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THE

October ~ November 2002

# POETRY PROJECT

newsletter



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## THE POETRY PROJECT

October - November 2002

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

The Poetry Project needs your help. Now! Specifically, we need your immediate and ongoing financial support. We must raise at least \$25,000 in new revenues.

Our rent was recently raised by over 30%. This precipitous increase comes on top of other already inflationary overhead expenses.

As an organization, the Poetry Project consistently minimizes its expenses. There have been no substantial pay raises for administrative staff in five years. Readers, performers, and workshop leaders are receiving the same fees as they were ten years ago—which are less than they were 20 years ago! At this point, the only way to significantly reduce operating expenses is to curtail or eliminate core components of the Poetry Project's program.

We've received regular government and foundation funding. We certainly will be making new applications and requests, but the climate is not good for the arts, in general, and even less favorable for literary organizations.

Given the prognosis for institutional funding and the reality of what it costs to operate the Poetry Project, we are turning to you, the Poetry Project's audience, subscribers, and community.

If you already contribute money to the Poetry Project by being a subscriber, member, or donor, THANK YOU. Please consider increasing your support by (a) increasing your membership contribution or (b) making a special year-end gift.

If you are a subscriber to *The Poetry Project Newsletter* or *The World*, please become a member.

If you are reading this letter from a "free" or complimentary copy of the newsletter, please take out an annual subscription.

We are reluctantly raising the admission prices of our regular events to \$10. Poetry Project members, however, will be admitted for an affordable \$5.

If everyone who receives this issue of *The Poetry Project Newsletter* were to increase their annual contribution by a mere \$20, we could balance our budget, raise the painfully modest fees we are paying reader's, performers, workshop leaders, etc., and reduce admission prices to 2001 levels.

Contribute today! Save us the expense of continued groveling and appeals.

Yours,

Ed Friedman, Artistic Director

# THE POETRY PROJECT IN . ON . OR ABOUT THE PREMISES

## A LOVELY DAY IN SEPTEMBER

In his feature article of the September issue of *Harper's*, the novelist Mark Slouka, responding to those who would say that the relevance of art had been obviated by last year's attacks, reminds us that "in June of 1945, workers reclaiming the Reich's prisons in Moravia had found poems, folded into thick squares, stuffed up into the electrical wiring." He points out that art, far from being "a kind of decorative garnish, a sprig of parsley on the cultural plate," is rather "an act of affirmation and resistance that, by its very complexity, [works] against the shameful reductionism of fear." If we quote him excessively here, it's only because he articulates our own position so much better than we can at 1:55 a.m. the day we go to press. And it's true: the poetry around us constantly blooms and spills forth its complex affirmations and resistances, flashing its vitality and relevance in veritable neon. Here's proof (not that you need it, but even so)—examples from a handful of new books:

Double consciousness gets swept aside by polyentendres, duck-rabbits, wavicles.

—from *C.C.* by Tyrone Williams

your holy is my holy is his holy  
the bare head will offend mutually  
—from *Arrival* by Sarah Anne Cox

*USA Today*

Here's vomit on it

—from *The Mood Embosser* by Louis Cabri

Oh triangular bird  
Of grief, grief,  
Would that you  
Would leave me  
And fly at the  
Rodeo Clowns

—from *The Shirt Weapon*  
by Brandon Downing

I spent a lot of time making a lot of mistakes  
I spend a lot of time ...

rejecting a lot of things  
at the eleventh hour trying to  
embrace them  
—from *Ashoka* by Andrew Levy

no one will ask us to choose art or  
life—this is why we  
understand large absences—I  
use the glass in front of  
the painting to check my  
lipstick—rules bend themselves  
—from *Dovecote*  
by Heather Fuller

"You belong in our swamps not  
our schools!" they rage.  
but clearly the cool-blooded  
Amphibian-American does  
not agree.

—from *Hip Logic*  
by Terrance Hayes

The monster trucks sparkle.  
The surround sound kicks-in.

—from *The Lobe*  
by Lytle Shaw

See? How shiny, furious, funny, righteous,  
mordant, and glowingly aware is the new  
crop of verse? More proof of the enduring  
human compulsion to fit words into the  
crevices. That said, we're putting this issue,  
and ourselves, to bed.

—Eds.





## A WEEK IN AUGUST

Some folks think that poetry and performance events evaporate during the hot summer months in New York. Nevertheless, one week this past August I found a slew of them, all alive and percolating—buzzing—humming—popping—hopping.

Started the week at a benefit party at Tonic for 6x6 (a poetry journal published by Ugly Duckling Presse) and *New York Nights* (a free poetry and politics newspaper published collaboratively by the Loudmouth Collective and Ugly Duckling). They'd had a huge fire at their editorial home base in March destroying many back issues and submissions.

Beginning: Walked into a beautiful film installation by Joel Schlemowitz. He created three pieces especially for the event. One projected above the entranceway—a film loop of pages and covers of 6x6 and *New York Nights* projected onto a mirror ball reflecting black and white multiplied images onto the vellum covered glass above the door.

The other two, scattered throughout the space, used the same device, only substituting gilt mirror and picture frames for glass. The disco ball images definitely fit the party

mood as the Loudmouth Chamber Ensemble took the stage, oozing sitar/guitar-pedal feedback/piano and straining trumpet—atmospheric mood music interrupted by an outpouring of simultaneous readings, a poetic Tower of Babel. Poets read their own and each others' work while stalking through the crowd and pacing in front of the stage. Readings continued loosely on the half-hour alternating music and performance.

Highlights: The Dresden Dolls, a band from Boston—woman in whiteface and black and white-striped stockings, garter-belt peeking out—banged ferociously on a piano—sang songs of vitriol and heartache backed by thunderstorm drums.

I ate up lines and fragments. Joe Elliot: "You come to be awed but ..." "The small still voice inside you is a transistor radio ..." Lewis Warsh: "Her lips look like they were painted on ..." "Think of feelings as things ..." "Everything about you is green."

Cynthia Hopkins sang and played melancholy songs on her accordion. I contemplated the holy grail stamped on Douglas' forehead as he told me, "If anyone says 'fuck' in a poem, I'm gonna say 'yeah!'" and encouraged me to instigate an orgy. Someone yelled

through the din, "Why come to a poetry reading if you're not gonna listen?"

Carlos Blackburn: "Furthermore night has no edge ..." "Bodies fling themselves through text ..." Background: red velvet curtains, light from film loops flickered on wooden beams across the ceiling. Mark Lamoureux: "She's out of body in the kitchen ..." "She's dancing through the dishwasher ..." "Fat Ass of Certainty ..."

Festivities: party talk, party drinks, couples kissing in the corners and leaving with different partners. A new drink, the Duck Blind, was invented for the night: ginger beer, rum, and coconut water—yummy.

The Ugly Duckling/Loudmouth Collective boys performed a hilarious pantomime/lip synch of the Beatles playing "She Loves Me," complete with screams of "John, John!" and "Paul, Paul!" from the audience. Steve Dalachinsky: "Foaming mouths of pumas ..." I don't know whether he actually read these lines or I imagined them through a vodka tonic and Duck Blind blur.

Finale: Blood Covered Skulls blasted James Brown during a hula-hoop contest followed by their rain of jerry-rigged homemade synthesizers, noise and sample madness.



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The workshop fee is \$300, which includes tuition for classes and an "Individual" membership in the Poetry Project for one year. Reservations are required due to limited class space and payment must be received in advance. Please send payment and reservations to: The Poetry Project, St. Mark's Church, 131 E. 10 St., NY, NY 10003. For more information, please call (212) 674 0910, or e-mail: [poproj@poetryproject.com](mailto:poproj@poetryproject.com)

## WRITING WORKSHOPS

### COGNITIVE DISSONANCE - Anne Waldman

TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 4 SESSIONS, OCTOBER 22ND - NOVEMBER 12TH.

Waldman writes, "It is not safety but the unevenness of life that allows artistic breakthrough. Shaky ground is best when trying to find new ways to walk. In this workshop, we will play with rhizomic collage, hypnologic states, investigate living in the "eternal war" zone, perform cross-genre experimentation & vocalize cultural intervention." Anne Waldman is the author of over 30 books including *Marriage: A Sentence* (Penguin Poets).

### THE POET IN THE WORLD - Jaime Manrique

FRIDAYS AT 7 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 18TH.

"A workshop for students interested in writing poems that extend beyond the realm of autobiography," writes Manrique. "We will look at works by poets such as Whitman, Paz, Szymborska, Agha Shahid Ali, and others whose imagination is deeply personal but also rooted in politics, history, and issues of national identity." Jaime Manrique's many books of poetry and fiction include *Twilight at the Equator* and *Tarzan, My Body, Christopher Columbus*.

### WORKSHOP - Renee Gladman

SATURDAYS AT 12 PM: 10 SESSIONS BEGIN OCTOBER 19TH.

"In this class," Gladman writes, "we will write toward the terrain between poetry and fiction where the shape and tone of the line or sentence is as much an idea about narrative as are the notions of time, place, and character. The class will imagine and test out those perspectives of storytelling that work against conventional assumptions of linear progression, authentic voice, and resolution." Renee Gladman is the author of *Juice* (Kelsey St. Press), *Arlem*, and *Not Right Now*.

### SURREALISM AND AUTOMATIC WRITING - Janet Hamill

TUESDAYS AT 7 PM: 4 SESSIONS, NOVEMBER 19TH - DECEMBER 10TH.

The writers and painters of Surrealism drew their imagery from dreams, and other non-rational states, and practiced automatism. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to investigate Surrealist techniques and make their own attempts at automatic writing. Janet Hamill books of poetry and short fiction include *Lost Ceilings*, *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, and *The Temple*.



Later in the week The Bowery Poetry Club hosted the Motor Mouth Series of Detroit writers and musicians. Heard Donald Breckenridge read excerpts from his novel-in-progress about teenagers in love and their dysfunctional families.

He: "Your mom likes her vodka though, huh?" Boy meets girl's folks. Do they like him—do they? He: "Well, I guess if they like me maybe they'll trust me." Road trip home—cows—hills—gravel—dilapidated barns. She: "You know, they really don't care all that much about what I do. ... Especially in summer, so long as I don't get pregnant." Fourth of July and magic mushrooms. He: "They're a lot better than acid, a lot better ... I would like to trip with you." She: "So you can fuck with my head." She admits her mother drinks because her husband beats her. He asks if her father beats her, too—she won't answer.

Next Lynn Crawford read from her new novel, *Simply Separate People* (Black Square Editions). A woman details the particulars of her life in a small town: its mayor, the owner of the sweater shop, how she spends her days, hours examining her lovers' clothes. She moved with her boyfriend and her new lover, a chef named Trowt, from the city to this small town. "Then things blurred ..." About her boyfriend: "I'm writing this down to get him out of my skin." But now she says, "I'm in love with someone else, a person who has disappeared."

She uses information as a cushion against intimacy. She says, "I loved Trowt; he didn't make me curious." Trowt says, "Tension is a wonderful source of creativity." She reports: "... the varicose veins in Trowt's legs are extreme."

Hung with John Farris at the bar as he did a tiny bit of heckling and gave me his imitation of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*.

Black Bottom Collective, a hip-hop poetry band with two rockin' backup singers, rounded out the evening of Detroit natives.

Black Bottom was a legendary neighborhood in Detroit which flourished from the 40s through the 60s. A highway divided the area along racial lines.

The leader of the group, Khary Kimani Turner: "When I turned 25 my people said congratulations on staying alive." Alternative hip-hop soul—"I got a fire in my belly and it's burnin' like, Blaze on." Major achievement: actually got everybody up to dance and sing along, call-and-response style, while he introduced the band.

Over the weekend caught part of the New York International Fringe Festival. After two mediocre plays in the afternoon decided to go to one more show that night: *Patty Red Pants* written by Trista Baldwin and directed by Tania I. Kirkman at the Red Room—taking off on "Little Red Riding Hood"—and it was great. Patty (Susan O'Connor) says, "The way I imagined it, Little Red was a ball of fire shooting through the forest, tearing off clothes from the heat of herself, exposing her beautiful, unfinished youth."

I found it really amazing, funny, moving, contemporary and real with lots of glowing poetic passages, but also disturbing. It was all about young girls' burgeoning sexuality with a backdrop of predators—older men viewing them as sexual objects. But it also explored those gray areas of seduction that exist in all "romantic" relationships—fantasies of submission, power, fear, the dangerous, risky unknown (fear of going into/desire to go into the woods). Pre-show music: Liz Phair's "Flower" from *Exile in Guyville*—"Every time I see your face I get all wet between my legs." Perfect. Patty's best friend Becky Bloom (Romy Nordlinger) the cool, tough, sexy counterpart to Patty's innocence—hanging out at 15 at Denny's and flirting with the waiter (Chris Libby)—Jeremy the boyfriend—the everyman—every male—the wolf—running through a catalog of pick-up lines.

Incredibly funny, great actors, really well-developed characters, even a murder mystery that wasn't predictably resolved by the end. A really good play throwing experimental and more conventional techniques, dialogue, monologues and snatches of poetry into an evocative mix.

Patty's dream: "I'm running through the woods in love with everything ... I'm burning ... I'm setting the trees on fire."

Lots in a week to satisfy my end of summer appetite—everything green and full to overflowing.

—Wanda Phipps



GARY SULLIVAN

## IMPROVISATION NOTES

Here I've cut and pasted in a way I hope will explore, through the overlaps and interstices of these sequenced borrowings, how disparate areas of creative investigation—poetry, music, physics, etc.—might interrelate and form a pattern of unintentionally collaborative work.

