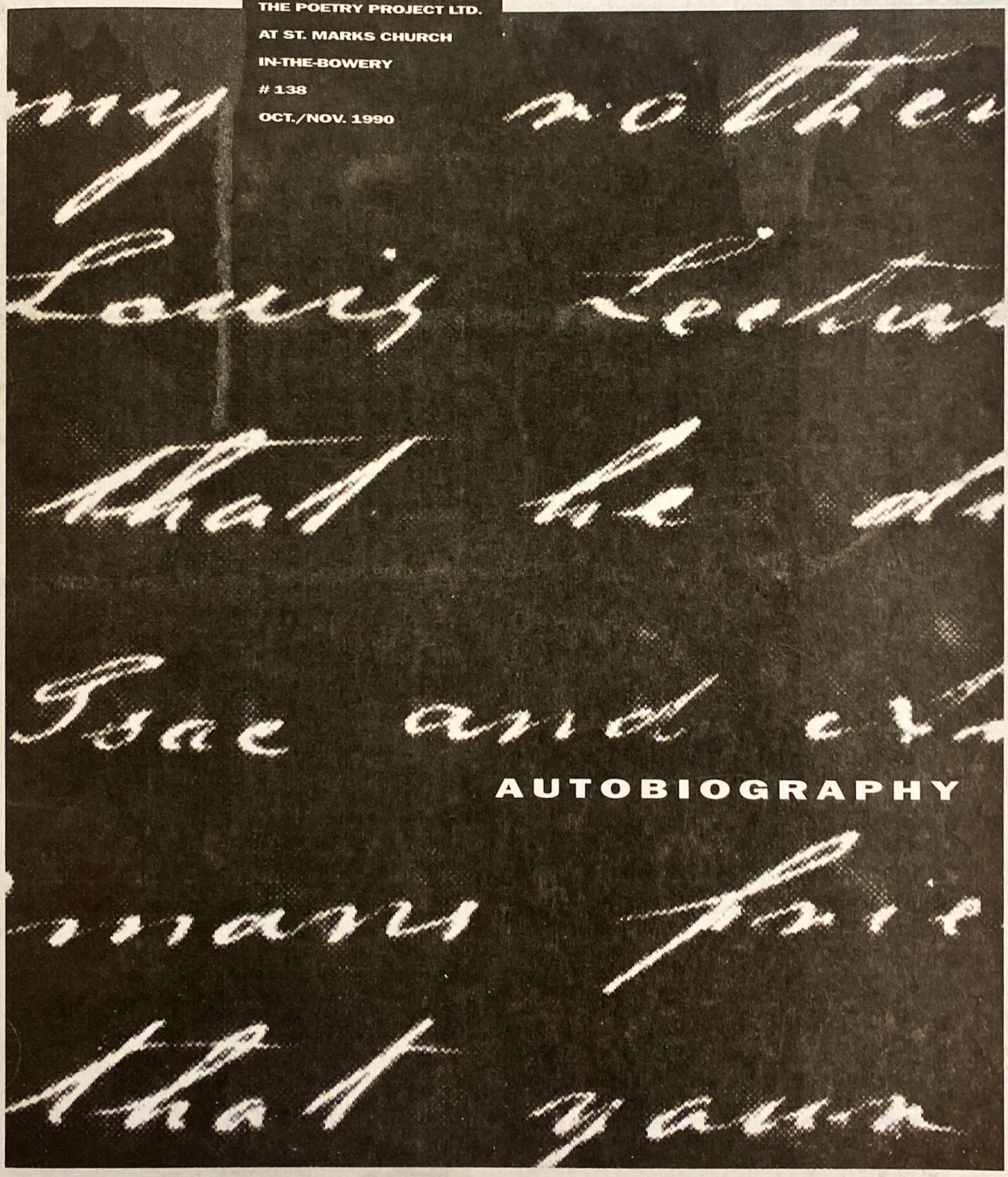
The Poetry Project

THE NEWSLETTER OF
THE POETRY PROJECT LTD.
AT ST. MARKS CHURCH
IN-THE-BOWERY
138
OCT./NOV. 1990



AUTOBIOGRAPHY

EDITOR'S NOTE

This year, in addition to the Newsletter's regular features, each issue will contain a section that focuses on a special topic. For this issue, I've collected articles, poems and experiments on autobiography. (Section starts on p. 13.)

Topics for the next two issues are:

December/January: "Appropriation"
(making poems with other poems and texts).
Deadline for submissions: October 7.

February/March: "Class and Poetry"
Deadline for submissions: December 7.

I'm particularly interested in looking at articles for the "Class" issue. Please query first.

JEROME SALA

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Interested advertisers contact Mike Rubin, Kimberly Lyons or Lee Ann Brown at (212) 674-0910.

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SYMPOSIUM

PRESENTATIONS FROM POETRY AND THE NEXT SOCIETY
SYMPOSIUM AT THE POETRY PROJECT: MAY 3-6, 1990

ASSERTIONS OF POWER: A CRITIQUE

Edie Jarolim

Let me admit from the start that I came to this symposium about poetry in the next society and assertions of power with a not-at-all hidden agenda. I came with the express purpose of discovering what role women might be seen as playing in that future society, of finding out what assertions of women's power might be discussed -- or even manifested -- here.

I know that in what has been termed the post-feminist age there are those who don't consider such issues relevant anymore -- if they ever considered them relevant to begin with. There's a lot of talk going around in the mainstream media that feminism has achieved its goals, and that younger women no longer want to be called feminists because they feel that the women's movement has led their generation astray. I, for one, have my doubts about that. I worry about a lot of things these days: I worry how large chunks of my not-so-large postfeminist salary would have to be spent on a flight out of the country, should such choices as were achieved 20 years ago by Roe vs. Wade be revoked here. And when I hear that the reaction to what is now being labeled the selfish 1980s is a call for a more caring, sharing generation, I worry about who's going to do most of the caring and sharing. And I especially worry that in the name of ecological consciousness, the l990s will bring a backlash against women as competent members of the workforce and relegate us -- as it did in that other revolutionary period, the 60s -- to the role of earth mother again.

But that's the mainstream, you may say. Need I worry about such things at the politically correct St. Mark's Poetry Project? Indeed, the bare statistics of representation at this symposium were rather heartening. For the poetry readings, there were seven male readers and six female readers, an almost even division. The panels were less even, 20 male panelists to 13 female, or about 2/3 to 1/3, but there were women represented on every panel, and on the Poetry and Knowledge panel, one that's philosophical and therefore stereotypically not a female domain, women were particularly well represented.

I was also heartened to discover a feminist discourse was assumed for the most part. I'm not only talking about the reactions to my saying I was doing a feminist summation of the conference -- I met with only a few sarcastic comments from male intellectuals about that, and I would be manifesting that notorious feminist lack of a sense of humor were I to take them to heart. I'm mainly talking about the fact that for most of the talks -- with one notable exception -- even if they were not specifically about feminist topics, it seemed a given that a woman's perspective was likely to be different from a man's -- and, more important, that ours was a point of view worth giving credence to.

Well, that's the good news. The bad news is that I noticed there was often a disparity between some of those superficial structures I just described and a number of the subtexts and superstructures of the symposium. But to get down to cases...

The first panel, on Friday afternoon, was called "Contemporary Latin American Poetry: Strategies for Power." The moderator, Roberto Echavarren, gave an overview of contemporary writing in Latin America -- a subject I was glad to learn more about, as I, like most North Americans, am rather limited in my knowledge of what's going on in Latin American cultures. Among the topics he covered was the new role women were taking in Latin American poetry; he cited how well represented women writers now were, and further noted that men were currently questioning stereotypical sex roles in their own poetry. Lila Zemborain spoke next about new feminist writing in Latin America, naming a number of contemporary women writers, and outlining what they were doing. The other panelists did not specifically address feminist issues, though the ethnopoetics about which Cecilia Vicuna spoke, an oral tradition carried on by the indigenous peoples of Latin America, was certainly indirectly relevant, and the self-ironic, personal talk of the last speaker, Jose Kozer, stressing the importance of destroying hierarchies and pantheons of poets, gave voice to some of that questioning about sex roles and heroism that Roberto Echavarren had alluded to.

So this all sounded very rosy as far as women writers in Latin America were concerned, but I have to admit I had my doubts. One thing that nagged at me was the stereotype of machismo in Latin America: Was that ill-conceived, or had it all just suddenly disappeared? The fact that the two women panelists gave the shortest talks -- especially short was Lila Zemborain's talk about feminist writers -- did little to assuage my doubts. Now I had planned simply to be a biased observer, and not to effect the actual events at the symposium, but in this case my curiosity got the better of me, and I asked the women panelists if indeed the whole male-dominated Latin American literary establishment had been swiftly overturned, as the panel seemed to suggest.

This is the answer that Cecilia Vicuna gave (in a condensed form, but I'm using quotes directly from her talk): "I have been publishing for 25 years or so," she said, "and I can tell you [the situation in Latin America] is terribly *machista*. Things are changing, but not fast enough. The most creative poetry is being done by a group of women in Mexico, Peru, Chile, in Bolivia and so forth who are very unknown. These women don't get critical attention because most of the magazine editors are men, and men also have most of the positions in academe. Women's poetry has to be pushed. I made a point of reading women writers, though I was not talking about women; all these people I spoke about have been completely erased. It's ironic, the male poets have been talking about the importance of becoming a woman -- but where is the woman they want to become? I wrote erotic poetry which was suppressed for more than ten years. It wasn't until the 1980s that women started to be allowed to write about their bodies; I am only one example. The situation is changing, but it has to change even more."

The next panel that afternoon was "Poetry and Knowledge," which included four women and two men. From the content of their talks, and one self-description (that of Rachel Blau du Plessis), it was clear that all the women on the panel considered themselves feminists, though feminism per se was not the subject of their talks. There were some interesting references, however, to the question of what knowledge specifically means to a woman. In talking about a poet's context, everything that she needs to know, Anne Lauterbach said, "One of my demons likes to sit between me and the afterlife with a test not unlike the one I took upon entering Columbia's Graduate English department, which tested me on everything I had forgotten. My

demon's test goes beyond the boundaries of literary studies; it covers everything, ingredients in a risotto, dates of the Crimean War, the titles of all Alfred Hitchcock's films, the architect of the Empire State Building." This strikes me as quintessentially a woman's perspective; most of the women I know are always worried that we don't know enough, or don't know the really *important* things. Elaine Equi made this point more directly. She said, "Some types of knowledge are privileged over others and these are usually the fields that have traditionally excluded women. So this whole idea of poetry and knowledge lends itself to the creation of a framework wherein women will always find themselves slotted as the less serious writers."

And in fact this seemed to be borne out at the panel itself. Although the majority of panelists were women, the only questions from the audience were both by men, and both were directed to one man out of the two men on the panel -- clearly he was a repository of the right kind of knowledge.

Friday night brought four lectures termed "Poetry 1990: The State of the Art." None of them specifically concerned women's issues, but Charles Bernstein gave the feminist-conscious talk I would have expected of him, while Kenneth Koch did not give the sexist talk I would have expected of him -- although, on the other hand, he didn't mention a single woman when he was discussing his literary influences. Amiri Baraka, I am surprised and pleased to note, spoke a number of times about the importance of women's rights and spoke out against male chauvinism; this is not the Amiri Baraka I'd remembered in the past. But even though he was scheduled as the last speaker, and not due to go on until about 10 PM, he kept the entire audience waiting another half-hour for him. A concomitant of stardom, with no gender implications, you say? Perhaps, but I see it as a male power play. Maybe unavoidable personal circumstances had intervened, you argue? I counter that Barbara Guest, surely a major figure too, dutifully handed in the text of her talk, although her husband had died the week before. The length of that talk, read for Guest by Elaine Equi, may also be attributable to the circumstances under which it was written, but for the record it was, in fact, the shortest one of the four.

