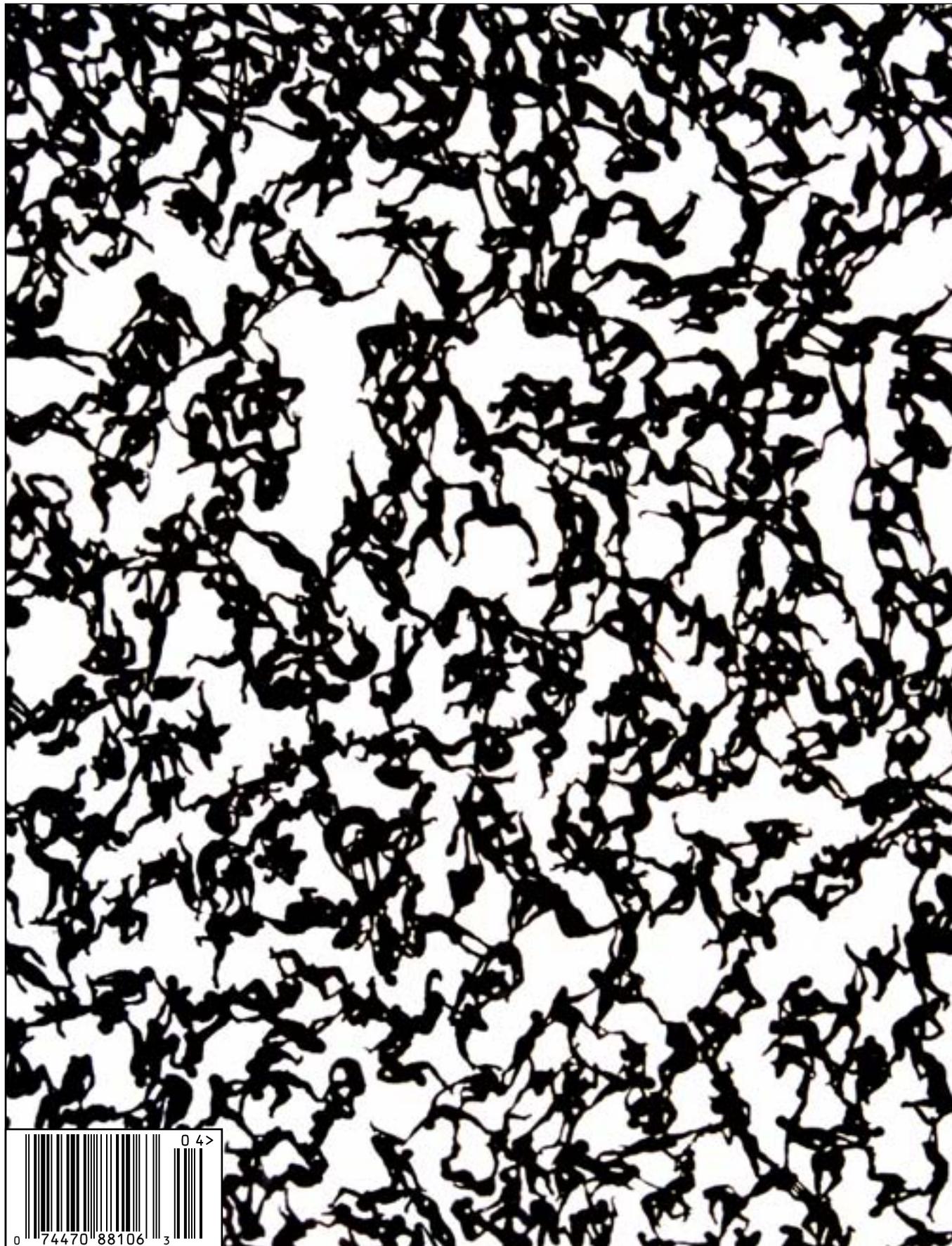


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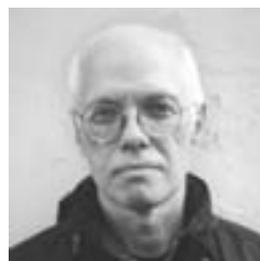


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THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

#212 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2007

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to the 42nd season of the Poetry Project. It's tempting to not make much of the fact that there is a new Artistic Director—that's me—since the Poetry Project has been brilliant in the continuous administration of its simple mission. My goal is to improve upon what we do well, most basically, providing a community setting in which a wide range of poets and artists can exchange ideas and information with a wide range of listeners. Naturally, making this service possible requires a good amount of work at things you, our readers and patrons, shouldn't have to worry about. As a nod to the curious I can share a few facts about myself: I was born and raised in Milwaukee as men were shuttling to the moon, I learned everything I know about poets and poetry from working at Woodland Pattern Book Center, I learned most of what I know about compassionate leadership from Anselm Berrigan. My favorite novel is *Moby Dick*, and I edit a poetry mag called *Gam*. I like history books. I write poetry books. Most importantly, if you ever need to say my last name out loud it sounds a bit like "semantic" but it's "Sa-maz-ek."

It is likely that our devotees have turned to the calendar page even before reading this missive. I hope that many of these readings make it onto your calendars. Brenda Coultas, Ron Padgett and David Trinidad are among those who have very new books out, Sparrow is coming down from his hamlet of Phoenicia to read with Lisa Jarnot (two poets who love Abraham Lincoln!), Cathy Park Hong is reading on a Wednesday for the first time. Alice Notley is reading here for the 39th time. The Monday and Friday Night Reading Series feature a lot of writers new to the Project as well as multi-media events, and a Poetry Pot Luck. Another thing, I make a really good cheesecake.

The transition into Directorship has been relatively smooth but necessarily frantic. I thank Corrine Fitzpatrick, Arlo Quint, John Coletti, Akilah Oliver, Steve Rosenthal, Stephanie Gray, Brendan Lorber, Anselm Berrigan, and the Poetry Project Board of Directors for their unlimited support and comradeship. And, of course, all of you who keep on showing up.

More soon,

Stacy Szymaszek

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

As most of you are aware, there has been some chair-swapping and bidding adieu as of late, with the departure of Anselm Berrigan and hire of Stacy Szymaszek as Artistic Director. Captain SS motored over to the desk with the newest iMac, and has been working all summer in the sweltering belfry.

After a trip to the West Coast that included a sea urchin attack and a slow speed camper van chase over a mountain in Mexico, I am back in my new role as Program Coordinator. Now privy to the No Wave and Brit art-punk mp3s left over from Miles Champion's tenure at this desk, I'll be answering the phone less and writing press releases more.

Arlo Quint has inherited the Program Assistant gig, having mentally prepared for the job by quitting Quitting Smoking during his honeymoon through Eastern Europe this past July. Arlo is the author of *Photogenic Memory* (Lame House Press, 2007) and *Days On End* (Open 24 Hours Press, 2006). He is a graduate of the poetics program at the University of Maine where he focused on critical theory and studied with poets Benjamin Friedlander, Jennifer Moxley, and Robert Creeley. As a critic, he has written on a wide range of topics from Letitia Landon's 19th century sentimental verse to the found poetry of Bern Porter. Some of his critical writing can be viewed online at UbuWeb. Arlo has been volunteering here since 2004, including an interim stint as Monday night sound tech. We're really excited that he has agreed to be consumed by the world of poetry, full-time.

The 2007-08 reading series will officially commence on September 24th. We're thrilled to welcome Akilah Oliver as the new Monday Night Coordinator. Akilah is a highly regarded poet and teacher. Her most recent chapbooks are *The Putterer's Notebook* (Belladonna Press, 2006), *a(A)ugust* (Portable Labs at Yo-Yo Press, 2007) and *An Arriving Guard of Angels Thusly Coming to Greet* (Farfalla, McMillan & Parrish, 2004). She is also the author of *the she said dialogues: flesh memory* (Smokeproof/Erudite Fangs, 1999), a book of experimental prose poetry honored by the PEN American Center's "Open

Book" award. She has been artist in residence at Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center in Los Angeles, and has received grants from the California Arts Council, The Flintridge Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. She has taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder and is core faculty at the Naropa University Summer Writing Program and adjunct faculty at Naropa. She currently lives and teaches in Brooklyn.

Stacy is now at the helm of the Wednesday Night Series, and I will continue to program the Friday Late Night Events.

Finally, and fabulously, John Coletti has answered the higher call towards Newsletter Editorship. John grew up in Santa Rosa, California and Portland, Oregon before moving to New York City fourteen years ago. He is the author of *The New Normalcy* (BoogLit 2002), and *Street Debris* (Fell Swoop 2005), a collaboration with poet Greg Fuchs with whom he also co-edits Open 24 Hours Press. His chapbook *Physical Kind* (Portable Press at Yo-yo Labs, 2005) is destined to be a classic. When you see this man, hug him. And hug Brendan Lorber too.

-Corrine Fitzpatrick

THERE IS NO MORE JOHN THERE IS ONLY ZUL

Ah weekends, I, too, miss them. It is with profound thanks and a deep sense of understanding that I, now, thank all previous editors for all the work they have ever done putting this "newsletter" together. Brendan, in particular, has been particularly helpful and patient. I feel as if I've dressed down his baby a bit this issue, but I hope, bit by bit, to make each issue just as attractive and insightful as his was. The Poetry Project and its community continue to be pivotal parts of my life, and so it's with a mixture of excitement and great nervousness that I take on trying to measure up to this job. And, yes, this is short because I've run out of space laying out issue #212! Special thanks to the staff, my friends, Molly, and all of the kind and brilliant writers who have contributed to making this issue happen. Please write to me with any and all suggestions, criticisms, wild compliments and holistic remedies for influenza brought on by InDesign sleeplessness.

-John Coletti

POETS VS. SCOUNDRELS

This summer, poet Ethan Fugate embarked on a 50 day, 3,500-mile cross-country trip on his bike, to raise money for cancer research in memory of his mother. Shortly before his trip his bike was stolen, but a fundraiser reading with Allison Cobb and Katy Henriksen was quickly held at the Zinc Bar and enough money was raised for Ethan to purchase a new bike. For details of the ride and information on how to donate to the American Cancer Society visit Ethan's blog at <http://biurbacopa.blogspot.com/>.

REGISTRY OF BIRTHS AND MARRIAGES

Sasha Berkman Tupac Spahr and Ismael Toussaint Durand O'Russa, welcome to your wonderful names! Arlo Quint and Christa Combellick got married in Maine and Dustin Williamson and Kari Hensley got married in California. Congrats!

SWEET RECOGNITION

Magdalena Zurawski is the winner of the 2006 Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Prize for *The Bruise*.

In case you are wondering what he is up to, Anselm Berrigan won a New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) 2007 Artist's Fellowship. Further congratulations to Betsy Andrews, Jen Bervin, Brandon Downing, Ted Mathys, Sharon Mesmer, Julie Patton, Kristin Prevallet and Marjorie Welish for winning New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) 2007 Artist's Fellowships as well.

Lila Zemborain is the recipient of a Guggenheim - 2007 Latin American and Caribbean Fellows.

THREE ROUNDS OF RAT

This summer Poets Jen Benka and Carol Mirakove headed up a communal street activism project called Relay Action Trip

(RAT) taking place before Independence Day, Women's Suffrage and Labor Day. Each person made a broadside, got on a team and went to their designated neighborhood to cover it in black, white and sometimes red paper glory. As of this writing, no one has been ticketed or arrested.

ONWARD

It is with shock and sadness that we note the passing of artist Jeremy Blake and filmmaker Theresa Duncan. They lived above the rectory on the grounds of St. Mark's Church and will be missed as our neighbors.

Artist Elizabeth Murray passed away in August peacefully in her country home surrounded by loved ones. There will be a formal ceremony to celebrate her life and art at MOMA in November.

And we also say goodbye to Grace Paley (1922-2007) and Liam Rector (1949-2007). You will be remembered and missed.



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WRITING WORKSHOPS AT THE POETRY PROJECT

BASIC AND BOLD: LOGOS R US – PATRICIA SPEARS JONES

TUESDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 9TH

Every writer finds a niche, a gesture, the thing that works in what they do. At some point it may become a style or convention. Sometimes it becomes a crutch. One way to break the mode is to be radical—that is, return to the roots. What brought you to poetry in the first place? This is a workshop for writers who want to re-look at how the structure and elements of poetry provide the wherewithal to make poems that are as ambitious, thoughtful and innovative as you want them to be. There will be in class writing, assignments, reading, and a revision project called —CAN THIS POEM BE SAVED?— in which you bring a poem that simply has not come to closure; seems to be stuck; or needs to be looked at by fresh eyes in the hope of finding what could make it work. This workshop is geared toward writers who have been seriously writing for some time. Please submit 5-8 pages of poetry and a brief description of what you'd like to accomplish in the workshop by September 28. African American poet, playwright and cultural commentator, Patricia Spears Jones is author of two collections, *Femme du Monde* and *The Weather That Kills*.

POETRY LAB: FORMS OF JOYFUL EXPERIMENTATION – TODD COLBY

FRIDAYS AT 7PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 12TH

In this workshop we'll forge new paths to the poem by investigating how far a poem can depart from being "a poem" and yet still be a poem. We'll experiment with breath, heartbeat, movement, blogs, the alchemy of words, visions, letters to the editor, spontaneity, psychoanalysis, collaborations, appropriations and self-hypnosis, along with various traditional forms. The main objective is to create a supportive and inviting atmosphere in our joyfully experimental "Lab." A partial reading list will include: Hannah Weiner, Jacques Lacan, Gertrude Stein, Diane Williams, David Markson, Miranda July, Thomas Bernhard, Bill Knott, Arthur Rimbaud, Alice Notley, Mina Loy, Charles Olson, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Todd Colby is the author of *Tremble & Shine*, *Riot in the Charm Factory*, *Cush*, and *Ripsnort*, all of which were published by Soft Skull Press.

