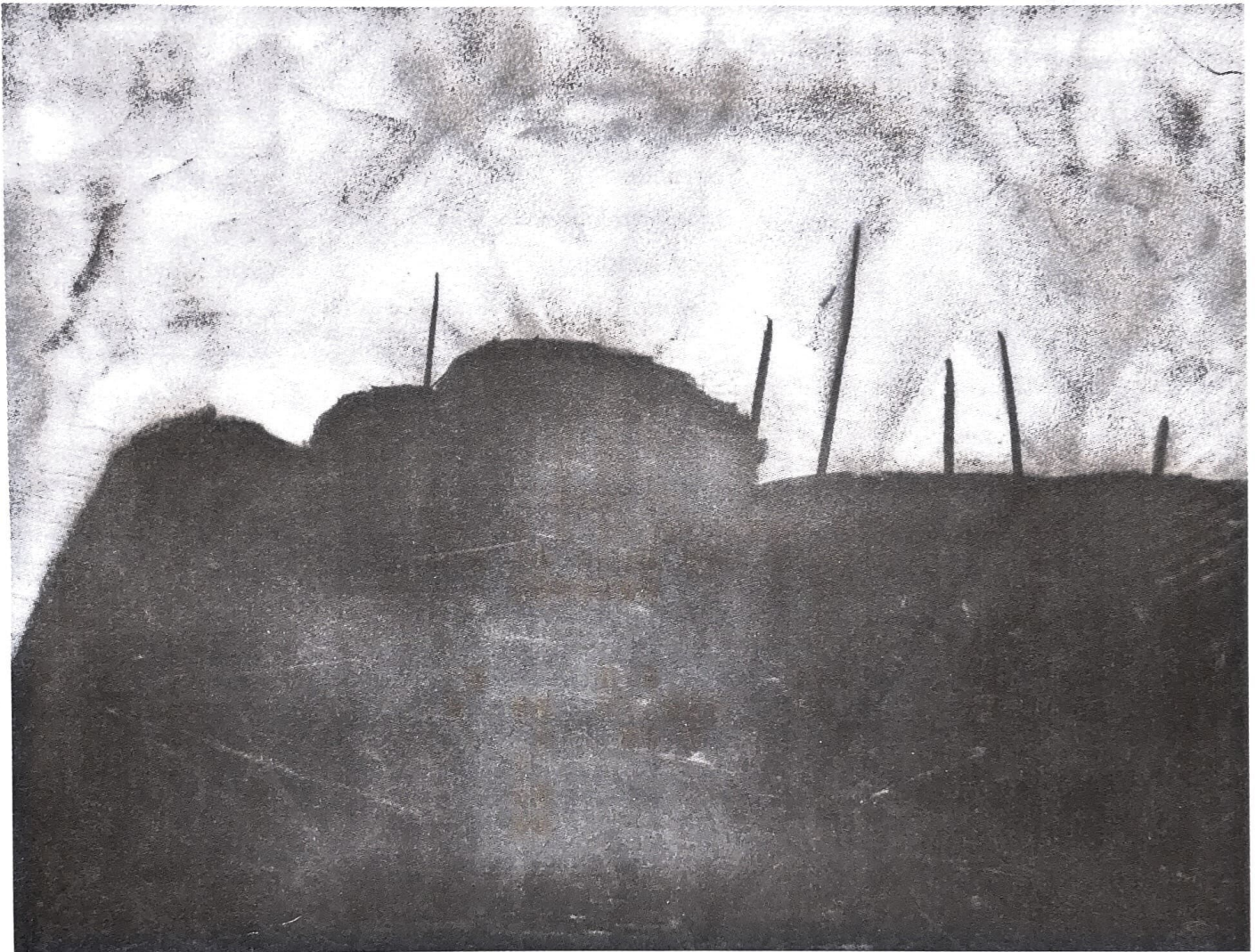

THE POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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ISSUE NUMBER 197 _DECEMBER/JANUARY 2003-2004



ANNE WALDMAN

Another Version of the World

CECILIA VICUÑA

On Xul Solar

NIKOLAI ZABOLOTSKY

The Suffering of Animals



**FORCES
OF IMAGINATION:
Writing on Writing**

Barbara Guest,
essays on poetics
*We expect poets
to give
a first-hand
account
of what
poetry is. But
some poets,
when they
write criticism,
produce
a kind of prose
that is
itself on the verge
of being
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--John Ashbery
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Hardcover, \$25

NEST

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attention
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CROP

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*Crop shows us
how poetry
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interchangeable
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--Kevin Killian
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poetry
and drawings
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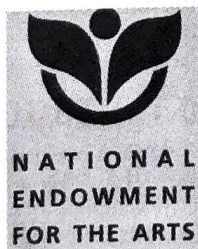
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COVER AND INSIDE ART: Richard O'Russa is a painter and letterpress printer living in New York City. He currently curates the 4th Floor Gallery at Soho Letterpress.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

I'm writing this with the first month of programming behind us here in the Poetry Project office (which somewhat resembles a sardine can with telephones), and it feels like a successful beginning. The readings have been well attended, the talk series has gotten off to an excellent start, and we've received a number of substantive donations of books and services. I want to thank everyone in the community who has written, phoned, e-mailed, verbalized and otherwise demonstrated various types of support since the last issue of the Newsletter appeared—it is tremendously encouraging to hear from you, even if I am not always the greatest correspondent in terms of immediate response. I also want to thank our staff, volunteers and interns who have made the events and office run fluidly and efficiently (for a bunch of poets) from the get go.

Because I am not old enough to remember a time when there was great support from the state for the arts, I maintain no illusions about the possibility of such an environ-

ment being recreated (and, conversely, I have no nostalgia for it either). The Poetry Project survives because the people who care about it have provided artistic, emotional and financial support consistently throughout its years. While this may be an obvious statement to some (you who have stacked chairs here after readings know who you are), I believe it is necessary to restate as often as possible. I would not have accepted the job of Artistic Director if I did not believe that the Poetry Project community could continue to function as a community, with all the requisite expectations, opinions, demands, insanities, and collective energy a vibrant artistic community entails.

As we head into the winter months (though 70-degree November days occasionally make one wonder if winter is a thing of the past), I hope to continue to see and hear from you.

Yours,

Anselm Berrigan
Artistic Director

NEW YEAR'S DAY

Once again the festering season approacheth

and it behooves us to call upon you—yes, you, fetid reader—regardless of your literary affliction or sexual stripe, to ask for your help. The 30th Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading must come to pass (for it is written), but it will do so only with your support. We are appealing to the community in all its forms to donate books, food, labor and, yes, money—in short, whatever you can.

The Marathon Reading is the Poetry Project's main fundraising event, and it is able to take place thanks to the continued support of writers, artists, musicians, publishers, vendors, and volunteers from hereabouts and elsewhere. It starts at 2 p.m. on Thursday, January 1st, 2004, and runs until around 1 a.m. the following day. We need approximately 10 volunteers an hour to keep it running smoothly—that's at least 100 volunteers total over the course of the day.

We will also be gladly accepting food donations (aside from the admission charge—back down to \$15 again this year, \$10 for members—any other money we make comes from the sales of donated food and books). Some of us are still undergoing the dental work that resulted from eating Gillian McCain's peanut butter/ice cream thingies last year (but do we regret it? Nah!).

Those of you within spitting distance of St. Mark's Church may recall that the book table has been looking a little sorry for itself in recent years. While all of us here in the office are big fans of the Frank O'Hara Award series put out in the day by Columbia University Press (what did ever happen to the Harry Mathews one?), we are hoping to have more recent books, chapbooks, broadsides, CDs, anything, on sale at this year's event. Please let us know if you are able to donate something this year, whether it's a single copy of your own book or a box of out-of-print classics you recently stumbled across in your closet.

The Marathon can't and won't happen without your help. Please call us at (212) 674-0910 or e-mail info@poetryproject.com. Thanks. Really.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sirs:

In the most recent newsletter, you noted having received a copy of *THE LAST OBLIVION* by Clark Ashton Smith. We appreciate the recognition. However, you

WHAT TED JOANS LEFT US

Ted Joans called me a hipster. If you knew me you'd know I'm as hip as a loaf of white bread. But that was one of Ted's talents—he even got me to believe it. Unlike Dr. Frankenstein, who needed human body parts to continue with his invention, Ted could remake you by just using his imagination.

In Paris, where I went to visit him, he'd hold court on a weekly basis at a café. He gave us the confidence to be able to call ourselves poets. The only requirement to become a part of his kingdom was you had to continue to be creative. He accepted no excuses. He'd hand you a used napkin and say he used these to write many of his poems. He expected you to do the same.

Ted Joans bowed down to no one. He was still a beatnik while others passed themselves off as hippies to stay current with the times. He just waited for beatniks to come back into fashion. When it did he felt a little left out—people who weren't old enough to have met Jack Kerouac were suddenly claiming him as their friend. You never get the recognition you deserve. In Ted's case it was doubly true because he was also a talented artist. He deserves a retrospective at a major museum.

Ted couldn't give directions to a restaurant without it sounding like poetry. If you recorded one of his conversations you'd have an epic as detailed as Homer. But instead of describing a foreign war that happened long ago, he talked about one that was ongoing—his battle against the establishment. He felt who were they to define what is or isn't poetry?

Whenever Ted would say a great line we'd say, "That sounds like a poem. Why don't you write it down?" He'd say, "You can have it. Use it in one of your poems. My only request is it better be good." I think it's a safe estimate to say that more than half his lines of poetry have someone else's name on them. That's how generous he was.

—Hal Sirowitz

Ted Joans was the author of *Teducation*, *Black Pow-Wow*, *Beat Funky Jazz Poems*, *Afrodisia*, and other books. Born on the 4th of July, 1928, Joans died in May 2003.

neglected to name Hippocampus Press as the publisher. We hope that future Hippocampus Press books noted in your column will include this information, so that interested parties may seek out the book more easily. Particularly, we will soon be sending a copy of *THE THIRST OF SATAN: POEMS OF FANTASY AND TERROR* by George Sterling, and edited By S. T. Joshi. We hope it proves of interest.

Thanks,

Derrick Hussey
Hippocampus Press
PO Box 641
New York, NY 10156
<http://www.hippocampuspress.com>

Dear Po Proj Newsletter,

Just a tiny correction. Tiny. In the Oct/Nov Newsletter, Elizabeth Robinson's book *Apprehend* is reviewed, and is listed, as being a publication of Apogee Press. It was actually published as a collaboration between Fence Books and Apogee Press.

Thanks,

Rebecca Wolff

Dear Marcella:

Congratulations to you on the fine job of redesigning and redirecting the Poetry Project Newsletter. Since I have been on the scene I always thought the Newsletter strayed from its duties by wanting to be a literary journal instead of a community newsletter. Thankfully, you have turned the Newsletter toward its more humble utilitarian purpose. The distinction is important because journals are generally bellwethers whereas a newsletter strives toward the egalitarian provision of useful news to a specific community.

The typefaces are clear, the pages are readable, and the text flow is natural. The illustrations work; their directness and simplicity reproduce well. The inclusion of births and departures among other news in the "Announcements" section helps to foster community by reflecting the real lives of the readership. "The Poet's Horoscope" by Madame Blahlahvlatsky is a humorous antidote to the too-serious poet. The Madame's name would be more punny if you removed the second "l." The return of more than one book review was a welcome sight for strained eyes after reading many crammed columns in the previous issue.

You could go further in being more inclusive by using more pages to represent a larger community. I recommend revising "Book

Reviews," first by scrapping "Books Received." Instead, review every book received in no more than 75 words quickly detailing the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the book. Another useful addition worth considering would be a classified section including employment opportunities, grants, residencies, and submission deadlines. You can regain four pages of the Newsletter by publishing less poetry. I do not intend this as a value judgement on the work of the poets in the Newsletter, just believe that it is more suited to a journal. However, Joan Murray's poem made sense being included because it illuminated John Ashbery's essay.

The photography is generally poor. The only one that really justifies its inclusion is of Joan Murray. Well, okay, the cat. Who can hate a cat, although editorially it makes no sense. Murray's photograph was probably good from the start then was scanned well. Finally, watch for inconsistencies of style, for example, some performers in the calendar have publishers noted with book titles, others do not.

Editing the Newsletter, a real labor of love, is a challenge. I wish you luck. Look forward to reading the upcoming issues.

Regards,

Greg Fuchs

The Editor: Thank you, Greg, for your support. I hope your letter encourages more readers to write in their thoughts. To respond to a few points in your letter, the cat is Madame Blahlahvlatsky's (not that she's really "owned" by her) and functions as her "medium," through which her astrological insights are channelled. However, Madame Blahlahvlatsky (which is her real name and therefore not subject to "punning") is on vacation in Columbus, Ohio, this month. As for Books Received, in an ideal world, yes, it would be absolutely lovely to review every publication that arrives in the office—unfortunately, I seem to require a bit of assistance in doing so (purely my own failing, I own, as well as that of society's, which requires me to make "money" so as to pay my "rent" and "eat"—fuckers!) so if you or anyone else reading this would like to write reviews, please let me know and I'd be happy to pile books upon your eager arms. As for the poetry, take the cat, but please don't make us give up the poetry! After all, it's in the title. All mistakes are corrected and all corrections are mistakes.

TURKISH POETRY

On Tuesday, December 9th, at 7 p.m., Talisman House will celebrate the publication of *Eda: An Anthology of Contemporary Turkish Poetry*. Editor, translator, and poet Murat Nemet-Nejat will read, along with

Talisman founder Ed Foster, and Küçük Iskender, one of Turkey's most celebrated living poets. The event, which costs \$10, will take place as part of The Kitchen's series on translation, curated by Esther Allen, located at 512 W. 19th St., between 10th and 11th avenues. For more information, call (212) 255-5793, ext. 11, or visit www.the-kitchen.org.

SUBMIT

Saint Elizabeth Street, a new literary magazine based in Greenpoint, New York, is currently seeking submissions of poetry. Send three to five poems to: Saint Elizabeth Street, 136 Freeman St., #1A, Brooklyn, NY 11222.

Submissions will be considered any time for *Sliding Uteri: A Rebirth of Poetic Language*. Please send no more than four pieces of up to 10 pages each of poetry, prose, photocopyable artwork, and mixed genre creative work. E-mail to slidinguteri@excite.com, or mail work to Sliding Uteri, P.O. Box 4834, Boulder, CO 80302-4834. Please include a SASE or e-mail address.

SMALL PRESS CULTURE WORKERS

Small Press Culture Workers is intended as a forum for poets, publishers, and editors of small, independent presses and magazines as well as publishers of artist's books to investigate the sub-economic force of small press publishing. Cultural work by artists and editors committed to building and sustaining community beyond simply marketing and products will be examined through papers and talks given at panel presentations.

Confirmed presenters include: Charles Alexander, Chax Press; Allison Cobb and Jennifer Coleman, co-editors of *POM2*; Rory Golden, Executive Director, Center for Book Arts; Brendan Lorber, Editor, *Lungfull!*; Jennifer Savran, LunaSea Bindery and Press; Juliana Spahr, co-editor, *Chain*, member of the Subpress Collective; Buzz Spector, former editor of White Walls, Chair, Department of Art, Cornell University; Mark Weiss, Editor, Junction Press.

The conference includes a small press book fair, a gallery exhibit: "Pages," curated by Buzz Spector, at the Ink Shop/Olive Branch Press and a group reading by the poet-publishers in attendance as part of the West End Reading Series' February event.

Contact Jane Sprague for further information regarding registration, lodging and conference details at janesprague@clarityconnect.com or (607) 564-3617.

READING REPORTS

UNUSUAL ROUTINE IN NOVI SAD

On Monday afternoon, the writers arrive in Novi Sad where they observe each other and chat. In the evening, they are driven to the castle-mansion in Cortanovci that will serve as their home for the next two weeks. Cortanovci—in English this sounds like Chortanovtsee—sits on a hill above the Danube River in the Serbian region of Vojvodina, about 100 km south of the Hungarian border.

The participants in the International Writer's Colony are fed regularly and provided with grappa, red wine, and pelinkovac—a bitters- and herb-laden drink of 24 percent alcohol. The local male participants tend toward the grappa, while the foreigners and women drink the pelinkovac. The locals smoke beautifully, inhaling deeply and exhaling forcefully, sometimes sucking down three cigarettes while eating.

Dubravka Djuric has invited Juliana Spahr and Bill Luoma from America. The writers go to Novi Sad, a city of about 300,000 on the Danube, slightly north of Belgrade, for a reading. Graffiti on the wall of the Cultural Center says: "NATO bombardiers, you are amateurs compared to us." The art scene collapsed and seems only now to be returning. It is known that two artists were put in jail. Another was given money and told to go to Paris. Other collapses: bridges due to NATO bombing. Tangled metal sticks out of cement pylons like public art.

The writers sit at a café and wait for the interviews, conducted by Varvara. What have you read in Serbian literature? What do you think of the NATO bombing? How are writers treated in your country? Only after the interview do the foreigners figure out that Varvara is Barbara.