The two sessions on Saturday afternoon were the most charged as far as issues of gender were concerned. The first one, called "Robert Creeley and the Politics of the Person," probably should have been called "Robert Creeley and the Politics of the Male" -- and I don't mean to suggest that's because it was a sexist panel, but because the issue of Creeley's masculine persona was very much under discussion. In their talks, all the panelists granted that the question of the person, or the "self," in Creeley's poems was a complicated one. Both Barrett Watten and Richard Blevins placed Creeley in an historical context, from which it was clear that an American self-doubting, anti-heroic stance, as well as Modernist fragmentation of the self, were two qualifying structures against which any notion of "the person" in Creeley's poetry must be measured. Susan Howe elaborated on the anti-heroic in Creeley, with some attention to the formal aspects of his verse, the short lines and hesitations. But it was Ted Pearson, the last speaker, who specifically addressed the question of the gendered self, the exploration of maleness, in Creeley's work by doing a feminist reading of the unnamed final poem in *Pieces*. He critiqued the role of the proposed masculine "I" of the poem, particularly noting the "I's" assumed masculine audience and his patronizing relationship to the women/ goddesses who appear in the poem.

In the stimulating discussion that followed the talks, a number of people countered -- or at least sought to strongly qualify -- Ted Pearson's reading with a defense primarily based on the form of Creeley's poems. Susan Howe elaborated on her original theme, citing Creeley's historical position as a young man at the end of the Second World War who was formed by his times, as well as his relative virtues, again relating to the short line of his poems. As she put it, "At least he doesn't go on and on and on the way men tend to do." The panel ended with a final defense of Creeley by Charles Bernstein from the audience, based again on such formal aspects of the poetry as hesitation. For me, however, neither Creeley's historical/personal context nor the form of his poems sufficiently mitigate their masculinist content. Just because someone hesitates before he says something sexist, that doesn't make it okay; in fact that only makes it more insidious, because it leads one to believe in the sensitivity of the speaker. More to the point, that hesita-tion is itself a convention that goes back to the Troubadours in whom Creeley was very much interested: "O my lady, I cannot speak, words fail me before you." But of course he eventually can, and always does. I will end the summation of this panel by noting that some of the more blatant examples of Creeley's sexist poems were provided for us by Alan Davies, in his piece on Creeley's erotic poetry; they were presented in a completely nonironic, nay, even approving fashion. I quote: "Bob articulated. That means that he set things down right, rightness a consequence of articulation."

The outcome -- i.e., the ultimate defense of Creeley's work on formal grounds -- of the panel notwithstanding, the terms of the discourse and the issues raised by it were so much in the feminist mode I began to feel somewhat uneasy: doing a feminist critique of the conference was beginning to feel a bit redundant. When it came to the next panel, however, "*The New American Poetry*: After 30 Years Is It's Still What's New," that feeling dissipated -- fast. This was the panel with the least sense of feminist discourse as a given -- and I quickly except Lorna Smedman, whose talk was very feminist, from that statement. In fact, what was most interesting about the panel was what was *not* said. The men on the panel, Lorenzo Thomas, Ray DiPalma, Ernesto Grossman, spoke in personal terms of what the anthology had meant to them, and all agreed, with some small qualification by Lorenzo Thomas, that the *New American Poetry* was still new -- as in personally meaningful; Diane DiPrima, who had been excluded from the *New American Poetry* anthology because, as she explained, she had been sleeping with LeRoi Jones, and Hetty Jones got Donald Allen to keep her out, said the whole concept of newness was irrelevant in the general Zen scheme of things.

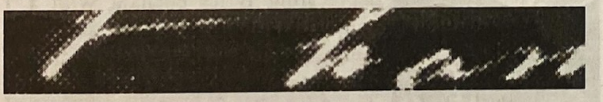
Most of the panel discussion was devoted to giving historical context, both a literary and social context for the anthology and a personal one for the speakers, who talked about what was going on in their lives when they first came across the volume; Ernesto Grossman placed *The New American Poetry* in the context of its influence on Latin American anthologies. But what I found most ironic was the claim by the speakers that the anthology had opened their minds and stimulated them. I'm not only talking about the fact that Lorna Smedman was the only one to address the exclusion of women from the anthology; not even Ernesto Grossman addressed the fact that there was, to say the least, a limited vision in naming the book the "New American Poetry," when the poetry of most Americans -- Canadians along with Latin Americans -- was not included. It was Lila Zemborain, the woman who spoke about feminist writers on the Latin American panel, who brought up that point from the audience. Nor was there a questioning of the whole politics of canon formation, of the act of anthologizing itself; that issue was again brought up only by a member of the audience, George Quasha.

As for the exception (which was largely ignored in the audience discussion that followed): as most of the men on the panel did, Lorna Smedman also described a personal reencounter with the anthology, although she hadn't come to it the first time when it was originally

published, but rather in the '70s, by which time it had become a standard text at Naropa. If her reevaluation -- a realization of the anthology's exclusion of women and of the book's ultimate irrelevance to her as a result -- was far more radical than that of the other panelists, perhaps it's because as a woman she has had more reason to make such a reassessment. I must take it on faith that Diane DiPrima too reevaluated those times; I wish she had spoken of that reevaluation more directly, however. DiPrima talked about the lack of importance to her of being in that anthology in the first place; I would have liked to have heard her comment on the fact that if all the men in the anthology who were sleeping with other men's wives had been excluded, it might have been a very short anthology indeed. Still, I am pleased to report that Lorna Smedman had the last word of the day. At the end of the panel, moderator Gary Lenhart acknowledged one limit of the anthology's title when he said that "In another sense maybe instead of The New American Poetry, we might understand it as the Poetry of New Americans." "*Some* new Americans," Smedman said.

And so the panels ended, if not the questions. With all the talk about the importance of historical context, *The New American Poetry* as well as the Creeley panel helped me articulate what for me is the most relevant question that's come out of the conference: Can people transcend their times? Feminism must address such larger social and political issues as racism, nationalism, and imperialism if it is truly to be considered feminism. But we are born into and constantly socialized with a complex set of beliefs and predjudices that come to seem perfectly reasonable to us: How can we step outside them? I wish I had a simple answer to that very complicated question. I know that in one sense the best poets are in fact those who are the most grounded in their times, the most able to capture the particular texture of those times - by which means they make their times timeless. Yet to step out of the mire of one's particular circumstances is what revolutionary and visionary thinking is all about, is how social change gets enacted. And who can we hold as visionaries -- not heroes, I emphasize, but visionaries -- if not our poets? In another crucial sense, then, I believe that our best poets not only can but *must* transcend their times.

EDIE JAROLIM edited the *Collected* and *Selected Poems of Paul Blackburn*. She has written on women writers for such publications as *Poetics Journal* and *Central Park*.



THE BODY AS AUTHOR

PRESENTED AS PART OF THE POETRY AND KNOWLEDGE PANEL
by Elaine Equi

To introduce the part of the body writing (make it visible, readable): arm, wrist, hand, finger, mouth... To inscribe it in the fable, to make of it a character in the intrigue. As if everything depended upon that: upon the hand that separates itself from the body through writing.
Claude Royet-Journoud

When I first heard the title for this panel, I had some problems with it. It intimidated me and I wasn't even sure that, vast as the topic sounded, I would be able to find an area within it where I would feel comfortable. The more I thought about it though, the more I realized that the source of my hesitation came from the small, innocuous word "and." Coming as it does between poetry and knowledge, it implies a separation. One that brings to mind, at least for me, a whole slew of negative associations.

For one thing, it makes knowledge and poetry two separate entities, as if knowledge were a sort of content or subject matter to be inserted or extracted from the form of the poem. Of course, there are many poems where this seems to be the case. Archeology, history, philosophy and science are all fields of knowledge that have spawned interesting and important poems, and I see nothing wrong with this per se. My reservations arise when some types of knowledge are privileged over others and these are usually the fields that have traditionally excluded women. So this whole idea of "poetry and knowledge" lends itself to the creation of a framework wherein women will always find themselves slotted as the less serious writers. It also seems to slot poetry as a less important form of writing, almost as if poetry were a kind of decorative holder for knowledge, or a way to merchandise knowledge for non-serious minds.

When I made a slight shift however, from poetry and knowledge, to poetry as knowledge, the topic seemed somewhat more manageable. Although I know it's the business of poetry to quibble over the difference between an "and" and an "as" (something which ordinarily would irritate me) -- in this case, the change it made was striking. So striking, I felt it physically.

Why is this? Probably the main reason is because it erases the separation between knowledge and poetry, and implies that poetry is not inferior to knowledge, but is itself a kind of knowledge. Also, it changes knowledge from a static thing to a process -- the knowledge is revealed in the process of reading or writing the poem. Now since this knowledge is so involved in reading and writing, I have to assume it's a kind of linguistic knowledge that poetry has to offer. Interestingly though, the more I focus on what happens between words, the more I begin to think about the body and its relation to language -- not only as a site for the poem, but also as interpreter / interrupter of it.

At first, I was reluctant to even mention the body. Just the word can bring up all sorts of New Age ideas, and it's easy to imagine a series of poems that celebrates getting in touch with the right elbow or left kneecap. A sort of personal biography of the body with all the limitations of that convention. That's not what I mean.

Rather what I mean is the body in its relationship to language. We speak of the body of a letter, of a paragraph, a body of work. Roland Barthes puts it this way: "Does the text have form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body... The pleasure of the the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas -- for my body does not have the same ideas as I do." Artaud also touches on this in his essay "Situation of the Flesh" -- "I retrace all the pathways of my thought in my flesh... There is a mind in the flesh, but a mind quick as lightning."

Thinking about the connection between body and language and the kind of knowledge it might offer us, I began looking at different poets to see how this idea surfaced in their work. None, however, really satisfied me. Whitman's "Body Electric" seemed too saintly and ecstatic for me to relate to, Artaud seemed too crazy and extreme, and while Olson says in his essay "The Resistance" that the body is the answer -- his concept, with its emphasis on breath, didn't appeal to me either. It seemed too literal.

One writer though, who did help clarify these issues in my mind was Paul Celan. Although most people bring up his name in reference to the uniqueness of his language, and the manner in which he seemed to forge an almost personal vocabulary, what I was really fascinated by was

the strange, distorted use he made of distance, gesture, and in particular, of the body. Just a random flipping through of his work reveals lines like these: "from an unpaired/ burgeoning-cleft/ flag-like lung," "Porous leaf/ for a mouth," "your slit-/ awake vein/ untangles," "to chew/ this bread with/ writing teeth," "hobgoblins/ calve/ from your glassy/ tits," and "slack-jawed/ fool above the treadmill/ on your earlobe hangs/ your eye."

Of course, it is not surprising that someone who spent a year and a half in a concentration camp and whose parents both died there, would have written poems strewn with dismembered body parts. But what is of particular interest to me is how instead of horror, he seems to use this fragmented sense of body in a positive, almost ecstatic way. What I mean by this is how the sense of fragmentation opens the way for an extended sense of self to emerge, or as Celan puts it in one of his poems: "Discus/ starred with premonitions/ throw yourself/ out of yourself."

One reading of his work lends itself to the idea that by regathering these disparate parts, he is reclaiming himself as a whole (the self in its wholeness) but I think the work goes further than this. Because it also seems true to me that his focus on the body is used as a springboard toward reclaiming his language. By starting from the part rather than the whole body -- the twitch, the blink, the reflex -- he discovers a way to speak about the unspeakable.

As a woman, his work is particularly inspiring to me. Women are no strangers to fragmentation in literature. The Petrarchan code, for example, is based upon the systematic dissection of the female body described by an objectifying male voice.

I would say that one of the most valuable pieces of knowledge I gained from Celan is a method and direction for using this fragmentation to my advantage. I could reclaim myself, but in a larger, more open and flowing sense--that is, my subjectivity could encompass many identities and still maintain its sense of self. I'm reminded here of Deleuze and Guattari, "The full body does not represent anything at all... We pass from one field to another by crossing threshholds: we never stop migrating, we become other individuals as well as other sexes and departing becomes as easy as being born or dying."

This whole idea of the speaker migrating from body to body -- or in Celan, from body-part to body-part -- isn't entirely new. In some ways it recalls certain aspects of older poetic traditions. Ovid begins *The Metamorphosis* by stating: "My intention is to speak of bodies changed to different forms." Also in more "primitive" poetries, the speaker or shaman could shift from body to body or even object to object.