From *The Bundle*, Steve Malmude:

Bivouac oval

recurs;  
new bases'  
wriggling  
loudspeakers'  
rigging;  
oasis

particulars;  
the intercom  
transmits the burbles  
of the water coolers;  
the portables  
succumb

to interference,  
mucking  
an aural  
clearance.

("Danang")

From *Improvisation, Its Nature and Practice in Music*, Derek Bailey:

[Here Bailey discusses the waning of the improvising tradition of thoroughbass in Baroque music.]

In the late and post baroque period, a formalized, theoretical framework of rules was gradually imposed on the music. This, a mortal danger to any improvised music, manifested itself partly in a flood of textbooks on decoration. Commenting on these, Ferand writes: "[They] point to a certain waning of the impulse to improvise—a truly creative art of ornamentation stimulated by the inspiration of the moment is replaced by the rationalistic mechanizing trend towards the convenient employment of diminution formulas supplied 'ready made.'" There is an unmistakable parallel between the situation described by Ferand and the condition of jazz in recent years where, as development comes to a standstill and the role for invention diminishes, the



number of college courses, summer schools and text books devoted to it grows.

[Here Bailey quotes from a 1934 instructional handbook on organ improvisation for Church services, a western classical music tradition of improvisation that goes back to the 17th century.]

From Whitmer's *General Basic Principles*:

"Don't look forward to a finished and complete entity. The idea must always be kept in a state of flux."

"An error may be only an unintentional rightness."

"Do not get too fussy about how every part of the thing sounds. Go ahead. All processes are at first awkward and clumsy and funny."

"Polishing is not at all the important thing; instead strive for a rough go-ahead energy."

"Do not be afraid of being wrong; just be afraid of being uninteresting."

[Also quoted in Bailey.]

From *Improvisation: the Entanglement of Awareness and Physicality*, a paper by Jim Denley, published in the improvisation issue (Summer 1991) of *Sounds Australian*:

"For the improviser the physicality of producing sound (the hardware) is not a separate activity from the thoughts and ideas in music (software). In the act of creation there is a constant loop between the hierarchy of factors involved in the process. My lungs, lips, fingers, voice box and their working together with the potentials of sound are dialoging with other levels which I might call mind and perception. The thoughts and decisions are sustained and modified by my physical potentials and vice versa, but as soon as I try and define these separately I run into problems. It is a meaningless enterprise for it is the very entanglement of levels of perception, awareness and physicality that makes improvisation."

From *culture*, Daniel Davidson:

Speech is the language of animals.

From *The Elegant Universe*, Brian Greene:

Far from being a collection of chaotic experimental facts, particle properties in string theory are the manifestation of one and the same physical feature: the resonant patterns of vibration—the music, so to speak, of fundamental loops of string. The same idea applies to the forces of nature as well. We will see that

force particles are also associated with particular patterns of string vibration and hence everything, all matter and all forces, is unified under the same rubric of microscopic string oscillations—the "notes" that strings can play.

...

Just as the different vibrational patterns of a violin string give rise to different musical notes, the different patterns of a fundamental string give rise to different masses and force charges. ... According to string theory, the properties of an elementary "particle"—its mass and its various force charges—are determined by the precise resonant pattern of vibration that its internal string executes.

...

[String theory declares] that the "stuff" of all matter and force is the same. Each elementary particle is composed of a single string—that is, each particle is a single string—and all strings are absolutely identical. Differences between the particles are actually different "notes" on a fundamental string. The universe—being composed of an enormous number of these vibrating strings—is akin to a cosmic symphony.

From *Aethers*, Avery E.D. Burns:

like clouds  
hacking color  
from sky  
two tugs  
pushing horizon  
a couple inches  
over

...

hesitate  
cello  
sheaf  
cull  
definitive  
ambrosia  
awakes  
electric  
flood  
who  
today  
accommodates  
pandemonium  
tightrope

From *culture*, Daniel Davidson:

My apparent goal is the telephone.

From *Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton*, Graham Lock:

Jill Purce told me that one of the inspirations behind *Stimmung* was Stockhausen's reflecting on the fact that the hum of his electric razor sounded different harmonics as he moved it over different parts of his face.

...

[From an interview.] Anthony Braxton: Let me put this into perspective. What we're really talking about is the reality of forces and how given forces in space can create a context for existence. When we get to the galactic formings, etc. we're really talking about the concept of existence.

[Quoted in Lock.] From *The Tri-Axium Writings*, Anthony Braxton:

... for if the highest understanding of creativity in world culture terms has to do with activity that reaffirms the vibrational alignment of its culture group (as a means to establish both how to live and the composite dynamics of its spiritual intent); what we have instead in America when we talk of entertainment is activity that moves to take our minds off of reality.

From an extemporaneous talk after a gig at the Knitting Factory, William Parker:

In the tone world there is no death, no disease, only joy, it's when you're into doing what you're doing, like when you're playing, or cooking. In the future the tone world is going to be crucial, because the bad guys don't know how to get there.

From *Skies*, Eileen Myles:

there is no dictatorship  
of the skies

From *Book Two*, Alan Davies:

Struggling earthward  
against the last lisp of the sun  
a struggling dashing  
becomes somnambulant  
caught in the cadence  
of this thought

—Drew Gardner



## SURFIN' SCHEHERAZADE

"Saga on moody doom? No, a gas!" writes Ross (Essay Assessor) Eckler about *2002: A Palindrome Story* [www.spinelessbooks.com/2002/book/index.html](http://www.spinelessbooks.com/2002/book/index.html), whose 2,000+ odd words read the same backwards as forwards. ("2002 is not only a marvel of ingenuity: it is also funny, sexy, and full of surprises," chimes in Harry Mathews with a more sober assessment.) When the cowards at Spineless Books finally get to producing a print version, you will miss the ability to hyperlink between the appearances of the many characters (with names like Bob, Otto, and Babs—no Nada!), which helps in this brief, convoluted story that includes three plot summaries. But unlike James' *The Ambassadors*, there are no chapters to print out of order!

The latest thing to fall onto my welcome mat, next to the free daily "Happy Mail" lessons in the Korean language that come out prismatically scrambled in my xenophobic Outlook but for a few shards of English ("field trip/ in trouble/ feed/ ostrich"), the cleverly disguised ads for bootleg Viagra and anti-spam software (disguised as ... spam?), and, just today, a website that will help me buy Andy Warhol prints from French auctioneers (the same people that brought us David Bowie's watercolors, no doubt) ...

Anyway, here's a gorgeous, richly decadent thing called Oculart [www.oculart.com](http://www.oculart.com) that might resemble the book cover of a recent edition of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* initially but, to us Flash folks and to anyone willing to surrender during work hours, has an engrossing charm—the best thing since *Neverending Story*, she said—and the soundtrack, moody and variable at first, happily dies away after a few minutes. As one half expects on a site as visually rich as this—ditto for the various incarnations of Aurelia Harvey's legendary [entropy8.com](http://entropy8.com)—the writing is so-so, of the "we planted truth roots on an odd date palm" variety (and I quote)—but I likes anyway. The later sections, like "nake brunch" (is this a rye typo?) and "lux pattern" are the most writing-heavy, but I somewhat prefer the simpler sections like "cat whisky," starring a Garboesque feline with a Mannerist neck, because it does ... nothing. One just stares at it ... clicks around ... and scratches. (For fast connections only—the downloads are huge!)

So you like to read? Well, people have

been asking me about [alienated.net](http://alienated.net)—the postnuke site geared toward chat-room-like discussion about "poetechnology" or anything worth soap-boxing about—which started with a lot of promise several months ago and which we ubu listservers thought would inspire us to work together to create some uber-site for visual poetics ... this seems like decades ago now, before the "war on terrorism," Martha Stewart, the rattling of the small press industry in Canada—Darren Wershler-Henry, creator of and most active contributor to the site, got swamped by the mess, being the *engagé* editor of Coach House Books—not to mention my shoulder going out with Patrick-Rafter like pains, thus keeping me from typing more than a few monosyllables a day. But the site's still going—"Now We're Talking Vulva?" reads the title of the latest announcement (I'll pass on explaining, but it's an mp3 site!).

In my time of visiting [alienated.net](http://alienated.net), the most active conversation has been one of the more recent—the red hot hunt for the author "Annoya," a parody of Christian Bök's Griffin Award-winning *Eunoia* (C\$80,000!), the hardcore Oulipian poem that is all the rage north of Loss Glazier. Young ubu starlet Angela Rawlings seemed hot on the trail when last I checked—tattooing clues on her abdomen lest her hard drive crash—but it's been quiet lately. Steve McCaffery's North American Centre for Interdisciplinary Poetics [www.poetics.yorku.ca](http://www.poetics.yorku.ca), while a bit less hip—Archibald Lampman, anyone?—seems livelier, with prose styles ranging from the vertiginously purple to the Perloffian modernisms-R-us style and much in between. I'm happy to see Pierre Borduas' Automatiste "Refus Global" manifesto there myself: "To hell with holy water and the French-Canadian tuque!" Yes, I haate that tuque!

But I'm afraid of Canadians, so when I want to relax I turn to Tom Raworth's great "doodles" [www.tomraworth.com/doodles.html](http://www.tomraworth.com/doodles.html) where you can overhear Jennifer Moxley and Steve Evans as they discuss the fate of the "dominant poetic" over yogurt and muesli, or maybe saunter over to Floating Sushi [www.andrew3000.net/floatingssushi](http://www.andrew3000.net/floatingssushi) to test my typing against a Tetris-meets-rebus-like-game-thing (ok, I don't know how to describe it) that is based on actual street signs in San Francisco (i.e., "Discoland"). Unless you've never flipped on a computer, you've probably already heard of Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries [www.yhchang.com](http://www.yhchang.com)—the best thing to happen to Korea since, well, the Happy Mail—

and witnessed in English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese or Korean (your pick) one of this Whitmaniac artist's fast-downloading, jazz-propelled and highly charismatic Flash pieces that make you want to take to the streets with a bottle of Samantha's and fake dreadlocks and shout (in six languages) "I've had enough and I'm not going to take it anymore!" Or: "Let's LOVE!" Or: "Chet Baker was suicided!" Yeah.

So I haven't hit any sites that could be called "poetry" proper, but I promise that next time, should there be a next time, I will—I just need an angle, friends. It's no secret that some of the best things on the net are also the stupidest, but there's nothing worse than stupid poetry, even when recited by a talking vu— ... by a talking computer. But the great thing about the web is how some really bad ideas—for "art," for "design"—are just there before you know it, troubling any certainties, should you let them be troubled, about what's good and what's clutter in this privileged world of culture, taste and habits. OK, maybe not. But I'm approaching a thousand words with this thing, and have to catch a bus to New Jersey. Please do check out the Young Hae Chang site (now why didn't I start with that?)—I'll be more organized next time!

—Brian Kim Stefans

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Check out our expanded "Mixed Media" section (pp. 28–29), where you'll find 100 new print publications, CDs, and more. Most are available through **Small Press Distribution** (toll-free: 1-800-869-7553; or: 1341 7th Street, Berkeley, CA 94710-1409). Not all of these treasures, however, are carried by SPD, so, wherever possible, we've provided contact information. Publishers: when sending items to be listed, please provide price/ordering information.

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## THREE LIVES

JUNE JORDAN  
(1938-2002)

This past Sunday I walked along Eighth Avenue in Park Slope doing the sense memory thing. Park Slope mid-late-70s going to June Jordan's apartment to plot revolution or hear amazing things. June's world was one of creativity, conflict, and constant laughter. I don't think you can separate her deep commitment to social justice, liberated sexuality and expansive creativity from her love of dance, song and getting down. June's Blackness defined her, as did her womanliness, her intelligence and her risk taking. She wrote children's books, essays, an opera libretto, and published several poetry collections over 30 years. She founded Poetry for the People when she moved from Brooklyn to Berkeley, helping to train a new generation of activist poets. I think it may be a long while before the depth of June's influence is fully understood and truly recognized. But one of the great things that she helped make possible is a way to share different voices, multiple voices seriously contemplating topics of gentle or serious import. And in that spirit, I share these wonderful thoughts on June from her friends, colleagues and admirers both here and abroad.

**Cynthia Kraman:** "In the mid-70s, June read with Sarah Miles at the legendary Sybossek's, in a series I put together with Ravi Singh (aka Neil Hackman). I remember thinking June was a sort of postmodern Marilyn Monroe—kittenish, breathy, sexy—and all the while delivering a raw, even violent commentary on history and culture. It was a totally transgressive moment in terms of sexuality, religious identity, ethnicity, and language although none of us gave it much thought. We were just being poets in New York."

**Cornelius Eady:** "June has left us a body of work that shows us how an American poet can be both political and poetic in the same breath. She was a constant reminder that there are other forces at



REBECCA LEVI

work in the literary world besides jealousy, suspicion, and self-promotion. Her joy of life, her belief in what's possible, her love of words and justice will be sorely missed."

**Qurasyh Ali Lansana:** "Between chemo sessions and plotting world domination, June found the verve and grit to chug through *Role Call*, a 565-page anthology of generational Black lit, pen a blurb in a matter of weeks, and sometimes smile. She was always giving back, even when she was on her own. I doubt she has ceased."

**Anne Waldman:** "June Jordan carried the brave good news of liberation & imagination with impeccable dignity through her spirited radical poetry & activism. She exemplified that there is no turning back from freedom, justice, responsibility, creativity. May her work rave through the Eternal War Machine and transmute all negativity of the postmodern Dark Ages!"

**Dan Belm:** "June was also really helpful to me, a real 'believer' when I was first writing poetry. She wrote a blurb for *One Hand on the Wheel*—I can hardly think of another poet who has done as much as June Jordan to help young writers believe in themselves and the power of their own voices—the Poetry for the People program she started is a brilliant example of that generosity and faith."

