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THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

ST. MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY
131 EAST 10TH STREET
NEW YORK NY 10003
www.poetryproject.com

#211 APRIL-JUNE 2007

NEWSLETTER EDITOR Brendan Lorber

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The Poetry Project's programs and publications are made possible, in part, with public funds from: the National Endowment for the Arts; the New York State Council on the Arts; the City of New York's Department of Cultural Affairs; and the Materials for the Arts/New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and Department of Sanitation.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

It's been a pleasure to help get this organization together on a daily basis for anyone and everyone the past four years, and as this is the last note I'll be sending along I'd like to thank some of the people who have made it possible to get anything done at all.

For aiding and abetting the various crimes we've committed here against reason, sense, stability and timeliness, and for giving their spirit to the Project when reasonable salaries and stipends might have been found almost anywhere else, I must thank Stacy Szymaszek, Corrine Fitzpatrick, Brendan Lorber, David Vogen, Stephen Rosenthal, David Cameron, Courtney Frederick, Stefania Iryne Marthakis, Erika Recordon, Arlo Quint, Regie Cabico, Stephanie Gray, Miles Champion, Corina Copp, Renee Gladman, Maggie Nelson, and Marcella Durand. And, in the same vein, my thanks to Jimmy Fragosa, who holds the Church building together with his hands.

For providing the counsel and wisdom to encourage a complete rewriting of the normal logic of a workplace, and for having the inimitable foresight to realize that turning a non-profit's annual budget over to a debt-ridden poet who wouldn't know a savings account from a hole in the wall is actually a brilliant idea, I must thank Gillian McCain, Elinor Nauen, John S. Hall, Ted Greenwald, John Yau, Gregory Fuchs, Jordan Davis, Rosemary Carroll, Kimberly Lyons, Edwin Torres, Paul Slovak, Steve Hamilton, Hal Wilner, Siri Hustvedt, Greg Masters, Dianne Benson, and Vicki Hudspith.

For the willingness to walk into a church, talk to people about poetry, read their work, and deal with a church alarm system that is no one's friend, I must thank Brian Kim Stefans, Tony Towle, Joanna Fuhrman, Brenda Coultas, Akilah Oliver, Thomas Savage, Dgls Rothschild, Oz Shelach, Robert Fitterman, Edwin Torres, Janet Hamill, Rachel Levitsky, Maggie Dubris, Merry Fortune, David Henderson, Nada Gordon, Gary Sullivan, Larry Fagin, Lisa Jarnot, Joel Lewis, Drew Gardner, Patricia Spears Jones, Marcella Durand, Brendan Lorber, Bill Kushner, Simon Pettet, Evelyn Reilly, Carol Mirakove and Kristin Prevallet.

The number of volunteers and interns to

thank is somewhere in the hundreds, and so that list can't rightfully be made in this space. But it's the volunteers and interns that make this place breathe. That work is too important to even begin to quantify, and my hope is that everyone who has helped in any way knows that I'm grateful. Be seeing you.

Love,

Anselm Berrigan

EMERGENCY FUND

Poet Frank Sherlock was rushed to the hospital January 22 with a severe case of meningitis. He underwent emergency surgery, and, as a result of the illness, suffered a heart attack and kidney failure.

He is without health insurance so we are making an appeal for emergency financial contributions on his behalf. Tax-deductible donations can be sent to:

'A 'A ARTS
c/o J. Spahr
5000 MacArthur Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94613

Checks should be made out to 'A 'A Arts. Please make a note that your check is for Frank Sherlock. Let's make getting better fast the only thing Frank has to worry about.

WERE WITH YOU IN RED HOOK

The Red Hook Tuesday Poetry Discussion Group will have its first meeting at the Brooklyn Public Library, Red Hook Branch (7 Wolcott Street @ Dwight), on April 3rd. Poems will be read aloud and discussed.

Meetings of the Red Hook Tuesday Poetry Discussion Group are free, and will take place the first Tuesday of every month, at 6:15pm. No one is required to buy or bring anything: a packet of poems is provided. Coffee and pastry are available.

The Red Hook Tuesday Poetry Discussion Group is a venture of The Poetry Project. Michael Scharf makes the reading selections and initiates discussion. Contact info@poetryproject.com for the lowdown.

PULL UP A CHAIR

We'd like to give a warm welcome to poets Greg Fuchs and Kimberly Lyons, who have

joined The Poetry Project Board of Directors as of this past winter. Oversight: love it or leave it baby.

ELATION OVER FOUNDATION'S ALLOCATIONS

Our heartfelt congratulations to Rae Armantrout of San Diego, CA & Nathaniel Mackey in Santa Cruz, CA for snaring the 2007 Foundation for Contemporary Arts grants for poetry. Congratulations also to the recipients in other artistic fields: Dance - DD Dorvillier and RoseAnne Spradlin; Music - Doug Henderson, Yuko Nexus6, and Jennifer Walshe; Theater/Performance Art - Clarinda Mac Low and Pan Pan Theatre; Visual Arts - Kimsooja.

FAREWELLS

Emmett Williams
Fluxus artist and poet
1925-2007

Gene Frumkin
Poet, editor, teacher
1928-2007

FROM THE EDITOR: YOU ARE THE WARRIOR POET

Real fearlessness is the product of tenderness.
—Chögyam Trungpa

The syllogistic allure of the Newsletter's compressed editorial asides is this: if you *think* they are about you, they *are* about you. So why make yourself the target when you could simply develop a more tolerant attitude towards yourself, you schmuck? No matter how bright your halo or malicious your relatively unused heart, nobody is *all* Mother Theresa or Daddy Attila. Once you notice the variegated, contradictory workings of your own self, you can see the graceful range in everyone around you & you will stop injuring eternity with poems that do little more than kill time.

These notes may appear, well, mean, but they mean well. The distracted among us may misread as breathless dystopian screeds what are simple, tender assertions that it's better to write *about* people than to write them off. Nothing more than a sweet jostle to shake poets out of their drowsy, fearful state of selfish, repetitive complacency.

Trouble is, that state is maintained by our fear of who we really are. Afraid of any dark impulses, thoughts & actions that betray our fragile perfection, we take an aggressive,

unfriendly stance towards ourselves. We avoid anything upsetting in there & failing that, are ruthless in our self-denigration. We become estranged & compartmentalized, condemning whole sections of our lives to static exile. Your problems would have no bearing on me, or mine on you, if giving up on yourself didn't have wider public implications. Noble or silly, our pursuits are impaired by sloppy vision & internal guile. Their crippled trajectories hobble the projects & people we live around.

Roiling with self-directed animosity, we become paranoid. We believe the world will see us for who we are & take us down. So we front, which renders the world as inscrutable to us as we are to it. We engage in preemptive strikes, which isolate us further & create the very conditions that legitimize our anger. We retreat to the safe haven of patterns that once worked. How many of us are repeating an idea for which we were praised years ago or, more often, another person's idea? How many warmed over *Howls*, how many reheated O'Haras will our anxiety clutter the landscape with? In our doomed attempts at self-preservation, we become laughable shadows of our own, or more often, somebody else's former self.

But there's no need for that protective con-tortion. The only person after you is your-self. By relinquishing notions of perfection, or happiness dependent of the acquisition of what some other guy has, there is no deprivation to feel down about. By taking a

charitable attitude towards ourselves, one that embraces failures as intrinsic to any character, we can feel more secure & abundant. & from that sense of plenty, we reflex-ively share our abundance with other peo-ple. No more pretending to be nice so peo-ple won't hurt you (more than you injure yourself). No more pretending to be mean so people will fear you (more than you dread yourself). No more writing charming poems so people will be dazzled by your fancy footwork (your poor, aching feet)!

There are many conceptions of what it is to be fulfilled. Shambhala teachings explore the warrior's approach. A warrior is not revealed in the commission of aggressive acts, but in becoming brave. The first, most difficult act of bravery is assessing who you are without arrogance or condemnation. Once accomplished, the need for external affirmation simply falls away, replaced with the fantastic optimism of no longer admir-ing people for their position nor fearing any sort of ruin.

Liberation also takes many forms – we can renounce ideas that disconnect us from each other & ourselves & redirect the discipline we developed in the service of our neuroses towards satisfying work. My own immediate liberation from stewardship of the *Newsletter* is eclipsed by the much greater liberation of what the *Newsletter's* revealed: the exhaust-ing futility of striving for the worldly trapp-ings of The Major Poet – & even more, the needless anguish of so many people who

regard such trappings as the paramount goal. Freedom from that pursuit is the secret reason why the overarching tenor of the *Newsletter* has been expansive, appreciative & excited about what the future of poetry has up its raggedy sleeve.

Lest anyone think otherwise, these notes have been no more negative than being woken up with breakfast in bed. No matter how nice it was to be asleep, no matter how compelling your dreams, the waking world is where you live. You are brilliant & that brilliance wants to be cultivated & expressed to the people around you. You can look at it as responsibility (“I am need-ed by things as the sky must be above the earth”) or simply the path of least resistance – it will always take more energy to prevent natural processes than to permit them. (“A diamond who wants to be coal”) You will always operate with a handicap, whether you are a poet or a world leader, if you thwart honest connections with your imme-diate environment. I know how intelligent & fearless you really are & I can't wait to spend the day with you more awake than we've ever been before.

Thank you then for being a poet, a good person who allows us to experience drala & inspiration. That's not sarcasm, and I am being specific about *you* in particular. Now that you understand why I've said the things about you that I have these past two years, my mission here is done.

– Brendan Lorber

FROM THE PAST

34 YEARS AGO

What's with this James Atlas? Every time he reviews a “New York School” poet, he repeats the same snotty remark: “The New York School of poets...whose guiding concern is to call attention to themselves.” (POETRY, Oct., 1971), and, “...New York School of Poets, better known as indulgent self promoters than writers” (POETRY, Jan 1973). Please don't say that any more.

Ed. Ron Padgett, #5 April, 1973

The recent reading/performance by Jonathan Stanton and his Siamese Banana Goon Squad at the 98 Green St. Loft was a riot, figuratively and almost literally. Stanton read one of his inim-itable stories while the Siamese Banana Gang acted out and illus-trated parts of it. Never in the course of history was so much owed to so few.

Ed. Ron Padgett, #6 May, 1973

33 YEARS AGO

Michael McClure roared & whispered. Allen Ginsberg vibrated from crown of head to sole of foot with tender evocative 20th Century Blakean incantation. Un-scheduled, Gregory Corso sim-ply undressed, streaked. The March 13th benefit at St. Marks was unrepeatable, a success in every way. With the Church rafters-deep in people, \$450 graced the Poetry Project poor box. And, not least of all, our sound system worked.

Ed. Bill Mac Kay, #14, April, 1974

12 YEARS AGO

...You never would have guessed: **Foamola** mentioned in Time magazine! In the January 23rd article “Hacker Homecoming” about **Phiber Optik's** just-out-of-jail-and-back-online celebration party at Irving Plaza, Joshua Quittner writes, “Onstage is a band called Foamola, consisting of a bald male organist, a **homeless man** playing what appears to be a pair of rocks and a female vocalist who yowls ‘When I read a book I always read **Balzac!**/ When I take a drug, I always take **Prozac!**’ Mercifully, an emcee named Jane Doe finally seizes the mike...” **Sparrow**, not to worry, I'm sure Ellen and Sylvia will let you come back home.

Ed. Gillian McCain, #157 April/May, 1995



SHAHRYAR MANDANIPOUR IN IRAN

TRANSLATED BY ZARA HOUSHMAND

About fifteen years have passed since post-modern thinking entered the scene in Iran and faced a warm welcome from the younger generation of Iranian poets and writers. Not only the young poets and writers of Tehran's modern metropolis nominated themselves as post-modernists, but even a poet and writer who, in a small town in the south, still got his drinking water from a cistern collecting rain by a two-thousand-year-old method.

From one point of view it seems very strange that the intense and bloody hundred-year-old debate between tradition and modernism still continues in Iran, but from another angle it is the logical circumstance of a society and culture paradoxically packed with contradictions. More than half a century ago, with the introduction of "New Poetry," Iranian poetry freed itself from the stamp and mold of cliché, the rhyming, metrical prison of fifteen-hundred-year-old prosody, and since then a noisy, energetic current in the literature of Iran's younger generation has been struggling to free itself in the name of post-modernism—especially under the influence of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault—even from the prison of language. Specialties of this poetry include conflicted meaning created by incorrect usage of grammar and syntax, wordplay and verbal lampoon, a deliberate flight from the notion that poetry should have a central theme and a vertical axis, the use of slang insofar as the system of censorship allows, and the scouring of familiarity from words and from the normal syntax of a poem's lines.

The turn toward post-modernism has contradictory causes, both simple and convoluted:

—Evidently, post-modernism is a more avant-garde trend than modernism and following it can thus loosen the knot of degrading backwardness of a country that, for all its power and potential, remains behind the walls of the third world.

—A superficial understanding of post-modernist views on tradition, as well as some faulty translations of post-modernist theory, have led to the fanciful notion that post-modernism, being contrary to modernism, aligns itself with tradition and even with religion.

—The revolution, bloody political disputes, the long and ruinous burden of the war with Iraq, identity crises, a lack of confidence in the future, and religious restrictions on individuals' lifestyle and even dress have all contributed to a turn toward anarchic style in Persian language that is mistakenly identified as post-modernism.

—The excessive political and ideological use of language, the excessive use of slogans, has turned the Iranian mind, especially youth, to despair of and disgust with language.

—The long precedent of censorship has caused criticism of the existing situation to display itself under the safe cover of a post-modern mask.

—The ancient Persian language is begging for Deconstruction.

—The literature of Iranian youth is intensely opposed to any connection with the patriarchal literature of previous generations, and post-modernism is the best and newest way to show this opposition and the antagonism of "fathers and sons."

—Iranian literature of the last eighty years has traveled through all the experiences and innovations of modernism, has exhausted the novelty and potential of modernism in the Persian language, and is now searching for new paths and to strip itself of the myth of modernism.

WORLD NEWS

BROOKLYN
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MISSISSIPPI

GRANADA
NICARAGUA

THE
CATSKILLS

The advent of post-modern thought and its welcome among Iranian poets and writers has negative and positive aspects. From one angle, it could do injury in a country that right now intensely needs to self-critique, to lay the foundations of democracy and fathom the depths of modernization. From another angle, with the shattering of clichés and linguistic superstitions, and the deconstruction of myth-bound thinking, it could play a positive role as a guiding polestar in Iran.

Shahryar Mandanipour, an award-winning Iranian author, is chief editor of Asr-e Pandjshanbeh (Thursday Evening), a monthly literary journal published in Shiraz.

Zara Houshmand is a writer who lives in a wooden horse in Texas.

LIDIJA DIMKOVSKA IN LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

February 8 is the Day of Culture, a national holiday here in Slovenia. It marks the day that the greatest Slovenian romantic poet, France Prešeren, died in 1849. At the center of Ljubljana's Prešeren Square is a monument to the poet topped with the Muse who inspires him. Around the monument all the social life in Ljubljana happens: celebrations of New Eve, concerts, national holidays. It's the place where Hare Krishna believers sing Hare Hare Krishna Krishna, where the taxis stop, where beggars ask for change, where wedding couples pose for photos, and tourists stop for a drink of water or beer.