WORLDLY AND INFINITELY DIMENSIONAL: A WORKSHOP – RACHEL LEVITSKY

SATURDAYS AT 12PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 13TH

In these times, the possibilities by which we may amplify, record, document, display, shape, formulate, and publish words increases daily. Although expanded media and its wide reach are in themselves a meaningful fact of our times, they don't necessarily enhance a poetry's resonance. How do we, and by we I mean both ourselves as ones and ourselves as groups, best construct and perform our poetries so as to be present in these particular times and yet open to the infinite possibilities of "projection," "conception," "performance"? Familiarizing ourselves with poets like Abigail Child, Julie Patton, Cecilia Vicuña, Bob Dylan, Linton Kwesi Johnson (some will be visiting the workshop), we will consider all means available and any means necessary to project living works into our world. Individually and collaboratively we'll construct performances, visual works, sound events, improvisations, etc. Rachel Levitsky is the author of *Under the Sun* (Futurepoem) and is the founder and co-editor of Belladonna Books.

The workshop fee is \$350, which includes a one-year individual Poetry Project membership and tuition for any and all fall spring and fall classes. Reservations are required due to limited class space, and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10th St., NY, NY 10003. For more information please call (212)674-0910 or e-mail info@poetryproject.com.

REMEMBERING SEKOU SUNDIATA (1948-2007)

Poet, teacher, performer, arts entrepreneur, and social justice visionary Sekou Sundiata died of heart failure on July 18. His passing at age 58 represents the premature loss of a unique prophetic voice, a generous spirit, and a wide-ranging talent whose individual brilliance coincided with untiring work to foster artistic community.



PHOTO CREDIT: MONIQUE DELATOUR

Sekou, who was born Robert Franklin Feaster, grew up in Harlem, the third son in a family with South Carolina roots. As a young man attending City College, where he studied with June Jordan and Toni Cade Bambara, he helped organize successful student agitation for an Open Admissions policy and institutional support for Black and Latino studies. A few years later, in 1974, he took part in the Sixth Pan-African Congress, the first of those gatherings held on African soil.

As Sekou began to perform his work and to issue it both in print and on recording, he also pursued a career as a teacher, first in the New York City public schools and then at the New School, where he was Writer in Residence before joining the regular faculty. His CDs include "The Blue Oneness of Dreams," nominated for a Grammy, and "longstoryshort." His extraordinary talents as a creator and performer of complex theater pieces blending music, voice, movement, and video projection shone in works including "The Circle Unbroken Is a Hard Bop" (about young African-Americans in the aftermath of the 1960's), "Blessing the Boats" (an autobiographical piece about kidney failure and successful donor transplantation) and, in 2006, "The 51st (Dream) State," a loving/critical meditation on American

citizenship in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the empire-on-steroids response. His theatrical productions, which toured widely here and abroad, brought together dazzling groupings of performers, including trombonist Craig Harris with whom he had a long collaboration. He appeared in Russell Simmons's "Def Poetry Jam" on HBO and in Bill Moyers's PBS series on poetry, and was a featured speaker at many arts events and conferences on citizenship and popular education.

Sekou often referred to African-American music as the indispensable source of his approach to composition. He preferred the title "ritual poet" to the inevitable "performance poet," citing the affinity between his pieces and oral forms like chanting and the dozens. He gloried in the riches of everyday language, espe-

cially the varieties of African-American vernacular with its exultation in style set alongside a passionate investment in telling stories that matter to physical and spiritual survival.

Sekou was an inspired creative go-between, working to bring together writer/performers, expressive traditions, and social movements whose cross-fertilization might never have occurred without his leadership. He lived the extraordinary highs and lows of his historical period without illusions or bitterness. To borrow a title bestowed on Audre Lorde by her biographer Alexis DeVeaux, he was a "democratic genius" who believed his own brilliance would flourish best in the company of many creative voices, including those of apprentice artists (his students) and working people who might never call themselves artists. His word rituals honor a world of living memory in the service of a livable and dream-worthy future for people of color, "Americans," and the planet.

*-Jan Clausen
New York City, NY
July 31, 2007*



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Brenda Coultas and Akilah Oliver: A Chat

In July I asked poets Brenda Coultas and Akilah Oliver to conduct a conversation with each other leaving the subject totally open to their own interpretation. With new books out or forthcoming this year and each having strong associations with The Poetry Project both past and present it felt like a perfect introduction to the season. They began talking online, then meeting at Tillie's coffee shop in Brooklyn, ultimately speaking together on a panel at Naropa over the summer. In the process they explored the process of retelling, new ways of mapping, uncovering and reassembling perceived truths surrounding them every day. Consciousness as focused experience. Desire as rethinking, rewriting.

BC: Its funny, we've known each other for a decade and a half (since '91). We've had only a very few chats, yet I feel that we've always been supportive of each other as artists.

I'm writing this from my mother's house in Indiana, in the attic is a box with a flyer for the Sacred Naked Nature Girls, a nude performance group of women that you co-founded. You were writing from the body, treating the body as a source of memory, story, and beauty. What strikes me are the multiple voices, each woman telling her own story of desire, and identity, that theme of multiple voices, the disjointed but connective thread of narrative, continues in your work. The reading you did this summer at Naropa, included a chorus of voices. Are these voices specific to the African American community?

AO: The idea of voice and multiplicity of voices in both performance work and in poetry stems from a rejection of the voice as solely representative of a subject, or a community of subjects. I'm working against homogeneity, because I think it limits and erases those very voices it claims to unify.

With the Sacred Naked Nature Girls (SNNG), a multicultural collective of women, we each explored race and sexuality as points of departure, and as multiple points of entry, I think, rather than as subject positions. That was some years ago. The group has not performed together since 1999. But that work, that working from the idea of the voice as multi-vocal, as a point of departure that invites new entries, that has continued on in my written work and in how I perform that work. So, the thread continues. Now, I think I'm more interested in narrative as fragmented, necessarily fragmented, in my negotiation of language, as are memories, borders, and bodies. I experience voice as an experience of language, rather than as representative of any specific community, though cultural and gender narratives continue to challenge my work. I'm interested in the spaces of collapse within and between narrative frames.

BC: You told me recently that you had always wanted to be an outlaw. Why? Was this instinctive or inspired?

AO: I don't remember saying that!

Well, language that does not conform to desired consumption is an outlaw. Language that desires its own consumption is an outlaw. Language that assumes its desire as desirable is an outlaw. And by language I also mean bodies.

BC: Could you tell me more about resistance in your work and discuss work that practices a resistance to the dominant culture?

AO: For me, I think writing within mutable frames and hybrid forms has become a writing of resistance, and also, writing narrative as if it were a kaleidoscopic rip in the dominant fabric. Dominant here gets tricky, but I think I mean narratives, practices, and systems that reify and reinforce hegemony, an already belated binary, but tenacious in its resistance! So the New York Times, for example, can be a narrative of resistance if and when it's read as a narrative of resistance. (I attempted to make it so through my cut-up experiment published as *a(A)ugust* by Brenda Iijima's Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, and she did the terrific collages for the chapbook, which further disturbed the authority of the Times.) But this resistance, I think this goes back to the reader, that the text exists only within the context of readers to some degree. I mean if no one reads something then it doesn't exist as a function or event, it simply is as an object. So almost any form, you know, books, texts, newspapers, or even blogs (which to some degree represent a new form of disposable 'literature') can potentially offer resistance to a dominant culture that relies on discard and erasure, but again, I think it works on two sides; that of the author in terms of intent, form, or deformation, and on how the reader receives and uses a text. It may or may not be a democratic exchange between author, text, and reader.

The dominant culture's practice of discard and erasure relates to consumption as commodity, and the reader, buyer, of this narrative, well, we're all complicit in some way. So one, I think, as readers, we're always in a dialogue of consumption, but it does not have to be one that leads to discard and

erasure as an act of power. Rather, I think works of resistance, and readers who resist, if I'm understanding what you mean by that, anticipate the im/possible, rather than recycle the possible. For example, I read Toni Morrison's *Paradise* some time ago and cited a line as an epigraph to a poem I wrote. The line is, "The sky behaved like a showgirl." Recently, this past summer at Naropa, this book came up more than once, like twice with two, different people, Michelle Puckett and Selah Saterstrom and they both cited one of the first lines from the book, which I didn't remember at all. That line is; "They shoot the white girl first." My point is about how a text presents itself and establishes itself in the memory network of a reader, *how that offers an examination of how literatures of resistance tap into the body*. The body as a site of redemption and a site of violence. So the body is a concrete metaphor (sort of like concrete poetry). I remembered "the sky" and they remembered "they shoot the white girl," but we each entered the text in dialogue with the body as situated in and outside of dominant cultural narratives, because Morrison set it up that way. What Morrison offers up is an invitation to practice the imagination as a vehicle of investigation into the privileging of bodies as sacred or sacrificial, or both. So again, race and gender are entwined. Talking more to Michelle about her reception to the book, she went on to say in an email to me, "This (*Paradise*) is a literature of resistance in that it uses its form (novel) to resist our normalized ways of making meaning of race. We are left to question, and to recognize our obsession with race as a maker of meaning...." I like that. And I would add gender too, how we challenge gender as a "maker of meaning" is important to literatures of resistance. What our bodies hold from any text, inform how we learn to love more fully. So maybe "literatures of resistance" offer us some ways to think about history and transcendence.

The Putterer's Notebook, a chapbook published by Rachel Levitsky and Erica Kaufman's terrific little press Belladonna, is a section from a longer work in progress that I'm writing called *Corruptions*, an anti-memoir. In this work, I'm engaging with two texts that for me are also narratives of resistance, philosophical texts,

Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* and Jacques Derrida's *Aporias*.

Agamben offers me an opportunity to further investigate ideas of "the irreparable," which leads me to the question of "What is the primary duty of repair?" given that "At the point you perceive the irreparability of the world, at that point it is transcendent." Then of course one question morphs into other questions, other memories, which present themselves as occasions in which to situate this dialogue of making sense of one's life...and ultimately one's death.

Ok, so then *Aporias*, among other meditations, explores an aporia as a variant plural: as experience, as passage, as the encounter of a limit. So, basically, death. Derrida offers a discussion of aporia and border: "What is at stake in the first place therefore is not the crossing of a given border. Rather, what is at stake is the double concept of the border from which this aporia can be determined." I think too of Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the border as a discursive place populated by multiple bodies, rather than as a dividing line. In the *Putterer's Notebook*, I'm morphing memory, ways of telling, investigation, and I imagine myself in dialogue with other thinkers, partially now that I think of it, because that's how I constructed a self for myself since I was a little kid, by being in dialogue with people

and ideas primarily through books. I'm lucky enough to have a community of writers to talk to now as well.

In what way does my engagement with these questions that arise from these books inform how I structure an anti-memoir? Well for me, this is a writing of resistance, resistance to the notion of the memoir as only recovery, you know, of retelling a truth, or of a document of a life that contains it's own authority, its own ethic if you will. Rather, the telling, for me, is a question of ethics, and the form somehow has to hold an examination of the kinds of questions that drive my imaginary, my memory of my body as a life. I think that dominant narratives encourage us to engage 'the past' as some nostalgic locatable place governed, you know, just governed. That makes it easier to control bodies and landscapes, representations. Whereas for me a memoir of resistance, an anti-memory, would encourage one to write lineage (because memory, memoirs, are linked to this idea of lineage) as the plural line leading to the question, or to many questions. Anyhoo, as my mother would say, that's what I'm grappling with in *The Putterer's Notebook/Corruptions*.

I'm also engaging with "diaspora," especially as thought out by Ian Baucom in his *Charting the Black Atlantic* where he poses the question of if and how one can "locate the postcolonial," which leads him to the physical and metaphorical examination of water, another passage. So we're back to structure and forms, topographies and temporality as, wavy, you know, not straight lines. So a narrative of resistance might not look like any one form, it may attempt to write its own shape into being.

BC: You refer to using philosophical text as perhaps methods of inquiry. What role does theory play in your work? Is it a point of departure or a framework?

AO: I think both, but more of a point of entry, departure, and re-entry. I started using theory, assigning theory texts, while teaching poetry workshops at Naropa a few years ago because at its best, theory to me reads like poetry, and often poetry is inquiry, which to me is wonderful because then new ways of looking happen for the reader, which is also what theory offers. Here in New York earlier this year, a few women poets met to read and discuss theory and philosophy for a while. Through them I discovered Agamben.

I think of you as using place and source materials in your work to uncover, and I'm using theory sort of in the same way, to locate, uncover and for me, dislocate.

I think of your work as part documentation, part 'uncovering' and recovery, particularly *A Handmade Museum*, and then too, as a new kind of storytelling, one that remakes a narra-

tive of place. So my question is about place, really. Place as both physical (Indiana, the Bowery), and place as imaginary (as the body of the character, as the idea from which you work). How does place figure into how you approach a book project, & how much does place inform the form?

BC: I'm very concrete which is a hindrance. I wish I was not so grounded (no pun intended). But it is the way I learn, have to gaze for a good long while at a subject or obsession, in order to know it. Place lends itself to that naturally with its concreteness as well as the symbolic aspect.

I focus on what is near, I go narrow but deep (I hope). I like what William Faulkner's refers to as writing from his own inexhaustible postage stamp of native soil. A tarot card reader told me that I get stuck on the details, and I find that to be true. You asked what's important for me, my concerns as a writer, as a recovery worker remaking a narrative of place? In *Early Films* (Rodent Press), I was interested in ripping the veil off the quaint notion of rural America as a bucolic pasture of "family values." I wanted to talk about desire, repression, the unofficial history composed of rumors, intrigue; the danger in the darkness of a rural road. The Midwest is a dangerous place, especially for young women. At age 18, I was an object of desire, stalked. Based on my conversations with other women, I take my experiences as the norm.

You mentioned phantoms in our conversation, and whether or not these were real life characters or fictions. They were mostly based on the real. Not much fictionalization was required. For *The Bowery Project*, I wanted to document the remains of the Bowery before the wrecking balls arrived. As you know, it's now all bankers living on the Bowery, my neighborhood draws bankers from all over the world. It's a bargain basement for Wall St. and in fact, the realtors advertise "live near your favorite restaurant."