**SuAndi (O.B.E.):** "The first time I saw

her I was struck by her warmth of character. When the audience responded to her work she stopped, looked up and smiled; almost in amazement that her writing had hit home with us. Such modesty I realized is true greatness. She hadn't kept us waiting like some of the so-called megastars of music and she was happy, delighted to give that extra poem. This is how she lived her life with great dignity and fought the illness that was to take her from us. I shall miss her smile."

**Wesley Brown:** "In the mid 1970s, I was one of the readers for NYSCA, selecting the recipients for poetry grants. One of the winning anonymous submissions was a poem entitled, 'On a New Year's Eve.' I have a vivid recollection of the prickling sensation on the skin of my arms as I read the lines: 'Infinity doesn't interest me/ not altogether anymore./ The temporary is the sacred/ takes me out./ All things are dear that disappear/ All things are dear that disappear.'" I later discovered that this poem was written by June Jordan and when I met her a few years later, I came to see to what extent infinity did not interest her. The world she cared about and brought to life in language—whether Lebanon, South Africa, Ireland, Nicaragua or Crown Heights—always had the definable feature of individual human beings. It couldn't have been otherwise, given the extraordinary and fallible person June dared to make available to those of us fortunate enough to have known and loved her. There was that laughter, wrinkling the corners of her eyes and accentuating her cheekbones. And once it started, the sound left her and any one else present in a state of joyous exhaustion. June's anger registered in her face quietly. And when she finally spoke, it was as though she were eating the words that outraged her. June gave us language to challenge the diction of the powerful. However, there is no language to adequately express how difficult it will be, for me, to live in a world without her being physically present in it. But how blessed we are to have had June to fill our lives with all she had to give."

—Patricia Spears Jones



## KENNETH KOCH (1925-2002)



The first poetry reading I ever saw was Kenneth Koch at the New School in the early summer of 1962. It was just a few months after I had decided to be a poet myself and I wanted to see what an actual reading was like. I knew Koch's poems from Don Allen's anthology, *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, and, like much of the work in the book, was both intrigued and a little baffled by it. What I saw in the New School courtyard that evening was an earnest, nice-looking man with dark hair, properly attired in a suit and tie, and wearing black horn-rimmed glasses. From his appearance, he easily could have been an advertising executive. He was definitely *not* a beatnik.

As soon as Koch began reading, I had trouble keeping up with his freewheeling scenarios, unattributed lines of dialogue, and wide-ranging barrage of images. The rest of the audience seemed to have no such difficulty, however. In fact, they kept breaking into knowing and sustained laughter. I had never thought poetry could be quite so *funny*. I felt like a dolt but tried not to appear like one—I laughed as well, though always a couple of seconds late. And, though somewhat bewildered, I joined in the enthusiastic applause at the end of the reading.

I saw in the program that Koch was teaching a poetry workshop at the New School the following January. Circumstances led me to take a rather quixotic trip to Los Angeles that fall. While there, I purchased *Thank You and Other Poems* (the only Kenneth Koch collection available at the time) and read it many times over. I needed to understand Koch's work better, as I had become determined to get back to New York in time for the New

School workshop.

It was a momentous decision. I quickly discovered that Kenneth, as so many other poets have found before and since, was a brilliant and exciting teacher. He made you want to write poems. He led you to feel that it was normal to be a poet. He gave you a sense that you were playing in the same ballpark as the "all-time greats"—Milton, Pope, Byron—whoever. In addition to literary illuminations, and enlightening digressions on many subjects, Kenneth gave non-binding weekly assignments to broaden one's sensibility. One week he suggested that we write a poem that was "like a novel," that could have plot and characters and be filled with narrative incident. This concept was totally counter (and that was the point) to the assumption of the poem as a personal and hermetic statement, so Kenneth spent a few minutes talking up the idea. "And who knows," he concluded, "you might be so inspired by your 'novel' poem that you could end up writing a real novel," and added, alluding to the popular cliché, "And then of course you would be a *real* writer." I didn't always feel up to his challenges, but the experience was vastly liberating. The inspiration I took from Kenneth's class so long ago has always stayed with me.

After the course was over, I gradually got to know Kenneth personally. We were sometimes on the same bill in readings (including my first one), and often at the same parties and other events. Along the way, Kenneth's poems took over from his classroom motivation—now it was Kenneth's *work* that made me want to keep writing. Even those of us who have been touched by Kenneth's pedagogical expertise always knew that he was a poet who taught, however dazzlingly, not a teacher who wrote.

I always enjoyed being around Kenneth, even at the risk of an occasional faux pas. At a party sometime in the mid-'70s, I mentioned to him (after a couple of drinks) that there was a line from "The Great Atlantic Rainway," simple and prosaic though it was, that had always stuck in my mind: *Kenneth is kind*. "Actually," he said matter-of-factly, "it's 'Kenneth was kind.'" The party was at the home of a poet and *Thank You* was little more than an arm's length away. Idiotically, as a reflex, really, I took the book from the shelf, found the poem and found the line. *Kenneth was kind*. Kenneth himself was still only a few feet away. I put the book back and heard, gently

and unironic: "Tony, there's such a thing as literary scholarship, and then there's having actually written the poem."

I never saw Kenneth give a bad reading, or fail to entertain the audience. At a benefit for Leroi Jones at the Living Theatre in 1963, one of the featured poets read so far over his time (about 25 minutes instead of five or ten) that, when he finished, the audience got up as one and walked out, taking an intermission where none had been scheduled. Cajoled back into the theatre from the sidewalk after twenty minutes or so, the first act was a jazz singer with piano accompaniment (Gaby Rogers and Mal Waldron). They brought the house down. Then Kenneth walked out on stage, in proper summer suit and tie (on a warm evening) and his trademark horn-rims, and looking borderline comical, since he was holding a large sheaf of papers with both hands against his chest as he walked to the podium. "More poetry," the audience seemed to groan inwardly. I felt sorry for Kenneth. It was too bad he was due up at this point in the program. Within a minute, however, he had the audience's attention and, in the next, they were laughing. When he finished, to an ovation, what the audience wanted was "more poetry." Kenneth had saved the evening. I went up to him after the event was over, effusive with compliments: How he could *follow* a musical act like that, after what the previous poet did, et cetera. My questions were rhetorical, but Kenneth answered, somewhat gnominically, deflecting my praise, "Don't ever worry about following anyone, just be careful who you're preceding."

Kenneth selected me (though he never said so) to read with him at the 92nd Street YMHA in 1968. We read together again at a Tribeca art gallery in 1988. I was very aware of the fact that it was 20 years after the "Y" reading, and 25 years since I had taken his workshop. That was meaningful to me, but I would never have remarked on this to Kenneth; he was perhaps the least sentimental person I have ever met. When, this spring, I hinted on the phone that I might like to visit him in the hospital, he said, "Even though normally we never see each other?" There was no tone of reproach in this, and I had no answer, except, "Well, yes, that's true," and I dropped it. Indeed, why should I want to go out of my way to see him now—because he was probably dying? I wasn't offended by the rebuff but I instantly regretted that I *hadn't* seen him



more often over the decades. I had somehow assumed that Kenneth would be there forever, and his incredible vitality and mental sharpness, undiminished as the years went by, subconsciously reinforced that impression.

When I learned the stunning news of Kenneth's diagnosis, a year ago this summer, I happened to be finishing a short book of prose, a memoir about my experiences of becoming a poet in the early 1960s. Kenneth of course was a central figure in it, along with Frank O'Hara, and the book was to be dedicated to them both. I had been nervous about what Kenneth might say about how I depicted him, or events he might not remember or remember very differently—since they were so much more significant in my life at the time than his—how, at the Cedar Bar, for example, when we were introduced (by O'Hara, whom I barely knew at the time) I was so tongue-tied that I inadvertently *insulted* him—and just two weeks before I was to start his workshop! Now I was afraid he might not survive long enough even to see the book, whether he liked it or not.

He did survive that first summer; the memoir was published in the fall and I sent a copy to Kenneth as soon as I could. It was about a week later when my phone rang, the morning of the day I was to go to Washington to read at the Library of Congress. It was Kenneth, thanking me for the book; it was "terrific." He then started reminiscing about the writer's conference at Wagner College in the summer of '63 that he taught and I attended, and which was sort of the "centerpiece" of the book; which led us to other stories and gossip from the following year. It was probably the longest phone conversation we had ever had, and fortunately it ended just before I would have had to cut it short so as not to miss my train. Kenneth sounded no different to me—he was bright and funny and engaging—with no indication of what I knew he had been through: the long hospital stay in Houston, periods of complete isolation, complete blood-replacement treatments. It was only anecdotally that I knew his hair had fallen out from chemotherapy and that he had lost a great deal of weight—I couldn't and didn't want to visualize it. As it happened, Kenneth himself went down to Washington only a week later, also to the Library of Congress, to receive a prize for his latest book, *Addresses*. Someone who was present at the event told me that Kenneth's

reading from the book, and his whole demeanor, was "heroic."

"I've got leukemia again," Kenneth said, lightly but perhaps with a hint of resignation. It was late in February and I had had to call him about the reading at Columbia he had promised me the previous spring but postponed because my book wasn't going to be out in time. Everything was utterly changed from the year before and I felt I was being self-centered and pushy by following up an unanswered note I had written—I just had to know if the reading was going to take place. Kenneth brushed aside my apologies. "Certainly you should have called me and certainly you should read," he said. "I'll make some calls. Don't be silly. Of course. Life has to go on."

—Tony Towle

## PHILIP WHALEN (1923-2002)



When I was 24 and still trying to figure out what the world of poetry was about I met Philip Whalen who was willing to inform me: "Poetry is what we do." So just "do" it everyday, and don't worry about it. That didn't stop one from being fretful, but it did seem that poetry was a practice that one engaged in for a lifetime.

And then there was the "content": "The content may be unintelligible or all but invisible ... but unless it is there ... steam, passion, whatever, there are only

words on paper, blather ... I've told you before I hear in my head a line of poetry before or while I'm writing. Or the way words go together in a quote (whether someone says something in conversation or I read it in a book) catches my attention & I write it down. Easy & yummy food thing is this: stir-fry any kind of meat, probably pork. Then remove from pan; add more cooking oil, then big chunks of green pepper, & chunks of a big white onion & garlic. Stir-fry a few seconds, then throw in a quarter cup of soy sauce & water & sugar (spoonful, big, of sugar), cover & cook a few seconds more. Then uncover, throw meat back into pan & add about 1/4 cup of black bean sauce, stir the whole mess around until it smells done & eat." (Oct. '62)

During the four years I lived in Japan in the early '60s Philip was a constant correspondent. His encouraging "Are you writing more poems" and his jaunty tone sustained me—"Horrible idiot squeals & grimaces continue about Spicer's book. Everybody mad at everybody else and enjoying every minute & squeak of it ... All of this is EXTREMELY confidential." (Nov. '62)

When Philip himself went to Japan our correspondence resumed—"So you met Kenneth Koch but how can you confuse him with me? He's years younger, has black hair and weighs lots less and is 7" taller than I am. I HATE COLD WEATHER. I suspect that NYC is cold right now too. I am writing an enormous messy novel, on & on & on, it makes no sense, just feathers & excelsior & finely shredded paper, string, old stockings etc. ... early Bruce Conner." (Jan. '67)

Philip's letters were elevating, energetic, temperamental, chatty, like the poet he was. For this identity as a poet he realized one day in Kyoto that he needed some singing robes. He went to market day at the local temple and started buying bright orange & red & gold pieces of obi cloth that he sewed into a kind of patch-work robe. I only saw him wear it once, after he came back to the United States. It was in the bright sunlight on Bill Brown's patio on the Bolinas Mesa. He looked dazzling and glamorous, like a firebird ready to take off. I never saw him wear it again, probably once was enough.

"Try to be patient—although it is I who say so, I who am the most impatient of God's creatures. Great will be your reward in Heaven etc. I have lots more to tell you & gradually will, if I acquire some patience myself. Love, Philip" —Joanne Kyger



# TOTAL POETRY?

**M**exican poet Gabriel Zaid, in a recent essay, calls for a "total poetry"—that is, a poetry fully integrated into one's work, politics, love life, recreational pursuits, "daily life," etc.

*Do you aspire to have your poetic practice encompass and/or spring from all aspects of life and experience? If yes, how and to what extent have you succeeded in doing so? If no, what kinds of parameters do you set for your poetic practice?*

## DIANE GLANCY

If poetry comes from daily life, it often possesses a narrative quality. Though the making of metaphor is one of the jobs of poetry, metaphoric discontent or misalignment is closer to the work of what poetry is (not does) because it gets beyond the edge of what can be reached, which is where poetry should arrive and part from as well. Often, several directions at once are allowed. Poetry is the indentation of this. In birch bark biting, the teeth are used to indent a pattern of some sort on a peeled strip of birch bark. Poetry should be in the time-space arena of the cosmological constant and the uncertainty principle. Caught in the physics of tightrope walking, position and velocity are the art making teeth-marks on birch bark, usually a floral pattern. The pure reason reasoned out, transferred, if you've seen the birch bark folded twice (the same principle for making paper dolls). Poetry comes from tooth prints, thereafter the bark unfolded for the pattern of the bitten. I think poetry is in the crossfire of this and that. Poetry is a strip art. The birch bark before layers pulled apart too thick for teeth to indent. Though birch bark biting is a northern tribe practice because birch barks are not south, the Cherokee define it well: a-wa-da-n'-toh'-ta-nv (my former tooth toothed by me) and u-da-n'-toh'-ta-nv (a tooth separate from its body) is the etching or indentation of tooth marks on birch bark. In the same way, poetry leads the realm of words into the vocabulary of the irrational.

