was born in one (Kentucky), like me, but was raised in a free state (Indiana) like me. We were white and so could cross the river. I was born on the bridge between the free side and the slave side, my head crowning on the bridge. I fully emerged in an elevator traveling upwards in a slave state. I have shopped in the slave state and ate barbecue there. I walked along the river-bank in the slave state and looked out at a free state.
My grandfather born and raised in a slave state, lived out his life in a free one.

My question remains: Are there any abolitionists hanging from my family tree?

Riding a yellow bus through Lincoln City en route to high school. Other Hoosiers, the residents of Spencer county, do they think of Lincoln? I used to be a
Midway Panther
Chrisney Wildcat
A Heritage Hills Patriot (those were my identities)
I could have been a
Tecumseh Brave
Tell City Marksmen
South Spencer Rebel
Boonville Pioneer
Or New Harmony Rappite (Utopian) and I used to be an American.

Brenda Coultas

BOOK REVIEWS

BILL BERKSON
THE SWEET SINGER OF MODERNISM
Qua Books, 2003, $20 (paper)

I remember loving Bill Berkson's piece on Wayne Thiebaud's "vanities" when it came out in *Art in America* nearly 20 years ago—and finding it odd to be feeling that way. Who, as Fairfield Porter wrote, likes to read art criticism? One thing that stuck in my mind was Berkson's inspired comparison of Thiebaud's still-life foods to "Miss Havisham's wedding cake, that vestigial lump of woebegone desire." Far from mere wit or display, the seemingly far-afield association illuminates the strange "disfunctions" of Thiebaud's cakes, artificial flowers, and other superficially familiar objects. Equally memorable for me was the carefully nuanced description of Thiebaud's (and Berkson's, since the late 1960s) northern California light, which is

> anything but "relentless." It lopes, jounces, jags, spreads (at its brightest like aluminum foil), and is often befogged when not rained out. It isn't 'knife-like' and definitive like the New York light that Porter loved, and in it the landscape is overwhelming and not commodious.

As a painter Thiebaud "is no stylist, however much he may pursue style. His pictures have a quick charm, which diminishes under scrutiny, and ponderous staying power." I'd like to be able to see and say and discriminate like that.

In addition to being lucid and penetrating, Berkson's writing displays all sorts of qualities that combine to make him one of the most stimulating—and adventurous—art critics around. His frame of reference is prodigious, enabling him, particularly in his longer pieces, to move well beyond specific art occasions to concerns of period, style, aesthetics, and more. He has a philosophical turn of mind, but his mind turns in a variety of other useful and interesting ways as well (it's not irrelevant that he is a poet), and he manages to keep perceptual and conceptual focus in balance. Although he must do his homework, that doesn't show. What does show is his passionate thoughtfulness, his generosity of spirit (when he is provocative or contrary, it is because things are in an unsettled state or need to be so), his willingness to trace initial responses to whatever lengths and through whatever complications they lead—even if the end product stubbornly retains an element of mystery or "chaos"—in order to produce meaningful and compelling accounts for a reader.

The Sweet Singer of Modernism (the title piece is on Hans Hoffman) has 38 articles, shorter reviews, lectures, and catalog essays written between 1985 and 2003, mostly on contemporary artists. The range is impressive: Bay Area painters, New York painters, ceramicists, photographers, sculptors, *Krazy Kat*'s George Herriman, and, a surprise, a long, clear and wonderfully informative piece on Piero della Francesca's "vibrant stasis" (which David Carrier calls "worth the price of admission"). Two general essays are bookends: "Critical Reflections," which displays more important good sense about what art writing is and how it ought to be accomplished than anything I've seen in a long time; and the autobiographical "A New York Beginner," which covers Berkson's coming of age in the late 1950s and early 1960s as well as a good deal of the vital artistic and social milieu of those times.

To me, the best pieces in the collection, in addition to these two, are on Thiebaud, Piero, de Kooning, Pollock, Albert York, Elmer Bischoff, Yvonne Jacquette, with a bunch of others close behind. But every piece is worth reading. Berkson doesn't fill space, doesn't work up attitudes, doesn't produce spurious clarifications, doesn't lay down the law. Much to the contrary, in both practice and theory, he underlines the "provisionality" of the critical effort, its tentative, exploratory nature (*pace* so much standard art writing). As a result, his own writing, tough-minded, smart and knowledgeable as it is, remains fundamentally modest, the account of *this* art writer's adventure in coming to terms with genuinely complex responses and thereby with the genuine complexities of the works of art that set them off. As Berkson argues in "Critical Reflections"—and I have never seen the point so forcefully made—the critic must honor "the actual chaos occurring in the mental space between the reviewer and the work." If "opacities" remain, then they remain; the critic's obligation is to be as clear as the material allows him to be.

One additional thought, which probably should be saved for some other place. Recently, in talking to a poet friend about what makes good poetry, I heard myself use the term "character." It's by no means a new idea—that at a certain point, different for different writers (artists, filmmakers, etc.), talent, ability of all kinds, resolve to character. Integrity is what first comes to mind, although that, in this context, is almost as large an idea as character. What exactly does artistic integrity mean? (How, for example, can you be "true to the material"?) The whole subject is exceedingly large. In the case of art writers, it occurs to me that character has to do with all the decision-making involved, conscious and unconscious. What to attend to and what not to attend to. How to do justice to the material, the audience, oneself. In what spirit and tone to carry out one's attentions. What does one aim at? What constitutes genuine as opposed to other sorts of success? What does it mean to be genuine? How does one avoid pandering, distorting, or settling for? Stay tuned. I submit that in addition to its nameable virtues and its overall adventurousness, *The Sweet Singer of Modernism* is saturated with character in the crucial positive sense, still vague, I had in mind when I used the term in connection to poetry.

