

# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#205 / DECEMBER 2005 - JANUARY 2006



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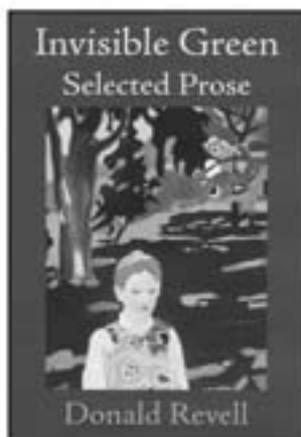


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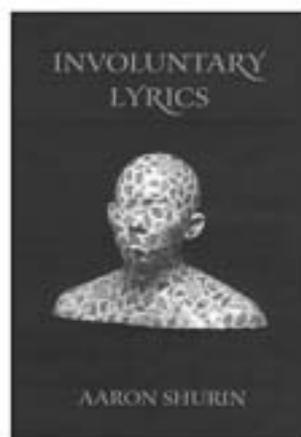
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# THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#205 DECEMBER 2005/JANUARY 2006

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Brendan Lorber

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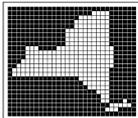
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State of the Arts



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

Upon the river, point me out my course  
That blows from the green fields and from  
the clouds And from the sky: be nothing bet-  
ter Than a wandering cloud Come fast upon  
me Such as were not made for me. I cannot  
miss my way. I breathe again That burthen  
of my natural self The heavy weight of many  
a weary day; Come from a house Shall be  
my harbour; promises of human like Are  
mine in prospect; Now I am free, enfran-  
chis'd and at large. The earth is all before  
me, with a heart

And the result was elevating thoughts  
Among new objects simplified, arranged  
And out of what had been, what was, the  
place "O'er the blue firmament a radiant  
white," Was thronged with impregnations,  
like those wilds That into music touch the  
passing wind; Had been inspired, and  
walk'd about in dreams, And in Eclipse my  
meditations turn'd And unencroached upon,  
now, seemed brighter far, Though fallen  
from bliss, a solitary, full of caverns, rocks  
And audible seclusions: here also found an  
element that pleased her Tried her strength;  
made it live. Here Neither guilt, nor vice,  
nor misery forced upon my sight Could  
overthrow my trust in Courage, Tenderness,  
& Grace. In the tender scenes I most did  
take my delight.

Thus strangely did I war against myself  
What then remained in such Eclipse? What  
night? The wizard instantaneously dissolves  
Through all the habitations of past years  
And those to come, and hence an emptiness;  
& shall continue evermore to make & shall  
perform to exalt and to refine Inspired,  
celestial presence ever pure From all the  
sources of her former strength. Then I said:  
"And these were mine, Not a deaf echo,  
merely, of thought, But living sounds. Yea,  
even the visible universe was scann'd And as  
by the simple waving of a wand With some-  
thing of a kindred spirit, fell Beneath the  
domination of a taste, its animation & its  
deeper sway."

*Unsigned*

## W.H. AUDEN TUNA MOLD TO PERFORM AT NEW YEAR'S

Our 32nd Annual New Year's Day  
Marathon Reading will take place on  
Sunday, January 1st, 2006. Because it falls  
on a Sunday this year we will start the event  
at 3pm, after St. Marks' weekly Sunday ser-  
vice. As always, we are appealing to the  
community for donations of books, food and  
labor. The Marathon Reading is the Poetry  
Project's major fundraising event, and it con-  
tinues to take place thanks to the support of  
writers, artists, musicians, publishers and  
vendors. Oh, and the very upright backbone  
of the event, volunteers. We need at least 10  
people an hour to make people wonder  
"how do they do it, it seems to have orga-  
nized itself?" Hum, if my math is correct,  
that's more than 100 volunteers total over  
the course of the day.

Office dialogue:

SS: "Corrine who gets volunteers for this,  
you or me?"

CF: "Me."

We're both new but she somehow knows  
more than I do. We will also be accepting  
donations of food and books to sell. The  
book table is a greatly anticipated part of the  
event, a rare bookshop that manifests one  
day per year, and we are counting on the  
generosity of poets, publishers and patrons  
to donate chap books, broadsides, out of  
print classics or any other printed matter of  
interest.

I'm especially looking forward to this gath-  
ering of poets and would like to offer some  
lines from Paul Blackburn (from *The Parallel  
Voyages*) as something to think about before  
we meet:

"Personally, I affirm two things: / the possi-  
bility of warmth & contact / in the human  
relationship : / as juxtaposed against the  
materialistic pig of a technological world"

and

"the possibility of s o n g / within that  
world: which is like saying 'yes' to sunlight."

Remember, the Marathon can't and won't  
happen without your help! If you are  
interested in volunteering or making a  
food or book donation please email  
info@poetryproject.com or call 212-674-0910.  
Thank you, friends.

*Stacy Szymaszek*

## FROM THE EDITOR

The off kilter Scottman taking off his kilt, this  
disturbing year has disrobed entirely to  
reveal a new one underneath. But Russian-  
doll style, 2006 should be not entirely unlike  
all its predecessors. I've skipped ahead to  
2012 where I'll be waiting at the end of the  
Mayan calendar for any fellow traveler who  
enjoys jogging neck deep in the teleological.  
In the future, some poets have finally figured  
out there is no fame for any of us, only com-  
radeship among those who have given up  
such idiotic conceits. But don't freak out,  
there are still enough who haven't to make  
things amusing for those who recognize  
invisibility is the precursor to actual experi-  
ence. For everyone who has tenure there will  
always be someone with elevenure to resent  
if that kind of cattiness is your bag. To say  
your ideas trump all others is the same kind  
of thinking that pits, say feminists against  
gay-rights activists for limited cultural atten-  
tion which serves the same imperial interests  
as Iraq's Shia fighting the Sunni. To the  
extent you covet success in a fundamentally  
misguided system is the extent that you sup-  
port the system & all its war-mongering. But  
while the institutional maladies that afflict  
us may be only very slowly tractable over  
eons, every moment is rife with absolute  
transformation. Cicadas in January and  
snow days in June, the meteorological dénouement  
headed at us, are, aside from  
harbingers of the end of the world, efficient  
symbols of the love thy enemy stored within  
each of us. The shared identity of all oppo-  
sites. That & having to edit this newsletter is  
why I missed your reading. I heard it was  
great. Please assume anything you enjoy in  
this issue is inspired by your work, because  
it is.

*Brendan Lorber*

## PROPS TO KATZ

We'd like to give Vincent Katz a hearty con-  
gratulations for having received  
the National Translation Award. The  
American Literary Translators Association  
have recognized his translations of  
Propertius, a decade in the making, as "the  
most valuable contribution to literary trans-  
lation during the preceding year." *Odio nos-  
trum penuriosus Latin , nos gratulor Vincent in  
suus veneratio!*

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## FROM THE READERS

Newsletter,

Your crazy fonts are destroying me and devastating my soul! Do you want to destroy me and do you want to be in the soul-devastating business? You god-damned punks?? Have some goddamned respect!! Trevor Winkfield reads this Newsletter!! Show some goddamned respect.

Sometimes when I'm watching Charlie Rose I feel seasick and realize that all the fuzz on the television is really Charlie's soul and I think I'm the only one who sees it. You goddamn punks. Those fonts are your souls and it's as dirty as Charlie Rose!! Have some fucking respect!!

xxx,

Jim Behrle

To the Editor:

I read with appreciation the report on Albany's poetry scene by Doug Rothschild (PPN #204). I thank him for the sympathetic & mostly accurate picture of the poetry scene here. However, as a long time habitue of the Albany & environs open mics, & as the host of the monthly open mic at the Lark St. Bookshop (third Thursdays at 7:30), I am compelled to write with two corrections.

First, Mr. Rothschild states "As I have not been spending my free time on the weekends in Albany, I have not as yet really become involved with the bulk of the local ... poetry scene." Well, nearly all of the open mics take place during the week, not on the weekends (i.e., first Wednesdays, second Tuesdays, second Wednesdays, second Thursdays, first & third Wednesdays, third Thursdays, last Mondays, last Tuesdays, you get the idea). The only weekend readings are the first Sunday in Schenectady (close enough) & the second Sunday in Albany. So we invite Doug to come read more often with us during any particular week of the month, in Albany.

Second, he seems to not like "the spoken word poem." But that is indeed a broad brush, since at any particular open mic on any particular night one might hear hip-hop poems, rhymed quatrains, slam-poems, long-line rants & short line musings. I mean, "spoken word poems" are by definition what one reads/recites aloud. Those dense, footnoted academic tracts that require 17 readings just to find the end are not (usually) read aloud, nor should they be. The "spoken word" scene is as varied, and as ephemeral, as music. As Eric Dolphy famously said, "When you hear music, after it's over, it's gone in the air, you can never capture it again."

So if any of the readers of the Newsletter would like to find out more about the many open mics in Albany, I invite you to visit [www.albanypoets.com](http://www.albanypoets.com), [www.thehiddencity.com](http://www.thehiddencity.com), [www.hvwg.org](http://www.hvwg.org), or give me a call.

Peace,

Dan Wilcox

## KATRINA GRATITUDE

Many gigantic thanks to the following volunteers and donors who helped us pull together the Benefit for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. We managed to raise \$5,042 for the 21st Century Foundation's Hurricane Katrina Recovery Fund, as well as collect several dozen bags worth of clothing and other items. We could not have done it without the help of the following:

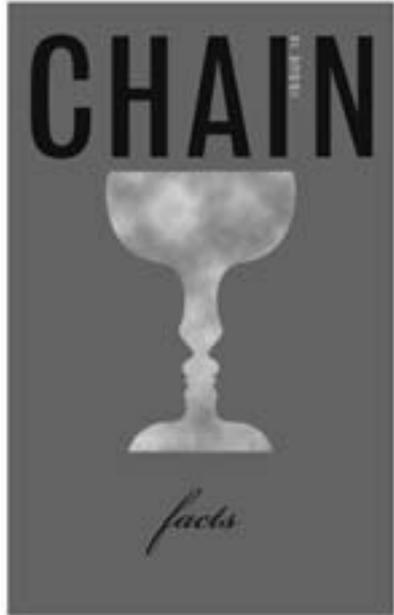
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# WORLD NEWS



## EUGENE OSTASHEVSKY IN FLORENCE, ITALY

I left the apartment yesterday evening with the express aim of buying a CD player, since a friend of mine had given me her band's CD yet I had nothing to play it on here. Lines of blue-clad riot police blocked the streets leading west from Piazza della Repubblica, with fence-windowed buses behind them. Those positioned closer to the south sported berets at gallant angles, whereas those further north wore a combination of motorcycle and Roman helmets, replete with black plastic neck-guards. Some police had transparent rectangular shields of the legionary variety, and one could imagine them doing the *testudo* move—like Caesar's men in Elizabeth Taylor's *Cleopatra*—under rioters' rocks, should it come to that. Others, however, had opted for round Greek-style shields, also made of transparent plastic with black plastic shield-arm straps on the inside. In place of swords, everyone was holding batons. The only thing needed for the performance were the rioters, but these, unfortunately, were nowhere in sight.

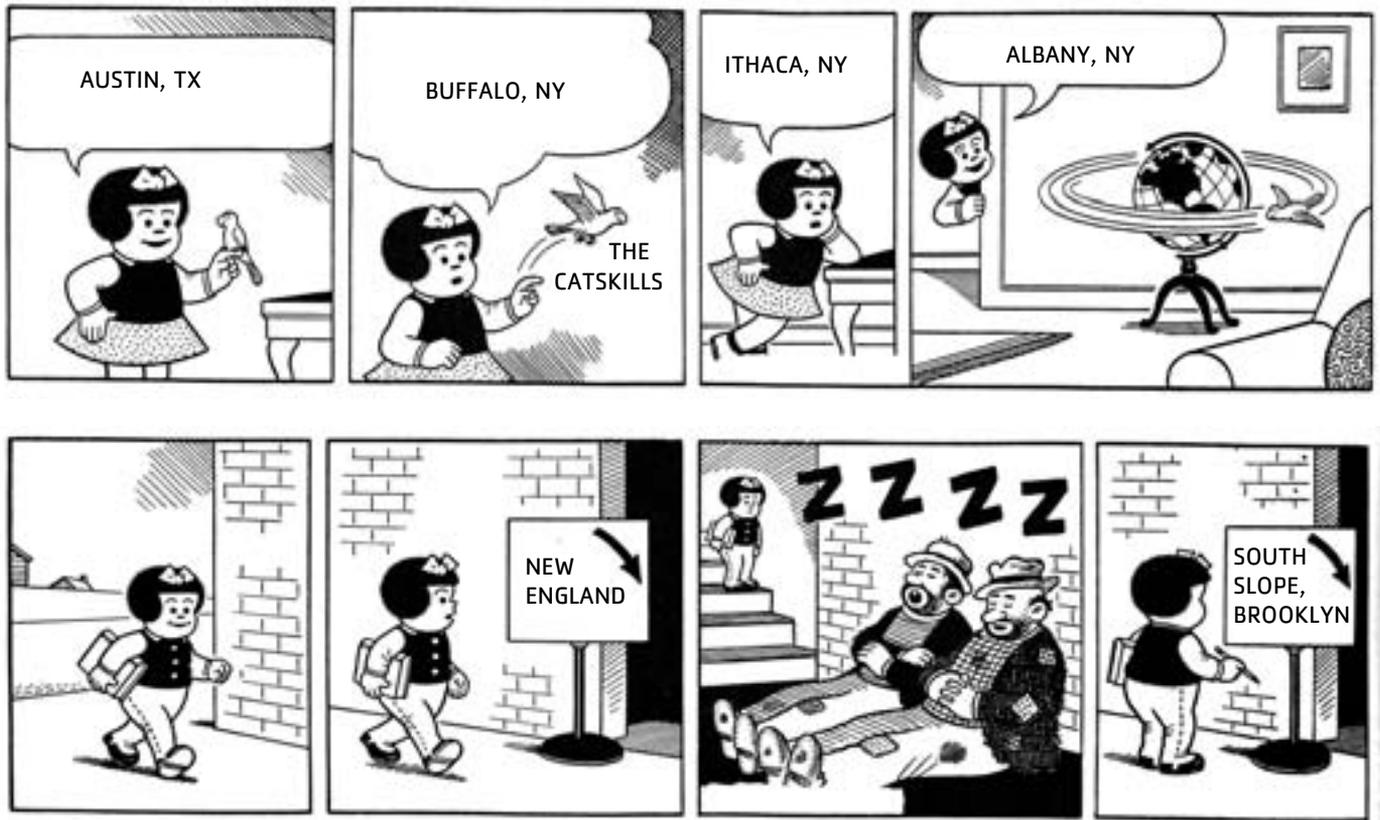
A group of passersby stood conversing with the policemen. It took me a few minutes to muster up the courage to ask what was happening, and when I did ask, it was two young ladies walking their dog (a mutt) rather than the *carabinieri* themselves. They answered in dialect, and not Florentine dialect either, but something very close to the tip of the teeth. Their answer included the word for demonstration, and also the word for mosque. So I went around the corner in search of the mosque and the demonstration, although the electronics stores were about to close and that would mean no CD player until next Thursday.

