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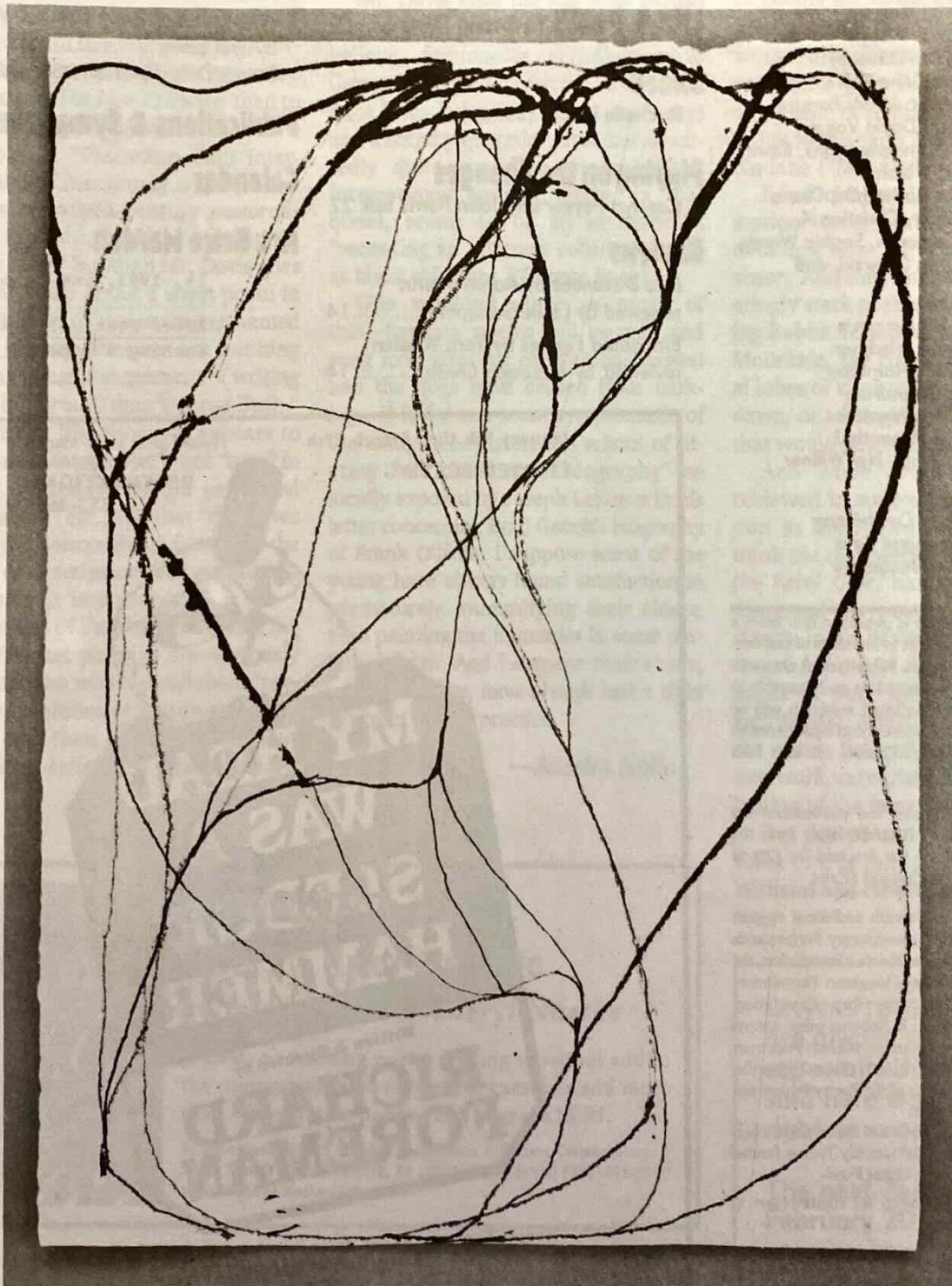
The Case of the Ant on the Page
LETTERS FROM HOLLO & SANDERS

Carl Watson
A PROLIFERATION OF BUTTERFLIES

Shoes
SELF-POIGNANT ROCHELLE KRAUT

Maximum Fish and Beat O'Hara
A TALK WITH JOHN FARRIS

On the Pumpkin of Morphine
SCALAPINO, OWEN, DAVIES, WINTER,
BORKHUIS, LEWIS, CABICO, STEFANS
+ DIRTY MCCAIN



2/3 1994



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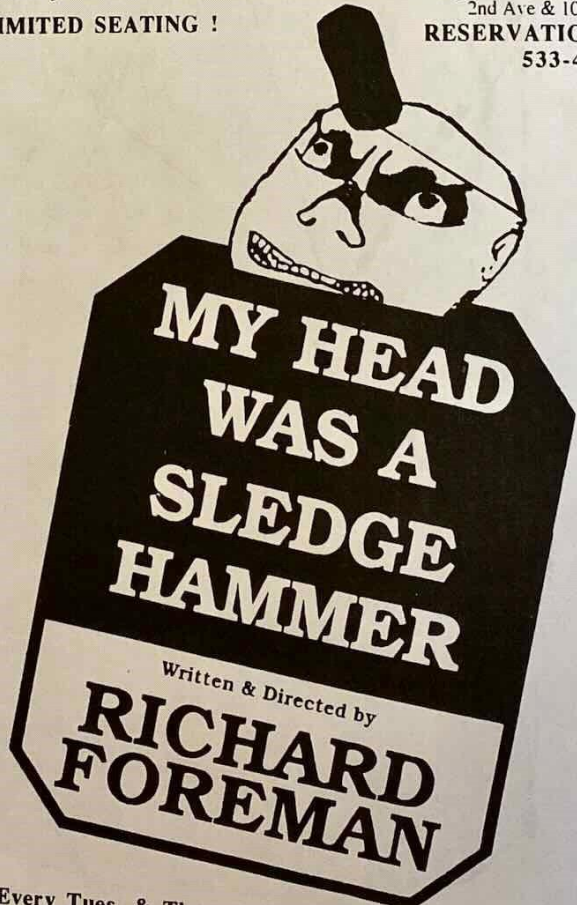
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To the Editors, POETRY PROJECT.

Giving in to an impulse that makes me feel a little like the proverbial retired Colonel writing letters to the *London Times*, I beg to take issue with Mr. Tim Davis' review of Edward Sanders' book *Hymn to the Rebel Café*.

Deliberately ignoring the two most powerful re-visionings in the book, "Cassandra" and "Melville's Father," Mr. Davis chooses to concentrate on what he calls "Sanders' ditties" ("Images of Miriam" and "At Century's End"), sequences of short aphoristic pieces, and proceeds to misread them in a stunningly humorless, not to say tone-deaf, manner more appropriate to *The New Criterion* than to the pages of the *Newsletter*.

His coinage "Pastoralus (sic) Interruptus" seems amusingly appropriate: what late twentieth century *pastoralis* wouldn't (and shouldn't) be *interruptus*, sooner or later? But then Mr. Davis goes on to pontificate about a short poem in which Sanders, or the character named "I" in it, claims that an ant running across his page at the moment of writing "is more important/than George Bush."

The gist of his discourse appears to be that such a statement is not "true" in the light of "today's media generated human nature" etc., and that "those two little words, George Bush, outweigh the ten lines of description that supposedly eclipse them in 'importance.'"

The ironies of Sanders' ant/Bush, fax machine/cricket pairings are obviously lost on someone who can call them "perverse juxtapositions of nature and technology" and then condemn them as "trite and unbelievable" (my italics).

Carried away by an ill-concealed animosity toward "the 60s generation poet-activist" and his "lifestyle," Mr. Davis then performs a curious *volte-face* by stating that "Belief is rarely an important quality of poetry reading."! Such oafishness ceases to be comical, and it is not redeemed by what follows—a disingenuous perplexity as to what "to do" with Sanders' book "which wants to chronicle while being votive." Was any chronicle ever created without a measure of devotion?

Mr. Davis ends the sad little performance with his own, as he seems to believe, *fashionable* genuflection to Gertrude Stein "who wrote so decisively of historical poetry" (you don't say) and a lengthy quotation from her admittedly quite charming crypto-babble. Interestingly enough, Stein, in that quote, seems to be all in favor of "recording an arbitrary collision" (such as black shiny ant / George Bush).

One wouldn't make so much of this—Sanders' poems will be read and sung long after his caravan has passed and the dogs have ceased from barking—if it did not seem symptomatic of the smug neo-Aristotelian school of literary "criticism" and "biography" so lucidly exposed by Joseph LeSueur in his letter concerning Brad Gooch's biography of Frank O'Hara. I suppose some of the young have always found satisfaction in prematurely mummifying their elders, then painting the mummies in some parodic fashion. And I suppose their elders, while still alive, have always had a right to object to that practice.

—Anselm Hollo

I would be the first to admit to being a *Ivery un-au courant*, an out-of-it geezer, not in style, pre-modern, a former beautiful youth whose eyebags now are in the league of Dickens or Bakunin, a poet whose bardic garb is intricately splashed with the various pigments of radicalism, and someone with a broken heart because his country has not evolved at least into a Scandinavian-style social democracy.

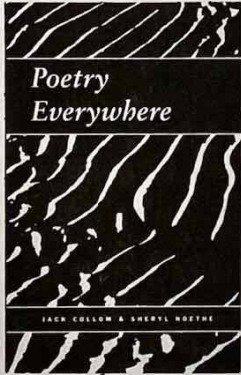
In my books, I try to present my investigative poetry as well as my observations about the natural world—the simply stark, the starkly complex, and the beautifully simple. And so in the mix of poems are those with simple images of ants across plantain leaves as well as works that discuss in detail historic vengeance ("By Pont Neuf"), the serial aggression of civilizations ("Cassandra") or life in the early 19th century mercantile lane ("Melville's Father").

I feel obligated to give some information in my current series of works detailing how I live and my political vision. And the result are those exasperatingly stark poems about my wife picking Rabbit Tobacco at the top of Mead's Mountain, the commingling in the aural lobes of a fax machine and crickets at dawn, or a hunger for a banking system that would better serve working people.

And while I am honored to be reviewed in such a prestigious publication as the *Poetry Project Newsletter* I think the reviewer of my book, *Hymn to the Rebel Café*, has rather too quickly dismissed my poetry and my political stance, in his haste to get me out of the way. I AM out of the way. I hand him a bottle of pure European water as he sprints past. And gladly leave to anyone the entire field of hasty bardic mania, overwork, careerism, and excessive eyeballing of the fame-flame.

But my poetry is definitely there—some of it is fully in the field of Olson, Williams and Hesiod, and it's IN the way.

—Ed Sanders



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**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
are always welcome,
especially if something
said here was terribly
right or wrong.**

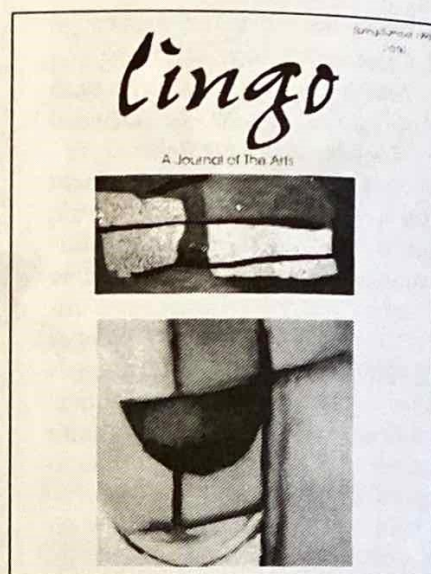
**The next deadline is
February 20.**

lingo 1 \$10.00**A Journal of the Arts**

A feature interview with Bernadette Mayer plus an excerpt from her forthcoming book *The Desires Of Mothers To Please Others In Letters*. A selection from *My Life In The Early Nineties* by Lyn Hejinian. A selection from Clark Coolidge's *City in Regard*. Poetry and photos from *Reconstruction* by Fanny Howe and Ben Watkins. Plus new work by Rosmarie Waldrop, John Ashbery, Eileen Myles, William Corbett and others.

Translations include: the complete text of Edmond Jabès' *A Foreigner Carrying In The Crook Of His Arm A Tiny Book*; a selection from Arkadii Dragomoshchenko's *Phosphor*. New translations of Jacques Roubaud, Elke Erb, Dominique Fourcade, Peter Waterhouse, and Pierre Martory.

Essays include: "Jazz on Video" by Peter Occhiogrosso and Geoffrey Young on Kenneth Goldsmith's text art. A 16-page color portfolio including Win Knowlton, Reginald Madison, Jim Youngerman, and Strombotne.