As I traveled in the northwoods listening to Stephen Hawking's *The Universe in a Nutshell*, the theory of Wave Function is a number at each point in space that gives the probability the particle is there. A poetry that relies less on narrative, unplugs

the dominant, nonrational appeal of the poem, gathers the scattered pieces, scatters in a few pines.

My former tooth toothed by me hurting after biting the birch. The ghost of the tooth crossed the river worn there from the transference of meaning.

There is a connection of poetry to relativity, and to the mystery still in the center of the M theory, the unification theory. I think it must be an active state: one thing verbing off another, but in its own way, with the sound and rhythm of ordinary life, but saying something extraordinary. Simple yet quandarous. With the quietness of how do you get from those to these and why would you want to? Sometimes ordinary life works best in nonfiction, the personal narrative. Poetry is a lake under the world, a cabin in the northwoods, the white clouds rambling overhead. It points to space that connects in the unconscious rather than the conscious mind.

## EILEEN TABIOS

**F**or the past two years, I've worked on a visual poetry project entitled "Six Directions." The poet Arthur Sze introduced me to the Native American perspective of directions: north, south, east, west, up and down. I considered such multi-dimensionality a metaphor for integrating the (external) world into the (internal) world of the poet's imagination, a concept manifested in "Six Directions" through multidisciplinary collaborations and the use of found objects/texts in sculptures/poems. Thus, for this Forum, I anticipated writing about how "Six Directions" explored my "poetics of everything, everything, everything" because everything can inform poetry.

But I recently heard from a Filipino friend. He says that his poems exploring colonialism recently were criticized by some non-Filipino poets and artists with such comments as "We've all been colonized at one point" and "Those who hang onto their culture are the worst kinds of right-wing extremists."

My friend's poetry reflects his consciousness of how English spread in the Philippines after its 1898 invasion by the U.S. Can history have so little relationship to poetics? I think not, and my friend's experience suggests that a way to show how I inte-



grate life and poetics is to raise this matter now in this forum. Little is known in the U.S. about Philippine history; as Filipino poet Alfredo Navarro Salanga once said, "They don't think much about us in America."

Shortly after bombing Afghanistan, the U.S. returned to the Philippines as part of its war against terrorism. Most Americans are unaware that the U.S. military presence reflects a governmental failure that extends a long-time inability by the country's politicians to adequately address development needs. In other words, the U.S. presence betrays efforts to get past what Filipinos call "colonial mentality," which legacy includes relying on outsiders to solve domestic problems. Moreover, this issue resonates in a context where political/economic power is concentrated within an elite formed from families who previously supported the country's colonizers.

But even if the U.S. military presence in the Philippines doesn't show colonialism to be a timely matter, I am surprised that artists cannot believe that colonialism is psychological as well as consisting of specific events bounded by time. And I am surprised that artists can diminish the significance of culture.

"Six Directions" reflects my attempt to be open to all of the world's possibilities, which inherently acknowledges that exploring one's culture does not require rejecting other cultures (the matter is not an either/or proposition as implied by the person who called my friend a right-wing extremist). My approach, rooted in what Buddhists call interconnectedness, is reflected in Emmanuel Lacaba's "Salvaged Poems" for stating:

*We are tribeless and all tribes are ours.*

*We are homeless and all homes are ours.*

*We are nameless and all names are ours.*

Lacaba wrote his poem while rebelling from the Philippine dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. That his poem transcends that context to become, for me, an ars poetica statement does not obviate the fact that I sourced his poem's "universality"—the poem's transcendence of the poet's autobiography—by first paying attention to my culture.

## MURAT NEMET-NEJAT

One of the questioners of this forum on a "poetry of integration," Gary Sullivan writes a poem imagining himself into an orgasm, a poem that he e-mails to Nada Gordon, the other questioner of this forum, to re-transfer her essence, transubstantiated in the poem, back to

her in Japan; Nada Gordon responds with a poem made up completely out of the English poet Milton's vocabulary:

your gaze azurn,  
moistered cataphracts  
all conglobed in plenipotent  
love. (Swoon)

Here are a series of re-substantiations, from semen to words, across space to Nada, from Nada to words, into which another text from another distance (culture, language) is transformed. In this process I see what a poetry of integration, total poetry, means to me. It is the poetry I have written since *Turkish Voices* eleven years ago, in which there is a conflict between distance (space, longing) and love in the body of language:

a part of,  
apart from my lover.

as words separate, I draw close  
as words draw near, I fall apart.  
(Aishe Series, 2001)

I am usually known as a translator, ironically a correct description. As I redefine it, translation is the essence of "total poetry." That is, it integrates the "outside"—not only another language, but any medium with which the poet's language weaves a dialectic relationship (a process of love and dependence across distance), in which both are transubstantiated. In "translation," the autonomy of discrete original poem disappears, and poems and poets break into parts; so does the distinction between original and translation, you and I and she/he. The poetic ego also breaks apart, losing autonomy—not personal psychology but the spirit of the times. In American poetry this relationship/space was first discovered by Jack Spicer, though I had not heard of Spicer or *After Lorca* when I wrote *Turkish Voices*—basically variations on the theme of love—in 1991–92.

The essence of *Turkish Voices* is the space within which fragments float—relate, yearn towards each other. *Turkish*: the other; *Voices*: its dialectic re-substantiation in the English language—or its re-emergence as Walter Benjamin's "ideal language."

Loving was such a panacea, a blood letting  
That when it was raining on the Galata  
Bridge  
The sky broke itself into two  
And poured  
Upon us. (Turkish Voices)

In my poems during the last seven years there are four "others": Sufism, the Turkish language, my own earlier poem *Io's Song* (1994–95) and popular culture. Sufism, in its pre-Islamic Shaman origins, is an intuitive, pantheistic philosophy where all opposites are seen as one: love, hate, sex, God, politics, death, etc. This fusion is refined in Islam into a dialectics between the forces of disintegration and chaos (away from God) and union (through a longing for God). In other words, Sufism is "total poetry," a movement towards distance (visually centrifugal) held together, re-substantiated by love.

Turkish is the language of Sufism. Agglutinative, it has a totally flexible word order, in which the word nearest the verb—across any "rational" syntax—gains emphasis, accent. This gives Turkish an infinite capacity for nuance, a cadential movement of spirit among words. This is *eda*, which is a movement of the mind, desire, of love. A melodic arabesque. In *eda*, motion towards and from is more potent than words themselves; words lean into and reemerge from the space surrounding them.

my joseph's fatal *faetal* seven year release  
of husbanding silo  
leaning on the coat of multi colors

and *and* your (souljam, 2001)

*Eda* is decorative, that is, it must be seen as well as heard. In *eda*, and in my poetry of the last nine years, there is a tension between the ear and the eye. One impulse is to jump into the empty space (the chaotic impulse), words disintegrating into tenuous, shadowy substances; the reader also must re-enter this meditative space, and through his/her love, be the reuniter, reader of the poem. Many poems in *Io's Song* are like that, like the speech of Io the calf (speech through an alien body/language) almost unsayable:

a hippo's anus  
s  
a up  
n NI ZED  
b a O O I O  
i I N NE  
s histO s  
p r lu  
c o e l  
s e o f i  
e o  
P  
s p  
i  
s h

of seduction (Io's Song, 1995)



My work of the last three years is an attempt to bring *eda*, this Asiatic movement of the spirit (of integration, “total poetry”) into American English. Turkish poetry between the 1920s and the 1990s is the mother lode of *eda*, poets unique and totally different, exploring the open-ended thread inherent in the language. *Waking to Constantinople*, *Romeo and Romeo*, *souljam*, *Pitcher*, *Coffee Grinds*, etc. are aspects of this process, transubstantiating this “distant” quality into the body of English:

the difference between knowing that  
 what is merely visible is woven  
 into what is longed for, and spelling out  
 that what is merely accepted is in  
 conflict with what is rumored  
 about  
(souljam, 2001)

## AKILAH OLIVER

I am thinking about Roland Barthes’ take on the construction of desire in *A Lover’s Discourse*, how it/desire situates itself or its language in multiple locations, such as within the desired “other.” Another space for desire’s discourse is within the construction of an absence, the lack or unrealized desired other, or in a sense, the mirror that is not constant, or which reflects outside of the given image. My relationship to my poetry—to any of my writings—has long ago deserted paradigms of either/or, and like the lovers’ discourse, it seeks something outside of my ability to feed it, to nurture or love it. It is as if it/the writing/poetics sustains a discourse with the “real” world, the mundane world, the dream world, the magic world, even when I am not consciously manipulating this discourse. Then, could I call my poetics a “total” poetry? Integrated? In the Western sense, no. My “no” is not of course absolute—that wavers as well. But I almost instinctively reject the idea that somehow my poetics, my writing discourse, the “it,” is capable or even desires the capability of integration. (I am thinking of integration as in a kind of cohesive meshing; a blending of the selves; an identifiable me.) In other words, I don’t wish my poetics to mirror or reflect some world I’ve come to know. There is something about the notion of a “total” poetics that is integrated that feels instinctively like a kind of splitting off, a false definition. The notion of integration causes me to abandon a devotion I’ve come to escape into relative to a discourse with my own poetics. That

devotion is based on a kind of surrender to a manipulative mystical. I desire to seek in my poetics not mirrors, but in a sense the absence, the image disappeared and represented in wild and unrecognizable ways that I know to be my “voice” but which nonetheless can betray me at a moment’s notice. I don’t desire the mundane discourse in my writing, yet I find it there. I don’t desire the opaque, yet I find it there. I desire instead a site, a literal and figurative site, where I am constantly in dialogue with difference, with language, with what I don’t know. I’m not sure if this site then is fully integrated into my life (I suspect it isn’t). I know I don’t desire it to be. I desire a contractual and working relationship with my poetics/writings, and often I succeed at that negotiation with the self. Other times I desire to be a visitor in this discourse. Other times I desire just to hear it as if it were outside of any self I may have constructed. In this sense, perhaps my writing is thoroughly situated (in shifting and unstable ways) into what I like to think of as my life. My resistance to the notion of an integrated poetic practice is not so much that I think there is anything rarefied or should be anything particularly elite about poetic practices, but rather I think my resistance is to an abandonment of the notion of multiplicity, chaos, and the “changing same” (see Baraka ...). I seek a continued poetic discourse that doesn’t desire an ordinary place in my life. I don’t need to sit down to it as I sit down to the table for dinner. This is my politics, the way I live, how I see the mundane world and the unknown. My poetic practice doesn’t need to reflect or revel in the everyday, say for example, the “political” world; yet I’m fine when it does. It needs to always be in discourse with itself, and I need to be in discourse with it. While I fight for that space of discourse to live in my “life”; I also fight for my life to exist as freely as possible in an anti-intellectual climate in which the prevailing tongue is crafted by clones and fools. And little of this, not much of this earth business, feels integrated at all.



GARY SULLIVAN

## ED FRIEDMAN

What makes writing poetry “total” for me is having my attention and awareness engaged enough for intuition and a sense of play to take over. When I succeed in following my interests and having the mind’s faster, more spontaneous processes involved, my observations, concerns, and ideas enter the poems as fresh arrangements of particulars. Though I haven’t, in any explicit way, set out to include all of my life in my writing, I have, at various times, chosen to pursue areas of interest that resulted in broader inclusions of experience evidencing themselves in my poems. Inherent to some areas of interest were possibilities for integrating reading and writing activities with other aspects of living.

One such interest has been decoration, which for me has meant trying to effect in language the kinds of opulence and pattern design found in many visual-art traditions. The principal function of decoration is to provide pleasure—enhancing and accompanying experience rather than attempting to capture, question, or conceptualize it. Decoration enlivens a viewer’s (or reader’s) attention with a play of appealing complexities. The decorative descriptions of hats that appear in *The New York Hat Line* (Bozoux of London, 1979) were written to be read while a series of hats made by Robert Kushner were being presented by models descending a spiral staircase. Also in a decorative mode, I wrote a number of works, such as *Evening Spots* and *Chinoiserie*, that I conceived of as verbal ambience or Muzak. *Chinoiserie*, which was performed as a play, had the kind of writing in it that I always wanted to have installed as environmental soundscapes in elevators and supermarkets. Though it was never installed in a public space, a performance of *Chinoiserie* was recorded and aired as a radio broadcast.

Another ongoing interest has been collecting examples of grammatically irregular language and flawed expertise. Among the best sources of this material have been cheaply produced phrasebooks and language tutorials. Learning to speak a new language or trying to make sense of a subject about which one has insufficient contextual information provides occasions when the imagination is left to fill in for gaps in understanding. The language that emerges in these “learning situations” can be curiously evocative, mysterious, and funny. Plagiarizing and imitating non-standard English and “naive” exposition has helped to expand the range of subject matter in my writ-



ing and undermine certain precious notions about usage, diction, and accuracy. Two works drawn from this material are the illustrated phrasebook *La Frontera* (Helpful Book, 1983) and *Lingomats* (1980), an edition of placemats that can be used to learn a foreign language while eating. Both of these works were collaborations with artist Kim MacConnel.

*The Telephone Book* (Telephone Books, Power Mad Press, 1979) was inspired in part by reading the brief transcripts of telephone conversations that appeared in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: from A to B & Back Again* as well as the transcript and summary of the PBS documentary *An American Family*. What interested me was how much was communicated in friendly or familial conversation. Also, I found in transcribed conversations an unexpected concreteness to the language. The snippets of phone dialogue I'd discovered in the aforementioned titles made me want to read some extended transcripts, and since I couldn't find any, I decided to tape record and transcribe my own telephone calls over the period of a few weeks. There are many interesting issues involved in taping and transcribing one's phone conversations, especially when doing so without the permission of the other people I was recording. In the context of this discussion, however, what was significant about *The Telephone Book* was that more of me, my life, and my relationships were brought into print. The conversations in-sum articulated an extended, multi-character, personal narrative that was unlike anything I'd previously attempted.