For my purposes, this is all appealing because it gives me a way to write. But beyond that, it offers me a very useful type of knowledge. Since fragmentation seems a fact of modern life for everyone, approaching it as a migration can produce exhilaration rather than fear. And the individual subject is not so much done away with, as it is expanded to include a more collective sense.

Elaine Equi's latest books are *Views Without Rooms* (Hanuman) and *Surface Tension* (Coffee House). She currently teaches a workshop at the Westside Y.

REVIEWS

Fractured Karma by Tom Clark.
Black Sparrow Press (24 Tenth Street, Santa Rosa, CA 95401), 1990.
168 pages, $12.50 paper, $20 cloth.

In my version, in the beginning or towards the beginning (of the world), it was assumed by people that anyone might know as much as the other. Then, as now, nobody knew what happened when you died; nobody knew what dreaming was, exactly; nobody knew how to characterize Nothing. The people made up story-song-philosophies, to fill the void of this not knowing, or maybe something *was* known, somehow remembered from the very beginning. At any rate, a poet was a composite (perhaps) anonymous (perhaps) voice of that endeavor & tradition. In the worsening of the world from sometime primeval until now, knowing--which is irrevocably unified, being something happening in a single mind--got allocated to separated-out categories, academic departments; the sexes became specialized (women were made not to know); & poetry lost its connection with religion, mythology, philosophy--became words, which are next to nothing.

Tom Clark's *Fractured Karma* is a book that for much of its length confronts questions of death & sleep, absence & return, before & after ("All life/Is a process of removal from life"--"...at last dawn comes/ Once again with its implications of the routine/Ways of knowing and acquiring and accepting by which/Unbelievably we are once more allowed to forget all this"). Part of my first impression of the book was of an obsession with states of color & iridescence, changes of light & cloud, leaves moving--emanations of something in nothing, what you see after what you're supposed to see stops being there. What changes there are in something usually perceived as static, a landscape. Another question: what is it to contemplate wordless, imaginationless (presumably) death, if you are a poet? The vantage of the book is grim involvement combined with the detachment of the master poem-maker. The work is often visionary, & even the poems about movie stars & writers, taken together, remind one of some strange new Tarot deck (though you don't "see" the figures). In all this Clark uses only his language & imagination--the known Tom Clark style from before (increased power & musicality)--no guru, no philsopher, no physicist, no linguistics man--no other expert to lean on. The book is scary, & very beautiful. This place he writes from, of void/non-void overlap, is a pure arena for the imagination to play in; & Clark is likewise pure: austere, bleak, exalted too. The trappings are as shimmering as ever.

PERISHABLE MEMO

I saw your body swim up the vivid night sky
A silvery white weight wet haired
Salmon breasting fire tides in silk swift ascension
While on the wide flowing black periphery
Wild stars flared out and showered
Failing to follow you in your higher leaping motion

But with my memory that fluid shape too will die
No one will see what I've seen
No one will go where I've been
Wan worlds from which the colors drained away
Leaving only these strange unearthly word outlines

The book is entered by the reader through the cover photo, of a painting by John Register (*Waiting Room for the Beyond*) of an empty chair in an empty room among clouds. The first sequence of poems (there are seven sections in the book) describes this painting from the point of view of one who, as "the clouds will pile/ Up soft as carpeting beneath/my feet... will return through/ The flood of sunlight and take/ My seat." The two subsequent sections meditate on winter dusk, darkness & dawn of the Solstice (return of the earth); & on a mix of archetypal figures, most especially one Psyche (the title sequence). Very gradually the book slides into something more like "the World": birds, trees & bulldozers (the building of an "Animal Research Facility" at Berkeley), a world of figures in movies & books. The movie-star types show up in the sixth section (actually numbered 5: *An Obsession*): Columbus, Kim Bassinger, St. Theresa, Ray Milland, Caravaggio, Hart Crane, Thomas Hardy, etc. The last section of the book is an extended narrative poem, one line / sentence per page, about the life of the British entertainer George Formby. Thus the progress of the book is from air to earth, from clouds to the center of the planet (Formby in coffin, listening to a clog-dance on the wood), which is insideout to one's expectations of shape or psychology. It's as if Troilus rose up into the aether at the *beginning* of *Troilus & Criseyde*. One also suspects that the chronology of the poems is reversed--though not strictly--from most recent to least. Since this "backwardsness" feels so odd, the book lingers in the mind. Or that is one reason the book lingers. For the writing is exceptionally good; its virtuosity never runs ahead of what is being said, & so everything does get said. The repetition of lines from poem to poem, & from section to section, is thrilling--it is also part of the sameness intrinsic to the subject of much of the poetry--landscapes of traffic, air, thought, birdsong.

I've found in the past few years that there are occasions in a life when contemporary poetry is absolutely no help. It seems to have ceased to provide spiritual guidance. Trivialized by extremes of autobiographical & urban provincialism, & of philosophical & linguistic theorizing, how can it be of use to "the reader" when the reader most needs it? One would like a whole poetry that assumed a whole reader (one who didn't have to be just like the poet mirror to mirror in order to understand the poet's poems--read the same books, live in the same neighborhood). This can be done without loss of specificity, if the poet stands in the center of what's important to anyone, as Clark has done, in the truth-telling place, & focuses outside his/her name & curriculum, into possibility. When it's time for you to have personal dealings with the archetypes, wouldn't you like to have a poet handy?

CASSANDRA

A primordial age underlies all events now
Moved by some blunt impulse as if snowblind
This is the hour when the mysteries emerge
Drawn by the dark earth rising plants
She expressed herself in many different ways
Saying "I've lost control again"
The fatality the girl from Kentucky

Everything is determined from before
Fate has dragged Snow White away
With a flash of pulses like a suicidal star
And we are howling or beating out our souls
Somehow it all makes sense though not really
There is none of that sharp outline we think of as reality
And she is still waiting on the moon palace stairs
As if she understood the wind & the rain

Reviewed by ALICE NOTLEY

If You're A Girl by Ann Rower, Semiotext(e)
(522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027),
1990. 270 pp., $6.00 paper.

While reading *If You're A Girl* by Ann Rower, I was strangely reminded of *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* by Amiri Baraka. On the most obvious and important levels, I was similarly moved by the emotionally urgent prose, keen wisecracks, the vulnerable public recounting of sometimes unpleasant personal episodes, and the way the writers artfully temper this direct revelation to create the distance between reader and writer that makes such revelation not just tolerable, but engaging. More trivially, I remembered how apparently hasty writing and careless proofreading allowed characters in Baraka's book to appear by their real names on the same page (or subsequent page) in which they appeared thinly disguised by transparent pseudonyms.

The writing here isn't hasty but does have a spontaneous vigor. The proofreading leaves something to be desired. But for the most part, Ann Rower has yielded autobiography's inherent authority to emphasize the fictive and playfully arbitrary nature of her writing. Though the first person narrator (and most of these stories have one) often seems to be identical with the author, a pseudonymous character strongly resembling the author sometimes intercedes (one even has a lover with the same name as the author's lover). In one of the book's tours de force, "Trick or Treat," we read a story in which some of the characters' names have been changed, then are given a critique by one of them that includes his opinions about the name changes. Sometimes we are given passages that appear to be straight from the author's diaries or transcriptions of taped conversations in which she was a participant. The book even includes an interview that the Wooster Group conducted with the author as they prepared to create a piece about Timothy Leary. Ann Rower, who knew Leary (and more particularly his psilocybin) at Harvard in 1961, then becomes a character in the Wooster Group production, "LSD...Just the High Spots."

I'm afraid, as I describe this, that I've made it sound terribly much like avant-garde fiction of the trendy and monotonous French variety. This is, admittedly, writing highly conscious of itself as writing. But if *If You're a Girl* can at times seem coy, that's noticeable only because rare. The book is more moving than tricky and is full of plenty of juicy incident. Just pick it up and begin reading anywhere. There are tales of madness, violence, drugs, and sex (this last alone and in varied combination with the other three). There are nights in the Hollywood Holiday Inn, Bellevue, and even a house of prostitution. There are glamorous celebrities, most notably the author's uncle, Leo Robin, who was known among Hollywood songwriters as "the poet" and who wrote, among others, "Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend," "Beyond the Blue Horizon," "Prisoner of Love," "Blue Hawaii," "If I Should Lose You," "Louise (every little breeze seems to whisper)," and "Thanks for the Memory," which became Bob Hope's theme song. There are two stories of how lines from this last song were censored for being too risque. Bob Hope himself makes a cameo appearance, as do Allen Ginsberg, Arthur Koestler, and Alan Watts (not as a quartet). Every page is full of life and music, although death and its agents never seem far away.

I hope I'm not saying more about myself than the book when I fondly describe Rower's sensibility as beat. I don't mean that this book is in any way nostalgic, picturesque, or provincial. I'm referring to a sensibility like Whitman's and Celine's, one that embraces a language enriched by all social strata, and that aspires to approximate the aesthetic pleasures of music without sacrificing the semantic content of words or experience. A friend who read one of Rower's stories in a magazine told me that she found it too cynical. Admittedly, many of these stories could be called slightly noirish. Perhaps it's the frequent trips to Los Angeles, where even rich Beverly Hills seems slightly sordid, perhaps it's the drugs. But I think it's the sheer effusion of style that reminds one of Raymond Chandler, or more accurately, William Faulkner. As with Faulkner, some might interpret the bleakness of her vision as cynical, but I've never found it anything but very, very smart. The eyes blink, but never fade to soft focus. She's curious about what makes all kinds of people tick, and there's an almost mystical sensitivity to context. There's hope also, not for the success of world government, but for the tolerance of -- and even more hopefully, the delight in -- human difference. In an old mode, there's a faith in the soulful, and the soul is always incarnate.

For instance, throughout the interview about Leary, many of the discussants recall the 1960s. For most, it is a generalized, strongly mediated version, as in "what it was like to be alive in the 1960s." Their memories are faithful and familiar. Ann Rower, however, is at once less certain of what happened and more precise in her description of it. She remembers only what it was like to be Ann Rower in 1961, and even that is filtered through what it's like to be Ann Rower in 1984, when the interview occurred. For which I'm grateful to her imaginative powers. Because I can't imagine being her or being there, having been someone else somewhere else. This is not the kind of writing that confirms your settled memory and leaves you nodding your head and saying "I know exactly how you feel." Instead, these stories are exotic, credible, startling, and revelatory.

In light of her comments that there's "always something criminal about writing," that "there's something toxic and poisonous in lies," and that she wants to "put back the Lie in Li(t)erature, as in Li(f)e," I'll risk sounding dumb to state flat out my admiration for the integrity of her writing. Contrary to the credo of creative writing classes, truth doesn't abide in consistency of tone or detail. Such crafted consistencies may well be truth's greatest enemy; they are certainly boredom's ally. Ann Rower writes in another "realist" mode, the mode where psychological stammering and Freudian conjunctions come out to play with the world's manifold aspects. It's the "realist" mode where her predecessors are Gertrude Stein, Faulkner, and Jack Kerouac (all of whom read French writers too). A regard for truth, in its more difficult aspects, suffuses every line.

In one memorable instance, the author describes how her ex-husband freaked out on 20 tabs of psilocybin and spent a day on his knees in the closet. Parenthetically, she adds that he claims it was she who cowered in the closet all day -- after the launch of a Sputnik. She needn't question the reliability of her own testimony like that, except that she knows contradictions make a fiction more credible (and also illustrate forcefully the amount of pharmaceuticals ingested by both spouses).

An entire section of the book is titled "Transfiction," a term which the author admits to having made up and which she explains as fiction created while transcribing dialogue from tape recordings. As she describes it:

> *In transfiction, you utilize this tension, you let your hands do what they want to on the keys, from being faithful to every um, and, er, every pause and beat of the original spontaneous spoken words, to modifying it slightly, changing plot and finally writing dialogue no one ever spoke to throw it into another world.* (PAGE 270)

This other world is the one that interests me, the visionary world of art. As Dore Ashton commented at a Poetry Project Symposium panel about the New York School Poets, "whatever it was about, it wasn't about ordinary life."