Charles North's collection of essays on writers and artists, No Other Way*, is published by Hanging Loose. His most recent books of poems are* The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight *and* Tulips *(with Trevor Winkfield).*

LORENZO THOMAS
DANCING ON MAIN STREET
Coffee House Press, 2004, $15

In *Dancing on Main Street*, Lorenzo Thomas addresses a "carnival of soft-spoken meanness" with moral fortitude and lyric grace. Affiliated with the Black Arts Movement and Umbra workshops of the late 1960s, Thomas uses the lyric to undermine informing (information anyone?) intelligence, appealing to an inwardness of mind instead. Lyric intensity is a term not often used to acknowledge social or political outrage. Satirical verse more easily comes to mind as a formal accommodation for the poem to vent its acrimonious temper. But as testament of quick-mindedness, Thomas's work is charged with subtlety and understatement. His lines float with an anaesthetic calm while under them the horror of human fate with numb compliance registers diminishing prospects. Reading the book is kind of like walking deeper into quicksand. It's pleasant at first, slowly descending into a soft embrace with the earth. But as you begin to see what's at stake—your life!—the enclosing goo panics the animal lungs for that inevitable, final gulp of air.

"Certainly, this should awaken the mind," he writes, "And the senses should shut down in shame…" Mind is a precious commodity where all around it's being replaced with with an absorbing sponge. The mind in contemporary culture, for Thomas, lacks an inward orientation and the charge of self-recognition.

"I'd rather not negotiate/ An understanding," he writes, "I have no taste/ For anorexic conversations."

Are these the words of a streetwise Griot? Sounds like a man in possession of himself, for sure. Reading the poems closely, and thinking about the book's title, you begin to see a series of masks: professor, poet, husband, soldier ("You too can grow up to be a square-jawed/ American hero, eyes rounding up with recognition"). "Main Street," of the book's title, refers to an office address of the University of Houston-Downtown where Thomas works. His diverse cultural experience, heritage, and creative gifts find expression here. One can only imagine the dance, those necessary performances:

Given choices, standing in the street
And shouting
Even for a worthy cause
The way we used to do
When we were young
Even for nothing
Is not choice

The world has changed.

In "Now You Can Worry," we witness the teary-eyed delusion of a woman estranged from her inward roots. And Thomas is relentless, carefully playing that edge between humor and disgust. "Tonight she's wearing her rejection slip," he writes, "A plotted frumpiness." The amplification of sex-as-weapon through liberal guilt taps into a false conscience, peculiarly American, that projects melioration, not justice, hypocritical equity, not self-knowledge.

O you don't know the pain
To look into the midnight eyes
Of that little child
In that picture from El Salvador
That total silence
That premature despair
And feel you can do nothing
Nothing you can do

Tonight she feels so frustrated
She almost cries

I've put up with that woman
For three years
You'd have been proud of me
I didn't turn all black, you know
All red eyeballs, "Now listen Bitch!"

In "Pornography = Exploitation of Men," we find inwardly fleeing couples extending marriage by market-appropriate images and sex industry style guides.

Homework for husbands
Who remain somehow devoted
To the proposition
It is possible to satisfy 40ish women
In a childish culture
Perhaps well-chosen small appliances
Can do what major purchases
have ceased to do

But it's money that's the source of Thomas's cultural criticism of marriage. Women humiliate his male characters ("It's tough being enough"), and economic expectations are considered coldly.

Love could be but it's not
A 50/50 partnership
Matched sets of polished lies
A usury of affection

I understand you don't understand
Money don't grow on trees

From intimate scrutiny to geopolitical measure, Thomas moves freely through the eyes of others. "Dirge for Amadou Diallo" registers a police murder with lyrical compression. "We could blame chance/ Or curse our earthbound ignorance/ Vow to concoct new mythologies/ That wouldn't/ Forge us such raw cruelties/ Marching our hope/ In coffles toward the grave." "Coffles" casts an historical shadow over this "incident," relating the violence between owner and owned, European and African. "It is hard to have your son die/ In a distant land," echoes the refrain. "And harder still/ When we can't understand." A poem somewhat earlier in the book, "Psalm," dated "Waco, Texas, 1993," might not relieve the suffering of the Haitian Diallo family. It indicts a monotheistic export of weapons by "pro-life murderers," "bombs and guns made in the USA."

O Lord, I don't know what to do
I don't like watching what comes into view
I will narrow my eyelids
Till there is nothing in the world but You

These cultural masks let Thomas speak with acerbic necessity. The multiple points-of-view, good humor and lyric expression prevent these poems from sinking the reader under a river of shit. You get a little boat, an oar and move out. He shows us ways of reading our world from a little dinghy on deep water.