*Space Stations*, a journal that I've kept since 1979, was inspired by one of William Burroughs' writing experiments. While he traveled, Burroughs kept a journal in which each page was divided into three vertical columns. In one column he noted present-time occurrences, another column was used for recording memories and thoughts, and the third column held quoted passages from whatever he was reading at the time. I changed the experiment by (a) writing in a single location, rather than traveling, (b) using the journal to "read" whole texts by typing short sections of them into the journal and then responding to each quoted passage in the memory-and-thoughts column, and (c) writing poems and prose pieces as "present-time occurrences."

I found that by mapping the shifts in my attention while reading and writing, as I do in *Space Stations*, I created an outlet or container for thoughts and memories that previously had no place to be recorded. The jour-

nal has also made it possible to read and write works requiring more concentration than I can usually muster, for example, reading *The Apollo 13 Mission Commentary* or *Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside*. Over several months, I internalized the practice of entering writing from different sources and modes of consciousness into designated columns, so I did away with the actual columns.

The *Space Stations* journal has functioned as both an ongoing diary and a productive working environment. The poems and reading projects that I work on in my journal are integral to an ongoing account of my interests and experiences. In practice this has meant that I don't have to hold one thought at bay while trying to summon a different one. If, for example, I'm writing a poem, feeling physically uncomfortable, and wishing I were doing something else, I could break off from the poem and note that "My back hurts and I want to be massaged till the cows come home, if only I had some cows." This line might not have fit into the poem I was writing, but by getting it off my mind, I can return, with less distraction, to what I was doing. As a result, my attention stays more focused for longer periods. I also have the line "My back hurts ..." which might be of some use at another time.

Most of the individual poems and prose pieces that I've finished and published since 1979 began as entries in *Space Stations*. Occasionally, I'll publish an aggregate section of *Space Stations*, as I did in *The Funeral Journal* (Jensen & Daniels, 2001). A fuller description of the journal's evolution, "How Space Stations Gets Written," was published in issue number 5 of *Poetics Journal*.

## RODRIGO TOSCANO

First, some queries of my own—with "answers" (imbedded polemics) *frontloaded*. Aren't poets in the U.S. (where the forum participants are writing from) already writing "about" everything under the sun? Their cockatoos, their eminent third-uncle bassoonists, their filmic (gaussy or pixilated) rushing rivers, etc.—

And how is this not all "integrated"—or could we ever imagine it not being so in our lives' practices? *Already* there's no writing that exists at a remove. Who's writing on the third moon of Saturn—is still "integrated."

The word "Total" is (curiously) standing in—is an interloper for, the word *Total*. [And

my apologies to Mr. Zaid, whom I haven't met, know next to nothing about, nor have the resources (as yet) for integrating you (the complex of your social being / cultural practice) in the dynamic of the political / cultural / literary environs that *this act* is taking place in.] So that "total" is the sign, in fact, that is being struggled over, while "integrated" is the conduit for its spillage (something that is basic rhetoric—as old as St. Augustine's "meditations").

The "total" that I'd "call for" is the sweeping *surge* of How'd We Get Here? (or thereabouts, torquing). What forces are shaping this all—called up from way back, as well as their near "total" fulfillment of an imperative (pre-scribed?) Future. *That* is what we're in contention with (continuously), or complicit with. And often both! The struggle *against* The Exploitation of our very sinews (in time and space), *against* Racism, *against* "divinely inspired" tomfooleries, *against* anti-woman speech / thought / action.

This is *complexity* for me. There's worlds of "integrations" around all this. And interruptions. And transformations. Forms—oh-kay. And Con—nyet?

Zaid's "total" strikes me as a very *now-frozen* total. No, I *don't* want to see poems read at the Super Bowl Halftime (public executions). Nor do I want the (alleged) "daily" raised to any principle, frankly. Poetry is (can be more of a) directed practice. It's specialized artistry and social practice. In highly complex (capitalist) societies it's almost a science as to how to *act* on that complexity: A need to measure, calculate—innovate. Poetry can produce abundance of newer meaning, it can be "ever searching," but it is always "integrated" to that other (historic) sense of "total."

And so the question that stands out here is, what does "a call" mean for "integrating" that which is *already* integrating?

To their credit, Nada and Gary are employing (an excerpt of) Zaid's call as a poetic-political *platform* for their new tenure at The St. Mark's—as a tone-setter, or rallying instance. Me? I prefer it *frontloaded*, just like that. And so my (friendly) speculation is that this forum acts to amplify and confederate several related galaxies of American Poetics of which they're key activists. And yet, they're allowing a democratic discussion / instance too, by way of a critical reception *to that* process. And that's an "integration," one based on common cultural work between us.





# ◆★☆☆☆ POETRY PROJECT EVENTS ☆☆☆◆

◆★☆☆☆ SEPTEMBER 30, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 2, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## A Tribute to Kenneth Koch

Kenneth Koch (1925-2002) was one of The Poetry Project's most revered elders. He was, with Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery and others, the core of the first generation of the New York School of Poets. Speaking and reading will be Robert Creeley, Jordan Davis, Ed Friedman, Katherine Koch, David Shapiro, Alex Katz, Frank Lima, Charles North, Ron Padgett, Tony Towle, Paul Violi, Anne Waldman, Dean Young, Emily Harvey, Alex Katz, Gary Lenhart, Frank Lima, and others. Kenneth Koch's numerous books include *Thank You and Other Poems* (1962), *Wishes, Beds and Dreams* (1970) and *One Train* (1994). As inspired a teacher as he was a poet, Kenneth Koch had a passion for communicating his own belief that poetry was life itself.

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 4, FRIDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Will Alexander

[Note: This event will be held at The Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery (between Bleeker and Houston) with a reading at 6 p.m. and music performance at 10 p.m.] Will Alexander is a poet, essayist, novelist and playwright. His latest books are *Above the Human Nerve Domain* (Pavement Saw Press), and *Towards the Primal Lightning Field*. His writing is a complex distillation of seemingly disparate energies brought to focus not in terms denotative of accessibility, but in that search for an essence that goes beyond the diurnal. [6:00 p.m. & 10:00 p.m.]

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 7, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Dodie Bellamy and Kevin Killian

Dodie Bellamy has written a novel, *The Letters of Mina Harker*, a collection of memoirs, *Feminine Hijinx*, and an epistolary collaboration on AIDS with the late Sam D'Allesandro, *Real*. Her latest book, *Cunt-Ups* (Tender Buttons, 2002), a radical feminist revision of the "cut-up" pioneered by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, won the 2002 Firecracker Alternative Book Award for Poetry. Kevin Killian is a poet, novelist, critic and playwright. He has written a book of poetry, *Argento Sire* (2001), two novels, *Sly* (1989) and *Arctic Summer* (1997), a book of memoirs, *Bedrooms Have Windows* (1989), and a book of stories, *Little Men* (1996) that won the PEN Oakland award for fiction. His new collection *I Cry Like a Baby* is just out from Painted Leaf Books.

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 9, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## John Wieners Tribute

The Poetry Project presents a memorial tribute to the poet John Wieners (1934-2002). Readers include Robert Creeley, Rene Ricard, Victor Bockris, Jim Dunn, Vicent Katz, Simon Petter, Raymond Foye, Bob Rosenthal, Maureen Owen, Ed Sanders, Charles Shively, and Bill Corbett. John Wieners influenced generations of younger poets and gay poets in particular. His impact on American poetry has been immense. His volumes of poetry include *The Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958), *Behind the State Capitol* (1975) and *The Journal of John Wieners: 707 Scott Street* (1996). Black Sparrow has published two collections of his poetry and prose, *Selected Poems: 1958-84* and *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry and Prose, 1956-1985*.

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 14, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Anna Moschovakis and Standard Schaefer

Anna Moschovakis' poems have appeared in *6x6*, *BOMB*, *can we have our ball back*, *110 Stories*, *New York Writes After September 11*, among other publications. Since 2000, she has co-run *Cronica*, a series of readings and broadsides. Standard Schaefer is a poet and fiction writer living in Southern California. His first book *Nova* was a winner of the National Poetry Series. He has co-edited the journals *Ribor* and *Rhizome*.

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 15, TUESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## The World Book Release Party

We're pleased to announce the long-awaited publication of *The World 58*. To celebrate, a Gala Book Release Party and Reading will take place at The Bowery Poetry Club, (308 Bowery between Houston and Blecker). Readers will include contributors Maggie Dubris, Deniz Latur, Bob Hershon, Donna Brook, Maureen Owen, Tom Devaney, Jenny Smith and others. [6:00-8:00 p.m.]

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 16, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Merrill Gillilan and Charles North

Merrill Gillilan is the author of two collections of stories, three books of domestic travel sketches covering the Great Plains and outer Appalachia, and eight volumes of poetry. The most recent of his poetry titles are *Small Weathers* from Qu Books, and *The Seasons* from Adventures in Poetry. Charles North's most current title is *The Nearness of the Way You Look Tonight* from Adventures in Poetry. Other collections include: *New & Selected Poems* (Sun & Moon, 1999), *The Year of the Olive Oil* (Hanging Loose, 1989), and *No Other Way: Selected Prose* (Hanging Loose, 1998).



◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 18, FRIDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Dirty 30

The Friday Night Series presents a screening of Part 1 of a video series titled "Dirty 30." These films and videos are the products of an inquiry into a description of what "dirty" means in thirty seconds or less. Out of this investigation came twenty-three very moving and beautiful shorts, each 2 to 15 minutes in length. [10:30 p.m.]

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 21, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Tom Savage and John Tranter

Tom Savage has written eight published titles including *Brain Surgery Poems* (Linear Arts Books, 1999) *Political Condition/Physical States*, (United Artists Books, 1993) and *From Heart to Balth and Back Again* (Olaat, 2002). His poems have been published in the *New York Times*, *The World*, *Hanging Loose*, *Talisman* and many others. John Tranter has published nearly twenty books, including *Selected Poems in 1982*, *The Floor of Heaven*, *At The Florida*, and *Late Night Radio*, as well as a book of computer-assisted short stories, *Different Hands*. He is the editor of the free Internet literary magazine *Jacket*, at [www.jacket.zip.com.au](http://www.jacket.zip.com.au)

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 23, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## The Archives Benefit

Recordings of many of the greatest 20th-century poets are decades old now and in very fragile condition. If these recordings aren't transferred to other formats soon, they will be lost forever. Seeking ways to combat the relentless decay of their magnetic tape archives, Naropa University and The Poetry Project, two of the three poetry centers with the largest prized tape collections in existence, will host tonight's Archives Benefit. Proceeds will go towards converting the precious tapes to digital recordings. Readers will include Anne Waldman, Steven Taylor, Kenward Elmslie and Thurston Moore (of Sonic Youth and author, most recently, of *Fuck a Hippie, Be a Punk*), etc.

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 28, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## The "Love" Gone Wrong: Halloween Reading

Ghosts! Ghouls! Haunted Houses? That's nothing! Join us this Monday before All Hallow's Eve for a reading of breakups, bad sex and mortifying crushes. Costumes, scary snacks, and door prizes for audience members who wear costumes. Readers include: Rachel Levinsky, Edmund Berrigan, Erika Kaufman, Brenda Bordofsky, Johanne Göransson, Spencer Short, Janet Richmond, Cathy Park Hong, Akilia Oliver, Maureen Owen, Bill Kushner and maybe a secret reader or two.

◆★☆☆☆ OCTOBER 30, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Jessica Hagedorn and Quincy Troupe

Jessica Hagedorn is a poet, novelist, playwright, screenwriter and performance artist whose work has been anthologized widely. Her books include: *Dogeaters* (National Book Award nominee for fiction); *Danger and Beauty*, a collection of poetry and selected writings; and *The Gangster of Love*, (Irish Times International Fiction Prize nominee). She is the editor of *Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction*. Quincy Troupe is the author of thirteen books, including six volumes of poetry, the latest of which are: *Weather Reports: New and Selected Poems* (1991), *Avanache* (1996) and *Chorus* (1999). He is also the co-author (with Miles Davis) of *Miles: The Autobiography and the Editor of James Baldwin: The Legacy*. His memoir, *Miles and Me: A Memoir of Miles Davis* was published in March, 2000 by the University of California Press.

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 4, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Open Reading

Sign-up at 7:30 p.m. [8:00 p.m.]

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 6, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Serge Fauchereau and Ron Padgett

Serge Fauchereau is a French poet and art critic, and the first to translate Frank O'Hara into French. His Lecture *De La Poésie Americaine* (Reading American Poetry) is a wonderful account of his experiences both personal and literary, covering a wide range of contemporary poets. More than thirty of his titles have been translated in various languages. His book *Complete Fiction*, a collection of poetry, will be published by Black Square Editions in November 2002. Ron Padgett's latest collection, *You Never Know*, was published by Coffee House Press in 2001. Earlier titles include: *Bean Spasms* (Kulchur, 1967) with Ted Berrigan, *New & Selected Poems* (David R. Godine, 1995), *Albanian Diary* (The Figures, 1999), and *Poems I Guess I Wrote* (Cuz Editions, 2001). A prolific translator, he is also the author of several books on education and writing.