The demonstration was not particularly large but it was tightly packed, and the demonstrators were the kind of counter-cultural-looking people one meets at experimental film shows. I thought of joining them in the hopes of making friends, but reticence drove me to take in the spectacle from the side. And what a spectacle it was! Two rows of police menacingly brandished their shields below lowered visors, while the demonstrators facing them sang

something anthemic and rocked back and forth, also in rows. (Italians sing every chance they get.) It all resembled a rock concert, when the audience belts out the refrain instead of the band and everyone fuses in the sentiment of heroic camaraderie. Flags flew above hoods and heads: the flag of the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra*, the alliance of former Socialists and moderate Communists, and also the Jolly Roger, which I presumed was the flag of the Anarchists. Being an ex-Soviet, I enjoyed the juxtaposition of flags, although any mass of people singing something in unison and brandishing their fists makes me feel as if a pogrom is about to unfold. I myself, I confess, have marched in demonstrations several times, and even joined in a chant once when I was seventeen; however, I still find it impossible to shake the feelings of ridiculousness and shame that accompany my taking part in such ventures.

I still wondered what any of this had to do with mosques, since none of the demonstrators looked as if they ever set foot in one, except while backpacking. A nearby smoker explained that the Northern League, a secessionist rightwing party that is now a member of the governing coalition, was holding a conference behind the police lines. The demonstrators were protesting the League's anti-immigration policies, and, in particular, its attempts to prevent the building of a mosque in Florence. Funny, I thought, the League wants to prevent the building of the mosque; the demonstrators want to prevent the League from preventing the building of the mosque; and the police want to prevent the demonstrators from preventing the League from preventing of the building of the mosque. There was surely a possibility for the generation of mathematical entities here, up to and including infinity. I also thought that everyone wanted to prevent someone else from being themselves, and yet the mosque would surely be built, the bigots got to be bigots, the demonstrators got to demonstrate, and the police got to do some policing: this was not such an entirely sad world after all. Feeling this reassured, I went off to the electronics store, where I did buy the CD player but I can't get it to work.

*Eugene Ostashevsky is the author of Iterature, a book of poems just published by Ugly Duckling Presse.*



JANE SPRAGUE IN  
**LOS ANGELES, CA**

*Sky-High Kid-Vision @ "The Moving Word"*

When you are ten and your mother is a poet you decide more and more often that you are less and less interested in hearing her read or hearing other poets read. However, if you are ten and your mother is a poet and you get hauled along for the show, Jen Hofer's house is not at all a bad place to be taken. For one thing, you walk into a room filled with food and dessert and you are hugged by beautiful women. Now that is not bad. For another thing, Jen has a very cool house and a way of climbing up to the roof of the studio out back. So you do your Star Wars best, stick deep inside your Jawa hood and take to the roof for respite. And this is what happens on the night of August 12, 2005 at "The Moving Word: a homemade evening of 16mm films & poems co-curated by David Gatten & Jen Hofer featuring films by Paolo Davanzo, David Gatten, Janie Geiser, Adele Horne, Lewis Klahr, Lisa Marr, Lee Anne Schmitt, and poems by Will Alexander, Jen Hofer, Harryette Mullen, Jane Sprague, and Diane Ward."

The night begins as more and more and then even MORE people filter through Jen's kitchen to find a spot to sit in her newly (cactus) landscaped backyard. It gets dark. And the films begin. Los Angeles is, after all, the city of film. Continuing a collaboration begun years ago in Chicago & Iowa City, David & Jen bring friends & peers together to engage with each other's work. The screen pitched in the backyard, folks fill every square inch of seating gobbling everything from Key Lime pie to Negra Modelo cerveza. The film score initially dukes it out with the neighbor's Christian salsa music and the occasional pining of dogs, but before long the night settles in under one of those never-quite-dark L.A. skies.

We were treated to Janie Geiser's collaged images ripped from the wheel of primary colors deep-dyed and gorgeous; a reading by Will Alexander from his *Exobiology As Goddess* and some newer poems; Adele Horne's (or Lisa Marr's?) lush black and white cinematic archeo-discovery of humankind's origins as a series of elliptical cowboy tropes; Diane Ward's careful poetic probe into politics, power and the language of power; Schmitt's complicated narrative of intimacy-interruptus; Jen Hofer's excellent new read from her manuscript-in-progress, *One*, Lewis Klahr's collaged comics to rocking score (this gets us out of our Jawa hood and happy) into Jane's Lyme disease apocalypse poem "White Footed Mouse" (read in tandem with Jen); David Gatten's insanely intense film of footage basically spoken by crabs, yes—crabs (you have to see it to know what I mean) and Harryette Mullen's poem/ode to the daily bus she rides: "Number 9 Sepulveda" (among others). The night finished with Paolo Davanzo's dedication to his Mom, filmed on the sly in China just after the Tiananmen Square "uprising" followed by Paolo & pals rollicking bluegrass band and Jen's rousing call to dance! So, twist my arm, dance we did, carefully picking our way over cacti and glad for backyard gifts from the City of Angels. Goodnight.

*Jane Sprague channels Jake Cuddihy.*

JULIE REID IN  
**PETALUMA, CA**

In the Petaluma Yellow Pages, there is no listing for Poetry. At first glance it might seem that, between Plumbing and Police Departments, there is nothing but Plywood and Veneers and Pneumatic Equipment. But no one who cares for poetry should let

# WORLD NEWS

this discourage her or him. In my opinion, pneumatics (being the study of mechanical properties of air in closed systems), smack dab against veneers suggests the very space in which poetry must reside most of the time. And besides, tomorrow is the opening night for “Not the More Lovely,” a dreamscape circus sideshow written and directed by Karen Penley, of “Circus Proboscis” fame, and who pays enormous attention to the small and very often unseen things. “Feeling the invisibles in the air,” she calls it. That thing Kenneth Patchen meant when he said: “For there is something to protect us which is more defenseless than we are.”

To feel for invisible things in the air, it should be more tranquil than it has been at the last few tech rehearsals. Poetry shrivels under the terse commands of impatient lighting technicians. I have watched Karen grow a little smaller in the past few days under the burden of handling the “above ground” end of her show. Because others have expressed doubt about her “invisibles,” she has even begun to lose track of them herself.

My role in the show, I feel, other than being the Gashlycrumb Tiny-esque character who scoots across stage blowing a black piece of fluff, and Karen’s affectionately novice costume and stage design assistant, is to help assure her of the very real substance of her show. Because it is after what we should all like to be after, soft circles like buttons covered in velour emerging out of the stunted eddies and ruts we get ourselves into when we’re stopped, thwarted and halted. As she herself has said, it’s “about trying to move through the blocks that are imposed, etc. so we can have full lives that move, that go all the way up, all the way down, in; out, etc. and it’s about how, if you go deep enough down, including everything as you go, you have the energy to go all the way up...”

Under our veneers, in Petaluma at least, there is pneumatic equipment to be had. Under the thin sheets of deceptively orderly appearances, we are trying to celebrate the crinkly and awkward things in us that unfold in strange and interesting ways.

*Julie Reid has a fear of being looked at combined with a yearning to be seen.*

## ERIC LORBERER IN THE TWIN CITIES

It’s been slow lately for poetry readings around here—and this considering that, if you throw a rock in the direction of a coffee shop, you’re likely to hit a versifier who calls the Twin Cities home—but things are finally starting to pick up after the normal summer lull. Tonight, for example, Sam Hamill’s a guest at a nearby college and a “Poets Against the War” reading has been scheduled, with local luminaries such as Robert Bly and Wang Ping joining in to lambaste the government’s ongoing police action in Iraq. Tomorrow, Raymond Federman will lay his supple postmodern sentences on a probably unsuspecting crowd at the University of Minnesota (yes, I realize Federman is considered a “fiction writer” in this country, but let’s give language-rich, experimental prose such as his an honorary seat at our poetry table—perhaps we could question these increasingly brittle codifications of genre while

we’re at it). The next night, much-loved local hero Jim Moore reads from his latest collection. And on and on... one’s calendar boxes can finally get a bit messy again.

Those particular three readings illustrate the range of poetry happenings as good as any: whether one’s bent is political, avant-garde, or rooted in the heartland, we’ve got it all—though rarely in one place. Our cities are large enough that there isn’t one poetry scene but many, and they seem not to intersect as often as might be catalyzing. Part of this is simply due to surfeit—even the most ardent reader of poetry might be hard-pressed to attend those three consecutive events—but part of it, I’d wager, is because poets and their ilk rarely stray from their sub-niches once they’ve found them, and it would require a summit meeting to get members of various poetry sects to break their détente.

This isn’t necessarily bad, of course—like everyone, I’ve got my own notions about which readings are worth attending—but it does highlight one of the reasons why poetry’s audiences are so notoriously small. One of the ways Rain Taxi tries to combat this is by sponsoring a city-wide book festival, now in its fifth year: for one day in October, at least, many factions meet under one roof, and so far, no fistfights have broken out (though I’m still hoping). Another great model for addressing the issue is by getting writers to do something else than shill their own work—our pals over at the Walker Art Center, for example, will have poet Elizabeth Alexander talking onstage with visual artist Kerry James Marshall later this month.

Of course, when things are quieter than we’d like there’s still an upside, and that’s to get our poetry in a silent way: from a book. There, too, we’re lucky that three of the biggest and best small presses in the country—Coffee House Press, Graywolf Press, and Milkweed Editions—all devote a sizeable portion of their lists to poetry, publishing both local writers and those far-flung. Their presence helps create a welcome environment for readers who might wish to turn away from the mainstream and toward the Heraclitean flow of poetry.

*Eric Lorberer edits the poetry-friendly Rain Taxi Review of Books from a secret location in Minneapolis.*

## HOA NGUYEN & DALE SMITH IN AUSTIN, TX

In 2005, poet Peggy Kelley began the Cross Quarter Reading Series. As the name suggests, the readings fall between the solstice or equinoxes (the quarter days on the calendar) and are of seasonal and ritual significance. Peggy (who studied with Robin Blaser) and John Herndon opened the series at the first cross quarter of 2005; Hoa Nguyen and Elisa McCool read for the second. The readings take place at Peggy’s yoga studio in South Austin, a great space to hear work while children spread out on the expansive floor to play. Canvases by painter RJ Oehler grace the walls while music by the Faux Pas accompanies post-reading conversations and wine drinking. Ken Fontenot and Norm Ballinger read November 5.

In other news, poet Shin Yu Pai and novelist Rex Rose read for Skanky Possum at 12th Street Books October 15. Pai’s

Equivalence was published by La Alameda Press in 2003 and Rose's novel Toast (Creative Arts) appeared in 2002. In November Winnow Press publisher Corinne Lee read with Austin poet Joe Hoppe at 12th Street. Lee's first book PYX was recently published by Viking and was a 2004 National Poetry Series winner.

Had you been in Austin Friday, September 30, chances are, poetry lovers, you would have been at our house that evening for potluck and libations. The usual crowd of artists, poets, children and skanksters arrived for conversation ranging from pedagogy to dove hunting ('tis the season in Tejas). Somehow, within moments it seems, a whole bottle of Sauza vanished (thanks David Hadbawnik). What, you may ask, has such late night debauchery to do with poetry? Well, everything, of course. It is the word in life getting tracked that can shine time to time.

Of note: a fat raccoon has taken to spending time in our yard and in a tree next door. It eats cat food and pranks about rattling leaves and disturbing loose plaster along the house skirt. We like to think this creature brings some kind of wild promise from the boggy bottom of Boggy Creek. As we ramble beyond equinox toward winter the quality of light shifts, the sky becomes more complex and we are left looking for what will come next—children in the water hose, a dragon fly by plumbego—the intersection of things with words. Austin poetry, whatever *it is*, and it is many things, but mostly, what makes it unique, is a populist spirit at home with the intense apprehensions of modernity guiding it. Thankfully, we've all been acquainted with the modern for a while now. We can invite it in from the sun. Ask it to sit and speak with us. We relax and point to the clouds and imagine the shapes existing there.

*Hoa Nguyen & Dale Smith run Skanky Possum*

## MICHAEL KELLEHER IN BUFFALO, NY

### OVER THE FALLS

September ends with the poetry season's first trip to the Falls, accompanied by L.A. poet and novelist, Sesshu Foster. Having arrived ahead of the publication of his new book, Atomik Aztex, whose publication by City Lights had been postponed by two weeks, Buffalo audiences had to settle for three readings unaccompanied by the traditional post-reading purchase of a book.

On Thursday, September 29, Sesshu read to a packed house of about seventy-five students and faculty at Buffalo State College. Speaking of how Hollywood markets a vision of L.A. to the entire planet that is completely at odds with the place in which he grew up, Sesshu (who is named after a 15th century Japanese artist) said

he felt it was his calling to write about the L.A. of his experience, specifically East L.A.

Foster writes prose poems and fiction, and the line between the two is connected primarily by his gifts as a storyteller. Poems relating his experiences in east L.A. and beyond are woven out of rich threads of idiomatic and colloquial speech, and are punctuated by strong end-stopped narratives which often resolve themselves in clever images and turns of phrase. The laid-back rhythms of his poems belie a strong political undercurrent that challenges both

the status quo of the dominant mainstream culture and the pieties of the multicultural left.

The prose poems were enhanced by readings of sections from Atomik Aztex. The novel is a blend of science fiction and satire that imagines an alternate reality in which the Aztecs have conquered the Spanish and are now colonizing Europe, and in which dead Aztecs return to an afterlife-as-slaughterhouse in East L.A.

After the reading (which began at the ungodly hour of 9 a.m.), we drove to Niagara Falls on a bright, windy day, parked our car on the American side and walked across the Rainbow Bridge to get a view of the falls from "over there." As we approached the Horseshoe Falls, the rising mist began

to dampen our clothes, and then one of the those strange rain showers that occur in full sunlight began to douse us, so we wandered back to Clifton Hill to find something to eat amid the wax museums, casinos and haunted houses.

That night Sesshu read again at Big Orbit Gallery along with poet James Thomas Stevens. An old ice factory converted into an art gallery attached to several large, cheap lofts with studio and living space, Big Orbit is home to quite a bit of poetry and experimental art in Buffalo. Currently, an installation is being constructed out all kinds of old scientific machinery. Rube Goldberg-type contraptions hooked up to satellites, spectrometers and an atom-smasher littered the room in which reading took place.

James read mostly from a long piece about Joseph Brant, whose strong middle section contained some barbed political commentaries written as clever rhyming epigrams. Sadly, much of the poetry and poetics community, perhaps unaware that these two writers were more interesting than most who come to read in our fair city, stayed home. But the intimate crowd of writers and friends who did come, were served up one of the better readings we've seen in some time.