Writing about place relates to the tangible, my access to Bowery, as a real time space that I inhabit on my way to the number 6 train, etc. I wanted to know the space, to describe it, to remember what was lost but not to romanticize the suffering that took place because the Bowery was a place of addiction and despair, but it was also home in the post WW2 years, to a community of working class men and women and later during the drug epidemic of later 20th century, home to artists such as photographers Robert Frank, Cynthia McAdams, and the writers Kate Millet, Hettie Jones, John Giorno. I was turned on by the Jane Jacob's classic, "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," and so I began to think of applying her idea about sidewalks and public character to a poetic investigation into the remaining street life of

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the Bowery. Wondering if I could in my investigations become a public character, the eyes upon the street, the person who knows everyone and who everyone knows and thus serves to create cohesion and connect the fragments of the street.

I took as models several projects that made use of sidewalks. Jacobs describes the point of city sidewalks which "is precisely that they are public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion."

The Abolition Journal, Book 1 of The Marvelous Bones of Time (Coffee House Press, 2007) was a quest to find out what is better about my county, and the intent was not to demonize (would be too easy and obvious), but to uplift the higher nature of the local. In that work, I want to know how the better folks of that place and time, (pre-civil war) reacted to living on the borderline of a free, yet very racist culture (Indiana), and a slave state (Kentucky, which was divided itself between the Union and the Confederacy).

The ghost stories are an experiment in genre, in creating and preserving folklore, by retelling stories and rumors of the uncanny, the weird. I always loved comic books like "Creepy," "Eerie," etc. There's a thrill involved, chills, and I think ghost stories help us deal with death or to deny death, and with the question of what's next? Do we survive and if so, in what form?

AO: The subtitle of your book, *The Marvelous Bones of Time*, is "Excavations and Explanations," which for some reason makes me think of desire. The desire to expose, to see and to have the hidden, the ghostly. What are your thoughts on history as ghost-like, or do you think of it that way?

BC: Yes, history is most certainly ghost-like. We catch glimpses of it, fragments, for example the faded writing on the sides of building advertising used clothing on the Bowery, the few remaining stars of David on 19th century Orchard Street buildings, glass bottles and bones unearthed by the tide at Dead Horse Bay, an old city landfill where horses were rendered, a place where the excavation is by nature. I think of excavating as going down into the layers, revealing what has been lost, discarded (accidentally or intentionally). These layers might be pages in a library or a literal digging into a mystery or subject. From them we may compose a mosaic of a time or event.

AO: Do you look at excavation as repair?

BC: Yes, a salvaging of sorts.

AO: We were both on a Naropa panel this past summer, "Beyond New American

Poetics – Rhizomic Directions." You said that one of the ways you think of lineage is as "archiving the social." I'm really fascinated by that. Could you talk more about who/what/where/how you locate your lineage? Or is lineage a living, you know, continuous becoming? Why, in archiving and keeping alive lineage, do you engage history in your writing? What drives you?

BC: I could have said anything on that panel! I was slightly terrified. Our fellow panelist Rod Smith quoted a line from Kevin Davies' "Pause Button," "Those who imagined themselves / panelists." That was my failure, I could not imagine "myself as a panelist" even though I was one. Where does one begin to address the fifty years since New American Poets? I focused on revolution, which is a subject that I've been interested in lately as a way to talk about the war. Also, as a way of honoring my very good friend, the poet, anarchist, and Indy media journalist Brad Will, who was murdered by paramilitary forces in Oaxaca this past fall.

What I meant by "archiving the social" was to note the failure of journalism. I'm thinking of Ed Sander's manifesto on Investigative Poetry which exhorts poets to be the historians of the future. Also of Williams' famous poem, "It is difficult / to get the news from poems. Yet men die every day / for lack / of what is found there."

Yes, I engage history in my writing, it's too rich to ignore. I research again so as to know my obsession. In regard to lineage, from the top of my head, Bernadette, Anne, Alice, Maureen, all those great women of the second generation New York School have been guiding voices. By the way, did I mention to you that I was so inspired by the Sacred Naked Nature Girls, that I read topless?

Akilah Oliver is the author of the she said dialogues: flesh memory (Smokeproof/Erudite Fangs, 1999), a book of experimental prose poetry and is on faculty at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Naropa University's Summer Writing Program. She has previously taught at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her chapbooks include a(A)ugust (Yo-Yo Labs, 2007), The Putterer's Notebook (Belladonna, 2006), An Arriving Guard of Angels, Thusly Coming to Greet (Farfalla Press, 2004). She currently lives in Brooklyn.

Brenda Coultas is the author of The Marvelous Bones of Time: Excavations and Explanations published by Coffee House Press this fall. Other books include A Handmade Museum (Coffee House Press, 2003) and Early Films (Rodent Press 1996). She lives in the East Village in Manhattan.

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In Search of the Goldmouth Poet: Susie Timmons

by CAConrad

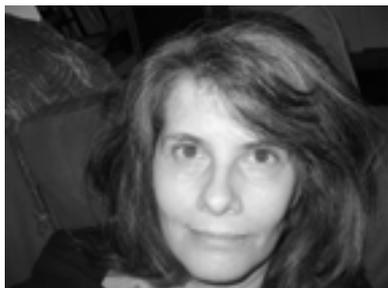


PHOTO CREDIT: SUSAN TIMMONS

A couple years ago I interviewed Eileen Myles for *The PhillySound* and asked her about poets she admired whose work was out of print or difficult to find. Her most enthusiastic response was for Susan Timmons, and in particular her book *LOCKED FROM THE OUTSIDE*. Later I shared the same question with other poets to get them to also talk about excellent poems that are hard to find. Larry Fagin dubbed this *THE NEGLECTORINO PROJECT*. I included Eileen Myles' answer for the others to see, and Susan Timmons' name appearing sparked additional enthusiasm for *LOCKED FROM THE OUTSIDE*, especially from poets like Anselm Hollo who chose the book for the inaugural Ted Berrigan Award with fellow judge Ron Padgett, published in 1990 by Yellow Press.

The book is almost impossible to find these days, but I was determined to at least see it, open it, somewhere, somehow. (*AND YOU SHOULD TOO!*) Then when Kevin Thurston invited me to read in Buffalo he took me to see Michael Basinski who gave us an unforgettable tour of the poetry collections. At one point he asked us if there was something in particular we wanted to see, and I didn't hesitate to blurt out *SUSAN TIMMONS PLEASE!* And after walking and searching the long aisles, there it was. Two copies of it on the shelf, and it was difficult to leave that dimly lit spot behind, wanting to read the book from cover to cover.

Even though I only had time enough to read a couple poems that day it was immediately clear why so many poets rave about her work. She throws a sharpness that grabs hold instead of slicing and running. And I thought about those poems a lot, fibrous thoughts itching my every inch of reading. And I kept missing opportunities to see someone's copy of the book for one reason or another. "all I ever wanted the only thing I ever wanted / the one thing I wanted out of life / was to feel you up. / and burn you up, baby, if I may be so bold / detergent."—Susan Timmons, "A GHOSTLY SHARK"

Then I was fortunate enough to come into contact with Timmons, and she was kind enough to mail me a copy of the book! And I started reading it as soon as I pulled it out of my post office box, and I walked onto the street reading it, unable to stop! And I

called my friend Frank Sherlock who was still at home recovering from meningitis, and *TOLD HIM THAT HE HAD TO SEE HER BOOK!* And I went over to his apartment and we read the book out loud together! Fantastic! And we were sad when it was over! Not a single lagging moment! And now of course I envy those of you who haven't read this book yet for the initial incisions to be made. Not that it loses power after the first reading, it's just that the first time is the first time, then after that it's....

We need this book back in print! And while she left New York some years ago to acquire degrees in geology and invertebrate paleontology in Massachusetts and Chicago, she never stopped writing poems. She's back in New York now with her dogs *Curly* and *Sweetie Pie*, camping, writing, and taking care of her parents who are soon to be married 60 years. She recently wrote to me that she's having a lot of dental work done these days. "I need three crowns. My mouth is like a goldmine. I really like my new dentist. She's very sweet. She said apologetically, 'Please don't feel bad if you drool. It's natural.' At last! No stigma." Her mouth is like a goldmine. And we're lucky she is about to skip right off *THE NEGLECTORINO PROJECT* list and back into the family of poets looking for gold. Hello! So glad you are back!

CAConrad is the author of Deviant Propulsion (Soft Skull Press, 2006), (Soma)tic Midge (Faux Press, 2007), and The Frank Poems (Chax Press, 2008). Yell at him at CAConrad13@AOL.com and he will yell back louder!

The Fruit of the Banana Tree

He was the only pope they ever knew. He was
quote real unquote

The portrait is peering straight into you
but in fact it is blind. You, who

never rode the south shore
never went to the pow wow
never kissed Pavlova's slippers

saw the temple burn
entirely missed the harp factory

WIND IS MY FRIEND

Chicago wind nips and bites,
then strides right through me
leaving in my place
a pure light-hearted blank.

*

Thank heaven for spiny things
things with edges, stickers, thorns
things that sting, scratch, cause
a rash, scrapes,
needles, spikes –
spiny.

*

the chain link oxidized–

hard by a brick wall in January's afternoon

bottle caps dig in
to the asphalt

tattered flag
puffed black plastic grocery bag

Susie Timmons moved back to New York in May of 2006 after an absence of 15 years, time spent mostly in Chicago and other portions of the heartland. She now lives in Brooklyn, and is laying low, putting her poetry house in order. She enjoys camping and paddling her canoe.

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We Mimic the Poisonings: a Brief Introduction to the Poetry of Ed Roberson

by Brandon Shimoda



PHOTO CREDIT: MARGUERITE HARROLD

What are we seeing? And what, in serious company, saying? Through, and to, what, the flux of substance and attention stretched—“the cross-mirrored depth reached / infinitely back into either—”—and at—“the long likeness.” In experi-

encing Ed Roberson’s poetry, myriad questions arise which formulate, through “burn and blindness,” our coordinates, both “flowering” and “stinking,” in the ecological matrix. His poems enjoin the willing into shifting, precariously embodied landscapes, by way of a powerfully individual diction and language, and a torqued, yet organically fluid syntax, that enacts the temporal anxiety besetting the communities and relationships within. The reader is ushered into a witness of the sights (sites) and sounds of that precariousness, into the landscape, where he or she must reconfigure breath, the tongue, the eye, and be a part.

As cumulative motion, the precariousness of risking the annihilation of the self at every breath and turn never departs from Roberson’s poems. It is the precariousness of existing within systems—political, social, communal, musculoskeletal—constantly evolving within an increasing economy of waste, in which human beings are an active, but by no means, preeminent substance. In Roberson’s *City Eclogue* (Atelos 2006), the city is drawn as the site of perpetual displacement, the social entanglements of man set alongside irrupted ecologies, mounting ordinances of waste turning inside-out. What is the cost of displacement and marginalization? Or, rather, how has marginalization become so readily accepted a texture?

In the short poem “for supersedure,” questions are swallowed by their own incontestability: “where do we go / but to die into immunity in this life // the thousand deaths that evolve us.” As Walt Whitman in “This Compost” charges us to “Behold this compost! Behold it well!,” Roberson engages in a sense of mixed terror and potential—generative precariousness—for it, from Whitman again, “renews with such unwitting looks its prodigal, annual, sumptuous crops. / It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last.” What has not changed is the perception, if not the sprung and settling dust, of the underpinnings of society disintegrating beyond preservation, the individual and collective cry drawn “as if in sand, that no one’s taking seriously.” Roberson’s poems then—in their perceptual science—are the call to “take” and “take seriously,” the shifting districts, the dissolution of the body behind the throttling scaffold, the stave against “malarias of memory,” dubious balances of powers, inequities piling up as towering collaborations over the streets, “an avalanche / in position.” The poems are a streaming revolution of the singular, idio-

syncratic and socially-conscious voice at the moment(s) in which “it” becomes polysemous.

When the fractures raise the structure raises the voices rise the poems—and with what affirmation, death, “but life that has been bitten / with its own sweating body of remembered / shortcomings ... all the life and death weight,” repeated—acknowledgement as shuttling poison née sugar through the organelles of action and persistence, do we turn away or face, “through / our feed of poison to inedible ourselves why / we mimic the poisonings to live to die at all.”

for supersedure

bitten without puncture through to see why
we die. the tooth our being born. only to know
when it places in that wound. it falls out.

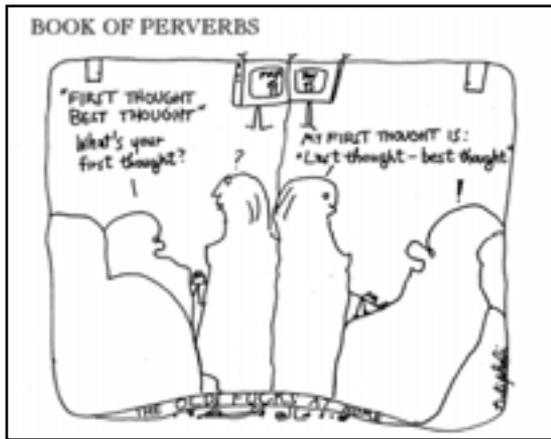
a cobra of standing eye to eye spits
us its vision the poison of able
to see that we can see it there go blank.

curl the scorpion carries up at the sky
coil of the rattler lifted into song.
into the mouth of the rainbow open

the road on its vanishing point tongue
already swallowed. where do we go
but to die into immunity in this life

the thousand deaths that evolve us through
our feed of poison to inedible ourselves why
we mimic the poisonings to live to die at all.

Brandon Shimoda has poems and critical reviews appearing or forthcoming in Colorado Review, Tarpaulin Sky, Free Verse, TYPO, Practice, Aufgabe, and elsewhere. Book projects are forthcoming from Corollary Press and Flim Forum Press. He curates the New Lakes reading and performance series, co-hosts the New Lakes Poetry radio show, and is a contributing editor for CutBank and Octopus Books. A small number of the above can be found in Missoula, Montana, where he currently lives.



EVENTS AT THE

Wreckage of Reason: XXperimental Women Writers Writing in the 21st Century, Make/Shift, and Bookforum, among other places. *Beauty Talk & Monsters*, her first book, is a collection of film-based stories recently published by Semiotext(e). She is currently working on her new book, *Showtime*. Masha's reading will be accompanied by a screening of *Nora*, a short narrative by Portland-based artists **Holly Andres** and **Grace Carter**. The film examines gender roles in terms of sexuality, power, violence and commerce by using tools of the classic suspense/thriller genre, most notably Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Please visit them online at <http://hollyandres.com/> & <http://gracecarterfilms.com>.

busy working on various community development/greenspace/sustainability projects under the rubric of Think Green! Her chapbook *Notes for Some (Nominally) Awake* is available from Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs. Julie often takes to the road for various collaborative projects with Uri Caine, and is a fellow at Bates College's Common Grounds Project in Maine, where she collaborates with Jonathan Skinner.