Dale Smith edits Skanky Possum *with Hoa Nguyen.*

ALLISON ADELLE HEDGE COKE
ROCK, GHOST, WILLOW, DEER: A STORY OF SURVIVAL
University of Nebraska, 2004, $24.95

Growing up in South Dakota, I went to school with a bunch of Indian kids in grade school, a few in junior high and a barely visi-

-ble handful in high school. "They drop out" was as much explanation as I ever heard. Now, Allison Adelle Hedge Coke's new memoir, *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer*, fills in what happened to them. In her case, she had to cope with a schizophrenic mother, alcohol and drug abuse, rape and foster homes, as well as an unremitting litany of physical ills, among them cancer, epilepsy, effects of a severe car wreck, gangrene, and toxic shock. Is her story typical? Knowing that one in eight teen Indian girls and one in five boys attempt suicide (Hedge Coke and her brother included) makes me think the answer is yes.

It's clear from page one that Hedge Coke, an American Book Award-winning poet, comes from stories and story-tellers: "Wherever we traveled or dwelled, we lived mostly on macaroni, bologna, bread, soup and always on prayer, story, and song. We prayed to greet each morning and to protect us through the night. We sang whenever the feeling moved us. And my father raised us with attention to story as a simple daily ritual, as regular as changing clothes or brushing hair."

She also has her "mixed breed" heritage: Huron, Tsa la gi (Cherokee), Muscogee, French-Canadian, Portuguese, English, Alsace-Lorraine, Irish, Welsh. Her book is likewise a mix of paradoxes and mutual exclusives: unbearable and gripping, harsh and generous. She tells it straight, with neither shame nor self-importance. Her language—warrior speech and woman talk—is as solid as a punch.

"We girls were told to be strong—'steadfast like a stone if need be.'" She is that, but it isn't always a good thing, as she gets in a scary number of fights sticking up against every injustice in town. One of the lovely things in *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer* is watching as she learns to bend, at least a little.

There's more to learn in this book, information provided with compact precision on sharecropping, gardening, gigging [spearing] frogs, tobacco auctions, breaking horses and much more.

At first, the occasional psychological summary bothered me; lines like the following seemed like therapy talk: "I wanted to believe in a person's sincerity so badly that I convinced myself he didn't know or remember those paranoid, violent episodes. Rationalizing made it easy to forgive and go on." However, I came to see that these realizations are so hard-won that they belong there as much as her exploits.

At an early age, she writes, "I added another 'l' to my middle name for alliteration and control of my own identity." She is working hard to locate herself in a world both profoundly hers as a Native American, and where she was never comfortable, for the same reason. "Writing the memoir, I felt as if I were shadow-boxing myself to pieces," she told me.

The relentless traumas can make the book tough to read at times (can one person really undergo this much?!?) although they are there not as victim porn but as part of her determination to integrate her life and lineage. Hedge Coke says hers is a life drenched with blessings. And acceptance: "Today, even after this much of my life has passed, all I know for certain is this: In this river, this strong life current pulls me ever on by its swiftness, dislodges, and sometimes haplessly drowns me: I am always resurfacing no matter how weary, still traveling on." I admire her and I admire her book.

Elinor Nauen has edited anthologies on baseball and automobiles, and is currently completing a book-length poem, So Late into the Night.

DOUGLAS OLIVER
ARRONDISSEMENTS
Salt, 2003, $16.95

These thoughts in purple knots of clouds
dash down false lightning flashes like
neon signs above the glistening
Grands Boulevards (pg. 1)

So opens *Arrondissements* by Douglas Oliver, a terrific selection of works in which the late British poet prisms the world through the beguiling textures of 20th-century Paris, his adopted home until he passed away in 2000. Beginning with the above-excerpted "Well of Sorrows in Purple Tinctures," a powerful meditation on the complex particularities surrounding death, which unfurls along and beneath the sloping streets of the French capital's 2nd arrondissement, Oliver's gambit is an appropriately intricate apprehension of human circumstance's troubled and troubling truths. It is perhaps little surprise then that Paul Celan is one of the book's presiding spirits—the great Romanian poet's crystalline word bundles, with their unspeakably deep trenches and head-beaten heart-hammer silvers, rhyme tonally with Oliver's daffodils that "tremble with hideous memories" and sudden slantings "down monstrous apartment blocks" without in any way pre-empting the often radical directness of Oliver's line. Indeed, it is a pleasure to be able to peer both at and through passages like the following:

Interpret this then.
What if the screen turns true,
loaded with real time,
and we'll be the red ones
boiling with screams and anger?
Now we'll be thinking of hell,
helmeted demons rising from flames.
No, that's simply the way
a yes/no mind goes:

These lines are taken from the final work in *Arrondissements*, "The Video House of Fame" (preceded by two shorter, more strictly lyric sequences, "The Shattered Crystal" and "China Blue"), an ambitious, book-length poem that probes social, political and virtual aspects of late-20th-century life through the ever more relevant lens of the video game. Those familiar with Oliver's previous long works (including *Penniless Politics*) will not be surprised to encounter the loose-limbed facility with which he negotiates the breadth of terrain covered here, nor at the authority with which he offers up his fascinating extended take on arcade-hall idiom. In fact, the variety of Oliver's articulations, from

He thought the poem's form a perfect
    crystal vase.

to

I blank out a moment
Myself morphed in Korg
wakes up on a manic
factory forecourt

is a key element of the book's richness.

