

poetry project

NEWSLETTER

APRIL/MAY 2000 ISSUE #179

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Craig Dworkin on Lyn Hejinian

An Interview
with Lorenzo Thomas

What's News? by Jen Hofer

REVIEWS OF

Prageeta Sharma

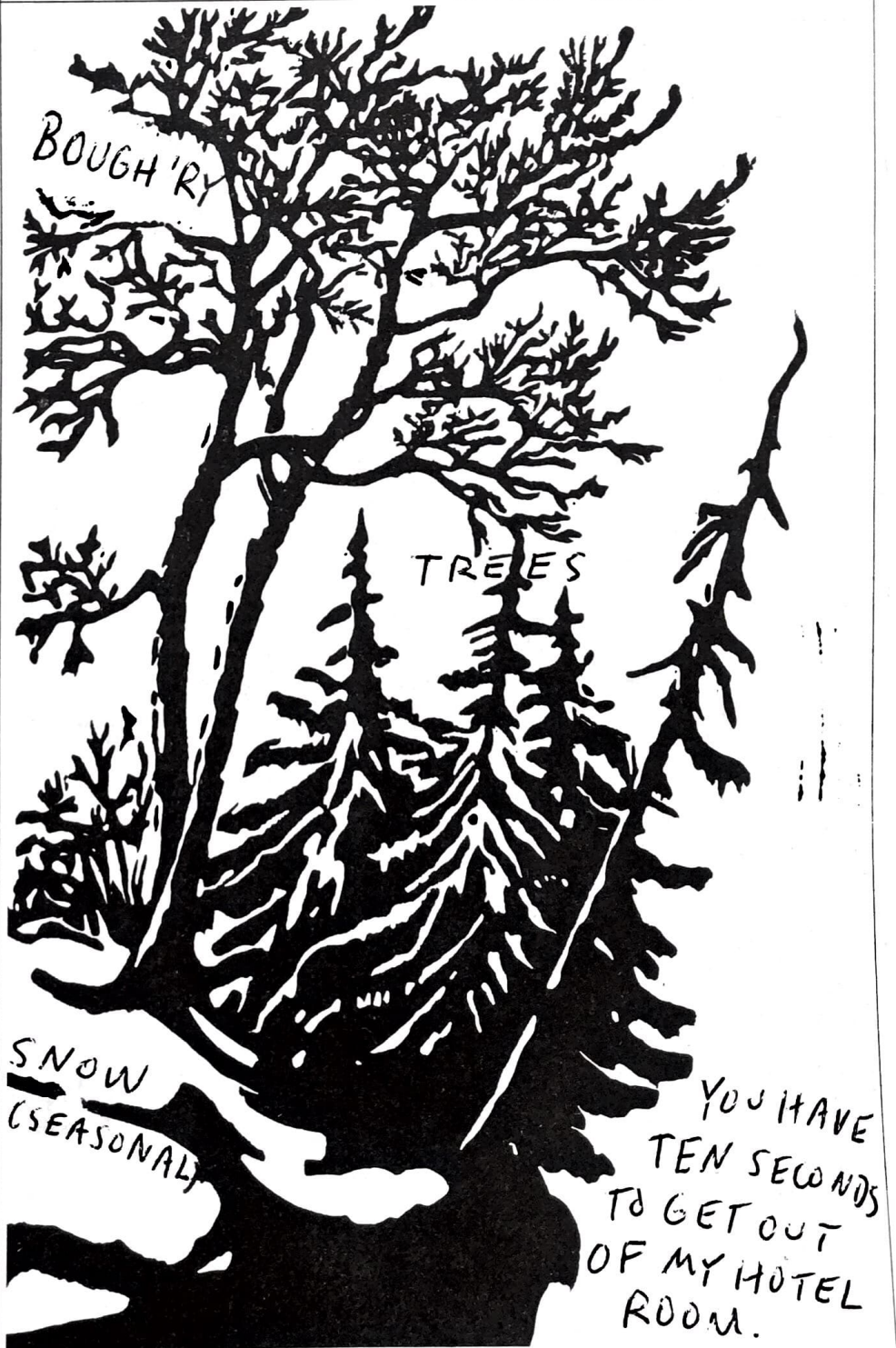
Edwin Torres

Kimberly Lyons

Hafiz

POETRY BY

Tim Dlugos



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EDITOR'S COMMENT

"Our river water at Lo always came to us clouded with sediment. 'Rich,' the Oankali called it. 'Muddy,' the Humans said, and filtered it or let the silt settle to the bottom before they drank it. 'Just water,' we constructs said, and shrugged. We had never known any other water."

...

It is common practice to speak of a given poem as a cut-up, collage, a montage or pastiche. It is also common practice these days to talk about a given poet as "the offspring" of two (or more) other poets. Lyn Hejinian as the progeny of Duncan and Stein; Notley of H.D. and Olson — or even of Browning and Plath.

So the question arises: when does the line-drawing end? When does the composite, collaged — Frankensteinian — sense of oneself as a poet end and the organic begin? When can one say that one is no longer the child of two (or more) schools or traditions and begin to contend with the frightening — vital — sense of oneself as a living, working writer? Not necessarily whole or clean or pure — but organic.

...

In *Imago*, the second volume of a science fiction trilogy by the brilliant writer Octavia Butler, a nuclear war of unimaginable proportions has wiped out most human and animal life on earth. The Oankali, a benign alien species, come down to save a handful of humans — so they can breed with them. The progeny of five parents — two humans, two gendered and one third-gender Oankali — is called in this fictional world, simply, a Construct.

...

"I slipped into my first metamorphosis so quietly that no one noticed. Metamorphoses were not supposed to begin that way. Most people begin with small, obvious, physical changes — the loss of fingers and toes, for instance, or the budding of new fingers and toes to a different design.

"I wish my experience had been that normal, that safe.

"For several days, I changed without attracting attention. Early stages of metamorphosis didn't normally last for days without bringing on deep sleep, but mine did. My first changes were sensory. Tastes, scents, all sensations suddenly became complex, confusing, yet unexpectedly seductive."

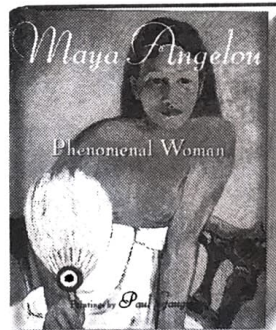
...

In this issue of the *Newsletter* there is change, manifest and latent. There is Prageeta Sharma, who calls it as she sees it; Edwin Torres, fractured, hilarious, healing. There is Kimberly Lyons. The title of her first collection, *Abracadabra*, alerts us to the magic inherent in writing and language, which — to use Sharma's lexicon — is a "transport medium." There is a future in this issue, a future with a past. As Craig Dworkin says in his beautiful retrospective of the work of Lyn Hejinian: "Exploration takes extra words. We cannot reduce it. Of anything that is, there might be more."

...

Construct excerpts taken from *Imago*, by Octavia Butler. (Popular Library: NYC, 1989).

New from Random House A Tradition of Classic Poetry Continues



"I would need Miss Angelou's genius with words to describe the effects of her poetry on my emotions."

—Chester Himes

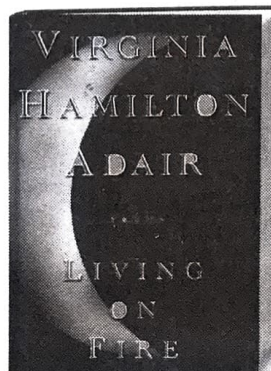
Illustrated for the first time with fifteen full-color paintings by Paul Gauguin.

"Intense, intelligent and wonderfully sly . . ."

—The New York Times Book Review

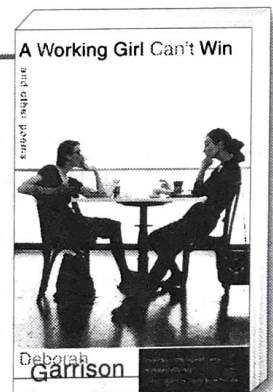
The New York Times bestseller and New York Times Notable Book, 1998

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"Virginia Adair speaks directly and unaffectedly . . . A poet of accomplishment and originality."

—Brad Leithauser, The New York Times



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It Used To Be More Fun

by

TIM DLUGOS

It used to be more fun to be a poet
start the day with coffee and a sense
of bowling over people in a public space
with words that tell how I'm bowled over
this minute by the light
that pours across the city and its various shoes
and uniforms of occupation
troops whose ways of life I'd never share
but for the spaces
we separately passed through
I thought that I was different as I filled
those yellow pads with words
written in the styles of heroes
I wanted to be famous as, but younger,
the New York Ingenue School
of poetry and life but now I know
that saying that I'm different
from the rest because I make a poem
instead of shoes and uniforms
is how I drove my car toward death
too long — it wasn't sloth
or lust or self-absorption
that put me where I ended up,
I was a poet, the same excuse
and boast my heroes used — the one
who was too drunk to see
the headlights coming, the one
who never left his bed, the connoisseur
of cure and re-addiction, the messed-up
child it used to be more fun before I knew
that what I thought I was and wanted
was death and my embroidery a shroud.
Say it loud, I'm not proud
of handiwork like that. I used to think
that poetry could serve the revolution
and that the revolution would transform
the world because the only way
that I could see things ever
changing was from outside
so I hitched my fortune to a threadbare star.

It was more fun to write against the war
 when we thought the gifts our heroes
 the downtrodden of the world
 bore were truth and justice
 instead of one more scam in Vietnam
 my poems and self-righteous voice
 helped give birth to boat people in Cambodia
 to unspeakable crimes and now
 my "US Out of Nicaragua" rap gives succor
 to another ominous bunch of agrarian
 reformers, this one with a top cop
 whose first name is "Lenin," a touch
 straight out of a darkly funny novel
 by Naipaul or Evelyn Waugh
 It used to be more fun when other places
 seemed better and more noble than America
 even the obsessive money-grubbing swamp
 of sanctimony that's America these days
 it used to be more fun when poetry
 didn't cost so much and when I didn't need
 the government to give me money to write poems
 I liked what poetry could do
 to street life, even and especially
 when it came from the streets I liked
 the poise and energy and grace
 of black poets and gay poets and Dadaists
 and unschooled natural artists
 who fell into the workshops through the open doors
 it was more fun before the mass
 of canny grant recipients of many hues
 took over it was more fun in my director's chair
 writing poems in an attic
 than as a director, hurting friends
 regretfully in the service of collective goals
 it was more fun before I knew
 my poetry could never be a spaceship
 to speed me far away, or that I'd always be
 outside it, like a parent,
 seeing its resemblance to
 my old intentions but unable
 to make it work
 and trusting it less
 for the truths it told
 than for the lies it didn't

Tim Dlugos (1950-1990) was active in the Poetry Project scene in the '70s and '80s. His *Powerless: Selected Poems 1973-1990* was published by High Risk Books in 1996. "It Used To Be More Fun," which was found among his papers, was written in the last year of his life. Dlugos' papers are now part of the Downtown Collection at the Fales Library at New York University.

announcements

Joy

New at the Poetry Project's web site: In the March issue of *Poets & Poems*, work by Summi Kaipa, Eric Priestley, Dale Smith, Elizabeth Treadwell, and Lourdes Vazquez at www.poetryproject.com/poets.html. New in Features: Maureen Owen's *Notes on Publishing*, taken from a "Telephone" interview done with Marcella Durand in February 1999. Owen discusses the art of mimeograph publishing, the beginning of *Telephone Magazine* and Telephone Books, women in publishing, and many other essential topics! Read it at www.poetryproject.com/owen.html. Also new in Features, Dale Smith's companion essay to his poems, "Tribute to Paul Metcalf" at www.poetryproject.com/metcalf.html. New in the Tiny Press Center: Elizabeth Treadwell talks about her new Lucille postcard series at www.poetryproject.com/lucille.html. And for your greater browsing pleasure, we created an Author Directory to find your favorite writers quickly and easily at www.poetryproject.com/authors.html.

Amram

On June 7th, starting at 8 pm, the Poetry Project hosts *From Cairo to Kerouac: A Celebration of Words & Music* with David Amram, to help Amram recoup from his house catching on fire this winter. Amram will perform excerpts from his opera based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, including a libretto by Joseph Papp and a short piece from *Theme and Variations on Red River Valley*, with singers Anne McKenna and David Kellet, flautist David Wechsler, and pianist Heidi Upton. The David Amram Jazz Quartet will also perform, as well as the David Amram Middle Eastern Trio, with Avram Pengas and George Mgrdichian. There will be readings of works by Jack Kerouac, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Diane di Prima, Terry Southern, Sonya Sanchez, Langston Hughes,

and Bob Kaufman, with whom Amram has collaborated. Readers will include Paul Krassner, editor and founder of *The Realist*; Estelle Parsons, an Academy Award-winning actress; Sterling Lord, Jack Kerouac's literary agent; Douglas Brinkley, the authorized biographer of Jack Kerouac; Teri McCluan, author of *Touch the Earth*; Brian Hassett; Matoaka Little Eagle; and many others. This event will be \$10; \$8 for students and seniors; and \$5 for members.