MONDAY 10/15 SABRINA CALLE, SARA MARCUS & BETHANY SPIERS

Sabrina Calle's work can be seen in *Small Town, Bombay Gin, String of Small Machines and Dutemesence Press*. Her chapbook, *The Gilles Poem: 2006 Winter Collection*, was released by Transmission Press. Her work has been shown at High Energy Constructs Gallery in Los Angeles (in a group exhibition of poetry/literature/language and the visual/media arts). **Sara Marcus** is a writer, musician, and curator of the series QT: Queer Readings at Dixon Place. Her writing appears in *Encyclopedia, The Advocate, and Heeb*, where she is also Politics Editor; and is forthcoming in an anthology of writing and artwork by touring musicians and in a collaborative chapbook with visual artist Tara Jane O'neil. She is working on a book about punk rock and feminism and is a member of the folk-rock band, Luxton Lake. **Bethany Spiers'** chapbooks, *Pretty Lou* (Black Lodge Press) and *empty birdhouse afternoon* (33 Press) are due out this fall. Previous work can be found in *the tiny, Write or Die, and Beyond Polarities*. Her first album, *Apparitions*, was released under the moniker, The Feverfew, in 2004 by Eyeball Records. Its follow-up, *The Owl and the Mirror*, is currently in pre-production.

WEDNESDAY 10/17 CATHY PARK HONG & MARK MCMORRIS

Cathy Park Hong's second book, *Dance Dance Revolution*, was chosen for the Barnard Women Poets Prize. Her first book, *Translating Mo'um*, was published in 2002 by Hanging Loose Press. She is the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship. She has written articles and reviews for *The Village Voice, The Guardian, and Salon*. Currently, she teaches at Sarah Lawrence College. **Mark McMorris** is a poet and critic who was born in Jamaica. He has been writer in residence at Brown University, and Roberta C. Holloway Visiting Professor in Poetry at the University of California, Berkeley. His books include *The Blaze of the Poui*, a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Prize; and *The Black Reeds*, winner of the Contemporary Poetry Series prize from the University of Georgia Press. *The Café at Light*, a text of lyric dialogue, appeared in 2004 from Roof Books. He is currently an associate professor of English at Georgetown University, in Washington, DC.

FRIDAY 10/19 [10 PM] THE TINY ISSUE 3 RELEASE PARTY

Come out and celebrate the recent release of the third issue of the annual print poetry journal *the tiny*, featuring readings by **Nick Piombino, Anthony Hawley, Kristi Maxwell**, and others. Plus live music from Grand Mal. BYOB. *The tiny* is an annual literary journal based out of Brooklyn and edited by Gina Myers and Gabriella Torres. For a complete list of contributors, visit <http://thetinyjournal.com/>.

MONDAY 10/22 RACHEL ZOLF & MATT HENRIKSEN

Rachel Zolf's newest collection of poetry, *Human Resources*, was released in spring 2007 by Coach House Books. Her previous collections are *Masque*,

SEPTEMBER

MONDAY 9/24 HETTIE JONES & JOAN LARKIN

Hettie Jones's twenty books for children and adults include her memoir of the Beat scene, *How I Became Hettie Jones*; the poetry collection *Drive*, which won the Poetry Society of America's Norma Farber Award; *Big Star Fallin' Mama, Five Women in Black Music*, honored by the New York Public Library; and *No Woman No Cry*, a memoir she authored for Bob Marley's widow, Rita. Just published are *From Midnight to Dawn, the Last Tracks of the Underground Railroad* (with Jacqueline Tobin), and a third poetry collection, *Doing 70*. Jones is the former Chair of the PEN Prison Writing Committee, and the editor of *Aliens at the Border*, a poetry collection from her workshop at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. **Joan Larkin's** most recent collection is *My Body: New and Selected Poems* (Hanging Loose Press). Previous books include *Cold River* (which received a 1997 Lambda Award), and *Sor Juana's Love Poems* (translated with Jaime Manrique). Larkin co-founded Out & Out Books during the feminist literary explosion of the 70's. She has served as poetry editor for the queer journal *Bloom* and co-edits the University of Wisconsin Press autobiography series, "Living Out." Her anthology of coming-out stories, *A Woman Like That*, was nominated for Publishing Triangle and Lambda awards for nonfiction. In her fourth decade of teaching writing, she teaches in the low-residency MFA program in Poetry at New England College.

WEDNESDAY 9/26 LISA JARNOT & SPARROW

Lisa Jarnot was born in Buffalo, New York and now lives in Queens. She is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *Some Other Kind of Mission, Ring of Fire, and Black Dog Songs*. Her biography of poet Robert Duncan is forthcoming from University of California Press. Her fourth full-length collection of poetry is forthcoming from Flood Editions. She is a teacher and a blogger. **Sparrow** is in the midst of his fifth campaign for President. He lives in Phoenicia, New York with his wife, Violet Snow, and his daughter Sylvia. Behind their house, an elderly rabbit named Bananacake resides in a rustic hutch. Sparrow writes the gossip column for the *Phoenicia Times*. (He invents all the gossip.) Sparrow's books are *Republican Like Me: a Diary of My Presidential Campaign, Yes, You ARE a Revolutionary!* and *America: A Prophecy—the Sparrow Reader* (all on Soft Skull Press).

FRIDAY 9/28 [10 PM] BEAUTY TALK & MONSTERS: MASHA TUPITSYN and NORA, a film

Masha Tupitsyn is a fiction writer and feminist critic who lives in New York City. She received her MA in Literature and Cultural Theory from the University of Sussex in England. Her fiction and criticism has been published or is forthcoming in the anthology

OCTOBER

MONDAY 10/1 OPEN READING SIGN-UP 7:45PM, READING AT 8:00PM

WEDNESDAY 10/3 LARRY FAGIN & CHARLES NORTH

Larry Fagin is the author of many volumes of poetry including *Complete Fragments: Poems 1976-86, I'll Be Seeing You: Selected Poems 1962-76* and *Rhymes of a Jerk*. He also co-edited *The Green Lake is Awake: Selected Poems of Joseph Ceravolo*. He teaches poetry privately as well as at the Poetry Project and Naropa University. He is a former Co-Director of the Poetry Project and is the founder and now co-editor of the press *Adventures In Poetry*. **Charles North** is the author of eleven books of poems, most recently, *Cadenza*. James Schuyler called him "the most stimulating poet of his generation" and the *Washington Post* said he is "one of the most memorable of contemporary poets." His previous poetry collection, *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight*, was chosen as one of five finalists for the inaugural Phi Beta Kappa Poetry Award.

MONDAY 10/8 KASS FLEISHER & DANTE MICHEAUX

Kass Fleisher is the author of *The Bear River Massacre and The Making of History; Accidental Species: A Reproduction; The Adventurous; and Talking Out of School: Memoir of an Educated Woman*. Her work has appeared in *The Iowa Review, Denver Quarterly, Bombay Gin* and *electronic book review*, among other journals. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Illinois State University in Normal. **Dante Micheaux** is a poet whose work has appeared in various journals and anthologies—including *Bloom* and *Callaloo*. In 2002, Micheaux received a prize in poetry from the Vera List Center for Art & Politics. He is a Cave Canem Fellow, recipient of the Oscar Wilde Award and a New York Times Fellowship. Micheaux is a candidate for a Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing at New York University and resides in Manhattan.

WEDNESDAY 10/10 WILL ALEXANDER & JULIE PATTON

Poet, novelist, playwright and essayist **Will Alexander's** most recently published work is *Sunrise and Armageddon*. Forthcoming is *Singing in Magnetic Hoofbeat*, a book of essays from Factory School. He is also the author of *The Stratospheric Canticles; Asia & Haiti; Above the Human Nerve Domain; and Towards the Primeval Lightening Field*. Alexander has been teaching in the Graduate Program at Mills College. **Julie Patton** is a performance artist and writer. She is

POETRY PROJECT

which was shortlisted for the 2005 Trillium Book Award for Poetry, and *Her absence, this wanderer*. Belladonna* books published a chapbook of Zolf's poetry in 2005 entitled *From Human Resources*. Zolf lives in Toronto and was the founding poetry editor of *The Walrus* magazine. She is presently working on a new collection examining competing knowledges in Israel-Palestine. Once a teacher in the public schools, **Matthew Henriksen** is now a freelance copy editor and carpenter's assistant. He has a chapbook, *Is Holy*, from horse less press. He founded and continues to edit the online poetry journal *Typo* with Adam Clay; curates The Burning Chair Readings; and co-edits and produces *Cannibal* with his wife, Katy, in Greenpoint.

WEDNESDAY 10/24

BRENDA COULTAS & DAVID LEVI STRAUSS

Brenda Coultas is the author of *The Marvelous Bones of Time*, released from Coffee House Press this fall. Previous books include *A Handmade Museum*, and *Early Films*. In 2005, she was a NYFA fellow, and is on faculty at the Study Abroad on the Bowery program at the Bowery Poetry Club. **David Levi Strauss** is a writer and critic in New York, where his essays and reviews appear regularly in *Artforum* and *Aperture*. His collection of essays on photography and politics, *Between the Eyes*, was published by Aperture in 2003. *Between Dog & Wolf: Essays on Art & Politics* was published in 1999 by Autonomedia/Semiotext(e), and *Broken Wings: The Legacy of Landmines* (with photographer Bobby Neel Adams) was published in 1998. He received a Guggenheim fellowship for 2003-04, to write his next book, *Image & Belief*. Strauss currently teaches in the Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College.

MONDAY 10/29

A 65TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FOR D.A. LEVY

Come honor the life and work of the late Cleveland poet-publisher who was at the vanguard of the mimeo revolution of the sixties. We'll recognize the radical and enduring effect Levy left on small press poetry and publishing during his short life with readings of his work and informal discussion. Participants will include **Steve Clay, Bob Holman, David Kirschenbaum, Jake Marx** and **Gary Sullivan**, with some special guests, too. This event will be preceded by a screening of Kon Petrochuk's Levy biopic *if i scratch if i write* at 5:00 p.m. at the Bowery Poetry Club. Co-curated with Boog City. Visit www.poetry-project.com for short bios on all and directions to the BPC.

WEDNESDAY 10/31

ANN LAUTERBACH & DAVID TRINIDAD

Ann Lauterbach's books include *And for Example, On a Stair and If In Time: Selected Poems 1975-2000*, all from Penguin. A collection of essays, *The Night Sky: Writings on the Poetics of Experience*, was published in 2005. She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and grants from Ingram Merrill and the New York Council for the Arts. In 1993, she received a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship. She is the Co-chair of Writing in the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College. **David Trinidad's** most recent book of poetry, *The Late Show*, was published this year by Turtle Point Press. His anthology *Saints of Hysteria: A Half-Century of Collaborative American Poetry* (co-edited with Denise Duhamel and Maureen Seaton) was also published this year by Soft Skull Press. His other books include *Plasticville* and *Phoebe 2002: An Essay in Verse*. Trinidad teaches poetry at Columbia College Chicago, where he co-edits the journal *Court Green*.

NOVEMBER

FRIDAY 11/2 [10 PM]

FELICIA LUNA LEMUS & JESS ARNDT

Felicia Luna Lemus is the author of the novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). She teaches writing at The New School and lives in the East Village of Manhattan. More information: www.felicialunalemus.com. An avid student of old fashioned mixologies, vast piracy, and assorted buggery, **Jess Arndt** is attempting to combine the three in her yet to be finished first novel, *Shanghaied*. Set in Gold Rush San Francisco, the story weaves and staggers through the opium dens, brothels and sailor holes of the Barbary Coast, continuously distracted by the gold-lust and tarts. Having just finished her MFA at Bard College, she trades her time between Brooklyn and a small island off the northwest coast of Washington State. She has most recently been published in *Velvet Mafia: Dangerous Queer Fiction*, *Instant City Journal*, *Encyclopedia Literary Journal*, *Bottoms Up! Writing About Sex from Soft Skull Press*, and *Baby Remember My Name*. She has a short story coming out from Inconvenient Press later this fall, in collaboration with visual artist, Xylor Jane.

MONDAY 11/5

OPEN READING

SIGN-UP 7:45PM,
READING AT 8:00PM

WEDNESDAY 11/7

ALICE NOTLEY & AKILAH OLIVER

Alice Notley is the author of more than twenty-five books of poetry including the epic poem *The Descent of Alette*, and *Mysteries of Small Houses*, one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize and the winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Poetry. Notley's long poem *Disobedience* won the Griffin International Prize in 2002. In 2005 the University of Michigan Press published her book of essays on poetry, *Coming After*. Her most recent books are *Alma*, or *The Dead Women*, from Granary Books, *Grave of Light: New and Selected Poems*, from Wesleyan, and *In the Pines* from Penguin. **Akilah Oliver** is the author of *The Putterer's Notebook*, *a(A)ugust, An Arriving Guard of Angels Thusly Coming to Greet*, and *the she said dialogues: flesh memory*, a book of experimental prose poetry honored by the PEN American Center's "Open Book" award. She has been artist in residence at Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center in Los Angeles, and is core faculty at the Naropa University Summer Writing Program and adjunct faculty at Naropa.

MONDAY 11/12

GUILLERMO CASTRO & MELISSA BUZZEO

Guillermo Castro is a poet and translator and the author of the chapbook *Toy Storm*. His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies. His non-fiction is featured in the anthology *Latin Lovers*. His translations of Argentine poet Olga Orozco, in collaboration with poet Ron Drummond, are featured in *Visions and The U.S. Latino Review*. His collaborative piece with composer Doug Geers, *Bride of Kong*, was presented on CCI Composers Collaborative's Non Sequiter 2000 summer festival on the Mainstage at HERE (NYC). Born in 1977 in NY, **Melissa Buzzeo** has worked as a counselor, curator, professor and palm reader. Her first full length book *What Began Us* is just out from Leon Works (NY). A second, *Face*, is forthcoming fall 2007 from Book Thug (Toronto). In addition she is the author of three chapbooks: *In the Garden of the Book*, *City M* and *Near: a luminescence*.