Before the reading, the writers are led into City Hall and photographed and given snacks and drinks. The mayor comes to give a speech and gets photographed. Juliana is interviewed by a lady reporter. Have you seen the bridges? What have you read of Serbian literature?

The writers go to the reading. The room quickly fills with smoke. They sit in an arc around four small tables. There are television lights on the writers and two microphones and two cameras, also from television stations. Each writer is introduced by the novelist Ljiljana Jokic Kaspar, the executive director of the Serbian Literary Society. The mayor is there and the governor of Vojvodina sits in the first row.

There are nine writers in all. From left to right, Radivoj Sajtinac is a poet and novelist living in Zrenjanin. Munib Delalic is a Herzegovinian poet and translator of Norwegian; he lives in exile in Oslo. Zvonko Karanovic is a poet and record storeowner living in Nis. Ljiljana Jokic Kaspar is a poet and novelist living in Novi Sad. Zorica Radakovic is a poet and playwright living in Zagreb. Dejan Ilic lives in Belgrade and is a poet and translator of Italian. Then Juliana and Bill from California. Ana Ristic is a poet living in Ljubljana and an editor of the journal *Balkanis*. Dubravka Djuric is a poet, critic, and translator living in Belgrade. At the reading, Zvonko announces that this is his last public reading. Radivoj reads a poem in English called "Manhattan":

Here I am.
It is the end of the century
It's the end of the road
but, I am on the top
I come here from Europe
from a small Balkan country
from a big East-side story
like a small poor insect
after History
I am here on

Manhattan
and I can hear
people are talking
about freedom
about money
about law and food
about globalization
about left-ideas

and I think
O.K. good luck, West
test yourself
Maybe
on that way
you will meet
different gods
different devils
different adventures
different history

but,
You and we
are in the same ozone hole
and who knows
where those differences
are

Dubravka reads last. She seems to mix prose, poetry, and dialogue poking fun at common sayings. At points she shouts in English: "she-male," "homosexuality," and other gender-associated words. The audience laughs. Even the governor laughs. Afterwards, many people tell Dubravka that she gave a good reading.

After the reading, a camera is focused on the Americans. What literature have you read of Serbia? How do prose writers and poets compare in terms of cultural support in America? How did you happen to come here/Who invited you? Have you seen the broken bridges?

The writers say goodbye to Novi Sad. That is the extent of their city fun. They do, however, take two outings off the Cortanovci grounds to go for A) fish goulash and to B) monasteries. Otherwise, the routine is just that: wake up, walk to breakfast, eat at the long table in the dining room, sit on the terrace under the linden tree and drink coffee and smoke, accept from George—the impeccable steward—either a grappa or a pelinkovac at 1 p.m., heed Petra's call—Petra is the impeccable cook—to sit down at the long table in the dining room for lunch, take coffee and smoke on the terrace under the linden tree until 3 p.m., retire to the bungalow for a nap, walk down to the terrace at 6 p.m., sit under the linden tree, accept from George either a grappa or a pelinkovac, heed Petra's call to sit down at the long table in the dining room for dinner, take coffee and smoke under the linden tree, retire to the party bungalow with many bottles of red wine, and drink, talk, smoke and dance to Radio Grasshopper. One of the high points occurs when T Rex, *Children of the Revolution*, is played one night. Maybe you had to be there. Which brings up another question: Why did the Americans accept an invitation to this place, which Ron Silliman refused to visit in 1992 because its government was committing genocide? One response would be that because the American government is currently supporting genocide in Palestine, as well as employing troops, weapons and contractors rather carelessly in Afghanistan and Iraq, the foreigners are there to talk with other writers, trying to understand nationalist aggression and war crimes, trying to understand their own complicity in this, as well as trying to understand possible oppositional roles of writing under such rule. The writers have seen how both countries struggle with nationalism. They have seen how both nations excel in the production of fear and

violence. They have seen how one country is arresting and holding or deporting, without due process, many of its Muslim residents, while the other has made sure that Muslim residents either live in Kosovo or do not. They have seen how one country carves the nationalist symbol on walls and into cement: two perpendicular lines with four C's (S's) in each corner. And they have seen the American flag in every place and on every product. The most hopeful thing they have seen, however, seems to be that poets of both states stand against this nationalism. Perhaps, in the words of one of the journalists, poets are for building bridges.

—Bill Luoma

FIRST NIGHT AT THE POETRY PROJECT

The halting late-night post-reading ritual subway ride through bedrock back to Brooklyn gives poets plenty of time to reflect on what they've just experienced. I recommend the protocol of forced subterranean meditation, especially after astounding events. What better way to light the dark East River tunnel that I'm stuck in RIGHT NOW than by replaying tonight's Poetry Project Season Premiere?

The new season opened tonight, 10/01, to a standing-room-only crowd. Anselm Berrigan fastened us in for the voyage and gave speedy intros for the two poets of the evening—Brenda Coultas and Bhanu Kapil Rider—personally attesting to the unrivaled magnificence of each. One is a community pillar, the other from a pilloried community.

After a long pull on a Poland Spring, Bhanu began with backstory on *Water-damage: a memoir*, from which she was about to read. During a flight years ago, a bomb threat forced her mother's plane to land in Baghdad. The passengers were detained at a nearby luxury hotel for five days while authorities interrogated everyone who'd been aboard. To pass the time, BKR's mother entertained the guests by singing Bollywood tunes at the hotel bar. Over the week of velvet incarceration, unspoken social schisms began to play out.

Bhanu's work tonight refracted narratives into a spectrum of displacement—displaced people, displaced spirit, displaced riches and especially the displaced psyche. The locales through which her restless poems traveled mirror the background alienation, the disassociation inherent in having many homes but only one body, one set of variegated backgrounds irreconcilable with wrenching current surroundings.

The work was constructed on clinical and personal research into the relationship of schizophrenia to ethnic and racial discrimination—more specifically, the high incidence of schizophrenia among South Asian women living in London—more specifically, her mother's battle with mental illness within that context. The degree to which a society fails to establish an equitable, compassionate form of integration is the degree to which the individuals within that society begin to disintegrate. The collision of her systematic investigation into the macrocosm & her direct contact with the microcosm echoed that experience, generating a language that felt alien even within the world it was creating.

At the podium, Brenda Coultas congratulated Anselm on his new post & wished him good luck for the next 20 years. She then began her trembling array of true accounts with a cautionary comment: although much of her reading would involve ghost stories and graveyards, the upcoming half-hour would actually be about mystery and life. Indeed she ended the reading, populated as it was with disembodied spirits, monsters, UFOs, psychics and the inexplicable, with "I'm going to the place where we all have gone before me and that's what makes me human."

To get at what it is to be human is to look at the things that can't be completely understood, the phenomena beyond empirical encapsulation. Given the choice, she'll opt to spend the night in the haunted room. A welder, a model, a Kentucky colonel, she writes from "a tear in the fabric." You might call her The Paranormal Poet, with narratives of impos-

sible ontology and imperceptible causes—except she's not documenting the orbs and raspy Gettysburg voices merely to see *The Beyond*.

Brenda said, "Edison spent the last few years of his life trying to build a device that would allow the living to talk to the dead. But before he was finished he died. And so..." Her work picks up where the "and so" leaves off. "Narrative of an Abduction," "A True Account of Living in a Haunted House," and "Baiting the Monster" all reflect back on what unites all of us beings, captive to the mystery, the infinite, all of us headed for the grand reunion tour someday.

There were times the room got crept out and times we were swept headlong into her shadowy narratives, but ultimately Brenda is constructing devices that invoke the dead so that the living might be able to talk...at long last...to the living.

—Brendan Lorber

TWO TAKES ON THE ZINC BAR

A gigantic crowd turned the crank on the new Zinc Talk/Reading Series on September 28th and started the perpetual motion engine for another season. Jo Ann Wasserman and Tony Towle threw the switch and we were off the ground almost immediately. After a one-and-a-half year hiatus, I emerged from under my Stetson at 7:01 pm with an altogether brief introduction before stepping aside.

After many years of selfless and insightful service, Douglas Rothschild has moved on and so I've returned as the solo host. A handful of stragglers were surprised to find the whip gets cracked at 7 p.m. Intros will be concise and allow you to form an opinion without even listening to the poets if you need to leave early. These intros may include short cut-ups of the guests' work and only the tiniest of asides. Even the between-reader-break will be short, coming to a close just as your conversation with the boy/girl/androgynous poet of your dreams gets good. So talk fast.

As in past years, we'll pony up two writers every Sunday. But now many Zinc guests will be giving talks. Tracey McTague just spoke to a rapt group on poet/musician Fitzroy Amerson. Later in the season, Andrei Codrescu will be discussing psychotic architecture, John Tranter literary hoaxes & Eddie Berrigan ideas so sensitive we can't discuss them here.

Among those on the red carpet for the season premiere were emeritus Zinc organizers Joe Elliot, Marcella Durand, and Mr. Rothschild. Also in attendance were Brenda Coultas and Atticus Fierman, fresh from their Mexican adventure, Laird Hunt here on special assignment from Colorado, Dan Machlin on a break from FuturePoem duties and Anne Waldman here to listen. Many others, equally effervescent, were also on hand, arriving just as I tried to get the slumbering giant of a soundboard up and running, so I was less attentive to their arrival. I'm told they included Gray Davis, Coach Don Zimmer and Antoine Yates, the guy with the tiger in his apartment.

A nervous Jo Ann Wasserman had considered not getting off the subway as it approached Zinc. But she decided it would be better for all involved for her to read for 20 minutes than to, you know, vanish and take on a new identity somewhere far away. We were delighted to have her cut the ribbon on the series with an array of roomy poems that, if I got the line right, were either "anti-logic or anti-disco ball." Her Place [n] Here refrain transmuted ideas into things and located joy as one more object slightly out of our reach. Her work was saturated and serpentine and allowed us to ride the minotaur through its own labyrinth without it even knowing we were there.

Tony Towle began his all too short half-hour with *Nine Immaterial Nocturnes*, which involved lines like "I never bought an American flag because I always knew where I was." Many of the pieces had their locus in old friends and events from years ago, yet the writing carried not an iota of nostalgia—everything felt as though it had occurred last night at

TWO TAKES ON THE ZINC BAR (CONT'D)

at the earliest. Though framed in a personal New York School context, the poems operated on an electric level of ambiguity and self-abnegating swagger that allowed them to cut right into politics and sociology.

Tony's Truth in Advertising series, rife with "resilient compassion," consisted of deadpan narratives and examinations of the inner lives of 30-second spot characters. A poet who can resolve the cognitive dissonance created by the consumerist state by telling you what to think has got nothing on one who, like Tony, leads you to resolve the irreconcilable in laughter and to continue pushing for truths on your own, right?

As part of the new Zinc Day Spa/Weight Loss Program, we inadvertently turned the heat up full blast that first night. Everyone left at the end of the reading flushed and glistening and calling into question Tony's rejoinder to the notion that "poetry is just noisy dance" with "dance is just sweaty poetry." I'd have to check with Edwin Denby, but it would seem that, at Zinc at least, poetry outdances the dancers.

The night ended with my presentation to outgoing host Douglas of a titanium-toothed circular saw blade in appreciation of his many years (so far) in poetry community construction at Zinc and beyond. By the time you read this he may already be in the great snowy north [sic]. Before we all said goodnight, he held the blade to his heart medallion-style and warned "poets who don't know how to edit—beware!"

The new Zinc Talk/Reading Series schedule for your 2003-2004 season, (with photos) is at users.rcn.com/lungfull. Click ZINC. Or you can see the readers in 3-D at 90 West Houston St. every Sunday at 7 p.m.

—Brendan Lorber

The Zinc Bar has over the years always felt like one of the more appropriate places to witness the intimate experience shared between readers and listeners. Due to the small scale of the back room, with its low ceiling, tightly placed booth-like and benched seating, one feels as much as one comprehends what is amplified by/in such close quarters.

Brendan Lorber, the host of the ongoing weekly happening, has a comedic sense and casual nerve that lends the situation a cabaret air. It was measured delight to see/hear poets Bill Kushner and Amy Holman. The pair was adequately matched, their downtown New York sensibilities unchanged and unchallenged, while also vibrant and searching. Sexuality and its constituent parts—the physical-material, the biological, and the "psycho-phenomenal"—were present as a seemingly unintended tension between the strategic positions these poets appear to take.

Kushner is an unabashedly homosexual man who continues to leave no doubt about it. He talked about men with beautiful buttocks, the "splash" of sperm, sleeping with a dark-toned man with whom he fell in love/lust. Holman seemed to reference her sexuality, but in a far more understated manner, a subtler calculation on mortality. I suspected that the context of their readings was the consistent thematic presence of "wanting," "having," "letting go." I enjoyed the situation and I was glad to have gone. I think Lorber has a good thing going on down there. After attending a few readings in the place, the only thing I might wish for—which may come later in the scene—is diversification, i.e., more new and unknown people (unknown to the NYC/Poproj scene) mixed in.

—Christopher Stackhouse

A TASTE OF ART

Ensnconced in a posh Tribeca neighborhood, surrounded by some of New York City's best (or at least most expensive) restaurants, and among

the din and turmoil of Wall Street's clattering mass of the straight-jacketed and high-heeled, is a café/gallery that sells caviar, bon-bons, champagne, and cosmopolitans, and which presents the monthly reading series, the First Tuesday's Reading Series at A Taste of Art.

Mostly poets go there it seems, but occasionally wealthy neighborhood ladies and gents stop by to mingle. Passersby peer through the plate-glass past the window display, pause and walk away, return and wonder. We wish they'd all come in to hear what they've been missing. Venues like this one are ripe for cultural exchange—not of the sexualized, racialized, or politicized kind per se, but the socio-economic class perception that includes all of these things, a continued invigoration of social fluidity, intellectual acumen as commonplace as the territory of imagination.

The inaugural evening this year featured four poets: Rebecca Wolff, Ann Lauterbach, David Mills, and Anselm Berrigan. Sparsely attended, the presentation nonetheless was warm, musical, scatological, artful, and artless, with a hum from the responsive listening group. David Mills was his requisite mad self, offering takes on the Holocaust, having the shits in Central America, an interracial/interlinguistic relationship in Poland, to be or not to be "black." Rebecca Wolff read airy, subtly angry Dickensque work. Berrigan forced us to roll deeply in the quotidian quagmire of the media barrage that wants to tell us how our personal lives should be—he of course takes the revolutionary position of refusing to be bought. Lauterbach's work, her musicianship, continue to insist that we make better work—that we embrace poetry as a visual art, as well as a literary one. One hopes that these radically individualist characters are lasting parts of what aesthetically defines the series. Being the host of the venue, I can't guarantee perfection—that which is worth its salt must be imperfect. However, I'd be flatly wrong to say the place doesn't warrant a visit.

For past and future readers, please see www.astateofart.com.

—Christopher Stackhouse

NOTES FROM A PHILLY SOUND POET

Poets everywhere are doing their best to oppose these darkening hours of American aggression. Recently in Philadelphia, Charles Bernstein worked with the Kelly Writers House to organize a night of readings at the Institute of Contemporary Art, titled *Poetry and Empire: Post-Invasion Poetics*. The title was the brainchild of Frank Sherlock while co-hosting *The Philly Sound Poetry Festival* with Tom Devaney. At the time, Frank set his title and idea aside for another event, but when Tom mentioned it to Bernstein, it sounded like a good name for a night of poetry. And what a night it was! One of those events you attend, happy to be alive in this most innovative age of the poem. It's simply impossible to cover all 30 poets who read, but for an amazingly crisp attention to the details of that night, refer to the 10/22 post on Ron Silliman's blog (<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com>). You can also hear the evening's readers on MP3 files available at the Kelly Writers House website, (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~wh/>). Be sure to listen to Bernstein, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, and Bob Perelman, MAN ALIVE, don't miss Perelman's poem! But some of the most inspiring were these potent younger voices of my generation, Jena Osman, Frank Sherlock, Jennifer Moxley, and others. I missed a few at the end, arguing with a misanthropic knucklehead outside the toilets, but Hassen gave high praise for Rod Smith and Rodrigo Toscano. The giant alarm clock is shaking its business in Philadelphia, and on the web wherever you live!

—CACorrad

(<http://phillysound.blogspot.com>)

THE SUFFERINGS OF ANIMALS

NIKOLAI ZABOLOTSKY

translated by Eugene Ostashevsky

The uncertain bodies of animals
Sat, crowded together in a shed.
They spoke to one another freely,
They spoke the language of nature.
"I hardly know myself,"
Said the bull, looking into the window.
"I bear the stamp of consciousness
And it has made me old at heart.
What am I to do with my doubt?
How do I silence my worry?
It would seem that the day is done
Without incident, and good riddance!
But it isn't that simple.
I bend under the yoke of depression.
Soon, soon I will be thrown
To the bottom of a bovine cemetery.
O moan funereal,
Doleful lamentation!
How horrible these words are: 'mass grave'!
A dead cow lies there in a heap
Over a sheep's crushed bones
As, to the side, a dog takes out its anger
By mutilating a corpse.
Somewhere a decomposing hoof
Provides a plant with nutrient;
That catalyst of putrefaction, worm
Has in a loose skull made his home;
Pieces of skin and contents of an eyesocket
Lie here, altogether scrambled,
And, condensing in the thicket,

Only the dew drops glisten and tremble."