As Alice Notley makes clear in her Editor's Note, *Arrondissements* is almost certainly not the exact book that Oliver would have offered us had he survived; all of the finalizing, the definitive selection of works to include, and miscellaneous editing fell to Notley. We owe her a great debt of thanks—*Arrondissements* is fitting testimony to the range and power of an important poet's work.

Laird Hunt is the author of Indiana, Indiana, *and* The Impossibly.

KAIA SAND
INTERVAL
Edge, 2004, $10

What often rings hollow in American political verse is the finger-pointing and projection that fails to consider how living in the U.S. (eating, working, shopping, driving) is sometimes contradictory, or at least inconsistent with the rhetoric of the poem. When American political poetry is most effective, it engages the injustices of empire while struggling with the complicity of living inside it. *interval* is a collection of liberatory poems that is successful partly due to the poet's sharp critique of the world she lives in. But it's the frank exposition of the fuzzy lines and contradictions (e.g., trying to live progressively in the USA without going crazy) that makes the book a complex and important investigation of 21st-century American living.

interval is a distinctly American text, where place is prominent. Poems visit the Wild West and the nation's capital. The "I" appears in each piece, though not necessarily as an individual. We are all present, hovering "like weather" over shadow governments and casinos from coast to coast. We are present in our thrill seeking and our consumption, shopping like patriots and pursuing liberty through extreme sports. And somehow, after all the distractions, the longing remains, like a national unrequited love.

my sweet
rogue nation
close lipped
promise kiss
me this way
misaligned
choices make
for more
wishes no free
trade for you
today

progeny suggests an irresistible cross-reading of the beginning boldface phrases of each page. The horizontal sub-poem can be read as an absurdist flip book through 24 pages, only to return to the individual stanza, staying awhile within each page's coiled and quiet tension laced with a measured urgency. The poem seems to be more introspective in tone, though such an assertion would diminish Sand's strategic obscurance of borders between the understood "I" as internal and the "political" as external.

As Buck Downs is quoted in the epigraph to *aquifer*, "Everyone winds up part in the water supply." Sand employs this idea in the "ashes to ashes" sense, and in terms of market—the way one is "in" natural resources or pharmaceuticals. The poem is part travelogue, part discourse on water politics, and part radical geography. Sand is careful not to grandstand about the environment, opting instead to search for a balance in a place of excess.

or environmentalism is not about
parklands only or sorry for
this western confusion
as if jobs and owls
in this pitted locale
    the spotted owl
    an emblem of privilege
I couldn't quite defend
ashamed of this but
my uncle logged and loved
the owls and another knew the fish
levels in the water

Among the narratives in *aquifer* is the history of water theft from indigenous Americans, and its connection with the inequities of tourism. "we come to Las Vegas to witness/ mirages we don't/ come to worry/ about the water the water/ the Cocopa never see/ return to the sea." The integrative seamlessness is evidence of Sand's almost casual comprehension of subject, and her sharp attention to line, which is at once sparse, clean and brilliant in its precision.

interval is Kaia Sand's remarkable debut—a book of poetry in which the aesthetic rigor never surrenders to shortcut to politics. It rings true in its assertions and its questioning. The message is both informed and imaginative, addressing privilege and dissidence in a brave and clear-eyed manner. From "Self-Portrait in a Passport Photo":

I am the tallest I have ever been

I wish to postpone
last month's appointments, understand
the sun, apologize to all
the other countries

I frisk myself, policing
the pickpocket, delighted at all
I confiscate

Frank Sherlock curates the La Tazza Reading Series in Philadelphia.

FREE RADICALS: AMERICAN POETS BEFORE THEIR FIRST BOOKS
JORDAN DAVIS & SARAH MANGUSO
Subpress, 2004, $15

RICHARD ROUNDY
THE OTHER KIND OF VERTIGO
Barretta Books, 2003

While doing mushrooms in the woods a few years ago, I became focused on the little white pine sprouts pushing up from under the ground cover. They seemed so fresh, confident, and singular in their characters—a little snotty and insouciant even, as if they felt they were already fully formed (and in that mysterious, scientific sense, they were). I felt proud of their energy and conviction, and honored to be able to sit back and stay out of their way. That's how the poems in *Free Radicals* make me feel.

As its secondary title states, *Free Radicals* contains work by poets who've not yet published premier collections. The representative work chosen by editors Davis and Manguso is excellent for its variety and personality: whether charming and perverse (Jennifer Knox's "My Big German Bra") or contemplative and philosophical (Alan Gilbert's "Relative Heat Index" and B.J. Atwood-Fukuda's "Ballybunion"), each piece feels as if it's aimed directly at you, the reader, rather than you, a committee. And while I hate the "take no prisoners" cliché, it's what came to mind as I was reading: language gets lovingly wrung (Johannes Göransson's "The Last Instrument," and Jim Behrle's "White Album," which contains the great line, "white as pussy in starlight, in raindrops"); styles get defined, redefined, and likewise hung out to dry (Katie Degentesh's "Seeds" and "5-Year-Old Girls Encountered," taken from her blog, which freeze and frame individual moments as paintings do); personae are inhabited and explored through hybrid story forms (as in Atwood-Fukuda's "The Wreck of the Platonic" and Tonya Foster's "A Folktale"). And speaking of tales, interesting too is the presence of direct—though, of course, insanely caroming—forward-motion narrative, reminiscent of, say, Jane Bowles. In Jennifer Knox's "Chicken Bucket," for instance, we have this, in just the first four lines:

> Today I turn thirteen and quit the 4-H club
> for good.
> I smoke way too much pot for that shit.
> Besides, mama lost the rabbit and both legs
> from the hip down in Vegas.