Reviewed by GARY LENHART

RON PADGETT, *Great Balls of Fire*, revised edition
(Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1990), 96 pp., $8.95 paper.
RON PADGETT, *The Big Something*
(Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 1990), 64 pp., $7.50 paper.

Ron Padgett's *Great Balls of Fire*, his first major book, was published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1969. It was one of the most noted books by the second wave of New York School poets who were reaching a wider audience at that time, a period which saw the trade press publication of Ted Berrigan's *Sonnets*, Tom Clark's *Stones*, Peter Schjeldahl's *White Country*, and Tony Towle's *North*. Coffee House press has recently published a revised edition of Padgett's book.

Great Balls of Fire's reappearance makes an interesting comparison to *The Big Something*, published by Geoffrey Young's press The Figures, which consolidates the chapbooks and uncollected poems written over the last decade or so. As one would expect, comparing the poems of a young man in his middle 20's to those of a middle-aged man approaching 50, the youthful exuberance and occasional arrogance have softened. Padgett's son has grown. Friends are dead. A "mellowing sadness," to use Padgett's words, pervades many of the poems here, but there is still energy and insouciance aplenty.

In an interview published about 20 years ago, Padgett spoke of two ways of writing a poem, comparing them to ways of taking a vacation. In the conservative way, you plan each step of the trip: destination to be reached each day, sights to be seen, budget allocated for each event. The other way is to simply take off, counting on chance and hoping that luck (and skill) will bring you back home instead of leaving you stranded in the desert. The second way has been Padgett's program for his own poetry. His strength has always lain in his trust of his sensibility. He lets an idea or impression fly, and then he stays with it, hangs on for the ride, long after most of us would have bailed out in frustration or terror. He'll risk slightness or incomprehensibility. And nine out of ten times, he'll bring the poem in for a successful landing.

Great Balls of Fire is manifestly the work of a young man. There are borrowings from teachers, poetic ancestors, and compatriots (e.g. the wonderful Koch-inspired "Falling in Love in Spain or Mexico"). There's a wild joy in being young and being a poet among poets, with jostling and is-that-my-line-or-yours horseplay (at least two lines here reappear in Berrigan's "Tambourine Life"). There are manifesto-like odes in the best Futurist style, with helpful Italian translations beneath them making them both homage and parody and allowing a young poet to eat his cake and have it, too. There's even "Some Bombs," in which Pierre Reverdy's *Des Poemes* are "translated" phonetically into English. Results such as the following led initial reviewers of the book to place Padgett squarely in the Dada tradition:

> On Intends Creek
> -cest a "whyso?" of the newt
> The montage swallows a toot
> Twos "suh" key oinks purrs the butt
> Gene Autry sleeps
> (from "Some Bombs" GBOF)

Though "Some Bombs," "The Complete Works," and others contain beautiful word-sperm, they don't, to my taste, fertilize anything, instead invoking the response that the 16th century poet John Lyly's works give Padgett:

> Lyly's language is gorgeous,
> of course, occasionally irritating,
> too, so you feel satisfied
> to have the experience just
> behind you. (from "Euphues," TBS)

The *Great Balls of Fire* poems that seem strongest today are the ones -- I was going to say, the ones less overtly literary, but Padgett will masterfully drop a literary allusion into the most personal poems -- the ones with a sense of being derived from Padgett's life instead of from the the books he read. "Joe Brainard's Painting Bingo," "Strawberries in Mexico," "16 November 1964," "When I Think More of My Own Future Than of Myself," all of these plus some of the short things hold up well. By the way, the revisions in the new edition are few and don't amount to much, just the occasional tightening of a loose nut.

The Big Something is a thinner book. There's no filler here; in these poems and short prose pieces, Padgett knows what he wants. He wrote once in a poem, perhaps only partly in jest, that he hoped he never found his "voice," but he has, and it's unmistakeable. It's a seemingly simple voice, American as Beaver Cleaver, decent, with Bible Belt good manners. At first reading, his emotional extremes seem to be a "golly gee" excitement and an anger of the "dadgummit" variety. But Padgett works best in this middle range, where he can exercise his formidable wit and sneak in his erudition (I loved the Keats tag in "Euphues"). When he goes tragic, it doesn't quite work: compare "Dog," his lament for Berrigan and Edwin Denby, with Berrigan's own laments for dead friends. Berrigan's poems in this mode are more touching because Berrigan wrote with an Irish sentiment (and occasional sentimentality) that Padgett does not permit himself.

Peter Schjeldahl, comparing Padgett and Kenneth Koch, once wrote that Koch mounts a frontal assault in every line, while Padgett's strategy is to parachute his troops in behind the lines. The parachute metaphor is appropriate, for a recurring image in Padgett's work is of floating off and coming back, both operations happening sometimes gently, sometimes with terrific force. Verbs such as "float," "leap," "fly," "blow," "sink," "fall," and "flutter" occur again and again in his poems. In a similar manner, his poetry is forever floating off, buoyed by a big fat abstraction, then falling with a thump back to the word as a thing on the page.

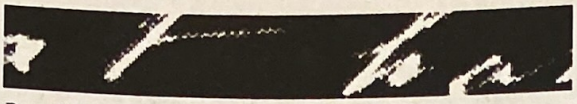
> There must be a place as funny
> as the one I describe, somewhere,
> perhaps an imaginary night club
> that has plenty of "class" in the attractive riffraff
> who are its habitues, the accent mark
> carried like a dagger in the brain.
> (from "How to Be a Woodpecker," TBS)

Padgett also loves to take a word literally and see what associations arise, as in "A Brief Correspondence Course," where he takes the closing "cordially" at face value, or in "American Cowslip," where he dissects the flower's name into its components in best Marx Brothers style and then puts the name back together, a new abstraction.

Autobiography has always played a part in Padgett's work, and he continues it here. "Coors" and "Oklahoma Dawn" evoke the Oklahoma, still not quite loved, where he grew up. "Snow" recalls his student days at Columbia. "My Room" in part relates a practical joke he played on Berrigan when they were young poets together. The poems set "today" are suffused with a gentle domesticity, a loving counterpoint to the flights of abstraction.

Was it Hemingway who defined courage as grace under pressure? Based on this definition, Padgett has to be one of the most courageous poets writing today. He has faith in his intellectual processes, his mental dexterity, and his ability to hold disparate images together in a graceful tension. He doesn't force them into a goosestepping chorus line, but, as Merce Cunningham does in his choreography, lets them dance their various solos, all weaving into one larger dance. It looks easy. It's not.

Reviewed by REAGAN UPSHAW



RENE RICARD, *God With Revolver*, Hanuman Books
(P.O. Box 1070, Old Chelsea Station, N.Y., N.Y. 10113).
102 pp., $12 paper, $20 cloth.

EDWARD DORN, *Abhorrences*, Black Sparrow Press.
174 pp., $12.50 paper, $20 cloth.

FRANZ WRIGHT, *And Still the Hand Will Sleep in its Glass Ship*,
Deep Forest Press (391 Chestnut St., San Francisco, CA 94133).
20 pp., $4 paper.

Poet Rene Ricard, Warhol child star of the Sixties and legendary underground New York nightworld cult celebrity, has until now been more talked about than read. In *God With Revolver* Ricard sympathetically identifies with Hollywood glamor stars like Ginger Rogers and Joan Crawford ("beauty we know / was just a matter of the right angle and lighting"), lyrically documents life-hustles, cheap romances and fallen dreams among the high society "art hystericals," and frankly catalogues the damage, pain and loneliness wreaked by a life unreservedly committed to love and poetry.

Set against a background of drastic contrasts in landscape, attitude and mood--the ironic distance between the French Embassy and Jack in the Box--Ricard's poems are at once tough and romantic, innocent and streetwise. Many of them are bittersweet anthems to faithless lovers ("the great perfidies from those we love the most") that state a fatalistic acceptance of the "poetic justice" of pain and loss as the inevitable aftermath of passion.

"The inside of the body pushes toward the outside / and I push myself through streets full of men... I know that love is a terrible thing / and a god of love will finish my life," Ricard writes. "My life is not such important merchandise."

In these poems, danger is always just around the corner, also madness, poverty and murder: "I've had too many knives pointed at me to think it's a coincidence."

A master at striking attitudes, Rene Ricard makes his poetry not simply the realistic mirror but the mythic "movie" of his life ("no vision but vues")--one that takes place in an atmosphere of glamor dreams and dramatic poses, on "the dark side of the night," and at "a certain distance from oneself."

For any book to provoke serious thought by running counter to the grain of the times is a rare thing; for a Poetry book to do so nowadays is practically unheard of. The biting epigrammatic verse satire of Edward Dorn is in that sense not only uncontemporary but anti-modern, a throwback to the eighteenth century of Pope and Swift, when critical intelligence and verse not only could but commonly did occupy the same mansion of the mind.

A fearlessly anachronistic and unreconstructed candor inhabit every line of Dorn's *Abhorrences*, a bitter denunciatory epitaph and journal of aversions to American life in the 1980's.

The Eighties, in Dorn's hard-eyed view, can now be recognized as "the last bit of paradise / hoving out of view," a time in which "the exploiter and the exploited / entered oblivion together" in "endless tupperware orgies" of fraud, cupidity, hypocrisy, vapidity and inanity. The decade's inheritance, the poet suggests, is a dreamless, seamless, largely senseless empire of airheads, cruising into the future under the power of the mechanical consumption of each avaricious citizen, all motivated solely by his or her "own individual good."

"I want to hear sandstone / intelligence / on the dull edge of truth," digruntled radio listener Dorn gives as his excuse for switching off "All Things Considered" at the end of one poem. His own resistance is abrasive, dry and fine enough to burn through the false cultural currencies of the present moment like acid applied to bankcard plastic.

Franz Wright's *And Still the Hand Will Sleep in its Glass Ship* introduces an intriguing new voice of stark, spacey expressionist distortion and anxious Traklesque subjectivity. The penetralium of mystery and negative capability in which John Keats once located the source of poetry opens up here and there in this newcomer's work, releasing an eerie analogical power--most strikingly in a blind, tumbling reach after metaphor titled "Gone":

"I dreamed you came and sat beside me on the bed / It was something that you had to tell me / I dreamed you came and sat beside me / Like a drowning at a baptism / Like an embittered shopper returning / The sad misspelled obscenities on men's room walls / Snow on dark water... something."

Reviewed by TOM CLARK

Tom Clark's latest book is a collection of essays, *The Poetry Beat* (University of Michigan Press).

BOOKS RECEIVED:

Walter Abish, *99: The New Meaning*, Burning Deck
(71 Elmgrove Ave., Providence, RI 02906). 110 pp., $8 paper/$20 cloth.

Ann-Marie Albiach, *ETAT*, Awede
(Box 376, Windsor, VT 05089). 122 pp., $10 paper.

Jack Anderson, *Field Trips on the Rapid Transit*, Hanging Loose Press
(231 Wyckoff St., Brooklyn, NY 11217). 89 pp., $9 paper.

Andrei Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside: A Manifesto for Escape*,
Addison & Wesley Publishing Co., Inc., 216 pp., $17.95 cloth.

Diane Di Prima, *Pieces of a Song: Selected Poems*, City Lights
(261 Columbus Ave., SF, CA 94133). 206 pp., $10.95 paper.

Michael Gizzi, *Just Like a Real Italian Kid*, The Figures
(5 Castle Hill, Gt. Barrington, MA 01230). 20 pp., $4 paper.

Wayne Kline, *Asbestos*, Edge Books
(P.O. Box 25642, Washington, DC 20007). 56 pp., $6 paper.

Steve Katz, *Journalism*, Bamberger Books
(P.O. Box 1126, Flint, MI 48501). 100 pp., $9.50 paper.

