

the poetry project

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g i l l i a n m c c a l n

Welcome to the revamped *Poetry Project Newsletter*. The new look you see here is thanks to my pal Eric Swenson, one half of **Necro Enema Amalgamated**, the producers of **BLAMI**. Eric and I haven't worked on a project together for over six years since we put out a lit-zine together called **THANG!** so we are both excited. As **Scott Thompson** says on **Kids in the Hall**, "Nothing lasts forever, except maybe poetry readings ..." I don't agree, but it's still nice to give up programming and try my hand at being an editor. Speaking of Canadian comedy group Kids in the Hall, **Jo Ann Wasserman** and I ran into **Kid David Foley** on the Upper West Side right before his appearance that night on the **Conan O'Brien** show. He's playing "Saturday Night Live's" **Pat's** boyfriend/girlfriend (take your pick) in the upcoming movie. I told him I was working on an oral history of punk and he replied, "Gee, that doesn't sound very hygienic." By the way, Jo Ann and I were on our way to **Edward Albee's** new Pulitzer Prize winner. Thinking of going? Don't. It reminded me of why I hate going to the theater. Though two recent plays that Jo Ann and I did check out (which reminded me why I should go to the theater) were **Edward Gorey's "Amphigorey"** at the Perry Street Theater and **Eric Bogosian's "Suburbia"** that just finished its run at the Lincoln Center. When I talked with **Edward Gorey** to see if he wanted to participate in the **Bunny Lang** reading last spring, I asked him if he would be attending any of the performances at Perry Street and he replied, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no ..." in a kind of sing-song chant. Well, even though he obviously detests NYC I think he would have loved the NYC production. Its hard to imagine his consumption-ridden characters jumping off the page but somehow the actors managed it. One guy looked like he had been submitted to some medieval body-stretching apparatus before the performance. All of the actors moved like spiders and bats and looked like ghouls. A real feast for the eyes. Although **Mr. Douglas Rothschild** dis-

agrees with me (though he does have the capacity to be a real disagreeable brat: See his "MY REVOLUTION OR YOURS?" in this issue) I thought that Eric Bogosian's "**Suburbia**" was brilliant. It would seem impossible to top his play "**Talk Radio**" at the Public Theater in '87 but he did ...

Who are the people who put out **EXILE** and how did they get to be so funny? **EXILE** is half serious literary newsletter (reviews of Stephen Jonas *Selected Poems* and *On The Pumice of Morons*) and half the **Spy** magazine of the **Language**



Exile's Gary Sullivan writes his own "R" after accusing Ron Silliman of Kostabi-ism.

movement. In **HELP SAVE SILLIMAN FROM THE ALPHABET**, Gary Sullivan writes, "It's said that certain of **Andy Warhol's** work wasn't actually produced by Warhol himself, but by employees or hangers-on of his Factory. And many of you have heard the rumor that the popular comic strip "**Garfield**" hasn't been drawn by creator **Jim Davis** in many years—that he farms the strip out to freelancers. You can probably guess where this is heading ..." Sullivan goes on to write his own "R" which he titles "**Ron**," which includes: "Bowl. Movement. Tight in my hand. ... Good to the last prod. ... Just add **Watten**." At the bottom of the page the editors write, "You, too, can

'**Help Save Silliman from The Alphabet.**' Send your contributions to 'Save Silliman,' care of this magazine." In "**NOT AN OPTION!** **The Interactive Macbeth**," **J.B. Sisson** sets up a theatrical experience whereas the audience can vote for plot options by punching buttons on electronic panels attached to their armrests. "When **King Duncan** asked, 'What bloody man is that?' The audience shouted, 'Dracula!' (35%), 'Jack the Ripper!' (20%), 'Chain-saw massacre guy!' (5%). S[he] goes on to write, "In the discussion period after the performance, the cast and audience agreed that **Shakespeare's** characters ask too many questions for their own good ..." The best line in **Eric Malone's** "**EXILE'S ROSTER OF OPENING LINES FOR ALL OCCASIONS**" was, *Excuse me, but, are you Barrett Watten?* **EXILE** also includes a worried letter from an MFA student to **Emily Dickinson** concerning "receiving" the poem vs. "writing" it; highlights from **Lita Hornick's** memoirs and *The Collected Shorter Poems of Eric Malone*. But one of the funnier pieces in this seven page newsletter was I think unintended. Seemingly unaware that **Clark Coolidge** and **Larry Fagin's** *On the Pumice of Morons: The Unaugural Poem*, was written using a **OULIPO** exercise, **Gary Sullivan** tends to find a bit more "meaning" in the text than I think was intended. As **Charles Bukowski** writes in his last book *Pulp* [see **David Vogen's** review in this issue], "Sometimes things are just what they seem to be and that's all there is to it." After searching through the text looking for clues as to Coolidge and Fagin's opinion of **Maya Angelou** and her inaugural poem, Sullivan writes of the guilty pleasure of reading the parody: '*Guilty because what really seems to drive Coolidge and Fagin's parody isn't that On the Pulse of Morning is propaganda, but that it's a horribly insipid poem written for an equally insipid audience ... Making fun of people who aren't as brilliant as you is sort of like punching someone simply because you have the physical advantage.* But Gary, they never said

the poem was insipid, you did. He goes on to write: *As hard as I laughed at Coolidge and Fagin's On the Pumice of Morons, and as much as I recommend it (and I wholeheartedly recommend it, in case that's not obvious), I wound up half-wishing they'd have taken on something a little less obvious—say, Bruce Andrews' brilliantly deluded public statements about the supposed "political"*



Carroll & DiCaprio at the Revolutionary Poetry Symposium.

value of his writing. But, then, Andrews is probably someone who'd take a swing right back at you. Coolidge and Fagin parodying Andrews? The whole concept is a parody in itself. No more fist fights, please. Anyway, **EXILE** is a great read. A one year subscription (4 issues) is only \$2.50, and you can get all seven back issues by simply sending a 52 cent stamp for each issue requested. Write EXILE, 149 Virginia Street #7, St. Paul, MN 55102.

Johnny Depp bought Jack Kerouac's raincoat for \$50 000. I hope good vibes are floating into the viper room out of that old smelly London Fog ... Tim Griffin said that Depp was at the final reading of the Revolutionary Poetry Symposium, sitting beside Allen Ginsberg, but since I haven't heard that from anyone else I need a second opinion ... Leonardo DiCaprio was definitely there, sitting beside Jim Carroll, checking out Ginsberg, Sanders, XYZ, Henderson and others. DiCaprio is playing Jim in the upcoming film version of **The Basketball Diaries** and I can't wait, because I just saw him play Tobias Woolf in *This Boy's Life* and he is brilliant. One of the scenes in the film is of Jim reading at The Poetry

Project (I don't know if it will be actually at St. Mark's Church or a set) so Leonardo was studying the scene ... Scenes from the **Revolutionary Poetry Symposium**: Overheard: David Greenberg saying, "Yeah, I played the new **Hole** album for Allen all day ..." Darius James laughing so hard that his body was curled up into a fetal position on the High-Lo panel when Barbara Barg played rap tapes. When later asked what

was so funny, he replied with his usual wit, "You wouldn't understand, it's a black thing..." Ed Sanders, when discussing his book on the **Manson Family**, describing his investigative tactics as being "hideous psychological techniques that can make a calm person into a foaming maniac..." Ed Sanders also saying that if you are always investigating or interviewing people like yourself, you should do some "self-analysis about the weirdo ally question." ... Every time I saw Bruce Andrews he was muttering about "squeaking weasels" with a grin on his face, quoting Amiri Baraka from his opening night lecture's afternotes: "To say that the government should resign, and pick random citizens is the most anarchist, backward, solipsistic, individualistic statement I have heard. But why should the government resign? Why should they resign when you accept them with cynical banter, while groveling in their social order for recognition, as squeaking weasels of the wheels of imperialist progress, needing only the proper grease—contracts, grants, ink, to be officially quieted." I must say that Baraka's lecture and his afternotes started the Symposium with a controversial bang ... High-Lo panel audience member Mike Tyler repeatedly

asked from the audience, *Give me an example of high art, give me an example of high art ...* To the question "Do people actually try to be revolutionaries in this day and age?" Sparrow responded, "Sure they do, like when they go out and buy black berets."

Is **Sulfur** the poetry world's equivalent to **The Firm**? Eliot Weinberger thinks that John Yau thinks so. Get a hold of the "Letters to the Editor" in the July/August issue of **The American Poetry Review** and get wind of the most heated public attack since Spike and Amiri. Yau wrote a derogatory reponse to a review of Weinberger's **American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders** and since then, all hell appears to have broken loose. Weinberger writes as a response of Yau in APR, "I will not dignify his scumbag race-baiting with a point-by-point response, or a defensive white liberal list of the things I've written and the publishing projects I've been involved with, a mumbled, "No, I don't beat my wife." Whew. All the published letters to the editor Yau personally responds to, including Weinberger's, where he writes, "Various sources have told me that Mr. Weinberger has considered bringing libel charges against me. These are further examples of Mr. Weinberger's belief in hierarchy. He's mad and hurt because I don't know my place and did something I should know better than to do in a mandarin society; I spoke." Yikes. Throw an excerpt from David Hinton's letter to the editor and you got war: "It is disheartening to witness Yau's more-left-than-thou tirade not only because Weinberger has spent the last twenty-five years promoting the very causes Yau is defending, but also because this kind of thing seems increasingly common among progressive intellectuals who have so marginalized themselves that such infighting seems the only way they can maintain the illusion of political relevance." I'm staying out of this one, but I would like to know who sent Eliot the package of about a hundred **Learning Annex** catalogues C.O.D. c/o the Poetry Project during the Revolutionary Poetry Symposium.

My friend Chris Simenuk (aka Gene Christian) is now the Associate Editor of **High Times**. Chris writes, "If I worked for **People** or **Newsweek** and tried to pull the crap I do here, I'd soon be collecting unemployment and the Feds would be rifling through my trash." Look out for his upcoming article on the Sturgis biker festival ... Michael Friedman has a book

of prose poems upcoming from The Figures ... **Michael Gizzi** and **Clark Coolidge** recently finished recording excerpts from **Jack Kerouac's** *Old Angel Midnight*, due for future release by Hard Press ... What jazz musician was kicked out of the Boulderado hotel during the Naropa Summer Program for walking through the lobby naked? ... **Vicki Stanbury** is now working for the **Voyager** company putting together poetry CD-ROMs ... **William Burroughs' Nike** ad is the only ad on TV that rocks ... **Mitch Highfill** and **Kim Lyons** recently went to visit **David Abel** in New Mexico. His new bookstore, **Passages** has opened in Albuquerque—lots of poetry books, old, new and rare, and I think he's doing mail-order [for more information call David at 505-843-9133] ... former newsletter ad salesman **Mike Rubín** copped the cover story of September issue of **Spin** with an excellent article on **Manson and Woodstock** ... **Mike Topp** writes to me: "I just wanted to confirm that industry rumors that I am dating **Maggie Estep** are entirely untrue."

The best looking literary magazine around is **P.J. Mark's** *Feed*. Beautifully designed, the latest issue 2/3, features poems, plays and fiction by Dale Peck, Gretchen Elkins, Amudha Rajendran, Dorthea Smartt, Mami Iba and more. Definitely worth \$5. If you can't find it in your local bookstore, write **Feed**, P.O. Box 1567 Madison Square Station, NYC 10159. Other stuff to get a hold of: **Joe Maynard's** lit-zine **Beet** (372 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11215, \$3). Issue #9 features work by **Peter Lamborn Wilson**, **Jim Feast**, **Hal Sirowitz**, **Carol Wierzbicki**, **Ron Kolm**, **Sharon Mesmer** and more. But the funnest part of the zine is the "Editor's Pages." In the same section he's discussing **Katherine McKinnon**, Maynard 'shamelessly' mentions that **Susie Bright** included work by he and **Bart Plantenga** in next year's **Best American Erotica**. Later on he writes, "Something must be in my drinking water, because I actually have something good to say about mainstream media. Yeah, yeah, it's by capitalists for capitalists, but think of it as the most widely circulated 'concept zine' in the world: **The Wall Street Journal**." Why do we all love **Todd Colby** so? Because he is so lovable, that's why. Reading at the second night of the symposium, Todd's midwestern roots were drowned out by a quick flush of the cheeks and a quantum leap in blood pressure. In "**The Boss**," perpo's answer to "**Take This Job and Shove It**," Colby's forehead metamorphosizes into varicose veins as he screams the lines,

"THE BATHROOM WAS SHAKING/ THE SOAP WAS THROBBING/ THERE WAS BLOOD ON THE FLOOR/ THERE WAS BLOOD ON THE BOSS'S FACE." A poem that begins with the narrator expressing a simple desire to stay home from work to write ends with fantasies of being in the roller derby with the boss, and screams of "I PROMISE I WON'T DO NO MORE DRUGS! JUST STOP THE CAMARO! STOP IT!" Read these poems and more (along with his modern classic, "Another Kiss Poem") in his latest chapbook **Ripsnort** (Soft Scull Press, 50 East 3rd street #5A, NYC 10003, \$5). Throw in a beautiful **George Schneeman** cover and you got a great buy.

A **Mabou Mines** theater collaboration, "Mother" will premiere at **La Mama Annex** in October and **Patricia Spears Jones** is the playwright and to use her words, "designated text person." **Ruth Maleczek** is the lead; veteran movie soundtrack guy **Carter Burwell** is doing the music; and **John Edward McGrath** is pulling it all together as the director. For more information call the folks at Mabou Mines (212) 473-0559. The other great news about our former Program Coordinator is that Patricia's poetry manuscript **The Weather That Kills** has been accepted by **Coffee House Press** ... There will be a memorial reading from the newly published Figures book *Alone With the Moon: The Selected Writings of Musa McKim* at the **McKee Gallery**, 745 Fifth Avenue (4th floor) on October 19th at 6 pm. Readers will include **Clark Coolidge**, **Stanley Kunitz**, **Geoffrey Young** and **William Corbett**. Refreshments will be served. **Musa McKim** was **Philip Guston's** wife, so there will be a curious grouping of Philip Guston friends, poets, fans and supporters of the Guston/ McKim family spanning many decades ... The Third Annual Poetry Publication Showcase at **Poets House** (72 Spring Street) shows off a full range of newly-published poetry—this "please touch" exhibit of more than a one thousand poetry books is free and open to the public. Panels take place at Poets House at 7 pm: *Poetry and Technology* (Oct. 27th), *Selling Poetry* (Nov. 3), *The Future of Poetry Publishing* (Nov. 17)—as does the *Grand Finale Reading* (Nov. 18). For more information call (212) 431-7920. ... The worst news is that painter and poet **Joe Brainard** died in May. The December/January issue of the newsletter will be dedicated to him. Along with some of Joe's artwork and poems, there will be remembrances of him by his friends. If you would like to send me something for this issue, please leave a message for me asap at the Poetry Project office (674-0910). Have a good autumn.

Toward a New Poetics

Contemporary Writing in France

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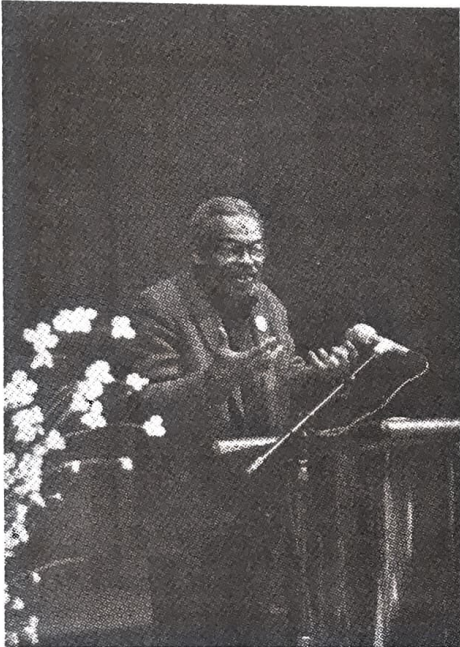
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"... like six fires continuously rekindling . . . a language of contagion. A language that emits thought. That also contains it by rhythmic force in order that one might, at the same time, breathe. (And the hand never letting go of what thought holds.)"