This year, February 8 was a Thursday, so Slovenians were given a four-day weekend. Many went skiing, traveled abroad or swam at a spa, all good ways to celebrate the poet. I am not that kind of celebrator however. I'm also not the type who attends the official holiday ceremonies at Cankarjev dom where the state presents awards to the best artists of the year. On a positive note, this year's literature award went to outstanding prose writer and lesbian activist, Suzana Tratnik. But in general, everyone at the event has a fresh hairstyle, wears their one-per-year evening dress and eats delicious food paid for by Slovene taxpayers.

I am pregnant, prefer comfortable trousers to evening gowns,

mineral water rather than champagne and like to avoid high heels. So I went to listen to poets at the international poetry festival "Trnovski terceti" held at the cultural center France Prešeren from February 7-9. For three days, nine poets from Slovenia and abroad presented their poems in an old hall with blue walls, hard chairs and a simple stage. The enthusiastic audience, smoking, drinking beer and wine, reacted spontaneously to every poem. The director of the festival is Tone Skerjanec, a good middle-aged poet and rocker with long, flowing hair and a relaxing nature that influences everyone around him. (His haikus were published in the US by Ugly Duckling Presse.) My husband, Aleš Mustar, himself a 38 year old poet is always kidding, "When I grow up I would like to be as Tone."

The first evening, Jouni Inkala read his peaceful deep poems in his sexy Finnish language. After that, Stanislava Chrobakova Repar, a Slovakian poet living in Slovenia, performed her metaphysical poems, Slovenian poet Esad Babačić, in his punk way, read his ironic poem "Shit" about the similarities between the making of human shit and poetry. On the second day of the festival I rested in the gentle voice of Slovenian poet Marcello Potocco always trying to connect nature and culture's paradigms. I also enjoyed the long funny ironic poem "Heracle" by my beloved Macedonian poet Risto Lazarov and I laughed for 30 minutes without a pause to the short rhyming satirical, erotic and political poems of Slovenian poet Ervin Fritz (age 67). It is great when such an urbane voice from an old man enters your soul. Because of poets like him, poetry will never disappear or be forgotten. The last day there was a silent, inner reaction to the existential poems of Egyptian poet Tarek Eltayeb and feminine/auto-ironic poems of Montenegrin young poet Jovanka Uljarević. The last poet was Slovenian Uroš Zupan who presented work divided between two poetics: one locally focused, urban and funny and the other globally profound, internal and melancholic. When the light switched on, the poetry of all nine poets remained around us as a UV factor protecting us from our personal ozone.

Lidija Dimkovska is a Macedonian-born poet and novelist living in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her book of poetry Do Not Awaken Them With Hammers was published by Ugly Duckling Presse.

ALEXEI KRUCHKOVSKY IN

SAINT-PETERSBURG & MOSCOW, RUSSIA

One of the vivid examples of contemporary poetry in Russia is web-based poetry, initially popularized in the nineties. Another is slam-poetry, which arose from the slam-tournaments held by Vyacheslav Kuricin in Saint-Petersburg and by Nikolai Ohotin in Moscow. The best known slam-poets in Russia are Irina Dudina of Saint-Petersburg and Julia Belomlinskaya and Andrei Rodionov of Moscow.

The poetics which developed in the late eighties and nineties still prevail in Saint-Petersburg, poetics that deal primarily with the structure of language. In the poetry of Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, which Michael Yampolsky has called “the poetic of a caress,” the language only slightly glances an object, sliding from one element to another. This is the poetry of a supreme materiality arising at the moment of a supreme absence. Alexander Skidan also expounds the poetic of a caress in many respects. He breaks off the language in the moment it begins to lose itself in intimacy.

At the moment Dmitrii Golyenko mostly constructs serial poems in which he investigates the conditions of modern Russian life. His poetry combines social analysis and literary criticism and brings into question the very possibility of such examinations.

For Alexei Parshchikov, now in Cologne, poetry is reality itself, with its endlessly spreading metaphor and connection to metamorphosis. As for Ivan Zhdanov in Moscow, reality appears as a spreading religious allusion. He scrutinizes the divine trace, the print of religion on language.

For Moscow poets, conceptualism is still very relevant. D.A. Prigov continues his experiments with fragments of common language and their social context. Prigov’s poetry is based on clichés that examine the language of glamour and the ideology of popularity.

Among younger Moscow poets, “the poetry of post conceptualism” is presented by such authors as Dmitrii Vodennikov, Maria Stepanova, Kirill Medvedev and Elena Fanaylova.

The neo-modernistic poetry of Dmitrii Vodennikov turns personal space inside out. His poetry uses the language of egotism to prove the very impossibility of the self.

In his foreword to Kirill Medvedev’s book *Everything is Bad*, Vodennikov says Medvedev has orchestrated “the brightest event in Russian poetry on the boundary of centuries.” After publishing another work in 2003, Medvedev completely refused to engage in any form of performance or distribution that would impede poetry’s manifestation of free choice and ethical sight.

For Maria Stepanova a poem is a collage of everyday life, fragmented consciousness, and personal experience. This leads to stratifying language and using clichés to disclose unrealized linguistic structures.

In the preface to her book *With a Particular Cynicism*, Elena Fanaylova writes, “a poet has no right to dread to speak.” Her

texts combine an extreme factual clarity and an attention to details beyond language.

Poetry in Russia, through its redefinition of the personal, through the splintering of language used to describe a fractured reality, has become a way of engaging in social criticism and of developing advantageous investigative tools. As Vodennikov says of the new poets here, they are “similar to a ship-rat, which feels the trouble first and, as it values the life, is the first who tries to escape, helping other people this way.”

Alexei Kruchkovsky was born in Saint-Petersburg in 1987 and studies Literature in the Saint-Petersburg State University.

SIMONA SCHNEIDER IN

TANGIER, MOROCCO

There’s a great struggle going on in this peaceful corner of North Africa. Call it modernity vs. tradition, call it preparations for joining the globalized world. The fact is, there are dancing midgets, men in cow mascot suits, and Brazilian dancers heating up the floor every night here at club 555 along Tangier bay. There are official club photographers taking pictures of police commissioners and big shots of the free-trade zone flanked by scantily dressed ladies. The story remains that when the shutter snaps, all involved have made a Faustian deal with the devil. These pictures are never destined to join the country’s official photographic archive.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, walls are being pulled down left and right to widen the roads that lead to the Grand Socco, the center of the old town. In order to enable passage for tourist buses, the new Wilaya chose to burn palm trees and demolish both a European and Muslim cemetery. Bulldozers skirt bums clutching Pastis and smoking “powder” to knock over regal tombs with inscriptions to “Our loving mother, Martha, who ‘fell asleep’ too soon.” While investigating the site, Alex and I encountered one grave-scavenger emerging from the cemetery with a plastic bag. He asked, “Would you like to buy an antique...German?” and pulled out a femur from 1889.

Almost simultaneously, a strange fire burnt down the second-hand clothing market where I get all my clothes. The merchants used old bedframes with wood platforms as display tables and never created a more permanent infrastructure. I learned that merchants squat on a piece of land so the government has to ask the owner of the land to let them stay. The government pays a one-time nominal fee in remuneration. Then, after simmering for decades and watching over the land like a mad king over his subjects, the landlord sabotages them. Over six hundred people lost their jobs and a warehouse with 800,000 euros worth of merchandise burnt down. The government claims it will honor insurance if the company can produce receipts for all of the merchandise. However, as they well know, the paperwork burned down with the store, and all merchandise was contraband.

Alex and I also recently were invited to a traditional lamb and prune tagine at Mfadel’s house. He is the great Moroccan patriarch. He lay like an odalisque while eating dinner and watched

white elephants chase through a forest in a Bollywood film on TV. Alex would like to note that the high point of the dinner was when a little lamb skittered into the house, saw us eating the lamb tagine, and lost control of its bowels on the dining room floor. I was also informed by a Moroccan co-worker, who claims he was programmed by every major intelligence agency in the world, that he is studying me through a series of subtle psychological tests to determine if what he has heard about Americans is true—that we are detached from reality and depressed.

Simona Schneider is a poet struggling under a pile of paper.

EDWIN TORRES IN GRANADA, NICARAGUA

Flying in to Managua, a volcano greets me with a steady stream of white puffs—a welcome poem from a land where even volcanoes claim status as Poet. I arrived in Granada and received my festival registration tag which I was to wear religiously “como un tattoo, si?” I could have blended into the turistas were it not for this branding which marked me as a rockstar. As Vice-Presidente Jaime Morales Carazo said in the festival’s opening ceremony that evening, after the impossibly robust folkloric fornicating dancers and before the fireworks, “Nicaragua has always been known for war but poetry saved its life.” So a poet in this country, is cheered, honored, praised, stalked for autographs, and generally revered. This year’s festival was dedicated to the Nicaraguan peace advocate and poet Pablo Antonio Cuadra, who said, “Our task of Nicaragua is to reconstruct ‘the bridge.’ The bridge of the Empire that is Central America.” His 100th birthday was celebrated at La Parque De La Poesia in the north of Granada. A park with 20-foot silhouettes of poets, sculptured portraits of Ruben Dario and Jose Coronel Urtecho among others, cut out of black metal sheets that bend over halfway up. Here I was, standing in the shadow of Ernesto Cardenal in the tropical heat, his features framed against a clear blue sky. I was in a parallel poetry universe wearing my native drape that I found at the market near my hotel. I scored with a beautiful little room that had its own *terrezita* overlooking a quilt of terra cotta roofs. The “lecturas” each evening consisted of four rounds with 8 readers each and always went on way too long, but the audience remained. I had a Rumblefish moment where a group of 4 handsome hooligans kept glancing at me as I was standing behind them in the plaza. I was thinking of making a move away from them to “safer” ground, when one of them meekly held up a piece of paper and a pen to me. They don’t know me or my “obra,” my statement, my work, but I’m a poet and that’s enough. The “Burial Of Intolerance” was the next day, an annual symbolic parade through the narrow downtown streets. Poets travel to 10 street corners accompanied by a funeral procession; a flatbed truck outfitted with a lavish costume of roses and a red velvet lecturn with microphone and huge speakers; a group of masked dancers in front, white colonialist and brown natives...this feud started before sandanistas and contras; and behind us, rotating giant girondas on poles with a marching band. It’s insane, thousands of people lining the streets, hanging out of windows,

cheering us on. A cacaphony of recorded cumbia music from the speakers and live music from the band mixes with the cheering. At my esquina I choose a Spanish chant that ends with a phonetic scream which the crowd answers with one of their own. A huge thrill in a militia sort of way, to have the streets primed to back you up. The festival’s poetry itself steered clear of experimentation and veered towards declamatory and heart. The next day was a visit to 8 pueblos within an hour of Granada. Each pueblo had a group of around 8 poets visit. Our van was escorted into the town by a police car, schoolchildren in their Catholic school outfits were lined along the streets as the school band played. We were taken to City Hall, met the mayor, dignitaries and board members, were made honorary citizens and taken to the school auditorium, an open-air courtyard filled with students and adults. After every two readers, a folkloric dance would tell the nation’s tale with more fornicating elegance than you’d expect from hormonal adolescents. We were given homemade hammocks as gifts and then taken to a community center for lunch with native foods like Guava milk and rice soaked in blood...yummier than it sounds, and so much respect all around. Closing night featured Ernesto Cardenal himself, fiery if not antiquated by the recent election. Poetry is not an underground activity here but part of Nicaragua’s daily survival. It was bittersweet and fitting, to experience the honor of being a poet, far from the streets of my home town.

Edwin Torres’ forthcoming releases are In The Function Of External Circumstances (Spuyten Duyvil) and The PoPedology of An Ambient Language (Atelos Books).

MIHIRO KIZUKI IN TOKYO, JAPAN

At Ben’s Café in Takadanobaba, Tokyo there’s a mic wide open to anyone who loves wordplay.

The participants are mainly in their 20’s and 30’s but it’s not unusual to find a teenager or someone in their 60’s at the mic. Most are Japanese or English speakers. Occasionally poets visit from other countries. Here is a great pure joy for those who love language.

It’s been about seven years since I initially took over organizing the open mic. When I first visited this New York-style café, I saw stylish but not too refined people in their 20’s sharing their poetical works purely by their voice, reading their poems through the mic. This was a pleasurable shock for me whose experience of poems up to that point had been only on the page.

Various kinds of poets have gathered at Ben’s Café for the last seven years. This place is always filled with a welcome atmosphere, so newcomers can relax, come again and become regular participants. While continuing to take part in the open mic, some poets start their own separate live shows.

When I became the organizer, Japanese society was only just beginning to recognize verbal, spoken poems as a form of poetry. So many reporters from TV stations, magazines and newspapers

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came here to cover the events and collect news, interviewing the participants and the audience. Their most common question for us was “Why do you read poems?” I really got tired of this question. How many professional singers would be asked “Why do you sing?” Every time I was asked this kind of question, I realized how much poems were isolated from mainstream culture. Compared to music, movies, dance etc., poetry is seen as minor in spite of the fact it’s such a natural form self expression for us.

My slam series “Prize, Price the Words” is unique. The audience votes with cash and the highest-earner is declared the champion. The participants are happy, probably because the prize makes them realize how much their performances and poems are appreciated. Creating a positive experience is what I aimed at, when I decided on using this voting system – even though I knew using money could be criticized.

The champion in January 2007 was Mr. Je t’aime Kitamura, a kind of rocker poet in his 50’s. Every time he performs, his outstanding way of reading, and his manly shouting, charms everyone. Even Mr. Shuntaro Tanikawa liked his performance when Mr. Kitamura took part in a tribute to Mr. Tanikawa’s poems.

Ms. Shiiko Kitamura, whose boyfriend is deaf, always includes gesture in her poetry. Her poems are naked personal facts, a bit artless, but people feel sympathy. Mr. Imamura read with punk passion. On the surface, he appears to be little more than a funny poet of light verse, but his words imply the sadness of this modern society. Mr. Taro “HONNIN” was very expressive. Mr. Aoba, perhaps in his 60’s, read extremely charming heartwarming poems. And so on.

But nowadays the poetry scene seems rather settled down, compared to five years ago, when this place was full of life, and potential poets, just beginning to explore their craft, rushed into the performance poem. From now on, we should be more appealing to people who would otherwise not be interested in poetry. Why don’t you come to Tokyo, grab a cup of café latte and express yourself in front of a mic which is wide open?

Mihiro Kizuki was born in Yokohama in 1977. Known as a performance poet & lyricist, she has organized an open mic poetry slam since 2000. www.mihiro.net

JEN CURRIN IN VANCOUVER, CANADA

Greetings, comrades. I report from up north: Vancouver, B.C., Canada, where gay marriage is legal and we smoke dope in the streets.