Friday, Sesshu gave a final reading to another packed house of students and teachers at Erie Community College. That night we saw *A History Of Violence* and ate Thai food. Did you know that Viggo Mortensen is also a *poet*?

*Michael Kelleher is the author of To Be Sung (Blazevox, 2005) and the Artistic Director of Just Buffalo Literary Center.*



Irish children sing it like this:

# WORLD NEWS

SPARROW IN

## THE CATSKILLS

Here are some messages from “bumper sticker laureate” Paul McMahon (of Woodstock): “PAPA’S GOT A BRAND NEW BAGHDAD” and “THIS IS THE END (the front’s up there).” Clark Strand sent me the haiku “‘This is depressing’: / my five-syllable review / of The Rolling Stones.”

The sunny, balletic poet-activist Amy Ouzoonian held a reading September 20 at Woodstock Town Hall for her anthology *In the Arms of Words: Poems for Disaster Relief*, to benefit victims of the tsunami and Hurricane Katrina (a book I am in). (See [www.west-ernedgepress.com](http://www.west-ernedgepress.com).) MaryJo Martin read: “can I dissolve / the instincts that drive me / to contend with nature //...though you have taught me sensei / that coolness / can neither be / a likely remedy / for drowning.”

Later that same day, Carolyn Forché appeared at The Colony, as part of the Voices for Peace reading. (She was introduced by Ed Sanders). Ms. Forché’s honest, formidable poems clad the group in wonder-garments. After, we gave a standing ovation. Tears welled in my eyes.

I attended the memorial for John Herald, the bluegrass guitar virtuoso and songwriter (“Yes, and now I’ll swim ashore, for I must make it / Although I’m up to my neck in high muddy water,” sang Linda Ronstadt on *Stone Poneys Volume III*.) Levon Helm, John Sebastian, and Larry Campbell – who is brilliant on Bob Dylan’s latest album, *Love and Theft* – played. Judy Whitfield read two poems by John’s father, Leon Serabian Herald, who was a Greenwich Village poet.

A group of (female) writers have been gathering at my house on Fridays for the last 1 1/2 years, performing what I call “experiments.” I sent them the following questionnaire, and several responded:

A) Have you written anything lately?

(1) Yes. Today. (2) yes (3) Only two little poems based on my wildlife work. I had a little baby squirrel who died on Wednesday. He was found clinging to his dead mother. The girl who found him gave him evaporated milk and he must have aspirated some into his lungs. He had aspiration pneumonia. I tried to save him and could not. It broke my heart . . . hence two small painful poems: “When a baby goes/from this world to the next/I weep.” “Did I do enough?/Was the understanding true?/Oh. . . which I, which truth?”

B) If so, what is the title?

(1) On Buying a Dress. (2) Dancing the Bones (3) No titles

C) Have you read anything useful lately?

(1) I have read *The Sun* magazine. (2) Rumi, Hafiz, Cohen (3) *Reading The Jesus Mysteries* now.

D) Do you feel that this area is conducive to writing poetry?

(1) This area, meaning upstate NY? Yes. But anywhere can be. (2) only if nature is conducive to your writing nature (3) This

area is very conducive to writing. Trees, clouds, crows, squirrels, bear, ‘possum, more.

E) What is the most difficult part of writing?

(1) Distractions. And then sitting down to do it. (2) sitting

F) What is the easiest part of writing?

(1) It’s like running. It’s best to get into the discipline of it. You do it in any weather. You know some days are easier than others. (2) losing myself into my muse (3) Nothing about writing is easy for me.

G) Do you have a favorite place, recently?

(1) Right now, its Big Deep. A swimming hole close to Woodstock. I like it when either I’m the only one there, or there are very few people. (2) i like being by water. (3) Favorite place: the bathtub.

Key: 1 = Adah Frank, 2 = Davida, 3 = Jo-Anne Rowley

*Sparrow has shown, so far, no talent for Su Doku. He lives in a trailer in Phoenicia, New York.*

AARON TIEGER IN

## ITHACA, NY

One might expect that with two schools (Cornell and Ithaca College) flanking the town of Ithaca, there would be a lively community full of poets, readings, conferences, etc. And in fact one would be right, though the keen observer might note that with the exception of conferences, most of these things exist completely independently of either of the town’s primary academic institutions. Though Cornell has a nationally respected MFA program, there is precious little interaction between its members (including faculty) and the non-academic poetic community.

Despite this ivory disconnect, things do happen. The most recent development on the local poetry scene is the advent of the SOON Productions reading series, of which I am a co-curator. Founded in 2004 by Karen Anderson, Theo Hummer, the now-departed Joel Kuszai, and Josh Corey (Ithaca’s ambassador to the blogosphere), SOON has recently celebrated its first year of “innovative and small press” poetry readings at State of the Art Gallery in the heart of downtown Ithaca. We’ve been happy and lucky to bring many exciting readers to our loyal audience, beginning with publisher/poets Jess Mynes and Christopher Rizzo and going on to include a variety of readers from a variety of backgrounds, including Brenda Iijima, Ron Henry, Peter Gizzi, Elizabeth Willis, Mark Lamoureux, Ange Mlinko, Karl Parker, Sean Cole, Fred Muratori, Guillermo Juan Parra, Anna Moschovakis, and Matvei Yankelevich, among others. Most readers thus far have come from either New York or Boston, and it’s always nice to have some new faces in town for the weekend.

The saddest news has been the lapse into hiatus of the once-mighty West End Reading Series, founded by Jane Sprague (also no longer a resident) and curated most recently by Ashley Watson. Hopefully this will be a brief, restorative interval and the series will rise anew in 2006.

As to publications, Ron Henry and I both continue to publish: Ron’s *Aught* is an online powerhouse of experimental poetry (fea-

turing such poets as Sheila E. Murphy, Vernon Frazer, and Steve Dalachinsky), and my own *CARVE* continues to appear (roughly quarterly, most recently in the guise of two new chapbooks: Christopher Rizzo's *Zing* and Jess Mynes' *birds for example*. Neither *Aught* nor *CARVE* are really local in focus, however. Also, Greg DeLisle's PoetrySpace website is an ongoing attempt to foster an online poetry community.

Also, in addition to whatever mysterious things happen in the hills of academia, rumor is that there is a highly successful poetry slam/open mike at Juna's, a local coffeeshop, as well as a group of genteel folks known as the Ithaca Community Poets, but I have yet to find anyone who knows much about either of them.

In short, Ithaca is a beautiful (if remote) place full of trees, hills, and water, with a surprisingly lively poetry scene. Certain local (i.e. nonacademic) poets have recently been seen congregating, and already this is pointing toward a more tangible sense of community for those who plan to live here longer than it takes to earn a degree.

#### Ithaca Poetry Links:

*Aught*: [\[people2.clarityconnect.com/webpages6/ronhenry/aught.htm\]](http://people2.clarityconnect.com/webpages6/ronhenry/aught.htm)  
*CARVE*: [\[carvepoems.org\]](http://carvepoems.org)  
 PoetrySpace: [\[poetryspace.org\]](http://poetryspace.org)  
 SOON Productions: [\[soonproductions.org\]](http://soonproductions.org)

*In addition to writing poems, Aaron Tieger edits CARVE Poems and co-curates the SOON Productions reading series in Ithaca, NY.*



## DGLSN.RØTHSICHLD IN ALBANY, NY

Dear Readers of the PPNL, Dan Wilcox, the Doyen of Albany Poetry, has written to inform me that i haven't been missing much poetry here by being out of town on the weekends, as it all happens during the week. Dan writes, "nearly all of the open mics take place during the week...first Wednesdays, second Tuesdays, second Wednesdays, second Thursdays, first & third Wednesdays, third Thursdays, last Mondays, last Tuesdays." So, it seems that i've been missing the poetry because i've been working 15 hour days & can't seem to find my slide rule. [i am a poetry zombie, on a given night i will go to the same venue at the same time every week. In NYC this works well, here in Albany, i keep going places & wondering when the poets will show up... 'coulda been the right place, mighta been the right time, musta been the wrong week'] However, i have been able to see a few readings in the Jawbone Series this month. First, let me give you the bad news—someone, let the poet remain unnamed—gave one of the most terrible performances i have ever seen. The reason it was so terrible was not because the poems were bad, & not because the reader could not read them effectively; but because the reader insisted, before each poem, on providing us [a gathering of long time poets,

professors of literature, & graduate students] with information that surely a 5th grader would have found extremely valuable. i mention this, so that we might all benefit from this painful experience. Thus, Advice for Readers: Check out your audience—if they do not appear to be 12 years old; they might take umbrage at a Mr. Rogers style question: 'Do you know what a Sound Poem is?' & they might desire the appearance of Kenneth Koch's 'strangler' when you announce, 'You won't understand this next poem, but I do.' It's best to avoid 'explaining' stuff in between your poems. Wait till the end, when people come up & ask specific questions, which you can then answer in a more personal setting. On a

brighter note: New UA arrival Chris Rizzo gave a very nice reading a couple of weeks ago & Alifair Skebe, just this Friday, gave a wonderful reading (with footnotes [that were part of the poems & not external to them]—parentheticals really—writ large, displayed, & delivered in a stage whisper) in which she struggled with the difficulties of representing, in the performance, the vagaries of the text. i particularly liked the way the 'performance elements' focused my attention on certain possibilities in the poems. Ali's reading was followed by a very good, though paired down, multimedia performance by Nicole Peyrafitte. After, people stood around & talked about POETRY of all things. The Albany poets seems to be an interesting enthusiastic bunch, now all I have to do is get hold of my Heisenberg & figure out the proper where's & when's.

*DglsN.Rthschld is a poet who unexpectedly admitting to having been wrong before, expects that surely he will be wrong again. & though he has never met them, he expects that there are those who think that he is wrong for our time, & wrong for america.*

## EDMUND BERRIGAN IN SOUTH SLOPE, BROOKLYN

The other week my ceiling began vomiting brown water through the light fixture and the smoke alarm. Luckily, this only occurred in the carpeted room and on my mattress. As I've only lived in this apartment for two weeks, I thankfully had a new neighborhood to explore, in search of its poetic gifts, which are recommended as an antidote to a mildew-y smell. To the Bodegas. Joseph's Grocery on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> is my favorite thus far. Items I've purchased there include toilet paper, Goya black beans, Purina Cat Chow, Tropicana orange juice, the Daily News, and a can of Foster's lager. I often peruse the shelves as I await the payment process, hoping to find the next essential item to maintain a balanced existence. But this obsessing over the future is unnecessary—I have a whole day laid out before me with the items at hand. Another day of poetry.

# WORLD NEWS

The One-Stop shop on 20th and 4th is more of a religious experience. The mustachioed fellow behind the Deli section seems to sing all his orations—even his vocal quest to discover whether you desire mustard. Though singing is often comforting, why is this man singing to me? I leave this performance with a sense of disquietude.

What is the name of the Bodega on 4th avenue between 16th and prospect avenue, handily near the Prospect Avenue R station? Two figures are concealed by a rather large counter as you walk in, and bear in mind that I'm 6'3". An imposing and unsmiling male figure is entrenched near the register, and a slender female figure is behind the deli portion of the counter. It seems appropriate to ask them both for the sandwich, as if asking one individually would be a slight to the other. What we have here is a formal domestic situation of some kind. And an old school one to boot, which makes a 90s man like me quiver right down to his inner spiritual, but not religious bi-sexual stem cells. So I leave with two vital forces of nature: a poetic musing on domesticity and an egg sandwich.

Thanks, Brooklyn.

*Eddie Berrigan has been here before.*

## JACK KIMBALL IN NEW ENGLAND

Summer sported flip-flops well into autumn in New England, matched in kind by some hot readings. Mid-August Massachusetts-based writers gathered for the Gloucester Arts Festival: Gerrit Lansing, Patricia Pruitt, Sara Stozler (reading Linda Crane), James Cook, Patrick Doud, Christina Strong and Mike County. Gerrit Lansing's poems addressed the place name, the city and the beach surround, "the pattern we are hung up on." In "Blue Decrepit Town" Lansing noted impressions from decades ago when he first visited Gloucester, pushing the narrative into tall tale-telling, "a golden lion...grabbed by the throat of the mind...as song flickers." Patricia Pruitt's diverse pieces had loci in New England, including one she said was "recently untitled." Patrick Doud delivered multithemed segments from a single manuscript called "Bomb," wrestling with autumn – "life reuniting with the

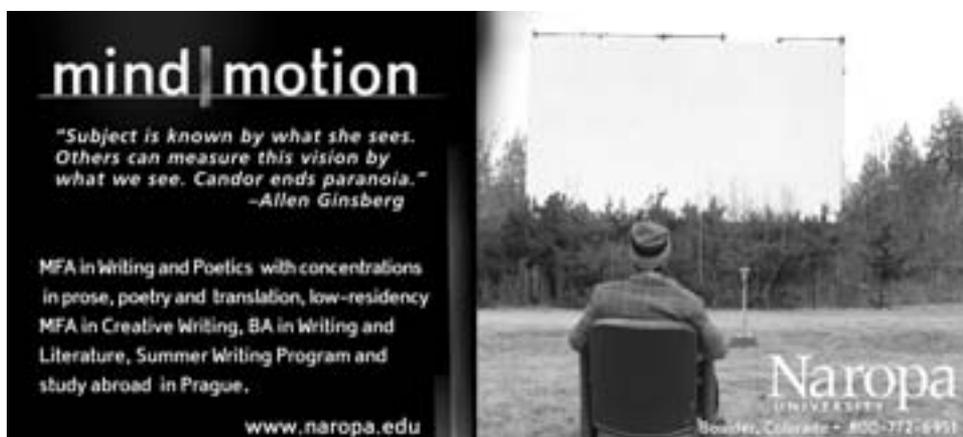
whole. // The whole, which is death?" – sometimes mixing springy dayglows – "the policeman in the sky"; "me and the zombies of May." Sara Stozler read work by Linda Crane, a deceased Gloucester poet who labored under the influence of Charles Olson and the scenic: "in dogtown there is a constant spring"; "the bird's head opens spilling / milkweed..."

In contrast, Mike County kept nature at arms' length, typified by "Robin": "Said to be a species...a trick / a deck of pinstripes shuffled... // Say the robin doesn't return? // Wonderful. I'll shell out the money / for wood to burn memory." James Cook gave a surprising performance that was moment-specific, reading from a manuscript he calls "Sugar Cane," featuring a "faceless" dictatorship for which "all men are servants," partly as "a knee to the groin" of Festival administrators, protesting the \$20 entrance fee for the night's reading (\$10 for 'poets'). Christina Strong read poems about poetry and against the sociopolitical stranglehold of the "narrow as we say conservative." Her pieces were off-narrative, but they made perfect 'sense' if we mean they were more than a little tormented as they commented on the moment, on limits of poetry, even while coincidentally picking up others' themes: "...wander beach and all these / fucking pictures, question of pay out or cash inn / name place zombie all the time."