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A M I R I B A R A K A



Revolutionary poetry is poetry expressing first as content and then most efficiently as form, the ideology, stance, and practice of revolution. Direct and complete social [change], and as political and economic and cultural change. That is, to change society by changing human relations within the society, and by so doing, change the humans ourselves. One factor of imperialism is that it has the capacity to absorb, co-opt, distort, or completely destroy almost anything—except the ultimate resistance to it, because like change, struggle is a constant. But definition is critical: one class' revolution is another class' Yeltsin (that is, craven, abject counter-revolution). Those artists who say their art has nothing to do with politics or society are simply retarded ... or winking at their own seduction as state and corporate prostitutes. Art expresses the ideological essence of society, its fundamental contradictions of our human social relations. The vaunted craft by which this kept sector daunts the naive and the philosophically insecure, is the same cry of the rulers who excuse the savage bloodiness of imperialism by claiming the formalism of technology is actually civilization. And we've heard that. Like those who praise the skill with which Jack the Ripper dis-

emboweled his victims: "This man is a trained surgeon." The purpose of what Marx called the "New Humanism" is simply the transformation of society, so that the majority of people wield the power to shape our lives according to the material and spiritual needs of the people, and that the rulers of the world be the great masses of humanity themselves. Matter transformed by consciousness. But the transformative power of art, as opposed to ink, is life versus death, creativity versus destruction, the essence of the dialectic which confronts us and informs our work. So that in the *Anon Forum on Arts and Culture*, (which you should read if you claim to be either artists or intelligent) Mao asks first of the would-be revolutionary artists "For whom?" That is, "For whom do you write?" Secondly in the *Anon Forum* Mao asks, "What do you celebrate, and what do

WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT OUR POETRY CAN FUNCTION AS A FORCE OF NATURE, TO TRANSFORM AND CLEANSE AND DESTROY AND RESURRECT. WE SETTLE FOR BEING "CRAFTS-PERSONS," FASHIONING CUNNING LITTLE ARTIFACTS DEVILS USE TO DRINK BLOOD OUT OF . WE ARE THE GOOD MANNERS OF VAMPIRES.

you attack?" We've heard a gentleman attack socialist society all night, but as far as the United States, nothing is happening—I guess they haven't killed any poets. From this, we can tell who's side you're on, the oppressed or the oppressors. In the same way, what do you think is good, what do you think is beautiful, what do you think is bad, what do you think is ugly? These also help define whether the work is revolutionary or counterrevolutionary. The bourgeoisie, the rulers ... the bourgeoisie tried to stifle the explosive and transformative nature of art. Its "magical properties" so to speak, except as correlatives to religion, and allusion, or as a nifty way to enhance advertising. Art is the human expression of endless birth and rebirth, the

Big Bang of universal becoming for the poet and the world, that hot eruption of word-jissom from which the living creature, e.g. egg, eagle, the being produced manifest of ecstatic fire, space transformed into speech, vision as the science of motion, as the interior life of what will always exist. Revolutionary art insists on the whole world as its measure, and the equality of being. It demands and forces into human consciousness the outline of the whole self of the world, it connects *is* and *be* and proves their mutuality. Revolution is the eternity of the world, the endless breath, the endless heartbeat, to deny it is to lie, and truth is the final reality. For the poets, it is critical to reject and step away from the death-cellar and the suave priests of savagery. Poetry lives as an expression of life, it is as strong as its life-force, what it represents in and to and from the world. We are taught to deny the power and force of art, except as elitist license. We do not believe that our poetry can function as a force of nature, to transform and cleanse and destroy and resurrect. We settle for being "crafts-persons," fashioning cunning little artifacts devils use to drink blood out of. We are the good manners of vampires. I am a Communist, so I believe that the nuclear force of the poem must be used to unite revolutionaries, and to win the advance to Communism. That it must be used as a weapon against the rule and domination of heathens. To be merely cynical is not revolutionary. If you claim revolution you must also claim science, as well as truth, and beauty. To be a revolutionary is to grasp the key link of our expression as a form of class struggle, a peoples' weapon to force the true self-consciousness that Du Bois wrote of. And the human self-realization Marx and Lenin spoke of in their philosophical notebooks. And the class struggle, the struggle for scientific truth, and the struggle for production, even against so-called "writer's block." Or revolutionary struggles. And our poetry is an expression of our relationship to these objectively, independent of our will. And [in] these times of rising fascism, and class betrayal, where one-time and suave revolutionaries snore instead of speak, and worship gibberish, and obscure song, what

revolutionary artists must do is enlist themselves and organize themselves in cultural revolution. It is not possible to deny the incredible filth of US popular culture as pornographed by film, drama, music, painting. We cry our defiance of the devil endlessly, yet wait impatiently to be discovered or rewarded by our declared enemies. Where are the cam-corder two hundred dollar movies? Where are the revolutionary awards that celebrate the Margaret Walkers.....? We settle for cynical comments on the Nobel and Pulitzer, on the National Laureates and genius awards, but create no Du Bois or Brecht awards to raise revolutionary themes and lives. When will we be able to call the poets and musicians and painters and dancers out of their studios and classrooms, or their (hell with it) stylish hovels and lofts, to bring their art, their energy, their vision, into the streets and communities, to disrupt the old society and help create the new. Even those of us who claim revolutionary stances spend most of our time talking about our enemies. Whenever we criticize them, we are expending our energy and force on them, rather than on the creation of the new, the transformative, rather than the creation of what does not yet exist, which we yet must swear to bring into being, if we are truly revolutionary. One hundred poets reading at population centers across this city, on revolutionary themes, in weekly or monthly consistent blasts, could force a new consciousness, however modest, into being. But this idea is confused as bohemianism or politics, and remains as non-existent as the national revolutionary political circles we need to survive this present fascist onslaught. The commitment to revolution, to the complete overthrow of savage oppression, and the spectrum of ignorant, or disingenuous, or self-indulgent, evil reaction, is also a commitment to work and study. It is a commitment to organization and mass expression. Where are our revolutionary journals? Where are our revolutionary newspapers and magazines? Where are our revolutionary movie houses and galleries and theaters? Instead we hear snoring. Or the fashionable cynicism of the loyal opposition. That's what we heard earlier, the loyal opposition. Loud with frustration, 'til the big buck comes, or the recognition by monsters that they have been named official hoers. It is the self-determination, self-respect, and self-defense of life itself and its revolutionary movements that the poets must concern themselves with, as intimately as their own personal lives. It is a new world we want to create, not just an endowed chair in a concentration camp. It is form as well as content, science and vision—art must be our magic weapon to create and recreate the world, and ourselves as part of it.

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ed Morales: remarks on "the complete breakdown of everything" (Mike Tyler)

I assume that in "Good-Bad, Hi Lo: The Taste of Revolution," we're going to talk about social class. In all the fuss about political correctness, with all the inauthentic debate going on about politics in and around academia today, the realm of social class isn't even considered. No one complains about "lower" and "middle" and "lower-middle" class people being too sensitive. No one ever confronts or alienates everyone else by saying "it's a lower-middle class thing, you wouldn't understand." The reason for this is that the Right, led at first by Richard Nixon, ersatz champion of "The Silent Majority," then Ronald Reagan, the executioner of Air Traffic Controllers, succeeded in silencing class-based discourse, transferring the arena of conflict to race, gender issues, and critical theory: let them expend all their energy on the debate on whether or not history is dead. While it is true that the race/sex identity movements of the '60s and '70s were underserved by traditional class-based politics, the moment at which they might have enriched each other was stolen, and common interests effectively severed. So moments like last year's, when groups of working class people of color squared off against gay activists over a linguistic debate concerning the Rainbow Curriculum instructional manual, only serve to illustrate how well the Right has done its job.

With all due respect to the formulators of this panel, I must first say that its premise, unless I have misunderstood it, is somewhat counter-productive. To say that people are closed off from a poetic work because their societal training causes them to think it "bad" or "low" is merely reinforcing a language construct that keeps class lines drawn explicitly. I come here almost believing that my role is to present some work of an "oppressed group" whose cultural development is minimal, but whose work deserves to be heard, and could be appreciated like a strong dose of nasty-tasting medicine. In other words, people who "come from nowhere," like Edmund White says in this month's *Bomb* magazine. It seems to happen in America more than in Europe, I guess because of our "free-flowing" class structure—although Genet managed to do it somehow in France, "come from nowhere." I come from nowhere. I was raised in a working-class apartment in the Bronx by two recently-arrived Puerto Rican migrants (I can't call them im-

migrants, because colonial history has appointed all of my people U.S. citizens). They were not intellectuals by any sense of the word, but they were cultured, steeped in a culture with a minuscule upper class, a culture dominated by the lower-middle class.

So when I come to the poetry of Mike Tyler, a white man, I find a sense of identity, not unlike I get when I read Pedro Pietri, Bimbo Rivas, Sandra Maria Esteves, Willie Perdomo and Paul Beatty. I identify with Tyler's notion of "The Muddle Class," that undefinable miasma of oppressed people who suffered from having their ability to use language being taken away from them. People who write poetry because it was the only thing that allowed them to resist, which is

No one complains about "lower" and "middle" and "lower-middle" class people being too sensitive.

the word Tyler asserts is "the most beautiful word in the American language."

"The Complete Breakdown of Everything" is one of six poems with the same title. My selection of this particular version was arbitrary, although it is an earlier one, and it expresses in simple terms the experience of the muddle class under the Reagan years. "The guy that promises you nothing is a good guy ... the guy that promises you nothing and gives you less is a hero ... the guy that promises you nothing and gives you less and kicks your teeth out is a saint." I sometimes wonder what is more horrible: the personal pain I lived because of the Reagan years: the Central American wars, the death of the labor movement, the destruction of the inner city, the repression against transgressive art and lifestyle; or the thorough indoctrination of the muddle class in accepting the punishment and blame for the fall of America.

*In the complete breakdown of everything we'd smile at the big lie
'cept we ain't got no teeth
so we just triangle
the ends of our mouths
up into our cheeks
and gape
at the passing parade
yippee, hurrah, hurrah,*

*there's the bastard
that done me today
go get us tiger
we have all sinned
come back and
kick my teeth out
again*

I think of John Leguizamo's *Spic-o-Rama*, where he lampoons a Latino homeboy Gulf War veteran, a potential muddle-class revolutionary, reduced to a drunk sexist pig on a streetcorner. It's easy for us to be repulsed by the muddle class masses, destroyed by language, seemingly hopelessly politically incorrect, getting in the way of our sexual liberation, getting in the way of creating well-educated critical theorist minority elites to seize power in institutions like politics, law, medicine and the press. But when we cut our links to them, when we insist we are not them, when we say that their art is different from ours, we are cutting off our arms and legs. Mike Tyler's message is, we must embrace them, we must embrace us. We must seize control of the language that causes the separation.

*Sticks and stone
may break my bones
but words perform
corrupt surgery
on the soul*

Words hurt us everyday. You'll find them on the 6 o'clock news everyday, in government forms, in bed with your lover. They add up to a language construct that prevent you from speaking to people, prevent you from being yourself. Language is not something that's constructed in neat, consumerist packages that allows you to express a code. At the risk of annoying Chomsky, language is something that happens between two or more people, spontaneously—an act of creation that is not within an individual, but in the warm space between subjects. The idea of community has been shattered into bits: we exist in warring, language-confined groups that think they're resisting, but are only serving to perpetuate the lack of community. It's time to fuse.

It's time to make art part of our everyday life and not surrender it to museums. It's time to strive for real multiculturalism, where community ideas are fused, when races are fused, when identities are fused, not presented side-by-side in carnival sideshows. How will we know what revolution is before we even know how to talk to each other?

THE HOODOO GUERRILLA DARIUS JAMES

The revolutionary, the artist and the magician commonly share in the struggle for change.

The Urban Guerilla fights against political, economic, military and cultural dictatorship with unconventional methods of armed and psychological warfare for the liberation of the oppressed. The role of the sorcerer poet is to wage the psychological war against the oppressor in conjunction with the language and consciousness accessible to the oppressed.

I say "sorcery" for the poet applies the principles of guerilla warfare with the principles of Magick in composing incantations of freedom in the war against the enemies of the oppressed.

Why psychological? The first task is to decolonize our minds from the body/mind split of European cultural hegemony as declimated through mass media, popular culture and academia.

Why Magick? Magickal consciousness sees in wholes, intergrating the foreground detail of the "tree" with the background patterns of the "forest": Forming a "circle" or one "revolution."

As Comrade Reed writes in his Catechism of Neo Hoodoom:

"D new hougans are 2 D left of Buck Rogers

O.K., Buck! Up with your hands! Where did you stash our galaxies?"

symposium

johanna drucker : The Third Game On Your Nintendo Board

I guess I'm going to be the odd person out here because in fact I don't believe that poetry is revolutionary. Not at all. I mean, I don't know any example ever anywhere of poetry's having changed anything, not a thing. And how can it be called revolutionary if that is the case. From my point of view, revolution means change, real change. Change in structure, change in government, change in values, change in personnel too. What has poetry ever changed?

It may be that a few poets, especially women writers at the turn of the century, actually changed the situations in which their own lives were lived, and by so doing, may have served as exemplars for other younger or more timid women to imagine, even attempt, such deviations from the norm—Edith Wharton, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein and so forth. But it wasn't their poetry that did that, it was because of their needs as social beings to have a space outside the suffocating conventions dictated by their class, upbringing, etc.—and also, in most cases, this was something made possible by their class since they had either means or motivation to make such changes.

But poetry? I mean, you're kidding yourself if you think Gertrude Stein's work has been assimilated, has changed thinking, language, or the world one iota. Neither has the work of Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, or Lautréamont—just to name the stellar men here—been assimilated. We all know that if the avant-garde participated in anything, it participated in its own publicity machine—especially in the 20th century in the actions/ attitudes of Marinetti, Tzara, Mayakovsky, and so forth—and big surprise—they borrowed from commercial language and their innovations went right back into that realm. Maybe the avant-garde contributed a tiny bit towards the new language of advertising. Wow. Is that revolutionary enough for you?

So all these poets who go around thinking that they are working in the spirit of the avant-garde are deluding themselves a few times over—first because they think they are participating trans-historically in something whose very conditions of existence have few parallels with our own (industrial capitalism vs. post-industrial inter-

national corporate capitalism, a society with minimal culture industry spectacle vs. one which is maxed out with supersaturated stimulation/ production, a homogeneous European state vs. a heterogeneous postmodern one), secondly because they

We all know that if the avant-garde participated in anything, it participated in its own publicity machine.....

think that the old avant-garde is something that it wasn't, and thirdly because they think they can *reply* this delusion in the present tense. Virtual poetic revolution ... the third game on your new Nintendo board.

In the present tense—let's see, even historically poetry is mainly about itself, refers back to its traditions. Its transgressions are significant within that tradition, and so, we always have to inquire into the place the tradition has at any given moment. Poetry's status has fallen. It is confused with greeting card text, spiritually inspiring books, new age mottoes—even jingles, one of poetry's last stands in the commercial world, are pretty much *passé* these days. Poetry has, as we know, little cultural capital. Can't really be bought and sold, not for a profit. So, its sphere of activity and influence is shrinking. Shrunk, I would say. Look at how poets are treated in the press—the *Times* does a piece on Brodsky after he gets the Nobel Prize—you could profitably compare this with a piece on the Loch Ness monster or on a hermit mystic who has spent a lifetime fasting and praying—I mean, poets are treated like they are a cult thing, not a culture thing.

The sphere of poetic activity is small. Very small. We are it. That's right, us and a few other people like us. Sure, there are poets who represent and speak for "communities" and they have some impact, some symbolic role to play. But only symbolic. Is that significant? Can be. Does it galvanize change? Maybe, maybe not—no more than any other passionate and visionary speech. Poetry seems to me to mainly provide a space for alternative language. An alternative space for imaginative language.

bruce andrews: REVOLUTION ONLY: Questions, Comments, Quotes, Embedded and in Bed.

Questions, comments, quotes embedded and in bed. To upstage a dialog with Language as a whole. "I sort of screwed up." "This is flush left." "I'm kind of pissed off." "Each mind is weirder than the next."

If we don't know what's revolutionary—abracadabra's, magic bullets (as in Magic: imaginary solutions to insurmountable problems)—rebel without a microphone—maybe we sense what a counter-revolution seems like. So: imagine a counter-counter-revolutionary poetics. HELLRAISER, upside down. Doltgeist, don't tell me not to do something. Detonate whatever holds up the established order: what protects it, invests it, insures it, secures it—this simultaneously overregulated and harmfully deregulated social body. To counteract. That would

Or does hope only come if we're willing to fuck ourselves up, not just to satirize from the outside but to counteract and embarrass our own standard selves and the narrow form of the self, the subject matter itself, for which we would take proud responsibility later.

mean: writing as politics, as having some political authority. Authority as translation. Rewriting & regoverning the social body. To expose its construction process, its works; how discourse grows typical skin with a desire to scratch it. "OH yeah-ooohh power..."

What is the not yet of writing? Knock knock. Agitate the total. Or counteract imitation. At every level of involvement: every bit, every syllable, topography, lexeme, normative grammar. As a politicized work with the particulars of language—to democratize its collective governance, to let us reinhabit a wide-openness of meaning—as a social site or field. In Distance, in Context, in reconstitution the Self, beyond Pluralism, beyond the Present.

1. Question Absorption?

"Let me invite you—come closer," but Language kicks in and you can be exhilarated by an all-overness of mediation. "I can't stuff myself anymore." Because constraints can work as intimacies, snug-lodes, clichéing the scope of Meaning—the Conversation. The conversation which could be total. "KEEP YOU DISTANCE." Must break. Hovering within possibilities, reading smudges from detonator devices applied to sentimentalities. Sudden opacities and fracturing, on all levels and at the limits of every brand of reference as the base of the body the social has

spread itself out into. Our bodies are not ours; don't let me fall out of my tip of the iceberg body, lifetime guarantee.

2. Question Autonomy?

You refuse to obey their orders. But whose are you?

3. Question Socialization?

How a person, a vehicle of sympathizing—absorbene junior—gets to be built or "WHAT ME WORRY." The spontaneous is hype. And shake my enchantment shit at you. Can we just empower 'us' or demonize 'them' if something even more basic stays at stake? The subject form—as social status quo vehicle, as flesh-devouring stickiness prototype with fake romanticizable center. You can write what isn't you. Poetry can be an expression of what you aren't. Break the summons. Back to prior to dictated dreams

before you're caught in the large type over-parsed version of cages of your own making. "Are you for real?" Or Frankenstein lips, pretty ejaculatory, instead of in less blabby conversation with an overall oversexed body of meaning globally. Facing that, isn't subject-matter an oxymoronic idealism? A sky writing of aerosol perforating enough of its ozone layer to bombard 'us' with consolatory and desubstantializing rays? The 'I' comes from everywhere: all pumped up, all overupholstered, channeling norms, seeping out of every pore of capital. "I enjoy working with people," identity empowers the status quo, he murmurs pleasantly, everything is under control. Or does hope only come if we're willing to fuck ourselves up, not just to satirize from the outside but to counteract and embarrass our own standard selves and the narrow form of the self, the subject matter itself, for which we would take proud responsibility later. "I DON'T GIVE A FUCK, MOTHERFUCKER," says The Boss. Or translate the self 'package,' this particular person as opposed to anybody everybody else, back into its more basic prior pre-prefab social materials, its more open possibilities in language: "rubbing on an erection" to stop making babies of ideology out of the subject form itself. Instead: can we choice down on the letters, the typeface, the

repositionable meanings, granularized, syncretizable, still sliding, allegorically, kept from being hauled into court. Maximizing the building blocks, before identity kicks in with the lure of presence, that premature ejaculation.