Search

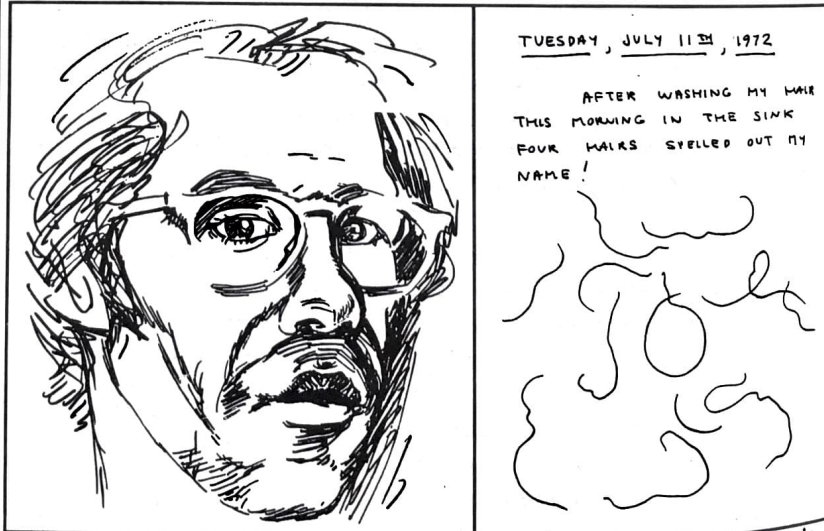
Maureen Owen is editing a new book by Elio Schneeman, forthcoming from Telephone Books, and is trying to locate where many of his poems were previously published. If you published

any poems by Elio Schneeman or you have information about where his poems were published, please E-mail Maureen Owen at pomowen@ix.net-com.com.

Send

Sandbox is seeking writers, composers, musicians, sound artists, singers/ performers, DJs, photographers, cartoonists, and general sound pranksters with strong opinions about sound/ music/ noise today for *Sandbox #8: Bang!* and the *Sandbox* event: *Bang!*, both of which are scheduled for September 2000. *Bang!* seeks to explore sound/ music/ noise production that is aesthetically subversive and/ or socially experimental. Project proposals are due by April 18th, first drafts by May 18th, and final drafts by June 18th. Send to *Sandbox Open Arts*, P.O. Box 150098, Brooklyn, NY 11215.

BRAINARD-FREEMAN NOTEBOOKS



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A Conversation

with

LORENZO THOMAS

by
Dale Smith

LORENZO THOMAS IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN. HIS COLLECTIONS OF POETRY INCLUDE *CHANCES ARE FEW*, *THE BATHERS* AND *THERE ARE WITNESSES*. *EXTRAORDINARY MEASURES*, A CRITICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF 20TH CENTURY AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE, WAS PUBLISHED THIS SPRING BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS. DALE SMITH SPOKE WITH LORENZO ON THE LAWN OF THE TEXAS STATE CAPITOL DURING A BREAK AT THE 4TH ANNUAL TEXAS BOOK FESTIVAL.

DS: You've written political, or culturally critical, poems in the past. Do you still use the poem as a political tool?

LT: Right now I have been writing a number of poems about my family, things I remember about them from my childhood. Aunts and uncles, you know, who had interesting history, immigrant history, it seems to me, when they were younger, had all kinds of amazing adventures in this country long before I was born. And, I don't know, I guess it's a function of age and memory that I feel like going back and reconstructing snippets of things I heard when I was a child, and writing poetry based on that. I don't know if that says anything about the particular moment that we're in. I used to write poetry that people considered very political, though I don't consider all of it to be so. But everything has a social context to it. I don't think that these [recent] poems are different really. They each have a political comment based on what those people, my aunts and uncles, analyzed as the place they were living in, and the actions that they took accordingly. I'm publishing, maybe, what I know of the actions. But if you read further into it, or if you read closely, you can see that they were reacting to a situation, and that reaction was in some sense a political reaction. Though I am not saying the personal is political, because that's nonsense. Politics is the conscious response to the social setting you find yourself in. "Anything I do is political because it's me"—that's not what I mean. These were immigrant black folks who had to make a way in this country, which at that time was not particularly a good country for black folks, immigrants or native born. And so I think part of what I've been doing in these poems is trying to understand what those stories I heard as a child really meant.

The prose things I've been working on, the book that comes out in February, *Extraordinary Measures*, goes back and looks at William Stanley Braithwaite, Fenton Johnson, Margaret Walker [and others]. I went back and started with

the teens, with [Paul Laurence] Dunbar and Fenton Johnson, because, again, I had the desire, reading this for experience. I know my life, and everything that happened with my life, but I'm fascinated to know what happened before I was here.

And I guess I was also looking

at people like Braithwaite and Fenton Johnson as being poets who faced the same issues and problems that I faced and did something in response to those. So Fenton Johnson in particular is, I would say, the first African-American modernist poet. And I wanted to know how he became that. How did he become the first black poet to be published in *Poetry* magazine? How did he become a featured writer in Alfred Kreyenborg's *Others* magazine, and I think maybe for a while, the only black poet who was, you know, part of that circle? What did that mean to him? So I think that's one of the things I wanted to look at because in some ways that spoke to the situation I find myself in often.

DS: What did you find out about Fenton Johnson?

LT: I found out that he was an excellent poet and a horribly naive politician who eventually was driven into silence by the FBI. He turns up under FBI surveillance as a radical dissident because of magazines he was publishing. They weren't poetry magazines. They were magazines intended for the general public, discussing the issues of World War I, segregation and the Jim Crow laws and their relationship to this country that's fighting to make the world safe for Democracy, [even though] black people can't vote or walk the streets safely in the United States. So he's approaching those issues, but unlike W.E.B. Du Bois, at the *Crisis*, who has 100,000 readers who are members of the NAACP, Fenton Johnson has a thousand readers and is publishing his magazine out of his pocket. He can't stand up to the FBI.

DS: So what happened?

LT: What happens is he shuts up, is what happens. So that's, you know, a kind of a horrible story. It's not the only story of that type but it is a story that is fascinating to me.

And I wanted to know more about that. And what I found out in looking at that is the situation Fenton Johnson faced during the World War I period is very much like what happened later on to somebody like Melvin B. Tolson during the World War II period. Tolson had a newspaper column called "Caviar and Cabbages," in a weekly black newspaper called *The Washington Tribune*. He has these poems of that era—"Rendezvous with America" is a very beautiful poem—that are very kind of upbeat in a sense—you know, songs in praise of democracy and all that. And I was interested to see how he reconciles all this. He knows better. He's lived in Texas in a segregated town. Lynchings go on around him. There's all kinds of labor strife going on in the very defense factories where black folks work, thinking, well hey, are black workers going to get a decent payday here, or does the same system continue while once again we fight to save the world democracies, fighting for freedom as Franklin Delano Roosevelt was talking about it? So I wanted to understand Tolson. How does he articulate this? Essentially what he does is he writes on two levels. One level is praising the promise of America as a democratic society and the other level is pointing out the shortcomings. And those are both interwoven into the same poems, and they certainly are the subject matter of his newspaper columns.

Langston Hughes is much the same. "I, Too, Sing America" is Langston Hughes doing exactly that. On one level it praises the promise of democracy in American society while very pointedly pointing out our objections to the reality which has never matched the rhetoric, even today. So essentially what I discovered going back to look at that, was that those are analogous to the 1960s when the civil rights movement began to change into something else, the Black Arts movement and things like that. Those issues were very real in the '60s. And what I learned in going back and doing the research is that's not the first time it happened, and unfortunately, it probably will not be the last time, because the forces that desire inequality in this society do not rest. They are at work doing evil all the time. So it's our business to pay attention. I think that going back and seeing how earlier thinkers, intellectuals or writers tried to deal with the situation can be instructive for us. We can look at where they fell off the tracks, or were pushed, and in most cases it's what's pushed, in this country's history. I think that can be instructive. I'm very dismayed when I talk to people today who think that everything started in 1980 and have no apparent interest in going back and looking at the history here and understanding what happened, what's still happening. Early on in the 1960s I was paying attention not only to African-American poets, of course. Ted Greenwald and I made a very conscious, careful study of Ezra Pound. We read everything we had heard about him. At the same time I made a very careful study, for me anyway, of a number of Surrealist writers, and talked to people like Ron Padgett who of course knew a lot more about it. Ron is a translator of French, so he knows what he's talking about.

DS: What did you learn from these writers?

LT: I learned a great deal from them. And then of course,

that thing the French Surrealist writers lead you to looking at is the Negritude writers, who are sort of lumped in that same category with the Surrealists. So they are Surrealists with a difference, and the difference is not merely skin color, or melanin. The difference is also a political difference. As disaffected as André Breton or Louis Aragon might have been, the black African and West Indian students—they're both of course [Léopold Sédar] Senghor and Aimé Césaire—have yet another dimension of disaffection or disaffiliation that's expressed in their work as people of African descent living in a colonial situation. Certainly there are, in terms of the poetry, some affinities—technical affinities—between what the French Surrealists are doing and what the Negritude poets are doing. The Negritude poets learned from the French Surrealists, but then they also learned from the Harlem Renaissance [poets] Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen. Césaire and Senghor were totally excited when in the 1930s they come across Eugene Jolas and his translations for *Transition* magazine of Claude McKay and Countee Cullen. You can follow also the African poets who were writing in Portuguese, [like] Francisco-José Tenreiro from the Cape Verde Islands, who writes very much in Portuguese but in the style of Langston Hughes. And these poets, the Portuguese-African poets, are of course, first excited by their elders, who are people like Senghor, and from there they too discover the poets of the Harlem Renaissance writing in English, and that excites them. And they, you know, create Marcelino dos Santos from Mozambique, and people like that. So all those things were very interesting to me and the people I was working with in the '60s in New York, people like Ted Greenwald and Ron Padgett, at Umbra Askia Muhammad Touré and David Henderson and Black Arts writers Larry Neal, Steve Kent, Amiri Baraka and all those people. Everybody was very much interested in knowing who came before us regardless of what their nationality or race might have been, though we might have been more interested in some people than others, individually. But that was the thing, we wanted to know who came before us. What, if anything, did we have in common in terms of the situations that we faced and the situations they faced, which is, I think, what study is about. It's not about being ignorant. How can you be a poet and be ignorant?

DS: You mean there were things that happened before 1980?

LT: Yeah, [laughter], just a few.

DS: So *Extraordinary Measures* is an investigation of a neglected past?

LT: This is a collection of essays that covers the entire 20th century in terms of starting with a poet like Fenton Johnson, in the teens, and coming up to commenting on some people that really start publishing in the '80s, people like Harryette Mullen and Paul Beatty, who I think are continuing some tremendous, great work. And again, I'm trying to trace the connections of those poets to the forebears, the people who've set patterns that they are now developing, expanding and moving onward. Because I think we have too much of a

love of novelty in the United States.

DS: What do you mean by that?

LT: Well, it's something that Jackson Mac Low warned me about many years ago. He pointed out to me that originality is not by itself a quality to be adored. Just because something is novel or original doesn't make it worthwhile. But in the United States we highly prize novelty and newness. I live in a city where you can't find a building from before 1883. This is also a city that has torn down skyscrapers that were built in the 1960s, mainly because they're too old.

DS: They're also replacing the stadium...

LT: Yeah, and replacing the baseball stadium for the same reason. It's too old. [Laughter]. It was built 30 years ago. And given a society like that I think the artist who does not pay attention to what the past was about is really aiding and abetting what I heard a poet this morning talk about (Dani Apodaca), [who said] the United States is a nation of amnesiacs. And that's the truth. Our concern for novelty and so-called originality or newness leads us to become a nation of cultural amnesiacs.

DS: It also seems that our stories, told through the media, comes as a series of Columbines, or other high-stress news events, crossing the screen and then fading out with no follow-up or judgment.

LT: There's no shadow cast at all. Everything is a brand new story. It lasts for three weeks and then it's dead. You can't find a newspaper anywhere in the country that will even run a sidebar giving you a history of one of these trouble-spots. It's like, hey, this is a brand new word, remember it for the next few weeks, and it will be replaced by something else. Like what Orwell writes about in 1984, where there's, you know, a memory hole and the files go down the memory hole and that's the end of it, and we conjure up something new. Sounds like what happened last month except the names are different. I don't think attention to the past destroys the poet's ability to say something new, or to be innovative. I don't believe the cliché either that you have to know the rules before you can break them. I think that's nonsense. But I do think you have to have a cultural memory. No matter what you want to do in terms of innovation you must have some sense of what came before this moment. There was a statement that Haki Madhubuti made several years ago in a moment of severe disappointment at what was happening with the racial situation in the United States. He said, why is it every 20 years black people have to do the same thing all over again. Right? Well part of it is the intransigence of the society and the evil-doers within it, who never cease. The other is not paying enough attention to the past, so that you have constantly people who think that they're doing something brand new when in fact they're doing something that was tried before. And because it was tried before doesn't mean that you don't do it again. But

you should have some awareness of what happened the last time this tactic was employed.