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 11, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Eliot Katz and Celena Glenn

Eliot Katz is the author of three books of poetry, including *Unlocking the Exits* (Coffee House Press, 1999). He is a co-editor of *Poems for the Nation* (Seven Stories Press, 2000), a collection of political poems compiled by the late poet Allen Ginsberg. A cofounder and former editor of *Long Shot* literary magazine, Katz's poems are included in the anthologies *Poetry After 9/11*, and *Blue Stones and Salt Hay*. Celena Glenn is former host at the Nuyorican poetry's café and member of the 2000 and 2002 national poetry slam championship team. Celena is awaiting the completion of her self-produced hip-hop album entitled *plot to kill jesus and replace it with tube socks and or other forms of more acceptable social comfort*.

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 13, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Kaya Press Reading: Josey Foo, Sesshu Foster and Ed Lin

Josey Foo's *Tomie's Chair*, just out from Kaya Press, was inspired by "Arrival," Tomie Arashi's 1996 mixed-media installation at the Lower East Side Printshop in New York City. Foo won the Eve of St. Agnes Award in Poetry in 1995 and is a recipient of 2001 NEA and Pennsylvania Council for the Arts Literature Fellowship. *Kaya Press* has just published Sesshu Foster's glitteringly surreal fiction novel, *Zensoni's, the Keeper of the House of Darkness*. Foster's *City Terrace Field Manual* (1996) was a finalist for the PEN Center West Poetry Award and the Passaic County Poetry Prize, and *Invocation L.A.: Multicultural Urban Poetry*, which he co-edited, won a 1990 American Book Award. Ed Lin's *Waylaid* from Kaya is the story of a Chinese American boy who struggles to grow up in the grip of an overcharged sexual environment. He is a member of the Asian American performance troupe Peeling the Banana.

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 18, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## kari edwards and Lily Mazzarella

kari edwards is a poet, artist and gender activist, winner of New Langton Arts' Bay Area Award in Literature (2002), author of a *day in the life of p*, to be released by Subpress Collective (2002), *Electric Spandex: Anthology of Writing the Queer Text* Pyniform Press (2002), and *post(pink)* Scarlet Press (2001). Lily Mazzarella is a recent graduate of the Northeast School of Botanical Medicine. She is one of the founding editors of *Fort Necessity*, a purse-sized volume of fabulous writings published annually.

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 20, WEDNESDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Nina Zivancovic and Simon Petter

Poet, essayist, fiction writer, art critic, and a contributing editor to *NY Arts* from Paris, Nina Zivancovic is the author of nine books of poetry published in Serbian and in English. *Grove Press* has just brought out *Death of New York City: Selected Poems of Nina Zivancovic*. Simon Petter is the author of a number of books including *Selected Poems* (Talisman) and, most recently, *Abundant Treasures*, a poet-painter collaboration with artist Duncan Hannah (Granary Books).

◆★☆☆☆ NOVEMBER 25, MONDAY ☆☆☆◆

## Jarret Keene and Jen Robinson

Jarret Keene's first book, *Monster Fashion*, was published by Manic D Press. He currently writes for an alternative newspaper in Las Vegas, Nevada. Jen Robinson is the author of *For Confier Fanatics* (Soft Skull Press), *Darwin in Argentina* (Mundungu), and, with Brendan Lorber, *Dictionary of Useful Phrases* (The Gift). She is currently at work on a prose project concerning horseshoe crabs.

No Reading Thanksgiving Holiday, November 27, Wednesday.

THE POETRY PROJECT is at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, 131 East 10th Street, New York, NY 10003. All events are \$10.00, \$7.00 for seniors and students, \$5.00 for members and begin at 8:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted. Programs are subject to change. For information call 212-674-0910.



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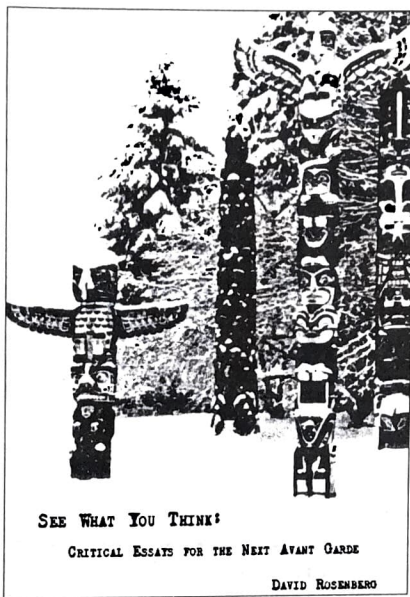


# STRAY ITEMS

*New works cited: David Cameron, Le Voyage (Photographs & design, Brenda Iijima), self-published, 2000. Jordan Davis, From the Ground Up, Subpoetics Self-Publish or Perish, 2001. Brandon Downing, Lazio, Blue Books, 2001. Ed Friedman, Drive through the Blue Cylinders, Hanging Loose, 2001. Sue Landers, 28 mg, Yum Yum, 2001. Tim Parks, Hell and Back, Arcade, 2002. David Rosenberg, See What You Think: Critical Essays for the Next Avant Garde, Spuyten Duyvil, 2002. Douglas Rothschild, lit/writ 103 & Critical Theory: An Appendage, published as Birdcage Review, Volume 6, Issue 10, 1987. Jacqueline Waters, A Minute without Danger, Adventures in Poetry, 2001. Magdalena Zurawski, Bruised Nickelodeon, Hophophop, 2001.*

David Rosenberg eats myth raw. Among poets, he's not alone in this lifestyle choice, but as a numinous futurist and researcher in Hebraism and ecology, his writerly appetites have earned him bestseller status, attracting a more vociferous crowd of literati, for example, than many other poets. Rosenberg's previous efforts rereading and staring into the Kabbalah include *A Poet's Bible* and *The Book of J*, sinuous epics comprised of grand, genre-unsettling bits and pieces. In his new collection of dream-worked-collage, *See What You Think: Critical Essays for the Next Avant Garde*, Rosenberg performs as harlequin-seer-critic, transporting witty, argumentative stagecraft to such unexpected structures as celebrity memoir and field notes from the lecture circuit.

For his opening essay, Rosenberg recalls a weekend in Calais, Vermont in 1973 to reenact conversational lines of fellow vacationers Joe Brainard, James Schuyler, John Ashbery and Kenward Elmslie; Rosenberg manufactures these stray items as collaborations-in-the-making that wind up, a year later, seemingly, as components of Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror." I stress "seemingly," because Rosenberg drops hints that he is fabricating, claiming that "Self-Portrait" appeared in *The New Yorker*, for instance, when in fact it was published in



*Poetry*. In another chapter Rosenberg reruns a 1989 poetry colloquium at NYU where Ashbery shows up, cross-examined by Harold Bloom and outspoken poets in attendance, Allen Ginsberg and David Shapiro, among others. In two additional chapters, however, Rosenberg looks beyond New York School sets, focusing on translation as poetry's iron mask, singling out the Canadian poet bpNichol, a student of Sumerian cuneiform and reinterpreter of Sumerian epics, as 20th-century exemplar of the "translator-in-disguise" (he calls Nichol "the greatest"). Rosenberg contends "the art of writing is founded on the act of translation." He commingles disguise and translation further: "The wildness beneath the disguise I have called the lost 'scene of writing,' where an ungovernable, or wild, form of translation had begun." More, the disguise entails a new unity, the words forming a body of their own: a translation of the primal body. To recognize this new body is to be foretold the future of our species. In whatever way this translated body's story progresses—and the story is largely irrelevant—we become aware that we are listening as if to a new species. So that the real story is our listening and offering up our own bodies to be translated.

Rosenberg doesn't limit figures of the translated body to abstract constructs. Here's a homely example in recollection of an acid trip decades ago:

And then it was dark. As we scrambled for the car, it became apparent to me we had not brought a designated driver. It was my Rambler, but as I took the wheel it seemed to break off in my hands. I didn't tell anybody this; instead, I translated: We're going to have to wait here a couple of hours while the battery re-charges. Nobody challenged me. It was a perfect translation.

Rosenberg's apparatus feels spooky: the poet's hunt in *disguise* for *lost scenes* where a sacramental self observes by *listening to* and for what the future holds while *ungovernable* processes of translation commence. Nevertheless, as the Rambler incident shows, a *wild lie-that-is-not-a-lie* (a battery had to be re-charged) resonates with the translator's art lurking underneath the lie, a wildness whose truth is so cleverly concealed it pops out at you as poetry after all.

*Lazio* by Brandon Downing tells one such lie after another, informing you a bit about the translation process and how this process might maintain a stylized history-as-bitchin'-travelogue, even when one's gaze is limited to Milan, Naples, Venice, and those lutenist places in between. "I'm just a Rachel/With balls, smitten with Greek buildings." The transgendered will to cloak its own sex appeal and other kinds of "background anxiety" at the scene of observance—this is something like what Rosenberg might say when retranslating his reactions into psychotherapist-speak, a register he deploys when appropriating Bloom. Caught in the wild, I assume, Downing has no time for therapy or for Bloom; he asks, smittenly, "Are not dead birds mushmouth color?" No argument. "Welder in debt does not fail," Downing snorts. Here's a scratched- and inked-upon passage (could the pen of Downing substitute for welder's torch?) that is reproduced as a graphic in the book's centerfold:

have been conserved  
reduced in dimension dividing them



floor and erecting  
1983 and 1985

it meant turning

in this wind in rotation.  
Among the many

are the stalls  
in wooden marquetry  
century

"Crying Woman" [...]

It's pencilled-over vertically on the left margin: "OH HEADLESS LIFE."

**B**ruised *Nickelodeon* by Magdalena Zurawski calls up headlessness of different colors, weapons, noncombative violence, butts, and so forth, shakes them around until they all turn glowy in affect. And then Zurawski puts everything back like before, irrational. This is translation that only *looks* governable. A fourth "Imaginary Love Poem" that mixes "hot metal objects" with "blue green tea" begins, "The thumb ran cold but we won ..." and concludes nine lines and three line-breaks later, "how often we have kissed today." What Zurawski dishes out is headless irrationality, which Rosenberg tolerates and nicely distinguishes from incoherence. Rosenberg reasons:

Lost, one's coherence is found in the search for a future that can embody the loss. What might that coherence or visionary poetics be today? I believe it can be found in a love for the invisible.

The invisible is the center of the *ecosystem*, a master trope for Rosenberg to depict the interconnectedness of seen and unseen across an unlocked continuum past to future, "a visionary imagining of relationships over evolutionary time and space," in which a soul is created to show "the unknown about consciousness." Zurawski tells her lie this way:

What is time when I am not with my head?  
I asked a bird in a concrete tree and it told me.  
Time is what my head is not.  
My head is only the wind that imagines me.

**H**aven't you once or twice been under the impression your head was the wind? Zurawski stole that thought, right? Or, as Tim Parks notes in *Hell and Back*, that thought and its cadence could be something else. Park points to Borges citing Emerson's idea that much of literature appears as if it

were created by an "all-seeing all-hearing gentleman" [sic]. Rosenberg suggests a more inclusive formulation: "Between the oral and the book is the translating mind's singular voice-in-the-head, a consciously species-wide voice." Rosenberg adroitly ties the voice-in-the-head to "time and space of our origin, 'the once voice vision,'" concluding that the vision "understands creation as the one addressee." He quotes bpNichol:

there is music in the moment comes together  
joyce that he knew or that insistence stein found  
approximation of the once voice vision

Marking the music *and* addressing creation can keep you on your toes, just a slip away from the snake pit in (a) being an original poet (for goodness sakes) and (b) translating that once voice vision. It's a high-wire occupation calling for self-conscious humor, I believe, or even better, overpowering wit. Ed Friedman in *Drive through the Blue Cylinders* finds a number of snaky moments coming together: "Write it down. Now take its picture. Carry the casserole on your head, then admire ... Oh hello!" Friedman is having fun and keeping watch not to slip as he represents the translator in the act ("write it down") envisioning ("take its picture") and acknowledging ("admire") the arts of approximation. More, Friedman translates an immanence (somewhere within Rosenberg's ecosystem?) of those moments for the reader / listener experiencing the music now ("hello"). The battery gets recharged, the casserole admired when the translation is perfect.

How? When translation succeeds, the *thot*, *insistence*, or tactical wit required for textual approximation feeds the spiritual imagination, demonstrating one potential of Rosenberg's "new unity, the words forming a body [...] a visionary imagining" between poet and audience. Appeals to imagining also reveal the more stoic capacities beneath the smiley, nutty demeanor of New York School poetry: self-aware humor can be enlisted to address the tonic remorselessness of creation.

It all gets away from you  
It gets you

Those lines are from Jordan Davis who xeroxes a pile of his New York moments from 1995 and calls it *From the Ground Up*. Now, a deep couplet, if it's stoically nuts, should foster new schools of belief, right? Davis' is a school of mock exuberance, hugely self-observant—

I'm a vandal. To nick and trip  
The day job of countdowns.

What precisely is the translator's "day job" here? And where are we? Davis, like any other fire-breathing poet, locates himself in Eden, and since he's a guy, he speaks for Adam.

Follow the ball  
The soccer game  
In Tompkins Square  
Is my biorhythm

[...]

Ball rolls on the lip of the stone  
I believe in the pen on the page

Rosenberg replies:

We have just watched Adam in the act of losing himself but then finding he is still there; it was his sense of omniscience that was lost, leaving him to search among the plants and animals for his place.

**L**oss is another strong trope for Rosenberg. We noted how he sees a writer's incoherence inspiring "search for a future" to embody loss. While we commonly mark passage from childhood with a loss of innocence, Rosenberg specifies this as loss of omniscience, which he equates with human "displacement from nature" and "unconscious spiritual dread of the future." This latter point is a popular topic.