4. Question Apparatus?

"Mission control is in error"—partonized and rebuked? But can we unsettle to the limits the machinery of social control and its sideshows, all narcotized into knowledges? Counter-counterrevolution as a democratizing of silence as well as speech. To unknowledge. Because so often we're up against social talkativeness, and not just a culture of silence. "Make swarm." Trouble funk on consumer fetishism, on the making of commodities (and self as commodity) without social recall, without social responsibility over the throws of the (loaded) language dice, just another white surface or big lie—consumable ventriloquism, that help make me, you, them. What if we translate the execution of the rules of the machine (rules behind the imaginary powers of the means of social reproduction) back into all its raw materials and raw moves, too incomplete to be eaten. If we open up (even teeniest bits of) language wide enough to map/explain/make sense of ... maximize ... everything, prior to brain-candy confidence and autarkic illusions of autonomy. With errors and fallacies, body metabolism on a new global scale. To make the future accountable—not just for "squeaking weasels of imperialist progress" but as activism.

5. Imagine Utopia?

Or translate every closure back into its possibilities. Choke what chokes the future. Words as suitors in maximizing democratizing conversation with everything. Perhaps there's we don't know something everything wrong with my brain. With reassuring complete breakdown of everything and history overthrow within language work. To create new contexts: beyond stasis (presence without alternatives), beyond indoctrination, beyond face-off pluralism (or constituency-based cooperational empowerment of something (united colors of) to talk about). Don't crowd me, "equals of the unknown." An active translating of all that's possible—a call and response in one move—before we are solicited into position. Or "nowhere" as everywhere up ahead.

murat nemet-nejat: tAkes or miStakes from the rEvoLUtionAry pOetry sYmPOSiUm, 1994

1. "My strategies as a playwright is creating the experience of reading."
Richard Foreman.

"Listening to a performance I tune it out." Richard Foreman.

"This failure of mine is the essence of my theater performed by other others, under my direction." Richard Foreman.

"Framing" lines, words with "activities" noise "straight lines" on page "recreate the experience of reading."

"Loops of music" as white activity. Activity as sound. White activity.

Richard Foreman: "As my wife said, pausing the VCR to pick something from the kitchen, that frozen image the composition of frozen moments is the experience of reading."

A question Murat did not ask Richard Foreman: "Are you saying that there is a connection between reading a text and watching TV, and your play and going to the kitchen? - does any of the loop activities in your play involve going to the kitchen?"

Richard Foreman in response to someone's question, maybe Jackson Mac Low's: "My actors are free to choose their activities improvisation? white improvisation? but I choose my own text."

2. "I love background noise in a cabaret while I am performing." Emily XYZ

"Double column on the page is raucous." Emily XYZ

"Sunset is dream - gave way to dreams men can never admit to." Emily XYZ

"cherry cherry cherry cherry cherry cash" Emily XYZ

Murat asking Richard Foreman, "Is sound in poetry the same as music in poetry?"

"A different kind of music" Jackson Mac Low

Music as noise, "raucous." Or as silence. White noise as silence. Robert Altman as the godfather of sound in poetry.

"Half of the show is my audience" Emily XYZ

"I don't worship language, I use it." Emily XYZ

"Say what you say before it arrives in understandable language." Richard Foreman

"I don't write to communicate ... I want to make them (it) alive" Jackson Mac Low

Emily XYZ responding to Jackson, "What-alive? I couldn't hear it?"

Jackson, "Them - my work."

The concept of an "alive" work. "Alive" A loop. "Loops of music" as Noise.

"Do my utmost to make it hearable to the audience" Emily XYZ

3. "I am a Korean." Walter Lew

"Revolutionary poetics is robbing the mainstream culture from its seductive power" Walter Lew

"An object observed close by is a revolutionary act" Melanie Weilson

"Poetically, agonisingly, HAL's lobotomy mimics natural death, grinding down into senility, and finally into second childhood. Querulously, faltering, singsong: 'Good afternoon, gentlemen. I am a HAL-9000 computer ... Mr. Langley taught me to sing a song ... It's called 'Daisy' ... Daisy, dai-sy, give-' falters HAL, going down to death." Melanie Weilson

"Rosebud, Bob said. Boob sled." Murat

"Revolutionary poetics is digging up the unspoken history and world of feeling associated with a peripheral culture" Walter Lew

"It's strategy is making itself unassimilable to master narratives" Walter Lew

Murat asking Walter Lew, "Does that mean that there is a revolutionary version of a translation?"

Translation as a revolutionary act. Translation creating noise. Noisy translation the essence of revolution.

Ed Sanders' advice approaching a hostile interviewee, "Choose what you wear. Study psychological stress techniques."

"Poet - psychological war against aggression." Darins James

Paul Beatty describing the experience of putting one's work on TV: "An English to English translation."

"Speaking English as second language in North America," Gail Scott speaking as a Quebecois.

"I am from Tobago living in Canada," M. Hourbese Philip.

"No mother tongue, English is not my mother tongue. English is a foreign anguish." M. Hourbese Philip.

"Translating a non-existent mother tongue existing in the mind into English" is anguish, is accent, is revolution.

M. Hourbese Philip's "multiple choice test" on the larger brain (of the white male), conceived by I forgot his name.

"Choose what you wear," Ed Sanders' Advice for interviewing a hostile interviewee in his/her house.

Transparency as subversion.

The icon of Dr. Livingstone meeting Stanley.

4. From the workshop Poetry and Technology: "What is the difference between a bear and a virtual bear?" "That's the biggest garbage I've heard."

"What's the difference between God and virtual God?" "Virtual God is real." It's the software programmer.

"Paranoia is normalcy in investigative poetics."

"Computer is a wall for me to bounce against" Jackson MacLow

From the Poetry and Technology workshop: "Give free shit to lure them ... Commodity lives." Eric Swenson, the "Enema" of Negro Enema Amalgamated, producers of *HEAM!*.

ULLA DYDO **on** GERTRUDE STEIN

Gertrude Stein is often spoken of as beginning a new way of writing. The moment we do that, we appropriate her, we make a model or teacher out of her. We make her stand for something. But the moment we talk of her as revolutionary we also make her harmless—we domesticate her. I am uneasy about the public images that have been drawn to make her fit agendas.

Feminists have appropriated her, lesbians have, theoreticians have. She has refused to fit. She now sits in Bryant Park, to remind us that she, that women have not received acknowledgment. Lesbian Avengers have demonstrated in the hope of placing Alice Toklas next to her—but all the public images of her already have Alice built into her, the two already iconized and deadened as a couple, as a monument, as a figurehead. She marched into my *Reader* through the Picasso portrait—on her own was not okay, she was made to do it through a painter, the painter far more successful and far richer than she. Success is a part of what builds these icons.

And all these icons disregard the only thing that matters to her: to write not the big ideas, not the Revolution, but the daily life, the observed, formed perceptions about what was in front of her, what she saw and heard. Not social action. Not even lectures which attempted unsuccessfully to explain (from outside) what could not be explained (her writing, which speaks from inside). And so she went back to writing and left lecturing largely behind.

In the war she listened to the radio, which also explained nothing and did not render the life she perceived. She heard politics on the radio but nothing was rendered comprehensible, nothing sufficiently specific and particular. She wanted to leave the radio behind as she left lecturing behind and return to writing the daily life.

When the texts for *A Stein Reader* were completed, my publisher insisted on designing a cover. Those of you who have seen the book may understand why I objected to it. It relied on the Picasso portrait to introduce Stein, implying that she can ride in only on Picasso's coat tails.

We know Stein of course from the Picasso portrait, and she wrote about that portrait too—she wrote about it and wrote about him and wrote about herself all in one because everything she did opened questions of identity—who she was, how she was represented, who represented her how and how she represented others or what representation, what composition was. In words.

One of the difficulties is how Stein went public. We know her from innumerable paintings and photographs and from her own public appearances, newspaper reports, her writing. She became a truly public figure. But she did not start that way and did not do her major work that way. What makes her interesting is that she is not a revolutionary who fits a theory or even advocates a revolution. She did not set out to revolutionize, she set out to write. She writes and writes but never with big words. She works only with little words that have almost no referential baggage—which gives her freedom to make things with them, including making new forms with them. In a sense she frees them of meaning in order to make meaning and work with them.

She refuses to fit any agendas. Perhaps that is a part of what makes her revolutionary—not that she creates a new movement with an agenda but that she wrote work that is still not explained and not easily exhausted.

douglas rothschild: My revolution or yours? Notes on a half turn

The one disappointing aspect of the Poetry Project's Revolutionary Poetry Symposium held last May is that almost 90% of the participation did not address the Adjective, describing the noun, in the Symposium's title. Even more notably inexcusable, yet typically acadenic [sic], even fewer of the panelists were able to address the topics on which they were asked to speak. Perhaps the most bizarre was Johanna Drucker, who one might think, having seen her books, would entertain some revolutionary thoughts, began her talk on "Revolutionary Poetics: Form & Subject Matter" by saying, "Poetry is not revolutionary." Personally, I always thought that poetry was either revolutionary or not depending on the poet, like Amiri Baraka verse [sic] Robert Lowell? Which brings me to the high water marks of this con-

ference, the reasons that you should have taken a couple of days off work & hung out in the East Village all weekend.

Opening night theatrics: Eliot Wein-

Eliot Katz saved us from this slough of reactionary despond by declaiming: POEMS are not magic bullets, poems are poems.

berger delivers his now legendary talk on how 20th century political revolutions (read Marxist) kill all the good poets. However, the 20th century has provided us with

new tools, such as the Internet, which affords us the ability to communicate rapidly & effectively & might just enable us to develop a forum for change. Enter Amiri Baraka, who may have had prepared notes, or may have not. Mr. Baraka however had taken very careful notes on what Mr. Weinberger had just said & launched a full scale barrage; effectively scuttling Mr. Weinberger's thesis (the likes of which we have not seen since the Potempkin). Baraka began by posing the questions: Is Social Realism bad? Is Modernism really good? {To answer these questions one must become embroiled in a discussion of taste, & as we know, taste is a result of social conditioning—ideology—perhaps modernism is bourgeois?} He ended by pointing out that the notion of the poet, hermetically sealed at his terminal, talking with poets of like mind on the Internet, is

a rather bourgeois ideal.

The next day, Paul Beatty marveled at his niece having acquired bourgeois sensibilities, without realizing that they were bourgeois sensibilities. Johanna Drucker ducked the possibility of being criticized for making a fairly successful career of producing expensive, handsome, iconoclastic books by claiming that revolution does not enter into it. Eliot Katz saved us from this slough of reactionary despond by declaiming: POEMS are not magic bullets, poems are poems. But the poet's job is to enlighten & inform: the poem provides information to the reader, the poem has not "not changed a thing" (Ms. Drucker). It has changed your MIND! (Or at least it has tried.) As Kenneth Koch once wrote, "Fresh Air." Also of note was Walter Lew's informative talk on the methods of intellectual resistance practiced by the Koreans during the Japanese occupation in WW2. A talk which now seems to compliment Mr. Katz's talk very well.

Unfortunately, for those of us with a more revolutionary bent, these ideas did not catch on & the symposium slipped into a vague wavering of opinions. Far too many panelists wondered why they had been asked to participate in their panels. The unfortunate result of this was that some of the panels left the audience unsure that the panelists understood what was going on. The panel entitled "Good-Bad Hi-Lo: The Taste of Revolution" spent a lot of time talking about embarrassment. No really, how embarrassing.

During one of the workshops someone apparently raised the question: "What is the difference between a virtual bear & a real bear?"—Providing that if you were to be attacked by a virtual bear it could kill you, presumably from the fear & pain. This is a question which Murat Nemet-Nejat correctly pointed out has nothing to do with revolutionary poetry. But which I bring up again in order to make what I feel is a vital point about the current Revolution in Poetry [sic]: The Internet.* (Mr. Weinberger being not the only one who thinks that this is where the real revolution of the future & even the present occurs.) Mr. Nemet-Nejat is correct in seeing that there is nothing revolutionary about the question of the virtual bear; he is wrong in thinking that the asking of the question is not relevant. However, the virtual revolution is by now a reactionary revolution.

THE SOLUTION TO THE DILEMMA OF VIRTUAL BEAR VERSUS REAL BEAR: To begin by arguing whether the bear can or cannot kill you is ridiculous. The point is moot. The difference between a virtual bear & a real bear is this: The questioner

{& any questioner who attempts to respond to this question} knows absolutely nothing of the real world. For unlike the virtual bear, who may exactly replicate every single bit of human knowledge about bears, the real bear contains within itself, not only all the information that bears know of bears, but also all the information that this particular bear knows of the real world. Nature, despite what we may want to think, exists without & beyond our perception of it. The revolution in virtual thinking which would bring us virtual bears is no revolution at all. European Culture has been attempting to eliminate the natural world since the year 2000 BC when Europeans accomplished the deforestation of Greece.

Perhaps the most revolutionary statement to come from the entire conference was made, of course, by Jackson Mac Low (living proof that Mr. Weinberger's claim that politically radical views & allegiances lead you to stop writing). Mr. Mac Low saves us from needing to worry about the meaning of the Symposium by teaching us a very simple truth, Poetry : Life : Revolution. Not three things, one. One thing.

The panel entitled "Good-Bad Hi-Lo: The Taste of Revolution" spent a lot of time talking about embarrassment. No really, how embarrassing.

Thus Mr. Mac Low provided the moment of enlightenment; pure, clear, beautiful. After explaining the methods of the creation of a text by Ann Tardos entitled "Among Men: For Speakers and Instrumentalists" during a panel on "Writing for Performance—Performing the Text," he stated that if anything was unclear in his presentation he would "be glad to read from the text." Implying that the answers to any questions about the relationship between Ms. Tardos's piece & revolution could be revealed simply by attending to the text itself. One thing, not two or three. ONE.

*Note: Developed interestingly enough by the Defense Department who recently got really upset when someone developed an Internet message scrambler which they could not decode.

HAMBONE

11

New writing by Tan Lin,
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701 pages, \$19.95

by Jennifer Moxley

A paradox of the "outside" in any art movement is its contradictory desire for legitimization combined with an acute fear of misrepresentation. The fear of a poetic history with no record of the "outside," not even a flawed one, makes any form of legitimization cause for both an excessive gratitude and a crisis of "who gets in." This fear seems partly responsible for elevating Donald Allen's 1960 anthology to the status of savior, as if no trace of experimental poetry could exist without it. The effect of lifting *The New American Poetry* to a level akin to that of the Armory Show of 1913 is to make the pressure on the next generation of experimental poetry anthologies intense. This pressure is only one of the challenges faced by Paul Hoover's *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. Add to it the diversity and breadth of publishing in the last 45 years, the inherent difficulty of representing in an anthology a tradition that is supposed to challenge the legitimacy of such forms, plus the over-determined label of "Norton," and it is easy to see what Hoover was confronted with when editing this book. Any product produced under these conditions is likely to be full of contradictions. The relevant question therefore is not how to resolve these contradictions, but rather how to present them.

Hoover introduces this Norton with a cursory historical map of post-WWII American poetry using poetic movements and formal or compositional tendencies as a guide. The groupings and styles he mentions are Black Mountain, the New York School, the Beats, San Francisco Renaissance, the Language Poets, poets "maudit," performance and oral poetry, deep image, aleatory or chance operational poetry, prose poetry, and poetry influenced by "field composition." Each of these movements or formal tendencies is presented as having a lineage that is in part represented in this anthology. For example, Hoover writes, "Language poetry finds its disparate precursors in Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* ... Russian Futurist Velimir Khlebnikov ... Zukofsky's *A* ... and the Objectivist movement in general" (establishing origins) and then when introducing Diane Ward he begins: "Associated with language poetry..." (placing her in a formation). In other words,

using the introduction combined with paragraph-long bios of each contributor, Hoover attempts to account for both included and excluded influences and connections; influences wide ranging both with respect to poetry (Blake, Whitman, the surrealists, Dryden, Catullus, Rimbaud, etc.) and other cultural phenomena (jazz, Zen, religion and mythology, the movies, pop culture, philosophical and linguistic thought, political movements and history). The body of the anthology, however, is organized chronologically by birthdate of the poets instead of by movement or formal tendency, which immediately makes determining the importance of each particular movement less easy than if it had been arranged around these constructions.

It would take too much space here to list all the poets Hoover includes, but he tries to include only those poets who come out of, or at least roughly fit into the movements or formal tendencies mentioned above. Though his choices overall are somewhat diverse, the strongest influences and inclusions are clearly poets coming out of Black Mountain, the New York School (both first and second generation), the Beats and the Language Poets. Hoover's insistence on foregrounding formations is formidable when compared to the standard Norton house style which has only the poet's name, birth (and if relevant), death date. The only danger with Hoover's connective map may be of making the avant-garde poetry world appear more like a mafia than is actually the case. Of course I prefer having the underpinnings of poetic community represented since it explodes the myth of isolated genius, but I nevertheless found the result of this technique somewhat daunting. After all, I didn't find out that many of the poets I first loved all knew each other at Harvard until I had already committed myself to being a writer—if I had known this from the get go I may have given up!