December 8, 2006: A windy, rainy night finds me and Christine Leclerc (my *gay* wife) heading over to the Western Front, an artist-run center started some thirty years ago by hippies. The occasion: a double book launch for Robin Blaser. University of California Press has just published his collected poems, *The Holy Forest*, and collected essays, *The Fire*.

Inside it’s hoppin’. We grab glasses of red and eye the crowd of

well-knowns and sort-of-knowns. Meredith Quartermain, this year’s BC Book Award winner, and co-founder—along with her husband Peter Quartermain—of Nomados Press (which has published chapbooks by Blaser, Lisa Robertson, and other wonders), breezes by, offering us salmon and shrimp grilled out back on the deck. The buffet is surprisingly unpicked over; I credit this to the predominantly grey-haired audience: these artists are no longer starving.

It’s a big crowd, around 200. I see members of the Kootenay School of Poets and the stylish ladies of vertigo west, a local poetry collective. Christine spots a web designer acquaintance as I’m introduced to Larissa Lai. We chat briefly with Governor General’s Award nominee Elizabeth Bachinsky and her hubby. It’s a whirl of poetry-talk, wine gulping, and genial “who’s here-ism”—then the lights dim.

A long but interesting intro from Peter Quartermain. And then, in true Blaser fashion, Blaser does *not* take the stand. Instead, he has several friends (including Stan Persky, George Bowering, Daphne Martlett, and Michael Varty, an employee of Duthie’s Bookstore) each read one of his poems. It’s the perfect touch from a poet who has written and spoken so much about the importance of community.

Finally Robin Blaser takes the podium. Small, handsome, a shock of white hair. He’s weeping. Openly. And his first words are: “Oh, my gratitude.”

At the risk of sounding cheesy, I’ll tell you: It was a serious *moment*, friends. How to describe? I mean, this word—“gratitude”—swells, taking in the whole room. The silence is thick; the audience transfixed.

Blaser jokes, dabs his eyes with a large handkerchief, and begins. His childhood in Idaho. Dante. The irreparable. The political. City streets. Beaches. Leaves. Images slice like rain. He reads an oldie, “Image-Nation 19 (the wand”: *First the difference among poppies and / white horses of advertisements, / the snow-storm and the grapes...* He then shares a series written in the last few days, including one written that day, “for you, of course, my dears.” It begins: *So, never let the world go by...* There might be a dry eye in the house. I wouldn’t know. I sit, holding my wife’s hand, as the room shimmers and we listen to our dearest queer grandfather—reading bedtime stories to wake us up.

Jen Currin is a less stylish member of vertigo west. She has published one book of poems, The Sleep of Four Cities.

EDMUND BERRIGAN IN SOUTH SLOPE BROOKLYN

Ah crap I hate poetry by now, so self-important, opaque, dyslexic-cannonical, hard to write, rarely tastefully pornographic, not as emotive as death metal, polarizing!, bi-parmesian, carbon black, rough pigtoe mussel, atrazine determinant, sink soap suds, special economic zonish, canoodling, neverant, miasmatic, nilotic, mica-ceous, supper inducing, sedimental, over fed, not about me, polite

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among mixed company, shorn, pocketwatch carrying, endearing to 5 year olds and 85 year olds but ignored by the rest, not read by poet's families, quaint, lilactic...um, alright so I love it again, sorry to plague you, etc.

I get asked a lot lately if I write poetry less now that I play music. You don't refuse to breathe do you? I don't throw away my bottle openers, my hammers, or my ability to write poetry. Shitcan the rest, though, if it don't fit in the pocket. Really, though a couple lovely folks told me they were quitting poetry. Another fellow is becoming a novelist. C'mon now, all this "I'm this, I'm that" is made up, anxiety, indecisiveness, etc. Don't buy it, its value is rarely conversational, and the historical records and subjective and anecdotal. It's just about having a thought, and once you've had that thought that's it. Your place in the canon or margin is too enshrined in darkness. The penchant for a defining phrase is a bore, just a space to fill. Once you've said you're a poet, that's enough, you don't have to speak ever again.

In other news my grandma turns 88 on Sunday. My girlfriend turns 25 on Tuesday. George Washington turns 265 two weeks from Monday. February itself is at least 6,000 years old, though my sources are still working on that one. Of course all of this already happened for you, old geezers of the future. I continue to look forward to these things, though, these things that have already happened to you. I'm stuck in this stupid moment of writing forever. I spent my whole life wanting to be one of the older poets, and you jerks are all still older than me. Only now everything is all my fault, instead of yours.

Back to poetry. It's like going back to coal, going back to poetry. & going back to coal we are (if by 'we' I mean energy and chemical companies looking for cheaper feedstocks). Yes, our so-called 'addiction to oil' which helped continue our so-called 'tolerance for or blind-eye to inconvenient murder and atrocities' has become vaguely unpopular now that the so-called 'cha-ching' of profits is ringing the wrong bells. So it's time to re-refine coal. It's time to send our patriots back to the mines. All the sad coal-mining country/folk tunes will require retractions. Or alternately, if your car breaks down, you can shove an ear of corn up its ass. Sorry about that ampersand by the way, I hear they're out. Long live the '&!'

So concludes the South Slope Report. I pick you up from the gutter and this is the thanks I get?

Edmund Berrigan recently enjoyed Hitchcock's 'Dial M for Murder.'

SPARROW IN THE CATSKILLS

Phillip Levine is a poet, playwright, actor and editor. (He edits the poetry page for www.chronogram.com.) Phillip hosts the weekly open mike at the Colony Cafe in Woodstock, New York.

Sparrow: When did you start MCing the open mike?

Phillip: I started July, '01.

Sparrow: And you rarely miss a Monday.

Phillip: Yes, I'd say I've missed 15, out of the 275 or so since then.

Sparrow: That's a lot of Mondays. What is the open mike MC life like?

Phillip: I like to joke about it: "It's a labor of labor" – or "Open Mike Forever" ("If you're not going to show up soon, don't worry, cause it'll be here forever").

Sparrow: There's a sense of equality in the room. A notable poet like Donald Lev will read right after some teenager in rehab.

Phillip: I make it a point, pretty much, of always thanking the person, even if their particular little poem drives me crazy. Because if I put too much emphasis on the work being good – or what I think is good – I would end up being frustrated. It would be impossible for me to be an arbiter of aesthetics. I mean, I can't be up there skipping people. I know some open mike hosts do that.

Sparrow: Really?

Phillip: Oh, yeah. And I've had a few people who've really tested me – because they come up and they're not even reading work, they're just

ranting. You know, you get the people recently off their meds... To be honest, though, when I first agreed to do it, it was a little self-serving. Because I knew it would provide innumerable nights to get comfortable with the mike, with engaging the audience, with reading my own work.

Sparrow: Was your acting...?

Phillip: I really jumped into acting because I thought it would help me with my poetry readings. That was the original... But I just loved it.

My friend Michael Da Torre says: "One of the great things about acting is you can be totally, totally scared, and you're not actually in danger."

Sparrow: What's the name of your clown movie?



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Phillip: *Fear of Clowns 2*. I play Giggles; he's a cannibal pedophile. But none of that was in the script. All I got from the director was: "He's totally whacked. He doesn't have any lines, but he's in a lot of scenes. He laughs a lot." You know, I got that part by just doing an audition on a tape, and sending it in.

Sparrow: You were in clownface?

Phillip: No. I was talking to a clock, pretending it was a cellphone. I was drooling on my cell... I was really out there! I was scary.

Sparrow: When will the movie come out?

Phillip: It's probably not going to ever get to the movie houses. It's going straight to video. But *Fear of Clowns 1*, there are 20 copies at Blockbuster! So people are going to see me.

Sparrow recently finished Sigmund Freud's Totem and Taboo.

THOMAS DEVANEY IN PHILADELPHIA, PA

I hadn't expected such comfort, looking at the light flurrying snow in Center City, in the work-a-day gray February sunlight today. At the corner of Walnut, looking down 12th Street the old store signs hide and hang here and there off of neighboring building fronts all along the block. Another magic thing about Philadelphia is that everything you look at – people, buildings, views in-between – everything feels nearby and at-hand. Looking straight out into the intersection, you think: *it's going to snow*, and it does. I've just come from visiting Frank Sherlock, one block away, at Jefferson University Hospital. Frank was struck down by a life-threatening infection in his knee (and body), a week before, and has been recovering ever since. All of Philadelphia has been pulling for him.

There's a lot going on here, but first, a big congratulations to Pattie McCarthy and Kevin Varrone on the birth of their son Emmett James, born on December 6th.

And readings, ah yes; for more about some of the literary life of Philadelphia, which is thriving, look-up: the Moles Not Molars series, mixing up writers and artists; the bustling Chapter and Verse series; the INVERSE poetry series (with music) in University City; and of course, all manner of events at Writers House (welcome Jessica Lowenthal, new Director), and Temple's reading series. The teeming "Locally Localized Gravity" show here, which features artists from all-over-the-map, is happening at the Institute of Contemporary Art all spring.

At her book party for *Blue Studios*, at the integral West Philadelphia art space Slought, Rachel Blau DuPlessis dipped into part of a conversation she had with George Oppen on his rejection of Surrealism VS. and what she calls his "saturated-realism." Rachel then skipped a generation or so ahead to a recent email exchange with Barbara Cole. One salient thread centered upon the now defunked practice, abolished in 1978, of exclusively using female names to name hurricanes.

Bob Perelman read from his book *IFLIFE* at Writers House in

January. I've been pouring through it ever since. Perelman writes: "Now if ever it is time to translate modernism into a contemporary idiom into 'something to read...'" The book is highly readable, though it's less of a "translation" and more of a transformation. *Paterson* was a reply to Pound's *Cantos*, and Zukofsky's "A" a reply to both. *IFLIFE*, in its own way, is a remarkable reply to all of the above.

Perelman also graciously hosted the chock-full 50+ poet off-site MLA reading here this December. Outside, after the reading, Brenda Iijima said she had been looking up at the vaulted ceilings inside when she heard the Arctic Shelf had broken off. I didn't say anything when Brenda asked where I was when I heard this unfathomable news because I heard it from her. I don't know what the sound of a 25 mile ice shelf detaching into the Arctic Ocean after 3,000 years sounds like, but I know what Brenda's face looked like; and I walked out into the night with her face, and that seemingly impossible sound, in my head.

Thomas Devaney is the author of A Series of Small Boxes (Fish Drum Press).

BETHANY PEARSON IN HATTIESBURG, MS

I'm not one of those people who rip tags off my mattress, or tags off my towels, for that matter. No, I'd rather break my own rules down to an exact, step-by-step science and tattoo them to my forearm. In fact, that should become mandatory for all the proven rule-breakers out there. So if the following selection seems oddly familiar, please be assured that I have received the appropriate permission in writing from the actual poet himself. I have carefully replaced some words from the original text with other words, paying special attention to their order but not to their appearance on the page.

It's past noon when I go for a ride in my red Mustang. First, I pass Ryan's where a cow waves inviting me to eat the steak buffet, with a cow bell on. Then past the motel where Neve was arrested for making crystal meth in room #36. The sun is hot, but my air conditioner cools me. I look for a bargain in gas. There is a Sting Ray at Exxon. On to City Hall, where the flowers brown in the sun, and sparingly the sprinkler mists them. A farmer stands outside with a mouth of Red Man, spitting. A schoolboy crosses: he yells and stomps. I honk: it is 3:20 of a Wednesday. Fluorescence in daylight is great beauty, as are tulip candles at twilight.

I stop for a Cherry Pepsi at Pizza Hut. Ivory Davis, my cousin, is wearing shorts, I call him "Hot Legs Ivory." And some pickles. Russell's women in leopard leggings call for him to come over. There are several blond guys in a booth now, which makes it gorgeous and cool. First JoEllen married, then Joy, then Lorraine. But isn't life fuller now that I didn't? And one has eaten and one walks, past the window with newborns in pink and blue caps and the Picayune Public Library, which they'll soon quit funding. I used to hope they'd get Frank O'Hara's poetry there. A cotton

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candy snowball and back home. My heart is in my CD player, it is Gish by the Smashing Pumpkins.

As you can see, I needed a sense of humor to get through that town. Now, I live several miles up the road in a larger town. There are usually about a dozen or so poetry readings here each year, some well-known poets and some soon to be well-known. Although I have missed all of Frank O'Hara's readings (we communicate only through messages imbedded in our poems), I have enjoyed a lot of others. At the last reading I attended, Jordan Sanderson offered a full audience some of the latest, greatest from his new chapbook, *The Last Hedonist*. Fortunately, that's a step away from where I began, and maybe even Frank O'Hara could find temporary satisfaction here. I'll ask him in my next poem.

Bethany Pearson really would like written permission from the poet himself.

JANE SPRAGUE IN LOS ANGELES, CA

Jake and I hit the 405 at 5 on Sunday. With any luck traffic will be light. He sleeps. I drive. Diane's invited Jake to come play "some new video game" with Jackson while she and I high-tail it downtown for a staged reading of Will Alexander's play-in-progress, "Conduction in the Catacombs." Dialing. In November I either suddenly aged or finally knuckled under the pressure of our current cultural moment; I got glasses and a cell phone in the same week. Both of these have dramatically altered my ability to move and communicate in public space. For better or worse. Driving. Dialing.

"Hey Diane. It's Jane. What street are you on? ...Is it north of Santa Monica or what? ... Right... yeah, I forgot that the street zig zags like that...okay. See you in five minutes." We arrive. Switch cars. Leave the kids to play Wii and head east to Chinatown. Park.

Chinatown is one of those classically "L.A." urban spaces where, for the first 2 years after moving back, I kept having this experience of "Is this a *real* place...or what?... is itIsn't this a movie set? I mean, this place can't be *real*." Walking through Chinatown is not unlike a compressed trip to Vegas: everything simulacra of itself.

"Hey look, the Mountain Bar."

"Looks like it's closed."

"Are they still doing that reading series?"

"The Otis readings? Yeah, Martha just sent me something the other day. I'll forward it to you."

"Cool. Let's get a drink." We go to Hop Louie's and take seats at the bar. Quick sips. Talk. "We should probably get going. It's almost six-thirty." We slide out of the bar.

We circumvent the gallery warren, enter the dark alley, pick past Full House restaurant's dumpster and descend the wooden steps to Betalevel. Above us, families and the odd hipster covey dine on Mu Shu Pork, War Won Ton and Fresh Chinese Vegetable. In the

basement/performance space, it's a friendly, laid-back scene. There's a bowl of potent-looking punch. It's bright red-magenta, though maybe that's just the light. People are mulling around. The performance hasn't started yet. There's a few moments to cram in some quick catch-up conversations, hug some people we haven't seen in months.