An inspired pairing of naturalists, Lisa Jarnot and Carl Martin read at Tazza Café, Providence in Mid-September. Carl Martin, who released two collections, *Your Stations, Girls* and *Genii over Salzburg* in the 90s, read from an unpublished manuscript that captures the "narcosis of moss," admitting to years spent analyzing terrains and mindscapes of the South. Based in Winston-Salem, Martin is an urbane critic of American culture ("As the adverse account shoos flies / There are still remnants if the dynastic fan"), tart fabulist ("Golf balls are tinder in the muzzle of art") and committed practitioner of synesthesia ("be like the river chirping its brown side"). In "The Prescription Drug Challenge" Martin "began dreaming of the South African killer bee," realizing, he said, "deep in the knobby, long distance knees of the soul" he can't pull it off, can't "spread all the pollen that I would like to spread." Lisa Jarnot started her set with a poem she said went with the surroundings, and that got the audience's attention, which she never lost: the poem happens in a "sad" restaurant, with "sad" people holding "sad" menus and gazing through "sad" windows looking out at the "sad" street. Jarnot read her singable pieces uninflectedly, a dissonance that played to mock solemnity ("tell me, poem") and rockabilly reproach ("jerks of god"). Most of her poems were from *Ring of Fire* and *Black Dog Songs*, work that

evokes nature's critters, "facilitator you, chinchilla, foodstuffs for the food chain..." piling on the gloomy nexus to an original state of consciousness, "the snow upon the human engine as it waits to be the snow ... unloved." What some might take as melancholy themes were contradicted by Jarnot's ease with the audience and by her playful, musical japes that furthered the dissonance.

*Jack Kimball is editor of Faux Press and coinor of the catchphrase, "Poetry on steroids = flarf."*



**mind | motion**

"Subject is known by what she sees.  
Others can measure this vision by  
what we see. Candor ends paranoia."  
—Allen Ginsberg

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Every year around this time people ask me, "Todd, you've run in five marathons and completed two Ironman triathlons, how do they compare to reading in the Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading at The Poetry Project?" I will now put all the questions to rest by answering them here.

### TRAINING

It is important to write the poem in advance of New Year's Day because your mind will literally cramp and your stomach heave when suddenly confronted with an large audience staring back at you waiting for something revelatory or at least inspired – if not funny – and realizing that the poem you jotted down on the F-train is actually sort of dorky. Just as it takes months of training to get one's body ready for the stress of running 26.2 miles through the streets of NYC, it is important to start working on your New Year's Day poem months in advance, like around August.

### FLUIDS

Just as the right beverage with an excellent electrolyte profile is essential to running a good marathon, so giving a good reading entails sipping the appropriate beverage moments before walking onto the stage. After reading the poem, it is even more important to seek more appropriate fluids to ease the tension, calm the mind, and not make you feel like everyone is staring at you and whispering about what a terrible (or brilliant) poet you are. Note: most likely, the people standing around in the back didn't even see or hear you read, so you should feel most at ease as you mingle with them.

### WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

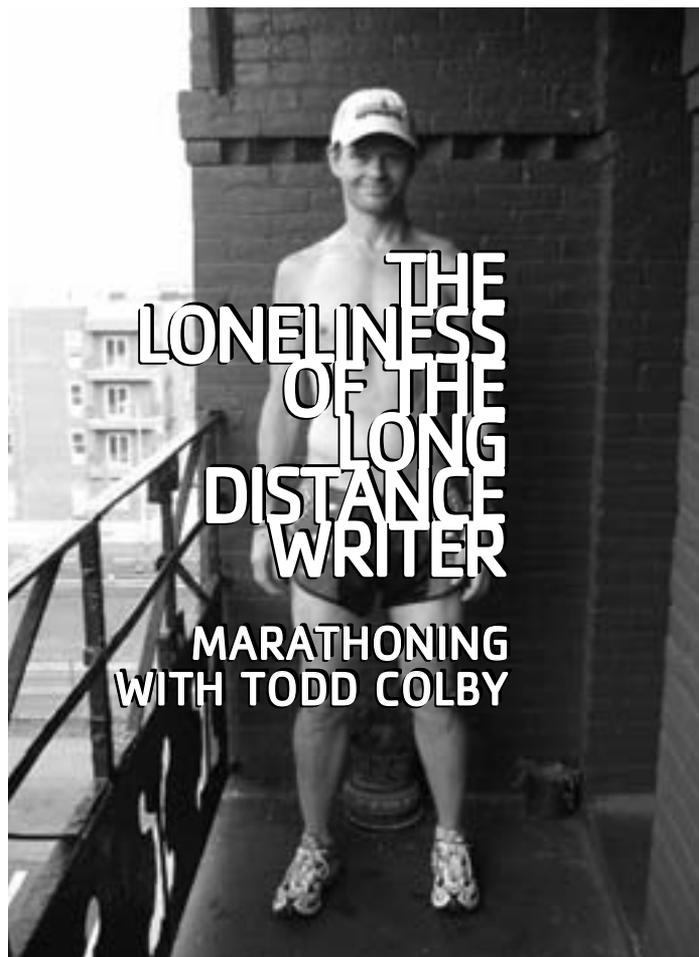
In The New York City Marathon, you have a pretty good idea of what kind of day your going to have by the time you're running over the 59<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge (about 18 miles into the 26.2). If you are not feeling groovy, a long day awaits you. Similarly, if you stand before the audience of your peers and heroes and begin reading what you thought was a hilarious poem and you are greeted with blank stares, it's definitely going to be a long two minutes. Good luck!

### BLOODY NIPPLES

There are all kinds of friction zones on the body and they make themselves readily apparent during a marathon. The worst of these afflictions are bloody nipples from a running shirt brushing against them for several hours. It's the intense, slightly nauseating sting you'll personally experience, but your friends and thousands of nameless spectators watching you run through the streets of NYC with two bloody splotches on the front of your running shirt will be your true running legacy. I consider it a sort of victory that I've never read a poem and gotten bloody nipples in the sixteen years I've been reading at the New Year's Day Marathon.

### LUBRICATION

There are many lubricants on the market these days for runners with chaffing issues. The best of these products is called "Bodyglide" which looks like stick of greasy deodorant that you



rub on various parts of your body before running a marathon. Bodily lubrication is not necessary on New Year's Day. In fact, anything more than a light moisturizer is usually frowned upon by the poetry community.

### DESPAIR

During every marathon there are moments of utter despair when the pain becomes so overwhelming that it blossoms into a huge black hole into which you sink further with every step. I've never felt that sort of despair on New Year's Day at the Poetry Project, but I have felt rather despondent when a reader right before me was given a thunderous ovation that felt more like a fitting end to the evening than an act to follow.

### CLOTHING

It is important to wear something comfortable that you've trained in on the day of the big marathon. New clothing on a long run can be unpredictable (see "Bloody Nipples"). The tried and true is what usually works best. It's also true that on New Year's Day some quirky new outfit or neat Christmas shirt will most likely make you feel like a total ass the minute you give your name at the door and start seeing old friends and fellow poets. Stick with what you know feels and looks good and you'll feel good standing in front of a lot of people reading a poem in it.

### SHOES

They should be comfortable and tied securely.

## CIGARETTES

At several points in the NYC Marathon, the air becomes thick and acrid with the distinct odor of cigarette smoke being exhaled by various spectators. There's nothing you can do about it but continue to run while taking slightly shallower breaths until you're through the smoky patch. This is very similar to walking past the smokers (many of whom are my friends) in the courtyard at St. Mark's Church. As you approach them, it's best to simply remark "It's cold out here! I'll talk to you inside."

## THROWING UP

Starting a marathon too fast will lead to premature exhaustion and stomach problems. There is nothing more embarrassing than throwing up in front of a crowd of onlookers because you started the day off too fast. Pacing is essential to completing any

endurance related event; remember that on New Year's Day, but especially on New Year's Eve.

## WALKING HOME

Walking home after a marathon is a physically painful event. The mere act of descending a flight of subway stairs is enough to bring tears to your eyes. Conversely, leaving St. Mark's Church after a full day and night of readings by some of the best living poets in the world should leave you feeling invigorated, inspired, and ready to take on the New Year with a can do attitude. Have a great New Year and remember to stretch

*Todd Colby is the author of Tremble & Shine (Soft Skull Press, 2004), and the graphic novel, Sympathetic Detonations (Evil Clown Books, 2005) with illustrations by David Lantow.*

# FROM THE PAST

## 12 YEARS AGO

It's this three page fanzine from **Rodney Leighton** in Pugwash, Nova Scotia called *IT'S jus' ME*. The nearest place to photocopy is 55 miles away, and he's gotta go get his eyes tested there, so hopefully the whole thing will be mailed next week, depending on "how much money the eye doc wants and what the weather does." he uses work like sushiesence and talks a lot about wrestling. He's into trading fanzines, tee shirts, etc., but if you don't go through with the exchange don't be shocked by the wrath of Rodney. **Mike Gunderloy**, founder of *Factsheet Five*, is public enemy number one for not sending Leighton a FF tee shirt. "Another hero dies..." writes Rodney. Anyway if you want a phone buddy he welcomes callers and his number is 902-243-2882...

Poets have begun to spring up on gossip columns in *The Post*, my favorite newspaper in the whole world. **William Norwich** devoted a fair amount of copy to **Rene Ricard** and his reputed feud with **Julian Schnabel**, who are ex-communicato. Nobody knows why they aren't speaking anymore, but Rene is taking \$5,000 from Schnabel for his piece "The Radiant Child," about Jean-Michel Basquiat, who Schnabel is now making a movie about. I loved Norwich's line, [Rene] "needed the money, most poets without suburban parents do..." When I told **Christian X. Hunter** about this, he thought I was talking about former tennis star **Renee Richards**, and told me about how she/he used to be his eye doctor...

Great *Long Shot* reading at Nuyorican on September 17th. Everyone rocked with really strong work, especially **Gavin Moses**. Surprise reader **Ric Ocasek** appeared like he had been reading poetry for years, even though he said that reading was a lot more nerve-wracking than singing. I read my epic *From the Unpublished Interview with Christ, Chapter One*, and felt kind of bad seeing its about a pretentious rock star with artistic ambitions. Ric, the poem is based on an interview with John Mellencamp and my own demented imagination. I hope no offense was taken.

*Gillian McCain*  
from *Dirt* 12/1992-1/1993

## 15 YEARS AGO

Using other people's writing in your own work is stealing. Some people like to think of it as being influenced, but face it, it's plagiarism. Stealing, in the 60's and 70's often took the form of "found" poems. It made us feel that poetry was virtually everywhere, just waiting to be found. You could morally vow you'd steal only "non-literary" writing and, by placing it in a literary context, demonstrate its literary or other weird qualities. You could soft-peddle the act of stealing by putting what you'd stolen in quotes, footnoting it, encasing it in epigrams, or choosing obscure sources so no one knew you were stealing... No matter what you call it, though, appropriation, imitation, copying-your-neighbor, cut-ups, freeing-the-poem-from-the-page, tipping-your-hat-to-your-influences, borrowing, translating, recontextualizing, etc. is stealing...

*Ed Friedman*  
from *Stealing: The context of my criminal record 12/1990-1/1991*

## 31 YEARS AGO

As nine-o'clock was chiming on the evening of Thursday, October 17th, I was sauntering up the well-lit, oft trod by yrs truly Charles Street (between Hudson and Bleecker) after an early dinner, determined for once to catch up on lapsed snoozing, when my silent reverie was cut short by the patter of tiny gumshoes advancing from the rear. It's a sound of no significance in dear old Blighty, so I nere batted an eyelid. Then a youth of around 14 or 15 appeared in front of me and said, rather excitedly, "Be quiet. Give us you money." And somehow I was pushed down onto a car bonnet my head back. Another quite odious runt who was fat in a muscular way and looked like he'd been chosen to portray Evil Personified shoved a long, slim knife into my ribs and said, "Where's your money?" He really was prodding the knife way in, deeper and deeper. I already had \$8 clutched in my palm, so I gave it to the snot who had first accosted me. He let go of my arm

## FROM THE PAST

to count it, and, somewhat peeved, informed his nasty chum, "Only \$8!" And then, to me, "Where's the rest?" I was saying something like, "Nothing, I haven't got it, I can't search myself, you're holding my arms," when the rest of the troop (circa one dozen post-pubescent of Caucasian extraction) started bashing me around the head with bricks and staves. In the process they used a lot of dirty language, which I thought was most uncalled for, and then they pummeled me in the face a lot with their mitts, the horrifying vision of a gigantic dental bill flashing through my brain, as well as undue concern for the safety of my reading glasses in the pocket of my snood. Then their antics stopped and they said \$8 wasn't enough (I suppose the poor mites figured they'd only gross around 70 cents each after the loot had been divided). I was about to offer them my watch when I thought, surely you jest? I mean, I felt so very relaxed, as though I were watching all this happen to someone else, and moreover it all seemed silly not to say inconvenient, and I just wanted to be allowed to get up and continue my journey home. Then he raised his knife very, very high above him a la Anthony Perkins in *Psycho* (my prone position adding drama to the perspective) and as I perceived it glint in the moonlight and begin its terrifying swoop towards my heart (I seem to recollect he was pushing very hard on the right side of my chest with his other hand, no doubt to ensure a good skewer) his comparatively nice accomplice shrieked, "No don't!" Well, it was at that microsecond in time I realized this was happening to me, not say, Janet Leigh. So, quick as the proverbial flash I managed to yank my head up (the knife in its decent nicking my brow) and, again "somehow," lunge a hefty kick at my would-be assassin's marriage license (balls to you Yanks), and then, forcing my rigid arm up, I socked the fourteen year old thug still holding it in his kisser really hard. He fell away, sputtering I believe, and as my other arm was mysteriously free, I rolled off the car bonnet onto the ground, picked myself up thinking, "Oh dear, I hope I haven't dirtied my pants," and scurried off into Bleeker Street, followed by a stone projectile which mercifully glanced off the shoulder of my bedraggled snood. I heard the little perishers scamper away in the opposite direction, eight dollars the richer. There were plenty of people promenading along Bleeker Street so I knew I was safe and slowed down. But, as passers-by kept starting at me I thought, "Are the bruises showing already?" – it didn't seem possible, the entire escapade being of only forty seconds duration. Nonetheless, having poo-pooed the idea of police assistance (sic) I stopped off on my way home at Ron Padgett's to check what damage, if any, had been rendered my mug. He very kindly made me a nice cup of tea and seemed quite impressed when the teacup didn't rattle in my hands. Patty sponged the little bit of blood off my brow, and I found another wee knife cut on my right thumb, the sole stigma-ta's of my brush with The Dark Lady. I must say I got a vicarious thrill telling Ron, Patty and Dick Gallup my story, and seeing them more scared than I was. I really wasn't affected by it in the

least. Then I went home, tired but alive, hopped into bed with Jane Austen and giggled myself to sleep. When I woke up next morning I found my head stuck to the pillow with dried blood so I had to go to the laundry.