Hoover tries not to simplify the complex theoretical motivations behind some of the poetry, while at the same time giving each movement a "conversational handle," for example calling the New York School "courtly eccentrics" and the Beats "earnest bohemians." And though it may be useful to imagine, as Hoover encourages us to do, that literary history is only made up of various new techniques and movements "bursting on the scene," one point to remember about all these anti-bourgeois cliques and coteries is that they are a direct product of bourgeois culture. This isn't to say they aren't radical, interesting or anti-bourgeois, but rather to point out that they value a "myth of origin" in the exact same way the bourgeoisie does in order to naturalize all of its historical progress

and dominance. In other words, experimentation, avant-gardism, and other such appellations of progressive schools of art tell more about the art's relationship to its historical moment than they do about artistic content. Hoover tries to "have his cake and eat it too" on this point by defining the term postmodern extremely broadly as 1) the historical period following WWII, 2) suggestive of an experimental approach to composition as well as, 3) a world view that sets itself apart from mainstream culture. He does not however go on to define "mainstream culture," though he does say its "life in writing" is narcissistic, sentimental and self-expressive, attributes I don't think anyone (even the poets in this anthology) is totally immune from. Considering the fact that Norton is a mainstream publisher it is also interesting to think of the contradiction of this anti-mainstream writing in this very mainstream package. A mainstream package may not automatically de-radicalize its contents, but it does effectively change the status of these writers from that of "outsiders," at least temporarily.

In making his definition of postmodernism so broad, Hoover enables himself to avoid giving any concrete information about why he picked the particular poets he did, or to deal with the issue of "value" at all. I think this is the weakest moment of a well-written introduction. Whether or not I personally agree or disagree with the individual selections within his overarching paradigm is not the point (of course, I agree with some and not others). The point is rather that though Hoover may remove an old notion of value (based on abstract greatness) he does not replace it, thereby skirting an explicit explanation of his selection procedure. What remains is the assumption that careful historical documentation will make choice obsolete or obvious. When Hoover says "this anthology does not view postmodernism as a single style ... postmodernism is, rather, an ongoing process of resistance," I want to see the word "poetry" replace the word "postmodernism" and to have a clearer definition of "resistance," if only because this anthology assumes that 1) mainstream poetry is analogous to mainstream culture and therefore a dominant cultural force and that 2) avant-garde poetry alone is a viable form in which to resist mainstream culture as a whole. Neither of these claims is self-evident. If we are going to act as if they are then we must be careful to present a cogent and seductive alternative. By trying to fill in the historical blanks left out by past literary gatherings in lieu of discussing the principles of his object choice, we as readers are left with essentially the same impression

given in the regular Norton anthologies of poetry, which is that "we again provide readers with a wide and deep sampling of the best poetry written in the English language." To refute the idea of a "best poetry," in a form that by definition includes some while excluding others, is to effectively place value. It is important to be self-reflexive about this effect and to stand strongly by your choices. By avoiding this and embracing pluralism, Hoover erases the force and disagreements between some of the poetic movements represented and also highlights more pointedly how this anthology fails as a "multi-cultural" book. It does nothing to forge a link between social movements and artistic ones, posing literary revolts as only barely connected to social dissatisfaction and dissent. For example, it fails to bring us as a progressive artistic community any closer to understanding why if formal innovation in art changes social perceptions and preconceptions, no viable social movement has arisen outside of the art world in direct response to it. Or why women innovators are often still characterized as quirky individualists apart from both the avant-garde's traditional masculinism and feminist "movement" or confessional poetry.

What makes a work of art revolutionary is its ability to exist both within and without its historical moment, similar to the way we imagine Utopias in the past in order to enable us to envision an alternate future. This Utopian position is important to delineate if only to remind us that collections of poetry, like poems, are constructions, and there can be better and worse "constructions." Keeping this in mind we shouldn't assume that an adequate representation of literary history could exist in any one anthology, no matter how great. Poetry should consistently challenge both the forms of poetic production and distribution. Within a larger context of debate Paul Hoover has done a decent job of realizing what the limited task of the anthology is, and it is in some ways unavoidably exciting to see all these "experimentalists" gathered together.

To approach this book without foreknowledge would be daunting to any student. I mention this in closing because Norton's are most often encountered in school rooms. (It is interesting to note that while this Norton contains a section of poetics, it dispenses with footnotes, explanations of the poems, or a teacher's companion volume!) To first experience American poetry through this book would be anything but pain, since literary logic is here disrupted by the diverse quality of the writing itself. Assuming this Norton does end up in the classroom, what will it say about the changing role of the avant-garde? An avant-garde that no longer relies on rumor and reputation, using terrorist tactics against bourgeois living, but rather employs the available tools of democracy to ensure a place at the table of "justified" history is certainly

something completely different altogether.

So while this anthology may very well be the necessary next step in the history of this particular poetry, the legitimation it so values reminds me of a line from the Lew Welch poem (not in the Hoover) "SMALL SENTENCE TO DRIVE YOURSELF SANE": "the next time you are doing something absolutely necessary ... say to yourself: 'So it's all come to this!'"

From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960-1990
Edited by Douglas Messerli
Sun & Moon, 1994
1135 pages, no price listed

by Tony Door

Late July, Calabria We are so grateful when we received our latest care package from our friends in the States; for although the weather has been wonderful, we had been looking at a long summer in the country without any serious reading to do. The arrival from the States of a big fat square book is none other than "Sun & Moon Press's long-awaited" anthology, *From the Other Side of the Century: A New American Poetry 1960-1990*, edited by Douglas Messerli. With just shy of 600 poems by over 80 poets, it is indeed a hefty tome. One well worth having.

When considering an anthology one generally looks to see who's in it & which poems of theirs are included. You can pretty much do that on your own. However, in the course of this correspondence, a friend advised me that, "Given the effort it took to produce such an anthology ... [a review] owes the editor, publisher & authors something ... that treats the poetry as poetry & not just the product of literary politics/marketing." Therefore, even though I believe that poetry is not just poetry, but is intrinsically tied to a poet's notions of literary politics & the poetic marketplace, I will say something about the work & its literary merit. So perhaps, you will be surprised by this review for it will seem as if I do not like this book, though I will at the same time recommend that you buy it; for indeed, despite its shortcomings, it is a fine book to have.

Mr. Messerli has made it very clear in his introduction that he wishes this anthology to be seen as "A" new Donald Allen anthology. Referring to Allen's anthology as "groundbreaking," he goes on to write, "Taking my lead from Donald Allen ... I felt that these poems could be grouped into small gatherings which might help to illuminate some specific issues & concerns." Writing this review I have found myself coming back again & again to argue with Mr. Messerli over his introduction. For me, this is the very nature of anthologies. The anthology is the sight of the creation

of the Can(n)on; the place where poets get that first blast into immortality. And so my argument begins. In his introduction Mr. Messerli outlines the principles he relied upon when making his choices for this anthology: "All anthologies are personal in the sense that they represent the values of their editors; but wasn't it possible, I wondered, to collect work that pointed at least to specific aesthetic choices ... & represent those choices in writing substantive enough to provide the reader a prospect of each author's poetic?" Mr. Messerli has embarked on this task of editing such an anthology because he feels that other anthologies collected since *The New American Poetry* "fail ... for two reasons: they have not presented a significant enough selection of their poets to help readers contextualize the work, & their selections have too often been based on personal agendas rather than on broader aesthetic points of view."

Much as Mr. Allen had once done in his anthology, Mr. Messerli has here "gathered" together certain poems by certain poets into numbered groups. Unfortunately, where Mr. Allen boldly asserts the presence of each poet in his or her respective group as a geographic imperative, Mr. Messerli uses a rather obscure rubric (I suspect) for fear that he might be found guilty of the heinous sin of "Labeling." Of course part of the reason the geographic imperative worked for Mr. Allen is that he anthologized from various local "scenes," which in our new "electronic age or reproduction," have all but disintegrated as locales. Less obviously, Mr. Allen based his groupings not upon a similarity in poetics, or politics, but on influence. As I have pointed out, a great deal of our contemporary ability to identify locality & poetry has disappeared with the increased availability to both accumulate & disseminate information. However, Mr. Messerli does not "gather" his poets together in a way which gives us an idea of their relation to each other. Additionally perplexing, Mr. Messerli (who has only one poet under the age of 40, where Mr. Allen had 28 under the age of 35) says, "Younger poets must create their own anthologies." However, he does not seem concerned by the monetary improbability of this ever happening.

The organizing or "gathering" methodologies apparently cannot, because of the sensitive nature of the very act of gathering, be clearly revealed to us. Nor can these gatherings be labeled by Mr. Messerli himself. In describing his gatherings, Mr. Messerli is continually looking over his shoulder at those poets he has anthologized: "In the first gathering I have included poets who are concerned ... with cultural issues & a complex of overlapping ideas about myth, politics, history, place, & religion ... The second gathering ... while concerned with some of the same issues as the first [emphasis mine]

(continued on page 28)

THE POETRY PROJECT

October

3 Open Reading. Sign-up at 7:30. [8 pm]

5 Victor Hernandez Cruz & Amiri Baraka "Migration is the story of my body, it is the condition of this age," Victor Hernandez Cruz wrote in an essay from his 1991 collection *Red Beans*. He is the author of numerous books including the classic Nuyorican work *Snaps*. Termed "frequently brilliant and unpredictable," Amiri Baraka has been a central figure in American culture since the 1960's. He has published twelve books of poetry, including *Black Magic Poetry*, *In the Tradition* & *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*. [8 pm]

10 Jon Mazur, Frank Nims and Sparrow Jon Mazur is an artist, writer, filmmaker and composer. After an unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Presidency in 1992, Sparrow organized the first demonstration of poets against *The New Yorker* & founded the One Size Fits All Movement. Frank Nims is the author of the chapbook *The Wild Swans at Cold Spring Harbor* & the forthcoming *Blues Bar*. [8 pm]

12 Bob Flanagan & Steven Hall L.A. writer & performer Bob Flanagan is the author of several books of poetry and prose, including *The Wedding of Everything*, *Slave Sonnets* & *Bob Flanagan: Super Masochist*. Ted Berrigan called Steven Hall's work "totally inscrutable." Hall is the author of several books including *My Newport*, *White Rice* and most recently, *Black Watch*. Former collaborators, Bob Flanagan sang lead in Hall's rock opera *Turbo Sporty*. [8 pm]

November

2 Jessica Hagedorn & Mark Anderson "You don't have to understand T.S. Eliot to appreciate Jessica Hagedorn," Caryn James wrote, "but it helps to know some Smokey Robinson." Jessica Hagedorn is a writer, performance artist and musician whose books include *Dogeaters* & *Danger and Beauty*. Most recently she edited *Charlie Chan is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction*. Mark Anderson is a writer and theater artist working in various performance-based media. Anderson's recent work includes *GREAT GRAND*, a work based on interviews with senior citizens and teenagers, *RESTLESS*, a theater/dance piece, and *MANUAL*, a feature length solo work. He is currently preparing a new monologue entitled *WHO*. (This event is part of The Poetry Project's participation in The National Literary Tour) [8 pm]

7 Open Reading Sign up at 7:30 pm. [8 pm]

9 Rudy Burckhardt, Simon Pettet, Anne Porter and Bill Corbett On photographer Rudy Burckhardt's latest collaboration (with Simon Pettet), *Talking Pictures*, John Ashbery writes, "If Rudy Burckhardt were Japanese he would be named a 'national treasure.'" Simon Pettet's books include *Lyrical Poetry*, *Enigma* & most recently, the collaboration with Burckhardt. Anne Porter raised five children with her husband Fairfield Porter. John Ashbery described her book *An Altogether Different Language* as "suave music...utter clarity...toward eternity." Poet, teacher and critic William Corbett is the author of *Philip Guston's Late Work: A Memoir*. [8 pm]

books including *My Newport*, *White Rice* and most recently, *Black Watch*. Former collaborators, Bob Flanagan sang lead in Hall's rock opera *Turbo Sporty*. [8 pm]

17 Robert Roth & Carletta Joy Walker Robert Roth is the editor of the literary journal *And Then*. Poet & writer Carletta Joy Walker can be heard on WBAI every Monday hosting her show *Joy Journal*. [8 pm]

19 Maggie Dubris & Jane De Lynn Paramedic Maggie Dubris is a guitarist with the all-girl rock band Homer Erotic & is at work on a novel entitled, *Skells*. Jane DeLynn is the author of four novels, including *Real Estate*. She was a foreign correspondent for *Mirabella* and *Rolling Stone* in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. [8 pm]

21 Painters on Poets with Carolee Schneeman, Duncan Hannah, Pamela Lawton, Steve Rosenthal & others. [10:30 pm]

24 Gillian McCain & Jo Ann Wasserman Gillian McCain is the editor of *The Poetry Project Newsletter*. A book of her prose poems is forthcoming from Hard Press. Currently program coordinator of The Poetry Project, Jo Ann Wasserman is a poet & prose writer whose work has appeared in *The World*. [8 pm]

26 Allen Ginsberg & special musical guests: A celebration of Rhino Records issue of *Holy Soul Jelly Roll: Poems and Songs 1949-1993*. [\$10, \$6 for members] [8 pm]

31 WFMU DJ Reading: Bronwyn Carlton, Dave Mandl, Jim Marshall & Bart Plantenga Bronwyn Carlton is the author of the forthcoming *The Big Book of Death* (Paradox Press). Dave Mandl is an editor, a musician, graphic designer and the co-editor of the book *Radiotext*. Jim Marshall (a.k.a. The Hound) has written articles for *L.A. Weekly*, *The Village Voice* and has a regular column in *High Times*. Bart Plantenga is a co-editor of *The Unbearables Anthology* & the author of *Wiggling Wishbone: Stories of Pata-Sexual Spectualtion*. [8 pm]

**Admission \$6 (contribution)
except where noted.
Program subject to change.
Call (212) 674-0910 for more info.**

Language as "suave music...utter clarity...toward eternity." Poet, teacher and critic William Corbett is the author of *Phillip Guston's Late Work: A Memoir*. [8 pm]

11 Art In Its Own Terms: A Tribute to the Work of Fairfield Porter Hosted by Rackstraw Downes. [10:30 pm]

13 A Celebration of Joe Brainard Readings & remembrances by John Brainard, Kenward Elmslie, Ron Padgett & others. [2 pm. Free]

14 Alan Arnold & George Green Novelist, playwright, screenwriter & journalist Alan Arnold is a contributing editor for *African Voices Magazine*. George Green was a two time winner of the Academy of American Poets Prize & has been published in *Bomb* & *Red Tape*. [8 pm]

16 Pedro Pietri & Miguel Algarin Pedro Pietri's work includes *Puerto Rican Obituary* & the play *The Masses Are Asses*. Miguel Algarin's books of poetry include *Nuyorican Kaddish*. He will be performing with musicians Victor Venega & others. [8 pm]

20 Ed Sanders' Amazing Grace Ed Sanders will be joined by Allen Ginsberg, Peter Schickele, PDQ Bach, Steven Taylor, Amy Fradan & others to perform original verses of "Amazing Grace" composed by Peter Seger, Anne Waldman, Robert Creeley & more [\$10, \$6 for members] [8 pm]

21 Peter Bushyeager & Carol Szamatowicz Art critic & poet Peter Bushyeager has been published in *Exquisite Corpse* & *New American Writing*. Teacher & lifeguard Carol Szamatowicz is an editor of *The World & Calico Kids*. [8 pm]

28 Mitch Highfill & Viriana Tkacz Mitch Highfill is the author of the forthcoming *Liquid Affairs* (United Artists). Viriana Tkacz is a poet, translator, director, playwright, & founding director of the Yara Arts Group. [8 pm]

30 Wang Ping & Elaine Equi Wang Ping is the editor & translator of a forthcoming anthology of contemporary Chinese poetry, & the author of *American Visa*. Elaine Equi is the author of seven collections of poetry including the forthcoming *Decoy*. [8 pm]

**2nd Avenue & 10th Street at
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery**

wRitinG wOrkshoPs at the pOetry pRoject

Larry Fagin: Prose Poem Workshop

An investigation of a genre relatively new to English-speaking poets. We will study European and American examples from the past two centuries, and work on weekly writing "assignments." Special attention to everyday speech, humor, and the unconscious. Some collaborative writing. Prose writers are also welcome.

Tuesdays at 7 pm (October 18th thru January 28th)

Larry Fagin was a co-director of The Poetry Project, and founder of Danspace. He has taught for many years in poets-in-the-schools program. His latest publications are *The List Poem*, *Lime Ricketys* (with Jack Collom), and *On the Pumice of Morons* (with Clark Coolidge).

Kimberly Lyons: Poetry Writing Workshop

Writing as ecstatic and difficult encounter with the polysemous. To open up depth of contact and particularize a vocabulary, participants will further develop their faculties and investigate generative zones. Reception to the discarded, fragmentary and unfamiliar will be encouraged through exercises, forays, and personalized as-

signments. Readings, including theory, will be made available. Beginning and practicing writers welcome.

Saturdays at noon (October 22nd thru January 27th)

Kimberly Lyons is the author of *In Padua*, *Oxygen* and most recently, *Rhyme the Lake*. Her work has appeared in *o'blek* and is forthcoming in a Sun & Moon anthology and *Lingo*.

Edwin Torres: .poetry.IN.performance.

This workshop will explore the communication of poetry in performance. Participants will play with ways to think about the language of what we do. Active participation and guest artists will be part of the journey.

Fridays at 7 pm (October 21st thru January 24th)

Edwin Torres is a poet and performer who has performed on MTV and toured with Nuyorican Live! He is the author of *I Hear Things People Haven't Really Said*.

Workshops cost \$150 which includes membership to The Poetry Project. This fee is good for one year, whereas the participant can take as many workshops as desired during that period. Checks can be sent to The Poetry Project, 131 East 10th Street, NYC 10003 or dropped by the office. Call (212) 674-0910 for more info.

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Jo Ann Wasserman

New to the challenges and rewards of the Program Coordinator's position, Jo Ann Wasserman is a familiar face at the Project. Serving as Editorial Intern (1992-93) and Membership Coordinator (1992-94), Jo Ann participated in several group readings at The Poetry Project. She has studied writing with John Barth, Bernadette Mayer, John Edgar Wideman and Darius James. Also a visual artist, Jo Ann has studied art at The School of Visual Arts. Currently at work on a collection of short stories titled *Special Rates for Horsemen*, her poetry has appeared in *The World*.