DS: As a teacher of poetry you probably see poems that are technically well-written but without a deeper cultural understanding?

LT: Oh, yeah. I think that poetry like anything else can be looked at as the creation of a wonderful, artistic object. If you're interested in lamps or coffee tables—if that's all you require of them—great. Well, lamps, you might want to have lamps that work. Certainly people have and can produce that, and it's just marvelous to look at beautiful objects. They really don't say much or really illumine anything for anybody, and that I think is certainly what you want to avoid. Unfortunately, like anything else, it's very easy to get into that. You write something that someone seems to enjoy and then the tendency is, well, do it one more time. But I think sometimes that's not the question. Why did people enjoy this one? Is it because it simply reinforces what they already believe, is it because it was the word of the moment, or is it because I actually managed to say something that was useful? And saying something that is useful in a poem, because I did it this morning, does not necessarily mean that writing the same thing again tomorrow is going to be useful tomorrow. Again, I think that's why, as a poet, we take responsibility for the whole history of the art form that we're doing. Nobody else is responsible for it except us. We have to know it if no one else does.

DS: Has knowing the history of the poem deepened your own practice?

LT: I don't know. I would hope so. In terms of craft I would say, to go back to our lamps and coffee tables, craft is just a matter of saying, well here I have before me 11 tools and I know how to do three things with each tool. Now there are some people who know how to do four or five things. This is entirely apart from having anything to say. Am I going to contribute anything to the development of my life-affirming discourse, which are issues that are beyond the so-called question of craft? I think the two are connected. I think that a good example is the longest movie that Leni Riefenstahl made, *Olympia*. She also did the *Triumph of the Will*. And in *Olympia*, Riefenstahl invented the way that sports is still broadcast on television. Thirty cameras, slow-mo, stop-action, etc, etc. She did all that in the 1930s. She invented the cinematic vocabulary of sports broadcasting. Well, it's marvelous technically. There's no better example of film editing that you can show anyone. But the whole point of it was to glorify the theory of the Aryan racial supremacy of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. That's the reality of it. So you have brilliant technique in the service of a rather dangerous social and political idea. Are the two connected? Yes they are. Can they be separated out again? That's the big question, which again brings you back to looking at a writer like Ezra Pound, for example. It's the same thing. There are technical lessons that you can learn from reading him, starting with *A Lume Spento* from 1909 and going forward to "Rock-Drill" in the *Cantos*. You can learn lots of things,

technically. And every poet writing in English, I think, has. Every poet who started writing before 1980 anyway. [Laughter]. Does that mean that you also imbibe Pound's social and political ideas? Well, yeah, you have. Have you bought them? Maybe not, but you have to be certainly consciously aware of that possibility. How much of the idea does the technique reflect and vice versa? I don't know the answer to that. I wouldn't even speculate. Each case is different. There is an answer there but I just don't know enough yet to frame one.

DS: Who were your teachers?

LT: The other poets that I knew in the formal workshops or the collectives—or just who I was hanging out with. I think that Ted Berrigan had a workshop that traveled with him, but it wasn't really a workshop. It was just hanging out with Ted. It was a workshop if you want to think about it a certain way because everybody learned something from Ted. You couldn't stand five minutes in Berrigan's company without learning something valuable. In school I was much more concerned about the literature teachers I had who taught me well. I read everything and I didn't do so well in courses that were not my major. But those were people who thought that you had to know early English writing and you had to know Victorian writing and you had to know Modernism. You had to know everything, was their attitude. Which was fine with me. I just loved to read everything that they put in front of me. And I guess, in terms of what I was saying earlier about knowing the history of the art, that's what I got from my literature teachers. But if you're talking about visual arts, painting or sculpture, or you're talking about music, no one in her right mind would suggest that a musician should not know the whole history of music. It doesn't matter at all what they want to do. Right?

DS: You'd want to listen to it all anyway. You'd want to buy every record you could get your hands on.

LT: Yeah. So you can sample it. [Laughter]. I met a few poets who don't read anything except their own stuff. I don't know how they survive as people, but I think that, again, one of the concepts of the Black Arts movement was to read and explore. And one of the things that happened in the Black Arts movement is that everyone realized that we had gone to school and we had these marvelous literature professors who had made us read everything, but they hadn't made us read any black people. So we had to go back and do that. And that was the main thrust of the Black Arts movement. We said, hey, we've got to go back and rediscover and reclaim all this material. It's there, it's in the library. It's on the street too. And that was what we were about, going back and finding it and reclaiming it, because again, when you start talking about a culture, the artist is the custodian of the culture. No one else is. Baraka says if you lose your culture you're in bad shape. This doesn't mean venerating it as an idol, or spending millions of dollars at auctions to buy rubbish, which is another expression of things going haywire. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about what Robert Creeley at one point referred to when he was asked about tradition. He

said, well, tradition is what is still useful. You see? And we're constantly making choices. But there are people who think that tradition is some kind of catechism or regimen that is imposed by some panel of experts somewhere. That's not the deal.

DS: It seems too that, since tradition is either ignored or, at the other extreme, commodified and marketed as an experience of high culture, people who work in the arts find themselves in a difficult position, because the public view of the artist doesn't match his or her living practice.

LT: I think that in some ways artists invent their audiences, but I don't think it's something that can be clearly seen, or that pays off in the short term. Certainly, the poets who started writing in the late 1940s and early 1950s have had a fantastic impact on the mind of America, like Allen Ginsberg, or even an older poet like Melvin Tolson, who is only now beginning to be appreciated for what he does. The changes are real and can be seen if you stop now and look back. Whether anybody could actually see those in the 1970s or 1965, I don't know. You can go to the library and look at *Time* magazine and see. It's an interesting research project. I don't know if anybody could actually pinpoint what had happened, or when it happened, but from this vantage point we know it happened. The world came to be more like they wanted it to be than it was then. That's what I mean when I say the artist invents his or her own audience. The world comes to be more like what we want it to be than it is when we started.

DS: It also became more economically and socially restrictive.

LT: Yeah, well, artists are not the only minds at work. [Laughter].

DS: It would be interesting to see what those minds were up to in the late 1940s.

LT: Well, among other things, they were inventing cybernetics, the computer—ENIAC and UNIVAC. That's what some other minds were doing in the late '40s. And they were doing it based on what the defense needs of World War II had been, which then became the rationale for post-war civilian society, with voices like those of the poets and painters saying, wait a minute, or howling, in protest.

November, 1999
Austin, Texas

o o o

Dale Smith coedits with Hoa Nguyen the magazine *Skanky Possum*. He lives in Austin, Texas.

Retrospective

LYN HEJINIAN

by

Craig Dworkin

Born in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1941, Lyn Hejinian graduated from Harvard University in 1963. It's true that there are times when it is embarrassing to have come from California. The degree to which you're sucked in, you soak it up. I do not want to drop any California ideas. I am your friend, accountable for my loyalty and my love. I want to say that at the outset, and most emphatically, in order to prevent any misunderstanding. Now that this has happened. Between circumspect and retrospect there is only the time of an idea. Hers has been the more difficult devotion. It's true to experience. Its question is looking backwards. In my opinion... no... well, of course it's natural to look back longingly at the brink of experience. You see? It's a purely rhetorical question. Myopia is psychosomatic. Such is your irony — seen at a distance. "My darling, your beauty is replacing irony." Imagine, please: morbid myopia. Thus myopia may serve to dispel the pains of chronophobia. Every syllogism assumes a certain empathy. We have come a long way from what we actually felt. Writing maybe held it, separated, there to see. An instant magnificent with claustrophobia. A moment yellow. The wall I noticed was papered. Against this significant backdrop my life is just a speck. Myopia. *My Life*. But what's the difference — every text aims at the complete realization of one's self-unimportance. Yet in this lies the true. Life lies alone. It flies in the night. [Blake]. It requires a high level of consciousness along with a loss of self. A loss of self with a high level of content. An emotion being a part. The mere mood of our words was producing content. Apart. A pause, a rose, something on paper implicit in the fragmentary text. p, o, c. Is a rose [Stein]. One grows restless. After all romantic love is an inquiry. Of course this is a poem, that model of inquiry. That love is emotional restlessness. Each metaphor is either psychological or linguistic. Language itself is never in a state of rest. *The Language of Inquiry*. The impossibility of satisfying oneself is part of language. The obvious analogy is with sex. It's a sex of inquiry. The genitals themselves are instruments of inspection. Of course I am exaggerating. The obvious analogy is with music. Music is an exaggeration. In 1983 Hejinian joined her husband, the jazz saxophonist Larry Ochs, on a tour with ROVA Saxophone Quartet to Leningrad and Moscow. The musician has a spouse and it attends. *A Thought is the Bride of What Thinking*. And the act of listening... like Faust!... the

itch... it's erotic to say everything. It's in the nature of language to encourage, and in part to justify, such Faustian longings. But to be honest, I do understand a few things about music. One tries to give the reader benefit of what one knows. Poetry anticipates a love of thinking. Your pleasure waits thought. Or that was the anticipation. But pleasure is a mental process too as well as the producer of an aesthetic object. A rose, a camera. Memory in repetition presents a self-sufficient object. Repetition in copying seems to mean to say, "I, too." It's a way of saying I, too, want you to have this experience. But words must have the experience of it. Form subjugates every experience. Repetition is a form of friction. Repetition in its form from a freedom barely intimate. Eventually everything turns back and it's voluptuous to repeat. The complex sex alternative, with complex repetition and simple combination. A sex static and tingling of oblivion and description. I thought I had said too much about discontinuity and the sex act. Sex is the excess of objectivity. There's no exit to objectivity. There is no static language. The work should be twitching with destiny or with necessity. Won't art fit with any opportunity. Convulsive beauty [Breton]. Very abstract. Beauty is meticulous but profuse. Necessity isn't any more abstract than beauty. A beauty of the indescribable. So beautiful and accurate. If we keep on abstracting, indeed. No continuation but a spasm. But quivering is an example of permeable intonations. Because they tremble, as it were, on the brink of one or another commitment. One thing I think about melody is the ordinary coincidence. That kind of intentionality. Monotony, autonomy, melody, coincidence — I want to indicate both blind chance and clear destiny (but really this is about introspection). Introspection is not a choppy narcissism nor a paraphrase. This is the difference between language and "paradise." The apologies on paradox and dice. This is not an accident. A person decomposing the unity of the subjective mind by dint of its own introspection. The coincidence is an estimate but also an instance of seduction. All our desires are synonymous. But don't say "desire" — we should look rather for verification. The urge to tell the truth is strong. Reality follows the mind as shadows the body. That strange matter in which I'm bound. But reality is the matter mediated. Everything else is real. The poem is protracted in evidence. There, just with a few simple words it is possi-

ble to say the truth. I want to say something about hypocrisy. When, by the way, I say say I mean write. I mean, "to write." And so forth. I cannot write for aid. *Writing Is An Aid To Memory*. Which is a kind of literacy. How to write. [Stein]. Her autobiography is ninety percent picaresque. Can't you make it eighty? [Stein]. The long shot got the nod [Ellison]. Apple is shot nod. Left shoe on right foot. Shod in high heels. "She imitates the generous woman: Here, sweetie, eat my apple! Then women are always sorry and they wish they could say, Hey, eat your own fucking apple! That one's mine!" "[laughter]." Women do have sense of humor. Goats do have wet noses. The old woman never tethered her goat. Still does the redness of an apple make it pretty. Pomes. My French was useless. In view of the potato. A cat is in time. Without knowing French and don't pronounce. Green verities. Apple. Names. Leave the names of apple cut. I do like to compare apples and oranges. To be lucky a mediation. That the definition of happiness wants to append. Hap. Pends, draping what thought to be, hung [Coolidge]. What was the meaning hung from that depend? O.k., I don't know. A continuation of quotations. So much depends upon [Williams]. Gradually the wheelbarrow is locked with gravel. Where it rested in the weather there it rusted. Red weather. The destruction of the postulates in poetry on which that notorious reference depends. In red weather [Stevens]. So much restlessness because one is hungry. No ideas but in potatoes. Hunger and thirst very different. It's like nothing without restlessness. There are no words but in thinking. No ideas but in things [Williams]. But the work is probably a good deal wiser than the horny old doctor he was. Sweet William. One kind of hunger is generosity. Hard to distinguish hunger from wanting to eat. Confusing volume (bulk) with the romantic... but that's generosity's ambition. You have always

known we wanted us. We have always known you wanted us [H.D.]. Quoting was something everyone needed. It's afloat in imitations. Sometimes the simplest identifications may be a cruel innocence. One's attention intersects with recognition. It is not the unknown but the imminence of the known that is mysterious, poetic, producing a state of heightened syntax. But he remains aloof, saying only that things *seem* familiar. Seeming is believing. I cannot quote, I cannot get context. That's not description, but testimony. It's devoid of interpretation. Writing is this unsystematized accumulation of statements and findings. It is in rereading one's journals, especially the old ones, that one discovers the repetition of certain concerns, the recurrence of certain issues, certain chronic themes that are one's own. Ideas remain fundamentally the same but the details change radically. The chronic ideas turn up. The time comes when each individual poem reveals not only its own internal connections but also spreads them out externally, anticipating the integrity each poem requires in order to explain obscure points, arbitrary elements, etc., which, if they were kept within the limits of the given text, would seem otherwise to be mere example so the freedom of expression. Our experiences achieve pathos when they force us to acknowledge that the significances and meanings of things — things we've known, it would seem, forever, and certainly since early childhood — have changed — or rather, when we are forced to absorb the memory of being utterly unable to catch or trace or name the moment of transition when one meaning changed to another — the moment of interruption in the course of our knowing such things. If there were continuity some of it could absorb this. The transition is natural. I decided to add the following line.