The horse replied:

"It's the masses that squint, wishing to read

Death's illegible creed—

Can't you tell need from need?

We need to know the bitter root of life.

In my elliptical skull

The brain lies like an oblong aspic

But it's not some dumb drone

Yawning in its slanting home.

Humans! In vain do you think

That I don't know how to think,

Since you beat me with a stick,

Since you shove the bit in my mouth.

The peasant hugs me with his knees

And hops, aggressively wielding a whip,

And, my eyes bugged out, I gallop

Grabbing the air with a greedy mouth.

Nature around me collapses,

The crippled world rocks to and fro,

Weeping, the flowers die

Because I knock them over with my feet.

A daisy, feeling the blow,

Closes her eyes and hits the sod

As on my back

The peasant like a horrible god

Waves around his arms and legs.

But when I stand there in my stall,

Dispirited and winded,

THE SUFFERINGS OF ANIMALS

NIKOLAI ZABOLOTSKY

Like an apartment window
I open up my consciousness.
And then, by pain deformed, I hear
The howling of the heavenly spheres:
It is some animal bewailing his sentence
To rotate the machine called 'wheel.'
Must it be so? I beg you, friends,
Are we but means for human ends?"

The horse fell silent. Everyone paused
In the grasp of primitive consciousness.
The composite body of animals
Looked like a poor corpse.
A lamp pumped full of kerosene
Swung burning like a martyr,
The light it cast so trembling and ancient
That being and nonbeing seemed as one.
Memories, the glum
Children of suffering,
Crowded together in the minds
Of the persistent animals.
And into two the double world split,
Its dropcloth tearing to reveal
An emptiness, cerulean and infinite.

"I have a vision of a cheerless graveyard,"
The bull said with burning eyes.

"There, on a sloping hillside
Someone sleeps at the bottom of a damp grave.
Who is he, pitiful, all in scabs,
Forgotten and half-eaten,

This inhabitant of a poor cemetery,
Dressed in an unkempt nimbus?
Nights languish around him
Resting on pale arms,
Flowers mutter around him
In funereal gossamer.
And, invisible to men
But gnarled and muscular like oak trees,
Rise the intelligent witnesses of his life—
The Tables of Destiny.
And everybody reads with stately eyes
The inventions of the interesting corpse,
Which reconcile the world of animals
Foolishly-beautifully with the skies.
Centuries will pass and pass,
Our children's children will be aged,
But even they will find peace
At the shore of such a grave.
Thus a man, fallen out of his time
And buried in the mire of Novgorod,
Has sown in the soul of nature
The beautiful image of man."

None spoke. None dared to believe.
Big-lipped, the horse was lost in daydreams.
And the night danced, like the first night,
Like a Roman candle on the roof,
Till suddenly it fell. The light
Burst forth and the majestic sphere
Rose. And, witnesses of words spoke in the night,
The birds sang out in the air.

NIKOLAI ZABOLOTSKY

by Eugene Ostashevsky

The *Sufferings of Animals* is the third of eight chapters in Nikolai Zabolotsky's exhilarating and troubling long poem *The Triumph of Agriculture*, written in 1929-1930. Born in 1903 to the family of an agricultural scientist, Zabolotsky, a serious young man with round glasses on a round face, became a founding member of Leningrad's last avant-garde grouping, OBERIU, which also included the poets Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedensky. After leaving OBERIU in the early '30s, Zabolotsky made a bid to become an officially recognized Soviet poet, but in 1938 was arrested, tortured, and sent to a labor camp. Released at the end of the war, he wrote intelligent but more traditional nature verse until his death in 1958.

Although, unlike other members of OBERIU, young Zabolotsky had no disdain for the Soviet system, his understanding of it was entirely unorthodox and perhaps a little out to lunch. The author is of the opinion that man, having thrown off his chains, will extend a helping hand to other species, and that science of the future will set animals free from sickness and death. The poem's human agitator, a soldier like those that came back from the front in 1917, promises animals that the arrival of the tractor will free them from exploitation; in the future, they will live and work in scientific institutes, where "horses, friends of chemistry" eat "polymeric soup" and "a cow in formulas and ribbons" bakes "pie out of elements." The text ends with the communal destruction of old farm tools, portrayed as instruments of oppression.

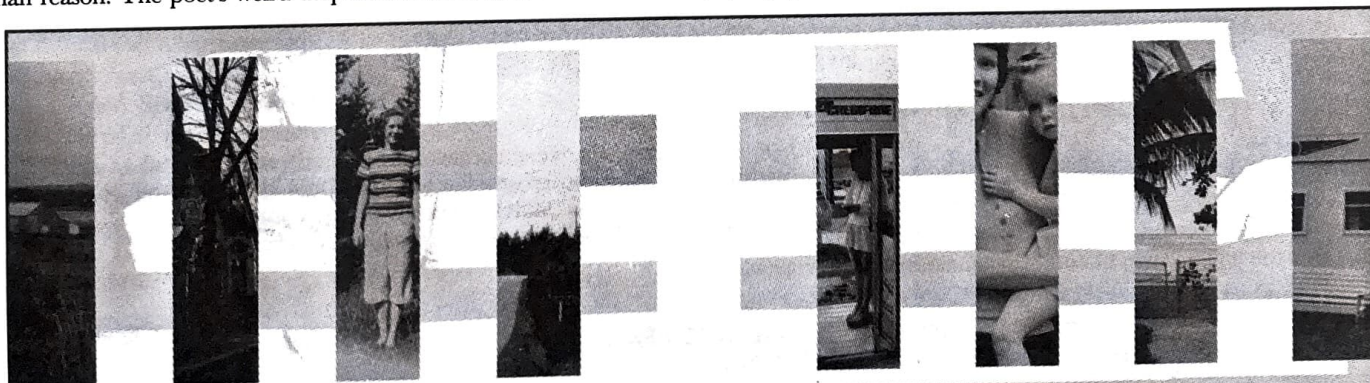
For Zabolotsky, the liberation of nature paradoxically results from its conquest by man. Entailing birth and death, growth and putrefaction, oppression and freedom, nature needs to be "corrected" by science and human reason. The poet's weird utopianism draws on several Russian

thinkers: the great botanist Kliment Timiriachev, for instance, argued that not only animals but even plants are endowed with consciousness of sorts, while the philosopher Nikolai Fedorov thought future science will lead to the resurrection of the dead. Zabolotsky's favorite utopian thinker, however, is the Futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov, whose grave is described and whose studies of mathematical constants in history are named towards the end of the present excerpt.

1929-1930 were strange years in which to write a poem like *The Triumph of Agriculture*. Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, adopted in 1928, called for transformation of agricultural economy from individual plots to state-run collective farms. Collectivization, with its requisitions of grain and livestock, led to the devastating famine of 1932-1933, leaving millions dead. It also entailed mass arrests of the better-off peasants, arrests such as one praised in the fourth part of Zabolotsky's poem. Its political naiveté places *The Triumph of Agriculture* into a very uncomfortable relationship with evil, but the poem itself is so incredibly beautiful and moving and concerned with the good, that I for one do not know how to react to what I rationally judge to be its objective complicity in murder. Likewise, Zabolotsky's later, more determinedly Stalinist pieces glorify slave labor in such a manner as to endow it with real dignity.

The 1933 publication of *The Triumph of Agriculture* met with a storm of vitriol: Soviet critics could not believe that the poet wrote in earnest. That his piece was not an aggressive satire of the Soviet regime. Although Zabolotsky escaped arrest for the time being, his second book, then being readied for print, was never issued.

Eugene Ostashevsky is putting together an anthology of Russian absurdist poetry by the OBERIU group for Northwestern University Press.



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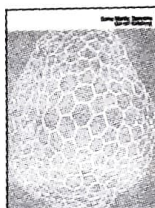
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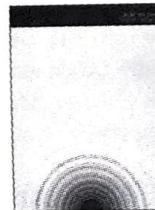
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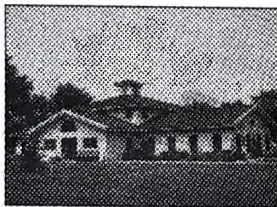
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XUL SOLAR

Xul said of himself: “I am maestro of a writing no one reads yet” and “I am world champion of a game no one knows.” But Jorge Luis Borges, who was influenced by him, said: “Xul took on the task of reforming the universe, of proposing on this earth a different order. For that, among other things, he changed the current numerical system of mathematics to use a duodecimal system, with which he painted his watercolors.” But Xul remained a secret. I remember hearing about him in the ’60s, but never coming across his work. His writings are uncollected even today, and his art didn’t begin to circulate until the ’80s. At one point, I wanted to make an anthology of his and went to Buenos Aires to visit his old home, now a Xul Museum. Someone showed me to his room and opened the closet for me. I saw his white iridescent tie and his green plastic belt. I could suddenly “hear” him speaking in Pan Criollo and dancing with Lita, his wife:

Olas, ólitas, vintos, hábitos, ráspiras, kinflores, hondónadas, pirmanchas, kingramas, biovacíos, tunzoes: too fon.

Waves, wavies, wine-reds, breath-rests, kinflowers, profundiaads, firestains, kingrams, biovoids, tongtoes: Too fon.

Pan Criollo was a language that Xul invented from the possibilities of language itself, a creative forerunner of *portuñol*, a fusion of Portuguese and Spanish, which eventually came to exist in South America. He tried speaking it with everyone; it sounded spontaneous, or not; it was an oral sensibility, a music constructed for the unity of the South, to be achieved through the invention of multivocal vocablos, a pure synthesis of languages.

Tal que me almúo.

So I soulunder.

His ideas influenced Borges, who derived some of his linguistic theories from Xul, and who in 1924 dedicated “El idioma infinito” to him. But Xul’s first text written in Pan Criollo did not appear until 1927, in the legendary magazine *Martín Fierro*, to later influence Oliverio Girondo’s *En la Masedula* in 1954.

When Xul died in 1963, only a handful of texts in Pan Criollo had been published. It went silent as a poetic tool. It remains a language disappeared before becoming widespread, a tongue first forgotten then learned, because I have no doubt that in the future (will there be a future? Or will the “de-futuring specialists” steal the future from us, as in Macedonio Fernández’s fables?) people will speak and write in other linguistic variations or inventions for which Pan Criollo will have been a brotherly foreshadowing.

Cuando se teocoexaltan se hinchan, xur auras irradian vita...i todo se servia granda y san luz.

When yur teocoexalts you swell, xur auras radiate vita... and alls fairgrand with SAINT luz.

Xul was born in Buenos Aires on December 14th, 1887, to immigrant parents. (His father was German, and his mother Italian.) In 1916 he travelled to Europe and lived in many different cities. He knew Picasso and Modigliani, but kept mainly to himself, generating his own poetic universe. In 1916 he changed his name from Alejandro Schulz Solari to Xul Solar, which could be read as “The Light of the Sun Reversed,” or “Lux from the South,” or “Light from the Other Side.” In 1924 he returned to Buenos Aires, the imaginary antipodes of the North, and joined the Southern Avant Garde, gathered around Martín Fierro. There he created his Pan-Klub, in the house where he lived, on calle Laprida 1212, and his work entered the imagination of Borges, Macedonio Fernández, Roberto Arlt, Leopoldo Marechal, Julio Cortázar, and countless young poets later gathered around the magazine Xul in the ’80s.

Veo hai algunas mui moles pagodas de solo libros, que se incuerpan a xus tantos léctores-ge no leen, masbién vitichupan ciencia y sofía.

I see some of my pagoda moles of books solely, pancluded into xur so many readers—who don’t read, rather sucklifeoutofscienceundsophy.

In Buenos Aires, Xul invented yet another language, not just for South America, but for the whole world to speak across dimensions, languages, and forms. This Pan Lengua was a system to communicate and link mathematics, music, astrology and the visual arts in unexpected combinations with untold creative potential. And all his pan-experimentation evolved out of or within a set of “games.”

But his games were not only games. They mobilized other dimensions: “Our patriotism is finding the highest possible ideal of humanity—fulfilling and spreading it all over the world,” he would say, playing with the invention of other realities.

Games were the “workshop of languages in the making,” as Macedonio said, the nucleus and matrix of it all, and none was more complex than the Pan Game, a board of non-chess, whose indeterminate rules were simultaneously a group of musical notes, a dictionary for the creation of new languages and a way to ask “What are we playing?”

Xul also created a new kind of piano, with three rows of colored keys, to play on a scale of his own invention, and to accompany the music of his paintings, acting as “scripts.” In “Choral Bach,” a watercolor dated from 1950, the notes appear as beings with enormous ears who move along the structures of the organ! His paintings were also texts, or texts/paintings, landing fields, anchors of visions, staircases to climb to the heaven of interconnections, where all gestures and forms alter and play with each other.

Perhaps Xul was el Solo Solista, the Soloist dreaming his co-echoes. Each one of his works becomes a hologram, where a bit contains the



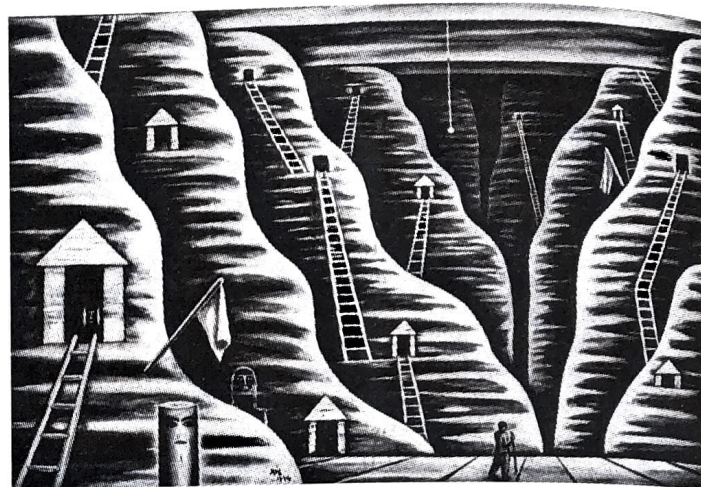
PORTRAIT OF XUL SOLAR
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whole, each fragment hinting at the larger universe it recalls. In this inniverse all arts communicate variations of a unique and multiform shape, and configure a panbeldoike, or total esthetic doctrine, readable from astrological duodecimal mathematics, where each artistic category or phenomenon relates to a number and a sign in the zodiac, like the fragments of a conceptual music where ideas are notes of a universal harmony. That is, a new co-echo esthetic of the arts and behavior in a mutual fusion and interpenetration: a different way of speaking and theorizing fusion, imposing an uncertainty that generates new modes of interpretation. It is as if Xul had fast forwarded to a liberated and evolved era, where there are no frontiers or fundamentalisms and where everyone communicates through logic and poetry in a Pan Language of Latin roots and suffixes/prefixes from every language, according to necessity.

Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine in close collaboration (sic transit GCI) with the author, New York, October 2003.

*Cecilia Vicuña, artist/poet from Chile, lives in New York and performs her work widely. Her latest book is *Ístan*, Kelsey St Press, 2002.*

Author of *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (Graywolf Press), Suzanne Jill Levine's latest book is *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).



XUL SOLAR, VALLE HONDO, 1944, TEMPERA ON PAPER, PRIVATE

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ANNE WALDMAN

Talks Poetry Infrastructure, Safe “Zones,” and Other Versions of the World WITH MARCELLA DURAND

It's easy to think in times like these how much Anne Waldman is needed, particularly here in New York City, where the anxious and beleaguered poetic community has had to make do for the last several years with only occasional restorative visits. But our times are selfish—Waldman's work is too restless, inquisitive, and expansive to be confined to the frettings of one temporal moment. Yet how glad we are in New York to have her back with us—her untiring efforts to push language past the boundaries of oppression recenter us, erasing our doubts and hesitations, reminding us just how very much there is to *do* and that poetry is alive with the lights of possibility. *In the Room of Never Grieve: New and Selected Poems 1985-2003*, a massively gorgeous selection just out from Coffee House Press, includes new work from Waldman's ongoing epic, *Iovis*, which investigates the tropes of masculinity and war. She has also recently published *Dark Arcana: Afterimage or Glow*, a meditation on the after-effects of the Vietnam War. Some of her current projects, that is, in addition to reinvigorating us worn-out New Yorkers, include co-editing with Lisa Birman an anthology of poetics and activism, titled *Civil Disobediences*, and, with Ed Bowes, a collaborative film, *The Menage*, in honor of Carl Rakosi's 100th birthday. In early 2003, she co-founded the Poetry Is News coalition with Ammiel Alcalay and was part of the Not In Our Name/Poems Not Fit for the White House event at Lincoln Center, New York.

MD: You've been a major figure at the Poetry Project and a mentor to many poets at Naropa University. Now you're back in New York City, making a new life. How does it feel?