It is that feeling of walking into a place where you know most of the people and it feels infinitely good. Good in a way that penetrates bone marrow. Deeply good in a visceral way that reminds you of what it is to be human. Good in a way of remembering humanness. And this is the perfect point of departure, as the lights go down, and we are plunged into Will's alter world of goddesses and ghosts living simultaneously among and within us as they negotiate life in the underworld through diction and dialogue which traverses time, whole epochs of human myth and mystery, language reaching over and through disciplines of art, science, metaphysics and psychological complexities. We take a seat on the bench, lean back against the bar and brace ourselves for the strange and wild ride as the lights go down and the women take the stage.

Jane Sprague's recent poems and reviews are forthcoming in Hot Whiskey, Tinfish and Xcp.

JULIE REID IN PETALUMA, CA

dear darkling beetle, in a sweet bottle of ink squeezed from blueberries (i.e. musebug) :

i have searched all the corners and the blank spaces in between for your substitute, the spaces perceived or merely known of, inferred, and I've taken a shine to ambulances, grown dizzy as a flounder drunk on wine, lost my balance over every cadence that came along. i'm quite aware that you're impartial toward my absence, and why this increases my pleasure of your presence is sensibly explained by the psychoanalysts. there is the grandeur of passing closer to the sun embedded in every magnifier of distant objects, to ease our discomfort as diminishing specks, dark envelopes of forgetfulness. but a poem, little more than a sustainable network of scraps, can have a transforming effect, turn us tender and protective over our own quotidian spheres, where water boils in copper pots and morning burgeons with everything beside, beyond, and apart from it. the poem, because it is covered in down, because it slows down the ordinary, bestows purpose upon the ordinary, entrusting it to us. our sweet exertions, our uncertain outcomes, all the indispensably saturated and cacophonous particulars, are invisible at the scale which is necessary to see the whole picture. but doesn't even a small fragment of chocolate broken off from the whole bar tell us what the rest of it tastes like?

julie reid, even though she knows this about chocolate, can't help herself from taking another and another and another taste of it.

ANSELM BERRIGAN LOOKS AROUND

FROM HIS SEAT IN THE BELFRY of St. Marks Church, outgoing Artistic Director Anselm Berrigan took a moment to explore where the Poetry Project has been & where it's headed. He'll be leaving his post this spring after having run the organization for four years, years that saw accelerating evolution for the Project & the context in which it operates. Four decades since its creation, the Project remains a critical nexus of adventurous writing & — through the efforts of the thousands of people who have been involved in that time — wields an unflinching commitment to the inquisitive spirit in which it was born.

Brendan Lorber: The Newsletter usually directs its attention to individuals, communities or endeavors that engage the Poetry Project, but rarely does it offer analysis of the Poetry Project itself. Now that you're on your way out it might be a good time to reflect on what you've done these past few years, why you're leaving and what, beyond some job description, the incoming director can expect upon arrival in the venerable belfry.

Anselm Berrigan: Let's see, I'll start from the back. The next director can expect a lot of activity, for starters. To some degree the numbers reflect this — 80-90 readings per season, 6-10 workshops, the *Newsletter*, the website, the *Recluse* and so forth. And with all that there are always more writers to choose from than there are readings — and that gap seems to grow every year. Keeping the Project artistically open and coherent at once while wading through all of the materials being generated these days is a central matter. The director does not have the luxury of being a tight-ass aesthete who likes what s/he likes and fuck all else. You have to have some vision towards process, potential, experimentation, urgency, the deep weird and the genuine come what may, because you're supposed to be helping develop a working artistic community that has more angles than you can see at any given time. But you know, that can make for a lot of pleasure.

On the administrative side, the main thing is keeping a steady stream of income flowing. The Poetry Project is relatively stable financially, but it's a constant juggling act and costs rise no matter what you do — many people who follow the Project in one sense or another are unaware, for instance, that the Project pays rent to St. Mark's

Church. The Church itself needs to keep a stream of income, and with the changes in the East Village over the years — it's a much more transient neighborhood than it used to be in some ways — that's not very easy to do. So the next director will need to be creative about fund-raising while maintaining a solid relationship with St. Mark's as it moves forward itself. All that said, there will be a strong core of people around to help the director with these things — there are a lot of good people who care about the Project and participate in its various mechanics. So you're never alone except, you know, as you choose to be.

The other two questions I can answer more efficiently. For one, I can't reflect much on what the last three-plus years have been like because there's a good deal to take care of before I split. I feel good about the work we've done, and I can say that four years will not have been enough time to do everything I might have liked or brought in every poet I might have liked to hear read. But that's a good thing, I'd say. As to why I'm leaving — I want to focus more particularly on my own writing and take a break from this kind of work. I've been director for four years, but prior to that I also worked in the office for two years as program assistant, hosted the Monday series for two years, taught a workshop, filled in occasionally to host Wednesdays, and helped with some other odds and ends across a five-year period. So I've been pretty directly involved with the Project for nearly nine years. I'm not leaving town or anything, and will certainly be available to help as needed with this or that. I'd like to have some time where I don't have to be "on" on a regular basis though, or be thinking about something like liability insurance.

Lorber: During the first half of the Project's existence, the director's chair was rarely occupied for long. But in the past two decades, new directors have been few & far between. You've been at the helm for four years & Ed Friedman ran the place for 16 before that. What was once a pretty common event has taken on greater weight and with it there's the sense that such a transition bears larger implications for the poetry community.

Berrigan: Well, there was one eight or ten-year period or so when Anne Waldman was director, and between that time and when Ed came aboard you had a series of shorter tenures. So there was a period of about a decade or so when a new director coming on was common, but it's also accurate to say that Ed and Anne combined to direct the Project for more than half its life-thus-far. I suspect that there were greater implications each time the job changed hands, but when I was hired in spring of 2003 I think the fact that it was the first change since 1987 made it feel a little less than casual. I mean, I was somewhat shocked myself at that point.

That shouldn't have to be the case in 2007. I don't think it really has to matter how long one person's tenure lasts, so long as the organization is in good shape and the community is able to sense that. The Board does ask for a three-year commitment when it hires a new director, and I think that makes a lot of sense — it takes about a year to get acclimated. But if there are a healthy number of poets who can do the job well and are willing to take on that measure of responsibility — as I believe there are right now — then a change in directors should be a point of interest rather than cause for alarm. If the Project had major structural

problems of any kind it'd be a different story, but if that were the case I either wouldn't be leaving or I would have been fired already.

Lorber: How have the changes in the neighborhood & the passage of time affected the demographics of the Project & the nature of its programs?

Berrigan: The Project community is spread out across New York City: on any given night there might be more people in the room who live in Brooklyn than in Manhattan. So the notion of the Project as an organization that primarily serves writers in the East Village or thereabouts is no longer valid – though in truth this has been the case for years and anyone actually paying attention to the Project knows that. Demographics is an odd term to apply to the Project. There is a membership base of 500-600 people, but then there is a number of people who are or have been part of Project programs that is a four-figure number and rather amorphous when you try and assess it. When it comes to the neighborhood changes – principally the continually increasing cost of living combined with the gradual increase in chain stores and bank branches – the Project has actually moved forward without much of a problem in of itself. So long as people stay in the city or in the area, it doesn't matter if they live in the Project's immediate neighborhood. As an event-based organization in a city with solid public transportation, the Project can survive any number of demographic changes so long as 1) New York City remains a place where writers and artists both can and want to live and work, and 2) St. Mark's Church maintains its own financial viability without having to raise the Project's rent an enormous amount.

The thing is, the nature of the Project's programs is not terribly complicated – the Project creates time and space for poets to develop and present their work largely through readings, performances and interactions with other writers and artists. There's always been a particular emphasis on newer work, but that is basically brought to bear by the poets themselves when they show up to read. The Parish Hall – the room in which most readings take place – is quiet, spare in decoration, and has great acoustics. You show up to read there and you are face-to-face with both a listening and usually very discerning audience and, maybe even more to the point, the fact of your own work. There's no café or bar ambience to distract the audience or

reshape the reading environment. So it's a great testing ground for one's own work, and as good a public environment as a poet can get to figure out what's working and what isn't. This occasionally makes people new to the space uncomfortable, but that's largely because of the realization that everything has been boiled down to your work, your voice, your delivery.....and the question of quality is absolutely on the table. So having said all this, the passage of time is best measured by the questions of whether or not new writers are coming in on a regular basis, and whether or not the Project overall is supporting work that is functioning on many levels and trying to break some ground – for the poet, for the art, for the audience, for the culture. I mean, that's a statement that is easy to take apart, I suppose, but I prefer a broad sensibility with high aspirations that gives people room to develop to the brittle terminology of experimentation and/or group aesthetics. And, by the way, my answer to both (of my) questions is yes.

Lorber: Part of the original draw of the Poetry Project was its organic development from within the creative community. Since that time it has accrued a large inventory of obligations & attachments to the traditions & individuals central to its historical development. In what ways, after 40 years, has the Project avoided becoming just another institution, an authority that any artist should in good conscience resist?

Berrigan: I'll work my way backwards through this. For starters, I think any artist in good conscience should resist anything they deem to be coming down on them, and so whether the Project is just another institution or not, a particular person might have a necessity to resist it based on where s/he is in life or work or mind. I mean, resistance in that sense is not only welcome, but necessary. Some folks who have been around the Project since its inception have resisted it rather intensely at times, though what "resistance" means can be any number of things, including rather subtle. Perceptions will be all over the map, and frankly, if the programming is various, then perceptions should be all over the map. One person's intellectual ivory tower is another's randy downtown bastion of collage tricks. The Project is what its record says it is. If anyone wants to investigate that

fully, they just need to read the event schedules on a regular basis – it's all public information.

There are some guidelines in place within the Project's artistic structure that are designed to keep the place open – series coordinators and the newsletter editor can work up to two years, but no more. The Wednesday series may be hosted by the Artistic Director for more than two years, but readers have to wait two years minimum to read again in a featured (30 min.+) capacity. By design there needs to be about one-third first-time writers reading at the Project in general each season. And workshop leaders are also subject to a variation of the two-year rule. People ultimately make a number of choices within this framework, but a certain amount of change is also inherently dictated. And you know, that initial organic community you described was funded almost entirely with public money, whereas today the Project gets about 12-15% of its income from public

funding and is much more self-sufficient than during its early years. It also has a larger community than ever at this point, and that community is both local and national (and international, to a lesser degree).

The obligation thing and the history thing are two separate matters as far as I'm concerned. There are poets who have been involved with the Project

for years & are not necessarily supported elsewhere & not likely to be anytime soon. There are also poets who don't like readings, don't like the social nature of them, and don't trust any organizations whatsoever, but will come to the Project once in awhile to read or to listen because the emphasis is, finally, on the work. So these long term relationships get created, and does that mean the Project is obligated to these individuals? I think it's a little more complex and a little more intimate than that. If by obligation you mean the kind of you-give-me-something and I'll-give-you-something mentality, then I completely disagree that the Project has accrued such obligations. Anyone who programs a weekly reading series on the basis of such obligations is a fool. But if you're talking about relationships that have been built over time and are about participation and artistic support & development, then yes, the Project has

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EVENTS AT TH



APRIL

MONDAY 4/9

BRANDON BROWN & ALLI WARREN

Brandon Brown is a poet and translator from Kansas City, Missouri. He had two chapbooks published in 2006, *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* and *908-1078*. He has recently published work in magazines edited by his friends. In 2005-2006 he co-curated the Performance Writing series, with Jocelyn Saidenberg, at New Langton Arts in San Francisco. He lives in San Francisco with Alli Warren and their cast iron pans. **Alli Warren** was raised in the Valley of San Fernando in Southern California. In 2006, Lame House Press published *Cousins*, and previous to that, some were *Hounds* and some were *Yoke*. She works in Berkeley at Small Press Distribution.

WEDNESDAY 4/11

WAY MORE WEST: THE POEMS OF ED DORN

A reading to mark the publication of *Way More West: New and Selected Poems* by Edward Dorn. Dorn was author of numerous books, including the comic-epic masterpiece *Gunslinger*. At the core of all of Dorn's work is a deep sense of place and the people who occupy it, underpinned by a wry ironic dissent. Reading Dorn's work will be **Jennifer Dorn**, **Michael Rothenberg**, **George Kimball**, **Rosalie Sorrel**, **Anselm Berrigan**, **Amiri Baraka**, **Anne Waldman**, **Ed Sanders** and **Ammiel Alcalay**.

FRIDAY 4/13 [10:00PM]

POCKET MYTHS: THE ODYSSEY

A reading to celebrate the fourth publication of the Pocket Myths series. *The Odyssey* is a film and book collaboration curated by **Andrea Lawlor** and **Bernadine Mellis**. The project features mostly queer, trans, and women artists working in and between genres to retell Homer's ancient epic of the aftermath of war. Readings by **Emily Abendroth**, **Justin Audia**, **Aria Baniyas**, **Julia Bloch**, **Tonya Foster**, **Laura Jaramillo**, **Delia Mellis**, **Megan Milks**, **Ariana Reines** and **Frances Richard** with a special presentation of **Eileen Myles**'s first film, *Book 22*. Please go to www.poetryproject.com for individual bios and visit www.pocketmyths.com for a complete list of contributors and more info on the project and series.

MONDAY 4/16

LORI LUBESKI & MARK TARDI

Lori Lubeski's latest chapbook, *Undermined*, is forthcoming this spring from Carve Press. She is the author of *Dissuasion Crowds the Slow Worker*, *STAMINA*, *eyes dipped in longitude lines*, as well as *Sweet Land* and *Trickle*, collaborations with Bay Area artist Jakob Kalousek. She recently collaborated with artist Jeannette Landrie on a collection of poetry and photographs titled *has the river of the body risen*. **Mark Tardi** is from Chicago, Illinois. His first book, *Euclid Shudders*, was a finalist for the 2002 National Poetry Series and was published by Litmus Press. More recently, two chapbooks have appeared: *Airport music* from Bronze Skull Press, and *Part First—Chopin's Feet* from *g o n g*. Poems and reviews can be found in *Aufgabe*, *Bird Dog*, *Boog City*, *Chicago Review*, *the Review of Contemporary Fiction*, and other periodicals.

WEDNESDAY 4/18

JOSEPH LEASE & PAUL VAZQUEZ

Joseph Lease's books of poetry include *Broken World* and *Human Rights*. Lease's poems have also been featured on NPR and published in *Bay Poetics*, *Colorado Review*, *Five Fingers Review*, *New American Writing*, *Paris Review*, *Talisman*, and elsewhere. Lease is Chair of the MFA Program in Writing at California College of the Arts. **Paul Vazquez** is the author and artist of "From Irony to Laughter," a long prose poem and images, variations and one installation. He has exhibited and read widely throughout the US and Europe. This reading will include projected images and 4 variations.