WEDNESDAY 11/14

RON PADGETT & SUSIE TIMMONS

Ron Padgett will be reading from his new collection of poems, *How to Be Perfect*, just published by Coffee House Press. Other books of his include *You Never Know* (poems), *If I Were You* (collaborative works),

ALL EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM
UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

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

and two memoirs, *Oklahoma Tough: My Father, King of the Tulsa Bootleggers* and *Joe: A Memoir of Joe Brainard*. Next year Black Widow Books will issue Padgett and Bill Zavatsky's translation of Valery Larbaud's *Poems of A. O. Barnabooth*. Go to www.ronpadgett.com. **Susie Timmons** lives in Brooklyn. Her work has been published in recent issues of *Court Green*, *Columbia Review* and other little magazines, and appears in the anthology *Up is Up and So is Down*. Her book *Locked From the Outside* (winner of the inaugural Ted Berrigan Award) is readily available. She currently has several manuscripts nearing completion.

FRIDAY 11/16 [10 PM]

POETS' POTLUCK

Just as it sounds: poets and the (ingestible) goods they bring. Please join us for a low-key night of readings, performances and really good homemade food. Stacy Szymaszek might bring cheesecake, Arlo Quint might bring a cake baked by Christa Quint, John Coletti will whip up something delicious, as will Filip Marinovic. Planning is in the works—if you'd like to participate please email cf@poetryproject.com.

MONDAY 11/26

STEPHEN MOTIKA & ERICA KAUFMAN

Stephen Motika's chapbook, *Arrival and at Mono*, will be published this fall by sona books. His work has appeared in *The National Post of Canada*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and *The Common Review*, among other publications. "The Field," a collaborative exhibition with Dianna Frid, was on view at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois, Chicago, in December 2003. He is the coordinator of public programs, education, and exhibitions at Poets House in New York City and publisher of Nightboat Books. **Erica Kaufman** is the author of several chapbooks, most recently *Censory Impulse* (Big Game Books), *civilization day* (Open24Hours), and a *familiar album* (winner of the 2003 New School Chapbook Contest). She is the co-curator/co-editor of *Belladonna*/Belladonna Books*. Erica lives in Brooklyn and is a Ph.D. candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center.

WEDNESDAY 11/28

HANNAH WEINER'S OPEN HOUSE

A reading to celebrate the vision of poet Hannah Weiner (*Clairvoyant Journal*, *Little Books/Indians*, *Spoke*) and the publication of *Hannah Weiner's Open House* by Kenning Editions, featuring readings, performances and recollections by **Charles Bernstein, Lee Ann Brown, Abigail Child, Thom Donovan, Patrick Durgin, Laura Elrick, Kaplan Page Harris, Andrew Levy, Bernadette Mayer, John Perreault, Rodrigo Toscano, Carolee Schneemann, James Sherry, Anne Tardos & Lewis Walsh**. See www.poetryproject.com for short bios on all.

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BOOK REVIEWS

BILL BERKSON

SUDDEN ADDRESS, SELECTED LECTURES 1981-2006

CUNEIFORM PRESS / 2007

REVIEW BY MURAT NEMET-NEJAT

“The continuous right-angled skin of the city.”

James Schuyler (quoted by Bill Berkson in his essay, “Sensation Rising,” *The Sweet Singer of Modernism*)

“love, of a not yet visible asia, is the barely sensible skin of plants.”

from souljam, k. Iskender (from *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry*)

“...not ‘words to choose to call up visual representations,’ but the reverse: visual representation to call up words.”

Robert Duncan (*The H.D. Book*)

The following two quotations from the essay, “Poetry and Painting,” in Bill Berkson’s *Sudden Address* contain the heart of what Berkson says about art, and more importantly, about writing, poetry, as part of the totality of artistic activity:

“Just when you have been glued to a screen, in the street you see people or a slice of sky, *and the sensation is continuous*. Your ordinary vision is suddenly invigorated or heightened. That sustenance has some staying power. I know I owe some of the presence of my alertness to looking at paintings... One should not get too entranced by the materialism of art.”

“Any divergence from the ‘everything’ principle is obfuscation, which often is necessary as a ground, to add surface. Surface is the great revealer. Both poetry and painting have surface, but with poetry the location of the surface is harder to pin down. With paint, color, the issue of revelation becomes paradoxical. As Robert Smithson reminds us, ‘The word *color* at its origin means to ‘cover’ or ‘hide’...”

The history of the second half of 20th century art can be understood in terms of a subtle, yet critical, dialectic which exists in relation to the idea of surface (or skin), of the relationship of this surface both to the painter (artist) and the viewer—even a more persistent question underlying this dialectic: are the two (produc-

er/consumer) separate or in the final analysis, inevitably, inexorably, must they be the same?

On the one hand, one has Clement Greenberg’s tautological view of surface where the fundamental act art, and the artist, can perform is to reassert the flatness of this surface, its aggressive, disillusioning materiality. In this concept, the reaction to such surface is instantaneous, like a bat hitting a ball (its vision instantly released). It is important to realize that in this concept the viewer is split away from the surface (indirectly from the artist) and put in a position of a consumer, an observer, a judge, an investor.

On the other hand, one has an idea of surface where, in Berkson’s words, “the sensation is continuous.” What does this continuity consist of? One can compare Berkson’s words with Greenberg’s principles. In both, the surface, the artistic object, propagates beyond itself. In Berkson this involves the heightening of “alertness.” Consumptive value is replaced by “sustenance” and a re-realization of flatness by invigorating “vision.”

The most profound characteristic of the second concept of surface, a skin which is a skein, is resistance, which makes instantaneous release impossible. For Berkson, a confrontation with this second kind of surface affects confrontations with all surfaces, including the texture of language, that is to say, poetry. Poetry is a heightened sustenance of attention originating from the ambiguous, retentive surface of painting.

For this to occur, the viewer must respond, in Berkson words, with a “complexity of seeing” which unfolds a perceptual weave which takes place in time, through a movement of language at the center of which is the eye. This is not a poetry of images, or even metaphors, but in Robert Duncan’s words from *The H.D. Book*, “not ‘words to choose to call up visual representations,’ but the reverse: visual representation to call up words.” The poem written with the eye materializes the complexity of seeing, its perceptual process, in real time, as a movement to an unheard mental music. In this dialectic skin possesses the materiality of space (not of a carton), bending by time, as space does. Time is a continuous present, while perception unfolds, walks its process through the eye. The experience of reading the poem and its writing, and the originating experience of looking at a painting (in “dumb” wonder) merge as a continuous, single performance.

Berkson calls this point of union between sensation and thought a “demarcation,” releasing the language locked in the body of the painterly surface into the parallel skin of a poem. For Berkson (as in photography) “a silence as full as light” is at the heart of this process:

"In Vermeer...the point of entrance is precise and realistic: surface, wall, threshold... the whole image strikes eye and mind instantly in equal measure like a natural light, a reminder that light is substantial, has pressure and weight....The ideal conception is that technique is...an ongoing state of attention like affection that lasts." ("Idealism and Conceit (Dante's Book of Thought)," *Sudden Address*)

"Light and space are vector fields, and with gravity thrown in, the balance of matter, if you see balance, is a continual demarcation: let it go at that and call it door." ("Idealism and Conceit")

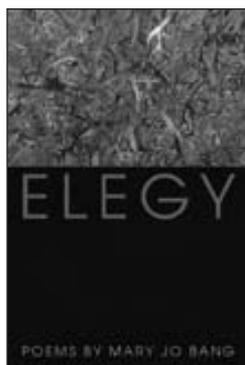
"In art, materials tend to assert their own values. Fresco wall painting—*fresco buono*, as they say—thrives upon a literal crystal effect, a chemical reaction based on the behavior of lime...“The plaster dries and re-crystallizes, the pigment particles are locked among the crystals. Thus the colors become an integral part of the wall’s surface, to endure as long as it endures” ("Idealism and Conceit")

"‘Declarative’ is one component of the surface; others are a silence as full as light, and a countenance that functions as a forward edge." ("Idealism and Conceit")

"Truth is face to face with every facet—or nuance—of fact. By nuance, every word of a poem gathers the poem’s surface energy. By the nuance of its surface a painting we might call ‘great’ actualizes its place in the culture that bred it." ("History and Truth," *Sudden Address*)

Berkson is saying that the poem transforms the light inherent in the painting surface, its “vector” field (the motion the word suggests), through the complexity of seeing, into a language of light, poetry inherently being a language of light. How does this transformation, the opening of the threshold occur? By a movement from facet to facet (of a painting surface or of a diamond), from nuance to nuance. In that way sensation, “fact,” is transformed into “thought.” Berkson suggests a poetry of light is a poetry of mental, spiritual motion, its darts and unfolding, something in another occasion I call “eda.” This motion extends beyond the surface of the painting to poetry, to history, to culture (a surface of duration, not instantaneity), for example, to Dante’s walk through the pratfalls of *The Inferno* (which Berkson compares to the tribulations of Buster Keaton), to Baudelaire’s wandering in the arcades of Paris

NEW POETRY FROM GRAYWOLF PRESS



ELEGY by MARY JO BANG

"The loss of a child—especially an only child who is in the prime of life—is one of the most painful experiences anyone can have and one, common sense tells us, almost impossible to render in an age of sensory overload. But Mary Jo Bang’s *Elegy* is the grand exception. In its insistence on “the inexhaustible / Need to be accurate,” *Elegy* is wholly absorbing. Avoiding all self-pity, false comfort, sentimentality or finger pointing, Bang’s terse, oblique poems anatomize grief, guilt, and mourning in pitiless detail. Do things ‘improve’ by the end of the year whose progress this heartbreaking book charts? Not really, but the reader is transformed. I know of no contemporary elegy that has its power.” —**Marjorie Perloff**



MODERN LIFE by MATTHEA HARVEY

"Matthea Harvey’s vision of America is spooky, apocalyptic, and beautiful: proof that there is wonder in even a dark time like ours.” —**George Saunders**

"Harvey is a master of the surprising, illuminating connection—the cognitive jump-cut....There is something of the Martian about Harvey...her disjunctions, reversals and bizarreries arise from her inquiry into the strangeness of sentience itself—how odd it is to think, feel and look.”
—**Maureen McLane, *The Chicago Tribune***, praise for *Sad Little Breathing Machine*



BOOK REVIEWS

or to Frank O'Hara's riffing off the "rectangular skin" of the city in his ecstatic walking poems of New York.

Because such a surface possesses resistance, autonomy (notice the word "crystal," suggesting light, used three times to describe this quality), it can not be totally appropriated. A plethora, a nest of unuttered words remain buried in it. (Berkson's word for the initiation of this process is "confrontation," between the poet and the superior surface of a painting, very much like a translator's feeling of lack in front of the totality of the poem he or she must translate.) Therefore, the demarcation, the movement from facet to facet in a poem is full of gaps. The gaps constitute the "*silence as full as light*" in a poem. While motion (light) creates a music of the eye, the gaps create a music of silence, heard by the soul, beyond the frame of either the painting or the poem. This way, Greenberg's tautological surface, celebrating the materiality of its own flatness, is transformed into something else, a skin, its sensuous complexity a gateway to a spiritual space:

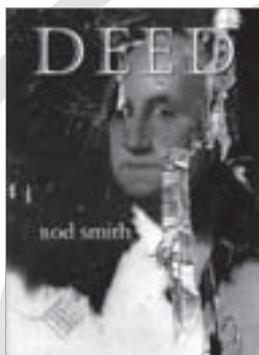
"The truest response to a painting or poem is another poem....In Michael Blackwood's movie of Guston at work, you get to see the beautiful gesture Guston makes as he walks slowly back towards the painting to put on more paint: He's

sort of swimming through the air like a Chinese dancer, and the hand not holding the brush is blocking off a certain area of the composition as he zeroes in." ("Travels With Guston," *Sudden Address*)

Bill Berkson's *Sudden Address* is, through seven essays written over twenty-five years, an extended meditation on transforming the surface of painting into a poetry, a language of spiritual essence. The first three, "Poetry and Painting," "Travels with Guston" and "Idealism and Conceit (Dante's Book of Thought)," lectures given between 1981 and 1985, focus mainly on painters. The last four, "History and Truth," "Walt Whitman's New Realism," "Frank O'Hara at 30," "The Uneven Phenomenon?—What Did You Expect?" lectures given between 2005 and 2007, express a view of American poetry developed from the idea of skin and surface explored in the earlier essays.

It is not within the scope of this review to present in detail the subtle movements, sudden diversions of Berkson's thought. I leave such pleasure to the individual reader. This reader at least became addicted to them, waiting for the next hit, and, when the book was finally over, he felt a sweet kind of sadness. Suffice it to say, Berkson suggests, as I tried to show in this review, that

KUHL HOUSE POETS *SSS* Mark Levine and Ben Doyle, series editors



Deed • Rod Smith

"The great thing about Rod Smith's work is that it is all risk all the time. In *Deed*, he has built a substantial architecture whose 'perilous upkeep' is dazzling. This is a truly wondrous book."—Peter Gizzi
98 PAGES • \$16.00 PAPERBACK

Complex Sleep • Tony Tost

"This reflexive and, yes, complex collection of procedurally nuanced anti-lyrics is a useful example of what is happening right now. Tost's approach is speechy and textual by turns. He hypnotizes the reader with his tricks but then gets you to stay with how good the work is. You wake up feeling refreshed and thinking how excellent it is to enjoy reading poetry this much!"—Laura Moriarty
122 PAGES • \$16.00 PAPERBACK



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BOOK REVIEWS

sensation turns into thought by means of a mental walk through resistant space, by means of a dialogue with it.

I would like to end this review by pointing to a “purloined letter” moment in the reading of this book which points to the subtlety and heart of its achievement, namely, the book’s title. Given that there are seven lectures in the book, one expects the word “address” to be in the plural. Suddenly one realizes that what is being “addressed” is not the audience, but the painting’s surface; a single, continuous activity which has gone on through Berkson’s life as a human being and a poet and through this book, “I feel, old man,/ seemingly, in the calligraphy of sudden thoughts.”