**lingo 2** \$10.00**Fall 1993**

A feature interview with John Ashbery. James Schuyler's letters. *Guston's Nixon* by William Corbett (drawings by Philip Guston). Poems by Bernadette Mayer, Barbara Guest, Clark Coolidge, Rosmarie Waldrop, Michael Gizzi, Marjorie Welish, David Shapiro and many more. In translation: Edmond Jabès, Marcel Cohen, Jean Frémon, Elke Erb and others.

A color portfolio including Trevor Winkfield, Darragh Park, and Barbieo Barros Gizzi. Photos and poetry from *The Berlin Book* by John Yau and Bill Barrette. Essays on music, art and film including more "Jazz on Video" and an interview with Leroy Jenkins by Peter Occhiogrosso. Ron Padgett on Trevor Winkfield, and Gus Blaisdell on Carroll Dunham.

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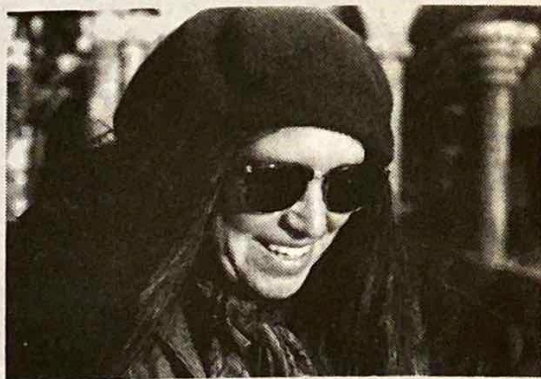
By Clark Coolidge, Michael Gizzi, and John Yau.
Photographs by Bill Barrette and Celia Coolidge.

Three poets collaborate while making the rounds in Kerouac's Lowell. "What do you see if you walk in a place where explosive acts of imagination had their source? And then what further acts are possible? . . . We were attracted here to find out. . . . Perhaps we thought to Geiger up some remnant bits from the rubble of Jack's Lowell. . . ."

October 1993

The Desires Of Mothers To Please Others In Letters

\$12.95



By Bernadette Mayer

A monumental St. Bernadette to the initiates, this work has achieved something like the status of "Manuscript Classic." An epistolary text which takes as its formal parameters the nine months of Ms. Mayer's last pregnancy — an augury by bee sting — and writes the reader's psyche to the fences. "She is a consummate poet no matter what's for supper or who eats it. Would that all genius were as generous." — Robert Creeley. By the author of *The Bernadette Mayer Reader*, *Sonnets*, and *Studying Hunger*.

February 1994

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Piero Heliczer, 1937-1993

During the very early 1960s a door opened briefly into the room of British poetry and for a while the air was breathable. Public readings by Michael Horovitz, Pete Brown, Adrian Mitchell, Libby Houston, Michael Shayer and many others gave energy and hope to a generation bored with verse that seemed without connection to their experience and surroundings. Among the poets from abroad whose contribution to this moment should not be forgotten were the Finnish-born Anselm Hollo, the American David Ball, and Piero Heliczer, who was tragically killed in a road-accident in Normandy two weeks ago.

Heliczer was born in Rome on mid-summer's eve, 1937. His mother was Jewish, from Prussia; his father Italian-Polish. Between the ages of four and six he was a child film-star ("*Il Piccolo Tucci*") after winning a contest for the most typical Italian boy in Rome. He acted with Alida Valli, and in Augusto Genina's *Bengasi*, which won first prize at Venice in 1942. After the war he was offered parts in *Shoeshine*, and *Rome—Open City*, but his mother "didn't want me to play with the dirty kids from the streets." The family was in hiding during the last two years of the war.

For a time Piero was secreted in a Catholic orphanage, where he was baptised. His father, a doctor who was a member of the Resistance, was captured, tortured and killed by the Gestapo.

In 1947 he moved to the United States and after attending Forest Hills High School he went to Harvard, which he left suddenly after an aesthetic difference with the authorities about the siting of a statue. By 1956 he was in Paris putting on plays and writing poetry. He began a small press—*The Dead Language*—hand-printing books, broadsides, and *A Pulp Magazine for the Dead Generation*, which included early work by Gregory Corso and Angus MacLise. Moving to England for a few years, he married Catharine Cowper, living first in London and then for some time in Brighton, where he made his first film, *The Autumn Feast*. He listened to William Byrd and Henry Purcell, gave readings around the country, and was an example to the growing small-press network of what could be achieved with very little money.

Back in New York he became involved with the Film-makers Co-operative, acted in Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and continued making experimental films: *Satisfaction*, *Venus in Furs*, *Joan of Arc* (in which Andy Warhol had a role), and the unfinished three-hour epic *Dirt*. Another magazine appeared: *The Wednesday Paper*. After many years the German government awarded him a sum of money in reparation for the death of his father. Heliczer, true to his vision, gave most of it away to fellow artists, using what remained to buy a small house in Normandy to which he would retreat.

For a while, in the 1970s, he lived on a dilapidated houseboat in Amsterdam which was mysteriously scuttled during one of his absences. In 1978 when I visited him he was staying on the worst street in the city, surrounded by books in a storefront that had been a Chinese restaurant the ownership of which was being disputed by two violent gangs.

He survived that, as he had so much else, and moved permanently to Normandy, where he lived simply, selling second-hand books in the local market. It was while travelling on his mobylette to visit his family in Holland that he was killed.

Piero Heliczer's early books, *Impri-matur 1281*, *You Could Hear the Snow Dripping and Falling into the Deer's Mouth*, *The First Battle of the Marne*, have long since disappeared. *The Soap Opera*, a collection published in London by Trigram Press, with illustrations by Warhol, Wallace Berman and others, although out of print, is well worth searching for. As an American living abroad, he missed inclusion with his contemporaries in such anthologies as *The New American Poetry*, and as a foreigner he is in (with the honourable exception of *Children of Albion*) no British anthology of the period. He deserves better.

While his way of life might have been an irritation to the trendy newcomers, the old Norman farmers who, along with the Mayor, attended his funeral were more tolerant. Reporting his death, the village newspaper said that he was "*apprécié pour sa gentillesse et son rire*." He would have liked that.

—Tom Raworth

One bright August day this year ('93), Jane and I drive up into the mountains. Browsing in Nederland's shoppes, I find a blue stone and a copy of *The Brief Hour of François Villon* by John Erskine, author of many popular books in the Thirties, including *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*; good subjects, watery works. And in the mail back in Boulder, there is a card from Tom Raworth to tell me: "Piero was killed in a traffic accident in France a few days ago. Bad, so his widow says—hit by a truck." Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry...

Piero Heliczer—"un marginal" in the French newspaper story Tom had sent me a month earlier, all about Piero's getting dragged out of bed and beaten up by pea-brained humanoids. His enterprise, "underground" movies, in the heady days of Harry Smith and Jack Smith and Andy Warhol, and before that, small handset books and broadsides that were *petits grimoires*, secret scrolls, prayer flags.

Erskine's books you can find in used book stores; Heliczer's are, as Tom states, among the most fugitive and rare. Cranky, often irritating and as they say irrational, a perennial wanderer between worlds, Piero was his own literary work's worst promoter. About a decade ago, Dennis Cooper devoted an issue of *Little Caesar* magazine to a selection of Piero's work made by Gerard Malanga. In its intensely private, slyly humorous, "wise child" surrealism, it is well worth another look, and I pray that his *opus posthumous* won't meet the fate of Darrell Gray's (after whose death a landlord "disposed of" the manuscripts left in his room).

—Anselm Hollo

Tom Raworth's essay is reprinted from *The Independent (London)*, August 11, 1993.

You Can Toy With Cause and Effect My Friend,

A funny thing happened the other day on the way to my LA, and I don't mean my private Los Angeles either, I mean my Libido Anonymous meeting. Synchronistic events took place that I didn't know anything about. 1) Interdisciplinary psychiatrists unleashed Dante, a viral robot which (like its namesake, that once-seminal volcano explorer) actually rappells down the steep slopes of subconscious architecture and into the very maelstrom of volcanic emotions to fetch back clues of our ancestral inner selves..2) Meanwhile across town, in another lab, a smaller version of the same binary-driven octoped descended into yet another explosive environment, as a group of Russian researchers sent mini-Dantes up the rectums of dogs where they would perform a delicate hip surgery, separating canine entities that had locked together and passed out due to malnutrition during sexual intercourse.

Once again technology augments leisure, and a mechanical convenience frees doctors and their ilk to exploit their imaginations instead of their dogma. One member of the 'ilk' noticed that the canine hip bones, in fact all post-cambrian vertebrate pelvic apparati, resemble in their symmetry, the human thyroid gland, especially as it appears in x-rays of double-YY hyperactive males with speech defects. The thyroid, or Adam's apple, is a large cartilage, a kind of auxiliary pelvis located in the larynx, whose gyrations inform most human speech. The resultant association of loins and voice, of course, bodes ill for the future of untainted rhetoric.

The thyroid is the gland that controls rates of metabolism and mutation. It is responsible for dwarfs and midgets as well as big-headedness, and it is often removed in an operation called a 'thyroidectomy' which has been the catalyst behind more than one misguided art project. One pre-med student with a promising video career had a great idea: she recorded, edited and replayed a speeded up case of the operation, beginning with the scene where a fragile and hesitant hand makes a slit in a throat, like a shimmering razor breaking the surface of a bowl of flesh-colored water. After digitally deleting hand and knife on her computer screen, she made it appear as if hundreds of bloody butterflies were leaving the wound in an act of thanks for maintaining the patient's small stature in the face of an indifferent universe. The student called her video "The Proliferation of Humility through a Violent Laceration" and sold it to MTV.

Oddly enough, the first public broadcast of this entertainment took place at precisely that time of year when hordes of Monarch butterflies were flocking to certain trees in a Mexican resort town seeking the mass crescendo of their collectively libidinous lives. The natural phenomenon happens annually, and during that time, everyone in the town begins to talk funny and/or subsequently grows or shrinks to strange proportions. Attracted by the illusory kinship, midgets and giants began to winter there with attitude. The town became a center of learning. The Mexican Thyroid Institute opened. A zen scholar was invited to give a speech. No one knew why. Was it order or anarchy? Relativity or chaos theory? Or was it simply a failure to communicate between the animate and inanimate worlds?

A local ornithologist who specialized in information theory noted that, undetectable amongst the apparent confusion

of flight patterns, the butterflies actually formed subtle symmetrical forms (a huge pelvis perhaps, or a chinese kite) as they chevroned through the sky, as if trying to send subliminal messages of order to those rapt observers on land. Semilogists proclaimed this was actually a form of non-votive, biological propaganda advocating the domination of symmetry—an elusive and dangerous aesthetic that pits one 'thing or entity' against another 'thing or entity' very much, but not exactly, like itself. And symmetry is a positive economic force, precisely because competition is born from similarity—picture a pair of lungs or kidneys, each trying to suck the sustenance of the other in the battle for prestige among the life-sustaining organs.

In the case of vain, self-cognizant entities, the competition can become so intense the two antagonists may merge, forming a concept called a mirror, photograph, or an imaginary lover—whatever it is called, it is that plane upon which an object meets its desire. Apparently this can happen at the very onset of human life, when a single embryo may well divide into twins in the womb, and then recombine back into a single embryo if there is not enough nutrition to sustain it. Carried to an adult conclusion, this is what happens when lovers begin to look and speak like one another, having exhausted all their differences in the name of the undefineable emotion that drew them together in the first place.

In the course of society's evolution, this tendency toward recombination with primordial selves became a popular explanation of the rampant social disease known as sexual intercourse, which in its more subtle form is called schizophrenia. In fact, when schizophrenics hear voices it has been shown to be an internalized twin, a memory of a once-perfect 'mate' making itself known to the sufferer, coming out of the closet so to speak to proclaim the validity of the egosexual lifestyle. Many self-love enthusiasts state that despite the pain such a lifestyle caused, it was more orgiastic than real sex, which often ended in bitter disappointment. Others said no way, emotional masturbation is equally disappointing, and the only solution is to simply forget it—the problem lies in the act, not in the memory. But then if love does always seem better as a memory, the answer must lie in our misunderstanding of the phenomenon. We could not stand true corporeal, temporal love—there's too much responsibility. So it has to sneak back to us in dreams and illusions. Often in the form of an image—a fake memory, a twin or illusory homeland to which we pledge unwarranted devotion.