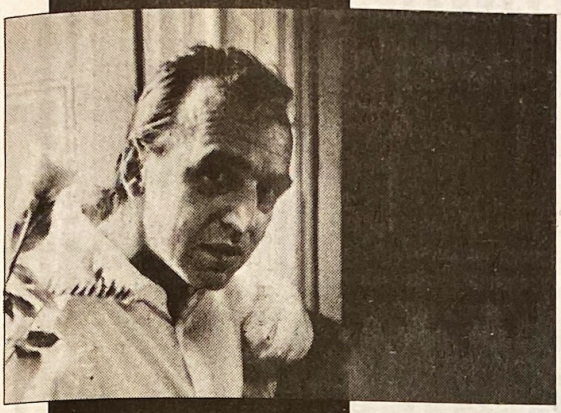
Jackson Mac Low, *French Sonnets*, Membrane Press
(P.O. Box 11601 - Shorewood, Milwaukee, WI 53211). 30 pp., no price listed.
_____, *Words nd Ends from Ez*, Avenue B
(P.O. Box 542, Bolinas, CA 94924). 93 pp., $7.50 paper.

Laura Moriarity, *Like Roads*, Kelsey St. Press
(P.O. Box 9235, Berkeley, CA 94709). 74 pp., $8.

Dennis Teichman, *V-8*, Past Tents Press
(3168 Trowbridge, Hamtramck, MI 48212). 61 pp., $6 paper.

NEW *Titles From Hanuman* BOOKS

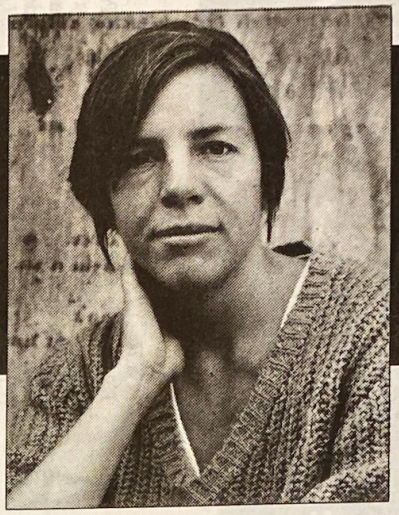
Rene Ricard
God With Revolver



Exquisite poems from the black prince of poetry. "Ricard's struggles, brought about through his insight into perversions of society, are profound and important ones."
-Publishers Weekly

102 pages $12.00 paper
$20.00 cloth

Eileen Myles
1969



In this obituary for the 1960s and her own lost youth, Eileen Myles once again reveals her-self as one of thefinest chroniclers of her generation.

64 pages $4.95 paper

Gregory Corso
Mind Field

Rome, that home-in-exile of the great Romantic poets, provides background and inspiration for this volume of new poems and haikus by one of the finest poets of this-or-any age.

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Elaine Equi
Views Without Rooms

Casual simplicity and com plex emotions are intertwined in these terse and subtle poems. Equi turns the world of appearances ever so slightly as to reveal the inner nature of people and things.

46 pages $4.95 paper

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THE POETRY PROJECT
OCTOBER/NOVEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

OCTOBER

1 Open reading

3 ALICE NOTLEY & MAUREEN OWEN

Alice Notley is the author of over 15 books of poetry including *Homer's Art* (Institute for Further Studies, 1990), *At Night the States* (Yellow Press 1988) and *Work in Progress* (Dia Foundation 1989). She edits, with Douglas Oliver, *Scarlet* magazine.

Maureen Owen's books include *Zombie Notes* (Sun Press), and *AE* (Vortex). *Imaginary Income* is forthcoming. Her work is included in the *Broadway Two* anthology.

8 MISS EUPHROSYNE BLOOM ET VAAL.

Carnivale de Tendresse. Poesie et Peinture.

10 BOB FLANAGAN AND DAVID TRINIDAD

Bob Flanagan and David Trinidad will be reading from their recently published book of collaborations, *A Taste of Honey* (Cold Calm Press, 1990) as well as from their solo books. Flanagan is the author of the infamous *Fuck Journal* (Hanuman Books). Trinidad's books of poems include *Monday, Monday* (1985) and *November* (1987).

14 LECTURE SERIES:

Frank O'Hara's *Second Avenue* read by Elizabeth Fox, Kenneth Koch, Gary Lenhart, Alfred Leslie, Joe LeSueur, Sharon Mesmer, Ron Padgett, Larry Rivers, Sparrow, Paul Schmidt, Susie Timmons, Tony Towle, and others to be announced. Talks on the poem by Kenneth Koch and Leslie Scalapino. **(3 PM)**

15 DARK STAR CREW

Dark Star Crew includes Finnegan, Nicole Breedlove, Maria Diaz, Christian Toth, Miz Mad, Stuart and Malkia, who are a coalition of powerful young poets who have performed together at the Poets Cafe and the Knitting Factory.

17 BOB HOLMAN & JEROME WASHINGTON

Bob Holman is a co-director of the NuYorican Poets Cafe and executive producer of *Poetry Spots* on WNYC-TV. He was in residence this summer at the Brooklyn Academy of Music with the poets' performing collective Dark Star Crew.

Jerome Washington's collections of poems include *A Bright Spot in the Yard* (Crossing Press, 1989) and *One Crow, One Budda* (Dem Dare Books, 1990). He is also the author of a fiction collection, *Beanfields* (Dem Dare Books, 1990).

22 CRAIG WATSON & DALE GOING

Craig Watson is the author of *0.10* (Awede), *Discipline, After Calculus*, and *Unsuspended Animation* forthcoming from paradigm press.

Dale Going is the author of *As/Of the Whole*, the 1990 San Francisco State University Chapbook Selection.

24 WANDA PHIPPS & ELIZABETH FOX

Actor, journalist and poet Wanda Phipps' recent poems have been published in *Exquisite Corpse, Transfer* and *Gallery Works*. Her articles and interviews have appeared in *High Performance, Paper Magazine* and *Cover Arts New York*.

Elizabeth Fox is the author of *Limousine Kids on the Ground*. Her recent poems have appeared in *Transfer* and *Shiny* magazines and she collaborated with Rudy Burckhardt on the film *Mystic Grange or Our Favorite Flower*.

29 JOCELYN GARLINGTON & RIKKI LIGHTS

Poets Jocelyn Garlington, a native of Baltimore and Rikki Lights of Philadelphia, author of *Dog Moon* (Sunbury Press), are the featured artists from Seventh Son Press, a small press dedicated to the work of Third World poets, writers & visual artists and publisher of the journal, *Blind Alleys*.

31 BOBBIE LOUISE HAWKINS & ANN ROWER

Bobbie Louise Hawkins's books of poetry and prose include *My Own Alphabet* (Coffee House Press, 1989), *One Small Saga* (Coffee House Press), and *Frenchy and Cuban Pete* (Timbouctou). A recipient of an NEA Fellowship, she is on the writing faculty at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado.

Ann Rower is the author of *If You're a Girl* (Semiotext(e), 1990) and a recipient, with Chris Kraus, of a 1990 Multi-disciplinary Fellowship from the New York Foundation of the Arts.

NOVEMBER

5 Open Reading

7 SUZAN-LORI PARKS & MIKE TYLER
Suzan-Lori Parks is a recipient of a 1990 Obie Award for her play *Imperceptibile Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, as well a a 1990 Fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts. Her play, *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* has just completed a successful run at BACA Downtown.
Poet and playwright Mike Tyler is the Literature and Program Director for ABC No Rio. He is also editor of *A.I.R. (American Idealism Rag)*.

12 ANA MARIA SIMO & ZOPHIA BURR
Ana Maria Simo is a playwright who will read from *How to Kill Her*, a novel in progress.
Zophia Burr is a poet and critic living in Ithaca, NY and has published her work in several small magazines including *Blue Unicorn* and *Banyan*.

14 VINCENT KATZ AND MICHAEL LALLY
Vincent Katz is the author of *Cabal of the Zealots* (Hanuman) and *A Tremor in the Morning* (Peter Blum Edition). He performs with the band The Throbbers.
Michael Lally is at work on his *New and Selected Poems* (1960 -1990). He edited the influential anthology *None of the Above*. Among his collections of poetry are *Hollywood Magic* and *Attitude*.

18 LECTURE SERIES:
Roberto Tejeda: The Image of the Other: the presence of Mexico in North American Arts and Writing. (7PM)

19 DENISE DUHAMEL & HERSCHAL SILVERMAN
Denise Duhamel's chapbooks include *Heaven and Heck* (Cortland Press) and the newly published *Skirted Issues* (Stop Light Press).
Herschal Silverman's many publications include work in *Blue Stones & Salt Hay*, an anthology of New Jersey poets.

26 SHEILA MURPHY &KATIE YATES
Sheila Murphy is the author of the the forthcoming *Teth* (Chax), *Sad Isn't the Color of the Dream* (Stride), and *18/81* (Gesture), a boxed set of 81 poems.
Katie Yates is working on her MFA from the Naropa Institute. Her manuscipt of poetry is entitled *Daedalus, it's cold here*, and she has published work in *Bombay Gin, In This Corner, The Underground Forest* and *We*.

28 DAVID ANTIN & JACKSON MAC LOW
David Antin's books include *Talking at the Boundaries* (New Directions, 1976) and *Tuning* (New Directions 1984). His *Selected Poems 1963-73* is forthcoming from Sun & Moon.
Among Jackson Mac Low's 21 books of poetry are *Words nd' Ends from EZ* (Avenue B), *Pieces o'Six* (Sun and Moon) and *Representative Works: 1938-1985* (Roof Books 1986).

The Poetry Project

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EVENTS BEGIN AT 8PM UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED: ADMISSION BY CONTRIBUTION OF $5.00.
PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

WRITING WORKSHOPS

The Autobiographical Poem,
Thursdays at 7 pm (October 18 through January 24).
Taught by David Trinidad. The focus of this workshop will be on the use of autobiographical material in poems, with special emphasis on the issue of self-censorship, as well as the degree and effectiveness of self-exposure--from the casual confession to the frighteningly personal revelation.

David Trinidad's five books of poetry include *Monday, Monday* (1985) and *November* (1987). A book of his collaborations with Bob Flanagan, *A Taste of Honey*, is just out from Cold Calm Press.

The Prose of Poetry,
Fridays at 7 pm (October 19 through January 25).
Taught by Larry Fagin. Describing the workshop Fagin said,"The idea would be to free the poet of certain formal concerns (line-breaks, spacing, meter) while retaining most of the other characteristics of verse and, if possible, increasing the intensity or risk. Prose writers might find the form user-friendly. We'll do some reading of early and recent prose poems but mostly we'll consider work by participants in-depth."

PLEASE NOTE: the workshop will be limited to 15 participants.
In order to be considered, a manuscript of up to five pages (prose poems, poems or prose) must be submitted to the Poetry Project by Monday, October 8th--please include your phone number(s) with your manuscripts.

Larry Fagin's books of poetry include *Rhymes of a Jerk* and *I'll Be Seeing You.*

Bilingual Poetry Workshop (English/Spanish)
Saturdays at 12 Noon (October 20 through January 26th) .
Taught by Cecilia Vicuña. A bilingual workshop presented as a continuing exploration of the place of encounter between the two languages. Manuscripts and contemporary poetry will be read in the light of the fusion and confusion arising from this encounter.

Cecilia Vicuña is a Chilean poet and artist living in New York. She has published 7 books of poetry incuding *Precario/Precarious* and is the editor of the series of Latin American literature in translation "Palabra Sur" published by Graywolf Press.

REGISTRATION FEES
Registration for the workshops costs $100, $50 for a year-long membership in the Poetry Project plus $50 annual workshop fee. Current members of the Project need only pay $50 at time of registration, providing they renew their membership when it expires.

LECTURE SERIES

Sunday, October 14th, 3 pm:
A public reading of Frank O'Hara's poem *Second Avenue* on Second Avenue (in the park in front of St. Mark's Church). Followed (in the Parish Hall) by talks on the poem by Kenneth Koch and Leslie Scalapino. Readers include Elizabeth Fox, Kenneth Koch, Gary Lenhart, Alfred Leslie, Joe LeSeuer, Sharon Mesmer, Larry Rivers, Sparrow, Paul Schmidt, Susie Timmons, Tony Towle, and others to be announced. *Second Avenue* (dedicated to Vladimir Mayakovsky) was first published 30 years ago by Totem/Corinth Books. Ted Berrigan said of the poem: "...There are only about four things in it... sort of positive light and dark, and negative...positive dark and negative dark, positive light and negative light and then, how to make a circle, out of those four. And then the division of it into twos... Second Avenue is a particularly apt title for it..." What does the poem have to do with *Second Avenue*? "Nothing and everything" says Joe LeSeuer.