Murat Nemet-Nejat is the author of The Peripheral Space of Photography (Green Integer, 2003) and the editor of Eda: an Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry (Talisman House, 2004).

HERIBERTO YÉPEZ

WARS. THREESOMES. DRAFTS. & MOTHERS
FACTORY SCHOOL / 2007

REVIEW BY JULIANA SPAHR

Heriberto Yépez, a Tijuana writer and Gestalt psychotherapist who has been showing up in the US scene a lot during the last few years, writes so as to push buttons. I remember hearing him read a few years ago at a small liberal arts college. He read a piece that had a man fucking a pregnant woman and the fetus, his son, giving the man a blow job as he did it. I remember squirming as I listened with feminist anxiety to Yépez reading this. At the end of the story, it became clear that the man is George Bush and the fetus is George W. Bush and I had that ah ha moment where I realized that my desire for gender decorum had me protecting all sorts of imperial male lineages. Or another story: at UCSC a few years ago Yépez gave a paper in which he claimed “I am Bush” and then, moving from “I” to “we,” he said “Bush is our way

to hide we are Bush” (this talk is posted at mexperimental.blogspot.com). If these examples are not enough to prove his provocations, then check out his video “Voice Exchange Rates” (available on YouTube) where he has a cartoon image of Gertrude Stein with a swastika carved into her forehead Charles Manson style asking “why do Americans rule the world?”

The Bush as fetus reading really pointed out to me how distinctive Yépez’s work is. It manages to hide provocatively conceptual, decorum-defying work behind the mask of conventional and well written realist fiction. His work often appears at first to be one thing (an off color story about fucking) and then he turns it into something else (a pointed story about political lineage). Reading his work I frequently realize that he has got me; he has played with my politesse and made a joke of it.

Wars. Threesomes. Drafts. & Mothers, Yépez’s first single author book in English (he has oodles in Spanish), is similarly provocative. In terms of genre, it is probably a short novel. It mainly has three characters: two twin brothers and a woman. And the story starts in Tijuana with an attempt by one of the twins and the woman to pick up a failed romance. But really, not much beyond conversation and self-reflection happens in the book, and there is much talk about drugs (is the brother using or not?), sex and sexuality, jealousy, and parental abandonment. As the book proceeds, the frame keeps shifting and the narrative is interjected with things like writing exercises, something that might be authorial commentary (“This story I’m reading now was written for a reading”), and Michael Palmer, Don DeLillo, and Reinaldo Arenas quotes. The novel comments frequently on how it is written in English.

But it isn’t just that *Wars. Threesomes. Drafts. & Mothers* is mainly a novel, it also seems to be a romance. But an exploded romance. It starts, as the romance usually does, with the couple meeting up again. And like many

romances, which often feature lovers from opposite sides of border disputes, their union is used as a way to talk about relations between nations. At moments the couple represents the north and the south. At other moments it is the US and Iraq: “In every couple there’s a United States and there’s an Iraq. ‘United States’ is the so-called-victimizer. The master that ejects violence. The psy-ops, the war-words, the troops he sends (The Kids!). And then—the other side—the so-called-victim. The so called poor-little-you. The one that doesn’t deserve the treatment you’re getting, your bad-bad luck, the you-know-who. ‘Iraq.’”

But because Yépez is primarily a provocateur, not a reconciler, the romance plot keeps going astray and mutating into something that suggests there are no easy and conventional answers to the political questions of today. The woman, in addition to being a former girlfriend of one of the twins, is also part of a threesome in Toluca. The twins, at moments are twin brothers and at other moments the narrative voice suggests that they are an invention of the writer: “I felt like I was two different men, and I started to call that situation <<My brother and I>>.” At other moments it is suggested that the whole story, threesomes and all, has been fabricated by one of the twins so he might “have something else in life.” Or the twins really are twins and they, similar to father and son Bush, have sex in the womb and outside it also. In other words, Yépez refuses to reestablish the couple, to end with the conventional marriages of the romance.

It might be stretching things a little to read *Wars. Threesomes. Drafts. & Mothers* as a romance. So perhaps another way to think of this book is as an equivalent to the “I am Bush” statement. I remember a friend angrily claiming that he was not Bush, that he had not started the war and neither had Yépez, after Yépez’s talk. But Yépez’s point was more subtle and multiple. It suggested that involvement in the oil wars extends beyond individuals and nations. It rejected

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lefty narratives of US exceptionalism (the sort of assumption that the US is so exceptional that it does horrible things all on its own; that other nations have no involvement) and first world passive guilt. It pointed to the ties between the US and Mexican government, the complicity of US and Mexican citizens. It rejected the idea that anyone could be innocent of anything. *Wars. Threesomes. Drafts. & Mothers* does similar work as it suggests that our personal romantic relationships carry wars in them. (This is a diversion, but it is also striking how this book does not fit easily into US definitions of "border literature;" yes, Yépez, like many writers of the border, moves between Spanish and English but the book is fascinatingly devoid of "local" markers and descriptions, ethnic exceptionalism, nationalism, etc.).

Although part of me wants to keep returning to the romance genre because the book does end with a collapsing and exploding couple of sorts: "The two planes not only announced the end of an era, but they also

showed what was happening inside our lives. I read 9-11 as the crumbling of two people together, as the failure to stay next to each other, standing. And one tower was Emily, and I was the other tower, the first to fall. And then one tower was my brother and the other tower was me, and we both were destroyed by the world. And one tower was my father, and he became dust, and the other tower, my mother, and she became a scream. And the two towers were love."

Juliana Spahr's most recent book is The Transformation (Atelos P, 2007).

ELAINE EQUI RIPPLE EFFECT : NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

COFFEE HOUSE PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY JOANNA FUHRMAN

At a recent reading given by Elaine Equi to an audience of inner-city high school students, I was impressed by how enthusiastically the teens responded; they laughed

hysterically at all of her jokes, and poked each other, audibly uh-humming at the lines they found clever. I can't think of any other poet so steeped in the traditions of surrealism and experimental writing who could connect so immediately with an audience of young people. What I find even more impressive is that Equi's ability to connect arises not from pandering or sentimentality, but instead from true wit. Defying those mainstream poets who preach against modernist difficulty, Equi's work reminds us that poetry can be sophisticated and challenging as well as accessible. Her poems are influenced as much by Lorine Niedecker and Francis Ponge as by the language of advertising and pop culture.

In the recently released *Ripple Effect*, Equi's collection of new and selected poems, there is a generous sampling of newer poems as well as work from her ten previous books. Throughout the years, Equi's voice has remained surprisingly consistent. The surrealism in the early poems might be slightly looser than the pared down lyricism of the

Burning Deck 2007

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[Dichten =, No. 9; translated from the German by Rosmarie Waldrop]

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later poems, but her sly and dry tone is the same. Because I've never been able to find any of Equi's pre-Coffee House books, I particularly enjoyed reading the older, playful poems in these collections. I love the almost-childlike perspective in "Ode to Chicago:"

In my city
dinosaurs are not extinct.
Evening they stroll downtown
and their smooth bodies
from the fortieth floor
are often mistaken for golf courses.

The speaker's lack of surprise, her tonal straight face, is a hallmark of Equi's style. She seems to be suggesting that it's perfectly natural to mistake a stray dinosaur for a golf course. This coolness creates the humor in the poem. What's funny is not that crazy stuff that is happening, but the way the speaker describes the bizarre as being perfectly normal. The poem ends with a great quasi-punch line; she writes, "in my city we know where we are from/ We remember our origins." These lines transform the poem from a dream-like fantasia into a parody of identity politics in poetry. The poem was written in the late seventies or early eighties when it was common for poets to write clichéd poems romanticizing the struggles of their distant ancestors. Equi's poem seems to be asking, if you're going to write about origins, why don't we go all the way back to the primordial? In this way, "Ode to Chicago" becomes a surrealist revision of the cliché genre that used to flood literary journals.

Equi's more recent work, while still quirky and fresh, is slightly more abstract. Take her description of medicine in "The Pill's Oval Portrait," one of the many new poems in the collection. This poem is typical of Equi's work in the way that she anthropomorphizes an inanimate object.

"Chemical Twin
neither happy nor sad
beneath your pink bonnet,
yellow halo,

There's a gentleness in her approach to the pills. Through the use of the twin and bonnet imagery, the speaker imagines the pills

as being like babies, and in this way suggests her love for them. What's interesting is how the imagery changes—instead of extending the baby imagery, Equi approaches the pills from various perspectives. This diversity of techniques makes the poem particularly rich. Like a cubist, she approaches the pills through multiple frames of reference. While the poem begins with sharp images, it quickly switches to sonic play.

lozenges of displaced anger
hexagons of grief.

The sound of the word 'hexagon' echoes the word 'lozenges.' Songlike, the syntax repeats. Soon the poem switches approaches again. She imagines the pills being born (again personifying them) in a "temple of science." What makes the poem interesting is the way Equi abstracts from the narrative. She ends the poem with,

Years from now, we will marvel
at the crudeness, remote,
that the economy needed to grow
so busily passive. Just one of not
too many ways of being in the world.

As in a Robert Creeley poem, Equi uses lineation and subtly contoured syntax to abstract her argument and make us experience language in a different way than we usually do. Grammatically, a reader would expect the word "remoteness" instead of remote. By using the adjective form instead of the noun, Equi destroys the illusions of naturalness, deconstructing the myth of a unified perspective. Her use of space on the page has a similar distancing effect; the spaces within and between the lines slow down how the poem will be read. Both techniques are means of abstracting the image.

Creeley described what he wanted in his poems as, "an almost objective state of presence so that they [words] speak rather than someone speaking through them." Equi, like Creeley, introduces an awkwardness into her poems so that the reader can have an encounter with language *itself*, freed from the banality of pure utility. Many poets, since Williams and Creeley, have played with syntax to achieve this effect.

What is so remarkable about Equi's work is how she includes these moments of lyric abstraction in poems that at first glance appear so accessible and funny. This juxtaposition of the comic and the lyric throughout her work is what makes her poetry so satisfying and fun.

Joanna Fuhrman's most recent book is Moraine. She teaches creative writing at Rutgers University and in the New York City public schools.

HANNAH WEINER
HANNAH WEINER'S OPEN HOUSE
EDITED BY PATRICK DURGIN
KENNING / 2007
REVIEW BY KAPLAN HARRIS

Hannah Weiner's frequent collaborator John Perreault, writing twenty years ago in the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, reports that Weiner burned the documentation of her early Street Works and other performance-related projects. The performances of that period were meant to be transient (a contrast to the monumentality of "great art"), but there was almost always a textual record. Weiner felt no need to preserve such a record, and unfortunately that made it difficult to appreciate the range of her work across a prolific period of almost thirty years. So Patrick Durgin's new edition answers to the urgent need for a recovery project by bringing together a generous selection of her unpublished, uncollected, and out-of-print works.

The first third of *Hannah Weiner's Open House* documents Weiner's emergence in the 1960s between the worlds of art and poetry. The title of the book comes from a two-day event (or non-event) in which Weiner invited the public into the homes of fellow artists and poets. (Bernadette Mayer didn't have a home so she stood on a street corner during the allotted time.) In one project Weiner vacuumed the streets, and in another she went around the city labeling objects like signs and doors. At one point she devised a feminist alternative to concrete poetry by creating panties with tape printed from the International Code of Signals.

The record of these projects is featured alongside Weiner's poetry from the 1960s,

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much of which had gone out of print. In *Code Poems*, she uses a sequence of nautical signals to explore the nature of translation and the limits of anti-war poetry. In *The Magritte Poems*, the material word anchors a series of short lyric poems against the pull of mock-interpretive footnotes. Such work reveals Weiner's early interest in non-linear communication or what she terms "knight's thinking" (as in chess).

In the early 1970s Weiner's poetry underwent a major transformation when she developed the ability to see auras like text messages on the environment around her. The "seen words" were almost wholly interruptive at first, but they soon became more functionally integrated in her journal writing. They gave advice. They helped with daily chores (picking out clothes, keeping appointments, cooking pancakes). Increasingly she used the disconnect between the quotidian and the clairvoyant messages as a means to study the artifice of language. Over the years Weiner kept reinventing the formal presentation of her "clair-style" work, and this new edition makes it possible to track such changes through excerpts from *Clairvoyant Journal*, *Little Books/Indians*, *Sixteen*, and *Spoke*.

Durgin has previously edited Weiner's *Page* (Roof Books, 2002),

Country Girl (Kenning Editions, 2004) and on-line editions of her early journals for the archives at the University of California-San Diego. So he is well-suited for the task of publishing Weiner's multivocal texts—with their challenge of non-normative spacing and capitalized, italicized, and underlined words. Durgin's choice of arrangement is useful because it provides a narrative for Weiner's evolving aesthetics and reveals her ongoing commitment to what he calls a "phenomenologically complex realism." The selection also shows how frequently Weiner paid homage to fellow artists and poets, such as Marjorie Strider, Barbara Rosenthal, Ted Berrigan, Jackson Mac Low, and Charles Bernstein. So three decades of the avant-garde can be traced through her association with different schools of art and poetry. And within the clairvoyant poems are the names of innumerable friends and fellow travelers who beckon to her attention. One aura offers up a playful, affectionate message, "BARRY CANT PRINT." This is of course Barrett Watten, who typeset the Angel Hair edition of *Clairvoyant Journal*.

But not all of the later poems fall under the auspices of "clair-style" writing. The long poem "Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women," published here for the first time, underscores the vicissitudes of



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by Laura Moriarty

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"Moriarty, who is the deputy director at Small Press Distribution, studied with Robert Duncan, and is closely associated with Bay Area poet Norma Cole (who provides an introduction). She has the former's baroquely elegant turns of mind and the latter's searching fluidity, but her subject matter—roughly, how one's self-perceptions form a language that one is always comparing to one's experiences—is all her own, and her lines have a tensile gorgeousness unlike anyone else's...."