Brenda G. Coultas

Brenda G. Coultas joins the Poetry Project as Program Assistant from The Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, where she received her M.F.A. in Writing and Poetics in 1993. There she studied with such Poetry Project friends as Bobbie Louise Hawkins, Keith Abbott, Anne Waldman, Anselm Hollo and Jack Collom. Brenda received Naropa's Jack Kerouac Scholarship in the summer of 1992. Her work can be found in the current issue of *The Indiana Review* and on the forthcoming audio disc, *Lip*, produced by Bloodtest for The Women's Action Coalition (WAC).

HARD PRESS

Books & Periodicals

lingo 3 West Coast Focus

June 1994

John Yau Interviews George Herms • Color Portfolio including: John Wesley • Lynn Foulkes • David Amico • Jimmie Durham • Julio Galan • New Work by: Lyn Hejinian • Leslie Scalapino • Jean Day • Kit Robinson • Cydney Chadwick • Killarney Clary • Michael Lally • John Godfrey • Tan Lin • Gillian McCain • Rod Smith • Ted Greenwald • New Fiction: *It Never Rains When the Crocus Sing* by Hubert Selby, Jr. • In Translation: Yi Sang • Joachim Sartorius • Collaboration: Clark Coolidge • Michael Gizzi • Celia Coolidge from *Providence* • Raphael Rubinstein on Julio Galan • John Yau on John Wesley • Geoffrey Young on Kim Dingle

Lowell Connector

\$12.95

Clark Coolidge, Michael Gizzi, and John Yau. • Photographs by Bill Barrette and Celia Coolidge. As homage to a writing hero, and as catalyst for their own work, the authors of *Lowell Connector* made several trips to Kerouac's hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts. The procedure was to visit specific sights described in Kerouac's work, taking in the homes, haunts, schools and literary memorials as a kind of memory protein in the activation of their own work.

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

The Desires Of Mothers To Please Others In Letters

\$12.95

Bernadette Mayer

A monumental St. Bernadette to the initiates, this work has achieved something like the status of "Manuscript Classic." An epistolary text which takes as its formal parameters the nine months of Ms. Mayer's last pregnancy — an augury by bee sting — and writes the reader's psyche to the fences. "*She Mayer Reader, Sonnets, and Studying Hunger.*" — Robert Creeley. By the author of *The Bernadette*

Sept. 1994

David Trinidad
Answer Song
High Risk Books
128 pages, \$10.99

David Trinidad is a poet from Los Angeles who, appropriately, is entranced by the movies and by pop culture in general. Trinidad grew up in the suburbs of tinsel town, where American families consume mass entertainment with reverence and without irony. The poet's mother, for example, threw out his copy of Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* for fear it would poison her young son's mind.

Answer Song, Trinidad's fifth collection, could be read as his autobiography in verse. The best poems of *Answer Song* are those included in Section Three. "Family Portrait, 1963," with its Daddy Dearest overtones, is a scary and painful poem. And the prose poem, "The Bomb Shelter," is, in my opinion, the jewel of the collection. The family depicted in this poem is just one step away from sinking into the horror of such movies as "The Stepfather": "My parents informed us that we were not to tell any of our friends about the bomb shelter. It was a secret. If there were a war, they explained our neighbors might show up with guns and try to get in. They might even try to kill us—they might be that desperate."

In Section Four, "Eighteen to Twenty-One," there are poignant portraits of Trinidad's sexual rite of passage as a gay man. Although the experiences described are traumatic, the poems are so vividly written that they rise above their subject matter. As in "Three Deaths" (about three women he knew in adolescence), Trinidad has a fine gift for depicting characters from his life. Section Six, a collage about Patty Duke, *Valley of the Dolls* (the novel and the movie version) and Jacqueline Susann, is at once the most interesting part of the book and the most problematic. Trinidad is not the first poet to have written about the movies, pop culture and television. But whereas poets such as Edward Field or Frank O'Hara could write about the great divas of the cinema with tongue-and-cheek detachment, Trinidad approaches Patty Duke (a "low" camp figure) as if she were a goddess with a lasting legacy. This section is at his best in the moments when, as in the tour de force poem "The Shower Scene in Psycho," Trinidad's life intersects with the events he narrates. The night of Sharon Tate's gruesome murder, "There was a storm ... rain and branches beat against the windows. I waited anxiously for

The Late Show to come on."

Even so, with *Answer Song* David Trinidad carves for himself a distinct place in contemporary American poetry. This collection is a moving and impressive performance. Jaime Manrique

Next: Young American
Writers on the New
Generation
Edited by Eric Liu
W.W. Norton, 1994
233 pages, \$21

Next: Young American Writers on the New Generation, an anthology of essays by writers between the ages of 24 and 32, focuses on the population known to many as "Generation X." Most of the smart contributors are careful to make clear that they are anything but intellectual "slackers." Unfortunately, much of *Next* is too smart for its own good, and reads like a stack of answers to an exam question.

But there are highlights. In "AIDS and the Apocalyptic Imagination," Stephen Beachy tackles his coming of age as a "Generation X" gay man and H.I.V. positive condition with a mighty wit and the kind of courageous intelligence one doesn't get in school. In "What Set You From, Fool?" poet Paul Beatty mixes hilarity and sage rhapsodic talk to recount growing up black in Los Angeles, while focusing upon the particular dangers racism poses as it aims to thwart the maturing mind. Lalo Lopez, too, puts caustic humor to worthy didactic use in "Generation Mex," a fierce and enlightening examination of her Mexican heritage. "How Dirty Pictures Changed My Life," begins with this command: "Burn it," (Lisa Palac refers to some hardcore sex videos discovered in her boyfriend's dorm closet) and ends with the writer's claim that her penchant for erotica is both liberating and compatible with feminist principles.

Editor Eric Liu's attempts to reflect diversity fall short—on the feminism count. While Naomi Wolf's "The Rites of Sisterhood," a commencement speech, is a sensible and balanced piece, most of the other essays on the subject of feminism are self-indulgent and short-sighted. Readers may find it disconcerting that all of six essays devoted to feminist topics appear to be authored by white heterosexual women.

The subtle yet persistent neo-conservative slant and bratty preoccupation with materialism in *Next* becomes tiresome. While there is no lack of annoying televi-

rEviewS

sion allusions, talk of books is rare. When editor Eric Liu does squeeze a bit of verse into his own essay, "A Chinaman's Chance," the spin he puts on Robert Browning reveals plenty: "... a man's reach must exceed his grasp—else what's a heaven for?" So it is in America. Every generation will strive, and often fail ... There may be temporary setbacks, cutbacks, recessions, depressions ... I happen still to believe in our national creed: freedom and opportunity ... what makes America unique ... the only country that could produce heroes like Colin Powell—heroes who rise from nothing, who overcome the odds." Michele Madigan Somerville

Kit Robinson
Balance Sheet
Roof Books, 1993
111 pages, \$9.95

What's to say. This is a very good book. Kit dips in. Every now and again, between July 1991 and December 1992, he found himself in a similar, long line, state of mind. Sort of feeling his way in, and around, before during and after. But slightly aerial, without vanity. "I have a feeling that no amount of preparation, no matter how thorough, will be adequate to the moment, wherein/ everything takes place." (*Balance Sheet*)

Whatever has come up, whatever's around, the final decision is made, *play the string out*, wherever, as a poet, forever. "We live on/ the margin. The gross domestic product is poetry. Otherwise, it's fucking./ Looking out the window is incremental business. Reading from books and games/ on the floor represent growth, and at length there is tenderness, understanding." (*Balance Sheet*)

Two sequences in the book, "Counter Meditation" and "Ice Cubes II" (covering periods just before and just after when *Balance Sheet* was written) summarize the last decade of the 20th century's movement of poem structure from flush left residual stanza organization through paragraphs to line-by-line one word beads, perhaps to some future lines strung on center.

Poetry organizes itself line by line. The basic prose unit is the paragraph. Kit takes this reader through the increasingly software prose world and lines up civilization's human soft spots.

Balance Sheet is a good read that will not break. Ted Greenwald

**Charlie Chan is Dead:
An Anthology of
Contemporary Asian
American Fiction**
Edited by Jessica
Hagedorn
Penguin, 1993
569 pages, \$14

Throughout *Charlie Chan is Dead* a rhythm runs that is difficult to measure, despite its linearity. For instance, halfway through the anthology appears a bittersweet narrative about the struggling relationship between a Japanese American journalist and his Chinese American psychoanalyst lover. This precedes a gut-wrenching portrayal of Chinese women who come to America with visions of "Gold Mountains," only to be lured into slavery and prostitution. Before the Seattle couple, there's a comic story of Hawaiian boys entering puberty, told in pidgin English. And before that, a witty portrayal of a slightly cynical, thirty-something, Chinese American male whose day job is to manufacture synthetic fragrances—easier work (much to his chagrin) than grappling in the evenings with his hopelessly optimistic mother who lived through the Cultural Revolution and can't help laughing hysterically at Johnny Carson. And before this, a vignette featuring a Filipino custodian who receives fellatio from a young man in the janitor's room—an act witnessed secretly everyday through a key hole by his own son.

These juxtapositions are just a sampling of what keeps *Charlie Chan is Dead*, a new anthology of Asian American writing, from ever plodding or veering from its course beyond the death in its title. This anthology does some of the work that the American media hasn't for Asian Americans. With the exception of a few recent films, including a version of Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, there's little to offer, especially from television and its revival of the old *Kung Fu* series into the equally ridiculous, *Kung Fu: The Legend Continues*—Charlie Chan would be proud. Jessica Hagedorn, the anthology's editor, whose novel *Dogeaters* was nominated for the 1990 National Book Award, has brought together an immense diversity of writings and writers (forty-eight in all) that celebrate and complicate the death of Charlie Chan into a collective process that gives this book, unlike most anthologies, the aspect of a great American novel (something that any one "Author" is unlikely to give us nowadays). In her helpful and informative preface, Elaine Kim de-

fines an America that is ever "becoming"—not merely an America that is free of discrimination, but one in which the making of American writing has more to do with Gertrude Stein than John Wayne (who once, incidentally, recorded an album of songs, featuring "The Hyphen Song," in which he lamented his dislike of "hyphenated Americans").

Along the way, there's plenty to see anew about America, especially if you consider yourself to be a non-hyphenated American. Though not always necessarily user-friendly, there is open space in *Charlie Chan is Dead* for "dead ghosts" (a derogatory but insightful Chinese term for Whites) seeking redemption from guilt. Consider the narrator's observations, in David Mura's "Fictive Fragments of a Father and Son" after looking through a Playboy in his parent's bedroom: *And so, like many other American boys, I discover my sexuality in the presence of a picture. And, like so many other American boys, I do not think of the color of the woman's skin. Of course, if she were black or brown or yellow... but she is white, her beauty self-evident. I sense somehow that she must be more beautiful than Asian women, more prestigious. But the forbidden quality of sex overpowers any thought of race.*

Race surfaces here without "us/them" dichotomies, which are rendered impractical in this anthology (and previously elsewhere, along with cultural nationalist agendas), for dealing with the subtleties, hybrids and paradoxes of what it means to be Asian-American in a racist, hyper-real, consumerist culture. Don't go looking for Mao's Little Red Book or even Confucius. You're more likely to find the influence of Philip Roth, Joyce Carol Oates or William S. Burroughs. Such complexities prevent the exoticism, blind worship, suspicion and hatred with which many Americans have learned to relate to Asia and its political movements. Many of these are coming-of-age stories told from the perspective of second or third generation Asian Americans trying to make sense of their lives. They often scrutinize the stereotypically inscrutable, like the private histories of their parents, who are often lost originals, actual natives of the Asia that's been colonized, interned, bombed, re-built, endlessly stereo-typed and vilified. In Sigrid Nunez's "Chang," the story revolves around a search for a father that's both a tribute to Gogol and a relentless, practically oedipal search for origins. *Sounds like therapy*—there are many characters here who would probably seek out analysis before the I-Ching.

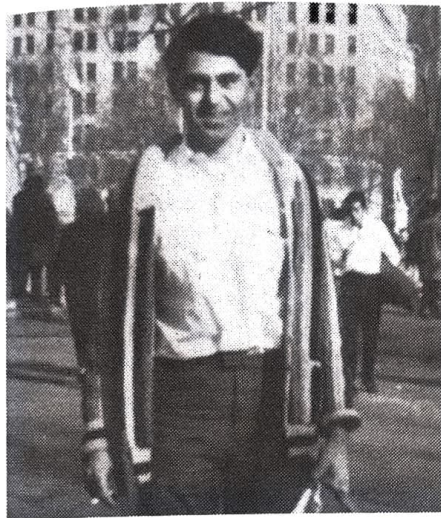
The New York Times Magazine recently featured an article about the rise of decadent, "Western" sub-cultures in Japan

(June 26, 1994, p. 36). It seems that bikers, porn stars, rockers and club girls—"more gritty, more sexy, more Western than Japan has ever seen before"—have been on the rise since the 80's. *Charlie Chan is Dead* also explores Asian American experience in terms of a definition of the West as a gritty, immoral antithesis of Charlie Chan and his impotent stereotypes. An excerpt from Han Ong's novel-in-progress, *The Stranded in the World*, dilutes and shows up the age-old, American underworld-as-adventure trope that's being quickly over-used (and over-hailed) in recent American literature and film (well-intentioned, executed and imitated examples of which include: William T. Vollman's *The Rainbow Stories* and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*). A teenage Filipino American male prostitute describes his world by using America, literally and figuratively: *It is the essence of private enterprise, the self-started business, American to the bone. What draws them to the practice is the obscenity, the attractive amorality of it all. And it's seeming ease, money for nothing, for just lying back and allowing a stranger to touch that body, to have its way with all that that inert stretch of skin suggests, the pleasure and the violence.* The second analogy, "the pleasure and the violence" of America is personified in his lover, a successful, white businessman, who's younger brother is lured into "whoring" himself and subsequently strangled to death by an irate customer, which leads the narrator to dream the death of his own younger brother under similar circumstances: *I'd see my brother in a glass coffin. Typical of that family: body trussed up and encased in glass for public display. Visual aid for my mother as she declaims about the deadenedness of American morality.* The narrator concludes: *There are certain images so true as you dream of them that they are virtually assured occurrences in real life.* Another version of the American Dream. The story ends with the image of the narrator's thumb "hitched to attract traffic, thumb hiked up as indifference to death and morality."

Finally, there is the cover of this book, repeated on the front and back, featuring half an image of an Asian man from an old movie still, mirrored symmetrically, vertically, so that the revolver he's holding (as if to shoot) is confronted with its own image. He faces you, looks you in the eye, but stands next to himself with half of himself somewhere out of the frame.

Robert V. Hale

Joseph Ceravolo
The Green Lake is Awake
 Edited by Larry Fagin,
 Kenneth Koch, Charles
 North, Ron Padgett, David
 Shapiro and Paul Violi
 Coffee House Press, 1994
 122 pages, \$11.95



Joseph Ceravolo in Washington Square Park. "He was regular and smart and wise. His hands all over the one that he loved. He spoke."

There's no silliness in this verse. And that's rare as an afterthought, among his contemporaries, if he had any. Beauty is, after all, a mark on the cheek of the beloved. And hindsight is never guarded, not here. Mr. Ceravolo writes prosody as deep as a knick, his fist over the landfall.

He rocks the boat in split-seconds. And there's no one in it! Just the stuff he took for fisticuffs and the stuff of love all over and in that. This man wrote so well, he

He wrote haikus of literal stuff off the cuff that anyone, of even lesser or more merit, would die for. Cadences are erect.

The small swell at his back side must have made him blush. But he knew the way to the water. And the silt-blue waters of Manhattanites buoyed him up. He wrote so irascibly blue that nothing could erase that. And joy in integers. He wrote all over most of his predecessors and about all his peers. That stuck.

There is no ground where there are no answers. Leave that to John and his god-sent stuff. Joe left no wake.

He wrote like a hat out of hell. And with the infinite graces let that be that. He suffered no cordons. He was regular and smart and wise. His hands all over the one

that he loved. He spoke.

I'm nowhere where he's concerned. We're nowhere where he's concerned. And we're all over where he took a kid's shovel at the beach to teach. He had thoughts.

His lines all as brief as what it takes any of us sentenced sentences to die.

Joe's lines flocked. And they still do over this or any other less abstemious page. They have the origin of life in them. And they make life curl around them like any other bespoke dictum about art obeying the rhythm about art obeying the dictum that what survives imitates nature in its manners of rhythm.

There's always more than meets the eye but never more than meets it. That is the dictum of speech.

If anyone could come back to life with the clear interdictions of speech ...

There are no arguments possible in speech, and in this Joe's writing no less. The collected works? Larry, get to work. Alan Davies

The Girl Wants To
 Edited by Lynn Crosbie
 Coach House Press, 1994
 208 pages, \$15.95

I got dumped back in the Spring, then August came and I returned the favor to someone else. Single again and open to what the universe has in store, I've got my heart/coochie bank book balanced and a birthday coming. Can't picture the perfect lover, but I'm crazily horny in an unusually non-specific way. What a perfect time to take home *The Girl Wants To: Representations of Sex and the Body*, an eclectic and imaginative multi-media compendium of women's writings on sex and the body edited by Canadian poet Lynn Crosbie. Like me, Crosbie's got good taste and an open mind. She hasn't put her stamp on a blueprint of female desire: there's no right answer here. What she presents is a menu of contemporary female sexuality. And what a tasty and complicated menu it is.

I choose greedily from Column A and Column B as I read through this collection, getting hot and bothered all over the place. I send a postcard to Xaviera Hollander's out-takes from a menage-a-trois and it says I Wish I Was There. Mary Louise Adams' mouthwatering description of girls-in-lust has me jotting myself a note: Pick up a couple of knottable silk scarves. Sylvie Rancourt's comic "From the Bottom"? I don't care if she's just a line drawing. Give Danielle, the ex-stripper who's

looking to get spanked, my phone number. All this from a (hmm...) straight girl.