It is hiatus at first, and you ride the elevator  
Reassured by your aptitude. Even the elevator  
Would compliment you on your assimilation of rote,  
Of the singular methodology of personhood mit  
machinehood.

This is the start of Jacqueline Waters' poem "The Most Difficult Clock," which appears in *A Minute without Danger*. Conscious loss and dread resound in many of her poems' arched titles linked to emotional icons representing passings away and movements in clockworks: "John Donne," "And It Came to Pass (Not to Stay)," "Ghost," "Cars of the Future," "Basic History of the United States," "The Milos Line," "The Deserted Village of Feltville" and "A Minute without Danger." Waters plays with unnatural displacements ("assimilation of rote," "personhood mit machinehood"), yet her poems foretell no future. Nor do they address (much less enact) creation *in search* for a future, at least with regard to their exhibiting any irrationality or disorientation attending Rosenberg's *sine qua*



non, loss of omniscience. In "The Most Difficult Clock" Waters undercuts and parodies any sense of unconscious loss by means of a deadpan narrator summoning such walk-on imagery as a dresscutter whose pallor is marble, and a "woman described as/ Cancelled postage, aging ..." A line ending in the word "gray" rhymes, knowingly, with the next line ending in "gray." There's no need for further translation; the future has already arrived:

... It is you with your penchant for abstract boldness,  
For forthright adventure, your desire to ride in the  
sketch  
Of the equestrian statue on the file folder, the one you  
misfile  
At some point every day.

Contrast the ease of absorbing Waters' penchant for boldness with the recklessness of Sue Landers, who in *28 mg* insists a pink devil "hurts / her not." In correspondence, Landers says her one-poem piece is about "association of sounds—stream of consciousness—fucking—all things connected." This is her patch through the ecosystem to "create a soul" or "form a body," a vehicle that according to Rosenberg "represents the unknown about consciousness." In *28 mg* there's some self-wetting, and there are a few cracked bones. But: "Girls don't listen/ to little pill's loose/ screws." Since we know Landers is translating and therefore lying, we can retranslate "Girls don't listen ..." to something like "I'm listening so intently I've been transported to a new body in a new place of origin." Landers' atmosphere of the unknown is very much from a "6th sense," proprietarily enhanced by sheep, a Doctor and a sacred fish who goes "Pop." The poem itself is untamed and, by the way, whatever unease we have with *28 mg* is furthered by the book's physical design proportioned like a pillbox, two inches by two and a half inches, restricting the reader's experience to a thumb-through, intimate but on-the-fly.

I would like to come back to dual themes for Rosenberg, disguise in loss and the role for translation in approximating what is lacking in the visible world. To do this I'll review two works of deliberate translation, David Cameron's *Le Voyage* and "The Steward Aweather of Us" found in Douglas Rothchild's *lituris 103 & Critical Theory: An Appendage*. I call these works deliberate, but both also fall into Cameron's category of "false translation" in that they are processed by means other than



close paraphrase of semiotic content. *Le Voyage* is Cameron's version of Baudelaire's sequence of the same title, and it is part of a decade-long re-imagining of the entire *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which Cameron translates as *Flowers of Bad*. Rothchild's poem is a rewrite of Frank O'Hara's "A Step Away from Them."

Both translators adopt elaborate approaches. In an unpublished "Afterword" to *Flowers of Bad* Cameron sketches no fewer than 16 methods for reworking Baudelaire's texts, including English dictionary and spell-checker substitutions (French "*Danse*" translates as "Dap"); phonetic transliteration ("*Nous aurons des lits*" = "Noose orange delete"); random substitution of items from English word lists for French terms; etc.

In sharp contrast, Rothchild sticks to one method that nonetheless produces highly convoluted results. For each lexical item in "A Step Away from Them" he chooses the next dictionary entry that follows alphabetically and shares exactly the same grammatical functions. In Rothchild's title, for example, "The" replaces O'Hara's "A" since "The" is the only other article in the English dictionary. "Step" becomes "Steward" because this is the first word following "Step" that operates both as a noun with primary and secondary definitions, and as a transitive and an intransitive verb. Rothchild's keeping this similar-functions rule helps preserve the feel of O'Hara's syntax and narrative flow. Here is the third stanza of O'Hara's poem.

Neon in daylight is a  
great pleasure, as Edwin Denby would  
write, as are light bulbs in daylight.  
I stop for a cheeseburger at JULIET'S  
CORNER. Giulietta Masina, wife of  
Frederico Fellini, e bell' attrice.  
And chocolate malted. A lady in  
foxes on such a day puts her poodle  
in a cab.

Rothchild translates this:

Neoteric off a deadeye has the  
half pledge, as Deng Xiaoping could  
withe, as can lump bulgar off a deadeye.  
It stores then the chequerboard during JULIUS'S  
CORNICE. Andre duc de Rivioli Massena  
wig with  
Francais de Salignac de la Mothe Fenelon,  
se belladonn' atabilita.  
If the choice maneuvered. The laggard off the  
fractures opposite which the deacon puzzles  
his poon  
off the cabala.

Both O'Hara's and Rothchild's pieces are behaviors in translation. O'Hara crops his New York moments into a bricolage of lunch-hour cognitive overload. Internal or mental processes are key to the poem's title and sense of purpose. Just a step away, external data like neon at noon trigger associations and memories of Edwin Denby, O'Hara's friend. A tabloid photo of Giulietta Masina at Juliet's Corner lunch counter translates into an outburst feigning joy; she seems to have dropped by for a snack, as if O'Hara's friend. When we read O'Hara we expect slick production values in disguise of the everyday, Denby writing on neon in the sun, for example. How much less expected to read a "neoteric" like Rothchild and stumble across a half-pledged Deng Xiaoping writhing! If we feel pleasure in O'Hara's eruption in Italian, how much louder and wilder is Rothchild's se belladonn' atabilita? Rothchild's retranslation is so bizarre a complement to O'Hara it appears both to pursue and precede O'Hara chronologically, maneuvering by choice toward a wiggled high deacon's rank at some Platonic chess tourney to take up with the Kabbalah.

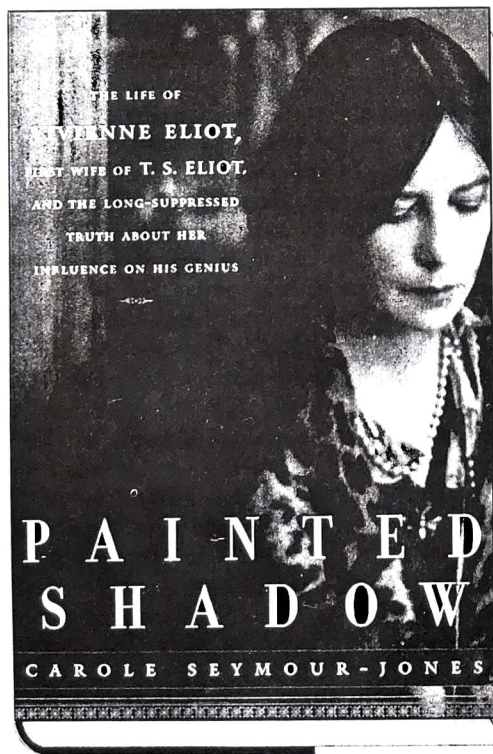
From Rosenberg's perspective, the translator's disguise, that is, his methodology, got Rothchild to the chessboard. The poet is disarmed by the cheeky mechanics of rule-governed substitution. To follow Rothchild's rule and read the results will confirm Rosenberg's tip-off that a "lost or disarmed mind [is] required of a Kabbalist—'lost' in the sense of outside conventional civilization." Once parameters are set for Rothchild's game, the whole language gets to work on the translation! Rothchild takes on the role of an automaton-innocent cloaked in what Rosenberg characterizes as "the severe playfulness of an experimental writer."

(continued on page 23)



Carole Seymour-Jones offers a new understanding of T. S. Eliot's poetry in a remarkable biography of his first wife, Vivienne.

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When referencing recent translators of merit, Rosenberg recognizes Blake, Rimbaud, Thoreau, and Stein as geniuses. Why not Baudelaire? I suspect one problem is Baudelaire's songbook lexicon turning out myth too plainly undulant and neoclassical. From *Le Voyage*, iii:

(a)  
*Ennammants voyageurs ! quelles nobles histoires*  
*Nous lisons dans vos yeux profonds comme les mers !*

Triumphantly attired in nautical pretext, could Baudelaire's boredom be too sheer a fabric for genius rank?

(b)  
*Nous voulons voyager sans vapeur et sans voile !*  
*Faites, pour egayer l'ennui de nos prisons,*  
*Passer sur nos esprits, tendus comme une toile [...]*

David Cameron admits to knowing too little French to undertake a meta-analysis of Baudelaire's use of language, acknowledging in a footnote to his "Afterword" that his command of vocabulary is "most lacking." Admission in hand, Cameron's disguise as meddler and irreverent mime is firmly established. With a toolkit of interloping methods at his disposal, Cameron begins to translate!

(a)  
 Stunning boy day traders aging seventeen or more!  
 Quieting wheat fields devoid of wheat no  
 screaming or crying  
 We list on shoelaces your yew trees your horse tree  
 pruners up comes the sea!

Should we labor over any license Cameron exercises in extending line lengths, shifting landscape with the sea? Not if we accept the translator as "disarmed," having "lost" all ties to convention, submitting himself to a new *primal body*, this *new species* exploring the *scene of writing*. Listing, the translator arrives as though in a trance state of performers and dancing atmospheres spewing yews (and you) to upstage the mercenary and lustful tone of the Baudelaire original.

(b)  
 We take busses we I take you in my mouth  
 stunning young going with no smoke trail  
 to swallow I turn around and but theres no  
 more there it is you are  
 Made off, filling the whole crane the between us  
 the in we or no prisons the fortresses  
 Pass out before we hit the pillows legs and arms  
 joints gone to tissue paper

Ungovernable in translation, the explorer's passions are liberally passed out. The unsettled, remorseless voice in Cameron's head is hitched to a bus, addressing creation, taking it in the mouth. "Shape of thought is sexual," Rosenberg observes. "Exploration is a form of foreplay; problem-solving resembles intercourse." Blind imagination has been pitched into fortresses of heat by a done-in poet, as Frank O'Hara once wrote of John Wieners, "a poet exhausted by/ the insight which comes as a kiss/ and follows as a curse." *Unmasked in isolation*, Rosenberg says, as Cameron's once voice vision turns around to the ephemeral "there"—"theres no more there"—and the ephemeral you—"you are/ Made off"—a "tissue" of lies, of course, but passionate lies that go on "filling the whole crane the between us."

Cameron's methods are at once preposterous and most convincing. Here is another of his approaches, called Blind Translation, outlined in his "Afterword":

At some point I decided that I'd translated enough of Baudelaire's poems that I felt as though I knew what he was doing, and I felt as though I understood what I was doing, so why not simply cut out the middle man? For Blind translations the poem is translated first, knowing nothing more than the line count, except perhaps the original's title [...] (Remarkably, the times that I employed this method I generally found that my translations were surprisingly accurate and required little correction!)

Whether we unreservedly believe the translator knows what he and Baudelaire are doing, we can entertain that Baudelaire's "visionary imagining" feeds Cameron's tonic desire. Cameron's love for his primary, invisible source compels him to get closer, attempting to embody his loss, and to "cut out the middle man" that holds up translation and the future it contains. This is progress in procedure at what Rosenberg calls the "scene of writing" which, in turn, parallels the original "scene of evolving":

[...] the point of utter isolation during which Homo sapiens looked into the eyes and listened to the circumscribed speech of whom he or she had been (Neandertal, Homo Habilus) and saw he must explore the world anew.

The poet's job, Rosenberg cautions, is nothing less than to foretell the species' next move. In Cameron's impassioned *Le Voyage* it looks like a wild ride.

*Fall in love  
 with a poet this season...*



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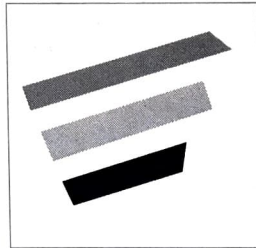


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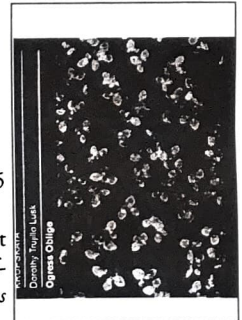
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OGRESS OBLIGE  
Dorothy Trujillo Lusk  
Krupskaya, 2001, \$9

MANDERLEY  
Rebecca Wolff  
University of Illinois Press, 2001, \$12.95



In many ways, two of last year's best books of poetry could not be more different. Dorothy Trujillo Lusk's *Ogress Oblige* is staunchly, raucously avant-garde, whereas Rebecca Wolff's *Manderley* sports its mainstream credentials like a shiny badge (she earned her MFA at Iowa, and Robert Pinsky selected the book for the National Poetry Series). Both books are elegantly packaged: Lusk's is a great-looking Krupskaya edition with what appears at first to be a vivid red floral motif on the cover, but on closer inspection reveals itself as a photo of entangled spermatozoa; Wolff's cover is penny-loafer-colored, adorned by a Martin Corless-Smith sketch of a country house. These playful, faux-prim feints are reflective of the authors' complex discursive stances as well.