Systems betray. Break them up into uncouneted discontinuous and voluminous digressions. Each alteration produces communication. Discontinuity (reference) is the survival of our expectation. Such hopes are set, aroused against interruption. Prediction and its collage. Lines interplay as we pass and form distracting patterns which encourage us to return, to alter purpose, wander back and forth, delaying our arrival elsewhere. One's concentration jumps around. I have written from almost every quarter imaginable, secular and persuasive, broken and improbable, proven and ambiguous. Pleasures through and with form. It's delightful, restricted, but inevitable yet in its unavoidable abridged impression harsh — if harshness and inexpressibility can be joined. The emotional intent is divergent and highly diverse. It is a variety, and it was made without the knowledge or permission, should probably be taken seriously, the desire being ardent and the willingness ready. I was beginning to look for some meaning when I should have been satisfied with events. It's something entirely meaningless and unexpected. Nothing in sequence, nothing in consequence. I simply couldn't manage the incorporation of what I know — or was in the process of knowing. I didn't change it. I am keeping quiet now. I behave with improvisation and intention. And the logical category called concatenation (on occasion betrayed). An example of para-description. In wide erasures with morphic resonance. Not fragments, but metonymy. There is no marginality in metonymy. There are so many metonyms. The poem is a correct metonym. This word in a flow is the metonym. Sleeplessness is a hazard of metonymy. Insomnia. Solicitude had for several days now developed a theory, a polemic. Aesthetic discoveries are themselves a theory made with bel-

ligerence. A drive of remarks and short rejoinders. They offer an apology more greeting than critique. An experiment in sequence and a greeting. This style has both a rational and an irrational ambiguity. I can't help but be interested in how things sit — before I intervene. With an instinct for interference. For the precision and detail of their intersection. Such displacements alter illusions, which is all-to-the-good. It's not displacement but relocation. And so entwined. Not without transitions. For example saying so is really only a transition. I'll always explain myself. Dialectics, as I understand the term, is a style of inquiry. It's strange to what extent we sometimes try to defend our work. Any work dealing with questions of possibility must lead to new work. Let me explain —. What are the objects in this poem on selection. The old fragmentary texts. Organizing a lot of material into a general view. An accumulation of detail making its own mass. A process whose pace doesn't coincide with comprehension's pace. One of the results of this compositional technique, building a work out of discrete units, is the creation of sizable gaps between the units. So between phrases it's essential that other phrases be inserted, and that they intercede logically, so the world will gain stability and the writer won't seem like an idiot. Exploration takes extra words. We cannot reduce it. Of anything that is, there might be more. There are many symmetries yet to be distributed. The asymmetries are immeasurable, intricate, endless. Life has no end, and they are complete. The end is temporary. But there's always some teacher lecturing endlessly from his collapsing podium with an infinite text. Cannot be taught and therefore cannot be. The second edition is now in its third printing and is taught in high schools, colleges, and universities throughout the United States and Canada.

Sustained pedagogy. So it's a theory of duration. A pleasure, and learning thus obtained. For the duration is enduring as has occurred in great desire its companion passion, as it is traditionally tendered. Buttons. Isn't the avant garde always pedagogical. I feel it's disappointing when it's not understood. (I have said, and meant, that I want people to "get" this, and yet, with expansive sensations, I hate to "lighten up"). They used to be the leaders of the avant garde, but now they just want to be understood, and so farewell to them. Rejection of closure, refusal to end. So where should we stop. Nowhere to end. The rejection of transparency. "The Rejection of Closure." Can I wait for a gradual resolution? One longs to be understood. A fascination for closure. But with an incomplete gesture, an unfinished phrase. Zoo... coffee... sky. It's the principle of connection not that of causality which saves us from a bad infinity. [Mac Wellman]. But that infinity is interrupted by clouds. Each droplet with the accurate details of its description. Accidents condense — a fabulous tedium. We are subject to the attractive force of surface tension. And one begins to examine the construction of small resonating forms (this occurs most often in spring), to investigate their behavior, and to extract from that a set of — I couldn't say images — principles which seem to be the only ones adequate to the attempt to say something. The horizon line is a spring. Zontal. Cutting off the horizontals — language put us there. A description is a question put to land by language. A word is a panorama. The perpetual field of paranoia. *The Cold of Poetry*. In the porous snow of eyes. Ice. I'm looking, prematurely, for a particular point of view — that of one who has already achieved objectivity. But I was a mere observer at my vanishing point. The vanishing point on every word. Objectivity modified by the desire not to com-

municate — but it's impossible not to communicate. Words, for example, simply can't help but give onto ideas. And a name at the vanishing point in a person's description. A maiden name. Ran into the hall to hang it up. If I hadn't found it, someone else would have — corridors are sad. It is good to know so. There is very little melancholy between a thing and a word that presents it. I'm not opinionated, except with aphorisms. A cell of graffiti is aphoristic. Something as nebulous as an epigram. An epigram is for timing and typing. Well — perhaps so. It is at this point that we again pick up our history, widely protracted. She began writing poetry as early as grammar school, and began publishing her first works in magazines in 1963 and 1964. She had made a sentimental beginning — it was very boring to me. It's beginning another pleasure in the middle of its message. That is to say, one steps in *medias res* with fanatic redundancy. Hejinian's other books include. By turns they are philosophical, anecdotal, and intimate. A little prose, a collection of anecdotes. There's no need to distinguish a poem from prose. Rushing chapters. *A Short Russian Novel*. It is hers to be methodical — genuinely methodical. It's as if she had been waiting for the chance to tell an anecdote. The greatest thrill was to be the one to tell. Thus was refused some affection for her own speculation. She binds herself to observation. She longs for something whole, complete, entire, but when she encounters disintegration she greets it like her lover. She's in an exchange system of irreversible flow. She follows word to word in words' design. Side by side and counterbalanced will strike now one and now another and have always been somewhat elusive, fanciful, and sometimes tortured, a number of highly, an ideal of perfection, and only she demanded, of an art. She means nothing. Nothing muffled in memory. The very

memory of motion. *A Mask Of Motion*. A word is not a point but a spot and prosody is a study of its motion. Every word is a process permitting flight. It is a prolonged, ruthless, unguarded kinesis. The muffle could take forever. But generally this requires money (that kind of memory). Memory is the money of my class. Memory meaning physically, expository, generous with substitution. My memory equals a narrative replacement. When I get nervous I'm narrative. Even words maintain this insecurity. *The Guard. The Cell*. Words are guards. Anxiety is vigilant. Maybe constructedness could take forever. We must learn to endure the insecurity as we read. But these distinctions can't safeguard my privacy. On which side of the guard is the word. *One Side, Around*. We will never know a true confession. To omit mention of giggling, of moving water, of the intensely disagreeable shock when any sensations are interrupted, and the delight of mere distinctness would be a fault. But why change subject matter. "Smatter." For that matter, it ever has been and ever will be, repeated, one hopes. "Humans repeat themselves." *Redo*. Repeating, dispersed, tired. A considerable amount of talk is tiresome. Versatility must be habitual. As for we who "love to be astonished." But this procedure is exhausting in that it reflects. As for we who like to think logically. Just as language itself is inexhaustible it has logic. Our exhaustion might account for the passage of time but not for progress through it, through innumerable temporal passages or conduits without a subsequent sense of communication, of acknowledgment, and of achievement. The bone of communication is hollow. During its absence my presence. My aporia achieved the glamorous anticipation of an answer. What does someone mean with such an expression? I have thought you misinterpreted my emphasis occasionally. I understand, I said — but it's poetics, not linguistics.

It is a poetry of certainty. It is completely straightforward. It invites participation. It was of great beauty. It is not imperfect. It keeps no memories. It is impossible. It holds. This is no accident. I would not prefer lack of complication. I was not disappointed. I have broken with fidelity to big things. Nothing was betrayed from my betrayal. Erring is faithful. But it's tempting. We will believe everything we say. For others, however, explanations are due — if not forthcoming. The hunt goes on. There's no where to get lost — or no, there's nowhere to be found. Now you know where you are. And what have we truly experienced. Too little danger, too much love. I can't know what I've missed. Poetry is violent. There is absolutely no catharsis. Everything is perpetuated. Particulars are always true. Disintegration is the grain of thought. The century of the fragment is demi-technical. Poetry is continuous. I am grateful.

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Craig Dworkin is currently teaching at Princeton University.



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poetry project calendar

events

APRIL 3. MONDAY

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]

APRIL 5. WEDNESDAY

Akilah Oliver & Bill Bissett

Akilah Oliver's first full-length book, *the she said dialogues: flesh memory*, was recently published by Smokeproof Editions. Bill Bissett's books include *loving without being vulnerabu* and most recently *skars on th see-hors*. A new CD, *rainbow mewsik*, with Chris Meloche is out from Red Deer Press.

APRIL 7. FRIDAY

Long Shot Magazine

A reading from contributors to *Long Shot Magazine*, including Reg E Gaines, Cheryl Boyce Taylor, Tony Medina, Dan Shot, and Jack Wyler. [10:30 pm]

APRIL 10. MONDAY

John Coletti & Susan Mills

John Coletti is currently collaborating on the book *A Place to Shin* with painter Zachary Wollard and a book of comics with artist Jonathan Allen. Susan Mills is the author of *Ruderal Plants in Manhattan* and *Crows*, a collaboration between 7 Canadian women filmmakers and writers, forthcoming from Ace Art Books.

APRIL 12. WEDNESDAY

Eric Priestley & Janet Hamill

Eric Priestley's books include *Abracadabra* (Heat Press), *Raw Dog* (Holloway Press), *Flame & Smoke: An Authentic Account of the Watts Riots* (The Watts Foundation). He is the recipient of a Paul Robeson/Zora Neale Hurston Award for Arts. Janet Hamill is the author of *Lost Ceilings*, *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, *The Temple*, and *Troublante*. A collection of short fiction, *The Eternal Café*, co-authored with Patti Smith, is forthcoming from Norton.

APRIL 14. FRIDAY

Po' Jazz

Jazz Open Mike (read your poem with jazz accompaniment) with featured poets and musicians Golda Solomon, Tom Aalfs and Crystal Williams. [10:30 pm].

APRIL 17. MONDAY

Kevin Opstedal & Michael Price

Kevin Opstedal is the editor-in-chief of *Blue Book* magazine. His latest book is *Crush* from SurfZombie Press. Michael Price is the junior editor of *Blue Book* magazine. *The Maya Journal*, published by SurfZombie Press, is his latest collection of verse. His book of poems, *Doombook*, was published by the Figures in 1999.

APRIL 19. WEDNESDAY

Adeena Karasick & Nada Gordon

Adeena Karasick is presently working on a CD-Rom intra-genre test, *Arrhythmatrix*. She is the author of *The Empress Has No Closure* (1992), *Memewars* (1994), *Genocide* (1996), and *Dyssemia*. Nada Gordon is the author of *More Hungry*, *lip*, *Rodomontade* and *Koi Maneuver*. Her forthcoming books include *foreign bodie* and *Correspondence* (with Gary Sullivan).

APRIL 24. MONDAY

Timothy Liu & Michael Scharf

Timothy Liu's books of poems include *Vox Angelica*, *Burnt Offerings*, and *Say Goodnight*. He is the editor of *Word of Mouth: An Anthology of Gay American Poetry*, forthcoming from Talisman House. Michael Scharf is a contributing editor at *Publishers Weekly* and *Poets & Writers*. Last year, he published a chapbook, *Telemachiad*, with his own Harry Tankoos Books.

APRIL 26. WEDNESDAY

Amiri Baraka & Cecil Taylor

Amiri Baraka has been at the forefront of the black-arts movement for the last 30 years. His most recent books include *Funk Lore: New Poems* (1984-1995) and *Transbluesency*. Other books include *Black Music*, *Preface to a 20-Volume Suicide Note*, *Home*, and his

play, *The Dutchman*, for which he received an Obie Award. Cecil Taylor is a composer and jazz pianist, who is the recipient of a MacArthur Award and who has had an 11-CD box set released from the Berlin festival held in his honor. His many records include *Unit Structures*, *The Great Concert of Cecil Taylor*, *Historic Concerts: Max Roach and Cecil Taylor*, and *Segments II*.