Elizabeth Fox is the author of *Limousine Kids on the Ground* (Rocky Ledge). She is program Director for Teachers and Writers Collaborative. **Kenneth Koch**'s books include *Selected Poems 1950-1982* (Random House) and a forthcoming collection of short stories *Hotel Lambosa*. **Gary Lenhart** is the author of *One at a Time* (United Artists) and is the editor of *Transfer* magazine. **Alfred Leslie** has recently completed a reconstruction for a new print of his film *The Last Clean Shirt* with subtitles by Frank O'Hara. **Joe LeSeuer** is at work on an extended memoir of New York in the 50's and Frank O'Hara. **Sharon Mesmer** is the author of *Jane Mansfield's Head*. Her play "The Sallys," written with Ellen Carter, was shown at the Poet's Theater Festival. **Ron Padgett**'s books of poetry include *The Big Something* (The Figures, 1990) and *Supernatural Overtone* (The Figures, 1990), a collaboration with Clark Coolidge. Painter **Larry Rivers** is writing (with Arnold Weinstein) his unauthorized autobiography. *Second Avenue* was written in his studio. **Leslie Scalapino**'s books include *Way* (North Point Press), and a collection of essays titled *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold.* (Potes and Poets). **Sparrow** is the co-editor of *The 11th Street Ruse*. He recently returned from a trip to Russia. **Paul Schmidt** translated Mayakovsky's play *The Bathtub* for the Empty Space Theater in Seattle. The Second Volume of *The Collected Works of Velimir Klebnikov*, translated by Schmidt in an ongoing series was published by Harvard University Press. **Susie Timmons**' book *Locked from the Outside*, winner of the first annual Ted Berrigan Award, is forthcoming from the Yellow Press. **Tony Towle**'s book of poems *North* won the Frank O'Hara Award. His work has recently appeared in *Broadway Two.*

Sunday, November 18th, 7 pm:
The Image of the Other: The Presence of Mexico in North American Arts and Writing.
Roberto Tejada will discuss the representation of Mexico in film, poetry and the plastic arts and how its mythology, terrain, and politics are approximated, misconceived, and re-cast. The work of Marsden Hartley, Charles Olson, Wallace Stevens, Louise Nevelson, Robert Creeley and Noguchi, among others, will be discussed in relation to Mexico.

Roberto Tejada is a poet and translator currently living in Mexico City. His work has appeared in *Sulfur, o.blek, Acts, Vuelta* and *Artes de Mexico.* He has edited an anthology of North American and British poetry on the subject of Mexico forthcoming from Editoral Vuelta. He edits *Mandorla: New Writing from the Americas*, a bi-lingual semi-annual literary magazine.

SPECIAL SECTION: AUTOBIOGRAPHY

3 STATEMENTS • 10 EXPERIMENTS • 12 POEMS

EDITOR'S NOTE:
I chose this topic for the first issue because it seems one that is still central and argued about by the various factions of the poetry community. In soliciting material, I asked for statements and poems that touched on autobiography or its related topics: identity, use of the "I," writing a life or life as writing. Here are some of the responses.

TO THE WRITER

WILLIAM FULLER

When I read, I am read, so I understand.

Your nouns compel me to repeat you, repeating me. The narrow words pinch. Nothing is itself is the name of this picture.

Being in earnest, you employ devices. Tropologically sheltered from reader-ly rain. But the text has eyes. 'It is the earth's eye, looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.' (1) One stares into this eye in order to appropriate its sight, to be beheld beholding it.

You write with an object in view -- yourself. I read with my version of this object in view, both me and not-me. The visibility of these objects is a prob-lem for imagination. I don't identify with you, or, I identify only in rhetoric.

The poem spontaneously disfigures you. We withdraw into it, living in conjecture. The transference spreads all over the page.

Early in the morning the body in conformity with you. Later in the day the disequilibrium. Later still, the sounds.

You read yourself out there, in your own text, and I read that gesture, read-ing myself responding to it, and how that proleptically shapes what you have written. This morning I heard the phrase 'dead man's escrow.' From now on, I'll read you differently (*my* autobiography).

I think this poem really does constitute you in some way, or I think you think that. But wouldn't that constituting also have to involve me? Lacking that, what have you constituted? This is how the reader manipulates you, with silence.

It seems I keep drifting back to the manifest content. Whereas we both know you want me to found a new text in its shadows.

Reading, I emulate you; writing, you exemplify me.

These lines stage you reading the enigma they've made me. ('The autobio-graphical moment happens as an alignment between two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution.') (2) *When I wrote those lines they became these lines. When you wrote yourself into them they became other.* ('The *I* hides in the other and in others, it wants to be only an other for others, to enter comple-tely into the world of others as an other, and to cast from itself the burden of being the only *I (I-for-myself)* in the world.') (3) *The poem acts us out.* ('Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing.') (4)

The letters behave as though they anchored us in changing thought.

I admire how you undermine my strategies. Keep talking; eventually I'll forget you.

Your enigmas draw me out, put me into play--'I love to lose myself in a mystery.'

I is us, reading to exceed one another. Its poem is what you don't know. I can point to techniques that allow *I* to be constituted, referring them to an intention to use them for the sake of their 'reciprocal orientation.' 'Then the reader crowds the page in the rush of his ideas'--*I* at the top of its game --'Imaginary writing that the writer is writing at the reader's request: the reader did writing to reader and writer, that-is-as reader and the writer can be writer the reader imagined of the reader easier to write than reader and writer in writing as the situation of written differences concentrating the reader's.' (5) Shake it, the sediment floats, writing me. 'I live in Chicago' with the rewriting instinct, the rereading instinct.

Thinking the moment has passed.

'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?' (6) is what indulgence declines to ask, and so the reader indulges. Hence I am uncertain about the authority you claim as registrar of your experience, but my uncertainty is galvanic. I think you sense this but are not happy about it. You don't want a 'central reader' but you've got one.

The reader has a stethoscope.

The text is a hand holding a piece of glass. Nothing is visible beyond it although sounds are heard. The source of the sounds is unknown. Each morning you place yourself in front of the hand and you read. What you read is always influenced by the sounds, sounds which are never themselves.

Stepping into the revolving door, I think of a figure for your work; stepping out, I have already forgotten it.

You're kaleidoscopic; your text isn't. We have these words in common, that's *all.*

Reading is self-discipline; reading well is asceticism. Ascetic play.

Your reader is only too willing to reveal himself to you.

I think *I* can live without your text.

Your text is at the bottom of a shaft.

Analogy between us; analogy between us and it. Another notation wakes another you. I wish I could be here on time.

The seduction of a page of shining eyes. To read I shut my eyes.

I have written you here and in that act you have written me. A part of me and a part of you. Hills of language.

NOTES

1. Thoreau, *Walden*
2. Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*
3. M. M. Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970-1971," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*
4. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*
5. Peter Seaton, *The Son Master*
6. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*

William Fuller's latest book is *byt*, published by O Books.
He lives in Chicago.

THE ORGANIZATION OF APPEARANCES: SOME NOTES ON POETRY AND THE QUOTIDIAN

JOEL LEWIS

The impetus for launching the Modernist movement in Anglo-American poetry was the search, in the words of T.S. Eliot, "for a proper modern colloquial idiom." For the early Modernists, the moving target was the Victorian poetry that they all had grown up with and learned to loathe. Ford Maddox Ford, whose family was related to the Rossettis, recalled attending private readings by Browning and Tennyson:

> *And it went on and on -- and on! A long, rolling stream, of words no-one would ever use, to endless monotonous, polysyllabic, unchanging rhythms, in which rhymes went unmeaningly by like the telegraph posts, every fifty yards, of a railway journey.*

The Modernists succeeded in reintroducing rigor and colloquial language to poetry. But, by raising the level of discourse in poetry, they also marginalized poetry by making the reader a specialist able to understand the free verse line and parse meaning from intentionally difficult texts. While pre-Modernist poets such as Edna Saint Vincent Millay and Robinson Jeffers were best-selling *authors* (as opposed to that oxymoron: a best-selling poet), it took Boni & Liveright ten years to sell out two thousand copies of the first American edition of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Wallace Stevens' great first book, *Harmonium*, did worse. It sold 100 copies of its initial 1,500 copy run. The desire for a colloquial language and the liberation from the "fetters" of iambic ("to break the pentameter, that was the first heave", says Pound in Canto 81) was by no means a populist strategy. Pound and Eliot were antidemocratic (the former thought his homie Mussolini *dope* and the latter envisioned the ideal society as that of a peasantry run by clerics and pointy-head Possum wannabees) and cummings, Stevens and H.D. were conservatives from out of the upper-classes of the late 19th Century.

Alone of that group of early Modernists (though not without prejudices against African-Americans and Jews), William Carlos Williams had a deep interest in including the quotidian in his poetry. Although his upper middle-class background was similar to those of Pound, Stevens & Eliot, he was alone in his feeling not quite an American -- having a Puerto Rican mother, an English father and Jewish ancestry.

Through his suburban medical practice, Williams spent more time with ordinary Americans than most of his peer poets. Still, he was hesitant to depict the world he found in Northern New Jersey. In "Apology" (published in 1917), he describes "the yards cluttered/with old chickenwires, ashes,/ furniture gone wrong;" but ends the poem by stating "No one/will believe this/of vast import to the nation.", as if to head off anticipated criticism of his use of "the anti--poetic". By 1938, his exercises "in the American idiom" present speech transcription, without any qualification, as poetry:

> TO GREET A LETTER-CARRIER
>
> Why'n't you bring me
> a good letter? One with
> lots of money in it.
> I could make use of that.
> Atta boy! Atta boy!

Williams went further than his Modernist colleagues in clearing the ground for a new poetry. Ordinary people and ordinary events become empowered in his poems. He moved from the limitations of Imagism -- the sometimes precious quality of the short Imagist lyric -- to the notion of the poet as documenter and the almost-silent interlocutor of the sentient world.

Since Williams' snapshots of Italians and Poles going about their lives on the back streets of Passaic and Paterson, much has changed with America and with poetry. For one, many American poets are descendants of those very same southern and eastern European immigrants (not to mention African-American, Hispanic & Asian-Americans) that Williams had such a compelling interest in. In this era, the quotidian is us -- our lives in a techno-computer society that seems bent on ridding daily life of all traces of eccentricities and quirks.

Some of the most interesting investigations in the quotidian in recent years have occurred with poets associated with the Poetry Project at Saint Mark's. Although to make a claim for a specific school of "Saint Mark's Poetry" is a risky enterprise (particularly since the mid-eighties, when the decidedly New York School orientation gave way to a varied menu of poetic discourses), it is a useful term to account for a large and varied body and writing that has had considerable influence on English, Canadian and American poetry without receiving much credit.

Lewis Warsh's "Immediate Surrounding" is an eight page recounting of "just /walking home, anxious/to get some work done," with the author "out of curiosity" deciding "to take/a different route." The poem is a decidedly non-dramatic, low-key memoir as keyed by a walk through the East Village. Ordinary items are juxtaposed in the manner they occur:

> man with a broom leans
> against the side of a blue
> car and smokes. The Marxist
> Leninist Information Center, a bookstore, is
> closed.

The title of the poem (*surrounding* rather than the plural *surroundings*) can be considered two separate words, rather than a cliched phrase. "Immediate" as in "immediacy" with the poet as cinematographer and "surrounding" a self-referential description of the poem.

William Corbett often uses the journal form to organize his seemingly casual, but remarkably observant & precise writing:

> 13 November
> That woman she might be mother
> champagne haired, slouching against the building
> on the block where Serge Chaloff's
> mother once taught piano
> (from *Columbus Square Journal*)

Another mother poem? Oh no... it's an "inside" jazz hit -- Chaloff an early death white baritone sax junk hero -- that points to the visibility of time, events and memory in the city.