AW: It feels comfortable in many ways. But edgy too. New York is definitely the political and artistic “charnel ground” it always has been. Last fall and spring, I was caught up with a lot of political activity—as many of us were—that still permeates everything. It was like the Sixties in some ways. Recently I sang my piece “Rogue State” at an anti-Ashcroft rally on Wall Street, SWAT team looking on. (Ashcroft was well hidden in the neighborhood on his Patriot Act promotional tour.) And certainly I have been following the work of younger writers for decades and many of the current “new”—aged 30-plus—generation have either gone through Naropa University or have been frequent teaching guests there—Brenda Coultas, Rachel Levitsky, yourself, Renee Gladman, Kristin Prevallet, Alan Gilbert, Anselm Berrigan, Lisa Jarnot, Elizabeth Willis, Bhanu Kapil Rider, Thalia Field, Akilah Oliver, Laird Hunt and Eleni Sikelianos now of Boulder, kari edwards in San Francisco. These writers and others are all in the mental spectrum. But New York demands thinking about the way writers live here and the “culture” they make, and how they intersect with one another and the larger world and interact with other artistic and

divergent communities. Do we want our poetry cultures locked in academies and universities? In MLA conventions and primarily white literary conferences? In safe havens alone? Granted, these institutions are supportive of writers, but there's a self-reflective solipsistic risk involved.

I'm interested in writers outside the mainstream, meaning those who work beyond careerism and who have also been active as cultural workers—as journalists, editors, translators, performers, curators, or “infrastructure” poets, people who work in and for the community. Infrastructure could be interpreted as a pejorative term, but here it's used to describe the person who sees a need for structures and zones, “temporary autonomous zones,” where folk have an opportunity to gather and create some kind of oppositional or counter-poetics community. That was the original vision for the Poetry Project and its “projective” space, which in the early days was working side by side with the Young Lords, the Black Panthers, the Motherfuckers, the Trotskyites. Nobody had any money to rent space and people “tithed” their time to benefit the groups they were affiliated with. The rent at St. Mark's is over the top now. Economics are harder now, but one can still tithe time. Ammiel Alcalay has suggested a Free University that maybe we can work on together, inviting scholars and writers and artists to teach short stints for free. And of

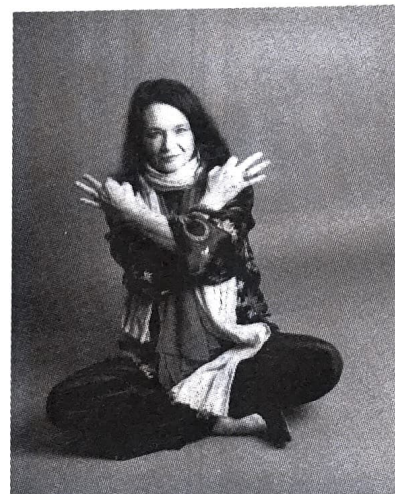


PHOTO BY KAI SIBLEY

course there's the community vision of the Summer Writing Program Kerouac School at Naropa, which co-administrative directors Lisa Birman, Max Regan, and assistant David Gardner—all wonderful writers and graduates of the MFA—are continuing to navigate. We create a unique poetics zone every summer. The transmission of infrastructure certainly exists at Naropa even though it costs real money to study there.

The Wednesday night readings at St. Mark's are really about the work. There's not a lot of excess production involved. I appreciate that kind of austerity around the writing. I remember Edwin Denby saying that St. Mark's cultivated an exquisite ear for poetry. People learned how to LISTEN there.

I went to a recent reading at the Tribeca Grand Hotel and here you are in this very chi-chi place, very modern, with this awful music wafting from the lobby. The wine is \$14 a glass and not very good, and it's an insult in a way, although it's great to see friends and the work is solid. But it's as if the work is being co-opted—that it's just an accessory to the space.

MD: I'm interested in your idea of “zones” for poetry. Is there a way for New York to expand these zones?

AW: Probably. There are a lot of hidden (and possibly problematic) zones of course, which include homeless shelters, prisons, schools, outdoor spaces, community centers, or out-of-the-way libraries. There are a lot

POETRY PROJECT EVENTS CALENDAR

DECEMBER JANUARY 2003-2004 2003

DECEMBER

1 MONDAY

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

2 TUESDAY

Kenneth King

To celebrate the publication of his new book, *Writing in Motion: Body—Language—Technology* (Wesleyan University Press, with a Foreword by Deborah Jowitz), Kenneth King will perform dance solos with text and music—movement as information—with a guest performer, the legendary Frances Alenikoff. Together they will perform two separate but overlapping solos, including King's *Word Raid: Impossible Tongue-Twisters for e.e. cummings*. The performance will be followed by a book signing in the Sanctuary. The event is co-hosted by the Poetry and Danspace Projects as part of Movement Research's 25th Anniversary Season (www.movementresearch.org). [8:30 pm/\$12]

3 WEDNESDAY

City Lights 50th Anniversary Celebration

A 50th anniversary celebration for San Francisco's renowned City Lights Bookstore, as well as a reading and party to acknowledge the steady and beneficent influence City Lights has had on independent publishing and bookselling far beyond the boundaries of San Francisco. Poet and City Lights founder Lawrence Ferlinghetti says, "City Lights has always thought of the Poetry Project in New York as a bellwether for the state of poetry. We have always stayed tuned to hear the latest voices on the frontiers of American poetry." Readers and performers include Ammiel Alcalay, Damon & Naomi, Karen Finley, Elaine Katzenberger, Bob Rosenthal, Oz Shelach, Ira Silverberg, Mark Swartz, John Trause, Anne Waldman, and more special guests TBA.

8 MONDAY

Paul LaFarge & Frances Richard

Paul LaFarge is the author of two novels, *The Artist of the Missing* (1999) and *Hausmann, or the Distinction* (2001). He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2002 and is currently working on his third novel, about flying machines and the weather. He lives out of his car. Frances Richard is the nonfiction editor of *Fence*, a member of the editorial team at *Cabinet*, and a frequent contributor to *Artforum*. Her first book of poems, *See Through*, is forthcoming from Four Way Books. She teaches at Barnard College and lives in Brooklyn.

10 WEDNESDAY

Fanny Howe & John Wilkinson

Fanny Howe is the author of many books of poetry and fiction, including *Economics* (Flood Editions), *Gone and Selected Poems* (University of California Press), *One Crossed Out* (Graywolf), and *Saving History and Nod* (Sun & Moon). She has won a Lenore Marshall Award, the Commonwealth of California Award, two National Poetry Foundation Awards, the American Book Award for fiction and two NEAs. She is currently teaching at the New School. John Wilkinson is associated with the "Cambridge School" of writers, whose work he has contrasted with U.S. "Language" writing as having no outside where typically theirs has no inside. His poetry is gathered in four substantial volumes: *Oort's Cloud: Earlier Poems* (Barque and subpress, 1999), *Flung Clear: Poems in Six Books* (Parataxis Editions, 1994), *Effigies Against the Light* (Salt, 2001), and the recently published *Contrivances* (also from Salt). He lives in Cambridge and works in London for the National Health Service. He is currently nearing the end of a year in New York as a Fulbright Scholar at the Center for the Study of Issues in Public Mental Health, where he is studying theories of risk and their application.



15 MONDAY

Paolo Javier & Rebecca Reilly

Paolo Javier is the author of *The Time At The End Of This Writing* (forthcoming from Ahadada Press). He is currently completing his MFA at Bard College and edits the online journal *2nd Avenue Poetry*. Rebecca Reilly is a PhD candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center and an associate editor of *Four Way Books*.

17 WEDNESDAY

Christopher Stackhouse & Rebecca Wolff

Christopher Stackhouse's drawings and poems have appeared in *Fence*, *Aufgabe*, *Hambone*, *The Village Voice*, *Mosaic Literary*, and others. He is one of the "authors" of *Seismaxis*, a limited edition chapbook of and about art-text dialogue. Rebecca Wolff's first book of poems, *Manderley*, was selected by Robert Pinsky for the National Poetry Series and published in 2001 by University of Illinois Press. Her second book, *Figment*, won the Barnard Women Poets Prize and will be published in April 2004 by WW Norton & Co. She founded the literary journal *Fence* in 1997 and launched the imprint *Fence Books* in 2001.

JANUARY

1 THURSDAY

30th Annual New Year's Day Marathon Reading

Featuring over 120 poets, performers, dancers, musicians, and artists, including Patti Smith, Lenny Kaye, Rebecca Moore, Yoshiko Chuma, Elliot Sharp, Mac Wellman, Anne Waldman, Dael Orlandersmith, Tuli Kupferberg, Judith Malina and Hanon Reznikov, Nick Zedd, Edwin Torres, Eileen Myles, Charles Bernstein, Bob Holman, Dana Bryant, Ann Lauterbach, Jackson Mac Low and Anne Tardos, Sally Silvers, Anselm Berrigan, Hal Sirowitz, Maggie Estep, Christopher Stackhouse, Kazim Ali, Willie Perdomo, Patricia Spears Jones, John Godfrey, Kevin Davies, Kimberly Lyons, Ange Mlinko, Gillian McCain, Rodrigo Toscano, Denize Lauture, Ed Friedman, Alan Davies, Miles Champion, Sharon Mesmer, and many more. [2 pm to 1 am, \$15, \$10 for members]

5 MONDAY

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

7 WEDNESDAY

Chris Edgar & Lisa Jarnot

Chris Edgar's first collection of poems is *At Port Royal* (Adventures of Poetry, 2003). His poems have appeared in *The Germ*, *Shiny*, *Double Change*, *Sal Mimeo*, and other journals, as well as in *The Best American Poetry 2000* and 2001. He is an editor of *The Hat*, the translator of *Tolstoy as Teacher: Leo Tolstoy's Writings on Education* (Teachers & Writers, 2000), and Publications Director of Teachers & Writers Collaborative. Lisa Jarnot is the author of *Some Other Kind of Mission, Ring of Fire*, and *Black Dog Songs*. Her biography of Robert Duncan will be published by University of California Press in 2005.

12 MONDAY

Douglas A. Martin & Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

Douglas Martin has published two collections of poetry and a novel, *Outline of My Lover*, named an International Book of the Year by the *Times Literary Supplement* and adapted in part by the Ballet Frankfurt for its production, "Kammer/Kammer." He is a co-author of *The Haiku Year*, to be republished by Soft Skull Press this winter. Eve Sedgwick's first book of poetry, *Fat Art, Thin Art*, was published by Duke University Press in 1994. Her other work includes *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire*, *Epistemology of the Closet*, and *A Dialogue on Love*, a book-length haibun published by Beacon Press in 1998.

14 WEDNESDAY

John Godfrey & Patricia Spears Jones

John Godfrey's latest books are *Push the Mule* (The Figures, 2001) and *Private Lemonade* (Adventures in Poetry, 2003). A longtime resident of Lower Manhattan, he has, as they say, been things and seen places. Patricia Spears Jones is the author of *Mythologizing Always* (Telephone Books, 1981) and *The Weather That Kills* (Coffee House Press, 1995). Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Agni*, *Callaloo*, *The Kenyon Review*, *New Black Writing*, and *The World*, and in the anthologies *burnrush the page: a de/poetry/jam* and *Poetry After 9/11: An Anthology of New York Poets*, among others. A longtime friend of the Poetry Project, she has worked as Wednesday Night Coordinator, Program Coordinator, and Workshop Leader.

21 WEDNESDAY

Erica Hunt & Elizabeth Willis

Erica Hunt's books include *Local History* (Roof Books, 1993), *Arcade* (Kelsey St Press, 1996, with Alison Saar), and *Piece Logic* (Carolina Wren Press, 2002). She is the Executive Director of the Twenty-First Century Foundation, a national public foundation that awards grants to the African American community. Elizabeth Willis is the author of *Second Law* (Avenue B, 1993), *The Human Abstract* (Penguin, 1995, selected for the National Poetry Series), and *Turneresque*, just out from Burning Deck. Her poems appear in new issues of *Explosive*, *Open City*, and *Triquarterly*. She teaches at Wesleyan University.

26 MONDAY

Talk Series: Kazim Ali, "Instruction Piece: Yoko Ono's New Relevance in Post-9/11 America"

Yoko Ono's artwork privileges the viewer's physical, intellectual, emotional, and conceptual response to sound, language, experience, and idea. A closer examination of her interdisciplinary work yields new ideas about how to live in this New World Order. Kazim Ali teaches literature and writing at the Culinary Institute of America and is a founding member of the Cocoon Modern Dance Company.

28 WEDNESDAY

An 80th Birthday Celebration for Harvey Shapiro

Harvey Shapiro was born in Chicago in 1924 and raised in New York. His first book, *The Eye*, was published by Alan Swallow in 1953, and nine others have followed since, including, most recently, *How Charlie Shavers Died and Other Poems* (Wesleyan, 2001). Shapiro worked as a journalist for *The New Yorker* and *Commentary*, among others, and then served as an editor for many years with *The New York Times*. He was editor in chief of the *Times Book Review* from 1975 to 1983. He has also taught workshops at Yale and Columbia. He edited *Poets of World War II* for The Library of America, published last spring. Tonight's party to celebrate his 80th birthday will include readings by Donna Brook, William Corbett, Norman Finkelstein, Kimiko Hahn, Robert Hershon, Michael Heller, Phillip Lopate, Geoffrey O'Brien, Hugh Seidman, Roger Shattuck, Bill Zavatsky, and Shapiro himself. With a reception to follow in the Parish Hall.

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

All events are \$8, \$7 for seniors and students, \$5 for members and begin at 8 pm unless otherwise noted.

Programs are subject to change. For information call (212) 674-0910.

of writers working in those spaces already. Maybe the forms have to change a bit, go beyond the solo promotional reading. The modest bookstores or bars—the Zinc Bar (which also has expensive drinks!) or that lounge near the East River.

MD: The Parkside Lounge, where you read *lovis*. Now, that was creating a very interesting zone—you had musicians performing in different places around the room.

AW: It felt both vast and intimate in sound and scope. Sam Hillmer was the musician/composer in charge. A Cage-like strategy allowed for improvisation—some of the musicians recited words and made sounds from live instruments and computers. Other readers included Elizabeth Reddin, the director of the series, my husband Ed Bowes, and Akilah Oliver. Grazia Della Terza danced during several sections. We only had time for one walk-through prior to the performance. It took eight hours and we didn't even get through Book I of the poem. We created an ambient sound at times, but then distinct instruments would be programmed in, or certain decisions were made about holding back during particular sections of the poem.

The art gallery scene should be totally liberated by poets. The current disjunct between the art scene and the poetry scene amazes me. In the past, there was more of a connection, more collaboration. It would have to come from the artists themselves, not the galleries. In terms of cultural activism, the galleries don't seem to be part of the same world. I'm talking mainly about upscale galleries with their "product," which can be deadly.

MD: I would suspect that things used to be different...

AW: The Paula Cooper Gallery used to do readings—the Stein and Cage readings. And to Paula's credit, Vincent Katz hosted a political event last spring there with Creeley, Ann Lauterbach, Michael Lally, and Ramsey Clark. But where is the ongoing commitment? Ted Greenwald did a terrific series at Holly Solomon years ago. I remember giving an early diaristic performance there with slides of South America. And there was Bernadette's celebrated MEMORY installation there, too. There was a sense of giving poets a kind of venue they don't normally have because they have nothing to sell. The new Cue Foundation/Gallery in Chelsea that has Bill Corbett on its board is planning some readings—that's a promising start.

Ed [Bowes] teaches video and film at the School of Visual Arts, so I've been going to shows by his students, who are often very accomplished moviemakers. But where do

you see this work outside its own circle? It's not necessarily scheduled as part of a film festival somewhere. There should be more arenas where you can look at something, have a discussion, include a literary reading or performance, like the salon Stan Brakhage used to host in Boulder. So, coming back to New York, and being an infrastructure poet for 30-odd years, I naturally think about this stuff.

Before Ammiel and I organized the Poetry is News event [at the Poetry Project, February 1, 2003] and before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, when we went to readings it was as if we were in a space that was not acknowledging what was going on "over there." People were too depressed or scared. Or there was compartmentalization at work—now we'll do our "anti-war" reading, next week it'll be something else. There was a serious disjunct. But that really changed very quickly. Somehow reclaiming the Parish Hall for that event felt very much like the times during the Vietnam war when poets were speaking out, hosting major benefits, bringing information and news from the fronts. It was in the air as the war began, very palpably—the urgency of our human condition. It's not to say that the work was necessarily about the war—it was more the alertness, the concern, the urgency, and the attention to the details and exigencies of lives happening everywhere, the interconnectedness of it all. There's also New York City's rawness and vulnerability and its position as an international city—a people's city. That there could be a blackout that people survived and somewhat bonded during is heartening. You feel that this place has been tested and people have come through extraordinary trials and tribulations (even with all the corruption and police brutality). New York City is always able to transcend the catastrophic. It's a "holy city."

MD: I think of your work as creating a verbal space around you, a physical effort that pushes the boundaries between poetry and other mediums. So it's interesting to

hear you talk about zones, spaces, and the political body. I wonder how that relates to the individual poet?