MONDAY 4/23

JOSÉ KOZER & HARRIS SCHIFF

José Kozér is the preeminent Cuban poet of his generation and one of the most influential poets in Latin America. His 37 books and 15 chapbooks have been published in Mexico, Spain, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Chile, and he has been translated into many languages. His book, *No buscan reflejarse*, was the first book by a Cuban poet in exile to be published on the island since the 1970s. His book, *Stet*, from which he will read with his translator, **Mark Weiss**, is the first English or bilingual attempt to survey his career. Since his first reading at the Poetry Project in 1968, **Harris Schiff** has worked for the Poetry Project as Co-Coordinator Workshop Instructor, Advisory Board Member and editor of *The World*. His most recent book is *Abandonship*. He is the editor and curator of the oldest established literary e-zine on the World Wide Web, *Slavery, Cyberzine of the Arts*, which he first uploaded in 1996 and most recently updated on Martin Luther King Day, 2007. The site is located at www.cyberpoems.com

WEDNESDAY 4/25

JOHN ASHBERY

John Ashbery has published more than 20 collections, beginning in 1953 with *Turandot and Other Poems*. His *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* won the three major American prizes: the Pulitzer, National Book Award, and National Book Critics Circle Award. His most recent volumes are *Girls on the Run*, *Your Name Here*, *As Umbrellas Follow Rain*, *Chinese Whispers* and *Where Shall I Wander*. *A Worldly Country* was just published by Ecco. A selection of

his art writings was published by Knopf in 1989 as *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles 1957-1987*. His work has been translated into more than twenty languages, and the first poem in his new book rhymes.

THURSDAY 4/26

A TRIBUTE TO CÉSAR VALLEJO

A reading to mark the publication of *Cesar Vallejo: The Complete Poetry* in a bilingual edition edited and translated by Clayton Eshleman. Vallejo (1892-1938) was a poetical innovator whose syntax-breaking search for meaning has been compared to James Joyce and Paul Celan. Readers of Vallejo's work will include **Jayne Cortez**, **Mariela Dreyfus**, **Clayton Eshleman**, **Forrest Gander**, **Edward Hirsch**, **San Shepard**, **Monica de la Torre**, **Cecilia Vicuna** and **Anne Waldman**. Co-sponsored by PEN World Voices, Poets House, and The University of California Press.

FRIDAY 4/27

ANSELM HOLLO, EILEEN MYLES & ANNE WALDMAN

Anselm Hollo, poet and literary translator, has been a faculty member of the Jack Kerouac School of Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, for more than twenty years. He is the author of thirty-odd books and chapbooks of his own works, the most recent one being *Guests of Space*, just out from Coffee House Press. **Eileen Myles** is one of the best-known unofficial poets in America. She was a Director of St. Mark's Poetry Project during the Reagan years. And she conducted an openly female write in campaign for President of the United States in 1992. She has toured her work all over the world and with Sister Spit in '97 and now this year again with Sister Spit. *Sorry, Tree* (poems) is forthcoming from Wave Books. **Anne Waldman**'s most recent books are *Structure of the World Compared to a Bubble*, a long Buddhist poem, and *Outrider*, a selection of essays, interviews and poetry just published by La Alameda Press. *Red Noir*, a collection of short performance pieces, and the CD *The Eye of the Falcon* (produced and with music by her son Ambrose Bye) are now available from Farfalla, McMillen and Parrish. She is an unstoppable force of nature and, as with Hollo and Myles, we are lucky to have her.

SATURDAY 4/28

NOT FOR MOTHERS ONLY

A launch party and reading for *Not for Mothers Only: Contemporary Poems on Child-Getting and Child Rearing*. This anthology brings to light the many strong, scary, gorgeous motherhood poems bring written right now—poems that address the politics and difficulties and stubborn satisfactions of mothering—while also publishing earlier poems that opened the space in which this new work might appear. Readers will include **Rachel Zucker**, **Deborah Landau**, **Kimiko Hahn**, **Ann Lauterbach**, **Camille Guthrie**, **Caroline Crumacker**, **Marie Howe**, **Alicia Ostriker**, **Miranda Field**, **Kathleen Ossip**, **Rebecca Wolff** and **Catherine Wagner**.

MONDAY 4/30

TISA BRYANT & JENNIFER FIRESTONE

Tisa Bryant's writings, *Unexplained Presence* (forthcoming from Leon Works), and *Tzimmes*, traverse the boundaries of genre, culture and history. She is currently at work on *[the curator]*, a meditation on identity, visual culture and the lost films of auteur Justine Cable. She teaches at St. John's University, Queens, and is a founding editor/publisher of the hardcover annual, *The Encyclopedia Project*. **Jennifer Firestone** is the author of the chapbooks *From Flashes*, which is an excerpt from a longer manuscript, and *snapshot* from Sona Books, as well as a chapbook forthcoming from Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs. She is the editor, along with Dana Teen Lomax, of an anthology in progress called *Letters To Poets: Conversations about Poetics, Politics and Community*. Her book, *Holiday*, is forthcoming from Shearsman.

THE POETRY PROJECT

MAY

WEDNESDAY 5/2 SAM ABRAMS & JIM COHN

Sam Abrams is the author of five collections of poems, most recently *The Old Pothead Poems*. He edited *The Neglected Whitman: Vital Texts* and has published poems in hundreds of places beginning with *Neon 2* in 1957. He is currently Professor Emeritus of Language and Literature in the College of Liberal Arts at Rochester Institute of Technology. **Jim Cohn** is the author of five collections of poetry: *Green Sky, Prairie Falcon, Grasslands, The Dance Of Yellow Lightning Over The Ridge* and *Quien Sabe Mountain*. He has edited the poetry journal *Napalm Health Spa* since 1990. Inspired by the art criticism of Frank O'Hara and the lineages shepherded by the Beat Generation. Cohn founded the diversity oriented on-line Museum of American Poetics (MAP) at www.poetspath.com in 1997.

MONDAY 5/7 OPEN READING SIGN-UP 7:45PM, READING AT 8:00PM

WEDNESDAY 5/9 AN EVENING OF POETS & PAINTERS WITH GRANARY BOOKS

Following in the venerable tradition of fostering and publishing collaborations between poets and painters, Granary Books has reinvented the form and extended it into the 21st century with some of the most interesting and compelling works in the form. This evening's program will emphasize a selection of Granary's less-seen limited edition artists' books, with slide presentations and hands-on examples presented by **John Yau & Archie Rand, Johanna Drucker, Larry Fagin & Trevor Winkfield, Charles Bernstein & Susan Bee, Anne Waldman, Ron Padgett, Julie Harrison** and others. For more information on Granary Books, visit their website at www.granarybooks.com.

FRIDAY 5/11 [6:00PM] A GLORIOUS CELEBRATORY FESTIVAL OF BRIEF READINGS FROM SOME RECENTLY PUBLISHED AND HIGHLY AWESOME CHAPBOOKS, TO BE FOLLOWED BY REVELRY

A group reading curated by **Matthew Zapruder**, celebrating poetry from recently released award-winning and self-published chapbooks, featuring **Dottie Lasky, Valzhyna Mort, Dan Chelotti, Kate Hall, Cindy King, Betsy Wheeler, Travis Nichols, Monica Fambrough, Lori Shine, Kathy Ossip, Cole Heinowitz** and **Stephanie Ruth Anderson**. Please visit www.poetryproject.com for individual bios.

MONDAY 5/14 THE CITY VISIBLE: CHICAGO POETRY FOR THE NEW CENTURY

Poets featured in the anthology *The City Visible*, published by Cracked Slab Books, will read to celebrate its publication. **William Allegrezza** is the editor of *morla* and the editor-in-chief of Cracked Slab Books. His book *Fragile Replacements* is coming out in 2007 with Meritage Press. **Joel Felix** edits the journal *LVNG* with Peter and Michael O'Leary. He is the author of the chapbooks *Catch and Release* and *Monaural*. **Simone Muench's** first book *The Air Lost in Breathing* won the Marianne Moore Prize for Poetry and her second *Lampblack & Ash* received the Kathryn A. Morton Prize. She is a contributing editor to *Sharkforum*. **Kristy Odellus** is a co-founder of *Near South*, a Chicago-based journal of innovative writing. Her poems, essays and reviews have appeared in *Chicago Review, Pavement Saw, La Petite Zine, Combo, Diagram* and others.

WEDNESDAY 5/16 TRACIE MORRIS & CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Charles Bernstein's most recent books are *Girly Man* and *With Strings*, both from the University of Chicago Press. Green Integer published the libretto and NMC the CD of *Shadowtime*, an opera with music by Brian Ferneyhough. Author page at epc.buffalo.edu. **Tracie Morris** is an interdisciplinary poet who has worked in extensively as a sound poet and multimedia performer. Her most recent musical recording has been with composer Elliot Sharp for his group, Terraplane. Morris was awarded a PhD in Performance Studies from New York University in 2006.

MONDAY 5/21 EVAN KENNEDY & TRISH SALAH

Evan Kennedy is the cofounder and singer of The Patriot Act, a now defunct politically insensitive rock and roll art project. He is the author of a pamphlet entitled *My Pet Goat* and a chapbook *Us Them Poems*. For this reading, he will read from "Voyage by Donkey," a modest piece serving as a dénouement to Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*, with video accompaniment by Zbigniew Bzymek. **Trish Salah** is a Montreal-based writer, teacher and spoken word artist. She has new work in the current issues of the journals *Drunken Boat, EOAGH, Canadian Theatre Review*, and in the collection, *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Source Book*. Her first book of poetry, *Wanting in Arabic*, was published by TSAR in 2002.

WEDNESDAY 5/23 RAE ARMANTROUT & PETER GIZZI

Rae Armantrout's most recent books are *Next Life, Up to Speed, The Pretext, and Veil: New and Selected Poems*. In 2007 she received an award in poetry from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. Armantrout is Professor of Poetry and Poetics at the University of California, San Diego. **Peter Gizzi** is the author of *The Outernational, Some Values of Landscape and Weather, Artificial Heart, and Periplus and other Poems 1987-1992*. He is also the editor of *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer*.

FRIDAY 5/25 [10:00PM] LOST & FOUND

Co-curated with filmmaker **David Gatten**. Torn texts in multiple voices. Fugitive transmissions. Images and objects lost and abandoned are found and polished. Show and tell till midnight. POEMS ARE FUN. A manual for violence prevention. ADVANCED TYPING TIPS, PART 5. Glass negative projections. Offerings from an archive. The sound of a slow train. Slide show notes from an abandoned elementary school. What to do when you lose someone. What to do if you find them. There will be surprises, appearances and absences. Please visit www.poetryproject.com for details on participating artists and poets.

MONDAY 5/28 JEFFREY CYPHERS WRIGHT & DAVID VOGEN

Jeffrey Cyphers Wright is a poet, publisher, critic and eco-activist. He studied with Ted Berrigan, Alice Notley and Allen Ginsberg and has an MFA in poetry. From 1986 until 2001 he published *Cover Magazine*. His poems have appeared in numerous journals and six anthologies. He is the author of ten books, the latest being *The Name Poems* from Sisyphus Press. He is the new editor of *Van Gogh's Ear*. **David Vogen**: born in Milwaukee, educated at Rutgers and NYU Graduate Writing Program, teacher, writer, editor, cook, published in *The New York Quarterly, Nerve, Details, Kalte Sterne...*, performed at the Chautauqua Institution and Mason Gross School of the Arts. Sound engineer at The Poetry Project since 1990. Saw The Clash play for 15 straight days at Bond's International Casino in New York City, 1981. Passed through Checkpoint Charlie in 1984 and made it back alive.

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

ADMISSION \$8
STUDENTS & SENIORS \$7
MEMBERS \$5 OR FREE

WEDNESDAY 5/30 NEO-BENSHI BEAST UNLEASHED ON THE EAST!

The Japanese term *benshi* means "film-teller," and *Benshi* narrators thrived in Japan and Korea in the Silent era, describing, voicing, and even expanding the films for audiences. "Neo-Benshi" originated in the Bay Area poets avant-garde, and has become something of a sensation. This 2-hour program of "hit" Neo-Benshi performances includes West Coast masters **Roxanne Hamilton, Stephanie Young, Rodney Koeneke, and Mac MacGinnes**, along with NYC's own **Gary Sullivan, Nada Gordon, Elaine Equi** and **Vincent Katz** followed by a program of short films by **Abigail Child, Brian Kim Stefans, Neo-Benshi** co-creator **Konrad Steiner**, and **Brandon Downing**.

JUNE

MONDAY 6/4 SPRING WORKSHOP READING

Spring participants from the workshops taught by Joanna Fuhrman, Akilah Oliver, Douglas Rothschild and Thomas Savage, will share their work.

WEDNESDAY 6/6 BUCK DOWNS & DAVID KIRSCHENBAUM

A native of Jones County Miss., **Buck Downs** lives in Washington DC and works in a location nearby. Recent projects include *pontiac fever, Ladies Love Outlaws, and Recreational Vehicle*. Poems can be found online at *fascicle* and *onedit*. **David Kirschenbaum's** work has appeared in the *Brooklyn Review Online, canwehaveourballback.com, Chain, and Pavement Saw*, among others. He is the editor and publisher of *Boog City*, a NYC-based small press and community newspaper now in its 16th year.

MONDAY 6/11 THE RECLUSE READING

Poets whose work appears in *The Recluse 3*, edited by the Project's staff, will read their work.

WEDNESDAY 6/13 EDMUND BERRIGAN & DAVID CAMERON

Edmund Berrigan is the author of *Disarming Matter, Your Cheatin' Heart, and Glad Stone Children* coming this spring. Under the guise of I Feel Tractor, he has released a CD, *Once I had an Earthquake* (Goodbye Better, 2006). He also co-edited the *Collected Poems of Ted Berrigan*. A lover of variants and misunderstanding, **David Cameron** is the author of *Flowers Of Bad, a False Translation of Charles Baudelaire's Les Fleurs Du Mal*, jointly produced by Unbelievable Alligator and Ugly Duckling Presse and *L.P.*, a series of variations on the Lord's Prayer soon to be made available by Unbelievable Alligator as a free e-book.

THE POETRY PROJECT
IS LOCATED IN
ST. MARK'S CHURCH AT THE CORNER
OF 2ND AVE & 10TH ST IN MANHATTAN
212.674.0910 FOR MORE INFORMATION

THE POETRY PROJECT IS WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE
WITH ASSISTANCE AND ADVANCE NOTICE

SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

ANSELM BERRIGAN LOOKS AROUND

CONTINUED FROM P. 15

many such relationships (and they are not all with poets, or widely known) and they are a large part of why the organization has survived this long and grown as well.

That makes nothing perfect, by the way, and doesn't mean that people aren't left out here or feel dissatisfied there. The dynamics of a large community of individuals is always going to be complicated, and that it's a community full of poets makes it only more so I suspect. The community is much larger at this point than the range of opportunities the Project has to offer during any given couple of years. If anything, a big matter for me as Director has been managing to honor the Project's history while keeping it open to new people. But it's not that difficult if you make sure that the work is emphasized above all else, for better or worse. As hard as this may be for some to believe, I am not particularly interested in the idea of the New York School, say, or the idea of Language poetry or performance-based poetry or synthesized stylings. But I am very interested in the work of many people associated with all of those things, and get particularly interest-

ed at times in pairing poets from seeming different artistic backgrounds. It's far from an exclusive tendency, mind you, but it's often the most interesting and it also makes for larger audiences.