APRIL 27. THURSDAY

Exene Cervenka, Elyn Maybe, & Patricia Smith

Exene Cervenka, vocalist and lyricist for the seminal Los Angeles punk band X, will perform in her first spoken-word performance in over 6 years. She is the author of *Virtual Unreality*, *Adulterers' Anonymous* with Lydia Lunch, and *Just Another War* with Kenneth Jarecke. Elyn Maybe is the author of *The Cowardice of Amnesia*, *Putting My 2 Cents In*, and *The Elyn Maybe Coloring Book*. She will read her work in Michael Radford's (*Il Postino*) upcoming film, *Dancing at the Blue Iguana*. Patricia Smith's latest book, *Africans in America*, a chronicle of the slave trade in this country, is the companion volume to the PBS documentary. [\$10; \$8 students; \$5 members][8 pm]

APRIL 28. FRIDAY

The World in Us: Lesbian and Gay Poetry of the Next Wave

A celebration of the publication of *The World in Us: Lesbian and Gay Poetry of the Next Wave* with Rafael Campo, J.D. McClatchy, Joan Larkin, Eileen Myles, Michael Lassel, Regie Cabico, and many others. [8 pm].

APRIL 29. SATURDAY

Edward Dorn's Gunslinger

In honor of the late poet Edward Dorn, Edward Sanders, Maureen Owen, Hettie Jones, Barbara Barg, Todd Colby, Fielding Dawson, Gillian McCain, Simon Pettet, Ammiel Alcalay, Don Byrd, Kristin Prevallet, Vyt Bakaitis, Joel Lewis, Lewis Warsh, and many others read from Dorn's book-length poem. [2 pm] [Free].

MAY 1. MONDAY

Open Reading, sign-up at 7:30 pm [8:00 pm]

MAY 3. WEDNESDAY

George Stanley & Martha King

George Stanley is the author of *Tete/Rouge/Pony Express Riders*, *You, The Stick*, and *Gentle Northern Summer*, among other books. Martha King's most recent book, *Seventeen Walking Sticks*, is a cycle of poems responding to drawings by Basil King. A collection of short prose, *Little Tales of Family and War*, is forthcoming from Spuyten Duyvil Press.

MAY 5. FRIDAY

Danny Lama & The Convulsive Cabaret

Danny Lama & the Convulsion Cabaret perform. Also featuring Kim Addonizio, Lisa Glatt, David Hernandez, and Jane LeCroy [10:30 pm].

MAY 8. MONDAY

Michael Ruby & Tracy Blackmer

Michael Ruby's first collection of poetry, *At an Intersection*, was recently published by Alef Books. Tracy Blackmer has performed in clubs and theaters, including Mother, the Westbeth Theater, Town Hall in Provincetown, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

MAY 10. WEDNESDAY

Susan Gevirtz & Charles Borkhuis

Susan Gevirtz's books include *The Black Box Cutaways* and *Narrative's Journey: The Fiction and Film Writing of Dorothy Richardson*. Her newest book, *The Hourglass Transcripts*, is forthcoming from Burning Deck. Charles Borkhuis is the author of *Hypnagogic Sonnets*, *Proximity & Stolen Arrows*, *Dinner with Franz*, and, most recently, *Alpha Ruins*. A collection of full-length plays is forthcoming from Spuyten Duyvil Press.

MAY 12. FRIDAY

Jeffrey McDaniel & Thomas Lux

Jeffrey McDaniel is the author of *Alibi School* and *The Forgiveness Parade*. He has performed at the Taos Poetry

Circle, Bumbershoot, the Smithsonian Institute, the Leningrad Writers Union, and on National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation*. Thomas Lux is the author of many books of poetry, including *New & Selected Poems 1975-1995*. [10:30 pm]

MAY 17. WEDNESDAY

Vicki Hudspeth & Simon Ortiz

Vicki Hudspeth is the author of *White and Nervous and Limousine Dreams* (with drawings by James DeWoody). She has directed plays by John Ashbery and James Schuyler with sets by Jane Freilicher and Alex Katz, respectively, for Eye and Ear Theater. Simon Ortiz is the author of 17 books, including *From Sand Creek, Fight-in': New & Collected Stories*, and *Men on the Moon*.

MAY 19. FRIDAY

Kings & Queens Drag & Wait

Pat Riarch hosts a night of lip-synching and full-throated night gender-bending bards and singers: including Gerald B. and others. [10:30 pm].

MAY 22. MONDAY

Jen Hofer & Kevin Davies

Jen Hofer is currently editing and translating an anthology of contemporary poetry by Mexican women, forthcoming in 2001. Her "What's News?" piece appears in this issue of the *PPNL*. Kevin Davies is a founding member of the Kootenay School of Writing. His books include *Comp.* and *Pause Button*.

MAY 24. WEDNESDAY

Charles Bernstein & Jessica Grim

Charles Bernstein is the author of 25 books, including *Log Rhythms*, with pictures by Susan Bee, *My Way: Speeches and Poems*, and *Republics of Reality: 1975-1995*. Jessica Grim is the author of *The Invertebrate Life*, *Locale*, and *Frays*.

MAY 26. FRIDAY

Heights of the Marvellous

A celebration of the publication of *Heights of the Marvellous: A New York Anthology* with Edwin Torres, Sharon Mesmer, Maggie Estep, Beau Sia, Prageeta Sharma, Lee Ranaldo, Michael Portnoy, Amanda Nazario, Marianne Vitale, Anselm Berrigan, Mitch Highfill, Maggie Nelson, and editor Todd Colby. [10:30 pm].

MAY 31. WEDNESDAY

Vernon Reid & Friends

A night of music and word with Vernon Reid, former guitarist for the band Living Color, and various poets.

JUNE 2. FRIDAY

Spring Workshop Readings

Readings from the students of the Poetry Project's spring workshops. Workshop leaders are Todd Colby, Kimberly Lyons, and Julie Patton. [10:30 pm]

JUNE 5. MONDAY

Joel Sloman & Cole Heinowitz

Joel Sloman is the author of *Virgil's Machine*, *Bus Poems*, and *Stops*. His *Cuban Journal* is forthcoming this year. He was the first assistant director of the Poetry Project in 1966, and the first editor of *The World*. Cole Heinowitz's first collection of poetry and prose, *Daily Chimera*, was published by Incomunicado Press in 1995. She is currently working on a novel, *The Dream Life of Anger*.

JUNE 7. WEDNESDAY

From Cairo to Kerouac with David Amram & Friends

A celebration of word and music with David Amram; musicians Anne McKenna, David Kellet, David Wechsler, Heidi Upton, the David Amram Jazz Quartet, and the David Amram Middle Eastern Trio with Avram Pengas and George Mgrdichian; and readings of works by Kerouac, Ferlinghetti, di Prima, Sanchez, Hughes, and others with readers Paul Krassner, Estelle Parsons, Sterling Lord, Douglas Brinkley, Teri McCluan, Brian Hassett, Matoaka Little Eagle, and many others. This event will help Amram recoup fire losses. [8 pm] [\$10; \$8 for students and seniors; \$5 for members].

The Poetry Project is located at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery
131 East 10th Street, New York City 10003
<http://www.poetryproject.com>

All events are \$7.⁰⁰, \$4.⁰⁰ for seniors and students, \$3.⁰⁰ for members and begin at 8 PM unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call 212 674-0910

book reviews



Bliss to Fill

BY PRAGEETA SHARMA
Subpress, (2955 Dole Street, Honolulu, HI 96816) 2000,
50 pages.

Prageeta Sharma does not shy away from the past. Indeed, she is unabashedly fond of the shrewdly deployed archaism as *Bliss to Fill*, her debut collection, proves. Her poems are littered with *thees*, *thys*, *whilsts*, and *shalls*. Often, she'll match an archaism with a contemporary foil, setting up a pairing that allows for the momentary reconciliation of past and present: "The moon, I knew was rising, sped to a velocity thrice times the hi-hat." In addition to her linguistic atavisms, her poems are haunted by concepts that bear little relation to the modern word. Among other anachronistic types, we encounter pirates, lords, serfs and ladies dropping hankies. These figures are incorporated into a contemporary setting, coexisting with a poetic "I" that is a resolutely 21st century gal. These combinations point to an inquiry that's central to Sharma's work: How can we reconcile the contemporary urban American life of "long island iced teas" and "shrinks" with traditional practices and values ("arranged marriage's," reli-

gion, "chivalry")? Our social and cultural inheritances still permeate our lives, but are these adequate for negotiating 21st century urban realities?

Sharma's book tackles both the social and artistic implications of this question. Even a cursory glance at her manuscript is enough to reveal her allegiance to her literary precursors. Poetic and philosophical luminaries are evoked both in introductory epigrams and within the poems themselves. Sharma is indebted to the past and admittedly so. How is this reflected in her poems? Stylistically, she treads an ambiguous middle ground between formal and casual, traditional and experimental. She doesn't shy away from grandiose Romantic notions like "grace," "bliss" and "the unfortunate doom of love gone awry." But she has no problem allowing these terms to coexist with modern trash talk like "mushy" "creepy" and "dumb." She's got one foot tangled in "laurel" wreaths while the other taps out the beat of some obnoxious rocker's latest "hit song." Her romantic penchant is thus tempered by her solid grounding in present day realities, and whenever a poem threatens to float off into *lala* land she jerks it back to earth with a deft turn of phrase.

Sharma has a way of joining straightforward words in quirky and wonderful combinations. She gives us "window gasps," a "girl bucket" a "kindergarten frenzy." These playful turns fly in the face of logic and hearken back to that first grade just-learning-to-read excitement when words were new and fun. Despite a relatively simple vocabulary and syntax, Sharma's statements are often phrased in a way that renders them ex-

tremely opaque, at times, completely impenetrable. This tendency can be, by turns, intriguing and frustrating. At times the poems seem to be couched in an ideolect that only the poet herself could understand. The reader feels alternately like she's been exploring a fantastic Arthurian themed fun-house and like she's been suckered into spending the past hour playing with a trick box that will never open.

These poems are populated by a slew of pseudo-symbolic figures including a "station manager" a "mysterious savant" "the genius" the "she-spartan" and "the general." Pre-eminent among these motifs are the "girl" and her "suitor." The girl acts as an emblem for the developing self, the insecure, clumsy, adventurous self who gets "in trouble" and gives herself over to "imaginings." She is most often identified with the speaker.

The suitor is this sweet young thing's idea of an ideal man (and, by extension, life as governed by a happily ever after fairy tale ending). He represents lovers, both real and imagined. This lover cannot, of course, live up to a girlhood daydream of romantic perfection, but this girl is, in fact, part adult, and realizes full well the futility of her fantasy. In inventing her own cast of characters to enact a nebulous romantic charade, the poet has seized control of her unrealized vision, creating a modern fairy tale that articulates her disappointment at the reality of the game while allowing for a little bit of grown-up make-believe.

The poet thereby affirms her control over her own personal territory: the poem. Here, if not in the the real world, she calls all the shots and manipulates elements to her own purposes. "I am transporting you to your/ parallel

desires..." she tells a particularly recalcitrant suitor (or soon-to-be ex-suitor). The poet has transformed herself into a space of hero/ sorceress. The poem itself has become a "parallel universe" (a concept Sharma is fond of) where the girl can finally do as she pleases. It is a place of freedom where she can reconcile opposites, create hybrids and liberate herself from the constraints of both social and "natural laws." Using "language as a transport medium" the poet takes poetic license to its logical conclusion. Such an enactment of self liberation was no doubt fun to write and is an equal pleasure to read.

—Liz Young

Elizabeth Young is the Assistant Editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*.



Fractured Humorous

BY EDWIN TORRES

Subpress (2955 Dole Street, Honolulu, HI 96816), 1999, 78 pages.

I have seen Edwin Torres dancing to the sound of a musical saw while wearing a hat of dirt on his head in a store window, and once wearing pure white with the painter/ poet Elizabeth Castagnas on New Year's day 1999. I've always wanted to be Edwin Torres for a day, to think like him, to wear cool glasses, to be as tall and thin, to have Puerto Rican soul so I could write "I'm near a tiger's smooch, BURP!" Or to audaciously title a poem "Thru the

Looking Ass." Or to say "Chuckles evince themselves/ laughily from my rhino nose/ Rhinoceros gear up/ through shredded membrane..."

Fractured Humorous is a complex book composed of multiple journeys; a book of travel, a book of fractures and a book of healing. It is a visit with the fractist, who in healing becomes the healer. The nomad is a constant in Torres' work, an alter ego for this poet who is claimed by a diverse group of avant-garde factions that include: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe, Poetry Project, and the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school. Thus he finds himself a nomad, a traveler among poets. There is a reason why Torres is claimed by all poetic camps, and that is because he is an extraordinary poet. *Fractured Humorous*, selected and edited by Carol Mirakove for the Subpress collective, is extraordinary poetry.