Maureen Owen's poems are "homemade" much in the manner that Hugh Kenner describes the creation of the American Modernist project. Their casual surfaces mask a skilled weave of interior geography, rambles through the library stacks & reportage from Dunk Rock Road. Her poems often make graceful and radical textual shifts that are grounded in the trunk route of daily expediency:

> we appear Bound in dashes Like
> the guy who after the 6th time was easily caught by
> the police & questioned Why he always robbed
> the *same* donut shop "I don't have a car," he told them
> "& it's close to where I live it's handy."

Wrapping up this regretfully limited list is Bernadette Mayer's booklength poem, *Midwinter Day*. Like much of Mayer's work, it is an experiment in "How To Write": in this case, the long-poem as a documentation of a project of a day's continual writing. This may very well be the Ur-text of American quotidian writing; the massive amount of daily detail and fact is transformed through numerous modes of discourse into one of the most interesting long poems of recent years. The critical silence concerning this text continues to surprise me.

These notes are intended to suggest the possibilities of the quotidian in poetry, its significance in "Saint Mark's Poetry" (Ayee! That phrase again!) and encouragement for further investigations by interested parties. As a poet who stakes out North Jersey as his territory, I find my own identity as a writer rooted to the incidents in the dayworld -- writing not as an escape from the daily life but the means to mediating that world. Daily life remains one of the few autonomous spheres left in the modern world -- though the morality cops are doing their best to police our sexuality, musical taste and politics. In his *Revolution of Everyday Life*, Situationist Raoul Vaneigem notes, "There are more truths in twenty-four hours of a person's life than in all the philosophies." The anarchist Elisee Reclus, a Paris Communard, coined the slogan "Travaillons a' nous rendre inutile" -- "Work to Make Ourselves Useless." And the last word goes to the town drunk of Tarboro, North Carolina: "Sonny Boy, it's all real -- so watch out!"

Joel Lewis was found in the brambles of the Hackensack meadows by Jonathan and Martha Kent, briefly played keyboards in one of the late units of Blood, Sweat and Tears, and prefers his White Castle "sliders " without ketchup.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY'S WILL TO FICTION

CHRIS TYSH

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the infans stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. This form would have to be called the Ideal-I, if we wished to incorporate it into our usual register in the sense that it will also be the source of secondary identifications, under which term I would place the functions of libidinal normalization. But the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being of the subject asymptotically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality.

Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage"

The reader will forgive me this extravagant epigraph, whose complexity cannot be cashed in the simple game of meaning but rather translated (transfered) as the particular problematic relationship between the agency of the ego and the other. Lacan observes the premature *infans* "still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence" seeing itself as a coherent subject which it is far from being. Lacan adds "this form would have to be called the Ideal-I." The subject smiles. Is gleeful. Never mind it is apprehending some future self, the very picture of phantasy. What I would like to retain from Lacan's analysis of the I concerns the *jubilation* of the subject, like a skirt, navy-blue, best seen rushing in front and pleated; worn over nothing, accompanying sign, erotic and fugitive in the field of desire. Not yet treacherous nor practice. The other element I shall take the liberty of grafting onto my reading of autobiographical discourse is Lacan's insistence on *fictionality*. I recognize myself by means of a fictional construct, "in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the subject." Neither the self-recognition nor the image in the mirror obtained by my reflection stand free of distortion, ambiguities, sequestered meanings, resistances, the invevitable artifice of writing. Autobiography, more than others, camouflages its fictionality in the name of an undisputed credit advanced to the genre which guarantees truth (or is supposed to) by collapsing the distance between author and narrator. It is the very same servitude to the notion of a unified, homogenous, ahistoric subject that has seen the autobiographical discourse as the chosen handmaid of veracity for the written subject. In the docudramas of identity carried out by modernity, the first person and the voices it speaks become detached from the retina of the proper and real. Autobiographical writing, like any other writing, is always haunted by the impossibility of adhering, of bridging the gap between itself and what it refers to. Into the gap fall the shadows of seduction, provisional tamperings, the indubitable invraisemblances. First-person writing starts with *meconnaissance*. The text reflects me by lying. The written I can only resemble itself. There seems little doubt some will recoil from unveiling this arrangement.

Yes, of course I have invented it
-- Beverly Dahlen, *A Reading 1-7*

That anyone should have imagined among writing's contingency tables an I in its exact likeness to life, to what happened, was said or remembered is simply a delusion, whipped up into myth by the premium on transperency and feelings. Writ large, autobiography and all the questions of authenticity it raises, posits an ideological fantasy which thrives on dematerializing the act of writing. The practice of writing, whether autobiographical or not is, in the final analysis, always a structure of differing from the living and already lived. "because words take the place of another, pretend, the violence of the word intervening. blessed or damned." (*A Reading 1-7* p. 67). The insight that this rule of intervention, of putting a word, a phrase where none existed can be seen yes, as *blessed*, "a long aching falling from the shoulder" (*Coat of Arms*) or *damned*, roped off from verisimilitude, its own circuit and disaster. More often than not, the scene of writing will encompass both in the mirror effects, sold as autobiography.

Even the most cursory look at *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* cannot fail to impress upon one the simple glaring fact that one prerequisite term is

missing from the cover. According to Philippe Lejeune, a French semiotician, autobiography exists, stictly speaking, formalistically speaking, when A=N=P. Malcolm X is N(arrator) is P(rotagonist) but critically, he is not A(uthor). The license to intervene, aggrandize, damage, invent, approximate, select, derange, yoke together, omit, differ (all vital strategies implicated in the production of a text) belongs to another, Alex Haley, Author. Needless to say, the obvious political ramifications of this set-up remain to be articulated elsewhere.

Autobiography's capacity to self-stage the agency of writing is the desideratum of "poetic autobiographies." The built-in artifice of poesis gives this literary category an infallible oxymoronic ring. A divorce takes place as part of a complicated system of representation by dint of which the autobiographical genre is defetishized while allowed to wear its accoutrements. In works such as Beverly Dahlen's *A Reading 1-7, 11-17* and Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, we witness a levelling off of the autobiographical privilege which sits imbedded in the fiction making. Instead of the imperative for specularity, these texts cue us to the irresistible drive of playing hooky, skipping around the bend and pull of genre, poisoning its very ground. "permanent constructedness." (My Life, p. 94).

Here words and their factoring do not function as a barrier system to life's inexaustible and munificent nature but, must we admit it, as a form of life itself, subverting the priority of life to writing. "For unless autobiography is an entirely gratuitous enterprise, which is possible, it seems to be adding something to the author's life that that life would otherwise have lacked: an affirmation, a shape, a meaning. Writing comes after living, then as its supplement, its supplement of meaning." (Martha Noel Evans). Contrary to this sensible view, one could argue that *A Reading, My Life* and if I may be permitted, my own *Coat of Arms*, usurp the autobiographical structure by highlighting the fictionality of the first-person and the attendant effects, instauring a recitative which is not computed as addition or complementarity but difference. The process of writing, willy-nilly, creates life and its meanings, however vampiristic, however imaginary. Like a translation it betrays its original, self-made nude, waving us on. "I break and traffic with the souvenir of a smile, that which insinuates, performs, writes. Incredibly fake." (Coat of Arms) If the new, postmodern poetic autobiographies seem to usher us into an esthetics of dissemblance, masquerade, increasing hybridization, wherein even the autobiographical voice is inspected for breaches against institutional decorum or even itself, it may be that it is useless to hang on to moribund structures, crowned by ideological rewards. The desire to rummage and furrow in the literary incinerator shall be read as part critique, part routine in the intractable attempt to continue imagining what was (not) and yet to come.

Works Cited

Beverly Dahlen, *A Reading 1-7 11-17*

Martha Noel Evans,
"Writing as difference in Violette Leduc's
Autobiography, *La Batarde*"

Lyn Hejinian, *My Life*

Jacques Lacan, *The Mirror Stage*

Philippe Lejeune, *The Autobiographical Contract*

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

Chris Tysh, *Coat of Arms*

Chris Tysh lives in Detroit where she teaches English at Wayne State Univeristy. Her play in verse, "Canal," will appear in the next issue of *o.blek*.

TEN THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE

1. In a poem, list what you know.

2. Write household poems -- about cooking, shopping, eating and sleeping.

3. Attempt to write about jobs and how they affect the writing of poetry.

4. Structure a poem or prose writing according to city streets, miles, walks, drives. For example: Take a fourteen-block walk, writing one line per block to create a sonnet; choose a city street familiar to you, walk it, make notes and use them to create a work; take a long walk with a group of writers, observe, make notes and create works, then compare them; take a long walk or drive -- write one line per mile. Variations on this.

5. If you have an answering machine, record all messages received for one month, then turn them into a best-selling novella.

6. Choose a period of time, perhaps five or nine months. Every day, write a letter that will never be sent to a person who does or does not exist, or to a number of people who do or do not exist. Create a title for each letter and don't send them. Pile them up as a book.

7. Compose a list of familiar phrases, or phrases that have stayed in your mind for a long time -- from songs, from poems, from conversation.

8. Write what is secret. Then write what is shared. Experiment with writing each in two different ways: veiled language, direct language.

9. Write a work gazing into a mirror without using the pronoun I.

10. Get someone to write for you, pretending they are you.

Bernadette Mayer

MAGAZINES RECEIVED

ABACUS #48
(Potes & Poets Press, 181 Edgemont Ave., Elmwood, CT 06110),
"Twenties 8 - 25" by Jackson Mac Low. $2.50.

Aerial #5
(P.O. Box 25642, Washington, DC 20007).
Includes Harryman, Darragh, Andrew Levy and others.
182 pp., $7.50.

Brooklyn Review #7
(Dept. of English, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY 11210).
Includes Gertsler, Dlugos, Trinidad, Wheeler.
60 pp., $5.

La Selva Subterranea / The Underground Forest #8
(1701 Bluebell Ave., Boulder, CO 80302).
Includes Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Zorna Neale Hurston and others.
43 pp., $3.

New American Writing #6
(OINK! Press, 2920 W. Pratt, Chicago, IL 60645).
Includes DiPalma, Ed Friedman, Waldrop, and many others.
129 pp., $6.

Paper Air, Vol. 4, No. 3
(Gil Ott, Singing Horse Press, P.O. Box 40034, Philadelphia, PA 19106).
Includes: Weiner, Equi, Andrews and Janet Grey.
110 pp., $7.

(Continued on page 23)

Jump to see

from LIFE

Look at the cask of reasoning
nothing beside the etiquette of poetry.
You put them side by side
you get more time out of them.

The things that are ahead of other things
seem obvious.
And there's nothing like a flower
that closes up at night.

Just go in
and watch what she's doing.
Then write it down.
You can go out on many limbs.

*

It's getting colder and the clouds are lifting.
Who is to say the household is not my happy genius?
People talk about trying something new - and why not? - but they
don't do it.

*

There's a firm wind out.
Smoke blows one way
and then the other.
What other cadence
can we give to thought?
Many have been stiff
and very unsure
but very few
have been only very stiff.
The moth again on the screen
breathes clear in the light.
The trees are all cut off
by the reach of the porch light.
The bird-feeder shakes
and the trees shake in the wind.
And behind it all crickets
shake something in the night.
There's no better justice
than event.
There's no better event.

*

And little blossoms
turn to flowers.

Earlier Story
He got his dick into someone as the plane went down. She survived. His wife raised the child.

Story
It was not until after her appointment to the City Council Firing Squad that Josephine began to doubt her masculinity. It wasn't doubt. She didn't know who she was.

*

Whether to take the me out of the poem entirely and let the
instruct. How to take the poem out of the poem. Let the instruction . After the words go on the page. Water over the bridge. Or just a car comes down the darkened slope.

When you write you betray your preferences.
The words are parasitic.
The host is the lived world.
Your preference is the form of the attachment.

Or as Leslie had suggested could it be rather a matter of attentive curiosity? That would be gentler. An attachment more only over time. For those who can manage it.

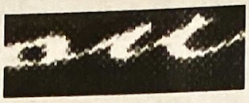
With poems we erase all evidence that we were here.
That's what we mean when we mention the future while remembering the past. I only came to ask.