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Weiner's social activism:

The work-day begins at 4:00 in the morning and doesn't end
until 9:00 or 10:00 at night
We knew exactly what we should do, get married
When her work is weighed or measured by the foreman she is
cheated shamelessly
We produced exactly the same number as the national
average
Not provided with any protection against the toxic effects of
the insecticides
Fifty-five masters degrees
For housing they are herded into barracks too filthy for
human occupation
We're poised at this historically important point

In the poem every other line alludes to graduates of Radcliffe College or peasant workers in Guatemala. Juxtaposed against one another, the lines suggest material and cultural differences that destabilize a political identification based on gender. The poem thus scrutinizes the cracks and fissures between second-wave and third-wave feminism. The poem is also somewhat autobiographical. Weiner graduated from Radcliffe in 1950 with classmates who likely included Barbara Zimmerman Epstein (class of '49) and Adrienne Rich (class of '51). Weiner clearly set off in a much different direction with her politics and aesthetics, and this new edition helps chart that path.

Kaplan Harris is currently editing, with Rod Smith and Peter Baker, The Selected Letters of Robert Creeley for the University of California Press. She and Mel Nichols curate the Ruthless Grip Poetry Series at Pyramid Atlantic Arts Center (www.dcpoetry.com/rg).

JAMES THOMAS STEVENS

BULLE/CHIMÈRE

FIRST INTENSITY PRESS / 2006

REVIEW BY BETH ANDERSON

"Moving across that bridge, we meet in our first foreign land." We might have jet lag or be in love or be reading *Bulle/Chimère*, a new book by James Thomas Stevens published by First Intensity. In this series of connected poems, the speaker is traveler and lover, dedicated equally to the beloved and the geographical and potently entangled with both. *Bulle/Chimère* is a departure in many ways from *Mohawk/Samoa: Transmigrations*, Stevens' recent collaboration with Caroline Sinavaiana, but nevertheless provides an involving read across cultures and continents that fits recognizably into the Stevens oeuvre.

Bulle/Chimère simultaneously builds upon and circumvents expecta-

tions offered by the categories of love poem and travel literature with poetry that demonstrates why "our surface tension, our iridescence, / requires remaining fluid...": Shifting through and around genres rather than succumbing to them, Stevens is the most agile of guides. Neat interplay between such expectations and the poems themselves is further emphasized by nuanced use of different definitions of the title words *bulle* and *chimère*. In less judicious hands, this trope could burden the work and lines such as "The body is always involved" might take on a ponderous tone of pronouncement, but in Stevens' poetry these moments are almost spontaneous, resembling remarks between travel companions that convey insights in real time, exchanged by "[c]himerical us, floating above the city."

One of my friends makes his living as a freelance travel writer. His specialty is the cruise, and his articles are alluring despite the form of excursion they investigate. One of the appeals of reading in the travel writing genre is the fantasy such writings offer; I would much rather read the article than take the cruise. And one of the genre's appeals to a writer may be the opportunity to provide such an escape: to author an extended postcard of sorts, a portrayal energized by subjectivity and exempt from the journalistic requirement that a place be presented from more than a single, slanted perspective. The first work by Stevens that I read was grounded in the industrial setting of Buffalo. His poems valued and rendered valuable that oft-maligned landscape. The particular geographies of *Bulle/Chimère* include numerous tourist destinations, which require a different sort of reclamation, and Stevens' reinvention of these places is no less deft. From "Thames":

St. Catherine's Docks and the Catherine wheel.
Here, forever turning
above the grey embankment.

Always walking on water, we
Move to the foot
of Westminster Bridge.

You tell me to
Look up.
From this,
Your favoured place, where time
is framed
between the statuary and sycamore.

And resting on a bench
we become
alchemical."

Stevens' approach to the love poem is equally adroit. Love experienced on a Eurail pass is notoriously illusory, a *chimère* ("an impossible and foolish fancy") or *bulle* ("insubstantial, groundless, or

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ephemeral"). So the genre says. But as Stevens points out, the bulle can be "held in coherent shape" and the chimère may take more solid form, a mythological but visible composite of three beings. This chimerical structure is echoed by the idealized and fantastical "us" formed of lovers plus landscape ("I see an image / of us inverted, / above / the winding *Isère*..."). Like bulle and chimère, locale can be touched but only fleetingly grasped. "[I]t all becomes fantastical, here." "Here" is Lake Erie or Sassenage or Regent's Canal, and it is also the page, poem, or postcard, the site where lover, beloved, and scene merge to produce the stuff of myth. Throughout *Bulle/Chimère*, Stevens retains contact with these regenerating patterns of event and recounting. While his "historian" continues "cataloging the small histories, that you were here, and I was here," he also glories in the fact that "serendipitous us," "[e]ver traversing us," endures "[f]or all improbable possibility." A bursting bubble may end the book, but the relationships established therein remain coherent, held intact by Stevens' words.

Beth Anderson lives in Oakland, CA. Her most recent book is Overboard (Burning Deck).

EVERY GOODBYE AIN'T GONE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF
INNOVATIVE POETRY BY AFRICAN AMERICANS
EDITED BY ALDON LYNN NIELSEN AND LAURI RAMEY
THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS / 2006
REVIEW BY CHRISTOPHER STACKHOUSE

An anonymous National Endowment for the Humanities reviewer, when looking at a proposal for this anthology, made the following claim: "This proposal does not pass the significance test.... the rescuing, preservation, and dissemination of everything cannot occur. A pecking order is necessary." It is a striking comment. The collection in question, *Every Goodbye Ain't Gone: An Anthology of Innovative Poetry by African-Americans*, edited by Aldon Nielsen and Lauri Ramey (who tell the story about the NEH reviewer in their introduction), serves to balance the effects of such dismissive if not hostile literary canonical gate-keeping.

Cultural urgency aside, a good deal of beauty, intelligence, and urbanity would be sacrificed in American literature were the work of this particular set of poets not acknowledged. One ever-present question is asked by the negation: What constitutes American literature? The question's urgency is even more powerful now, as poetic practices that were once the property of experimentalists increasingly find their way into so-called mainstream poetry. More individuated experiences of 'poetics' in recent years have been accused of attempting to 'denature the poem', or are being viewed as products of 'modernist dogma'. Positions that echo or espouse this kind of nonsense have on the line a sense of identity to lose, or fear that an otherwise sure-footedness is at risk of being befuddled. If there was or is a threat (to the American lit canon specifically) offered by "African-American mid-century poetic experimentalists" and their

logical posterity, it is that the 'experiment' does have room to grow, and is in itself a cause for investigation, sparking an increase in scholarly attention to itself. This is not (or at least should not be) a threat, or something to be disputed at all. By virtue of its institutional neglect, the work of such writers is ripe for reading, fruit born of nutritious material hard wrought.

Though Nielsen and Ramey "make no pretense to encyclopedic coverage of avant-garde, black poetics from decades following the Second World War," the assembled work does present one clear, suitable, social framework by which to experience poetically the conditions of African-American writing during that given time. Contemplating this version of "Post-War" (and after) American writing further problematizes murky conversations about 'voice,' 'materiality of language,' content, and the essential functions of narrative in "experimental" practice. Ed Roberson's short poem *poll* (written during the late 1960's) elegantly addresses the extant contentious "Black Vote" and attendant political leadership, for instance:

skin that is closed curtain.
it is impossible to know. How
the light is cast.

a mark that is kept the elect-
ion determining the race
before the candidate runs.

Darkie is the night is
an old image given color.
the skin is history. the dark horse

Even some of the most "outish" written work, of say Norman H. Pritchard, deals with marginality (cultural, aesthetic, poetic, 'racial', political, etc) in a way that provides several entry points to a complex lineage. Pritchard, in particular, interrogated normative publishing conformations by incorporating verso, gutter, and recto spaces as completely usable 'language material', making page marginality (in the book's page construction/layout) an analogue to the seemingly marginal social positions of poet and black person. The anthology reproduces four of eight poems from his debut *The Matrix* (Doubleday and Company, 1970). The most challenging among those included in this group is the poem ' which may have originally been published as ".

It's rare selections like those from Pritchard, who is "legendarily unknown" (to quote a poet friend) that highlight the importance of this book. Included are many writers one expects—Ishmael Reed, David Henderson, Clarence Major, Lorenzo Thomas, Stephan Jonas; but also the less expected William Anderson, Tom Postell, Helen Quigless and Cecil Taylor. The genealogy of the poets brought together extends beyond literature per se, beginning to dig deeper into the fiber of American art and literary history, enhancing a comprehension of the culture into which our poets come of age, live and die.

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A corollary made explicit here also addresses the participation of women. Just fewer than twenty percent of the poets published in this volume are women. The editors were careful to note that had they been "successful in securing poems from all of the potential contributors [they] approached" they would have included more. One of the most notable absences is the work of Audre Lorde, especially given selections by June Jordan and Jayne Cortez—two rather present figures (by given standards, popular even) which Lorde's oeuvre could be argued to triangulate.

The imperfections of this anthology are intriguing; the collection's subtractions (intentional or not) are ambiguous. One wonders for examples: Why the era of Amiri Baraka and not the era of his formerly known as Leroi Jones? Where are the poems of Jay Wright? How do Nathaniel Mackey or Ntozake Shange fit into the scheme of things? Who in this camp would be the antecedents of say Gary Fisher or Essex Hemphill—why not articulate that? (Its disingenuous to discuss literary 'innovation' without addressing Queer writing, its influences and attendant values.) In the introduction, why not historically contextualize more directly some of the work in relation to Concrete poetry, Objectivist poets, or The Beats (notably given the attention here paid to Bob Kaufman)? How does this work (the sum

total of it if that can be reached) offer ballast to the oft-perceived frivolity and self-indulgence of modernist poetic thread in literature?

The aforementioned questions bear another set of curiosities about how sex, class, education, aesthetics, politics, religion (yes religion), reasons-for-making all perhaps to various degrees differ among a group of artists, but what binds them here. At once something amorphous and nameable in that equation is 'Blackness' in America. Taking that a step further, an added complexity asks what does exactly distinguish a 'Black voice' or 'White voice' (or more nuanced, circuitous, ultimate—a 'non-voice') in our literature, in this particular 'innovative' poetic spirit. Is 'voice,' content implied or content, by virtue of all that influences its presence to assert or abate? Still there is after that, something tangible and particular to the 'Black' experience that parallels, is contiguous to, the broader American experience in which all of our writers live—that is, to attempt to find and maintain footing or to abandon pretense of that altogether.

Given that there are only thirty-eight poets included in this volume, and though some person could probably count thirty-eight more who should have been included, it is unlikely that a second volume (however appropriate the original page length at 300 + pp.) of the

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same number will satisfy a burgeoning taste for a fuller picture of the American literary landscape over the past couple centuries. It will be great to have one when it shows up. I have some suggestions besides the ones I made earlier, for perhaps a more contemporary version: John Keene, Dawn Lundy-Martin, Mendi Obadike Lewis, Duriel Harris, Douglas Kearney, Khalil Huffman, Shane Book, Julie Patton, Ronaldo Wilson, C. S. Giscombe, Tyrone Williams, Rene Gladman, Erica Hunt, Ernesto Mercer, Jean Michel Basquiat, Harryette Mullen (though Mullen is mentioned in the introduction), Thomas Sayers Ellis, Geoffrey Jacques, Jonathan David Jackson, Tonya Foster, Deborah Richards and Robert “Beans” Stewart.

What is offered by this book’s compilation is the unquantifiable potential to teach. It certainly affords a younger generation of ‘African-American’ poets the opportunity to experience literary responses to a different (than their own) set of extreme challenges to expressions of marginality both social and aesthetic. It offers the broader, growing (more diverse by the second) American writing community the opportunity to understand more fully one more domestic, ‘stateside’ influence on its ‘contemporary poetry.’ This work also challenges an elitist, cavalier, “art for art’s sake” attitude in a time (now) where there’s a need for national self-examination—or perhaps a re-examination of the conditions under which a good deal of American art and literature of the 20th Century was created.

Christopher Stackhouse is the author of Slip (Corollary Press, 2005) and co-author with writer John Keene of the collaborative book Seismosis (1913 Press, 2006), which features Keene’s text and Stackhouse’s drawings.

SUSAN BRIANTE
PIONEERS IN THE STUDY OF MOTION
AHSAPTA PRESS / 2007
REVIEW BY ERICA KAUFMAN

Susan Briante’s full-length debut, *Pioneers in the Study of Motion*, is a lyric concerned with ethnographic importance, a work of archi-

tectural rigor that embraces the fluidity of culture while presenting a timely critique of globalization. The word “pioneers” suggests innovation and discovery, and “the study of motion” refers to economic/political mobility as well as the “act or process of moving or being moved.” Briante guides the reader through a text that moves multidimensionally in its layering of individuality, research, history, and science. *Pioneers in the Study of Motion* is an exceptional book that fluidly navigates weather, place, government, and personhood.

The book opens with a section of poems entitled “Eventual Darlings” that sets the reader in a specific landscape in the midst of globalization. In “Love in the Time of NAFTA,” Briante writes, “The books she reads are getting longer. She has lost her faith in bottled water.” This excerpt is simultaneously photographic and politically loaded. On the one hand, the reader sees a lone unopened bottle, on the other hand, if bottled water isn’t safe, what is? Briante asks the important question—what effects will globalization have (or is already having), on individuals? She writes in “5th Day of the Rainy Season,” “What makes the masses into masses?” The title of this poem embraces a specific time in a specific region, while the poem itself is a meditation on difference, or the homogeneity that NAFTA aimed to create via trade bloc. To quote from “12th Day of the Rainy Season,” “Exaggerated mania for identification, writes André Tridon, is a symptom of weakness.”

Does this mean that the quest for individuality, whether it be cultural respect, gender equality, or labor rights, is futile (in the face of government)? Briante tackles this question with grace and her ambitious poems succeed in taking the reader through a vast highway of nativities, personas, and heritages. Land, language, and character become one in these poems and Briante writes in both first person and third person, mediating between observation and embodiment, between archaic and real. To quote “14th Day of the Rainy Season,” “I fall in

love with anything native: smoketrees, a woman who scrubs my towels with a stone.” This is one of many beautiful moments—the acknowledgement of what a human’s natural response to difference should be—love, curiosity, envelopment.