As an illustration of this, witness how moths are attracted to the warm wax of a candle flame. The real reason is because the infra-red radiation emitted coincides almost perfectly with the wavelength of sex-attractant chemicals in female moths, which are in turn detected by light conducting spines protruding from the male's antennae. These spines act as radiation guides similar to the optical fibers used to transmit the pulses of light by which modern telephone communications are conducted. To the moth it is like a wireless phone call from death, expiring as they do in the heat of their misguided passion. And, subliminally, that's what the phone company means when they ask you to reach out and touch someone. They really mean reach out and expire like a moth, in the

But You Can't Toy With My Affections by Carl Watson

threes of your own, personal misguided passion. They then provide you with a bunch of call-waiting, and call-forwarding services to do just that.

Humans are only subliminally aware of this threat however because we do not actually have antennae. We do however have cancer, a disease of repression and mutation whose closest cousin in so-called healthy individuals is "hair-growth"—yes, hair growth—in fact hair is really just a kind of cancer-hat decorating the head, an anomaly caused by certain sadistic, goading, pro-growth proteins. It seems silly, but one rationalization for the disease is the general consensus that people probably "feel" too much anyway. And if they feel too much, they probably think too much too, mostly of themselves. Thus as skin cancer rates rise, researchers began to test new vaccines for megalomania, suspecting that the rampant cell mutation is actually the struggling of repressed entities to form their own bodies, thus succeeding from the tyranny of the host. In which case it is a disease in tune with the political tenor of the times—that is, the increasing division of the world into special interest groups who can look at each other and actually hate each other based on some level of mutual understanding. Such explanations may sound unnecessarily complex, but as time passes, all systems supposedly test the boundaries of chaos via increasing complexity. Explanations encumber themselves and a general loss of meaning results. Knowledge needs to be adjusted.

We now know for instance, that life does not actually get more complex, it merely mutates. Things cast imperfect reflections. It might seem a lot of stuff is happening, but it's really just the same stuff over and over again. There's absolutely no way to keep track. Relating events through the drawing of a graph or the compiling of statistics is a time-honored tradition, and it not only creates hitherto non-existent relationships, it perpetuates the illusion of cause and effect through a sort of forced physical proximity. Advocates of the process live in what is called a user-created universe. An example of which would be the psychiatrist, who by asking leading questions, intends to induce the multiple personalities she is looking for, thus

creating the pluralistic society which keeps her employed. In this same manner, a "user" creates a universe which keeps him employed, or at least at odds indefinitely with whatever trivial pursuits refuse to please him.

What we're driving at is an explanation of the process that links physical motion to thought, that process whereby forms of attraction and navigation are made to serve the functions of narration or metaphor, binding things together in absurd fictional ways. Time may be traversed as space, as reality bootstraps itself into being. Narration joins one place to another. The pretense here is that anything that actually moves through this world has to tell itself a story to do so. Usually it is a love story. Thus truth gives way to desire, and the strangest things begin to make perfect sense. Causation works backwards. Butterflies begin to explain the shape of the thyroid gland. Earthquakes tracked on oscilloscopes are used to outline the rudiments of human speech. Spiderwebs, which are purposely constructed to mock flowers, become, precisely through this knowledge, the underpinning behind elaborations on human trappings such as churches, fashionable dress, etc—that is, the bait by which the perceiver is captured and eaten by faith.

We now perceive a history composed mostly of mistakes and misconceptions. Science, too. Indeed, frenzied mathematicians have been forced to admit that it's not success, but failure, that offers truly exciting clues to the cosmos, and that the most profound and startling findings are the result of utter flukes and errors. Indeed, there are so many things happening in our peripheral vision that it's not even funny. It is very nearly religious, however. It makes us dizzy. And maybe that's how all religion really starts. Someone gets dizzy and they think that explains the universe. And the funny thing is—it does. Things get said no matter how inanimate the source. Radio waves emanating from seismic faults seem to imitate interstellar broadcasts. Strange lights are often mistaken for the flying saucers that bear our ancient relatives. A global headache explains the biblical parting of the seas. "No pain, no gain," Moses said, not only relating discomfort to freedom

but providing a prophetic clue to the future of volition itself.

What links all events ultimately is precisely that spiritual pain which is not, as popularly believed, caused by a sinister cloud of unknowing or by paradox, but by something so simple as destabilized magnesium levels in the human cerebral cortex. Studies show that such destabilization spreads from one spot of the brain to another like a wave moving through a pond of cream. The phenomenon, which is called "spreading depression" is often experienced as rolling waves of nausea—one of the wretched hallmarks of migraine headaches. It produces a storm of electrical quirks, spanning the visual cortex, causing optical and auditory disturbances which account for the fact that nearly 20% of migraine sufferers experience a shimmering hallucinatory aura as the first symptom of an attack. It may be a spectacular pulsing star of light, or a dance

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her resistance to
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up

of geometric forms, sometimes turning into hallucinations similar to those induced by psilocybin or LSD, lasting for several minutes and followed by temporary blindness. In fact the auras are such an astonishing experience they are believed to explain many historical mystical visions. One nun in the 12th century reports "I saw a great star, most splendid and beautiful and with it an exceeding multitude of falling stars. And it was then I knew..." She didn't go on to say what she knew.

There are many such occurrences. One devotee saw the blue face of a bruised Jesus flare up like a rocket ship and fly off toward Mars. He understood this to be the divine seeding of the soil of impending war, and he therefore joined the army. Elsewhere in a village shopping mall, the movement of an Adam's apple up and down carves the air into a self-fulfilling tirade that sends its proponent to the nuthouse. Pelvic girdles twist in dancehalls across the globe and coils of light form the ghosts of DNA molecules spiralling off to influence the future. A man kisses a mirror in a sad hotel, parting his hair down the middle in an act of compromise for the same reason. Thyroids flap their lobes in the throats of prophets, while the tree of life sways under a burden of invisible butterflies. What bumps the Richter scale toward disaster may begin with the smallest of tremors, like the touch of a hesitant lover. Thus a nipple manipulated with affection may end somewhere in holocaust. A man pulls pud in a bleak alley in a dying world and a dream unravels like a spool of silk. This ejection of milk or semen into the great pool of empathy is often experienced as remorse, while yet far out in chilly space, billions of tons of hydrogen are converted into helium at

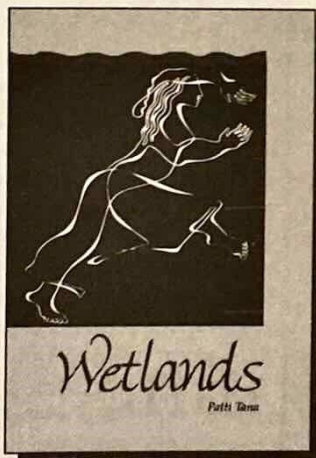
unfathomable temperatures in the hearts of stars every second, as they wink on and off across the galaxy. Powerful forces are operating all around us and all we can do is try to look good. And one way to do this of course is to add character to your features through the indulgence of pain—cocoa butter, plenty of starlight, and pain.

Indeed, in the annals of ancient medicine, starlight is said to make your skin soft and your eyes bright. It adds sheen to your hair and gives a boost to your sex life. It offers guidance in times of strife. Many animals set internal compasses by the stars. They see or sense polarized bands and auras, and act upon them. Birds, and migrating moles. Lemmings and lemurs. Even some plants make long mysterious journeys by starshine. They start here and they end up there. Vast forests and giant patches of clubmoss thousands of miles across have been known to shift subtly towards these seductive beams. In the light of what we now know about migraines vs. migration patterns, we might say it is as if all these things, indeed the sum total of sensation itself were migrating toward that pulsing bead of human pain which draws all data into a web and calls it divinity, causing a state of intelligence that severely resembles encroaching vegetation.

cognition into a web, cognizance
Whole histories disappear in the blink of an owl's eye.

—Carl Watson

POETRY



Patti
Tana



WETLANDS

This collection of poems and stories tells of a young girl's journey to womanhood. From a child sledding in the snow or skimming stones on the river to an adult dancing by the ocean in the moonlight, Tana relates the power of water as an element in our lives. Complemented by the serene endless line drawings of Alfred Van Loen, *Wetlands* is a collection that affirms life and inspires personal reflection.

0-918949-35-1 Paper \$8; -36-X Cloth \$12

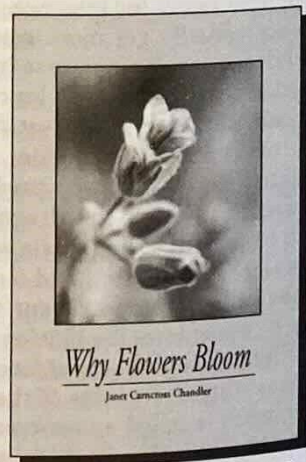
WHY FLOWERS BLOOM

These poems share the many joys, frustrations, and sorrows of the long and full life of a woman now in her eighties. Writing is a wonderful tool that Chandler takes full advantage of as she faces daily and lifelong milestones: moving into a retirement home, starting a writer's workshop for women, and turning eighty. There is never a dull moment in this lively story of a still young older woman - older, but never old.

0-918949-37-8 Paper \$8; -38-6 Cloth \$12



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Dirt

by Gillian McCain

How can I begin a Dirt column with out first mentioning the antics of Sparrow? Seconds after giving me his latest issue of *Big Fish* filled with *Translations From The New Yorker*, he told me of the previous day's follies: Sparrow, along with his poet/wife Ellen Carter (and I'm sure daughter Silvia was there somewhere), Ron Kolm and others, stormed the offices of Tina Brown's empire for a sit-in/protest/love-in/dialogue-opener, to invite a discourse with *New Yorker's* poetry editor Alice Quinn on why she seems so bent on publishing poems about "Greek Gods, birdbaths and Connecticut angst" (quoted from Jim Windoff's "Off the Record" column in *The New York Observer*). Of course the sun-dried tomatoe-y red tape was just too much to get through, with a worried-looking receptionist calling in a jack-of-all-trades guy (probably an intern from the Iowa Writing Program) to buffer the situation, telling the protesters, that "it's really better to call." As the protest went on, an anonymous poet repeatedly faxed to the magazine's offices a letter stating, "The question, 'Why is there *New Yorker* poetry?' is as vexing as the theological question 'Why is there evil in the world?'" Ron Kolm, author of

the brilliant chapbook *Welcome to the Barbecue*, described the event as "A Dada event to kill off Daddy." Sparrow told a reporter, "Personally, I think our poets are just as bad as their poets, but at least we have a sense of humor. We demand to get published in *The New Yorker*—because we're just as bad as they are." Right on. Please don't miss this issue of *Big Fish*, with Jose Padua's already classic translation of Charles Simic's "The Pleasures of Reading." And the first poem of Mike Topp's that I've ever seen that's longer than six lines! Speaking of Sparrow, he'll be participating in *No Commercial Potential: A Tribute to Frank Zappa* on February 18th along with Joel Lewis, Elinor Nauen, Richard Gehr, musician Gary Lucas (from *Gods and Monsters*) and many many more. Short cuts: Dalkey Archive Press is publishing a book of Aurelie Sheehan's short stories. Ed Sanders is recording a CD of rewritten verses of *Amazing Grace*, verses by Anne Waldman, Ron Padgett, Carl Rakosi, among many many more. Miguel Algarin and Bob Holman have edited *ALoud: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe Anthology* that is forthcoming from Holt. Todd Colby called me up and told me that he started smoking

again, and ran the New York City Marathon in three hours and fourteen minutes. Todd sounded extremely proud of himself on both fronts. Marc Nasdor just finished designing the marketing campaign for Prozac.

MILK was reviewed in *Factsheet 5* labeling the work "slacker-poets uncensored journals" and that the index in the back reminds them of the *Worhol* [sic] diaries. Wanda Phipps' *XYLOID* got a good review, too. Two of my favorite people (and great poets to boot), Jeffery Conway and Thomas Ellis recently got photographed by Bruce Weber for *Interview* magazine. One of the best events I ever attended at the Poetry Project was Kenward Elmslie's *Postcards on Parade* (performed by Kenward and Steven Taylor) and I was happy to see that Bamberger just published the book. Kenward is a great postcard artist himself. Speaking of mail-art, is it true that genius rubber stamp designer Ken Brown writes? And if so, where can we find some? The second issue of *Lingo* magazine is out and it looks beautiful with a cover by Trevor Winkfield. Michael Gizzi stole the show at the *Lingo* reading with his amazing epic travel poem. Check out Steve Dalachinsky's wonderful new chapbook *One Thin Line* (Pinched Nerves Press, c/o Steve Hartman, 1610 Avenue P

#6B, Brooklyn, NY 11229). New *John Giorno* book out in January published by Serpent's Tale/High Risk Books. Who and when is someone going to re-issue Bob Rosenthal's masterpiece *Cleaning Up New York?* Vincent Katz read a wonderful poem on Francesco Clemente at the *Poets on Painters* reading in December. Speaking of F. Clemente, The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics is hosting a national literary conference called "Beats and Other Rebel Angels: A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg" July 3-9, 1994. Conference participants include Clemente, Ken Kasey, Marianne Faithfull, Philip Glass, Diane Di Prima, Robert Creeley, Meredith Monk and many more. For more information write: The Naropa Institute, 2130 Arapahoe Avenue, Boulder, Colorado, 80302 (303) 444-0202. One of the happiest things that happened to me in 1993 was rediscovering The Gotham Book Mart. I took Trinity and David, two friends of mine from Canada and we scoured the Edward Gorey books. Later, on the way to MOMA, David said that he fell in love with Gorey after seeing that he had dedicated one of his books to R. D. Laing. He was severely disappointed when I corrected him that it was V. R. Lang, and couldn't seem to understand why I thought the whole thing was so funny. See you in April.