In "God Gave Safe Passage to the Animals through His Forest of Bright Spectrums," Knox both withholds and yet gives the secret away:

> You're searching for some [blue bird] thing
> in the living room, but you're not sure what
> [blue bird] it is—you woke up here, in
> your pajamas, holding your pee, feeling
> small and looking for some [blue bird]
> thing.

And Tonya Foster's "A Folktale" is just that, and more:

> A father stands on a walkway talking
> about how he landed
> in the unfamiliar mountains of Colorado.
>
> A winter story. (He was the proverbial fly
> in the bowl of Denver airport.) He was,
> he says, a stranger travelling townsfolk offered
>
> inappropriate advice and direction to.

The other thing that makes this collection so inviting is its humor, for which, in my opinion, poetry evinces a crying need (and not, as Jordan Davis in his intro reports, a Barnes & Noble clerk told him, "anthologies of work by newly minted MFAs"). Jeni Olin's "Tom Brokaw" begins:

> Tom Brokaw is a beautiful person.
> By beautiful I mean communicating disease

Likewise Amy Lingafelter gets off on the right foot:

> When you smoke with both hands all night,
> both sets
> of fingertips smell,
> which is why I love candy. Nasty
> candy.

Maybe Behrle in "Beacon Arms" keys us in on what makes the work by these poets so striking:

> Becuz No One's looking and you can:
> induct magic into the Hall

I've been carrying *Free Radicals* around with me for weeks, and I've found something new to like every time I've opened it.

Likewise with Richard Roundy's premier collection, *The Other Kind of Vertigo*, which is not as bold-faced, but lyrical, agile, and quietly assured. This "other" vertigo seems, in a way, lovelier than the kind we're used to, and comes in the form of a newly angled visioning that occurs suddenly and takes your breath away:

> These sidelong buildings raise shadow
> architecture to a new form of glancing . . .
> ("Insignia")
>
> . . . walking backwards into the pearl-like
> compositions of space . . .
> ("The Right Combination")

Much of this vertiginousness comes from poems that begin *in media res*:

> However, there are times when sitting
> is not enough and you must get up
> and greet something of the day with your
> brain.
> ("Union Square")

in this melodic experiment . . .
("Poem")

With pink still in effect
behind your head, the angels
form a platoon . . .
("The Right Combination")

You feel as though you've stepped into a scene suffused by a light from another place, where the action occurs in a corner of the frame, or even in your blind spot. You perceive it, but look at it straight on and you'll miss it, get "waylaid en route to the miracle," because it's always off-road that all the interesting stuff happens. Plus, one must be attentive before the word go:

Isn't that what's required,
a time-honored way of looking
that's equal to the weight of what is seen?
("Sense of Irresponsibility")

Those lines could sum up what may be the underpinning of the book: actions equally partnered with results, and creating "the sequence of what we've never gotten used to." Perhaps that's the other kind of vertigo: you start out believing the long, lulling phrases are setting you down in one place, but suddenly you're in another:

the feelings I've had since then
I've renamed them, gone back
and authored incidents to cull support
tear lengths of crystal in the prelapsarian
world
which is merely a bite to eat.
("The Other Kind of Vertigo")

But these are sequences you don't want to get used to. They need to always be new.

Sharon Mesmer is the author of Half Angel, Half Lunch *(Hard Press),* The Empty Quarter *(Hanging Loose), and the forthcoming* In Ordinary Time *(Hanging Loose).*

CONSIDERING CHAPBOOKS

There is huge effort put into the publication of chapbooks: the letter-pressed covers of Atticus/ Finch; the hand-bound work of Ugly Duckling Presse, gong, and Palm Press; the comforting uniformity of Pressed Wafer and Potato Clock Editions. So why aren't more chapbooks reviewed? Perhaps it's the scarcity of the chapbook. Perhaps it's the unofficial, though seemingly ubiquitous, belief that chapbooks aren't "real" books. Whatever the reason, this column is a humble attempt to attest to the love that so many folks put into the writing and publishing of chapbooks.