AW: Well, by claiming the space as an extension of your body, you're inviting the public into that sphere where you extend voice and body and mind. It's extremely physical and participatory. While performance may be somewhat exhibitionistic, it can also be generous, cathartic, and empowering; it's a transmission that goes both ways. The ground where you take your stand, the ground that you're on, I often invoke as "charnel ground," which I mentioned earlier. This is a Buddhist term that refers to the place where energies meet—life and death, moment to moment—and choices and risk. It's best for me when it's not all figured out or scripted, but the text, the words feel strong. So, more dependent upon where I am psychically and psychologically and physiologically in the moment, counting a lot on body and voice, mind's attention to the work and what the work is calling out of me—rage, gentleness, grief, love, wit, other states of mind, other voices. How it demands to be presented or heard. I use the term "modal structures" for what I do in performance. Sometimes it's sung, sometimes it's *sprechstimme* (spoken/sung), sometimes whispered. Maybe I have to lie or crouch down or move in circles. And then it's exciting to invite in some music or dance.

I recently did a collaboration at the Omega Institute with musician Steve Gorn and dancer Douglas Dunn. I read from my book *Dark Arcana/Afterimage or Glow* at one point, which is writing from a trip to North Vietnam, but I was also "intervening" with it, expanding and recombining bits of things. Douglas had created a huge mortarboard hat out of cardboard that he could turn over and stick his face in. He played with that most elegantly and then he put a bandanna over his eyes and "conjured" a hostage, a victim, or soldier, as I knelt down close to his body, reading. While my writing has these voices and dynamics and thematic situations, it also in this context invites intervention. There's no

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one strategy that dominates the trajectory. When performing solo, I like to stretch my voice so it goes operatic on one end and then down to a low deep male bass—It just happens organically. I don't even know where it's going much of the time.

MD: Have you ever scored your voice?

AW: A couple of people have tried to score texts based on listening to tapes, but there seem to be too many variables in the way the work is presented. I like the musical arrangement, the soundscape. My son Ambrose Bye composed for the CD that accompanies my new book, *In the Room of Never Grieve*. He plays keyboard, but there are many other embellishments that he created to weave around my vocals. I would like the documentation to exist. It's also useful for the musicians I work with. Bethany Spiers now plays the mandolin for me on occasion and we are thinking about a CD project.

MD: I think you're one of the few poets who reaches out to non-Western traditions. We've lost touch with Asian cultures...

AW: And it's showing in this terrible rift with the Asian Muslim world, Indonesia being just one example. People forget that Indonesia is 90 percent Muslim. People do not know the difference between Hinduism, Islam and its diverse traditions, or the various kinds of Buddhism, not to mention Shinto, Jain, Newari, or Hinduism Bali-style. Indonesia is huge. India is huge and multi-cultural. We have ambassadors residing in other parts of the world who have no connection to the culture, who never even think of studying the language or reading a book about where they are or how to dress, how to conduct themselves. Do our ambassadors and attachés to France even speak French? I once went to a reception at the U.S. ambassador to Nepal's residence. He was a Nixon appointee and liked to trek; that was about it. He had a very superior racist attitude concerning the beggars at his gate—no compassion. There's a pressure that the world be dominated by American culture, which includes, in the current myopia, American greed, paternalism, certain religious values. When Muslim practitioners are held captive here, there's incredible insult to their praxis, around dietary restrictions.

The literary canon is heavily European-dominated and so invested in a colonial view—the great Anglophone Empire. And the commentary from France—brilliant, elucidating, but what about the incredible subtleties of non-linear form? The cosmological complexities of gamelan? I was always drawn to Asia, and I wanted to study with Buddhist teachers at the source. I also had such a strong fascination

with ritual, shamanism, oral traditions. What is scary is the great capitalistic maw and the sense that other cultures will all be ultimately subsumed in it. Marxism is troubled in Asia and elsewhere. Late capitalism? Little hope there for respect for the "other."

MD: When I taught at Brooklyn College, I found that most of the students wanted to fit in. They wanted to read American texts, to be "American."

AW: My own name was originally Waldemann. I grew up in this neighborhood in [Greenwich] Village with Portuguese and Italian friends and they would be embarrassed about their names. But to go back to your question [about Asian culture], I'm preparing for the Lorine Niedecker conference [held in Milwaukee & Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, on Oct 8th to 12th] and want to take my comments elsewhere, talk about the orality of her work, and the silence—that contradiction and irony—bring in some of Thoreau's and Cage's ideas. And also her deep sense of *pratyak-samutpada* (Sanskrit for interconnectedness) as an "ecologically" alert human being. What is the link between these more Buddhistic notions and this rational Objectivist (although that's disputed with her early and late work)? There's something attractive about the spartan sincerity of the Objectivists—the "no frills" approach, the intellectual rigor forged from a deep commitment to socially progressive values. That has some resonance with Zen.

But there's also something about Niedecker being "silenced" and repressed by Zukofsky—the fact that she had to destroy the whole correspondence from the '30s because of their romantic relationship, their entanglement. Again, the positioning of the woman versus the man. But then she's able to move into this spiritually "bigger mind" that holds contradictions and a magnificent sound in her later work.

So look at the literal "gaps" there, the manuscripts that were lost, the letters that were destroyed, the editing, the serious elision in that relationship, which was the principal one, you could say. And there's a lot of sound at the same time in that absence, sound that plays in the poetry. She mentions her favorite texts: Marcus Aurelius, a book of Japanese haiku, and Thoreau. She works with the "heaven/ earth/ man" principle of haiku and I find also sympathy with the *ti bot* of Thai/Asian poetics, the striking of the gong or the word. The poems are runes that have to be activated. Koans you have to crack. They have to be unleashed, in a way, opened up by the imagination, whether you're reading them out loud or silently (her preference). So many have this erroneous idea of a passiv-

ity coming from the East, yet eastern philosophy examines the minutiae of sense perception and mind to an extraordinary degree and describes these insights with clarity and depth, which is in itself, for me, a kind of poetics of engagement, activity, and liberation.

MD: Tell me about your new project.

AW: It's a long serial poem entitled "Structure of the World Compared to a Bubble," which is the title of a particular Buddhist sutra (or religious text). It started out from a pilgrimage I made in '96 to a specific site, the Borobudur stupa in Java, Indonesia. The stupa had been buried for hundreds of years under dense vegetation, although its fame existed in lore and legend. (It's now claimed as a national treasure.) As you climb the stupa, you circumambulate circular passageways that are carved with panels telling various stories and sutras. One is the *Jakata Tales*, which describes the former lives of the Buddha when he manifested in various animal guises. And there's another sutra where a pilgrim journeys into the phenomenal world and has a host of encounters with mythical creatures, with a rabbit, with a goddess of the night, with empty space, with a rock—where everything is a teacher. I love that idea of the picaresque voyage and the view that anything in your experience, wherever you are—here in 2003, New York City, MacDougal Street—is vibrant. The poem is a walking meditation on the phenomenal world. You move towards the top of the stupa and things become more abstract. You move into this realm of the Buddhist path and then everything becomes even more vibrant. You ponder the Six Realms of Existence, the darkness of the Hell realm, the paranoia of the animal realm, and the sex and desire of the god realm. In Dante's *Paradiso*, somehow he's able to pull off through language an experience, a very abstract experience of light and love towards the top of the mount. There's the aspiration for some sort of parallel in language to the strong experience I had being there. Then, of course, the meditation is all over the map, so to speak, the references to the mundane, to my own reality, to the intersecting circles and cycles of history and mental discourse. It's very exploratory that way. We'll see. It's mostly in place, but still needs dramatic intervention. I also want to get the gamelan sounds, which were such an important aural landscape to my stays in Indonesia and part of my study there, into the poem.

I attempt here, as elsewhere, to resist dominant forms, resist my own Western grasping and didacticism. I'm very grateful for the opportunities that I've had to travel to Asian *fellaheen* lands.

Did you see the First Cities show at the Met? [*Art of the First Cities* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art through August 17, 2003.]

The translation of the legend of “Enmerkar and The Lord of Aratta” on a cuneiform tablet is interesting. It describes the rivalry between the cities Uruk and Aratta, which are both vying for the attentions of the Goddess Inanna. The focus of the text, however, is the “cultural superiority of Sumerian civilization over the lands that provided its luxury goods by means of tribute and trade.” The poem begins with a hymn to the city of Uruk, then quickly zeroes into the battle of wits between the cities’ respective rulers.

This speech was long and difficult to understand;

The messenger’s mouth was too heavy and he could not repeat it because the messenger’s mouth was too heavy

and he could not repeat it

The king of Kulaba formed some clay and put words on it as if on a tablet.

Before that time the inscribing of words on clay (tablets) did not exist;

But now, in the sun of that day, it was indeed so established—

the king of Kulaba had inscribed words as if on a tablet, it was indeed so established)

The king of Aratta set a clay lamp before the messenger

(in its light) the king of Aratta looked at the clay (tablet)

the spoken words were but nails, and his brow darkened

the king of Aratta kept staring into the clay lump.

The rivalry between these cities is settled not by force, but by wit! At that time “the inscribing of words onto tablets did not exist ... The spoken words were but nails.” This is a great story! The beginning of written language! If we could only fight our battles with wits and wills—create a new language and write some lasting treaties!

MD: This is good to hear—I had been a little bit depressed after that show, seeing all the war-like images. I thought, all humanity does is fight!

AW: I love the staring into a lump of clay. It’s a little bit like how we were made.

MD: Having language pressed into you. Speaking of language and experience, you’ve been part of many different literary movements...

AW: I did want to say something first about how *Dark Arcana* was also a pilgrimage, and a way to look at that war that was so much a part of our history [the Vietnam War]. But

there was also a sense of going in obeisance. A sense of homage, of bowing, of trying to transform the horrible suffering—or acknowledge its gravity as an American. I didn’t even think of it as a poem at the time, it was a list of questions. Now it’s part of *The Eternal War*, the last book of *Iovis*.

MD: There were some things in there that really struck me, like that [the Vietnam War] was not called a “war.” Like that the “war” in Iraq has been declared over.

AW: Oh, the euphemisms.... We’re not in *The War* now, but we’re in the middle of what is in a way the REAL war—the war of psyches—and it’s a guerilla war.

MD: In *Dark Arcana*, you write that we hadn’t protested “enough.” Today it seems like the ‘60s were the ultimate protest. And my generation maybe feels, well, look how much you did, and it still wasn’t enough...

AW: In a way it’s never enough, but you have to keep the struggle going. I wonder about the staying power of the young people now involved, spearheading the environmental and anti-war movements. There are still some veterans, but there’s a gap. It’s as if some people were sleepwalking through a generation and got lost—where are they? It’s interesting to go over [to Vietnam] to see these elderly survivors—they didn’t fight because they were parents and grandparents. So many millions of people died who would be my age now...You really notice that because you see very old people and very young people. And then thinking, you’re a psychological survivor of that war in a way.

MD: The Vietnam War wasn’t the first time a war was protested, nor the last. Supposedly, the protests stopped because there was no longer a war. But it doesn’t matter what they call it.

AW: There’s a lot going on, everywhere I travel. Your question about what more could we have done—it had to do with being less naïve at that time and being able to really see back in time—cause and effect—and see larger forces and scenarios at work. What’s really behind all our sword rattling now? Isn’t China the real perceived enemy to U.S. hegemony? So all the moves being made now are related to that bigger picture.

MD: While reading *In the Room of Never Grieve*, I saw various influences during different periods of your work. Are there any particular “tools” you’ve made your own?

AW: Some of the performative strategies, the look and feel of the *Iovis* sections, the play with gender, genre, other voices, story, the sentence (particularly in *Marriage: A Sentence*), rhizomic moves of all kinds, documentary

and investigative poetics based on personal research, travel. Asia, Buddhism, tantrism, shamanism. Feminist praxis, political concerns. Self-imposed experiments and attention to the smallest increments of speech, breaking it down, but with a lot of emotion. I’ve always been interested in the relationships in gender dynamics, the tensions there.

MD: Speaking of interviewing people on the “other side,” *Iovis* really delves into this territory that is so forbidden to women...

AW: I had to look at my own energy, which corresponds to the karma family energy in Buddhism that craves leadership, wants to monitor the battalions, lead the troops. There is something in my specific conglomeration of tendencies that needs to be engaged with “skillful means” or *upaya*. Be on the move, make things happen. Go to battle for the imagination. Transmute the war energy into something equally as powerful—compassion? I was insulted that the epic is primarily seen as a male form. There are female epics, H.D.’s *The Trilogy*, or Alice Notley’s *The Descent of Alette*. Ambrose made a comment [about *Iovis III*], saying, what, another book called *Iovis*? Can’t you think of another title? So it’s subtitled *The Eternal War*. Ambrose is the secret Virgil of the poem and if he’s not going to be a part of it, I’m lost. I need to have a young male voice countering the hag. There’s so much of this dual-gender energy in it. The events of all our consociational time are in there, organically, atmospherically. I can’t give up this investigation just yet.

MD: That question is so unexplored—why do we go to war? It’s such a norm.

AW: Why? It’s the fallacy of our mental projection. Suicidal death wish? We are actually killing ourselves in this current mess. We think we have to kill the “other” to be who we are, to have power. And we are killing so much else—the planet, its other non-human denizens. An empire wanting to shape the world in its own image. I couldn’t believe that Wesley Clark, in a recent *New York Review of Books*, gives an assessment using all this strategic language of why the war failed. The whole premise should be questioned from the start! Who is doing that? Where are the wise leaders? And, of course, as Patti Smith aptly sings, “people have the power.” The vitality of the “warring god realm” has very much to do with paranoia and incredible aggressive intelligence, an intelligence that needs somewhere else to go. It’s not only about gender—war has some interesting passive support from women. What is going on? We’re under a blinding habitual pattern of destiny that we just cannot see our way out of. It’s just one fucking version of the world. It does *not* have to be this version.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORLD COMPARED TO A BUBBLE

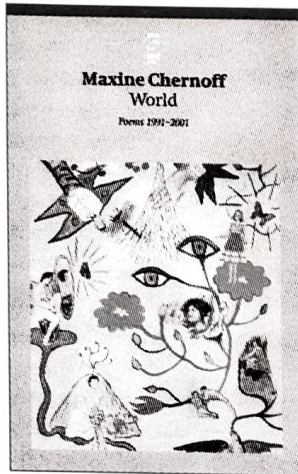
Anne Waldman

Prologue

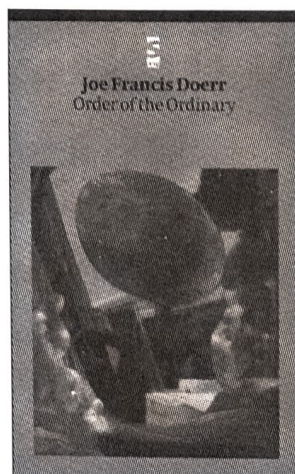
walking towards the imaginal and literal site
which is here [thump on head & heart]
(with accompanying gongs) •

- It was in the middle of my life I read the world as a
- book—faded gold stone dramas meticulous wind
- which parts are doctrinal on the one hand
- and then you are free to live and interpret as you will
- a philosophy gathered here on a million blocks of stone
- that's to say relevant to say I won't
- get shuttled or shoved by fear again
- denied in catastrophic nuit, noche, notte
- night and whatever extra bite for Javanese-Sanskrit sounding
- theme doth bring—calendar? cosmology? wake-up call?
- no one can keep you from the stupa gate
- collective civilization brings in love or
- destroys itself in conflict and kinship reckonings
- care is Huan and Human both and told this by
- biccolage or off the French cuff, theoretical philosophers'
- gloom or sound oft foiled by threat then
- swims out of erotics full of war
- a breeze blowing towards the land
- towards a charnel ground of death
- syntagmy of aether of appropriate time and place
- of lines never drawn, roads not buoyed
- but trawl a bit, cast a net for the others
- from Middle Dutch traghelen, to drag
- travel far, not a pilgrim that does not travel
- thy medium loving in the direction of propagation
- the ice breaks, you are once again at sea and holy
- pneumatically sealed on your bodhisattva path
- air gets in the interstices you want to escape
- from while you are in an act of cross-fading
- not a revealed religion but a walk on a wildebeeste side

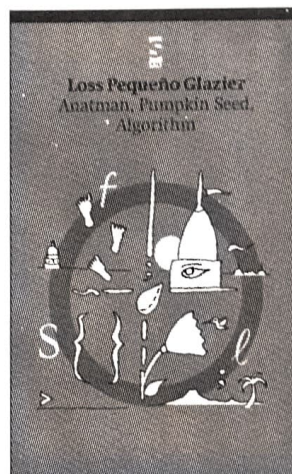
Mind over mutton.