Life & Death

by Jordan Davis

A response to Dana Gioia's performance piece at Poets House as printed in *Poetry Flash*, in its own words.

What I would like to do tonight is to make twelve assumptions about contemporary poetry. No one would have predicted that I was careful to understand how the literary world operated. But history usually works dialectically, and rap is usually composed in a four-stress line; cowboy poetry is written mainly in a rhymed stress meter related to the English ballads, and interestingly. In the discredited, presumably elitist techniques of Anglo-Saxon poetry, a text could be transcribed and transmitted independently of the author's physical presence. Live poetry vastly outnumbers the people who read it in books. Who actually made a living off poetry?

The first observation is that poetry slams command poetry. This leads to my second observation: anyone is related to the dominant culture and its opposite, poetry. The fifth point is that poetry in America is now so

segmented and atomized that there is no longer a lower Manhattan, a Palo Alto, a Seattle, a San Antonio, a Charlotte, a Fargo, a Tuscaloosa. I would guess that half a million regular readers of poetry are reading the same book. Robinson Jeffers! Robinson Jeffers! Or Robert Lowell. This leads to my sixth observation: a poet, having little or nothing to do with his or her own writing, is sustained, here or there, to have a regular place at the table. The key word here is *or*. My seventh observation is that poetry criticism will make at least four uncomplimentary remarks. First, it seems to lack courage. Second, the major developments are over. Third, few really first-rate developments are so inwardly focused that they interest the public. Fourth, the dominance of extremely intelligent general readers has made you expect to see Robert Fitzgerald, Louise Bogan, and Randall Jarrell. My eighth observation is dead. My ninth observation is that computers, word processors, desktop publishing, computer networks, xeroxing, tape

cassette recordings, video technology, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry Flash*, *The New Criterion*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Verses*, and *American Poetry Review*, New Formalism, Language poetry, the avant-garde, New Narrative, Bennington, North Beach, Greenwich Village, Poets House, the Poetry Center and the Nuyorican Cafe, preserve old culture, but have gradually turned it into another sort of commercial venture—a naughty one. A tenth unexpected trend in American poetry would have been particularly surprising. My eleventh point is a young poet, about 250, merging into the mainstream; so productive, hardly a month goes by when this full-time someone doesn't churn out permanent writing. The bad news, is, I think, the good news: my final point. The intelligentsia has been unwittingly laid. Ideas didn't exist twenty years ago. Hundreds of specialized radio audiences are the vast numbers of unemployed intellectuals and artists who will be damned by the year 2000. The vast majority of young American writers.

But there were things, like the charming Nordic Poetry Festival at Cooper Union, that made it clear one didn't totally regret poetry. One hopes it will be an annual or, at the very least, tri-annual event.

I'm a little frightened by the Maggie Estep posters; I'm also scared of Anne Waldman in the Naropa ad. You both have been reproduced as line art!

And you smell poets, you know who you are! I have cousins and a little brother more sickeningly accurate! Advance not your art with scratch-n-sniff stickers!

Hurrah, *Hanging Loose*. A Bruce Andrews poem one may share with children, and some Gary Lenhart poems to keep for oneself.

Hurrah, *Arshile*. Alice Notley's amazing sad concise and true introduction to the latest *Selected Poems* of Ted Berrigan. Laurie Price's sure diction, almost Elizabethan? in "Early Sonnet" and "Proviso." Joel Dailey's forthright-if-shaky "Continuous Present." Ron Padgett's amazing annoyed concise and true "Twilight Slide" (amazing="my back is yawning to the evening"; annoyed="distant, cranky blue jay"; concise="A few minutes before Caravaggio"; true="wait, I did"). His "5 Poems" is good, too.

Hurrah, Erica Hunt. First book *Local History* is brilliant: "Past tense of read is read." Reading in December was great; the best part was the best piece was written after the book.

Hurrah, Robin Blaser. *The Holy Forest* contains many interesting books. It is spookily radiant. It is there with Duncan, Spicer, Olson, and your introducer, Creeley. It makes you available, finally.

Hurrah, Neil Strauss. Your *Radiotext(e)* enstranges the Motorola generation's appliance of choice into the ur-black box. Not much of the current Howard Stern-Rush Limbaugh promotional material here, just good Semiotext(e) insanity—the extra "e" is for extraterrestrials. But is George Orwell really a "perpetrator?" Is Theodor Adorno a "crank?"

Hurrah, Exact Change. *Everybody's Autobiography*. May I brave Anselm Hollo's injunction against charming babble? Stein to Picasso; "You are extraordinary within your limits but your limits are extraordinarily there." Also contains the famous "there there." Better than Paul's letter to the Romans.

Hurrah, Sun & Moon. *Parties* by Carl Van Vechten is, yes, a lively arch book archly alive, with a great disjunctive sweet snottiness (great=oh never mind).

FIN

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Jeffrey Werbylo & Rebekah Windmiller

Feb. 24-27 • Schandelemeier & Company

March 4-6 • Janet Lilly & Valerie Adefokun

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O Books: Distributed by Small Press Distribution, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702; & Inland Book Company, 140 Commerce St. East Haven, CT 06512. O Books: 5729 Clover Drive, Oakland, CA 94618.

The Sugar Borders, William Fuller, ISBN # 1-882022-18-1. \$8.00. Beautiful platelets, vivid in order to be real. Beverly Dahlen says, "These are poems which creates the experience of negative capability." A space of middles everywhere, one hallucinates having a dream.

The India Book, Essays and Translations from Indian Asia, Andrew Schelling, ISBN # 1-882022-1-16-5; \$9.00. Essays are interposed with translations from Sanskrit of erotic, Buddhist, and Hindu poetry which are enriched by the essays and also illuminate them. "This book is a tiny sip of some elder traditions that are nourished on essential fluids." Gary Snyder

Cold Heaven, Camille Roy, ISBN # 1-882022-15-7; \$10.00. Two plays that have the dissonant, radical beauty of poetry. Eileen Myles called *Bye Bye Brunhilde* "Not a play but an exploding poem by a bright new writer from the West Coast." This is new theater with an inner sense occurring that is "like driving into a hallucination."

Precisely the Point Being Made, Norman Fischer, Chax Press and O Books, \$10.00. 1-882022-14-9. Michael Palmer writes about this work that it is Presence before the body and before actions though in all their illusoriness." Charles Bernstein has written about this poet, a Zen monk whose work is now in its maturity, "Incandescently tranquil, the poems of Norman Fischer neither confront nor confirm, preferring to give company along the way."

Subliminal Time, O/4, ed. Leslie Scalapino, \$10.50. ISBN 1-882022-17-3. A collection of 18 writers including Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Carla Harryman, Jerry Estrin, Laura Moriarty, Eileen Myles, and featuring Jena Osman, Laynie Browne, A.A. Hedge Coke, Lori Lubeski, Randall Potts. Milton Apache hallucinates in nature. The collection includes Aaron Shurin's radical writing/ poem on AIDS, "Human Immune;" and color poems by Robert Grenier which are drawn superimposed on each other as if a mirror of the collection itself in interior and collective gestures.

The Quietist, Fanny Howe, \$8.00. ISBN: 1-882022-12-2. Poetry: Pure equilibrium.

Crowd and not evening or light, Leslie Scalapino, \$9.00. ISBN: 1-55713-141-4. Poetry: as if photographing the inside of dense phenomenal existence floating.

THE POETRY PROJECT

PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

THE WORLD 48

Contributors: Curt Anderson, Alici Askenasi, Wayne Berninger, Lee Ann Brown, David Cameron, Alan Davies, Jordan Davis, Lydia Davis, Barbara Einzig, Tania Elizov, Elaine Equi, Valerie Fox, Michael Gizzi, Marcella

Harb, Bill Harris, Bob Holman, Lita Hornick, Christian X. Hunter, Daniel Krakauer, Bill Kushner, Gary Lenhart, Kimberly Lyons, Steve Malmude, Bernadette Mayer, Charles North, Naomi Shihab Nye, Maureen Owen, Ron Padgett, Mary du Passage, Anthony Schlagel, Eleni Sikelianos, Edwin Torres, George Tysh, Anne Waldman, Lewis Warsh, Hannah Weiner, and C.D. Wright. *Cover by Rudy Burckhardt.* **\$5.00 per issue.** Subscriptions: **\$20.00 for 4 issues.**

MILK

Issue 2: The Record That Changed My Life:

Ed Friedman, Lenny Kaye, Jose Padua, Ann Rower, Silvia Sanza, Carl Watson and others. *Edited by Gillian McCain.* **\$3.00 per issue.**

XYLOID

Issue 1: Texts and Artwork by Dana Bryant, Matthew Courtney, Lynn Crawford, Brendan deVallance, Eric Drooker, Paul Fortunato, Cliff Fyman, Philip Good, Darius James, Seth King, Elmer Lang, Ric Ocasek, Donna Ratajczak, Scumwrenches, Lynne Tillman, Stephen Tunney, Jeffrey C. Wright, and others. Issue 2: Performance Texts (in preparation). Edited by Wanda Phipps **\$3.00 per issue.**

WRITING WORKSHOPS

LANGUAGE AS ADVERSARY

Taught by Murat Nemet-Nejat. Thursdays at 7 pm (through March 10th). The workshop will concentrate on each participant's confrontation with the reason why he or she is a poet or desires to be so, and the way a person's work is related to that reason. **Murat Nemet-Nejat** is a poet, translator and essayist. His books of poetry include *The Bridge*, and his translations include *I, Orhan Veli*.

IT'S GOT A BACK-BEAT YOU CAN'T LOSE IT

Taught by Barbara Barg. Fridays at 7 pm (through March 11) A workshop for poets, songwriters, and the rhythmically challenged. Concentration on percussive explorations of the linguistic instrument. Features performances by guest musicians and poets, polyrhythmic dithyrambs and orchestral hyperbole. **Barbara Barg** is a singer / songwriter / drummer with the band Homer Erotic. *Origin of the Species* is her latest book.

EDITING THE WORLD

Taught by Lewis Warsh. Sat. at noon (through the end of April). The workshop will collaborate on editing and producing three issues of *The World*, the literary magazine of the Poetry Project. Interested participants are required to send five poems to *The World* c/o The Poetry Project. **Lewis Warsh's** most recent book is *A Free Man* (Sun and Moon).

Registration Fees

Registration for Poetry Project workshop costs \$100 a year for Project members. Annual membership in the Poetry Project costs \$50. Register, in person, at the Poetry Project office or by mail.

Revolutionary Poetry

The Poetry Project Symposium

May 4-8, 1994

There has been so much activity in the New York poetry scene and elsewhere that we could use some time together to catch up, and locate areas of agreement and difference in various approaches to writing and presenting poetry. *Unity* → *Criticism* → *Unity* is how Mao described the method for "resolving contradictions among the people." Among poets, the procedure develops more like *Edginess* → *Readings/Lectures/Discussion/Parties* → *Edge*. The idea is to arrive at a more diverse and energized collectivity—at what's individually possible.

The Poetry Project's staff has met during the fall to discuss the symposium, and some of the topics that are likely to be taken up include: Poetics & Class; Writing for Performance/Performing Text; Revolution in Form/Revolution in Content; the Poetics of Social Commentary; Investigative Poetics; Critical Theory in Poetry; High-Low/Good-Bad: *The Taste of Revolution*; Revolutionary Traditions; and Accessibility & Challenge: Approaches to "Difficult" Works.

Study/discussion groups that want to meet prior to or during the symposium will have opportunities to publicly report on their proceedings and findings. Groups that might profit from meeting under the "revolutionary poetry" rubric include: literary magazine and press editors; activist poets; translators; the coordinators of literary programs and reading series; poetry teachers; critics and reviewers; working class poets; middle class poets; owning class poets; regional poets; multi-genre poets; multi-media poets; multi-lingual poets; multi-cultural poets; poets who want to gather to discuss particular works and/or authors. IF YOU WISH TO CON- VENE A DISCUSSION/STUDY GROUP DURING THE SYMPO- SIUM, PLEASE CONTACT US SO THAT WE CAN LIST YOUR GROUP IN THE SCHEDULE OF SYMPOSIUM EVENTS.