Celluloid City (Potato Clock Editions, 2003), a collaboration between Michael Friedman and artist Jim Ringley, juxtaposes seven iconographic ink drawings with seven prose poems. Friedman's poems are carnivalesque, humorous, and self-renewing, as he lends a sense of duration to the often disparate sentences he strings together. Chris Stroffolino's *Scratch Vocals* (Potato Clock Editions, 2003) prefers the tangled and knotted thought, which consistently derails itself through the accrual of buried puns and bursts of clarity within his sometimes exhaustive sentences. The torque of the sentence is central to Elizabeth Willis's chapbook of prose poems, *Meteoric Flowers* (Atticus/ Finch, 2004). Here, each one asserts the elegant control with which Willis evokes and embraces a fertile image garden; yet, it is the depth of meaning buried in the skip, leap, or interstellar jump between them that sets one's mind blooming. More ominous in tone, the prose poems of Cynthia Sailers's *Rose Lungs* (Atticus/ Finch, 2003), take as their backdrop the films *Nosferatu*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, *Memento*, and *Fury*. Think of Rimbaud, in all his "I is other" glory, given a good dose of the last century's worth of cinema and you might come close to the shadowy, shifting intellect emanating from these poems. Although no less shadowy, the shifting in Anthony Hawley's *A f i e l d* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2004) is one of continuous thwarted approach, where the inclusive pronoun "we" crawls, camps, and canoes through a linguistically amorphous landscape. The journey is as much in the rhythmic ricochet of assonance and colliding syntax, as it is in the terrain the words themselves represent. This sense of simultaneity comes through in Juliana Spahr's *things of each possible relation hashing against one another* (Palm Press, 2003), where the things are those pertaining to ecosystems of Hawai'i. This anaphora-based exploration of commingling natural habitats, and the effect that human intervention has on them, employs a system of language mirroring that of the natural world; new phrases are assimilated into, and immediately, though subtly, change the course of the poems' outcome. Spahr closes with a note on the problem of nature poetry's myopic view, her procedural method, and source texts. Also site-specific, Aaron Tieger's *Sea Shanties of Old Vermont* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2003), weaves a nostalgia-producing return trip to Brattleboro with the memories now ghosting this one-time home of the author. A straightforward earnestness, given a jolt of punk rock angst, covers Tieger's acquaintance-infested Vermont. Populated with numerous conversational exchanges, and a hint of nostalgia, though of the more digressive variety, wherein a clausal extension often overtakes the original subject, Paul Killebrew's *Forget Rita* (Poetry Society of America, 2003) was selected and introduced by John Ashbery. Incidentally, one can't help but chuckle at the irony of Ashbery's admitted uncertainty as to why Killebrew, "...chooses to reiterate the phrase 'in the end' six times near the beginning of the poem...", as Ashbery's infamous double sestina, buried within *Flow Chart*, was, perhaps, the inspiration for Killebrew's own use of a buried Ghazal, which explains the reiterated phrase. Speaking of reiteration, Mark Lamoureux's *29 Cheeseburgers* (Pressed Wafer, 2004) uses the conceit of this meal to construct an account of life led in greasy diners, hovering around grills, cafeterias, and chain restaurants. As in one's actual life, the meals here—each is assigned a specific location—function as a backdrop for the poems, which progress from Lamoureux's childhood in Connecticut, through his college years in Vermont, trips to New York, and current home in Boston. Lamoureux's range as a poet is evident via comparison to another chapbook of his, *City/Temple* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2003), which narrates a third-person account of Jin, an enigmatic figure, who, like the Jin of the Koran, occupies a mortal space between human and that of the divine. Wholly rooted in the human side, Sarah Mangold's *Boxer Rebellion* (gong, 2004) takes a documentary approach, mining a source text, *The Reminiscence of Mrs. Roy C. Smith, Jr.*, to splice together an account of, and argument for, the individual voice our larger notion of history so often effaces. Evanescent yet evocative, the fragmented images that charge Africa Wayne's *tiny pony* (portable press at yo-yo labs, 2004) point toward, without making claims to, the various meanings buried within objects and actions that pass undetected through our daily lives. From "a mile/ long stretch of beach" to "light inside a high rise," Wayne's panoramic sequence constitutes a quiet imperative for paying closer attention to the world. Surely this starts with color, an argument for the importance of which Brenda Iijima makes manifest within *Color and its Antecedents* (Yen Agat Books, 2004). In this work, which attests to the relationship all poems have to one another via the use of color, Iijima threads together quotations, poems, and commentary to create an essay that, in its openness, so resembles poetry one would be hard-pressed to call it anything but. One could think of a few colorful things to call radio-personality Sean Cole; thankfully, *Itty City* (Pressed Wafer, 2003) makes poet foremost among them. Performative and playful, though never letting the joke get the better of the poem, Cole's chapbook demonstrates a surprising diversity of form. From the epistolary to the abecedarian, outtakes from daily writing to homophonic reworkings and variations, the poems are a wakeful reminder of the depth of fun available via language and the depth one can manufacture from having fun with it.

Noah Eli Gordon's latest chapbook is What Ever Belongs in the Circle *(Anchorite).*

KATHLEEN FRASER
DISCRETE CATEGORIES FORCED INTO COUPLING
Apogee Press, 2004, $12.95

It starts with a foot. "It was that motion of the back foot caught in the photo as a blur" which draws us into "Soft pages," the poem which contains the title of Kathleen Fraser's new book. This is a book that searches for connections, for some kind of fixed state of the world that metaphysically does not and cannot exist. There is wonderment in awareness so closely tuned to all that comes into and exits the mind. It watches, takes account. The foot again in another instance, the act of writing, just physically writing, the barking neighbors, the underwear, it's all being absorbed, not coyly or preciously but shrewdly with the eye of a draftsperson who would account for shadow and rain.

There is a curious feeling of not actually being placed in the world when you read these pages. We are temporary, constantly in motion. From the blurred photograph of the foot to Bernini's sculpture of Daphne turning into a tree, there is an attempt to somehow account for movement and for time. But it can never be fixed. In these lines they are always changing or getting lost.