*Trevor Winkfield*

from Crime Supplement: East Side, West Side 12/1974

Allen Ginsberg is collecting money (\$2,000, to be precise) to pay a group of lawyers (including Harvey Silvergate of Boston) to get Timothy Leary in front of a judge with habeas corpus to find out if he's singing under duress...

Allen is looking for an apartment or loft with rent up to \$200 a month and huge amounts of room to live in forever...

Lewis Warsh (who has a Massachusetts license) was stopped in Soho for lack of an inspection sticker. The constabulary made a few phone calls & also the cryptic remark, "I have an erection in the sky for Massachusetts." Lewis sped away...

Ed Friedman wants, needs a place in the sun, an apartment, to rent, to share, with a long lease, at least a year, \$100 – 150, in Soho or the West Village, or the East Village, or anywhere but the Bronx. Call 226-2478 in the mornings after 8 a.m...

Meanwhile, Bernadette Mayer requires a two-month roommate to share her spacious Second Avenue apartment. Nocturnal Bernadette requests only evening callers to fill this January-February vacancy.

*Bill MacKay 1/1975*

### 34 YEARS AGO

*Matchbox*, the only magazine in the world devoted to one-word poems, has just brought out its sixth issue, hilariously enough an "all-women's issue." The magazine's name derives from the fact that it is ingeniously bound into a "book" of matches, so you get not only 9 or 10 poems but also 22 matches. *Matchbook* comes carefully wrapped in Reynold's Wrap and is edited by a possibly non-existent person, Joyce Holland, c/o Al Buck, Box 304, Iowa City, Iowa...

*Bean News*, the most ravishingly idiotic-brilliant little newspaper to appear in the history of mankind, might be available from Ed Dorn (its probably editor), 521 Crain Avenue, Kent, Ohio 44240...

Dean Faulwell, hot on the heels of his success with *Oink* magazine, of which he was a co-editor, is now starting his own magazine, *Boink*, which promises to be as devastating as *Oink!* Manuscripts and subscriptions should be addressed to Mr. Faulwell at 2403 Milvia, Berkeley, California 94704

*Ron Padgett 1/1972*

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED  
 ADMISSION \$8 / STUDENTS AND SENIORS \$7 / MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE  
 THE POETRY PROJECT IS LOCATED IN ST. MARK'S CHURCH  
 AT THE CORNER OF 2ND AVE AND 10TH ST IN MANHATTAN.  
 212.674.0910 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

# EVENTS AT THE

## DECEMBER 2005

**SATURDAY 12/3 1:00pm**  
**OLSON NOW**

Who, where, and what is Charles Olson now? Come as you are for an open forum on Olson organized by **Ammiel Alcalay** and **Mike Kelleher**, and co-sponsored by Beyond Baroque. See the New York premiere of **Henry Ferrini's** *Poet and the City: Charles Olson and the Persistence of Place*; listen to **David Amram**, **Jack Hirschman**, **Ed Sanders**, and **Anne Waldman** perform Olson. To join the discussion already taking place, go to [www.olsonnow.blogspot.com](http://www.olsonnow.blogspot.com), or e-mail [olsonnow@gmail.com](mailto:olsonnow@gmail.com).

**MONDAY 12/5**  
**COREY FROST & FILIP MARINOVICH**

**Corey Frost's** writing has been published in the *The Walrus*, *Geist*, *Narrativity*, *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, and other journals and anthologies. His book of anti-travel stories, *My Own Devices*, and his most recent book, *The Worthwhile Flux*, were both short-listed for various awards, but won none. **Filip Marinovich** is a poet living in New York, a member of Ugly Duckling Presse Collective, and co-editor at *New York Nights* newspaper. Work in theater includes writing and directing "Skin Around The Earth" at NYC Fringe 2002.

**WEDNESDAY 12/7**  
**CELEBRATION OF THE COLLECTED POEMS & THE COLLECTED FICTION OF KENNETH KOCH**

A book party for and readings from two new and substantial collections from Kenneth Koch, who passed away in 2002: *The Collected Poems of Kenneth Koch* (Knopf) and *The Collected Fiction of Kenneth Koch* (Coffee House). *Collected Fiction* includes Koch's rambunctious novel *The Red Robins*, as well as his semi-autobiographical stories from *Hotel Lambosa* and much uncollected short fiction. *Collected Poems* contains ten books' worth of Koch's dazzling poetry celebrating the pleasures of friendship, art, and love. Readers will include **Ron Padgett**, **Charles North**, **Paul Violi** and **Mark Halliday**.

**MONDAY 12/12**  
**LESLIE BUMSTEAD & SINA QUEYRAS**

**Leslie Bumstead's** book, *Cipher/Civilian*, is forthcoming from Edge Books. Poems have appeared in *your black eye*, *The Tangent*, *Anomaly*, and *Gare Du Nord*. Recent work has been in collaboration with poet Jean Donnelly. **Sina Queyras** is the author of *Slip* and *Teeth Marks*. Her third collection of poetry, *Lemon Hound*, is due out from Coach House Books in 2006. She edited *Open Field: 30 Contemporary Canadian Poets*, for Persea Books in 2005.

**WEDNESDAY 12/14**  
**PIERRE JORIS & NICOLE PEYRAFITTE**

Poet, translator & essayist **Pierre Joris** left Luxembourg at age 19 and has since lived in the U.S., Great Britain, North Africa, and France. *Rain Taxi* praised his collection *Poasis: Selected Poems 1986-1999* for "its physical, philosophical delight in words and their reverberations." With Jerome Rothenberg he edited the award-winning anthologies *Poems for the Millennium* and, most recently from Exact Change, *Pablo Picasso, The Burial of the Count of Orgaz & Other Poems*. During the fall of 2005 he was in Morocco, working on translations of Maghrebian poets. **Nicole Peyrafitte** is a visual artist, vocalist and writer who has performed throughout the United States and Europe. Each step of her work attempts to fulfill her compulsion to learn through a process of immersion that generates performances incorporating voice/paintings/drawings/collages/writing & even cooking. Recent visual work can be found on-line in Masthead No 7 and Double Room #3.

**FRIDAY 12/16 10:30pm**  
**A NIGHT OF JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR**

Dust off your bellbottoms and join us for a memorable night of music selections from the world's greatest pop opera. Anyone with a costume or a toy/food donation gets in for a discounted price. Presented by **Diana Kazakova** of the Bjorkestra with **Justin Hines** on percussion, plus a special appearance by **Urban Cathedral**.

## JANUARY 2006

*New Years Day di*



*Now sh*

**SUNDAY 1/1 3:00PM ONWARDS**  
**32ND ANNUAL**  
**NEW YEAR'S DAY**  
**MARATHON READING**

Spend the first day of the year with a terrific assortment of poetry, performance, dance, music and multimedia, with over 130 performers and readers including: Ammiel Alcalay, Penny Arcade, Jennifer Benka, Anselm Berrigan, Edmund Berrigan, Donna Brook, Dana Bryant, Regie Cabico, Steve Cannon, Elizabeth Castagna, Todd Colby, Shanna Compton, Steve Dalachinsky, Monica de la Torre, Latasha Diggs, Maggie Dubris, Steve Earle, Joe Elliot, Jose Angel Figueroa, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Dorothy August Friedman, Ed Friedman, Lo Gallucio, Philip Glass, John S. Hall, Bob Hershon, Brenda Iijima, Paolo Javier, Tyehimba Jess, Patricia Spears Jones, Adeena Karasick, Erica Kaufman, Lenny Kaye, Denizé Lauture, Tan Lin, Brendan Lorber, Gillian McCain, Tracey McTague, Susan Maurer, David Mills, Rebecca Moore, Dael Orlandersmith, Yuko Otomo, Wanda Phipps, Chris Rael, Keith Roach, Mercedes Roffe, Lauren Russell, Bethany Spiers, Stacy Szymaszek, Brian Kim Stefans, Edwin Torres, Rodrigo Toscano, David Vogen, Anne Waldman, Shanxing Wang, Matthew Zapruder and many, many more. [\$17, \$12, \$10]

# THE POETRY PROJECT

*...n't go as planned.*



*... had a new plan.*

WEDNESDAY 1/4

KAZIM ALI & PAOLO JAVIER

**Kazim Ali's** first book of poetry *The Far Mosque* was published by Alice James Books in October 2005. He is also the author of a novel *Quinn's Passage*, and the publisher of Nightboat Books. **Paolo Javier's** latest book, *60 Iv bo(e)mbs*, was just published by O Books. He is also the author of *the time at the end of this writing* (Ahadada), and lives in New York.

FRIDAY 1/7 10:30pm  
RAGE OF AQUARIUS

Gather and celebrate the birthday day of **Desiree Burch**, comedian and NY neo-futurist of *To Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind*. She'll bring Aquarian rebellion with other poets, playwrights and provocateurs **Clay McLeod Chapman**, **Kyle Jarrow**, **Christine Hamm** and **Red Metal Mailbox**.

MONDAY 1/9

TRUONG TRAN & MAC WELLMAN

**Truong Tran's** latest collection, *dust and conscience*, published by Apogee Press, was awarded the San Francisco State Poetry Center Book Prize. He recently ventured into the world of children's literature, authoring *Going Home Coming Home*, published by Children's Book Press. **Mac Wellman's** recent books of poems are *Miniature* and *Strange Elegies*, both from Roof Books. Current the-

ater projects are: "Bellagio" (about the long and strange friendship between the Futurist F.T. Marinetti and Italian dictator Mussolini), "The Invention of Tragedy," in progress for a 2006 production at the Classic Stage Company, and a new play, "Left Glove."

WEDNESDAY 1/11

SUSAN WHEELER & JORDAN DAVIS

**Susan Wheeler** is the author of four collections of poetry, *Bag 'o' Diamonds*, *Smokes*, *Source Codes* and *Ledger*; and of *Record Palace*, a novel. Her work has appeared in eight editions of the Scribner anthology *Best American Poetry*, as well as in *The Paris Review*, *London Review of Books*, *Verse*, *Talisman* and *The New Yorker*. **Jordan Davis'** new book is *The Moon Is Moving: Million Poems Journal II*. He is in the middle of the second season of *The Million Poems Show*, a monthly poetry talk show he hosts at the Bowery Poetry Club. He is a member of the Subpress Collective, an editor of *The Hat*, a contributor to *Constant Critic*, and a daily blogger at [equanimity.blogspot.com](http://equanimity.blogspot.com).

WEDNESDAY 1/18

JOHN COLETTI & DENIZÉ LAUTURE

**John Coletti** grew up in Santa Rosa, California and Portland, Oregon before moving to New York City twelve years ago. He is the author of *Physical Kind*, *The New Normalcy*, and *Street Debris*, a collaboration with poet Greg Fuchs with whom he also co-edits Open24Hours Press. **Denizé Lauture** writes poetry in Creole, English and French. He has authored three volumes of poetry, with a new book, *The Black Warrior and Other Poems*, forthcoming from subpress/Open24Hours. Lauture is also the author of three children's books, a teacher, a Spanish Literature scholar and a former welder.

MONDAY 1/23

ANNE CARSON & CHRISTINE HUME

**Anne Carson** is the author of over 10 books of poetry and criticism and teaches ancient Greek at the University of Michigan. She has been awarded a Guggenheim and a MacArthur among many other accolades. Her new book

is called *Decreation*. **Christine Hume** is the author of *Musca Domestica* and *Alaskaphrenia*. Her criticism has been published in *The Chicago Review*, *Context*, *Verse* and online at How2 and Slope. She teaches at Eastern Michigan University.

WEDNESDAY 1/25

BETSY ANDREWS & CATHERINE DALY

**Betsy Andrews** is the author of the chapbooks *She-Devil*, *New Jersey* and *C-3/In Trouble* (Boog Press flipbook with Bruce Andrews). Her poems and essays have appeared in *Fence*, *Narrativity* and *PomPom*, forthcoming in *26* and *Five Fingers Review*, and in anthologies including *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, and *Dangerous Families: Gay and Lesbian Survivors of Domestic Abuse*. **Catherine Daly** has lived in Los Angeles long enough to be included in *Green Integer's Pip Anthology of World Poetry of the 20th Century, No. 5: Intersections*. She is the author of *DaDaDa*, the first trilogy in a project entitled CONFITEOR, and *Locket*, as well as chaps and eBooks including the forthcoming *Hello Phantasm / Mime* and *Cocktails*.

MONDAY 1/31

TALK SERIES:

EDMUND BERRIGAN:

CAUGHT IN THE HUMAN SHREDDER

Greil Marcus conjured a vision of the "Old, Weird America" in his book of the same title, of a landscape where blues and folk musicians of different eras interacted in a beautiful and violent place accessible by something like a turn of phrase from a Bob Dylan song. This will be a talk/performance on the merging of poetry and songwriting in terms of applications, influences, and technical issues. Figures cited will include Blind Blake, James Schuyler, Blind Willie Johnson, Joan Baez, Cynthia Dall, Stephen Malkmus, Ted Berrigan, John Ashbery, Bob Dylan, Alice Notley and others. **Edmund Berrigan** is the author of *Disarming Matter*, *Your Cheatin' Heart*, and several other chapbooks. He performs music regularly as I Feel Tractor, as well as in the groups Mellow Crypt and Twig Light.

THE POETRY PROJECT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE  
WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE.  
SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

# INTERVIEW

## LOOKING IN THE MIRROR A TALK WITH NOAM CHOMSKY

[PART I]

Noam Chomsky is nobody special. He merely explores lines of critical inquiry & creative engagement as we all do. Or would, if everything in American culture weren't aligned to prevent just that kind of behavior. A professor of linguistics at MIT for the past half century, he's published a vast collection of books on philosophy, intellectual history, linguistics, economics & politics. He continues to deliver talks to audiences in violation of fire codes the world over, articulating the fundamental needs of the planet's people & analyzing the social architecture designed to resist their attainment.

I caught up with him among the spires of the Frank Gehry-designed building that houses his office. Outside the windows, the canted Dr. Seusslike towers seem to question both their ivoryness and their toweriness. Inside, by a desk piled high with books "Maybe someday I'll quit so I can read all of these. Just kidding." & under the gaze of a Bertrand Russell poster, we talked about the commissar class, intellectuals, the liberal media, state violence, Iraq, compassion, consumerism, the instinct for freedom. Oh & poetry.

Noam Chomsky: So what are we doing?

Brendan Lorber: Well, I have a few questions, but why don't I explain why I'm here.

Chomsky: Sure.