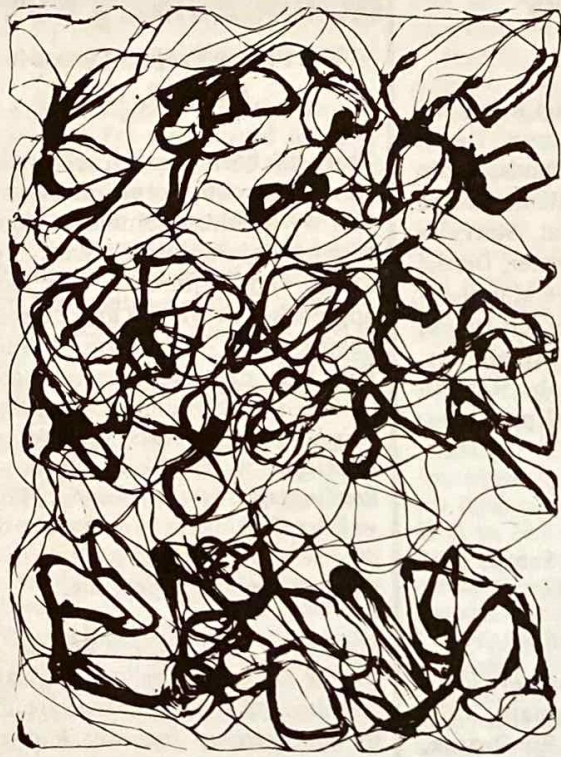
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FEBRUARY

2 BILL KUSHNER, TOM SAVAGE & ELIO SCHNEEMAN
 Bill Kushner's books of poems are *Head and Love Uncut*. Tom Savage's most recent books are *Processed Words*, *Housing*, *Preservation & Development*, and forthcoming, *Political Conditions Physical States*. Elio Schneeman's most recent book of poetry is *Along the Rails*. His work has appeared in the anthologies *Nice to See You: Homage to Ted Berrigan* and *Out of This World*. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

4 PETER ORLOVSKY & WEATHERLY
 Peter Orlovsky's *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs* was recently re-issued by Northern Lights Press. Weatherly's books of poetry include *Mau Mau Cantos American*, *Thumbprint*, and *Climate Stream*. With Ted Wilentz, he co-edited *Natural Process*, an anthology of African-American poetry. **Fri., 10:30 p.m.**

7 OPEN READING
 Sign-up at 7:30. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

9 ANDREW SCHELLING & ANNE WALDMAN
 Poet, translator & essayist Andrew Schelling is Assistant Director of The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute. His book *Dropping the Bow: Poems from Ancient India*, won the Academy of American Poets translation award in 1992. Anne Waldman is the author of 39 books of poems. Her most recent work, the book-length poem *Foris*, was described by Ken Tucker in *The New York Times* as "one of the most powerful and original pieces of poetry in recent years." **Monday, 8 p.m.**

2 ELINOR NAUEN & MAUREEN OWEN

Hailing from South Dakota, Elinor Nauen is the author of *Cars and other poems*. She is the editor of *Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend: Women Writers on Baseball* (Faber & Faber). Maureen Owen edited *Telephone Books & Telephone Magazine* through 30 titles of the press and 19 issues of the magazine to date. Her most recent books are *Imaginary Income* and *Untapped Maps*. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

4 HOMAGE TO COOKIE MUELLER

Readers TBA. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

7 OPEN READING

Sign-up at 7:30. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

11 EPIPHANY ALBUMS: THE RECORD THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

Evert Eden, Maggie Dubris, Chris Simenuk, Vanessa Weiman, Hal Sirowitz & more. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

14 AN EVENING OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POETRY

Featuring Yan Li, Ming Xia Li, Wang Ping & Xue Di. Curated by Wang Ping. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

translation award in 1992. Anne Waldman is the author of 39 books of poems. Her most recent work, the book-length poem *Iovis*, was described by Ken Tucker in *The New York Times* as "vast, eager and exciting, a thick poem that is one of the most open-minded and audacious of latter-day dialogues between the sexes." **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

11 NO COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL: A TRIBUTE TO FRANK ZAPPA
Joel Lewis, Elinor Nauen, Janet Bardini, Glen Kenny, Gary Lucas, Sparrow, Richard Gehr and more. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

14 VALENTINE'S DAY BENEFIT READING
Love Poems & chocolate kisses. Readings by over 50 poets & performers including Greg Masters, Silvia Sanza, Jeffery Conway, Daniel Garrett, Carmen Valle, Edmund Berrigan, Nina Zivancevic, Linda Yablonsky and more! **Monday, 7 p.m.**

16 BOB HOLMAN & SEKOU SUNDIATA
Bob Holman is the co-director of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe and the host of their Friday Night Slams. Along with Miguel Algarin, he edited *ALLOUD: The Nuyorican Poets Cafe Anthology* which is forthcoming from Holt. Poet Sekou Sundiata's theater-work *The Circle Unbroken* is a *Hard Bop* was recently produced. His new multi-media work will be performed at the American Music Theater Festival. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

18 UNCENSORED: ARTISTS JOURNALS
Sylvia Plachy, Duncan Hannah, Seth King & more. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

21 PATTI POWERS & CHI CHI VALENTI
As an ambivalent adieu to one of America's most tribal pastimes, Patti Powers took her sharp eye on the road for a cross-country "farewell to stripping" tour which resulted in the book-in-progress *Roadstrip*. A nightclub fixture for the past 15 years, Chi Chi Valenti is the founder of Jackie 60's where she curates the monthly poetry series *Verbal Abuse* and edits a lit-zine of the same name. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

23 WANDA PHIPPS & EDWIN TORRES
Coordinator of the Monday Night Reading/Performance Series at the Poetry Project, Wanda Phipps is a poet, performer, dramaturge & translator. Her work has appeared in over twenty literary journals, including upcoming issues of *Muleteeth* and *O-blek*. Ethan Pettit writes on Edwin Torres' poetry, "Instead of sounding things, he 'things sounds' ... so that words and meanings go 'ker-plunk' like soft percussion." Performance-poet Torres is the author of *I Hear Things People Haven't Really Said*. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

25 POETS FROM THE KOOTENANY SCHOOL OF WRITING:
Canadians Kevin Davies, Catriona Strang, Nancy Shaw, Lisa Robertson & Jeff Derksen. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

28 BOB SYKORIAK & THE ALIEN COMIC (TOM MURRIN)
Cartoonist/performer/telethon host Bob Sikoryak presents pop culture from the abyss with slides, music & a mosh pit. A former Beverly Hills criminal attorney, Tom Murrin's performances include obscure artifacts, homemade props & tales of trash culture. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

16 MEI-MEI BERSERBRUGGE & JACKSON MAC LOW
Poet Mei-mei Berserbrugge's most recent book is *Sphericity* (Kelsey St. Press) with drawings by Richard Tuttle. Forthcoming is a book with artist Kiki Smith about the endocrine system. she has had recent work in *Avec and Conjunctions*. Author of over 25 books of poetry and performance works and a composer, Jackson Mac Low's most recent publications are *Twenties: 100 Poems, Pieces o' Six: Poems in Prose* and the CD *Open Secrets*. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

18 WORKSHOP READING
An evening of poetry & performance by the Poetry Project's workshop participants. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

21 MOVING TOWARD A CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EASTERN AESTHETIC
Featuring poets Barbara Nimery Aziz & others. Curated by Marcella Harb. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

23 JORGE SANTIAGO PEREDNIK & RAUL ZURITA
Introduction by Ernesto Livon Grosman. Argentine poet, critic, translator, and publisher Jorge Santiago Perednik is the author of *The Thousand Monkeys*, *The Shock of the Lenders*, and the controversial *Anthology of New Argentine Poetry (1976-1983)*. A Chilean poet living in Rome, Raul Zurita was an important figure of the cultural resistance that took place during the last military government in Chile. He is the author of *Purgatory*, *Paradise is Empty*, and *Anteparadise*. **Wednesday, 8 p.m.**

25 MIX: CLARK COOLIDGE, DAVID MELTZER & TINA MELTZER
Former members of the 60s rock group The Serpent Power, poet/musicians Coolidge and the Meltzers reunite 25 years later as MIX, offering a hybrid of poetry, musical improvisations, jazz standards and original songs. Words & music. Jazz & poetry. San Francisco & New York. **Friday, 10:30 p.m.**

28 'ON THE VERGE'
A reading of young writers from the new anthology *On the Verge*. Featuring Natasha Trethewey, Edwin Frank, Suzanne Keen, Sharan Strange, Sophie Cabot Black & others. Curated by Thomas Sayers Ellis. **Monday, 8 p.m.**

MARCH

REVIEWS

AARON SHURIN

Into Distances

Sun & Moon, \$12.95 paper.

Aaron Shurin's *Into Distances* is a form of new narrative which uses only words seen: Shurin cites such authors as Djuna Barnes, Charles Baudelaire, Raymond Chandler, and Gustave Flaubert, as sources for borrowing words and phrases. Sometimes "shadow" scenes bleed through, yet he is freeing these from the compositional mark of their origin; and freeing the writing from the control of his own intentionality, to create a "breath of disjunction," a distance from control and a multiplicity of identity and circumstance.

The effect of single words even is that of occurrences and memories which belong to others; not as the nostalgia of the conventional story form, in which a character tells a unified experience (or sense of experience being unified): but as if the "memories" are really taking place and have a pattern that's time and history (similar to the replicants in *Blade Runner* who've had memory implants).

A landscape takes place that's very specific undercut by the incredible occurring minutely so as to "seem" real, which highlights the question: what "real life" is the referent outside of the suggestive words or phrases from others' texts? Shurin seems to have a curious and delicate neutrality that allows this other absorbing landscape to be visible as if by not disturbing water with too much, even any, motion on it: "He knew where he stood and changed the subject. It completely disappeared."

An American history, particularly in the title piece "Into Distances," generates scenes of cowboys, apparent memories of being in covered wagons. This text is dislocated from the focus that would be an historical novel; as if the tenuous whispers or sensuous touches are the marks or imprints that are that history. It is a "view of history" completely unlike the conception of history

given to us normatively, and therefore unlike the given notion of what is noticeable as reality.

This is accomplished by the fabric of text, the apparent memories, set in a spatial galaxy of relative position and distance as if one were, within one's own dream, awake in someone else—"When the whole scene seemed to vanish she was the most conspicuous object before them, intermingled with recollections. Another moment half-obliterated by point of view."

The interior monologue is the landscape: "The interior air remained entire"; yet the "inner mind" is seen from a perspective of distance.

"It has been years with ease and swiftness. They came soundlessly over the wheel of the sky." Everything is experienced outside. Color and sensation generate action.

The description of the action of landscape and time removes the action into the non-human, the sky of text.

—Leslie Scalapino

TOM WHALEN

Elongated Figures

Red Dust, \$4 paper.

"We are not far away. The earth rises to kiss us."

Everything ambulates in Tom Whalen's brilliant little trilogy, *Elongated Figures*: the dead, the living, the inanimate landscape and all the fragments environment is heir to. The dead seem not to know that they are dead and the

After Reading Benjamin Lee Whorf

I put down the blue mug
of fresh-made Yuban
& thought to
myself: "That's a *Real*
Good cup of coffee that
I made!"

2.29.85 / 7:37 pm

—Joel Lewis

living seem not to be restricted by it. Through memory within memory within a memory particulars appear and reoccur in slightly altered guises. In this haunting work, a 2001 quality prevails as figures move across time barriers in and out of life's flashbacks, eternally repeating a slightly altered version. As if in the layers of each recollection the scenario is changed subtly by the eerie fact that it has been remembered before.

"She remembers this in memory only." Those who are brought back in memory also have only their memories to guide them. It is all that the characters coming to play here have. But in remembering each other they cause a chain reaction of past. A young man reads a book about a couple traveling over an unending bridge. This will happen again and again until the action has become pure movement, absolute expression. Death is not the final, but only a condition in the mind in Whalen's country. The power of the living to endow the deceased with living traits removes death's annihilation. In the distillation of repetition the recaller zeros in on a private world peopled by the past and by the imagination. The process becomes a distilling towards purity, towards clarity, but the memories complicate the pure vision of the seeker and involve him in a vortex of his own making.

Whalen shows us there is no beginning and no ending to where the individual and the individual's memories meet in concentric circling and like the mythological Uroborus become a closed circuit. Parents shape the child's skills of organizing the world surrounding them. But it is with this bent that the child become grown-up recalls the events from their lifetime that lock them in the great round of flashbacks they are left to struggle upward through like one climbing out of Dante's Hell.