In the piece "You can hear her breathing in the photograph," she measures distance in a photograph of the Bernini sculpture of Daphne and Apollo. There is as much consideration for the photograph and photographer as there is of Bernini and the actual piece of marble that has been cut. The poem is acutely aware of what everyone involved must be thinking and of their part in the story: the photographer, *"Apollo almost has her,"* he thinks. *"You can tell by his floating unclenched hand."* Bernini himself, "She's disappearing, he knows that much. *Apollo's claim of certainty should be gaining on her shouldn't it?*" The couple, "Her indefiniteness was not tolerable to his practiced will." And the writer herself, "Why must the photograph of the two of them come out of its envelope every year and be pinned to the wallpaper?" Here is a struggle between the definite and the indefinite, the fixed and unfixable. And finally, inevitably its end.

One of my favorite parts of "Soft pages" is the section that contains an empty box where some considerations, now lost, of the photograph (of the blurred foot) were meant to go, but they cannot be retrieved from the past; they have disappeared. It's a marvelous study of how we are being in time without the anxiousness that often accompanies such contemplation. People float in and out of existence without much fanfare or drama, "The air came down like rice. It scattered through unevenness and uneventfulness."

There are many threads one can follow in this book: a persistent step off a curb; a constant threat of traffic; the notebook with its pages blank and otherwise. They are all revisited from various angles until we are left only with the pleasure of our experience of them.

Sarah Anne Cox is the author of Arrival *(Krupskaya, 2002).*

BOOKS RECEIVED

BOOKS AND CDS

OXO
Pierre Alferi
Burning Deck, $10

THE TO SOUND
Eric Baus
Verse Press, $12, 80 pgs.

PINK STEAM
Dodie Bellamy
Suspect Thoughts, $16.95, 183 pgs.

SELECTED POEMS BY ILHAN BERK
Önder Otçu and Murat Nemet-Nejat, trans.
Talisman House, $12.95, 90 pgs.

ONE SCORE MORE: THE SECOND 20 YEARS OF BURNING DECK 1982-2002
Alison Bundy, Keith & Rosmarie Waldrop, eds.
Burning Deck, $15, 239 pgs.

VOICES OF THE CITY
Marie Carter, Robert Hershon, Rosamond S. King, & Charles Russell, eds.
Hanging Loose, $14, 96 pgs.

EVOLUTION OF THE BRIDGE
Maxine Chernoff
Salt, 128 pgs.

DEVOURED BY THE MOON
Rafael Pérez Estrada
Steven J. Stewart, trans.
Hanging Loose, $14, 142 pgs.

MUSEUM OF ABSENCES
Luis H. Francia
Meritage Press and the University of the Philippines Press, 72 pgs.

IMPROVISATIONS (BOOK 3)
Vernon Frazer
Beneath the Underground, $12.50, 95 pgs.

SIMULCAST: FOUR EXPERIMENTS IN CRITICISM
Benjamin Friedlander
University of Alabama Press, 354 pgs.

THE VOICE OF THE POET
Allen Ginsberg
$19.95, CD and 64-page book

DENNY SMITH
Robert Glück
clear cut press, 265 pgs.

THE TIME AT THE END OF THIS WRITING
Paolo Javier
ahadada books, $12.95, 96 pgs.

ELEGIES & VACATIONS
Hank Lazer
Salt, 133 pgs.

POTENTIAL WEAPONS
Jocelyn Lieu
Graywolf Press, $15, 140 pgs.

FALSE MEMORY
Tony Lopez
Salt, 116 pgs.

TO TELL THE LAMP
Lisa Lubasch
Avec Books, $14, 115 pgs.

WHEN THE BODY SAYS IT'S LEAVING
Pansy Maurer-Alvarez
Hanging Loose, $14, 81 pgs.

THE JOYOUS AGE
Christopher Nealon
Black Square, $13, 69 pgs.

PRESENT/TENSE: POETS IN THE WORLD
Mark Pawlak, ed.
Hanging Loose, $16, 212 pgs.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF TREES
John Perlman
Potes and Poets

FOR THE WRONG REASON
Mary de Rachewiltz
Edgewise, 62 pgs.

OCTOBER SNOW
Samuel Reifler
Pressed Wafer, $12, 86 pgs.

ODE TO CERTAIN INTERSTATES AND OTHER POEMS
Howard W. Robertson
clear cut, 181 pgs.

A GREEN LIGHT
Matthew Rohrer
Verse, $12, 81 pgs.

WRITING THROUGH: TRANSLATIONS AND VARIATIONS
Jerome Rothenberg
Wesleyan, $24.95. 240 pgs.

I MY FEET
Gerhard Rühm
Burning Deck, $10, 120 pgs.

AMERICA A HISTORY IN VERSE VOLUME 3 1962-1970
Edward Sanders
Black Sparrow, $19.95, 387 pgs.

BEFORE, DURING & AFTER
Hal Sirowitz
Soft Skull, $13, 124 pgs.
FATHER SAID
Soft Skull, $23, 168 pgs.

GOEST
Cole Swenson
Alice James, $13.95, 63 pgs.

PASTORELLES
John Taggart
Flood Editions, $13.95, 104 pgs.

AFTER THE CHINESE
Joseph Torra
Pressed Wafer, $12, 95 pgs.