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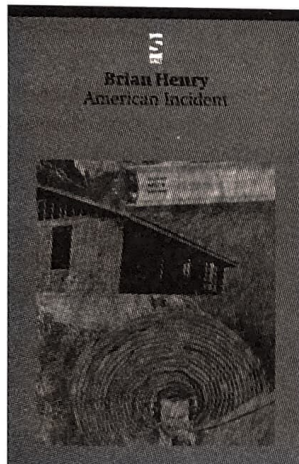
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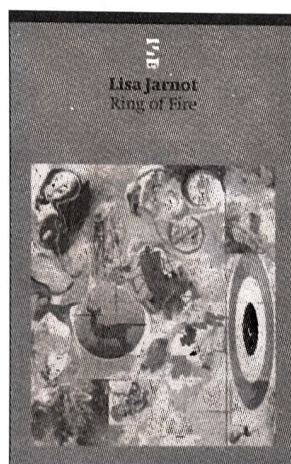
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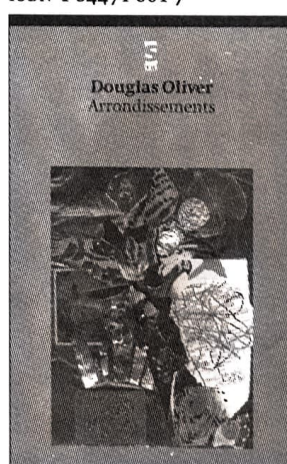
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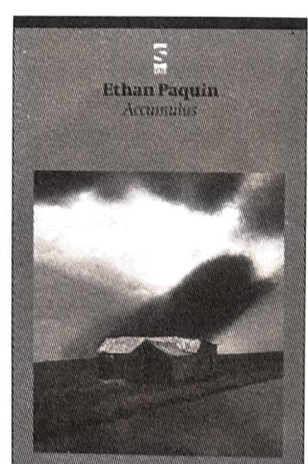
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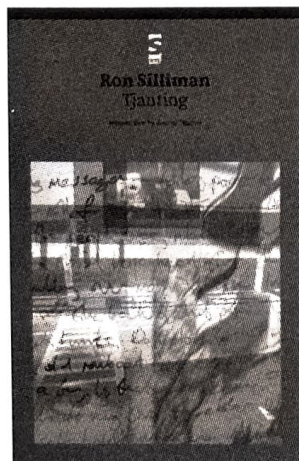
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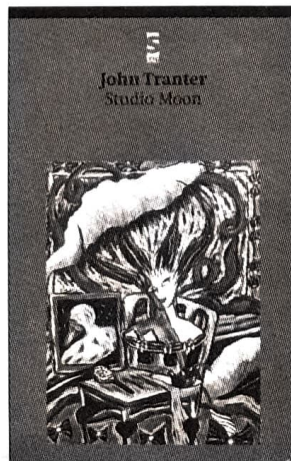
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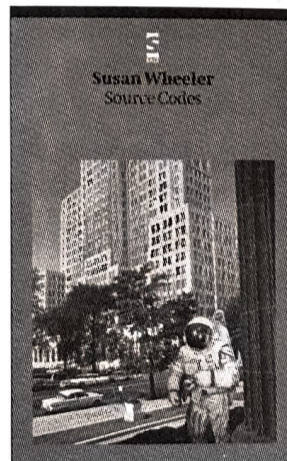
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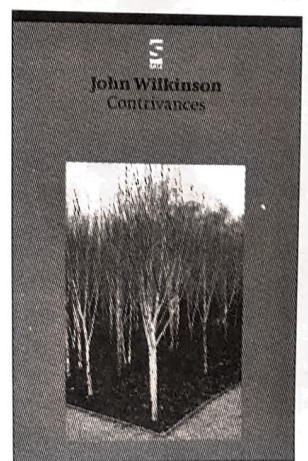
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BOOK REVIEWS

EZRA POUND

THE PISAN CANTOS

New Directions, 2003, \$13.95

Edited by Richard Sieburth

POEMS AND TRANSLATIONS

Library of America, 2003, \$45.00

Edited by Richard Sieburth

Pound introduces one of the lesser celebrated themes of the *Cantos* in another poem, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," in which he writes: "He had moved amid her phantasmagoria,/ Amid her galaxies.../ Drifted... drifted precipitate,/ Asking time to be rid of.../ Of his bewilderment..." What the "phantasmagoria" is might be one of the most contentious questions surrounding his poetry, since one's understanding of this field—a rhythmical mesh of "luminous detail" that either does or does not find its place in a closed matrix of meanings, the forerunner of Olson's sense of the geography of the page—goes a great way toward explaining the *Cantos* as a "political" poem.

The phantasmagoria clearly has nothing to do with "free association"—that's what the Surrealists claimed they were doing, though their associations were conspicuously reductive of the convulsive effects of Lautréamont and never as boring as dreams often are. (Pound never took an interest in the "unconscious" and his use of the word "psychology" was often with a note of satire.) Is it the "broken bundle of mirrors" of "Near Perigord"? The "dim wares of price" of the "Portrait d'une femme"? Seeing as he got the word from Henry James ("Of course I moved among miracles. It was all phantasmagoric...") and that the latter poem, about a self-alienated woman, is an exercise in the Master's sentence (in both meanings of that word), that provides some pedigree. Is it the "swoon" of Charles Bernstein's poem "The Klupzy Girl," the one that "brings you to your senses"? Bernstein himself argues that Pound "was obviously unsatisfied with anything but a complexly polyphonic style," and that, despite his "fear of indeterminacy," created work "filled with indeterminacy, fragmentation, abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, equivocation, ambiguity, allegory" ["Pounding Fascism" from *A Poetics*]
—practically a

short-list for all the good bad things that Bernstein has found so useful in his own work ("repetition" and bracing lyrical purple being notably absent).

The French poets think of Pound as a mystic in the Symbolist tradition, or so the American poets think the French poets think. I've never got a straight answer on this one, but Denis Roche translated both *The Pisan Cantos* and the *ABC of Reading*. The latter, a glossed assemblage of "luminous details," the only critical book that could be classed a "phantasmagoria," suggested Roche felt that *The Pisan Cantos* had some didactic function as a repository of useful knowledge. Some poets worked the wild thingness of the "phantasmagoria" into an intellectual backbone for some nativist, anthropological or shamanist poetics, a channeling of the material unconscious. This might be the Rothenberg/Joris approach, branching off from the New American poetics of Ginsberg and Sanders. One academic critic related every image and symbol in the "Cantos" to the images on the American dollar bill—either an insult to the designers of the dollar bill or a justification, in an Oulipian frame, of the entire project.

The questions raised above come back to life with these two new volumes, beautifully edited and glossed by Richard Sieburth, a scholar known more for his translations of Hölderlin than for his work on Pound (though his first book, *Instigations*, on Pound and Rémy de Gourmont, is one of the best I've read on the poet). Sieburth's introduction and notes on *The Pisan Cantos* make the poem nearly intelligible on conventional levels, and passages that I never bothered to look up because they seemed to correspond with other passages that I never understood in the first place (my Beavis-and-Butthead version of the "fugal method") obtain a new clarity, granting some of the slighter gestures, such as the Dada turn of the line about "urine" below, an aesthetic charge that might have been eclipsed in the earlier editions:

and Mr Edwards superb green and brown
in ward No 4 a jacent benignity,
of the Baluba mask: "doan you tell no one
I made you that table"

methenamine eases the urine
and the greatest is charity
to be found among those who have not
observed

regulations

Pound's patronizing attitudes toward African Americans—saying that "Mr Edwards" had a "Baluba" mask made him both a character in a real-life Noh play and a figure out of Frobenius's Congo—is tinged with affection (anyone who says anything nice in a Pound poem is clearly a good guy), though also tinged, as Sieburth explains, by further racist attitudes about Americans and the "melting pot." What is important, for our purposes, is the ease the glosses give in clarifying what might be called the narrative of *The Pisan Cantos*, making room for an appreciation of when the cunning technician—the strong, provocative rhythms of the first lines of "Tenzzone," the play of the "buffoon" (in his own word), or the drop to contemporary bathos in "Homage to Sextus Propertius"—resurfaces here in the line about "methenamine."

Sieburth obviously agrees with the contention of Christopher Hitchens (citing Robert Conquest) that "lousy poetry was a good if not exact predictor of bad faith in politics," [Hitchens, "Against Sinister Perfectionism"], but whereas Hitchens' approval rating for a poem drops if it strays too far from an Auden/Larkin line, Sieburth clearly believes that Pound had the right idea about poetry itself: "As is often the case, Pound is his own best critic: when in the late thirties and forties he writes 'kikery' or 'judeocracy' as a synecdoche for usury we need go no further than the imprecision of his terminology to know he is utterly wrong, utterly in violation of his own doctrine of *le mot juste* or *cheng ming*" (*Instigations*, 103). The "phantasmagoria" of *The Pisan Cantos*, in light of the overlapping cultural maps of *Poems and Translations*, force the question of whether an aesthetic compass can ever be a stay to an ethical compass that has gone haywire. When lost in an eyes-glazed-over *dérive* through the 800 pages of the *Cantos*, the fact of a compass of any stripe becomes important.

The story of *The Pisan Cantos* is well known—I won't waste precious space here

since you can all Google it if you'd like. During those years, Pound was working on a complete translation of the works of Confucius, kind of like the Plato, Homer, and Ben Franklin of Asia wrapped into one (you can Google him, too). Unlike his other translations, such as the "Sextus Propertius" (Google) and "Cathay" (Google), these were idiosyncratic, but struggled to be loyal to the meaning of the texts as they were set down—i.e., he didn't start smashing different parts of the texts together to make new poems. *Poems and Translations* makes an impressive, if unspoken, argument for the plausibility of a part of Pound's project that is occluded by discussions of his politics: his efforts to piece together an American "renaissance"—Confucius, he felt, was key to it.

Any comparison of Pound's early poetry to that of the latter parts of the two-volume Library of America *Nineteenth Century American Poetry*—spirited but staid work by Richard Hovey, Madison Cawein, George Cabot Lodge, Trumbull Stuckney, and a host of American poets who tried to reach Europe but either died young or before Modernism exploded—will show that, even when Pound was imitating Browning and Yeats and churning out "Canzoni," the liveliness of his line, the budding "polyphony," was setting fires under the feet (literally) of more rule-based metricists. Pound's early "stale creampuffs" were punk rock compared to the prudent stanzas of the American adherents of Parnassianism and Decadence. That he would add to these early studies, not simply discard them, and thus begin the sketchbook of meters that would be "our" inheritance is why, in the '50s and '60s, there was a sort of idolatry around Pound despite the repugnance of his social views. The early parts of *Poems and Translations* dart from idea to disparate idea, many of them eventually brought to completion; *The Pisan Cantos* reads, with the help of Sieburth's glosses, as the outer galaxy that the Hubble telescopes of "Mauberley" and "Near Perigord" pointed to. No poet before or since has left so much for other writers to work with while emphasizing that, indeed, that was the point of his voyages—to jumpstart a renaissance by putting as much on the table as possible to work into something "new."

Compare this variety, optimism and excitement to the expressions of cultural exhaustion prevalent now in the United States, in which you would think—after a century of the most manic and ambitious explorations into the most divergent writing styles, from Derek Walcott to Barrett Watten, going back to Emily Dickinson and coming up to now with Christian Bök—that there are only two

flavors of writing: "post avant" and "official verse." What Pound asked of poets was that they peek out of the hole, partake in some intellectual "dissociation"—certainly beyond any tedious question of "lineage" and beyond the borders of our own self-centered country—to set the stage for this renaissance. Our lack of concern with metrics beyond occasional lip service paid to the repetition of vowel sounds and like matter (here on Silliman's Island) regardless of a phrasing's cultural base or an examination of the larger corpus from which a cadence arose, has been detrimental to our present culture of poetry, in which the line is often equated with some pledge of cultural allegiance—like a haircut or a badge—rather than the bow and viola in which Pound would have us believe.

Brian Kim Stefans' books include Free Space Comix and Fashionable Noise: On Digital Poetics.

DEBORAH RICHARDS *LAST ONE OUT*

Subpress, 2003, \$12

Deborah Richards' book *Last One Out* is a remarkable cataloging of presentations. Working through archaeological and cultural texts, faux parables, and cinema, Richards vigorously de- then re-constructs the ways in which blackness (both as identity and body), and woman (again, both as identity and body), have been presented in (Modern) Western culture. Definitions (both scientific and cultural) are offered, narrative sequences from films are recast, and the entire Tarzan mythos is duly treated to a thorough interrogation.

Much of the complexity of this book lies in the visual appearance of the language itself. Words, phrases, sentences are set apart from one another, layered upon each other, and forced against each other through a series of grids, panels, and columns. The panels echo movie stills, the accumulating grids becoming a sequence of images. In the first section of the book, "The Beauty Projection," for example, language from supposedly differing texts—a beauty manual, an archaeological "study," and a descriptive account of Saartje Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus"—are placed side-by-side and upon each other, creating a violently interrogative reading of the ways in which these texts reinforce inherited notions of the ideal and its opposite. The effect is almost encyclopedic, as definitions interact with historical narratives, instruction, and scientific analysis.

It is with this encyclopedic foundation that Richards progresses through the final three sections of this book. "Parable" is a narrative sequence, which works through the familiar tropes of the cinematic feminine—

from the noirish *femme fatale* to angelic Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. In the third section of the book, "C'est l'amour: That's Love," Richards again picks up the columnar structuring of the first section, this time, however, in order to present parallel narratives of film adaptations of Bizet's opera *Carmen*—Francesco Rossi's version of 1984 (more faithful to Bizet's original), and Otto Preminger's version of 1954 (itself an adaptation of Oscar Hammerstein's 1943 musical). Much of the focus in this section is directed toward the character Carmen Jones, as played by Dorothy Dandridge, as well as the most jarring differences made in the "updating" of the *Carmen* story. Not only does Richards foreground the obvious change in race from the original *Carmen*, but also the ways in which cultural assumptions surrounding "blackness" are pronounced to the point of absurdity—everything from the "jived-up" song lyrics to the murder of Carmen Jones in a janitor's closet (if the original *Carmen*'s death in a bull-ring suggests some kind of cultural specificity and significance, then what does the death of Carmen Jones in a janitor's closet suggest?).

If interrogations of filmic narratives make up the preceding bulk of this book, then the final section deals explicitly with the staging of scenes. Proceeding from the Tarzan films of the '30s, *Last One Out* looks to interrogate, in the author's words, "the rituals of race and sexuality in the claustrophobic space of the theatre set." In this, everything from stage directions to the manner of the character's dress illustrate the ways in which the "staged" is as much a product of cultural ideas surrounding race and gender as it is a determining factor—just as filmic representation is not simply a reflection of societal assumptions, but an active participant in their construction.

Jerrold Shiroma is the editor/publisher of duration press and durationpress.com.

CECILIA VICUÑA *INSTAN*

Kelsey St. Press, 2002, \$5

In this radiant new collection, there is nary a difference between the line in drawing and the line of poetry. "Gramma kellcani," the first section of the book, contains only text-based drawings; some of the graphic lines connecting dots here are letters. Other drawings feature lines that are not separated from the text, but rather flow out of the handwriting itself; in these, each line corresponds to a different word or phrase. A third set of drawings features no drawn lines, but strings of letters that swirl around the page.

The layout of text in all of these pieces encourages the reader to combine letters, words, and phrases in different ways, thus experiencing multiple readings. In the very first drawing, for instance, we are invited to read the words that time and its palindrome emit, and to keep in mind the felicitous connection between the two terms as our eyes continue to travel over the following pages.

On the page Vicuña's interdisciplinary drawings exhibit their formidable lineage: Mallarmé's constellations, Apollinaire's calligrams, concrete poetry, Michaux's calligraphic drawings. Her treatment of lines at times is not unlike Michaux's; her visual poems echo the aphorism that appears in his book *Emergences/Resurgences*: "Like me the line seeks without knowing what it seeks, refusing the sudden lucky finds, the easy solutions, the easy temptations." Vicuña's lines resist finality and closure; they insist on circularity and their existence in a three-dimensional space—so much so that most of the drawings ignore the convention dictating that each page should be a separate unit. Instead they extend across both pages and make use of the fold between them, like the drawing in which a v-shaped text, "la hermandad de los sentidos," slides into the fold, conveying the two senses that her poems appeal to—the eye and the ear.

The visual display of Vicuña's poems is not only a result of her effort to set words in motion, instead of fixing them to the page, but a result of her efforts to better represent how she sings or performs them. The drawings function as a sort of musical score that indicates that these poems have a unique sound. The length of the lines, their undulations, and their spatial dissemination, are the reader's cues. That they are handwritten underscores the fact that Vicuña's practice is closer to the oral tradition than to print culture. When she performs, her voice seems to come from some mythical pre-Babel moment in which languages complemented each other and functioned in unison.

The reader can access the texts of the drawings, which don't have a clear beginning or end; this is in keeping with the polyglotism of Vicuña's lexicon. Lines swerve from English to Spanish to Quechua and then break down to Latin and Greek, to then spin back, changed, into English, only to keep yielding other multilingual associations. Often we are offered the possibility of experiencing words simultaneously in two different languages, as when there appears a clear line between the letters "i-n-s-i-n-u-a..." that then forks and leads to both a "t" and a "c" and then continues its path towards the letters "i-o-n." We can only guess what minuscule swerves caused cognate words to have different pronunciations and spellings once the languages to which they belonged were constituted. Vicuña's drawing lines capture the randomness of such differentiation processes.