Singular isolated images that make up a life. Every recollection surrounded by what is forgotten, what is forbidden. The great blank spaces of non-memory. A translation of existence. A list of memories. But can we rely on the vigilant narrator? Are all the mysterious tableaux taken from real life events? Or have some simply been invented and then remembered? Are some parts of dreams, snippets of fantasies, a collec-

tion of images that sang to the imagination, visions, unrealized plans?

Or a description of an event in childhood taken from a story in a magazine read on a train years later. Is the story unfolding in a book, in life, or in a film? Whalen uses the most mundane of actions to suspend normalcy. He does not so much create the surreal out of regular dailiness as show regular dailiness to be surreal. As though one's life blew up—and the bits are settling back to earth in random order, yet completely relevant to one another. A scrap of paper tumbles out of the book the narrator is reading, slow motion to the floor, but a floor that can exist only in some paranoid dream or some suspension of reality. He picks it up and discovers the name of the lover he is with.

Is there a feeling of betrayal? Secrets of a former life. Or a spy quality. Can the lover be trusted?

In a film the narrator sleeps and dreams of his mother's treatment at the hands of medical monsters. Dream constantly recurring. In it strangers and a violent element in the uneasy quiet. An odd stranger approaches, scar tissue under her eye. An analogy is made between a pencil and a tornado. Hands speaking in a silence, unable to decipher. Images dressed for the Ball.

Are the dreams of the memories in the book? Or does the book cause the dreams? He is found sleeping, his head in the pages of the book. His dream is the same loop. His mother at the hands of.....a need to avenge her.....then she (the lover?) finds him at the table his head in the pages of a book. Whalen presents us with three archetypes:

from Nebel

He thought first of the races. Music came and went through the rooms. He followed it as best he could. That voice, yes, came and went with the days. He cupped water, but he had been lying to her—he was not the Count of Ganges

Heine returned. His father had had a stroke, his mother in shock treatment.

the dead

In a book. He no longer recalled the race track. what was the couple in the story searching for. They were on a train in the mountains. A slip of paper fell to the floor with her name on it. He told her but felt like an intruder. A man on a horse in the distance. He didn't want to call her. His voice lay like a shadow over the dunes.

Mad about the treatment his mother

was receiving.

She leaves him.

dead, we can say whatever it is we can say.

the window. the sea.

Father — music.

She thinks how am I to move his heavy load. To wake him from his sleep of the dead. But he was in a field. Thinking where was she. Cock fight. Feathers of blood. A knife in his side.

She walks on the beach. He is not with her. In her memory only.

He thought then that he might as well be reading the Book of the Dead. An orchestra broke up. They all wanted to find her now. An O opened. He felt his voice crumbling inside it.

you think etc. musing. let go—holding you back.

He could not see the horses as they circled the track.

Nebel are you there are you with us

whole life going by. He will read in a book about a couple travelling over an unending bridge. He will see the music repeat itself over and over.

—Maureen
Owen



MICHAEL GOTTLIEB
New York
The Figures, 1993, 112 pp.,
\$12 paper.

Michael Gottlieb has a more riveted connection to space than the many space-saving poets who preceded him. His understanding is more riveted because it is less intellectualized. It is unstrained.

In his new book *New York* he writes from inside the spaces of New York City and from the space of rural Connecticut to which he during the time of writing moved. In other words in Michael's case there's an identity between internal space and external space that is unique. He offers no resistance between the two and yet as he exists

and mediates between them he makes of that existence and of that mediation a work of literary art.

Perhaps it's a question of what Joyce called the ineluctable modalities of the visible. It's certainly something felt to be very close to that.

There are reverberations of sense that don't take any time and Michael has more than a few of them.

"This is not your city."

And it's a very funny work. The humor runs under it as aging in the age and shows up as points of hilarity. "The unexamined life: among other allures, it frees up considerable amounts of free time." It's the stuff some novels are made of and "The Great Pavement" is a sort of novel. Everything in it is new and it's reflected upon for its own sake. Its own value. This separates it from a lot of recent poetry where the machinations are made to dominate.



Duke's Delay

dropped in passing
the pitch of color a car
through shimmering puddles

waiting for the wake

where there was only
a parked tree in fine print
(hidden motors)

listening for a cleaner dark
whatever it was decided not to
sharp tunnel of eighths
walking the crease of a new now
eggshell crunch across frozen snowcap

here as to be without
winter steps (the moon)
where the darkness comes from

word as heard chemistry
playing the part of what
gets in the way

blue shadow over snowy cliffs
counting bones in the dragon's spine
sifting a century between the next
two notes

—Charles Borkhuis

The numbered sections of the book cohere to various extents. But as the sections of the book follow one another this becomes a definition of coherence. We accept in some more looseness between the paragraphs than in others we are made to enjoy. It's prose.

At times Michael tells a story and the rest of the time he is one. His writing inhabits the city the way he did. Way he still must have as his move out of it continued to inflect his experience of it. The book was written by someone becoming an expatriate.

And his understanding is tantamount. He actually explains things. Seen much of that in poetry lately? Each section is actually a march of a particular understanding toward its destination. You.

Even the loosest sections build. Perhaps it's unavoidable when the writing is coherent.

It's as if Michael sees the city dying at least in places and insists on keeping it alive. Or didn't want to leave for fear it would die without him. And there's something to that.

And there's something timeless about it too. The line "How long ago you stopped patronizing the restaurant we just discovered" especially where it appears in the context of section *fourteen* of "The Great Pavement" is as indigenous to the thirties or the seventies as it is to now. So that we get that/this now as an intermittent constant.

The sections don't accrue the way chapters have been wont to do. Each section is a portrait of time in time. But without the age-old accrual. Perhaps the present fast-moving stases don't permit that. Perhaps the city won't.

And yet there are hosts of lines that would fit well in any decently-motivated novel: "That spring, walking into the early evening was like leaning a drowsy wrist in a slow stream; the season sinking slowly into summer; intemperate showers of ginko and cherry." With its simplicity fairly makes the blood rise.

Or section *twenty-one*.

And there's a love of language. Of course that has been made obvious by now hasn't it? I mean humor is love of life plus love of language. And gently understanding doesn't get expressed without a love of language. It exists but it doesn't get expressed.

And the sensuality of it often. "A thin dark strap from the shoulder, let heedlessly drop." It explains itself. That's

what something is when it just is. And the movement from was to is evaporates continuously through a storm of words that was and therefore are. It's effortless. Someone let it be so and big thanks for that.

There's also great subtlety and finesse in the telling. It would take the quoting of a section or two to show it to you. Better you read the book. Even the sections that are somehow more knocked together than the others still show it. And that's more than something where so many let it fall apart. Some of the sections come together as if by miracle. Or happenstance. The two equatable. No?

There's no resentment here really. "And when someone calls you an idiot, the proper, indicated response must always be *yes, yes!* And cry it cheerfully." Humor. "It's about *friends*—that's what it's all about." Truthfully. And no intended or extant distinction between truth and humor.

The work never comments on itself. Isn't that what separates writing from literature now that writing can be straight ahead and literature is what we've come to expect? Even the very funny section about tarmac only reminds us of the title and keeps us knowing where we are. Readers on home turf.

Every story contains within it many stories. That's why we can't keep up with what's happening when we write. And that's also why we invented writing.

It's not that we know where we are but that we are here that counts. It's the knowing makes some of us write but it's thanks to something else that some of us write as we are when we are here.

"I don't know. I just remember."

—Alan Davies

CHARLES BORKHUIS

Hypnagogic Sonnets

Red Dust, \$3 paper.

The sonnet form has been undergoing a revival in recent years, with the free-form sonnets of Ted Berrigan, Bill Kushner and others. And now we have Charles Borkhuis's remarkable sequence of *Hypnagogic Sonnets*. Each sonnet is fourteen lines long, as one would expect, and there are fourteen sonnets in the sequence. Borkhuis uses words sparingly, and his short lines tend to isolate individual words. This puts more

pressure on the words, by concentrating the reader's attention on them. Similarly, the short verse paragraphs bracket single images for close scrutiny. Borkhuis has chosen a form that allows the reader to focus on each separate image. But it wouldn't do to read these poems like a newspaper editorial, looking for an orderly sequence of thoughts. In these poems, images and thoughts follow each other outside the bounds of logic and sequential thinking. Little pockets of meaning form a mosaic pattern that skips over grammatical boundaries.

Many words suggest that the poet is asleep or in a dream state: "Sleep... body in bed... behind closed lids... awake in dreamskin" etc. But the poems can also be read as a formal experiment in language. Borkhuis says he's not really a language poet, but language is certainly at the center of his concerns:

*the body buried alive
behind a wall of words*

*scratches and murmurs
(Sonnet I)*

*he notices his body has become
a form of writing
(Sonnet IX)*

What is the dominant theme of these sonnets? The ways in which language and experience blend into each other:

distance whipped

*by syllables in deep recline
the turning
of things toward their sound
(Sonnet I)*

Language becomes a metaphor for experience, and experience a reflection of language:

*black pronoun on the frozen lake
where the foot stops
white between words
(Sonnet IX)*

There are isolated pockets of surrealism in these sonnets:

*a scroll of small stones
unrolls from a rabbit's skull
(Sonnet III)*

But this image isn't the kind of spontaneous mayhem you get with Breton's *automatisme*. It has the feel of something carefully worked out, as do most of Borkhuis' surrealistic images. Elsewhere in the poems, we find a kind of toned down surrealism. The hard edges

of the surrealist image are softened into less startling, but more suggestive word patterns:

*two silver wolves bead
together in the folds of a leaf*

*.....
flight as thought tracing
the body's outline (connected to the pen
by a thread)*

(Sonnet XIV)

I had long been an admirer of Charles Borkhuis's plays. And it came as a surprise to me to find that this playwright is also a super poet. It's rare for someone to feel equally comfortable with poetry and theatre. It's a kind of balancing act. But Charles Borkhuis is very sure-footed, and never loses his balance.

—Guy Gauthier

JIM CARROLL
Fear of Dreaming
Penguin, \$14.95 paper.

Long before I knew you, I knew something was wrong with you. First there is me. My roots. My stoop. My friends. My eyes, my hands, my mouth, my brain, my body, my sense of direction, my energy etc. My passages and transformations. My possibilities. My obsessions.

*It seems, at times, I have designed
too well this vision of you.*

*I cannot survive your eyes
when they are scarred with a need
for some lesser form of love.*

Ouch. When I first discovered Jim Carroll's work, I considered Jim Carroll to be one of the most exciting human beings I had never come across. What I like about Jim Carroll's work is me. Lewis Warsh showed me one of his photo albums which contained a few photos of Jim. I read a book titled *Nice to See You* and I see poets on the streets of the East Village and they are buying food, walking dogs, arguing, making up and making love, writing, hustling for readings, work, survival, and we say hi to each other. These things, sometimes, are easy to forget. I'm just as scared as anybody else. And I'm just as much a hero.

One night Jim was reading at the Project with Eileen Myles and I asked him if he would grant me an interview for my magazine. He was writing my phone number. My area-code-first delivery caused a minor crisis and I took the

blue pen from him, wondered whom it belonged to, and continued to write the number with the area code in its proper place

on the back of a long white envelope. He stuck it into a pile of papers in his bag. I told him he was going to lose the envelope. "Believe me, I am not going to lose this envelope," was the reply. Despite the slightly acrid tone in Jim's voice, I considered feeling flattered for a minute but then realized the envelope probably contained his paycheck. O.k. So the feeling of excitement was not quite mutual. So the artist is not quite as accessible as I imagined. Maybe the separation of art and artist is sometimes needed, as well as convenient.

Take what I give, not what I'm saying.

Hollywood and New York stars. In my 1970s Fitzgerald and Hemingway offered me a well-written glimpse, a voyeuristic hands-off peep and critically acclaimed sniff of how the other half lives. I was born on my knees; my mother was on her back. Modern survival includes many compartments. To renew you need some new clothes and a vacation. For fast instant removal, TV is necessary. Vicarious anything for the immobile masses. Aspiration, accumulation, and delusions of objectivity are part of our indoctrination.

*For this generation,
infected with too many antidotes,
there must be a balcony, a height
where one may be lifted up
beyond the timorous grip of glamour,
of glory without rage,...*

If I had a definitive complaint about Jim's work it would be that he seems at times prone to deliberately obscure his extreme existence behind the beauty of his well-chosen words. But the words are seamless and clear, confessional in their clarity. And perhaps the translation of a life into art is the only thing an artist given to excess can do to heal.