AN ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN GREEK POETRY
Nanos Valaoritis and Thanasis Maskaleris, eds.
Talisman, $24.95, 640 pgs.

MACULAR HOLE
Catherine Wagner
Fence Books, $12, 64 pgs.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD COMPARED TO A BUBBLE
Anne Waldman
Penguin, $18, 107 pgs.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCES
POETICS AND POLITICS IN ACTION
Anne Waldman & Lisa Birman, eds.
Coffee House, $18, 480 pgs.

HAZE: ESSAYS, POEMS, PROSE
Mark Wallace
Edge Books, $12.50, 104 pgs.

MAGAZINES

COMMONWEAL 2
947 Geary St., #5, SF, CA 94117. Work by David Hadbawnik, Stacy Doris, Keven Killian, Elise Ficarra, and others. $5.

COURT GREEN 1
Columbia College Chicago, English Department, 600 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605. Work by Ron Padgett, and others. $10.

CRAYON
Bob Harrison, 2542 N. Bremen, #2, Milwaukee, WI 53212. Work by Tina Darragh, Rodrigo Toscano, Pat Reed, and others. $25 for two-year subscription.

HANGING LOOSE 84
www.hangingloosepress.com. Work by Maureen Owen, Jeni Olin, Tom Savage, Hal Sirowitz, and others. Three issues for $17.50.

KIOSK 2004
wings.buffalo.edu/epc/mags/kiosk/index.html. Work by Tyrone Williams, Tan Lin, and others. $5.

LONG SHOT
P.O. Box 6238, Hoboken, NJ 08030. The "Beat Bush" issue with 118 contributors. $10.

SAINT ELIZABETH STREET 2
136 Freeman St, #1-A, Brooklyn, NY 11222, saintlizstreet@hotmail.com. Work by Bill Kushner, Charles Bernstein, Lytle Shaw, and others. $5.

URVOX 3
P.O. Box 9249, Denver, CO 80209. Andrew Joron, Pattie McCarthy, and others. $10.

VERSE: THE PROSE ISSUE II
Dept. of English, U. of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602. Hélène Cixous, and others. $18 for three issues.

XANTIPPE
P.O. Box 20997, Oakland, CA 94620-0997. Work by Ange Mlinko, Tsering Wangmo Dhompa, and others. $10.

XCP: CROSS CULTURAL POETICS 14
bfn.org/~xcp/. Work by Kamau Brathwaite, Tyrone Williams, and others.

TINY PRESSES

YOUR CHEATIN' HEART
Edmund Berrigan
Furniture Press, 19 Murdock Road, Baltimore, MD 21212. Chapbook.

PLAN B
Chris Carnevale
The Sea Press, 63 Woodland Road, Lee, MA 01238. Chapbook with cover by Barbeio Barros Gizzi.

ITTY CITY
Sean Cole
Pressed Wafer, 9 Columbus Square, Boston, MA 02116. Chapbook with cover art by Jim Behrle.

AVOID ACTIVITY
William Fuller
Rubba Ducky, epc.buffalo.edu/presses/rubbaducky. Chapbook.

SHORT SHRIFT
Malka Geffen
Bigfan Press, bigfanpress@yahoo.com. Chapbook with silkscreened cover.

17 SONGS and SIX POEMS
Michael O'Brien
The Elephantine Press, PO Box 923, 6200 AX Maastricht, The Netherlands. 4' x 4' silkscreened chapbooks.

TABLETS 1- 4: IN THE PLACE OF SKY; NATURE-SOMEWHERE; EXISTENCE SOME-WHERE; THE CONTAINER OF TRANSITION and TARSALS 1-2: ROVE AND ARRANGE, A COLLECTION OF SILENCES
Peter Ganick
West Hartford, CT. Set of four self-published chapbooks and two self-published chapbooks.

FLOURISH: SONNETS
Jeffrey Cyphers Wright
Soncino Books, PO Box 1215 Cooper Station, NY, NY 10276. 4' x 8' chapbook.

VANISHING POINTS OF RESEMBLANCE
Tom Becket
www.generatorpress.com, $7, paperback.

POETS AT EL SWOOPO
Fell Swoop, The All Bohemian Review, 3003 Ponco De Leon St., New Orleans, LA 70119. Work by Ted Berrigan, Anselm Hollo, Clark Coolidge, Maureen Owen, and others.

MY HUSBAND, THE GENIUS
Aram Saroyan
Fell Swoop, The All Bohemian Review, 3003 Ponco De Leon St., New Orleans, LA 70119.

THE RISE AND FALL OF PLANET X
15th Annual Eco-Lit class anthology at Naropa University, taught by Jack Collom.

IN MINE EYES
Christopher Porpora
Anne's House, P. O. Box 392, Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY 12520, Limited letterpress edition of 175.

MY LUMP IN THE BED: LOVE POEMS FOR GEORGE W. BUSH
Stuart Ross, Ed.
Dwarf Puppets on Paade, www.hunkamooga.com. Chapbook.

INCREDIBLY SHORT STORIES 1
marinaeckler@hotmail.com
Work by Noel Black, and others.

MARCH 18, 2003
Michael Lally
Written for "VERSUS: Poets Against the War" at Paula Cooper Gallery, Libellum books, libellum@el.net.

MOLA
Bob Harrison
Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs. yoyolabs@hotmail.com. $6.

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