Lorber: How would poetry – what's written, how it's perceived, how writers interact – be different if, Frank Capra-style, the Poetry Project had never been born?

Berrigan: Crikey. Poets are going to write poems whether there's a project or a dollar or a tank or a lollipop nearby or not. I read recently, in advance of her reading with Kamau Brathwaite, that Susan Howe had taken a class at the Project taught by Ted Greenwald in the early 70s. Apparently she was focusing largely on visual art at the time, but making use of words. Ted visited her studio and suggested she start putting those words onto paper and so she did. Maybe if there's no Poetry Project that process takes a little while longer to happen. Maybe not.

Lorber: How has the evolution of the project's role in your life affected your relationship with poetry, and with your own sense of identity? And now that you're joining the emeritus ranks, what comes next in your life?

Berrigan: I'm a better listener. I get more

out of readings than I used to. The social aspect of readings is a non-issue for me, and I can just listen. Hosting a reading means you have to keep an eye on the room, outside noise, tech matters and so forth. But when everything is humming along the listening itself is just a pleasure. The quality of the reading makes for its own questions, but I really enjoy the fact of the readings and the variation from week to week. And the matter of quality is always interesting – and necessary – to me. It helps, I think, that I view the enormous number of readings in New York as part of a cycle of development within the art and not as a series of social obligations.

As to my own identity, I feel reticent about speaking to it too much. It's true that I've had a long and unusual relationship with this organization. But it's not true that the Project was very important to me growing up. I didn't start writing poems until I was 19 and gone from home. I didn't give the Project much thought until I came back to New York in 1996, and by that time I was already immersed in poetry. If it hadn't been the Project it would have been something else. And what comes next will be something else.

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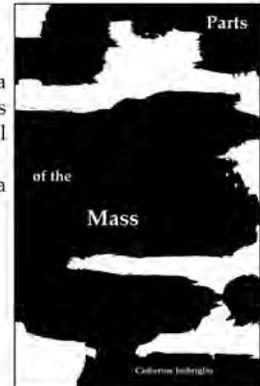
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INTERVIEW

A CONVERSATION WITH JOHN TRUDELL

"HE IS EXTREMELY ELOQUENT, THEREFORE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS"

—FROM JOHN TRUDELL'S
17,000 PAGE FBI FILE

More than mere activist or poet, John Trudell is adept at living beyond specific identities. His reinventions emerge not despite but because his humanitarianism renders any one allegiance artificially confining. As a poet he's discovered a means of maintaining authentic presence, of connecting perceptual, physical & spiritual reality that incorporates & builds on a life of struggling against economic & cultural deprivation. Trudell, the son of a Santee Sioux father and a Mexican mother, became involved in Native American activism after returning from the Vietnam War. He was the spokesman for the All Tribes occupation of Alcatraz Island and was later chair of the American Indian Movement, amassing the largest FBI file in the agency's history. In 1979 Trudell burned an American flag outside FBI headquarters on the grounds that the flag had already been desecrated by race & class injustice. Twelve hours later, his mother-in-law, pregnant wife and three children were killed in a suspicious fire at Trudell's home on the Shoshone Paiute reservation in Nevada. After that, he began writing "hanging on lines," his poetry. Since that time he's recorded about a dozen albums, often with traditional music, and has remained an outspoken philosopher whose power transcends hemmed in notions of what activism can accomplish.

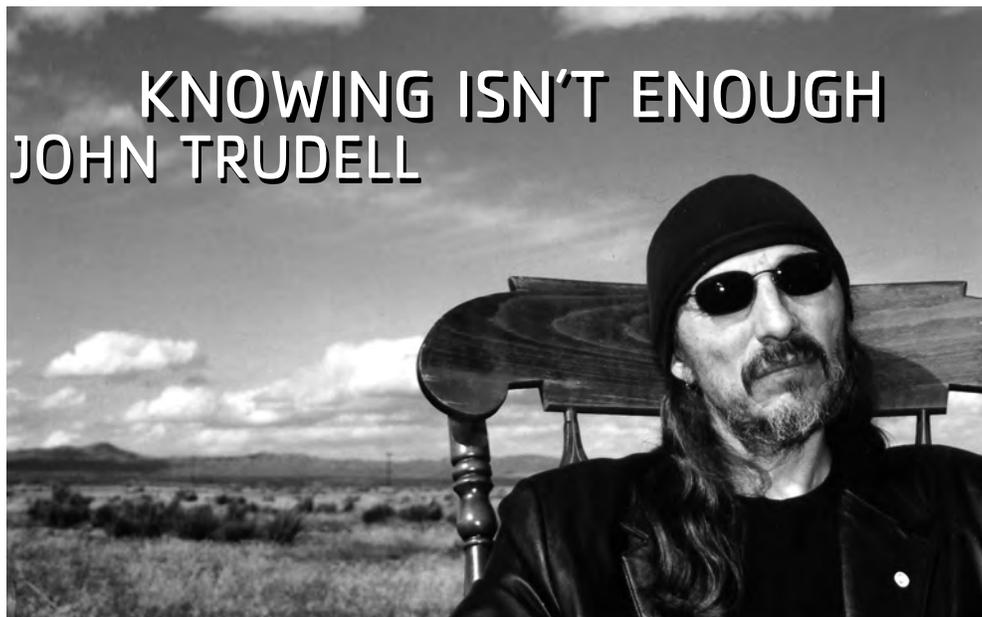


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Brendan Lorber: You've said you felt you were knocked unconscious when you were born and have spent your entire life trying to come to. What techniques have you called upon become more aware?

John Trudell: I never thought in terms of technique. There are some things I can't explain. I went through my life experiences and at a young age things just didn't seem right to me. I was always influenced by that and as different things have happened in my life I thought about them a lot, maybe out of necessity. It's apparent to me that the reality that's being imposed upon us, something's not right about it. It's almost like this is not real, what reality's supposed to be all about. My mind goes off with these kind of things but I've never thought in terms of any technique. I just do what I do.

Lorber: Everyone from the FBI to Kris Kristofferson says you are dangerous – who are you dangerous to and why?

Trudell: [laughs] I'm not dangerous. But when Kris says it and the FBI says it they're saying it two different contexts. In the FBI's context... well I don't think I'm dangerous to anybody or anything. It's just that

I see reality as I see it, I think the way that I think and I speak the way that I speak. If there's anything in this area that's dangerous – which I truly don't understand – it's got to be about perceptions of reality. I'll put it like this: I have my moments of coherence, I can be very coherent at times, this isn't a full-time thing, but I can be very coherent at times. I think that's what's being perceived as dangerous, because the system itself, not just the FBI, they don't want people using their intelligence clearly and coherently and really thinking about things. They want people to just believe what they're told because if people are busy believing then they're obviously not thinking. It's about perceptions of reality.

Lorber: My next question touches on those perceptions of reality. What are you able to achieve as a poet and musician that you were not able to achieve as an activist? That is, how do the goals of being an activist differ from those of being an artist – and how are they the same?

Trudell: When I was an activist, when that was my identity, it wasn't a goal. It was just something I felt I had to do. It seemed that the only realistic thing for me to do at that

time was to be involved in the activism. But when that changed and I became involved in the writing and the performance and what is called the artist thing, one of the main things I noticed in the transition is that I was more free. That's because the political activism thing is a very limited way to view reality. When I had the activist identity, I was perceiving reality as a political activist. That's a limiter, it was putting blinders on. I could only see what was going on based upon my political activism and when you get right down into the reality of politics, and what it really is all about, politics is very territorial, very competitive, very aggressive. It's based upon beliefs and party lines. It has its own extremism. No matter how good or righteous the cause is, whether from the left to the right, or the Indians to the whites it doesn't matter. Politics is aggressive in nature and competitive. It's non-cooperative. So when I had a political identity, I was limiting my ability to see what was really going on in a larger context. When I looked at us as native people, this political activism served a useful function. But in the long run it wasn't our politics. And if it's not our politics then how can we use it to speak our truths and

our realities. We can blurt out a lot of repressed emotional frustration but venting repressed emotional frustration has absolutely nothing to do with coherence. So when the change went over and I started writing I realized I could express my truths the way I want to. And that's what's needed now. It gave me peripheral vision that I didn't have.

Lorber: That notion of identity lead into the next thing I wanted to touch on. You've said, "Some people call me a poet. Others say I'm an activist. Some say my poetry and music is political. Others say it's about the spirit of my people. I don't buy into any of those labels. I may be a little bit of all those things, but I'm more than any of them. We all are. That's what makes us human." How do people get pushed into those specific limiting identities?

Trudell: It starts at birth, the programming. We are human beings. That is who we are. That is our identity, each and every one of us. That is our identity. We may be female or male or we may be one race or another but we're human beings. That is our identity. Everything else is how we're dressed up. But from the time we're born, we're programmed to not perceive reality as human beings. We're programmed to perceive reality by race, gender, religion, guilt. The purpose of that programming is to create chaos in our thought process. It's to confuse our real identity. As long as that chaos and confusion exists then we can be manipulated. Our anarchy can be manipulated to serve someone else's purpose.

Lorber: Continuing with that, the civil rights and American Indian Movements were viewed as threats by the US government in part because they were bridging communities that had been kept apart for a long time. Your work as an activist and a writer connects the fight against racism, sexism and classism, yet many activists and writers view each as a separate battle. Why do so many people want to divide the issues into smaller parcels?

Trudell: We are programmed to do that. We're addicted to that energy pattern.

Lorber: You've said "most people are trying to find solutions to the problem within the confined abstractions of democracy and if they're not willing to think objectively about responsibility to our descendants then they will come up with no solutions – they will only perpetuate the

enslavement and feed it." How can a person break out of their programming, out of that cycle?

Trudell: We need to respect the value and power of our intelligence. We need to use our intelligence to think. We need to think clearly and coherently. We need to activate and understand the power of our intelligence and if we would use our intelligence clearly and coherently we will break out of that. But as a society were not using our intelligence clearly and coherently. We use our intelligence to be fearful, to be insecure, to believe. We *believe*, we don't think. We've been programmed to believe so the effectiveness of our intelligence has been neutered. Instead of us using the power of clear and coherent thinking we've been neutered down to where we just use our intelligence to believe what we're told to believe. You can't really think and believe at the same time – it's one or the other, because if you just believe you're pretending to think. When you're just believing, your pretend-thinking is limited by the definitions of your belief. The power of our intelligence, the energy of our intelligence, the power that it represents, it needs to flow. We need to understand the value and power of our intelligence and use it clearly and coherently.

An example of the power of our intelligence is if you've ever had the experience of feeling powerless, overwhelmed and depressed. How bad can you make yourself feel when you're feeling that way? How does it affect the people around you? The irony there is you're feeling powerless but in reality that *is* power. The worse you can make yourself feel – that's power, that's your power. And how it affects the people around you is the physical side of how your power spreads. We really need to come to grips with reality. What I'm getting at is, if we understand and respect the power of our intelligence and use it clearly and coherently then that power that we use to make ourselves feel bad, that power can be used to create coherence.

In dealing with beliefs – and I'm not saying that to have beliefs is bad – but what I am saying is to use the word believe and use it all the time is a negative because it stifles

our thinking. The people, whoever they believe their creator is, whether it's God or Yahweh or Mohammed or Allah or The Great Spirit, whoever people relate to as a creator, we need to show respect to that creator. We can make all the rah rah words about a spiritual this or whatever we can rah rah ourselves all we want but the reality is, if we truly respect our creator, we would respect the gift of intelligence that our creator gave us and use that gift appropriately. Clearly and coherently. It's in our best interests to reach that realization. We've been so confused, disoriented and disconnected, we're not showing our creator respect no matter how much we rah rah. We can drop on our knees and pray at the drop of a hat we can rah rah everything. But if we're not using the gift of our intelligence clearly and coherently were not fulfilling our responsibility to the life that our creator gave us.

It comes down to this: recognizing who we are and what our own power is. I don't have a manual or a step by step process on

how one goes about this. But I think the first step in going about it is for us to make a decision within our own selves, "I'm going to use the power of my intelligence to be as clear and coherent as I possibly can. I'm going to think. I choose thinking over believing." and head in that direction, because it'll activate.

Lorber: In some ways the US government has been acting more overtly, as though they're making it easy to use our intelligence to see the economic injustice and military oppression around the world.

Trudell: People aren't using their intelligence to do that. They're seeing it, but if people were truly using their intelligence they would deal with it. We have to watch out for the slight of mind. I don't think the US government is more overtly doing it now. From how I view reality, they've been very overt the whole time, it's just that people don't want to see it. What's happening here and why I'm saying it like this is that were not activating our intelligence clearly and coherently by what were seeing. We're emotionally reacting to what we believe. But we're not thinking in ways to create solutions. Let's say, using your ter-

The way
reality stands
right now, you
can't save
democracy
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humanity.

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minology, they may be more overt in what they're doing. The people who are for it react out of their beliefs and they support it however they support it. The people who are against it emotionally react out of their beliefs. We go through these motions to act out our emotional reactions but if you look at it historically speaking we haven't produced any results. We haven't settled the issues. The missing thing here is using our intelligence clearly and coherently in facing reality.

We're still within the limits of the abstractions of democracy. Either we're going to serve humanity, either we're going to be respectful to our creator and create a more balanced reality or were going to be loyal to some dark age belief system that was imposed upon us. We need to think beyond the way we've been programmed to believe because the way reality stands right now, you can't save democracy and save humanity. You can't do it.

If you look at it practically speaking, why would you want to save democracy? Democracy in reality means the right of the entitled to rule. But who decides who's entitled? In an ownership of property world, the entitled will always be the ones who own the property. That's just reality. I'm not advocating this – the only thing I'm advocating is that we use the power of our intelligence to really look at reality very clearly if we want to produce coherent solutions. When I look at where the situation stands now, and I came through the 60's, I'm talking about *how come nothing's changed?* How come the beast is worse now than when we started out? Our intentions were good, so what's missing? I think the missing link is we didn't really think – we reacted. And that's the shift that has to be made now. We'll see...

Lorber: That programming goes back a long way. Back when colonial leaders first showed up here –



JOHN TRUDELL AT ALCATRAZ OCCUPATION PRESS CONFERENCE, 1970.

PHOTO CREDIT: MICHELLE VIGNES

Trudell: It goes back to the fucking Romans, to the Pharoahs, man. It goes way, way back.

Lorber: But the techniques have been similar all along, of pitting different groups against each other.

Trudell: Yes.

Lorber: Like a few hundred years ago it was African slaves versus white indentured servants versus Native Americans so none of them would band together against the ruling class. The same strategy more recently in Vietnam and Iraq where soldiers have more shared interests with the people they're shooting than with the people who sent them over. But it's very difficult to overcome the misplaced allegiance and manufactured, artificial fear that's placed in people.