*I challenge you to restore
a reckless elegance in place of
The vapors you breathe of hubris and
boring...*

*to commit to sleep in a painless chamber
The tedious pets of your cradled syringes.*

I can't reckon the violent images to be a matter of pure craft, though there is that. The intelligence is not a façade, not a matter of surface. There are no clumsy literary acrobatics, no laborious density or failed contrivances, the relentless card-catalogue files of words

REVIEWS

and textures commonly used to explore passion and violence.

*Its color is violet, like lips
that have been smashed*

by night

or robbed of blood by lack of breath.

Still, the element of mostly honesty is what moves me. Although even at the height of my obsession, I did not imagine Jim's work to be a total picture.

Fear of dreaming/living. Have no fear. All is inevitable. The poem, and everything else, is always about you.

Fear of Dreaming contains *Living at the Movies*, Jim's first book of poetry (79 poems); the delicately surreal *Book of Nods* (34 story dream visions); "New York City Variations" (a manifesto?); *Poems 1973-1985* (41 poems); and *New Work 1989-1993* (2 stories, 13 poems).

—Merry Fortune

MEG DALY, BETH FEIN, GABRIELE LEMAY, DAVID LEVINSON, CATHERINE MARTIN, JOEL VERBIT, ALISON WOODS, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DAVID TRINIDAD

5X7

Privately Printed, \$4, call 222.9193

The book is actually 8 1/2 by 5 1/2. It is not a photograph—although the book can metaphorically be taken as a photo-composite of adult life.

5X7 refers to seven writers, each revealing five candid snapshots (poems) of their lives. Not surprising—considering that these poets share David Trinidad as a mentor. Trinidad, who is known for his personal poems laced with pop images, praises the unique voices of his students and cites Fein's "For Bobby." But the book goes beyond musical icons and Post Super Sugar Crisp cereal prizes.

Catherine Martin's poems flow with lyrical fervor—celebrating womanhood ("I Turn to You, I Love Your Body") with poetic rhetoric ("Cut the God Out").

Contrast this to Beth Fein's vulnerability ("Spring has Sprung," "The Nature of Boys") as she heightens her school-girl experiences and conjures haunting, oftentimes disturbing images ("Fathers")—in the subtlest of metaphors.

LeMay handles her life stories with whimsical cadences ("The Meeting Notes That Got Miss Anthrope Fired")

and asks herself "Winter, winter on the wall:/ Who's the coldest bitch of all?" ("Ashes") using her unique rhythmic passages that crescendo into the insight of broken relationships ("I Left You," "The Surgeon Asks Me To Marry Him, And I Say").

Alison Wood tells off Rumpelstiltskin ("Fables") like a skilled stand-up and compares "Good Fortune" to the size of her husband's ear with tickling wit.

Joel Verbit's pieces capture the stark reality of desolate isolation ("A Spring Walk") found "In the City" and in the poignant progressions of a father-son relationship.

The most stunning presentations from 5X7 come from the youngest writers: Meg Daly and David Levinson. Both tackle sexuality with a scathing edge. Levinson's edges slice into day-to-day routine of life in the city ("A Child's Game") to the sexual awakening in "Red Fish"—a well-crafted sonnet crown. "I Want to Be Cremated" also shows off Levinson's ability for story-telling as he takes the death of a grandparent and painfully surfaces instances of incest. Like Levinson, Daly takes those adolescent images and creates a dazzling kaleidoscope in "The Jewel." Daly's buoyant style is shown in "Fifth Year"—another gem that brings a fallen tooth, The Osmonds and an absentee father together.

What is most impressive, overall, is the fact that this book was self-published by the seven writers themselves. The look surpasses that of the run-of-the-mill chapbook—from the typeface to the cover—all for the price of \$4!

It is a challenge to anthologize the works of several writers. It is an inspiring work and a lesson for writers to bring the power into their own hands. What is even more miraculous is seeing the portrait each writer has developed of his or her own persona through the colorful menagerie of the words themselves.

—Regie Cabico

STEPHEN DOBYNS
Velocities: New and Selected Poems, 1966-1992

Penguin, 302 pp., \$12.50 paper.

Stephen Dobyns' careful, thoughtful poetic voice is central to his work. His narrative is never obscured by a subject, be that subject a strip show or a

baby's fascination with shaving cream. His voice survives changes into many different aspects, from the grumble of a Belfast, ME blue-collar worker to the posturings of Bravado personified. *Velocities: New and Selected Poems, 1966-1992* shows a shift in Dobyns' motivation away from the desire to entertain and amuse towards the simple urge to communicate truths about human life.

The book begins with Dobyns' recent, unpublished material and then jumps back to selections from *Concurring Beasts* (1972). This jump brings to light, more than the changes in Dobyns' style, the similarity of work from the two disparate periods; a certain articulate punchiness surfaces in both selections. In the earlier volume's "Leaving the Bar and Low Life at Closing, I Unsuccessfully Pursue Sainthood," a drunk narrator asks: "Sister, where are your smiles and promises now?/ Half the morning has been answered. No book or mother/ ever told me there were streets like these." One finds a fiercer match in the new "Syracuse Nights": "You are sick of books and the TV sucks/ and you'd like to see one guy haul off/ and smack another in the chops..." Dobyns' mutations of voice are, rather than flexings of a poetic muscle, recreations of the voices he himself has heard and would like his readers to hear, as well.

In successive books, Dobyns follows a path leading from extroversion to meditation. First person narrative pervades the selections from *Griffon* (1976), which, as the author explains in an afterword, was an experiment with Anglo-Saxon riddle form. This speaker forces the reader into an awareness of the good and the bad in everyday life. In "Gluttony," from a series on the seven deadly sins, Dobyns writes, "You invite me to your house for dinner;/ I restock the shelves of my childhood.// Everything I eat makes me thinner;/ I must eat faster." The directness and sharpness of these poems recalls Lorca, Popa, Lux, and Tate. In *Heat Death* (1980), however, their force gives way to a more vague surrealism which allows Dobyns to fill a forest with men carrying umbrellas in one poem and transpose the Roman Romulus against the backdrop of an Iowa town in another. These last flirtations are more pleasing than his Anglo-Saxon swordplay, but both attempts seem stylistic flukes which are disconnected from the rest of his work.

In *The Balthus Poems* (1980), Dobyns has matched the grainy smoothness of Balthus' paintings with equally cool descriptive diction. Not merely a poetic photographer, the poet presents visual scenarios in a manner which shows his intense observation, as in "The Card Game": "The boy has never known her not to cheat,/ and kneeling on the chair, leaning on the table/ as if preparing to pounce, the boy is preparing/ to tell her." Many of Dobyns' poems describe the steps leading up to personal—and possibly perverse—moments, such as those in Balthus' paintings. The works in *Black Dog, Red Dog* (1984) and *Cemetery Nights* (1987) are often humorous, depicting absurd but telling situations calmly and reasonably. In "Dancing in Vacationland," the poorer residents of Searsport, ME leave their tar-paper shacks in the back woods and dance down Main Street, past affluent tourists and summer residents. In "The General and the Tango Singer," a tango singer tries to put out a roaring fire with a song about lost love. The implicit sarcasm of these earlier poems gives way, finally, to the more contemplative (but less fun) selections from *Body Traffic* (1990) and the previously unpublished work. Here, Dobyns reflects on more political subjects, such as the social climate in Santiago or teenage runaways. He treats these subjects with seriousness, giving them their full cosmic significance. The fatherly opening of "The Body's Weight," from *Body Traffic*, encapsulates the progression from fascination to concern evident in *Velocities*: "A bookcase has its books, a horse supports its rider/ but the body's greatest burden is itself..."

—Max Winter

The Selected Poems of Charles Olson, edited by Robert Creeley

(The University of California Press, 221 pp. \$30 cloth)

A consideration of Olson's stance towards the electronic media and advertisements which blossomed in the fifties could serve to highlight those virtues of his poetry that may not have been so apparent in his time, when jazz poetry and the poetry of the "Beats" would make him seem less original than, in fact, he was. It is interesting to consider that the author of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, Marshall McLuhan, was born only a year after Olson, and that both writers used A. N. Whitehead's sec-

ular cosmology for elaboration of their own notions of the human point of perception being but one object among many. Whereas Olson would write, however, that "polis is/ eyes," and would bemoan the rise of the "pejorocracy" and the infiltration of "mu-sick, mu-sick" in Gloucester, permitting his experience with the media to support his gnostic convictions, McLuhan, whose relationship with ads and the media was complicated by a combination of disgust (he felt the best way to fight it was to study it) and fascination (fueled, initially, by the fact that few believed him) would become widely known as the "messenger of the media," its prophet. To reconcile the convictions of the poet—who followed the syllable back into the throat, through the ear and to the mind (a search for origins, physical and archetypal) and who is probably the least commercial (even in its deconstructed sense, despite his metaphors) of American poets—with those of the scholar who considered the electronic media "an extension of the central nervous system" and who seemed to believe that the progenitor of effect lies elsewhere, beyond the body, in a "tribal" (hence, nothing to discover!) space—may appear initially daunting. A reconciliation is possible, however, and it would place Olson most securely, in one's thinking, where he felt he was, which is in his time (though he longed for a preliterate past) and securely outside the "tradition" of sacrosanct literature as borrowed and "modified" by Eliot. Olson writes in *Call me Ishmael*: "Some men ride on such space, others have to fasten themselves in like a tent stake to survive. As I see it, Poe dug in and Melville mounted. They are the alternatives." He thus poses, even so early in his career, as a journeyman "among stones," impatient with that which is seen only in print (the China of *The Cantos*, for instance), and that poetry which is, because of its weakened "attention" to ear and body, permeable by the diction of the flux of an indeterminate discourse, that being of the mass media. However, his emphasis on "space" or object over discourse, his distrust of the industrial machinery of word and imagery (which could include that "poetry which print bred"), and his attention to the varieties of distance between speech as spoken and written places him, albeit uncomfortably, somewhere within the sphere of McLuhan's interests.

One result of Olson's exact and exacting attention to the syllable as basic unit, a corollary to his desire for what one might call a virgin speech, was his longer line. It seemed to arise out of silence, unannounced by what preceded it (he rarely set up a base, or bass, tone at the start of his poems), a serial technique that may have been influenced by Boulez, who taught briefly at Black Mountain. Though many of his longer lines do not quite stand on their own, like the following from Frank O'Hara:

Close to the fear of war and the stars which have disappeared.

or (from John Ashbery):

And it was uniquely the weather, O bombe glaces university!

or the very famous (from Pound):

The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant's bent shoulders

lines which turn back on themselves, claiming a unique melodic vocabulary within their limited space, and which are presented as separate units within the poem: Olson was able to maneuver, or proceed among, lines that could be two or three words in length and lines much longer, expressly declamatory,

often with a grace (he describes this in "Merce in Egypt") that is unique and has been rarely matched or attempted.

*Torso on torso in either direction,
young Augustus*

out via nothing where messages]

are

*or in, down La Cluny's steps to
the old man sitting]*


a god throned on torsoes,

old Zeus

*Sons go there hopefully as though
there was a secret, the object]*

to undo distance?

A comparison of an early draft of "This" (not in the *Selected Poems*), reproduced in the fifth volume of Black Sparrow's Olson/Creeley correspondence, and the final version printed in the *Collected Poems* shows how much Olson did have to work, figuring which of his longer (preferred) lines should be broken into shorter, tighter rhythmical and syntactic units, a practice, as defined by Williams, carried out on typewriter. Olson, for all



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Anne Waldman

of his emphasis on thrust and breath, however, didn't have the natural skill for spoken ambience that, for instance, O'Hara had; and sometimes his poetry is listless, a mere continuance, without the humor, imagistic variety, melody or ambition for pure (i.e. playful) experimentation that O'Hara exhibits. One might argue that, were the reader to be immersed in the various esoteric literatures from which Olson derived much experience, this ambience would come to life; however, much of his poetry tends to bombast when his attention to text and rhetoric falters (including placement of commas!), and no cosmology or advanced poetic theory could ever truly salvage it. The opening of "In Cold Hell, In Thicket," for instance, is a unique confluence of shape, breath, and "meaning" that walks a fine line between that which is personality (license) and that which is music (discipline). Parts of the longer *Maximus* poems and most of the later, diary-like sections, however, tend to err on the personality, or the idiosyncratic, side, with obscure particulars and a variety of flourishes without the sure structure of the poem, as extension of content or endless exploration even, to sustain them.