I love to find myself deep, deep into a good story, so Ramabai Espinet, Pamela des Barres and Makeda Silvera's rich and well-crafted entries satisfy other urges. Ann Diamond's character Mona, The Whore of Existential Loneliness ("Her life, she said, was best understood as collage") is my evil twin. I go for it, vicariously, through Dawn Mourning's in-your-face poetic extortions ("Don't just stand there,/ take me./ Throw me down/and fuck me./ You've got a cock/ use it,/ for something more than pissing") and Gigi the Galaxy Girl's slow groove with a blender. I discover a one-act play with its legs all wrapped around Kathy Acker's "The Whores in Jail at Night," and a lay-person's guide to the tenets of S/M inside Barbara Wilson's dishy tale of an afternoon at the Learning Annex. Then I examine the bios at the end of the book closely, imagining the myriad directions I might take in one writerly lifetime.

I lay back, well-fed and sated, sensing that cupid and my muse are hand-in-hand on the stoop and about to ring the bell. I'm reminded that I don't have to choose. I thank Goddess for making me as tasty and complicated as she did. Kathy Ebel

Paul Beatty
Joker, Joker, Deuce
 Penguin, 1994
 108 pages, \$12.95

This brilliant work is a scroll down of an emergent African-American poet's coming of age on the Lower East Side. Beatty's poetry is post-beat and post-black power and truly post-modern in its 21st century implications. There it will be, if not this voice, a voice very much in the same realm, that can codify and deliver the mind and spirit of a persona who has copped both the hip hop and the generation x shit. It is that avowed voice of a generation that is often lost in promotional advertising prose and propagandistic news bytes recurring on a tape loop—be it video, or tape, the spoken word or music—that Beatty has transcended to a place of understanding and clarity.

In *Joker, Joker, Deuce* the music of the word is rap and its antecedents, jazz and a bedrock of gospel and blues. Put that together with a college graduate's understanding of standard knowledge, and fuse it with an intelligence that has known the street in all its grim games and splendor

and you have an approach to what Paul Beatty offers.

Beatty's poetry has a mean black wit that is as laugh-out-loud as it is steeped in an inner city cryptology that is beautiful to behold. His muse is often in eyes wide open to situations be it common workplace, school days, self-analysis, societal analysis or just hanging in the 'hood. Sometimes cartoons with only words to convey the images, Beatty's poetry more often is hard insights and playful verbal dexterity, long landscapes from a tough mind. He has a way of saying anything he wants to. From "Independent Study": "shreds of yellow newspaper/ instead of tree leaves/ tumble thru broken fields of glass ..." "No Tag Back" is a masterpiece of a poem. It takes his hip hop ethos from his grade school origins, surrounds it a black cultural/ historical point-of-view, and then delivers a most fantastic narrative of hip hop's power: "and the token grammy award/ is scratched from all the glass shrapnel/ dispatched when rap shattered the window of radio access ..." "Verbal Mugging" and "About the Author" are amusing poems about reading poetry and nascent literary life. "Two Pink Dots? You Positive?" achieves a rare humorous and scary power in it's

depiction of a teenage pregnancy and birth: "so he leaned back/ put one foot on my uterus/ pulled pants he didnt have down to the crack of his ass/ tilted his baseball cap/ barely into his third trimester/ the little squirt was already down wid O.P...." Beatty really takes on the page and fashions his lines splendidly towards meaning. His youth sparks many of his poems, recalling landmark moments of his childhood, and then he takes off, beyond argot, at the height of new African-American expressionism to deliver poetry that is truly delightful and awesome. David Henderson

Carolyn Forche
The Angel of History
HarperCollins, 1994
84 pages, \$20

Crossing to the new millennium, angels are appearing on every street corner, right next to the GAP. We are in apparent need of guidance—a longing for spiritual protection to deliver us from our animosity toward reality. Carolyn Forche's *The Angel of History*, a book-length poem which is divided into five sections, takes

its direction from the philosophy of Walter Benjamin. The book begins with a quote from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise ..."

Intended as observation, the poem is not about experience. According to Forche, "these are utterances from my own encounter with the events of this century ..." Even when the author writes about her grandmother Anna, the persona of the poem emerges as the anguished angel, hovering just above the horror of human maneuvering during the twentieth century. The angel is propelled along a path strewn with "bones put into rice bowls" and "the baby crawl(ing) over its dead mother seeking milk." Moving onward, without the ability "to stay, awaken the dead ..." the angel speaks French with survivors of the Holocaust, mourns the student who immolated himself in a 1968 protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia, starves

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alongside casualties of American-created "Banana Republics" and in the aftermath of Hiroshima, listens to "the living/ and the dead not crying for help."

It is her sensitivity and unique weaving of detail which allows Carolyn Forché to observe horror without reducing her observation to cliché or sound bites. She forces the reader to reevaluate the events which have led us, in accumulated speed, to the next thousand years of history. Forché is not merely encouraging but pushing us to accept the responsibility of learning our past and facing our future even as the unutterable continues and "the pile of debris before (the angel) grows skyward." Jo Ann Wasserman

**Light From a Nearby Window:
Contemporary Mexican Poetry
Edited by Juvenal Acosta
City Lights Books, 1994
231 pages, \$12.95**

Mexico is a wacky place. Intensely spiritual and depressingly indigent on the fringes, weirdly cosmopolitan and literate in the center, it's a society that's in a major convulsion right now (but that doesn't mean they're not having fun). You might wonder, with all that Nafta stuff, presidential election, long lines at the Frida Kahlo museum, how could they have time for poetry? Well, the culture that exists as a kind of living poetry of feathered-serpent gods and eviscerated, bleeding hearts makes the most of its muse, as evidenced in this well-curated collection by Juvenal Acosta.

Making the most out of his friendship with San Francisco beat and City Lights mogul Lawrence Ferlinghetti and a group of 11 poet-translators, Acosta has succeeded in putting out an extremely nifty book. The included poets represent various tendencies in Mexican society, hailing from the urban monster metropolis, Mexico City; northern, U.S.-like Monterrey; southern, rebellious Chiapas; and also naturalized poets from Honduras and Egypt. In their work is an unmistakably Mexican passion, irony, and mysticism.

There is a funky Bukowski feel in Richard Castillo's "Ode to the Urge." "to urinate is a pleasure/ What's there to say? One takes a leak/ saluting love and friends/ one spills himself long into the throat of the world/ to remind himself

we're warm inside..." Indeed. The pleasing economy in the canto-like verses of Lucha Corpi soothes with its silences and angular precision. But the biggest lessons here seem to come from David Huerta, author of "Incurable," the longest poem in the history of Mexican poetry. "The physical body and all its ideas say wait," Huerta announces, knowingly, and you actually shut off the machinery of your technologized brain for a second to fill yourself with his words.

I mentioned visceral, right? Well, bring Francisco Hernandez's "Until the Poem Remains" to your next body-piercing party: "Strip away the flesh/ until the poem remains/ with the sonorous darkness of bone./ And smooth the bone, polish it, sharpen it/ until it becomes such a fine needle,/ that it pierces the tongue without pain/ though blood chokes the throat ..." Which I guess is proof that California kulture was invented in Mexico. So if you want to live in the space of bizarre dreams of serpentine netherworlds and experience premonitions of the political chaos that the end of the millennium holds, draw back the blinds and let in some Light From a Nearby Window. It'll go a long way with feeling a little more whole with the hemisphere. Ed Morales

**Robin Blaser
The Holy Forest
Coach House Press, 1993
394 pages, \$19.95**

Like a missing link walking out of the forest, this book reveals so much about the so-called San Francisco Renaissance, and poetry in general, that it is hard to discuss in a brief review. The language draws attention to itself, but remains lush and descriptive as well. Like Spicer's works, many of these poems are serial poems, where meaning is accrued over pages of poetry, reflecting back and forth over time. Like Duncan's work, there is an interest in occult or metaphysical subject matter. But this is where the similarities end. In fact, it is only superficially that these poems resemble those of Blaser's peers. Since 1956, Blaser has been writing an exact music of the mind and body, publishing sparsely in magazines and small chapbooks. Many of his readers knew that there was a larger body of work in progress, but with the scant attention his work has received over the years, few knew how large and various that oeuvre would be.

This is a collected poems, and they speak to each other in a way that is uncom-

mon in such a collection. The love poems speak to the political poems, which speak to the philosophical poems, forming a mental sine wave. There are several serial structures "folded into" the book, such as the "image-nation" poems, which explore the ways love and sex blend with linguistics and politics in myth and reading. There is an autobiographical line here which is often undercut by universals. The universals are lifted from various sources, such as anthropological texts and the newspapers. When reading the "image-nation" series, with its various voices collaged together in the "modern" manner, it is easier to miss the deeper lyrical movement of the shorter poems like "Invisible Pencil," "At Last," and "Merlin." It is in these lyrics that Blaser reaches the level of song, captivating and delicious, and thoroughly moving, "as if the hometown river flowed/ into the room and out of the heart."

For so many years, Blaser's chapbooks have been out of print. I had xeroxed his first, *The Cups*, from a friend's collection. Likewise, *The Moth Poems* were passed back and forth among friends. In recent years, there was a little book out from Talonbooks, *Syntax*. This was the only book in print until now. All of these collections are here, plus Blaser's amazing translation of Nerval, and a surprise section at the back of the book of very early poems from 1956 through 1958.

For my generation, Blaser has been more of a legend than a reality. One reads his definitive essay on Spicer, one sees a few poems here and there. Blaser's peers speak of him fondly, occasionally he is quoted in reference to alchemy or structuralism or Spicer. At long last, Coach House Press has made this substantial collection available in an affordable and beautifully designed trade paperback edition. I urge one and all to read this book: "a translation of oneself into the other/ is/ so/ delicately/ perched among words." Mitch Highfill

**Barbara Barg
The Origin of the Species
Semiotext(e) Native
Agents Series, 1994
156 pages, \$6**

Semiotext(e) Native Agents series has done it again. After a slew of great uniformly sized books (great for reading on the subway) from the likes of Eileen Myles, Kathy Acker and David Rattray, comes a wonderful book by Barbara Barg.

If you've ever heard Barbara Barg's

voice with her band Homer Erotic or seen her alone, you know that her voice is beautiful one moment and a snap crackle flask of acid pop across the face the next. I was happy that her new book *The Origin of the Species* delivered just the punch she packs live. This book is full of dreamy ditties on the breakdown of the world from Memphis to the Lower East Side. It's about succumbing to the horror and ecstasy that inhabits those exquisite blocks of ENERGY. Barbara has her finger on the pulse and she's relating the beat. And as Captain Beefheart said, "If you've got ears, you gotta listen."

While I was reading her book I got scared a few times, thinking she was going to come into my apartment and knock me upside the head for not paying close enough attention—her voice is that real on the page, which is no small feat. Her writing is sharp because, like the best of writers, she stays "close to the nose" when she describes her personal vision of staying alive in this wicked age we live in. That's right, staying alive, surviving. And when you are a survivor, you come out on the other side a lot stronger, wiser, and more vulnerable. As she writes in "Fresh Out of Nodland": *I'm bored with wearing black all the goddam time. I'm now naive enough to want to shine a little light. A little corona on my persona. I had forgotten what it is to be gentle with myself.* It's these moments that separate Barbara's writing from the somewhat stereotypical writing of other ex-junkies. She's not romanticizing a damn thing about that hell: "I've been down low/ I've been traveling blue/ I've been cool too long/ Life/ is the hot/ concept." Whew! When is the last time you heard something that honest without smirking? She doesn't just hit the nerve, she stomps on it, which is what makes this book so exhausting and rewarding. You can't read Barg's work passively, you gotta roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty.

There are songs, poems, short stories and automatic writing in this collection, as well as an element of mysticism (à la *A Vision* by William Butler Yeats), which leads me to my favorite poem, "Guide for the Perplexed," a piece of writing that was apparently channeled through her as she sat down at her computer to write a letter to a friend. It's not something that's easy to quote from, or to summarize, but I will recommend that you read it before going to sleep (when your defenses are down). It messed with my dreams after I finished the piece. I was under the firm belief that she had mastered some alchemical language matrix that was capable of changing the chemistry of my brain so that it only picked

up the frequencies of her voice.

Another great piece is "Pop Quiz" with a preface explaining that this is only a "review," not the "real thing." What follows is a questionnaire of sorts that asks almost every question we were born to ask. Answers that will never be found in the latest edition of *How Things Work*. No, these are questions best answered by a poet (to list a few): "What is the difference between a flower and the rent?" "Who among us is waiting until tomorrow to begin their real life?" "What do we take the point to be of a cock?" "What is shampoo?" "Would you rather open your arms or your veins?" "Do you hug people you don't want to fuck?" "Do you fuck people you don't want to hug?" With every question comes an amused silence followed by an insatiable need to read the next unrelated question. But hey, there's nothing to worry about, it's only a pop quiz!

I'll wind it up with the funniest lines in the book, from the poem titled "Good Morning Princess": "Your family wanted a doglike robot./ They got you instead." Tell it like it is Barbara. Todd Colby

Alan Davies Rave Roof Books, 1994 61 pages, \$7.95

Stinging, slender columns, *Rave*'s long poem "Split Thighs" appears constructed of gusts from lengthier phrases (as in aposiopesis, "the leaving of a thought incomplete by a sudden breaking off") condensed into consonantal, punchy units: "glob spank meadow/ quaaludes spoke meats/ glot pants." This is the kind of pop music heard at times on the Coolidge, Greenwald, and Andrews stations and it is ugly and funny. Mosh pit word combos. Shifting subjectivity, multiple lines of thought and tone interfere with one another with a melancholy obsessiveness that sustains fragmentation.

Tangents spin off of cryptic commenting on the pursuit and relinquishing of longings: "ocean spray/ these romantic twists/ farms full of you/ funny how we answer/ the slow and crazy." Lyric grace is stopped short: "the answers altered/selecting sea men/ puns/ purposeful by then."

"Split Thighs" was first circulated as a xerox piece generated by Davies during a sojourn in Boston and the blurb on the back informs it was written in a club in something called the combat zone. Without narrative explicitness, this poem enacts

the evasions and minute culminations of erotic encounter. Since the sexual acts that are intimated ("probe ass/suggestion"; "cup to tongue to clit") are not claimed in some sense or followed up on they hang there as anatomized close ups. The porno sheen of those passages is startling and urgent but feel somewhat forced.

What becomes evident is that although the splintery, fast shifts and tender low-notes (bet Davies was reading Creeley in those days) seem generated by a consciousness of real bodies doing things to each other in real space, the combat zone is writing. This is text sex (bet he was reading Derrida too). "Words cut up/ volitional and thoughtful" ... and "words put down/ nothing special to say." Poesy (perhaps this is the "pussy" that manifests on numerous occasions throughout) tries to get it on (again) and "this process/ cumulate diction sounds." Yet once elusive contact appears possible, "take cock to tongue lip/ lament mangle trope" things break down. I get the idea from this poem that language structured as we most often know of it cannot pleasure the circular pulsation of its refraction. In the endless delay, "moss amorous mess," "misread torment polish," parts jostle.

The other three short pieces in this book are "Orders," "Vitals," and "An Isherwood Novel" and they are all very different from one another and pick up on the sex and writing texture but in different forms. First published in 1975, "Split Thighs" carries out some radical anti-syntactical and rhetorical moves that predates a lot of stuff that looks and sounds like it. It's a challenging poem that after almost twenty years is still fresh. Kimberly Lyons

Charles Bukowski Pulp Black Sparrow Press, 1994 202 pages, \$13.00

Nick Belane. He's one tough dick. Blue eyes, old shoes, thirty pounds overweight and nobody loves him. But don't cross him—he's awesome when he's pissed. He'll knock the shit out of you with a left hook and a set of brass knuckles, or stick a gun up your mouth until you pass gas. He comes highly recommended by a man you haven't met but never mind, it doesn't matter, because Belane's got an assignment. Actually, he's got a list of them:

1. Find out if Celine is Celine. Inform Lady Death of findings.
2. Locate the Red Sparrow.

3. Find out if Cindy is screwing around on Bass. If so, nail her ass.

4. Get the Space Alien off of Grovers' back. Celine alive? Lady Death? A red sparrow and a space alien? What the hell is going on here? Just another novel by Mr. Blood & Guts himself. And *Pulp* is one tough book. From the smoking pistol on the cover to the worn, acne-scarred, wart-bespeckled, broken, rebroken, and grizzled face of Bukowski on the end page, we are pulled into a world where men are men, horses are horses, and women are, well, ethereal, alien, or sluts, but always deadly.

Bukowski dedicates this book to bad writing and he means it. Taking his inspiration from the exaggerated mannerisms of the classic "True Detective" pulp magazines and the deadpan humor of 1940s Grade B noir films, Bukowski sets it all down in his own backyard—the politically correct yuppie hell of Los Angeles in the '90s (Belane drinks cold saki, pays bar bills with a Gold Visa card, and carries around a video camcorder to record his evidence).

But the hodgepodge accumulation of Belane's adventures, along with several supernaturally outrageous characters and incidents (plus the strangely metaphysical ending) refer back to the crude absurdity of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* more than to film noir. Indeed, this book has more in common with Poe than with, say, Dashiell Hammet or Raymond Chandler. Weaving a fine and sordid line between pulp-comic melodrama and over-the-top machismo, Bukowski manages, however dark and violent, to entertain: *Then I noticed his belly. It was like a soft mound of dead shit and I slammed my fist deep into it. His face doubled over into my upcoming knee. He fell, then rolled off to one side. Ghastly sight. I walked over, slipped out his wallet. Photos of children in pornographic poses.*

The book is written, like much of Bukowski's poetry, in short, succinct lines. No wasted words, no superfluous character descriptions or scene layouts. If it's not right there in front of you then don't bother looking for it. Some chapters are only one sentence long: "Skip the rest of the day and night here, no action, it's not worth talking about." Don't bother trying to discover any hidden meaning because Bukowski will dump all the psychological shit right back on you: *Last dream I had I was laying under this elephant, I couldn't move and he was releasing one of the biggest turds you ever saw, it was about to drop and then my cat, Hamburger, walked across the top of my head and I awakened. You tell that dream to a shrink and he'll make something awful out of it. He'll tell you that*

the turd is a penis and that you are either frightened of it or that you want it, some kind of crap like that. What he really means is that he is frightened or wants the penis. It's only a dream about a big elephant turd, nothing more. Sometimes things are just what they seem to be and that's all there is to it. The best interpreter of the dream is the dreamer.