The book begins with a literal fracture and goes on to explore fractures and healing of different natures. The book is divided into five sections by time and place, and then further divided by single transition poems that allow the reader as well as poet to shift gears and prepare for the next journey. You could think of *Fractured Humorous* as a wonderland, however, unlike Alice, Torres is the inventor. And it may be where he prefers to live. It is more than speech and linguistic/ logic razzle-dazzle, it is writing from the heart of the nomad, the lonely truth seeker, and shaman who journeys on in spite of our selfish and self-destructive nature.

In the introductory poem "Roaming as the Roamers Do," Torres lays out his naked ambitions and intentions. He fully confesses his belief in the power of language to divide and to heal, it is this faith in language that drives the nomad forward: "...to play mindfields offa fractured stomp// <society as a mul-

timingual somethingle> to fess up to the fact — that— // the ramifications of this <inner> playground/ manifest themselves with every fantasy i/ denude myself in// now naked in my fracture <deluded nudist manufactured>/ <tracked in rapture> the fracturist/ soars above the mend/ aware of what needs to meet/ to make the heal complete."

In this collection, it is the body, as well as place, that exerts a gravitational pull on Torres' wonder world. The first section "fracture :: one month/ with broken arm in bed" deals with the poet's post-accident awareness. Torres writes "After my accident, I found myself walking the streets/ with alert-risers on full ... for left side." The broken arm is loaded with metaphor, for Torres imagines himself "as a winged warrior." The body is what grounds this nomad literally and figuratively. A month in bed allows the poet's imagination and humor to flourish while his body and psyche recover. "May Cause Drowsiness" comes with the instruction "recite in heavy accent of non-determined origin": "Ah. The killers of pain./ Do not, it says here... Operate/ heavy machinery!/ No crane!/ No lifting!/ Do not, for example ... Affect revenge/ on nine-year old bully whom/ you would wish dead! DO NOT — is a bad/ thing to do... On these killers! Did I/ mention —oh — do not erect/ the four-story ...DON'T DO THAT!"

Torres' nomad is a romantic. It is love that propels the restless seeker. The six part "Fractured Humerus" opens with a female presence:

My wings she asked

Are they injured Will you be
able to complete your
mission

How about the expanse they

cover Their breadth Will
 they keep
 their hover Are we still in
 mid-flight What about
 your fancy's tails
 Will we remain in their
 obstruction Is moonity
 glow still just a
 starlit waif away You promised
 me a curve Has that been
 interrupted

In "alaska :: five days/ with poets
 in snow," the presence of an
 eroticized Mother Earth awes the
 nomad. "How daring you are,
 mother/ How simple to place/
 your coldest daughter under-
 neath your/ hottest flame and
 my heart, here ... Caught/ in
 your frozen arms." The last
 poem in *Fractured Humorous* is
 a love poem, as the nomad con-
 templates the return of his lover
 amid the ruins of post-commist
 Berlin: "Rimfires of/ revolution
 filtered through me, ... Where
 we are/ one direction, where my
 west waits/ for changes in the
 wind, changes/ To bring my east
 back to me."

"diana :: one day/ with sister
 in boston" is unusually straight-
 forward and tender. The poet
 has one short day to say goodbye
 to his sister who is leaving for
 Africa, her other home, for one
 long year. The poems reveal the
 distance, distance creates. "...We
 didn't know/ what to get you ...
 you're so hard to/ shop for, so
 we decided/ on money, you
 decide/ what's important." The
 sister mirrors the nomadic poet,
 "I look at her journey.../ when
 you go to something that isn't/
 on steady ground, you look/ to
 hold onto something you know.
 And so/ we sigh, to hear our
 breath/ our lungs.... work."

The effects of place on lan-
 guage are most fully realized in
 Torreian speech as in "england
 :: three weeks/ with poets in
 van." Compare Lewis Carroll's
 "Twas brillig, and the slithy
 toves/ Did gyre and gimbale in
 the wabe:/ All mimsy were the
 borogoves,/ And the mome raths
 outgrabe"

with:

When little kids
 in foreign lands jibber,
 they jibber in foreign tongues.
 The little fipps
 they ask for as little kids will do,
 Become jibbering jibbs with
 accents—my
 how flippery-foo!

"Through the Looking Ass" is a
 hysterical entry point into a
 Nuyorican/ UK world as the
 narrator in search of his cat
 crawls through the looking ass:

I'm now inside my plumber's hole
 looking for my cat, with
 no clothes on. Me and the animal
 are naked... on all fours.

I find things I've misplaced/
 when I was 90 years old — I'm not
 even
 50 yet, so it's a curious thing
 to discover — what I'm going to
 lose
 before I get it.

Waterpipes soakup atmosphere
 and cat-hair.
 I call his name out and hear
 a hollow ringing from my mouth
 ... another hole
 appears on my face
 where my mouth should be.

I'm naked and step inside this new
 hole.
 I'm in — what my mouth is —
 when I shut-up ... I'm serene
 with no hat, sitting on a plumber's
 vacation
 where a hole rules my life
 everytime I sit on the toilet.

In the final segment "berlin
 :: three days/ with pen on
 mayakovsky lane," Berlin seems
 like a sister city to the lower East
 Side, with its squatters and
 artists inhabiting a decaying
 industrial landscape teeming
 with struggle and possibility.
 The centerpiece of this section
 "The Architect of Change,"
 written five years after the wall
 fell, is almost a manifesto. It is

full of optimism as the poet
 imagines the possibilities of
 Berlin, the fractured city once
 divided, now healing:

*In the architecture of change,
 the blueprints rust
 as the artists take over. In the
 neon twilight, a new
 generation ages quickly,
 before you can say elder, before
 your eyes, a generation
 of twilight bluers,
 quill-glow on the resonance of
 reverberation, on the
 warmth of concrete hill
 sides,
 in the fields of rocket
 sculpture, stillborn
 on their movement
 of hope.*

In the last stanza, the nomad
 bears witness and shares:

I do these acts of chivalry
 thinking nobility is
 my engine
 I've been here... just like you,
 neighbor
 What I've seen is in my time, is
 all
 I have eyes like you, pen like
 you
 So why is this heart so new
 As it sees envisioning
 differents upon visits
 Of declaration and splendor
 It telegrams them to you, dear
 neighbor... who are now
 beside me
 Re-visioning your see, as this
 Goes on

Torres remains the most opti-
 mistic, agile poet around. *Frac-
 tured Humorous* is a poetics of
 possibility and romance. His
 nomad is not a cynic but a
 heroic wanderer who, in spite
 of and because of the human
 condition, journeys on.

—Brenda Coultas

Brenda Coultas co-edited the *Newslet-
 ter* with Eleni Sikelianos last year. She
 has a letterpress book coming out from
 the Art Institute of Maryland in the
 spring.



Abracadabra

BY KIMBERLY LYONS

Granary Books (307 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1401, New York, NY 10001), 2000, 100 pages.

The title of Kimberly Lyons' first book, *Abracadabra*, contains 5 A's, and vibrates with associations. On one hand it refers to Lyons' main precursors, the Objectivist poets, especially Louis Zukofsky (one of the poems in the book is titled "A Fragment of A"), on the other to the kind of white magic we associate with childhood. Yet the Objectivists, whose work Lyons has assimilated beautifully, is only one of her sources, and unlike Zukofsky, who tried to personalize Pound's notion of collaging "radiant gists" and "spots in time," Lyons proposes a more fluid and spectral method of juxtaposition. This is where the magic of the title comes in (now you see it, now you don't), both adult and childlike magic, the poetry never far from child's play in the hand of an adult, a continual glancing over things as if they were being made visible for the first time.

"A life collects from objects" she writes in "For Cecile Poe," but the objects that proliferate in the poems aren't consumable goods or brand names. Often, the objects that enter her line of vision are discarded on the street — objects of neglect as opposed to objects of desire. ("A high heel/ inside a suitcase/ filled with rain" — from "Shower" — isn't far from "a red wheel/ barrow/

glazed with rain/ water.") By creating a verbal translation that eroticizes the object, the eye assumes guardianship over what it sees, if only for a moment. The high heel on the street is no accident. The poet is going somewhere fast, and in the process trips and falls, leaving her baggage behind. Even if it's not her high heel, she identifies with what she sees. Identification is sometimes the only basis for emotional reality and maybe objects can only be meaningful in a subjective context, i.e. you have to become the object to give it meaning. In a brief introductory note, Lyons acknowledges the friends who sent her postcards or gave her collages which inspired many of the poems, as if to say that the way things enter your life (as gifts, or at random) is the key to how you perceive them and connect them with one another. But all objects are neglected, out of place, eccentric, erotic — and maybe an emotional state, as much as an idea, is necessary to fuel the connection. Nor is it accidental that she begins the book with a quote by Joe Ceravolo, a neglected great poet, also heir to the Objectivists. (Like Lyons, Ceravolo assimilated the work of first and second generation New York School poets, and went on to create something completely new.)

The book is divided into five sections, more recent poems first, but reads of one piece (there are no obvious shifts in content or tone to distinguish the sections), with the title poem coming at the end of the second section:

We watch together
black collide with white.
This is not the night
falling around snow

or a mailbox swallowing
our letter
frozen dark air around the cubes
the white sink cups
wet black pantyhose
like a lake seen
from the
small window of a train.

The window of a face
on film
big kosher salt in a small black pan.

The way the objects stay afloat in this poem, as if passing through a magnetic field, reminds me of Rachel Whiteread's use of negative space in her installations and sculptures, "the night/ falling around snow" as tangible as the "air around the cubes." The poem keeps expanding until it arrives, in the last line, at something real (even "wet panty hose" registers in terms of its own reflection), not a film of the real or a view out the window but the thing itself — "kosher salt in a small black pan" — basic and inscrutable.

There's a drama in this book which belies the playfulness of the title, a buried truth which the title also reflects, the awakening of the child-likeness, the serious play of negotiating the abyss of one's child-self. "Abandonment of a thing attached/ gets worked out, right?" she writes in one of her most ambitious poems, "One Hundred Views of Edo." The question mark at the end of the statement is a cry for reassurance that you can give up on things and people and everything will work out. The question implies disbelief or doubt — the measure of the act of abandonment — but at least she's asking it. The word "right" is the non-cynical voice speaking: one wants to live inside the word because the negative response — "no, it won't work out" — is too terrifying. Possibly the drama is not so much dealing with loss as creating a world that matters to begin with. The poem is a collage of contexts and glimpses, a travelogue through "transparent shadows/ on the rim of the virtual," where everything is anticipatory and "the rewards are sugary and elusive" and the only thing that makes sense are "the paths, internal." Lyons acknowledges the viability of both resistance and submissiveness, not insistently, but as part of an ongoing process where resolution — becoming one thing — is preferable to co-existence. Her

work, for all the influences it summons, is truly a rallying cry for independence from the lineages of the past, for the freedom to follow "paths internal." *Abracadabra* marks a defining moment, a real opening, a step onwards.

—Lewis Warsh

Lewis Warsh's new book is *The Origin of the World*, forthcoming from Creative Arts. He is Editor and Publisher of United Artists Books.

Hemisphere's Planetarium Petals

BY KIMBERLY LYONS
Situations Press, 1999.

"Hemisphere's Planetarium Petals" is an extremely subtle and sharply imaged work that, like Joseph Cornell's dream boxes, collects objects under a transformative gaze, registering both their original status and their placement in the mind as elements in a new landscape. The poem starts in the viscous, ocular realm of movement and metaphor. "The eye, a box of fluids, conveys/ a channel/ a platform/ of weeds/ the floor of the river floats."

In part three of Lyons' five part title poem, she writes "The geometry/ holds the glass of the lake." Here I am reminded of "The Human Condition," the 1933 painting by Rene Magritte which depicts a painting on an easel facing a window that looks out on a nature scene. The painting fits the landscape so closely that the canvas appears to be transparent. Magritte's painting makes us aware of the taken-for-granted transparency of language that is placed over the world. There is a similar, surreal displacement of word and image in many of Lyons' poems. "She reclines in a starred throne// and her mouth engulfs the horizon," or later "This mass pushes upward/ displaces// another place// . . . Frame of/ themselves pointing/ out of the frame," or still later "The radio girl/ lossoes word/ horses over the fence."

Again and again, a mindful image is cut out of the background of the world and then placed over another context, while the hollow shape left in the background is filled in by an image from a new context. This juxtaposition of contexts highlights various ways of perceiving, of being-there with things and words in which the actual commingles and intertwines with the purely possible. These poems resonate between subject and object in a generous playfulness that often ends in a kind of ironic caress as in the lines "the bread Jesus walks on/ to get to his/ bowl of cereal."