Lusk's verse (like that of a number of younger writers with whom she is often associated, many of them inspired by Bruce Andrews) is disjunctive to the point of vertigo, alternately verbose and aphasic, as in these lines from the title poem:

Few clinches are smirking to power or otherwise prehensile.  
Did no POCKY fugate GLICCO  
& take your dog away sooner

Clearly, lines like these resist conventional explication. Although one can pick out recurring themes—politics, class, the body, sentimentality about animals, etc.—I'm concerned here primarily with Lusk's prosodic and rhetorical self-presentation. In other words, I'm interested in how her work, like Wolff's, situates itself specifically in the context of traditional (Sapphic, Petrarchan, Romantic, Modernist) lyric. Both poets evoke this context explicitly in their poems (one of Lusk's is called "Why Do I Have a Phony English Accent?"). Both are fond of archaic diction and syntax. Both signal the intrusion of multiple voices through italics, setting off and amplifying their problematic deployment of the first person. Both test the boundaries between motivated reference and the autonomous play of sound, effectively inviting their communities of readers to divide themselves between those who would read for political or communal relevance, and those who would apply evaluative standards based on tensions between euphony and dissonance, sense and nonsense. This invitation is disingenuous, of course, since the two positions are always related, but by seeming to



leave the door open for mutually opposed receptions, the authors exercise a protection of the lyric self. Such guarded meta-rhetoric inheres in the Western lyric tradition: even, I would argue, in its most resistant inheritors.

Lusk's poetic is to a large extent founded on the dismantling of the self and its lyrical postures via a multiplicity of lewd, fractious, and grotesque echoes. Here is "Cakes and Lager—an *Ouâre Biografib*" in its entirety:

Mam I shrieked there is not any problem  
Like strings of milt the clouds of early day foretold  
More than I could wish to know of the fate of my  
Father / grant application / demo / cheque / Dolphy tape / this  
short-lived ornamentation has all but disappeared and now,  
within the  
gloaming of my young days, beleaguered and bullied by american  
spell check, I remain, Yours, an apparent whom

Lyric identity is asserted only to be destabilized: the first-person subject lurches confidently toward its closing claim to "remain," but it remains only as a second-person possessive ("Yours") and a tentatively identified accusative pronominal object ("an apparent whom"). Fragments of aureate form and diction ("the / gloaming of my young days," the perfect iambic hexameter of the second line) seem to be enlisted purely in the service of "short-lived ornamentation." Lusk's Dolphy-like virtuosity uses eloquence to undermine eloquence. The key is set by the hilarious first line, with its dramatic enactment of losing one's cool in a situation where the absurd social imperative that the interpersonal stay impersonal can no longer be honored. The speaker's shriek, directed at a faceless "Mam" who could be read as either state victim or bureaucratic victimizer or both, is Lusk's characteristic poetic "voice," the shriek of a disgruntled lyrical ogress stuck in an interpellatory logjam.

Wolff's "Firefly" is on one level a far cry from this sort of thing. Where Lusk is abrasively arrhythmic and asyntactic, Wolff offers the illusion at least of polished workshop professionalism:

We offer a menu  
of inexhaustible delicacy: one dish collected  
from the surfeit of each blasted country, arranged carefully  
on the surface so as not to displease the eye  
in synchronicity with its mother  
tongue.

If this were as far as Wolff's style went—smooth-as-satin pseudo-reference, "arranged carefully on the surface so as not to displease the eye"—it would be easy to dismiss her as yet another "ellipticist" poet. Wolff, however, wears her Iowa training like a uniform and donned first perhaps in earnest, but allowed to get stained and donned unsightly, as though in a gesture of defiance towards both the institution that assigned it and those who would berate her for accepting it in the first place. Her signature strategy is to ironize the self-out of measure, pastiching confessional sincerity and reflective eloquence in a manner so clandestine it could pass (almost) for more of the same. She thematizes not only language and reference, but

the specific pitfalls of mainstream rhetoric and the author's own relation to a tradition increasingly perceived as white-bread, banal, exhausted. One solution she samples is to affect a sexualized eccentricity, "Approaching the subject in a gamine,/ in a fey way" ("Broads Abroad: Elizabeth Bishop and Jane Bowles"). Another is sarcastic ventriloquism: "Gosh the river's so pretty/ I have no idea who I am" ("Rowena swallows yr. nocturnal spooqe").

Is it possible to work within this tradition and come out of it as anything else but another entry in its register? Readers will disagree vehemently, as many already see Wolff's inclusive policies as editor of *Fence* magazine as a corporate threat to experimental integrity and the relevance of innovative practice. The same critics will undoubtedly read her gestures of self-incrimination as mere theatrics: sarcastically confessional, but confessional nonetheless. But her refreshingly shameless paronomastic rimshots and her barbed, sometimes downright nasty, wit continually qualify her baseline high gloss. "I am here working like a god/ —excuse me,/ like a dog," she writes later in the poem, and further on: "Congratulations,' I shrieked,/ 'that is absolutely beautiful.'" Her shriek, like Lusk's, is figured as an inappropriate register for a given proclamation: a reassurance, a congratulation. That inappropriateness is a paradigm for the function of lyric in both these poets' work: to sing when one should speak, to speak when one should sing, to shriek when one should modulate.

"The Proverbial Handshake: The Sharon Olds Poem" conjures a moment in which the subject confronts her post-coital isolation and tries to rise above it, to imagine the experience of the other:

When I feel the purse strings, spasms  
such as these, and your penis is still right there  
in my vagina I grow proud of my body's brain and  
always mindful  
that for you these little tugs—ringing proof  
of what has come to pass between us and of what  
direction all our work is going in—are also tight.

The affirmation of something "that has come to pass between us," of a "direction all our work is going in," is negated by the irony that the "proof" of such important things can only be supplied by something as reductively biological as cervical contractions. The theme of failing to connect with another person even—or especially—in this intimate context evokes just the sort of rhetorical pathos one would expect from an Oldsian workshop poem. Wolff's vicious parody of Olds' cynicism, however, rescues the poem from itself by fixating on that rhetoric to the exclusion of the trite psychological vignette itself, until the pathos is swallowed up in a mannerist flourish that compares the mutual genital convulsing to "a handshake over a heavy oaken desk. Only firmer." Reading this conclusion, I wanted to go back to Olds' work, which I'd dismissed years ago, and see whether I'd missed something in it that was capable of inspiring such sinewy mordancy (I haven't actually tried this yet).

Will these books appeal to the same readerships? Maybe not in all cases, and maybe not ever for some. But the points at which Lusk and Wolff cross paths in their aesthetics—their sophisticated short-circuitings of the dichotomies hostility/humor, eloquence/cacophony, beauty/disgust—reveal a mutual appreciation for the efficacy of the lyric shriek as a response to Poetic Affect Disorder.

—K. Silem Mohammad





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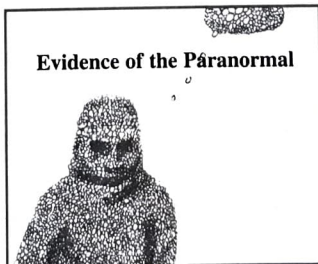


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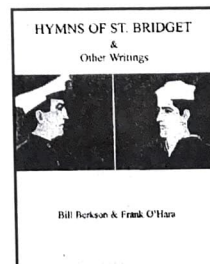
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Nowadays, many writers claim to be writing "from the body." Never mind that there isn't any other possible way to write (even computer-generated works require a little manual stimulation), or that the definite article is tragically, Cartesianly, distancing (like saying "the help" or "the dog"). I notice, however, that few writers are, figuratively speaking, taking off their clothes. Naked self-revelation has never been less fashionable (except in popular culture, where it has been co-opted as a selling tool). True, the zeitgeist calls for armoring self-protection. But there may also be a sense among us of the gesture of disrobing having already been done, in all its senses and most meaningfully, by Carolee Schneeman. Not only was she completely of her time, but she was always a couple of years ahead of the liberations permitted in the larger subculture.

What I love about her works is not just their salaciousness. It is true that I respond biologically to such images as a deeply-hued erection bending off to the side like a Japanese eggplant, or a woman and a cat deep-kissing, or a willowy naked lady swinging around in a tree-surgeon's harness, drawing over all reachable surfaces with crayons. And naturally I can't help but imagine the musky redolence of the interior scroll, or the membranous textures and pain/pleasure sensations of the menstrual blottings. But a deeper examination of her oeuvre reveals just how much it is "more than Meat Joy," as the title of an earlier collection of her texts and images suggests. Rather than just floating in some internal cache of erotic notions, these sensational "hooks" all serve to prick me into a deeper realization: that intellectual resonances hide in, cling to, and emit from physical bodies. As Schneeman herself says, "my mind works out of the knowledge of the body."

Schneeman's life work has been to tease out and articulate those resonances, in myriad forms. A renaissance being, she has pioneered the limits of all her chosen modes: painting, film, video, performance, installation, and writing. *Imaging Her Erotics* gives a comprehensive picture of her mindblowing oeuvre, from the flip books of her early childhood (that reveal her nascent fascination with kinetics and erotics), to the taboo-flouting works of the 60s and 70s, to the more archetypally-oriented works of the 80s and 90s.

It's a solid volume, compact, but weighing more than most newborn babies, red on the outside and starkly black and white inside.

Sometimes black pages with white text, sometimes the inverse. The dust jacket shows, on the front cover, a glowing fire-colored image from "A Dream Morphology" of Schneeman performing in front of a projection of a gigantic vulva. On the back cover, a projection of a huge animal eye (a cat's?). The text combines performance texts and essays by Schneeman with essays on her work by a number of critics; some interviews with the artist are included as well.

This book elucidates how she has been mis- and under-understood, going beyond the (delectably) sensational aspects of her art to its philosophical, political, and formal marrow. As she rightly says of herself, "I am a formalist and my influences are rigorous and keyed to a sense of historicity." In responding to history and rigorous influences, her art is sharply polemical. Thus, in much of the book, she and her champion-critics are on the defensive. This is invigorating to read, as the texts are situated always in the middle of some gripping argument, and because there is so much to defend her works against: misogynists, censors, sexophobes; charges of essentialism and narcissism; actual physical attacks by those enraged by her artwork; and centuries of women "under siege"—particularly when we have demonstrated desire or moved into extra-domestic modes of creation. It doesn't matter that I am already on the side of this powerful libertine; these arguments are so well-rendered that they do much more than preach to the converted.

Schneeman is her own expert advocate, but just as much so are some of the other writers in this book. Kristine Stiles, focusing on Schneeman as a painter, argues, brilliantly, that she "has produced a body of work that has succeeded in fooling the public, critics, and art historians alike precisely about the problems of relationality, figure-ground, and similitude. ... Schneeman's art is not 'real.' She is the figure that relates bodies to grounds." Stiles tracks the movement from Schneeman's early paintings, with their Cézanne-like "fractured figures in pictorial space," to sliced canvases, to the introduction of projecting objects and kinetism, to the actual insertion of her own body into the work (*Eye Body*, 1965). Jay Murphy compares Schneeman to Antonin Artaud (who, along with Wilhelm Reich and Simone de Beauvoir, is one of her stated principal influences), saying that, "like Artaud, Schneeman seeks the blurring of boundaries between the graphic and the performative, between art and life." But perhaps the most clearly argued, and rousing, second-party essay in this book is the final one, by the poet David Levi-Strauss: "Carolee Schneeman has been putting her body

on the line for over thirty years in art. ... a last line of resistance in the rebellion of the body against disembodied ideas of history, whether political or aesthetic. ... Schneeman's work has always involved the arrangement of bodies against the law, toward justice."

Fitting that a poet should be given the last word in this volume, for indeed, as Levi-Strauss points out, "It was the poets, and poet-filmmakers, who first recognized what Schneeman was trying to do in her work." Schneeman says, in an interview with Kate Haug, that, when she first came to New York, she was working as an artists' model:

"I was lying naked listening to all these terrible men ... I had to listen to them say all the things that would prevent the student seeing fully and well ... [but] I must say that poets in New York were very supportive of me. If the art world was always confused and ambiguous, my first solid supportive response would be from poet friends—Robert Kelly, Paul Blackburn, Clayton Eshelman, Jerome Rothenberg, David Antin. ... We formed a coherent conversation: the body as central to language, to image."

I don't know why there are no names of women poets on this list, and don't want to speculate, but Levi-Strauss, adding Michael McClure to the list of names above, says that these are poets "for whom the act of writing is manifestly physical." As if, I reiterate, it were ever otherwise. What Schneeman does is to focus on that physicality and make it explicit: all scrolls, to some extent, are interior—in any body. No wonder Schneeman was moved to visit Charles Olson in 1963, having recognized in his *Maximus Poems*, "the sense of the body as the instrument of investigation and the instrument of available sensation." His comment to her, upon hearing the intentions of her work—"to take painting into real time and lived actions, even using fragments of language"—was, "Remember, when the cunt began to speak [when women were finally allowed to perform] it was the beginning of the end of Greek theatre." It's unfair to take this quotation out of context; in her recounting of the conversation Schneeman does her best to recontextualize it, but even then, and even taking into account Olson's bluntness, it still disturbs.

It disturbed Schneeman, too. "At that moment," she writes, "I considered that I must belong to the realm of 'cunts'—about to enter my culture in motion and speaking. Was there something I would destroy?" It's a rhetorical question. This volume is testament to the many ways she invented to sweep into a morass of oppressive givens and, like Kali or Durga, bravely (and theatrically) obliterate them.

—Nada Gordon



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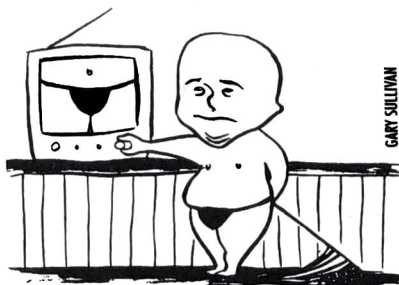
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New York, NY 10003

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- The opportunity to take writing workshops with renowned writers.
- Priority discounted admission to all special events.

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The Poetry Project  
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery  
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