The title section of the book, *Pioneers in the Study of Motion*, takes on an even more ethnographic trajectory with poems whose titles mirror figures in a society (“The Cartographer’s Son”) and whose words themselves mirror the architecture of a city, with the city itself in flux. Briante writes, “There is a time when you realize that for everything you are thinking, there is a word, sometimes two.” Nothing in these poems is static, just as nothing in the world is static. But, despite the continual push to move forward, it is crucial that one never forgets his or her past, and that one should always remain historically mindful. In his essay, “weighing the losses, like stones in your hand,” Ammiel Alcalay writes, “Does the memory of kin you never even knew leave its own implacable trail upon the very texture and fabric of your body, growing as you grow to imprint itself upon your every move?” Briante embraces and makes accessible this very idea of heritage, of kinship. In “While the Bride, Miami Beach, 1999,” she tells us “Her mapping of the island is instinctual” and “I wanted you to be true to scale./ I wanted you to be glossy.” Here is a cartography of longing, a wish for past-present. To quote “The Archaeologist’s Lover,” “Because every line is susceptible/ to biography, she spits/lace.”

In her author’s statement, Susan Briante states, “It [poetry] is a matter of doing more than just freezing a moment but observing it in relation to what comes before and after it, a deeper gaze that allows us to see beyond what the eye can register.” Briante’s crisp, panoramic verse achieves this. *Pioneers in the Study of Motion* is an active book, full of poems that spark thought, inspire research, and leave the reader craving more. “Her practice compels argument—in great shortage across the alleged fence of U.S. verse writing today—and so makes a claim on a time lag: that of semblance in search of

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sounds assembled in such 'slender forms [as] to express a large country.' (Roberto Tejada). This book is indeed a geography lesson, a history course, a color photograph, a diorama, and a gem.

erica kaufman lives in brooklyn.

FOUR FROM JAPAN:
CONTEMPORARY POETRY & ESSAYS
BY WOMEN. KIRIU MINASHITA,
KYONG-MI PARK, RYOKO SEKIGUCHI
& TAKAKO ARAI.
INTRODUCTION & TRANSLATIONS
BY SAWAKO NAKAYASU
LITMUS PRESS / 2006
REVIEW BY MATTHEW HENRIKSEN

For all the boldness of Sawako Nakayasu's collection *Four from Japan*, an anthology of four female poets of socio-political and experimental worth, in addition to their lyrical qualities, the book's first noticeable contribution to innovative and emerging poetics is the book production. Many small presses have either turned to book arts (to the detriment of content selection) or have gone the lo-fi route. Litmus and Belladonna, however, have produced a gorgeous volume with none of the superfluous glam some small presses flaunt. The object of book design is, after all, a response to the content.

The layout offers spacious pages for essays, translations, visual texts, and original versions in Japanese and French. Piece to piece and poet to poet, the pages transition seamlessly.

Such devotion to production befits the book's editor, Sawako Nakayasu, who for years has imported work from Japan through the journal *Factorial*. Though my own experience with contemporary Japanese poetry is limited to the issues of *Factorial* I've read and some poems in other magazines, I can glean from the little I know that the four poets represented here are more a representation of Nakayasu's particular vision and not a PC cross-section of the Japanese avant-garde status quo.

Kiriu Minashita, with her clever distortions

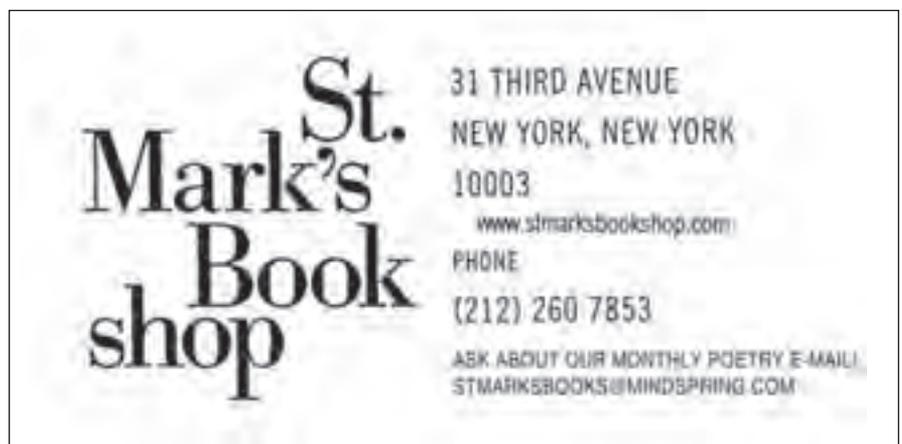
of everyday language and popular culture ("A Perfect Day for Coelacanth") would benefit any American indie magazine. Her essay "Title, or the Conversion Plug of the Anima," addresses the phenomena of "cargo cults" in some South Pacific islands and applies it as metaphor to, among other topics, the state of contemporary poetry, which Simon DeDeo also addresses on his widely-read review and discussion blog, *Rhubarb is Susan*, a central meeting spot for American experimentalists, counter-culturists and aestheticians. However, in "Sonic Peace" Minashita demonstrates an intellectual openness that "post-avant"-type ironists wouldn't dare: "Circulating beneath your skin/Like a fresh water hydra experiment/Is a radiant spirit." Kyong-Mi Park applies more of a traditional foundation to her work, or at least comes closer to an American "mainstream," in her obsession with daily minutia and the minutia of speech. She awaits moments in which the ordinary can expand: "Because the instrument/started playing on its own/its strings go just a touch out of their way/for the brightness of the bright room" ("Instrument"). Like Minashita, Park gracefully indulges in her thoughts. Though we could cast the label "experimental" over her poems, Park seems more motivated to speak than to restructure language, as in "April": "How much/Had I spoken of it/And then, you see/Since that day, every time April comes around/It's me turned into two dirty legs/You think it'd be left in the cage." Both poets turn to the strange ("hydra experiment," "two dirty legs"), but

the strangeness does not undercut the sentimental mind at work. Rather, as in O'Hara, the strangeness is at one with the feeling.

Ryoko Sekiguchi, who lives in Paris and translates her own work into French, represents an ever more apparent international avant-garde. Her prose poems, more reminiscent in their tone of Valéry or Prévert than Rimbaud or Baudelaire, seem to turn the meditative water-fluency of haiku toward the scientific: "If there, no two combinations of sounds are the same, and if they occasionally seem very close, each syllable spoken further distinguishes them from certain species while linking them up with yet others, in a staircase rhythm, the unfurling of a digital cross-section that knows no rest" (from *Heliotropes*).

Takako Arai uses the space of the page to suggest the mighty breaths and vocalizations of her poetry, which seems intent above all else on aligning with the rhythms of time and space. Like Kamau Brathwaite or Anne Waldman's poems, the text claims an omnipotent presence of words: "**A clever trick/A clover tree//Already, this is my turf, here/Alrighty, is this my turn, hey//My urine already soaked in/My, you're in, all reticent and**" ("Fox, Appearing").

I imagine the collection presents a perspective on Japanese poetry in its contemporary situation and on the traditions these poems rise out of and/or against. While the ability to incorporate socio-political concerns in



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conjunction with a daring aesthetic impresses me, I don't need to look beyond the many amazing lines this array of very different poets provides. The collection also reminds me that the most daring poems do not experiment merely for the sake of innovation: they innovate so we may discover.

Matthew Henriksen has a chapbook, Is Holy, from horse less press. He edits the online poetry journal Typo, curates The Burning Chair Readings, and edits and produces Cannibal in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

THOMAS WEATHERLY
SHORT HISTORY OF THE SAXOPHONE
THE GROUNDWATER PRESS / 2006
REVIEW BY CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

Of course the word is a brick. This notion, and also that of poet as mason, is gorgeously confirmed in Thomas Weatherly's new book, *short history of the saxophone* (the groundwater press 2006). Though Weatherly has been publishing poetry for almost 40 years, *short history of the saxophone* is his first published work since the early '70's, when he put out two books—*Maumau American Cantos* and *Thumbprint*—and co-edited *Natural Process: An Anthology of New Black Poetry*. Rumor has it he lives in Alabama, but little can be gleaned from traditional sources. Whether Weatherly is exceedingly quiet or more curiously obscure, the apparent humility of his biography befits his poems.

As with the title and the press, every word in this book is in lowercase. This, along with the appropriately boxy courier font, emphasizes the pure physicality of Weatherly's poems. Many of them take on explicitly geometric proportions. Sometimes it's difficult to tell whether one is reading poetry or attempting to solve an emotional quadratic word problem. Take "blatherskite," for example, a poem composed of (or built from) five lines of three words consisting of six letters each. There is an almost volumary logic to it: 5 x 3 x 6. A ninety cubic poem where each constituent part is similar but not identical, identifiable only in the relative difference it exhibits from its counterparts. Like, say, a gathering of meerkats. That is the effect of seeing words like "seeing" and "exiles" in close proximity to each other yet also compounded by their proximity to "selves" and "travel." The letters appear to drift

from word to word, tailing chunks of meaning with them. There is a mysterious consonance—visual, conceptual, musical—at work between these building blocks and yet the more mysterious thing is that they remain utterly unique.

Despite the tensely constructed nature of these poems, Weatherly is not merely a minimalist. A passion always intrudes here and even, thankfully, slips into profanity. In a delightfully self-deprecating poem "legendary," he writes: "known aloof / renew aloud / lewd renown". The various vocabularies Weatherly employs serve to open language up and bring it back together on equal footing. Among the more abstract anagrammatical passages—"vain die / a divine / i invade / naive id"—one finds blues poems and backroom talk—cunt, coon, hoodoo, hardon, jellyroll, shitface, poontang—even a "bojangle villanelle," that multiply the possibilities of voice. The result is that "hardon" can sit sturdily beside "humane" without either taking up too much room.

And there is also room here for names beside "thomas" and "weatherly," both which appear repeatedly. In addition to ezra, elias, mabel, medusa, and many more, there is an index of dedications in the back corresponding to nearly every poem. No poem, apparently, is too small to dedicate. One of my favorites, "babe," is for Steve Salinas:

babe ruth
rare july

Another of my favorites, "open," is a wonderful elbow to the kidney of the self-important poet, a mathematical admonition of sorts:

o p e n
p a g e
e g o s
n e s t

These are poems that simultaneously warn, humble, focus, and free. They are products of a "never muted heart," as the refrain of *short history of the saxophone's* longest poem, "wally," reminds us. His is a music of masonry, a sonorous structure entirely composed of unique bricks. Or, in Weatherly's own words, "muscle / tucked / inside / buicks".

Chris Martin's first book, American Music, comes out from Copper Canyon in November. He wrote it for you.

DAVID MELTZER
DAVID'S COPY: SELECTED POEMS
OF DAVID MELTZER
PENGUIN / 2005
REVIEW BY GLORIA FRYM

David Meltzer is a mind, to paraphrase Henry James, upon which nothing is lost. He's a scholar of everything that's interesting and makes everything that isn't rise to his occasion just by speaking of it. You can't start a conversation with this poet that doesn't burst out into kaleidoscopic splendor, bibliographic rays generating more rays, until the walls of the room melt away and he's riffing into space. That is to say, open space emanating from an open mind.

One of his geniuses is to lead you where to look for answers to questions you didn't know existed before. Or for the possibility of many, divergent answers, happily questioning themselves. To chat with Dr. Meltzer is a spiritual experience akin to reading The Talmud while listening to Eric Dolphy.

David Meltzer, whose vast knowledge of literature, film, music, philosophy, semiotics, bionics, myopics, *yiddishkayt*, you name it he knows about it, barely has a single ironic cell in his DNA. And the same goes for his marvelous poetry. It's encyclopedically true without a trace of pretense:

book is fact
book survives
book lies
book lives
in their death
book is barrier
book opens the gate
book remembers language
book forgets
book never sets the record straight
book knots the tangles
book hides w/ metaphors
death is the others
writer survives
to right death
but gets it wrong
what's the song

Don't imagine that Dr. Meltzer even likes the honorific Doctor. I conferred it on him whether or not he wants it. Long time core faculty in the Poetics Program at New College of California, he teaches ideas, *hold the workshops*, because he's too egalitarian to defang anybody else's poetry. This man simply doesn't pass judgment.

As he writes in *Beat Thing*:

Kerouac's postcard
"Don't call me Mister
call me Jack"

Even in his many poems critical of Empire & Capital, Meltzer's anger at oppression and injustice is devoid of the mean or the bitter. A Meltzer poem mines the language for sound fields:

it was the Bomb
Shoah
it was void
spirit crisis disconnect
no subject but blank unrelenting
busted time
no future
suburban expand into past
present nuclear (get it) family
druids Pavlov minutiae
it was Jews w/blues
reds nulled & jolted
Ethel & Julius brains smoke
pyre of shoes or eyeglasses
weeping black G.I.s
open Belsen gates
things are going to look different
when you get outside

Who could better sing of poetry after Auschwitz? If Adorno had met Meltzer, he might have traded his absolutism for the song that never ends.

Step lightly into his lines and the marvelous fireworks begin. Everything finds its way into these poems

hey
I don't wanna be civilized
don't wanna be tiny-towned into little plastic citizen
pink lucite letter opener & bill-payer bobalink
chirper of microchippy song of complicity
....

garlic armpit Molly Goldberg

....

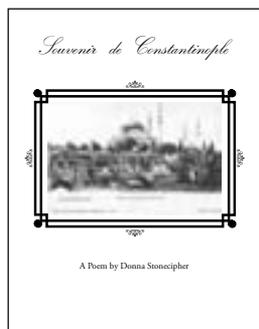
not hairball Reilly lunchpail not
life w/Swedish immigrant mom not
Chayevsky's ghetto pastorals nor E.C.
*Menace Vault of Horror Mysterious
Adventures Strange Science, not Mad*
"in the presence of comic books
they behave as if drugged" dear Dr.,
Werthem Chuck Berry Johnny B. Goode

It's some kind of rare that the poet and the man possess similar natures. And just why is David Meltzer a great poet and a great person? Ask anybody who's read him, knows him, and studied with him. Just don't ask him, and don't praise him while he's in earshot, because he'll blush more than he already does.

He'll take it on the page.

Gloria Frym is a poet and fiction writer.

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