Trudell: It's difficult to overcome it, but the way it gets done is one individual at a time makes up their mind, "I'm going to be

as coherent as I possibly can." And we'll get there, because the change we're looking at has to happen in an evolutionary context, not a revolutionary context. There is no revolutionary solution. Revolution just means you spin back to your starting point. Oppressor oppressed. A revolution always goes back to its starting point but evolution is more linear. It continues on its own circular manner so to speak, or maybe its all about spirals [laughs]. Evolution continues on and we are a part of evolutionary reality. If we make decisions that we are going to be as clear and coherent as we can, we'll see where we're at in a couple of years. The power of depression can affect the people around you, well the power of coherence can also affect the people around you. We'll just replace the power of depression with the reality of coherence one individual at a time and power will spread.

Lorber: One way is through the use of language. Corporations and governments have always recognized the power of language to control people. They've used it to separate populations from the accurate perception of their surroundings. For example, by making corporations rather than humans the subject of terms like health, growth and efficiency, they have masked what would more accurately be described as profit, hegemony and exploitation. It becomes difficult to even conceptualize a world in which the well being of people is the priority. Resisting that corruption of language and reconnecting it to its human and environmental origins – has that been in your mind as you've gone forward as a writer?

Trudell: No. [laughs] Not really. I'm not surprised by anything that they do. They're doing nothing new. Historically speaking they're doing what they've always done. To have a small minority ruling class feed off the larger mass. There's nothing new going on here. The technology, the terminology and the generations change but the system

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remains the same. So I'm not surprised by anything that they're doing.

I just started writing because it happened. There was no thought where "I see things more clearly." There was no thought of nothing. I started writing because it happened and I just follow it. I can't take any credit. I just went where my life took me, all right. In that attempt to become conscious I just followed where life took me. That's exactly in the end what happened.

Lorber: That's the way interesting things happen. Rather than coming to some conclusion beforehand and making it fit. Just allowing it to emerge.

Trudell: One of the things I learned out of it though that I think is a step in the direction is: *knowing isn't enough*. Knowing isn't enough. It's understanding what we know. That's the piece that seems to be missing. We were programmed in school to memorize and to know how to be able to come up with the right answer. Whether we understood or not, that wasn't important to them. The only thing that was important to them was that we understood to go along with the program. It was actually important to them that we *didn't* understand what the program really was. So whatever's going on here, knowing isn't enough. Understanding what we know is very important but we can only reach that understanding through clear and coherent use of our intelligence.

Lorber: What poets, artists, activists or other people continue to inspire you and lead you in new directions?

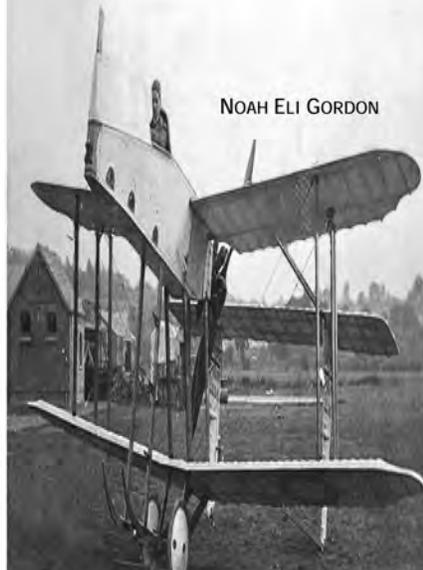
Trudell: Well, that's a hard one to answer because I don't want to say names and leave out names. Willie Nelson is one. He's a big influence.

Lorber: How does he inspire you?

Trudell: He – and Kris Kristofferson's another one, and Jackson Browne – because they see reality. They understand what's going on. Things like that, I like. There's a lot of stuff I listen to that I maybe don't remember the name. I wouldn't say I'm hearing a lot, but I'm hearing more and more by different artists that's heading in the right direction. But I'd say Willie because I just like his style.

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BOOK REVIEWS

ALICE NOTLEY

ALMA, OR THE DEAD WOMEN

GRANARY BOOKS / 2006

REVIEW BY JEN BENKA

In a recent interview with *Poets & Writers Magazine* (September/October 2006), Alice Notley remarked that she envies her poetry performed aloud. "It is something that has to do with the sound of words... how words connect to the mind and to the throat at the same time," she said. One can hardly think of a more timely text to be lifted from the page and given voice than her *Alma, or The Dead Women*.

Notley's book, which she notes was written between July 2001 and March 2003, is one of the most scathing repudiations of President Bush and his henchmen available to readers. She is forthright about her intentions: "this work is an attack."

If the actress Susan Sarandon must speak at the next rally against the U.S. occupation of Iraq, she might consider reading an excerpt from Notley's book—perhaps the piece, "Curse Tablet of Dead Women," which begins, "may the men now ruling wherever on earth, elected or not, be bound; the rulers (call them that) of the United States, may they be bound." Or, "Postscript," which pronounces, "Bush Cheney Rumsfeld Ashcroft Rice et al dead / we pronounce them spiritually dead."

Barring a Sarandon performance on the White House lawn, the irony of Notley's denunciations is, of course, that as they are housed in a work of literature, President Bush will never encounter them. This is also a source of freedom. She writes in "Cruities of Enlightenment:"

"i am enlightened and we are, i can say anything i want to. i am saved and we are, because i say so not you. do you know that if my poetry lasts—that is if there is a future that is similar in any way to this present—my condemnation of our leaders will have considerable weight, and i am loading it down, the words that count will be mine. and our present leaders will be despised and laughed at. because this is the way that literature works. though they are too unread to know this."

And Notley's words and her more than 26 books already count. With *Alma, or The Dead Women*, she offers to readers a mythic almanac that is rooted in her life and the hysteria of the historical times we live in. Ours is a "world of torture," a world without touch, which the title character Alma liberates herself from by shooting up into her forehead, or her third eye, a Buddhist symbol of enlightenment. Alma, whose name comes from the Latin word for "kind," is a god and one of many "dead women," who have been victimized by poverty, war, rape, prostitution, or other horrors and acts of

violence, that the author situates herself among. "i don't want to belong except to the dead world," she writes. "no one wants peace but the dead."

Told in prose and poetry in a narrative style that Notley has described as "novelistic," the book is comprised of six sequential sections, each of which contains 20 to 50 or so short pieces, many of which graphically treat the text like collage. The cadence of each piece is both musical and muscular, and often resonates with a rhythm paved by Gertrude Stein. In the piece, "Anna," for example, she writes, "they keep saying people are mostly good. that is a form of masturbation. and i, i am not, and i, i had just had the dream of hitting and saying you're just a little prick, and i, i then know, i am not mostly good and i still don't know if good is a thing, though bad is."

Throughout the work the author and her cadre of dead women—Anna, Myra/Mira, Alta, Cherokee, Hippy, and Cosette, to name a few—relate events like the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq to past atrocities such as the taking of land from Native Americans and the testing of a nuclear bomb in Nevada. In the piece, "Radiated," Notley reminds us that, "all Americans have been exposed," and that the weapons of mass destruction were and are in the United States, not Iraq.

The public and its leaders don't listen to women, but poems do. And Notley forges a language landscape where women can speak through the "negative space," which is death and the emptiness of our culture:

"i will continue to present the range of our power our syntax our marks our reflections and conversations, as scribe, as names, as light, as seer and as creature owl. you will do as you wish but may yet be affected, for you are not in control of all nature, and we are forceful and capable of changing the particles, for example, of thought and ideation. you may not be able to bear it; we hope you cannot." ("How The Dead Women May Operate From Negative Space")

The overall effect of the work is an enactment not of letting pain go, but letting it loose. It is the difference between release and escape. The rage and grief she conveys can be challenging to absorb, but Notley wants us to be uncomfortable. Why, now, should we be otherwise?

Jen Benka is the author of the collection of poems, A Box of Longing With Fifty Drawers (Soft Skull Press, 2005), and serves as the managing director of Poets & Writers.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

GIRLY MAN

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS / 2006

REVIEW BY CHUCK STEBELTON

Charles Bernstein's new volume *Girly Man*, richly furnished in hardcover with a gorgeously rendered Susan Bee dust jacket, cites the original chapbook publication of two chapters as pamphlets rather than chaps. By calling them pamphlets, which call to mind slogans, Bernstein suggests that he intended to affect an immediate outcome beyond a beautiful book object or a cannonball in the gift economy. The individual poems take on necessarily different resonances than when read against the primary context in which they first appeared. Some take on multiple registers, others seem more muted here. Many, thankfully, find complement elsewhere in a growing number of sound files and critical responses on the author's EPC page and at Penn Sound.

Girly Man's opening chapter appeared with Chax in 2003, lovingly hand sewn with a spiffy little woodcut figure thinking a speech balloon that says, "Let's Just Say." The book-ending of first and final pieces allow each of the four poems here to make fullest use of the smaller format. Both the opening poem "In Particular" and the final untitled poem "every lake has a house" proceeds as a list of impossibly shifting positions, each ending on an inversion of the opening line. In the case of "In Particular," "A black man waiting at a bus stop / A white woman sitting on a stool" cap a four page litany of impolitic characters and caricatures. A Wiccan matron swimming in glue. A balding brownnoser in tutu. The poem comes into its own the moment it returns to what it first meant to dodge: "A white man sitting on stool / A black woman waiting at bus stop."

The short untitled poem "every lake has a house" frames the same trick in the shorter space of a single page. Bernstein inverts its title line by closing on "& every house has a lake." In the process he proceeds to zoom in on that house and every house to a level of improbable and even impossible detail: "& every face has a thought / & every thought has a trap." Given four poems in a single package, this bracketing by inversion is a send up at the level of the poem and on the level of sequence. At the opening of this larger collection, the tone leading chapter "Let's Just Say" wants to contain each impulse the rest of the collection's poems will follow or else slyly resist.

One of the impulses in *Girly Man* is to have fun at the expense of facts that aren't logically necessary. The two part "Language, Truth, and Logic" is a hoot, insisting as always that there's no need to be too precious. Longer poems that resist this same impulse, take "Likeness" with its "The repetition is like the repetition," a real groaner, can come off as mere scores.

The most topical section is "Some Of These Daze," composed of letters and notes from late 2001. There's a strong sense of family and neighbor. Mostly commitment and aftermath:

"It's a bit ominous," a friend writes, "the way the politicos are speaking about talking with one voice."

—I am just trying to get by talking with no voice."

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Other sections strike a bemused, comic tone and document the sense of a poet very much of his own time. “He’s So Heavy, He’s My Sokall” is a wry performance in itself: “I’m laughing so hard I could sigh.” Throughout *Girly Man* Bernstein is at play with thinking and this leads him to coin what could immediately become a new slogan: “War is the extension of prose by other means.”

Chuck Stebelton is the author of Circulation Flowers (Tougher Disguises) and works as Literary Program Manager at Woodland Pattern in Milwaukee.

KIMBERLY LYONS

SALINE

INSTANCE PRESS / 2005

REVIEW BY PAUL FOSTER JOHNSON

While it is a resolutely contemporary book, Kimberly Lyons’ *Saline* is sensitive to the loss of places and things to the passage of time. Lyons also shows an affinity for techniques borrowed from the past, using and undoing aesthetic strategies ranging from modern to romantic to classical in her refiguration of poetic space.

At first glance, the inclusion of locations, dates, times, sources, and people give *Saline* a conversational quality and a sense of spontaneity and occasion. But taken together, these indexes accumulate into the careful inventory of a preservationist. Throughout these poems, the precision with which Lyons approaches the everyday forms a tension with the tendency to abstract and transform the raw material of observation.

Lyons’ pitch-perfect sense of irony serves this project by making her subjects seem simultaneously grand and ordinary. In “Astroland,” for instance, a paean to Coney Island kitsch sounds into the urban cosmos:

I’ve seen your pulsing palaces
mechanized silence under a sweating
pearlized moon
the button of a queen’s sweater.

It all burned down.

Essence of the ocean
via Astroland.

Lyons extends the metaphorical majesty of celestial place-names, pulling other bodies into the gravitational field of this paratactic elegy for a disappearing Brooklyn institution. If, like “an eyeball in its socket, earth is coated by a layer of aqueous saline,” the essence of the ocean is the waft of a vast sadness.

In addition to checking vital signs of the metropolitan wild, *Saline* calibrates its language to sites from Minnesota to Italy. The hunt for the right phrase suggests a frustrated longing for the recuperation of worlds that are farther than they may appear. “Dark Nebulosity” presents the struggle of describing something that is for the most part absent, a pocket of the universe that is inaccessible or must remain nebulous:

I try to
find another word for
“explosive” then
the reversal of momentum
has the ragged shape of
real daffodils.
Raw, withered, green, pale
dry, wet, magnified
dissolved
torn, inclusive, singular
a hive in this sense
midnight’s remnants
whirl off
petals, dead stars.

Facing lyric exhaustion, the speaker reaches for those ineffable daffodils and draws back an obscure handful. The search for the exact word works against the image in what is productive activity all the same. Lyons exhibits great talent for creating these reversals, trafficking in verbal economy to improvise these shapes and flatten them out.

“Soul of an Etruscan” is the upholstery button around which the fabric of book’s first section gathers, giving us a poet with a task but ultimately dissolving this persona. While reading Rilke on a Metro-North

train, the speaker tries to find the best way to work the title phrase into a poem. Channeling the romantic taste for antiquity, she ruminates on immortality and form amid the Hudson River School scenery until the swing sets and trash give way to the purity of light and waves.

Yet as often as ephemera open into ideal forms, the spirit world finds its realization in a Halloween store. Lyons’ attention to old, disposable, or discarded objects reflects the ambivalence of consumer desire; despite their degraded appearance, blown trash and plastic miniatures are exalted as sculpture. The prose paragraphs of “Saline,” the final poem, read as a montage of the life of such objects, alternately rendered in detail and reduced to simple shape and color.

And where is the viewer? “I float with Jesus in a large rectangular room of lateral light bars and gilt edges functionless objects.” In these spare rooms, there is a great deal to sort out, and this collection dares the reader to approach with the rigor that is so evident in its composition.

Paul Foster Johnson is an editor at Litmus Press and the author of the forthcoming collection Refrains/Unworkings (Apostrophe Books).

ANDREW EPSTEIN

BEAUTIFUL ENEMIES: FRIENDSHIP AND POSTWAR AMERICAN POETRY

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS / 2006

REVIEW BY K. SILEM MOHAMMAD

A new trend in academic criticism—almost a sub-genre—has arisen in the past few years: studies of modernist and postmodernist poetry with an emphasis on issues of community and innovation that are of immediate relevance to practicing writers. Juliana Spahr’s *Everybody’s Autonomy*, Michael Magee’s *Emancipating Pragmatism*, Lytle Shaw’s *Frank O’Hara: The Poetics of Coterie*, and similar recent university press books by younger poet-critics perform a double duty: they contribute to the literary-historical scholarship around individual artists and

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formations, and they serve as sounding boards for ideas about factors that directly affect contemporary poetics. What these books generally share is a sense of having been written out of a motivated interest in the ways that narrative genealogies built around charismatic individuals and movements shape our own activities as poets, for good or bad.