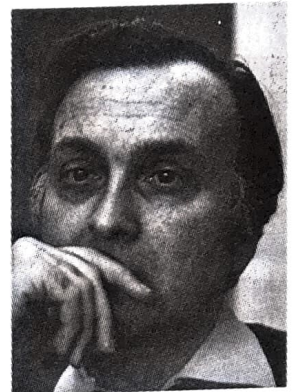
Ties between these words are the heart of the second section of the book, "the poem," or in Spanish, "the cognate poem." It is no coincidence that the origin of the word is in the Latin *gnatus*, to be born: the poem and drawings were born jointly to the "madre del habla" (mother of speech) and the "mother of time." The poem is a cognate of the drawings, since it is made more or less of the same text in the first part of the book. It also explores the kinship of words in Vicuña's three languages—English, Spanish, and Quechua—and the bountiful possibilities of practicing homophonic translation between them. Her "milk/ del trans/ late" yields, for instance, "the in me/ grant/ ing /me/ life." Migration, here, implies not a severing but the opposite, the unfolding of plurality and the possibility of encompassing a larger whole.

The following sections of the book, as if they were palimpsests, rewrite in different registers what appears in the book's first two parts. "Fables of the beginning and remains of the origin" contains a patchwork of aphorisms and verses, as well as quotes from poets that have in common their meditative stance on language and time. Although

Renaissance Men



John Donne
(1572-1631)



Robert Duncan
(1906-1988)

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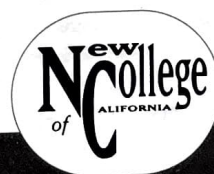
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most of the words in languages other than English are explained at the end in “dixionario a diction”—a wonderfully intimate glossary of what’s not in English in the drawings and the first poem—what appears in the fable remains untranslated. Some of the lines in it are revealing of Vicuña’s overarching endeavor:

Voy a tejer mis tres lenguas away.

I’ll weave my three tongues away.

Una lengua ve en otra el interior del estar.

A tongue sees in another the interior of being, of the star.

A word is a non-place for the encounter to take “place.”

And speaking of encounters taking place, Vicuña recently did a multimedia performance at the King Juan Carlos I auditorium of New York University. Not surprisingly, this event proved that the already complex and teeming system of *Instan* has many more levels. Vicuña sang an improvised piece (part of the series of “Quasars” with which she usually begins her performances) as she walked to the front of the auditorium, holding a device that emitted a thin red beam of laser light. The light beam crisscrossed the room in a way not unlike the lines in the book’s pages do. Seeing her read from *Instan*, turning the book around, was one of the evening’s best moments. One of the videos screened, also called “*Instan*,” presented a close-up of Vicuña’s throat and partially illumined face as she performed the poem at The Kitchen last year. The insistence on the intersection of sight and hearing is palpable in this piece, which is parallel to “Instrument of Light,” the last video screened. Her vocal cords are as much an instrument of light as is the minimal sculpture featured in this last piece. The sculpture consists of a shell suspended from a string, reflecting light as it turns from one side to another. However, once, the shell doesn’t manage to turn 180 degrees and show its interior to the viewer. Its purpose is not to display itself, but rather to transmit light, just as Vicuña’s work is a conduit for language to reveal its miraculous essence.

Mónica de la Torre is the co-author of *Appendices, Illustrations & Notes and, with Michael Wiegers, is also the editor of Reversible Monuments: Mexican Contemporary Poetry.*

RODRIGO TOSCANO
PLATFORM

Atelos, 2003, \$12.95

Rodrigo Toscano’s *Platform* is his newest, longest, and most complex book of poetry. The work is consistent with his two other full-length collections, *The Disparities* (published

second even though it was his first collection) and *Partisans*. All three books adhere to an evolving poetic strategy of incorporating interacting elements, including locales (often California and New York City), critiques (of art community interactions and their sets of received wisdom), and notes (on poetic, economic and social processes, and methods of production). These elements are broken into pared-down, scrambled, and remolded thought-detritus sculptures that gradually build detail, function, and effect over the course of each book.

In isolation some of these poems seem at first glance to be smears of vocabulary decontextualized to the point where the author’s position toward and perceptions about the subjects being invoked can be difficult or impossible to determine. This vagueness, or movement towards abstraction, would seem an odd maneuver for a writer with such obviously pointed political and social concerns. Isolation can be misleading, though. *Platform* works more like a long serial poem than a collection of individual works. It becomes clear after reading the entire book that the contexts are developed with consistency and care, but at a glacial pace, building through scattered, glimmering markers. Toscano’s poetry is not abstract. Nor is it an encryption of private experience. It is a set of condensed and fragmented public statements which keep from collapsing under the weight of their own contradictions because the author navigates the contradictions as one of many problematic layers to be taken into account.

Much of *Platform*, especially the first half, may seem encoded or even private to readers unfamiliar with Language poetry. This is too bad, since the dedication and care in addressing serious problems directly in poetry and the rigor evidenced in Toscano’s refusal to compartmentalize his poetic thought might well be valuable to anyone, not just specialists. The partial illegibility is, of course, a classic Language poetry response to clarity as it is defined by the powers that be, and despite the extended critiques and satires of Language poetry in the book, it is clear that Toscano places himself squarely in that tradition. The precedent for this move is perhaps clearest in the poetry of Michael Gottlieb, who creates condensed details of micro-community and leaves it to the reader to draw out the connections to a larger context. Toscano treats the two as a seamless part of the same system.

Platform is a book of poetry primarily concerned with asking questions. What are you supposed to do with your perceptions as a leftist or progressive within the system of broker-state capitalism when you exist in a

context that basically allows no room for them? What are you supposed to do with your creativity? Has the creative response of avant-garde writers been adequate?

Much of the substance of this book operates as a critique of the psychosocial status economy of avant-garde poetry. This is a topic the author has a robust and detailed set of files on, since this is the artistic circle he has been working within.

sans recriminative
“special glove”

feel out
the state
of aesthetic

things—

(“with a little string tied around it
but with a little attachment
twirled
kinda—
sorta—
over a triple
slip
knot
bow,
see? “)

then later in the same poem:

“Came we then to the place aforesaid by”

Bob Grenier [affix smiley face here]

hand-sewn

3 copies, this being No.2—

editions 1 and 3,

have a grainier look (in the main)

—in edition No. 3, the word “hocus”

appears as

“pocus” (but in supernal spaghetti font #7)

\$120

Global economies and local struggles—the larger systems mirrored by those invoked here—emerge more and more as the book goes on. By the end, the problems of group poetic activity have transformed into and mixed with problems involving strikes, Wall Street, Mexican field workers, Catholicism, police brutality, the media monopoly, Exxon Valdez, and the first Gulf War.

From “About the Amadou Diallo Police Shooting”:

what “criminal” statutes, are cops held to?

and so can we talk about it—Power

there’s Minimalist and Maximalist political demands

(attentive to dynamics of the moment)

to not (from the jump) comp to

monistic impulse

the whole tamale

“revolution”

It is as if an extended poetry clique bitching session had grown by analogy to a broader set of concerns and explorations about the interacting layers of global economy which, after all, interlock inescapably with everyone's personal life.

Part of the difficulty and the reward of *Platform* is that it manifests its own act of orientation from the assumption, or perception, that any act of creativity and thought has to take place from within a set of inherently objectionable interlocking systems—from within the problem—rather than by imagining oneself outside of any of it.

"If a slave says to his master: "You are not my master," if they convict him, his master shall cut off his ear"

*

"I don't have much of an ear for that kind of poetry"

is what they say

still

in Dayton.

The dogged relentlessness of Toscano's critique, which the author apparently also applies to himself, can become laborious, but this laboriousness has a specific artistic purpose. Many of the topics he confronts—competition, legacy and inheritance, the disparities between group and individual capacities for action and achievement, and indeed, questions of how to free up one's own thought processes—have an inherent enervation to them because they exist in the context of larger social forces which discourage their investigation. Instead of covering this situation over, ignoring it, or wishing it away, Toscano uses it as a kind of medium, much in the way composer Anthony Braxton does, by establishing a grind and then breaking it up with small flashes of insight, lyricism, and humor. These flashes are all the more vivid for the context in which they occur.

One of the questions Toscano asks in the book, even as he writes a relatively obscure poetry, is whether a high degree of obscurity has to be the only alternative to what he calls the "counter-factoid masticables" that pass for clarity in the culture at large. There are new dramatic elements in this poetry, absent in the earlier works, which might point to an alternative. This humorously theatrical and absurd imaginary space is epitomized in the poem "Affekt Funereal/Affekt Jamboree," which features a radio announcer voice commenting on a very unusual Macy's parade:

these are the first
100% soy
caskets
ever made?

some people have actually run up to
nibble at them...

kids, if you're watching this...

make sure you never think of any other
social arrangements

other than one that

Militarily Has To Dominate Three
Quarters of the World

Platform has more to do with diagnosing present blockages and problems than proposing alternatives. There is a feeling, though, that the basic impulse acting in the background as a poetic engine is a desire to find somewhere to start in reimagining social relations from within the terms and experience of seemingly irrevocable social imbalances, or at least to begin locating oneself in the mess.

Drew Gardner is the author of Sugar Pill.

LAYNIE BROWNE *POLLEN MEMORY*

Tender Buttons, 2003, \$11.95

In *Pollen Memory*, Laynie Browne investigates the forgotten "effects of trees on internal landscapes." These poems imagine and map connections between the natural world, time, human subjectivity, and human bodies—but the means of connection is not a linear record of history, nor a mechanical logic. Instead, Browne's lyric seeks moments of encounter among often the often uncategorized archives of dreams, hoping to create "a place shared by coincidence rather than by regularity," while at the same time believing that such moments of encounter are more than "random accumulation." As Browne wonders about the croaks of frogs or the feathers of peacocks, delineated boundaries—especially those between human and nature—become transparent. If we are brave enough to "allow transparency to provide a middle," our perceptions of the world—and hence the world itself—can shift: a tree can carve "pockets of night into daylight, a reminder that divisions lie in form from habit." Browne does not deny the existence of division, but focuses on the habits on which such divisions are structured, and hence how they can be restructured.

Creating and enacting (new) forms of being makes apparent formerly opaque connections, but it does not disentangle them or make them easily encoded. The multiplicity of connection and encounter can be overwhelming. "The difficulty lies in possibility." The possible—"opening shutdown interiors"—might be impossible. And if not impos-

sible, then possibly dangerous. Such opening requires risk-taking, and a willingness to be physically and psychologically vulnerable. "To museums of the heart: what grows impatient is the sapling unnoticed, pushing out into the eyes." It is difficult to tell outside from inside. Is the sapling "pushing out into the eyes" from within or without? If the middle is transparent how do we locate it? For Browne, the exact configurations of such relationships are less important than the acknowledgement that such relationships exist, and that we have a role in creating them. Her poems are an invitation to "listen more often to things" and to recognize "these things as skills." Such a recognition might require a reconstitution of self and world, much like a tree requires that flesh of a seed be ripped apart and consumed in the process of remaking itself.

Moments and spaces of encounter can be painful and risky, but also delightful. "Ocean despondency is a lie," and while we find ourselves in "rooms of madness" and feel like inadequate machines, Browne reminds us that the rooms are filled with "not madness, but the red called divine," and that "without instruments one may be better equipped to notice transmission." Although the language of dreaming is often deemed the opposite of logic and sanity, it is better suited to recognizing the transparent middles and missing objects which go undetected by rational mechanisms. We create connection and project information unknowingly—"Vibrations are transmitted by their carriers, pollinating platforms as they step from the trains. Some are left in the streets and unintentionally a passer-by might carry them in passing." We are unconscious of this "everyday travel."

Paradoxically, it is through dreaming—while we are still, asleep, unconscious—that awareness of movement and awareness of the history of such moment can occur. To create anything—whether it be a self, a political entity, or a housing development—requires an awareness of how fossils, living entities now supposedly solidified, "continue to move." The preferred developers of these poems, either through wisdom or fear of a curse, do not build on a burial ground. Instead, when they learn that a burial ground exists, they stop development, they think about what is encased in the body of the ground: "All that you wish to build has a life beneath the surface unaccounted which first must be encountered." Such an encounter requires a reevaluation of self.

Not all developers and would-be developers are willing or able to investigate the sedimentary histories of fossils, or trace the paths of pollen spores: "Listening to dreams is the

risk of staying out later, meeting lingering pasts, the future memory, fragments and plans of reservations which stumble past, stopping to see you." These poems believe in possibility, even if frightening and problematic because the outcome is never sure. However, "[k]nowing leaves little room for roaming." Not everyone will risk dreaming, but these poems encourage taking such risks.

Lorraine Graham is the editor of *Anomaly* and the author of *Dear [Blank] I believe in other worlds.*

LAIRD HUNT
INDIANA, INDIANA (THE DARK AND LOVELY POTIONS OF THE NIGHT)

Coffee House Press, 2003, \$20

Indiana, Indiana (the dark and lovely potions of the night) is a novel (says so on the cover) with the inherent compression of poetry on the page and the timbre of a real on-the-spot storyteller's voice. It is, however, a novel. To be sure, a quick flip through the pages might set you wondering about the look of the thing. Lots of space around the words. Words drifting down and around a page. A lot of text that just doesn't seem to be anything like a paragraph. Letters? Yes. Riddles? That too. Small songs? Um-hmm. So a novel?

Absolutely.

In fact *Indiana, Indiana* is really a saga. Just under 200 pages—precise and lean on those pages, too—this book has the internal dimensions of an epic. The space of the story unfolds methodically as if determined more by echo than by any clear sense of visual distance or placement. The echo of Noah Summers' articulations fixes a location for the reader. An old man nearing death, Noah is allowing meditation, apparitions, retrospection, and a "scrabby old cat" to fill his immediate physical space. The novel begins in Noah's hands. He holds them up to the fire for warmth. The reader's first idea of the scope of both the book and its setting is that immediate. Intimate. Fits in the palm of your hand. Then it begins to open, "Through the gaps where his fingers are gone Noah can see the stove, and, on the low table beside it, the chipped blue bowl filled with water. Noah takes his hands away from his face, reaches into the breast pocket of his coveralls, retrieves a paper flower, inspects it, then drops it into the bowl. Nothing. The green and orange flower swells a little, then, without opening, not even a little, begins to sink." As the crepe flower fails to bloom in water, space contracts around Noah. The tension between expansion and entropy pumps throughout the novel, generating compression and a condition for combustion. When this combustion occurs, the novel (unlike less imaginative fiction) is not over. Entropy begins yet

again. This is a kind of physics at work with its first dimension, space, spiraling in and out and back in again.

Noah drifts.

Away from the junk-cluttered room on the north end of the shed on the north side of the farm in the center of the county in the center of Indiana in the heart of the country, and down a long dark hallway toward a brightly colored door.

A second dimension of Hunt's physics of *Indiana, Indiana* is time. And this, too, Noah navigates unstably. Time is a mesh, a fishing weir, catching most of what passes through its light threads and holding them there. And that is where they stay. So Noah can drift over to a space on the web to hear his father, Virgil, reading aloud to him. Noah can lean back to stretch his legs and see himself argue with his mother, Ruby, as she orders him outside to the rubbish heap with his precious collection of animal bones ("Do you want to see one?" "No I Certainly do not." "You sure?" "I'm sure." "Bones aren't clean?" "What I said was bones are filthy." "What about when they're inside us?").

Events happen not in real-time or movie-time, but in old-man-puttering-about time.

"For every piece of their lives that is still visible," said Virgil, "there are thousands of pieces that are not."

"What is time?" Noah asks.

Virgil tells Noah the story of his great-grandmother who had anxiously awaited the return from war of her son. News came that the man had been killed and "That evening she had asked the hired man to fetch her the light axe, and had set to work." She chopped up the old clock. Virgil finishes the story, "She told your mother that she had meant the gesture to indicate her desire to lose or kill time, or both, but that time, even if you had fabricated the most intricate symbolic renderings of it, could neither be killed or lost. But think if it could. (Noah had tried.) Just think. (He had not been able.) What impossible series of adjustments would you have to make, to recorrespond yourself, if it recombobulated itself, or if you ever found it again?"

the light coming down across her, her hands held, slightly open

Hunt writes toward the third principle of the novel: love. A chaining mechanism through generations. In *Indiana, Indiana* space and time may be inconstant, but love is immutable. Noah meets Opal on the dance floor at Gerald and Minnie Roberts' and they fall in love, are married and live very long lives. But they only inhabit the same space for a very short time. At the end of that time Opal is taken away, put some-

place where she can "rest." But together they remain despite distance. They do not make that "impossible series of adjustments" for the resurrection of time. Instead they continue together, trying to communicate across the Indiana landscape. Opal's voice enters the novel in letters:

Dear Noah

Do you remember when we went to the cave? Do you remember how we walked down into the ground and the ceiling dripped and part of the time the drip was still and quiet and part of the time it was stone? I like how a drip can come up out of the floor. I know it doesn't really. But I like how it can. Do you know what I pretended? I told the doctor I was pretending, I pretended we were in the cave. I pretended I was on the ceiling and you were on the floor. I smiled and the smile dripped onto your head and stretched me and you grew. Then I grew and you stretched. I told the doctor. I said our heads had dripped into each others I told him we were a single column now.