ALAN DAVIES

NOT ANYMORE (*from* "OF")

the sound of police cars
& rain accumulating in
the light fixture in
the bathroom -- the most
dangerous leak in the
house -- like that time
in the loft on Duane
Street when Miles yelled
for me -- there was a
mouse running up my
mattress-on-the-floor bed
getting close to his head
as he watched the tv
& I took off my Doctor
Scholes and squashed it
without even thinking
& he went on watching
tv without even blinking
and not too many
nights later I snuck in
a 22-year-old poetry fan
after Miles went to sleep
and we made love for
hours and then laid there
thinking until she said --
"how old did you say you
were?" & I told her -- 38 --
and she said "that's
amazing --" -- & I said,
wanting to hear her say how
good it was -- how young I
looked -- how whatever it was
that amazed her about my
being that age that time,
so I said "what's amazing
about it?" & she said "a
guy your age, still sleeping
on a mattress on the floor."

MICHAEL LALLY

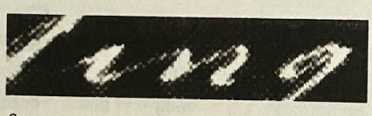


M DRST DWGHT

I wndr f
y hv frgttn m ltgthr
I hv nt
hrd frm y snc m
lttr f ystrdy
prhps
y cld nt
rd & nd nthr
scrpt cd f
bsnc I wnt
t tll y f
m wlk ln n
Prspct Prk tdy I ws
frd I wld
s nbdy & hr
nthng bt nstd
ts trs & tny sprng bds
cm & m nfltrd
lk sm Ngls Whspr

yrs sncrl Lbn

LABAN CARRICK-HILL



SONNET

Suck me my virgin
because we are welcome
as the casualties of the poor
move your cock sideways
& sit your cunt around
let's not go to the movie
it's too crowded for everybody
Tiddly Winks, World Map, Clash
Roger Rabbit, Mouse Trap,
Solarquest, the Ice Cube game

Past hordes of girls & boys
Some of them are ours
Lesbians wake and go out to walk
All mothers together, the poison hydrangea

BERNADETTE MAYER

New O Books

Distributed by Small Press Distribution, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702; and Sun & Moon Press, 6148 Wilshire Blvd., Gertrude Stein Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90048
Segue 303 E 8th NY 10009

KISMET, Pat Reed;
ISBN#1-882022-03-3; $8.00
A book-length poem about which Robert Grenier has said: "With *abandon . . . through the poem* into the (claros) opacities & frog-bound clarity of a *Spring & All*."

Open up
the dark gate

just how dark
is the dark gate

it can only be
so dark

THE INVETERATE LIFE,
Jessica Grim;
ISBN #1-882022-04-1; $7.50
A first collection of poetry described by Laura Moriarty as "Strength. Wit. Non-stop action. These assertions are only incidentally beautiful. Vulnerability is allowed into a cadenced, breathless analysis. The past is your problem. And try to keep up. Because there is no slack."

"Stress holds the real & its 'toward' aligns us with mystery's arraignment, faces in facts moving about."

Bruce Andrews

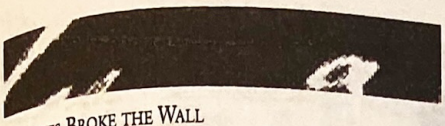
CANDOR, Alan Davies;
ISBN #1-882022-08-4; $9.00
A juxtaposition of essays, reviews, and poems which is apprehension as tonal critical commentary. The text skates up to itself in sometimes utter simplicity, revealing himself/itself.

It's cognition.

We both want you.

"Davies' belief in radical self-reflexivity has led him, in the course of his writing career, from a virtually opaque formalism to a continuity of text and life-world that is anything but aesthetic construction."

Barrett Watten



Rabbits Broke the Wall

a gorgeous knot of words hovers before my face
when I fall asleep

aphids swarming on a bunch of dead chrysanthemums
sag harbor kitchen sink

the jargon of pealing bells
propels my line into the star guide

*

I cry my eyes out

I would do absolutely anything.

I guess I would

*

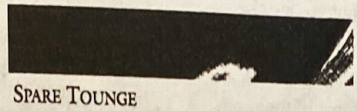
twilight

hedges

the highway

birds fly over

Susie Timmons



Spare Tounge

Wondering around the meaning
of a necessity

so not the hours
but the proclamation of a bowl
circum digraph culents

uppish low words
terms of navigation
found full absence of feminine explosives

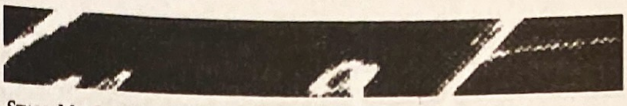
Fencing one lid
I relive myself

slot
spot
zone
turf
leeway
decay

Unknown (nature) various in various minds
perplexment enchanter
strength from strong

found the word sea
unexemplified

Melanie Neilson



Stall Me Out

why you no rhythm

afraid of women asexual pseudo intellectual
bald mt. fuji shaped head

no booty havin big nose
size 13 feet pigeon toed crook footed

taco bell burrito supreme eatin
day dreamin

no jump shot cant dunk

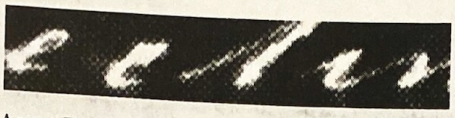
comic book readin
nutrition needin

knock kneed sap sucker
non drivin

anti-fashion
constantly depressed clumsy no money mutherfucker

take your weak ass poems
and go back to los angeles

Paul Beatty



At the End of the Dream I Can Fly

A woman in a black kimono dyed black hair
disappeared behind a black curtain
I'd decided to give a poetry reading in drag
A feather boa many shades of blue
turned into a string of seashells
Odd light from elaborate lampshades
antique furniture Sally Kellerman's
I couldn't find the right high-heels
so decided not to do the reading in drag
I might not be able to handle it

Outside my automobile a small red truck
wasn't where I parked it Carloads of men
all in the same red gown and blonde wig
began arriving for the reading A guy
I think he was flirting sang to me
but then he put his arm around another guy
I had to find my truck I took a shortcut
through a fenced courtyard A long line
of schoolgirls wearing party dresses carrying balloons
marched towards me I jumped up to avoid them

On the next street a wild dog chasing me
teeth viciously snapping at my feet
As I ran along a path that twisted
through some trees I realized I was flying
flying high enough to escape the dog
and could see all the backyards below
like the neighborhood where I grew up
and I thought *my red truck my red truck*

David Trinidad

Landscape

In my dream I pulled
out the folder called
action. And what
did I do. I threw
it at you. Look at
this I screamed.

Yesterday was like a
poem I didn't
write. Ending
with that classic
rhyme, being
and breathing.
Me on my bike.
Lines flying at
angles to the
city. I felt joy
at Columbus Circle.
Privacy. Knowing
this moment
but no one else
will. All the other
folders were in
foreign languages.
I had to pick
action because
it was in English.
A very direct joke.
The night
before I was
so sensitive
I could even
feel my asshole
on the seat. And
today I knew
my life
was what
I had
to do.

Eileen Myles

Both of Us

what's in my throat right now
could sink a boat

why not the my
in my oh my

what's in my sink right now
could throat a boat

what's in my I
don't either

trust it's
not you that's

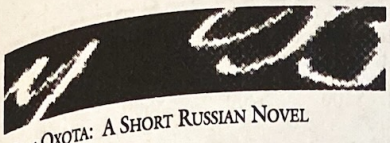
the trouble
my right

now boat could
sink a

you choose to mis
under

stand me where
are boats could equal.

Robert Fitterman



from OXOTA: A SHORT RUSSIAN NOVEL

Chapter Eighty

Leningrad lies in the haze of its sides
It lies as a heroine
Now it is both
How not -- the not is sometimes impossible to
    reach

It was
But then is the work of art not an act but an
    object of memory
Then from a great disturbance
The most delicate message accumulates
But you must know why you write a novel, said
    Boranovin
It's not to displace anything
It has context and metronome
By insisting on a comprehension of every word I
    am free to signify space though not to
    represent it
So I must oppose the opposition of poetry to
    prose
Just as we can only momentarily oppose control to
    discontinuity, sex to organization,
    disorientation to domestic time and space,
    and glasnost (information) to the hunt

Chapter Eighty-One

A crow was grunting in the snow
But what's the difference -- every text aims at
    the complete realization of one's
    self-unimportance
A paradise
How could we ever finish what we never started
Zina, I said
Ho
What is it called
Freud's meeting with a Cossack Mama
Zina's blankets were replaced by Tanya's
Youth is a situation of designations
Assonance and repetition slow language and
    emphasize labor
Last year's new foliage was a silverish fog of
    green
This year's will be also
The narrative tense is a future one -- experience
    is an object of memory

Oxata

LYN HEJINIAN

THE BLOW TORCH

A blow torch passes over an old door, remounted,
and paint bubbles into paisley colours;
quilted oils button down snub on to pine;
the flame returns; life's light returns
to events happening in new bedrooms,
curling paint into friable charcoal coils.
How do we get to these newly-prepared places?
Did poetry bring us here, as we pretend,
that owl flying out of wooded night
into a trick theatre with salons of gauze,
the bird noiselessly circling a dark auditorium,
as scenes change with different lighting,
the bird still flighting there in present moments.

We wanted to paint this door gold
with undercoat of black, but the boys said blue.
Wigged surfaces melt in ripples.
Where the scraper has flaked off thick paint
blue polyeurethane now gleams in depressions
shaped like stagnant pools in saltings.
Some day lights up in a very distant past;
the wind ripples across marsh grass;
a shallow bogland, low and sour, a raging boy
playing tragedian in his head among billowing stages,
and then made tranquil through the variousness of gulls,
his eye following their flight
up to cliffs crowned with golden gorse
the dizzy blue.

That night, post-war, a quarter-mile from childhood,
listening to breezes rustling above dark walls
of a pinewood inhabited by owls,
the boy climbed past a sagging door
in the derelict Shelley family manor, Shelley Park,
and entered a theatre of art and varying times,
empty rooms constantly relit by flames that pass.

DOUGLAS OLIVER

MAGAZINES RECEIVED CONT'D.

Poetry New York #3
(c/o Ph.D. Program in English, CUNY Graduate Center, 33 W. 42nd St., NYC 10036). Includes Ashbery, Ash, Rothenberg, Baran. 77 pp., $3.

Triage #2
(P.O. Box 1166, Sterling Heights, MI 48311).
Includes Kofi Natambu, Dennis Teichman, George Tysh.
36 pp., $3.50.

TYUONYI #6/7
(c/o Recursos de Santa Fe, 826 Camino de Monte Rey, Santa Fe, NM 87501). "Patterns/Contexts/Time: A Symposium on Contemporary Poetry" edited by Phillip Foss and Charles Bernstein. 236 pp., $14

THE POETRY PROJECT WISHES TO THANK THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS AND FUNDING AGENCIES FOR THEIR RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS:

New York State Council on the Humanities, Mudge, Rose Guthrie Alexander & Ferdon, The Bohen Foundation, Con Edison, Chubb Realty and the Picred Heller Foundation.

WE EXTEND OUR APPRECIATION TO OUR NEW MEMBERS, RECENTLY RENEWED MEMBERS AND CONTRIBUTORS:

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WE APPRECIATE THE INVALUABLE SUPPORT OF OUR VOLUNTEERS: David Borchart, Martine Bellen, Euphrosyne Bloom, Susan Cataldo, Bonnie Finnberg, Kate Fallon, Phil Goode, Marni Grant, Mitch Highfill, Virginia Hooper, Fred Hull, Stephen Ielpi, Ken Jordan, Teresa Keefe, Lori Landes, Annie Lanzilloto, Greg Masters, Sharon Mesmer, Mimi McDermott, J.B. Miller, Wendy Miller, Jena Osman, Lauren Roland, Mike Rubin, Sal Salasin, Sparrow, Vicki Stanbury, Jennifer Stone, Mike Topp, Denise Ostrow, Wanda Phipps, Steve Raspa, Tim Rogers, Sharon Shively, Eddie Vega, Katie Yates, and Joey Zander.

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