The second poem, the "Three Algonquins," has a longer, prosy line but is still involved with picking up the sticky edges and "fur candy" that accumulate and are transformed by memory's brushes. We are in a kind of junk shop of the mind where "The x-ray, the gems, the folded map of 'The United States,' the beetle, the crumbs in the groove of the ruler" all contribute to a collage of disparate surfaces. Lyons wonders about an old photo of three Algonquins that seem to hold "a secret" in their silent, icy stares. "Lockjawed women with small oval eyeglasses holding bibles... Skating Algonquins, beaver stole milk board. Hinge of this thought, a cigarette makes an arrow." In this regard, thought steals back and forth between objects and words, revealing a world of firefly details that comes close to a descriptive hallucination.

Kimberly Lyons' planetarium is a plethora of bright, irrational bloomings, radiant insights, and odd bits and pieces of found objects that have gotten stuck in the fabric of memory like "Painted postcards/ off the sidewalk/ from the dead man's apartment."

—Charles Borkhuis

Spuyten Duyvil will publish Charles Borkhuis' *Mouth of Shadows: Two Plays* in the fall of 1999, and Bucknell University will publish his book of poems *Alpha Ruins* in 2000.

The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master

TRANSLATED BY DANIEL LADINSKY
Penguin/ Arkana, 1999
326 pages, \$13.95.

Daniel Ladinsky's *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz* is an "original" poem masquerading as a "translation." These two readings are irreconcilable, and this fact profoundly mars the book.

As an "original" poem, the book belongs to the tradition of visionary, religious writing, as the following quote from its introduction makes clear: "I feel my relationship to Hafiz defies all reason and is really an attempt to do the impossible: to translate Light into words — to make the luminous resonance of God tangible to our finite senses. About six months into this work I had an astounding dream in which I saw Hafiz as an Infinite Fountaining Sun (I saw him as God), who sang hundreds of lines of his poetry to me in English, asking me to give that message to 'my artists and seekers.'"

As God talked to Moses in Hebrew, to Mohammad in Arabic, Hafiz spoke to Daniel Ladinsky in English. Mr. Ladinsky is translating a dream, not a 14th century Persian text. His preparation towards it has the aura of the road to Damascus, "My work with Hafiz began in the fall of 1992, on a early morning walk in the countryside of western India, on a beautiful tree-lined road that leads to the former residence of Meher Baba...."

Incredible as it may seem, there is not a single poem (gazel) of Hafiz of which any one of the poems in *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz The Great Sufi Master* is a translation or adaptation or extrapolation or deconstruction; no poem in the book is in dialectic relation to a specific Persian text. Nada, besides the obvious fact that Mr. Ladinsky's poems ignore Hafiz's gazel form. One parable in the book, "The Difference Between," belongs to Indian folklore. Hafiz did not

write it; in fact, narrative is alien to Hafiz's elliptic, serialist lyric style. The book's most striking images are Mr. Ladinsky's inventions:

COURTEOUS TO THE ANT

God
Blooms
From the shoulder
of the
Elephant
Who becomes
Courteous
To
The
Ant.

It may be thrilling to discover a touch of Zen in Hafiz, "the Sufi Master"; but Hafiz never said these lines, except in Mr. Ladinsky's dream. Elephants nor, I think, ants appear in his poetry. No "God" blooms from no "shoulder." Once the assumption of a classical 14th century text behind it, which gives it a radiance as the receiver of a prior light, is removed as fictional, one has a new age rip-off. The poem becomes unreadable.

WHAT THE HELL

The
Real love
I always keep a secret.

All my words
Are sung outside Her window,
For when She lets me in
I take a thousand oaths of silence.

But,
Then She says,

O, then God says,

"What the hell, Hafiz,
Why not give the whole world
My
Address."

A witty, mildly shocking poem is putting curse words in Love/ God's mouth and comparing "Her" to a courtesan. But, again, Hafiz never wrote these lines. The careful, self-conscious arrangement of words

on a line suggesting a precise cadence being reproduced is a fiction. If the poem were by Hafiz, its Sufism would verge on heresy. As a 20th century poem, it is nothing. Its heretical aura is delicious (maybe that's what the author means by light) and virtual, devoid of danger.

In his renderings, Daniel Ladinsky alters Hafiz's text in two ways the combination of which, in my view, is fatal, creating the irreconcilable break between "originality" and "translation." The gazel is an intricate, serial, non-narrative form, often consisting of variations around a theme. Within a given rhyme scheme lines can be rearranged. Hafiz's elliptical and allusive style, reinforced by rhymes, create sound patterns similar to arabesques. Daniel Ladinsky may be forgiven for ignoring the intricate gazel form, particularly if he wants to focus on the clarity of Hafiz's vision — "translate his Light" — which is embodied in his images, his symbols.

Images, symbols are not metaphors, alluding to something outside themselves, in Hafiz; but autonomous. In her book on Sufism, Sufi, Expressions of the Mystic Quest, Laleh Bakhtiar describes this essence succinctly: "[symbols are] 'in suspense' in the place of their appearance ... like an image suspended in a mirror. It is a perfectly real world, preserving all the diversity of the sensible world in a spiritual state." Symbols do not reflect or point to, but embody a vision. As spiritual essences, they are possessors of light. In other words, they can not be substituted or dispensed with. That's why Daniel Ladinsky's fictitious renderings are so profoundly wrong, even in the book's own terms, making the poems unreadable as Hafiz translations. My Iranian friends are struck speechless by the clueless nerve of the author's assertions.

Why does the title of the book say, "Poems by Hafiz," and not "Based on" or something in that vein? The charitable answer would be that Mr. Ladinsky did not know any better, that he truly believes he is translating Hafiz and *The Gift* is a

visionary labor of love. He told me as much in a telephone conversation, pointing to how well the book is doing, when I asked him to refer me to one or two specific Hafiz Gazels in the book, which he could not. The second answer is that "Hafiz" is a marketable brand name. Would Arkana have published this book if its author was merely Daniel Ladinsky? I am also curious if Penguin has ever vetted the nature of these translations.

The Gift may give great delight as a new age religious/inspirational text, decidedly less so, in my view, as a 20th century poem; but one should have no illusion one is reading Hafiz, either his text or his spirit. As such, the book is worse than a failure; it is a deception, a marketing rip-off of his name.

The following are three couplets from two gazels from *In Wineseller's Street, Renderings of Hafez* by Thomas Rain Crowe. These translations may be imperfect, but the light emanating from them is authentic, revealing perhaps that Holderlin is the poet closest to Hafiz in spirit in the West:

As the Beloved passes by in an open
boat, all He sees are strangers,
And this is why He always wears a veil

O lord, tell me how it is that wine
sticks in the lip of a pitcher,
Like blood. And yet when it is poured
a sweet glugging fills the air.

Help! The Hearstealer has gone away.
Through my weeping eyes
The idea of a letter from Him, is like
reading words floating on the
water of a rushing stream.

—Murat Nemet-Nejat

Murat Nemet-Nejat's essay, "The Peripheral Space of Photography" will be published by Sun & Moon's Green Integer series this year. Another essay, "Mao and Matisse: A Decorative Poetics, Pleasure, Ideas, and Rebellion" is also forthcoming on the Web magazine *Big Bridge*. He is currently editing an anthology of 20th century Turkish Poetry which will be released by Talisman House.

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from Letters Home:
Reading Dislocations, Or
The Machinations of Defamiliarization

by
Jen Hofer

no hay qué decir
no hay cómo no decir
lo que no hay

there isn't anything to say
there isn't any way not to say
what there isn't

—María Negroni

We want to say
'Common sense'
And cannot. We stand on

That denial
Of death that paved the cities,
Paved the cities

Generation
For generation and the pavement

Is filthy as the corridors
Of the police.

—George Oppen
from section 26,
"Of Being Numerous"

The bougainvillea flagrant in full bloom, jacaranda just beginning to lavender up the avenues. Student strikers in prison, the federal riot police occupying the National Autonomous University of Mexico, officially reopened for classes yesterday: in the School of Philosophy one single student showed up for classes, in the School of Law strikers and anti-strikers came to blows. Half a moon in a dusty mid-afternoon sky. It's hot. It's mango season. There's a lot of traffic.

In the too-big, too-fast, too-much world, a person might begin to locate herself by walking around, taking the bus, taking the metro. And by reading. To begin to become situated by moving through a space, or through the vertigo of the spacious, expansive limitations of difference and foreignness. When I'm feeling a little awkward, I often

head for the bookstore, or for books and literary magazines, wherever they might be found.

It is a source of endless joy to me that you can buy just about anything on the street in Mexico City. Literature is no exception. While some kiosks are devoted entirely to news media or pornographic comic books or a combination of tabloid newspapers, cough drops, and tamarind-chile candies, many others carry the range of dailies (from near-fascist Right-wing rags to the questionably comfortable musings of the Left intelligentsia; I've been buying various newspapers of late in my assiduous search for housing and to see the same event reported in four or five different papers is as wondrous as Alice in Wonderland but without the tea cakes), each with its weekly literary supplement — these are by far the most widely-read literary organs in Mexico — and also glossy, pop-culture publications with hefty sections devoted to literary arts (like *Equis*, *ViceVersa*, *Nexos* and *etcétera*). Many of these, and many publications devoted solely to literature, have varying degrees of connection to officially (i.e. governmentally) sanctioned culture machines and/ or political parties — coming from a place where the primary publications I read are the likes of (among many others) *kenning*, *XCP*, *Chain*, *combo*, *Interlope*, *Explosive*, *Tripwire* and *Tinfish*, I feel daunted in my attempts to understand cultural production in a context where the arts are often (always?) used as a means for governmental "self-expression" and/ or so that certain kinds of politics can gain a purchase in international intellectual communities. Such is the case with the two magazines which arose, somewhat in opposition to each other, in the aftermath of Octavio Paz's *Vuelta*. *Letras Libres* (ed. Enrique Krauze) is almost alarmingly filled

with colorful ads (many of them financed by government institutions, the phone and electric companies, or the right-wing opposition party); nonetheless, I find it quite wide-ranging in its consideration of political and socioeconomic issues, prose, poetry, reviews and literary theory. (*paréntesis*) (ed. Aurelio Asiain) is a bit more overtly literary in its artsy, aesthetics-of-the-word presentation. Divided into sections, it features poems, prose and critical texts (many in translation from countries around the world), reviews, and short commentaries about political, literary and art-world matters, and it is a thoroughly enjoyable read. However, at the risk of sounding anti-machista (a risk I'm happy to take), I must note, after having read a number of issues of these publications, how amazing it is to me that while their tables of contents regularly feature between 30 and 40 entries each, you are likely to encounter between zero and one texts (more often than not a poem) by writers of the female persuasion.

At absolutely the other end of various spectra — literary, political, production-value — are the large number of zines, pamphlets, tracts and other assorted music, art, activist and sex paraphernalia which can be found on the street at the Chopo every Saturday, flea-market-vivid in its mix of gutter punk, glamour punk, goth, heavy metal, hippie and both local and foreign tourism, and off the street at the Biblioteca Social Reconstruir (Social Reconstruction Library), an outstanding anarchist library on the second floor of a nondescript building with a slightly precarious elevator. These (like *La voz de Anáhuac*, *Brigada Subversiva* and *Recordatoria*), along with a few small-run and extremely difficult to locate journals like *La Jícara* (ed. Ambar Past, printed and sewn by hand on outstandingly gorgeous hand-made paper), *Azar* (one project of a small press of the same name, ed. Rubén Mejía), *útopos* (unsigned collage pamphlet series, nearly impossible to find), *TunAstral* (epistolary broadside series edited by Roberto Fernández Iglesias) and *Sintética* (one of the funkier magazines coming out of Baja California, ed. Karla Mora Corrales) form what I

might call the foundation of a network (though not necessarily particularly well-networked) of independent little magazines. Mexico, however, is a country where foundations shift and even shatter with some regularity: both literal and figurative earthquakes provide fairly regular disruptions.

Outside the regions where these and other small magazines are produced, it is almost impossible to find them. Few normal readers (I don't count myself among these) will spend their afternoons in the mustard-yellow angular concrete imposition at one end of Plaza Loreto which houses the offices and libraries of the CONACULTA (National Council for Culture and the Arts), with an extensive collection of litmags from all over Mexico. Other magazines, produced in Mexico City or distributed here (usually only a few University-published magazines or sometimes those published by state-run Casas de la Cultura make it out of their hometowns), can be found at delicious used bookstores like La Torre de Lulio and La Torre de Viejo or in the quiet coffee-infused comforts of upscale, though I must admit delightful, bookstores like Librería Pegasso and Librería Gandhi, and sometimes on one of the hundred and fifty or so two-blocks'-worth of tables, book-heavy under strung-together tarps, at the Sunday phenomenon known as La Lagunilla, one of the largest antique, junk and book markets I've had the overwhelmed pleasure to wander. These magazines often contain a compelling mix of translated and Spanish-language fiction and non-fiction prose, political and literary theory, and poetry, and include journals with themes, like *Alforja* (ed. José Ángel Leyva, different themes each issue — my recent favorite focused on poetry and film) and *Líneas de fuga* (ed. Philippe Ollé-Laprune and published by the Friends of the International Parliament of Writers, an organization dedicated to ending censorship and aiding writers in exile), and non-themed journals like *Fractal* (ed. Ilán Semo, with beautifully silkscreened

covers), Biblioteca de México (ed. Eduardo Lizalde, large-format and lovely and one of many journals published by the CONACULTA) and *Poesía y Poética* (ed. Hugo Gola, published by the Universidad Iberoamericana which just last month cut funding to the magazine, signaling its probable death unless readers come to its speedy rescue).