Lorber: The work of many contemporary poets falls in the space between your areas of analysis. Experimental poets have taken language itself as their topic & are using it to reveal the ways in which the world around them is conceptualized. I understand the danger in personalizing your work by drawing a connection between linguistics & politics but I wanted to ask you a few questions about each field.

People joke that the only thing you can do to a blank piece of paper to make it worth less is to write a poem on it. Poetry is the least commodifiable of the arts. You can't sell it. Its practitioners have historically positioned themselves at the economic & social margins. From that vantage point, one would expect them to offer profoundly liberated cultural analyses. Some do. But many, even very insightful ones, seem to write from positions of extreme indoctrination. You've argued that, because the US is in many ways a very free country, it is also a heavily propagandized one lest the population think the wrong thoughts. Could you talk about the means of that propaganda, specifically how self-proclaimed intellectuals & even people who consider themselves radicalized, become co-opted.

Chomsky: For one thing, it's just a general psychological phenomenon the world over. It's not pleasant to look into the mirror

honestly. It's much easier to look at someone else's misdeeds. Especially if you happen to be beating someone over the head with a club, it gets much harder to look in the mirror & much easier to look at their bad character. When you happen to be in the richest & most powerful country in the world & in a privileged position within it you are in effect beating people over the head with a club all the time, domestically & internationally. It's therefore only natural that you would want to project for yourself an image of angelic goodness & for others either evil or backwards or needing our help or having to be uplifted. The situation is just so natural.

### The intellectuals don't know about it and they're not aware of not knowing.

Who are the intellectuals? They are people with the privilege, background and training to express publicly the conceptions of their natural constituency which is the powerful & the privileged. If you look over history you find overwhelmingly that intellectuals are servants of power, justifying crimes & atrocities, denouncing enemies & doing it with great ability. There is a fringe of exceptions always & its close to a

historical universal that the fringe & exceptions are treated very badly depending on the society. In some societies they get their heads blown off, in others they'll be exiled & others they'll be subjected to tons of vituperation & lies. But they're never treated nicely which makes sense. It gets very deeply embedded.

Lets take a look at the picture over there that was given to me about 15 years ago by a Jesuit priest I know. I put it there because of what it means but also because I've discovered over the years that its kind of a Rorschach. When well-educated people from

North America come to the office, nobody knows what it is. People from South America, almost everybody knew what it is it up until about 10 years ago when they became more indoctrinated to the US-dominated system. Younger people don't know what this is. People in Europe maybe 10%. Well, what is it?

It's the archbishop of El Salvador [Oscar Romero] murdered by forces connected to the US while saying mass. It was a couple days after he had sent a letter to President Carter pleading with him not to send military aid to the junta which was just destroying the people fighting for their human rights. He's a famous figure in El Salvador, called a Voice of the Voiceless. That's the angel of death above him. The other figures are six leading Jesuit intellectuals who had their brains blown out in 1989 along with their housekeeper & daughter by an elite military unit armed, trained & directed by the United States which left just a hideous trail of bloodshed.

Suppose something like that had happened in Czechoslovakia. Suppose in 1980 an archbishop had been murdered by security forces tied to the Russians. Then 70,000 people were killed and at the end of the decade Václav Havel & half a dozen of his associates had their heads blown off by a Russian trained military force. Would we know about it? Well yeah. Absolutely, there would have been a nuclear war.

But in this case *we* did it. But no one from north of the Rio Grande has any idea of what we did. If I mention it to someone, they have no memory of it. It's one of those universals: If we commit a crime, it doesn't exist. If others do it, particularly official enemies, everybody knows what happens. And we go way out our way to prove they committed these crimes.

Look at the trial of Saddam Hussein. It takes some discipline for the press not to report this, for intellectuals not to notice it. But the trial starts tomorrow. The first crime they're trying him for was killing 143 of people in 1982 as a reaction to an assassination attempt. 1982 happens to be an interesting year in US-Iraqi relations because that's the year in which Reagan dropped Iraq from the list of states supporting terror so that we'd be able to supply him with aid, including military aid & the material for developing weapons of mass destruction & biological weapons which we then continued to do right through his worst atrocities. The Halabja al-Anfal massacre, after the end of the war with Iran was over. Is that going to be mentioned when he's brought the trial? No, you can't even *mention* it. & it goes on & on



Noam Chomsky in his office: "This is my favorite picture. It makes me the most miserable."

There was just a meeting a few days ago at the Ibero-American Summit in Spain. They put out a very strong statement first of all condemning the US blockade, as they call it, of Cuba. They also are demanding that the United States accept Venezuela's request for extradition of Luis Posada Carriles a leading international terrorist, the man who was accused by Venezuela of having masterminded the blowing up a Cubana airliner which killed 73 people. The US courts just turned them down. This was reported in one US newspaper, the LA Times. The Boston Globe picked up the report. Sooner or later it'll get reported but in some obscure way.

Just a couple of days ago the UN's special rapporteur on food [Jean Ziegler] came out with a blistering report in Geneva which will be presented in New York next week in which he accused US forces in Iraq of withholding food to drive people out of towns & cities that they were going to destroy, like Falluja. Now that's a grave breach of the Geneva conventions. But is it news? Suppose someone accused Iran of this kind of behavior. It'd be the lead story.

Lorber: But in this case it doesn't enter into the conversation.

Chomsky: It made it into a Seattle newspaper, but that's it. And so these things are out of history.

The intellectuals don't know about it and they're not aware of not knowing. It's not a conscious suppression. Orwell wrote about this reaction in the introduction to *Animal Farm* – but the introduction was never printed. It was discovered later among his papers, unpublished. The introduction was called "On Literary Censorship" and in it he says, look this book a piece of satire, but even in England, a free country where we don't put people in tor-

ture chambers, there are still many ways to insure that unpopular ideas do not get expressed.

He doesn't go into it in any depth, he has about two sentences about the mechanism. One is that the press is owned by wealthy men who do not have any interest in certain things being said. Another, which I think is more important, is a good education. He says that if you have a good education, you go to the right public or private school and then go on to, say, Oxford or Cambridge, you have inculcated into you the understanding that there are certain things that it wouldn't do to say. It just wouldn't do to think them. It's like drinking the wrong wine before dinner. You just don't do. It's part of being in polite respectable society not to have these thoughts. And the fact that his essay went unpublished tells you something. The mechanisms are comprehensible both at the institutional level and the psychological level. It's about as close to a historical universal as you can get with very rare exceptions.

Lorber: Is the increasing overttness of the violence in American foreign policy, & the increasing domestic militarization, are they serving to radicalize people, make them see the mechanics of an often brutal state as systemic or merely specific to this administration?

Chomsky: It's extraordinary. You can't be an expert in what everyone is thinking but I have a fair amount of experience traveling around the country and talking to people and I get a ton of mail. It's not a scientific sample but it's a big sample with very different opinions and all different perspectives. I've noticed that, since 9/11 there's a huge increase in concern about the world. Now this is a very insular society, nothing outside our borders even exists, in fact not much even two states away. This is a very self-centered society. But it changed after 9/11 & it changed in lots of different directions. In some sectors it meant religious fanaticism, chauvinism, kill the bastards, murder the Iraqheads and on and on. In other sectors people began to say what are we doing in the world that makes people hate us? There's a willingness to think about things.

Audiences just shot up, invitations went thru the roof, small book publishers sold out and had to reprint everything from the 70s and 80s because the demand was so high.

And also the amount of hysterical vituperation from liberals has increased. They're the guardians. I basically agree with the right wing when they complain about the liberal press. The liberal press, and colleges which are also institutionally liberal, make up the commissar class. Their role, the role of the liberals, is to be mildly critical and to set bounds, this far and not one millimeter further.

That's NPR, Harvard, the liberal press they're complaining about and that's what intelligent propagandists do. You don't want it direct from the government, people will see through that, that's like Pravda, but if you get it from the guys who are supposed to be on the left then its much more believable.

Do you see that in poetry?

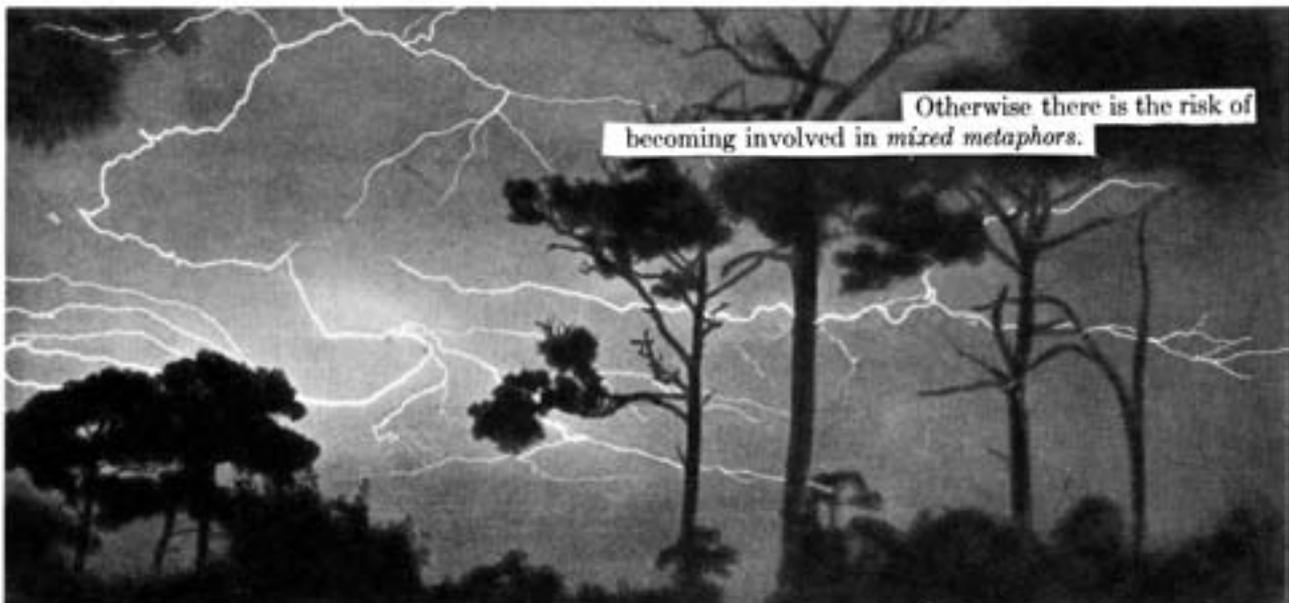
Lorber: There are people who have become more willing to discuss their surroundings, but even within that there's been a break. There are those who are those who are doing more systemic analyses & then there are those who have stopped watching network news and now watch

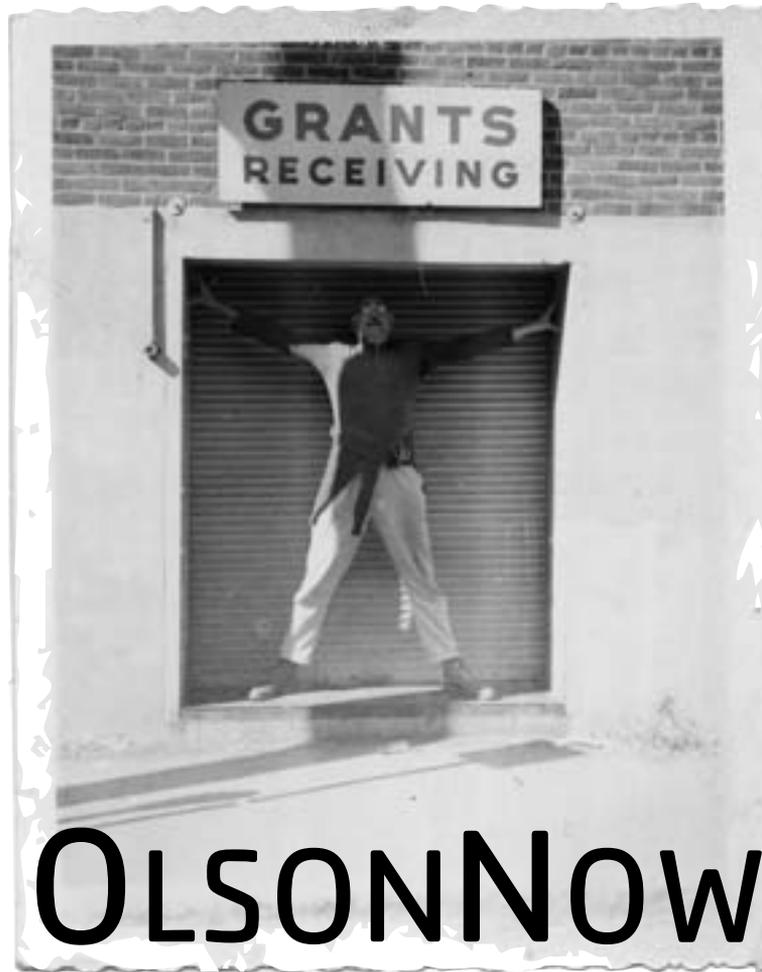
PBS or listen to NPR and consider themselves to be radicals because they're opposing the Bush administration. That's I was asking, if you seen the increasing overttness of US policies make people more aware of the systemic mechanics or just yearn for the good old days of Clinton or Carter.

Chomsky: Most of it is just listening to NPR. And for NPR it's all about the Bush administration. But it is true the Bush administration is on the extreme end of the spectrum.

**It's not pleasant  
to look into the  
mirror honestly...  
especially if you  
happen to be  
beating someone  
over the head  
with a club**

**A Talk with Noam Chomsky continues  
in the February/March 2006 issue of  
The Poetry Project Newsletter**





# OLSON NOW

BY AMMIEL ALCALAY & MICHAEL KELLEHER

**OLSON:** Born in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1910, to an immigrant, working-class family of Swedish and Irish origins. His father worked in the postal service as a letter carrier, active in the union, fighting for workers' rights. Olson felt his father's premature death, in 1935, was the result of conflicts with higher-ups. By then, Olson was one of the few children of immigrants enrolled in graduate school at Harvard, in the new American Studies program. Even so, labor remained a model for his intellectual ethics. In a 1952 letter to Merton Sealts, a Melville scholar, Olson blasted the official world of Melville scholarship:

“... god damn these *insolent* fucking *imposers*—users—*vulgarizers* of a man they *hold their jobs by*: my god,

Merton, how can they be so *dishonest* as to *peddle* him whom they owe their feeding of their children to?”