Love, Opal

Love. Something which defies time, gravity, space? Hunt is able to raise this question without sentimentality.

Noah thinks back on Ruby and Virgil dying. "Separated by several years, five rooms, two hallways, and one flight of stairs, Noah found nothing immediately implicit in their relative positions at death. Two months ago, however, after making a rectangle of long-stemmed roses around the edges of that bed, it became clear to Noah that Virgil and Ruby had died almost side by side, almost in each other's arms."

The promise and accomplishment of Hunt's earlier works (*The Paris Stories* and *The Impossibly*, among them) is transcended in *Indiana, Indiana* through a refinement of the author's many sensibilities and a gathering of disparate experience. There are very few writers who could pull off a serious philosophical meditation on time and turn around and tell you the story of The Finger Lady without seeming coy. For every idea that rises high, there is something steady to ground it. Hunt's twin strengths of sincerity and generosity earn him any leap of faith necessary in following this mysterious and demanding narrative.

This is an epic series of love stories, spanning generations full of tall tales, switchbacks, rev- elations, sidetracks, and poems. There is not one false step. There simply would not be space or time or love for it in *Indiana, Indiana*.

Jo Ann Wasserman's first full-length book of poems, The Escape, is just out from Futurepoem books.

MICHAEL RUBY
AT AN INTERSECTION
Alef Books, 2002, \$15

This astonishing collection—which, incredibly, is a first published book—is a lot of traffic patterns comprising outtakes of eight years of writing (1985-1993). The degree of commitment that Ruby has is remarkable: I think there are few moments in his life that are not in some way consciously translated into one of his studies. Those experiments represent one of Ruby's most distinguishing attributes: his writing's profound formal diversity, only a small part of which is represented in this collection. Those unknown volubles include: *Inner Voices Heard Before Sleep*, transcriptions of voices collected from bedtime's borderlands; *The Edge of the Underworld*, a book constellated around a translation of Aeneas' weekend in Hades based on Zukofsky's work with Catullus; *Window on the City*, a collection of extreme vocalizations of a Brooklyn view of Lower Manhattan; *Trances*, poems rendered whole cloth from "consciously" imposed mystical states; *Fleeting Memories*, based on on-the-job involuntary recollections; *Compulsive Words*, a work of topographically charged fields related to words that have an obsessive insistence in Ruby's mind; and *American Songbook*, riffs on songs from Bessie Smith and Fats Waller to Creedence Clearwater Revival and Tupac, including a series of incredible renderings of Hendrix's "Star-Spangled Banner" suitable for when the Super Bowl is played on the planet Mars prior to the first production of Karl Kraus' *The Last Days of Mankind*, among a legion of others.

So, as you can see, there is a lot converging in *At an Intersection*, and from that standpoint, place is a recurrent trope in the book. Yes, it's a place between states of mind—A.K.A. heaven and hell—but also history, geography, literary caravans, mortality, observation, dreams, and "FRENCH TOAST, I saw that much" collide, rest/and or pass like a bus

In a cloud of smoke, much louder than
it had to be,

A public service message on back,
LUPUS LEARN AND LIVE.

("Final Meeting")

Ruby's collection is informed by the aforementioned experimental stuff of found objects in "Signs at the End of a Night Drive"; constructivism, specifically in "Kupka's Abstractions" and "Only on Tuesday"; language mechanics in "Conjunctions" as well as "Among Senses" (its use of Palmer's polysemous radiance); and the usual suspects of the contemporary NYC scene—notably the Brainardian "I Chose to 'Remember'" and "My First Thirty

Summers," as well as Clark Coolidge and Bernadette Mayer in Ruby's later work.

On the other hand, not least among Ruby's informers is what we call our lives, or the old lumpy slabs of whale fat out of which we hack each day. It is in reconciling that innate inchoate material into a knowing structure that his work assumes this Ur-American pragmatic quality, at points with a literality that Williams would have backed—assuming we may extend Doc's "things" to include energy, which ideas first and foremost are. In Ruby there's nothing flaky, but rather solid intent backed by direct-sense experience resolved into text. For example, his first poem "Openings" is literally that—volleys of opening lines—and echo a bit what Mandelstam said regarding Velimir Khlebnikov: "Every line he wrote is the beginning of an epic." If there's destination, it's that.

Nobody sees your face anymore

Only the waves beyond it

Doubling back, as we must in Ruby's palindromic universe, it's those "waves" to which Ruby, never losing "site" of the face of things, listens and reaches—and ultimately renders. It constitutes an exegesis into the borderless state of experience beyond perception and even language itself, achieved as it only can be by means and at the edge of solid ground, or whatever you want to call this Rilkean assumption. And he pulls it off! He yokes the extremes of an absolute pragmatism in clear and minute record of "a cigar butt, a toothpick, a pencil, a finger pointing" with a numinous breach into that energetic potentiality not at the back of it all but here and here and here. In that, consciousness remains his big conundrum and persistent interest, or "thing between": how its beginning lies in simultaneity. Sure, there is a Whitmanesque expansiveness, though the terrain is now that darkest path called "the head"—and though, as Ruby quotes from Democritus, "All we perceive is our bodies." Or, what's black and white and red all over? Ruby should be read that way. Ruby should be read.

Sam Truitt is most recently the author of Vertical Elegies 5 (Georgia, 2003).

BILL KUSHNER
IN THE HAIRY ARMS OF WHITMAN
Melville House Publishing, 2003, \$20

"There are few things more exhausting than childhood," Bill Kushner writes. Yet one of the greatest charms of his sixth collection of poems is the sense that he has yet to exhaust his own childhood.

At 70-something, Bill Kushner can easily convince us he's still a kid "raised on macaroni and dreams"—a good explanation for the sense of energy and expansive possibility that

pervades these poems. He finishes one and gets up "tiny, giggling, naked, into light." He finishes another and gets up female:

Next morning, when I awoke, I was a
beautiful woman.

Well, well, I wondered, will I have to
change my name?

Kushner has an enviable ability to pull off naked streaks of giddy, flippant, and shockingly unsappy optimism. But this book is not all "a kiss on that pretty butt of/ you, Miss America." Poems for Matthew Shepard and the World Trade Center attacks clearly establish this. So do the numerous pieces exposing and exploring the pitfalls and pratfalls of human relationships, where it's clear that Kushner's vivaciousness, optimism, and attention to detail emerge from and are inseparably mixed with strong emotions of frustration, sadness, and loss.

Unlike the traditionally brooding Romantic, though, Kushner always manages to walk the fine line between bathos and pathos and come out laughing, not just at the beautiful strangeness of events, but at himself:

I must go
on, as the snow must go on, for it is our
future
for it is our nature, for it is our hunger, to be
always falling but never sticking, & how like
life & sticky desire ...

From exploring the erotic possibilities of a mugging to calling himself a "pale/ old man in light blue pajamas," there are few borders Kushner won't cross, or few vulnerabilities he won't disclose in his efforts to fully describe and explain his emotions. Yet in doing so he never comes across as unattractively or excessively needy. This isn't just a rare quality in poets. It's a rare pleasure to read.

Pieces dedicated to local poets and mentioning James Schuyler make clear the poetic tradition in which Kushner has been working ever since

I lost my cherry, dear Mr. Rockefeller, in
your fine building

high up on back stairwell, oh how many
years ago?

Kushner's work is a fine example of what happens when the O'Hara branch of the New York School embraces the openness, the newly explicit gayness, and the darkness of a post-AIDS, post-9/11 world. Working within this tradition, Kushner has evolved it to include political sensibility and a freshly personal vulnerability, all without losing his sense of fun. Not just "I do this I do that," but "If we do this then this & this/ will happen."

Katie Degentesh keeps a weblog at kated.blogspot.com.

BOOKS RECEIVED

BOOKS

NEST

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge
Kelsey St. Press, \$14, 71 pgs.

CRY OUT: POETS AGAINST THE WAR

Edited by George Braziller
George Braziller, 121 pgs.

ANDRÉ BRETON: SELECTIONS

Edited by Mark Polizzotti
Poets for the Millennium,
University of California Press,
176 pgs.

DRENCHED

Susan Cataldo
Telephone Books, \$9.95, 158 pgs.

PHOEBE 2002: AN ESSAY IN VERSE

Jeffery Conway, Lynn Crosbie,
David Trinidad
Turtle Point Press, \$21.95, 649 pgs.

TURN THE WHEEL

David Cope
Humana Press, 88 pgs.

A RUSH OF HANDS

Juan Delgado
The University of Arizona Press,
\$15.95, 85 pgs.

TWENTY-SEVEN PROPS FOR A PRODUCTION OF *EINE LEBENSZEIT*

Timothy Donnelly
Grove Press, \$14, 97 pgs.

A POET'S TRUTH: CONVERSATIONS WITH LATINO/LATINA POETS

Edited by Bruce Allen Dick
The University of Arizona Press,
\$17.95, 240 pgs.

READING THE ILLEGIBLE

Craig Dworkin
Northwestern University Press,
\$29.95, 238 pgs.

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CALENDARS

Annie Finch
Tupelo Press, \$14.95, 70 pgs.

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Peter Gizzi
Wesleyan University Press, 99 pgs.

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Diane Glancy
The University of Arizona Press,
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Fanny Howe
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Andrew Joron
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115 pgs.

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Faye Kicknosway
Wesleyan University Press, \$18.95,
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Anne-Marie Levine
Pearl Editions, \$12, 67 pgs.

WHERE RIVER MEETS OCEAN

devorah major

City Lights Publishers, \$9.95,
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ECHOES OF MEMORY

Lucio Mariani, translated by
Anthony Molino
Wesleyan University Press, \$14.95,
120 pgs.

FATHER OF NOISE

Anthony McCann
Fence Books, \$12, 74 pgs.

NINE ALEXANDRIAS

Semezdin Mehmedinovic,
translated from Bosnian by
Ammiel Alcalay
City Lights, \$9.95, 61 pgs.

THE DESIRE TO MEET WITH THE BEAUTIFUL

India Radfar
Tender Buttons, \$11.95, 64 pgs.

MARÍA SABINA: SELECTIONS

Edited by Jerome Rothenberg
Poets for the Millennium,
University of California Press,
204 pgs.

FASHIONABLE NOISE: ON DIGITAL POETICS

Brian Kim Stefans
Atelos, \$12.95, 298 pgs.

VERTICAL ELEGIES 5: THE SECTION, SONNETS

Sam Truitt
The University of Georgia Press,
\$16.95, 69 pgs.

TRUE NEWS

Craig Watson
Instance Press, \$10, 80 pgs.

BARTER

Monica Youn
Graywolf Press, \$14, 75 pgs.

A USEFUL ART: ESSAYS
AND RADIO SCRIPTS ON
AMERICAN DESIGN
Louis Zukofsky, edited by Kenneth
Sherwood
Wesleyan University Press, \$65
(cloth), \$24.95 (paper), 245 pgs.

MAGAZINES

CHAIN: TRANSLUCINACIÓN 10
www.temple.edu/chain. Dante &
Caroline Bergvall, Lorenzo Thomas,
Kishwar Naheed & Mahwash
Shoab, André Spears, and more.
\$12 for one issue; \$20 for two.

NO: A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS 2
www.nojournal.com. Will Alexander,
Caroline Crumpacker, Cole
Swensen, Aaron Kunin, and more.
\$12 for one issue; \$20 for two.

TINY PRESSES

A.BACUS #153
Kristin Prevallet: "From *Fallen Left*
Behind Forms for Elegy."
P.O. Box 42696, Tucson, AZ
85733-2696
\$30 for one-year subscription.
Photocopied stapled magazine.

ATTENTION AND MAN
Ilya Bernstein
Eastern European Poets Series #1
Ugly Duckling Presse, 112 Pioneer
St., Brooklyn, NY 11231
\$8. Letterpressed book.

CLOSE QUOTE
Marie Borel, translated from the
French by Keith Waldrop
Burning Deck,
www.burningdeck.com, \$5.
Offset, saddle-stitched chapbook.

SEVERAL GHOULS HARDLY
WORTH MENTIONING
David Cameron
Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 596
Bergen St., Brooklyn, NY 11238,
\$6 ppd. Chapbook with photos.

CARVE
51 Prentiss St., #7, Cambridge,
MA 02140. William Corbett,
Joseph Torra, Brenda Iijima and
others. Saddle-stapled magazine.

BOOK 3: BAD DAD
Alan Davies
Other Publications, 36 pgs.
8 1/2 x 11 collection.

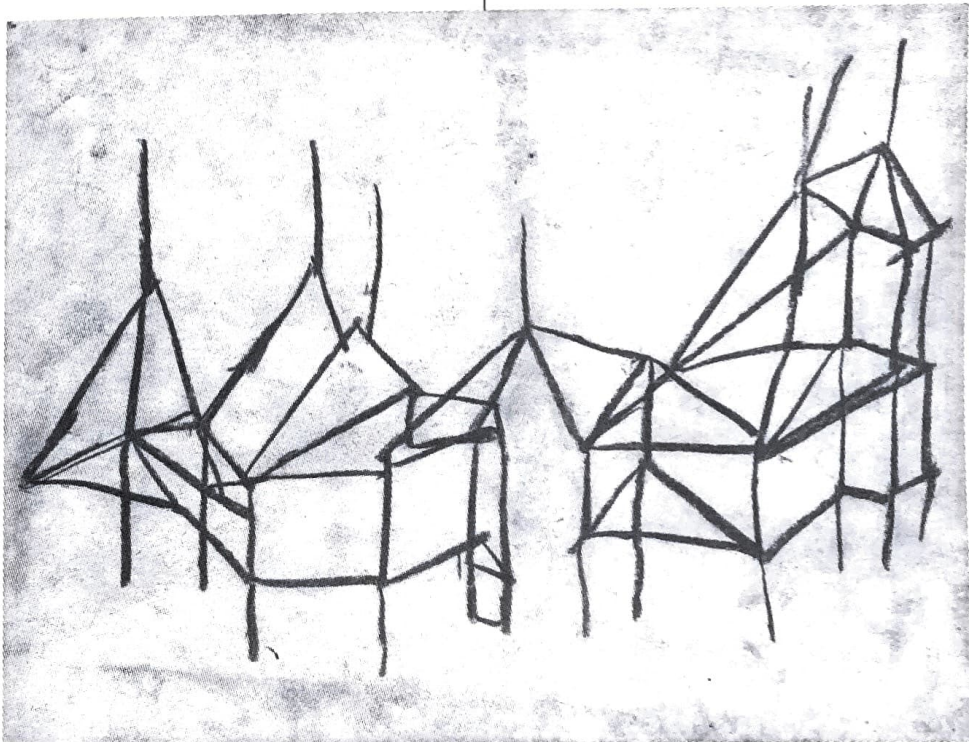
FOUND IN THE PARK
Barbara Henning
Long News, 158 E, 7th St., BA5,
New York, NY 10009
Chapbook with photographs of
Tompkins Square Park, NY. Edition
of 108, signed and numbered.

IF NOT METAMORPHIC?
Brenda Iijima
Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 596
Bergen St., Brooklyn, NY 11238,
\$6 ppd. Chapbook.

SAINT ELIZABETH STREET 1
136 Freeman St. #1A, Brooklyn,
NY 11222. Fanny Howe, Hal
Sirowitz and others. \$5; \$9 for a
subscription.

SLIDING UTERI 1
Sliding Uteri, P.O. Box 4834,
Boulder, CO 80302-4834
Laura Mullen, Reed Bye, Laird
Hunt and others. Saddle-stapled
magazine.

TINFISH 13
47-728 Hui Kelu Street #9,
Kane'ohe, HI 96744. The "dirty,
filthy & mucky issue." Ida
Yoshinaga, Steve Carll, Stephen
Ratcliffe, Jane Sprague, and oth-
ers. \$20 for three issues; \$8 for
one. Cover by Thomas Wasson.



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\$50 \$85 \$125 \$250 \$500 \$1000 I do not wish to join at this time but here is my contribution of \$ _____.

(For your gift of \$25 or more you'll receive a year's subscription to *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.)

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*NOTE: Please make all checks payable to The Poetry Project. Detach this page and mail to: **THE POETRY PROJECT, C/O ST. MARK'S CHURCH, 131 EAST 10TH STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10003**

YOUR GIFT ENTITLES YOU TO THESE MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

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- Discounted admission for a year to all regularly scheduled and special Poetry Project events.
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Substantial savings on workshops offered at the Project.
Priority discounted admission to all special events.

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FREE limited-edition broadside: *The Vermont Notebook* memorial broadside, by John Ashbery and Joe Brainard, 16 x 19 inches, edition of 125, signed by John Ashbery.

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THE POETRY PROJECT

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