In a context of government repression and the specifics of Mexican cultural complexity, there is the problem of the person, the problem of the writing (I'm well aware that these contexts, these problems/ questions are equally present in the United States — equally, and also differently). I forget why it's important to write yet a viable activist method eludes me. My passions are in language yet I resist the pleasures of the text. In a context of overt and covert official cultural infiltration of the arts, how do I position myself as a reader? I find that my methods and frameworks no longer fit my situation, as if I am understanding all the words but the significance of the


phrase as a whole arches out away from my ability to see its shape, a set of tracks whose beginning and end (and do I have any way of knowing these are different?) I cannot see, whose edges are a bit blurry in the partial light between two thoughts, two languages. In "Of Being Numerous," Oppen continues, "The power of the mind, the/ Power and weight/ Of the mind which/ Is not enough, it is nothing/ And does nothing." And even so, it must continue doing. What else, after all, does a girl have?

o o o

Jen Hofer is editing and translating an anthology of contemporary poetry by Mexican women that will be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 2001. This "Letter Home" is part of an on-going series. For more information on any of the publications or places mentioned in this essay, to donate time or money towards helping keep the Biblioteca Social Reconstruir alive (it's currently in dire straits) or to find out where to read further "Letters Home," please contact Jen at jenho@mindspring.com.


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Hanging Loose Magazine #75

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Gad Hollander by Adi Hollander

John A. Williams introduced by Ishmael Reed
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John A. Williams by Stathis Orphanides

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18



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books received

POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Ammiel Alcalay

Memories of Our Future
City Lights Publishers (San Francisco, CA), 1999. 330 pages, \$17.95, ISBN 0-87286-360-3.

John Bennett, ed.

Ragged Lion: A Tribute to Jack Micheline
Smith Publishers/Vagabond Press (Ellensburg, WA), 1999. 211 pages, \$14.95, ISBN 0912824-40-9.

Star Black

Balefire
Painted Leaf Press (New York, NY), 1999. 85 pages, \$12.00, ISBN 1-891305-16-6.

Michael Boughn

One's Own Mind
The Institute of Further Studies (Canton, NY), 1999.

Cid Corman

Nothing Doing
New Directions (NY, NY), 1999. 160 pages, \$13.95, ISBN 0-8112-1425-7.

Elizabeth Cunningham

Small Bird: Poems and Prayers
Station Hill/Barrytown, Ltd. (Barrytown, NY), 2000. 80 pages, \$12.95, ISBN 1-58177-058-8.

Leslie Davis

Lucky Pup
Skanky Possum Press (Austin, TX), 1999. 57 pages, \$5.00, ISBN 0-9671035-3-3.

Tory Dent

HIV, Mon Amour
The Sheep Meadow Press (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY), 1999. 95 pages, \$19.95, ISBN 1-878818-81-3.

Mark DuCharme

Near To
Meeting Eyes Binder/Poetry New York (Brooklyn/New York, NY), 1999. 16 pages, ISBN 0-923389-41-5.

Theodore Enslin

Re-Sounding: Selected Later Poems
Talisman House (Jersey City, NJ), 1999. 130 pages, \$16.95, ISBN 1-883689-93-7.

Euripides, trans. David Kovacs

Trojan Women, Iphigenia Among the Taurians, Ion
Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA), 1999. 511 pages, \$19.95, ISBN 0-674-99574-0.

Molly Fisk

Listening To Winter
Heyday Books (Berkeley, CA), 2000. 50 pages, \$12.50, ISBN 0-9666691-3-4.

Kathleen Fraser

Translating the Unspeakable: Poetry and the Innovation Necessity
The University of Alabama Press (Tuscaloosa, Alabama), 2000. 213 pages, \$19.95, ISBN 0-8173-0989-6.

Jean Fremont

Painting
Black Square Editions (New York, NY), 1999. 19 pages, \$6.00, ISBN 0-9675144-1-X.

A. Ginsberg, A. Clausen, and E. Katz, eds.

Poems for the Nation
Seven Stories Press (New York, NY), 2000. 72 pages, \$5.95, ISBN 1-58322-012-7.

Robert Herron

The German Lunatic
Hanging Loose Press (Brooklyn, NY), 2000. 103 pages, \$13.00, ISBN 1-882413-70-9.

Anselm Hollo

Caws and Causeries: Around Poetry and Poets
La Alameda Press (Albuquerque, NM), 1999. 176 pages, \$14.00, ISBN 1-888809-15-9.

Harry Humes

Butterfly Effect
Milkweed Editions (Minneapolis, MN), 1999. 46 pages, \$12.00, ISBN 1-57131-408-3.

Pierre Joris

h.j.r.
Other Wind Press (Ann Arbor, MI), 1999. 54 pages, \$8.00, ISBN 0-9626046-4-X.

Summi Kaipa

The Epics
Leroy Press (San Francisco, CA), 1999. 29 pages, \$5.00.

Robert Kelly

Runes
Other Wind Press (Ann Arbor, MI), 1999. 25 pages, \$8.00, ISBN 0-9626046-3-1.

Will Kirkland, selector and translator

Gypsy Cante: Deep Song of the Caves
City Lights Publishers (San Francisco, CA), 1999. 126 pages, \$10.95, ISBN 0-87286-361-1.

Dean Kostos

The Sentence That Ends With a Comma
Painted Leaf Press (New York, NY), 1999. 105 pages, ISBN 1-891305-05-0.

Steve Kowit

The Dumbbell Nebula
Heyday Books (Berkeley, CA), 2000. 79 pages, \$12.50, ISBN 0-9666691-2-6.

Chris Kraus

Aliens and Anorexia
Semiotext(e) and Smart Art (Santa Monica, CA), 2000. 240 pages, \$8.00, ISBN 1-58435-001-6.

A. Klobucar and M. Barnholden

Writing Class: The Kootenay School of Writing Anthology
New Star Books (Vancouver, BC), 1999. 214 pages, \$16.00, ISBN 0-921586-68-X.

Carol Mirakove

Wall
Ixnay Press (Philadelphia, PA), 1999. 22 pages, ISSN 1526-3983.

Gail Mitchell*Bone Songs*

Taurean Horn Press (San Francisco, CA), 1999.
96 pages, \$10.95, ISBN 0-931552-11-7.

Eric Pankey*Cenotaph*

Alfred A. Knopf (New York, NY) 1999.
85 pages \$22.00, ISBN 0-375-40764-2.

Barbara Rosenthal*Soul and Psyche*

Visual Studies Workshop Press
(Rochester, NY) 1998. 148 pages,
\$15.00, ISBN 0-89822-121-8.

Lytle Shaw*Cable Factory 20*

Atelos (Berkeley, CA) 1999. 112 pages,
\$12.95, ISBN 1-891190-05-9.

Anne Tardos*Uxudu*

Tuumba Press/O Books (Berkeley/Oakland CA), 1999. 96 pages, \$15.00,
ISBN 1-891190-99-7.

Marjorie Welish*The Annotated "Here" and Selected Poems*

Coffee House Press (Minneapolis, MN)
2000. 147 pages, ISBN 1-56889-098-5.

Magazines:***Calyx* vol. 19 no. 1**

Editors: Cranston, Delgado, McFarland, Reaman, Rhea, Schuman, Smith
(PO Box B, Corvallis, OR, 97339), 144 pages, \$9.50, ISSN 0147-1627.
Contributors: Marge Piercy, Jill McGrath, Diane Glazman, and others.

***Free Lunch* #23**

Editor: Ron Offen

(PO Box 7647, Laguna Niguel, CA 92607), 32 pages, \$5.00.
Contributors: David Hernandez, Laura Joy Lustig, Len Roberts and others.

***Imay* #3**

Editors: Chris McCreary, Jenn McCreary (1164 S. 10th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147), \$5.00, ISSN 1526-3983.

Contributors: Rod Smith, Marcella Durand, Elizabeth Treadwell and others.

***Hanging Loose* #75**

Editors: Hershon, Lourie, Pawlak, Schreiber (231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217), 104 pages, \$7.00, ISSN 0440-2316.

Contributors: Anselm Hollo, Ed Friedman, Hettie Jones, and others.

***Skanky Possum* #3**

Editors: Hoa Nguyen, Dale Smith (2925

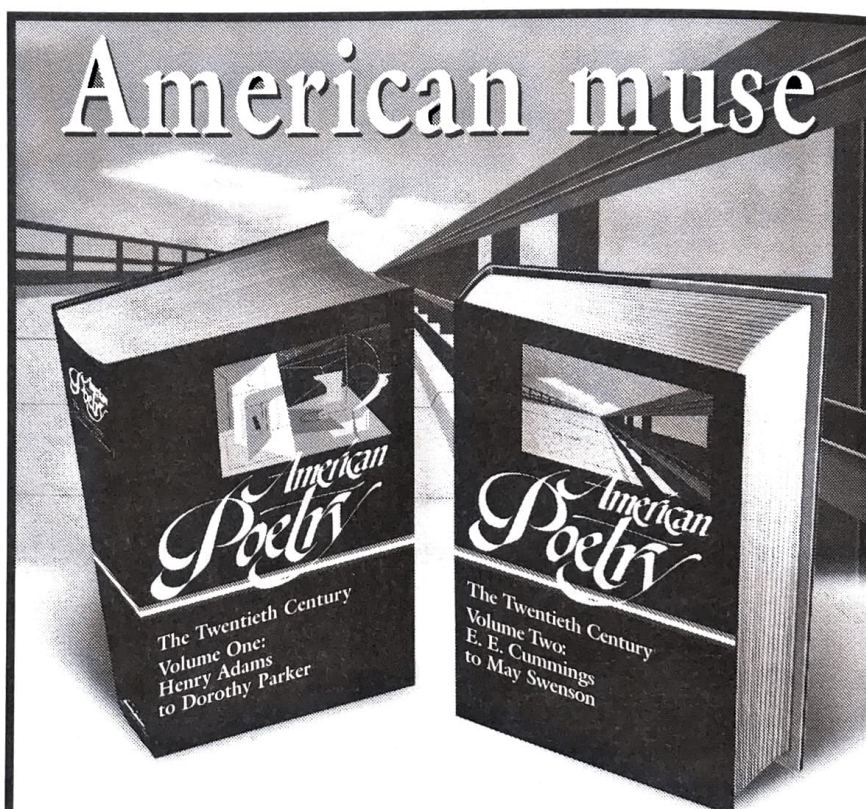
Higgins, Austin, TX 78722), 92 pages, \$5.00.

Contributors: Kenward Elmslie, Jack Collom, Kevin Larimer, Lihn Dinh, and others.

***Tool a Magazine* #3**

Editors: Eric Sweet, Lori Quillen (PO Box 3125, Albany NY 12203), 102 pages, \$6.00.

Contributors: Laird Hunt, Rosmarie Waldrop, Eileen Miles, John Yau and others.



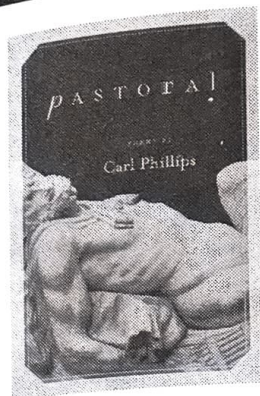
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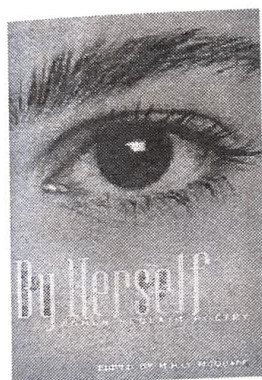
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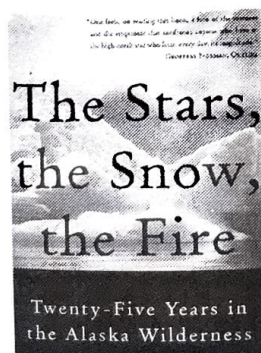
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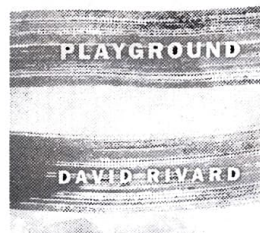
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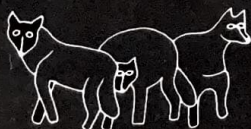
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