Olson came into WWII as an idealistic New Dealer and worked in the Office of War Information under the Roosevelt Administration; by the time he left, in 1944, he could have been appointed to a cabinet level position. Instead, sensing the nature of the Cold War's gathering bureaucratic and political momentum, he turned his back on party politics and started visiting Ezra Pound, incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's Hospital while former Nazis worked their way into positions of power and political influence in the intelligence, scientific, and academic communities. In his last letter to Pound, in 1948, Olson wrote: “you damn well know anglosaxonism is academicism and shrieking empire. LIFE out of

Yale, CULTURE out of Princeton, and the BOMB out of Harvard.” After going to the Yucatan to study Mayan hieroglyphs, Olson became rector of Black Mountain College. Little escaped his voracious intellectual appetite and high-energy scrutiny: historical geography, paleontology, archaeology, non-Euclidean math, dance, the Tarot, anthropology, psychology, Native America, the Incas and Aztecs, Ismaili Islam, westward expansion, rock

painting, the military industrial complex. This immersion in different systems of knowledge, and ways of knowing, was crucial to Olson's definition of the “postmodern,” a phrase he coined in a 1951 letter to Robert Creeley. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Olson became a focal point for the society of the little magazine, something that he insisted should not fall into the habit of, as he put it: “The oldest thing here in these States: backtrailing, colonialism, culture scratching!” Rather than pursue a political or academic career, Olson chose to spend most of his creative years, at great cost to himself and his family, living in abject poverty in a small tenement apartment at Gloucester's edge, amongst Italian immigrant fisherfolk, dilapidated warehouses and trucking depots.

**OFFICIALLY:** In 1975, the New York Times passed judgment: “For twenty years or more Charles Olson has been a cult figure in American literature and a prophet of the Black Mountain poets even to their second, third and successive indistinguishable generations... We know what happens to cult figures. When the bubble bursts it bursts completely and they go down into academic oblivion. I hope this won't happen with Olson. But I fear it may.” The review concludes: “*The Maximus Poems* is a huge and truly

angelic effort. It needs prolonged reading and extended commentary. Here, all I can do is record my feeling that Olson succeeded only in parts. The whole is a failure." Like "conspiracy" theorists, the definition and enclosure of Olson as a cult figure encodes him as not being worthy of serious attention. Perversely, we are made to feel sympathetic to the reviewer's dilemma, forced into the unpleasant task of the literary execution of the poet who marked our era in 1946 when he wrote:

"My name is NO RACE" address /  
Buchenwald new Altamira cave...

Mark that arm. It is no longer gun. / We  
are born not of the buried but these  
unburied dead".

**UNOFFICIALLY:** It has been thirty-five years since the death of Charles Olson in 1970, and more than fifty years since he failed to get a Fulbright fellowship to study Sumerian civilization in the Iraq that now features a Burger King catering to occupying American forces atop the ruins of Ur. While all the signs were there then, the country Olson lived in would be almost unrecognizable to him now: "pejorocracy" has come to stay, and much more than "sound, itself" is "neoned" in, as Olson wrote in the first Maximus poem, in the early 1950s. We live in the heart of a country of deep pol-

itics. The 9/11 Commission, in section 11.1, titled "IMAGINATION," tells us that: "Considering what was not done suggests possible ways to institutionalize imagination... It is therefore crucial to find a way of routinizing, even bureaucratizing, the exercise of imagination." What are the deep politics poetry now faces? Do the paths taken and not taken through Olson's life, thought, and poetry offer any answers? Are those paths blocked off by restraining orders and forms of administrative detention encoding and enforcing the larger bureaucratic nets that subjugate and atomize knowledge and experience?

**APEIRON:** One of Olson's many ancient sources was the Pre-Socratic philosopher and mapmaker, Anaximander, who believed that his teachers, such as Thales (who believed that water was the primal source of all creation), had it wrong, that in fact prior to the four elements there was another, original substance, which he called: "apeiron." "Apeiron" means, literally: boundlessness. Similarly, Olson read contempo-

rary historical circumstance (meaning, world war, the atom bomb, the military-industrial complex) as the result of a wrong turn in Western thinking, which took place in Greece circa 500 b.c.e., when history mutated from an activity to a discipline and when philosophy started dealing with "forms." These two facts lead western thought into dualism and positivism, two modes that restrict human activity to cogitation, categorization, and stasis. Olson's "Projective Verse" is a call for dynamism and boundlessness: against the corraling of poetry into forms that do not

**"a move away from what we think of as the 'literary,' finally claiming for poetry an altogether other range of importance."**

extend from content he proposes the page as an open field; against a poetry that is separate from human activity he proposes breath as point of reference; and against the forms of institutionalization that would remove poetry from the body politic, be those forms universities or governments, he proposes "the special view of history" as an active stance in the world. It is the very boundlessness of Olson's project that leaves so much more work to be done.

**TESTIMONY:** "All this work was implicated in a move away from what we think of as the "literary," finally claiming for poetry an altogether other range of importance. What Olson founded in Buffalo, what followed from his arrival there, begins with that. "Literary" in this context, that is both Olson's work and the work he engendered in Buffalo, has to do with two different but related issues. It refers both to the conventions, modes and procedures of writing that mark, however broadly and ambiguously, what is proposed at any given moment as "literature," and also with the "life worlds" such practices are implicated with, something loosely called, say, the "literary life," complete with all its competitions, prizes, career paths, disciplinary bodies, canonical aspirations, and so on. The literary,



then, as an institution, as institutionalized practices. Crucial to Olson's sense of a move beyond or around the literary is his notion that it's possible to reconnect with or recover energies that pre-exist their historical institutionalization into a specific, fixed grammar of social practices. And even more importantly, that to do that, to push one's self toward that connection, is to disrupt or alter that grammar, a profoundly political act." (Michael Boughn describing Olson's arrival in Buffalo for a teaching position in 1963)

"I date my confirmation of a life in poetry to the Berkeley Poetry Conference in 1965 and the point where Charles Olson says:

No, I wanna talk, I mean, you want to listen to a poet? You know, a poet, when he's alive, whether he talks or reads you his poems is the same thing. Dig that! And when he is made of three parts – his life, his mouth, and his poem – then, by god, the earth belongs to us! And what I think has happened is that that's – wow, gee, one doesn't like to claim things, but god, isn't it exciting? I mean, I feel like a kid, I'm in the presence of an event, which I don't believe myself.

"*In the presence of an event*" was the illuminating phrase for me. His reading was fragmented, disturbed, and chaotic on one level, but completely lucid on another. He kept the audience there for more than four hours." (Anne Waldman)

"Olson's "Projective Verse" hit me like a wallop." (Joanne Kyger)

"To me, Olson's concept of the *polis* was just simply the idea that you had to be grounded in the concerns of the people, that the people are finally the makers of history. What are the concerns of the people? Why are they these concerns? The whole question of putting the hinge back on the door. That is, trying to find out what had been

hidden from us by the emergence of this new one-sided society. That was important, particularly for me being black because I knew part of that was the connection to Africa. Where are the foundations of the world from?

**"It is therefore crucial to find a way of routinizing, even bureaucratizing, the exercise of imagination."**

Charles was saying, "you have to go back, you have to go back." One of the most important parts was language, you know, the expression of life is language, and you have to grasp languages. I think the problem now is they have reduced

poetry again to abstract metaphor and they are not trying to teach you anything. They are trying to be ironic or to make you feel sad or happy, but it is not a teaching instrument anymore. The educational process, the political process along with the emotional charge, that is supposed to be *one* thing. And with the whole motion of the 1960s, what the poetry began, they are covering it up again. It is like the door opened and the door closed. You have to fight that because what they do, they bring in another wave of academic people who are just talking about nothing at all. They refuse to talk about the world. With that, you get a cover, a muting and a mutation of the arts themselves. So what passes as art suddenly has changed and is mutated. The unfortunate thing for us, I think, is that a lot of people of our own generation are dying at this point when we are in a real key kind of transitional period. You see people drop all around you. Great people, people who could help explain the world. These people preserve the life of the future. Without that history the future will be born dead, born as a corpse." (Amiri Baraka)

"I don't feel I'm doing anything different from what Charles Olson is doing, which is trying to discover the geography of America, which is the geography of the world, which is what human civilization is all about, and which is what my life as a poet is all about." (Diane Wakoski)

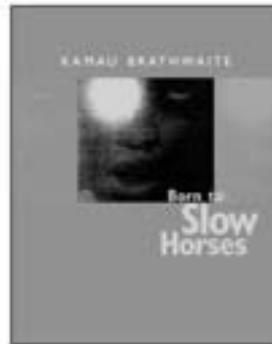
**OLSONNOW:** OlsonNow began through several discussions: one has been ongoing with Fred Dewey, in Los Angeles, who increasingly saw in Olson a model for the intersection of local political and poetic issues enacted in the work he was doing with *Beyond Baroque* as a press and a physical space that has served as a communal focal point in Venice for many decades. The other centered on ways to raise consciousness about (and money for) Henry Ferrini's film-in-progress, *Poet and the City*: Charles Olson and the Persistence of Place, which will have its first New York screening as part of the December event, along with performances by David Amram, Ed Sanders, Anne Waldman, and others. It quickly became evident that the best means to advance these discussions was to bring Olson back into the conversation about poetry and the public, a conversation from which he has been largely absent over the last decade. The project kicked off with a talk by the two of us at the Zinc bar in NYC in May. Another project-in-progress is a reprint of Olson's *Special View of History*, by *Beyond Baroque*. At our most ambitious public event to date, OlsonNow, at the Poetry Project on December 3, we hope to energize the poetry community with a sense of boundless purpose, with Olson as originator and inspiration. To that end, the format for the day will be open dialogue. We hope to provoke passionate discussion outside the framework of papers/auditors (academia) and personality/audience (poetry scene). We have also begun a blog ([olsonnow.blogspot.com](http://olsonnow.blogspot.com)), to which anyone can post comments, and to which anyone can submit a post to be commented upon. The discussions the blog elicits can and will become part of the discussion of the December event. Please direct any questions about the project to Michael or Ammiel at [OlsonNow@gmail.com](mailto:OlsonNow@gmail.com).



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BARBARA GUEST

*THE RED GAZE*

Wesleyan University Press / 2005

Barbara Guest's newest book, *The Red Gaze*, is full of poems that are like good cinematography: fluid, visual, and surprising. I've always admired Guest's unique ability to create seamless links between person and object, real and material, but here she takes this talent even further. The direct kinship between the book's title & the poems within is everywhere evident, particularly if one thinks of the idea of "the gaze" in Lacanian terms of shaping one's own identity through the act of looking at someone or something and the attainment of visual recognition. "The Gaze" is important in poetry because it enables the reader to connect to a poem, while also allowing the poem itself to develop its own unique qualities.

In her essay "Imagism" (*Forces of Imagination*, Kelsey Street Press, 2003), Guest defines image as "a locus between intuition and concept." *The Red Gaze* begins with a poem titled "Nostalgia," in which the sheer variety of imagistic sensations is overwhelming. "Hands are touching. / You began in cement in small spaces. / You began the departure. Leaves restrain. You attempted the departure. / A smile in sunshine, nostalgia."

The very first line strikes a primal chord, arousing a sense of tangibility through word choice, while in the second line extends the sensation to meet the exterior world. The relationship of the poem to the past, implicit in the poem's title, is further developed by the repetition of the word "departure." By the end of this first poem ("I am not detached, / bulletins permit us comb, fish of silver"), we are submerged in Guest-world, that place where language serves as monocle, charged with sound, muscle, and clarity.

Guest's language does not merely describe, it presents the reader with the means to see in an entirely new way. In the poem "Imagined Room," her gaze turns imperative with lines like, "Do not forget the sky has other zones" and "Let there be no formal potions." Hers is not a gendered gaze, it surpasses all traditional limitations normally placed on a point of view. As such, Guest changes the way one thinks of time, thought, and even what a poem can accomplish. This is illustrated in the last couplet of "Imagined Room", "In the tower you flew without wings / speaking in other tongues to the imagined room."

*The Red Gaze* takes the norm and subverts it to an extent where the poem becomes completely omnipotent and, at the same time, empowers the reader. Anything is believable and possible, flight, fluency, brain space.

In "Alteration," Guest extends an invitation to the audience to join in her struggle against the ordinary. "I ask you to permit the image / and the alteration of time." With "A Burst of Leaves," where she says "We are ready for a new orientation." and with so many other poems in *The Red Gaze*, Guest sets the stage for an exciting new sphere of innovation. In "A Reason for Poetics" (*Forces of Imagination*), Guest writes, "Ideally a poem will be both mysterious (incunabula, driftwood of the unconscious), and organic (secular) at the same time." Guest's poems achieve this and much more.

# BOOK REVIEWS

According to Lacan, "the gaze" is a result of "the mirror stage," where a child learns to recognize his or her own image. That recursiveness may be, in part why the very word "gaze" is often indicative of fascination, wonder, and awe. Throughout Guest's work, the idea of "the gaze" is tri-fold—reader to poem, poet to poem, poem to poem. In fact, the poem itself is its own fascination-provoking entity. In "The Past" she writes, "It might have been a celebration, so strong the presence / of the poem."

In the title poem, Guest writes "Complications of red enter the leaf / and it is more accomplished." This parallels the progression of the poems in this book, they are colorful, complex, and challenging. It is as if the poems themselves have already passed through "the mirror stage." They are now self-aware, and because of this, assertive in their originality. As she states in "No Longer Strangers," "You will notice it is all one speech, / and jocular."

In her poem after abstract expressionist Hans Hofmann, Guest writes, "To invoke the unseen, to unmask it. Reality in a glass / of water. The mirror reveals heartstrings of reality." Hofmann is recognized for his ability to combine elements of surrealism with a conscious sense of perception, a technique that is not all that different from Guest's poetics. She too is able to "invoke the unseen," to use a "mirror" to "unmask reality." As she writes in "Shifting Persona" (*Forces of Imagination*), "The poem's concealed autobiography. A memoir of itself which is released as it becomes a presence in existing time." Or, as in the poem, "Composition," "Our lives are composed with magic and euphony."

The closing poem of *The Red Gaze* is entitled "Supposition" and reads, "You are willing / to pass through the center / composed of independent poetics. / To rearrange rhyme, / while you gather its energy." The poem is then followed by a closing quote from Theodor Adorno, "In each genuine art work something appears that did not exist before."

*The Red Gaze* is itself a "genuine art work," a great rarity that progresses with equal skill through the visual & intellectual. These are visceral poems and it is hard not to be drawn into "the gaze" they invoke. This book is a welcome addition to Guest's masterful body of work.