Bukowski himself makes a rough appearance in the form of an alcoholic, psychotically homicidal mailman who turns out to be the book's most unsettling character, though his actions are more the stuff of reputation than of autobiography. But as in all of Bukowski's fiction, his legendary misanthropic voice emerges out of all the character's mouths. As Belane observes: *If I died right now there wouldn't be one tear dropped anywhere in the world. Not that I wanted that. But it was odd. How alone could a sucker get? That's when you knew you were old, when you sat wondering where it went. . . . Well, it doesn't go anywhere, its not supposed to. I was three quarters dead. I slicked on the TV. There was a commercial. LONELY? DEPRESSED? CHEER UP. PHONE ONE OF OUR BEAUTIFUL LADIES. THEY DESIRE TO SPEAK TO YOU. CHARGE IT TO YOUR MASTER OR VISA CARD. SPEAK TO KITTY OR FRANCI OR BIANCA. PHONE. . . .*

Ultimately Belane's search for the fabled Red Sparrow, and his flirtation with Lady Death become an allegorical swan song for Bukowski himself, whose death several months prior to *Pulp*'s publication informs every page of crude, cynical humor. But don't read this book for autobiographical insights or existential philosophical meanderings—you'll miss the point. David Vogen

Amy Gerstler Nerve Storm Penguin, 1994 92 pages, \$12.95

The poems in Amy Gerstler's *Nerve Storm* present a range of characters in a wide, transmutable terrain spanning time and culture. Each moment questions where we are and what we are made of. Many of these poems contain the voice of a descriptive investigator on the "threshold of human notice." The poet's unyielding eye attempts to exploit experience while sensations linger and overlap from image to image and poem to poem. Gerstler's sense of the magical and extraordinary is balanced by her hard, often ironic, and startlingly precise powers of observation.

Heightened sensory perception and altered states of awareness charge the more vivid of these poems. In the title piece, a murderer confesses: "In my mind I listed everything I was in danger of inhaling... There are moments when what you see tumbles down around you and shatters at your feet. Fumes rise." Concrete hyper-reality gives way and transforms into a kind of lightness that leaves you open-mouthed and awed. Often the elemental, the biochemical, becomes a vehicle for transformation—the murderer notes inhaled fumes or the child in "Scarlet Fever" drinks tainted milk. Illness, memory, and consciousness become interdependent.

In the latter poem the matter-of-fact speaker reflects on the origins of her restricting and isolating heart murmur. Suddenly life becomes a sickbed—people come and go but there is no outside. Without overt sentiment each memory phrase harbors a surreal surprise as everything changes from the taste of cereal and the smell of tea, to the look of people and the feel of thoughts. A chance gift book on extinct birds provides further transport for the itchy molting child. Even in her adulthood she cannot shake the sensation of that strange birdie realm of kindred spirits. She is still caught like a prehistoric creature in the Smithsonian, caught in an imperfect body and a fuzzy network of emotion.

Another excellent poem that achieves a similar kind of serendipity is the semi-whimsical "Mermaid's Purse." You are lost in the intoxicants of imagination and intricate detail that define beauty and inform the mystery. Repeatedly Gerstler drops you off somewhere strange in order to lead you even further out to watch the fumes rise or question the engulfing colors of the oceans. While many of these poems muse and search around issues of identity and consciousness, they all provide some kind of an answer. The act of looking around and spilling the contents of what

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you see and the recognition that takes place in the poem echoes back and reminds you where you are, wherever you are. Diana Rickard

Ted Berrigan Selected Poems Penguin Books, 1994 142 pages, \$12.50

With the publication of *Selected Poems* by Ted Berrigan, edited by Aram Saroyan and with a beautiful, personal introduction by Alice Notley, Ted's poems will hopefully reach a wider audience. These poems are infused with a great presence: big at heart, kind and totally passionate about poetry. His enthusiasm for poetry was contagious; scores of younger poets (myself included) wrote under his wing. This volume should place Ted on the platform where he belongs—a major, innovative poet of the 20th century.

The poems are arranged more or less chronologically (with the exception of the last section devoted to a large selection of *The Sonnets*) and read like a story of Ted's life. The earlier poems, such as "Bean Spasms" (a collaboration with poet Ron Padgett and painter Joe Brainard), "Tambourine Life," "Peace," and the "things to do" poems, are exuberant, playful, amusing and lyrical. Often the lines move across the page down a series of steps, "like a walk across the page" as Alice Notley notes in her introduction.

There is a lot of movement in these poems; the poet, feverish with ideas, "rushed hatless into the white and shining air/ glad to find release in heaven's care" ("For You"). Ted allows the reader passage into his life through his poetry (his life and his poetry were one). We see Ted waking, reading, writing and walking through Manhattan, digging the streets. He lets us know what time it is in his inverse:

*Friday's great
10 o'clock morning sun is shining!
I can hear today's key sounds fading
softly
and almost see opening sleep's epic novels*

("Things to Do in Providence")
Every word in place, the imagery and lyricism describe ordinary experience accurately and precisely.

The later poems, such as "Red Shift" and "Last Poem," are more autobiographical; intensely sad at times, they are perhaps his most beautiful in imagery and feeling:

Alone and crowded, unhappy fate, nevertheless,

*I slip softly into the air
The world's furious song flows through
my costume.*

("Red Shift")

The voice of the poet has become disembodied, the spirit rising out of the confines of a body that caused him so much trouble. These poems are obsessed with death, especially in the deaths of Jack Kerouac and Frank O'Hara and his own impending. Other lines from "Red Shift" today ring a particularly melancholic note after the recent death of Joe Brainard whom they refer to: "Not that painter who from very first meeting/ I would never & never will leave alone until we both vanish/ into the thin air we signed up for & so demanded ..."

I imagine Ted and Joe now working on a new series of collaborations in the after-life, which, one day, all of us will be able to see. Dig deep into your pockets, folks, and come up with \$12.50 to buy this book.
Elio Schneeman

Robert Hershon Into a Punchline: Poems 1984-1994

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Sherman Alexie First Indian on the Moon Both from Hanging Loose Press, 1994

**Alexie: 116 pages, \$12
Hershon: 96 pages, \$10**

What these poets have in common besides a publisher is brilliant regionalism. Sherman Alexie is a Spokane/ Coeur d'Alene Indian from Washington state; Robert Hershon is New York to the heart, bone and core. They both write most forcefully when looking closely at what is close at hand, and droop when they abandon their turf. Alexie's tendency toward rhetoric is exaggerated when he leaves the West, and Hershon's (few!) "unlocated" poems are slight.

Hershon is at his best when observing and gently commenting: in the subway poems that roll through the book ("F Train: Beards Going to Work," "D Train F Line Shazam"); in the pure New Yorkese of "Bleecker and Carmine: Walk to Work"; in "NYC Country Music": "O the sun setting over the projects/ and the voices sing along with/ the ice cream truck/ so off key like to die/ lonesome whistle jukebox etc."

His humor is offhand, without attitude, wrapped in layers like a bum on the F train, each layer unwrapping into abundance and leading to something deeper as well as funnier. "I was/ considering falling in love with you/ on behalf of my seventeen-year-old self. He/ would have remembered you for weeks while I/ have already forgotten you."

His poems are almost never look-at-me flippant, so calling the book *Into a Punchline*, which suggests stand-up comedy, gives the wrong impression. How 'bout "Whimsy Hit by Truck" for the effect of his humor, or "Someone from Around Here," four perfect vignettes that add up to a guy who knows his neighborhood inside out and is so transparent we see New York right through him.

A Hanging Loose Press discovery, Sherman Alexie is making a name for himself as a poet of delicate, challenging power. Of *First Indian on the Moon*'s five sections the most impressive are "Tiny Treaties," about a love affair with a white woman ("We survived/ / only because of the hunger/ strong as the falls we cross now/ like ghosts of salmon") and the songs of "All I Wanted to Do Was Dance" ("I've dreamed your hair/ could save us all ... /Its strength is a knot/ for holding Skins together./ Its shine is the moonlight/ and its shine makes you/ the first Indian on the moon").

The best poems come when he lets himself soar over the golden wheat fields and hot hollow air of the Northwest. He at times has the young poet's desire to sum up the poem, go for the barn-burning ending: "God has dark skin"; "Our voices will save our lives." And he occasionally displays earnest excess (but hey, he's 28): "Could it be true? Am I Native American only when I am hated because of it? Does racism determine my entire identity?" No, poetry does, and that's our good luck.
Elinor Nauen

Daniel Halpern Selected Poems Knopf, 1994 219 pages, \$23

Scanning a handful of titles from Daniel Halpern's *Selected Poems* begins to reveal the recurrent query informing Halpern's writing—how do the past, present, and future fuse in the human psyche? In "Déjà Vu," Halpern has a vision upon awaking beside his lover; a future man touching her, but with his (Halpern's) hands. As in many of Halpern's poems, the flesh is the vehicle of memory. The body links us to experience in ways at once mystical and natural—

as in "Scars," mere rifts in skin "...can evoke the entire event/ in a moment—the action, the scent/ and sound—place you there a second time." Halpern presents us with a novel idea about the way memory works, that the mind is only aware of what the body has remembered.

Selected Poems, consisting of excerpts from six of Halpern's previous books, is valuable as a portrait of a growing writer. Halpern's interest in the cyclical nature of memory is only a shyly approached notion in his early poems, such as "Photograph" and "White Contact." The dominant sentiment in the first half of the book is, unfortunately, a young poet's immature egotism, harboring more than a few colonialist, sexist tendencies. Halpern, who once lived in Tangiers but now resides in Princeton, New Jersey, at times comes off as the quintessential Westerner longing to be, or rather possess, the "exotic." In "The Ethnic Life" he proudly announces, "I've been after the exotic for years," and his pursuit is rewarded in the form of possessing two women—a young Eurasian wife, as well as an Indian contortionist lover. He goes on to smugly boast, "In my life/ There is no room/ For bikinis or Chanel, / Or the waxed beauty of the West." Is preferring one stereotype of womanhood to another supposed to be a morally superior position?

As the book progresses, Halpern's immature edges are worn away by some powerful introspection, creating a deft, honest crop of poems. The only reminders of Halpern's earlier egotism and love of the "exotic" are his much-trumpeted skills in the kitchen and his affinity for cramming his poems with the names of far-off cities and foreign words. The older poet looks back with a clear eye, yet retains a dash of his youthful predilection for the mystical. Remembering becomes the purpose of existence: "It's preserving the continuation of flow that keeps us/ awake during the hours of darkness, afloat/ buoyant til come-what-may, isn't that it?"

Halpern's style is dominated by repetition. He frequently recycles words and entire phrases throughout a poem, creating a strange yet familiar rhythm. Describing both his views on existence and his almost chant-like poems, Halpern writes in "Infidelities," "We want it lingering this way, constant renaming, constant return." Halpern's knack for the music of a repeated phrase is strikingly successful in several of his poems, most notably "Tango," in which the rhythm of the words seems to sweep off the page. But resonance is a difficult technique to manage, always teetering on the line between powerful and annoying. In several of the poems it leans

toward the latter, such as in "Argument": "Her fair head's an aquarium of trouble, troubling through troubled sleep." Halpern further trips up his poems when he becomes overly assonant, "boats, set in the glassy glaze of the bay's brittle," (Thank you very much, Dr. Seuss) or when he gets caught up in wordy intellectualizing. Yet when Halpern sticks to what he does best, chronicling what the soul and the body have recalled in his smooth, unadorned, chanting stanzas, his work contains resonating power. As in "House of Flame," these poems have the power to heal, and amid memories, dare to ask about the future—"Is it possible/ a nervous knife,/ vegetables on edge,/ is it possible?"

Liz Vederman

The Letters of William Burroughs, 1945-1959 **Edited by Oliver Harris** **Penguin, 1994** **472 pages, \$12.95**

Is William Burroughs America's Kafka? His readers are familiar with the writer's business suit, tie and hat coupled with hysteria and paranoia: his preoccupation with technologies, government agencies and their operatives; his satirical binges, bugs and centipedes; his great, disorganized papers collected by friends into novels; his personal flight from country to country in a kind of Great Escape from the law. Of course, Burroughs himself points out that "vast Kafkian conspiracies" serve as the backdrop for such novels as *Naked Lunch*. And in various correspondences throughout his life—when he senses the dice of the universe are loaded against him—he shows the same sensibility; he sees his publisher making "Kafkian demands" of him, for example, and he describes London as "a vast Kafkian maze of frustrating agencies." In another instance, when afraid that Allen Ginsberg won't answer his letters, Burroughs desperately writes Jack Kerouac that he needs "an Advocate who can teach The Court." What is especially curious about *The Letters of William Burroughs, 1945-1959* (beyond the intelligence and downright hilarity one expects from Burrough's writing) is the extent to which they extend this line of metaphor, and the light they shed on the importance of the letter for a certain kind of writer. Putting aside for a moment the ultimate absurdity of any equation "Burroughs=Kafka," letters and letter-writing certainly played

similar roles for the American and the Czech: for Burroughs they composed, essentially, a brilliant novel in themselves (a fact most obviously demonstrated by *The Yage Letters*), and were a creative lifeline, central to his literature and very existence.

The letters begin, innocently enough, with epistolary trickles to Ginsberg and Kerouac as Burroughs makes a stab at a living in St. Louis by fashioning concoctions against tooth decay, and later with his arrival on the farm in New Waverly. At this time most letters concern themselves with attaining this drug, that drug, saving the tomatoes from frostbite in the nick of time, etc. "Tarantulas, ticks, chiggers and mosquitoes are emerging in droves ... I am contemplating the purchase of a ferret," he writes. It's fun reading. The seeds of disenchantment with law and order are sown, and bloom as Burroughs observes the Texan "regle du jeu" and he himself is finally busted in New Orleans for heroin possession.

Then he leaves the United States—and this begins the real beginning of his remarkable relationship with Allen Ginsberg, to whom the great majority of these letters are addressed. As Burroughs moves further from America, and then has to bear the agony of Joan Vollmer's death, Ginsberg becomes the mirror into which Burroughs continuously looks, the vital transistor for his letters and emergence as a writer. Ginsberg is, of course, Burroughs' literary agent; and these letters give a fair share of the nitty-gritty surrounding Burrough's frustrations with getting novels like *Junkie* published. But Burroughs becomes obsessive, investing himself totally in this correspondence and the poet begins receiving as many as three letters a day. From Tangiers, they begin to contain long passages that will be used in *Queer* and *Naked Lunch*—characters described from everyday life emerge as Dr. Benway or Kief. Even in describing his own condition, Burroughs slips into the style of his novels: "From taking so many shots I have an open sore where I can slide the needle right into a vein. The sore stays open like a red, festering mouth, swollen and obscene." As Burroughs writes the letters in the style of a "running diary," Ginsberg becomes for him the channel upon which all energy, the details of his descriptions, and the naked, flying whimsy of the "routines" are derived and played—making the letters the very blood that gives life to the writing. As he writes at one point to Ginsberg, "I need you so much your absence causes me, at times, acute pain. I don't mean sexually. I mean in connection with my writing." Or, as Burroughs writes

to Kerouac when apparently spurned by the younger poet, "Right now I am in urgent need of routine receivers. Whenever I encounter the impasse of unrequited affection my only recourse is in routines. (Really meant for the loved one, to be sure, but in a pinch somebody else can be pressed into service.)" In a sense, Ginsberg becomes the Felice to Burroughs' Kafka: a person the writer almost never meets, separated by great distance (and with whom actual meetings seem inevitably booby-trapped), but needs contact and emotional drama with in order to survive. "I did not think I was hooked on him like this," he writes to Kerouac. "One letter would fix me ... I am incapacitated. Can't write. Can't take interest in anything." It's no surprise Burroughs at one point calls himself a "vampire."

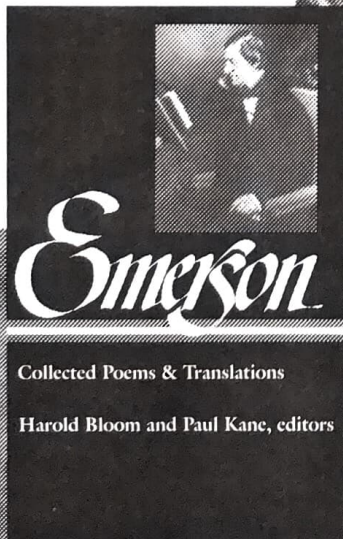
Of course, this moment passes. And this, in the end, is only one way of reading the letters (although further comparison with Kafka even reveals uncannily similar dreams about disorganized letters and manuscripts). After leaving Tangiers, and especially after *Naked Lunch* begins its trek toward widespread recognition—with Burroughs interviewed by *Life* magazine, for example—Burroughs' need for Ginsberg as an audience diminishes.