Andrew Epstein's *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* covers some of the same ground and treats some of the same central figures as the above-mentioned volumes. He divides his attention equally between Frank O'Hara, Amiri Baraka, and John Ashbery—a grouping that is itself illustrative of Epstein's desire to "complicate stable, reductive definitions of phenomena like 'The New York School' and to suggest that literary history must attend to the messy contours of actual poetic communities and friendships" (12). Epstein's stated concern in this volume is with what he identifies as "the problem faced by every avant-gardist, every writer: how to avoid appropriation, how to ward off absorption by groups, institutions, and other forces that might reduce one's ability to change, move, or create freely, while at the same time navigating and feeding off of literary communities and friendships" (283). It is this tension between, on the one hand, the energizing aspects of friendship and community, and on the other, the conformity implicit in group identification, to which Epstein devotes most of his attention. He traces this complex back to the growing mid-century discourse surrounding conformity and individualism, which co-existed with an emergent emphasis on the importance of artistic community. In his treatment of the latter, Epstein cites such under-recognized sources as Paul Goodman's 1951 *Kenyon Review* essay "Advance-Guard Writing, 1900–1950." Poets like O'Hara received pieces like Goodman's as catalyzing calls for community and solidarity, at the same time that they remained to some degree in thrall to individuality.

Epstein pursues the "paradox" formed by this dual pull on poets' inclinations as the

main thrust of his study, and he marshals his examples, drawn from poems as well as correspondence and other documents, into largely compelling exhibits for his central case. If this case nowhere congeals into an argument more specific than the observation that the conflicting imperatives of community and individuality can place irresolvable pressures on artists, it is nevertheless presented in such a way that the reader comes away with an enriched appreciation for the work of the poets and a heightened understanding of their particular communal dynamics. Epstein's close readings of individual poems are sharp and trenchant, though these are also the passages that feel most stuck within the confines of traditional criticism; the attempt to make each analysis reflect on the larger focus of the book sometimes reads as tendentious. (This is, I think, a limitation imposed by the conventions of the genre rather than any failure of insight on his part.) Most engaging of all are the sections in which Epstein explores the poets' intertextual and collaborative processes in depth, especially when he cites unpublished documents such as a wonderful letter-poem to Kenneth Koch co-written by Ashbery and O'Hara, which he reprints in full.

K. Silem Mohammad is the author of Breathalyzer (Edge Books, 2007).

**SPARROW
AMERICA: A PROPHECY
THE SPARROW READER
SOFT SKULL PRESS / 2006
REVIEW BY BRENDA COULTAS**

In this collection of prose, the poet Sparrow wears the hat of a provocateur and journalist (during his subversive presidential campaigns he changes into a stovepipe hat a la Abe Lincoln). The theme of identity bookends this collection of Sparrow's journalistic forays into American culture from the early 90s to the present. In investigating America is he investigating himself? Who is America? Who is Sparrow? What of Sparrow's troubled yet sometimes-affectionate relationship

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—Mei-meï Berssenbrugge
BOMB, Summer 2006

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with America? Is Sparrow's absurdist faux-naïveté a front for covertly profound social criticism or is profound social criticism itself the absurd domain of the vrai-naïve?

The Reader begins with "My Names," an essay on the naming of the poet formally known as Michael Gorelick of the Bronx. Of course, this being Sparrow, it becomes a hysterical riff on spam, the poet delighting in all the incarnations of his name bestowed upon him by Spam marketers:

Souciep
Dear healthcliff
Hello Sparky799@Juno.com
Sparrott1

... "I love these names—temporary, awkward, apt. They seem expressive of my inner selves, 'Sparky799' is my 'party personality', 'Souciep' my suave, artistic persona. 'Soo wee', though mildly insulting [it is a call for pigs] is my abrasive side."

From this treasury of Sparrow's writings, I only have space to discuss a few gems. There are instructions for writing bad poetry, translations of New Yorker poems, cloud interpretations, and bathing, hereafter referred to as "bathifying." Like a true politician, Sparrow has something for everyone. *America: A Prophecy* is composed of 6 sections with lists of proverbs sandwiched between. For example, "Let sleeping bags lie." "The bus comes whether we wait or not." "Everyone in a bathroom eventually meets." "Mice give milk too."

In "Report From America," Sparrow plays the straight man in his adventures outside of

New York City:

Pardon me, but I've left New York. I've been touring the United States, and believe me, it's different. People actually wear those clothes that look so amusing in Times Square—yellow shirts and golf pants—they wear them all the time. Cash registers in supermarkets speak in a female voice, and no one says, "I saw Dave." They say, "I saw Dave's car."

Sparrow finds that America is a capitalist's wet dream where one can buy an ATM of one's own in gold or putty grey. His observations are fresh. On Colorado dialects, he notes, "Many people answer the phone, 'Y'hello,' a bastard offspring of 'Yeah' and 'Hello.' After a week, a discerning linguist can distinguish, 'Huh, huh,' which means 'No.' In New York, if you call someone 'Guy' as in 'Hi guy!' it means you're gay. Here it means you're a cowboy."

In *My Politics*, he describes himself as "one of the first personal-as-political activists" or rather as an "inactivist." He lists among his (in)achievements not having watched television in 28 years, eaten meat for 29 years, and to have never earned more than \$11,806 a year. Instead of crossing a picket line at MoMA, he writes a letter to the museum directors requesting them to negotiate with the 40 strikers who "only earn \$17,000 a year. Upon seeing three insects trapped in an ATM machine, he opens the door and when they do not fly away, he blows upon them gently until they find their freedom."

In full disclosure, I, the reviewer, confess to being a member of the East Village Militia, founded by Sparrow in order to protect the East Village "from natural disasters and capitalism" and a longtime Sparrowphile. The danger in reading *America, A Prophecy*, is laughing inappropriately in public, a desire for a long, lavender bath, a growing fondness for clouds, voting for Britney Spears for president. Oh, and sudden, intractable enlightenment.

CHUCK STEBELTON *CIRCULATION FLOWERS* TOUGHER DISGUISES / 2005 REVIEW BY ANTHONY HAWLEY

Citizen, eat these poems. Eat these poems because they recognize and will fill a lack in your human body. Chuck Stebelton has designed a new machine, a system—digestive, circulatory, and nervous. I say this not solely because the title, *Circulation Flowers*, implies that something in this book is living liquid. It is. But beyond that, if "eating seems like a tune to me now" as Chuck says in "Scritti Politi" then the tunes here constitute both nourishment and organ.

And in this era of extreme circulation (what now is not circulating, not fractioned and bought?) these poems know well not to resurrect some lost condition. They do not propose to fix the body by rebuilding. Instead they build into the porous architecture of the ongoing capital. Look at this from the "The Ballad of 20 Minutes Duration:"

Book of miter and argonaut, Mel Tillis

book of the halves of the face of the country
moving independently of one another. Balletic

I eat my kleenex for breakfast and use rose sour
weetabix to dry my tears. Aureoles pink as paste

The "we," each and then, we disperse
the sudden long shot of an arrow tipped with
insulin.

Here and elsewhere the pressure
(poundage-wise) one sentence puts on
another is huge. It is as if the assemblage of



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the poem appears to possess so acute an understanding of the “book of halves of the face of the country / moving independently of one another” that instead of trying to piece together the “disperse[d],” it takes scattering for what it is. Say two side-by-side balloons grow in size the more helium goes inside them. Naturally the distance between their surfaces decreases, facilitating travel. Here, however, the proximity of stuffed sentences doesn’t necessarily ensure easy crossing—from “aureoles pink as paste” to “the ‘we,’ each and then,” to the “long shot of an arrow tipped with insulin.” So how map these lines, all this cleaving into? Better we map *with* them, follow contraction’s lead.

Which is to say, this is not about “moving independently,” this poem is that very motion. The lyric can’t circumnavigate nostalgia. But lyric innovation can redirect nostalgia towards another tense besides the past. It can also evade maudlin affectation by fixing its longing simultaneously towards multiple conditions (present, future, subjunctive), as in “Shells of Orange Corvettes:”

What did I lose? Orchards to flood! And you?
More than a grove.

If the shark stops moving pour grenadine on its
tail. What won
against the queen of the eyesores? Stingray?
Crown Victoria?

What split windows to moonflower faster? The
opposite
of apposite is? Lime green? And the checkered
flag must be
remembered. Where is the checkered flag? Past

the far blur

of your bones in May? Dual exhaust? Ashes of
the flags of which?

My back to the ground? I am you. Is Gorgeous
coming? Green

line turns yellow? Sorrel ditches? Scurrilous?
Openly confide?

Besides the sheer combinatory power of the above lines (“opposite / of apposite is? Lime green?”), the stanzas spare nothing in their exacting uncertainty. They take the initial interrogative “what did I lose?” one step farther by asking more than just what was lost. They ask what is being lost, what will be lost, what one would lose if one were to etc. For instance, the reader gets the sense that “the far blur / of your bones in May” and the “ashes of the flag of which” herald from hours yet to come. Like Spicer’s poems Chuck’s commune with both the dead and some future transmission. If these poems harbor nostalgia they do so consummately for various temporal conditions, instants of the future perfect, instances outside the self, the how of the should.

“All the wrong people are / dreaming of photography” the book’s last page tells us. And immediately after that, “to light up an other world to / eyes open and following a negative around the room.” Citizen, “follow a negative.” Follow *this* negative. Put these poems inside you, you will be safe.

Anthony Hawley is the author of The Concerto Form.

EDITED BY BRANDON STOSUY
UP IS UP, BUT SO IS DOWN: NEW YORK'S DOWNTOWN LITERARY SCENE, 1974-1992
NYU PRESS / 2006
REVIEW BY JOEL LEWIS

A good sign that an anthology of contemporary writing is “working” is the number of young writers who read it and decide “that’s for me!” Certainly that was the effect of Donald Allen’s *The New American Poetry*, which quite literally created a tradition of alternative poetics that continues on 47 years and shaped the direction of a generation of poets ranging from Ron Padgett to Ron Silliman. In *The American Tree*, edited by the aforementioned Silliman, took Language Poetry out of the coffee houses and art spaces of New York and San Francisco and into the hands of impressionable young poets languishing in suburban bedrooms and crumbling dormitories. On my suburban NJ college campus, my pals and I were entranced by a now-forgotten anthology called *None of the Above*, edited by Michael Lally. This eclectic book was “the” anthology for those weary of the mewlings of Marvin Bell, Daniel Halpern and their ilk, delivering a remarkably diverse mix of voices ranging from Alice Notley to Bruce Andrews.

The brand-new anthology of mostly 80’s era prose and poetry called *Up Is Up, But So Is Down* has the same potential uplift as those earlier gatherings. Editor Brandon Stosuy has put together a collection that

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BOOK REVIEWS

captures the energy of an era that younger writers today have a nostalgia for in the same way that my college buddies & I longed for a Way-Back Machine that would put us at Bleecker & LaGuardia on a nice Spring day in 1957.

The nostalgia factor is high here, due to the amazing gathering of posters and zine covers that liberally illustrate the volume. Thanks needs to go to that pack-rat poet Ron Kolm, who literally filled up his Long Island City apartment with the sort of lit-life detritus that most of us convert to book-markers and scrap paper at best. Look, ye denizens of the digital age, at the lost art of the handwritten flier! Those fliers, filled with ghost clubs and where-are-they-now poets is akin a long-lost family scrapbook.

Stosuy seems to weigh the book towards the prose writers, which might be a financially based decision as well as aesthetic one. Looking back, the prose writers were the Harmon Killebrews of the scene – Kathy Acker was a living punk deity and Tama Janowitz had displaced Terri Garr as the “cute smart girl” on David Letterman’s Late Night couch. In addition to the folks that “made it” like Mary Gaitskill, Eric Bogosian (he on *Law & Order*, no less), Brad Gooch

and Karen Finley, this volume is a great showcase of local favorites like Peter Chermes, Darius James and Cookie Mueller.

The vitality of prose writing seems to be a result of roots in the outsider stance of writers like William Burroughs, Hubert Selby and a mix of sources ranging from Artaud to the Post-Structuralist theory that was all the rage in universities and in magazines like *October*. The poets of the scene, especially the dominant Unbearable grouping, were more anti-anti-Academic than anything else, and a lot of the work owed a bit too much to Charles Bukowski than anyone should allow. Most of the poets that Stosuy chose were not only identified with the Poetry Project, but served as Project functionaries, such as the late Tim Dlugos who was a great editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. The arrival of the Slam scene in the early 90s ushered in an era of actual populist poetry that changed the entire dynamic of the downtown poetry scene.

Two qualms before I go: I think Stosuy underestimates the importance of the **original** Nyorican Café, and of Nuyorican as the actual indigenous LES poetry. Miguel Algarin’s café, which alternated poetry with great salsa emanating from a killer sound

system, plus an audience made of just regular folks who would tell you **exactly** what they thought of the poetry they were listening to was an eye-opener to those of used to the cloistered atmosphere of the typical poetry reading.

I was also surprised that the LANGUAGE Poets did not get any representation. In their marvelous rags-to-tenure story, Language poetry’s first books were mimeoed affairs and many of their early events were organized in conjunction with downtown artists and musicians. A particular presence was Bruce Andrews, who often performed in a group called BARK with dancer Sally Silvers and saxophonist John Zorn.

No doubt this book will be found in the years to come by some kid in a college library. And it will inspire her to move to downtown and become a great writer like Lynn Tillman. But then the kid will realize that she’ll have to switch her major from Lit to Finance if she entertains any hopes of living on the margins of the culture as it is now.

Joel Lewis is the only poet known to have been trashed by the NY Times redheaded columnist Maureen Dowd.

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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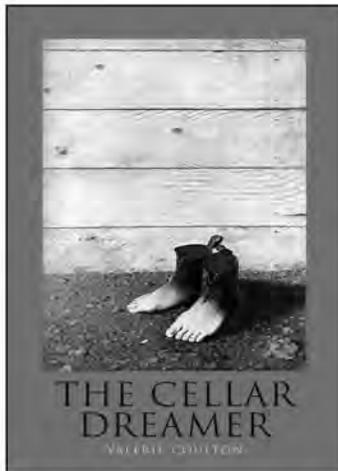
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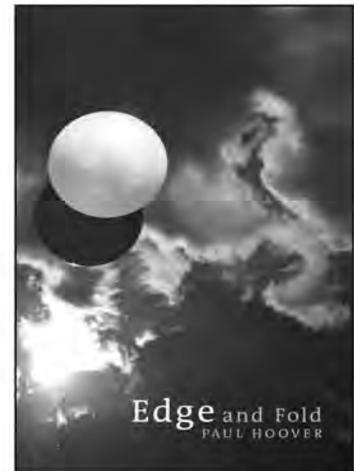
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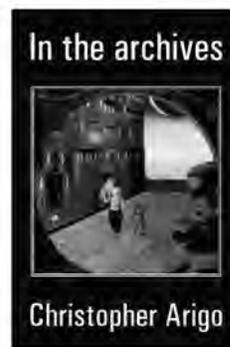
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