The virtue of Creeley's selection is that he presents Olson the poet, embodiment of his ideas rather than as victim of the divorce between writing text and speech and of his own misgivings about poetry. Olson could really write the long poem, and many of those included are unlike anything else, each one deserving, and demanding, its own close reading. If he often erred on the side of diffuseness, his characteristic didacticism (often, a stupid masculinity-as-doctrine) and a retreat into historical references that obtain an air of "importance," it can be said also that he never became cute, a stand-up comic, a casual surrealist, nor did he make any effort to refer to those things "we all love" in order to promote his own acceptance. This collection—elegant in construction, and the odd choice of the sans serif font and page size ("Some Good News": 8 pages in *Maximus*, 11 in the *Selected*), which may seem contrary to Olson's intentions—is a real break in the continuity of selected Olsons.

—B. Kim Stefans

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Shoes

by Rochelle Kraut

I notice people's shoes.

Functional, beautiful, sexy, old, elegant, new, worn down at the heel. Shoes tell me stories, evoke feelings about the person wearing them.

Fifteen years ago I was interested in the walking messenger. I stood on 5th Avenue at Rockefeller Center and took Super 8 film of messengers walking by, fleeting glimpses of men appeared and were swallowed by a sea of people. Many walking messengers were old men and their shoes were like them stooped, beaten, bent into strange shapes, worn, sad and scraped. It seemed like a difficult job for an old man, a desperate occupation. In their frayed coats, they shuffled more than walked, the soles of their shoes thin.

Carl Solomon was a messenger for many years. I was surprised he was only 64 when he died. Walking messengers must be a dying breed or dead already, replaced by the FAX machine.

Today, the character of shoes has changed. This was pointed out to me by a friend who loves shoes. She complained that people wore more sneaker-type shoes and less leather. I thought it was because they were more affordable than leather, and perhaps more instantly comfortable. However, they don't show their age and character as well. They're easily and sooner replaced. Sneakers don't

have much to say.

Shoes are burdened with significance. My parents talked about shoes with the reverence and respect due to holy objects. Talked about in whispers. There was something desperate in their feelings about shoes, especially for my mother. It exhibited itself when she had to buy shoes for me. There was a lot of searching and critical assessment and in the end I'd get the biggest, brownest, ugliest pair of shoes imaginable. I was a skinny wisp of a thing too. My legs looked like fragile toothpicks at the ends of which were two big club-like feet. This is how I learned about poignancy. No shiny black patent leather Mary Janes for me, no matter how I begged. Self poignancy is a lot better than self pity.

When we went shopping, my mother talked about not having shoes. She ran without shoes all summer, happy, dancing and singing for sweets tossed to Sophia. But with the Russian winter approaching, there wasn't enough money to get shoes for everyone in the family. They took turns going to school in winter. That's why she never got past the 8th grade. Winters were long. Not having shoes was poverty, something to be ashamed of.

My mother always stressed the health benefits of the ugly shoes I had. It was important for survival. She always said if you had bad shoes, your feet would get bad and if your feet got bad, you were good for nothing, you

couldn't walk. Your health would suffer severely without good shoes and good feet. As a consequence of this childhood anguish, I now have nice looking feet.

I was about 12 years old when I saw my first images of the Holocaust. A documentary on TV. Piles of broken bone and skin. Piles of children's shoes. Later I read Primo Levi. His description of the camp clogs and how they could directly lead to the death of an inmate only reinforced the early message about the basic necessity of shoes.

I think I own about 20 pairs of shoes. Maybe more. Most are over 25 years old. Shoes of the 50s and early 60s. Some pairs belonged to my mother or mother-in-law. My oldest pair are brown suede platform shoes that were hand made for my mother circa 1950. She paid 60 American dollars for them in Germany. It was illegal for them to have American dollars. Some shoes I bought in thrift shops for 25 cents. Some I've never worn, they almost fit, smaller than size 6. Most are dress up shoes and I don't get dressed up that often. Some are very fragile and I don't think I can wear them anymore. I used to be a size 6, then a 6 1/2. Now I've crept up to a 7 in some new styles. I used to think my love of shoes had to do with being an Aquarian. Our weakness is the ankle which somehow translates to shoes. As long as they are beautiful, I can wear any old shoes between size 6 or 7 because they've been broken in by someone else.

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Playing on the Changes

CAROLYN PEYSER TALKS TO JOHN FARRIS

John Farris has become some sort of legend on the Lower East Side. He was the salaried resident poet at the now-defunct Living Theater. With Patricia Winter, he is co-editor of Sensitive Skin, published by B. Kold. [A review of his new book, It's Not About Time, appeared in the previous issue of the Newsletter.]

CP: I'm amazed that *It's Not About Time* is your first book. Hadn't I heard someone was shopping around a manuscript for you a couple of years ago?

JF: Oh, someone's been doing that for years, and I'm always losing them. (...) People would always ask me to give them poems, stories, plays, and I never would. I never really felt secure enough, confident enough about my work to give them to them. I would publish little things here and there just to kind of, you know, stay in it. But I never wanted to publish anything because I never felt I was demonstrating all that I could demonstrate. I didn't know what I was doing, and I knew it. That's part of why I like to compose by hand. I like to keep them like this (handwritten on yellow paper) 'til I'm ready to let them out.

CP: Can you quantify the difference between your earlier and more current writing?

JF: Take a poem like this. "Dread" Sometimes I hear an echo/I imagine it your voice./Just the other day/in front of Ray's Candy Store/I heard a young woman speak/so trillingly and with such full round phrases/ I was startled/knowing it could not have been you/Not here/where there are no mountains/no stones. Now, in three words here—echo, mountains, and stones—you get a whole dialectic of mythology with Echo, a mountain nymph who was turned into stone. On

top of it is Ray's Candy Store—a simple, sort of prosaic, accessible approach to life. And behind, a sort of poetic history. But in my earlier work, I would have all this stuff on the top, and the simple message would be hidden behind. I always wanted my poems to be like crossword puzzles. Forget one entendre, double entendre; I wanted four and five entendres all the way. I was impressed by Borges and all the Latin American writers, and I learned about metaphor, and I liked it; I would read all this stuff and pack my poems with all this information, and uh, they would be so obscure. I mean really. Which is fine, sometimes, if you want to do that for some specific reason. But it's much better to be able to write anything you want to write, any way you want to write it. And I couldn't do that. I couldn't pick up a poet, glance at him, and recreate his style...and I didn't want to publish anything before I could do that. Now, I know that I'm not going to be ashamed when I'm 90—if I'm 90—looking at these poems. The others, I shudder to encounter. They're what I call "almost poems"...and that's why I was very judicious about putting them out.

CP: What brought you to literature?

JF: I don't know, I always liked it. I was reading supermarket signs by the time I was three! But mostly, I just read fairy tales, and the incantations always moved me to some other place. I lived in fairy tales. My physical environment wasn't all that pleasant, and it wasn't filled with desirable literature. But I always had books. TV came along in the next decade, but I didn't really like it. My father lived on the corner of Lenox Avenue and 136th Street, across from Harlem Hospital, where I was born.

Harlem was very different then, you know. There was a lot of culture...and also, New York was segregated then, so whatever culture there was was right there, in Harlem. There was the Apollo, there was the Golden Gate, the Savoy, the Woodside, Minton's...there was music everywhere, everywhere—in the clubs, on the streets. The kids would be dancin', doin' these little ginny jigs. There were horse-drawn wagons to sell all the fruits vegetables and everything,—and they'd be hucksters, they'd sing what they were selling. It was constant, and I really loved that. No time for TV...I looked at that, and read. I didn't really start hangin' out until I was 12, when I stopped going to school. I became a juvenile delinquent, oh, until I was about 17, 18.

CP: What does that mean to you—"juvenile delinquent"? That's someone else's label.

JF: Oh, you know, I wouldn't go to school, I smoked plenty of pot...but I didn't do anything but read. Now, we're talking about the 50s, so marijuana was very, very, very illegal. So, you might say I was hanging out with artistic elements and criminal elements. I was just generally anti-social. I wouldn't go to school, I didn't like how certain materials were disseminated, I didn't like how I was different.

CP: Did anyone encourage you to...

JF: No.

CP: I mean, were you writing early?

JF: No one encouraged me to write. No one encourages me to write, now. Just me. Oh, people would always say I was so bright, but I didn't know what that meant. And they didn't know what that meant, either. No one will ever encourage you to do anything like that unless they're an artist themselves. And I didn't know that many artists. I just decided I was going to be a writer, and I decided that early on.

CP: Was it the Beat scene that brought you down here to the Lower East Side?

JF: To tell you the truth, I was looking in the newspaper and I saw Ted Joans and a bunch of them at a party. They were all dressed up in leopard skins and beating bongos. The caption read "Wild Greenwich Village Party", and I said, "That's for me!" (laughter) And eight months later I was in jail for smoking pot—for three years.

CP: Did you do a lot of reading and writing during that time?

JF: I read free verse poets...but I didn't understand it, I didn't understand what made it poetry. I didn't like Sandburg much; I read Whitman, and I liked Whit-

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man more. Then I looked at William Carlos Williams...and I wasn't as struck by him as I was by Frank O'Hara, who seemed to close the perimeters that Williams opened. O'Hara closed them somewhat, he gave you room to play wherever you wanted to play. Y'know, there were no Beats, there was only O'Hara. I realized that I liked leaping through the rhythms and making the message and the rhythm one. Like your one eye is one eye, and your other eye is your other eye, but together they're your vision. Making all the little organisms, all the little organs in a poem, live. The letters are your tools, your little sticks for your house. You take each letter, and you make it count for something, make it tie something together. If it doesn't have any symmetry, or if it's not asymmetrical enough, you just take that one back and get another one. And that's the way you build a poem.

CP: Now, you said Frank O'Hara was the only Beat. Some people might take issue with that...

JF: I'll tell you quite plainly what I mean. The greatest exponents of the Beat years in literature used maybe one or two techniques. Except Kerouac—I actually liked his poetry, he reminded me a lot of Williams Carlos Williams in the poetry. They used one or two elements. Ginsberg used basically religious texts like Kaddish, for "Howl" he used Biblical rhythms and rhymes and references, and he applied that to practically every situation and experience he was confronted with in the literature. And for me that's not enough. I mean, just for me...obviously it was enough for him and for other people—he sort of marked the age. [John reads O'Hara's "On Rachmaninoff's Birthday", then "Poem in January".] I mean the rest of them couldn't do that. They were more modern than that, and that is modern enough for me. I mean you can do all that other stuff if you want to but...he can do anything: he can open it up, he can do what they did. That's what I'm interested in, that kind of mobility and versatility...and I'm working on it. (a beat) But then I was invited to become part of The Black Arts. [Led by Amiri Baraka, The Black Arts Repertory Theater/ School was founded in 1965 to coalesce Black artist-revolutionaries.] But they were very, very, very racially polarized. The first afternoon at a meeting—they invited everybody, like we invited everybody to everything right now, like Steve [Cannon] invites everybody—and then they get up there and say 'OK, all the white people have to leave'. I didn't like that

but I stayed around—you know, it was a party—in fact, I made a speech saying that was the dumbest thing possible. I said if you want to have secrets, you don't have to announce to the world you have secrets, just let everybody have fun and tell your little stories in the back room (laughs). But The Black Arts already had this little army that I didn't know anything about. I'm strictly a cultural animal, always have been.

CP: Not political?

JF: No, I'm not. Politics have never interested me. But I'd say, you're doing it wrong, this and that. So I got a reputation for being a dissenter. A naysayer. I'd been hired by The Black Arts to edit their newsletter, but we had political differences about what I was representing and what tone they wanted. I wrote in the same satirical manner that I write now—everybody's grist for my mill. And they wanted stuff slanted toward Black. So I got the reputation of being a jive-ass non-deliverer. I met some really great people though, Harold Cruz, Sun Ra...and Sun Ra made me stay there. They were always my friends. Well, by now I had a little voice, but when I showed a good friend one of my poems, he said 'oh, you're a primitive, you're a

street poet.' That stung me into a 10-year silence. Then I went to college to find out what I was trying to write about, what writing is...since I didn't really know, though I was supposed to be a writer. But my mentors only made me mad, interfering with what I was doing. Every two months, I'd have my one good poem. That was enough to keep me going with them—but not with all the great poets that I liked. After my second marriage broke up I was in and out of New York for a number of years. Then in the early '80s, when I was running a reading series at Life Cafe, I started hangin' out with Joe Semenovitch, who taught me what to read and how to write modern poetry. He's published in our last *Sensitive Skin*. I started writing with him, we would write back and forth about each other. That tightened up my technique a lot.

CP: Who did he tell you to read?

JF: People like Basil Bunting, Marianne Moore, Greek poets like Yannis Ritsos, Cavafy, oh just poets and poets and poets because he works in a library at Hunter. After my little journeymanhood with him, I finally learned how to write. So that's the story about how poetry saves Farris's life.

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