While living in Paris, the style of the letters changes as do the novels. What remains apparent, however, is the letters indispensable nature; they exist on the same level as the novels and biographies (and, in fact, a reader should have these other books ready at the side while reading, if for no other reason than it will fill up some holes in the narrative). As Burroughs writes

from Tangiers in 1954, "I've been thinking about routine as art form, and what distinguishes it from other forms. One thing, it is not completely symbolic, that is, it is subject to shlep over into "real" action at any time (like cutting off finger joint and so forth). In a sense the whole Nazi movement was a great, humorless, evil routine on Hitler's part. Do you dig? I am not sure I dig myself. And some pansy shit is going to start talking about living his art." Allow me to be that pansy, once removed. Like Kafka before him, Burroughs is one of those individuals for whom the psychological and physical collapse fantastically into one with the act of writing, which is actually living his mind—of which these letters are a unique and important record.
Tim Griffin

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(Tome, continued from page 15)

... is more focused on issues of self, social group, urban & suburban landscape ... & visual art The third gathering ... plac[es] an emphasis upon issues of language, reader, & communities ... The final gathering ... focus[es] on issues of performance, voice, genre, dialogue, & personae." Mr. Messerli further points out that "There is no poet included in this anthology who *might not be thought of in another context*, another gathering." [emphasis mine] This hesitancy defeats the purpose of having sections at all. If one has created sections in part because they "may help to reveal ... the major concerns of each poet's work," one should delimit the sections in such a way that each poet's placement enhances the reader's understanding of the poet's relation to the other poets in that selection. This is particularly important if one expects "this [to] be of particular help *in the classroom situation*." [Emphasis mine] All this of course points out one of the major drawbacks of this book: While it wants to present a single coherent view of contemporary poetry, its method of organization remains unclear.

Not only do the gatherings lack a strong focus, but the work collected in this anthology, although strong, lacks the powerful & memorable poems which would make it the book a reader will read again & again. Much like Mr. Allen, who explains his "gatherings" as such: "Occasionally arbitrary & for the most part more historical than actual, these groups can be justified finally only as a means to give the reader some sense of milieu & to make the anthology more a readable book & less still another collection of 'anthology pieces.'" Mr. Messerli, as we shall see, also wishes to avoid creating an anthology which will become merely "another collection of 'anthology pieces.'"

Mr. Messerli has relied upon the poets in
(continued on page 30)

publicAtions reCeived

Mimi Albert, *Skirts* Baskerville Publishers (7616 LBJ Freeway Suite 220, Dallas, TX 75251-1008, 1994). 258 pages. \$19.00.

Gary Aspenberg, *Bus Poems, Broken Moon Press* (P.O. Box 24585, Seattle, WA 98124-0585, 1993). 80 pages. \$11.95.

Lee Bartlett, *The Greenhouse Effect, American Poetry Contemporary Writing Series* (Lords of Language, P.O. Box 4867, Albuquerque, N.M. 87196, 1994). 57 pages. \$9.95.

Janet Carncross Chandler, *Why Flowers Bloom, Papier-Mache Press* (135 Aviation Way, #14, Watsonville, CA 95076, 1994). 115 pages. \$8.00.

Peter Didsbury, *That Old-Time Religion, Bloodaxe Books* (P.O. Box 15N, Newcastle upon Tyne, England NE99 1SN, 1994). 64 pages. No price listed.

Rita Dove, *The Darker Face of the Earth: A Verse Play, Story Line Press* (Three Oaks Farm, Brownsville, OR 97327-9718, 1994). 140 pages. \$10.95.

Janice Eidus, *Urban Bliss, Fromm International* (560 Lexington Avenue, NYC 10022, 1994). 180 pages. \$19.95.

Barbara Einzig, *Distance Without Distance, Kelsey St. Press* (2718 Ninth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, 1994). 123 pages. \$10.

David Gilbert, *Five Happiness, Trip Street Press* (P.O. Box 190201, San Francisco, CA 94119, 1994). 92 pages. \$6.95.

Dale Going, *The Vew They Arrange, Kelsey St. Press* (2718 Ninth Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, 1994). 77 pages. \$10.00.

W.N. Herbert, *Forked Tongue, Bloodaxe Books* 1994. 128 pages. No price listed.

Esther Iverem, *The Time: Portrait of a Journey Home, Africa World Press, Inc.* (P.O. Box 1892, Trenton, N.J. 08607, 1994). 85 pages. \$9.95.

Ursula K. Le Guin, *Going Out With Peacocks and Other Poems, HarperPerennial* (10 East 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10022, 1994). 82 pages. \$12.00.

Elizabeth Mackiernan, *Ancestors Maybe, Burning Deck* (c/o Rosemarie Waldrop, 71 Elm Grove Ave., Providence, RI 02906, 1993). 159 pages. \$8.00.

Jackson Mac Low, *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters, Station Hill* (Barrytown, NY 12507, 1994). 229 pages. \$14.95.

Aminta Marks, *A Pieta for the Dispossessed: The Grace of Palestinians, The Grindstone Press* (107 Moore Street, Princeton, N.J. 08540, 1994). 172 pages. \$12.

Jack Marshall, *Chaos Comics, A Pennywhistle Chapbook* (Haringer House, P.O. Box 42948, Tucson, AZ 85733-2948, 1994). 32 pages. \$6.00.

Donna Masini, *That Kind of Danger, Beacon Press* (25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108-2892, 1994). 106 pages. No price listed.

Michael McLure, *Simple Eyes & Other Poems New Directions* (80 Eighth Avenue, NYC 10011, 1994). 134 pages. \$10.95.

Paula Meehan, *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter, Eastern Washington University Press*, (Mail Stop 133, Showalter Hall, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA 99004-2496, 1994). 66 pages. \$12.00.

W.S. Merwin, *Travels, Alfred A. Knopf* (201 East 50th Street, NYC 10022, 1994). 137 pages. \$12.00.

Robert C. Morgan, *After the Deluge: Essays on Art in the Nineties, Red Bass #16, Red Bass Publications* (105 West 28th Street, 3rd floor, New York, N.Y. 10001, 1993). 79 pages. \$8.50.

Les Murray, *Translations From the Natural World, Farrar, Straus & Giroux* (19 Union Square West, New York, N.Y. 10003, 1994). 67 pages. \$21.00.

Michael O'Brien, *The Floor and the Breath, Cairn Editions* (P.O. Box 573, Old Chelsea Station, New York, N.Y. 10011, 1994). 72 pages. \$12.50.

Tom Pickard, *Tiepin Eros: New & Selected Poems, Bloodaxe Books*, 1994. 160 pages. No price listed.

Alane Rollings, *The Struggle to Adore, Story Line Press* (Three Oaks Farm, Brownsville, OR 97327, 1994). 105 pages. \$12.95.

Stephen Sandy, *Thanksgiving Over the Water, Alfred A. Knopf*, 1994. 83 pages. \$11.00.

Mark Strand, *Dark Harbor, Alfred A. Knopf*, 1994. 48 pages. \$11.00.

Hope Taylor-McGriff, *Overflow, Bryant & Dillon Publishers, Inc.* (P.O. Box 39, Orange, N.J. 07050, 1993). 103 pages. \$6.95.

Stephen Todd Booker, *Tug, Wesleyan Poetry Series, University Press of New England* (23 South Main Street, Hanover, N.H. 03755, 1994). 50 pages. \$10.95.

Kim Vaeth, *Her Yes, Zoland Books* (384 Huron Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138, 1994). 71 pages. \$9.95.

Mona Van Duyn, *Firefall, Alfred A. Knopf*, 1994. 80 pages. \$11.00.

Rachel Wetzsteon, *The Other Stars, Penguin Books* (375 Hudson Street, NYC 10014, 1994). 101 pages. \$15.99.

1994). 251 pages. \$7. *The Siege of Art: Craft and Conscience* issue. Ntozake Shange, Wanda Phipps, Amiri Baraka.

B City #8 (Connie Deanovich, editor; 517 North Fourth Street, DeKalb, IL 60115, 1993). 62 pages. \$5. *Special Sestina Issue. Poems by Tim Dlugos, Jeffery Conway, Maxine Chernoff, Nina Zivancevic.*

Big Allis #6 (Melanie Neilson and Jessica Grim, editors; 139 Thompson Street, #2, New York, N.Y. 10012, 1993). 76 pages. \$6. *Features work by Ulla Dydo ("Stop Look and Listen: A Digression on the Picture of a Page by Gertrude Stein"); Bruce Andrews, Catriona Strang, Martine Bellen, Jeff Derksen.*

Compass 19: Cuban Writers in the U.S. (Latin American Writers Institute, CUNY, 500 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10451, Spring 1994). Bilingual publication. No price listed.

Cover (Jeff Wright, publisher & editor; P.O. Box 1215 Cooper Station, NYC 10276, Summer 1994). 42 pages. \$2.00. *Poems by Bernadette Mayer, Gerrit Henry, Andrei Codrescu, Sparrow.*

Crazyhorse #46 (Dept. of English, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 S. University, Little Rock, AR 72204, Spring 1994). 182 pages. \$5.

Dreamtime Talkingmail #6 (Mickal And & Patrick Mullins, editors; Xeroxial Endarchy, Route 1, Box 131, LaFarge, WI 54639, Summer 1994). 29 pages. \$3. *An interview with Gary Snyder & "The No Go Zone" by Hakim Bey.*

Hanging Loose #64 (231 Wyckoff Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217, 1994). 96 pages. \$5. *Ed Friedman, Chuck Wachtel, Joel Lewis. Amazing "poetry reading" etchings by Jean Holabird.*

Heaven Bone #11 (Steven Hirsh, editor & publisher; P.O. Box 486, Chester, NY 10918, 1994). 96 pages. \$6. *Poetry, fiction, reviews. Featuring "New Surrealism: An interview with Image Psychologist Dr. Akhter Ahsen."*

Indiana Review (Gretchen Knapp, editor; Indiana University, 316 N. Jordan, Bloomington, IN 47405, Volume 17/ Number 1). 206 pages. \$7. *Kathy Acker, Barrett Watten, Diane Glancy.*

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chapbooks

Cydney Chadwick, *Draconic Nodes, Texture press chapbook #5* (c/o Susan Smith Nash 3760 Cedar Ridge Drive, Norman, OK 73072-4621, 1993). 19 pages. \$4.00.

Mac Hammond, *Six Hearts, The Nickel City Press* (314 Highland Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14222, 1994). 6 pages (inserted into folder). No price listed.

Dean Kostos, *Celestial Rust, Red Dust* (P.O. Box 630, NYC NY 10028, 1994). 24 pages. \$3.

Geoffrey O'Brien, *The Hudson Mystery, Red Dust*, 1994. 28 pages. \$4.

Holly Scalera, *Crazy Love Rides, Red Dust*, 1994. 23 pages. \$3.

Susan Smith Nash, T.E. Lawrence: *A Veil in the Sand, Room Press* (c/o John Perlman, editor; 29 Lynton Place, White Plains, NY 10606, 1994). 14 pages. No price listed.

Eric Swenson & Keith Seward, *Necro Enema Amalgamated, The NEA Agenda* (c/o NEA, P.O. Box 208, Village Station, NYC 10014, 1994). 10 pages. \$3.

Anne Waldman, *Ancestor, Ancestor, Heaven Chapbook Series #23, White Fields Press* (P.O. Box 3685, Louisville, Kentucky 40201-3685, 1994). 12 pages. No price listed.

magazines

Another Chicago Magazine #27 (Barry Silesky, editor & publisher; Left Field Press, 3709 N. Kenmore, Chicago, IL 60613, 1994). 223 pages. \$8. *Featuring contemporary chinese poetry.*

Agni #39 (Askold Melnyczuk, editor; Boston University Creative Writing Program, 236 Bay Street Rd., Boston, MA 02215,

Lift 13 (Joseph Torra, editor; 10-Rear Oxford Street, Somerville, MA 02143, 1993). 73 pages. \$4. *Edward Barrett, Lori Lubeski & Gian Lombardo.*

MA1 (David Kirschenbaum, editor; Boog Literature, P.O. Box 221, Oceanside, NY 11572-0221, May 1994). 15 pages. \$3. *Special impromptu issue for NYU's Beat Conference. Critical analysis of Beats. Drawings by Meg Arthurs.*

Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing (Robert Shapard & Frank Stewart, editors; English Dept., University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI 96822, Summer 1994). 211 pages. \$15. *Special Feature: Chinese Poetry After Tiananmen Square.*

Poetry New York: A Journal of Poetry and Translation #6 (Burt Kimmelman, Senior Editor; P.O. Box 3184, Church Street Station, NYC 10008, Winter 93/ Spring 94). 52 pages. \$5. *Nathaniel Tarn, Colette Inez, Lewis Warsh.*

Sensitive Skin #2 (Buddy Kold, Editor, P.O. Box 20344, NYC NY 10009, Spring/Summer 1994). 39 pages. \$4. *Chris Kraus, Richard Hell, Max Blagg, Carl Watson, Lola Rodriguez.*

The Little Magazine #20 (Daniel Coogan, editor; English Dept., University at Albany, State University of NY, Albany, NY 1222, 1994). 196 pages. \$7. *Anne Tardos, Chris Stroffolino, Katie Yates. An interview with Robert Grenier by Rebecca Bush.*

Tight (Ann Erickson, editor; P.O. Box 1591, Guerneville, CA 95446, 1994). Volume 5, number 2. 272 pages. \$4.50.

West Branch #34 (Karl Patten & Robert Love Taylor, editors; Bucknell Hall, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA 17837, 1994). 99 pages. \$4. *Denise Duhamel, Bay Stevens, Gary Fincke.*

his anthology to help him select their poems: "I invited about 80 . . . poets to join me in making a selection of their work . . . [this] helped me to avoid one of the pit falls common to anthologies by *directing my attention away from a fetishization of particular poems to a perception of the whole body of each poet's writing.*" [Emphasis mine] This view is a bit curious because eventually one wants a book filled with great poems. A poet's reputation is not made by an anthology; however, an anthology's life span can be determined by how many "great" poems are in it. Mr. Messerli hopes that by focusing on "representative work," rather than "anthology pieces," he can avoid the pit falls of "fetishizing" certain poems & losing sight of the work in general. I, however, want anthology pieces in an anthology. Which leads me to ask the questions: Representative of what? & How can a poet's best work {my understanding of the term "anthology piece"} not be representative? The bread & butter of "Anthology" is "anthology pieces." They are the why & wherefore of people who buy it. The general public, on the one hand, buys the anthology because of the great poems that are in it! The American Professoriate, on the other, assigns the anthology because great poems are easier to teach—students actually like good poetry! Which puts us back in school. In his introduction Mr. Messerli states that one of the reasons this anthology is sorely needed is "for use in college & university courses." Perhaps he is hoping that it will become a standard library volume?

Without "anthology pieces" Messerli has given us an incredibly homogeneous work. Mr. Messerli attempts to create, from an experimental tradition, a seamless fabric(k): a monolith of similitude sprouted from a field whose focus & strength has always been that of great diversity. Even so, it is almost impossible to be unable to find much good poetry in a book this size. The problem for me is that it all seems to be by the same author.

More directly what this anthology attempts to demonstrate is that "A" particular movement in poetry—one which tends to use disjointed & disjunctive language as a poetic "Texture"—

descends from *The New American Poetry* of the first half of this century. Mr. Messerli tries to achieve this demonstration of pro-generation by arranging each of his sections in chronological order—as if contiguity implied congruity. This method gives us Amiri Baraka in the same section as John Cage, Jackson Mac Low, & Kenward Elmslie; & Allen Ginsberg in the same group as Charles Olson, Fanny Howe, & bp nichol. On the one hand these are all important

in his literary career Uncl'Ez thought of himself as an imagist, a vorticist, a fascist, an economist, a Confucian scholar & a patriot. We tend to think of him as a Modernist, perhaps The Modernist, or even a Postmodernist, etc. Literary history writes what it will. One should not become overly concerned with what it might have to say 25 years or more after one's death. {Or even 25 years before.}

Finally, to return to one of my earlier battles,

one very interesting aspect of this anthology is the work that is missing (e.g. Hannah Weiner's early visionary work). Although I realize this remark resembles that rather trite little anthology game, "Can you name what's missing?" I make reference to the "leaving[s] out" in order to raise the question: "Why?" Clearly, one of the reasons is related to a question of aesthetics; however, I would like to propose that the politics of marketplace has indeed had a profound effect on the selection of poems in this anthology. Mr. Messerli seems to be steaming straight toward a confrontation with Paul Hoover's *A Norton Anthology* & Eliot Weinberger's *American Poetry Since 1950*. Which brings me to another consideration inherent in the contemporary literary marketplace: which poems are available for publication. Clearly, larger publishing houses such as Norton can control the rights to poems more easily than the smaller houses. Thus, many poems which Mr. Messerli may have wished to include in his anthology may have been unavailable. On the one hand, this is unfortunate as we cannot purchase just one anthology & "have it all." On the other hand, this is fortunate as we now have more anthologies which are available to us than ever before.

If you are saying to yourself, "I just bought the new 'A Norton,' do I really need another indefinite anthology?" The answer is YES! The book itself is a keeper. But to quote Robin Williams in that horrible movie, my advice is *rip out the introduction* [emphasis mine].

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR WELCOME
More anthology reviews next issue.

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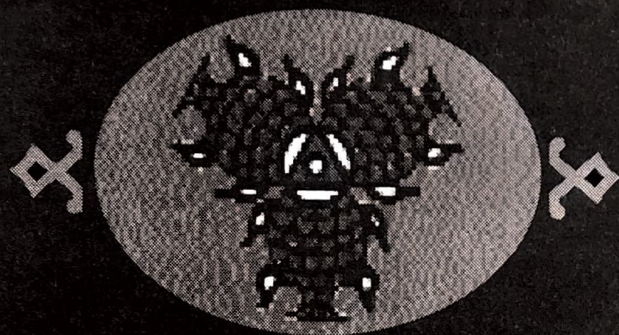
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poets, & on the other, it is unclear how Mr. Baraka, Mr. Elmslie, & Mr. Ginsberg fit into this book. Mr. Messerli hasn't seen fit to explain this. Here he misses the point, if one wishes to get into the academy—on their terms—(which seems to be the real point about this anthology) one must use their terms; that is to say, BE part of a movement. At various points

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