*Erica Kaufman lives and works in New York City.*

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# BOOK REVIEWS

ELENI SIKELIANOS  
*THE CALIFORNIA POEM*  
COFFEE HOUSE PRESS / 2004  
*THE BOOK OF JON*  
City Lights Publishers / 2004

Eleni Sikelianos has two heady and rich offerings this year: *The California Poem*, a book-length poem, and *The Book of Jon*, a memoir of her late father. She wants to get down everything in *The California Poem*, an exuberant work of many forms: lyrics, descriptions, facts, photos, postcards, diagrams and, above all, lists. Following Garcia Ordóñez de Montalvo's early portrait of the [CAP?] amazon women of California, Sikelianos relates how they, and the state of California itself, have "caused so much injury...that it may cause you equal pleasure." Coffee House's generous and elegant layout provides ample room for a childhood, girlhood, and poethood. Distinct and confident, Sikelianos's work recalls the influence of Whitman's expansive American line, the enthusiasm of Ginsberg, and the intimate urgency of Alice Notley: "Everything I know / occurred in California and everything / I know later, everything I know of California / is shaped like a piece of cardboard / and smells like the black plastic pitch that stretches between / Bakersfield & apricots"

With satisfying insouciance, Sikelianos includes just about everything about her experience of the Golden State. Life, death, time, sex, memory, art-making, the sun, the desert and the ocean lead us own into the specifics of local geography, flora and fauna and from there back to knowing in all its forms. Sikelianos's keen sensitivity to sound abounds: heavenly wolf stars turn over a Callippe Fritillary; a Wrentit sits in the mariposa. There are "laughable echinoderms," but "no iguanodon but time." There are giant shining armadillos, yoginis, and muchachos; there is a lot of opossumness. At Nerve Lake, we learn the Chumash name *humqag* from the Queen of the Drought. Real life vampires and uncouth gringos do 360s in a "pelagic perfect cosine wave." The vermin are against the leeches of Zaca Lake. These are the "researches of Eleni."

Outside of all this delicious imagery, there are moments of anger and frustration, as her beaches are taken over by oil-drilling companies and worse. While the book is clearly an elegy, it remains hopeful: the poems are a "list // of disappearances...what is appearing?" Seaside cockroaches have human faces, she tells us. A restless tale of home and homelessness with "rage, sadness, and dismay," the gorgeousness of its details nevertheless prevails: "oh, what's this—the car is an earth! the bird is a self! the / mask is human!" We get to sit in her "back-to-nature quonset huts," as Sikelianos creates her "dream music with holes in it." With its gold rushes and nuclear waste, public masturbators and trailer parks, wentletraps and Cachuma's foot, sidewinders and winos, *The California Poem* is a luxuriant trip, wild and unexpected, in the true language of that verdant landscape.

Blessed, and often haunted, by a fabulous family history, Sikelianos has also accomplished an unblinking vision of her father in *The Book of Jon*. Tree doctor, musician, heroin addict, lover of animals, storyteller, reader, walker, plan-maker, and eccentric, Jon Sikelianos rambled through his life of disappointed hippie pipe-dreams to die of homelessness and addiction in a motel room. A volatile, rebellious spirit, Jon emerges in the book as a magnetic, yet mostly absent, force in the life of this poet. Seeing him only sporadically as a child and young woman, Sikelianos depicts their encounters through poems, proposed film scenes, memories, letters, dreams, interviews, photos (beautiful ones), and lists, all to determine, "who's your father, who?" Like all good biographies, it's painful and exhilarating to read, to witness the ruin of another's life and to know its beauty.

Sikelianos begins the book trying to remember the last time she saw her father, so she can start to imagine his death; she wants to reconcile his brilliance and artistry with the cliché of the absent, drunk, mean dad. We hear about his jokes and talents, his mistakes and failed plans. At 16, he went to the Louvre, pulled a piece of paint from a Rousseau he loved and kept it in his pocket til it disintegrated years later: a perfect metaphor for this bright yet foiled life. We see him in perpetual motion, reading 100 books a week, telling gun stories, walking all night and day through the deserts of New Mexico.

*The Book of Jon* is a story of abandonment and of holes. And the poet registers her frustration, yet there are lovely memories too, as when Jon teaches Eleni, age seven, to shoot pool in a bar or, working at the zoo, he would bring foxes home. "Light Gathers About My People" is a bright elegy in a book that refuses to fall into simple nostalgia.

In these "shreds of stories," a picture emerges of the parallels between the poets's life & her father's. They both traveled: Jon crisscrossed the country "so many times a small constellation appeared"; Eleni travels abroad, finding herself in equally dusty and deserted places, exploring her own ambivalences & modes of escape. Notwithstanding the hurt of having endured betrayals and weaknesses, the clarity of her experiences with her father is what lingers. After being beaten badly on the streets, after being kicked out of the hospital, in his final dangerous homeless life, Jon shambles through Albuquerque, with the "pale blue plastic band fluttering nostalgically on his wrist for weeks."

*The Book of Jon* is a part of a longer fantastical family history Sikelianos intends to write; the poet's fans will eagerly look forward to the tales of Melena the Leopard Girl, not to mention the pilgrims, Nobel-nominees, detectives, counts, heirs, and opium-runners. The poet acknowledges her anxiety about what is inevitably left out in her portrait, as she tries to remember his voice in this painful vision: "I only have this thin slice on the life: it is from a daughter's eye."

*Camille Guthrie's new book, In Captivity, will be published by Subpress later this year.*

JENI OLIN  
*BLUE COLLAR HOLIDAY*  
Hanging Loose Press / 2005

There are many things to admire about Jeni Olin's *BLUE COLLAR HOLIDAY*, but to me the most striking is the expansive, inclusive "one moment" feeling that permeates all the poems.

"On a clear day you can see forever – / At Lenscrafters you can be fitted in about an hour." What is contained in (and constrained by) the language of that particular line and its funny little rhyme is all that is playful, hopeful, sublime and ridiculous. The line comes early in the collection, but the music of it resonates until it comes to rest later on – "and this, at the end of day is what dazzles me" – when the back story of the death of a lover becomes foreground (just as the lover's paintings come to rest against the poems themselves). Olin's poems create a space for the mundane humor of the everyday to be played off against larger forces – "there are fates / Far worse than blackness, the clap. Though / Nobody knows what they are" (a riff on Somerset Maugham's advice about novel-writing) – and for life's rich, silly pageant and death's shittiness to exist together. But the import of the lover's life and demise does not commandeer power in any of the poems: there are other beloveds who surface and submerge as well, and all words and all lovers and all moments are allowed to rest fitfully together.

Olin understands how theme, emotion and intention can be manipulated to create an almost mathematical interlock within the line. These skillful blendings are never without humor, and often rock lyrics act as a binding: "New York will not accept me at this weight & / Mothers of the disappeared don't come 'round / Here anymore"; "Mama take this pepper spray from me – / I can't defame the minions tonight"; "Well-hung and snow-white trash. / The furniture was heavy failing also." And while there is much spontaneity in these seeming throwaways, nothing is ever thrown out just because. Even other elegies carry their weight: a mention of Alice Notley's "At Night the States," a riff on a few words from Plath's "Daddy" ("The Wandering Jew that ate my sunshine"), the line "Only you and your bloody wig" which may recall the wig of blood in Ginsberg's "Howl," and a line by Ginsberg from his elegy to Frank O'Hara acting as an epigraph to the final poem, "The Day Allen Died" (which of course recalls ... well, you know). It's as if all these elements are acting to preserve what can never stick around, and so what is ephemeral is continuously rendered fresh and new.

As I'm writing this review Badly Drawn Boy's song "You Were Right" comes on the radio: "Sometimes it's hard to love someone until the day that they are gone." That "gone" doesn't have to mean physical death. The loves of *BLUE COLLAR HOLIDAY* (which are not always the poet's, I don't think) are wonderful and problematic – "A love flared yesterday in Flushing, Queens / Expired amid diet ginger ale & racy gladiolas"; "It would be so easy to stay but. / Was it Sal Mineo in the doorframe? / I knew you felt like that. / & so my hell is hardly there"; "You could never leave me alone and then you could" – and this "one moment" of love and loss is accessed again and again here with compassion and accommodation right up until the last four words, which bring the benediction: "what I work with."

Sharon Mesmer's recent books are *In Ordinary Time* (Hanging Loose Press) and *Ma Vie a Yonago* (Hachette Littératures, France).

# AMERICAN POETS

## The Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan

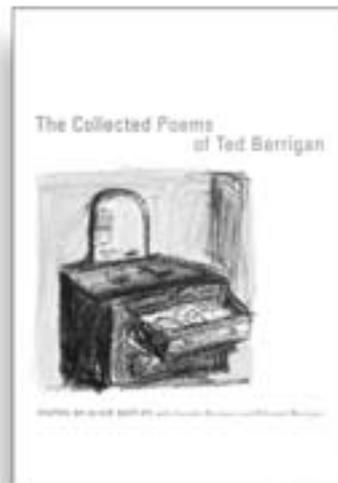
ALICE NOTLEY,  
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Introduction and Notes by  
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# BOOK REVIEWS

BRANDON DOWNING  
*DARK BRANDON*  
Faux Press / 2005

*Dark Brandon*, the new collection of poems by Brandon Downing, arrives housed in a stark black cover emblazoned by a title in white serif font with a touch of gothic flair, and no cover image. On the equally black back cover floats a white price (\$15.00), a pair of white bookseller categories separated by a slash (Poetry/Cinema Studies) and a medium-sized white box containing (in black) a barcode, beneath which the publisher's url can be found, also in black. There are no blurbs, no author photo, and no bio.

Once inside we discover a two-page table of contents – one page in white with black text, the other mirroring it in black with white text – indicating that the book contains some 56 poems on 103 pages. Interspersed throughout the book are images either “by, or...found by, the

author,” including: a collage/poem containing business ads and headshots of what appear to be small business owners; two visual poems that reference rebuses and abecedaria; a tight close-up of George W. Bush's face; a pair of cartoonish portraits; a faux book cover entitled, “Brandon Downing's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn;” and several oddly blank pages whose blankness seems either a layout miscue or a cleverly disguised witticism.

In between these images exist the 56 aforementioned poems, whose titles, many of them taken from films and television shows, evince a high quantity of referencing which belies the poems' low quotient of referentiality. Most of the poems rely heavily on a combination of collage and quotation, loading lines with bits of text in quotation marks that sometimes indicate speech, textual appropriation or, perhaps, a person speaking the text aloud while holding up the index and

middle fingers of both hands and bending the fingers twice at the joint. The reader is left to guess whether the quoted texts come from movies referenced or from bits of conversations plucked from the subway or from some other private source altogether.

Avant-garde poets, practically by definition, use constraints to highlight particular aspects of language in ways that reveal new possibilities for words. But there is a fine line between constraints that liberate and constraints that constrain, and said liberation often arises from a dominant quality in the writing or arrangement of texts that transcends the rigid formality of their experiment. Charles Bernstein's ventriloquizing irony elicits howls of laughter. Lyn Hejinian's resistance of narrative closure invigorates her narrative with poetic possibility. Jackson Mac Low's music transcends even his most rigorous self-imposed limitations.

But constraints constrain when too many are placed on a single poem, or when they become codified into rules, or when their ability to communicate ideas is taken for granted, as it seems to be in this collection. Many of the poems in *Dark Brandon* are victims of their own fidelity. Parataxis, textual appropriation, resistance to closure, ventriloquism, irony, and parody all tend toward a flattening effect that gives the feeling of reading a series of lists organized into visual approximations of poetic forms.

There are, however, isolated moments when the poems threaten, through the rather more conventional means of rhyme and meter, to sing their way out of the paralyzing parataxis at their core. For instance:

“When Anthony Quinn / wears leopard skins”

“I am so netted / breathing on his chins.”

These tetrameter lines, which faintly recall the Anglo-Saxon line of four beats split by a caesura, are of a kind that occasionally springs forth to liberate these poems from the otherwise monotonous listing that dampens both the exuberant spirit of their author and his obvious prosodical skill.

Michael Kelleher

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MICHAEL IVES  
*THE EXTERNAL  
COMBUSTION ENGINE*  
Futurepoem Books / 2005

“how about one immense pleasure?”

“Uh-huh, I temped once.” (“First Communion”) This ironic entry into Michael Ives’ first book masks the highly articulated and innovative narratives to unfold. His energetic prose-poetry acts as architecture and alchemy, even where language mocks itself. Ives is a button-pushing poet to reckon with, able to fire epiphanies at brain-bending velocity.

In *The External Combustion Engine*, Ives takes embedded expectations of language (combustible) and converts them to a new fuel for thought, a new idiom. “We light fires and cook down the distance. Warming bowls full of far: these they call our eyes—they who, with eyes on their body, call anything that sees an eye, and look for the body that it’s on.” Ives delves deep into the woods and wits of consciousness, and retains his spunk.

Section I opens onto a surrealist’s panoply of 37 short prose vehicles that range from the satiric to the absurd. Ives has “confounded the real and the play disguise.” There is a “Spoon Man,” a “Half-Headed Woman,” and “Poor James”—“a length of velvet.” Delirious, cabaret prose. Ives extracts the juice

beyond the rust of consciousness and creates imagination reversals. Like Stein, Ives can be read aloud with relish. “Anything, after all, can become an orchid, if you look at it long enough—” “Anything can be anything.”

Ives lures revelation with the fable and the parable. “Four Fingers of the Left Hand” is particularly dreamlike with a brother and sister pair that appears again in “Capillarity.” They make a fire a dog, and try to feed it. But when the brother leaves their game to go inside, the sister pivots: “‘That will only make it more hungry’, she said as I was walking toward the house. ‘Besides, what makes you think you’re outside?’”

In “A Secularization,” Ives practices the inexplicable: “‘A bird just flew into my head,’ yelled the first man, ‘I for one have never heard of such a thing happening before.’” Ives links with Jean Giono for the miraculous, Céline for the exclamatory—“Verily, orgasm was converting me wholesale into an aviary!”—and Robert Walser for defiance of all kinds.

Ives drives at a clip through “The Seizure” (section II), a *nar-rant-ive* plus parables, and takes a *triathlogue* style of jibing his audience. This digressive *grand mal* is an unwieldy ride, but presents a new spoke in the wheel of Orpheus, as our modern music-lover is lost to his parking lot Eurydice. One starts to take

for granted how ingeniously Ives moves between trajectories, though “perhaps my chief delight in all this sad world lay in the very effort *to redirect the natural course of my intuitions*” (italics, Ives). The maniacal “Seizure” goes bushwacking as Ives feeds on the “mythologico-musical consciousness” and Orpheus-obsessive. This particular engine smolders out between Orpheus and Eurydice, as they find no recognition in their ignition. The “sister” as oracle, and Eurydice as magnet, point to how combustible are our perceptions: “we shall lose our dominion of awareness as swiftly as we acquired it.”

“Gong Drops” (section III) is a set of aphorisms (*comme-Michaux*): “Everyone ‘has’ a you and a me—not by choice, not a you according to the me’s dictates, yet a me forged in the glow of you.” After all these gem-like “lessons under the ordeal tree,” one may yet find solace: “Into the lake of the mouth, one syllable at a time, I followed a retrograde umbilicus hand over hand back to my thoracic Eurydice.”

If this work seems highfalutin at times, it is also clear that such “intellectual montage” is intended. Ives sustains a superconductivity that burns through language to reveal unlikely currents. “I can hear me hearing all the way down.” One becomes fiercely, almost steadily dazzled.

*Albystyre Julian’s writing can be found in Chain, Talisman, Insurance, and Pharos.*

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*Anselm Hollo*



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